



LINE OF SIGHT

REGION VI PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
STRATEGY 2022–2026

NORTH CENTRAL WEST VIRGINIA

REGION VI
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL



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INTRODUCTION AND VISION

Region VI Planning and Development Council ("Region VI") is the designated Economic Development District through the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) for the counties of Doddridge, Harrison, Marion, Monongalia, Preston, and Taylor. As the region's Economic Development District, Region VI is responsible for developing a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which is a five-year economic plan to guide the growth of jobs, commerce, and community development. The CEDS is a strategy-driven plan guided by a diverse workgroup of local representatives. It is established through local input, statistical analysis, and integration of economic development principles and practices. This CEDS identifies key themes that surfaced during the research process and during interviews conducted with stakeholders in Region VI. Each action recommendation included in this plan will assist north central West Virginia in accomplishing the CEDS vision:

Provide a clear line of sight for success and inspire north central West Virginia to unite in larger regional economic development efforts that improve our communities.

Line of sight is the ability to connect with your goal or target. In business, it ensures that employees see the connections between their individual goals and the goals of the company and is a method to let employees know that their work matters. In regional economics, line of sight establishes more resilient communities that value their contribution and understand the purpose of others within the system.

Region VI has developed strategies that capitalize on

Region VI has developed strategies that capitalize on strengths and opportunities to empower communities to build upon successful economic sectors and to pursue new and sustainable avenues for prosperity to grow the region's diversifying economy.

This plan was created in accordance with Title 13 of the Code of Federal Regulations Chapter 3, and as such it includes:

- a technical report providing an outline of current conditions, trends, future needs, and strategic findings;
- findings from an in-depth analysis of community and private sector participation, including an analysis of regional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, also referred to as a SWOT analysis;
- a strategic direction/action and implementation plan that includes a set of goals, objectives, and strategies;
- an evaluation framework that measures the effectiveness and performance of the identified goals in the plan; and
- an economic resiliency component, which identifies strategies for preventing, withstanding, and quickly recovering from a shock to the economy.

Region VI was established by the 1971 West Virginia Regional Planning & Development Act. Its mission is to establish actionable strategies and plans that are responsive to the economic development needs of north central West Virginia and lay the groundwork for implementable projects and programs.

In West Virginia, Region VI, along with the other regional councils, are structured as locally oriented, public corporations. They are directed by elected officials and appointees from a cross-section of the region's social and economic institutions. Region VI has 68 board members, representing from six counties, and 39 municipalities.

Region VI retains a professional staff adept in public administration, regional and community planning, and economic development.

Region VI nominated members to a CEDS Strategy Committee. These members represent various sectors of the region, including education, federal employment, transportation, local government, economic development boards, and recreation and have guided the development of this CEDS.

SWOT ANALYSIS

Throughout fall 2021, an in-depth SWOT analysis was conducted to determine the issues and opportunities important to north central West Virginia. Participants included Region VI board members, elected officials, representatives of local chambers of commerce, business owners, regional transportation representatives, and over 300 members of the general public who participated in a survey.

The SWOT identified key themes that support this plan’s vision. These themes include:

1. Continuously evaluate and improve our regional infrastructure.
2. Encourage an ecosystem that cultivates innovation and entrepreneurship.
3. Nurture the authentic Mountaineer Country experience and quality of life.
4. Capitalize on north central West Virginia's competitive advantage.

According to stakeholders, the region’s biggest strengths are its natural beauty and outdoor recreational opportunities, the people who call this place home, and its diversified economy supported by access to good education and health care.

West Virginia University (WVU) and the region’s major healthcare providers, WVU Medicine and Mon-Health, are among the region's largest employers and attract many talented minds and a dedicated workforce to the area. The region’s strategic location is easily accessible from the metropolitan areas of Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. along two major interstate highways. Regional airports provide commuter flights and maintenance services for many of the aerospace industry’s most popular aircraft. Due to these and other factors, the region has experienced population growth of 10% in the last 20 years. A net increase of 7,230 jobs were added in the region between 2010 and 2019—after the Great

Recession and before the COVID-19 pandemic. In this time period, 5,530 jobs were added in Monongalia County alone.

Priority projects identified throughout the region revolve around capitalizing on the tremendous opportunities available in north central West Virginia. Broadband expansion, continued tourism development, and continued recruitment of federal agencies into the I-79 Technology Park resonated with SWOT participants.

While less tangible to envision than physical infrastructure, participants repeatedly touched on weak civic infrastructure: the social connections, pools of local talent, and formal or informal networks that allow residents to solve problems, work together, and build a thriving community. At the same time, respondents overwhelmingly stated that what they like best about the region was its small-town atmosphere and friendly neighbors. This gap, whether perceived or real, calls for a need to create networks within and between north central West Virginia communities.

Dilapidation of communities, vacant homes and storefronts—as well as a lack of sufficient technical assistance for new and small businesses—justifies the need to illustrate clear lines of sight to overcome barriers and inspire our communities to regrow and rethink economic development.

Finally, the greatest threats identified relate to the region's ability to grow. Perceptions and policies influence economic development in the region. A workforce and community can become discouraged and susceptible to substance abuse if clear sight lines for success and economic mobility are not demonstrated, promoted, and nurtured. Additionally, corporations may be hesitant to invest in a state whose policies may be in contrast with their values.

This CEDS presents an understanding of key trends occurring within Region VI and north central West Virginia. Its clear line of sight goals and strategies will help realize the area's potential and achieve long-term success for a resilient regional economy.

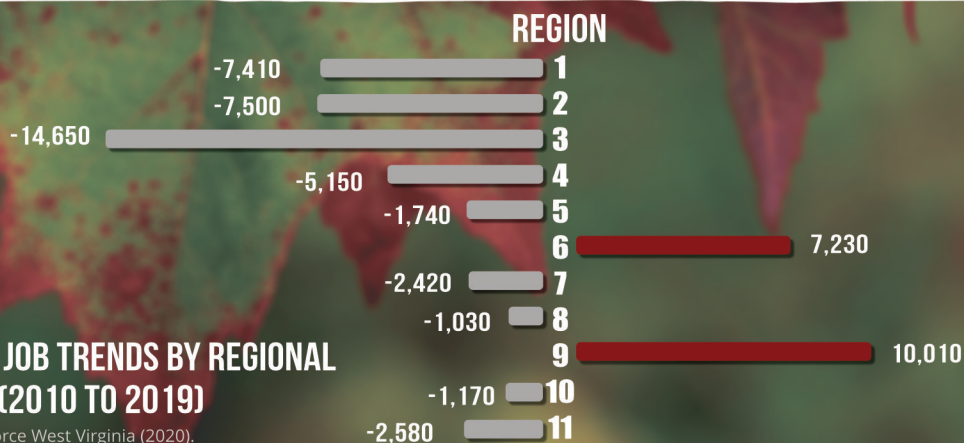


FIGURE 1. JOB TRENDS BY REGIONAL COUNCIL (2010 TO 2019)

Source: Workforce West Virginia (2020).

RESILIENCY

Some Region VI communities are still emerging after overcoming an economic shock due to job losses in the natural resources and energy sector. Furthermore, while the dust was still settling from the boom-and-bust reality of the coal, oil, and gas industries, COVID-19 once again redefined the region's economic viewpoint and our lives. If anywhere in the country understands the value of resiliency it is north central West Virginia, which continues to withstand and recover from economic disruptions.

A recent study funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission identified about a dozen factors that make cities and counties more resilient, as illustrated in Figure 2.

According to this study, best practices for growing economic resiliency in Appalachia include:

- 1. Invest in education, technology, infrastructure and broadband**
- 2. Engage the community over the long term**
- 3. Create communities where people want to live**
- 4. Grow youth engagement and next generation leadership**
- 5. Identify and grow the assets in the community and region**
- 6. Build networks and foster collaboration**
- 7. Move multiple sectors forward for economic development and grow value chains**
- 8. Cultivate entrepreneurs and develop resources for business start-ups**

Many regions throughout the country—those in locations vulnerable to significant natural disasters and those dealing with economic shifts—are improving their resiliency with customized approaches. Learning from earlier experiences, Region VI can anticipate and mitigate threats to help prevent future shocks and quickly rebound to ensure well-being for our communities. Through information gathered during this CEDS planning process and SWOT analysis, resiliency has been woven into Region VI's key themes, goals, and strategies in the following ways:

- 1. Infrastructure focuses not just on the physical infrastructure that equips the region for effective responses and recovery, but also on the civic connections that allow residents to solve problems, work together, and build a thriving community.**
- 2. Innovation and entrepreneurship support further diversification of the regional economy.**
- 3. The Mountaineer quality of life will inspire a lifestyle of wellness by improving physical health and exercise, providing access to healthy local foods, and promoting outdoor activities, while mitigating environmental threats in our communities.**
- 4. North central West Virginia's competitive advantage in the care health and wellness sector will help us recover from natural disasters and pandemics, while the region's access to high-quality education institutions provides opportunity for upskilling and retraining a workforce after a plant closure or the downturn of an entire industry.**

There is no crystal ball to predict the future, and no one action can guarantee resiliency. Therefore, north central West Virginia will continue to grow smarter, stronger, and more resourceful to withstand these inevitable economic interruptions, while becoming the best of who we are.

FIGURE 2. FACTORS OF RESILIENCY





SUMMARY BACKGROUND

REGIONAL OVERVIEW — THE PEOPLE

When asked “What do you like about your community?” during the SWOT process, the overwhelming responses were “the people” and “my neighbors” (see SWOT survey results in Appendix A).

Population

Region VI is located in north central West Virginia and is composed of six counties: Doddridge, Harrison, Marion, Monongalia, Preston, and Taylor. As illustrated in Table 1, its population grew to 286,677 in 2020.

This represents a steady increase of 2.3% since the last census in 2010. The increase is supported mainly by strong growth in Monongalia County, which grew by 10.0% and outpaced the national growth rate of 7.4% over 10 years. Preston County and Taylor County were the only other counties in the region to grow, but at much lower rates. This trend is occurring statewide, with 47 of 55 counties losing population over the past 10 years. West Virginia was the only state in the country to lose population during this time period.

Several factors, including a general decrease in fertility and the aging of the baby-boom generation are partly driving population decline. Other factors include a migration imbalance and an inability to create a clear line of sight for the thousands of graduates of WVU and other higher education facilities.

