

How Big is the World's Economy?

Despite all the attention paid to China, India and others, the United States still anchors the world as its largest national economy. In fact, the annual U.S. economic output matches that of the next four nations combined.

According to the 2007 *CIA World Factbook*, the 10 largest national economies based on gross domestic product (GDP, listed in U.S. dollars) are (see chart).

It's also worth noting that the world's collective GDP was \$53.64 trillion in

Top National Economies

1. United States	.....\$13.79 trillion
2. Japan	.....\$4.35 trillion
3. Germany	.....\$3.26 trillion
4. China	.....\$3.25 trillion
5. United Kingdom	.....\$2.76 trillion
6. France	.....\$2.52 trillion
7. Italy	.....\$2.07 trillion
8. Spain	.....\$1.42 trillion
9. Canada	.....\$1.41 trillion
10. Russia	.....\$1.27 trillion

2007 and a combined European Union would place first (16.37 trillion).

A common refrain (including from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in his State of the State address) is that California would boast the sixth-largest global economy if it were a stand-alone entity. Truth is it has dropped to eighth. In fact, an article in the *International Herald Tribune* notes that California "would have to annex nearby Oregon, Washington and Nevada" to regain its sixth-place stature.

Growth Start Project to Aid Business in Eastern Region

The state hopes the Growth Start Project provides a welcome boost for entrepreneurs in East Central Indiana.

As part of the Eastern Indiana Regional Workforce Board's Start-up Indiana program, a Strategic Skills Initiative grant has been awarded by the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (IDWD) to Economic Region 6 (which includes Blackford, Delaware, Fayette, Henry, Jay, Randolph, Rush, Union and Wayne counties).

The Growth Start Project falls "under the umbrella" of Start-up Indiana, according to Tracy Hartman, a business services representative for the Strategic Skills Initiative. Growth Start is designed to assist entrepreneurs and those wishing to expand their businesses in the planning stages, offering up to \$10,000 in matching funds.

"We will take a plan and examine what's missing," says Valerie Alexander, Growth Start Project grant and contract management director. "If it needs help with feasibility or the marketing plan, we will help match funds to make that happen."

According to the program's web site, financial assistance can be offered toward business plan development, feasibility studies and technology assessments. The site also lists the following criteria that would render a business a candidate for the program: a solid management team, a competitive advantage, revenue potential and job creation potential.

Growth Start is also used to complement the Business Opportunities for Self Starters program, also funded by the IDWD to help high school students in eastern Indiana gain strong business acumen.

When asked how they intend to evaluate Growth Start's success, organizers note the proof will ultimately lie in the economic growth.

"Measuring success will involve seeing how many entrepreneurs can start a viable business in the region," Alexander says.

Resource: Growth Start Project at www.growthstartproject.com

Making the Drive More Comfortable

Anderson-based Comfort Motion Technologies LLC is engineering software to maximize comfort and safety in car seats.

In fact, Indiana's 21st Century Research and Technology Fund earlier this year awarded the company a grant worth more than \$1 million to aid this effort. The Vehicle Seat and Multi-Position Software focuses on enhancing ergonomic benefits to drivers by redistributing body weight within the seat, thus reducing driver stress and fatigue. According to Alan Rowley, senior vice president of commercialization for Comfort Motion, the three main purposes of the software are to maximize safety, comfort and medical benefits.



During the development process, the company has partnered with both Ball State University and Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology.

"With Rose-Hulman, we did the initial development work on an algorithm, and that included human testing," Rowley notes. "We also did human subject testing with Ball State, focusing on improving how people feel (in the seats)."

Rowley adds that the Ball State research has also focused on driver alertness, as well as minimizing blood clotting. He explains Ball State will be conducting "major studies" on these matters toward the end of the year.

Comfort Motion, which has a full-time staff of five in its Anderson office, could have a major impact on how drivers feel in their vehicles in the near future. According to Rowley, negotiations are currently in the works to bring the software to market as early as the 2009 model year.

