Summary and Survey Feedback on the North San Joaquin Valley (NSJV) Economic Regional Economic Assessment Conference of 19 November 2014

On 19 November 2014 the Business Forecasting Center (BFC) housed in the Eberhardt School of Business at the University of the Pacific hosted an economic assessment on the NSJV region at the Modesto Civic. The conference had 95 registrants and 60 attendees from across the NSJV. The BFC research team and seven other experts from across the NSJV and two other regional experts for adjoining areas of the northern California mega-region presented to the audience during the morning conference at the Modesto Centre Plaza in downtown Modesto.

A brief online survey of seven questions was distributed to the attendees of this conference which took place in Modesto on November 19, 2014. Twenty-six people responded to the survey, and 21 of those respondents shared their contact information to stay updated on project information.

Respondents

Location of employment (This does not mean that respondents are county employees)
- Approximately 46% of respondents (12 people) were employed in Stanislaus County
- 31% in San Joaquin County (8 people)
- 19% in Merced County (5 people)
- 4% in Mariposa County (1 person)

Location of respondent residence
- Stanislaus County: 42% or 11 people
- San Joaquin County: 27% or 7 people
- Merced County: 15% or 4 people
- Calaveras County: 4% or 1 person
- Mariposa County: 4% or 1 person
- Madera County: 4% or 1 person
- Sacramento County: 4% or 1 person

Summary of Content

Depending on the question, some respondents answered all the questions and some did not.

Statements about the NSJV
- Approximately 81% of respondents said the NSJV is a distinct region
- 77% believe the NSJV to be a part of the Northern California Megaregion
- 84% believe the NSJV needs to build an identity that separates it from the Southern San Joaquin Valley
Most important challenge facing the North San Joaquin Valley (in descending order)
- Education and workforce development: 42% or 11 people
- Infrastructure: 15% or 4 people
- Business and Regulatory Environment: 12% or 3 people
- Marketing: 8% or 2 people
- Quality of Life: 8% or 2 people
- Other: 15% or 4 people
  - Business retention and attraction
  - Challenge to becoming to what? This region is not other regions and should celebrated for that.
  - Innovation, good paying jobs, opportunities, community based food systems
  - Demographics/immigration

What collaborative projects/strategies/initiatives do you think hold the greatest benefits for economic development in the North San Joaquin Valley? 19/26 respondents

This was an open ended question. Answers were organized into themes and areas but a number of issues connect and overlap. Respondents offered the following ideas:

Business
- Region of available and affordable sites, consistent permitting processes, and available/qualified work force
- Development of an agribusiness initiative

Education and training
- Graduating students who are work ready
- Vocational education
- Workforce development
- Investment in education
- Synchronize education and training to streamline opportunities

Marketing/branding
- Establishing a recognized name identity
- Marketing of tourism, advertising existing resources (e.g. Stockton Airport)
- Collaborative marketing to Silicon Valley

Infrastructure and the economy
- Goods movement (highways, rails, and ports), location of industrial parks
Collaboration
- Regional collaboration
- Connecting academic institutions to long-term regional projects (e.g., watershed restoration, high-speed rail and regional rain development)
- Workforce training projects that integrate employer participation

Transportation
- Access to Bay Area airports through mass transit
- Enhance freight and passenger (commuter) rail service through better geographic coverage/better access for user and efficient timing on current and future routes
- Mass transit (commuter rail) would greatly benefit the NSJV. Connecting BART and Sae light rail and ACE
- Investment in transportation

Assessment
What's working and what's not working and use results to find what will attract more employees and companies

Other projects
- Initiate urban food forests and gardens, improve local food access
- We need to promote our region as the garden of Northern CA, capitalizing on our food and wine industries to generate more tourism, and attracting more highly educated people and jobs to our region.
- We live in a very special place and must not expand urban and industrial sprawl in an effort to provide opportunity. In other words - don't kill the goose that lays golden eggs!!
- NSJV has a unique opportunity to differentiate and market itself. It is not solely an east, east-bay nor is it a northern central valley--none of which may have meaning outside of CA. We have a unique opportunity to brand ourselves and create our message for external eyes and ears. We need to stop the self-deprecation.
- Although not unique to the region, reform of public sector pension/health care cost is imperative. As with Stockton, Modesto is also on the verge of insolvency. Simply raising taxes is not the answer, that approach only decreases competitiveness.
- Northern San Joaquin Valley is uniquely positioned to build on bay area economic growth if we can enhance the travel corridors through enhanced and more pervasive rail service --both commercial and passenger.
- The individual structure of the cities/towns, need to be enlarged in their thinking about the area as a whole.