



Regional Overview

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The Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) is the officially designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the six county region consisting of DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, and Okeechobee counties. It coordinates the transportation planning activities for the region particularly regarding major transportation project funding allocation.

Stakeholders in the process include The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the cities in the region, the six listed counties, and the general public. The Heartland Region is primarily rural with the exception of the Sebring and Avon Park, and unincorporated areas, which are located in Highlands County. The six listed counties are within the South Central Rural Area of Opportunity (RAO), which is defined as a region composed of rural communities that have been adversely affected by extraordinary economic events or natural disasters. The main economic activities of the region include agriculture (primarily citrus and sugar cane cultivation), services including health care, and tourism. Details specific to each county are provided below. The Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) provides the 2015 population estimate information.

regional OVERVIEW



DeSoto County

Bounded by Charlotte, Sarasota, Glades, Manatee, Highlands, and Hardee Counties, DeSoto County is located in the western portion of the region. The county seat is the City of Arcadia, which is the county's only incorporated area. The county is largely rural in nature,

with its economic base predominantly in agriculture and cattle. The main transportation arteries in the county are US 17 and SR 70. Rail service is provided by CSX and Seminole Gulf Railway, which provide a connection to Florida's state-wide rail network, stretching from Jacksonville to Tampa and Palm Beach to Pensacola.

DeSoto County comprises the Arcadia Micropolitan Statistical Area, which is included in the North Port-Sarasota, Florida Combined Statistical Area in neighboring Sarasota County. DeSoto County encompasses 640 square miles. According to FDOT 2014 data, DeSoto County has 82.8 miles of total state highway, comprised of 67.3 miles of two lane roads, and 15.6 miles of four lane facilities. With the multi-lane reconstruction of US 17 south of Arcadia, the amount of four lane roadways will increase.



Glades County

Glades County is bounded to the north by Highlands County, to the west by Charlotte County, to the south by Hendry County, and to the east by Lake Okeechobee and Okeechobee County. It is located in the central portion of the region. The county is approximately 987 square miles, of which 56 square miles are occupied by the Brighton Seminole Indian Reservation. The City of Moore Haven, which is the county seat, encompasses one square mile and is the only exception to the rural nature of the County. Each year Glades County's population increases due to seasonal flux. Much of that is from residents who live there part time. Additionally, Glades County has a large amount of land designated as agricultural and consequently receives a seasonal work force each year.

The main transportation artery in Glades County is US 27. Rail service is provided by the South Central Florida Express which is the largest private agricultural short line railroad in the United States used to transport sugar. According to FDOT 2014 data, Glades County has 85.8 miles of total state highway facilities, with 56.8 miles of two lane state roads, and 29 miles of four lane state roads.



Hardee County

Located in the northwestern portion of the region, Hardee County is bounded to the north by Polk County, to the west by coastal Manatee County, to the south by DeSoto County, and to the east by Highlands County. The county seat is the City of Wauchula and includes two other incorporated municipalities of Bowling Green and Zolfo Springs. The county is one of the country's top prime agricultural centers for produce and livestock. The major transportation network of the county includes SR 62, SR 64, SR 66, SR 636, and US 17. Rail service is provided by CSX. Hardee County encompasses an area of 638 square miles. According to FDOT 2014 data, Hardee County has 94.7 miles of total state highway, comprised of 74.7 miles of two lane roads, and 13 miles of four lane facilities, and 7 miles of 6 lane facilities. The 6 lane facility is a one-way pair on US 17 through Wauchula.



