Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Update for the East Alabama Region

ALABAMA REGION IV

December 1st, 2020

Prepared by
East Alabama Regional Planning
and Development Commission

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INTRODUCTION

A comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) is designed to bring together the public and private sectors in the creation of an economic roadmap to diversify and strengthen a regional economy. The East Alabama CEDS provides an analysis of the regional economy and serves as a guide for establishing regional goals and objectives, developing and implementing a regional plan of action, and identifying investment priorities and funding sources.

The East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (EARPDC) serves as the Economic Development District (EDD) for a ten-county region encompassing the following counties: Calhoun, Chambers, Cherokee, Clay, Cleburne, Coosa, Etowah, Randolph, Talladega, and Tallapoosa. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a regional planning and implementation process designed to create jobs, foster more stable and diversified economies, improve living conditions, and provide a mechanism for guiding and coordinating the efforts of people and organizations involved in economic development. Through the planning process, a CEDS document is developed which:

- outlines the region's assets, challenges, needs, and opportunities;
- identifies the goals and objectives of the development program;
- presents the strategies and action plans devised to achieve those goals; and
- outlines criteria for evaluating the program's achievements.

The program is intended to provide greater economic and social stability for the region and its people and to assist existing and guide new economic development activities in the region.

This document is being prepared to bring the *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the East Alabama Region* into compliance with the requirements of the Economic Development Administration Regulatory Revision Final Rule, which went into effect on January 20, 2015. It will be comprehensively updated once every five years. Annual reports will be prepared in the interim years to summarize and assess any significant changes that may affect development within the region.

East Alabama Economic Development District

Public Participation

The 2017 CEDS incorporates information gathered for the *CLEAR Plan 2030: Community Livability for the East Alabama Region*—a citizen-based, grassroots planning effort designed to enhance the quality of life for residents in the region and provide a course to economic resiliency, housing affordability and land reuse and preservation. The project was funded by a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The *CLEAR Plan 2030* was the culmination of a three-year planning process conducted by the East Alabama Partnership for Livability, a thirteen-member consortium of public and private entities and non-profit organizations—including the EARPDC—that provide services to multiple jurisdictions in east central Alabama. The Consortium hired Partners for Livable Communities and The Walker Collaborative—which partnered with Randall Gross / Development Economics, Skipper Consulting, Inc., and Epiphany Collaboration, LLC—to assist with the project.

Each Consortium member co-chaired one of six Livability Resource Teams (LRTs), comprised of regional stakeholders (including local elected officials and residents) and experts in one of six key aspects of livability: Community Engagement, Economic Competitiveness, Transportation, Housing, Education, and Health. Each LRT created individual studies pertaining to its area of expertise. Each study included an examination of existing conditions, identification of needs, and establishment of goals, objectives, and performance measures.

The planning process also included an extensive community outreach campaign consisting of a regionwide survey, two "County Conversations" in each county, sessions at senior centers and housing authorities, "mini-conversations", distribution of printed materials, use of local broadcast stations and newspapers, and the CLEAR Plan 2030 website and Facebook and Google Plus pages. Participants in these activities received information about livability and provided feedback about livability practices and needs in their communities. Partners in community outreach included Chambers of Commerce, educational institutions (including Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind), civic clubs, human service providers, and local governments. Ultimately, at least 5,400 people throughout the region contributed to the *CLEAR Plan 2030*.

The CLEAR Plan 2030 planning process involved two years of intensive public engagement.

PART I
BACKGROUND

The East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission serves a ten-county area in east-central Alabama, bordering the Alabama-Georgia state line. The region lies between the expanding Birmingham and Atlanta metropolitan areas and also is convenient to the Montgomery, Chattanooga, Tennessee and Columbus, Georgia metropolitan areas. Some of the region's ten counties and 59 municipalities have shared in the neighboring regions' successes or leveraged their own natural, human, and/or man-made resources to generate their own success; others have not been as fortunate. The following chapters present an overview of East Alabama's people, economy, and resources.
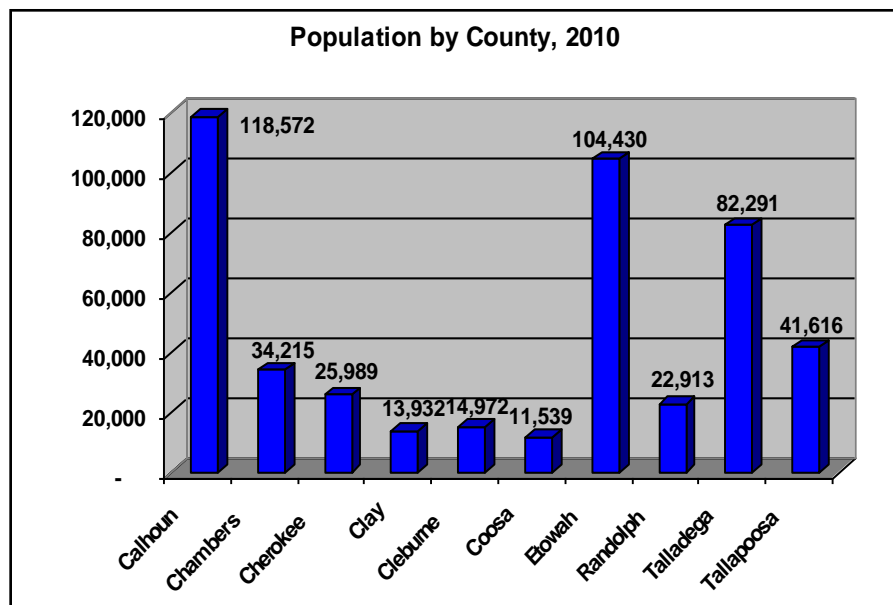
Population

People are the most important part of the economic engine. People need goods and services, people need to make and provide the goods and services, and people need jobs to earn an income to buy the goods and services. The following sections describe general characteristics of the people living in the East Alabama region.
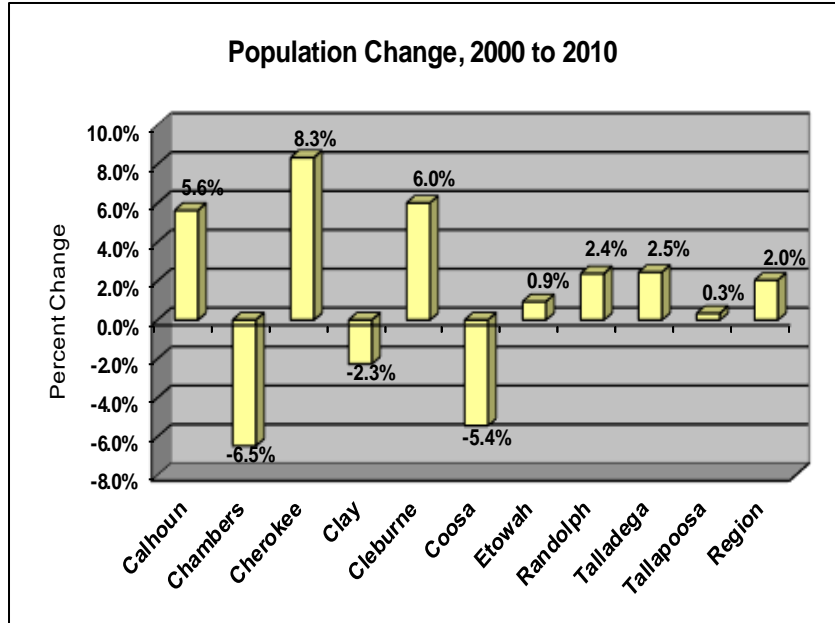
Population Trends

As of the 2010 Census, 470,469 people lived in the East Alabama region, a 2% increase from 2000. Meanwhile, Alabama grew by 7.5% and the U.S. by 9.7%. Nearly two-thirds of the region's population is concentrated in only three counties: Calhoun, Etowah, and Talladega. Calhoun and Etowah Counties are the region's two metropolitan statistical areas, with Anniston and Gadsden as their core cities.

The region's three most populous counties were not necessarily the fastest-growing counties, however. Instead, two of the more rural counties, Cherokee and Cleburne, had the highest growth rates, followed by Calhoun County. The population in Etowah, Randolph, Talladega and Tallapoosa Counties rose slightly, while Chambers, Clay and Coosa Counties lost population.

Population by County, 2010

County	Population
Calhoun	118,572
Chambers	34,215
Cherokee	25,989
Clay	13,932
Cleburne	14,972
Coosa	11,539
Etowah	104,430
Randolph	22,913
Talladega	82,291
Tallapoosa	41,616

Cherokee, Cleburne, and Randolph Counties offer people working in metro areas (including Atlanta) scenic country and small-town living. Calhoun, Etowah, and Talladega Counties are employment centers traversed by Interstates. Chambers, Clay, Coosa and Tallapoosa Counties were significantly impacted by textile plant closings, although automotive plant suppliers have helped Tallapoosa County recover.

Population Change, 2000 to 2010

Long-range data show fluctuating population with a generally upward trend in nine of the region's counties. Fifty-year growth rates ranged from 7.6% in Coosa County to 59.4% in Cherokee County. Only Chambers County had a net population decrease, at 9.6%. Regionally, the greatest population gain occurred between 1970 and 1980, when all ten counties enjoyed growth. This decade was the only time since 1960 that regional growth, at 12.5%, was comparable to that of the state, at 13.1%, and the nation, at 11.4%. Over the 50-year period, East Alabama's growth rate was 17.3%, much lower than the state's 46.3% or the nation's 72.2% growth rates.

Population Change, 1960 to 2010
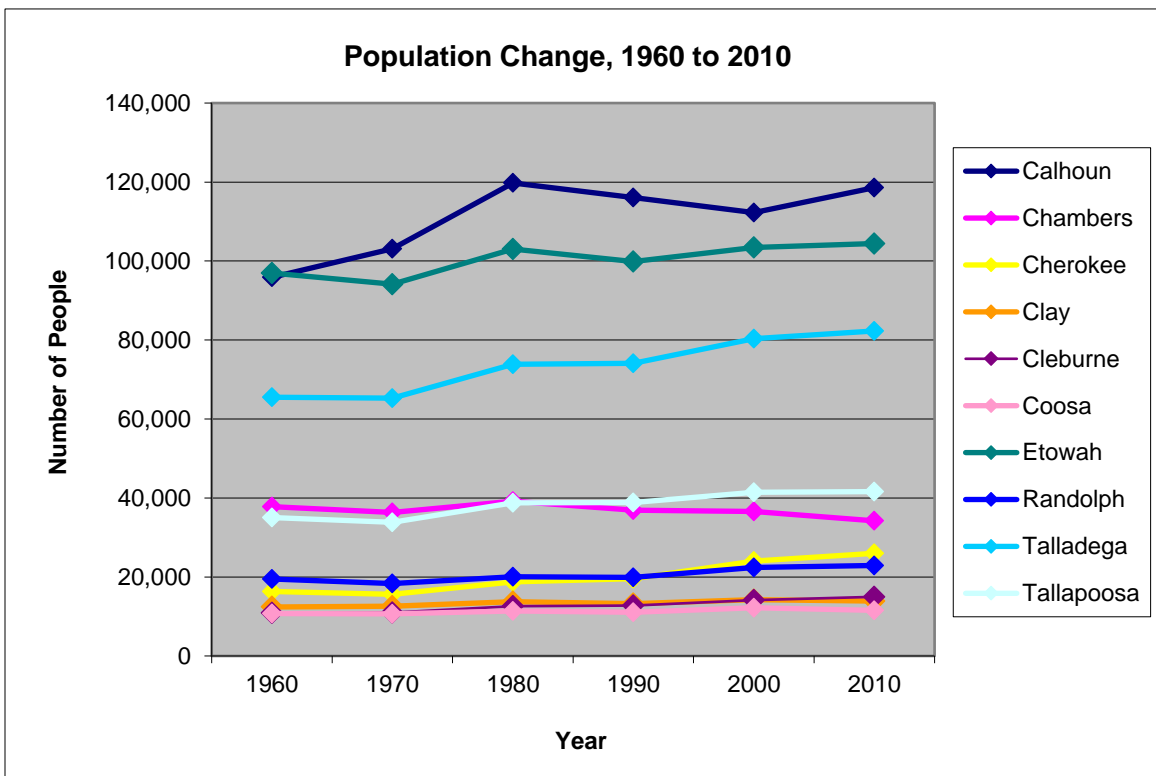
Municipality size in the East Alabama region reflects the area's rural nature. Of the 59 municipalities, almost half were towns of less than 1,000 people in 2010. Just over one-fourth had populations between 1,000 and 5,000, and only seven cities had more than 10,000 residents. The largest city in the region, Gadsden, dropped to less than 40,000 people in the 2000 Census and continued to lose population through 2010. Anniston, the second largest city, has been losing residents since 1960. Therefore, although half of the region's ten counties—Calhoun, Chambers, Etowah, Talladega, and Tallapoosa—have more people living in incorporated cities and towns than in the unincorporated areas, rural and small town life prevails.


Municipality Size, 2010
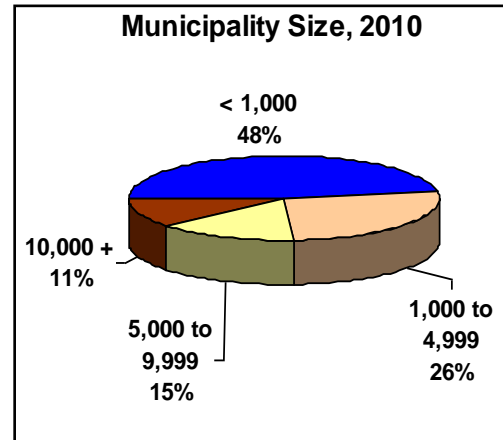
"City life" did gain popularity in six counties (Calhoun, Cherokee, Clay, Cleburne, Coosa, and Talladega) between 2000 and 2010, however. Of the region's 59 municipalities, 35 gained population, and eight grew by over 20%. Three towns incorporated during that decade: Cusseta in Chambers County, with a population of 123; Kellyton in Coosa County, with a population of 217; and Munford in Talladega County, with a population of 1,292. Fredonia, in Chambers County, incorporated after the 2010 Census.
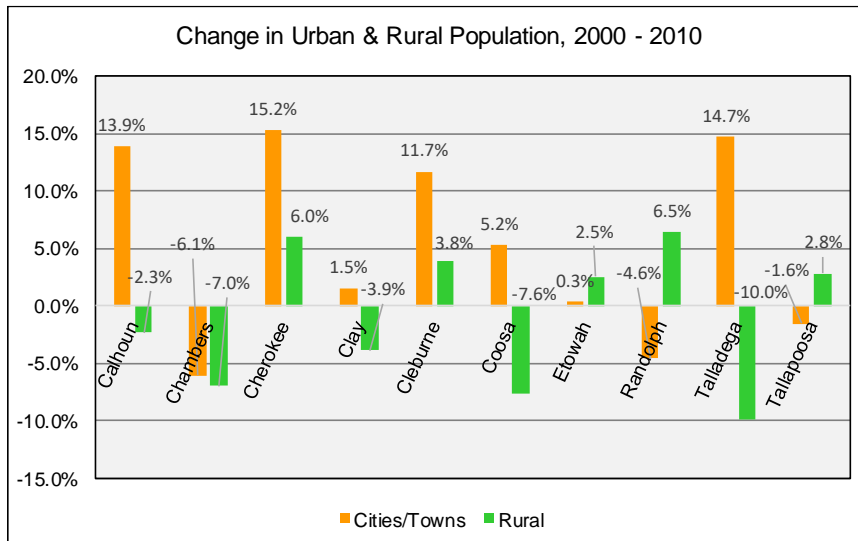
Although Chambers County suffered widespread population loss, the rate of decline was higher in the rural areas than in cities and towns. Of the 23 municipalities that lost population, seven suffered losses of more than 10%. Two towns merged with adjoining cities between 2000 and 2010. Blue Mountain, in Calhoun County, abandoned its

Major Municipal Population Shifts, 2000 - 2010

Municipal Population Growth		Municipal Population Loss	
Jacksonville	49.3%	Ridgeville	-29.1%
Goldville	48.6%	Waverly	-21.2%
Oxford	46.9%	Camp Hill	-20.3%
Lincoln	36.9%	Daviston	-19.9%
Talladega Springs	33.9%	Lanett	-18.1%
Leesburg	28.5%	Hobson City	-12.2%
Cedar Bluff	24.1%	Ranburne	-10.9%
Bon Air	20.8%	Goodwater	-9.7%

Change in Urban & Rural Population, 2000 - 2010

charter and was annexed into Anniston; and Mountainboro, in Etowah County, de-incorporated and was annexed into Boaz.

Map of the East Alabama Region
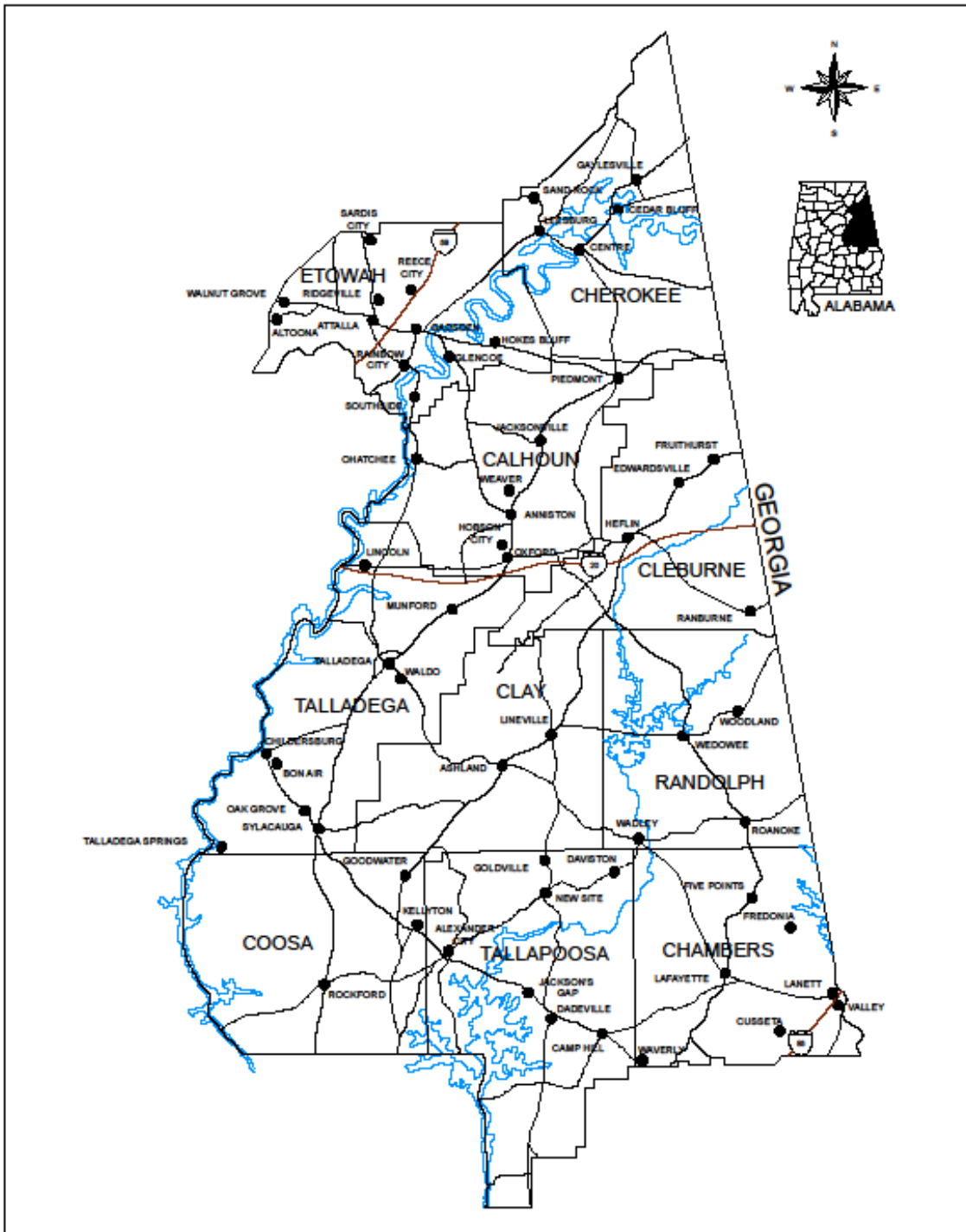
Calhoun and Etowah Counties have the highest percentage of urban population in the East Alabama region, at 69.0% and 60.2% respectively. These counties are followed by Chambers County, at 50.2%, and Talladega County, at 44.5%. At the other end of the spectrum, Cherokee, Clay and Cleburne Counties had no urban area whatsoever. In Coosa County, only 2.6% of the population lived in an urban area, and in Randolph County, 21.8% was considered to be urban.

