For the past two decades, the state and federal governments have consistently shortchanged Southern California on goods movement and transportation funding. One region’s inability to join together and collectively advocate for key projects was a major factor. The Mobility 21 Summit in Ontario on Monday is a clear indicator that times are changing.

Founded in 2002 by the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) and the Automobile Club of Southern California, Mobility 21’s goal was to bring together elected officials, transportation providers, businesses, labor, local municipalities, and community leaders to address the transportation issues facing Los Angeles County. Mobility 21 was instrumental in securing funding for many projects including:

- $500 million for the construction of the Gold Line Eastside Extension
- the Metro Exposition Light Rail Transit Project
- northbound 405 carpool lanes
- Interstate 10 carpool lanes
- the Alameda Corridor East Railroad crossing improvements.

Mobility 21 was also a strong advocate for the passage of Propostions 1A and B on the ballot in November 2006. However, our partnership was confined to Los Angeles County.

That all changed yesterday at the Ontario Convention Center. This year, Mobility 21 became a regional collaborative that includes Los Angeles, Orange County, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura counties. Each of the county’s transit agencies and leading business organizations, along with the Automobile Club of Southern California, are now equal partners in advocating for projects that will benefit all 17 million residents in the five-county region.

A united regional effort is essential if Southern California is going to successfully compete against other regional coalitions around the nation for limited federal and state financial resources.

With all five counties working together through Mobility 21, our potential for securing vital investment in Southern California increases dramatically. If we collaborate successfully, then all of us will share in the victories though easier commutes, more jobs and cleaner air.

Join us as we continue to make our voices heard. To learn more about the Mobility 21 coalition, including our partnering organizations and advocacy priorities, visit www.mobility21coalition.com. Local summits will continue over the next 12 months as we lead up to the 2008 regional summit. The coalition is also planning to attend the Chamber’s annual advocacy trip to Washington, D.C. from April 15-17, 2008.

And that’s the Business Perspective.

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The Business Perspective is a weekly opinion piece by Gary Toebben, President & CEO of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, produced with the input of Senior Policy Advisor Rusty Hammer.