

# **I-85 Corridor Alliance Stakeholder Networking Workshop**

Valley, Alabama

June 21, 2006

*Approximately 100 business, political, and educational stakeholders from throughout the I-85 Corridor region participated in roundtable discussions about Corridor assets, challenges, and potential strategies and initiatives. The following responses were reported from five facilitated roundtable discussions. Assets, barriers, and strategies are listed in the rank order in which they were mentioned in the roundtables.*

## **I-85 Corridor Assets**

### **1. Infrastructure**

- ♦ Transportation (including I-85) network
- ♦ Utility systems (water, sewer, gas, electricity)
- ♦ Health and medical facilities
- ♦ Telecommunications

### **2. Higher education institutions**

- ♦ 4-year universities
- ♦ 2-year colleges

### **3. Quality of life**

- ♦ Recreational facilities and opportunities
- ♦ Tourism sites
- ♦ Sense of community

### **4. Location within state and southeast region**

- ♦ I-85 corridor itself

### **5. Quality of workforce and people living in the corridor region**

- ♦ Strong work ethic
- ♦ Strong sense of loyalty to employers

### **6. K-12 education systems**

- ♦ Some are excellent
- ♦ Others very good

### **7. Natural resources:**

- ♦ Lakes and streams
- ♦ Forests
- ♦ Clean air
- ♦ Climate

## 8. Opportunities for growth and development

- ♦ Available local incentives for existing and new businesses
- ♦ Legal climate favorable to development
- ♦ Available developable land
- ♦ Attractive tax structure for economic development

## 9. Other

- ♦ Quality community and political leadership
- ♦ Cooperative business environment
- ♦ Strength of manufacturing sector in the corridor
- ♦ Successful technology development efforts
- ♦ I-85 Corridor Alliance
- ♦ Diverse nature of corridor communities (large and small, rural, suburban and urban, varied local economies, populations with demographic variety)
- ♦ Strength of overall corridor economy
- ♦ Successful strategic and comprehensive planning efforts in some communities
- ♦ Examples of successful regional and partnership approaches
- ♦ Successful nonprofit organizations
- ♦ Successful small businesses
- ♦ International knowledge and skills
- ♦ Maxwell and Gunter Air Force bases

## I-85 Corridor Barriers

### 1. Underachieving K-12 school systems (disparity of quality)

### 2. Lack of focused strategic planning and smart growth development efforts

### 3. Competition among communities, duplication of efforts, political divisiveness

### 4. Infrastructure (particularly communications technology; some community water and sewer systems)

### 5. Lack of financial resources

### 6. Other

- ♦ Large economic gaps between communities
- ♦ Lack of leadership and vision
- ♦ Lack of needed worker skill sets; lack of technical education opportunities
- ♦ Negative attitudes toward planned growth and development
- ♦ Lack of proactive marketing
- ♦ Rundown communities, neighborhoods
- ♦ Sense of community and unity
- ♦ Environment
- ♦ Lack of affordable quality housing
- ♦ Social problems
- ♦ Image (state rather than corridor)
- ♦ Apathy
- ♦ Health care costs

## **I-85 Corridor Strategies**

- 1. Promote communication, information sharing and relationship building**
  - ♦ Share models of successful initiatives and programs; seek to replicate successful efforts
  - ♦ Inform and educate stakeholders and citizens about local resources, activities and assets
- 2. Develop a strategic plan focused on the overall I-85 corridor**
  - ♦ Encourage cooperative development strategies for the corridor
- 3. Promote tourism on a corridor basis**
- 4. Promote projects and activities that link employers and education providers**
- 5. Establish a branded corridor identity**
- 6. Encourage the creation of regional leadership programs**
  - ♦ Include youth programs
- 7. Other**
  - ♦ Promote citizen involvement throughout the corridor
  - ♦ Secure needed financial support for I-85 Alliance projects and activities
  - ♦ Encourage the adoption and implementation of smart growth/low impact development strategies that minimize environmental problems
  - ♦ Focus on bringing technology, especially modern telecommunications infrastructure, to unserved or underserved areas
  - ♦ Market the corridor's unique strengths and assets
  - ♦ Develop arts and crafts marketing strategies
  - ♦ Encourage the development of new small business operations
  - ♦ Promote strategies that encourage retention of corridor industries and businesses
  - ♦ Promote economic development activities that provide local students with opportunities to remain in their home counties or communities when they graduate (local employment opportunities)
  - ♦ Pilot projects to target corridor communities that are less developed
  - ♦ Promote positive community attitudes
  - ♦ Provide incentives
  - ♦ Encourage political cooperation among local elected officials in the corridor
  - ♦ Ensure that classes and information on international economic development, foreign cultures and languages are made available in corridor school systems
  - ♦ Benchmark Alliance projects and activities against successful corridors in the U.S.