TABLE 1. REGION VI POPULATION TRENDS

	POPULATION			POPULATION CHANGE		
	2020	2010	2000	2010–20	2000–20	2000–10
DODDRIDGE	7,808	8,202	7,403	-4.8%	5.5%	10.8%
HARRISON	65,921	69,099	68,652	-4.6%	-4%	0.7%
MARION	56,205	56,418	56,598	-0.4%	-0.7%	-0.3%
MONONGALIA	105,822	96,189	81,866	10%	29.3%	17.5%
PRESTON	34,216	33,520	29,334	2.1%	16.6%	14.3%
TAYLOR	16,705	16,895	16,089	1.1%	3.8%	5%
REGION VI	286,677	280,323	259,942	2.30%	10.3%	7.8%
WV	1,793,716	1,852,994	1,808,344	-3.2%	-0.8%	2.5%
U.S.	331,449,281	308,745,538	281,421,906	7.4%	17.8%	9.7%

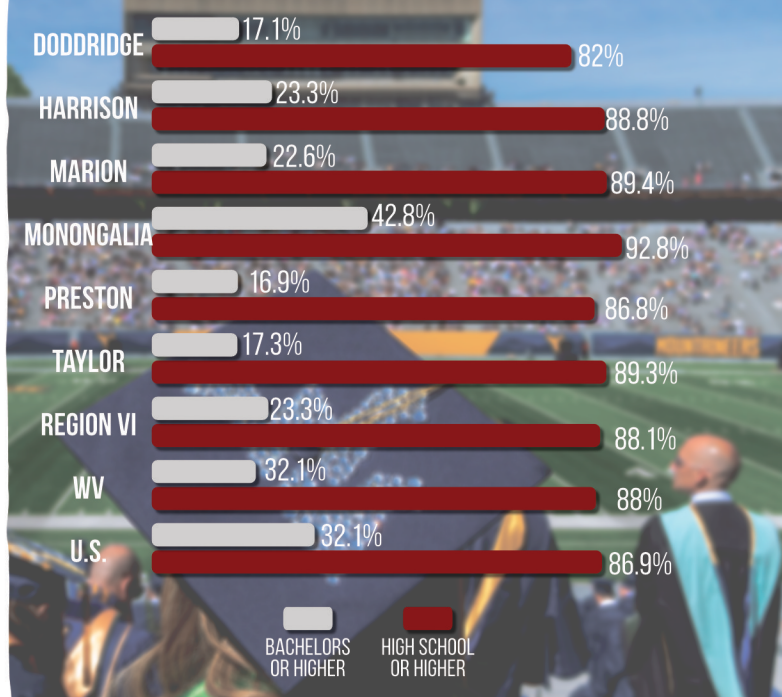
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2020).

Educational attainment

Region VI has a highly educated workforce. As illustrated in Figure 3, the region as a whole performs above the state average, and its high school graduation rate is on par with the nation’s. However, the region lags behind the United States in the attainment of bachelor’s or higher degrees.

Monongalia County leads the region in educational attainment, with 92.4% receiving high school diplomas and 42.8% earning a bachelor’s degree or higher. This far exceeds the state and national rate.

FIGURE 3. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, AGE 25+, 2020



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2020).

Poverty

The nation’s 2019 poverty rate was 13.4%, with West Virginia’s statewide rate at 17.6%. North central West Virginia’s regional poverty straddles those of the state and nation at 16.2%.

While the region’s overall rate slightly declined between 2016 and 2019, Doddridge County’s rate increased by 3.4%. The impacts of poverty can range from a less-prepared workforce to reduced spending power of the middle class to fuel the regional economy.

TABLE 2. REGION VI
POVERTY RATES

	2019	2016
DODDRIDGE	18.8%	15.4%
HARRISON	11.1%	15.9%
MARION	15%	16.7%
MONONGALIA	19.1%	22.2%
PRESTON	19.1%	15.3%
TAYLOR	14.3%	16.6%
REGION VI	16.2%	17%
WV	17.6%	17.7%
U.S.	13.4%	15.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2016, 2019).

¹The baby-boom generation includes those born between 1946 and 1964, who are now 57 to 75 years of age.

Median household income

Median household income is one way to measure a community's economic status. It is a strong indicator of overall income and influenced by extremely low or high incomes. North central West Virginia's median household income has typically risen year over year, with the exception of Marion County between 1989 and 1999.

TABLE 3. REGION VI MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

	2019	2016
DODDRIDGE	18.8%	15.4%
HARRISON	11.1%	15.9%
MARION	15%	16.7%
MONONGALIA	19.1%	22.2%
PRESTON	19.1%	15.3%
TAYLOR	14.3%	16.6%
REGION VI	16.2%	17%
WV	17.6%	17.7%
U.S.	13.4%	15.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2021).

REGIONAL OVERVIEW — THE COMMUNITY ASSETS

While many SWOT surveys and interviews reference the strength of the region's natural assets, its beauty, and recreational venues, others identified the region's health care system, educational institutions, and aviation facilities. North central West Virginia must continue to support its existing assets and invest in its aging infrastructure to remain competitive and welcome new businesses and members to the community.

Energy industry

Energy has been, and continues to be, an important economic sector in the region. The region is rich in coal and natural gas, home to several electric power plants, and poised for significant growth in renewable electricity generation.

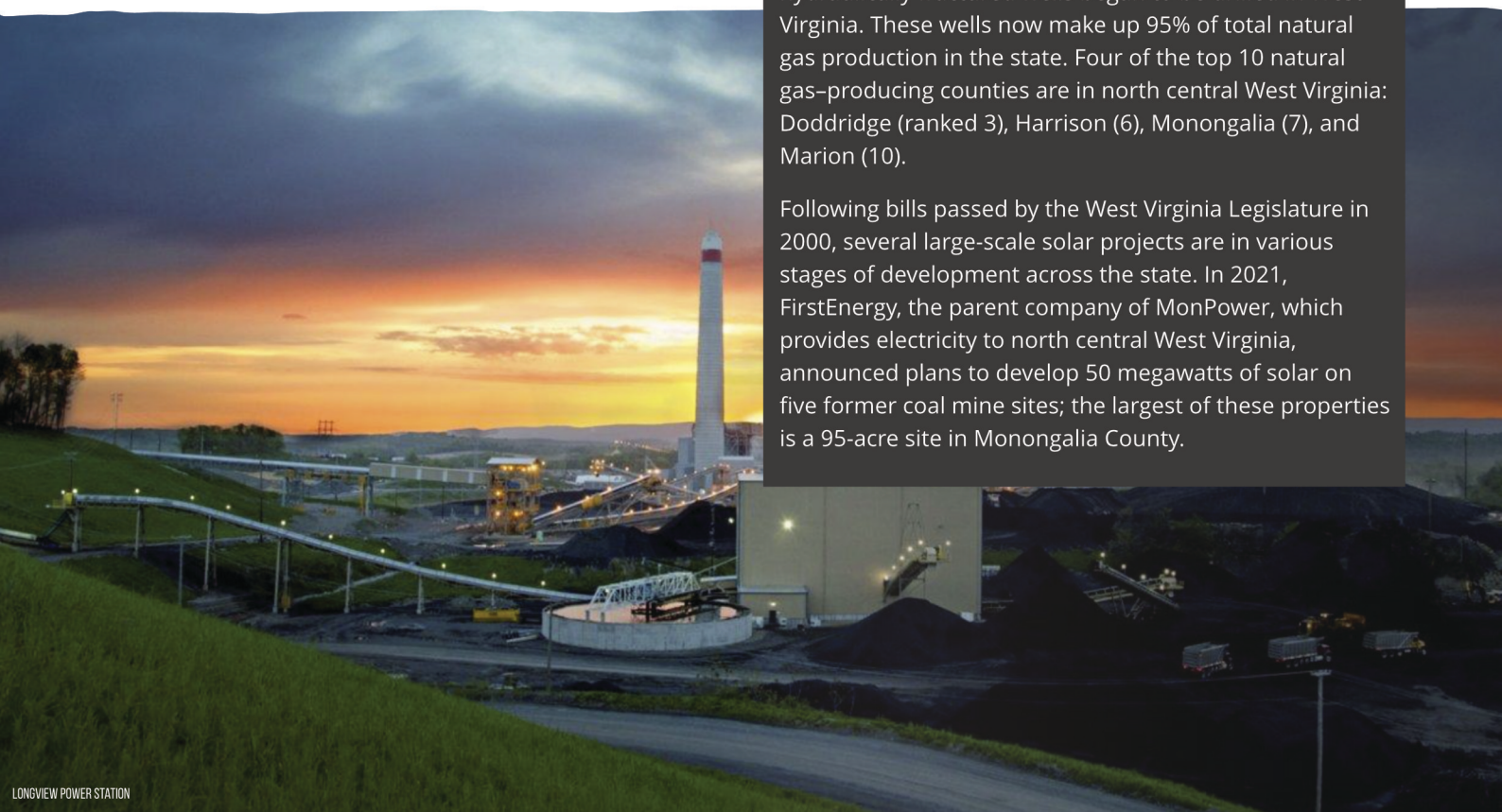
The coal industry in the region has changed markedly over the last decade. In 2011, all Region VI counties except Doddridge County reported coal production; of these five counties, production was dominated by Marion and Monongalia counties. Now, only Marion and Taylor counties report continued production, and Taylor County production is dominated by a metallurgical coal mine.

Despite the county-by-county shifts, coal production in north central West Virginia stayed relatively constant, declining slightly from 2011 through 2019. Production fell off considerably in 2020. It is too early to tell whether this drop is solely related to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on the economy, or whether it reflects a longer-term trend in which cheaper electricity generation from natural gas and renewables and policies reducing greenhouse gas emissions are impacting demand for thermal coal.

Four of the state's power plants are located in the region: Fort Martin Power Station (Monongalia County), Grant Town Power Station (Marion County), Harrison Power Station (Harrison County), and Longview Power Station (Monongalia County). Longview has announced plans to build a natural gas-fired power plant and a solar array adjacent to its coal-fired power plant, diversifying the region's electricity generation portfolio.

While thousands of conventional oil and gas wells dot the landscape of north central West Virginia, the industry began to shift in the late 2000s as horizontally drilled, hydraulically fractured wells began to be drilled in West Virginia. These wells now make up 95% of total natural gas production in the state. Four of the top 10 natural gas-producing counties are in north central West Virginia: Doddridge (ranked 3), Harrison (6), Monongalia (7), and Marion (10).

