

GASTON COUNTY

CLT AIRPORT CONNECTED ECONOMIC POSITIONING STRATEGY



1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF STUDY

In September 2017, the Greater Gaston Development Corporation (GGDC) commissioned MXD Development Strategists Ltd. (MXD) to prepare the Gaston County CLT Airport Connected Economic Positioning Strategy (Strategy). Through a collaborative public-private approach, the Strategy is designed to fully leverage the County's close proximity and access to CLT Airport and its Intermodal Center.

The foundation for the Strategy lies in Gaston County's strategic location and outstanding connectivity to Target Economic Sectors and Development Opportunity Sites.

The Strategy will inform and help guide Gaston County in long-range planning and economic development initiatives as they relate to CLT Airport by fulfilling the following objectives:

- Position Gaston County and its municipalities as the best option outside of Charlotte for CLT Airport and Intermodal Center-related development.
- Inform planning, economic development, and marketing-branding strategies.
- Identify development opportunities and catalyst projects within Gaston County's municipalities to expand recruitment potential.
- Support the economic rationale for improving existing mobility corridors, creating new mobility and economic corridors, and unlocking developable land.
- Put Gaston County on the CLT Airport map for economic development initiatives and company recruitment.
- Provide a platform and framework for implementation.

This Strategy has been prepared under the overall direction of a Steering Committee which includes senior representatives of the GGDC, Key Stakeholders from local governments, and CLT Airport. Funding for the Strategy was provided equally by GGDC members and local governments in Gaston County.

STUDY TEAM:

Having worked in over 50 countries around the world on similar assignments, MXD is a global leader in leveraging the connectivity at and around airports to identify Economic Cluster Activities, Airport Connected Development Opportunities, and Target End User Industries. MXD assembled a skilled and knowledgeable team that brought local insight and experience to the assignment:

- **Kimley-Horn & Associates** - Charlotte-based Transportation Planning, Infrastructure, and Engineering sub-consultant.
- **Lyerly Agency** - Belmont-based Stakeholder Engagement and Communication sub-consultant.

STUDY AREA:

Gaston County has a population of over 218,000, making it the fourth largest county in the Charlotte region and the 10th largest county in North Carolina. It has a rich history of textiles and manufacturing and features a mixed urban-rural landscape with many unique cities and towns. Strategically located along I 85 and U.S. 321 on the west side of the Charlotte Metro Area, Gaston County's eastern cities are only a 10-minute drive from CLT Airport and a 20-minute drive from Uptown Charlotte.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Over a nine-month time frame, the Strategy was prepared in four main stages:

- Assessment of Existing Conditions
- Market and Economic Analysis
- Economic Driven Land Uses and Development Strategy
- Implementable Action Plan

The project began with an examination of Existing Conditions and Stakeholder Engagement with Key Stakeholders from Gaston County and surrounding areas. The study team engaged with these Key Stakeholders through various methods, including Focus Group Sessions, One-on-One Meetings, and a Drop-In Open House. Stakeholders represented a variety of economic sectors and organizations including Transportation, Logistics & Distribution, Planning, Economic Development, Chamber of Commerce, Major Businesses, Healthcare, Major Property Owners, Developers, and Education Institutions.

Significant themes that were revealed through the Stakeholder Engagement process include:

- Critical need for transportation improvements and the Catawba Crossings project
- Necessity to engage regionally regarding mass transit options
- The outstanding potential of Gaston County for development and redevelopment
- Continue efforts to improve perceptions of Gaston County
- Need to reposition the local workforce and build on skills training programs

ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

The Strategy utilized an Economic Cluster Analysis approach to understand the key pillars of economic activity in the region, as well as major economic trends, challenges and opportunities that impact Gaston County's potential for new economic development.

The analysis consists of the following components:

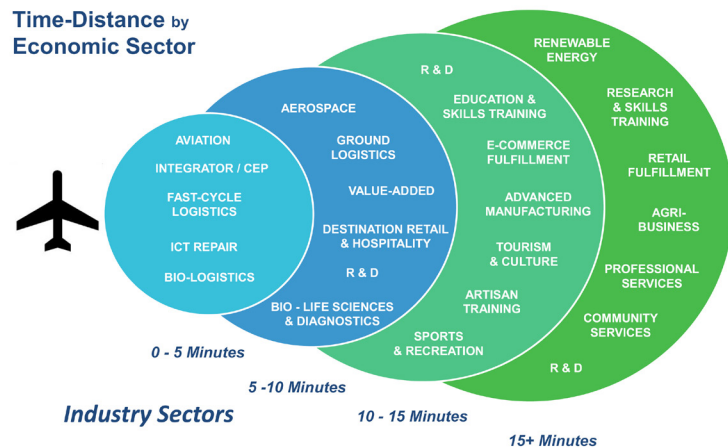
- **Regional Economic Overview** to provide an understanding of North Carolina, and surrounding regions to inform the types of economic activity that would be well positioned in Gaston County.
- **Economic Cluster Analysis** to identify the key pillars of the regional economy, sunset industries and sunrise industries, and potential development opportunities for Gaston County to consider.
- **Current Economic Clusters** which examines clusters that are strongly concentrated in Gaston County, drive the local economy, and offer the majority of local employment.
- **Recommended Economic Clusters** which include those clusters which present the strongest opportunities for Gaston County to pursue based on its proximity to CLT Airport.

