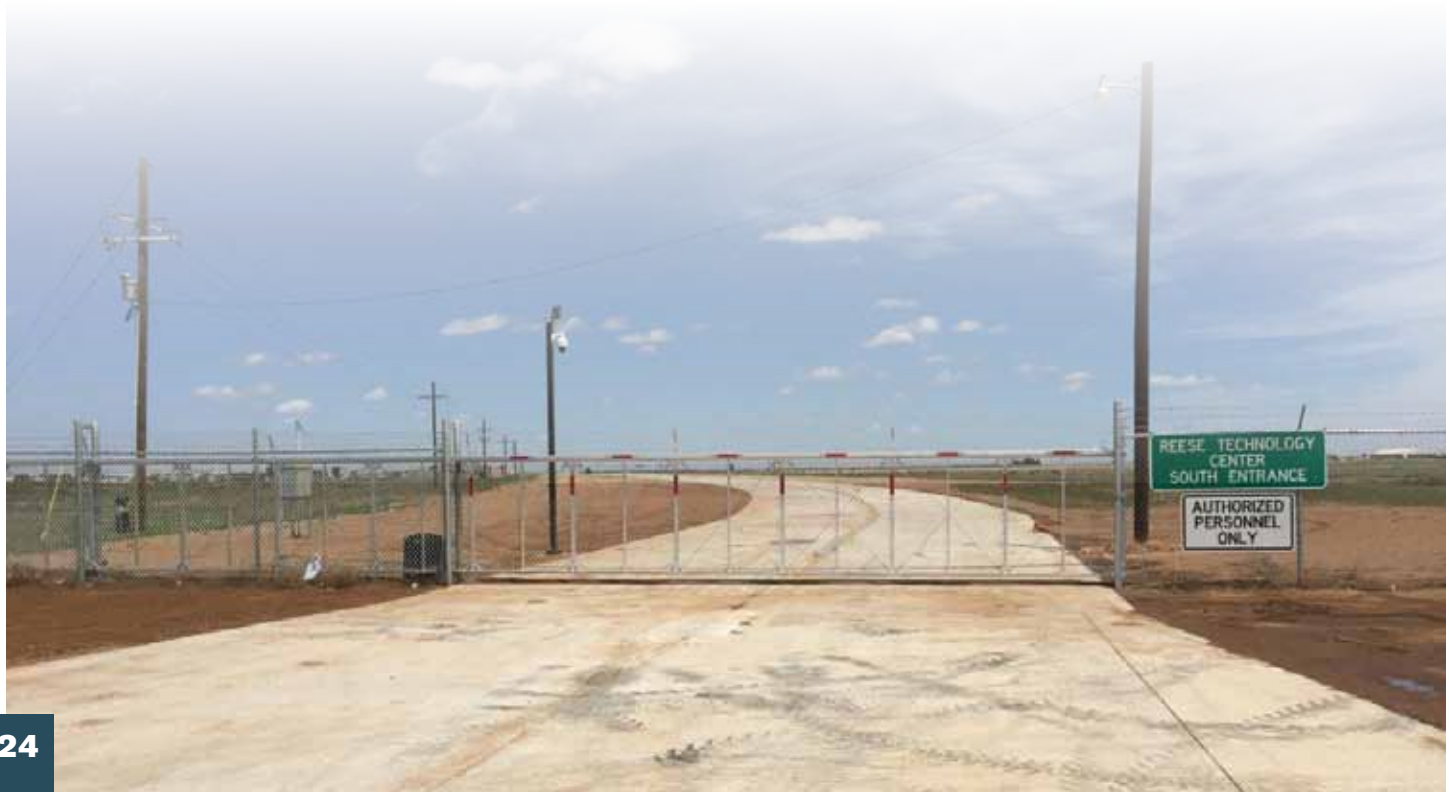
Fostering Regional Economic Resilience through Transportation Accessibility Enhancements at the Reese Technology Center in **Lubbock, Texas**

A key characteristic of economic resilience is the ability to respond to a shock or disruption in a way that allows an impacted community or region to "bounce back better" in a direction that sets a course for a prosperous and secure future. In 1995, the Lubbock, Texas region was reeling from the news that Reese Air Force Base—a facility that had trained over 25,000 pilots since the 1940s and was a symbol of pride for the community—would be closing as part of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process.[83]

