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February 5, 2025

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Jackson County Plan

The attached Jackson County Plan is provided by the Jackson County Commission to the citizens of Jackson County for information. The plan was prepared by the Jackson County Commission to help understand the growth that is occurring across the Tennessee Valley and to understand the impacts this growth will have on the future of our County. The plan offers recommendations on how to prepare for and accommodate the projected growth. This Plan was funded by a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and the Jackson County Commission. The Commission contracted with an Architectural, Engineering, Community Planning Development consultant to conduct community engagement, collect data, and prepare the plan. The plan builds on Jackson County's strengths, identifies issues that must be addressed to further economic development, and sets out strategies to build a growing, sustainable economy for the businesses, industries and residents of Jackson County. Public meetings were held throughout the county. A countywide survey was conducted. The plan was developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders, including a steering committee representing county and local government, utility providers, economic development agencies, local businesses, residents and other community stakeholders. Interviews were held with elected officials, utilities providers, as well as representatives of city and county schools, Highlands Medical Center, and local and regional economic development organizations. The plan identifies opportunities as well as challenges as we look forward and prepare for the future's growth in Jackson County. The County Commission wants to express our appreciation and gratitude to the residents of Jackson County, and the many people and organizations that partnered with us to help develop this County Plan.


Willie B. Nance, Jr., Chairman
Jackson County Commission



Economic Resiliency Plan

Jackson County, Alabama

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The County Commission would like to extend its gratitude to the Mountain Lakes Chamber of Commerce, Jackson County Economic Development Authority, Jackson County and Scottsboro City Schools, Northeast Alabama Community College, Tennessee Valley Authority, Jackson County Mayors Association, Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments, and the water, sewer and gas utilities serving our communities for their assistance and participation in developing this plan.

A very special thanks to all the residents and property and business owners who participated in meetings, filled out surveys and otherwise contributed their voices to preparing this plan.

Adopted by the Jackson County Commission
November 25, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The following plan was prepared by the Jackson County Commission to guide economic development throughout the county, to promote job growth, higher wages and improve the quality of life of county residents. The plan builds on Jackson County's strengths, identifies issues that must be addressed to further economic development, and sets out strategies to build a growing, sustainable economy for the businesses, industries and residents of Jackson County.

Process

The plan was developed with input from a wide range of stakeholders, including a steering committee representing county and local government, utility providers, economic development agencies, local businesses, residents and other community stakeholders. Interviews were held with elected officials, utilities providers, as well as representatives of city and county schools, Highlands Medical Center and local and regional economic development organizations.

Public meetings were held throughout the county from February to May 2024. A project website was prepared to provide information to the public about the planning process, public meetings and other input opportunities and emerging plan materials. A countywide survey, made available online and in print form, was conducted during this timeframe. Focus group meetings were held with representatives of local industries, education and workforce development organizations, the tourism committee of the Mountain Lakes Chamber and infrastructure and utility providers.

Plan materials were drafted and reviewed with the steering committee, with the final plan being presented to the Jackson County Commission in November 2024.

Plan Highlights

Jackson County has many assets that provide a foundation for economic growth: excellent secondary and post-secondary workforce development programs; healthy industrial and agricultural sectors; location in the center of several expanding major metropolitan areas; a stunning natural environment, outdoor recreation opportunities and destinations that draw tourism; and a strong sense of community. Plan recommendations address ways that these assets can be better leveraged to support economic growth.

There are several critical issues that are hindering economic development in Jackson County. For example, there is limited access to natural gas. While some residential growth is occurring, the county's housing supply is weak—providing few options for prospective residents and young residents as they enter the workforce. A lack of childcare and other issues are suppressing labor force participation. Inadequate revenue streams constrain county government services.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jackson County is one of Alabama's hidden gems, featuring caving destinations that are popular throughout the Southeast, lush mountains, hunting preserves and the Tennessee River. The County is located conveniently between two economic powerhouses—Huntsville, Alabama and Chattanooga, Tennessee. The explosive growth in nearby Madison County will soon reach Jackson County. As a result, the county's population is expected to increase by 20-30% over the next fifteen years.

Jackson County could grow by 20-30% in the next 15 years.

So that this growth can be secured and sustained, Jackson County and its municipalities, utilities providers and other local partners must build on the county's unique strengths and resolve several challenges, which are laid out in this plan.

Assets

Jackson County has many assets that make it an outstanding location for living, work and play. These attributes are essential to building a resilient economy to offer jobs to residents, attract businesses and support government services.

The county offers features people look for when choosing a place to live: **affordability, good schools, safety, a strong sense of community, and access to the great outdoors.** In addition to local jobs, Jackson County's location between Huntsville and Chattanooga provides access to outstanding economic opportunities for its residents.

The county is well located and provides transportation options to businesses and industries. US Highway 72 provides "interstate quality" access to Huntsville and to Interstate 24 just north

of the Alabama state line. And, interstate 59 is under 15 miles from communities southeast of the river. Two active railroads cross the county, and Scottsboro Municipal Airport is well run and capable of meeting the needs of area businesses.

The county school system has wisely invested in a state-of-the-art workforce development program in the Kevin Dukes Career and Innovation Academy. Local schools and partnerships with Northeast Alabama Community College are producing a talented workforce.



Issues

Despite its many assets, there are challenging conditions that will hamper Jackson County's economic future if meaningful action is not taken to address them.

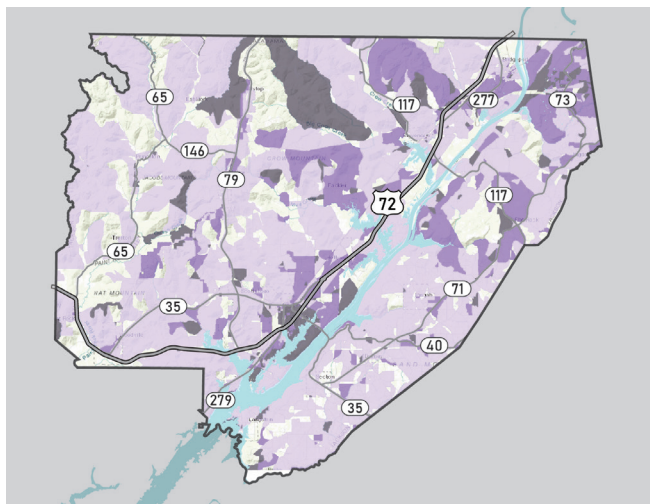
While low taxes contribute to the county's affordability, it also limits annual revenues needed to maintain road infrastructure and provide other basic services. Outside of residential developments that have emerged in the county seat, Scottsboro, there has been very little new housing developed over the last two decades limiting choices for existing and prospective residents. Workforce participation is hindered by limited childcare and other issues. These and other factors have created the appearance of stagnation that is negatively affecting economic development.

Infrastructure

Investments in water and sewer services in the western portions of the county will enable growth emerging from Madison County. Jackson County and other partners should support the Town of Woodville's efforts to expand water and sewer services to support potential residential and economic growth in the area.

Access to natural gas is limited. The current supply from the southwest is insufficient to support potential growth. Connecting to a new gas source will be expensive but will be necessary to support industrial development and attract housing development.

Improving mobile phone coverage is essential to providing an attractive environment to prospective residents and to support emergency services.



Mobile coverage is limited, in part, because cell service providers with infrastructure in one part of the county offer little or no service in other areas.



Industry

Workforce development programs and economic development efforts are current strengths for the county and should stay on course. While the County is producing a skilled workforce, it struggles to retain young people. Increased employment options and wages, coupled with other quality of life improvements, will help keep or bring back young residents as they enter the workforce.

Childcare is a challenge for employers and employees.

Low labor force participation is an issue nationally and is clearly felt in Jackson County. Numerous factors contribute to this. Industry representatives indicated that limited access to childcare is a challenge for employees. As the state and nation continue efforts to recover from the opioid crisis, substance abuse is suspected to be another challenge to job participation and providing dependable workers for existing and prospective industries in Jackson County.

Housing and Business Development

Marketing Jackson County as a great place to live can attract developers and prospective residents. Overall, area schools are well-ranked statewide, and Jackson County communities offer the safety and small town way of life that many people look for when choosing where to live. Moreover, the County's outdoor amenities are unparalleled.

For all of these positive features, housing development has lagged even as older housing stock declines. Today, there are few homes available for rent or purchase. A variety of new housing types must be developed to facilitate population growth, which will then attract new businesses to the county.

New housing is needed for the County to grow.

Strategic utilities investments and other improvements will make Jackson County an even more attractive place for development and will draw prospective residents and help retain more young people.



Agriculture

An inland port along the Tennessee River will help to sustain and grow the county's agricultural economy, which has generated as much as \$276 million in sales in recent years. A port would offer barge access for area farmers to transport crops, fertilizer, and other farm products.

A meat processing facility will support livestock farming. A lack of processing facilities in the state has caused farmers to send livestock out of state for processing increasing transportation costs. Local processing could also increase access to locally grown food.

An agricultural center would provide resources to farmers, encourage innovation and resiliency and offer facilities for trade events and community uses.



Tourism

An update, comprehensive marketing strategy will accelerate the county's already successful tourism economy, drawing a wider variety of visitors and encouraging longer stays.

A countywide wayfinding system will help visitors find their destinations more easily, raise awareness of the area's diverse attractions and present an attractive, organized image of the county.

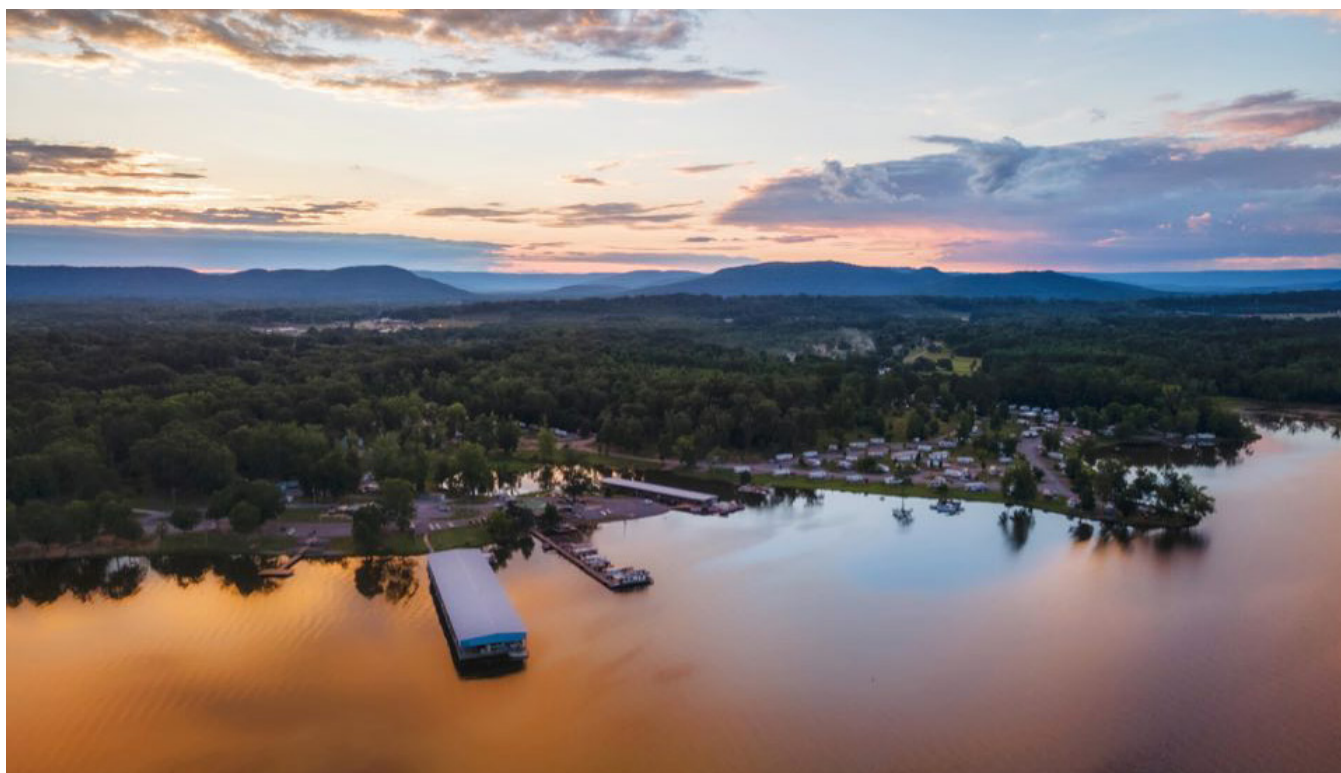
Tourism-supportive development including additional lodging options, a visitor center and a major destination along the river would provide services and activities to complement existing tourist attractions.

To get the greatest benefit of tourist activity, a countywide sales tax must be considered. This will capture more of visitor spending, generating more funding for public infrastructure and services.

Plan Priorities

Jackson County has enormous potential. To capture that potential, important decisions must be made by the county government, its municipalities, utilities providers and other public and private entities. The Economic Resiliency Plan is intended to guide the county and its partners in individual and collective efforts to create a stronger, sustainable economy. The plan emphasizes several priorities that emerged through the process. Initiatives that should be pursued in the early stages of implementing the plan include:

- Increasing utilities availability in western and central Jackson County
- Expanding economic opportunities and labor force participation
- Improving mobile phone coverage
- Accelerating housing development
- Generating more revenue to fund public infrastructure and services





COUNTYWIDE ASSESSMENT

An assessment was prepared to identify the county's strengths and weaknesses in a variety of categories. The assessment was developed from US Census and other socioeconomic data sources, stakeholder interviews and input from the Steering Committee. A summary of those findings is provided below.

Strength A significant asset for promoting economic growth and job creation in the area.

Neutral Factors that may include a combination of strengths and weaknesses that offset each other; conditions that are just average or may be a less critical location factor.

Weakness A significant limitation, potentially constraining future growth and development or a critical deficiency in a key factor.

Strengths

Jackson County has many assets upon which it can enhance and sustain its economy. While each of these is considered a strength, there may be a need to protect or improve on each of these.

- Airport
- Existing industries
- Workforce development programs
- Broadband coverage
- Geographic location
- Business and political climate
- Positive image of the county's natural environment
- Public schools and Northeast Alabama Community College
- Affordability
- Fire and police protection
- Outdoor recreation
- Tourism
- Agriculture

Neutral Conditions

Some indicators involve a mix of strengths and weaknesses. The weaknesses within each of these categories must be addressed to enable opportunities that are currently suppressed.

- Available land for industrial and retail development
- Labor availability
- Water, sewer and electric utilities
- Rail access
- Regional cooperation
- Healthcare
- Vision and planning for growth
- Retail development

Weaknesses

The following are issues that must be addressed to grow Jackson County's economy, become more resilient, and improve the lives of its residents.

- Labor force participation
- Limited available buildings for economic development purposes
- Poor cell phone coverage
- Road conditions
- Lack of port access along the river
- Limited access and supply of natural gas
- Limited housing supply
- Limited childcare for working parents
- Cultural activities
- Population and income levels with respect to retail development
- Limited lodging to support tourism

The assessment evaluated Jackson County's primary economic and community characteristics among 11-major categories and 42 sub-groups. Each sub-group is summarized in the following pages, representing either strengths, neutral factors or weaknesses for Jackson County.

These categories represent two basic functions, Product and Process, in terms of how they function in the community. Product refers to what we have, and Process is how we administer it.

Product

Business location and expansion are an extremely competitive process. Executives and consultants screen communities on paper by looking for knock-out-factors to narrow the list down to a select few communities they will visit. "Fatal Flaws" such as a lack of suitable available sites or building space can eliminate a community at the onset of a site research project. The same logic applies to existing businesses that want to expand or local entrepreneurs who want to start a new business. The lack of necessary resources or a bad business climate will inhibit job creation and hurt a community's ability to recruit companies and create jobs.

Process

The **process** of economic development is just as important as the **product**. Without effective strategies, programs and implementation, the likelihood of success in economic development is reduced. As with the Product, the Process component will address both strengths and weaknesses in Jackson County and will include recommendations for addressing the items indicated. Both Product and Process are considered in each of the ten matrix elements.

