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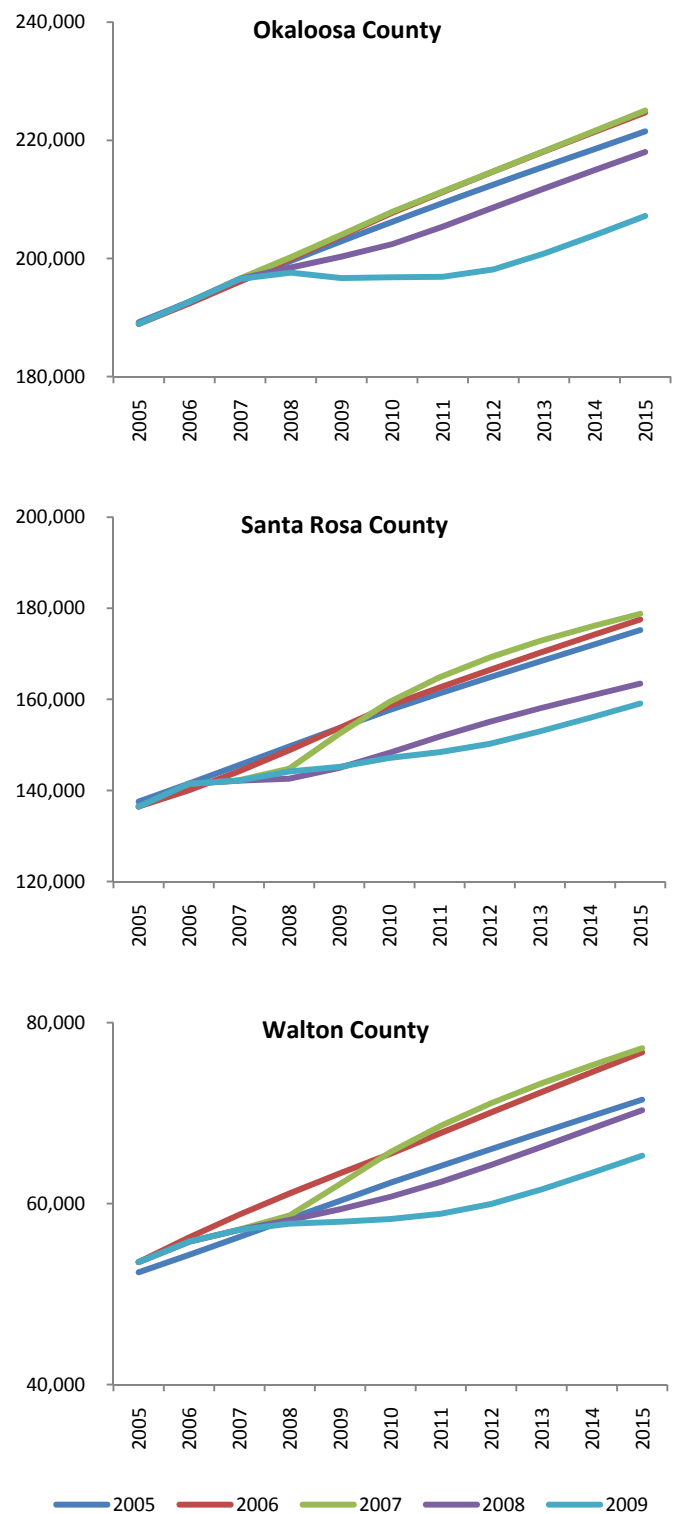
MILITARY REALIGNMENTS IN CHANGING TIMES

The 2005 BRAC Realignment process drew to a close in an era of almost unprecedented economic growth in the State of Florida. At the time when the estimated population impacts of military realignments in Northwest Florida topped out at between 16,000 and 22,000, organic population growth estimates were soaring as well. As Figure B.1 demonstrates, published State-of-Florida forecasts predicted strong growth through 2015 for the forecast years of 2005 (blue), 2006 (red) and 2007 (green). It was during this time of expansion that planners were first coming to grips with the potential impacts of the arrival of the Joint Strike Fighter and the 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne) on the economy of the region surrounding Eglin Air Force Base in Okaloosa County. Clearly, there would be challenges associated with accommodating the incoming personnel on top of the tremendous organic growth that was forecast to occur.

