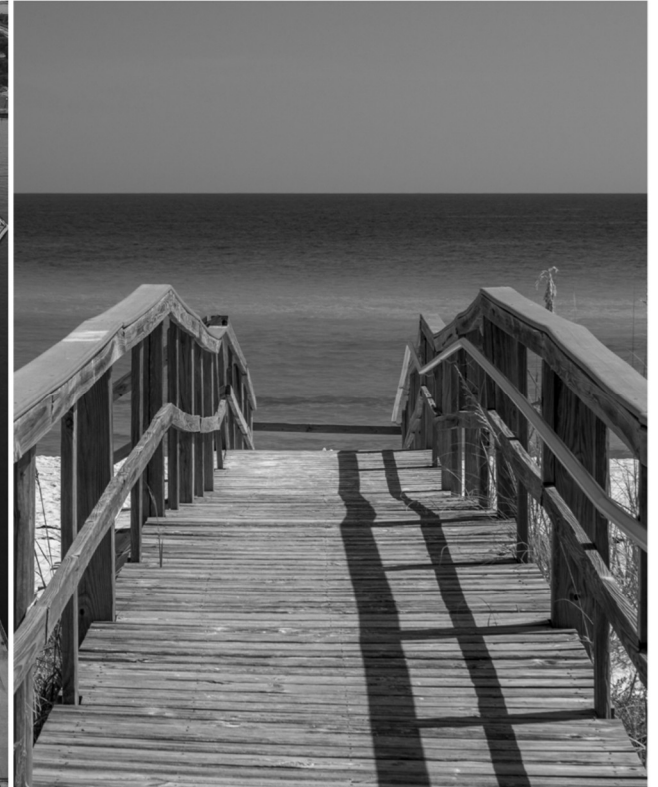


**EMERALD COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL
COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

2022-2026



DRAFT 2025 Annual Performance Report



Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, June 2021

2025 Annual Performance Report, October 2025

Funding for this report is provided by the U.S. Economic Development Administration

Additional copies of this report may be obtained by contacting:

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Steering Committee

The Emerald Coast Regional Council would like to thank the following steering committee members for the input and guidance provided during the 2022-2026 major CEDS update:

- o Nathan Sparks, Okaloosa County EDO
- o Danita Andrews, Florida West EDA
- o Ted Everett, Washington County EDO
- o Verdell Hawkins, Florida Power & Light
- o Nicole Gislason, UWF Haas Center
- o Shane Chadwick, Florida's Great Northwest
- o Rebecca Ferguson, Port of Pensacola

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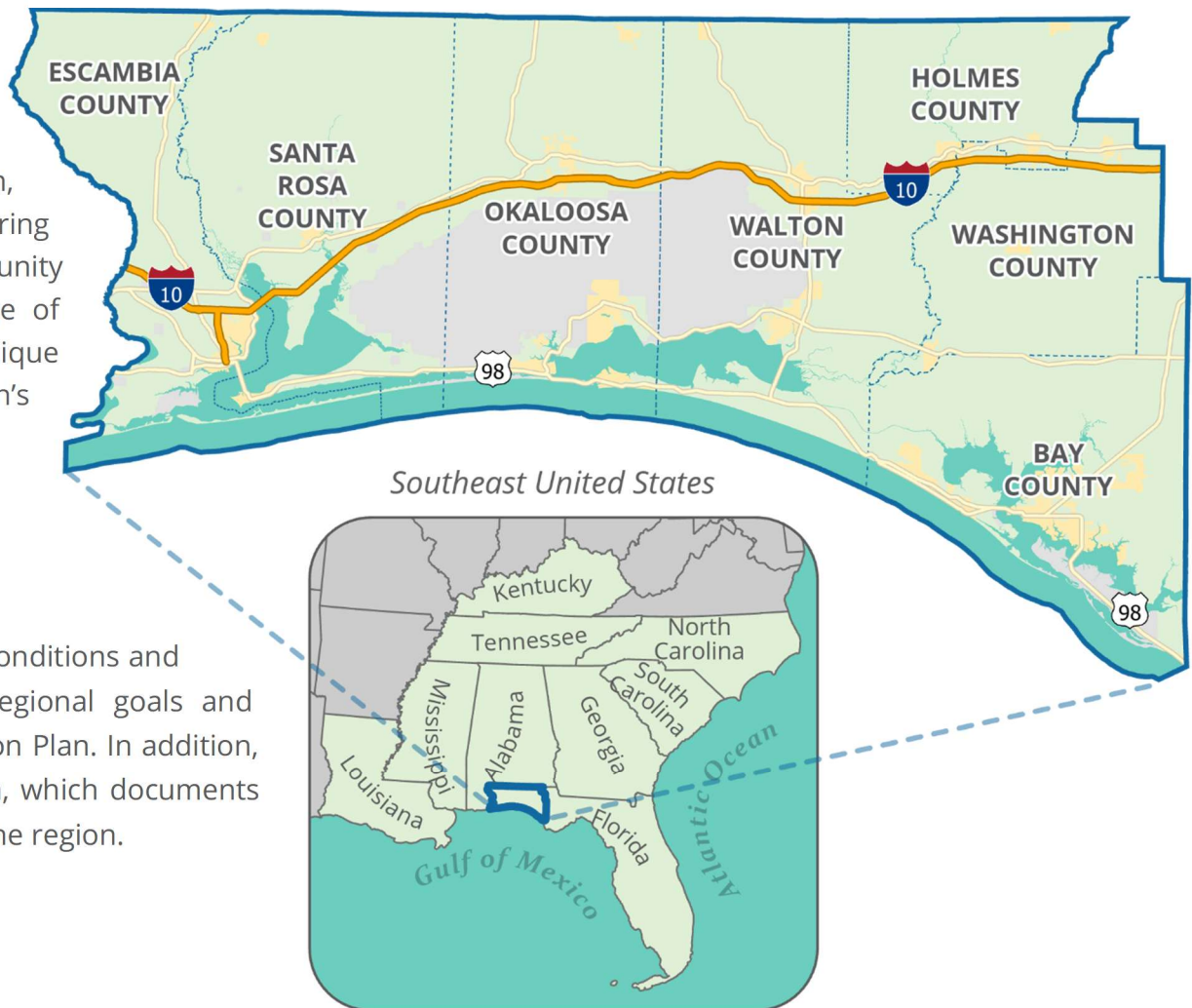
List of Acronyms

AFB	Air Force Base	TPO	Transportation Planning Organization
ATMS	Advanced Traffic Management Systems	REEF	Research Engineering & Education Facility
BEA	Bureau of Economic Analysis	RRTP	Rural Regional Transportation Plan
BLS	Bureau of Labor Statistics	SIS	Strategic Intermodal Systems
EC-ARC	Emerald Coast Area Resilience Collaborative	STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
ECRC	Emerald Coast Regional Council	UF	University of Florida
EDA	Economic Development Administration	UWF	University of West Florida
EDD	Economic Development District		
EDO	Economic Development Organization		
FDOT	Florida Department of Transportation		
FL-AL	Florida-Alabama		
FSU	Florida State University		
GCSC	Gulf Coast State College		
ITS	Intelligent Transportation Systems		
LEPC	Local Emergency Planning Committee		
MGD	Millions of Gallons per Day		
MIRR	Military Installation Resilience Review		
MPOAC	Metropolitan Planning Organization Advisory Council		
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area		
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration		
NSF	National Science Foundation		
NWFSC	Northwest Florida State College		
PWEAA	Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance		

