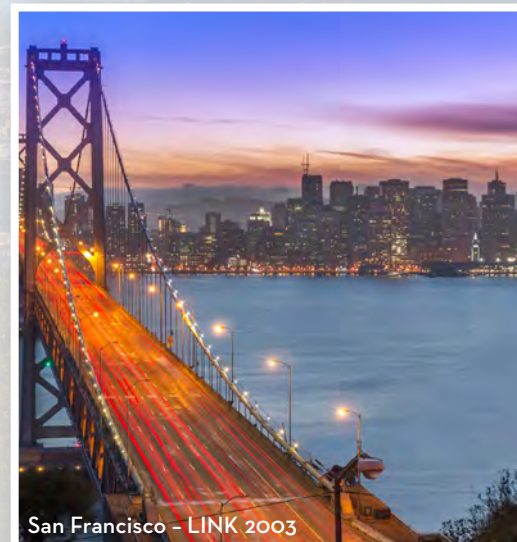
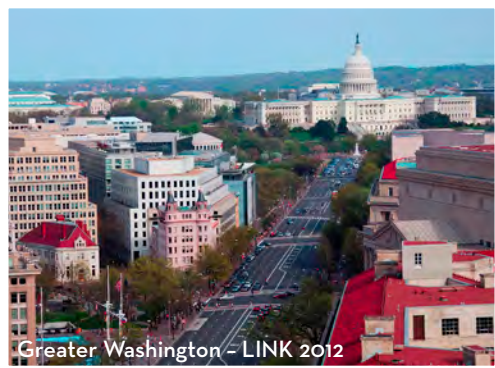




The Journey Continues...



Presented by



ATLANTA REGIONAL COMMISSION

The logo for the LINK 20th Anniversary features a stylized atomic symbol on the left, composed of three intersecting elliptical orbits in orange and blue. To the right of the symbol, the word "LINK" is written in a large, bold, dark blue, sans-serif font. Below "LINK", the words "20TH ANNIVERSARY" are written in a smaller, bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

LINK

20TH ANNIVERSARY

The Journey Continues...

Presented by



LINK: A Legacy of Success



In 1997, the 60 members of the first LINK delegation boarded a plane in sunny Atlanta and landed in snowy Denver.

It's safe to say that no one on that first trip could have known how much the LINK program would grow during the next two decades, or how much of an impact these annual visits would have on our region.

This year, I am thrilled to join more than 100 metro Atlanta leaders on the 20th LINK trip, a visit to the fast-growing Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. As I reflect on this milestone, I am reminded of how these journeys opened our eyes to new ideas and approaches for dealing with the most pressing issues facing us back home.

At the same time, the LINK trips helped me realize that the Atlanta region is doing many things better than anybody else. This affirmation has kept me and my fellow LINK participants energized and eager to keep working to further improve metro Atlanta.

The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) established LINK (Leadership, Involvement, Networking, Knowledge) as a way to build on the remarkable level of regional cooperation that occurred in conjunction with our hosting the Centennial Olympic Games 20 years ago this summer.

Indeed, these trips have helped metro Atlanta leaders get to know each other much better. In many ways, these strengthened relationships have been LINK's most lasting legacy.

Along the way, we learned about cutting-edge programs and met inspiring leaders working to transform their home regions.

We saw first-hand how public art is reshaping Philadelphia communities. We learned about new kinds of transit in San Diego. In Vancouver, north of the border, we visited "complete communities," built to accommodate people of all ages. And in our nation's capital, we saw how transit has sparked walkable development across the region.

And, we've brought some good ideas home with us. The regional public opinion survey from the Kinder Institute at Houston's Rice University inspired ARC and its partners to launch the Metro Atlanta Speaks regional survey, now in its fourth year. The Mayor's Roundtable in Chicago sparked the creation of the Metro Atlanta Mayors Association. And Seattle's Prosperity Partnership brought us the Atlanta Regional Economic Competitiveness Strategy.


You'll read about these efforts, and many more, in the pages that follow. I hope you will be inspired by these stories and share them with others who want to make a difference in our community.

LINK has been successful because of the active engagement of participants like you. Because of your dedication, LINK is helping to create a great metro region, where our children and grandchildren will want to call home.

Thank you for helping to build the LINK program and continuing its legacy of success.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "W. K. Armstrong", is positioned above the name Kerry Armstrong.

Kerry Armstrong

An aerial photograph of Denver, Colorado, showing the city skyline with several prominent skyscrapers in the center. The foreground is dominated by a lush green park with many trees, some of which have yellow and orange autumn foliage. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The word "DENVER" is written in large, bold, light blue capital letters across the middle of the image, and the year "1997" is written in large, bold, orange capital letters to the right of "DENVER".

DENVER

1997

The mood during the inaugural LINK trip was electric. The group, which included nearly 60 metro Atlanta leaders, toured the new Coors Field and visited Douglas County, the nation's fastest-growing large county, which had instituted a growth boundary to shape development. Conversation among LINK participants turned to the issue of regional cooperation and the need to build greater consensus. During dinner at the Colorado governor's mansion, Randy Poynter, ARC chair and chair of the Rockdale County Commission, offered a toast: "Here's to us. Let's change the world."



