



Institute for Transportation Research and Education
North Carolina State University

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Advanced Vehicle Research Center to Benefit the Future of North Carolina

Raleigh, N.C. – North Carolina State University and the State of North Carolina will likely benefit tremendously from the development of the new 630-acre Advanced Vehicle Research Center (AVRC) in Northampton County. That is according to Richard Dell, executive director of the Center, in his speech to engineering students and transportation professionals at the Transportation Founders Fund (TFF) fall seminar held this week on Centennial Campus at NC State University where Dell presented plans for the AVRC.

Dell began the lecture by discussing the history of the AVRC project, which was initiated in 2001. The North Carolina Department of Commerce reviewed the proposal and after the 2002 feasibility study was completed, funding was approved in 2004. In 2005, Northampton County purchased the land and placed it in a trust for the facility and \$7.5 million in state support was earmarked for construction. Construction is expected to begin before the end of the year.

The mission of the center is to provide a modern automotive proving ground as a resource to industry and educational institutions in North Carolina and by doing so, to establish the state in a leadership role in the automotive industry. It is anticipated that similar economic development and research leadership will take place in North Carolina as it did in similar facilities. For instance, the MIRA center in the United Kingdom (UK) became the cornerstone of the British automotive industry and the Transportation Research Center, Inc. facility in central Ohio led Honda to locate four plants in that state. Ohio State University has one of the leading automotive programs in the country because of its access to the automotive research center.

“The State of North Carolina is interested in it purely and simply from a standpoint of economic development — how many jobs it will create,” Dell said. It is estimated that between 6,000 and 20,000 new jobs may be created in North Carolina and a significant growth for the entire transportation industry. There is an opportunity for federal cooperation and research at this facility. It will provide world class, next generation research and development; a secure, well-equipped proving ground with test tracks, a vehicle dynamics area, engine and chassis dynamometers, alternative fuel and fuel cell testing labs, and client garages. The ride and handling track is contributed and designed by Lotus Engineering, one of the world’s premier automotive consultancies.

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In North Carolina, universities have been conducting extensive automotive research, but grants and funding opportunities will increase when they have a resource available to back it up. “That’s what our facility can do,” states Dell. An advisory board was set up in 2005, which includes Mr. Fred Gallasch, a graduate and distinguished alumnus from NC State University, and Dr. Richard Gould, interim head the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at NC State. AVRC received a grant from the Department of Energy for research and has partnered with NC State on three activities: a hydrogen refueling station, a test vehicle for ethanol efficiency, and a combustion analysis lab including a research engine put in at NC State. The hydrogen refueling station activity is in partnership with the NC State Solar Center, and Wolfpack Motor Sports is converting an older Corvette for the ethanol testing.

Dell discovered that more than 75 professors, faculty and staff are already involved in automotive research — from highways, to materials, engine design, electrical controls, and textiles. NC State is also providing assistance to review the master plan for the “design/build” phase of the AVRC. It makes sense that the university will be recognized as an automotive university in the future. Dell said this could lead to an Automotive Center of Excellence at the university. “To move forward, we really see our partnership with North Carolina State University as a cornerstone of what it is we are doing, in fact, to the extent that we’ve now located our offices here on Centennial Campus,” he said. The offices are located in Engineering Building II.

The Transportation Founders Fund (TFF) hosted this free event. The TFF is a unique opportunity for transportation students and professionals in North Carolina to interact with top-level transportation executives, and supports the transportation program at N.C. State University (NCSU). It is an outreach activity of the Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE) and the Department of Civil Engineering at NCSU.

The Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE), administered by North Carolina State University, is a non-profit organization that conducts research, education, and technical assistance projects on a wide variety of surface transportation issues with the goals of solving problems and creating new products, better services, and smarter workers. ITRE is located on NCSU’s Centennial Campus. For more information about ITRE, TFF and related programs, please visit our Web site at www.itre.ncsu.edu