

# Hooker Addresses LAI Atlanta Winter Meeting

February 6, 2018 | Chapter News, Events

**Date:** Tuesday, February 6, 2018

**Location:** Atlanta Regional Commission

**Speaker:** LAI Member & Atlanta Regional Commission Executive Director Douglas Hooker

**Topic:** The Atlanta Regional Commission and Affordable Housing Coordination

**Recap:** Housing is still relatively affordable in Metro Atlanta, but add in the high cost of our brutal commutes and the true cost of living in the region strains the average household. Housing affordability was one of many pressing issues on the mind of Doug Hooker, executive director of the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) and guest speaker at LAI Atlanta's Winter Meeting, held February 6, 2018.

According to Hooker, Atlanta is still competitive when it comes to housing as 72.5 percent of homes are still affordable to households with a median income. Among major U.S. cities, only Minneapolis is more affordable, with 74.8 percent of homes affordable to median income households.

"Add in transportation costs, however, and affordability flips," said Hooker.

## **We spend even more on transportation than on housing**

Members of a median-income household in Atlanta – median household income being \$47,000 per year – spend an estimated 31 percent of that income on housing expenses, but even more of their hard-earned money, another 32 percent, on transportation costs. That leaves only 37 percent for food, healthcare, education and recreation combined.

That's why, said Hooker, the ARC is working to support changes in transportation policy in addition to regional housing policies. To that end, Hooker gave an update on Georgia Senate Bill 386, introduced the day before by State Senator Brandon Beach, that would consolidate transit planning and construction under the existing Georgia Regional Transportation Agency (GRTA).

A new, regional board would direct transit expansion in 13 counties, with MARTA continuing to serve as the region's major transit operator. Hooker noted that many of

the details were yet to be finalized, but said that there was strong support for centralizing transit decision making to improve mobility in the Metro Atlanta region.

Transit and transportation are not the only areas where increased collaboration will help the region. Education is another.

### **Bringing school districts together for the first time**

Hooker described the ARC's efforts to bring regional school districts together to share experiences and data. One of ARC's role as a regional planning agency is to gather and analyze data and statistics about the Metro Atlanta region.

According to Hooker, ARC is now assisting school district superintendents from multiple cities and counties – many of whom had never gathered around the same table before – in quantifying performance and other statistical metrics in the same way. That, Hooker said, will lead to a much more accurate picture of K-12 education trends and issues in Metro Atlanta and facilitate public policy decision making.

### **Atlanta's Southside: A river runs through it**

Hooker shared some of the exciting plans now on the table for the area around Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and the Flint River watershed.

"The Flint River is one of the longest unimpeded waterways in the United States," said Hooker, noting the absence of dams for nearly 220 of the nearly 350-mile-long river.

For decades, the river has been neglected, polluted and even buried – its headwaters literally flow underneath Hartsfield-Jackson. Now a regional coalition is working to embrace the river and apply Atlanta Beltline-style planning approaches to energizing the waterway and the communities that surround it.

Hooker said that addressing the Flint River will enhance the vision of the Aerotropolis Atlanta Blueprint, an ARC-led framework for revitalizing Southside around the expanding international airport.

*The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the intergovernmental planning and coordination agency for metropolitan Atlanta. ARC coordinates many areas of planning with and among local governments, and serves as a convener on issues that affect the region's long-term sustainability and competitiveness. Find more information at [atlantaregional.org](http://atlantaregional.org) (hyperlink).*