



NESAs

The North Eastern Strategic Alliance

PRESS KIT

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North Eastern Strategic Alliance
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ABOUT NESAS

Founded in 2000, the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESAS) is a regional economic development organization that serves nine-counties in northeast South Carolina. NESAS's primary objective is to enhance significantly the quality of life for residents of the region by creating additional jobs and capital investment within the existing industry base as well as through recruitment of new companies and expansion of tourism-related development.

Now more than ever, successful economic development is vital to our region's growth. If we are to thrive in the present environment we must work tirelessly to ensure the NESAS Region is regarded by businesses around the globe as an ideal place to live and work.

Through one-on-one meetings, group presentations, media relations, and marketing initiatives, NESAS's leaders and staff endeavor to bring the region's key messages to business leaders and site selection consultants, across the country and around the world.

SERVICES TO ALLIED COUNTIES

NESAS's nine member counties are Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Marion, Marlboro, and Williamsburg. NESAS's core services to these county members include:

- **Product Development.** NESAS supports its counties through product development assistance and initiatives.
- **Research.** NESAS maintains up-to-date information that can be used for RFI's and also will assist each county with preparing these documents for companies and consultants. In addition, NESAS subscribes to a proprietary database of nearly 14 million companies worldwide and will use this database to assist county allies in their lead generation and research efforts.
- **Marketing.** NESAS markets the region locally, domestically, and internationally and provides its services to each county economic development group for specific marketing projects.
- **Business Development.** NESAS encourages its local economic developers to participate in its domestic and international business development missions. These missions are organized, planned, and executed by NESAS.

CLIENT SERVICES

NESA staff has the resources and expertise to assist companies interested in relocating or expanding in the region. Our customized service insures that companies have access to all of the components needed to jump-start their business including:

- **Regional site selection.** NESA will work with representatives from each of its nine counties to identify the best buildings or sites based on your company's needs. From there, extensive research and guided site tours allow you to make a fully educated decision before you commit.
- **Infrastructure.** NESA will work with CSX (railroad), the South Carolina Department of Transportation, water and sewer authorities, telecommunications companies, and energy companies to identify locations that have the infrastructure your company requires to be successful.
- **Incentives.** NESA will coordinate with its county allies and the South Carolina Department of Commerce to develop competitive incentives packages, making locating in the NESA Region one of the easiest and best business decisions you have ever made.
- **Workforce.** Through resources offered by the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology (SiMT) and ReadySC, the NESA Region has the resources to provide you with a world-class workforce that will ensure your profitability and success in the region for years to come.

COUNTY PROFILES

Chesterfield County is centrally located on the border of North and South Carolina, with access to Interstate 77, Interstate 20 and Interstate 95. The County is less than two hours away from the Ports of Charleston and Wilmington and less than an hour from Charlotte Douglas International Airport.

With companies including Pepsi, Conbraco and Wal-Mart currently thriving in the area, Chesterfield County is an ideal location for any business. The County's available land and buildings are ideal for industrial expansion, and the quality of life there is unsurpassed.

Darlington County is situated in the northeast quadrant of South Carolina about 80 miles northwest of Myrtle Beach, the golf capital of the South; 78 miles northeast of Columbia; 120 miles north of the historic Port of Charleston; 174 miles east of Greenville; 99 miles south of Charlotte, NC; and 292 miles east of Atlanta, GA. Access to all of these cities is by Interstate Highways I-20, I-26, I-95 and I-77.

Darlington County is blessed with more traditional transportation advantages as well such as I-95 and I-20, which pass through the county, as well as access to a variety of motor freight carriers and CSX rail.

Dillon County offers businesses opportunity with a touch of Southern style. Located in South Carolina's Pee Dee region, Dillon County sits on Interstate 95 near the South Carolina and North Carolina border. It is a short distance from South Carolina's Grand Strand and from the City of Florence.

While Dillon County's large amounts of available land are well-suited for industrial expansion and population growth, the small-town atmosphere and relaxed lifestyle exemplify its "southern style." With nearby interstates leading to major ports and airports, Dillon County is ideal for business and people. It's where you can combine both business opportunities and southern style for the best place to live, work, play and relax.

Florence County is located in the northeastern quadrant of South Carolina in the coastal plain physiographic region. The county's eastern boundary is the Great Pee Dee River, a system whose drainage basin consists of some 8,830 square miles within North Carolina and South Carolina. At its eastern point, Florence County is less than 50 miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean. Interstates 20 and 95 run directly into the city of Florence.

Florence County's strong and diverse economy is the key to the quality of life enjoyed by its citizens. As the hub of retail trade, services and healthcare for a regional population base in excess of 500,000, Florence County enjoys assets well beyond those found in most tertiary metropolitan markets in the United States.

COUNTY PROFILES (continued)

Georgetown County is located in northeastern South Carolina on the Atlantic Ocean, between Myrtle Beach and Charleston. The county and state's exceptional economic climate successfully holds down operating costs and increases the return on investment for business. Georgetown County offers easy access to port and rail service, an available, trainable work force, tax advantages and economic incentives. The Georgetown County Commerce Center offers established infrastructure at three industrial parks.

Georgetown is the oldest continuously open seaport on the eastern seaboard. It is known as a shallow-draft port, with a water level of 27 feet. This is a break-bulk port that imports salt, cement, wire, aluminum, forest products and limestone. The port also leases a berth to ISG, a major importer of raw materials. The Port of Georgetown is the South Carolina State Ports Authority's dedicated break-bulk and bulk facility, handling 1.8 million tons of cargo annually.

Horry County is recognized widely for its excellent quality of life and wins top honors for its temperate climate, 60 miles of sandy beaches, world-class golf courses, state park and excellent entertainment options.

The Myrtle Beach area was the 12th fastest growing region in the U.S. in 2008 with a growth rate of over 3%. Corresponding with this growth, the County is making significant infrastructure investments. In the past six years, over \$1.7 billion has been invested in the construction of roads and interstate-quality highways. A new 11,000 square-foot general aviation terminal was recently completed in Myrtle Beach and a \$100 Million Expansion and Renovation project at the Myrtle Beach International Airport is underway. The Myrtle Beach International Technology & Aerospace Park, now being developed, is situated adjacent to both the new general aviation terminal and the airport. This site will offer prime business locations.

