

4

Regional Demographic & Economic Profile



2024 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. Franklin County borders Vermont and New Hampshire and the Massachusetts counties of Berkshire, Hampshire, and Worcester.

Franklin County has a population of 71,085¹ 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 17,661 people. The smallest populated municipality is Monroe with a population of 114. Ninety percent of the housing stock in Franklin County is owner-occupied, of which 70% is in the form of single-family homes. 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 1970² and 2000, the county’s population grew by 21%, 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

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all socio-economic demographic data is from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey, Five-Year (2017-2021) Estimates Program.

² U.S. Census Bureau, total populations from decennial Census surveys.

1990's, the county's population slightly declined between 2010 and 2020, with a population loss of 352 (a decline rate of -0.5%). Table 4-1 illustrates the estimated population change in Franklin County and surrounding counties in this decade. Franklin County and the counties to the west and north have lost population, with counties to the south and east moderately gaining population.

Table 4-1: Total Population for Franklin County and Surrounding Counties, 2017 to 2021

Geography	2017 Total Population	2021 Population Estimate	2017-2021	
			Change	Percent Change
Franklin County, MA	70,926	71,085	159	1.0%
Berkshire County, MA	127,751	129,089	1,338	0.98%
Hampden County, MA	469,188	466,265	-2,923	-0.99%
Hampshire County, MA	161,197	161,810	613	0.99%
Worcester County, MA	818,249	856,858	38,609	0.95%
Cheshire County, NH	75,960	76,473	513	0.99%
Windham County, VT	42,869	45,811	2,942	0.93%
Massachusetts	6,789,319	6,991,852	202,533	0.97%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau - 2020 Census of Population & Housing, and 2021 American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates.

The population growth that occurred between 2017 and 2021 took place in towns scattered throughout Franklin County. The top five towns which experienced the most growth are: Gill, Whately, Buckland, Wendell and Montague. All of these towns either have easy access to I-91 or Route 2. The majority of 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. Roughly half (52%) of the Franklin County population is currently aged 45 and older. Of that age group, just over one third (37%) is aged 45 to 54 years old, and 63% is aged 65 years and older.

The region is expected to see a significant increase in the number of elderly residents over time. The older “Baby Boomer” generation (born 1946 to 1964) has begun reaching 75 years old in 2021. Studies have shown that nationally, over 40% of people age 75 and above are either non-drivers or have limited their driving.³ 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.

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 2021, 82% of Franklin County residents are estimated to commute to work by car (with 73% driving alone and 9% carpooling), 4% walked, 1.2% took public transportation, and 1% took other means. 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 2021, approximately 12% of Franklin County residents worked at home. The Covid-19 Pandemic, starting in March 2020 caused many residents to begin working from home. From the survey conducted for this Plan update, 27 percent of survey respondents said that they have changed how they commute since the pandemic.

Ethnic and Racial Diversity

Franklin County is the least racially and ethnically diverse county in the Commonwealth. As of 2021, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that 91% of the population in the county is White. This is compared to a Massachusetts percentage of 75% that is White. The next largest populations by a single race in the county are Asian (1.7%) and Black or African American (1.2%), and a very small percentage (0.1%) that is Native American/Alaska Native. The population of people of two or more races is 4.2% in Franklin County. The population of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity is the largest minority in Franklin County at 4.4%.⁴ Over the years, the Hispanic and Latino population has increased from 3.2% of the total population in 2011 to 4.4% in 2021.

³ Straight, A., *Community Transportation Survey*, America Association of Retired People, 1997.

⁴ According to the U.S. Census Bureau definition, Hispanic or Latino origin is an ethnicity that can be from any race or races.

