

Regional Business Alliance of South Florida



Overview

A group of business leaders and economic development officials created the Regional Business Alliance in 2002. They recognized the need to work together as one region and to coordinate the planning and economic development efforts of the South Florida region. The Regional Business Alliance grew out of a 2002 meeting of the chairpersons of business-led organizations representing Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties. There are 24 Board CEO members, with places for three designated members from each county.

The Regional Business Alliance concentrates its regional efforts in three areas — regional transportation, regional cooperation, and net economic growth.

Regional Priorities

The Regional Business Alliance has achieved its most tangible success on regional transportation. In its short two-year tenure, the Alliance helped craft legislation and led the campaign to create the region's first multi-county transportation authority, the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority.

The Regional Business Alliance hit the scene with a splash. Its members identified and articulated the need for new solutions to transport people and goods quickly, efficiently and cost-effectively across the region. Transportation planning and funding organizations are largely county- and city-based, making collaboration and agreement on overarching regional transportation programs difficult.

The region's key business leaders, organized as the Regional Business Alliance, led an initiative to pass enacting legislation for the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority. The Regional Business Alliance formed a task force to study the issue and requested that the local planning councils prepare a "white paper" that examined transportation challenges facing the region. It contained specific recommendations for financing and operating a regional transit system. The Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach County Commissions endorsed the legislation and sent it to the Florida Legislature. The State Legislature passed it, and on June 20, 2003, Governor Jeb Bush signed into law the legislation creating the South Florida Regional Transportation Authority.

For the first time, there is one organization charged with the responsibility to develop and coordinate the transportation systems within Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. The Authority coordinates activities with the county metropolitan transportation organizations, local transit agencies, and the regional planning councils. In the future, it will address South Florida's transportation projects from a regional

perspective, as well as provide inter-county rail and bus service. The legislation also established a dedicated funding source for the Authority.

The Regional Business Alliance's role in the creation of the Regional Transportation Authority was significant. It galvanized business leaders on a tangible regional issue and affirmed South Florida as a single competitive region undivided by county lines. "Never before has the South Florida business community joined forces in this way on an issue of such magnitude" said *The Sun-Sentinel* in a June 3, 2002 editorial.

Another of the Regional Business Alliance's priorities is the promotion of regional consensus. The Regional Business Alliance has acted as a catalyst for a comprehensive plan for South Florida, and its business voice has been able to cut through the region's inefficiencies. "We gathered up all the plans — the yellow-covered, blue-covered, and green-covered ones — and said this was crazy," said Ralph Marrinson, Chief Executive of the Marrinson Senior Care Residences and a leader of the Alliance. "There are no borders and no passports needed. John and Joe Public don't have a clue how goods and services have been divided by county. We are developing communication."

The Regional Business Alliance has extended its fervor for regional cooperation to regional economic growth. The Alliance's third priority is to ensure that job growth in the three-county region is not just being transferred from one county to the next. Until a year ago, each county competed with the others for new business through their own economic development organizations: the Broward Alliance, the Beacon Council, and the Business Development Board of Palm Beach County. The Regional Business Alliance has been a catalyst behind their coordination. In 2003, the three Executive Directors signed a "non-compete" agreement and agreed to coordinate and communicate on business development issues.

Structure and Operations

The Regional Business Alliance has 24 Board members, all chief executives from area companies. The Board includes positions for each of the three member counties, Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach.

The members of the Broward Workshop, the Economic Council of Palm Beach County and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce make up the Regional Business Alliance's committees. The committees include transportation, cultural arts, net economic development and water. The Regional Business Alliance is still in its formative stage. It has a minimal budget, and carries out its agenda with staff from the South Florida Regional Planning Council and economic development organizations. Even though the Alliance applied for its first operating grant of \$100,000, its place in the regional business civic landscape is still as a catalyst. "We are not a 'doing' entity," says Marrinson. "We are a cultivating entity."