# FRAMEWORK 2030
## partnering for the future

# Regional Economic and Land Use Strategy

**Original version: July 2021**
**Current version: January 2022**

## CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI RIVER
# CMRP
## REGIONAL PLANNING PARTNERSHIP

**www.RegionalPlanningPartnership.org**

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# Welcome and Acknowledgements

There is power in working together. Our region is made up of strong and independent communities who – through their qualities of life, place, and opportunity – have attracted significant growth and investment. Through effective planning and management, our cities and townships have maintained their unique character while also accommodating new investment. But our region is also connected. We share a market, labor force, transportation network, and so much more. These connections are vital to our continued success. The challenges within these systems, however, cannot be solved by one community alone. Networked problems require networked solutions, and certain issues need a collaborative regional response.

With this broader view in mind, we began a process to better understand our regional strengths, challenges, and opportunities. Framework 2030 was an inclusive process to map this complex and interconnected system and identify a path forward. Through significant outreach and community engagement, we heard over 8,000 thoughts and ideas from the broader public and folded those into the process. We also looked closely at the data to better understand our shared conditions and trends. Housing, transportation, land use, economics, and many other topics.

This work progressed through the global pandemic and related economic disruptions. Despite these shared difficulties, more than 2,000 people contributed to the process. The regional vision represents their interests, and this plan could not have been completed without them.

In the end, we developed a proactive response to our region's challenges and opportunities that will help guide this Partnership, and the communities we serve, for the next decade. That is this plan. That is Framework 2030.

We look forward to being principal partners in our region's continued growth and advancement. The future is made brighter together.

Sincerely, *Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership*

# FRAMEWORK 2030

*partnering for the future*

Framework 2030 is an inclusive, transparent, and ongoing process to identify the central challenges and opportunities in the region. Through conversation and analysis, the Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership has developed this plan to move the communities forward, together.
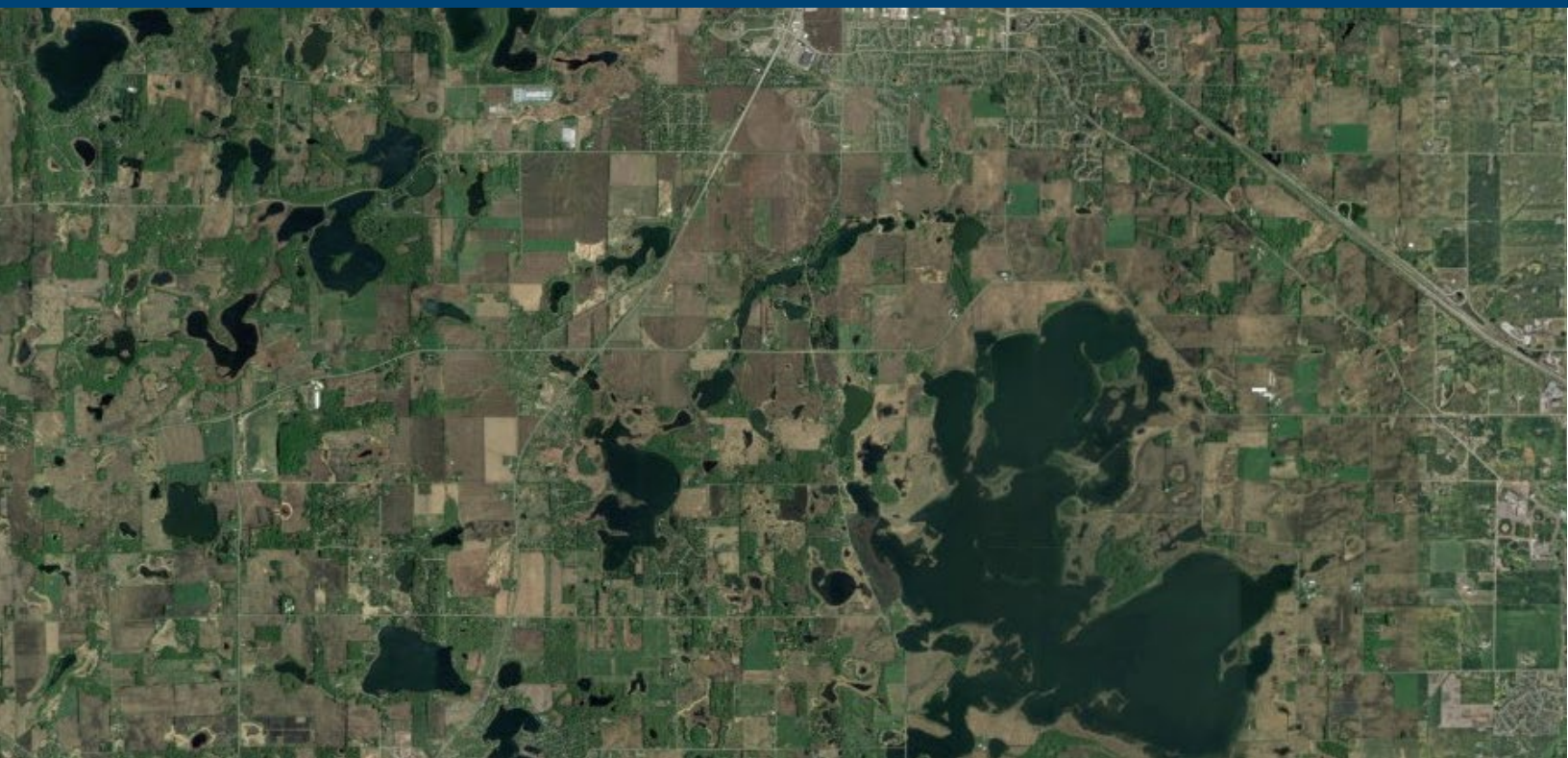
# Introduction and Background

## Planning Area



### Planning Area

As shown, the Partnership identified a *regional* planning area and a smaller *focused* planning area based on the availability of data for technical analysis.