Marion County is located between the resort area of Myrtle Beach and Interstate 95, and encompasses 489 square miles of northeastern South Carolina's coastal plain region. The county seat of Marion is only 22 miles east of Florence, and within an hour and a half of the capital city of Columbia via Interstate 20. Myrtle Beach and the coast are only 45 minutes southeast on U.S. 501, while historic Charleston is located two hours to the south.

Access is a great feature of locating a business here, with major interstates, railways, and airports all within easy reach. Marion County is in the heart of the Charlotte-Raleigh-Charleston triangle, one of the nation's most dynamic markets.

COUNTY PROFILES (continued)

Marlboro County is centrally located within two hours from Charlotte, Raleigh, and Wilmington, NC and 90 minutes from Myrtle Beach. The County is crisscrossed with numerous state and federal highways.

Marlboro County can offer industry a vast array of state and local business incentives. An employment-based incentive is offered that places a moratorium on paying corporate income tax to the state for a period of ten years if 100 or more jobs are created within a period of five (5) years. This incentive is increased to a 15-year moratorium if 200 or more permanent jobs are created.

Williamsburg County is located in what is known as the Pee Dee Region of South Carolina. The County is situated midway between Interstate 95 (28 miles), Interstate 26 (55 miles), and Interstate 20 (49 miles). The County seat of Kingstree is less than an hour's drive from Charleston and the Myrtle Beach Grand Strand area - one of the nation's leading vacation destinations.

One of the strongest advantages to locating a business or industry in Williamsburg County is the state's workforce training program - The Center for Accelerated Technology Training (CATT). Formerly known as the South Carolina Special Schools Program, CATT provides customized workforce training for your company - at no cost to the employer.

TARGETED INDUSTRIES

Aerospace - Our high quality of life, low cost of doing business, and excellent location, swayed Boeing to select South Carolina as its location for final assembly of its 787 Dreamliner. While Boeing's decision to locate in South Carolina speaks volumes to our state's business-friendly environment and the strong legislative support aerospace companies receive in the state, it is the strong work ethic of our people that will make Boeing and your company successful in South Carolina and in the NESAs Region.

The NESAs Region is the prime location for the aviation and aerospace industry due to our extensive infrastructure, close proximity to the Ports of Charleston, Wilmington, Georgetown and Savannah, and competitive land and labor costs.

Call Centers - Call centers are one of the fastest growing segments in the telecommunications industry. While centers vary in size and mission, the NESAs Region has numerous buildings and sites that are fully-served by reliable electric and telecommunications companies, making us the perfect place for a successful business.

Data Centers - As the world becomes increasingly digitized, the need for reliable data centers to sustain growth is essential. The NESAs Region is well positioned to accommodate growth in the data center industry and offers numerous sites that meet or exceed the infrastructure requirements specified by most data centers. Some sites in the region are considered fault tolerant and concurrently maintainable given their utility infrastructure and excess capacities.

Distribution and Logistics – Located halfway between Miami and New York and within an 8-hour drive to over 50 percent of the major U.S. markets will allow your company to trim its logistics costs and increase its competitive position in the global marketplace. Our prime location and top tier infrastructure means that distributors can reach their targets by land, air or sea.

- The NESAs Region boasts major interstate access: I-95 North/South (Maine to Florida), I-20 East/West (South Carolina to Texas), I-73 North/South -proposed (Michigan to South Carolina)
- The NESAs Region is home to Florence Regional and Myrtle Beach International Airports
- Columbia Metro, Charlotte Douglas International and Charleston International airports are all within a short drive of the region
- Over 350 miles of rail as well as numerous rail-served sites within the NESAs Region including access to Class 1 CSX rail throughout the region
- The Port of Georgetown is the South Carolina State Ports Authority's dedicated break-bulk and bulk facility, handling 1.8 million tons of cargo annually

TARGETED INDUSTRIES (continued)

Food Processing – Based on its central eastern seaboard location, the NESAs Region is an ideal location for food processing operations. With a skilled workforce, extensive transportation infrastructure, reliable electricity, and an abundance of water, it's not hard to see why companies like Heinz, Perdue Farms, and National Choice Bakery have chosen to make this nine-county region home.

Plastics – The plastics industry is one of the world's fastest-growing industries and what better place to locate your facility than in the northeast region of South Carolina. Home to some of the top plastics producers in the world such as Sonoco, Nan Ya Plastics, DuPont, Wellman Recycling, and Tupperware, the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESAs) Region has the resources and workforce your need to be successful.

The NESAs Region's workforce is ranked third in the United States and first in the Southeast in terms of productivity. The region is also home to many sites and buildings that are well-suited for the plastics industry as well as an abundance of water and sewer capacity and many rail-served sites.

TOP FIVE REASONS TO LOCATE IN THE NESAS REGION

1. **Quality of life** - Located in beautiful South Carolina, the NESAS Region offers something for everyone. You can spend a day at the beach, play a round of golf, cheer at one of the professional or collegiate sporting events, dine in one of our many restaurants, or visit a museum or theme park.
2. **Workforce** - The labor force in the NESAS Region continues to grow exponentially in proportion with the increasing population of the region. As of December 2009, the NESAS Region had a labor force of nearly 325,000 people. Further, because of the region's low cost of living, wages enable employers to ensure they have the staff they need to deliver a top quality product or service to their customers.
3. **Training** – New employees can be trained at one of the region's seven colleges and universities or at the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing Technology, and best of all, through the State's Ready SC program, this training can come at no cost to the employer.
4. **Land & Infrastructure** – The NESAS region boasts a wealth of available sites and buildings including a host of South Carolina certified industrial sites. In addition, access to highways, sea/airports, and an abundance of electricity and water, all make the region ideally suited for industries that require a top of the line regional infrastructure.
5. **Location, location, location** - The NESAS Region is centrally located along the Eastern seaboard, halfway between New York and Miami. In addition, businesses in our region will find themselves within an 8-hour drive of over 50 percent of the major U.S. markets.

NESA REGION LABOR STUDY KEY FINDINGS¹

The NESA area has a household population of approximately 673,700; a civilian labor force of approximately 346,800; and a pool of approximately 46,400 unemployed persons who are actively seeking work.

The results of this survey indicate that a new or expanding employer will be able to attract employees from an additional pool of about 83,600 underemployed workers.

