The Santa Barbara County State of the Commute Report summarizes Census-based commuting characteristics for Santa Barbara County (population 429,200), its eight incorporated cities, other unincorporated communities, and interregional commuting to and from neighboring Ventura and San Luis Obispo Counties.

Regional Jobs-Housing Imbalance

A primary influence on commuting is the relationship between where people live and where they work. This relationship has become an increasingly important issue locally as the spatial mismatch between jobs and affordable housing is causing growing numbers of workers to reside farther from their workplaces.

Regionally, this trend is evident with large numbers of commuters traveling daily from housing in Ventura, Santa Maria, Lompoc, and the Santa Ynez Valley to jobs on the South Coast. Commuting between San Luis Obispo County and Santa Maria continues despite a relative jobs-housing balance.

The intra-county jobs-housing imbalance leads to increased transportation demands on U.S. 101 and State Route 154, with a consequent increase in congestion.

The one-way commute distance for workers who live in Santa Maria and work on the South Coast is:

- Approximately 65 miles and takes 75 minutes.
- Equates to approximately 650 hours of time spent in travel annually.
- Is approximately 30% of a normal 2,080 hour work year.
- Equivalent to 16.2 weeks of vacation.

Jobs for South Coast and North County

Source: Census ACS 2006-2010
The inter-county commuter imbalance also significantly reduces travel speeds on U.S. 101 during peak commute times as commuters from Ventura County travel to and from South Coast jobs. Current traffic on U.S. 101 southbound already exceeds capacity from Olive Mill to Padaro Lane and Turnpike to Mission. Other northbound and southbound segments of 101 are currently approaching capacity and remain slow during peak periods.

Congestion is also an issue locally for many communities. State Route 246 in the Santa Ynez Valley is often congested due to increasing visitor activities. In the Santa Maria Valley, the slow transport of agricultural products through the central urban areas and State Route 166 also causes congestion. In the Lompoc Valley, State Route 1 traffic can be slow during peak commute periods.

The continued reliance on single occupant vehicles and the limited availability of alternative modes of travel such as rail or carpooling lanes adds to the congestion during peak commute times.

Differences in housing costs help to explain the large number of people who choose to reside far from their workplaces on the South Coast, increasing the lengths of their work trips. Median home prices on the South Coast are over 100% higher than those in Ventura County and are 210% higher than those in North County. The jobs-housing imbalance and housing cost differential are not the whole story. For example, commuting from S.L.O. County to Santa Maria has grown despite a relative jobs-housing balance.

“Drive a little; save a lot” may appeal to workers who believe the cost of housing on the South Coast is out of their reach. Workers may fail to appreciate the cost of the commute itself in time, money, pollution, and stress.
Development Activity

The SBCAG 2040 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Community Strategy encourages more housing growth on the South Coast to locate homes near jobs and reduce long distance commuting. However, if past trends continue, the majority of housing development in the near future will continue in North County jurisdictions, especially in Santa Maria. More affordable housing options in the North County will continue to attract workers from the more costly South Coast housing market.

The majority of new commercial development and the resulting jobs are anticipated in Santa Maria as well as Goleta. More employment opportunities in the North County could help to alleviate longer commutes to the South Coast for jobs.

Transit

Transit ridership spiked in FY 2008/09, likely due to increases in fuel prices. This increase is consistent with Census results that suggest an overall increase in transit use for commute trips.

Total transit ridership in the County grew by approximately 2 million riders annually or 26% from FY 1999/00 to FY 2009/10.

Transit commute trips increased from North County jurisdictions to jobs on the South Coast (Clean Air Express) as well as between Ventura and South Santa Barbara County.

The largest annual percentage transit ridership increases from 2000 to 2010 occurred for the following:

- Guadalupe Flyer increased by 51,994 riders or 152%.
- Clean Air Express increased by 93,690 riders or 101%.
- S.M. Area Transit increased by 534,048 riders or 94%.
- S.Y. Valley Transit increased by 21,422 riders or 91%

In this same period, the S.B. Metropolitan Transit District, the South Coast’s largest transit provider, increased by 853,083 riders or 12%.

The Vista Coastal Express began service in FY 01/02 and has shown an increase of 230,156 riders or 487% by 2010, and the Breeze began in FY 05/06 increasing by 12,918 riders or 35% by 2010.

Overall transit ridership has nonetheless declined since the peak in FY 08/09 by 824,770 riders or – 8.0% by FY 12/13, likely due to the economic recession, job loss and lower fuel prices.
Countywide Commute

*The daily commute into Santa Barbara County from S.L.O. County to the north and Ventura County to the south is significant, often causing congestion during peak commute periods.*

The year 2010 out-commuting from:

- Ventura County to S.B. County is approximately 11,360 commuters/day.
- S.L.O. County to S.B. County is approximately 8,245 commuters/day.

By comparison, workers out-commuting from S.B. County to Ventura County are far lower at 1,865 commuters/day. Out-commuting to S.L.O. County is roughly balanced at 7,220 commuters/day.

In response to the housing cost differential, and other factors, in-commuting to S.B. County grew dramatically from 2000 to 2010 by more than 25% in the case of commuting from Ventura County.

Commute Trends

The year 2000 out-commute flow from Ventura County to S.B. County was 9,009 commuters/day. By 2010, the number of commuters had increased by 2,351 commuters/day or 26% over the ten-year period.

