

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Southeastern Massachusetts is a diverse region with a healthy mix of cities, suburbs, and rural areas. Our economy ranges from agriculture and fishing to high tech manufacturing and service businesses. Our geography includes hundreds of miles of coastline, the state's largest natural lakes, and thousands of acres of wetlands and forests.



Southeastern Massachusetts is a fast growing region. With the large metropolitan areas of Boston and Providence to the north and west, respectively, and the enormously popular tourist destination of Cape Cod immediately to the southeast, southeastern Massachusetts is nestled among three generators of growth and economic activity.

Despite having its identity often submerged by its three better-known neighbors, southeastern Massachusetts is a unique and special place. Its heritage, its people and its livability are unmatched anywhere and yet, parts of the region have remained the economic stepchildren of the state - always lagging behind in indicators of economic strength such as employment, income, education and new investment.

The cities of southeastern Massachusetts - Attleboro, Fall River, New Bedford and Taunton - are typical examples of places that have been hurt by industrial disinvestment and relocation. Although traditional industries such as manufacturing have been on the decline in these cities for several years now, other industries have grown. The gradual increase in the region's retail trade and a wide variety of services are indicative of the area's economic potential and appeal to tourism. Meanwhile, advances and increased employment in health care and social assistance services are opportunistic and timely responses to the challenge confronting the community and its growing elderly population.

A. FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The economy of southeastern Massachusetts, especially along the South Coast, continues to lag behind the national and state economies. In 2016, both cities of New Bedford and Fall River had 6.2% unemployment rates, making them both rank among the state's highest ten communities in unemployment. These levels persist despite strength in some sectors and an aggressive local effort to boost the economy in these cities. While the entire area is currently experiencing an economic resurgence, pockets of distress remain in the region where some problems are worse than other areas.

The District's most recent economic strategy, as expressed by the vision, goals, objectives, action plan and recommended EDA projects found in this report, focuses primarily on these pockets of distress that have lagged behind the state and abutting regions.

The District's experience from 2000 to 2016 can be summed up by the nine findings of the Regional Economic Strategy Committee (RESC) resulting from the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) process:

1. **SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS NEEDS TO DEVELOP MORE JOB OPPORTUNITIES TO KEEP PACE WITH A GROWING POPULATION.** While the region's population is growing at a rapid pace, the growth in jobs has not kept up, leaving a large jobs gap. In 2015, there was a gap of 85,607, less than last year's 96,484 between the number of available labor force in the region and the number of jobs and employment opportunities located here. Closing this gap by increasing the job opportunities in the region is a major goal of this report.
2. **WITH THE ENTIRE REGION EXPERIENCING ECONOMIC DISTRESS, SOME PARTS OF THE REGION ARE STILL LAGGING BEHIND THE REST OF THE REGION AND STATE.** Most notable are the cities of Fall River and New Bedford, which continue to experience unemployment rates that are much higher than the state average. The northern half of the region appears to blend with the metro Boston economy. In 2016, the average unemployment rate in SRPEDD's northern sub region was 3.6%, while in South Coast sub region was 5.2%.



3. **THE REGION'S ECONOMIC PROFILE HAS SHIFTED DRAMATICALLY, SO THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY MUST SHIFT ACCORDINGLY.** While the manufacturing industry dominated the region's economy in previous decades, the Health Care and Social Assistance sector has emerged with the highest rates of employment in the District. This change requires a regional strategy that focuses beyond infrastructure, into broader social and economic agenda that addresses social capital and human resources investments.
4. **THE ROLE OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE REGION (INCLUDING SRPEDD) MUST MEET THE DEMANDS AND CHALLENGES OF THE TIMES.** SRPEDD's role must focus upon building regional partnerships among all parties involved in economic development - especially in creating a workforce capable of meeting the needs of emerging clusters, such as the biomedical/biotechnical and life sciences sectors. Establishing a close link between education and training, financing, site development, promotion and quality of life issues deserve equal consideration. Giving priority to knowledge-based and innovation- oriented economic development is a challenge that must be faced by the region.
5. **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRANSPORTATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES IS INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT TO OUR ECONOMIC FUTURE, AND GOOD PLANNING IS ESSENTIAL TO THESE CONCERNS.** More commuter rail access to Boston is a high priority need. Proposed inter-modal transit and freight system improvements will maximize the linkages between the communities in the area to airport and seaport warehouses/facilities.
Commuter rail service linking Fall River & New Bedford to Boston will more closely tie the region to metro Boston economy. Quality of life and environmental concerns are becoming increasingly important as economic development factors.