Although the East Alabama region continues to enjoy population growth, the growth rate has been considerably lower than that of the state or the nation. As stated previously, the East Alabama region had a 2.0% increase in population between 2000 and 2010 and a 17.3% population increase between 1960 and 2010. Comparatively, the population of the State of Alabama increased by 7.5% in the last ten years and 46.3% since 1960. The United States experienced a 9.7% increase in population between 2000 and 2010 and a 72.2% increase between 1960 and 2010.

In terms of physical size, the East Alabama region encompasses 11.8% of the land in the state. The proportion of the state's population residing within the East Alabama region continues to slowly decrease. In 1980, East Alabama was home to 12% of the state's residents. That number has slipped to 10.4% in 2000, and 9.8% in 2010. It was expected that the steady expansion of the Atlanta and Birmingham area commuter sheds, and the retirees who have been attracted to the region's rural character and natural amenities, would be reflected in the regional perspective with the 2010 Census. Unfortunately, that is not the case. It does appear, however, that the influx of commuting residents and retirees has assisted in maintaining a somewhat stable population base.

Population By Age Group

The movement of the Baby Boomers (people born from 1946 through 1964) into retirement age has been a national dialog for quite some time. Besides the potential impact of this generation's retirement on Social Security, there has been great concern about a shortage of employees to fill the void that will be left when these experienced workers retire. The Baby Boom was followed by a "baby bust," a sharp decline in birth rates that lasted through 1976. The birth rate did increase between 1976 and 1990 (sometimes called the "echo boom"), but the jobs the Baby Boomers vacate will have to be filled by increasingly younger–and less experienced–workers over time. Much discussion has ensued about means to entice Baby Boomers to remain in, or otherwise contribute to, the workforce longer.

The effects of the boom-bust-echo are evident in the pattern of change in age distribution between 1990 and 2010. People born during the first ten years of the Baby Boom moved into the 45-64 age category during the 1990s, causing a very high rate of increase. Low growth and decline in the 25 to 44 and 18 to 24 age categories reflects the decline in births at the end of the Baby Boom and during the "baby bust". The negative change in Alabama's and the region's college age population also could indicate an increase in the number of young adults who chose to go to college, or get employment, out of state. The "echo boom" is evident in figures for the United States and less so for Alabama. The region appears to have missed out on the "echo boom".

East Alabama has been plagued by young adults leaving the region to attend college then obtaining jobs outside the region. This tendency exacerbated the effects of the "baby bust" and essentially negated the "echo boom". Unless the exodus of young adults is halted then reversed, East Alabama businesses will have more difficulty filling positions vacated by retiring Baby Boomers than will businesses in other parts of Alabama or the nation as a whole. The region has been attracting retirees and older workers, however. These people have been attracted to East

Alabama because of the State's low taxes and the region's numerous lakes, Appalachian foothills, rural character, and easy access to larger urban areas.

Population Change by Age Groups 2000 to 2010

Age Distribution, 2010
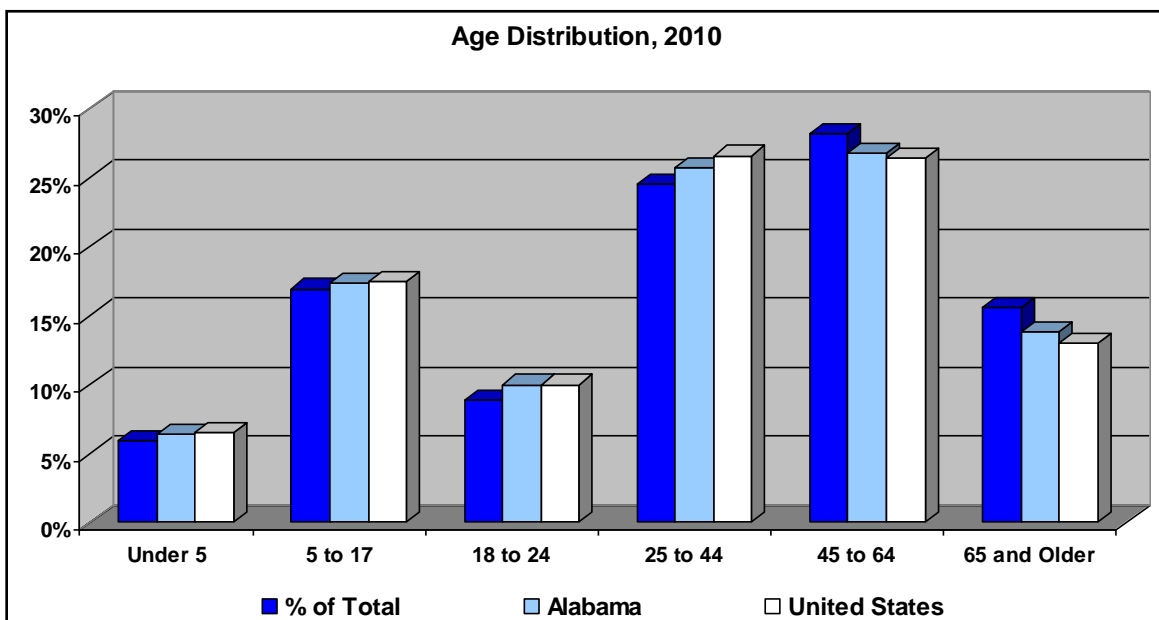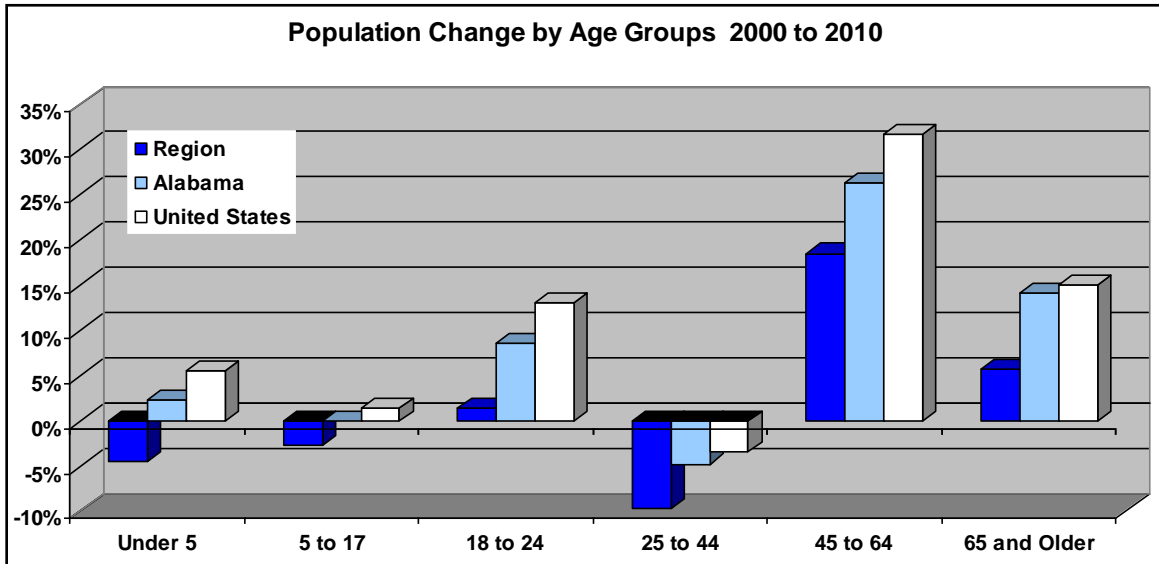
Population by Race & Hispanic Origin

Across the East Alabama region, about three-fourths of the population was white and just under one-fourth was black or African American as of the 2010 Census. The remaining population, at 3.7 percent, was people who are of another race or multi-racial. Between 2000 and 2010, there was a 1% decrease in the white population and a 3.5% increase in the black population. People of races other than white or black nearly doubled in number and as a percentage of the total population. The percentage and number of Hispanic people more than doubled over the 10-year span, with 2.7% of the population claiming to be of that ethnic origin in the 2010 Census. Hispanic or Latino origin is reported separately from race because people who are Hispanic or Latino share a common culture but may be of any race. At present, the number of people who may face language barriers

when seeking employment is small. While this fact may seem to be beneficial for the region–in that most of the present and future workforce should have minimal communication problems–it is a detriment to foreign-born people who move into the region, as few resources exist to help them acclimatize.

The increase in persons who are of other races or multi-racial is due not only to immigration but also to the continued efforts in the 2000 and 2010 Censuses to document and count these persons as a separate race sector. Prior to 2000, multi-racial persons were grouped with one-race categories. For data management purposes, multi-racial persons (due to their relatively small numbers), other small, single race categories, and the "some other race" category were combined into "other".
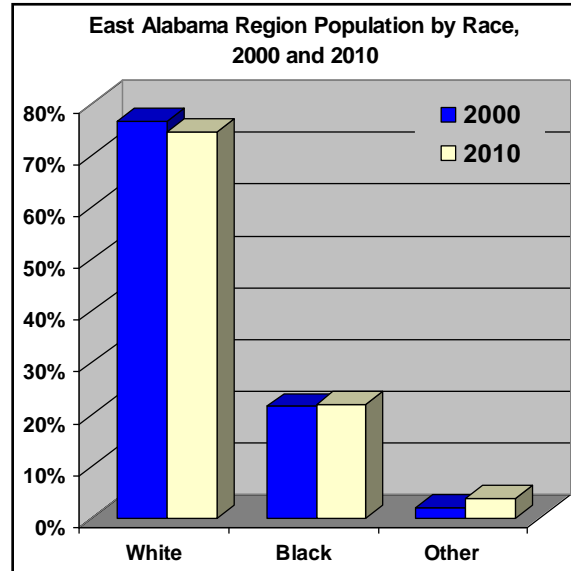
The three counties with the strongest minority presence are Chambers, Coosa, and Talladega Counties. Even in Chambers County, which has the highest minority population, the black
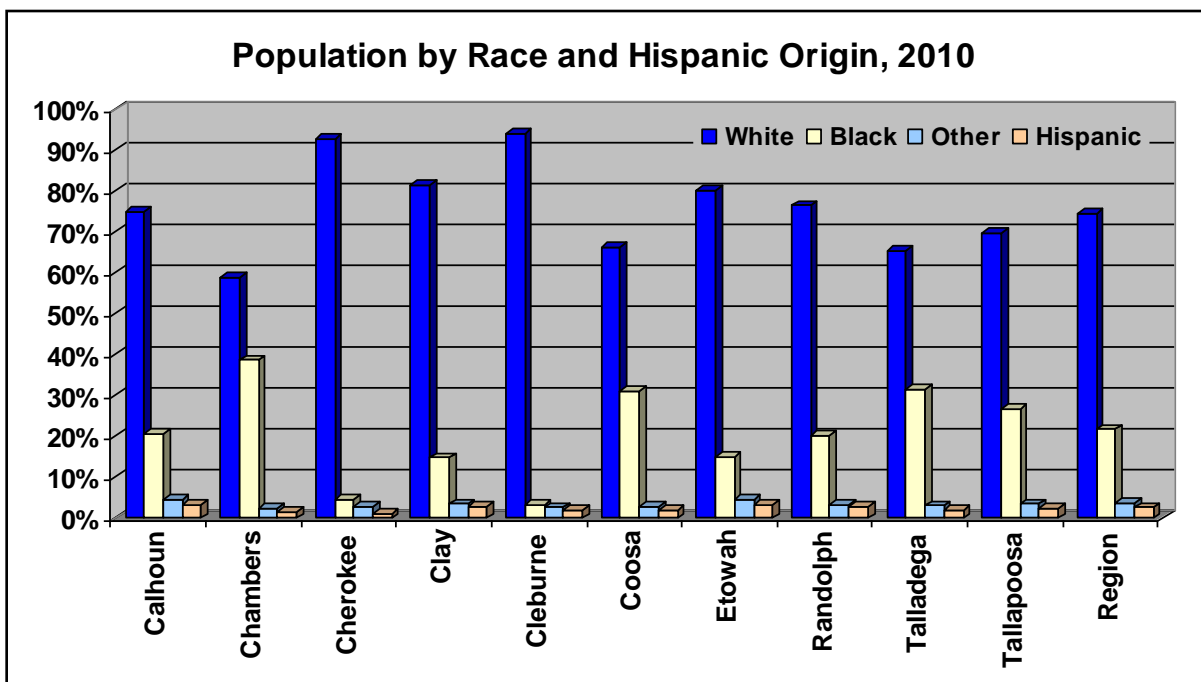
population only comprises 38.7% of the total population, and all minority races combined make up less than half of the population, at 41.2%

Cleburne and Cherokee Counties have the smallest concentrations of minority population, at 6.0% and 7.3 percent, respectively. Minority population in the remaining seven counties ranges from 18.3% to 33.7% The Hispanic population is highest in Calhoun and Etowah Counties, each with 3.3% The smallest concentrations of Hispanic persons are found in Cherokee County, at 1.2% of the population, and Chambers County, at 1.6%
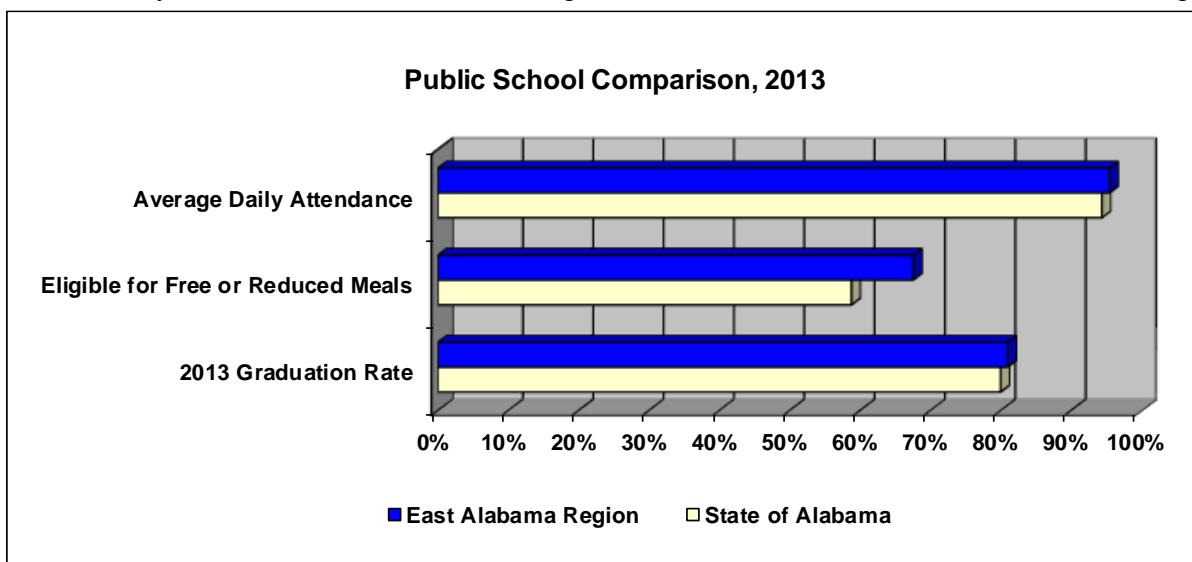
Workforce Development and Use

Even if a community has people to fill the jobs economic developers attract, those people must have the skills employers need. The following sections discuss educational and training opportunities available in East Alabama and examine indicators of present workforce preparedness for the ever-changing economy.

Educational Facilities

Workforce development begins when we are children. In our youth, we learn the skills we need to survive–including skills to obtain and retain employment. We learn to read, to write, to perform mathematical calculations, and we begin to form ideas about what we want to be when we grow up. The East Alabama region has numerous educational facilities that help children and young adults prepare for entry into the working world.

Primary and secondary education is offered through 21 different city and county school systems, which collectively have 170 schools. Just over two-thirds of the school children in the region are eligible for free or reduced price meals, at 67.6 percent, as compared to 58.8% statewide. Only five school systems have fewer than 59% of their students receiving meal assistance. And, in no system is there less than 50% of the students eligible for the free or reduced meal programs. Meal assistance is an indicator of poverty levels in the school systems, and children living in low income households also may need other types of assistance to remain in school and be successful in their educational endeavors. The East Alabama region's high school graduation rate, at 81 percent, is slightly higher than that of the state, at 80% Over half (57 percent) of the region's school systems have a high school graduation rate that is equal to or higher than that of the state. Nine school systems in East Alabama have a graduation rate that is lower than the state average.

Public School Comparison, 2013

	East Alabama Region	State of Alabama
Average Daily Attendance	~97%	~96%
Eligible for Free or Reduced Meals	~68%	~59%
2013 Graduation Rate	~81%	~80%

According to the Alabama Department of Education school system report cards, the Anniston city school system had the lowest graduation rate, at 58 percent, followed by the Lanett city school system, at 64 percent, and Attala and Gadsden city schools, at 70% Other school systems with graduation rates below 80% were Coosa County, Randolph County, Chambers County, and Sylacauga and Talladega city schools.