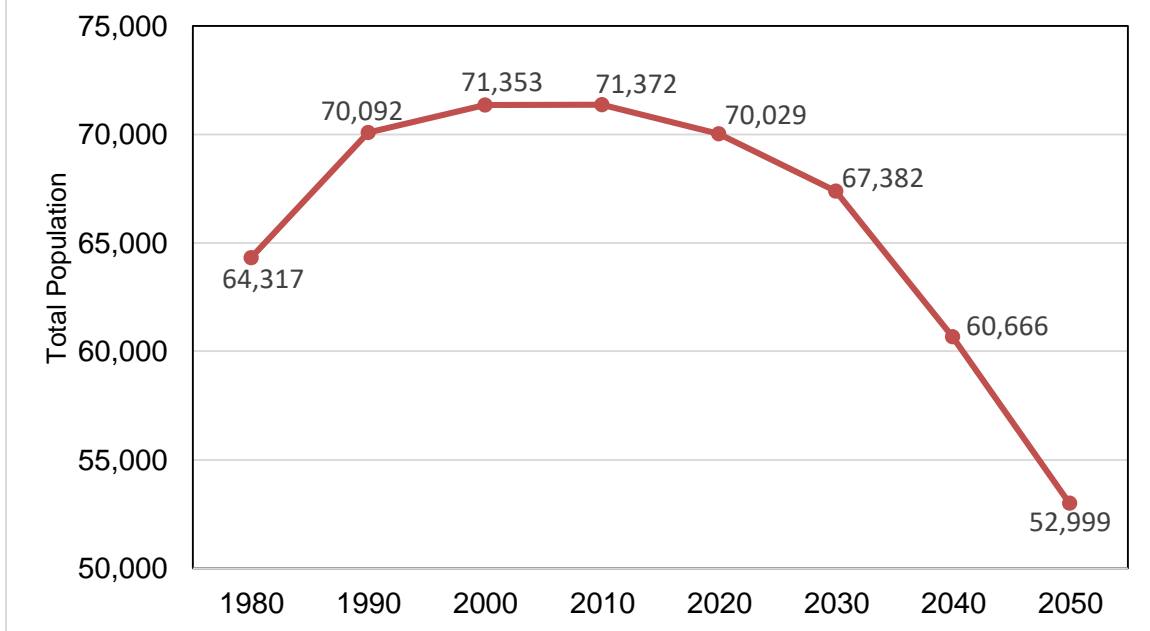
Population Projections to 2050

The demographic data presented shows that the Franklin County population size has been relatively stable, is becoming older, and its racial and 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, to the year 2050. In general, the MassDOT forecasts show that the next twenty-five years will be a period of modest growth for the Commonwealth as a whole. Massachusetts is projected to grow at 3.4% between 2020 and 2050 with some places increasing more rapidly and some losing population. During this same time, Franklin County is projected to lose -25.4% of its total population, decreasing to 52,999 people by the year 2050. The total population loss for the county over this thirty year timeframe is approximately 18,030 people. This population loss 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.

An important consideration about these projections is that while they are based on a sound methodology and the FRCOG recognizes that population loss is a very urgent issue for the region, these projections are not foregone conclusions. They do not take into account contextual factors such as the removal of broadband access as a barrier; the mainstreaming of remote work; impacts of climate change and climate migration; and other factors.

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.

Figure 4-1: Past and Projected Franklin County Population, 1980 to 2050



Source: U.S. Census - Decennial Census of 1980, 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020 MassDOT and UMDI Population Projections.

