



## Norfolk Southern McCalla hub on track for 2012 opening

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By **Michael Tomberlin -- The Birmingham News**

Norfolk Southern's \$97.5 million railroad hub in McCalla won't create that many direct jobs, but officials said Monday the project will deliver a major economic boost to the area.

Representatives of the railroad company were joined by Gov. Robert Bentley, U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus, elected officials, business leaders, economic developers and McCalla residents at a groundbreaking ceremony at the 316-acre site of the Birmingham Regional Intermodal Facility, as the company calls it.



Norfolk Southern provided this new rendering of the McCalla railroad hub it is building.

Norfolk Southern Chief Executive Wick Moorman called the hub an "anchor" to the company's \$2.5 billion Crescent Corridor project that aims to boost the use of rail-to-truck shipping containers from New Orleans to New York.

He also promised that the company will be a "positive addition" to the community, which did not fully embrace the project.

"It will support the supply chain, the huge flow of goods that move between those two areas in our country today," Moorman said. "It's going to mean the creation of a lot more jobs. It's going to be a big public benefit of moving trucks off the highway. It's going to mean big fuel savings for this country. The benefits go on and on and on."

Norfolk Southern's own studies predict that 8,600 jobs will be created or retained

over the next decade because of the facility, though fewer than 100 people will work at the hub. The company says it will have a \$4 billion economic impact over that period.

Moorman said it will have the capacity to handle about 165,000 containers and trailers annually.

Bentley cited the job creation figures as critical to his goal of returning Alabama to statistical full employment. Bentley has refused to take a salary as governor until that goal is reached.

"Our goal is to get Alabama working again," Bentley said. "My salary is not important, but your salary is important and the salaries of the people who live and work in this region are important."

Patrick Murphy, head of economic development for the Birmingham Business Alliance, said the intermodal facility is already attracting new industry -- not just in distribution but also in manufacturing. Murphy said as the hub ramps up, more growth will radiate out from it.

"This intermodal facility is going to have a regional impact," he said. "We anticipate a lot of existing companies will grow because of their proximity here, but the opportunities for new facilities coming to the area will certainly increase."

The Birmingham Regional Intermodal Facility is expected to open in late 2012.

Bachus, R-Vestavia Hills, likened the growth of intermodal transportation to that of the interstate highway system.

"The interstate highways revolutionized our transportation system," he said. "Intermodal is doing the same thing again. When we look back in 100 years, we will see it was one of the developments that put our nation ahead."

The most personal speech at the groundbreaking came from state Rep. Allen Farley, R-McCalla, who was able to recite by memory the names of the families tied to the dairy farms that once dotted the McCalla landscape.

He said what makes McCalla special is not the farms but the families and the love they share for each other and for their neighbors. Specifically, Farley cited the relationship of Eloise Rosser and her late husband, Sam -- owners of the key piece of property that made the McCalla project possible.

Opponents of the hub openly criticized the Rossers and others who sold their property to the railroad. Critics complain the hub will diminish the area's quality of life by increasing truck traffic and pollution, and they worry that it is too close to an elementary school.

But Farley defended the decision.

"I'm asking and I'm convinced Norfolk Southern will be to the residents of McCalla -- a neighbor, an ally," Farley said. "I'm looking forward to a partnership with Norfolk Southern. I'm also looking forward to a future when we can look at each other and say, 'You know, what they've got in McCalla is the secret.' You can have jobs. You can have economic development. But if you don't have a love like Sam and Eloise had, it doesn't mean a thing, does it?"

Moorman pledged to be a good neighbor.

"I will stand here today and tell you as the chief executive officer of Norfolk Southern, we will be a positive addition to this community," he said.

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