Of particular interest to those in economic development is the availability and quality of vocational education programs. All of the school systems have career and technical training programs. All but three of the systems have received business or industry certification on all of their career/technical programs. Many of the school systems appear to do a good job of informing students about career and technical education classes and of helping students find jobs in related fields or schools at which to continue their education.
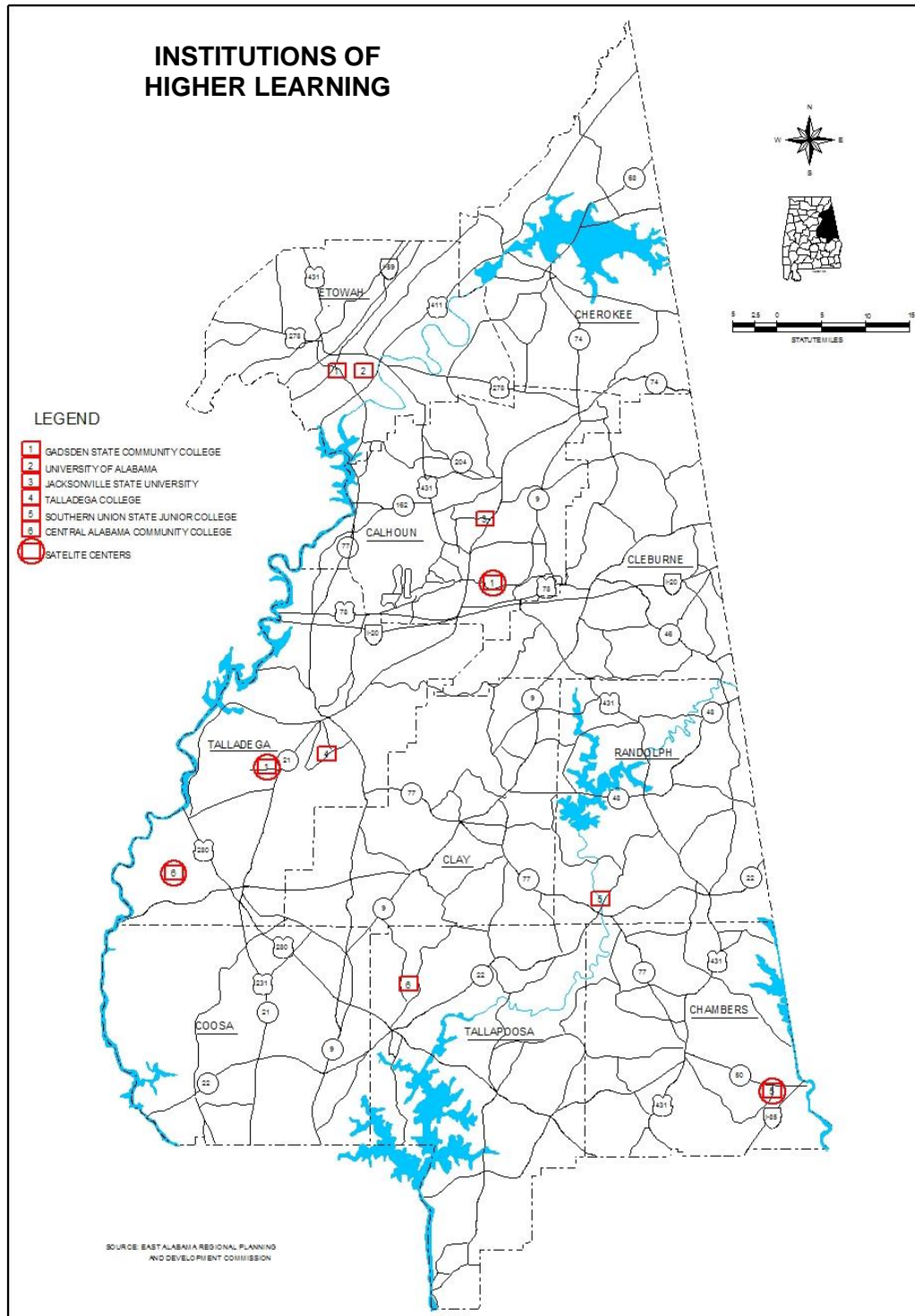
Although students may continue their education in other parts of the state and country, they also have opportunities to receive training in a specific career or to attend college closer to home. Trade schools and similar professional training programs are too numerous to list. There are six main campus colleges and universities and five associated satellite centers in the East Alabama region, which are shown on the map on the opposite page and described in the following section.

Jacksonville State University, located in Jacksonville, was founded in 1883 as a teacher's college. Since then, Jacksonville State (JSU) has grown to offer a wide range of majors within the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Commerce and Business Administration, Education and Professional Studies, and Nursing and Health Sciences. JSU's programs in Art, Business, Communication, Computer Sciences and Computer Information Systems, Dietetics, Drama, Education, Music, Nursing, and Social Work are accredited by their professional associations. JSU offers seven bachelor's degrees, six master's degrees, and an educational specialist degree. The Gadsden branch of Jacksonville State University (JSU-Gadsden) offers upper level (junior and senior) courses toward bachelor's degrees in business, education, and nursing.

The University of Alabama Gadsden Center offers masters and educational specialist degrees in the College of Education, the Master of Library and Information Studies, the Master of Arts in Management, and the Master of Social Work. The University has the only accredited library college in Alabama.

Talladega College, in the City of Talladega, is a private liberal arts college that confers the Bachelor of Arts degree in several disciplines under the Divisions of Business and Administration, Humanities and Fine Arts, Natural Sciences and Mathematics, and Social Sciences and Education. Students in the Division of Natural Sciences and Mathematics also can earn special degrees and certificates. Founded by former slaves William Savery and Thomas Tarrant in 1865 to educate the children of former slaves, and chartered in 1869, Talladega College remains dedicated to serving the educational needs of African-Americans.

Central Alabama Community College (CACC) is a two-year institution with two main campuses–one in Alexander City and one in Childersburg. It serves Clay, Coosa, Talladega, and Tallapoosa Counties in East Alabama. CACC offers Associate degrees in Science, Applied Science, and Occupational Technology plus certificate programs. Degrees and certificates are offered in fifteen fields of study, including industrial engineering technology and manufacturing technology. Students can transfer core courses to four-year colleges and universities, and CACC has partnered with Capstone School of Nursing at The University of Alabama and with Faulkner University to enable CACC students to obtain Bachelor and Master degrees primarily through distance learning. CACC has also developed a Skills Training program to offer employment training to students not wishing to pursue a degree. CACC is fully accredited in its academic and technical programs of study.

INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

LEGEND

1	GADSDEN STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
2	UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
3	JACKSONVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY
4	TALLADEGA COLLEGE
5	SOUTHERN UNION STATE JUNIOR COLLEGE
6	CENTRAL ALABAMA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
◯	SATELITE CENTERS

SOURCE: EAST ALABAMA REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

    Gadsden State Community College (GSCC) has three campuses in Gadsden, one campus in Centre, one campus in Anniston, one instructional center at McClellan, and instructional sites (in the region) at Piedmont High School and in Cleburne County. GSCC offers academic and technical programs. The academic division offers Associate in Science, Applied Science, and Arts degrees in over fifty majors in its two-year transfer/career program. The technical division offers Associate in Applied Sciences degrees and certificates in engineering technologies and applied technologies

(e.g., automotive, cosmetology, welding). GSCC's Skills Training Center offers short-term, non-credit, competency-based training programs in air conditioning and refrigeration, machine trades, office careers, and welding. GSCC is fully accredited in its academic and technical programs of study.

Southern Union State Community College (SUSCC) serves Randolph and Chambers Counties within the region, with campuses in Wadley and Valley. The two Opelika campuses also are convenient to those counties. The Academic Division offers an Associate in Science degree, and academic courses are transferable to other colleges and universities. The Health Sciences Division offers programs leading to certificates, awards of achievement, occupational certificates, and Associate in Applied Science degrees. Some of the courses in this division may be transferable to a four-year college or university. The Associate Degree Nursing, Emergency Medical Services, Nursing Assistant, Practical Nursing, Radiography, and Surgical Technology programs are accredited/approved by their professional associations. The Technical Division offers Tech-Prep and Dual Enrollment programs for high school students, Business and Industry programs to meet area employers' training needs, and Associate degree and certificate programs. The Cosmetology, Therapeutic Massage, and Automotive Collision Repair programs are accredited/approved by their professional associations. The Adult Education and Skills Training Division assists non-traditional college students in obtaining the basic and/or occupational skills necessary to obtain a job in the shortest period possible. SUSCC is fully accredited in its academic and technical programs of study.

Professional Development Programs

The community colleges and JSU provide training and services to those who need to increase or update their work skills and to area businesses and industries. JSU's Small Business Development Center provides counseling and training to small businesses free-of-charge. The Small Business Development Center is housed in the Center for Economic Development (CED), which provides applied research in economic development to state and local government agencies and conducts business research for private commercial enterprises on contractual bases. The CED has conducted economic impact studies, marketing research, and business research. JSU-Gadsden houses a satellite office for both programs.

CACC's Alexander City campus is the only WorkKeys Certified Testing Center in the region. WorkKeys is a job skills assessment system measuring "real world" skills that employers believe are critical to job success. It assesses an individual's skills through a work-related problem-solving process. The Center then compares the individual's skills with skills required for particular positions within a business or industry and helps identify additional training that could help that individual achieve career goals. The Alabama Office of Workforce Development initiated this program to help job seekers and employers, who can use WorkKeys to gage a prospective employee's skill level.

East Alabama has two of the state's sixteen Alabama Technology Network (ATN) Centers, which is a partnership between two-year colleges, the University of Alabama system, Auburn University, and the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama. They are located at CACC and at GSCC. ATN helps businesses remain competitive by teaching employees the latest practices in the areas of health safety and environmental, human resources and organizational development, information technology, lean manufacturing, and quality systems. ATN members also provide

technical assistance to businesses if needed, helping them identify existing or potential problems and possible solutions to those problems, plus resources to implement those solutions.

The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs' Office of Workforce Development has 30 One-Stop Centers and 31 satellites throughout the state to provide job-seekers with information on job development, occupational and educational training, vocational rehabilitation, veterans services, and unemployment insurance. Employers work with local centers to locate employees with specific skills. Many centers are electronically linked with partner agencies, such as the Alabama Departments of Industrial Relations, Human Resources, Rehabilitation Services and Education, two-year colleges, and others. The Alabama Career Center System sites in the East Alabama region are the Cheaha Career Center (Anniston), Gadsden Career Center, Roanoke Career Center, and Talladega Career Center. Career Center partners in the region are Alexander City CareerLink (satellite), Anniston CareerLink, Gadsden CareerLink, the Sylacauga Re-employment Center, and Talladega CareerLink.

The Alabama College System's industrial training institute, AIDT, provides job-specific training free of charge to new and expanding industries. Alabama's influx of new automotive plants has drawn employees away from existing industries. The two-year colleges are offering a federally funded program to train workers to fill jobs vacated by those who found work in the expanding automotive industry. The program provides training and job placement services at 34 sites around the state, concentrating in areas around Alabama's automotive manufacturing plants. Existing industries seeking more workers include carpet, metals, and machinery manufacturers.

The Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is a source of employment training for job seekers who are at least 55 years old and who have a limited gross household income. The program prepares participants to re-enter the full- or part-time job market by providing paid, temporary part-time community service training in governmental or 501(c)(3) non-profit agencies. The East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (EARPDC) administers the program, managing 98 authorized SCSEP slots. The EARPDC is a sub-grantee of Senior Service America, Inc. (a national contractor) and the Alabama Department of Senior Services. Many older workers have gained valuable on-the-job experience and self-sufficiency through this program.

Locally-initiated workforce development initiatives also abound. For instance, the Greater Valley Area Chamber of Commerce and the University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center offer local business owners and employees a series of five weekly classes called the MBA (Moving Business Ahead) Institute. Other program sponsors include local banks and the county's two newspapers. People who attend all five classes receive certificates of completion.

Programs for People with Special Training Needs

Human service organizations, housing authorities, and businesses throughout the region have made efforts to provide worker training for populations that have difficulty finding and keeping employment, such as people who are homeless, who have low incomes or are on welfare, who are elderly, or who have disabilities.

Probably the most well-known facility serving people with disabilities is the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB) in Talladega, which was founded in 1858 by Dr. Joseph Henry Johnson as the Alabama School for the Deaf. Since then, AIDB has grown to become the world's most comprehensive education, rehabilitation, and service system, serving children and adults who are deaf, blind, and multi-disabled and their families. All AIDB services are available to Alabama

residents at no charge. Out-of-state students are accepted in the residential programs when space is available. They pay tuition and room and board charges. In addition to providing services on campus, AIDB has eight Regional Centers that provide a wide range of services, from at-home visits for parents of infants who are sensory impaired to programs for seniors who may be experiencing hearing and/or vision loss late in life. AIDB's E.H. Gentry Technical Facility is an accredited two-year technical school which offers adults with sensory impairments aged 16 and up a program of evaluation, adjustment, and vocation training in thirteen different fields. Alabama Industries for the Blind is the state's largest employer of people who are blind or visually impaired, with two manufacturing plants, one retail store, and three stores on military bases in Alabama and Georgia. Employees at the Talladega facility and the Birmingham satellite make and distribute home and office products.
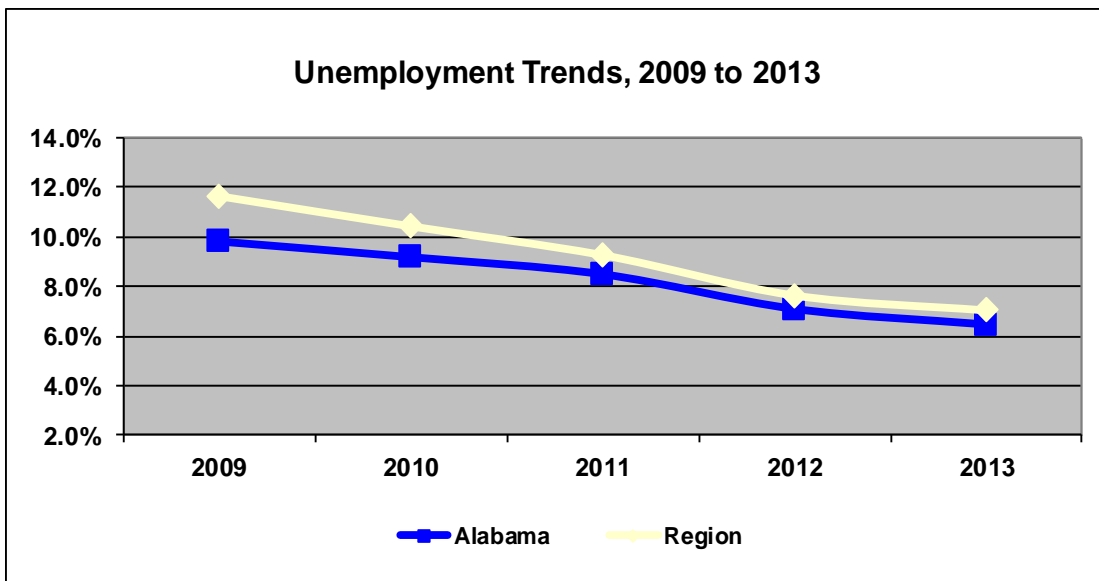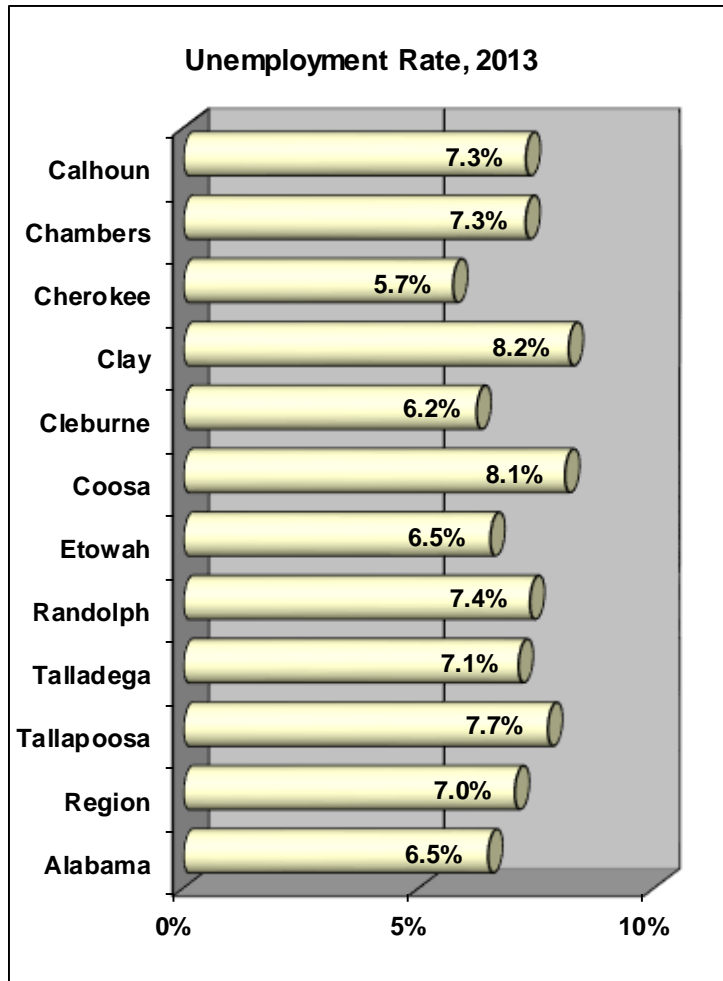
The Present Workforce

According to the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations, East Alabama had a 2013 civilian labor force of over 200,000 persons, which is a 2.2% decrease since 2009. The labor force has declined by more than 4,400 people (net) during the past five years. Calhoun County lost the most people from the labor force, at 3,054 persons. Chambers, Etowah and Talladega Counties saw slight gains in labor force, while the other counties experienced losses of fewer than 1,000 people. Clay County, however, did experience a large labor force loss in terms of percentage of the labor force, at 11% (616 people). Randolph County lost 7.8% of its workers during the five-year period, followed by Calhoun County at 5.7% During the same time period, the state suffered a loss of only 2,331 persons from the labor force, which equates to an overall decrease of 0.1%

