

East Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

2025 Annual Update

Prepared for the U.S. Economic Development Administration
December 2025

1. Introduction

The East Alabama Regional Planning & Development Commission (EARPDC) serves ten counties—Calhoun, Chambers, Cherokee, Clay, Cleburne, Coosa, Etowah, Randolph, Talladega, and Tallapoosa. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) provides the region's long-term economic roadmap and serves as the basis for partnership with the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA).

This 2025 Annual Update summarizes current conditions; documents progress on the CEDS goals and incorporates new data from the East Alabama CEDS Dashboard. It also sets the stage for the 2026 five-year CEDS update.

2. Summary Background & Regional Profile

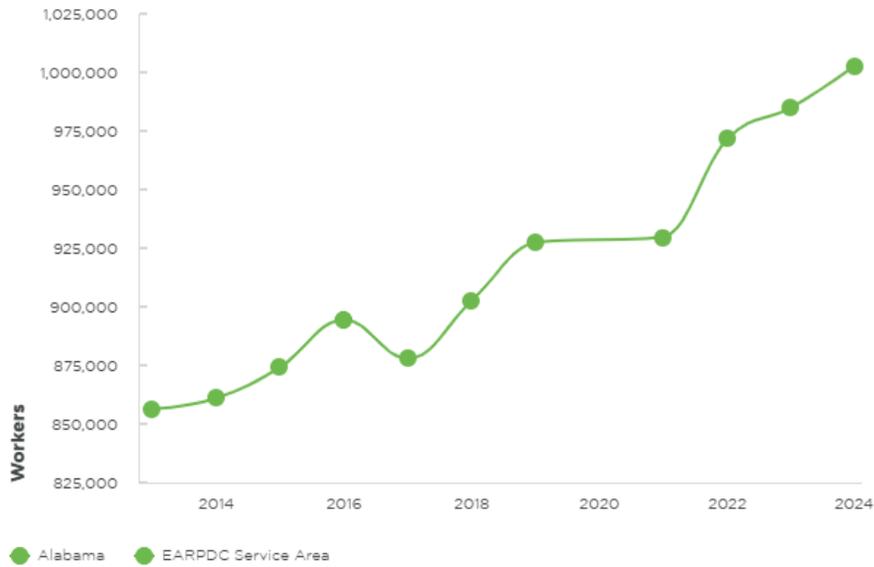
2.1 Population & Demographic Trends

East Alabama's population remains relatively stable overall, with variation across individual counties. The region has a substantial share of adults in their prime working years. According to the U.S. Census data, there are 79,319 workers between the ages of 25 and 44 in the region, representing 42.4% of the workforce, which closely aligns with the statewide share of 43.1%.

Maintaining and growing this segment will be critical to long-term competitiveness, especially as some younger residents continue to leave for larger metropolitan labor markets.

Chart 2.1 – Workers Age 25 to 44

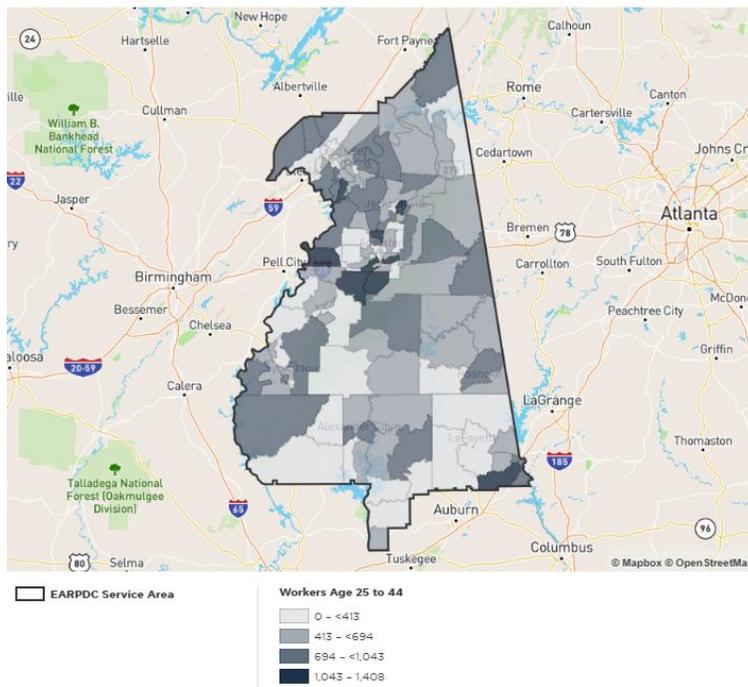
Workers Age 25 to 44



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 1-year

Map 2.1 – Workers Age 25 to 44

Workers Age 25 to 44



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

2.2 Workforce & Education

The region’s workforce is a core strength, supported by a network of institutions including Jacksonville State University, Talladega College, Gadsden State Community College, Central Alabama Community College, Southern Union State Community College, and the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind.

Key 2025 indicators from the dashboard include:

- High school graduation rate: 88%, matching the statewide average.
- Associate degree attainment: 9.5% of residents 25 and over.
- Bachelor’s degree attainment: 10.9% (below Alabama’s 17%).
- Graduate or professional degree: 7.1% (below Alabama’s 10.8%).

