

WABASH RIVER

Regional Development Authority



CLAY • PARKE • SULLIVAN • VERMILLION • VIGO

WEST CENTRAL INDIANA



REGIONAL PLAN

JANUARY 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	WELCOME TO WEST CENTRAL INDIANA
3	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
4	REGIONAL BACKGROUND
4	Clay County
5	Parke County
6	Sullivan County
6	Vermillion County
7	Vigo County
8	Regional Demographics
13	Economic Landscape
15	Commuting Patterns
19	Shared Vision For Growth
21	VISION STATEMENT
22	PURPOSE AND GOALS
23	METHODOLOGY
26	FRAMEWORK OF PLAN
27	Goal 1: Strengthen Regional Collaboration
30	Goal 2: Expand Housing Availability and Affordability
33	Goal 3: Invest in Regional Infrastructure
36	Goal 4: Promote Economic Development + Workforce Growth
39	Goal 5: Enhance Quality of Life
42	CONCLUSION
43	ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
44	APPENDICES

WELCOME TO WEST CENTRAL INDIANA

As Chair of the Wabash River Regional Development Authority (RDA), it is my privilege to introduce this transformative plan designed to guide the future of our region, encompassing Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties. This plan is a testament to the power of regionalism—the understanding that our shared success depends on working together to address challenges and seize opportunities that extend beyond individual county lines. We are immensely grateful to the Wabash Valley Community Foundation for bringing this opportunity to our region through Lilly Endowment Inc, Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (Gift) VIII initiative. This program has been instrumental in enabling the development of a regional plan to move us forward. Their support underscores the significance of investing in regional collaboration to create a brighter future for West Central Indiana.

West Central Indiana is a region rich in natural beauty, historical significance, and untapped potential. From the rolling hills of Parke County to the thriving industries in Vigo County, the agricultural strength of Clay County, the energy resources of Sullivan County, and the entrepreneurial spirit of Vermillion County, we are a tapestry of diverse assets and communities united by a shared vision for growth and prosperity.

In today's interconnected world, regional collaboration is no longer optional—it is essential. By leveraging the unique strengths of each of our counties, we can build an economic and social foundation that is stronger together than apart. Regionalism enables us to pool resources, share knowledge, and create opportunities that benefit not just one community, but all of West Central Indiana.

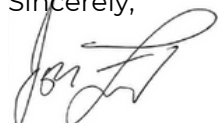
This plan represents months of collaboration with residents, business owners, and community leaders across our region. Your voices have guided us, helping identify critical areas for investment such as workforce development, infrastructure, education, and enhancing quality of life. Together, we are creating a roadmap to ensure West Central Indiana remains competitive and attractive to families, businesses, and visitors alike.

Looking ahead, this plan positions our region to adapt to change and prepare for the future while celebrating the qualities that make West Central Indiana a remarkable place to live, work, and play. It is not just a document—it is a call to action for all of us to think regionally and act collectively.

I encourage each of you to take an active role in this journey. Whether you contribute through your expertise, investments, or advocacy, your participation is vital to the success of our shared vision. The road ahead will require persistence, creativity, and collaboration, but I am confident that the people of Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties are ready to rise to the occasion.

On behalf of the RDA Board of Directors, thank you for your commitment to making West Central Indiana a region of opportunity and promise for generations to come. Together, with the support of initiatives such as Gift VIII, we can achieve extraordinary things.

Sincerely,



Jon Ford
Board Chair
Wabash River Regional Development Authority (RDA)



Executive Summary

West Central Indiana, encompassing Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties, is a region defined by its diverse communities, rich history, and significant potential. Recognizing the importance of collaboration to address shared challenges and seize opportunities, the Wabash River Regional Development Authority (RDA) has developed this regional plan. This plan outlines a unified vision for economic growth, quality of life enhancement, and long-term sustainability through regional collaboration.

A pivotal moment in this planning process was our successful partnership with the Wabash Valley Community Foundation in securing funding through Lilly Endowment Inc's Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow (GIFT) VIII initiative. This program provided a crucial planning grant to identify regional strategies that align with the shared goals of our communities. The grant facilitated in-depth research, extensive stakeholder engagement, and the development of actionable objectives tailored to the unique needs and strengths of West Central Indiana.

The planning process brought together diverse voices from across the region, including residents, business leaders, educators, and local government officials.

This plan serves as both a roadmap and a call to action for all stakeholders. It emphasizes the importance of leveraging regional assets, such as our proximity to the Wabash River, a strong agricultural base, and robust industrial sectors, while addressing shared challenges like workforce gaps and infrastructure improvements.

The funding received from the Wabash Valley Community Foundation has been instrumental in enabling our region to move from vision to action. With this planning grant, we have laid a solid foundation for regional strategies that not only support individual counties but also strengthen the collective future of West Central Indiana.

As we implement this plan, the commitment of every stakeholder—public, private, and nonprofit—is vital to achieving our goals. Together, we can create a region that is economically competitive, socially inclusive, and ready to embrace the opportunities of tomorrow.

GOALS

Through this collaborative effort, we identified key priorities to guide our regional goals:

Strengthen Regional Collaboration

Expand Housing Availability and Affordability

Invest in Regional Infrastructure

Promote Economic Development + Workforce Growth

Enhance Quality of Life



Regional Background

Region Overview

West Central Indiana is a dynamic region composed of Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties. Each of these counties brings unique strengths and characteristics, forming a diverse and interconnected tapestry that defines the region. Together, they provide the foundation for economic growth, cultural richness, and a high quality of life, making West Central Indiana a vibrant place to live, work, and play.

Total Regional Population: 185,271 (July 2023)

Clay County, Indiana

Founded in 1825, Clay County has a rich history shaped by its natural resources and hardworking communities. Nestled in the heart of west-central Indiana, the county earned its name from the abundant clay deposits that once fueled a thriving brick and pottery industry. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the clay and coal industries were economic cornerstones, drawing laborers and entrepreneurs who built the foundation of its towns, particularly Brazil, the county seat. The county's location along the Historic National Road further solidified its role as a hub of trade and transportation during the westward expansion of the United States.

Culturally, Clay County reflects a blend of rural Midwestern traditions and a proud working-class heritage. Generations of families have contributed to its growth, valuing community engagement and preserving local history. Events such as the Clay County Fair and various festivals celebrate the region's agricultural roots and foster connections among its residents. The Clay County Historical Society plays a vital role in maintaining the area's heritage, curating artifacts and stories that document its evolution from a frontier outpost to a modern community.

Today, Clay County balances its historical legacy with a diversified economy and a commitment to preserving its rural charm. The county is an area steeped in agricultural tradition and industrial innovation. Clay County's robust agricultural sector supports the local economy while its strategic location along major transportation routes position it as a hub for manufacturing and logistics. The close-knit communities of Brazil and surrounding towns are celebrated for their strong work ethic, community spirit, and historic landmarks, such as the annual Pottery Festival in Clay City, Route 40 Fest in Brazil and the Medieval Faire in Poland, which attracts visitors from across the Midwest. This blend of history, culture, and innovation creates a vibrant community where past and present coexist harmoniously, offering residents a sense of belonging and continuity.

Clay County Population: 26,460 (July 2023)

Parke County , Indiana

Parke County, often celebrated as the "Covered Bridge Capital of the World," is a picturesque region steeped in history and natural beauty. Renowned for its collection of more than 30 historic covered bridges, the county preserves a unique piece of 19th-century engineering and rural charm. These iconic landmarks, nestled among rolling hills, winding rivers, and serene woodlands, draw thousands of visitors each year, especially during the famous Covered Bridge Festival. This annual event transforms the county into a vibrant hub of activity, celebrating its rich heritage with crafts, food, and community spirit.

Beyond its architectural treasures, Parke County boasts a dynamic cultural and economic life. Its artisan communities thrive, producing handmade goods that reflect the area's rustic character and creative ingenuity. Small businesses play a vital role in sustaining the local economy, offering everything from antiques to locally sourced produce. Outdoor recreation is another cornerstone of life in Parke County, with attractions like Turkey Run and Shades State Parks offering opportunities for hiking, canoeing, and exploring the region's stunning natural landscapes.

The heritage of Parke County is deeply rooted in its agricultural traditions in rural Indiana. Generations of families have worked the land, fostering a strong sense of community and connection to the past. Today, the county blends this historical legacy with a forward-looking vision, balancing preservation with progress. Parke County's charm lies in its ability to honor its history while providing a welcoming, vibrant environment for residents and visitors alike.

Parke County Population: 16,484 (July 2023)

Sullivan County, Indiana

Sullivan County holds a storied history deeply intertwined with its natural resources. Established in 1817, the county was originally known for its vast reserves of coal, which fueled local industry and positioned it as a leader in energy production for much of the 19th and 20th centuries. Over time, Sullivan County has embraced change, transitioning from its industrial roots to a more diversified economy that includes advanced manufacturing and renewable energy projects. These initiatives underscore the county's commitment to sustainability and its forward-thinking approach to economic growth.

Agriculture remains a cornerstone of Sullivan County's identity, with its fertile lands producing staple crops like corn, soybeans, and wheat and specialized products like green beans and melons. Generations of farming families have contributed to the county's prosperity, and modern techniques have allowed this sector to remain competitive. Meanwhile, workforce development programs ensure residents are equipped with the skills necessary for emerging industries, helping to secure the county's economic future while maintaining its agricultural traditions.

Culturally, Sullivan County is marked by a deep sense of pride and community. Events like the Sullivan County Fair, Merom Chatauqua, and local festivals bring residents together, celebrating shared heritage and fostering connections. The county also treasures its natural assets, such as Sullivan Lake, Sullivan City Park, and Merom Bluff which offer spaces for relaxation, recreation, and family gatherings. These areas, along with other outdoor amenities, highlight the county's dedication to preserving its scenic beauty while enhancing quality of life for its citizens. Sullivan County is a testament to resilience and adaptability, where historical roots and modern innovation combine to create a thriving, vibrant community.

Total Population: 20,757 (July 2023)

Vermillion County, Indiana

Nestled along the Wabash River, Vermillion County is a gateway for commerce and a cornerstone of West Central Indiana's agricultural heritage. Known for its entrepreneurial spirit, Vermillion County supports a growing network of small businesses and industries. The county's natural resources and recreational sites, including the Wabash Riverfront and nature trails, offer opportunities for tourism and environmental sustainability.

