# 2007 CEDS ANNUAL REPORT

SOUTH CENTRAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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## ACTION PLAN

In 2006, the South Central Planning and Development Commission prepared a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. The CEDS provided a brief summary of the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and based upon the result of the brief analysis gave goals and objectives that might help improve the region's economy in the coming years. Specific steps were identified for each objective that could help achieve the desired results. This Action Plan was devised to promote economic development, foster effective transportation and enhance and protect the environment. The Plan promotes use of technology and the effective development and use of the workforce. Of great concern is the availability of adequate funds to accomplish the plan. Many of the region's communities have limited resources to implement the needed upgrades to aging infrastructure and to implement the projects that will help protect the area from further coastal erosion and storm surge. More funding opportunities or flexibility in providing local match would greatly help.

***Performance Measures***

The CEDS is reviewed annually in order to determine its effectiveness in meeting the Region's goals. SCPDC monitors the number and kinds of projects implemented as identified in the CEDS as one way to gauge its usefulness. Participation in the process by area public and private partners is also one way to estimate the success of the process. Using jobs created or new investment in the Region as a way to measure the success of the CEDS is difficult as there are too many unknown factors involved in industry start-up, expansion, relocation or closure that are beyond the control or the scope of the CEDS, as exemplified by the 2005 hurricane season. However the process and the concluding document are useful tools for the Region's planners in developing local comprehensive plans and fostering a forum for exchanging ideas and strategies.

Following is an annual review of economic data for the region along with brief summary of accomplishments during the past year and immediate plans for the coming year. This annual review was approved by the Regional CEDS Committee (the SCPDC Board) at its meeting of October 25, 2007.

## OVERVIEW OF THE SOUTH CENTRAL REGION ECONOMY

The Houma MSA (Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes) is predicted to be the fastest growing MSA in Louisiana in terms of new jobs in the coming two years with an estimated 5,200 new jobs. Many of the new jobs are expected to be found in fabrication work as two large fabricators, Gulf Island Fabricators and J. Ray McDermott are beginning to make prefabricated modules for chemical plants. Continued growth in area shipyards is also anticipated (Scott, et al). Construction work on La. Hwy. 1 is expected to cost $202 million and will greatly improve access to Port Fourchon, the site of many businesses serving Gulf of Mexico marine interests.

The South Central River Parishes, St. Charles, St. John and St. James will also see continued growth as businesses and residents from other parts of the New Orleans Metropolitan area decide to permanently relocate to the River Region. Several major industrial projects have been announced for these parishes including the following:

- $1.55 retrofit of Entergy's Little Gypsy Power plant in LaPlace
- $3.2 billion expansion of the Marathon refinery Garyville
- $1.6 billion Eastman Chemical solid carbon gasification plant in St. James

Assumption Parish continues to monitor growth in surrounding communities and plans to create an inter-modal air cargo facility at its boundary with neighboring Ascension Parish.

The latest available Census estimates indicate a regional population of 347,662 in July 2006, an increase of 3%. Each of the six parishes in the region grew over the previous year as follows:

| Parish | 2005 Population | 2006 Population |
|---|---|---|
| **Assumption** | 22,996 | 23,671 |
| **Lafourche** | 90,543 | 93,438 |
| **St. Charles** | 50,203 | 50,969 |
| **St. James** | 20,885 | 21,904 |
| **St. John the Baptist** | 45,950 | 48,742 |
| **Terrebonne** | 106,078 | 108,938 |
| **South Central Region** | 336,655 | 347,662 |

**Source: Louisiana Tech University**

The South Central Region's economy remained strong during the past year as evidenced by low unemployment and improved wages. The preliminary unemployment rate in the Houma Metropolitan Area (Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes) was 2.7% for August 2007, a change from 2.9% in August 2006. Unemployment decreased between August, 2006 and 2007in both St. John the Baptist (7.4% to 6%) and St. Charles (5.1% to 4.5%) Parishes. Assumption Parish also experienced a decrease over the previous year dropping from a rate of 5.0% to 4.3%. St. James Parish had the largest unemployment rate in August 2007 and experienced a slight increase during the one year period, from 6.3% to 6.6% (Louisiana Department of Labor). Annual rates for 2005 and 2006 illustrate the impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on individual parishes. The number of reporting business establishments in the South Central Region rose from 7,498 in 2004 to 7,638 in 2005.

