

Voices and Views

Listening Posts Across Minnesota

JULY 2000

MINNESOTA PLANNING

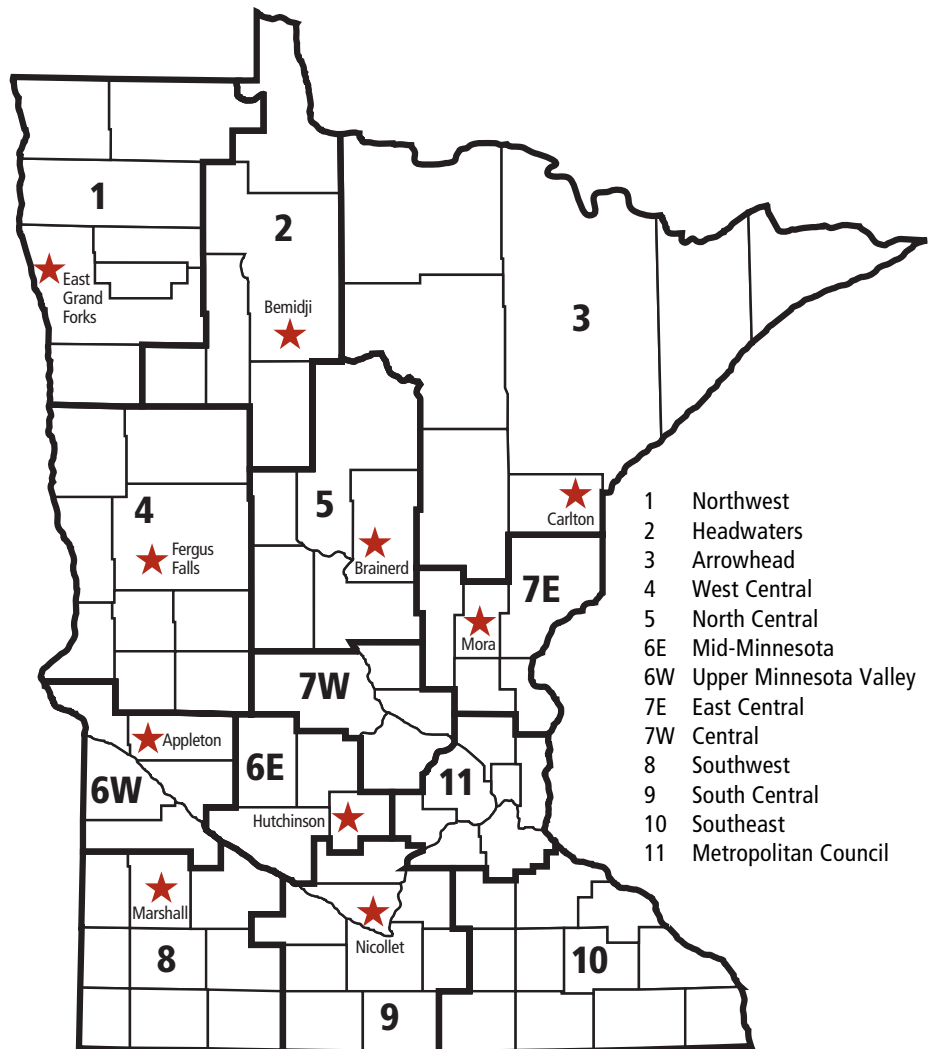


Minnesota Planning develops long-range plans for the state, stimulates public participation in Minnesota's future and coordinates activities among the state agencies, the Minnesota Legislature and other units of government.

Voices and Views: Listening Posts Across Minnesota was prepared by Sandra Stalker. It is the product of 10 listening posts organized by Minnesota Planning between December 1999 and April 2000. These listening posts were hosted by Regional Development Commissions and cosponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development. Minnesota Planning staff involved were Dean Barkley, Director; Jack Uldrich, Deputy Director; Diane O'Brien; Tom Gillaspay; Barbara Ronningen; and Steve Reckers. Demographic and economic data were prepared by the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning. Maps were prepared by the Land Information Management Center at Minnesota Planning.

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Listening Post Locations in Minnesota Development Regions



Source: Minnesota Planning

Upon request *Voices and Views: Listening Posts Across Minnesota* will be made available in an alternative format such as Braille, large print or audio tape. For TTY, contact the Minnesota Relay at 800-627-3529 and ask for Minnesota Planning. *Voices and Views: Listening Posts Across Minnesota* and the 70 maps prepared for the listening posts are available on the Minnesota Planning Web site.

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Voices and Views

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Message from the Director of Minnesota Planning

There's a childhood memory that many of us share. We are looking out a schoolroom window and wondering what the world would be like in the far-away year 2000. We probably missed some of the lesson during those daydreams, but we were busy — wondering what our neighborhoods would be like in 2000, wondering what cars would be like, and in my case, wondering if my hometown of Annandale would finally have its own McDonald's by the year 2000.

As a boy, when I considered what the world would look like, I never wondered about shaping that world. Either I figured that somebody else would decide about my neighborhood, my car and that McDonald's or I assumed change would just happen.

But the business of keeping our neighborhoods safe, our rural communities prosperous, our state a place that welcomes newcomers and holds the loyalty and affection of its lifelong residents is not the passive business of letting stuff happen. It's an active and engaging and sometimes argumentative business. It is also an essential business.

Minnesotans are clear — they want their state, their region and their communities to be safe, welcoming and economically viable. The Governor affirmed this vision when he made healthy, vital communities one of the cornerstones of *The Big Plan*. The next step is for Minnesotans throughout the state to make that plan and their future real.

At Minnesota Planning, the state's long-range strategic planning agency, we are committed to the essential business of helping Minnesotans shape the state's future. To bring new focus to that business, the agency held a series of listening posts in 10 state development regions from December 1999 through April 2000. Participant feedback is summarized in *Voices and Views: Listening Posts Across Minnesota*.

The listening posts were inspired in part by the Governor's comments at the Rural Summit in Duluth in 1999. The Governor gave the tough message that solutions to rural problems would not come from St. Paul, but from the rural communities themselves. People thought that he did not care. This could not be further from the truth. The Governor recognizes that it is difficult for policy-makers in St. Paul to understand the real needs of rural areas. He wants officials to get out into the state to find out what local people say their needs are. He wants leaders of rural communities to share their vision with state government and bring ideas about how the state can assist local communities develop their potential. These listening posts were intended to foster interaction between different levels of government and citizens.

State agencies and local governments haven't always shared a coordinated approach, but we've learned we must work together. Communities too, must stop competing among themselves and work together to solve the problems of their regions. There is an important role for Regional Development Commissions, working as partners with state government to help their regions prosper.

There is no one answer for rural Minnesota, because all of rural Minnesota is not the same. Communities must have real choices about how they develop. Every area has its own unique housing, economic and environmental needs. The challenge is to encourage the younger population, especially those under age 35, to become involved as future community leaders.

At the listening posts I tried to talk for two minutes and listen for two hours. Usually I succeeded. I sincerely wanted to listen to people's perspectives about their regions and to help figure out how state government can work with local people to help solve problems. Addressing the problems of rural Minnesota will be a key challenge for the next biennial budget, and the administration wants to develop a strategy to get economic growth out into areas that need it.

I am grateful to the United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development for cosponsoring the listening posts and to all the state agency representatives who attended. The ideas raised at the listening posts were carefully documented. Our key task now will be to follow them through with the people who can make things happen.



Dean Barkley



From left: Dean Barkley; Gene Hugoson, Commissioner of Agriculture and Chair of the Environmental Quality Board; and Senator Don Ziegler at the Region 9 Listening Post in Nicollet, Minnesota. Photograph by Lindsey Ranstrom, courtesy of *Mankato Free Press*.

Common Themes

I'm not complaining. I live in my lake home, have a 10-minute drive to work and free parking. We live the good life here. But ...

— Citizen at Carlton

It is the quality of jobs that matters, not just the quantity.

— Gary deCramer, State Director of Rural Development, U.S.D.A.

We cannot grow our population unless we have good schools.

— Citizen at Carlton

Most people don't want to pollute — they just don't know they are.

— Citizen at Fergus Falls

We need people to understand that non-metro Minnesota is more than the triangle of Duluth, Rochester and St. Cloud.

— Citizen at Appleton

Each region of the state is different and each has a different story to tell. Nonetheless a number of common themes emerged. This report is therefore in two parts. The first section outlines the ideas and issues which people raised in region after region. The second section reports the specific challenges facing individual regions and some suggestions for solving them. Overall, the report identifies some of the key issues that people believe must be addressed to maintain healthy, vital rural communities in our state.

The viewpoints in this report are a sample representation of the unrestricted discussions that took place around the state and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the administration or Minnesota Planning staff. All opinions are valued and will be included in the administration's deliberations on policy and funding.

The overwhelming impression gained from the listening posts was that Minnesota citizens are proud of their regions, value their quality of life and live in communities that work well together. Some areas are experiencing a growth in population, but most are experiencing a decline. All are conscious that their population is aging. It is not surprising, therefore, that the emphasis everywhere was on the need to create viable economies that would encourage more young people to move out of the Twin Cities and into rural Minnesota.

Good jobs will retain young people

In regions of both increasing and declining population, job creation is a major concern. All regions want a greater variety of higher-functioning and better-paying jobs to retain young people, particularly college graduates. To create and maintain a high-quality work force requires not just education and training but an active campaign to get young people to stay. Many people stated the need for more local access to higher education, and nearly all recognized the important role played by technology schools. Industry should work with high school students and be a major partner in higher education. Training needs to be responsive to a job market that is evolving and changing all the time. Most people will change jobs many times in a lifetime, so they need to be taught skills that will enable them to adapt and change.

At several listening posts people also recognized that the regions that welcome minority populations are more likely to thrive economically.

Encourage businesses to relocate

People in rural Minnesota want a share of the metropolitan area's vibrant economy. They want to work in partnership with the state to encourage businesses, especially high-tech industries and financial institutions, to relocate to rural Minnesota. Publicity abounds about businesses that cannot find enough workers in the Twin Cities. Satellite companies such as Northwest Airlines' call center in the Arrowhead region have been a great success. Small communities do not have the capacity to attract business, and people say there is a role for state government, along with the Minnesota Business Partnership, to act as a conduit. Large businesses are more likely to expand into rural Minnesota than relocate, and they would be encouraged by financial incentives, such as tax breaks or

Agriculture is still at the heart of the rural economy

Intertechnology companies are having to look to China and India for skilled workers because we cannot provide them.

— Citizen at Bemidji

Take local people and train them right here.

— Citizen at Brainerd

I'd like to see every farmer in the region involved in the dislocated worker program to get training through the winter when they are not farming.

— Citizen at Appleton

To be pro-job also means to be pro-job providers.

— Representative Marty Seifert

What the state needs is an entrepreneurial economy in which people can create their own jobs.

— Citizen at Carlton

economic assistance. One strategy for job creation suggested at several listening posts was moving some state government jobs out to rural Minnesota.

Local businesses must be helped to grow

Listening post participants recognized that development must come from inside the community as well as from outside resources. In an effort to develop greater self-reliance and increase diversity in their economies, rural communities must develop additional entrepreneurial opportunities. While striving for diversity, rural communities also noted the need to take advantage of their uniqueness and the need to develop niche markets. They do not want to import what can be produced locally.

Balanced growth is essential, creating mixed income economies that prevent concentrations of poverty. It was suggested that state universities could serve in a "think tank" capacity to look at ways that industries can thrive in rural areas.

Regional planning should take a holistic approach, recognizing the differences between small communities in a region. Inter-district dialogue could have exciting outcomes.

The emphasis throughout the listening posts was on diversifying the rural economy and particularly on attracting high-tech business, but those who spoke about agriculture did so with great passion. Many participants noted that agriculture must be made viable, but only a few solutions were suggested. People would like to see fewer corporate farms (the "ultimate monopoly"), more family-run farms of 200 to 400 acres and a free market for agriculture.

