

Planning for Transportation **Together:**

Collaborating to Address Transportation and Economic Resilience





About the NADO Research Foundation

Founded in 1988, the NADO Research Foundation is the nonprofit research affiliate of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO). The NADO Research Foundation identifies, studies, and promotes regional solutions and approaches to improving local prosperity and services through the nationwide network of regional development organizations. The Research Foundation shares best practices, offers professional development training, analyzes the impact of federal policies and programs on regional development organizations, and examines the latest developments and trends in small metropolitan and rural America. Most importantly, the Research Foundation is helping bridge the communications gap among practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Learn more at www.NADO.org and www.RuralTransportation.org.

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Introduction

Across the nation, state agencies and regional planning and development organizations are working together and with other partners to create jobs, improve access to employment, education, and essential services, and to advance quality of life in communities and regions. Transportation facilities, infrastructure, and services are critical components to support these economic and quality of life outcomes, along with other policies and investments. Transportation can be an economic asset where the system allows for access to the workforce, resources, and markets. As a feature of the landscape, a region's roads, paths, and services also support community vitality.

Transportation and economic development efforts occur through both a mix of state-led policies and programs that include local and regional input and participation, as well as more locally developed priorities that benefit from state funding and technical assistance. Top-down and bottom-up efforts often work together, as policies and plans adopted at the state level have provided a useful framework for regions to complete their own transportation and economic development planning and project development. Having a strategic planning process that carries through to implementation is critical to accomplishing economic and mobility goals. So is the consideration of a project's broad community impacts that impact quality of life, in addition to traditional criteria often measured in economic development. Agencies often look to jobs created or retained and to the levels of private investment to understand the economic impacts of a program or project. However, communities often wish to go deeper and invest in transportation initiatives that create multiple kinds of benefits for users and increase the assets and options available to residents, businesses, and visitors. Aligning transportation investments with other resources and projects also benefits communities. Transportation operates alongside workforce investment, housing, community development, utility infrastructure, and other initiatives to affect the regional economy.

Broader community and economic development impacts may be less visible than counting jobs, but they contribute to a region's economic resilience and they add to the stock of assets available to a community or region. Economic resilience can be defined as the ability of a region to recover quickly from a shock, withstand a shock, and avoid a shock altogether.¹ Drawing from this emphasis on resilience and the value of qualify of life, participants at a focus group held in 2016 developed a



framework for understanding transportation and economic development through an in-depth discussion of programs, processes, and projects that result in benefits for regions and localities. The proceedings led to the following definition of economic development that can be used in transportation and related planning efforts:

*Economic development in transportation involves deliberate interventions to produce tangible benefits that are specific to the context, are sustained over time, and make a place more resilient.*²

This definition of economic development in transportation shaped the research questions addressed through this larger research project. The case studies featured in this report include a variety of transportation-related efforts, including policies, programs, plans, and projects that reflect the definition above, by creating tangible benefits through context-specific efforts intended to be sustained over time and to increase resilience. Each case study identifies state and regional-level agencies that have roles in the initiatives that connect transportation to economic development, although other partners are often involved as well.

At the state level, state departments of transportation (DOTs) are central to the planning and operations of transportation networks. Other state agencies, including commerce and

tourism agencies, have roles in shaping the economies of the states they serve, and as a result, also shape the transportation demand and the network. In addition to the federal policy and funding framework, state legislatures provide funding and policy for transportation investments made within a state, and their decisions, along with those of transportation commissions or other decision-makers, affect how the transportation network is maintained and improved over time.

On the regional level, many areas are served by multijurisdictional regional planning and development organizations (RDOs). They may go by many names across the United States, such as economic development district, council of governments, regional commission, or planning and development district. Many were created by state statute or executive order, and they may operate as regional governments or nonprofits. Typically, they are multipurpose agencies, developing regional economic development plans as well as providing other regional and local planning services and assistance. RDOs usually have governing boards made up of representatives of the local governments they serve and other community leaders, and they often serve as regional conveners of a wide group of non-governmental stakeholders through various committees and public engagement processes. Their community and economic development work is reliant on transportation and has an impact on how the transportation system is used. In addition, in many states, RDOs and similar organizations perform rural transportation planning under contract to their state DOTs. This may occur through regional, rural transportation planning organizations (often known as RTPOs or RPOs), or through less formal partnerships with state DOTs to address rural transportation. Some RDOs also house and staff metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs).

Local players with a role in affecting transportation and economic development include city and county elected and appointed officials, as well as professional staff serving local governments. In addition, local economic development offices often serve critical roles in business recruitment and other economic development efforts. Chambers of commerce, health and human service agencies, education and workforce development institutions, nonprofits, stakeholder groups, and others all fill local niches with an interest in transportation outcomes that relate to community and economic development goals.

¹U.S. Economic Development Administration (2015). Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Content Guidelines. Washington, DC. www.eda.gov/ceds

²NADO Research Foundation (2016). Advancing Collaborative Planning: Summary of a Focus Group on Transportation and Economic Development, www.nado.org/advancing-collaborative-planning-focusgroup

Key Findings

Several themes emerged during focus group discussions, interviews, and document review. Conducting broad engagement, leveraging existing plans and programs, and connecting to implementation were all factors considered important to the outcomes of efforts where states and regions are collaborating to plan for and implement transportation and economic resilience. These themes are described briefly here and explored more fully in the individual case studies.

Broad Engagement

Practitioners placed an emphasis on gathering broad stakeholder input, including from area businesses, developers, and the general public, to understand what characteristics are important for maintaining or growing segments of the economy. In South Carolina, the intersection improvement at U.S. 78 and U.S.

321 included extensive outreach to the public and

business owners, including design charrettes that identified specific concerns related to access and community character, such as retaining downtown parking, preserving streetscape features such as trees, and improving safety for freight, passenger, and non-motorized travel through the area. In Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Transportation and its partners conducted individual interviews with many strategically important employers to understand their transportation concerns, obtain feedback, and share information. When the Virginia DOT and partners implemented the legislation that led to the Smart Scale investment framework, they conducted outreach to a broad segment of stakeholders and the public to talk about prioritization criteria. This led the state to adopt weighting to address concerns about equity across the state and an iterative process to adapt prioritization criteria over time. In Texas, local agencies identified the Reese Technology Center as an important economic asset, leading to its redevelopment through the Base Realignment and Closure process. Employers and other tenants of the center were concerned with safe and adequate transportation access, and as a result reached out to state and federal agencies to seek funding and plan for improvements.

Link Existing Planning Processes and Programs

States, regions, and communities adopt a variety of planning documents, and they have a sense of strategy and vision even where formal plans are not developed. Connecting transportation to economic development involves aligning various planning processes, so that strategies and investment plans support the same vision and goals. Drawing upon plans and visioning efforts that have been previously completed creates a sense of continuity and movement toward implementation. Florida's adoption of a uniform framework for economic development stretches across agencies. It has created an opportunity to align processes across some state agencies and provided a lens for completing plans and programs at the regional and local levels. The statewide transportation planning process in South Carolina includes regional transportation plans developed by councils of governments serving rural regions. This effort is institutionalized through planning agreements and adoption of a funding formula for the regions. The connected state and regional processes provided an opening for the robust engagement and planning that went into the intersection improvement in the town of Denmark, South Carolina. Although the Regional Prosperity Initiative is a new effort in Michigan, northwest Michigan stakeholders adapted their implementation of the statewide effort to incorporate earlier work completed in the region's locally-driven Sustainable Communities plan, which was supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and other existing local government plans. Through the Regional Prosperity Plan, the northwest Michigan region connects transportation and land use strategies to important economic sectors and factors such as developing talent in the various chapters developed for the plan. The Cross Kentucky Master Trail Plan was developed to integrate non-motorized transportation efforts with the existing Trail Towns program, a program designation that helps communities plan for economic development related to tourism.

Connect to Implementation

With constrained funding, long timelines to implement projects, and complex decision-making processes, it is easy to lose the connection between transportation planning and realizing outcomes. However, the cases included in this research effort connect planning to implementation, either through specific projects occurring at the state or regional level, or through improved selection processes and criteria and tools that are shaping future investments. Planning processes often identify regional assets as well as future direction, so leveraging plans can help agencies and communities build on other recent public outreach and stakeholder input to shape decision-making. The Regional Prosperity Initiative in Michigan is being implemented differently across the state, but the Regional Prosperity Plan adopted in northwest Michigan offers concrete tools and models for local governments to consider when developing or updating their plans and zoning ordinances. This method allows users of the plan to understand how their region's and community's vision is affected by local decisions, and how to shape new



growth and land use change to meet those visions as projects are implemented. The originally proposed intersection design in Denmark, South Carolina, would have altered the character of the community through a road widening and removal of historic buildings. This intersection was identified in earlier plans, including a regional freight study. By focusing on outcomes, the project planning and design led to implementation that has met mobility needs for passenger, freight, and non-motorized travel through the downtown area and created economic and community benefits as well.

Each of the case studies included in this collection identifies characteristics about the state and regional collaborations that contributed to the success of the effort. These sample strategies may offer ideas to practitioners to enhance existing partnerships and establish new ones, as well as how to use transportation planning to spark discussions on enhancing economic resilience and addressing broad community outcomes as well as traditional economic measures.

Research Methods and Future Directions

The NADO Research Foundation completed this research through the review of statewide and regional transportation and economic development plans and programs, research projects, websites, and other documents. The NADO Research Foundation also conducted interviews with numerous transportation and economic development practitioners across the nation, including individuals connected with or knowledgeable about the specific case studies included in this report, as well as many others who provided helpful information, resources, and experience regarding specific projects, targeted development sites, corridors, or regional plans.

All of these conversations shaped the understandings of roles states and regional planning and development organizations can play to work together and the significant aspects of economic resilience and community economic development that are influenced by transportation. In addition, a focus group held in March 2016 played a critical role in defining economic resilience in the context of transportation planning and recommending effective practice for partnerships to meet these goals.³ Future research will focus on incorporating measurement into planning and implementation efforts. Practitioners identified a need to share ideas and methods used by transportation and economic development agencies to benchmark progress and criteria used to connect project selection with the economic resilience outcomes envisioned by a state, region, or community. Research conducted for this report suggests that economic modeling showing the impacts of jobs resulting from a transportation project or policy are useful and helpful for understanding investments and changes for communities. However, practitioners reported that more information on economic resilience and strategies to achieve resilience would improve decision-making and connections between programs.