Following bills passed by the West Virginia Legislature in 2000, several large-scale solar projects are in various stages of development across the state. In 2021, FirstEnergy, the parent company of MonPower, which provides electricity to north central West Virginia, announced plans to develop 50 megawatts of solar on five former coal mine sites; the largest of these properties is a 95-acre site in Monongalia County.



Broadband

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the importance of broadband access for educating students, working remotely, accessing healthcare, and shopping. Access to affordable, reliable, fast internet access remains a challenge for numerous West Virginians across all counties.

As illustrated in Figure 4, only approximately two-thirds of households in north central West Virginia have access to broadband internet. Doddridge and Preston counties generally have less access than the other counties, although large percentages of people living in portions of the other four counties also do not have access.

Even when broadband is available, the median download and upload speeds are often below 25 megabits per second (Mbps) and 3 Mbps, respectively—which are the thresholds for the Federal Communications Commission’s definition of broadband. [REF]

As illustrated in Figure 5 (download) and Figure 6 (upload), large portions of Preston County—, but also parts of most of the other counties in the region—have median speeds that do not meet this definition of broadband. (NTIA, 2021)

FIGURE 4. REGION VI HOUSEHOLDS WITH BROADBAND ACCESS

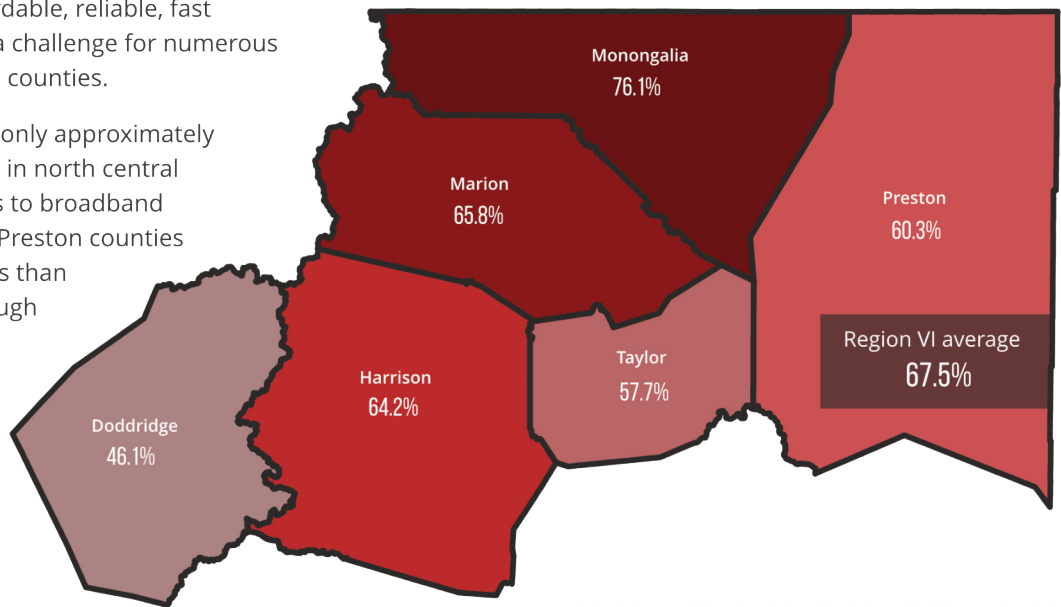


FIGURE 5. MEDIAN DOWNLOAD SPEEDS (MBPS)

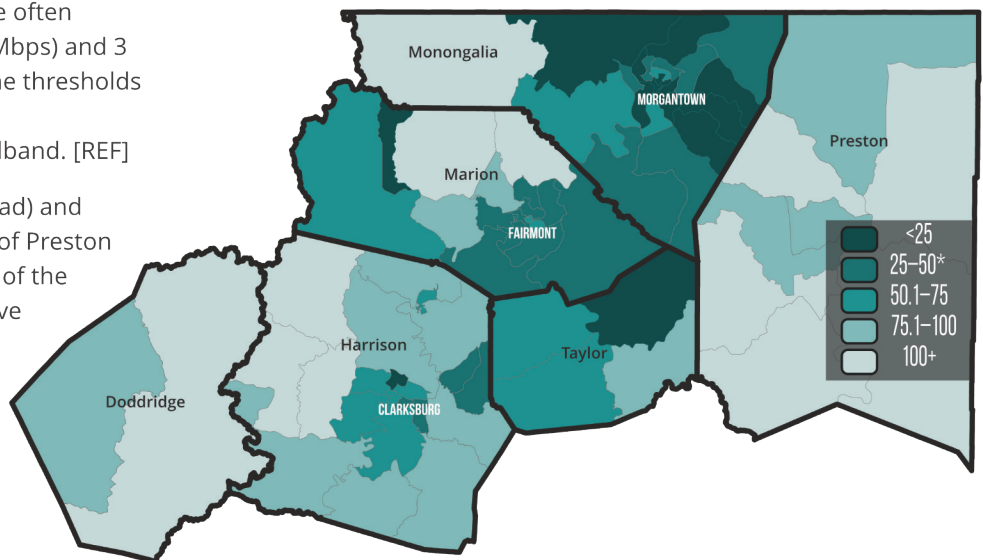
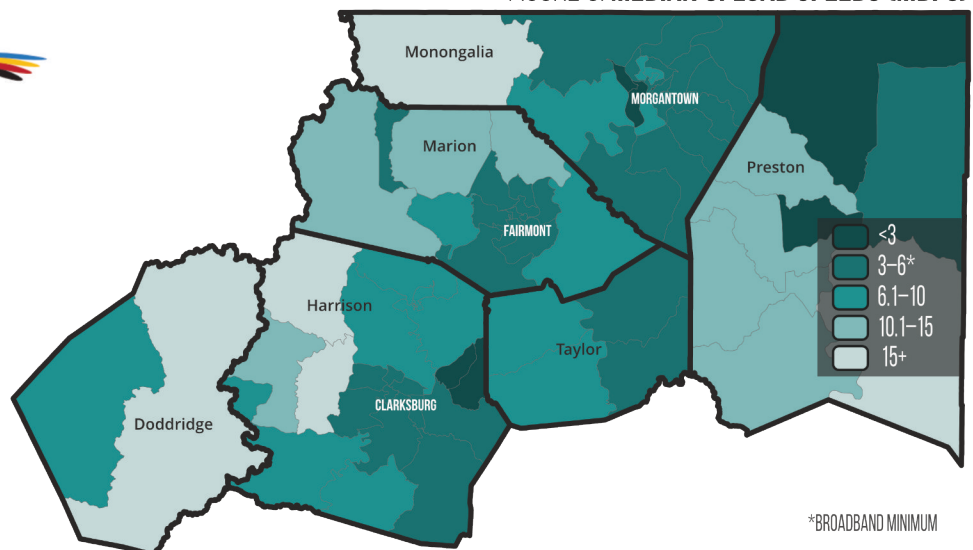


FIGURE 6. MEDIAN UPLOAD SPEEDS (MBPS)



*BROADBAND MINIMUM



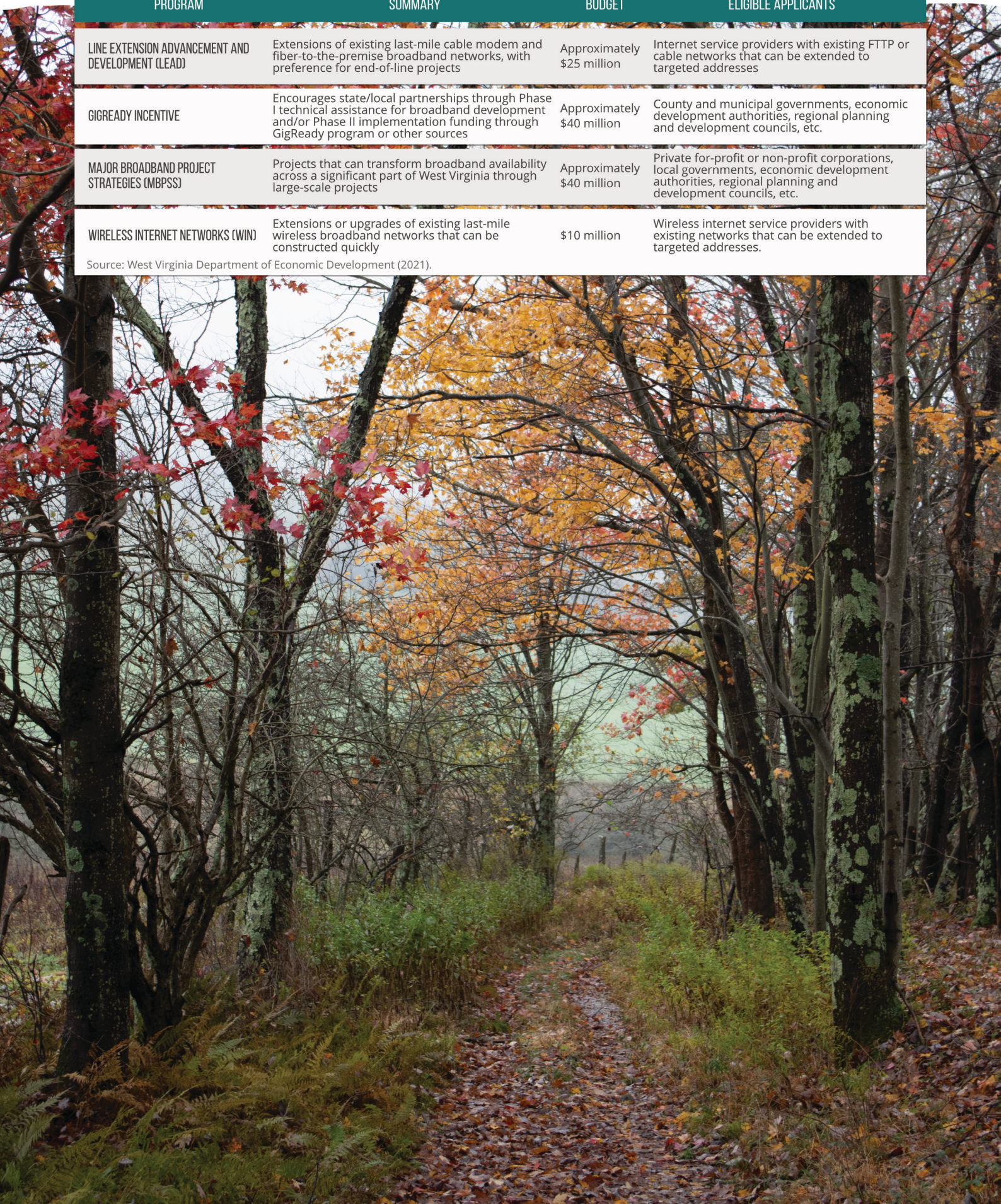
Source: National Telecommunications and Information Administration (2021), U.S. Census Bureau (2019).

