

Area attractive to variety of businesses

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Troy Highway isn't just a conduit for business. More and more often, it is becoming a business address. The huge surge in construction along the highway may just be a preview of what is to come, one area developer says.

Convenience, price and rising traffic counts make Troy Highway a prime address for small businesses, and, at least for now, a Troy Highway location comes without the premium cost often associated with prime locations.

Stephen Saunders, CEO of Saunders Realty, which represents several properties along and near the highway, said the demand for flexible-use locations is rising along Montgomery's southeastern edge.

Saunders said a typical flex-use client is a small contractor who needs maybe 1,000 square feet of office space and about

two or three times that for warehouse or shop space. That contractor needs a location convenient to the entire market, but does not need to pay a premium for a hot retail location.

"They are finding there is land out in that location," he said. "They know they don't have to be on the corner of Main and Main."

Saunders' company is developing the Southeastern Business Park with lots costing about \$2 per square foot. That cost, he said, is a bargain compared to commercial lots in the northern suburbs that cost up to four or five times that amount.

Woody Bryan, of Bryan's Floor Store, has watched the Troy Highway change in the 17 years his company has been in business.

He agrees that low land prices are driving the area's growth right now. At some point, he said, the growth is going to start fueling itself.

"Some big service stations are opening up. It is something that is really needed."

—Woody Bryan
Bryan's Floor Store

"I think anytime a new business opens up, you get more traffic," he said. "Any business would help this area."

But not all of Troy Highway's growth is in the flex-use category.

There are not only plenty of places to stop, but plenty of places to stay.

Several national hotels have either opened new locations or renovated older properties. Days Inn, Holiday Inn Express and a Howard Johnson's are either open or under construction.

Some of the growth is straight retail. A new Raceway convenience store is under construction, joining a group of others along Troy Highway be-

tween the Montgomery Mall and Bell Road.

A general growth across South Alabama is creating more traffic between Montgomery and communities such as Troy, Enterprise and Dothan. The convenience stores and hotels are sprouting in response to that additional traffic, Saunders said.

Bryan said the area could support the retail that is there now and more.

"Some big service stations are opening up," he said. "It is something that is really needed."

So far, the mall and Bell Road bracket the growth on Troy Highway, but Saunders said that is likely to change on both ends.

He predicted within a few years development will stretch south of Bell Road. On the northern end, the mall's future likely will determine the direction of development on Troy Highway, he said.

The mall was purchased

Thursday by Dothan Acquisitions LLC.

"Depending on what they do with the mall, it may spur some more growth," Saunders said.

Retail is driving the part of Troy Highway nearest the mall. McClinton and Co. is selling several lots on an access road between Troy Highway and the Montgomery Commons center and its Wal-Mart anchor.

The area's largest residential development, the Liberty Square Apartments, front onto the access road.

The area south of Bell Road can expect a gradual change from a rural area to a commercial one, he said.

"I think there will be more of what is there," Saunders said.

That doesn't mean he expects a sudden urbanization of the community.

"There is so much land out there," he said.