I. INTRODUCTION

The Cleveland, Ohio Metropolitan Statistical Area is comprised of 5 counties (Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Medina) in northeastern Ohio. The region is just over 2000 square miles, and is bordered to the north by Lake Erie. The total population is 2.1 million; approximately two-thirds (1.3 million) of the region’s residents live in Cuyahoga County, which contains the city of Cleveland. Ohio’s counties contain townships and two types of municipalities, villages and cities; cities have populations of 5,000 or more per federal census counts. The Cleveland MSA includes 61 cities, 45 villages, and 58 townships (NOACA 2011).

The city of Cleveland and the surrounding region were settled around the turn of the 19th century, but population growth was slow until the construction of the Erie Canal and railroads in the mid-1800s (OHS 2005). These developments brought about such rapid population growth that Cleveland's population increased from under one thousand to more than forty thousand people in just forty years (OHS 2005). Over the next century, the region was built up around the steel and oil industries. As industry has declined nationwide, the region’s employment has shifted away from industry to other types of services. A sector-based breakdown of region’s 2010 employment is listed in Table 1 below. Unemployment in the MSA is currently between 8-10%, which matches the national average (BLS 2011b, 2011c).

As the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Cleveland MSA, the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency (NOACA) carries out long- and short-range transportation planning, transportation-related air quality planning, and area-wide water quality management. NOACA has a staff of 45 and is overseen by a 38-member Governing Board, comprised of local
elected and appointed officials. The most recent and comprehensive plan created by NOACA is *Connections 2030: A Framework for the 2030 Transportation System*. Adopted in 2005 and updated in 2009, this document focuses on transportation and environmental issues, per federal legislation. (Unless otherwise noted, all of the following data come from the 2009 Update to *Connections 2030*.) In the following memo, I will review current and projected demographics for the region, analyze the Connections 2030 plan, and offer recommendations for other regional planning tools that could be incorporated into NOACA’s work.

**Table 1. 2010 Average Non-Farm Employment, Cleveland MSA (BLS 2011a)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Jobs (1000s)</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Jobs (1000s)</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational &amp; Health Services</td>
<td>188.3</td>
<td>19.00</td>
<td>Leisure &amp; Hospitality</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>8.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade, Transportation, &amp; Utilities</td>
<td>178.3</td>
<td>17.99</td>
<td>Financial Activities</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>6.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>139.5</td>
<td>14.07</td>
<td>Other Services</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional &amp; Business Services</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>13.11</td>
<td>Mining, Logging, &amp; Construction</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>116.3</td>
<td>11.73</td>
<td>Information</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Nonfarm Employment</td>
<td><strong>991.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**II. CURRENT REGIONAL PLANNING: Connections 2030**

**A. Population Projections**

The Cleveland region’s total population has not changed significantly over the last 40 years: from a 1970 peak of 2.3 million, it decreased to 2.1 million in 1990 and then grew slightly (to 2.15 million) over the following decade. The Office of Strategic Research in Ohio’s Department of Development (DOD) projects that this relative stability will continue through 2030, with a total population of 2.13 million, or 1% less than the population in 2000 (NOACA 2009, 1). If these projections are realized, Cleveland will be unique among metropolitan areas in the United States for its 60-year population stability.
NOACA uses these state projections (per requirement of Ohio Department of Transportation) for county trends and creates its own projections for population distribution within the counties and their various communities. NOACA predicts overall outward migration for the region: Cleveland and other “urban core communities”\(^1\) will lose significant portions of their population, while incorporated areas outside the core and unincorporated areas will gain enough population to keep the region’s total population stable. NOACA predicts the highest losses, 20% of their 2000 population levels, for Cleveland and Cleveland Heights (96,000 and 10,000 respectively). At the opposite extreme, Brunswick Hills Township is projected to gain 106% (4,600) and Montville Township is projected to increase by 134% (7,200) from 2000 to 2030 (NOACA 2009, Table 2).

