

NEWS

LINK TRIP 2016: Find 'common interest,' metro leaders told: Texas officials say that's key to uniting a region to tackle big issues.

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FORT WORTH, TEXAS -- Regionalism is simply more effective.

More than 100 key metro Atlanta leaders heard that message Wednesday as they began a four-day visit to Dallas-Fort Worth to examine that region's progress and how it has confronted many of the same issues they face at home.

"What is good for Fort Worth is good for Dallas, and vice versa," said Betsy Price, mayor of Fort Worth.

The Atlanta group, on the 20th annual LINK trip organized by the Atlanta Regional Commission, includes political, business, transportation, economic development and philanthropic leaders. This is the second time LINK has gone to Dallas, though it's been more than 15 eventful years since the first.

Regionalism has been a sore spot for metro Atlanta's patchwork of counties and cities. A regional transportation tax plan failed badly with voters in 2012.

"You have to paint a picture of a common interest," the LINK group was told by **Timothy Bray**, director of the Urban Policy Research Group at the University of Texas. "Because it is not always in our nature."

Reality has forced much of the change in Dallas and Fort Worth, said Mike Eastland, executive director of the North Central Texas Council of Governments. "The world has forced us to act regionally."

Dallas and Atlanta, arguably the two largest business hubs in the Southeast, are perceived by leaders in both cities as both rivals and peers. The LINK group hopes to get a clear sense of how Dallas and Atlanta are similar, as well as how they differ.

Ann Cramer, a senior consultant with Coxe Curry & Associates, has been on all but one of the LINK trips.

The big issues are often the same: transit, education, how to attract professionals and business, how to manage growth.

"We always want to see what we can learn from another city that will have relevance to Atlanta," she said. "We've learned something from every community."

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