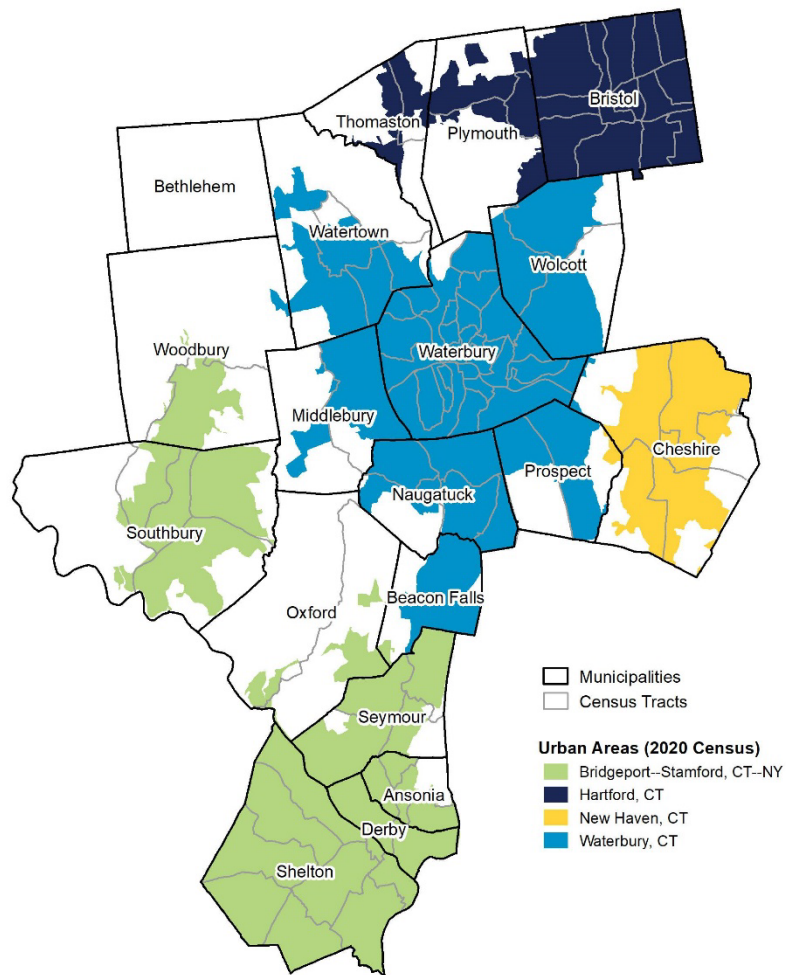


1.0 NAUGATUCK VALLEY REGIONAL PROFILE

The Naugatuck Valley planning region, represented by the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG), is the collaborative body of nineteen towns and cities in west-central Connecticut. With the City of Waterbury as its largest municipal member and geographic center, the NVCOG represents 450,376 residents across 422 square miles (2020 census population data). Due to its central location, the Naugatuck Valley Planning Region includes the whole of the census-defined Waterbury Urban Area, as well as parts of the Hartford, New Haven, and Stamford-Bridgeport Urban areas. The NVCOG also includes two Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), including the entirety of the Central Naugatuck Valley MPO and four out of 10 municipalities within the Greater Bridgeport and Valley MPO.



Map 1 Urban Areas within the NVCOG Planning Area, US Census Bureau, 2020

The Naugatuck Valley planning region is comprised of the following communities:

- Ansonia
- Beacon Falls
- Bethlehem
- Bristol
- Cheshire
- Derby
- Middlebury
- Naugatuck
- Oxford
- Plymouth
- Prospect
- Seymour
- Shelton
- Southbury
- Thomaston
- Waterbury
- Watertown
- Wolcott
- Woodbury

DEVELOPMENT

Historically, the region grew around a robust manufacturing economy, supported by its location along the Naugatuck and Housatonic rivers that provided power and transportation to early factories. It was the center of American brass manufacturing, renowned for products such as clocks, buttons, munitions, and machines. To support the many factories, the region's population grew, and dense urban centers were created to provide housing and services in proximity to these facilities. Over time, the development of modern sanitary sewer systems, public water, communications, and electrical infrastructure facilitated the growth of larger cities and factories in the region, served by an increasingly consolidated rail system, eventually all part of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford, or simply the New Haven, Railroad.

Beginning shortly after the second World War, heavy manufacturing began migrating south, west, and overseas, leaving behind physical and environmental challenges that the region still faces today, while also plunging many of the region's communities into economic depression that has taken years to overcome. In that time, however, the Naugatuck Valley economy has diversified significantly. Healthcare, educational services, retail, and professional and business services now dominate the economy. High precision and advanced manufacturing also remain notable contributors to the region's economy.

The second half of the 20th century saw a shift of population and employment growth from traditional urban centers to the suburban and rural parts of the region. Despite suburbanization, the region's cities continued to play a vital role as the social, cultural, and institutional centers while also retaining their position as critical employment centers.

Beginning in the early 2000s, following national trends, traditional urban centers are seeing returning populations and increased investment, and newer developments include more walkable, mixed-use patterns reminiscent of traditional downtowns. Today, the NVCOG region has a mix of growing, vibrant city centers, considered to be the urban core of the region, older "inner ring" suburban style development with aging but still popular residential styles and

commercial activity in strip mall style buildings, and “outer ring” communities including large residential homes on large lots and the region’s remaining agricultural assets.