AIRPORT CONNECTED DEVELOPMENT

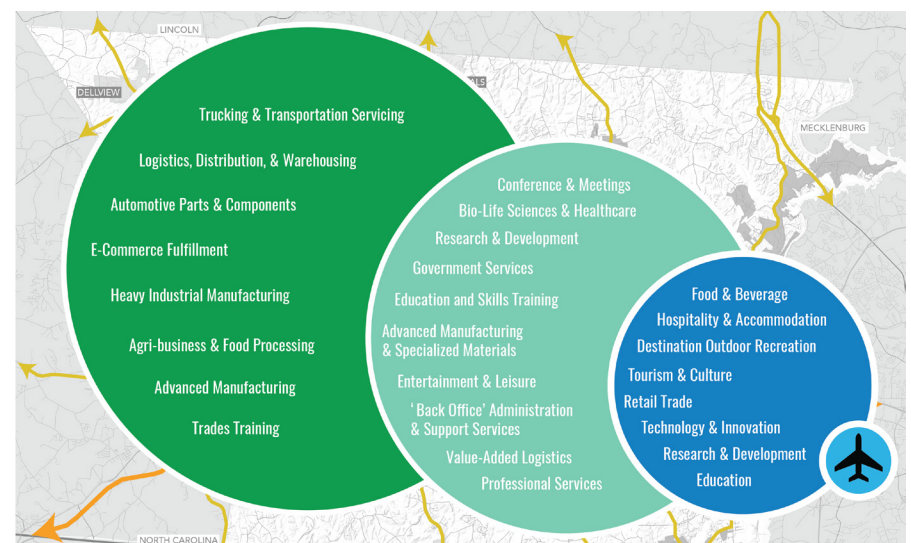
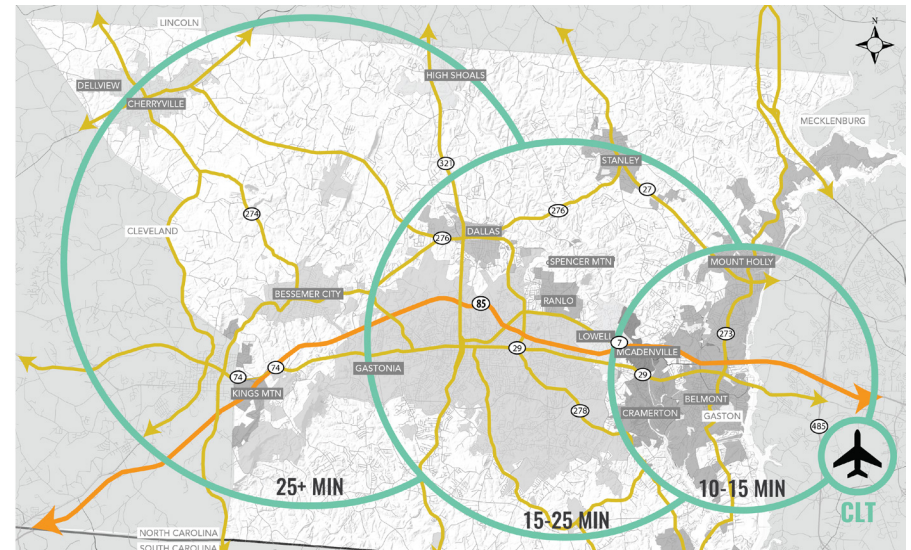
As Charlotte's economy continues to grow, it creates opportunities for growth among businesses that have an economic relationship to CLT Airport. New commercial development that responds to this opportunity is called 'Airport Connected Development'. By leveraging Gaston County's proximity to CLT Airport to attract private/public sector Airport Connected Development industries, new opportunities for regional economic growth will arise.

Industries that value proximity to an airport include Hospitality and Accommodation, Logistics and Distribution, Advanced Manufacturing, Skills Training, and Destination Entertainment, among others.

The figure below illustrates the relationship between different types of Airport Connected Development and their preferred driving distance to an airport. While a small percentage of companies require air-side access – which is expensive and quite limited - the vast majority of Airport Connected Development will locate in less expensive areas where access and travel times to the airport meet their specific requirements.

