



Stennis Space Center, Mississippi

Nov. 6, 2009



# Ready for lift off

Shuttle engine foreground, A-3 test stand background. Photo courtesy of NASA

*It's been a science and technology hotspot for 40 years, but Stennis Space Center's designation as a Project Ready technology park may propel the NASA site into a new stage as an economic engine...*

**I**t's hard to picture a more potent list of characteristics: Hundreds of scientists and technicians working in fields as varied as rocket propulsion, geospatial technologies and underwater research; universities from two states; workers for some of the biggest names

in the aerospace industry; one of the world's largest supercomputers; one of the largest concentrations of oceanographers in the world; tight security; and room to grow.

And now a Project Ready designation. NASA's sprawling John C. Stennis Space Center on Nov. 6 is scheduled to

receive formal designation as a Project Ready site. It's the fifth location to receive the Mississippi Power designation, but the first in the category "technology park," the first federal facility, and both the oldest and by far the largest park to receive certification.

"Since Hurricane Katrina, we have seen a 10 percent growth in our center's work force in support of NASA, other government agencies, and private technology-based companies," Stennis Director Gene Goldman said. "We feel that our future is bright in South

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Mississippi, and we hope this certification will reassure those looking at our center.”

The Project Ready designation is official notice that the 14,000-acre SSC Technology Park is “shovel-ready.” The designation comes at a time when Stennis Space Center and the surrounding region seem poised to enter a new era of economic development. A series of initiatives, from the Gulf Coast’s bid to build aerial tankers to development of an advanced manufacturing park in New Orleans, along with a push by four states for wider recognition of their aerospace activities, are bound to put a spotlight on this region. And that’s likely to benefit SSC and Hancock County.

“The key components necessary for development to occur are infrastructure, utilities, transportation, and facilities,” said John W. “Jack” Zink, executive director of the Hancock County Development Commission, formerly the Port & Harbor Commission. “SSC Technology Park, with its Project Ready designation, sends a clear signal to industries and high-technology companies that we have a prepared team and environment to support their new location decision.”

He thinks the Project Ready designation will shine a light on SSC and Hancock County.

Charlie Beasley, president of the Mississippi Enterprise for Technology, an incubator and technology transfer

office at SSC, thinks this could help SSC reach new heights.

“Stennis Space Center is certainly a jewel in the Gulf South region as an economic engine for the communities and a strategic innovator for our country. Stennis is a strong national asset whose value has undoubtedly not reached its pinnacle yet,” he said.

### Project Ready

Established in 2008, the Project Ready program is designed to prepare sites for development, including manufacturing, warehouse/distribution and high technology. The idea is to complete the long preparatory work in advance and wind up with sites “shovel-ready” when suitors call.

What distinguishes Project Ready from many other site certification programs is it utilizes a third party to set guidelines and determine when a site is ready. Under a three-year contract, McCallum Sweeney, a site selection consulting firm from Greenville, S.C., and Waggoner Engineering Inc., of Jackson, Miss., work with economic development agencies to identify land for development, analyze suitability, propose layout, determine property ownership and costs and provide an engineering estimate of development costs and schedule. It’s made possible through the Mississippi Power Economic Development Trust.

“Across the country, we’re seeing that certified sites are a proven advantage to

## Story at a glance

14,000-acre Stennis Space Center wins Project Ready certification

3,900 acres of developable land

Served by two interstates

Close to two commercial, one general aviation airports

Access to water, rail transportation

Multi-disciplinary scientific/technical expertise

Five universities, one community college

Rocket system, satellite subsystem assembly on site

Houses one of the largest supercomputers

Hosts national data centers

Home of Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command

Lockheed-Martin, Pratt & Whitney and Rolls-Royce among tenants



lure industry,” said Arnie Williams, Mississippi Power economic development director. “We have seen how certified sites have brought major projects to other communities, and how great an impact they have on the regional economy. We want Stennis Space Center to see its share of this kind of growth.”

Ron Magee, who coordinated the Project Ready designation, said the NASA center has a lot to offer operations that decide to locate at the park.

“Agencies and industries interested in Stennis have the ability to access laboratory services, shop support, medical services and a variety of employee amenities,” said Magee. City and community services include banks,

post office and wellness and daycare facilities.

**The multi-tenant facility**

Stennis Space Center dates back to the 1960s when it was created to test rocket engines for NASA. Chosen because the site was rural and had water access, one of the most notable characteristics is the 125,000-acre acoustic buffer zone that surrounds 14,000-acre SSC.

SSC was used to test Saturn V rockets for the Apollo program and in 1975 started testing Space Shuttle main engines. But over the years the mission expanded and other federal agencies were invited to set up operations.

That decision to open up SSC to other agencies may have been one of the most significant changes to occur at the NASA center. It expanded the center into a multi-disciplinary, multi-tenant facility.

SSC today has an economic impact of \$840 million on a two-state, 50-mile radius. It has more than 30 resident agencies and over 5,000 employees engaged in a host of activities. The largest tenant is the Navy, which operates its oceanographic research community from SSC. It's also the location of the National Data Buoy Center, the 500-employee NASA Shared Services Center, large data centers, geospatial and earth sciences activities and several university cooperative activities, including the Northern Gulf Institute and Center of Higher Learning, which runs a state-of-the-art visualization center.

