

**2010 Chamber of the Year**  
Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce  
Synopsis 1

**SECTION 4:**  
**Leading Businesses.**  
**Leading Communities.™**

1. **Program/Service name:** Chamber Leadership Initiatives for Northwestern Kentucky (C-LINK)

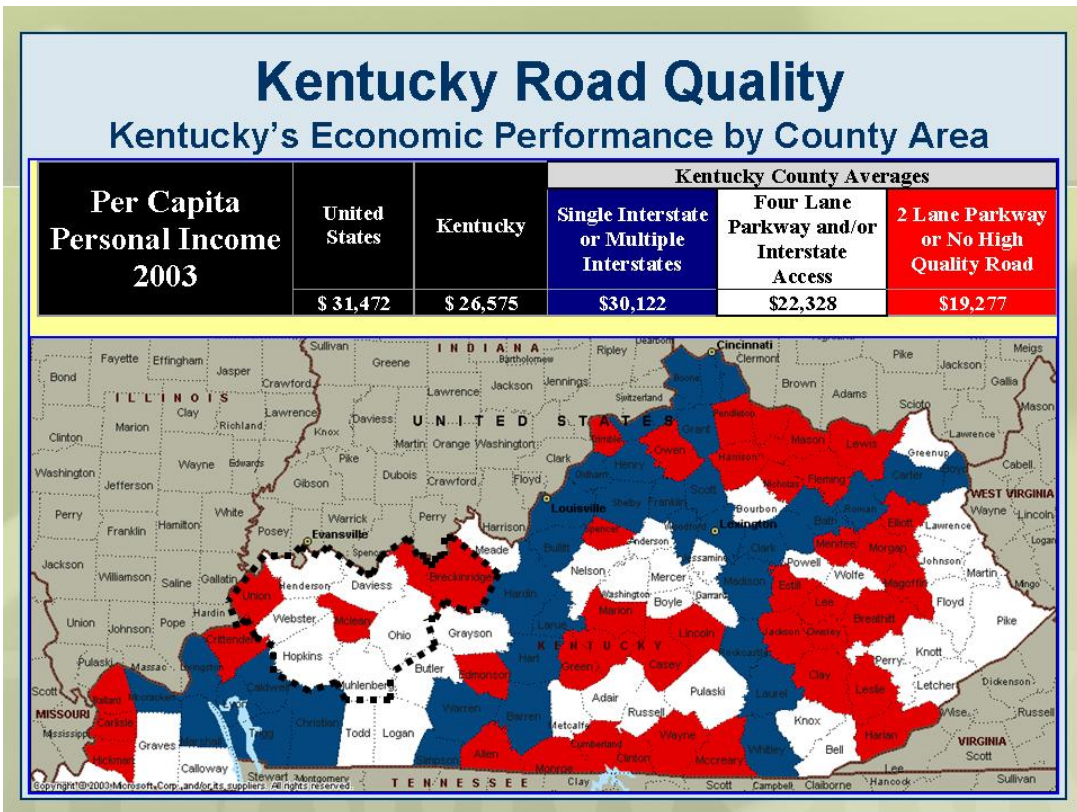
2. **The Core Chamber Strength(s) addressed:** Economic Opportunities



3. **Program/Project summary:** C-LINK was spearheaded by the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce in 2007 as an alliance of 12 chambers in ten counties in northwestern Kentucky. The goal of C-LINK is to think regionally and bring the business leadership of the area together and rally for projects of regional importance. The #1 priority of C-LINK is the promotion and eventual funding of the new seven-state, 2,600-mile **Interstate 69** that will run directly through the heart of the ten counties. C-LINK is an ongoing and evolving alliance, but its formation is complete and represents a significant step in harnessing the collective political and economic clout of the 3,225 combined business members of the 12 Chambers of Commerce. Progress is evident in a handful of measures.

4. **Needs Identification:**

- a. The target audience of C-LINK is the membership of each chamber but more importantly, Kentucky's state lawmakers and members of Congress. This area of Kentucky is somewhat economically depressed and no Interstates currently run through any of the ten counties. I-69 represents a real opportunity, but state and federal highway funding is very limited, and a collective voice is necessary to make it reality.
- b. Jobs and opportunity go where the Interstates are in the United States. This is clearly indicated by the map on the following page that shows the average per capita income of Kentucky's counties. Residents living in the ten counties in C-LINK (outlined in black) clearly have a lower income than the counties in blue with direct Interstate access. This map is widely shown by C-LINK in its many presentations and always brings positive comments about how the alliance is positively identifying the importance of direct Interstate access.
- c. Leadership organizations and/or political entities in the ten counties have not worked together in the past to any measurable degree. Counties tend to be competitive with each other and often struggle to land a very limited number of new employers. Political differences can magnify those issues. C-LINK is the first time three of the largest cities in western Kentucky—Owensboro, Henderson and Madisonville—have worked together for common goals.



