IMPACT OF ETHNIC MINORITY RETAILERS ON URBAN REVITALIZATION EFFORTS:

THE BUFORD CORRIDOR CASE

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Overview

This paper presents the results of a large-scale study that examines the impact of ethnic minority retailers on urban revitalization with a focus on the nature and consumer market of these businesses. The study focuses on the Buford Highway Corridor, a blue-collar immigrant community on the eastern edge of Atlanta. The phenomenal transformation of the so-called Buford Corridor from a once-retail district to a bustling ethnic business enclave has gained attention from public policy makers, academics and business leaders alike.

The literature to date suggests that in theory, retail and ethnic minority businesses play a critical role in the growth of urban areas. What is lacking in this body of literature is specific evidence as to *what extent* and *how* the ethnic minority retail trade contributes to this development. The study examines this issue by investigating the structure, operations and markets of the ethnic minority retailers in the Buford Corridor as a unique case in point.

The guiding premise of the study is that *the Buford Corridor miracle could not have happened without the massive contribution of*

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its vibrant and unique retail trade. Given that premise, the main research objective is to provide an in-depth case analysis of the contribution of the largely ethnic minority retail trade to the successful development of the Buford Corridor by using both longitudinal and cross-sectional data. Specifically, we examined:

1) the demographic and performance profile of the existing ethnic retail community along the Buford Corridor;
2) the opinions of the three major constituents (retailers, consumers and policy makers/community leaders) regarding the perceived performance and contribution of the retail trade to the development of the district;
3) the landscape of the economic activity in relation to the number, types and performance levels of the ethnic retail outlets established in the area;
4) the opinions of the three major constituents on how to continue and enhance the growth in the district.

■ Introduction

Urban development, which broadly entails legislative and regulatory strategies that affect the amount, timing, location and character of development, is increasing in importance as an issue related to retailing. In the retailing literature, retail-driven growth has become an important topic for its managerial and policy implications. Among the general retail classification, one type of retailer, namely, the ethnic minority retailer, has become increasingly prominent in both North America and Europe (Barret, Jones and McEnvoy, 1996). Today, it is widely accepted that the ethnic minority business is a standard feature of the advanced urban economies (Blaschke and Ersoz, 1990). Given that, the question then becomes what impact the retail trade, in general, and ethnic retailing, in specific, have on the economies (usually urban) and neighborhoods in which they are located (Barret Jones and McEnvoy, 1996). Academic researchers have tried to address this question from a number of different perspectives including economic, social and cultural. For example, one potential impact is the "enhanced social solidarity of the cultural minority status" (Light, 1984), which then leads to ethnic commercial strength and the potential for accumulating greater strength over time. In the case of ethnic retailers, their existence stimulates the emergence of ethnic wholesalers, ancillary services and self-employed professionals. This is facilitated through the inter-generational transfer of expertise and formation of in-group networks of trade-information exchange. Ethnic retailers, with their ability to focus on distinct needs of certain ethnic segments, as well as their appeal as exotic outlets, in time expand their market share and add significantly to the economic vitality of their neighborhoods.

Portes and his followers (Portes, 1981; Portes and Bach, 1985) expand the argument in a different direction arguing that the contribution of the ethnic minority businesses is essentially through the idea of an ethnic enclave, which then affects the labor market and employment in an area. According to Portes (1981) "enclaves consist of immigrant groups who concentrate in a specific spatial location and organize a variety of enterprises servicing their own ethnic market and/or the general population" (pp. 290-91). This concentration in a specific area then promotes in-group solidarity, which manifests itself in the use of co-ethnic suppliers, informal channels of capital sourcing and privileged access to markets and supply of labor (Wilson and Portes, 1980). In time, the resulting network of diverse ethnic businesses begins to attract external business such that the enclave functions as an "export" base for tapping into the purchasing power of the mainstream market (Bailey and Waldinger, 1991). For example, as in the case of the Buford Corridor, the enclave begins to attract non-ethnic customers who are in search of unique products and services.

This conceptualization seems appropriate for explaining the revitalization process that took place in Buford Corridor in the past couple of decades. While the Corridor fulfils the requirements of an enclave, unlike most enclaves it is not a single-ethnicity district, but a multi-ethnic one. More interestingly, the Corridor is not as segregated as other similar districts such as the Little Italy, Chinatown or Little Cuba of other culturally diverse cities. On the contrary, Vietnamese, Hispanic, Korean and Chinese outlets share the same strip mall complexes along the Buford Corridor. For example, the city's largest Latino travel and insurance agency is located in the "Asian Mall," while the Mexican-owned International Ballroom holds an "Asia" night once a week, and many of the Asian restaurants hire Hispanic workers. Clearly, this multi-ethnic twist on the old, one-ethnicity enclave concept has resulted in a more powerful, dynamic and exciting development in the case of the Buford Corridor.