Hendry County

Hendry County is located in the southern portion of the region and is nestled between the south shores of Lake Okeechobee and the northern sawgrass marshes of the Everglades. It borders Collier County to the south, Broward and Palm Beach Counties to the east, Glades County to the north, and Charlotte and Lee Counties to the west. The county is approximately 1,190 square miles, of which 82 square miles are occupied by the Big Cypress Indian Reservation. The county seat is the City of LaBelle, which is located in the northwest while the largest municipality is the City of Clewiston which is on US 27 and borders Lake Okeechobee. Hendry County's economic base is predominantly agricultural. The main transportation arteries in the county are US 27 and SR 80. Rail service is provided by the South Central Florida Express, which is the largest private agricultural short line railroad in the country used to transport sugar. Hendry County comprises the Clewiston Micropolitan Statistical Area. According to FDOT 2014 data, Hendry County has 64.9 miles total of state highway facilities, with 31.9 miles of two lane state roads, and 32.9 miles of four lane state roads.



Highlands County

Highlands County encompasses an area of 1,106 square miles and is located in the northern portion of the region. It has the largest population in the region and is the most urban of the counties. It is bounded by Polk and Osceola Counties to the north, Hardee and DeSoto Counties to the west, Glades County to the south, and Okeechobee County to the east. The Avon Park Air Force Range is located in the northeastern portion of the county. The county seat and largest city is the City of Sebring. The other incorporated municipalities include Avon Park and Lake Placid. Highlands County is rapidly urbanizing, transitioning, in part, from an agricultural economy that remains strong in citrus and livestock production, to an emerging service economy. The main transportation arteries in the county are US 27, US 98, SR 17, SR 64, SR 66, and SR 70. Highlands County is on the main CSX line from Central to South East Florida which has four daily Amtrak services at Sebring Station on the "Silver Meteor" and "Silver Star" between New York and Miami. In addition, rail service is provided by the South Central Florida Express, which is the largest private agricultural short line railroad in the country used to transport sugar.

Highlands County comprises the Sebring Metropolitan Statistical Area, as well as having a sufficient population to be designated as the State of Florida's 27th MPO / TPO (including the 5 neighboring counties), with the required population of 50,000 within the Avon Park – Sebring Urbanized area. According to FDOT 2014 data, Highlands County has 132.5 miles of total state highway facilities, with 84 miles of two lane state roads, 30.4 miles of four lane state roads, and 18 miles of six lane facilities.



Okeechobee County

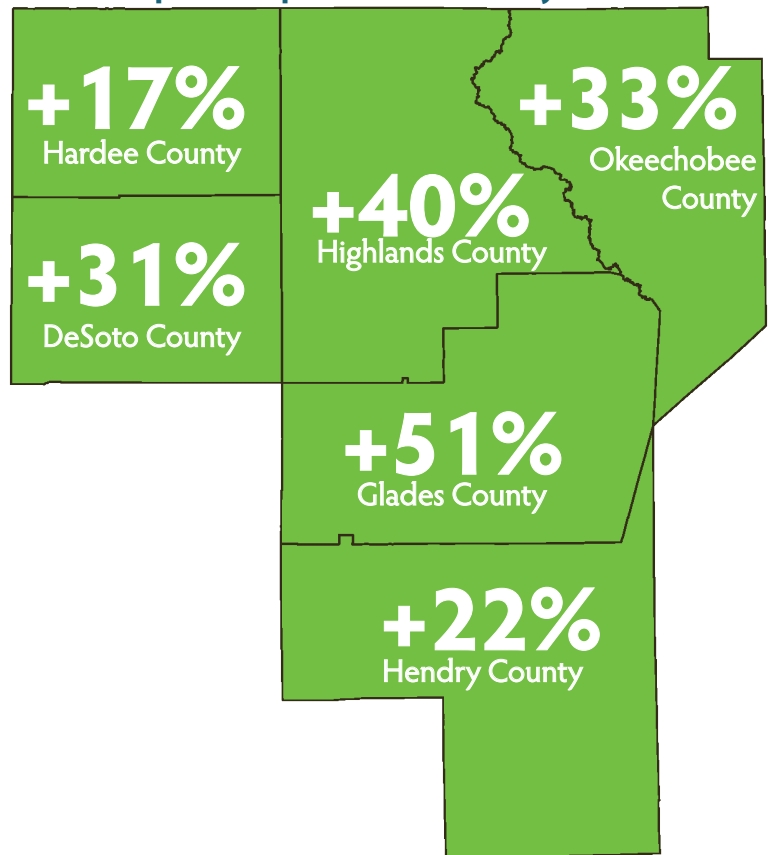
Okeechobee County is located in the northeastern portion of the region. The southern boundary of the county borders Lake Okeechobee. Polk, Osceola, and Indian River Counties are adjacent to the northern boundary, Indian River, Martin and St. Lucie Counties are adjacent to the eastern boundary, and Glades and Highlands Counties are adjacent to the western boundary. The county encompasses 892 square miles, and the City of Okeechobee is the only incorporated municipality. The county's economic base is agriculture, trade, transportation, and utilities. The county is crossed by several state and US highways that converge in downtown Okeechobee including US 98, US 441, SR 70, and SR 78. The Ronald Reagan Turnpike (FL SR 91, Florida's Turnpike) crosses the northeastern corner of the county but does not have any direct exits within the county. Like Highlands County, the county lies on the main CSX line from Central to South East Florida which sees four daily Amtrak services at Okeechobee Station on the "Silver Meteor" and "Silver Star" between New York and Miami.

