3.1 OUR POPULATION

3.1.1 REGIONAL GROWTH

In the twenty-five years following the end of World War II, the Syracuse area, and the nation, changed dramatically. The creation of the interstate highway system, the rapid construction of single-family homes, increases in personal income, and the steep rise in birth rates all combined to fuse cities to larger regions like never before. Locally, this meant building I-81 and I-690 in Downtown Syracuse, locating I-690 along the west shore of Onondaga Lake, and an unprecedented wave of suburban home construction.

The City of Syracuse’s population peaked in 1950, with over 220,000 residents. Over the next 60 years, the city’s population fell steadily, dropping by about a third to 145,700 people in 2010. Meanwhile, Onondaga County as a whole saw net growth, adding 131,000 total residents between 1950 and 1970 alone, then remaining fairly stable through the next few decades. Since virtually all of the County’s population growth was in the towns rather than the city, it meant that every town in the county grew and total population in the towns more than doubled in 20 years, from 120,000 in 1950 to 274,700 in 1970 (Syracuse-Onondaga Planning Agency, 2007).

Between 1970 and 2000, the population in Onondaga County’s towns continued to grow, but at a much slower pace, adding another 35,000 residents. As Figure 3.1 shows, the net result over the past 40 years has been population re-distribution, not population growth. While population has decentralized, the City of Syracuse remains the region’s economic core, with 37 percent of the region’s total employment located in the city (and 15 percent of the region’s total employment in the Downtown and University Hill areas). This has

Between 1950 and 1970, Onondaga County’s total suburban population more than doubled, from 120,000 to 274,700.
translated into longer commutes, more vehicle miles traveled, and the need to spread the same amount of transportation funding over a much larger geographic area.

Between 2010 and 2020, this pattern of population spread without population growth continued. According to the most recent data from the American Community Survey (ACS), the SMTC MPA’s current population is 501,141, virtually unchanged from 2010. At the same time, the region has added thousands of new housing units both in the City of Syracuse and in suburban towns.

The latest ACS data (collected between 2014 and 2018) also shows that the region’s key demographic indicators are basically unchanged from their 2010 levels. Income and poverty levels, racial composition, and household size, for example, are all within two percentage points of their 2010 levels.

### 3.1.2 Population density

As population has expanded away from the urban core of the region, new development has also generally been more spread-out than earlier development patterns. The places that saw the most growth

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**FIGURE 3.1: POPULATION OF CITY OF SYRACUSE AND ONONDAGA COUNTY, WITH SQUARE MILEAGE OF URBAN AREA, 1950 TO 2010**

*Source: U.S. Census*
between 2000 and 2010 tended to be parts of the region with very low population densities (eastern Cicero, western Camillus, southern Lysander; the eastern part of the Town of Onondaga).

While the more rural parts of the region (for example, the Towns of Elbridge, Fabius, and Schroeppel) lost population, some of these towns saw an overall increase in households. The Census defines a household as “all the persons who occupy a housing unit as their usual place of residence.” When the total number of households increases without population increasing, it means that households are getting smaller on average. The implication is that the region is creating more homes in rural areas to house fewer people.

As people spread farther from one another, they also tend to get farther away from places that they may visit on a regular basis like schools, grocery stores, and pharmacies. With this comes greater dependence on the use of motor vehicles to reach these destinations. Using mass transit becomes particularly difficult in low-density areas. The transit numbers bear this out. Bus ridership is highest in the City of Syracuse. Only about one percent of commuters based in the suburbs use transit, versus eight percent in the City of Syracuse.

**What this means for the LRTP.** Transportation improvements often perpetuate low-density, sprawling development. This tendency is described in the Land Use – Transportation Cycle, which summarizes the relationship between accessibility and development.

Breaking this cycle can be difficult. It can mean diverting resources from areas that are growing to areas that have been declining. In our

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### Population density and transit

Planners at the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA) and Centro have described the relationship between population density and efficient transit service as follows: Settlement patterns must be compact to permit cost-effective and convenient transit service. Scattered development typically cannot be serviced by transit at a reasonable cost. Walking distance to bus stops is also a major component of serviceability. Almost all City homes and jobs were located within ¼ mile of a bus route in 2007. In the surrounding towns and villages, only 34 percent of homes and 60 percent of jobs occurred within ¼ mile of a bus stop. Today’s suburban and rural places do not have the population density required to support traditional transit service. (Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency, 2012)
Placing the focus of transportation investment on the region’s urbanized core will provide environmental and fiscal benefits as well as improvements in how people get around.

Transportation-Land Use Cycle

A relatively small amount of development in a rural area can trigger requests for roadway improvements: for example, a narrow country road might be paved and widened to accommodate a few new houses. As this road becomes more accessible, it can attract more development. Over time, these incremental steps can lead to a much wider road and much more development. Without population and tax base growth at the regional level, this pattern is undesirable and fiscally problematic.

region, it may mean doing more to improve streets and transit in the city and in the inner-ring suburbs, rather than in areas that are seeing more overall housing development. The benefits, however, are much greater than the costs in the long term. By shifting the focus of transportation investment from improving capacity and accessibility at the region’s periphery toward the region’s urbanized core, the region can make progress toward several of the goals identified in local plans, including farmland preservation, minimizing impacts to sensitive environmental areas, conserving energy, improving fiscal responsibility, reducing vehicle miles traveled, and increasing the availability of multiple transportation modes.

