

4

Regional Demographic & Economic Profile



2016 Regional Transportation Plan

4 Regional Demographic and Economic Profile

Understanding Franklin County's current and future demographic, socioeconomic, and land use patterns are necessary to effectively plan for the region's transportation needs. Chapter 4 examines in detail the current population and economic conditions of the county in order to determine transportation issues that should be addressed. Chapter 4 also looks to the future and examines projected population and job growth with the intent of anticipating future transportation needs.

Franklin County is the most rural county in Massachusetts. It is located in the northernmost portion of the Connecticut River Valley of western Massachusetts. It borders both Vermont and New Hampshire. Franklin County also borders the Massachusetts counties of Hampshire, Berkshire, and Worcester.

Franklin County has a population of 71,408 and a population density of 98 people per square mile in its 725 square mile area. The majority of the twenty-six towns in the county are very small – averaging approximately 1,400 residents. The largest municipality, and only city, is Greenfield with a population of 17,526 people. Ninety percent of the housing stock in Franklin County is owner-occupied, of which 65 percent is in the form of single-family homes.¹ The landscape in Franklin County is predominately open space, forest, and farmland. The soils in the Connecticut River Valley are ideal for agricultural uses, and consequently, the region has a rich agricultural history.

Regional Demographics

Population

To better assess the transportation needs of the region, it is necessary to understand how the population in Franklin County is changing. Between 1970 and 2000, the county's population grew by 20 percent, an increase of 12,300 people. Much of this growth took place during the 1970's and 1980's. Following the trend of slower growth that began in the 1990's, the county's population remained relatively stable between 2000 and 2013, with a total population of 71,408 in 2013 (a growth rate of -0.2%). Table 4-1 illustrates the more recent population changes in the last thirteen years in Franklin County and surrounding counties.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all socio-economic demographic data is from the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates 2009-2013.

The population growth that occurred between 2000 and 2013 took place in towns scattered throughout Franklin County without a very clear geographic pattern. The top five towns which experienced the most growth are: Deerfield, Erving, Orange, New Salem, and Gill.

Table 4-1: Estimated Population for Franklin County and other Western Massachusetts Counties, 2000 to 2013

Geography	2000 Census Population	2013 Census Population	2000-2013	
			Change	Percent Change
Franklin County	71,535	71,408	-127	-0.2%
Berkshire County	134,953	130,545	-4,408	-3.3%
Hampden County	456,617	465,144	8,527	1.9%
Hampshire County	152,251	159,267	7,016	4.6%
Worcester County	750,963	802,688	51,725	6.9%
Massachusetts	6,349,097	6,605,058	255,961	4.0%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau - 2000 Census of Population & Housing; 2009-2013 American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates, U.S. Census Bureau.

These towns are primarily located throughout the southeastern quadrant of the region. The majority of the towns that lost population during this time period are located in West County.

Age Distribution of the Population

For transportation planning, it is important to know not only the size of a region’s population, but also its composition by age group and how that may change over time. As people age, their use of the transportation network tends to change. For example, the elderly are less likely to drive by themselves and are more likely to use public transit or find other alternatives. In addition, the number of adult workers in a region affects peak traffic volumes as they commute to their workplaces. Like much of the nation, Franklin County is getting older as the “Baby Boomer” generation ages. Half (49%) of the Franklin County population is currently aged 45 and older. Of that, 16 percent is aged 65 and older and a quarter (23%) is aged 25 to 44 years old.

The region is expected to see a significant increase in the number of elderly residents over time. The “Baby Boomer” generation (born 1946 to 1964) has begun reaching 65 years old and will reach 75 years old in 2021. Studies have shown that nationally, over 40 percent of people age 75 and above are either non-drivers or have limited their driving.² As a result, it will be important to provide transportation services, including public transit and paratransit/van services for Franklin County’s expanding elderly population.

² Straight, A., *Community Transportation Survey*, America Association of Retired People, 1997.

Other age groups of interest for transportation planning are 25 to 44 years old and 45 to 65 years old. These age groups comprise the bulk of the workforce and typically make their trips to and from work during the peak morning and evening commute hours. In 2013, 88 percent of Franklin County residents commuted to work by car (with 78% driving alone and 8% carpooling), 5 percent walked, and 1 percent took public transportation. Traffic congestion during commuting hours can be addressed in part through provision and promotion of healthy transportation options to single occupancy vehicle travel for work commutes. Options could include the use of park and ride lots for carpooling or transit, ridesharing programs, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Congestion can also be influenced through flexible work schedules and through the provision of telecommunications infrastructure that helps support residents who work from their homes. In 2013, approximately 6 percent of Franklin County residents worked at home.