The year 2000 out-commute flow from S.L.O. County to S.B. County was 7,480 commuters/day. By 2010, the number of commuters had increased by 765 commuters/day or 10% over the ten-year period. The majority of the commuter increase is to Santa Maria.

Commute Trends to S. Coast

The year 2000 out-commute flow from Ventura County to:

- the City of Santa Barbara was 3,635 commuters/day compared to 5,520 in 2010, an increase of 1,885 commuters/day or 52% over the ten-year period.
- the City of Carpinteria was 1,600 commuters/day compared to 2,155 in 2010, an increase of 555 or commuters or 34% over the ten-year period.
- the Goleta Valley was 1,649 in-commuters/day. Commuting to the City of Goleta (incorporated in 2002) was 1,345 in-commuters/day in 2010.
Commute Trends - S.L.O. County to North S.B. County

The out-commute flow from S.L.O. County to Santa Maria increased most significantly from 4,549 commuters/day in 2000 to 5,425 commuters/day in 2010, an increase of 876 or 19% over the ten-year period. Many of these commuters live in the nearby community of Nipomo and work in Santa Maria.

Commute Trends - Commute from S.B. County

Meanwhile, the year 2000 out-commute flow from S.B. County to Ventura County of 2,419 in-commuters/day dropped to 1,865 in 2010, a decrease of 554 commuters/day or –22.9% over the ten-year period. This decrease is likely temporary, a result of jobs lost during the economic downturn. Long-term projections still show increases as the overall workforce continues to grow.

The year 2000 out-commute flow from S.B. County to S.L.O. County was 5,045 commuters/day compared to 7,220 in 2010, an increase of 2,175 commuters/day or 43% over the ten-year period.
In 2010, the drive alone mode has the highest countywide percentage of all travel modes to work with 133,740 commuters/day or 67%, followed by carpoolers with 30,975 commuters/day or 15%.

The public transit mode has 7,535 commuters/day or 4% of all modes.

The bike mode has 6,830 commuters/day or 3% of all modes.

The walking mode has 8,740 commuters/day or 4% of all modes.

In 2010, the drive alone mode has the highest countywide percentage of all travel modes to work with 133,740 commuters/day or 67%, followed by carpoolers with 30,975 commuters/day or 15%.

The public transit mode has 7,535 commuters/day or 4% of all modes.

The bike mode has 6,830 commuters/day or 3% of all modes.

The walking mode has 8,740 commuters/day or 4% of all modes.

Public transit, bike, walk and carpool mode trips combined increased by 15% or 7,250 commuters/day, from 46,830 commuters/day in 2000 to 54,080 in 2010.

The highest proportion of commuters (43%) have a short travel time of less than 15 minutes.

Six percent have a travel time over 60 minutes, which includes those commuting from outside the County.

The mean travel time is 21 minutes.

Shifting from driving alone to an alternative mode reduces congestion, commuting costs, and greenhouse gas emissions. For many commuters, short trips can be accomplished by walking, biking, or local transit. For longer trips carpooling and inter-regional bus service are good options.

- Public transit commutes increased from 4,360 to 7,535 commuters/day in 2010, from 9% to 14% of the alternative modes.
- Bike commutes increased from 4,855 to 6,830 commuters/day in 2010, from 10% to 13% of the alternative modes.
- Walking commutes increased from 7,200 to 8,742 commuters/day in 2010, from 15% to 16% of the alternative modes.
- Carpool commutes increased from 30,415 to 30,975 commuters/day in 2010, but declined from 65% to 57% of the alternative modes.

Note: Travel Time data does not include a distance factor and as a result does not account for the time lost in congestion. Travel time data includes those workers 16 years and over who do not work at home.
The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG), in its capacity as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization and Regional Transportation Planning Agency for Santa Barbara County, is responsible under Federal and State law for developing transportation plans and programs for the region through a “continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive” planning process carried out in cooperation with other State, regional and local agencies.

SBCAG’s governing Board of Directors consists of the five members of the County Board of Supervisors plus one City Council representative from each of the eight cities within the county.

SBCAG is the County’s Local Transportation Authority and uses Measure A funds to implement projects that address congestion problems. Further information can be found on the SBCAG Measure A website.

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### What SBCAG Does

SBCAG offers a variety of commuter services through its Traffic Solutions division. As Santa Barbara County’s regional rideshare organization, Traffic Solutions encourages commuters to choose commuting options other than driving to work alone through marketing and public outreach, incentive programs, and by acting as an information resource. Call the Traffic Solutions help line at 805-963-SAVE for information about carpooling, vanpooling, biking, or to have a free Santa Barbara County bike or transit map sent to you.

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### Data Sources

Commuting data is used for a variety of purposes, including planning for ride sharing, transit and capital expenditures and estimating future travel patterns.

This summary report provides commuting data from the 2006-2010 Census American Community Survey Transportation Planning Package, released on October 2013, and evaluates this data (for workers 16 and over) in Santa Barbara County between 2000 and 2010.

The Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics data, released annually, is an alternate source for home-to-work flow data from the Census Bureau. This program has built a set of data files using administrative information and is described and compared with the Census American Community Survey in the technical report associated with this summary. Although not compared here, the two data-sets are broadly consistent in their results.