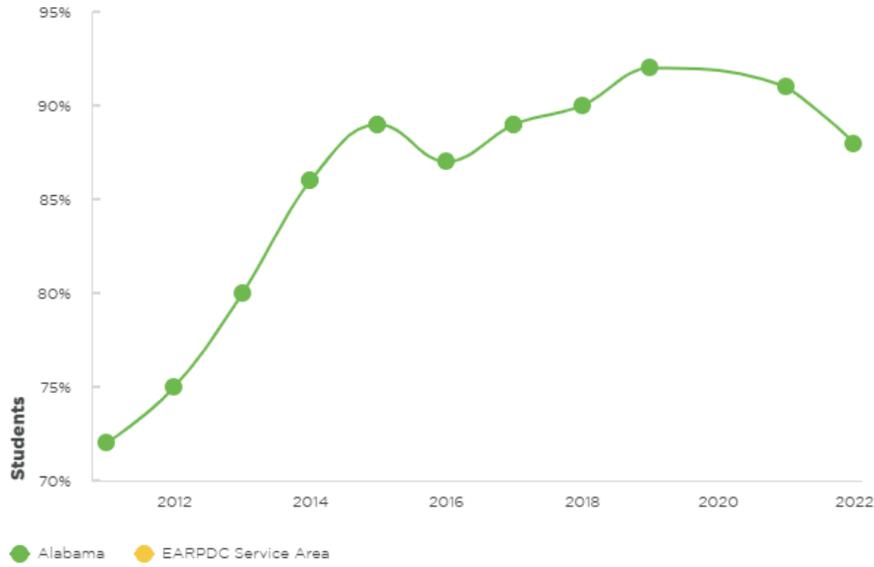
These figures highlight substantial completion at the high school and associate levels, with opportunities to grow bachelor’s and graduate-level attainment.

Table 2.1 – Key Regional Workforce Indicators (2025)

Indicator	EARPDC Region	Alabama
Unemployment Rate	6.1%	4.8%
Labor Force Participation	53.6%	58.1%
High School Graduation Rate	88%	88%
Associate degree Attainment	9.5%	9.0%
Bachelor’s Degree Attainment	10.9%	17.0%
Graduate Degree Attainment	7.1%	10.8%