The desired pay rates of the underemployed workers are reasonable when compared to their existing pay rates. The median current pay rate of the underemployed workers is \$13.59 per hour, and their median desired pay rate is \$15.14 per hour.

The median desired pay rate of the unemployed workers who are actively seeking work is \$10.75 per hour.

Survey results indicate 5% of the underemployed and 12% of unemployed, actively seeking work individuals have less than a high school degree.

In addition to the underemployed and those unemployed individuals who are actively seeking work, survey results indicate approximately 10,500 unemployed individuals in the labor shed who are not actively seeking work but would consider re-entering the workforce.

COUNTY BY COUNTY LABOR STATISTICS

Unemployment Rates – June 2011

Source: South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce

• Chesterfield County	14.1%
• Darlington County	14.0%
• Dillon County	15.7%
• Florence County	11.9%
• Georgetown County	11.4%
• Horry County	10.5%
• Marion County	20.1%
• Marlboro County	18.4%
• Williamsburg County	14.6%
• NESA Region	14.5%
• South Carolina	10.5%

NESA Region Labor Force 342,273

¹ The full NESA Area of South Carolina Labor Report can be found online at <http://www.nesasc.org/UserFiles/nesa/Documents/Labor%20Study/NESA%20SC%20Final%20WFV%20Sept%202009.pdf>. This report was compiled and prepared in September of 2009 by The Pathfinders.

RECENT ARTICLES

NESA Holds Two-Day Seminar on “Effective Ways to Recruit Call Center Projects”

August 5, 2011

Last week, the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESA), a local economic development organization representing nine counties in South Carolina’s northeast corner, held a two-day training and education seminar for local economic developers aimed at aiding their efforts to recruit call centers to the region.

The event, sponsored by Progress Energy, SCANA, and the South Carolina Power Team, featured Susan Arledge of Arledge Partners, which specializes in providing site selection services and is often retained by businesses seeking to find sites for new facilities.

“By choosing Susan Arledge, we’re receiving insights on how best to bring a call center to our region from someone regularly asked by companies to advise them on where to locate – in essence we’re learning about the newest tools of the trade from the very type of individual we will be targeting,” said NESA’s executive director Jeff McKay.

Attendees at the event expressed a great deal of satisfaction, and noted that NESA’s efforts to keep economic developers up to speed on the latest economic development trends in relevant industries are absolutely vital.

“Our continued education and training seminars are a large and important part of our efforts to stay current in the fast paced world of economic development,” said McKay.

“In 2010 our three education and training events were so well attended and the feedback from participants so positive, we decided to continue with this session and I expect we will continue to hold such events in the future as the need arises,” said Frank Willis, NESA executive committee member.

NESA Works For You

Pee Dee Regional Business Journal

June 2011

With every advance in technology, the distance between production, distribution and market shrinks. As a result, one can now purchase a car assembled in North America with an engine manufactured in East Asia, whose designers live in Europe. This is the essence of globalization, and it has its obvious benefits to the consumer and manufacturer. It also, however, presents new challenges to local economies. At the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESA), a local economic development organization representing nine counties in South Carolina’s Pee Dee and Waccamaw regions, regionalism is our answer to globalization. It enables our community to compete for jobs with other locales across the country, and around the world – from Texas to Taiwan. And it’s working.

Last year NESAs staffers directly contacted over 3,600 companies and participated in 18 economic development missions both inside and outside the U.S. This resulted in 210 unique meetings with companies, consultants and brokers. Our team members have logged hundreds of hours in front of company executives and site-selection consultants. As a result of these efforts, in 2010, 111 active leads were pursued by NESAs which led to the creation of jobs and capital investment in the region.

While all of these numbers are impressive and bring to the forefront the results of our efforts, the ins and outs of economic development often can be lost on those not heavily involved in the process. Yet, how we do what we do, does have significance to everyone living in our region. No large scale employer sets up shop or expands its operations in the NESAs region without community support. These new opportunities come as at least a partial result of those economic development efforts.

Economic development is and has always been a relationship building business. It starts with an initial conversation: a discussion at a conference with a company executive, a meeting with a group of site selection consultants, for example.

Over time, this relationship opens the door for representatives of the entire NESAs region to coordinate efforts and put our region's best face before the potential employer. At times this involves hosting a potential employer in the region. Other times it means flying to visit and taking the time to answer their questions. As the decision date draws near, our staff and partners work together as a team to ensure that our region is doing everything it can to show that each of the businesses needs are met right here.

Contrary to the decades old model for economic development, rather than limiting our focus on one county, we bring the whole region together when working on a potential opportunity. Rather than guarding our relationships and connections, we reach over county lines and share them. We have adopted this model because we know that the impact of each new job and dollar of capital investment has a positive ripple effect across our region.

In the vast majority of cases the catalyst for each outreach effort – be it a phone call, meeting or even a piece of direct mail – is rooted in hours of research spent ensuring that we are well aware of moves being made and considered in the industries that are most relevant to our region. Simply put, NESAs is always working to ensure that we are striking while the iron is hottest. At present we are pursuing 40 active projects which represent an opportunity for more than \$1.8 billion in new capital investment and more than 5,825 jobs.

In this effort, we often get support from local, state and federal elected officials, as well as business leaders associated with companies of all sizes. And when all of these groups come together to work on a major project, our state is able to compete for and secure the largest opportunities.

For example, most recently, a host of organizations and officials came together in an effort to bring Boeing's new Dreamliner plant to South Carolina. While the factory is not set to be built in our region, this new plant will have a profound impact across our state, and NESAs has already begun efforts to capitalize on this opportunity.

In coordination with various partners, NESAs has started working to bring Boeing sub-contractors to our area. Members of our staff have already made several trips to Washington State to meet with the leaders of these companies, and show them all that the NESAs region has to offer. We have also garnered media coverage in aviation and manufacturing oriented outlets in order to tell our story to the leaders of that industry. And in just a couple of weeks, NESAs will join State and local leaders headed to the Paris Air Show. The sole focus of all of these efforts is to bring jobs to our region.

As any salesman will tell you, based on this description, economic development is not all that different from traditional sales. And they would be correct. Our job is to sell our region to potential employers.

