

Fact Sheet – Demographic and Social

Understanding current and future demographics can inform how West Virginia plans for and operates a multimodal transportation system that meets the needs of residents. As West Virginia's population changes, the transportation system should be ready to maximize access to opportunity.

Current and future demographics can inform how WVDOT works with its partners to prepare for change and plan for future transportation system users' needs. West Virginia's population will continue to change over the coming decades alongside social preferences for transportation services.

Where are We Today?



Population Change While statewide population has declined over the past ten years, population has increased in several areas throughout the state particularly in the Eastern Panhandle (Berkley and Jefferson Counties) as well as in Monongalia County. As of July 1, 2019, according to estimates by the US Census Bureau, West Virginia's total population is **1,792,147, representing a 3.3% decline since 2010 (approximately 60,487 fewer residents)**. West Virginia lost population both naturally, with 19,000 more deaths than births, and through migration, with 27,000 more people leaving the state than moving in.

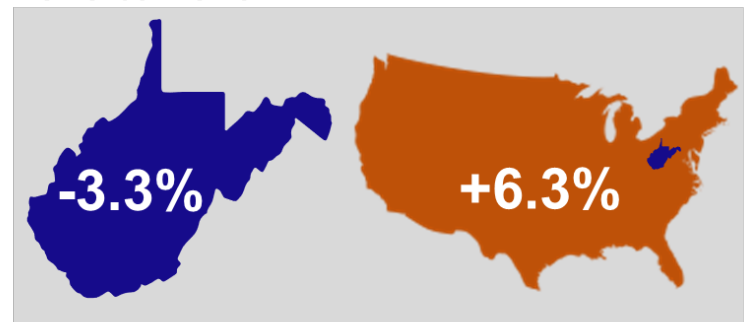
West Virginia is the third least dense state on the east coast (denser than Maine and Vermont) at an average density of 75 persons per square mile in 2019 (a decrease from 77 persons per square mile in 2010).

West Virginia is also losing population faster than recent forecasts, which do not account for county-by-county increases. According to population projections in 2017 from the WVU Bureau of Business and Economic Research, West Virginia's population was projected to fall from 1,852,994 in 2010 to 1,806,816 in 2030.¹

In 2019, West Virginia's statewide population has already fallen below the 2030 forecast. Projections from the University of Virginia Demographics Research Group in 2018 show West Virginia's population is expected to continue to decline, falling to 1,661,849 by 2040.² Based on these forecasts, West Virginia would be the 12th least populous state by 2040 (compared to the 13th today – Idaho's population will pass West Virginia by the late 2020's).

West Virginia remains an overwhelming majority white state, at 93.5% in 2019. Generally, the state's ethnic makeup has remained steady over the past decade with a slight influx of Hispanic populations.

2010 to 2019



2020 to 2040



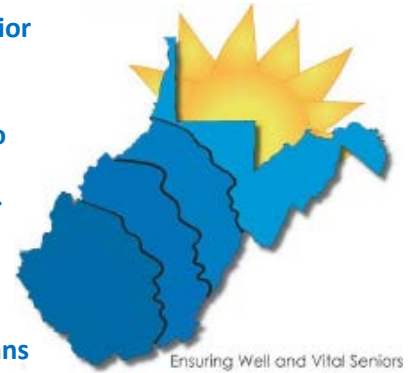
¹ <https://business.wvu.edu/research-outreach/bureau-of-business-and-economic-research/data>

² <https://demographics.coopercenter.org/national-population-projections/?q=demographics/national-population-projections>

Refer to the Transportation and the Demographic Research Paper for more analysis and information.

Residents are Aging West Virginian's are quickly aging across the state with 20% over age 65 (compared to 16% for the US) which equates to a 31% old age dependency ratio statewide (the population age 65-plus divided by the population ages 16-64). Nearly half of all households have at least one individual over 60. The increasing aging population will put pressure on state resources for seniors. Without on-demand transportation services, these residents cannot carry out daily activities like grocery shopping and attending medical appointments once unable to drive themselves.

