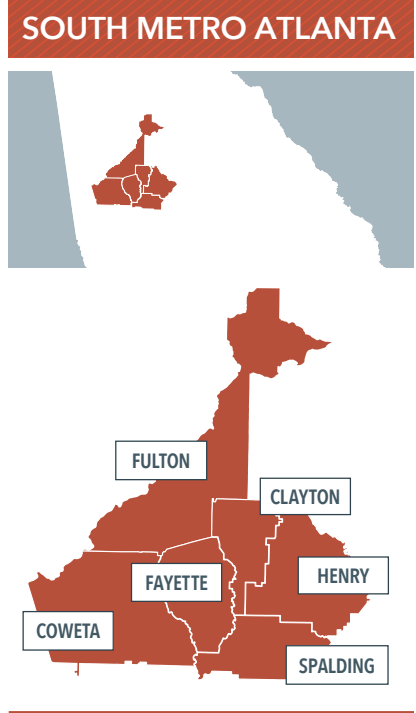




Providing Transit Solutions:
Gerald McDowell, executive director of the ATL Airport Community Improvement Districts (AACIDs)



“For the Atlanta region to grow and expand, South Metro has to grow and expand,” says Gerald McDowell, executive director of the ATL Airport Community Improvement Districts (AACIDs). “But in order to do that, there has to be more transit and transit solutions made available.”

Improving Mobility

The AACIDs previously participated in the Atlanta Regional Commission’s Transportation Management Association (TMA), an organization that helps employees overcome challenges getting to and from work by increasing mobility options.

“Our community improvement districts were one of the places for the TMA, and we actually took over the program in July 2023,” he says. “In 2024, we rebranded it to Shift, playing on the shifts of working; first shift versus second shift.”

The program offers ridesharing and carpooling incentives like gas cards and MARTA passes. Participants who carpool at least twice a week can also redeem up to five free rides from work annually with rideshare options like Uber and Lyft.

While the program initially targeted airport employees, Shift is now avail-

Region on the Rise

Transportation, Manufacturing, Workforce

[By Jennifer Hafer]

From its humble beginnings as an abandoned racetrack just south of downtown to its title run as the world’s busiest airport for 25 out of the last 26 years, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport continues to be the heartbeat of South Metro, fueling not just job growth, but innovation that’s transforming transportation, enhancing educational opportunities and bringing coveted live, work, play communities to the region.

On New Year’s Eve, the airport kicked off an 18-month celebration of its centenary. This is more than just a 100th birthday party; the airport is also commemorating its contribution to both aviation and the development of Atlanta. It provides an annual direct economic impact of \$66 billion in Georgia – \$34.8 billion in Metro Atlanta alone – and 380,000 jobs, with some 63,000 of those jobs on-site.

able to the roughly 150,000 employees within the AACIDs, McDowell says.

“Shift helps employees find reliable and rewarding ways to get to work,” he says. “We’ve hired a consultant that is out working every day with companies and helping them identify what challenges their employees may have getting to and from work, and we’re using this program to help meet those challenges.”

According to McDowell, Shift is off to a “roaring start,” with approximately 6,400 people using the services in some way in 2024. Shift has proven to be a very attractive option to help overnight workers find transportation alternatives when MARTA goes offline for service, he says.

“This is a program they can tap into to address that challenge of not being able to utilize public transportation,” McDowell says. “For those that already work in the airport area, it gives them another option should they get in a bind getting home or getting to work, but the bigger benefit is when companies are recruiting or hiring, one of the challenges is how people will get to work. It could be a make-or-break decision about whether a company can hire new employees.”

The AACIDs will soon be offering another mobility option: microtransit. The Atlanta Region Transit Link Authority recently awarded the AACIDs a \$2.6 million grant to fund a two-year microtransit pilot program. McDowell says River North Transit LLC will partner to help the AACIDs launch the program, and service is expected to begin in the second quarter.

“Microtransit is a mobility service that is an on-demand service, which distinguishes it from public transportation,” he says. “Users download an app, and through the app



Design Phase Underway:

The AACIDs will launch a Personal Rapid Transit demonstration project this year. The rendering (above) shows the pod vehicles that will transport two to six people from the ATL SkyTrain station to the Georgia International Convention Center (route shown at right).