Executive Summary

Since 1964, the Emerald Coast Regional Council (ECRC) has directed planning efforts that impact activities involving interactions across jurisdictional boundaries. In 1995, the ECRC, then known as the West Florida Regional Planning Council, was designated an Economic Development District (EDD) by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration (EDA). To maintain its status as an EDD and continue receiving grants and technical assistance from the EDA, a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is required. This document is updated annually and undergoes major updates (rewrites) every four years to encompass new developments and strategies for the region. An effective CEDS consists of a data-driven, participatory process led by a multifaceted steering committee. The CEDS is also informed through community outreach and partnerships built through the range of ECRC programming during the year. This plan is unique among regional plans as it focuses on the region's specific economic conditions.

Figure 1. Emerald Coast Location



2025 Annual Performance Report

This report analyzes the region's current economic conditions and serves as a progress update on achieving the regional goals and strategies outlined in the CEDS Implementation Action Plan. In addition, this report includes an update on Projects to Watch, which documents major economic development activities throughout the region.

Implementation Action Plan – 2025 Progress Report

This section evaluates progress made towards reaching the regional goals and strategies identified in the 2022-2026 Major CEDS Update.

Goal: Support educational programs, activities, and partners which encourage development of programs and opportunities that will meet the region’s educational and workforce needs.

Talent Supply & Education	Strategy 1. Assist partners throughout the region in maintaining and creating specialized educational programs and training to meet the region’s ever changing business needs.
	Action 1.1. Use the role of ECRC to coordinate leverage grant and low interest loan funding to support an education system responsive to business needs.

Implementation Progress:

The following educational programs were funded throughout the region, expanding educational opportunities and meeting workforce training needs.

The Seaside School in Walton County received a \$9.5 million grant from Triumph Gulf Coast to support new and expanded industry certifications and dual enrollment programs in business administration, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and engineering. The funds will allow for 3,820 new students to earn Florida Department of Education-approved Career Technical Education certifications.

Pensacola State College (PSC) was awarded a \$7.6 million grant from Triumph Gulf Coast. The grant will provide partial funding for the development of a new facility to support the issuance of at least 2,002 new National Institute for Automotive Excellence (ASE) diesel maintenance technician certificates. The facility will be developed at the Santa Rosa County Industrial Park East.

Bay District Schools was awarded an \$8 million grant from Triumph Gulf Coast to expand the District’s existing certification programs in healthcare, aerospace, manufacturing, artificial intelligence, and computer science. The grant will provide 2,880 students with the opportunity to receive Florida Department of Education-approved Career Technical Education (CTE) certificates and credentialing.

Gulf Coast State College (GCSC) has partially completed the construction of its Inter-Professional Education Simulation Training Center at its Panama City campus. The Center will allow GSC to deliver 4,312 new industry-recognized credentials, including certifications and licensures in healthcare-related fields. The project was partially funded by a \$24 million grant from Triumph Gulf Coast.

The University of West Florida received a \$3 million grant from Triumph Gulf Coast that will allow the school to establish the Center for Water and Vessel Engineering. The Center's program will provide 175 new certificates issued by the American Boat & Yacht Council in Marine Composites. Total programmatic costs are estimated at \$16 million.

Goal: Encourage innovation and foster robust entrepreneurial ecosystems to drive economic growth.

Innovation & Entrepreneurship	Strategy 1. Develop the region’s entrepreneurial hubs and connect them with industry clusters, assets, services, networks, facilities, tools, and expertise in order to facilitate business creation and retention.
	Action 1.1. Leverage federal grant and low interest loan funding to introduce more capital into the entrepreneurial landscape and assist small businesses.

Implementation Progress:

No new activities were undertaken by ECRC during the 2025-2026 period. However, several of our partner organizations continued to engage with state and regional initiative to expand access to capital for local businesses. FloridaCommerce continued the deployment of federal State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI 2.0) funds through participating lenders. Regional partners also supported business incubators including One Okaloosa’s “Startup Okaloosa” and FloridaWest’s CO:LAB in Pensacola. Additionally, events such as the Northwest Florida Pitch Day and the Doolittle Institute’s small business training forums contributed to building connections among small businesses and lenders.

Goal: Ensure the Emerald Coast's Economic Infrastructure is state of the art and connects communities in every part of the region.

Infrastructure & Growth Leadership	Strategy 1. Plan, advocate for, and create a modern infrastructure network to support a competitive economy.
	Action 1.1. Use the role of ECRC to coordinate prioritization of regional transportation projects across jurisdictional boundaries.
	Action 1.2. Address congestion and commuter issues along major corridors such as US 98 and CR 30A through planning solutions and emerging technologies.
	Action 1.3. Develop and implement a rural regional transportation planning process for the area outside the Transportation Planning Organization boundaries to identify and prioritize projects based on local needs and a cost feasible plan.
	Action 1.4. Close the digital divide by investing in construction of fiber and wireless broadband for business retention and attraction.
	Strategy 2. Promote a regional approach to the multi-modal transportation system for people, goods, and services.
	Action 2.1. Coordinate and implement the design/build of a regional Advanced Traffic Management System (ATMS) and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) improvements that create a connected, computerized system that improves safety, mitigates congestion, and improves regional growth adaptability.
	Action 2.2. Coordinate TPO freight committees and pursue a regional freight plan to identify and resolve issues related to mobility and movement of goods and services.
	Action 2.3. Correct current deficiencies and create a more balanced transportation portfolio with a focus on bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure related policies, roadway design standards, and funding mechanisms.

Implementation Progress:

Our commitment to modernizing the region's infrastructure network remains a priority. As the coordinator of the region's three Transportation Planning Organizations (TPOs), ECRC has successfully facilitated the prioritization of regional transportation projects across jurisdictional boundaries. This year, each TPO adopted its Project Priorities in Summer 2025, including key regional routes such as US 98 and I-10 for the Florida-Alabama and Okaloosa-Walton TPOs, and SR 20, US 98, and US 231 for the Bay County TPO. These priorities were established through extensive public outreach and workshops involving the TPO Technical and Citizen Advisory Committees. The region's TPOs are also moving through the updates to their Long-Range Transportation Plans (LRTPs), which occur every five years. The Florida-Alabama TPO has adopted its LRTP. Updates are underway for both the Okaloosa-Walton and Bay TPOs.

To address congestion and commuter issues, significant projects have been advanced along major corridors. Notable priorities include the planned multimodal overpass installation over US 98 in Gulf Breeze and ongoing US 98 corridor capacity improvements prioritized across all three TPOs. The Brooks Bridge Replacement (currently underway) project in Okaloosa County, the Around the Mound project in Fort Walton Beach, and the Destin Crosstown Connector aim to alleviate congestion. The Bay Parkway Phase III in Panama City Beach is being planned to reduce congestion on US 98.