“These trips proved to be very valuable to me in many ways. One instance was that the Mayor of Atlanta and I had some differences of opinion. We were able to sit down with no fanfare and no spectators and agree that we would discuss our disagreements one-on-one, rather than through the newspaper. It makes a difference when you know someone as a person, rather than as a politician.”

- Wayne Hill, former Chairman, Gwinnett County Commission and Atlanta Regional Commission



“All the LINK trips have been special memories. I always value the opportunity to engage with regional leaders, focusing on getting to know someone new each trip. Secondly, I always learn something I can apply to my organization as a result of experiences and practices shared by other regions.”

- Yvonne Williams, Executive Director, Perimeter CIDs

Key Takeaways

Regional Cooperation



The Atlanta delegation learned how the Denver region's six counties came together through the "Mile High Compact" and passed sales tax increases to support the construction of Coors Field and provide funding for cultural organizations. Denver Mayor Wellington Webb discussed how he made regional cooperation a centerpiece of his administration.

Transportation

LINK participants took notes as the Denver region was working to pass a regional transportation tax. Denver's tax failed that year, but passed on the second attempt, in 2004.



SEATTLE 1998

Nearly 70 leaders from the Atlanta region headed northwest to Seattle,

where they found a vibrant downtown, home to thousands of residents and a booming high-tech economy. They were surprised to learn that Seattle had not built any major new roads or highways during the previous two decades. Meanwhile, LINK participants were bonding. “This year, I found the barriers crumbling,” said Hattie Dorsey, President of the Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership. “We are beginning to view ourselves as a group working toward common goals.”



“These trips have proven over and over that cooperation, from both the public and private communities, is needed for a region to succeed. The first step is getting together and opening dialogue on the issues, which is accomplished most efficiently through the spirit of LINK.”

- Frank T. Mann, Senior Director, Cushman & Wakefield



Key Takeaways



Thriving Downtown

Metro Atlanta leaders were envious of the activity they saw in Seattle's downtown. Seattle Mayor Norm Rice explained downtown had hit bottom a few years earlier, but a public-private effort helped create a new retail and office district with renovated theaters and new residential developments.



Urban Growth Boundary

The Seattle region's urban growth boundary divides areas of higher density from more rural settings. LINK participants said this wouldn't work in metro Atlanta. "We can't continue to sprawl, but we need a bottom-up approach," said Carolyn Hatcher, President of the Georgia Conservancy.



DALLAS/FORT WORTH 1999

LINK participants, accustomed to visiting regions with fewer jurisdictions than their own, were awed by the sheer size of the Dallas region and its 16 counties and 240 different jurisdictions. They toured the stunning Meyerson Symphony Center, rode on the region's new light rail system and visited with Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk, who admitted to being envious of Atlanta. "What makes Atlanta special is that you've got nine to 10 colleges and universities," Kirk said. "Never take for granted what an asset those are for your region."



“We were focused on a new concept: live, work and play communities. John Williams had developed several of these projects in Dallas that were thought to be models for the future.”

- Bill Bolling, Founder, Food Well Alliance



“I remember vividly the contrast between the two cities. The Fort Worth Club, our first stop, was warm and welcoming, with a western feel. Downtown Dallas was glitzy and glamorous, with its shiny and sophisticated skyline.”

- Ann Cramer, Senior Associate,
Coxe Curry & Associates

Key Takeaways

Regional Planning

Historically, regional planning didn't occur between Dallas and Fort Worth, according to Tarrant County Judge Tom Vandergriff. That changed when they were forced by the Civil Aeronautics Board to co-develop an airport.

Economic Divide

Dallas, like Atlanta, had a racial and economic divide between its north and south sides. Dallas had a champion working to address the issue – Don Williams, former Chairman of Trammell Crow. “We are literally a tale of two cities,” he said. “It’s a disgrace that all of our citizens don’t have access to jobs and quality housing.”

CLEVELAND 2000

In contrast to the first three LINK trips, which visited fast-growing regions, metro Cleveland had long struggled and was in search of a turnaround. The group toured the new Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and three new sports facilities, seeing first-hand how the community was reinvesting in itself. Many Clevelanders believed that the city's best days were behind it. The region, however, was making progress by leveraging its primary assets – rediscovering its riverfront and investing in its cultural institutions, historic buildings and neighborhoods.



“They readily admitted their faults and problems. In Atlanta, we tend to be boosters. And you don't learn unless you are talking about your mistakes.”

- William Mosley, Attorney, Jackson Lewis





Key Takeaways




The Power of Collaboration

In 1979, Cleveland was in default, the city was losing population and its manufacturing base was shrinking. Atlanta developer John Williams called Cleveland “a city in crisis,” before leadership came together, “to resurrect a sinking ship.”