3.1.3 GROWTH AREAS

Downtown. Downtown Syracuse has seen rapid growth in recent years. More than $250 million has been invested in creating new residential units in Downtown in the past eight years – primarily by redeveloping vacant retail or warehouse space – and more units are available to owners and renters every year. Five-year ACS data for the period from 2012 to 2016 shows Downtown’s population at 2,755, but the Downtown Committee, which tracks housing availability in Downtown Syracuse, estimated the neighborhood’s population at just over 4,000 in its most recent annual report (Downtown Committee, 2019).

Franklin Square/Inner Harbor. Like Downtown, Syracuse’s Franklin Square/Inner Harbor area has seen both redevelopment and new construction in recent years. Between 2014 and 2020, 300 new
apartments came on the market in this area, many in newly-constructed buildings.

**University Hill.** Enrollment numbers at Syracuse University (SU), SUNY Upstate Medical University and the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) have all increased over the past 20 years, with SU’s total enrollment growing by more than 4,000 students since 2001. The resulting demand for housing has led to a surge in new construction and redevelopment in and around the University Hill area.

**Suburban towns.** Even as Onondaga County’s total population has remained flat and new housing has been added in the City, the region’s population continues to spread into towns. Data from the Census Building Permit Survey shows relatively intense residential construction in the towns of Clay, Lysander, Manlius, and Camillus between 2015 and 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 - 2019). Apartment complexes with more than 400 new units have been built in both Clay and Van Buren in recent years, and a smaller (96-unit) apartment complex opened in Camillus in 2016. Developers have also shown interest in developing apartments on sites in Liverpool, Manlius, and Fayetteville. Single-family homes also continue to be built in rural areas such as Pompey, Skaneateles, and Otisco.

### 3.1.4 Generations and Transportation Choices

**Seniors and Baby Boomers.** Between 1980 and 2010, the median age in Onondaga County rose from 30 to 39 years old. In our region, 16 percent of the population (73,000 residents) is currently age 65 and above (2018 5-year ACS). Over the next 20 years, another 129,000 residents will be reaching retirement age and making decisions about where to spend their retirement years.

In 2010 the AARP noted that “while surveys have shown that most people prefer to remain in their homes and their communities as they age, they also like to remain mobile and independent and to be near grocery stores, libraries and doctor’s offices.” By 2018, AARP found “that although the desire to stay in their community and residence remains high among adults age 50 and older, intensity has dropped since 2010.” AARP goes on to state that “transportation is a big issue in a 2010 AARP survey, 63% of Onondaga County voters age 50 and over said they would be more likely to stay in New York if improvements were made to public transportation and alternative transportation services for older or ill residents.
for older Americans, as their ability to drive can change over time and become a safety issue.” A 2002 study in the American Journal of Public Health reported that every year 600,000 people age 70 and over stop driving (Foley, Heimovitz, Guralnik, & Brock, 2002). In our region, we are fortunate to have many transportation providers to assist senior citizens in getting to needed services. But in many cases, older residents effectively lose their mobility for recreation and social visits. The relatively-recent entry of transportation network companies (TNCs, also known as ride share) into the Upstate New York market may expand options for seniors; however, a 2018 AARP survey found that usage of these services by adults age 50 and older is relatively low, with less than one-third of the group having ever utilized a ride-share service (even though 94 percent of the group said they are aware of such services).

What seniors say about transportation

As part of its Shaping an Age-Friendly CNY study, Forging our Community’s United Strength (F.O.C.U.S.) Greater Syracuse conducted a study of nearly 2,000 Central New York residents. Nearly half of respondents said that they were planning on moving from their current home and, of these, 43 percent said they were planning on moving out of state. Fifty-four percent of respondents identified transportation as “essential” or “very important” to their decision on where to move as they get older. Walkability was identified as a key factor by even more people.

F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse’s survey also asked respondents to include “any other information” they wanted to in the survey. Of the 300 responses to this question, 16 percent were related to transportation, transit, or walkability. The study summarizes these comments as follows:

“Comments on public services focused mainly on snow removal or community improvements. Responses included: ‘Community ... that is walkable with transportation access,’ ‘in the suburbs ... there is no reliable, affordable, accessible transportation,’ ‘very limited bus transportation in our area,’ ‘more bicycle lanes,’ ‘need sidewalks repaired,’ and ‘sidewalks are seldom kept snow and ice free which makes it dangerous for aging people.’”