Matrix from the Countywide Assessment

Available Land and Buildings		
Industry-readily available land		
Airport expansion sites, support hangars and facilities		
Retail sites		
Available buildings		
Labor and Workforce		
Labor cost		
Labor availability, skilled		
Labor availability, unskilled		
Workforce productivity and work ethic		
Utilities		
Electricity		
Water		
Sewer		
Natural gas		
Telecommunications		
Broadband		
Transportation and Economic Geography		
Airport		
US and State Highways		
County and Local Roads		
Rail		
Port access		
Location		
Business, Political and Economic Climate		
Local incentives		
Local government support		
Zoning and enforcement		
Image and appearance		
Regional cooperation		

The assessment included evaluation of qualitative and quantitative data obtained through interviews, research and analysis of key economic and demographic variables. The consultant team met community key stakeholders in over 35 separate interviews and small group forums. Throughout interviews and meetings, it was surprising how most came to similar conclusions about Jackson County.

The complete assessment is provided as an appendix to this plan.

Strengths

Airport The Scottsboro Municipal Airport (Word Field) is well-managed and, with 10 acres available for expansion, adequate to serve the county's aviation needs.

Existing industries Manufacturing is the largest employment sector for county residents. The ten largest county manufacturers represent a diverse mix. Three of the top four employers are textile-related industries.

Workforce development programs Jackson County Schools operates a state-of-the-art Career and Innovation Academy that is closely linked with workforce programs at Northeast Alabama Community College.

Broadband Coverage Despite its size and largely rural character, most areas of the county have access to high speed broadband services.

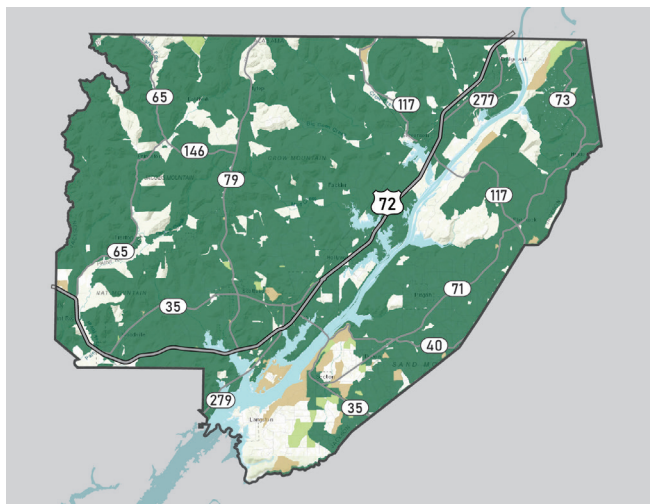


Figure 1 Fiber coverage areas (source: ADECA)

Business and political climate Jackson County (and the state) offer favorable environments for business and industrial development with low taxes and modest regulation.

Natural environment The Tennessee River and lushly forested mountains provide a strong first impression and numerous outdoor recreation opportunities.

Schools Jackson County Schools are well-ranked among school systems in the region. Three community colleges are located within 45 minutes of Jackson County.

Affordability The county is one of the most affordable in north Alabama with low taxes and low housing costs.

Geographic location Jackson County is located between Chattanooga TN and Huntsville AL and is near the center of several major Southeast cities, an area referred to as "Freight Alley."



Figure 2 Jackson County | Freight Alley

Fire and police protection Jackson County has a low crime rate and is served by a highly capable Sheriff's department and eight fire departments.

Outdoor recreation With vast areas of wildlife management areas for hunting, national caving attractions and boating and fishing on the Tennessee River, the county has an exceptional combination of outdoor activities.

Rail access A Norfolk Southern line extends across the county parallel to US 72. A CSX line connects from Tennessee to Stevenson.

Tourism Hunting, fishing and caving experiences contribute to significant tourist activity as well as the nation's only Unclaimed Baggage location and several notable historic sites.

Agriculture With over 700,000 acres of timber and farm land, agriculture is a major contributor to the county's economy and sense of place.

Neutral Conditions

Available land There are several large sites available for industrial development; however, some landowners are reluctant to sell land.

Labor availability There are many skilled workers living in the County and working in manufacturing. Area workforce development programs are producing more skilled workers, though there is no guarantee they will remain in the county as they enter the workforce. Labor force participation is below the state average.

Water, sewer and electric utilities Water systems operating in the county are meeting current needs. Interconnecting the systems and other improvements would accommodate more economic growth than is possible with some individual systems. Sewer service is available in communities along US 72 and in a small area south of the river. TVA, which generates electricity for the county, has experienced shortages in severe cold weather.

Regional cooperation The County, Chamber and EDA are actively involved with regional economic development organizations in north Alabama and Tennessee. A sense of competition between municipalities is perceived to limit potential cooperation.



Freight Mobility Coalition, Thrive Regional Partnership

Healthcare The recent acquisition of Highlands Medical Center by the Huntsville Hospital system has enabled improvements, yet healthcare access outside of Scottsboro is limited.

Vision and planning for growth Recent efforts by county and municipal leaders have shown a much greater emphasis on growth and planning for that growth than in the past. Yet, there are mixed opinions among county residents about whether, or to what degree, Jackson County should grow.

Retail development Outshopping has decreased in the last eight years. New restaurants and retailers have emerged in Scottsboro. Retail development in the county has been limited mostly to US 72, taking advantage of traffic counts along the highway.



Business grand opening, Scottsboro

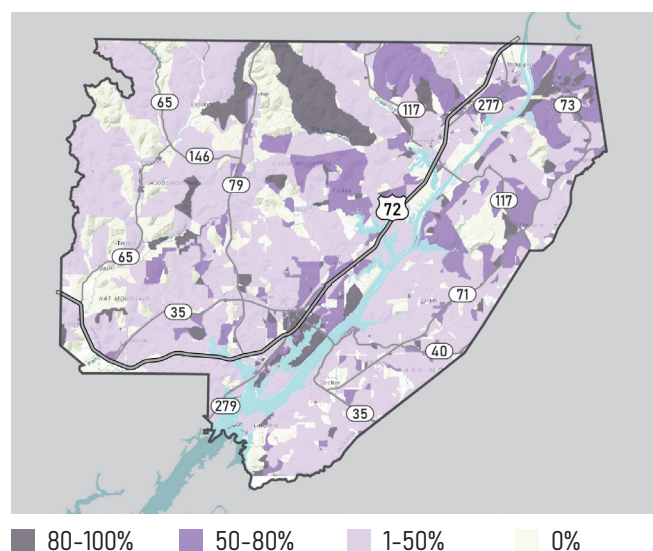
Weaknesses

Labor force participation Just below the state average, labor force participation is negatively affected by limited childcare, low wages and other issues.

Available buildings Only one existing building is currently being marketed for industrial use in the County. With tight county and municipal budgets, public officials are hesitant to fund speculative building development.

Cell phone coverage Cell service coverage and signal strength are very limited. Carrier networks tend to be limited to only portions of the county

Figure 4 Mobile service coverage (source: ADECA)



Road conditions The County does not have adequate revenue to keep up with road maintenance needs and has depended on one-time funding sources to accelerate road work in recent years.

River port Despite the amount of manufacturing, timber and farming in the county, there is no publicly operated port on the Tennessee River for transportation of local products.

Cultural activities Arts and cultural facilities, events and organizations are mostly limited to the county seat, Scottsboro.

Natural gas Only very limited areas of the county have access to natural gas service.

Housing supply There is very little housing available for-rent or for-sale in the county. Other than subdivision development in Scottsboro, most residential construction in recent years has been limited to individual homes.

Childcare As in many parts of the state and nation, Jackson County families have few options for childcare and childcare costs are high, an issue impacting labor force participation.



Demographics The county's smaller towns do not have large enough populations to attract retail development. Lower median income levels also constrain retail recruitment.

Lodging Though tourism activity is high, in the past, accommodations have been limited mostly to RV parks and cabins. This has begun to change with construction of hotels in the county seat.

County Road 3, Langston Gap



Kevin Dukes Career and Innovation Academy



Storey Trucking, Henagar



Ole Gin Steakhouse, Section



Willow Creek Apartments, Scottsboro



COMMUNITY INPUT

As part of the planning process, residents, business owners and other stakeholders shared their concerns and aspirations for the County through a series of community meetings, focus groups and surveys.

Input meetings were geographically distributed to make it convenient for residents, property owners and community stakeholders to participate. Over the course of four months, meetings were held at North Jackson High School and in Pisgah, Skyline, Woodville and Scottsboro.

In addition to community meetings, a survey conducted to learn how residents feel about life in Jackson County today, how it is changing and their thoughts about the future. The survey was made available online. Print surveys were distributed to libraries, town halls and other public locations throughout the county.

Issues for the Future

Survey participants were asked to identify, from among 15 categories, what issues they felt were most important to the future of Jackson County. The results echo several points highlighted in community meetings, while giving a sense of the relative importance of issue topics.

Responses highlighted the importance of issues that have impacts on both quality of life and economic development: education, business development, safety, healthcare and industrial development. Housing was also emphasized, reflecting the county's limited housing supply and acknowledgment of its importance to economic growth.

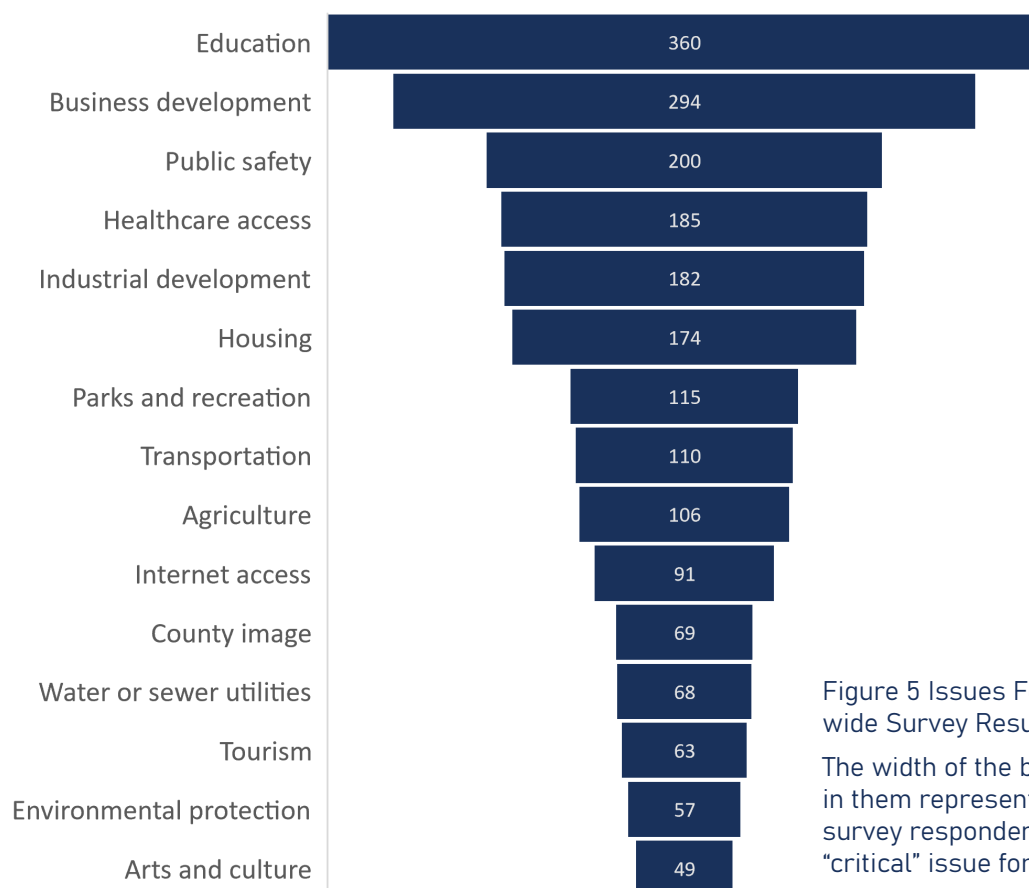


Figure 5 Issues For the Future - County-wide Survey Results

The width of the bars and numbers within them represent the number of times survey respondents selected the issue as a "critical" issue for the County's future.

Community outreach event, Scottsboro



North Jackson High School

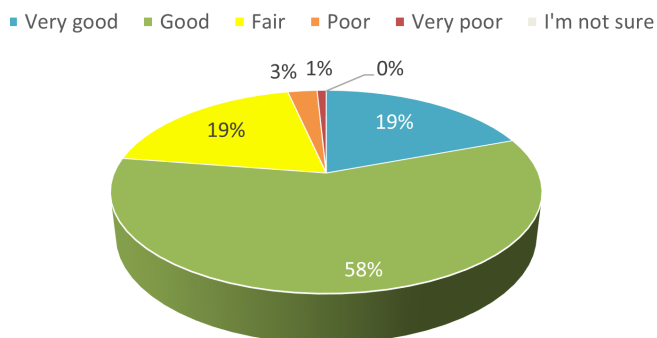
Quality of Life

Survey takers were asked to consider their quality of life and whether they perceive it changing for the better or worse. Participants were asked to identify factors that they feel are contributing to a better quality of life or reducing or constraining it. Responses indicated most are satisfied with life in Jackson County. Likewise, most expressed that their quality of life has either stayed about the same (38%) or improved (38%).

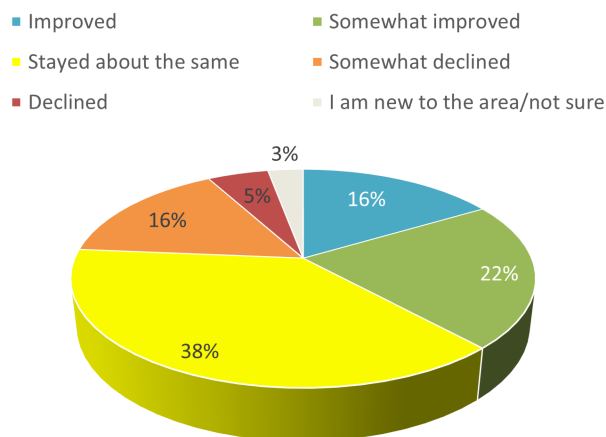
Survey respondents indicated the positive impact of sense of community in their lives as well as cost of living, safety and schools.

Despite the lower cost of living in Jackson County, many indicated increasing prices, low wages and limited economic opportunities as issues detracting from their lives.

Quality of Life Today



How has your quality-of-life changed?



The following sections of the plan identify strategies to develop and sustain Jackson County's economy and to prepare the County and its communities for regional growth. Plan objectives are organized into the following major themes:

Infrastructure

Adequacy of roads, water and sewer utilities and other infrastructure elements is critical to the economy and quality of life of residents in Jackson County. Road maintenance and cell phone coverage are insufficient for current conditions. Limitations in other infrastructure and utilities have a dampening effect on growth in some parts of the county, including communities that are otherwise well-placed for growth. These issues must be addressed to facilitate economic growth and make Jackson County an even more enjoyable place to live, work and invest.

Industrial Development

Providing stable, higher-wage jobs, manufacturing and other industries increase economic opportunity for county residents. While labor force participation is lacking, strong workforce development programs are producing skilled workers. Growth of industries within the county will help retain those skilled workers and increase household incomes.

Agriculture

Farming is an integral part of Jackson County's character and economy. Strategies that support agricultural activity, much of which is family-farming, will increase their profitability and longevity while also preserving the county's natural environment.

Housing and Business Development

Jackson County has many attributes that make it an attractive place to live. However, there are areas in which the County and its municipalities can improve to become more attractive to prospective residents, including young residents returning from college and entering the workforce. Residents yearn for more diverse and more distributed shopping and dining options, which will come with population growth and increased household incomes.

Tourism

Given its extraordinary natural setting and unique historic features, tourism activity contributes significantly to the County's economy. A fresh, comprehensive tourism marketing strategy in combination with strategic public investments will optimize tourism activity and generate revenue that can improve services for residents.