Arts and Cultural Foundations

Evidence of Cleveland’s former glory was the health of its arts and cultural institutions. Thanks to old money, the Cleveland Community Foundation had a \$1.6 billion endowment – giving away \$84 million in 1999. The Playhouse Square Foundation restored four historic theaters and provided homes to six performing arts organizations.

A vibrant photograph of the San Diego skyline, featuring several tall, modern glass skyscrapers reflecting the blue sky. In the foreground, numerous sailboats are anchored in the harbor, their masts and sails visible against the water. The overall scene is bright and sunny, with a clear blue sky and a calm sea.

SAN DIEGO

2001

Perhaps the most surprising part of the trip to sunny southern California was the fact that San Diego's metro area consisted of only one county and just 18 incorporated cities – and that this didn't translate into a regional mindset. "They seem to have the same challenges that we face," said Atlanta architect Peggy Whitaker. The LINK delegation enjoyed lunch aboard the USS Tarawa amphibious assault ship and visited Balboa Park, home to the San Diego Zoo.



“We visited an environmental center in San Diego, where I found children learning about the environment. At the time, we were in the process of designing the Gwinnett Environmental and Heritage Center. We had 110,000 people go through our own center last year and enjoy some of the things I had picked up on this LINK trip.”

- Wayne Hill, former Chairman,
Gwinnett County Commission

Key Takeaways



Bus Rapid Transit

San Diego's "flex trolleys" impressed participants, showing the potential of bus rapid transit systems that mimic the look and feel of rail-based transportation. "I was impressed with their market-based approach to mass transit," said Rick Reinhard, President of Central Atlanta Progress. "It blew me away."



Growth Choices

San Diego leaders told the LINK delegation that their region was at a crossroads as it prepared to add a million new residents by 2020. If the region implemented its vision for higher density in urban areas served by transit and lower density in rural areas, it could conserve 400,000 acres of land.

CHICAGO 2002

The 90 LINK delegates marveled at the Windy City's urban charms.

Parks, trees and flowers sprouted on almost every corner. People strolled on wide sidewalks. Architectural treasures stretched to the sky. Throughout the trip, which included a riverboat ride and visit to Chicago's Cultural Arts Center, the prevailing theme was the effectiveness of Chicago's leadership – especially that of longtime Mayor Richard M. Daley. During the trip, Daley met with then newly-elected Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin.



“The highlight was sitting down in a small group with Mayor Daley for a frank and enlightening discussion about his administration, the issues facing Chicago, taking control of the Chicago Public Schools and his father's legacy. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”



- Jim Breedlove, former Director of External Affairs, BellSouth/AT&T



Key Takeaways

Dedicated Parks Funding



One of the most exciting ideas that emerged was Chicago's Parks District, which received dedicated tax funding. Forest Claypool, former Superintendent of the Chicago Park District, said trees, greenspace and parks help to humanize the city.



Regional Mayors Association

The Atlanta delegation drew inspiration from Chicago's Mayors Caucus, which brings the region's mayors together to build consensus on key issues. Upon returning, Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin worked with other mayors in the region to establish the Metro Atlanta Mayors Association.



Transit Governance

The governance of Chicago's public transit system was seen as a possible model for metro Atlanta. In Chicago, one umbrella group – the Regional Transportation Authority – oversees the region's transit agencies.



SAN FRANCISCO 2003

The Bay Area provided a number of object lessons for the 110 Atlanta area leaders who made the trip. They learned about the promise of high-occupancy toll lanes, the lack of quality affordable housing and the region's struggles to work together on critical issues. San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown noted there were more than 25 transportation agencies in the Bay Area, while Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown told the Atlanta group: "Do I talk to my fellow mayors? No, not if I can help it."



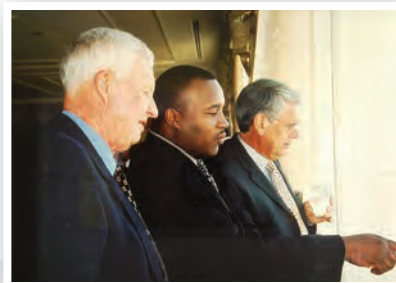
“As much as we complain about the lack of regionalism in metro Atlanta, we are better off than we think we are. I get the feeling that the Atlanta region is more together than we’ve been in decades.”

- Sam Olen, Attorney General, State of Georgia



“On the San Francisco LINK trip there was a great deal of discussion around high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes. Today, these are becoming an integral part of metro Atlanta’s traffic management model. The other thing that stood out was the Bay Area Council, a business-sponsored, public policy advocacy organization. It had a broader policy range, a larger research effort and more robust advocacy than any of its metro Atlanta counterparts, then or now.”

- Andrew Feiler, President, Metro Developers



Key Takeaways

Transportation and HOT Lanes

The Atlanta delegation was intrigued with the region’s network of toll lanes and the idea of drivers paying to avoid congestion. “They are far more advanced than we are,” said Rita Rainwater, then chair of the Douglas County Commission. “But we’ll get there.”

Quality of Life

San Francisco preserved large swaths of land for parks and green space and also invested in the arts, moves that helped attract high-tech workers to feed its booming technology sector. “The attractiveness of the environment makes it so desirable for creative workers,” said Charles Brewer, founder of MindSpring.