Culturally, Vermillion County is a vibrant community where neighbors come together to celebrate shared traditions. Annual events like the Little Italy Festival in Clinton honor the county's diverse heritage, while other fairs and local gatherings like the Newport Hillclimb showcase its strong sense of pride and togetherness. The county's parks and recreational areas further enhance quality of life, providing spaces for relaxation, outdoor adventures, and family-friendly activities. Vermillion County's blend of historical significance, economic resilience, and natural beauty makes it a welcoming and forward-thinking place to live, work, and visit.

Total Population: 15,417 (July 2023)

Vigo County, Indiana

As the largest county in the region, Vigo County serves as an economic and cultural anchor for West Central Indiana. Established in 1818, it was named after Francis Vigo, an Italian-American patriot and financier of the American Revolutionary War. The county is anchored by Terre Haute, its largest city and county seat, which has historically been a center of commerce, education, and industry in the region. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Vigo County's strategic location along the Wabash River and proximity to major rail lines fueled its growth as a transportation and manufacturing hub.

Home to the City of Terre Haute, Vigo County is a hub for education, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. With institutions like Indiana State University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, and Ivy Tech Community College, the County is a center of innovation and talent development. The city also boasts a vibrant arts scene, with landmarks like the Swope Art Museum, the LaVern Gibson Championship Cross Country Course, and the Terre Haute Symphony Orchestra. These cultural offerings, combined with a storied history, contribute to Vigo County's identity as a dynamic and diverse community.

Economically, Vigo County has transitioned from its historical reliance on manufacturing and coal mining to a more diversified economy that includes higher education, healthcare, and logistics. The growth of industries such as advanced manufacturing and renewable energy reflects the county's efforts to adapt to changing economic landscapes. Retail, tourism, and small businesses also play significant roles, supported by the county's strong infrastructure, including its position along Interstate 70, making it a key link between Indianapolis and St. Louis.

Geographically, Vigo County is defined by its mix of urban centers and rural landscapes, with the Wabash River serving as a prominent natural feature. The county offers numerous recreational opportunities, including trails, parks, and nature preserves, such as Griffin Bike Park and Hawthorn Park, which attract outdoor enthusiasts. The government of Vigo County operates under a standard Indiana county structure, with an elected board of commissioners and a county council overseeing legislative and fiscal matters. Efforts to engage citizens and invest in public infrastructure demonstrate the local government's commitment to fostering a thriving, connected community.

From its historical roots as a transportation and industrial hub to its modern identity as a center for education, culture, and innovation, Vigo County continues to evolve while preserving its rich heritage and sense of community.

Total Population: 106,153 (July 2023)

Regional Demographics

The population data reflects a diverse and balanced community spanning multiple life stages, each contributing to the vibrancy and character of the area. With 28,693 individuals in the school-age group (5 to 17), the region boasts a strong foundation of youth, highlighting the importance of education and family-oriented services. Schools and extracurricular programs play a central role in shaping this demographic, emphasizing the community's commitment to nurturing the next generation.

The college-age population (18 to 24), numbering 21,550, underscores the region's role as a hub for higher education and early career development. This age group likely fuels local universities, colleges, and vocational training programs, fostering innovation and injecting youthful energy into the community. Many in this cohort are laying the groundwork for their futures, contributing to both the academic and cultural vibrancy of the area.

The young adult and older adult demographics, each with 44,085 individuals, represent the region's core workforce and family base. Young adults (25 to 44) are in the prime of their careers and family-building years, driving economic growth and engaging in community leadership. The older adult group (45 to 64) brings a wealth of experience and stability, often serving as mentors and anchors within both professional and social spheres. Together, these groups reflect a dynamic and active middle segment that powers the local economy and sustains community initiatives.

The senior population, comprising 34,556 residents ages 65 and older, adds depth and continuity to the community's identity. This group often carries the collective memory of the area, sharing wisdom and traditions that enrich cultural heritage. Services and activities tailored to this demographic, such as healthcare, senior centers, and recreational programs, ensure their continued engagement and quality of life. Collectively, these population figures paint a portrait of a balanced and thriving community, where every age group plays a vital role in shaping the present and future.

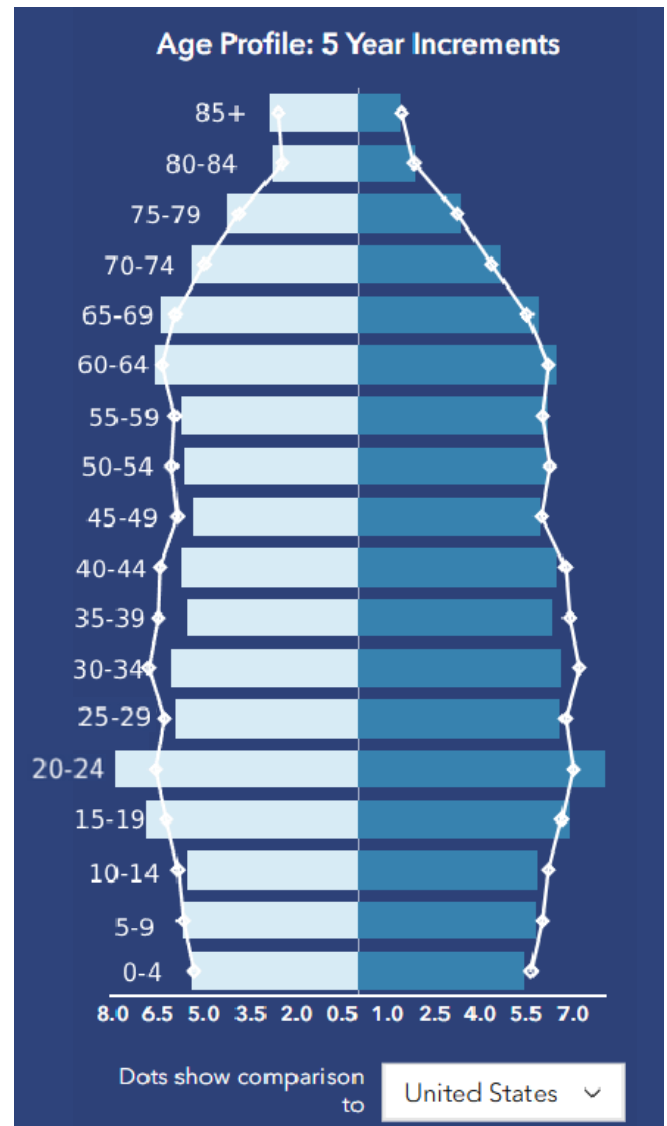
The demographic profile of the region, encompassing Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties, reflects a predominantly White population, with an average of 93.98% identifying as White Alone across the counties. This figure highlights the historical and cultural roots of these communities in rural Indiana. However, the counties also feature diverse racial and ethnic groups that contribute to their character.

Black residents represent an average of 3.2% of the population, followed by individuals identifying as Two or More Races at approximately 1.7%. Other groups, such as Asian Alone (0.64%) and American Indian or Alaska Native Alone (0.42%), comprise smaller portions of the population but still play an essential role in the region's diversity. Similarly, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander residents account for about 0.1% on average.

Hispanic or Latino residents, who represent an average of 2.16% of the population, further enrich the cultural landscape, contributing to the communities' vibrancy and economic life. These demographics showcase a blend of longstanding traditions and evolving diversity, positioning these counties as communities with deep historical roots and opportunities for inclusive growth.

The population data reflects a diverse and balanced community spanning multiple life stages, each contributing to the vibrancy and character of the area. With 28,693 individuals in the school-age group (5 to 17), the region boasts a strong foundation of youth, highlighting the importance of education and family-oriented services.

Figure 1



Schools and extracurricular programs play a central role in shaping this demographic, emphasizing the community's commitment to nurturing the next generation.

The college-age population (18 to 24), numbering 21,550, underscores the region's role as a hub for higher education and early career development. This age group likely fuels local universities, colleges, and vocational training programs, fostering innovation and injecting youthful energy into the community. Many in this cohort are laying the groundwork for their futures, contributing to both the academic and cultural vibrancy of the area.

Figure 2

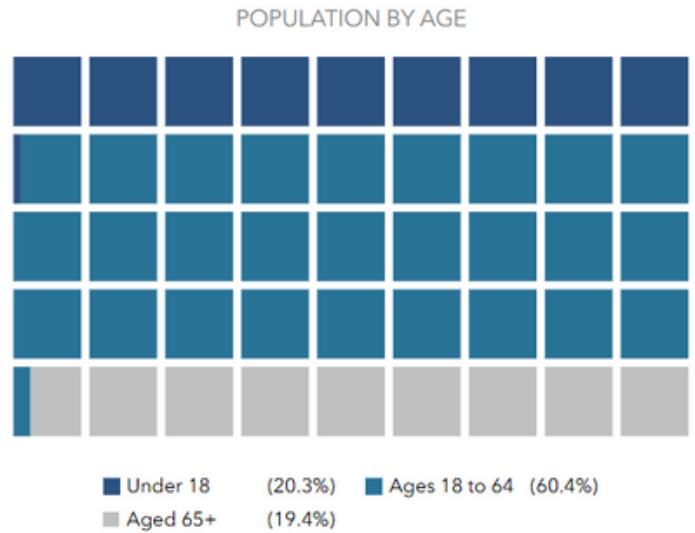
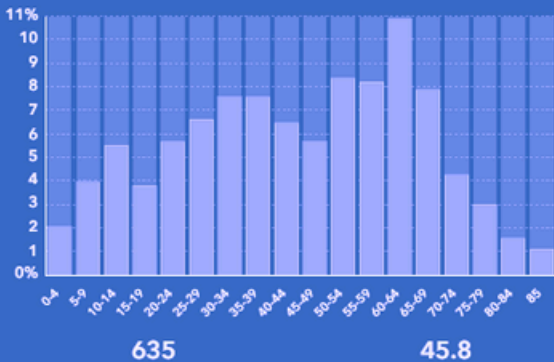
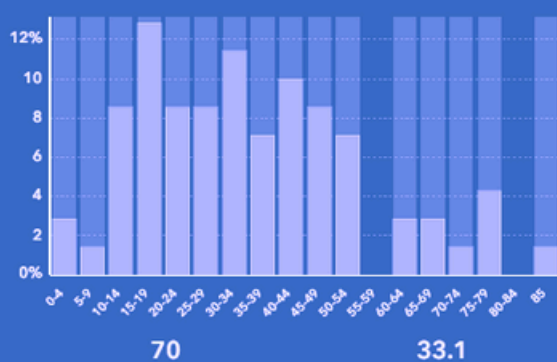