In addition to its within-enclave dynamism, the impact of Buford's multi-ethnic business has now reached beyond its borders to tap into the mainstream economy within the greater metro Atlanta. Unlike the original ethnic enclaves in which the businesses were heavily dependent on co-ethnic communities, the Buford enclave is able and willing to trade with the mainstream population. Examples of these new niches are the low-order retail trades, particularly in the food, service and imported goods industries. The outreach of the Buford enclave is consistent with empirical findings in Britain, for example, where ethnic retailers have tapped into the restaurant trade, promoting and exploiting a demand for "exotic" cuisine (Parker, 1994), for open-all-hours convenience stores (Rafiq, 1990) and for unique imported goods and apparel (Phizacklea, 1990).

The literature presented above suggests that, in theory, the retail industry in general and ethnic minority businesses in particular play a critical role in the growth of urban areas. What is lacking in this body of literature is specific evidence as to what extent and how the ethnic minority retail trade contributes to this development. The present paper aims to study this issue by examining the structure, operations and performance of the ethnic minority retailers in the Buford Corridor as a unique case in point.

■ Method

The method involved collection of both secondary and primary data. The secondary data were collected by compiling information from a number of online and print sources. The primary data collection was done with three different groups: retailers, consumers and policy makers/community leaders. Retailers and consumers were tapped with surveys while the information from the last group was obtained via personal interviews. For retailers, the original survey in English was translated by a national agency specializing in technical translations into the languages of the major four ethnic groups: namely Hispanic, Vietnamese, Chinese and Korean. Two different lists were purchased and merged to develop the population universe for each of the four ethnic minority retailers on the Corridor. Every third name on the list from each group's list was used to generate the initial sample. A formal introductory letter was sent to each business informing them about the upcoming interviewing process and seeking their cooperation. Given the importance of language and trust in securing retailer cooperation, interviewers were selected from each of the ethnic groups. In light of the slight language variations among different groups of Hispanics, recruitment of flexible interviewees who are sensitive to this issue was deemed important. Interview protocols and procedures were developed and provided to the interviewers. Retailer interviews lasted one month. The interviewers went from door to door, introduced themselves in the native language, and asked for cooperation. At the termination of each interview, they presented the respondent with a gift bag which contained a high quality Atlanta baseball cap, a DeKalb Chamber of Commerce coffee mug and a few brochures from the Chamber introducing their hotlines and different programs. In the end, all the initial quotas were reached, and in three cases (Vietnamese, Korean and Hispanic with 30, 25 and 30 completed interviews, respectively) they even exceeded the target sample size.

Consumer interviews were held exclusively in Plaza Fiesta, the largest mall on the Corridor anchored by Marshall's and Burlington. Given the multiple ethnicities, it was deemed impossible to get any meaningful cell sizes with a sample size of 100. Hence, by choosing Plaza Fiesta as the locale for data collection, we tried to maximize representation from a single group, the Hispanics. Despite that, a number of other ethnicities were still represented in the sample. For the same reason, we also increased the sample size to 130. With very strong support from the mall management, the data collection began at the end of January and lasted for a month. In order to attract respondent attention and secure cooperation, a professionally designed stand was created, with the BCP (Buford Corridor Project) emblem on it. The names of the sponsoring organizations (DeKalb Chamber, ICSC and Georgia State University) were also featured on the stand as well as the logo "one place . . . many cultures." The stand also communicated to the public that each respondent would receive a $3 honorarium in return for their participation. The interviewers, who consisted of two Spanish-speaking Anglos and up to four native South Americans, donned badges around their necks. These badges featured their names as well as the logo on the stand. Data were collected during weekdays and weekends, and at different times of the day to capture the maximum variety among consumers.

The last group of interviews was conducted by the project director, and were one-on-one sessions, lasting anywhere from 45 minutes to two hours. Upon the recommendation of the Chamber, the scope of the interviewees was expanded from city officials only to include other "stakeholders" of the Corridor. The initial listing from the Chamber was used as the starting point, and the sample grew with each interviewer identifying new candidates. The respondents ranged from the Mayor of Chamblee, to City Council members, from Chamber members, developers and public interest group leaders to ethnic community leaders. The interviews were informal, conducted with open-ended questions, and were extremely insightful in shedding light on some issues on which no published information is available.

■ Secondary Data Findings

Background

The Buford Corridor section of North DeKalb County continues to emerge as a major center of population and growth for recent immigrants in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. Fueling this growth is the retail trade, which is an attraction for shoppers, workers and their suppliers. The ethnic flavor of the Buford Corridor retail trade is perhaps its most prominent feature. Since the 1990s, ethnic-oriented shopping centers with names such as "Koreatown," "Asian Square" and "China Town" have opened in the area. In addition, numerous existing retailers have repositioned their stores and merchandise as well as services to cater to the growing ethnic market. As a result, the Buford Corridor today showcases Georgia's greatest concentration of ethnically diverse restaurants, grocery stores, dry goods and service businesses.

The growth in the retail trade on Buford Corridor, and the Atlanta region in general, has been due to the increasing demand from the substantial population growth. The international population has been showing a remarkable climb. The latest statistics released by the University of Georgia, Center for Economic Development indicate that Georgia has the fastest growing Hispanic market and second fastest growing Asian-American market in the nation (*Atlanta Journal and Constitution,* 2002).

