

OVERVIEW

On December 15, 2000 the federal government authorized the formation of the Delta Regional Authority. This authority covers 8 states (Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Alabama) and their respective 236 counties/parishes. In Missouri the act covers 29 counties – Bollinger, Butler, Cape Girardeau, Carter, Crawford, Dent, Douglas, Dunklin, Howell, Iron, Madison, Mississippi, New Madrid, Oregon, Ozark, Pemiscot, Perry, Phelps, Reynolds, Ripley, Scott, Shannon, St. Francois, Ste. Genevieve, Stoddard, Texas, Washington, Wayne, and Wright.

The southeast and south central counties in Missouri that are a part of this Authority traditionally have been the poorer counties in the state according to unemployment and poverty statistics. In April, twenty (20) of the counties had an unemployment rate of 6% or greater (Wayne County unemployment is 11.8%) and five of the counties unemployment rate was between 5-5.9%. Missouri's overall unemployment rate was 5.2% for the same period. Every county's per capita income is below the state average of \$27,103, with the lowest per capita income being Wayne County whose per capita personal income is \$15,449.

It is an area that ranks very low in quality indicators under the Kids Count. Nineteen of the 29 counties ranked at 80th or below in the ranking of all of the 114 counties plus the City of St. Louis. Kids Count is a ranking of each county examining outcome measure directly affecting children in the state. The ten measures cover among other things, poverty, birth weight, infant mortality, child deaths, abuse, and dropout rates.

Multi-modal transportation inclusive of roads, rail, river, and air access is either scarce or deficient. Interstate (four lanes) connections across the entire southern part of the state are needed as well as better north south access. The area is home to five ports in various stages of development, which struggle to maintain operations on a consistent basis.

However, it is important to note that this area also offers various venues of higher education, abundant natural resources such as timber, clear streams, and the fertile ground of the Mississippi River. It is an area which has tremendous opportunities and high potential for economic and community growth and improvement.

PLANNING PROCESS

Over the past two years, the State, Regional Planning Commissions (RPC), and others have conducted need assessments in the Missouri Delta Region. These need assessment results are shown in Appendix 3. In addition, the five Regional Planning Commissions of the region have been undertaking a comprehensive strategic planning activity as a part of their Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies process in cooperation with the US Economic Development Administration. This process has included numerous public hearings in each region. Appendix 4 details the RPC goals for their respective areas.

In June of 2002, a public meeting was held with approximately 50 invited attendees to examine these previous activities and to determine a listing of priorities to meet the needs of the region in Missouri. These priorities will serve as the interim state plan until Governor Holden names the Missouri Commission on the Mississippi Delta. At that time, the Commission will utilize these priorities, and various other data to further refine the plan, determine measurable results, and examine other broad based activities affecting the entire region.

GOALS FOR THE MISSOURI DELTA REGION

For this area to succeed, we must increase economic opportunity through development in a holistic approach. The priorities fall into four distinct categories:

- A. Transportation
- B. Regional Investment Opportunities
- C. Educational Opportunities
- D. Quality of life

PRIORITIES

TRANSPORTATION

1. ***To maintain, improve and diversify transportation structures and features for all modes of transportation within the region.***

Transportation is more than just highway improvements. This goal is inclusive of rail, river, road and air transportation. There are five ports serving the area along the Mississippi River in various stages of development. Their sustainability is key to economic development activities.

Maintenance and upgrading of the highway system in the region is vital. Highways serving the area need be improved either to 4 lane or 'super 2' designation. Interstate corridors connecting Missouri and other Delta states are key to expansion of commerce.

Finally, the transportation improvements should include provision of public transit systems for employment opportunities. The rural nature of the area provides a barrier for residents to be able to get to work as they move into the job market. This transit system is also needed to provide a means of reaching health care providers.

REGIONAL INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- 2. Foster economic development that makes the best possible use of the region's resources including personal, agricultural, and natural resources.*

There is the need to diversify the economy especially improving employment and business opportunities thereby creating jobs and increasing the per capita incomes of the area. The region is rich in resources. An economy respecting and utilizing these resources in a sensitive manner through various value-added activities will not only increase economic activity, but also help to balance those resources in a responsible manner.