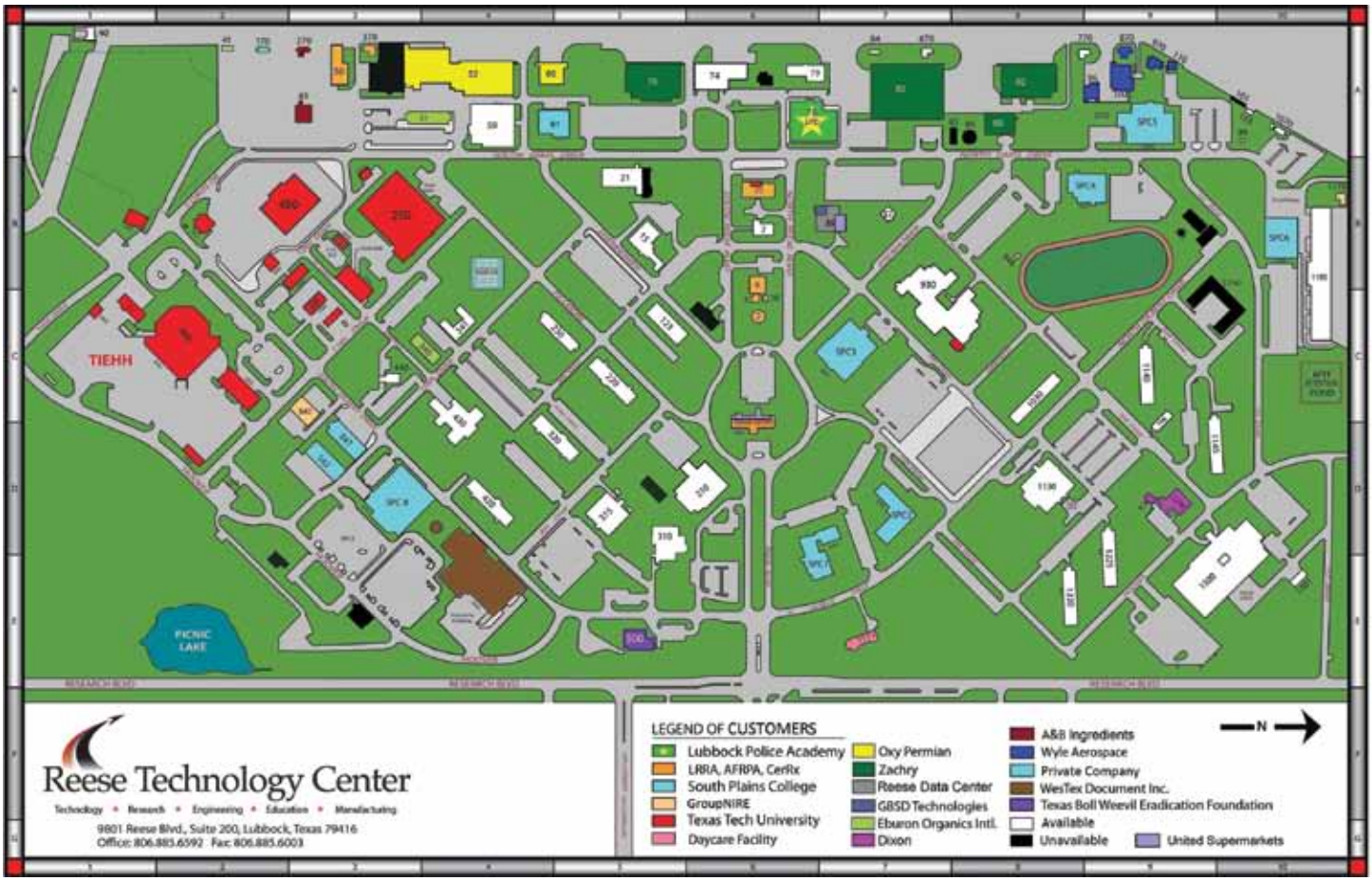
Despite this major setback, stakeholders came together in a public-private partnership, first through the Lubbock Reese Redevelopment Committee (LRRC) and then the Lubbock Redevelopment Authority (LRRA), to transform the air force base into the Reese Technology Center (RTC), located on over 2,400 acres about 10 miles from downtown Lubbock. The RTC's efforts are guided by its mission statement, which is for the site to be the "premier regional center in [its] area of service for economic development centered around technology, research, engineering, and education."[84] The RTC is home to companies such as Wyle Aerospace, Zachry Industrial, Inc., GE Wind Energy, and small start-ups, as well as facilities for Texas Tech University and South Plains College. Around 2,000 people are on-site each day at the RTC. "To have one location with research, technology, and higher education all together is huge for our region," notes Kelly Davila, Director of Regional Services at the South Plains Association of Governments (SPAG).[85]