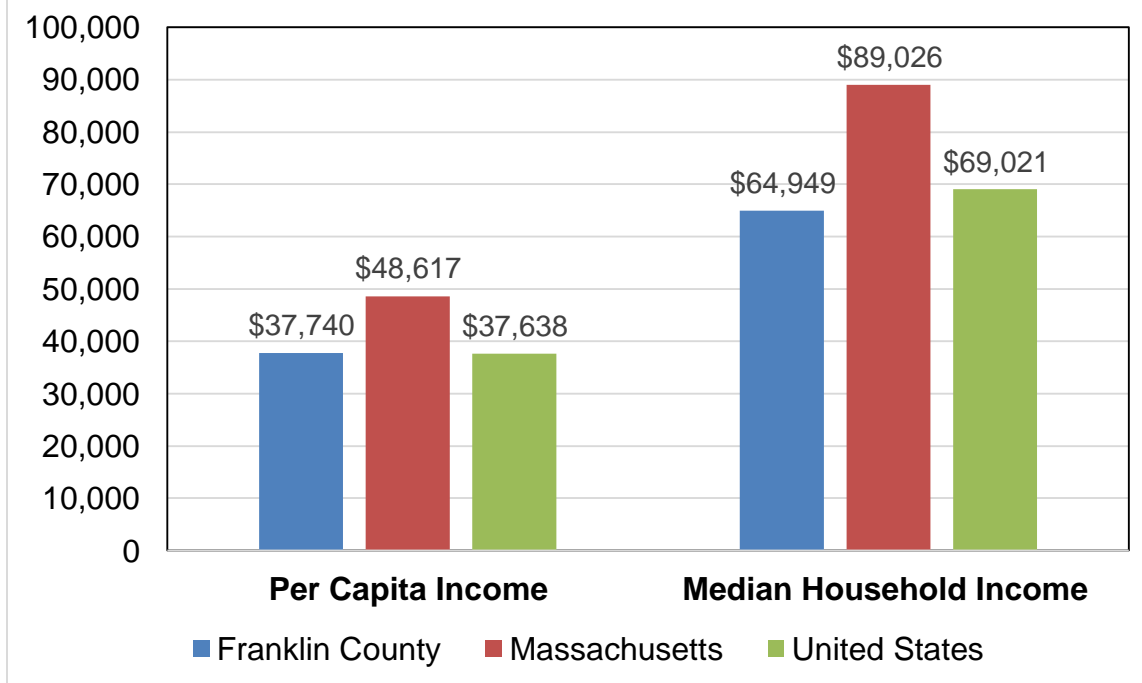
Income and Employment Profile

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

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

Figure 4-2: Per Capita Income and Median Household Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates.

In general, U.S. Census data shows that Franklin County's incomes are much lower than Massachusetts as a whole. In 2021, the county's median household income was \$64,949, which was much less (27% less) than Massachusetts's median household income of \$89,026. Another income indicator is per capita income. By this measure, Franklin County's income is still 22% lower than the Commonwealth's. Franklin County's per capita income is \$37,740, compared to the Massachusetts per capita income of \$48,617.

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 and benefits, which have resulted in lower incomes in the region.

In 2021, the poverty rate for Franklin County was 10.6%, which was slightly higher than the state rate of 9.9%. The areas within the county experiencing higher poverty rates than the

state average include several of the downtowns and village centers that had once been traditional hubs of manufacturing employment, such as Orange (16.1%) and Greenfield (13.2%). Other areas with higher poverty rates include the small towns located farther from major employment centers, such as the towns of Wendell (13.6%), Charlemont (16.4%), and communities with a higher concentration of college students, such as Sunderland (13.8%).

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 actively searching for work. Persons not actively seeking employment, such as enrolled students, retirees or stay-at-home parents, are excluded from the labor force figures. The unemployment rate describes 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

