

Summary of Follow Up Meetings on Medical Device Report

June 18 and 25, 2004

This report provides an overview of the key points raised and action steps recommended during two follow-up meetings held in Springfield and Hartford after the public release of the I-91 Corridor medical device industry study. Meeting discussions revolved around five topic areas: capital acquisition; collaboration and technology transfer; training and personnel; public policy; and marketing. It was observed during these follow-up meetings that the I-91 Corridor has a medical device industry presence, but no strategy. The comments and recommendations outlined below suggest strategies for realizing the region's medical device industry potential.

In certain U.S. metropolitan areas the medical device industry is experiencing strong growth. Industry enclaves like Boston and Minneapolis actively support the medical device industry in their area. Investigations into the mechanisms, methods and incentives that these areas employ to support the medical device industry would benefit the development of an I-91 Corridor medical device industry growth strategy.

In the I-91 Corridor more than 300 businesses are directly involved in the production of medical devices. A regional effort to support existing firms would generate valuable industry testimonials and foster a reputation that the I-91 Corridor is a great place for medical device companies. However, in order to effectively support them, much more needs to be learned about these companies.

It is clear the region's precision manufacturing base, related to a history of serving the aerospace industry, is its most salient medical device manufacturing asset. Universities and hospitals are also important contributors, but in an increasingly competitive industry it is important to identify a unique regional strength. Tight tolerance, high-precision manufacturing of metals, plastics and electronics is the I-91 Corridor's unique strength.

The segments of the region's medical device industry, including manufacturers, researchers, engineers and supporting organizations, need to be more effectively coordinated. To "connect the dots," a regional medical device industry directory of firms and related suppliers was proposed. Such a directory would serve as a tool to raise the I-91 Corridor's medical device industry profile and to encourage communication among firms, organizations and individuals involved in the design, development and production of medical devices.

Connections between I-91 corridor medical device businesses and the higher education system need to be strengthened. The need for a "point person" or "convener" was stressed during the follow-up meetings. Someone or some entity needs to connect researchers with the "end users" of the technologies they are developing. Furthermore, there is a need to coordinate educational and training programs that meet the medical device industry's workforce needs.

Despite New England's recognition as an area of medical device industry activity, elected officials in the I-91 Corridor know little about the industry. An effort should be made to educate state and local government officials about the medical device industry and its economic development implications. The region's medical device industry would benefit from government

support in the areas of marketing, economic incentives, reduction of regulatory hurdles and facilitation of industry-higher education partnerships.

Whatever strategies are ultimately adopted to support the I-91 Corridor's medical device industry, a coordinated, region-wide effort will be required to ensure success. A regional medical device industry reputation cannot be forced upon the region; it must be developed methodically. The campaign to aggressively market the region's medical device industry should not precede the definition of goals and strategies. Finally, the strategic plan to foster growth of the I-91 Corridor's medical device industry should be clear, concise and designed to produce measurable results.