Federal and state resources are now being invested to dramatically increase broadband access in West Virginia. For example, the state’s American Rescue Plan Act Broadband Investment Plan includes four programs, as summarized in Table 4. Regional planning and development councils such as Region VI are eligible applicants for two of these programs: GigReady Incentive and MBPSSs.

TABLE 4. WEST VIRGINIA’S AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT BROADBAND INVESTMENT PLAN

PROGRAM	SUMMARY	BUDGET	ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS
LINE EXTENSION ADVANCEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (LEAD)	Extensions of existing last-mile cable modem and fiber-to-the-premise broadband networks, with preference for end-of-line projects	Approximately \$25 million	Internet service providers with existing FTTP or cable networks that can be extended to targeted addresses
GIGREADY INCENTIVE	Encourages state/local partnerships through Phase I technical assistance for broadband development and/or Phase II implementation funding through GigReady program or other sources	Approximately \$40 million	County and municipal governments, economic development authorities, regional planning and development councils, etc.
MAJOR BROADBAND PROJECT STRATEGIES (MBPSS)	Projects that can transform broadband availability across a significant part of West Virginia through large-scale projects	Approximately \$40 million	Private for-profit or non-profit corporations, local governments, economic development authorities, regional planning and development councils, etc.
WIRELESS INTERNET NETWORKS (WIN)	Extensions or upgrades of existing last-mile wireless broadband networks that can be constructed quickly	\$10 million	Wireless internet service providers with existing networks that can be extended to targeted addresses.

Source: West Virginia Department of Economic Development (2021).



Natural beauty and outdoor recreation

The tourism and outdoor recreation industries have grown in recent years across the nation, but that steady rise surged in 2020 amid COVID-related lockdowns. Today, the outdoor recreation industry boasts \$788 billion in output, supports 5.2 million jobs, and makes up 2.1% of the national GDP—more than the oil, gas, and mining industries combined (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2021).

An estimated 265 million Americans, or 80% of the population, participated in outdoor recreation during the pandemic, one-third of whom were first-timers. As many as 45 million of these nascent recreationists are expected to be long-term customers (Furlong and Diamond, 2021). Overall, total outdoor participation has climbed by 2.2% in the past year (to 52.9%), which is the largest annual increase recorded since the Outdoor Industry Association began tracking the numbers (SGB Media, 2021).

More than 65 million visitors made 16.6 million overnight trips and 49.8 million day trips to West Virginia in 2020. These visitors support an outdoor recreation economy with 23,000 direct jobs and 45,000 supported jobs that generates \$700 million in wages and salaries, contributes \$1.5 billion in value added, yields \$534.5 million in tax revenue, and comprises 1.9% of the state GDP. Outdoor recreation is one of the most thriving industries in the state (West Virginia Tourism Office, 2020; Outdoor Industry Association, 2021).

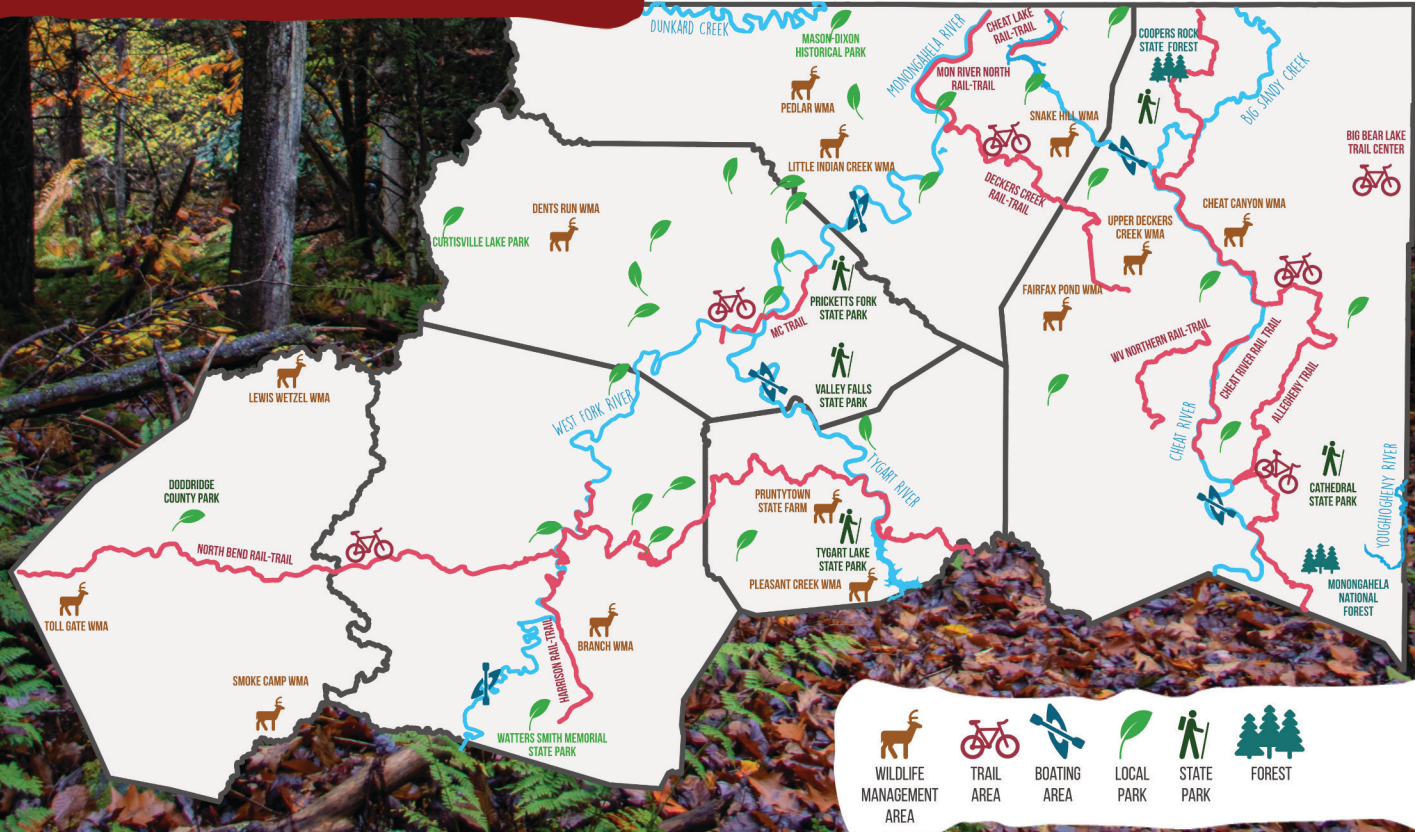
North central West Virginia is home to abundant natural beauty and outdoor recreation assets. As illustrated in Figure 7, the region has six state parks, over 100 local parks, one state forest, a portion of the Monongahela National Forest, 15 wildlife management areas, two lakes, approximately 111 miles of water trails, 233 miles of whitewater trails along numerous rivers, and 460 miles of land-based trails.



BIG BEAR LAKE TRAIL CENTER

MOUNTAINEER COUNTRY CVB

FIGURE 7. REGION VI OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSETS



Transportation

Highways

The majority of Region VI is connected by highways and interstates. I-68 traverses east-to-west through the northern half of the region in Preston and Monongalia counties. It then merges with I-79, which runs north-south through Monongalia, Marion, and Harrison counties. I-79 intersects with U.S Route 50 in Clarksburg; this four-lane highway, which is among the earliest highways in the country, stretches coast to coast and still supports travel and commerce in Taylor, Harrison, and Doddridge counties.

River transportation

The Monongahela River has historically been used as a barge shipping route. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers maintains a series of locks and dams to facilitate the river's use, providing a route for shipping goods from Marion and Monongalia counties north to Pittsburgh, and potentially further as the Monongahela River feeds into the Ohio River. In recent years, however, as shipping volumes decreased, the locks and dams in north central West Virginia have been open for fewer hours—impacting not just the use of the river by barges, but also by recreational boats that cannot travel from one pool to the next. Designation as a marine highway could potentially open new opportunities for projects and funding that would expand the use of the Monongahela River (U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration, 2021).

Airports

The region is served by two regional airports and is on the horizon of becoming a base of operation for the region's emerging aerospace industry.

Located near exit 7 off I-68, Morgantown Municipal Airport (MGW) offers daily flights to Washington Dulles Airport (IAD) and Pittsburgh International Airport (PIT).

Located near exit 124 off I-79 in Bridgeport, the North Central West Virginia Airport (CKB) is currently served by two commercial airlines: Allegiant and United Express. Allegiant offers service to Orlando/Sanford, Florida as well as seasonal service to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and Destin-Fort Walton Beach, Florida. United Express offers global connectivity through its hubs at Chicago O'Hare and Washington Dulles airports.

Annual operations, as illustrated Table 5, include arrivals and departures at these two airports, while Table 6 illustrates the number of passengers using the regional airports for travel.

While airline passenger flights are important assets to the region, bringing convenience and visitor spending to the area, the North Central West Virginia Airport also substantially contributes to north central West Virginia in several other ways such as government; education; airport operations; its maintenance, repair, and overhaul division; and manufacturing. Workers at this airport provide routine maintenance to Aurora Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Bombardier (now Mitsubishi), and Pratt Whitney, creating almost 1,500 full-time equivalent jobs with an annual payroll of \$109 million (Volaire, 2019).



TABLE 5. ANNUAL OPERATIONS

AIRPORT	AIR TAXI	GENERAL AVIATION - LOCAL	GENERAL AVIATION - ITINERANT	MILITARY	TOTAL
MORGANTOWN MUNICIPAL	23,119	17,746	12,595	2,200	55,660
NORTH CENTRAL WEST VIRGINIA	2,039	2,179	6,857	5,333	17,053

Source: Federal Aviation Administration (2021). Note: These operations cover the period from October 2019 through September 2020.

TABLE 6. ENPLANEMENTS AT COMMERCIAL SERVICE AIRPORTS (2017–2020)

AIRPORT	2020	2019	2018	2017
MORGANTOWN MUNICIPAL	3,369	7,304	5,890	5,698
NORTH CENTRAL WEST VIRGINIA	18,468	41,802	36,917	25,105

Source: Federal Aviation Administration (2021).