Change in Labor Force and Employment, 2009 to 2013

While the local and state labor force decreased slightly from 2009 to 2013, the number of people who are unemployed dropped significantly during that period. In East Alabama, unemployment decreased by more than 9,700 persons, or 41% Likewise, the state saw a 34% decrease in unemployed persons. In both instances, this decrease was achieved in part due to increased employment. Overall, the region added over 5,300 jobs (a 2.9% increase), most of which located in Talladega, Chambers and Etowah Counties. Statewide, businesses added over 69,000 jobs, a 3.6% increase. Despite these gains, unemployment rates in East Alabama's counties have not returned to their pre-recession levels.
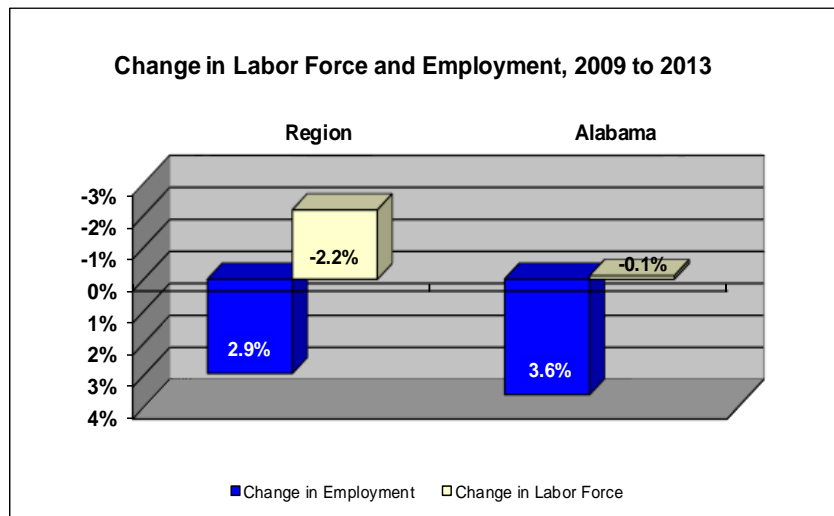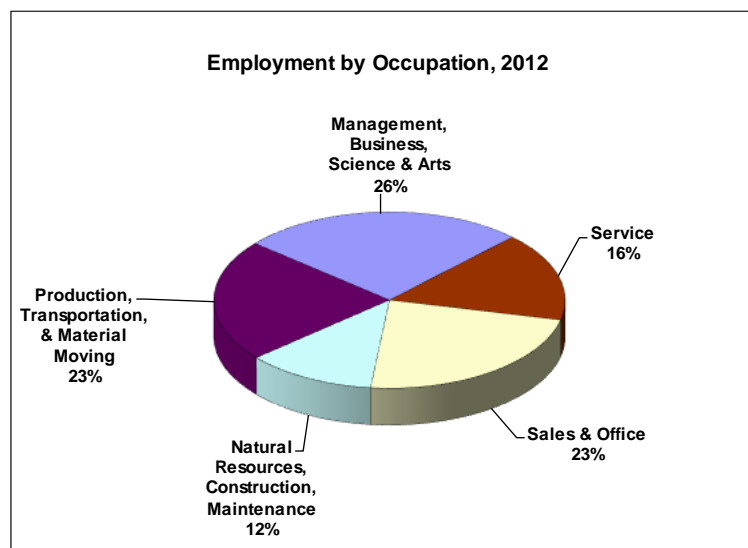
Only three counties had an unemployment rate that equaled or was lower than the state's rate of 6.5% in 2013. Cherokee County had the lowest unemployment rate, at 5.7 percent, followed by Cleburne County, at 6.2 percent, and Etowah County, at 6.5% The other seven counties had unemployment rates greater than 6.5% Unemployment rates were highest in Clay County, at 8.2 percent, Coosa County, at 8.1 percent, and Tallapoosa County, at 7.7% East Alabama's unemployment rates have been consistently higher than the statewide rate. The three counties mentioned above consistently fared better than the state during the past four years, and the unemployment gap between the state and the region has been decreasing steadily since 2009. All East Alabama counties saw unemployment levels decline between 2009 and 2013. The most dramatic improvement occurred in Chambers County, which dropped from 17.7% to 7.3% in five years.

Unemployment Rate, 2013

County	Rate
Calhoun	7.3%
Chambers	7.3%
Cherokee	5.7%
Clay	8.2%
Cleburne	6.2%
Coosa	8.1%
Etowah	6.5%
Randolph	7.4%
Talladega	7.1%
Tallapoosa	7.7%
Region	7.0%
Alabama	6.5%

Unemployment Trends, 2009 to 2013

Alabama: 2009 ≈ 9.9%, 2010 ≈ 9.2%, 2011 ≈ 8.4%, 2012 ≈ 7.0%, 2013 ≈ 6.5%
Region: 2009 ≈ 11.6%, 2010 ≈ 10.4%, 2011 ≈ 9.3%, 2012 ≈ 7.8%, 2013 ≈ 7.0%

In the 2000 Census, most of East Alabama's employed residents reported working in production, transportation, or material moving, in spite of the large reduction in textile jobs that was occurring around that time. The "sales and office" and "management, professional, and

related" occupations ranked a close second and third respectively. The post-2000 introduction and subsequent expansion of companies such as Honda and Teksid appeared to have increased the number of people working in production significantly enough to have more than offset the continued exodus of textile jobs from the region. Around the end of the decade, according to the 2008-2012 American Community Survey, a slight shift was recognized as management and professional jobs came to employ the largest sector of the East Alabama region, at 26.2 percent, followed closely by sales and office occupations, at 23.1 percent, and production, transportation and material moving jobs, at 22.5% The East Alabama region has a considerably larger percentage of the labor force working in production, transportation and material moving than the State, at 15.7%

Employment by Occupation, 2012

- Management, Business, Science & Arts 26%
- Service 16%
- Sales & Office 23%
- Natural Resources, Construction, Maintenance 12%
- Production, Transportation, & Material Moving 23%

As with unemployment, underemployment is prevalent in the East Alabama region. A 2012 study of underemployment in Alabama—produced by the University of Alabama's Center for Business and Economic Research—found that 41% of East Alabama's workers are underemployed. That study defines underemployed persons as "workers who believe that their education and training, skills, or experience (i) are not fully utilized in their current jobs and (ii) qualify them for higher paying or more satisfying jobs for which they could leave their current positions."

Throughout the region, the vast majority of workers felt their current job fit well with their education and training, skills, and experience. However, well over half did believe that they were qualified for a better job. Most workers would leave their current job for a job that offered a better income, and just under one-fifth of workers had sought a better job within the three months prior to the study. About 14% stated that they would not leave their current job. Most workers would prefer that a new job add no more than 20 miles or 20 minutes to their present commute, but over one-quarter would be willing to travel farther than 20 miles and over one-third would be willing to travel longer than 20 minutes for a better job. Primary reasons cited for being underemployed were lack of job opportunities in the area, low wages at available jobs, and living too far from jobs.

Although underemployment could lead workers to seek employment outside the region, the study's authors point out that underemployment can be a benefit to areas with low unemployment rates. Those who are underemployed would be likely to apply for new jobs that more closely match their skill levels, provided that the new job had better pay (or other incentives) than the current job. Furthermore, the positions these workers vacate would become available to others who are looking for a job or a career change.

East Alabama experienced this phenomenon when Honda Manufacturing opened, and subsequently expanded, its plant in Talladega County. Median household incomes in many parts of the region have been below the State's median for quite some time, so the relatively high-paying jobs at Honda drew thousands of applicants. Hopefully these and other higher-tech jobs that have followed will help stem the erosion of household incomes in East Alabama. The median household income did increase by over $9,000 between 1990 and 2000 and increased again by roughly $6,100 between 2000 and 2012. However, the regional median income slipped from 90% of the State's median in 1990 to 89% in 2000 and 87% in 2012. The
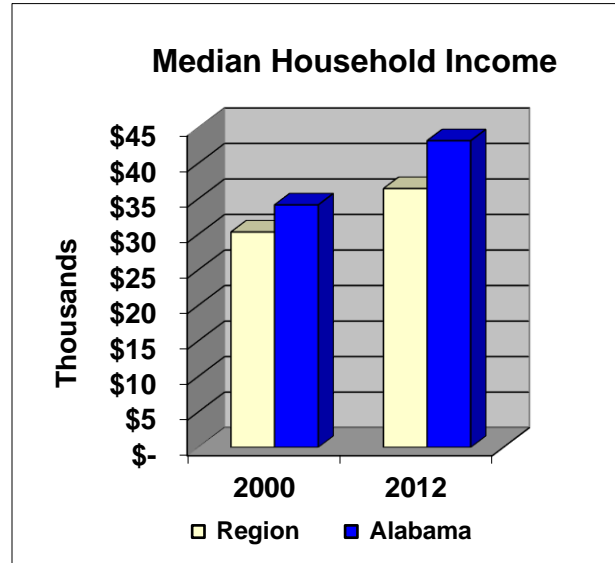
growing discrepancy between regional and state incomes occurred because the percentage of households earning below $25,000 decreased more statewide than it did in East Alabama. On the other end of the spectrum, the State experienced a more robust gain in households earning $75,000 or more than did the region. Neither the State nor the regional median incomes kept pace with inflation. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Inflation Calculator, $1.00 in 2000 had the same buying power as $1.33 in 2012, or a 33% inflation rate. During that time, the median household income rose 26% statewide and 20% across the region.

Another indicator of regional (and worker) prosperity is the poverty rate. As would be expected given the trends in household incomes, the gap between regional and statewide poverty rates also has been growing. In 2000, East Alabama's poverty rate was only 0.6 percentage points higher than the State's. During the following decade, poverty rates rose in all ten counties, and the gap widened to 2.4 percentage points. Cleburne and Tallapoosa Counties fared better than the other counties, with only a 0.4 percentage point increase in household poverty.
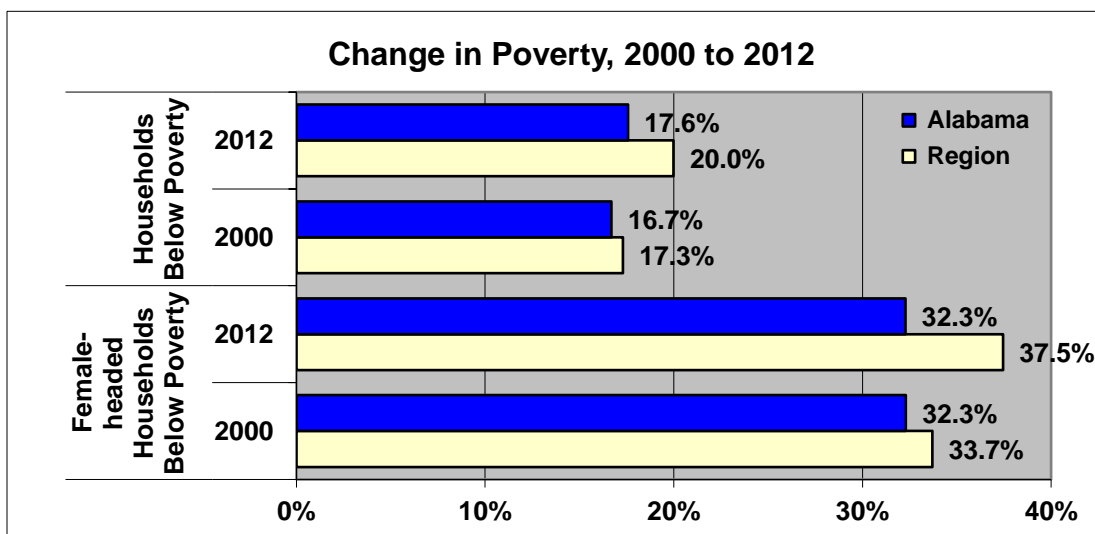

Households headed by a female tend to have higher poverty rates than those headed by a male or shared by a married couple. Conditions seemed to be improving for Alabama women who were

heading a family household, as their poverty rate fell from 40.7% in 1990 to 35.6% in 2000. Adding female-headed nonfamily households (women who were single or living with people not related to them) into the 2000 figures decreased the poverty rate to 32.3% The 1990 Census did not break out nonfamily data by whether a male or female was head-of-household. Although the poverty rate for this demographic fluctuated since 2000, by 2012 it had returned to 32.3% statewide.

In East Alabama, the percentage of female-headed families with an income below the poverty level remained relatively stable, at just over 36% in both 1990 and 2000. Adding female-headed nonfamily households into the 2000 figures decreased the poverty rate to 33.7% By 2012, the poverty rate for this category of households had risen almost four percentage points.

Income levels often correlate strongly with educational levels. Adult educational levels in East Alabama have been improving over time. More people age 25 and over had completed high school and received at least some college education in 2012 than in 2000. Many factors may have contributed to this change, some of which are: the introduction of jobs requiring a better education; the infusion of Atlanta-area retirees and commuters, who tend to have relatively high incomes and high education levels; and the loss of some older long-time residents, who had been more likely to drop out of school to work in area industries.
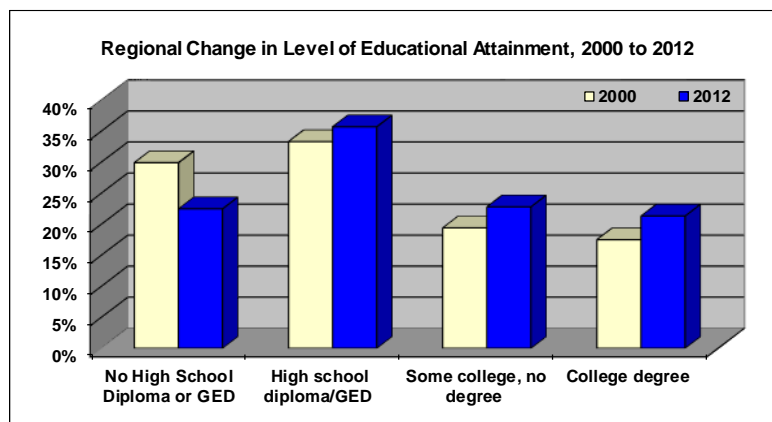
In spite of this progress, the region still lags behind the state in educational attainment. This discrepancy probably is caused, in part, by East Alabama having a higher proportion of people in the older age categories than the state. Also, the regional high school dropout rate exceeded the statewide dropout rate in 2007 and 2008. The region may have a history of having higher dropout rates than the state. Finally, the region has a history of

high school graduates going to college elsewhere then looking for jobs that require higher skill levels and offer higher pay than they can find in East Alabama.
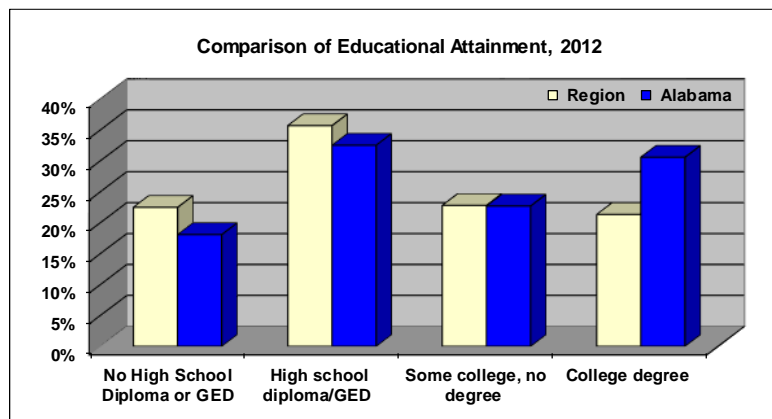
At this particular time, the automotive industry (manufacturing plants and their suppliers) and the redevelopment of Fort McClellan–which closed in 1999–are the two main determinants of East Alabama's future workforce needs. The Honda plant dramatically increased its production and employment since it began operations in 2001. This industry not only has brought more jobs to the area but also has supported many smaller specialized businesses and spin-off industries in the region. Although not in East Alabama, the Kia plant near West Point, Georgia, has begun to have a similar effect on the region. Kia and Hyundai tend to share suppliers, and a Hyundai plant is

located in Montgomery, positioning the region's southern tier counties as competitors for automotive suppliers. The redevelopment of Fort McClellan also could have a great impact on the region. The McClellan Joint Powers Authority envisions a mixed-use community, bringing high-tech jobs and recreational and residential uses to the site. The next chapter will discuss the region's economy in more detail.

Changes are taking place in the occupational structure of East Alabama's labor market. Many new, complex, specialized job choices are appearing due to such factors as technological advances, changing lifestyles, governmental policies, and the offering of new goods and services to the public. Those engaging in workforce development need to ensure that training opportunities within the region keep pace with these changes.

The Regional Economy

Economic developers have a complex task: bringing jobs into their communities and capitalizing on economic clusters while promoting economic diversity. Although they are discussed in more detail later in this chapter, in general, economic clusters are interrelated businesses that are located in close proximity to one another, such as automobile manufacturing plants, the companies that provide the plants with parts, and the companies that provide the parts plants with materials for their manufacturing processes. While communities should make efforts to create an economic synergy by bringing together interrelated businesses, they also need to foster multiple clusters of businesses that center around different types of industries. Doing so will help buffer the community from a potential downturn in one particular industry. The following sections examine the different components of East Alabama's economy.

Overview

The East Alabama region is home to approximately 8,000 businesses, which employ over 116,000 people. As would be anticipated, most of these businesses are located in the three counties that have the most people: Calhoun, Etowah, and Talladega Counties. In fact, the distribution of business throughout the region strongly correlates with the distribution of people throughout the region. Nearly two-thirds of the region's residents (64.9 percent) live in Calhoun, Etowah, and Talladega Counties, and just over two-thirds of the region's businesses (69.5 percent) have located in these three counties.

Although much emphasis is placed on an area's largest employers, the vast majority of East

Comparison of Population and Business by County
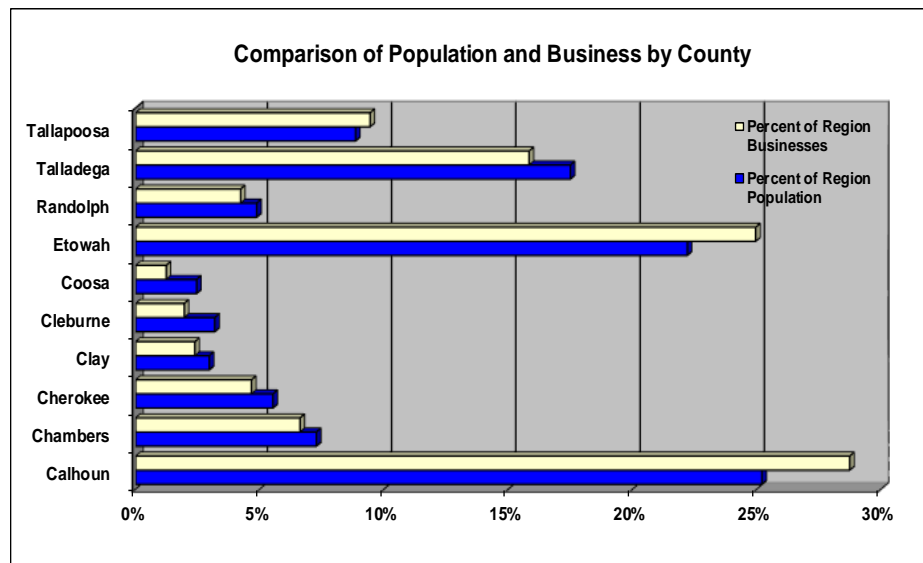
Alabama's businesses employ 20 or fewer people. Small businesses are just as prevalent throughout the state. In fact, in the region and across Alabama, less than 1% of all businesses have over 250 employees. However, these statistics should not detract from the fact that an industrial plant that is located in a rural county and employs 350 people could eliminate most of the jobs in the county should it relocate or close. That county would lose not only that business and at least some of its resident workforce but also jobs in the businesses that supported that industry or that provided goods and services to that industry's employees.