The development of value-added industry allows farmers to control their own destiny and is therefore seen as an important area of growth. New uses for agricultural products must be continuously sought. Investments are needed in skills training and research to help farmers develop markets. People asked for continued investment in value-added cooperatives and praised the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute for its work. There were complaints about hidden taxes and fears that the government has turned its back on production agriculture. People want decision-makers to recognize that farming is a business like any other and farmers need the most up-to-date technology available.

Agriculture is in structural transition. Whereas it used to be labor intensive, now it is capital intensive and specialized.

— Representative Bob Ness

I am fed up with people bashing my business. I feed a lot of people. I am not just a farmer. I am a businessman.

— Citizen at Nicollet

In Canada they are getting \$27 a hundredweight for milk. Here it is \$9.53, the lowest price for 20 years.

— Citizen at Mora

You can't raise taxes on farmers finding it hard to make it.

— Citizen at Fergus Falls

We need more people to be farmers.

— Representative Ted Winter

We need the state to stop looking out here and seeing a bunch of farms — tourism is one of the areas we include.

— Citizen at Appleton

A lake is no longer enough.

— Citizen at Fergus Falls

We must not export our most valuable resource, our young people.

— Citizen at Mora

In several places low farm commodity prices are a concern as they influence buying power to pay taxes, develop businesses and jobs, support schools and build housing.

Tourism is a viable option in many areas

Listening posts were held in Brainerd and Bemidji, where tourism is already a major part of the economy. In several other regions participants saw tourism as an important option for economic development and job creation, and many spoke eloquently about their area's outstanding natural resources.

The Lac qui Parle Reservoir area could be developed into biking and hiking trails. East Grand Forks participants believe the area would be suitable for a state park; Lake of the Woods and the Red River have tremendous potential for recreational use. A recent tourism grant to Rock and Pipestone counties has boosted pride in the Southwest region, but people in general do not know about these "hidden gems." It was suggested that one way the state could help showcase areas of natural beauty is by providing state dollars to build Tourism Information Centers within the regions and not just at state boundaries.

All regions value their quality of life

Job creation must be partnered with viable local communities where young families will want to live and work. Providing services such as law enforcement and fire protection can be difficult when the tax levy is capped at an unrealistic level, thus giving little local control. Employers should place emphasis on good

working environments to retain employees. All amenities, including churches, schools, libraries, recreational and arts facilities are important to maintain a high-quality work force.

A sound infrastructure supports viable communities

“Infrastructure” came up many times during the listening posts. Many regions have aging populations and face great difficulties in supporting the necessary repairs to the infrastructure. Several discussions concerned water and sewerage, but the elements of infrastructure most often raised were technology, transportation, health care and affordable housing.

Good telecommunications access is essential

Participants at the listening posts were unanimous in emphasizing the potential of technology in the revitalization of rural communities. Telecommunications infrastructure was seen as vital for economic development. All areas of the state should have equal access to the telecommunications that will provide the jobs of the future and act as a catalyst for many other developments. Citizens in rural communities fear being left behind “as some towns were when the railroads were built.”

High-speed telecommunications are perceived to be the tool that can bring a diverse mix of business into rural regions. Currently, large companies will not move into an area unless there is affordable access, fast enough for effective business practices. A benefit of high-speed telecommunications is the breakdown of geographic barriers that have historically hindered many rural businesses. An additional benefit of this technology for all communities is its potential to reduce road congestion. Despite the growth of “e-commerce,” communities still need a commercial district to support small businesses.

Only Southwest and Mid-Minnesota seemed satisfied with current service. Complaints in other areas were about lack of access, service to public buildings only, lack of fiber optics, or service that is too slow or too expensive.

Remember, it's not being online that matters — it's speed of connections and cost for access that are important.

— Citizen at Appleton

The Legislature needs to review all the laws which govern telecommunications in Minnesota.

— Citizen at East Grand Forks

Discussion about the role of state government spawned diverse views. Communities more satisfied with their telecommunications access want local control and service from private companies; however, they also believe the state has a role in ensuring that no small community is passed over in the technology revolution. At some listening posts, participants argued that private for-profit companies will not provide service in sparsely populated areas.

Small cities and counties with low tax bases do not have the money to install a technology infrastructure. There is a need for competition and deregulation. While it is generally felt that state intervention is necessary, people did not favor the proposed “Connect Minnesota” plan, which they said could actually make the situation worse. Wireless may ultimately be the salvation of rural areas.

Transportation is important for economic development

Transportation featured prominently during the listening posts. In most regions, participants were quite clear and specific about what improvements are needed in their area. The importance of good transportation to economic development was constantly reiterated. There is a major concern about equity and a feeling that Minnesota regions have not always been treated equally.

More specifically, participants noted that planners must aim for balance and developments should not be funded in one part of the state at the expense of others. When bonding issues are decided, many outstate projects are cut, but rural areas cannot support extensive lobbying. Local telecommunications access and control are seen as crucial and technical assis-

tance was requested from the state. Long-term planning, a long-term funding packet and a statewide regional transportation system like Iowa's were all requested.

Mora citizens suggested improving highways 8 and 23 for better access to the freeway and discussed safety issues on Highway 27. They believe highways 65 and 169 have potential as development corridors and hope that the state will learn from “the fiasco in Cambridge” and listen to the views of local people. Appleton citizens recommended that the Department of Transportation look at the entire 12/22 corridor in a new way. Highway 7 should be the primary east-west connector with four lanes. Participants in Nicollet said that improvements to highways 14, 71 and 169 are urgently needed, as is a four-lane highway between New Ulm and Mankato.

Although residents in Fergus Falls appreciate their excellent freeway access, they wanted people to know that “there is life beyond I-94, on both sides.” The listening post in Hutchinson reinforced frustration over the lack of a four-lane highway to the region from the Twin Cities, while Carlton citizens want another north-south corridor through the northeast region to spur economic development. The maintenance of county roads and bridge bonding were issues in several places.

Air transport is a concern in East Grand Forks and Fergus Falls, where participants said it is too expensive and infrequent. In Hutchinson rail transportation is seen as necessary to unload the highways and someone suggested that light rail should extend all the way to Marshall.

It was clear, however, that road transportation is considered the priority for moving both people and products. People have seen developments along the major corri-

People prefer commuting to moving. ... It is more important to drive to work and to church than ride to the mall.

— Citizen at Nicollet

You know, we're locked inside an iron triangle here in Appleton — it's almost like Kosovo.

— Citizen at Appleton

Affordable housing cannot be created without affordable land.

— Citizen at Nicollet

The key is dollars per hour in jobs.

— Citizen at East Grand Forks

dors and want a share of the action for their regions. A Mora citizen commented that new roads do not need to be ugly if curves and hills are not eliminated and wild flowers are planted.

Local transit systems are a huge asset to communities, with good systems in Faribault and Martin counties. Seniors can remain independent for years longer if there is good transportation, but transit systems also benefit disabled citizens, welfare-to-work participants, and young people who do not have a driver's license.

Health care is a concern in many rural areas

Health care is a critical issue, especially in rural areas with disproportionately high elderly populations. This issue is expected to intensify as the baby boomer generation ages when it will become a problem for the whole state. People said that health care costs have seen annual increases of 28 percent and 36 percent in recent years. While it is essential that health care remains viable in all communities, with immediate access to service, listening post participants recognized that providers are "caught in a box" with reimbursement rates.

The overarching impression of health care is one of insufficient coordination between state and federal governments, which always seem to be fighting each other. People said that more creative ways must be found to deal with the situation. In Hutchinson it was suggested that the University of Minnesota could help by tapping greater Minnesota for internships, or by creating local training facilities and satellite clinics. Participants in Brainerd were particularly concerned about care for the elderly, with empty beds in nursing homes because of a shortage of qualified nurses and staff. A citizen expressed concern for certified nursing assistants, who do a very difficult job for very low wages.

Affordable housing is an economic issue

The need for affordable housing was discussed at most listening posts. Government was asked to look at ordinances that prevent the development of affordable housing. Housing for seniors was seen as a priority in several places to provide more appropriate accommodations for the elderly and make available suitable homes for young families. More incentives are needed to encourage small towns and industry to provide affordable housing for workers and for-profit developers to incorporate affordable housing, which also creates more integrated neighborhoods. In areas of growth, participants were concerned about sprawl. Housing development should be planned so that it is easier to deliver services and open space is retained. Sewer systems need to be developed in unincorporated areas to enhance growth.

In both Mora and Nicollet the escalating cost of land was viewed as a serious problem. Nicollet participants said that land currently costs \$16,000 to \$18,000 per acre, while in the southern part of the East Central region values have increased by 200 percent for marginal development land. Some people would like to reverse

If I were a member of the school board I would be real worried right now.

— Citizen at Appleton

School boards are seeking mergers just to survive and children are paying the price.

— Citizen at Bemidji

There needs to be more of the real world in the school system. ... Students are being prepared for jobs that don't even exist yet.

— Citizen at Bemidji

Higher education is not funded fairly. ... It can't all happen at the metro campus.

— Citizen at Carlton

A surgeon from 50 years ago wouldn't recognize an operating theatre of today, but a teacher from 50 years ago wouldn't notice anything different in the classroom.

— Representative Bill Hilty

the policy of charging higher property taxes on manufactured homes, since it penalizes those who can afford it least.

Recognizing that affordable housing is an economic issue, listening post participants said the higher priority is the growth of industry and higher-paying jobs so that developers will build houses which people can afford to buy.

Quality education systems will stimulate economic growth

Listening post participants were clear that access to a world class education at all levels will stimulate high-quality, high-wage jobs. Education was raised at many listening posts with comments about both K-12 and higher education. Most regions are proud of their K-12 systems, but many are concerned about declining enrollments. Two new schools were built in Ortonville for \$3 million and \$9 million, but in fall 2000, only 27 kindergartners are enrolled in the district.

Declining enrollment affects programs but the main concern is its effect on budgets. This is exacerbated by the reliance on property tax funding where there is a low tax base. Aging populations, in particular, cannot handle the property taxes required to support a high-quality school system.

Small communities need viable local schools. There are huge fiscal disparities between school districts across the state, and there is something fundamentally wrong with a system in which some districts can spend three times as much per capita as those in rural areas. School boards are facing tough facility issues. It was suggested that the state could use the budget surplus to give interest-free loans to help communities pay for their schools. More equitable funding for rural schools is urgently needed as part of the state's drive to push up standards.

Everyone agreed that Minnesota children deserve an education of the highest quality, but there was some disagreement as to what that means. Participants in Fergus Falls had some concerns about the Profile of Learning, while at Bemidji it was emphasized that schools have a responsibility to teach young people social values: to respect other people, put value on property and understand the concepts of democracy.

Most regions want better access to higher education

In most regions participants want to improve local access to higher education so that young people have the option to remain in the area in which they were brought up. Many people think two-year degrees should be more widely accepted and would like to see more technical colleges. A college education is not appropriate for everyone; however, higher education should be made available to

people of all income levels. Tax credits would be one way of doing this.

It was suggested that colleges need to be more oriented to the lifelong learning process, with a more innovative approach to distance learning and evening scheduling. To create a highly skilled work force, universities and colleges need to expand and offer new courses. The bonding bill for the 2000 legislative session has been disappointing in this respect.

An education for the 21st century

At both the K-12 and higher education levels, it is essential that young people receive an education that prepares them effectively for today's job market. People want to see an emphasis on technology and on the natural resources of their own regions. Apprenticeship programs and cooperation between schools and industry were suggested to connect high school graduates with jobs.

Telecommunications access is essential to maintain a high quality education system, at both K-12 and higher education. At the K-12 level, some people would like to see the Technology Access Grants reinstated. In several areas there was concern that schools cannot take advantage of new ways of teaching and learning because the technology infrastructure is not available.

The state should be a key player in the upcoming technology summit for higher education and has a responsibility to think statewide. Funding is a great concern, with perceived inequities between the University of Minnesota and MnSCU, and between the metropolitan area and greater Minnesota.