NOACA also uses Ohio DOD projections to examine the upcoming changes in the age distribution of the region’s population. Grouping the population into 3 general categories, school age (0-19), working age (20-64), and elderly/retired (65+), some county and regional trends for 2000 to 2030 are clear. Three counties, Lake, Lorain, and Cuyahoga will lose population in the school age category, but Cuyahoga’s 20% loss will have the most significant impact on school districts, funding, and facilities. The entire region, and especially the outer counties, will have an increased elderly population, which will affect transportation and other service needs in the region. The working age population is predicted to decline overall, most significantly in Cuyahoga and Lake Counties. This will negatively impact the resources of those counties, and,

\(^1\) NOACA divides its region into urban core communities, incorporated areas outside the core, and unincorporated areas. By county, the urban core communities are: Cuyahoga County: Bay village, Bedford, Berea, Brooklyn, Brook Park, Chagrin Falls Village, Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, East Cleveland, Euclid, Fairview Park, Garfield Heights, Lakewood, Linndale, Lyndhurst, Maple Heights, Mayfield Heights, Newburgh Heights, Parma, Parma Heights, Rocky River, Shaker Heights, South Euclid, University Heights, Warrensville Heights, Woodmere; Lake County: Eastlake, Fairport Harbor, Mentor-on-the-Lake, Painesville City, Timberlake, Wickliffe, Willowick; Lorain County: Elyria, Lorain, Oberlin, Sheffield Lake City. Medina County: Lodi. (NOACA 2009, 11)
NOACA argues, will not give the region enough workers to meet the slight employment growth projected for the same time period.

B. Employment Projections

NOACA estimates that regional employment will increase slightly, by 7%, from 2000 to 2030. This is the same percentage growth the region saw between 1990 and 2000, though that period was one of great national growth, and the Cleveland area’s growth rate was only half the national one. It is important to note that both the original Connections 2030 document from 2005 and the 2009 update only include pre-recession data (2000 Census and the 2005 and 2007 American Community Surveys), which means that the predicted employment growth may no longer be accurate. In addition to growth, the two employment trends that NOACA identifies are a shift in sector, from basic to service and retail, and a geographic shift outward that matches the projected patterns of population growth for the region.

NOACA summarizes the major trends it sees for the region as “slow-to-no regional growth,” the geographic spread of the economy from urban to suburban areas, and the shift from a manufacturing economy to a services one, which brings about slower growth in income for residents and the region (NOACA 2009, 13). The impacts of these trends are significant: as different areas within the region grow and decline, they will be competing with each other for portions of the same resources pool. The core communities will suffer population, employment, and financial losses that make it difficult to support their remaining population, and the outer communities and unincorporated areas will have to manage an influx of people and businesses without an infrastructure in place to meet increased demand for transportation and other services.
C. NOACA Goals and Strategies

After detailing the population and employment projections summarized above, NOACA’s 2030 Connections plan shifts to their goals and strategies for the region. The document describes each goal in detail, and includes notes on progress-to-date as of the 2009 update. NOACA’s ten goals for 2030 are to:

1. Advance the region’s economic competitiveness based upon a sustainable development approach integrating environmental, social equity, and economic perspectives.
2. Enhance the natural environment and ecology of the region by improving air, land and water quality, conserving transportation energy, addressing climate change, and by identifying and preserving existing critical natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas.
3. Preserve and improve the efficiency and safety of the existing transportation system, prioritize elements of the system identified as significant and ensure the system serves homeland security.
4. Establish a more balanced transportation system which enhances modal choices by prioritizing goods movement, transit, pedestrian and bicycle travel instead of just single occupancy vehicle movement and highways.
5. Improve the transportation mobility of the transit-dependent and low-income individuals to jobs, housing and other trip purposes.
6. Provide additional transportation system capacity to move people and goods only when such capacity improvements promote the NOACA Principles, minimizing the adverse impacts of the investments on existing communities within the region.
7. Foster reinvestment in existing urban core areas throughout the region, and work to target and manage transportation investments to implement Plan goals.
8. Foster intergovernmental and private sector relationships to strengthen the regional community and assist in Plan implementation.
9. Direct the Plan and its investments toward efficient, compact land use development/redevelopment that facilitates accessibility, saves infrastructure costs, preserves and enhances farmland, forests and open space and enhances the economic viability of existing communities within the region.
10. Foster improvement in the quality of life of residents in the region through attention to aesthetics in the planning of the transportation system. (NOACA 2009; emphasis mine.)

