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Collaboration is the Cure to South Florida/Treasure Coast’s Bad Report Card

The grades are in, and the South Florida/Treasure Coast megaregion is headed for a mega-disaster if local governments, businesses, and organizations don’t start working together, according to a biennial regional indicators report from Florida Atlantic University.

“There’s a slogan from an old advertising campaign that applies here: ‘Collaborate or die,’” says James Murley, director of FAU’s Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions, referring to a J.D. Edwards ad campaign that emphasized the importance of businesses finding the right strategic partners to be competitive.

“For South Florida and the Treasure Coast to compete with other regions around the state as well as around the world for business, tax dollars, and other resources, our leaders are going to have to work together the way they do so effectively in Tampa, Orlando, and elsewhere.”

Every two years, FAU researchers analyze every study on the megaregion from Key West to Vero Beach to find trends to mark the region’s progress. This year, more trends than ever are down, and others are neither up nor down.

The indicators report looks at three aspects of three focus areas:

- **People**—who they are, where they’re coming from, the general health and educational achievements of South Floridians, and how the region’s leaders work together.
- **Place**—the quality and future prospects of natural and built environments and the ability to get from one place to another.
- **Prosperity**—looks at the economy, quality-of-life issues, and the divide between the region’s haves and have nots.

People	
• Healthy Communities	↓
• Educated Workforce	↓
• Regional Collaboration	↑
Place	
• Natural Environment	↔
• Built Environment	↔
• Mobility	↓
Prosperity	
• Innovative Economy	↑
• Trade, Tourism, Culture	↔
• Closing the Income Gap	↓

“These factors define our region’s livability—its attractiveness to tourists, new residents, and relocating or expanding businesses. However, a convergence of negatives, such as what we’re seeing, may repel productive people,” says Murley, who served as secretary of the Florida Department of

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Community Affairs under Governor Lawton Chiles. "So many down arrows indicate that our region, as we know it, is not sustainable."

The negatives are the results of concerns about the growing disparity between South Floridians with means and those without in their general health and healthcare availability, the widening income gap, and lagging educational opportunities and attainment. Unabated heavy traffic and lack of mass transit alternatives continue to be a major concern.

While there have been some improvements in the natural and built environments, the lack of progress of the Everglades restoration has negative long-term implications, as does the unsettled real estate market which has undermined homeownership and the local government tax base.

The report suggests that South Florida and Treasure Coast politicians, civic and business leaders should focus on collaborative projects on transportation, especially funding TriRail and other mass transit; creating synergy rather than competition among the region's three airports and three seaports; building on the strengths and improving the weaknesses of our schools, colleges, and universities as a collective whole; and restoring the Everglades to the west and the coastline to the east.

While regional collaboration got a positive mark in the FAU study, the study suggests that much more needs to be done. Examples of regional collaborative efforts include:

- Workforce housing is the joint focus of diverse groups such as the Palm Beach County Housing Leadership Council, Broward Housing Partnership, the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, the Regional Business Alliance, and the Urban Land Institute—working with governments and businesses to solve one of the region's greatest challenges.
- Southeast Florida 2060 is taking the long view of the region, which will double in size to more than 11 million people over the next half century. Planning to tackle the region's challenges in three- to five-year time horizons, this effort has just begun and still needs funding.

The researchers also are encouraged by recent efforts to boost South Florida and the Treasure Coast in life sciences, information technology, aviation, entertainment, and international trade. Emerging technologies in alternative energy, marine science, and nanotechnology also will present opportunities for higher wage jobs.

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The Center for Urban and Environmental Solutions is a program of the College of Architecture, Urban and Public Affairs at FAU, southeast Florida's regional public university. The Center is focused on regional thinking and action to identify problems and to develop workable solutions facing urban regions. For more information, visit www.cuesfau.org. For the full text of the report, visit www.soflo.org.

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Editors: For a copy of the report or to interview Mr. Murley in advance of the release date, please call Chris Dudley at 305-456-1625.