Chart 2.2- High School Graduation Rate

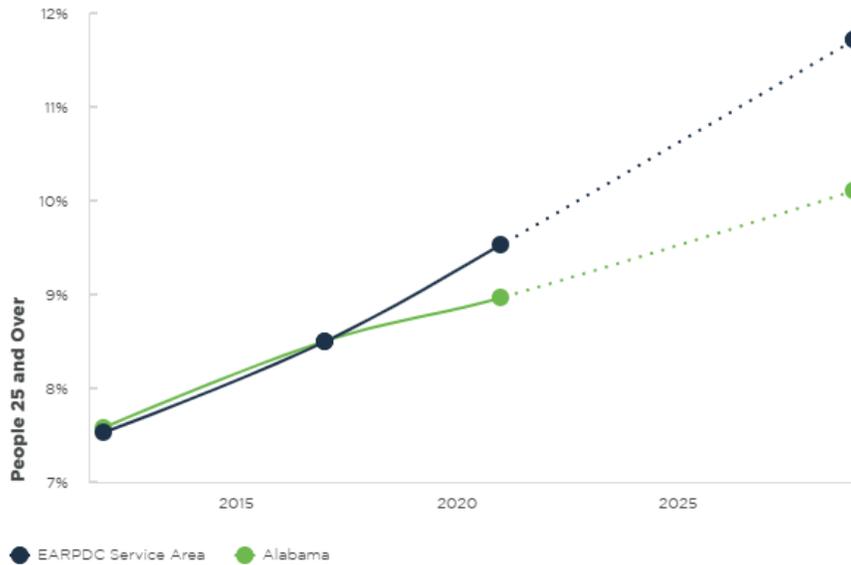
High School Graduation Rate



Sources: ED Facts

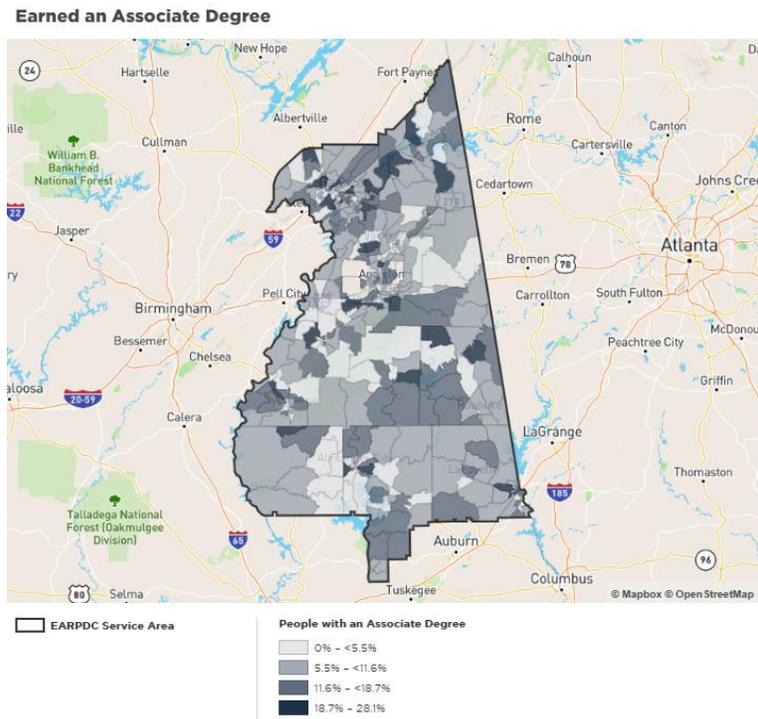
Chart 2.3- Earned an Associate Degree

Earned an Associate Degree



Sources: US Census Bureau; US Census Bureau ACS 5-year

Map 2.2- Earned an Associate Degree



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

2.3 Economic Activity & Industrial Structure

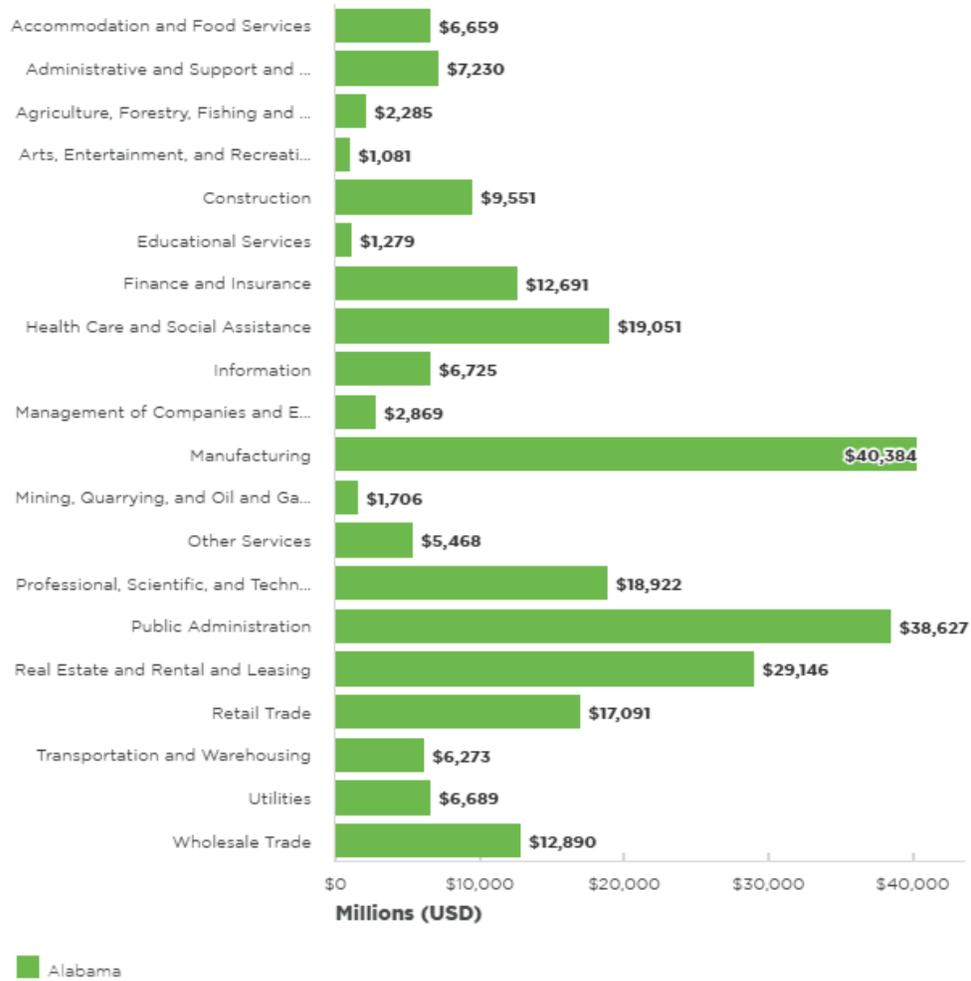
East Alabama’s economy is closely integrated with broader statewide trends. The dashboard shows that Alabama’s real gross domestic product is approximately \$245.4 billion, with manufacturing, healthcare, social assistance, and retail trade among the most significant contributing sectors.

Within this context, East Alabama contributes significantly to manufacturing and healthcare but continues to experience uneven growth across its counties. Regional unemployment stands at 6.1%, above the state’s 4.8%, and labor force participation is 53.6% versus 58.1% statewide. The median household income in the region is \$57,673, compared to \$62,027 for Alabama.

These indicators underscore the need to grow higher-wage opportunities while also increasing workforce attachment.