³ NADO Research Foundation (2016). Advancing Collaborative Planning: Summary of a Focus Group on Transportation and Economic Development, www.nado.org/advancing-collaborative-planning-focusgroup

Not Just Another Road Construction Project: Intersection Enhancement in **Denmark, South Carolina**

Like too many other rural Southern towns, the city of Denmark, South Carolina has suffered decades of population loss, economic disinvestment, and disrepair in its historic downtown. In addition to these systemic and long-term challenges, this city of 3,500 in Bamberg County also faced a more visible dilemma at a pivotal downtown intersection—maneuverability for the many tractor trailers and large vehicles turning from U.S. 78 to U.S. 321. The four-lane street design impacted safety and quality of life for local residents and business owners: trucks would often drive onto the sidewalk while turning, shift into the oncoming traffic lane, and multiple times hit the corner of a historic building home to the city's beloved art gallery.⁴

Given these design and functionality challenges, plans began in 2008 to address the issues posed by this intersection. An early proposal would have shifted the intersection further north, an approach that would have led to property takings and likely would have further eroded the downtown's quality of place. That proposal did not move forward, but further conversations were initiated and brought together the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), City of Denmark, Lower Savannah Council of Governments (LSCOG), and Stantec, a consulting firm.⁵ Years of planning, collaboration, and creative financing eventually led to a project plan that included an intersection redesign, a road diet, and streetscape improvements that would increase transportation safety for all users, promote a sense of place in the downtown, and support local economic development.

LSCOG prioritized the project in its Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), which was incorporated into the 2009 South Carolina Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).⁶ The COG played a major coordinating role throughout, bringing partners together and moving the design, administrative, and funding processes along in a cooperative way that honored the vision of the local community. "This project is not simply another road construction project, but rather a comprehensive improvement that considered all modes of transportation within a rural small town context," notes Jennifer Tinsley, LSCOG's Planning, Community, and Economic Development Administrator. "As a COG, we work to give our communities the building blocks and bones to rebuild" and support economic development, she notes.⁷

This effort resulted in many new "building blocks" for downtown Denmark that increases safety for drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists alike, therefore improving quality of life and making the downtown a more attractive and welcoming place to be. Key elements of the project included:⁸

- Reconfiguring the undivided four-lane highway into a twolane corridor
- Improving turning radii for trucks by relocating traffic signal stop bars
- Increasing lane widths
- Bulb outs to slow down traffic



U.S. 321 Before

- Installing/improving sidewalks and crosswalks
- Stormwater drainage infrastructure

Other streetscape improvements including signage, lighting, parking, benches and pedestrian rest areas, landscaping, bike racks, and trash bins

Eighty percent of the project was funded through FHWA Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds, while SCDOT's Guideshare Program covered the balance, which met the required 20 percent match. The project came in under budget at \$2.2 million, with \$3.14 originally allocated. This effort was the first in South Carolina that used rural transportation funds to make both functional redesign and enhancements.9

All of these improvements are in line with the goals and spirit of Denmark's Master Plan, previously developed in partnership with Clemson University (which also assisted with identifying appropriate drought-resistant landscaping options for the project). Design charrettes organized by Stantec in partnership with the city, open forum meetings, and planning commission workshops provided opportunities for local business owners and residents to learn more about the project, weigh in with their suggestions and concerns, and be a part of the process. Local stakeholders felt heard and their investment in the process was a key reason for the project's initial success and the likelihood that positive impacts will be felt into the future.

Though the project was just completed in January 2016, the community and local businesses are already experiencing tangible benefits in downtown Denmark. A new restaurant has opened up and a deli/ice cream store installed a patio and outdoor seating options for patrons, adding to community character and giving the business capacity to serve additional

customers. Foot traffic is on the rise, and other local businesses are extending business hours to meet interest and demand. The art gallery that previously was clipped by passing trucks is now seeing more visitors as a result of the project: the intersection improvements have "provided an added benefit to the Jim Harrison Gallery as motorists window shop and then make a visit to the gallery," notes Michelle Shepherd, program manager with SCDOT.¹⁰ The city is applying for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to leverage the success of this initial project and deliver additional streetscape enhancements for the rest of the downtown area.¹¹

The enhancement and streetscape improvements are benefiting locals and tourists alike, including the many who visit the city every spring to attend Denmark's popular Dogwood Festival. This event, which has been held for over 35 years, is an annual gathering to celebrate the blossoming dogwood trees and enjoy music, food, dancing, and other entertainment. In fact, part of the streetscape improvements included the sandblasting of the dogwood flower onto the sidewalks in over 30 spots downtown, a permanent reminder of Denmark's identity and culture.

The success of this project-from planning to implementationcan serve as a model for other small communities seeking to make transportation enhancements that support safety, economic development, and broader placemaking goals. "We received feedback that the project inspired surrounding businesses and towns, such as Allendale, to invest in their respective pieces of the community," comments Shepherd.¹² Overall, this project is an example of how local, regional, and state partners can collaborate with public input to carry out a forward-thinking, cost-effective project that improves the safety





and quality of life for local residents. Says Tinsley, "While we can't stop the trucks from coming through town, this project was designed to slow them down so that drivers know they are passing through someone's community and home," and to balance the freight travel through town with local travel and quality of life.¹³

Strategies for Success

Economic resilience is place-specific and focuses on community context

Tinsley advises to be thoughtful about the impact planning decisions will have on the fabric of the community. The initial plan for this intersection project would have led to property takings—including a historic library and the destruction of live oak trees important to the community's character—and would have further eroded the quality of life downtown. Further conversations and planning led to a more positive outcome that will have a lasting impact.

Another effort to boost resilience is to ensure that the planning outcomes honor the community's vision. In this case, the intersection design is consistent with the City of Denmark's Master Plan, designed with public input in collaboration with Clemson University.

Involve the business community in planning decisions

Impacted business owners were involved early in the process of redesigning the intersection of U.S. 78 to U.S. 321 in Denmark. Their participation ensured that parking remained available in the chosen design, to ensure that customers could access their businesses. In addition, they made valuable contributions to the plan design, and they felt that their views were heard and valued.

Connect project planning to community identity

Overall, recognize that intersection enhancements like these are not just construction projects, but can have a major impact on a community's identity, sense of place, and economic opportunities.

- ⁴ Personal communication with Jennifer Tinsley, March 2016
- ⁵ Personal communication with Jennifer Tinsley, June 2016
- ⁶ Personal communication with Jennifer Tinsley, July 2016
- ⁷ Personal communication with Jennifer Tinsley, July 2016
- ⁸ Personal communication with Jennifer Tinsley, June 2016
- ⁹ Personal communication with Jennifer Tinsley, July 2016
- ¹⁰ Personal communication with Michelle Shepherd, July 2016
- ¹¹ Personal communication with Jennifer Tinsley, July 2016
- ¹² Personal communication with Michelle Shepherd, July 2016
- ¹³ Personal communication with Jennifer Tinsley, July 2016



Addressing Employers' Transportation Concerns in **Minnesota**

Transportation agencies and planners in Minnesota have made efforts to gather feedback from businesses who are important to the regions' economy about their transportation issues and other major concerns. These initiatives are occurring by multiple means, including through research by Minnesota DOT (MnDOT) and through more local economic and community development efforts to listen to the private sector, deliver improvements, and as a result, root regional economies more firmly in place.

Manufacturers' Perspectives on Minnesota's Transportation System

In 2013, MnDOT began an initiative to analyze freight users' perspectives and challenges with the transportation system. This effort focused on manufacturers, as businesses reliant on transportation for their operations and important contributors and employers in the regional economy. Two MnDOT District offices have completed qualitative data collection and analysis to shape transportation decision making, in west central and southwest Minnesota.^{14,15}

In each region, the study began with a cluster analysis conducted by the State and Local Policy Program (SLPP) at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, which identified geographic concentrations of interconnected firms and support institutions and their interactions. Along with additional recommendations from local economic development practitioners, the cluster analysis identified industries and manufacturers that were significant in the regional economies and beyond, which made them candidates for in-person interviews. The interviews were conducted by a two-person team including MnDOT staff, a researcher from SLPP or University of Minnesota Extension Center (UMEC), and a local or regional economic development professional (including staff of a regional development organization, or RDO) or UMEC educator.¹⁶

The interview teams used a set of pre-established questions to gauge manufacturer concerns regarding infrastructure (such as shoulder width, turn lanes), operations and maintenance, communications, and policy (such as size and weight restrictions). In addition, businesses referred to a map to indicate their major routes and locations they had concerns about.¹⁷ Because of limited funding and the length of time involved in initiating new projects, the interview teams focused on challenges and soliciting suggestions that were low-cost, including permitting and communications issues as well as physical infrastructure feedback.¹⁸



This study methodology resulted in candid and rich information provided by manufacturers, distribution firms, transportation and logistics firms, and other businesses.¹⁹ Primary concerns included signage to improve identification of truck routes and for safety; turn and passing lanes; roundabouts accommodating trucks and oversize loads; pavement quality and potential damage to trucks or products; bridge capacity and clearance; shoulders to accommodate heavy loads pulling off; snow and ice removal to ensure reliability; and communications and policy concerns regarding construction projects and permitting processes.^{20, 21}

Although respondents identified some desired infrastructure improvements that would require significant investments, some of the feedback related to finding out more information about construction projects that might impact their operations or improvements to Minnesota 511, already a valuable resource for truck drivers and other travelers who can call or visit the website for information on weather-related road impacts, construction, and congestion. A high level of importance of being able to predict and plan for disruptions to the normal transportation routines was reported by many businesses.²² Manufacturers also described how their business practices were shaped by transportation, including manufacturing products based on size and load requirements and working around seasonal weight restrictions, such as training customers located outside the state on timing their orders to avoid the spring weight limits imposed to avoid damage to the roads, stockpiling product for later shipment, or reducing loads.23

