this one be conducted at least once every 10 years.

We found that sales-tax data are a good substitute for traditional ways of measuring economic activity in cities across Greater Minnesota. Level boundaries and membership need to be viewed with caution, because they can be arbitrary, but taxable sales are a useful and simplified way to gauge the level of economic activity at any one time.

To support such analyses, the Department of Revenue needs to stabilize its methodology for collecting sales data. For our purposes, including businesses on the edge of town makes sense, because we care about economic strength and vitality of the city as an urban center. We can understand the Department of Revenue’s need to focus on the official municipal boundaries, because they are in the tax business. Either way, a sales-tax data collection system needs to be in place for an extended period of time.

Department of Revenue data on taxable sales are available for most of the larger cities in Minnesota. It would be helpful if these data were available for all cities with populations of more than 3,500.5 The smaller cities are among those most in trouble and such data, especially when broken down to detailed industry, could help them mobilize themselves.

Missing comparable data for surrounding states is a problem. If such data were available, it would allow us to reconstruct trade centers that cross state lines, such as Fargo-Moorhead. Furthermore, it would give us a greater mix of city sizes and allow us to create more robust levels. Minnesota, for example, has only one city in the $300 million to $900 million taxable-sales group. We recommend that the states work together to achieve this goal.

Individual cities can use the data and analyses presented here to take charge of their own futures. Just because a city is positioned at Level 4 where the trend is downward, it is not doomed to oblivion. Cities will need to take the lead themselves, but help is available from a number of sources, including the regional analysis unit at the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Minnesota Design Team, and Minnesota Mainstreet. The Minnesota Initiative Foundations cover Greater Minnesota and are an excellent source of assistance to cities. Several midwestern states collaborated to produce a web-based resource called Downtown Economic Development Tools.6 Finally, we especially recommend the various community economics programs available through University of Minnesota Extension, including Retail Analysis and Development, Business Retention and Expansion, Customer Service, and a new Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities initiative.7

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2010 State and Twin Cities Metro Population Maps Available

CURA has partnered with the Minnesota State Demographic Center and the Cartography Lab in the University of Minnesota’s Department of Geography to produce four-color, poster-sized (17.5 x 20 inches) wall maps showing population distribution in Minnesota and the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area, as well as population changes in the state, using data from the 2010 U.S. Census. The statewide and metro-area distribution maps and the statewide population change dot map are plotted at the block level. The statewide population change choropleth map is plotted at the minor civil division level, which includes cities, townships, and unorganized territory. The maps include major water features and selected major roads and highways. Smaller versions of the maps (with some detail removed for legibility) can be found on the next four pages. Postersized versions of the maps with full detail are available for download as PDFs at the following URLs:


For those who want to print the maps, both FedEx Office and the University of Minnesota’s John R. Borchert Map Library (map.lib.umn.edu) offer reasonable prices for printing from these files at full size.

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5 Data are available for sales-tax receipts for all cities of 2,000 residents or more. See “Sales Tax, Minnesota, 2003–2008,” www.mngeo.state.mn.us /choose/metadata/sales_tax.html. That data set covers all receipts, including any local levies. It is not clear how useful it will be for determining economic activity.

6 See www.uwex.edu/ces/cced/downtowns/index.cfm

7 See www.extension.umn.edu/community/. MIRC is supported by the Blandin Foundation.
Twin Cities Metropolitan Area Population Distribution, 2010

Each dot represents 50 persons
City and minor civil division boundaries
Minnesota Population Distribution, 2010

Each dot represents 100 persons

City and minor civil division boundaries
Minnesota Population Change, 2000-2010

Each dot represents 50 persons gained

Each dot represents 50 persons lost

County borders