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FEATURED

South metro sizzles with opportunities, outlook says

Noreen Cochran Mar 1, 2017



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From left, R. Eric Clarkson of Wakefield Beasley & Associates and Palmetto Mayor J. Clark Boddie catch up at the South Metro Development Outlook conference Feb. 23 at the Georgia International Convention Center.

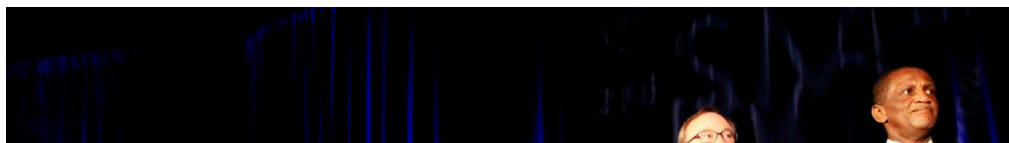
Businesses will be banging on the door to hang their shingles in the south metro area . after traffic unsnarls . but in the meantime, jobs and contracts are available.

So said a number of economic development and transportation pundits, including Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed.

He praised a %dynamic economy,+including a \$100 million investment in the decommissioned Fort McPherson by Tyler Perry Studios, resulting in a box office smash beating Tom Cruise's and Tom Hanks's recent offerings.

Speaking at the South Metro Development Outlook conference Feb. 23 at the Georgia International Convention Center, Reed advised attendees %not to get tired.+

%Double-down, work harder, because this is south metro's moment,+he said.





Award winners listen to Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed, not pictured, at the South Metro Development Outlook conference Feb. 23 at the Georgia International Convention Center.

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Listeners included award winners like College Park Mayor Jack P. Longino, who won the Community Catalyst Award, and Henry County Commissioner Dee Clemmons, honored with the Economic Development Award.

The conference, in its 15th year of presentation by land-use planning company The Collaborative Firm, brought together elected officials and business leaders to examine and discuss the south metro region's growth and opportunities, host Michael Hightower said in a statement.

Speakers like Kevin Johnson, senior vice president of economic development for Invest Atlanta and Aerotropolis Atlanta Alliance vice chair, highlighted results and outlined plans.

He spoke of 100 acres of undeveloped land for potential corporate headquarters near Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, a region branded as an aerotropolis, or airport city

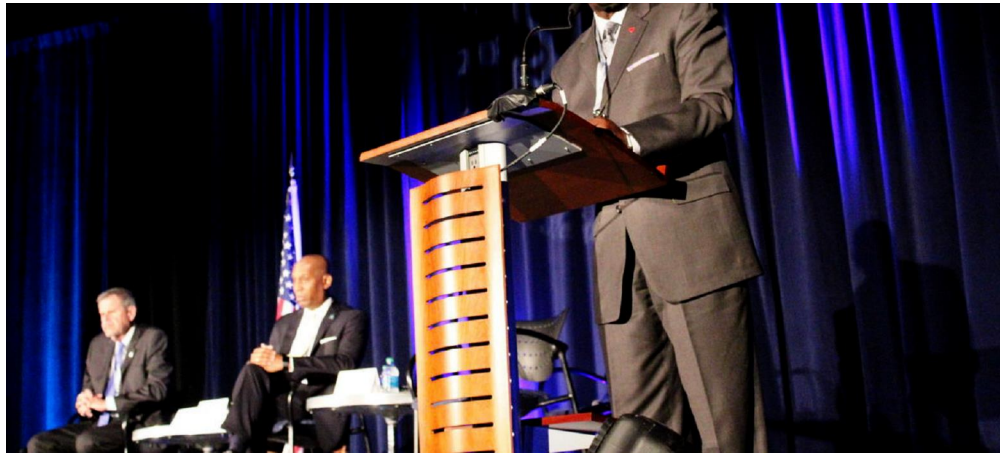
"We will market that, unlike what we've done in the past," Johnson said. "We want to see more than \$1 billion in construction in the aerotropolis over the next five to 10 years. That's billion with a B."

Union City Mayor Vince Williams said attendees should be on the lookout for the rollout of Connect South Fulton.

"We are in the process of launching a new governmental relations, business marketing and economic development arm for all of the south Fulton cities," he said, noting there are now eight. "Eight" is the number of new beginnings.

