7.1 Commuting and Transportation Patterns

The Importance

Our ways and means of moving about has a direct impact on our quality of life and it reflects our development patterns, our social patterns and our use of natural resources. Heavy reliance on motor vehicles can worsen air, water and soil pollution, damage wildlife habitat and consume increasing amounts of nonrenewable resources. Longer commuting times also represent a growing physical gap between home, community, and work.

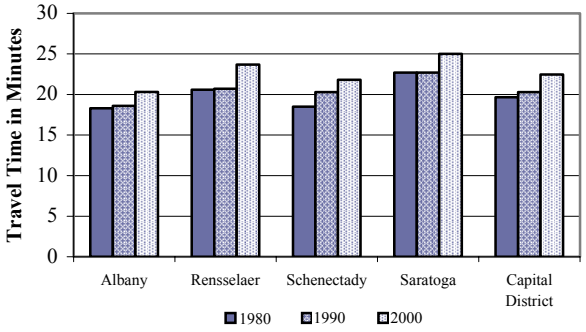
About this indicator

Using NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and the Texas Transportation Institute data, this indicator measures the Capital District's annual highway delay per person due to congestion, and highway Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) per highway lane mile. This indicator also uses Census data to examine the Region's methods of traveling to work and the time it takes to get there. Using historic data on what percentage drove alone to work, what percent take transit, and the average amount of time to travel to work, this indicator examines the transportation trends in the Capital District.

Sources for this Indicator

- The 1970, 1980, 1990, and 2000 Censuses.
- New York State Department of Transportation "State Touring Routes" data.
- Texas Transportation Institute Roadway Congestion Factbook.

Average Travel Time to Work
by County and the Capital District

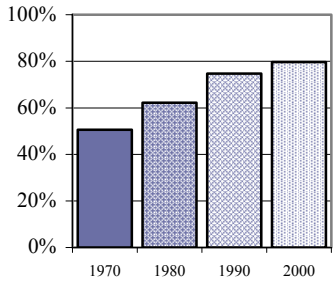


Commuting and Transportation in the Capital District

The average travel time to work in the Capital District has increased from just under 20 minutes in 1980 to over 22 minutes in 2000. The vast majority of the increase in travel time occurred during the 1990's.

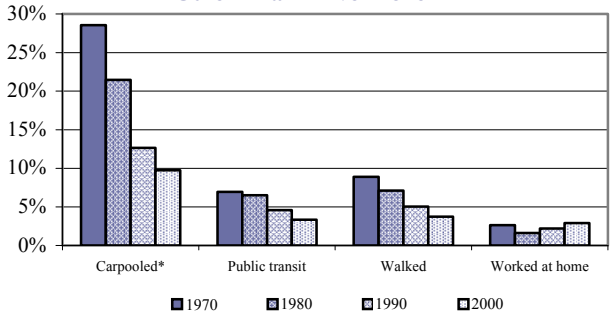
Since 1970, the percent of workers driving to work alone in the Capital District has risen from 51% to 80%. At the same time, the number of workers carpooling dropped from 29% to 10%. The

Capital District Percent
Driving to Work Alone



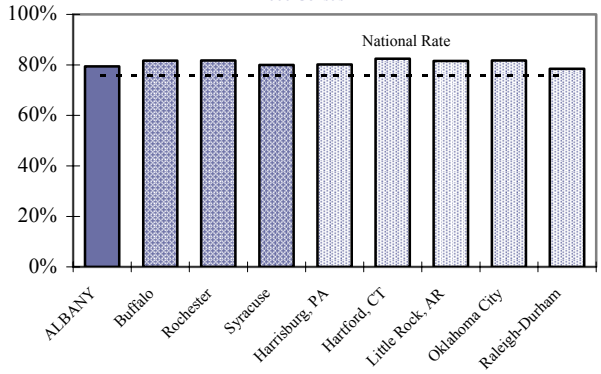
percent of workers using public transportation and walking to work also dropped significantly over the past 30 years. Despite the shift away from public transportation and walking, the primary shift has been away from carpooling to driving alone. This shift can be viewed as a representation of greater prosperity and freedom of movement, but it also inevitably results in more traffic per capita and less personal contact between neighbors and coworkers.

Capital District Means of Travel to Work Other Than Drive Alone



*1970 Carpool percent estimated based on the number of passengers in private cars.