The process of gathering and analyzing manufacturers' and related industries' perspectives resulted in several immediate benefits. Some existing methods of communication had been unknown to businesses, including MnDOT District office email



lists that relate information about construction impacts on travel and weather-related roadway conditions. Other suggestions included hosting pre-construction webinars on the impacts of upcoming projects and MnDOT attendance at industry events, as well as individual meetings with firms that have unique shipping challenges to identify alternative routes that meet their needs.²⁴

Some employers saw almost immediate benefits from the interview participation in follow up engagement by MnDOT staff to address their specific concerns.²⁵ In one instance, MnDOT assistance with permitting facilitated a manufacturing facility expansion. Staff also met with a dairy cooperative to address concerns about the reliability of shipments coming in and going out even during snowstorms and construction projects, and were able to add a turn lane to a larger project to accommodate a manufacturer's workforce safety concerns.^{26, 27}

The interviews also provided information useful for future decision-making by MnDOT regarding planning, programming, and design of projects that incorporate manufacturer concerns. MnDOT is working with local jurisdictions to coordinate on road construction planning, to avoid any unnecessary delays that affect business operations, costs, product perishability, or livestock health to the extent possible. Snow removal schedules may be adjusted to accommodate business needs, such as safe and timely workforce arrivals for shifts. At the statewide planning level, accommodating freight users (such as oversize loads as well as standard truckloads) in roundabouts, is an area of concern, as well as continuing to focus limited funds on low-cost/high-benefit projects. Institutionalizing new processes to build upon private sector, local official, and economic development organization relationships that were built during the interviews is also a priority for the state.²⁸

Identifying Workforce Concerns

Some regions in Minnesota have low unemployment, but that economic indicator is not always a wholly positive one. "We are having such significant workforce shortages that it's been very challenging for many employers to keep staff levels up," says Wayne Hurley, planning director for West Central Initiative, which serves as both a community foundation and RDO for counties in MnDOT's District 4. Although the manufacturers' perspectives interviews revealed that area employers are generally fairly satisfied with the districts' existing transportation network, they identified more distant metropolitan congestion as a problem for accessing markets. The region sees a risk in retaining and recruiting employers in the face of challenging congestion, although not local, and an inadequate supply of labor that will be exacerbated as the baby boomer generation ages out of the workforce, even as the region experiences slow, steady growth.²⁹

As a result, Hurley says, the communities are working together to try to make west central Minnesota a more attractive place to live. Some of this is occurring through marketing efforts like a website called Live Wide Open (**www.livewideopen.com**), but it is also through efforts to strengthen the communities' livability, so that residents will want to stay and new residents will move to the area.³⁰

A strong connection to transportation exists in these efforts, particularly through increased interest in adopting Complete Streets in cities and towns. Some localities have desired to add Complete Streets elements to resurfacing projects on MnDOT-maintained roads, or to address underground utility infrastructure. Once a project has already been programmed in the STIP, its scope is defined and budgeted, and changes would require delays or for communities to spend their own funds to complete work on their own. With support from BlueCross BlueShield of Minnesota, West Central Initiative developed a Complete Streets guide. Hurley says, "The guide is intended to convey best practices of steps for how communities can engage in a discussion of planning Complete Streets projects and when those should occur." The goal is to have more conversations before a potential project is scoped, since it is often costprohibitive for communities to complete major projects on their own.³¹

West Central Initiative and other RDOs in Minnesota also work on Safe Routes to School when requested by local communities. This includes assisting with plans for schools, helping with projects that may incorporate both Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School elements, and conducting awareness programs to encourage children and families to travel safely by walking or bicycling to school. Multi-county regional health improvement program groups have been key partners in both the Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School efforts, since they have an interest in promoting active transportation as a way to improve health outcomes. Implementing infrastructure projects is usually done through funding support from MnDOT through the federal Transportation Alternatives Program.³²

By addressing transportation demands of evolving communities alongside other concerns such as education and community development, communities in the region are working to achieve mobility outcomes that support a vibrant regional economy. Through state funding support and partnerships with RDOs, MnDOT and its regional partners are looking in new ways at the economic benefits that may arise from transportation initiatives related to both freight transportation and personal mobility.

Strategies for Success

Identify stakeholder roles and strengths

An effective strategy to completing the manufacturer perspectives studies was to bring in a multidisciplinary team. The expertise of transportation researchers was beneficial in identifying key economic clusters, research design, and interview training to ensure consistent data collection. Incorporating the regional development organizations (which in Minnesota conduct regional economic development planning and assist MnDOT Districts with supporting statewide planning tasks) and local economic development offices added local knowledge and relationships.^{33, 34}

MnDOT staff are transportation experts in their own right and were able to answer questions that came up in interviews with businesses. They also recognized that the manufacturers' and other private entities' input brought new information that was useful for reflecting on how their daily activities affected business decisions and operations. District and Central Office staff together are analyzing how to apply the feedback to existing plans and priorities, in the case of location-specific feedback, and how these perspectives influence the planning and prioritization processes in general, to the extent feasible.³⁵ The RDO staff who participated were able to apply the information to their own transportation planning, as well, and to creatively think about mobility solutions to addressing employers' workforce concerns.³⁶

Deliver value through efficiencies and low-cost improvements

Although businesses interviewed in the manufacturers' perspectives research did express a desire for some major infrastructure projects, such as highway expansions to four lanes on certain significant corridors, other requested projects such as turn lanes or unpaved shoulders might be able to be delivered at much lower cost. A strong theme in the feedback from the private sector in both MnDOT Divisions was for enhanced communication to support both advance business operations planning and decision support for drivers.

The potential solutions identified by MnDOT's team and by customers included some efforts that could be completed at very little cost, such as adding businesses to existing email updates. Others would require a larger investment in staff time by MnDOT Districts and regional partners, such as direct outreach to businesses, and improvements to systems such as permitting and 511 that would be larger statewide investments. Signage to improve the ability of drivers to make decisions represents another low-cost effort that would improve reliability and assist with safe and timely business-related travel. RDO efforts to address community livability have also focused on efficiency, encouraging early attention to and discussion about context and desired improvements before a project is scoped. As this enhanced level of dialogue continues, communities may be able to implement more projects such as Complete Streets effectively, in partnership with MnDOT-programmed efforts.

The interview process assisted MnDOT with strengthening the agency's relationships with customers. A focus on solutions that are realistic and implementable helps MnDOT to deliver in ways improve business operations and solidify stakeholder buy-in into participating in the transportation decision-making process.

¹⁴MnDOT District 8 (2014). Manufacturers' Perspectives on Minnesota's Transportation System: A Pilot Study in Southwest and West Central Minnesota

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- ¹⁵MnDOT District 4 (2015). Manufacturers' Perspectives on Minnesota's Transportation System
- ¹⁶ MnDOT District 8 (2014)
- ¹⁷ MnDOT District 8 (2014)
- ¹⁸ MnDOT District 8 (2014)
- ¹⁹ MnDOT District 4 (2015)
- ²⁰ MnDOT District 8 (2014)
- ²¹ MnDOT District 4 (2015)
- ²² MnDOT District 8 (2014)
- ²³ MnDOT District 4 (2015)
- ²⁴MnDOT District 8 (2014)
- ²⁵ Personal communication with Kathleen Mayell, March 2016
- ²⁶MnDOT District 8 (2014)
- ²⁷ MnDOT District 4 (2015)
- ²⁸MnDOT District 8 (2014)
- ²⁹ Personal communication with Wayne Hurley, July 2016
- ³⁰ Personal communication with Wayne Hurley, July 2016
- ³¹ Personal communication with Wayne Hurley, July 2016
- ³² Personal communication with Wayne Hurley, July 2016
- ³³ Personal communication with Annette Bair, August 2015
- ³⁴ communication with Wayne Hurley, July 2016
- ³⁵ District 4 (2015)
- ³⁶ Personal communication with Wayne Hurley, July 2016

Smart Scale, Smart Virginia

In 2014, Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe signed into law House Bill 2, an effort to prioritize multimodal projects across the state for funding. Known as Smart Scale, the prioritization effort provides a framework for scoring projects before they are considered by the Commonwealth Transportation Board.

With its emphasis on multimodal transportation, implementation of the legislation is the responsibility of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT), Department of Rail and Public Transit (DRPT), and Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment (OIPI), while the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) uses the project scores to make investment decisions.

The legislation had bipartisan support from the governor and legislature, coming a year after a new transportation revenue package was adopted. Lawmakers wanted to demonstrate the benefits of the new tax to the public through a transparent process. Previously, the process of selecting projects had been perceived as political, opaque, and subject to changing priorities that did not address true needs. "Having political support was key, with bipartisan will and a desire to change the way things were done," says VDOT Assistant Administrator for the Division of Transportation and Mobility Planning Chad Tucker.³⁷

Through Smart Scale, metropolitan planning organizations, planning district commissions (or PDCs, which are regional development organizations that staff rural transportation planning programs and are Economic Development Districts), public transit agencies, and local governments that maintain their infrastructure are able to submit projects. Two funding programs accessed through Smart Scale are focused on improving capacity or safety, rather than state of good repair. Capacity improvements are multimodal and can include access management and operational improvements.³⁸ The Construction District Grant Program allocates funding to each of the VDOT construction districts, and projects are ranked at that level. For the High-Priority Projects Program, projects are prioritized statewide.³⁹

Developing a Performance-based Framework

Screening criteria ensure that the projects meet the needs identified in Virginia's long-range multimodal policy plan, called VTrans. Projects must address:

• Corridors of Statewide Significance (identified in VTrans and serve interregional travel; may be funded through either Smart Scale program)



- Regional networks (serve intraregional travel; may be funded through either program)
- Urban Development Areas (or UDAs, serve local activity centers and are designated by local governments as targeted for future growth following transportation-efficient land use principles; funded through the Construction District Grant Program)
- Safety (based on the Potential for Safety Improvement measure, the predicted rate of crashes for that type of facility subtracted from number of serious injury or fatal crashes; funded through the Construction District Grant Program)⁴⁰

The applicants submit an online application with detailed information about their proposed projects, including a welldefined scope, project description, and reasonable cost estimate. VDOT supplies an application worksheet to help applicants prepare the information, and the agency identifies points of contacts throughout the state to coordinate with applicants before the deadline. The first round of applications were submitted in 2015, followed by another round in 2016, with applications due in the fall, screened for eligibility, and scored through a rigorous performance measurement system by staff from VDOT, DRPT, and OIPI late in the calendar year. Project scores were announced and submitted to CTB in January, and CTB made its investment decisions based on the scores and other factors for the draft six-year improvement program in April.⁴¹ In the future, the application period will occur every two years.⁴² The online application format has been successful and is being considered for other funding programs as well.⁴³

The application process emphasizes project readiness, relying on consideration of five different factors statewide. plus a sixth factor of transportation-efficient land use in areas with a population greater than 200,000. The five statewide factors include safety, congestion mitigation, accessibility, environmental quality, and economic development. For each factor area, two or three quantitative metrics demonstrate the value of a project in meeting the factors.44 Certain measures are addressed in the project application, but VDOT and DRPT provide data to generate scores for some of the measures to determine the benefit provided by the project.