Similarly, in an AARP (2014) report entitled State of the 50+ in Onondaga County, New York, about a quarter of workers over the age of 50 surveyed said that they are at least somewhat likely to leave New York after retiring. Sixty-three percent of Onondaga County voters surveyed said that they would be more likely to stay in New York if improvements were made to public transportation and alternative transportation services for older or ill residents. Sixty-one percent said that sidewalk conditions in their community were a problem. Problematic sidewalk conditions included walkways that were too narrow, poorly lit, in need of repair or non-existent.
National sources have noted that for some Baby Boomers, a much more appealing alternative has been to migrate to cities that offer a variety of transportation options (Bahrampour, 2013; Nasser, 2012). City neighborhoods with a mix of homes and businesses, supported by low-cost transit options, provide much greater mobility to seniors whose physical or cognitive limitations prevent them from driving.

**Millennials.** A wealth of research indicates that the number of Millennials (the generation born between 1980 and 2005) living in cities is growing, particularly among those with college degrees.¹ In the City of Syracuse, total population fell by nearly three percent between 2000 and 2017 but the number of residents in the 25 to 34-year-old group increased by nearly eight percent and the number of residents in this age group with college degrees grew by 33 percent.²

Between 1983 and 2014, the percentage of 20- to 24-year-olds with driver’s licenses fell from 92 percent to 76 percent (Transportation Research Institute, 2016). The average number of miles driven by 16 to 34 year-olds fell by 23 percent between 2001 and 2009 (U.S. PIRG & Frontier Group, 2014). In a recent survey, Millennials were the only age group that said that giving up their mobile phone would be worse than giving up their car (Zipcar, 2014).

**What this means for the LRTP.** Suburban expansion continues to be the dominant demographic pattern, but demand is growing for neighborhoods that are walkable, streets that are bikeable, and regions that are connected by modern mass transit systems. The City of Syracuse is seeing renewed interest in downtown living, which is reflective of the larger national trends in the housing choices of many Baby Boomers and Millennials. Investments in our transportation

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¹A robust literature has sprung up to document this generation’s interest in urban living. For example, see the April 2014 *Time* article “The New American Dream is Living in a City, Not Owning a House in the Suburbs”. See also Millennials in Motion, a study prepared by the US PIRG Education Fund, Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next, prepared by the Pew Research Center, and The Young and the Restless and the Nation’s Cities by Joe Cortright, prepared for City Observatory.


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**Millennials are driving less and gravitating toward urban centers.**

**Millenials and location choice**

In a survey of Millennials living in major urban areas conducted in 2013, top reasons identified for the respondents’ choice of location were:

- Ease of mobility
- Proximity to work
- Culture
- Public transit options
- Living near friends and family
- Pedestrian friendliness.

(American Public Transportation Association, 2013)
system can complement these trends by incorporating Complete Street principles, expanding off-road trails, and supporting development in or near already developed population centers, rather than in rural areas.

Orienting future development around transit service is a key element in making our region more sustainable. In the long-term, enhanced transit options, such as bus rapid transit (BRT), can be combined with a plan for regional transit oriented development (TOD) to make transit an option that more people will choose to use. Chapter 4 discusses BRT and TOD in more detail. Ride-share services may become more widely accepted by older adults over time, and these can complement existing and future public transit options.

### 3.1.5 Income and Poverty

The data on incomes and poverty levels in our region show a stark contrast between the City of Syracuse and the suburban towns. Onondaga County’s median household income is $20,000 higher than the City of Syracuse’s. While most of the suburban communities have poverty rates at or below the statewide average of 15.1 percent, the poverty rate city-wide is 32.6 percent, and the poverty rate for children in the city is 47 percent. The City of Syracuse also has the greatest concentration of vacant housing and the lowest median home values in the region. While Downtown Syracuse has seen an infusion of redevelopment capital in recent years, concentrated poverty persists in other city neighborhoods.

A SOCPA report describes the effects of concentrated urban poverty as resulting in neighborhoods “where basic needs such as jobs, education and health care become less plentiful and where residents have diminishing opportunities to participate in the regional economy...”
(i.e., urban poverty). These trends also result in an imbalanced racial profile, with communities characterized by a concentration of poverty also home to a disproportionate share of the County’s minority populations.” (Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency, 2012)

From the perspective of transportation, the key question related to income disparities is: does the system work equally well in providing access for all users, regardless of their income level? This question may be explored in terms of availability of transportation facilities or transit service, average commute times from different areas of the region, or the ability to reach places such medical facilities or educational opportunities from various locations or by different modes of travel.

Twenty-six percent of households in the City of Syracuse do not own a vehicle, compared to 5.6 percent of households in the towns. The proportion of residents using mass transit to get to work is higher in the city (8 percent) than in the suburbs (0.9 percent). Among workers living below the poverty line in the city, 31 percent use transit to get to work.

Commute times for transit riders are higher, on average, than commute times for drivers or carpool users. The average commute time for all City of Syracuse residents is around 17 minutes but for those who ride a bus it is more than 30 minutes.

**What this means for the LRTP.** Transportation can play a role in the ability of many of our region’s poorest residents to take advantage of employment or educational opportunities. Transportation connects workers to jobs and connects adult students to education centers, where they can get the skills to pursue new career opportunities. For those without access to a vehicle, the Centro bus system is the primary means of transportation in our region. The SMTC’s Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan includes an inventory of transportation services available to low-income individuals (as well as people with disabilities and the elderly community) and includes recommendations for improving access, such as extending existing service routes to targeted employment centers, feeder bus routes, and grouping other agency trips to reduce duplication of service.