The most intuitive and yet least considered element of our economic development efforts is what we say when we are in these meetings. We of course discuss our geographic location, low taxes, and quality of life; these are vital elements in any conversation intended to pique a potential employer's interest. But ultimately our constituents are our product. We sell the NESAs work-force and its ethic. In a twenty-first century globalized economy, the thing that sets our region apart is the people, plain and simple. Our ace-in-the-hole, the trick up our sleeve, the secret to our success is that we in the NESAs region have a ready, willing and able workforce, like no other.

From the initial conversation, to the day the ground is broken, and beyond, NESAs is there explaining why setting up shop in our region is the right choice for a wide range of employers. And this effort starts and ends with NESAs's workers, because that's who we work for.

Jobs, Big Bucks Will Follow I-73 in the Pee Dee

Florence Morning News

May 15, 2011

The advent of Interstate 73 in South Carolina will pump thousands of jobs and millions of dollars into the Pee Dee, and that's figuring things conservatively, economist Chris Chmura told the executive board of the North Eastern Strategic Alliance on Friday.

Speaking to the NESAs group at its regular meeting at Francis Marion University, Chmura said that when the proposed interstate link between Michigan and Myrtle Beach is complete in 2030, it will produce more than 22,000 sustainable jobs in South Carolina, produce an economic impact of more than \$2 billion, and will put \$120.8 million a year into state and local governmental coffers.

“And that,” Chmura said, “is taking a very cautious approach to the numbers.”

Chmura is the president and chief economist for Richmond-based Chmura Analytics. Not surprisingly, Chmura’s presentation, which NESAs helped fund, was welcomed with open arms by the economic development group.

State Sen. Yancey McGill of Kingstree, in fact, could barely contain himself after Chmura finished her presentation.

“It’s just what I expected, just what I expected,” McGill told his NESAs colleagues. “This is not just about these four counties (that I-73 will pass through in South Carolina), but about the whole region, the whole state. It will make a big difference in Dillon and Chesterfield and wherever. I think we need to schedule a public forum as soon as possible to tell everybody about it.”

Former state Rep. Doug Jennings of Bennettsville said NESAs, I-73.org and other supporters will make sure the news gets out. He said he thinks the impact on movers and shakers, however, would be as important as what the public thought.

“We believe this study we allow us to put our case forward and give us additional momentum at both federal and local levels,” Jennings said.

The I-73 project is already riding some real momentum following a vote last month by the , according to the S.C. Department of Transportation to appropriate \$105 million in state road bonds for a six-mile stretch of I-73 in Dillon County. Much like the Chmura study, that decision is as much a momentum builder as it is an actual boost to the project, although it is that, too. SCDOT officials said the 90-mile I-73 project in South Carolina is estimated to cost about \$2 billion. Chmura’s study is based on the road being completed in 2030.

The project has generated some opposition. Environmental groups are worried about the impact on wetlands, some small towns along the route are concerned about being bypassed, and at least one transportation commissioner, Sarah Knuckles of Rock Hill, has called the decision to fund the project a mistake. Knuckles said she believes the process used to obtain the funding was less than transparent. She’s also said the interstate really isn’t needed, and hence, would be a waste of money.

Chmura’s study goes a long way toward refuting that last claim. Though it may be true that building a new road simply relocates development from one place to another, there is no doubt “from the literature,” Chmura said, that roads bring development and fiscal improvement.

Chmura said the fact that I-73 in South Carolina actually takes people to a destination — that would be Myrtle Beach — enhances its impact. The best way to understand that impact, said Chmura, is to compare the estimated impact of I-73 in South Carolina with its estimated impact in Virginia and West Virginia (Chmura Analytics completed studies

in both those states). Chmura said the Virginia segment of the road will pay for itself in 10 to 11 years, the West Virginia segment in 20. South Carolina's payback time? About four years.

"That's pretty striking," Chmura said.

And it could be even more dramatic than that. Chmura and company only estimated the interstate-boosted increase in visitors to South Carolina at 7.1 percent. The study projects impacts from just one distribution center relocating to the I-73/I-95 nexus, and makes no allowance at all for heavy industry that Chmura believes "will almost certainly come here" after the road is built.

"So I think there could be some very different figures," Chmura said. "But we didn't think it was correct to put those into this report."

The study showed 126 new roadside businesses — hotels, restaurants, gasoline stations — opening along the S.C. route. That would produce significant sales, "ripple effect" economic benefits and jobs. But clearly the biggest boost comes from the increase in jobs at the end of the line in Myrtle Beach. The increased number of visitors will, Chmura estimates, create more than 12,000 jobs and some 6,100 jobs based on the spending generated by the 12,000.

"The impact there (Myrtle Beach) is significant," Chmura said, "but it will make a big difference all along the route."

NESA Aims to Capitalize on Region's Transportation Options

Florence Morning News

April 21, 2011

Hop on Interstate 95 and you could end up anywhere from Miami to Maine.

But officials with the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESA) hope to ride this highway to economic success over the next few years.

Officials with NESA, an economic development organization that serves a nine-county region in northeastern South Carolina, said the presence of major highways like I-95 and I-20 could help them attract thousands of jobs to the area.

That's because interstates like these are particularly appealing to distribution companies, and that's why NESA had made these businesses one of its main targets for future development.

"A company's chief goal is to get products into a consumer's hands as quickly as possible," said Jeff McKay, NESA's executive director.

Friday's news that \$105 million in additional key funding has been secured for the I-73 interchange at I-95 in Latta surely will add to the region's appeal, McKay said.

"Any company looking to relocate here with logistic concerns, and that's just about everybody, is going to notice this," he said. "We've already got 20 and 95 and if you add 73 going into Michigan, that's pretty impressive. It adds to our advantages in this area."

The Pee Dee and Grand Strand have multiple advantages over other parts of the country when helping companies reach that goal, he said.

McKay estimates that distribution centers located in the region could extend products to 60 percent of the country's population within a day's truck drive.

That might not be so easy at distributions centers in major cities, which tend to have major traffic problems, he said.

"We're building a case here to say that we aren't a congested market," McKay said. "We're a great location for any logistics-type company that you're looking for, because we don't have that congestion."

But highways aren't the only route for distributing goods. There's also rail, air and ports, all of which exist in or near the NESAs region.

"I think we have all the things in place; it's a matter of taking advantage of the resources we have, going out marketing, getting in front of the right folks, and getting (them) to do business here," McKay said.