This value-added economy is inclusive of agricultural industries, cultural heritage tourism development, and tourism development respective of the clean, clear streams and springs as well as utilization of the Mississippi River as both a tourism resource as well as industrial base.

Economic diversification must include the attraction of industries and businesses that provide sustainable wages and benefits to serve to raise the per capita income of the area.

The Universities and Colleges in the area must work in partnership with business, industry, and the agriculture to educate their students in the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed in these occupations. In addition, Universities, Colleges, and other public and private businesses and organizations including regional planning commissions need to conduct pure and applied research projects and studies designed to improve local business conditions or the potential for future economic growth.

3. ***Improve the infrastructure which serves to facilitate community and economic development***

This infrastructure is inclusive of such activities as community water and sewer improvement, telecommunications, and addressing issues unique to the area such as drainage and flood control. In addition, industrial park infrastructure improvement, which may also include the availability of industrial buildings suitable for new or expanding industries, is needed. Infrastructure is also inclusive of the provision of quality childcare facilities to provide care for families and providing access to quality health care and affordable housing.

4. *Develop access to capital*

To enable the area to foster economic growth and create wealth, the region must develop a means of access to capital. The development of financial pools for use by business and industry are one means of achieving this goal. In addition, access to both attracting and maintaining venture capital will allow for development of new business and industry. Access to capital for entrepreneurial development is also a key need.

For communities in the area to become less dependent on federal and state aid, they must be able to have access to increase funding capacity. One means of this is increasing the assessed valuation in a community. Another includes the development of community and private foundations that can provide the philanthropic funding for community services and improvements.

Finally, individuals must be enabled to have access to capital for the creation of personal wealth. This can be achieved through the creation of a means for personal savings programs, homeownership opportunities, and micro-loan programs.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

5. Improve job skills of the workforce

This priority not only includes the traditional job development and training programs operated by the local workforce investment boards, but also includes activities such as offering educational opportunities for those interested in starting a new business or improving their management abilities.

6. Development of human resources through education and training.

While this priority is closely related to Priority 5, it is distinctly different. It encompasses the life long learning concept (pre-school through post-secondary education). Partnerships must be established between schools (from elementary to the university level) and the business and industrial sector to insure a ready workforce exists for the needs of the future. Finally, this priority includes the need for continued improvement to school facilities to enhance educational opportunities that prepare students for work in the 21st century.

QUALITY OF LIFE

7. Enhance the quality of life for all residents

Retaining and attracting residents to the area relies on the continued enhancement of the quality of life for everyone in the area. This priority includes improving existing housing stock as well as providing a diversity of housing choice in the area, development and improvement of various community facilities, the provision of a variety of recreational opportunities for all ages and the responsible use of the areas natural resources.

Governor Holden's Managing for Results Initiative	Missouri is a leader in Education	Missouri is Successfully Navigating through tough economic times
	Increased percentage of children prepared for kindergarten	Increased level of per capita income
	Increased percentage of students scoring proficient or higher on MAP tests	Decrease rate of unemployment
	Increased percentage of 18 year olds with a high school diploma or GED	
Delta Authority Objectives		To develop the transportation infrastructure of the region for the purpose of facilitating economic development in the region
		To assist the region in obtaining the job training, employment-related education, and business development (with an emphasis on entrepreneurship) that are needed to build and maintain strong local economies
		To provide assistance to severely distressed and underdeveloped areas that lack financial resources for equipping industrial parks and related facilities
Missouri Delta Region Priorities	Development of human resources through education and training	To maintain, improve and diversify transportation structures and features for all modes of transportation within the region
		Foster economic development that makes the best possible use of the regions resources including personal, agricultural and natural resources
		Improve the infrastructure which serves to facilitate community and economic development
		Develop access to capital
		Improve job skills of the workforce