Ethnic and Racial Diversity

Franklin County is the least racially and ethnically diverse county in the Commonwealth. As of 2013, the U.S. Census Bureau shows that approximately 94 percent of the population in the county is White. This is compared to a Massachusetts percentage of 80 percent that is White. The remaining population in Franklin County is split predominately between Black (0.9%) and Asian (1.6%), with a very small percentage (0.2%) that is Native American/Alaska Native. Hispanics make up the largest minority in Franklin County at 3.3 percent.³ The racial and ethnic composition of the population has remained fairly stable since 2000, although the Hispanic population has increased slightly from 2 percent of the total population in 2000.

Population Projections to 2040

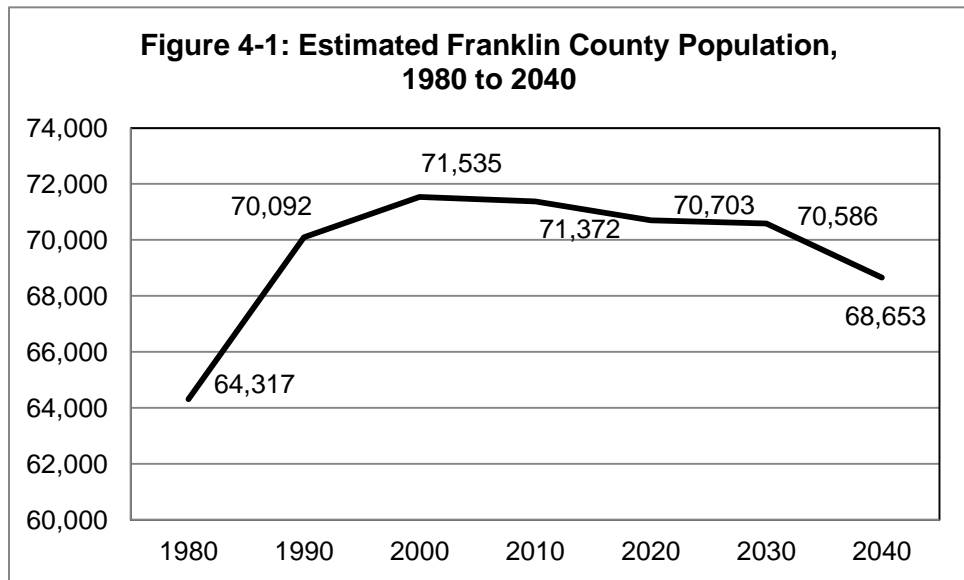
The demographic data presented shows that the Franklin County population size is currently stable, it is gradually getting older, and the ethnic composition is only slightly changing. It is also important to look ahead and forecast how the population may change in the future in order to meet the shifting demands of the region. As part of this effort, MassDOT, in partnership with the UMass Donahue Institute, has developed socio-economic forecasts for all regions of the Commonwealth, including Franklin County, out to the year 2040. Those forecasts have also been applied to the twenty-six municipalities in the county.⁴ In general, the MassDOT forecasts show that the next twenty-five years will be a period of moderate

³ According to U.S. Census definition, Hispanic or Latinos are considered an ethnicity and may be of any race.

⁴ The FRCOG has adjusted the municipal forecasts based on local conditions that the projection methodology does not take into consideration, such as presence of broadband infrastructure or passenger rail.

growth for the Commonwealth as a whole. Massachusetts is projected to grow at 10 percent between 2010 and 2040 with some places increasing more rapidly and some losing population. During this same time, Franklin County is projected to lose 4 percent of its total population, decreasing to 68,653 people by the year 2040. The total population loss for the county over the next twenty-five years will consist of approximately 2,719 people. This loss of population can largely be attributed to the aging of the large Baby Boomer group and fewer births to replace their loss. There is also very little immigration projected to occur in Franklin County to

make up for this population loss, which is the driving force of much of the state's growth. Figure 4-1 shows the projected change in the Franklin County population in relation to the county's past population growth since 1980. The projected population



loss emphasizes the RTP goal of continued maintenance of the transportation system rather than expanding it.

Income and Employment Profile

Income and Wealth

The income levels of a community often indicate the potential transportation needs of a region. Areas with lower-income populations tend to benefit more from the existence of public transportation because the costs associated with using public transportation are less than the costs of owning and maintaining a car. In addition, low income households often do not have the resources needed to cope with rising fuel costs, such as moving closer to work or purchasing a more fuel-efficient vehicle.⁵

In general, U.S. Census data shows that Franklin County's incomes are much lower than Massachusetts as a whole. In 2013, the median household income for the county was

⁵ Cooper, Mark N. "Rising Energy Prices Strain Household Budgets and the Economy For Most Americans," *Consumers Union*. September 2004.

