

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE DISTRICTS

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Regional Governance Districts

A TACIR Staff Report

February 2010

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PURPOSE

This report is a staff-generated TACIR report written to explore potential strategies to assist the state in responding to globalization, changes in technology, changes in citizen expectations, and other trends affecting our government. This study was originally included as a staff project in TACIR's Fiscal year 2008 work program. The hypothetical regional governance districts (RGDs) discussed in this report are not meant to be the final word on the topic, but rather as a place for the conversation to begin. Only reports clearly labeled as "Commission Reports" represent the official position of the Commission. Others, such as this report, are informational.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides background information on regions and related concepts, a select inventory of regions in Tennessee, and an overview on how the realignment of several existing regional systems into **regional governance districts** (RGD) might better serve our state. It is meant to start a discussion on how Tennessee's service districts might be more efficiently and effectively structured.

A **region** is a spatially continuous population that is bound either by historical necessity or by choice to a particular geographic location. They transcend political borders to include less precisely defined social and economic areas. Identification with a region may be based on an affiliation with or attraction to local culture, local employment centers, local natural resources, or other location-specific amenities. **Regionalism** is the focusing of government, business, or community policies, practices, and efforts on maximizing economic performance in a regionalizing world, while **regional governance** can be seen as the official application of a regionalist approach. Governance is distinct from government—while government is the traditional organization of public authority used to provide necessary services, governance is the provision of those services. While the word has been used to refer to service provision by traditional government, it has come to be used to refer more specifically to service provision through a non-traditional approach, such as by a contractor or through a public-private partnership.

Tennessee is well-served by a number of official regions, and there are many examples of effective regionalist approaches. Still, more can be done to improve the governance of those regions. An important first step toward better regional governance is identifying inefficiencies in existing organizational structures and realigning those structures to better enable local efforts. This report discusses five groups of regions that could benefit from being better aligned. Each of the five is to

some degree associated with improving Tennessee’s economy. They include development districts, metropolitan planning organizations/rural planning organizations (MPO/RPOs), community action agencies (CAAs), local workforce investment areas (LWIAs), and economic growth strategy regions (EGSR). The report also examines two typologies classifying Tennessee’s counties—county types and rural/urban continuum—both from the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for clues on how best to organize the state’s regions.

The report argues that there are some straightforward improvements to be gained from aligning the five service regions:

1. The various organizations serving a region would be better able to collect and share data.
2. The regions would be better able to collaborate and cooperate to provide services.
3. The aligned regions will make it easier for people doing business with the organizations to know which agencies serve their area.
4. Aligning the regions will help build a sense of regional community, better assisting local governments, chambers of commerce, convention bureaus, etc. in marketing their communities.

This report is not advocating the creation of a new level of government. The goal is to align service regions for better coordination and efficiency and to improve the quality of life of Tennesseans. The aligned regions should also take into account Tennessee’s unique geography, demographics, and history, as reflected in the discussion of county types and the state’s rural

character. Based on several criteria, the report recommends the creation of 10 regional governance districts:

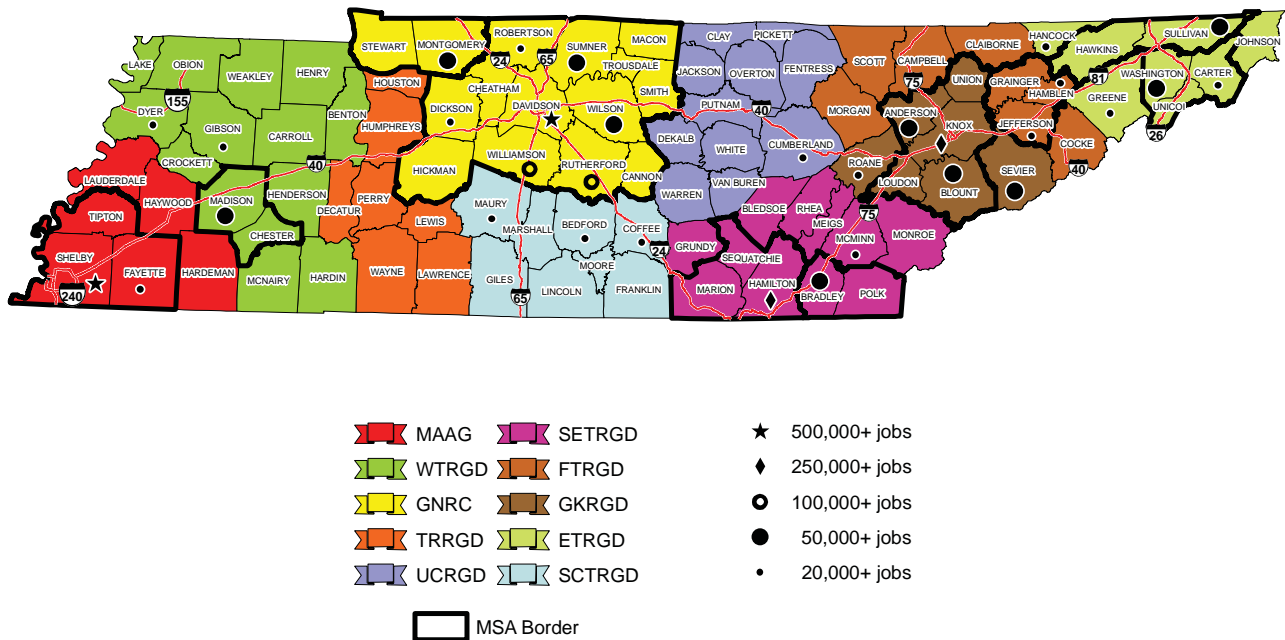
- Memphis Area Association of Governments (MAAG)
- West TN RGD (WTRGD)
- Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC)
- Tennessee River RGD (TRRGD)
- South Central TN RGD (SCTRGD)
- Upper Cumberland RGD (UCRGD)
- SE TN RGD (SETRGD)
- First TN RGD (FTRGD)
- Greater Knoxville RGD (GKRGD)
- East TN RGD (ETRGD)

PROPOSED REGIONAL GOVERNANCE DISTRICTS

The RGDs would be the service areas for the current development districts and would replace the current EGSRs. Two existing development districts (Northwest TN Development District and all but one county of the Southwest TN Development District) would be merged into one RGD (WTRGD), one RGD (TRRGD) would be created out of portions of GNRC, SCTDD, and SWTDD, and the FTDD would be split into two RGDs (GKRGD and FTRGD). Also, Monroe County would transfer to the SETRGD. The state designated RPOs and WFAs would be redrawn to either overlap or fall within the RGD borders. As much as possible, the RGDs borders would be drawn in a way that encompasses the federally created MPOs and CAAs. By current statute, the CAAs designated as HRAs are required to be aligned with the development district borders. There would also have to be some consideration given to Area Agencies on Aging; seven of the nine agencies are currently housed within development districts. None of the service agencies would change their core mission and most would serve primarily the

same areas they now serve. The RGDs are not meant to be the final word on the topic, but rather as a place for the conversation to begin. It would not be wise to arbitrarily draw or re-draw these borders without considerable conversation with the various local governments, state departments, service agencies, and constituents affected. Other regions might also be candidates for alignment, while others would never make sense. It would be ridiculous to recommend aligning watershed districts to match man-made borders. No district should be aligned at the expense of service quality.

Proposed Regional Governance Districts



INTRODUCTION

Regions, regions, regions. It seems that regions are everywhere lately—from presidential speeches to meetings at city hall to stories in local newspapers. To the casual observer, it might seem that scholars and government officials had just recently invented the idea of regions—a brand new solution to all that had ailed government. Of course, the truth is that regions have been around for a long time and that while they do provide opportunities for improving government service, they are not a silver bullet. Some of the potential benefit that could be gained from regions may be lost in the haphazard way they have been organized. In this brief, I will provide some background on regions, a select inventory of regions in Tennessee, and some recommendations on how they might be better structured to serve our state. Specifically, I will recommend the alignment of several existing regional systems into regional governance districts.

REGIONS, REGIONALISM, AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

We should start by clearing up three terms that are popular in current public policy literature: regions, regionalism, and governance. A **region** can be defined as “a spatially continuous population (of human beings) that is bound either by historical necessity or by choice to a particular geographic location.”¹ Regions transcend political borders to encompass less precisely defined social and economic areas.² Identification with a region may be based on an affiliation with or attraction to local culture, local employment centers, local natural resources, or other location-specific amenities.³ While inclusive, even this definition fails to reflect an important characteristic of regions:

¹ Dawkins (2003). Also, see Lippard & Green (2008) for further discussion of regions and regional typologies.

² Foster (1997).

³ Dawkins (2003).

WHAT IS A REGION?

