

ReImagine Appalachia Whitepapers Detail Regional Infrastructure and Investment Priorities

Most Appalachians want to do our part to build a vibrant future for our families and communities. We deserve leaders in Washington who will do the same. By calling on our elected leaders to build out broadband, bring back the Civilian Conservation Corps and grow cleaner and more efficient manufacturing, we can rebuild our communities, repair our climate and put people to work in quality jobs with fair wages and good benefits.

The ReImagine Appalachia Coalition has released two jobs studies with the Political Economy Research Institute showing that our blueprint would create nearly half a million jobs across Pennsylvania and Ohio alone. ReImagine Appalachia's whitepapers are the next stage in our work to show that investments in the people, communities, and infrastructure of Appalachia can revitalize the region, creating an Appalachia where everyone is paid a living wage, and where future generations can put down roots with clean air to breathe and water to drink.

Implementing these policies could create
nearly half a million good jobs across
Appalachia with incalculable side benefits to
our land, health and communities.

Modernize Manufacturing

Appalachians have always known how to make things. We have the skills to build a more prosperous future based on local wealth creation. With the right federal infrastructure investments and fair-trade policies, the region could become a 21st century manufacturing powerhouse.

In our [Growing Clean and Efficient Manufacturing whitepaper](#), ReImagine Appalachia details how shuttered coal plants can be repurposed into eco-industrial parks, employing circular manufacturing principles, where one company's waste becomes another's raw material. Coal plant boilers and turbines at existing sites can be repurposed for combined heat and power (CHP), providing a more efficient way to meet the heat and power needs of manufacturers. Industrial assessment centers and manufacturing energy partnerships can provide low-cost industrial energy audits and energy-efficiency training for the workforce.

To help manufacturers modernize, the federal government also should promote labor-management partnerships and union apprenticeships with access to greater opportunities for women as well as Black, Indigenous, and other working people of color.

The industrial sector uses a third of the energy in Appalachia. For some industrial consumers, such as the chemical sector, energy can represent as much as 60 percent of total costs.

By focusing on upgrades to this sector, we can save money while significantly reducing emissions. In addition to introducing policies that would increase the adoption of energy efficiency measures such as CHP, we recommend an aggressive strategy to grow a clean and efficient manufacturing sector by helping companies enter new markets developing in response to consumer demand for more socially and environmentally responsible products.

The Ohio Valley region could become the hub of several next generation products, including electric vehicles, energy storage, and alternatives to single-use plastic.



Source: [PERI: Impacts of the ReImagine Appalachia & Clean Energy Transition Programs for Ohio](#)

Building out Broadband

High quality, affordable broadband is foundational for a prosperous 21st century Appalachia. Children and families, as well as the businesses, schools and health care institutions serving them, require broadband. Universal broadband is also necessary for a smart grid.



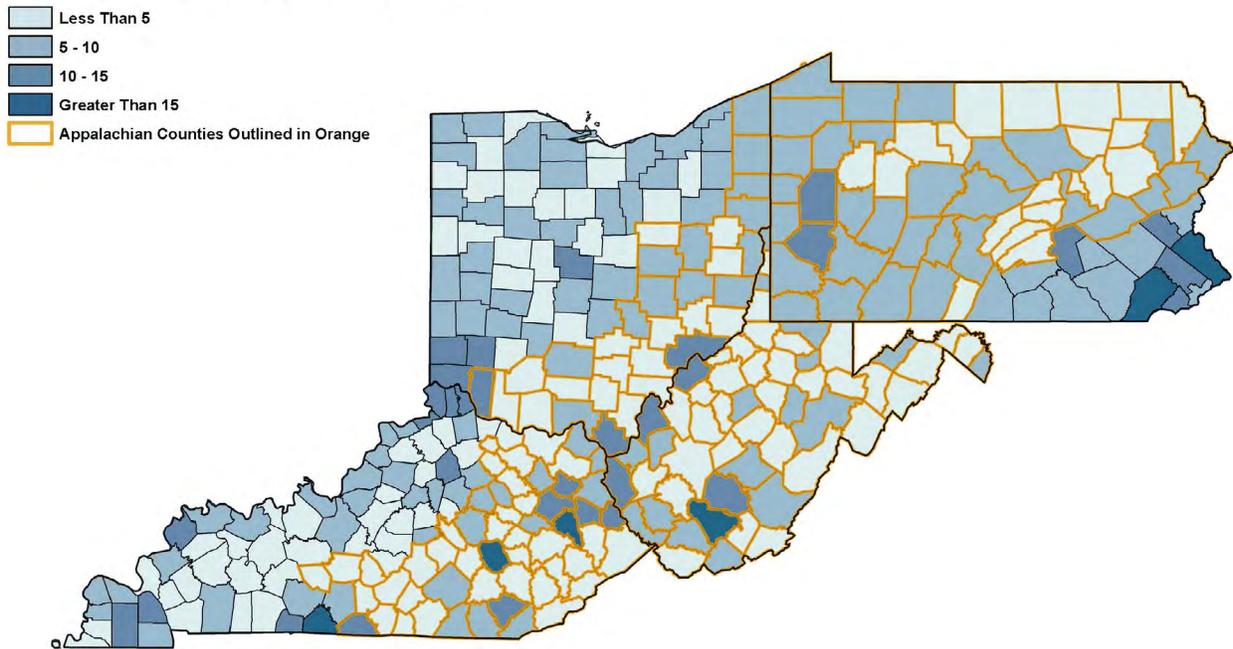
Source: [PERI: Impacts of the ReImagine Appalachia & Clean Energy Transition Programs for Ohio](#)