TRANSPORTATION

The Naugatuck Valley region was able to develop and thrive due to an extensive transportation network that supported the movement of goods and people. Despite their hilly and occasionally inhospitable landscape, the Naugatuck and Housatonic rivers provided power and access to the core of the region. Navigable up to the confluence with the Naugatuck in Derby, the Housatonic provided access for manufacturers to markets around the world.

Neither river could ever match the access and mobility that the proliferation of railroads in the region were able to provide. Beginning as many separate railways, including the Naugatuck, Waterbury-Meriden-Connecticut River, New Haven and Derby, and the Hartford, Willimantic, Providence, and Fishkill Railroads, service was eventually consolidated under the ownership of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford, the rail giant that eventually controlled most passenger and freight service throughout southern New England. Rail service continued in the region through the bankruptcy of the New Haven and formation of the Penn Central, but with declining routes and frequency and further deterioration of the system. The system today, belonging in part to the CTDOT and in part to private freight operators, has seen renewed investment, increased service, and continues to play a vital role in the mobility of the region. The condition of, as well as goals for, the rail system in the region are further covered in Chapters 5 and 7.

Through the middle of the 20th Century, the construction of state and federal highways, including CT Route 8 and Interstate 84, provided a means for further expansion of automobile and truck traffic in the region. As was true in most cities, the construction of the highways forced the relocation of primarily minority neighborhoods, disconnected downtown areas from their surrounding cities, and encouraged the decline in downtown population in favor of suburban and rural development. These changes in development, along with underinvestment in maintenance and growing traffic volumes, have resulted in a highway system today that faces delays, congestion, and state of good repair challenges, all addressed further in this document in chapter 4.

Also impactful to the region’s urban and industrial core was the severe flooding of the Naugatuck River caused by Hurricanes Connie and Diane in the summer of 1955. In addition to the estimated \$1.5 Billion (1955 dollars) worth of damage to the communities along its length, the response to this flood involved a series of flood walls and control dams that impacted ecosystems and access in each Naugatuck River community. These flood control systems are largely still in place today. Naugatuck Valley communities are increasingly finding innovative ways to use these assets for more than just flood control, as best exemplified by the Derby and Ansonia Greenways built on top of the existing flood walls.



Figure 1 The Flood of 1955

Despite the challenges faced in the region over the years, the urban cores of the Naugatuck Valley planning region are well poised to continue their revival in the coming years. Changes in the way people work and live, long-coming and sped up by the COVID-19 pandemic, all position the NVCOG region to attract new investment and residents in the coming years. Easy access to major metropolitan areas including Lower Fairfield County, New York, New Haven, Hartford, and Boston, along with a lower cost of living, easy access to nature, and strong municipal services are all key components to the region's increasing attractiveness to new residents. Additional improvements to the transportation system will be necessary to meet the demand and expectations of new residents, especially those that arrive from denser urban areas.

Similarly, as companies begin, move to, or grow within the region, the transportation system will need to serve the needs of those living in the surrounding communities that travel to employment centers within the region. Though there are several cities with significant inbound commuting, Shelton's growing business community and location at the crossroads of several regions will put increasing demand on the already overburdened highway system if alternatives are not developed.



Figure 2 Waterbury Line train at the Waterbury Train Station

1.1 POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Between 2000 and 2020, the region saw modest growth, adding 21,600 new residents, bringing the population of the full region to 450,374. Within the CNVMPO portion of the region, the total population is now 361,516. Trends within the region show a continued interest in urban dwelling, with Waterbury, Bristol, and Shelton (a member of the GBVMPO) representing the most rapid growth in the region while many suburban and rural towns remained stagnant or lost population in the 2020 census. However, despite strong public engagement campaigns, a combination of concern about data privacy and COVID-19 likely resulted in undercounts within the 2020 census.

Population Growth in the Naugatuck Valley, by Municipality: 2000-2020

Geography	Population			Percent Change	
	2020	2010	2000	2010-2020	2000-2010
Ansonia	18,916	19,249	18,554	-2%	4%
Beacon Falls	6,000	6,049	5,246	-1%	15%
Bethlehem	3,385	3,607	3,422	-6%	5%
Bristol	60,833	60,477	60,062	1%	1%
Cheshire	28,733	29,261	28,543	-2%	3%
Derby	12,325	12,902	12,391	-4%	4%
Middlebury	7,574	7,575	6,451	0%	17%
Naugatuck	31,519	31,862	30,989	-1%	3%
Oxford	12,706	12,683	9,821	0%	29%
Plymouth	11,671	12,213	11,634	-4%	5%
Prospect	9,401	9,405	8,707	0%	8%
Seymour	16,748	16,540	15,454	1%	7%
Shelton	40,869	39,559	38,101	3%	4%
Southbury	19,879	19,904	18,567	0%	7%
Thomaston	7,442	7,887	7,503	-6%	5%
Waterbury	114,403	110,366	107,271	4%	3%
Watertown	22,105	22,514	21,661	-2%	4%
Wolcott	16,142	16,680	15,215	-3%	10%
Woodbury	9,723	9,975	9,198	-3%	8%
Region Total	450,374	448,708	428,790	0.4%	4.6%

Table 1 Population Growth in the NVCOG Region, 2000-2020, US Census Bureau

POPULATION GROWTH ESTIMATES

POPULATION GROWTH ESTIMATES

Because of the interconnectedness of MPOs within Connecticut, the CTDOT models air quality conformity for the full state. These models take into consideration expected population change over time, which similarly must represent data from across the state, and all MPOs within Connecticut are using the below population growth estimates for planning within the MTP timeframe. Though estimates, these numbers forecast future changes based on using town level trend lines taken from the decade prior to ACS 2019 estimates. This continues the modeling methodology of the CNVMPO’s last air quality conformity adoption in February of 2022.

