



An Urban and Metro Strategy for Michigan: Helping Our Cities and Metro Areas Achieve Their Economic Potential

By Julie Bennett*

The right strategy for Michigan will help the state achieve three goals essential to the health of its cities, its metropolitan areas, and the state as a whole:

Goal 1: A strong link between innovation and manufacturing to increase regional exports and attract global investments.

Goal 2: State support for strong regional systems that train existing workers as well as welcome new ones that fuel economic growth.

Goal 3: Targeted investments that leverage distinct assets in urban and metropolitan areas so that regional economies can be transformed.

Why a Metropolitan Strategy?

The kind of strategy that's most likely to strengthen urban areas in a global, networked, rapidly changing economy will focus on:

- **The right assets.** Urban areas will achieve better economic recovery when they build on their strengths—their essential, economic reason for being and their unique mix of institutions, amenities, and opportunities.
- **The right geography.** There are reasons to pay particular attention to central cities within a metropolitan context: central city decline and wide disparities between city and suburban prosperity are associated with slower regional income growth, and job gains in a central city have a positive effect on housing prices in the suburbs. But fundamentally, the economy tends to be organized around metropolitan areas.
- **The right strategies.** Understanding the economic assets of urban areas and their metropolitan context drives the policy recommendations that help leverage the special assets of urban and metropolitan areas in Michigan. In some cases, these assets are widely shared, and in other cases, they are unique to particular metropolitan areas.

Michigan's assets are concentrated in its metropolitan areas. The state's top 14 metropolitan areas are home to 82 percent of the population, 84 percent of the jobs, 86 percent of state gross domestic product, 85 percent of exports, 91 percent of science and engineering jobs, and 85 percent of postsecondary degree holders.

The next economy will be oriented toward innovation, particularly in the manufacturing sector, to spur growth through ideas and their deployment. The next economy will demand and reward global engagement, including exports to take advantage of growing global demand, and the ability to attract global investment. The next economy will be powered by low-carbon technology, processes, and products. And, the next economy will provide greater opportunities for workers at all skill levels, including workers who want to immigrate to Michigan.

Michigan's metropolitan areas are positioned to succeed in the next economy because of their strong history in manufacturing and innovation, their significant share of Michigan's existing export economy, their high concentration of global talent and investment, and their substantial inroads on the production side of low-carbon economy.

- Ninety percent of the state's high-tech-industry employment and 80 percent of its advanced manufacturing jobs are in metropolitan areas. Six Michigan metropolitan areas had a higher number of patents per 1,000 workers from 2001 to 2012 than the average U.S. metropolitan area.
- Detroit ranks fourth among large metropolitan areas in electronic vehicle technology specialization, and Grand Rapids ranks second for green consumer products production and development. Jackson and Bay City are especially strong in innovations of biofuel and wind energy technology. Seven of Michigan's metropolitan areas meet or exceed the national average for intensity of clean jobs.
- Of the 20 largest metropolitan areas in the United States, Detroit is the first in terms of export intensity (the share of output that is exported). Grand Rapids ranks 10th among the 100 largest U.S. metropolitan areas in terms of export intensity. Ten of Michigan's 14 metro areas are more export-intense than the U.S. average.
- Michigan's metropolitan areas are home to strong and emerging industry clusters and powerful anchor institutions like universities, medical centers, and research institutes.

Michigan also has some hurdles to overcome.

- The growth of the working-age population in 13 out of 14 metropolitan areas is slower than the national average. In particular, the working-age population of cities has a low level of educational attainment and as of June 2011, nine of Michigan's 14 metro areas had an unemployment rate above the national average of 9.3 percent.
- Michigan's metro areas have very few foreign-born residents, although they show impressive educational attainments when compared to immigrants nationwide. Foreign-born residents in 12 of Michigan's 14 metros, including smaller metros such as Saginaw, Niles, Monroe, and Bay City, have rates of graduate or professional degree attainment higher than those of foreign-born residents nationwide.

- Many of Michigan’s metro areas do not leverage the power of their anchor institutions and the clusters of firms throughout the metros so that these anchors and clusters spark additional job creation, innovation, and distinctive, vital physical environments.
- Michigan’s state leaders have tended to spread funds for revitalization or economic growth evenly around the state, rather than focusing on game-changing investments in a small number of places.

Recommendations for Accelerating Michigan Metropolitan Economic Growth

Goal 1: A strong link between innovation and manufacturing to increase regional exports and attract global investments.

- Reorient the 21st Century Jobs Fund to include manufacturing and innovation, particularly among small manufacturers.
- Create a strong foreign direct investment (FDI) strategy to attract innovative firms that fill gaps in key manufacturing clusters.
- Help small manufacturers and service businesses increase exports through robust export assistance, promotion, and financing.

Goal 2: State support for strong regional systems that train existing workers as well as welcome new ones that fuel economic growth.

- Use existing workforce dollars to drive regional workforce strategies that match cluster strengths.
- Seize the opportunity to demand changes in federal workforce laws.
- Help highly educated immigrants gain Michigan professional certificates.

Goal 3: Targeted investments that leverage distinct assets in urban and metropolitan areas so that regional economies can be transformed.

- Support a small number of urban and metropolitan industry clusters with grants tailored to the specific needs of emerging, existing, or advanced clusters.
- Designate one to three new “urban innovation districts” that connect innovation-generating anchor institutions with infrastructure, housing, and amenities, and support them with a 21st Century Places Fund.

*Julie Bennett’s remarks are derived from a report prepared by Public Sector Consultants. To download the full report, visit <http://www.businessleadersformichigan.com/research-reports/>.

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