Figure 3

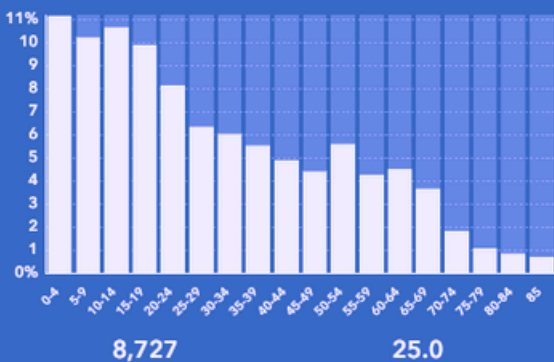
Native American Population (%)



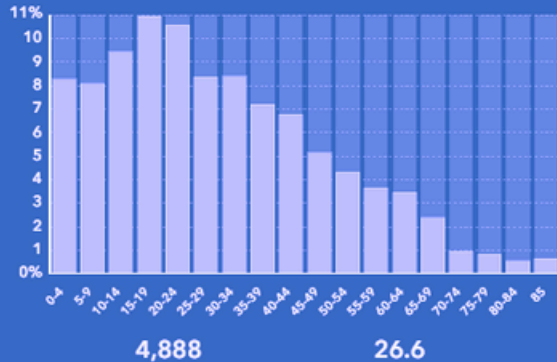
Pacific Islander Population (%)



Multiple Races Population (%)

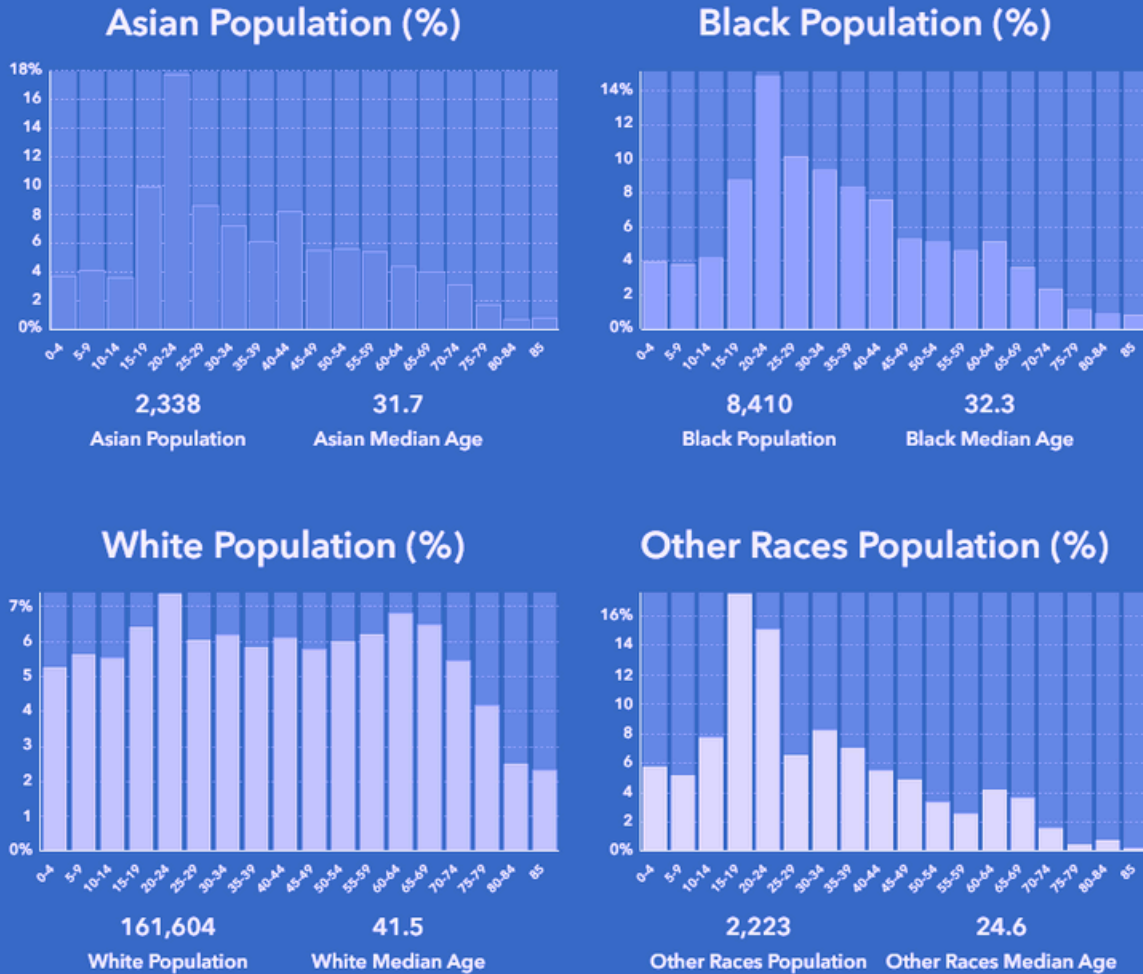


Hispanic Population (%)



Individual population distribution percentages are based on each racial group not the whole population.

Figure 4



Source: This infographic contains data provided by Esri (2024, 2029). © 2025 Esri

Figures 3 & 4 provide a comprehensive race and age profile for a population of West Central Indiana across the five counties, offering key demographic insights. The data highlights the racial composition and age distribution for several groups, including Asian (2,338), Black (8,410), Native American (635), Pacific Islander (70), White (161,604), Other Races (2,223), Multiple Races (8,727), and Hispanic populations (4,888).

Median ages range widely, with the highest among Native Americans (45.8 years) and the lowest among Other Races (24.6 years). Additional key facts include a slight population decline (-0.1%), a diversity index of 26.4, a median household income of \$57,509, and a median home value of \$156,538. The infographic illustrates the percentage distribution of each racial group across different age cohorts, showcasing the diversity and generational trends within these communities.

The data reveals notable disparities in age and racial demographics that can inform strategic planning and resource allocation for the five counties. The White population dominates numerically but has the highest median age (41.5), indicating an aging majority that may require increased investments in healthcare, retirement, and eldercare services. Conversely, groups like Hispanic and "Other Races" populations have significantly younger median ages (26.6 and 24.6, respectively), signaling the potential for workforce growth and the need for youth-focused initiatives such as education, job training, and housing.

The relatively small populations of Asian, Native American, and Pacific Islander groups, coupled with their distinct median ages and distributions, highlight opportunities for targeted outreach to address their unique needs. The "Multiple Races" category, with a median age of 25 and a sizable population, underscores the growing diversity and need for inclusive policies and programs that reflect the area's changing demographics. The low diversity index (26.4) and slight population decline (-0.1%) suggest these counties may face challenges in attracting and retaining younger, diverse populations, emphasizing the importance of fostering a more inclusive and vibrant community to sustain growth.

Table 1

Population Percent Change	Clay County	Parke County	Sullivan County	Vermillion County	Vigo County
Population, percent change – April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2020	-1.6%	-4.9%	-3.3%	-4.9%	-1.6%
Population, percent change – April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2023	0.0%	2.1%	-0.3%	-0.2%	0.0%

Source: United States Census 5 Year Survey

Table 1 presents the population percentage change for counties in West Central Indiana, comparing two distinct periods: April 1, 2010, to July 1, 2020, and April 1, 2020, to July 1, 2023. From 2010 to 2020, all five counties experienced population declines, with Parke and Vermillion counties seeing the largest decreases at -4.9%, followed by Sullivan County at -3.3%, and Clay and Vigo counties both at -1.6%. In contrast, the more recent period from 2020 to 2023 shows slight stabilization or growth for some counties. Parke County recorded a modest increase of 2.1%, while Clay and Vigo counties maintained stable populations with no change (0.0%). However, Sullivan and Vermillion counties continued to see small declines, at -0.3% and -0.2%, respectively, reflecting ongoing demographic challenges in parts of the region.

Economic Landscape

In examining the economic landscape of the region, several critical indicators of income and poverty emerge. These counties, each with their unique demographic and economic profiles, reveal a tapestry of financial well-being and challenges.

Median Household Income serves as a primary measure of economic health. This metric varies across the counties, reflecting the diverse economic conditions and opportunities available to residents. Higher median household incomes suggest better economic stability and access to higher-paying jobs, while lower incomes may indicate economic challenges and a need for economic development initiatives.

Per Capita Personal Income further illuminates the average income earned per person, providing insight into the overall economic productivity and standard of living within each county. Higher per capita incomes typically correlate with higher standards of living and greater economic opportunities, while lower per capita incomes may highlight areas where economic growth is needed.

Persons in Poverty is a crucial statistic that highlights the percentage of the population living below the poverty line. This figure is essential for understanding the socio-economic challenges faced by residents and the need for targeted interventions and support programs. Higher poverty rates may imply a lack of access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, necessitating comprehensive social and economic policies to address these issues.

Table 2

Income and Poverty	Clay County	Parke County	Sullivan County	Vermillion County	Vigo County
Median Household Income	\$67,676	\$66,776	\$54,985	\$59,363	\$52,525
Per Capita Personal Income	\$36,588	\$31,264	\$29,424	\$30,418	\$30,829
Persons in Poverty	12.6%	15.2%	15.6%	12.5%	20.2%

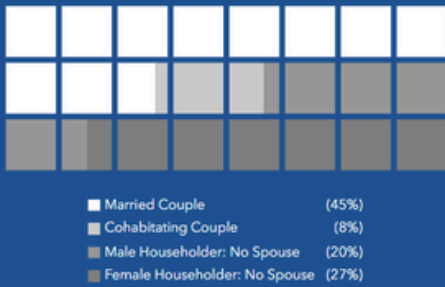
Source: United States Census 5 Year Survey

Figure 5

The 2020 Census data includes information on population and housing as well as detailed data on age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, household and family type, relationship to householder, group quarters population, housing occupancy, and tenure.

