



# Leadership Interview Quotes

Compiled by ARC Staff 4/3/09

In preparation for undertaking a long-range, comprehensive regional planning effort called **PLAN 2040**, the Atlanta Regional Commission conducted leadership interviews during the months of February and March, 2009. ARC senior staff met with 43 metro Atlanta leaders representing local and state governments, as well as business, economic, education, environmental and social fields of endeavor.

Key quotes from these interviews have been collected and nested under key subject headings:

- » **Growth Patterns**
- » **Workforce Development**
- » **Economy**
- » **Institutional**
- » **Leadership**
- » **Implementation**

Those interviewed were asked to respond to the following question:

***What are the economic and environmental development and policy issues that will impact planning needs in the Atlanta region over the next decades?***

## Growth Patterns

- “Our airport cannot be replicated elsewhere. It is an irreplaceable resource.”
- “If I live in a place where I have to get in my car to get on a train, then I am just going to stay in my car.”
- “Smart Growth is a bunch of ##@%. It is just an excuse to redistribute funds to major urban areas.”
- “One power plant uses as much water as three cities.”
- “There needs to be a proportional emphasis on transportation and water. These are the issues that are going to kill us.”
- “ARC can do more to ensure that farms and lands are protected and valued; more protection of local farms for producing local food.”
- “We need deep thinking about the role of electronic communication infrastructure becoming just as important as the physical.”
- “Growth and expansion experienced for the last 10 years will not continue if we keep the current attitude toward immigrants.”
- “How can we help our residents understand that we are at a tipping point, where our suburban community is becoming urban?”

***“People are gravitating toward centers.”***

- “Each new development must add to the value of our community and the regional portfolio.”
- “The concept of sustainable development should be seen as a means to preserve small town values.”
- “Our community is not interested in heavy rail, but we do feel that commuter rail would be a good investment for the region.”
- “We don’t want to look at ARC to solve all our problems, but we do need help from time to time to referee between us and other jurisdictions.”
- “We need to focus on getting people around in our centers.”
- “If you want to get people out of their cars, you have to be willing to build places that allow them to do that.”
- “Not everyone wants an urban lifestyle, but more and more people do and that’s refreshing to hear.”
- “ARC should provide assistance to local governments to help them reduce congestion through design.”
- “We are a destination state for both the young and old.”
- “The aging population may be drawn closer to the central city, but they will need options and easier ways to get around.”
- “People choose where to live in order to take care of their families. Primary considerations are good schools and access to jobs.”
- “A transportation network needs to be put in place that can actually change how people commute.”
- “How can we repair and connect hydrology in our urban communities?”
- “The region can’t be single-minded about water. It’s not just about supply.”
- “A sustainable water supply is essential.”
- “In urban areas almost all of our air and water quality problems can be traced back to the car and the patterns built to serve it.”
- “MARTA is not the problem. We are the problem. The perceived problems with MARTA are a red herring and excuse to remain close-minded.”
- “There should be adequate provision of greenspace in the new regional plan.”
- “Focus on nodes, activity centers and cities in terms of providing infrastructure.”
- “ARC needs to be thinking within the mega-region concept.”
- “Environmental protection and preservation must be a focal point.”
- “Environmental sustainability should be encouraged and rewarded, not punitive.”
- “We either need to learn to live with gridlock or shut down development.”
- “Bring back the best of the 1950s.”

## Workforce Development

- “We have to upgrade human capital as a leap of faith.”
- “Education should look at all parts of the workforce. Low-end jobs seem to get left out of the picture.”
- “Charlotte is about to get a major corporate relocation because they can demonstrate a broadly relevant workforce.”
- “Poor education is an impediment to quality of life and hurts my bottom line.”
- “The region needs to address higher education and technical school training to develop a strong workforce.”
- “Schools may not be an ARC issue, but they impact so many things that ARC directly works on.”
- “Knowledge should be our key commodity.”