SNAPSHOT

CLAYTON COUNTY

POPULATION
(2023)

298,300

PER CAPITA INCOME
(2023)

\$26,826

UNEMPLOYMENT
(November 2024)

4.7%

COWETA COUNTY

155,892

\$43,281

3.3%

FAYETTE COUNTY

123,351

\$52,188

3.2%

FULTON COUNTY

1,079,105

\$61,438

3.9%

HENRY COUNTY

254,613

\$36,051

3.9%

SPALDING COUNTY

69,946

\$36,803

4.4%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Georgia Department of Labor

they can request a ride through a microtransit service anywhere in the (AACIDs) district. This on-demand service works very similar to Lyft, except it’s public transportation.”

Another mobility solution the AACIDs have been exploring is Personal Rapid Transit (PRT). After seven years of conversation and preparation, and an investment of about \$500,000, the AACIDs will launch a demonstration project this year, McDowell says.

“PRT consists of pod vehicles that carry two to six people, and the demonstration project will cover about a half mile, connecting the SkyTrain coming from the airport to the Georgia International Convention Center,” he says, noting the route will loop around the new College Park Arena. “The design phase has started, and construction will begin in 2025 with it being operational sometime in the third quarter of 2026.”

The PRT demonstration project is being done in collaboration with MARTA, which has pledged \$10 million toward the

\$18 million project, according to McDowell. In addition to the track, there will also be a virtual reality component to the project, which will demonstrate how a “larger network could work in the airport area,” he says.

“Here you have another on-demand solution and it has a fixed route,” McDowell says. “It operates just like the MARTA train, having its own guideway separate from traffic. We believe because of Hartsfield-Jackson and what it represents in the region, it is an ideal platform to explore these emerging mobility solutions.”

If fully realized, Atlanta would become only the second city in the U.S. to have a PRT system. Morgantown, West Virginia, has been operating PRT since the mid-1970s, McDowell says.

Each of these mobility options falls under the umbrella of an “Automated Transit Network” (ATN), McDowell says, noting the combination of options covers public transportation users from the first mile to the last mile “and everything in between.”

“We believe that this is the solution for 21st century public transportation,” McDowell says. “Right now in South Metro, the MARTA train costs more than \$1 billion per mile to expand and any expansion would take 20-30 years. But with an ATN, you get the same level of service, but it is a solution that can be implemented in the next five years.

“An automated transit network would cost one-tenth of [expanding MARTA train service],” he adds, “and could be online potentially in five years in the South Metro community.”

Convenient Location

Located in Clayton County, the airport enjoys an enviable position: 80% of the U.S. population is within a two-hour plane trip and a two-day freight drive.

“In Clayton County our motto is, ‘Where the world lands and opportunities take off,’” says Erica Rocker, the county’s economic development director.

Around 80% of the airport’s 4,700 acres lie within the borders of Clayton County.

Across five runways, Hartsfield-Jackson serves more than 150 U.S. destinations and more than 70 international destinations in more than 50 countries. On average, there are 2,100 arrivals and departures daily, ferrying an average of 286,000 passengers a day.

Rocker says proximity to the airport is a major draw for supply chain and logistics operations, warehouses, food and beverage distribution firms and aviation companies – enterprises that provide jobs from Metro Atlanta south to Macon and east to Savannah.

“Industrial is still king,” she says. “Two of the five buildings at Victory Landing are complete and the first tenant has moved in.”



CONTRIBUTED

Cutting-Edge Farming: The Clayton County Board of Commissioners joined the Andrew J. Young Foundation at the 2024 groundbreaking of the Forever Young Aquaponics facility, above. The facility will grow organic greens.



CONTRIBUTED

Positive Change: The Victory Landing Logistics Center (site plan shown above), an industrial park near the Atlanta airport; at right, Erica Rocker, economic development director for Clayton County.



CONTRIBUTED

The Victory Landing Logistics Center is a last-mile industrial park located on 90 acres on a site once pitched for a Falcons stadium and Amazon’s second headquarters.

Rocker says the county is experiencing significant growth in new and expanding industries, including TOTO, a Japanese firm that manufactures high-end plumbing fixtures. The company invested \$238 million to expand its production floor in Morrow last year.

