

Larry Collins

Testimony for U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship Field Hearing

My name is Larry Collins and I serve as the President of the Livingston Economic Development Council – the LEDC. It is the mission of the LEDC to recruit new businesses to the parish, to support existing businesses and help new businesses to get established in Livingston Parish.

I have been working in the economic development arena for over 25 years in the Capital Region and have lived here for over 50 years. Consequently, the comments made here today will be a composite of observations and experiences over the past 5 decades.

Since this hearing is focusing on transportation issues and the impact on businesses, I would like to relay information that is pertinent and actionable to support federal efforts to eliminate current and avoid future traffic impediments to small businesses.

First, we should all recognize the improvements made to the interstate 12 bridges from the Amite River to the Pearl River are under way and will be completed soon. The citizens and businesses are appreciative of this investment which is, actually, in advance of the traffic demands. This will set the stage for the widening of the interstate along this corridor. Ongoing attention to the widening efforts should create a capacity that will serve the existing businesses' ability to move product, raw materials and finished goods efficiently to other markets and to ports, as well as, provide for the safer and more efficient access of their employees.

And, while I12 provides a method to move thousands of vehicles through the parish, some consideration needs to be given for the improvement of existing exits and the flow of traffic onto the “surface streets” as a result of the increased interstate volume. Some emphasis should be placed on those high volume situations which create gridlock at certain high volume times even to the point of backing traffic up onto the interstate traffic lanes. These situations are unsafe and are not conducive to customers trying to reach businesses. Further, these situations discourage new businesses from establishing operations in what would otherwise be a very desirable location.

Other vital corridors, such as HWY 190 and HWY 16 should receive the attention of federal funding mechanisms, as well. These highways alleviate pressure on the interstate system and provide alternate routes when disruptions occur on the interstate. Further, many small businesses choose to locate along these

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“secondary” corridors which make these roadways even more important to those types of companies. It is important that the State and the Parish have access to funding to make the necessary improvements to stay ahead of the forecast growth.

It is important to note that along with infrastructure improvements to support businesses, the US Senate should be mindful of the impact that increased and ever changing regulations by the Environmental Protection Agency and the US Army Corps of Engineers has on small businesses. Because many small businesses are selling products and services to companies adversely impacted by more stringent requirements, the impact of losing a single major customer who must curtail their operation or move it overseas can be devastating. Many small businesses, themselves, are unable to locate in areas or expand in areas that have been technically “deemed” wetlands, although to the casual observer, serve no environmental or recreational purpose. This Committee should seek remedies for these situations – especially in regard to small businesses.

Thank you for the opportunity to convey these thoughts to your Committee.