

11.1/GREATER BILOXI PLANNING AREA

In 1995, Biloxi's city limits encompassed the Biloxi Peninsula and North Biloxi. The 1996 *Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan* designated a Planning Area (defined as the territory into which Biloxi could logically expand over the 25-year planning period of the plan) extending from the northern city limit to the boundary of the southernmost tracts of the De Soto National Forest. In 1999, the City's boundaries were expanded into this Planning Area via annexation to include Woolmarket and land around the Tchoutacabouffa River. In 2004, the City annexed an additional area of approximately 850 acres located east of Biloxi and north of D'Iberville along Highway 15.

The *Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan* supported the expansion of Biloxi to the north and growth has occurred in North Biloxi and Woolmarket where land elevations are higher and development is less vulnerable to storm threats. This growth is projected to continue as infrastructure and public water and sewer service are extended north of I-10. Acknowledging the ongoing momentum of growth to the north, the *Comprehensive Plan* designates a new "Greater Biloxi Planning Area" into which the City could logically expand over the next 20–25 years (Figure 11.1). By designating this area, the City can consider land use and population trends beyond the current

city limits during this time period. Several significant changes have occurred since 1996 that suggest the need for this expanded Planning Area:

- As noted, a large amount of land has been annexed into the City from the Planning Area designed by the 1996 plan.
- Hurricane Katrina devastated much of the housing stock in East Biloxi and other areas of the Biloxi Peninsula. Rebuilding has been slowed by factors such as construction costs, expensive insurance, speculative land values, and the ongoing risk of storm damage. In addition, the City has adopted new Flood Insurance Rate Maps with higher base flood elevations as required by FEMA, making reconstruction in designated flood areas more expensive.
- Tradition, a master planned community, is under development at the intersection of New Highway 67 and Highway 605 north of Biloxi. At full build-out over the next 20-25 years, the community could include over 15,000 housing units, 2 million square feet of commercial space, and 35,000 to 40,000 residents.
- Water and sewer service is being extended north of I-10 into the Woolmarket area along State Highway 67, Woolmarket Road, and Cedar Lake Road. In addition, New Highway 67 provides access to Tradition and other developing neighborhood centers.
- Biloxi's residential and commercial growth to the north provides an opportunity to develop an appropriate area for an employment and/or light industrial center. This center could be served by a rail line rerouted from Irish Hill Drive as the existing CSX line is developed as long-term multi-modal alternative to Highway 90.