Resource: Alan Rowley, Comfort Motion Technologies, at www.comfortmotion.com

Stories by Matt L. Ottinger

No Big Changes on Indiana Rails Expected

Short-line railroads were initially designed (as the name suggests) to operate over a short distance to connect industries that could benefit from each other's products and services. They have been used for years to haul steel, cars and heavy equipment.

Some business forecasters have speculated the ethanol boom would provide a national boost to short-lines due to the need to move farm products and municipal waste to biofuel facilities.

According to Indiana Department of Transportation Communications Specialist Jennifer Tate Henderson, however, no new short-lines are slated to be added in Indiana anytime soon.

"The rail infrastructure is pretty well set in Indiana," she states in an e-mail. "Some may change hands and if there are

portions of Class I railroads (larger freight railroads) that those companies do not want anymore, there is a possibility that new short-lines may be formed."

Henderson explains that short-line traffic has been stable in recent years. She adds that there are currently 37 freight short-lines and port authorities (public or private entities that manage rail operations within ports), three Class I railroads and four tourist railroads in the state.

"Most of the new biodiesel or ethanol plants in Indiana are locating on Class I railroads," she offers.

Resource: Indiana Department of Transportation at www.in.gov/indot

Task Force to Round Up Indiana Agriculture

State officials have assembled a 20-member Indiana Agriculture Regulatory Structure Task Force to evaluate the state's agricultural climate. The task force will produce a report for the governor and Legislature by early December.

"Our goal is to review the regulatory structure – not the regulations themselves – and determine if the state has the right efficiency, effectiveness and capacity in dealing with agriculture," says task force chairman Ted McKinney of Dow AgroSciences. "The industry has grown tremendously in four years, and it could grow even more. The governor is asking if we're prepared for the next 10 to 15 years."



While there are currently 13 different entities regulating Indiana agriculture, McKinney explains consolidating them may not be necessary in the future.

"The task force had no preconceived notion as to what will happen, and it's too early to project any combining," he notes. "It's possible, but it's not a predetermined outcome."

McKinney also surmises that so far a major overhaul of the industry's regulation has not been suggested.

"The feedback we're getting is that nobody is suggesting we blow up the entire structure and reconstitute it," he explains. "Nobody seems to want to wipe the slate clean and start over."

Resource: Ted McKinney, Indiana Agriculture Regulatory Structure Task Force, at (317) 337-4792

Streets Across the Nation Getting New Look

Sick of traffic? Had it with smog? Tired of walking in the street?

A movement across the country is being developed by non-profits and some state legislatures as a means to combat these challenges. It involves paving the way, so to speak, for Complete Streets, which allow and encourage all types of transportation. According to Indiana Bicycle Coalition Executive Director Chris Hancock, this means "designing streets to meet the needs for all users, not just vehicles but also pedestrians and bicyclists."

CompleteStreets.org, the web site of the National Complete Streets Coalition, explains Complete Streets are those that provide safe access for pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and bus riders of all ages and abilities. Some states (including California, Florida, Vermont and Virginia) have even pushed related regulations into their Departments of Transportation. However, no such movement has taken place yet in Indiana, according to Hancock.

"I think Complete Streets are gaining popularity nationally for safety, access and connectivity," he surmises. "In Indiana, some cities are working toward it, but it's not a statewide effort yet. (Indiana Bicycle Coalition) may be working toward that in the near future, and some Indiana cities are doing a lot of work to promote that philosophy."

Health by Design, a central Indiana coalition comprised of members and partners interested in using city planning to promote active living, is backing current initiatives.

"Health by Design supports efforts such as the Cultural Trail, the proposed addition of bike lanes to New York and Michigan Streets and Allisonville Road in Indianapolis, and the multi-modal options (in Carmel) which highlight this progress," organization chair Kim Irwin writes in an e-mail.

Resources: Chris Hancock, Indiana Bicycle Coalition, at www.bicycleindiana.org

Kim Irwin, Health by Design, at www.allianceforhealth.org