

Transportation

It is essential, before the analysis of the collected data takes place, to present the current transportation infrastructure in and around Conway. The transportation of goods in this country is truly the backbone of our economy. Without the modern and efficient infrastructure of the interstate system, secondary highways, railways, and inland waterways, we would be unable to share the productivity of our economy that makes our nation strong today. Transportation is a cost of production and distribution added to every product from the raw materials to the delivered product. Without these modes of transportation, the American way would be just a dream.

Many advocates of highways and interstates claim that transportation improvements bring economic growth to areas in need of economic stimulus. Without careful planning, the economic growth that these highway improvements contribute is sometimes considered suburban sprawl. (Mixing commuters from residential areas and commercial activities with heavy industrial activities and adding traffic and congestion to the local roads and delays to efficient freight movement). Unfortunately the above currently describes Conway in some instances.

Transportation routes in Conway between the industrial areas, railroad lines and Interstate 40 could be improved. It is the belief of the research team that in order for Conway to provide better control of heavy truck volumes, an access road should be built on the south side of Conway, connecting Highways 286 and 64 East. This would allow large tractor-trailer trucks easier access into the industrial park from the Interstate without entering narrow residential streets and high volume traffic thoroughfares. The addition of

an intermodal truck/rail yard will help to link modes of transportation and facilitate the movements of goods from the local area to the national and global market place.

As an example of a top priority initiative to promote economic development in areas similar to Conway, the feasibility study recently conducted in the Mississippi Delta area along Corridor 18 has shown that with the proper planning and vision, areas with transportation resources readily accessible can significantly increase the amount of economic development in that particular area. An immediate feasibility study should be conducted for the Conway area's high priority Interstate 40 and State Highway 65 North, along with considerations for the railroad lines traveling through Conway. Interstate 40 and Highway 65 North have far-reaching regional, as well as national, implications. Running from North Carolina via Nashville, Memphis, Albuquerque and Flagstaff to Barstow, California, Interstate 40 is a major route from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific Coast. Just as important to Conway is Highway 65. This highway begins in New Orleans and runs via Pine Bluff, Little Rock, Branson, and Springfield to Kansas City, Missouri. The intersections of these two major cross-country arteries are in Conway, Arkansas and effectively link the regional, national, and global marketplaces with Conway's mid-western industrial capabilities and opportunities. Likewise, US Highway 64 is another artery of significance to Conway connecting I-40 at Conway and Arkansas Highway 167 at Beebe. This highway has become an east-west "shortcut" and effectively serving as an outer ring to metropolitan Little Rock. It is being widened in anticipation of growing traffic count. The economic benefits for Faulkner County and Conway's future, in an increasingly competitive global economy, are both obvious and substantial.

In addition, the major improvements to Highway 286 and Dave Ward Drive should make the City ready for additional industries to call Conway their home in the near future. The new highway will open many doors to Conway, not only industrially, but also residentially. Together, with the multitude of transportation modes available to the City of Conway, economic success is in the hands and vision of the citizens and decision makers within the county and city.

According to the information gathered from the survey conducted, most manufacturing businesses (39%) use in-house logistics to ship their goods by truck. This is much cheaper, for certain products and quantities, than going to a broker or an outside trucking firm for shipping needs. The needs of the manufacturer can be met with personal and customized service if the shipping is done in-house. Many manufacturers opt to use independent trucking firms (32%) to ship their product. The use of trucking firms generally reduces the manufacturer's costs of shipping versus buying their own trucks and paying the drivers and maintenance cost of the trucks. The service of the trucking firm is usually not as personal as it would be using an in-house trucking operation. The next most utilized form of trucking is the use of third party logistics (18%). The less than full load method of transporting goods is very popular with manufacturers in Conway. This allows the manufacturers to use major trucking firms together with other businesses who need to ship their product without having to pay for a full truckload of goods. Trucking brokers are the least used method (11%) of utilizing the trucking industry in Conway.

In terms of improvements to local modes of transportation, an improvement in the trucking industry would most benefit local manufacturers. This result is of no surprise

because most manufacturers in Conway use the trucking industry to transport their goods to the end consumers. An improvement to the local airfreight would benefit eighteen percent (18%) of the respondents, and eleven percent (11%) of the businesses surveyed said that a local improvement in inland waterways would most benefit their organization's bottom line. Most of the respondents in the study stated that the improvement in the trucking industry would generally consist of cheaper rates and therefore translate into either cheaper fuel costs or more fuel-efficient trucks. They believe that the Interstate system is adequate for their particular needs and that no major improvements are needed, other than the lower costs of actual shipping. Many of the businesses surveyed agreed that if the Conway Municipal Airport were able to expand to where airfreight was a feasible option for shipments, then they would use that particular mode of transportation directly out of Conway instead of shipping their goods to Little Rock or Memphis to be put on a plane. Those businesses that said an improvement to inland waterways would improve their bottom line were the few companies that already use this form of transportation. These companies ship goods from overseas, pick up their raw materials from the Port of Little Rock, and truck the goods from Little Rock to Conway. If a port were built on the Arkansas River near Conway, these companies would reduce shipping costs just by eliminating the need to use trucking firms to transport their goods forty (40) miles on Interstate 40 to Conway. The port would also attract many new businesses to the area as well as increase employment opportunities that pay higher than average wages.

Conway has the tools and ingredients to become a major player in the state's economic picture, as well as the regional economic picture, all it needs is the right plan of

action, the vision, and the desire of its citizens to make progressive plans today that will build the foundations needed for the future.