GREATER BOSTON 2004

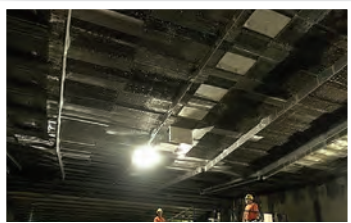
When more than 100 leaders from metro Atlanta visited Boston,

they saw the recently completed \$14.6 billion “Big Dig” project, which buried a downtown highway and created more urban greenspace. Participants were intrigued by the new Massachusetts Community Preservation Act, which matched any tax revenues a community collected for acquiring greenspace or developing affordable housing. They also marveled at the visual impact of the Zakim-Bunker Hill Bridge. “They don’t go for the lowest common denominator,” said Helen Hatch of TVS architectural firm. “Good design is of value in Boston.”



“I was impressed and even a bit intimidated by the way the Boston region’s universities worked together and with the business community to create, fund, support and nurture start-up businesses, particularly high-tech ventures. There seemed to be much greater collaboration between the academic and private sectors than we had at the time.”

- Sharon Gay, Partner, Dentons





Key Takeaways



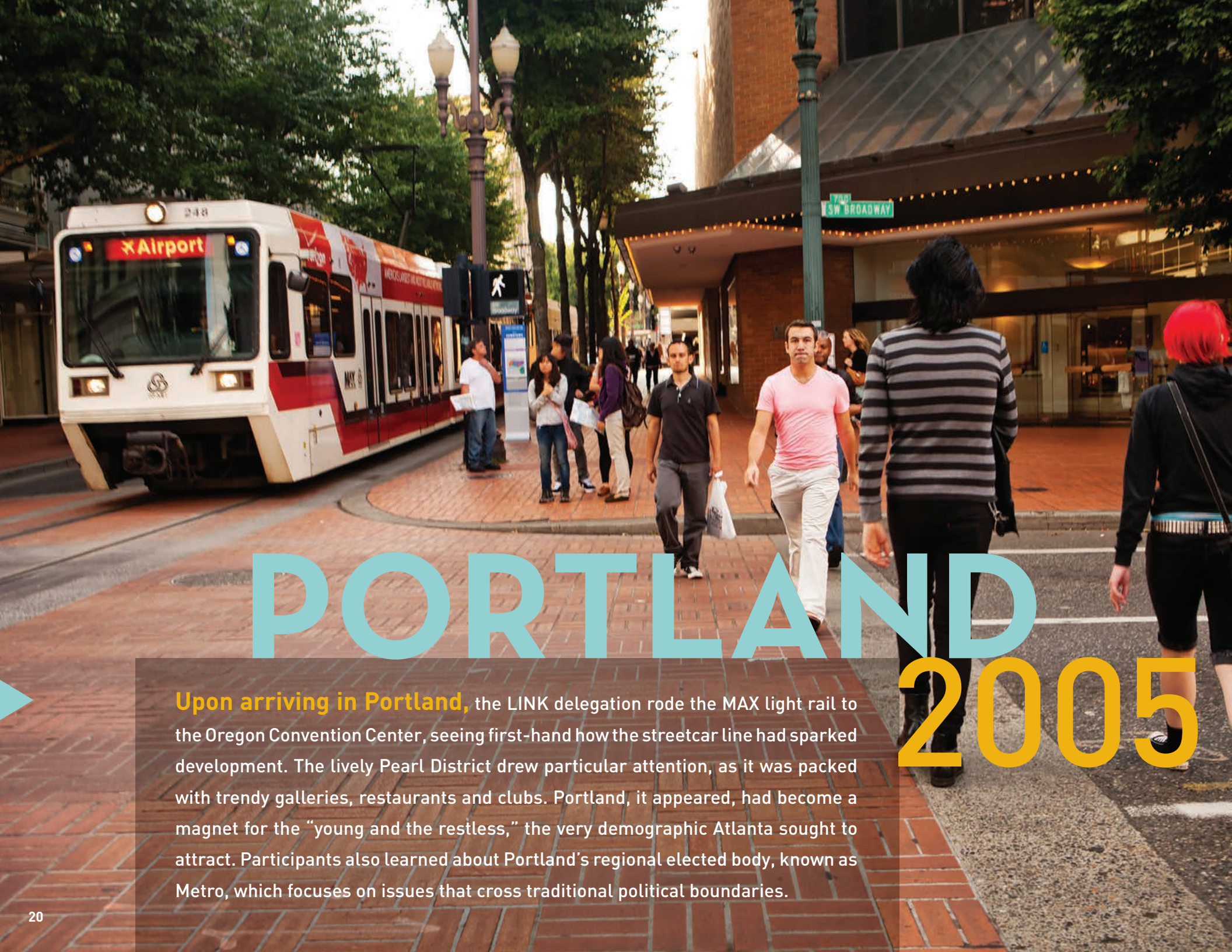
Regional Transit Agency

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) served 175 communities in the region, overseeing the subway system, light rail, streetcars, buses and a new bus rapid transit line, as well as commuter rail and ferries. At the time, MBTA had 900 miles of rail with 300 stations. MBTA also received \$680 million a year in state funding.