According to FDOT 2014 data, Okeechobee County has 96.1 miles of total state highway facilities, with 86.2 miles of two lane state roads, and 9.9 miles of four lane state roads. A multi-lane reconstruction of SR 70 from east of Okeechobee to St. Lucie County is in the final stages of completion.

population **GROWTH**

Based on the regional visioning effort Heartland 2060, a regional blueprint was developed to guide growth and development in the region over the next 50 years. The table below summarizes the anticipated level of population growth by county. As many credible population projections as were available were analyzed and vetted for their particular applicability to this plan, and ultimately a hybrid of two projections generated by the University of Florida (UF) Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR), was selected.

Anticipated Population Growth by 2040



Population Growth Projections

County	2010	2040
DeSoto	34,862	45,650
Glades	12,884	19,500
Hardee	27,731	32,500
Hendry	39,140	47,850
Highlands	98,786	137,850
Okeechobee	39,996	53,250
Heartland (total)	253,399	336,600

33% Population Increase from 2010 to 2040



For more information on population projections and the methodology, please view our the LRTP Technical Support documents at <http://heartlandregionaltpo.org/programs-and-plans/lrtp-2040/>.



Based on the regional visioning effort Heartland 2060, a regional blueprint was developed to guide growth and development over the next 50 years.

32%

**EMPLOYMENT GROWTH
REGION WIDE**

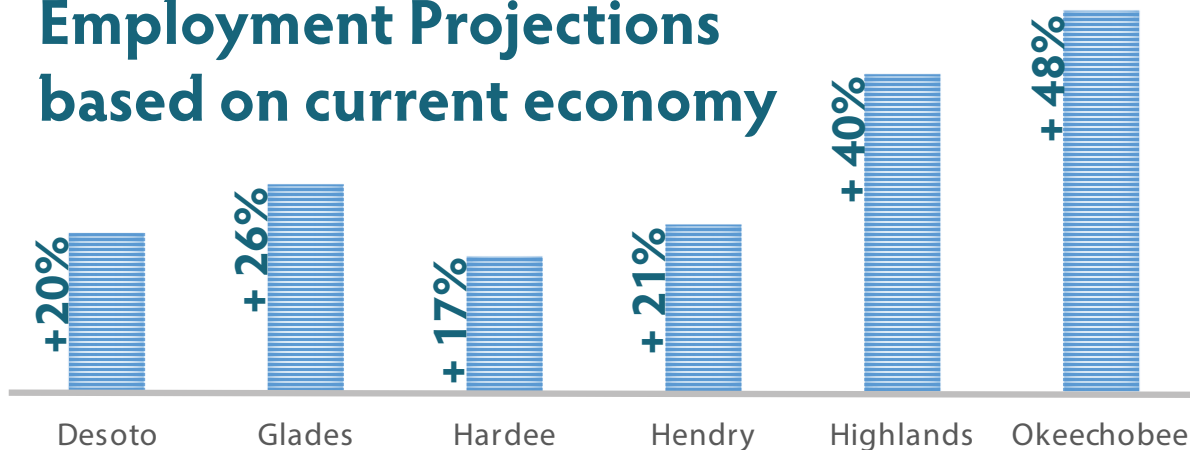
The table below summarizes the anticipated level of employment growth by county. The employment projections were partially developed using custom population projection inputs which were specifically created for this project.