To improve multimodal transportation options across our region, ECRC has been actively working on policies, roadway design standards, and funding mechanisms that prioritize bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The Bay County TPO Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Trail Master Plan is ongoing, and the Okaloosa-Walton TPO Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Trail Master Plan is upcoming. These efforts align with goals to promote sustainable and accessible transportation options.

The "Seven Layer Cake" initiative is ECRC's a comprehensive approach to transform the region's infrastructure into a state-of-the-art, connected system that supports Vision Zero and smart city initiatives. This multi-phase project focuses on integrating advanced technology across key areas, including the deployment of fiber optic cabling along high-fatality corridors, the development of a regional ATMS, and the establishment of a Regional Traffic Management Center, which will be the most technologically advanced facility in Northwest Florida. The initiative supports the goals of reducing congestion, enhancing safety, and promoting multimodal transportation options, aligning with the broader objectives of creating a modern infrastructure network that connects communities and supports economic growth. By prioritizing technological advancements and data analytics, the Seven Layer Cake initiative aims to deliver sustainable and resilient infrastructure improvements that benefit the entire ECRC region.

Advanced Traffic Management Systems (ATMS) and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) operations and maintenance continue to be the #1 Non-SIS priority for each TPO. ECRC, along with the TPOs, has completed multiple regional planning efforts (Safety Action Plan and Smart Regions Master Plan) to identify the high-injury network and the ITS technologies that could be deployed to reduce fatalities and serious injuries. The Florida-Alabama TPO is also supplementing these efforts with their own Data Analytics Plan and Congestion Reduction Strategy.

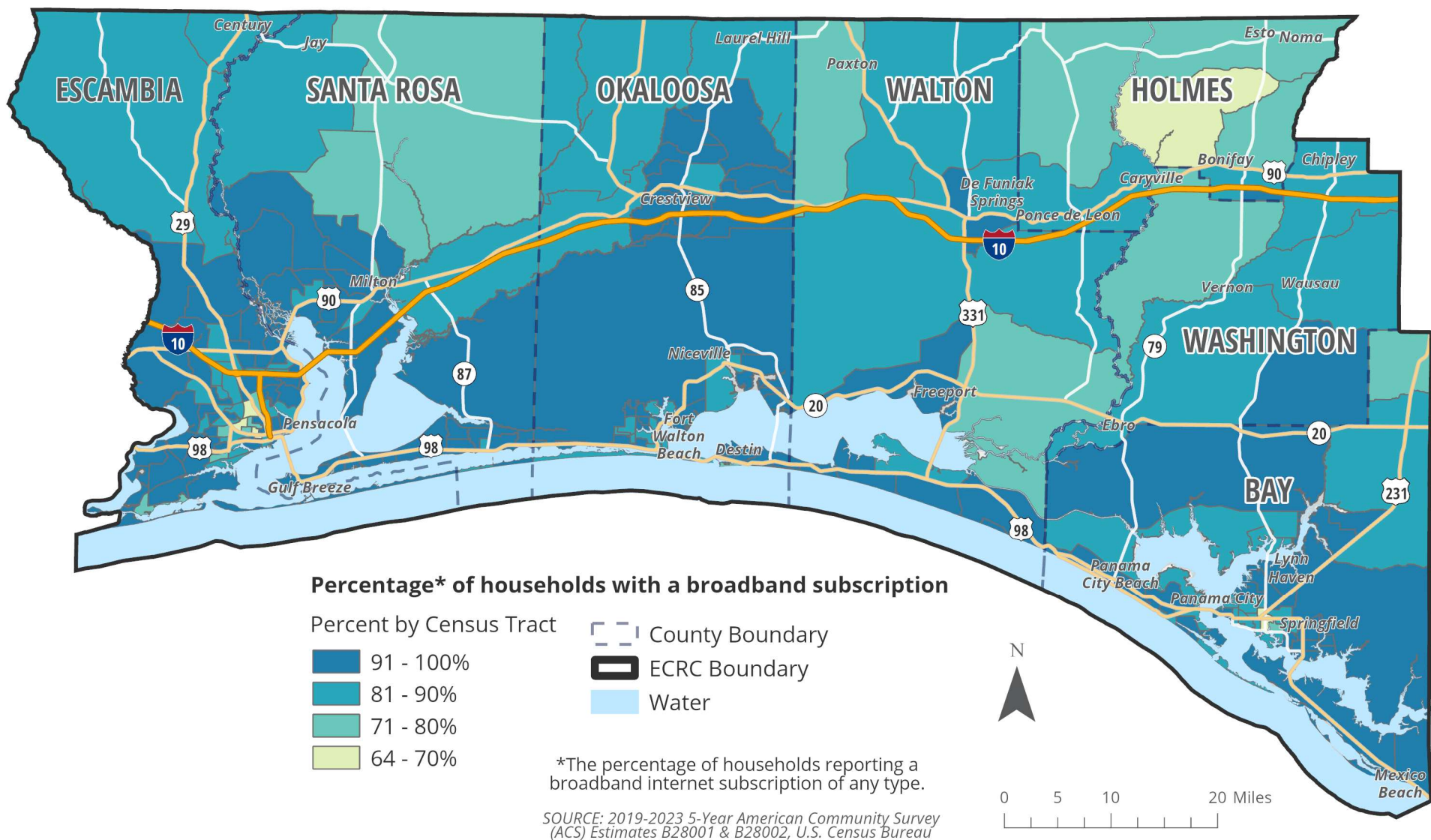
In 2025, significant progress was made toward establishing the Regional Traffic Management Center (RTMC), with FDOT, ECRC, and Escambia County finalizing design and selecting a contractor for construction. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on November 12, 2025. The RTMC will centralize ATMS and ITS operations for the western Panhandle, coordinating traffic management across county and municipal boundaries. Once operational, it will provide real-time monitoring, incident response, and congestion management capabilities to improve mobility and safety.

Grant documents and NEPA are being processed for the Safe Streets for All (SS4A) Demonstration grant, and ECRC anticipates kicking off the project in the third quarter of 2025. The grant will allow for the design and implementation of innovative technological improvements. It will evaluate the safety impact of those ITS improvements on two of Pensacola's highest crash rate segments, Fairfield Drive and Pensacola Boulevard, for the prevention of deaths and serious injuries.

The ECRC is advancing regional freight initiatives by coordinating TPO freight committees and identifying priorities through the MPOAC Freight and Rail Committee, with plans to include a comprehensive Regional Freight Plan in future work programs. These efforts aim to address mobility challenges and enhance the movement of goods and services across the region, supporting economic growth and connectivity. Beyond the boundaries of our three TPOs, the development and implementation of a Rural Regional Transportation Planning (RRTP) process has been instrumental in identifying and prioritizing projects based on local needs from communities that have not traditionally been a direct part of the FDOT planning process. This effort ensures that transportation infrastructure extends beyond urban areas, benefiting communities across the region. The plan establishes a priority transportation improvement list for the region's rural areas similar to the TPOs. In May 2025, the RRTP adopted an updated list of the top ten (10) project priorities and continues the collaborative effort to plan transportation infrastructure beyond the urban boundaries. Projects identified to receive funding are the Lake Jackson multi-use trail from the county line to Lake Drive in Walton County, the resurfacing of Highway 164 (from Highway 97 to US 29) in Escambia County, and safety study project on I- 10 at Main and Chipley in Washington County. RRTP maps were reformatted into an interactive dashboard to display the rural project priorities by type in an interactive tabular format. [An interactive map](#) is also available that consolidates all RRTP projects, along with related transportation layers, in a single location at the regional scale.