A close examination of the figures on the right shows that the 2007 estimates, particularly in Santa Rosa and Walton Counties, were the most optimistic. For those two counties, the near-term annual growth estimates for 2009 and 2010 hovered around 5 percent – a clear shock to the long-run equilibrium growth rates. The 2008 conference would redirect these soaring growth estimates back towards reality and the 2009 conference would bring them down further still. Also, during that period, the first empirical estimates of the net impacts of the realignments process were produced. The departure of the 33rd Fighter Wing from Eglin reduced the 16,000 to 22,000 initial net population impact estimates to approximately 11,000 for the Tri-county study region. The most optimistic net estimate was therefore halved at the time that planners were developing an understanding of the impact of the recession on organic growth patterns across the region. An accurate assessment of the near and medium term organic-growth and realignment-impact estimates was critical to nearly all of the recommendations that are contained in this document.

Planners ultimately concluded that organic (economic and population) growth rates through 2015 would be mild and that the 11,000 net impact 2015 figure was the most likely scenario. They then proceeded to complete the various facets of the analysis based on those two key assumptions, the empirical support for which is found in Section C. Planners quickly reached the conclusion that successful accommodation of the realignment activities

Figure B.1: Comparative Population Forecasts from the Florida Demographic Estimating Conference



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would hinge on the ability of the region to a) establish the institutional framework necessary to implement the recommendations, b) create and foster successful economic diversification efforts and c) deal with the transportation infrastructure issues that plague the Tri-County area. Other prominent recommendations include the construction of a high school and a firehouse in the Crestview area – as well as execution of a number of small area studies across the region. The executive summary is designed to provide a contextual overview of the realignments process and highlight the key steps necessary for successful implementation of the recommendations contained in the broader document. We begin with the overall implementation framework.

IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

Successful implementation of the recommended strategies will require the rapid development of an institutional framework to oversee the process. In the Implementation Section (I) planners recommend the establishment of a Military Sustainability Partnership to jointly house and oversee efforts spurred by the Growth Management Plan and the Joint Land Use Study. Planners recommend that such a partnership be housed within the offices of the Okaloosa County Government. The Partnership would be led by an Implementation Steering Committee to oversee the efforts of a technical committee related to the Joint Land Use Study and an additional technical committee charged with overseeing the efforts of the Growth Management Plan.

To be competitive in the coming budget cycle, the region must move quickly and effectively to ensure that the Partnership is fully functional in short order. There is little time for error. Planners therefore suggest, at least in the initial stages, that the County and other partners engage the services of a professional that has experience in creating and advising entities such as the one contemplated here. Such a route should ensure that the Partnership functions efficiently in the short and long term. The Growth Management Planning team recommends the services of The Florida State University's FCRC Consensus Center (which has experience in the region) as an advisory group to structure the Partnership and facilitate and advise the body as it is stood up. Such a process should lead to a much more smooth and effective execution of the overall effort. A smooth and effective execution will, in turn, be necessary to successfully secure the funding dollars needed to implement the recommendations throughout

the document. The consulting team will now turn to a discussion of the critical policy-specific recommendations that should aid in the successful accommodation of the realignment activities.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

As planners studied the impact of the military realignment activities on the Tri-county regional economy, it was clear that the effects would be positive and significant through the 2015 period. Moreover, the sustained impact on the economy post 2015 would be approximately \$1 billion annually. This impact, however positive, is set to occur in a region where the military is already a (and in some counties *the*) key driver of economic activity.

In Okaloosa County alone, the military accounts for approximately 50% of the total value of goods and services produced by the county's economy (GDP) either directly or indirectly. In Santa Rosa County, the figure is closer to 20% and in Walton County just shy of 10%. These figures highlight the critical reliance of the local region on the military as a driver of economic activity. They also highlight the need to diversify the economy by a) attracting other economic drivers to the region and b) connecting local businesses to export markets across the US and abroad.

After all, if the BRAC committee had charted a course opposite the current one and reduced the military presence at Eglin, the outcome could have been disastrous (at least in the near and medium term) for the local economy. Diversification is therefore key to long-term economic viability in the face of future realignment activities (which may not always be so positive) and the normal cycles and swings associated with the economy. In the People and Jobs section, planners outline a series of recommendations that should aid in diversifying the local economy. However, there is little doubt that the Partnership will wish to make such an effort an integral part of their operations.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

This study was conducted to identify the impacts associated with BRAC actions on the communities in the three counties surrounding Eglin Air Force Base. From a transportation perspective, this study focused on the surface transportation system, including roadways, transit and bicycle and pedestrian systems. A second goal of this study was not to duplicate the various other

