

Land Use and Growth Management Profile

The Southwest Region is comprised of ten counties – Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington, and Westmoreland – and 549 municipal governments. Geographically, the region covers 7,025 square miles and is situated in the southwestern portion of the State. The region is the largest metropolitan area in Appalachia. The Allegheny Plateaus section of the Appalachian Mountains defines the region’s terrain, which is rugged and heavily dissected by surface waters that have produced deep valleys and steep hillsides. This geography has greatly contributed to the region’s historic and existing land use patterns.

The region is highly accessible given that 24,821.4 roadway miles, representing 20.6 percent of the State’s total highway miles, traverse the ten counties. This transportation network includes: Interstates 70, 76, 79, 279 and 376; U.S. Routes 19, 22, 30, 40, 119, and 422; State Routes 18, 51, 60, 66; and numerous county and local roadways. The region did not construct an interstate beltway system in the 20th century. Nearly 76 percent (19,005.5 miles) of the region’s 24,821.4 roadway miles are non-federal systems and, of this share, 82.5 percent (15,687.3 miles) are local roads not eligible for federal funding.

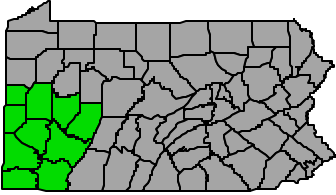
From 1990 to 2000, the region’s population decreased by 1.4 percent, or 38,072 persons to 2,656,007. This trend is indicative of the region’s declining population over the past 40 years, which is directly attributed to the sharp contraction in the State’s steel industry beginning in 1963¹ and a loss of

over 178,000 manufacturing jobs throughout western Pennsylvania between 1969 and 2000 (Bureau of Economic Analysis). Today, the region’s population mirrors the levels achieved just prior to the industrial build-up during World War II.

Due to steep slopes and rolling topography, the majority of the region’s population is concentrated throughout the river valley communities. The high concentration of population stemming outward from the highly urbanized county of Allegheny has contributed to the relatively high population density levels found in Beaver County (416.8). In comparison, the region’s overall population density is 377 persons per square mile (2000 Census). In contrast, the population density levels of the remaining eight counties are lower relative to the region and this reflects their overall rural character.

Historically, the Southwest Region’s economy relied heavily on the steel manufacturing industry, which employed nearly 100,000 people throughout the Monongahela and Beaver Valley’s in 1974¹. But, the industry’s collapse spawned the region’s difficult transition into the State’s post-industrial economy, which featured an ever-increasing level of service sector jobs.

As part of this economic transformation, the region’s economy began to capitalize on its wealth of colleges and universities, which supported employment growth in high-skilled and high-technology occupations. “By the 1980s, barely 20 percent of Pittsburgh jobs were in manufacturing, and



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the city's third-largest employment sector was research and development."¹

Today, seven of the region's ten counties are included in the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area (Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington, and Westmoreland Counties). The region also includes the Indiana Mircopolitan Statistical Area as defined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the strength and vitality of these areas are essential to the region's growth and development and are instrumental in defining the region's land use patterns.

Key Land Use Trends

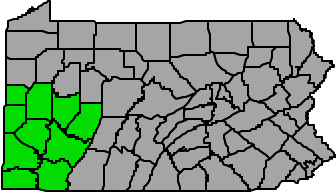
- ☑ **The sharp contraction of the State's steel industry directly contributed to the region's significant population losses and decline of its urban centers.** After increasing steadily for decades, the region's population growth crashed following the demise of the State's steel industry, beginning in 1963 (Figure 1). The region's industrial centers were the hardest hit whereby the proportion of residents living in the region's boroughs and cities began to decrease after 1960, and the percentage of urban dwellers in 2000 returned to the levels enjoyed in 1930 ¹.

The depleted tax base resulting from loss of industry ratables and related population decrease has contributed to lower fiscal capa city for the affected communities.

