



***BRINGING HIGH-SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR TOGETHER TO ADDRESS WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF THE AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR***

## INTRODUCTION

It is hard to imagine that a region housing both the nation's largest automotive market and one of the state's best automotive training programs would face difficulty training and recruiting students for careers with guaranteed placement, competitive salaries, and great benefits. However, this is the reality Cerritos College and its main partner, the Southland Motor Car Dealers Association (SMCDA), are trying to change in the Southern Los Angeles region.

Every semester, over 1,000 students enroll in one of Cerritos College's automotive programs, but such numbers have proven to be insufficient to satisfy the growing demand of local dealerships. Recognizing this shortage, Cerritos College and SMCDA have partnered to raise \$15 million for the renovation and expansion of the college's auto complex into a state-of-the-art facility with newly developed programs in alternative fuels, marketing and management.

*The educational track for automotive careers has deteriorated due to negative perceptions, limited training capacity, and rising demand.*

Nevertheless, deeper investigation into the causes of this shortage of workers suggests that training capacity may not be the sole bottleneck in workforce development. Negative perceptions of the "grease monkey", lack of updated information on automotive careers, and the demise of vocational automotive programs in high schools are all responsible for the deterioration of an educational pipeline to automotive careers. Investments in training capacity must be accompanied by improved efforts in recruiting and outreach in order to reestablish this pipeline.

Cerritos College and SMCDA have taken leading roles in a consortium of local organizations that aim at implementing training, recruiting and outreach efforts to raise awareness of local students, teachers, counselors and parents of the lucrative opportunities in auto careers. The final result is more than a pipeline, but a model for high schools, community colleges, and industry to **engage in regional planning efforts** that so far has brought positive results to all involved. The consequences of this type of integration are relevant for the vitality of the State's economy, and it is no surprise that the Southeast Los Angeles County Workforce Investment Board (SELACO WIB) is seeking opportunities to align their own interest in efficient regional planning with the successful work of Cerritos and SMCDA.

## AUTO INDUSTRY IN CALIFORNIA

Although manufacturing of passenger vehicles no longer takes place in California, the other “hidden” parts of the auto industry are still important components of the State’s economy. Southern California is a major global center for automotive design, marketing, and retail, and is home to all US headquarters of Asian automakers, with the exception of Subaru. In 2006, Californian dealerships reported over \$100 billion in sales of automobiles (cars and trucks), service, and parts, which represented 20% of the State’s total retail sales. Automotive sales also generated \$13.6 billion in revenues to other State businesses and collected \$7.5 billion in federal, state, and local taxes. In the same year car dealerships employed 150,000 employees and spent over \$13 billion dollars in salaries and benefits.

Passenger and commercial vehicles are becoming more dependent on: complex electronic components, diverse fuels, and customization. In addition to the expected growth in the auto sector due to positive trends in number of licensed drivers and economic performance, California is also among the leading states in **intelligent transportation systems, alternative fuels, racing, and auto-modifications**.<sup>1</sup> The increasing complexity in automotive design imposes challenges on the industry to maintain a viable workforce with evolving industry standards.

*Southern California is a major global center for automotive design, marketing, and retail and is home to nearly all US headquarters of Asian automakers.*

This growing need for workers in the auto sector is not unique to California. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the national average age of current labor force in the auto industry is 50, with an average of 15,000 technicians retiring per year. Until 2010, attrition and growth in the sector are estimated to cause a nationwide need of approximately 30,000 new automotive technicians annually. According to Todd Leutheuser, SMCDA executive director, “studies show that there will be greater need for automotive technicians in next 10 years than nurses due to this change in dynamics of industry and technology.”

## THE PROBLEM

It is in light of such growing need for workers in the auto-sector that Cerritos College and SMCDA have partnered to expand the college’s training infrastructure into the Southland / Cerritos Center for Transportation Technologies (SCCTT). The SCCTT will continue to provide the hands-on, nationally authorized training for General Motors, Ford, DaimlerChrysler and import vehicles. In addition, it will operate a California Advanced Transportation Technology Center - partially subsidized by the state to

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<sup>1</sup> In 2006, California had 26.5% of nationwide hybrid car sales, up 28% from the year before, with the cities of Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco controlling more than 85% of the state’s sales.

encourage development of alternative fuel sources – and an expanded Hybrid Training Center.

The center will also house Northwood University's West Coast Program, which will focus on offering opportunities to earn a four-year Bachelor of Arts degree in Automotive Marketing and Management. The program is focused on working adults, and will be considerably more affordable than a traditional four-year university degree.



The expanded training capacity provide by the SCCTT is one component of a larger strategy that focuses on developing an **educational pipeline to automotive careers**. Surveys of students enrolled in the Cerritos' auto programs indicated that student recently graduated from high school were significantly underrepresented in classrooms. Teenagers perceptions of automotive careers are still of the “grease monkey” and do not reflect the complex technology and skill sets required by technicians. As a result, almost half (46%) of students surveyed in local high schools have a negative opinion of these careers. Also, 78% of teachers and 52% of counselors in local high schools receive no information regarding lucrative career opportunities in the auto sector. Discussions about the sector at schools also tend to focus entirely on technical careers and ignore other rewarding careers in management, finance, and marketing.