\$53,100, which is much less (24% less) than Massachusetts's median household income of \$66,866. Another income indicator is per capita income. By this measure, Franklin County's income is still 22 percent lower than the Commonwealth's. Franklin County's per capita income is \$29,259, compared to the Massachusetts per capita income of \$35,763. The lower per capita and median income figures for Franklin County in part reflect the lower average salaries and lower costs of living in western Massachusetts compared to Boston and other eastern Massachusetts communities. However, these statistics also reflect economic challenges within the region. These challenges include the loss of a historic manufacturing employment base. As numerous jobs have left Franklin County, they have often not been replaced by comparable employment opportunities with good wages, which have resulted in lower incomes in the region.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income Estimates Program, Franklin County had an estimated 12.6 percent poverty rate, compared to 11.9 percent for the State in 2013. The areas experiencing high poverty rates include several of the downtowns and village centers that had once been traditional hubs of manufacturing employment, such as Turners Falls (19.9%), downtown Greenfield (15.4%), downtown Orange (12.7%), and Shelburne Falls (9.4%). The small, remote hill towns of Rowe (15.9%), Hawley (13.6%), and Monroe (11.1%) are also impacted by high poverty rates.

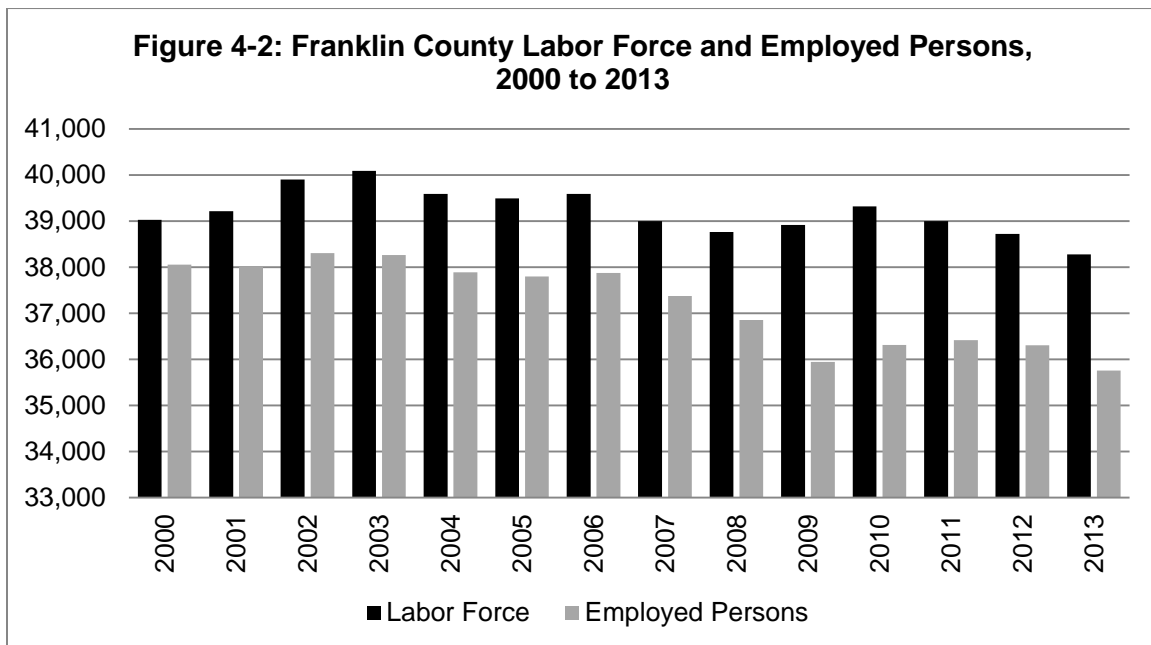
Employment

Regional employment trends reflect both the condition of the national and regional economy and changes in the region's population. When employment opportunities are created in a region, people are likely to move there. Similarly, when jobs in a region are lost, there is typically an out-migration of residents. To understand long-range transportation trends and commuting patterns, it is important to understand the size of an area's labor force and its employment level. An area's labor force is defined as the number of residents age 16 or over who are currently employed or who are searching for work. Unemployment figures describe the percentage of people in the labor force who are not employed (part-time or full-time) during a certain period and who are actively seeking work.