Wastewater, drinking water, and stormwater utilities

Whether cleaning it, distributing it, or controlling it, managing water is critical to economic development and maintaining quality of life. Limiting pollution and ensuring adequate capacity for existing, expanding, and new businesses is critical to Region VI’s resiliency.

Over 90 registered water and sewer service providers are located within the six-county region. Previous CEDS documents have put a great deal of emphasis on this infrastructure. While water and sewer projects are still important, prioritizing them over all other projects may

limit Region VI’s staffing capacity for other types of economic development initiatives. In order for lines of sight to be cleared, Region VI will need support beyond utilities and will need to lean on assistance programs for small utilities.

Across the state, including in north central West Virginia, opportunities exist for public service districts to voluntarily merge. If done right, public service district mergers, consolidations, or acquisitions can lead to efficiencies that lead to ratepayer savings.

Primary and secondary schools

North central West Virginia has built some of West Virginia’s strongest school districts, with several recently ranked at or near the finest in the state. Three of the top 10 school districts are in the region: Monongalia (ranked 1), Doddridge (4), and Harrison (7). Marion ranks just outside at number 11. (Niche, 2021)

As illustrated in Table 7 and Figure 8, the region’s enrollment numbers remained steady from 2013–2018. Declines began in 2019 and accelerated in 2020–2021. The fact that all north central districts lost between 2–5% of enrollment suggests little migration to other districts and may be an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. These trends should be monitored moving forward to determine if there are other factors causing enrollment declines.

TABLE 7. SCHOOL ENROLLMENT BY COUNTY (2019–2021)

	2019–20	2020–21	TOTAL CHANGE	PERCENT CHANGE
DODDRIDGE	1,118	1,099	-19	-2%
HARRISON	10,544	10,067	-477	-5%
MARION	7,873	7,579	-294	-4%
MONONGALIA	11,589	11,062	-527	-5%
PRESTON	4,373	4,205	-168	-4%
TAYLOR	2,381	2,293	-88	-4%

Source: West Virginia Department of Education (2021).

Higher and post-secondary education

North central West Virginia provides access to educational opportunities unparalleled by other regions in the state. Over 50 institutions offer training and education within 90 miles of Fairmont, Region VI’s central municipality. Several two-year and four-year colleges exist within the region, including WVU’s main campus in Morgantown, which is one of the largest employers and economic drivers in the region.

Founded in 1867, WVU was formed under terms in the Morrill Act, offering land grants of 30,000 acres of federally owned land to each state that agreed to establish a college to teach agriculture and the “mechanic arts,” also known as engineering.

Today, 14 Morgantown colleges and schools offer 359 majors in addition to its original agriculture and engineering focus. Hundreds of distance education and online classes are also available.

In fall 2019, 26,839 students enrolled at the Morgantown campus. These students come from 118 nations, all 50 U.S. states (plus Washington, D.C.), and all 55 West Virginia counties; 52% are West Virginia residents. (WVU, 2021a, 2021b)



WVU is rated as an R1 institution, the most elite category for research-focused schools that designates a very high level of research activity (The Carnegie Classification, 2021). WVU now sits alongside such institutions as Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Johns Hopkins as R1 institutions. Only 130 of the nation's 4,500 colleges and universities attain this ranking.

This dedication to research and innovation is another advantage north central West Virginia offers as a clear line of sight for economic development in the region.

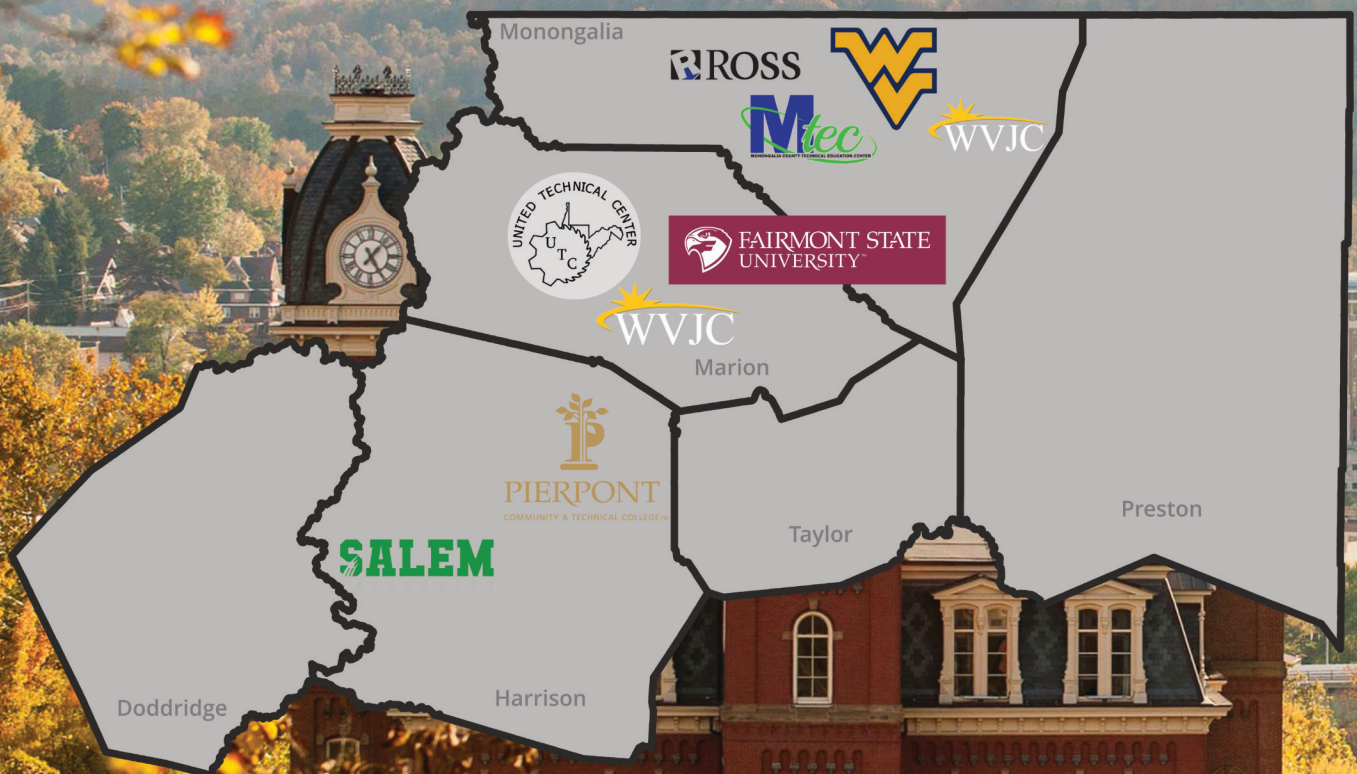
Fairmont State University, the first private normal school in West Virginia, was established to train teachers in Fairmont in 1865. Now a state-supported institution, it offers dozens of certificate and degree programs at the associate, bachelor's, and master's levels via 41 degree programs and over 90 fields of study.

In addition to WVU and Fairmont State University, north central West Virginia is home to numerous community colleges, junior colleges, technical schools, and apprenticeship programs.

One type of apprenticeship is offered by labor unions in north central West Virginia, which combines classroom and on-the-job training. In Morgantown, the Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 152 offers a five-year program that teaches all aspects of the trade, including pipe welding certification, medical gas certification, blueprint reading, plumbing, and heating and cooling. Apprentices learn under the supervision of journeymen and attend classes two nights a week. The apprenticeship program is free, and apprentices are paid while working on real jobs. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 596 in Clarksburg offers a similar apprenticeship program that covers topics such as general wiring for receptacles, switches and breaker boxes, working with conduit, motor controls and fire alarms, and a complete understanding of all aspects of the trade.

As shown in Figure 8, opportunities for traditional, specialized, and continuing education are located across the region.

FIGURE 8. REGION VI EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS



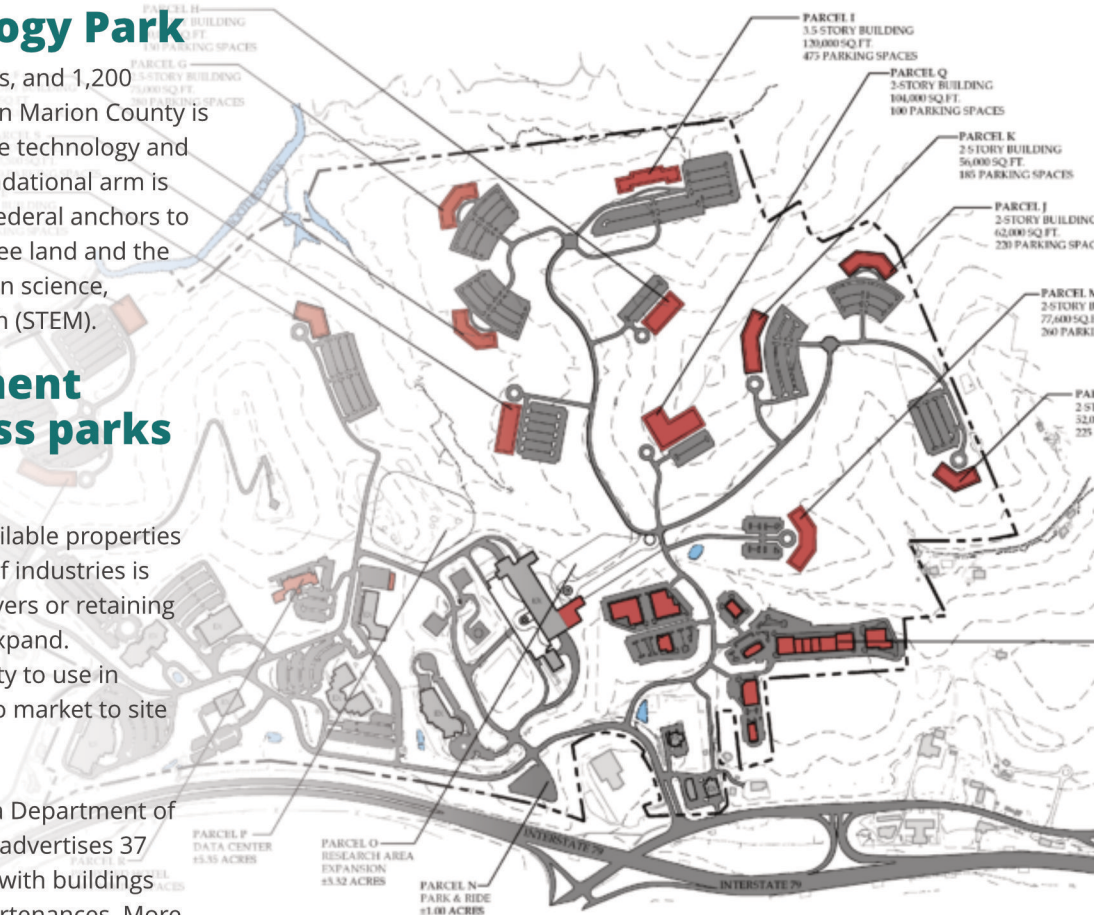
I-79 High Technology Park

With over 400 acres, 30 businesses, and 1,200 employees, I-79 Technology Park in Marion County is steadily growing its footprint in the technology and knowledge sector. The park's foundational arm is focused on continuing to recruit federal anchors to north central West Virginia with free land and the infrastructure to support careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

County development authority business parks and property

Having an adequate supply of available properties that can accommodate a variety of industries is essential to attracting new employers or retaining existing employers that need to expand. Furthermore, repurposing property to use in emerging sectors creates assets to market to site selectors.