All of these goals are important, and will help guide NOACA’s work to develop the Cleveland region over the next 20 years. However, as I will discuss in my recommendations below, the planning process and implementation would greatly benefit from a comprehensive vision for the
region, and from a more interactive way to track the progress of NOACA and its partner institutions on the different aspects and strategies of each goal.

III. Recommendations

After analyzing the demographic and economic projections for Cleveland, and NOACA’s current planning efforts for the region, I have several recommendations for regional planning approaches and tools that could be useful for NOACA’s future work. The first recommendation is a broad one, which will likely affect the entire process. I believe NOACA’s regional planning work would be much more engaging if it began with an overall vision and goal for the region. At the very least, Goal 9 in the current Connections 2030 plan should be moved to the top of the list, so that residents, planners, and local officials understand the overall plan for the region before delving into specific topics. Another minor but essential change would be to modify the language NOACA uses to describe its efficacy and ability to shape the region. Currently, the 2030 Connections guide states,

NOACA’s priorities remain in the maintenance and preservation of existing areas and their infrastructure. However continued growth of population and employment in areas outside the core cities, inevitably results in additional transportation needs on the Federal Aid System in the vicinity of new growth. Control of this pattern appears to be outside the reach of the MPO’s authorities. (NOACA 2009, 48; emphasis mine.)

The regional trends that NOACA faces are daunting; I am not downplaying their power or significance. However, there are many tools and strategies for guiding growth and development to specific geographic areas within a region, for managing decline in healthy ways, and for attracting specific types of businesses to a region. As Calthorpe and Fulton argue in The Regional City, though communities and regions may seem to be formed by invisible markets or
other hidden forces, “the real illusion […] is that we cannot control the form of our communities” (2001, 4). To be an effective regional planning leader, NOACA must be confident in its abilities as an organization to develop those strategies and work with communities to implement them.

One way to heighten NOACA’s status as an effective regional planning agency is to increase and deepen its engagement with residents of the Cleveland area. The final pages of Connections 2030 describe NOACA’s outreach to date and its low response rate from the region’s communities. For further updates to Connections 2030 and other regional planning efforts, NOACA should increase their resident outreach, and implement some new strategies to do so. For example, NOACA planners can coordinate with local community groups and neighborhood organizations to incorporate regional visioning and planning exercises into their regular programming. In these settings, NOACA staff should be prepared to explain the various futures that are possible for the Cleveland region—not just the projections of continued sprawl and urban decline included in Connections 2030, but also alternative scenarios—and should have visualization tools available for residents to examine. The sessions can include focus group discussions, surveys, and mapping and other design tools as avenues for residents to give their input to NOACA. In addition, NOACA should consider re-designing its website to be more user-friendly, and to include a clear way for the public to interact with the alternative scenarios and offer their comments online.

Once NOACA staff members have worked with residents across the region to create a comprehensive vision for the Cleveland area, they can determine which regional planning tools will be the most effective for realizing that vision. Because of the expected geographic shift in

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2 Boston’s MetroFuture project, an initiative of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, provides a good example of this type of resident engagement and visioning process. An explanation of the process and tools used can be found at www.metrofuture.org.
population and employment distribution described above, NOACA should incorporate tools for both growing and shrinking regions, in order to address the needs of all the region’s communities.