In our pursuit to close the digital divide, ECRC facilitated meetings and coordination with local governments in our region. Substantial investments in fiber and wireless broadband infrastructure have continued across the Panhandle (See Figure 1). These projects are crucial for business retention and attraction, as they enhance our region's connectivity and digital capabilities. Conexon Connect and Escambia River Electric Cooperative completed a 2,000-mile fiber-to-the-home network serving more than 12,000 rural homes and businesses in rural Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties. Additionally, LiveOak Fiber reported that its Northwest Florida build serving Santa Rosa, Okaloosa, Walton, and Bay Counties has passed the halfway point with more than \$50 million in investment to date.

Figure 1 - Regional Broadband Access



Goal: Bolster the Emerald Coast economy by recruiting new businesses and promoting the expansion of existing businesses.

Business Climate & Competitiveness	Strategy 1. Encourage the development and growth of small businesses in rural and underserved communities.
	Action 1.1. Research capital seed funding.
	Action 1.2. Serve as a resource partner to local Economic Development Organizations.
	Strategy 2. Coordinate planning efforts with assistance for regional key industry clusters and supply chains.
	Action 2.1. Promote North Florida Manufacturing, Logistics, and Distribution Corridors through the platform of the TPO freight groups.
	Action 2.2. Use representation on the Florida Freight Committee to advocate funding for regional supply chain projects and promote significance of regional infrastructure for inclusion in national highway freight network.
	Strategy 3. Address site development to accommodate business expansions and relocations.
	Action 3.1. Conduct regional assessments of specific commercial and industrial-use accommodations in new and existing business parks.
	Action 3.2. Strengthen the role and presence of ECRC within local economic development organizations.
	Action 3.3. Research shared revenue models for business site development.

Implementation Progress:

ECRC's collaboration with local Economic Development Organizations (EDOs) continues to support small business growth in rural and underserved communities. As a resource partner, ECRC continues to assist EDOs and local governments in grant writing and management, enabling them to secure critical funding for business development. Notably, ECRC continues to support Santa Rosa County in its successful Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP). The DCIP grant will assist in the construction of a through-the-fence taxiway connecting Naval Air Station (NAS) Whiting Field with the new Whiting Aviation Park. These strategic initiatives enhance the region's appeal for aviation-related commercial and industrial development, leveraging a limited-access use agreement with NAS Whiting Field to provide civilian tenants with access to military runway facilities, significantly boosting the region's aviation and defense capabilities.

Grant management services are being provided to the Okaloosa Gas District (OGD) in support of their \$5.3 million grant from USDOT, Pipeline Hazard Mitigation Safety Act program. The grant will allow OGD to replace over 28.9 miles of unprotected steel mains and 1190 services in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida. ECRC is also providing grant management services to the Port of Panama City (PPC). PPC received an \$11.2 million grant from USDOT Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP) for the East Terminal Phase Two Expansion Project. The scope of work

includes final design and construction of a 200,000 square foot (SF) warehouse, along with associated rail spur extension and terminal roadway improvements to serve the warehouse.

Through representation on the Florida Freight Committee, ECRC continues to advocate for funding and prioritization of regional supply chain projects, highlighting the importance of regional infrastructure for inclusion in the national highway freight network. These efforts are critical in positioning the Emerald Coast as a competitive hub for manufacturing, logistics, and distribution. Pensacola International Airport, Northwest Florida Beaches Airport, the Port of Pensacola, the Port of Panama City, Naval Air Station (NAS) Pensacola, NAS Whiting Field, Hurlburt Field, Naval Support Activity (NSA) Panama City NSA all provided presentation briefings during the development of the Florida-Alabama and Bay County 2050 Long Range Transportation Plans and were members of the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan Steering Committee. Freight priorities and rail priorities for the Northwest Florida were submitted through the MPOAC Freight and Rail Committee.

A partnership of ECRC, FloridaMakes, Apalachee Regional Planning Council (RPC), Northeast Florida RPC, and the North Central Florida RPC is applying to the U.S. Economic Development Administration for a grant to support the North Florida Advanced Manufacturing Corridor Study. If awarded, the two-year effort would result in a strategic framework to guide industry growth, private investment, and the creation of high-wage jobs across North Florida.

Florida's Great Northwest received a \$4.7 million grant from Triumph Gulf Coast in support of the development and implementation of a research and marketing plan targeted at economic and industry diversification across Bay, Escambia, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Walton and other NW Florida counties. Project funding will support economic development through market research, strategy and plan development, and marketing plan implementation.

Goal: Support high quality governance to sustain Florida’s economic and quality of life expectations.

Civic & Governance Systems	Strategy 1. Balance resources through sound management of physical development.
	Action 1.1. Coordinate economic development efforts with related land use planning for consistency among government departments.
	Strategy 2. Strengthen partnerships with local governments, agencies, and non-profits by identifying opportunities for joint projects.
	Action 2.1. Conduct workshops and roundtables on planning policies and procedures, economic development tools, and available funding programs.
	Strategy 3. Create a culture of informed civic engagement and participation.
	Action 3.1. Support early and continuous public involvement in development and implementation of plans and decision-making process through modern yet accessible methods.
	Action 3.2. Ensure equitable representation from small business owners, special populations, and traditionally underserved populations by creating outreach methods tailored to the audience.

Implementation Progress:

ECRC continues to play a critical role in coordinating regional planning and governance efforts, enhancing resource management, and promoting sound development practices. We provide day-to-day planning and permitting support to the Town of Century, as well as reviewing major comprehensive plan amendments from regional governments. Our Military Installation Resilience Review (MIRR) assessed the infrastructure supporting six significant military installations across five counties, creating an extensive list of regional projects that bolster resilience and military readiness. To keep the list of priority projects relevant, we work with our regional military installations and local governments to update it annually as priorities and funding opportunities change and progress is made. This initiative also involves developing Intergovernmental Support Agreements (IGSAs), which allow local governments and their contractors to directly provide services to military installations, potentially saving millions annually and generating additional non-tax revenue for local governments.

Our engagement extends to environmental stewardship, as we participate in regional estuary programs, including the Pensacola and Perdido Bay Estuary Program, where we serve on the Technical Advisory Committee for the regional vulnerability assessment, and the St. Andrews and St. Joseph Bay Estuary Program, where ECRC has a seat on the management council, which assisted in the adoption of the program’s first Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan.

RideOn utilized modern and accessible engagement methods, including Facebook, LinkedIn, a dedicated project website, print materials, presentation slides, and targeted community outreach efforts. RideOn continues to engage employers to craft solutions to address their employees’ commuting challenges.