MPO	2019	2023	2025	2035	2045	2050
SWRMPO	380,336	385,393	387,947	400,437	412,691	418,736
HVMPO	229,379	234,824	237,567	251,014	264,214	270,736
CNVRMPO	354,309	358,823	361,109	372,225	383,151	388,517
GBVMPO	409,480	412,475	414,006	421,400	428,657	432,216
SCRCOG	566,583	571,398	573,843	585,742	597,411	603,122
CRCOG	969,836	982,812	989,352	1,021,014	1,051,611	1,066,567
RiverCOG	172,060	175,296	176,928	184,920	192,761	196,620
SCCOG	277,633	280,877	282,533	290,454	298,091	301,812
NHCOG	110,102	111,514	112,237	115,683	119,034	120,661
NECCOG	95,567	97,614	98,649	103,692	108,651	111,080
Statewide	3,565,285	3,611,026	3,634,171	3,746,581	3,856,272	3,910,067

These estimates show moderate growth across the state, following the trend of the last several decades of slow growth or stagnation at the town level. These projects show the CNVMPO growing from 354,309 as of the 2019 ACS to an estimated 388,517 in 2050, or a growth of 9.6%. On a town-by-town basis, these projections show steady growth in almost every town within the region. Though this chart shows all the NVCOG towns, the GBVMPO communities are highlighted in gray.

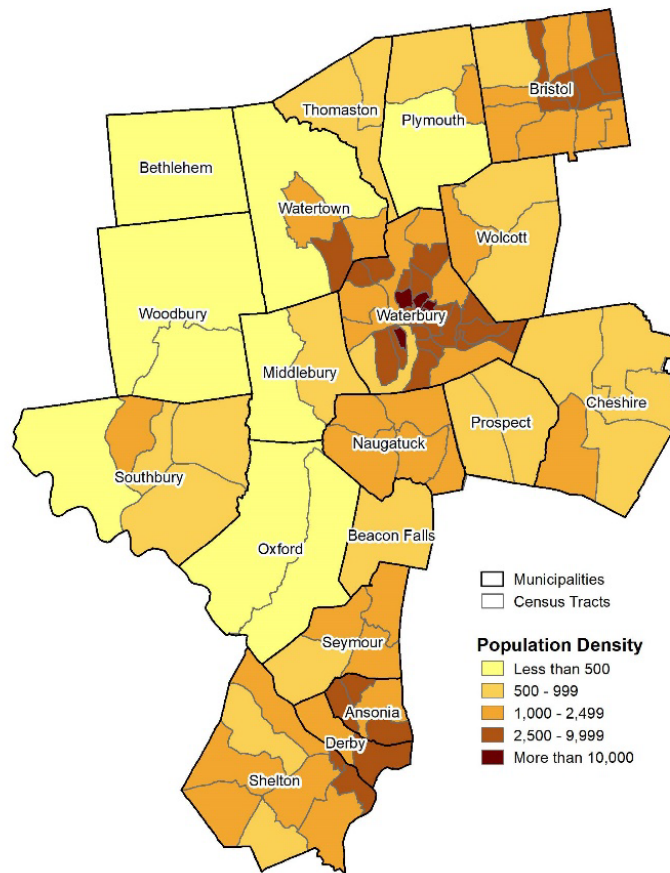
Town	MPO	2019	2023	2025	2035	2045	2050
Beacon Falls	CNVRMPO	6,222	6,426	6,530	7,038	7,535	7,782
Bethlehem	CNVRMPO	3,402	3,479	3,518	3,706	3,892	3,983
Bristol	CNVRMPO	59,947	60,187	60,313	60,897	61,472	61,751
Cheshire	CNVRMPO	28,937	29,601	29,931	31,559	33,156	33,945
Middlebury	CNVRMPO	7,798	7,966	8,050	8,460	8,863	9,063
Naugatuck	CNVRMPO	31,109	31,537	31,752	32,812	33,855	34,368
Oxford	CNVRMPO	13,255	13,864	14,171	15,680	17,164	17,896
Plymouth	CNVRMPO	11,597	11,678	11,721	11,918	12,111	12,203
Prospect	CNVRMPO	9,703	9,968	10,103	10,763	11,411	11,731
Southbury	CNVRMPO	19,571	20,071	20,321	21,557	22,768	23,366
Thomaston	CNVRMPO	7,536	7,650	7,710	7,998	8,280	8,417
Waterbury	CNVRMPO	107,569	107,969	108,176	109,151	110,120	110,582
Watertown	CNVRMPO	21,575	21,771	21,870	22,346	22,811	23,041
Wolcott	CNVRMPO	16,586	16,918	17,085	17,899	18,700	19,094
Woodbury	CNVRMPO	9,502	9,738	9,858	10,441	11,013	11,295
Ansonia	GBVMPO	18,653	18,617	18,602	18,516	18,429	18,384
Derby	GBVMPO	12,340	12,340	12,340	12,336	12,335	12,332
Seymour	GBVMPO	16,437	16,714	16,854	17,538	18,209	18,540
Shelton	GBVMPO	41,129	42,036	42,491	44,728	46,921	48,005

POPULATION DENSITY

Owing in part to its historic growth pattern and strong industrial past, the Naugatuck Valley maintains a population density higher than the Connecticut Average. Using data from the 2020 ACS, the region had an estimated 1056.5 residents per square mile (which includes non-residential land and roads), compared to 743.5 statewide. Waterbury, which is extensively developed and has the largest proportion of multi-family units, had the highest population concentration in the region with 3770.7 persons per square mile.