One key strategy for dealing with the Cleveland region’s population and resource distribution is *regional tax-base sharing*. This is especially important, as NOACA has calculated that the expected population spread will cause a $70 million loss to the urban core communities, an increase of $87 million for incorporated areas outside the core, and shift 10% of the region’s economy to townships or unincorporated areas that do not have the ability to raise tax revenue from that income. Creating a system for regional distribution of tax revenue will address the inequity of the resource bases between the urban core and the rest of the region, and will decrease intra-region competition for commercial and industrial development (Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001). As the ideal locations for increased residential and commercial development within the region become clear, NOACA may want to consider implementing *Transit-Oriented Development* in those locations. This approach will use the region’s existing resources most efficiently, and allow for targeted development of transportation and other services (Calthorpe and Fulton, 2001).

The Cleveland region has many similarities to Detroit as it is described in “However Unspectacular: The New Suburbanism,” an essay in Philipp Oswalt’s *Shrinking cities: Volume 2, interventions*: “[The city’s] real problem is that it is growing unevenly; moreover, it is characterized by segregation and extreme inequality between the central city and the suburbs” (Armborst et al. 2006, 324). The two strategies that Armborst et al. suggest for Detroit could be implemented in Cleveland to help NOACA effectively manage its uneven distribution of growth and decline. The first is the concept of *new suburbanism*, which involves creating some of the
aspects that draw residents to suburban areas within inner-city neighborhoods. The clearest manifestation of this is the “reparceling” of residential lots, so that families with children can have yards and outdoor space without moving out of the city (Armborst et al. 2006, 329). This would also reduce traffic and transportation problems elsewhere, as many of these neighborhoods are already walk-able and have access to public transportation. While these “new suburban” residents are likely to own cars, they will not be as dependent on them for daily commutes and errands as they would while living in the outer suburbs.

The second strategy from Armborst et al. is using public education to create regional identity. Creating a sense of regional identity, especially linking the residents of the outer communities and unincorporated areas to the center city, is crucial to the cooperative efforts required to plan and develop on a regional scale. This educational campaign should be part of school curriculum, but is necessary for residents of all ages. This could be incorporated in the public meetings and visioning exercises mentioned above; residents could spend time identifying the assets and characteristics that define them as a region, from geographical features to sports teams and arts institutions. Having this regional identity established will make it much easier for residents and local governments to buy into a comprehensive regional plan that may require their specific communities to make cuts or changes.

My final recommendations have to do with incorporating food and agriculture into NOACA’s planning work. Though the field of food systems planning is still in its infancy, the two professions overlap significantly in the contexts of public health, racial and economic justice, regional economic development and environmental sustainability. As of the 2007 Census of Agriculture, the five NOACA counties had 3,098 farms that cover 295,126 acres. Though those totals represent approximately 15% and 21% declines from 2002 levels, respectively,
market value of farm products sold was $310,196,000 in 2007 (NASS 2007). This is not an insignificant piece of the region’s economy, and the fact that each county still has an active agricultural sector is important for a number of reasons.

First, there is a growing movement in the United States to support small- and medium-scale agricultural production for local and regional sales. NOACA should consider partnering with organizations such as the Northeast Ohio Food Web\(^3\), which works on a 16-county scale in the same region. NEO Food Web has developed tools and literature on how the region can shift a portion of its consumption to locally grown and processed foods, in order to improve the health of residents and to capture some of the financial benefits of agricultural production and keep that capital inside the region. In order to fully maximize the benefits of creating a regional food system, NOACA could also start by conducting a community food assessment, to determine what kinds of foods are produced in the region, and what kinds of food its residents have access to on a regular basis.\(^4\)

What a community food assessment will likely make clear is that there are serious inequities related to healthy food access and diet-related illnesses (hunger, malnutrition, overweight, obesity, diabetes, etc) in the Cleveland region, and that those inequities fall along race and class lines, as well as urban/suburban geographic divisions. Armed with a full understanding of the current status quo, NOACA could then determine which tools would be best for addressing the gaps in the current food system. Some options would include incentivizing the return of full-service grocery stores to urban neighborhoods, creating new

\(^3\) NEO Food Web’s research, recommendations, and publications can be found at [http://www.neofoodweb.org/](http://www.neofoodweb.org/).

