

GATEWAY

AT THE TABLE: All Star Automotive Group President Matt McKay, GNO Inc. CEO & President Michael Hecht, Stirling Properties CEO Marty Mayer and Baton Rouge Area Chamber CEO & President Adam Knapp have been able to accomplish what decades of others before them couldn't: Get Baton Rouge and New Orleans collaborating.



TIM MUELLER

The Super Committee

IT SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING that might happen in a parallel universe.

New Orleans and Baton Rouge, meeting every two months to talk about what they have in common. New Orleans and Baton Rouge, joining forces to forge an international trade strategy. New Orleans and Baton Rouge, testifying side by side before the Louisiana Legislature on higher education. New Orleans and Baton Rouge, pushing for the same transportation project.

But a parallel universe it's not. It's what's known as the Southeast Super-Region Committee.

This group of 26 business leaders has accomplished what others have not even dared

imagine: They've gotten the centuries-old archrival regions to communicate and even collaborate.

The SRC, as it's known, is a high-powered group with representatives from the two regions [including the Northshore] that meets every two months to strategize over issues in which the communities have a common interest. Most of them bring a regional perspective to the table to begin with, since they do business all along the corridor.

The committee got its roots in the early days after Hurricane Katrina, when feelings between Baton Rouge and New Orleans were arguably at their worst.

Widespread perception was that Baton

Rouge was trying to execute a "power grab" from New Orleans—in part via the 10/12 corridor concept, which initially excluded the Crescent City. Leaders from the region convened a meeting to put an end to the bad blood.

"We said, 'What's going on? This is not helping anybody. Let's get in a room together and have a dialogue about how we can repair relationships,'" says Stirling Properties President & CEO Marty Mayer. "We realized in the course of that dialogue that we really had to work together if we were going to work through recovery."

In the years since the hurricane, however, the SRC has gone way beyond that initial mission. For one thing, its members have come to realize the Southeast Super-Region itself is a political and economic force to be reckoned with [see chart].

Baton Rouge Area Chamber President & CEO Adam Knapp says other mega-regions—like the one stretching from Houston to Dallas—already compete on a global scale, in part because of their sheer size.

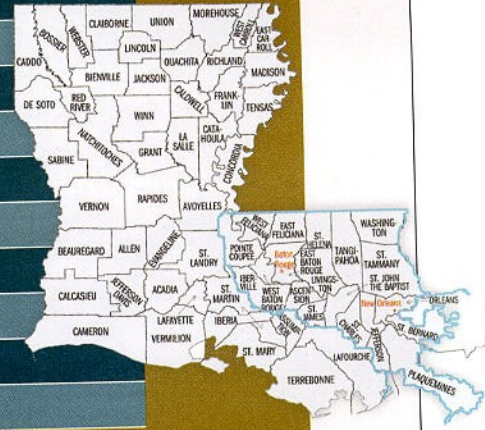
"It's humbling to think of how many people and businesses are out there in those very large mega-regions," he says. "It just underscores that Baton Rouge and New Orleans need to think of each other as one economy in some sense, and that we have to partner together on a very long-term scale, because together our competition is with the world and the nation, not against each other."

The committee has adopted three priority issues on which it has already brought to bear its considerable combined influence. The first major cooperative effort was a Booz Allen Hamilton study on optimizing the international trade potential of Southeast Louisiana.

The SRC has also recommended five priorities for the Tucker Commission, which is

SOUTHEAST SUPER-REGION SNAPSHOT

	GNO	BR Area	Super-Region	State	% of State
Population	1.3 million	774,327	2.1 million	4.4 million	48%
Employees	548,341	348,159	896,500	1.9 million	48%
# of Firms	38,314	20,740	59,054	124,049	48%
# of 1000+ Emp. Firms	29	26	55	106	52%
Fortune 1000 Firms	3	2	5	6	83%
Sales Tax	\$1.1 billion	\$682 million	\$1.8 billion	\$2.9 billion	63%
Port Volume (tons)	358 million	55 million	413 million	498 million	83%
Air Travel	3.8 million	482,376	4.3 million	5.1 million	84%
Construction Permits	4,789	3,755	8,544	16,305	52%
# of Legislators	50	24	69	144	48%



A high-powered group

BATON ROUGE

All Star Automotive Group President Matt McKay

Baton Rouge Area Foundation Vice President John Spain

Capital One Southern Banking Franchise President Rob Stuart

CSRS Principal Curt Soderberg

NH Holding President Michael Trufant

EATEL President Robert Burgess

Gulf Coast BIDCO President Cornelius Lewis

Latter & Blum Director Karl Landreneau

Baton Rouge General President & CEO Bill Holman

Jones Walker Partner Scott Chenevert

Woman's Hospital President & CEO Teri Fontenot

MAPP Construction President Mike Polito

Blue Cross President & CEO Mike Reitz

NEW ORLEANS

Stirling Properties President & CEO Marty Mayer

Omni Bank CEO Jim Hudson

Print-All Owner Dale Benoit

Daigle Fisse Managing Partner Howard Daigle

Capital One New Orleans City President Steve Hemperley

St. James Parish President Dale Hymel

Leger Shaw Partner Walt Leger, Jr.

IMTT Plant Manager John Little III

Adams & Reese Partner Mark Spansel

Whitney Bank President John Turner, Jr.

Dow Chemical Site Leader Steve Milligan

Jones Walker Managing Partner Bill Hines

Greater New Orleans Foundation Senior Vice President Ellen Lee

reviewing possible reforms for higher education—one of which includes properly funding LSU as a flagship research university.

The group is also committed to securing intercity passenger service between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. The SRC has asked Department of Transportation & Development Secretary William Ankner to reconsider applying for stimulus funding.

In the near future, the SRC plans to collaborate on a strategic study to determine what's needed to beef up the Louis P. Armstrong International Airport.

"You have Baton Rouge saying, 'The New Orleans airport is important.' You have New Orleans saying, 'Baton Rouge needs to have a flagship research university,'" Knapp says. "That's a much better mentality to have."

So what's changed? What's made this newfound alliance possible now? GNO Inc. President & CEO Michael Hecht says that in sitting down at the table, those involved have come to realize they have more in common than not. And a post-Katrina shake-up in leadership—particularly in New Orleans—has opened the door.

The partnership could face its toughest test yet in the coming year, however, when the high-stakes census count determines population—and in turn, political representation and federal funding—for the two regions for the next decade.

But for now, the biggest challenge is coordinating the schedules of participants so the meetings can take place.

"Some of the most significant business leaders in both markets are sitting down together every two months, so coordinating time is difficult," says All Star Automotive Group President Matt McKay. "But everybody realizes how important this is." **1012**