Seventeen percent of transit riders have commutes of an hour or more, compared to fewer than two percent of commuters who drive.
Areas of the region with concentrations of low-income and minority residents are identified in the SMTC’s Environmental Justice Analysis as “priority target areas.” (See Section 1.1.5 for a description of Title VI and Environmental Justice requirements for MPOs, and Figure 4.5: Environmental Justice Priority Target Areas.) Part of the SMTC’s obligation to comply with federal civil rights policy is ensuring equitable access to transportation facilities in these priority target areas. Given the importance of transit to low-income populations, it is critical that transit facilities in priority target areas be equivalent to those in the rest of the region.

Expanding and upgrading transit service in our region will benefit all residents, but particularly those who cannot afford the cost of owning and maintaining a car. There are also opportunities to connect low-income residents to jobs through means other than regular fixed-route bus service; this topic was explored in the SMTC’s recent Work Link study, which is discussed in greater detail in Section 4.4.3.

### 3.2 OUR ECONOMY

#### 3.2.1 REGIONAL ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

**Total Economic Output.** Total economic output for the Syracuse Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) was on the order of $33 billion in 2017, an increase of 1.5 percent over 2007 (after adjusting for inflation). This compares well with the Rochester and Binghamton MSAs, both

In general, this LRTP provides data at either the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA) level, which includes all of Onondaga County and four towns in adjacent counties, or for Onondaga County alone. In the case of the overview of economic activity in Section 3.2, information is provided for the Syracuse Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes all of Onondaga, Oswego, and Madison counties. The MSA’s total geographic area is more than twice that of the MPA, but because Oswego and Madison counties are relatively rural, the MSA’s total population is only a third greater than that of the MPA.

It should also be noted that different agencies take different approaches to come up with the total number of jobs and total number of employees in an area. Employment numbers used elsewhere in this plan are from the U.S. Census (decennial Census or American Community Survey). These numbers are generated using surveys of individuals and payroll data. Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) are based on a variety of sources and may show a slightly different picture of the region’s economy.
of which saw slight declines in overall real (inflation-adjusted) gross domestic product (GDP) between 2007 and 2017. But our region lagged behind the Buffalo and Albany MSAs, both of which saw real GDP growth at or near ten percent in this period.

Like many of the MSAs in Upstate New York, the Syracuse region tends to lag behind the national economy both in earnings and in long-term growth. Local GDP has been rising but regional growth rates are well below national levels. For the past ten years, per capita GDP in our region has been between $6,000 and $10,000 below national levels.

As shown in Figure 3.2, government expenditures make up 16 percent of total GDP in the Syracuse MSA - more than any of the other industrial sectors. In terms of GDP, “government” refers to public spending, including spending on defense, education, and public services. Finance, insurance and real estate services make up a large proportion of the local GDP, but a much smaller percentage than in the rest of the nation. The Syracuse region’s specialization in providing education and healthcare services (often referred to as the “Eds and Meds” sector) is reflected in this sector’s 12 percent share of total regional GDP, compared to nine percent in the rest of the nation. Manufacturing continues to play a major role in our regional economy, as does the professional services sector. The region also has some unique specialties – such as fabricated metal products manufacturing and paper production – that are not captured in the industrial sector data.

**FIGURE 3.2: MAJOR INDUSTRIAL SECTORS AS A PROPORTION OF TOTAL GDP, SYRACUSE MSA AND USA, 2017**

*Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis; the industrial sectors not shown each make up less than five percent of the GDP in both the Syracuse MSA and the U.S.*
County Employment Trends. Data for Onondaga County is provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW). As Figure 3.3 shows, over the 24-year period from 1993 to 2017, total employment in Onondaga County saw peaks and valleys, but the net result was no significant change: employment remained between 240,000 and 245,000 jobs.

The past 20 years have seen the county’s economy continue to transition away from goods-producing jobs and toward service-providing jobs. As shown in Table 3.1, service-providing jobs make up the bulk of the employment in Onondaga County, and the number of jobs in this sector is on the rise. Onondaga County lost more than 15,000 jobs in goods-producing sectors (manufacturing and construction), while gaining nearly 13,000 jobs in the service-providing sector and gaining 2,700 jobs in the government sector between 1993 and 2017. Annual average wages are highest in the goods-producing and government sectors; together these sectors make up only 28 percent of the job market.

Figure 3.4 provides more detail on the rise in service-providing employment. The only two segments of the services sector to see a net increase in employment over the past 24 years were “Leisure and Hospitality” and “Education and Health Services”, both of which

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**FIGURE 3.3: ONONDAGA COUNTY EMPLOYMENT, 1993 - 2017**

have continued to see growth in recent years. Trade, Transportation and Utilities is a “super sector” in the BLS data that includes retail, wholesale, transportation, and warehousing jobs, as well as utilities. In our region, this super sector continued to lose employment in the post-recession period between 2013 and 2017, although National Grid, UPS, and Destiny USA remain major employers in this category.

