

One Vision, One Region

Area's efforts to work together paying off in big ways

BY JENNIFER THORNBERRY

A new attitude is slowly taking hold across Greater Louisville and Southern Indiana. The concept of regionalism – the idea of cities and counties cooperating for the benefit of the whole region – is creeping into the psyche of residents and businesses.

Part of the driving force behind this concept of regionalism is the Regional Leadership Coalition, an advocacy group that promotes a 25-county economic development region defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, including 18 counties in Kentucky and seven counties in Southern Indiana. RLC's mission is to promote regional cooperation and connections.

"The map is less important than the concept," RLC Executive Director Rich McCarty said.

The region is a whole



Rich McCarty,
President, Regional
Leadership Coalition

Regionalism is "a mindset more than anything else," McCarty said. It is about changing the mindset from competing with your neighbors to cooperating with them for the good of the whole region.

When it comes to attracting businesses and jobs, the competition is other communities such as Memphis or Dayton, McCarty said.

The region faces some hurdles to embracing that concept. One is the two-state situation.

"We're really just one big community here in Louisville and Southern Indiana. We just have an overgrown river running down



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the middle," said Dale Orem, chairman of the RLC board and vice chair of Your Community Bank in Jeffersonville, Ind. "I think it's so important that we on both sides of the river understand why we are trying to have this regional look."

Another hurdle is the image of Louisville – "the big city" – as the enemy of rural areas. In the past, small towns have asked why they need Louisville.

But that also can be turned around, McCarty said. Louisville in many ways has not been as accommodating as it could be in extending the welcome to outlying counties.

"On both sides, there's a lot of relationship building. That's what it boils down to," McCarty said. "The attitude is not going to change overnight."

Cooperating across the river

The Ohio River Bridges project is a perfect example of regionalism in action. "The reality is without regional cooperation, there's no way this project would get done," McCarty said. "It is connecting two states, two different cities, and so in many ways, it's a great regional project."

The three parts included in the project are: building an East End Bridge that connects the Gene Snyder Freeway in

Located on the banks of the Ohio River; Louisville is Kentucky's largest city, the nation's 16th largest city and "The Gateway to the South."

Louisville to the Lee Hamilton Highway in Southern Indiana; building a new bridge immediately east of the Kennedy Bridge to carry northbound traffic, with the existing Kennedy Bridge carrying southbound traffic; and rebuilding Spaghetti Junction.

Both Kentucky and Indiana have successfully funded the project for the next two years. The project is expected to take a total of 15 years and cost \$2.5 billion to complete.

Orem credits the leadership on both sides of the river with securing this funding. "I think both states have stepped up to the batter's box, as well as the federal government," he said.

U.S. Rep. Anne Northup, R-Louisville, has been working to build two bridges between Louisville and Southern Indiana since she began her career in the Kentucky Legislature in 1987.



Dale Orem, Chair,
Regional Leadership
Coalition



Rep. Anne Northup,
R-Louisville

“By moving unnecessary traffic out of the downtown area, while also providing for increased traffic flow through the city center, we can provide Louisvillians with a long-term solution to the ever-increasing burden of traffic congestion,” Northup said.



Rep. Mike Sodrel, R-Indiana

U.S. Rep. Mike Sodrel, R-Indiana, has secured \$20 million in funding in the six-year federal highway bill that was signed into law last August, as well as an additional \$2 million in an appro-

priations conference report. “We all know how important these bridges are to the entire region, and I will continue working in with my colleagues in Congress to obtain the necessary funding,” Sodrel said.

The bridges project will benefit anyone who travels I-65 into or through Louisville, McCarty said. All north and southbound traffic currently is forced to go through downtown Louisville.

“What other city of our size, of a metro population of 1.2 million, doesn’t have a bypass option for pass-through traffic?” McCarty said.

There is no doubt that construction for the bridges project will impact people’s

everyday lives for many years to come. “If we can get through the next 15 years, similar to how we got through the construction of the Watterson or the Gene Snyder, it will be the best thing for this community in the long run,” McCarty said.

Catalysts for the region

Although the bridges project is the most prominent example of regionalism, it is not the only one. Several other projects also are becoming catalysts to push the region forward.

- **The new arena:** The Louisville Arena Task Force has chosen the LG&E Riverfront property as the site for the new arena. The site is within walking

Two Bridges, One Project



- 1. KENNEDY INTERCHANGE:** (Spaghetti Junction) New interchange system will be rebuilt to the south
- 2. DOWNTOWN BRIDGE:** New six-lane bridge for northbound I-65 traffic, with southbound traffic on existing Kennedy Bridge
- 3. DOWNTOWN INDIANA APPROACH:** New ramp system will link Clark Memorial Bridge and I-65

- 4. EAST END KENTUCKY APPROACH:** 2,000-foot tunnel under U.S. 42 and a redesigned partial interchange at U.S. 42 in Kentucky
- 5. EAST END BRIDGE:** New six-lane bridge will link the Gene Snyder Freeway in Kentucky with the Lee Hamilton Highway in Indiana
- 6. EAST END INDIANA APPROACH:** New interchange at Old Salem Road and reconstruction of IN 265/IN 62

Regional Leaders Speak Out

What does regionalism mean to people in the Greater Louisville and Southern Indiana region? Leaders from across the area give their thoughts on how the new cooperative attitude is helping the region thrive.