Labor Force

According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD), Franklin County's labor force has fluctuated over the past fifteen years. The labor force grew throughout the 2000s and then decreased during the recent Great Recession. After 2008, the Franklin County labor force recovered and began to grow again for several years after the Recession. However, since 2010, the labor force has declined back to pre-

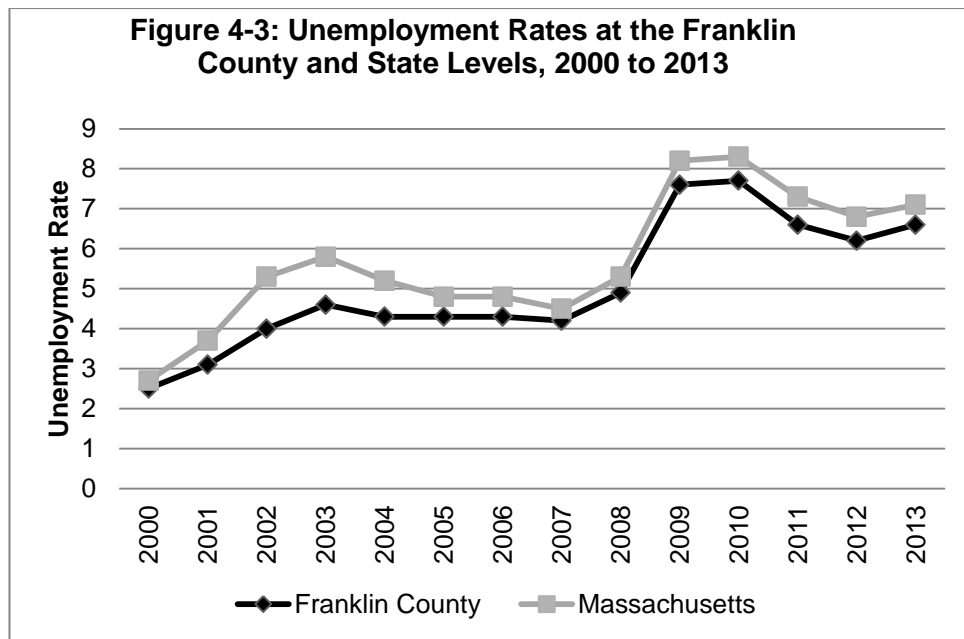
2000 levels. Figure 4-2 shows the changes in the region's labor force and employment levels.



Predictably, the largest town labor forces in Franklin County are located in the most populated communities. Greenfield contains 24 percent of the county's population and accounts for 23 percent of the labor force for Franklin County. Together, the four largest towns (Greenfield, Montague, Orange, and Deerfield) in the region comprise 54 percent of Franklin County's total population and 52 percent of the county's labor force.

In 2013, Franklin County's unemployment rate of 6.6 percent was only slightly lower than the State (7.1%). However, unemployment levels among the individual towns vary greatly. Several towns have consistently experienced high rates of unemployment. According to data from the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development for 2013, eight towns in Franklin County had higher unemployment rates than the State rate. The towns with the highest unemployment rates fall into two types of categories: 1) isolated hill towns and 2) downtowns and village centers that had been traditional hubs of manufacturing employment. The towns of Charlemont (7.5%), Wendell (7.4%), Colrain (7.3%), and New Salem (7.1%) have high unemployment rates and are located in the more rural areas of the county. The population centers of Shelburne (9.5%), Orange (9.1%), Montague (7.5%), and Greenfield (7.1%) are also sites of high unemployment. These unemployment figures do not distinguish between full or part-time employment and obscure

the fact that underemployment is a significant problem for the region. Figure 4-3 shows the change in unemployment in Franklin County between the years 2000 to 2013.



Although the unemployed are not commuting to jobs, they are often traveling for employment interviews and training. Unemployed residents can greatly benefit from support services, including transit services, which can help them access, obtain, and keep good jobs. Without adequate public transportation options, it can be difficult for potential workers who do not have the use of a vehicle to access and maintain quality employment. Assisting low-income residents with transportation to work, training, and educational opportunities that can improve their employment options, is a major focus of the transit network in Franklin County and of proposed transit service improvements. Chapter 9, “Transit and Paratransit Services,” describes in detail the transit network and its various services.

The best estimates of self-employed workers in Franklin County are from the U.S. Census Bureau’s data on non-employer businesses, which is reported annually (with a two-year lag time). Non-employer establishments are defined as having no paid employees (other than the self-employed individual), have annual business receipts of \$1,000 or more, and are subject to federal income taxes (thus excluding non-profit organizations). The Census Bureau’s most recent data (2013) estimates that Franklin County has an estimated 6,103 non-employer businesses, which is a slight decrease of 88 businesses since 2008.

Major Employers

There are 33 employers in the region that have at least 100 employees. Most of the major employers are located in the county's primary employment centers, including Deerfield, Greenfield, Orange, and Whately. Yankee Candle, which has its headquarters and a large retail store in Deerfield and manufacturing facility in Whately, is the largest employer in Franklin County with more than 1,000 employees.

It is important to note that many Franklin County residents are employed outside of Franklin County; 33 percent of employed county residents commute to jobs outside of the county, often in nearby communities in Hampshire County, such as Amherst and Northampton. The largest single employer of Franklin County residents is the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. The most recent data available shows that in 2002, UMass Amherst estimated that it employed 1,250 Franklin County residents (not including student employees). UMass Amherst has a total of approximately 5,300 non-student staff and faculty members.