Communities must respect the environment

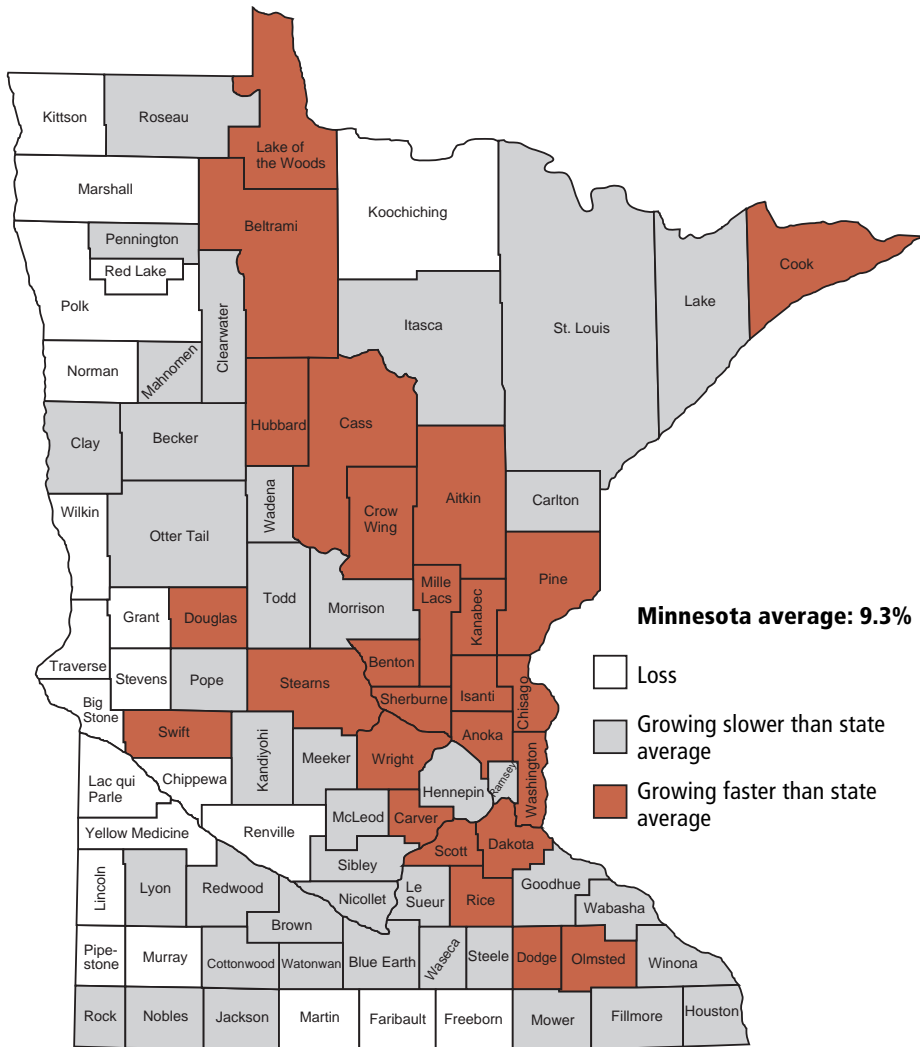
Environmental issues inspired lively discussion at a number of listening posts, especially in areas of recent growth. In all regions participants were conscious of the richness of their natural resources, the importance of protecting them and maintaining clean air and water.

People noted that economic development should not come at the expense of land use and infrastructure planning, and many believe in structured growth and wise management of the environmental impact. Water and sewerage issues were raised in several places. In Hutchinson there is significant concern about pollution of the Crow River and the amount of industry between the region and the Twin Cities.

Education about the environment is essential, both in schools and in communities. Communities also need to recognize the conflict between keeping lakes and rivers

Population growth rates are highest in metropolitan and North Central counties

Percent change from 1990 to 1998



Source: State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Fifteen years ago if a county board mentioned a land use ordinance, members would get hung. It's a healthy thing now.

— Citizen at Bemidji

People will have to accept they just don't need 10 acres.

— Citizen at Fergus Falls

Why spray insecticides when you can plant? I live in the environment, yet people tell me I have to change my priorities.

— Citizen at Nicollet

We need to plan for open space — a little space for harmony, light and balance.

— Citizen at Mora

clean and the importance of farming as a livelihood. Newcomers to rural areas often like living in the country, but don't always like the things that go with it.

Effective land use requires planning

Many participants supported comprehensive land use planning. Sprawl is a concern and zoning was favored in most places. People emphasized the importance of local planning and cooperation. There should be local regulatory control on land use, but planning should be regional. The state should act as a catalyst, providing guidelines, projections and funding, with greater cooperation between state agencies and citizens. Land characteristics vary across the state, so it can be difficult to enforce mandates. There was concern, however, that land use is dictated not by government but by business.

Bemidji participants would like access to some state lands. Mora citizens expressed appreciation for the grants available to

purchase development land and commented that the state could help facilitate that program.

In Fergus Falls many citizens believe that over-regulation is a problem, exacerbated by a belief that the Pollution Control Agency does not understand how farmers operate. Some regulations do not make sense, and as a result, dairy farmers are pulling out of the region, participants reported. They wondered how some areas, like Thief River Falls, have successfully sustained large-scale dairy operations.

Grant allocation should be fairer

People value Minnesota Planning's Community-Based Planning grants and other grants available to local communities, but clearly there are many frustrations with the grant application process in general. Many regions do not have the personnel and resources to keep preparing and submitting multiple grant applications. Participants said that policies and criteria set in St. Paul do not always meet the needs of rural Minnesota. There should be more flexibility and grants with performance goals, not restrictive guidelines, were requested. State government needs to understand that different areas have different needs, and it was suggested that Regional Development Commissions be given a larger role.

A key issue raised several times, but very vocally in Appleton, was that of fund-matching. Many rural communities simply do not have the capacity to match funding, whether it is for tourism, technology or bridge bonding. The system is unfair because it creates a situation in which rich areas get more and poor areas get less, reported citizens. Carlton participants expressed frustration about rejected grant

applications even when matching funding was available.

Partnership between all levels of government is essential

The key to good planning is partnership between the different levels of government. More statewide planning is needed, however, the state needs to maximize local participation. Carlton citizens expressed the fear that the state wants to do the planning for the local area.

A perceived lack of cooperation from state agencies was also an issue. The Pollution Control Agency, and the departments of Transportation and Trade and Economic Development were most often mentioned by listening post participants. It was suggested that staff from these agencies need to connect more with communities and should live in the area to fully understand its needs. State government could decentralize more and establish offices throughout greater Minnesota.

State agencies do not always cooperate with each other and are divided on some issues, said participants. Mora citizens believe that transportation problems are exacerbated because the area is administratively part of three different districts.

People in many regions were conscious of the irony of the phrase "greater Minnesota" to describe the development regions. In different ways and in different contexts, they feel they are in fact "lesser Minnesota." Many participants believe that Twin Cities residents, whether they are policy-makers, business people or citizens, have little understanding of the problems facing rural parts of the state or of the potential of many small communities.

VOICES AND VIEWS

Regional Perspectives

We are a state. Let's plan as a state, with a strong local voice. We need to feel part of the bigger family called the state.

— Citizen at Carlton

People in the Twin Cities are very metro-oriented. They need to understand they are part of the state, not the state itself.

— Citizen at Marshall

The population of the state is split 50/50 between the metro area and rural Minnesota, and the budget should reflect that.

— John Swift, Commissioner,
Iron Range Resources &
Rehabilitation Board

Help locals be in charge of the planning process. They will do that if the empowerment is there.

— Citizen at Carlton

When you're sending dollars to rural Minnesota, don't ask us to match them. This matching process works against us. St. Cloud can match them, we can't.

— Citizen at Appleton

It took us three years and nine permits from different agencies to complete a water project.

— Citizen at Hutchinson

Between December 4, 1999 and April 27, 2000, Minnesota Planning sponsored 10 listening posts around the state, presented chronologically in this report. These listening posts were cosponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture – Rural Development and hosted by Regional Development Commissions. Attendance varied from 30 to 90 participants at each session, ultimately involving about 700 public officials and citizens. State legislators were invited and were present at East Grand Forks, Marshall, Mora, Hutchinson, Nicollet and Carlton. Representatives from the departments of Administration, Agriculture, Commerce, Children, Families and Learning, Health, Natural Resources, Transportation, Trade and Economic Development, and the Pollution Control Agency variously attended many of the meetings.

Supporting material — including graphs and maps for each region, showing economic and demographic trends — were prepared by the State Demographic Center and the Land Management Information Center at Minnesota Planning. Since the listening posts took place, new demographic and economic data have been collected. The graphs in this report have been updated to reflect the most current information available.

After brief presentations, participants at listening posts were asked to identify issues and share ideas for building their region's future. First, in small groups, they were asked to think of a 10-year-old child they knew, and to list the most important things they want for that child living in the region in 2020. From the feedback sessions, three to five issues were identified as being priorities in the region. These issues formed the basis of more in-depth discussion. Detailed notes were taken and documents prepared and sent to participants. Information has already been passed on to other state agencies and will be used in strategic and budget planning for the state.

Region 1, Northwest

The problems of areas like the Northwest need media attention and Governor Ventura has a role to play as an advocate for the regions. Giving back the budget surplus may be popular, but the state needs to put money into things like state parks and nursing homes.

— Representative Jim Tunheim

The Internet is key to the development of the region, and health care is the major issue.

— Representative Bernie Lieder

Agriculture is not just about the way we produce food, it is part of our rural life. The whole agricultural economy is tied to what we have, land and water.

— Representative Rod Skoe

We need to be encouraging and inviting. We need to welcome people of other cultures and races. We have infrastructures. We have space; housing is more affordable; we have high value systems.

— Citizen at East Grand Forks

The Northwest region is still recovering from the impact of the Red River flood of 1997. Despite this, people are generally positive and forward-looking. Throughout the 1990s the population has stabilized, but it is aging. In Red Lake a precipitous decline in the school-age population is anticipated. The Red River flood had no major effect on population, except in the immediate East Grand Forks area, and although it is too early to say how many people will move back, the general trend is for people to rebuild after a disaster.

Listening Post at East Grand Forks — December 4, 1999

Attendance 80, including Representatives Jim Tunheim, Bernie Lieder, Rod Skoe

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Economy
- Technology
- Quality of life

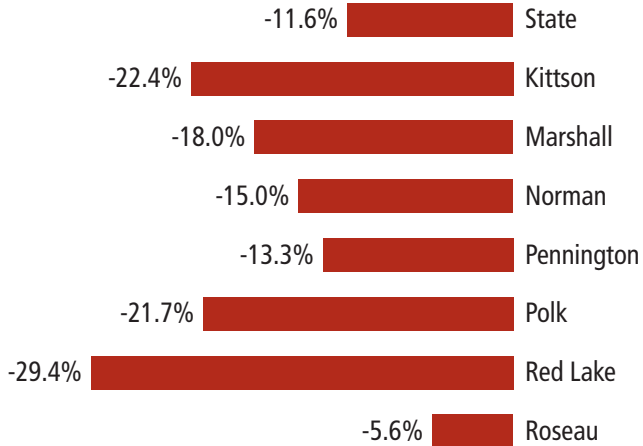
KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- Change the policy for grant allocation: if all requirements are met, an area will qualify for a grant automatically.
- Decentralize state government and give the Regional Development Commission a greater role.
- Amend rules and laws that hinder the region economically: "Why not have a regional enterprise zone for livestock in northwestern Minnesota?"
- There are telecommunication lines to public buildings, but not private ones and where they are available they are phenomenally expensive.
- Wireless was suggested: "It costs a zillion dollars to get cable." An Internet cooperative might work, and the state should work with the rural phone cooperatives that do exist. The legislature needs to review the laws that govern telecommunications in Minnesota.
- Good, fast telecommunications are essential to attract industry to the area. The state needs to work with companies to ascertain their needs and to provide solutions.
- Transportation is important for economic development. Air transportation is too expensive; industry needs good highways to reach out-of-state markets.
- Smaller school systems are in trouble. Incentives, pilot systems and alternative methods of operating schools were all suggested.
- A commitment of state funds, tax credits, industry and jobs which pay enough are all needed to create affordable housing.
- Many aspects of medical care, access to health insurance and Medicaid, home health plans and the cost of medicine, are all concerns.