Currently MassDOT is pursuing the Middleborough Secondary and the Middleborough/Lakeville Commuter Rail Line as an option to bring interim service to Fall River and New Bedford while continuing to design and permit the Stoughton Route.
6. **SMALL BUSINESS REMAINS THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR REGIONAL ECONOMY.** Southeastern Massachusetts still depends on the growth of small businesses. In 2015, the average-sized firm in Bristol and Plymouth Counties had 12.9 and



12.3 employees, respectively, while the state average was 14.2 employees. Our regional and local economic development strategies must nurture the existing small-size businesses so they can expand, and strive to foster new small businesses.

7. **TRADITIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT IS CRITICAL TO THE REGION, AND FUTURE INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS MUST INCLUDE TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE.** Water, sewer and road planning are still essential to provide quality sites for business expansion, but fiber optics and other telecommunications and technology-related infrastructure are also vital to the region.
8. **EDUCATION REMAINS OUR MOST IMPORTANT NEED.** The SRPEDD region suffers from a shortage of professionals and college-educated individuals in the labor force. In 2015, only 8.7% of persons 16 years and over in the region were in the professional, scientific and management industry sectors compared with 13.3 for the state and 11.0% for the U.S. Although there has been improvement educational attainment levels for adults with a bachelor's degree or higher was 25.9% compared to 40.5% for the state and 29.8% for the nation in 2015.
9. **TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY, THE REGION MUST COLLABORATE IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF INNOVATION AND GENERATE INVESTMENT.** Entrepreneurs, scientists, researchers and innovators need to work together to bring about successful investments to fund an innovation-driven economy. The region's industry relies mostly on manufacturing, even though there is a trend and a demand for technology-driven industries.

B. **FACTS ABOUT SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS**

- Population – SRPEDD's population as well as, the overall statewide population remained stable with barely 3.0% growth from 2000 to 2010. Within the region, the population in seven communities grew by more than 10.0% while seven others experienced a loss in population over the same period.

- Ethnic Heritage – As of 2015, over one quarter (26.1%) of the region’s population reported Portuguese as their first ancestry. Other major groups include those of Irish (19.8%), English (12%). From 2000 to 2015, most of the region’s racial minority groups (African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics) have increased dramatically.
- Agriculture - Farming remains an important component of the region’s economy. Bristol County is the state’s largest vegetable producer; Plymouth County is the state’s largest cranberry producer.
- Zoning - Zoning in the region follows expected patterns. All of the region's municipalities have adopted some zoning, with by-laws generally constructed around residential, commercial, and industrial categories. Almost ninety percent of the region's land is zoned for residential use, with higher densities generally permitted in the cities and the larger suburban towns. About half of the municipalities have adopted wetlands or water supply protection zoning. Build-out analyses conducted in all cities and towns in 2000 indicate that there is at least six times more land zoned for business and industry than can ever be developed in the region. Much of the region’s land that is zoned for business and industry is unsuitable for those uses due to environmental constraints or lack of infrastructure.
- Transportation - The region is served by the Boston/New York/Washington passenger and freight rail corridor. There are three airports in the area: Logan in Boston, TF Green in Providence and the New Bedford airport. Two commuter rail lines, the Shore Line through Attleboro and the Old Colony Line originating in Middleborough/Lakeville currently connect the region to Boston. The construction of highways has spurred significant commercial, industrial and retail development in Attleboro, Dartmouth, Fairhaven, Mansfield, Middleborough, North Attleborough, Norton, Raynham, Swansea, Taunton and Wareham. The relocation and reconstruction of Route 44 from Raynham to Plymouth (Phase 1 completed in late 2005) has implications for future economic development in the region.



- Recreation - Southeastern Massachusetts has unique recreation and tourist opportunities, including several major state parks, beaches and forests (Massasoit, Myles Standish, Demarest Lloyd, Dighton Rock, Horseneck Beach, Fall River-Freetown, Fort Rodman and heritage state parks in Fall River and New Bedford), the Whaling National Park in New Bedford. In the area offers 40 golf courses, outstanding private attractions including the Battleship Massachusetts, the historic schooner Ernestina, Buttonwood Zoo and the New Bedford Whaling Museum, and the best sailing and fishing on the east coast. Many SRPEDD communities also sponsor active recreation programs for adults and children.



- Early History - The region is a center of Native American history and culture. The Wampanoag Tribe occupied this area long before the Pilgrims landed here in 1620, and evidence of this civilization is still found throughout the region.
- Education - High school and college graduation rates in the region have been on the upswing, with 14 of the 27 communities in the region attaining higher rates than the state average (89.8%), yet only 5 communities exceeded the state average (40.5%) of those who completed four years of college and above.
- Fisheries - The New Bedford Seaport continues to lead the nation as the top fishing port in the U.S. as measured by dollar earnings. According to the National Marine Fisheries Service, New Bedford landed 124 million pounds valued at \$321 million in 2015, enabling it to maintain its #1 rank among U.S. fishing ports. Between 2001 and 2015, the number of fishing establishments in the city increased from 131 to 141, with employment in the fishing industry at 811, and total wages valued from \$44,610,748 to \$84,590,544.
- Manufacturing - As of 2015, this sector employed over 11.2% of the region's work force compared to less than 7.3% for the state. Over a third of the state's employment in primary metal manufacturing has remained in the region. Additionally, about a third of the state's miscellaneous manufacturing jobs located in the region are meeting the demands of a

technology-dependent economy - production of computer and electronic products, electrical and communications equipment as well as medical devices and related instruments.