Households by Size	Number	Percent
Total Households	72,746	-
1-Person Household	22,313	31%
2-Person Household	25,632	35%
3-Person Household	10,328	14%
4-Person Household	8,168	11%
5-Person Household	3,811	5%
6-Person Household	1,617	2%
7+ Person Household	877	1%
Average Household Size	2.37	-

Households by Type

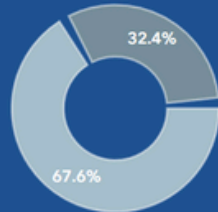


Source: This infographic contains data provided by U.S. Census (2000, 2010, 2020). © 2025 Esri

KEY FACTS

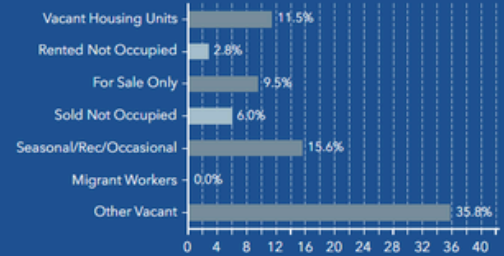
185,031 Total Population **82,185** Housing Units **96.9** Population Density **2.37** Average Household Size **72,746** Total Households **25.1** Diversity Index

Total Housing Units by Occupancy



● Owner Occupied HUs ● Renter Occupied HUs

Total Housing Units by Vacancy



Group Quarters Population

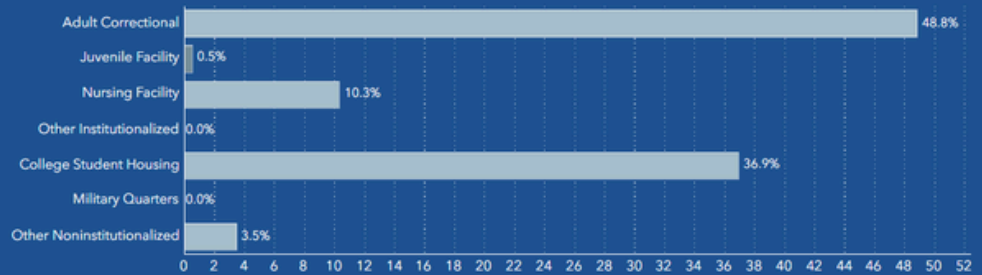


Figure 5 provides a comprehensive overview of key housing and demographic data for West Central Indiana, highlighting trends in household types, household sizes, housing unit occupancy, vacancy rates, and group quarters populations. Between 2010 and 2020, the region saw a slight population decline of 0.25%. As of 2020, the household population—comprising individuals living in traditional housing units such as homes, apartments, and portable homes—totals 172,386. Additionally, the group quarters population, which includes residents in dormitories, mental health facilities, treatment centers, and correctional institutions, is 12,645. The total number of housing units and their occupancy rates further illustrate housing trends in the region.

In our region, 11.5% of vacant housing units are classified as permanently vacant. Additionally, 8.8% of vacant homes are either owned or rented but currently unoccupied. A further 15.6% of vacant homes are designated as having seasonal or occasional occupancy. Finally, 35.8% of vacant homes in West Central Indiana remain vacant for reasons that are not categorized.

Commuting Patterns

Commuting patterns provide valuable insights into the travel behavior of individuals, particularly how they move between their homes and workplaces. They are a valuable tool for analyzing employment trends and overall economic competitiveness. This information is crucial for understanding the distribution of economic activity and the interdependence between different regions.

By analyzing commuting data, economists, planners and community leaders can assess labor market dynamics, including the availability of jobs, the mobility of the workforce, and the match between job locations and residential areas. This helps in understanding the efficiency of the labor market and identifying areas with labor shortages or surpluses.

OUTBOUND COMMUTES: RESIDENTS LEAVING THE REGION FOR EMPLOYMENT

Residents of West Central Indiana exhibit a dynamic commuting profile, shaped by a blend of economic opportunities, transportation infrastructure, and regional connectivity. This narrative explores the daily commute of workers leaving the region, focusing on the flow of workers traveling to key destinations, including nearby counties and across state borders.

Regional Overview

West Central Indiana is a region defined by its small towns, rural landscapes, and proximity to several major economic hubs. While many residents find employment locally, a significant number commute to neighboring counties or even out of state, driven by employment opportunities in diverse industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, education, and logistics.

Key Commuting Destinations:

- 1. Knox County (288 commuters):** Vincennes, Knox County's largest city, serves as a regional hub for education and healthcare, anchored by Vincennes University and Good Samaritan Hospital. U.S. Highways 41 and 50 support this commuting flow.
- 2. Montgomery County (242 commuters):** Crawfordsville, the heart of Montgomery County, attracts residents employed in education, manufacturing, and logistics. Companies like Nucor Steel and Wabash College create a steady pull for workers traveling along I-74 or U.S. 231.
- 3. Fountain County (152 commuters):** Known for its agricultural economy and industries tied to agribusiness, Fountain County's commuters rely on rural roadways and connections to U.S. 41 and I-74. Its proximity to Tippecanoe County further influences employment opportunities.

4. **Greene County (256 commuters):** Greene County, with its economic focus on healthcare and manufacturing, sees commuters drawn to facilities like the Greene County General Hospital or businesses tied to the nearby Naval Surface Warfare Center at Crane. Its rural charm and manageable commuting distances make it an appealing option.

5. **Illinois (1,657 commuters):** The largest out-of-state destination of West Central Indiana workers is Illinois, particularly the areas close to the Indiana-Illinois border. Cities like Danville and Champaign attract commuters in healthcare, education, and logistics, while some travel even farther for opportunities in Chicago. This flow underscores the strong interstate economic ties supported by U.S. 136 and I-74.

Transportation Infrastructure and Challenges

West Central Indiana benefits from an extensive network of highways, including interstates, state roads, and U.S. highways, that connect residents to regional economic centers. However, challenges such as rising fuel costs, limited public transit options, and occasional rural road maintenance issues can impact commuters. For those traveling to more urban areas, traffic congestion and longer travel times are significant concerns, particularly in Marion and Hendricks Counties.

Lifestyle and Commuting Trends

Many commuters from West Central Indiana are drawn to opportunities offering higher wages, career advancement, or specialized roles not readily available within the region. However, the region's residents also value the affordability and slower pace of life in their home communities, making commuting a tradeoff for economic opportunities elsewhere. Flexible work arrangements and remote work trends have begun to influence these patterns, but traditional commuting remains dominant.

INBOUND COMMUTES: WORKERS TRAVELING TO THE REGION FOR EMPLOYMENT

West Central Indiana serves as an employment hub for a diverse group of workers from neighboring counties and beyond, drawn by opportunities in education, manufacturing, healthcare, and other industries. This narrative explores the profile of employees commuting into the region, highlighting key areas of origin and the dynamics shaping their daily travel.

Regional Overview

West Central Indiana's central location and economic diversity make it an attractive destination for workers. The region, known for its strong manufacturing base, agricultural ties, and educational institutions, pulls in employees from surrounding counties and even out-of-state locations. Commuters are supported by a network of state highways, U.S. routes, and rural road systems that facilitate access to jobs in the region's towns and cities.