NORTHWEST REGION

Except in Roseau County, school-age population is projected to decline dramatically

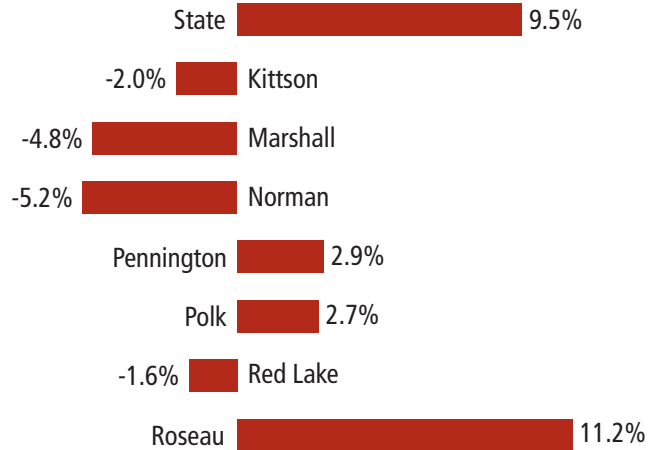
Percent change in number of children age 5 to 17 from 2000 to 2010



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Projected change in working-age population varies across counties

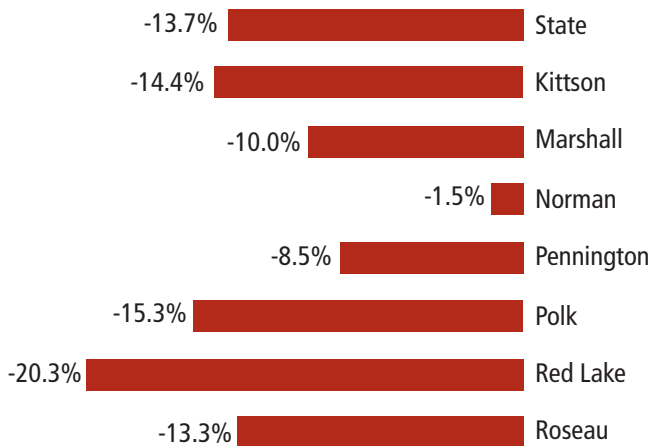
Percent change in number of people age 16 to 64 from 2000 to 2010



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

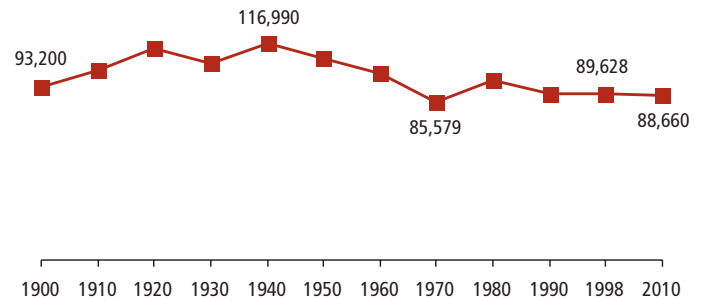
Decline in farms echoes a statewide trend

Percent change in full-time farms from 1992 to 1997



Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

After a sharp decline from 1940 to 1970, population has stabilized



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau counts and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region 8, Southwest

Community-based planning has to happen if the regions are to survive. Rural Minnesota can no longer exist on farming, so creating a technology infrastructure and attracting business are crucial, with the state and local communities working together. "We need to get together and work together, otherwise we'll fall apart."

— Senator Jim Vickerman

The Twin Cities have grown because of investment from the state. It is now important to concentrate on rural Minnesota, creating the technology and transportation infrastructure necessary to attract industry and higher paying jobs.

— Representative Ted Winter

After the upcoming census, even if everybody is counted, southwestern Minnesota will lose one seat in the Legislature. It is business, not government that creates jobs, and the region needs to be able to guarantee a good worker climate.

— Representative Marty Seifert

The Twin Cities are growing while the population in rural areas is shrinking. It is not what either area wants. Both trends need to be reversed and the answer lies in economic development and the diversification of the economy. ... Technology is a politically sensitive area, but the aims are to create equity among the regions and to help rural Minnesota become competitive. Part of the solution lies in partnerships with local service providers.

— Dean Barkley

This administration is about change. It needs to look at what needs to be done and provide incentives.

— Citizen at Marshall

The 1980s were a difficult time for the Southwest, with a poor economy having an adverse effect on population. The area has enjoyed something of a "renaissance" in the 1990s, largely due to the spirit of the people. The population has stabilized and future growth will depend on in-migration as the ethnic mix of the population is increasing. The school-age population is declining, in line with statewide trends.

Listening Post at Marshall — January 13, 2000

Attendance 85, including Senators Jim Vickerman and Arlene Lesewski; Representatives Ted Winter, Marty Seifert, Richard Mulder and Elaine Harder

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Demographic changes
- Economy
- Infrastructure
- Community life

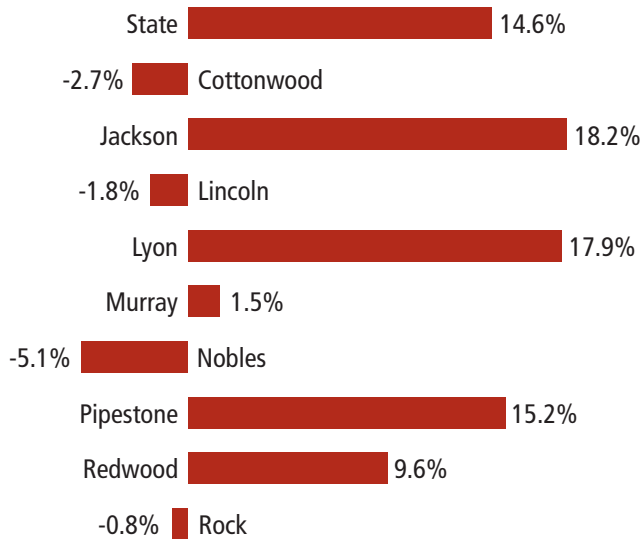
KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- The loss of young, well-educated people is a major concern.
- Continued investment is needed in value-added cooperatives. The community is dependent on agriculture and this is not going to change.
- Housing is an economic issue. Affordable housing is under-funded, but only higher wages will really solve the problem.
- Lack of water is a concern and greater cooperation is needed with state agencies, especially the Department of Natural Resources and the Pollution Control Agency, with more flexibility in the rules and compromise on both sides.
- Transportation is a key issue in attracting industry. Continued support for bridge bonding is needed from the state.
- The region has good technology access, but the industry should be de-regulated to increase competition.
- There should be a rural factor in education funding. Schools are consolidating all the time, with adverse effects on the infrastructure.
- Health care is a major concern — cost shifting, over-regulation, the rising cost of health care, nursing home costs and access, availability of hospital beds and the income level for medical aid were issues raised.
- Cooperation between areas was seen as important since multi-unit proposals are more successful in grant applications.
- The region lacks a sense of identity, unlike the Iron Range, but has a lot to offer and would like to develop its tourist potential. The state has a part to play, displaying loyalty and raising awareness.

SOUTHWEST REGION

Growth in employment varies dramatically among Southwest counties

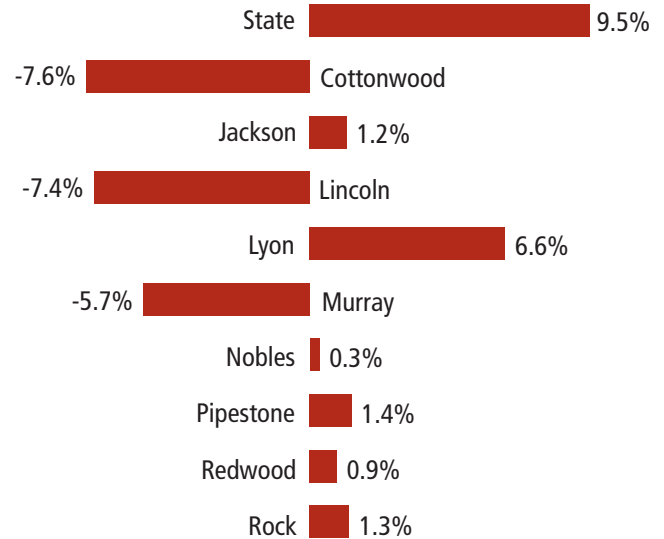
Percent change in number of people employed from 1990 to 1998



Source: Minnesota Department of Economic Security

Change in working-age population will vary across counties

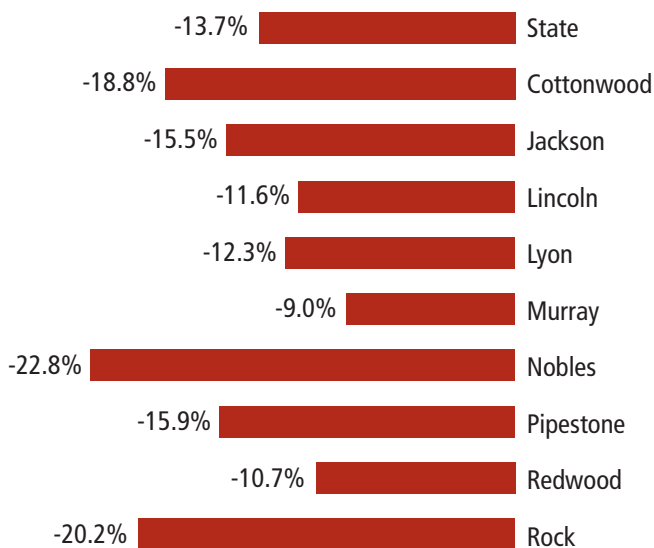
Percent change in number of people age 16 to 64 from 2000 to 2010



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

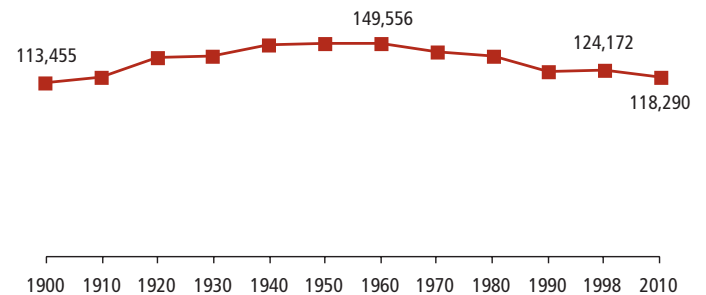
All counties experienced a loss in farming

Percent change in full-time farms from 1992 to 1997



Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

Population has decreased since 1960



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau counts and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region 7E, East Central

The preservation of open spaces is also preserving the food supply.

— Citizen at Mora

We're enthusiastic about communities working together and I've been pleased to hear these ideas expressed in other regions. It is important for regions to stop competing among themselves. ... It would be good to see Regional Development Commissions playing a larger role, working as partners with state government to help their regions prosper.

— Dean Barkley

Property owners need to preserve the natural resources. Iowa is currently offering \$40 per acre for the Conservation Reserve Program; Minnesota offers \$20. Developers here are offering \$1,000 an acre, and the first houses are going up.

— Citizen at Mora

The key to higher wages is increased productivity, which is why technology is so important. In this region the jobs tend to have poor technology and lower wages. Planning and funding assistance are needed from the state.

— Citizen at Mora

The population of the East Central region is rising, a trend that is expected to continue. The school-age population is projected to fall, in line with the statewide trend, although this decline will be less than in other parts of the state. Median household income in all counties has risen faster than the statewide average, and there has been a strong rise in property values, particularly in Chisago County.

Listening Post at Mora — January 24, 2000

Attendance 60, including Senator Twyla Ring, Representatives Sondra Erickson, Bill Hilty and Jim Rostberg.