- ☑ **Development patterns in the region are disparate.** As illustrated in Figures 2

and 3, population and housing growth within the region has largely occurred in the region's post World War II communities. This growth, however, is constrained differently throughout the region due to significant differences in topography and the varying degrees of accessibility to major transportation systems. For example, the higher rate of growth that has occurred in Cranberry Township is partly related to the township's accessibility to Interstates 76 and 79 which junction in the township, and its more moderate topography. Major transportation systems have also allowed for growth in Allegheny County.

- ☑ The region's ten counties and the City of Pittsburgh are working together through the region's current long-range plan, the 2030 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania, to focus on achieving balanced, cost-effective growth by emphasizing investment in population centers with existing infrastructure. The 2030 Regional Plan outlines an integrated program of projects and actions that are guided by the principle that the relationship between economic development and the region's transportation system is fundamental. The 2030 Plan particularly emphasizes strengthening key connections to improve the movement of people and goods through a balanced and efficient transportation system, infill development, and effective use of growth corridors.



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☑ **Post WWII communities experienced more housing growth than older communities.** Figures 2 and 3 show that growth in housing outpaced the region's population growth during the 1990s. The reduction in household size in the region from 3.52 persons per household in 1950 to 2.38 persons per household in 2000 mirrors a national trend of decreasing household size and an increased demand in housing units. Similarly, the region's occupancy rates stand at 92 percent, and the City of Pittsburgh is a few points less at 88 percent compared to the national rate of 91 percent.

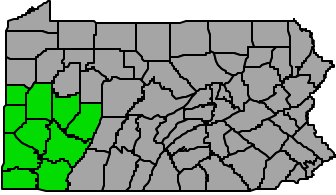
☑ **Productive farmland is in decline.** Similar to statewide trends, the region is experiencing a decrease in farmland. From 1987 to 1997, the Southwest Region lost nearly 1,682 farms constituting 157,738 acres. This represents 22.6 percent of the State's total decline in farmland during this period.

However, the region has experienced an increase in farmland since 1997. According to the 2000 Census of Agriculture, the Southwest Region experienced a slight increase (1.5% or 18,458 acres) in the amount of farmland and a notable increase in the number of farms (1,062 farms or 11.4%).

The USDA 2002 Census of Agriculture reports that total land in farms decreased in the United States from 954,752,502 acres in 1997 to 938,279,056 acres in 2002. Total land in farms

decreased in Pennsylvania at approximately half the national rate from 7,819,648 acres in 1997 to 7,745,336 acres in 2002. The average farm size in PA increased from 130 acres in 1997 to 133 acres in 2002, similar to the national increase from 431 acres in 1997 to 441 acres in 2002. The value per acre of Pennsylvania farms continues to substantially exceed the national average. Average value of land and buildings per acre in PA increased from \$2,524 in 1997 to \$3,419 in 2002, well above the national averages of \$967 in 1997 and \$1,213 in 2002.²

☑ **The region's population is aging** (Figures 4 and 5). The region's out-migration is below average; however, the region's in-migration is exceptionally low. Loss of young people and families of child-bearing age in previous decades has not been reversed by in-migration, thus resulting in a continuing higher percentage of older citizens compared to regions with higher rates of in-migration. Some analysis does show that these trends are beginning to shift. In their Fall 2001 edition, *Pittsburgh Economic Quarterly* states that U.S. Census Bureau estimates of total net population migration for the six-county Pittsburgh region have remained fairly flat. In addition, the report states that the latest estimates of population migration generated by the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Social and Urban Research show that the rate of net out-migration among the working age population is approaching



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some of the lowest levels in the last two decades.