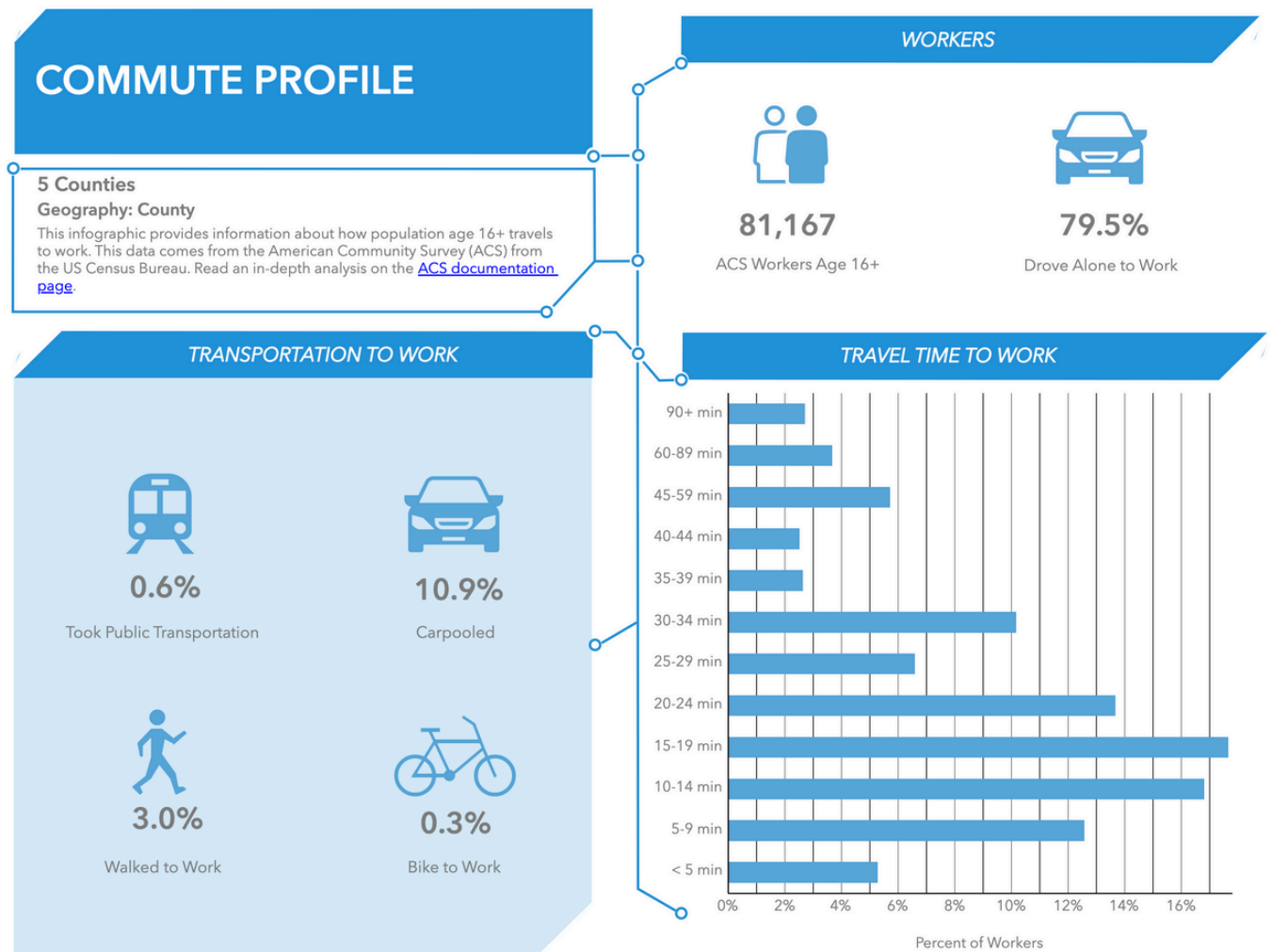
Key Sources of Commuters

1. **Putnam County (236 commuters):** Workers from Putnam County travel to West Central Indiana, often utilizing U.S. 231, State Road 240, I-70 and U.S. 40. This group includes professionals in education, manufacturing, and healthcare who are drawn by job opportunities in industries not as prominent in their home county. The commute is relatively short, making it manageable for those seeking employment outside their immediate community.
2. **Owen County (117 commuters):** Owen County's rural residents frequently commute to West Central Indiana for roles in manufacturing and education. With connections like State Road 46 and U.S. 231, workers find easy access to employers in the region, particularly in cities like Terre Haute and smaller industrial hubs.
3. **Greene County (460 commuters):** A significant number of Greene County residents commute to West Central Indiana, largely due to the region's strong manufacturing and logistics sectors. The Naval Surface Warfare Center-Crane Division is a significant employer in Greene County, but workers also seek opportunities in nearby West Central Indiana, facilitated by highways like State Road 54 and U.S. 231.
4. **Knox County (164 commuters):** Knox County residents are drawn to jobs in West Central Indiana's growing manufacturing and healthcare sectors. Commuting routes like U.S. 41 and U.S. 150 support this flow of workers. The relatively short drive makes it feasible for employees to benefit from the economic opportunities in the region.
5. **Fountain County (158 commuters):** Fountain County's workers often commute to West Central Indiana for opportunities in logistics, education, and industry. The proximity of I-74 and U.S. 136 provides convenient access for these commuters, many of whom seek roles in cities like Crawfordsville or Terre Haute.
6. **Illinois (2,192 commuters):** The largest group of out-of-region commuters comes from Illinois, particularly areas close to the state line. Workers from cities like Danville and Champaign frequently cross into Indiana for jobs in manufacturing, logistics, and healthcare. Interstate 74, U.S. 136, and U.S. 41 are critical routes facilitating this substantial cross-border commuting flow. The draw for Illinois residents is often driven by competitive wages, lower cost of living in Indiana, and access to jobs in less congested areas.

REGIONAL COMMUTE PROFILE

The Commute Profile infographic provides an analysis of commuting patterns for workers aged 16 and older across the five county region, based on data from the American Community Survey (ACS) from 2018 to 2022. It reveals that the majority of workers, 79.5%, drive alone to work, highlighting the region's reliance on personal vehicles. Other commuting methods include carpooling, which accounts for 10.9%, walking at 3.0%, public transportation at 0.6%, and biking at 0.3%, indicating minimal use of alternative transportation options. The data also illustrates travel times, with the most common commutes lasting 15-19 minutes (16%), followed closely by 10-14 minutes (14%) and 20-24 minutes (13%). Shorter commutes of 5-9 minutes make up 12% of the total, while longer commutes, such as 60-89 minutes, are relatively rare at around 2%. These trends reflect the geographic and infrastructural characteristics of the region, where shorter commutes and reliance on personal vehicles dominate.

Figure 6



Source: This infographic contains data provided by ACS (2018-2022).

© 2025 Esri

Source: This infographic contains data provided by ACS (2018-2022).

NOTABLE EMPLOYERS WITHIN THE REGION

Clay County

- Great Dane
- Process Development and Fabricators (PDF)
- Ascension St. Vincent Clay
- Morris Manufacturing

Parke County

- Futurex Industries
- Rockville Correctional Facility
- Scott Pet Products
- Superior Hardwood
- Kirby Foods

Sullivan County

- Raybestos Powertrain LLC
- Hoosier Energy
- Peabody Energy Corporation
- Sullivan County Community Hospital

Vermillion County

- Elanco
- Duke Energy Cayuga Station
- International Paper
- Infrastructure & Energy Alternatives (IEA)

Vigo County

- Union Health
- Vigo County School Corporation
- Indiana State University
- Vigo County
- Amcor
- U.S. Federal Correctional Complex
- Terre Haute Regional Hospital

A Shared Vision for Growth

While each county has distinct attributes and priorities, they are united by a common goal: to foster regional collaboration and build a sustainable future. Together, these five counties form a cohesive region that leverages its collective strengths to attract businesses, retain talent, and create a high quality of life for all residents. Through this plan, West Central Indiana is poised to achieve unparalleled growth and prosperity while preserving the unique character of its communities.

REGIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative

In 2021, Indiana launched the Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) that dedicated \$500 million in state appropriations to promote strategic investments that will make Indiana a magnet for talent and economic growth. The Wabash River RDA secured \$20 million through this initiative to invest in projects that foster innovation, collaboration, and progress. The RDA has allocated this funding to 24 projects across the region, ensuring immediate impact and laying the groundwork for long-term economic and community development. These projects reflect the shared vision of creating a vibrant region that thrives on opportunity and collaboration.

READI 1.0 Projects

- City of Sullivan Central Plaza Corridor
- City of Sullivan City Pool
- City of Terre Haute Rea Park
- Clinton Housing
- Downtown Terre Haute Hotel and Parking Garage
- Design and Innovation Studio (Vincennes University)
- Diversity and Career Center (Ivy Tech Community College)
- Downtown Rockville Building Restoration
- Early Learning Center (Indiana State University)
- Homes for the Future (Regional Initiative through Thrive West Central)
- Ritz Theater
- Rose-Hulman Ventures (Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology)
- SMWC Sports & Equine (Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College)
- Sports Complex and East Side Aquatic Center Feasibility Study
- Sullivan Housing Project
- Sullivan Plaza Archway
- Swope Art Museum
- Terre Haute Children's Museum Outdoor Space Feasibility Study
- The Mill
- The William Henry Harrison Presidential Mansion and Visitor Center
- Turn to the River
- West Central Indiana Business Hub
- West Terre Haute Clinic and Pharmacy
- Wilma and Liston Buell Community Center



READI 2.0

On April 28, 2023, the Indiana General Assembly adopted HB 1001, the state's biennial budget bill, which includes an additional \$500 million for READI 2.0 over the next two years. These funds allowed Indiana regional partnerships to once again submit applications to the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) for funding projects that promote talent attraction and retention and economic growth. The Wabash River region received \$10 million in READI 2.0 funds. The region's READI 2.0 projects will be publicly announced, individually, as they are approved for compliance by the state.



Vision Statement

The Wabash River Regional Development Authority envisions a thriving, united West Central Indiana where collaboration drives innovation, economic growth, and quality of life. By leveraging the region's unique assets and fostering partnerships across Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties, we aim to create a resilient and vibrant community that embraces progress, preserves its heritage, and inspires future generations to live, work, and thrive along the Wabash River.

REGIONALISM

Through collaborative partnerships with West Central Partnership, Thrive West Central, higher education institutions, and other key stakeholders, we have made significant strides over the past several years in raising awareness about the importance of regionalism. Our coordinated efforts with the State of Indiana have positioned us to capitalize on transformative opportunities, including the Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI).

With unified efforts of three regional organizations—Wabash River RDA, Thrive West Central, and West Central Indiana Partnership—working collectively under the West Central Indiana Partnership umbrella, we aim to continue pursuing regional initiatives.

- **Wabash River Regional Development Authority** exists to pursue economic opportunities in partnership with the State of Indiana.
- **Thrive West Central** serves as the direct connection to the Economic Development Association and serves as the key organization for aging and disabled resources, housing, and transportation.
- **West Central Indiana Partnership** focuses on overall quality of life metrics and serves as the foundational organization for the 21st Century Talent Designation.

While each group has a distinct mission, all are united in their dedication to transforming West Central Indiana, encompassing Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties, into a premier region to live, work, and play.

By sustaining this coalition of committed leaders, strategic partners, and strong public-private collaborations, we are positioning West Central Indiana to seize future opportunities and drive growth across the region.



Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this regional plan is to provide a strategic roadmap that unites the communities within the Wabash River RDA region of Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties in achieving sustainable growth, enhancing quality of life, and fostering a sense of shared identity and collaboration. As West Central Indiana continues to evolve, this plan aims to address the region's unique challenges and opportunities by prioritizing regionalism—leveraging collective strengths to create a vibrant and prosperous future for all residents.

This plan builds on extensive input from residents, business leaders, and community stakeholders, ensuring it reflects the needs and aspirations of those it serves. Through collaboration, innovative thinking, and strategic investments, the plan aims to guide decision-making and resource allocation while fostering a culture of inclusivity and adaptability. By focusing on the interconnectedness of the region, the plan serves as a blueprint for achieving shared objectives that benefit each county individually and collectively.

The goal of the regional plan is to foster regionalism within West Central Indiana by uniting our partner counties through collaboration, innovation, and strategic investments.

GOALS

By leveraging our shared strengths and addressing common challenges, we aim to accomplish the following goals within this regional plan.

- 1. Strengthen Regional Collaboration**
- 2. Expand Housing Availability and Affordability**
- 3. Invest in Regional Infrastructure**
- 4. Promote Economic Development + Workforce Growth**
- 5. Enhance Quality of Life**



Methodology

The development of the West Central Indiana Regional Plan is rooted in a comprehensive and inclusive approach, building upon existing local and regional planning initiatives to ensure alignment with community needs and aspirations. The plan leverages insights and frameworks established through local community planning efforts, as well as the extensive regional strategies developed during the READI 2.0 process. This foundation of collaboration and prior research provided a strong starting point for identifying priorities and actionable strategies.

To ensure the plan reflects the diverse perspectives and needs of West Central Indiana, multiple surveys and public forums were conducted across the region. These engagement opportunities allowed residents, business leaders, and community stakeholders to provide valuable input, ensuring the plan addresses opportunities and specific challenges within individual communities.

Although the GIFT VIII planning grant guiding this effort primarily falls within the service area of the Wabash Valley Community Foundation (Clay, Sullivan, and Vigo Counties), secondary research was conducted for Parke and Vermillion Counties, recognizing their integral role in the Wabash River RDA and the broader fabric of West Central Indiana. These efforts ensured that each county's unique assets and needs were fully integrated into the plan.

This multi-faceted methodology of leveraging existing plans, conducting targeted research, and engaging communities directly has resulted in a regional plan that is both data-driven and community-focused, creating a roadmap for sustainable growth and collaboration across West Central Indiana.

SWOT ANALYSIS

This SWOT analysis highlights the need for West Central Indiana to capitalize on its strengths and opportunities while addressing its weaknesses and mitigating potential threats. This balanced approach will position the region for sustained growth and success.

STRENGTHS

- **Strategic Location** - Proximity to major transportation assets, including interstates, railways, and the Terre Haute Regional Airport, providing access to key markets.
- **Higher Education Institutions** - Presence of Indiana State University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Ivy Tech Community College, and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College fostering talent development and innovation.
- **Diverse Economy** - Strong sectors in agriculture, manufacturing, energy production, and healthcare.
- **Natural and Recreational Assets** - Iconic landmarks like the covered bridges of Parke County, Sullivan Lake, and the LaVern Gibson Cross Country Course enhance tourism and quality of life.
- **Collaborative Regionalism** - Active partnerships through organizations like the Wabash River RDA, Thrive West Central, and West Central Partnership.

WEAKNESSES

- **Workforce Gaps** - Challenges in retaining young talent and filling skilled labor positions.
- **Aging Infrastructure** - Need for modernization of transportation, utilities, and digital connectivity.
- **Limited Housing Options** - Insufficient affordable and diverse housing stock to meet growing demands.
- **Perceived Fragmentation** - Historical lack of coordination among counties prior to regionalism initiatives.
- **Economic Disparities** - Variability in economic opportunities and resources across counties.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Economic Development and Workforce Growth** - Leverage emerging industries such as renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, and technology innovation, and enhance training programs with local educational institutions and employers to bridge skills gaps.
- **Regional Collaboration** - Strengthen partnerships between public, private, and nonprofit sectors to drive collective progress.
- **Quality of Life Enhancements** - Promote and capitalize on community assets and natural resources to attract new residents and business.
- **Regional Infrastructure Investments** - Utilize state and federal funding opportunities for transportation, broadband, and housing improvements.
- **Housing Availability and Affordability** - Streamline the development process by increasing zoning flexibility, encouraging mixed-use developments, and incentivizing the development of vacant or underutilized lots within established neighborhoods.

THREATS

- **Economic Volatility** - Dependence on specific industries vulnerable to market fluctuations.
- **Population Decline** - Challenges in attracting and retaining residents, particularly younger generations.
- **Competition from Other Regions** - Other areas competing for businesses, talent, and investment dollars.
- **Environmental Risks** - Potential flooding and other natural hazards impacting communities near the Wabash River.
- **Funding Limitations** - Reliance on external funding sources, which may fluctuate based on state and federal priorities.

West Central Indiana stands at a pivotal crossroads, with a strong foundation in strategic location, education, economic diversity, and natural assets to drive growth. However, addressing weaknesses like workforce gaps, aging infrastructure, and limited housing options is essential to overcome barriers to progress. By leveraging opportunities in emerging industries, regional collaboration, and infrastructure investment, the region can chart a path forward that enhances quality of life and strengthens its economic resilience. Mitigating threats such as population decline, economic volatility, and environmental risks will require a proactive, unified approach to ensure the region remains competitive and adaptable in the face of challenges. Through strategic action, West Central Indiana can build on its potential to achieve long-term sustainability and prosperity.



Framework of the Plan

This regional plan is structured to provide a clear, actionable roadmap for the future of West Central Indiana. It identifies key, overarching goals and outlines objectives and key strategies to achieve them, ensuring accountability and progress. The framework is designed to be dynamic, allowing for adaptability as the region evolves and new opportunities arise.

Objectives

The objectives serve as the foundation of the plan, addressing the region's priorities and aspirations. Each objective is aligned with the overall vision for economic growth, enhanced quality of life, and sustainable development.

Implementation Strategy

To accomplish the established goals and objectives, a high-level implementation strategy has been developed to streamline execution of the initiatives identified within the regional plan. The successful implementation of this regional plan will streamline regional priorities to further enhance collaborative efforts in West Central Indiana.



Goal 1: Strengthen Regional Collaboration

West Central Indiana's future depends on collective action and mutual support among its five counties. Historically, fragmented planning efforts limited the region's ability to compete for economic development opportunities and state or federal funding. Strengthening regional collaboration ensures that counties leverage shared resources, reduce duplication, and amplify their collective voice. The Wabash River serves as a unifying geographical feature, symbolizing interconnectedness and shared destiny. By fostering trust and coordinated efforts, this goal lays the groundwork for addressing complex challenges, from workforce development to infrastructure improvements, ensuring a united and competitive region.

OBJECTIVES

Objective 1.1 – Establish strong intergovernmental relationships and collaboration.

- **Action 1.1.1:** Develop formal agreements (e.g., MOUs) to define roles, responsibilities, and shared goals of community stakeholders and partners.
- **Action 1.1.2:** Establish a Regional Collaboration Council (RCC) as the central body for coordinating and advancing collaboration efforts across West Central Indiana.
 - Composition: Include representatives from county governments, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, nonprofit leaders, and private-sector stakeholders from all five counties.
 - Responsibilities:
 - Facilitate cross-county working groups focused on specific priorities such as workforce development, infrastructure, and housing.
- **Action 1.1.3:** Organize regular regional summits for government leaders to identify opportunities for collaboration and resource-sharing.

Objective 1.2 – Build trust and relationships between counties, embracing 'regionalism' and coordination across the region.

- **Action 1.2.1:** Host annual regional leadership retreats, bringing together leaders from all sectors to collaborate, build relationships, and address shared challenges.
- **Action 1.2.2:** Implement peer exchange program, where local leaders and staff members spend time in neighboring counties to learn about innovative practices and foster intergovernmental understanding.
- **Action 1.2.3:** Develop and launch a marketing campaign, showcasing joint accomplishments to highlight the benefits of collaboration and inspire ongoing efforts.
 - Celebrate regional successes to reinforce the value of collaboration and foster a shared identity while leveraging individual community assets.

Objective 1.3 – Foster open communication with stakeholders and regional leaders to address complex challenges, promote transparency and demonstrate reliability and commitment to shared goals.

- **Action 1.3.1:** Enhance www.wabashriverrda.com to become a readily available platform for regional communication to share updates, progress reports, and feedback opportunities.
- **Action 1.3.2:** Establish a monthly e-newsletter to keep stakeholders informed and engaged.
- **Action 1.3.3:** Organize public engagement forums to involve residents in shaping regional priorities, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes.
 - Host one forum in each county.

Objective 1.4 – Coordinate and promote joint planning and project implementation across the region.

- **Action 1.4.1:** Develop a Regional Project Database to track ongoing and planned initiatives to identify synergies, reduce duplication, and foster alignment.
 - Collaborate with regional partners and community stakeholders.
- **Action 1.4.2:** Seek state and federal funding for multi-county projects, with an emphasis on shared infrastructure (e.g., broadband, transportation) and economic development initiatives.
- **Action 1.4.3:** Implement regional data-sharing agreements to streamline access to demographic, economic, and planning data, enabling evidence-based decision-making.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The implementation of Goal 1 begins with a shared commitment to fostering a unified and collaborative region, where mutual trust and coordination drive progress. By aligning the efforts of government leaders, community stakeholders, and private-sector partners, West Central Indiana can effectively address complex challenges and unlock regional opportunities. A systematic approach, focused on structured communication, actionable partnerships, and measurable outcomes, will ensure the successful realization of this goal. The following implementation steps outline key actions to strengthen regional collaboration and sustain progress over time.

Public and Private Sector Engagement

Strengthen partnerships with businesses and nonprofit organizations to mobilize resources and expertise for regional efforts.

- Engage private-sector leaders in identifying opportunities for investment and collaboration.
- Partner with nonprofits to expand capacity for community-focused initiatives such as workforce training, housing development, and environmental sustainability projects.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Establish a robust monitoring framework to track progress and ensure accountability.

- Use key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure outcomes related to trust-building, joint planning, and project implementation.
- Publish an annual Regional Collaboration Report to share successes, lessons learned, and areas for improvement.
- Conduct periodic stakeholder satisfaction surveys to gauge perceptions of regional collaboration and identify opportunities for improvement.

Actionable Steps

1. Launch the Regional Collaboration Council and hold an inaugural summit to set objectives and approve the Regional Collaboration Charter.
2. Appoint liaisons and establish local task forces within three months to initiate county-level stakeholder engagement.
3. Enhance the Regional Communication Platform within six months, including the newsletter, and community engagement plan.
4. Conduct the first regional leadership retreat within the first year to build trust and foster relationships among leaders.
5. Begin tracking and cataloging projects in the Regional Project Database within the first year to align planning efforts and pursue funding opportunities.

Through these initiatives, West Central Indiana can harness the power of regional collaboration to create a more cohesive, competitive, and resilient region.



Goal 2: Expand Housing Availability and Affordability

The region faces a critical shortage of affordable and diverse housing options, a barrier to attracting and retaining residents. Expanding housing availability is essential to accommodate workforce needs, support population growth, and revitalize communities. With its mix of urban centers and rural areas, West Central Indiana must address zoning barriers, incentivize development, and modernize housing policies. This goal reflects the urgency of creating inclusive housing solutions that cater to all income levels, ensuring the region remains livable and attractive to families, professionals, and retirees alike.

Objective 2.1 – Address systemic barriers to housing development while supporting the development of new housing at various price points.

