

CHAPTER TWO: REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES CONCEPT

During the community input process, Clay County residents sent a clear message—improving Clay County’s economy is the number one priority. The challenging question, however, is how does the Clay County improve its economy without compromising what is valued—the small town feel and rural character, and the good quality of life so many residents enjoy? The CCCP’s answer to this question lies in the regional opportunities concept presented here.

Clay County does not stand in isolation. Every day, regional forces shape the county’s physical, economic, and social makeup. While county leaders independently cannot change many of the regional forces at play, leaders can remain aware of the forces to overcome the challenges they bring while also capitalizing on the benefits. The regional opportunities concept encourages strategic connections to the regional centers that encircle the county. The concept provides Clay County with a plan to restore (e.g. agriculture) and build a new (e.g. a warehousing hub) employment base that can withstand dramatic economic shifts such as the recent real estate bust, and also considers how to do this in a way that protects what county residents value.

The regional opportunities concept underpins many of the Plan’s policy recommendations. Most, in some way directly link to the regional opportunity concept. For example, the percentage of adults in Clay County with a bachelor’s degree or higher is lower than that in the state. In order to increase the number of adults with bachelor’s degrees, residents need access to higher education. The CCCP suggests strategically linking with the many regional higher education institutions to bring higher education to the county. The following table summarizes some of the regional opportunities discussed throughout the CCCP, while Map ___ provides the visual representation of the concept.

Regional Opportunity	Benefits
<p>Clay County is within driving distance from five metropolitan areas: Knoxville, TN to the north, Asheville, NC to the east, Greenville/Spartanburg, SC to the southeast, Atlanta, GA to the south, and Chattanooga, TN to the west.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment opportunities • Economic development opportunities building on the economic clusters of the metropolitan areas • Further Clay County Transportation's (CCT) goal of becoming a public transportation provider
<p>Clay County sits in the middle of a ring of Interstate Highways, with the closest access point being I-75 near Cleveland, TN. From Chattanooga, TN (2.50 hours), one can access I-75 and I-24. From Knoxville, TN (2.50 hours), Interstates 75, 81 and 40 are accessible. Asheville, NC (2.00 hours) provides access to I-26 and I-40. I-85 and I-26 pass through the Greenville/Spartanburg, SC area (2.25 hours). The main interstates coming into and heading out of Atlanta, GA (2.25 hours), are I-85, I-20, and I-27.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic development marketing opportunity (market that Clay County is two hours from everywhere) • Opportunity to plan for greater metropolitan access in future transportation plans • Coordinated commuting opportunities
<p>A number of two- and four-year higher education institutions are within a 20-minute to one-hour driving distance; many of which have satellite centers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job retraining • Youth/young adult retention • Increase the number of adults with bachelor's degrees (an economic development indicator) • Opportunity to create a regional learning center in Clay County
<p>There are a number of small regional airports easily accessible and close by. Larger airports are in each of the metropolitan areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic development • Opportunity for CCT or a private business owner to run shuttles to nearby airports
<p>While these are not detailed on the map, Clay County and the region have similar natural features, outdoor recreation opportunities, a shared cultural heritage, and overlapping events. Many communities do not have enough activities to entice visitors to stay for several days. Clay County can work with other communities to develop and market regional, or loop, tourism opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism promotion in the metro areas • Economic development through natural resource and outdoor recreation promotion • Promotion of the loop tourism concept (see page ___)
<p>Each of the metropolitan areas have identified the economic development clusters they have or are trying to develop.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clay County can intentionally reach out to business leaders in the metro area to share how Clay County can further their business growth plans • Clay County can assist local small business owners develop their businesses by intentionally linking them to business opportunities in the metro areas

Clay County Regional Opportunities