However, the redevelopment of this former base eventually met limitations for the expansion and growth of the companies and businesses that were located at or wanted to locate to the RTC. Transportation access to the location "was extremely tight" says Davila, particularly for moving wind turbines onto the site that were being used for wind energy testing.[86] Additional improvements were also needed to make it easier and safer for all types of vehicles to enter the RTC and also access other facilities that were being sought after for office and warehouse space.

As a political subdivision with no taxing or legal authority, the RTC has limitations on what kinds of funding it can receive for transportation improvements. Because it is served by a state highway, conversations began with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) about accessibility enhancements for the site. TxDOT was willing to work with the RTC if it could secure additional funding. The South Plains Association of Governments became involved with the discussions to



Courtesy South Plains Association of Governments



Courtesy Reese Technology Center

assemble a project plan and secure funding from the Economic Development Administration (EDA). SPAG was a natural fit for this role, given that it had previously administered a grant for the RTC to fund fiber and high-speed Internet infrastructure for the site. Additionally, SPAG's executive director position holds a permanent spot on the RTC board, further ensuring long-term collaboration and partnership between the regional organization and the technology center.

The eventual joint EDA-TxDOT funded project, completed in March 2016, provided the following upgrades for the RTC site:[87]

- Deceleration, acceleration, and median turn lanes
- Widening State Highway 114 to improve safety for drivers and facilitate ingress and egress for a variety of vehicle types
- Transitioning an unused runway into a road for improved access to existing facilities and buildings
- Infrastructure improvements for another entrance and exit location for the site

"As with any transportation project, TxDOT's priority was safety. Working in partnership with the RTC ensured the entrance would have the features, including acceleration, deceleration, and turn lanes which would allow RTC traffic to safely connect to an already busy roadway," notes Doug Eichorst, P.E., TxDOT Lubbock District engineer.[88]

Construction took about a year to complete. The final project cost $2.050 million dollars, with $1.225 million funded through EDA's Public Works program and the balance from TxDOT, which covered critical match dollars.[89] SPAG played a key role throughout the project, including writing the application to EDA and carrying out administrative responsibilities to ensure the project was completed on time and within budget.

In the short time since the enhancements were completed, the RTC and its customers have benefited from the upgrades. Some companies have scaled up their operations and moved into buildings that are now better accessible, while numerous manufacturing companies and others have signed leases to move on-site. Overall, the RTC estimates that at least 100 new or retained jobs will result over the next few years because of the increased accessibility and competitiveness of the campus.[90]

"The EDA/TxDOT enhancements have added value to the Reese Technology Center by positioning us to better serve our existing campus partners and by helping us to attract new partners in support of our mission and vision statements," says Murvat Musa, RTC's Executive Director. "The project has not only

impacted our property, but has made a region-wide impact for transportation in west Texas."[91]

Overall, these enhancements are the latest chapter in Lubbock's resilience story as it responded to the loss of the air force base in the 1990s. These transportation improvements—supported by key partnerships and a creative financing strategy—are meeting the multiple goals of supporting economic development and innovation, transportation safety, and broader regional competitiveness.

Says RTC's Musa, "This project was truly a collaborative effort by EDA, TxDOT, SPAG, and many other partners, and is a successful model of what can be accomplished with true collaborative partnership."[92] TxDOT's Doug Eichorst agrees. "Our valued and long-lasting transportation partnerships with local organizations, governments, and their leadership have been key in the successful and timely completions of numerous local projects."[93]

Strategies for Success

Resilient communities and regions turn setbacks into opportunities

While the closure of the air force base was a shock to the Lubbock area, its transformation into the Reese Technology Center has made the region more competitive and is attracting and growing new innovative businesses and firms.