	Respor	Responsibility	
	State	Applicant	
All Measures			
Detailed description of improvement		Х	
Project location		X	
Safety			
S1. Reduction in number of fatal and severe injury crashes	Х		
S2. Reduction in number of fatal and severe injury crash rate	X	*	
Congestion Mitigation			
C1. Increase in person throughput	Х	*	
C2. Decrease in person hours delay	Х	*	
Accessibility			
A1. Increase access to jobs	X		
A2. Access to jobs for disadvantaged population	X		
A3. Checklist of multimodal elements included in the project (transit, bike/pedestrian, park & ride, etc.)		x	
A3. Number of non-SOV users	Х	*	
Environment			
E1. Checklist of project elements that contribute to reduced pollutant emissions and/or energy use (transit, bike/pedestrian, park & ride, energy-efficient facilities, etc.)		x	
E1. Location of improvement on roadways with truck use > 8 percent		X	
E1. Improvements that henefit freight rail or intermodal facilities		X	
E2. Acres of natural and cultural resources potentially impacted	X		
Economic Development			
ED1. Transportation project consistency with local comprehensive plan or local economic development strategy		x	
FD1 Transportation project consistency with regional economic development strategy		X	
ED1. List of development project supported by the transportation improvement (within			
roughly 1 mile) including description, square footage, distance from the transportation project, and directness of access that the transportation improvement provides		x	
ED1. Development project consistency with locality comprehensive plan/zoning		X	
ED1. Development project site plan status		X	
ED1. Development project site utilities status		X	
ED2. Improve access to distribution, intermodal, and manufacturing facilities		X	
FD2 Improve STAA truck route	x		
FD2 Improve access reduce congestion norts /airports	x	1	
ED2. Improve access reduce congestion ports/an ports	x		
ED2. Tomage (10005) per day	v		
Lond Use and Transportation Coordination	~		
11. Dremeter well / hile friendly mined use development		v	
L1. Fromotes wark/orke-friendry, mixed-use development			
L1. Promotes in-fill development	v	A	
L1. Per Capita VMT Reduction	Å	v	
L1. UDA support		X	
L1. Supports VDOT Access Management policies		X	
 * On non-VDOT roadway facilities, the applicant will need to provide year 2025 peak period volum roadway (transit, park & ride, bike/pedestrian) projects, applicant will need to provide expect period usage. Applicants will be encouraged to provide supplemental data and applysis, but will not be required. 	ne data. For ed year 202!	non- 5 peak	

Virginia Smart Scale

As VDOT, DRPT, and OIPI staff conducted outreach to determine

how to implement the statutory language, they heard from local officials and the general public a concern about how to meet the needs of very urbanized areas, rural areas, and everywhere in between.⁴⁵ To address that issue, and in recognition that all parts of Virginia are important to keeping the economy moving, Smart Scale applies weighting to the measures according to how rural or urban a region where each proposed project is located. Smart Scale applies four categories (A being the most urban and D being the most rural) to the regional PDC or MPO level. For projects in the most urban areas, congestion mitigation is the factor weighted the highest, and safety and economic development are the lowest. At the other end of the spectrum, rural areas have economic development and safety as the most heavily weighted criteria. Categories A and B, as large and medium-sized urbanized areas over 200,000, include the land use measures in their weighting.⁴⁶

The significant amount of outreach conducted to determine the measures, along with the decision to weight the criteria, resulted in a framework that was understandable for decision makers and the public. The process will likely be an iterative one, as state-level staff determine how scores correlate to implementing

long-range needs and goals, and as localities, PDCs, and MPOs analyze how their priorities relate to the characteristics considered in the screening and scoring processes.⁴⁷

One factor area that may see improvements is accessibility. In the first two rounds, Smart Scale's measures have emphasized access to jobs, since measuring improvements in job accessibility captures benefits to workers who can access more jobs within a given distance and benefits to employers whose potential labor-shed increases. Based on feedback after the first round of scoring, future metrics may also include access to healthcare and education, as key destinations for meeting community

development goals in addition to employment-related goals. Economic development has been a difficult area to define, and existing measures relate to both consistency with locally and regionally adopted plans (which guide local decision-making about policies and projects to seek funding for), as well as access to specific sites slated for development. The criteria regarding proposed projects' impacts on sites have been adjusted since the first round.⁴⁸

Although Smart Scale is a state-level policy, opportunities for collaboration with regional and local entities were built into the implementation of the program. From the start, VDOT, DRPT, and OIPI conducted significant outreach to stakeholders, including to MPOs and to PDCs doing both rural transportation and economic development planning work, to get feedback on proposed measures and process for implementing the statute. Depending on the type of project being proposed, either regional agencies or localities can put in project applications, with certain locally-sponsored projects requiring a resolution of support from the MPO or PDC as part of the application.

The state has moved toward performance-based planning in stages. Rural regional long-range transportation plans were adopted by the PDCs around 2010 and were incorporated into Virginia's 2035 State Highway Plan, which in turn informs VTrans. The rural long-range plans included data-driven analysis of regional needs, as well as strategic goals and objectives.⁴⁹

In 2016, one region, the Thomas Jefferson PDC, has begun updating its rural regional long-range plan. With assistance from VDOT district staff to update a spreadsheet tool to score potential projects, the PDC has begun to analyze the region's needs through a similar framework to the one set up by Smart Scale. According to the PDC's Director of Planning Will



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Cockrell, "The goal is to provide a detailed guidance tool for our local and regional officials, to:

- Identity real transportation needs, as opposed to those perceived needs that arise from political processes
- Identify which projects will score well in the state's funding system
- **3.** Highlight potential adjustments to priority projects, to increase the likelihood of getting funded
- **4.** Develop sequences and strategies for implementing projects"⁵⁰

Other PDCs provided some assistance to localities to analyze how potential projects might fare before they put in the effort to submit applications through Smart Scale, but those efforts have not been linked to a long-range plan update.⁵¹ Thomas Jefferson PDC's efforts are intended to develop a method for getting the best possible projects into the Smart Scale system to be scored and potentially funded.⁵² VDOT's support for the long-range plan update through its rural planning work program contract with Thomas Jefferson PDC, together with VDOT staff support of the PDC's scoring analysis present other opportunities for the regional agencies to adopt state-level initiatives. This collaboration allows PDCs to adapt their planning work to meet state- and locally-identified priorities through the long-range plan and project prioritization process.

Strategies for Success

Robust public and stakeholder outreach enhances the outcomes of the process

"Public engagement was a huge part of the success of Smart Scale. We spent countless hours talking, meeting with people, holding webinars, and holding 27 public hearings. We drove over 20,000 miles during this process. We wanted it to be a collaborative, open-ended conversation so that we could make sure that at the end, we have something that works well for everybody," said Ronique Day, policy analyst for Virginia's Office of the Secretary of Transportation. The end result was identifying a process and measures that could be explained in plain language to decision makers and the public, and transparent development of project scores and the connections to investment decisions by the CTB.⁵³

Working toward previously identified goals leverages other efforts and contributes to plan implementation

Smart Scale's metrics include some that address consistency with adopted plans, which helps to narrow the potential projects to those that meet already identified priorities, including some projects already vetted locally and with significant preparatory work completed. Smart Scale was intended to meet stateidentified needs and goals with constrained resources, with an emphasis on low-cost improvements and projects ready to start quickly. The first round of prioritized projects leveraged a significant amount of other local, state, or federal funds.

Recognize that the prioritization process will change over time

VDOT, DRPT, and OIPI focused on a narrow set of measures initially, to be able to utilize available data and to assess how the process was working. Very soon after the first round of Smart Scale was completed, the agencies began working with stakeholders to identify things that worked well and input on issues to alter or update in future rounds of prioritization.⁵⁴ Changes to the program and efforts to replicate both the application and the prioritization process demonstrate the success of the initiative and its ability to ultimately improve the resilience of the state's economy and critical needs such as safety.

For more information, visit vasmartscale.org/default.asp.

³⁷ Day, Ronique, and Chad Tucker (2016). "Revolution in Project Selection: Virginia DOT Smart Scale" webinar presentation, www.ssti.us/ Events/revolution-in-project-selection-virginia-dot-smartscale

³⁸ Day, Ronique, and Chad Tucker (2016). "Revolution in Project Selection: Virginia DOT Smart Scale" webinar presentation, www.ssti.us/ Events/revolution-in-project-selection-virginia-dot-smartscale

³⁹ VDOT (nd). Smart Scale, vasmartscale.org/about/default.asp

⁴⁰ VDOT (2016). Draft Smart Scale Technical Guide, vasmartscale.org/ documents/201606/sstechnicalguide_edits_20160627_final_for_posting. pdf

⁴¹ VDOT (nd). "How to Apply," http://vasmartscale.org/faqs/default. asp#howtoapply

⁴² Day, Ronique, and Chad Tucker (2016). "Revolution in Project Selection: Virginia DOT Smart Scale" webinar presentation, www.ssti.us/ Events/revolution-in-project-selection-virginia-dot-smartscale

⁴³ Personal communication with Elijah Sharp, June 2016

⁴⁴ VDOT (2016). Draft Smart Scale Technical Guide, vasmartscale.org/ documents/201606/sstechnicalguide_edits_20160627_final_for_posting. pdf

⁴⁵ Day, Ronique, and Chad Tucker (2016). "Revolution in Project Selection: Virginia DOT Smart Scale" webinar presentation, www.ssti.us/ Events/revolution-in-project-selection-virginia-dot-smartscale

