STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In any planning effort, projections are required of all future events and conditions which are considered to lie outside the scope of the plans to be prepared, but which affect plan design or plan implementation. The probable future demand for land and transportation and utility services and the demands upon the natural resource base will depend to a considerable extent upon the size of the future resident population of the Region; and, in turn, the size of that population will depend to a considerable extent upon economic activity levels within the Region. Control of changes in population and economic activity levels, however, lies largely outside the scope of governmental activity at the regional and local levels and certainly outside the scope of the physical planning process. Future population and economic activity levels must therefore be projected and, once projected, become important inputs to the plan preparation process. Accordingly, the Regional Planning Commission must carry out demographic studies and prepare demographic projections pertinent to the proper performance of its primary statutory responsibility to make and adopt an advisory plan for the physical development of the Region.

This report is the third edition of SEWRPC Technical Report No. 11, The Population of Southeastern Wisconsin, the first edition having been published in 1972, and the second edition in 1984. The primary purposes of this report are to present the results of the reexamination and updating of the demographic data considered in prior Commission studies of the regional population and to present new projections of regional population levels to the year 2020. With respect to the possible range of future regional population levels, several major uncertainties appear to exist. The most important of these uncertainties concerns the future pattern of migration into and out of the Region. Prior to the 1960s, the Region had established a long-term pattern of net in-migration. During the 1960s, however, there was a virtual balance between in-migration and out-migration. During the 1970s, out-migration exceeded in-migration by more than 100,000 persons; and during the 1980s, there was a net out-migration of over 80,000 persons. Migration is linked to both demographic and economic factors, the latter including job availability, personal income levels, and labor force participation rates. The complex interrelationships between migration and other demographic and economic factors are only partially understood, and the determination of future migration levels and patterns is always an uncertain process for areas such as the Southeastern Wisconsin Region. Another important uncertainty is that regarding the future course of fertility. After reaching historically high levels during the 1960s and early 1960s, the number of births occurring yearly in the Region declined steadily during the late 1960s and through the 1970s. Although fertility rates showed a moderate increase through the 1980s, age-specific fertility rates in the Region, State, and Nation are currently at some of the lowest levels ever observed, and total fertility is currently below replacement level at all three of these levels. While most demographers do not anticipate a return to the high fertility levels of the “baby boom” era, there is uncertainty about whether fertility will remain at its current low level, continue to increase, or begin again to decrease.

To deal with these and other uncertainties, the Commission prepared alternative projections of regional population levels for the year 2020. The alternative projections seek to identify a range of future population levels, identifying reasonable upper and lower limits of such levels within the Region. The regional population projections presented in this report were developed using a cohort-component procedure similar to that used successfully by the Commission in its previous population projection efforts. This range of population projections is useful in the development of robust system plans at the regional level, as well as facility plans at the local level, plans that may be expected to remain viable under greatly varying future conditions.

Although the population projections presented herein were prepared specifically to meet regional planning requirements, these projections should also be of use in certain private planning efforts, as well as in public planning efforts at the county and local levels. To this end, potential users are urged to contact the Commission staff both for assistance in exploring the applicability of the regional population projections to the potential user’s needs and for such assistance as the Commission staff can render in the actual adaptation and application of the projections to such needs.

Respectfully submitted,

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Executive Director