Housing most of the eight-mile Buford Highway Corridor, DeKalb County is also the county that has experienced the largest growth in its international population. With the increasing number of immigrants, the Buford Corridor, the once-fading rental district, continues to be a bustling ethnic work, residential and entertainment enclave. As we refer to the Buford Corridor as an "enclave," we need to note an important distinction: while the Corridor fulfills the requirements of a typical enclave, unlike most others, it is not a single-ethnicity district but a multi-ethnic one. Vietnamese, Hispanic, Korean, Chinese and many other minority businesses share the same strip mall complexes along the Corridor. This unique characteristic has a number of economic and social development implications for the area.

Population Trends and Market Characteristics

DeKalb County's moderate population growth in the 1980s (average annual change of 1.2%) almost doubled its speed in the 1990's with an average annual change of 2.2% for the period between 1990 and 2000. The ethnic background of the population of DeKalb County changed significantly between 1980 and 2000. The population change among the top four immigrant groups in DeKalb County for this period is significant. The number of Hispanics exploded (512% and 236%, respectively, between 1980 and 1990 and 1990 and 2000) in this period. During 1980-1990, the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese populations grew 178%, 170%, and 465%, respectively. The steep climb continued for all of the four ethnicities in the 1990's with the exception of Koreans who posted a negative growth between 1990 and 2000. Trend changes in the ethnic heritage of DeKalb residents suggest a continued increase in the percentage of residents in each group, with the Hispanic and Vietnamese showing the steepest increases.

Business-Market Retail Analysis

Retailing on the Buford Corridor contributes to the area in a number of significant ways. It (1) provides an economic draw, (2) serves as a major contributor to the identity of the Corridor and (3) holds potential for continued growth. Traditionally, retail in the area used to serve the markets within a two-to-three mile radius. However, as the primary data collected from consumers and retailers show, today the drawing power of the area appeals to a much broader market. The new ethnic character of the area's retail is a hopeful indicator that, in time, the Buford Corridor can become one of the major tourist attractions of the MSA. The retail trade along with total establishments in DeKalb County grew 37.3% between 1982 and 1997. Focusing on the minority-owned businesses in DeKalb County, **Exhibit 1** shows a number of interesting statistics. First,

EXHIBIT 1. DEKALB COUNTY ANNUAL BUSINESS PROFILE

	1987	1997	Percent Change 1987–1997
Minority businesses with paid employees	369	2,797	658
Minority businesses number of employees	1,116	13,440	1,062
Minority business payroll	$11,580,000	$267,891,000	2,213
Minority business sales and receipts	$90,701,000	$1,460,387,000	1,510

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

the number of enterprises with paid employees exploded in the decade between 1987 and 1997 (658% growth) as did their employment capacity (1062%), business payroll (2213%) and sales and receipts (1510%). These statistics not only show the economic contribution of the minority enterprises to the county development but also indicate the amazing speed with which such impact has occurred.

With respect to types of retail establishments that operate along the Corridor, it is a mixture of community centers, neighborhood centers and strip centers as well as freestanding owner-occupied buildings. In addition to large shopping centers such as the Pinetree Plaza (199,000 sq. ft.) and Asian Square Center (100,000 sq. ft.), other mid-sized retail centers such as Chinatown, Korean Town, Northwoods Plaza and Buford Highway Flea Market are located along the Corridor. Perhaps the most innovative and unique addition to the landscape is the 350,000 sq. ft. Plaza Fiesta, which has been positioned successfully since 2000 as a commerce and entertainment complex aimed to be a cultural center for the Latino community.

Restaurants and food-grocery stores make up the largest category along the Corridor, followed by music-video, clothing, pharmacy-drug-cosmetic, entertainment, auto parts-services and jewelry, plus a whole range of personal, repair, travel, financial and other services such as pawn, cleaning-laundry, printing, money transfer, photography, florists and so forth.

The location of the Corridor is one of its major assets, since the area offers ready access to I-285 (Atlanta's Perimeter highway) and I-85, as well as to two major arterial roadways, namely Clairmont and Buford Highway. In addition, two Marta commuter railway stations are located within the Corridor boundaries. In sum, the Corridor is well-situated for excellent regional access. Commuter rail access is likely to have a positive impact for residential development and employment opportunities.

■ Primary Data Results

Retailer Survey Results

Retailers from the four major ethnic groups located on Buford Highway were interviewed about a number of issues. Open-ended as well as scale items were used to probe a variety of issues.

Exhibit 2 shows the types of retail businesses that are represented in the survey. Consistent with the Buford Corridor's character, restaurants, cafés and bakeries are the leading category, followed by clothing stores and gift stores and grocery-food outlets. The respondents were also questioned about whether they had multiple businesses, but since only a negligible number (less than 5%) reported a second business, it was not deemed important enough to report here.

The retailers surveyed are mostly new businesses with 60% being five years or younger and about 43% being two years or younger. Only about 10% of the businesses surveyed are more than 10 years old. These

EXHIBIT 2. MAJOR TYPES OF RETAIL BUSINESS SURVEYED

Type	Percent
Restaurant/café/bakery	27.0
Clothing	7.6
Crafts/gifts	7.6
Grocery	6.7
Pharmacy/herbal	4.8
Hair/nail salon	4.8
Financial/tax/insurance	5.7
Bookstore	3.8
Jewelry	3.8
Auto parts/repair	2.9
Electronics	2.9
Entertainment (arcades, etc.)	2.9
Music/media	1.9
Other	

Source: Primary Data

are consistent with the secondary data findings, which indicate a heightened ethnic minority activity in DeKalb County in the past decade. Interestingly, crossing the age data with ethnicity showed that the majority of the young (one to four years) retailers were predominantly Hispanic, while Korean retailers tended to be the older businesses. This is an interesting finding, which sheds light on some of the future expansion plans indicated by the Korean businesses. The rate of ownership of the retail property, as expected, is fairly small (90% renting vs. 9.5% owning).

Exhibit 3 presents the retailers' perceptions of their customers' ethnicity. Keeping in mind that these numbers represent estimates by retail-

EXHIBIT 3. RETAILERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CUSTOMERS' ETHNICITY

Retailers	Chinese	Korean	Vietnamese	Hispanic	Other/ Asian
Chinese	64%	6%	14%	13%	16%
Korean	6	83	3	4	4
Vietnamese	7	3	69	4	17
Hispanic	2	1	1	8	11
Other/Asian	37	11	16	8	27
Unidentified Ethnicity	10	—	58	25	8
TOTAL (weighted)*	13%	23%	25%	29%	13%

*Totals are averages of the cells weighted by the number of retailers in test cell.
Source: Primary Data Path

ers rather than factual statistics, we see some cross-ethnic shopping. As expected, 64% of Chinese retailers' customers are Chinese, 83% of Korean retailers' Korean, 69% of Vietnamese retailers' Vietnamese and 86% of the Hispanic retailers' customers are Hispanic. However, we see some cross-shopping activity, particularly among the Asian communities. (Later, we will compare this finding with the cross-shopping of retailers among *suppliers* of different ethnicities.)

In the retailers' opinion, the top reason why consumers are attracted to the Corridor is the variety of products and services they can find there, meaning special goods and services from their native countries (27%). Service quality (16%) and friendly, knowledgeable employees from the native countries (11%) with whom no language barrier exists (5%), as well as the convenient and accessible location (13%), are all important draws for consumers. A breakdown of these results reveals interesting insights. While a majority of the retailers who ranked location as a major customer attraction are Koreans (93%), product-service variety is rated most important by Hispanics (46%), service quality by the Vietnamese (53%), and low prices by the Chinese (46%).

The number one reason (61% of responses) for locating on the Corridor is proximity to the target market—whatever ethnic group this might be. The second reason retailers articulated (23%) is the convenient and accessible location, which is important not only for attracting customers but also for facilitating employee access. Low-cost business operation (6%) and high commercial activity (4%), which is alternatively referred to as "a bustling commercial center for minority communities" or "a fast developing area," are also among the stated reasons for locating on the Corridor.

The breakdown of these responses is also insightful in that three of the Asian groups have identified location as the most important reason (Vietnamese 26%, Chinese 21% and other Asians 35%) while the Koreans (33%) and Hispanics (33%) have pointed out customer proximity as their first reason for choosing the Buford Corridor. Interestingly, two shopping malls, Korea Town and Plaza Fiesta, were also mentioned by some retailers as reason for being located on the Corridor.

Retailers' top three perceived advantages of the Corridor are consistent with their reasons for locating there. Location is mentioned by 40% of respondents, proximity to market by 31% and high commercial activity by 4%. Again, crossing these results with ethnicity, we see that location is the top perceived advantage for all Asian groups (Vietnamese 17%, Korean 41%, Chinese 12% and other Asians 17%) while customer proximity is highly touted by the Hispanics (58%).

The top disadvantages of the Corridor as perceived by retailers are lack of security (18%) and limited parking (18%), followed by extremely high inter-ethnic business competition (10%) and the predominantly low-income clientele. Analyzing the data further by ethnicity, we also see that security is the predominant concern of three Asian groups (Vietnamese 37%, Koreans 42% and other Asians 16%) while limited parking is mainly a disadvantage perceived by the Vietnamese retailers. Increasing competition within ethnic retailers is worrisome for the Koreans (30%), Chinese (30%) and Hispanics (40%). One-third of the retailers have only one to three suppliers and about 40% have between four and 10 suppliers. These numbers are not surprising given the small size and scope of these retailers. Only two retailers (the large supermarkets) have indicated that they have over 90 suppliers.

The more interesting results emerge when we look at the cross fertilization between retailers and suppliers from different ethnicities. Out of all the retailers, 36% use Chinese suppliers, 33% use Anglos, 25% use Koreans, 20% use Vietnamese and 20% use Hispanics. About 13% of all the respondents say they procured more than 80% from the Chinese suppliers while only 7% procured the same amount from the Hispanic suppliers, 13% from the Anglos and 9% from the Vietnamese. An impressive 15% say they procured over 95% from Korean suppliers. **Exhibit 4** shows that clearly the Chinese suppliers are the most preferred with

EXHIBIT 4. RETAILERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SUPPLIERS' ETHNICITY

Retailers	Chinese	Korean	Vietnamese	Hispanic	Anglo	Other/ Asian
Chinese	7%	1%	5%	—	—	22%
Korean	4	66	—	—	—	22
Vietnamese	16	4	37	2	2	—
Hispanic	18	1	1	81	38	29
Other/Asian	37	4	—	—	33	25
Unidentified Ethnicity	19	—	10	—	50	8
TOTAL (weighted)*	19%	17%	11%	11%	17%	16%

*Totals are averages of the cells weighted by the number of retailers in test cell
Source: Primary Data

19% of the purchases coming from them, followed by Korean and Anglo suppliers (17% each) and Vietnamese and Latinos (11% each). With respect to relations with suppliers, 51% of the respondents indicated having "very good" relationships, 42% "good," and only 7% "poor."

The most frequently mentioned type of supplier support is credit

(16%) followed by payment in cash (10%), discounts-promotions (8%), cooperative advertising (8%) and delivery (7%). About 10% of the respondents said that they received none. Interestingly, both credit (65%) and payment in cash (90%) were mentioned exclusively by the Vietnamese among all the Asian respondents, while discounts-promotions were mentioned most frequently by the Hispanics (50%). With respect to involvement with the professional and social organizations in their ethnic community, only a meager 8% indicated such involvement. Consistent with these results, only 30% said they considered such involvement to be helpful in their businesses.

With respect to employment statistics, as expected, the majority (70% of the retailers surveyed) have four or fewer full-time employees, 20% reporting five to 10 full-timers and only 4% with more than 11 full-time workers. Similarly, the number of part-time workers is also small, with 44% reporting four or fewer part-time workers.

About half of the retailers surveyed said that they hire their relatives as employees (50.5%) a common practice among minority enterprises. Of these, over 35% have their spouses working for them, 8% uncles or aunts and 5% report employing their kids in the business. Twenty-seven percent of the retailers have Spanish as their primary language, 24% Korean, 29% Vietnamese, 16% Chinese and 6% English. Sixty-three percent said their English is very fluent, 50% fluent, 34% not fluent and 4% not at all fluent.

Similarly, 28% reported Vietnam as their native country, 26% Mexico and other South American countries, 24% Korea, 9% China and 11% Other Asian. Fifteen percent of the retailers said they have been in the U.S. for only five years and less, 21% six to 10 years, 18% 11-15 years, 15% 16-20 years and 19% over 21 years. Clearly, over half of them (52%) have been in the U.S. for 10 or more years.

With respect to prior business, 27% of the retailers reported being in Services, 11% in Manufacturing (worker), 8% Clerical/Administrative and 9% in the Restaurant/Hospitality business. About 40% held their prior jobs for six years or less.

A good 62% of the retailers said they were very satisfied or satisfied with the current performance of their business, 20% reported being neither satisfied/nor unsatisfied, 11% were not satisfied and 2% were not at all satisfied.

As for the education profile of the respondents, the statistics reveal a fairly well-educated group with 58% having some college or more education. In addition, 42% of the respondents reported having some kind of training before opening their current business.

When inquired about their expansion plans, 20% said they plan to expand business in the next 12 months, and 16% in the next 24 months.

Of those who said they will expand, interestingly, 26% reported plans to open a new branch in the North Atlanta region. a smaller percentage to a new building on the Corridor and a few to start a new business in various areas such as wholesaling, real estate, gas station, travel and so forth.

Appendices 1-4 present the input from the retailers with respect to what they would like to see change on the Corridor. These data were very rich, but for the sake of brevity, the information has been summed up in the appendices. To summarize them, there is one which tops the list of all the four ethnic retailers: improving security and safety in the area. By that, they mean both reduction in crime as well as reduced traffic hazards and fatalities. Another frequent mention is improvement of the physical appearance and infrastructure, so that the Corridor can be a pleasant and interesting place not only for immigrants and metro Atlanta residents but also for tourists and visitors to the city. The need to advertise and promote the Corridor to outsiders was also mentioned often, as well as the necessity to open more business centers, malls and entertainment complexes. Education, not only for language fluency but also in entrepreneurship and business management skills, was mentioned by most retailers.

Consumer Survey Results

Consumers were intercepted at Plaza Fiesta, the biggest mall located on the Buford Corridor. After examining the demographic and geographic distribution of the area consumers, it was concluded that the population was too ethnically diverse to be represented with a sample of 100 consumers. Although we later increased the sample size to 130, the number of observations for each ethnic group would have been very small if the sample tried to include them all. Hence, the decision was made in favor of collecting data in a predominantly Hispanic mall in order to analyze one ethnic consumer group deeply instead of narrowly examining many. As such, the interviews were conducted for one month, weekdays and weekends at Plaza Fiesta, and at different times throughout the day in order to capture different consumer types.

The frequency of visits to the Buford Corridor is high. While 64% reported a frequency of one to three times a week, 10% said they come to the Corridor four to six times a week, and about 23% seven or more times per week. Only 3% reported a frequency of less than once a week. The reason for such a high number of visits is both logistical (a lot of customers live in or near the area) and social (the Corridor serves as an "epicenter" for people wishing to connect with their kin after work).

The reasons for coming to the Corridor were: 80% to shop, 36% to eat, 28% to pass time and 7% for work. The types of stores visited on these trips are reported as: 55% clothing stores, 9% grocery, 7% music/ media, 5% restaurants, 2% each entertainment and flea markets and other assorted store types.

The amount spent on a typical visit to the Corridor is as follows: about 12% spend $20 or less, 40% spend $21-$50, 32% spend $51-$100 and 16% spend more than $101. With the average spending per trip at $79.48, and given the frequency of visits, these numbers indicate a fairly high spending pattern on the Corridor.

When asked why they choose to patronize the stores on the Corridor, the consumers gave the following responses: 29% Convenient/Close Location, 17% Ethnic Environment/Ambiance, 15% Low Prices and 12% Variety of Stores and Services.

In response to which store qualities are most important to them, the consumers said Good Customer Service (36%) is the leading criterion, followed by Convenient Location (17%), Friendly Employees (16%) and Employees Who Speak Their Language (11%). It is very clear that the human service element offered in these shops is the dominant reason why customers choose to shop them.

Similarly, when probed about their satisfaction with each of these qualities in regard to the Corridor stores, 54% indicated being "very satisfied," 39% satisfied and only 6% not satisfied. With such high satisfaction levels, combined with the ability and desire to spend money, the Corridor stores clearly have a higher traffic and business potential.

Consistent with the high marks given to Location, 89% of the consumers find it easy to get to the Corridor. Most of them use their own cars for transport (76%); 24% rely on other modes including buses and 4% use taxis.

Exhibit 5 presents the quality ratings of different product and service categories. As shown, with the notable exception of furniture quality, all the categories such as food, clothing, entertainment and services are rated very good or good by over 50% of all consumers. Clothing and services are particularly rated high by an impressive number (about 80%).

The respondents were from a variety of countries, including South America, Europe, Asia and Africa. The highest percentage of consumers belonged to Mexico (41%), followed by the U.S (28%), and Other (5%). Of these, 60% indicated Spanish as their first language, followed by English (26%), and 12 other languages (including the Other category) comprised the languages of the remaining 14%. As expected, English was the most frequently mentioned second language by the respondents (26%).

Unlike the retailers, consumers indicated higher involvement levels

EXHIBIT 5. CONSUMERS' QUALITY RATINGS OF PRODUCT & SERVICES

Category	Rating	Percentage
Food	Very Good	38
	Good	39
	Poor	10
Clothing	Very Good	30
	Good	57
	Poor	12
Furniture	Very Good	11
	Good	39
	Poor	23
Entertainment	Very Good	25
	Good	36
	Poor	22
Services	Very Good	27
	Good	53
	Poor	9
Dining	Very Good	18
	Good	29
	Poor	12

Source: Primary Data

with their ethnic organizations (34% very involved or involved), and over half of them (57%) said they believed that such involvement can help with their social and professional lives.

With respect to demographics, 39% of the respondents were married with the following age distribution: 18 years and younger (5%), 18-34 years old (68%) and 35 years and older (27%). Sixty percent of the respondents were males.

Fifty-seven percent reported being employed full time, 20% part time and 23% were not employed. Most dominant employment categories were 34% in Sales/Secretarial Professional 28% in Services, 14% Construction work and the remainder in other professions.

As for annual income levels, 24% reported earning under $10,000, 20% between $15,000 and $20,000, 9% between $21,000 and $30,000, 8% between $31,000 and $40,000. Eight percent reported earning more than $40,000.

Although the survey sample consisted of consumers from 27 different zip codes, as expected, the most frequent ones were the Buford and DeKalb County codes (12% each from 30319 and 30345; 7% from 30329, 5% from 30341).

Finally, **Appendix 5** shows the most frequently mentioned changes consumers would like to see on the Corridor. Topping the list were security from crime and safety from speeding, high volume traffic. (This is consistent with the complaints from non-profit, civic organizations in the area, such as PEDS, which report an exceptionally high number of deaths from pedestrians trying to cross the seven-lane Buford Highway without many refuges, crossways or traffic lights.) Also highly mentioned was the need to clean the area (upgrading it, making it "classy" were other mentions), the need to add parks for families and kids, soccer and sport fields, better public transportation, more malls, theaters and other entertainment and more variety in stores. An interesting wish that occurred fairly frequently is the need for variety—not only in the types of stores (they would like more non-ethnic, mainstream stores to move in) but also in the types of customers (would like more non-Hispanics and non-Asians to shop there). Also mentioned often is the need for more friendly, culturally-sensitive and bilingual employees—specifically Marshall's and Burlington were mentioned frequently in this regard.

Interviews with Officials and Other Stakeholders

A series of personal interviews were conducted over a period of two-and-a-half months with people with a variety of affiliations. The only common thread among them was their deep interest and involvement in the Corridor and its future. The groundwork for these interviews was laid back in the Fall of 2001 when the project director contacted DeKalb Chamber of Commerce and the offices of the Mayors of the City of Chamblee and City of Doraville, all of which have a part of Buford Highway in their boundaries.

Appendix 6 shows only a small subset of the rich information from these interviews. To sum up some of these results: security and traffic once again emerged as the top concerns among this group's members. Pedestrian safety is vital, in the face of a community that not only has to walk (no insurance, no license, no funds—therefore no car) but also *wants* to walk since it is ingrained in their culture as a means of transportation and as a form of recreation. Depending on who was being interviewed (a citizens' activist group, a county official, a developer, an ethnic attorney, etc.), they had differing views as to how this could be resolved. Nevertheless, the necessity for sidewalks and crosswalks and refuges was voiced by all. Also voiced was the disappointment with the DOT's slow progress on this issue. Several interviewees commented on the difficulty of finding authorities to "own" the problem since the Corridor cuts across two cities, one county and is state owned. They also emphasized imposing zoning and other regulations to bring more order and aesthetics to the Corridor given its potential to become "another Soho" or "a real showcase of the multicultural world, not an Epcot" (Interview with Vince Riggio, RAM Development, 1/24/2002). The need for education was emphasized by this group almost as much as it was by the retailers. The need for all sorts of buildings, from office complexes to shopping centers and malls to mixed-use units, surfaced very frequently. The interviewees, in general, expressed their hope for the future given the history and amazing revitalization of the area. They were in total agreement in terms of the energy, drive and passion the immigrant community has brought to the area, but they also expressed the need to focus on this group and help them in their acculturation not only from a social vantage but also from a commercial success point of view.

■ Emerging Issues and Recommendations

The Buford Corridor is a miracle in revitalization. Once a crime-infested, vacant area, today it is a vibrant microcosm of the global village located in the heart of the one of the 10 top most livable cities in the U.S. To date, it has greatly enjoyed the entrepreneurial spirit of its ethnic minorities in the creation of many unique product and services retailing. However, the successful development of the area can be hampered by a number of obstacles if these are left unattended. The following issues and recommendations have emerged as a result of our secondary and primary research:

- Safety and security in the area is grossly inadequate. This concern has to be addressed as the first priority.
- Traffic is a major problem for pedestrian safety and is an inhibitor of the area's draw from non-ethnic markets.
- Increasing competition from other areas in Atlanta and the state might draw businesses and residents away or slow down migration into the Corridor.
- The authorities and residents alike need to realize the potential of the Corridor to become a magnet for not only new immigrants, but also mainstream markets and tourists, and invest resources in the area.
- An extensive and unique marketing program is needed to create an identity in the minds of Atlanta residents as well as outside visitors. Respondents in our study have plenty of innovative and practical ideas on how to achieve this, ranging from multi-ethnic festivals, to special sale days, to "Cuisines of the World" events, and so forth. Awareness of and interest in the Corridor should be raised to much higher levels than what they are now.
- An active targeting of the tourists to Atlanta will help to promote the Corridor as a unique attraction. Some of the marketing activities mentioned above could be geared toward the tourist market as well.
- It is essential to develop a land use plan and zoning regulations that will address the existing traffic circulation problems and hazards, make the area more attractive aesthetically, help promote pedestrian

activity (that helps to reduce crime and increases commercial activity) and help reinforce the character of the Corridor. Some of our respondents, particularly developers, had extremely creative and reasonable ideas about building sidewalks that are geared to pedestrians, bikers, rollerbladers, parents with strollers and even potential Alternative Vehicle owners.

- New business centers, shopping complexes, malls and anchors are needed to increase the draw of the area as well as for creating some focus on the Corridor. Definitely more buildings and structures are needed since the occupancy rates are almost 100% in the area.
- Resident and business education should be a priority. The passion and energy to work and succeed should be supported with enhanced language and business skills as well as with other means of acculturation into the American way of life. The many educational institutions in the area in addition to various county and ethnic chambers of commerce can be instrumental in this venue. Since our research indicates a fairly high level of education among retailers from their native countries, there is a base to build on here.
- The area merchants as well as residents from various ethnic groups should be organized around the common goal of enhancing the Corridor's vitality. Such efforts will help create a single voice from the area so that, in addition to being a strong tax base, the corridor will begin to emerge as a political power. An "Overlay Committee" is already being organized by one of the prominent developers in the area, which intends to bring together representation from all walks of life on the Corridor as well as from the city officials.
- The "feeding off different cultures" should be encouraged and promoted. Our research has indicated some levels of cross-shopping among consumers and cross-supplying among retailers, but these statistics can be enhanced if active steps are taken to enhance the feeling of unity, or as our logo said it best, the idea that the Corridor is "one place. . . . many cultures." Actively promoting events and activities geared towards bringing the multiple cultures together will not only identify the unique image of the Corridor further, but will also promote increased commercial and social reviralization in the community.