Within Region VI, the West Virginia Department of Economic Development currently advertises 37 vacant parcels and 24 properties, with buildings ranging in size and available appurtenances. More than 40% of these properties are in Harrison County, while only 2% are in Taylor County.



MASTER PLAN
I-79 TECHNOLOGY PARK



REGIONAL OVERVIEW — THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE

“Eds, Meds, and Feds” (plus state and local government) claim the top spots as employment anchors in north central West Virginia (Table 8). While these sectors are somewhat “recession proof,” they are potentially subject to budget cuts and shutdowns. Among north central West Virginia’s greatest strengths are its diverse economy and stable markets that offer opportunity throughout the region.

TABLE 8. EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR (2019)

SECTOR	ESTABLISHMENTS	EMPLOYMENT	TOTAL WAGES (BILLION \$)	AVERAGE WAGE (THOUSAND \$)
GOVERNMENT	494	26,961	\$1.5	\$56.9
EDUCATION AND HEALTH SERVICES	834	24,287	\$1.3	\$55.3
TRADE, TRANSPORTATION, AND UTILITIES	1,481	20,614	\$0.88	\$42.5
PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS SERVICES	901	12,770	\$0.74	\$57.8
CONSTRUCTION	594	6,981	\$0.39	\$56.2
NATURAL RESOURCES AND MINING	113	2,814	\$0.25	\$88.4
LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY	834	13,255	\$0.23	\$17.2
MANUFACTURING	148	3,540	\$0.19	\$54.6
FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES	596	3,343	\$0.18	\$52.8

Source: Workforce West Virginia (2021).



TABLE 9. EMPLOYMENT BY COUNTY

SECTOR	DODDRIDGE	HARRISON	MARION	MONONGALIA	PRESTON	TAYLOR	REGION VI
2010	1,280	35,160	21,880	57,640	7,330	3,160	126,450
2011	1,290	35,780	22,280	58,050	7,410	3,160	127,970
2012	1,390	36,060	22,350	59,280	7,530	3,310	129,920
2013	1,480	37,120	22,380	60,960	7,610	3,600	133,150
2014	1,650	37,880	22,290	62,050	8,000	3,680	135,550
2015	1,640	37,540	21,450	62,410	8,010	3,670	134,720
2016	1,690	37,690	20,500	62,300	7,980	3,680	133,840
2017	1,730	37,760	19,380	62,720	7,790	3,470	132,850
2018	1,790	38,940	18,830	63,140	7,650	3,370	133,720
2019	1,720	38,710	19,030	63,170	7,710	3,340	133,680
2020	1,540	35,860	17,470	59,430	7,460	3,180	124,940

Source: Workforce West Virginia (2021).

Business licenses

North central West Virginia has a strong, independent entrepreneurial spirit. While business growth declined during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, it rebounded quickly in 2021. The willingness and desire to succeed is matched only by the region's market strength potential. Continued support to develop these markets, provide technical support to small businesses, and provide attainable local finance options will grow the diversified economy of north central West Virginia.

TABLE 10. BUSINESS LICENSES BY COUNTY (2019)

	START YEAR	OPENED	CLOSED	END YEAR	GROWTH
DODDRIDGE	217	35	-12	240	10.6%
HARRISON	3,158	407	-140	3,425	8.5%
MARION	2,131	277	-82	2,326	9.2%
MONONGALIA	6,142	796	-220	6,718	9.4%
PRESTON	1,441	173	-42	1,572	9.1%
TAYLOR	450	61	-18	493	9.6%
REGION VI	13,539	1,749	-514	14,774	9.1%

Source: West Virginia Secretary of State (2021).

TABLE 11. BUSINESS LICENSES BY COUNTY (2020)

	START YEAR	OPENED	CLOSED	END YEAR	GROWTH
DODDRIDGE	240	25	-29	236	-1.7%
HARRISON	3,425	379	-362	3,442	0.5%
MARION	2,326	285	-277	2,334	0.3%
MONONGALIA	6,718	839	-699	6,858	2.1%
PRESTON	1,572	173	-145	1,600	1.8%
TAYLOR	493	85	-48	530	7.5%
REGION VI	14,774	1,786	-1,560	15,000	1.5%

Source: West Virginia Secretary of State (2021).

TABLE 12. BUSINESS LICENSES BY COUNTY (2021)

	START YEAR	OPENED	CLOSED	END YEAR	GROWTH
DODDRIDGE	236	30	-9	257	8.9%
HARRISON	3,442	483	-121	3,804	10.5%
MARION	2,334	339	-65	2,608	11.7%
MONONGALIA	6,858	956	-221	7,593	10.7%
PRESTON	1,600	216	-47	1,769	10.6%
TAYLOR	530	73	-15	588	10.9%
REGION VI	15,000	2,097	-478	16,619	10.8%

Source: West Virginia Secretary of State (2021). Note: Data are from January 1 through December 1.

Employment sectors

The location quotient (LQ) quantifies how concentrated a particular industry is in one area compared to a larger region. In this analysis, industry employment in north central West Virginia is compared to industry employment in the entire state of West Virginia and the nation. An LQ of greater than 1 means the industry has a higher concentration of jobs in the region than the state or the nation. Table 13 presents LQs for sectors within north central West Virginia.

Industries with high LQs are typically exporting industries and are important because they bring income into the region and reaffirm the strongest industries or a competitive advantage in the region. LQs can begin to identify emerging sectors or those starting to decline and should be used with other indicators to determine a complete picture of an industry.

While having a concentration within a particular sector is one indicator of a presence, it should also be evaluated along with growth trends (Table 14) to determine regional cluster strength, and then compared with larger state and national trends. For instance, the LQ for the “Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction” sector in Region VI indicates a high concentration of workers compared to the nation (Table 13), but its job growth is trending downward.

Many of the same sectors surface in the job growth data as the LQ data, including, for example, Professional, scientific, and technical services; Utilities; Construction; and Health care and social assistance.

TABLE 13. REGION VI LOCATION QUOTIENTS BY SECTOR (2019)

SECTOR	END YEAR	GROWTH
ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICES	1	0.9
ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT AND WASTE MANAGEMENT AND REMEDIATION SERVICES	1	0.7
AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, FISHING AND HUNTING	0.2	0.1
ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND RECREATION	0.8	0.5
CONSTRUCTION	1.2	1.2
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES	1.3	5.1
FINANCE AND INSURANCE	0.6	0.4
HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	1.1	1.3
INFORMATION	0.9	0.5
MANAGEMENT OF COMPANIES AND ENTERPRISES	1	0.6
MANUFACTURING	0.7	0.5
MINING, QUARRYING, AND OIL AND GAS EXTRACTION	0.7	4.2
OTHER SERVICES (EXCEPT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION)	1	0.9
PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND TECHNICAL SERVICES	1.3	0.7
REAL ESTATE AND RENTAL AND LEASING	1.1	0.6
RETAIL TRADE	1	0.9
TRANSPORTATION AND WAREHOUSING	0.9	0.7
UTILITIES	1.3	3.2
WHOLESALE TRADE	0.8	0.5

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2021). Note: LQs calculated by authors.

In an effort to create clear lines of sight and combine these two employment indicators, Figure 9 divides the sectors into four quadrants. Sectors in the upper-right quadrant have LQs greater than one and positive job growth. These powerhouse sectors are already well-established in the region and are still growing.

Sectors in the upper-left quadrant are emerging sectors. They are less well-established in the region (LQs are less than one), but they are enjoying positive growth.

TABLE 14. REGION VI JOB GROWTH BY SECTOR (2016–2019)