The regional planning area includes all of Sherburne and Wright Counties, while the focused planning area is tied to Partner communities.
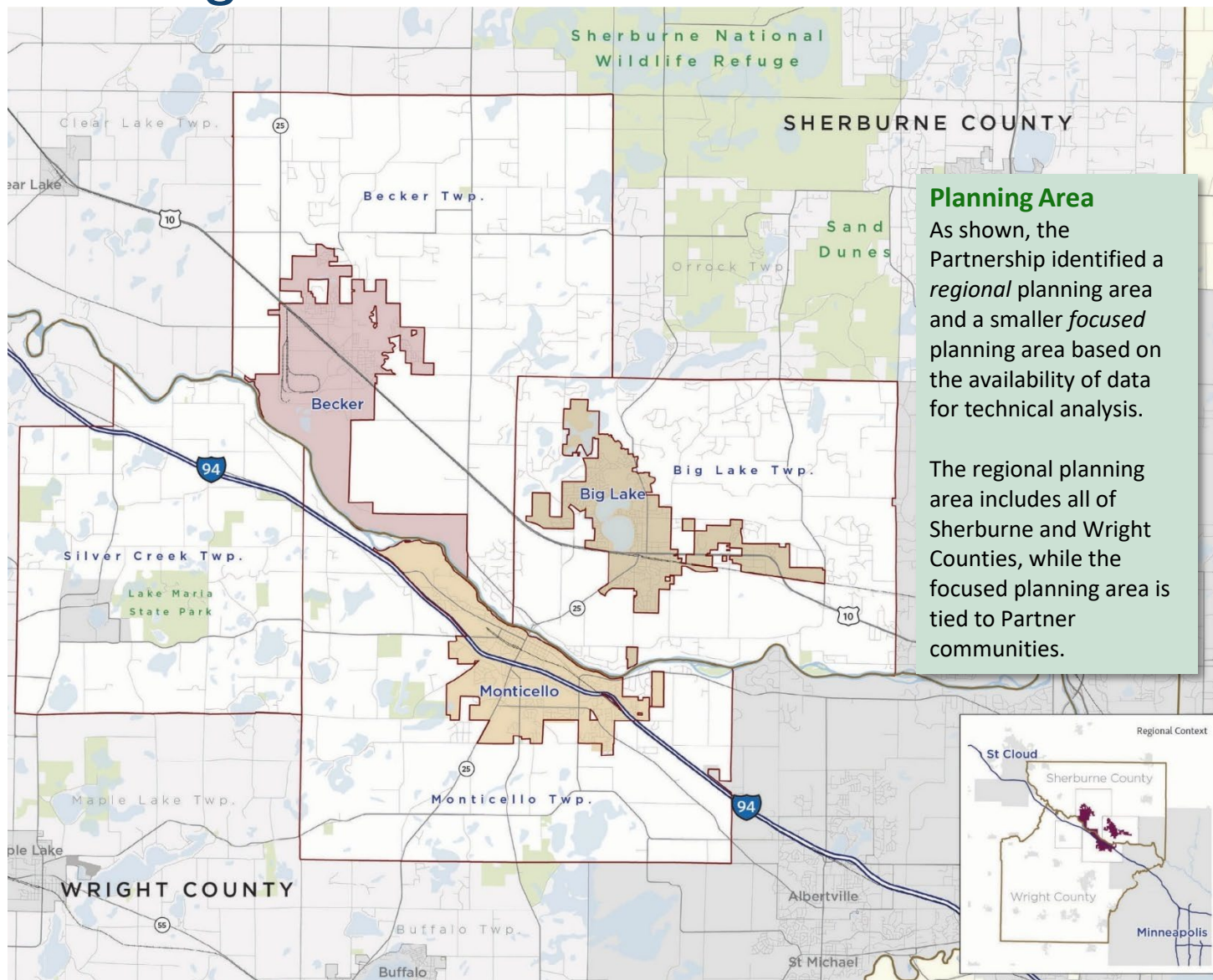
# Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the communities of the Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership began the region's first collaborative planning and economic development project. Framework 2030 was an inclusive, community-driven process to develop the region's first collective vision. The Partner communities anticipate significant growth and development in the coming decades, and chose to utilize this collaborative approach to regional planning to maintain a high quality of life for area residents, businesses, and visitors.

## Working with the community to build a strong and catalytic plan

At the conclusion of the process in summer 2021, more than 2,000 people had contributed over 8,000 ideas to the conversation. This, coupled with strong research by the planning team and leadership by the Partners, led to the development of the Framework 2030 vision and strategies. The plan is the product of that collaborative process and represents the strong spirit and diverse interests from across the region. The communities, like the rest of the world, felt the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and related economic shutdowns. Rather than disrupt the work, these events helped reveal hidden trends and provided an incentive for collective action against future disruptions.

The plan is divided into three sections: an introduction to the process, contributors, and community; an overview of the region today including key findings related to land use, economics, housing, and other topics; and the vision, values, strategies, and actions. These wide-ranging actions – projects, policies, or programs – were elevated by the Partnership based on their potential to move the region forward; they are actively monitored and updated on the CMRP [website](#).



### Who is the Partnership?

The Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership currently includes elected representatives from the cities of Becker, Big Lake, and Monticello; Becker, Silver Creek, Monticello, and Big Lake townships; and Sherburne and Wright counties.

Originally known as the Highway 25 Coalition, some of these communities formed in 2016 to better understand the transportation issues that were affecting the region. This group completed several projects that yielded clear, usable data on traffic and service levels. While the initial focus centered on the region's connectivity, it soon became apparent that a more holistic approach would be required to accomplish the goals of each community.

In July 2019, the group adopted a new name: the Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership along with a new joint powers agreement that reflected their expanded scope on regional challenges and opportunities.

# Background

## Goals for Framework 2030

The Framework 2030 process took place over 20 months, involved thousands of stakeholders, and was guided by two clear process goals developed at the outset of the work:

**1** Create a unified set of regional goals, policies, and priorities that Partner communities commit to honoring; it is not a regional comprehensive plan

**2** Include guidance developed with Partner communities on how they can refine their local approaches, policies, plans, projects, and regulations over time to harmonize them with the regional direction

## Why now?

The Central Mississippi River region anticipates significant growth and development in the coming decades. The Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Area is among the fastest growing in the country, and this development energy has already started to significantly affect the communities in this region.

