

Introduction & Background

The goal of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is to bring together the public and private sectors in the creation of an economic roadmap to diversify and strengthen regional economies. The following document shall provide a path to guide Upper Cumberland residents and leaders as they strive to create jobs and improve the standard of living. This is a working strategy and as developments occur and priorities change, so must this document.

(Region Profile) The Upper Cumberland region is composed of 14 counties in the northeastern portion of central Tennessee. The District contains 5,093 square miles and has a population of 348,273. The counties of Cannon, Clay, Cumberland, DeKalb, Fentress, Jackson, Macon, Overton, Pickett, Putnam, Smith, Van Buren, Warren and White make up the Upper Cumberland Region.

(Population) The Upper Cumberland region has been experiencing steady population growth over the past several decades. Counties range in size from just over 5,000 citizens in the smallest county to over 75,000 in the largest county. Cookeville, the largest city, has approximately 30,000 residents. Area population growth has been somewhat variable, but largely consistent with state and national trends.

(Transportation) The Upper Cumberland is in an ideal location of the state, centrally situated between three of the four largest cities in Tennessee. Tennessee has excellent road infrastructure and a large majority of the region is connected by four-lane highways. Interstate-40 runs through the heart of the region, connecting travelers from Barstow, California to Wilmington, North Carolina. The southern counties are just minutes away from Interstate-24 which is a primary route in the automotive corridor of the southeast. The region contains nine regional airports and multiple rail access points.

The Upper Cumberland is blessed with several current transportation projects, but several rural communities in the region are still in need of increased connectivity to four-lane highways and Interstate 40, additional interchanges to open industrial and residential development, or traffic studies to increase safety and efficiency of traffic flow.

(Geography) Located in portions of the East Central Basin, Highland Rim, and Cumberland Plateau of Tennessee the Upper Cumberland is overflowing with natural scenic beauty. Waterfalls and natural swimming holes are just a few of the tourism attractions that draw adventure enthusiasts. There are countless hiking trails, camping sites, motorcycle routes, immense caves, kayak excursions and much more sprinkled through the area. The Upper Cumberland has 10 state parks and one national park – Big South Fork. The region would benefit from the addition of hotels and restaurants to serve visitors and promote longer stays and greater expenditures.

(Economy) The Upper Cumberland is a rural region with small to medium sized towns. Median household incomes range between \$28,804 and \$43,914. Unemployment has averaged between 7.3 % and 9.4% over the past decade reaching a peak of 13.2% in the height of the recent recession. Job loss has been felt across the region and wages have remained relatively stagnant. The past year has brought a few expansions and one credible job announcement which has turned the tides to a concern for available workforce. Excellent educational facilities including a premier engineering college, Tennessee Tech University, several Community Colleges and TN Centers of Applied Technology are available throughout the region. These institutions are doing their best to provide the needed workforce, but gaps are still present.

(Workforce & Education) Adult education levels have been continuously increasing over the past several decades. In 1970 the percentage of 25-64 years olds that had a high school degree or higher was only 26%. That percentage has more than tripled and today over 84% of 25-64 year olds have a high school degree or higher. Graduation rates have remained steady and the region has a current high school graduation rate of over 91.1%, significantly greater than the state average of 88.5% and the national average of 83.2%. Although the region fares well in high school graduation, it begins to lag behind in post-secondary education. The current workforce (ages 25-64) represents 21.9% with an associate's degree or higher and only 15.9% with a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the state of Tennessee with approximately 34.7% and 27.3% respectively. The region is blessed by the multitude of educational facilities listed on the previous page. Students have access to a variety of training programs, and it is expected that the Governor's Drive to 55 initiative will increase post-secondary training. High school students may now receive two free years of education through the TN Promise program, and adults may earn a two-year degree or specialty certificate through the TN Reconnect program at no cost.

The makeup of our workforce has shifted significantly in the past twenty years. Manufacturing accounted for 32.5% of the workforce in 2000 and represents just over 18% of today's workforce. The apparel industry, which formerly accounted for almost one-third of the area's manufacturing base has decreased dramatically. Retail trade employs 13% of the regions workforce, followed closely by Healthcare employing 12% of the regional labor pool.

Job closures over the past several decades have left several vacant buildings across the region. These buildings primarily do not meet the needs of modern industry. Recognizing this trend, several communities in the region have begun developing green field industrial parks. Parks currently in development are the Clarkrange Business Park, Highlands Business Park, Lafayette Technology Park, Mountain View Industrial Park, and the Plateau Partnership Park. Leadership shall continue to pursue additional industrial land for development.