It's also where Lockheed Martin builds satellite components, Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne assembles RS-68



Photo courtesy of NASA

The B test stand at SSC, used for Delta IV rocket engine testing.

and J-2X rockets and Rolls-Royce tests commercial jet engines. With all that activity, SSC's original purpose remains. It's where NASA will test the next generation of rockets that will return astronauts to the moon and beyond.

The SSC Technology Park is designed to attract new government and private entities compatible with the adjoining land use. NASA identified 3,900 acres as available for green field development or occupancy of available building space. The idea is to provide an environment for testing, research, assembly and data operations, as well as supporting administrative functions of government agencies or private companies that are involved in creating

technologically advanced products and services.

The park has a lot to offer. It's served by Interstate 10, about two miles from SSC, and Interstate 59, some six miles away. There are over 100 miles of roads within the space center.

The closest commercial airports are Gulfport/Biloxi International airport, 40 miles to the east, and Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, about 60 miles to the southwest.

The closest ports are Mississippi State Port in Gulfport, about 65 miles away, the Port of New Orleans, about 50 miles away, and Port Bienville, about 15 miles away in Pearlington.

SSC's strength is compounded by being adjacent to the 580-acre Stennis International Airport, a general aviation airport with an 8,500-foot runway, three miles away in Kiln. That airport is adjacent to a 100-acre airpark that's home to the Joint Airborne Lidar Bathymetry Technical Center of Expertise and Optech International,

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**Other Project Ready sites**

| Site                                    | Location   | Park category      | Acres | Date         |
|---|------------|--------------------|-------|--------------|
| Jackson County Aviation Technology Park | Moss Point | Industrial         | 300   | August 2009  |
| Howard Technology Park                  | Ellisville | Industrial         | 350   | October 2008 |
| Key Brothers Aviation Site              | Meridian   | General industrial | 130   | March 2009   |
| George County Industrial Park-Phase II  | Lucedale   | Large industrial   | 400   | March 2009   |

## Stennis Space Center tenants

### Federal

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Defense
- Department of Energy
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of the Interior
- Environmental Protection Agency

### States

- Mississippi
- Louisiana

### Education

- Center of Higher Learning

- Mississippi State University
- University of New Orleans
- University of Mississippi
- University of Southern Mississippi
- Pearl River Community College

### Major contractors

- Applied Geo Technologies Inc.
- Computer Sciences Corp.
- Jacobs Technology Inc.
- Lockheed Martin Space Operations
- Pratt & Whitney Rocketdyne Inc.
- Rolls-Royce North America
- Science Applications International Corp.
- Science Systems and Applications Inc.

both specializing in geospatial technologies.

On the southern portion of SSC just south of I-10 work is underway to create the Infinity science center on nearly 200 acres of NASA land near the Interstate 10 Welcome Center. When finished, it will help visitors understand the critical science and technology work done at SSC.

### Hancock County

For Hancock County, Stennis Space Center is just one of three areas that have become economic development magnets. When combined with the other two areas - Stennis International Airport/Airpark and Port Bienville Industrial Park - the three provide the county with locations for activities ranging from aerospace to advanced materials and more.

The timing of the Project Ready designation may be about as good as it gets. Hancock County is in a state that's targeted geospatial, aerospace and advanced materials. Over the years the state has managed to attract a large number of geospatial technology companies, many of them opting to locate at SSC or the surrounding area.

Mississippi has also been highly successful at attracting aerospace companies. It's home to American Eurocopter, owned by EADS North

America, which builds Lakota light utility helicopters for the military. In 2007, GE Aviation picked Mississippi for the 200,000 square foot plant to build composite parts for the 787 engine.

In addition, Hancock County is a member of the Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance for Economic Development, which has targeted among other fields aerospace, advanced materials and geospatial technologies.

The aerospace activity in South Mississippi is significant. It includes Keesler Air Force Base, a premier Air Force technical training center and home to a Reserve wing, Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport, home of a major Air National Guard combat training center and helicopter repair depot, and the Jackson County Aviation Technology Park, where unmanned aerial systems are built.

Hancock County, for its part, brings to the table the propulsion and geospatial activities at SSC and the surrounding area, as well as the advanced materials work at Port Bienville Industrial Park and geospatial work at Stennis International Airport and SSC.

Furthermore, Hancock County is a vital part of a Gulf Coast aerospace corridor that includes portions of four states sharing Interstate 10. That region

has activities ranging from weapons development at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., to human-machine interface research in Pensacola, Fla. Portions of the spacecraft for the Constellation Program will be built in east New Orleans, where plans are in the works to turn 800 acres around Michoud Assembly Facility into an advanced manufacturing park. The Gulf Coast corridor is scheduled to become home of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Training Center and could become the location where EADS and Northrop Grumman build tankers for the Air Force. All of that regional activity can work to Hancock County's favor.

In recent years economic development groups have worked together to promote the region. In its most recent iteration, the governors of Mississippi and Alabama announced formation of a four-state "Aerospace Alliance" that includes Louisiana and Florida. It's designed to elevate the profile of the region as a location for aerospace activities.

Now that SSC has Project Ready certification, work will begin with the Mississippi Development Authority and local economic development groups to market SSC with the new Project Ready Technology Park certification.

It's ready for lift off.

- David Tortorano