

Regional goals to be unveiled

'Partnership for Prosperity' aims to improve capital area's quality of life

By Jim Wasserman -- Bee Staff Writer
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A coalition of Sacramento-area business groups will announce today an ambitious new regional business plan to help make the capital a national center for clean energy technology and build more civic amenities to further boost the region's quality of life.

Dubbed "Partnership for Prosperity," the plan aims to sharpen the region's competitive edge for job growth and overcome its growing liabilities that include expensive housing and traffic congestion.

Backers among 34 regional business associations in technology, real estate, sports and tourism say new kinds of jobs and an environment favorable to innovative startup companies are essential for a six-county region growing to almost 4 million people within 45 years.

"Our region will probably be fine if we do nothing," said Matt Mahood, president and chief executive officer of the Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce. "But if we get regional groups aligned along common strategic goals, now we can influence market forces a little."

Metropolitan Sacramento, with its reputation for trees and the biggest political scene outside Washington, D.C., typically lands in the top one-third of national rankings for business.

Although a new business strategy has faced initial skepticism in a metro area that has seen earlier high-minded plans languish, it could, if successful, spur regional action such as that recently proposed in San Jose.

There, regional leaders hope to raise \$1 billion for a new music center, technology and art museums, and sports facilities. As the dominant city of Silicon Valley, San Jose, like Sacramento, is taking cues from cities such as Indianapolis and Denver.

Both have spent heavily in recent years on parks, sports and cultural facilities, and expanded convention centers to boost their national statures and position themselves for job growth and tourism.

Sacramento's regional business plan, scheduled to be unveiled at a 9:30 a.m. news conference today, establishes a three-to five-year process in which area action teams identify specific priorities, then build unified regional strategies to realize them.

Partnership for Prosperity backers say their initiative could especially stimulate an already-growing clean-energy sector that some believe could create up to 11,500 jobs in a region many believe is too reliant on state government and construction. It includes 35 or more companies working in solar energy and biofuels, as well as the planned Renewable Energy Institute in Roseville and the existing West Sacramento-based California Fuel Cell Partnership.

Last week, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger also launched a new Energy Efficiency Center at the University of California, Davis. There, 32 faculty members will help bring research ideas into the marketplace.

"With the fuel cell collaborative in West Sacramento and some of the innovation taking place around these kinds of issues, Sacramento has as good a chance to be a leader as anybody," said Ted Bradshaw, a UC Davis professor and expert on statewide energy issues.

"No city or region has a monopoly on this industry as of yet," added Oleg Kaganovich, chief executive officer of the Sacramento Regional Technology Alliance. "There is no 800-pound gorilla. So in effect, we've started on a mostly level playing field."

Among other Partnership for Prosperity goals is improving the business climate in a part of California that has lagged in creating new companies despite abundant scientific research at nearby universities. The plan also aims to more closely align high school and college education with the regional economy to build a high-quality job force and keep it from being lured away.

Proponents acknowledge their efforts to shape a long-term future for Sacramento have met initial and continuing skepticism in parts of the region's public and private sectors.

During the 1990s, Sacramento similarly embarked on high-profile visioning and planning efforts known as Sacramento Tomorrow and the Regional Economic Cluster Study. In 1990, regional leaders envisioned life in 2010 when Sacramento's National Football League team had just won its first Super Bowl.

"The initial skepticism was: How are you going to see this through?" said Kristine Mazzei, senior project manager for Sacramento-based Valley Vision. "When we started this, many of the partnering organizations had the same concern."

The nonprofit think tank, which focuses on improving the region's quality of life, has guided the plan's 15-month formative stage. Valley Vision's board members include Sacramento Bee Publisher and President Janis Besler Heaphy, while its founders include former McClatchy Co. publisher and board member James McClatchy.

Still, area leaders cite hope for Partnership for Prosperity based on their recent success in crafting a regional 45-year growth strategy called the Sacramento Region Blueprint. The large-scale planning process involved hundreds of area citizens and aims to make future growth more compact and less auto-dependent. The effort won numerous national and statewide awards.

Graphic: Tracking growth in jobs and people

PARTNERSHIP FOR PROSPERITY

MISSION STATEMENT

"The region will thrive if we ..."

Focus on business: Make the Sacramento region a great place to do business.

Develop our people: Develop a first-class work force to maximize our competitive advantages.

Create an outstanding place: Enhance the region's quality of life to make sure the region is a great place to live, work and visit.

THE REGIONAL BUSINESS PLAN AT A GLANCE

Business development

Identify top business priorities.

Create networks and forums to promote mutual respect between the public and private sectors.

Clean energy technology

Attract and retain clean-energy technology businesses.

Produce and keep skilled people to support industry growth.

Brand the region as a "hotspot" for clean-energy technology.

High school education

Identify ways to align education system with emerging economic opportunities.

Maximize business and community engagement in high school education.

Postsecondary education

Grow programs critical for the region's future competitiveness.

Retain talented students for region's work force.

Civic amenities

Identify new regional civic amenities the community will support.

Develop funding strategy to support selected amenities.

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