⁴⁶ VDOT (2016). Draft Smart Scale Technical Guide, vasmartscale.org/ documents/201606/sstechnicalguide_edits_20160627_final_for_posting. pdf

⁴⁷ Personal communication with Elijah Sharp, June 2016

⁴⁸ Day, Ronique, and Chad Tucker (2016). "Revolution in Project Selection: Virginia DOT Smart Scale" webinar presentation, www.ssti.us/ Events/revolution-in-project-selection-virginia-dot-smartscale

⁴⁹ VDOT (nd). Rural Regional Long-Range Plans, www.virginiadot.org/ projects/rural_regional_long-range_plans.asp

⁵⁰ Personal communication with Will Cockrell, June 2016

⁵¹ Personal communication with Elijah Sharp, June 2016

⁵² Personal communication with Will Cockrell, June 2016

⁵³ Day, Ronique, and Chad Tucker (2016). "Revolution in Project Selection: Virginia DOT Smart Scale" webinar presentation, www.ssti.us/ Events/revolution-in-project-selection-virginia-dot-smartscale

⁵⁴ Day, Ronique, and Chad Tucker (2016). "Revolution in Project Selection: Virginia DOT Smart Scale" webinar presentation, www.ssti.us/ Events/revolution-in-project-selection-virginia-dot-smartscale

Pennsylvania Highway Occupancy Permit Reviews: **Considering Development Impacts**

To improve the process of issuing Highway Occupancy Permits (an access management tool), the Pennsylvania DOT (PennDOT) initiated a review process that concretely connects transportation impacts to land use and economic development plans and projects. Through the secure, web-based ePermitting System, the permit process allows users to create, submit, track, comment on and print Highway Occupancy Permit applications. Permits are issued to property owners, utility companies, municipalities and municipal authorities, as well as developers and others who request access to the state's right of way. The permit process is intended to preserve access, safe and convenient passage of traffic, and protect the structural integrity of the highway by regulating design, construction, drainage, and maintenance of accesses such as driveways, local roads, utility facilities, and more.55

The electronic permitting system engages stakeholders from the onset, before PennDOT issues the permit. The permitting system is available statewide, and PennDOT District offices can choose how broadly to encourage local and regional stakeholders to comment. In the north central portion of the state, when developers submit a request for a Highway Occupancy Permit, they must include a letter from the regional planning partner such as the rural planning organization (RPO) or MPO serving the area. The developers must review and address any RPO or MPO comments or concerns with the proposed development and its impact on transportation. County planning staff also have a formal opportunity to provide comment, which often occurs through the regional comments that are submitted.⁵⁶ In the future, the regional planning partners may become more

involved in field scoping with PennDOT and private developers, which would lead to even more enhanced consideration of impacts from multiple perspectives.57

The new permitting system addresses a gap in the development process, where land use and economic development were not always fully considered in transportation decisions regarding access management. Localities in Pennsylvania are not required to adopt local comprehensive plans to govern land use, and many rural places have limited land use or zoning controls. The planning work that occurs at the regional level is developed by leaders and stakeholders to be a vision for the region, but it is advisory, since land use control rests with local governments.58

Although land use, transportation, and economic development are inextricably linked, planning for them in a comprehensive way is not easy to accomplish. "It is very important to have an integrated, high-level planning process that involves all of the critical stakeholders in those three focus areas," says Eric Bridges, executive director of the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission. "It's easy to say that the need for planning is there, but it's an entirely different thing to actually implement an integrated process."59

One significant benefit of Highway Occupancy Permitting system is that local and regional stakeholders can help to better target investments or decrease impacts on the transportation system by providing their input on new economic development through the permit requests. The permitting system has also led to renewed interest in updating zoning maps as a tool for local governments to guide development that has an impact on





the economy and transportation demands, as well as the local landscape. Smaller localities with limited internal resources for planning generally seek assistance on updating zoning from their regional planning and development organizations, which also house Pennsylvania's multi-county RPOs.⁶⁰

Strategies for success:

Communicate across the public and private sector entities

Incorporating the RPOs and MPOs into the permitting review process adds a reliable method for developers and public sector leaders and planners to be informed of one another's efforts. Although local governments do not always have the capacity to participate in every permit review affecting their jurisdiction, they have the opportunity to comment. By their participation in their RPOs, they have another seat at the table to cooperatively establish the region's direction for transportation priorities, and the desire for transportation to support economic retention and growth. This direction shapes the analysis of impacts that the regional planning partners provide for the permits requested within their region.

Institutionalize methods for stakeholder engagement

The Highway Occupancy Permit review process follows the same steps from the same agencies every time a new application is initiated. As a result, every permit review benefits from the inclusion of multiple stakeholder perspectives and earlier consideration of land use and economic development together with transportation access.



The benefits of using this particular process are limited to access management permit requests, but through the formation of RPOs and MPOs with broad stakeholder representation, the adoption of regional long-range plans that incorporate community and economic development goals and measures, and improved alignment of regional planning with economic development agencies and workforce boards, Pennsylvania has taken steps to incorporate multiple perspectives into other aspects of the transportation planning and decision-making process, as well.

- ⁵⁵ PennDOT (nd). "Highway Occupancy Permits," www.penndot.gov/ Doing-Business/Permits/HighwayOccupancyPermits/Pages/default.aspx
- $^{\rm 56}$ Personal communication with Amy Kessler, July 2016
- ⁵⁷ Personal communication with Eric Bridges and Amy Kessler, March 2016
- ⁵⁸ Personal communication with Eric Bridges and Amy Kessler, March 2016
- ⁵⁹ Personal communication with Eric Bridges, March 2016
- ⁶⁰ Personal communication with Eric Bridges and Amy Kessler, March 2016

Promoting Progress in **Northwest Michigan**: Implementing the Regional Prosperity Initiative



Collaboration, partnerships, and cross-sector coordination are all key ingredients that communities, regions, and states seek when planning successfully for long-lasting and inclusive economic development. However, working together and achieving true cooperation is much more difficult in practice than in theory. At all levels of government, conflicting interests, turf wars, and competition often create barriers for effective outcomes.

This situation was no different in the state of Michigan, where Governor Rick Snyder has said that "for far too long, parts of Michigan didn't work well together," leading to "community versus community and area versus area."⁶¹ As the state seeks to position itself to compete in the global economy, it has struggled with coordinating more than 80 different service regions leading to overlapping responsibilities, gaps, redundancies, and missed opportunities. An infamous "spaghetti map" was created to better visualize the disconnect that existed, leading the state to recognize that "the old model of service delivery did not make sense."⁶²

To address these challenges, the governor spearheaded what became known as the Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI). With support of the legislature, the RPI was signed into law as part of the fiscal year 2014 budget.⁶³ It has two major elements: to better align service boundaries for state services, and to fund a grant program to encourage better regional collaboration and effective outcomes.⁶⁴ After a year of input from a variety of public and private stakeholders, a new service delivery map was created which identifies ten "prosperity regions" that state departments have been encouraged to align with to improve efficiency and impact. "We've created these ten regions to make Michigan more effective, competitive, and successful in building a strong economy which will generate jobs and a great future for our kids," says Governor Snyder.⁶⁵

The RPI also funds a voluntary grant program for the state's established regional planning agencies (RPAs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) to better encourage and facilitate improved planning, cooperation, and benchmarking.⁶⁶ Three different funding ranges (up to \$250,000; up to \$375,000; and up to \$500,000) are available to regions and MPOs depending on their level of involvement, participating partners, and deliverables to be produced.⁶⁷ Collaboration is at the heart of the RPI and is a requirement for funding through the grant program. "We need all layers of government, business, and individuals to work well together," says Governor Snyder.⁶⁸

Regional Prosperity in Northwest Michigan

With the different funding levels available and the varying levels of involvement, the RPI has been implemented in different ways across the state. One of the RPI's earliest and strongest supporters is the RPA Networks Northwest, formerly known as the Northwest Michigan Council of Governments (NWMCOG). Based in Traverse City, Networks Northwest serves a ten-county area and is the convening agency for that RPI region.⁶⁹ The RPI is providing "state support for regional planning in a big way," says Matt McCauley, Network Northwest's Director of Strategic Initiatives.⁷⁰ The RPI process inspired a major organizational shift for Networks Northwest in addition to its





Courtesy Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget

name change. The COG board of county commissioners and the Workforce Development board of private sector representatives were combined together in addition to new representatives from local communities and the education, transportation, and philanthropic fields. The current board has 63 members, representing public and private sectors and covers the entire geography of the ten-county region.⁷¹

As a region that received funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Sustainable Communities Initiative program in 2011, northwest Michigan had a "head start that gave us an extra boost in the direction we were already heading" when the RPI was established, notes McCauley.⁷² "We began our planning process by going through every single master plan in our region and looking for common themes. Our exercise was about taking existing plans, coming up with common themes among those plans, and then identifying some broad-based goals and strategies that can be used for most of our communities," he explains.⁷³ This was no easy task: there are 109 master plans and 146 zoning ordinances in northwest Michigan.⁷⁴

This process, which also included extensive strategy sessions, discussion groups, online surveys, and other public involvement, led to the development of Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan. This document contains a host of information including best practices, data, goals and strategies, and other resources for a variety of interested stakeholders that make up the 190 local units of governments in northwest Michigan.⁷⁵ The Framework for Our Future plan is meant to "start a conversation" around the nine thematic areas covered in the document, says McCauley.⁷⁶ These themes includes: growth and investment; housing choices; transportation; arts and culture; recreation; natural resources; talent; healthy communities; and food and farming.⁷⁷

Though each of these chapters stands alone, they are all interconnected and woven together with the common theme of promoting economic development and forging a more competitive region. A good example of this is the chapter on transportation, which states that northwest Michigan's transportation network "is perhaps one of its most critical economic development assets."⁷⁸

Recognizing the need to strengthen all aspects of this transportation network—roads, transit, non-motorized transportation, rail, air, water, freight, and multi-modal infrastructure—the Framework provides a variety of strategies, a local implementation checklist for improving master plans and zoning ordinances, and a host of maps and data. It addresses the many challenges facing the region's transportation systems, including rising transportation costs, barriers to public transportation, the toll of cold weather on infrastructure, and the impacts of a growing and aging population.⁷⁹ It also provides an easily understandable overview of the often complex federal and state policies and legislation affecting transportation decision-making.