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Transportation
- Telecommunications
- Job creation
- Land use

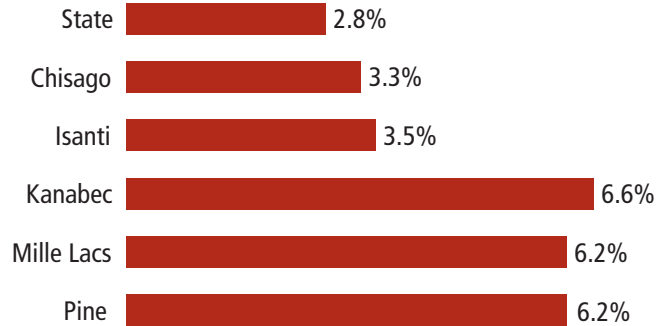
KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- External support is needed for the upkeep of the region's many county roads. This would be a good use for the budget surplus.
- The development of fiber optics is connected to the development of roads. All communities need affordable access, and many communities are afraid they will be left behind.
- The state could look at regulatory issues and also try to coordinate telecommunication systems.
- The region needs a high profile publicity campaign to recruit new companies and new residents and to encourage people to telecommute from this area to the Twin Cities.
- Job creation requires investment in technology and education, including retraining, with planning and funding assistance coming from the state.
- Regional planning should take a holistic approach, with communities working as part of a team, each developing different roles.
- Local municipal zoning is crucial to plan for open space. It should be left to local government, but some communities in the region have no zoning policies.
- Regional planning should include local regulatory control on land use.
- The state should be a major player in helping facilitate the purchase of development land; grants from the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources are appreciated.
- The water system has to be upgraded constantly, at great cost to local taxpayers. There are concerns about pollution from local scrap yards which service the Twin Cities, and developers who abuse state regulations on resettlement ponds by staying just below the thresholds for creating them.

EAST CENTRAL REGION

Unemployment is highest in northern part of the region

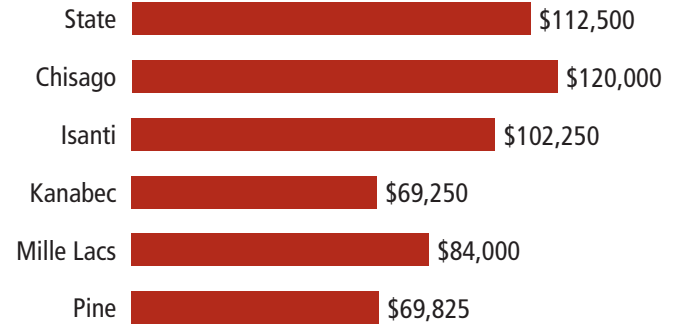
Unemployment rate in 1999



Source: Minnesota Department of Economic Security

Housing prices in Chisago County top state average

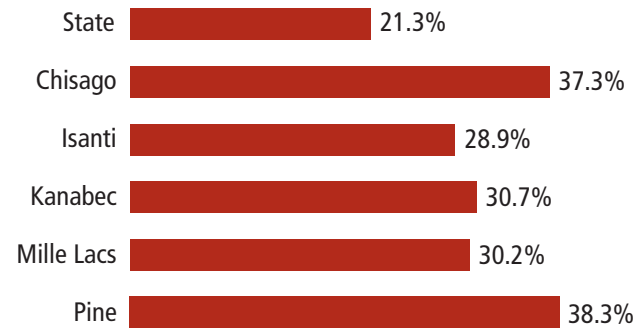
Median house prices in 1998–99



Sources: Minnesota Planning and Minnesota Department of Revenue

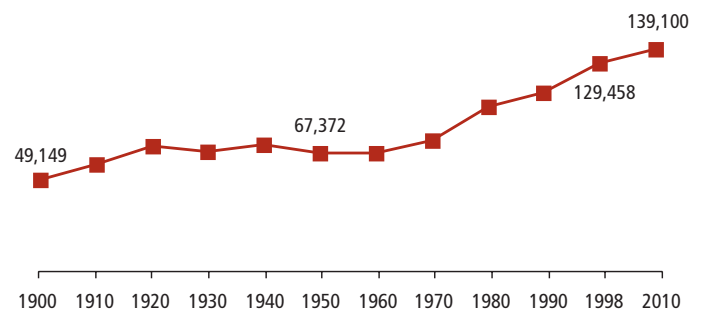
Median household income rose throughout region

Income growth from 1990 to 1995



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, model-based estimates

Population has been increasing rapidly since 1970



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau counts and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region 6E, Mid-Minnesota

Out here we have the Yellowstone Trail 212. We'll have to go back to covered wagons if we don't put it back together soon.

— Citizen at Hutchinson

Government assistance is needed to explore ways to diversify. We need to identify and take advantage of natural and human resources in order to create a viable rural Minnesota. ... The ideas will come from the local people.

— Representative Bob Ness

One telephone system with high speed Internet access has got to be a priority.

— Representative Bob Ness

There is an aggressive state transportation plan. We know it is critical for regions to get their goods to market, and this plan will move up projects that have been waiting. Transportation is a funding priority. There will need to be a balance between the regions and the cities.

— Dean Barkley

The population of the Mid-Minnesota region is growing steadily, and this growth pattern has been consistent since 1910. It is a transition area, with the northeast sector growing rapidly, while the southwest is in decline. The working-age population is projected to increase in all counties except Renville, and the school-age population will decrease by less than the statewide average. The labor market is tight, as it is throughout the state, and the ethnic minority population has been increasing, particularly in Kandiyohi County.

Listening Post at Hutchinson — January 26, 2000

Attendance 40, including Representative Bob Ness

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Transportation
- Environment
- Preserving agriculture
- Education
- Medical care
- Technology

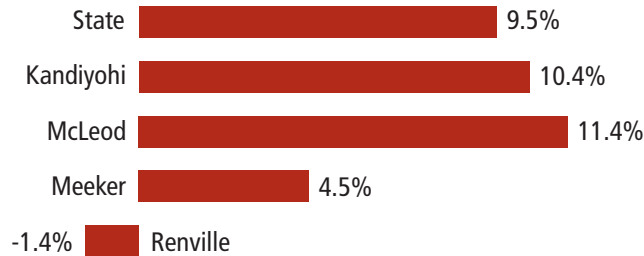
KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- Minnesota regions have not always been treated equally with regard to transportation.
- Water and sewerage are significant problems in the region's glacial plain, leading to problems of inflow and infiltration.
- The density of industry between the region and the Twin Cities is causing pollution of the Crow River.
- Research funding could help solve some of the region's problems, instead of constant attempts at interim solutions.
- Farmers are reluctant to put land into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program because of the long-term commitment.
- The older population is growing rapidly. The area is running short of funds for transportation and nutrition programs.
- Health care costs are a real problem and reimbursement rates are unfair.
- The region has spent \$10,000 writing three years of grant applications and there was a suggestion that grant allocation should be automatic.
- There were concerns about tax levy limits; setting them at 2.5 percent hampers growth.
- Overall the region has good Internet access but it costs 16 times as much as it does in Minneapolis. The state should mandate minimum requirements for each community; that way, private companies could not bypass them because they are not profitable.

MID-MINNESOTA REGION

Working-age population forecast is mixed

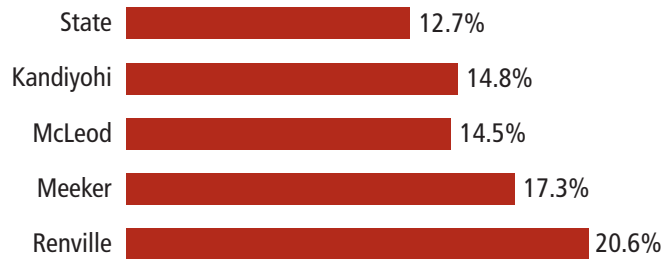
Percent change in number of people age 16 to 64 from 2000 to 2010



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Older population in Renville County highest in region

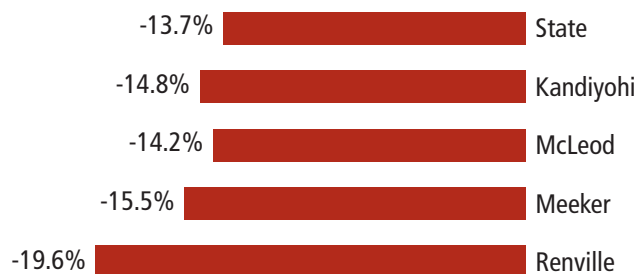
Percent of people age 65 and over in 2000



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region has seen loss of farms

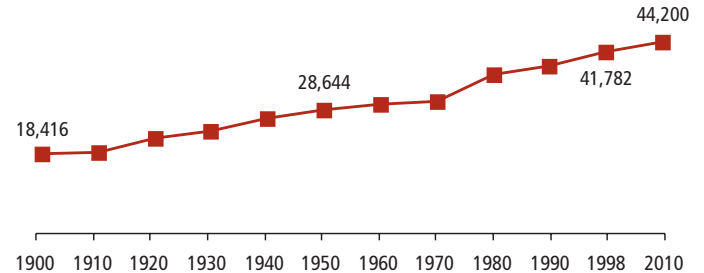
Percent change in number of full-time farms from 1992 to 1997



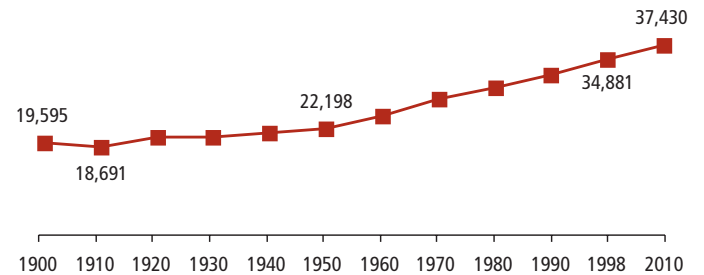
Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

Disparate trends characterize county populations

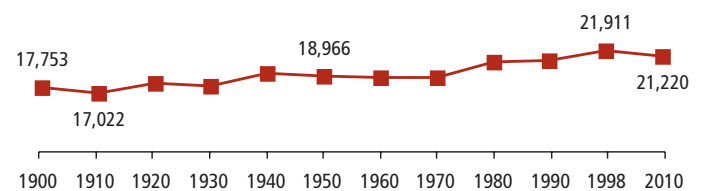
Kandiyohi County



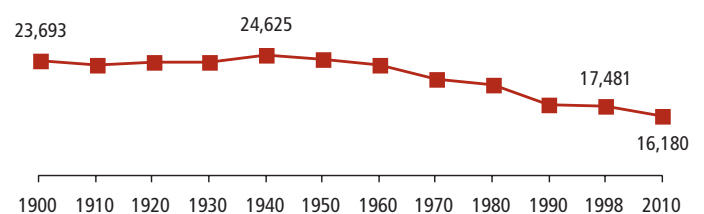
McLeod County



Meeker County



Renville County



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau counts and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region 5, North Central

The state should work on the technology infrastructure right now, and it should go down 1-94 and across the state.

— Citizen at Brainerd

This administration wants to be judged on what the state looks like in 20 years time but in order for state government to help, it needs a sense of local priorities.

— Jack Uldrich, Deputy Director of Minnesota Planning

An important role of U.S. Department of Agriculture – Rural Development is to help small businesses, particularly in under-served communities, prepare business plans so that they can acquire funding.

— Gary deCramer, State Director of Rural Development, U.S.D.A.

There is a quality of life in the area, which is blessed with lakes, rivers and woods. There is also a high value system. People want to be able to stay in the area.

— Citizen at Brainerd

Overall North Central is a region of population growth, but internally there are huge differences from one county to another. The population is also becoming more racially diverse. This is expected to be the peak year for school enrollments, while the projected increase in population over age 65 is higher than average in Cass and Crow Wing counties.