From *Growth Concentration in Tennessee Regions*

A quick search shows a broad range of examples of regions, to include among many others, the federal Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA), the US Bureau of Economic Analysis' (BEA) Economic Areas, Tennessee's development districts, rural planning organizations, metropolitan planning organizations, Tennessee Grand Divisions, and watersheds. What makes these often-disparate examples all qualify as regions? How do you define a region? The Encarta Dictionary offers several relevant definitions:

1. A large land area that has geographic, political, or cultural characteristics that distinguish it from others, whether existing within one country or extending over several
2. A large separate political or administrative unit within a country
3. An area of the world with particular animal and plant life
4. Any large indefinite area of a surface
5. An imprecisely defined area or part of something such as a sphere of activity

The Know Your Region project of Western Carolina University provides a detailed list of six categories or region types.

- **Functional regions** are geographic areas defined by a shared function, such as soil conservation districts or watersheds, whereas **economic regions** are defined by the shared commercial, production, or market traits of its component areas. Functional and economic regions may not be officially designated regions, but rather defacto regions, such as the region-states discussed by Kenichi Ohmae, the "citistates" discussed by Neal Peirce, or the economic mega regions discussed by Robert Lang, Dawn Dhavale, Richard Florida, and others. (*cont.*)

any single location is likely a member of many defined regions of various and overlapping boundaries. It is also important to understand that regions vary in terms of their focus and in terms of the problems, issues, and opportunities they face. Goals and priorities often vary within a region.⁴ Regions and how they are perceived evolve over time as a result of topography, history, economic activity, unity of thought and vision, and mutually recognized opportunities.⁵

While most economic and other public policy issues are addressed at the national, state, or local government level, economies and policy problems don't respect borders. From a regional perspective, there is no singular, national economy with one-type-fits-all fiscal policies, but rather a linked, common pool of regional economies, each with its own strengths and weakness and its own goals and priorities.⁶ Hershberg (1995) argues that the region—not the city, suburb, or county—is the competitive unit of the global economy. He argues that only regions have the scale and diversity required to compete globally. He continues that regions

are the geographic units in which we create our goods and services. We hire from a regional labor force.

⁴ Lippard & Green (2008).

⁵ Tobin (2005).

⁶ Barnes & Ledebur (1995).

We count on a regional transportation system to move the people and the materials involved in their production. We rely on a regional infrastructure to keep the bridges and roads intact and our sewers and pipelines functioning. We live in a regional environment whose water and air do not recognize political boundaries.

While a region is a place, **regionalism** is an approach; it is both a tool and a state of mind.⁷ Regionalism is the focusing of government, business, or community policies, practices, and efforts on maximizing economic performance in a regionalizing world.⁸ As Grossman (1995) states, regionalism

is more than planning, more than development, more than research, more than government, more than the private sector, and more than the not-for-profit sector. It is all of these, plus the ability to breathe new life into old structures and forms of activity which were designed for an agricultural

(continued from Page 8)

- **Political, administrative, and data regions**, on the other hand, are officially designated regions. Political regions, multiple jurisdictions grouped together for political representation, include congressional districts and state legislative districts, among others. Administrative regions are groupings of multiple jurisdictions organized to provide or oversee service provision. These regions are not limited to a single function, as are functional regions. Examples of administrative regions include development districts in Tennessee, which assist in service provision in a wide range of program areas, including economic development, housing, aging services, and transportation. Data regions are groupings of multiple jurisdictions in order to provide a logical, common base for statistical collection and reporting. Often, data regions are grouped based on economic factors, as are MSAs, which are largely based upon commuting patterns.
- **Issue regions** are another example of an unofficial region. These regions are groupings based upon a general consensus of beliefs, values, and positions on specific issues. A commonly identified issue region is the Bible Belt, the swath of southern US states generally associated with conservative religious beliefs.

The Know Your Region project's authors qualify their typology, noting that regional definitions are flexible. They note that regions "are not given entities, but rather are defined according to various characteristics depending on the purposes of the definition." In other words, our definition of a region will depend largely upon our reason for attempting to define the region. If we are interested in water carrying capacity, for example, we may define regions based upon the location of watersheds. The authors go on to note that regions are often "action entities," meaning that they exist primarily in order to address a perceived problem. Finally, the authors remind us that regions exist within a network of larger and smaller entities.

⁷ Walsh (1997).

⁸ Lippard & Green (2008).

While no approach provides governments with the ability to control global economic forces, regional governance can be a key strategy toward successfully responding to those forces.

society, honed by an industrial society, but incapable of dealing with an information society.⁹ In short, regionalism is the active promotion of cooperation within a region.¹⁰ As the cost and complexity of government has increased, regional cooperation has come to be seen as necessary to provide a management capacity that is beyond that of single communities. This cooperation is not just between a government and its various communities, but also across governments—both vertically across levels (federal, state, county, city) and horizontally across peers. And it goes beyond the obvious need for cooperation between large cities and their suburbs within a region; it also includes suburb-to-suburb cooperation.

Regional governance can be seen as the official application of a regionalist approach. Different people use the term governance to mean different things, but the definition that is important in our context is governance as the recognition by government that it cannot act alone nor can it expect the market to solve all of society's problems; thus, government collaborates with other actors to provide necessary services.¹¹ Post (2004) neatly summarizes the difference between regional government and regional governance as structure versus policy decisions: regional government refers to the formal institutions of local government, whereas regional governance refers to the policy decisions made by existing governments. The word governance has come to be used to refer to service provision through a nontraditional approach, such as by a contractor or through a public-private partnership.¹² Feiock, Moon, and Park (2008) argue that for a region to be successful, it needs to create regional institutions that mobilize physical, human, and social capital, and it needs

⁹ Grossman (1995).

¹⁰ Tobin (2005).

¹¹ Hill & Hupe (2009).

¹² Rhodes (1996).

to support these institutions' efforts with regionally focused programs and fiscal policies. Their prescription relies on the use of collaborative network approaches to government. As with our definition of governance, network approaches emphasize the importance of both vertical relations between levels of government and horizontal relations across governments, as well as collaboration between the public sphere and the private sphere, both for profit and not-for-profit.¹³ Tennessee already has some of the necessary components for effective regional governance in place, though the state needs to do more to empower local governments to act regionally.

Regions, regionalism, and regional governance have had varying impact on public policy; their largest impact has been on economic development policy. As public officials have attempted to make or keep their communities competitive in the global economy, many have alternately latched on to economic development strategies that purport to aid in attracting or retaining businesses and jobs. Two key approaches focus alternately on attracting corporations—through incentives, tax breaks, and the availability of a well-trained workforce—or on using quality of life amenities to attract talented individuals, who in turn serve to attract quality jobs.¹⁴ Both tend to neglect the role of governance in the success of regions. While no approach provides governments with the ability to control global economic forces, regional governance can be a key strategy toward successfully responding to those forces.

¹³ For an excellent discussion of collaborative management, see Agranoff and McGuire (2003).

¹⁴ These approaches are often presented as conflicting rather than complementary strategies. In contemporary literature on the topic, they are generally championed by Friedman (2007) in favor of incentives and training and Florida (2002, 2008) in favor of place amenities. The approaches, of course, predate these authors. Wallis (1995) presents essentially the same alternatives, labeling them as Neo-Fordist or Industrial Districts paths. Feiock, Moon and Park (2008) put the two approaches into the context of existing economic development theories—comparative advantage theory, institutional theory, human capital theory, and social capital theory. They note that neither of the two approaches provides a “silver bullet” for attracting development, and that they are not mutually exclusive.

Economic, social, and technical trends are supporting a clustering of economic and demographic growth in large, urban-suburban regions and a global pattern of commerce that has increased the importance of these regions.

A NEW FOCUS

The buzz on regions has experienced an ebb and flow over the last several decades. While they have long been important actors, they are now even more in the spotlight as the increasing pace of globalization has underscored their significance. A number of factors has contributed to globalization and the increased role of regions, including improvements in communication and transportation, as well as political changes such as the end of the Cold War.¹⁵ Thus, economic, social, and technical trends are supporting a clustering of economic and demographic growth in large, urban-suburban regions. These trends also support a global pattern of commerce that has increased the importance of these regions. In the United States, the financial strain on local governments caused by federal cuts in aid has also contributed to interest in regional approaches.¹⁶ This interest has increased as a result of the recession that began in late 2007,¹⁷ though some authors see the recession as the start of a period of retrenchment for globalization and a return to a greater focus on centralized national policies.¹⁸

The U.S. Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency have moved toward funding only regional projects. Other federal agencies have been slower to adopt a regional focus, but momentum is building.¹⁹ The current federal administration has included enhanced regionalism as one of its policy platforms, advocating a regional approach that “disregards traditional jurisdictional boundaries, setting policy that takes into account how cities, suburbs, and exurbs interact”

¹⁵ Wallis (1995) contends that globalization has been occurring for several decades but that the end of the Cold War and the lowering of international trade barriers have caused its pace to increase. Friedman (2007) attributes the increased pace of globalization to a combination of political and technological factors, including the rise of the Internet and work-sharing software.

