

Air Quality

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Clean Air Act?

The Clean Air Act (CAA) **42 U.S.C. §7401 et seq. (1970)** is the comprehensive federal law that regulates air emissions from stationary and mobile sources. Among other things, this law authorizes U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to protect public health and public welfare and to regulate emissions of hazardous air pollutants.

How do Georgia DOT projects show compliance with CAA?

The CAA section 176(c) requires that Federal transportation projects are consistent with state air quality goals, found in the State Implementation Plan (SIP). The process to ensure this consistency is called Transportation Conformity (“conformity”). Conformity to the SIP means that transportation activities will not cause new violations of the NAAQS, worsen existing violations of the standards, or delay timely attainment of the relevant standard. In complying with these guidelines the Georgia Department of Transportation (Georgia DOT) will complete an analysis on the effects of the proposed project on air quality.

The quality of the Atlanta region’s air impacts public health and overall quality of life. Because vehicle emissions are a significant contributor to air pollution, air quality is a major consideration in the region’s transportation planning.

The Atlanta region must meet air quality standards set by the EPA that increase over time. These standards focus on two primary pollutants: ozone, a gas that forms in the atmosphere from tailpipe emissions, smokestacks and other sources; and particulate matter, tiny bits of particles in the air produced by car and truck exhaust, power plants, manufacturing facilities and other sources.

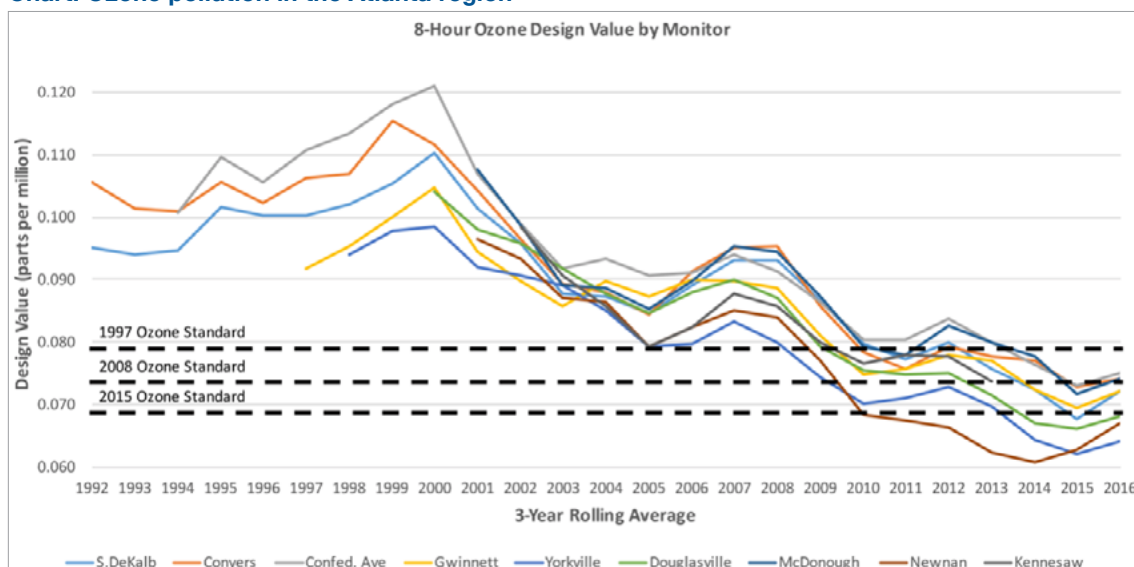
The Atlanta Regional Commission and its transportation planning partners are charged with developing a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) that meets state and federal air quality standards. This is achieved by prioritizing transportation projects that improve congestion or provide alternative commuting options, such as transit or bike lanes.

The U.S. Department of Transportation, along with the EPA, reviews the region’s transportation plan to determine whether it conforms to air quality standards. If it does not, federal transportation funds could be withheld from the region.

The Atlanta Region’s Plan is the latest iteration of the regional plan prepared by ARC. Whenever major changes are made to transportation projects and programs, the associated RTP requires a new conformity determination. The current [Conformity Determination Report](#) documentation for the Atlanta Region’s Plan is provided below.

By 2013, all nine of the region’s monitoring stations had met the more stringent 2012 particulate matter standard. Particulate matter pollution has been declining since 2007.

Chart: Ozone pollution in the Atlanta region



What is air quality transportation conformity?

Transportation conformity is a way to ensure that Federal funding and approval goes to those transportation activities that are consistent with air quality goals. Conformity applies to transportation plans, transportation improvement programs (TIPs), and projects funded or approved by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) or the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in areas that do not meet or previously have not met air quality standards for ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, or nitrogen dioxide. These areas are known as “nonattainment areas” or “maintenance areas,” respectively. Regulations governing transportation conformity are found in Title 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations (40 CFR Parts 51 and 93).

How do the Major Mobility Investment Program (MMIP) projects contribute to air quality?

MMIP projects are in the ARC’s conformity plan. The ARC received a conformity determination from the USDOT on March 18, 2016. Projects are evaluated for consistency with state and federal air quality goals, including Carbon Monoxide (CO), Ozone, PM_{2.5}, and MSATs (Mobile Source Air Toxics) as part of this assessment.

CO: The MMIP projects will be evaluated for the potential to result in increased CO concentrations in the project area.

Ozone: The MMIP projects are in an attainment area are identified in the Plan 2040 Regional Transportation Plan and FY 2016-2021 Transportation Improvement Program by reference numbers.

PM_{2.5}: Effective October 24, 2016 the State of Georgia is considered to be in attainment for PM_{2.5}, so no further analysis of PM_{2.5} emissions is warranted.

MSATs: The MMIP projects will be evaluated for the potential to result in increased MSATs concentrations in the project area.

Sources:

<https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-clean-air-act>

[GDOT Air Quality report template](#)

<https://atlantaregional.org/natural-resources/air-quality/air-quality/>

https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ENVIRONMENT/air_quality/

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