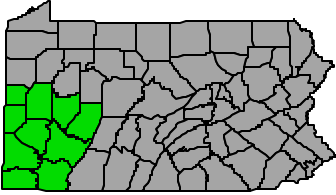
- ☑ **The Commonwealth lacks a coordinated approach to collecting, developing, and disseminating standardized data to counties.** The challenge in developing multi-municipal and regional plans is the cost involved in collecting and developing consistent data sets such as land use/cover and population forecasts. The lack of standardized data sets available from the State forces county planning and economic development agencies to spend a significant portion of their funding assistance dollars to collect and develop credible base information to support their planning studies. This, in turn, sacrifices the time and budget necessary to develop sound planning solutions.
- ☑ **The region’s transportation system is suffering from a lack of adequate funding necessary for maintenance and improvement.** As identified in the 2030 Regional Plan, the region’s highway transportation systems are critical in linking communities and moving goods and services. Weather, topography, and increasing traffic volumes have taken a grave toll on these systems, but the lack of transportation funding to support the necessary improvements is further exacerbating the problem. Coordinated transportation is done through a cooperative process with three PENNDOT Engineering Districts (10, 11, and 12), local, state and federal agencies prioritizing the allocation of the

available transportation improvement dollars. However, the demand for transportation funding is so great that the region is seriously challenged in making the necessary improvements to revitalize the local economy. The region has adapted to the lack of adequate funding by increased reliance on toll facilities to complete long-planned regional highway improvements.

Recognizing the reality of funding shortfalls, the 2030 Transportation and Development Plan for Southwestern Pennsylvania applies the “80/20 Rule of Thumb” when considering transportation improvements. The 80/20 Rule mandates that transportation plans apply approximately 80 percent of funds to capital maintenance of and upgrades to existing transportation infrastructure, and only about 20 percent to new construction. When new construction is necessary, Goal #16, Objective D of the 2030 Regional Plan directs the region to:

Implement those new capacity projects that cost-effectively provide the greatest user benefits for travelers and freight shippers and haulers, that provide missing links, and that support the counties’ economic development priorities, complementing existing development and providing access to areas with existing water and sewer capacity.

- ☑ **Transportation systems have improved development opportunities in all areas of the region.** The region’s expressways



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have made the region's rural communities more accessible to the urban employment markets. This trend, coupled with affordable land values outside the employment centers, has allowed for more rural residential development and connected rural communities to more job opportunities.

Goal #18 of the 2030 Regional Plan articulates the commitment to improving opportunities for all areas in the region through coordinating investments in economic development and transportation infrastructure:

Goal: A balanced, integrated, multi-modal transportation system, linking important regional activity centers and major development areas, will provide:

- businesses access to markets,
- workers access to jobs,
- residents access to services, and
- residents and visitors access to tourist attractions.

Objective B of Goal #18 clearly expresses the priority of effective growth and development:

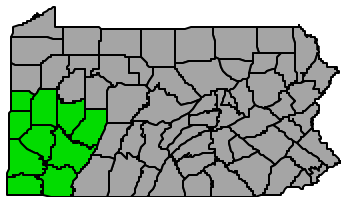
Recognizing the importance of access to major markets for economic development, give priority to transportation investments that support major economic development sites where other infrastructure and reasonable access for freight, employees and customers is available, requiring simply infill, upgrades or linkages.

Increased economic opportunities across the region impact the daily travel patterns of workers. The number of people commuting 90 minutes or more increased from 7,030 in 1990 to 23,181 in 2000, or 229.7 percent (Figure 6). Figure 6 also illustrates the decrease in the shorter commute times (i.e., 5 to 19 minutes), which is indicative of the decentralization of the region's urban centers and increased traffic congestion.

Goal #20 of the 2030 Regional Plan recommends regional transit improvements to help address the issues of traffic congestion and rising commuting times:

Improved location, quality, convenience and comforts of [transit] transfer facilities will reduce the trip time and costs for travelers changing travel modes for trips within and out of the region and will help manage congestion by encouraging use of alternatives to single-occupant-vehicle travel.

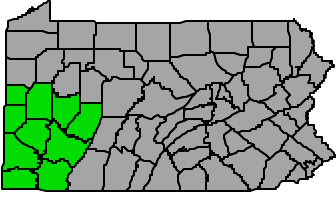
- ☑ **The region is experiencing an increase in county and multi-municipal planning efforts.** In addition to the region's long-range plan, each county within the region is in the process of beginning, updating, or completing their comprehensive plans. The region is also experiencing a heightened interest and participation in multi-municipal planning efforts.
- ☑ **The region has rich natural assets and numerous recreational amenities.** These natural resources are readily



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identified by the region's residents as a major contributor to their quality of life.

- ☑ **Land use taxation as a source of revenue is significant to local communities.** Land use related to property tax is a significant source of funding for the region's school districts and other local government functions.



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Figure 1
Historic Population of the South West Region

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

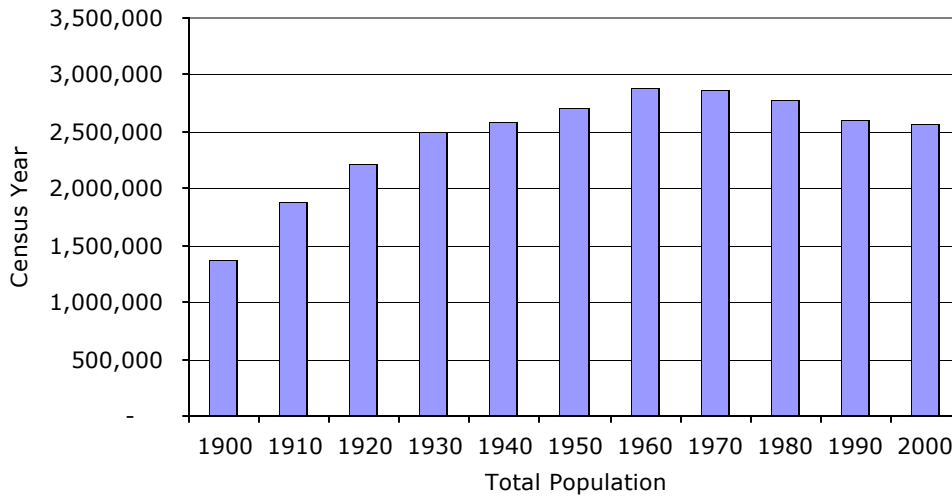
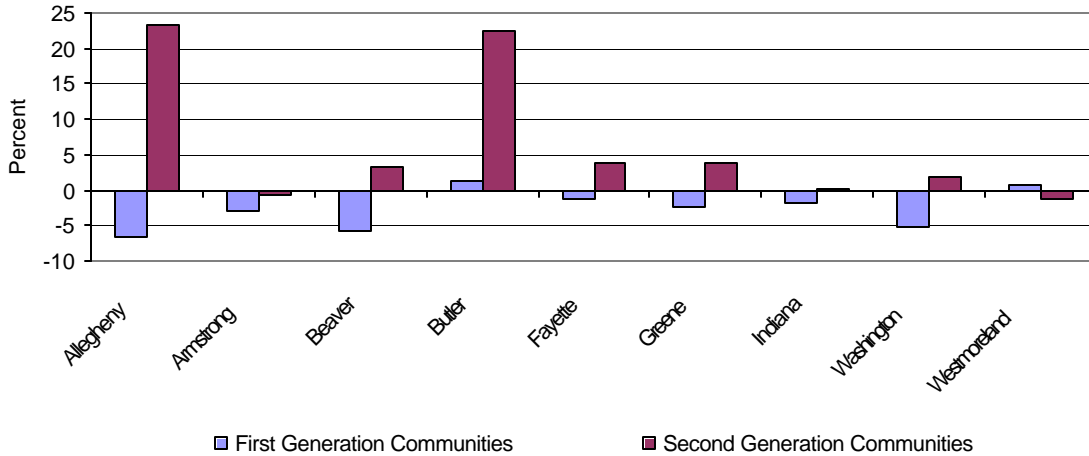
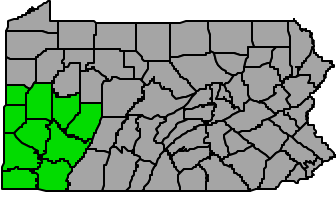


