



# INTRODUCTION

## THE COMMON FRAMEWORK

The West Michigan Strategic Alliance was launched in June of 2000 by a diverse group of community leaders. From its start, the Alliance set out to be a catalyst in encouraging cooperation and collaboration among the businesses, institutions and governmental units of the greater Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Holland area—**The West Michigan Metro Tri-plex.**

This publication, *The Common Framework*, looks at our Tri-plex from a global perspective, in comparison with other metros in the Upper Midwest, and across the various systems or activities within the Tri-plex. *The Common Framework* is the result of two years of objective data gathering, analysis and strategic planning conducted by more than 250 volunteers across ten essential activities: Environment, Economy, Education & Research, Health & Human Services, Tourism, Arts & Culture, Land Use, Infrastructure, Transportation/Logistics and Governance.

The work of the ten Essential Activities Committees was considered in cross functional dialog by the 40 members of Leadership Forum of the Alliance. This mix of government, business and institutional leaders from throughout the Tri-plex developed **Priorities for Regional Collaboration** (pages 26 and 27). These Priorities represent the areas where—working together—we can create the greatest long-term benefit.

*The Common Framework* is not a plan for the future; it provides a snapshot of West Michigan that can be used as a tool for creating a shared understanding of our Metro Tri-plex, its complexities and interconnections, its strengths and weaknesses and its opportunities and threats. This information can help decision makers of all organizations make more informed choices for the future.

# DEFINING THE COMPETITIVE CONTEXT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

## GLOBAL NETWORKS AND NATURAL REGIONS

The world is becoming one market. State-driven economies, such as the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, are now market-driven economies. **World trade is now conducted among powerful new trading blocs** such as North America, the European Union and the Russian Federation, which are based on functional, economic relationships rather than political ideology. "Natural Regions," subsets of these trading blocs, cut across political boundaries and have become the basic units of world competition for investment capital and human talent.

## Advanced information and telecommunications networks are accelerating the pace of global change.

They are combining with transportation to create an integrated global network. Goods and services travel more broadly and faster than ever before. These forces are driving corporate mergers and relocations worldwide.

These shifts in the global market are affecting regions around the world. Metro areas with populations larger than one million, like the West Michigan Metro Tri-plex, now compete for economic opportunities on a global basis. **Understanding these forces and taking the steps to prepare the region for this new global reality is vital to secure our future.**

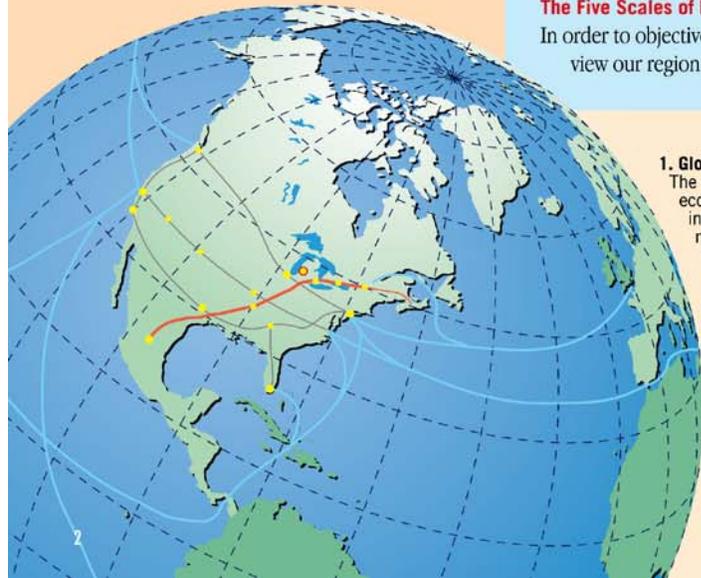


## The Five Scales of Reference

In order to objectively evaluate the West Michigan Region, we must view our region within the following five geographical contexts.

**1. Global Scale (pages 2-3):** The integration of the world's economies has resulted in an increasingly seamless global network. Understanding how the West Michigan Region fits in the new global picture provides the basic context for the region.

**2. Continental Scale (page 4):** The divisions of the world's new economic geography are no longer the ideological blocs and national states, but rather a series of functionally-integrated trading blocs and natural regions. As a result of the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) treaties, the West Michigan Region now occupies an important position in the newly created North American Trading Bloc.



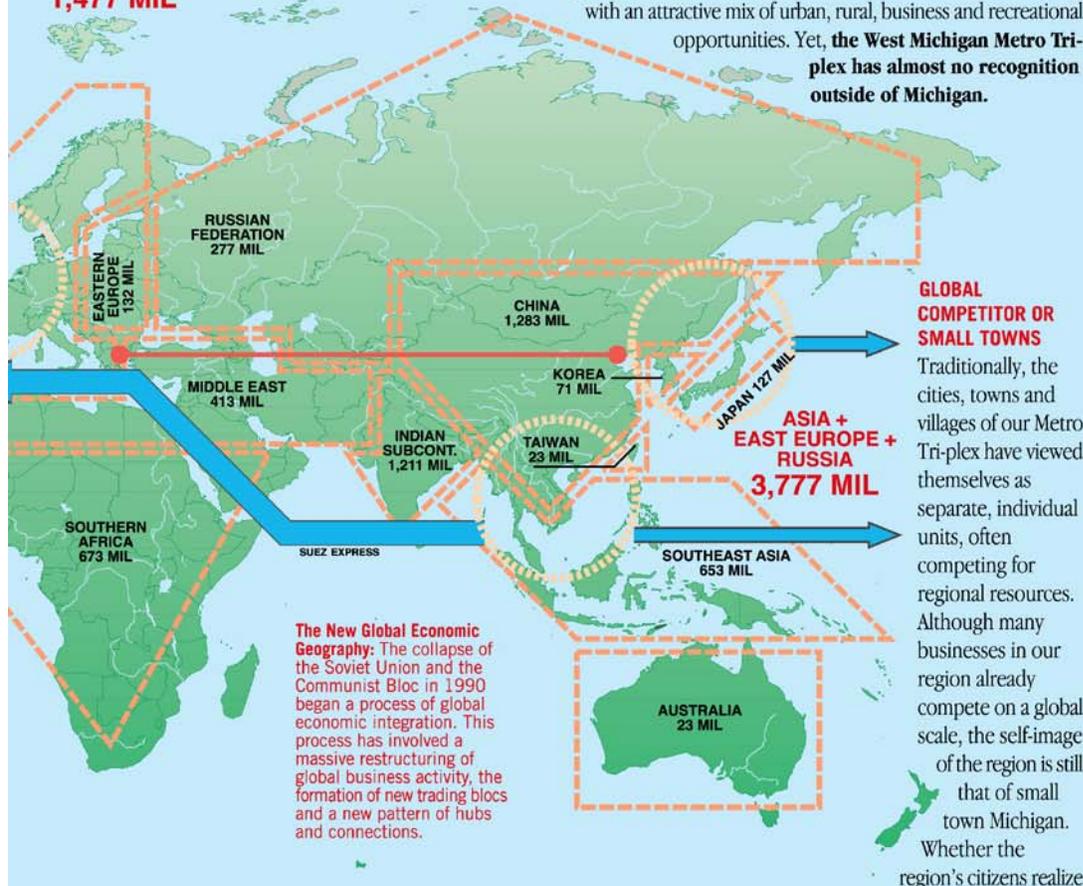
# SUCCESSFUL PAST . . . UNCERTAIN FUTURE

## REGIONAL IDENTITY IN GLOBAL MARKETS

To sustain and grow economic activity in the new global marketplace, regions need to achieve a strong identity. Some metro centers, such as New York or London, are already well established, while others, such as Atlanta or Indianapolis, are gaining in recognition. Still, others lack recognition.

The Grand Rapids-Muskegon-Holland Metro Tri-plex is more than just an overflow of the Detroit or Chicago metros. We are a **dynamic urban center** in our own right, with an attractive mix of urban, rural, business and recreational opportunities. Yet, **the West Michigan Metro Tri-plex has almost no recognition outside of Michigan.**

EUROPE +  
AFRICA +  
MIDDLE EAST  
1,477 MIL



**The New Global Economic Geography:** The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc in 1990 began a process of global economic integration. This process has involved a massive restructuring of global business activity, the formation of new trading blocs and a new pattern of hubs and connections.

Whether the region's citizens realize it or not, West Michigan is already a competitive unit in the global economy. **In order for the region to compete effectively for global opportunities, the people of West Michigan need to think and act from a larger metropolitan perspective.**

## OUR JOBS AT RISK...

Our current economic success is threatened by global consolidation, leading to the loss of major corporate headquarters and many jobs.

## OUR ENVIRONMENT AT RISK...

Rapid population growth and expanding development threaten our natural environment.

## OUR CITIES AT RISK...

Migration from our central cities to suburbs and rural townships contributes to diminishing tax bases and unevenly resourced school systems.

**The work of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance is a timely response to these powerful forces that are shaping every aspect of West Michigan.**

West Michigan has evolved into a dynamic and growing region with a strong economy and unique culture. By most measures our region is thriving as a great place to live, work and play. However, our past success does not guarantee our future.

Growth has brought with it serious challenges that threaten the quality of life for future generations. **The most important problems and opportunities we face are beyond the ability of any individual unit of government to act upon. Many are beyond the scope of government alone.**

Effective response to change requires the collaboration of governments, businesses and nonprofit institutions on a regional level.

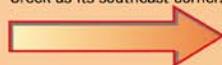
**Now is the time to act, while we can make informed choices from a position of strength.**



**3. Super Region Scale (page 5):** The Upper Midwest Super Region contains 11 metros with populations over one million people including our West Michigan Metro Tri-plex. The metro areas of Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Detroit, Indianapolis, Louisville, Milwaukee and St. Louis were used as benchmarks for this study.



**4. The West Michigan Region Scale (pages 6-7):** The West Michigan Natural Region covers a market area with more than two million people that includes the Metro Tri-plex. The West Michigan natural region stretches from Traverse Bay in the north to Kalamazoo in the south. It extends down the coast of Lake Michigan, on the west as far as South Haven. The eastern edge generally follows US-27 and touches Battle Creek as its southeast corner.



**5. The Metro Tri-plex Scale (pages 8-11):** The urban core of the region, with a total population of over one million, includes the greater Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Holland Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). This rapidly urbanizing area is comprised of over 100 cities, townships and villages spread across parts of Kent, Ottawa, Muskegon counties.

**Tri-plex Essential Activities (pages 12-25)**

**Priorities for Regional Collaboration (pages 26-27)**

# OUR NEW REGIONAL CONTEXT

WE ARE IN A NEW LEAGUE



**Hubs, Corridors and Connections:** The emergence of the NAFTA corridor is changing the pattern of air and sea hubs, international trade flows and the corridor structure of the Upper Midwest.

## COMPETING ON A NATIONAL SCALE

Because of its growth, West Michigan has advanced to play in a “new league” with peer cities that include Cleveland, Indianapolis, Columbus and Cincinnati. Although many of us in West Michigan still perceive ourselves in terms of smaller communities, we will increasingly find ourselves competing on a global and national scale.

## THE NEW NORTH AMERICAN TRADING BLOC

For the first time in history, the three nations of North America have joined in a free trade agreement to form a single “North American Trading Bloc” with a combined population exceeding 400 million. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) corridor (illustrated above) is the “industrial backbone” of North America, providing the transportation and communication infrastructure that links the industrial centers of Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. This corridor, extending from Montreal and Toronto to Mexico City, runs directly through Michigan, adjacent to the West Michigan region. The corridor links the world’s largest economy (U.S.) to the 10th largest (Mexico), and the 11th largest (Canada).

## THE UPPER MIDWEST SUPER REGION

West Michigan’s position midway between the super-regional hubs of Chicago and Detroit gives our companies an economic advantage by being able to service both population centers. Despite the challenges of being a peninsula state, the southern area of our region is well positioned and in close proximity to both the important NAFTA and the major east-west transportation corridors. In the global marketplace, however, the Upper Midwest finds itself disadvantaged by its distance from the coasts.

# UPPER MIDWEST SUPER REGION

## TEN BENCHMARK METROS



### HOW DO WE COMPARE?

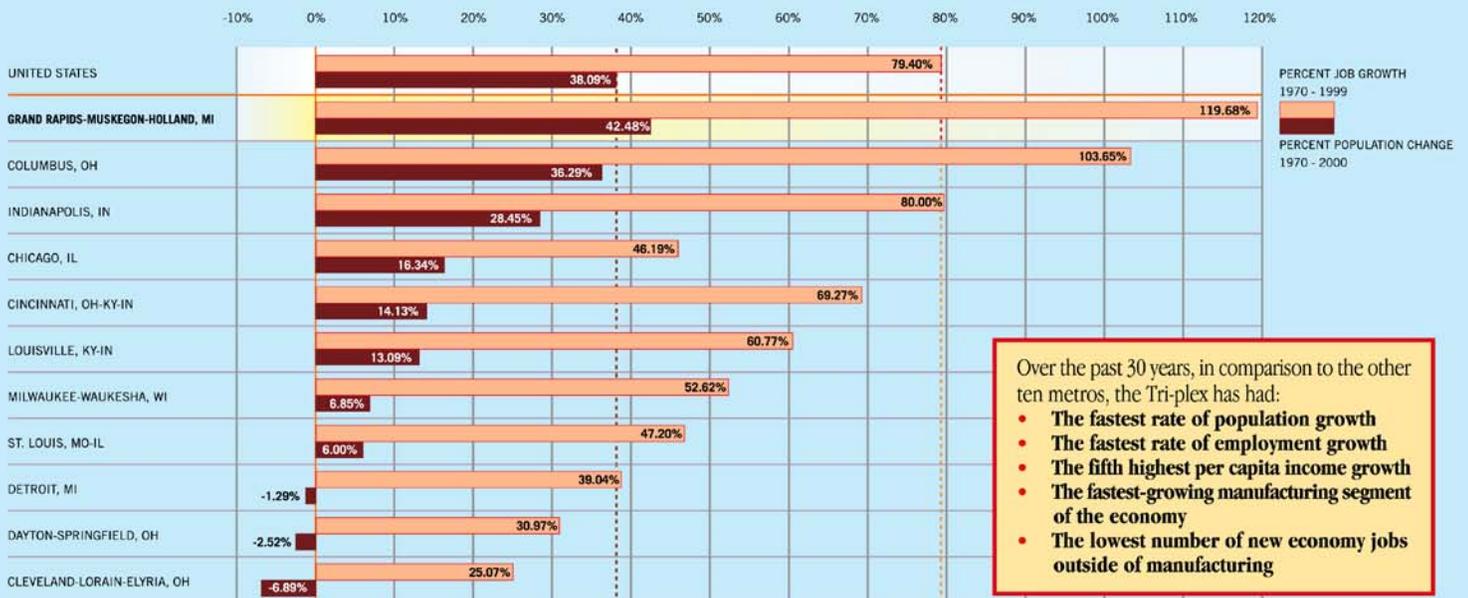
The Upper Midwest Super Region has 11 metropolitan centers with populations of over one million, including the West Michigan Metro Tri-plex. To better understand our position, this study benchmarked our metro against the ten others, including Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Detroit, Louisville, Indianapolis, Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis.

The study shows we are not the smallest of these metros. In fact, we are ninth in size, with a larger population than Dayton or Louisville. Of the 11 comparable cities, the West Michigan Tri-plex is the only one that does not refer to itself by the name of a central city.

### STRUCTURE: A METRO TRI-PLEX

The structure of the Tri-plex is unlike any other metro area in the super region. All other metros in the super region are single-centered and growing outward from their cores. Our metro is transforming from its established pattern of three anchor communities into a single and continuous urbanized center. Of the five lakefront metros in the super region, only the Tri-plex has its main population center located inland, off the lakeshore. Of the benchmark cities in the Upper Midwest, the Tri-plex has a unique combination of urban amenities and lake resorts.

**PERCENT JOB GROWTH CHANGE 1970 - 1999  
& PERCENT POPULATION CHANGE 1970 - 2000  
BY METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS**



Over the past 30 years, in comparison to the other ten metros, the Tri-plex has had:

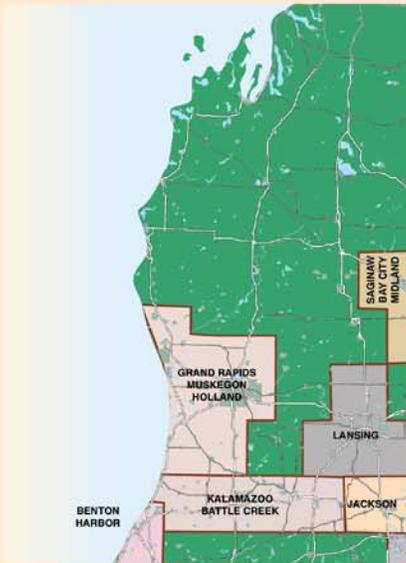
- The fastest rate of population growth
- The fastest rate of employment growth
- The fifth highest per capita income growth
- The fastest-growing manufacturing segment of the economy
- The lowest number of new economy jobs outside of manufacturing

All of the figures are based on Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) as defined by the Census Bureau.

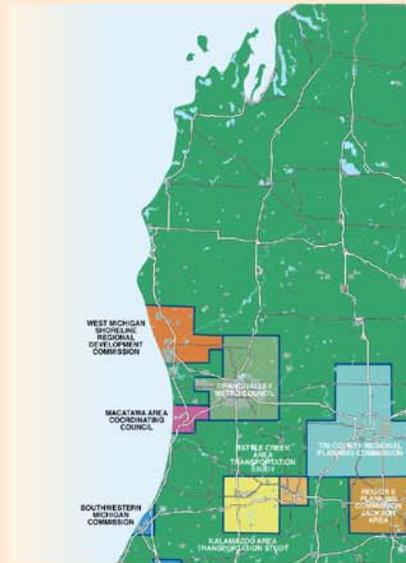
# DEFINING THE REGION

## CURRENT PATCHWORK OF DEFINITIONS

Over the years, West Michigan has been divided and defined by multiple overlapping economic, research and government entities. These agencies have defined the region as an area covering anywhere from four to 25 counties, adding to the already fragmented pattern of county, city, village and township boundaries.



**MSA (Metropolitan Statistical Area):** An MSA, as defined by the United States Office of Management and Budget, is an area containing a core city with a population of at least 50,000 people, together with neighboring communities that have a high degree of economic and social connection. The Grand Rapids-Muskegon-Holland MSA is a four-county area comprised of Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Allegan Counties. This MSA had a population of 1,088,514 in 2000, with an estimated population of 1,311,602 by 2025.



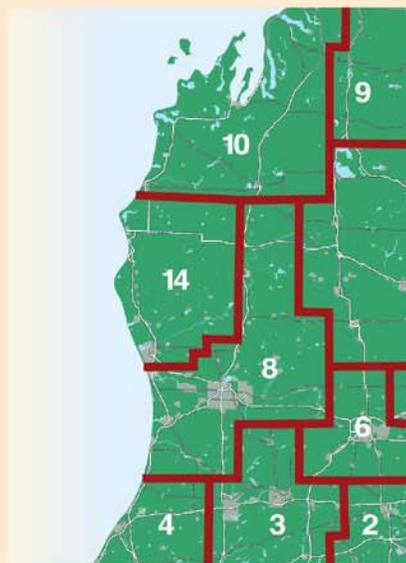
**MPOs (Metropolitan Planning Organizations):** West Michigan has three Metropolitan Planning Organizations. These are the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (serving 33 units of government in the greater Grand Rapids area), the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (serving 27 units of government), and the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council (serving seven units of government in the greater Holland/Zeeland area). **There is no MPO serving the areas in the center of the Tri-plex where the greatest future growth is anticipated.**



**Trade Areas:** Rand McNally determines a Trade Area after an intensive study of land formation, population distribution, newspaper circulation, economic activities, highway facilities, railroad service, suburban transportation and field reports of experienced sales analysts. The West Michigan natural region has five such trade areas, including Grand Rapids/Holland, Muskegon, Kalamazoo, Traverse City and Battle Creek.