Towns along the Naugatuck River and in the eastern portion of the region are partially or fully sewered, allowing greater densities. In the eastern portion of the region, Prospect does not have municipal sewage, but does have several properties connected to neighboring municipalities. In the west portion, Bethlehem and Woodbury have no municipal sewage capability, and service through Oxford and Southbury is limited. Though limiting, the lack of wastewater service has not prevented development in these towns, and a combination of novel treatment facilities and shared services have allowed the growth of higher densities in these towns.

Population Density in the Naugatuck Valley Region



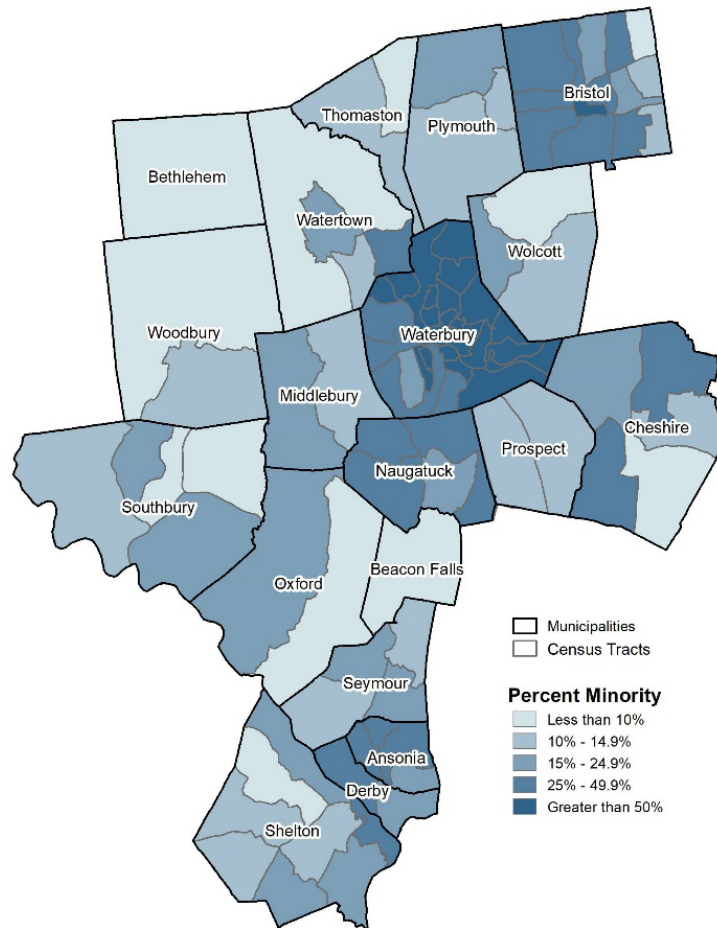
Map 2 Population Density by Block Group, 2020, US Census Bureau

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Immigration, migration, and higher birth rates among minority groups have made the region's population more diverse than ever before. As of 2020, 29.2 percent of the region reported being of one or more non-white races. The population across the region is growing more diverse, with Waterbury as a majority-minority city, having nearly 59% of its total population belonging to a minority racial or ethnic group.

Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the region with a population of 81,600, a 42% increase since the 2010 census. Hispanics now make up 18.1% of the population. The growing population of non-white residents was not restricted to the traditional urban cores, with every town across the region growing more diverse over the 10-year period. Though a trend seen throughout the state, with towns across the board diversifying, this does break from other points in history where minority populations were increasingly concentrated in urban centers.

Minority Population in the Naugatuck Valley



Map 3 Minority Population Percentages by Block Group, 2020, US Census Bureau

HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY STRUCTURE

Household arrangements have changed as the average age of marriage increases, family sizes decrease, and life expectancy increases. Less than half of the region's households are made up of married couples with 17.6% of households being single parents. Persons living alone, cohabitating couples, married couples without children, and other non-traditional households are becoming more prevalent.

Less than half of married couples have children aged 18 and under. Empty nesters are becoming less common as the younger generations reside at home longer, and many young couples have delayed having children in the last few years due to economic uncertainty.

INCOME AND POVERTY

There is a large income gap between the urban centers and the remainder of the region. 2020 estimates have the median household income in the region at \$83,841 compared to \$68,485 in urban cities. Over a

quarter of households in the urban core are low income (making less than \$25,000 per year). On the opposite end of the income spectrum, the rural municipalities in the region are high income (making \$100,000 or more per year).

The increasing inflation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic impacted household and family income throughout the region. Since 2015, median household income increased in 17 out of 19 municipalities. This reflects the nationwide trend of increasing wages. The drop in household income occurred in Watertown, while Beacon Falls stayed relatively flat.

The number of people in poverty increased by 71.7% from 2000 to 2020. In 2000, there were 31,412 people living in poverty (7.5% of the total). By 2020, it had increased to 43,807 (10% of total). Poverty increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic. Waterbury, which has a poverty rate of 21.3%, is home to over half of the region's impoverished.

Child poverty is a prevalent issue in the urban core, where 14.7% of children live below the poverty line. Ansonia, Derby, and Waterbury have child poverty rates at or over 20%. Child poverty is also strongly correlated with household structure. Children in single parent households are 4.4 times more likely to live in poverty than households with both parents present.

