

Economic Conditions

Over the last thirty years, the BHJ region has been passing through a significant era of change due to national economic trends. For many years, this area has been included as an important part of the nation's industrial heartland. Coal mining, electric power generation, various types of manufacturing, including steel making, formed the core of the area's economy.

Throughout the United States, all of these industries have been experiencing great change. Coal mining declined in northern West Virginia, eastern Ohio, and western Pennsylvania as coalfields were depleted and clean air regulations reduced the market for the high sulfur content coal in the area. Steel making and other types of manufacturing have increasingly faced stiff competition from overseas and have been forced to reduce labor costs to compete in the world market. Power generation, which also had been based on the supply of locally mined coal, has also suffered from changed circumstances due to the passage of clean air legislation.

Consequently, the economic core of the region has eroded over time. Employers, in an effort to remain competitive, have tended to replace labor force with technological improvements designed to increase productivity. Nevertheless, the manufacturing sector remains the heart of the economic base of the BHJ region. Figure 3 shows the generalized distribution of existing major manufacturing employment in the Study Area.

While employment is lower than it once was, these jobs tend to pay high wages and remain a very important piece of the regional economy. Currently, the manufacturing base of the BHJ region is concentrated in the Ohio River Valley in a linear pattern extending south from the Weirton-Steubenville area.



Service and commercial employment in the region has increased, again reflecting the overall trend at the national level. These jobs have different geographic distribution, tending not to be located in the Ohio Valley. Rather they are found in growing retail areas on ridge tops, east of Weirton and west of Steubenville. See Figure 4.

As employment has decreased in basic industries, the population characteristics of the region have changed as well. It is estimated that within the three-county BHJ region, population has declined by more than 30,000 persons since 1970, equivalent to roughly 18 percent of the area's 1970 population. The estimated population of the three-county BHJ region based on the 2000 census was 135,966.

