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MSU plans symposium on state transportation

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By STEVEN NALLEY
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Mississippi State University will host the 2012 Transportation and Economic Symposium: Transportation for Mississippi's Sustainable Economic Growth starting at 12:30 p.m. Tuesday and continuing through Wednesday at the Bost Extension Center. The event will bring together MSU faculty, economic developers, industry representatives and government officials at all levels, including Starkville Mayor Parker Wiseman, MSU Vice President for Research and Economic Development David Shaw and Mississippi Development Authority Executive Director Jim Barksdale, who will provide opening remarks. Shaw said the symposium will examine economic growth and sustainable living and demonstrate how the two fields can be complementary. "We have a great deal of activity in the transportation and research arenas here at MSU," Shaw said. "A logical next step would be to actually organize and host a symposium on this topic." Northern Gulf Institute co-director and MSU research professor Bill McAnally is coordinating the symposium, and he said it is Mississippi's first symposium of its kind, to his knowledge. "It grew out of a conversation between (North Mississippi) Transportation Commissioner Mike Tagert and Tom Bryant of Pickering Firm," McAnally said. "They were talking about the need to focus on the future, and to focus people's attention on the future."



One of the symposium's primary segments is a roundtable with Mississippi's three transportation commissioners. Bethany Stich, associate director of transportation policy at MSU, said this roundtable is a smart move for new Southern District Transportation Commissioner Tom King and new Mississippi Department of Transportation Executive Director Melinda McGrath.

"With MDOT having essentially a new sort of face to it with a new commissioner and a new executive director," Stich said, "this is a good first step to get MDOT and MDA together to look at how transportation and economic growth can work together."

Skip Scaggs, existing industry division director with MDA, will moderate two other roundtables, one on multi-modal success stories throughout the state and one on future challenges and opportunities. Starkville Mayor Parker Wiseman said the Starkville/MSU Area Rapid Transit system is one transportation opportunity he would like to turn into a success story, and he believes the symposium can help.

"It's simply an opportunity to gain some perspective of what's going on in the world of transportation from both the private sector perspective and the public agency perspective," Wiseman said. "Transportation issues are vital in shaping our communities, whether it be the role transportation infrastructure plays in economic development or the role that improved access to better transportation plays in the quality of life that the citizens of a community know. As a local government official, it is important that I stay up to date on ever-changing trends within the transportation industry."

Finally, the symposium will feature the fourth annual Transportation Workshop, where 28 students and faculty will compete with posters representing their transportation related research. Sandra Eksioglu, MSU assistant professor and competition organizer, said participants come from several different colleges, including MSU, the University of Southern Mississippi, the University of Memphis, and Hampton University in Virginia, the last of which collaborates with MSU through the federal University Transportation Center program.

"Many of those participants are from college of engineering, particularly the department of industrial and systems engineering and civil and environmental engineering," Eksioglu said. "It is quite a day for this group of students and faculty from across Mississippi."

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