### 3.2.2 Existing employment centers

**City of Syracuse.** The City of Syracuse is the region’s economic core, with over 90,000 jobs in the city. The Downtown and University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>1993 Number of jobs</th>
<th>1993 Percent of total jobs</th>
<th>1993 Annual average wage</th>
<th>2013 Number of jobs</th>
<th>2013 Percent of total jobs</th>
<th>2013 Annual average wage</th>
<th>2017 Number of jobs</th>
<th>2017 Percent of total jobs</th>
<th>2017 Annual average wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>36,752</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>$32,943</td>
<td>39,692</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>$53,850</td>
<td>39,490</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>$63,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goods-producing</td>
<td>45,327</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>$35,105</td>
<td>29,024</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>$59,131</td>
<td>29,816</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>$64,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-providing</td>
<td>161,283</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>$22,994</td>
<td>171,960</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>$42,118</td>
<td>174,316</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>$46,298</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**FIGURE 3.4: CHANGE IN SERVICE-PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT, 1993 - 2013 - 2017, ONONDAGA COUNTY**


The City of Syracuse is the region’s economic center, with over 90,000 jobs located in the city limits: more than in the Towns of DeWitt, Salina, Cicero and Clay combined.
FIGURE 3.5: EXISTING AND PROPOSED EMPLOYMENT CENTERS AND RETAIL CORRIDORS

Legend
- Hancock International Airport
- Regional Transportation Center
- CSX DeWitt Rail Yard/Inland Port
- Existing Employment Centers
  A Tassy Plastics
  B Hillrom
  C Radisson Corporate Park
  D Woodard Industrial Park
  E Electronics Park
  F Downtown Syracuse / University Hill
  G Destiny USA
  H Route 481 Corridor
  I Hancock Air Park
  J Route 298 Corridor
  K NYS Thruway / Route 690 Area
- Existing Retail Corridors
  1 W. Genesee St./ Township 5
  2 Route 31 (including Great Northern Mall)
  3 Route 11
  4 Erie Blvd. East (including ShoppingTown Mall)
  5 Fayetteville Towne Center
- Proposed Future Employment Centers
  a White Pine Commerce Park
  b Syracuse Inner Harbor
  c Distribution Facility - Clay
  d Distribution Facility - DeWitt

Data Sources: NYSDOT, 2013; Onondaga County, 2013.
Hill areas have the highest employment density in the region although these areas of concentrated employment make up a relatively small proportion of the total jobs in the city; part of the attraction of doing business in a city is that there are plenty of places to do business. Destiny USA is the region’s largest single retail center and second largest employment center, but other retail centers in the city include Armory Square as well as neighborhood retail centers such as James Street and Westcott Street. While large-scale manufacturing has all but disappeared from the city, many small manufacturers continue to do business on the Erie Boulevard corridor and on the city’s north side. Erie Boulevard is also a major retail corridor. And while the “Eds and Meds” sector is dominated by University Hill, St. Joseph’s Hospital (just north of Downtown) and Loretto (southern end of the city) are the region’s fourth and ninth largest employers, respectively.

**Downtown Syracuse.** Approximately 20,000 people work in Downtown Syracuse, making it the single greatest concentration of economic activity in the region. As the seat of City and County government, as well as the location for local offices of state and federal agencies, government jobs make up much of Downtown’s employment. In the private sector, only two downtown firms rank among the top 25 employers in the region: AXA Equitable Life Insurance, with just under 1,000 employees, and National Grid, with around 2,000. Financial, legal, engineering, marketing, real estate, and insurance firms with fewer than 1,000 employees make up the remainder of Downtown’s employers. The departure of Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield’s 825 employees from Downtown in 2008 dealt a temporary blow to the district’s vitality, but it has been more than made up for by the in-migration of firms like OBG (now part of Ramboll), WCNY, and Haylor, Freyer & Coon, which relocated to Downtown from suburban locations. Additionally, tech firms like TCG Player, SpinCar, Ephesus Sports Lighting, and the Digital Hyve have selected downtown offices over suburban business parks.

The popularity of newly redeveloped market-rate condominiums and apartments has attracted the attention of retailers, restaurateurs, and firms interested in capturing the talent and the purchasing power of young people. Infrastructure improvements, including the

On the whole, the past 10 years have seen a wave of revitalization in Downtown that runs counter to the long-term trend of population decline in the city.
extension of the Onondaga Creekwalk to Armory Square and beyond, have supported this resurgence of economic activity. As the region’s gathering place, the center of government activity, and its cultural core, investments in transportation improvements in Downtown yield benefits to thousands of workers and residents.

**University Hill.** Three of the region’s ten largest employers are located on University Hill, and during the school year it is either home to or a destination for Syracuse University’s (SU) more than 20,000 enrolled students and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry’s (SUNY ESF) 2,200 students. SU’s Carrier Dome is a venue for football and basketball games that regularly draw 20,000 to 35,000 spectators. April 2020 saw the opening of SU’s National Veterans Resource Center, a 115,000 square foot facility dedicated to the educational needs of the region’s veterans.