C. THE REGION'S ASSETS AND LIABILITIES

1. ASSETS

- The region has miles of the most beautiful coastline in all of North America, much of which remains in unspoiled condition, and the longest undammed river in Massachusetts: the Taunton River.
- The region is rich in history. From Dighton Rock to Plymouth Rock; the whaling ships; Frederick Douglass and the underground railroad; New Bedford's inspiration of Herman Melville's classic "Moby Dick"; the Lizzie Borden infamy; the age of textiles to Battleship Massachusetts, all representing snapshots of critical periods in America's history.
- The region has a rich history of reaching out to far places for trade and cultural linkages. From the world travels of New Bedford's whaling fleet, the nineteenth century trade with Japan, the distant voyages of the fishing fleet, and the role of Fall River's families in the development of Central America, the region maintains a strong international perspective.
- The region is one of the nation's leading producers of cranberries, especially in the towns of Carver, Middleborough and Wareham. The Ocean Spray Headquarters is located in both Lakeville and Middleborough.
- New Bedford continues to be ranked as the #1 fishing port in the U.S. as ranked by value of the harvest.
- The region's coastline and inland lakes and ponds, along with rich forests and state parks, are highly conducive to all types of sports activities throughout the year. On top of this, the region's close proximity to Cape Cod, Newport, R.I., and historic



attractions such as Plymouth, makes it particularly attractive for tourism activity.

- The region's centers of industry have ample buildings ready to be occupied almost immediately.
- The region has ample land to attract industry looking for modern, first class office park and factory sites.
- The region is generally, well served by first-rate highways, rail lines and quick access to major airports in Boston, Providence, Worcester and New Bedford.
- With the spread of development away from our largest cities (i.e., Boston, Worcester, and Providence) the region is well positioned to attract future growth.
- In 2015, the Southeastern Massachusetts area had an estimated average cost of \$291,396 for a single residential unit lower than the Greater Boston's estimated cost of \$405,500 (Source: The Warren Group and Northeastern University's Boston Foundation Report).
- The region is located in the center of three of the nation's most renowned clusters of higher education institutions. Boston and Cambridge area (Harvard, MIT, Boston College, Boston University, University of Massachusetts), Worcester area (Holy Cross, Worcester Polytechnic, Clark University) and Providence area (Brown University, R.I.S.D., Providence College) are all within easy commute for students, faculty and industries, requiring ties to higher education.
- Within the region are acclaimed public and private institutions of higher learning such as UMass Dartmouth, Bridgewater State University, Bristol Community College, Massasoit Community College, Wheaton College, and the UMass School of Law at Dartmouth. Considerable attention and efforts are being made by these institutions to reach out and provide training institutions to reach out and provide training of the region's workforce for much-needed skills in the marketplace.



- The region is a center of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit. The UMass School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST) in New Bedford and the Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) in Fall River are indicative of these advances occurring in the area. The region is constantly "spinning off" new firms.

- An increasing number of businesses are investing in both quality control and employee education and training programs. New partnerships between business entities in the region and the local colleges have started to offer supplementary courses for low income and minority population such as English language skills in order to enable them to compete in the workplace.

- The region has a reputation for a workforce with a high level of productivity and low absenteeism.

- The region has a core of broadband and wireless technology (cloud) for internet access that is readily available.

- The region remains a relatively unspoiled and undeveloped, situated between the major metropolitan areas of Boston and Providence.

2. LIABILITIES

- The region's education system needs significant improvement to prepare its residents competitive edge in an ever-changing world, especially with life and business skills. In order to address this issue more state resources for education are needed. The dropout problem from high school is a particularly acute problem.

- The region's workforce is in need of further skill development for emerging 21st century commerce and economy.

- Overall, the region is well served by its transportation systems. Locally, Routes 24 and 44 have deficiencies that need some remediation.



- The region is host to many old industries confronting relocation pressures to other parts of the country and elsewhere in the world where lower labor costs will enable them to remain globally competitive.
- Sewer and water system improvements are long overdue in certain areas of the region, which serve as potential major deterrent for growth if left unattended.
- The region is in need of assistance in cleaning up its contaminated lands and in the renovation or removal of outmoded buildings that are blights on the landscape. Unless addressed, these problems will deter further growth particularly in existing urban centers.
- Utility rates are high in some parts of the region.
- Negative perceptions about the region among the local public and Boston businesses and political communities prevent certain businesses from relocating into the area.

