



Atlanta
BeltLine

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Partnership

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

Wednesday, October 25, 2023

BeltLine Leadership Discuss Transit at the Council for Quality Growth's 2023 State of the BeltLine
250+ Attend Annual Address & Breakfast at Uptown Atlanta

ATLANTA, GA – On October 24, 2023, the [Council for Quality Growth](#), [Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.](#), and the [Atlanta BeltLine Partnership](#) co-hosted the annual State of the BeltLine address and breakfast in the atrium of the newly redeveloped Uptown Towers at [Uptown Atlanta](#), a growing mixed-use development project surrounding MARTA's Lindbergh Station. Over 250 Council for Quality Growth members of the development community, business leaders, elected officials, and other BeltLine stakeholders gathered to hear this annual update from the project's leadership. The State of the BeltLine concluded the Council's annual series of "State of" events, following eight regional county addresses. "The BeltLine has become an integral part of Atlanta's future," said Michael Paris, President & CEO of the Council for Quality Growth. "We're proud to provide the platform for this leadership team to tell their placemaking story and share their vision to not just build a trail, but to build economic value and prosperity in the neighborhoods and communities the BeltLine touches."

Mayor Andre Dickens opened the program with greetings from the City of Atlanta. "Atlanta is a group project," he started, "and this bold undertaking of the Beltline has captured global attention." Mayor Dickens complimented the network of leadership working to advance the BeltLine, advance equity along it, and continue to connect communities. "The creation of the BeltLine has made just about everyone in the City of Atlanta a stakeholder in its future and the future of this city," he said. The Mayor set the stage for the conversation that followed, reminding attendees that transit has always been a part of the BeltLine's initial plan to integrate with – not disrupt – the communities it serves. "What the BeltLine really doing is connecting us."

Anna Roach, Executive Director of the Atlanta Regional Commission, moderated an Executive Discussion between Clyde Higgs and Rob Brawner, "Celebrating Momentum and Planning for the Future." The President & CEO of the Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. (ABI) and the Executive Director of the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership (ABP) took the opportunity to update the business community on all the progress made along the 22-mile loop in the last year and look ahead at what's to come. A year ago, Higgs reported that the BeltLine was on track to have 80% of the trail either under construction or completed within 24 months. Now halfway through that time, he reported a new projection of over 85% within the next 12 months. \$750 million dollars have been invested in the BeltLine to date, leading to over \$9 billion in private investment.

ABI and ABP expect to exceed their goal of creating 5,600 new affordable housing units by the trail's completion in 2030. Brawner and his team are making additional efforts to support legacy residents. "It's not only about keeping them in the community," said Brawner, "but also about keeping them in their homes and helping them build wealth." The Partnership is looking to continue raising philanthropic funding for three main projects going forward, including the Legacy Resident Retention Fund, which covers the increases in property taxes for single-family homeowners not supported by the BeltLine's Tax Allocation District. The other two are the expansions of Enota and Westside Parks.

Metro Atlanta is expected to add 2 million residents in 2050, the big statistic behind the necessity for transit and transportation options to move people around the city. In 2016, the advancement of the More MARTA program was voted for by residents with 70% approval. This included transit expansion on the BeltLine. Higgs wants to

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see “verdant, green, approachable” transit added to the BeltLine. “We’re not talking about a 50-mph vehicle barreling down the BeltLine. We don’t need a concrete monstrosity,” he said.

While it is important to the BeltLine’s leadership to include the community in the conversations around transit, Higgs reminded that “transit is part of the DNA of the Atlanta BeltLine.” Many of the challenges to BeltLine transit are aesthetic ones – worries over the tree canopy or adding concrete barriers. Higgs hopes that Atlanta can come together to realize a vision for transit that integrates into the BeltLine that exists today and sets up future generations for success in mobility. “We want to give people access to all of the things they care about from a quality-of-life perspective without having to get into a personal vehicle,” he said.

Higgs was joined by a panel of partners and major stakeholders to continue the conversation on BeltLine transit, including Ambrish Baisiwala, Chairman and CEO of Portman Holdings, Lisa Benjamin, Chief Operating Officer of the City of Atlanta, Collie Greenwood, General Manager of MARTA, and Jim Irwin, President of New City Properties. They discussed successful transit systems in other cities. Benjamin spoke of 4 days spent between Seattle and Portland without having to get into a car. “Investment in our infrastructure is what we need for options, access, and opportunity,” she said. Greenwood likened his vision for the BeltLine to the streetcar networks of Paris and Barcelona, but “safety is non-negotiable,” he said.

Irwin and Baisiwala are both large property developers with major projects along the BeltLine. Baisiwala expressed metro Atlanta’s overarching need for multiple transit options and urged careful study on cost benefit as all those options are considered. Portman Holdings has 23 buildings that incorporate transit, and the Chairman and CEO recognizes the regional need for transit. “When we talk about the notion of transit, ultimately it is to lean into the overall solution for a better quality of life,” Baisiwala said. Irwin emphasized the importance of doing things right, not fast. “This is not just a weekend activity,” he said. “We’re at a point in our city where people are using this 5, 6, or 7 days a week to actually get around to where they need to be.” He said one-third of Mailchimp’s employees use the BeltLine to get to work every day, the reason the Fortune 500 IT company chose the Eastside Trail to call home.