INFRASTRUCTURE

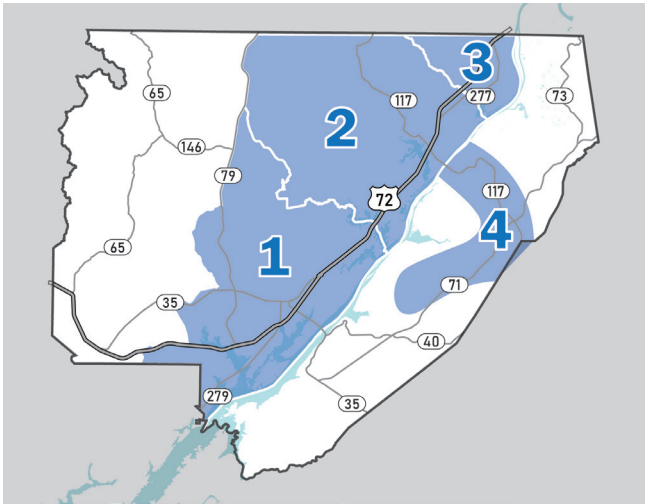


Figure 6 Natural gas coverage areas

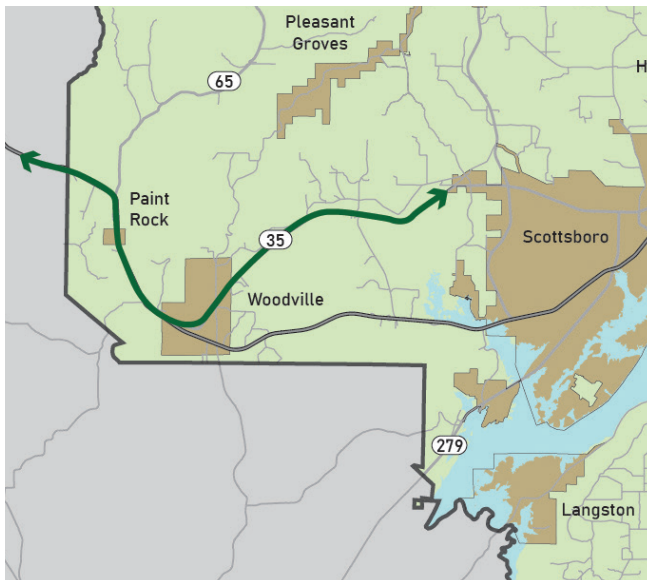


Figure 7 Potential gas main connection from Huntsville to Scottsboro

Objective IN1

Improve natural gas supply

Expanding access to natural gas was identified as a critical need within the county to attract and support residential and industrial development. Natural gas service is limited mostly to Scottsboro, Bridgeport and Stevenson. Both Bridgeport and Stevenson obtain gas from East Tennessee Natural Gas. Those utilities have indicated that supply is sufficient to support growth. Scottsboro WSG provides natural gas service from a pipeline along AL 79. Gas is purchased from Marshall County Gas District.

Natural gas service is available to only a small area south of the river from the Upper Sand Mountain Gas District. The Section-Dutton utilities board has considered adding gas service but a previous study indicated insufficient demand to warrant cost investment.

To accommodate future growth—industrial, commercial and residential—Scottsboro WSG has indicated a need to connect to another source. Building a gas main along AL 35 to connect to Huntsville Utilities is an option that has been considered. The estimated cost of the project is \$34 million. In addition to increasing the supply to Scottsboro WSG, the gas main would also create opportunities for Paint Rock, Woodville and other areas in the western part of the county to connect to natural gas.

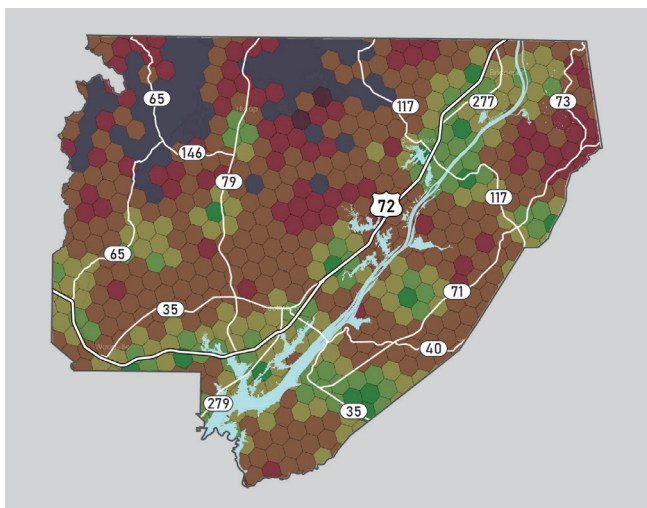


Figure 8 AT&T LTE Signal Strength

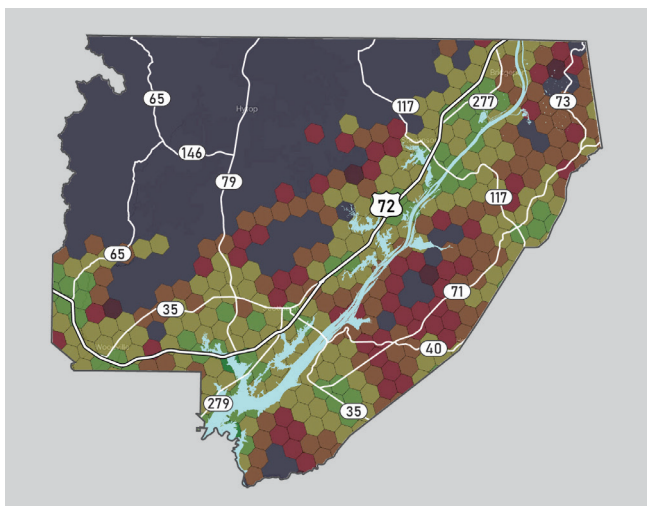


Figure 9 T-Mobile LTE Signal Strength

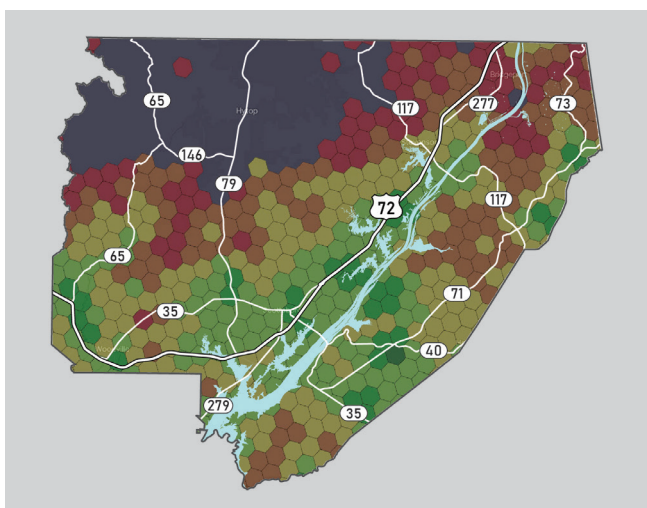


Figure 10 Verizon LTE Signal Strength

Objective IN2

Improve cell phone coverage

Cell phone coverage in Jackson County is greatly limited. While there are a large number of cell towers, the County's topography greatly limits the reach of these towers. As a result, signal strength is low in several areas. There are portions of the county to the north and west with no LTE coverage from the three service providers (see figures at left). Coverage gaps and low signal strength affect emergency services and can have a negative effect on attracting business, industrial and residential development.

The County should conduct a study, in coordination with telecommunications providers, to determine where additional towers and antennae are needed to address signal strength issues. According to available mapping data, there is a significant number of towers throughout the county, including a high concentration in the hilly, northern areas. However, it is not known how many of those towers include operative antennae and which carriers may be using them. The County could recruit cell tower companies to upgrade existing towers and/or construct new towers, or even take on such investments as an incentive for providers to install additional antennae to improve coverage.

Signal Strength

	Good
	Fair
	Poor
	No signal

Objective IN3

Improve and expand sewer services

Five municipal sewer authorities provide sanitary sewer services to Jackson County communities. These include Scottsboro, Woodville, Section-Dutton, Stevenson and Bridgeport. The sewer system serving Hollywood is operated by the Jackson County Water Authority and is connected to the Scottsboro WSG system.

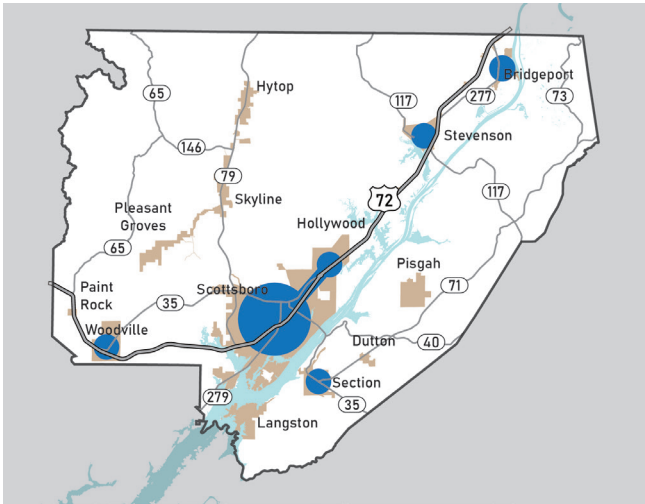


Figure 11 Sanitary sewer systems

The Woodville sanitary sewer system is fairly small, serving approximately 115 customers (about one-third of households) and does not extend to US Highway 72, the town's most traveled route and primary connection to Huntsville. Expanding the sewer system to US Highway 72 will enable Woodville to support growth. Woodville's proposed sanitary sewer improvements, which would double its treatment capacity to 50,000 gallons per day, are estimated at over \$5 million. Given the potential for residential growth in the Woodville area, plans for higher capacity treatment improvements should be planned so that the system can be scaled up to meet future growth demands.

Stevenson Utilities has obtained funding through the State Revolving Loan Fund to increase sewer capacity from .75 MGD to 1.5 MGD (million gallons per day).

Sewer use has risen in Bridgeport due to expansion of existing industries, while the system has lost a small number of residential customers. Bridgeport Utilities would like to increase the capacity of its lagoon treatment system to 5 MGD to support future needs.

In addition, the sanitary sewer system operated by the Section-Dutton utilities board is currently only available in Section and nearby unincorporated communities, Shiloh, Powell and Geraldine and Northeast Alabama Community College. It serves approximately 900 customers. The utilities board has planned improvements to the system that are estimated at \$16.5 million. This is the only system in the county serving areas east of the river. Expanding the system or development of a new system would enable growth on the east side of the county.

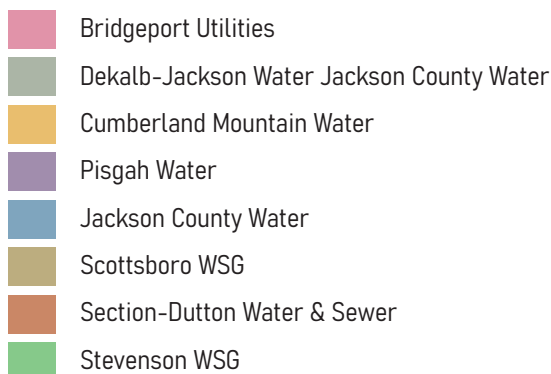
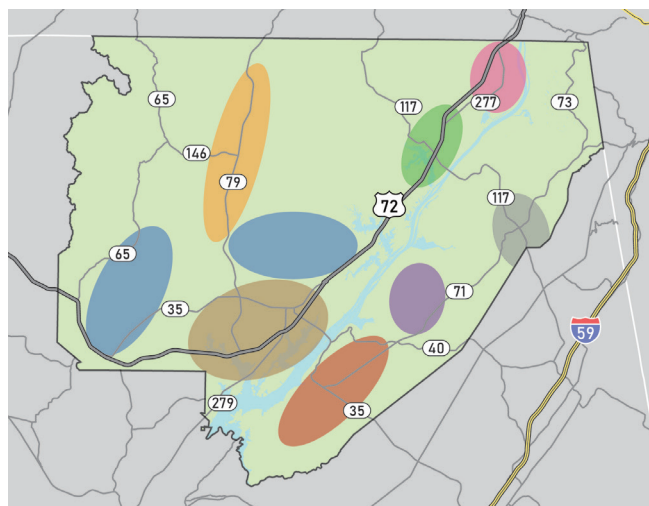
Contingent on future residential growth patterns in the Hollywood area, the sewer system operated by the Jackson County Water Authority may need to be expanded. As an alternative, it may be possible for Scottsboro WSG to provide sewer to the area.

Objective IN4

Improve water services

Jackson County is served by eight separate water systems including Bridgeport, Stevenson, Scottsboro, Pisgah, Dekalb-Jackson, Cumberland Mountain, Jackson County, and Section-Dutton. The systems serving central areas of the county and the Section and Pisgah areas have experienced growth in residential customers over the last ten years. Each of these have indicated capacity to absorb additional residential development. However, adding new industries and other high water-use customers would strain some of these systems.

Figure 12 Water systems



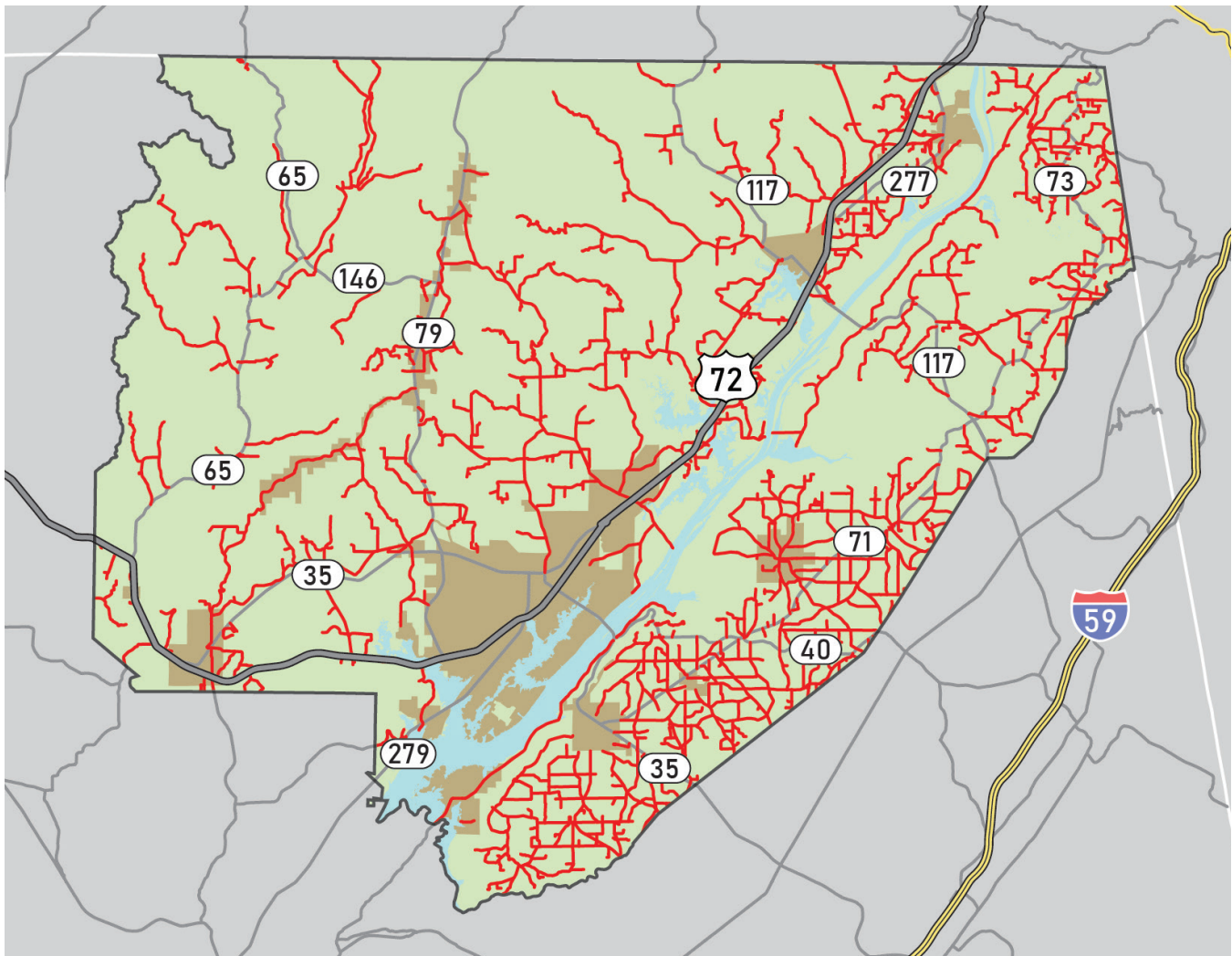
Scottsboro WSG intends to install booster pumps that will help to provide water—during high demand periods—to the Jackson County and Cumberland Mountain systems, which currently purchase water from Scottsboro. Interconnecting the water systems throughout the County would provide redundancy during times of high water use and in the event a water system experiences problems. Opportunities to improve redundancy include connections between Jackson County and Stevenson and between Scottsboro and Section (requiring crossing the river).