¹⁶ Walker (1997).

¹⁷ Kocieniewski (2009).

¹⁸ Altman (2009).

¹⁹ Taylor (2006).

and pledging to use an “integrated approach to enhance economic competitiveness, sustainability, and equity in our cities and metropolitan areas.”²⁰ This approach is in line with a recent report by the Brookings Institution, which found that effective regional governance is needed to position the United States to succeed going forward. That report recommends that the federal government encourage regional collaboration with incentives and grants and support this collaboration by improving data collection and cataloging best practices.²¹

The focus is moving beyond just regional collaboration toward an integrated regional focus. This integrated focus, which Taylor (2006) describes as “cooperative and conforming,” requires not only that municipalities work together but that municipal projects are integrated if they are to receive federal funding. Taylor cites transportation legislation that requires planners to evaluate the commuting needs of the workforce, freight needs of the economy, and equitable accessibility of roads to low income neighborhoods. This year, the federal government, acknowledging a continued lack of coordination, has placed even greater emphasis on multi-department planning—forcing departments to think outside of their own “silos”—with a requirement that the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development collaborate in their planning process. The Environmental Protection Agency has recently joined this collaborative effort.²² In Tennessee, Governor Bredesen created the Jobs Cabinet in 2003 to encourage the Departments of Agriculture, Education, Labor, Economic Development and others to work together and improve economic development coordination.²³

While many scholars and practitioners see government cooperation and collaboration as key to reducing social

The focus is moving beyond just regional collaboration toward an integrated regional focus that is “cooperative and conforming,” requiring not only that municipalities work together but that municipal projects are integrated.

²⁰ Executive Office of the President (2009).

²¹ Brookings Institution. (2008).

²² Environmental Protection Agency (2009).

²³ Governor Phil Bredesen’s Web site (2009).

While many scholars and practitioners see government cooperation and collaboration as key to reducing social inequalities and improving local government economic efficiencies, there is disagreement regarding what type of regional structure best supports effective cooperation.

inequalities and improving local government economic efficiencies, there is disagreement regarding what type of regional structure best supports effective cooperation. Some advocate the formal consolidation of local governments into large super-metropolitan area governments, others the creation of a new regional tier of government, and others case-by-case, policy-by-policy cooperation among local governments.²⁴ Savitch and Vogel (2000) contrast the governance strategy of cooperation and collaboration against the more formal government strategy of consolidation.²⁵ The collaborative route, coined “new regionalism,” argues that metropolitan areas can create regional governance structures that are not tied to a single, dominant unit of government.²⁶ Feiock (2004) adds the important observation that competition and collaboration, generally seen as incompatible elements in intergovernmental relations, are both found in nearly every system of local government and can in fact be quite complementary. Evaluating metropolitan governance from an institutional collective action perspective, he suggests that decentralized systems of governance can provide the civic, political, and administrative interactions needed to facilitate cooperation.²⁷

TOWARD BETTER REGIONAL GOVERNANCE IN TENNESSEE

Tennessee is well-served by a number of official regions, and there are many examples of effective regionalist approaches. Still, more can be done to improve the governance of those regions. Some of the regions in Tennessee were created by the state and others are federally designated. Some are really no more than service areas designated by various state departments. Perhaps the best known group of regions in the state is that of

²⁴ Post (2004).

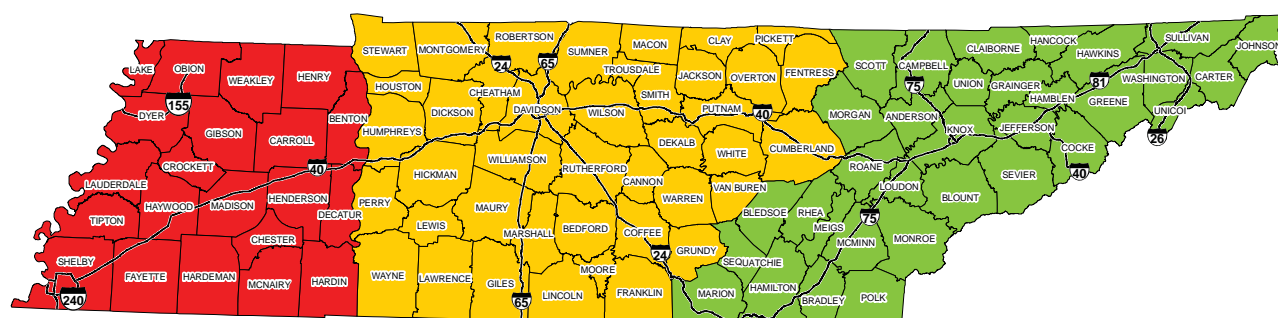
²⁵ Savitch & Vogel (2000).

²⁶ Oakerson (2004).

²⁷ Feiock (2004).

the three grand divisions of East Tennessee, Middle Tennessee, and West Tennessee. While the grand divisions are largely ceremonial, they are used by some state agencies to divide program services. They also provide an important sense of identity to their residents, with many Tennesseans drawing deep distinctions among the three grand divisions. The three stars on Tennessee's state flag represent the grand divisions.

Map 1. Tennessee's Grand Divisions



West Grand Division

Middle Grand Division

East Grand Division

State Population July 1, 2007 = 6,156,719

Population Including Cross-border MSA Counties = 6,762,548

Source: US Census Bureau

Probably the second best known group of regions in Tennessee is that of the Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA). MSA boundaries are defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and serve as one of the principle data regions used by the US Census Bureau and other government agencies. Intended to represent economically and socially integrated regions, there is a relative wealth of data available for MSAs and their component counties. According to the OMB definition, an MSA is a statistical area

associated with at least one urbanized area that has a population of at least 50,000. The Metropolitan Statistical Area comprises the central county or counties containing the core, plus adjacent outlying counties having a high degree of social and economic integration with the central county as measured through commuting.

Tennessee has ten MSAs:

- Chattanooga, TN-GA
- Clarksville, TN-KY
- Cleveland
- Jackson
- Johnson City
- Kingsport-Bristol-Bristol, TN-VA
- Knoxville
- Memphis, TN-MS-AR
- Morristown
- Nashville-Davidson–Murfreesboro–Franklin

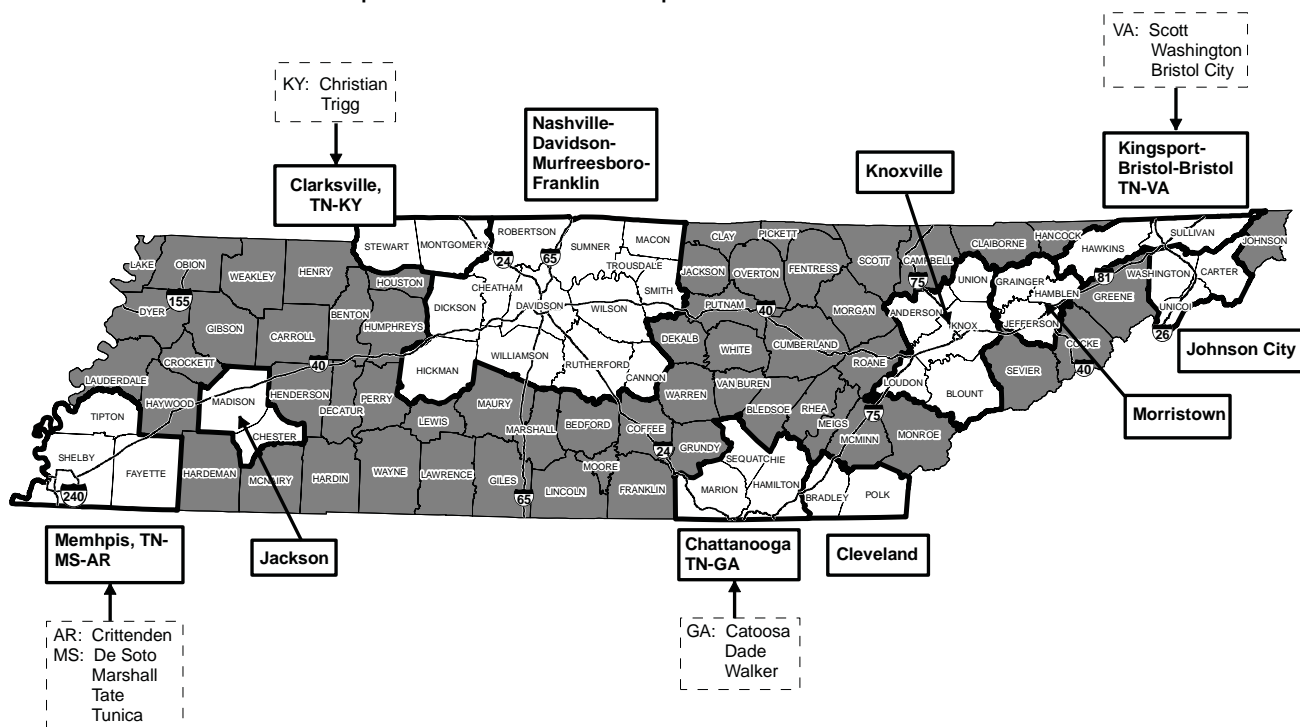
Four of these MSAs, Memphis, Clarksville, Kingsport-Bristol, and Chattanooga include non-Tennessee counties. There are twelve of these non-Tennessee counties, plus Bristol City, Virginia, which for data purposes is treated as a county. Unlike in Tennessee, cities in Virginia are not considered to be part of counties. Tennessee also has 20 micropolitan statistical areas, which the OMB defines as areas having “at least one urban cluster of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 population, plus adjacent territory that has a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured by commuting ties.”²⁸