Diverse Leadership

Boston leaders cited Atlanta as a model when it came to race relations and diversity among its elected officials. They lamented that their region had no African American mayors or members of Congress, even though blacks were the fastest growing segment of their population.



PORTLAND 2005

Upon arriving in Portland, the LINK delegation rode the MAX light rail to the Oregon Convention Center, seeing first-hand how the streetcar line had sparked development. The lively Pearl District drew particular attention, as it was packed with trendy galleries, restaurants and clubs. Portland, it appeared, had become a magnet for the “young and the restless,” the very demographic Atlanta sought to attract. Participants also learned about Portland’s regional elected body, known as Metro, which focuses on issues that cross traditional political boundaries.



“My favorite LINK trips held clues about how to best improve Atlanta’s transportation network. In Portland, I found myself looking out over the next streetcar expansion, somewhat surprised there was interest from our group. Years later, Atlanta’s Streetcar, certainly subject to skepticism, is already generating the kind of development spurred by MAX. Other trips have built on that momentum to create real solutions to Georgia’s transportation issues.”

- Ben Young, Editor, Georgia Trend



Key Takeaways



Streetcar

The striking success of Portland’s streetcar hit home for many in the Atlanta delegation, drawing parallels to the new Atlanta BeltLine project. John Carroll, founder and president of the Portland Streetcar, was also a developer who realized how a streetcar could be a catalyst for new development.



Regional Leadership

The Atlanta contingent learned about metro Portland’s regionally elected body. Created in 1978 to oversee the implementation of the area’s urban growth boundaries, its role had expanded to include regional planning on issues such as parks, trails, solid waste and recycling.

SOUTH FLORIDA MIAMI 2006

The trip to sunny South Florida,

which marked the 10th anniversary of the LINK program, exposed participants to the region's remarkable level of ethnic and racial diversity. Miami Mayor Manny Diaz led a bus tour in which he pointed out buried streams the city had uncovered to create "blue ways," part of his ambitious efforts to make Miami an even more beautiful place. Florida Governor Jeb Bush discussed how the state was incentivizing regionalism in its large metro areas.



“All of the LINK trips taught me one outstanding lesson – leadership is the key to success. Miami proved this point over and over, as we witnessed how the leadership of one mayor turned Miami into a hot, international destination.”

- Kay Pippin, Mayor, City of Jackson, GA





Key Takeaways




Urban Renaissance

Miami's downtown skyline was dotted with dozens of cranes, marking the home of future condo towers. Mayor Diaz explained that the city, once the poorest large city in the U.S., had seen its tax base doubled in the previous four years, with 94,000 residential units in the pipeline.



Regional Cooperation

South Florida, like metro Atlanta, was growing fast, and the two regions faced many of the same challenges — water supply, traffic congestion, immigration and an aging population. The state of Florida was providing funding to help greater Miami deal with some of these issues.



VANCOUVER

2007

This west coast Canadian city was abuzz preparing for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games when more than 100 LINK participants visited. The delegation was intrigued to learn that in Vancouver, many hold a positive view of density and traffic congestion. They also heard about Vancouver's Livable Region Strategic Plan, a 100-year vision to develop more sustainable communities. Also of note, Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin held pre-LINK talks with Vancouver leaders to discuss humanely dealing with homelessness during the Olympics, when the whole world is watching.



“People in Vancouver obviously respect the environment around them. They truly are building something for future generations by asking: ‘Does it contribute to quality of life and sustainability?’”

- Kay Pippin, Mayor, City of Jackson, GA



“Vancouver showed us what a walkable city looks like. We are making some real progress in creating walkable places in the Atlanta region, but we still have much ground to cover to catch up with Vancouver.”

- Jim Stokes, President, Sustainable Solutions Georgia

Key Takeaways

Complete Communities



Vancouver introduced Atlantans to the concept of “complete communities” that not only have all the amenities residents need, but are also built to accommodate people of all ages. A city ordinance requires 25 percent of new housing in the central city be suitable for families with small children.

No Highways through Town

Vancouver blocked construction of freeways in its urban core in the 1970s and built a seawall around its downtown that accommodates pedestrians and cyclists, creating a strong sense of place for residents and visitors alike.



METRO DENVER 2008

In the 11 years since LINK first visited metro Denver, that region had made tremendous progress. Stronger regional institutions and ties had been forged, and – perhaps most importantly – voters in 2004 had passed a sales tax to support transit expansion, clearing the way for a 120-mile network of light rail and commuter rail. In contrast, an effort to allow similar votes in regions across Georgia had recently failed to pass the state Senate. During the trip’s closing session, Atlanta leaders pledged to make new transportation funding a rallying cry for the region.



“Denver has proven that transit connectivity to the urban core supports first-class growth in suburban areas. What’s frustrating is knowing that Atlanta has what is needed to not just replicate, but improve upon Denver’s accomplishments. Yet, our region has been challenged in taking these steps.”