Defense Economic Impact Estimates	
Total Regional Impact	
Regional Economic Impact	\$20.6 Billion
Percent of Economy	23.0%
Employment	157,312
Income	\$14.4 Billion
State and Local Taxes	\$785 Million

Source: Florida Military & Defense Economic Impact Summary, 2024

Additionally, ECRC has embarked on new planning initiatives, including the City of Mary Esther’s Comprehensive Plan Update, which was adopted in September of 2025, and an ongoing cross-jurisdictional Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing for Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties, which aims to improve housing access by evaluating local programs, regulations, and ordinances. Our collaborative efforts with the Florida Housing Coalition and Texas A&M Extension Community Watershed Partners also led to a Resilient and Affordable Housing Workshop in Bay County, which brought together military, county, and city leaders to explore strategies for balancing workforce housing needs, and which also produced a guide for local governments across the state to guide planning for attainable and resilient housing.

Participation in the Tri-County Partnership Initiative (TCIP), a program of OneOkaloosa, continues, with ECRC planning staff participating in several working groups. The purpose of the TCIP is to enhance military installations and their supporting defense communities. Northwest Florida military installations are major

economic drivers in the region. Working Groups are tasked to help solve some of the more pressing issues facing service members and the civilian workforce that support the military missions and live in the surrounding communities. Road congestion, housing affordability, and childcare services are just some of the issues addressed in the working groups.

Goal: Promote regional understanding of resilience and sustainability efforts and integrate the experience of advocates and practitioners into future planning endeavors.

Environmental Quality, Protection, & Resilience	Strategy 1. Assist regional communities' disaster resilience efforts through targeted capacity building.
	Action 1.1. Conduct workshops on environmental resilience planning that help create the connection between land use strategies, smart design, and economic impact.
	Action 1.2. Coordinate the Local Emergency Planning Committee and facilitate exercise drills for government entities such as health departments and airports.
	Action 1.3. Provide technical assistance to local jurisdictions on coastal management strategies.
	Action 1.4. Head up and coordinate a regional resilience collaborative to address regional resilience issues.
	Strategy 2. Support restoration and utilization of regional waterways and greenways as a stimulant for economic growth and improved quality of life.
	Action 2.1. Work with local governments and nonprofits to plan for greenway trails and connectivity.
	Action 2.2. Work to improve and protect waterways through coordination of coalitions and planning efforts
	Action 2.3. Plan and implement environmental education programs and events.
	Strategy 3. Support and promote the growth of resilience initiatives and projects within the region.
	Action 3.1 Create an annual Action Plan to plan for and implement resilience projects and initiatives in the region through the EC-ARC.
	Action 3.2 Host an online forum to harbor information on resilience projects and initiatives in the region.

Implementation Progress:

ECRC leads efforts to enhance regional resilience through targeted capacity building and effective coordination with local entities. In line with our commitment to disaster resilience and pursuant to the Emergency Planning and Community Right-To-Know Act, we coordinate the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC). The LEPC is responsible for developing the regional hazardous materials emergency response plan, maintaining a repository of hazardous materials information, and conducting outreach to raise awareness. Comprising local professionals from fields such as firefighting, law enforcement, emergency management, environmental protection, health, transportation, and industrial compliance and safety, the LEPC works together to mitigate the effects of hazardous material releases by collecting data on the storage of chemicals above specified quantities. Additionally, we coordinate critical exercise drills for government entities, which are essential for

preparing our region to respond effectively to hazardous material emergencies and strengthening overall regional preparedness. In the fall of 2025, ECRC engaged Santa Rosa County Emergency Management, a local chemical company, and several regional partners in a tabletop exercise simulating the response to a chemical spill.

The establishment of the Emerald Coast Area Resilience Collaborative (EC-ARC) has brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to address resilience issues effectively. Through the EC-ARC ECRC develops annual updates to the Military Installation Resilience Review's list of priority adaptation strategies across the region, ensuring a structured and coordinated approach to enhancing resilience.

One of the key adaptation strategies emerging from the MIRR focuses on coastal resilience, particularly around NAS Pensacola and along US 98. Okaloosa County Coastal Resources recently submitted a pre-proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's 2024 National Coastal Resilience Fund for site assessment and initial design of a large-scale living shoreline alongside Highway 98 on Okaloosa Island. The project aims to protect the coastline and enhance community and military resilience, and the County has been invited to submit a full proposal. This initiative underscores the importance of integrating resilience into regional planning efforts, particularly in areas critical to both community and military operations.

In support of environmental restoration and sustainable economic growth, ECRC has collaborated with local governments and nonprofits to plan for greenway trails and connectivity. Our efforts include providing training to local governments that are pursuing Transportation Alternative (TA) and Transportation Regional Incentive Program (TRIP) grant funding for alternative small transportation projects, such as pedestrian and bicycle facilities and recreational trails; and assisting local governments in obtaining funding for the SUN Trail network, targeting gaps within our region to promote healthier, more vibrant communities, and partnering with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Office of Greenway and Trails to keep a current inventory and status of identified Multi-Use Regional Trails within the Florida Greenways and Trails System.

ECRC also contributes to the Pensacola and Perdido Bay Estuary Program's Vulnerability Assessment Technical Advisory Committee, where we provide expertise in evaluating regional vulnerabilities to environmental hazards. Our involvement helps ensure that resilience strategies are well-informed and tailored to the specific needs of the local communities.

Goal: Support the creation and maintenance of a diversity of housing options to support a competitive workforce and high quality of life.

Housing	Strategy 1. Encourage and implement programs that support development of a range of housing options to meet regional demand.
	Action 1.1 Perform housing research, support planning efforts, provide grant writing and technical assistance.
	Strategy 2. Develop a toolkit for local governments to understand the range of options to improve housing access, affordability, and accessibility.
	Action 2.1 Develop and share a toolkit highlighting options to improve housing for the region's local governments.

Implementation Progress:

ECRC partnered with the Florida Housing Coalition and Texas A&M Extension's CHARM program, with support from the Gulf of America Alliance, to pilot a new resilient affordable housing planning workshop in Bay and Walton Counties. In Bay County, ECRC worked with housing staff, military planners, and local stakeholders to evaluate housing sites through workshops that combined risk data with infrastructure and land availability, identifying a county-owned parcel near Tyndall AFB as a priority location for workforce housing. In Walton County, facilitated a regional workshop that expanded on these findings and helped local leaders apply scenario planning tools to guide future land use and housing strategies with a focus on resilience and affordability. The results from these workshops formed the basis of a housing development toolkit published early this year by the Florida Housing Coalition.

ECRC is developing an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing for the Escambia Consortium. The Consortium represents Escambia County, Santa Rosa County, the City of Pensacola, and the City of Milton. This effort will evaluate barriers to fair housing choice, identify patterns of segregation and housing needs, and provide recommendations to guide local governments in ensuring compliance with HUD requirements and advancing equitable access to housing opportunities across the region.

ECRC Staff continues to administer the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) housing programs for the counties of Walton, Holmes, and Washington.