“We also recently enjoyed a major ribbon cutting with XPO ... a logistics and transport company at their Ellenwood location,” she says. “They opened an 80,000-square-foot facility with 152 doors. This particular location is one of seven break-bulk locations in the country, and these are critical to supply chain distribution.”

The company operates on a 24/7 schedule, and the Clayton location moves 3 million pounds of consumer and business freight every day, according to Rocker, who says the new service center created 160 local jobs.

“They move goods to 99% of U.S. zip codes, which is tremendous,” she says. “They have 25 drivers who are in the 1-million-mile club. The average wage starts at \$70,000 and goes up from there.”

On the horizon, a new \$117 million, 8,000-seat convocation center is scheduled to open this summer, and a new high school – shaped like an airplane – will become the first public high school in the nation with a nine-hole golf course. The groundbreaking for North Clayton High School was in December 2024, and it is expected to open next year.

Rocker says all of this shows the county is on the rise. “Right now, according to the ARC [Atlanta Regional Commission], we’re at 304,000 citizens,” she says. “The average income is \$60,000 now, which is great, and one out of every four households in Clayton County has a household income of \$100,000. I don’t think we get our market share of good news about all of the positive things that are going on in the county.”

Focused on helping generate positive buzz for Clayton County is the Aerotropolis Atlanta Alliance, a public-private partnership working to spur economic projects in South Fulton and Clayton County. Its mission is to boost regional economic competitiveness surrounding the airport.

“This past year has been a good year,” says Shannon James, president and CEO. “We’ve seen some really good winds.”

It’s been years in the making, but South Fulton is set to welcome a mixed-use development to the City of East Point. A developer has purchased a 55-acre site that formerly housed a bottle manufacturing facility on Sylvan Road. It could eventually comprise a movie/film component, residential, retail, hospitality and entertainment facilities, according to James.

“It was our No. 1 catalytic site we’ve been working on for several years in partnership with the region, and it is

now activated,” he says. “Catalytic sites are sites that have significant regional impact.”

The first step in the transformation of the property is the demolition of an existing structure on the site in the first quarter of the new year, James says. Construction is expected to begin next year.

“In our Blueprint 2.0 [we] took it a step further and made [this property] a focus site,” he says. “We hosted bus tours and broker receptions, and we marketed it domestically and abroad. There was a heavy, heavy interest from the single-use community, but the Aerotropolis strategy was to create a destination-type feel in the central business district.”

More Than Manufacturing

Creating a destination was also the driving force behind the new aquatic center that opened last summer in Spalding County, according to David Luckie, executive director of the Griffin-Spalding Develop-



Transformative Site:

Shannon James, president and CEO of the Aerotropolis Atlanta Alliance, right, says a mixed-use development is coming to East Point. The 55-acre property, the conceptual plan of which is on the far right, is formerly home to glass container manufacturer Owens-Illinois Inc. and now owned by Quark Properties. McDonald Development is leading the project with input from Aerotropolis and East Point Mayor Deana Holiday Ingraham.



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- Two Development Authorities with ability to offer bond financing
- Lots of Available Redevelopment or Repurposed Building Opportunities
- Home of Camp Creek Marketplace, Camp Creek Pointe, Camp Creek Business Center, Southmeadow Business Park and several major headquarter companies

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**EAST
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ment Authority. The Spalding County Aquatic Center, featuring an eight-lane, 25-yard pool and a four-lane instructional/therapy pool, is located in The Lakes of Green Valley Industrial Park. A grand opening was held in June 2024.

“The development authority donated 40 acres to Spalding County for the aquatic center,” Luckie says. “You can swim, do exercises, take swimming lessons and rent rooms for parties out there. The main point though is to give our local swim teams the opportunity to swim competitively here, as well as hosting competitions here for other communities that have competitive swim teams.”

The aquatic center is part of the development authority’s vision that an industrial park should be more than a collection of manufacturers and warehouses. A daycare at that same industrial park has been operating successfully for years, Luckie says, opening early and staying open later than traditional daycares to accommodate workers’ schedules.

“At our Lakes of Green Valley Industrial Park, we have reserved a 10-acre area that overlook three lakes. It’s a beautiful spot,” he says, “and we would like to have restaurants, dry cleaners, banks, anything that could service the people who work at the park.”