The Partners are collaborating on this regional planning and economic development project to optimize regional and local benefits to maintain and build greater quality of life, place, and opportunity. This means development that brings high-paying jobs and other amenities to the region; the range of housing that people need; a robust infrastructure that supports critical transportation, technology, and utility requirements; and access to nature.

## Who was involved?

The process was led by the Partnership with assistance from key community staff and a team of consultants. The final vision and strategies are the result of significant contributions by community stakeholders throughout the region.

## Framework 2030: By the numbers



> "We need to look at a bigger picture of what is possible, not just from government, but from our citizens, and empower them to accomplish their own vision."
> -- Community participant

**1**
**Regional vision**

**12**
**Strategies**
*Organized by topic: land use, economic growth, and interconnections*

**25+**
**Action Steps**
*Projects, policies, and programs to lead the Partnership forward and continue regional collaborations*

**2,151**
**Community participants**
*Two rounds of community engagement to generate and test ideas and direction*

**8,101**
**Comments and ideas**
*Wide range of ideas and comments from community stakeholders*

**20**
**Months of work by the Partners**
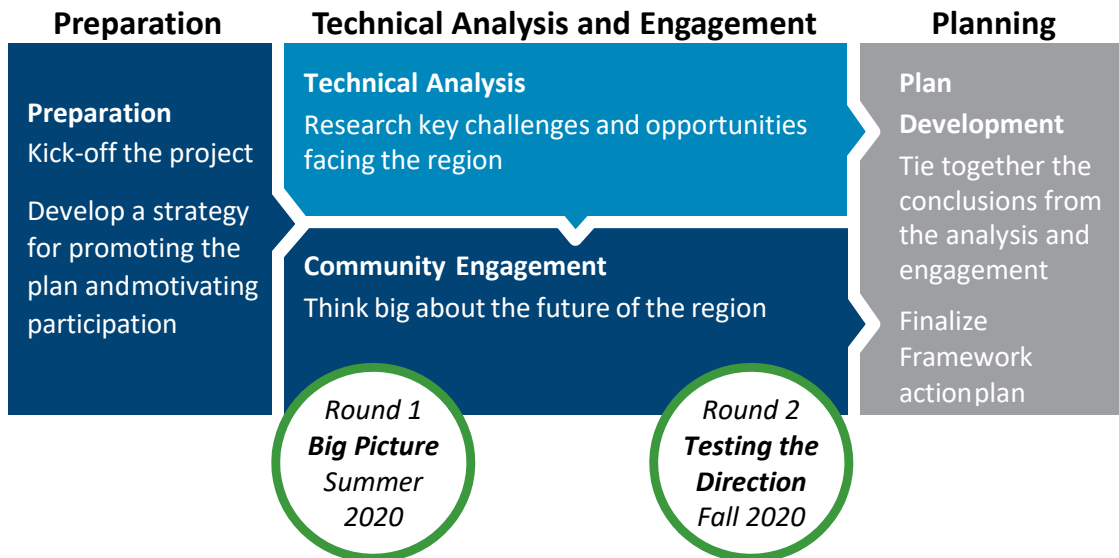*Meetings between the Partners, planning team, and community stakeholders*

# Process

The Framework 2030 process was designed to help Partner communities establish a common direction for their future and build consensus around realistic actions to guide their collaborative work. To achieve this, the process was organized along two parallel tracks: technical research and analysis, and community engagement. This section highlights the findings from the two rounds of engagement.

## Big Picture: Engagement Round 1

Round 1 engagement was conducted using four surveys, with "big-picture" questions tailored to the following stakeholder groups: community members; employees of public, private, and nonprofit organizations; leaders of public, private, and nonprofit organizations; and elected and appointed officials. Outreach and recruitment utilized a network approach, asking direct connections to invite and encourage people in their networks (like the community school districts) to participate and further spread the word. This generated more than 7,000 responses to 18 open-ended questions, ranging from the region's current condition to ways to improve the region in the future. See major themes to the right.

**Preparation**

**Technical Analysis and Engagement**

**Planning**

**Preparation**
Kick-off the project

Develop a strategy for promoting the plan and motivating participation

**Technical Analysis**
Research key challenges and opportunities facing the region

**Community Engagement**
Think big about the future of the region

**Plan Development**
Tie together the conclusions from the analysis and engagement

Finalize Framework action plan

*Round 1*
***Big Picture***
*Summer 2020*

*Round 2*
***Testing the Direction***
*Fall 2020*

## Testing the direction: Engagement Round 2

From the Round 1 feedback in summer 2020 and direction from the Partnership, a draft vision and strategies were developed. In late 2020 and early 2021, the Partnership asked key stakeholders for feedback on the draft vision and strategies. During the second round the planning team developed an online survey and facilitated several feedback sessions with partner communities and the Partnership itself. Participants were asked for feedback on the draft regional vision statement and the supportive strategies. During this round more than 1,600 responses were offered showing strong support for the vision and strategies with minor modifications. Respondents also shared 650 action recommendations (project, policy, or program ideas) to help realize the vision.

To learn and read more, read the full report on the website: https://regionalplanningpartnership.org/.

**2,151**
**Total Participants**
*from across the region*

**8,101**
**Total Comments**
*Wide range of ideas and comments from participants across the region*

### Key themes from community engagement

**Leadership**
*Collaboration & strategy*

**Opportunity**
*Economics & planning*

**Location**
*Demand & advantage*

**Community**
*Connections & place*

**Growth**
*Housing & major projects*

# Structure and Direction

The communities of the region are distinct, and each approached the Framework 2030 process from multiple angles and with varying perspectives. This diversity of places and people is an asset, but it can make finding consensus a challenge. Through an honest process of discovery and discourse, Partner communities and leadership were able to identify a common path forward. The regional vision statement sets the broad direction with more specific strategies organizing their collective action.

## Finding the regional vision

Central to the discussion throughout the planning process was a need for better alignment and communication of the region's direction. Tucked between the Twin Cities and St. Cloud Metropolitan Areas, the region's communities are facing new challenges related to growth and change. This places pressure on leadership to make effective decisions that leverage growth energy but also protect the strong character of their communities. The regional vision statement – presented later – is the broadest distillation of the community's goals and ambition. Results from the Partnership's open and inclusive engagement process directly shaped the regional vision statement and the values, strategies, and actions that support it.