The Brookings Institution has reported that the 100 largest MSAs are home to over 83% of the U.S. population, generate two-thirds of U.S. jobs, and account for three-fourths of the nation’s gross domestic product.²⁹ MSAs are similarly dominant in Tennessee, where they are home to 76% of the state’s population, generate 80% of the jobs, and account for 91% of

²⁸ Most of the micropolitan statistical areas are single counties, though there are two multi-county micropolitan statistical areas in Tennessee, one encompassing Franklin, Moore, and Coffee counties, and the other encompassing Jackson, Overton, and Putnam counties.

²⁹ Brookings Institution (2007).

Map 2. Tennessee Metropolitan Statistical Areas



Source: U.S. Office of Management and Budget

the gross domestic product.³⁰ As reported in TACIR's *Growth Concentration in Tennessee Regions* (2008), the trend is toward more concentration in each of these areas, especially in the Nashville, Knoxville, and Clarksville MSAs. It is important to note that the MSA total figures include data for several counties located outside of the state, so the MSA totals for just Tennessee counties would be low.

Other regions include the federally created service areas of the quasi-governmental Tennessee Valley Authority, the Delta Authority, and the Appalachian Regional Commission, locally operated regions required or authorized by federal law, such as metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) and community action agencies (CAA), and state designated service areas such as local workforce investment areas (LWIA) and rural planning organizations (RPO). Several of these regions will be the focus of a later section in this report discussing better alignment of service areas.

³⁰ Population data is for 2007 and employment data is for 2007. Both are from Lippard & Green. Gross domestic product data for 2008 is from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (2009).

An important first step in making the most of the strengths of the state's component regions is identifying inefficiencies in existing organizational structures and realigning those structures to better enable local efforts at regionalism.

REGIONALISM IN TENNESSEE

There are also several good examples of regionalism in Tennessee, from simple shared service agreements between local governments for fire, police, and other services, to the state's development districts. Tennessee's three metropolitan governments—Nashville-Davidson County, Lynchburg/Moore County, and Hartsville-Trousdale County—are classic examples of applied regionalism, where municipal and county functions are combined in an effort toward more efficient government. Nashville-Davidson County's adoption of metropolitan government in the 1960s is often given as a reason for the community's subsequent growth and success, allowing it to avoid some of the urban versus suburban conflicts of other large communities. As of this writing, Memphis and Shelby County have begun discussions regarding a possible consolidation of their governments or services.³¹

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE IN TENNESSEE

As discussed earlier, it is widely acknowledged that effective regions require a strong public-private partnership in addition to partnerships between governments—a collaborative form of governance. There are many examples of private and public-private regional efforts in Tennessee, to include area chambers of commerce located in the state's larger metropolitan areas and several not-for-profit regional initiatives, including Cumberland Region Tomorrow in the Nashville region and the Coalition for Livable Communities in the Memphis region. Also, the Knoxville region benefitted from a five-year collaboration initiative (2000-2005) known as Nine Counties, One Vision.

Tennessee should support efforts toward regional governance in order to make the most of the strengths of the state's component regions. This focus should go beyond simple job creation or

³¹ Greenblatt (2009).

economic development to a focus on overall improvement of quality of life. An important first step is identifying inefficiencies in existing organizational structures and realigning those structures to better enable local efforts at regionalism. In the next section, I will identify five groups of regions that I will show could benefit from being better aligned.

MISMATCHED SERVICE REGIONS

In this section, we will explore five groups of regions that are to some degree associated with providing services to improve Tennessee's economy—development districts, MPO/RPOs, CAAs, LWIAs, and economic growth strategy regions (EGSR).³² As the state's economy is really a collection of regional economies, one would expect these service regions to in some way reflect the borders of the regional economies, with the most commonly accepted definition of those borders being the borders of the MSAs. This is not an exhaustive inventory of regions, or even of regions associated with the state's economy.

Development Districts. Tennessee has nine development districts, which were established following the Tennessee Development District Act of 1965 in order to coordinate economic development activities.³³ The development districts, which are public non-profit associations of local governments, are arguably the most robust regional bodies in Tennessee. While they were created as and remain federally funded economic development districts, their role has expanded beyond just economic development activities. They now play a major role in coordinating implementation of various federal and state programs. Among other services, they provide local governments with expertise on housing, tourism, environmental

³² Some of these regions are considered special purpose governments. For ease of reference, and to more clearly distinguish them from local, that is county and municipal, governments, I will refer to them collectively as service regions.

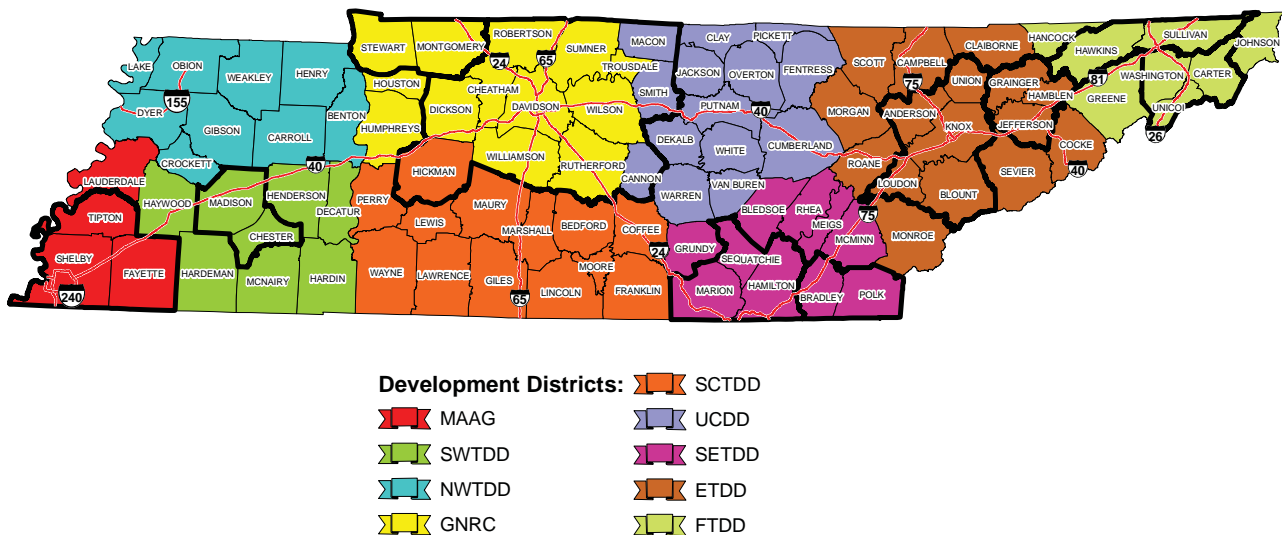
³³ Tennessee Code Annotated, Ch. 14, Title 13.

planning, infrastructure development, and senior citizen services planning. For example, they play a key role in assisting the Tennessee Housing Development Agency and local governments in seeking federal grants for housing. The development districts also have the authority to prepare long-range plans for land use and economic development, but they do not have the authority to implement or enforce those plans.³⁴