Bridgeport Utilities has proposed to increase capacity to 7.0 MGD with the possibility of increasing to 15 MGD long-term. Bridgeport has not seen any residential growth in recent years, but water use has increased over 20% due to growth of existing industries.

The Jackson County Water system would need to improve the system to support any major industrial growth including upgrading water mains, booster pumping stations and storage tanks.

In addition to the proposed sewer system expansion in Woodville, the town has also studied water system improvements that would further support development along US 72 and meet fire suppression needs. The proposed water system improvements are estimated at \$3 million.

Figure 13 County Roads



Objective IN5

Accelerate county road improvements

In terms of land area, Jackson County is one of the largest counties in Alabama. Many of the roads serving the county—approximately 1,023 miles—are the responsibility of Jackson County. Due to limited annual revenues, the County is unable to keep pace with needed maintenance of county roads. This is a critical need for the unincorporated and incorporated areas that rely on county-maintained roads, both for development purposes as well as emergency response.

Between 2021 and 2023, the County accelerated roadwork to between 20 and 28 miles of repaving with the help of grants and other “one-time”

funding sources. The County Engineer has estimated that the County would need to resurface 50–60 miles of roadway per year to keep them in good condition. To achieve this could cost over \$20 million annually, not including bridge maintenance.

Given that the County's most recent annual budget was \$29 million, it is clear that the County must find additional revenue to keep pace with the need for road improvements.



INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Increasing industrial development in the county is intended to expand economic opportunities and improve wages for residents. While a high percentage of residents work in the manufacturing sector, according to US Census estimates, many of those commute to jobs outside the county.

Jackson County features several **assets** that are attractive to industries that may consider locating or expanding in the county:

- Strong workforce development programs, including the new Kevin Dukes Career and Innovation Academy and Northeast Alabama Community College
- An “interstate-quality” US highway that provides access to Huntsville and to Chattanooga (via I-24)
- Central location between several metropolitan hubs, an area referred to by economic development entities in the region as “freight alley”
- Well-operated airport in Scottsboro capable of serving industry needs
- Low taxes and low cost-of-living for workers
- Strong broadband coverage
- Supportive government and business environment
- Quality of life amenities attractive to industries and their workers

Most existing and potential industrial development is focused along US 72 and in the center of the county. With proximity to I-59, opportunities for industrial growth in some eastern parts of the county could rise in the future with strategic infrastructure development.

However, there are several **constraints** that are limiting economic development opportunities:

- No interstate access (despite the benefits of US 72)
- No port along the Tennessee River for industrial or agricultural transport purposes
- Low labor force participation rate (54.7% as of June 2024 compared to 57.5% for the state)
- Poor cellular service in many areas of the county
- Limited natural gas supply
- Sewer availability and capacity in potential growth areas
- Few childcare options for working parents
- Limited housing supply
- Limited available buildings for industrial use
- Poor condition of County roads and bridges

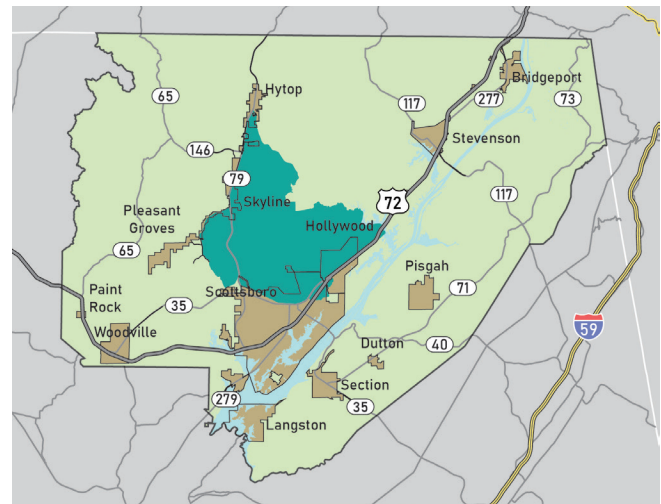


Figure 14 Federal Opportunity Zone

Objective ID1

Increase Labor Force Participation

Currently, labor force participation in Jackson County is just below that of the state average. And, Alabama's participation rate has remained about five percentage rates below the national average for over ten years. According to the Alabama Policy Institute, some of the top factors limiting labor force participation in Alabama are:

- Childcare costs and availability
- Higher rates of incarcerated persons and persons with criminal records
- Addiction to opioids and other drugs
- Automation and globalization
- Young people staying in school longer
- Increased unemployment benefits (particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic)
- Mismatch with skills desired by industries
- Individuals desires for higher wages and reluctance to "settle" for lower-paying jobs

These factors are present in Jackson County to varying degrees. Of those, only a few can be influenced locally.

"...estimates state that as much as 43% of the decline in men's labor force participation rate between 1999 and 2015 is due to the opioid crisis."

-Workforce Participation Report, March 2024, Alabama Policy Institute

Childcare Services

Jackson County, local industries and other local and regional partners should consider financial assistance to reduce costs to working parents for childcare. Ultimately, this will encourage greater private investment in childcare services, which is lacking throughout the county. The Community Action Partnership of North Alabama operates Early Head Start and Head Start programs in Scottsboro and Stevenson. At the state level, Alabama's Commission on 21st Century Workforce has recommended tax credits for employers that contribute financially to workers' childcare costs.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Increased substance abuse treatment and mental health services can reduce labor participation issues related to drug addiction and crime. A significant percentage of criminal convictions are drug-related. Pretrial diversion programs have increased throughout the state. These options are available through the Jackson County Drug Court established in 2007. Behavioral health facilities are available in Scottsboro and Bridgeport.



The newly constructed Creekside Behavioral Health Center in Bridgeport offers comprehensive, in-patient mental health services.

Objective ID2

Increase Available Land and Buildings

There are currently eight available properties being marketed by the Jackson County EDA, including a 500,000 sf building in Stevenson and undeveloped sites in Stevenson and Bridgeport and at the Jackson County Industrial Park, Scottsboro Industrial Park, and Northeast Alabama Technology Site near Dutton. Despite these assets, there are no sites available west of Scottsboro, a portion of the county that would be attractive to suppliers and other businesses connected to industries in Madison County. This area is constrained due to sewer limitations and a lack of large properties available for purchase. Expansion of the sewer system (described in the Infrastructure section) will make property along US 72 more valuable, which could facilitate land sales for industrial and other development purposes.



Workforce training at Northeast Alabama Community College

Other Initiatives

Build on Workforce Development

Jackson County is home to a cutting edge workforce development facility operated by Jackson County Schools. Participation in the Kevin Dukes Career and Innovation Academy's programs is available to high school students in county schools as well as to those enrolled in Scottsboro City Schools. In addition, the county benefits from workforce programs available through the Northeast Alabama Community College, which has developed a strong partnership with the County schools program. The Innovation Academy intends to evolve its courses to meet the needs of area industries and to stay on top of changing technologies. Workforce development and placement is also supported by the Alabama Industrial Development Training agency

Continue Regional Partnerships

Jackson County's economic development representatives work hand in hand with their peers in other parts of the region, including the North Alabama Industrial Development Association, the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, the Huntsville/Madison County and Greater Chattanooga Chambers of Commerce and Thrive Regional Partnership. This involvement with regional economic development programs raises Jackson County's profile, increases lobbying power and allows access to economic development leads that be best met by sites and other characteristics only Jackson County can offer.

Manufacturers Association

Manufacturers and other area industries may benefit from the creation of an association. Such an organization could serve as an advocacy group on legislative, regulatory and other interests and needs of area industries and businesses. A manufacturers association could also provide an interface between industries and workforce development programs and other government and nonprofit organizations on industrial development matters.



AGRICULTURE

Agriculture remains an important part of the County economy and its monetary value has increased over the last ten years, which is reflected in \$276 million in sales in 2022. Most farming in Jackson County is carried out by families and includes production of hay, soybeans, corn, cattle and poultry. Three initiatives have been identified that would increase the profitability and sustainability of farming: creation of a river port, recruitment of one or more processing facilities and development of an agricultural center that provides services to farmers and programs that promote farming.

Agricultural activity in Jackson County comprises almost 700,000 acres with two-thirds of that devoted to timber and the remainder to farmland.

Objective AG1 Develop River Port

There is no operating public port in Jackson County. A facility is needed to support barge access for area farmers to transport crops, fertilizer, and other farm products. The Economic Development Association has evaluated three sites for the development of a port. One of these sites is a property along the Tennessee River in Bridgeport owned by the State Docks Authority. However, the site is likely too small and difficult to access for use as a port facility.

Approval from TVA will be required in accordance with their Reservoir Land Management Plan as sites are considered for the future port. A now defunct port authority will need to be re-established or a new authority created, depending on the ultimate location for the port. State legislation was approved in 2023 to support and incentivize use of Alabama's ports for manufacturing, warehousing and distribution.



The Port of Decatur is the only facility of its kind along the Tennessee River in Alabama. The facility is approximately 60 river miles from Jackson County. Jackson County farmers also use the closer but more limited river port in Guntersville.

An agricultural processing facility provides separation, cleaning, processing, converting, packaging, handling, storing, and other activities to prepare crops, livestock, and other agricultural products for distribution.

Objective AG2 Recruit Processing Facility

Despite the amount of livestock production in Jackson County, there are no processing facilities inside the County. This means that farmers must transport livestock a greater distance for processing. Due to statewide gaps in meat processing facilities, \$15 million was awarded to the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries in 2023 to provide loans to processors to expand facilities in the state.

Local access to food aggregation, processing, and distribution channels allows small and mid-sized farmers to tap into larger markets. Having a local processing facility increases access within the county to farm products raised there, which can reduce food deserts in small, rural communities.

Jackson County EDA and the Cooperative Extension Service have noted that a beef or pork processing facility would have a positive impact on livestock farming. Such a facility will require natural gas and sewer services, which will need to be taken into account, in the recruitment process.

Lake Majestik Farms, Flat Rock



The United States Department of Agricultural offers funding specifically targeted to the development of agricultural innovation centers. With a \$1.5million grant from USDA, the University of Georgia is launching the Value-Addition Institute for Business Expansion (VIBE), a new center for rural food business assistance and resources.

Objective AG3

Develop Agricultural Center

Development of an agricultural center could bolster farming activity in Jackson County and provide a variety of resources to local farmers. An agricultural center could include a variety of services to sustain and improve innovation and profitability in local farming activities, including best practice and business courses, farming education for hobbyists and children, and promotional events and activities. Agricultural centers can also provide resources on “value-added” processing, manufacturing, processing and marketing.



The North Alabama Agriplex in Cullman was created in 2000 to support farming and showcase the area's agricultural heritage. The campus is expanding with a new 8,500 sf building housing a community hub, a teaching kitchen and administrative offices.



Lane Agri-Park in Murfreesboro, Tennessee offers agricultural education programs in association with the University of Tennessee extension service and features a farmer's market, livestock barn, horse arena and community and event spaces.



Goose Pond Island, Scottsboro

HOUSING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Development of new housing and businesses is largely a product of market forces, though government policies, investments and regulations can encourage or discourage private investment. Retail shopping, restaurants and similar businesses grow where population and income levels are sufficient to support them.

Despite many positive attributes that make Jackson County an attractive place to live, population growth has been relatively flat. According to the US Census, countywide population has increased by about four percent over the last forty years. Only the City of Scottsboro has experienced any substantial growth during that time frame. As a result, most new business development in the county has occurred there. However, there is evidence that the population has been rising in Scottsboro as well as the central and southern portions of the county south of the Tennessee River. This is seen in new residential customers in the areas served by the Scottsboro, Jackson County, Section-Dutton, Pisgah and Cumberland Mountain water authorities. Such increases have not been experienced in the easternmost parts of the county.

This pattern is consistent with the expectation that growth that has been occurring in nearby Madison County would spill over into Jackson County. Some portion of the recent population increases—according to local officials in these

areas—appears to be people moving to Jackson County from out-of-state, particularly retirees attracted to the area's low cost of living. This anecdotal information is reinforced by the fact that, while new residents are appearing, enrollment in Jackson County and Scottsboro City Schools has declined by about ten percent over the last ten years. Because these emerging households are scattered across the county and many of them, reportedly, are smaller households, their effect on potential business development may be somewhat blunted.

Nonetheless, Jackson County has the potential to attract families and younger households as growth spreading outward from Madison County continues. Should population increases emerge more clearly in Jackson County's municipalities, it is more likely to produce demographic patterns that will encourage private investment in new businesses.

There are several ways through which Jackson County and its municipalities can encourage residential growth and, thereby, development of new businesses. These include ongoing efforts to recruit industries and increase wages and economic opportunities for residents; marketing the County's many quality of life attributes; and investing in facilities, services and infrastructure necessary to attract and support growth.

Payne's Drug Store, Scottsboro



Objective HB1

Market the County as a Great Place to Live

Jackson County has many positive attributes that make it a desirable place to live. Despite this, the county appears to have been overlooked for some time. Given the explosive growth experienced in Madison County, Jackson County has the potential to draw a larger percentage of that growth by raising its profile within the region.

The county's housing inventory is limited. With only few exceptions, housing construction, particularly single-family subdivision and multi-family development, has been modest in the last several decades. By marketing its competitive advantages, Jackson County can increase interest among would-be residents, which can in turn spur residential construction:

- The county has a cost of living index lower than most other places in the region.
- Jackson County Schools have comparable ratings to those in Madison County and higher scores compared to other school systems in the region.
- The county has a low crime rate comparable with that of Limestone County but much lower than Madison and Marshall Counties.
- Jackson County has outstanding outdoor recreational amenities, including boating, fishing and other river-based activities as well as hunting, birding, caving and hiking.
- There is a strong sense of community and traditional small town values that will be attractive to many prospective residents.

Jackson County needs a larger supply of single-family housing and other residential options to facilitate economic development and to provide housing choices for its young residents as they enter the workplace.



Cell tower, Paint Rock



Vacant historic building, Stevenson



Healthpointe Primary Care, Scottsboro



PreK class at Rosalie Elementary School

Objective HB2 Make the County an Even Greater Place to Live

While Jackson County does have many assets supportive of residential growth, there are issues that must be addressed to optimize its growth potential. Below are some of these issues, several of which are discussed in other sections of this plan:

- Dependable cellular phone service is a must for residents, businesses and industries. Provider coverage and signal strength are an issue in several areas of the county.
- While the image of the county along its major roads is generally positive, abandoned homes, overgrown properties, litter and other blighting conditions are present in areas that may be discouraging private investment in new homes and businesses.
- Increased sewer coverage will be needed to support residential development in Woodville and other potential growth areas.
- Natural gas is a desirable utility for residential development, however, access to natural gas is limited in many parts of the county.
- Healthcare services have improved through the acquisition of the Highlands Medical Center by the Huntsville Hospital system; however, access to healthcare services outside of Scottsboro continue to be limited.
- Childcare services are limited, which can discourage working parents from staying in or locating to Jackson County.
- Maintenance of county roads and bridges is a visible issue that detracts from the image of Jackson County.