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studies undertaken by transportation agencies, but to take these studies and their recommendations into account and build upon this previous work. Based on the demographic and land use work done through this study, the projected transportation impacts of BRAC actions on the regional roadways were identified. This analysis concluded that the vast majority of the projected roadway deficiencies in the region are projected to occur regardless of the impacts associated with BRAC, and in many cases the additional impacts associated with BRAC actions were insignificant. BRAC actions are anticipated to have a significant impact on the SR 85/SR 123 corridors between Crestview and Fort Walton Beach/Niceville. The SR 85 North (N) / SR 123 corridor is a vital transportation connection from Interstate 10 near Crestview to Niceville and Fort Walton Beach, carrying thousands of the region's residents to their jobs each day at Eglin, Duke Field, Hurlburt Field, Northwest Florida Regional Airport and other destinations in the region. A literal lifeline, SR 85 is vital link that supports national defense missions at Eglin Air Force Base (AFB), enables the hurricane and emergency evacuation of the region and connects jobs to affordable housing north of I-10 and Crestview.

SR 85N is one of only four north-south corridors providing access across the 724 square miles of Eglin AFB, which spans Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton Counties. SR 85N is the only one of these corridors that lies entirely within Okaloosa County, making it THE north-south route across the base for many of the county's residents. The significance of this corridor is recognized in its prominent designation to the State's Strategic Intermodal System (SIS). This SIS distinction requires that roadway service levels cannot be degraded by traffic congestion and delays that would impact the corridor's functional purpose to move people and goods safely and efficiently.

SR 85 is a designated hurricane evacuation route that connects the densely populated areas of Niceville, Destin, Fort Walton Beach and the storm threatened areas to the east and west along US 98 to Interstate 10 and beyond. During the development of the Northwest Florida Transportation Corridor Authority (NFTCA) Master Plan, SR 85 was identified as an evacuation deficiency, and without improvement, hurricane evacuation times could approach approximately 21 hours in the future. The NFTCA Master Plan identified that widening SR 85 to six lanes could improve hurricane evacuation clearance times by over 30% (approximately

6 hours). An important observation that supports this need is that the two nearest alternate routes that connect to US 98 must crossover the Choctawhatchee Bay, either on the bridges of SR 293 or US 331. During the inclement weather and high winds of an advancing storm, these bridges could be closed to traffic effectively forcing traffic to divert to alternate routes, including SR 85. SR 85 also provides access to the only designated hurricane shelters north of Niceville that are located in Crestview and Laurel Hill

Other roadways in the region area also anticipated to be significantly impacted including portions of US 90 in near Crestview and Milton. Deficiencies and specific recommended improvements for these areas are discussed in the full report. The following section identifies the priority recommendations for both policies for the three County region and needed improvements to the SR 85 corridor and areas where BRAC impacts were most intense.

Priority Recommendations

- Conduct a local transportation funding study for the tri-county region that would include the formation of a committee made of local elected officials, agency representatives and citizens to study and develop recommendations for dedicated local transportation funding options, including funding for transit, bicycle and pedestrian projects.
- Through the implementation steering committee continue to identify and pursue grant funding opportunities.
- Create and implement a "complete streets" policy. Streets must consider the needs of all the potential users, not just the automobile. In addition to providing route choice for the traveling public, streets must also provide for mode choice. Incomplete streets may not only discourage travel by alternative modes, but may be hazardous for non-auto users. A complete streets policy will ensure that facilities for all modes are required as part of the initial planning, design and construction (or reconstruction/resurfacing) of all roadway facilities. Incorporate provisions for all modes in the improvements recommended in this study. Given the distance involved it is unlikely that many will walk to Eglin AFB, however, some may arrive by bicycle and/or ride transit. All trips begin and end as a pedestrian. Provisions for all

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modes are consistent with the smart growth policies and provide additional benefits to the area in terms of quality of life, safety, livability and sense of place.



Complete Streets include multiple transportation modes

- Address capacity issues in the SR 85 / SR 123 corridors. The impacts of the BRAC actions are projected to be concentrated in this corridor from US 90 in Crestview south to US 98 in Fort Walton Beach. This corridor is vital to the success of the region, providing access to Eglin Main Base and its mission, access to much of Eglin Reservation and its missions, access to the regional airport (Northwest Florida Regional Airport), access to shelters and safety for the coastal areas in the event of hurricanes or tropical storms as well as providing the only surface transportation corridor open to the general public between the northern and southern portions of the County that is entirely within the County. In recognition of its importance to the regional, portions of this corridor have been designated as part of the Strategic Intermodal System by the State of Florida. Recommendations for this corridor to increase capacity include:
 - Provide express transit service from residential areas to Eglin Main Base, and or the Duke Field/7SFGA areas, including consideration for park and ride areas and vanpool programs.