1.2 REGIONAL ECONOMIC TRENDS

The economy of the Naugatuck Valley, recovering slowly from the recessions of the early 21st century, was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. The major economic trends shaping the region are:

- Unemployment disproportionately affects young workers under the age of 25.
- Jobs are suburbanizing. During the last ten years, the suburban areas saw job growth while the urban core lost jobs.
- Over half of Naugatuck Valley residents commute to jobs outside the region.

LABOR FORCE

The labor force is made up of Naugatuck Valley residents over the age of 16 who are either employed or are unemployed and looking for work. As of 2021, the region's labor force was 228,920, of which 212,840 were employed and 16,080 were unemployed. From 2010 to 2013 the state and region experienced a labor force contraction which can be attributed to stagnant job growth, unemployed workers dropping out of the labor force, and a growing number of residents hitting retirement age. In 2014 the labor force grew for the first time since 2009 and has remained steady until 2020. People who had difficulty finding work during the pandemic are reentering the labor force as the job market improves.

EMPLOYMENT

As of 2021 there were 212,840 employed residents living in the region. This is 13,247 less than the pre-COVID number in 2019 when there were 226,087 employed residents. The number of employed residents decreased every year from 2008 to 2013 but has continued to rebound from 2014 to 2019. The number of working aged residents is projected to grow after the low employment levels of 2020. Attracting and retaining young workers will be necessary to replace the growing number of retirees.

UNEMPLOYMENT

From 2019 to 2020 the region saw the number of unemployed residents more than double from 9,938 to 19,610. The jump in unemployment was caused by both job losses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unemployment has decreased in 2021 to 16,080, or 7% of the labor force. The labor force contraction (unemployed people that have stopped looking for work) is responsible for some of the drop in unemployment, and a strong employment market in 2022 has continued the declining trend. Improvements over the last three years, the unemployment rate remains above state and national averages.

Labor Force, Employment and Unemployment in the Naugatuck Valley: 1997-2021

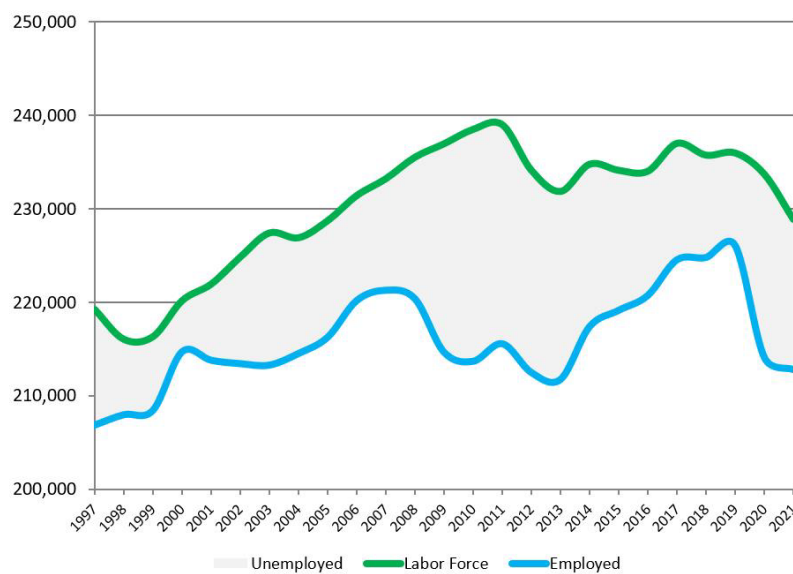


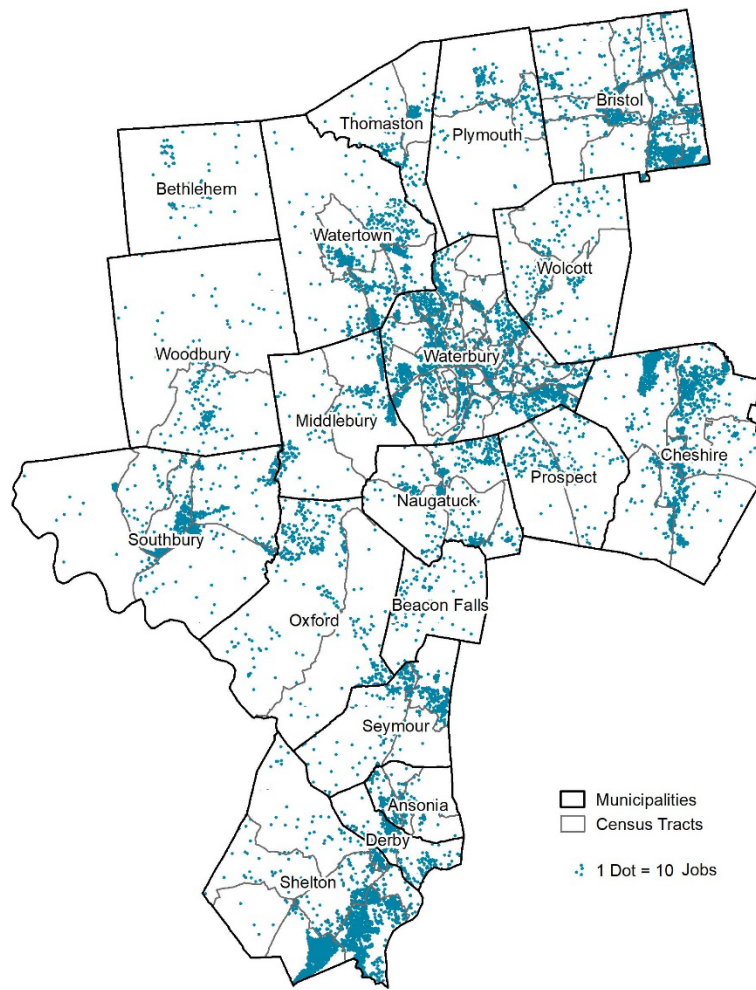
Figure 3 Labor Force vs Unemployment, CT Department of Labor, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

JOB

As of 2023, it is estimated that there are 165,642 jobs within the NVCOG region. Waterbury remains the center of employment for the region, with 39,940, followed by Shelton, Bristol, and Cheshire. Estimates provided by the CT Department of Labor suggest that employment in all towns within the region will grow between 15 and 18%, with Waterbury remaining the largest job market.

