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## **When Traffic Piles Up, Drivers Sit and Publishers See New Opportunity**

By ANDREW ADAM NEWMAN

With explosive population growth in Atlanta over the last decade, traffic engineers there are grappling with some of the worst jams in the country. But when marketers at Random House looked at Atlanta's bottlenecks recently, they saw an opportunity: to pitch audio books as the antidote to road rage.

A new promotion, Atlanta Listens, has placed billboards and advertising on the sides on more than 110 buses. The copy begins, "Make your commute more ..." and ends with one of a number of adjectives, such as "magical" (with an image of the book "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows") or "lighthearted" (with "The Nanny Diaries.")

"The campaign is really to communicate to the commuters of Atlanta, 'Here's more you could be doing in your car — you could be learning more or making your commute more romantic,'" said Amanda D'Acierno, director for marketing and publicity at Random House Audio.

She said that traffic woes were not the only reason that Atlanta was chosen over other cities for the \$200,000 promotion, which includes print ads, book festival sponsorships and street teams giving away audio books at parking garages. The city has also been a good market for Random House, ranking 10th in audio book sales and 12th for print sales.

According to a survey by AudioFile, a magazine for audio book enthusiasts, 53 percent of customers listen in their cars, compared with 24 percent who listen at home. In Atlanta, the average commuter drives 31 minutes each way, almost 20 percent longer than the national average.

The Audio Publishers Association said that audio book sales represented about \$923 million in 2006, a 6 percent increase over 2005. But even as the industry grows, audio book divisions generally must make do with meager marketing budgets that are spent riding the coattails of publicity for hardcovers.

“I would guess this is the first time that audio books have been on billboards and the sides of buses,” Ms. D’Acierno said. It is also unusual — if not unprecedented — for a publisher to advertise a format over individual titles, though booksellers are hardly complaining.

Pam Fromer, audio buyer for [Borders Group](#), the bookstore chain, said that overall audio book sales (not just Random House titles) are up as much as 10 percent at the 15 Borders stores in the region as a result of the “Atlanta Listens” campaign, which started in August and will end in November. Borders is giving audio books prime real estate in displays at the front of some stores.

“Audio is one of those categories that if you get someone to try it for the first time, you’ve pretty much created an audio book listener out of that,” Ms. Fromer said.