In our [Broadband Builds the Future whitepaper](#) ReImagine Appalachia details how high-quality internet is now basic infrastructure. Like access to water or electricity, broadband is a necessity. The pandemic has made this issue even more visible; as those with quality broadband access can make better use of telehealth, online schooling and telecommuting, those without broadband are left further behind.

ReImagine Appalachia analyzed open source data for our four states. We revealed inadequate service with particularly poor broadband in the Appalachian region. The private market and corporations aren't meeting the needs of Appalachians. That's why the federal government needs to step in with policies and regulations to require universal, quality service.

Appalachian Parts of Ohio Valley States Have Slow Broadband:

UPLOAD Speeds (Mbits/s) by COUNTY in PA, OH, KY, WV



Source: Keystone Research Center based on Measurement Labor NDT Data 12/30/2019 - 9/7/2020 downloaded from <https://www.measurementlab.net/visualizations/>

The initiatives to expand broadband must strengthen provisions protecting union rights with good wages, as well as ensuring access to a diverse population.

Historically, Americans have stepped up to the challenge of bringing utilities to our underserved region.

Universal broadband across Appalachia is possible, and we can put thousands of people to work in good union jobs to build it out.

104 Appalachian counties in our four state region do not have access to internet speeds fast enough for basic internet functionality including video conferencing, online learning, and telehealth.

Invest in Agriculture and Revive the Civilian Conservation Corps

Our outreach to communities across the region has revealed two major challenges: a lack of economic opportunity and the need to reclaim damaged land. In our whitepaper titled [Heal Our Land and Our People—Revive the Civilian Conservation Corps, Promote Regenerative Agriculture](#), we propose innovative solutions to create major progress toward both concerns.

Investments in capturing carbon through regenerative agriculture could transform our region while supporting local agriculture and food access in urban and rural areas. In addition, we call for investing in forest



Source: [PERI: Impacts of the ReImagine Appalachia & Clean Energy Transition Programs for Ohio](#)

restoration. This includes growing more native trees and plants and enabling landowners to earn more income. A key step toward healing our land must also include the reclamation of land damaged by extractive industries.

As ReImagine Appalachia’s whitepaper details, converting the 37,300 acres of farmland across Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia to regenerative practices could sequester as much as 895,200 tons of carbon per year. Reforesting mountaintop removal mined lands could capture as much as 63.9 million tons of carbon per year.

Implementing these two regenerative methods alone could absorb up to 20% of all carbon emissions from these four states.

These initiatives present a unique opportunity to heal social inequities in our region by investing in communities and people. Reviving the Civilian Conservation Corps could create nearly 100,000 jobs in the region. This program should include priority hiring for returning citizens as well as others facing barriers to employment.

Our federal leaders should also provide resources for cooperatives supporting local agriculture, agroforestry, value-added products made with locally grown materials, and eco-tourism.

Conclusion

The new normal can’t be like the old normal. We need to invest in people, communities and land if we want Appalachia to survive and thrive into the next century. Our work is time sensitive. We are experiencing one of the most divisive and difficult times in our nation’s history. But there is also opportunity. We can use this moment to ReImagine Appalachia. Federal policymakers will be passing major legislation that will shape the future of our nation. Our blueprint creates a vision for a 21st century sustainable Appalachia, and identifies the federal resources needed to get from where we are to where we need to go. These studies’ findings underscore what we already know: A better future is within reach, if we are willing to come together and demand it. We’re making sure the people of Appalachia have a say in how our region rebuilds. Join us in defining our future and calling for an Appalachian climate infrastructure plan.