## Strategies to organize action

The vision and values alone are not enough to drive regional collaboration and coordinated investment. The Partners worked hard to identify general strategies and specific actions to operationalize the vision. These priorities emerged from the engagement and the analysis of the planning team. They were presented back to the community for feedback during Round 2 engagement. With this feedback and permission to proceed, the Partners then assigned specific projects, policies, or programs to each of the final 12 strategy statements. This plan includes identifies a series of action proposals to help move the region forward.
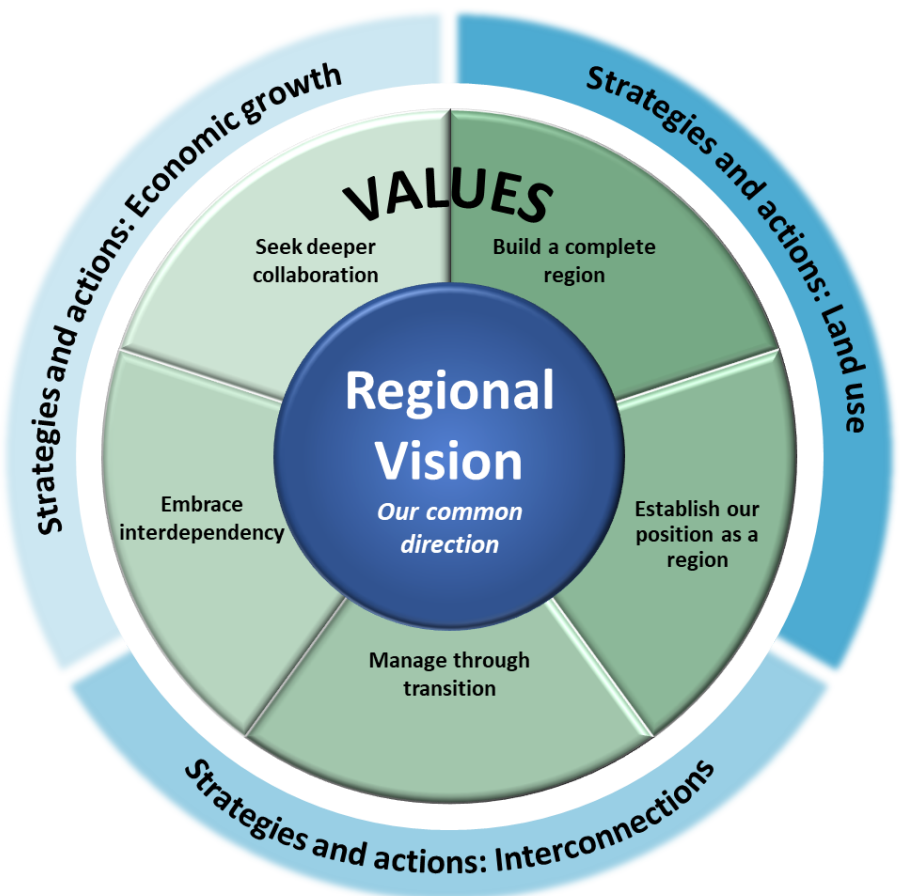
# The Region Today

## Introduction

Sherburne and Wright County are the second and third fastest growing counties in Minnesota. The energy related to this growth brings distinct advantages for the Partnership communities. This includes a broadening tax base, growing property values, a larger market for goods and services, and others. Expansion also poseschallenges to community leaders as they work to maintain the feel and characterof their communities and achieve beneficial outcomes for both new and long-time residents. This section provides an overview of the critical conditions and trends revealed through the analysis.



## Taking a Snapshot: Major Trends

To better inform this discussion and build relevant and effective recommendations, the Partnership's consultant team first analyzed the region's demographic, economic, market, and place-based conditions and trends. Over a series of presentations linked in the narrative to the right, the team presented these findings to the Partnership for their consideration and feedback. Each of the documents is available for deeper review through the Partnership website.

**PEOPLE**
*Demographics, population, households, race & ethnicity, etc.*

**PLACE**
*Land use, mobility, housing, community character*

**PROSPERITY**
*Economy & employment, sector mix, education*

**MARKET**
*Consumers, commuters, goods/services, and market definition*

**GROWTH**
*Potential for development, planned growth analysis*

**PERFORMANCE**
*Job change, property values, wages, industry mix and change*

### Want to learn more?

Each of the major topics and findings introduced on the left is further explored in the Regional Factbook Briefings. These reports explore six major topic areas and collect key data, major trends, and critical findings from the research and analysis. This and other information can be found on the Partnership website: https://regionalplanningpartnership.org/

## Growth and change

Population in the region is growing four times the state average, with the region set to exceed 290,000 residents by 2050. This strong growth is coupled with other demographic shifts. The region is aging with its largest and fastest growing cohorts over the age of 45. The communities are also becoming more diverse related to race, ethnicity, and country of origin.

**Regional Population over Time**

- 1970
- 1980
- 1990
- 2000
- 2010
- 2018
- 2040
- 2050=295,000

Legend:
- Sherburne County
- Wright County
- Regional Planning Area

## Economic expansion

The two counties are also expanding economically, with a 36% increase in GDP between 2010 and 2018, up to $8.2B. The region has added more than 10,000 jobs in its major sectors that include health care, manufacturing, and retail trade. Public entities dominate the top 10 major employers with 7 out of the 10 coming from this sector.

**+$2.1B**

**Regional GDP growth**
*$8.2 billion in 2018, up $2.1 billion from 2010 for the region*

## Strong housing demand; Increasing prices

The housing market saw a marked increase through 2019-2020, with prices rising quickly and inventory decreasing. Homes in the region are newer than the state average and single- family units are most common, 8 out of every 10 units. Since a low point in 2012, the planning area has experienced steady growth in median sales price, consistent with the larger seven-county region surrounding the metro.