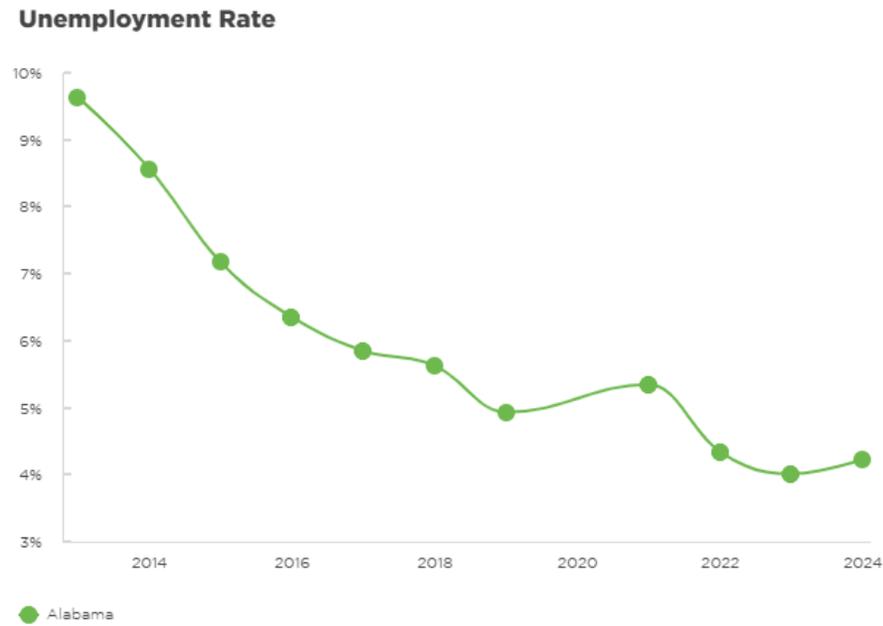
Chart 2.4 - Real Gross Domestic Product

Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by Industry



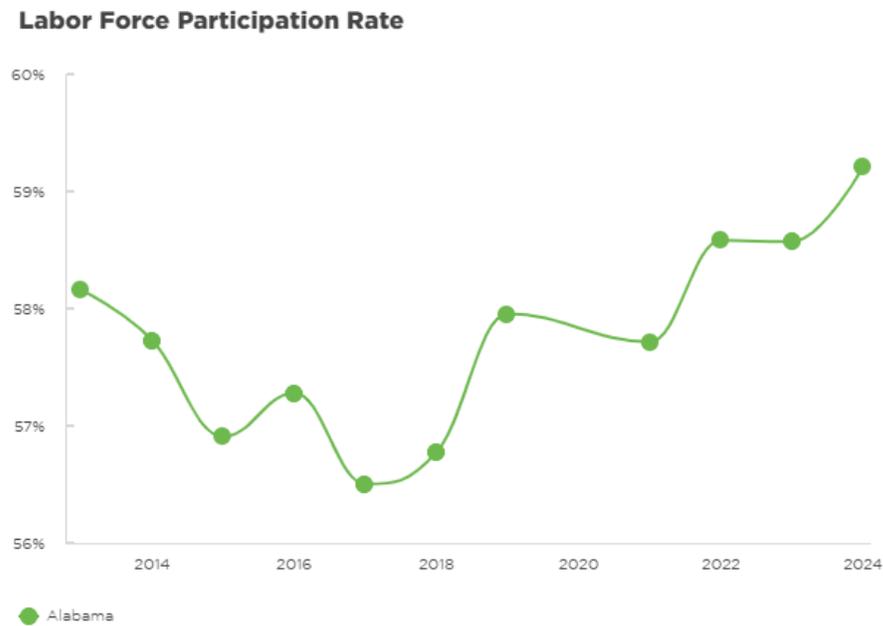
Sources: BEA 2023

Chart 2.5- Unemployment Rate



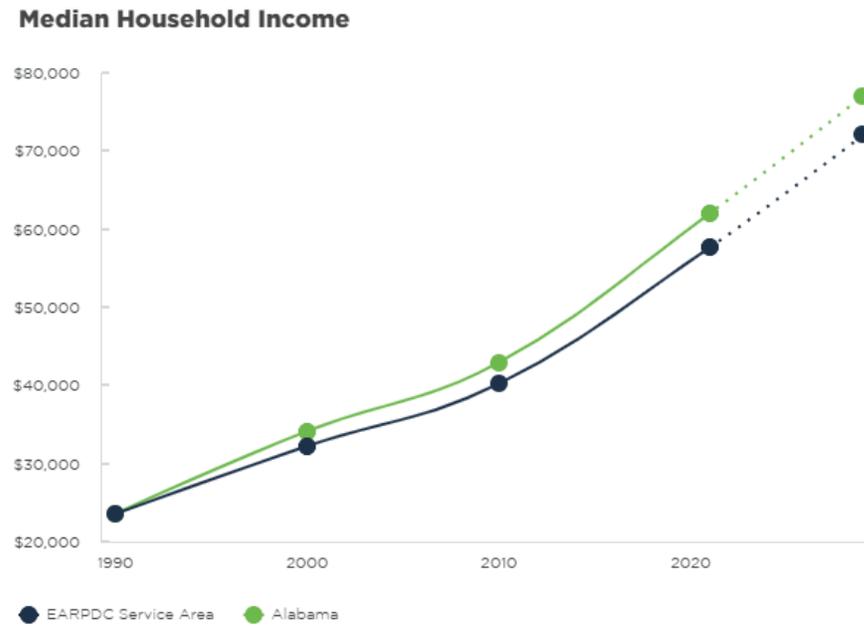
Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 1-year