The West Virginia Bureau of Senior Services was created per the Senior Services Act of 1997. The Bureau promotes services to enhance the health, safety and welfare of West Virginia's senior population. The Bureau serves as the primary agency within state government designated to receive federal Older Americans Act Funds and to provide services to the senior population.



Influx to Urban Areas, Escaping Rural Poverty Most West Virginian's own homes despite lower median household incomes (average of \$45,000 for 2014 – 2018 compared to \$60,000 for the United States), and while over one third of residents still reside in rural areas, more are moving to urban regions for job opportunities. The metro area population continues to grow, approximately 5% over the last decade, while totals of college graduates and individuals in the 35-44 age group remained nearly zero with a slight decline. Improving job access with reliable and safe transportation options can help residents in disadvantaged communities on top of strong workforce development and employee retention efforts.

Travel Patterns Vehicle travel is the overwhelming majority of passenger transportation in West Virginia – over two thirds of residents hold a driver's license, and most households have at least two cars. Recent data showed 81% of employees drove alone to work and 9% carpooled, commuting about 25 minutes on average. Less than 4% of commuters chose alternative modes like transit, biking, or walking to work. In 2019, around 3.9% of workers did not commute to work and instead worked at home.

During COVID-19, according to a cross-section of different national surveys, over 40% of the U.S. labor force is working from home full-time, another 33 percent are not working and the remaining 26 percent – mostly essential service workers – are working on their business premises.³



Alternative Modes Marshall University has launched a public bike share system which is popular among college students and other young professionals. Morgantown and Huntington both have efficient transit systems which move students and employees around university campuses. The majority of residents do want to see improvements in the state's roadways and bridges, particularly to help improve highway safety and reliability. Given the lack of travel options, especially in rural areas, the highway system is the lifeline to jobs, health care, services, and recreation.



³ <https://news.stanford.edu/2020/06/29/snapshot-new-working-home-economy/>

Access to Public Education Schools throughout many counties are far apart. Physical distance combined with dangerous rural roadways and limited public transportation services has caused rural students to suffer across all levels of schooling simply because of access. Furthermore, most college-aged students live too far from universities to commute but cannot afford living expenses to live on campus which hinders their ability to actually enroll.

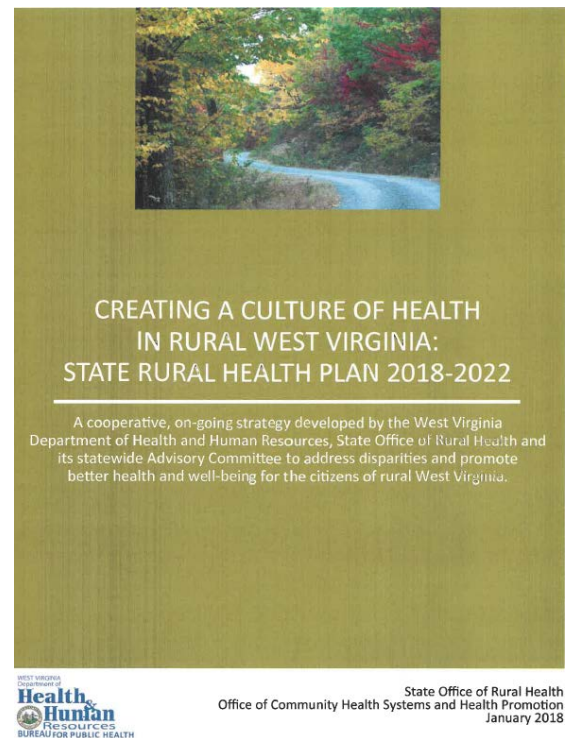
The pandemic has increased the recognition of the challenges faced by many students in rural areas of West Virginia. Some students lack equal access to computers and internet service due to unreliable mobile as well as IT infrastructure statewide, higher rural poverty levels, and too few personal tools like computers. State leadership has taken distinct steps to ensure education continues amidst the pandemic, setting up +1,000 WiFi hotspots statewide to give students option to take classes online.