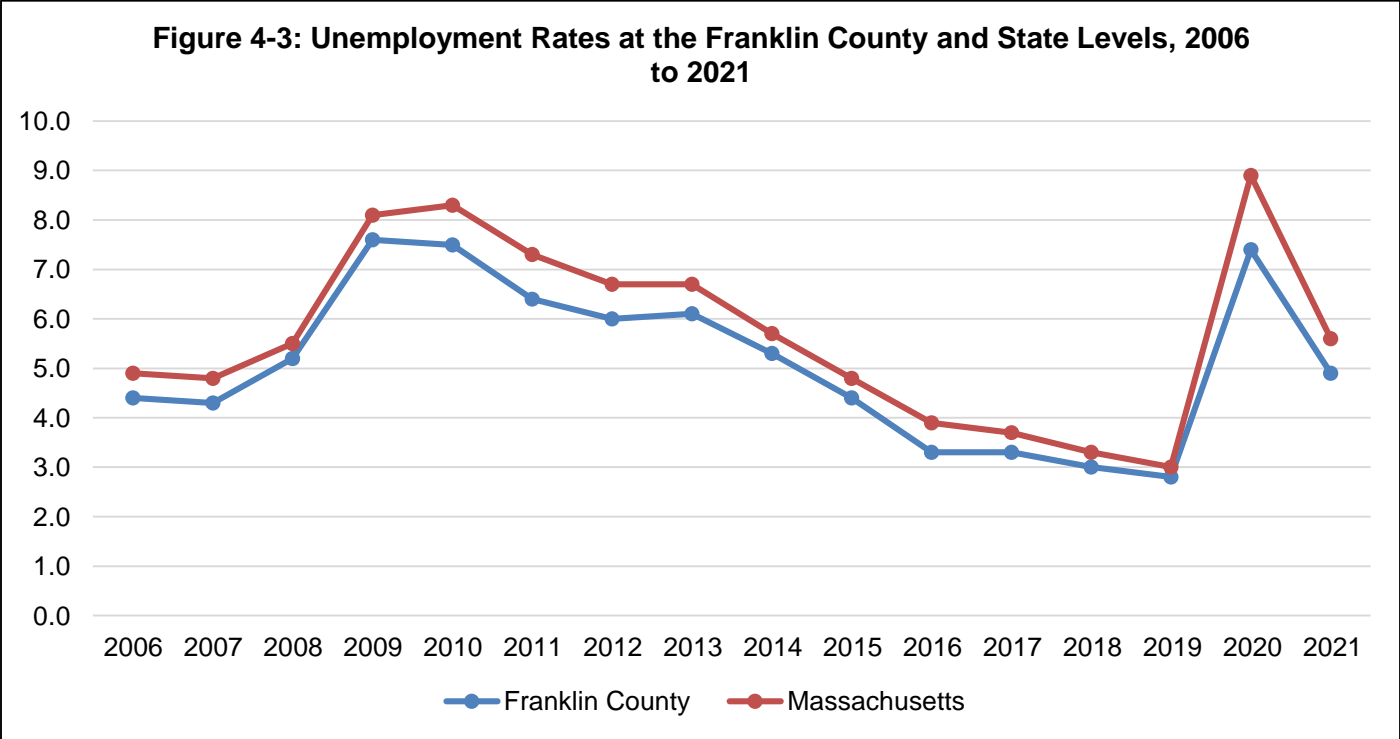
According to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD), the size of Franklin County's labor force has fluctuated over the past decade. The labor force grew throughout the early 2000s and then began to decrease starting in 2007 due to the Great Recession. By 2010 and the introduction of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act programs policies to catalyze the economy, the size of the Franklin County labor force grew to greater than pre-recession levels and the number of employed increased greatly. Starting in 2014, the county's level of total employment began to grow consistently from year to year to the highest employment level in twenty years. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 Pandemic caused Franklin County's labor force to decline significantly beginning in March 2020 and at a greater rate than experienced statewide. While, the total labor force has since grown from 2020-2021, it has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Traditionally, the largest town labor forces in Franklin County are located in the most populated communities. This is still true, but to a lesser extent since the Covid-19 Pandemic. Greenfield contains 25% of the county's population and now accounts for 14% of the labor force for Franklin County. Together, the four largest towns in the region (Greenfield, Montague, Orange, and Deerfield) comprise 55% of Franklin County's total population and 33% of the county's labor force. These rates show that the current labor forces are more

dispersed around the county rather than concentrated in the population centers as they historically have been.

In 2021, Franklin County's unemployment rate of 4.9% was lower than the State (5.6%). Among the individual towns, the unemployment rate can vary greatly. Several towns have consistently experienced higher rates of unemployment than the State rate. In 2021, seven towns had rates above the State rate which is consistent over the last 4 years. Typically, 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 (6.8%), Rowe (7.0%) and Wendell (6.6%) have higher unemployment rates than other Franklin County towns and the state, and are located in the more rural areas of the county. The population centers of Orange (6.2%) and Montague (6.2%) are also sites of higher unemployment. Erving and Bernardston also had unemployment rates above (5.8%) or at the state rate (6.6%) respectively. One common factor contributing to a town's higher unemployment rate would be the closure of a nearby major employer, such facility closures are described in the section on major employers. Another important factor to note in the national rise in unemployment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which continued to be higher than pre-February 2020 up until January of 2023.

