

Reprint "ATLANTA"  
From the April 1969 Issue of Forum Magazine

# ATLANTA

Almost everything that catches your eye in the aerial photo at right is less than ten years old.

The freeway network; the big-league sports stadium (1); the auditorium-convention center (lower right-hand corner); the 41-story First National Bank Building (2)—highest in the city, but not for long—and the six-building complex known as Peachtree Center (3)—these are only the most conspicuous landmarks of a \$1.5-billion downtown building boom that, in less than one short decade, has transformed Atlanta from a slow-paced Southern town to what its boosters like to call a “national city.” What they mean by that term is that Atlanta now exerts powerful economic force beyond its region.

The spectacular boom didn't just happen by itself. It is mostly the result of a vigorous promotion campaign called “Forward Atlanta” which was launched in 1961 by government and business leaders. The campaign has been so successful that more than 130 cities have sent delegations to Atlanta, hoping to learn the secret of its success.

They would be well advised to start by getting a mayor like Atlanta's Ivan Allen Jr., who took office in 1962. As president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1961, Allen was instrumental in getting the Forward Atlanta program started. After that, as mayor, Allen saw to it that the city participated fully in the public-private effort.

Virtually all of Forward Atlanta's advertising campaign (“Atlanta: a new kind of city”) has been concentrated in the North. “They're the cats with the bread,” explains Opie L. Shelton, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce.

So far, downtown Atlanta's spectacular boom has been mostly a matter of quantity, not quality. The towering new office buildings are impressive more for their size than for their design, and they have been plunked down with

little regard for the environment (the handsome Equitable Building (4) is the first to have a landscaped plaza at its base, for whatever *that* may be worth).

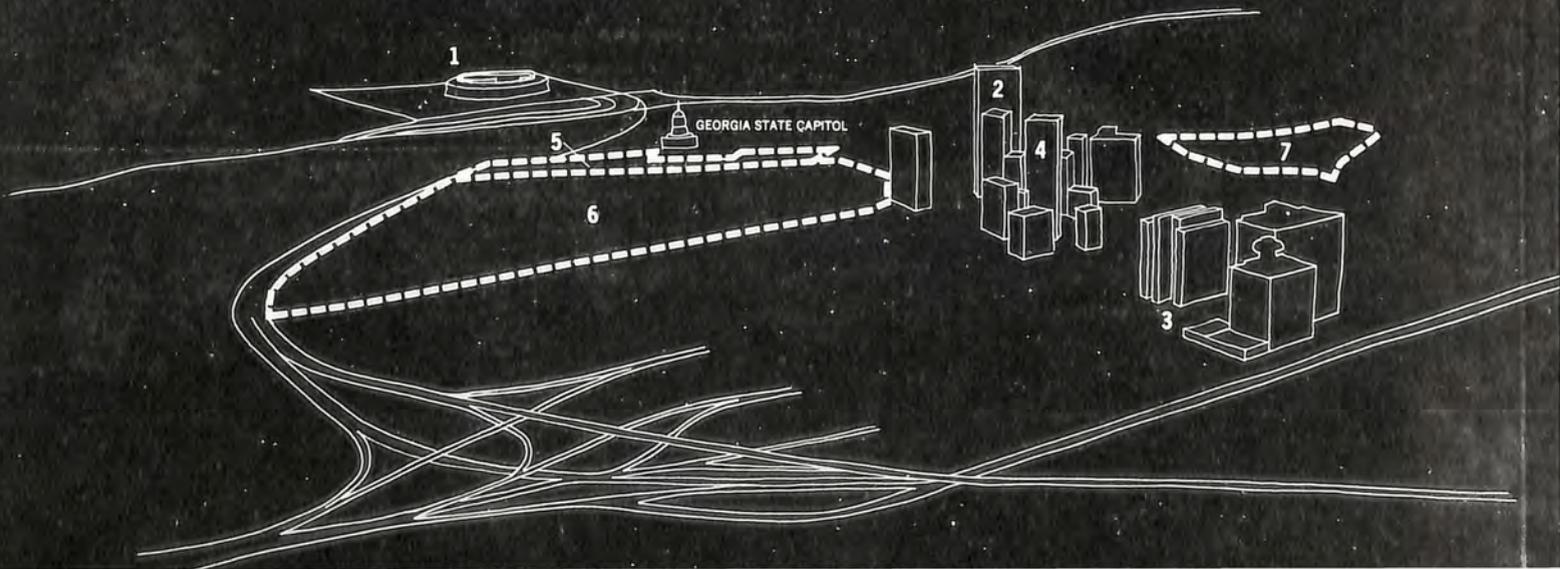
Public projects have fared no better. For all its closeness to downtown, the stadium might as well be miles away, since it is cut off from the core by a massive freeway interchange. And the auditorium-convention center is inconvenient to the hotels which generate most of its use—and are, in turn, supported by it. A third civic project, the multipurpose Memorial Arts Center completed last year, would have been a natural for downtown, but it was built in a residential neighborhood.

#### Possibly, a new kind of city

Atlanta's civic and business leaders are now waking up to the fact that “bigger” and “better” are not always synonymous, and they have begun laying plans to assure that the future growth of downtown embodies both. Their plans—and hopes—are centered on six key developments that could serve as catalysts for making downtown Atlanta the “new kind of city” its boosters now claim it to be.