| Parish | Unemployment Rate 2005 | Unemployment Rate 2006 | 2004 Average Establishments | 2005 Average Establishments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assumption** | 9.2% | 4.8% | 337 | 332 |
| **Lafourche** | 5.6% | 2.8% | 1990 | 2012 |
| **St. Charles** | 10.1% | 5.2% | 1034 | 1062 |
| **St. James** | 9.9% | 5.9% | 384 | 394 |
| **St. John the Baptist** | 12.1% | 7.4% | 773 | 805 |
| **Terrebonne** | 6.1% | 3.0% | 2980 | 3033 |

While employment levels were lower in some areas of the region than others, incomes rose throughout the region. Personal income levels also rose, except in Assumption, where per capita income dropped by about 2.7%. Earnings of persons employed within that Parish also decreased.

| Parish | Earnings of Persons Employed in Parish in 2004 (in millions) | Earnings of Persons Employed in Parish in 2005 (in millions) | 2003 Median Household Income | 2004 Median Household Income | 2004 Per Capita Income | 2005 Per Capita Income | 2004 Average Weekly Wage | 2005 Average Weekly Wage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assumption** | $276.3 | $220.8 | $35,296 | $34,781 | $25,672 | $24,980 | $628 | $598 |
| **Lafourche** | $1,633.6 | $1,719.9 | $38,360 | $38,437 | $26,769 | $27,509 | $596 | $643 |
| **St. Charles** | $1,362.4 | $1,431.4 | $45,492 | $46,009 | $26,692 | $26,811 | $861 | $904 |
| **St. James** | $400 | $436 | $36,353 | $36,945 | $21,803 | $22,870 | $730 | $835 |
| **St. John the Baptist** | $630.6 | $678.2 | $39,034 | $39,436 | $23,796 | $24,964 | $645 | $706 |
| **Terrebonne** | $2,112.6 | $2,239.6 | $37,431 | $37,726 | $24,556 | $24,719 | $618 | $651 |

(Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis)

Following is a summary of the progress in meeting the 2006 CEDS goals and objectives.

**Goal One**: Improve the public infrastructure of the region in order to support and sustain a viable economy and environment.

**Objective 1: Improve road infrastructure and capacity**

- Complete Leeville bridge crossing and continue La. Hwy. 1 improvements
- Build an East/West road to connect Globalplex to Interstate 10 (Port of South Louisiana)
- Anticipate completion of the Gramercy Wallace Bridge and La. Hwy. 3127 in January 2008
- Continue efforts to complete I-49
- Develop a Master Transportation Plan for the River Parishes (Acadian Road Extension)
- Develop a transportation loop around Thibodaux
- Investigate adequacy of La. Highways 1 and 308 as alternate hurricane evacuation routes through Assumption Parish
- Monitor plans for creation of North-South Access Road between LA Hwy 3127 and US Hwy 90
- Continue repairs and upgrades to other State and local roads
- Widen La. Highway 20 in Thibodaux
- Replace/expand Tiger Drive Bridge in Thibodaux
- Four lane La. Highway 3127 from Edgard to Donalsonville

Accomplishments

The State continued construction of the Leeville Bridge. The road connecting the Gramercy Wallace Bridge and La. Hwy. 3127 is under construction and should be complete in January 2008.. The SCPDC continues to work on the Master Transportation Plan for the River Parishes. The region continues to monitor the North - South Access Road and other transportation projects in the region.

In the coming year, the region will continue to monitor progress of all of these projects.

**Objective 2: Improve water and wastewater treatment and collection capacities**

- Continue to upgrade water treatment facilities and capacities in all communities
- Continue to improve wastewater treatment and build additional collection systems throughout the Region
- Continue to investigate ways to improve water flow along Bayou Lafourche and counteract salt water intrusion
- Provide linkage between the St. Charles East and West Bank water treatment facilities and provide additional treatment capacity for the East Bank
- Continue efforts to upgrade old and provide new or expanded municipal wastewater systems throughout the Region
- Identify priorities of sewerage projects for implementation
- Prepare engineering work for update of St James Parish-wide Sewage System facilities plan
- Continue to investigate Bayou Lafourche Diversion Project
- Upgrade salt water control on Bayou Lafourche south of Lockport and on the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway
- Implementation of Bayou Lafourche locks at Golden Meadow

Accomplishments

St. John the Baptist Parish received an EDA award to help upgrade the Lions Water Plant to accommodate a new sugar refinery. Gramercy continues to work on upgrading its water plant as do other communities. The City of Thibodaux received an EDA award to upgrade its sewer pump capacity in order to serve growing programs at Nicholls State University. St. Charles Parish continued progress in preparing for bids to construct a waterline under the Mississippi River to connect its two water plants. SCPDC received two grants from EPA to provide for wastewater feasibility analyses. The first project is underway in Assumption,

Lafourche and Terrebonne. The second program will look at the west banks of St. James, St. John and St. Charles and should be underway in the near future. The programs will identify available treatment capacities and identify priority projects for implementation.