Chart 2.6- Labor Force Participation Rate



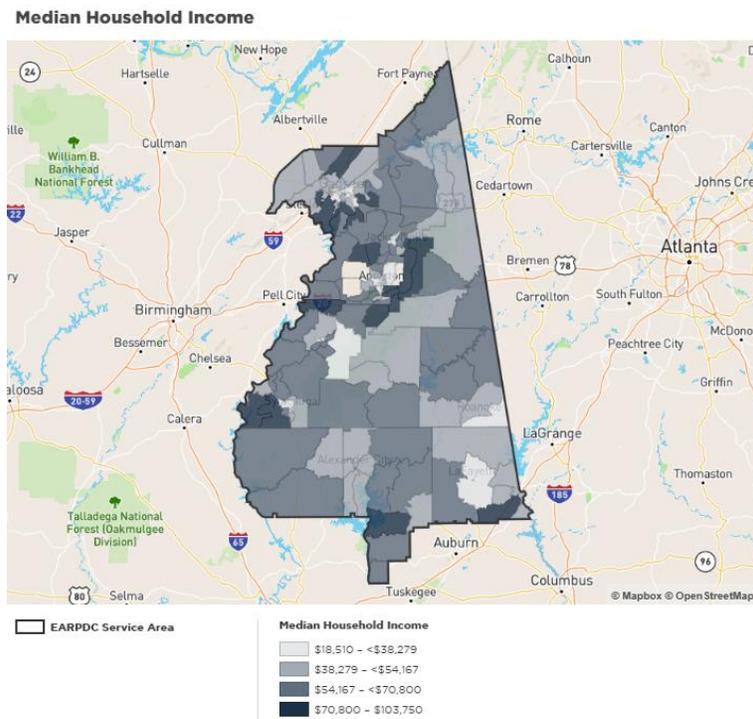
Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 1-year

Chart 2.7- Median Household Income



Sources: US Census Bureau; US Census Bureau ACS 5-year

Map 2.3- Median Household Income



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

2.4 Quality of Place & Infrastructure

Quality of place remains a defining strength for East Alabama. The dashboard shows that only 22.1% of households are considered cost-burdened (spending 30% or more of income on housing), compared with 24.8% statewide. At the same time, 35.3% of parcels are classified as vacant, indicating both disinvestment and potential opportunities for redevelopment.

The broadband subscription rate stands at 58.2% of households, which is below the statewide rate of 65.5%. The average commute time is 26.3 minutes, slightly longer than the Alabama average of 25.4 minutes.

Table 2.2 – Housing and Quality of Place Metrics

Indicator	EARPDC Region	Alabama
Excessive Housing Cost Burden	22.1%	24.8%
Vacant Properties	35.3%	22.7%
Broadband Subscription	58.2%	65.5%
Average Commute Time	26.3 minutes	25.4 minutes
Walk/Bike/Transit Commuters	1.5%	≈1.7%

Chart 2.8- Excessive Housing Costs



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 1-year

Note: Excessive Housing Costs refers to housing costs 30 percent or more of income

Map 2.4- Excessive Housing Costs

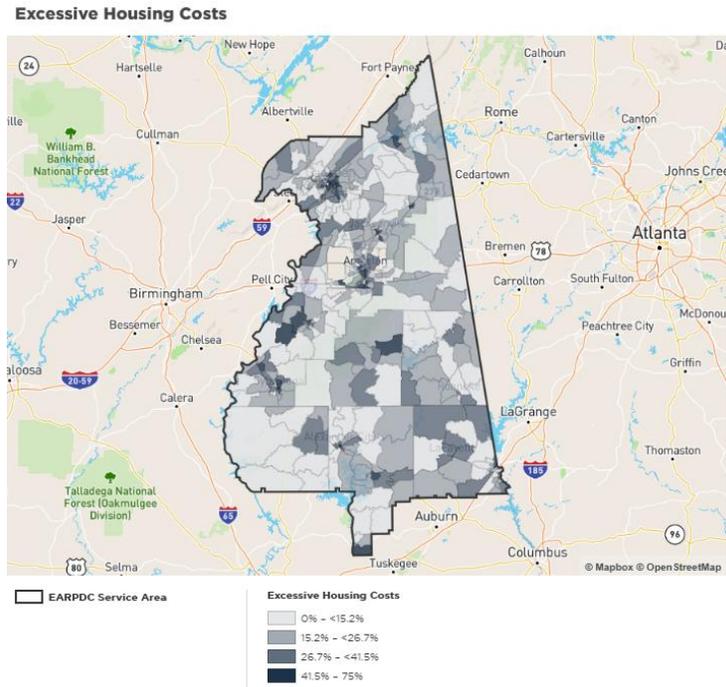
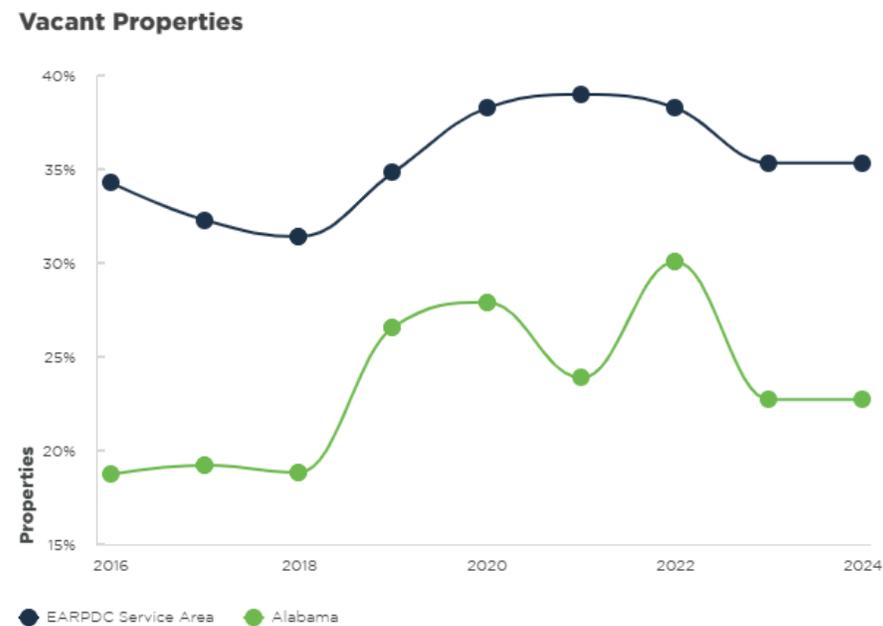
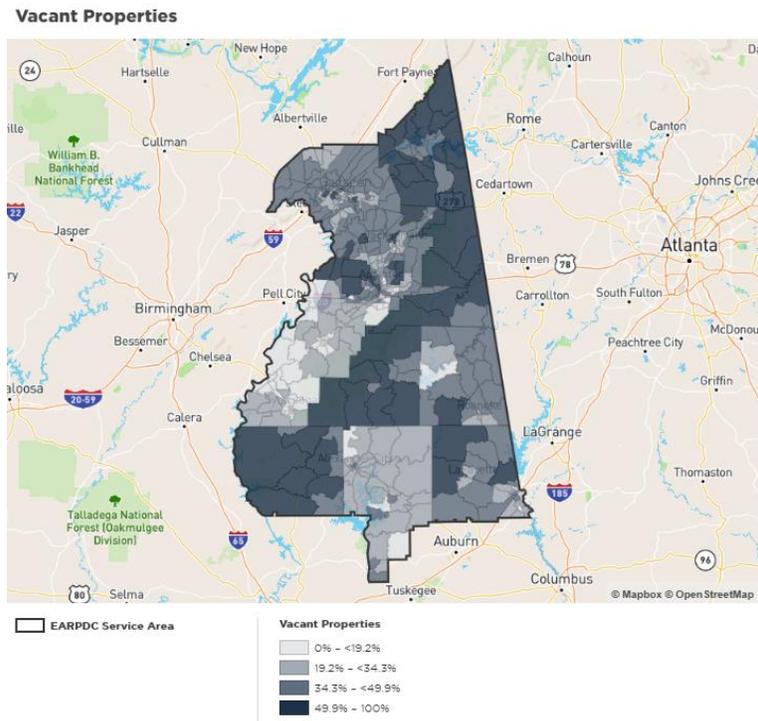


