



BIRMINGHAM'S INNOVATION DESTINATION

QUESTIONS? We have answers.

How is The Switch different from what we've been doing?

Innovation and entrepreneurship are happening all over the city, but in order to better tell Birmingham's story, we are establishing The Switch as the epicenter of innovation for the city. The core of the story begins with Innovation Depot and ripples outward from there, which is why we are focusing the brand in the blocks immediately around Innovation Depot.

There have been efforts in the past to brand the innovation district, mostly through signage. The Switch is different because it's more than just a brand - it's a full set of tools designed to support innovative business growth in Birmingham. These tools are accessible through The Switch website, which provides resources for entrepreneurs and links to the organizations that can help innovative businesses find support, help and the tools to support their success.

In short, The Switch is Birmingham's home for innovation.

What's an innovation district?

The Brookings Institute defines innovation districts as "geographic areas where leading-edge anchor institutions (Innovation Depot in our case) and companies cluster and connect with startups, business incubators and accelerators. They are also physically compact, transit-accessible and technically wired while offering mixed-use housing, office and retail in close proximity."

If this were written with a Birmingham focus, the anchor institution is Innovation Depot and the companies that cluster are those like Pack Health. The startups are those found in Innovation Depot and the incubators are programs such as the Velocity Accelerator. The area we are beginning with is compact, only spanning a handful of blocks - from 1st to 4th Avenues North and 16th Street South to I-65 - adjacent to the city's Intermodal facility and within walking distance to the city's largest urban park and more than 2,000 apartments, lofts and condos.

Where is The Switch?

The Switch includes the blocks immediately around Innovation Depot and moves outward from there. Think of Innovation Depot as a pebble thrown into the heart of the city and innovation rippling outward from there.

We have been very careful not to draw hard edges and create a "district." Rather, we are calling The Switch an Innovation Destination. The Depot is the core - the epicenter where you can easily be connected to the tools and resources to help launch and grow a startup. But, where the district will ultimately "ripple" out to is yet to be determined.

Likewise, to the north and the east of The Switch, we have been careful to recognize the already established Civil Rights District and Fourth Avenue Business District where social innovation, inclusion and equality are celebrated. The Switch connects to these important districts, but in no way is The Switch designed or intended to "take over" those important components of Birmingham's history.

All three - The Switch, the Civil Rights District and the 4th Avenue Historic District - celebrate different aspects of economic growth, business development, opportunity, equality and inclusion.

I run a startup. Should I move to The Switch?

We would love that, and hope you will, but you don't have to. However, The Switch can be a tool and resource to help you launch and grow your business. The Switch is a singular place to go - both physically and digitally - for information and resources. It also provides a critical mass of entrepreneurs, founders and ecosystem supporters to help generate more creativity and innovation.

Where did the name come from?

The blocks immediately around Innovation Depot began life as a switchyard for the city's railroad industry. As recently as 1980, there were tracks and switches running along 14th Street North. When you look at the city in plan, you can still see where some of the old tracks shaped the way in which buildings were constructed. In fact, the long sign projecting on the front of Innovation Depot follows an old rail bed.

In the context of today, however, "Switch" takes on different meanings. Switches may still redirect trains, but they also route, direct and transmit information. And, on a more global level, we are "switching" Birmingham and making it viable and vibrant for the future.

Many organizations talk about innovation. Why do we need another?

The Switch is not another organization, but rather a unifying element for the city. The Switch is first and foremost a place – again, both physical and digital – and not trying to copy or replicate any other organization already focused on innovation, business/economic development, entrepreneurship and any other similar activity. Instead, it is designed as a destination – a place – to go and get the help you need to launch and grow a business in Birmingham – which is why we call it an Innovation Destination rather than just a district.

Why do we need The Switch?

To accelerate growth in Birmingham. By creating a defined destination and brand, we can better tell our city's story. This will lead to more economic opportunity, growth and success for Birmingham.

Who is behind The Switch?

The University of Alabama at Birmingham, REV Birmingham and the Birmingham Business Alliance are leading the initiative, but many more organizations have been involved in the planning and launch of The Switch. Including:

- The City of Birmingham
- Alabama Power
- Alabama Capital Network
- Alabama Works
- Birmingham Bound
- Innovate Birmingham
- Innovation Depot
- Shipt
- Tech Birmingham
- Urban Impact, Inc.
- Venture for America

In addition to these groups, we have been working with area property owners, existing business owners in the area and developers of key properties to inform them of The Switch and work with them to determine how they, as stakeholders in the area, can help build out the physical plant that will help Birmingham make "The Switch."

Who do I contact if I have questions about The Switch?

REV Birmingham is the lead organization. To facilitate communication and ensure everyone gets the support they need, we are centralizing contact information. Those with questions and needs can complete the contact form at theswitchbham.com, and REV will help connect you with the appropriate person.

What types of resources are available?

The Switch partners are experts in all facets of business in Birmingham. From starting up and securing funding to locating your office and building out your space, The Switch can connect you to the right resource. At its base level, The Switch offers:

- A location in the city center primed and ready for redevelopment
- Other STEM jobs in close proximity to your business
- Easy access to area expressways, the airport, public transportation and the Central Business District
- Gigabit Internet connectivity
- Walkability to more than 2,000 residential units and Birmingham's largest urban park
- Opportunity zone, hub zone and other economic development-related programs
- Connectivity to the Civil Rights District and the Fourth Avenue Business District