*“As the world changes, human capital has become the principal driver for economic growth.”*

## Economy

- “It’s hard to look at the current situation and believe we are in a normal business cycle. We are not experiencing change in a linear fashion, but perhaps a drastic one-time change.”
- “The region is currently in a brain drain. We have forgotten we have to compete for the best and the brightest.”
- “Economic development is beyond projects and corporate relocations.”
- “Dialogue with research universities to find out where they are putting their chips down, long-term.”
- “Climate change is a major economic and environmental threat.”
- “Climate change is a myth.”
- “Atlanta is a hugely attractive location for global investments, but we have not taken advantage of these opportunities.”
- “Public management is critical to the private sector.”
- “On climate change, the most practical and politically feasible role is to do what EPA tells you to do.”
- “ARC should support economic development by joining forces to help others succeed.”
- “The Port of Savannah will continue to have a significant impact on the region’s position as a hub for logistics.”
- “Focusing on transportation and water is economic development.”
- “Still have too much of an entitlement mentality.”
- “Carbon restraints will be a reality. The region needs to understand this and begin taking action now.”
- “We need to focus on retaining students that attend our universities. Particularly international students as they can become contacts for international investment.”
- “The airport is the primary economic hub and catalyst for growth in the region.”
- “Delta Airlines is seriously considering a move to Memphis. What can the region do to insure they remain in Atlanta?”
- “Higher education draws people to the region and provides economic development.”
- “We are a pro-business state, but so are our neighbors. Don’t think they aren’t trying to take businesses away from Georgia.”
- “Our economic edge should be the core services our region provides such as transportation and education.”
- “The current economic situation could be seen as constraining, but should also be seen as freeing. There is the need and chance to take a fresh look.”
- “Clearly the region’s economy is too dependent on growth. We are too vulnerable to these types of slowdowns.”
- “The region isn’t doing the best it can in terms of leveraging resources, particularly in terms of higher education.”
- “We have an existing ‘corporate footprint’ of providing regional and global services that we need to take advantage of.”
- “If the state maintains the current attitude toward immigrants, it will not be good for business and the region will suffer.”
- “Opportunities for attracting international businesses will be limited by the current perception of the region related to immigrants.”
- “Right now everyone is re-thinking priorities. We should too.”
- “We need to improve the quality of life in the region and provide more amenities that attract the international community.”
- “The region needs a great transportation system to prosper.”
- “Georgia is not currently well-positioned for an eventual economic recovery.”
- “Will the region collapse? No, but it looks like we will meander along while companies go to more progressive states that are close enough to take advantage of the Georgia market.”

*“North Carolina is a constant reminder that Atlanta does not dominate the SE.”*

## Institutional

- “Regional planning is influenced too heavily by the counties, with not enough attention granted to the municipal governments.”
- “The Atlanta region is not unified. It is the core versus the outer counties.”
- “ARC spends too much time on social engineering and passing social judgment.”
- “There is a perception that ARC pushes its own agenda, sometimes in conflict with local values and policies.”
- “ARC does not value the input of cities at a leadership level.”
- “Local governments don’t have resources to do everything they would like. Cities need help from the region.”
- “ARC needs to align itself with other metro and urban areas in the state.”
- “There shouldn’t be more than one transit agency in the region.”

*“The governance structure in place is not conducive to major metropolitan areas succeeding.”*

## Leadership

- “We have proven over the last three to four years that ARC can create a regional consensus.”
- “ARC should host a metro leadership conference to bring state and local officials together.”
- “You don’t realize and don’t appreciate leadership until you don’t have it.”
- “The greatest single threat to the region’s success is a handful of bad actors in state government.”
- “If Atlanta has to be considered the enemy for non-Atlantans to get elected, it will be hard to untie the knot and solve the problem.”
- “What is the cost of doing nothing?”
- “It is not about lines on a map, but having the leadership and institutional capacity to implement it.”
- “We don’t represent ourselves well in Washington. The state and the region need to be on the same team.”
- “We need to clarify our agenda for state government.”
- “Shame to waste a crisis. This is the time to figure out what is important. Take advantage of ARC’s good reputation and demonstrate a vision for the region.”
- “Long-range plans might as well be code to an elected official that they don’t have to worry about the implications.”
- “Where there is turmoil, there is opportunity.”
- “The new era will not be about catch-up, but about getting out front as a global leader.”
- “Our leaders should use this time to figure out what this cycle means to them and their communities. ARC can be an entity that helps them work through this.”
- “Our leaders need to be willing to reposition themselves. The core issues that pulled them into public service may not be current priorities. They need to determine if there are new issues they need to become educated on. New issues may become their primary focus.”
- “Lack of progressive thinking from our elected officials is prevalent at all levels.”
- “ARC needs to show more leadership on regional waste and energy reductions.”
- “Georgia is no longer seen as progressive in terms of quality of life or economic issues.”
- “Courageous leadership is needed to hold people accountable for the danger they’re doing to the region.”
- “I would give business high marks in their ability to make things happen, but not to legislators or some local government officials.”

