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Statement Regarding “Measuring Sprawl 2014” Report

by Douglas R. Hooker, Executive Director, Atlanta Regional Commission

“Measuring Sprawl 2014,” a report released earlier today by Smart Growth America, looks at where metro Atlanta stood in 2010, after 50 years of rapid growth and development. It is, in essence, a look back in time.

Since 1970, the Atlanta region grew rapidly, sprawling outward from the central city. However, the Smart Growth America report fails to address significant, region-shaping changes in both development patterns and attitudes about growth in our region over the last 10 to 15 years.

Since 2000, the Atlanta Regional Commission’s (ARC) Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) has helped 113 communities create more livable, walkable environments. ARC has provided \$15 million in planning grants and more than \$170 million in transportation investments that have helped revitalize downtowns throughout the region and energized major employment centers like Midtown Atlanta and Perimeter Center. Today, LCI areas account for five percent of the region’s land area, but they contain seven percent of the region’s housing, 24 percent of commercial space and 38 percent of office space.

In his 2013 study of metro Atlanta’s Walkable Urban Places, Chris Leinberger, Charles Bendit Research Professor with the George Washington University School of Business, said, “Surprisingly, this research has found that sprawl in metro Atlanta is approaching an end.” Leinberger’s report, titled *The WalkUP Wake-Up Call: Atlanta*, shows that in 2000, only 14 percent of the region’s income property was in walkable urban places (WalkUPs). By 2008, that number had almost doubled to 26 percent. And, in 2013, it had doubled again to 60 percent.

ARC’s “Metro Atlanta Speaks” public opinion survey conducted in 2013 found that almost 40 percent of those surveyed would consider moving into a mixed-use community if they had the opportunity to move within the region. More than 75 percent favored redeveloping older areas as the “best way for metro Atlanta to accommodate growth,” and when asked, “What is the best long-term solution to traffic problems in metro Atlanta,” more than 62 percent pointed to either “improvements to public transportation” or “developing communities in which people live close to where they work.”

The metro form pendulum is swinging in metro Atlanta, both on the ground and in the minds of its residents. ARC is proud to be a part of this change and, with our LCI program and our many partners around the region, we hope to continue the trend.