**DMAs (Designated Market Areas):** DMAs are defined by Nielsen Media Research as non-overlapping geographical areas for planning, buying and evaluating television audiences across various markets. The Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo-Battle Creek DMA is a 14-county area with a 2000 population of 1,903,860.



**State Designated Planning and Development Regions:** Michigan Public Acts 46 and 281 established the 14 Economic Development and Planning Regions for the state.



**BEAs (Bureau of Economic Analysis Trade Areas):** The Department of Commerce uses the Bureau of Economic Analysis trade areas, or BEAs to analyze economic activity in the United States. The two BEAs in West Michigan are the Traverse City BEA and the Grand Rapids-Muskegon-Holland BEA, with a combined total of 25 counties and a population of 2,168,736 in 2000.

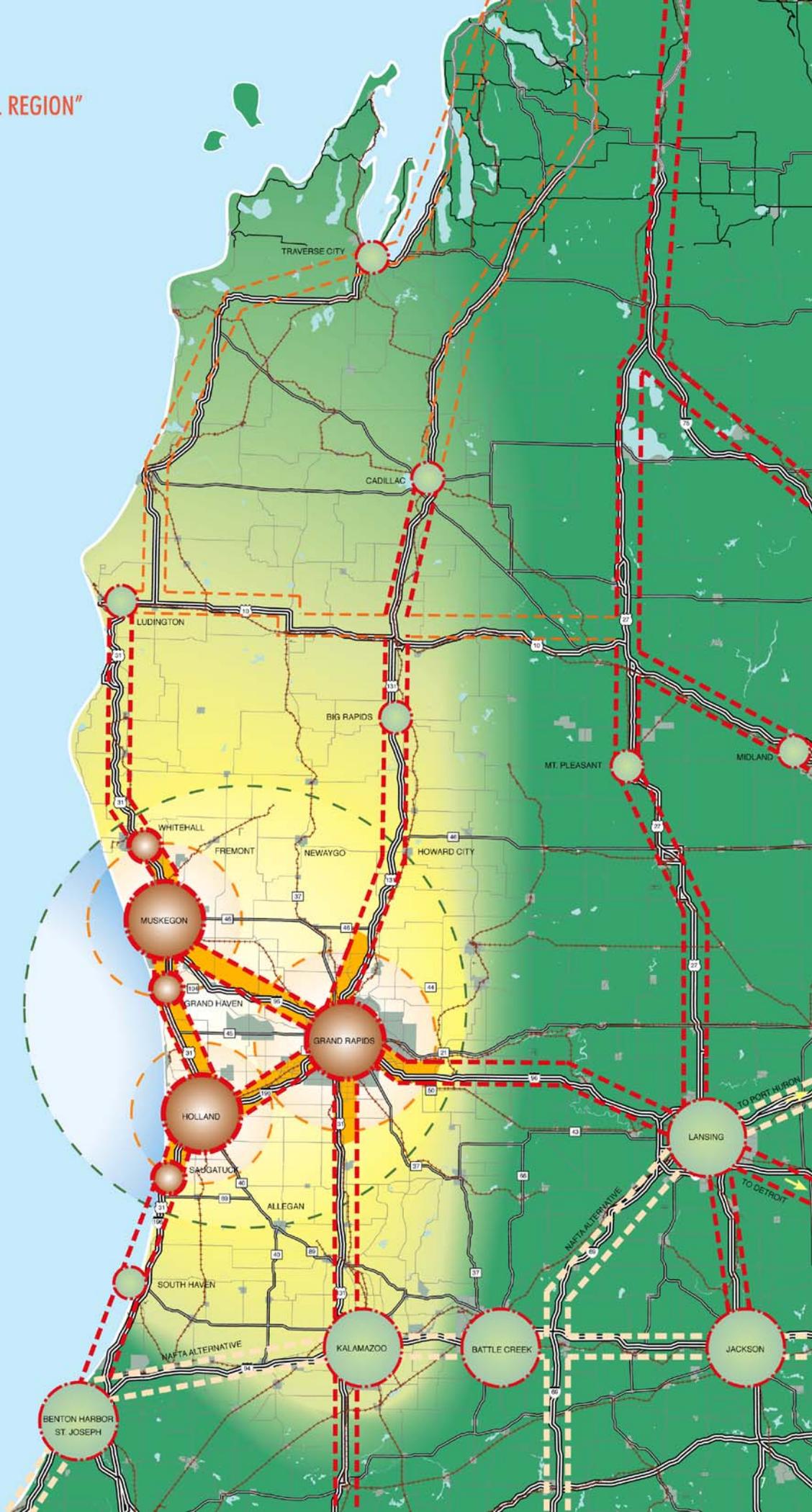
## UNDERSTANDING THE "NATURAL REGION"

The West Michigan Natural Region, depicted here in yellow, reflects the way that people actually live, work, shop and play without regard to political and organizational boundaries. Its communities are closely tied together by common history and traditions, the transportation network, economic activities, health and social services, cultural and social activities and media coverage. By integrating traditional definitions of the region with regional travel patterns, holiday destination zones and movement of goods and services, we can define a West Michigan functional market region, known as a Natural Region. West Michigan's Natural Region extends from Traverse Bay on the north, down the coast of Lake Michigan past South Haven, to Kalamazoo, touching the edge of Battle Creek. The eastern boundary of the natural region lies just west of US-27.

### Relationship between the Metro Tri-plex and the Natural Region

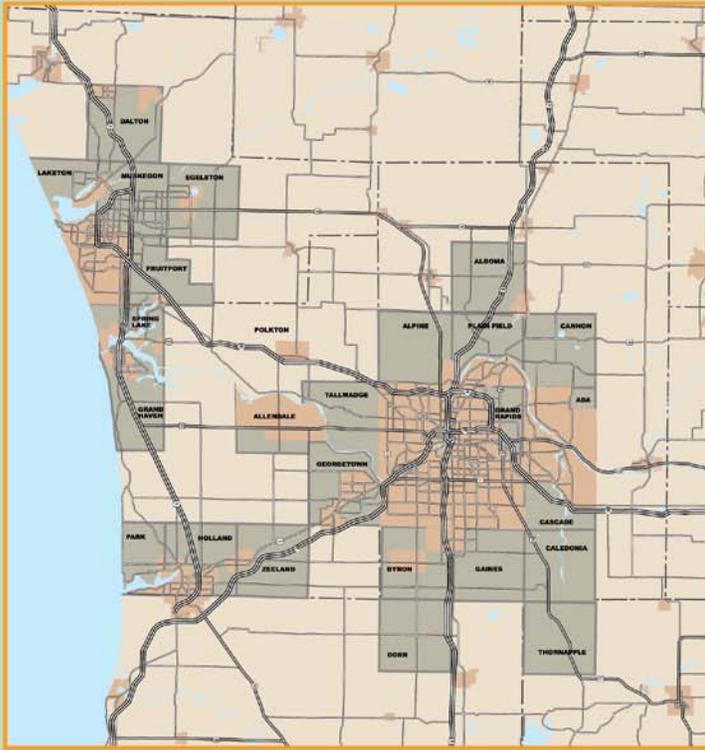
The urban hub of the Natural Region is made up of the greater Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Holland area. This is unusual in that the urban hub has three anchor cities surrounded by many smaller, interactive and interconnected communities that are all growing together. To describe this relationship we refer to the urban center as the West Michigan Metro Tri-plex. The Tri-plex has the largest concentration of transportation, economic, institutional, cultural and medical resources in the Natural Region.

- MAJOR CENTERS WITHIN TRI-PLEX
- CENTERS OUTSIDE OF TRI-PLEX
- CORRIDORS INSIDE TRI-PLEX
- CORRIDORS OUTSIDE TRI-PLEX
- MAJOR NATIONAL CORRIDOR
- THE NATURAL REGION
- CITY, VILLAGE OR OTHER URBAN AREA
- THE TRI-PLEX METRO AREA



# DEFINING THE METRO TRI-PLEX

## STRUCTURE AND PATTERNS

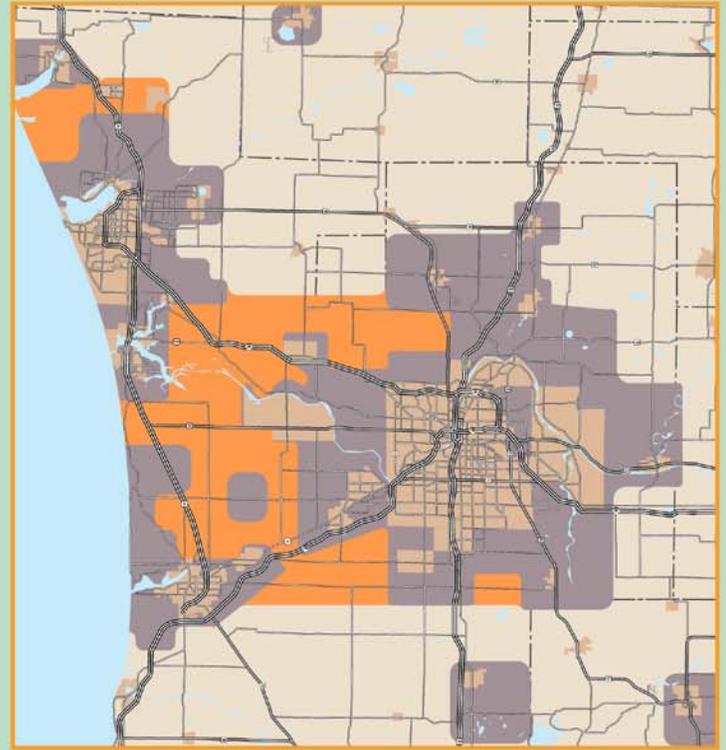
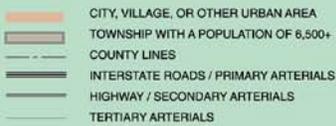


**Urbanization: The Pattern of Incorporated Municipal Units and Urban Areas.**

This map shows the location and extent of the existing urbanized areas. The pattern of urbanization reveals the emerging metropolitan nature of the Tri-plex.

The cities, villages and townships of the Tri-plex range in size from Grand Rapids, with almost 200,000 people to Saugatuck, with just over 1,000 residents. Each of these is a distinct political unit. The Metro Tri-plex currently consists of four primary and two secondary groupings of contiguous cities, villages and charter townships. Of the four primary groupings, the Grand Rapids area is the largest with 15 urban townships and 15 cities. The Muskegon area is

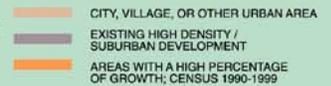
composed of seven urban townships and five cities, including the Grand Haven grouping with three cities. The Holland area has three urban townships and two cities. The secondary groupings are formed by Whitehall and Montague to the north of Muskegon and by Saugatuck and Douglas to the south of Holland.



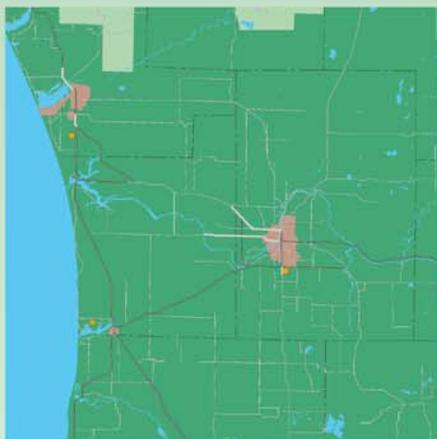
**Growth: The Pattern of Metro Expansion and Change.**

The growth pattern on this map reveals the rate and direction of urban expansion. There are two main areas of urban growth in the Metro Tri-plex. Grand Rapids is growing in all directions while the entire lakeshore is filling in from Whitehall to Saugatuck. The combination of these two growth patterns is filling in the entire area between I-96, I-196 and the lakeshore. Suburban growth is increasingly low-density. This low-density growth is having an enormous impact on the region—especially our environment and agriculture. Ottawa County, located in the center of the three major growth areas, is Michigan's top producing agricultural county. Yet,

it had the highest population growth rate of the Grand Rapids-Muskegon-Holland MSA of almost 27% between 1990 and 2000. **The four counties of the MSA are expected to grow at a combined growth rate of 20% over the next 25 years.**

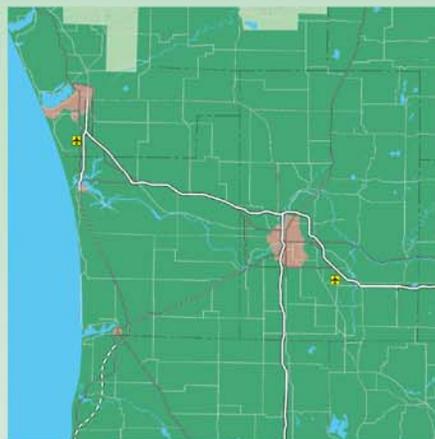


## EVOLUTION OF THE METRO TRI-PLEX



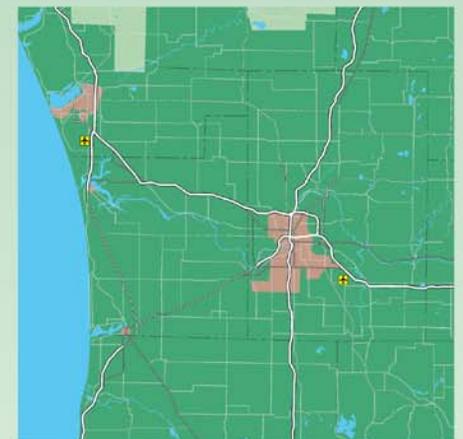
1945

- ▶ The population of the four counties in 1940 was 442,338 and grew to 531,081 by 1950
- ▶ 1930: First Tulip Time Festival is organized and held
- ▶ 1945: City of Muskegon debates construction of US-31 as bypass or business route to lakefront
- ▶ 1947: Holland Sentinel Newspaper begins circulation
- ▶ 1949: Ja-Ri Distributing Company (now Alticor) is organized



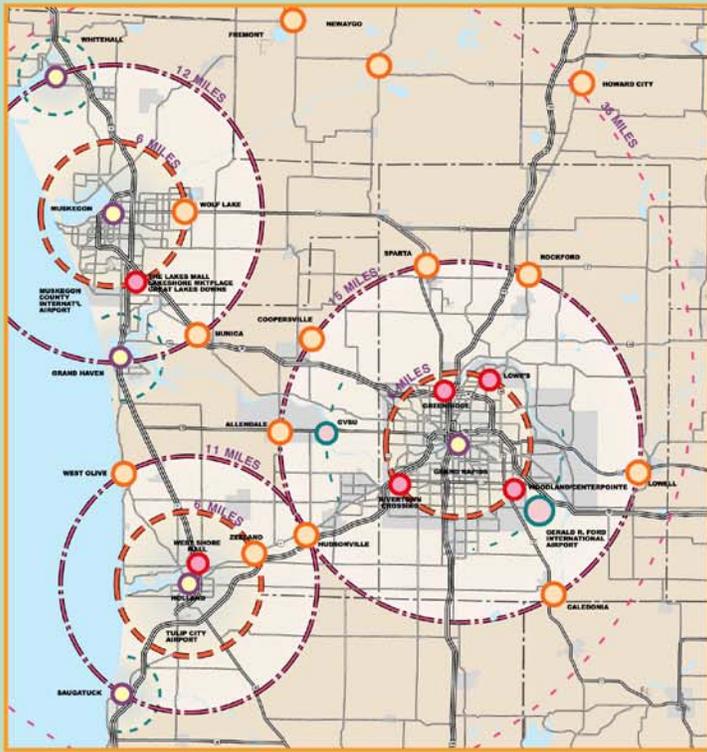
1960

- ▶ The population of the four counties in 1960 was 669,578
- ▶ 1960: St. Lawrence Seaway opens; Mart Dock in Muskegon sees increased use and need for expansion of operations
- ▶ 1961: US 131, Grand Rapids' first freeway, opens
- ▶ 1963: Kent County's new airport (Gerald R. Ford Int'l) opens
- ▶ 1963: Grand Valley State College welcomes its first class
- ▶ 1965: "De Zwaan" Windmill dedicated by Prince Bernhard
- ▶ 1974: I-196 bypass opens in Holland



1975

- ▶ The population of the four counties in 1970 was 763,226 and grew to 840,824 by 1980
- ▶ 1970: West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission is formed
- ▶ 1981: First Celebration on the Grand celebrates opening of Gerald R. Ford Museum, Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, and Grand Rapids Arts Museum
- ▶ 1988: Westshore Mall opens in Holland



**Proximity: The Relationships between the Major Centers.**

The distance and relationship between the major commercial development centers reveals the changing distribution of economic activity and commuting patterns. Throughout the Metro Tri-plex is a series of both traditional and newly formed commercial centers. These centers represent the largest public, private and institutional employment concentrations and they form destination points for passenger and freight traffic. The location and number of these centers reflect the market conditions related to demographic changes, transportation improvements, government policies and financial investment. In turn, each new development

influences future growth patterns. Our traditional city centers are typically mixed-use, while new commercial centers are focused on single use such as retail, office, industrial or residential developments.

- MAJOR CITY AREA OF INFLUENCE
- PERCEIVED URBAN EDGE
- OTHER CITY AREA OF INFLUENCE
- EXTENDED METRO INFLUENCE
- TRADITIONAL CENTER CITIES
- RING CITIES / PERIMETER CITIES
- REGIONAL SHOPPING CENTERS / MALLS
- AIRPORT / INSTITUTIONAL CENTER



**Corridors: The Pattern of Ground-based Transportation Infrastructure.**

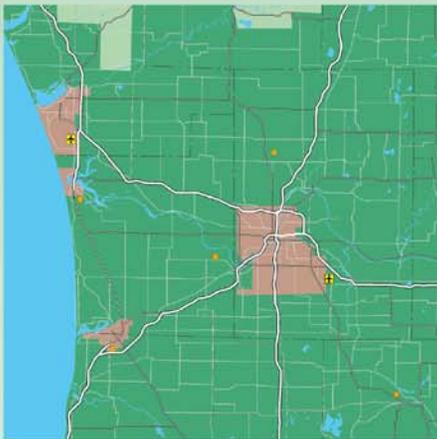
The pattern of transportation corridors reveals the connections that link the Metro Tri-plex. The major corridors form a triangular pattern of US-31, I-96 and I-196 connecting Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland. US-131 forms a north-south corridor connecting the Tri-plex to Kalamazoo.

connect I-196 in Zeeland north through Ottawa County to I-96 in Nunica. The M-45 corridor is undergoing upgrades from Grand Rapids to US-31, and the Coopersville-Allentown-Hudsonville corridor is being studied.

New corridors are being added that will impact the growth patterns of the Tri-plex. The M-6 or South Beltline is under construction to the south of Grand Rapids connecting Gerald R. Ford International Airport at I-96 to I-196 (scheduled for completion in 2005). The proposed Alternative US-31 corridor would

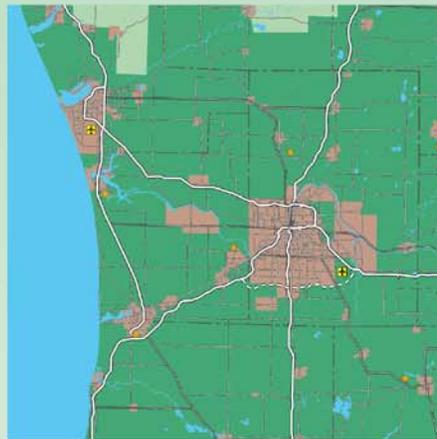
**Our traditional triangular highway pattern is becoming an urban grid.**

- EXISTING MAJOR CORRIDORS
- MAJOR CORRIDORS UNDER CONSTRUCTION
- PROPOSED MAJOR CORRIDORS
- PROPOSED SECONDARY CORRIDORS



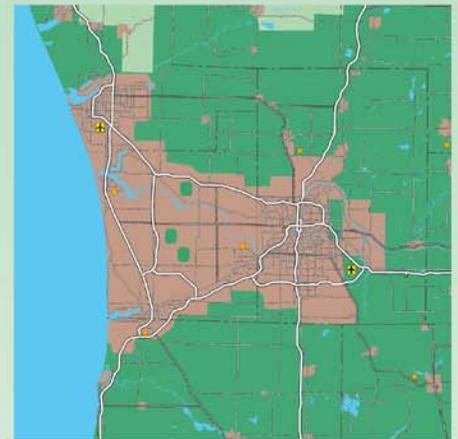
**1990**

- ▶ The population of the four counties in 1990 was 937,891
- ▶ 1990: Cherry County Playhouse moves to Frauenthal Theater
- ▶ 1990: Grand Valley Metropolitan Council is formed
- ▶ 1993: Macatawa Area Coordinating Council is formed
- ▶ 1995: Holland adopts Strategic Plan for downtown
- ▶ 1996: Van Andel Arena opens in Grand Rapids
- ▶ 1997: Holland celebrates its Sesquicentennial (150 yrs.)