Projects to Watch – 2025 Update

Okaloosa County

Shoal River Ranch Gigasite: This is a 10,500-acre industrial park located at I-10 and U.S. Highway 90 being positioned for large scale economic development. The upcoming phase of the project will involve securing funding for intersection improvements and road construction. To accommodate continued residential, commercial, and industrial growth, the Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners is actively working to site, permit, fund, and construct a brand new 1.5 MGD (Phase 1) wastewater treatment plant at the Shoal River Ranch Gigasite. At present, the target completion date for the project is December 2026.

Williams International Co., LLC: A developer and manufacturer of gas turbine engines, will construct a 500,000 sq.ft. manufacturing center to expand operations for the development and production of aerospace systems. The company proposes to create 336 new Jobs. The total project cost is estimated to be \$157M, of which Triumph Gulf Coast is providing \$16.5M. The Center will be constructed at the Shoal River Ranch.

Central Moloney Inc: This electric transformer manufacturer will be constructing a \$50M, 300,000 ft² production facility on a 48-acre parcel located within the Shoal River Ranch Gigasite. The project will take three years to design, permit, and construct, and is expected to employ 350 at full build out.

Bob Sikes Airport: Consideration is being placed on locating a manufacturing facility on a 20-acre parcel east of the runway. This project would require utility extensions, taxiway and apron construction, road extensions, and parking construction.

Fort Walton Beach Commerce & Technology Park: This project is a 300-acre park including a wide range of tenants such as Boeing and Lockheed Martin that has recently undergone a comprehensive master planning process. The Master Plan proposes several transportation improvements.

Holt Industrial Park: This is a small, industrial enclave located on I-10. Businesses located there are currently on septic and sewer situated 12 miles away.



Workshop on Housing Development in Bay County

SOURCE: ECRC

Escambia County

Pensacola State College: The College broke ground on its 34,000-square-foot Aviation Airframe and Powerplant Mechanics Program facility at the Pensacola International Airport. The program will provide the 18-month FAA-aligned certification program. Total project costs are estimated at \$16 million.

OLF-8: This is Escambia County's proposed 500-acre mixed-use commerce park located adjacent to Navy Federal Credit Union off I-10. The Master Plan includes residential, retail, public amenities, office, commercial, and light industrial uses. The property has been purchased and rebranded as Outlying Fields.

The Bluffs: The Bluffs is Northwest Florida's Energy Intensive Industrial Park is continuing its marketing and infrastructure development.

Co:Lab Expansion: Escambia County and Pensacola's 22,000-square-foot business incubator and growth accelerator is undergoing expansion efforts.

MxD West Florida: MxD (Manufacturing x Digital) West Florida is an effort by the University of West Florida to create a regional version of the MxD in Chicago. This facility would harness many of the natural assets in downtown Pensacola, proximity to the Port of Pensacola for blue technology development, and existing UWF infrastructure in the downtown area. The expansion/new build would allow growth of current laboratories near the port to accommodate more projects, as well as train a larger number of students downtown.

Bay County

Port Panama City: The Port was awarded a \$11.2 million grant by the Department of Transportation Maritime Administration for the construction of a 200,000-square-foot warehouse at the East Terminal. This expansion will allow the Port to expand its cargo operations and is estimated to create 337 jobs (140 direct, 134 induced, and 63 indirect).

Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport: The Airport has received a grant from Triumph Gulf Coast for the development of a 120,000 sq. ft. facility to expand the existing operations of IAG AERO Group, Inc. IAG is an MRO services provider. The project will allow for the creation of 500 new jobs at the proposed facility, their existing facility and their Lynn Haven facility. Triumph will provide \$25 Million of the \$107.5 Million cost.

Santa Rosa County

Whiting Aviation Park: Whiting Aviation Park is a 239-acre commercial/industrial park adjacent to Naval Air Station Whiting Field in Northwest Florida. Through a limited-access use agreement between Santa Rosa County and the United States Navy, civilian tenants of the Aviation Park will be able to use the Navy's airfield facilities. The agreement allows up to 75 operations by civil aircraft per day with access to two active bi-directional runways. The Navy provides runway access and monitors airspace.

Leonardo Helicopter completed the construction of its new 123,000 sf Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul facility. Leonardo anticipates creating 50 jobs in the Aerospace Product and Parts Manufacturing subsector, and a capital investment of \$54 million.

North Santa Rosa Water Reclamation Facility: This new advanced wastewater treatment facility will allow the City to stop using its current plant which is at capacity and discharges directly into the Blackwater River. The new plant will increase resilience and expand capacity to accommodate the growth of North Santa Rosa County. The location of the facility has been changed. The project has returned to the development stage.

Northwest Florida Industrial Park @ I-10: The buildout of and development of the Northwest Florida Industrial Park @ I-10 continues.

Walton County

DeFuniak Springs Airport: The City of DeFuniak Springs has received over \$7 million in funding from various sources to aid in the construction of two 6,400-square-foot hangers, one 10,000-square-foot hanger, a taxiway, an access road, and associated utilities. This infrastructure will allow the airport to attract new innovative employers in aerospace and defense, including Advanced Air Mobility (AAM). The project will create 500 jobs and have a total estimated fiscal impact of more than \$12.3 million.

Washington County

Sunny Hills Infrastructure Expansion: Washington County is planning a \$13 million investment in water and sewer infrastructure along State Road 77 to support growth in the Sunny Hills area. The project aims to accommodate the development of new homes and attract businesses to the region. County officials are pursuing state and federal funding to kickstart this initiative, which could significantly boost the local economy by supporting residential and commercial growth.

Washington County Industrial Park: The Board of County Commissioners applied for and received a \$4.9 million PWEAA grant from EDA. The funding will assist in the construction of a 400,000-square-foot manufacturing facility at the Park. Total project costs are \$8.3 million, and it is anticipated that 100 jobs will be created. The Project will leverage \$45 million in private capital investments.

Holmes County

Broadband Expansion: Holmes County received approximately \$14.7 million through the Broadband Opportunity Grant Program to expand high-speed internet access across rural areas, including Bonifay, Westville, and Ponce de Leon. This project aims to provide fiber-to-home services, improving connectivity for homes, businesses, and farms with speeds up to 200 megabits per second. The fiber deployment is ongoing.

Infrastructure Improvements: Holmes County and the City of Bonifay will receive approximately \$6 million for infrastructure improvements, including water and roadway upgrades and enhancements to Bonifay's wastewater treatment plant. This initiative is projected to create around 120 new jobs and attract significant capital investment, positioning the area for further economic development.

