

Business expert: I-73 vital to Pee Dee, Grand Strand economy

Friday, Aug 31, 2007 - 04:11 PM Updated: 10:32 AM

By Terry Ward

SCNow.com

WBTW News Channel 13

Building Interstate 73 is vital to the economy of the Pee Dee and Grand Strand, a South Carolina business expert said today during a North Eastern Strategic Alliance luncheon. Bill Schaperkotter, the Greenville-based managing director of Fluor Global Location Strategies, toured economic development sites and buildings in Williamsburg, Georgetown and Horry counties Thursday and gave an assessment of the NESAs region during the luncheon.

NESA represents Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Georgetown, Horry, Marion, Marlboro and Williamsburg counties.

Schaperkotter said I-73 would open up the interior of the NESAs region, where some of the states poorest counties are.

“There is a glaring need for I-73,” he said.

The proposed interstate —which would link Myrtle Beach to Michigan — would cost \$2 billion, take 10 years to build and cross Marlboro, Dillon, Marion and Horry counties.

“That (I-73) will change the economy more than any single factor,” Schaperkotter said.

Schaperkotter directs a staff of principals and consultants who perform site location for projects representing more than \$2 billion annually in capital investment. He has worked on more than 50 industrial and business projects, according to a NESAs press release. He is associated with projects for IBM, Lockheed Martin, Yokohama Tire, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, AT&T and Conoco.

NESA Executive Director Jeff McKay said any plan associated with Schaperkotter carries instant credibility.

Schaperkotter described U.S. 52, which runs through much of the Pee Dee, as a beautiful, four-lane highway, but said many industries looking for a site to locate would never be aware of the U.S. 52 corridor if there’s no interstate access nearby.

“I know (building I-73) won’t be an easy job, but the time to start is now,” he said.

Rep. Nelson Hardwick, R-Surfside Beach, called on Schaperkotter to contact from the Upstate representatives in the General Assembly to let them know how badly I-73 is needed.

Schaperkotter agreed to Hardwick’s request and was applauded for it by the crowd of 50 or so legislators and business leaders from the Pee Dee and Grand Strand who attended the luncheon.

In addition to speaking about I-73, Schaperkotter said NESAs should target industries that fit the work force of its region and aim to land companies that offer high-technology jobs. He also praised the Southeastern Institute of Manufacturing and Technology at Florence-Darling Technical College as a world-class training facility.

Schaperkotter said NESAs strategy for marketing the region is sound and its regional stance in marketing the area is a good idea.

“I have a very favorable impression of what I’m seeing and hearing,” he said.