Percentage of Businesses by Number of Employees, 2012

Number of Employees	Percentage
Less than 20	86.8%
20 to 49	8.6%
50 to 99	2.6%
100 to 249	1.3%
250 to 499	0.5%
500 to 999	0.2%
1,000 or More	0.1%
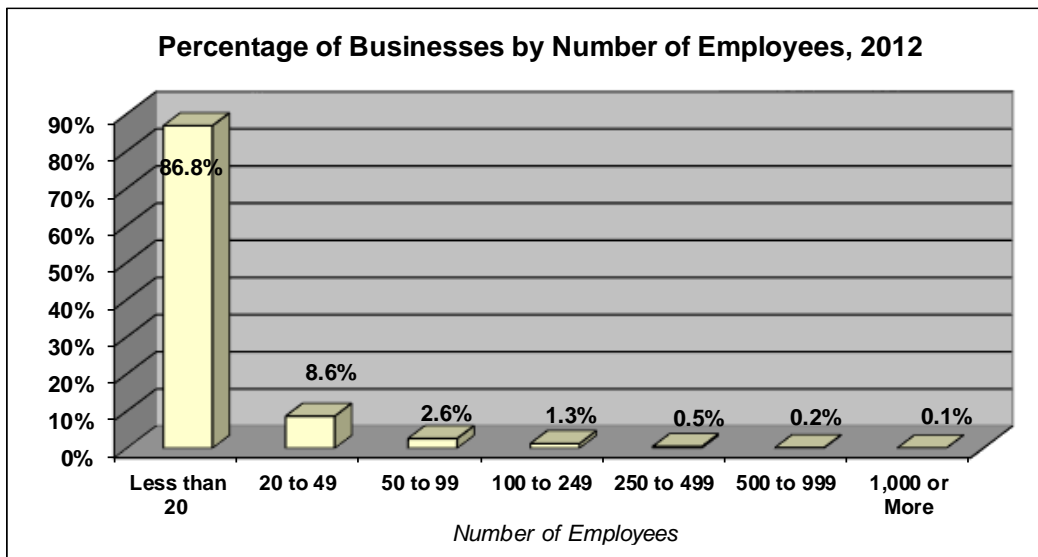
East Alabama's 8,000 businesses pumped over $3.8 million in pre-tax income into the area's economy in 2012. People who worked in the region averaged roughly $32,677 in gross pay, which is 15% below the average pay statewide. It is important to note that not all of these people spent their money in East Alabama. Some workers commuted into the region, and some East Alabamians commuted to jobs outside the region. In 2012, the region's workforce consisted of roughly 187,228 employed people, according to the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations. In other words, there were about 70,556 more workers than there were jobs throughout the region. Therefore, many people had to leave the region to work. Commuting data from the 2008-2012 American Community Survey supports these findings. In 2012, over one-quarter of East Alabama's workers commuted to jobs outside the region. Most people do remain within the region to work, however. Nearly two-thirds of the region's employed residents lived and worked in the same county. Unfortunately, data on commuting flows between counties is no longer available through the Census. However, in 2000, 11% of people living in East Alabama commuted to jobs in another county within the region, and workers living outside East Alabama filled one of every thirteen jobs in the region. Data available through Alabama's Workforce Development Program supports that the commuting trend has continued throughout the East Alabama region.

At the county level, the 2008-2012 American Community Survey estimates that commuting patterns varied greatly throughout the region, with 78% of Coosa County's workers driving to another county to work and 83% of Calhoun County's workers going to jobs within the county. Current data is no longer available, but local residents traditionally have held most of the jobs in their county of residence. In 2000, at least 73% of jobs were filled by workers living in the same county as their employer in nine of the ten counties. Interestingly, Coosa County had the largest percentage of people leaving the county to go to work, at 75 percent, and the largest percentage of

people coming from other counties to work in its businesses, at 44% Most of the people commuting into Coosa County lived inside the region. Chambers County businesses attracted the largest percentage of workers from outside the region, at 23%, mostly due to its historic economic ties with Troup County, Georgia. However, the exodus of West Point Manufacturing from that area, and the addition of the Kia plant, may have altered the commuting pattern between those two counties.

Just under one-fourth (23 percent) of the people working in East Alabama work in manufacturing. Manufacturing is the top employer in the region and in eight of the region's ten counties. Health care and social assistance ranks first in Etowah County and is the second largest employment sector region-wide. At least 17% of all East Alabama employees work in medicine, social services, or a related field. Retail trade ranks a close third and is the largest employer in Calhoun County. Rounding out the top five employment sectors are "accommodation and food service" and "administrative and support and waste management and remediation". The "administrative and support" portion of the latter category covers numerous occupations that would be considered as supportive or ancillary to operating a business, such as office administration, temporary help agencies, printing and copying businesses, telephone answering services, travel agencies, security services (but not law enforcement), and building and grounds maintenance. "Waste management and remediation" is fairly self-explanatory.

Comparison of Employment by Major Industry Sectors, 2012

	Construction	Manufacturing	Wholesale Trade	Retail Trade	Transportation and Warehousing	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	Admin. & Support, Waste Mgmt & Remediation Services	Health Care and Social Assistance	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	Accommodation, Food Services	Other Services (except public administration)
#1 Sector (pink)											
#2 Sector (orange)											
#3 Sector (yellow)											
#4 Sector (green)											
#5 Sector (cyan)											
Alabama	4.9%	14.7%	4.5%	14.1%	3.6%	5.7%	8.8%	15.0%	1.1%	9.8%	5.0%
Region	3.2%	23.1%	3.6%	15.3%	3.2%	2.7%	6.7%	17.4%	1.1%	9.6%	4.5%
Calhoun	2.1%	16.4%	5.5%	17.9%	2.0%	3.3%	9.3%	16.2%	0.6%	12.4%	4.9%
Chambers	2.3%	20.7%	1.4%	16.7%	7.1%	2.0%	7.1%	17.3%	1.4%	8.0%	5.2%
Cherokee	1.9%	47.4%	1.9%	17.1%	1.8%	0.9%	1.5%	9.5%	0.4%	7.2%	3.6%
Clay	2.3%	39.1%	2.3%	9.2%	4.0%	1.9%	0.6%	16.2%	0.6%	3.6%	3.6%
Cleburne	21.5%	23.8%	2.6%	13.2%	0.9%	1.2%	4.7%	4.7%	0.0%	5.0%	11.9%
Coosa	6.5%	33.0%	6.5%	10.2%	1.3%	0.9%	1.3%	16.5%	16.5%	0.3%	2.4%
Etowah	3.8%	16.4%	3.4%	15.1%	2.1%	4.0%	5.1%	24.6%	0.9%	11.0%	5.3%
Randolph	2.7%	23.9%	2.5%	18.4%	4.9%	1.2%	2.5%	15.2%	0.5%	8.1%	4.0%
Talladega	2.9%	34.7%	2.6%	11.8%	4.9%	1.9%	7.6%	12.2%	1.1%	7.6%	3.1%
Tallapoosa	3.5%	22.1%	2.7%	14.6%	4.7%	1.8%	7.7%	20.4%	2.3%	8.1%	3.9%

Each industry sector shown employs 5% or more of the work force in at least one county.

East Alabama is more reliant on manufacturing than the state as a whole. Statewide, more people work in health care and social assistance, at 15.0 percent, than in manufacturing, at 14.7%

Retail trade is a close third, employing 14.1% of all workers throughout the state. Likewise, the State of Alabama is more reliant on manufacturing than the country as a whole. Nationwide, manufacturing only employs 9.7% of workers, behind health care and social assistance, at 15.9 percent, retail trade, at 12.8 percent, and accommodation and food services, at 10.3% As with the region, "accommodation and food service" and "administrative and support and waste management and remediation" round out the top five employment categories both statewide and nationally.

Economic Trends

Although the State of Alabama fared well in the early 2000s, those economic gains were diminished by industry and business down-sizing, consolidations, and closings in the latter part of the decade. During the 2002 through 2012 time period, Alabama saw a net decrease of 1,993 businesses—a 2.0% decline—but a modest gain of 4,644 jobs, a 0.3% growth rate. Average annual pay increased from $28,755 in 2002 to $38,647 in 2012—an increase of $9,354 or 34% Unfortunately, East Alabama did not share in the state's success. The region experienced the economic downturn much more severely than other parts of the state, with a net loss of nearly 21,000 jobs and 800 businesses. This decline occurred in spite of the new jobs created by the Honda manufacturing plant in Lincoln and several automotive suppliers that located throughout the region. The average worker did receive an increase in annual pay, but that "raise" was over $900 less than that of their counterparts across the state. In spite of the difference in pay increase, salaries in East Alabama did rise at a greater rate than did those across the state, at 38%

East Alabama has lagged behind other areas of the state in attracting new residents, employers, and jobs for quite some time. The region contains 15% of Alabama's counties (10 of 67) and 12% of the state's land area. In 1980, 10.6% of Alabamians called East Alabama home, and the region claimed 9.9% of Alabama businesses and 10.4% of Alabama jobs. The economic figures declined slowly but steadily over the next 32 years, to 8.2% of the State's businesses and 7.4% of Alabama jobs by 2012. The population did rebound slightly between 2000 and 2012 but, at 9.7 percent, is still lower than the 1980 percentage. This trend should reverse as the Atlanta and Birmingham metropolitan areas continue to push outward, making East Alabama more attractive to metro-area workers who want a more rural lifestyle and, subsequently, to businesses. However, it would be prudent to determine which of East Alabama's economic sectors have been strengthening and which have been weakening, so economic developers know how to target their efforts.

Although 5-year economic trend analysis is common, EARPDC staff selected 2002 as the base year so there can be a comparison between the period preceding the Great Recession and the beginning of the economic recovery.

Economic Clusters

Once upon a time, the textile industry permeated East Alabama–not just its economy, but also its communities. Textile companies built plants, they built housing for their workers around their plants, and sometimes they even built stores, schools, parks, and civic buildings. The companies provided all the necessities for residents of these mill villages. Gradually, the companies gave up ownership of the stores, the schools, the parks, the civic buildings, the houses. Worker pay and the cost of keeping up the plant equipment and facilities increased. Many of the companies started moving production to countries that could offer lower production costs. Some of the companies that attempted to remain in East Alabama were driven out of business by low-cost competition.

Although it is still one of the region's economic clusters, the once thriving textile industry has eroded precipitously over the past ten to 20 years.

According to a 2007 report produced by the Harvard Business School's Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness, *Clusters and Cluster Development*, clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, and associated institutions in a particular field that are present in a nation or region. Clusters arise because they increase the productivity with which companies can compete. The development and upgrading of clusters is an important agenda for governments, companies, and other institutions. Cluster development initiatives are an important new direction in economic policy, building on earlier efforts in macroeconomic stabilization, privatization, market opening, and reducing the costs of doing business.

While the textile cluster has declined, other economic clusters have been rising. East Alabama sits in a triangle of automobile manufacturing plants: Honda Manufacturing of Alabama, in Lincoln; Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama, in Montgomery; and Kia Motor Manufacturing Georgia, in West Point, Georgia. In addition to being the home of the Honda plant, the region reaped the benefits of Honda's supplier network and has attracted Kia and Hyundai suppliers, as the two companies have the same parent company and share suppliers.

Wood products are another of the region's clusters. This cluster originates in the region's countless wooded acres. Timber growers. Timber harvesters. Timber trucking. Pulp mills. Paper mills. Lumber mills. Lumber stores. Cabinet makers. Wood preserving factories. Numerous individuals and companies engage in wood-related business in East Alabama.

Tourism is an under-emphasized cluster in East Alabama. Tourism revolving around outdoor recreational activities exists in abundance. Hikers in the Talladega National Forest purchase last-minute supplies, eat at local restaurants, and may want to stay one night in a hotel. People who float the canoe trails or go fishing may use a local outfitter, purchase supplies locally, eat at local restaurants, and sleep at local hotels. Area lakes are home to local, state, and national fishing tournaments that draw fishers to area hotels, campgrounds, restaurants, and stores. Rock climbers at Cherokee Rock Village may want to spend the night nearby, eat a meal or two, and purchase forgotten equipment. Visitors to the Little River Canyon National Preserve may wish to rent a cabin at DeSoto State Park or a hotel room in a nearby town. Cyclists on the Chief Ladiga Trail can stop for a drink or a meal, an overnight stay, or bicycle equipment or repairs. The City of Heflin's frisbee golf course has attracted visitors from other states. Heritage tourism has been increasing nationally as more places lose their historic flavor. Locally, many communities have brochures guiding visitors along historic sites walking or driving tours. The City of Talladega has an annual Pilgrimage. The City of Valley, made up of four former mill villages, has been a participant in a multi-state textile heritage trail. Local assessments of natural, historical, and cultural assets and coordinated development and marketing efforts could help this economic cluster reach its full potential.

Geography, Environment, Natural Resources

The East Alabama region's ten counties encompass 6,164 square miles of land, making it the second largest of Alabama's 12 regions. These counties form a generally triangular region sandwiched between the Alabama/Georgia state line on the east and the Coosa River on the west. As would be expected in a region of this size, there is great natural diversity and an abundance of natural resources, giving the region great potential for expanding its economic base and realizing considerable economic growth.
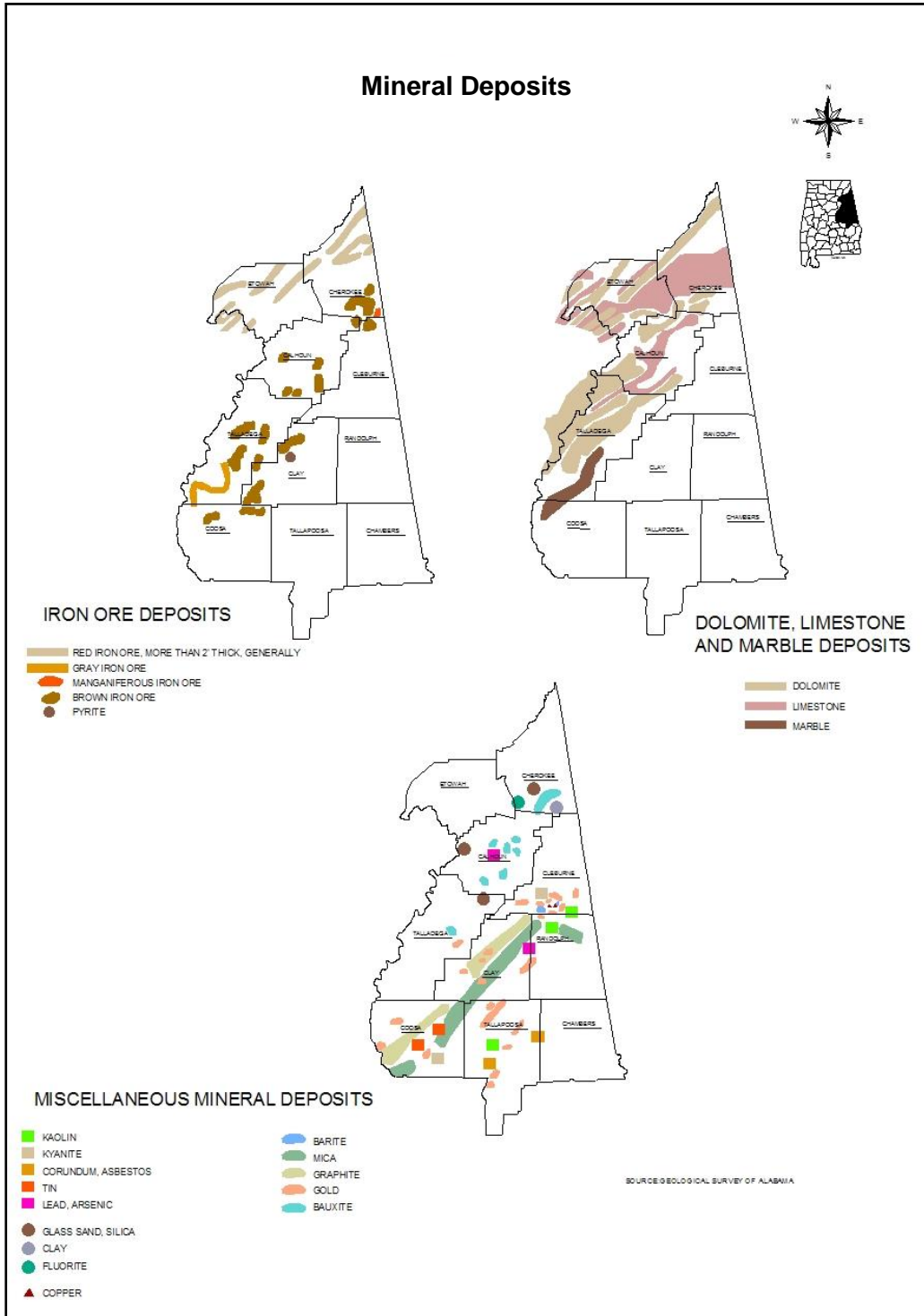
Geographic Features

Geographic features are major determinants of an area's physical potential. These features determine opportunities and constraints that shape land use patterns. They may also facilitate or impose restrictions on economic development activities. The East Alabama region is an area of distinct topographic contrast and is physically diverse and rich with natural resources. The northern two-thirds of the region is characterized by the mountainous terrain of the southern Appalachians, interspersed with broad, low-lying river valleys. The Coosa and Tallapoosa Rivers flow southwest through this portion of the region, draining a large headwaters area in northwestern Georgia. The two rivers eventually converge in the Montgomery area to form the Alabama River. The main mountain ridges separating these two rivers possess the highest elevations in Alabama. The summits of Mount Cheaha, the State's highest point, Dugger Mountain, and Choccolocco Mountain are over 2,000 feet above mean sea level. The main mountainous ridges extending through Talladega, Calhoun, Cleburne, and Cherokee Counties constitute the heart of the Ridge and Valley geographic province. Small portions of Etowah and Cherokee Counties north and west of Lookout Mountain are located in the Cumberland Plateau geologic province. The remaining southeastern half of the region is characterized by the rolling plains of the Piedmont geologic province, which extends east into Georgia and south to the Fall Line, extending roughly from Columbus, Georgia, to Montgomery.

Topographic Elements

Topographic information provides a quick overview of the characteristics of an area, such as hilly or flat areas, soil conditions, vegetated areas, and mineral collection areas. This information on the land may suggest the best sites for buildings, transportation access, and activity areas. Alternatively, imposing conventional development patterns on variable topography may result in hazardous conditions. Geological features in the region that may present major barriers to economic development are soil limitations and severe slopes.

There are many soil types in the region that may pose problems for various land use development. The greatest limitations imposed by these soil types are soils subject to frequent flooding and soils having shrink-swell characteristics and low strength. The Soil Conservation Service publishes reports periodically which can be used in determining the suitability of soils for various urban uses. By determining the suitability of soil and identifying problem areas, development may proceed and provide a safe and healthy environment. Severe or steep slopes also present limitations to urban development in the region. Slopes in excess of 25% may cause severe limitations for all types of development.