That's something he said the region probably hasn't done aggressively enough with distribution centers in the past. In spite of that, a handful of centers already exist within the region, like QVC and IFC in Florence, Harbor Freight in Dillon and Walmart's distribution center in Chesterfield.

These centers serve as examples that logistics and distribution industries can succeed within the NESAs region.

"Anytime you're talking to someone, they want to see a proven track record," McKay said. "And I think you can look at the success of the other distribution companies that we have in the region, and if they can't help us sell this area, then we're never going to be successful."

Beyond transportation methods, though, the region possesses another advantageous characteristic: geography. Its central location along the east coast makes distribution to many larger cities relatively easy.

And the region's reach grows even more in the next few years as construction begins on I-73. The interstate, from Myrtle Beach to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., could take at least 10

years to complete. It would cross six states — Michigan, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia and the Carolinas — and cover 80 miles in four South Carolina counties: Marlboro, Dillon, Marion and Horry.

At a cost of \$2 billion, it will be the first interstate link to Myrtle Beach, the heart of the state's \$16 billion tourism industry. Some say it also could cut hurricane evacuation times from the Grand Strand by 11 to 15 hours.

"I-73 will give us an ultimate access into the Michigan area," McKay said. "So that's just another added benefit or added asset on the existing infrastructure that we're able to offer."

Bring Your Product to Market by Air, Land, and Sea

Expansion Solutions Magazine

March/April 2011

A company can have the best design for the most ingenious product. It can even have a well-defined business development plan and the means to build that product en masse. But unless that company can bring its product to market, all that ingenuity and capacity means very little.

Transportation is a vital component of business. Civilization itself was built along trade routes; centuries ago, a city cropped up near the mouth of a great river, on the bay of an ocean, or in a convenient spot near a mountain pass. In today's globalized hi-tech society, products are delivered to market and consumers by air, land and sea. And the communities with the most growth potential are often those that recognize that in addition to simple geography, investment in local and regional transportation infrastructure is a critical factor in shaping their potential for regional growth.

The NESAs region – named for the North Eastern Strategic Alliance, South Carolina's northeastern regional economic development group – has focused on ensuring that for every business that locates in the area, there are abundant options for transporting goods from producer to buyer.

A good example of this is the appropriately named "Carolinas I-95 Mega-Site." This industrial park sits on more than 1,900 acres zoned for industrial development, in the heart of the NESAs region. It is bordered on the Southwest by I-95, which means a truck could leave that site, and reach Maine or Florida, without ever leaving the highway. And, is bordered on the East by CSX Class I rail access, which connects the site to nearly every corner of the country.

But, roads are not the only way to distribute a product from the mega-site. The land is less than five miles from Dillon County Airport, and a thirty minute drive to Florence Regional Airport. And, if you need to transport your product by ship, that's not a problem either. The Carolinas I-95 Mega-Site is 85 miles from the Port of Wilmington, 89 miles

from the Port of Georgetown, and less than a three hour drive (159 miles), from the Port of Charleston.

The site also benefits, of course, from the NESAs region's central location along the Eastern seaboard. But, it's the investment in transportation infrastructure that makes it an ideal location for industry. As many site selection consultants will attest, it is important not to fall in love with just one component of a potential location and ignore the other important benefits or pitfalls associated with a particular locale. Again, using the Carolinas I-95 Mega-Site as an example, one would find that the planners of the site also worked to ensure that this site has ready access to gas, water, waste, and fiber optics.

Paying attention to long-term, future-oriented planning is the key. Often the overlooked element of ensuring the infrastructure (and in particular the transportation infrastructure) at a locale in question, will stand up for years and decades to come.

According to NESAs executive director Jeff McKay, the communities in the NESAs region, have long emphasized the importance of investing in the regional and local transportation infrastructure.

"You could easily trace our focus on this issue back at least to the redevelopment of the Myrtle Beach Air Force Base. After the BRAC commission shut down the base, the community came together and used the existing infrastructure to enhance our civilian air transportation, and even develop an industrial aerospace and technology park, MB ITAP," McKay said.

The future of NESAs transportation infrastructure looks even brighter than the past. For example, the proposed I-95/I-73 interchange, officially dubbed the "Interchange of Hope," will connect I-95 with I-73, thus enabling smooth traffic flow from Maine to Myrtle Beach.

"We have seen a substantial amount of success in our efforts to bring this project forward, and I'm confident that in a few short years, we will see this interchange of hope, become a reality," McKay said.

Though there are never any guarantees on a project of this scope, the NESAs region's emphasis on the "Interchange of Hope," and their continued focus on the type of regional cooperation that enables a location like the Carolina's I-95 Mega-Site to come on the market, exemplifies what site selection consultants and the business executives they work with should be looking for in a location.

Whether or not the world economy was suffering as it has in recent years, every business should seek cost savings wherever they can. Doing so enhances their bottom line, and ensures their competitiveness in the world market. One can replace employees, reengineer products, even change the company's central focus, but once a company builds on a certain location, moving is a difficult reinvestment.

While this fact highlights the importance of choosing a location with a strong transportation infrastructure, companies also need to consider whether that community possesses an eye towards growth. If it does, and if the numbers work out, businesses should not hesitate to examine the benefits of relocation. After all, sometimes the grass is truly greener a little bit closer to the road.

NESA Quarterly Update

Pee Dee Regional Business Journal

March 2011

In today's environment, economic development is more vital to our community than ever. From Florida to Maine and from New York to California, the message from local, state and national leaders is clear: Americans want jobs. That is the overarching focus of the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESA), a local economic development organization representing nine counties in South Carolina's Pee Dee and Waccamaw regions.

In order to succeed, we believe that those tasked with economic development should rethink the long held belief that neighbors should be viewed as competitors, rather than allies, in efforts to pursue new employment opportunities for local citizens. Quite simply, in the modern world, the path to the future must include *regional* economic development.

With this strategic understanding, NESA can pursue a shared, collaborative approach towards economic development. We bring together in concert the strengths and assets of our nine counties in order to recruit job opportunities for our local communities. And while this approach has seen great success, our work is far from over; we will not rest until each individual living in our nine-county region has an opportunity to pursue full-time, fulfilling employment in their chosen profession.

As anyone who has worked in local community or even business development can attest, bringing together nine counties is not a simple task. But since NESA's inception, our successes and collaborative approach have enabled us to garner the trust of our partners and increase our national visibility in the world of economic development.

