

Chairman Ellis:

"If you can't say something nice, don't say nothin' at all" is a line that was made famous by the rabbit character Thumper in the 1940s Disney film *Bambi*. We, the members of the Chatham Area Transit Authority (CAT) Board, have followed this advice throughout the legal and political attacks you have leveled against this agency and our state legislative delegation following the passage of House Bill 756. That ends today.

For months now, since Gov. Kemp signed House Bill 756, you have taken your frustrations with our state legislature out on CAT riders. Our riders didn't ask for this fight. They don't want this fight. We don't want this fight. Our community rightfully wants us to work together to ensure service is reliable, safe, and efficient.

Your November 13 letter threatening to cancel the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between CAT and Chatham County is an unnecessary, shortsighted, and cruel folly that will punish all CAT riders, and especially its most vulnerable ones, those who depend on paratransit service. Compounding this threat with a coordinated "sickout" last Friday by many of CAT's paratransit drivers required CAT supervisors and other staff to scramble and change plans so that riders didn't miss doctor's appointments, dialysis treatments, and other necessary trips.

These two actions are just the latest attacks on our community's transit system. Earlier this year, millions of dollars in needed capital projects were intentionally excluded from the SPLOST 8 list, casting real doubt on CAT's ability to have local funds to match federal opportunities for bus replacement, bus stop improvements, and other basic needs in future years. And if that wasn't enough, you recommended the Chatham County Board of Commissioners cut the CAT mileage rate in half, which would have blown a \$9 million hole in the budget that would have resulted in severe route and frequency reductions. Thankfully, your fellow commissioners didn't follow your lead, but even the \$1.9 million reduction that was ultimately adopted significantly impacts the services CAT can provide Chatham residents.

The county's legal strategy has failed at every turn. It is clear with this latest threat that the County now realizes its legal arguments will not prevail and instead hopes this obviously desperate action will result in some kind of "win." To be clear, there

are no winners here. Taxpayers are paying both sides of the legal bills and are getting absolutely nothing for it.

And to add insult to injury, your letter attempting to bully us with cancellation of the IGA accused CAT of focusing “on the tourist economy and ferry system to the detriment of the local citizens.” This is laughable. We invite you to review all meeting minutes, recordings, and documents since we were sworn in on July 1 and find one single instance of this board favoring one part of CAT service over another. Here’s a hint: don’t waste your time, it’s not there.

And even if there were some evidence of this (there is not), are you really suggesting the 28,000 Chatham County residents who work in our visitation economy don’t deserve some attention and support? Tourism workers are not second-class citizens because they rely on CAT. The simple truth here seems to escape your comprehension: ALL of CAT’s services are critical to Chatham County’s economy and quality of life of our residents and neighbors. Our transit system is, and must be, a single, unified system, not a series of isolated service components. Your “either/or” mentality is shortsighted and does a disservice to your constituents who rely on CAT. And importantly, you ignore the CAT employees who could very well be laid off if the County continues to starve CAT of funding.

The hypocrisy of all of this is that since July 1, you have refused to seat the County’s three representatives on the CAT Board. How can you complain about anything this agency is doing when the County, which has more Board seats than any other entity, has no representation at meetings and in discussions because of its own intransigence?

We will no longer “say nothin’ at all” while you attempt to cripple CAT services and harm CAT’s riders in a petty, vindictive attempt to register your displeasure with the Legislature. We’ve had exactly zero conversations with you or any other representative from the County about your CAT service priorities since July 1. Instead, we get served with lawsuits, draconian funding reductions, and threatening letters. Frankly, we’d like to focus on improving CAT’s service and offerings. Instead, we are, yet again, forced to spend time and money dealing with nonsense.

Despite the fiery tone of our response, nothing we say here today is any more provocative or chaotic than the actions you have decided to take, potentially harming CAT's riders and even threatening to upend the livelihoods of CAT employees. Unfortunately, we are at a point where these actions are not a matter of if they harm folks, but when.

If you go through with the cancellation of the IGA, refuse to remit dollars owed to CAT, and do not offer solutions to the problems *you* created by the elimination of SPLOST 8 funds and reduction of mileage rate collections, this Board will have no choice but to drastically reduce public transit services impacting the exact constituents you claim to represent and care about.

Our requests are simple: stand down with your frivolous litigation, appoint your County representatives to the Board, and let's have a collaborative conversation about achieving our collective priorities in delivering public transit service. Our employers, our workers, our riders, and our CAT team members are counting on us to work together.

CAT Board of Directors