

# Columbia County's Future is Now

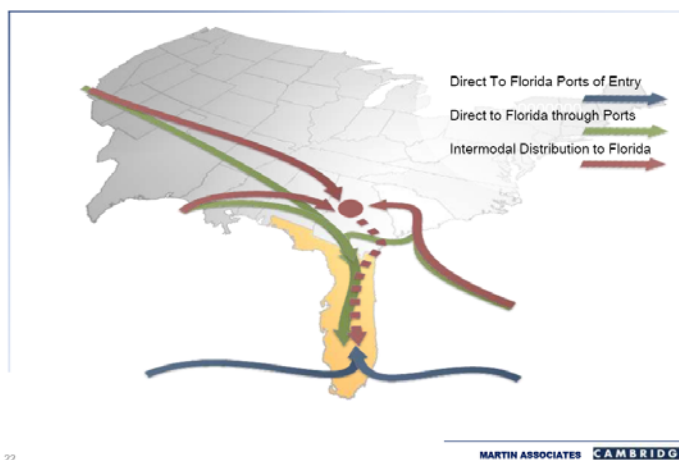
The Panama Canal expansion will forever change the trade industry as we know it and Florida is in a perfect position to seize the opportunities that will come from that change. The expansion is expected to be complete in 2014. Once the expansion is complete, new trade patterns will evolve and the doors will be wide open for landmark opportunities.

Under the leadership of the Florida Chamber Foundation, a freight, trade and logistics study is currently underway. The objectives of the study are:

- Document existing domestic and international trade flows to, from, within and through Florida
- Project future domestic and international trade flows to, from, within and through Florida
- Identify opportunities available to Florida to compete at a new level in the global marketplace including capturing more discretionary cargo and adding value to discretionary cargo flowing through the state
- Identify transportation, land use, economic development, and institutional strategies needed to compete at a new level in the global marketplace

Preliminary findings presented at the Florida Chamber's International Days summarized the trends and indicators impacting global logistics decisions. Early reports indicate immediate opportunities Florida has to capture imported consumables. Current trade patterns demonstrate South Atlantic and U.S. west coast ports are the major sources serving Florida. If Florida takes advantage of new trade patterns, Florida could be the port of entry for some of the same products traveling across the United States to reach us.

## Flow of Containerized Imports to Florida



Florida's major import flows, including flows moving through Florida ports and competing ports, are illustrated in the included graphic. Opportunity for imports and exports are abundant

but the public and private sectors must start preparing now; Florida's future starts right now. The Florida Chamber is pushing to double exports in the next six (6) years. As stated in a Florida Chamber press release in April 2010, international business accounts for about 14% of Florida's economy and for nearly 1.2 million jobs. Despite the global recession and its impact on Florida's economy, international trade was one of the strongest sectors in the state in 2009. More than 48,000 Florida companies export, accounting for 18% of all U.S. exporters. In six years, the Florida Chamber expects that number to double.

Columbia County is in a prime strategic location to serve the emerging trade flows. Not many communities can say they have the assets we do - the two major interstates (I-10 and I-75), an airport, two railroads (CSX and Norfolk Southern) and located within 60 miles of a deep sea port (JaxPort). Although we have great assets, the community still needs to prepare for future growth. Action steps need to be taken *now* to prepare for emerging opportunities.

The Columbia County IDA has been working with Enterprise Florida and the U S Department of Commerce to identify local businesses that will benefit from international trade. If your company has a product that it produces, then it might be marketable as an export item to other countries. If you are unsure or would like to know more, contact the IDA at 386-758-1033 and we will be glad to assist in setting up an appointment with the trade experts.

The Panama Canal expansion will be complete before we know it. To compete at a new level in the global marketplace, it will take both public and private sectors working together to develop and implement the appropriate business climate and infrastructure to handle the additional import and export business that is expected.

Our community has grown tremendously over the last ten years and we have outgrown the existing infrastructure. The Columbia County Commission deserves accolades for their forward thinking approach to address the growing utility needs of our community. Utility infrastructure is just one of the areas that have to be addressed to further develop Columbia County. Commission Chair, Ron Williams' recent message "Columbia County's Future is Now" will soon be promoted throughout the community with a banner displaying the logos of local government. Let this serve as a reminder that the community leaders are being proactive and planning for sustainable growth. We have a bright future ahead and have the ability to make this vision a reality.

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