

# SMDO25

**SOUTH METRO  
DEVELOPMENT OUTLOOK CONFERENCE  
CELEBRATING OVER 20 YEARS!**

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**VISIONARY LEADERSHIP:  
CRAFTING TOMORROW'S ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE**

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Presented by  
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**FEBRUARY 19, 2025**

GEORGIA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER  
2000 CONVENTION CENTER CONCOURSE  
COLLEGE PARK, GA



## *Message From The Host*

*Dear Attendees,*

I am excited that you are joining us for the 23rd Annual South Metro Development Outlook (SMDO) conference on Wednesday, February 19, 2025! This conference has been designed as a unique opportunity for you to engage with a vibrant community of professionals, all working together to shape the future of the South Metro region.

SMDO has grown to become the largest conference of its kind in metropolitan Atlanta, with nearly 1,000 registrants for today. SMDO brings together leaders and influencers from Fulton, Gwinnett, Clayton, DeKalb, Henry, Fayette, Cobb, Coweta and Douglas counties, as well as the City of Atlanta, to discuss the region's growth, opportunities, and challenges.

This year, SMDO25 will feature a range of impactful topics, such as technology, which includes artificial intelligence, electric vehicles, transportation, and affordable housing. In addition, we will discuss new and exciting economic development announcements, regional growth projections, and our professionals will provide the annual economic forecast. These discussions will offer valuable insights into the pressing issues that are shaping the future of South Metro, Atlanta and our state.

This year, SMDO will also host the first Annual Small Business Summit, which will be held from 2:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. following our luncheon. This new addition will provide valuable information, tools and assistance for our small businesses and will be a new addition to our annual conference.

Attending SMDO25 gives you the opportunity to connect with elected and appointed officials, private sector developers, industry experts, community leaders, and key decision-makers. This makes for an excellent platform for networking, learning, and exploring new ideas for development and collaboration.

In conclusion, it has been our privilege to host this inspiring conference for more than two decades, and we are delighted that you have joined us at SMDO25. Whether you are coming to learn, connect, or share, this event will provide valuable experiences and opportunities.

Enjoy the day!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Hightower". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Hightower

# SMDo25

## Registration, Networking, and Continental Breakfast

7:00 a.m. - 7:45 a.m.

## OPENING SESSION.....7:45 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.

### Remarks and Introductions

Trisha Colpetzer

*Director of Communication/Strategic Planning, The Collaborative Firm*

### National Anthem

Cathy Rollins

### Presiding

Cheryl Preheim

*Anchor, 11 Alive WXIA*

### Greetings

Robb Pitts

*Chairman, Fulton County Board of Commissioners*

### Special Remarks (Video)

Jon Ossoff

*United States Senator, Georgia*

### Reflections

Georj Lewis, Ed.D.

*President, Clayton State University*

### Prelude Video

Amazon, Presenting Sponsor

### Sponsor Message

Terreta Rodgers

*Head of Community Affairs, Atlanta Region, Amazon*

### Welcome & Conference Overview

Michael Hightower

*Managing Partner, The Collaborative Firm*

*Founder, South Metro Development Outlook Conference*

### Trailblazer Award

Recipient: Kathryn Powers

*MARTA Board Member | Assistant Dean, Mercer Law School*

Presenters:

Valencia Williamson

*President & Chief Executive Officer, Clayton County Chamber of Commerce*

*MARTA Board Member*

Ricky L. Clark, Jr.

*Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority Board Member*

*City Manager, City of Forest Park*

### Visionary in Real Estate Development Award

Recipient: John Wieland

*Founder, John Wieland Homes*

Presenter:

Marci Collier Overstreet

*Council Member, District 11, City of Atlanta*

## PRESIDING



Cheryl Preheim

## OPENING SESSION



Senator Jon Ossoff



Michael Hightower



Terreta Rodgers



Chairman  
Robb Pitts



Georj Lewis, Ed.D.



Trisha Colpetzer

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**SESSION I ..... 8:30 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.**

**Navigating Economic Growth: Finance & Business Strategies for Future Development in South Metro**

Experts discuss key financial strategies, investment opportunities, and sustainable business models shaping the region's economic future.

**Moderator**

Sharon D. Subadan  
*City Manager, City of South Fulton*

Leonte Benton  
*President, T. Dallas Smith & Company*

Ben Young  
*Editor & Chief Publisher, Georgia Trend*

Joy Rohadfox  
*Chief Executive Officer, Rohadfox Construction*

Roger C. Tutterow, Ph.D.  
*Director of Econometric Center, Kennesaw State University*

**Excellence in Education & Global Workforce Development Award**

Recipient: Dr. Irvin T. Clark, III  
*President, Southern Crescent Technical College*

Presenter:  
Dr. Ray Perren  
*Deputy Commissioner, Technical College System of Georgia*

**SESSION II ..... 9:15 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.**

**Driving the Future: Artificial Intelligence, Electric Vehicles, and Technology Innovations Shaping South Metro's Tomorrow**

Industry leaders explore how AI, EVs, and emerging technologies are transforming transportation, energy, and business, driving growth and sustainability while addressing new challenges.

**Introduction of Session**

Sharonda Hubbard  
*Chief Operating Officer, The Collaborative Firm*

**Moderator**

Debra Lam  
*Founding Director, Partnership for Inclusive Innovation  
Georgia Institute of Technology*

Michael J. Ruffin  
*Director of External Affairs, AT&T Georgia*

Jonathan Noble  
*Senior Director, U.S. Government Affairs, Microsoft*

Laron Walker  
*President, Sciberus, Inc.*

Melissa Free  
*Region External Affairs-Region Executive, Georgia Power Company*

**Excellence in Tourism & Hospitality Award**

Recipient: Mercedes Miller  
*President, ATL Airport District Convention & Visitors Bureau*

Presenter:  
David Offenhauser  
*Board Chair, ATL Airport District Convention & Visitors Bureau*

**GENERAL SESSION I**



**Moderator**  
Sharon D. Subadan



Leonte Benton



Ben Young



Joy Rohadfox



Roger C. Tutterow, Ph.D.

**GENERAL SESSION II**



**Moderator**  
Debra Lam



Sharonda Hubbard



Michael J. Ruffin



Jonathan Noble



Laron Walker



Melissa Free



SESSION III ..... 10:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Enhancing Connectivity:  
The Future of Transportation in the South Metro

As the South Metro region continues to grow, the need for efficient, sustainable, and accessible transportation solutions have never been greater. This panel features key leaders from the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, Georgia Department of Transportation, and Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport to discuss the evolving landscape of mobility in the South Metro. Topics will include improving regional connectivity, expanding transit networks, and creating more inclusive and equitable transportation systems for the future.

Introduction of Session

Vida Mannings  
Senior Director, Transportation Services, The Collaborative Firm

Personal Rapid Transit Overview

Gerald McDowell  
Executive Director, ATL Airport Community Improvement Districts

Mariah Ray  
Senior Vice President, Head of Government Relations, Glydways

Moderator

Claudia Bilotto  
Senior Vice President, Southeast Region Executive, WSP USA

Meg Pirkle  
Chief Engineer, Georgia Department of Transportation

Collie Greenwood  
General Manager & Chief Executive Officer, Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority

Jan Lennon  
Interim Airport General Manager, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport

Public Service Award

Recipient: William "Bill" Edwards

Presenter:  
Michael Hightower  
Managing Partner, The Collaborative Firm  
Founder, South Metro Development Outlook Conference

SESSION IV ..... 11:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Atlanta Regional Commission Report

Gain insights into how the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) collaborates with local governments and community partners to address regional challenges, prioritize investments, and shape strategies for improving the quality of life for all South Metro residents. From sustainable transportation networks to ensuring public safety and enhancing workforce opportunities, ARC's comprehensive approach to regional planning ensures a prosperous and inclusive future for the entire Atlanta area.

Session Overview

Clyde Higgs  
Chair, Council for Quality Growth Board of Directors &  
Chief Executive Officer, Atlanta Beltline

Introduction of Anna Roach

Vince Williams  
Mayor, City of Union City

Anna Roach  
Executive Director & Chief Executive Officer, Atlanta Regional Commission

GENERAL SESSION III



Moderator  
Claudia Bilotto



Collie Greenwood



Jan Lennon



Meg Pirkle



Gerald McDowell



Mariah Ray



Vida Mannings

GENERAL SESSION IV



Anna Roach



Mayor Vince Williams



Clyde Higgs

Session IV | cont'd

**Visionary Leadership in Education Award**  
Recipient: Dr. Anthony W. Smith  
*Superintendent, Clayton County Public Schools*

Presenters:  
Benjamin Straker  
*Board Chair, Clayton County Public Schools*

Nina Packer  
*Executive Director, Clayton County Public Schools Foundation*

CONCURRENT SESSIONS .....11:30 A.M. - 12:15 P.M.

