

A thorough understanding of the conditions and trends that shape the region’s residents, travelers, economy, and transportation network is important in the transportation planning process. These forces define the region and its transportation system while providing a glimpse into the implications of its evolving needs.

Section Four of this plan includes a detailed inventory of the region’s transportation system. Detailed Demographic, Economic, and Commuter profiles are included in the appendices. The following table summarizes the major trends and implications affecting the region.

| <i>Demographics</i>  |  |
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| <b>Trend/Issue</b>   | <b>Implication</b>   |
| <b>The region has experienced slight population decline since 2000</b>   | Over that time, the region’s population has decreased by 3.84%. This decrease is not significant enough to impact the region’s transportation needs.   |
| <b>The region’s population is aging</b>  | The median age of the region is increasing at almost double the rate of the state. An older population will have greater need for public or human services transportation. The higher rate of aging may present challenges that aren’t present in other regions of the state, which may cause unique impacts on the region’s transportation network as compared to other regions around the state. |
| <i>Commuting</i>   |  |
| <b>Trend/Issue</b>   | <b>Implication</b>   |
| <b>Over the past 30 years, more workers are driving to work alone</b>  | The region continues to grow more dependent on the automobile as a primary means for transportation. Carpools have decreased in popularity as a means of transportation.   |
| <b>Over the past 30 years, more households have begun to have three or more vehicles available</b>                     |  |
| <b>A higher percentage of those workers living in boroughs walk to work than do those living in townships</b>          | The need for safe sidewalks, crossings, and walkways within boroughs and local neighborhoods remains important.  |
| <b>The average worker’s travel time to work was 27.6 minutes in 2019. 61.5% of workers travel less than 30 minutes</b> | Over the past 30 years, worker’s travel times to work have increased slightly. Most workers living in the region are now commuting outside of the region (About 60% of the workers). Those who do not work within the region are likely to work in either Blair or Cambria Counties. However, there has been a growing increase in workers that are traveling further distances for employment.    |
| <b>Since 1990, the percentage of workers commuting 90 minutes or more to work has doubled</b>                          |  |
| <b>COVID-19 Impacts on commuting</b>   | Starting in 2020, workers began commuting less to work. Teleworking and compressed work weeks were incorporated by many businesses as a resiliency strategy to combat COVID-19. The long-term impact on commuting has yet to be realized but will need to be monitored in the coming years.  |

| <i>Economic</i>  |  |
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| <b>Trend/Issue</b>   | <b>Implication</b>   |
| Over the past decade, the region’s economy has switched from a construction economy to a services-based economy.                               | Over the past ten years, employment in the construction industry has declined, and is projected to continue to do so. The region’s industries consist of mostly retail, health, and service establishments, which require different transportation needs.  |
| The most numerous establishments in the region are retail trade, health care, and other services (except public administration).               |  |
| The region’s average unemployment rate has consistently remained above the statewide average over the past ten years.                          | The region’s economy has not experienced significant growth over the past decade. The region has experienced a significant increase in unemployment between 2007 and 2009. In 2020, the unemployment rate grew to almost 10% due to COVID-19 but stabilized to below 6% in 2021.                                 |
| The percentage of persons below the poverty level has increased since 1999.  |  |
| <i>Bridges and Roadways</i>  |  |
| <b>Trend/Issue</b>   | <b>Implication</b>   |
| Travel on the region’s roadways has been declining since 2005.   | Over the last five years, travel in the region has been negatively impacted by increases in unemployment and gasoline prices. As the economy begins to improve, it is expected that travel will also increase again. Travel decreased significantly in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 but is expected to rebound. |
| The region has a large network of state-owned, local-owned, and other agency-owned roadways to maintain.                                       | In Pennsylvania, 6.57% of all state-owned roadways are located within the region, along with over 15% of Pennsylvania Turnpike miles and 10% of miles of roadways owned by other agencies (PA DCNR, PA Game Commission, etc.).   |
| Half of all linear miles of roadways in the region are local owned roadways.   | The region has a large local roadway network that is the responsibility of local municipalities and counties to maintain.  |
| Roadway conditions are best on primary arterial roadways.  | Most conditions on primary arterial roadways are considered to be good or excellent. Only about half of all secondary roadways are considered to be in good or excellent condition.  |
| The region has an extensive bridge system that is rated as poor. Recent funding efforts have improved the overall bridge rating of the region. | The region’s bridge needs, to reach condition goals by 2033, exceed the current funding levels available. Eight and a half percent of bridges on the State System over 8ft or greater and 31.5% of bridges on the local system over 20ft are rated as poor.  |

| <i>Other Modes of Transportation</i>                                       |  |
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| <b>Trend/Issue</b>   | <b>Implication</b>   |
| <b>The region lacks adequate passenger and rail freight opportunities.</b> | Much of the region is underserved by both passenger rail and rail freight. Limited passenger rail service hinders intercity connectivity and strengthens dependence on the automobile. Limited rail freight opportunities impede economic development and goods movement as well as increase congestion on the road network. |
| <b>Rail freight traffic is increasing.</b>                                 | The state is expecting a 41% increase of rail freight tonnage by 2040, increasing the chance of transportation accidents involving trains.   |
| <b>The region is underserved by public transportation.</b>                 | The rural nature of the region creates challenges for providing public transportation. As the region’s population continues to age, the demand for public transportation will continue to grow.  |