Various mineral collection areas are found in almost every county in the region. Only Chambers County in the southeastern corner of the region has virtually no mineral supply, with only a portion of a deposit of corundum/abestos that extends eastward from Tallapoosa County into Chambers County. Although the other nine counties in the region all have mineral deposits to some degree, the most abundant mineral resources are located in the northwestern half of the region.

Mineral Deposits

IRON ORE DEPOSITS

- RED IRON ORE, MORE THAN 2' THICK, GENERALLY
- GRAY IRON ORE
- MANGANIFEROUS IRON ORE
- BROWN IRON ORE
- PYRITE

DOLOMITE, LIMESTONE AND MARBLE DEPOSITS

- DOLOMITE
- LIMESTONE
- MARBLE

MISCELLANEOUS MINERAL DEPOSITS

- KAOLIN
- KYANITE
- CORUNDUM, ASBESTOS
- TIN
- LEAD, ARSENIC
- GLASS SAND, SILICA
- CLAY
- FLUORITE
- COPPER
- BARITE
- MICA
- GRAPHITE
- GOLD
- BAUXITE

SOURCE: GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF ALABAMA

Hydrologic Resources

While the area's surface water system is the most obvious hydrologic feature, it is only one of the several hydrologic resources found in the East Alabama region. Other resources include groundwater resources, wetlands, flood plains and watershed protection. Since water is a basic requirement for all life, these hydrologic resources require special consideration and protection. The East Alabama region is home to an extensive surface water system that includes the main stems of three rivers: the Coosa River, the Tallapoosa River and a small portion of the Chattahoochee River. Flowing southwest from Georgia, the Coosa River flows through Cherokee and Etowah Counties before forming the western border of the region along Calhoun, Talladega and Coosa Counties. The Tallapoosa River also enters the state from Georgia and flows through Cleburne, Randolph, Chambers and Tallapoosa Counties before merging with the Coosa River to form the Alabama River in Elmore County south of the East Alabama region. Finally, the Chattahoochee River flows from Georgia into Alabama in Chambers County and travels south forming the border between the two states.
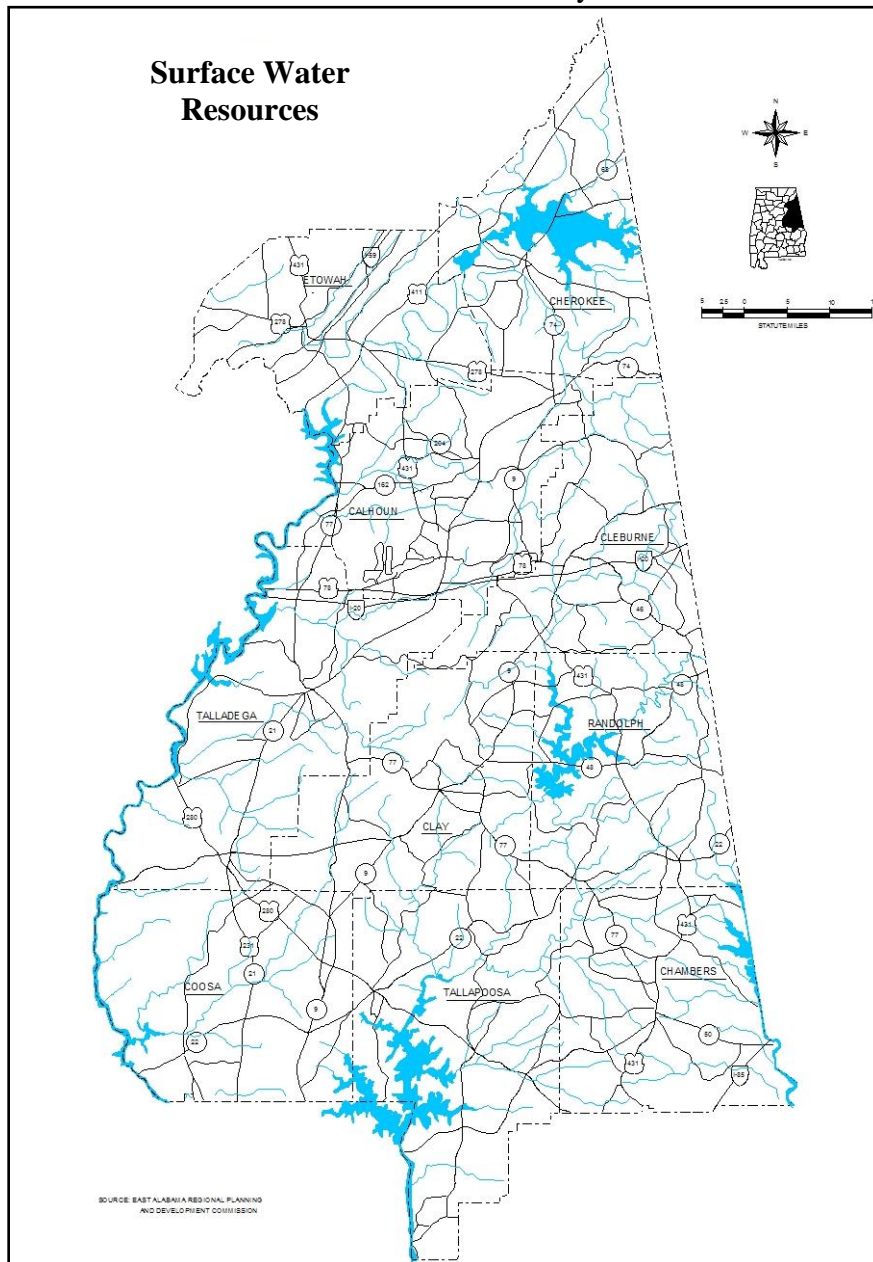
The Tallapoosa River system includes Lake Wedowee (an impoundment of the R.L. Harris Dam) in Randolph County, Lake Martin in Tallapoosa County, and Yates Lake, also in Tallapoosa County. Lake Martin is the largest of the reservoirs that is wholly located within Alabama. The East Alabama Region also includes portions of two lakes on the Chattahoochee River system, both of which are partially located in Chambers County: West Point Lake and Lake Harding. The remainder of these lakes are in Georgia.

Equally as important as the surface water resources are the region's groundwater resources. Most of East Alabama's

Surface Water Resources

SOURCE: EAST ALABAMA REGIONAL PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

groundwater resources are located in the northwestern part of the region that lies in the Appalachian Ridges and Valleys Formation. All or most of Calhoun, Cherokee, Etowah, and Talladega Counties are located in this formation. This area generally has high yield wells, at 150 gallons per minute (GPM) or more. In addition, the southern part of Tallapoosa County, which lies in the Southern Coastal Plan Formation, also has high yield wells, at up to 1,000 gallons per minute. The remainder of the East Alabama region is located in the Southern Piedmont Formation, in which the aquifers generally yield less than 50 gallons per minute. These counties include Chambers, Clay, Cleburne, Coosa, Randolph, and Tallapoosa Counties.

MAP 6
GROUND WATER RESOURCES
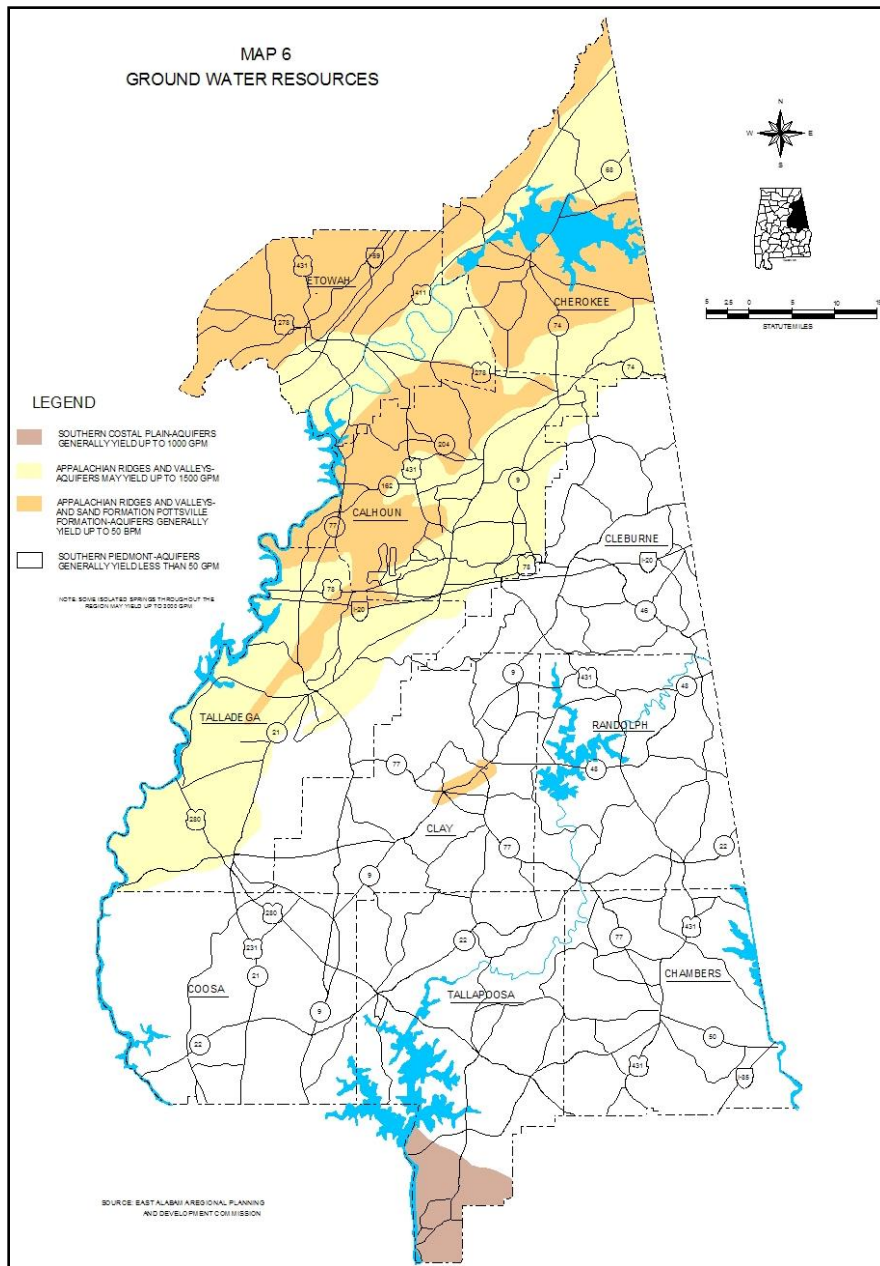
Floodplains and wetlands are found throughout the region. Many of the region's municipalities and counties participate in the National Flood Insurance Program. Flood insurance rate maps for the participating jurisdictions are available through the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission. Several of the region's municipalities and counties have had special flood hazards identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), yet are not in the National Flood Insurance Program. Wetlands, such as bogs, swamps, and marshes, are now recognized as prime environmental features. The State SCS has recently completed a statewide inventory of the wetland locations utilizing infrared photography. Additional information concerning wetland locations is available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) and local SCS offices.

Endangered Species

Endangered species are those in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range. Their prospects for continued survival and propagation are in immediate jeopardy. A list of rare and endangered species is available through the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Sport, Fisheries and Wildlife. The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has also compiled a database indicating at least 414 known native plants and animals from around 20 or fewer sites in the state. In an effort to protect endangered species, the United States government prohibits any action, including the removal of advantageous habitat that would endanger any of their numbers. Most construction that is viable to economic development reduces habitat acreage. Not only are land type species subject to these effects, but birds and aquatic life as well. Fish populations, for example, are seriously affected by channel changes, construction-generated pollution, and point and non-point discharges of pollution.

The single biggest problem affecting protected fish is sedimentation, which smothers fish eggs and habitat. Sedimentation results from agricultural and forestry practices and from bridge and road construction, all of which can cause erosion. Soil conservation measures, such as leaving buffer strips adjacent to streams when cutting timber on steep slopes, should be employed. Also, pesticides should not be sprayed near waterways. The best way to avoid impacts on fish is to closely follow Alabama's Best Management Practices for Forestry.

Vegetation Resources

The East Alabama region has abundant vegetation resources, including several federal and state forest and park areas. These areas include two districts of the Talladega National Forest -- the Shoal Creek District and the Talladega District, the Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge, Cheaha State Park, and Wind Creek State Park. These forest areas provide a variety of recreational opportunities, as well as functioning as a conservation tool for the forest resources. Three types of forests are dominant throughout the region. Oak-Pine forests are found in the northern part of the region, primarily in Calhoun, Cherokee, Cleburne and Randolph Counties. There are small forests of longleaf-slash pine in western Clay and Coosa Counties and eastern Talladega County. The predominant forest type is the loblolly-shortleaf pine forest which is found in Chambers, Cherokee, Clay, Cleburne, Coosa, Etowah, Randolph, Talladega, and Tallapoosa Counties. The region's forest resources are closely tied to its economic health, making it imperative that these resources be managed properly.
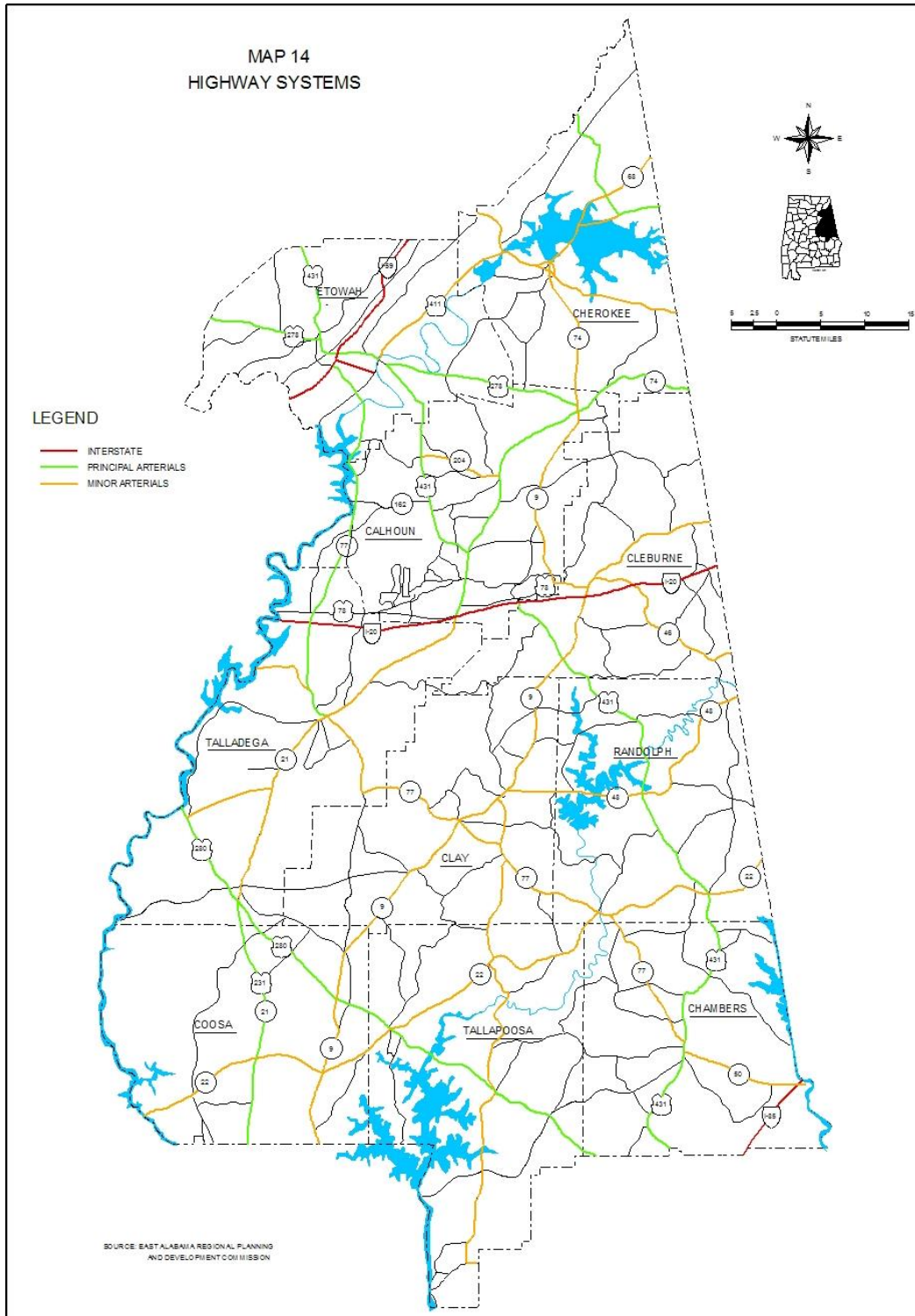
Transportation Access and Other Development Resources

The region's infrastructure and other development resources are important in retaining and attracting both a population base and business and industrial base. In this section, the region's existing infrastructure is reviewed, including transportation systems and utility systems, along with the financial resources available to improve that infrastructure.
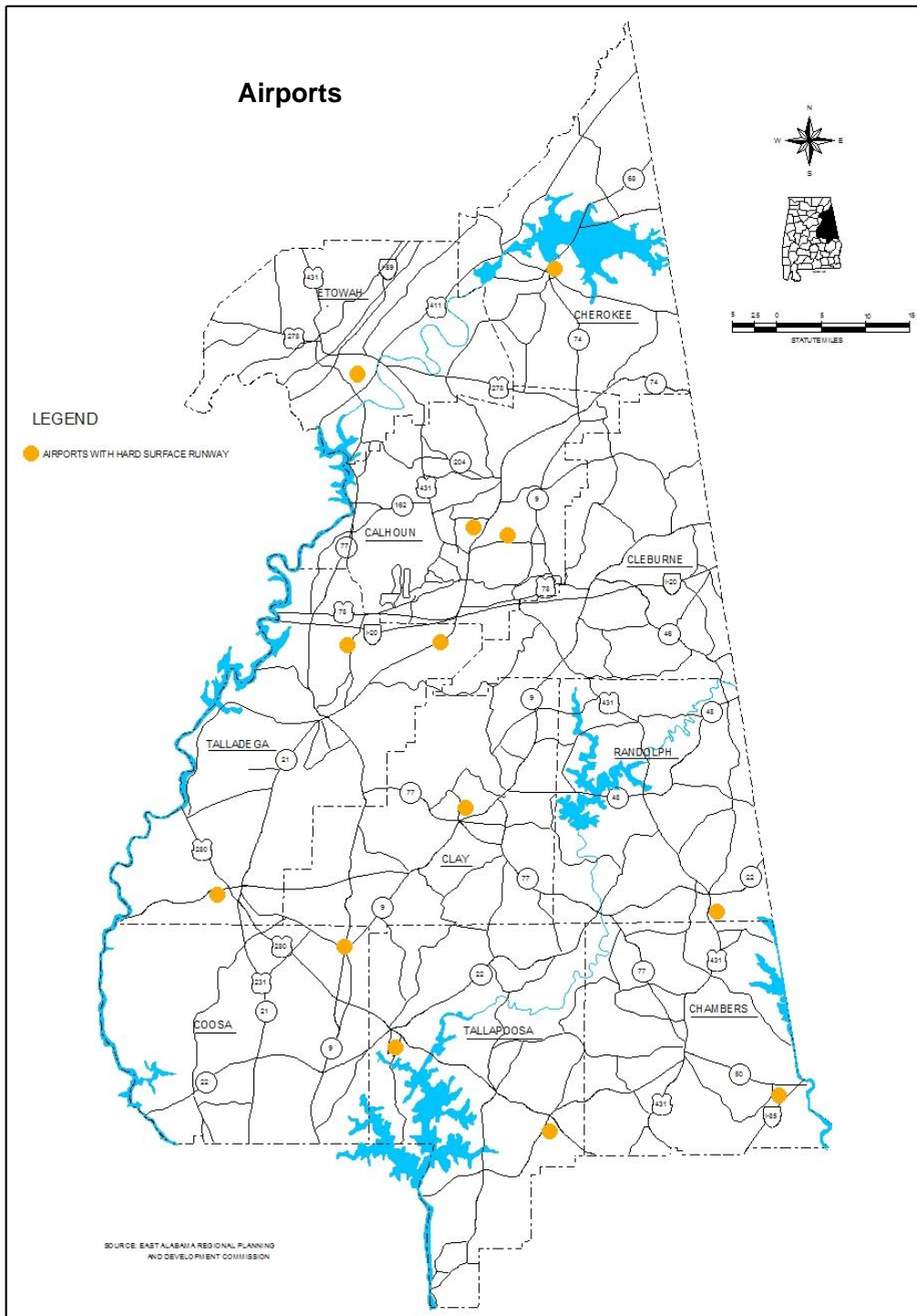
Transportation Facilities

There are several means of transportation available in the ten county region, which maximize accessibility for the essential movement of people and goods between linked activities. Due to the low population density of most of the region, travel demand is primarily served by the highway

network. The East Alabama Region has a good basic network of federal and state highways, and many miles of paved county roads, as shown on the map. Almost all of the region's population growth centers and major employment hubs are accessible by one of the interstates or federal highways; there are, however, a few municipalities that have experienced population growth that are only accessible by a state highway.