Part of this success has been in creating economies of scale in the context of supporting our local communities in a variety of ways such as training opportunities for local community developers. In recent years, NESA has sponsored a number of seminars for partner economic development officials in which they have heard directly from leading site selection consultants about what prospective employers are looking for, how best to catch a target's eye, and what tools will enable them to close the deal.

Another element of our success has been strategic coordination and building relationships among neighbors. Take for example a manufacturing company looking for a location to build a new facility. Presently if their site selection consultant or chief executive travels to a random town in rural America, they will hear mainly about the resources available

specifically in the locale under consideration. But the benefits touted will more often than not end at the city or county line.

Through NESAs, member counties have come together in a manner that enables them to discuss with authority the benefits associated with the entire region, and use relevant experts from neighboring counties to paint a clear picture of our assets. For example, the NESAs region boasts seven educational institutions and is also home to the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology, a world-class training facility. And each of these different assets has its own focus and forte. By being able to rely on experts from each location to show the added value of both the institution and by direct extension the region as a whole, NESAs partners know that throughout a potential employer's visit, every relevant regional asset is brought to his/her attention.

NESAs partners all recognize that the success of their neighbors will be beneficial to themselves. That's a key point of differentiation with many communities across the U.S. There is, of course, a simple rational explanation for a neighboring county's ostensible altruism: a rising tide lifts all boats. But equally as important, by coming together and sharing strategies, tactics and best practices, our partner organizations have developed the types of relationships that naturally maximize the likelihood that neighboring counties will promote each other's assets.

No matter where a business locates within our region, each community has the potential to benefit from their neighbors' successes. Because of our collaborative efforts, new factories' suppliers will find it easy to come to the region, and other companies will employ individuals who will visit our beaches and send their children to our summer camps. Still others will send their employees for training at the aforementioned local educational institutions.

Some may see this as a sort of trickle down economic development. NESAs sees it as more of a splash, with the positive ramifications of the initial success radiating to neighboring cities and counties. Companies see economic boundaries, not geographic boundaries, in their location searches. It is the only way that our communities will be able to compete because no one county is an island that possesses everything a potential employer needs. So the next time you read about a community down the road landing a major economic development success do not fret because the new employer is 30 minutes away. Instead, smile, because their success will be to your benefit as well.

North Eastern Strategic Alliance Releases 2010 Annual Report

February 10, 2011

With State support, regional group distributed more than \$200,000 as part of 2010 NESAs Economic Development Grant

The North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESAs), an economic development organization encompassing South Carolinas northeast region, released its annual report, focusing on its successes during the previous year. Eighteen companies expanded in the NESAs region, resulting in more than \$132,000,000 in new capital investment and the creation of more than 1,356 new jobs.

The report shows that NESAs officials also contacted officials from 3,640 businesses, held 210 meetings with companies, consultants and brokers, went on 18 business development missions, and pursued 111 active leads. Overall, the NESAs region saw a 2.4% decrease in unemployment -compared with a state decrease of 1.9% and a national increase of 0.1%.

“I am very proud of the work we did in 2010, but there is still much more to be done,” said Senator J. Yancey McGill, NESAs Executive Committee Chairman. “Through our regional partnership, we will continue to pursue every opportunity to bring jobs to this region. Our work will not be complete until every NESAs resident has full-time, gainful employment.”

According to the report, with support from state funds, NESAs was able to distribute more than \$200,000 in economic development grants to several partner counties:

- Chesterfield County, Strategic plan updates,
- Darlington County Potential I-20 mega site engineering assessment,
- Darlington County I-20 Industrial Park development,
- Dillon County, Marketing and promotion of Dillon County product,
- Florence County, Website and lead generation,
- Georgetown County, Economic development consultant services,
- Horry County, Website update,
- Marion Count, Creation of new signage and the marketing and branding of the new county slogan,
- Marlboro County, Improvements in the visibility and marketing ability of Marlboro County,
- Williamsburg County, Hemingway Commerce Centre expansion project, and
- Tri-County (Dillon, Marion, Marlboro): Marketing and promotion of the I-95 Gateway Park.

Modern Jobs Through Modern Economic Development

Expansion Solutions Magazine

January/February 2011

The impact of the economic downturn has touched to some degree every community in America. Some communities took a back-to-basics approach to their economic development efforts, focusing solely on trying to resurrect the jobs that helped America thrive in the 20th century. The residents of the northeast corner of South Carolina quickly recognized that this would not be enough.

Under the leadership of the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESA), the local economic development group that serves the nine counties that make up South Carolina's Northeast region, the residents of South Carolina's Pee Dee and Waccamaw regions have found that to bring twenty-first century jobs to their region, they need to employ twenty-first century tactics.

In the past, we have reported on the NESA region's emergence as a "corridor of aviation excellence," as well as on their efforts to build an incubator for modern manufacturing and technology upstarts. However, the quintessential example of the community's forward thinking approach is their drive to bring to the region renewable energy solutions and green collar jobs.

Here is an example of those efforts: local officials in Williamsburg County are working with the publicly traded company Solar Energy Initiatives (OTC:SNRY) to transform an empty 200,000 sq.-ft. textile plant into a "solar academy." According to David Fann, CEO of Solar Energy Initiatives, the goal of the project is to "teach... the solar business."

Eventually the company, which has dealers in 30 states, will relocate its global headquarters to the new facility, which will use on-site solar-generated energy as its power source.

"It doesn't get any more twenty-first century than what Solar Energy Initiatives is doing in Williamsburg County," said NESA's executive director Jeff McKay.

But the technology is not the only 21st-century element of the story associated with Solar Energy Initiatives' new facility. According to McKay, a modern attitude towards economic development was a necessary component to bringing the company, and its 200 jobs, to the region.

"I feel strongly that part of the consideration in bringing any company to our region is that NESA and all of our partners at the local and state level will make sure that we are working closely with prospective employers well past the initial point of agreement – through the entire, often challenging process of making such an investment," McKay said.

According to F. Hilton McGill Jr., executive director of the Williamsburg County Development Board, McKay followed this strategy to the tee during NESAs effort to help Solar Energy Initiatives setup shop in the region.

