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Southern's \$112 Million Intermodal Facility is Coming to McCalla

by Paul Davis

No doubt about it: Norfolk Southern's \$112 million Regional Intermodal Facility is coming to McCalla. Approval from the Department of Transportation is expected in mid-February. Barring any unforeseen developments, a meeting will be held in late March to officially announce that all permits are in place.



In an effort to continue a dialog with the community, Norfolk Southern hired Phyllis Kennedy of Sycamore Consulting to set up a meeting for a presentation to key members of the McCalla community. The railroad giant felt that it was timely and essential to tell about the latest outlook for the economic impact of the Intermodal Facility on the community of McCalla and surrounding area. Kennedy served the first five years of Governor Riley's administration as the Director of the Department of Industrial Relations.

She first introduced Dr. Sam Addy, Director of the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Alabama, to the 35 guests seated in Moore's Cabin on Moore's Cemetery Rd. on Tuesday, January 12. Dr. Addy lives just six miles from McCalla. He didn't equivocate. He dived right in.

"This project will bring jobs, tax revenue, national competitiveness, environmental improvement at every location of the four Intermodal Facilities that Norfolk Southern has completed or has plans for," he said. "Do you think that a

\$112 million project is only going to open up 70 jobs?"

That seemed like a no-brainer. But what about "national competitiveness".

"Efficiently delivering containerized freight to the ports of New York or New Orleans will mean that Alabama manufacturers can have competitive access to foreign markets," he continued. "That's a huge plus in attracting business to our state. It cannot help but do so. And rather than degrade the environment, the big picture is that this kind of approach will require less oil and reduce greenhouse gases. Every containerized train will take over 200 trucks off our highways."

He summarized the bad news with the good.

"Let's keep things in perspective," he suggested. "By every measure and in spite of the recent downturn, this has been one of our best decades ever. Certainly there is no getting around the fact that 2009 was a disaster. Here in Alabama we lost 240,000 jobs. This year is going to continue to be tough for everyone."

"But think of it this way," he concluded. "2010 is a year of recovery. That's a fact. We can see the first evidence, the telltale signs of recovery. Part of that evidence is right here in front of us: this Regional Intermodal Facility. It's a huge investment. That's a firm belief in the future. From such commitments and others like the new Home Depot Regional Distribution Center located here, we can say with confidence that things will be better in 2011 and better still in 2012."



After Dr. Addy, Phyllis Kennedy introduced Lee Cochran, Manager of Norfolk Southern's Intermodal Development. He addressed what he called the "Ten Myths" regarding the Intermodal Facility.

"Most of what we know about Intermodal operations comes from our Austell, Georgia, location north of Atlanta," he began. "Bear in mind that Austell is about 2 1/2 times as large as this facility will be. Let's start with noise. Our findings are that the level of noise is not much more than an occasional jet flying over. This is not heavy manufacturing. This is more like a giant parking lot, a parking lot that will not be visible. You will not be able to see the McCalla facility from any location. Berms will hide the view and reduce noise."

He addressed the air pollution issue next.

"Diesel emissions, modeled on higher use," he continued, "still do not exceed EPA standards. Besides that, we are committed to equipment that meets the new Tier IV standard, even though that standard for engines is not yet required. All of our yard tractors that shuttle and move containers will be Tier IV. That will produce significantly less harmful emissions than was measured by the current model."

The big bugaboo, a decrease in property values, got a simple disclaimer.

"Our experience in Austell," he firmly declared, "has simply shown that this fear has not materialized."

He continued to touch on each objection that has been raised.

"The environmental assessment," Cochran stated, "is that this facility will not negatively affect native plants or wildlife. No chlorine gas will be transported. Last year at Austell, we had two spills. The largest was one of 15 gallons. It was quickly identified and contained. Most of the rain water that falls on this site will be collected and used to irrigate our landscape. There will be very little runoff. Engineers tell us that the new bridge on McAshan will be able to handle the increase in truck traffic. The special lights that we have chosen will direct a large portion of the glare downward."

A member of the audience had visited the Austell facility at night. He stated that light effect was negligible.

Cochran is expecting the results of the Alabama Department of Transportation's review on February 18.

"ALDOT is really driving the train right now, so to speak," he said. "After their review, they will make their findings available to the county and to the schools. The public will have the info 30 days before the March meeting."

"Let me invite you to come to Austell to see what the operation is really like," Cochran concluded. "We will set up a tour for any group at whatever time that group would like. We're working hard to make this new facility safe for the environment and safe for the community. It's got to be win-win for everyone."