

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. Recently, a small section of I-85 in Atlanta was expanded to include toll lanes; cars and trucks driving in these lanes pay a premium or toll on the use of those less congested and traveled lanes. Texas, by comparison, lacks any interstate highway with three lanes in each direction across the entire state. Instead sections of every interstate in Texas vary from the minimum two lanes in each direction to a maximum of eleven lanes in each direction along sections of the Katy Freeway (I-10) in the Houston area. In addition, Texas has numerous toll roads in major metropolitan areas and increasingly in other areas of the state, and often freeways increasingly have toll lanes similar to those on I-85 in Atlanta.

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 U.S. 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 2016, 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.ⁱ Once selected, 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.ⁱⁱ

THINKING Critically

- ★ What is the advantage to having the governor appoint the State Transportation Board, 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?

i. Georgia Department of Transportation, "State Transportation Board," www.dot.ga.gov/AboutGDOT/Boardwww.dot.ga.gov/aboutgeorgiadot/board/pages/default.aspx (accessed June 8, 2016).

ii. Ibid.