One is Architect-Developer John Portman's Peachtree Center, which is already Atlanta's biggest and best downtown development, and promises to become much more so. Three others are large air-rights developments flanking the core of downtown: Developer Raymond D. Nasher's Park Place project (5), the Georgia State College campus (6), and Developer Thomas G. Cousins' project (7). The fifth and sixth elements are a proposed metropolitan rapid transit system converging at the center of downtown, and a small-scale pedestrian movement system looping the downtown area.

These six developments, and what they could mean to downtown Atlanta, are discussed on the following eight pages.





**Portman's Peachtree Center is the first major step toward Atlanta's goal of "a new kind of city"**

During the '60s, while the rest of downtown Atlanta was booming chaotically, John Portman was creating, step by step, the city's only cohesive complex of integrated buildings and spaces.

Peachtree Center stands rather aloofly apart from the clutter at the downtown core and has, in fact, become a little downtown all of its own. The visitor to Atlanta could easily have all of his needs attended to within the six buildings that currently compose the complex.

Both Peachtree Center and John Portman's remarkable career as an entrepreneur-architect got off the ground in 1961 with the 22-story Merchandise Mart (1 on plan). Before he designed and built the Mart, Portman—with his partner, H. Griffith Edwards—had been practicing architecture in the conventional way, and becoming increasingly frustrated. Portman wanted to design large-scale urban developments, but no such commissions were coming his way. So he decided: "If I come up with an idea and promote and develop it myself, there won't be any question about who is going to be the architect."

**The first idea**

In 1957, after Portman had promoted a successful furniture exhibition in a remodeled downtown building, he came up with the idea that Atlanta could support a big, new merchandise mart, and that he could promote and design it. Portman formed a development corporation and secured an \$8-million loan from Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., plus additional backing from Atlanta Realtor Ben Massell and Dallas Developer Trammel Crow.

With Portman in complete control of its design and financing, Peachtree Center was on its way. In 1965, three years after the Mart opened, Portman added the Peachtree Center Building, a 30-story office tower (2). Then, in rapid succession, he built the Trailways Bus Terminal topped by a four-deck parking structure (3); the 21-story, 800-room Regency Hyatt House Hotel (4); the 25-story Gas Light Tower (5); and its mirror-image Twin

Tower (6). He also doubled the size of the original Mart to 2 million sq. ft. in 1968, making it the second largest in the world (after Chicago's).

Now under construction is a circular, 200-room addition to the Regency (7). And later this year, on a site behind the twin towers (8), construction will start on Peachtree Center's (and the city's) tallest building: a 70-story tower containing 57 floors of offices topped by 13 floors of "corporate apartments." The apartments will be leased by companies for housing and entertaining visiting executives and important guests.

**A harmonious whole**

With one notable exception—the soaring interior of its hotel (see page 47)—Peachtree Center is not a showcase of exciting architecture. But the complex adds up to more than the sum of its parts. The individual buildings, if not distinguished in design, are at least harmonious in their relationships. And Portman has added plazas, landscaping, outdoor sculpture, and other touches that tie the complex together at ground level.

At night, Peachtree Center remains bustling with activity long after the rest of downtown has closed up. The hotel, of course, is the major nighttime attraction, but Portman has placed a number of restaurants in and among the other buildings to assure after-hours activity throughout the center. Two of the restaurants are located beneath the plaza that separates the twin towers, and two others are in the Mart—one on the ground floor and another on the roof.

Portman has also linked the buildings with a series of enclosed pedestrian bridges, and claims that "you can go anywhere in Peachtree Center without going outside." The claim is true, as far as it goes. But if, for example, you want to get from the hotel to the lobby of the Peachtree Center Building without going outside, you have to cross a bridge leading from the hotel lobby (4) to the base of the Gas Light Tower (5); take an elevator to the 23rd floor; cross

a bridge spanning Peachtree Street to the roof of the Mart (1); cross another bridge connecting the Mart with the 23rd floor of the Peachtree Center Building (2); and, finally, take another elevator down to the lobby. Nevertheless, the bridges are a convenience for those people who work in the three office buildings.

