Overview of Economic Development Policies and Plans in the Suncoast Corridor

This memo presents an overview of economic development plans and policies in the Suncoast Corridor study area. The purpose of this memo is to provide an understanding of economic development objectives and priorities identified by regional and local organizations within the study area. The identification of significant geographic areas and industries will inform the planning process including the identification of potential corridor needs and opportunities.

Overview

Florida’s Regional Planning Councils (RPC), among other responsibilities, each manage Economic Development Districts (EDD) as designated by the U.S. Economic Development Administration (Suncoast counties in bold):

- The Apalachee RPC (ARPC) includes Calhoun, Franklin, Gadsden, Jackson, Jefferson, Leon, Liberty, and Wakulla Counties.
- The Tampa Bay RPC (TBRPC) includes Citrus, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, and Pinellas Counties.

Each EDD develops a five-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which identifies regional goals and strategies for economic development. The CEDS are aligned with the Florida Strategic Plan for Economic Development. The most recent CEDS were adopted in 2017.

All local governments have the option of developing an Economic Element of Local Government Comprehensive Plans. These Comprehensive Plans serve as strategic planning documents for community development. Most county and municipal governments have an economic development office or staff responsible for economic development. Some county governments have formed economic development organizations, sometimes as public-private partnerships.

One regional economic development organization operates in the region: The North Florida Economic Development Partnership (NFEDP) operates as a 501c(6) public-private partnership providing technical assistance for local economic development, business retention and expansion, site selection, and marketing services for the 14-county region designated by the state as a Rural Area of Opportunity. The Partnership’s member counties are: Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union Counties.

Additionally, three regional workforce boards coordinate workforce development activities in the region:

- CareerSource Florida Crown serves Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, and Union Counties.
- CareerSource Citrus Levy Marion services Citrus, Levy, and Marion Counties.
Targeted Industries

The ARPC’s CEDS identifies agriculture, forestry, and fishing in rural areas and professional and technical services in urban areas as historically significant industries within the region. While the ARPC plans to leverage these strengths for additional growth, the CEDS also establishes a goal of economic diversification in several industries. The CEDS specifically highlights tourism (including ecotourism and agritourism), professional and technical services, health care, medical marijuana, warehousing, light/clean tech manufacturing, cloud data storage, and agricultural technology. The CEDS does not specifically identify a comprehensive list of target industry clusters as part of its strategy.

The NCFRPC includes in its CEDS the findings of a Targeted Industry study that Enterprise Florida, Inc. conducted in the region. The Targeted Industry study identified five industries categorized as either currently expanding or having the potential for high-wage job growth:

- Logistics & Distribution
- Bio-fuels & Renewable Energy
- Building Component Design & Manufacturing
- Healthcare Services & Products
- Aviation Services & Products

The TBRPC CEDS emphasizes the strong health care and finance industries in the region. The CEDS also finds that the region has a strong concentration of jobs in the Administrative and Waste Services, Financial and Insurance, Management of Corporations, and Real Estate industries. Several objectives in the CEDS affirm that the region will build on its existing competitive strengths while pursuing diversification initiatives. However, the CEDS does not specifically identify a comprehensive list of target industry clusters as part of its strategy.

The NFEDP identifies seven key industries for the region:

- Manufacturing
- Logistics & Distribution
- Logging & Timber
- Agriculture-based industries
- Technology & Healthcare
- Aviation Services & Products
- Tourism.

Additional industries are highlighted by specific counties in their Local Government Comprehensive Plans.

Maps of all employers with more than 50 employees and employers in the manufacturing, distribution, and trade and warehousing sectors are provided in the appendix to this memo. A map of major employers in the NFEDP region is included as well.

Targeted Development Areas

As part of the economic development strategies for specific industries, regional and local organizations have identified priority areas and specific sites for economic development.
The NFEDP highlights specific properties or sites for marketing to prospective companies and site selectors. These range from vacant land zoned for industrial or commercial use to shovel-ready sites with available infrastructure to existing properties that can be repurposed. The appendix includes a map of sites currently marketed by NFEDP, as well as industrial parks in the region. These sites indicate areas where future job creation or capital investment may occur.

Counties and municipalities typically identify areas for industrial or commercial land uses as part of their future land use plans or in their land development codes and zoning regulations. These future land use maps can be reviewed for consistency with the CEDS and other regional strategies.

Finally, local, state, and federal agencies each identify specific areas or zones for targeted industries or incentive programs. Relevant designations in this area include:

- The 14 counties in the NFEDP have been designated by the state as the **North Central Rural Area of Economic Opportunity** and qualify for certain planning and incentive programs.

- **Opportunity Zones** are designated by the U.S. Department of Treasury as historically underinvested low-income census tracts. Projects within Opportunity Zones can receive funding from private sector capital gains investments in exchange for tax deferrals or exclusions on the capital gains income. Each county includes one or more Opportunity Zones (map in appendix).

**Policies Impacting Economic Development and Transportation**

Individual counties have developed policies for transportation and economic development planning as part of their comprehensive plans. These policies can guide the corridor planning process.

Several counties have identified land use planning and zoning designations for interchanges adjacent to planned or existing arterials to maximize economic development potential while managing traffic at these access points. Other counties have established policies for Right-of-Way (ROW) preservation in corridors that may serve as future high-capacity facilities. An example of transportation-oriented development planning comes from Madison County, which has established land use restrictions near its airport to ensure the airport has space for potential expansion and to manage traffic access to and from the airport.

Additionally, several counties affirm that they will coordinate their transportation planning efforts for capacity enhancements with other counties and/or the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), to optimize traffic flow and minimize land impacts. The Citrus County Comprehensive Plan directly references the Suncoast Parkway II extension and indicates that its Interchange Management Area requirements will ensure development adjacent to the interchanges maximize economic development opportunities while minimizing impact on access to the Parkway.

Several counties have established land use designations to minimize urban sprawl, such as urban development overlays or designated urban development areas to concentrate development in a localized area. Additionally, some counties establish percentages of total acreage within the county that can be designated as urban in order to preserve the rural character of the county.

**Implications for Corridor Planning**

Counties, RPCs, and economic development organizations within the study area have targeted specific industries, many of which rely on efficient transportation systems to access markets at and beyond the regional level. These partners also are focusing on specific sites and zones, which identify areas that may need additional transportation connectivity in the future.
Major Employers - All Industries

Source: InfoGroup
Major Employers - Selected Industries

Source: InfoGroup
Major Employers in the North Central Florida Rural Area of Opportunity

Source: North Florida Economic Development Partnership.
Industrial Parks in the North Central Florida Rural Area of Opportunity

Source: North Florida Economic Development Partnership.
Properties Marketed in the North Central Florida Rural Area of Opportunity

Opportunity Zones in the Suncoast Corridor

Source: U.S. Department of Treasury