**5. Program objectives:**

- a. The Owensboro Chamber board has realized through its ongoing advocacy efforts that working collaboratively with other chambers in the region was the way to build support for regional projects such as Interstate 69. Gaining support for state and federal dollars for the project would take a “united front” to gain the support of politicians and other “decision-makers.” Bringing the collective voice of a large business coalition together leverages the strengths of the chamber of commerce model. This is particularly true when the focus is on a large economic development project such as a new Interstate highway.

**6. Methodology:**

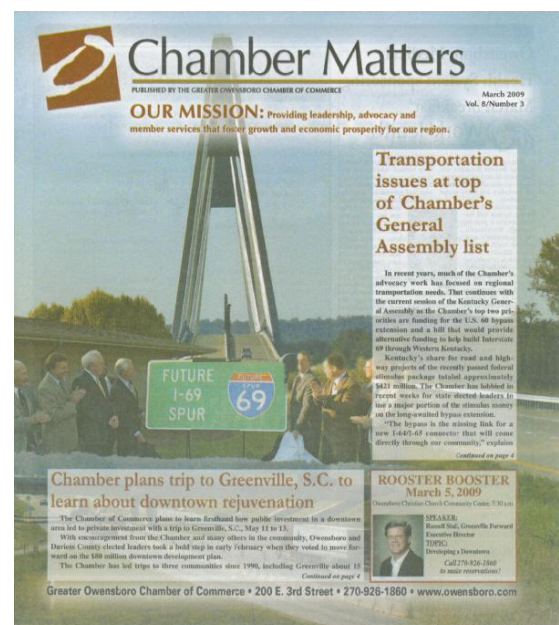
- a. The Owensboro Chamber board knew that reaching out to form an alliance with area chambers could be difficult without forethought. Owensboro is twice as large as any other town/city in the ten counties so it would be important for the smaller chambers—most of them without any paid staff and the smallest having only 60 members—to not feel as though “big brother” was attempting to dominate them. To alleviate this concern, it was proposed that each chamber in the alliance would submit two members from their board to serve on the C-LINK board. Consequently, the smallest chambers would have the same representation on the board as the Owensboro Chamber. Two of the smallest counties in the alliance both had two chambers each in their county. Those four chambers were asked to submit one person each from their board to the C-LINK board. Therefore, the C-LINK board consists of 20 people. This method of board representation was very well received by all 12 chamber boards. A concern of the small chambers with their corresponding budgets was how C-LINK would be funded. The Owensboro Chamber plus the chambers in Henderson and Madisonville agreed to provide startup seed

money but did not request money from the other nine chambers. Funding for the third full year of operations, 2010, is as follows:

<b>CARRY OVER BALANCE FROM 2009:</b>		
		<b>\$ 5,225</b>
<b>COMMITTED CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP:</b>		
Atmos Energy		\$ 2,500
AT&T		2,500
Petersburg Coal		2,500
		<hr/>
<b>TOTAL COMMITTED CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP</b>		<b>\$ 7,500</b>
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<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>		<b>\$12,725</b>
<b>PROPOSED EXPENSES:</b>		
Website		3,500
Sponsorship of legislative caucus meetings		750
Meals for board meetings		1,000
Misc.		500
		<hr/>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>		<b>\$ 5,750</b>

## 7. Communications:

- a. To communities: C-LINK and its work to promote the construction of I-69 has been the subject of numerous media stories in the past three years. In fact, C-LINK's name has become nearly synonymous with I-69 and the president of the Owensboro Chamber is frequent source for reporters in the area when an I-69 related issue arises.
- b. To individual chamber members: The Owensboro Chamber regularly updates its membership about C-LINK work. For example, the cover story of the March 2009 Chamber Matters newsletter at right highlighted the work of C-LINK and other transportation-related advocacy being undertaken by the Chamber.



- c. To elected leaders: C-LINK has communicated with elected leaders in many ways. It has sponsored two legislative receptions at the state capital (photo of February, 2010 reception with I-69 banner in background below), hosted a legislative transportation committee meeting in Owensboro, testified to legislative committees and traveled to D.C. twice in the past 14 months to lobby senators and congressmen. One of the D.C. trips in March of 2009 involved meeting with and coordinating work with I-69 advocates from four other states as Congress writes the next federal highways authorization bill.