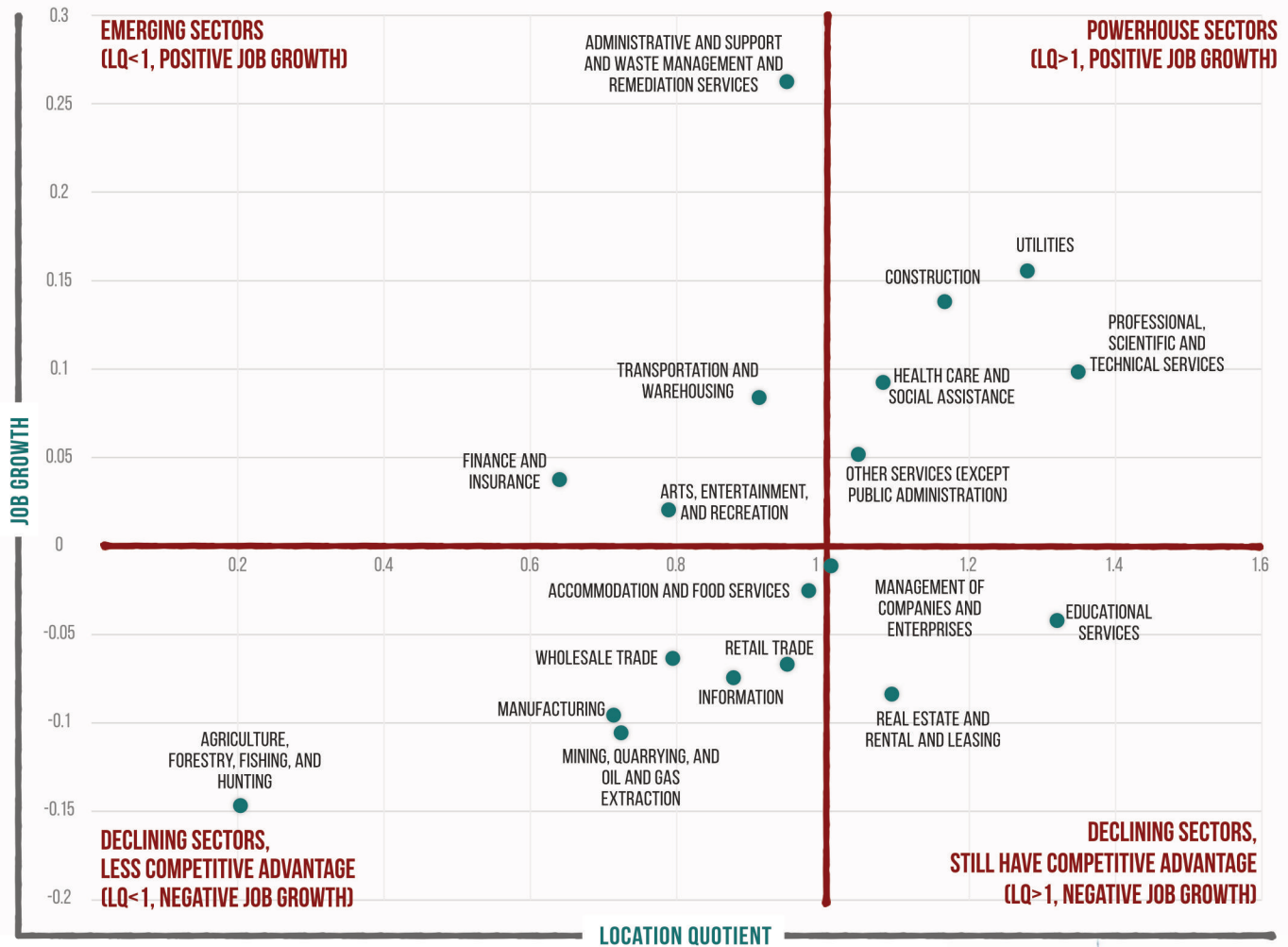
SECTOR	REGION VI	WV	U.S.
ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICES	-3%	-1%	6%
ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT AND WASTE MANAGEMENT AND REMEDIATION SERVICES	26%	4%	4%
AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, FISHING AND HUNTING	-15%	-4%	-1%
ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND RECREATION	2%	11%	9%
CONSTRUCTION	14%	14%	11%
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES	-4%	-5%	6%
FINANCE AND INSURANCE	4%	-1%	3%
HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	9%	2%	7%
INFORMATION	-7%	-14%	3%
MANAGEMENT OF COMPANIES AND ENTERPRISES	-1%	20%	7%
MANUFACTURING	-10%	1%	4%
MINING, QUARRYING, AND OIL AND GAS EXTRACTION	-11%	8%	9%
OTHER SERVICES (EXCEPT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION)	5%	2%	4%
PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND TECHNICAL SERVICES	10%	6%	7%
REAL ESTATE AND RENTAL AND LEASING	-8%	-1%	7%
RETAIL TRADE	-7%	-7%	-2%
TRANSPORTATION AND WAREHOUSING	8%	6%	13%
UTILITIES	16%	-1%	-2%
WHOLESALE TRADE	-6%	-4%	0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2021). Note: Job growth rates calculated by authors.

It is often said that “a rising tide lifts all boats,” and the same is true in an economy. To understand what unique strengths and weaknesses exist in north central West Virginia, “competitiveness” indicates regional sector performance compared to the overall national growth rate and national sector growth rate trends.

For instance, the national construction industry grew 11.4% between 2016 and 2019. Combined with the overall national employment rate that grew 4.8% during that same time, Region VI would need 16.2% more construction jobs to have a competitive advantage. Seeing that Region VI added 13.8% more construction jobs, this admirable amount is not enough to be considered unique and have a competitive advantage over other regions in the nation and is represented as a negative number in Table 15. A negative number indicates either slower growth or decline of a sector in the region; these sectors are therefore considered to be lagging. A positive number indicates that job sector grew faster in the region than the nation. Sectors with positive regional competitive effects are therefore considered to be leading sectors.

FIGURE 9. REGION VI LOCATION QUOTIENTS AND JOB GROWTH



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2021). Note: Job growth rates calculated by authors.

TABLE 15. REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS BY SECTOR (2016–2019)

SECTOR	VS. U.S.
UTILITIES	4.2
ADMINISTRATIVE AND SUPPORT AND WASTE MANAGEMENT AND REMEDIATION SERVICES	2.2
CONSTRUCTION	-0.1
PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND TECHNICAL SERVICES	-0.2
HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	-0.2
OTHER SERVICES (EXCEPT PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION)	-0.4
TRANSPORTATION AND WAREHOUSING	-0.5
FINANCE AND INSURANCE	-0.5
ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, AND RECREATION	-0.9
MANAGEMENT OF COMPANIES AND ENTERPRISES	-1.1
ACCOMMODATION AND FOOD SERVICES	-1.2
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES	-1.4
REAL ESTATE AND RENTAL AND LEASING	-1.7
MINING, QUARRYING, AND OIL AND GAS EXTRACTION	-1.8
INFORMATION	-2.0
MANUFACTURING	-2.2
WHOLESALE TRADE	-2.3
RETAIL TRADE	-3.1
AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, FISHING AND HUNTING	-5.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2021). Note: Regional competitiveness rates calculated by authors.



SUMMARY OVERVIEW — CONCLUSION

These employment indicators begin to demonstrate the potential for competitive regional cluster formations. Clusters are geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field (Petousis, 2008). Clusters typically are strongest when formed organically and offer advantages such as:

1. sharing customized facilities, infrastructure, and suppliers (such as laboratory space or data centers);
2. learning through rich environments that facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation among clustered firms; and
3. matching workers productively through deep labor markets (such as computer engineers in Silicon Valley or auto engineers in Detroit).

However, clusters can be risky, decrease resiliency, and leave other sectors of the economy potentially neglected. Given north central West Virginia's unique assets and diverse economy, Region VI can strive to facilitate the creation of a regional workforce training system to support several industry clusters, while also preparing workers for in-demand jobs. This system would develop sectoral partnerships with industry employers, government, economic developers, labor representatives, community organizations, and educational and training institutions.

These sectoral partnerships can direct funding to secure technical expertise, develop skills training curricula, and provide wraparound services such as childcare and internet access. The partnerships can increase job growth through upskilling and interventions that support economic mobility in the region while using north central West Virginia's competitive advantage in education.

Sectoral partnerships and cluster interventions have been identified as key themes of this CEDS. Civic infrastructure networks, adequate infrastructure, a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce, and access to capital can all nurture clusters naturally, while providing opportunities for other industries to succeed.

UPSKILLING

North central West Virginia's proximity to training facilities and accredited educational institutions places it in a prime position to upskill and reskill its existing workforce and present lines of sight for a new generation.

Upskilling can increase resiliency for the region's already-thriving sectors and provide anchor institutions with the resources needed to operate without disruption. It can also provide opportunities for highly skilled workers in the natural resources extraction industry to repurpose thousands of acres of underutilized land and equipment as the world shifts toward low-carbon alternatives for energy production.





Adam Webster

ACTION PLAN

North central West Virginia is blessed with a diverse economy and abundant community assets to compete in this post-COVID economy. However, with so many opportunities it may be easy to get distracted or lose sight of the larger economic picture. Region VI will focus on the following key themes to become the strong, collective, and credible voice needed to advance economic initiatives:

1. Continuously evaluate and improve our regional infrastructure.
2. Encourage an ecosystem that cultivates innovation and entrepreneurship.
3. Nurture the authentic Mountaineer Country experience and quality of life.
4. Capitalize on north central West Virginia's competitive advantage.

As detailed below, each key theme contains goals that establish “where we want to be.” Each goal then contains strategies as to “how we get there,” along with performance measures to evaluate “how far we’ve come” or if there is a need to modify the approach.

In many cases, Region VI lacks the staffing capacity to single-handedly achieve any key theme or goal, nor is that always its most effective role. The following strategies listed will be implemented in partnership with Region VI communities and organizations.

KEY THEME 1 — CONTINUOUSLY EVALUATE AND IMPROVE OUR REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure is the foundation that supports a society. It is more than just bricks and mortar or pipes and pavement. It also includes the intangible community connections we build, in concert with these roads and towers that will give us line of sight for our future. These elements are forever evolving and needing to be maintained.

Goal 1.1: Create alliances that advance the region’s interests and the well-being of our community

Developing and maintaining a dedicated intergovernmental and community relations framework will ensure that Region VI is well prepared to respond to challenges and opportunities as they arise. Networking, information exchange, and collective action enabled by civic institutions—such as chambers of commerce, business leadership organizations, and industry associations—can improve a region’s resilience to shocks by galvanizing and activating leadership networks to address shared challenges. (Brookings, 2018)

Strategies

- Build relationships with boards, associations, and key community stakeholders to create broad-based support for CEDS implementation.
- Support the formation of committees with key stakeholders and Region VI members focused on implementing and reporting on CEDS actions.
- Foster intergovernmental networking opportunities.
- Support the preparation and promotion of strategic funding opportunities.

Performance measures

- Number of meetings attended
- Number of action plans developed by Region VI CEDS committees
- Number of letters of support drafted

Goal 1.2: Elevate Region VI's reputation as a trusted government partner

By leveraging relationships and fulfilling commitments to partners, Region VI can continue to build a reputation as an innovative, trusted council of governments.

Strategies

- Participate in federal and state working groups, task forces, and municipal associations.
- Research and analyze emerging challenges and opportunities facing the region.
- Provide strategic information and advice to leaders on the latest policy developments and challenges of the day.
- Create a safe environment for local government representatives to ask questions, explore unconventional approaches, and review case study solutions.
- Develop, implement, and maintain a consistent and credible communications plan.