CONCURRENT SESSION I

**South Metro Economic Development Highlights**  
Atlanta's Southern Crescent is undergoing transformative growth. This panel explores public-private partnerships driving economic expansion, improving services, sustainability initiatives, and enhancing regional connectivity.

**Moderator**  
Evie Hightower  
*Associate General Counsel, Head of Real Estate and Data Centers, NORAM, Meta*

Sarah Jacobs  
*President & Chief Executive Officer, Coweta County Development Authority*

Sarah-Elizabeth Langford  
*Executive Director, Development Authority of Fulton County*

Niki Vanderslice  
*President & Chief Executive Officer, Fayette County Development Authority*

Erica Rocker  
*Economic Development Officer, Clayton County Government*

Dr. Eloisa Klementich  
*President & Chief Executive Officer, Invest Atlanta*

Breezy Straton  
*Vice President, Elevate Douglas Economic Partnership*

CONCURRENT SESSION II

**Gateway Flint River Trails Project**  
The U.S. Department of Transportation awarded \$64.9 million to support a 31-mile network connecting the Flint River headwaters, enhancing access to jobs and essential services in Clayton County, College Park, East Point, Hapeville, and surrounding communities.

**Introduction of Session**  
Michael Hightower  
*Managing Partner, The Collaborative Firm*  
*Founder, South Metro Development Outlook Conference*

**Moderator**  
Shannon James  
*President & Chief Executive Officer, Aerotropolis Atlanta Alliance*

Mike Alexander  
*Chief Operating Officer, Atlanta Regional Commission*

Deana Holiday Ingraham  
*Mayor, City of East Point*

Landry Merkison  
*Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Clayton County Board of Commissioners*

Alan Hallman  
*Mayor, City of Hapeville*

Bianca Motley Broom  
*Mayor, City of College Park*

CONCURRENT SESSION I



**Moderator**  
Evie Hightower



Sarah-Elizabeth Langford



Niki Vanderslice



Sarah Jacobs



Erica Rocker



Dr. Eloisa Klementich



Breezy Straton

CONCURRENT SESSION II



**Moderator**  
Shannon James



Mike Alexander



Mayor Deana Holiday Ingraham



Landry Merkison



Mayor Alan Hallman



Mayor Bianca Motley Broom



## LUNCH SESSION

**SEATING** ..... 12:15 P.M.

**PROGRAM** ..... 12:30 P.M. - 2:00 P.M.

### Musical Entertainment

Recording Artist Milkshake Mayfield

### Opening Remarks

Michael Hightower

### Invocation

Edward Johnson

*Mayor, City of Fayetteville*

### Lunch Served

### 2025 South Metro Development Outlook Award

Recipient: Andre Dickens

*Mayor, City of Atlanta*

Presenter:

Michael Hightower

### Acceptance and Commentary

Mayor Andre Dickens

### Leadership In Action Lunch Session

#### Moderator

Melissa Mullinax

*Vice President & Business Development Officer, HNTB*

Dr. Alieka Anderson-Henry

*Chairwoman, Clayton County Board of Commissioners*

Carlotta Harrell

*Chairwoman, Henry County Board of Commissioners*

Lorraine Cochran-Johnson

*Chief Executive Officer, Dekalb County*

Lisa Cupid

*Chairwoman, Cobb County Board of Commissioners*

Nicole Love Hendrickson

*Chairwoman, Gwinnett County Board of Commissioners*

### Final Insights

Michael Hightower

## LUNCH SESSION



Michael Hightower



Mayor Andre Dickens



Mayor Edward Johnson



**Moderator**  
Melissa Mullinax



Chairwoman  
Dr. Alieka Anderson-Henry



Chairwoman  
Carlotta Harrell



Chief Executive Officer  
Lorraine Cochran-Johnson



Chairwoman  
Lisa Cupid



Chairwoman  
Nicole Love Hendrickson

**SMDO25**  
**HONOREES**



**DR. ANTHONY W. SMITH**  
Clayton County Public Schools



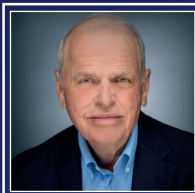
**MAYOR ANDRE DICKENS**  
City of Atlanta



**KATHRYN POWERS**  
MARTA Board Member



**DR. IRVIN T. CLARK, III**  
Southern Crescent Technical College



**JOHN WIELAND**  
John Wieland Homes



**MERCEDES MILLER**  
ATL Airport District Convention & Visitors Bureau



**WILLIAM "BILL" EDWARDS**  
Public Servant



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