**2000**

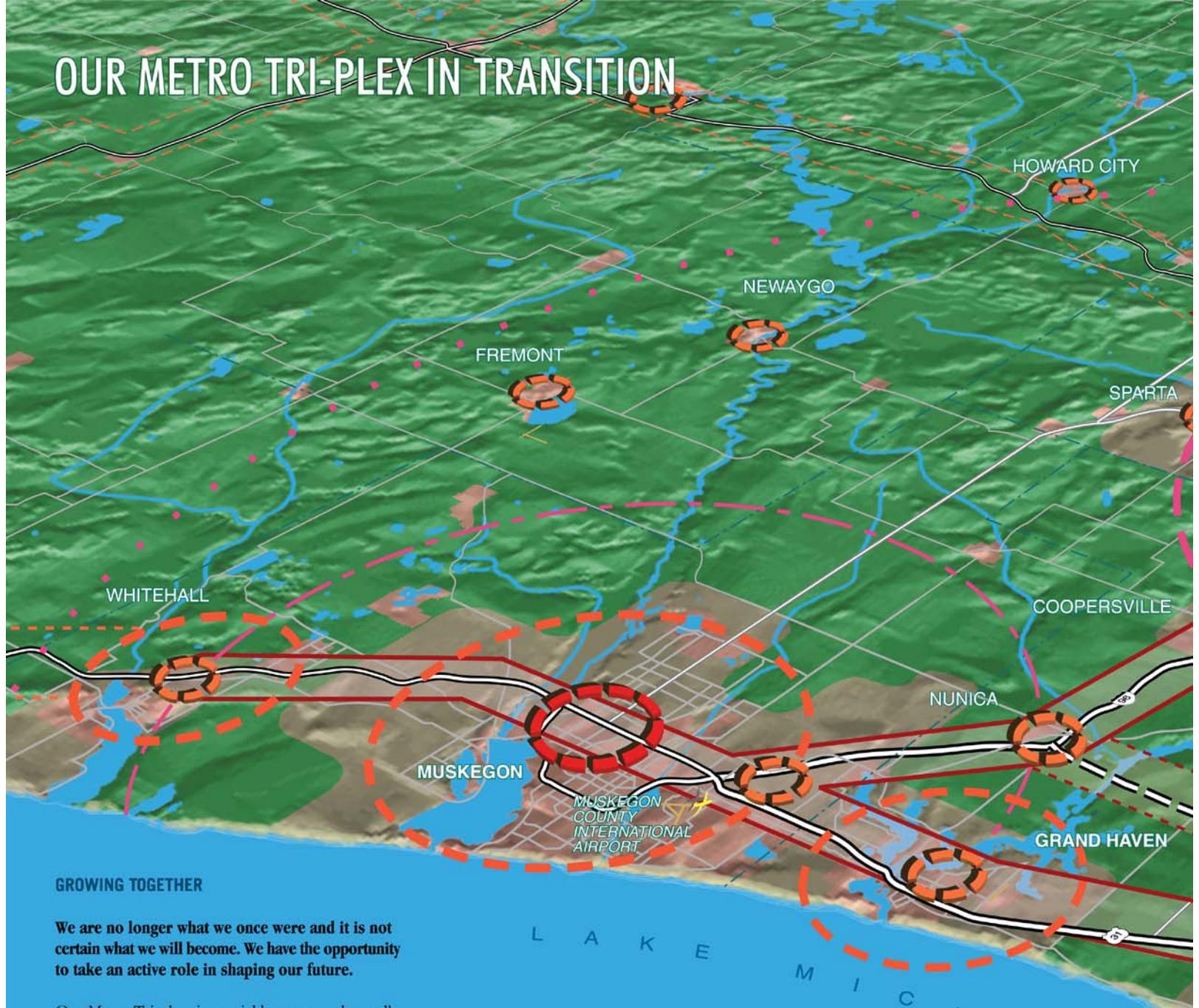
- ▶ The population of the four counties in 2000 was 1,088,514
- ▶ 2000: The Lakes Mall developed at US-31 and Sternberg Rd.
- ▶ 2000: Muskegon General and Mercy merge to become Mercy General Health Partners
- ▶ 2000: West Michigan Strategic Alliance is formed
- ▶ 2000: Rivertown Crossings Mall opens in Grandville
- ▶ 2004: DeVos Place Convention Center opens in Grand Rapids
- ▶ 2005: The M-6/South Beltline is to be completed



**2025 - YOUR CHOICE?**

- ▶ The population of the four counties will be over 1.3 million
- ▶ The US-31 Alternative could be completed from Holland/Zeeland to Nunica
- ▶ M-45 could be four lanes from Grand Rapids to US-31
- ▶ A network of green and open spaces could be formed
- ▶ The regional economy could become more diversified
- ▶ Over 100 units of government could be working collaboratively
- ▶ West Michigan could be the best place to live, work and play in the Midwest

# OUR METRO TRI-PLEX IN TRANSITION



## GROWING TOGETHER

**We are no longer what we once were and it is not certain what we will become. We have the opportunity to take an active role in shaping our future.**

Our Metro Tri-plex is special because we have all of the economic and cultural amenities of a million population metro, with the recreational opportunities and scenic beauty of a resort community. We have the only metro area on the Great Lakes that has its main population center inland rather than on the waterfront. Because of this, we are able to enjoy a remarkable area of natural scenic beauty along our lakeshore.

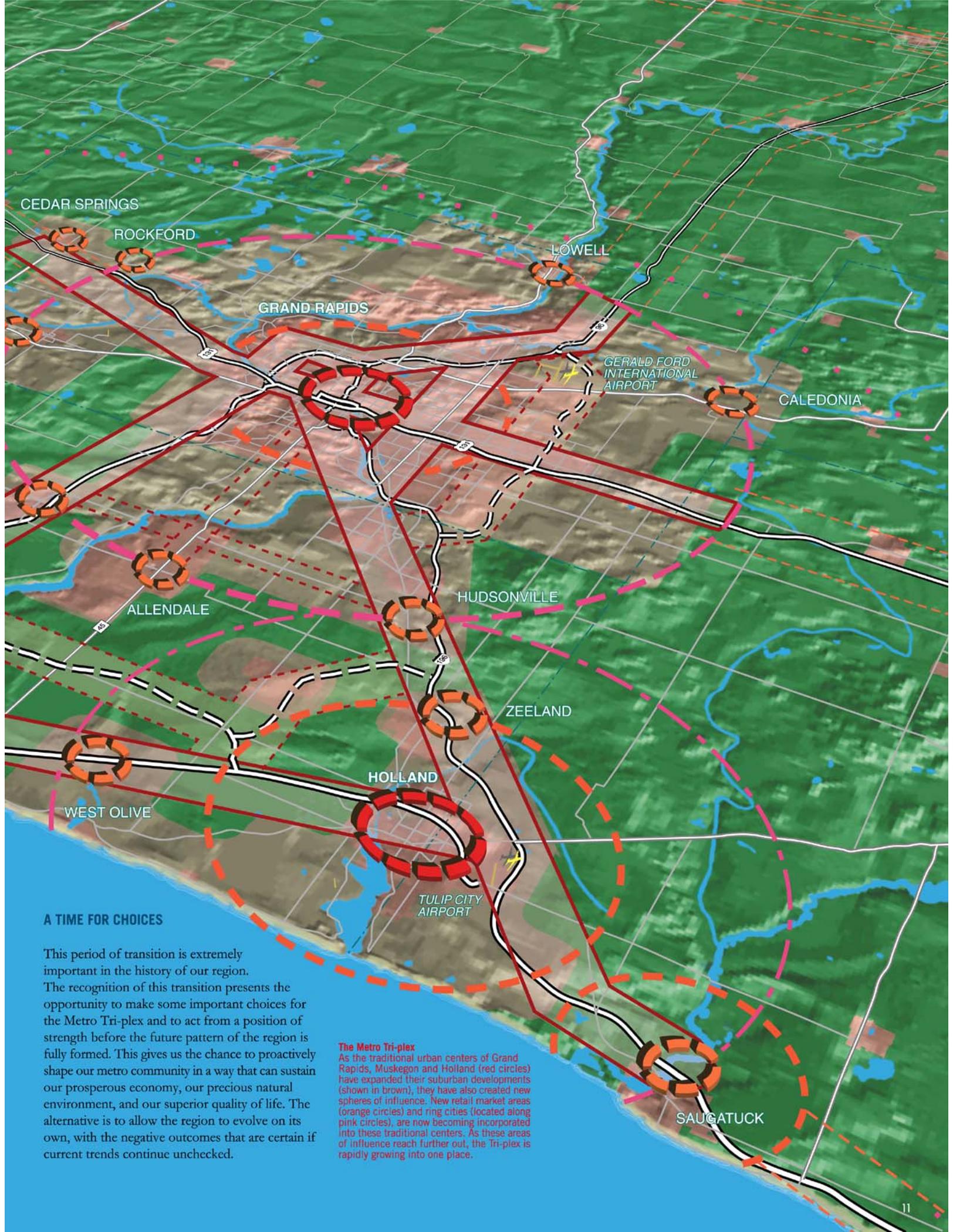
Our rapid population growth and the process of urbanization are transforming the historically separate cities of Grand Rapids, Holland and Muskegon and their surrounding communities into a single, highly-interactive and interdependent metro center with more than 1.1 million people. This transition involves a multi-dimensional shift affecting every urban, economic, and environmental system. During this period of transition, decisions regarding land use, transportation, infrastructure, and economic development will profoundly impact the character and quality of life within the Metro Tri-plex.

## WILL WE BECOME "LOS ANGELES ON THE LAKE"?

Our evolution from a collection of small cities and towns into an urbanized metro hub resembles, on a smaller scale, the pattern of how the Los Angeles metro area has evolved over the past 50 years. Like Los Angeles, we have our main urban center inland. It is linked to a string of smaller beachfront communities by a network of interstate freeways. Urban growth in Los Angeles was a product of the development between the downtown and the water. Each community planned independently without consideration of impacts on its neighbors. The result today in Los Angeles is congestion, smog, and a scarcity of open green space in many neighborhoods. Rapid population growth—combined with the absence of coordinated regional planning and policy—have eroded Los Angeles' quality of life.

## AN INTERACTIVE AND INTERDEPENDENT WHOLE

As our region evolves and grows together into a single Metro Tri-plex, **a regional identity and collaborative planning must emerge if we are to successfully manage our new growth and development issues.** In the future, our government, business, and institutional organizations—along with the citizens of the region—must begin to think of ourselves as what we truly are. We are all part of an interactive and interdependent whole. Each of us must begin to understand the growing negative impact of not planning for the region as a whole.



CEDAR SPRINGS

ROCKFORD

LOWELL

GRAND RAPIDS

GERALD FORD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

CALEDONIA

ALLENDALE

HUDSONVILLE

ZEELAND

HOLLAND

WEST OLIVE

TULIP CITY AIRPORT

SAUGATUCK

### A TIME FOR CHOICES

This period of transition is extremely important in the history of our region. The recognition of this transition presents the opportunity to make some important choices for the Metro Tri-plex and to act from a position of strength before the future pattern of the region is fully formed. This gives us the chance to proactively shape our metro community in a way that can sustain our prosperous economy, our precious natural environment, and our superior quality of life. The alternative is to allow the region to evolve on its own, with the negative outcomes that are certain if current trends continue unchecked.

#### The Metro Tri-plex

As the traditional urban centers of Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland (red circles) have expanded their suburban developments (shown in brown), they have also created new spheres of influence. New retail market areas (orange circles) and ring cities (located along pink circles), are now becoming incorporated into these traditional centers. As these areas of influence reach further out, the Tri-plex is rapidly growing into one place.

# ESSENTIAL ACTIVITIES

## NEW PERSPECTIVES

Just as a human body has different systems that function interactively to keep it healthy, **communities are supported by various interdependent essential activities** that must be performed consistently and well for communities to remain healthy over the long-term.

The **West Michigan Strategic Alliance** identified ten essential activities in our Metro Tri-plex. Committees comprised of hundreds of volunteers from across the region and representing government, business, non-profits and institutions were assembled to examine these essential activities. Each committee **evaluated the strengths, weaknesses, problems, opportunities and threats of one essential activity.**

The work of each Essential Activity Committee was brought to the Leadership Forum for cross-functional discussion. The pages that follow present each Essential Activity Committees most important thoughts. Additional details of their work can be found on our web site: [www.wm-alliance.org](http://www.wm-alliance.org).

**Each Committee was charged with the following:**

### ENVIRONMENT

Evaluate the environmental resources and conditions of the Tri-plex to determine how our environment is impacted by our growth and development patterns and how it affects quality of life for our citizens.

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Evaluate our economic activity and patterns within the Tri-plex in the context of the new global marketplace to assure the sustainability of employment opportunities and general prosperity for the benefit of all our citizens.

### TOURISM / CONVENTIONS / ENTERTAINMENT

Understand our image beyond our own region and how tourism attracts human talent to our region and contributes to our economy.

### ARTS / CULTURAL ACTIVITIES / HISTORY

Evaluate our existing cultural assets and programming to understand how they contribute to quality of life for all citizens. Understand our history, community values and evolving cultural diversity.

### EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

Evaluate our educational capability to prepare our citizens to achieve personal and community prosperity and fulfillment. Examine research support capabilities required to stay competitive and to support future economic development.

### HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Evaluate our ability to deliver competitively priced, quality health and human services to diverse constituencies across the Metro Tri-plex.

### LAND USE / URBANIZATION / DEMOGRAPHICS

Evaluate and understand the economic, environmental and social impact of population demographic trends and land use policies on the urban growth patterns within the Metro Tri-plex.

### TRANSPORTATION / LOGISTICS

Understand how all modes of transportation interact with each other to impact the economic competitiveness of our businesses and quality of life for our citizens and visitors. Understand how our transportation policies interact with land use and infrastructure policies in shaping the future of our region and individual communities.

### INFRASTRUCTURE

Examine the structure and patterns of our infrastructure systems (water, sewer, energy, telecommunications), how they interact with land use and transportation policy and how they impact our current and future economic competitiveness and quality of life.

### GOVERNANCE

Understand the organization and decision-making patterns of governmental jurisdictions, businesses and institutions serving the Metro Tri-plex to foster better communication, cooperation and collaboration for mutual benefit.

# ENVIRONMENT

## WILL FUTURE GENERATIONS PRAISE US OR CURSE US?

**The natural environmental assets of the region are inextricably linked to its quality of life and economic prosperity.**

Residents and visitors enjoy exceptional natural attractions that are fundamental to the lifestyle of West Michigan, including lakeshore beaches, sand dunes, rivers, lakes, forests and diverse plant and animal life. These same natural features influenced early settlement and commerce, shaping the patterns of growth and economic development onto the face of the land.

None of West Michigans natural features matches up with the man-made jurisdictional boundaries within the Tri-plex. **Serious environmental threats exists because land use decisions are made on a jurisdictional basis, not an ecological systems basis.**

**We need to recognize the diversity and uniqueness of our natural environment. There is a sincere public interest in sustainable development, which can be defined as human activity that simultaneously contributes to:**

- **The vitality of the economy**
- **The integrity of ecological systems and**
- **The advancement of social equity**

**Planning for sustainability is the key to continuing our quality of life.**

### OBSERVATIONS

**Our very existence is dependent upon Lake Michigan's water quality.** Michigan is the only state bounded by four of the Great Lakes, which

hold approximately 18% of the world's fresh surface water. The West Michigan Natural Region includes the shoreline of Lake Michigan from South Haven to Traverse Bay.

The Metro Tri-plex contains large tracts of national, state, county and municipal forests and parks including six state parks with beaches and several small county/municipal parks along the shoreline.

The Metro Tri-plex encompasses five major watersheds, each of which crosses multiple jurisdictional boundaries. The Muskegon, Grand and Kalamazoo Rivers reach far inland, all converging within the Tri-plex.

The region is experiencing significant air and water degradation problems. Air quality is often poor and regulatory compliance cannot always be achieved through management within the region. Urban and rural runoff poses a serious risk to surface and groundwater quality in the region.

The West Michigan Metro Tri-plex is part of the Agricultural Truck Belt. There are only a few of these specialized zones in the U.S. **Ottawa County, located at the center of the rapidly urbanizing Tri-plex, is the highest producing agricultural county in Michigan.**

While there are many independent efforts that may offer pieces of a framework to build an overall regional environmental strategy, there is currently no comprehensive, cross-jurisdictional environmental strategy for the region.



### Major Water Basins for the West Michigan Region

This diagram illustrates the major watersheds of the West Michigan Region and how each flows into the Great Lakes. The major ridgeline is shown as a thick dark red line. The orange arrows show the flow of water over land and into the rivers, bays and lakes. The blue arrows show the amount of water flowing into Lake Michigan from each of the rivers and bays.

- MAJOR RIDGELINE
- SECONDARY RIDGELINE
- TERTIARY RIDGELINE
- FLOW OF WATER
- FLOW INTO LAKE
- CUFT/S CUBIC FEET PER SECOND

## IN TRANSITION

Traditionally, the environment has provided raw materials and been exploited for its resources. More recently, though, there has been a profound change in the way that most people view their environment. Today's residents are becoming aware of how important our unique environment is to the quality of life in the region. During this period of transition, environmental restoration and protection are increasingly becoming a focus.

**Increased population is putting greater pressure on the lakeshore and the river basins. The region's open space and agricultural lands are at serious risk. If current trends continue unchecked, the growing Metro Tri-plex will, in time, urbanize the entire area into a "Los Angeles on the Lake" without regard for the loss of our precious natural environment.**

**We are at a point in time where the protection of our unique environmental assets is still possible.**

## THREATS

**Rapid population growth and population redistribution are jeopardizing environmental assets.**

**Fragmented decision making threatens our ability to develop an environmental strategy for the region.**

**The lack of a comprehensive inventory of recognized environmental assets keeps us from collaborating effectively to protect those assets.**

Diversion of resources toward development of new infrastructure at the expense of maintenance of the existing infrastructure creates environmental risks, especially to water and air quality.

An uninformed public with a lack of awareness of the environmental impact of their actions increases the rate of environmental destruction.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Identify and prioritize the environmental assets that are most important to our quality of life and develop a regional strategy to protect them.

Become a global model for leadership in the development of ecologically sustainable design in renewable energy sources, transportation alternatives and coordinated land use planning.

Increase awareness of farmers, businesses and home owners on responsible fertilization and drainage practices.