Traffic congestion is a recurring issue in the University Hill neighborhood, with 18,000 workers and thousands of students converging on a square mile packed with academic buildings, medical facilities, and a variety of related destinations. Rather than build sprawling satellite locations elsewhere in the city or region, however, the district’s largest employers continue to build and reconstruct facilities in and around University Hill. Syracuse University’s Campus Framework plan epitomizes this approach, by proposing that first- and second-year undergraduate housing be relocated from South Campus to Main Campus.

State-funded facility improvements established this trend, with more than $211 million invested in SUNY Upstate alone and millions more in improvements and additions to Hutchings Psychiatric Center and SUNY ESF (Downtown Committee). State and federal support also helped build the $41 million Syracuse Center of Excellence, located on what has become the northern edge of the University area: Water Street, east of Almond Street (Russell, 2011). The Central New York Biotech Accelerator, opened in 2013, sits just east of the Center of Excellence on Fayette Street.
Private investment, including more than $140 million in new buildings on the SU campus, $50 million in new facilities at Crouse Hospital, and $15 million in hotel renovations, have furthered a construction boom on University Hill. The combined value of public and private spending is on the order of three-quarters of a billion dollars, signaling without doubt that the Hill’s largest institutions are committed to enhancing - not dispersing - their presence on the Hill.

**Suburbs.** While jobs, like neighborhoods, have spread out from Syracuse over the past 60 years, our region has maintained a relatively high level of overall employment density. A 2013 Brookings Institution study identified the Syracuse MSA as being among the nation’s most centralized small employment centers. According to this study, only 22 percent of the jobs in the Syracuse MSA are more than 10 miles from downtown, compared to 24.5 percent in Poughkeepsie, 29 percent in Springfield, MA, and 38 percent in Stockton, CA.

Most of the region’s largest employment centers are located at the junction of major transportation facilities. Just as the Erie Canal helped Syracuse emerge as a center of trade and commerce, similarly the combination of proximity to the DeWitt Rail Yard, Hancock International Airport, the New York State Thruway, I-81, I-690, and I-481 have helped make the Towns of DeWitt and Salina attractive places to do business over the past several decades. The northern part of the Town of DeWitt (north of I-690) is the second largest job center in the region, after the City of Syracuse.

Although Electronics Park, built by General Electric in the Town of Salina in 1946, preceded construction of the Thruway and I-81, the site clearly benefits today from proximity to the Interstate system. Lockheed Martin is currently the primary occupant of this site and the tenth-largest employer in the region with over 2,000 jobs.

Other parts of the region with significant employment centers include the Town of Geddes, where a number of distribution-related businesses are located in and around the I-90/I-690 interchange, and Woodard Industrial Park in the Town of Clay, home to Raymour & Flanigan Furniture and Eagle Comtronics.
Radisson Corporate Park in the Town of Lysander is home to one of only 12 Anheuser-Busch breweries in the United States. The brewery employs approximately 480 people and generates 180 truck trips per day. Radisson Corporate Park is also home to several large distribution and warehousing businesses.

There are also large employment centers in remote parts of the county, such as Tessy Plastics’ manufacturing plant on Route 5 in Elbridge, Hillrom’s (formerly Welch Allyn) plant in Skaneateles, and smaller industrial and commercial parks that are found in rural areas, like the Oswego County Industrial Park just north of Phoenix.

Aside from Destiny USA, most of the region’s major retail corridors and nodes are located outside of the city. These include:

- Erie Boulevard East (which begins in the city and continues to the east), the Bridge Street corridor, and ShoppingTown Mall (which is slated for a major redevelopment) in DeWitt;
- Towne Center at Fayetteville;
- Route 11 between Route 481 and Route 31 in Cicero
- Route 31 near Route 481, including Great Northern Mall, in Clay
- Route 5 (West Genesee Street) and Township 5 in Camillus.

### 3.2.3 Travel and tourism

Syracuse is home to many destinations that attract visitors from throughout the Northeast, including Canada. These attractions include museums, sports venues, shopping destinations, New York State and County parks (including a zoo), farm markets/agritourism, entertainment/theaters, and historic sites as well as numerous festivals throughout the year and the New York State Fair. Tourism plays an important role in generating sales and room tax revenues. These tax revenues lower local property tax rates and subsidize municipal services. In addition, many sectors of our economy – such as hotels and dining establishments, retail, healthcare facilities, entertainment venues, and college sport venues – contribute to tourism-related spending.

Our extensive network of highways, bus routes, walkways, and bikeways accommodate local tourism sectors, influence visitors’ first impressions of the region, and contribute towards overall quality of
experience. The State, County, and City continue to invest in tourism-related improvements, which include transportation infrastructure investments that support travelers and tourists.