One of the development districts, the Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC), was given some planning authority by legislation in 1988 when it was created from the merger of the Mid-Cumberland Council of Governments and the Mid-Cumberland Development District. It is codified as TCA, Title 64, Chapter 7. Under that law, the GNRC was given authority to review developments of regional impact. Generally, the regional council exercises its planning authority by working with and assisting the local planning agencies located within the region.³⁵ GNRC and the other eight development districts are all shown in Map 3. The other eight are First Tennessee Development District, East Tennessee Development District, Southeast Tennessee Development District, Upper Cumberland Development District, South Central Tennessee Development District, Northwest Tennessee Development District, Southwest Tennessee Development District, and the Memphis Area Agency of Governments.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO)/Rural Planning Organizations (RPO). Urbanized areas of 50,000 or greater population are required by federal

Map 3. Development Districts Serving Tennessee

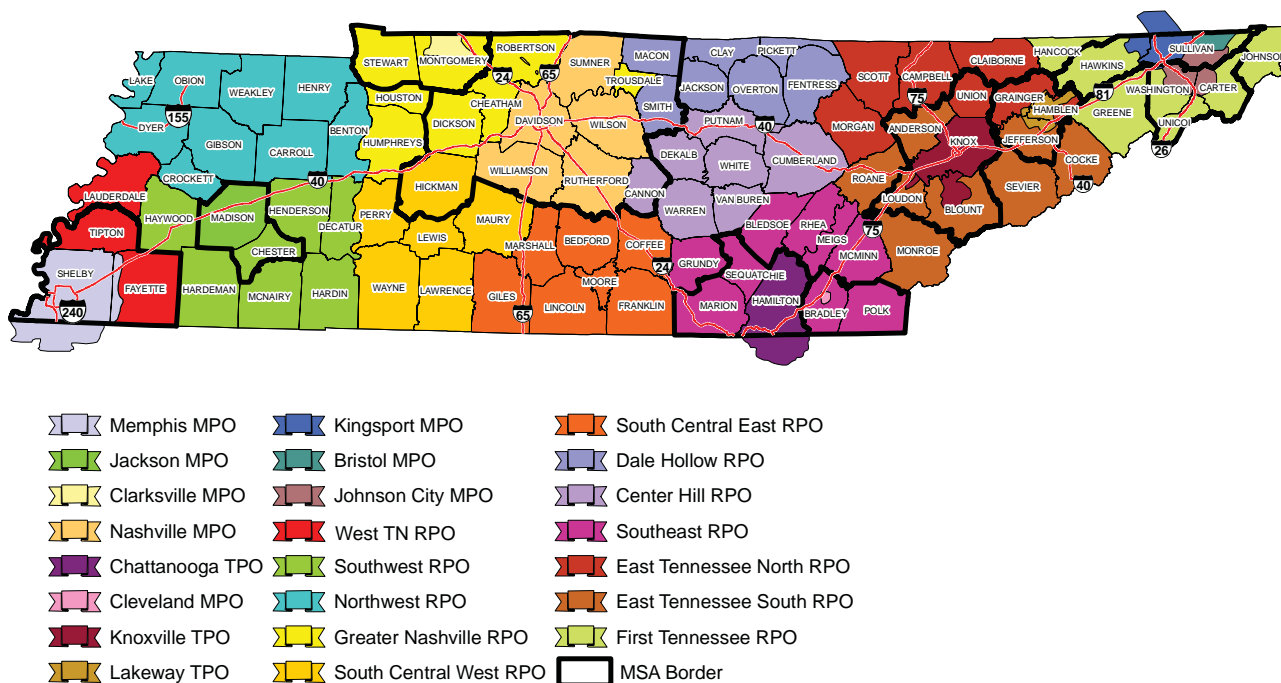


³⁴ Terry, Thurman, & Lippard (2010).

³⁵ Ibid.

law to have an MPO in order to maintain a comprehensive and cooperative transportation planning process. Tennessee’s eleven MPOs are centered in the cities of Bristol, Chattanooga, Clarksville, Cleveland, Jackson, Johnson City, Kingsport, Knoxville, Memphis, and Nashville, as well as in the Lakeway area that serves Morristown, Jefferson City, White Pine, and portions of Hamblen and Jefferson Counties.³⁶ The MPOs sometimes have different designations, such as the Knoxville Transportation Planning Organization or the Johnson City Metropolitan Transportation Planning Organization, but they are all by definition MPOs. These MPO regions were created by the Federal Highway Administration in the 1960s to perform transportation planning. Originally encompassing just the four most populous counties in Tennessee, they were expanded in the 1980s as a result of population growth to include urbanized areas of adjoining counties.³⁷ As a result of new air quality requirements, some were expanded again in the early 1990s. MPOs are administered by an Executive Board—consisting of locally elected officials and the Governor—and a Technical Committee—comprised of planners and engineers from local governments and other transportation agencies.

Map 4. Metropolitan Planning Organizations & Rural Planning Organizations Serving Tennessee



Sources: US OMB, Tennessee Department of Transportation

³⁶ Tennessee Department of Transportation (2009).

³⁷ Terry, Thurman, & Lippard (2010).

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) has recently created twelve RPOs, comprised of multiple counties and their cities to provide a similar type of regional transportation planning in the rural parts of the state that the MPOs do in the urbanized areas.³⁸ Their purpose is to involve local officials in multi-modal transportation planning through a structured process with a goal of ensuring quality, competence, and fairness in the transportation decision making process. The RPOs are supposed to consider multi-modal transportation needs on a local and regional basis, review long-term needs and short-term funding priorities, and make recommendations to TDOT. Tennessee's twelve RPOs are Center Hill, Dale Hollow, East Tennessee North, East Tennessee South, First Tennessee, Greater Nashville Regional, West Tennessee, Northwest Tennessee, South Central Tennessee East, South Central Tennessee West, Southeast Tennessee, and Southwest Tennessee.³⁹ The MPO borders remain within distinct MSA (even when they cross state borders), while the RPO borders do not. Looking back to Map 3, some of the MPOs and RPOs also cross development district boundaries within the state.

Community Action Agencies (CAA). The state is also served by a network of twenty CAAs, created by the federal government in 1964 as part of the “war on poverty.” CAAs provide and coordinate for integrated provision of a variety of services, including nutrition assistance, transportation, employment training, and education, with the intent of helping impoverished individuals and families who participate to move toward independence and self-sufficiency.⁴⁰ CAAs receive funding from the Tennessee Department of Human Services through the Community Services Block Grant and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. CAAs can also receive funding from such organizations as the United Way

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Tennessee Department of Transportation (2009).

⁴⁰ Tennessee Association of Community Action (2009).

and from other federal, state, and private sector contributions.⁴¹ While most of the CAAs serve multi-county regions, eight of the CAAs serve only one county (Anderson, Blount, Bradley, Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Montgomery, Shelby). As shown in Map 5, the CAAs borders are generally not aligned with those of the MSAs. Referring back to Map 3, the CAAs are generally aligned with the development districts, though in some cases their borders are crossed. Most development districts have several CAAs within their borders.

Tennessee's twenty CAAs include Anderson County CAA, Blount County CAA, Bradley-Cleveland Community Services Agency, Chattanooga Human Services, Clarksville-Montgomery County CAA, Delta Human Resources Agency, Douglas-Cherokee Economic Authority, Highland Rim Economic Corporation, Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee, Metropolitan Action Commission, Mid-Cumberland Community Action Agency, Mid-East Community Action Agency, Mountain Valley Economic Opportunity/ETHRA, Northwest Tennessee Community Action Partnership, South Central Human Resource Agency, Shelby County Community Services Agency, and Upper East Tennessee Human Development Agency.