Furthermore, the Framework speaks to state-level goals identified by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) in its long-range transportation plan, Moving Michigan Forward: 2005 – 2030. One example is corridor planning, which MDOT has established as a key priority. The Framework calls out the importance of directing investment and resources to commercial corridors; a 2014 inventory found that "over two-thirds of the region's jobs are located within a quarter-mile of one of these commercial corridors; and that nearly a third of the region's population lives within that radius."⁸⁰ These are areas that can provide a tremendous amount of economic development opportunities in urban, rural, and suburban communities when thoughtfully planned and funded.



One example is the 269-mile U.S. 131 Corridor, which runs through many communities that are faced with unemployment, poor housing stock, and downtown disinvestment. Networks Northwest, in partnership with local communities, developed a U.S. 131 Corridor Economic Strategy as well as a Corridor Community Study that explores opportunities to attract new investment, support transportation infrastructure, outdoor recreation, and overall improved quality of life for residents. The community study contains regional economic development strategies and useful data, maps, and information for local decision-makers.⁸¹

Overall, the RPI has been an experiment in improving the conditions to make collaboration and communication easier across Michigan. Ten state agencies have aligned their service regions to the newly-created Prosperity Regions map, including the Michigan Departments of Transportation, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Rural Development, and Environmental Quality, and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. At the regional level, each of the ten Prosperity Regions have had a different experience under the RPI. Some have faced challenges because some of the new RPI regions don't align with existing RPA or Economic Development District boundaries. In northwest Michigan, the process has been well received, and Networks Northwest and the Framework for Our Future are helping facilitate a conversation by putting the information and tools in the hands of stakeholders and local leaders to make informed decisions. This has moved the region into a strong position, says Network Northwest's McCauley. "By having documents like the Framework and going through a shared regional process to create it, we have a regional culture that exists that values public-private partnerships and puts us in a top-tier level for competitiveness."82

Strategies for Success *Focus on collaboration*

RPI has been effective at challenging the status quo and breaking down barriers to true collaboration by thinking differently about service delivery and meeting the needs of local constituents effectively and efficiently.

Build momentum by working from existing plans

Networks Northwest leveraged existing plans and took advantage of the relationships, knowledge, and resources developed through its participation in the HUD-funded Sustainable Communities Initiative and reviewed existing master plans to inform the content of Framework for Our Future.

Offer guidance on local implementation

Provide regional and local stakeholders with the tools, maps, and information they need (such as in a document like Framework for Our Future) to start a conversation about themes and issues that are important to them. This approach allows local agencies to have access to information about possible implementation strategies that may be appropriate for their vision and goals.

Identify economic activity occurring along transportation networks

The work centered on U.S. 131 offers a model for exploring opportunities to support commercial corridor planning that directs investment and resources to areas that are growing the economy and home to residents.

⁶¹ Networks Northwest (2014). "Governor Rick Snyder Discusses Regional Prosperity Initiative." www.youtube.com/ watch?v=PUMWbUhXUdM

⁶² State of Michigan (2014). "Regional Prosperity Initiative: Opportunities for Shared Success," www.michigan.gov/documents/dmb/ Regional_Prosperity_FAQs_430327_7.PDF

⁶³ Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget (2013). "The Basics," www.michigan.gov/dtmb/0,5552,7-150-66155-310319--,00.html

⁶⁴ State of Michigan (2014). "Regional Prosperity Initiative: Opportunities for Shared Success," www.michigan.gov/documents/dmb/ Regional_Prosperity_FAQs_430327_7.PDF

⁶⁵ Networks Northwest (2014). "Governor Rick Snyder Discusses Regional Prosperity Initiative," www.youtube.com/ watch?v=PUMWbUhXUdM

⁶⁶ Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget (2013). "The Basics," www.michigan.gov/dtmb/0,5552,7-150-66155-310319--,00.html

⁶⁷ Michigan Department of Technology, Management, and Budget (2013). "Details for Regions," www.michigan.gov/dtmb/0,5552,7-150-66155-310321--,00.html

⁶⁸ Networks Northwest (2014). "Governor Rick Snyder Discusses Regional Prosperity Initiative," www.youtube.com/ watch?v=PUMWbUhXUdM

⁶⁹ Networks Northwest (nd). "About Us," www.networksnorthwest.org/ main-site/about-us

- ⁷⁰ Personal communication with Matt McCauley, June 2016
- ⁷¹ Personal communication with Matt McCauley, August 2016
- ⁷² Personal communication with Matt McCauley, June 2016
- ⁷³ Personal communication with Matt McCauley, June 2016

⁷⁴ Networks Northwest (2014). Framework for Our Future: A Regional Prosperity Plan for Northwest Michigan, www.networksnorthwest.org/ userfiles/filemanager/4520

- ⁷⁵ Networks Northwest (2014). Framework for Our Future
- $^{\rm 76}$ Personal communication with Matt McCauley, June 2016
- ⁷⁷ Networks Northwest (2014). Framework for Our Future

⁷⁸ Networks Northwest (2014). A Framework for Transportation in Northwest Michigan, www.networksnorthwest.org/userfiles/ filemanager/3194

⁷⁹ Networks Northwest (2014). A Framework for Transportation in Northwest Michigan

⁸⁰ Networks Northwest (2014). A Framework for Transportation in Northwest Michigan

⁸¹ Networks Northwest (2015). US-131 Corridor Community Study, www.networksnorthwest.org/userfiles/filemanager/4064

82 Personal communication with Matt McCauley, June 2016

Fostering Regional Economic Resilience through Transportation Accessibility Enhancements at the Reese Technology Center in **Lubbock, Texas**

A key characteristic of economic resilience is the ability to respond to a shock or disruption in a way that allows an impacted community or region to "bounce back better" in a direction that sets a course for a prosperous and secure future. In 1995, the Lubbock, Texas region was reeling from the news that Reese Air Force Base—a facility that had trained over 25,000 pilots since the 1940s and was a symbol of pride for the community—would be closing as part of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process.⁸³

Despite this major setback, stakeholders came together in a public-private partnership, first through the Lubbock Reese Redevelopment Committee (LRRC) and then the Lubbock Redevelopment Authority (LRRA), to transform the air force base into the Reese Technology Center (RTC), located on over 2,400 acres about 10 miles from downtown Lubbock. The RTC's efforts are guided by its mission statement, which is for the site to be the "premier regional center in [its] area of service for economic development centered around technology, research, engineering, and education."⁸⁴ The RTC is home to companies such as Wyle Aerospace, Zachry Industrial, Inc., GE Wind Energy, and small start-ups, as well as facilities for Texas Tech University and South Plains College. Around 2,000 people are on-site each

day at the RTC. "To have one location with research, technology, and higher education all together is huge for our region," notes Kelly Davila, Director of Regional Services at the South Plains Association of Governments (SPAG).⁸⁵

However, the redevelopment of this former base eventually met limitations for the expansion and growth of the companies and businesses that were located at or wanted to locate to the RTC. Transportation access to the location "was extremely tight" says Davila, particularly for moving wind turbines onto the site that were being used for wind energy testing.⁸⁶ Additional improvements were also needed to make it easier and safer for all types of vehicles to enter the RTC and also access other facilities that were being sought after for office and warehouse space.

As a political subdivision with no taxing or legal authority, the RTC has limitations on what kinds of funding it can receive for transportation improvements. Because it is served by a state highway, conversations began with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) about accessibility enhancements for the site. TxDOT was willing to work with the RTC if it could secure additional funding. The South Plains Association of Governments became involved with the discussions to





assemble a project plan and secure funding from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). SPAG was a natural fit for this role, given that it had previously administered a grant for the RTC to fund fiber and high-speed Internet infrastructure for the site. Additionally, SPAG's executive director position holds a permanent spot on the RTC board, further ensuring long-term collaboration and partnership between the regional organization and the technology center.

The eventual joint EDA-TxDOT funded project, completed in March 2016, provided the following upgrades for the RTC site:⁸⁷

- Deceleration, acceleration, and median turn lanes
- Widening State Highway 114 to improve safety for drivers and facilitate ingress and egress for a variety of vehicle types
- Transitioning an unused runway into a road for improved access to existing facilities and buildings
- Infrastructure improvements for another entrance and exit location for the site

"As with any transportation project, TxDOT's priority was safety. Working in partnership with the RTC ensured the entrance would have the features, including acceleration, deceleration, and turn lanes which would allow RTC traffic to safely connect to an already busy roadway," notes Doug Eichorst, P.E., TxDOT Lubbock District engineer.⁸⁸

Construction took about a year to complete. The final project cost \$2.050 million dollars, with \$1.225 million funded through EDA's Public Works program and the balance from TxDOT, which covered critical match dollars.⁸⁹ SPAG played a key role throughout the project, including writing the application to EDA and carrying out administrative responsibilities to ensure the project was completed on time and within budget.

In the short time since the enhancements were completed, the RTC and its customers have benefited from the upgrades. Some companies have scaled up their operations and moved into buildings that are now better accessible, while numerous manufacturing companies and others have signed leases to move on-site. Overall, the RTC estimates that at least 100 new or retained jobs will result over the next few years because of the increased accessibility and competitiveness of the campus.⁹⁰

"The EDA/TxDOT enhancements have added value to the Reese Technology Center by positioning us to better serve our existing campus partners and by helping us to attract new partners in support of our mission and vision statements," says Murvat Musa, RTC's Executive Director. "The project has not only impacted our property, but has made a region-wide impact for transportation in west Texas."91

Overall, these enhancements are the latest chapter in Lubbock's resilience story as it responded to the loss of the air force base in the 1990s. These transportation improvements—supported by key partnerships and a creative financing strategy—are meeting the multiple goals of supporting economic development and innovation, transportation safety, and broader regional competitiveness.

Says RTC's Musa, "This project was truly a collaborative effort by EDA, TxDOT, SPAG, and many other partners, and is a successful model of what can be accomplished with true collaborative partnership."⁹² TxDOT's Doug Eichorst agrees. "Our valued and long-lasting transportation partnerships with local organizations, governments, and their leadership have been key in the successful and timely completions of numerous local projects."⁹³

Strategies for Success

Resilient communities and regions turn setbacks into opportunities

While the closure of the air force base was a shock to the Lubbock area, its transformation into the Reese Technology Center has made the region more competitive and is attracting and growing new innovative businesses and firms.