- Robert F. Dallas, Director, Georgia Governor’s Office of Highway Safety





Key Takeaways




Hospital Turnaround

Denver's public hospital, like Atlanta's Grady Memorial Hospital, had faced financial troubles. By 2008, the Denver facility had been turned over to a nonprofit corporation and was operating in the black, providing services for the entire region, such as the 911 and EMS systems.



Arts and Culture

Voters had passed a sales tax in 1989 to support arts and culture throughout the region. The tax was small – just one-tenth of one percent. But Joe Bankoff, President of the Woodruff Arts Center, was impressed that this tax could accomplish so much.

An aerial photograph of Minneapolis, Minnesota, showing a dense urban skyline with numerous skyscrapers in the background. The foreground is dominated by a vast expanse of green trees, likely in a park or residential area, with a body of water visible at the bottom. The sky is clear and blue.

MINNEAPOLIS

ST. PAUL

2009

Cutting-edge transportation and redevelopment projects were among the highlights of the trip to the Twin Cities. LINK participants rode the region's new light rail system and marveled at a historic Sears building that had been redeveloped into a thriving office and retail center adjacent to a 25-mile walking and biking trail. This offered a glimpse of the future: Several years later, Atlanta's own historic Sears building would be transformed in a similar fashion into Ponce City Market.



“What took me by surprise was their belief in the power of a good quality of life. The region had made concentrated efforts to build biking and pedestrian infrastructure to improve health. And they drove economic development by focusing on early education and higher education.”

- Ann Hanlon, Executive Director, North Fulton CID

Key Takeaways

Investing in Education



Minnesota's renowned educational system was cited as a reason companies locate, and remain, in the state. But this comes at a cost: a relatively high state corporate tax rate. Local leaders, though, said the investment was needed to build a strong education system.

Quality of Life



Minneapolis-St. Paul boasted a strong arts and cultural community with first-class facilities. And despite its cold climate, Minneapolis had become the No. 2 bicycle commuting city in the U.S., with 177 miles of trails and plans for a major expansion.

GREATER PHOENIX 2010

Immigration was perhaps the hottest topic during the journey to the desert southwest. The LINK delegation heard from supporters and opponents of a controversial Arizona immigration bill and discussed how such a measure might affect economic growth in the Atlanta region, which continued to struggle in the wake of the Great Recession. LINK participants also toured Arizona State University's new downtown campus and discussed the business of higher education.



“The greater Phoenix trip was very timely, as they presented the controversial immigration debate. There was lively discussion among our group that helped bring our regional community together, providing an interesting contrast between the two regions.”

- Frank T. Mann, Senior Director, Cushman & Wakefield



Key Takeaways



Renewable Energy

The Greater Phoenix region had seized on renewable energy, particularly solar, as a path for future economic development. LINK participants were told that by 2020, 30 percent of Arizona's power will come from renewables. This sparked a meaningful exchange among participants from Georgia Power, Gas South and Southface, showcasing LINK as a venue for sharing ideas.



College-Led Urban Revival

The Phoenix region's partnership with Arizona State University impressed Atlanta's leaders, particularly how the school had helped spark a revival in downtown Phoenix. The LINK delegation also learned about the New American University, the largest public research university in the nation.



SEATTLE 2011

In 2011, LINK made a return trip to the Puget Sound region, where participants learned about the region's struggles to replace an earthquake-damaged elevated highway. A business leader told the LINK group that the Seattle region suffered from "Seattle Nice" – the inability to make a decision until everyone is happy, noting it took 13 years to build a third airport runway. LINK participants also explored the Experience Music Project museum, took a tour of the giant Boeing factory and got an up-close look at Qwest Field, home of the Seattle Seahawks and Seattle Sounders FC.



“It did broaden my horizon. The people on the trip helped me visualize the Atlanta region in a new way. I learned that it’s not about a particular project list. It’s about an overall vision for the region.”

- Jan Jones, Speaker Pro Tem of the Georgia House of Representatives

Key Takeaways



Transit Funding

Seattle leaders were still stinging from the fact that MARTA received federal transit funds some four decades earlier that could have gone to Seattle, but voters there turned down a transit-funding referendum. In 2008, metro Seattle voters approved a transit-heavy referendum, a year after a roads and transit referendum had failed.



Sustainability

Former Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels made sustainability a hallmark of the city and also led the effort to get U.S. cities to adopt the Kyoto Protocol to reduce carbon emissions. Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed pledged during the trip that Atlanta would become one of the 10 most sustainable cities in the country during his administration.



Emphasizing the Economy

The Puget Sound region’s Prosperity Partnership inspired the delegation to launch the Atlanta Regional Competitiveness Strategy. Under the direction of LINK participants, Craig Lesser and Pedro Cherry, the effort has grown to include more than 1,000 volunteers working in four committees.