- **Action 2.1.1:** Utilize Thrive West Central’s Housing Resource Hub as the central location and network to drive housing initiative and ensure alignment across the region.
 - Create local committees to address unique housing challenges in urban and rural areas within the region.
- **Action 2.1.2:** Evaluate current zoning laws, permitting processes, and barriers to housing development.
- **Action 2.1.3:** Streamline permitting processes and reduce identified regulatory barriers to encourage housing development.
 - Implement online permitting systems and fast-track approvals for affordable and workforce housing projects.
- **Action 2.1.4:** Partner with developers to incentivize affordable housing projects through tax credits, grants, or reduced impact fees.

Objective 2.2 – Expand access to workforce and middle-income housing.

- **Action 2.2.1:** Foster collaboration between the public and private sectors to accelerate housing development.
 - Expand the Homes for the Future Initiative to include partnerships with local employers, developers, and financial institutions to create workforce housing options near job centers.
 - Work with major employers to offer down-payment assistance, rental subsidies, or other incentives to employees through an Employer-Assisted Housing Program.
 - Incentivize Affordable Housing by partnering with local communities to provide tax credits, grants, or reduced impact fees to developers building affordable housing.

Objective 2.3 – Enhance the character of existing residential areas by modernizing and land use and zoning policies.

- **Action 2.3.1:** Conduct zoning audits to identify outdated or restrictive policies and revise them to support diverse housing types.
- **Action 2.3.2:** Invest in improving existing residential areas to enhance quality of life and housing stock.
- **Action 2.3.3:** Support and provide resources for the development of home improvement grants or low-interest loans for property owners to upgrade aging homes, improve energy efficiency, or modernize infrastructure.
- **Action 2.3.4:** Support neighborhood beautification efforts, including parks, sidewalks, and lighting, to increase property values and attract residents.

Objective 2.4 - Promote high-quality residential development in appropriate locations.

- **Action 2.4.1:** Use data-driven analysis to identify optimal locations for new residential development, focusing on proximity to jobs, schools, and amenities.
 - Housing Opportunity Maps
 - Residential Needs Assessments
 - Infrastructure Analysis
- **Action 2.4.2:** Encourage mixed-use and transit-oriented developments to maximize land efficiency and accessibility.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The implementation of Goal 2 recognizes the urgent need to address the region's critical shortage of affordable and diverse housing. By focusing on systemic barriers, workforce housing solutions, zoning modernization, and targeted residential development, West Central Indiana can ensure livable communities that attract and retain residents across income levels. A coordinated approach involving local governments, private developers, employers, and regional organizations will be key to addressing these challenges and achieving sustainable, inclusive growth.

Community Engagement and Education

Involve residents and stakeholders in housing initiatives to build support and ensure alignment with community needs.

- Host forums and distribute surveys to gather input on housing priorities and share progress.
- Launch awareness campaigns to inform residents about the importance of diverse housing and ongoing regional efforts.
- Highlight completed projects and successful partnerships to demonstrate the tangible benefits of collaboration.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Establish a framework to monitor progress and evaluate outcomes of housing initiatives.

- Establish KPIs such as the number of new housing units, reduction in permitting times, and increased access to workforce housing.
- Conduct periodic reviews to adjust strategies as needed.

Actionable Steps

1. Conduct zoning audits and permitting process reviews in all counties within six months to identify and address systemic barriers.
2. Launch the Housing Opportunity Maps initiative within the first year, using data to prioritize development sites.
3. Secure funding and implement at least two workforce housing projects through public-private partnerships within the first 18 months.
4. Initiate neighborhood revitalization grants or loans for home improvements and infrastructure upgrades by the second year.

By following these steps, West Central Indiana can create a robust housing ecosystem that supports workforce needs, attracts residents, and ensures the region's long-term livability and prosperity.

Goal 3: Invest in Regional Infrastructure

Aging infrastructure is a significant challenge for West Central Indiana, impacting everything from transportation to broadband connectivity. Investing in modern, efficient infrastructure is pivotal for economic growth, quality of life, and environmental sustainability. The region's strategic location, with access to major highways, railroads, and the Wabash River, provides a solid foundation for enhancing connectivity. This goal prioritizes equitable access to utilities, integrated transportation networks, and expanded broadband coverage, enabling residents and businesses to thrive in a globally connected economy.

Objective 3.1 – Review and prioritize the region's quality of life infrastructure needs.

- **Action 3.1.1:** Develop a regional infrastructure master plan, informed by stakeholder input and current assessments.
 - Establish an Infrastructure Oversight Task Force to lead and coordinate infrastructure planning, funding, and development efforts across the region.
- **Action 3.2.1:** Create a transparent prioritization framework to allocate resources effectively through recommendations provided within the regional infrastructure master plan.

Objective 3.2 – Support the expansion of water, sewer, stormwater and other utilities throughout the region.

- **Action 3.2.1:** Strengthen relationships with state and federal agencies to secure technical assistance and funding for regional projects.
- **Action 3.2.2:** Seek state and federal funding to modernize and expand utility infrastructure in underserved areas.
- **Action 3.2.3:** Advocate for regional priorities during state and federal infrastructure planning cycles to ensure alignment with funding priorities.
- **Action 3.2.4:** Partner with local governments and utility providers to ensure equitable access to services.
 - Develop a regional utility expansion plan to address gaps in water, sewer, and stormwater services, with a focus on underserved communities.

Objective 3.3 – Improve Broadband Access/Availability throughout the region.

- **Action 3.3.1:** Collaborate with internet service providers (ISPs) to expand broadband infrastructure to rural and underserved communities.
- **Action 3.3.2:** Conduct a comprehensive assessment to identify broadband service gaps and prioritize areas for investment.

- **Action 3.3.3:** Offer subsidies or grants to support affordable internet access for low-income households.

Objective 3.4 – Promote an integrated and balanced transportation network that accommodates motorists, bicyclists, pedestrians and transit.

- **Action 3.4.1:** Invest in multi-modal transportation options, including bike lanes, sidewalks, and transit services.
 - Develop a regional transit and mobility plan to incorporate bus routes, bike lanes, and pedestrian pathways to connect communities.
 - Prioritize projects that enhance regional connectivity between West Central Indiana communities and reduce transportation barriers for residents.
- **Action 3.4.2:** Support the adoption of policies that require transportation projects to accommodate all users, including motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Implementing Goal 3 requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach to address West Central Indiana's aging infrastructure challenges. By focusing on utilities, broadband access, and multi-modal transportation networks, the region can foster sustainable growth, improve residents' quality of life, and strengthen economic competitiveness. This implementation strategy outlines actionable steps to modernize infrastructure through coordinated planning, equitable resource allocation, and targeted investments, ensuring the region remains connected and resilient in a global economy.

Community Engagement and Transparency

Ensure stakeholder involvement and transparency throughout infrastructure planning and implementation.

- Host forums to gather input on infrastructure needs and share progress updates.
- Launch an online dashboard to track project status, funding allocations, and timelines.
- Raise awareness about the importance of infrastructure improvements and how they benefit residents and businesses.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Establish metrics to track progress and ensure goals are being met.

- Establish KPIs to monitor metrics such as miles of broadband installed, number of multi-modal transportation projects completed, and percentage of households with access to utilities.
- Publish a report summarizing achievements, challenges, and upcoming priorities.
- Use feedback and data to refine strategies and address emerging needs.

Actionable Steps

1. Form the Infrastructure Oversight Task Force within the first six months, and begin developing the Regional Infrastructure Master Plan.
2. Conduct a broadband mapping initiative within six months to identify underserved areas and guide investment priorities.
3. Secure state and federal funding for at least two critical utility or transportation projects within the first two year.
4. Launch the Regional Transit and Mobility Plan within the first 12 months, identifying priority investments for multi-modal transportation.
5. Implement a public utility subsidy program to expand water, sewer, and broadband access to low-income households by the second year.

Through these steps, West Central Indiana can modernize its infrastructure to support long-term economic growth, enhance connectivity, and ensure equitable access to essential services for all residents.

Goal 4: Promote Economic Development + Workforce Growth

Economic stability and growth in West Central Indiana rely on diversifying industries, developing talent, and retaining a skilled workforce. The region's strong manufacturing, agriculture, and energy sectors must adapt to evolving market demands and embrace emerging fields like renewable energy and technology. Additionally, workforce gaps remain a challenge, particularly in skilled labor. By fostering entrepreneurship, enhancing training programs, and addressing barriers such as childcare and transportation, this goal ensures the region builds a robust, adaptable economy that meets current and future demands.

Objective 4.1 – Expand and diversify the employment base throughout the region.

- **Action 4.1.1:** Oversee the development of a regional business growth strategy to focus on diversification and industry alignment, attracting industries aligned with regional strengths, such as advanced manufacturing, logistics, and technology.
- **Action 4.1.2:** Support coordinated outreach to prospective businesses, highlighting incentives, workforce availability, and regional assets.
- **Action 4.1.3:** Support small businesses and entrepreneurs through grants, technical assistance, and training programs.

Objective 4.2 – Develop a skilled and adaptable workforce, aligned with regional economic needs.

- **Action 4.2.1:** Partner with educational institutions and employers to create training programs tailored to local industries.
- **Action 4.2.2:** Expand partnerships between educational institutions and employers to offer hands-on learning opportunities for students and job seekers through internships and externships.
- **Action 4.2.3:** Promote apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities.
- **Action 4.2.4:** Encourage businesses to implement robust training programs to up skill existing employees and prepare them for evolving roles.

Objective 4.3 – Create a regional strategy focused on business attraction, retention and expansion.

- **Action 4.3.1:** Develop a comprehensive regional strategy to attract new industries and support existing businesses.
- **Action 4.3.2:** Conduct outreach to prospective businesses, highlighting regional assets and incentives.

- **Action 4.3.3:** Develop retention programs to support existing businesses, addressing challenges such as workforce shortages or infrastructure needs.

Objective 4.4 – Support and promote policies aimed at maintaining a balanced economic base.

- **Action 4.4.1:** Advocate for balanced growth across sectors to reduce over-reliance on a single industry.
 - Collaborate with state and local governments to support policies that foster balanced economic development, such as infrastructure investments and workforce incentives.
- **Action 4.4.2:** Monitor economic trends to anticipate and mitigate potential risks to regional stability.

Objective 4.5 – Address barriers to workforce participation.