**+$104k**

**Change in median sales price**
*From 2012 to 2019, home sales prices have risen sharply, 7% increase*

## A large, regional market

Both the labor force and market area are regional. Most regional employees commute in from outside the region, and most regional residents commute to work outside. Job growth — particularly in Sherburne — has been fueled largely by workers from outside the county. Within the consumer market, no individual community within the region has enough population or income to sustain the present levels of economic activity alone.
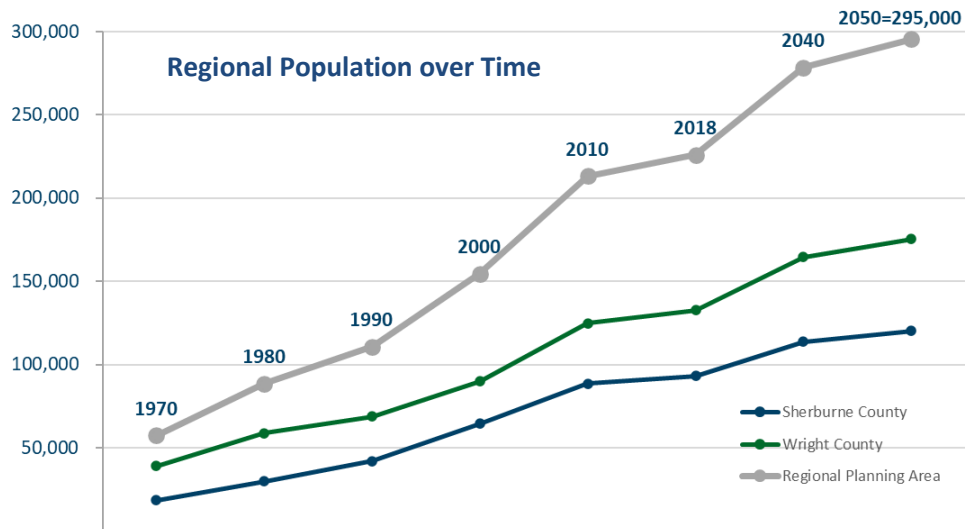
## Strong wage growth, more business starts

The region saw a 19% increase in business establishment from 2015 to 2019, outpacing the growth in overall employment, with two-thirds of this growth in construction. Wages are also rising regionally, up from 15% over the same period or $87M in total. Wage leaders by sector include construction, manufacturing, and professional services.

## Room for additive growth, development

Based on current zoning capacity, the focused planning area could add between 12,000 and 18,000 new residents in its residential districts. The communities are significantly over-zoned for commercial with more than 1,150 acres in this district (equivalent to 52 large format or "Big Box" retail sites). Like commercial, not all industrially zoned parcels are fully utilized: 1,800 acres or 32% of industrial districts are currently vacant or used for agriculture.

**18,000**

**Residential growth capacity (residents)**
*An estimate based on current mix of housing and development density*

## Conclusion: A dynamic region

These, and myriad other factors, demonstrate the rapid changes occurring across the region and the need for a proactive and coordinated approach to decision making.

CMRP
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# Vision, Strategies, and Actions

## Introduction

Framework 2030 is a response to the collective challenges and opportunities facing each of the partner communities. The data demonstrate that these places are tightly connected through their market, their communities, and their interdependencies.

There is a vital opportunity for these partner communities to unlock the shared potential through collaboration and shared investment. This starts by establishing a clear vision to align the work to come. This section presents the regional vision for the communities of the Partnership, the values through which they will operate, and the more specific strategies and actions to operationalize the vision.

The process of finding consensus — especially across a region — can be difficult. As the Partnership undertook their work to develop the vision and supportive strategies, and later the detailed actions, they relied heavily on the input and ideas of the community and key stakeholders. The sentiments shared in the initial round of engagement were integral in crafting a vision statement that fit the identity and diversity of the places within the 201-square-mile planning area. With more than 2,000 contributors and over 8,000 thoughts and ideas, the vision, strategies, and actions directly reflect the emergent themes from this feedback.

Framework 2030 is built around a general and encompassing vision statement (see next page). The vision is the broadest expression of the region's aspirations for the future derived through comments and ideas from the community it represents.

Underlying the vision are commitments in the form of values, higher-order statements that set the general direction for action.

# Our Vision

We – the communities of the Central Mississippi River Regional Planning Partnership – are a strong and dynamic region.

We are made prosperous through our network of assets and proactive leadership, made unique through our vital and connected places, and made home by our welcoming people and communities.

## Our values help us further articulate our vision

### Build a complete region

Fewer residents both live and work in the region, and the majority of workers live outside the Partnership communities. These related to job quality and housing affordability or availability may limit the region's competitiveness related to the workforce and increase the potential long-term tax burden on residents.

### Establish our position as a region

The Partnership can play an important role in establishing a cohesive regional identity and common direction, complementing and supporting the unique Partner communities.

### Manage through transition

The region is experiencing disruption within formerly stable economic sectors such as energy and retail. Some of these are unique to the region and others are part of broader, national trends. All represent shifts in the economic stability of the region that encourage the Partnership to identify and pursue growing industries.

### Embrace interdependency

Communities within the region are tightly bound to each other through strong economic relationships; no individual community within the planning area has enough population or income to sustain the present level of economic activity on its own. There remain untapped opportunities to better network the region's assets, amenities, and opportunities especially in response to key challenges.

### Seek deeper collaboration

The Partnership has demonstrated the benefit of regional collaboration through its planning and ongoing discourse. Nurturing and reinforcing these relationships through measurable actions will help sustain momentum and benefit both the region and individual entities.

# Strategies and Actions

The Partnership initiated the Framework 2030 planning process to effect change and drive strong forward well-founded projects and policies. The vision and values set the direction. The strategies identified based on community guidance and regional data analysis are more detailed declarations of intent. To operationalize the regional vision and strategies, detailed action steps are the most specific proposals and include projects, policies, and programs.

## Demonstrate value, build trust, grow influence

Plan implementation is an ongoing process that includes a regular cycle of prioritizing, workplanning, funding, evaluation, and celebration. This is a management process that should involve multiple organizations around the region, even beyond the Partnership.

Importantly, long-term implementation of Framework 2030 requires prioritization. As the Partnership grows its influence and capacity, its annual workload will likely increase. This is a slow but deliberate process where the group will demonstrate its value and, in turn, build trust and recognition.

### Topics and Priorities

Careful analysis of the feedback from the community and stakeholders revealed three key areas of emphasis: land use, economic growth, and interconnections.

These were used to organize the strategies and actions to reflect the emergent consensus from the public.