Listening Post at Brainerd — January 27, 2000

Attendance 40

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Job creation
- Health care
- Community life

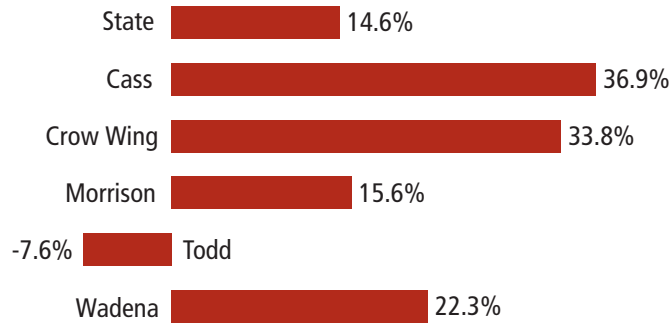
KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- Because of the technology infrastructure, job growth is expected to be intense in parts of the region.
- High-speed technology access is necessary for business expansion, but is not necessarily needed right to people's homes. The state should be working on that connection.
- People need to consider what the jobs of the future are going to be, what skills will be needed, and work to establish partnerships with colleges so that people can be trained without having to move away.
- Ways must be sought to process products locally, and small local businesses need tax incentives.
- Nursing homes — especially staffing shortages and reimbursement rates — and lack of coordination on health care between state and federal governments are areas of concern.
- The region has many cities 15 to 20 miles apart, all addressing the same issues. Much more can be achieved when communities work together.
- A six-county plan to turn a hospital into a jail, which had support from all parties, was excluded from the Governor's bonding bill.
- Too much has to be accomplished from a tax levy capped at unrealistic levels, giving little real local control.
- The Department of Natural Resources has wonderful local programs, but should do more public relations about what the programs can do.
- Business is driving environmental issues, and people want to keep the area beautiful.
- The area is growing very rapidly which is desirable, but it is time to pause and take a breath. Planned economic growth is essential.

NORTH CENTRAL REGION

Cass and Crow Wing counties have seen a dramatic increase in employment

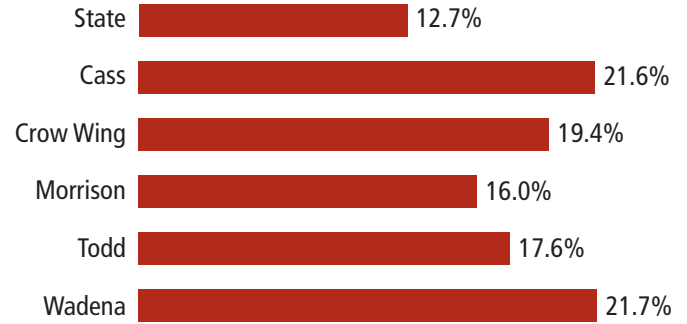
Percent change in number of people employed from 1990 to 1998



Source: Minnesota Department of Economic Security

High proportion of older residents live throughout the region

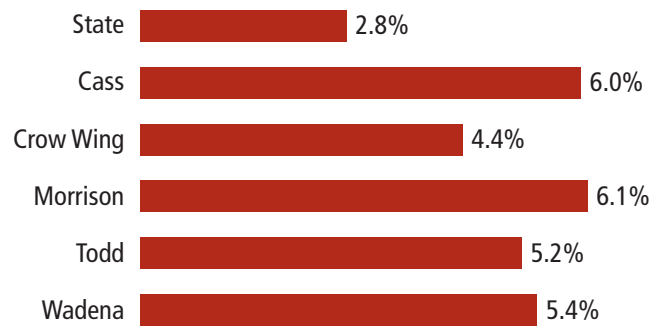
Percent of people age 65 and over in 2000



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

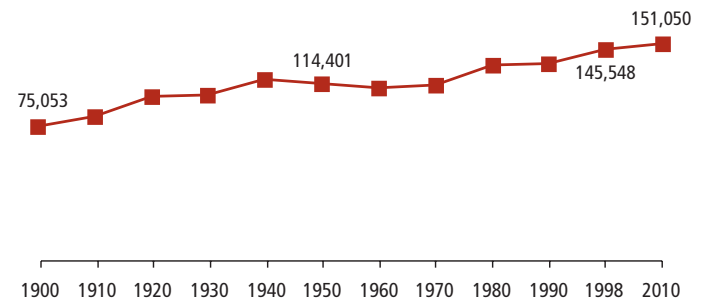
Unemployment rate is almost twice the state average

Unemployment rate in 1999



Source: Minnesota Department of Economic Security

Population has been growing slowly since 1900



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau counts and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region 2, Headwaters

When I first moved back to this area I was against land use planning. Now that I see what is happening, I've changed my mind.

— Citizen at Bemidji

The Red Lake community is currently experiencing moderate economic growth, but high population growth. People are coming home and want to stay, but cannot do so without jobs. The listening post, together with two opportunities for meetings with the Governor, are much appreciated. "I offer my hand in partnership to state government to help improve life for the Native American people."

— Bobby Whitefeather

Independent loggers spend their paychecks right here.

— Citizen at Bemidji

Education, from pre-school to grad school, should concentrate on the 3Rs and technology, with a focus on the applied fields related to the area — forestry, for example.

— Citizen at Bemidji

The Headwaters region is an area of growing population, with a strong increase in Beltrami, the most populous county. The percentage of people over age 65 is growing faster than the statewide average in all counties. The region's population is becoming more racially diverse. Poverty rates are high, with a 10.3 percent unemployment rate in Clearwater County. Although median incomes are lower than in other parts of the state, they are rising faster than statewide trends.

Listening Post at Bemidji — February 1, 2000

Attendance 80

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Education
- Jobs and training
- Land use

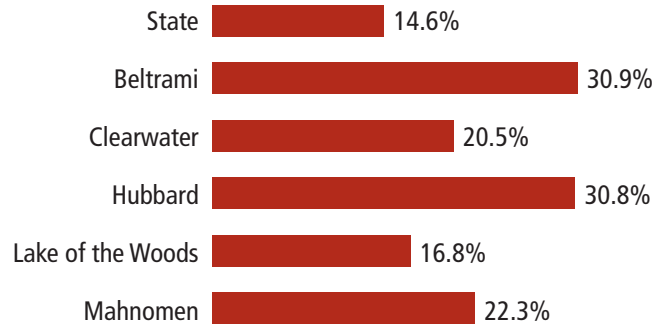
KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- Young people must be encouraged to stay in the area. This requires job opportunities, technology, training, arts activities, community services and day care.
- More technical schools and colleges are needed, with greater emphasis on the area's natural resources.
- School budgets in small communities and the effects of consolidation are concerns.
- The information highway is crucial to economic development. The area has capacity but it is not as fast as the metropolitan area. This should be developed to enable people to work at home.
- If a community can provide a well-trained work force, the jobs will come. Quality workers can be hard to find; too many people have a limited work ethic and poor communication skills.
- Land use management is crucial at a time of growth. There is 30 percent growth each year with evidence of sprawl in small communities.
- Waste water is a key issue, but the rivers, lakes and streams have to be protected. The region has an abundance of natural resources and they have to be constantly reassessed.
- If populations of different communities came together so that townships and cities could consolidate, it would be possible to maintain a more effective infrastructure.
- Communities should balance out facilities, bearing in mind there is a declining tax base.
- Land use is dictated, not by government, but by business, whose philosophy is "get big or get out." The logging industry is a good example of this.
- People would like to see a return to sustainable local industry.
- Tourism is seen as a mixed blessing: "The Department of Natural Resources has a lot to learn about how tourism affects logging."

HEADWATERS REGION

Employment growth is twice state average in Beltrami and Hubbard counties

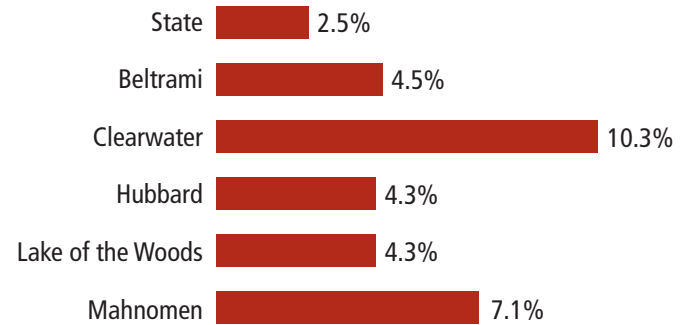
Percent change in number of people employed from 1990 to 1998



Source: Minnesota Department of Economic Security

Unemployment rate in Clearwater County is four times the statewide average

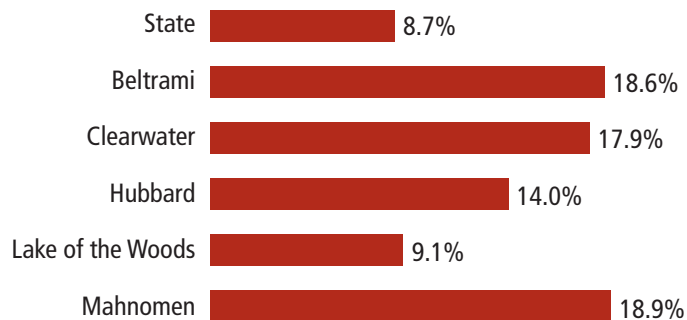
Unemployment rate in 1999



Source: Minnesota Department of Economic Security

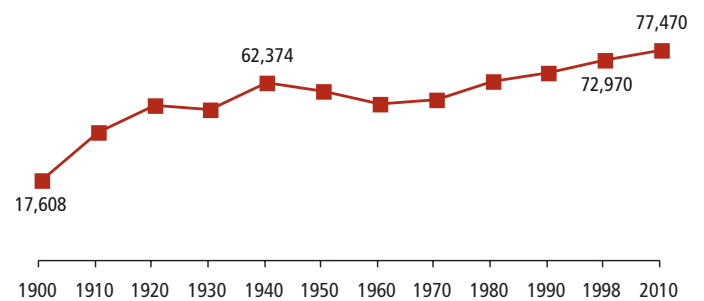
Estimated poverty rates are high throughout region

Percent of people living in poverty in 1995



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, model-based estimates

Population has been rising steadily since 1970



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region 6W, Upper Minnesota Valley

In order to get businesses to move out of the Twin Cities into greater Minnesota, we've got to compete with South Dakota. If we want business to move to this side of the border, we need to match the incentives that South Dakota offers.

— Citizen at Appleton

The state needs to have a spirit of cooperation with greater Minnesota — places like Appleton are never mentioned — it's always the Willmars and Rochesters. State government needs to look at the rest of the state and think about the needs of towns of all sizes.

— Citizen at Appleton

Identify up to 500 metropolitan area businesses that are willing to relocate to greater Minnesota and create state-funded incentives for companies that do move, so they can offer living wages.

— Citizen at Appleton

I have fought for roads in this region for 37 years and it still hasn't changed the dots on the MnDOT maps.

— Citizen at Appleton

Let's face it — in this region we've hit rock bottom. We know we have to work together to succeed. But we need help. Now we're so far down, we almost can't get back to a better level.

— Citizen at Appleton

The Upper Minnesota Valley's population is now stable, having declined from 1940 to 1990. Although the state's working-age population is expected to grow by about 10 percent in the next 10 years, it is declining in the region, except in Swift County, home of Prairie Correctional Facility in Appleton. The region's median income is below the state average, but incomes are growing more quickly than they are elsewhere in the state. An aging population has stopped active farming — dividends, interest and rent are largely responsible for the rapid income growth.