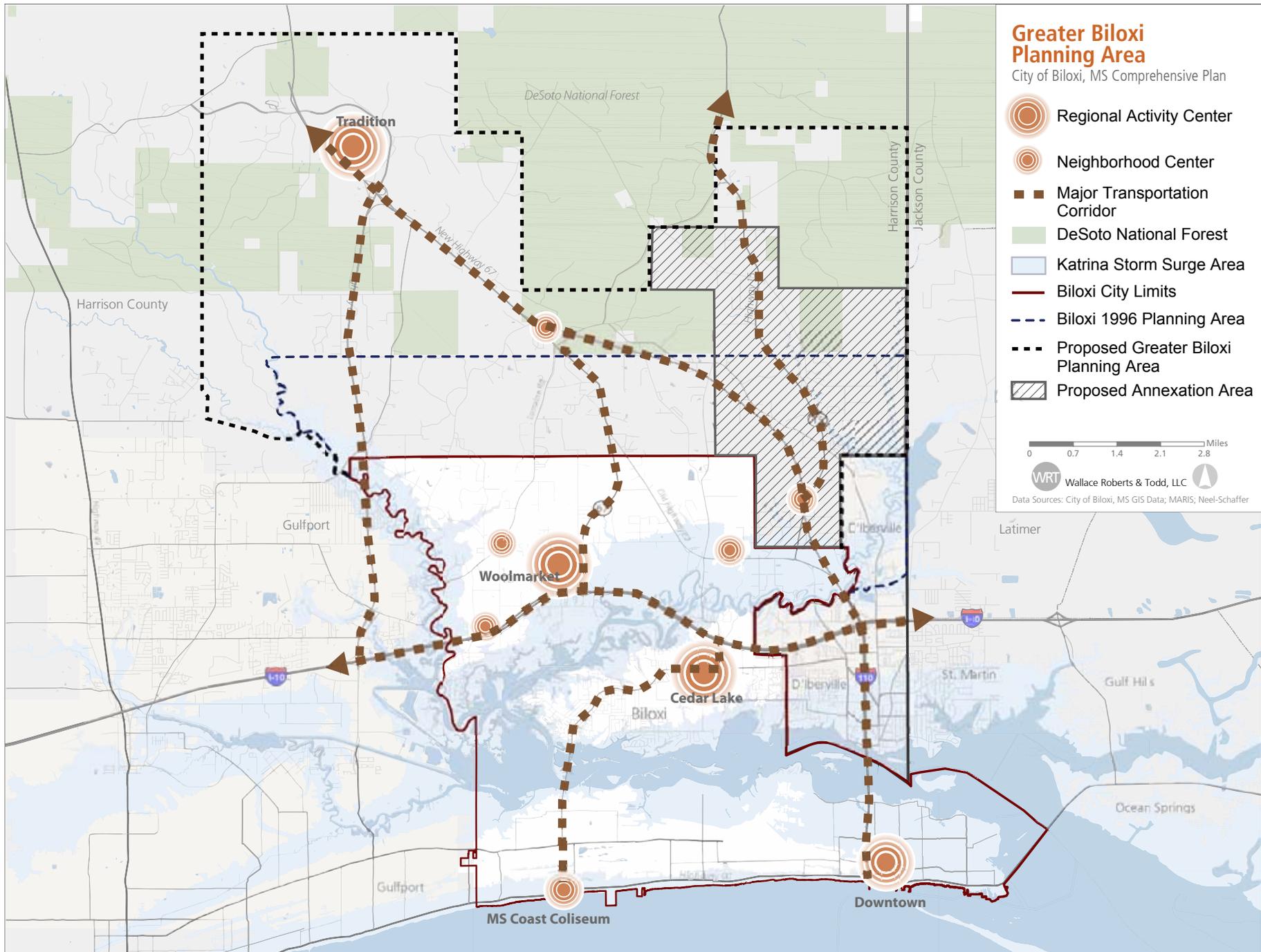


FIGURE 11.1/GREATER BILOXI PLANNING AREA

Shown on Figure 11.1 along with the present city limits and the remaining portion of the 1996 Planning Area outside of Biloxi, the Greater Biloxi Planning Area covers approximately 52 square miles in unincorporated Harrison County (generally north of Woolmarket but excluding large blocks of the DeSoto National Forest).

Figure 11.1 illustrates a framework of existing transportation corridors and emerging or potential future centers within the Greater Biloxi Planning Area. The transportation corridors include Highway 67, New Highway 67, Highway 605, and Route 15. Three centers are designated in locations at or near major road intersections (to provide convenient vehicular and future transit access) and away from sensitive environmental features (e.g., floodplains, wetlands), as follows:

- Tradition, the new master planned community under development near the intersection of Highways 67 and 605 about 5 miles north of Biloxi’s municipal boundary, is designated as a **Regional Activity Center**. Already developing with residential, educational, and medical uses, Tradition’s master plan calls for a compact, traditional neighborhood development with a Town Center, a range of housing options (cottages, apartments, condominiums, townhomes, and estates), and over 30% of the community preserved as green space and parks.
- **Neighborhood Centers** are shown in two locations designated as “Community Centers” in the July 2008 *Harrison County Comprehensive Plan* (within the pending annexation area just north of Biloxi’s northeastern boundary and at the intersection of Old Highway 67 and New Highway 67).

As indicated by their titles, the centers are envisioned as an extension of the pattern of compact, mixed-use centers designated on the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map within Biloxi’s municipal boundaries (e.g., Downtown Biloxi, Cedar Lake, and Woolmarket). The roadways connecting these centers are envisioned for future development into multi-modal transportation corridors. For example, bicycle facilities are proposed along Highway 67 as part of a planned citywide bicycle network (see Chapter 4, Transportation). The need for future transit to serve developing centers north of the Back Bay of Biloxi should also be explored with CTA. The DeSoto National Forest provides a natural edge for development to the north and provides the potential to link Biloxi’s future greenway and trail network to a regional open space resource.

11.2/ANNEXATION ANALYSIS

By designating the Greater Biloxi Planning Area, Biloxi can consider potential growth in the context of a logical, phased plan for future land use coordinated with the provision of public infrastructure and services. Land within the Greater Biloxi Planning Area is recommended for further study based on the indicia of reasonableness of annexation established by the Mississippi Supreme Court. These standards are:

- 1/ The municipality's need for expansion;
- 2/ Whether the area sought to be annexed is reasonably within a path of growth of the city;
- 3/ The potential health hazards from sewage and waste disposal in the annexed areas;
- 4/ The municipality's financial ability to make the improvements and furnish municipal services promised;
- 5/ The need for zoning and overall planning in the area;
- 6/ The need for municipal services in the area sought to be annexed;
- 7/ Whether there are natural barriers between the city and the proposed annexation area (PAA);
- 8/ The past performance and time element involved in the city's provision of services to its present residents;
- 9/ The impact (economic or otherwise) of the annexation upon those who live in or own property in the area proposed for annexation;
- 10/ The impact of the annexation upon the voting strength of protected minority groups;
- 11/ Whether the property owners and other inhabitants of the areas have in the past because of their reasonable proximity to the corporate limits of the municipality, enjoy the (economic and social) benefits of proximity to the municipality without paying their fare share of the taxes; and
- 12/ Any other factors that may suggest reasonableness.

Biloxi is proposing to annex 14 square miles within the Greater Biloxi Planning Area located north and east of the City's municipal boundaries in unincorporated Harrison County (Figure 11.1). The proposed annexation is being contested by the City of D'Iberville and was under review by the Biloxi City Court as of September 2009. Uses within the proposed annexation area are a mix of single-family residential, manufactured homes, limited commercial businesses, and undeveloped land. New Highway 67 crosses this area and construction of the new D'Iberville High School (Harrison County Public School District) is nearly complete.

As with any newly annexed area, the City can provide or plan to provide police, fire, and emergency services protection, street maintenance, municipal water and sewer, zoning and land use planning, recreation, and other municipal services already afforded to Biloxi residents for new residents. The proposed annexation area falls within Biloxi's path of growth, contains one of the designated centers within the Greater Biloxi Planning Area, and is served by major arterial roadways with the

potential for future transit service. The proposed annexation meets many objectives of this Comprehensive Plan. For example, the plan advocates a balanced approach to growth that focuses development north of the Peninsula in compact centers and neighborhoods that are more efficiently served by public roadways and infrastructure. The proposed annexation would increase Biloxi's potential for development outside of designated flood hazard zones in an area that is easily accessible via New Highway 67, Route 15, and I-110 to the employment, cultural, entertainment, retail, and service opportunities on the Biloxi Peninsula.

While there is the potential for further annexation within the Greater Biloxi Planning Area, it is important to note that the City is not proposing any annexations at this time as a result of this designation other than the pending annexation case. As sewer, water, and transportation improvements occur north of I-10, it will be essential for the City to continue to balance redevelopment on the Peninsula with new development north of the Back Bay of Biloxi.



11.3/INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

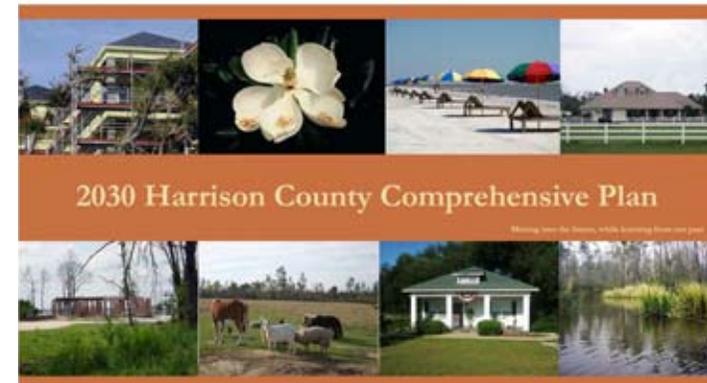
The Mississippi Code (17-13) of 1972 enables local governmental units to cooperate and to contract with other local governments to efficiently meet the goals of their communities. Section 17-13-3 permits local governments to “provide services and facilities in a manner pursuant to forms of governmental organization that will accord best with geographic, economic, population and other factors influencing the needs and development of local communities.”

Many of the issues and trends affecting Biloxi are not limited by the City’s municipal boundaries. For example, issues related to land use, storm vulnerability, the environment, transportation, and the economy impact the entire region.

Biloxi is located within Harrison County and much of the Greater Biloxi Planning Area is presently in the unincorporated part of the County. The *Harrison County Comprehensive Plan* (July 2008) recommends a number of goals and policies for joint planning and decision making with other jurisdictions in the region (e.g., regional entities, school districts, state agencies, federal agencies, etc.). Plan strategies include ways to increase communication, promote economic vitality, improve safety, enhance opportunities for healthy living, enhance regional tourism, and ensure long-term fiscal health through intergovernmental cooperation. The Harrison County Council of Governments provides an opportunity for representatives of the County and its five cities (Biloxi, D’Iberville, Gulfport, Long Beach, and Pass Christian) to meet on a bi-monthly basis and discuss regional issues.

Opportunities for Intergovernmental Cooperation

Implementation of the Comprehensive Plan needs to move forward not only at the citywide level, but at the regional level as well. Biloxi can benefit from the assistance of regional organizations and creation of partnerships to efficiently accomplish many of these strategies and actions described in this plan. This section describes opportunities for partnerships and ways to engage in regional planning and promote intergovernmental cooperation. In addition to participating where appropriate in strategies outlined by the *Harrison County Comprehensive Plan*, examples of new and ongoing regional initiatives proposed by the Biloxi Comprehensive Plan include:



The Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area

One objective of the Comprehensive Plan (see Chapter 5) is to protect and promote the natural, cultural, and historic resources that define Biloxi's unique character. Natural resource and heritage planning is regional in nature and transcends jurisdictional boundaries. The *Mississippi Gulf Coast National Heritage Area*¹ is a regional plan with three primary goals: strengthening the region's heritage identity, conserving the area's heritage resources, and protecting and marketing the heritage area to attract visitors.

The Heritage Area Plan covers the coastal Mississippi counties of Pearl River, Stone, George, Harrison, Hancock, and Jackson. As part of the Plan, municipalities are encouraged to partner and collaborate with the goal of conserving resources and strengthening the region's tourism draw. One concept is to designate regional corridors and clusters to showcase the Gulf Coast region's resources and enable visitors to experience them in an organized, focused way based on their interests. For example, Biloxi is grouped with the cities of Ocean Springs and D'Iberville in a "First Colonies" cluster connected by the "Coastal Heritage—Old Spanish Trail Corridor" along US Highway 90.

In addition to municipalities, regional partners include the Mississippi Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Biloxi Bay Chamber of Commerce, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain, and coastal institutions (e.g., USM Katrina Center, Beauvoir, Maritime & Seafood Industry Museum, Ohr-O'Keefe Museum of Art, etc.).

Coast Transit Authority Regional Service

Given the rising costs of energy and transportation and related environmental issues, one major factor in the success of Biloxi and the region in the future is its ability to improve the availability of transit service and link major employment centers with housing (see Chapter 4). Two recent reports, the *Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal Transportation* and the *Gulf Coast Transit Development Plan*, recommend future bus rapid transit and intercity high-speed passenger rail service along the east-west corridor that traverses the Biloxi Peninsula. Implementing these recommendations will require cooperation between each of the Gulf Coast cities in close partnership with the CTA.

In addition, as Biloxi grows to the north, it is essential to coordinate future transit service with new mixed-use centers and existing employment centers on the Peninsula and in North Biloxi. According to the most recent economic Census, about 4% of Biloxi's population walks and 0.4% of the population takes public transportation to work. Over 91% of the population drives alone or carpools to work. The CTA projects areas of North Biloxi and Woolmarket will be able to support transit service services before 2030.² As planning for multi-modal transportation options moves forward, Biloxi residents will have greater choice in how they get to their jobs each day.

Convenient and accessible public transportation across the region is one way to reduce the environmental impacts and high energy costs related to driving. Additionally, Biloxi is exploring the potential for CTA to provide service to and from the Gulfport-Biloxi Regional Airport and surrounding coastal cities to serve residents and support the potential for increased tourism in the region. This is consistent with national trends;

¹ A National Heritage Area is a region designated by Congress to promote preservation and sustainable economic development related to unique cultural, historic, natural, and recreational resources.

² Gulf Coast Transit Development Plan (2007), Exhibit ES-2 Transit Network Design 2030.

across the nation, community demand for public transportation is growing. In fact, according to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) transit ridership grew 4% in 2008 over 2007 and 2008 had the greatest total number of trips since 1956. While this jump in U.S. transit ridership occurred as gas prices increased, it appears to be a trend that will continue despite the recession-related reduction in the price of oil.

Public transit service offers a number of solutions to 21st century challenges, such as reducing dependence on fossil fuels, reducing vehicle miles traveled, and stimulating economic growth. In part, the success of Biloxi's future land use plan hinges on creating multi-modal linkages to existing and future centers accommodating transit, bicycle, and pedestrian use in addition to automobiles.



Trail, Greenways, and Bicycle Planning

As Biloxi develops its open space system around waterways and greenways, the City can collaborate with adjacent cities, counties, and other interested parties to identify linkages and opportunities for trails across jurisdictional boundaries (see Chapter 6). In addition to multi-municipal planning, Biloxi should partner with the Biloxi and Harrison County School Districts and private recreational providers to determine how to best share resources to meet the needs of citizens for parks, recreation, and other community facilities. Recreational providers and schools, who already work closely with families and children, can be ideal partners to identify the needs of local residents and provide coordinated facilities and services.



Gulf Coast Housing

The provision of affordable workforce housing is an issue across the six-county Gulf Coast Region (see Chapter 7). Hurricane Katrina damaged much of the affordable housing stock in Biloxi and across the region. The Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) and other regional housing organizations and nonprofit agencies have been working to replace housing on the coast and make the public aware of available assistance. The Gulf Coast Renaissance Corporation established the Regional Employer Assisted Collaboration of Housing (REACH) to help businesses support housing assistance for their employees. An essential goal of the MDA and housing agencies is to locate housing near economic development opportunities and employment, consistent with the housing goals of Biloxi's Comprehensive Plan. MDA is continuing to work with the local housing authorities in Harrison, Hancock, and Jackson County to help fund and restore public housing with the goal of providing more affordable housing than what was located on the coast prior to Hurricane Katrina. In addition to increasing the supply of affordable housing, the regional agencies can partner with local power companies to promote energy conservation and other green building practices for housing.

Economic Development and Employment Growth

There are many agencies and organizations (e.g., Biloxi Chamber of Commerce, Greater Biloxi Economic Development Foundation/Innovation Center, Gulf Regional Planning Commission, and others) working to strengthen the City and the region's economy. The Economic Development Element (Chapter 8) proposes formation of a Biloxi Economic Development Committee to provide a forum for these organizations to collaboratively work together, share resources, and coordinate their programs and initiatives to maximize benefits for the City's economy. Examples of economic development strategies proposed by the Comprehensive Plan that this committee could address include:

- Explore creation of a regional business/employment center and industrial park in the Woolmarket area (Objective 8-1)
- Grow the visitor industry by increasing the range of activities and attractions for individuals and families (Objective 8-2)
- Revitalize the Downtown as a regional mixed-use activity center and destination (Objective 8-3)
- Encourage business startups and "home-grown" entrepreneurial activity (Objective 8-6)
- Partner on workforce training and development programs to prepare students and residents for 21st century employment opportunities in the 21st century (Objective 8-7)