MAP 14
HIGHWAY SYSTEMS

LEGEND

INTERSTATE
PRINCIPAL ARTERIALS
MINOR ARTERIALS

SOURCE: EAST ALABAMA REGIONAL PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

There are 13 airports located throughout the region. The majority of these airports serve local residents who own small passenger planes. Anniston-Calhoun County Airport and Gadsden Municipal Airport are the only two airports in the region capable of supporting commercial air

traffic, although regular airline service to both airports was suspended in 1996.   Commercial air service, however, is available in nearby Birmingham.

Airports

LEGEND

● AIRPORTS WITH HARD SURFACE RUNWAY

SOURCE: EAST ALABAMA REGIONAL PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Railroad Systems

ETOWAH

CHEROKEE

CALHOUN

CLEBURNE

TALLADEGA

RANDOLPH

CLAY

COOSA

TALLAPOOSA

CHAMBERS

SOURCE: EAST ALABAMA REGIONAL PLANNING
AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

STATUTE MILES
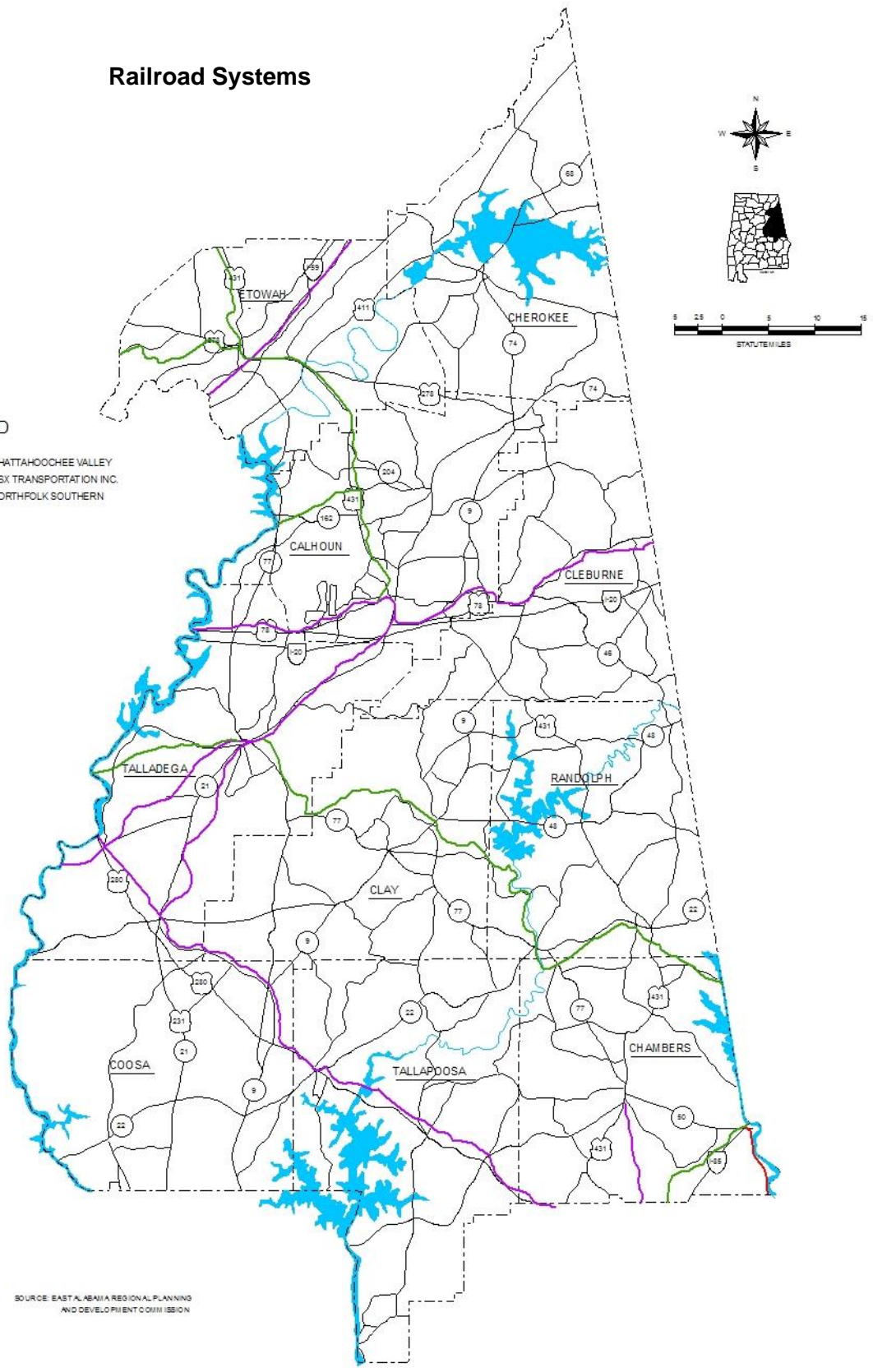
The major railroads that operate through the East Alabama Region are Norfolk-Southern, CSX Transportation Incorporation, and the Chattahoochee Valley. The most heavily traveled lines in the region are Norfolk-Southern, connecting Birmingham and Chattanooga, and CSX Transportation Inc., connecting Birmingham to Gadsden and Anniston.

The region has numerous motor freight lines to provide freight service. The regular and frequent schedules, in addition to the good connections in nearby metropolitan areas, enable this area to be close to market centers across the nation.

There is one commercial bus line available in the ten county region, Greyhound Bus Line. The City of Gadsden has a demand-response urbanized transportation system called Dial-A-Ride. The City of Anniston operates an urbanized fixed route transit system and complementary paratransit service, which serves Anniston and Hobson City. Rural area transportation services are available in all but Chambers and Randolph Counties.

Water and Sewer Facilities

The provision of water supplies and sewage treatment facilities within the region is of utmost importance. The provision of these services also constitutes one of the primary determinants of land use intensity throughout the East Alabama Region. This is particularly true of water service areas. Individual wells often yield water in low quantities during certain periods of the year. Therefore, intense urban development must depend on public supplies. As shown on the water and sewer maps on the following two pages, water and sewer service areas are located within and adjacent to incorporated municipalities. Most often the water is supplied by these municipalities, and in some cases public water authorities provide service to the unincorporated areas. Private wells are also used in isolated areas throughout the region. All sewage treatment plants in the area are owned by municipalities, except in areas where they are owned by governmental installations. The following discussion presents an analysis of existing and proposed water and sewer treatment facilities in various counties, and the impact of these facilities on land use.

Existing Water Service Areas
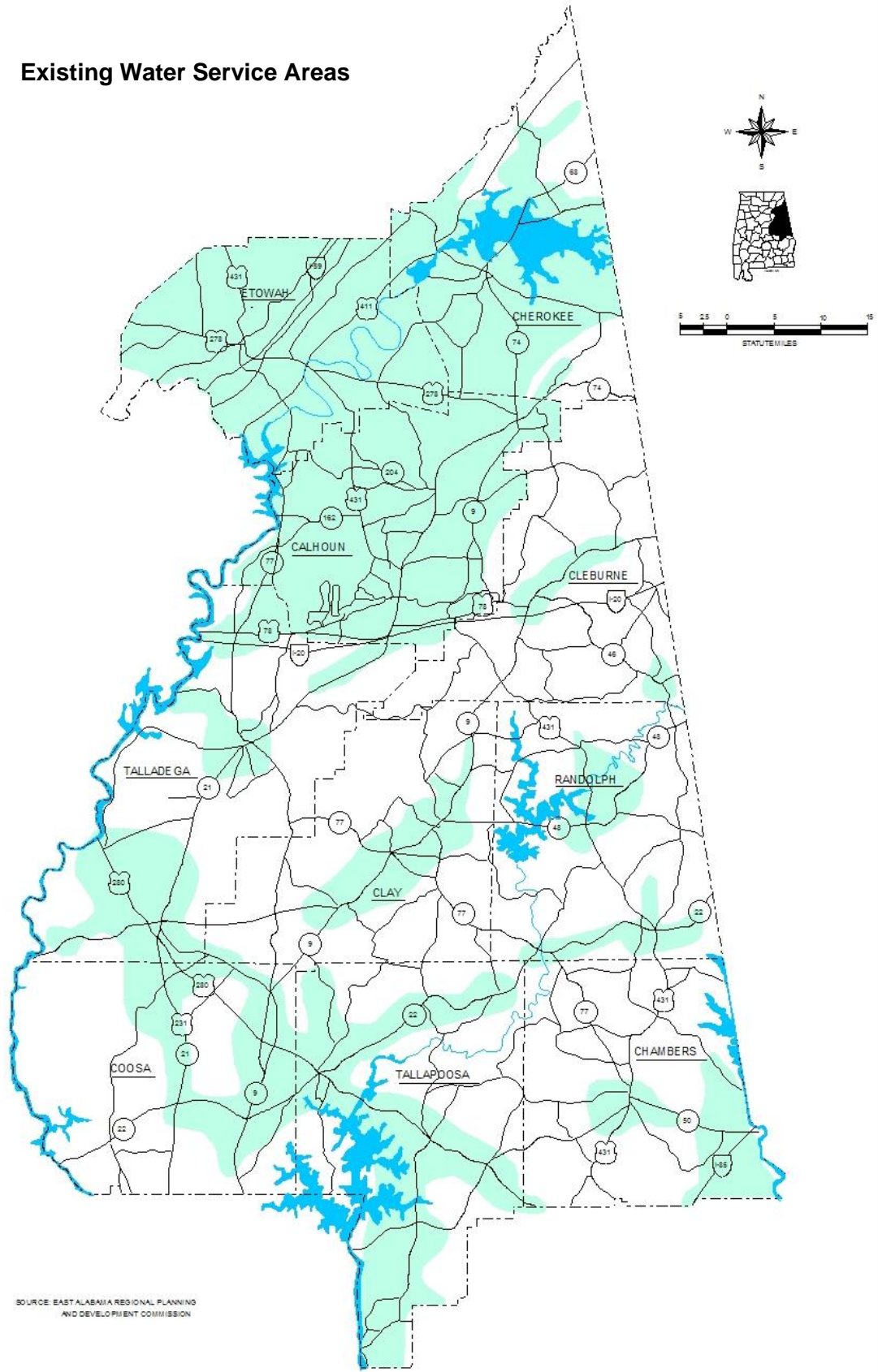
Existing Sewer Service Areas
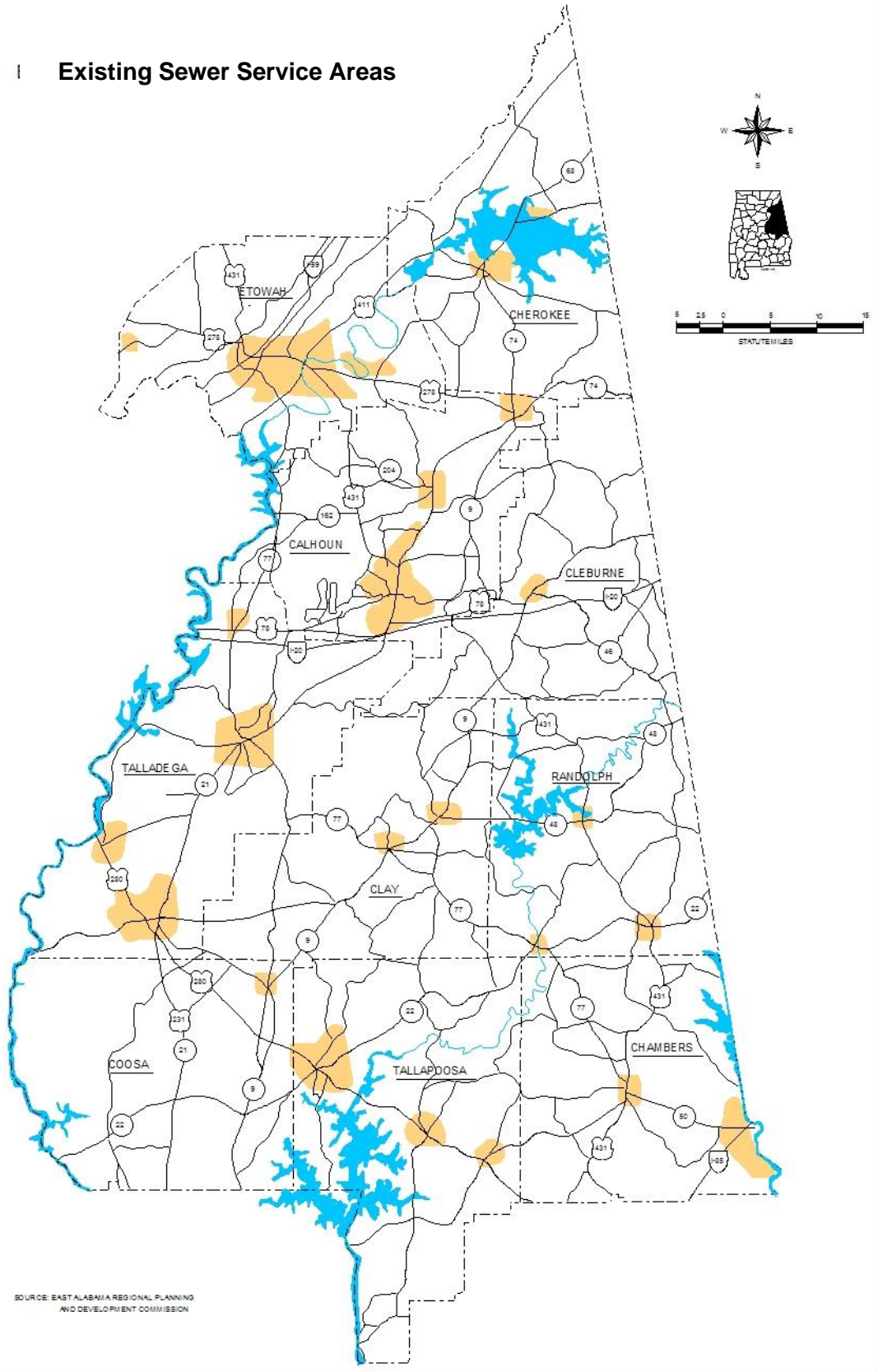
Public Utilities

The Alabama Power Company serves an area in and around the Anniston, as well as all the counties within the region with the exception of the northern portion of Cherokee County. The Cherokee Electrical Cooperative provides for the electrical needs of those residing in Cherokee County and portions of Calhoun and Etowah Counties. In addition, several of the municipalities located throughout the region have their own electric systems. They buy power from either the Alabama Power Company or rural electric co-ops (REA) and distribute the electricity within the corporate limits through their own system.

Natural gas is provided by Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Company in the southern portion of the region and by Southern Natural Gas company in the northern portion of the region. Although natural gas facilities are not available for every municipality in the region, most areas are served by natural gas facilities. Transcontinental Gas Pipe Line Company purchases natural gas in Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi and moves it across the continent, selling it principally to local utility companies and local gas distributing systems. Southern Natural Gas Company has transmission lines running through the northern portion of the East Alabama Region, with small lines to the individual cities. Alabama Gas Corporation serves as a natural gas distribution company and distributes the gas supplied by Southern Natural Gas Company to residential, commercial, and industrial customers in the area. In addition to Alabama Gas Corporation, there are many smaller municipal and private distribution systems serving various communities in our region. The natural gas transmission lines are located throughout the district so that natural gas facilities could be made available to nearby communities upon demand. Public utilities for the most part, are adequate for current needs and for foreseeable future demands of the district.

PART II
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES
AND ACTION PLAN

This final phase of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy entails devising program development strategies and determining which strategies will be most likely achieve the overall economic development goal for the region. The EARPDC's overall goal is to develop an expanded economic base within the East Alabama Region which utilizes the region's natural and human resources, provides full employment for the region's citizenry, and improves the area's quality of life. The following chapters translate this broad goal into a series of long-range goals and short-range objectives and establish ways to achieve those goals and objectives and to measure success.

This section summarizes the *CLEAR Plan 2030 Implementation Plan*, which was the culmination of an intensive two-year public engagement process. The *Implementation Plan* presents rural and small urban communities (ranging in size from 55 to 37,000) and rural and small urban counties (ranging from 11,000 to 120,000 inhabitants) with potential means to attain the goals their residents identified as crucial to improving livability. The *Implementation Plan* considers feasibility and potential impacts of plan implementation, addressing the resources needed to carry out the proposed projects and providing case studies. Strategies are phased and potential challenges are addressed. The *Implementation Plan* is intended to aid in maximizing the potential for long-term success of these initiatives and to facilitate marketing the region to prospective investors and businesses. The full document is available in the online library at www.earpdc.org.