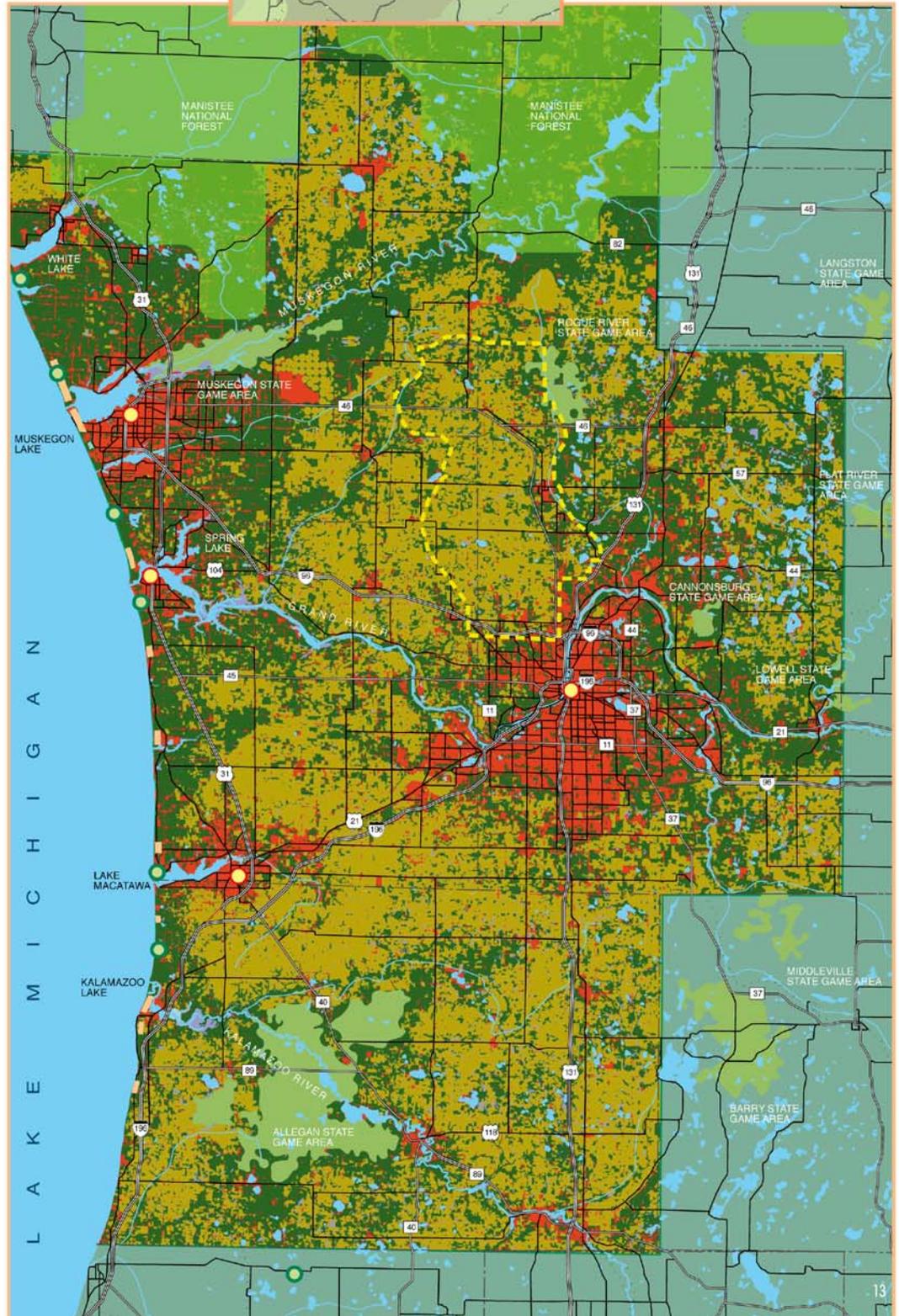
**Develop a collaborative, comprehensive, cross-jurisdictional environmental strategy for the region, engaging government, business, social services, nonprofits, education and the philanthropic community.**

**Great Lakes Locations for Upper-Midwest Benchmark Metros (right):** This diagram shows the relationship of West Michigan to the ten benchmark metros. The West Michigan Tri-plex is one of five metros located on a Great Lake.



**The Environment of the Tri-plex (below):** This diagram not only shows the traditional connections of cities along the area's rivers, but also the areas of land covered by national and state parks as well as the fruit ridge.

- ORIGINAL SETTLEMENTS
- STATE PARK
- FRUIT RIDGE
- PUBLIC BEACHES
- RIVERS / LAKES
- URBAN AND BUILT-UP AREAS
- AGRICULTURAL AND/OR NURSERY STOCK
- NATURAL AREAS
- WETLANDS
- NATIONAL FOREST
- STATE GAME AREA



# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## CAN WE RELY ON OUR MANUFACTURING SUCCESS?

A regions economic prosperity is essential to the well-being of its citizens as it provides employee income, government revenues and philanthropic resources. Without economic prosperity, we cannot have quality of life. **Without quality of life, we cannot achieve economic prosperity.**

West Michigans stable economy has been a driving force behind the growth of the region. Prospective companies and existing employers value the strong work ethic, entrepreneurial spirit and productivity of the regions workforce.

### OBSERVATIONS

For the past 30 years, manufacturing has driven the West Michigan economy. A diversified mix of globally competitive manufacturers has led the region to outperform the 10 other metros in the Upper Midwest.

Over the past 30 years, our region has experienced:

- Y The fastest rate of employment growth
- Y The fastest rate of population growth
- Y The fifth-largest per capita income growth

We have the ninth-largest metro economy in the Upper Midwest Super Region, with five Forbes 500 (private) companies and four Fortune 1000 companies.

During the past three decades, manufacturing jobs here have increased 60%, in contrast to an 11% to 43% decline for the other 10 benchmarked metropolitan areas.

In the past five years, earnings growth among West Michigan manufacturers outpaced the nation as a whole. **That increase in earnings can be directly attributed to the productivity gains generated by area manufacturers' efforts to work smarter by employing new technologies and progressive management practices such as lean manufacturing.**

West Michigans development as a manufacturing center has its roots in the fine furniture industry of the 19th century. The office furniture and

automotive supplier industries have evolved into the dominant industries in the region. **Our industry clusters, defined as employment concentrations higher than the national average, include Office Furniture, Automotive, Metal Working, Food Processing, Printing/Graphic Arts and Plastics.**

The service sector of our economy is growing, particularly in the areas of education and health services. Tourism and agriculture also play major roles in the regions economy. Ottawa County leads the state in market value of farm products sold.

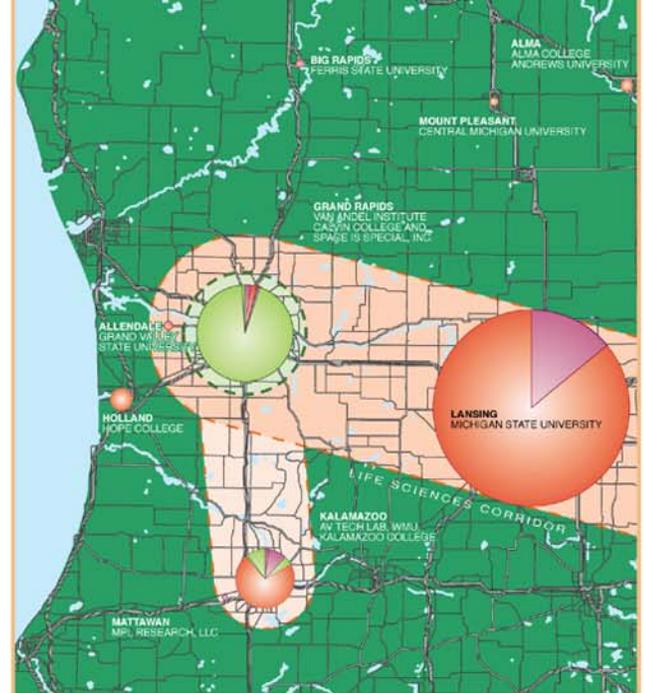
**As the home of the Van Andel Institute (VAI), an independent research organization focused on molecular cancer research,** West Michigan is gaining recognition as an emerging center for advanced life sciences research. The VAI serves as the western anchor of the Michigan Life Sciences Corridor, a statewide initiative designed to link research institutes, universities (MSU, U of M, Wayne State and WMU) and private industry.

Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland are beginning to invest in infrastructure designed to attract and incubate new business in information technology, life sciences and advanced manufacturing.

### IN TRANSITION

Traditional manufacturing continues to drive job creation in West Michigan and comprises 26% of the regions employment market share. Continued innovation and advanced manufacturing techniques among local industries have led to the areas long-standing reputation as a world-class manufacturing center, but **in a global marketplace, investment capital, human talent and natural resources move freely to their best opportunities.** West Michigan must compete for those resources in this new arena.

**Our success in manufacturing and agriculture has attracted families of many ethnic origins. This growing ethnic and linguistic diversity**



### requires new approaches to workplace communication and training.

Development and partnerships spawned by the Van Andel Institute have already begun. Wet labs and other specialized laboratory space are under construction by Grand Valley State University and Grand Rapids Community College in conjunction with the development of new health sciences education programs offered by both schools.

### THREATS

Outside of the manufacturing sector, job growth has not been as strong in such emerging economies as information, knowledge, high technology and life sciences. The lack of significant development of jobs in these emerging industries, as well as the lack of a research university to incubate these businesses, makes it more difficult to offset negative trends with positive actions.

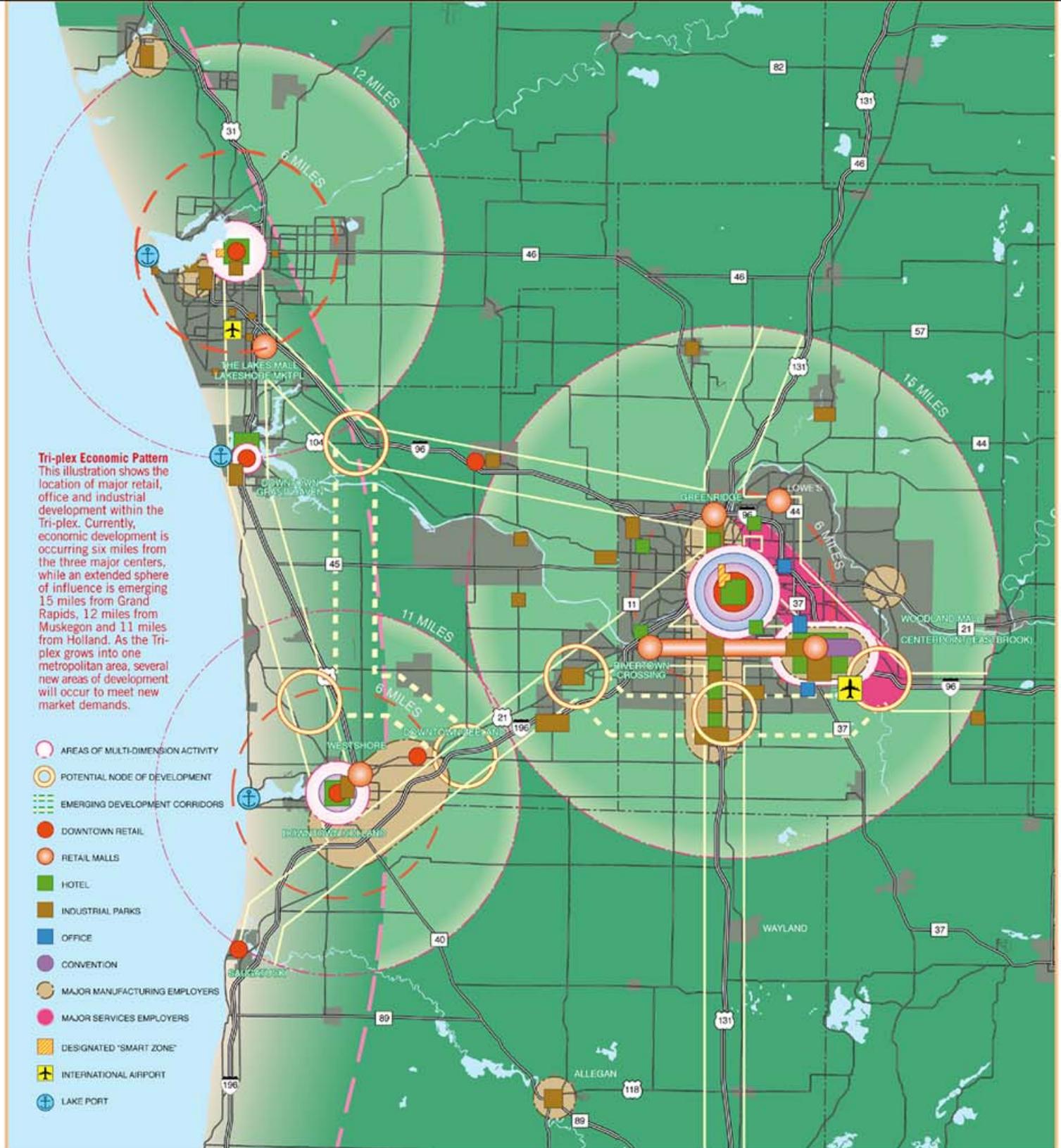
Global consolidation of manufacturing and other traditional industries has resulted in **the loss of major corporate headquarters** and many jobs locally. The region is at risk of losing the community involvement and philanthropic resources of locally owned businesses. The decline

**Medical Research in West Michigan:** The Tri-plex will benefit from a \$60 million investment from the Michigan Economic Development Commission over the next five years. However, most National Institute of Health and National Science Foundation funding for research goes to Lansing.

- MICHIGAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION FUNDING
- NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH FUNDING
- NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION FUNDING

**Super Region Economies**  
The graph below illustrates the growth of manufacturing in the Super Region. The red numbers in parentheses show the rank of each metro area within each category.

BENCHMARK METRO STATISTICS	POPULATION		GROSS METRO PRODUCT (IN BILLIONS)		TOTAL FULL/PART TIME EMPLOYMENT		PER CAPITA PERSONAL INCOME		MANUFACTURING EMPLOYMENT		MANUFACTURING EARNINGS	
	2000	1990 - 2000 % CHANGE	2000	1997 - 2000 % CHANGE	1999	1990 - 1999 % CHANGE	1999	1990 - 1999 % CHANGE	1999	1990 - 1999 % CHANGE	1999	1990 - 1999 % CHANGE
UNITED STATES	281,421,906	38.09%	9,963.00	20.03%	163,757,900	79.40%	28,549	744.83%	19,252,700	-2.21%	906,409,000	417.78%
GRAND RAPIDS-MUSKEGON-HOLLAND, MI	1,088,514 (9)	42.48% (1)	42.30 (9)	21.13% (3)	693,940 (9)	119.68% (1)	27,616 (10)	608.28% (5)	164,540 (6)	58.62% (1)	7,742,793 (8)	691.70% (1)
MILWAUKEE-WAUKESHA, WI*	1,500,741 (8)	6.85% (6)	54.80 (8)	16.94% (9)	1,007,206 (8)	52.62% (6)	31,805 (2)	595.65% (7)	179,084 (5)	-13.60% (2)	8,411,842 (5)	309.41% (6)
COLUMBUS, OH	1,540,157 (7)	36.29% (2)	60.70 (5)	20.68% (4)	1,051,798 (7)	103.65% (2)	29,777 (8)	630.72% (4)	96,655 (10)	-15.43% (3)	4,753,177 (10)	353.09% (5)
INDIANAPOLIS, IN	1,607,486 (6)	28.45% (3)	57.70 (7)	21.78% (2)	1,057,709 (6)	80.00% (3)	30,523 (4)	637.63% (2)	130,468 (8)	-15.66% (4)	7,800,460 (7)	413.65% (2)
CINCINNATI, OH-KY-IN*	1,646,395 (5)	14.13% (4)	59.40 (6)	17.88% (6)	1,064,244 (5)	69.27% (4)	30,105 (7)	630.88% (3)	144,555 (7)	-16.67% (5)	7,954,072 (6)	369.77% (3)
DETROIT, MI*	4,441,551 (2)	-1.29% (8)	156.30 (2)	18.44% (5)	2,550,134 (2)	39.04% (9)	31,472 (3)	584.17% (9)	461,745 (2)	-20.38% (6)	32,850,687 (2)	366.56% (4)
LOUISVILLE, KY-IN	1,025,598 (10)	13.09% (5)	38.70 (10)	22.66% (1)	678,969 (10)	60.77% (5)	29,342 (9)	639.47% (1)	90,142 (11)	-26.21% (7)	4,182,852 (11)	277.32% (8)
ST. LOUIS, MO-IL	2,603,607 (3)	6.00% (7)	89.60 (3)	16.23% (10)	1,617,026 (3)	47.20% (7)	30,382 (6)	607.55% (6)	196,585 (4)	-28.44% (8)	10,218,842 (4)	269.57% (9)
DAYTON-SPRINGFIELD, OH	950,558 (11)	-2.52% (9)	31.20 (11)	13.13% (11)	581,151 (11)	30.97% (10)	27,369 (11)	537.97% (11)	98,793 (9)	-32.04% (9)	5,023,334 (9)	236.56% (10)
CHICAGO, IL*	8,272,768 (1)	-30.88% (10)	332.80 (1)	17.58% (7)	5,017,234 (1)	46.19% (8)	34,743 (1)	594.86% (8)	652,993 (1)	-32.50% (10)	35,347,807 (1)	278.50% (7)
CLEVELAND-LORAIN-ELYRIA, OH*	2,250,871 (4)	-6.89% (11)	80.80 (4)	17.08% (8)	1,394,562 (4)	25.07% (11)	30,472 (5)	567.08% (10)	227,609 (3)	-34.80% (11)	11,595,417 (3)	229.12% (11)



**Tri-plex Economic Pattern**

This illustration shows the location of major retail, office and industrial development within the Tri-plex. Currently, economic development is occurring six miles from the three major centers, while an extended sphere of influence is emerging 15 miles from Grand Rapids, 12 miles from Muskegon and 11 miles from Holland. As the Tri-plex grows into one metropolitan area, several new areas of development will occur to meet new market demands.

- AREAS OF MULTI-DIMENSION ACTIVITY
- POTENTIAL NODE OF DEVELOPMENT
- EMERGING DEVELOPMENT CORRIDORS
- DOWNTOWN RETAIL
- RETAIL MALLS
- HOTEL
- INDUSTRIAL PARKS
- OFFICE
- CONVENTION
- MAJOR MANUFACTURING EMPLOYERS
- MAJOR SERVICES EMPLOYERS
- DESIGNATED "SMART ZONE"
- INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
- LAKE PORT

of the domestic auto market share and supply chain consolidation in the automotive industry are impacting our automotive suppliers. The banking industry is consolidating and larger players have acquired many local lenders. These acquisitions disrupt the personal relationships between borrower and lender that are crucial to the success of entrepreneurial companies.

The local agriculture industry is also at risk. This is due in part to heavy tax liabilities for farmers who are taxed at highest use rates on their property, the difficulty of competing with foreign farmers whose land and labor is dramatically less expensive and the temptation to sell out to developers.

Demand for fresh water will escalate in the future. Diversion of Lake Michigan water poses a potential long-term economic threat to the region.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

Continue to **take action to protect the sustainability of the region's economy** and the jobs that come with it. The various economic development organizations across the region are now exploring ways to collaborate in developing a growth strategy for West Michigan with a unified identity that can be marketed to increase our global recognition.

**Evaluate emerging economies to determine how best to build upon existing strengths and experience to create new clusters that can achieve sustainable leadership in their industries.**

Collaborate with institutions of higher learning to create tech-training centers, necessary to reposition the regions workforce in preparation for new employment opportunities.

**Businesses must take a more active role in collaboration with government** in the planning and policies related to highways, inter-modal transportation and infrastructure that is crucial to the competitiveness of West Michigan companies.

# TOURISM / CONVENTION / ENTERTAINMENT / SPORTS

## THE NEW WEST COAST?

The West Michigan Tri-plex is a highly desirable destination for tourism and convention activities. It has miles of beaches and dune areas, camping and boating opportunities and the cosmopolitan resources of a million-plus metropolitan area. **The success of the tourism/convention industry is based on many of the qualities that the region's residents would like to protect, enhance and promote.**

Tourism, convention, entertainment and sports attractions represent important benefits to promote when marketing the region.

The region has a long tradition of staging popular festivals and events. The many attractions are served by a variety of lodging opportunities, from resort cottages to the finest of urban hotels.

### OBSERVATIONS

Tourism and convention are important contributors to West Michigan's economy. They foster recreational and entertainment opportunities that enhance our quality of life.

