With the attainment of statehood in 1837, counties were a simple way to partition Michigan for administrative purposes. Critical assets are more fundamentally distributed based on underlying natural, geographical, ecological and other features, while counties were designed for governance purposes. Today, the aggregations of counties may be more important for regional planning purposes, especially when assets are essential building blocks of prosperity.

Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Counties, version 7b” (Shapefile), 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/.
Minor civil divisions are the cities and townships that make up local governments in Michigan. Economic activity of a global scale occurs at a regional level. To be globally competitive, a region should find ways to ensure local collaboration to achieve regional objectives that do not have high transaction costs. When the economic, social and demographic concepts of place bear no resemblance to the governance concept, it is more difficult to manage place performance and prosperity.

Source: Michigan Center for Geographic Information, “Minor Civil Divisions, dissolved version 7b” (Shapefile), 2007. Available at: http://www.mcgi.state.mi.us/mgdl/.
Intermediate School Districts

Intermediate school districts add another layer of complexity, especially since knowledge infrastructure is critical to the building of successful places. The degree of coordination necessary to achieve success in the knowledge economy makes it a challenge to mount an education-focused strategy for success, in part, because of multiple overlaying jurisdictions.

Source:
With the plethora of school districts, the challenge of overlapping public entities is further elevated. Managing place-success on a regional basis can be a challenge when decision-making is fragmented. All public entities need to commit to cooperation and collaboration to enhance the potential for regional economic success.

How much more can investments in new highways enhance Michigan’s performance? Where? What other assets need to be linked better to highways? What upgrades are needed to provide greater access to quality-of-life assets? How will highways’ primacy diminish with the possible resurgence of high-speed rail and mass transit in the nation, in Michigan and its regions?

Source: Environmental Systems Research Institute, StreetMap USA, 2006.
As with freeways and highways, railroad lines have historically served an important purpose in the state. Can the existing networks of highways, freeways, roads and railroads be part of an integrated plan as Michigan begins to position itself for the future? Are railroad lines merely ways of moving goods, as has largely been their role thus far? Or can they become a mechanism for the flow of new products, people and ideas, which are more relevant to the New Economy? What additional infrastructure can be connected to railroads? Will technology open up new uses of these railroad lines (broadband, etc.)? 

**Railroad Lines**

Source: Environmental Systems Research Institute, StreetMap USA, 2006.
Air travel is critical to Michigan’s connection to the global economy. New global cities are emerging worldwide that Michigan’s places need to be better connected to. Could our airports become better hubs of New Economy activities by integrating with new light rail systems and other forms of transportation, creating seamless connectivity for people, ideas and goods?

Michigan lacks airports that handle between 3 million and 14 million total flights per year.

Source: Environmental Systems Research Institute, StreetMap USA, 2006.
Michigan’s freshwater cargo ports provide potentially valuable connections to the global economy. Though water-based shipping is slower than other conventional forms of goods transport, this method of shipment is often less expensive when shipping time is less of a factor. What goods and products of the state are better positioned globally if our economic development strategies are integrated with our port strategies? Marine cargo ports could be complements to new forms of transportation in the future.

Summary

Michigan’s roads, highways, freeways, railroad lines, air and water ports represent statewide and regional assets that have served the state well in the industrial economy. Much of these were built to support economic and quality-of-life purposes, based on the visions of state and federal authorities, in cooperation with local officials. As the regions of Michigan begin to engage new economic visions, what roles can these valuable assets play? What economic visions are enabled or potentially strengthened by the physical location of these assets? What inter-local partnerships are needed to bring these visions to reality?

Source:
Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, “Michigan Port Collaborative - Port Categories, Resources and Status” [Shapefile], 2009.