

# TEXAS VS GEORGIA

Interstate Highway 75 (I-75) stretches for 400 miles in Georgia from the south central part of the state's border with Florida to the northwest border with Tennessee near Chattanooga. Currently, the highway is at least six lanes, three in each direction, throughout the state. Only one road in the entire state of Georgia is a tollway: Georgia Highway 400 (GA 400), which runs from central Atlanta to the northeast, ending near the town of Dahlonega. The decisions to make I-75 six lanes and to make GA 400 a tollway were made by the Georgia State Transportation Board, the equivalent of the Texas Transportation Commission.

The Georgia State Transportation Board is selected by the state legislature and is required by law to consist of one person from each of Georgia's congressional districts. Thus, as the number of representatives from Georgia in the U.S. House of Representatives changes due to reapportionment every ten years, so does the state's transportation board. After the 2010 census, Georgia was given an additional seat in the U.S House of Representatives, and, as a result, the Georgia State Transportation Board was also enlarged by one. In 2014, the board had thirteen members. In contrast, the Texas Transportation Commission consists of five members, appointed by the governor for six-year terms. If Texas followed the Georgia model, then Texas's commission would consist of thirty-six members.

In Georgia, the entire state legislature does not choose the entire board. Instead, members of the state legislature divide into small groups based on the thirteen congressional districts. All members of the state legislature from a congressional district select one member of the state transportation board. Each board member serves a five-year term.<sup>i</sup> Once elected, the Georgia State

Transportation Board selects one of its members to be the chair, and another member is selected as the vice chair. The chair and vice chair serve one-year, renewable terms. In Texas, the governor appoints one member of the Texas Transportation Commission as the chair of the commission.

The Georgia board serves a similar function to its Texas equivalent. The board in Georgia hires a commissioner to oversee the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). The board also designates which roads are part of the state highway system, approves long-range transportation plans, oversees administration of construction contracts, and authorizes lease agreements.<sup>ii</sup>

## THINKING Critically

- ★ What is the advantage to having the governor appoint the State Board of Transportation, as is the case in Texas?
- ★ What is the advantage to the system used in Georgia, which is based upon congressional districts?
- ★ To what extent does Georgia violate the principle of separation of powers?
- ★ How would gerrymandering congressional districts in Georgia shape or change transportation policy?

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i. Georgia Department of Transportation, "State Transportation Board," [www.dot.ga.gov/aboutgeorgiadot/board/pages/default.aspx](http://www.dot.ga.gov/aboutgeorgiadot/board/pages/default.aspx) (accessed September 19, 2014).

ii. Ibid.