The Tri-plex offers a unique combination of small coastal towns with access to urban amenities. Many cultural offerings are of a quality equivalent to those found in larger cities.

**Because of the quality of our surroundings, many year-round recreational activities are available in the Tri-plex.** These include freshwater recreation opportunities of all kinds, more than 550 miles of bike trails and more than 75 golf courses. The Muskegon Winter Sports Complex boasts one of only four luge tracks in the United States.

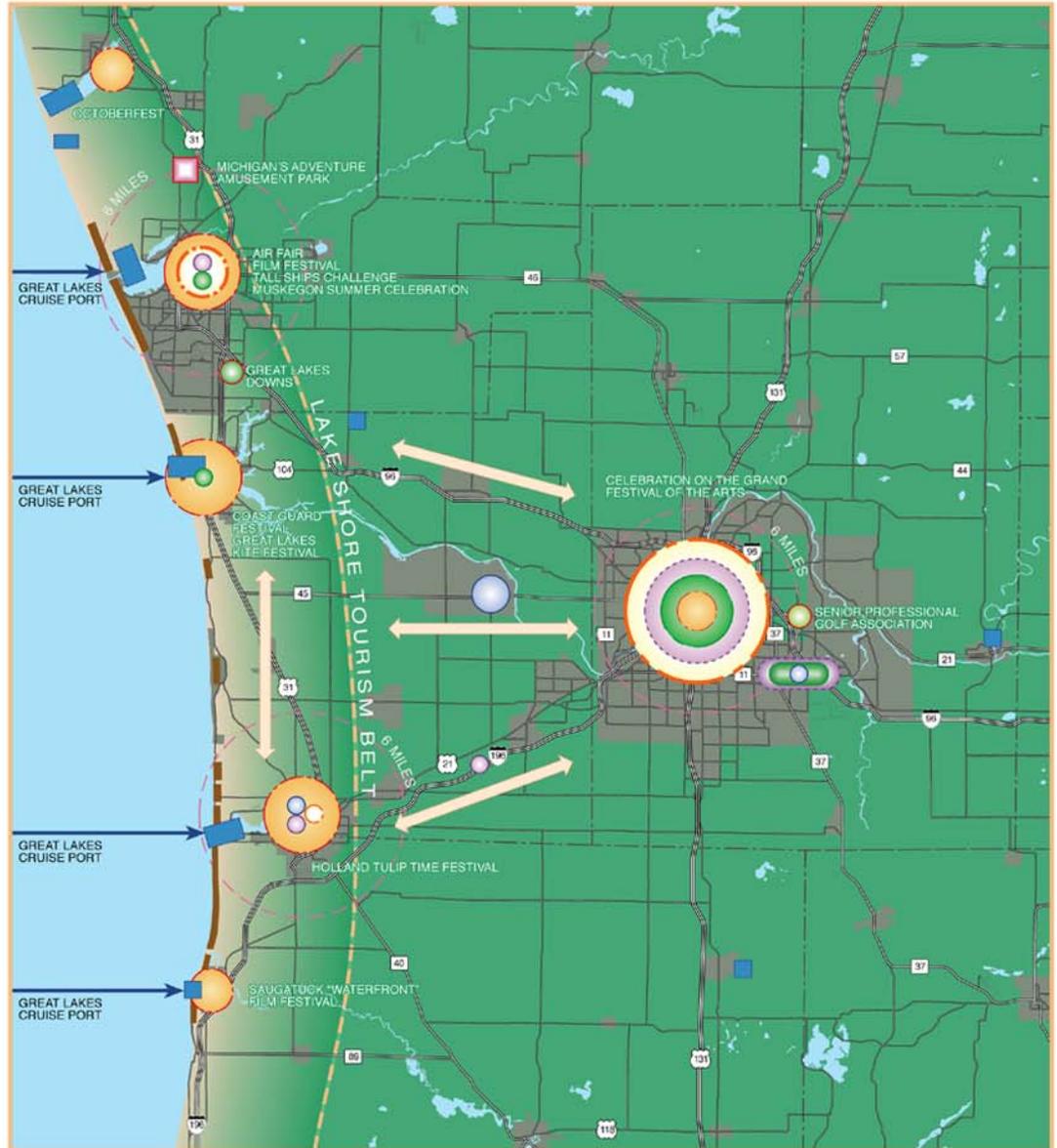
The strength of our convention business is based on the connection between the convention center (located in downtown Grand Rapids) and other natural, cultural and entertainment resources located throughout the Tri-plex.

### IN TRANSITION

For more than 100 years, the West Michigan lakeshore has been a tourism and convention destination. Much of our earlier tourism was tied to Chicago, but now we are drawing from a larger regional and national market.

The expansion of tourism will influence every other sector of the economy because vacation destinations become desirable locations for full-time living. **High-value economic activity gravitates to high quality of life areas.**

With the development of convention facilities in downtown Grand Rapids, the region is competing for convention business with other second-tier metros such as Indianapolis, Cincinnati and Columbus. Expanded convention business will also enhance the visibility of the region.



### THREATS

The lack of a regional mindset among governmental jurisdictions and within the general public undermines our ability to compete in the tourism and convention business.

**Our ability to attract convention business is limited by the scarcity of direct/nonstop flights to the region.**

The absence of a common regional marketing identity with coordinated and sustained advertising is a barrier to the growth of the tourism industry.

### OPPORTUNITIES

**Collaborate on a branding strategy to sell the region as a destination. The four Convention and Visitors' Bureaus of the Tri-plex are spearheading an effort to create a regional brand for the purpose of marketing West**

**Michigan as a destination. These efforts could be enlarged and reinforced.**

**Focus our marketing efforts on competing with other regions rather than competing within the Tri-plex.**

Package our unique urban structure, lakeshore, and available cultural, historic and environmental assets together to significantly increase tourism. Nurture an inclusive environment that draws diverse tourism populations.

Develop and promote agri-tourism opportunities in the Tri-plex.

Create coordinated signage that will guide visitors to the attractions within the Tri-plex.

Promote coordinated public and private transportation across communities to provide connections between the convention centers and cultural and entertainment resources.

**Tri-plex Tourism, Convention, Entertainment and Sports:** Not only does the Tri-plex benefit from the fine offerings in the Grand Rapids area with minor league sports, conventions and hotels but also from its open space and tourism attractions throughout the area, such as festivals, bike paths, golf courses, wineries, farmers' markets and water-oriented activities.

- HOTELS
- FESTIVALS
- CONVENTION MEETINGS
- PROFESSIONAL SPORTS
- MINOR LEAGUE SPORTS
- COLLEGE SPORTS
- REGIONAL ATTRACTION
- MARINAS
- LAKESHORE BEACHES & DUNES
- ➔ EXISTING AND POTENTIAL CRUISE SHIP PORTS

# ARTS / CULTURAL ACTIVITIES / HISTORY

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THE ARTS TO THE WELL-BEING OF THE REGION?

**Arts, culture and history speak to and nurture the human spirit. They stimulate imagination and creativity essential to human progress.** They give us our identity, a sense of place in the continuum of time and an awareness of our obligations to future generations. They teach us truths about human nature and our relationship with the natural environment.

The West Michigan Tri-plex area is rich in diverse cultural resources with especially significant offerings in the three anchor communities. Yet despite its considerable resources and its rich history, **the Tri-plex as a whole is not yet perceived as a major cultural center—either by its residents or by the outside world. The growth and increasing diversity of our region demand that cultural institutions find new and exciting ways to appeal to the entire Tri-plex.**

## OBSERVATIONS

**The area's broad range of artistic, cultural, and historical resources reflect the unique character of the individual communities that make up the Tri-plex.** Most of these organizations operate independently, unaware of the need to collaborate.

The numerous accredited museums in the area offer impressive holdings, but none have sufficient holdings and resources to compete with prestigious institutions in other major metropolitan areas of the upper Midwest.

Several unique festivals draw people from regional, national and global audiences. A number of ethnic festivals have emerged that reflect the rapidly growing diversity of the region.

The anchor communities have been proactive in the preservation and designation of historic sites, helping to define and preserve the traditions of individual communities.

**The strength and diversity of the region's cultural assets help to position the Tri-plex as a major tourism destination and give it the ability to attract new audiences and enhance economic development.**

## IN TRANSITION

Traditionally, the Metro Tri-plex has functioned as many individual and unique communities, each with its own art, culture and historical institutions serving the local population. Today, people are becoming increasingly mobile, frequently attending cultural functions in several communities. **Unlike metros with a single, dominant population center, West Michigan's multiple population centers present us with unique challenges in offering high-quality and broad public access at a cost that is competitive with other metros.** The result is fragmentation, duplication of effort and increased competition for audiences and funding.

Rapid growth and changing demographics challenge cultural institutions in the Tri-plex. Competition for scarce resources to meet the needs of education, health and human services has made it increasingly difficult to attract the governmental and philanthropic resources cultural organizations need to deliver quality programming.

## THREATS

If artistic, cultural and historical organizations fail to demonstrate their importance to both the overall quality of life and economic growth, resources will dwindle even further.

## OPPORTUNITIES

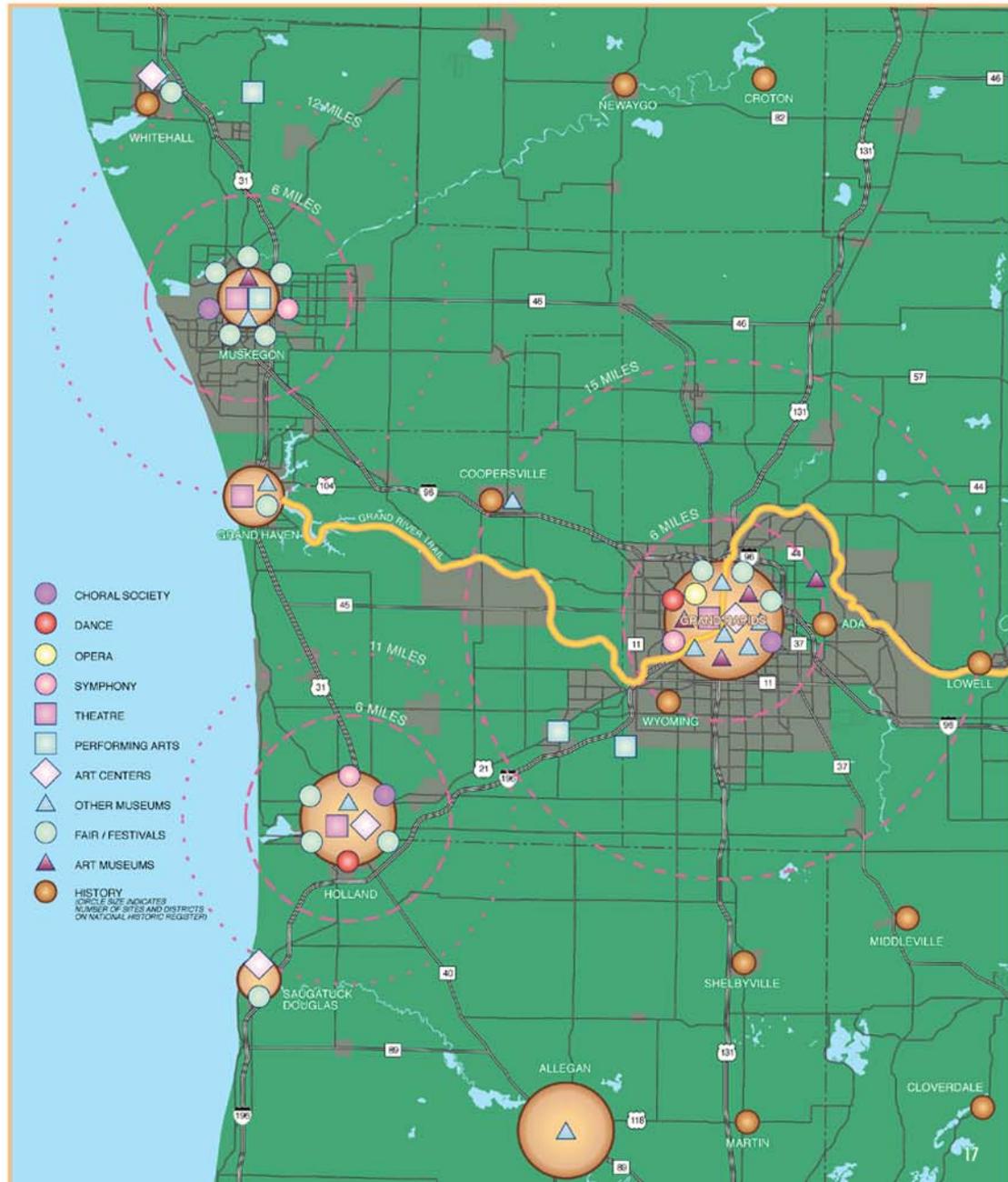
**Begin to think and act like a million-plus metro region without losing the unique cultural assets of our individual communities.** To attract and

retain human talent, the region needs to deliver art, culture and history offerings that are comparable to a metro area of its size, but do so in a cost-effective manner.

Encourage cultural organizations to reach across the region and across disciplines to collaborate on projects that reflect both the local perspective and the growing diversity of the region.

Only by acting together can artistic, cultural, and historical organizations achieve an effective voice to attract funding as communities struggle to meet the needs of education, health and human services.

**Tri-plex Arts, Cultural Activities and History:** This map is intended to give the flavor of the arts and cultural events in the Tri-plex and show how these activities are primarily clustered in the anchor communities. It cannot show the detailed richness and diversity of these activities in the region. National historic registered sites, districts and bridges are located throughout West Michigan.



# EDUCATION & RESEARCH

ARE WE PREPARING LIFE-LONG LEARNERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?

The communities of the West Michigan Tri-plex have a tradition of valuing education and its contribution to the region's quality of life and economic vitality. Evidence of this tradition is reflected in the variety of K-12 and higher educational resources available within the Tri-plex.

**Population growth, increased ethnic diversity, urban migration, decreasing educational funding and governance patterns have created major challenges for our educational systems—particularly at the K-12 level.**

## OBSERVATIONS

There are 43 public school districts, 25 charter schools and many parochial schools in the Metro Tri-plex. Most of these districts do not conform to any other political boundary. The educational performance and financial health of the K-12 systems ranges from districts listed as exemplary to those in serious crisis in one or both areas.

There is a shortage of teachers of color. The increasing diversity of our schools requires a new approach to teacher recruitment and placement.

**Despite attempts to equalize funding, disparities persist that local school districts cannot resolve.** Structural and political issues erect barriers to collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries. Urban migration complicates and exacerbates this problem.

Educational opportunities outside of formal K-12 school programs (such as Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, the Grand Rapids Civic Theatre and the Holland Area Arts Center) are accessible to a limited number of residents.

The West Michigan Tri-plex is the only metro center in the Upper Midwest that does not have a major Ph.D. granting research university. The areas liberal arts universities have only recently begun to facilitate the commercialization of technology and new business start-ups. Some research and development is done by private industry.

Both community colleges and vocational centers, which represent an alternative to a traditional college education, are present in Grand Rapids. However, **Ottawa and Allegan Counties lack community college capability and Muskegon lacks a vocational training center.**

The region has a major medical research facility in the Van Andel Institute, which is part of the Life Sciences Corridor established by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and connected to MSU, U of M, WMU and Wayne State. A consortium that includes MSU, GVSU and some local hospitals is conducting medical research and educating over 200 medical interns.

Located in Muskegon, the Annis Water Resources Institute of GVSU specializes in research and education outreach on water resource related issues and serves as the field station for the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration.

## IN TRANSITION

The global economy places new demands on our educational system from K-12 to the doctoral level. Our regions educational institutions are not equally well prepared to train students for the needs of the 21st century global economy. An inadequately prepared workforce will threaten the economic vitality of the region.

**Urban migration from central cities to the suburbs and rural townships has left some school districts in crisis. While one district may need to close school facilities, a neighboring district may need to build in order to accommodate increased population.**

The increasing diversity of the population in terms of race, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic origins requires a new approach to running our schools. **Merely providing the opportunity for students to learn is not enough. Many schools provide, or will need to provide, services such as basic health and dental screening, pre and post school programming, connections to social service agencies and even breakfast.**

## THREATS

Continued migration of middle and upper class families from our central cities to the suburbs and rural townships leaves behind a student population with a greater concentration of higher needs students, creating a crisis for our inner city schools.

**Allowing some parts of the system to continue in distress will adversely affect the overall economic condition of the region.**

Though our region achieved manufacturing success without a research university, growth of information technology and life sciences employment will require us to consider developing this resource for the future.

**Failure to increase the effectiveness of the educational system for all students and to feed the needs for life-long learning will have a negative impact on our region's vitality.**

## OPPORTUNITIES

**Collaborate across jurisdictional boundaries to eliminate financial disparities and improve the performance of all students.** Current state funding methods create disparities. We need



**Tri-plex K-12:** This diagram illustrates the complex school district boundaries of the Tri-plex.

- K-12 STATE ZONE 3
- K-12 STATE ZONE 5
- K-12 INTERMEDIATE DISTRICTS
- K-12 DISTRICTS
- K-12 DISTRICT NAMES
- COUNTY LINES
- INCORPORATED CITIES, VILLAGES AND OTHER URBAN AREAS

to consider options for restructuring and/or revenue sharing as modeled in Florida, Minnesota and Missouri.

Evaluate the role a research university could provide in stimulating employment opportunities within the information technology and life sciences fields.

Use these collaborative partnerships with research universities to encourage new models of research outside of the traditional brick and mortar approach, increasing the commercialization of science and engineering research.

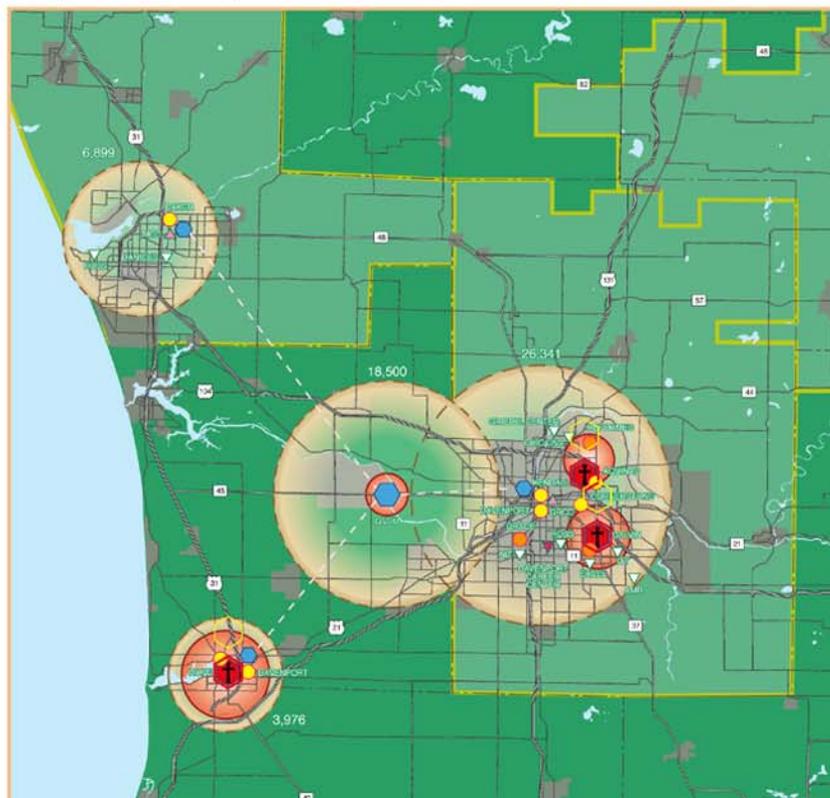
Add community college capability to serve Allegan and Ottawa counties and a Skills Center to serve the Muskegon area, ensuring a capable workforce to meet future demands.

Promote and nurture strategic partnerships to contribute to education's role in balancing issues of quality of life and economic vitality.