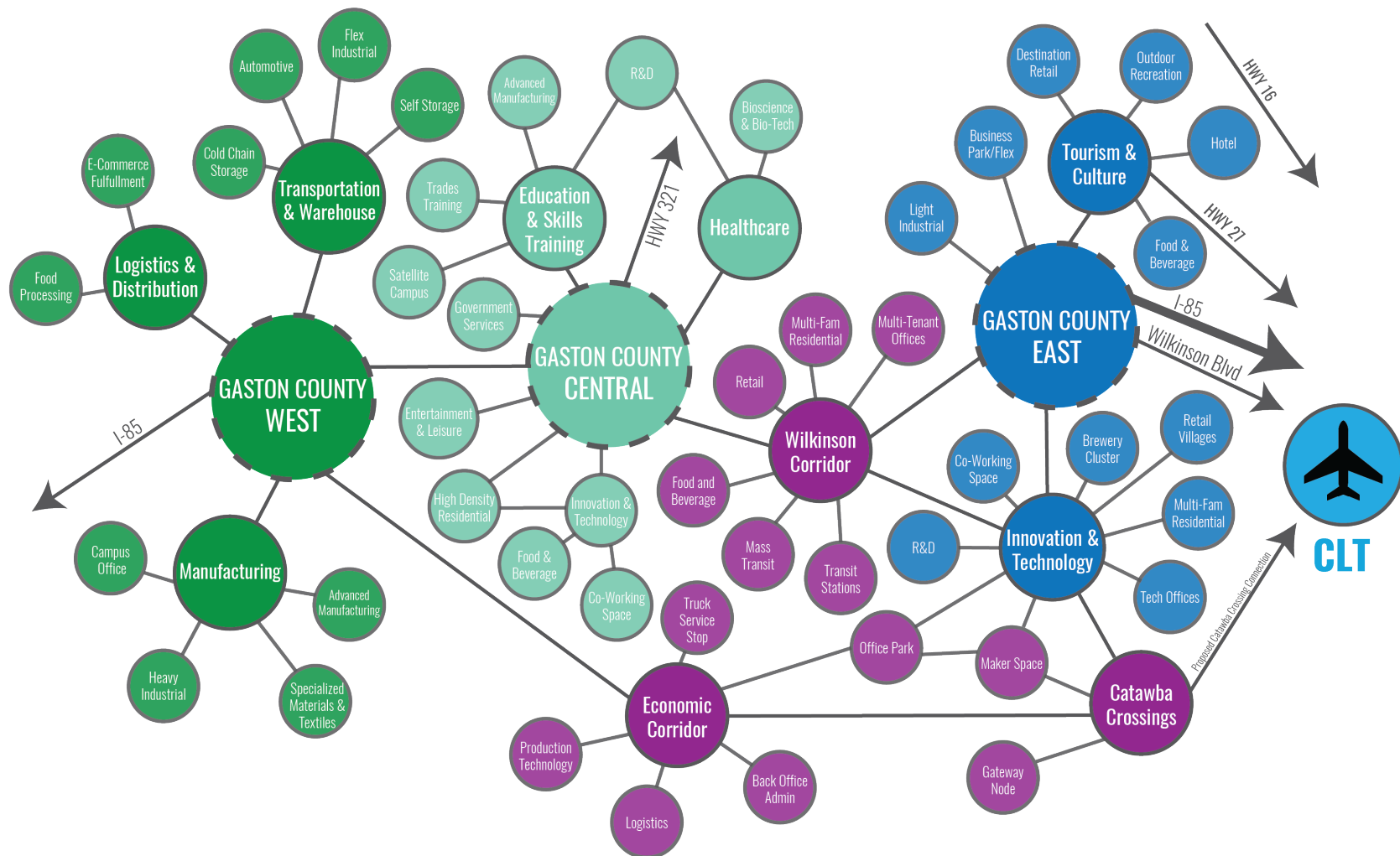


Based on the Airport Connected Development approach, the above figure overlays the time-distance clusters on a map of Gaston County, and the figure below depicts the recommended economic and industry sectors for each time-distance cluster within Gaston



ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Building upon Gaston County’s role in Airport Connected Development, the figure below visualizes the associated upstream and downstream economic development that is generated by the primary sectors, and how transportation related initiatives would enable the economic sectors to flourish.



MARKET ANALYSIS

Real Estate Market Analyses were performed for multiple land use asset classes to determine the Forecasted Real Estate Absorption in Gaston County. The asset classes explored in this Strategy include: Industrial (Warehouse, Flex, Manufacturing), Office, Retail, Hotel, and Residential.

Each of the Market Analyses includes the following elements:

- **Market Overview** of the Charlotte MSA and its component sub-markets, including vacancy, lease rates, absorption, cap rates, trends and other key data shaping development potential.
- **Supply Analysis** to understand the competitive influence of existing developments in the local area, as well as new projects in the development pipeline, to determine a realistic development program.
- **Demand Analysis** to understand the likely drivers for new development in the region over the next 20 years. This absorption forecast is the product of a series of methodologies, including a historically-based projection, an employment-based projection and a working age cohort projection.
- **Market Share Analysis** to estimate the share of the projected development for the Charlotte Metro Area which could be captured by Gaston County over the next 20 years.

Land Use	Gaston County Current Inventory	Gaston County 20-Yr Potential Absorption LOW	Gaston County 20-Yr Potential Absorption MODERATE	Gaston County 20-Yr Potential Absorption HIGH
Office/ Business Park	4.1 m SF	1.6m SF	2.2m SF	2.7mSF
Accommodation	1,500 Rooms	750 Lower Priced 100 Upper Priced	1,000 Lower Priced 139 Upper Priced	1,250 Lower Priced 180 Upper Priced
Retail	5.7m SF	1m SF	1.24m SF	1.5m SF
Light Industrial/Flex	526,000 SF	315,000 SF	420,000 SF	525,000 SF
Warehouse	24m SF	5.8m SF	7.9m SF	9.7m SF
Manufacturing	10.8m SF (est.)	1.9m SF	2.6m SF	3.2m SF
MF Residential	22,500 Units	5,043 Units	6,725 Units	8,406 Units

ECONOMIC MOBILITY CORRIDORS

The Economic Mobility Corridors indicate where opportunities for targeted growth and development could occur across Gaston County. Each Corridor has been identified based on its strategic location, connectivity and relationship with CLT Airport, and ability to improve mobility within Gaston County.

For each Economic Mobility Corridor, the Strategy identifies Strategic Positioning and Planned and/or Identified Enabling Transportation & Mobility Initiatives. The Strategic Positioning considers the functionality, relevance, and connectivity aspects of each Corridor, including its role to improve economic connectivity between Gaston County and CLT Airport, and how the Enabling Transportation & Mobility Initiatives could open up Economic Development opportunities.