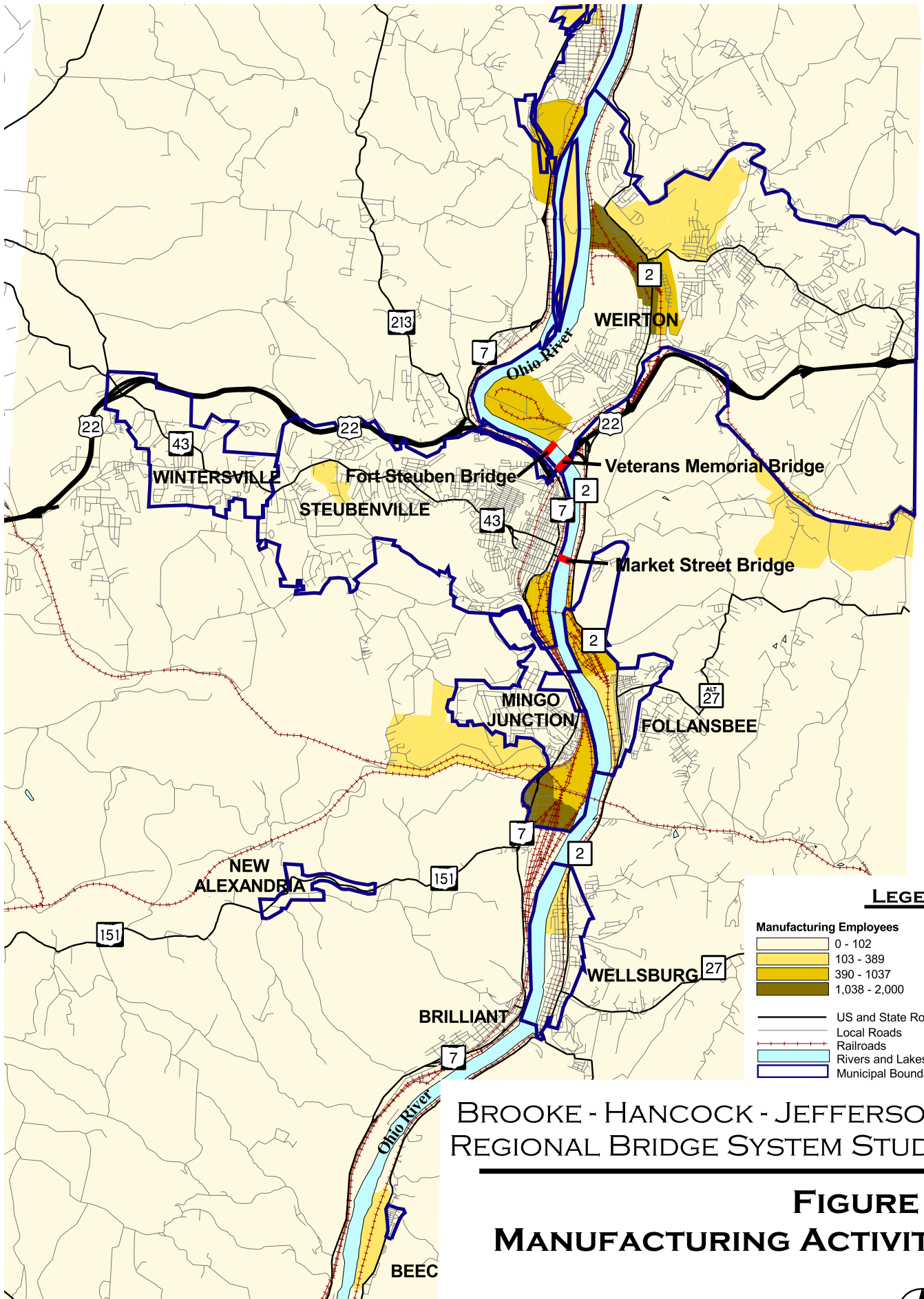
The decline in population in the BHJ region has occurred disproportionately among younger age groups, meaning that over time, the region's population has grown older. While the trend towards an older population is prevalent throughout the United States, it has occurred more rapidly in the BHJ region. For these reasons, there is a very strong and understandable desire in the BHJ region to find ways to counter these trends and restore stability and even growth to the

area's economic and population bases. A prime example of this effort is the planning now underway by the State of West Virginia to improve WV 2, the principal arterial running north/south on the West Virginia side of the Ohio River Valley. This road is now a two-lane highway through much of its length. Currently there are two major construction projects underway to widen sections of this route to four lanes, with plans in the works to widen the remaining sections in the future. The primary reasons for this project are the need to correct safety problems caused by roadway geometrics and landslides as well as the desire to improve the competitive position of towns along the West Virginia side of the Ohio River, including Follansbee, Wellsburg, Beech Bottom and others. This effort to improve WV 2 extends throughout the State.

In addition, the West Virginia Route 2 and I-68 Authority has the responsibility to promote the improvement of the WV 2 corridor from Chester to Parkersburg and the extension of I-68 from Morgantown to Moundsville. The Authority is composed of representatives from ten counties. The mission of the Authority is to “work closely with all those interested and involved to promote the development of those two projects in a manner most beneficial to the region and the State.”

Forecasts for future growth in the region's employment are modest. Much will depend on the region's ability to attract the type of jobs that are consistent with the national and global economy and to maintain a competitive and efficient manufacturing base. Many efforts, both public and private, are underway to retain and grow existing jobs as well as to attract new jobs. An excellent transportation system, one that provides connectivity throughout the BHJ region, is essential to economic growth.