## Tri-plex Higher Education

This diagram illustrates the pattern of universities, colleges and technical schools in the Tri-plex. The three major centers claim the largest diversity of facilities while GVSU in Allendale boasts the highest number of students in a singular location.

- ENROLLED STUDENTS (size of circle indicates number of students)
- NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION FUNDING
- PUBLIC 4-YEAR
- THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
- PH.D. GRANTING SCHOOLS
- PRIVATE COLLEGE
- BIBLE COLLEGE
- ▲ PUBLIC-2 YEAR OR LESS
- ▼ PRIVATE-2 YEAR OR LESS (NON-PROFIT)
- ▼ PRIVATE-2 YEAR OR LESS (FOR-PROFIT)
- COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICTS



# HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

## CAN WE KEEP UP?

Our health and human service providers are challenged to provide accessible, high-quality care to all residents.

Quality and cost measures are indicators of the efficiency and effectiveness of the system for those who access it. Our population health measures are a reflection of the access to health care and human services, environmental conditions, educational attainment and income of citizens within our region.

**Community health and well-being demand attention to the wellness of all people, especially the very young and the elderly.** The majority of our health care expense is incurred in the first few months of a new life and as we care for our elderly in their final years. The cost of poor birth outcomes to employers health plans, nationwide, is estimated to be \$5.6 billion per year. The Institute of Medicine estimates that for every dollar spent on prenatal care, over three dollars are saved in medical costs for low birth weight infants. Disease prevention education and management of chronic disease lead to similar savings in health care cost for the elderly.

### OBSERVATIONS

West Michigans people and its human service agencies embody an ethic of caring.

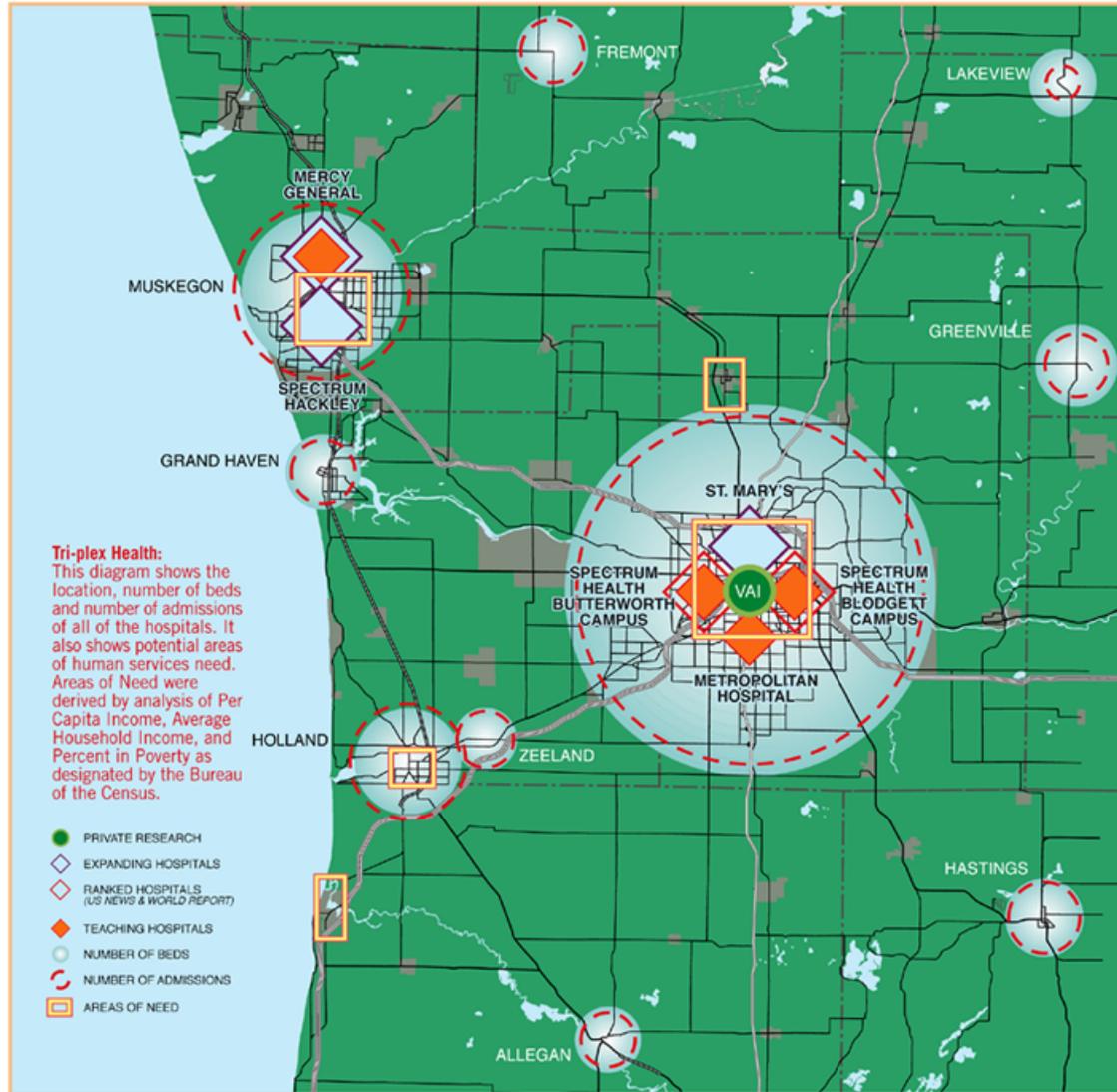
Population health measures have been compiled by the Health Services and Resources Administration. The areas where the four counties in our MSA (Kent, Ottawa, Muskegon and Allegan) have better health than national averages include premature births and mortality measures of lung cancer, colon cancer, homicide and unintentional injuries. A portion of the region has had success in the prevention of cancers and coronary heart disease. All four counties compare unfavorably with national averages in the number of women receiving early prenatal care, infant mortality and in infectious disease due to E. coli. A third of the region compares unfavorably in mortality from strokes. Disparities in health measures and health care access for minorities and the poor are a national concern that is reflected in this region as well.

Within the Metro Tri-plex there are four clusters of health care services located in our largest communities of Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland, as well as one in Grand Haven.

**The cost and quality of our health care services is competitive in the Upper Midwest.** However, as in other regions, the growth of employed but uninsured or underinsured workers is a key issue in defining health and social services needs.

Although there is no medical school within Tri-plex, through affiliations with medical schools across the country, extensive medical training is conducted in Grand Rapids and Muskegon. These residencies, fellowships and internships have attracted hundreds of physicians-in-training to the area, many of whom have chosen to remain.

The capacity of the public health system is crucial in the maintenance and improvement of population health. Any decrease in access to immunizations or water sanitation will have an adverse impact on all citizens. Public Health has to be a collaborative participating partner in any regional health care planning.



### IN TRANSITION

The urban migration of upper and middle class families from the core cities to the suburbs and rural townships results in higher concentrations of low-income families with higher than average health and social service needs in our central cities. Pockets of high need also exist in many rural areas.

**When concentration of poverty exceeds 15% of population, as it does in our urban neighborhoods, demands for health and human services rise sharply.**

**There has been a shift in the provision of social services from the government to non-governmental organizations.** This, together with increasing distances from extended-family sources of support has added to the burden on local agencies.

Changing racial demographics require culturally sensitive delivery systems within the health and human service provider network.

### THREATS

Local resources are inadequate to fully fund the shift in services from federal support to local government and non-governmental organizations.

While West Michigan seems to be a low priority target, the unfortunate realities of living in a terrorist world suggest that we must quickly develop a coordinated plan for bio terrorism and other public health disasters.

### OPPORTUNITIES

**Enhance regional coordination and collaboration of health and human services providers to create higher quality and more equitable delivery of services.**

Regionally coordinate and enhance public health efforts to work toward a prevention agenda.

**Invest in regionally coordinated prevention activities that reduce health care costs in the long term.**

Invest in environmental initiatives that address issues of air quality, water quality, green and open spaces and auto dependence throughout the Tri-plex as preventive health measures affecting all residents.

Strengthen and coordinate university and hospital research relationships to build a stronger medical infrastructure.

# LAND USE / URBANIZATION / DEMOGRAPHICS

## BY CHOICE OR BY CHANCE?

It's hard to think of West Michigan without bringing to mind a natural environment resplendent with dunes and beaches, rivers and woodlands and the highest producing agricultural land in the state. Yet our rapid population growth and expanding development are putting these precious assets at risk.

**A metropolitan development pattern is replacing the historic pattern of separate cities surrounded by small villages and rural farmland. This changing pattern not only affects how the land is used, but how fast the land is developed.**

### OBSERVATIONS

Land use controls and policies in the Tri-plex are divided among 100 jurisdictions without any formal, comprehensive regional collaboration. The beginnings for collaboration have been created by the state legislature in Public Act 263 of 2001.

If current trends in land use continue, the potential exists for the Tri-plex to develop into Los Angeles on the Lake, a scenario in which agricultural land and open green space are quickly consumed by haphazard development due to the lack of a regional vision.

Between 1990 and 2000, the population of our Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) consisting of Allegan, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties, increased an average of 16.1% to reach a total population of 1,088,514. At 26.9%, Ottawa County experienced the fastest rate of increase, while the average rate of population increase for the State of Michigan was 6.9%.

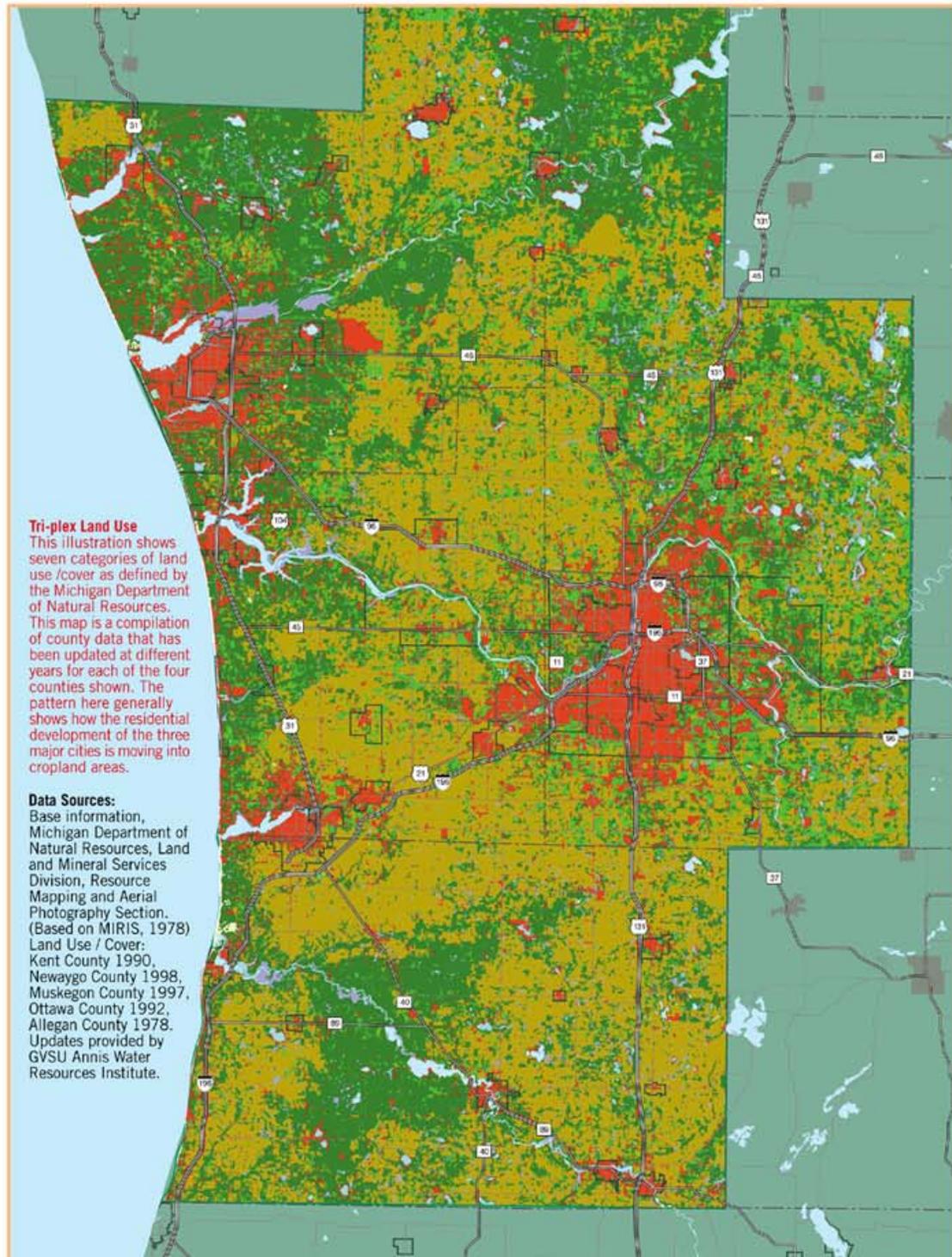
The areas racial and ethnic diversity rose in concert with the growth in overall population. In the four-county area, the number of white residents increased by 10.3%, the Black/African American population rose 24.4%, Native American population increased by 6.4% and the number of Asian residents grew by 97.89%. The most dramatic increase occurred in the **Hispanic/Latino population, which rose 136.43% within the MSA.**

Although West Michigan is known for its outstanding economy, however poverty, unemployment and low incomes still exist in some areas. High percentages of people live below the poverty level in urban centers and there are pockets of poverty in several rural areas as well.

### IN TRANSITION

**Since the mid 1900s, there has been an evolution from mixed land use to large single-use blocks of land. We have created large industrial parks, regional shopping malls and sprawling housing tracts.** This pattern of land use has been driven by familiar economic forces. It has, however, brought about unanticipated and undesirable consequences which were not factored into existing economic models. An automobile-centric lifestyle has resulted in increased traffic congestion. **Poverty has increased in central cities as middle and**

LAND USE CATEGORY (IN ACRES)	ALLEGAN	KENT	MUSKEGON	NEWAYGO	OTTAWA
URBAN AREA / DEVELOPED	32,981 6%	112,253 20%	60,337 18%	14,015 3%	56,184 15%
AGRICULTURAL AND/OR NURSERY STOCK	280,101 52%	176,247 32%	66,403 20%	132,523 24%	176,582 48%
OPEN FIELD	24,077 4%	110,852 20%	32,091 10%	51,535 9%	40,605 11%
FOREST	176,606 33%	132,466 24%	155,568 46%	326,858 59%	80,841 22%
WATER	8,659 2%	10,363 2%	12,298 4%	11,456 2%	8,468 2%
WETLANDS	15,583 3%	14,141 3%	8,622 3%	14,616 3%	5,729 2%
BARREN / SAND DUNE	1,052 >1%	0 0%	1,390 >1%	9 >1%	521 >1%
<b>TOTAL ACRES</b>	<b>539,059 100%</b>	<b>556,322 100%</b>	<b>336,709 100%</b>	<b>551,012 100%</b>	<b>368,929 100%</b>



**Tri-plex Land Use**  
This illustration shows seven categories of land use/cover as defined by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. This map is a compilation of county data that has been updated at different years for each of the four counties shown. The pattern here generally shows how the residential development of the three major cities is moving into cropland areas.

**Data Sources:**  
Base information, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Land and Mineral Services Division, Resource Mapping and Aerial Photography Section. (Based on MIRIS, 1978)  
Land Use / Cover:  
Kent County 1990,  
Newaygo County 1998,  
Muskegon County 1997,  
Ottawa County 1992,  
Allegan County 1978.  
Updates provided by GVSU Annis Water Resources Institute.

**upper income families have migrated out along with businesses to less urbanized areas.** The resulting segregation and concentration of poverty create almost insurmountable challenges for city schools, the health care system and human service organizations.

Rather than growing outward from a single large population center as do other metros in the Upper Midwest, our Tri-plex is growing together from the three anchor communities of Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland. The construction of M-6, combined with the proposed realignment of US-31 and the widening of M-45, is changing our growth patterns from a triangular pattern into a rectilinear urban grid.

**Increased demand for land to be used for commercial and residential development creates higher land values in rural areas, contributing to a reduction in the amount of farmland and open space.**

**THREATS**

Lack of adequate collaboration among the jurisdictions of the Tri-plex promotes poor land use decisions in the region.

Differing approaches to data collection and varying levels of sophistication in the use of GIS mapping make it hard for local units of government to share planning documents, making collaboration much more difficult. REGIS, the geographic information system of the Grand Valley Metro Council is an example of a potential solution in this area.

**No comprehensive inventory of environmental assets exists of the areas that need to be protected, preserved and enhanced. Land use patterns, if they continue on the same path, will result in loss of precious environmental assets, including valuable agricultural land and further deterioration of urban centers. Unless we choose to act, these trends will eventually harm both economic development and our quality of life.**

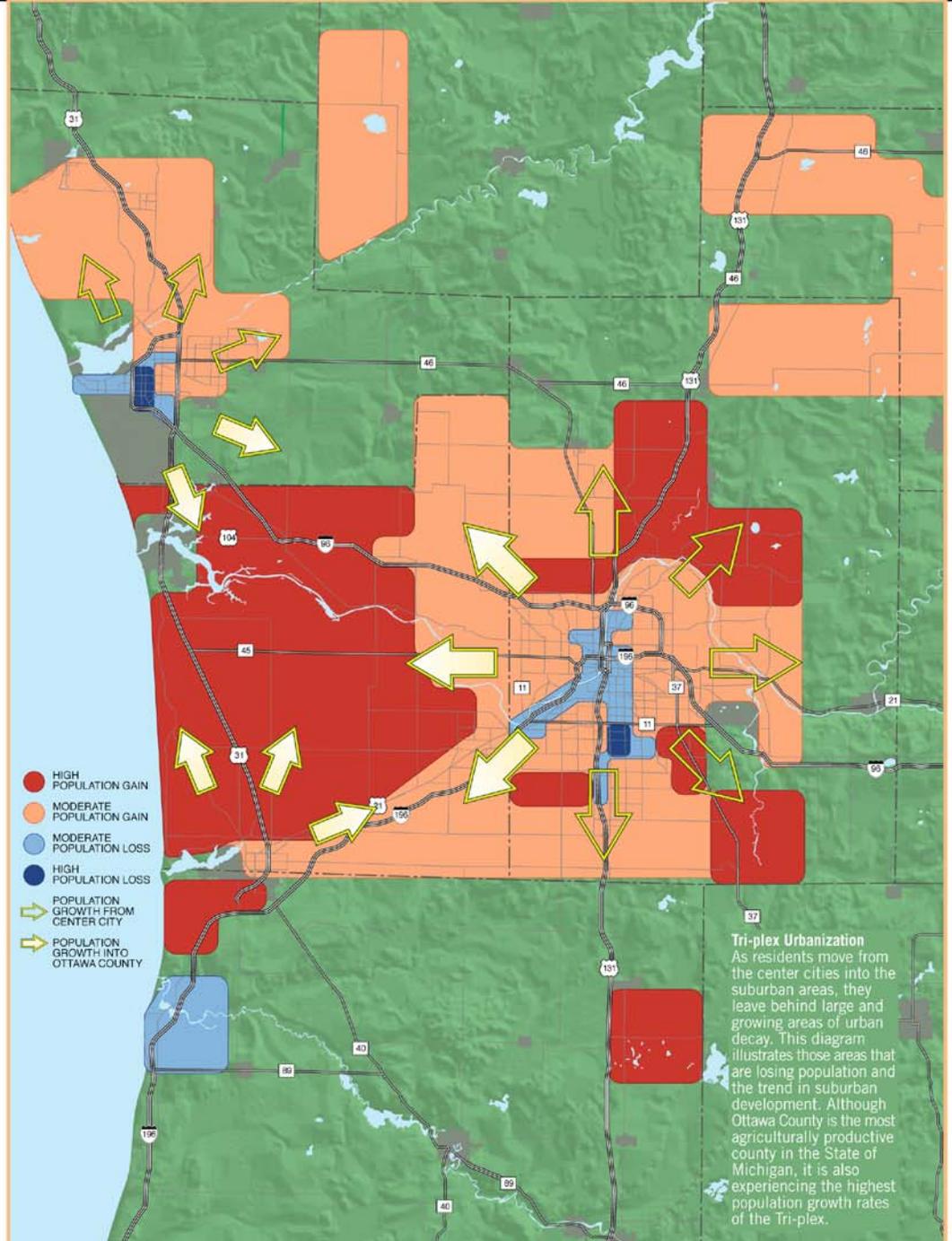
**OPPORTUNITIES**

**Find ways to coordinate land use, transportation and infrastructure planning and policy from a broader perspective while preserving our traditions of local decision control. Decisions regarding land use, transportation and infrastructure planning are all interrelated. Coordination is critical if we wish to preserve the character and integrity of our environment and quality of life.**

More focus must be given to urban redevelopment to assure that our central cities are livable and sustainable.