**Promotion vs. design**

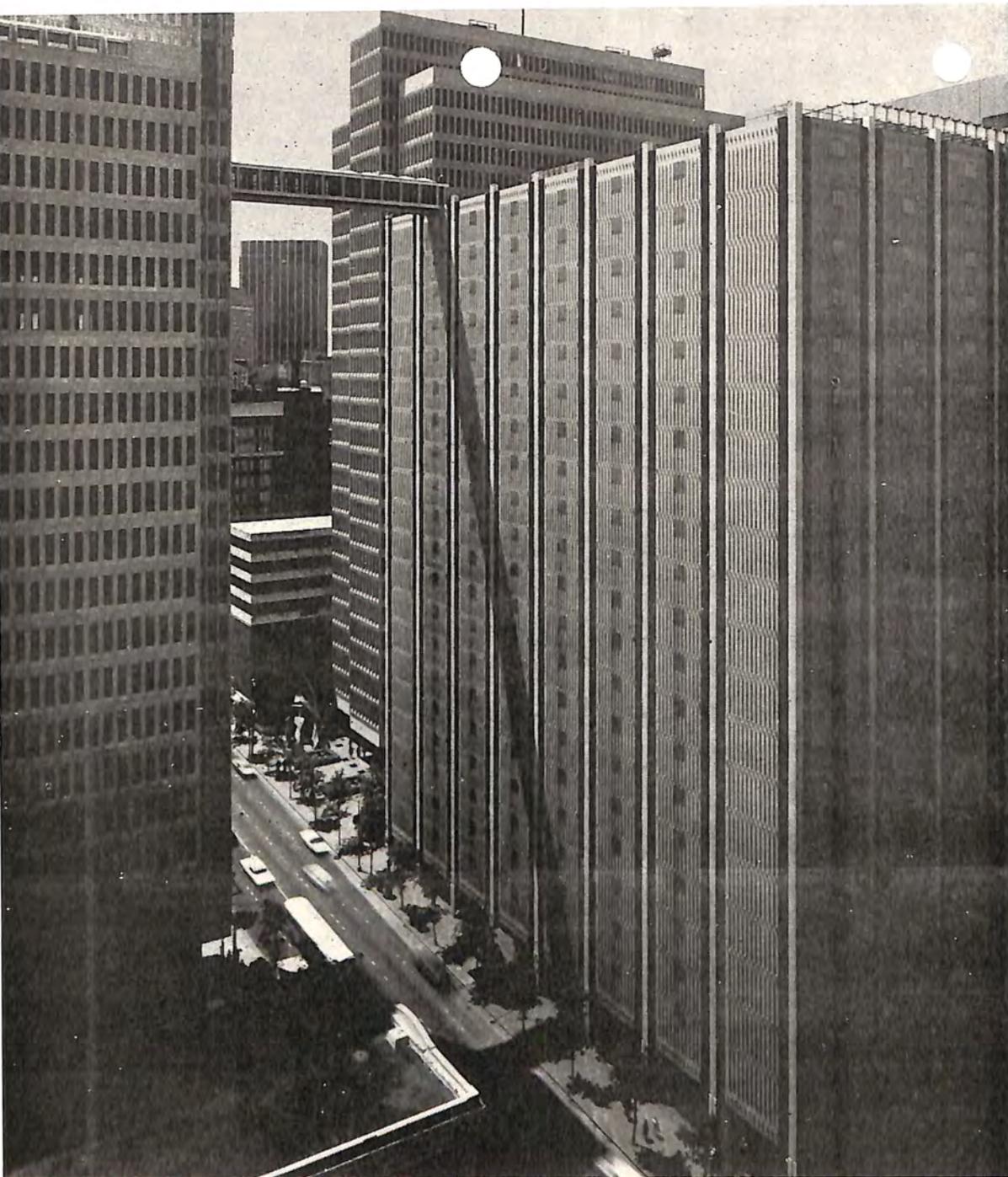
Some architects take a dim view of Portman's dual career, claiming that his role as a developer compromises his integrity as an architect. Portman denies that there is any conflict of interest, and he cites his design of the Regency Hotel as a case in point. Portman asserts that the Regency, with its spectacular interior courtyard rising the full height of the building, would not have been built if he had designed it for a hotel client. (It was sold to the Hyatt House chain after construction was nearly completed.) One architect in a large New York firm agrees. "We tried to get one of our hotel clients to accept an interior courtyard, and got nowhere," he said. "The client's first and last reaction was 'Look at all that wasted space!'"

The present Peachtree Center, says Portman, is only the nucleus of what will eventually become a "city within a city," containing apartments, shops, theaters, and a wide variety of other functions. Portman is continually acquiring parcels of land in the area, the latest being a lease on an adjacent state-owned site (9) occupied by an old hotel, which will be demolished.

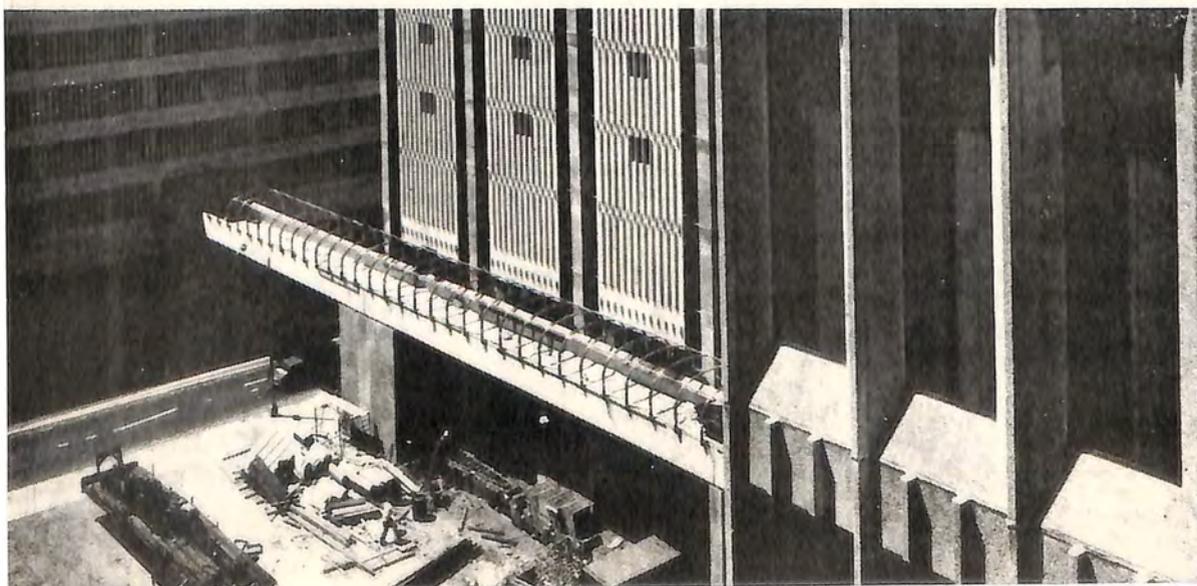
One of Portman's future plans involves the city's proposed rapid transit system. If it gets built, one of its routes will probably burrow underneath Peachtree Street, which bisects Portman's complex. At the same time, an underground roadway could be built, and the street could be turned into a pedestrian mall (see page 50).