Map 5. Community Action Agencies Serving Tennessee

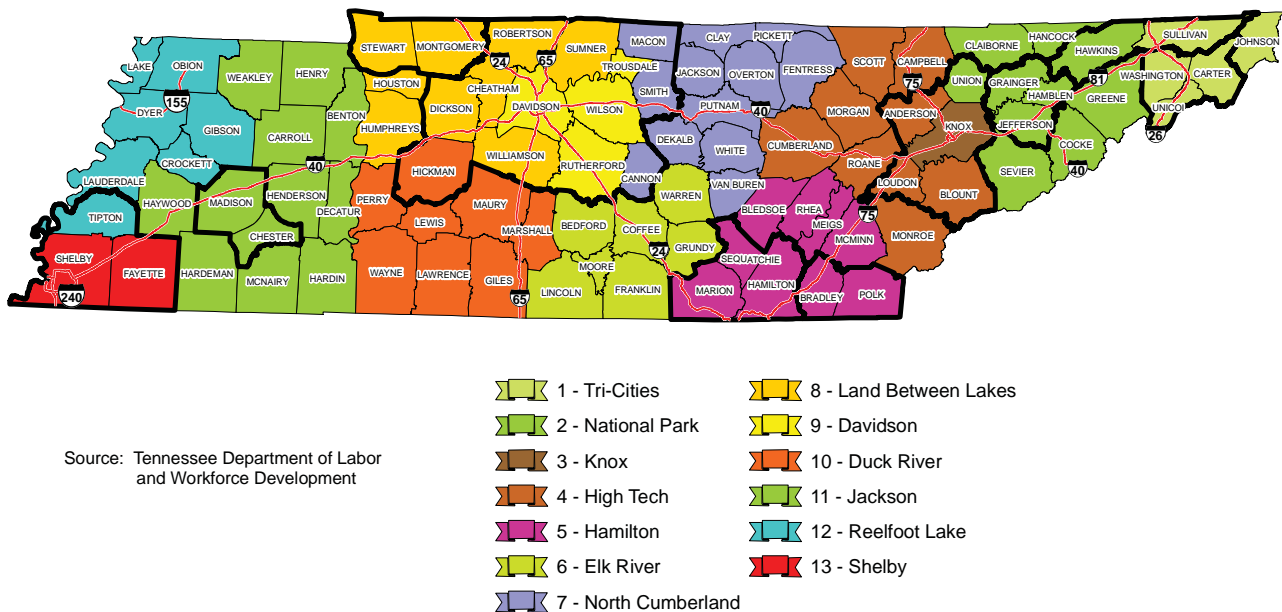


⁴¹ Ibid and Mid-Cumberland Community Action Agency (2009).

South Central Human Resource Agency, South East Tennessee Human Resource Agency, Southwest Human Resource Agency, Upper Cumberland Human Resource Agency, and Upper East Tennessee Human Development Agency.

Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIA). The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development has divided the state into 13 LWIAs as part of its implementation of the state’s Career Center System. Each LWIA includes counties with similar labor market and employment factors. The LWIAs are administered by local boards in an effort to provide workforce development and career services based on local needs.⁴² The LWIAs do not align with the other regional borders. While the LWIAs provide an important service in helping to educate and train Tennessee workers, it is interesting to note that even the Department of Labor and Workforce Development uses MSAs rather than LWIAs to summarize regional data in their monthly labor market reports. As shown in Map 6, the LWIAs do not correspond with MSAs, crossing borders in several instances. They also do not correspond with development district, MPO/RPO, and CAA borders.

Map 6. Local Workforce Investment Areas Serving Tennessee



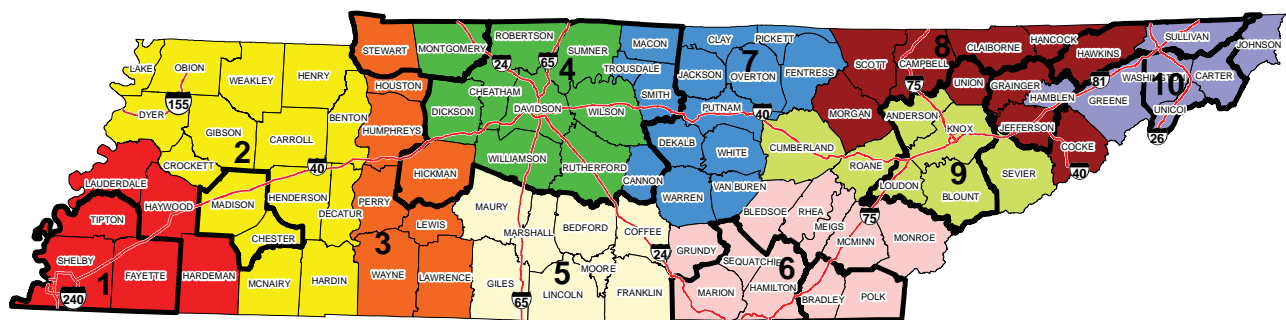
Source: Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Economic Growth Strategy Regions (EGSR). The Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER) of the University of Tennessee brought clustered like counties into regions

⁴² Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (2009).

in a report they prepared for the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (ECD) in 2004.⁴³ CBER used a statistical technique called cluster analysis to divide the state into ten regions which they labeled EGSRs. The idea was to cluster together the counties that were the most like each other while still being part of a geographically contiguous area. As shown in Map 7, this approach produced regions that varied quite a bit from the other regions discussed above.

Map 7. Economic Growth Strategy Regions Serving Tennessee



Source: US OMB and TN Department of Economic & Community Development

There is a certain, attractive rationale behind CBER's EGSRs—grouping similar counties with similar development needs together so that they can be supported by a uniform growth strategy. Another approach might be to attempt to balance the regions so that they are not all similarly buffeted by economic tides. If all of the counties in a region have similar needs, strengths, and weaknesses, they all can expect to be similarly affected by the economy. If the goal is to establish a more balanced, more diversified, approach, then clustering might not be the best approach; however, if the goal is to target services in an efficient, focused manner—as is the case with the EGSRs—then the cluster approach makes perfect sense. I will use the EGSRs as the starting point for aligning the other service regions, but first, let's take a closer look at the characteristics of the counties that make up these regions.

THE COUNTIES

Tennessee's 95 counties are a diverse lot, from the major urban centers of Memphis (Shelby County) and Nashville (Davidson County) to the manufacturing centers of the northeast and

⁴³ Center for Business and Economic Research (2004).

the rural clusters on the Cumberland Plateau. I will use two typologies from the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture—one updated and modified by TACIR staff—to provide a brief overview of some classifications of Tennessee’s counties. The typologies are the ERS’s county types and their rural/urban continuum. This section is meant as an introductory summary on county classifications; TACIR staff will be exploring this topic further in a forthcoming study.

COUNTY TYPES AND EMPLOYMENT CENTERS

I used the ERS’s county types codes as the basis for an expanded county typology for Tennessee. In their 2004 typology, the ERS coded all counties in the U.S. for their dominant industry in earnings by place of work. The earnings used were a three-year average for the years 1998-2000. In order to be categorized as a certain type—farm, mining, manufacturing, service, or federal/state government, the county had to meet certain thresholds that were roughly set based on county averages.⁴⁴ The thresholds were 15% of total earnings to qualify as a farm county, 15% for mining, 25% for manufacturing, or 15% for federal/state government. If a county met more than one threshold, it was classified by the industry with the largest number of percentage points above the threshold. Services were not allowed to take such precedence over the other industries; however, a county with 45% services that met no other threshold, would be classified as a service county. If it failed to meet any of the thresholds, it was reported as a non-specialized county.

I updated the ERS types using earnings data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis for 2005-2007, and expanded the list of types to reflect counties that met more than one threshold.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ The ERS thresholds were roughly set at the mean for non-metro counties plus one standard deviation. For a full explanation of the ERS methodology, see <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Rurality/Typology/Methods/>.

⁴⁵ I used the BEA’s NAICS classifications of industries, which replaced the SIC classification for industries that had been used by the ERS. At the level used, the data is comparable.

I reported these counties as balanced counties (B), but also noted the industry that most exceeded the threshold. For example, a county that met both manufacturing and government thresholds, with manufacturing most exceeding the threshold, would be reported as B-M for balanced but manufacturing dominant. Unlike the ERS typology, I allowed service to take precedence over the other industries, in part to reflect the shift in Tennessee’s economy from a manufacturing to a service base. Similarly, I reported non-specialized counties (N) with a subcategory to note the industry that came closest to meeting its threshold.