Encourage mixed income housing that promotes cultural and economic diversity in neighborhoods.

Create an interconnected green and open space network based on current efforts. This is an initiative that could serve to cut across uncoordinated land use planning with a larger vision.



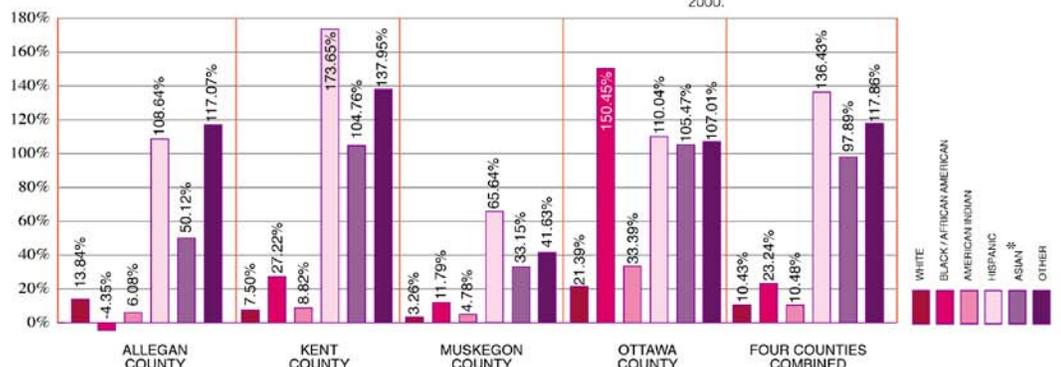
cooperation and collaboration in land use planning among jurisdictions.

in the land use decision-making process.

**Tri-plex Demographics:** The graph below illustrates the percent growth of ethnicity in the Tri-plex. Hispanic/Latino was the fastest growing ethnic group in our metropolitan statistical area from 1990 to 2000.

\*In 1990, the U.S. Census designated a category of "Asian or Pacific Islander." In 2000, these categories were split into two separate designations of "Asian Persons" and "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander." In the 2000 census the total number of people in our MSA in the category of "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander" was 450. For purposes of this report we have combined the two categories for 2000.

**POPULATION GROWTH RATE OF RACE / ETHNICITY 1990 - 2000**



# TRANSPORTATION / LOGISTICS

HOW DO WE GET THERE FROM HERE?

The West Michigan Tri-plex is located on the northern edge of the continental grid the transportation infrastructure for moving goods and services throughout the United States. Michigan's peninsular geography creates challenges in transportation linkage for both the state and the region.

Developed to better facilitate the flow of goods and services between Canada, the United States, and Mexico, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Corridor runs through Michigan. Passing predominantly through the eastern part of the state, however, it does not directly connect to the West Michigan region.

## OBSERVATIONS

Our region has transportation hubs in Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland. Grand Rapids is the dominant hub with the largest airport, rail and road network. Muskegon is the second largest, with a lake port, a commercial airport and interstate highways. Holland comes in third, with a lake port, interstate highway, three general aviation airports and the second regional Amtrak stop.

Traditional growth patterns within the three separate urban centers have resulted in the development of three distinct, urban transportation-planning organizations known as Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). These federally required and defined organizations are mandated to coordinate transportation-related planning efforts within their boundaries.

**As development spreads toward the center of the triangle, there is a need for enhanced cooperation among the MPOs and with non-MPO areas to address the changing pattern.**

Land use planning does not reflect the evolution of the region from three anchor communities into a singular Tri-plex metro structure. Transportation project development reacts to a lack of regionally coordinated land use planning.

All transportation modes serve the sub-parts rather than the region as a whole. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) is responsible for statewide and regional transportation planning for state highways. Rural task forces and small urban committees review local transportation system needs and identify projects outside of the MPO areas. Cities, road commissions and transit agencies are also responsible for transportation planning on their systems. All of these groups will benefit from increased cooperation and collaboration on a regional basis.

Airports located in Grand Rapids, Muskegon and Holland serve freight and passenger air service within the Tri-plex. The Gerald R. Ford International Airport in Grand Rapids is the 17th largest of the nation's 71 small air hubs. Grand Rapids is one of only two small hubs among major

metros of the upper Midwest. Other competing airports provide air travelers a more convenient choice. However, **passenger distribution and the resulting fragmented funding hinder the Grand Rapids airport from developing into a "medium" air hub with substantially more direct flights and greater access to the global marketplace.**

The region has strengths in the availability of all modes of transportation (intercity bus, transit, rail, road, air and non-motorized), but there is no regional inter-modal plan that would connect the various modes of transportation in Holland, Muskegon, Grand Rapids and the areas in between.

## IN TRANSITION

The I-96 corridor between Grand Rapids and Muskegon, the I-196 corridor between Holland and Grand Rapids and the US-31 corridor between Holland and Muskegon create a triangular transportation pattern, connecting the three urban centers. However, this pattern is in transition. **The historic triangular transportation pattern of the region is changing into an urban grid structure.** Future plans for surface transportation include the construction of M-6, the widening of M-45, and the proposed plans for a realigned US-31.

**Although US-131 has the highest traffic volume, over the past five years the highest rate of traffic growth was on the Tri-plex corridors (I-96, I-196 and US-31).**

## THREATS

Development is occurring between the traditional urban centers. This creates challenges for coordinated land use planning and developing an effective inter-modal transportation system. **The region lacks a comprehensive master plan to support and guide development and inter-modal transportation planning.**

Without coordinated regional planning of land use, transportation and infrastructure, each system reacts to the others, rather than being planned to complement the other.

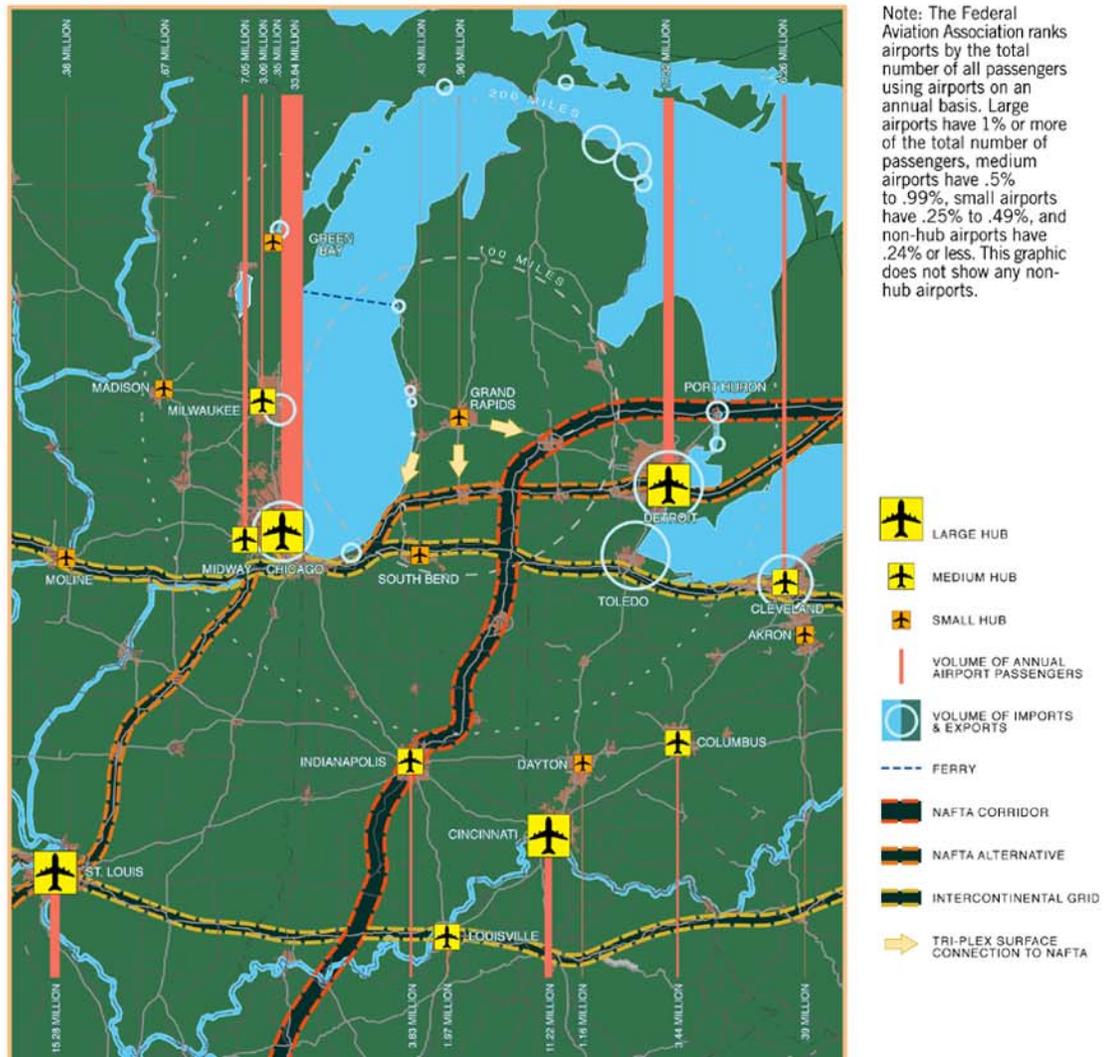
A regional approach to transportation planning is hampered by a fragmented focus on short-term problems and issues only.

## OPPORTUNITIES

Expand regional cooperation to maximize the benefits of future investments in transportation through existing local, MPO/regional and state processes.

**Super Region Transportation:** As of 2000, the FAA designated the Gerald R. Ford International Airport as being a small hub with almost one million passengers per year. Within 150 miles, West Michigan can benefit from its proximity to two large hubs in Chicago and Detroit. It also benefits from its close proximity to the NAFTA corridor, its alternative and the intercontinental grid connection of Chicago to New York. Its ports, however, have a significantly lower volume of imports and exports when compared to other benchmark regions.

Note: The Federal Aviation Association ranks airports by the total number of all passengers using airports on an annual basis. Large airports have 1% or more of the total number of passengers, medium airports have .5% to .99%, small airports have .25% to .49%, and non-hub airports have .24% or less. This graphic does not show any non-hub airports.





**Address the lack of a comprehensive regional land use plan to support and guide integrated inter-modal transportation planning.**

Explore the feasibility of high-speed passenger rail connections to the developing Chicago/Detroit high-speed rail corridor in order to ensure the regions competitive status.

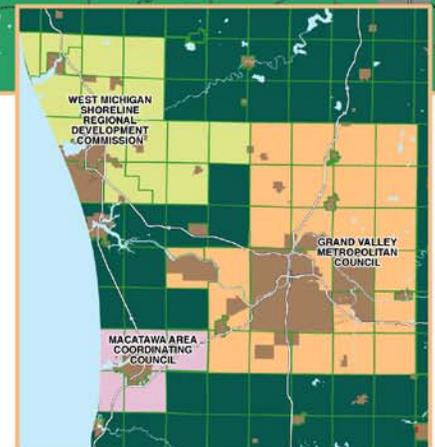
Develop strategies to better utilize our access to deep-water ports for future economic development and for tourism opportunities.

Expand and continue to connect corridors of non-motorized transportation throughout the region.

Identify and preserve new and existing inter-modal corridors within the Tri-plex in order to maintain options for future transportation needs.

**Emphasize and improve connections from the Tri-plex to the NAFTA Corridor, the continental grid and to rail corridors on the east and south side of the state.**

**Educate the general public on the benefits of comprehensive regional planning.**



**Tri-plex Transportation Planning**  
Within the Tri-plex, there are three federally mandated and defined Metropolitan Planning Organizations, (MPO) each charged with transportation planning for its respective area.

# INFRASTRUCTURE

## CAN WE DO IT RIGHT?

The West Michigan Tri-plex has experienced tremendous growth in its population over the past 15 years. This increase is due in large part to the healthy business climate and the high quality of life in the region. **Coordination of utilities, transportation and land use planning is important to managed growth.**

### OBSERVATIONS

The municipal service suppliers of water and sewage treatment facilities each operate in their individual service areas, using growth plans that do not extend beyond those boundaries.

The availability of communications through high-capacity fiber optic lines is uneven across the region. Multiple lines serve Grand Rapids, but other parts of the region lack adequate access.

Water supply has become a political issue in some areas of the region and will take on even greater importance as population growth, business expansion and power needs increase demand.

**Inadequate sewer treatment capacities have an effect downstream—literally—and will ultimately impact the water quality of Lake Michigan.** Sewage treatment, septic tanks and the accompanying environmental concerns will become a greater focus in a growing region of 1.1 million people.

Not all communities are prepared to deal with the expense of replacing the existing water and sewer infrastructure.

### IN TRANSITION

A regional view of infrastructure planning will become more important as current systems grow and fill in the gaps of coverage between population centers. **Cooperation and coordination among utility and infrastructure providers is needed to manage growth more effectively.**

**While the world is experiencing a transformation in information and telecommunications networks, parts of the Tri-plex are not keeping pace. The lack of access to broadband will hinder the future development of West Michigan.**

### THREATS

**The region lacks maps showing how utilities and infrastructure are laid out across the Metro Tri-plex. This inhibits collaboration that could improve service and public health.**

Extensive resources and economic planning by local communities are needed to renew the aging infrastructure of our cities and older commercial areas. Keeping our central cities vibrant will help to stem uncontrolled urban sprawl.

### OPPORTUNITIES

**Facilitate communication and cooperation among governmental units throughout the Tri-plex on issues of infrastructure, transportation and land use planning. The passage of the Public Act 263 of 2001 is a good first step in outlining the process by which these units of government will begin this collaboration.**

Ensure that deregulation of Michigan's investor-owned electric distribution system does not disrupt electric service. Deregulation should provide an opportunity to improve and expand services toward more competitive pricing.

Encourage cooperation among telecommunications providers, local governmental units and regulatory agencies to identify current and future fiber routes, cell tower placements and emerging technologies.

Repair or replace aging infrastructure in inner cities and older commercial areas in order to increase capacity and to avert any negative environmental impacts.

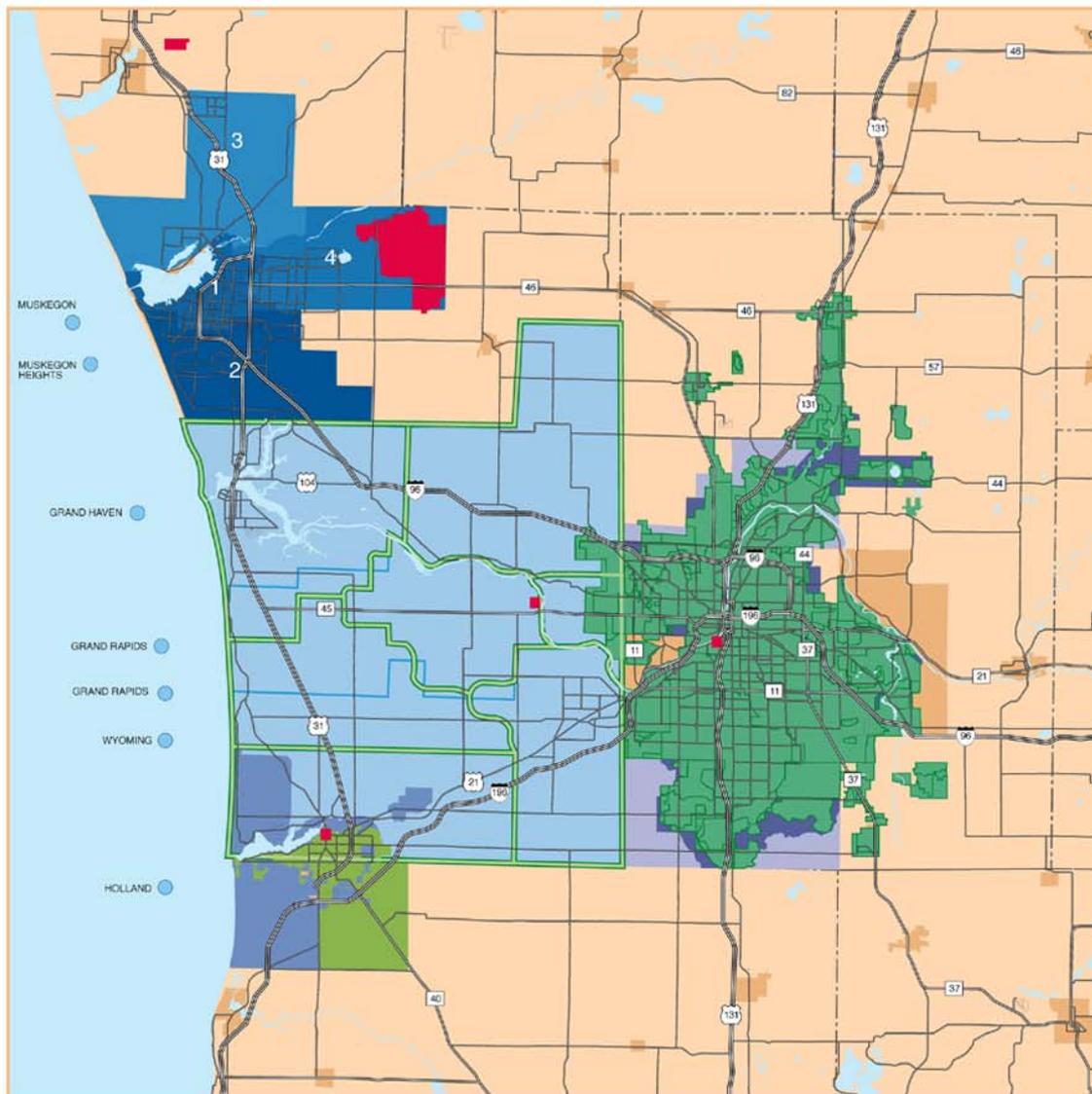


**Regional Communication (left):** Analysis of the long haul fiber optic cable shows that the Holland area lacks access to broadband.

LONG HAUL FIBER OPTIC CABLE

**Tri-plex Utilities (below)** This map diagrams the service areas of water and wastewater supply and treatment. Although this map looks sparse in information, it is the first map created by combining information from all four counties of the Tri-plex.

- WASTEWATER SERVICE AREAS (KENT)
- WATER SERVICE AREAS (KENT)
- CONTRACTUAL WATER SERVICE AREAS (KENT)
- WASTEWATER SERVICE AREAS (HOLLAND)
- WATER SERVICE AREAS (HOLLAND)
- WASTEWATER SERVICE AREAS (OTTAWA)
- PROPOSED WATER SUPPLY SYSTEM (OTTAWA)
- WATER ZONES (MUSKEGON)
- WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT
- WATER INTAKE



# GOVERNANCE

## CAN REGIONAL COOPERATION OVERCOME LOCAL BOUNDARIES?

The importance of inter-governmental cooperation has increased dramatically as West Michigan's Tri-plex evolves into a single metropolitan center. **Strong traditions of home rule and local government make the coordination of policies, regulations and investments extremely difficult. Many regional issues are dealt with on a sub-regional rather than a region-wide basis.**

### OBSERVATIONS

The area defined as the Metro Tri-plex is comprised of all or part of 100 units of government including 68 townships, 38 cities/towns/villages and the four counties of Kent, Ottawa, Muskegon and Allegan.