Work will continue on each of these objectives during the coming year.

**Objective 3: Improve public facilities and services**

- Continue upgrade to public libraries
- Provide public transit throughout the region
- Continue efforts to improve regional health facilities and services
- Improve neighborhood and municipal parks
- Continue work with the Regional Criminalistic Laboratory
- Continue Regional Solid Waste Authority efforts to address solid waste disposal and transportation issues
- Upgrade fire protection facilities throughout the Region

Accomplishments

Parishes continued to upgrade libraries throughout the region. The River Parishes Transit Authority moved a step closer to implementation of a system for St. John and St. Charles as it submitted requests for funding assistance to the Federal Transit Administration and the La. Department of Transportation and Development. The SCPDC received a grant from the FTA and begin work to analyze the feasibility of providing public transit service in Thibodaux.

In the coming year the region will continue to monitor and implement these programs.

**Objective 4: Continue infrastructure improvements at area ports and airports**

- Construct improvements at all area airports
- Construct a road to connect the South Lafourche Airport to La. Highway 3235 including a Bayou Lafourche Bridge crossing.
- Continue to pursue general cargo opportunities to better serve the maritime industry
- Develop a public dock on the West Bank of St Charles Parish
- Construct conveyor from docks to service lay-down areas at Globalplex (Port of South Louisiana)
- Rails spur rehabilitation and extension with warehouses for Globalplex Intermodal Terminal
- Increase warehouse and distribution capacity at the Port of South Louisiana
- Construct Northern Expansion project for Port Fourchon
- Convert Golden Meadow and Larose Floodgates into locks in order to facilitate waterborne commerce during high water stages
- Explore feasibility of establishing rail service to Port Fourchon
- Support initiatives to improve public facilities and access to Port Fourchon beaches
- Complete EIS and Feasibility Studies for North-South Corridor connecting Port Fourchon to I-10
- Provide rail service to the Port of Terrebonne
- Complete infrastructure improvements at the Port of Terrebonne facility
- Deepen the existing east-west channel connecting the Houma Navigation Canal to Port Fourchon to 12-feet to facilitate flow of traffic between the ports of Terrebonne and Fourchon Continue efforts to ensure the planned Houma Navigation Canal and lock system are designed for medium draft vessels at 200 feet wide and 20 feet deep

Accomplishments
The Port of Terrebonne received an EDA award to provide bulkheading at a location to accommodate a major tugboat builder. The Port will begin construction in 2007.

The region will continue to monitor these programs and projects in the coming year.

**Objective 5: Improve flood protection and drainage**

- Improve area levees, in particular the Morganza to Gulf and other hurricane protection levees Support efforts to create a Comprehensive Hurricane Protection Plan for Coastal Louisiana
- Support Governor's LA 1 Task Force plans for hurricane evacuation route from Grand Isle to Alexandria
- Continue drainage improvements throughout the Region
- Reduce regional businesses' vulnerability to natural disasters by coordinating informational resources to facilitate preparedness and recovery planning
- Continue to upgrade and improve area pump stations and pump capacities including the
- Lafourche-Company Canal Pump Station Project
- Construct the West Bank flood protection levee
- Construct hurricane protection levee from St. John the Baptist to Ascension Parish north of Interstate 10

Accomplishments
Parishes and levee districts continued to work on flood protection projects throughout the region.

**Goal Two: Create and retain quality jobs and foster a more diversified economy.**

**Objective 1: Work within existing industry clusters to identify workforce development and training needs.**

- Continue efforts to design education programs that match training to the area job market and update capacity to track training efforts
- Support efforts to expand on existing job training programs
- Exploring potential for building on existing institutional assets like the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute at Nicholls State University in implementing such training alliances
- Increasing coordination to bridge basic and occupational skills training for adults with limited education and skills and linking training to workforce needs identified by employers
- Coordinate with the SBDC at Nicholls State University and regional Chambers of Commerce to expand on existing leadership programs to develop a regional "young president's forum" to provide mentoring and peer networking to improve fledgling entrepreneurial companies' chances of success
- Explore potential for using the St. James Parish mobile classroom program as a model for taking sector-specific job training linked to actual employment opportunities into communities where a significant part of the adult population possess limited education and skills
- Explore potential for local adaptations of model joint labor/management partnership programs and of state community colleges and community-based organizations to improve access to on the job and skill training
- Support efforts to expand the business incubator created Nicholls State University in cooperation with South Louisiana Economic Council

Accomplishments
L. E. Fletcher Community and Technical College continued its program and facility expansion plans. An EDA grant to the City of Thibodaux will allow increased pump capacity to serve the Nicholls State University campus and support its planned expansion of the Chef John Folse Culinary Institute.