A pedestrian mall closing off Peachtree Street would not only enhance Peachtree Center, it would provide a vital connecting link between the center and the rest of downtown Atlanta.

Six buildings now compose Peachtree Center: (1) the Merchandise Mart; (2) the Peachtree Center office building; (3) a Trailways bus terminal topped by a four-level parking garage; (4) the Regency Hyatt House Hotel with a revolving restaurant above its roof; (5) the Gas Light office tower; and (6) the Twin Tower. A 200-room circular addition to the Regency is now under construction (7); and a 70-story office-apartment tower is scheduled to get under way this year (8). Another structure, as yet undisclosed, will rise on a block adjacent to the center (9).



Left: two of the four enclosed pedestrian bridges that connect the buildings of Peachtree Center. The one at top spans Peachtree Street from the 23rd floor of the Gas Light Tower to the roof of the Merchandise Mart, where a restaurant is located. The bridge in the photo at left connects the Mart with a parking garage.



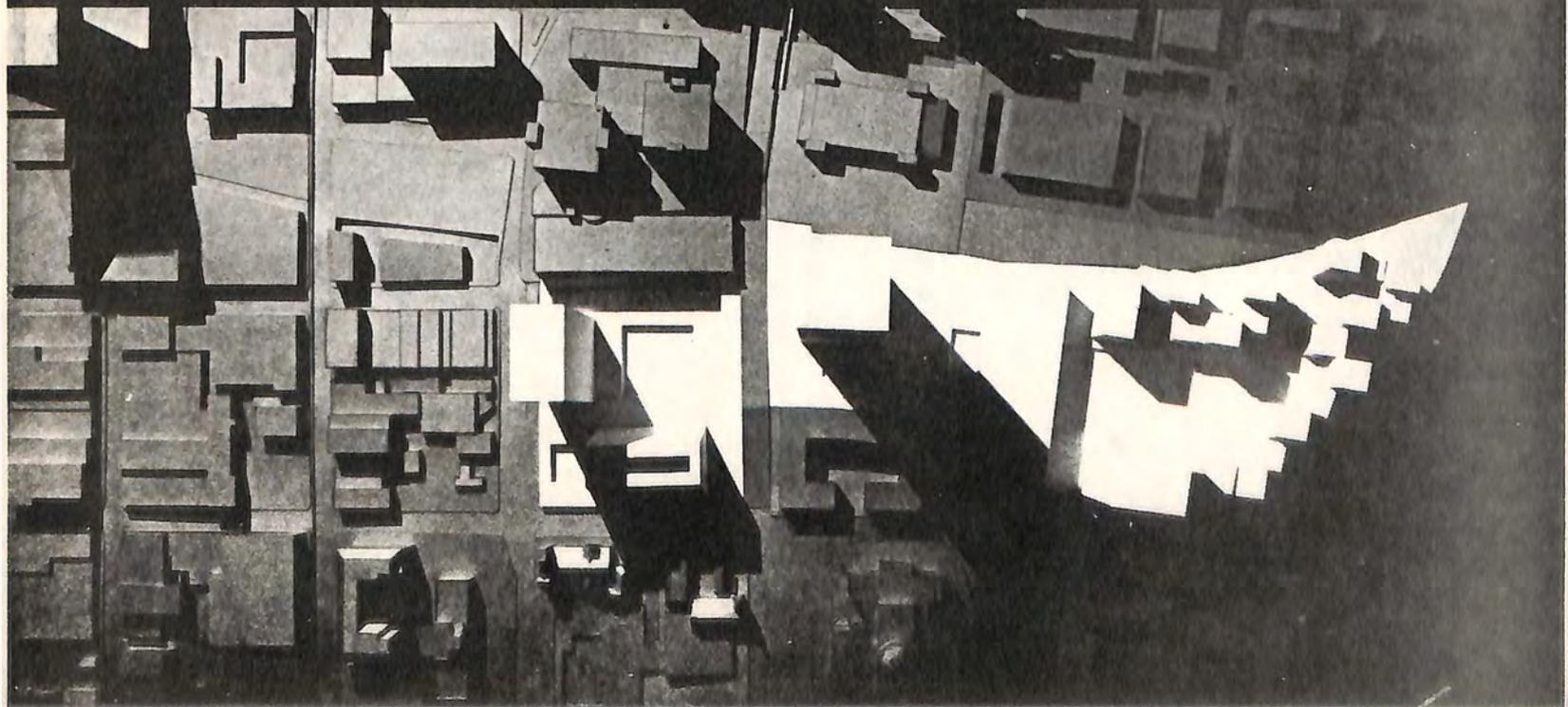
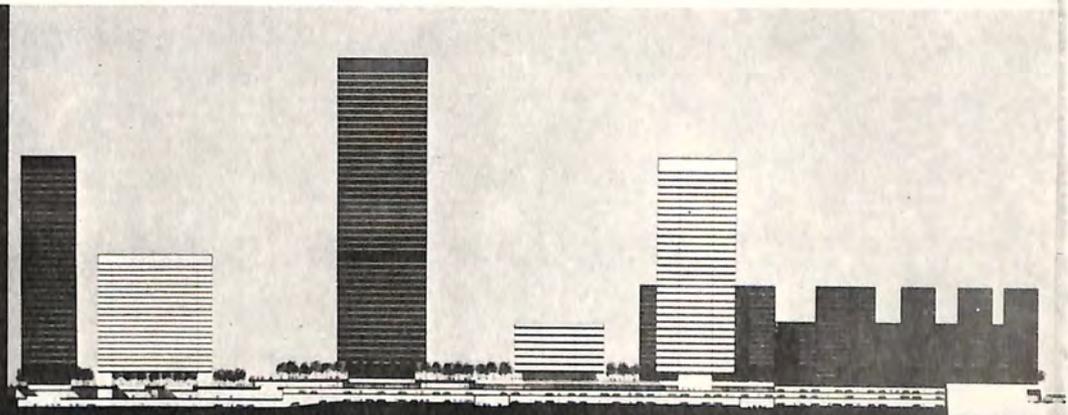
Right: the skylit interior courtyard of the Regency Hyatt House Hotel. The space is 223 ft. high and 140 ft. across, enclosed on all four sides by cantilevered balconies which serve as corridors for the 800 guest rooms. The glassed-in elevator cars rise along the outside of a rectangular core at one side of the courtyard.