**Land Use**
Topics related to physical growth development, housing, and others

**Economic Growth**
Personal prosperity, business growth and start-ups, indicators, and metrics

**Interconnections**
Regional connectedness, communication, marketing, sharing, and collective work

The action steps emerged through an iterative process of community engagement, analysis, conversation, and deliberation to help move the region toward its vision. They are carefully defined as projects, policies, or programs, and are measurable and discrete. The action agenda is ambitious and will require coordination between multiple groups, so prioritization is critical. This work will take time, sequencing, and a strong response to the region's primary needs as they evolve over time.

### Influence or control? Leading the regional conversation.

The issues and opportunities that emerged from the Framework 2030 conversations and analysis were wide-ranging. Some of these – like traffic congestion, major infrastructure projects, or economic disruptions – are outside the effective control of a regional group like the Partnership, but can be tackled if the group works with others.

Other issues are better handled by the strong local communities that make up the region. Where the Partnership does not have an obvious or appropriate point of control, actions are about influencing good decision making or participating in conversations that will have an impact on the communities.

# Land Use Strategies and Actions

## Overview

At more than 200 square miles, the Partner region is large and includes a diverse range of places. Each of the communities has strong history of planning and consideration when it comes to managing their land assets and resources.

The analysis highlighted several key areas of interest within the topic that were reinforced through the community's comments. Housing, placemaking, parks and natural areas, and land management are several of priorities reflected the strategies and actions.

## 201 sq mi

**Size of the Focused Planning Area**

*Almost twice the size of the cities of Minneapolis & St. Paul combined*

**Other types**
**17,523 units**
(20% of housing)

**Housing:**

**Single-family detached**
**67,253 units**
(80% of housing)
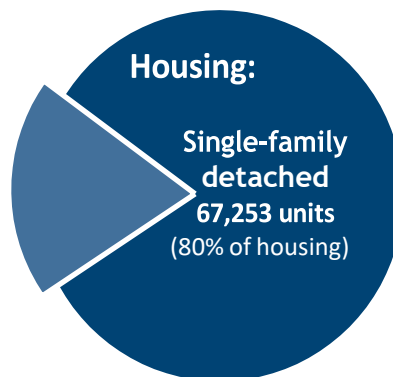
## 50+

**Miles of multi-use paths**

*Connecting internally across the region and into the larger network*

# Land Use Strategy L1. Leverage the region's unique parks and natural resources

In addition to serving as a major gateway to recreation opportunities "Up North," the region and Partner communities enjoy a wealth of their own natural assets. These include the Mississippi River, multiple lakes, the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, and numerous community parks and trails.

### Action L1-A: Promote the expansion of bicycling and walking infrastructure throughout the region

**Expanded outdoor recreational facilities and infrastructure and creating connections across the region would improve mobility, increase recreation options, enhance regional identity, attract visitors, encourage small business, and help attract talent across the region.** The region is rich in natural beauty and outdoor amenities, with 50+ miles of biking and walking trails and 60 miles of the 4,600-mile North Country Scenic Hiking Trail in the region; improvements and connections benefit the entire region.

### Action L1-B: Develop a regional parks website

**Sharing information about natural amenities would create a greater sense of collaboration and identity.** Residents and visitors often benefit from assets outside their own communities. There are currently 61 parks in the three cities, plus the Mississippi and Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. By hosting a website with information about programming, places, events, and the natural environment, the Partnership could highlight regional outdoor recreation opportunities and support future investments.

### Action L1-C: Commission a regional trails and greenways map and plan

**A digital map of city, county, regional, and state parks, trails, and greenways for use by residents, visitors, and to inform future planning.** Consolidating existing local maps into a comprehensive and dynamic regional greenways map on the CMRP and Partner websites could also support Partnership-hosted discussions about future trail connections and developments of particular importance to the Partners.

# Land Use Strategy L2. Promote lifecycle housing

A majority of regional employees commute into the region from outside the region and the majority of residents in the regions commute outside of the Partnership communities for work. This suggests opportunities to expand housing options and availability for incoming commuters. Unaddressed, this trend could limit the region's competitiveness related to the workforce and increase residential tax burdens.



## Action L2-A: Present an annual report and presentation on housing trends and development

**Communities may benefit from sharing information about the housing conditions and trends in the region.** Employment, education, land use, transportation, infrastructure, and others are all influenced and affected by housing, and communities in the region are seeing higher housing costs and average sales prices. In this dynamic market, the Partnership can collect important data, share with communities to inform policies and decisions, and convene regional discussions about regional housing issues and options.

## Action L2-B: Facilitate community conversations around strategic growth areas

**Involve the community and leadership in identifying and influencing key growth corridors or nodes. Facilitate an ongoing discussion around areas of particular opportunity.** Development has already transformed communities to the south of the region, with housing development, commercial growth, and major investments in transportation infrastructure significantly changing the character and scale of these places. With increased work-from-home options and fewer large-tract development opportunities along I-94, development pressure in this region will intensify. Proactively engaging communities in an ongoing discussion around key development corridors and nodes will deepen understanding of development opportunities or threats, lead to a more coordinated approach to land management (especially along corridors), and help ensure growth enhances the quality of place, life, and opportunity.

## Action L2-C: Develop a regional housing strategy

**Based on data, trends, and input from local partners, a regional strategy provides high-level guidance for accommodating housing growth while respecting the character and priorities of the region.** This is a logical outgrowth of the meetings, collaboration, and data collection facilitated by the Partnership. The strategy could reflect on changing demand, share ideas about how to respond to growth, define the market area and various housing products, address topics such as workforce housing, post-pandemic housing needs and opportunities, and housing incentive tools. Communities would share regionally and manage detailed information and decisions locally.

# Land Use Strategy L3. Invest in placemaking

Residents of the region love their communities and see even greater potential for the future. Investments in downtowns, neighborhoods, parks and trails, and elsewhere should focus on authentic expressions of the community and cultivate a better sense of place and strong connections *across the region.*



## Action L3-A: Host a regional placemaking committee and placemaking microgrant program

**Placemaking is a creative and proactive approach to connecting people with the public places they share.** This was a major priority for respondents to the Framework 2030 community survey. This committee guides regional placemaking, manages the microgrant program, and over time may provide leadership to inventory and seek funding for placemaking projects; support or sponsor community events; create a regional placemaking map, etc.

