



NORTH COUNTRY REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

401 West Bay Plaza
Plattsburgh, New York 12901
November 14, 2011

Empire State Development Corporation
Attn: Kenneth Adams
633 Third Avenue, 37th Floor
New York, New York 10017

Dear Ken:

On behalf of the North Country Regional Economic Development Council, we are extremely pleased to submit a truly historic document -- the first ever comprehensive plan for our seven county regional economy.

As you know, the North Country is unlike any of the other nine regions. It is vast in size, almost double most of the other upstate regions. It has no metro or economic center, consisting instead of several micropolitan communities set within a rural context, forming several economic sub-regions. It lacks basic connecting infrastructure to a far greater degree than other areas, from broadband to transportation to energy. And at its heart lies the 6 million acre Adirondack Park, an absolutely unique geographic and economic landscape.

Governor Cuomo's region by region approach presents a long overdue opportunity to all areas of our state, but it is an especially welcome opportunity for the North Country which has been particularly ill served by past statewide economic development programs built around one-size-fits-all criteria and predetermined priorities. Our characteristics are absolutely unique, our scale of business is smaller on average, our regional economy is diverse and segmented, and some of our most important sectors such as tourism have been too long ignored in favor of statewide flavors of the year.

That is why we have been amongst the strongest advocates for the new approach the Governor is implementing, and it is why we have embraced this mission with such determination and enthusiasm. Make no mistake. Ours is likely the only one of the ten regions that has never had any form of a regional plan before, unlike most of the metro centered regions, and we have in fact never before collaborated in a sustained, strategic way across the full seven counties placed within our defined region. This could well have been a serious disadvantage but instead, we embraced a bottom up process that simultaneously constructed a powerful new platform of collaboration and sharing, while also creating a plan that reflects our genuine diversity of challenges and economic opportunities.

The North Country is an especially complex mosaic, requiring attention not to a few central focal points but to a full range of interconnecting pieces, with the loss of any of the pieces guaranteeing a loss of the total picture. It includes practical approaches to maximizing the value of such vital regionwide components as tourism, agriculture and small business, while also committing to such strategic clusters as defense in the Watertown area, aerospace and transportation equipment in Plattsburgh, advanced materials and manufacturing around Clarkson, and biotech and health in Saranac Lake. Plus, there is, as there must be, clear recognition of the longer term infrastructure needs of a region that still lacks too many basics in too many areas such as broadband, natural gas and transportation connectivity by highway, rail and air, as well as emergent opportunities in clean energy.

And we appropriately highlight the regional and statewide importance of the North Country's growing role as a host and gateway for international investment and commerce, aggressively and successfully tapping the power of the integration of the U.S. and Canadian economies.

The overall plan is a practical, agreed roadmap to economic transformation for current and future generations of this often misunderstood and underserved region of New York. That transformation resides not in one or two perceived big bangs but instead in a network of "firecrackers" that can transform areas or sectors, coming together in a sustainably brighter future for all concerned.

We thank you, Governor Cuomo and Lt. Governor Duffy for the historic opportunity to create this plan and to craft an unprecedented economic development partnership across northern New York. We now look forward to working actively with you to turn this set of strategies into reality for the North Country and for the entire state.

Sincerely,



Garry Douglas
Co-Chair



Anthony G. Collins
Co-Chair