MARKET

Jobs in the Naugatuck Valley, by Block Group: 2020



Map 4 Density of Jobs within the NVCOG Region, 2020, US Census Bureau American Community Survey

As has occurred throughout Connecticut, the region has shifted from a manufacturing-oriented economy to a service-oriented one. Health care and social assistance has become the largest job sector, followed by government (which includes public school teachers). While much less prominent than in the past, manufacturing remains the third largest sector of the region's economy, with over 20,000 jobs. Across industries jobs have become increasingly spread away from the traditional urban core. While Downtown Waterbury still serves as an employment hot spot, suburban office parks and remote distribution sites have spread employment throughout the region. Additionally, following the COVID-19 Pandemic, more and more employees are allowed to work remotely, meaning an increasing number of jobs cannot be pinned to a location in the traditional way. As this trend continues, employment and housing not only come closer together but converge into one location for many.

1.3 COVID 19 IMPACT

Since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 10, 2020, the country's transportation dynamics shifted dramatically. People were urged to stay home and practice social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This left roads empty, transit ridership down, and work travel patterns dramatically altered. Three years after its initial onset, the pandemic has had significant and lasting impacts on mode choice, traffic volumes, and safety. Many industries have returned to pre-pandemic work arrangements, but others have implemented some degree of additional telework and some companies offer fully remote positions that previously would have been in an office.

COVID-19 also impacted the global supply chain. Factories closed when they experienced outbreaks and could not produce their product line. Strict international COVID restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the virus worsened this trend. Factories trying to produce goods had to wait for components that were delayed. With the "just in time" production methodology implemented for the past several decades, this created ripples across the supply chain as companies and consumers could not get products they needed. These closures caused by outbreaks applied to ports as well, which impacted the global trade network as ships had to wait days up to several weeks to unload goods they were carrying. This had profound impacts on the freight industry and has caused many to reevaluate how the country can prevent it from happening again.

In addition to the supply chain, the pandemic impacted regional population trends. Because the 2020 census occurred so early in the pandemic it is likely that there was an undercount of residents in the region, especially in the denser and more immigrant heavy city centers. Additionally, in the years since the census, movement into the region has continued as home and rental prices have increased quickly across the state. The NVCOG region offers relatively lower costs of living than the state as a whole, which appealed people who looked for more accessible housing during the height of COVID-19. The growth in population, not yet fully captured in Census or American Community Survey data, has impacted the region's roads, housing stock, and density, and will continue to effect transportation planning in the foreseeable future.

TRAVEL PATTERN IMPACTS

For the reasons noted, the pandemic caused a significant shift in regional traffic patterns. Reports of traffic volumes dropping created headlines at the beginning of the pandemic, but little reporting has been done since then. Using Streetlight, NVCOG obtained traffic data within the region for 2019, 2020, and 2021. Zones were drawn along interstates and other major routes within the state to obtain traffic data passing through them.

PEAK HOUR

A significant way travel has shifted during the pandemic is when the peak hour occurs during the day. The peak hour for a roadway is when the roadway sees the largest volume of traffic traveling across it during the day. In 2019, during a 7-day period, the peak time for most of the analyzed zones was between 3 PM and 7 PM, and many of the zones had a peak time between 10 AM and 3 PM. A small number of zones had a morning peak time. The total number of vehicles that traveled during their respective peak times was around 1,200,000 vehicles.

STREET LIGHT DATA

THE NVCOG USES STREET LIGHT DATA, A BIG DATA PLATFORM THAT UTILIZES ANONYMIZED AND AGGREGATED LOCATION DATA FROM CELL PHONES TO ESTIMATE VOLUMES, ROUTES, AND TRIP CHARACTERISTICS. THIS PLATFORM PROVIDES GREATER VISIBILITY INTO TRAVEL IN THE REGION WITH LOWER MARGINS OF ERROR THAN TRADITIONAL DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In 2020, most of analyzed zones had a peak time between 10 AM and 3 PM, and for many the peak time was 3 PM and 7 PM. There are no zones that had a morning peak time. The total number of vehicles that traveled during the respective peak time was around 1,100,000 vehicles.

In 2021, most of the peak hours were between 10 AM and 3 PM, much like 2020. However, the amount of midday peak hours has decreased by around 6 percent while the 3 PM and 7 PM peak hours grew 8%. One zone had a

morning peak time instead of none in 2020. The total number of vehicles that traveled during the respective peak time was around 1,140,000 vehicles.

