

Walking on the Abraham Lincoln Bridge was indeed “a once-in-a-lifetime-opportunity.”

But stick around.

Because by the end of 2016, the East End Crossing will open; all the downtown construction will wrap up, and we will finally complete the untangling of Spaghetti Junction.

Completing the Ohio River Bridges Project is just one example of the dramatic change happening throughout our community.

We are definitely in a city in transformation – and that’s not just good. It’s great. Because we live in a *world* that’s in transformation.

And our goal is to do more than keep up with the pace of global change; it’s to leap ahead.

I know the future is challenging to predict, but Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said it best: “Faith is taking the first step, even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”

I have tremendous faith in Louisville, in our citizens and in our ability to meet challenges and take advantage of opportunities. We’ve proven that together over the last five years.

To understand the state of the city today, we have to understand where we’ve been and where we’re going.

So let’s look to January 2011: In the shadows of the Great Recession, unemployment was over 10 percent. Massive budget deficit. Little or no job growth. Anxiety about the future.

So we got to work and eliminated our structural budget problem and embraced innovation and collaboration -- with partners *outside* of government.

Because government never has all the answers. But we *can* ask the right questions.

Like, how do we retool our economy to keep up with global change?

To answer that, we brought business tools, like Six Sigma and data analytics, to Metro Government. Through the award-winning LouieStat performance improvement method that we created and other efforts, we looked at ourselves, our industries, our workforce -- everything we could measure.

We identified a painful truth -- for about 30 years, average wages in Louisville fell behind many of our peer cities and the country as a whole. So that was a no-brainer to attack.

We created an economic development cluster strategy around sectors where we already have momentum, strong potential for job growth, and where our research tells us we can be best in world:

- Lifelong wellness and aging care,
- Logistics and e-commerce,
- Food and beverage,
- Advanced manufacturing
- Business services.

To be the best in the world, you have to think globally. That's why we created the BEAM regional economic development partnership with Lexington, to grow our advanced manufacturing cluster and boost exports. Since then, Kentucky has had record exports for four years in a row.

The next question? How can we ensure our citizens have the education and training they need for the jobs of the future?

And, how do we address the unfortunate fact that too many of our underprivileged kids arrive at kindergarten dramatically behind their classmates in social, emotional and learning development?

Our answer: Cradle to Career. As we announced last year, this system is based on our city's core value of lifelong learning, and it addresses a crucial finding of our data – that the path to a successful career starts long before somebody in their 20s walks into their first job interview. It starts before children take their first steps.

Our goals are to identify the key barriers to success at every step, and then coordinate with educators, parents and health and social service providers to make sure kids' basic needs are met so they can focus on learning.

We've also created skill-development programs like Code Louisville, an innovative public-private partnership that teaches citizens of all ages the software coding skills essential to high-tech jobs – an area our business community highlighted as an urgent need.

Code Louisville trained 288 citizens in its first year, and helped a group of high school students from Beecher Terrace create their own web services company. This year, we're going to expand the program and train more future coders and tech entrepreneurs.

That's what embracing innovation helps us do: Identify stubborn, longstanding problems and target them with unique solutions.

Sometimes when you embrace innovation, people question your priorities. I saw that when I posed this question, related to another of our core values:

How do we become an even more compassionate community and embrace the notion that *all* of our citizens should be respected so their human potential will thrive?

Some people said emphasizing compassion would make me -- and our city -- look weak. In fact, it has made us look strong.

Consider our citizens' response:

- The Give A Day Week of Service broke another world record this year with 166,000 volunteers and compassionate acts.
- Last September, close to 1,000 citizens painted away hateful graffiti from the walls of the Louisville Islamic Center -- an attack on everyone's religious freedom, regardless of faith.
- That same commitment shone bright when Louisvillians proclaimed we could be both a compassionate and safe city by welcoming refugees from around the world.

Compassion is part of our DNA. It's who we are -- and it's also good for business.

I asked the CEO of Computershare what made the difference between his company choosing us or another city. He said one reason they brought 250 new jobs to Louisville is because they liked our city's focus on compassion.

This focus is what I call social innovation. It's critical to develop these social muscles so we don't become a Ferguson or Baltimore, and it's another example of how we're transforming our city.