Chart 2.9- Vacant Properties



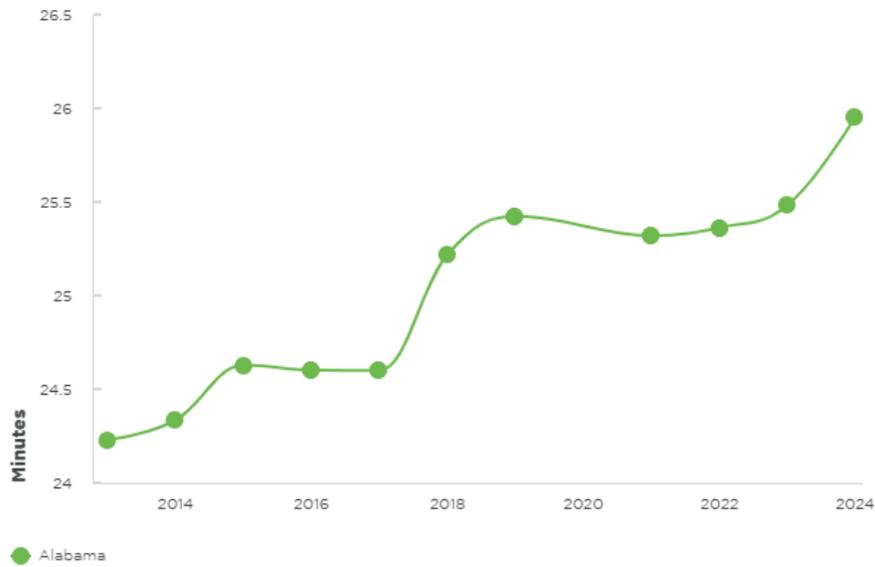
Map 2.5- Vacant Properties



Sources: County Tax Assessors 2024

Chart 2.10- Average Commute Time

Average Commute Time for Workers



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 1-year

Map 2.6- Average Commute Time