2019 Zone Peak Times

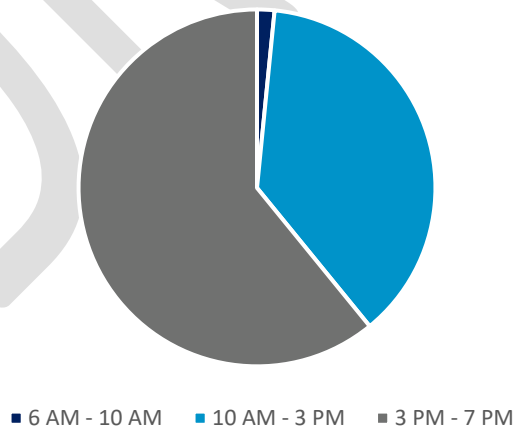


Figure 4 2019 Peak travel times in the NVCOG region, Street Light Data

2020 Zone Peak Times

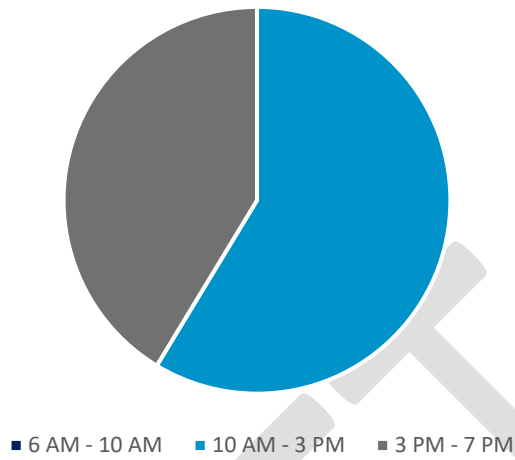


Figure 5 2020 peak travel times within the NVCOG region, Street Light Data

2021 Zone Peak Times

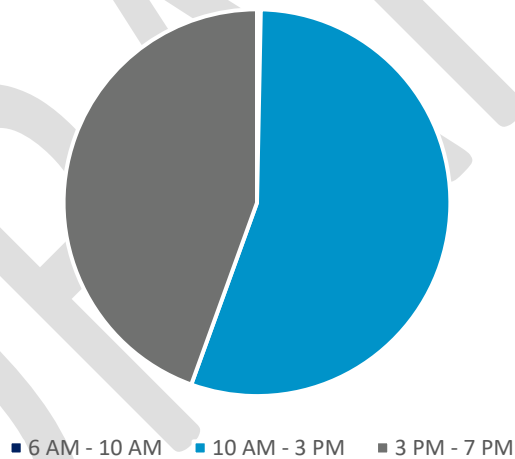


Figure 6 2021 peak travel times within the NVCOG region, Street Light Data

From the data gathered, traffic peak hours shifted from the evening and the morning to the middle of the day. This shift logically follows the decrease in traditional on-site employment during standard work hours and is likely to remain going forward as remote work and telework become standard. The change in peak hour traffic will undoubtedly impact the future needs of the region. People's travel destinations are changing, and travel may be spread throughout the day, reducing the need to accommodate spikes during the peak hours.

PROJECTING FUTURE TRAFFIC NEEDS

Projecting future travel patterns is difficult and becomes even more challenging with a variable such as COVID. As of the preparation of this plan, the pandemic is still causing travel disruptions. But patterns are starting to emerge. Public transit ridership levels are slowly returning to pre-pandemic levels, aided in part by the suspension of fares on buses throughout the state. Companies that intend to return to offices have mostly done so, which is having an impact on urban commercial centers, most notably on Downtown Hartford. This change in work location will impact commuting, likely continuing the shifted peak hour, less predictable origin-destination pairings, and less use of commuter transit services. Demographic changes, yet to be quantified through the US Census Bureau, may also have lasting impacts on travel as the region's core cities increasingly repopulate, increasing the ability for walking/rolling and micro mobility solutions for short trips.

For planning purposes, the region has considered travel changes throughout the period of the pandemic, as well as trends prior to its onset, and programmed projects that will improve the system in the short term while attempting to meet the long-term demands. This includes forecasting low VMT growth into the future and focusing on safety because technology and behavior changes may result in increasing speeds that put drivers and other users at risk.

Farmington Canal Heritage
Trail in Cheshire



1.4 TOURISM TRAVEL

The Naugatuck Valley Planning Region offers a variety of reasons for tourists to visit, including access to nature and outdoor recreation, cultural institutions, and a thriving agritourism business. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) operates and maintains eleven state parks, forests, and scenic reserves in the region. These areas offer a wide range of activities throughout the year, such as hiking, mountain biking, swimming, cross country skiing, camping, and hunting. As further detailed in chapter 6.3, the region also has several multi-use trails and greenways, which are important tourist attractions. One of them is the Naugatuck River Greenway, a planned 44-mile trail, running along the Naugatuck River from Torrington to Derby. Currently, more than eight miles are open to the public with more expected to be opened in the next few years. Other trails include the Larkin State Park Trail, Middlebury Greenway, and the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail, which passes through Cheshire as it connects New Haven to Northampton, MA. Data from the University of Connecticut's Trail Census shows more than five hundred thousand visitors to the region's trails each year. This number is expected to grow as new trails are opened and existing trails are connected.

Museums throughout the region offer residents and visitors the opportunity to view fine art exhibits, learn about the industrial past of the Naugatuck Valley, and connect with the cultural history of the region's towns. The region has many registered historic buildings and districts. These assets improve the quality of life for the residents of the NVCOG region and attract thousands of visitors each year primarily from the adjacent tri-state New York/New Jersey/Connecticut area.

Cultural institutions beyond those focused on history are also abundant. Agritourism is a growing but vital piece of the economy of the region, with a variety of pick-your-own farms, seasonal attractions, and a growing craft beer, local wine, and spirits industry. Especially in autumn, but throughout the year, the region's agricultural roots are on display through the many fairs, festivals, and farmer's markets. Additionally, the region is home to two active theme parks, including Quassy, located along Lake Quassapaug in Middlebury, and Lake Compounce, the oldest continuously operated theme park in the country.

IMPACTS TO THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Tourism fluctuates seasonally, and so do the effects on the region's transportation network. During the summer, many tourists use Interstate-84 as they pass through the region on their way to prominent weekend destinations in New England like Cape Cod and the Maine Coast. The region's two amusement parks, Lake Compounce and Quassy Amusement Park, also bring an influx of roadway traffic to I-84, Route 6, and Route 229. In the fall, leaf viewing is a common activity, and national and state highways in the region experience increased congestion, most notably Route 6, Route 8, and I-84



DID YOU KNOW?

THE NVCOG MAINTAINS A SERIES OF MAPS HIGHLIGHTING THE REGION'S CULTURAL AND HISTORIC ASSETS. CHECK IT OUT HERE:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/fdee600a5028455abffb8c5e5d86329c>

Interstate 84 and Route 8 experience the most significant impacts of tourist travel in the region, largely because of people traveling from New York City, through the region, and into New England. Beyond the major expressways, visitors regularly interact with the region's network of state numbered routes, which provide direct access to city centers and many of these attractions. Though limited, the impact of this traffic on some of the region's roads is notable, especially during key events. These delays are

a piece of the region's ongoing efforts to mitigate congestion, as well as to improve safety for all users of the roadway network.

Bicycles and micro-mobility devices are part of the solution to the region's congestion and an attraction of their own. In addition to the region's paved multi-use trails, off-road biking and, increasingly, biking through city centers, is an attractive pastime that has continued to grow in popularity since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the increasing popularity of outdoor activities, the region aims to take advantage of the momentum and further provide safe and efficient means for cyclists to travel.

The region's public transit assets also provide an opportunity for continued expansion of tourism to the region. Currently, commuters and residents use the Waterbury Line of the Metro-North Railroad, but it does little to attract visitors to the region. However, there is an opportunity to greatly expand rail access to visitors from New York and Boston. In addition, the CT Fastrak BRT service continues beyond the dedicated busway into Bristol, providing another means for tourists to travel into the region from Hartford and CTRail's Hartford Line.

IMPROVING TRANSPORTATION ACCESS FOR NVCOG RESIDENTS

Despite a growing wealth of opportunities, the NVCOG region's tourist attractions are often overshadowed by neighboring, better-known destinations with greater institutional support or easier access to transportation. Improving public transit service and making non-motorized transportation more viable will increase access to local tourist attractions and mitigate the congestion that seasonal tourism causes.

Currently, most visitors drive to the region's tourist attractions in a car. Aside from venues in or near downtown Waterbury or downtown Bristol, local bus service is not generally a viable option. Moreover, most people who access the region's wealth of outdoor activities do so by motor vehicle. The system of multi-use trails encourages cycling and walking/rolling, but an NVCOG survey on usage of the open sections of the NRG found that 71% of visitors traveled to the trail by car, either alone or as a passenger.

Providing easier transportation access to local destinations can foster more sustainable tourism habits and keep more tourism dollars within the regional economy. Potential improvements include enhancing access by public transit and non-motorized modes, improved wayfinding, and completion of long-distance trails:

- **Enhancing Transit Access:** Many current and potential tourism opportunities in the region are not accessible by mass transit or difficult to get to by walking/rolling or riding a bike. Improving access to transit options, service quality, and station amenities will help make public transportation a more viable and attractive option for tourist travel. Transit routes should serve major tourist destinations where possible and have robust options for transfers at major transit hubs. Additionally, improved access to and quality of active transportation options will both further enhance mobility and boost the attractiveness of tourist destinations.
- **Wayfinding:** With a few exceptions, the major transit hubs in the region (e.g., Waterbury Branch Line stations, the Waterbury bus pulse, and the Bristol bus hub) are more than a quarter-mile walk/roll from population centers and tourism destinations. Highlighting available tourism destinations within walking/rolling distance of major transit hubs through directional signage, 45-degree wayside maps, and public event posting boards is an easy and inexpensive way to encourage existing riders to visit nearby destinations.
- **Long Distance Trails:** The NVCOG is helping its member communities develop long-distance trails, including the Naugatuck River Greenway, which spans the region. NVCOG analysis has shown that long-distance trails have positive economic benefits, including increased tourism spending.¹ NVCOG should continue to support the development of trails regionally, particularly trails that connect current and potential tourist destinations and services with population centers. Additionally, future phases of NVCOG trail development should incorporate additional services at trailheads, including adequate bicycle parking and repair stations, zoning and development that expands services and destinations near the trails, and connections that help walkers/rollers and cyclists access off-trail amenities.



WHY DID WE SAY THAT?

THROUGHOUT THIS DOCUMENT, WE USE WALK/ROLL INSTEAD OF JUST WALK. THIS PHRASE BETTER REPRESENTS THE DIVERSITY OF WAYS PEDESTRIANS CAN MOVE, WHETHER IT BE WALKING ALONE, WALKING WITH A MOBILITY AID, OR USING A WHEELCHAIR FOR ASSISTANCE. ALL RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO THE NVCOG REGION DESERVE HIGH QUALITY SIDEWALKS AND TRAILS THAT ARE ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL.

¹ Naugatuck River Greenway Economic Benefits Study



CT Route 132 crosses
Wood Creek,
Bethlehem