WASHINGTON^(DC) 2012

A sense of urgency accompanied the trip to the nation's capital, as the Atlanta region was just months away from a region-wide vote on a transportation sales tax. As the Atlanta delegation toured Baltimore, Arlington, Va. and Washington, a theme emerged: denser development near transit was fostering tremendous economic development there. Trip highlights included staying at the historic Willard Hotel, meeting in the Russell Senate Office Building and getting an impromptu close-up of the Space Shuttle Discovery on the airport tarmac.



“It was interesting to see the way D.C., northern Virginia and southern Maryland were competing with each other in a positive way, rather than trying to bring each other down.”

- Josh Rowan, Branch Manager, MBP





Key Takeaways

Transportation

Chris Leinberger of the Brookings Institution addressed the Atlanta delegation and noted that while MARTA and Washington's Metro started at the same time, Metro was able to expand much more rapidly. As a result, greater Washington had been able to develop a number of walkable town centers connected to transit.

Education

Kaya Henderson, Chancellor of Washington's public school system, discussed the major reforms she's put in place, such as merit-based compensation packages for top teachers. Tad Leithead, ARC Chair, said he would like to import Henderson's ideas to Atlanta.

A photograph of the Houston skyline featuring several prominent skyscrapers, including the Bank of America Tower with its distinctive blue glass facade. In the foreground, there is a calm body of water reflecting the city and a green grassy hill with a dirt path leading up towards the buildings. The sky is overcast with soft clouds.

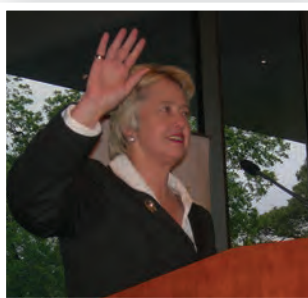
HOUSTON 2013

The LINK delegation was welcomed by Houston Mayor Annise Parker, the first openly gay mayor of a major U.S. city. The participants toured the world-renowned Texas Medical Center, which includes the MD Anderson Cancer Center. And they learned that Houston voters had approved funding for two major projects: \$100 million in bonds to build hiking and biking trails along Houston's network of bayous; and a multi-billion dollar transit expansion.



“I remember hearing that despite the Great Recession, Houston was thriving, adding almost 200,000 new jobs and leading the nation in corporate relocations. You could feel that energy in the community. Also, as a member of the Georgia World Congress Center Authority, I remember touring Houston’s Reliant Stadium to glean ideas for the Falcons’ new retractable roof facility.”

- Bill Russell, CEO, Russell Landscape LLC



“Regional economic development was one area where Houston seemed to shine compared to Atlanta. There was one umbrella organization for the region – the Greater Houston Partnership.”

- Tedra Cheatham, Executive Director, Clean Air Campaign



Key Takeaways

Public Opinion Survey



The Atlanta contingent was highly intrigued by a public opinion survey that the Houston region had been conducting annually for about 30 years, enabling leaders to track how the region’s views change on key topics. This inspired ARC and its community partners to launch the Metro Atlanta Speaks survey.

Diversity and Disparity



Houston, the largest city in Texas, is also the most diverse city in the U.S., with a population split among Anglos, Latinos, African-Americans and Asians. The city had seen a sharp increase in income inequality. “The striking redistribution of income is the central political challenge of our times,” said Stephen Klineberg, a sociology professor at Rice University.

PHILADELPHIA 2014

The City of Brotherly Love was experiencing a renaissance, with a buzzing downtown scene, thriving public art program and booming healthcare sector. After disclosing the secret to a perfect Philly cheese steak sandwich, Ed Rendell, former Pennsylvania governor and former Philadelphia mayor, told LINK participants that a key to the turnaround was acting and thinking as a region. "If they are going to hear you at the state Capitol, the city and the suburbs have to act as one. You have to care as one," said Rendell.



“Since the Philadelphia trip, the City of Duluth has created a master art plan that is helping set the stage for murals to come to our city.”

- Nancy Harris, Mayor, City of Duluth





Key Takeaways



Public Art

Jane Golden, founder of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program, said public art is addressing poverty and crime by bringing creative energy to the city's streets. Inspired by what they saw and heard, the Atlanta delegation launched the Atlanta Regional Public Art Program in 2015.

Community Revitalization



John Fry, President of Drexel University, opened the eyes of many LINK delegates to the role of "anchor institutions" in revitalizing communities. Drexel was literally taking its campus to the other side of the railroad tracks, working with the community to create what he called an "innovation neighborhood."



GREATER **TORONTO** 2015

Density and diversity were the main themes as the LINK delegation traveled to North America's fifth largest metropolitan area, where 46 percent of the population was born in another country. Even the suburb of Mississauga had impressive towers to house its 500,000 jobs and almost 1 million people. Participants couldn't get over the number of cranes dotting the region's skyline, as Greater Toronto continued to boom.



“The Atlanta metro region is leveraging about 5 percent of its international diversity, while Toronto is leveraging about 90 percent. Atlanta can be one of the most global regions in the country.”

- David Lubell, Executive Director, Welcoming America



“Relentless incrementalism – the need to get focused on something and work it and work it and work it. That is something I would definitely take home with me from Toronto.”

