

Northwest Georgia Regional Plan Update Steering Committee

Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats Analysis

November 30, 2018

Transportation

- Many areas of the region lack connectivity to Interstates and need additional investments in roads and routes that improve connectivity to serve existing industry and expansion, and provide good logistics for additional industry location.
- The US 411 and East/West Connections to I-75 must be improved as this access is critical for industry.
- Other East/West Connections must be developed or improved.
- Legislative Issues to be brought to delegations include additional funding for the impact of greater truck weights on local or state roads, as well as additional funds for maintenance and repair for local and state roads and bridges.
- Better identification and signage of existing truck routes; establish additional truck routes.
- Need additional state funding for local bridge repair and replacement.
- Additional planning for Local Transit (rural 5311) especially as rural areas using 5311 funds become urbanized due to population growth, either developing their own Metropolitan Planning Organization or partnering with existing MPOs, and losing the state match? From the 5311 funds
- Additional funding is needed for expansion of local and regional airports.
- A discussion of alternative transportation options including high speed rail (extensive subsidy and cost discussion), expanded coordination of transit and/or regional transit routes, and additional bike and pedestrian options and connections.

Carry over from Economic Development:

- Additional industry and expansion of existing employers drives demand for investment in state highways and local roads to provide connections to and from interstates, Appalachian Regional Port, suppliers and employment centers.
- Greater funding is needed for design and construction of Local Access Roads for industrial development and expansions.
- Connectivity to the Interstate is critical for workforce access from across the region.

Natural Resources

- There are many opportunities for more Blueway Connectivity, both additional access to new kayaking and canoeing trails and more access points on known routes such as the Etowah River.
- Communities need additional trail connectivity to towns with rooms and food, especially for visitors from outside the region. The additional economic impact of providing access points,

signage, trails/paths to restaurants, restrooms, and needed amenities would likely outweigh the public investment.

- Investment and interest in recycling & litter reduction/ cleanup activities are on the rise.
- There is a need for increased education on the importance of resource conservation.
- Additional funding is needed for citizen engagement for historic resource preservation.
- Additional greenway connectivity is needed to draw greater interest to preserving and conserving the abundant natural resources of the region while also creating additional tourism and economic development opportunities.
- Conservation subdivisions can be a tool to preserve home values, prevent stormwater runoff, provide additional public greenspace and connect with local and regional greenways, parks and trails.
- Natural Resources in the Region:
 - State and federal parks, forests need investments for existing facilities
 - Better advertising for natural assets
 - Vast natural resources underutilized

Better funding and higher prioritization for natural resource preservation:

- LWCF Funding exists, also GEFA
- Increase representation of resources in Regionally Important Resources plan
- Identify private funding sources

Create a better asset list for both the Regionally Important Resources plan and Regional Plan.

Regional Cooperation

- There is a need for regional legislative collaborative lobbying for regional highway planning/ improvement.
- Improve coordination between MPO's in region (Chattanooga-North Georgia, Greater Dalton, Bartow, Rome-Floyd, Atlanta Regional Commission).
- The North Georgia Regional Water Partnership of utility providers serves as the implementing arm of the Coosa-North Georgia Water Planning Council for state and federal funding, studies, and projects.
- Regional and multi-county coordinated planning for the Appalachian Regional Port and related infrastructure and development.

Education

- There is a lack of connection as a region between education and workforce development providers especially college and career academies and technical colleges, and the industry and employers in those communities that can benefit from the programs and skill sets offered including soft skill development.

- Partner with business and industry, Chamber of Commerce and other community leadership organizations, to show the impact of the College and Career Academy model.
- Look to Southwire as a model of partnership between industry and education as well as to the Great Promise Partnership which develops community partnerships between high schools and industries to provide on the job training in employable skills for at-risk high school students.
- HON as an employer that has partnered with high schools/ Chattahoochee Technical College to develop a partnership to teach needed skills and provide needed training equipment.
- NWGA CCA (Whitfield) uses European apprenticeship model with total preparation and soft skills integrated into curriculum.
- Development of skills for Northwest Georgia jobs (need training and skill development for the jobs and industries in our region)
- Support from leadership- community and industry involvement in school leadership and boards to guide development of needed curriculum and skills.