It should be noted that 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 2006 to 2021.



Source: MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Local Area Unemployment Statistics.

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 existing services and recommended additions.

The percentage of workers who are self-employed in Franklin County, either in an incorporated or unincorporated business, is higher in Franklin County (33.4%) than the State (27.0%). According to 2021 data, there are 5,088 workers who are self-employed.

Major Employers

There are 33 employers in the region that are identified as having at least 100 employees.

These employers include private businesses, non-profit organizations and governmental entities (such as public schools). Most of the major employers are located in the county's primary employment centers, including Deerfield, Greenfield, Orange, and Whately.

Yankee Candle Company, which has its headquarters and a large retail store in South Deerfield and manufacturing facility in Whately,

is the largest employer in Franklin County with more than 1,000 employees. The next largest employers are Pelican Products Inc. in South Deerfield, and Seaman Warehouse in Orange, with over 500 employees each. Employers with 250 employees include the region's largest medical facilities, Baystate Franklin Medical Center, and private educational institutions, Deerfield Academy in Deerfield and Northfield Mt. Hermon School in Gill. The other employer identified as having 250 or more employees is the Walmart Supercenter in Orange.

Largest Employers in Region

- Yankee Candle Company, Deerfield & Whately
- Pelican Products, Deerfield
- Seaman Warehouse, Orange
- Baystate Franklin Medical Center, Greenfield
- Deerfield Academy, Deerfield
- Northfield Mt. Hermon School, Gill
- Walmart Supercenter, Orange

The U.S. Census Bureau offers data on commuting patterns of workers. In 2020, it estimated that 38.5% of the 13,188 residents of Franklin County who were employed, worked at jobs located in Franklin County. Of the workers who were employed outside of Franklin County, 16.4% of them commuted to jobs in Hampshire County, with the next most frequent destinations being Hampden County (10.1%) and Worcester County (10.9%).⁶

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.

Tourism in Franklin County

One growing sector of the region's economy is the tourism sector. Many of the 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. It is identified as a key economic cluster in region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan. More

⁶ <https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>

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. For years, many Franklin County towns were unserved or underserved in terms of broadband internet access. With only half of the municipalities with cable television broadband systems, the remaining communities had either no last mile broadband access or developed their own systems in recent years. In addition, some of the towns with cable broadband systems had limited service areas that did not cover the entire municipality.

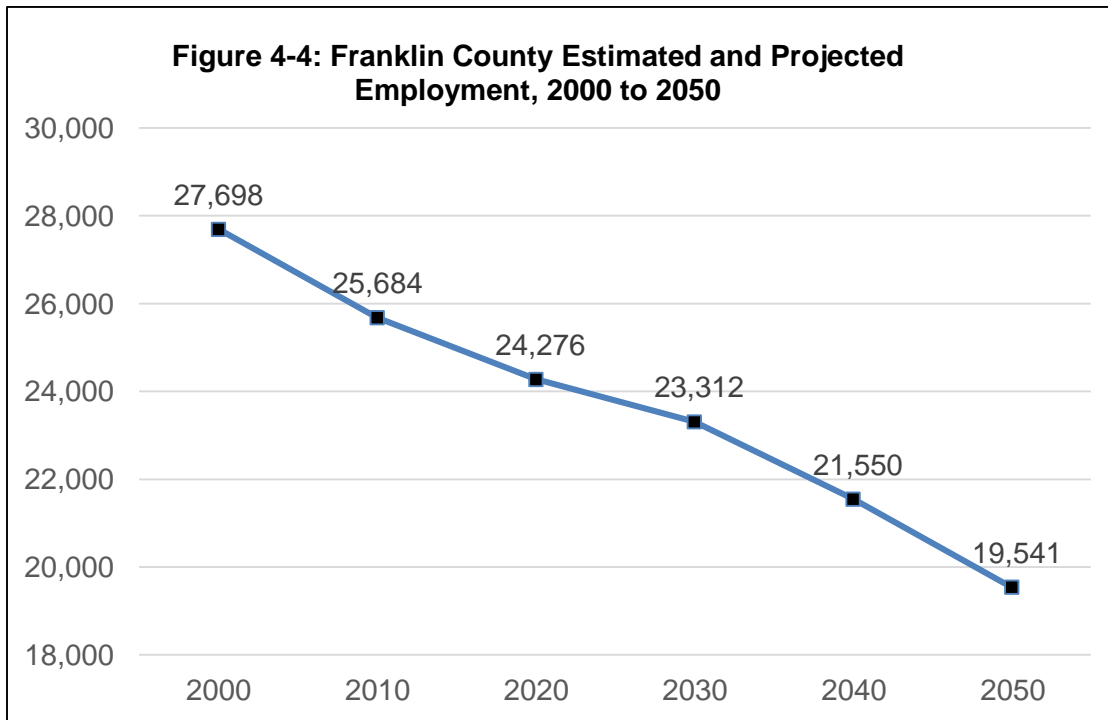
The Governor Baker-Polito Administration launched the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) Last Mile Program to support the expansion of cable networks in underserved communities and the creation of new fiber-to-the-premise and wireless broadband networks in unserved communities. These new networks were able to leverage the MBI's MassBroadband 123 middle mile fiber network that was completed in 2014 using federal and state funding. After years of work and significant local, state and federal public investment, every town in Franklin County had operational last mile broadband networks by the end of 2022.

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 regional level allocations are based on the premise that 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 within easy commuting distance to Hampshire County employers will grow 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.



Source: MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development; MassDOT and UMDI Employment Projections.

As shown in Figure 4-4, the forecasts show that Franklin County’s total employment will decline by 19.5% over the next twenty-five years, while the state’s employment is projected to grow by 4.3% over the same time frame. Employment in Franklin County as of 2020 was at 24,276 and is projected to experience a large decrease of 4,735 employees by the year 2050.

The forecasts show that Franklin County will lose employment by the year 2050. 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. 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 and increase of passenger rail to the region should be promoted to 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.

Households Without Cars

In 2021, 8% of Franklin County households (2,599 households) did not own or have access to a motor vehicle for their transportation needs, compared to 12% of households statewide. The Census figures show that the two population groups that are most likely not to own a car are renter households and older households. An estimated 18% 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 STPP study found that switching from the use of a private vehicle to transit service can save a family thousands of dollars annually.

The Census data also shows that, by age group, households with the head of household age 65 years and over, are more likely not to have a car. In Franklin County, 4% of households (1,273) led by householders aged 65 or older are carless. As the county's population continues to age, there should be an examination of how to make the transportation infrastructure more "age-friendly" to increase safety and allow seniors more independence with their mobility.

Commuting Trends

Mode of Transportation to Work

The automobile is the primary mode for commuting travel in Franklin County. In 2021, 82% of Franklin County's employed residents commuted to work by car; with 73% driving to work alone, and 9% carpooling. In comparison, 73% of Massachusetts commuters drove alone and an additional 9% carpooled. The proportion of Franklin County commuters who walked (4%) or other means (1%), such as bicycling, was similar to the state averages. However, the

percentage of commuters who took transit in Franklin County was 1%, compared to the statewide average of 8.5%. Practically the same percentage of employees worked at home in Franklin County (12%) as the statewide average (11.9%). Only 6 towns in Franklin County had less than 10% of people working from home. In the past, 10% of people working from home was considered high. In 2021, the towns that had below 10% of its population ranged from 3.1% to 7.5%, with Monroe as an exception of having 0% of people working from home.

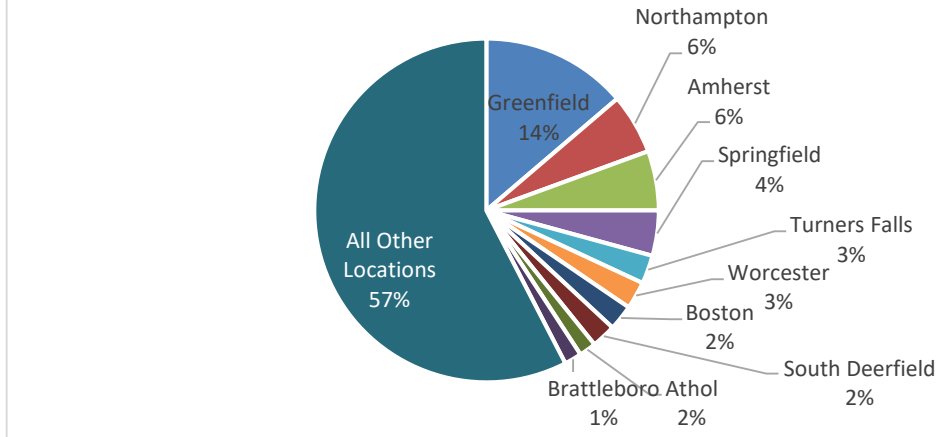
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many companies and organizations had to shift to telework in March of 2020. As mentioned previously, it is anticipated that the number of employees working from home, also known as telecommuters, will continue to increase in Franklin County in the coming decades. The growth 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 worker's 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 every day. Another important factor that will promote telecommuting in the region is the recent expansion of telecommunications infrastructure and high-speed internet services in the region.

Commute Patterns

The American Community Survey five-year estimates data provides commuter information including the average or mean travel time to work. The mean travel time for Franklin County workers is 22.7 minutes, compared to 27.5 minutes statewide. The towns with the lowest commute times are closest to major employment centers. They are Greenfield (17.4 minutes), Deerfield (19.1 minutes), Sunderland (20.6 minutes) and Montague (22.3 minutes). As would be expected, the towns with the longest commute times are furthest from major employment centers. They are Heath (38.5 minutes), Warwick (41.1 minutes), and Monroe (44.5 minutes).

Most employed Franklin County residents that worked outside of Franklin County, worked in employment centers within easy commuting distance, such as Amherst and Northampton in Hampshire County, or Athol in Worcester County. However, other top work destinations for residents included the Commonwealth's largest cities such as Springfield, Worcester and Boston. A breakdown of top worker destinations by town is shown in Figure 4-5.

Figure 4-5: Top Work Destinations for Employed Franklin County Residents, 2020



Source: On the Map, U.S. Census Bureau, <https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>.

For jobs located in Franklin County, the majority of workers (57%) are Franklin County residents. For the workers who live outside the county and commute to Franklin County for work, most live in Hampshire, Hampden and Worcester counties. See Table 4-2 below for top origins for workers employed within Franklin County.

Table 4-2: Origins for Franklin County Workers

Residence of Franklin County Workers	Count	Share
Greenfield	3,578	15.6%
Turners Falls	963	4.2%
Northampton	671	2.9%
Orange	448	2.0%
Chicopee	410	1.8%
Athol	408	1.8%
Springfield	406	1.8%
Amherst	402	1.8%
South Deerfield	384	1.7%
Shelburne Falls	321	1.4%
All Other Locations	14,968	65.2%

Workers also come from Berkshire, Middlesex, Essex, and Norfolk Counties in Massachusetts as well as out of state in Windham County Vermont and Cheshire County New Hampshire. Franklin County and these two neighboring counties to the north share many characteristics. Recently, the FRCOG and corresponding regional planning agencies in

southeast Vermont and southwest New Hampshire have begun working together to examine shared transportation and economic issues and improve connections between them.