- Doug Hooker, Executive Director, ARC



Key Takeaways



Civic Action

Before being elected mayor of Toronto, John Tory helped found Civic Action, a non-partisan organization that brings together business executives, labor leaders, nonprofits, academia and engaged citizens to tackle key challenges facing the region.



Transit Investment

The Greater Toronto region planned to invest \$32 billion in transit projects during a 15-year period, Bruce McCuaig, CEO of Metrolinx, told the LINK delegation. A key to the region's success, he added, has been shifting the conversation from the number of vehicles being moved, to the number of people who are being moved.

LINK: BEYOND 2016

For the past two decades, the LINK program has exposed us to many different places, ideas and stimulating thought leaders, helping us become more informed about how to move the Atlanta region forward.

We've learned a great deal from our peers across the country about how to approach our own challenges. Meanwhile, LINK participants from across the Atlanta region have bonded and built productive, lasting relationships.

These are impressive achievements, to be sure. But we cannot rest on our laurels. The world is changing rapidly, and our region's leaders need to be willing and able to adapt quickly in order to remain at their competitive best.



As we look ahead to the next 20 years, we must ask ourselves: How might the LINK program need to change in order to remain a vital civic resource?

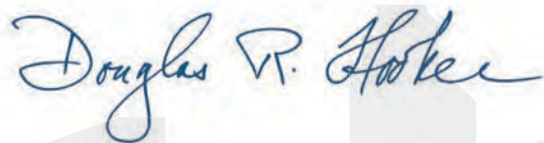
There are many questions to consider. Should the trip continue to be held every year, or should we opt for a different frequency? Should we organize smaller LINK trips that focus on specific topics, such as workforce development or K-12 education reform? How do we make sure to include the new generation of leaders that is emerging?

All of us at ARC thank you for joining us these past 20 years, whether you went on one trip or attended all of them. We hope you have found that your leadership contributions to the region were strengthened by your LINK experiences.

I encourage you to continue supporting ARC and the LINK program, as we consider new models and welcome new generations of regional leaders. It's critically important that we keep exploring other places in order to secure our future back home.

Thanks to you, our LINK journey continues.

Sincerely,



Douglas R. Hooker
ARC Executive Director
April 2016

LINK Learning Works Both Ways

“The LINK visit in 2009 was meaningful for me because I saw that Atlanta’s economic developers presented a more unified vision than the Twin Cities when recruiting companies. We have since created an organization that is the entry point for economic development contacts. That LINK visit figured into the trajectory our region was pursuing to think more regionally and to present a more unified front.”

- Emmett Coleman, Vice President of External Affairs,
Comcast - Twin Cities Region

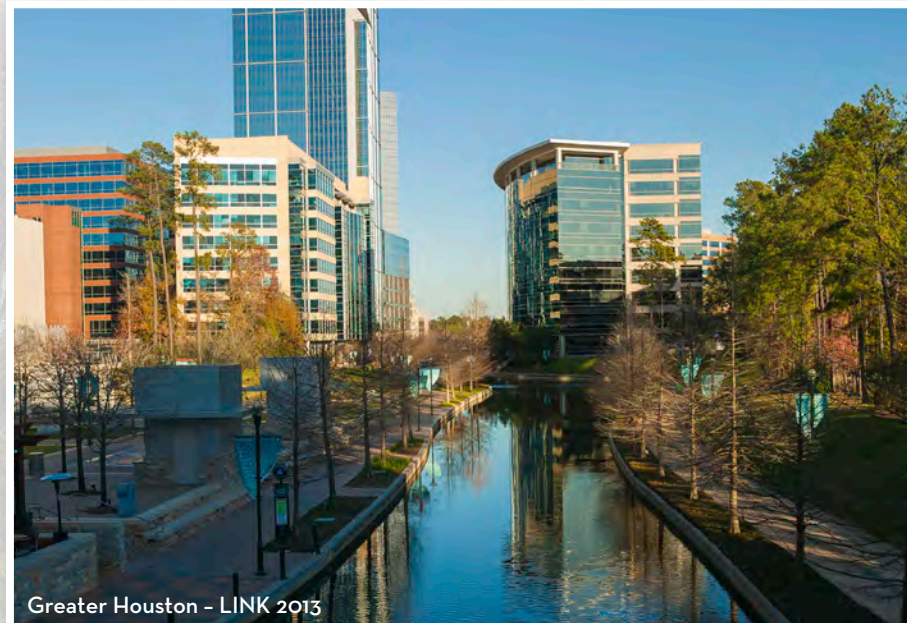


Special thanks

Maria Saporta, longtime Atlanta business, civic and urban affairs journalist, contributed extensive research, content and select photos to this commemorative book. She is editor of the SaportaReport and also writes news and opinion pieces for the Atlanta Business Chronicle. Maria has attended all but one LINK trip.

ARC would also like to thank the many LINK participants who contributed their reflections on past visits.

Finally, we would like to thank the Council for Quality Growth for the sponsorship of this commemorative book, as well as our many LINK sponsors who have made these journeys of learning possible.



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