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■ Acknowledgments

The author greatly appreciates the financial support from the International Council of Shopping Centers Educational Foundation, the valuable feedback from Dogan Eroglu, Keith Melton and Vince Riggio, and the persistent data collection efforts of Levent Alam, Kathryn Beane, Karen Bernhardt, Xianqin Guo, Jae Sun Jung, Luis Izaguirre, Duong Tran and Rafael Villegas.

■ Appendix 1. Korean Retailers' Suggestions for Improving Commercial Life on the Buford Corridor

_*_ Improve safety/security ("need to attract customers at night as well," "too many robberies")
_*_ Turn the Corridor into a multicultural town; offer activities such as Korea Night, Chinese Night, street parades
_*_ Clean up; "change image from an unclean, no-identity street to a clean and unique Corridor to attract mainstream communities"
_*_ Put a cap on number of stores in each business; heightened competition among Koreans is leading to flights to N. Atlanta
___ Advertise and promote the Corridor as tourist attraction
___ Give incentives to retailers and businesses to locate on the Corridor (e.g., tax incentives)
___ Appoint county and city officials who are culturally sensitive and understanding ("Korean cuisine is not compatible with sanitation requirements")

* Indicates most frequently mentioned suggestions.

■ Appendix 2. Chinese Retailers' Suggestions for Improving Commercial Life on the Buford Corridor

_*_ Improve security (lower crime and robbery)
_*_ Improve traffic (bad traffic conditions are costing lives and customers)
_*_ Improve the structure and infrastructure to attract and develop businesses; store design, signage and landscaping need improvement
___ Promote more interaction and mingling between ethnic groups; they can collaborate and still operate and live according to their own cultures
___ Regulate billboards, signage, visuals etc., to improve the "look" of the Corridor

__ Educate the minority retailers on business analysis, marketing, entrepreneurship, etc.
__ Make space for more parking
__ Promote the Corridor to outside customers to attract middle- and upper-income groups

* Indicates most frequently mentioned suggestions.

■ Appendix 3. Vietnamese Retailers' Suggestions for Improving Commercial Life on the Buford Corridor

_*_ Open more business centers
_*_ Build new parking lots, improve existing ones
_*_ Improve security
__ Improve/upgrade/organize new business activities
__ Open more shopping centers/bigger centers
__ Attract more upscale clientele by improving the look of the street, developing the Clairmont intersection area, etc.
__ Build a cultural/arts center for Asians; center for children's activity
__ Attract a higher variety of retailers selling goods and services

* Indicates most frequently mentioned suggestions.

■ Appendix 4. Hispanic Retailers' Suggestions for Improving Commercial Life on the Buford Corridor

_*_ Improve security and safety (lower crime and robberies as well as deaths due to pedestrian crossings)
_*_ Improve maintenance and cleanliness of the Corridor
_*_ Build parks, sport fields and other recreational centers
_*_ Advertise and promote the Corridor; use public relations
__ Improve public transportation

__ Attract more ethnic minority businesses by helping the ones already here: offer language classes, business education, teach American culture and ways, provide financial assistance to beginners
__ Appoint officials who are not biased against Hispanics; who are bilingual
__ Promote more unity among the ethnic groups living here; more interaction
__ Open more cultural malls like Plaza Fiesta

* Indicates most frequently mentioned suggestions.

■ Appendix 5. Consumers' Suggestions for Changes on the Buford Corridor

__ Improve security and safety
__ Improve cleanliness and appearance
__ Build parks/theme parks
__ Build more malls, theaters, entertainment
__ Build sidewalks/bike routes
__ Create a classier/upgraded atmosphere
__ Provide better public transportation to/from and on the Corridor
__ Attract more consumers from the mainstream, not only minorities
__ Bring in non-ethnic stores such as Footlocker, T.J. Maxx, etc. and non-ethnic restaurants/fast food
__ Put in friendly, bilingual employees (esp. in Burlington and Marshall's)

■ Appendix 6. Suggestions from the Officials and Stakeholders

__ There is an urgent need to improve safety and security (both crime and traffic safety)
__ The area has a tremendous potential to become a unique microcosm of the global village and serve as a work-live-play area for immigrants and mainstream communities
__ There are needs for architectural, structural and infrastructural changes for aesthetic, practical and safety reasons

__ The tendency among different ethnicities to feed off each other should be encouraged for both commercial and social reasons

__ More residential and commercial buildings are needed, as are new shopping centers and anchor stores

__ Parks, fields and other recreational spaces are needed

__ The passion, "anxiety to work" and entrepreneurial energy should be encouraged by both public and private organizations

__ Education is a must in all walks of life from pedestrian and driver education to language fluency to teaching of business skills

__ The city should be more cognizant of the potential of the Corridor as a tax base for commercial activity, as a natural location for the exploding immigrant community and as a unique tourist attraction which is one-of-a-kind in the Southeast

__ The community should be organized to own its locale and to be heard as a single, strong voice

__ Tax incentives, financial help and incubators are some of the means that can be used to mobilize the existing energy in the Corridor

__ The non-ethnic entrepreneurs should recognize the business potential in the area and invest with new ideas such as the successful Plaza Fiesta.