Luckie notes the industrial park was developed using a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). It is adjacent to the similarly named Green Valley Industrial, which was among the first in Georgia to be built using a SPLOST. The development authority also controls about 200 acres of River Park, an industrial park that lies mostly in Butts County.



Building Community: David Luckie, executive director of the Griffin-Spalding Development Authority, at EcoPol North America, which is in the Lakes of Green Valley Industrial Park

“Across the four-lane [from the industrial parks], we’re going to have a new regional airport with a 5,500-foot runway to start with,” Luckie says. “The airport authority is in the final throes of trying to get all of the sites purchased so they can get started with construction. They’re anticipating flying the first plane out maybe by 2030.”

Employees of Tomorrow

The development authority is also working closely with Southern Crescent Technical College (SCTC) and the Griffin-Spalding County school system to find creative ways to address workforce development, Luckie says. The city and county are a UGA Archway Partnership Community, a collaboration focused on a variety of community and economic development issues.

Coweta County is also celebrating some economic development wins. Considered a hub for advanced manufacturing, it welcomed Hitachi Construction Machinery Americas’ new regional headquarters to Newnan last year. Meanwhile, Yamaha is beginning construction on its \$20 million SMART (Sequenced Material and Reduced Transportation) warehouse, the first of its kind



Indoor Swimming: The Spalding County Aquatic Center features an eight lane 25-yard pool with a diving board and a four-lane pool with warmer water, above, that is accessible to people of all abilities.

for Yamaha Motor Company worldwide.

On the education and workforce front, Coweta County has been making big moves, according to Candace Boothby, president and CEO of the Newnan-Coweta Chamber.

“From the newly rebuilt Newnan High School, which reopened in August 2024 after the 2021 tornado, to the 25th anniversary of the Central Educational Center, Georgia’s original career academy model, we’re bridging the gap between classrooms and careers.”

Also helping in this area is the recent return of the in-person Coweta Works program, an annual student expo that gives 1,800 eighth graders a hands-on look at local industries and career paths.

Workforce development is also top of mind in Fayette County, where Development Authority Director of Existing Industry Amanda Fields is introducing a novel way to introduce students to the world of work.



New Regional Headquarters: Rendering of the Hitachi Construction Machinery Americas facility in Newnan that includes 88,000 square feet of office space.

“Like a lot communities, our biggest challenge is workforce development,” she says. “A lot of careers in manufacturing are aging out. Workers are retiring

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FAYETTE COUNTY
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

and taking a decade’s worth of knowledge with them.”

To build the county’s workforce development pipeline, in February, the development authority hosted a career expo for eighth grade students. Over the course of three days, every Fayette County public school eighth grader was bused to the expo where they were introduced to business professionals and participated in hands-on activities related to various industries, including engineering, IT, manufacturing and public safety. Prior to the event, the students were given an aptitude test to provide insight into which career might be a good fit for them, Fields says, noting it was timed to occur as the eighth graders were set to make their high school schedules. The expo was held at the district’s Center of Innovation, a former middle school that now offers career and technical education courses to prepare students to be college or career ready. The facility, which opened in January of 2023, also offers classroom space for both Clayton State University and SCTC.



School Restored: Newnan High School, which was rebuilt after significant tornado damage in 2021, reopened in August 2024.

With expansions happening at existing industries including Gerresheimer, a German manufacturer of medical devices such as inhalers and auto-injectors, in Peachtree City, and Hoshizaki,

AUTOMATED TRANSIT NETWORK

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Design work on the Automated Transit Network (ATN) Demonstration Pilot is underway and the ATL Airport CIDs are excited to showcase an innovative, efficient, and sustainable transit solution for South Metro Atlanta's airport area. The pilot will demonstrate how the Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) system connects key locations like the GICC and Gateway Center Arena, offering more convenient and accessible travel while redefining urban mobility, setting the stage for future expansions in the region.



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a company that manufactures ice machines used by Sonic and Chick-fil-A, and the arrival of SP Meditec, a Danish company that produces plastics for the health-care industry, workforce development is crucial to the community’s continued success, Fields says.

“Between existing and a couple of new industries we got in 2024,” she says, “we created 973 new jobs.”

Already home to the Town at Trilith, a master-planned residential and mixed-use community with a school, restaurants, retail and office space, and Trilith Studios, one of the largest production facilities in Georgia and one of the largest purpose-built studios in North America, Fayette County is adding another jewel to its crown.

In April, the U.S. Soccer Federation broke ground on its first-ever National Training Center (NTC) and Headquarters. Named the Arthur M. Blank U.S. Soccer National Training Center in recognition of the Atlanta United owner’s \$50 million

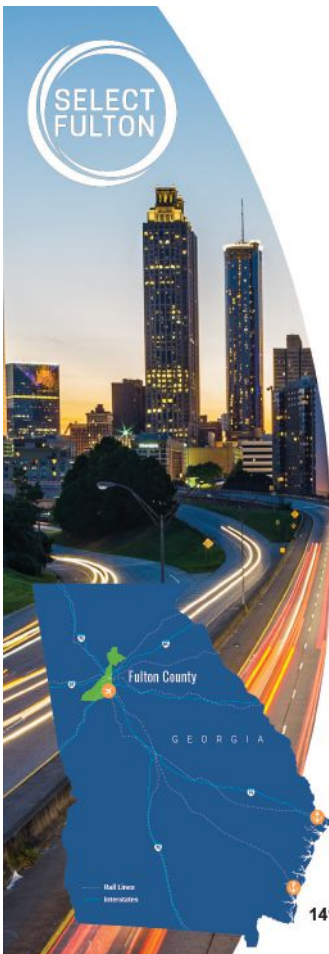


Showcasing Employment Opportunities: Fayette County eighth graders attended a career expo in February, above. Candace Boothby, president and CEO of the Newnan-Coweta Chamber, above right, says workforce and education are priorities in her region.



contribution to construct the facility, the NTC will span 200 acres and include more than a dozen soccer fields and more than 100,000 square feet of indoor courts for all 27 U.S. Soccer National Teams.

“This is going to have a tremendous impact on the community, Metro Atlanta, South



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Filmmaking Destination: Trilith Studios is one of the largest production facilities in Georgia.

Metro and the state,” says Leonardo McClarty, president and CEO of the Fayette Chamber of Commerce. “Locally, you’ll have the impact through the visitors that will come here that may have never known about Fayette County, and also just the early developmental side of it; the work being done to build the facility itself, that’s created opportunities for local business.”

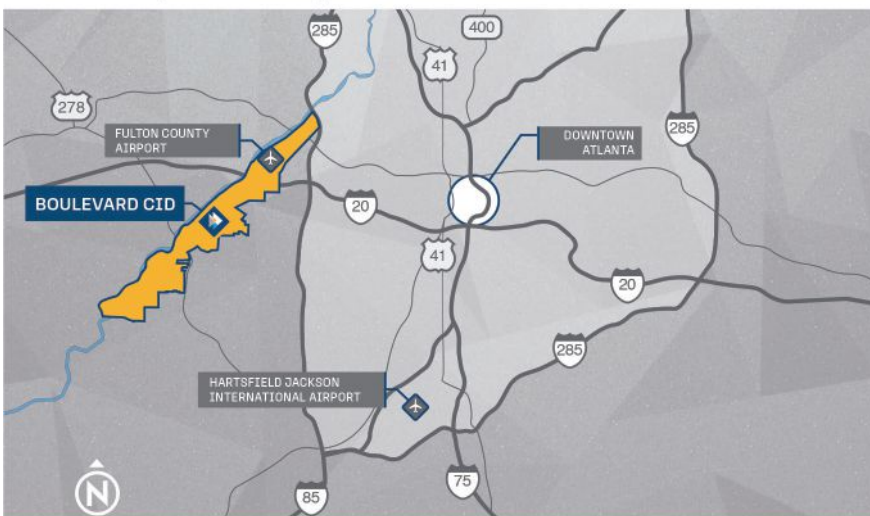
The NTC will create an estimated more than 400 new jobs and represents an investment of more than \$200 million. It is expected to open in 2026 before the FIFA World Cup tournament comes to Atlanta.

“They will be relocating, ballpark, a couple hundred employees from Chicago to this area, which will add to the local talent pool and lead to some new residences and some new spending as well,” McClarty says. “Once the opening takes place and you do have those that are training and coming into this community, that further puts us on a bigger map in terms of exposure.”

In September, it was announced that

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TRAINING CENTER

Massive Investment: Rendering of the Arthur M. Blank U.S. Soccer National Training Center and Headquarters, which is being built in Fayette County

Atlanta was one of 11 cities invited to host the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup (a new international competition). Those matches will take place from June 15 to July 13 of this year at Mercedes-Benz

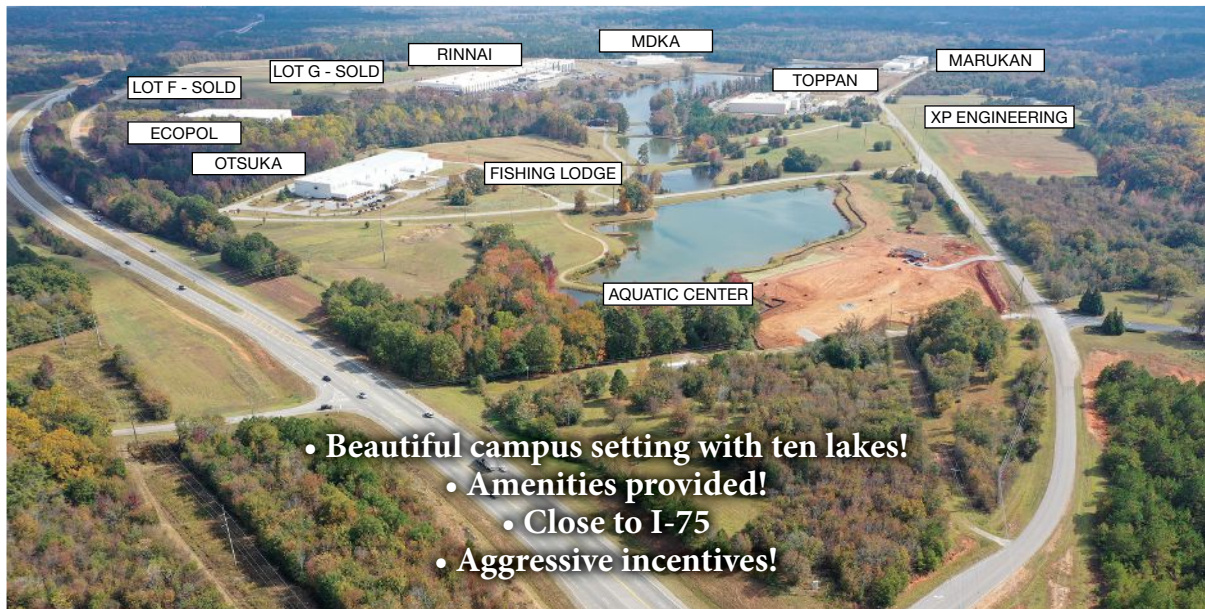
Stadium. The stadium will then host the eight matches of the FIFA World Cup 2026 around the same time next year.

In advance of the 2026 tournament, the Fulton Executive Airport is undergoing a facelift, according to Select Fulton Director Samir Abdullahi.

“[The county] is future-proofing the airport and expanding hangar capacity,” he

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ERIC SUN

Tremendous Impact: Leonardo McClarty, president and CEO of the Fayette Chamber of Commerce, at the construction site for the new soccer training center.

says. “There will be a longer runway, on-site fire rescue and a customs facility. They’re shutting down the Crosswind Runway and turning that into jet parking space in preparation for the World Cup.”

A new state-of-the-art animal shelter that includes a veterinary clinic and a \$180

million public-private partnership redevelopment initiative on Fulton Industrial Boulevard called Renew the District are also among the highlights happening in South Fulton, Abdullahi says.

“We’re not just seeking private investment,” he says. “We’re going to be invested in this area.”

South Metro’s proximity to the world’s busiest airport, skilled workforce and strategic location will continue to elevate this region on the rise. 🏗️



CONTRIBUTED



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Invested in the Region: Select Fulton Director Samir Adbullahi touts Renew the District, a redevelopment initiative along Fulton Industrial Boulevard that involves demolishing some older buildings, above left. A new state-of-the-art animal shelter, seen in the rendering above right, is also coming to the area.