The *CLEAR Plan 2030* utilized eight livability principles to guide the planning process.

1. *Encourage Prosperity and Upward Mobility*
   - Recognize the potential to grow and create prosperity for all
   - Mobilize resources to encourage an inclusive, competitive, and satisfied workforce
   - Support inclusive, competitive, and satisfied workforces
   - Provide opportunities for young people (jobs, education, recreation) as reasons to stay

2. *Champion Valued Communities*
   - Encourage healthy lifestyles and strong families
   - Create safe environments for all residents
   - Support communities of faith
   - Address health of both mind and body

3. *Value and Protect the Region's Beauty and Natural Resources*
   - Support stewardship to ensure that natural resources meet the needs of present and future generations

- Preserve the natural beauty and unique assets in the region
- Provide open access to active and passive recreational pursuits

4. *Celebrate Heritage and Cultural Assets*
   - Express the region's history, diversity, sense of place, accessibility, and vibrancy through high- quality urban design and historic preservation
   - Host ample and diverse arts and cultural resources that are available to all residents

5. *Think Regionally, Act Locally*
   - Support diverse, accessible, and affordable transportation options that allow all people to be mobile
   - Take advantage of proximity to other cities and increase access, allowing for regional connectivity
   - Leverage political and economic resources together to solve problems
   - Capitalize on opportunities that cannot be handled within neighborhoods, towns, or cities
   - Create infrastructure that supports economic growth, cultural vitality, and environmental stability

6. *Invest in Quality and Accessible Education*
   - Promote high-quality learning environments, along with opportunities for continued education for all age groups
   - Increase access to job skill training and other higher-level education opportunities

7. *Promote a Sense of Place and a Pride of Ownership and Home*
   - Promote a love of home and hearth as community values
   - Value engaged, well-informed citizens whose voices influence government processes and who take pride and active interest in issues affecting their community
   - Support high quality, diverse, and affordable housing options that are available to all residents

8. *Grow Local and Regional Leadership*
   - Be far-seeing enough, flexible enough, and wise enough not to undermine either physical or social support systems
   - Engage all members of a community to create more prosperous, convenient, equitable, healthy, and attractive places for present and future generations
   - Build visionary and entrepreneurial team-based leadership that invites public participation across all spectrums and works creatively to accomplish its goals
   - Address the interdependent economic, environmental, and social concerns of a community and region
   - Create linkages among all stakeholders and foster public/private partnerships

ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

REGIONAL NEEDS FOR ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

The Economic Competitiveness Livability Resource Team (LRT) and the Education LRT held combined meetings due to the intertwining nature of workforce development, economic competitiveness, and education. Discussion centered on the following regional needs:

- **Need to diversify the regional economy.**
  - Currently the economy is concentrated on specific industries, i.e. the automotive industry, military, and education.
  - Region 5 and Region 8 Workforce Development Councils identified the target industries in the region. They include automated manufacturing, construction, healthcare, services, and tourism.

- **Apathy regarding cooperation among entities can be difficult.**
  - There is a need to motivate people to be involved in improving the economy and supporting their community and larger region.

- **Thinking regionally, but acting locally is necessary.**
  - However, doing so is a difficult concept to incorporate into everyday life.
  - Economics, natural resources, and tourism are especially important to a regional outlook and could be tied to the region.
  - Creating corridor plans connecting cities to one another would help tie together the region.

- **Define the regional advantages and how to market them.**
  - Identification of what makes the region unique and advantageous is integral to marketing it to national and international businesses, industries, and people looking for a new place to call home.

- **Enrich the support system for existing business and industries.**
  - Make sure people know they are appreciated and a vital part of the East Alabama economy.
  - Create a plan to help recruit businesses, industry, and people into small communities.
  - Infrastructure costs can be prohibitive to development and hinder progress; therefore, something needs to be done to address it.

- **Creation of "Leadership East Alabama" program.**
  - This program would facilitate an exchange of ideas and promote a more regional perspective.

- **Workforce development and coordination is vital to meeting industry needs.**
  - There is a need to link education and industry needs.
  - Connect community colleges and high schools with industries.
  - School funding for training in specific industrial techniques can be difficult to obtain and may be unpredictable.

- **Need to change the mindset regarding career tech education.**
  - There is a negative connotation associated with career tech and 2-year degrees. This mindset needs to be changed.

- **Career coach and job shadowing.**
  - More job shadowing and career coach opportunities need to be offered to students so they can determine the best path for their future.

- **Need to identify what skills already exist in the region and what skills are needed.**
  - Identify industry needs/skills gaps. Technological advances are changing labor force needs, specifically the number of people needed to do a specific task.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, BARRIERS, STRATEGIES, METRICS & IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Goal 1. Align needed skills with jobs.

Objectives
- Develop an effective collaborative environment between industry and education.
- Continually analyze employer needs and employment trends.
- Align education and training programs with actual needs.
- Provide learning opportunities through real life experiences.

Barriers
- Lack of knowledge of how to or desire to participate in an effective collaborative environment between industry and education.
- Lack of knowledge of available training for students and businesses.
- Financial costs associated with developing specific career aligned curriculum.
- Identifying specific employer needs can be problematic, time consuming, and ever changing.
- Limited involvement of local businesses and industries in workforce and economic development conversations, which are needed to further the region economically.

Strategies
- Work with the Region 5 and Region 8 Workforce Development Councils, EDAA, and AIDT to further communication between industry and education.
- Pursue low cost mechanisms and grant funding to identify needs and provide training and real life employment experiences.
- Provide workshops/training seminars on grant opportunities and how to write grant applications.
- Promote the ACT WorkKeys program, which utilizes the National Career Readiness Certificate, across the region.
- Create a database which lists all available training programs throughout the region.

Metrics
- Increase the percentage of over 25 population with an associate's degree or higher to the State's average (currently 29%) over a five-year period. Measure using American Community Survey.
- Increase the number of ACT WorkKeys program schools and graduates obtaining a National Career Readiness Certificate by 2% over a five-year period. Measure using data from ACT.

Implementation Steps
- Develop strong partnerships with private employers for training and education.

- o   Coordinate with Region 5 and Region 8 Workforce Development Councils
- o   Conduct direct personal outreach to existing private employers
- o   Leverage private funding for scholarship programs
- Increase access to higher-education resources.
  - o   Maximize the use of scholarship programs
  - o   Work to enhance Jacksonville State University as the region's premier four-year institution of higher education
- Enhance communication and promotion of existing workforce programs.
  - o   Work with the Workforce Development Councils to promote the State's existing workforce training and education programs

FY2020 Update:

In FY2020, EARPDC submitted a grant on behalf of the Sylacauga Alliance for Family Stability to the North East Alabama Community foundation. If funded, this project would have targeted individuals not in employment, high education, or adult training in an effort to bring them into the workforce. This project was not funded.

Goal 2. Increase the number of people prepared for high wage, high growth jobs.

Objectives
- Market and promote the region to national and international industries.
- Increase awareness of career opportunities in local high growth sectors.
- Enhance and increase educational and training opportunities.

Barriers
- Differentiating the region from the state and nation can be difficult
- Lack of desire to complete the necessary education to be prepared for the high wage, high growth jobs

Strategies
- Develop a comprehensive marketing package to promote the region to the world.
- Provide informational packets in schools and online stating career paths and the steps to take to achieve the high wage, high growth jobs.
- Increase the number of career coaches promoting occupational options.

Metrics
- Increase the number of ACT WorkKeys program schools and graduates obtaining a National Career Readiness Certificate by 2% over a five-year period. The data will come from ACT.

Implementation Steps
- Enhance and promote amenity value to retain businesses and educated workforce.
  - o   Work with the Community Foundation of Northeast Alabama's member foundations to generate funding for enhancing community amenity assets
  - o   Promote community assets and amenities to existing and prospective businesses
  - o   Examine opportunities for regional amenity corridors
- Identify local economic development strengths and small-town targets.

- o Identify market opportunities in small towns and rural communities
- o Assist with implementation of economic development "readiness" projects and programs
- Promote fairs and trade shows to enhance networking
  - o Promote the use of mobile job and training fairs
  - o Promote larger cities in the region as sites for trade shows
- Engage students and prospective workers with technology training.
  - o Promote the use of emerging technologies to increase interest in training and education
  - o Work with area businesses to promote more apprenticeships and other hands-on training

FY 2020 Update:

EARPDC has been a constant presence in all economic development forums held around the region. In this capacity, EARPDC has looked for opportunities to further this goal and push the importance of this goal.

Goal 3. Provide training and job opportunities to enhance human capital.

Objectives
- Communicate opportunities to special populations, training providers and employers.
- Identify and connect special populations to employment and training opportunities.
- Assist with training providers and employers in how to accommodate special populations.

Barriers
- Identifying and communicating training and employment opportunities to special populations can be extremely difficult
- Financial cost and unpredictable nature of grants to fund training programs and the costs associated with marketing the programs are troublesome

Strategies
- Work with social service and economic development agencies to communicate training and other opportunities to special populations and employers.
- Dovetail this work into as many other programs as possible to lower expenses.

Metrics
- Increase the number of training events held each year by 2% over a five-year period.

Implementation Steps
- Support the existing social service framework.
  - o Work with existing social service and development agencies
- Engage and incentivize the private sector in special needs training and employment.
  - o Engage with the private sector
  - o Establish incentive programs
- Enhance access to support systems to enable participation in training and employment programs.
  - o Enable use of life skills training
  - o Inventory and distribute information about existing services
  - o Increase access to standard industry equipment and technology
  - o Enhance volunteer recruitment
  - o Enable child care services

FY 2020 Update:

EARPDC has been a constant presence in all economic development forums held around the region. In this capacity, EARPDC has looked for opportunities to further this goal and push the importance of this goal.

Goal 4. Support existing businesses and spur local entrepreneurship.

Objectives
- Create a business incubator to provide resources to support entrepreneurs.
- Develop a marketing brand for the East Alabama region.
- Develop a strategy to enhance the tourism industry.
- Coordinate efforts to retain existing businesses and industries.
- Enhance financial incentives/opportunities for local existing business/industry.

Barriers
- Extensive collaboration and knowledge is required to create a business incubator
- Finding common ground can be difficult and prohibitive to the collaboration needed to develop a marketing brand, creating a strategy to enhance the tourism industry, and coordinating efforts to retain existing businesses and industries
- Financial burden associated with developing a business incubator and offering incentives/opportunities to local existing business/industry
- Geographic size of the region can be problematic when trying to promote collaboration throughout the region. Thinking regionally but acting locally is difficult.
- Technology deficit in the region. There is a lack of consistent, high-quality long distance and cell phone service, nor is there high-speed internet everywhere in the region.

Strategies
- Utilize existing educational resources—e.g., University of Alabama Center for Business and Economic Development or Jacksonville State University Small Business Development Center—to provide knowledge to galvanize collaboration and development of a business incubator, marketing brand, tourism strategy, and retain existing business and industries.
- Pursue partnerships, grant-funding sources, and other resources to relieve the financial burden associated with developing a business incubator or offering incentives/opportunities to local existing business and industry.
- Utilize technology as much as possible to connect the region; for example, conference calls and web conferencing can bring people together.
- Collaborate with Connecting Alabama and other organizations to bring high-speed internet and other communication technology to as many people as possible in the region.

Metrics
- Increase the number of collaboration/planning meetings held each year by 2% over a five-year period.
- Increase participation in the Alabama Communities of Excellence (ACE) program by 1% over a five-year period.

Implementation Steps
- Establish a regional marketing program and brand.
    - Build on existing economic development resources
    - Work with existing industries to identify competitive strengths
    - Determine regional economic development branding concepts
    - Develop a regional economic development program
- Leverage tourism potential.
    - Develop a regional tourism development strategy
    - Establish tourism corridors and nodes
- Assess the feasibility of business incubator projects.
    - Work with universities to identify incubator concepts
    - Test the feasibility of incubators
- Promote the use of existing small business resources.
    - Take advantage of resources available through Made in Alabama organizations
    - Communicate with area businesses about assistance programs
- Focus on business retention and growth efforts.
    - Most new jobs will be created by businesses that already exist in the region
    - Enable the growth of existing businesses
- Enhance amenity value as a tool for economic development.
    - Costs and amenities drive location decisions
    - Link economic development and tourism efforts
- Focus financial and other incentives on growing local businesses.
    - Local businesses create jobs and create amenity value
    - Let the State handle incentives for out-of-state relocations

2020 Update:

EARPDC operates a revolving loan fund. This loan fund brings capital to small businesses that they would not be able to receive otherwise. In FY2020, EARPDC received 8 applications for RLF assistance and loans were approved for 2 businesses. The loans totaled $329,512.90. Without the RLF program, these businesses would not have access to capital, and they would not be able to grow or even start.

Goal 5. Capitalize on existing downtown areas.

Objectives
- Conduct a comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance review and update, if needed, to create appealing downtown areas which promote opportunities for mixed-use space.
- Develop a marketing plan to accentuate downtown areas.
- Establish and promote social, recreational, cultural, and commercial activities downtown.
- Design an effective and safe multimodal transportation plan to and within downtown.

Barriers
- Apathy regarding downtown areas, especially ones in complete disrepair
- Time and fiscal constraints and apathy towards reviewing comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances

- Establishing clear governance over downtown areas, including maintenance and ability to conduct activities, is needed
- Prioritization of the personal motor vehicle over any other form of transportation is problematic when trying to promote biking and walking
- Conflict between rural and urban counties regarding priorities and competition

Strategies
- Organize small activities downtown to draw people to the area, building on the momentum to launch an aggressive program of events to draw people to the area, promote biking and walking.
- Acquire research that promotes downtowns and what can happen if a community focuses their efforts on their downtown.
- Work with the regional chamber of commerce programs to communicate the benefits of collaboration and identify the priorities of rural areas.

Metrics
- Increase the number of communities that have a downtown association or equivalent program by 2% over a five-year period.
- Increase the number of communities that participate in the Main Street program by 2% over five-years (they are currently not accepting new applicants).

Implementation Steps
- Establish a regional main street program and recruit downtowns.
  - Establish a regional main street program
  - Promote the merits of downtown revitalization
  - Identify candidate communities for a revitalization program
- Establish a local revitalization program (recommended for each community, adapted to meet their unique circumstances and needs).
  - Establish a downtown revitalization entity
  - Prepare a downtown revitalization plan
  - Implement the revitalization plan
- Establish a local historic preservation program.

FY 2020 Update:

EARPDC continued to participate in Downtown workshops and initiatives. EARPDC staff have worked to establish a partnership with the Mainstreet Alabama group. EARPDC also encourages RLF applicants to explore the possibility of locating their business downtown.

Goal 6. Assist in the development of physical infrastructure and facilities; for example, utilizing or demolishing abandoned industrial and commercial sites.

Objectives
- Identify and seek funding sources to improve existing industrial and commercial sites and provide adequate community facilities and services.
- Repurpose or remediate existing properties.
- Designate and promote buildings comparable to the AdvantageSite program.

- Provide best practices regarding the permitting process for construction and demolition of buildings.
- Insure a safe, efficient and economic transportation system.
- Provide safe, decent, and sanitary housing in a suitable living environment for all residents of the region.

Barriers
- Environmental and regulatory concerns associated with reuse or demolishing of existing structures, especially former industrial sites
- Funding and collaboration is needed to create a program for buildings that is comparable to the AdvantageSite program
- Funding
- Current transportation practices
- Lack of affordable housing

Strategies
- Develop partnerships for sharing best practices, identifying potential funding sources, and addressing regulatory and environmental concerns.
- Work with the existing AdvantageSite program to modify/adapt it for buildings.
- Work with transportation professionals to modernize transportation practices.
- Collaborate with housing providers to increase available affordable housing.

Metrics
- Increase the number of reutilized industrial and commercial sites by 2% over a five-year period.
- Develop a program for buildings comparable to the AdvantageSite program and see the number of certifications increase each year over a five-year period.
- Increase the percentage of local governments with adequate community facilities and services by 2% over the next five years.

Implementation Steps
- Utilize programs for inventorying and marketing industrial properties.
    - Utilize the existing AdvantageSite program for industrial sites
    - Establish a program for buildings modeled after AdvantageSite
- Utilize programs for funding infrastructure and facilities.
    - Pursue funding from existing programs for infrastructure and facilities
    - Explore the potential for new programs for infrastructure and facilities funding
- Utilize existing environmental clean-up programs.

2020 Update:

EARPDC continued work on 2 demolition projects funded through the Community Development Block Grant Program for 2 member governments. EARPDC is continually working to eliminate blight and encourage infill development across our region.

EARPDC continued to administer the City of Talladega's EDA-funded sewer line project. This project allowed the City to recruit Georgia-Pacific to the region, and with it, over 100 jobs.

EARPDC worked with the City of Centre and the City of Gadsden to secure 2 EDA grants. These projects were preliminarily selected for funding, and pending final approval, will award over 2 million dollars between the two cities.

EARPDC worked with the City of Gadsden on a Southern Automotive Workforce grant through the Appalachian Regional Commission. This grant was preliminarily selected for funding, and pending final approval, will award 1 million dollars to the City for infrastructure improvements to support new and expanding industries.

Goal 7. Develop and conserve the region's natural resources by utilizing land use and growth management policies.

Objectives
- Provide optimal development of communities' agriculture and timberland.
- Provide optimal development and control of water resources and address flood hazard issues in the region.
- Protect and preserve valuable environmental and historic resources.
- Promote the efficient use of energy.

Barriers
- There is a delicate balance between development and conservation, which can be problematic for agricultural land, timberland, water resources, flood hazard areas, and historic resources.
- Lack of knowledge of land use and growth management practices.
- There is a cost associated with implementing energy conservation methods, which may deter people from implementing the measures that would be cost saving in the future.

Strategies
- Providing educational materials clearly explaining development constraints and optimal conditions for development.
- Educate on the benefits of land use and growth management practices.
- Identify funding sources for implementing energy conservation methods.

Metrics
- Increase the percentage of reused properties by 2% over a five-year period.
- Decrease the percentage of vacant commercial structures by 2% over a five-year period.
- Increase the number of local governments with land use and/or growth management policies by 2% over the next five-years.

Implementation Steps
- Provide educational opportunities on land use and growth management.
  - Utilize educational forums on sound land use and growth management practices
  - Utilize educational forums on comprehensive planning and zoning
  - Provide additional educational opportunities on comprehensive planning and zoning
- Assist communities with planning and zoning initiatives.
  - Initiate comprehensive plans

- o   Initiate new zoning and development regulations
- Educate the public on energy efficiency measures and encourage action.
  - o   Promote the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Program
  - o   Encourage action from potential Energy Star program participants
  - o   Promote other existing energy programs

2020 Update:

EARPDC worked on planning projects for Piedmont, Wadley, Lincoln, Heflin, and Cedar Bluff during FY2020. During this time, staff members educated communities on growth management techniques and proper land use policies.