The closure or downsizing of major employers in the region has had a variety of impacts on the regional economy and on residents. These events have had a negative impact on employment levels and incomes, and at times have contributed to the out-migration of the traditional working age populations.

Just to the north of Franklin County, the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station (VY) in Vernon, VT, permanently ceased all operations on December 31, 2014. In 2014, the plant had 550 employees, of which 101 (or 18%) lived in Franklin County. These employees, most requiring very specialized skills to operate and manage the power plant, have relatively high wage and salary levels – much higher than the average regional income. Job levels at the plant will gradually decline as the decommissioning process continues over the next six to seven years. By 2021, it is expected that there will only be 24 employees to manage the site.⁶



A farm stand in Franklin County.

Tourism in Franklin County

One growing sector of the region's economy is the tourism sector. Many of the

⁶ "Economic Impacts of Vermont Yankee Closure," UMass Donahue Institute. December 2014.

communities in Franklin County view tourism as a way to enhance their local economies and support local artisans and craftspeople, and also to promote and protect the region’s natural, cultural, and historic resources, including farmland and forestland. More information on tourism in the region can be found in Chapter 11: Scenic Byways and Tourism.

Telecommunications Infrastructure Improvements

An important factor in the region’s economy is the availability and efficiency of the telecommunications infrastructure. Telecommunications infrastructure includes systems that provide telephone, television and broadband internet services. In many parts of Franklin County, the services available through the current telecommunications infrastructure are inadequate for present day needs. Issues of reliability, affordability, and access are significant obstacles for small and large businesses, educational and health care institutions, and individuals. Fortunately, a significant project was recently completed that is changing the telecom landscape in the region.

In 2008, Governor Patrick and the state legislature established the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI)⁷ and a \$40 million Incentive Fund to construct the “middle mile” infrastructure that connect unserved areas to the greater global telecommunications network. In 2010, the MBI received a \$45 million federal award, which was combined with over \$26 million in state funding, to construct the *MassBroadband 123* middle-mile network. The first segment of this middle mile network was constructed along the I-91 corridor and in coordination with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.



Installing broadband conduit along I-91.

Completed in 2014, this network provides the critical connection for 120 cities/towns in western and north-central Massachusetts to the global internet network. In addition, *MassBroadband 123* provides direct connects to over 1,200 community anchor institutions (such as town halls, police departments, schools, and medical centers) to this network.

⁷ More detailed information about the MBI is available on their website at <http://broadband.masstech.org>.

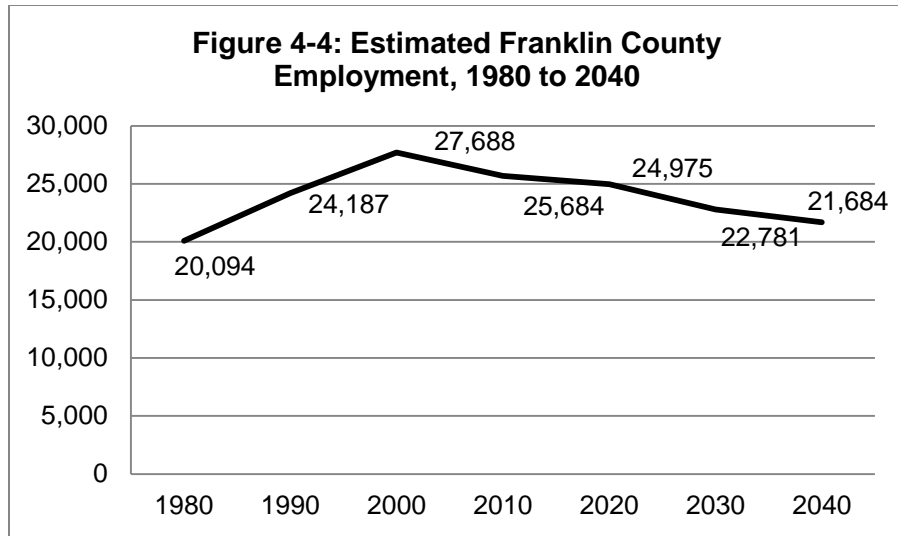
The creation of this middle mile network allows other network builders and service providers to use this network to connect to the “last mile” to serve customers. In the summer of 2014, Gov. Patrick’s administration and with the support of the state legislature included an additional \$50 million in the IT Bond Bill to support last mile infrastructure investment by the MBI in the unserved and underserved communities of western Massachusetts. The MBI is currently working with interested communities to explore how a regional network could be implemented using some of these funds as well as local contributions to be made by the participating municipalities. At the same time, the MBI is working with communities only partially served by cable to determine how this service could be extended to unserved premises. The improved internet service could attract new residents and employment to Franklin County and promote telecommuting – all of which could affect transportation infrastructure needs.