- Provide north/south capacity in the Crestview area by constructing the PJ Adams Parkway / Antioch Road preferred alternative (as determined through the ongoing PD&E study) or by constructing the locally preferred parallel corridor.
- Provide additional capacity from the Crestview area to the Niceville area. Additional capacity may be provided by improving the corridor to 6 lanes, which may be used for general purpose, or for some form of transit. The improved corridor should include facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Provide additional capacity for the SR 123 corridor as based on the preferred alternative identified in the ongoing PD&E study.

- Plan and Program studies to identify and implement lower cost system management improvements in the more urban, built out areas of the region such as Crestview, Fort Walton Beach, Mary Esther, Shalimar and Valparaiso. Such improvements include intersection improvements, signal timing and coordination improvements, access management improvements and incorporation of facilities for bicyclists, pedestrians and transit in all future improvements.
- Implement and construct the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector projects and the recommendations of the NFTCA from the Mid-Bay Bridge Connector to SR 87 in Santa Rosa County to provide for additional east –west capacity and an alternative parallel corridor to US 98 in this portion of the County.

Short Recommendations

- Identify and Implement local funding sources. Pursue additional grant opportunities as they become available.
- Create and implement a “complete streets” policy.
- Address capacity issues in the SR 85 / SR 123 corridors. Recommendations for this corridor to increase capacity include:
 - Provide express transit service from residential areas to Eglin Main Base,

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- and or the Duke Field/7SFGA areas, including consideration for park and ride areas and vanpool programs.
- Provide north/south capacity in the Crestview area by constructing the PJ Adams Parkway / Antioch Road preferred alternative (as determined through the ongoing PD&E study) or by constructing the locally preferred parallel corridor.
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- Foster distinctive attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- Make development decisions predictable fair and cost effective
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions
- Encourage multi forms of transportation – “Complete Streets”
- Develop better cross jurisdictional communications between city, county and AF on matters of growth – land use changes, zoning, facilities and encroachment
- Undertake “**Small Area Studies**” for those growth areas that are expected to receive increased development to insure adequate facilities
- Consider **reevaluating LOS** for certain quality of Life services in Small Area Studies

SMART GROWTH AND LAND USE

The future development of the various land uses to serve each county could benefit from the inclusion of Smart Growth Principles (as previously identified in the Introduction chapter). Specifically, the following recommendations could be applied and utilized within these growth areas to achieve the following eight Principles, including:

- Encourage developments with a mix of land uses
- Take advantage of compact building design
- Create and range of housing opportunities and choices

EDUCATION

The total net student population resulting from all BRAC activities, direct, indirect and induced across the three county areas is estimated to be 2166 including 1,221 elementary students, 420 middle school students and 525 high school students. Forecasts prepared by the Haas Center in July of 2009 expect that 90 percent of this student population will reside in Okaloosa County resulting in 1,101 elementary students, 379 middle school students and 473 high school students.

It is expected that Crestview will see the bulk of this growth resulting in the following recommended needs.

- 79 new teachers by 2015 for all grade levels to maintain 15:1 student / teacher ratio
- Crestview High school is currently over capacity by 134 and expected to receive an additional 335 students by 2015 requiring a new High school or significant additional capacity
- ft Walton Beach area is expected to need an additional 14new teachers
- Niceville / Valparaiso Area is expected to need an additional seven new teachers by 2015
- Six special needs teachers within the TRI – County area by 2015

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PUBLIC SAFETY & EMERGENCY SERVICES

- Increase Training for First Responders to include PTSD and TBI awareness
- **Law Enforcement Officers, Overall- 25**
Crestview 17;
- **Firefighters, Overall -18**
Ft Walton Beach area – 4; Crestview - 8; new fire station/ staff when thresholds are met
- **Certified Shelter Space, Overall 900**
Okaloosa County - 800

QUALITY OF LIFE

Because of the vast quantities of natural areas devoted to hunting, trails/hiking, camping, swimming and outdoor recreation the counties very often meet their Levels of Service (LOS) related to outdoor recreation at the macro level. However, at the community or city level the distribution of these facilities is often lacking. The following are recommendations regarding the Recreation Elements of the county Comprehensive plans.

- Reevaluate the LOS standards for neighborhood and Community parks.
- Consider requiring developers to set aside acreage for neighborhood and community parks based on size of development., or cash in lieu of land donation
- Include recreation land in Small Area Studies
- Continue to monitor development activity by area to insure adequate recreation lands or facilities