Solid partnerships and relationships made this project a success

SPAG has a permanent position on the board of the RTC and the two organizations collaborated on a previous EDA grant. Additionally, local, regional, and state partners came together to find a solution to funding and logistical challenges.

Think outside the box about funding sources

RTC's status and funding limitations were addressed by TxDOT providing critical match dollars on the EDA grant.

Courtesy South Plains Association of Governments

Economic competitiveness also serves to build resilience

The transportation and infrastructure improvements at the RTC can be viewed through the lens of economic development as these enhancements are making the region more competitive and attractive to outside companies and allowing local firms to expand.

[83] Reese Technology Center (2015). "History of the RTC," reesetechnologycenter.com/index.php/about2/history
[84] Reese Technology Center (2015)
[85] Personal communication with Kelly Davila, July 2016
[86] Personal communication with Kelly Davila, July 2016
[87] Personal communication with Kelly Davila, June 2016
[88] Communication with Doug Eichorst via Kelly Davila, July 2016
[89] Personal communication with Kelly Davila, June 2016
[90] Personal communication with Kelly Davila, June 2016
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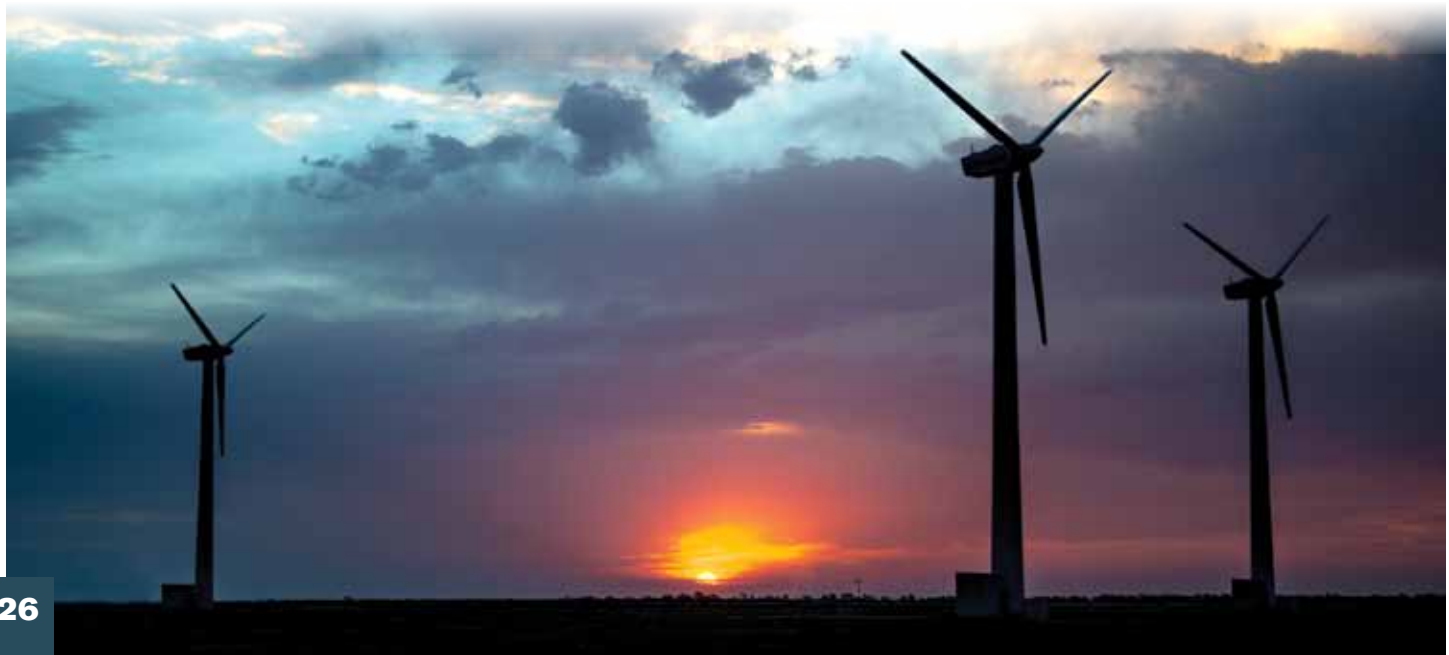

Courtesy Sandia National Laboratories, Lloyd Wilson