Employment Projections

Employment projections are useful for transportation planning, because they can help estimate future commute travel flows and help assess the need for transportation services and facilities for work-related travel. As with the population forecasts used in this RTP, the employment forecasts were produced by MassDOT, in partnership with the UMass Donahue Institute. The total employment in an area is equal to the number of employed residents in the area, plus the number of non-residents who commute into that area to work. Excluded from the figure are the residents who commute out of the area to work.

MassDOT provided employment forecasts for the regional and municipal level. The municipal level allocations were performed with the assumption that each town’s share of employment will remain constant over the next twenty-five years. This is based on the premise that primary employment trends are regional and the employment centers in Franklin County today will generally continue to be the employment centers in the county for the foreseeable future. While this is true, it is also likely that the communities bordering Hampshire County will most likely become bedroom communities over the next twenty-five years and see an increase in their share of the region’s employment. From an employment perspective, the most important population changes are those that occur at the regional level. Population changes for individual towns, especially smaller towns, have only a minor impact on employment since many workers commute to jobs outside of their community.

As shown in Figure 4-4, the forecasts show that Franklin County’s total employment will decline by 16 percent over the next twenty-five years. The state’s employment is projected to grow by 8 percent over the same time frame. Current employment in Franklin County stands at 25,684 and is projected to lose 4,000 employees by the year 2040.



The forecasts show that Franklin County will lose employment by the year 2040. This is largely due to the graying of the region’s population as they age out of the workforce. Other regions in the state with similarly aged populations are also expected to have declining employment. They include Berkshire County and Cape Cod. In terms of planning for the transportation of commuters in the region, these forecasts seem to indicate that the current highway infrastructure is sufficient for commuters’ needs. The status of the public transit system should be evaluated to ensure that it is serving the workforce efficiently and effectively. In addition, the return of passenger rail to the region should be evaluated as to how it can best serve the area’s labor force as it potentially changes to a more telecommuting/long distance employment model.

Transportation Profile

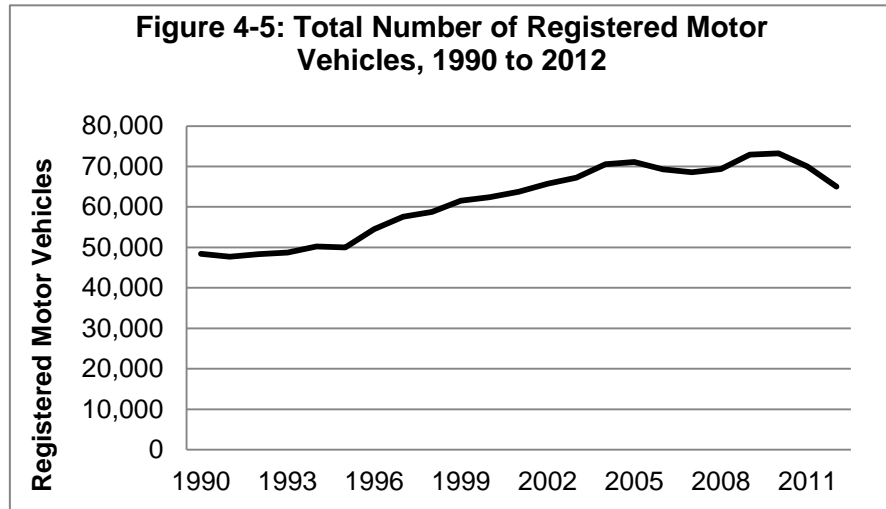
Because of Franklin County’s rural character and limited transit services, the county has a high level of private vehicle ownership and most of Franklin County residents rely heavily on their vehicles for travel.

Registered Motor Vehicles

The number of registered motor vehicles has continued to grow in Franklin County at a rate faster than the population – although there have been fluctuations in that growth, which Figure 4-5 illustrates. Between 1990 and 2005, the number of registered vehicles in Franklin County increased 47 percent to a total of 71,106. However, after 2005 the number of vehicles actually declined back to approximately 2000 levels as a result of economic impacts from the Great Recession. Since the economic downturn, the number of vehicles in

the county has fluctuated. In 2013, there were approximately 65,000 total registered vehicles.⁸

Overall, during the sixteen years between 1990 and 2012, the number of registered vehicles grew by 34 percent. At the same



time, Franklin County's population only grew by 1.8 percent. The disproportionate increase in the number of registered vehicles compared to population growth suggests there is increasing motor vehicle usage in the region and a growing dependence on motor vehicles for transportation. This trend is likely to continue despite the small decline and leveling of registered vehicles that occurred from 2005 to 2012.

