Everett-Stewart Regional Airport Economic Development Study
Final Report

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Prepared for:

Everett-Stewart Regional Airport KUCY

Discover Obion County Tennessee

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Introduction

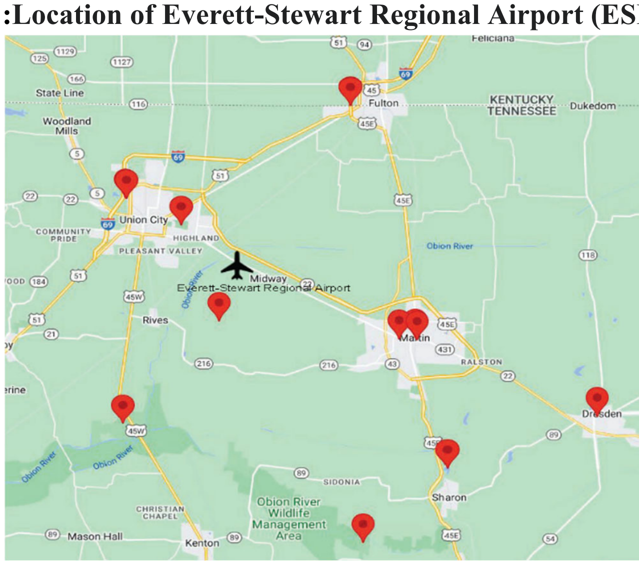
On behalf of Everett-Stewart Regional Airport (ESRA) and Obion County Joint Economic Development Council (JEDC), Economic Decisions Group (EDG), the Consultant, has performed an economic impact study to evaluate ESRA's contribution to economic development Obion and Weakley counties (study region) in 2023 and developed a roadmap to leverage the Airport to stimulate economic development in the study region. This final report provides the scope of services undertaken and it is discussed as follows:

- Background of the Airport
- Operations and Management
- Inventory of the airport assets
- Social and economic profile of the study region
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Economic Impact Analysis
- Economic Development Plan.

Airport Location and Background

The Everett-Stewart Regional Airport (ESRA), designated as UCY(KUCY) by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), is a general aviation airport located 4 miles southeast of Union City, TN (Figure 1), at the coordinates 36-22-47.066 N / 88-59-8.527 W. The Airport is 346 feet/105 meters above Mean Sea Level (MSL). The weather conditions in Union City/Obion County, TN, are generally mild, characterized by warm summers and largely cool winters. Average temperatures range from 44° Fahrenheit (F) to 89° F during the summer. The mean daily maximum temperature of the hottest month is 89° Fahrenheit (F). The annual average rainfall is 51.98 inches.

Figure 1:Location of Everett-Stewart Regional Airport (ESRA).



[1]Before the United States entered World War II, there was the recognition by the U.S. Army that great steps would have to be made to incorporate air power to strengthen the military. Congress agreed with the military and by 1942 steps had been taken to train the military pilots. Obion County, Tennessee was chosen as a training area and a plot of ground, about 840 acres east of Union City and just east of the Obion River and north of the Union City-Martin Road (now Stanley's Chapel Road) was chosen to build a training base.

The Riddle-McKay Company, now Embry-Riddle University, was contracted to operate the base and the training program. Many metal buildings were built in 1942-43, as well as a wooden control tower. Two wooden hangers were added in 1943. The control tower was replaced by the present terminal building. Approximately 19 classes of cadets were trained at Riddle-McKay Field in Union City and were sent all over the world. The primary training aircraft was the PT-Stearman.

After WWII, the War Surplus Act allowed the airport to be given to Obion County. The grant included certain stipulations about how the land could be used, sold, retained, etc., and that it must be used as an airport. It was named Tom Stewart Airport after Senator Tom Stewart. Later, Congressman Robert A. "Fats" Everett's name was included and for many years it was known as Everett Stewart Airport. In late 2007 it became the Everett Stewart Regional Airport jointly operated by Obion and Weakley counties.

Data Collection

The consultant team conducted desk studies and meetings/interviews to collect relevant data for this study. The consultants facilitated meetings/discussions both in-person and virtual meetings with the Project Steering Committee, Airport Manager, Economic Development Officers and other identifiable groups. Desk studies comprised review of relevant studies and federal data sources including:

- Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)
- U.S. Census Bureau
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)
- Northwest TN Development District's (NWTDD) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (2022)
- Tennessee DOT's Northwest PRO Rural Transportation Plan (2020-2022)
- West TN Planning Portal for Blue Oval City Planning.
- 2040 Tennessee Aviation System Plan (TASP)
- Federal Aviation Administration's Airport Data

[1] Retrieved from https: www.estewartregionalairport.us/history (History | Everett-Stewart Regional Airport (estewartregionalairport.us))

ESRA Operations and Management

ESRA is a public-use airport owned by Obion County, TN, and operated by the Everett-Stewart Regional Airport Board. On behalf of the Board, an Airport Manager has been stationed at the Airport to manage the daily activities or operations. The airport operates from 7:30am to 5:00 pm between Monday and Saturday and 12:30pm to 5:00 pm on Sundays.

The Tennessee Aviation System Plan (TASP) conducted in 2019, classified ESRA as a community business airport. Community business airports have a minimum of 100 jet operations annually and support the community with moderate jet activity. Table 1 presents the number of based aircraft at the airport in 2019, 2023 and the forecast for 2040.

Table 1:Based Aircraft at ESRA

Aircraft Type	2019	2023	2040 (Forecast)[2]
Single Engine	30	45	31
Multi Engine	4	5	8
Jet/Turboprop		3	2
Helicopters	1	1	2
Other		2	0
Total	35	56	43

Source: TASP (2019), ESRA Airport Manager (2023), Barge Design Solutions (2040)

Aircraft operation is broadly defined by the FAA as either local or itinerant. Local operations refer to traffic patterns within sight of the airport or departing to/arriving from a landing facility within a 20-mile radius of the airport. All other operations are classified as itinerant. Itinerant operations are those that either arrive from outside the airport area or depart from an airport and leave the airport area. Table 2 presents annual local and itinerant operations at ESRA for 2019 (TASP) as well as 2020 and 2040. Although, the total annual operations between 2019 and 2020 are similar, there is a remarkable difference between local and itinerant operations. Based on the consultant team's onsite observations, discussions with airport management and review of FAA's Airport Master Record, the ratio between local and itinerant flights for 2020 is more reasonable than that of 2019. This provides more credibility to the 2040 operations forecast since it is based on 2020 operations data.

Table 2: General Aviation Summary at ESRA

Aircraft Operations	2019	2020	2040 (Forecast)[3]
Local	4332	3558	3654
Itinerant	1708	2576	2646
Total	6040	6134	6300
Local (%)	71.7%	58%	58%
Itinerant (%)	28.3%	42%	42%

Source: TASP (2019), Barge Design Solutions (2020 and 2040)

[2] Airport Layout Plan for the Everett-Stewart Regional Airport, Barge Design Solutions, 2023.
[3] Airport Layout Plan for the Everett-Stewart Regional Airport, Barge Design Solutions, 2023.

Inventory of ESRA Assets

Well-equipped, maintained, and competitively priced facilities are vital to improving aviation traffic, enhancing operational efficiency and stimulating local economic development. ESRA sits on about 857 acres of land earmarked for both aeronautical and non-aeronautical use, such as development of landside and airside facilities. Landside facilities include passenger terminals, aircraft servicing, storage, maintenance, and parking lots. Airside facilities include infrastructure that are required to ensure safe and efficient movement of aircraft. These include runways, taxiways, lighting, and navigational aids.

Landside Facilities

ESRA is equipped with landside facilities that support travelers, pilots, and aircraft handling functions. Table 3 presents the list and conditions of landside facilities including the administration/terminal building; fixed-base operator (FBO): aircraft maintenance, aircraft hangars, aircraft fueling facilities, aircraft apron parking; vehicle parking; and emergency services. Essential landside facilities discussed below include:

- **Terminal/Administration Building.** The Airport is equipped with a 3,505 square-foot terminal or administration building. The building area includes a passenger waiting, drop-off/pick-up areas, pilot lounge, restroom, and conference rooms.

- **Hangars.** The facilities at the Airport include a 10-unit T-hangar, 5-unit row hangar building, 2 WWII era large open hangars, and 3 box hangars (2 relatively new, the other built in 1999).

- **Fuel Storage.** The Obion County, through Airport management, owns and operates aviation fuel storage facilities. The facilities or fuel farm is composed of two (2) above-ground 12,000-gallon tanks for Jet-A and Avgas each, and a 3,000 gallons fuel truck for Jet-A fuel delivery on the ramp.

Table 3: Existing Landside Facilities

Description	Size/Dimension	Condition
Landside Buildings		
Terminal Building	3,505 SF	Needs improvement (interior design)
Terminal Parking	37 spaces	Needs improvement (surface upgrade)
Terminal Apron	221,855 SF	Good
Terminal Tie-Downs	8 spaces (1,800 SF)	Good
10-Unit T-Hangar	6 spaces (14'x44'), 4 spaces (14'x48'), 14,655 SF Total	Good
Row Hangar	5 units (9,840SF)	Good
Agriculture Hangar Apron	91,845SF	Good
T-Hangar and Row Hangar Apron	30,810 SF - Total	Good
Hangar / Office Space (North)*	26,400 SF Total; 18,000 SF Hangar space	Needs major rehabilitation
Hangar / Office Space (South)*	26,400 SF Total (18,000 SF Hangar Space)	Needs major rehabilitation
80' x 80' Box Hangar (Hangar G)	6,400 SF	Good
80' x 80' Box Hangar (Hangar H)	6,400 SF	Good
50' x 60' Box Hangar	3,000 SF	Good
Airport Support Facilities		
Aircraft Fuel	Avgas 12,000 gallons	
Aircraft Fuel	Jet-A 12,000 gallons	
Airport Equipment Maintenance Storage	2 shop/storage areas (ends of T-hangars) and one open tractor storage "carport"	
Additional Landside Facilities		
Fencing	6" barbed wire with security	
Landscape architecture		Needs improvement
Signage (Martin Highway, Airport Road and Airport Entrance)		Needs improvement
Airport amenities (meeting and conference rooms pilot lounge, etc.)		Needs improvement

Source: Barge Designs, EDG observations and interviews.

Airside Facilities

The airside facilities support all arriving and departing operations of aircraft. These include runways, taxiways, and navigational aids (NAVAIDS).

Runway and Taxiway Facilities

ESRA has a single runway designated as Runway 01/19. The designation stems from its 010º/190º orientation and is considered a North-South aligned runway. The runway is 6,503 feet long and 100ft wide and constructed of asphalt surface. Runway 01/19 is designated as an ARC C-II runway and has pavement strength rate at 45,000 pounds for single-wheel landing gear (wheel) and 60,000 double-wheel landing gear. The runway is designed with precision runway markings and medium intensity lighting in accordance with FAA standards, such as the landing designator, edge stripes, and centerline.

In addition to the runway, the airside facility at UCY consists of a full parallel taxiway, once used as a runway. To the west of the taxiway, are three (3) connectors to the runway. The taxiway is 45 feet wide and has asphaltic-concrete pavement. East of the taxiway lies the connection to the main and south apron. The main apron provides access to the terminal and the t-hangar apron. The south apron is located at the approach end of the runway and was developed to support agricultural operations, a critical industry, in the study region.

Based on data collected from the airport, the runway has an average Pavement Condition Index (PCI) of 65, the taxiways PCI values range from 71 PCI to 75 PCI, and the apron areas recorded an average PCI of 87. On a 100-point scale, with 100 being in perfect condition, the runway, taxiways, and apron areas are in good condition. An extensive list of airside facilities and conditions are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Existing Airside Facilities

Description	Size/Dimension	Condition
Runway Facilities		
Primary Runway Orientation	01/19 (North/South)	
Runway (length & Width)	6503ft x 100 ft (1,982 m x 30m)	
Runway Surface & Condition	Asphalt	Scheduled for resurfacing. Funding is subject to TDOT/FAA approval.
Runway Lighted Approach Aids	PAPI, ODALS, REIL	Scheduled for replacement. Funding is subject to TDOT/FAA approval.
Runway Strength	45,000 SW /60,000 DW	
Runway Lighting	MIRL	Scheduled for replacement. Funding is subject to TDOT/FAA approval.
Runway Pavement Markings	Precision	New markings will be undertaken, as part of the scheduled resurfacing. Funding is subject to TDOT/FAA approval.
Runway Navigation Aids	ILS, RNAV	
Average Runway PCI	65	Good
Displaced Thresholds	None	
Taxiway Facilities		
Taxiway Type	Full Parallel	Fair
Taxiway Width	45ft	
Taxiway Surface & Condition	Asphalt	Scheduled for resurfacing, Funding is subject to TDOT/FAA approval.
Taxiway Lighting	MITL	Scheduled for replacement. Funding is subject to TDOT/FAA approval.
Average Taxiway (main) PCI	71	Good
Average Taxiway (connector) PCI	75	Good
Average Apron PCI	87	Good
Average Taxiway (Hangar) PCI	63	Fair
Other Facilities		
Wind indicator	Segmented Circle/Primary Wind Cone	Good
Rotating Beacon	L-802A	Fair
Weather Reporting	AWOS-III	Good
Airfield Signs	Standard	Scheduled for replacement. Funding is subject to TDOT/FAA approval.

Source: Barge Designs Solutions, EDG Observations

Navigation Aids (NAVAIDS)

Navigation aids or NAVAIDs consist of electronic, visual and/or communication aids to provide guidance to pilots approaching an airport to facilitate safe operations. The runway at ESRA is fitted with extensive navigation aids to guide approaching pilots. These include Precision Approach Path Indicators (PAPIs), Runway End Identifier Lighting (REIL), Instrument Landing System (ILS), Rotating Beacon, and Wind Cones. A summary of some of the navigation aids are provided below:

- **Instrument Landing System (ILS).** The runway is equipped with ILS precision approach equipment, providing aircraft receivers with both horizontal and vertical electronic course guidance to the runway. The ILS equipment is comprised of an end-fire glideslope antenna (vertical course guidance) located on the eastside of the runway, and a localizer antenna (horizontal course guidance) located directly off the end of runway

- **Omni-Directional Approach Lights (ODAL).** ESRA is fitted with an ODAL. ODAL augments the ILS and other systems such as the Precision Approach Path Indicators (PAPIs), rotating beacon, a lighted wind cone. An AWOS is also installed at the airport that provides meteorological information (wind direction, speed, etc.) to guide pilots to conduct safe operations.

- **Precision Approach Path Indicators (PAPIs).** Runway 01/19 is equipped with four-box PAPIs located on the left side of the runway threshold. The PAPI has a four-box PAPI (P4L) on the left. This landing aid helps pilots to visually establish their aircraft on the proper approach glide path for landing by emitting a row of red and white lights that indicate when the aircraft is vertically aligned properly with the runway. A four-box PAPI system emits three to four white lights if the aircraft is higher than the glide path and three to four red lights if the aircraft is lower than the proper glide path, indicating to the pilot an adjustment of altitude is needed. The PAPIs at ESRA is fixed to a three-degree (3°) glidepath.

- **Runway End Identifier Lighting (REIL).** Runway 01/19 is fitted with REIL system. REIL provides rapid and positive identification of the end of runways. The system consists of two synchronized, unidirectional flashing lights that are positioned on each corner of the runway landing threshold, aimed upward and outward at 10 to 15 degrees.

- **Rotating Beacon.** ESRA's runway is fitted with a rotating beacon. It is located east of the T-hangar outside of the perimeter fence. This comprises high intensity lamps mounted on an assembly that rotate 360° every six seconds, emitting alternating green and white lights in equal duration. The rotating beacon is operational from sunset to sunrise and during Instrument Meteorological Conditions (IMC).

- **Wind Cone.** Two wind cones, primary and secondary, serve ESRA. The primary wind cone is fitted west of Runway 01/19 and visible from both ends of the airfield and the secondary wind cone located adjacent to the agriculture ramp. It provides visual surface wind information to pilots. The wind cone does have a segmented circle to indicate airport traffic pattern.

Economic Profile of the Study Region

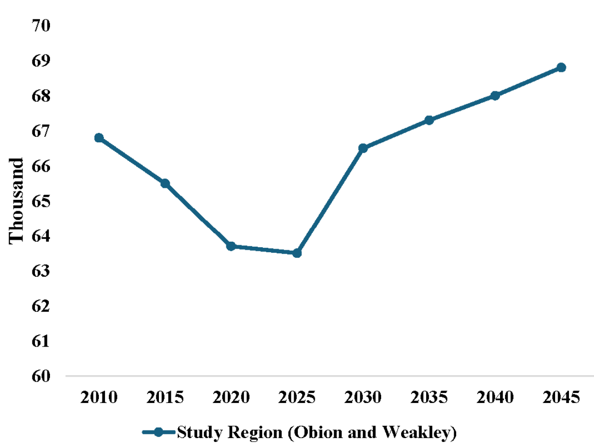
Population Trend

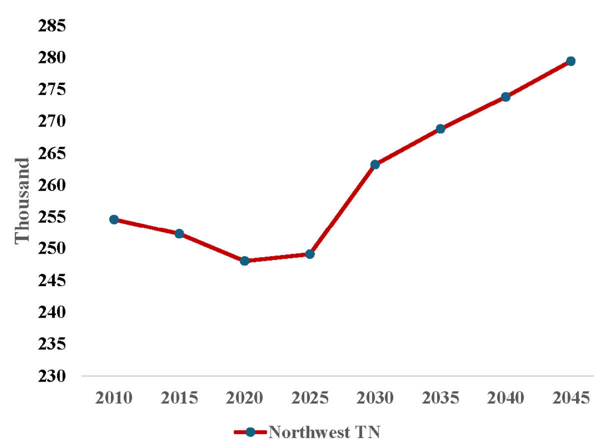
Population trends in the study region (Obion and Weakley counties), mimics that of the Northwest Tennessee region (NW TN), as shown in Figure 2. The study region has experienced population decline over the past two decades and the trend is expected to continue to 2025. This decline, particularly among the working-age population, does not bode well for economic development. According to the U.S. Census Bureau decennial counts, the population decline between 2000-2010, from 67,345 to 66,828, and 2010-2020, to 63,689 are 0.8 percent and 4.7 percent respectively. The population is further expected to decline to 63,522 in 2025, representing a marginal decline of 0.3 percent. The persistent population decline is attributed to the relocation of residents to other areas of the U.S. to seek better economic opportunities following the effects of the Great Recession (2008-10), and closure of businesses, including Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, the largest employer in the region. Over the same period, the Northwest TN region experienced a marginal population increase of 0.9 percent from 2000 to 2010 and followed by a 2.6 decline between 2010 – 2020.

Northwest TN population, including Obion and Weakley counties, is projected to grow from 2025 to 2045. It is projected to be 279,405 in 2045, from 249,124 in 2025, representing 0.6 percent cumulative annual growth rate (CAGR). Over the same period, the study region is expected to grow at 0.4 percent cumulative annual growth, from 63,522 in 2025 to 68,772 in 20245.

The anticipated population growth is expected to emanate from the spillover effects of Blue Oval City development in Stanton, TN. Blue Oval City, also known as "The West Tennessee Mega Site," is Ford Motor Company's 4,100-acre, six (6) square-mile "automotive manufacturing ecosystem" or industrial park for the manufacture of electric trucks and related batteries. The Park is expected to attract numerous manufacturing and related businesses to Stanton and neighboring cities/counties. It is therefore essential that the study region is well-positioned to reap the benefits from the Blue Oval City development.

Figure 2: Population Trends and Study Region and Northwest TN

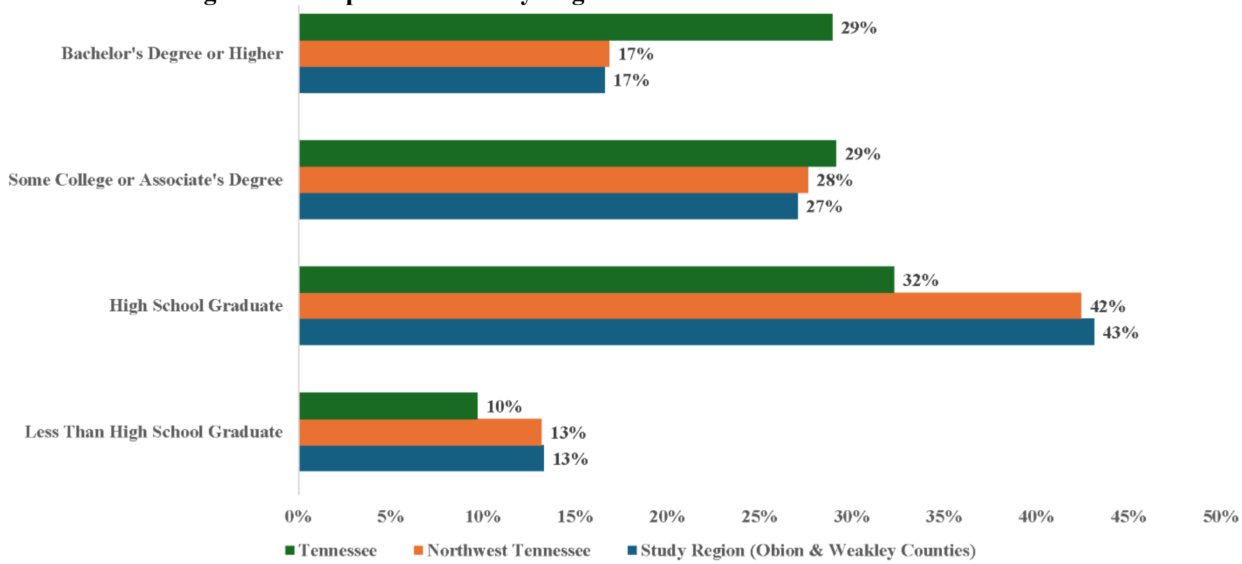




Educational Attainment

Educational attainment is an indication of workforce quality (skilled and unskilled) available in the region. Based on educational attainment estimates (Figure 3), the majority of Obion and Weakley counties are educated residents. According to the U.S. Census (American Community Survey 5-year estimate, 2017-2022), about 43 percent of residents in the study region are high school graduates. This outperforms the statewide attainment of 32 percent. In contrast, the study region underperforms relative to the State, among school dropouts.13 percent of residents aged 25 years and over did not complete high school, compared to 10 percent statewide.

Figure 3: Comparison of Study Region and Statewide Educational Attainment



For bachelor's degree or higher, Obion and Weakley residents make up about 17 percent, compared to the statewide estimate of 29 percent. The study region is home to the University of Tennessee – Martin (UTM). Therefore, the region's underperformance among bachelor or higher degree holders relative to the State further explains the exit of UTM graduates or working-age population to other areas to seek economic opportunities, thus serving as a barrier to economic development.

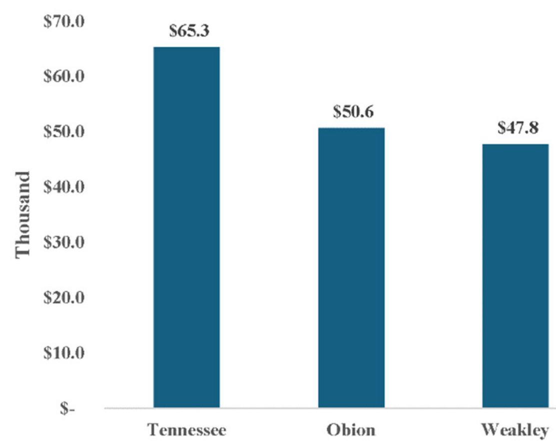
The rapid increase in technology adoption for economic and social activities coupled with the anticipated economic opportunities from the Blue Oval City development, indicate that skill requirements for future available jobs will require a bachelor or higher qualification. Consequently, it is essential for Obion and Weakley counties to create the enabling environment to retain college graduates to enable it to attract high-paying and technology related opportunities from Blue Oval City and other areas.

Income and Poverty

Median household income in Obion and Weakley counties is about three-quarters that of the State. This, coupled with the high proportion of residents living under the poverty level is an indication of low disposable income in the region. Therefore, the likelihood of inducing local economic development through spending is low.

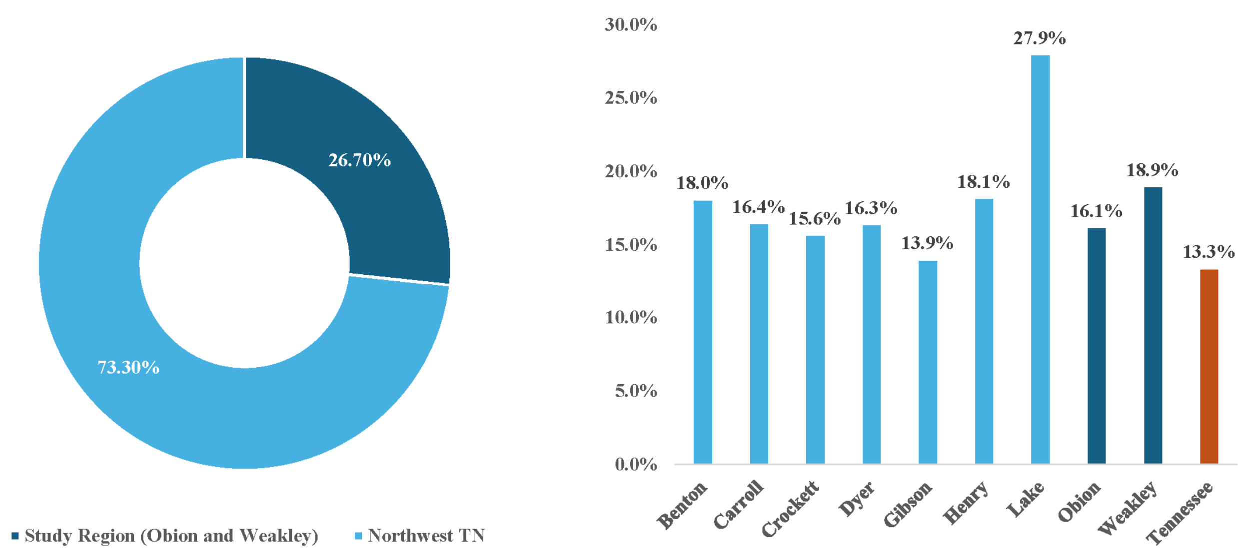
As shown in Figure 4, the median household income in TN is $65,254. This compares favorably with $50,638 and $47,769 for Obion and Weakley respectively.

Figure 4: Median Household Income Comparison



According to ACS 5-year estimate, about 17 percent or 39,939 residents in Northwest TN are under the poverty level. Of these residents, 10,663 live in the study region (Obion and Weakley counties), representing about a quarter residents under poverty in Northwest TN. From Figure 5, the proportion of residents living under the poverty level for each of the nine (9) counties in the Northwest region is higher than the State of Tennessee. Also, Obion County has fewer proportion of residents in living under poverty in Northwest TN, except Gibson and Crockett.

Figure 5: Percentage of Population Below Poverty Level.



Housing Cost

Housing availability and cost are key considerations in corporate relocation decisions. According to the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimate, housing units in Obion and Weakley counties are 14,355 and 15,002 respectively, totaling 29,337. Of these housing units, 57.3 percent are owner-occupied, 30.2 percent are renter-occupied, and the remainder (12.5 percent) are vacant.

Homeowners and renters in the study region are cost burdened (Table 5). This cost burden is disproportionately among renters and attributed to a combination of low household income, aging housing infrastructure, and constrained housing supply. The cost burden is expected to further exacerbate due to the projected population growth in anticipation of local economic recovery. Based on ACS data, about 20 percent and 16 percent of homeowners in Obion and Weakley counties spend 30 percent or more of their household income on mortgage payment. This compares unfavorably with the recommended 28 percent housing cost as a share of household income. For renters, gross rent as a share of household income is 39 percent and 44.5 percent in Obion and Weakley counties respectively.

The study region is rife with aging housing infrastructure. As shown in Table 6, about 0.3 percent of the housing stock is up to 3 years and about two-thirds (67.7 percent) range from 42 years to over 83 years. These aging infrastructure and the related maintenance concerns are expected to further increase housing costs. Additionally, the projected population growth is expected to increase demand for housing which will in turn increase housing prices. A clear housing policy and agriculture policy related to land use will serve as a critical step to enhance economic development opportunities

Table 5: Housing Cost Burden

Gross Rent as Share of Household Income	Share of Renters	
	Obion County	Weakley County
Less than 20 percent	37.4%	31.2%
20.0 to 29.9 percent	23.6%	24.3%
Greater than or equal to 30.0 percent	39.0%	44.5%
Homeowner costs as Share of Household Income	**Share of Homeowners**	
	Obion County	**Weakley County**
Less than 20 percent	64.6%	60.4%
20.0 to 29.9 percent	15.5%	23.4%
Greater than or equal to 30.0 percent	19.9%	16.2%

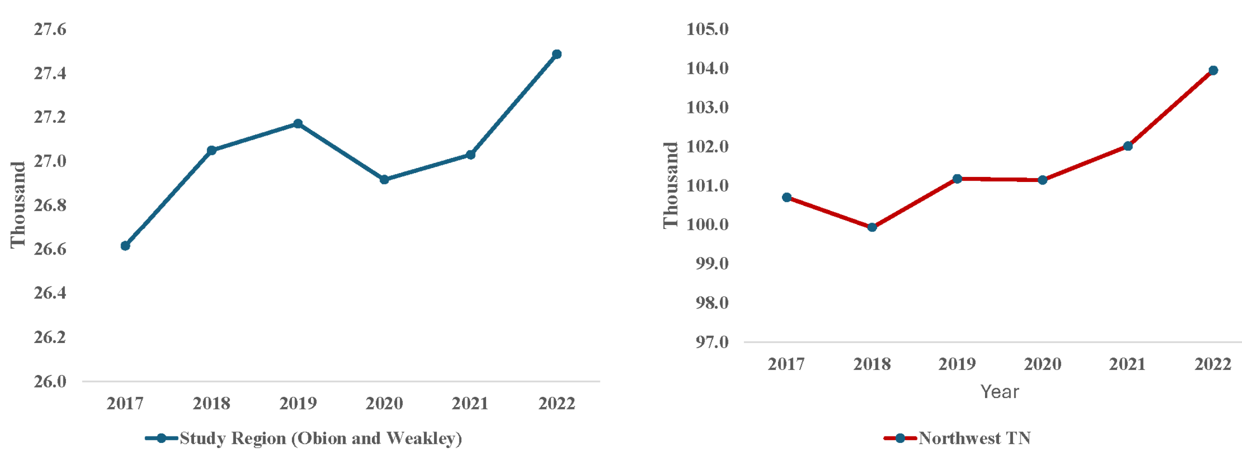
Table 6: Aging Housing Infrastructure

Built Year	Housing Infrastructure Age	Percent of Total Housing
2020 or later	Less than 3 years	0.3%
2000 – 2019	4 - 23 years	19.6%
1980-1999	24 - 42 years	32.3%
1960-1979	43 - 62years	38.9%
1940-1959	63 - 82years	18.9%
1939 or earlier	83 years or more	9.8%

Employment Trend

Overall employment in the study region (Obion and Weakley) has increased from 26,613 in 2017 to 27,486 in 2022 (Figure 6), representing an increase of 3.3 percent. Over the same period, Northwest Tennessee recorded a similar growth of 3.2 percent, from 100,696 in 2017 to 103,944 in 2022. However, the study region experienced a one-percent decline in 2020 to 26,916, from 27,170 in 2019. The decline is attributed to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which led to a temporary shutdown of businesses and general economic and social activities, resulting in the abatement of demand and supply of goods and services.

Figure 6: Employment Trends in the study Region and Northwest TN



Employment growth rate in the study region is yet to attain the pre-pandemic level. Prior to the pandemic (2017-2019), the study region recorded employment growth of 2.1 percent, outperforming the 0.5 percent for the Northwest Tennessee region. However, employment growth during the post-pandemic (2019-2022) period has been relatively slow. The study region recorded an employment growth rate of 1.2 percent compared to 2.7 percent for the Northwest TN region.

Table 7: 2022 Employment Share by Industry

Industry	Employment	Employment Share (%)
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	743	2.7%
Construction	1690	6.1%
Manufacturing	5673	20.6%
Wholesale trade	641	2.3%
Retail trade	3360	12.2%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	1366	5.0%
Information	375	1.4%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	709	2.6%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	1353	4.9%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	6771	24.6%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	2110	7.7%
Other services, except public administration	1388	5.0%
Public administration	1307	4.8%
Total	27486	100%

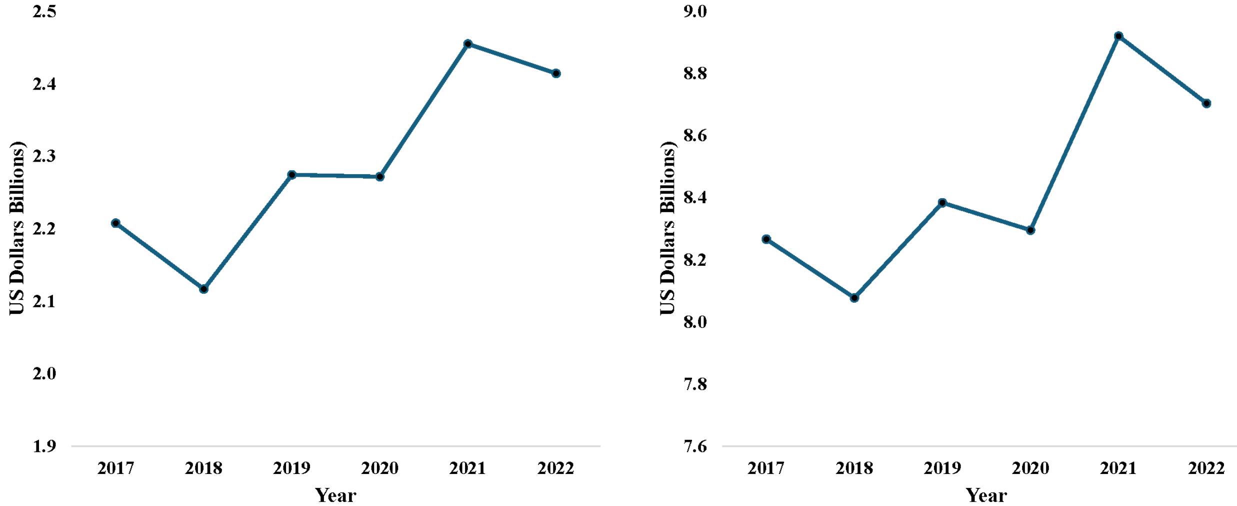
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate (2018-22).

As shown in Table 7, manufacturing, trade (retail and wholesale), and education services are the top three industry employers in the region. In aggregate, employment in these industries constitute about 60 percent of total employment in 2022. Top five (5) employers in the region include Tyson Foods; Stanley Black and Decker; University of Tennessee-Martin; Williams Sausage Company; and Titan Tire.

Economic Output

The real gross regional product (GRP) or value of economic activity of the study region was $2.46 billion in 2021 and $2.41 billion in 2022. These represent a growth of 8.1 percent from 2020 and a decline of 1.7 percent from 2021 respectively. The relatively high growth attained in 2021 was attributed to the observed nationwide surge in demand for goods and services following the supply shock associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. As demand and supply of goods and services normalize, we anticipate short-term fluctuations in economic performance. In 2022, the private sector contributed about $2.03 billion in economic activities, representing about 84 percent of total economic activities. Like the study region, the Northwest Tennessee (NW TN) economy experienced a dip in the real value of economic activities from 2021 to 2022. In 2022 the NW TN economy recorded a real gross regional product of about $8.7 billion, down from about $8.92 billion in 2021, representing a dip of 2.1 percent.

Figure 7: Real Gross Regional Product Trend (2017-2022)



As evidenced in Figures 7, the NW TN, including the study region have recovered from the remnants of business closures, such as Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company and the Great Recession that ended in 2010. Since 2017, the study region has recorded a 9.7 percent growth in real GRP compared to 3.8 percent growth for the rest of NW TN. Also, the value of economic activities in the study region constitutes close to a third of the total Norwest Tennessee economy (Figure 8), thus signaling the importance of the study region to the economic growth of NW TN.

Figure 8: Real Economic Growth Comparison (2017 – 2022)

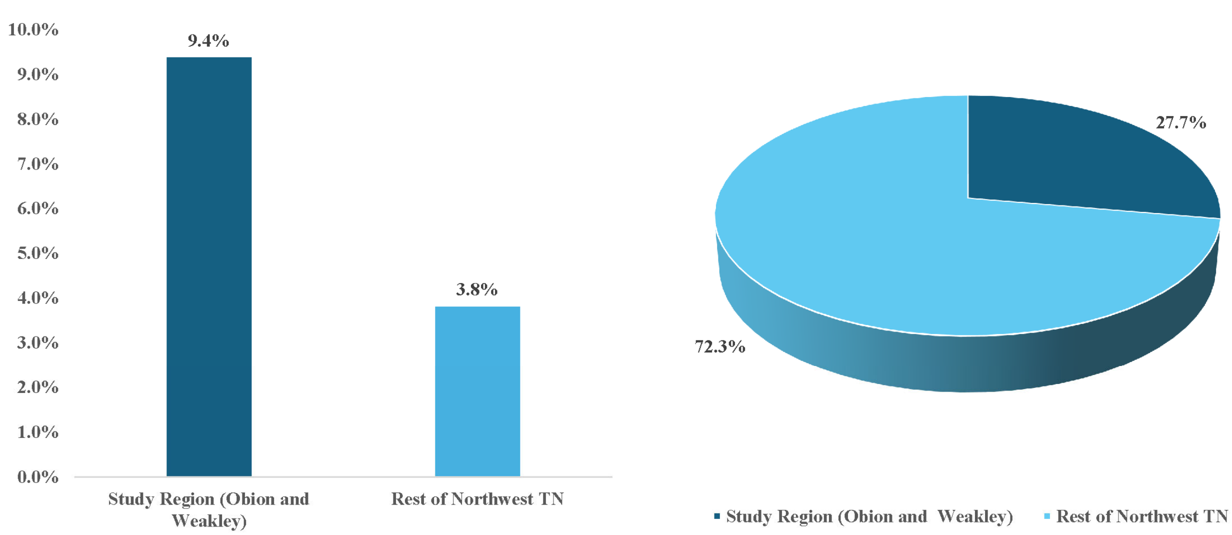
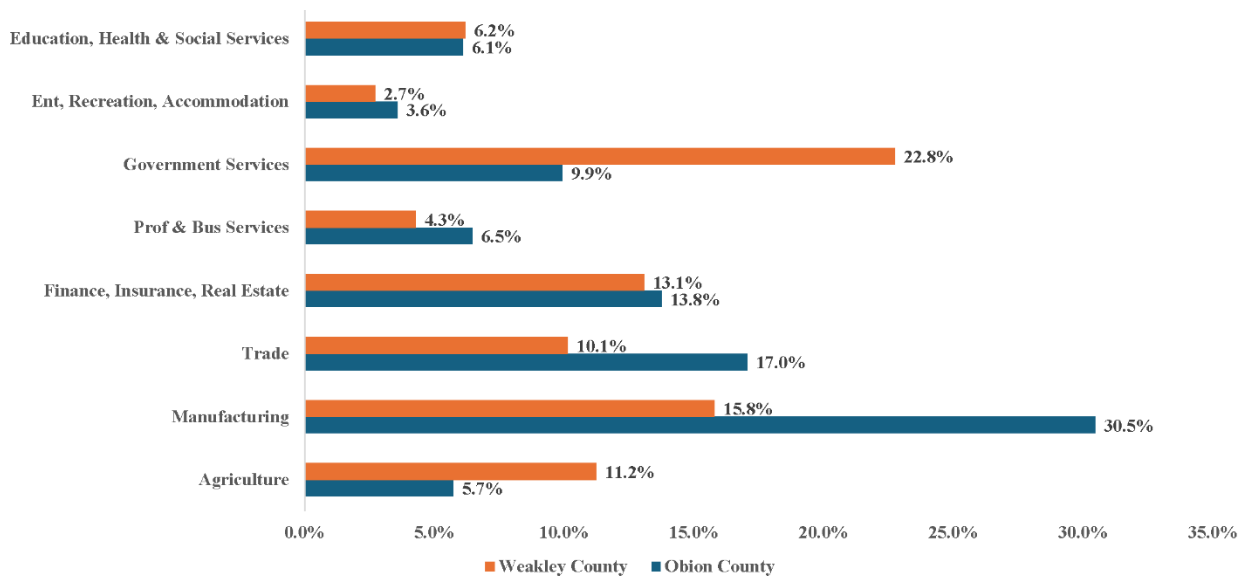


Table 8 and Figure 8 present the major industries that drive economic activities in the study region. In 2022, these industries contributed about 78 percent of total economic activities in the region.

Table 8: Major Economic Drivers in Obion and Weakley Counties

Industry	2022 Real GDP Contribution (%)
Manufacturing	23.6%
Government & Government Enterprises	15.9%
Trade (Retail and Wholesale)	13.8%
Real Estate, Rental & Leasing	10.5%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	8.3%
Education, Healthcare, & Social Services	6.1%
Total	78.2%

Figure 9: Industry Contribution to Real Gross Regional Product (2022)



Economic Importance of the Airport

General aviation plays a vital role in supporting economic development, connectivity, and quality of life in rural America by providing essential transportation services, facilitating business activities, supporting agriculture, promoting tourism, creating jobs, and enhancing the overall well-being of communities and industries. Additionally, the presence of general aviation airports can attract businesses and industries to locate in areas served by these facilities, creating additional jobs and economic activity.

Direct Job Creation and Economic Activity.

ESRA and its supporting businesses have created employment in the local economy. It also provides significant support economic activities emerging and strategic industries in the region. These industries include manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism.

Manufacturing

ESRA provides enormous business support to the manufacturing industry, the leading contributor to economic activities in the study. Interviews conducted by the consultant team indicate that ESRA's comprise:

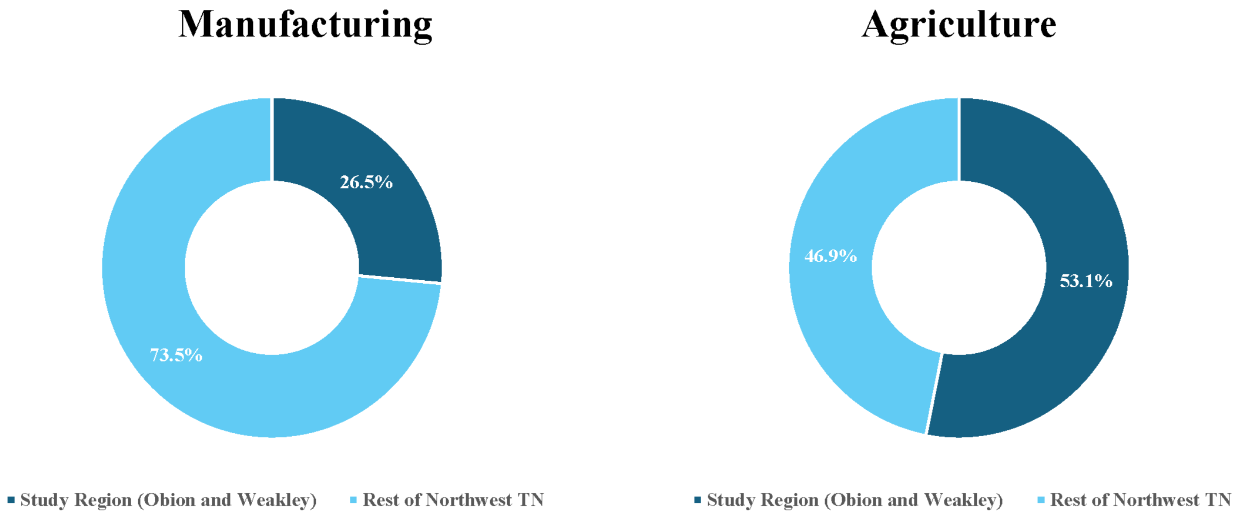
- **Transportation of Personnel**. Provides efficient and flexible transportation for manufacturing executives, engineers, technicians, and other personnel to manufacturing facilities, supplier sites, and customer locations, facilitating business operations and decision-making.

- **Supplier/Vendor Visits.** Facilitate face-to-face meetings, negotiations, and inspections, strengthening supply chain relationships and ensuring product quality and reliability.

- **Emergency Response and Maintenance.** On a few occasions, ESRA provided the opportunity to facilitate rapid response capabilities for manufacturing emergencies and maintenance needs.
- **Supply Chain Resilience.** In the event of a natural disaster, ESRA will enhance supply chain resilience for manufacturing industries by providing alternative transportation option during disruptions or emergencies, allowing manufacturers to mitigate risks and maintain operations continuity.

Manufacturing is a critical industry and the largest contributor to gross regional product in the study region and Northwest TN. In 2022, manufacturing recorded about $570 million, representing 23.6 percent of real gross domestic product of the study region, and 16 percent growth from 2017. Also, the manufacturing industry in the study region contributed about 27 percent of the total manufacturing industry in the Northwest region, as presented in Figure 10. The demand for aviation is expected to grow in tandem with the expansion of the manufacturing industry. Based on population and employment projections associated with Blue Oval City, the study region is expected to benefit from spillover manufacturing and related businesses in the supply chain of electric truck and battery production.

Figure 10: Study Region's Contribution to Manufacturing and Agriculture



Agriculture

ESRA provides critical support to agriculture, a key industry in the study region. ESRA's support stems from the platform it provides for aerial application or pest spraying services to manage pests and diseases to improve farm output and efficiency. Agriculture creates local employment, infuses millions of dollars into the local economy, and protects the natural environment. Agriculture production in the study region comprises soybeans, grains, corn, wheat, as well as livestock (poultry, cattle, and hogs) and related products. According to 2022 Agriculture Census data, farmlands in Obion and Weakley counties represent about 70 percent and 79 percent of the respective land sizes. The farms are owned and operated by about 189 families. The potential threat to the agriculture industry stems from its aging workforce. About 38 percent of the workforce is over 65 years and 10 percent are below 35 years of age.

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the real value of economic activities in the agriculture industry was over $200 million in 2022. This represents 8.3 percent of the real gross regional product ($2.4 billion) of the study. As shown in Figure 11 (above), the agriculture industry in the study region contributed more than half of value-added services in the Northwest TN region in 2022.

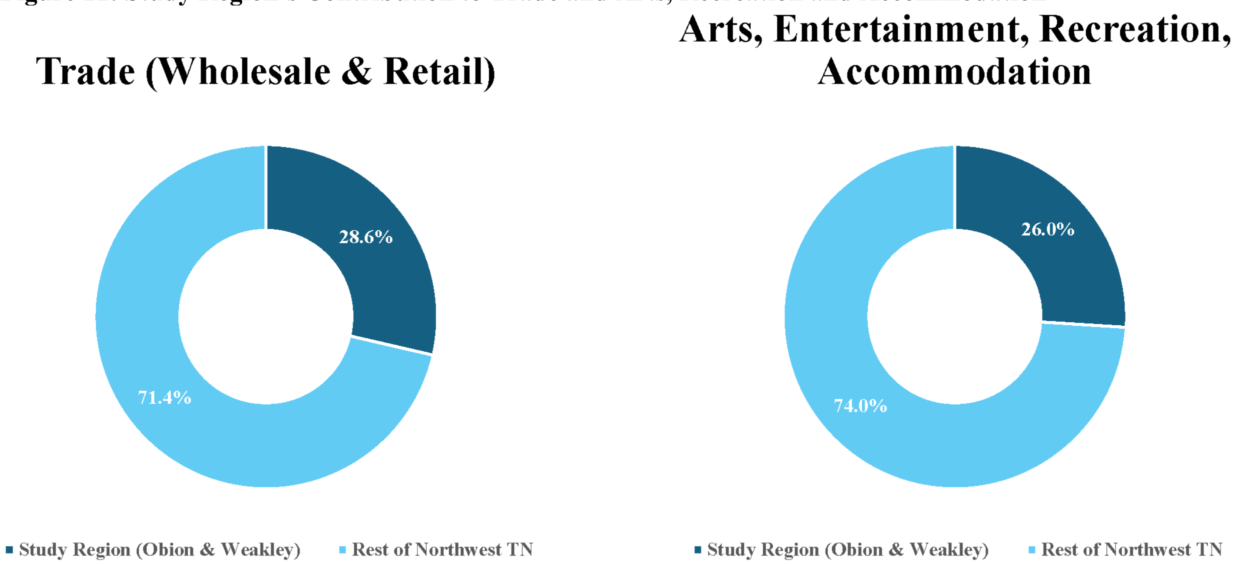
Tourism

General aviation airports often serve as gateways to rural tourist destinations, recreational areas, and outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and camping. They attract visitors, generate tourism revenue, and support local hospitality businesses, including lodging, retail, and entertainment sectors. Tourism is an emerging industry in Obion and Weakley counties (study region). The region is endowed with natural assets, such as Reelfoot Lake, that can be unlocked to transform tourism into a major income earner for the region. While tourism is not identified by a dedicated North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code, the contributing industries to tourism include recreation, arts and entertainment, retail, accommodation, and food services.

There is lack of data on the mode of transport of visitors to local attractions, including Discovery Park and Reelfoot Lake State Park, in the study region. However, anecdotal evidence available to the consultant team indicates visitors travel by chartered bus or personal automobile, thus making aviation travels either few or negligible. Interviews with airport management and economic development executives indicate that sporadically, recreational flyers, aircraft owners and flight instructors utilize ESRA as a gateway to the region for same-day entertainment and food services. This provides an opportunity to attract high-income earners, aircraft owners and other aviation related travelers to the local attractions.

Discovery Park, a local amusement park located in Union City, TN and Reelfoot Lake State Park are the major attractions in Obion and Weakley counties. In 2023, over 265,000 guests visited Discovery Park. Of these visitors, about 48,300 were students. Based on available data, the Reelfoot Lake State Park attracted over one million visitors annually between 2022 and 2023. Most of these visitors are located within a three-hour drive.

Figure 11: Study Region's Contribution to Trade and Arts, Recreation and Accommodation



As of 2022, real gross domestic product associated with Arts, Entertainment and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services in Obion and Weakley counties were 3.6 percent and 2.7 percent respectively. These compare unfavorably with some of its nearby counties such as Dyer (5 percent), Henry (5.3 percent), and Lake (5.9 percent). This performance signals the opportunity for Obion and Weakley counties to improve their performance in this industry and compete favorably with their neighbors. Overall, about 28 percent of economic activities in the Northwest TN region is contributed by the combined economy of Obion and Weakley, as shown in Figure 11.

Other Services

In addition to manufacturing, agriculture, and tourism, ESRA supports emergency services as well as training and education for residents in the study region. These include:

- **Emergency Services**. On very few occasions, emergency medical services (air ambulances) have utilized ESRA to transport patients for medical attention. Recent closings of several community hospitals in the study region have made it difficult for residents to access healthcare, especially older adults with chronic health conditions. This has heightened the need for ESRA as a critical infrastructure to support emergency response capabilities. ESRA is also well-positioned to support law enforcement aircraft, and volunteer pilot organizations to undertake public safety and emergency response capabilities in the wake of a natural disaster and other emergencies.

- **Training and Education.** ESRA has onsite firms or businesses that offer flight instruction and recreational flying services. In partnership with the local school, ESRA educates students in aviation maintenance and management. These programs provide skills training, career pathways, and opportunities for youth engagement in aviation-related fields.

Stakeholder Engagement

On May 17, 2024, an in-person stakeholder engagement meeting was held at the Discovery Park of America in Union City, TN. The objective of the stakeholder engagement was to solicit public input, address concerns, and facilitate consensus to support the economic development strategy or plan. The meeting was attended by the airport management; business owners and airport users; economic development officers, state and local government representatives. Organizations that were represented included, but not limited to:

- Joint Obion County Economic Development Corporation
- Weakley County Economic Development Board
- City of Dresden
- Obion County
- Obion County Tourism Development Board

The meeting commenced with the introduction of participants, followed by a presentation on the study objectives, role of the stakeholders, and the economic profile of the study region (Obion and Weakley Counties) and the Northwest Tennessee region (NW TN). The presentation highlighted key economic drivers (including competitive and emerging industries), importance of the study region to the NW TN region, and areas of improvement to support growth of Everett-Stewart Regional Airport (ESRA).

Following the presentation, attendees were constituted into small groups composed of about seven (7) members in each group, including a group leader, for a discussion session. The groups were constituted to create an enabling environment for attendees to openly discuss and offer diverse views strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) associated with economic development of the region as well as ESRA's role in shaping the economic future of the region (Obion and Weakley counties). This collaborative approach created the environment for a comprehensive understanding of the local terrain, diverse viewpoints and identification of potential factors or strategies to enhance ESRA's operations and services as well as its collaboration with other industries to stimulate economic development.

The facilitated questions posed to attendees included the following:

- ***Question #1***. Consider reasons why residents and businesses come or will come to Obion & Weakley Counties. What are the strengths of Obion & Weakley that you want to see continue (in general, not transportation specific)
- ***Question #2***. Consider the short- and long-term barriers or challenges to response or reasons noted in Question 1.
- ***Question #3***. How can the Airport operations/improvements help Obion and Weakley Counties achieve your responses to high quality of life or economic development?
- ***Question #4***. What are some of the barriers or challenges associated with the Airport operations or improvements that are important to consider?

OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES

A total of forty-nine (49) responses were provided by the attendees. The responses to each of the four (4) questions vary, indicating the diverse interest of the attendees. Below are the summaries of the facilitated questions.

Response To Question 1

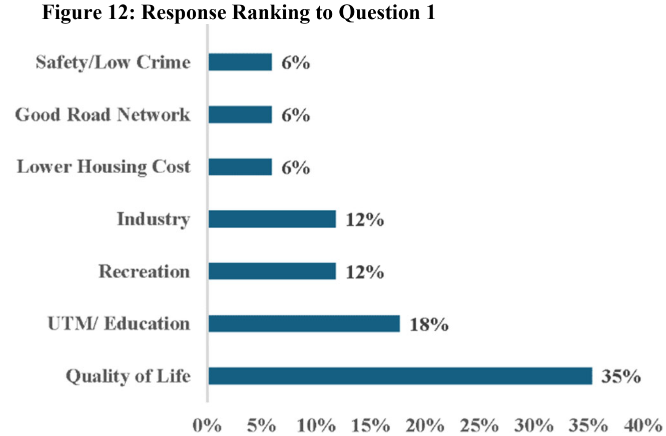
Question 1: Consider reasons why residents and businesses come or will come to Obion & Weakley Counties. What are the strengths of Obion & Weakley that you want to see continue (in general, not transportation specific)

Attendees' response to this question is as follows:

1. Quality of Life
2. UTM/Education
3. Recreation
4. Industry
5. Lower Housing Cost
6. Good Road Network
7. Safety/Low Crime
8. Unique Location
9. Low Taxes

As shown in Figure 12, the top four (4) factors that attract residents or businesses to the study region are Quality of Life (35%), Education (18%), Recreation (12%), and Industry (12%). Low Housing Cost, Good Road Network, Safety/Low Crime, and Unique Location are tied at 6%.

Figure 12: Response Ranking to Question 1



Response To Question 2

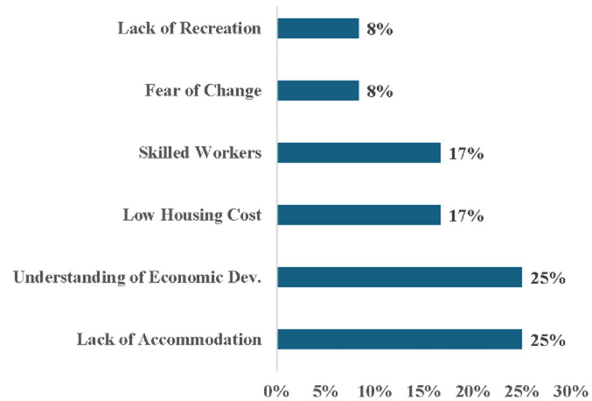
Question #2: Consider the short- and long-term barriers or challenges to response or reasons noted in Question 1.

The attendees identified fourteen (14) short- and long-term barriers. These are:

- Lack of Accommodation
- Understanding of Economic Development

Figure 13: Response Ranking to Question 2.

- Low Housing Cost
- Skilled Workers
- Fear of Change
- Lack of Recreation
- UTM/Education
- Sustainability
- Airport Conference Space
- Road Maintenance/Improvements
- Rising Cost of Living
- Accessibility to Amenities
- Child Care
- Population Decline



The top six (6) barriers in attracting people or business to the region are shown in Figure 14. Of these barriers, lack of accommodation and understanding of economic development, each represent 25% of the responses. These are followed by low housing costs and a shortage of skilled workers, both receiving 17% of the responses. Finally, fear of change and a lack of recreation were also noted as contributing factors, receiving 8% each of the responses.

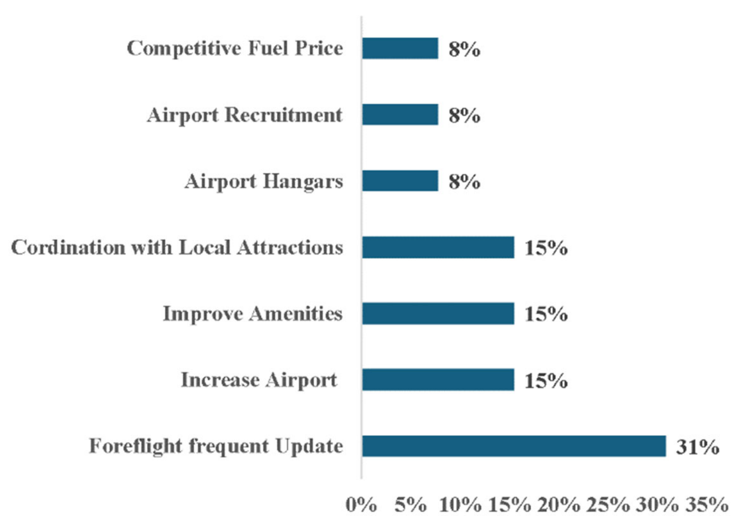
Response To Question 3

Question #3 How can the Airport operations/improvements help Obion and Weakley Counties achieve your responses to high quality of life or economic development?

The proposed improvements identified by stakeholders were:

- Foreflight Frequent Update
- Increase Airport Capacity
- Improve Amenities
- Coordination with Local Attractions
- Airport Hangars
- Airport Recruitment
- Competitive Fuel Price
- Airport Website Update
- Meeting Space
- Overnight Transit Plane
- Limited Land Development
- Runway Improvement
- Coordination with Tour Operators
- Funding and Development
- Marketing the Airport
- Publicity
- Airport Schedule

Figure 14: Response Ranking to Question 3



The top seven (7) out of the seventeen (17) responses that participants believe would contribute to the economic development of Obion and Weakley Counties are shown in Figure 14. The figure shows that the primary reasons that could contribute to the economic development of Obion and Weakley Counties are frequent Foreflight updates, which received 31% of the responses. Furthermore, coordination with local attractions, improved amenities, and increased airport capacity each accounted for 15% of the responses. Additionally, competitive fuel prices, airport recruitment, and airport hangars each received 8% of the responses.

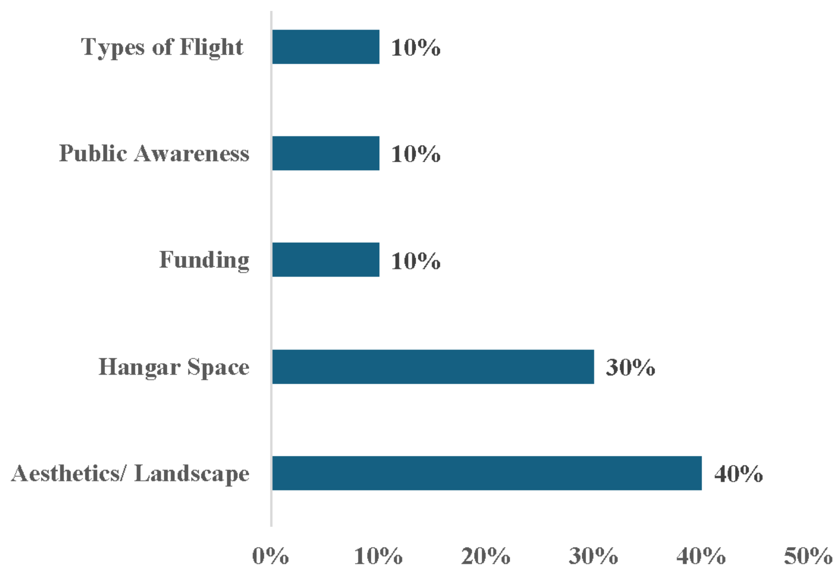
Response To Question 4

Question #4 What are some of the barriers or challenges associated with the Airport operations or improvements that are important to consider?

In the question of barriers or challenges associated with the Airport operations or improvements, participants provided ten (10) factors and voted on the top five (5) shown in Figure 15. The ten (10) responses were:

- Aesthetics/Landscape
- Hangar Space
- Funding
- Public Awareness
- Types of Flight
- Political Support
- Limited Transportation
- Demand for Aviation/ Airport
- Private Investment Barriers
- Signage at Airport

Figure 15: Response Ranking to Question 4



Economic Impact Assessment

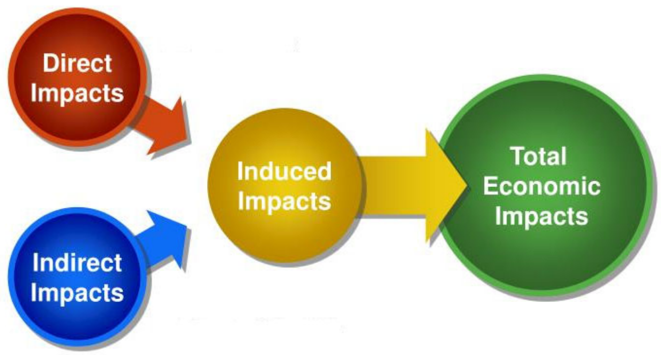
This section focuses on the estimation of economic impacts associated with the Everett-Stewart Regional Airport (ESRA). As shown in Figure 16, total economic impact comprises direct, indirect, and induced, as discussed below:

- **Direct impacts.** These are local economic impacts attributable to ESRA's operations, including support services.

- **Indirect impacts.** These impacts arise from the procurement of materials or services between ESRA and vendors or businesses in its supply chain.

- **Induced impacts.** Direct and indirect impacts are the sources of induced impacts. Induced impacts stem from household consumption of wages on goods and services.

Figure 16: Schematic Representation of Total Economic Impact.



Economic Impact Estimation.

ESRA's economic impacts are estimated from two major sources, operations and visitor spending, as discussed below:

- **Operational impact.** These comprise air transportation and supporting services, such as aircraft repairs, training and education.
- **Visitor impact.** This is composed of local spending associated with aviation-related travelers or visitors to the regions.

Operational Impact

In addition to airport operations and management, ESRA is home to four (4) aviation-related businesses. Jobs and related payroll, procurement and other activities undertaken by these businesses have significant economic impacts. These businesses are:

- **Russell Flying Service (agricultural applicator).** Russell Flying Service primarily offers aerial agricultural applicator services.

- **Full Stop Aviation (Maintenance Shop/ Flight School).** Full Stop Aviation provides aircraft maintenance services for experimental, antique, and many other specialized aircraft. They also provide essential aircraft training such as Private, Instrument, Commercial, CFI, CFII, and biennial flight reviews. Their unique training opportunities include tailwheel and high-performance. Most of Full Stop Aviation's customers are domiciled outside of Obion and Weakley counties, generating financial inflow to Obion and Weakley Counties.

- **Will-Aero, LLC.** Will-Aero LLC is a general aviation maintenance firm, and it is owned by William C. Waggoner. Mr. Waggoner, a recognized aviation expert, has recently served as a Department of Defense (DoD) Contractor. He is an A&P IA Mechanic with extensive King Air and Cirrus maintenance experience and holds a Private Pilot License with a Multi-Engine Rating. Most of Will-Aero's customers are located outside of the region, thus supporting financial inflow.

- **Lester Flying Service.** Lester Flying Service is an Aircraft Rental and Flight Instruction business. Lester Flying Service provides Basic, Instrumental, and Commercial Flight Training as well as Aircraft Rental to the Everett-Stewart Regional Airport and surrounding areas. Their Cessna 172 is excellent for training and sightseeing.

To estimate the economic impact of ESRA for 2023, annual revenue, employment, and other relevant data associated with ESRA's operations were collected. The data, in conjunction with the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) RIMS II Input-Output Model, were utilized to perform economic modeling to estimate the direct, indirect, and induced impacts, as presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Economic Impact of ESRA Operations

Impact Type	Business Revenue ($M)	Payroll ($M)	Jobs (No.)	Value-Added ($M)
Direct	$12.2	$2.02	23	$6.68
Indirect	$1.83	$0.49	8	$1.00
Induced	$1.44	$0.40	9	$0.87
Total	$15.49	$2.91	40	$8.55

Visitor Impact

Economic impact associated with aviation-related visitor spending in the region was estimated based on annual itinerant or transient trips, average number of passengers per flight, and duration of stay. Insights gained from discussions with ESRA management and businesses in the study region indicated that aviation travels to the area are business-related, and most passengers or corporate executives make daily trips. Therefore, a fraction of the passengers are likely to spend on meals (lunch) during their visit. The estimated visitor impact is presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Economic Impact of Visitor Spending

Impact Type	Business Revenue ($M)	Payroll ($M)	Jobs (No.)	Value-Added ($M)
Direct	$0.89	$0.28	8	$0.52
Indirect	$0.18	$0.04	1	$0.22
Induced	$0.18	$0.05	1	$0.28
Total	$1.15	$0.37	10	$1.03

Table 11: Total Economic Impact of ESRA Operations & Visitor Spending

Impact Type	Business Revenue ($M)	Payroll ($M)	Jobs (No.)	Value-Added ($M)
Direct	$13.12	$2.30	31	$7.20
Indirect	$2.00	$0.53	9	$1.22
Induced	$1.63	$0.45	10	$1.15
Total	$16.74	$3.29	50	$9.57

From the estimated total economic impacts (Table 11), the significantly low contribution from indirect and induced impacts indicates remarkable financial leakage from the local economy and serves as a barrier to economic development. These low contributions signal that the majority of businesses in ESRA's supply chain (indirect) and/or where residents spend their wages (induced) are either domiciled outside of the study region or are owned by non-residents. For example, McDonalds, Walmart, and NAPA Auto Parts are national and international retail chains with a local presence but are owned by non-residents of Obion and Weakley counties. Although these businesses provide local employment and contribute to tax revenues, the extraction of financial resources (profits) from the local economy serves as a constraint on local economic development. It is, therefore, imperative for Obion and Weakley counties to focus on the development of local small businesses to retain resources to fuel developments in the region.

Economic Development Strategy

Goal 1: Make Everett-Stewart Regional Airport (ESRA) the Gateway

To transform ESRA into a gateway to Obion and Weakley Counties, it is essential to increase its awareness; build a distinct identity; enhance passenger experience; and facilitate smooth travels. ESRA should also play a significant role in introducing passengers to the region's unique culture; attractions; and amenities. These are expected to improve aviation traffic; generate revenue; and stimulate economic development, thus making ESRA a strategic asset in the region's growth. Below are strategies to achieve this goal:

Strategy 1.1: Branding and Marketing. Airport branding and marketing are essential for creating a distinct identity, enhancing the passenger experience, building trust and loyalty, generating revenue, attracting airlines, and supporting economic growth. Effective branding and marketing strategies can transform an airport from merely a transit point into a memorable part of the travel experience, driving both business success and community benefits. Effective marketing can lead to increased traffic, which can translate into higher revenues from landing fees, fuel sales, and other services. Marketing strategies that focus on customer satisfaction can enhance the overall experience, leading to positive word-of-mouth and repeat business.

Actions:

- Engage a landscape architect to redesign existing wayfinding signs; line the driveways with trees and/or shrubs from Martin Highway to ESRA's main entrance; and the airport landscape design to provide a sense of direction and enhance the visual appeal.
- Engage an interior designer/decorator to upgrade the interior of the terminal building, rearrange the seating area, enhance existing meeting/conference rooms, and identify position for marketing material brochures and general functionality.
- Provide 24-hour digital signage at ESRA main entrance, and provide information on working hours, aviation support services, fuel prices, and other amenities at the airport.
- Engage a website designer to update the existing website. The update should include a virtual tour of the redesigned directional signs, landscape, airport amenities, traveler information, and FBO services. Advertise local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, local events, and attractions to generate non-aviation revenue.
- Create a robust online presence through social media and mobile apps to provide travelers with updates, promotions, and interactive city guides to attract visitors and support regional tourism and business.

- Partner with local tourism boards and businesses for joint promotions and advertising campaigns.

Strategy 1.2: Improve amenities at ERSA to enhance traveler experience. Traveler information services at airports are integral to creating a positive first impression and ensuring a smooth, enjoyable, and memorable travel experience for visitors. They play a significant role in supporting the local economy, including tourism and manufacturing, while promoting sustainable and responsible travel practices. The immediate impact of effective airport marketing and branding is expected to lead to a shift from the current sporadic visits to more frequent and consistent visits by same-day recreational flyers, aircraft owners, and flight instructors seeking entertainment and food services in the region. Alongside the development of suitable local attractions, this initial shift would open the door to attracting high-income earners, aircraft owners, and other aviation-related travelers, encouraging them to explore the local culture and attractions.

Similarly, business and conference facilities at ESRA will offer considerable benefits, enhancing the travel experience for business travelers, providing revenue opportunities, and contributing positively to the local economy. Access to business and conference facilities at ESRA allows business travelers to conduct meetings, make important calls, or work on urgent tasks without leaving the airport. These facilities provide a quiet and professional environment equipped with necessary amenities such as high-speed internet, meeting rooms, and office supplies. These business amenities will attract more business travelers, giving ESRA a competitive edge over other airports. These facilities can generate additional revenue for airports through rental fees for meeting rooms, equipment, and services provided.

Actions:

- Facilitate implementation of the updated ESRA Layout Plan developed by BARGE Designs, including the proposed hangars.
- Engage an architecture and engineering (A/E) firm to assess the feasibility and design of a non-aviation related real estate facility which will provide additional amenities such as state-of-the-art meeting/conference rooms, business lounges with workstations, printing services, high-speed internet facilities, and pilot restrooms and generate non-aviation revenue.
- Provide concierge services to help travelers with hotel bookings, transport arrangements, and itinerary planning to facilitate seamless travel.
- Provide staffed information desks with brochures on local dining, hotels, attractions, and events or offer interactive kiosks where travelers can explore the city’s attractions. Install interactive screens with information about the city's history, landmarks, and events.

Goal 2: Leverage ESRA to Boost Tourism

Tourism is an emerging industry in Obion and Weakley counties (study region). The region is endowed with natural assets, such as Reelfoot Lake, that can be unlocked to transform tourism into a major income earner for the region. To stimulate or boost tourism, it is imperative to upgrade existing recreational facilities and develop new destination-based recreational facilities. These developments coupled with ESRA's unique location, must be leveraged to serve as a gateway for high-value visitors or tourists, aircraft owners, and their families to the recreational areas, including outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, and camping. Spending associated with these visitors will generate tourism revenue, and support local hospitality businesses, including lodging, retail, and entertainment sectors. To boost the performance of the tourism industry, the following strategies and related actions must be implemented:

Strategy 2.1: Collaborate with stakeholders to pursue cost-effective marketing and promotions. Collaborate with general aviation companies, tour operators, and local businesses to create all-inclusive tourism packages that offer a seamless and personalized travel experience. These packages should include private flights, accommodations, activities, and transportation services, ensuring that travelers have a hassle-free and enjoyable journey from start to finish.

Actions:

- JEDC/WCEDB, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, should develop joint brochures and social media campaigns featuring essential aviation services, hotels and resorts, local cuisines, culture and local attractions.
- JEDC/WCEDB, in coordination local hotels and special events organizers, such as festivals and fairs should develop a targeted marketing to aircraft owners or aviation-themed festivals that attract tourists to the area.
- JEDC/WCEDB should collaborate with ESRA and local hospitality businesses to create incentive-based bundled offers aimed at attracting aviation-related tourists. These packages could include discounted accommodations at partnered hotels or resorts, along with tickets to nearby attractions. The incentives should be tailored, to the length of stay, offering options such as 1-day, 2-day, and 3-day packages.

Strategy 2.2 Unlock the intrinsic value of Reelfoot Lake. High-quality destination-based and memorable recreational experiences attract repeat and new visitors. These unforgettable experiences are driven by factors such as visual appeal, customer satisfaction, and the availability of both indoor and outdoor recreational facilities, including golf courses and ski resorts. Along with recreational facilities, the presence of business amenities such as meeting and conference rooms, business lounges and high-speed internet creates an opportunity to attract business-related events. When a destination offers a variety of recreational activities, tourists are more likely to extend their stay to experience more of what is available. This increases spending on accommodation, food, and other local services, thus contributing to the local economy. These activities lead to job creation both within the recreational facilities and in the wider community.

Actions:

- Obion County should engage an architectural and engineering (A/E) firm with expertise in environmental sustainability to develop a flood protection plan and design along the Reelfoot Lake to curb ongoing soil erosions that has either or nearly exposed building foundations.

- Engage a consultant to undertake a feasibility study for the development of a medium-high end destination-based resort along Reelfoot Lake to include indoor and outdoor activities. The resort should incorporate existing recreational facilities.

- JEDC and Obion County should proactively engage stakeholders to build support for potential changes that are likely to occur in the community. The engagement should discuss the social, economic and environmental benefits of flood protection and development of a resort.

Goal 3. Create Economic Opportunity Pathways for Residents.

Economic expansion is key to halting and potentially reversing decades of population decline that has characterized the region and its environs. The decline stems from relocation of residents due to the growing lack of economic opportunities in the region. Therefore, expanding existing businesses, attracting new ones, fostering local entrepreneurship, and preparing the workforce for the job market are key avenues to retain talent, create diverse opportunities for residents, and position the region on a path to economic growth. Integration of ESRA into economic development strategies will enhance place-based development, such as tourism, and attract businesses in high-growth industries such as agriculture, manufacturing and technology. These industries will benefit from improved logistics, and global connectivity, and transform the region into a more resilient and diversified economy.

Strategy 3.1 Develop a competitive identity for economic development. Develop a unified message that highlights the region’s distinctive strengths and sets it apart from neighboring counties. This core identity should emphasize the region's unique assets, from its economic potential to its cultural offerings. Once established, this message should be strategically tailored for different audiences and deployed across all platforms, making it easy for each target group to recognize the value of investing in the region.

Actions:
- Develop a competitive identity for the region, that highlights its strengths and showcases the key the key factors that attract businesses to relocate or invest in the region.
- Develop infomercials to capture representatives of existing manufacturing firms highlighting the strengths or competitiveness as well as opportunities in the region.

Strategy 3.2. Update promotional materials to make an investor pitch. Obion and Weakley counties must consistently update their marketing materials including websites, social media, and multimedia assets to maintain a strong online presence. It’s also essential for economic development staff to regularly collect data on the effectiveness of these materials and campaigns, making adjustments as needed. Additionally, the economic development team should take a proactive approach with potential investors, delivering tailored pitches to attract their interest.

Actions:
- Update existing competitive identity and marketing materials (website, social media, and more) to reflect new positioning.

- Prepare industry investment marketing portfolios (brochures and videos) for clusters, and ensure they are available in print and digital.
- Develop a consistent "Why Obion or Weakley?" story and pitch to be used by all economic development staff and related partners (updated annually).

Strategy 3.3 Workforce Development. Workforce development and economic development are intricately connected, as a well-prepared workforce is essential for driving innovation, increasing productivity, and fostering economic growth. A skilled workforce enhances the competitiveness of industries by improving the quality of products and services and enabling companies to adopt advanced technologies. Areas with a highly skilled workforce often attract more investment from both domestic and international firms. This can lead to the establishment of new businesses, expansion of existing ones, and the creation of higher-paying jobs.

For example, high-quality customer service is the backbone of the tourism industry, driving customer satisfaction, loyalty, and business growth. Whether through direct interactions or via digital channels, effective customer service can turn a simple trip into an unforgettable experience, fostering positive relationships between tourists and destinations. This emphasis on service quality is crucial in maintaining a strong reputation in an industry that relies heavily on personal recommendations and repeat business.

Actions:

- JEDC/WCEDB should collaborate with UT Martin to design and offer targeted on-the-job training to current, especially frontline staff in the tourism industry, including local attractions, hotels/bed and breakfast, food and beverages, and retail businesses.

- JEDC/WCEDB should develop a workforce partnership with UT Martin to align selected programs to industry needs. These include but not limited to, Hospitality and Food Management Service Management, Master of Business Administration (MBA), Agricultural Business, Agricultural Science Production and Electrical Engineering.

- JEDC/WCEDB should develop workforce partnership with TCAT NW (Tennessee College of Applied Technology) to align selected programs to industry needs. These include, but not limited to, Automotive Technology, Computer Information Technology, Electric Vehicle Production Technology, Hybrid Electric Vehicle, and Industrial Electricity.

- JEDC/WCEDB, in partnership with businesses, should offer internships and hire graduates from the UT Martin and TCAT to retain talents and improve management of businesses within the industry.

- JEDC/WCEDB, in consultation with businesses, must retrain residents through existing apprenticeship programs to align their skills with industry needs, especially in high-paying jobs.

- Community engagement helps identify gaps in skills and employment, which can be addressed through targeted workforce development initiatives, improving the overall economic health of the area.

Strategy 3.4 Local entrepreneurship support. In addition to workforce development, local entrepreneurship is a powerful economic development tool. It can foster economic growth, increase employment opportunities, reduce poverty, and enhance the overall quality of life. For Obion and Weakley counties, it is vital to enhance local economic activities, retain and re-invest financial resources in the local economy. Therefore, promoting and nurturing local entrepreneurship will enable the region to stimulate economic growth, foster innovation and build economic resilience.

Actions:

- In collaboration with the UTM REED Center and related centers, to provide free or low-cost business education in areas such as digital marketing, e-commerce, and financial management support to local start-ups or expand existing local businesses.

- Establish a business incubator in partnership with local universities, such as the University of Tennessee at Martin and Tennessee College of Applied Technology Northwest (TCAT NW) that focuses on sectors with growth potential in the region, such as tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, and small-scale technology businesses.

- Facilitate connections between new entrepreneurs and experienced business owners to provide valuable insights and support. Create a regional mentorship network where seasoned business owners in Obion and Weakley Counties volunteer to coach and mentor newer entrepreneurs.

- Encourage larger businesses and institutions to source goods and services from local startups and small businesses. Create a “Buy Local” campaign that incentivizes local governments, schools, and hospitals to source products and services from local entrepreneurs. Encourage restaurants, hotels, and other food and beverages businesses to source their produce from local farmers.

- Develop tourism-related businesses that leverage the area's unique history and natural beauty. Encourage the creation of bed-and-breakfasts, local dining, and boutique stores that attract tourists. Promote local festivals or craft markets to draw visitors to the area.

- Community engagement can foster a culture of entrepreneurship by providing resources, mentorship, and support networks for local entrepreneurs. Encouraging local innovation can lead to the creation of new businesses and jobs.

Strategy 3.5 *Workforce Housing Development*. A well-crafted workforce housing strategy can significantly stimulate economic development by ensuring that housing is available and affordable for workers at all income levels. These strategies align workforce housing development with economic growth, ensuring that local economies have the housing they need to support a thriving labor market.

Actions:

- Conduct a market analysis to determine current and future housing needs by assessing the local workforce's income levels, employment sectors, and housing availability. Evaluate the gap between available housing and the affordability of homes or rental units for the local workforce.

- Collaborate with private developers to o build affordable housing units through tax incentives, zoning flexibility, expedited permitting processes, and access to low-interest loans. Leverage public land for workforce housing developments at reduced costs or as equity in projects.

- Integrate workforce housing into broader economic development strategies, ensuring housing policies align with job creation and workforce attraction initiatives. Ensure that housing initiatives are aligned with efforts to attract and retain skilled workers, particularly in high-growth industries.

- Regularly monitor and evaluate the success of workforce housing initiatives to measure their impact on economic development and adjust strategies as needed. Stay responsive to changes in the local economy, housing market, and workforce needs, adjusting policies to remain effective and relevant.

- Encourage the development of energy-efficient workforce housing that reduces long-term living costs for residents. Provide financial incentives for workforce housing developers that incorporate sustainable building materials and practices.

- Educate the public about the benefits of workforce housing to garner community support and reduce opposition to new housing developments. Develop or expand programs that improve existing housing stock in distressed neighborhoods, making it more appealing for workers to live there.

Goal 4: Funding Strategies.

Economic development in Obion and Weakley Counties, Tennessee, can be accelerated by employing a mix of funding strategies tailored to the unique needs and opportunities. Government grants and subsidies provide vital financial resources, while public-private partnerships offer a way to attract investment.

Economic development is essential for fostering sustainable growth, improving the quality of life, and creating new opportunities in Obion and Weakley Counties. Like many rural regions, Obion and Weakley Counties, constrained fiscal resources, inadequate infrastructure and job opportunities continue to pose unique challenges to economic development. However, with targeted funding strategies, a mix of public and private sector sources, these counties can promote local businesses, attract new industries, and improve infrastructure to boost their economies.

Strategy 4.1. Public Sector Funding. Federal and state governments offer a range of grants and subsidies specifically aimed at fostering economic growth in rural areas. Programs such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development grants provide financial assistance to stimulate local economies by investing in essential infrastructure, housing, and small business growth. Additionally, the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development offers several grant opportunities that can help Obion and Weakley Counties attract new businesses or expand existing industries.

Actions:

- Engage a consultant to assist Obion and Weakley Counties to apply for the competitive discretionary grant from the Hazard Mitigation Assistance Program administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to fund mitigation measures that reduce disaster losses, including floods.

- ESRA should continue its annual applications for the Federal Aviation Authority's Aviation Improvement Program to fund its landside and airside facilities development.

- Engage a consultant to assist Obion and Weakley Counties to apply for the USDOT competitive discretionary grant to fund recreational trails, as part of tourism development and improved health outcome.

- Engage a consultant to assist Obion and Weakley Counties with the application for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) discretionary grants. HUD awards discretionary funding through multiple grant programs that support HUD initiatives, including Affordable Housing Development and Preservation, Community and Economic Development, Environment and Energy, Fair Housing, Homelessness, Homeownership, Rental Assistance, Supportive Housing and Services.

- Continue reliance on economic development-related planning and technical assistance funding to support feasibility and planning studies.

- Engage the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development (TDTD), the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to access grants to fund workforce development, tourism enhancement and other economic development-related infrastructure developments.

Strategy 4.2 Public-Private Partnership (PPP or P3). Public-Private Partnerships are collaborative agreements between government entities and private businesses that can be leveraged to finance large-scale infrastructure development. For example, in Obion and Weakley Counties, P3s could be used to develop major attractions like resorts, event centers, recreational facilities, industrial parks, and affordable housing. Local businesses could also play a role in P3s by supporting smaller-scale initiatives such as creating artisan markets, promoting local food tourism, or establishing guided outdoor recreation opportunities like hunting, fishing, or hiking tours. These partnerships can provide the necessary capital for development while reducing the financial burden on the public sector.

Actions:

- Proactively pitch to potential investors by emphasizing the region's competitive advantages, as well as the incentives provided by ESRA, the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development, and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Highlight the benefits, particularly for suppliers to firms setting up in Blue Oval City.
- Identify entrepreneurs or businesses that could be eligible for small business loans and/or grants from the Small Business Administration to encourage investment in the region.

Conclusion

Based on the ESRA asset condition assessment, the economic foundation of the study region, and the proposed economic plan, we present the following recommendations for consideration:

- As outlined in this study, ESRA serves as more than just a transportation facility or asset; its operation is a critical component in driving the economic development of the study region. ESRA plays a vital role in supporting key industries, such as manufacturing and agriculture, while also fostering the growth of emerging sectors like tourism and hospitality. This includes recreation, hotels, food and beverage services, retail, and transportation services. Therefore, the growth and expansion of the industries are expected to drive increased demand for key inputs, such as aviation and related businesses within the supply chain. This will, in turn, amplify ESRA's economic impact and its contribution to the region's economic growth. It is essential to implement the proposed branding and marketing initiatives to raise awareness of the improved facilities and amenities, thereby enhancing the traveler experience and attracting potential new businesses and visitors.

- Funding is crucial to the successful implementation of the proposed actions at ESRA. While the FAA's Airport Improvement Program (AIP) remains the primary source of funding for infrastructure enhancements, ESRA has the potential to diversify its revenue streams, including aircraft parking and storage fees, as demonstrated by the increasing demand for hangar space. It is, therefore, essential for ESRA management, Obion County, and the Tennessee Department of Transportation to collaborate with the FAA to identify and remove any funding barriers, expediting the development of the proposed ESRA Airport Layout Plan. Additional revenue sources suggested in this study include advertising and user fees for business-related amenities, such as conference and meeting rooms.

- Adopt a collaborative approach to promoting economic development and marketing efforts, aimed at boosting tourism and attracting businesses to stimulate growth. The partnership between JEDC, WCEDB, ESRA management, and other stakeholders should take a proactive stance in engaging potential tourists, businesses, and investors. These outreach efforts should be tailored and harmonized across multiple platforms including electronic and print media, websites, and social media, to reach potential visitors and businesses. The messaging should emphasize the region's competitiveness, assets, available incentives, and overall quality of life.

- Facilitating economic expansion is key to diversifying the region's economic base, building resilience, and creating multiple opportunities for its residents. Critical factors for achieving economic growth include:

    - The quality and availability of labor, which is essential for fostering local entrepreneurship and attracting businesses to drive economic development. While there is strong interest in growing strategic and emerging industries, the region's two-decade-long population decline, particularly among the youth and working-age groups, poses a significant challenge to future economic growth. Immediate steps must be taken to implement the proposed workforce and local entrepreneurship development strategies to create economic opportunities for residents.

    - Similar to labor, housing costs and availability are critical factors in determining quality of life and influencing business relocation decisions. Currently, there is a constraint on housing supply, with affordability challenges being particularly severe for renters. As the population begins to grow, housing demand is expected to exceed supply, driving up market prices and further worsening affordability issues. Therefore, the region should undertake a comprehensive housing study to evaluate market conditions, affordability, and potential incentives to increase housing supply.

- The study region should explore additional public funding sources and private sector financing to support infrastructure planning and development. The federal government offers a wide range of funding programs that are awarded on a competitive basis to eligible projects, with evaluation criteria often including project economics and anticipated economic development outcomes. These funds can be utilized for technical assistance, planning, and construction activities, such as hiring consultants to conduct feasibility and environmental studies near Reelfoot Lake. Additionally, private sector financing options, including public-private partnerships, should be pursued to support the development of large-scale infrastructure projects in the region.