



2007 Public Policy Agenda Infrastructure

Executive Summary

The Greater Akron Region is poised to realize economic growth and investment over the coming years, and the Greater Akron Chamber is ready to spearhead the charge for business and job growth for the area. As a leading economic development organization, the Chamber is dedicated to creating a political climate that encourages business attraction and retention, job creation, entrepreneurship, workforce development, and infrastructure support, making the Greater Akron Region a superior choice for business location and providing a high quality of life for the people of the region.

The 2007 Public Policy Agenda outlines the issues that our business leadership believes will promote investment in our region. The Chamber will proactively work with our decision makers at the local, state, and federal levels to impact decisions that will positively affect the business climate of Northeast Ohio. With the help of our members and partners, we know that we can provide a framework for guiding responsible public policy decisions that foster economic growth, job creation, and a strong quality of life for our communities.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure is one of the determining factors for business location and expansion. A region that has access to adequate transportation corridors, air service, health care providers and facilities, communication networks, parks and recreation, arts and sports venues, and that provides a safe and secure environment offers businesses and their employees an attractive place to live and grow. The Greater Akron Chamber supports a number of programs and initiatives that will bolster our regional infrastructure and add to the quality of life enjoyed by the people of the region.

- **Surface Infrastructure** – Northeast Ohio's transportation infrastructure must be improved. With the reauthorization of the Federal Transportation Equity Act (TEA-21), the region is scheduled for investment in highway projects that will help the region grow and prosper. **The Greater Akron Chamber will continue to monitor federal and state funding levels for transportation infrastructure project in the region. In Summit County, the Chamber will support local efforts for S.R. 8 improvements north of the Ohio Turnpike to I-271 including conversion to a limited access highway and the addition of a Seasons Road interchange serving Stow and Hudson. In Medina County, the Chamber will continue to monitor the S.R. 18 and I-71 improvements. In Portage County, the Chamber will advocate for widening of S.R. 14 from Ravenna to Streetsboro, in particular the section of S.R. 14 from 59 to 88. The Chamber also supports intersection capacity improvements throughout the County.**

- **Air Service** – The Greater Akron region is fortunate to have a first-class air service system in the Akron Canton Airport. The ease of use and proximity provide an extremely desirable commodity for businesses interested in locating to the region. **The Greater Akron Chamber will support the Akron-Canton Airport in its efforts to make a 3rd round trip LaGuardia flight permanent. The Chamber will encourage the opening of slots at Reagan National Airport for small communities. The Chamber will support the Akron-Canton Airport in its bid for the Small Community Air Service Development Program for 2006, as well as, safety upgrades and the extension of runway 5/23. The Chamber will continue to advocate for affordable and accessible direct flights to other cities from Akron-Canton Airport.**
- **Housing** – Ranking in the top five in both quality of life surveys and corporate relocation factors is available, diverse, affordable housing and in particular, “workforce housing.” Greater Akron is fortunate that 80% of the population, based on median household incomes, can afford the median priced home in our region. Housing is not only a quality of life issue but also makes our region a superior choice for business relocation. A well-housed workforce, that can afford their own homes, is a motivated and stable workforce. In addition, the construction industry and its allied support industries are one of the region’s key business clusters and one of our nation’s leading economic indicators. **The Greater Akron Chamber supports the availability, diversity, and production of affordable housing for all our region’s citizens. This will provide security, shelter, and wealth for our citizens and region and is a factor we possess that many other regions of our country do not.**
- **Energy: Electricity** – On January 4, 2006, FirstEnergy’s Rate Certainty Plan (RCP) was approved by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO). Under the plan, customers of FirstEnergy’s Ohio electric utility operating companies, including Ohio Edison, are expected to pay essentially the same prices for electricity through 2008 as they paid in the mid-1990s. The RCP also provided for the company to postpone for future recovery fuel and distribution-related increases that otherwise could have occurred during the 2006 through 2008 period. The difference between Ohio Edison’s rates and those of other Ohio electric utility companies will continue to diminish over the next three years as AEP, Cincinnati Gas & Electric, and DP&L implement rate increases called for in their rate plans. After 2008, when Ohio customers are expected to begin paying market-based prices for generation, we believe there will be very little difference in the total price customers pay across Ohio. In 2005, FirstEnergy spent approximately \$1 billion on system improvements and daily operations throughout its Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey service areas. The company also began a five-year program to make additional reliability improvements to its system. Called the Accelerated Reliability Improvement Program, or ARIP, it will result in an additional \$26 million investment by Ohio Edison in 2006 to enhance the electric service for Akron area commercial, industrial, and residential customers. **The Greater Akron Chamber is supportive of FirstEnergy’s Rate Certainty Plan because it will help ensure a continuation of stable generation prices for business and industrial customers; provide opportunities for customer shopping; and support economic development efforts and low-income, energy-efficiency programs.**
- **Parks, Trails, and Green Space** – Maintaining a high quality of life is critical to attracting businesses to the region. The Greater Akron Region has been fortunate to have government leadership that realizes the importance of green space and park development to the economic future of the region. To stimulate community and economic development through new business development, recruitment, and retention, quality of life issues must be addressed. **The Greater Akron Chamber supports the continued development of the Summit County Trail & Greenway Plan and the Ohio & Erie Canal Heritage Corridor. The Chamber advocates for growth of regional open space and trail networks for public access and recreational use. The Chamber urges funding at the local, state**

and federal levels to complete the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath project and to preserve and expand our park systems.

- **Prisons and Corrections** –The annual budget of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction has more than doubled from a decade ago. While incarceration is dictated for violent, predatory offenders, there remains a large population of nonviolent offenders spending short periods of time in overcrowded, expensive prison cells. **The Greater Akron Chamber continues to support development and implementation of successful, cost-saving, community-based programs which protect the public, hold offenders accountable, and provide opportunities for better lives.**
- **Communications** – Ohio's economy would be enhanced by investment in new communications and video programming infrastructure, including fiber optic and Internet protocol ('IP') technologies. Cable Services, and Video Services bring important daily benefits to Ohio by providing news, education, and entertainment. Competitive Cable Service Providers and Video Service Providers are capable of providing new video programming services and competition to consumers in Ohio and have stated their desire to do so. There has been only minimal competitive entry into the facilities-based video programming market since Ohio's current franchising requirements were enacted. The cable franchise requirements and associated build-out requirements have acted as a barrier to entry to many new facilities-based entrants, because time-to-market and reasonable cost of entry are critical for new entrants seeking to compete with the cable incumbents. Under both federal and State law, there is considerable uncertainty concerning whether and to what degree the cable franchise requirements apply to various Competitive Cable Service Providers and Competitive Video Service Providers, especially to the extent those new entrants are already subject to public right-of-way management under other State regulatory schemes. **The Greater Akron Chamber supports the authority of Competitive Cable Service Providers and Video Service Providers to use the public rights of way to the extent the cable franchise requirements do not apply, and to promote competitive entry by all Competitive Cable Service Providers and Video Service Providers, the State of Ohio can and should provide a state-issued authorization for Competitive Cable Service Providers and Video Service Providers to deploy their systems and provide Cable Service and Video Service to residents of Ohio. This state-issued grant will allow all Competitive Cable Service Providers and Video Service Providers to move forward in making the significant investments required to provide new services and competition for video programming."**
- **Federal Deficit** – According to Kiplinger, the net interest on the national debt is now 8% of the budget. The federal deficit is approximately \$400 billion, more than 3.3% of the GDP which includes the surplus from Social Security taxes. If the surplus were segregated, deficits would increase by \$170 billion reaching 5% of the GDP. As baby boomers retire, it is predicted that the deficit will skyrocket. **The Greater Akron Chamber encourages our federal legislators to focus attention on reducing the deficit.**