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## Business owners meet with eye toward future

By: Amy Thorpe

RALEIGH – Hundreds of small business owners from across the state came together Tuesday for the fourth annual North Carolina Transportation Conference.

The Department of Transportation hosted minority and women business owners in the transportation industry. Attendees like Niveen Kattan, who owns a Greensboro contracting company, said they hope to pick up a few new tools for business.

"Put another tool in my toolbox, as they say," Kattan said.

Kattan said there are plenty of challenges to owning her own business.

"It's hard, especially being in construction and being a woman-owned firm," Kattan said. "I get letters that say 'Mr. Niveen Kattan.' People just don't expect to see a woman."

Small business owners from around the state say the transportation conference is about networking, which they say is an increasingly important element of business in the recession.

"Companies are looking to grow or expand their businesses, and to be quite honest with you, just survive in these economic times," said Anthony Roper, with N.C. DOT.

DOT leaders say only about 17 percent of small businesses they work with are women- or minority-owned, but they believe working with those businesses will help North Carolina's economy in the future.

"That's significantly an increase over what we've done in the past," Roper said. "We want to continue to sustain that and grow that even more."

Kattan said she's confident the economy will get better as small businesses in the state thrive.

"Times are changing," Kattan said. "We are definitely in a better era now."

The DOT partnered with the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials and the North Carolina Public Transportation Association to host the conference.

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