Cathedral Caverns

TOURISM



Jackson County Park



Unclaimed Baggage



Bridgeport Depot Museum

Jackson County is home to a wealth of events and destinations that attract visitors throughout the year. Approximately 70 fishing tournaments are held along the Tennessee River each year. Numerous caves, wildlife management areas, refuges and trails draw hunters, spelunkers, birders and hikers. The county also features historic sites, racing venues, golf courses and unique cultural attractions that add to tourist activity. Unclaimed Baggage—the nation's only lost luggage retailer—draws roughly one million visitors annually.

While tourist-related business activity has grown to contribute upwards of \$87 million dollars annually, there is still room for growth. There are several ways in which the County can achieve greater economic value through tourism, including marketing, wayfinding and lodging. In addition, development of one or more additional destinations along the river could have a substantial impact on visitor activity. A list of the county's tourism assets (shown in Figure 18) is provided in the Appendix.

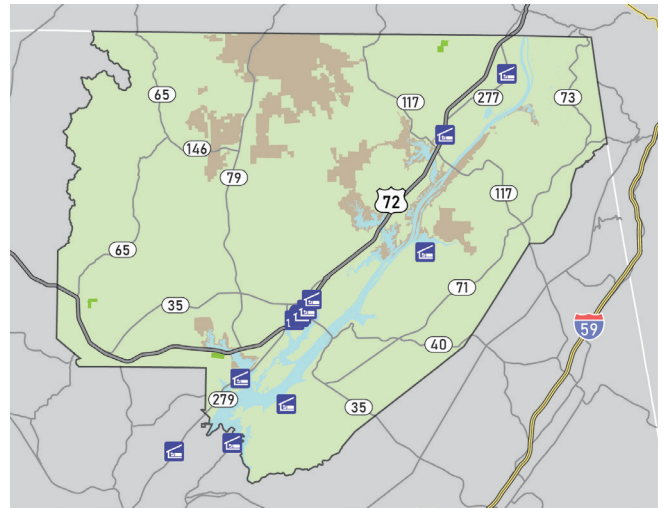


Figure 15 Lodging facilities

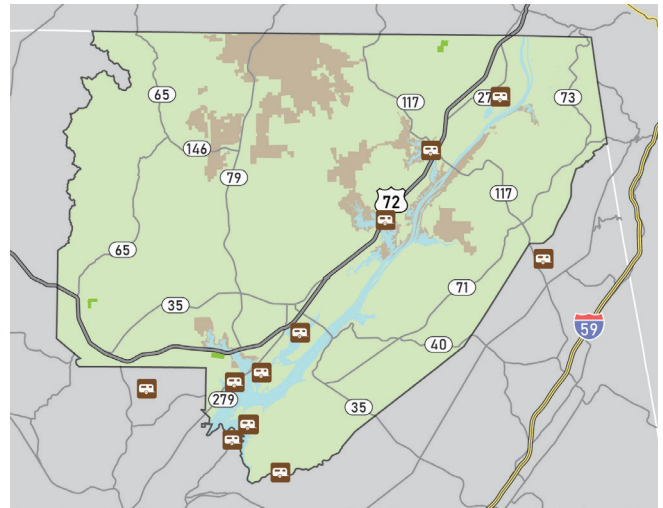


Figure 16 RV Parks and campgrounds

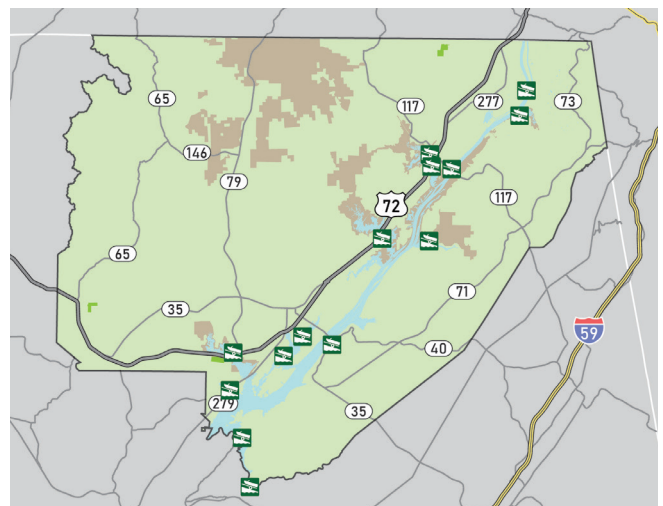
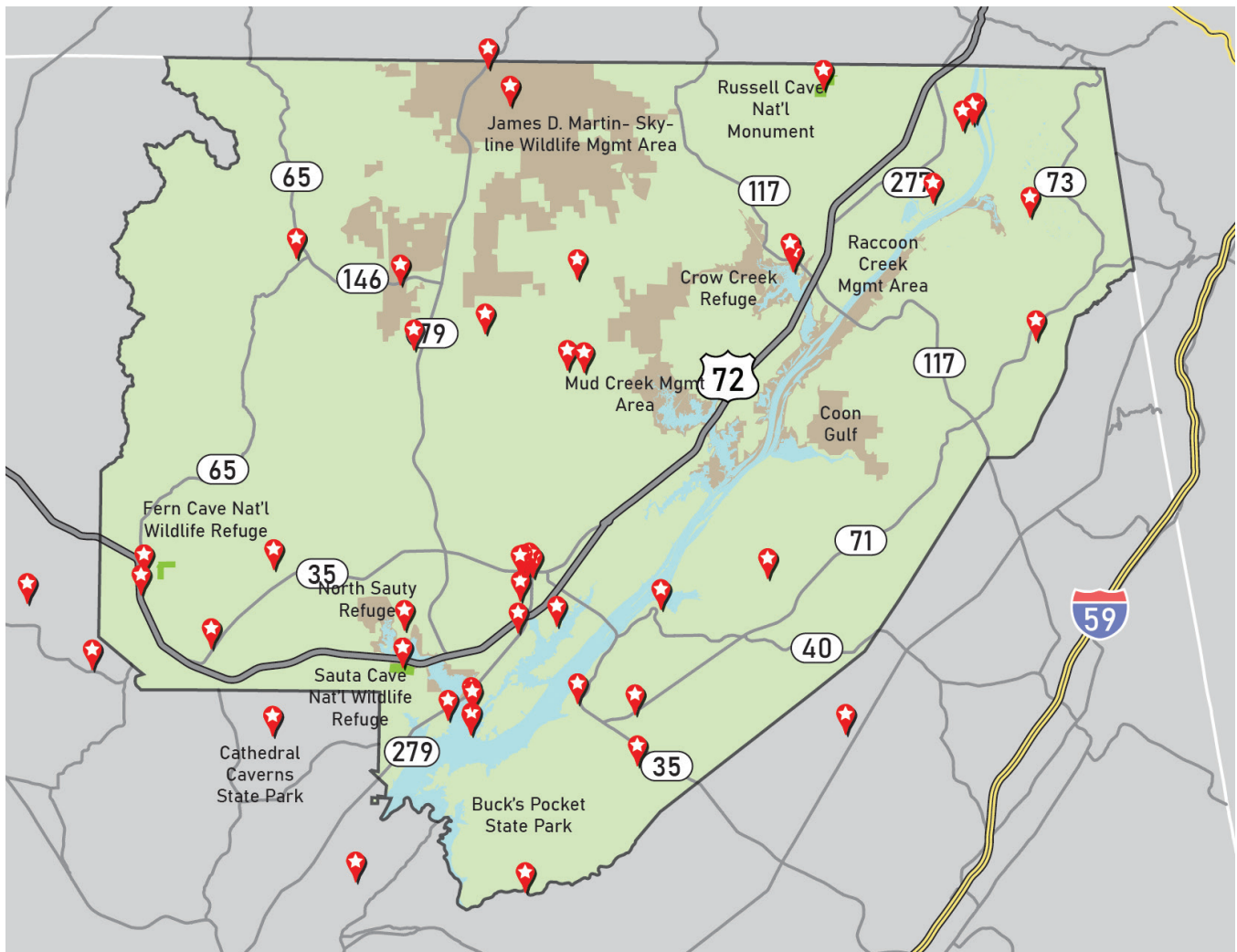


Figure 17 Public boat launches

Figure 18 Tourist Destinations



Objective T01 Accelerate Marketing

The Mountain Lakes Chamber of Commerce is developing new branding for the county to help attract industries and businesses and increase tourism. To complement this effort, a comprehensive tourism marketing plan should be developed with strategies targeted to all types of potential visitors.

Jackson County is already a popular destination for hunting and fishing. Greater tourism potential could be realized if more of those visitors bring their families and stay longer, which will result in more local spending. That can be done by marketing other activities that may be of interest to spouses and children or to the whole family when not hunting and fishing. The County has a

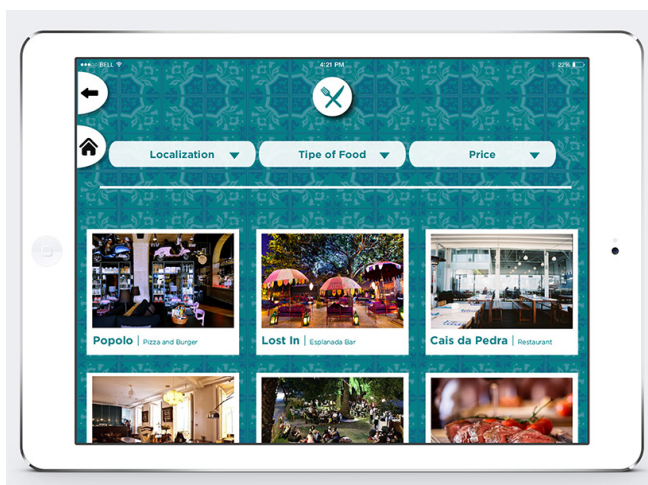
wealth of other outdoor activities, shopping, historic sites and cultural activities to keep visitors engaged during their stays. A similar approach can be taken with cavers, hikers and other visitors. Coordinated cross marketing by individual attractions will optimize this potential.

Jackson County can also be marketed as a day trip destination for those visiting regional attractions like the US Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, the Chattanooga Aquarium, and Rock City. The county's tourism marketing strategies should be coordinated with state and regional efforts such as the Tennessee River Line, Singing River Trail, and Alabama's Scenic Byway and Birding Trail programs.



Above: Vehicular wayfinding sign in Hendersonville North Carolina.

Below: Tourist-oriented wayfinding app



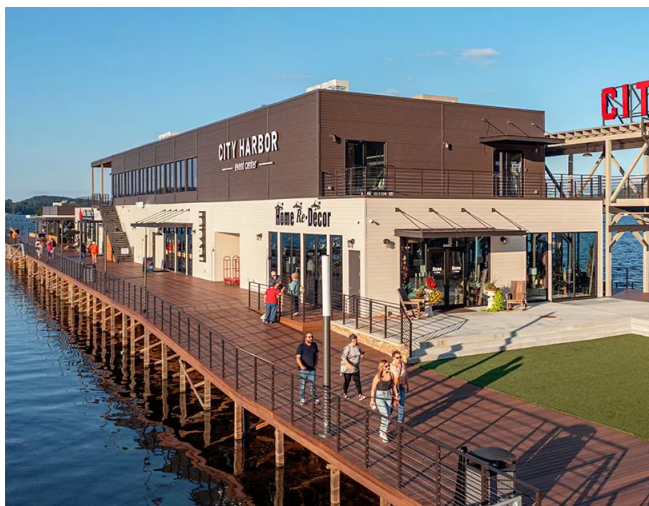
Objective T02 Develop a Wayfinding System

A wayfinding system would serve multiple purposes for Jackson County. In addition to helping visitors navigate to their destinations, a attractive, well-organized signage system will alert visitors to other amenities and help give a strong, positive impression of the County. The system should include directional signs for motorists as well as an interactive wayfinding app that offers in-depth information about each site and nearby lodging, shopping, entertainment and attractions that might be of interest to visitors based on their planned destinations.

The first step in planning a wayfinding system is conducting a comprehensive inventory of all the destinations that might be included on vehicular directional signs. This would include:

- Outdoor recreation sites
- Boat launches/river access points
- RV campgrounds, hotels and other lodging facilities
- Historic sites
- Cultural sites and entertainment amenities
- Wildlife management areas and refuges for hunting and birding
- Shopping and dining areas

Following the inventory, wayfinding routes and sign locations are planned, and the sign system is designed. Signs should incorporate branding graphics consistent with those used to market county tourism online and in print media.



Nearby Guntersville's City Harbor development is an example, mentioned by community stakeholders, of an attraction that could serve many types of tourists visiting Jackson County. City Harbor offers lodging, restaurants, entertainment and special events that draw tourists as well as residents.



The Florence and Lauderdale County Visitors Center features exhibits including the area's music heritage, Wilson Dam, the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Rosenbaum Home, Native American artifacts, and tributes to notable residents. The center also features an aquarium with local fish and information on fishing Pickwick and Wilson Lakes.

Objective T03

Support Tourist-related Development

Tourism relies on existing attractions and assets rather than "build it and they will come" projects. And, while Jackson County already has many tourism assets, there are gaps that could be filled by a mix of public and private investment.

Tourist Hub

Countywide tourist activity would benefit from development of an attraction along the river that would serve as a nexus for visitors, potentially offering lodging, entertainment and dining. Several ideas were proposed in community and stakeholder meetings, ranging from a casino to a water amusement park. Goose Pond Island would make a great location for such an amenity.

Obtaining land along the river has been an obstacle previously. TVA controls much of the land along the river and does not, typically, sell riverfront property. The authority will offer 99-year leases, which is often less desirable for private developers.

Lodging

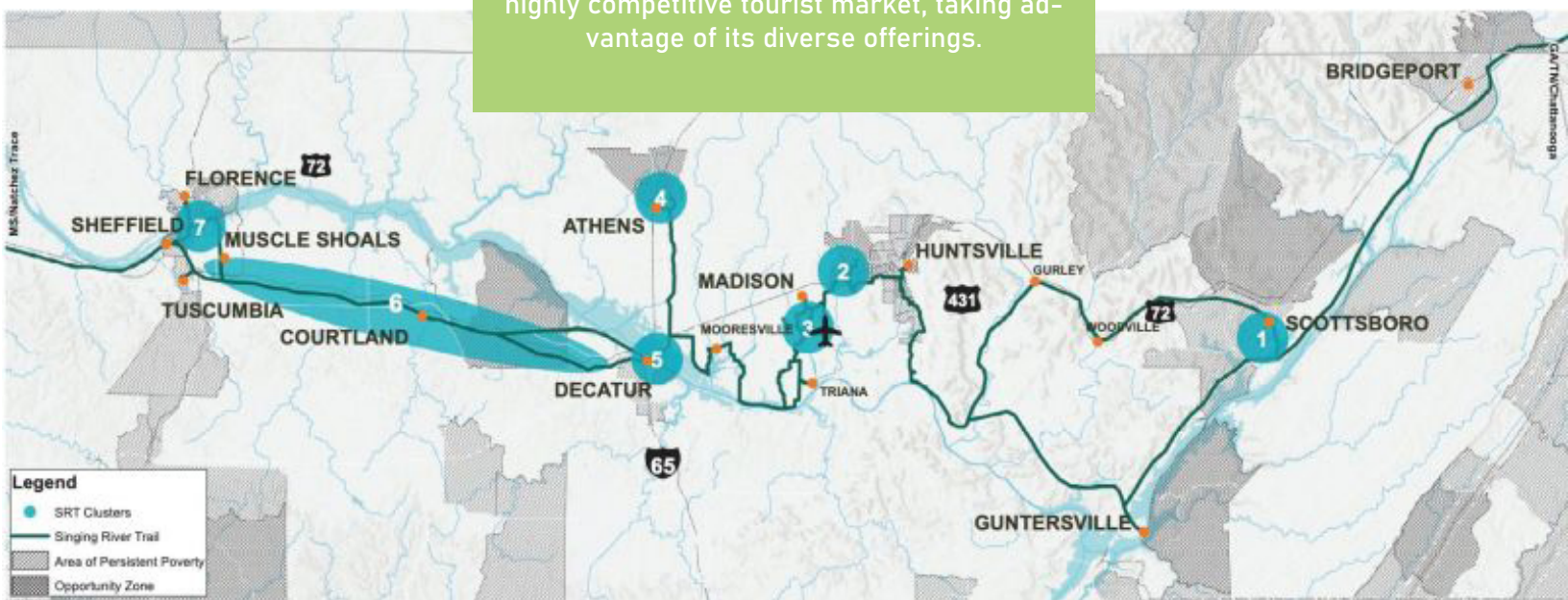
Tourism in Jackson County has historically focused around hunting, fishing and caving. For multi-day stays, these visitors' needs have been filled by cabins, RV parks and more recently short-term rentals. But, as Jackson County has attracted large fishing tournaments, hotels and other lodging options have begun to grow. Additional lodging amenities will help the county attract visitors for longer stays.

