

crime in their surrounding communities, so that many middle-income families feel they have no choice but to move out to developing suburbs. As a region, this causes us to spend more on police than most of our peers, to less effect, and build new roads faster than we can maintain them. And while the Kansas City region is second in spending on public education, our students perform only at the peer average.

At best, then, our fragmentation makes us inefficient. At worst, it diminishes our opportunities and competitiveness.

There are signs of decreasing fragmentation, however. Median household incomes and housing values in our urban core are rising. Downtown continues to revitalize. And the region's life-science initiatives are beginning to bear fruit. This gives us real momentum which should continue. It must.

To improve our competitive position, we need to take a "metro" outlook and come together to build things no single community can build on its own. A great region is made up of more than great neighborhoods. A great region creates value for the rest of the world in ways that cannot be easily duplicated elsewhere. Above all, this requires innovative people nurtured by world-class universities, vital urban areas, wonderful art and cultural opportunities, high-quality natural areas, excellent schools, an entrepreneurial culture and, yes, great neighborhoods, too.

There is clearly work to be done here. But despite the Kansas City region's challenges — or perhaps because of them — we can take comfort in the fact that our citizens are highly engaged and appear to be the most willing to fund improvements that address what they consider to be top issues. Now, if only we can agree on what these are . . .

So what do we do?

Metro Outlook is a tool for seeing connections, seeing where we need to improve. By taking a broad view, it is designed to uncover areas where policy changes might set the region on a path to a more innovative, more competitive economy.

MARC worked closely with the Brookings Institution to develop a set of high-leverage policies. These are available as a companion report, *Organizing for Success: A Call to Action for the Kansas City Region*, published by the Brookings Institution in 2006 and also funded by the Kauffman Foundation.

These policy recommendations are summarized here so that Metro Outlook functions as a strategic plan for the Kansas City region, beginning with stating a regional vision and set of goals, analyzing (through its indicators) the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and finally culminating with a set of policies and objectives.

The analysis of indicators identifies three areas that are relatively weaker than the rest — Social Cohesion, Institutional Performance, and Resource Efficiency. To this end, Brookings identified policies in these three areas as the most fundamental for the region to undertake.

Policy Recommendation 1: Boost the Region's Innovation Capacity

Objective 1.1:

- Recognize and leverage industry strengths and firm legacies.
- Thoroughly examine unique specializations and niches as well as obstacles to growth
- Assess where economic development dollars are spent
- Realign current investments to support entrepreneurship and innovation

Objective 1.2:

- Establish a collaborative vision and plan for bolstering local commercialization and entrepreneurship.
- Area universities, research institutions, business alliances, and state and local political leaders must come together to articulate a unified vision and strategic plan aimed at taking the region's research capacity to the next level.
- Establish cooperative organizations, such as research consortia and entrepreneurial support networks
- Cultivate a local network of venture capitalists and angel investors
- Fund incubator facilities
- Develop programs to prepare workers for high-skilled jobs

Objective 1.3:

- Boost research capacity at KU Medical Center and UMKC.
- Adopt the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Task Force which focus on building research capacity at the University of Kansas Medical Center
- Grow leadership at the University of Missouri-Kansas City to enhance life science research capacity

Policy Recommendation 2: Create more Focused Growth Patterns

Objective 2.1:

- Develop a comprehensive vision for future development.
- MARC must launch in the next two years a visioning process to increase the understanding of and provide direction on metropolitan growth, transportation, natural resource protection, housing, and economic prosperity.
- Focus on building regional citizenship, establishing desired outcomes for the region's physical form, and improving connections between regional organizations

Objective 2.2:

- Implement a regional "cores and corridors" strategy.
- Refocus development along major corridors, with the goal of increasing the region's share of population in these areas

- Design a multi-modal transit system that links and expands the region’s nodes of density and modify zoning to encourage transit-oriented development around these nodes

Objective 2.3:

- Create a region-wide affordable housing strategy.
- MARC should take the lead in conducting a full assessment of where low- and moderate-income housing is currently located and where it needs to be expanded.
- Include an evaluation of the current allocation of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits
- Kansas City local government leaders should work with the Greater Kansas City Home Builders Association to develop voluntary, incentive-based programs in which private developers would produce a portion of units in their projects for low-income working families. Incentives might include density bonuses or tax abatements.

Policy Recommendation 3: Break Down Racial Disparities in Incomes and Assets

Objective 3.1:

- Improve access to higher education.
- Regional leaders need to work with the area’s four-year colleges, universities, community colleges and technical schools to develop focused campaigns to boost minority enrollment and ensure they have the resources to complete their training or degrees.
- These partners should actively engage in marketing campaigns targeting area minority high-school students.
- Work with minority student organizations to gain feedback on how institutions can better meet student needs, including programs that facilitate making the transition from associate’s and training programs to four-year, post-secondary schools

Objective 3.2:

- Develop a coordinated workforce development strategy.
- Perform a comprehensive diagnostic of existing regional workforce programs on both sides of the state line, identifying who is doing what, who is being served, and who is being left behind and why
- Engage an umbrella group of local industry groups, workforce development leaders and educational institutions in an on-going dialogue on how they can work together to remedy weaknesses and gaps
- Ensure the system continually meets the skill needs of local industry
- Provide clear “career ladders” of training and educational opportunities to help employees ascend from low- to high-skilled occupations
- Connect minority youth to jobs to gain skills, experience and knowledge concerning the needs of employers

Objective 3.3:

- Establish regional prosperity campaigns to build the assets of low-income and minority residents.
- Organize a major effort to market the availability of Earned Income Tax Credits to low-income residents.
- Package together federal and state supports and utilize online screening tools to determine program eligibility and facilitate enrollment.

Policy Recommendation 4: Organize for Success

In order to implement this agenda, Brookings tackles the region’s fragmentation directly, suggesting that, “Overcoming these divisions is thus the key to combating the challenges discussed here, and to realizing a more competitive future for the region. . . . To this end, the Kansas City area must follow the lead of Louisville, Minneapolis, Chicago, Salt Lake, and other regions throughout the country that have taken aggressive steps to assemble multiple constituencies around a shared regional agenda.” (emphasis in the original).

Objective 4.1:

- Kansas City’s major institutions must work closely together to tackle the region’s big challenges.
- Area business, civic, academic, government and media organizations need to align themselves around the agenda articulated above, develop a concrete plan of action with each one taking the lead in one or more policy areas.

Objective 4.2:

- Regional institutions need to engage the metropolitan citizenry in their efforts.
- Engaging residents and other stakeholders will be essential for any kind of regional vision to build an understanding of regional issues and constituency for change.

Objective 4.3:

- Constantly monitor the progress on these initiatives.
- The region must establish a set of measurable outcomes and develop benchmarks against which to gauge whether or not the area is moving forward or falling behind in meeting them. Only by routinely measuring and reporting such information can leaders be held accountable for results . . . which is, of course, one of the core purposes of Metro Outlook.

Sources

Individual data sources are listed with each Metro Outlook indicator. These sources include:

- 2002 Census of Governments
- 2003 Zip Business Patterns
- ACCRA – The Council for Community and Economic Research
- American Housing Survey
- Brookings Institution
- Bureau of Economic Analysis
- Bureau of Labor Statistics
- Bureau of Transportation Statistics
- Centers for Disease Control
- Downtown Council
- Environmental Protection Agency
- ETC Institute
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Greater Kansas City Community Foundation
- Harvard Business School
- Johnson County Sun
- Kansas Bureau of Investigation
- Kansas City Area Life Sciences Institute
- Kansas City, Kan., Police Department
- Kansas City, Mo., Police Department
- Lewis Mumford Center for Comparative Urban and Regional Research
- Marketplace
- Mid-America Regional Council
- National Association of Home Builders
- Partnership for Children
- Standard & Poor's
- Texas Transportation Institute
- The Kansas City Star
- TRIP Transportation Research Group
- U.S. Census Bureau
- U.S. Department of Justice
- U.S. Patent and Trade Office
- UMKC Center of Economic Information