



Two Plus Two Equals More

South Carolina is landing more jobs and more credibility as a transportation industry cluster, thanks in part to an Upstate automotive research center.

No pun intended, but Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research (CU-ICAR) on I-85 near Greenville is on a roll — just do the math. In recent months, the center won *two* research-park accolades and *two* key transportation-sector investments. One of these, from Colorado-based **Proterra Inc.**, will generate more than 1,300 new jobs. The company announced plans in February to build a state-of-the-art research and development and manufacturing facility where it will develop and assemble “cleantech” drive and energy storage systems for heavy-duty vehicles.

Among other products, Proterra makes the BE-35 fast-charge battery-electric transit bus, which has been tested at the Federal Transit Administration’s Altoona Center as achieving between 17 and 21 miles per gallon (diesel equivalent), a roughly 500-percent improvement over conventional diesel buses. Proterra’s first

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vehicle, a battery-dominant fuel cell hybrid transit bus funded by the FTA, is in service in Columbia, S. C.

“After a nationwide search involving some 30 states, we selected Greenville, South Carolina, as a result of the state’s numerous benefits in terms of work force capabilities and research and development support,” said Jeff Granato, Proterra’s CEO, at the February 4 announcement. The company plans to invest US\$68 million and create more than 1,300 new jobs over the next seven years in Greenville County. The company will hire a variety of skilled workers to support functions including mechanical assembly, warehouse, logistics, managerial, engineering and quality assurance.

Also in February, **Sage Automotive Interiors**, which makes automotive bodycloth for OEMs, announced it would locate its headquarters at CU-ICAR in

one of the center’s several new buildings under development. A \$3-million U.S. Dept. of Commerce grant is helping to finance a new, 60,000-sq.-ft. (5,600-sq.-m.) multi-tenant building with office and lab space, 60 percent of which is already spoken for by Sage Automotive, which will occupy one floor, and others.

Sage, a portfolio company of South Carolina based investment firm Azalea Capital, followed up that news with an April 13 announcement that it would invest \$10 million and create 80 new jobs over the next five years at its manufacturing facility in the nearby Greenville County community of Gayley. Four hundred of the company’s 1,000 worldwide associates are employed in Greenville County.

The Right Stuff

In noting the Upstate’s strong technology and innovation resources as contributing factors in the company’s investment decision in Gayley, Sage CEO Dirk Pieper cited the support and assistance of the Greenville Area Development Corp., Clemson University and CU-ICAR, where, in addition to Proterra’s new facility, **American Titanium** also will begin construction on its R&D center (see the South Carolina Spotlight in the May 2009 issue) on site this year.

“We are way ahead of where I thought we might be at this time,” says Robert Geolas, CU-ICAR’s executive director. Recognition from science park authorities in 2009 didn’t hurt. The Association of University Research Parks named CU-ICAR its 2009 Emerging Research/Science Park. And the National Academy of Sciences, in a statement to the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science

The Ecoliner city bus is a zero-emissions vehicle under development by Proterra, Inc., and under consideration for use by dozens of U.S. cities. The company is establishing an R&D and manufacturing center at Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research, near Greenville.



Photo courtesy of Proterra