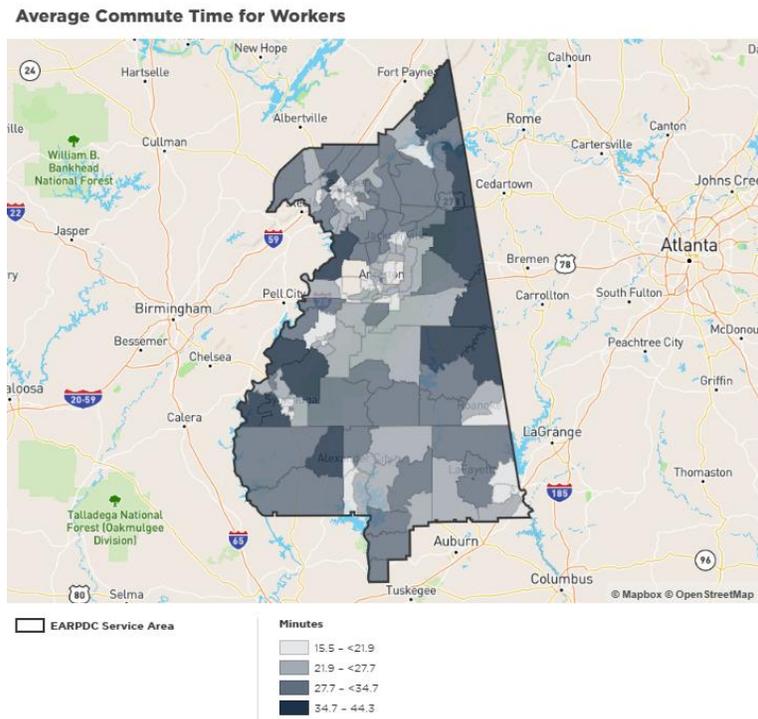
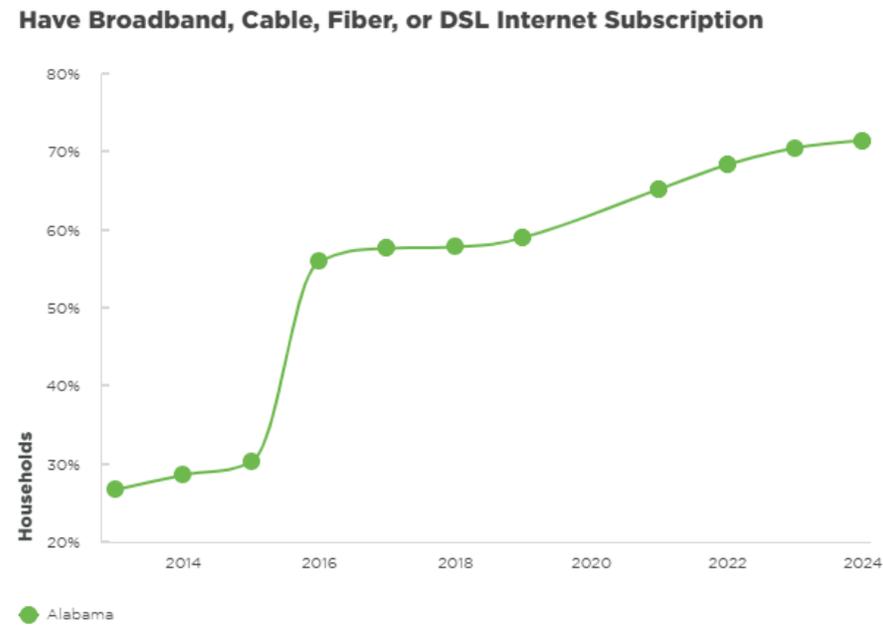
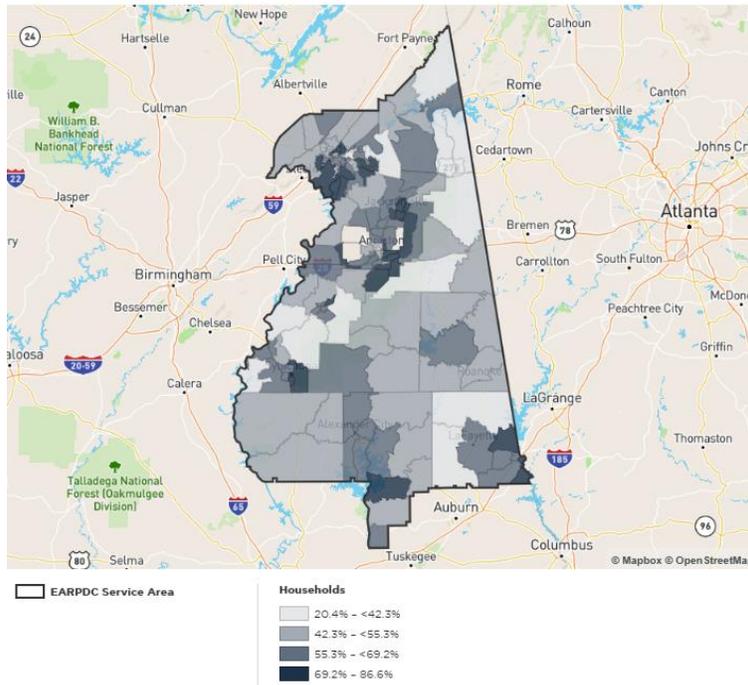


Chart 2.11- Broadband Subscription Rate



Map 2.7- Broadband Subscription Rate

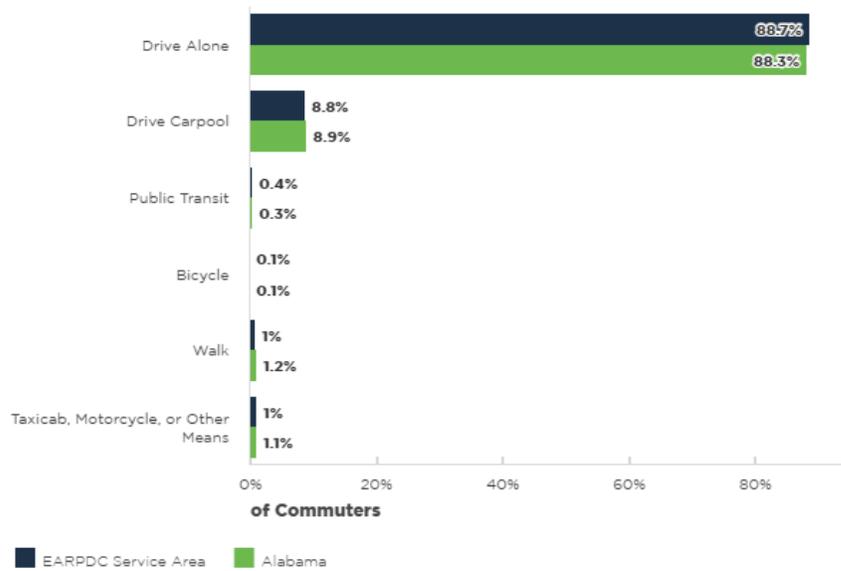
Have Broadband, Cable, Fiber, or DSL Internet Subscription