Promoting Public Health Before COVID-19, many West Virginian's were already suffering from obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and arthritis on top of a local opioid epidemic. The state has consistently ranked first in the US in both obesity and diabetes cases. Transportation as well as public health experts know that without transportation to care facilities, those suffering from chronic health conditions and/or drug abuse are more likely to continue to suffer and/or not receive full help needed to completely recover. Many people need assistance accessing treatment simply because they live far from care facilities and are unable to drive themselves.

West Virginia's 2018 – 2022 Rural Health Plan include goals related to transportation such as improving access to healthcare (rural and urban), developing the workforce, holding individuals accountable for their own health, and prioritizing known health conditions to reduce unfavorable outcomes. Two state programs are underway to improve access to healthcare: MARP 2020 and Transportation to Care.

- [Medical Access Road Project \(MARP\) 2020](#) funds physical roadway construction to improve access to medical facilities and along medical supply routes.
- [Transportation to Care](#) connects rides from one of West Virginia's eighteen public transit agencies to recovering addicts to receive treatment.

Access to Healthy Food A key component of promoting public health is providing access to healthy food options. West Virginia is first in the US with car-less populations and/or those who live greater than 20 miles from a grocery store according to US Census data. Additionally, 36% of residents need to drive 10 miles to a grocery store, and 13% of low-income residents have food access issues. Food accessibility, transportation, and public health are interdependent. Grocery stores are working to meet "the five A's: accommodating, acceptable, available, accessible, and affordable," but more support for meetings like the [2019 West Virginia Food Desert Summit](#) is needed to continue strategies that help increase food access in rural parts of the state.



The Rural Health Plan details strategies to help address disparities and promote better health and quality of life in rural West Virginia. More information is available [here](#).

TRENDS, DRIVERS, AND OPPORTUNITIES



Where Are We Going?

Demographic and social trends in West Virginia are creating opportunities and challenges for the future of multimodal transportation and its ability to provide access for residents to goods and services. Five critical trends impacting transportation's future include:

- **Continued low population growth statewide and declining population in many communities may create transportation funding challenges due to flat or declining local and state tax revenues.** This creates a challenge for funding multimodal transportation – particularly given that transportation mobility and asset preservation needs will continue to increase in West Virginia.
- **Continued influx of younger residents into urban areas could lead to a greater demand more transportation options.** This creates an opportunity for new transportation modes and services to offset driving alone, resulting in reduced emissions and congestion.
- **More older residents or residents with disabilities could increase demand for more on-demand mobility options, especially in rural areas.** This is a significant challenge, given spread-out communities and health care options and the rural highway network. Creating safe and reliable mobility options for these residents is critical to maintaining their quality of life.
- **Rural areas face many challenges related to education.** Improved transportation connections are one strategy to help bridge the rural-urban education and technology divide. Transportation connections can also facilitate broadband access for these rural communities, leading to both improved education and economic conditions.
- **Public health depends on safe transportation and mobility.** Grocery stores need to be accessible to reduce obesity and food deserts. Limited access to all levels of health care in rural areas create challenges for at-risk populations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed limitations, weaknesses, and equity issues statewide. Many residents statewide were already suffering from chronic health conditions, with rural residents lacking robust access to care facilities. The pandemic has brought these at-risk West Virginians into the spotlight, necessitating more critical thinking regarding the connection of transportation improvements to both health care services and improved distribution of health care equipment and treatment.

WVDOT Future Direction

Continued statewide population changes alongside an expanding aging cohort will have impacts on transportation needs and the provision of services for a large population with mobility constraints and health issues. Prioritizing resources to address these challenges may require new programs and partnerships with other Federal and State agencies as well as the private sector to leverage funding and raise awareness.

Where West Virginia is growing, like the Eastern Panhandle and Morgantown regions, managing highway travel demand through reliable and safe multimodal options will increase in priority to help maintain and expand prosperity. In areas seeing declines, improved access to jobs, health care, recreation, technology, and other services can help stabilize the population and create opportunities for new businesses. There is also potential that West Virginia's growing tourism industry and generally low land cost create opportunities will attract more retirees and tourism associated economies.



Refer to the [Transportation and the Demographic Research Paper](#) for more analysis and information.