



GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE
CITIES INITIATIVE
L'ALLIANCE DES VILLES
DES GRANDS LACS ET DU SAINT-LAURENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Mayors From Around the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region
Launch a Historic Economic Transformation Action Plan to Build a World-
Renowned Fresh Coast Economic Corridor**

*The Action Plan positions the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor to unlock opportunities for
18 million new jobs while protecting our precious fresh water*

New York, NY – September 24, 2025 – Today, Mayor Brandon Johnson of Chicago, IL, Mayor Valérie Plante of Montréal, QC, Mayor Justin Bibb of Cleveland, OH, Deputy Mayor Paul Ainslie of Toronto and several other Cities Initiative members unveiled the *Economic Transformation Action Plan: A Blueprint for Economic Growth and Freshwater Stewardship in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region*. The Action Plan provides a 10-year blueprint to position the region as the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor™ and one of North America's fastest-growing economies over the next decade while safeguarding the region's unparalleled freshwater resources for current and future generations.

With 84 percent of North America's surface freshwater, a highly integrated regional economy that ranks as the third largest in the world and other comparative advantages, the region is uniquely positioned to thrive in an era of global water scarcity. Through the implementation of the Action Plan, the Cities Initiative and its partners aim to build on these strengths and contribute to the achievement of the following regional goals by 2035:

- Attract 500,000 new businesses that are committed to sustainability
- Create 18 million jobs for the region's residents
- Avoid any percentage increase in consumptive water loss
- Improve water quality from 'fair' to 'good'
- Reduce emissions by 300 million metric tons

Mayor Brandon Johnson, Chicago, IL:

"The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region is uniquely positioned to lead North America's next era of economic growth. With the world's largest supply of surface fresh water, a highly skilled workforce and a proven record of innovation, our region has what it takes to attract sustainable industries, create millions of jobs and prove that economic prosperity and freshwater stewardship can go together. As one of the region's leading economic hubs, Chicago is proud to stand with communities across this region to unlock its full potential."

Mayor Valérie Plante, Montréal, QC:

"For too long, economic growth in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region has come at the expense of the health of our environment. This Action Plan marks a clear break from that past, advancing a new approach to economic development, one that places water quality and supply at the heart of economic prosperity. By working together



across borders, we are proving that a thriving economy and the protection of our most precious resource – our fresh water – can and must advance hand in hand."

Mayor Justin Bibb, Cleveland, OH:

"The release of this Action Plan is a historic milestone for our Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region. It demonstrates what is possible when mayors, Indigenous leaders and communities work together across borders to shape our own future. In an era when local action matters more than ever, this plan highlights the power of collaboration to drive economic transformation while protecting our fresh water for generations to come. As a Great Lakes city, Cleveland is honored to play a leading role in advancing this vision for our collective prosperity and sustainability."

Deputy Mayor Paul Ainslie, Toronto, ON:

"As one of North America's great global cities, Toronto is eager to build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region. Our shared waters connect us, and this Action Plan ensures they will also sustain us by driving innovation, strengthening resilience and improving quality of life for millions of people. By working together across borders, we can show the world how cities and regions can lead in building a resilient and prosperous future."

Developed by the Cities Initiative's Mayors Commission on Economic Transformation, the Action Plan identifies 17 strategies and 76 actions for local governments and other stakeholders. It also includes 12 program concepts that the Cities Initiative will explore to support the Action Plan's implementation throughout member communities. Collectively, these strategies, actions and program concepts will **support the establishment of the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor by attracting and retaining sustainability-oriented industries; modernizing the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway; creating accessible, mixed-use and vibrant waterfronts and building a sustainable, independent and North American-produced clean-energy grid.**

The Cities Initiative has Memorandums of Understanding with the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Legislative Caucus and the Council of the Great Lakes Region (CGLR), which will continue to support the Action Plan as Implementing Partners. In addition, several other partner organizations have signed a joint statement expressing support for sustainable economic growth and freshwater stewardship across the region.

Featured speakers at the launch event included Mayor Brandon Johnson of Chicago; Mayor Valérie Plante of Montréal; Mayor Justin Bibb of Cleveland and Deputy Mayor Paul Ainslie of Toronto. Additional members in attendance included Mayor Mat Siscoe of St. Catharines, ON; Mayor Ryan Sorenson of Sheboygan, WI; Mayor Rob Burton of Oakville, ON; Mayor Cory Mason of Racine, WI; Mayor Roger Reinert of Duluth, MN; Mayor Sam Cunningham of Waukegan, IL; Mayor Eddie Melton of Gary, IN; Mayor Ken Johnson of Muskegon, MI; Mayor Daniel Côté of Gaspé, QC; Mayor Gino Moretti of Saint-Anicet, QC; Grand Council Chief Linda Debassige of the Anishinabek Nation; Councillor Sean O'Meara of Halton Region, ON and Councillor Lauren Anderson of Chatham-Kent, ON



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“Global fresh water is dwindling rapidly, yet here in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region we have an opportunity to lead,” said Mayor Eddie Melton of Gary, IN. “The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative’s *Economic Transformation Action Plan* ensures we attract investment, create millions of jobs and protect the fresh water that defines our communities.”

By embracing the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor™, the region can attract industries, talent and investment while preserving the unparalleled freshwater resources that sustain it. For more information on the Action Plan please visit <https://glslcities.org/etap/>.

BOLD REGIONAL GOALS

Cities Initiative members and partners are crafting a bold new vision for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region. By 2035, leaders from around the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region will work together to:

- 1 **ATTRACT HALF A MILLION BUSINESSES**
- 2 **CREATE OVER 18 MILLION NEW JOBS**
- 3 **AVOID ANY INCREASE IN % CONSUMPTIVE WATER LOSS**
- 4 **IMPROVE WATER QUALITY FROM “FAIR” TO “GOOD”**
- 5 **REDUCE EMISSIONS BY 300 MILLION METRIC TONS**

About the Cities Initiative

The Cities Initiative is a multinational coalition of municipal and Indigenous government executives representing communities in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River Region who are working to promote economic prosperity in our communities and protect our fresh water for the benefit of current and future generations. With more than 350 communities represented, the Cities Initiative is leading the way in advancing the environmental, economic and social health of the region by addressing issues impacting its residents.



For more information, please contact:

Jacqueline Edwards | Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative |
jedwards@glslcities.org