The parking structure pictured above is the first phase of a \$500-million, multilevel air-rights project planned by Developer Thomas G. Cousins. It will contain office buildings, hotels, shops, and possibly a sports arena.

Dallas Developer Raymond D. Nasher's \$200-million development will lie between the government center (note State Capitol on model photo below) and the Georgia State College campus (opposite). The buildings will rise above a multilevel platform (right).



The Cousins, Nasher and Georgia State projects could be the start of a vast "platform city"

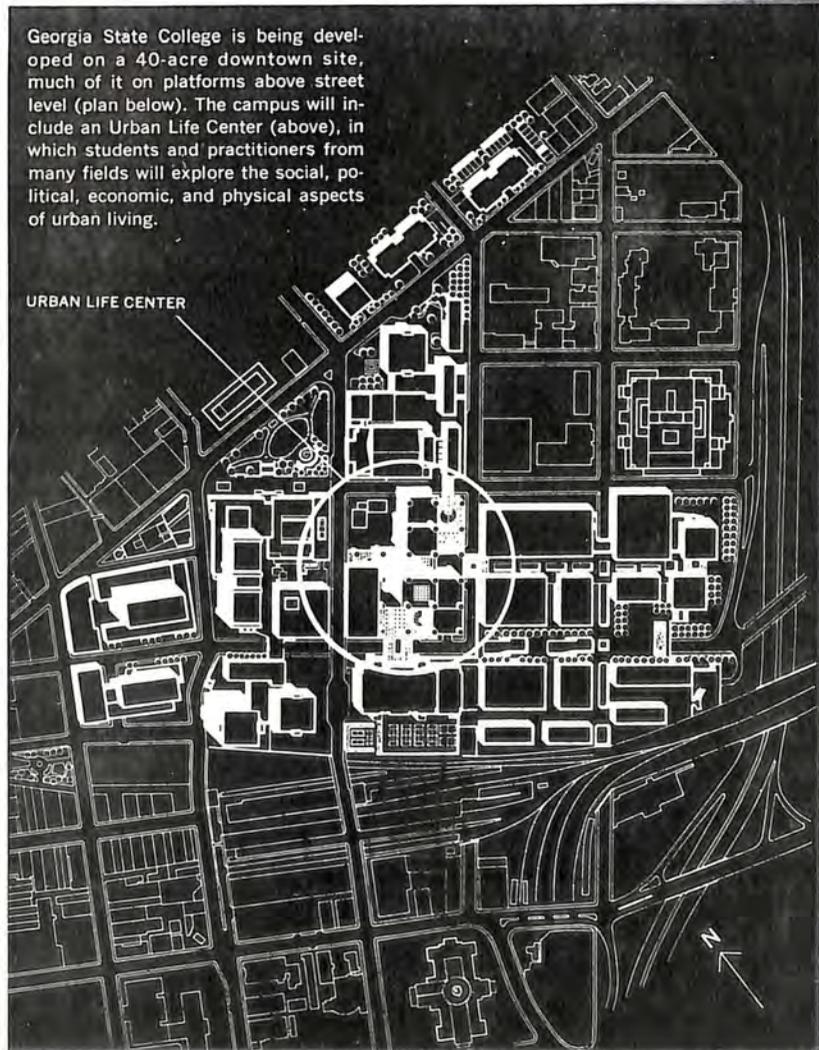
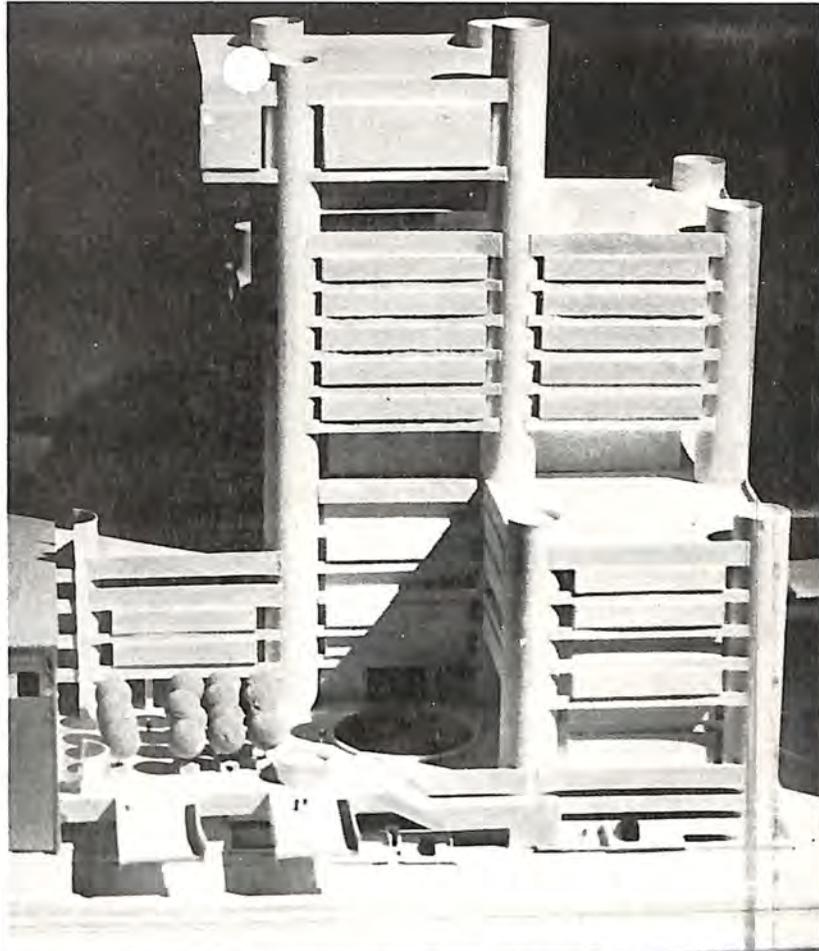
With a little luck and a lot of coordinated planning, the three projects pictured on these pages could be the springboard for making downtown Atlanta a multilevel "platform city," in which all the transportation and pedestrian activities would be sorted out and meshed in a series of interrelated levels.