Visitors Center

Jackson County should have a visitors center in a high visibility location. Such a facility would offer information about the county's attractions and amenities, a gift shop and restrooms, giving visitors a comfortable place to get oriented and learn about experiences they can add to their agenda. A permanent location near a primary travel artery or adjacent to another major attraction would be desirable. In the short-term, the visitor space in the Chamber should be improved and advertised online to visitors.

Tennessee RiverLine is a regional program intended to develop a multimodal system of trail experiences along the Tennessee River from its formation in Knoxville, TN, to its confluence with the Ohio River in Paducah, KY.

Tennessee RiverLine worked with Jackson County communities to develop concepts for riverfront infrastructure and local parks to encourage recreation and tourism. The park concepts are included in the Addendum to this plan.

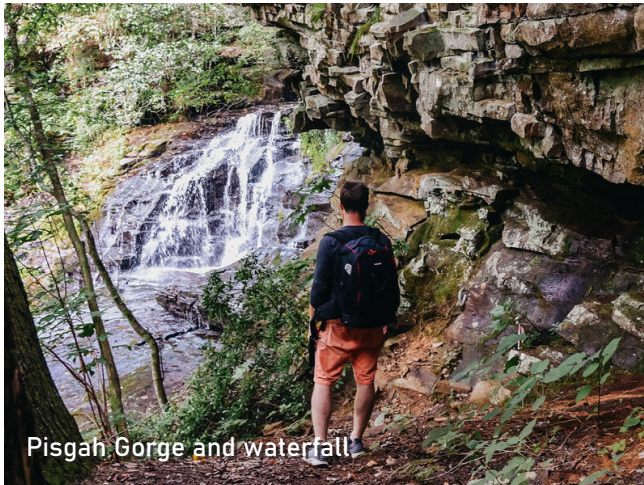


The Singing River Trail is a proposed 200-mile greenway system intended to create new health and wellness, educational, economic, tourism, and entrepreneurial opportunities for North Alabama communities. Construction has already begun in Madison County and funding has been secured for segments in the Decatur area.



Eel grass being removed from river

There are approximately 360 short-term rentals in the Jackson County area advertised through Airbnb and VRBO. Only those in Scottsboro are reflected in tourism revenues because lodging taxes are not collected in unincorporated areas.



Pisgah Gorge and waterfall

Other Tourism Initiatives

Eel Grass

An invasive species of eel grass has emerged along the Tennessee River, and in particular, in the Guntersville reservoir. The rapidly growing aquatic plant is disrupting fishing, boating and other river-based recreational and tourist activities in Jackson County. While TVA has worked to mitigate the problem—having removed more than 120,000 cubic yards of floating eel grass—a permanent solution is still being sought. A three-year study is being conducted by Mississippi State University to identify the best methods to remedy the problem. In the meantime TVA are treating the shoreline and, in combination with and the My Lake Guntersville organization, removing the plant during its growing season.

Sales and Lodging Taxes

To benefit from tourist activity, Jackson County should adopt a sales tax and business licensing program. This will provide much needed revenue to help the County fund essential services to its residents. By creating a business licensing program, the County can collect lodging taxes on short-term rentals and other lodging providers.

Access to Outdoor Attractions

While the county has several public boat launches providing access to the river, some caving and hiking areas are on private land or do not have secure access points. The county should work with private landowners to assure safe, legal access to these sites. This may include improving and building additional trails and other physical improvements. Extension of the proposed Singing River will provide more cycling opportunities and trail-based recreation and links between several county destinations. The State of Alabama recently created the Sweet Trails Alabama funding program to accelerate construction of hiking and biking facilities to take advantage of the state's outdoor recreation assets.

PROJECTING GROWTH

Population projections were prepared to understand the County's potential for growth through 2040 and to gauge infrastructure needs to support possible growth.

Several data sets were analyzed to uncover long-term trends, such as countywide population change since 1870, as well as more recent trends—changes in school enrollment and housing development over the last several years. Multiple data sources—growth in water service customers, new housing appearing in tax assessor records, and changes in County and Scottsboro City Schools enrollment—were investigated to determine whether new population growth has occurred in recent years that has not been reflected in the 2020 Census or American Community Survey (ACS) estimates.

School Enrollment

School enrollment data from the last ten years showed that both Jackson County and Scottsboro City Schools have seen declines in enrollment over the last ten years. Enrollment in County schools has decreased by 9.9%, while enrollment in Scottsboro City Schools declined by 10.2% since 2014. Population projections based on this data would indicate a loss in population in the future or, at a minimum, a decline in the number of households with school-aged children.

Housing Trends

According to County Tax Assessor data, there has been an increase of 331 homes in the County tax rolls between 2019 and 2023. Two-thirds of those homes were constructed in Scottsboro. On the surface, this would indicate that housing, and therefore, population is increasing. However, there are other variables that limits the reliability of this dataset, on its own, as a basis for population estimates.

Census and ACS estimates indicate that total County housing stock has increased only marginally (0.3%) since 2000, while the percentage of homes that have become vacant in that time-frame has increased from 10.4% to over 12%. While new homes may have emerged on tax rolls since 2019, some portion of existing homes are likely to have become vacant during the same time period, making it difficult to determine a net increase in homes, and thus, population.

Household size, which could be used to estimate population added from new housing units, has declined in Jackson County since 2000. This is a trend seen in neighboring counties as well as at the state level. In Jackson County 1- and 2-person households represented the majority of households (60-65%) between 2000-2020. 1-person households have steadily increased while 4-person and larger households have decreased.

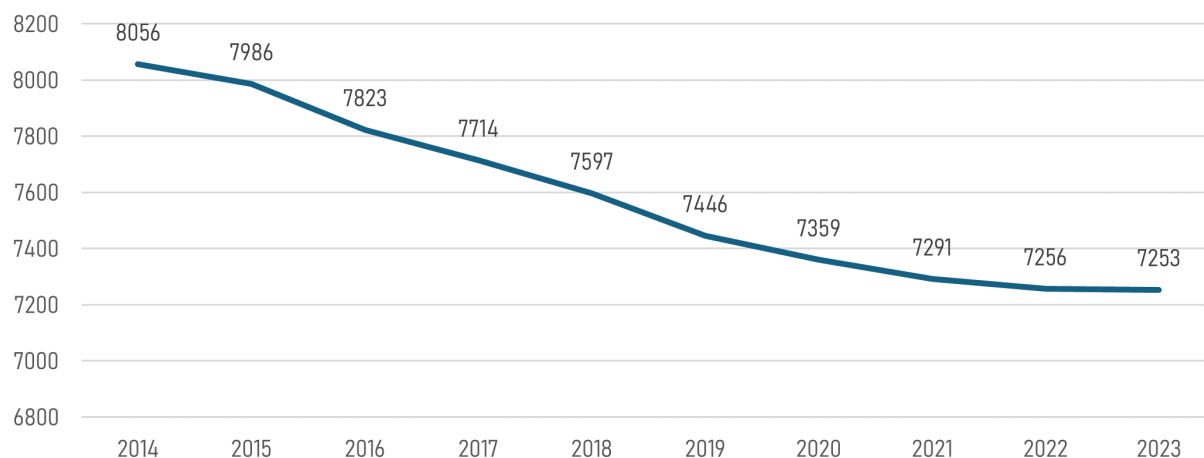


Figure 19 Jackson County and Scottsboro City Schools Total Enrollment 2014-2023

However, there has been fluctuation within the percentages of 2- and 3-person households during this timeframe, which makes it difficult to estimate household size for new homes.

Given school enrollment trends, population increases that might be represented by the addition of new homes appear to be offset by some combination of diminishing household sizes (1- and 2-person households) and increasing number of vacant homes during the same time period. Either or both of these changes would match with the decline in school enrollment over the last ten years.

Area Water Systems Data

In addition to growth in housing stock, another dataset that was evaluated to determine recent trends in housing and population growth is the number of residential customers in Jackson County served by area water systems. Data collected indicates positive trends in housing and population growth in central portions of the county and south of the river.

This dataset shows an increase of about 1,200 new water customers over the last five years, or about 240 households per year. The discrepancy between the number of new homes estimated by Tax Assessor data—331 in the last five years—and the 1,200 new water system customers should be noted. Some of this may be explained by the reuse of formerly vacant homes. Because the County does not require building permits, there is not a means to verify this activity in unincorporated areas.

There are various factors that may explain the decline in school enrollment during the same time period. These include the: new residential customers are households without school-aged children, overall decline in household sizes countywide, an increase in homeschooling, and some existing households transitioned from wells to public water systems.

CBER Projections

Projections prepared by the University of Alabama Center for Business and Economic Research in 2018 show Jackson County losing 7% of its population between 2020 and 2040. More recent projections prepared by CBER (2022) show Jackson County losing 2% of its population between 2020 and 2040. According to the 2022 CBER estimates, the County's projected population in 2040 would be 51,452.

Historic Trend Projections

Using decennial estimates of Jackson County's population, potential population increases between 2020 and 2040 were projected. Two trend lines were produced. The resulting projections indicated the County could rise to between 57,349 and 62,426 by 2040 (see Figures 20 and 21).

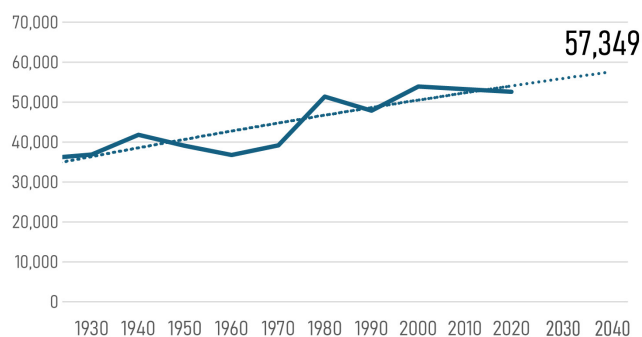


Figure 20 Historic Trend Projection 1

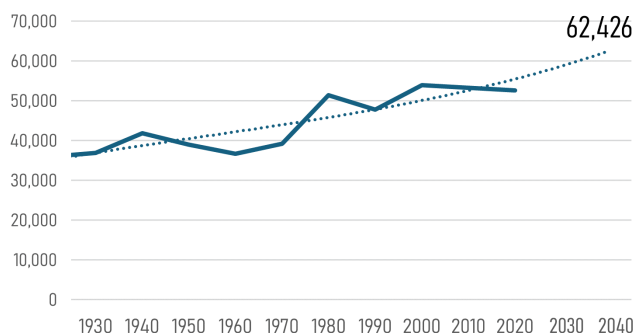


Figure 21 Historic Trend Projection 2

Regional Share Projections

The following analyses projected population growth in Jackson, Madison, Limestone and Morgan Counties. These four counties are the most likely to absorb population increases driven by ongoing economic growth in the Huntsville metro area. The first analysis used historic population trends and the second analysis used CBER's projections for the four-county area.

Using the four-county projections, estimates were developed assuming the county achieves certain percentages of four-county growth. The estimates assumed Jackson County would either **maintain** or **increase** its portion of area growth through 2040. The County's percentage of regional population has steadily declined since 1980. Maintaining the current percentage share of the regional population (7.9%), as the region grows, will see the county's population increase as the region grows.

- In 2020 Jackson County experienced its lowest percentage (7.9%) of the four-county area's population over the last fifty years. Nonetheless, if Jackson County maintains this per-

centage, continued growth in the four counties around Huntsville could result in a population of 69,198 by 2040 in Jackson County.

- Between 1970 and 2020, Jackson County averaged 10.5% of the regional population. If conditions were improved so that Jackson County could achieve this historic average, by 2040 the County's population could rise to 91,972. This level of growth is possible, but not likely without one or more significant changes occurring in the future.
- CBER projected population growth in the four counties to total 822,418 by 2040. If Jackson County maintains 7.9% of that total population, continued growth in the four counties around Huntsville could result in a population of 64,971 by 2040 in Jackson County.
- If Jackson County were able to increase its share to 10.5% (the County's 50-year average but higher than the current share), the county population could rise to 86,354 by 2040. This level of growth is also possible, but not likely without significant changes occurring to stimulate and support such growth.

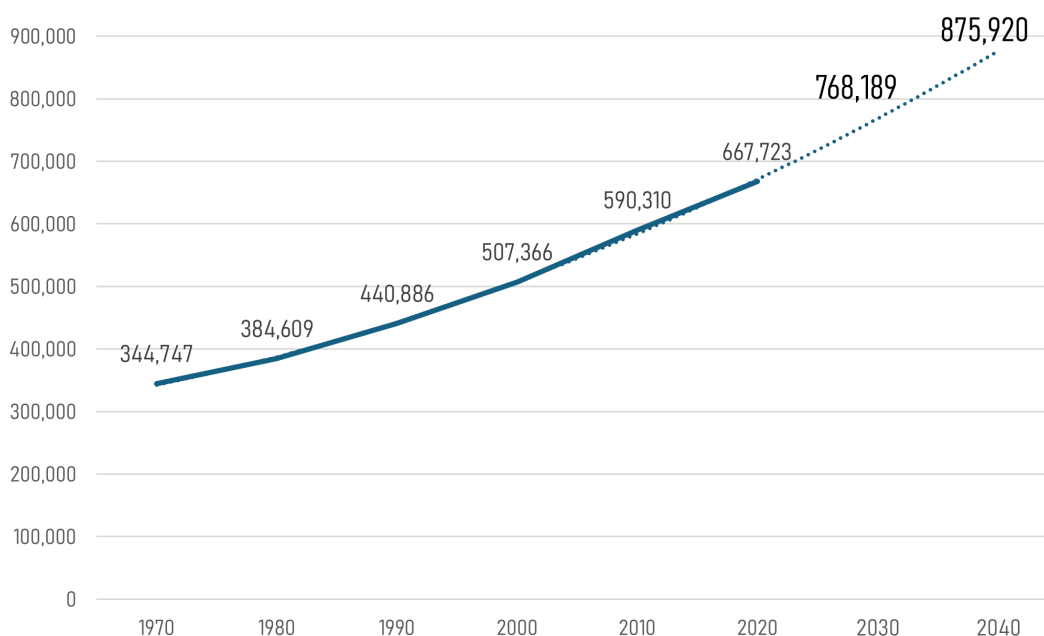


Figure 22 Four-county Historic Trend Projection

Projections Summary

The seven population projections for Jackson County through 2040 are contrasted in the chart below. The 2022 CBER projection (far right) indicates a slight loss in population. The two models based solely on Jackson County's historic population trends show positive, yet modest, growth through 2040. The remaining four models included an assumption that the County would either maintain or increase its share of future four-county population growth, one set using the CBER projections for the four-county area, and the other using projections based on historic growth patterns for the four-county area.

A 2040 population between 65,000 and 70,000 (represented in the two 7.9% regional share projections) appears to be an achievable goal and a reasonable basis upon which to evaluate infrastructure and service needs. This would represent an average annual population increase between 775 and 1,035 residents per year over the next 16 years. This rate of growth is slightly higher than the rate of growth indicated by the increase in residential water customers over the last ten years. If future growth includes a higher percentage of households with school-aged children than has been seen in the last ten years, it will reverse school enrollment decline.