“NESAs, along with other economic development partners in the State, guided us throughout the process for setting up our operations. This type of assistance is absolutely vital to ensuring the smooth and successful development of a project of this size and scope,” McGill said.

Both McKay’s particular attitude towards business development coupled with the region’s focus on renewable energy jobs are having a tangible and lasting impact on the community.

As far back as 2009, NESAs focused on ensuring that no economic development opportunity went unexplored. In a region known for its manufacturing prowess, this meant hunting for ways to bring new business and expand local opportunities in industries that just 10 years ago may not have been a natural focus.

For example, in the summer of 2009, Milwaukee-based Johnson Controls announced its intention to locate a new battery recycling facility in Florence County. Battery recycling may not be the first thing to come to mind when considering which 21st-Century renewable energy industries to focus upon. But the effort will result in bringing an estimated \$100 million investment and 250 prospective jobs – an important economic development success for the region.

“Solar, wind, and other sectors are industries we believe strongly have a place in the NESAs region,” McKay said. “But there is more to the idea of bringing green jobs to our region than just the high-profile renewable energy industries. We believe that by seeking out each and every perspective opportunity, regardless of what may or may not fit into our preconceived notions about modern industry, we will maximize our economic development success and find those companies for whom the NESAs region is the best fit.”

Citing the fact that Johnson Controls already had a presence in South Carolina, McKay further notes that today’s economic development efforts are not always about bringing a new company to the region.

“We’ve found that it is important to work with existing employers to expand their operations in our region. In the case of Johnson Controls, the company had already employed over 1,000 South Carolinians, including 200 workers at their Florence facility right here in the NESAs region,” he said.

And this, McKay added, ties in directly to the initial lessons about the importance of working with perspective employers long after they have agreed to locate in the region, “The key is to ensure that you are with your region’s employers every step of the way. Modern economic development is about more than just jobs in modern technology, it’s

about providing the type of twenty-first century service to employers that will keep them successful and growing.”

Aviation’s Next Great Location

Expansion Solutions Magazine

November/December 2010

In the mid 1990s, many communities across the nation were faced with the impending closure of their local military bases. Anyone who has lived in an area with a base knows that these facilities are integral parts of the local economy – if not the key driver of the community’s economic success.

Politicians fight tooth and nail to avoid a base closure in their community because typically it takes decades to repair the local economy in the wake of losing a military facility. But in 1993, when the Department of Defense decided the time had come to decommission the Myrtle Beach Air Force Base, the residents of this region, true to their character, came together and formed a plan to survive and thrive.

Just more than a decade-and-a-half later, the Myrtle Beach International Airport, developed on the site of the old military base, has become one of the fastest growing airports in the world. Now having completed its second stage of development, the residents of the NESAs region—the North Eastern Strategic Alliance, the local economic development group that serves South Carolina’s Northeast region—now are publicizing the second phase of their development of the base. That development includes a regional airpark that has caught the eye of top aviation industry officials.

Centrally located along the eastern seaboard of the U.S., NESAs’s aviation corridor is ideally suited for maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) associated with virtually all travel east of the Mississippi River. With a 10,000 foot runway, airplane hangars and light industrial application facilities, the development of Myrtle Beach Airport’s aviation park will provide a host of opportunities for aviation oriented businesses and airlines in particular.

“The airport’s two-mile runway enables us to bring in nearly any aircraft; in fact, we even serve as an alternate landing site for the space shuttle,” said Jim Moore, NESAs’s business development director.

In the past six months, Moore has been traveling across the country in an effort to bring attention to the myriad opportunities available in Myrtle Beach. He talks with aviation industry executives and consultants about how the NESAs region can help them move beyond conducting business as usual. In these meetings Moore is keen to assert that there is one basic consideration that businesses are overlooking in deciding where to locate—or relocate—manufacturing and MRO facilities.

“While companies certainly explore various options and conduct a great deal of research when expanding their business, they too often are not focused on their existing practices,” Moore said. “We feel strongly that revisiting these practices—either independently, or within the context of an expansion—will pay great dividends.”

Moore believes firmly that by examining every business element that impacts a company’s bottom line, even those that have been in place for a period of time, businesses are likely to uncover new cost-effective alternatives to their business-as-usual practices.

“In light of current economic conditions, it’s become imperative that aviation industry executives place great emphasis on thinking outside the box,” he said.

For example, Moore notes that during every one hundred hours of a plane’s flight time, several major airlines take their planes to offshore locations for routine maintenance and certification. “This practice is unnecessary, given what Myrtle Beach Airport has to offer in terms of MRO,” he said. “By the time you fly five hours each way, you’ve already used a tenth of your airtime just to get to and from the overseas facility. Fifteen years ago that may have made sense, but today there are new options.”

Moore knows that he is not alone in delivering this general message to aviation industry leaders. And he believes that airline executives are coming around to considering the opportunities presented by rethinking where they locate their facilities and service their aircraft.

As an example, Moore cites the recent decision by Boeing to locate its newest facility just south of Myrtle Beach in North Charleston. There Boeing will build its top-of-the-line aircraft, the 787 Dreamliner. Many experts expected Boeing to locate its new facility in Washington where the company has been building aircraft for years.

The new Boeing plant is expected to bring a host of service providers and sub-contractors to the NESAs region, but Moore believes that for many of these companies, there is a great deal more than just proximity to Boeing going into the decision to locate in South Carolina.

“Without a doubt, our location is a big plus; we’re halfway between Miami and New York and with Boeing opening up down the road we expect an influx of companies coming to our state and region,” he said. “But I think the increase in attention to our region from the aviation industry comes from a confluence of factors besides location.”

Moore believes that each of the NESAs region’s assets feeds into each other. For example because of its close proximity to large airbases in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, military personnel have been coming to Myrtle Beach to vacation for years. As a result, when these individuals complete their military service, many choose to locate with their families in the area. And in-turn, the region has a high concentration of very well trained hard-working aviation experts. This top-of-the-line workforce, coupled with

the State's famously low tax burden, is spurring businesses to look to the region to locate aviation oriented companies.

“Ultimately, quality of life, workforce availability and trainability, may not make national headlines, but they are very much at the heart of a business's decision on where to locate,” Moore said. “Companies often initially consider the region because of its location, but when businesses decide to set up shop here, it's more than that; it's because they know that the NESAs region provides them with a place to live, work, play, and turn a profit.”

