



The North Alabama Region: A Globally Competitive Community

www.naita.org/globalcommunity.htm

GC² Executive Summary

Background

The North Alabama Region: A Globally Competitive Community (GC²) is a catalyst to build a sustainable globally competitive region. With Huntsville/Madison County as its economic core, this region extends across 14 counties in North Alabama (Cherokee, Colbert, Cullman, DeKalb, Etowah, Franklin, Jackson, Lauderdale, Lawrence, Limestone, Madison, Marshall, Morgan, and Winston) and Lincoln County, Tennessee. This area – identified by the federal government as Economic Area 74 – includes the Tennessee Valley region in North Alabama. The GC² initiative is currently led by the North Alabama International Trade Association (NAITA) and the Port of Huntsville.

GC² is the result of a series of Global Community Forums held in 2004 in conjunction with the Southern Growth Policies Board of North Carolina to discuss the issues of *Globally Positioning the South*. Three forums were held in Huntsville discussing three primary focus areas: strengthening workforce, strengthening business, and strengthening civic relationships. A strong recommendation that resulted from these forums was that a strategic plan is needed to address the issues of globalization. The results of our forums, as well as many others held throughout the Southeast, were used in Southern Growth's 2004 Report on the Future of the South – *The Globally Competitive South (Under Construction)*.

Following these forums, a planning committee was formed and regional meetings have been held to further explore ways to address globalization and the need for a regional strategic plan for economic growth. A regional strategic plan will help focus collaborative energy on common issues and efforts that will make a difference in the region, and a regional mechanism/entity focusing on regional issues is needed to move this initiative forward. The GC² Planning Committee continues to research other regional initiatives that can provide a roadmap and benchmarks for the North Alabama regional initiative.

October 25, 2005 Regional Meeting – GC² Summit

Doug Henton, President & Founder of Collaborative Economics in California, provided the keynote address for the GC² Summit on October 25. Doug and his partners were instrumental in the start-up and continued success of the regional initiative in the Silicon Valley, "Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network" and have worked with similar regional efforts across the country. Doug discussed regional stewardship and the methodology other regions have used to bring leaders together for collaboration on important issues. Rep. Jeff McLaughlin, District 27, Alabama State Legislature, enlightened us on the critical issue of Inter-Basin Water Transfers from the Tennessee River and how this can adversely impact our water supply and economic development. The general consensus following his presentation was that this water issue is a critical regional economic development issue for North Alabama. Participants from across the region also identified other key regional issues to address, including K-12 educational curricula impacting workforce development, regional visioning, creating a positive image of North Alabama, and securing funding for the Memphis-Atlanta Highway. Presentations from the GC² Summit are available at www.naita.org/globalcommunity.htm.

May 23, 2005 Regional Meeting

On May 23, 2005, NAITA and the Port of Huntsville hosted approximately 100 regional economic developers, business and community leaders, and leaders in education at all three levels to discuss four key focus areas critical to a globally competitive community – Education/Workforce Development, Business Development, Civic/Cultural Relationship Development, and Infrastructure Development. Participants identified key issues, including establishing a regional vision, strengthening our educational curricula, collaborating on workforce issues and getting ownership from business, integrating international visitors and residents in our communities, using arts and education to understand and celebrate diversity, expanding international trade education and networks, and strengthening our infrastructure resources through expansion (highways, pipeline, waterways, and information highway) and regional planning. Counties represented at this event included: Cullman, DeKalb, Etowah, Franklin, Jackson, Lawrence, Lauderdale, Limestone, Madison, Marshall, Morgan, and Lincoln County in Tennessee.

Following are specific critical issues identified from each focus group on May 23. On October 25, participants voted on which of these issues need to be addressed regionally. The issues in bold received the most votes.

Building & Retaining Talent – Education/Workforce Development

- Ownership/involvement from business on workforce development/education issues
- Greater collaboration/awareness on workforce issues
- Soft skills/hard (technical) skills balance in workforce development programs
- **Strengthen and internationalize K-12 curricula (strengthen math, science, career technical, and foreign language education)**
- Effective marketing to change the negative mindset regarding career/technical education among students, parents, and educators

Creating & Sustaining Jobs – Business Development

- **Establish a regional vision**
- Improve/expand trade education & networks
 - Leverage NAITA – work with small businesses across region
 - Work closely with International Services Council
 - Visa access
 - Involve international companies already located in the region
- Expand sub clusters & grow new clusters
- Use and market Foreign Trade Zone more
- Provide industrial incentives for globalization

Community International & Cultural Relations – Civic & Cultural Relationship Development

- **Create a positive image of North Alabama**
- Integrate newcomers to be effective participants in the community
- Link arts organizations and international service organizations regionally for marketing purposes: one day orientation; database
- Use arts/international festivals to celebrate diversity
- Education in K-12 to understand and celebrate diversity

Expanding & Strengthening Connections – Infrastructure Development

- **Secure funding for Memphis/Atlanta Highway**
- Pipeline – petroleum pipeline fuel
- Planning – long term multi-modal regional planning
- Waterways – additional river port operations & industrial/manufacturing sites
- Information Highway – broadband communication capabilities throughout the region

Randall Kempner, Vice President for Regional Innovation, Council on Competitiveness, Washington, DC, stressed during his keynote address on May 23 that the ultimate goal for regional cooperation and development is “prosperity.” Based on his experience in working with regions across the U.S., he recommended that the North Alabama initiative focus on incorporating technology, building talent, vigilantly protecting our quality of life, cultivating a dynamic, tolerant culture, and getting connected.

Establishing a regional strategic plan and a regional visioning effort will help all of North Alabama effectively and efficiently identify and address common issues across the region. Currently there is no entity focusing specifically on regional issues in the GC² region. Establishing a structure or mechanism to collaborate on these critical issues would ensure the success of North Alabama as a globally competitive community.