## Action L3-B: Commission local public art in regional gateway and wayfinding signage

**Local art in regional gateways can beautify, unify, and connect communities through a common aesthetic.** Arts-based placemaking is an effective way to promote a sense of place as well as increase cultural diversity and civic engagement. Physical art projects have a tangible impact on communities and signal to residents and visitors that they are in a place with a unique identity. Funded projects should maintain a consistent visual relationship and display the regional brand. The works and the artists should be local, and decisions around placement and content left up to the individual communities.

# Land Use Strategy L4: Pursue a coordinated approach to land use planning and management

The "small town feel" is a shared and treasured value across the region's diverse communities, and can be attributed to the scale and character of development (or the lack of it) in each place. The multi-year trend of strong growth in jobs and people will continue over the coming decades. To maintain the region's character while enabling the benefits of good growth, communities in the region will need to fashion plans and policies that work in concert.

## Action L4-A: Identify key regional corridors for coordinated planning

**As a network of connected places, partner communities would benefit from coordinated planning of the regional corridors.**
Regional corridors present an opportunity for jurisdictions to collaborate on land use decisions, transportation considerations, and placemaking strategies. Although such planning is complex, it is also an effective way to build a collaborative spirit, facilitate smart growth, and promote positive economic outcomes, and lay the groundwork for significant future infrastructure and economic investments.

## Action L4-B: Develop a regional conceptual development strategy

**Integrating the comprehensive plans and land use policies of the individual communities into a cohesive regional strategy and map would provide significant insights for future development.** Aggregating relevant existing plans would help identify points of friction and areas of redundancy, unnecessary competition, or gaps in planning. The Partnership communities could then discuss how to address some of these findings in a regional strategy and routinely update the composite map.

# Economic Growth Strategies and Actions

## Overview

The region's economy has continued to expand along with its population over the last five years. GDP increased by $2.1 billion, jobs by 10,000, and business starts by several thousand. While these indicators speak to a strong and expanding local economy, several outlying challenges could disrupt the trend. By continually addressing workforce, jobs diversity, disruptions, and cultivating strong metrics, the region can add resiliency along with raw growth.

| +$2.1b | +750 | 70,151 |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| **Regional GDP growth** | **New jobs added from 2015-2019** | **Number of business establishments** |
| *$8.2 billion in 2018, up $2.1 billion from 2010 for the two-county region* | *An increase of 6% with 12,997 total jobs in the Focused Planning* | *Within the two-county region* |

# Economic Growth Strategy E1: Expand quality and diversity of employment opportunities

The region has the opportunity to expand employment opportunities in emerging industries while strengthening the quality of jobs in the local economy. By investing in small business and private sector job growth, the region builds resiliency through a broader array of employment industries.

### Action E1-A: Facilitate expansion of high-speed internet access across the region

**Broadband internet is necessary to support business growth and will be essential to improving and increasing employment opportunities in the region.** The Partnership can help the region expand broadband across the planning area.



### Action E1-B: Create and maintain regional inventories of industrial land and commercial property vacancies

**A collaborative approach to industrial land marketing and management could mitigate vacancies and promote economic synergy among the Partnership communities.** This can help identify strategic locations for new industrial clusters and facilitate a cooperative approach to marketing and sharing leads, protecting industrial lands, and supporting intensification efforts. **Accessible and centralized commercial vacancy information can reduce barriers to filling these holes and avoiding long-term blight and disinvestment.** The accelerated use of e-commerce platforms for basic goods fulfillment and increased remote work has left communities in the region struggling with commercial vacancies and redundancies. A centralized database of commercial vacancies provides easy access for potential new tenants and crucial information for local decision making about additional commercial land. In addition, creative and adaptive reuse of vacant commercial spaces may help address other challenges in the region, such as housing.

# Economic Growth Strategy E2: Increase the pool of skilled labor in the region

As the region transitions from one economic era to the next, there will be an increased need for skilled and adaptable labor. Most regional employees commute in from outside the region, while most regional residents commute out of the region for work – and this gap will continue if unchecked.

## Action E2-A: Initiate discussions with higher-education institutions to better integrate economic development with workforce development

**Increasing and strengthening the workforce requires strong relationships between communities and a variety of educational institutions.** The region has a higher percentage of high school graduates than the state average, but residents are less likely to complete post-secondary education than their peers. The Partnership could aggregate information and facilitate discussions with post-secondary educational institutions and training organizations to help produce a stronger, more competitive workforce, and thus support and attract new employers and generally provide better opportunities for residents.

## Action E2-B: Facilitate partnerships between businesses and schools

**Experience is often the best teacher. Promoting and facilitating opportunities for students to gain "real life" work experience would bolster the workforce in the region.** The Partnership can convene conversations between major employers and high schools to discuss regional workforce and employment issues and opportunities, build mutually beneficial relationships, and forge lasting relationships that encourage students to continue working in the region after graduation.

# Economic Growth Strategy E3: Network the response to economic disruptions

Economic disruptions are being felt throughout the region; some are unique to this area and others are national. Some of these were spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic and related to the economic shutdown; others were well underway, such as decommissioning the two power plants. One of the most effective responses to economic disruptions is regional collaboration and coordination on the region's growing and emerging industries.

## Action E3-A: Commission a regional fiscal analysis of land use

**Understanding the fiscal impacts of different types of land use clusters is essential for good decision making and future planning.** The fiscal productivity -- or the net community benefit -- varies across the region based on land use. As of 2021, 84% of land is zoned agricultural / rural, 6% residential, 4% industrial, 2% riverfront, and <1% commercial. Each generates different levels of revenue based on local and property taxes, and has different costs due to infrastructure needs and school service requirements. Understanding the net impact of these revenues and costs on government finances can help decision makers identify the types of land use to encourage and those to approach with caution. Beyond a point-in-time study, regularly tracking the net fiscal effects of land use is a valuable tool for evaluating decisions with regional impacts.

# Economic Growth Strategy E4: Measure impacts of action locally and regionally

Measuring the success of any initiative requires logical measures of progress such as dashboards that provide leaders with necessary information. This region – through this collaborative Framework 2030 effort – is committed to making progress across a wide range of topics and identifying a set of key metrics to measure community progress critical to long-term success.