Workers Driving Alone to Work by MSA
2000 Census

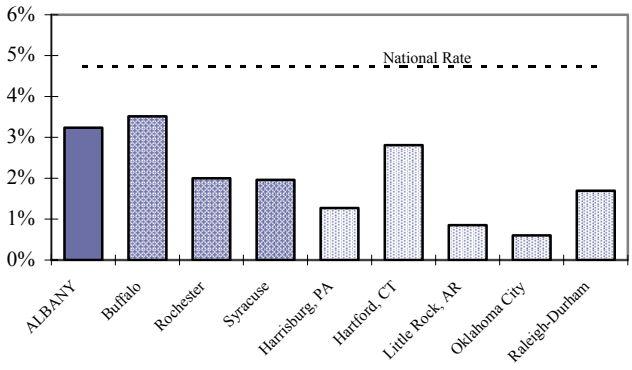


Regional Comparison

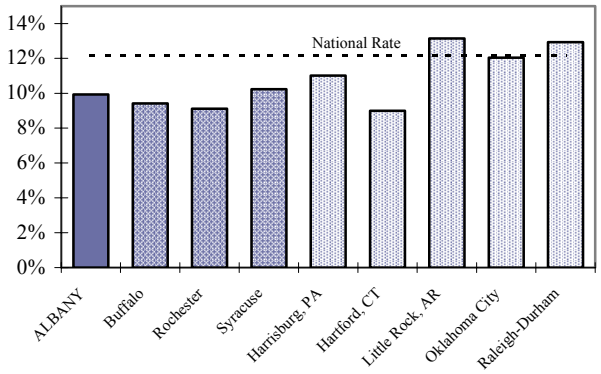
All the regions in the peer group have similar percentages of people who drive to work alone. All are slightly above the national average because the national rate includes major metro areas where public transit is often the best means of commuting.

There are significant differences between the regions in the alternative commuting methods. The Southern regions, Little Rock, Oklahoma City, and Raleigh-Durham, have significantly higher carpooling rates while the Northern regions have higher transit usage and more people walking to work.

Workers Taking Public Transit to Work by MSA



Workers Carpooling to Work by MSA

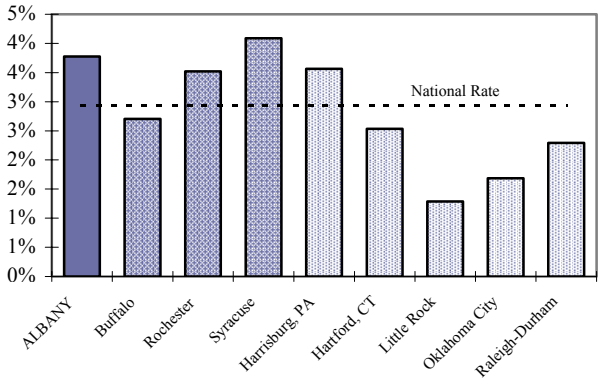


Not being major metropolitan cities, none of the regions is close to the national transit usage rate. However, despite the cold weather, Albany, Rochester, Syracuse, and Harrisburg, all exceed the national rate for walking to work. Walking is more feasible in the older Northern cities with higher population densities. Much of the growth of the Southern regions occurred after the lower density, auto oriented, suburban development patterns took hold.

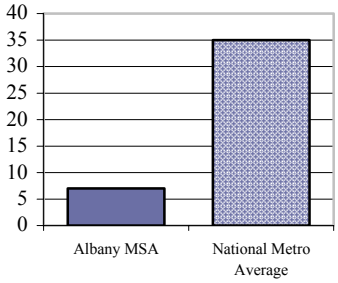
Highway Capacity

In 1997, the Texas Transportation Institute did a study examining the freeway daily VMT per freeway lane mile as well as the annual hours of delay due to freeway congestion. This study provides a baseline for comparing the Capital District's highway infrastructure and traffic with that of other metro areas. Not all of the other peer regions were included in the study, so Austin, TX was included to fill out the comparisons. The Albany MSA has a little more than half of the national MSA rate for VMT per freeway lane mile.

Workers Walking to Work by MSA



Annual Hours of Delay per 1,000 Persons



Less traffic per lane results in fewer hours of delay due to congestion. As a matter of fact the national MSA average rate for hours of delay is five times higher than the Albany rate.

1997 Freeway Daily Vehicle-Miles-Traveled Per Freeway Lane Mile