FIGURE 2
South West Region
Population Growth Comparison 1990-2000

Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000





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Figure 3
South West Region
Housing Growth Comparison 1990-2000

Source: U.S. Census, 1990 & 2000

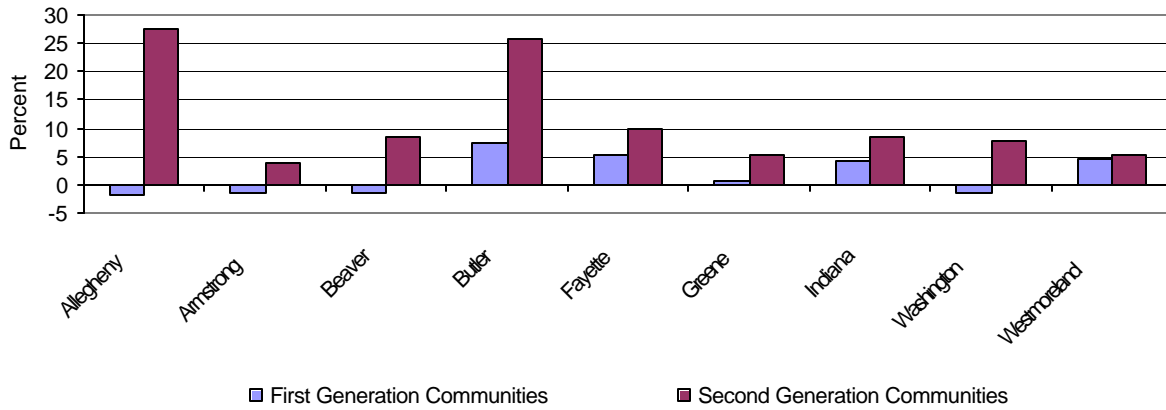
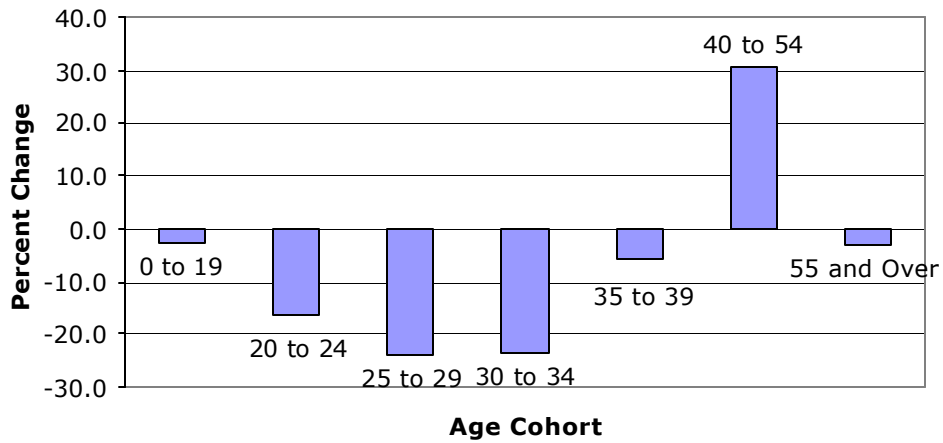
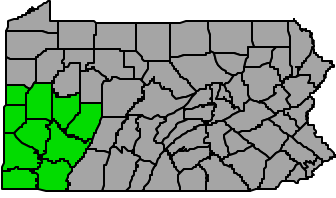


Figure 4
South West Region Population
Age Cohorts Trend: 1990 to 2000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau





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Figure 5
South West Region Population
Age Cohorts: 1990 and 2000
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau

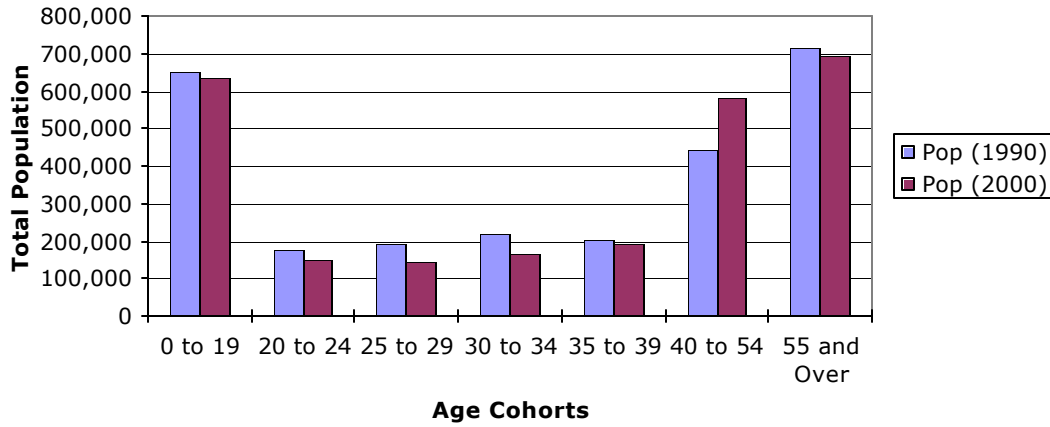
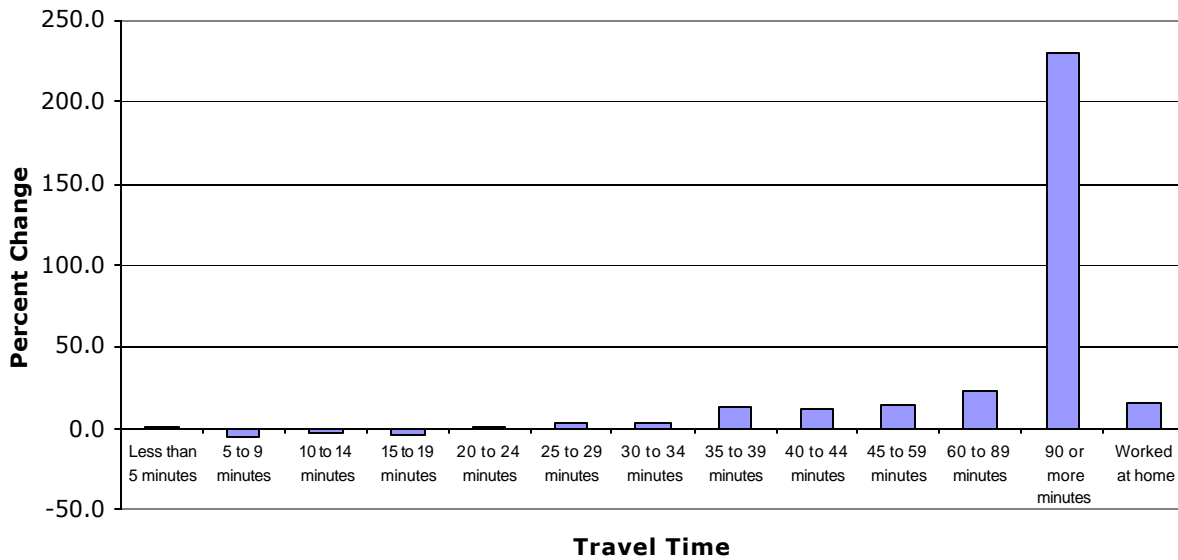
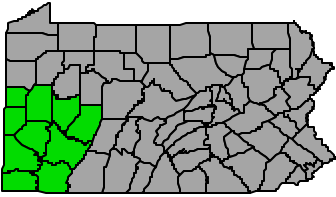


Figure 6
South West Region
Percent Change in Travel Time: 1990 to 2000
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau





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¹ Miller, Randall M., and William Pencak., eds. Pennsylvania: A History of the Commonwealth. University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP; Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 2002.

² USDA 2002 Census of Agriculture, Pennsylvania
(<http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/census02/volume1/pa/index1.htm>)