The New York State Fairgrounds is experiencing a rebirth as the state invested more than $100 million to offer new incentives, attractions, and facilities such as the $50 million Exposition Center - the largest expo facility north of New York City between Boston and Cleveland. In total, approximately 2 million people visit the Fairgrounds each year to attend various events. The largest event, the Great New York State Fair, hosted approximately 1.33 million people during 18 days in 2019. New fair attendance records have been set each year since 2016. To address the swell of Fair-related traffic, NYSDOT, OCDOT, and Centro have made many transportation investments to accommodate growing attendance numbers:

- Centro has completely revamped bus operations to the Fairgrounds;
- NYSDOT redesigned the I-690 ramp and intersection (Exit 7) with a new signal/lanes to improve bus flow and accommodate increased traffic volumes;
- Development of the 65-acre Orange Lot with more than three miles of paved interior roads, two miles of sidewalks, and 114 new LED lights for improved visibility;
- NYSDOT is currently constructing a bridge over I-690 West to accommodate a new ramp from the Orange Lot to I-690 East;
- OCDOT redesigned Bridge Street and Milton Avenue with various streetscape/beautification improvements and a 16-foot wide pedestrian promenade to the Fairgrounds; and
- New York State is currently extending the Empire State Trail (a statewide trail system) through the City of Syracuse along a route that brings it to the Fairgrounds’ entrance.

Onondaga County also continues to invest heavily to attract travelers and support local tourism, especially to one of its greatest natural assets, Onondaga Lake. The County has invested hundreds of millions of dollars reclaiming Onondaga Lake and its shoreline, extending the Loop-the-Lake Trail, and developing the 17,500-seat St. Joseph’s Health Amphitheater at Lakeview. The Amphitheater attracts performing
artists and fans from throughout the region. When complete, the Loop-the-Lake Trail will encircle the lake and connect with the Empire State Trail and the City of Syracuse’s Creekwalk trail. As part of current trail extension efforts, the County is developing a bicycle/pedestrian bridge over the CSX railroad mainline.

In addition, the Central New York Regional Recreation & Heritage Plan (completed May 2017 by the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board) outlines a regional bicycle touring corridor network for Central New York, including Cayuga, Oswego, Onondaga, Madison, and Cortland Counties. Twenty-nine potential recreation and bicycle touring corridors are included in this plan that connect heritage sites to one another and to other already-existing trails (such as the Loop-the-Lake Trail, Empire State Trail, and the Creekwalk). In conjunction with the CNYRPDB, the SMTC is currently planning a couple of specific links within Onondaga County for the Regional Recreation & Heritage Plan. Also as part of the current UPWP, the SMTC, CNYRPDB, and SOCPA are working together on the Onondaga County Empire State Trail Local Economic Opportunities Plan. This plan will help local municipalities capture the economic potential of the Empire State Trail, with the goal of making it easy for trail users to exit the trail and access local businesses via safe trail and/or on-road connections. All of these efforts will work towards attracting tourists, from both near and far, to our local municipalities, heritage sites, and recreational resources.

3.2.4 Proposed future employment centers

Distribution facility, Town of Clay. In November 2019, the Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency (OCIDA) approved the construction of a 3.7-million-square-foot, five-story tall, warehouse and distribution facility – by some estimates, the second largest such facility in the world. This distribution center will be located in the Town of Clay on land that was previously used as a golf course. The 110-acre site is located between Morgan Road and Route 57 on the north side of the Liverpool Bypass, just north of the Village of Liverpool. In May 2020, it was announced that Amazon would occupy the facility (Baker, 2020). It is expected to employ 1,000 workers and generate approximately 25 tractor-trailer trips every hour. Tractor-trailer trips will use the nearby Thruway entrance (Exit 38) on Route 57.
Economic Outlook

Each year, CenterState CEO* asks its members about their expectations for their industries and the region’s economy in the coming years. The resulting Economic Forecast for Central New York provides the best available snapshot of near-term economic conditions in our region**.

Two-thirds of the businesses participating in the 2019 Economic Forecast projected that they would add between one and ten new employees in the coming year, and 75 percent anticipated very strong sales and/or revenue growth.

While many of the business leaders surveyed were optimistic about business expansion, they also identified challenges to sustaining growth in the region, such as finding a qualified workforce, addressing poverty, and the costs involved in keeping up with the rapid pace of technological change.

According to the 2019 Economic Forecast, between 2003 and 2017, the value of the region’s exports increased by 52 percent, and the number of jobs supported by exports grew dramatically. Most businesses in our region (80 percent) report that they do not currently export a product or service, but most expect their export business to grow in the coming year.

Historically, the business community in Central New York has not identified significant unmet transportation needs, such as a missing freeway or rail connection. The 2019 Economic Forecast reaffirms this long-term trend: two-thirds of surveyed business leaders reported that they did not anticipate that changes in transportation and logistics would have an impact on their business in the coming year.

*CenterState CEO is the largest economic development organization in Central New York, and is one of the SMTC’s member agencies. It coordinates public and private economic development activities in a 12-county area and counts more than 2,000 businesses in its membership.

**The Economic Forecast for Central New York covers five counties: Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, and Oswego. CenterState CEO’s 12-county region includes the five Central New York counties, as well as Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Oneida, Seneca, St. Lawrence and Tompkins Counties.

Intermodal / international shipping - DeWitt Rail Yard. The CSX Rail Yard in DeWitt has been a critical link in the region’s freight network for decades. Its location at the junction of I-481 and I-690, only two miles south of the Thruway and thirteen miles from the airport, make it a natural point around which to develop a major transportation and distribution hub. In recent years, global economic forces have converged to increase this area’s importance in international shipping.