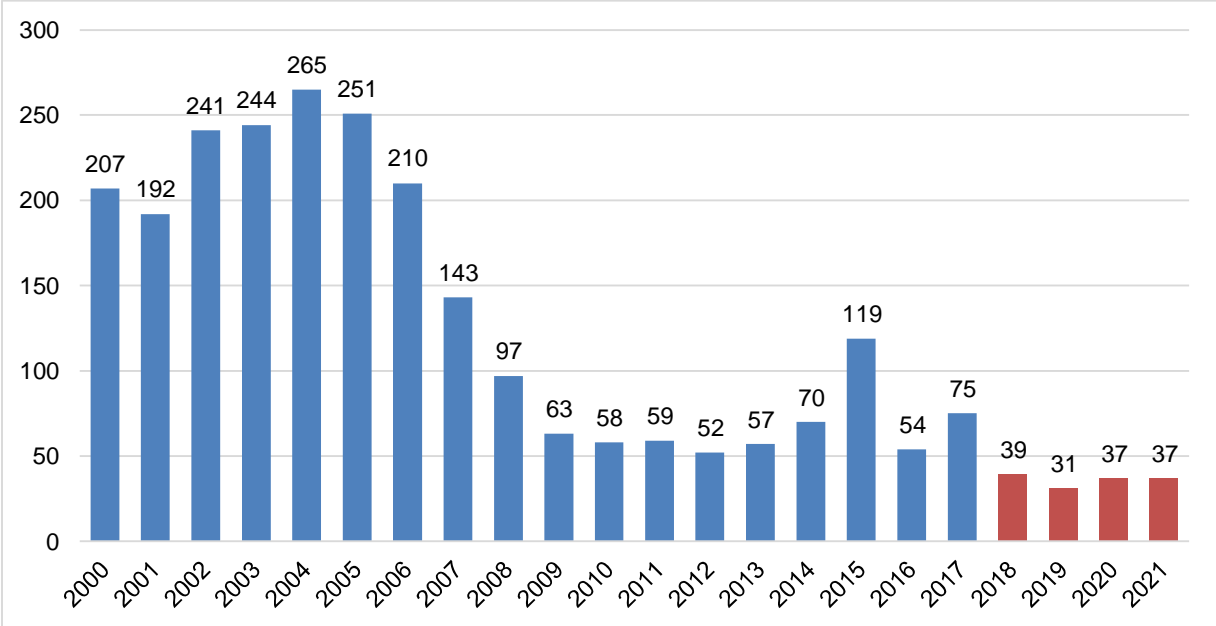
Land Use

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. As the state's most rural region, Franklin County has experienced a relatively limited amount of development.

According to land use data from MassGIS, undeveloped is still the predominant land use, accounting for more than half of the county's acreage, and even the most urbanized towns in the county, such as Greenfield, are at least 20% forested. Farmland is the second largest land use, comprising 10% of the county's total land area. All developed land uses (residential, commercial, etc.) combined account for only 5.7% of the county's acreage.

Based on building permit data, slow development trends have continued. By 2007, the number of building permits dramatically decreased due to the economic impacts of the Great Recession. After 2012, the number of building permits began to increase. The sharp rise in 2015 is due to the reconstruction of the large, multi-family Leyden Woods apartment complex in Greenfield. Today inflation, high wages and other price increases have cut into contractors' bottom lines between 2020 – 2023, thus slowing new residential building throughout the county. Figure 4-10 shows the change in building permit activity in Franklin County between 2000 and 2021.

Figure 4-10: Number of Building Permits Issued in Franklin County, 2000 to 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Construction Statistics, 2000 - 2017. Data from 2018-2021 Franklin County Cooperative Inspection Program which only encompasses 16 franklin county towns, not all 26, including 3 of the largest towns in the county.

Almost all of the housing units that have been developed since 2000 were single-family homes built along existing roadways, such as on Approval-Not-Required (ANR) development lots. ANR development allows 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. There are currently very few subdivisions being built in the region. However, as growth in the region continues and there is less land with necessary 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, a number of Franklin County communities have 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. At the same time, 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 the outright purchases of land, or through the purchases of development rights.

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 in coming decades. However, this projection does not take into consideration of factors such as the implementation of region-wide broadband, climate migration, and other factors. Population trends should continue to be closely monitored.
- There has been and will continue to be high growth in the number of elderly residents.
- The unemployment rate continues to be low and the size of the labor force is recovering from COVID-19 Pandemic.
- There will be a growing number of telecommuters/long distance commuters from Franklin County.
- Employment projections show that employment in Franklin County will decline over the next twenty-five years.
- The pace of new construction has been historically very slow and even more so since the rise in construction costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This development trend is likely to remain in place for the short term. While projections show that the region is projected to lose population, there are outside factors that may very likely change this and the region should prepare for medium to long term development.