*“Do something.”*

## Implementation

- “Focus on small victories that make big change.”
- “The next big thing is a whole bunch of little things put together.”
- “ARC is not active enough in the General Assembly. As a result, state officials are not addressing metro issues.”
- “It would be nice to do a few things right in the region instead of a lot of things wrong.”
- “Never met an RTP I didn’t like. It never turns into a good TIP.”
- “In regard to transportation, it is not that we don’t have enough money, it is just that we put it in the wrong places.”
- “Regional plans need to be enforced.”
- “Regional plans don’t turn into local action.”
- “Avoid the fatigue of thinking so far in the future.”
- “Identify what hasn’t worked without playing the blame game.”
- “The locals need to sign off on the plan and implement.”
- “ARC has defaulted in planning to others to implement.”
- “ARC operates passive/aggressive and should say no to the inclusion of projects in our plan that will not be implemented.”
- “Denver’s success in the short-term with making transportation progress should be embarrassing to Atlanta.”
- “Identify the network of resources that people will rely on.”
- “Federal dollars should be spent on major projects.”
- “LCI is the best example of getting community buy-in that ARC has had in the past 10 years.”
- “ARC needs to identify specific issues in the outer-ring counties and help them compete.”
- “The plan would be very successful if it placed an emphasis on the young and the old.”
- “How will we look out for the people who will inherit what we create?”
- “Our region doesn’t have the mindset that Portland has, but we can sell the idea of sustainability by focusing on ‘greenbacks’ rather than ‘green ideas’.”
- “How can ARC help commuter rail happen?”
- “Environmental sustainability is something we need to look at over the long-term, but economic sustainability is something we need to look at now.”
- “Three biggest issues are funding, funding and funding.”
- “Aging population is important, but you can’t forget about the youth.”
- “We need to look at successful communities within the region and learn from them.”
- “We need to create an educated electorate, so that they demand more from their elected officials.”
- “Every plan should have a short-range and long-range element.”
- “We need to stop promoting local projects in the TIP and start promoting regional projects.”
- “Transportation and fuel-efficiency must become larger concerns.”

*“Market three to four big ideas to galvanize the public and encourage the region to act more cooperatively. People get excited about big ideas. ARC should consider an ‘Imagination Proclamation.’”*

# List of Interviewees

## ARC Board/Members of ARC Committees

Buzz Ahrens (Cherokee)  
Charles Bannister (Gwinnett)  
Mike Bodker (Johns Creek), along with John Kachmar, Patty Hansen and Cindy Jenkins  
John Eaves (Fulton)  
Eddie Freeman (Spalding), along with Anthony Dukes  
Eva Galambos (Sandy Springs)  
Tad Leithead (TAQC)  
B. J. Mathis (Henry)  
Kevin Little (Walton)  
Clair Muller (City of Atlanta)  
Richard Oden (Rockdale)  
Sam Olens (Cobb)  
Jack Smith (Fayette)  
Tom Worthan (Douglas)  
Daniel Yearwood (Barrow)

## State/Local Government Officials

Carol Couch (Georgia Environmental Protection Division)  
Glenn Richardson (Georgia Speaker of the House of Representatives)  
Billy Copeland (McDonough), along with Rodney Heard  
Bill Floyd (Decatur)  
Donnie Henriques (Woodstock)  
Bucky Johnson (Norcross)  
Arthur Letchas (Alpharetta), along with Bob Regus and Diana Wheeler  
Harold Logsdon (Peachtree City)  
Jerry Oberholtzer (Snellville)  
Mickey Thompson (Douglasville)  
Dave Williams (Suwanee), along with Marty Allen and Kevin McOmber

## Regional Leaders

Tom Bell (Cousins Properties)  
Bill Bolling (Atlanta Community Food Bank)  
Alexandro Coss (Mexican American Business Chamber)  
Jorge Forment (United Americas Bank)  
Dennis Creech (Southface)  
John Grant (100 Black Men of Atlanta)  
Richard Holmes (Southern Company)  
Jim Jacoby (Jacoby Development), along with Mitch Jacoby and Scott Contra  
Milton Little (United Way)  
Dennis Lockhart (Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta)  
Michael Russell (H. J. Russell & Co)  
Ben Taube (Southeast Energy Alliance)  
Richard Tucker (University Board of Regents)  
Otis White (Civic Strategies)  
Ray Weeks (Beltline Partnership)  
Sam Williams (MACOC), along with Renay Blumenthal  
James Young (Citizens Trust Bank)