Williams' message of moving vision to action echoed in construction opportunities announced elsewhere in the conference.





Far right, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport General Manager Roosevelt Council speaks at the South Metro Development Outlook conference Feb. 23 at the Georgia International Convention Center as, from left, Council for Quality Growth President and CEO Michael Paris and Kevin Johnson, senior vice president of economic development for Invest Atlanta and Aerotropolis Atlanta Alliance vice chair, look on. [Buy Now](#)

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Airport General Manager Roosevelt Council, recently upgraded from interim status, said a \$6 billion, 20-year building plan, including a sixth runway and four-star InterContinental hotel, has room for many qualified contractors.

"We hope that this will help spur commercial development around the 4,700-acre airport campus," he said. "ATLNext will create numerous jobs, which will be both white-collar and blue-collar in nature."

Council said the airport is ready to commit one-third of the plan's budget to small and minority-owned companies, taking full advantage of the ability to create a better life for a whole lot of people."

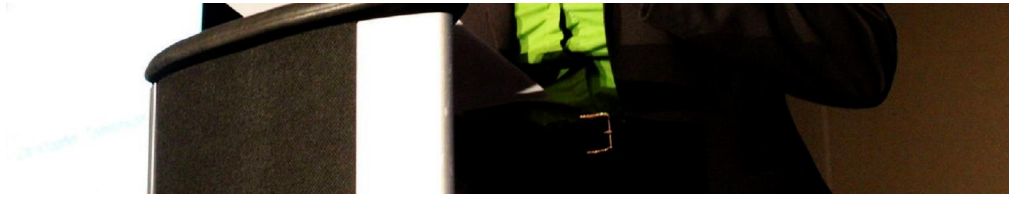
"If you think about how you can take advantage of that, 20 years can lead anyone to a different level of living, different prosperity and a whole different way of life," he said.

State Road and Tollway Authority Executive Director Chris Tomlinson said the authority, which is planning a new Xpress Bus park and ride lot in Henry County, is looking for partners.

The authority's Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank is taking applications through March 17; \$45 million will be awarded in the next round of loans and grants, he said.

"I hope to work with many of you in the future," he told business owners in the audience.





Georgia Department of Transportation board member and McDonough native Dana Lemon speaks at the South Metro Development Outlook conference Feb. 23 at the Georgia International Convention Center.

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Georgia Department of Transportation board member and McDonough native Dana Lemon invited attendees to celebrate the success of the new I-75 south metro express lanes between Stockbridge and McDonough.



The lanes gave south metro first crack at the newest technology, said department Commissioner Russell McMurry.

They will help economic development by speeding up commutes and freight shipments on non-toll lanes and surface streets, he said.

That success begets success, McMurry said.

On the long-term horizon is adding two barrier-separated truck-only lanes on I-75, including Henry County, aimed at reducing travel time between Macon and Atlanta by 40 percent by 2030, he said.

Freight movements are very important to Georgia, he said.

Shorter-term traffic relief will come from a diverging diamond interchange in south Fulton at Camp Creek Parkway and I-285 ready by spring 2018.





From left, Georgia Department of Transportation Commissioner Russell McMurry speaks at the South Metro Development Outlook conference Feb. 23 at the Georgia International Convention Center as, from left, department board member Dana Lemon and State Road and Tollway Authority Executive Director Chris Tomlinson look on.

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But progress has a price, McMurry said, beyond the department's nearly \$2 billion proposed fiscal 2018 budget.

Get ready for these barrels everywhere, he said about orange-and-white safety markers. Just get used to it.

Other speakers included Henry County Chair June Wood, Fulton County Chairman John Eaves, Atlanta Regional Commission Executive Director Doug Hooker, economist Roger Tutterow, Ph.D., Fulton Industrial Boulevard Improvement District Executive Director Gil Prado, Aerotropolis Atlanta Community Improvement District Executive Director Gerald McDowell, Development Authority of Fulton County Executive Director Al Nash and Council for Quality Growth President and CEO Michael Paris.

Information: www.southmetrooutlook.com

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Noreen Cochran is the editor of the Henry and South Fulton Neighbor newspapers and a former New Yorker. She earned an undergraduate degree in drama from New York University and attended Georgia State University's journalism school.