Listening Post at Appleton — February 21, 2000

Attendance 55

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Technology
- Jobs and wages
- Transportation
- Education
- State policies

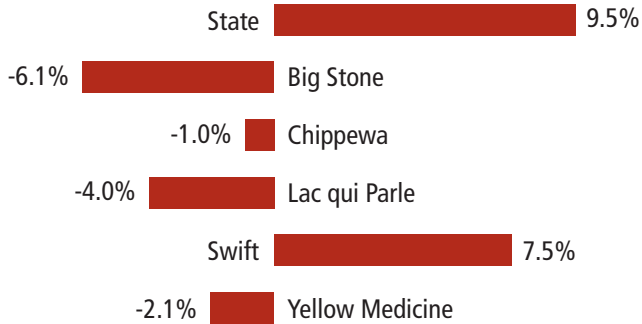
KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- Equal access to technology is needed throughout the region. Frontier has a good cable system which only serves Dawson. There are three T1 lines in Ortonville, but they are not accessible to the public.
- Some people believe the Governor's telecommunications plan is actually a setback to the region; however, the state should take a larger role in making technology available to citizens. Help was requested to leverage the options that exist already.
- The conditions for grants are too specific and restrictive.
- More jobs that pay living wages are needed with greater cooperation on local and state development options and business recruitment. Department of Trade and Economic Development staff need to be available to help with these issues and should advocate for businesses struggling to find workers to relocate to regions such as this. Department staff need to know the regions they serve.
- Use tourism as an option for economic development. A grant application with broad-based community support was rejected by the Department of Trade and Economic Development.
- Transportation and roads need to be improved to help the region economically.
- Under the current bridge bonding regulations calling for matching funds, the average township will not be able to support anything at all.
- The state needs to address issues relating to an aging population in rural Minnesota.
- Rural communities have trouble connecting with state agencies for assistance.

UPPER MINNESOTA VALLEY REGION

Working-age population will decline in most of the Upper Minnesota Valley

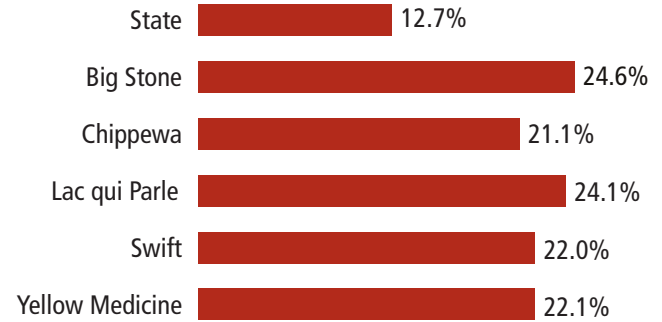
Percent change in number of people age 16 to 64 from 2000 to 2010



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Population of region is much older than the state as a whole

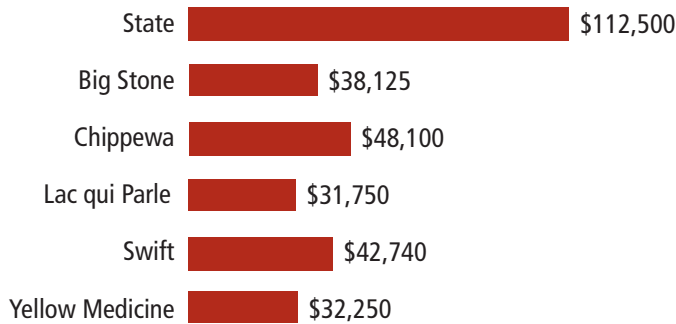
Percent of people age 65 and over in 2000



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

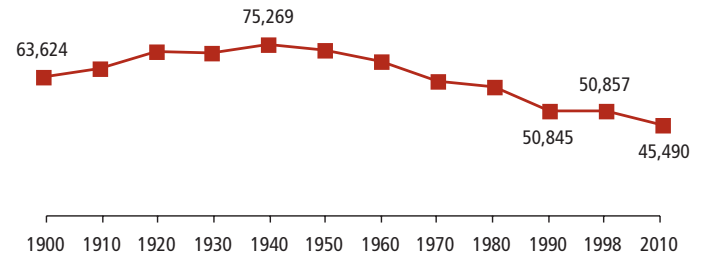
Homes cost less than half the state average

Median house values in 1998–99



Sources: Minnesota Planning and Minnesota Department of Revenue

Population has declined since 1940



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region 4, West Central Initiative

We need to be positive about what does exist in the region.

— Citizen at Fergus Falls

You put horses in a pasture and you're in trouble. They say we're polluting the rivers. ... You can smell the feedlot but you can't smell the field, but fields are being contaminated with chemicals all the time. There is not a lot of common sense to some of the regulations.

— Citizen at Fergus Falls

People need to be educated about country living. Only four out of a graduating class of 90 are farm kids.

— Citizen at Fergus Falls

In Clay County there was a public meeting about a proposed chicken farm. Feelings ran so high that the two sides came to blows. After that, though, they did talk to each other and the matter was resolved. But the next time 'chicken farms' was on the agenda, it was standing room only!

— Citizen at Fergus Falls

Overall, the West Central region is gaining population, but there are huge differences across the nine counties. Between Fergus Falls and Moorhead is the prairie growth area, but population in the eastern part of the region has not grown. Towards the Dakotas there has been long-term population loss and a rapid aging of the population. This is similar to the area directly south, where 25 percent of the population is over age 65.

Listening Post at Fergus Falls — March 21, 2000

Attendance 30

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- A clean safe environment
- Education
- Infrastructure
- Jobs

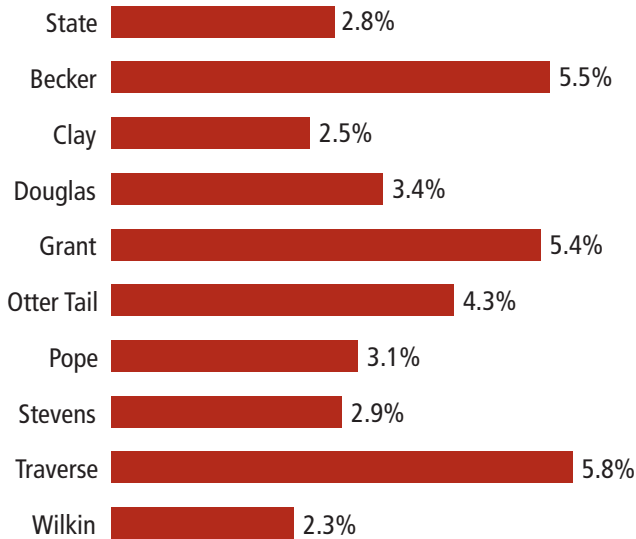
KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- Communities need to work together, and green spaces must be planned for. This can be difficult where counties don't have zoning. Feedlots would be a less contentious issue if the communities that wanted them could have them.
- Sprawl is not just an urban issue.
- Over-regulation is a problem, and the Pollution Control Agency does not understand how farmers operate. Other countries subsidize agriculture much more heavily.
- People recognize the conflict between keeping lakes and rivers clean and the need for people to make a livelihood from farming.
- Education funding is a serious problem in areas with declining enrollment. In counties with agriculture-based economies, property taxes can't be raised to support education.
- More money should be spent on Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and less on the University of Minnesota.
- Affordable, high-speed access to technology is necessary throughout the region. Local businesses are fleeing because appropriate access is not available and they cannot compete in a global economy.
- Education cannot take advantage of new ways of teaching and learning because the technology infrastructure is not available in parts of the region.
- Work-force development should start in schools, but teachers need to be trained differently and unions have made this difficult.
- Incumbent worker training is also important. Larger companies do this well, but smaller businesses don't have the resources. Partnerships with community technical colleges were suggested.

WEST CENTRAL REGION

Unemployment rates vary widely in West Central Minnesota counties

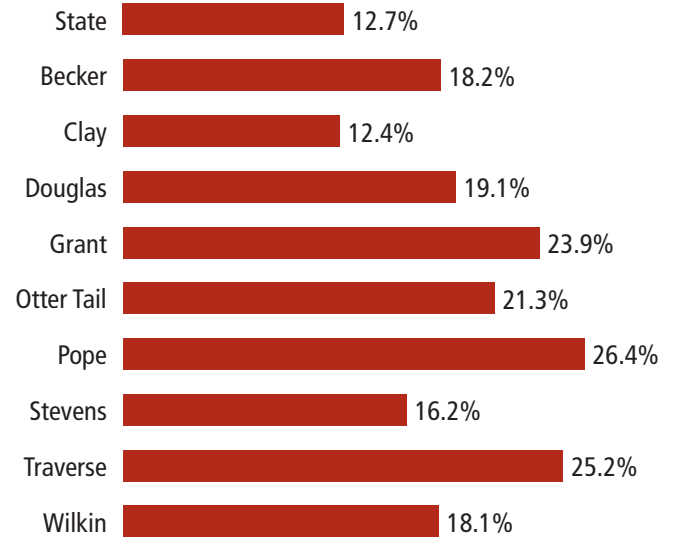
Unemployment rate in 1999



Source: Minnesota Department of Economic Security

Proportion of older population is high

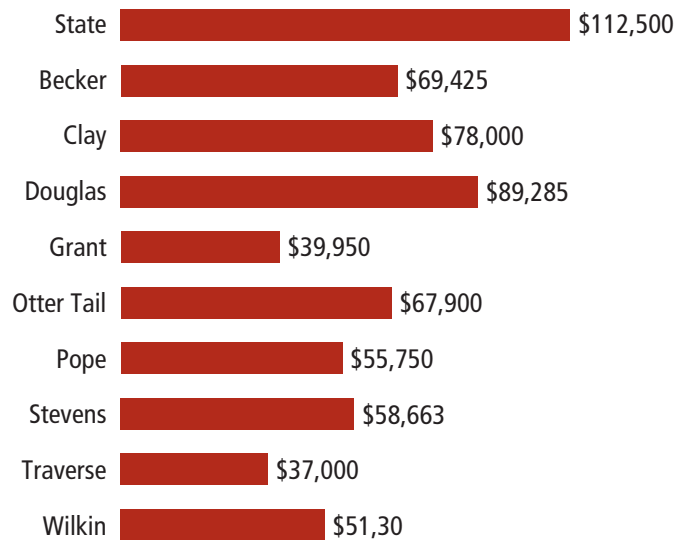
Percent of people age 65 and over in 2000



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

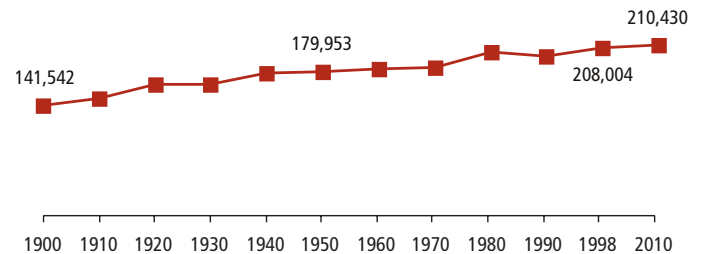
Housing prices range widely throughout the region

Median house prices in 1998–99



Sources: Minnesota Planning and Minnesota Department of Revenue

Population has been slowly rising since 1900



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau counts and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region 9, South Central

Counties must work together with communities. Everyone is interrelated and each community needs to find the bridge that links it to others. ...Team does not have an I in it.

— Citizen at Nicollet

The focus must be to knock down the barriers to growth put up by state and federal governments. Rural communities need viable plans for economic growth. Technology deregulation will benefit all of Minnesota. A good telecommunications system is a catalyst for many other things, but it is very fast changing, and the challenge for the legislature is that it has to rewrite statutes going back to 1914.

— Representative Bob Gunther

The answers to rural Minnesota's problems lie in the minds, thoughts, activity and energy of the region itself. There is good interaction among state agencies and a growing recognition that "agriculture is not only rural and rural is not only agriculture."

— Commissioner Gene Hugoson,
Department of Agriculture

The South Central region is a heterogeneous area, with a large amount of growth coming from the metro area, which continues to move outward. School district maps show a changing racial and ethnic mix. The school-age population in all nine counties of the region is expected to decline over the next decade, in some counties by more than twice the statewide average.

Listening Post at Nicollet — March 25, 2000

Attendance 70, including Senator Don Ziegler; Representatives Julie Storm, John Dorn, Bob Gunther.