Since the opening of a new set of locks on the Panama Canal in 2016, the tonnage of freight moving through the canal has increased dramatically, exceeding projections of how quickly the new locks would expand freight movement. Analysts have predicted for years that an increase in freight through the canal would present an opportunity
for the development of East Coast “inland ports” to take pressure off of the already congested Port of New York and New Jersey (PONYNJ). An inland port facility in Central New York could use rail lines to move freight out of the New York City metropolitan area to our region, where shipping companies would be able to take advantage of a relatively uncongested freeway system to distribute freight to other parts of the country.

In 2019, New York State dedicated up to $19 million toward the construction of the Syracuse Intermodal Container Transfer Facility at the CSX DeWitt Rail Yard. This project includes two new cranes (allowing for longer trains and increased capacity), new entry and exit kiosks, improved circulation within the facility, and expanded storage capacity. The new facility is expected to reduce the cost of shipping by up to $500 per container, thereby making the Central New York region more globally competitive. When fully operational, this new intermodal import-export facility will handle approximately 30,000 containers annually.

**Distribution and warehousing, Towns of DeWitt and Manlius.**

A new Amazon distribution facility has been proposed less than a mile north of the CSX tracks in the Town of DeWitt, near the I-481/Kirkville Road interchange. At 112,000 square feet, this distribution center is expected to employ roughly 200 people and generate 30 tractor-trailer trips daily. This type of development along with the proximity to the rail yard may attract attention from other firms in the transportation and warehousing sector. For example, a large warehousing and container storage facility has been proposed on a site immediately north of the CSX rail lines, between Girden and Fremont Roads at the western edge of the Town of Manlius.

**Unmanned Aerial Systems Test Corridor.** Unmanned aerial systems (UAS) technology is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world; its application beyond recreation and goods movement are just beginning to be explored. As a recent article in Forbes put it:

> With their onboard computer-controlled cameras and their capacity to go places that people and other machines cannot,
drones hold enormous promise to sharpen law enforcement, crack down on terrorism, help farmers monitor crops, assist insurance agents in assessing damaged assets, and, all in all, buoy the retail, transportation and entertainment industries, among others. If the Internet can deliver information, then drones can deliver almost everything else. (Levick, 2018)

Central New York is on track to become one of the nation’s top regions in UAS development. In the fall of 2017, the Northeast UAS Airspace Integration Research Alliance, or NUAIR, began testing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in a small area around Griffiss International Airport in Rome, NY – one of only seven such test sites approved by the Federal Aviation Administration. In 2019, the full 50-mile testing corridor between Rome and Syracuse was completed, allowing drones to be operated beyond the operator’s visual line of sight. In November 2019, Governor Cuomo announced a $12.5 million investment by the State to expand drone testing facilities at the Syracuse Technology Garden.

In the fall of 2018, CenterState CEO projected that six UAS companies would create nearly 200 jobs in Central New York in the near future, with private investment on the order of $40 million. Several of these firms were Genius NY grant recipients; these grants are designed to ensure that startups – particularly those in the UAS field - take root and grow in Central New York.

White Pine Commerce Park. The Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency (OCIDA) has been laying the groundwork for a new industrial park in the northern part of the Town of Clay. White Pine Commerce Park, located at the NYS Route 31 intersection with Caughdenoy Road, is expected to accommodate up to two million square feet of industrial development. When development comes to this facility, it may become a major regional employment center (OCIDA, 2013).

3.2.5 SUMMARY OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Over the next 30 years, business activity will continue to be drawn to established suburban commercial centers that offer both available commercial space and access to transportation facilities. Radisson
Corporate Park, Collamer Crossing Business Park, and other commercial parks in northern DeWitt are likely to continue to see both new development and the reuse of existing facilities. The distribution facility in the Town of Clay will bring many new employees to the southern part of that town. White Pine Commerce Park is expected to come on-line in the next five to ten years, adding a significant employment center to the northern part of the MPA. The UAS industry is expected to continue growing, with jobs distributed at various locations throughout the region.

Within the City of Syracuse, Downtown and University Hill will continue to be major employment centers. The Inner Harbor is likely to be the city’s fastest-growing employment center over the next 10 to 20 years, as new commercial space is added and the currently vacant land between Franklin Square and the Inner Harbor is developed.

None of the economic development plans in the MPA have identified specific transportation issues that are placing limits on regional economic competitiveness. Instead, these plans emphasize that the infrastructure that we have should be in the best condition possible.

Transportation investments that promote safety, ensure that our infrastructure is in a state of good repair, and that reduce congestion make good economic sense. Transportation improvements should capitalize on businesses’ general interest in the City of Syracuse by supplying higher quality transit service, such as bus rapid transit, along some routes in the city. Our region has plenty of low-density, suburban office space with good freeway access. Investments in walkable, mixed-use commercial districts served both by transit and local roads have the potential to give the region a competitive advantage in attracting smaller firms that value an urban setting.
REFERENCES:


