Metro Atlanta has no natural physical boundaries to restrain development, making the Atlanta region one of the least-dense metropolitan areas in the U.S. Not surprisingly, metro Atlanta residents also have one of the longest average daily work commutes in the nation. The Livable Centers Initiative (LCI) program began in 1999 as a way to provide an alternative to these prevailing development patterns. Through the LCI program, planning grants are provided to local governments and non-profit organizations to help them prepare a plan for the enhancement of existing town centers, activity centers and corridors. This enables these areas to take advantage of infrastructure and private investments already committed in these communities — resulting in more balanced regional development, fewer vehicle miles traveled and better air quality. After the initial LCI plan is complete, more money can be made available to the jurisdictions to help implement these plans.

To date, the ARC Board has approved $13 million in study funds — $1 million annually — for use in years 2000 to 2012. The studies are awarded on a competitive basis to local governments and non-profit sponsors for producing plans that define future development strategies, transportation improvements and support public and private investments. The ARC Board also approved an initial allocation of $350 million for priority funding of transportation projects resulting from LCI studies. An additional $150 million was approved for these projects in the 2030 Regional Transportation Plan, for a total commitment of $500 million. To date, more than $141 million in planning and transportation funds have been allocated to 107 distinct areas in the region.

While each LCI area is unique, they all employ similar concepts of smart development, such as:

- Connecting homes, shops and offices through mixed-use developments
- Enhancing streetscapes, sidewalks and general community aesthetics
- Improving access to transit and multiple transportation modes, including roadways, walking and biking
- Expanded housing and employment options
- Creating an outreach program that promotes the involvement of all interested stakeholders in the formation of the plan.
LCI Program Yields Beneficial Results

ARC has completed a biennial report on the LCI program since 2004. The program’s progress is measured in terms of new development and changes in local land use policies to support the plan’s implementation. The last biennial assessment, carried out through surveys sent to every LCI community, was conducted in 2008. Through this process, 1,148 new development projects were reported, including:

- 222 projects that are planned
- 164 that are under construction
- 762 that have been completed

These projects are anticipated to add more than 84,500 residential units, more than 19 million square feet of commercial and approximately 38 million square feet of office space to the Atlanta region.

To allow some of the densities and mix of uses found in the LCI plans, most jurisdictions must adopt new regulations. In some cases, failure to change zoning codes and comprehensive plans can derail a plan from the start.

Fortunately, most local governments are changing their policies and regulations to allow for the quality growth that is outlined in their LCI plans. Through the 2008 LCI survey it was determined that:

- 93 percent have adopted, or in the process of adopting, their LCI study into their comprehensive plan
- 67 percent have adopted, or in the process of adopting, special LCI zoning districts
- 56 percent have adopted, or in the process of adopting, affordable or senior housing policies
- 88 percent have adopted, or in the process of adopting, design guidelines

A CLOSER LOOK

Riverdale

In 2006, the City of Riverdale, located just south of the City of Atlanta and Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, was the recipient of an LCI grant. Like many cities whose primary development occurred in the 1960s and 1970s, parts of Riverdale were in need of revitalization. The resulting LCI plan included several transportation strategies to improve local access and circulation and create a less auto-centric community. And rather than permitting the future shape of the city to be determined by chance, Riverdale adopted their plan to act as a new guidebook for the evolution of the city.

In 2009, the City of Riverdale begin construction on a new town hall, one component of a larger town center project entitled “The Promenade,” located within the heart of the city and near the city’s major commercial corridor. The town center project is the critical piece of the LCI plan, and its realization required flexibility and innovation. Upon completion, The Promenade will be comprised of a government center that includes a community center, city hall and public plaza/amphitheater, along with mixed-use commercial space and residential housing.
In 2004 the City of Buford, a historic small town located 35 miles northeast of Atlanta, prepared an LCI study for the downtown area in order to protect and enhance its historic character while establishing a framework for quality new growth in the undeveloped areas ringing it. Through this effort the community envisioned downtown Buford as a unique pedestrian-oriented town center catering to the shopping and services needs of residents and visitors. The community believed that its downtown should encourage walking and strengthen community bonds, while ensuring that automobile and bicycle traffic moved in a safe and efficient manner. Pocket parks and plazas were envisioned throughout and important historic structures were preserved and protected. The study recommended that the downtown include a variety of uses, with low-rise, mixed-use buildings along Main Street transitioning to less intense live-work and studio uses as the distance from the center increases. The plan called for existing neighborhoods to be protected, but better connected to Main Street through new sidewalks and trails. To date, several study recommendations have already been implemented, including streetscape and pedestrian upgrades, the conversion of unused factory space in the downtown area into residential units and the development of a new city hall.
Stockbridge

Stockbridge is situated in the southeast Atlanta region, and up until a few years ago served primarily as a residential community. In 2000, the City of Stockbridge was a recipient in the first round of LCI planning grants. Through the planning process, it was recognized that the LCI study area was struggling with interrelated land use and transportation issues such as a lack of mobility and accessibility, inconsistent development quality, long travel distances and automobile dependence, as well as an image of uncontrolled commercial growth. A vision of the LCI plan was to provide environmentally-sensitive and aesthetic integration of a circulation network that efficiently and safely transports residents and visitors, with an emphasis on an all-mode transportation system. Members of the community also expressed a desire for a more positive image of balanced growth, with designated areas to accommodate various densities and development types in various districts, according to infrastructure availability and potential. Since the plan’s completion, the city has been active in the implementation of their vision, and has completed the development of a new city hall and town center, as well as several sidewalk and pedestrian enhancement projects.

The LCI program also has the ability to connect study funds and local land use initiatives with funds for transportation projects. To date, more than $129 million has been leveraged for 82 transportation projects in 48 LCI communities. The table below breaks down this funding and details the amount of money apportioned to each type of project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Type</th>
<th>Funding Amount</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pedestrian</td>
<td>$88,396,056</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bike/Ped</td>
<td>$24,470,991</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Use Facility</td>
<td>$7,097,602</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit</td>
<td>$20,192,900</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadway Operations</td>
<td>$6,165,241</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadway Capacity</td>
<td>$3,181,618</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This funding has enabled LCI areas to begin implementation of their LCI plans through projects like sidewalk installations, streetscapes and pedestrian enhancements, multi-use/multi-modal corridors with bike lanes and the construction of transit station improvements such as plazas and parking decks. As indicated in the numbers, the vast majority of transportation projects are focused on providing non-vehicular improvements, such as sidewalks, pedestrian crossings and bike lanes.