Employment Growth Projections

County	2011 Estimate	2020	2030	2040
Desoto	13,582	15,625	16,365	16,365
Glades	4,586	5,247	5,442	5,792
Hardee	11,395	12,900	13,304	13,388
Hendry	19,106	21,148	22,284	23,068
Highlands	38,547	45,484	49,919	54,110
Okeechobee	14,505	17,485	19,608	21,455
Heartland (total)	101,721	117,889	126,922	134,178

The employment projections are used in the Futures modeling to allocate jobs spatially to employment centers and by industry. The employment projections were derived from an economic forecasting software (REMI PI+), by replacing the stock population forecast with the custom population projections mentioned above and detailed in the Heartland 2060 documentation.

Employment Projections based on current economy



For more information on employment projections and the methodology, please view our the LRTP Technical Support documents at <http://heartlandregionaltpo.org/programs-and-plans/lrtp-2040/>.

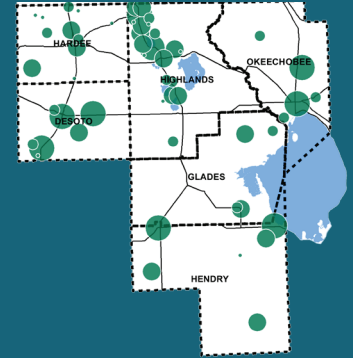
economic FUTURES

Based on the regional visioning effort Heartland 2060, a regional blueprint was developed to guide growth and development over the next 50 years. Employment projections were created for three different potential economic Futures. These three Futures are the Current Economy, Energy Economy, and Trade Economy. Two of the Futures (Energy Economy and Trade Economy) correspond to a regional focus on particular industry clusters, and the Current Economy Future corresponds to a continuation along the current economic trajectory.

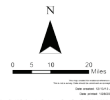
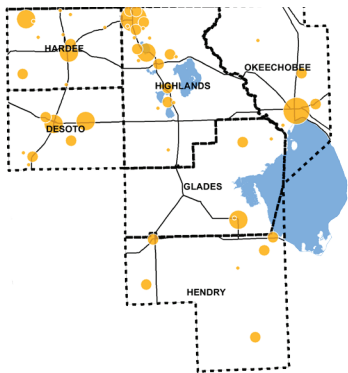
Future "Current" Economy in 2040

The Future "Current" Economy projects a future which is based on the present and follows current and historical trends in population, employment, and land use. This Future continues the current economic prominence of agriculture, healthcare, mining, warehousing, ecotourism, and service industries.

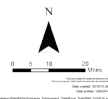
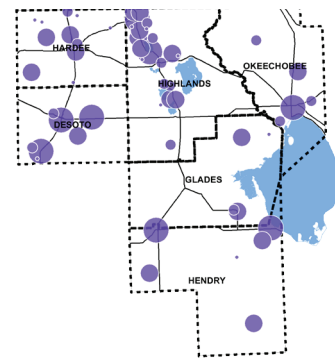
Total employment in the Future "Current" Economy for the region is projected to increase by nearly **32%** to close to **134,178 jobs**. The majority of these jobs are projected to be in existing employment centers.



Energy-Focused Economy



Trade-Focused Economy



For more information on economic projections and the methodology, please view our the LRTP Technical Support documents at <http://heartlandregionaltpo.org/programs-and-plans/lrtp-2040/>.