Myrtle Beach Airport has direct flights to two dozen cities across America, and is continuing to grow. Through the efforts of individuals like Moore and his colleagues at the NESAs, word is rapidly spreading that the NESAs region set to become America's next great hub of aviation excellence.

NESAs Region's Quality of Life "Second to None"

Trade & Industry Development Magazine

July/August 2010

Few of us can find work in our chosen professions down the road from our favorite vacation spots. But right centrally located on the eastern seaboard, located in South Carolina's beautiful Pee Dee region, there's something for everyone.

The area boasts a diverse landscape with access to beaches, rivers, mountains, and parks. You can spend a day at the Grand Strand, play a round of golf, cheer on a local sports teams, dine in one of many great restaurants, or visit a museum or theme park. And you can do all of this, right down the road from your business, plant or factory.

“Our region is not just a place to take your family for a two week vacation; our prime location means those who set up shop here are never more than a car ride away from a range of relaxing activities,” said Jeff McKay executive director, of the North Eastern Strategic Alliance (NESAs), the region's economic development organization.

McKay's point is that having a vacation destination less than an hour from one's business is a unique recruitment tool. “Employers anywhere can offer good salaries and benefits, but how many can offer workers the opportunity to both work and play where they live,” McKay added.

Moreover, despite the NESAs Region's proximity to large cities and Myrtle Beach resorts, the cost of living and doing business here are among the lowest in the country. According to McKay “This adds up to one simple conclusion, when it comes to quality of life, our region is second to none.”

Four Keys to Working with Elected Officials

By J. Yancey McGill and Hugh Leatherman.

ChamberPost – the Blog of the US Chamber of Commerce

June 2010

When the federal government announced that it allocated a massive amount of money to stimulate the economy, elected officials, business owners, and community leaders began evaluating ways to benefit from the program. The most successful communities were able to secure federal assistance by relying on strong, structured, public-private partnerships. With a combined five decades in local government, and a commitment to economic development that transcends party or ideology, we have learned a great deal about what strengthens private-public collaboration, and what weakens it. There are four critical components to working with elected officials in order to grow business and community:

You are your community.

Lately it has been increasingly popular to beat up on business owners. The media focuses on a false dichotomy between Main Street and Wall Street. Fortunately, for all of us these two streets intersect at every turn. As business owners that sit on the crossroads, you are the economic engine of your community. This means that for an elected official, helping a small business owner is not about the owner, it is about the business, because businesses create jobs, and now more than at any time in generations, creating jobs should be your representatives' principal domestic policy priority.

Don't go it alone.

We all have heard the phrase 'the rising tide lifts all ships.' It's a popular cliché for a reason: it is true. Local business leaders should recognize that when the town down the road secures a new project, your own businesses and workers will also benefit. Rather than constantly competing with your neighbors, partner with them, communicate with one another and prioritize your targets based on what is best for your local region. Competition should be focused on the regional level, because it is ultimately beneficial if the prized highway is built in the next county; after all, roads can be built that lead to it.

Organizations matter.

The local Chamber of Commerce, the regional economic development board, and the latest blue ribbon commission on job creation—these organizations are the most effective tools for building the lasting public-private partnerships that will help your community survive and thrive. You don't have to sit on every board, and as business leaders, you likely haven't got the time for anything extra. But consider membership in these organizations part of your personal job description. Your perspective is important; your community wants to hear it; and when the economic storm comes, the benefits of these partnerships can be your community's shelter.

Petition the Government.

Statisticians will tell you that one vote rarely, if ever, counts. But lobbyists can prove that one letter or one phone call makes a difference, and ten or twenty can change an elected official's vote. Taking a few minutes a day—many business leaders do—to understand the impact of your State and Federal government's decisions is vital. Reviewing analysis from the organizations of which you are a member, is an important part of the service they provide. But you cannot stop with just being informed. Until you pick up the phone or send a quick email, your voice is silent, and that voice is the most important one in the debate.

The writers, South Carolina State Senators J. Yancey McGill (D), and Hugh Leatherman (R), sit on the executive committee of the North Eastern Strategic Alliance, a regional economic development organization that serves a nine-county region in the northeast corner of South Carolina.

NESA LEADERSHIP

J. Yancey McGill currently serves as the Chair of the North Eastern Strategic Alliance Executive Committee. McGill is also a member of the South Carolina Senate where he has served since 1989. Prior to serving in the Senate, he served on the Kingstree, South Carolina Town Council from 1976 – 1979, Mayor Pro Tempore from 1978 – 1979, and Mayor of Kingstree from 1984 – 1988. He is currently serving on the Senate Agricultural and Natural Resources, Ethics, Finance, Fish, Game and Forestry, Invitations and Transportations committees. He serves on the Executive Committee of Senate Finance, and as Chairman of the Finance Subcommittee on Natural Resources.

He has served on the Board of Directors of the Waccamaw Regional Planning & Development Council, past Chairman of the Waccamaw Industrial Revolving Loan Committee, Chairman of the Waccamaw Regional Planning Development Council, and the Medical University Board of Visitors. He was chosen Senate Legislator of the Year by the S.C. Cable Television Association and Association of Conservation Districts in 2002, Legislator of the Year by the S.C. Association of Counties in 1993, Legislator of the Year S.C. Association of Regional Councils in 1997, and Senator of the Year by the American Legion in 1999.

Senator McGill attended The Citadel and Francis Marion College. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from The Citadel in 1994. He is a businessman in Kingstree, South Carolina when he is not attending to his duties in the Senate. He is a Real Estate Broker and Residential Homebuilder. Senator McGill and his wife, Pamela, have three children – Lisa, John and Maggie, and one grandchild.

Jeff McKay has served as the Executive Director for the North Eastern Strategic Alliance since 2005. McKay brings to NESA nearly two decades of experience in the economic development arena, including most recently thirteen years as the Director of the Greater Statesville Development Corp, during which time his community received numerous honors and awards from business and site selection oriented publications.

McKay serves on the Tourism Task Force Committee of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, the board of the South Carolina Economic Developers Association, and is a past president of the North Carolina Economic Developers Association He also sits on the International Economic Development Council, I-95 Corridor Study Advisory Board, and the advisory board of the Francis Marion University Center for Entrepreneur.

McKay holds a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Public Affairs from Western Carolina University. He lives in Florence with his wife and their two children.

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