- The flat-topped parking structure pictured on the opposite page is the first phase of what will probably be the largest of the three projects. It will be built on air rights over a downtown railroad yard. Its developer, Thomas G. Cousins of Atlanta, has not released details of his plan, but it has been reported that the development will represent an investment of some \$500 million and will contain office buildings, apartments, hotels, stores, and possibly a sports arena. Architects for the development are Toombs, Amisano & Wells of Atlanta.

- On a pie-shaped site adjacent to Atlanta's state-county-city government center, Dallas Developer Raymond D. Nasher will build Park Place, an 18-acre, \$200-million complex that will also rise above railroad tracks. Its first building, a 22-story office structure, is now being designed, and plans call for construction of a hotel, additional office buildings, apartments, and a shopping concourse beneath a landscaped plaza. Architects are Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (New York) and Finch, Alexander, Barnes, Rothschild & Paschal of Atlanta.

- The third development, the Georgia State College campus, is already under way in a 40-acre area lying adjacent to the Park Place site. When it is completed in 1975, the campus will rest on a pedestrian platform built over existing streets. The focal point of the campus will be a 500,000-sq.-ft. Urban Life Center (model photo) designed by Finch, Alexander, Barnes, Rothschild & Paschal. It will draw upon all the school's departments to carry out comprehensive studies of the urban ecology. Georgia State's master plan was prepared by Robert & Co. of Atlanta.

The almost simultaneous emergence of the three multilevel de-



Georgia State College is being developed on a 40-acre downtown site, much of it on platforms above street level (plan below). The campus will include an Urban Life Center (above), in which students and practitioners from many fields will explore the social, political, economic, and physical aspects of urban living.

developments flanking the center of downtown has suddenly made the possibility of creating a "platform city" more than just a dream. "The potential is fantastic," says Planner Robert W. Bivens. "This thing is absolutely loaded."

Bivens is executive director of Central Atlanta Progress Inc. (CAP), a unique public-private planning organization set up by the city's civic and business leaders to coordinate and guide the future development of downtown. Working with funds provided by the business community, the city, and the federal government, CAP is now conducting planning studies that eventually will lead to a comprehensive set of guidelines for creating the "platform city." In addition to the three big air-right projects, CAP has these three major elements to work with:

- A proposed rapid-transit system (dotted lines on conceptual diagram at right) converging at a downtown Transit Center located between the three new platform developments. Its underground mezzanine would tie in with the three developments to form a continuous pedestrian concourse. (A referendum to construct a 44-mile metropolitan transit system was defeated at the polls last November, but its advocates consider the turndown only a temporary setback. The plan is now being restudied by the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, and a revised proposal will be presented to the voters at a later date.)

- A small-scale movement system (dotted lines) serving pedestrians in the downtown area. Atlanta—along with Dallas, Denver, and Seattle—was selected last month by the Department of Transportation to participate in a \$1.5-million "action program" leading to the development of central transportation systems that will "blend with the human environment."

- "Railroad Gulch," a vast area of downtown railroad yards crisscrossed overhead by a network of elevated street viaducts. The gulch and its viaducts provide a built-in framework for development of the "platform