**Objective 2: Provide technical support and infrastructure necessary to support new start ups**

- Create business incubators in Thibodaux and Terrebonne Parish and other communities and continue to support the incubator program in St. Charles Parish
- Provide ongoing technical assistance concerning tax incentives and loan programs
- Administration and expansion of the SCPDC Revolving Loan Fund Program
- Continue Enterprise Zone Assistance
- Increase the number of regional businesses marketing on-line in order to enhance individual firms' ability get quickly return to business, even if a storm or other disaster destroys or damages their physical facility
- Create a micro-lending program for very small businesses and self-employed individuals

Accomplishments
Through a grant from Shell, a micro grant-loan fishery recovery program known as "Back to the Dock" was initiated. A similar small business (under 15 persons) grant/loan was developed as part of the recovery effort. The number of applications received statewide indicated a need for this kind of assistance.

**Objective 3: Support research and development of new and emerging clusters**

- Develop warehousing, light industrial and high technology clusters in St Charles Parish
- Investigate feasibility of a warehouse distribution center in St John the Baptist and St. James Parishes
- Explore potential to expand on existing institutional structures at Nicholls State University to create cluster development centers to spur technological innovation and commercialization and export of products, expertise and services in the maritime-shipbuilding, culinary and information technology industries
- Increase coordination among training providers and the business community in order to explore potential for undertaking regional, sector-based workforce development, planning, training, job matching and outreach
- Further the development of a distribution, light industrial, energy and advanced manufacturing cluster in St. Charles Parish with programs providing needed job and skill training

**Goal Three**: To improve the overall capacity of the Region to make efficient land use decisions.

**Objective 1: Develop and/or update Parish Comprehensive Plans**

- Complete Assumption Parish Comprehensive Plan
- Complete Terrebonne zoning effort in areas outside Houma
- Begin St. James Comprehensive Planning Process
- Update the Lutcher Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances
- Explore possible land use Master Plan for Lafourche Parish
- Update the St Charles Parish land use plan
- Continue to keep parish and municipal codes current

Accomplishments
Terrebonne moved forward with its recommendations for zoning in areas surrounding Houma. Parishes and municipalities continued to update their codes and make land use planning decisions.

**Objective 2: Develop and implement other programs that enhance existing land uses and encourage development near existing centers of business and industry**

- Develop opportunities for sharing expenses related to the enforcement of the State Uniform
- Building Code through participation in a regional inspection program
- Continue update of historic structure inventory
- Revitalize the Thibodaux CBD and Historic District Area
- Investigate feasibility of creating a Reserve Historic District
- Plan for access and development along U. S. Highway 90 (future I-49 corridor)

Accomplishments

The Regional Building Code Council was formed to staff inspectors and plan reviewers for the entire region. The communities share the cost of the staff and in so doing have minimized their cost in enforcing the new mandatory statewide building codes. The SCPDC continues to update the historic structure inventory.

**Goal Four:** To improve the overall capacity of the Region to make economic development decisions.

**Objective 1: Identify Sites Suitable for Various Types of Industrial Development**

- Update and continue existing site inventories
- Create GIS based inventories of available sites for communities where none exist
- Inventory and assess brownfields sites to foster redevelopment

Accomplishments

SCPDC received two brownfield grants and will continue efforts to inventory and assess sites that can be returned to the market. The Port of South Louisiana continues to maintain a GIS site inventory within the River Parishes, and SLEC is developing a program which will accomplish a similar goal in the Bayou Region.