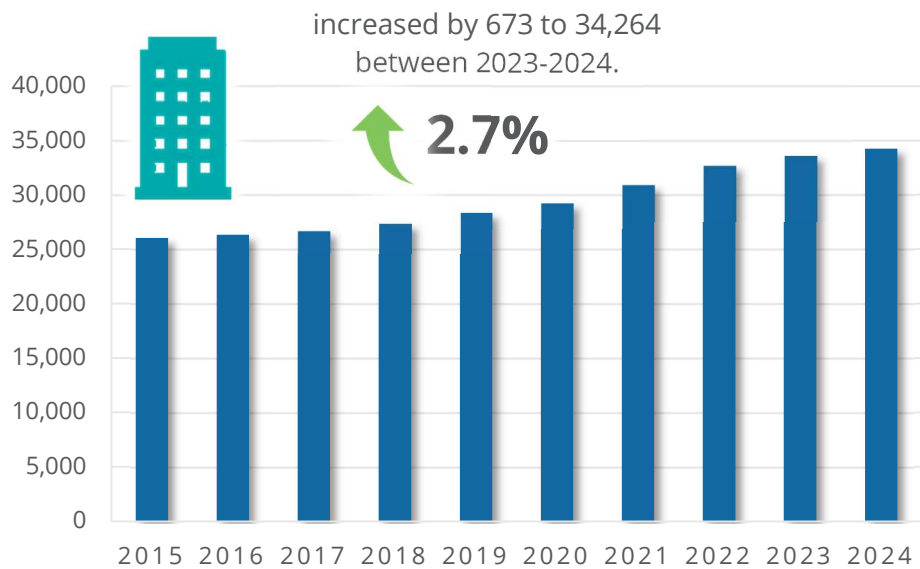
I-10 & U.S. 79 Commercial Development: Busy Bee purchased an 86-acre property from the Holmes County Development Commission and Holmes County. The company plans to develop a 55,000 sf Busy Bee travel center. Future plans include the development of the remaining 60 acres, which would include hotels, retail, and restaurants.

Impact Dashboard

The success of desired outcomes is tracked through monitoring specific metrics that reflect the outlook of the region. The following charts show data trends over the past ten years and highlight the past year’s growth or decline. At the time of this update, the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) annualized data was for 2024 (preliminary), while the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) annualized data was for 2023.

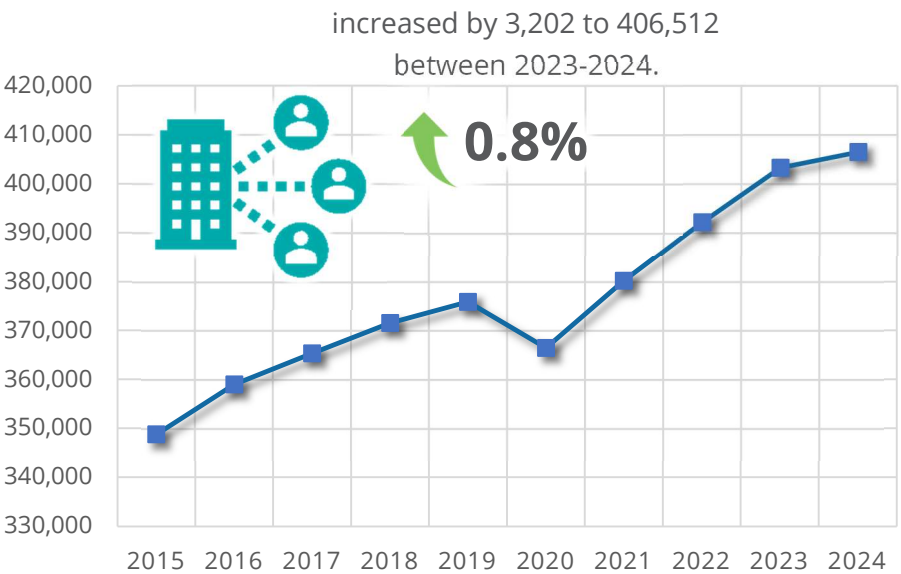
Unless otherwise noted, the data shown is for the entire Emerald Coast Region.

NUMBER OF
BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

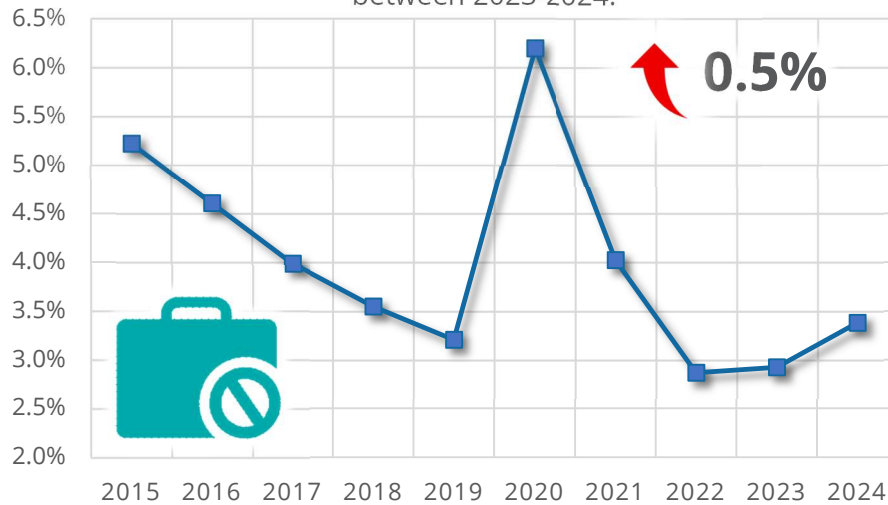
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

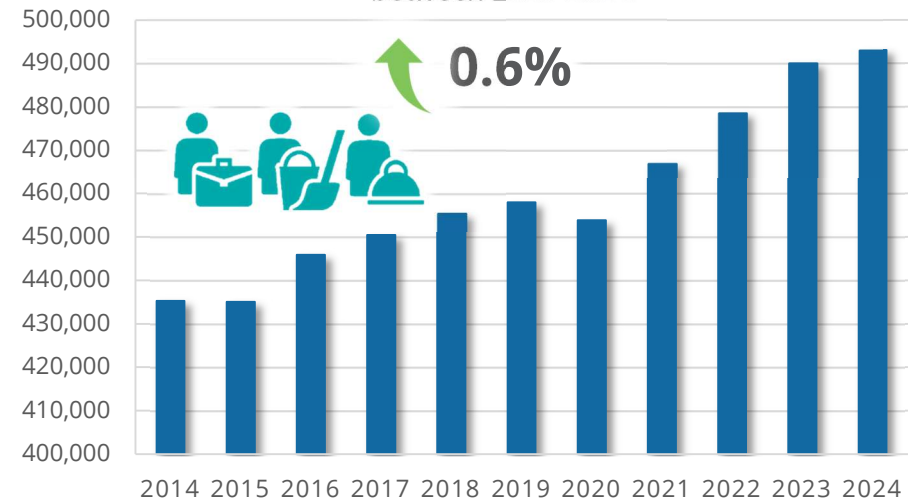
increased by 0.5% to 3.4%
between 2023-2024.