Economic Development

- Because industries, healthcare providers, educational institutions are regional employers, there is a need for development of a greater regional skilled workforce.
- There is additional need for state funding for transit options for workforce and employee transportation needs.
- Industries are expanding their operations in the region (example Toyo Tire) and needing a greater skilled workforce to fill the new positions.
- Industry and communities call constantly for help to address the lack of soft skills in the workforce and especially recent graduates – to address issues of dependability, being on time, strong communication skills.
- The Calhoun College and Career Academy grades students on soft skills as much as operational skills.
- The College/ Career Academies and integrated Career Pathways are a work in progress for the future.
- Additional water/ sewer/ broadband fiber infrastructure is needed to support industry (Dig Once local ordinances).
- Training and workforce development needs place the emphasis on brain work, not hands
- Northwest Georgia has available water resources and land resources.
- For economic development, improving access to I-75 or other interstates is key, as is connectivity through Highway 411, US 27, major routes to move truck traffic. Additional directional signage and ordinance delineation of preferred truck routes is needed.
- The region has several Class A Rail tracks provided by CSX, Norfolk Southern. The region utilizes the Appalachian Regional Port.
- Partner schools with businesses, to allow students to work on class projects to provide marketing, logo and branding and other advertising and branding needs.

- Downtown development and redevelopment is on the rise- Dalton, Rome, Cartersville as examples.
- Downtowns need a flexible and workable alcohol ordinance.

Land Use

- Keep industry located, sited near interstate.
- Separate industry from residential areas to avoid conflicts.
- Industry is now more interested in use of rail in addition to trucking.

Infrastructure

- Additional and existing infrastructure has high costs to local governments if not recouped from taxes/ fees or subsidized in grants.
- Need state, federal funding for additional deployment of broadband in rural or unserved areas where population is not dense enough for the market to directly supply broadband.
- There is a need for greater funding and public and employer support for recycling programs.
- There is a need for greater funding and public and employer support for Keep Georgia Beautiful affiliates for education, outreach, events and development programs.

Housing

- Develop and implement a sewer strategy for sprawl control.
 - Encourage in-town residential for greater access to Live, Work, Play.
 - Incentivize the redevelopment of blighted or vacant industrial areas for residential use near downtowns.
- Gilmer, Fannin, Pickens: Need mid-level housing (\$150,000- \$250,000)
- Short-Term rentals provide tourist housing but also takes up the available housing supply creating greater demand for affordable workforce housing for those working in service, retail and related jobs in tourist areas.
- For blighted historic neighborhoods:
 - Tax incentives for restoration via National Register
 - Stricter code enforcement to address blight and prevent additional deterioration of blight-prone areas.
- Need more Senior housing and greater housing diversity for all wages, ages and stages of life (single professionals, young families, empty-nesters, seniors and elderly) so that the housing market, both rental and owner, is active and meets needs at each age.
- Need greater funding for handicap & senior home improvements to allow for independent living longer in the home.

Health

- Provide more opportunities for physical activity & walking/ biking opportunities/ connectivity to destinations including
 - Outside recreation
 - Financing
- Assist communities throughout the region to connect to the Silver Comet Trail.
- Develop more parks and connectivity of trails to parks, downtowns, residential areas.
- The Rivers to Ridges Gordon Trails system is an example of planned connectivity to community destinations using trails.
- Continue sidewalk and trail connectivity (subdivisions, rural areas) especially if required in development ordinances.
- Northwest Georgia Healthy Communities Partnership is an example of healthcare community solutions, and is a group that brings providers together to develop solutions and address unmet needs of those who fall outside the normal healthcare system.
- Our region has healthy thriving hospitals (Dalton, Calhoun, Rome, Jasper, etc.).
- Market the highly skilled, innovative technology and procedures available in this region.
- Highlight the healthcare network as an incentive to attract and retain employers.
- Need more trauma centers (Paulding is adding a Level 4 Trauma Center).
- Rural health care is still a problem (limited availability of care, access, poverty, insurance).