So let's discuss some specific city transformations. Some of the most dramatic are tied to our economy. Since January 2011:

- We've created more than 47,000 new jobs.
- Unemployment has dropped from 10.3 to 4.3 percent.
- We've gone from a \$25 million budget **deficit** to an \$18.9 million budget **surplus**.
- We've opened 1,900 new businesses.

Just in the last year, we've seen or announced:

- A \$1.3 billion investment and 2000 new jobs at Ford.
- A \$310 million expansion and 300 new jobs at UPS.
- A \$180 million expansion and renovation at the Kentucky International Convention Center.
- Small business loans totaling about \$60 million in investment, up from \$35 million in 2014.
- And Site Selection magazine named us one of the top 10 Metro areas for economic development.

You can see our momentum. You can feel it. And you can count it!

And the world is taking note.

Just in the last year, Louisville's transformation into one of the world's great travel destinations has been trumpeted in Time magazine, USA Today, the London Times, Travel and Leisure and many, many others.

That kind of publicity helps us compete for global business and talent.

The knowledge workers who power the new economy, and the companies that employ them, want a city with a great quality of life, signature arts and cultural events, diverse food and music, and one-of-a-kind parks.

We compete well in those areas. This year, we will celebrate the opening of the entire Parklands at Floyds Fork and pass the halfway point in completing the magnificent 100-mile Louisville Loop.

The global economy and its workforce also demand that we modernize our roadways, transportation systems and built environment.

That's why we fought for and won a \$16.9 million TIGER grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation. More than 600 cities applied, and we were one of only 39 chosen. We'll use that money to transform Dixie Highway, reduce accidents and give our citizens and businesses a more modern roadway.

Preparing for the future also means having the best technology infrastructure.

That's why we're working with Google Fiber to increase access and provide cost-effective Internet service up to 40 times faster than what's available now. Other telecommunication companies, too, are now saying *they* plan to offer faster speeds at lower prices.

That's a win for our entrepreneurs, businesses, workforce, students and families, and a huge signal to the world. It also fuels our business momentum, which will be taking another visible, above-ground leap forward tomorrow.

Because, that's when we break ground on the new downtown Omni Hotel. This will be a gorgeous, game-changing, \$300 million exclamation point to our skyline.

We plan to fill the Omni's 600 rooms, as well as those of the six other hotels that are planned or underway, with visitors who want to experience our city's great amenities, like Bourbonism.

Bourbonism is our first ever year-round tourism experience, and we've got nine urban distilleries open today or under construction.

The transformations I've outlined are the result of years of work by people in and out of Metro Government – people who believe, as I do, that it's time for Louisville to play in the world's big league, and play with the entrepreneurial gusto to win.

One key to the future is understanding how Foreign Direct Investment, like the Haier acquisition of GE Appliances, can help us grow. So, with our BEAM partnership, which now covers 18 Kentucky and four Southern Indiana counties, and with help from the JP Morgan Chase Foundation, we're going to start a new chapter, with the Brookings Global Cities Initiative, to study opportunities to further tap into the global economy and grow jobs.

We have so much worth celebrating in Louisville. The transformation over the last five years has been very encouraging.

Of course, we also have challenges, and transformations we still need to make, including making us a healthier city.

We're working on a city-wide effort to find creative solutions to some of our most persistent health challenges, from diabetes to depression to breathing better. Humana's Bold Goal complements our Healthy Louisville 2020 plan, and together, we'll help Louisvillians enjoy more healthy days.

Ensuring the health of our natural environment also helps protect our own health. So we're partnering with U of L and the Institute for Healthy Air Water and Soil on the Green Heart Project, which examines the impact of trees and plant life on respiratory and cardiovascular health.

And we recently launched TreesLouisville, a non-profit dedicated to creating an arboretum of trees – and cleaner air - in every neighborhood in Louisville.

Replenishing our tree canopy is something we have the tools to do right now. There are other areas where, to really make the progress we're capable of making as a city, we need a tool we don't have: LIFT - Local Investments for Transformation, also known as the local option.

If you agree that Louisville needs this valuable tool to be able to compete with cities around the country, please contact your legislators and tell them to support LIFT.

And, if you don't agree, don't call them!

Of course, we still have to make smart investments in our community today.

That's why we opened new Wi-Fi hotspots in the Russell neighborhood, near where the groundbreaking \$31 million West Louisville Food Port will start construction later this year, creating about 200 jobs.