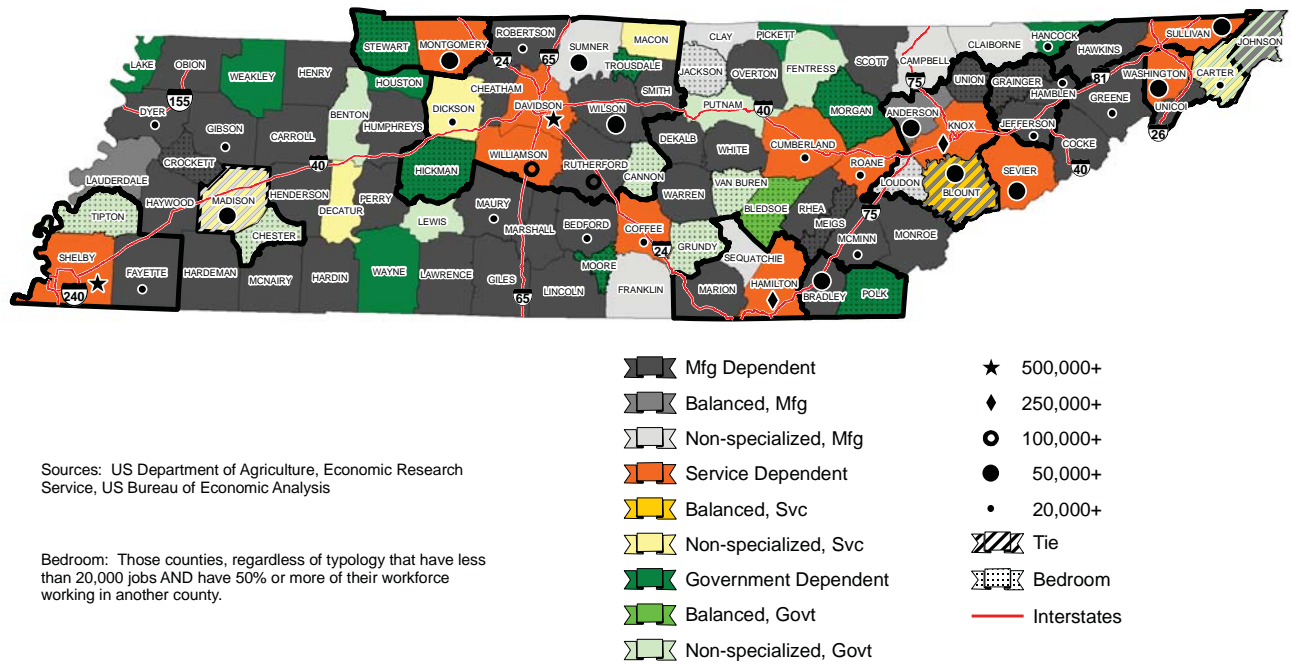
I made one other change to the categories, including earnings from local government employment with the federal/state earnings. I used a threshold of 25% for this expanded category, which I took from the ERS’s 1989 county type methodology. The ERS had also included local government earnings in that earlier version. Thus, the thresholds I used were Farm 15%, Mining 15%, Manufacturing 25%, Services 45%, and Government 25%.

Table 1 shows the distributions of county types for Tennessee. By far, the most common county type is manufacturing, with forty-four straight manufacturing counties, two manufacturing-dominant balanced counties, and eight manufacturing-dominant non-specialized counties. Of course, just because a county is manufacturing dominant does not mean it has more manufacturing jobs than a county that is not; magnitude matters. McNairy County, with the highest percent of manufacturing earnings (49%, \$188 million) accounts for less than one quarter of 1% of statewide manufacturing earnings while Shelby County, with just 10% (\$3.2 billion) of its earning being from manufacturing, accounted for 13% of the statewide total. Indeed, five counties (Shelby, Davidson, Rutherford, Hamilton, and Sullivan) accounted for 40% of Tennessee’s manufacturing earnings. Tennessee had twelve services counties, twelve government counties, four balanced counties, twenty-three non-specialized counties, and no farm or mining counties. Bledsoe County met the threshold for farm, but was categorized as balanced-government because it met the government threshold by a larger margin than the farm threshold.

| TABLE 1. TENNESSEE COUNTIES BY TYPE | |
|--|---------------|
| Type | Number |
| Farm | 0 |
| Mining | 0 |
| Manufacturing | 44 |
| Services | 12 |
| Government | 12 |
| Balanced | |
| Mfr | 2 |
| Svcs | 0 |
| Govt | 1 |
| Tied | 1 |
| Non-specialized | |
| Mfr | 8 |
| Svcs | 3 |
| Govt | 9 |
| Tied | 3 |

There were a number of counties where the industries tied in how close they came to thresholds. Tied counties are indicated on Map 8. Map 8 also shows Tennessee’s federal

Map 8. TACIR Update of USDA/ERS County Typology Codes, 2005-2007



interstate system and job centers—counties with 20,000 or more jobs. An obvious pattern is that services dependent counties and major job centers are primarily located within MSAs or along interstate corridors. Also, there are several counties that are categorized as bedroom counties, which are counties with 20,000 or fewer jobs, that send most of their residents to another county to work.⁴⁶

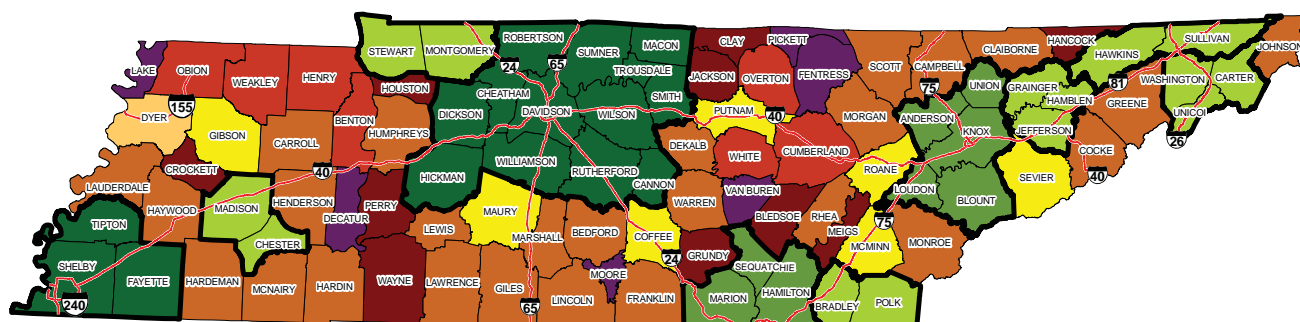
THE RURAL ISSUE

One cannot discuss Tennessee’s counties without acknowledging that most of them retain a rural quality. The ERS has also created a typology to reflect the degree of rurality for each county in the United States. Their Rural-Urban Continuum Codes distinguish metropolitan (metro) counties by the population size of their metro area, and nonmetropolitan (non-metro) counties by their degree of urbanization and adjacency to MSAs.⁴⁷ As shown in Map 9, most of Tennessee is classified as partially rural with urban populations below 20,000. Five counties, Lake, Decatur, Van Buren, Fentress, and Pickett, are classified as completely rural and not adjacent to an MSA. There are two points to consider to avoid confusion. First, the

⁴⁶ See Lippard & Green (2008).

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture (2009).

Map 9. The Rural-Urban Continuum in Tennessee, 2003



Sources: US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service

- Metro Area of 1 million or more
- Metro Area of 250,000 to 1 million
- Metro Area of fewer than 250,000
- Urban pop. > 20,000, adjacent to MSA
- Urban pop. > 20,000 not adjacent
- Urban pop. 2,500 - 19,999, adjacent to MSA
- Urban pop. 2,500 - 19,999, not adjacent
- Completely rural, adjacent to MSA
- Completely rural, not adjacent

populations used for this classification are urban population, not county total population.⁴⁸ Second, for considering adjacency, don't forget that some counties, such as Giles and Lincoln, are adjacent to MSAs in other states. Also, while the ERS reports MSAs as urban, one should note that many MSA counties have large rural tracts. Brookings reports that more than half of the nation's rural residents live within an MSA.⁴⁹

It is interesting to compare the rural continuum map to the county type map. Most of rural Tennessee is classified as manufacturing counties. Rural manufacturing counties face a particularly large challenge in maintaining or improving quality of life in the face of our changing economy. Tennessee cannot neglect its rural areas but in this time of restrained resources must seek the correct balance between return on investment and maintaining a good quality of life. The state should analyze its economic development and land use strategies to

⁴⁸ The ERS refers to the Census Bureau definition of urban. The Census Bureau defines urban as geographies meeting any of four criteria: all territory, population, and housing units in urban areas; a cluster of one or more block groups or census blocks, each of which has a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile at the time; surrounding block groups and census blocks, each of which has a population density of at least 500 people per square mile at the time; and, less densely settled blocks that form enclaves or indentations, or are used to connect discontinuous areas with qualifying densities.

⁴⁹ Bradley & Katz (2008).

determine if there is room for improvement in the current balance. As an example, TACIR is working with the Tennessee Department of Transportation, Department of Economic and Community Development, and the University of Tennessee on a study to determine whether the lack of a four-lane highway to the county seat significantly limits economic development in the nineteen counties without one. The state currently holds providing such connectors as a priority.

REGIONAL GOVERNANCE DISTRICTS

The assumption in this report is that Tennessee can increase the level of service to its citizens by aligning the various service regions that serve the state. This assumption should not be taken on blind faith. I recommend further research to quantify any efficiency or other service quality improvements; however, some improvements from regional alignment seem to be common sense. First, the various organizations serving a region would be better able to collect and share data. Second, they would be better able to collaborate and cooperate to provide services. One of the tenets of modern public administration is that much of government is accomplished by networks of officials. Thurmaier and Wood (2002) argue that repeated personal interactions among local government officials from different jurisdictions help in the creation of interlocal agreements.⁵⁰ Aligning the service regions would simplify these networks and would allow for more frequent interactions among the same officials. Third, the aligned regions will make it easier for people doing business with the organizations to know which agencies serve their area. Finally, aligning the regions will help build a sense of regional community, better assisting local governments, chambers of commerce, convention bureaus, etc. in marketing their communities.