\(^4\) The Community Food Security Coalition has many tools for community food assessments available on its website: [http://www.foodsecurity.org/](http://www.foodsecurity.org/). In addition, a Tufts University graduate student has created a map of community food assessments in the United States, with links to their publications, that can serve as models: [http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=213950701121419589184.00049fdd320e67f510678&ll=37.71859,-98.701172&spn=42.122586,82.089844&z=4](http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=213950701121419589184.00049fdd320e67f510678&ll=37.71859,-98.701172&spn=42.122586,82.089844&z=4)
public transit routes from low-income, transit-dependent neighborhoods to grocery stores, and ensuring that zoning in urban and suburban areas does not prevent individuals and organizations from starting agricultural enterprises.

Working proactively to protect and improve the health of its residents through these and other strategies will help the region financially. Kenneth Thorpe and other researchers at Emory University have predicted that, if current trends do not change, over half of Ohio’s population will be obese by 2018 (Tribble 2009). This is a significant increase from current levels—the 2007-2009 average showed that 29% of adults in Ohio were obese (TAH). Thorpe’s economic model shows that the increase in obesity could raise the costs to the state’s health care system as high as $21.7 billion each year (Tribble 2009). These high costs will be borne by individuals, through increased healthcare premiums, and by the general public through Medicare and Medicaid. As Kaye Spector writes in a 2009 article in The Plain Dealer, “the Ohio Hospital Association estimates that obesity costs Ohioans $3.3 billion in health care every year, with half of obesity-related medical spending paid by taxpayers through Medicare and Medicaid” (Spector 2009). Curbing the rising obesity rate, and improving the overall health of residents, will minimize the financial burden of diet-related illness to the region’s residents and the region as a whole. Freeing up resources that would have gone to cover healthcare costs will allow the Cleveland region to invest in other sustainable development projects.

NOACA briefly addresses the issue of preserving farmland in Connections 2030, but it does so only from an environmental standpoint, in the same breath as it mentions other open space areas such as parks and natural preserves. While it is true that agricultural land does provide “green space” for a region—significantly more so than a factory or other industrial development—regional planners must recognize that farming is an industry: farmers make
decisions about inputs, outputs, and management decisions that have direct ecological and economic impacts on their land and the entire region. Unlike many industries, most farming operations are considered non-point-source polluters, and therefore are not regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency or other environmental laws. Thus as NOACA works to preserve farmland in the Cleveland region, it must be sure to take into account the many factors involved in active agricultural production, and consider offering its own *guidelines and incentives* for farmers to follow *environmentally sustainable practices*.

Finally, in 2007, the average American farmer was 57 years old (up from 50 in 1970), and 25% of farmers were over 65 (Ahearn 2009). As these farmers reach retirement age, we will need a new generation of well-trained farmers to take over their work, but the barriers to entry are extremely high, especially for those who will not inherit land. Though this is a national problem, NOACA and the Cleveland region should take an active role in supporting programs and organization that train beginning farmers and help them acquire access to land and local markets. Though they are not part of the work that NOACA is currently doing, these food, health, and agriculture-related tools and strategies will be crucial to developing the Cleveland area as a healthy and sustainable metro region.

In conclusion, I found many positive elements in the Connections 2030 plan and the rest of NOACA’s work, but feel strongly that the regional process needs a comprehensive vision for pro-actively creating change, instead of just reacting to current and projected trends. I hope that the recommendations offered here will provide residents and NOACA staff with the opportunity to envision and create a healthy and sustainable future for the Cleveland metro region.
REFERENCES


