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Neglected Sector Gets Trade Hopes

By Angela Shah

County's southern area called prime location for a new state hub

Southern Dallas County may not look like the state's next booming trade hub now, but local business and government leaders said Tuesday they have high hopes for the area.

The Union Pacific intermodal rail yard in Wilmer is one of several facilities officials hope will establish the southern part of Dallas County as a shipping hub. "The places that will do well will be places that can grow, places that can export," said Mike Rosa, vice president for economic development at the Greater Dallas Chamber. "The southern sector is positioned to do this. It has a logistics advantage."

His remarks came during the chamber's annual Southern Sector Infrastructure Forum & Tour, designed to introduce executives to business opportunities south of the Trinity River.

Robust business in southern Dallas County would mark a welcome turn for an area that's lately been in the news for the unkempt Wilmer-Hutchins Independent School district, now disbanded.

The southern half of the Dallas-Fort Worth region is largely undeveloped, save for strip mall retail centers and business parks that dot the landscape along the interstates.

NAFTA hub

But business is beginning to take notice of the opportunities there, boosters say. The port of Topolobampo, Mexico, signed an agreement Tuesday with the Dallas NAFTA Trade Corridor

Coalition to formalize North Texas as an inland hub for international trade from the Pacific facility.

Also, the Allen Group of San Diego announced plans to build an industrial office park near a new Union Pacific intermodal facility in Wilmer.

"Dallas is probably the most dynamic market" in the country, said Edward Romanov, chief executive of the Allen Group, which has spent two years assembling land for the approximately 4,500-acre site.

"This is our chance to help the Dallas business community to refocus efforts back to Dallas instead of Fort Worth or Alliance," he added.

Area outlook

The daylong panel included presentations on the Dallas-Fort Worth area's economic outlook, and perspectives from utility companies, railways and general aviation airports.

Also, the city gave attendees an update of the Trinity River Corridor project, which is designed to open up the Trinity Forest to recreational use and open an equestrian center, among other amenities in the next few years.

Though speakers acknowledged the area's challenges – issues with crime and low educational attainment – they still rattled off familiar themes about why the southern sector is a good investment: central geographic location, good workforce, low cost of land.

And, unlike much of the region's developed northern half, the southern sector still boasts quick commute times.

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Unique position

The area is already home to key parts of a budding trade corridor, said Dallas City Councilman Bill Blaydes. "We can't afford to lose this opportunity," he added. The Union Pacific terminal, in particular, is expected to play a key role in efforts by the city of Dallas to create an inland port south of downtown.

The intermodal facility sits near a Federal Express distribution center.

Indeed, Dallas developer David Garner pointed out that the FedEx development demonstrates one of the southern sector's main advantages: Truckers are able to drive to the company's headquarters in Memphis in a day and still meet trucking safety requirements.