⁵⁰ Thurmaier and Wood (2002). They note that their study is not able to parse the influence of or ability to broker agreements by individual actors from that of their organizations.

The goal is to align service regions for better coordination and efficiency and to improve the quality of life of Tennesseans. How to accomplish this goal? We will start with our existing regions as it is better to build on the strengths of existing regional organizations than to invent new organizations.⁵¹ Of the existing regions, the two that make the most sense to serve as our starting point are the development districts, with their extensive range of services and extensive government networks, and the EGSRs, which are clustered to promote focused service strategies. The aligned regions should also take into account Tennessee's unique geography, demographics, and history, as reflected in the discussion of county types and the state's rural character.

I used a set of ground rules to develop proposed borders for the aligned regions, which I am calling regional governance districts (RGD):

1. RGDs should as much as practical cluster like counties together so that state, local, and regional leaders can craft focused strategies for their improvement. For this reason, the EGSR borders created by UT CBER were used as a starting point. For the same reason, RGD borders should take into account county types, the rural character of individual counties, and the location of job centers and interstates.
2. RGDs should not break up Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Areas. The MSAs are the most commonly accepted indicators of the boundaries of our economies.
3. RGDs should not break up MPOs and should cause limited realignment of CAAs. As these districts were created under federal auspices,

⁵¹ Mazey (1997).

changes to their borders would be more difficult to enact than changes to districts created by the state.

4. RGDs should if possible respect the borders of the state's three grand divisions. While somewhat ceremonial, the grand division borders are used as the service boundaries for some state programs and do provide a sense of belonging to their residents.
5. Commuting patterns will be used to help allocate counties that could fit into more than one RGD. While not a perfect indicator of connectivity and shared policy interests, commuting patterns are the basis for economic connectivity as delineated by MSA borders, and thus a reasonable tie-breaker.

This report is not advocating the creation of a new level of government. Further, the creation of RGDs would not require any changes to the boundaries or government structures of Tennessee's local governments. Rather, RGDs would change the structure of the service regions that support the local governments and their citizens. This would be more a change in governance rather than a change in government.⁵² While these changes would not be easy, they would be easier than creating new levels of government or consolidating existing governments.

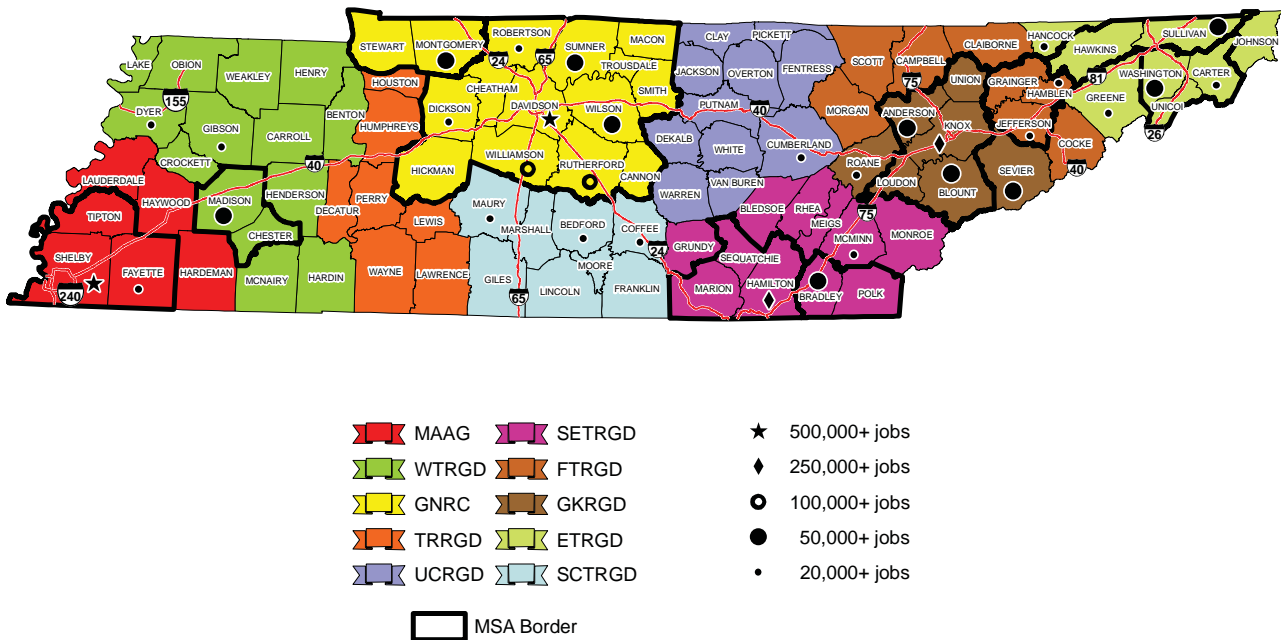
As shown in Map 10, the end result would be the creation of ten RGDs:

- Memphis Area Association of Governments (MAAG)

⁵² Post (2004) notes that while changing regional government often requires significant changes in local government structure, changing regional governance maintains local governments but requires a shift in their behavior. She adds that altering the structure of a metropolitan area's government is historically a difficult process.

- West TN RGD (WTRGD)
- Greater Nashville Regional Council (GNRC)
- Tennessee River RGD (TRRGD)
- South Central TN RGD (SCTRGD)
- Upper Cumberland RGD (UCRGD)
- SE TN RGD (SETRGD)
- First TN RGD (FTRGD)
- Greater Knoxville RGD (GKRGD)
- East TN RGD (ETRGD)

Map 10. Proposed Regional Governance Districts



The RGDs would be the service areas for the current development districts and would replace the current EGSRs. Two existing development districts (NWTDD and all but one county of SWTDD) would be merged into one RGD (WTRGD), one RGD (TRRGD) would be created out of portions of GNRC, SCTDD, and SWTDD, and the FTDD would be split into two RGDs (GKRGD and FTRGD). Also, Monroe County would transfer to the SETRGD.

The state designated RPOs and WFAs would be redrawn to either correspond with or fall within the RGD borders. As much as possible, the RGDs borders would be drawn in a way that encompasses the federally created MPOs and CAAs. By current statute, the CAAs designated as HRAs are required to be aligned with the development district borders. There would also have to be some consideration given to Area Agencies on Aging; seven of the nine agencies are currently housed within development districts. None of the service regions would change their core mission and most would serve primarily the same areas they now serve. The RGDs shown here are not meant to be the final word on the topic, but rather as a place for the conversation to begin. For example, several colleagues have expressed opinions regarding the borders of the TRRGD, and how several additional counties might fit better within that RGD than in its neighboring regions—there would need to be a thorough discussion on how to improve upon the work of UT CBER’s clustering methodology as well as the modifications I have made to the EGSR borders in creating the RGDs. It would not be wise to arbitrarily draw or re-draw these borders without considerable conversation with the various local governments, state departments, service regions, and constituents affected. Other regions might also be candidates for alignment, while others would never make sense. It would be ridiculous to recommend aligning watershed districts to match man made borders. No district should be aligned at the expense of service quality. It is also important to understand that the RGD borders should not be considered set in stone once created. The regions need to be able to change over time as the economies and other factors linking their various communities change.

CONCLUSION

Barnes and Ledebur, writing on behalf of the Ford Foundation in a report presented to the National League of Cities, recommended four actions that states could take to better enable regional collaboration among its local governments:

- State legislatures can identify and remove impediments to regional action in state law as well as enact authorization and encouragement for local governments to collaborate in regional governance.
- Governors can identify and remove agency impediments to better collaboration as well as find ways to better encourage collaboration.
- State governments can identify and remove or reduce tax and revenue policies that cause inter-local competition for economic development, and thus inhibit inter-local collaboration.
- All of these actions should be taken with the participation of local governments. States should encourage and enable regional collaboration, not mandate it.⁵³

RGDs address three of these four recommendations; inter-local tax competition is a topic for another report. The creation of RGDs—aligning the service boundaries of development districts, EGSRs, WFIAAs, CAAs, MPO/RPOs—has potential as an incremental step toward more effective regional governance. Their creation would likely be a difficult process involving significant negotiations among governments and agencies. I recommend further research on the specific boundaries for RGDs, as well as a thorough assessment of the steps required to effectively align the service boundaries of the various types of districts. Such research should focus on the needs and expectations of the local governments and their citizens as well as the various state and federal agencies and program administrators.

⁵³ Barnes & Ledebur (1995).

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Charlie Cardwell, County Officials Association of Tennessee

Private Citizens

Rozelle Criner, Sr., Ripley
Tommy Schumpert, Knoxville