

ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS AND THE METROPOLITAN COUNCIL'S RESEARCH, INFORMATION, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Frequently Asked Questions

Regional economic competition in a global economy

1) What is "regional economic competitiveness?"

Regional economic competitiveness refers to the ability of a region to compete effectively and prosper in the global economy.

2) How does our region support economic competitiveness?

Our region supports economic competitiveness in three dynamic, interrelated ways:

- Economic development – Retaining, attracting, or growing businesses that bring wealth into the region, or enable the region to reduce its reliance on imports from elsewhere
- Community development – Infrastructure, services, and amenities that support businesses and residents, serve as a critical foundation to attract and retain talent, and support a strong economy
- Workforce development – Initiatives to train, educate, retain, and attract a talented workforce

3) What organizations help to ensure that the Twin Cities region competes well in the global economy?

Many organizations play a role, and partnerships among them are essential. Here are major players:

- Economic development – GREATER MSP (the region's economic development partnership), economic development authorities, cities, port authorities, industry associations, Minnesota Department of Economic Development (DEED), nonprofits, counties, chambers, businesses
- Community development – Cities, counties, townships, community development agencies, housing and redevelopment authorities, Metropolitan Council, DEED, chambers of commerce, utilities, airports, railroads, nonprofits, foundations, etc.
- Workforce development – Educational institutions, DEED, county and city workforce organizations, businesses, trade unions, industry associations, foundations, nonprofits, chambers

4) What is the Council's role in economic competitiveness?

The Council has two key roles in economic competitiveness. The first is the Council's historic role in community development, which focuses on infrastructure, services, and quality of life amenities that attract and support companies and residents. Our responsibilities include: wastewater collection and treatment operations; highway planning; transit planning and operation; water supply and quality planning; regional parks and trails planning and funding; land use planning; and funding support for Livable Communities projects.

The second is the Council's role in research and analysis of data that has long served as the foundation for planning and development throughout the region. We research and analyze data related to regional demographics, land use and development, housing, construction activity, and the economy and employment.

Economic research, information, and technical assistance

5) What is the Council planning to do?

Starting in 2015, the Council will make additional economic information and technical assistance available to local governments. The goal is to provide communities more insight into what drives the region's economy and their local economy. Communities may elect to incorporate this information into local comprehensive plans.

6) What kinds of data will the Council provide?

The Council will develop information and/or tools to help local governments identify and analyze:

- The geographic distribution of businesses that drive the regional economy.
- The real estate requirements of these economic drivers.
- Sites for economic growth.
- Our region's freight and distribution system and connections to the global economy.
- The geography of the workforce and access to jobs.

We will work with our partners, such as DEED, the University of Minnesota, MnSCU, GREATER MSP, and others to produce this information.

We will also provide technical assistance for communities who seek advice on how to apply these resources to their local planning and development activities.

7) What is the timetable?

The Council will make research and information tools available in 2015. This will enable communities to use the tools as they begin comprehensive plan updates in 2016. Stakeholder input and the need, in some cases, for help from collaborating partners will shape the delivery schedule of individual tools.

8) How will this effort help economic competitiveness?

The Council believes that decision makers who guide local comprehensive plans will strengthen the competitiveness of our region if they gain more information about the regional economy, the economic drivers in their community, and the needs and challenges of their employers. We need to work together locally and regionally to plan for and provide competitive sites for economic growth, infrastructure, and the amenities needed to attract, retain, and grow businesses and a talented workforce. In a time of tight local budgets, we want to ensure that all cities and counties in the region have access to this information.

9) Does this go beyond the Council's established mission?

No. The historic, statutory role of the Council is to be a vital contributor to the region's economic competitiveness (Minn. Stat. 473.173). In partnership with local governments, our long-range planning and investment activities support the efficient movement of people and freight, the efficient treatment of wastewater, a quality of life to attract and retain talent, a consistent framework for land use planning, and access to employment locations.

10) How will the Met Council communicate about its economic competitiveness work and who can I contact for more information?

For partners that continue to express interest, Council staff will hold periodic meetings and send information via e-mail. For a broader audience, the Council's website and newsletter will periodically contain information about the latest work. The Council always welcomes opportunities to discuss this work directly with interested partners. Requests should be sent to Mark VanderSchaaf at 651-602-1441 or mark.vanderschaaf@metc.state.mn.us.

The role of local governments

11) What voice did local governments have in developing this new program?