C-LINK has focused much of its attention on advocating I-69 at the federal level to Kentucky's senior senator and Republican leader Mitch McConnell. With Congressman Whitfield's large request for I-69, it's believed Senator McConnell will be key to eventual significant I-69 funding for Kentucky in the reauthorization bill. C-LINK directors have taken two trips to Washington D.C. since March of 2009 to meet with Senator McConnell and also hosted a reception for him in Owensboro in October of 2009.

C-LINK has funded a website—[www.buildi69-ky.com](http://www.buildi69-ky.com)—that includes an explanation of C-LINK and the need for Interstate 69. The site also allows people to send a pre-written letter to Senator McConnell and the state's other senator and Congressmen. These letters are pre-written and allow for the user to complete the process in a minute or less. The graphic on the right is the home page. The site has generated 75 emails to each of the four in the past three months.



- d. To corporate sponsors: C-LINK has acquired a three-year commitment of \$2,500 per year from AT&T, Atmos Energy (natural gas utility) and Petersburg Coal (regional company) to help fund operations. The C-LINK chairman and Owensboro Chamber president have personally visited with leaders of those companies and other funding prospects to stress the importance of C-LINK's work.

## 8. Evaluation:

C-LINK's advocacy of the Interstate 69 project has led to *significant* results in the past two years. This includes:

**Early 2009 - Large Congressman Whitfield request:** Congressman Ed Whitfield from Kentucky's First Congressional District requested \$644,900,000 in the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee request for the **highway reauthorization bill**. C-LINK encouraged Congressman Whitfield to make this large request, which would obviously move I-69 forward in a major way in Kentucky.

**Summer 2009 - Infrastructure authority bill:** The Kentucky General Assembly passed a bill during a special session in June of 2009 that for the first time would allow tolling for major bridge projects in the state, including the \$1 billion I-69 bridge near Henderson. C-LINK communicate to legislators over several months leading up the bill's passage that "west Kentucky is not afraid of tolling." This was done to counter overwhelming and highly publicized "anti-tolling" sentiment regarding a bridge project in another region of Kentucky. Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear and Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels held a ceremonial signing of the bill in Henderson in September of 2009 (photo above) in large part due to C-LINK's advocacy.



**Fall 2009 – State names I-69 project manager:** Former Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) district director Ted Merryman was named I-69 project manager in September of 2009 by the transportation cabinet. This action means that for the first time a full-time employee of the KYTC is now working with officials of the state and federal FHWA to build I-69.

**Early 2010 - Scoping study for SIU6:** The KYTC issued a contract in early 2010 for a consultant to study the upgrades required to bring the Purchase Parkway in southwestern Kentucky to full Interstate status. This action was taken after C-LINK worked with the West Kentucky caucus legislators on a letter-writing campaign to Kentucky's secretary of transportation. Through its research, C-LINK had "discovered" that KYTC had a \$7 million credit from the 2005 SAFETEA-LU legislation for I-69 that the state had not yet tapped. Part of this credit is being used for the scoping study.

**Early 2010 - Upgrading parkways for I-69 underway:** KYTC has started the process to develop an agreement with Kentucky FHWA to bring 80 miles of existing parkways through Kentucky into the Interstate system. This would involve nominal upgrades to the Pennyryle and Western Kentucky parkways and would complete about half of the 160 miles of I-69 through Kentucky.

**Early 2010 – Kentucky's road plan:** Kentucky's legislature is currently developing its new six-year road plan. It has not previously included *any* I-69 projects, but C-LINK has worked with legislators in the region to add them. Both the proposed 2010 road plans of Governor Beshear/KYTC and the Kentucky House included **nine**

separate I-69 projects along the corridor totaling more than \$60 million! The state senate included three projects, and C-LINK subsequently went to work advocating for all nine in a road plan conference committee. This was done by working with area legislators plus an organized fax and email campaign to members of the conference committee. As of Friday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the legislature had reached an impasse over road plan and budget considerations and the final status of how many I-69 projects will be in the final approved road plan was not known.

C-LINK's success might be best reflected in how its model has been adopted by another group of chambers near the region. Fourteen chambers of commerce in southwestern Kentucky decided in early 2009 to form their own multi-chamber organization. The group asked C-LINK for guidance and eventually adopted C-LINK's structure of two directors from each participating chamber. This new alliance is called the West Kentucky Regional Chamber Alliance (WKRCA). At C-LINK's urging, WKRCA's board adopted the development of Interstate 69 as one of its top two priorities. This, in effect, means that 26 chambers spanning the entire nine-county I-69 corridor through western Kentucky are now advocating it.