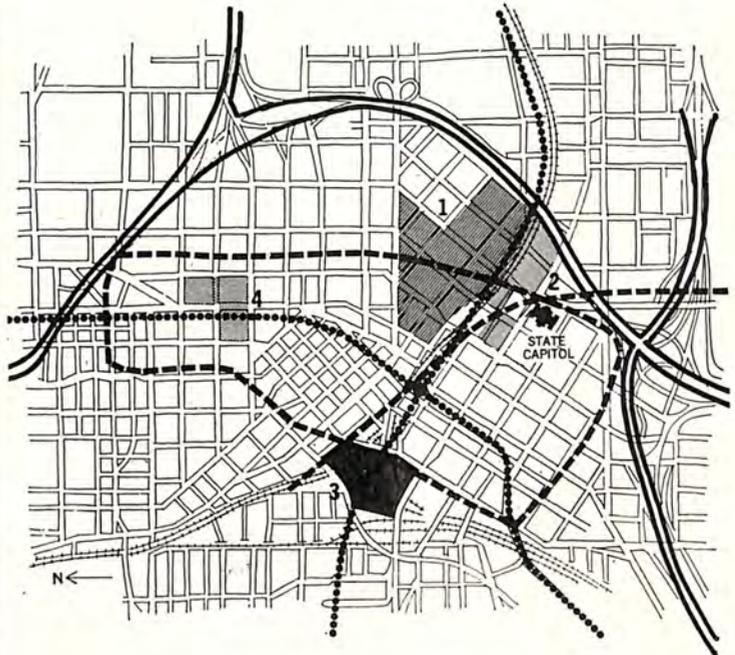
city." The Nasher and Cousins projects, both of which use air rights over sections of the gulch, are the first to take advantage of this framework, and Georgia State's platform over existing, grade-level streets will tie in with it. CAP's plan will establish guidelines for incorporating future projects into the framework. (There are likely to be many opportunities to do so, since the size of downtown is expected to double by 1983, and the gulch will be the most desirable area for the growth to take place.)

#### Multilevel network

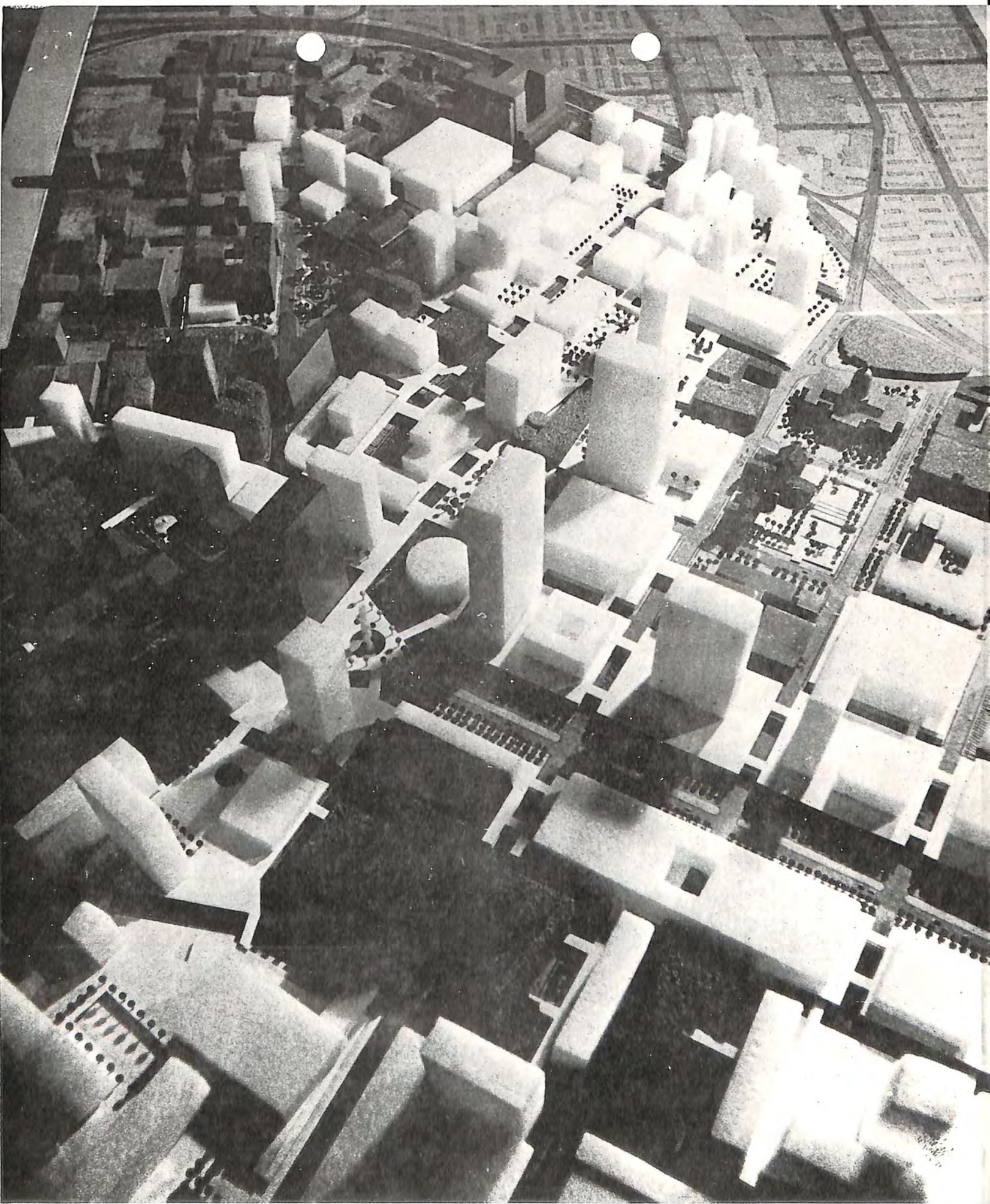
If CAP is able to coordinate and guide all of these converging elements, the result could be a downtown something like the model pictured on the opposite page. It was prepared by Houshang Fahadi, a member of CAP's staff, to stimulate community discussion leading to the development of a master plan.