The top manufacturing clusters in the Upper Cumberland include automotive, vulcanized materials, wood products, plastics, production technology, furniture, and metalworking technology. The Upper Cumberland ranks in the top 50 in the US for automotive and vulcanized materials. Automotive is the number one employing cluster in the region with nearly 5,000 positions filled.

1. Automotive – 4.86k
2. Vulcanized and Fired Materials – 2.48k
3. Wood Products – 1.65k
4. Plastics – 1.42k
5. Production Tech/Heavy Machinery – 1.37k
6. Furniture – 1.275k

1,750 Employed by Yorozu - Top Industrial Employer in the Upper Cumberland Region of TN
1,000 Employed by Bridgestone – 2nd Top Industrial Employer in the Upper Cumberland Region of TN

Top Upper Cumberland Employment by Sectors

19.77%	Government
18.51%	Manufacturing
13.22%	Retail Trade
12.11%	Health Care & Social Assistance
8.48%	Accommodation & Food Service

Community and Private Sector Participation

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee was formed for the development of the region's 2017 CEDS document. The committee was made up of private and public-sector representatives from across the region. The broad spectrum of committee members provided a diverse and comprehensive representation of those who live, work, and do business in the Upper Cumberland. Committee members include a banker, a small business owner, a representative of the local workforce development agency, a representative of the region's only university, a minority representative, and several local officials. In addition to the CEDS Committee, UCDD staff have hosted a series of Economic Development Strategy Sessions inviting local leadership, economic development professionals, educational representatives, utility providers, healthcare representatives, and others. All regional organizations assisting with economic and community development met with the local representatives to focus on the current needs and future vision for each of the 14 counties individually. Several trends were recognized across the region. Information gathered from each of these meetings is reflected in the document.

Analysis of Economic Environment

The 2017 CEDS document is consistent with other government-sponsored plans including the Local Workforce Investment Area 7 Strategic Plan (2014-2019), the State Economic & Community Development Regional Strategic Plan, and the State of TN's overall goal to be the #1 place to do business in the southeast. Multiple goals laid out in the following pages support state and nation-wide goals of workforce development, broadband expansion, and resiliency.

Previous financial investments in the Upper Cumberland are immeasurable. Each city and county have worked continuously installing and maintaining infrastructure to serve their residents and businesses. Utility companies and broadband providers have invested in connecting this region with reliable power, cable, and internet. County governments have spent billions on educating the next generations, and private industries have made significant capital investments in the region building factories, warehouses and distribution centers, and filling those buildings with equipment.

SWOT

Strengths:

Road Infrastructure

Central location in US

Educational Resources

- Tennessee Tech
- TCAT
- Community Colleges (Cookeville Higher Education Campus, Vol State, Nashville State, Motlow, Roane State in Crossville)
- TN Promise, Reconnect, Pathways TN, Drive to 55

Agriculture

Natural Features/Great Outdoors/Beauty of Region

- Tourism
- Quality of Life – Industrial attraction
- Retiree recruitment

Industry-Friendly State

- No state income tax
- Right to Work State
- Good infrastructure
- Low property taxes
- Easy to recruit management
- Low cost of living
- Industry/education collaboration
- #1 in US for automotive manufacturing

Low Unemployment Rate (3%)

Weaknesses:

Lack of Interchange Exits/Limited Access (Hwy 111)

Rural Location/Access to I-40 (Lafayette)

Workforce

- Work Ethic
- Employability Skills
- Substance Abuse
- Availability of Trained Workforce

Lack of Residential and Commercial Development

- Lack of retail (2 largest communities stated this)
- Struggle to recruit (lack of housing for) executive management to small communities
- Lack of water to all parts of rural counties
- Lack of industrial infrastructure (specifically sewer)
- Lack of industrial inventory/shovel ready sites
- Empty buildings don't meet the needs of current industry
- Topography (for industrial)

Opioid Crisis and Crime

- Overcrowded jails
- Limited workforce
- Increased healthcare/insurance costs

Opportunities:

Workforce Development

- Workforce Summit in Cumberland to start business education collaboration
- Industrial Readiness Training - Internships, dual-enrollment, professional development
- Expand soft-skill training through curriculum

Placemaking

- Improve perception (within region and without)
- Revitalize downtowns
- Attract young families
- Reverse population decline
- Grow health and well-being of region

