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## ARC chair urges Buckhead group to think regionally

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Tad Leithead

Even though Atlanta Regional Commission Chairman Tad Leithead took the mic April Fool's Day at the Buckhead Business Association's meeting Thursday at the City Club of Buckhead, his message was no joke.

"We simply cannot tolerate what we have allowed this city to become in terms of traffic," he said. "We also cannot tolerate what we've allowed this city to become in terms of water ... and education."

Leithead, who has been chairman for three years, addressed these three priority issues with the acronym WET — water, education, transportation.

"I believe not only does that acronym make sense, but that priority order makes sense," he said.

He said even if the state is successful at appealing the federal ruling over Atlanta's water use from Lake Lanier or reaching an agreement with neighboring states, the city is still in trouble.

"We are the largest metropolitan area in the country served by the smallest reservoir," he said.

A favorable legal position and more capture, containment and conservation of water will be needed, he said.

Association President Heather Wright asked Leithead what the possibility would be of speeding up a new water reservoir project.

"Is there going to come a point where someone in authority is going to suspend some impact problems and get reservoirs built?"

He said the process of building a reservoir takes at least five years to permit and because of environmental issues and because there is no funding secured for it.

For education, he said, the commission is beginning an education initiative that will focus on gathering best practices and resources to improve school systems.

"We can work to try to establish minimum standards for who is allowed to run for school board," he said.

Leithead addressed transportation issues by demonstrating how the problems affect Buckhead.

Pointing out that the largest structure on the new Terminus building in Buckhead is the parking deck, he said that 96 percent of people working in the community commute to work by a single-occupancy vehicle.

He also noted how congestion at the Downtown Connector/Interstate 20 interchange affects traffic buildup at Piedmont and Peachtree roads in Buckhead.

"We are getting choked to death by traffic," he said.

Leithead urged that the Buckhead community can help by thinking regionally and submitting ideas and suggestions to the commission.

"To solve the issues that are challenging us in business today, we've got to work together as a region," he said.

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