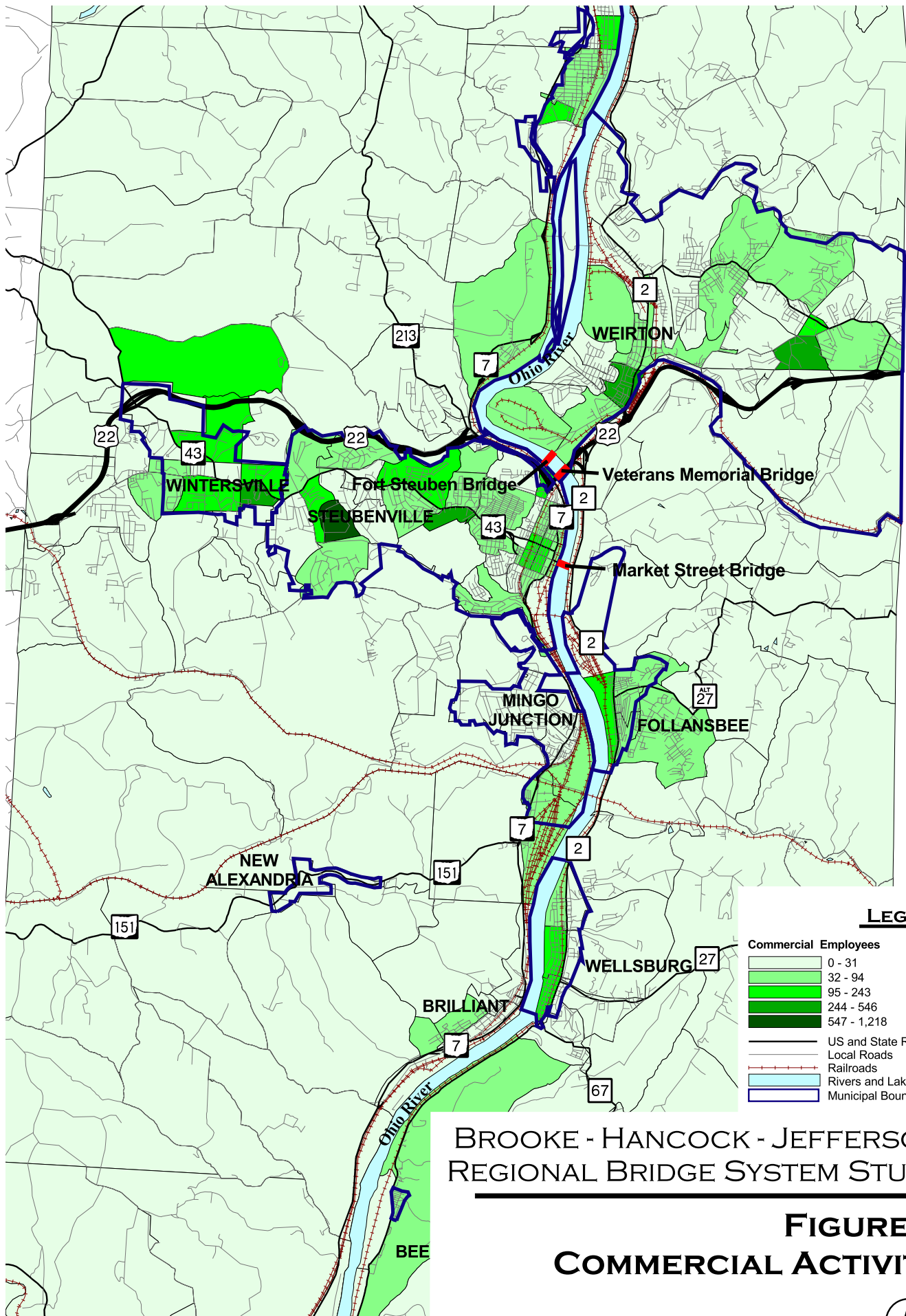
Figures 5 through 8 show the expected locations for employment centers in the planning year 2025.



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**FIGURE 3
MANUFACTURING ACTIVITY**





LEGEND

- Commercial Employees**
- 0 - 31
 - 32 - 94
 - 95 - 243
 - 244 - 546
 - 547 - 1,218
- US and State Routes
— Local Roads
— Railroads
— Rivers and Lakes
— Municipal Boundaries

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**FIGURE 4
COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY**