Solid partnerships and relationships made this project a success

SPAG has a permanent position on the board of the RTC and the two organizations collaborated on a previous EDA grant. Additionally, local, regional, and state partners came together to find a solution to funding and logistical challenges.

Think outside the box about funding sources

RTC's status and funding limitations were addressed by TxDOT providing critical match dollars on the EDA grant.



Courtesy South Plains Association of Governments

Economic competitiveness also serves to build resilience

The transportation and infrastructure improvements at the RTC can be viewed through the lens of economic development as these enhancements are making the region more competitive and attractive to outside companies and allowing local firms to expand.

⁸³ Reese Technology Center (2015). "History of the RTC," reesetechnologycenter.com/index.php/about2/history

- ⁸⁴ Reese Technology Center (2015)
- ⁸⁵ Personal communication with Kelly Davila, July 2016
- ⁸⁶ Personal communication with Kelly Davila, July 2016
- ⁸⁷ Personal communication with Kelly Davila, June 2016
- 88 Communication with Doug Eichorst via Kelly Davila, July 2016
- ⁸⁹ Personal communication with Kelly Davila, June 2016
- ⁹⁰ Personal communication with Kelly Davila, June 2016
- $^{\rm 91}$ Personal communication with Murvat Musa, July 2016
- 92 Personal communication with Murvat Musa, July 2016
- 93 Communication with Doug Eichorst via Kelly Davila, July 2016



Florida's Six Pillars Framework: Sharing a Unified Approach among State and Regional Agencies

In 2011, the Florida Chamber Foundation (the research arm of the Florida Chamber of Commerce) released a 20-year strategic plan, Six Pillars of Florida's Future Economy, after conducting research and outreach to community and economic development entities. The 20-year plan provided a framework for strategies to grow the state's economy and measure improvement over time. The six economic pillars identified in the plan include:

- Talent supply and education
- Innovation and economic development
- Infrastructure and growth leadership
- Business climate and competitiveness
- Civic and governance systems
- Quality of life and quality places

The Florida Chamber of Commerce also developed the Florida Scorecard to report progress on metrics related to each of the six pillars, with a color-coded online dashboard indicating the level of progress for each measure.⁹⁴

Connecting to Economic Pillars Statewide Plans and Initiatives

These pillars served as the organizing framework for local communities, other state agencies, and the economic development plans created by Florida's regional economic development districts, known as regional planning councils or RPCs. These same economic pillars also appear in the Florida Strategic Plan for Economic Development developed by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity in response to state legislation in 2011 requiring a statewide economic plan. The plan was developed in partnership with Enterprise Florida, Inc., CareerSource Florida, and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), with significant outreach to stakeholders and the public through the RPCs, the Florida Chamber of Commerce, and many other partners. The plan outlines strategies for the state agencies to support the six pillars.95 An appendix to the economic plan breaks down a matrix of strategies and the state-level agencies and organizations with tactics and metrics supporting progress toward shared goals.96

Each of the RPCs across the state develop a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, the economic development plan required for the U.S. Economic Development Administration's designated Economic Development Districts and grantees. The RPCs used the six pillars to ensure that regional strategies were aligned with statewide priorities and initiatives. The consistency among regions across Florida included using a standard format and common data sets that align with metrics reported in the Florida Scorecard. This, alongside using the uniform six pillars framework for strategies, was useful for integrating the regional plans into the statewide business development plan.

The Florida Transportation Plan developed by FDOT is also consistent with the six pillars framework. The planning process included forming advisory groups to identify issues and potential strategies related to each of the six pillars. The connection to local and regional efforts was made by including a representative of the Florida Regional Councils Association and other local government groups on the FTP steering committee, advisory council, and implementation team.

The result of the comprehensive outreach and analysis is a threepart plan comprising a Vision Element, Strategic Intermodal System Policy Element, and Strategic Intermodal System Policy Plan, which were adopted in 2015 and 2016.97 The connection to the economic pillars is evident in the emphasis areas and strategies developed in the Strategic Intermodal System Policy Plan. One method for implementing the six pillars is aligning transportation investments with economic, workforce, trade, and tourism activities by other state and regional partners. The plan identifies support for global and domestic trade flows and development of intermodal logistics and cluster initiatives as a strategy. Another strategy emphasizes balancing travel outcomes with support for regional and community visions, which can tie economic indicators to community development and quality of life metrics. Throughout the emphasis areas and strategies, the plan calls for collaborating with other state and regional partners.98



Institutionalizing Support for Economic Outcomes

One way to support infrastructure goals and meet private sector mobility needs has been to establish a regional freight coordinator position in each FDOT district office. These new positions, established in 2014 within the 7 FDOT districts, are intended to serve as a primary contact for coordinating freight issues relating to multiple modes, including highways, rail, air, marine, and spaceports. The coordinators facilitate investment decisions. They communicate with and seek input from customers and public and private sector partners on national and international freight issues. Their work with economic development agencies, private sector entities, and others supports consistency in freight improvements, and with the economic pillars adopted in so many state, regional, and local plans.⁹⁹

Having the position at the district level benefits local and regional stakeholders across the state. For example, the Central Florida Regional Planning Council's Heartland 2060: Building a Resilient Region plan, adopted in 2014, identifies freight and logistics as an economic strategy for the region's future growth, along with manufacturing, renewable energy, and other sectors with a need for reliable transportation. This plan was developed through a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and provides a comprehensive framework for the region's other planning activities.¹⁰⁰ Having an FDOT freight coordinator with a background in private sector logistics who is based in the FDOT district is a helpful resource for the RPC to analyze freight concerns and advance its economic development priorities developed through Heartland 2060 and other planning initiatives.¹⁰¹

Like other RPCs in Florida, Central Florida RPC serves in an economic development function in addition to completing other planning tasks. In 2015, the region formed the Heartland Transportation Planning Organization, a federally designated MPO serving an urbanized area and six largely rural counties that is also staffed by the RPC. The MPO structure offers another mechanism for implementing transportation and economic development strategies at the regional level, as well as an institutionalized method for communicating with FDOT about local plans and priorities through the MPO planning process. The MPO adopted a transportation model that uses land use and economic assumptions developed for the Heartland 2060 plan. With the Heartland 2060 plan's emphasis on resilience, economic diversification, and implementation of the state's six pillars approach, developing analysis and decision support tools from the plan for the MPO further integrates economic development and resilience into the region's transportation planning and programming work. According to Pat Steed, executive director of the Central Florida RPC, this alignment of plans, goals, and strategies allows for local decisions to be based on good data.102

One project in central Florida that is consistent with the state and region's plans is the adoption of the DeSoto-Arcadia Regional Transit deviated fixed-route service. Established in 2012, the transit service serves the small city of Arcadia, with a large number of minimum wage jobs and few transportation choices. The transit service serves 1,200 people per month and provides access to jobs and services, which contributes to the region's goals of improving quality of life.

Strategies for Success

Align goals, objectives, and strategies across plans developed by multiple agencies

Using a common set of assumptions, organizing framework, and performance metrics ensure that implementation is strategic and coordinated. Agencies and private organizations operating at various levels have different roles and responsibilities, but early and continuous dialogue and a commitment to consistency can help to identify how diverse entities can work within their own program areas toward shared economic and community development outcomes.

Performance metrics matter

The Florida Scorecard is an important tool for communicating what matters in implementing economic development strategies and helping agencies and the public to know how strategies are working. Although the data dashboard is developed and maintained by the private sector Florida Chamber of Commerce, much of the data comes from public sector partners and nationally available datasets, so it represents a strong publicprivate partnership and investment in planning. In addition to presenting statewide trends, the data are also reported at the regional level, so RPC partners can report on the progress made in their economic development and other planning initiatives.

⁹⁴ Florida Chamber of Commerce (2016). The Florida Scorecard: Metrics to Help Secure Florida's Future, thefloridascorecard.org

⁹⁵ Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (2013). Florida Strategic Plan for Economic Development

⁹⁶ Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (2013). Florida Strategic Plan for Economic Development Appendix—Tactics and Metrics from State Agencies and Organizations

⁹⁷ Florida Department of Transportation (2016). "Florida Transportation Plan (FTP) and Strategic Intermodal System (SIS)," floridatransportationplan.com/resources.html

⁹⁸ FDOT (2016). Florida Transportation Plan: Strategic Intermodal System Policy Plan, floridatransportationplan.com/pdf/FDOT_FTP-SIS_PolicyPlan.pdf

⁹⁹ FDOT (nd). "District Freight Coordinators," www.dot.state.fl.us/ multimodal/freightcoordinators.shtm

¹⁰⁰ Central Florida RPC (2014). Heartland 2060: Building a Resilient Region, heartland2060.org/download/Heartland_2060_Resiliency_ Plan_06-30-14.pdf

¹⁰¹ Personal communication with Patricia Steed, October 2015

¹⁰² Personal communication with Patricia Steed, June 2016

Paths to Economic Prosperity: The Cross **Kentucky** Master Trail Plan

'Hike, Paddle, Cycle, or Horseback Ride' across Kentucky

What began as a dream of the former Kentucky First Lady Jane Beshear-the creation of a trail system to encourage and facilitate travel across the state on foot, bicycle, kayak or horse-has moved a step forward to reality with the publication of the Cross Kentucky Master Trail Plan. Released in October 2015, this plan identifies 11 major trail routes that crisscross the state, as well as 17 potential connector trails to link communities to the trail systems and each other. Beshear, an avid horseback rider herself, said at the release of the plan, "As a supporter of adventure tourism,



I've advocated a trail system that would allow the hiker, paddler, cyclist, or horseback rider to travel across Kentucky. This plan lays the groundwork for just that, and will help communities large and small as they work to develop trails and improve outdoor recreational experiences for citizens and visitors."¹⁰³