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

LABOR FORCE

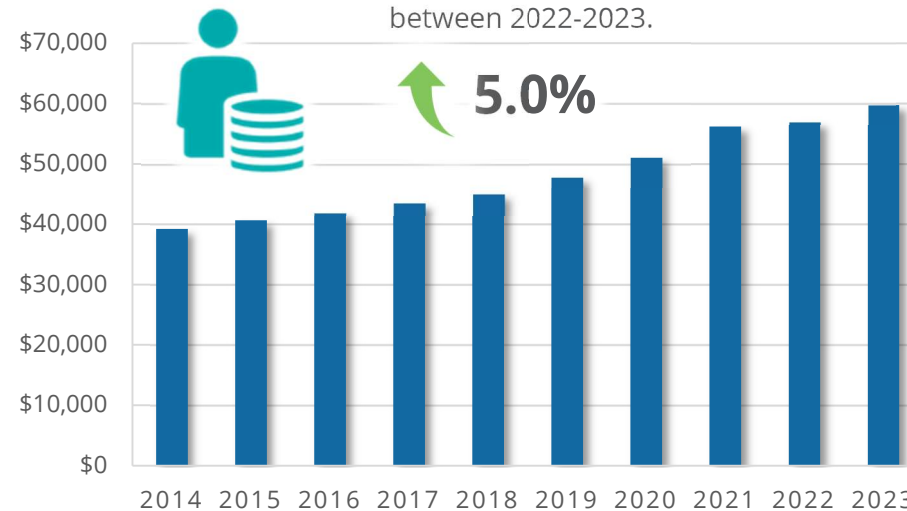
increased by 2,926 to 493,014
between 2023-2024.



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

PER CAPITA INCOME

increased by \$2,851 to \$59,756
between 2022-2023.

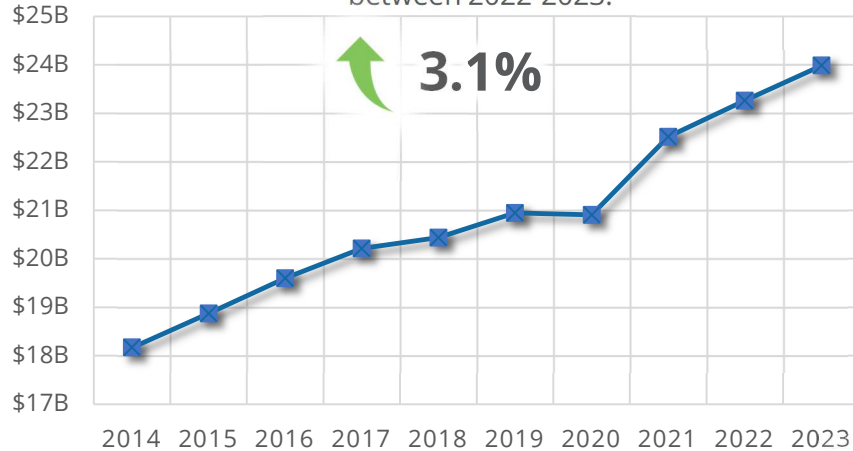


SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)

PENSACOLA - FERRY PASS - BRENT MSA

REAL GDP*

increased by \$0.7B to \$24.0B
between 2022-2023.

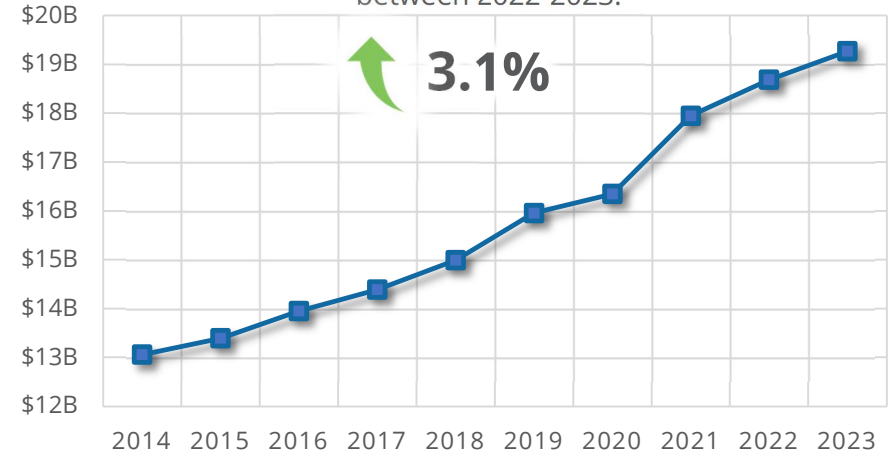


SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)

CRESTVIEW - FORT WALTON BEACH - DESTIN MSA

REAL GDP*

increased by \$0.6B to \$19.3B
between 2022-2023.



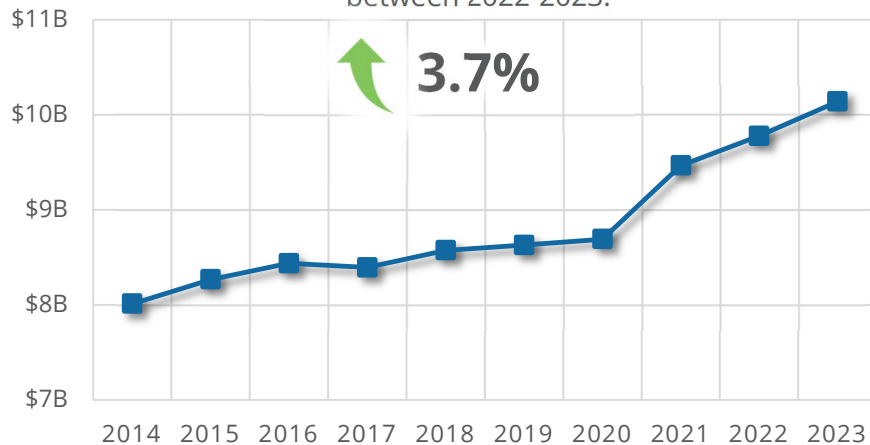
SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)



PANAMA CITY MSA

REAL GDP*

increased by \$0.4B to \$10.1B
between 2022-2023.

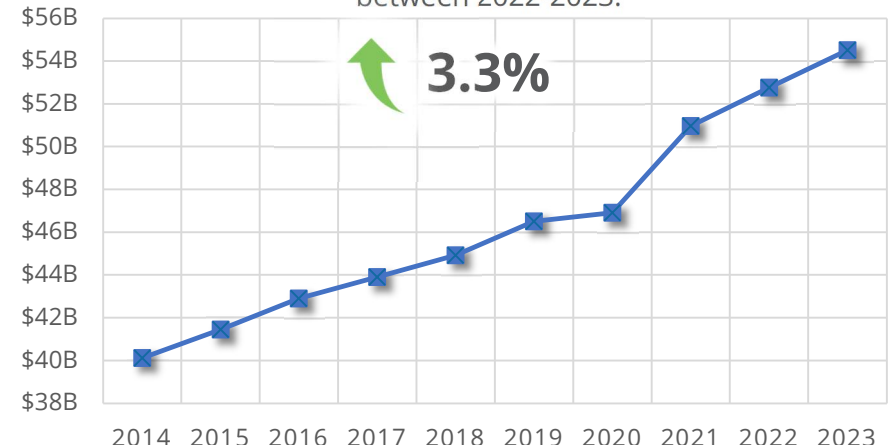


SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)

EMERALD COAST REGION

REAL GDP*

increased by \$1.7B to \$54.5B
between 2022-2023.



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)

*Chained 2017 dollars, all industries.