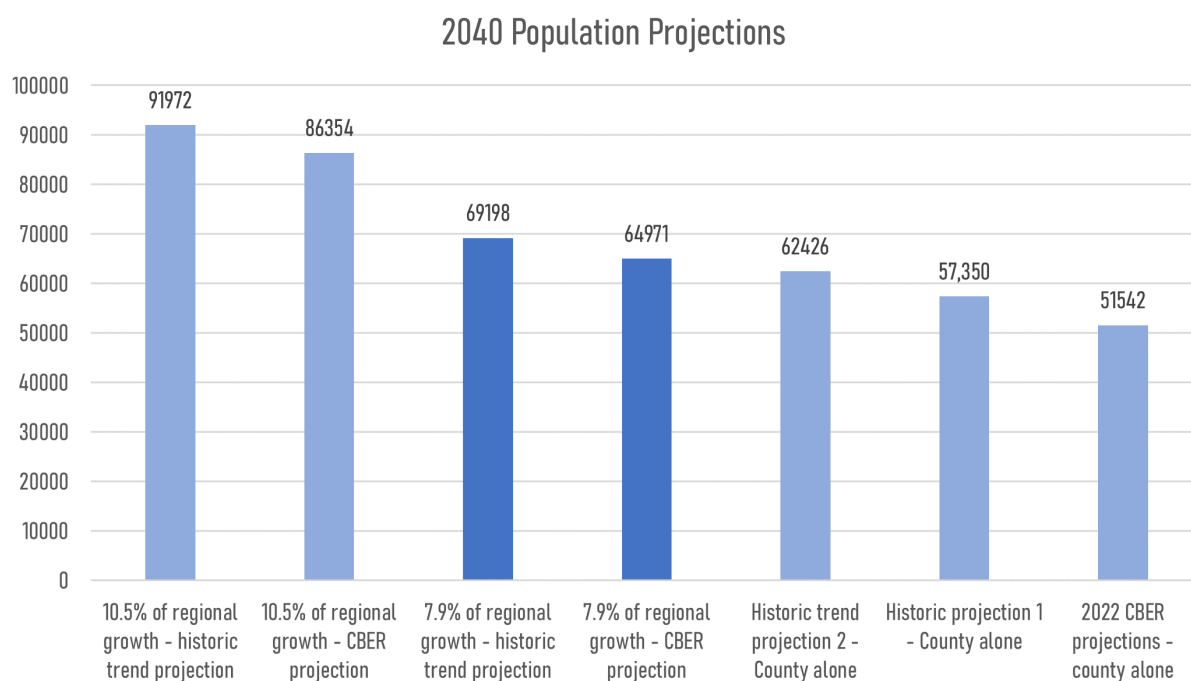


Figure 23 Comparison of Population Projections – Jackson County

Where Growth can be Expected

Economic development and associated growth centered around Huntsville has already spilled over into neighboring counties and will likely be a prime factor in population growth in Jackson County. A significant portion of the projected increase in Jackson County's population will fall into two categories: 1) commuters working in Madison County and 2) residents working in jobs in Jackson County that have been created as a result of economic expansion outward from Madison County.

The western and central areas of the county are the most accessible for those commuting into Huntsville/Madison County for work. Similarly, future industries in Jackson County that have economic or strategic connections to businesses and industries in Madison County will tend to seek locations that offer convenient transportation between the two. Therefore, it is likely then that a significant portion of population growth will occur in this area, roughly following US Highway 72 from the Madison County line to Scottsboro.

Additional growth is also likely in the Hollywood area given its accessibility by way of US 72 and its proximity to the county seat. This is supported by recent increases evidenced in water system data.



Hollywood Elementary School

Central Jackson County

Of the incorporated places in this growth area, Scottsboro and Hollywood represent the longest commute into Huntsville/Madison County. Despite this, the two communities will likely attract a high percentage of future residential growth. Scottsboro offers convenient access to goods, services and amenities that will be attractive to potential residents within Scottsboro and nearby Hollywood. In addition, the two communities have utilities capable of supporting more population growth. Scottsboro, in particular, offers infrastructure and services able to meet increased needs of a higher population.

Woodville

Woodville offers a shorter commute into Huntsville/Madison County but does not provide the same access to goods, services and community amenities as Scottsboro. Still, some may prefer Woodville's small town environment and shorter commute. Woodville's sewer system will play a major role in determining where any significant residential development occurs. Currently proposed improvements will be necessary for growth, but those plans should be tailored to ensure the sewer system can be upscaled cost-effectively as residential development interests become a reality.

While there is current opportunity for business development in Woodville, such as businesses serving nearby residents and highway commuters, residential development will be the primary driver for future business development.



Woodville Town Park

Paint Rock

The incorporated community closest to Madison County is Paint Rock. The community does not offer a sewer system, which will limit residential growth. Some residential developers (and homebuyers) may be willing to invest in lower density development that avoids the need for sewer access or may be willing to invest in decentralized wastewater treatment systems to maximize land development potential. Still, the lack of a local sewer system and limited access to goods and services will constrain Paint Rock's growth.



North Jackson County

Skyline, Hytop and other communities in northwest and north-central Jackson County are likely to experience modest residential growth in the coming years. This is supported by the increasing number of residential water customers served by the Cumberland Mountain and Jackson County water systems. Growth, however, will be limited without sewer system access that would attract subdivision development.



Skyline Commissary

Northeast Jackson County

Residential growth in Bridgeport and Stevenson has been flat or declining slightly, while business and industrial development has been more positive. This part of the county will see less of the growth rippling outward from Madison County but may be influenced by growth around Chattanooga, which is growing more slowly than Huntsville.



South of the River

Communities south of the river will experience less of projected growth but should nonetheless be expected to grow incrementally as has been seen in the water systems serving Section, Dutton, Pisgah and nearby communities. Because of its proximity to the county seat, highway accessibility and water and sewer availability, Section is likely to see more residential growth compared to other Upper Sand Mountain communities. A pump storage facility being considered by TVA could boost employment around Pisgah, which could attract new residents.



View from Weathington Park, Section

Figure 24 Steep slope areas

There are multiple factors, in addition to infrastructure, that will constrain or otherwise affect development in the County. Several of these are shown in the maps on this page. These include:

- Flood prone areas
- Steep slopes
- TVA-owned land and use restrictions
- Wildlife refuges, management areas and national park sites

As can be seen from the slope map, hilly topography dominates the northern and northwestern parts of the county. Between these hilly areas and the Tennessee River are flatter areas more conducive to development. South of the river, the Upper Sand Mountain area exhibits more rolling terrain.

Low-lying areas along the Tennessee and Paint Rock rivers include flood-prone areas. Several large flood-plain complexes are located along the creeks that drain into the Tennessee River.

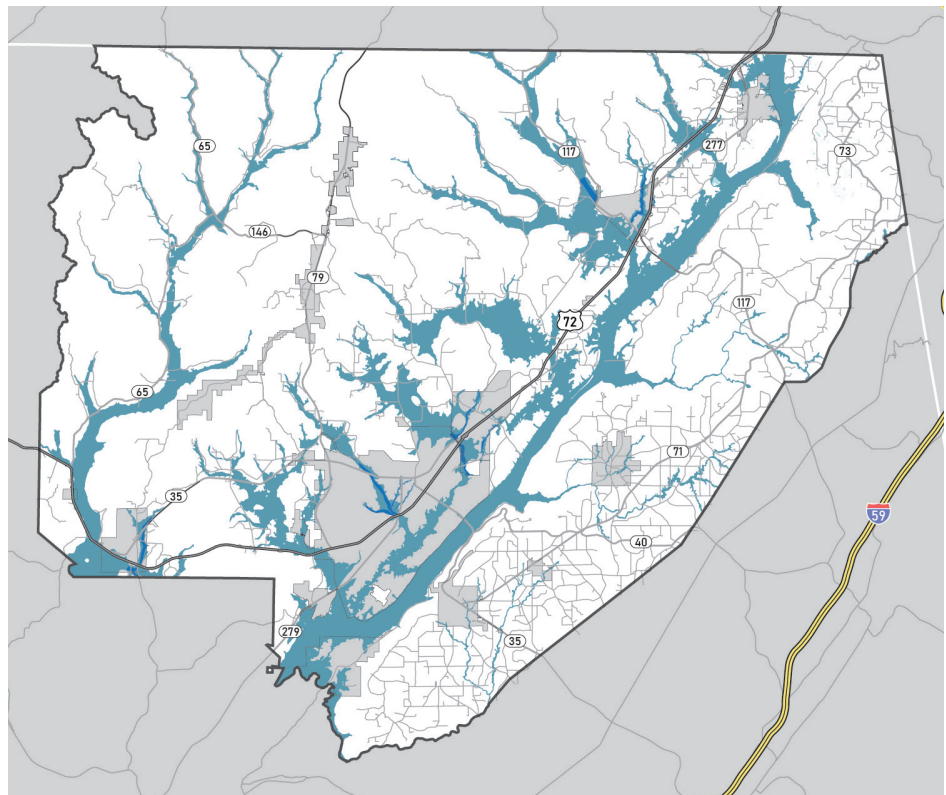
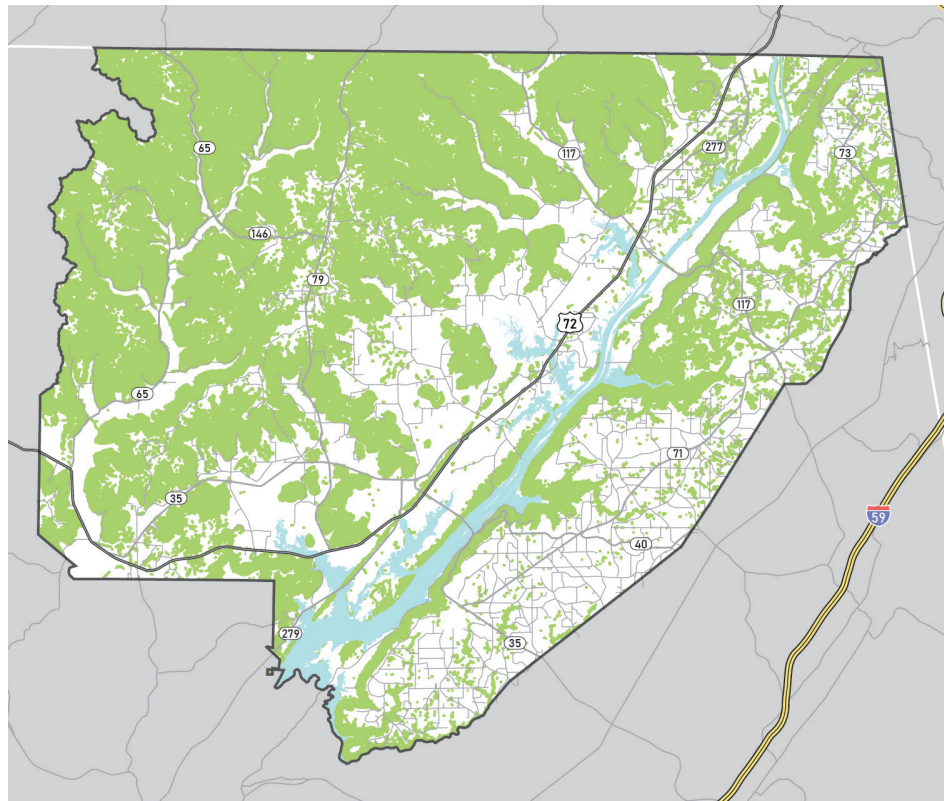


Figure 25 Flood prone areas

Figure 26 TVA Reservoir Land Planning Zones

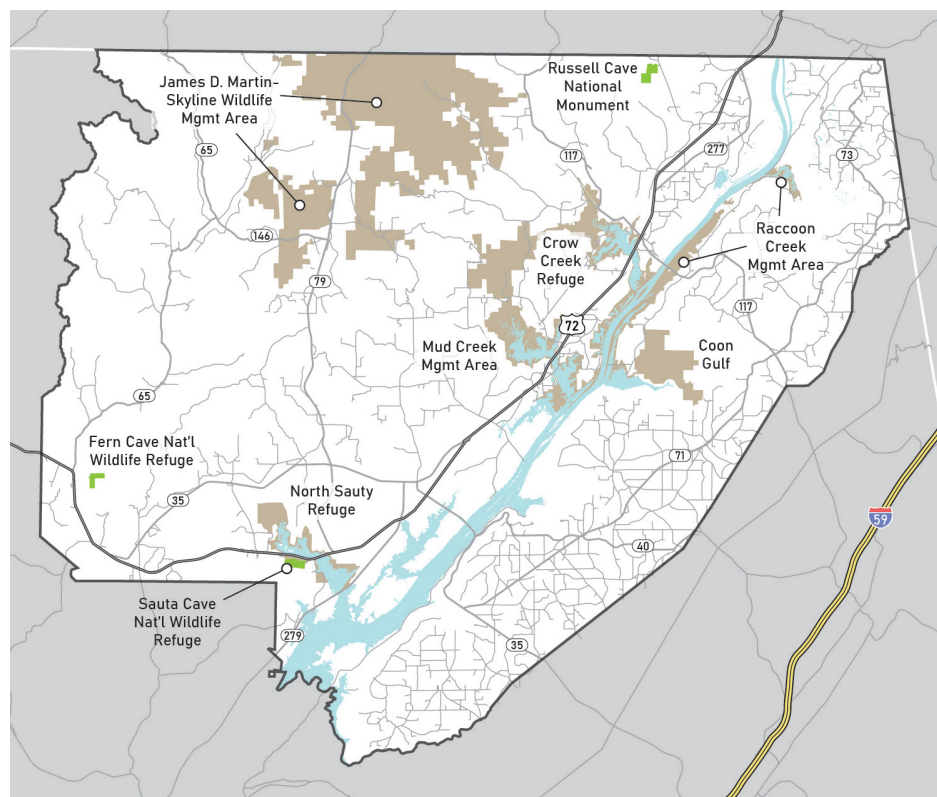
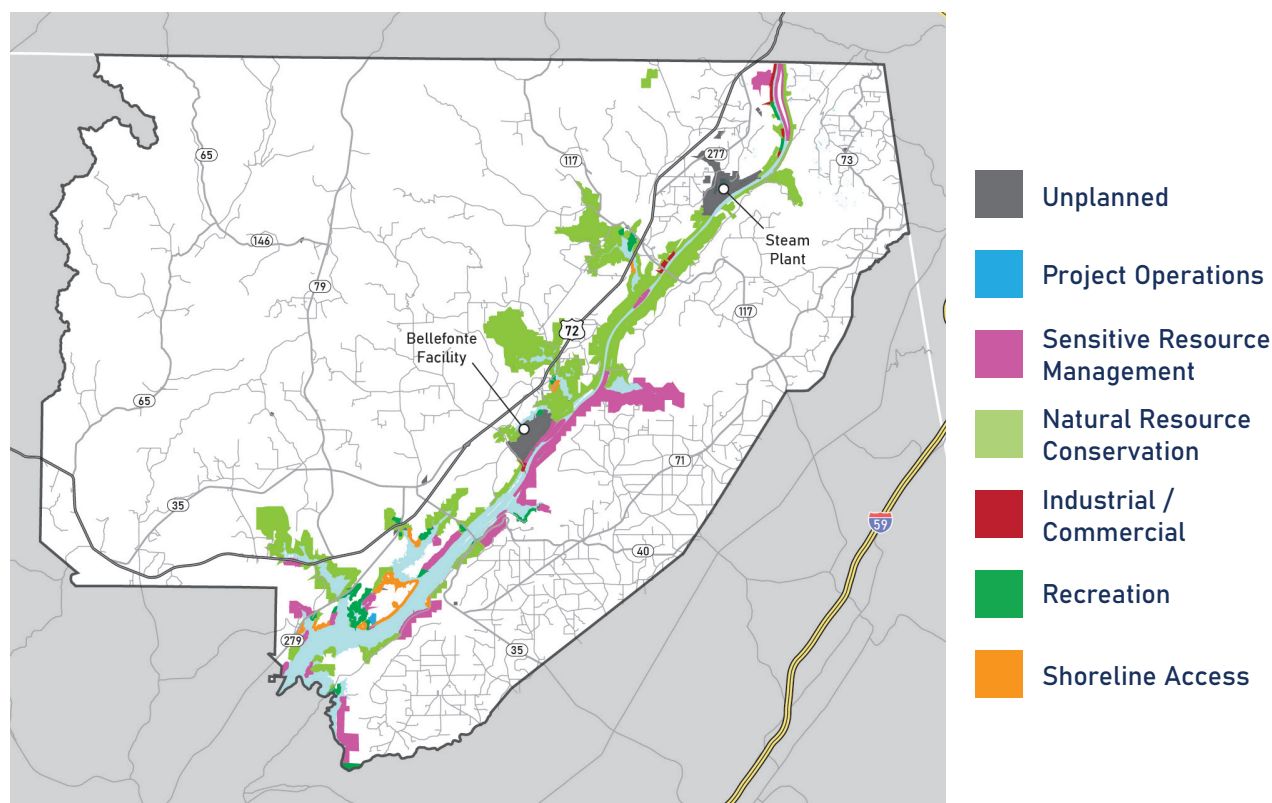


Figure 27 Wildlife Refuges, Management Areas and National Park Sites

TVA owns roughly 30,000 acres in Jackson County, most of which is along the Tennessee River. Development of land near the river will be affected by TVA property ownership, easements and other restrictions. Only 67 acres are zoned for industrial and commercial use in TVA's Reservoir Land Management Plan.