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

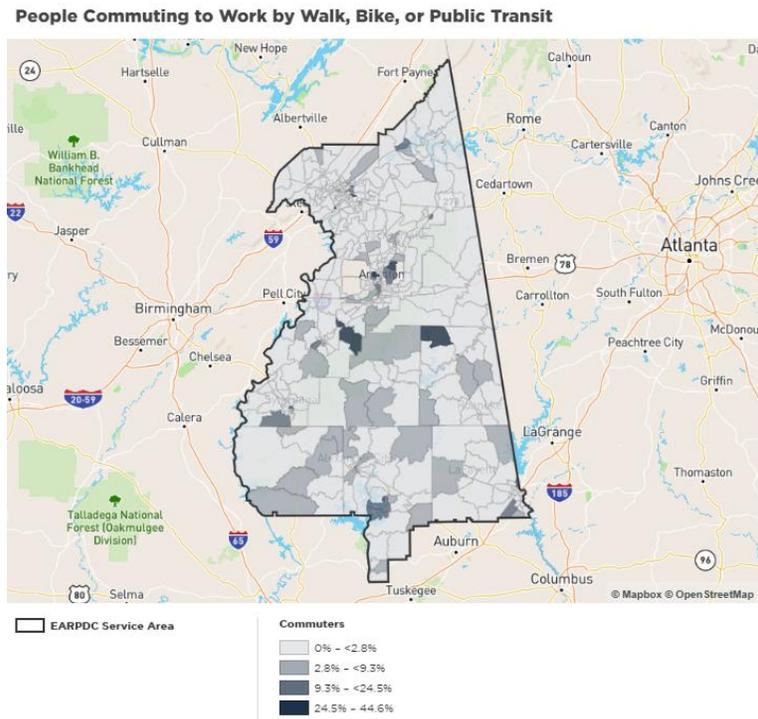
Chart 2.12- Commute Transportation

Commute Transportation to Work



Sources: US Census Bureau ACS 5-year 2019-2023

Map 2.8- Commute Transportation



3. 2025 CEDS Review Process & Stakeholder Engagement

Throughout 2024–2025, EARPDC convened its CEDS Steering Committee for a series of virtual and in-person meetings, focusing on each of the central goal areas of the CEDS. Members reviewed data from the dashboard, identified progress and gaps, and provided recommendations for the 2025 update.

Participants included local governments, economic development organizations, chambers of commerce, workforce and education partners, health and human services agencies, utilities, and community-based organizations.

4. Regional SWOT Summary (2025)

The 2025 SWOT analysis is based on the dashboard indicators and input from the Steering Committee.

Strengths include a robust manufacturing base, affordable housing options, substantial outdoor recreation assets, and dedicated local leadership.

Weaknesses include lower labor force participation, lower attainment of bachelor's and graduate degrees, broadband adoption gaps, and high vacancy rates in specific communities.

Opportunities include leveraging outdoor recreation and tourism, expanding entrepreneurship support, aligning with state workforce initiatives, and redeveloping underutilized sites.

Threats include ongoing out-migration of young adults, health professional shortages, and competition from larger metro areas for talent and investment.

5. Progress on CEDS Goals (2024–2025)

Since the adoption of the current CEDS, the region has made measurable progress across all goal areas:

- Economic Competitiveness – Communities have advanced downtown revitalization efforts, small business grants, and brownfield redevelopment planning.
- Workforce & Education – High school completion remains strong, and new training programs in health, trades, and technical fields have been launched.
- Infrastructure & Broadband – Broadband expansion projects and EV charging installations are underway, and regional transportation plans have been updated.
- Quality of Place – Parks, trails, and public realm improvements continue to enhance livability.
- Health & Resilience – Telehealth stations, senior wellness programs, and active living initiatives are expanding.

6. Performance Measures & CEDS Dashboard Integration

The East Alabama CEDS Dashboard serves as the region's primary performance measurement tool. It tracks key indicators across labor market conditions, demographic trends, business dynamics, housing, broadband, and health access.

The dashboard will be the foundation for setting specific targets and monitoring progress in the 2026 CEDS.

8. Preparing for the 2026 Five-Year CEDS Update

The following year will focus on preparing a full five-year CEDS update. EARPDC will collaborate with the Steering Committee and regional partners to update the SWOT analysis,

refine goals and objectives, incorporate new best practices, and fully integrate the dashboard into performance measurement.

Stakeholder engagement will include regional workshops, surveys, and targeted outreach to underrepresented populations.

9. Conclusion

The 2025 CEDS Annual Update confirms that East Alabama is making progress toward a more resilient and diversified economy, while also highlighting persistent challenges that will shape the 2026 CEDS. With strong partnerships, data-driven tools, and an engaged Steering Committee, the region is well-positioned to pursue strategic investments that enhance economic opportunity and improve quality of life.

Regional Maps & Key Indicators

This section presents selected regional maps from the CEDS Dashboard that illustrate key spatial patterns in economic, housing, infrastructure, and health indicators. Maps are intended to complement the narrative and tables in previous sections.