- **Action 4.5.1:** Expand access to childcare, transportation, and flexible work arrangements.
 - Support West Central Indiana Partnership in the implementation of the Grow Up in West Central Indiana Regional Child Care Strategic Plan developed by Indiana State University in partnership with Ivy Tech Community College - Terre Haute.
- **Action 4.5.2:** Develop initiatives to re-engage underutilized talent, such as retirees, veterans, or individuals re-entering the workforce.
- **Action 4.5.3:** Work with local transit providers and employers to develop transportation options for workers, such as shuttle services or expanded bus routes.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Achieving economic stability and growth in West Central Indiana requires a proactive approach to diversifying industries, building a skilled workforce, and removing barriers to employment. By leveraging regional strengths in manufacturing, agriculture, and energy while embracing emerging sectors like renewable energy and technology, the region can position itself as an economic leader. Addressing workforce gaps through partnerships with educational institutions, businesses, and workforce boards will ensure that local talent aligns with industry needs. This implementation strategy focuses on targeted actions to enhance economic resilience and adaptability for sustained regional prosperity.

Community Engagement and Support

Ensure that residents and stakeholders are engaged in economic development initiatives.

- Host forums to gather input on workforce and business development priorities.
- Launch regional campaigns to highlight local career pathways and opportunities in emerging industries.
- Promote success stories of regional businesses, workforce programs, and entrepreneurial ventures to inspire participation and attract investment.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Establish a framework to measure progress and adapt strategies as needed.

- Track metrics such as job creation, industry diversification, workforce participation rates, and the number of small businesses supported.
- Conduct quarterly reviews with partners to ensure alignment and adjust plans as necessary.

Actionable Steps

1. Outline goals and establish the Regional Business Growth Strategy.
2. Develop partnerships with educational institutions to launch industry-aligned training programs within six months.
3. Implement an Entrepreneurship Support Program within the first year, providing resources to technical assistance and grants for small businesses.
4. Partner with West Central Indiana Partnership, Indiana State University and Ivy Tech Community College for childcare and transportation pilot programs within the first 18 months, partnering with major employers to address workforce barriers.
5. Secure funding and attract at least three new businesses aligned with regional strengths within two years.

Through these targeted actions, West Central Indiana can foster economic diversification, close workforce gaps, and build a resilient economy that supports residents and businesses in achieving long-term success.

A wooden sign for Griffin Bike Park with two sections: 'GRIFFIN BIKE PARK' on top and 'BASIC TRAINING SKILLS PARK' on the bottom. The sign is set against a background of trees and a person on a bicycle.

Goal 5: Enhance Quality of Life

Quality of life is a cornerstone of community development and talent attraction. West Central Indiana offers unique assets such as the Wabash River, extensive recreational opportunities, and a rich cultural heritage. However, to compete with other regions, investments must be made in health services, childcare, parks, and public spaces. This goal focuses on creating vibrant, connected communities that attract and retain residents by offering a balanced, fulfilling lifestyle. It also emphasizes social cohesion, encouraging pride and belonging among diverse populations, making the region a premier place to live, work, and play.

Objective 5.1 – Increase access to rural health and wellness services.

- **Action 5.1.1:** Partner with healthcare providers to establish clinics or telehealth services in underserved areas.
 - Identify underserved areas within the region.
- **Action 5.1.2:** Expand mental health and substance abuse resources to support community well-being, including crisis intervention and counseling programs.
- **Action 5.1.3:** Identify and pursue funding opportunities for regional initiatives.

Objective 5.2 – Invest in parks, recreation, and open space amenities that draw and retain young professionals.

- **Action 5.2.1:** Develop regional parks and greenways that connect communities and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities.
- **Action 5.2.2:** Seek grants for local governments to upgrade or expand recreational facilities.
- **Action 5.2.3:** Establish regional parks with amenities such as sports complexes, amphitheaters, and nature centers to draw visitors and residents alike.

Objective 5.3 – Support regional childcare initiatives through the ‘Grow Up IN West Central’ Plan.

- **Action 5.3.1:** Partner with employers to provide on-site childcare or subsidize care for employees.
- **Action 5.3.2:** Partner with local colleges and workforce boards to expand training and certification programs for childcare providers to increase capacity and quality.
- **Action 5.3.3:** Identify and incentive underutilized spaces that can be converted into licensed childcare centers.

Objective 5.4 – Promote community well-being and social connectivity.

- **Action 5.4.1:** Support events, festivals, and cultural programs that foster a sense of community pride and belonging.
- **Action 5.4.2:** Invest in public spaces and amenities that encourage social interaction and community engagement.
- **Action 5.4.3:** Develop initiatives to engage residents in community improvement projects to foster a shared sense of responsibility and pride.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY:

Achieving a high quality of life is essential for West Central Indiana to attract and retain talent, build community pride, and foster a sense of belonging among residents. This goal focuses on leveraging the region’s natural, cultural, and recreational assets while addressing gaps in healthcare, childcare, and social infrastructure. By investing in vibrant public spaces, accessible services, and community programming, the region can create an environment where people choose to live, work, and thrive. The following implementation strategy outlines actionable steps to achieve these objectives through collaboration and strategic investments.

Regional Quality of Life Committee

- Establish a committee composed of parks and recreation departments, healthcare providers, and cultural organizations.
 - This group will lead efforts to expand recreational amenities, improve rural healthcare, and support community engagement initiatives.

Community Engagement and Support

- Empower municipal and county governments to prioritize quality-of-life initiatives.
 - Encourage adoption of zoning and development policies that encourage the creation of green spaces, mixed-use areas, and childcare facilities.
 - Provide resources to technical assistance and grant opportunities for parks, childcare, and public spaces.
- Leverage the expertise and resources of local nonprofits to enhance community programs.

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Track progress and measure the impact of quality-of-life investments.

- Establish KPIs and monitor metrics such as healthcare access rates, childcare availability, park usage, and resident satisfaction surveys.
- Develop a Quality of Life report highlighting successes, identifying challenges, and setting goals for the next year.
- Conduct regular surveys and public forums to gather input and adjust strategies accordingly.

Actionable Steps

1. Establish a regional quality of life network within the first six months and define regional priorities.
2. Partner with healthcare providers to launch one new rural clinic or telehealth initiative within twelve months.
3. Apply for state or federal grants to fund at least two parks or recreational facility upgrades within the first year.
4. Partner with West Central Indiana Partnership, Indiana State University, and Ivy Tech Community College on the 'Grow Up IN West Central' Plan by supporting childcare provider training programs and launching one employer-supported childcare initiative within 12 months.
5. Host a Regional Cultural Festival within the first year to promote community pride and connectivity.
6. Implement a regional greenway project connecting at least two communities within the first 18 months.

By executing these steps, West Central Indiana can create vibrant, inclusive communities that enhance quality of life, attract new residents, and retain existing talent, securing the region's future as a premier destination to live, work, and play.



Conclusion

The **Wabash River Regional Development Authority (RDA) Regional Plan 2025** represents a transformative vision for the future of West Central Indiana. Grounded in regional collaboration, this plan is a testament to the collective determination of Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo Counties to work together in pursuit of shared prosperity. By focusing on strategic goals—strengthening regional collaboration, expanding housing availability, investing in infrastructure, promoting economic development and workforce growth, and enhancing quality of life—we have charted a clear path forward to address our region's unique challenges and opportunities.

At its core, this plan is a roadmap for action, guided by the diverse voices of our communities, informed by rigorous analysis, and aligned with the shared values of West Central Indiana. The goals and strategies outlined here reflect not only our commitment to growth but also our dedication to preserving the qualities that make this region special—our natural beauty, strong work ethic, and deep-rooted sense of community.

Implementation of this plan will require continued collaboration, innovative thinking, and sustained effort. The Regional Collaboration Council, task forces, and committees recommended within this plan should play pivotal roles in ensuring alignment, tracking progress, and adapting strategies as needed. Through the coordinated efforts of local governments, community organizations, private-sector leaders, and residents, we can transform the vision of this plan into reality.

The success of this regional plan depends on the active engagement of all stakeholders. Each county, community, and individual has a role to play in building a thriving, united region. Whether through advocacy, investment, or simply participating in local initiatives, your contributions will help shape a brighter future for West Central Indiana.

As we move forward, let us remember that our strength lies in our unity. By leveraging our collective assets, addressing our shared challenges, and embracing the principles of regionalism, we can ensure that West Central Indiana is not only a great place to live, work, and play but also a region poised for sustained success and innovation.

Together, we can achieve extraordinary things. Let this plan be the foundation of a prosperous and vibrant West Central Indiana for generations to come.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LILLY ENDOWMENT, INC.

WABASH VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

- Board of Directors
 - Dr. Lea Anne Crooks, Chair
 - Summer Long, Treasurer
 - Conrad Koehler, Secretary
 - Travis Behem
 - Dr. Daniel Bradley
 - Janell Chatman, Vice Chair
 - Sara Clark
 - Brian Dougherty
 - Karen Dyer
 - David Friedrich
 - Dr. Christopher Himself
 - Dianna Knox
 - Jennifer Lincoln
 - Santhana Naidu
 - Allison (Ally) Orwig
 - Brennan Randolph
 - Dr. Brian Ross
 - Aaron Warner
- Beth Tevlin, President & CEO

WABASH RIVER REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

- Board of Directors
 - Jon Ford, Board Chair – Vigo County Representative
 - Jim Exline – Sullivan County Representative
 - Josh Alsip – Clay County Representative
 - Chadd Jenkins – Parke County Representative
 - William Rennels – Vermillion County Representative

Appendices

References

Bureau, US Census. "American Community Survey 5-Year Data (2009-2023)." *Census.Gov*, 26 Nov. 2024, www.census.gov/data/developers/data-sets/acs-5year.html.

"Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)." *Thrive West Central*, 6 Aug. 2024, thrivewestcentral.com/ceds/.

County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, www.countyhealthrankings.org/health-data/indiana. Accessed 9 Apr. 2024.

Partnership Parke County, www.partnershipparkecounty.com/. Accessed 17 May 2024.

"See You In Terre Haute 2025 Community Plan." *Terre Haute Community Data*, Aug. 2019, www.terrehautecommunitydata.com/community-plan.

"West Central Indiana Partnership – RDA." *InDepth Profile: STATS Indiana*, www.stats.indiana.edu/profiles/profiles.asp?scope_choice=a&county_changer=18153. Accessed May 2024.