67,000 acres of land are within designated wildlife management areas, refuges and national park sites (Russell Cave). Most of these properties are owned by the State of Alabama, TVA or the Department of the Interior and are unavailable for development.

Preparing for Growth

Infrastructure

Jackson County, its municipalities and utility authorities will need to prepare for future growth. While area water systems have indicated they are capable of taking on additional residential development, sewer capacity and availability is more limited and will affect the location and density of population growth.

The major road network is sufficient, despite noted maintenance issues, to handle projected population increases and added traffic volumes. As discussed previously, road maintenance is already a challenge for Jackson County because of limited tax revenues. More growth will mean more traffic wearing on county roads, further emphasizing the need to generate additional revenue to cover these costs. Given that the County does not levy a sales tax, this is an area in which the County could increase funding for road maintenance and other needs that will increase as the county grows.

Schools

While school enrollment is currently dropping in Jackson County and Scottsboro City school systems, enrollment should be expected to increase as growth occurs. With countywide population potentially increasing 20–30% by 2040, school enrollment will rise even though household sizes may decline as seen currently in the county. These impacts will likely be seen to a higher degree in Scottsboro. Population growth in County school zones will be more varied. The school systems should monitor demographic changes and plan ahead for school investments to accommodate additional enrollment in areas where residential development emerges.

Police Protection

The Jackson County Sheriff's Department and local police departments will need additional staff to keep pace with residential growth. Police departments in Woodville, Hollywood and other smaller communities may be faced with more intensive staffing needs—compared to their size today—if projected development and population growth occurs within their jurisdictions.



Fire Protection

Much of the county is served by volunteer and part-time/full-time fire departments. Insurance Service Organization (ISO) ratings are based on local fire services, personnel, equipment, training and infrastructure (e.g., fire hydrants). Poor ISO ratings increase property insurance costs and can discourage residential development. Every effort should be made to shore up local fire services to improve ISO ratings, lower insurance costs and assure the safety of residents and businesses.

Should a building code be adopted, Jackson County will need to hire inspections staff to administer the regulations. Permit fees will contribute toward staffing costs.



Protecting Capacity on Major Roads

The County and municipalities should safeguard the capacity of existing roads through access management practices, such as requiring developers to install turn lanes at entrances to new subdivisions and limiting the number and frequency of driveways on collector and arterial roadways. Effective access management practices will help avoid the need for costly road widening projects. Access management standards can be incorporated into subdivision regulations. Standards can also be adopted so that they are enforceable even when development occurs that does not involve subdivision of land. This is typically done by adding access management standards into and adopting public works or engineering standards, as is the case with County standards.

Building Code

Jackson County has not adopted a building code and, therefore, does not conduct building inspections as new development occurs. While this makes it easier to develop, it can present problems as development occurs. First, without enforcement of minimum standards, new construction may be unsafe or of lower quality construction that is susceptible to deterioration. Second, poor quality development may discourage other private investors from building housing nearby.

Another benefit is adoption of property maintenance standards as part of the building code. This will help the County manage issues with abandoned and poorly maintained buildings that pose safety risks and may create blighting conditions that discourage private investment in neighboring properties.

Subdivision Regulations

In addition to incorporating access management provisions, the County's subdivision regulations are in need of an overall update to assure that new streets and other infrastructure installed in new development is adequately designed and constructed.



ACTION PLAN

The matrix on the following pages lists the major initiatives identified during the planning process. Each initiative is assigned a phase based on its importance, sense of urgency, cost considerations, expediency and other considerations.

“Low-hanging fruit”—projects that are inexpensive and relatively simple to accomplish—are typically assigned early timeframes. Accomplishing these tasks shows progress and helps build confidence. Major projects can be complicated, expensive and take considerable time to complete but they may have initial steps that need to be taken early on to avoid unnecessary delays.

Timeframe

This represents a combination of the relative importance of the task to the community and the likely duration necessary to complete related actions: short (1-5 yrs), mid (6-10 yrs), and long (11+ yrs). Tasks referred to as “long-term” may be extraordinarily important to the community but will likely take a considerable amount of time to complete because of costs or other complicating factors. Initial steps for some mid- and long-term tasks may need to be taken relatively soon to assure they can ultimately be accomplished within the desired timeframe.

Lead - Partners

These are local, state and other entities whose involvement—which may vary from political support to technical assistance—may be essential in pursuing and completing the task. The lead organization is listed first followed by potential partner organizations. Additional partners, such as private foundations, may also be available depending on the nature of the action.

Funding, Technical and Other Resources

These are potential funding sources, organizations and programs that offer technical and other assistance relevant to the particular task.



Gorham's Bluff, Pisgah

Implementing the Plan

The following Action Plan is intended as a guide to implementing the initiatives recommended in the plan and to facilitate discussion between the County and local partners regarding next steps and overall priorities for Jackson County.

The timeframes suggested in the Action Plan reflect the general order in which projects must be pursued. Efforts are identified as “short-term” initiatives because they must be accomplished early because other projects are contingent on their being completed first. Some initiatives are considered short-term because there is a higher sense of urgency associated with them. An example of this is improving mobile coverage, which is negatively impacting police and other emergency services. Limited child care and related issues make life more difficult for residents, reduce labor force participation and make the County less appealing to prospective businesses and residents.

Steering Committee Recommendations

Once the plan initiatives had been established, the Steering Committee recommended the following as the top ten priorities. These are noted in Action Plan with ★

- Mobile coverage study
- Install new cell towers/antennae
- Natural gas pipeline
- Bridgeport water system improvements
- County road improvements
- Tourist hub/attraction
- Childcare access
- Eel grass management
- Countywide sales tax
- Countywide business licensing

Ultimately, the County Commission, local governments, utilities and other involved parties must make their own decisions about their budgets and priorities. Nonetheless, certain plan initiatives are critical to the County's economic well-being and the lives of residents and, thus, should inspire unified action and collaboration.

Areas in which the County and its local partners should strive to work together in order to make progress sooner rather than later include:

- **infrastructure**, including mobile coverage, but also improving water, sewer and gas services where lacking in the areas along US 72 in the central and western portions of the county. Utilities investments will enable much needed housing development to tap the County's growth potential, which will lead to greater business development
- **job and salary growth**, including industrial recruitment and expansion and addressing issues affecting labor force participation such as child care and substance abuse treatment
- **revenue generation** to enable the County and other local governments to invest in infrastructure and services, including low-cost efforts to increase tourism activity and revenue and adopting a countywide sales tax.

Stewarding the Plan

The County should consider establishing a task force to steward plan implementation, with representatives of area governments, utilities providers and area businesses/industries. The task force would meet regularly and establish committees organized around major themes and initiatives. The purpose of the organization would be to maintain a focus on executing the plan and the communication and collaboration necessary to accomplish multi-jurisdictional efforts.

ACTION PLAN*

Initiative	Timeframe	Lead - Partners	Funding, Technical and other Resources
★ Improve natural gas supply/construct pipeline	short-term	Scottsboro WSG JCC	ADC, EDA, ADECA/ ARC, US DOT
★ Mobile coverage study to identify locations for additional cell towers and/or antennae	short-term	JCC/carriers	PWEAA grant
★ Construct additional cell towers, install additional antennae	short-term	JCC/cell tower companies	PWEAA, DOJ T&E, ARC/POWER
Expand Woodville sewer system	short-term	Town of Woodville	CWSRF, ARC, USDA
Plan for added sewer capacity in Hollywood area	mid-term	Jackson County Water	CWSRF, ARC, USDA
Install booster pumping station to support Cumberland Mountain and Jackson County water systems	short-term	Scottsboro WSG	DWSRF, ARC, USDA
Upgrade and expand water system in Woodville	short-term	Town of Woodville	DWSRF, ARC, USDA
★ Increase Bridgeport water system capacity	short-term	Bridgeport Utilities	DWSRF, ARC, USDA
Connect Stevenson and Jackson County water systems	mid-term	Stevenson/Jackson County Water	DWSRF, ARC, USDA

*Abbreviations are explained in the Glossary following the Action Plan.

ACTION PLAN

Initiative	Timeframe	Lead - Partners	Funding, Technical and other Resources
Connect Scottsboro and Section-Dutton water systems	long-term	Scottsboro/Section-Dutton utilities	DWSRF, ARC, USDA
★ Secure additional funding and accelerate County road improvements	ongoing	JCC	USDOT, ALDOT, ARC
Continue industrial recruitment	ongoing	JCEDA MLCC	Thrive, GCEP, HMCC
Secure land for industrial development	ongoing	JCEDA	EDPA (SEEDS)
★ Develop plan to grow childcare services, reduce costs	short-term	JCC MLCC CAPNA	ADHR WS, CFGH
Select site, obtain approval and construct river port	short-term	JCEDA/JCC	USDOT, USDA, ALDOT Industrial Access
Establish port authority	short-term	JCC	n/a
Recruit one or more agricultural processing facilities	ongoing	JCEDA	n/a
Plan and build agricultural center	mid-term	JCEDA/JCC ACES	USDA Innovation Center program

ACTION PLAN

Action	Timeframe	Lead - Partners	Funding, Technical and other Resources
Complete branding effort and market Jackson County for residential	short-term	MLCC	n/a
Expand healthcare services to rural areas	ongoing	HMC JCC	HHS
Support programs to combat substance abuse	ongoing	JCC	CFGH funds, INSPIRE
Develop comprehensive tourism marketing plan	short-term	MLCC	ATD
Prepare wayfinding master plan and tourism app	mid-term	MLCC/JCC	ATD, RPO
Install vehicular wayfinding system	mid-term	MLCC/JCC	ALDOT (ATRIP)
★ Develop a multi-use tourism hub/attraction on river	mid-term	Developer JCC, JCEDA, MLCC	n/a
Recruit hotel developers/lodging providers	ongoing	JCEDA MLCC	n/a
Improve Visitors Center at Chamber office	mid-term	MLCC	ATD
Build permanent Visitors Center	long-term	MLCC JCC	ATD
Continue efforts to manage eel grass	short-term	TVA JCC	TVA, ACES

ACTION PLAN

Action	Timeframe	Lead - Partners	Funding, Technical and other Resources
★ Adopt countywide sales tax	short-term	JCC	n/a
★ Establish county business licensing program	short-term	JCC	n/a
Adopt lodging tax	short-term	JCC	n/a
Identify access needs for outdoor destinations	ongoing	MLCC	ARC
Plan and develop trail connections to outdoor attractions, Singing River Trail and Tennessee RiverLine	mid-term	JCC MLCC	ADECA (RTP), Sweet Trails Alabama, ARISE, Thrive
Update Subdivision Regulations	short-term	JCC	TARCOG
Adopt Access Management standards	short-term	Municipalities	TARCOG
Adopt Building Code and inspections program	short-term	JCC	n/a
Increase staffing in Sheriffs office	ongoing	Sheriffs Office JCC	USD0J
Improve fire departments/ISO ratings	mid-term	Fire departments	USFA, USDHS, AFC, Leary Foundation
Enhance, prepare Jackson County schools for growth	ongoing	JCSD	TVA, CFGH

Glossary

Organizations

The following are government and other organizations referenced in the Action Plan. Some are local organizations that will be directly involved

in executing the plan. Other of these organizations may offer funding or technical assistance in pursuing various initiatives.

ACES

Alabama Cooperative Extension Service

ADC

Alabama Department of Commerce

ADECA

Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

ADEM

Alabama Department of Environmental Management

ADHR

Alabama Department of Human Resources

AFC

Alabama Forestry Commission

ALDOT

Alabama Department of Transportation

ARC

Appalachian Regional Commission

ATD

Alabama Tourism Department

CAPNA

Community Action Partnership of North Alabama

CFGH

Community Foundation of Greater Huntsville

EDA

US Economic Development Administration

EDPA

Economic Development Partnership of Alabama

GCEP

Greater Chattanooga Economic Partnership

HHS

US Department of Health and Human Services

HMC

Highlands Medical Center

HMCC

Huntsville-Madison County Chamber

JCC

Jackson County Commission

JCEDA

Jackson County Economic Development Authority

JCSD

Jackson County School District

MLCC

Mountain Lakes Chamber of Commerce

RPO

Rural Planning Organization (TARCOG)

TARCOG

Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments

Thrive

Thrive Regional Partnership

TVA

Tennessee Valley Authority

USDA

United States Department of Agriculture

USDHS

United States Department of Homeland Security

USDOJ

US Department of Justice

USDOT

United States Department of Transportation

USFA

US Fire Administration

Funding Programs

The following are grant and other funding programs referenced and whose names are abbreviated in the Action Plan. Funding programs may change over time, including funding amounts and program names. Some programs may change over time or only be available for a limited time.

ARISE

Appalachian Regional Initiative for Stronger Economies (ARC)

ATRIP

Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ALDOT), 20% match required

CWSRF

Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (ADEM), low interest loans for sewer system improvement

DWSRF

Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund (ADEM), low interest loans for water system improvements

INSPIRE

Investments Supporting Partnerships in Recovery Ecosystems Initiative (ARC)

POWER

Partners for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization Initiative (ARC)

PWEAA

Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance grant (EDA), 30% local match required

RAISE

Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity discretionary grant fund (US DOT), subject to change

RTP

Recreational Trail Program fund (ADECA)

T&E

Technology and Equipment Grant (DOJ)

WS

Workforce Stabilization Grant (ADHR)

Other Funding Programs

Several of the government and nonprofit organizations referred to in the Action Plan offer multiple funding programs that are not specifically mentioned in the Action Plan but that may be relevant to individual projects or to components of individual projects.

ADECA offers funding for low- and moderate-income communities through its Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program.

ALDOT offers funding for transportation-related projected beyond the ATRIP/ATRIP-II programs. These include the Alabama Transportation Infrastructure Bank, Rebuild Alabama Act Annual Grant, and Transportation Alternatives Program.

ARC offers a wide variety of funding programs in addition to ARISE, INSPIRE and POWER. These include Area Development, Access to Capital and Local Access Road programs.

The Daniel Foundation offers grants for a variety of community development projects.

EDA offers up to 42 different funding programs ranging from planning and research to infrastructure development.

HHS offers funding through numerous programs including the CDC, National Institutes of Health and Administration for Children & Families.

Innovate Alabama Network offers grants for a variety of economic development efforts to network members.

Norfolk Southern offers grants up to \$50K for economic and community development projects.

T-Mobile offers grants up to \$50K for various community development projects.

TVA offers grants and various forms of community support and technical assistance to communities in the Tennessee Valley.

USDA offers a variety of funding programs in support of agriculture and rural development.

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