Performance measures

- Number of meetings attended
- Number of newsletters produced
- Number of member government work sessions hosted
- Attendance rate of full council meetings

Goal 1.3: Ensure adequate quantity and quality of physical infrastructure and resources to remain competitive with surrounding regions and states

Strategies

- Investigate and promote state and federal programs that help drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater utilities manage their systems.
- Assist board members and their agencies with performing research, developing applications for funding opportunities, and managing grants for infrastructure projects.
- Work closely with utility directors and managers to understand and identify rehabilitation, expansion, and capacity upgrade projects.
- Work with drinking water utilities to assist in implementing their source water protection plans.
- Support initiatives and projects that bolster regional airports.
- Assist in hazard mitigation planning and implementation, such as green infrastructure plans to reduce flash flooding impacts while improving social outcomes.
- Support regional transportation organizations.
- Coordinate a regional infrastructure inventory of current and proposed projects and details.
- Support the expansion of bicycle and pedestrian facilities to connect neighborhoods and communities within the region.

Performance measures

- Feet of water and sewer lines rehabilitated or installed
- Gallons per day capacity
- Miles of trails constructed
- Total airport flight operations



Goal 1.4: Improve and accelerate the expansion of high-speed internet, cellular, and emergency communication services to underserved areas of the state

Younger workers and families tend to be heavy users of internet services, Real estate agents are reporting that younger house buyers are reluctant to live in areas with poor internet service, and homes without high-speed internet are more difficult to sell, leading to lower prices, negatively impacting county income from property taxes.

Strategies

- Investigate opportunities to increase regional technical assistance for broadband coordinators to provide service to rural and underserved areas.
- Assist in pursuing funding opportunities to complete strategies identified in the Region VI Strategic Broadband Plan and County Action Broadband Plan.
- Assist in pursuing opportunities available through the Federal Communications Commission's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund and the West Virginia State Broadband Initiative.
- Support last-mile cable modem and fiber-to-the-premise broadband networks that can be constructed quickly.
- Coordinate with local governments and organizations interested in planning to pool local funding to help expand broadband infrastructure (GigReady).
- Support the inclusion of innovative technology and connectivity as a standard for new construction and remodeling projects (Line Extension Advancement and Development, or LEAD).
- Provide assistance to large-scale multicounty projects that require additional resources to achieve rapid implementation (Major Broadband Project Strategies, or MBPSs).
- Support expanding and improving existing wireless internet networks—a specialized solution useful in remote or sparsely populated areas that are difficult to reach with fiber optic cable.

Performance measures

- Feet of optic fiber
- Broadband targeted areas with optimal service
- Number of homes with access to broadband internet



KEY THEME 2 — ENCOURAGE AN ECOSYSTEM THAT CULTIVATES INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Region VI will foster an environment that nurtures its talent and workforce, supports entrepreneurship, and assists communities that do both.

Goal 2.1: Maintain the highest-ranking region in academic achievement

Strategies

- Nurture cross-sector collaboration with educational institutions.
- Promote access to educational opportunities.
- Leverage 21st-century technology to develop high-quality, cost-effective training programs.
- Engage local, regional, and statewide stakeholders to communicate the importance of educational attainment and eliminate the gap between the skills employers require and the education and training available in the state.
- Explore creative introductory educational programs in K-12 schools for teachers, parents, and students in aerospace, healthcare, hospitality/tourism, science, engineering, and manufacturing.
- Engage experts with diverse backgrounds to mentor and support young professionals' career journeys, from exploration to job attainment.

Performance measures

- Monitor educational programs
- Monitor labor market alignment
- Monitor employment opportunities

Goal 2.2: Develop workforce capacity for regional clusters through education, mentoring, and internship programs

Strategies

- Support programs to meet current and future skill needs of employers.
- Assist in expanding entrepreneurship education programs in K-12 schools.
- Promote credit-based apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training as workforce development solutions.
- Foster career technical education opportunities for high school students interested in careers such as skilled labor and health care.
- Support adult education, reskilling, and upskilling programs to improve access to the labor market and amplify opportunities for economic mobility.
- Identify and address challenges associated with workforce upskilling such as childcare, tuition finance, and credit transfer.

Performance measures

- Set of metrics for internships and apprenticeships
- Set of metrics for labor market alignment
- Set of metrics for upskilling enrollment
- Set of metrics for labor market alignment

Goal 2.3: Foster innovation initiatives

Strategies

- Strengthen collaborative efforts with the region's universities, medical research facilities, and workforce development organizations to expand upon and maintain accreditations and designations, such as West Virginia University's R1 status.
- Investigate networks that connect investors and financing institutions with university researchers.
- Support business incentives and programs to advance key industries, create jobs, and continue to diversify the economy.
- Coordinate with I-79 Technology Park representatives to support efforts to recruit federal agencies to the region.

Performance measures

- Set of metrics for internships and apprenticeships
- Set of metrics for labor market alignment
- Set of metrics for upskilling enrollment

Goal 2.4: Increase north central West Virginia's economic confidence

Strategies

- Educate local government officials and staff about the importance of attracting entrepreneurs and instilling an entrepreneurial mindset.
- Strengthen relationships between business owners, entrepreneurs, and banks via programs such as loan clinics.
- Develop a regional clearinghouse to disseminate information about resources available to entrepreneurial start-ups and small businesses.
- Investigate local and regional access to capital (angel, venture, and loan programs) for all types of businesses, large and small.
- Support the establishment of business incubators that work with existing industries for technological innovations, with a focus on small-scale manufacturing and renewable energy.
- Coordinate with state and federal agencies to increase technical assistance for small businesses on topics that include finance, business plans, product development, accounting, payroll, and marketing.

Performance measures

- Number of jobs created
- Number of business closures and openings
- Total number of establishments
- Number of educational convenings with elected officials regarding entrepreneurship



KEY THEME 3 — NURTURE THE AUTHENTIC MOUNTAINEER COUNTRY EXPERIENCE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Authentic places are not “made,” but are instead supported, protected, and advocated for by place managers and stakeholders. As people seek deeper connections with their surroundings, authenticity can serve as a tool to drive economic and community development efforts. Authenticity can attract people who are tired of the sameness of the suburbs and want a lifestyle based on genuine experiences.

Goal 3.1: Discover north central West Virginia’s identity

Strategies

- Partner with institutions to understand unifying themes connected with history, culture, and natural beauty.
- Inventory and examine the region’s current assets, such as cultural venues, historic districts, and public art installations.
- Study high traffic sites and create user profiles, to help expand their use.

Performance measures

- Number of inventory maps created
- Number of visitor profiles created

Goal 3.2: Preserve and restore areas of significance

Strategies

- Inventory available properties that need restoration and/or preservation.
- Assist initiatives to restore community “Main street” facades, brownfields, vacant buildings, and architecture.
- Support place-making initiatives.
- Connect with recreational users and business owners to understand potential threats to regional assets.
- Assist local governments looking to integrate and update local ordinances.
- Support the design of, and assist with the implementation of marketing plans to promote rural communities as business-ready locations.

Performance measures

- Vacancy rates along Main Streets
- Number of visitor profiles created

Goal 3.3: Invest in livable communities and the quality of the experience

Strategies

- Capitalize on assets unique to north central West Virginia communities.
- Evaluate policies that support place-based initiatives such as short-term rentals, hotel and motel fees, and home rule sales tax.
- Regularly evaluate the quantity and quality of housing stock.
- Investigate educational courses designed for anyone interested in becoming a homeowner.
- Support regional housing development in areas where necessary infrastructure already exists. Housing development fulfills the specified goals of this plan and such development receives Region VI PDC’s full support.
- Strategize ways to support and encourage youth and young families to remain in or relocate to the region’s rural communities.

Performance measures

- Population ages 25 to 44
- Net migration into counties
- Hotel/motel tax revenues
- Local sales tax revenues
- Dollars invested in tourism-related businesses

Goal 3.4: Showcase the region on a broader scale

Strategies

- Collaborate with partners to support branding initiatives that promote regional destinations.
- Promote cultural experiences and activities to help showcase opportunities in the region.
- Support initiatives that develop career paths in the tourism industry to attract and retain youth.
- Monitor and understand new ways visitors are traveling and their destination interests.
- Investigate local talent retention and attraction programs, including welcoming community initiatives, that attempt to retain recent graduates from nearby colleges and attract people to return back home or to move to the region.

Performance measures

- Number of community events held, such as festivals or cultural experiences
- Total tourism jobs and wages compared to previous years
- Number of overnight lodging stays

Goal 3.5: Promote and support local agriculture as a cultural asset and viable economic practice

Strategies

- Promote and support local farmers' markets.
- Work with agricultural partners to explore opportunities to bridge production and consumption gaps, such as value-added initiatives.
- Connect existing farmers with new members of the workforce.
- Support expanding workforce training and apprenticeship programs to help produce a strong, knowledgeable agricultural labor force.
- Assist in strengthening educational programs that support small and large farmers, including curriculum-based, accredited farm apprenticeship programs and food systems certification curricula.
- Work with partners to create a local food system that enhances equitable access to affordable, healthy food.
- Encourage funding to local food pantries to continue buying locally.

Performance measures

- Set of metrics assessing the economic impacts of local/regional food systems
- Number of farmers' market days of operation
- Job growth in the agricultural sector



KEY THEME 4 — CAPITALIZE ON NORTH CENTRAL WEST VIRGINIA'S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

A competitive region is one that can attract and maintain successful firms and maintain or increase standards of living for the region's inhabitants. Skilled labor and investment gravitate away from uncompetitive regions towards more competitive ones.

Goal 4.1: Demonstrate the economic case to invest in thriving and emerging sectors

Strategies

- Obtain technical assistance to conduct economic impact analyses for growing sectors, as well as gap analyses, to identify and overcome obstacles faced by emerging sectors.
- Share statewide policies that align with competing states and regions with regional leaders.
- Routinely review and update current and emerging cluster analyses.
- Leverage thriving industries to support the growth of quality jobs in other, more accessible sectors.

Performance measures

- LQs for thriving and emerging sectors
- Job growth in thriving and emerging sectors

Goal 4.2: Develop successful domestic firms to support anchor industries and clusters

Strategies

- Identify areas that the region leads or has the potential to lead.
- Support the development of a supply chain study and determine actions to address disruption issues and unanticipated supply shocks.
- Research strategies that establish a resilient supply chain to support local suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and businesses.
- Assist in strengthening small businesses' buying power and reduce dependency on out-of-region goods and services.
- Review the region's manufacturing capabilities and align them with demand for products and services within the region.
- Investigate case studies and strategies to onshore manufacturing, reduce disruptions, and increase resiliency.
- Support feasibility studies on underutilized properties, such as vacant manufacturing facilities and abandoned mine lands, to accommodate new market trends.

Performance measures

- Number of sectoral partnerships created
- Number of industry cluster convenings

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APPENDIX A: PUBLIC SWOT ANALYSIS RESULTS (STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS)