



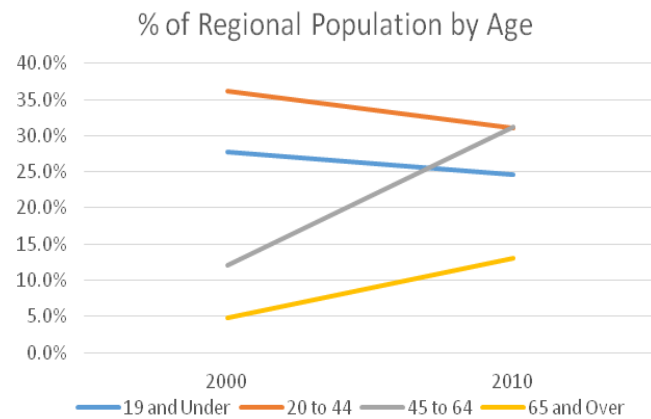
Central New Hampshire Regional Plan

"A region that builds on what we already have - supporting growth and prosperity while at the same time conserving our heritage, natural resources, and sense of community. CNHRPC is committed to supporting the uniqueness of this region and the quality of life that is both a strength and competitive advantage."



Key Trends and Facts: Community and Economy

⇒ Attracting a younger population is increasingly important to maintaining a viable workforce that supports an older population.



⇒ The continuing decline in the number of people coming forward to volunteer may impact New Hampshire's long tradition of volunteerism to fulfill local and regional functions.

⇒ Regional employment is forecast to increase by approximately 10% by 2020, with the largest growth rates in Healthcare and Social Assistance (25.4%)

⇒ The regional unemployment rate has dropped from 5.6% in 2009 to 4.8% in 2013. Statewide unemployment has dropped from 6.2% in 2009 to 5.3% in 2013.

⇒ The vast majority of residents in the region (93%) have broadband at home, but there are many areas where speeds are not adequate for business and teleworking.

⇒ Key recommendations from Central / Southern NH Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) include:

- Focus on growing local businesses
- Engage local entrepreneurs and investors
- Support and incubate new businesses
- Make local permitting processes easier to navigate
- Emphasize skills training and work readiness
- Increase business development services and technical assistance
- Take a regional approach...create a regional brand

As the region moves forward, it is:

- a vibrant region** → where commercial growth for key industries is thriving, there is a broad range of employment opportunities and a diverse supply of housing stock, all while maintaining the region's unique characteristics and quality of life.
- an efficient region** → with its land use development, transportation, energy usage and fiscal expenditures.
- an accessible region** → with a balanced, sustainable, and diverse transportation system that integrates transportation and land use to improve mobility and job accessibility.
- a united region** → where there is a collaborative spirit and regional cooperation on planning issues.
- a balanced region** → where the environment/open space/farmland and traditional settlement patterns are balanced successfully with residential and economic development
- a connected region** → where all residents feel connected to neighborhoods, activity centers and recreation areas.

Key Trends and Facts: Housing and Infrastructure

⇒ An aging population leads to more homeowners planning for different housing types.

⇒ Rental costs in the Central NH Region (\$970) are less than the state median (\$1,005). However, there are pockets in the region where some residents are paying over 50% of income on rent.

⇒ All wastewater systems in the region have surpassed their 20 year design life as many of the systems were implemented over 30 years ago and are immensely inefficient.

⇒ The region's rural settlement pattern is a challenge for transportation needs for vulnerable populations such as seniors and the disabled.

⇒ 30% of the region's highway pavement condition is in poor condition. The aging transportation infrastructure continues to be an issue.

⇒ 5% of NHDOT bridges and 22% of municipality owned bridges in the region are red listed.

⇒ 80% of the region's residents drive alone to work and the average commute time is 22.1 minutes.

What We Heard:

What is best about the region?

- ♦ **Community** - friendly, small town, close knit
- ♦ **Natural Resources and Recreation** - rural landscape, scenic beauty, access to outdoor recreation
- ♦ **Economic Vitality** - downtown, town centers, local businesses, farms and local food

"Neighbors are friendly, quiet at night, great elementary schools."

What could make this region better?

- ♦ **Economic Vitality** - stronger downtowns, job opportunities, lower taxes, better broadband
- ♦ **Transportation** - public transportation, improved infrastructure, bicycle and pedestrian options
- ♦ **Community Services** - more town and social services, community centers and events

"Public transportation, carpool to Concord, airport; entertainment, more young folks and ideas."

Key Trends and Facts: Natural Resources and the Environment

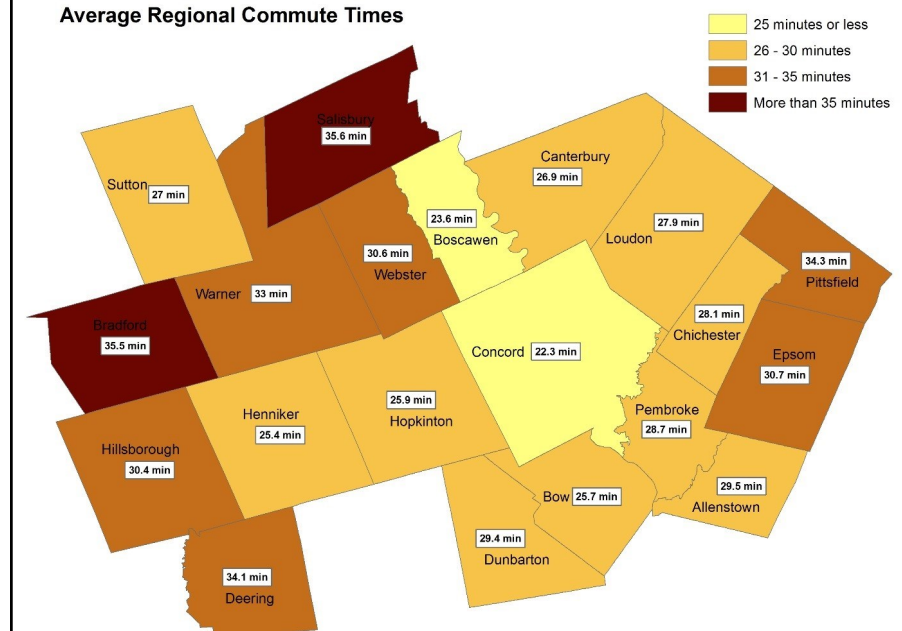
⇒ Stewardship of natural resources is an important investment to maintain the rural and scenic qualities valued by residents.

⇒ Merrimack County is the top county in New Hampshire for agriculture sales; however, the average farm size continues to decrease in Hillsborough and Merrimack Counties but there is an increase in the number of farms.

⇒ As the population ages in place, more people will be looking for recreation opportunities close to home.

⇒ Twenty major disasters within the previous 41 years have been declared, 11 of which were within the last nine-year disaster period.

Average Regional Commute Times





Connect



Sustain



Invest



Partner



The Regional Economy

As a region with a high quality of life and a strong sense of community, there are opportunities to enjoy a rural lifestyle with access to recreational activities while still being a short distance to metropolitan areas. The workforce, though older, is well educated and skilled and is a draw for businesses. The region's median income is high. Taken together, all of these factors can serve as effective tools to attract economic activity. Challenges for the region's economy include an aging infrastructure in need of repair and expansion of broadband access for business growth.

The recently completed Central/Southern NH Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) includes the identification of a wide range of regional priority projects, including economic development initiatives such as water/sewer improvements, the expansion and enhancement of broadband services and numerous transportation related projects. Another important element is the completion of an economic development based strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis (SWOT) that includes recommendations such as emphasizing skills training and work readiness, increasing business development services and technical assistance, taking a regional approach and focusing on "growing your own" local businesses.

What Communities can do:

- ⇒ Participate in CEDS update process.
- ⇒ Form/support local Economic Development Committees.
- ⇒ Participate in local and regional broadband development initiatives.

What CNHRPC can do:

- ⇒ Continue to support the CEDS development and annual update process.
- ⇒ Facilitate and participate in regional broadband initiatives.
- ⇒ Provide local economic development and circuit rider planner assistance.

The Path to Energy Efficiency

According to the Granite State Futures survey conducted for RPCs, residents view energy efficiency as the second highest priority for investment of public dollars. Seven (35%) of the region's master plans have goals that support and encourage energy efficiency and conservation. The challenge is often how to make it happen. Shifting reliance on energy from an imported product to a local one is a sought after vision but it will take time to counter the realities of such a strong dependency on fossil fuels and its market forces.

Encouraging the supply of energy needs of the region today and in the foreseeable future in a way that reverses our dependence on external sources of energy is an important partnership at the local, regional and state level. Energy costs are major line items in government, business and personal budgets. Everyone benefits from cost effective energy efficiency improvements and conservation measures as a reduction in energy consumption leads to lower energy rates due to load reduction and deferred investments in transmission and generation.

What Communities can do:

- ⇒ Track energy use by conducting an inventory and audit of municipal buildings.
- ⇒ Create a local energy committee.
- ⇒ Develop an energy chapter in the master plan.

What CNHRPC can do:

- ⇒ Provide assistance to communities that want to pursue energy chapters and energy efficiency improvements.
- ⇒ Connect local officials to programs, funding, and initiatives available that address energy efficiency improvements.
- ⇒ Be sure communities are prepared to review larger scale renewable energy projects.

Meeting Housing Demands

The housing picture in the region suggests that because population growth is slowing, the housing need is being met. Lower costs for both purchase and rental housing suggests that housing demand will be met in terms of units and cost. However, just below the surface there are some areas of concern. These include: 1) a need to "downsize" for seniors to smaller units; 2) the cost of housing for various groups, including younger people starting out and seniors on fixed incomes, disabled persons, refugees, and single parents; and 3) transportation issues given the rural nature of the region and the dependency upon the single occupancy vehicle. These challenges present municipalities with housing issues to plan for in the future as well as opportunities to manage change within the community.

What Communities can do:

- ⇒ Allow for a variety of housing types in the regulatory framework.
- ⇒ Monitor demographic and population changes.
- ⇒ Develop strategies to limit transportation impacts on housing choice.
- ⇒ Maximize incentives like RSA 79E, TIF Districts and RSA 162N.

What CNHRPC can do:

- ⇒ Assist communities with developing ordinances and regulations.
- ⇒ Provide regional demographic and population data; assist communities with analysis of the numbers at the local level.
- ⇒ Conduct analyses and engage in transportation planning support.
- ⇒ Assist municipalities with strategy development and adoption/implementation process.

One Landscape – Using it Wisely

Residents appreciate the rural landscape and the recreational opportunities it provides. All municipalities in the region have master plan objectives that aim to preserve and protect the natural resources and traditional rural character through effective management and conservation.

As the landscape changes over time to accommodate development, balancing natural resource protection with other uses becomes increasingly important. Protecting water quality and maintaining a clean water supply and efficient infrastructure are important to preserve quality of life. Municipalities and the state partner in the protection of water and land resources, but there is also a strong stewardship element that is dependent on local efforts and volunteers. Equally important is connecting people to outdoor recreational opportunities and supporting the continuing role of agriculture in the region.

What Communities can do:

- ⇒ Ensure that local conservation values are reflected in land use regulations and master plan objectives.
- ⇒ Communicate between local land use boards and committees to ensure effective planning efforts.
- ⇒ Support connectivity of open space lands and trails also across municipal boundaries.

What CNHRPC can do:

- ⇒ Inform local officials of funding opportunities.
- ⇒ Facilitate communication and partnerships between communities to address data sharing and information on natural resource management across boundaries.
- ⇒ Provide information on best practices for stewardship as a resource for communities.

Moving Around the Region

The region's extensive system of roads, highways and bridges provides residents, visitors and businesses with a high level of mobility. The transportation system forms the backbone that supports the region's economy by providing access to customers, materials, suppliers, and employees. Reliance on private vehicles is a reality for most of the region and can be a challenge for an aging population. Residents expressed interest in more public transportation, pedestrian and bicycle options. The Volunteer Driver Program is a region-scaled approach to addressing transportation needs.

The regional transportation planning process in the region is driven by bottom-up community participation through the Planning Commission's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) which is supported by CNHRPC and New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) staff. TAC membership consists of representatives from CNHRPC member communities who act as liaison to local boards and councils.

What Communities can do:

- ⇒ Be members of the TAC and regularly attend TAC meetings.
- ⇒ Participate in the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) update by completing projects proposal forms and ranking the regions projects.
- ⇒ Update transportation chapters in master plans and use for guidance when making decisions.

What CNHRPC can do:

- ⇒ Provide assistance to communities to update transportation chapters.
- ⇒ Connect local officials to programs, funding, and initiatives available that address transportation improvements.
- ⇒ Encourage communities and NHDOT to work in partnership on transportation projects throughout the region.

Managing the Effects of Weather Hazards

Weather in the region has become more extreme, more variable, and more wet in the past two decades. Heavy rains are now regularly experienced, many of which result in flooding conditions. Fluvial erosion is choking rivers with sediment and debris, exacerbating floodwaters. Community budgets stretch to respond to road washouts, salting and sanding expenses, debris removal, and emergency assistance overtime. No community within the region has been spared from these extreme weather effects of a changing climate.

This continuing transformation into a warmer, wetter region means local communities should consider adapting to these new circumstances. Local Hazard Mitigation Plans examine the potential effect of weather hazards and develop a series of recommendations to help reduce the impact of these disasters. Multi-faceted approaches are necessary to preserve the region's assets and adapt to the changing new normal of climate and weather.

What Communities can do:

- ⇒ Update Hazard Mitigation Plans and fulfill the implementation actions.
- ⇒ Upsize small culverts to accommodate flooding conditions.
- ⇒ Review and update the municipal Emergency Operations (EOP) Plan.
- ⇒ Use fluvial erosion hazard assessments to identify infrastructure projects.

What CNHRPC can do:

- ⇒ Assist communities with Hazard Mitigation Plans.
- ⇒ Inform emergency responders and local officials on mitigation and adaptation resources and projects.
- ⇒ Develop culvert assessments and Road Surface Management Systems (RSMS) inventories for communities.