Leadership Development

- Education for newly elected local officials & leadership

Utility capacity planning

Increase recycling

Legislative advocacy

- Regional leadership working together to request biggest needs of the Upper Cumberland region to elected state and federal legislature

Marketing council

- Representatives from large regional organizations – TTU, hospitals, highlands, UCDD

Threats:

Aging Population

- Retirement of experienced workers
- Increase in needs for healthcare
- Lack of affordable housing for seniors
- Absence of transportation for aging seniors
- Rise in needs for in-home care

Workforce

- Leakage - rural industries paying lower wages – driving workforce to higher paying areas
- Departure - experienced workforce retiring/leaving the workforce
- Lack of skin in the game producing lower quality students
- Lack of interest in sectors where there is (or will be) a shortage of employees such as manufacturing, healthcare, logistics, etc

Solid Waste

- Many rural communities at capacity for landfill
- Very expensive to properly dispose of waste

Resiliency

- Natural disasters - flooding, fires, ice storms, tornadoes, droughts - regional preparedness and collaboration is crucial in the event of circumstances beyond our control
- Leadership turnover - consistency in programs and initiatives by local leadership from one administration to the next
- Federal and state leadership - uncertainty in funding vital to rural communities ability to thrive

Goals & Objectives

Goal 1: Workforce Development: Educated workforce meeting all employment needs in the region

Objective 1: Connect employers to employees

Action Item 1: Increase communication with existing businesses to determine their current and future employment needs

Action Item 2: Educate residents on the availability of jobs and the skill sets required to obtain them

Objective 2: Increase the number of citizens with postsecondary degrees and certificates

Action Item 1: Seek funding to sustain Upper Cumberland Reconnect advisors that assist adults interested in returning to school navigate the educational system.

Action Item 2: Connect postsecondary education organizations with local businesses to offer specialized training for businesses

Goal 2: Advocacy: Legislative members fully educated on most prominent needs and concerns of the region

Objective 1: Local leadership identify most important legislative issues

Action Item 1: Elected officials of each community meet together regularly to determine the most important legislative matters and the region's stance on each.

Action Item 2: Create documents to clearly express the position of the region on a wide range of topics.

Objective 2: Increase legislator awareness of the region's stance on political subjects.

Action Items: Expand involvement in Day on Hill events

Action Items: Coordinate regionally focused meetings among sub-groups of the Upper Cumberland.

Goal 3: Industrial Development: Prepared communities competitive in industrial recruitment and expansion

Objective 1: Increase inventory of industrial property across the region

Action Item 1: Continue development of publicly controlled sites i.e. environmental testing, utility expansion, site preparation.

Action Item 2: Identify privately held sites that may be marketed or optioned

Objective 2: Improve Request for Information responses by participating in TVA RFI audit, sharing responses across the region, and implementing regional marketing.

Objective 3: Increase regional marketing efforts through industrial tradeshows such as SelectUSA Investment Summit. Proactively share regional marketing material to develop awareness of the Upper Cumberland among business decision makers.

Objective 4: Create local Business Retention & Expansion programs in each county

Action Item 1: Educate chamber directors and community leaders on the best methods to support existing industries.

Action Item 2: Establish a plan of approach for each community to ensure businesses are contacted multiple times each year.

Goal 4: Retail Development The region has adequate, thriving retail establishments supporting the quality of place of the Upper Cumberland

Objective 1: Grow the community by attracting retail business, putting people and real estate assets to work.

Action Item 1: Identify prime retail real estate in each community.

Action Item 2: Establish target retailers that demographically align with each community.

Action Item 3: Market available sites to prospective retail establishments whose requirements align with site characteristics

Objective 2: Grow existing commercial businesses

Action Item 1: Publicize leakage data educating business owners on needed products and services for each county individually.

Action Item 2: Hold entrepreneur training informing the entrepreneur community of the businesses needed in each community based on leakage data.

Goal 5: Transportation Infrastructure The region is easily accessible to residents, visitors and businesses

Objective 1: Improve transportation network

Action Item 1: Inventory existing transportation projects and track progress and expected timeline to completion.

Action Item 2: Identify future needs through exploration, research and traffic studies,

Action Item 2: Work with traffic engineers to understand the needs and impact in order to make the case among State and Federal funding partners.

Objective 2: Educate State and Federal partners on the identified needs

Action Item 1: Create a priority project list and rank projects by need as a region

Action Item 2: Lobby state and federal partners in support of the top identified transportation projects.

For questions or comments please contact:

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