Jurisdictional boundaries do not match regional growth patterns, environmental features, or transportation and commuting routes.

**As the region develops into a Metro Tri-plex, utilities become a more important factor in defining the pattern of residential, industrial, commercial and community growth, and they are often used as a means of political control.**

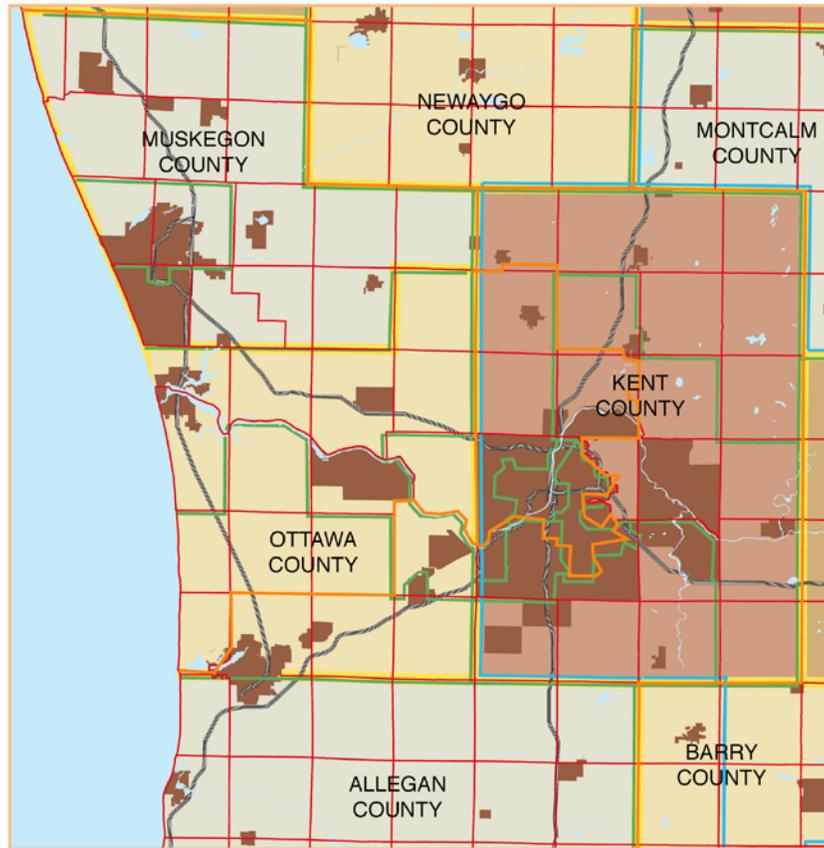
Many local governments have already developed relationships to larger geographic areas defined by the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission and the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council. They have undertaken coordinated planning for transportation, land use and infrastructure for their respective areas. Though there is planning done at many levels throughout the Tri-plex including city, township and county the center of the Tri-plex is not served by a Metropolitan Planning Organization to coordinate Federal Transportation dollars.

There is no comprehensive GIS (Geographic Information System) database for the entire metro region. GIS can be a very effective tool for identifying problems and solutions across varying systems such as transportation, the environment and infrastructure. Even though several sub-regional efforts are taking place, the differing approaches to data collection and varying levels of technology make it hard to share planning documents.

**No framework exists for governmental leaders to meet and discuss common problems and opportunities, nor is there an organization that links government, the private sector and the institutional sector to discuss problems.**

### IN TRANSITION

**The tradition of home rule is being challenged by problems that are bigger than any one governmental unit can manage. Issues in transportation, infrastructure, the environment and other areas often transcend the boundaries of local government and will require the collaboration of government, business, and**



**Tri-plex Governance:** Although this area benefits from being in only one state and having few federal jurisdictions, there are over 100 different jurisdictions, including counties, general law townships, charter townships, cities and villages within the Tri-plex. Coordination among all units of government will be necessary to effectively plan and manage the Tri-plex as it develops into one metropolitan area.

- CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
- STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
- STATE SENATE
- COUNTIES
- TOWNSHIP GRID
- INCORPORATED CITIES, VILLAGES AND OTHER URBAN AREAS

**institutional organizations. Effective ways to collaborate across governmental jurisdictions for planning our future or maximizing our human and financial resources have not yet been developed.**

Our growing population and increased demand for government services leads to an increasing number of conflicts between local governments and underscores the necessity for cross-jurisdictional decision making.

### THREATS

The highly fragmented pattern of local government neither matches the emergent urban structure of the Tri-plex, nor does it align with the patterns of the natural environment, transportation or development.

Development that is subsidized, not balanced with other values, and occurs without effective coordination, endangers the quality of life in West Michigan.

Lack of statutory authority to deal with regional planning issues will continue to result in uncoordinated planning efforts.

### OPPORTUNITIES

Create a regional alliance of local governments to develop and implement effective policies and long-range strategies for shaping the future of the Tri-plex.

Encourage more widespread sharing of geographic information systems services, as in the example of the REGIS system of the Grand Valley Metro Council. This system is available to any group and offers participants the opportunity to share valuable information, provide better and more consistent service to their constituents and reduce their operating costs.

**Create a cohesive state legislative caucus representing the Metro Tri-plex.**

Develop a reliable, easily accessible and objective source of local and metropolitan governance information.

Develop functional consolidation of governmental services.

**Planning Tools**  
The chart below shows how different states have attempted to strategically manage growth.

### STATEWIDE COORDINATED PLANNING TOOLS

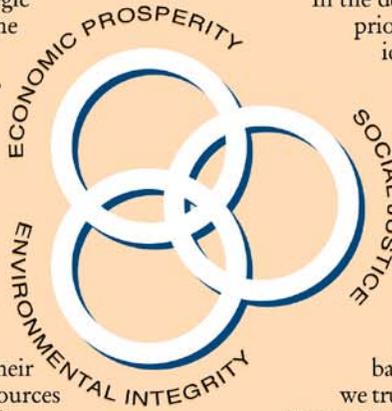
STATE	TOOL	DATE IMPLEMENTED	TRACK RECORD	GENERAL REPUTATION	KEY OUTCOME
FLORIDA	IMPACT FEES	1987 <sup>1</sup>	SUCCESSFUL	POSITIVE	GROWTH PAYS FOR ITSELF
MARYLAND	TRANSFER OF DEVELOPMENT AREAS	1980 <sup>2</sup>	SUCCESSFUL	POSITIVE	90% DROP IN LOSS OF FARMLAND
	DIRECTS STATE FUNDING TO DEVELOPMENT AREAS	1997 <sup>3</sup>	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN	UNKNOWN
MICHIGAN	SUBDIVISION CONTROL ACT AMENDMENTS	1997	SUCCESSFUL	NEUTRAL	MODERATE
OREGON	GROWTH CONTROLLED BOUNDARIES	1972 <sup>4</sup>	SUCCESSFUL	POSITIVE	LESS FARMLAND LOST; URBAN AREAS STRONGER
VERMONT	MULTI-COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION	1970 <sup>5</sup>	SUCCESSFUL	HIGHLY REGARDED	MITIGATED THE IMPACTS OF GROWTH; TOURISM AND AGRICULTURE PRESERVED
WASHINGTON	GROWTH MANAGEMENT IMPACT	1991 <sup>6</sup>	SUCCESSFUL	POSITIVE	COUNTIES MUST PROTECT FARMLAND AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SENSITIVE AREAS

1. International Journal of Public Sector Management, K.C. Simmonds, 1993.  
 2. 1000 Friends of Minnesota at <http://www.1000.org/ictool5.htm>  
 3. Growth Management Laws, Fact Sheet, Feb. 1998 at <http://www.farmland.org/tas/tas-gml.html>  
 4. Vermont Environmental Board, Twenty-fifth Anniversary Report, 1970-1995, Office of the Governor, Howard Dean  
 5. Subjective based on overall literature  
 6. Maryland State Department of Education at [http://www.msde.state.md.us/doi/smart\\_growth.html](http://www.msde.state.md.us/doi/smart_growth.html)

# SUMMARY OF THE PRIORITIES AND PROCESS OF THE PROJECT

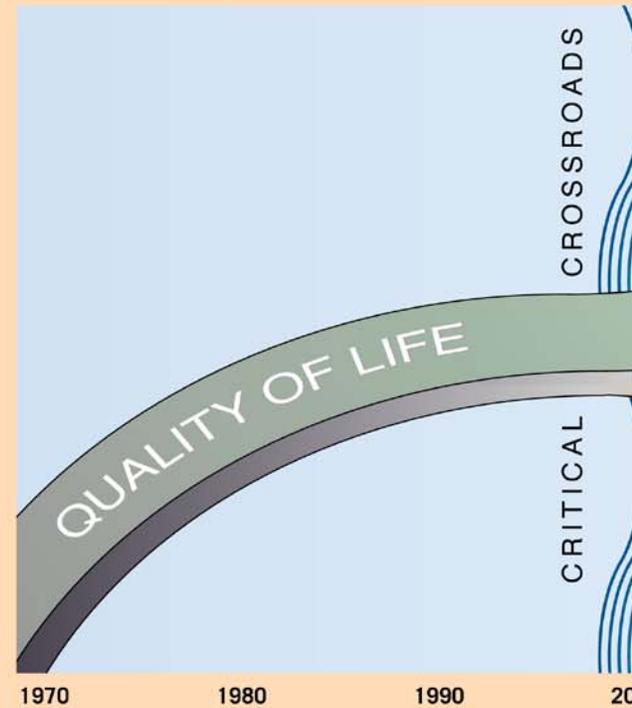
## DEVELOPMENT OF PRIORITIES

Through a series of strategic planning steps utilizing the collected to produce this *Common Framework*, the 250 volunteers involved in the West Michigan Strategic Alliance identified Priorities for Regional Collaboration. They emerged as clear priorities where governments, businesses, institutions and public interest groups can pool their energies and financial resources for greatest mutual benefit.



In the development of these priorities, the Alliance has identified three fundamental principles to guide community decision-making: **Economic Prosperity, Environmental Integrity and Social Justice.** Through regional collaboration that balances these principals, we truly can become the **best place to live, work and play.**

For more information on the work of the West Michigan Strategic Alliance go to our website at [www.wm-alliance.org](http://www.wm-alliance.org)



## PRIORITIES FOR REGIONAL COLLABORATION

### CREATE A REGIONAL MINDSET

First and foremost, we need to see ourselves as we really are—members of an interactive and interdependent metro community not just residents of many separate jurisdictions. This new mindset is needed to create greater awareness of the common threats and opportunities facing our region and the benefits of addressing them together. No single government, business or institution has the resources and decision-making authority to do it alone.

Communities don't fail overnight. It takes years of small, seemingly insignificant decisions made without the benefit of a larger perspective, a collaborative approach and a common vision. Communities don't succeed overnight either. Achieving a preferred vision for our region will take time. Seeing our Metro Tri-plex as the sum of its parts is the first step toward a positive future.

### FOSTER A PROSPEROUS ECONOMY

As our economy goes, so goes the health and well-being of our region. The resources generated by our regional economy are vital for improving our quality of life for all residents.

Entrepreneurial spirit and a love for West Michigan have provided an unusually high number of locally grown industries and entrepreneurs committed to community involvement and philanthropy.

Continued prosperity cannot be taken for granted. The impact of the global economy, new technologies and industry consolidation has thrust the West Michigan economy into a period of transition. We are heavily committed to a manufacturing economy and are under-invested in today's emerging high-tech industries.

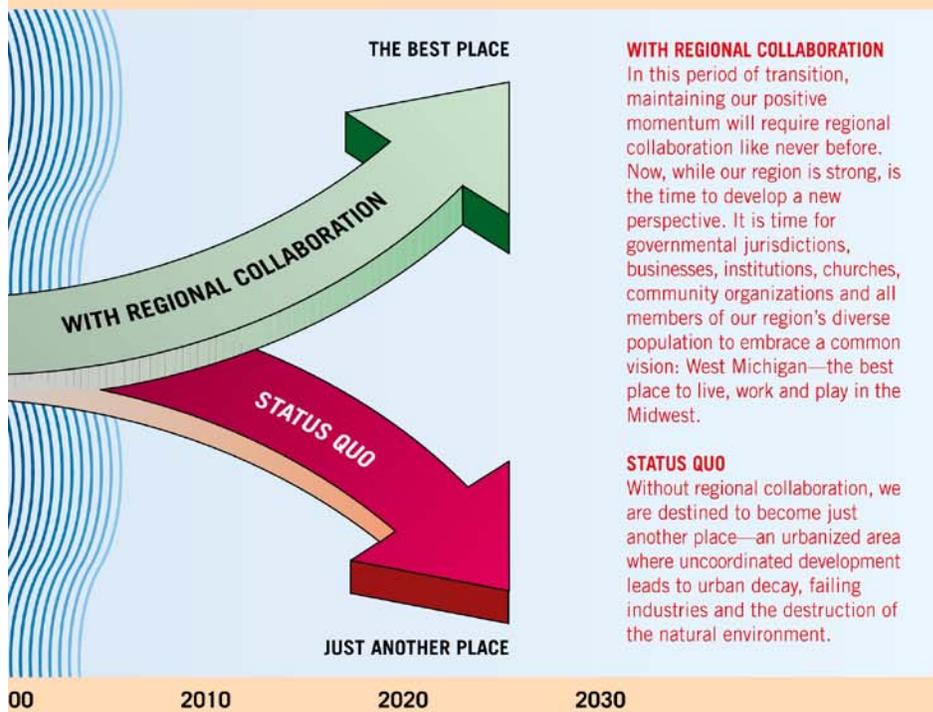
Our region must recognize that the rules of the game have changed. Our challenge is to help our existing employers remain competitive while nurturing new job opportunities within emerging growth industries that build on our strengths and experience.

### ENSURE A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

West Michigan's natural environment is essential to our quality of life and plays an important role in defining our region.

Rapid population growth and development have placed our natural environment in jeopardy. We must identify, prioritize and protect these precious environmental assets before they are lost to further development.

Our lakes, rivers, dunes, forests and unique farmland do not conform to man-made boundaries of local planning units. Sustaining the region's unique environment will be successful only with a collaborative regional approach.



**WITH REGIONAL COLLABORATION**  
 In this period of transition, maintaining our positive momentum will require regional collaboration like never before. Now, while our region is strong, is the time to develop a new perspective. It is time for governmental jurisdictions, businesses, institutions, churches, community organizations and all members of our region's diverse population to embrace a common vision: West Michigan—the best place to live, work and play in the Midwest.

**STATUS QUO**  
 Without regional collaboration, we are destined to become just another place—an urbanized area where uncoordinated development leads to urban decay, failing industries and the destruction of the natural environment.

## SUCCESSFUL PAST, UNCERTAIN FUTURE

West Michigan has evolved into a dynamic and growing region with a strong economy and unique culture. The last 25 years, by most measures, have allowed our region to prosper and develop in many diverse and positive ways. However, **our past success does not guarantee a successful future.**

Rapid growth in the region has brought with it serious challenges to our individual communities and the region as a whole. Changes in technology and the world economy are impacting West Michigan like never before and the pace of this change is increasing.

We are a region in transition. We are no longer simply a collection of independent, self-contained small midwestern towns with clearly defined borders. Our prosperity and rapid growth has transformed the greater Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Holland area into an emerging metropolitan region that is now home to more than 1.1 million people.

**While we are clearly not what we once were, we have not yet arrived at what we will become. An exciting yet critical window of opportunity exists for our region to determine its future and the quality of life that will be enjoyed by future generations.**

### REVITALIZE OUR URBAN CENTERS

Our central cities play an important role for our Metro Tri-plex. They provide their greater communities with a common unifying identity. They serve as gathering places and central locations for sharing the cost of common facilities and services.

Many of our cities and urban centers are facing a common crisis created by economic, demographic and lifestyle trends beyond their control. They are faced with diminishing tax bases and aging infrastructure. Unevenly resourced central city school systems struggle with issues that extend beyond the walls of the classroom into the neighborhoods they serve.

Businesses and higher-income families are moving out of the central cities leaving an increasing population of low-income families behind. Many of these families lack the resources for education, housing, transportation and health care needs. Left unattended, these trends will overwhelm our urban centers and spread to surrounding areas.

All of these issues are interrelated. There are no quick fixes. Urban center revitalization can only be achieved with a comprehensive approach that includes support from the larger Tri-plex community.

### DEVELOP A TRI-PLEX GROWTH STRATEGY

Individual planning activities of more than 100 units of government, have resulted in a disturbing regional development pattern. If current land use, transportation and infrastructure trends continue, the potential exists for the Tri-plex to develop into “Los Angeles on the Lake,” a congested place where agricultural land and open space will be quickly consumed by haphazard development that lacks a regional vision.

The Common Framework offers a new perspective. No longer are the communities of the Tri-plex separate and unrelated; they are instead components of a major metropolitan area. This new identity calls for a growth strategy created from a regional perspective.

A region-wide vision for land use and development in the Tri-plex will take years to create and implement. We need to begin the process now while options for creative and responsible land use, transportation and infrastructure strategies still exist.

### STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY

If we in West Michigan are to live peacefully and compete effectively in this rapidly shrinking world, we must learn to relate to people of many different cultures and perspectives. The place to begin this effort is right here at home where our rapid population growth has brought with it much greater diversity.

Race and ethnicity are only one dimension of our population's increasing diversity. Religious and socio-economic diversity are also growing. West Michigan is changing and beginning to reflect the diversity of the world around us. Our communities have made efforts to deal with racial and ethnic intolerance but we need to do more to take advantage of the benefits associated with a diverse population.

The strength and vitality of our Tri-plex will be determined by our ability to understand and embrace different ethnic, religious and socio-economic perspectives. We will build stronger communities if we can tie our mutual well-being to one another.



# WEST MICHIGAN STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

Collaboration to secure our future

## MISSION OF THE ALLIANCE

*To be a catalyst for regional collaboration.*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*We believe that the most successful future will come from regional decisions that balance economic prosperity, environmental integrity and social justice.*

## VISION FOR WEST MICHIGAN

*To be the best place to live, work and play in the Midwest.*

### THE LEADERSHIP FORUM

- Tim Achterhoff<sup>o</sup>
- Roger A. Andersen\*
- Judy A. Barnes\*
- Arnold Boezaart<sup>o</sup>
- Ted Bosgraaf<sup>o</sup>
- Paul E. Boyer\*
- Jim Brooks, Chair
- John H. Brown
- Jim Buck
- Steve Buihuis
- Chris Byrnes
- Ryan Cotton
- Nancy Crandall
- Eric De Long
- Maxine M. DeBruyn<sup>o</sup>
- Jerome Dixon
- James Dunlap
- Ken Freestone\*
- Joy Gaasch
- Martha Y. Gonzalez-Cortes
- George Hamenburg
- Sue Higgins
- Pat Johnson
- John C. Kennedy III
- Fred Keller<sup>o</sup>
- Birgit Klöns<sup>o</sup>
- Nana Kratochvil
- Bill Lowry
- Bradford Mathis\*
- Chris McGuigan\*
- Cindy Morat-Larsen
- Rick Muniz
- Vernon Nash
- Jan Nienhuis
- Patricia Oldt\*
- Penny Pestle
- Milt Ronwer
- Asaline Scott
- Margaret Sellers Walker
- I. John Snider II<sup>o</sup>
- Sharon Steffens
- Alan D. Steinman
- Julie Stoneman
- Howard Sutton<sup>o</sup>
- Michael Viola-Vu

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION

West Michigan Strategic Alliance  
 44 East 8th Street  
 Holland, MI 49423  
 Phone: (616) 494-9202  
 Fax: (616) 494-0460  
 E-mail: info@wm-alliance.org  
 Website: www.wm-alliance.org

### PREPARED BY

Michael Gallis & Associates  
 Charlotte, NC

**o** = Executive Committee  
**\*** = Essential Activity Chair  
**\*** = Essential Activity Vice-Chair