**Objective 2: Support efforts that sustain regional tourism**

- Support coordination efforts of area tourism commission and chambers to promote the culture and heritage of Region
- Promote the culture and heritage of the entire region
- Docking Facility at Oak Alley and other tourist attractions along the Mississippi River
- Expand tourism efforts throughout the South Central Region
- Provide additional public access to outdoor scenic and recreational areas such as Lake Verret
- Explore potential of coordination among regional tour bus and hospitality industry to create a shuttle bus service from the New Orleans airport to locations in the district

Accomplishments

SCPDC updated the Parish profiles used by the Louisiana Department of Economic Development for the region and identified a prime site in each parish that is being promoted for development. The South Louisiana Economic Development Council is piloting a website that will promote its region (which includes part of the South Central District) and feature sites suitable for development, demographic information, tourist information and other important data that will promote the area. SCPDC will assist SLEC as possible to complete the site.

**Objective 3: Continue to explore opportunities to further new and emerging clusters**

- Hold one or more workshops to present information on cluster development and emerging clusters
- Increase the Region's understanding of industry clusters and their role in the regional economy

- Increasing linkages to connect the business community and university-based research and development expertise in order to expedite innovation, early adoption of new technologies, development of information technology products and services and entry into export markets
- Coordinating with the Small Business Development Center at Nicholls State University, Chambers of Commerce and other development organizations to offer small businesses access to up-to-date, industry oriented market data to help them forecast and respond to market and industry trends and identify and act on opportunities
- Planning and Implementation of the Bayou Lafourche Waterfront Development project to revitalize growth and development along Bayou Lafourche from Donalsonville to the Gulf of Mexico.
- Begin implementation of the Bayou Lafourche Corridor Master Plan
- Begin construction of the Central Market

Accomplishments
The Bayou Lafourche Corridor Master Plan was completed in 2007. Individual communities along the Bayou including Assumption and Lafourche Parishes and the municipalities of Lockport, Thibodaux and Golden Meadow will begin implementation of the programs cited in the coming years. Lafourche Parish also has developed a master plan for creation of the Central Market at the La. Hwy. 1 and U.S. Highway 90.

**Goal Five**: To improve the fiscal capacity of local government and to make the Region financially attractive for economic development.

**Objective 1: Identify existing incentives**

- Prepare and continue to update a brochure on existing regional and state incentive programs
- Identify new incentive and other programs that would be of use to existing and developing cluster industries
- Investigate feasibility of implementation of such programs
- Identify other assistance programs that area industry would find helpful

Accomplishments
SCPDC held two workshops on incentive programs offered by the state. The target audience is businesses. A workshop was held in cooperation with BTNEP concerning comprehensive planning and a future one will discuss economic development as part of the comprehensive planning effort.

**Objective 2: Investigate the potential of creating new incentives geared toward growth sectors**

- Encouraging cooperation and joint production and marketing ventures among businesses in clusters and across interrelated "super cluster"
- Cooperate with the business community, parish economic development departments, Chambers of Commerce and other development organizations to implement a district wide business retention program to counter migration of businesses and innovations out of the region
- Explore potential to increase the regional pool of investment capital for entrepreneurial development in the district by utilizing incentives such as tax credits under the Louisiana Early Stage Angel Investment Incentives program
- Increase the number of regional businesses qualifying for tax credits and abatements under the Louisiana Enterprise Zone, Quality Jobs and Industrial Property Tax Exemption programs
- Increasing the number of regional businesses utilizing tax credits and other tax relief benefits under the federal Gulf Opportunity Zone program
- Increase the number of regional businesses complying with ISO 9000 and ISO 1400 standards in order to improve quality control and increase "exportability" of local products, expertise and services

- Investigate potential to develop strong regional branding of food and tourism products and services and promoting improved coordinated scheduling of festivals and other events, bundling of services and use of the internet to organize and market tour packages
- Explore possible resources to establish a micro-loan fund for entrepreneurs in self-employment businesses such as tour guide and craftsperson in the tourism and eco-tourism cluster

Accomplishments
The region's economic development planners continued to promote development within the region's clusters.

**Goal Six:** To protect and conserve the natural resources of the Region and to promote more equitable use of these resources for business and recreation.

**Objective 1: Conserve the available resources for future generations**

- Promote the wise and sustainable uses of non-newable resources
- Create education and outreach programs that promote same
- Implement Barrier Island Restoration Projects
- Implement the Coast 2050 Ecosystem and Louisiana Coastal Area Strategies
- Promote fresh water diversions from the Mississippi River into coastal wetlands and marshes

Accomplishments:
SCPDC and the Barataria Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) partnered to develop a guidebook and series of workshops on comprehensive planning and sustainability in the BTNEP region. The guidebook will focus on comprehensive planning, economic development planning, implementation tools and conservation easements and similar programs. There will be four workshops, of which the first was held in March 2007.

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