The Economic Mobility Corridors that have been identified for Gaston County include:



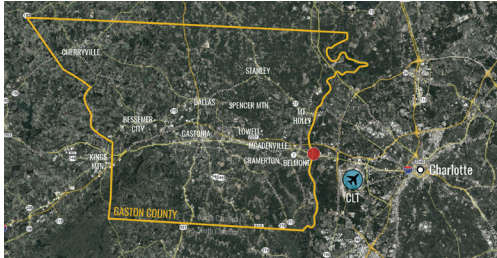
- T1** Interstate 85
- T2** US 74/29 Bridge
- T3** US 74/29
- T4** Catawba Crossings South
- T5** South Gaston Economic Route
- T6** Catawba Recreation Trail
- T7** Catawba South Shared Mobility Loop
- T8** Highway 27
- T9** New Hope Rd./Route 279
- T10** NC Highway 7
- T11** Cox Rd./Lineberger Overpass
- T12** US Highway 321
- T13** Central Gastonia
- T14** Highway 16

ECONOMIC MOBILITY CORRIDORS



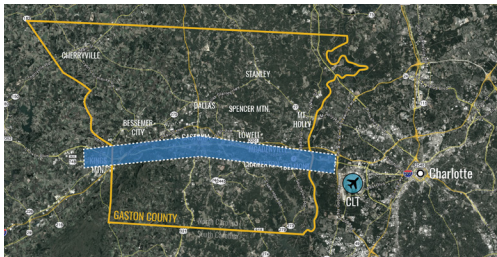
INTERSTATE 85 CORRIDOR [T1]

- North Carolina's primary Economic Artery.
- Direct connection for commercial and commuter traffic between Gaston County and CLT Airport.
- Approved widening project with all new interchanges, including Main Street/Highway 7 in Belmont, South Gaston Economic Route, & Lineberger Connector Overpass.



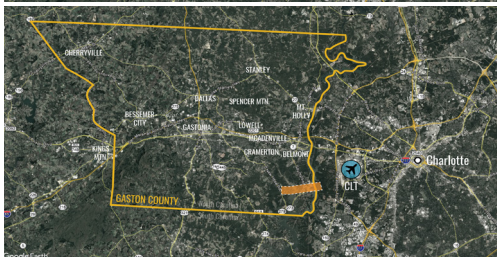
WILKINSON BLVD. (US 74/29) BRIDGE [T2]

- Aging reliever route for Gaston County that connects to CLT and Charlotte.
- Improvements should establish a cross-section that facilitates various modes of traffic (Commuters, Commercial Vehicles, Cyclists/Pedestrians, Transit).
- Improved Bridge should be flexible to facilitate a potential future Mass Transit Corridor and new mobility technologies.



WILKINSON BLVD.-FRANKLIN BLVD. (US 74/29) [T3]

- Significant Economic 'Spine' that passes through most municipalities
- Preserve Corridor for potential Mass Transit that could facilitate the evolution of various transit technologies including BRT, LRT, Commuter Rail, Shared Ride Lanes, Autonomous Vehicles.
- Opportunity for high density Mixed-Use TOD focal areas at Proposed Stations.



CATAWBA CROSSINGS SOUTH [T4]

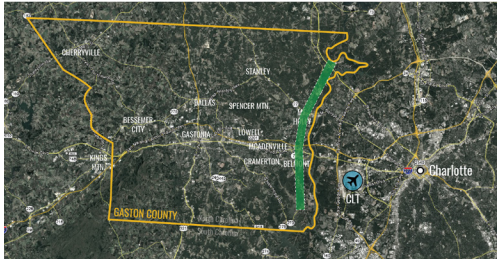
- Connection between Gastonia, Belmont, and the River District & CLT Airport.
- Would relieve Gaston County from regional traffic congestion on I 85, and establish community growth and economic development in West Charlotte.
- Facilitates strong economic connections and establishes the foundation for a new Economic Mobility Corridor passing through South Gaston County.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY CORRIDORS



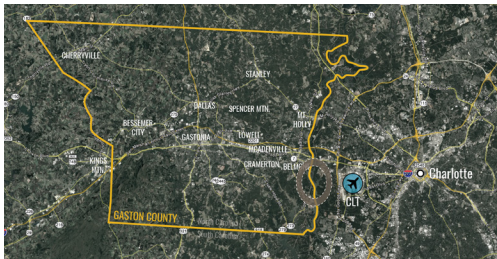
SOUTH GASTON ECONOMIC ROUTE [T5]

- Potential new corridor through greenfield lands for providing fast access to Gastonia, Bessemer City & Kings Mtn, particularly for commercial goods traffic.
- Accelerates economic development in southern and western Gaston County by reducing the drive time connectivity with CLT Airport to less than 15 minutes.
- Intersects with New Hope Rd. at a Town Center Mixed/Multi-Use Development.



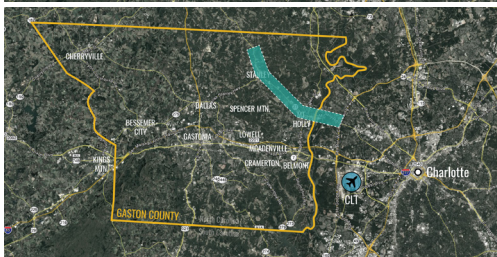
CATAWBA RECREATION TRAIL [T6]

- Contiguous North/South Trail along the linear waterfront at the Catawba River.
- Connect with waterfront park locations, Carolina Thread Trail, and other regional outdoor amenities throughout Belmont, Mount Holly and Gaston County.
- Supports outdoor recreation elements of the Gaston Outside "GO" campaign.



CATAWBA SOUTH SHARED MOBILITY LOOP [T7]

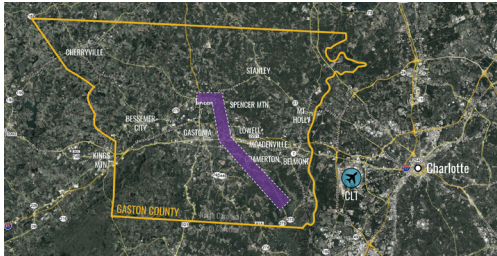
- Would connect Belmont and South Gaston County (near Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens and South Fork/McLean) with the River District and CLT Airport in Charlotte.
- Could be initially established as a Transit Route, but could have the flexibility to adapt to future mobility technologies for demonstration projects.
- Requires Catawba Crossings South and Improvements to US 74/29 Bridge.



MOUNT HOLLY HIGHWAY 27 CORRIDOR [T8]

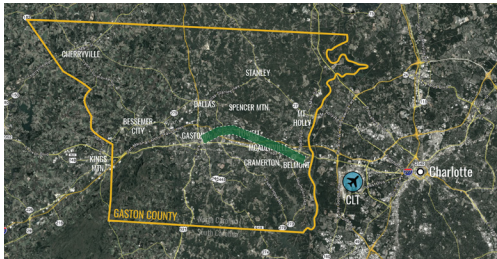
- Direct connection across the Catawba River to I 485, which connects to the west and south of CLT Airport.
- Trucking or Logistics Companies benefit from this seamless connection to CLT Airport, as it relates to moving their products and people.
- Connects to US National Whitewater Center, could be improved by pedestrian bridge.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY CORRIDORS



NEW HOPE ROAD ROUTE 279 CORRIDOR [T9]

- Immediate opportunities to become a “Multi- Modal Complete Street”.
- Once Catawba Crossings is built, will be an Economic Route connecting to CLT’s south side and Intermodal Facility.
- Establishes a “Southeastern Gaston County Economic Triangle”, that connects Gastonia, McAdenville, Lowell, Belmont, Cramerton, River District, and CLT.



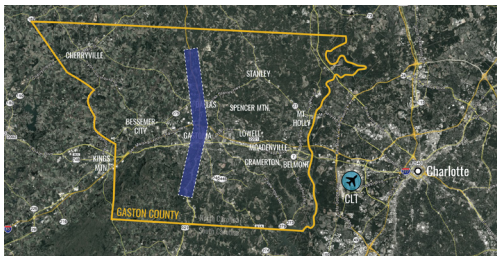
COLLECTION OF VILLAGES ROUTE - HIGHWAY 7 [T10]

- Interlaced chain of “Quaint Villages” flanking Highway 7 corridor between Gastonia and Belmont, also including McAdenville, Lowell and Cramerton.
- “Multi- Modal Complete Street” improvements to facilitate safe and efficient flow of all transportation modes (cars, bicycles, pedestrians).
- Would become a “Regional Tourism Amenity” for residents and visitors.



COX RD. & LINEBERGER TRACT OVERPASS FROM I 85 [T11]

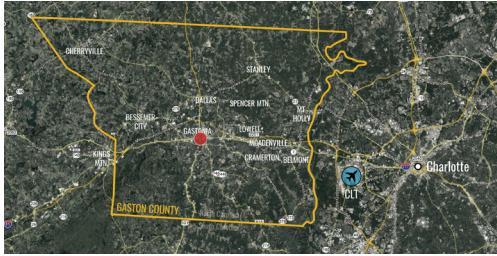
- Overpass will connect Destination Retail south of I 85 with CaroMont Healthcare Campus and currently undeveloped 450-acre “Lineberger Tract” north of I 85, establishing an important “North/South Connection”.
- Establish “Local Transit Loop” from new Mass Transit Corridor on Wilkinson Blvd. - Franklin Blvd. (US 74/29), as well as TOD nodes.



HIGHWAY 321 CORRIDOR [T12]

- Primary North/South Route in Gaston County.
- Connects Gastonia and I 85 with Regional Economic Engines including Gaston College, and companies located within the Gastonia Technology Park.
- Would intersect with potential “South Gaston Economic Route” to provide a direct connection between Gastonia with the River District and CLT Airport.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY CORRIDORS



CENTRAL GASTONIA [T13]

- Established plans to improve streetscapes and spur economic development and employment on local mobility routes in Gastonia.
- Improvements to the Franklin Blvd. (Route 74/29) to include a potential Mass Transit Terminus Station in Downtown Gastonia.
- Expand “Authentic Downtown” environment by connecting FUSE District to Downtown with enhancements to Main Street.



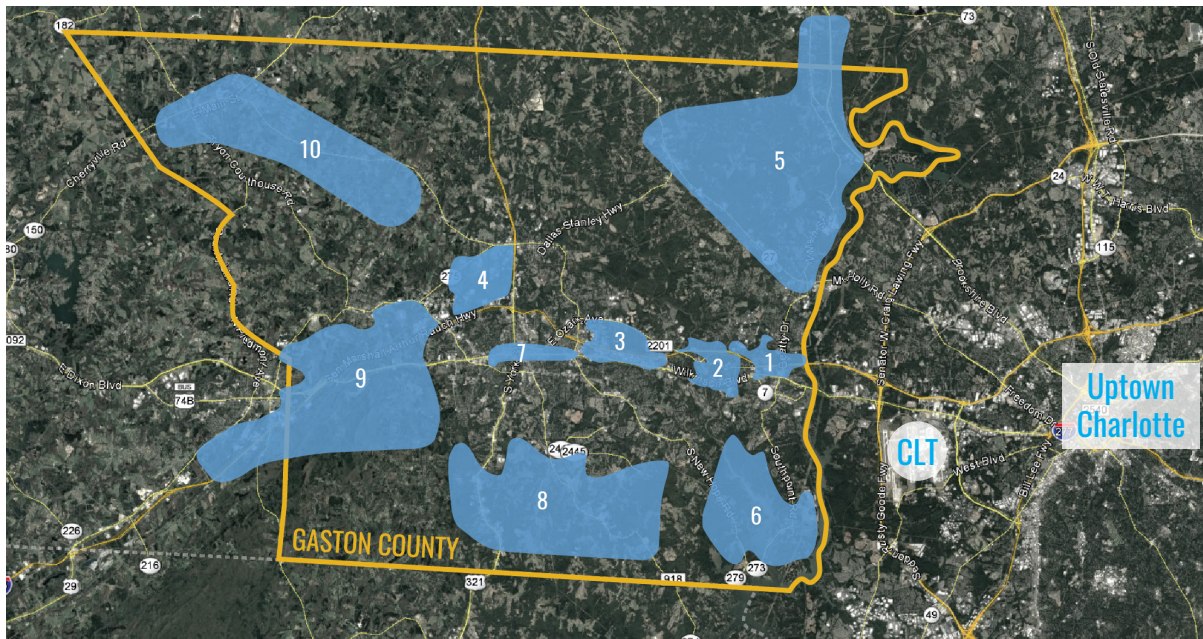
HIGHWAY 16 [T14]