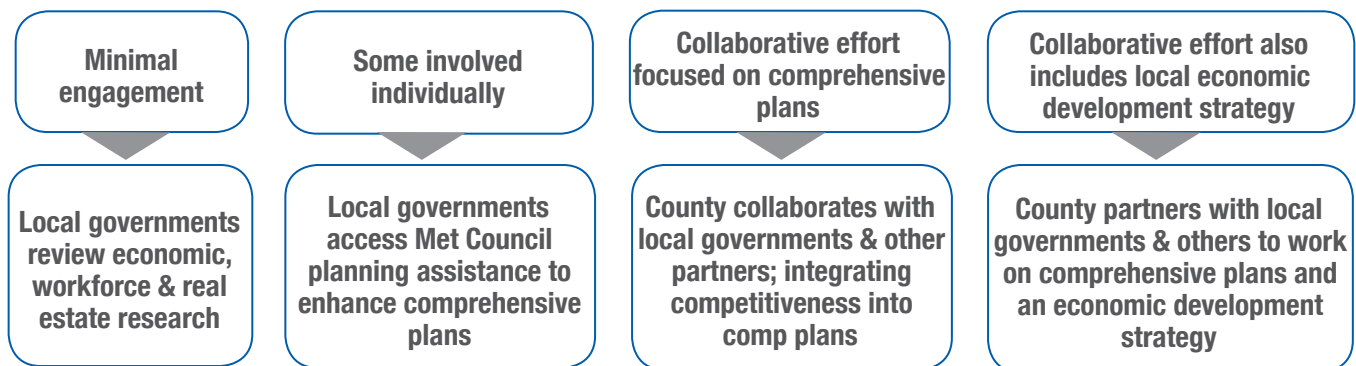
During 2014, the Council held a series of workshops with counties and communities in the seven-county metropolitan area. We introduced the concept of integrating economic competitiveness into the comprehensive planning process. Participants gave feedback on research and information tools that would be most helpful to them. Based on this feedback, the Council identified the tools above (Q6).

12) Will local communities be required to address economic development in their comprehensive plan updates?

No. The Council will simply provide more economic research, information, and technical assistance to support communities that choose to integrate deeper consideration of the economy, transportation, transit, sites for economic growth, and workforce into their comprehensive plans.

13) What are potential local and county roles in this program?

Counties and communities across the region each have different challenges, opportunities, and priorities at any given point in time. **Participation in this program is completely voluntary.** And for those counties and communities that choose to participate, the Council expects that the level of engagement will vary. The following are provided as examples to help illustrate a range of potential roles.



The connection between Thrive MSP 2040, economic competitiveness, and the new program

14) What's new about the Council's emphasis on economic competitiveness?

The Council has always made economic competitiveness a priority. However, its emphasis on economic competitiveness has been heightened in recent years due to trends in the last decade.

Relative to many other metro areas, the Twin Cities regional economy underperformed during the 2000-2010 decade. As a result, a consensus emerged among regional leadership that the region needs a strong collaborative effort to advance our economy in the future.

To support this effort, the Council elevated prosperity as one of five key regional outcomes in its current development guide, Thrive MSP 2040. In Thrive, we made a number of commitments, including:

- Collaborate with regional partners to develop a shared vision and strategic priorities to advance regional economic competitiveness.
- Grow our partnership with cities, counties, GREATER MSP, and other partners in economic competitiveness.
- Leverage our research and analysis function to examine and analyze the land use and infrastructure needs of the region's leading industry clusters. This work will inform city and county discussions about land use strategies that support economic development.

15) A lot of discussion is occurring in this region about the importance of integrating economic competitiveness with equity. How will the Council program address this issue?

The Council agrees that in the 21st century, economic competitiveness and equity go hand in hand. The new economic research program will be designed to support a variety of efforts to ensure that the region's economic competitiveness work improves access to economic opportunity for all residents. In particular, the Council will:

- Identify industry sectors and sector-related occupations that provide career ladders for populations with lower income and educational attainment.
- Identify occupations that offer living wage and benefit opportunities.
- Analyze the locations of jobs with career ladders and living wages in relationship to areas of concentrated poverty and racially concentrated areas of poverty.

16) Thrive says something about discouraging the conversion of industrial land to other uses. Will this be a requirement in local comprehensive plans?

No. The Council encourages the preservation and development of well-sited industrial land, but does not require it. We will provide information on the site location requirements of the region's economic drivers, our region's connections to the global economy, workforce, living wage jobs, transportation, and other economic factors. This will put local officials in a position to make better informed choices about how they might affect the region's economic vitality as well as their community's economy.

The Council recognizes that all development decisions involve tradeoffs. We acknowledge that sometimes land uses such as recreation and housing are appropriate in areas such as riverfronts. The new emphasis on industrial land is designed to ensure that more factors are taken into account when development decisions are considered.