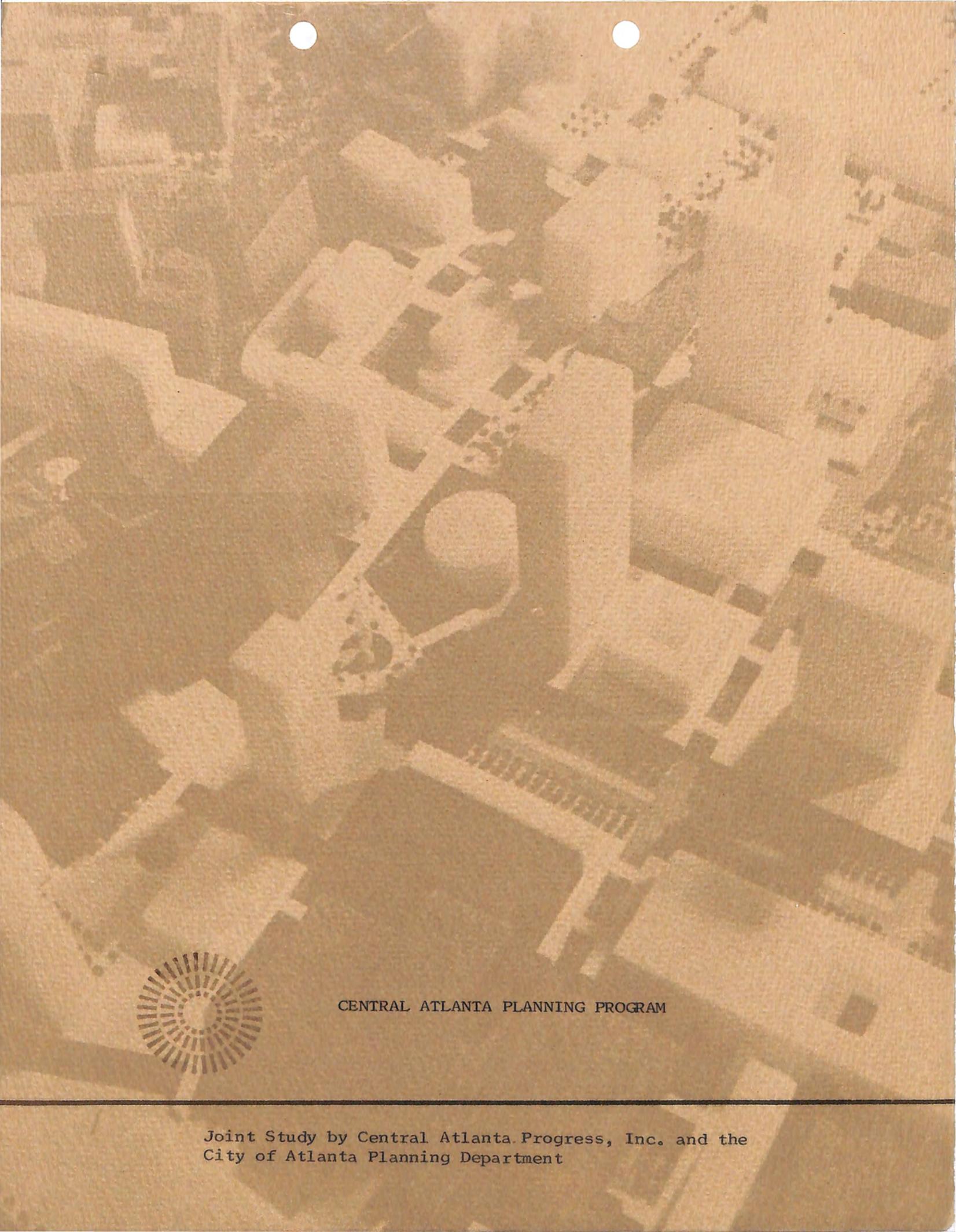
At the upper right-hand corner of the model photo are the Georgia State campus, the Nasher development, and the government center (note the dome of the State Capitol); at the lower left-hand corner is the Cousins project; and between them is the circular Transit Center. From this nucleus, a network of traffic-free pedestrian platforms spreads out in all directions to tie in with the existing downtown and with new developments in the railroad gulch. Beneath the platforms are separated levels for cars and transit, plus a mezzanine-level pedestrian concourse lined with shops.

Atlanta's "platform city" is a long way from fruition, but the city's decision-makers, both public and private, have already demonstrated that they consider it more than just a vague possibility. As the first year's public-private effort, they have jointly provided some \$300,000 to finance studies by CAP and the city's planning staff. "This represents a new dimension," says Planner Donald G. Ingram, CAP's associate director, who is coordinating the effort. "With both the city and the business community committed to it, we think we can make it happen."



The conceptual diagram above and the model pictured on the opposite page are the initial steps in downtown Atlanta's plan for becoming the nation's first "platform city." The plan centers on four large existing or proposed downtown developments: (1) the Georgia State College campus; (2) Park Place; (3) a third large air-rights development; and (4) Peachtree Center. Incorporated in the plan are a proposed rapid-transit system (dotted lines) converging at a Transit Center in the downtown core, and a "mini-system" (dashed lines) for transporting pedestrians throughout the downtown area. The result would be a multilevel network separating cars, transit, and people in a series of interrelated levels. PHOTOGRAPHS: Page 43, Wray Studio; pages 44 and 48 (top); William A. Barnes.





CENTRAL ATLANTA PLANNING PROGRAM

Joint Study by Central Atlanta Progress, Inc. and the  
City of Atlanta Planning Department