- Crosses the Catawba River and connects Gaston County with I 485 and Uptown Charlotte.
- Primary connector route for economic activity occurring between Charlotte, Gaston County, and Lincoln County.
- Employment-focused corridor that is well positioned for Advanced Manufacturing, Time Sensitive Logistics, Self Storage, Warehousing, and Mixed-Use Development.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AREAS

The Strategy identified ten Economic Opportunity Areas, based on criteria relating to: proximity to the airport, current growth patterns, availability of land for redevelopment/development, and existing industry clusters. Economic Opportunity Areas demonstrate where concentrations of Targeted Economic Opportunities for commercial development, catalytic projects, and urban revitalization are expected to occur within Gaston County. The analysis of each Economic Opportunity Area includes:

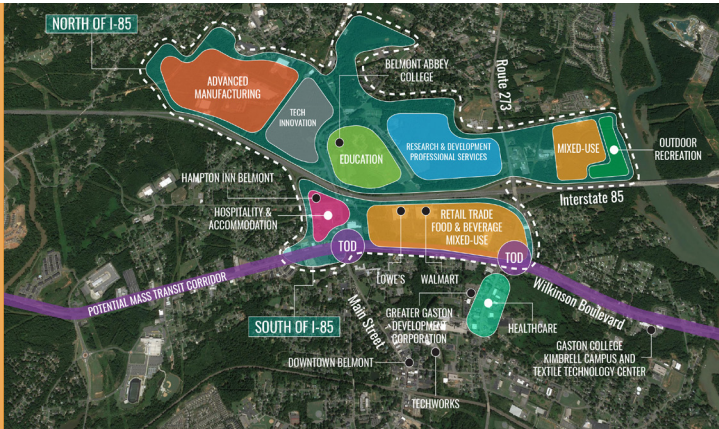
- **Strategic Positioning and Economic Connectivity to CLT Airport**
- **Key Map** indicating the Area's location within the Airport Connected Development Time-Distance Clusters
- **Projected Absorption** for each recommended asset class over 20 years, based on the Moderate to High forecasts.
- **Recommended Development Typologies**
- **Recommended Industry Sectors**
- **Potential Catalytic Projects** to accelerate economic development opportunities
- **Transportation & Mobility Initiatives** that could potentially unlock developable land
- **High-level Economic Sector Land Use Map**



#	Opportunity Area
1	Belmont/Abbey Properties
2	McAdenville/Lowell/Cramerton
3	Lineberger/CaroMont
4	Gaston College/Technology Park/Dallas
5	Mount Holly/Stamley
6	Catawba South
7	Central Gastonia
8	South Gastonia
9	Bessemer City/Kings Mtn
10	Northwest Gaston/Cherryville

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AREAS

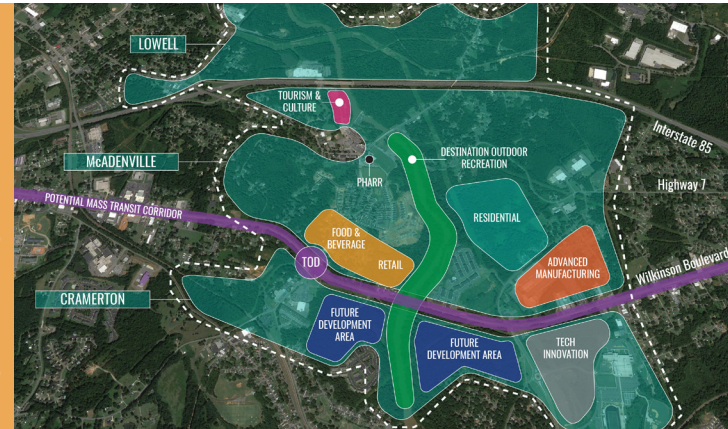
BELMONT / ABBEY PROPERTIES



TARGET ECONOMIC CLUSTERS:

- Retail Trade
- Education
- Hospitality & Accommodation
- Food & Beverage
- Technology & Innovation
- Research & Development
- Professional Services
- Outdoor Recreation

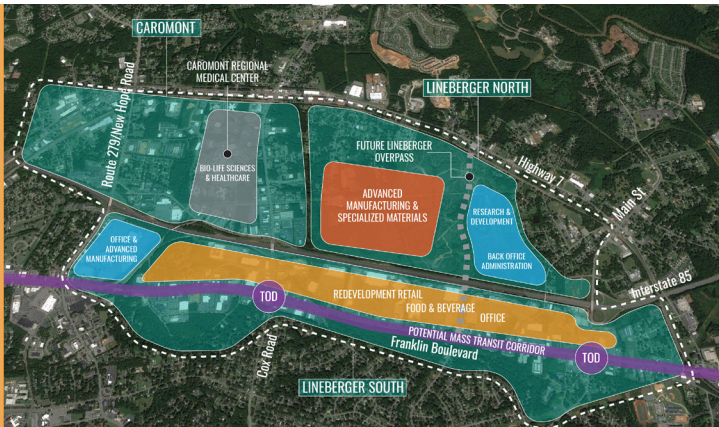
MCADENVILLE/LOWELL/CRAMERTON



TARGET ECONOMIC CLUSTERS:

- Food & Beverage
- Hospitality & Accommodation
- Destination Outdoor Recreation
- Tourism & Culture
- Technology & Innovation
- Advanced Manufacturing

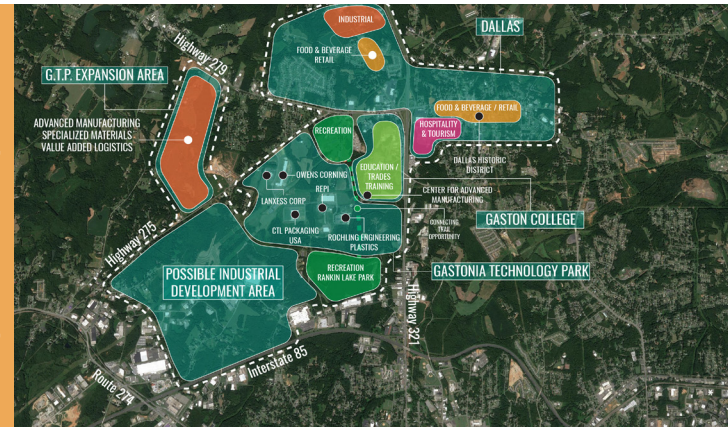
LINEBERGER / CAROMONT



TARGET ECONOMIC CLUSTERS:

- Bio-Life Sciences & Healthcare
- Research & Development
- Back Office Administration & Support Services
- Advanced Manufacturing & Specialized Materials

GASTON COLLEGE/TECH PARK/DALLAS

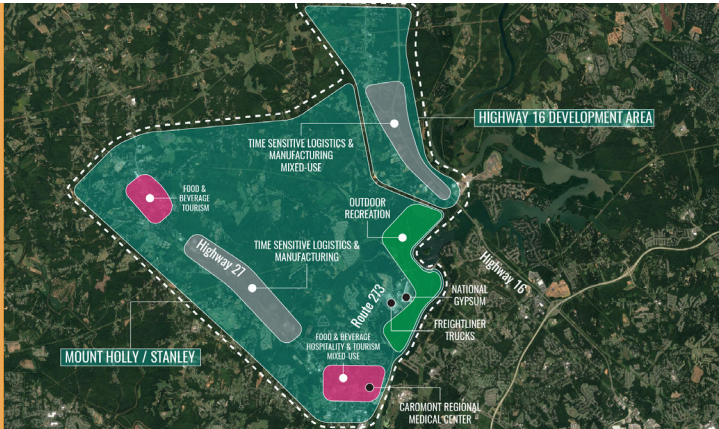


TARGET ECONOMIC CLUSTERS:

- Education & Skills Training
- Research & Development
- Advanced Manufacturing & Specialized Materials
- Value Added Logistics
- Trades Training
- Professional Services

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AREAS

MOUNT HOLLY / STANLEY



TARGET ECONOMIC CLUSTERS:

- Tourism & Culture
- Hospitality & Accommodation
- Food & Beverage
- Destination Outdoor Recreation
- Time Sensitive Logistics
- Trucking & Transportation Services

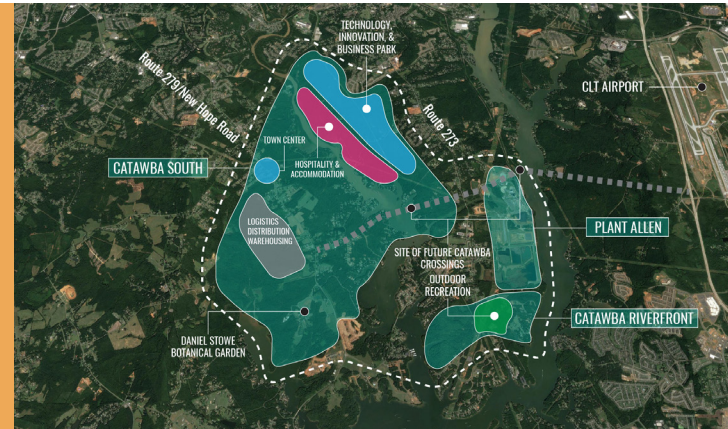
CENTRAL GASTONIA



TARGET ECONOMIC CLUSTERS:

- Government Services
- Conference & Meetings
- Entertainment & Leisure
- Professional Services
- Retail Trade
- Back Office Administration & Support
- Food & Beverage

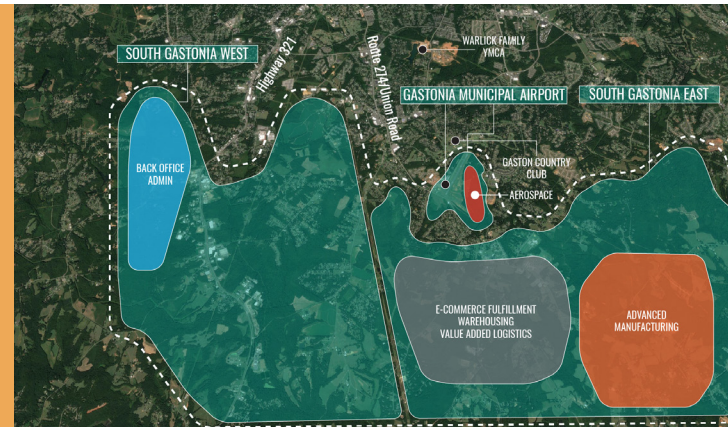
CATAWBA SOUTH



TARGET ECONOMIC CLUSTERS:

- Time Sensitive Logistics
- Technology & Innovation
- Hospitality & Accommodation
- Tourism & Culture
- Food & Beverage
- Conference & Meetings
- Logistics Distribution & Warehousing

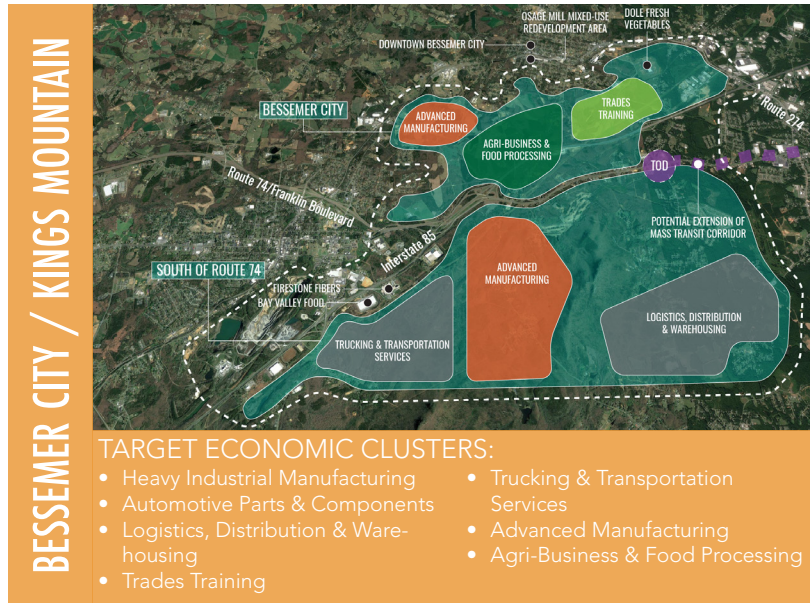
SOUTH GASTONIA



TARGET ECONOMIC CLUSTERS:

- Logistics, Distribution & Warehousing
- E-Commerce Fulfillment
- Agri-Business & Food Processing
- Aerospace
- Advanced Manufacturing & Specialized Materials
- Value Added Logistics
- Back Office Administration & Support Services

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AREAS



CATALYTIC PROJECTS

In order to activate the Strategy, a variety of recommended “Catalytic Projects” have been identified. Based on the findings of the Stakeholder Engagement, Economic Analysis, Real Estate Market Analysis, and Case Study research, the Catalytic Projects effectively leverage the competitive advantage of Gaston County's proximity to CLT, while meeting wider economic development goals for the region.

Catalytic Projects act as anchor magnets to attract related up- and down-stream businesses and sectors, successfully accelerating economic growth as well as deepening the connection between Gaston County and the economic activity generated by CLT Airport.

The Catalytic Projects for Gaston County are defined as being either:

- Transportation and Infrastructure Projects
- Land Use and Development Projects
- Programs and Processes

Transportation & Mobility Catalytic Projects

- T.4 Catawba Crossings South
- T.7 South Catawba Shared Mobility Loop
- T.10 Collection of Villages Route NC Highway 7
- T.15 Mass Transit Corridor on US 74/29

Land Use & Development Catalytic Projects

- C.1 South Gaston Industrial Development Area
- C.2 FUSE District
- C.3 Transit-Oriented Development Nodes
- C.4 South Belmont Destination Conference Center
- C.5 Temperature Controlled / Cold Chain Distribution Facility
- C.6 Trucking and Heavy Equipment Auction
- C.7 Culinary Incubator
- C.8 Medical Devices Manufacturing & Bio-Life Hub
- C.9 Food Processing and Innovation Facility
- C.10 Truck Servicing and Charging Station

Programs & Processes Catalytic Projects

- P.1 Mill Adaptive Reuse Program and Incentives
- P.2 Economic Marketing & Communication Campaign: Gaston County's Connectivity to CLT
- P.3 CLT Airport Connection with Gaston College
- P.4 County-wide Public Transportation System

IMPLEMENTATION ACTION PLAN

The Implementation Action Plan indicates the potential partners and stakeholders that could be involved throughout the implementation process of each Catalytic Project or Economic Mobility Corridor.

These stakeholders range from State, County, and Municipal bodies, to the private sector and external industry partners. The role that each stakeholder plays in relation to the Catalytic Projects and Economic Mobility Corridors are defined as the following:

- **Planning and Policy:** Contributing planning studies, policy documents, and overarching vision and permissions for the project.
- **Potential Funding Partner:** Provides financial support, investment, tax incentives, grants, and other fiscal sources for the project.
- **Marketing and Advocacy:** Supports the project by promoting its significance and importance to the broader region.
- **Implementation and Development:** Involved with physical implementation including land assembly, site preparation, and construction.

CONCLUSION

Through a comprehensive and collaborative process, the Gaston County CLT Airport Connected Economic Positioning Strategy has been designed to identify economic development opportunities that fully leverage the County's close proximity and access to CLT and its Intermodal Center.

The Strategy has identified Target Economic Sectors and Strategic Opportunity Sites which will enable Gaston County to be proactive in attracting new industry sectors and advocate for unique economic development initiatives. Specifically, this strategy has provided the rationale for positioning for Gaston County and its constituent municipalities as excellent options outside Charlotte for CLT and Intermodal Center related development, as well as putting Gaston County on the CLT map for business recruitment and relocation.

The Gaston County CLT Airport Connected Development Strategy Document, which is separate from this Gaston County CLT Airport Connected Economic Positioning Strategy report, encapsulates the directions of the comprehensive report and Implementation Action Plan. It represents a succinct summary and call to action for pursuing the regional revitalization of Gaston County. The Development Strategy Document provides an information platform for marketing and implementing development opportunities across Gaston County.