Households Without Cars

In 2013, 7 percent of Franklin County households (approximately 2,153 households) do not own or have access to a motor vehicle for their transportation needs, compared to 13 percent of households statewide. The Census figures show that the two population groups that are most likely to not own a car are renter households and older households. An estimated 16 percent of renter households in Franklin County have no vehicle available. The higher rate of carlessness among renters is related to two primary factors. First, most of Franklin County's rental housing is located in village and downtown areas that, because of their population density, typically have the highest degree of access to transit services. Secondly, renter households, on average, have lower incomes than homeowners and are more likely not to own a private vehicle because of the costs associated with vehicle ownership. Studies by the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) and the Surface Transportation Policy Program (STTP) have found that transportation costs are typically the second largest household expense next to housing. Low income households can be particularly burdened by transportation costs, spending a quarter of their income or more, on their travel and private vehicle expenditures. The STTP study found that switching from the use of a private vehicle to transit service can save a family thousand of dollars annually.

⁸ Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services, 2013.

The Census data also show that, by age group, elderly households, especially older elderly, are most likely to not have a car. In Franklin County, 21 percent of households led by householders aged 75 or older are carless. Reasons for the higher level of carless households among the elderly include physical limitations, which make driving difficult, and as discussed above, the expense of private vehicle ownership for elderly fixed-income households.

Commuting Trends

Mode of Transportation to Work

The automobile is the primary mode for commuting travel in Franklin County. In 2013, 87 percent of Franklin County's employed residents commuted to work by car; with 78 percent driving to work alone, and 8 percent carpooling. Town level data is not available, but historically many of those that worked from home lived in the more remote hilltowns of the county.

As mentioned previously, it is anticipated that the employees working from home, also known as telecommuters, will continue to increase in Franklin County in the coming decades. The growth in telecommuting will be driven by the increasing number of technology and information-based jobs that can be conducted from remote locations, such as a workers' home. It will also be driven by the number of people who move to Franklin County, but who choose to keep jobs that are based outside of the region and to which they do not need to commute to every day. Another important factor that will promote telecommuting in the region is the recent and pending expansion of telecommunications infrastructure and high-speed internet services in the region

Commute Patterns

In 2013, approximately 62 percent of Franklin County residents worked in Franklin County and the other 38 percent commuted to jobs outside the county. The majority of residents commuting to work outside Franklin County worked in Hampshire County (20%), though some worked in Worcester County (5%), Hampden County (5%), or Windham County, Vermont (2%).

Due to changes at the U.S. Census, town-level commuting patterns are no longer available. The most recent town-level data that is available for Franklin County residents commuting to jobs outside of Franklin County is the decennial 2000 U.S. Census. This data showed that the two major commuting destinations outside of Franklin County are Amherst and Northampton. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, approximately 3,600 Franklin County residents work in Amherst, and 1,900 Franklin County residents work in Northampton.

While this data is fifteen years old, these two towns remain the largest commuting destinations for Franklin County workers.

Franklin County residents have an average travel time of 24 minutes. The percentage of workers that were commuting longer distances (an hour or more) to their jobs increased between 2000 and 2008. However, since 2008, this percentage has remained the same at 6.3%.

Land Use

The link between land use and transportation is important to consider as new transportation facilities are reviewed or the expansion of old facilities is evaluated. Transportation improvements or expansions, such as adding roadway lanes, upgrading bridges to remove weight restrictions, or establishing and expanding transit services, can themselves promote additional development and influence future development patterns.

Table 4-2: Franklin County Land Use, 2005

Land Use Category	Acreage	% of Total
<i>Undeveloped Land</i>	436,975	94.3%
Forest	357,909	77.2%
Agriculture	36,072	7.8%
Open Land	8,164	1.8%
Recreation	1,716	0.4%
Water/Wetlands	33,111	7.1%
<i>Developed Lands</i>	26,535	5.7%
Residential	18,981	4.1%
Commercial/Industrial	2,178	0.5%
Urban Open*	2,072	0.4%
Transportation	2,167	0.5%
Other Developed Uses**	1,136	0.2%
<i>Total Acreage</i>	463,511	100%

*Urban Open land includes parks, cemeteries, public and institutional buildings, and green spaces. **Other Developed Uses include mining and waste disposal.

Source: MassGIS, 2005.