Higgs, Benjamin, and Greenwood collectively encourage the multitude of opinions on BeltLine transit, referencing back to the Mayor’s mantra of Atlanta being a group project. “There’s lots of energy and gumption about the BeltLine,” said Higgs, “but now robust conversations are needed for this next iteration of the BeltLine.”

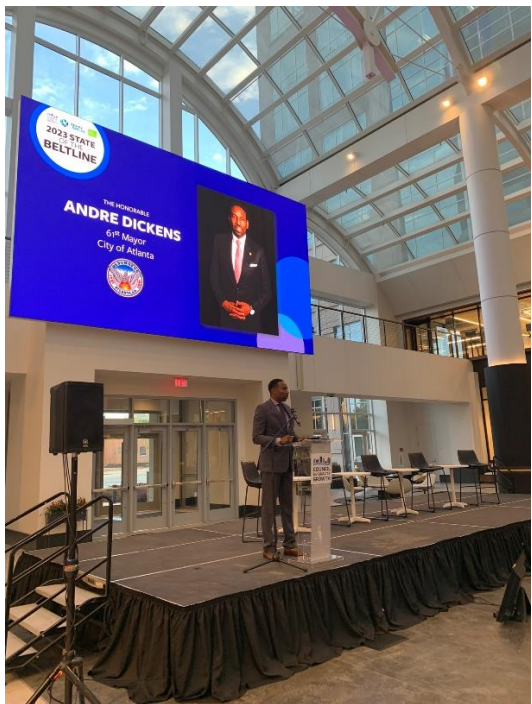
The Atlanta BeltLine project has been a significant source of economic development and quality growth for the City of Atlanta and is on track for completion by 2030. Atlanta BeltLine, Inc. and the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership have collaborated since 2005 to develop a 22-mile multi-use urban trail, transit, and park system connecting Atlanta’s neighborhoods, creating jobs, developing affordable housing, adding greenspace, showcasing arts and culture, and engaging the communities it reaches. The Atlanta BeltLine is partnering with MARTA and the City of Atlanta to plan, design, and engineer a comprehensive transportation network that is equitable and accessible for all. The Council for Quality Growth is a proud partner of the Atlanta BeltLine and its initiatives to promote an increased quality of life for our region’s residents and businesses.

The Council would like to extend a thank you to the teams at ABI and ABP for your partnership each year on this important event. The full recording of 2023 State of the BeltLine can be re-watched at www.councilforqualitygrowth.org/REWATCH.

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[From left: Clyde Higgs, Lisa Benjamin, Collie Greenwood, Ambrish Baisiwala, Jim Irwin]



[Mayor Andre Dickens delivers greetings from the City of Atlanta]



[Anna Roach moderates Executive Discussion between Clyde Higgs and Rob Brawner]



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About the State of the County/Agency Series

The Council for Quality Growth hosts 10 ‘State of’ events across the region, including 8 counties and 2 agencies. We work in close collaboration with the office of the County Chairs in Cherokee, Clayton, DeKalb, Douglas, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale, as well as with leadership at MARTA and the Atlanta BeltLine, to provide a platform for our counties and agency partners deliver an annual update on achievements, projects, and the future that is specifically geared toward the business community and the Council’s membership. A full calendar of the Council’s 2023 Signature Events, including the State of the County/Agency series, can be viewed and downloaded here: [2023 Programs Calendar](#)

About the Council for Quality Growth:

The Council for Quality Growth is a trade organization that works to ensure continued growth and economic success for generations to come by providing advocacy, information, and education to its members. For 37 years, the Council has been committed to the mission of promoting balanced and responsible growth and is proactively involved in the formulation of policy and legislation critical to the growth and development industry. The Council addresses, head-on, strategic economic planning, infrastructure needs, and tough quality-of-life issues throughout the metro Atlanta region and state. Visit www.councilforqualitygrowth.org for more.

About Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.

Atlanta BeltLine, Inc.’s vision is to be the catalyst for making Atlanta a global beacon for equitable, inclusive, and sustainable city life. As one of the largest, most wide-ranging urban redevelopment programs in the United States, the Atlanta BeltLine is building a more socially and economically resilient Atlanta with our partner organizations and host communities through job creation, inclusive transportation systems, affordable housing, and public spaces for all. For more information on the Atlanta BeltLine, please visit www.BeltLine.org.

About the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership

The Atlanta BeltLine Partnership (ABP) ENABLES the Atlanta BeltLine project by raising funds from the private sector and philanthropic community, ENGAGES the public through programming and outreach and EMPOWERS the residents of the 45 Atlanta BeltLine neighborhoods through targeted partnerships in the areas of health, housing and economic opportunity. For more information on the Atlanta BeltLine Partnership, please visit www.BeltLine.org.

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