Bluegrass Area Development District: Expertise and Relationships

In close partnership with the Kentucky Tourism, Arts, and Heritage Cabinet's Office for Adventure Tourism, the Bluegrass Area Development District (BGADD) spearheaded the effort to plan, design, and promote the Master Trail Plan. The state's collaboration with BGADD was a natural fit for a project like this that requires an understanding of local and regional conditions, technical mapping software, and an ability to convene partners and nurture relationships. "We have the in-house expertise to be able to draw trail lines across the state using GIS," notes Shane New, director of community development at BGADD.¹⁰⁴ BGADD, located in Lexington, is one of 15 Area Development Districts (ADDs) that cover the state. ADDs serve their regions by providing support to local communities in a host of areas, including workforce development, transportation and infrastructure planning, GIS mapping, and aging services. "The ADDs have the local and regional knowledge that we could filter up to the state. This really helped shape the maps that were part of the plan," says Chris Chaney, BGADD transportation planner.105

Courtesy Flickr user Lynn Dieter

New credits the strong relationships that the ADDs maintain with each other and with state and local partners in making the Master Trail Plan a success. "There is a strong connectivity that exists between the ADDs and with the state," he says. "For example, we all have contact with the Kentucky Infrastructure Authority which is helpful in addressing local issues connected to water, sewer lines, and other projects."¹⁰⁶

BGADD served as the quarterback for the planning effort by utilizing its GIS capability to map routes, host conference calls and meetings with the ADDs, and gather input from a host of key stakeholders including local associations, elected officials, parks and recreation staff, and trail advocates from around the state. "It was neither a top-down nor bottom-up approach. Everyone had input," says New.¹⁰⁷ This is particularly important given that there is already strong momentum throughout the state for a trails network, with 12,000 miles of trails already linked. The Master Trail Plan would therefore formalize much of the momentum behind many of the trails identified in the document and encourage the creation of new trails to promote connectivity.

A How-to Guide

BGADD received \$20,000 in funding from the Kentucky Office of Adventure Tourism to design and develop the plan. The final document consists of three major components: 1) Trail routes, maps, and geographic details 2) Recommendations for planning, constructing, and maintaining trails, and 3) An appendix with useful documents, templates, and strategies. Taken as a whole, this plan provides a useful framework to navigate the sometimes complex process of trail development. It also makes the case for how these efforts support broader economic development, encourage healthy and active living for residents and tourists alike, and protect natural landscapes and scenery.

The Master Trail Plan provides maps for the 11 major routes identified through the planning process, as well as 17 "connector" trails that link at least two major points of reference. The existing and proposed trails identified are displayed via a large state map at the beginning of the plan, as well as through detailed trail maps which contain zoomed-in snapshots of specific portions of the trails highlighting trail distances, towns, historic landmarks, state and national parks, and other points of interest. In addition, the plan includes a statewide "Blue Water Trails Map" of major and secondary river and creek trails. The Master Trail Plan is very transparent in that the trail lines drawn are fluid and are meant to inspire, rather than dictate, local and regional trail planning, noting that "[f]inal location will ultimately depend on landowner willingness, existing trail utilization, local citizen desires, interconnectivity of the trail to neighboring cities and counties, funding, and other various other concerns."108

The plan embodies a "how-to" spirit of empowering local communities, organizations, and residents to plan, implement, and maintain the local and regional trail networks. It provides in-depth information about the economic, social, and environmental benefits of trails, strategies for engaging with stakeholders, legal and regulatory issues to consider, and best practices in trail construction, sustainability, and maintenance. The plan also dedicates a significant amount of space to the topic of land acquisition, one of the more challenging and delicate aspects of the process. It shares various legal approaches and mechanisms for protecting both public and private landowners, as well as suggested responses to commonly asked questions from private landowners such as "Can I be held liable if someone had an accident [on the trail]"? and "Will this keep me from developing my land as I choose?"¹⁰⁹

Finally, the Master Trail Plan contains an extensive 40-page appendix section which includes model documents and templates to assist local organizations and residents in their planning and implementation efforts. This section includes sample language for establishing an MOU for trail maintenance, state statute text for protecting landowners from liability, recommended liability waiver language, tips for funding a trail program, and steps for creating a local non-profit to guide the planning process.¹¹⁰ The inclusion of these materials make the Master Trail Plan a genuine "how to" guide that promotes bottom-up planning and implementation from those closest to the ground, rather than an imposed top-down effort.

Supporting the Trail Towns Program

The Master Trail Plan was developed with the goal of encouraging more communities to participate in the state's Trail Towns program. Created in 2012, this program supports small communities' economic development efforts to improve their local tourism industry by connecting to a local or regional trail. Towns must apply to the Office of Adventure Tourism to receive official designation as a Trail Town and have:

- **1.** Constructed a trail to connect into an existing trail system
- **2.** Completed an economic development process to develop or strengthen its tourism services
- **3.** Devised a Plan of Action that will guide them beyond certification to improve their ability to serve trail-using visitors¹¹¹

Kentucky's Trail Towns have pursued a variety of initiatives including infrastructure and placemaking projects such as streetscape improvements, improved signage and wayfinding, and historic preservation. They have also embraced tourism and business development strategies through marketing, hospitality training, and supporting festivals, concerts, and other cultural offerings. According to the Office of Adventure Tourism, "[b] ecoming a Trail Town is as much about a unified mentality and spirit as it is physical improvements," making this a truly holistic undertaking.¹¹²

Currently there are 13 designated trail towns, with nearly 40 others that are either actively applying to the program or have expressed an interest in doing so. It is anticipated that these communities will develop the potential arterial trails identified in the plan, leading to a continuous network that achieves the broad vision of a state-wide network of connected cross-Kentucky trials. "This plan really supports the Trail Town program and can help communities that received or are pursuing Trail Town status to help build trails," notes BGADD's Chris Chaney.¹¹³

The Trail Town program has been an important element in Kentucky's broader tourism efforts, which brought in \$1.37 billion in tax revenues in 2014 alone. It's a fast-growing sector in the state, having matured into a \$13.1 billion industry that created 13,000 new jobs from 2009 - 2014.¹¹⁴ The Master Trails Plan now positions the state to continue to nurture this industry by both strengthening the Trail Towns program and also leading to broader tourism-related revenue such as lodging, food and entertainment, outfitters and equipment tours, and other outdoor recreation services.

Just the Beginning

The development and roll-out of the Cross Kentucky Master Trail Plan in many ways is just the beginning of a potentially transformative long-term endeavor for the Bluegrass State. Achieving the goal of creating a 30,000-mile trail network



takes time, resources, partnerships, and local buy-in. That is why the plan is packaged as a guide—a type of invitation to encourage local and regional participation in the effort. Packed with maps, templates, and solutions to complex questions about land acquisition, legal implications, and trail construction and maintenance, the plan puts power in the hands of local communities and organizations to help make this project a reality. Implementation of trail projects will involve multiple partners, and communities may seek funding from philanthropic, local, state, or federal sources such as the Transportation Alternatives Program administered through the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet.

Both New and Chaney at BGADD see an important role of their organization, as well as the statewide network of ADDs and their state partners, in keeping the momentum moving forward around trail, outdoor recreation, and tourism projects. Because of the strong interest around these issues, BGADD are making internal staffing changes to allow Chaney, currently a transportation planner, to shift into a role that focuses specifically on trails, bike and pedestrian access, and active transportation issues. With this great opportunity presented by the trail plan, "we can't let it slip through the cracks," says New.¹¹⁵

In its first few pages, the Master Trails Plan beautifully summarizes the power of trails to inspire people, connect communities, and leave lasting impressions: "Trails can guide travelers toward special locations. They open up innumerable possibilities and create the potential for memorable experiences. They can bring communities together and carry us far from home."¹¹⁶ With the vision of the former First Lady, the support and expertise of the state's Area Development Districts, and critical partnerships with state agencies and local organizations and residents, Kentucky is taking steps on the path towards economic prosperity, better health outcomes, and protected natural landscapes.

Strategies for Success

Connect transportation facilities to local placemaking

Supporting a statewide trail network can serve as part of an economic development strategy that links transportation,

tourism, placemaking, conservation, and other cross-cutting initiatives.

Kentucky's Master Trail Plan was designed to empower local communities and regions to carry out trail development by providing tools, resources, and information to support locallydriven projects.

Identify partner strengths

Regional development organizations like Kentucky's Area Development Districts have the technical expertise (such as GIS and other mapping tools), established partnerships, and broad vision to support the development of statewide trail plan.

Leverage existing programs and resources

A statewide trail plan can support wider tourism and outdoor recreation initiatives like the Kentucky Trail Town program by providing opportunities for more communities to become designated trail towns and connect to a wider trail network.

¹⁰³ Commonwealth of Kentucky (2015). Gov. Beshear, First Lady Unveil Statewide Trail Plan, Tout Tourism Growth, kentucky.gov/Pages/ Activity-Stream.aspx?viewMode=ViewDetailInNewPage&eventID=%7 BC58A0C97-9B8A-4C01-A5A6-D97313997791%7D&activityType=Pre ssRelease

- ¹⁰⁴ Personal communication with Shane New, February 2016
- ¹⁰⁵ Personal communication with Chris Chaney, February 2016
- ¹⁰⁶ Personal communication with Shane New, February 2016
- ¹⁰⁷ Personal communication with Shane New, February 2016

¹⁰⁸ Commonwealth of Kentucky (2015). Cross Kentucky Master Trail Plan, www.kentuckytourism.com/!userfiles/Outdoor_Adventure/ Adventure/Statewide%20Master%20Trail%20Plan.pdf

- ¹⁰⁹ Commonwealth of Kentucky (2015). Cross Kentucky Master Trail Plan
- ¹¹⁰ Commonwealth of Kentucky (2015). Cross Kentucky Master Trail Plan
- ¹¹¹ Commonwealth of Kentucky (2015). Cross Kentucky Master Trail Plan

¹¹² Kentucky Office of Adventure Tourism (2012). Kentucky Trail Towns: A How-to-Guide for Communities, www.kentuckytourism. com/!userfiles/Industry/Adventure/Trail%20Town/Trail%20Town%20 Guide%20&%20Overview.pdf

¹¹³ Personal communication with Chris Chaney, February 2016

- ¹¹⁴ Commonwealth of Kentucky (2015). Gov. Beshear, First Lady Unveil Statewide Trail Plan, Tout Tourism Growth
- ¹¹⁵ Personal communication with Shane New, February 2016

¹¹⁶ Commonwealth of Kentucky (2015). Cross Kentucky Master Trail Plan





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