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Technology
- Agriculture
- Affordable housing
- Job creation

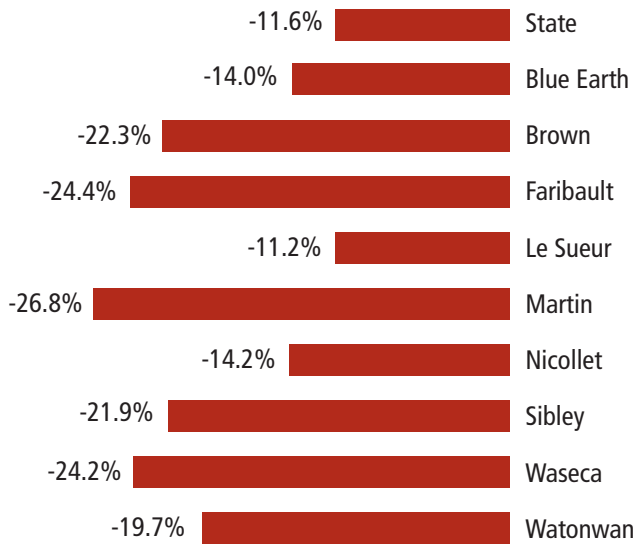
KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- The Minnesota Department of Administration's planning guide to help communities build a technology infrastructure is helpful but not enough. There should be tax incentives for companies or cities that provide access or training.
- Technology access is directly linked to jobs, but some small communities with a low tax base do not have installation resources.
- People from the region who have moved to the Twin Cities should be contacted and asked to lobby their legislators.
- Government has turned its back on production agriculture. The state needs to realize that agriculture is a business.
- Priority aid for farming families, over-regulation of agriculture, feedlots and hidden taxes are all concerns.
- Local transit systems in the region have been a great success.
- Incentives are needed to encourage small towns and industry to help provide affordable housing for workers. Affordable housing cannot be created without affordable land, which can be difficult to acquire. Government should look at ordinances to identify those that prevent the development of affordable housing, and for-profit developers should be encouraged to incorporate it into developments.
- Sewer systems need to be developed in unincorporated areas, otherwise they can't grow.
- Staff shortages in health care are a concern.
- There is a desperate need to get seniors back into the work force.
- It is a major role of state government to help cities and schools. Nicollet is ineligible for a lot of grants, because the median income is too high.

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

School-age population will decline dramatically in most counties

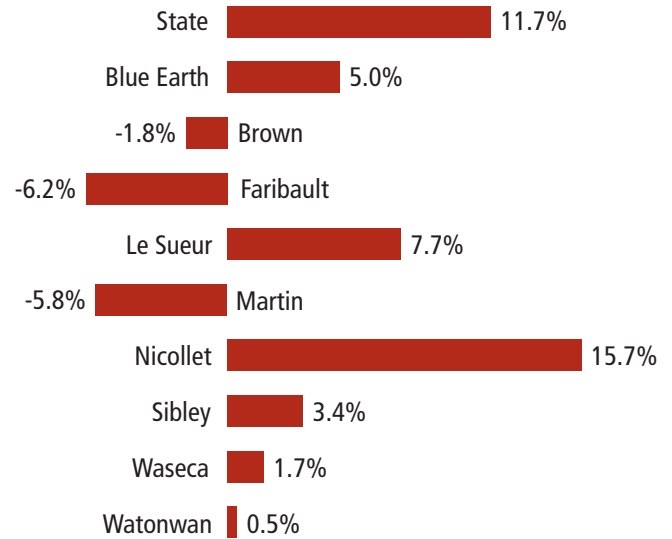
Percent change in number of children age 5 to 17 from 2000 to 2010



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Nicollet County is projected to see highest gain in older population

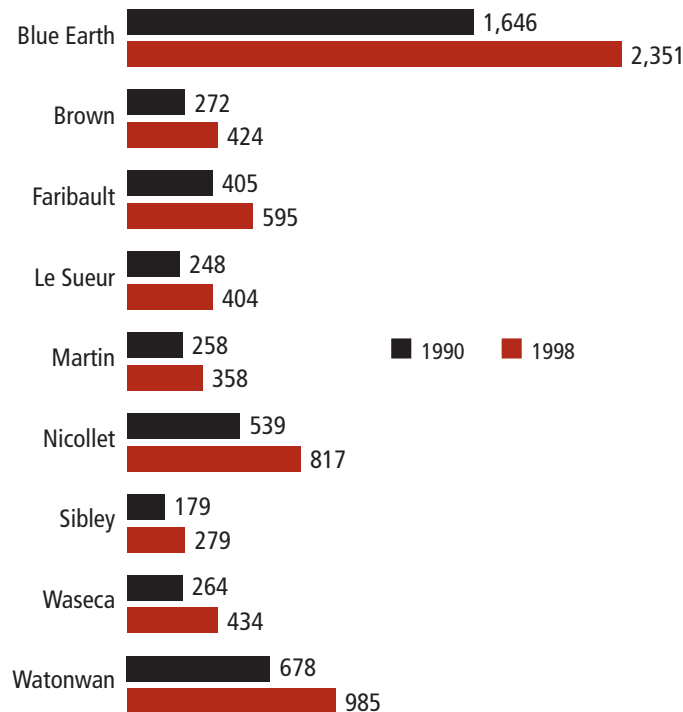
Percent change in number of people age 65 and over from 2000 to 2010



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

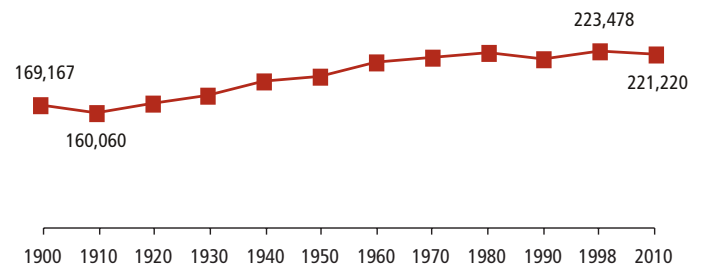
Population is more diverse

Number of minority residents



Source: U.S. Census Bureau estimates

Population is stable in recent decades



Sources: U.S. Census and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Region 3, Arrowhead

This region is the size of West Virginia and needs a comprehensive plan and a strong voice at the table for the rest of the state.

— Citizen at Carlton

This region was built on taconite, timber and tourism, but to make it viable now it needs the fourth T — technology. The metro area always seems to get served first, but if anyone needs technology it is rural Minnesota.

— Citizen at Carlton

Minnesota is a locally controlled state and Minnesota Planning has no jurisdiction to make rural Minnesota do anything.

— Dean Barkley

This region is organized with regard to economic development. People are meeting and talking. ... We are not averse to putting money into this locally, but we need help.

— Citizen at Carlton

Overall the population of the Arrowhead region is stable, but there is a projected decline in the school-age population, particularly in Koochiching County. Over the next decade the population over age 65 is expected to increase by more than the statewide average in Itasca, Koochiching and Lake counties. Poverty rates are high in several counties of the region.

Listening Post at Carlton — April 27, 2000

Attendance 90, including Representative Bill Hilty

PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

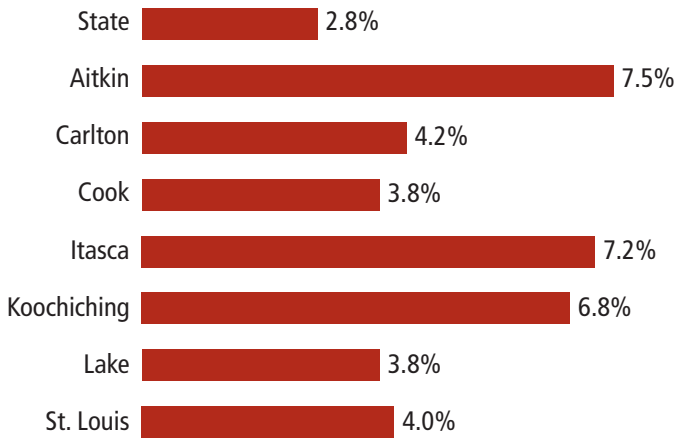
- Education
- Planning
- Infrastructure
- Job creation

KEY REGIONAL ISSUES

- To maintain a high quality education system, access to telecommunications is essential, both in schools and at home.
- One of the region's major problems is maintaining an infrastructure for higher education. The 2000 bonding bill has been a disappointment in this respect.
- To help create a highly skilled work force, two-year colleges need to expand and offer new courses, particularly in technology and engineering.
- Rural colleges should be funded in the same way as the University of Minnesota.
- School populations are in decline, and schools boards are facing tough facility decisions. The state could use the budget surplus to give interest-free loans to help pay for local schools.
- The state should challenge community colleges to be more responsive to job training.
- Small communities don't have the capacity to attract business. State government needs a program to help small businesses with their planning.
- Communities need to face up to the aging of the population.
- The state needs to plan to keep all regions economically competitive, but must maximize local participation.
- Ninety-two percent of Cook County is owned either by the state or federal government so the local community has very little influence on planning.
- Communities won't attract new people without a water and sewer infrastructure. The soil in the region is so constrained that conventional in-ground systems do not work and expensive, alternative systems are needed.
- The region has older housing, and help is needed to maintain properties.
- Lasting change in the region will come from businesses grown internally. Lack of support from the Department of Trade and Economic Development is a concern.
- There are cultural differences between the Twin Cities and rural Minnesota. It would be useful to look around the country at where businesses have expanded into rural areas.

Several counties are experiencing high levels of unemployment

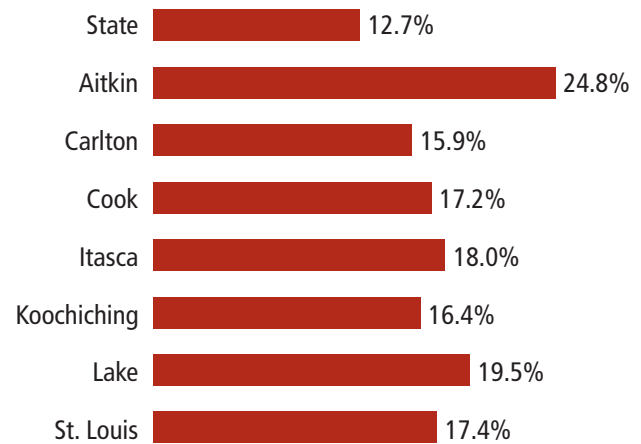
Unemployment rate in 1999



Source: Minnesota Department of Economic Security

A higher than average proportion of the population is elderly

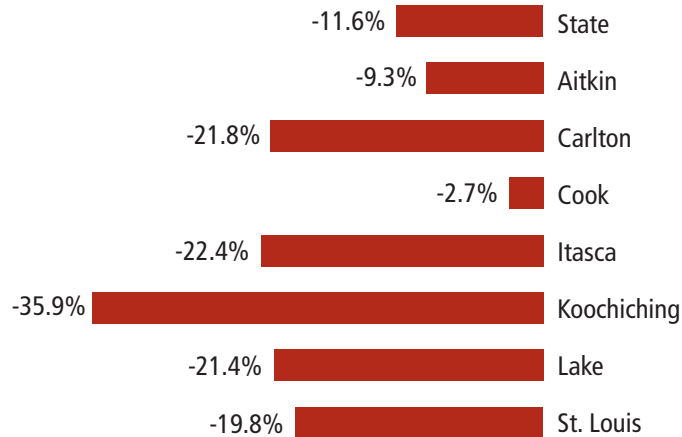
Percent of people age 65 and over in 2000



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

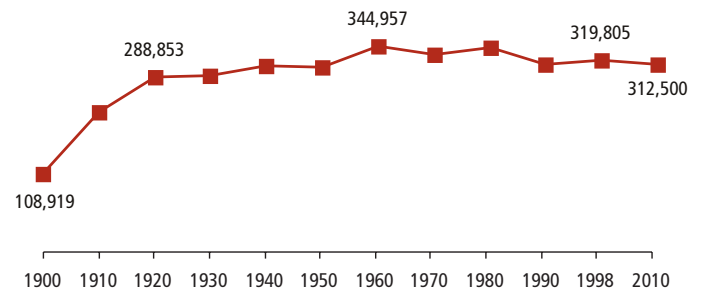
Decline in school-age population varies across the region

Percent change in number of children age 5 to 17 from 2000 to 2010



Source: Projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning

Economic downturn in the 1980s caused population dip



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and projections from the State Demographic Center at Minnesota Planning