

## Conclusion and Next Steps

East Central has produced a State of the Region report for two reasons.

- To provide useful, accessible information to people in their communities, local government staff and officials, and interest groups.
- To collate baseline information that will enable us all to understand the basic make-up of the region and provide the foundation on which we will begin to plan for the future. This report along with input from the public participation process will enable East Central to take the next step in the regional planning process.

This report has explored current and future trends, as well as identified issues in nine broad categories: demographic and socioeconomic data, economic development, housing, transportation, community facilities, agricultural, natural, and cultural resources, and land use. It has also examined examples of intergovernmental cooperation currently in place throughout the region. This information will help us to make good strategic policy choices.

To achieve real progress, development of policies for these areas will need to be pursued in an integrated way. For example, land use and transportation planning will have to be taken forward together, there will need to be close links between housing and economic development strategies, while preserving rural character will require action on a variety of fronts. In addition, protecting water quality, avoiding excessive long-term costs for infrastructure provision and maintenance, minimizing the fragmentation of ecosystems and curbing damage to environmentally sensitive areas will require a solid understanding of the interaction between urban and rural policies. To move forward successfully will require close cooperation and partnership between the public, private and voluntary sectors at the regional, county and local levels.

The policy choices that are made will have long-term impacts on residents' quality of life: socially, economically and environmentally. As we begin to think about the future we will need to take a broad, long term, proactive approach. This includes being aware of the broader context of our decisions and conscious of the forces of change, which may or may not originate within the region. In addition, it means embracing many uncertainties and involving all stakeholders in clarifying a preferred future. We need to clarify our aspirations for how we want the region to look in the future, specifically: what would we like to be preserved? what would we like to be changed? and, what would we like to be created?

Developing a vision of our preferred future represents the next step in the regional planning process and will be the focus of Milestone Report #2: Issues, Opportunities and a Regional Vision. As we work toward producing this report there are two primary approaches that can be used to explore the impact that the trends identified in this report may have on the region.

- First, for the trends that are most likely, for example, an aging population, an increasing number of households and a reduction in household size, we need to ask how do we respond?

- Second, for the areas of greatest conflict, we need to reexamine our basic assumptions about the issues and we need to ask are there better ways to address these challenges?
  - New construction, reconstruction and expansion of highways, at considerable cost, seem to be the dominant current trend in transportation. How can we rethink how we deal with transportation issues relating to sprawl? how can we promote compact, mixed land use patterns that provide access, reduce social exclusion, and create livable communities while being cost effective?
  - The number of residential units in the region increased by 43% in the 20 years between 1980 and 2000, however the amount of residential land increased by 173%. How can we promote cost-effective redevelopment and development of land with existing or nearby community facilities while continuing to provide both housing choice and affordability?
  - Approximately 320,000 acres of farmland were lost during this 20 year time period, an area larger than the entire area of Winnebago County. How can we protect farmland and preserve rural character while ensuring the continued economic vitality of the region?
  - The region's natural resources, groundwater and surface water, lakes and open spaces are under increasing pressure from both the urbanization of our rural areas and greater than ever recreational use. How do we ensure the protection of our natural resources in the face of competing demands?

Developing policies to address these issues will require trade-offs that will present many challenges. Regulation vs. private property rights, economic development vs. environmental protection, development vs. costs, residential development vs. preservation of rural character, consolidation vs. local control.

### Next Steps

In terms of the planning process the next steps are outlined below:

- Complete Chapters 7 and 8, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2003.
- Make available the approved State of the Region report on the East Central web site, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003.
- Make available, interactive data tables, on the East Central Data Center, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003.
- Prepare a summary State of the Region report, newsletter format, for widespread dissemination, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2003.
- Organize two public information meetings in the region, March / April.
- Establish Citizen and Technical Advisory Committees, February through April.
- Bring Milestone Report #1: The State of the Region (2003) and East Central Policy (2003) to the April Commission meeting for adoption, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2003.
- Draft Milestone Report # 2: Issues, Opportunities and a Regional Vision for presentation at the October 2003 Commission meeting, February through October.