The demise of vocational training in high-schools also contributes to the alienation of high-school students from the auto sector. The absence of hands-on programs contributes to misinformation regarding current career standards and decreases interest in both technical and managerial careers in the auto sector. The few available vocational programs tend to be underfunded and disconnected from local industry or the community colleges.

## **BRINGING THE COLLEGE TO THE KIDS**

Cerritos College has taken a leading role in a consortium of regional organizations that aim at systematically addressing the need for an educational pipeline.<sup>2</sup> The group's proposed **Transportation Career Pathways** (TCP) expands on efforts Cerritos and local partners have been undertaking for several years, the most recent of them being the **Automotive Career Institute** (ACI). The consortium – the Southland Cerritos Partnership for Advanced Transportation – has applied for a grant from the Quick Start Partnership Initiative for Advanced Transportation Technologies to finance the expansion of each of the projects described below.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The consortium comprised of local colleges, the Los Angeles County Office of Education, Unified K/12 School Districts, Regional Occupational Programs (ROPs), SMCDA, the Southern Los Angeles County Workforce Investment Board (SELACO WIB) and representatives of local industry.

<sup>3</sup> The grant is for \$450,000 but the consortium partners have raised \$800,000 in matching funds.

ACI was developed for local high schools without existing vocational automotive programs in order to increase enrollment of graduates in automotive programs of local colleges. It is a tuition-free training program in core automotive introductory areas that uses Cerritos College's facilities and curriculum. The program is divided into four progressive semesters and introduces topics in: automotive service, auto body, automotive engines, automotive design, marketing, and management. The curriculum used is purposefully designed to improve reading and math skills in order to facilitate ACI students in passing high school exit exams. The program is coordinated by Cerritos College and the Southeast Regional Occupation Program (SEROP) and it was first piloted with great success in 2005 to 32 students. The consortium seeks to develop a replicable model to be implemented in two partnering colleges: Sierra College and College of the Canyons. Students are encouraged to apply for internships in participating local dealerships.

**TCP** also intends to rebuild the automotive vocational program in local high schools by providing expertise and technical support. Local industry experts and faculty from Cerritos College will work closely to revise and develop curricula for interested schools, as well as evaluate these programs. Industry partners are also committed to provide access to equipment that reflects current industry standards.

*The Automotive Career Institute was developed by a consortium including local colleges, the Los Angeles County school district, the Southern LA County WIB, and industry representatives.*

Finally, the consortium is working on expanding outreach programs to raise awareness and interest of students, parents, teachers, and counselors in automotive careers. Staff from local ROPs, high schools and Cerritos College will organize a series of meetings and workshops to dispel the image of the "grease monkey" and highlight the lucrative careers in the auto sector. The outreach strategy will also include working with middle-schools to organize tours of the SCCTT's facilities and develop one-week technical summer camps.

## **THE PIPELINE GOES FARTHER**

Meetings between college, high school, and private sector representatives have led to conversations beyond the issues of the automotive sector. The types of projects and partnerships used to address the shortage of automotive workers also affect high-school students' performance and interest in school, facilitate recruiting of college students, foster interest in the development of vocational programs closely linked to industry, and a series of other outcomes that benefit the various partners of the consortium. If the *theme* of automotive sector is temporarily removed then what is left is a well-integrated effort by different partners to identify and resolve overlapping issues. Quite often, such shared problems end up also being leverage points to the reorganization of the workforce development system from a focus on symptoms, to root causes, and from isolated to coordinated actions.

It is not surprising that participating high-schools are becoming more interested in partnering to address other issues associated with enrollment of graduates in college programs (a major measure of success for the institution). Linkages with the private sector help contextualize actions within current industry expectations and facilitate internship and employment placement. Dealership managers are moving away from a practice of “robbing” one another of available workers to a process of “raising” local talent. Overall, addressing problems collectively is naturally leading to an overlapping of success, since the output of an effort is the very input of another.

A large sector such as the automotive one, with such an influential trade association (SMCDA), is unlikely to require the services of a local workforce investment board. So far, the work of Cerritos College, SMCDA, and their consortium has focused on an intermediary step (college enrollment) that is not the direct goal of a workforce investment board (job placement). However, the system developed as a consequence of the established pipeline is exactly what SELACO WIB envisions as the future: more effective regional planning. In other smaller sectors without significant representation, SELACO WIB may be positioned to play a similar leading role in convening the right players to promote, expand, and link their various individual successful efforts into similar well-integrated pipelines. The development of a system of pipelines may be a crucial solution to harnessing the local Californian talent to continue supporting the growing of our State’s economy.

*For more information:*

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