Just today, FarmedHERE, a company that does organic, indoor vertical farming, announced it will locate at the Food Port, creating 40 jobs, many of which will go to people from the neighborhood.

These are exciting investments.

So are our public libraries, which are critical lifelong learning hubs. That's why we opened our beautiful Southwest Library, where we met last year; why we will open the South Central Regional Library early next year; and why I will be discussing with the Metro Council a proposal for Metro Government to invest \$1 million toward the \$4.5 million renovation of the St. Matthews Eline Library, which has the highest circulation of any of our branches.

It is just good business to take advantage of opportunities like this. Thanks to our friends in St. Matthews for leading this charge!

Certainly, our first and greatest responsibility is public safety. It's where we devote 58 percent of all General Funds.

We've seen cities where police-community trust has dissolved, resulting in 24-7 tension. In Louisville, we view public safety as a collaboration between public safety professionals and the citizens they serve.

We are in the process of outfitting our LMPD patrol officers with body cameras. Data shows that body cameras lead to drastic reductions in citizen complaints and use of unnecessary force. This project is more than 80 percent complete and we'll reach 100 percent by June 30.

Just over a year ago, we launched the Real Time Crime Center, which uses technology and data analytics to help our officers fight crime. And just last year, we launched the 9th Mobile Division, deploying officers to keep the peace in neighborhoods where our data analysis tells us they can do the most good.

Still, crime is not a problem we can arrest our way out of. This past year, while overall crime levels were flat, homicides rose to tragic and unacceptable levels. It happened in most of America's larger cities, but that's no reason not to address it here.

So, what are we as a community going to do about this?

We must understand why some citizens choose a tragic path destined for violence or incarceration or both – and we must offer alternatives.

That's why we created our Office for Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods -- to work with community partners to reduce the number of homicides, suicides and drug overdoses in our city.

As recognition of our solid approach, the office has helped secure approximately \$10 million in private and federal grants to support many efforts.

The most recently announced is Pivot to Peace. This program intervenes with certain hospital patients who are receiving treatment for gunshot, knife or other violent crime injuries, so that we stop retribution crimes and provide options to guide these citizens toward a bright future.

Pivot to Peace is innovative, promising and one of the many actions we're taking to give more of our young people hope and a sense of possibility.

We have too many citizens, particularly young men of color, who don't believe in their own futures. For both moral and economic reasons, that's not acceptable; it can't ever be acceptable. Otherwise, our claims of compassion and shared prosperity are hollow.

For Louisville to reach its full potential, we must be a city where the path to prosperity and opportunity is open to every single one of our citizens.

That's where I need your help.

I want each of you and the businesses you represent to invest in our future by joining the dozens of local companies that hire young people through our SummerWorks program.

SummerWorks helps young people learn the value and the dignity of work, and helps them find their own path to opportunity. I see SummerWorks participation as something that should be part of our business community's cultural DNA.

Our first year of SummerWorks in 2011 had 200 students; last year, we employed more than 2,500. This year, we want to serve even more youth. These jobs can be transformational experiences.

Brianne Dorsey is a SummerWorks student who started off at Thorntons doing store clean-up and stocking shelves. Her managers saw that she was a go-getter. The next summer she signed up customers for their Refreshing Rewards program. And last summer, Thorntons was so pleased, they assigned her to work in the HR department.

She says it's given her "first-hand experience with what I want to do with the rest of my life." I'd like to ask for a big round of applause for Brianne and Thorntons, our biggest SummerWorks supporter.

I'd also like to thank Humana for **just** joining the SummerWorks family and agreeing to hire 25 young people.

Lastly, thanks to club president Greg Braun and to everyone in the Rotary Club for all you do for our city, from the transformational Rotary Promise Scholarships, to the Paul Harris Fellow program, to your recently planned Chickasaw Park initiative.

And I'd like to give a special thanks to my terrific team at Metro Government, as well as the Metro Council and their new president, David Yates, for their dedication to public service.

As we consider the challenges and opportunities ahead of us, I'd like to close with the words of the great President for whom our new bridge is named, Abraham Lincoln: "The best way to predict your future is to create it."

Friends, our time is now. Our city's transformation is underway. It's happening now. And we have everything we need to create a big, bold, bright future for all our citizens.

Let's keep working, keep moving forward, and we'll create this future together.