## Action E4-A: Establish and update regional indicators dashboard; monitor progress

**Measuring, tracking, and publishing economic data over time supports progress tracking and informs future strategies.** A regional dashboard tracks progress on actions and strategies that advance the regional vision, using pertinent data over time and presenting the information in a clear and compelling way. This helps communities identify broader trends, and the dashboard indicators then become the benchmarks to evaluate the Partnership's progress to increase the region's competitiveness and advance the vision.

# Interconnections: Strategies and Actions
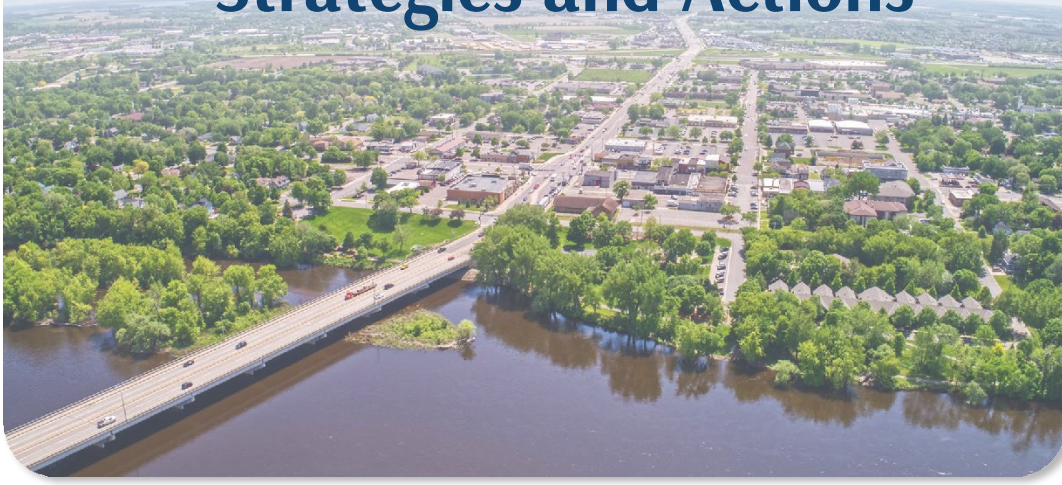
## Overview

Despite the Mississippi River, the communities of the region are tightly connected to one another. No single community has the population or spending power to support the full suite of amenities, retail, or services that are in the region today. The networked market helps to support this, just as the regional labor force supports small and large businesses alike. Communities are working together – as demonstrated by the Partnership – with greater regularity to better coordinate their investments, amplify their issues with state and federal agencies, and generally share their progress. This is great news for the region and, indeed, the communities as well.

## Key Findings:

*Partnership communities are the critical sources of trip generation and potential customers*

**9,203** Residents who commute into the region for work

**5,981** Residents who live and work in the region

**21,432** Residents who commute outside the region for work

**39,000** Average vehicles *Cross over the MN Highway 25 bridge daily*

# Interconnections Strategy I1: Use clear regional identity to advance collaborative work

Each community is unique, and at the same time they rely on one another for jobs, housing, retail, and amenities. A recognized regional brand connects or associates places with one another, provides leaders with an object to reference and celebrate, and can leave a memorable impression on visitors. The Partnership's work on Framework 2030 is a crucial first step in establishing a regional identity, and richer regional collaboration further builds that identity and unlocks new opportunities for resources, action development, and successful implementation.



## Action I1-A: Integrate branding with placemaking initiatives

**Applying the regional brand to local placemaking initiatives will provide a common thread that links the efforts of each community.** While every placemaking project or event will be unique, attaching the regional brand to each of them illustrates how the communities are part of something larger than themselves and builds awareness and support for the Partnership's regional efforts.

# Interconnections Strategy I2: Enhance regional connections

The physical and non-physical connections across the region play a key enabling role for local and regional economic activity. These corridors are the unifying factor for the region and help define its character.

## Action I2-A: Continue ongoing conversations with MnDOT and the counties regarding special projects

**Regular and ongoing communication across various agencies will be essential for understanding projects of special interest to the region.** Most major transportation and infrastructure investments in the region have resulted from cross-jurisdictional collaborations. As the region grapples with growth and associated congestion, it will be essential for the Partners to speak with a more collective and unified voice as major investments are considered and prioritized.

# Interconnections Strategy I3: Share talent, time, and information

The region today is a collection of small cities and smaller townships (based on population). One advantage of this scale is the ability to foster community connections and reinforce the "small town feel" – but this scale also limits capacity. Working collaboratively, communities can enhance their capabilities by sharing time, talent, and information to take advantage of larger-scale opportunities and solve complex challenges.



## Action I3-A: Host an annual "State of the Region" forum

**An annual meeting to present findings and facilitate conversation offers a unique opportunity to showcase and share the Partnership's growing role in data collection and analysis, reporting, and convening.** As the Partnership's work develops momentum and increases in impact and value, communities and non-government entities in the region will benefit from coming together to discuss and learn from each other about information, findings, results, and opportunities.

## Action I3-B: Pursue a regional lobbying effort, "Our fair share"

**A primary role of the Partnership is to advocate for the communities and the region at the state and federal levels.** State and Federal funding for transportation, infrastructure, housing, and other major investments is increasingly tied to regional collaboration and data-driven analysis. Sitting at the center of discussions occurring around the region, the Partnership can elevate the region's needs and highlight its potential to ensure that priority projects are considered and/or funded. Through its ongoing regional convening it can develop strong priority investment targets.

# Interconnections Strategy I4: Continually address regional vulnerabilities

Framework 2030 should result in an ongoing process by the communities in the region to identify areas of weakness or vulnerability. The project was initiated in 2020, a year of profound disruption, and this churning is expected to continue for some time. The region must commit to an ongoing evaluative process.

## Action I4-A: Study social service opportunities that may benefit from regional coordination

**Services like food banks and ridesharing may better serve our communities if they operate at a regional level.** A full inventory of social services in the region would provide a clearer understanding of coverages, gaps, and redundancies. Then the Partnership can convene gatherings to consider more efficient and effective ways to deliver these critical services.