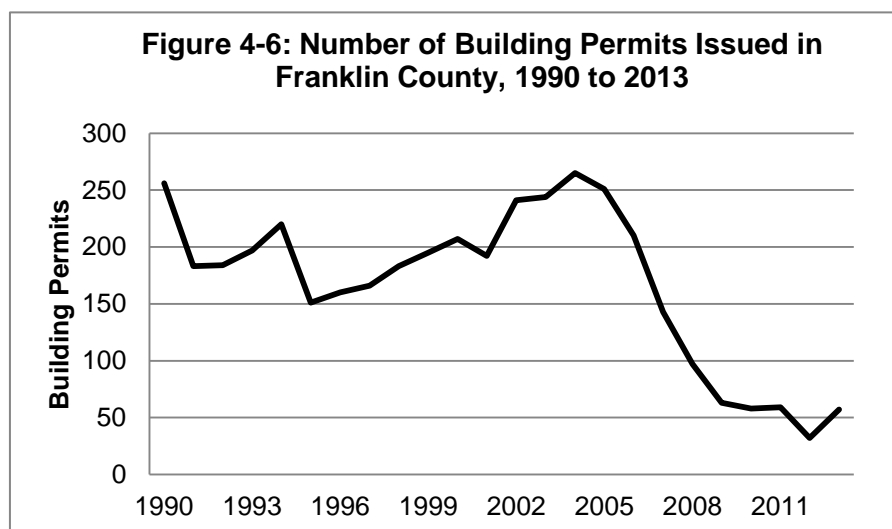
As the state’s most rural region, Franklin County has experienced only a limited amount of development. Forestland is still the predominant land use, accounting for more than three-quarters (77%) of the county’s acreage, and even the most urbanized towns in the county, such as Greenfield, are at least 45 percent forested. Farmland is the second largest land use, comprising 7.8 percent of the county’s total land area. All developed land uses (residential, commercial, etc.) combined account for only 5.7 percent of the county’s acreage. These figures are based on MassGIS 2005 mapping of land uses from aerial photographs – the most recent land use data available. The 2005 acreage by land use for Franklin County is shown in Table 4-2.

Although Franklin County is predominately undeveloped, it has experienced substantial growth and development in recent decades. Between 1985 and 1999, the amount of developed land in Franklin County increased 30 percent (7,200 acres). Most of this new

development, almost 6,600 acres, was residential in nature. In Massachusetts, new residential development can occur along road corridors with relative ease, due to the State’s Approval-Not-Required (ANR) rules, which allow for the subdivision of land without Planning Board approval, if certain conditions can be met. These conditions are that each subdivided lot must meet minimum road frontage requirements and must have adequate access to protect public safety and welfare. As a result of the expansion in residential acreage from 1985 and 1999, the amount of Franklin County agricultural land decreased by 12 percent and the amount of forestland fell by 2 percent.

MassGIS updated its aerial photography and land use data in 2005. Unfortunately, due to different data collection methodology, the 2005 land use data is not directly comparable to the 1999 land use data. As a result, it is difficult to assess how land uses have changed in the six years between 1999 and 2005. It is very likely that the trend of residential growth continued during that time period based on the increase in building permits. Between 2000 and 2004, the number of new housing units in the region grew by 1,126 or 25 percent. However, growth has dramatically decreased since 2005 due to the effects of the Great Recession. In 2012, there was almost no construction activity with permits issued for a total of only 32 units. This is compared to the 265 permits issued in 2004. There are signs that the construction market is beginning to strengthen in the region and it is likely that development will pick up in the next several years – particularly as more communities gain access to broadband service. Figure 4-6 shows the change in building permit activity in Franklin County between 1990 and 2013.

Almost all of the housing units that have been developed since 2000 were single-family homes built along existing roadways, such as on ANR lots. There are currently very few subdivisions being built in the region. However, as growth in the region



continues and there is less land along existing frontage available for development, it is anticipated that more subdivisions will be constructed. These subdivisions will include new roadways to serve the new homes. These roadways will need to be maintained as either private roads by the developer and property owners, or as public roads by the communities

in which they are located. The impact of the subdivision roads on existing roadway infrastructure will also need to be assessed.

In response to development pressures and concerns about their ability to handle future potential growth, a number of Franklin County communities have recently revised their zoning bylaws to direct growth to areas within their towns with the highest current levels of development and the best infrastructure (water, sewer, roadways) to accommodate new growth. Towns have also worked to encourage other areas to remain undeveloped farmland and forestland. Land conservation organizations in the region, such as the Franklin County Land Trust and the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust, have protected a considerable amount of private farm and forestland in the region through purchases of land and the purchases of development rights for other land parcels. As of January 2015, 33 percent of the total acreage of Franklin County has been protected from development (MassGIS).

Summary of Demographics and Socioeconomic Trends

The following are key demographic and socioeconomic trends that have significant implications for the transportation system and transportation planning within the region:

- Population size has remained relatively stable and is projected to decline slightly.
- There has been and will continue to be a high growth in the number of elderly residents.
- Labor force in the region has declined since 2008.
- There will be a growing number of telecommuters/long distance commuters.
- Employment projections show that employment in Franklin County will decline over the next twenty-five years.
- The pace of new construction has been very slow and may increase in the future, but will likely not be significant.



Official opening of the reconstructed Eunice Williams Covered Bridge in Greenfield.