

Alabama

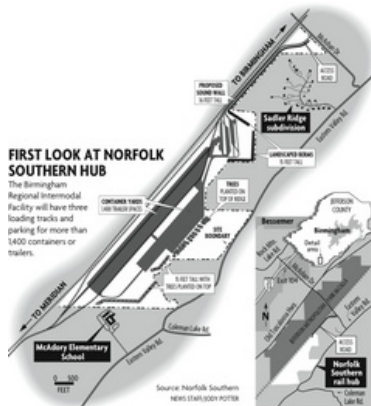
Group hears pluses of Norfolk Southern McCalla hub plan

By **Michael Tomberlin****Email the author** | **Follow on Twitter**

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Norfolk Southern operates this facility at Austell, Ga. and wants to add a similar operation in McCalla. (Special to The Birmingham News)



[View full size](#) McALLA -- McCalla residents in favor of a \$112 million Norfolk Southern railroad

hub -- and a few who remain undecided -- were able to hear from some of those behind the project at a meeting Monday night.

The Norfolk Southern-backed McCallaCan group held its second meeting with a slate of speakers that talked about how the railroad company came to pick a 316-acre site next to McAdory Elementary School for the Birmingham Regional Intermodal Facility project as well as the potential economic impact.

Newell Baker was on Norfolk Southern's site selection team that ruled out sites in Irondale, Ensley, two other McCalla sites and, most recently, a site in Bibb County that McCalla **residents opposed to the project** presented to the railroad company in August.

Baker said the McCalla property directly across the railroad tracks from the Jefferson Metropolitan Park McCalla industrial park was the only one that met all of the railroad's criteria. He said the Bibb County site had too many issues.

"If money was absolutely no object and if time was absolutely no object, would we make this site work? Maybe," Baker told around 40 people gathered for the meeting. "Is it the best site for the intermodal terminal? Absolutely not."

Norfolk Southern wants to use the hub to rapidly move intermodal trains long distances and then transfer the shipping containers on those trains to local delivery trucks and vice versa.

Patrick Murphy, head of economic development with the Birmingham Business Alliance, said the prospect of thousands of jobs being generated just by having the hub here is likely.

He said in the next 20 years, the BAA anticipates 4,000 new jobs will be related to or retained at companies manufacturing or shipping products through the hub. Another 4,000 spinoff or support jobs tied to those companies will also be created or retained thanks to the hub, Murphy predicted.

"We have had four projects that have visited our area and asked about this facility -- who came here because of this facility," Murphy said. "To our surprise, two of the four were manufacturing, not distribution."

Ashley Cousins of AC ESS LLC is working to form a community outreach group of McCalla residents and others with a vested interest in the community.

A selection committee will choose a 10-person group that will express concerns, identify issues and discuss ideas related to McCalla. Cousins is taking nominations for the community outreach group. The nomination form can be found on the [McCallaCan](#) Web site.

"This is all about facilitating communication between Norfolk Southern and the community," Cousins said.

No Hub 4 McCalla, a group of residents led by those who live closest to the proposed site, will hold a public meeting at the elementary school tonight. Opponents are concerned about the health and welfare of students at the school and the facility's potential impact on the environment, traffic and property values.

On Thursday, the Alabama Department of Transportation is hosting a public information meeting along with Norfolk Southern at the Bessemer Civic Center. It will be the second meeting in which transportation and environmental experts are available to discuss concerns raised by the public.

The map used in this post was changed to a newer, correct version at 3:23 p.m. on Nov. 10, 2009

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