

Officials seeking to boost Route 3 corridor

By **Jon Chesto** | Managing Editor-Print

State transportation officials spent hundreds of millions of dollars to widen Route 3 from Burlington north to Lowell.

Now, a new group of local officials and business leaders are trying to make sure the area gets the biggest bang for those bucks, in terms of economic development in the Route 3 corridor.

Robert Buckley, a senior partner at Riemer & Braunstein, says his law firm and a couple other businesses (developer Gutierrez Co. and Enterprise Bank) each ponied up \$10,000 to launch the Middlesex 3 Coalition early this year. All five towns along the corridor — Burlington, Bedford, Billerica, Chelmsford and Lowell — are also on board. They've each chipped in \$5,000, and their top municipal managers serve as directors of the new organization.

Middlesex 3 will hold its first formal meeting on Oct. 2 — at 8 a.m. at 600 Technology Park in Billerica — to kick off fund-raising efforts. The

goal, Buckley says, is to bring all five towns together to focus on employers, needs along the widened Route 3 — namely workforce training, transportation and housing.

Buckley says the group differs from a traditional chamber of commerce — a few chambers already serve the area — in a number of ways. There's the active involvement and backing of Greg Bialecki, Gov. Deval Patrick's economic development secretary. Bialecki's receptiveness could prove important in the years to come, especially as the towns along the route lobby for more transit, housing or education dollars from the state. There's also the unusual situation of having the five top municipal officials from Lowell and the four towns interacting and discussing what's best for the corridor.

The Route 3 corridor certainly has the potential to be more than just a higher-speed (on some days, at least) connection between the bedroom towns to the north and the big employers within the Route 128 beltway. Recent expansion



Officials are trying to expand economic development in the Route 3 corridor.

announcements for the corridor by high-profile companies such as Keurig and E-Ink are just some examples.

For the corridor to thrive in the long-term, though, regional planning and coordination should play an important role. The chambers of commerce could take up this responsibility. But this new, more focused group could end up proving the more effective route — a route that might be replicated, if successful, in other key transportation corridors in the state.