Joan Riehm, Deputy Mayor, Louisville Metro Government

“‘Regionalism’ to me means people working together across boundaries – political, geographic, public or private sector – to accomplish commonly-held goals. It represents the best path to success for communities that want to be competitive and attractive in today’s increasingly complex and global society.”



Kerry Stemler, Chair, One Southern Indiana

“Regionalism is one of the most vital components in creating and maintaining a thriving socioeconomic arena that requires collaboration between the public and private sectors in metro Louisville and Southern Indiana. Never before has the spirit in the region been as strong as it is today.”

“The 23 counties surrounding the Louisville metro area in both Kentucky and Southern Indiana represent an economic impact area that provides jobs for all those people in the region. What is good for one county has a direct impact on all surrounding counties in the region. Regionalism causes multi-interests to work toward a common goal.”



Robert W. Lanum, Senior Member, Stites and Harbison, PLLC

“The Louisville region is our identity to the outside world. We represent a very small percentage of the regional population base, on our own; we have little chance of being recognized around the world. But as a partner with the rest of Greater Louisville, we are represented as a part of one of the largest cities in America!”



Darrell Voelker, Executive Director, Harrison County Economic Development



Mike Harreld, Regional President, PNC Bank

“Political boundaries are increasingly an obstacle in the way we work, live and play. Creative mechanisms of cooperation and removing inefficiencies that impede the practice of living will distinguish and define the nature of successful communities in the 21st century.”

Harreld, a Louisville business and community leader for decades, is now based in Washington, D.C.



Billie Wade, President/CEO, Citizens Union Bank

“To me regionalism is when government and business leaders work together to make a conscious attempt to manage the opportunities and constraints of the diverse areas of the communities they serve. By working together, the individual communities we serve are benefiting by having specific needs met at a much faster pace. There is also a much greater understanding of how issues and opportunities in Southern Indiana impact the Greater Louisville region and visa versa.”

distance of 3,900 hotel rooms, two-thirds of which are first class.

Ed Glasscock, member of the Executive Committee of Greater Louisville, Inc. and co-managing member of Frost Brown Todd in Louisville, sees the arena as a great opportunity to improve the economic climate of the region. “It will help the region attract larger conventions and entertainment events, which bring people and money to the marketplace. The long-term

economic impact on this region will be very significant,” he said.

- **Waterfront Park:** Begun in 1986 as a way to clean up one of the most unattractive parts of the city and beautify Louisville’s waterfront and downtown, the Waterfront Park is now through two of its three phases of development. The park hosts hundreds of events and attracts an average of more than 1.5 million visitors a year.

“I don’t think anybody in this community could deny that the money spent on the development of that Waterfront Park has not been a win-win for everybody. It truly is a remarkable green space project,” McCarty said.

- **River Ridge:** A 6,000-acre tract of real estate in Clark County is being developed into the largest commercial and industrial campus in the Greater Louisville market.

Louisville and Southern Indiana residents have told time since 1924 by the world's second largest clock atop the Colgate-Palmolive factory in Jeffersonville.

“The potential over there is off the charts,” McCarty said. “The number of jobs it will bring and the economic development that it will generate is critical to this region – and that includes both states.”

- **McAlpine Locks renovation:** The Army Corps of Engineers currently is working on a \$350-million renovation of the McAlpine Locks to replace a 1,200-foot chamber to help ease river traffic's passage through the locks.

“No one really knows about it, because you don't go through the locks unless you're in a barge, but it's extremely important,” McCarty said. “If the McAlpine Locks are not functioning, river traffic stops. They are an important asset for this community.”

- **Airport expansion:** As the former Standiford Field was outgrowing itself in the 1980s, the Louisville Regional Airport Authority announced ambitious



Courtesy One Southern Indiana

expansion plans in 1988. In 1995, increased passenger activity, the ranking as a major international airport and the Airport Authority's vision for the future drove the name change to Louisville International Airport.

“Who would want to think where we would be as a community if we hadn't invested in Louisville International Airport?” McCarty said.

- **Fort Knox:** The Army training post, which touches parts of Bullitt,

Hardin and Meade counties and trains thousands of military personnel yearly, has long been a presence in the region.

It is an extremely important asset to this community, McCarty said. “Until the recent base closures, people assumed it would always be there,” he said. “Most of us take for granted the economic spin-off.”

The region needs to work with the powers that be to make sure it continues to function and stays off the base closure list, he said. ●

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