Commuting Analyses in the West Piedmont Planning District

Beginning in March, PDC staff began analyzing American Community Survey (ACS) data from the U.S. Census Bureau to determine the modes of transportation commuters use to get to work, and to determine where the greatest disparities in income were located, as this factor can significantly influence the mode of transportation used. The components of the Planning District that were analyzed were the Danville MPO, which includes the City of Danville and the urbanized portion of Pittsylvania County; and the City of Martinsville. The purpose of the analyses was to shed light on potential mobility constraints among residents of the MPO and the City of Martinsville, and articulate the results to local policy makers.

Diagnosis of the Region’s Health

According to a recent ranking of residents’ overall health conducted by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, communities in the West Piedmont Planning District exhibited below average results. Out of 131 counties and cities in the Commonwealth surveyed, Henry County and Martinsville ranked 123 and 113, respectively; Patrick County ranked 85; the respective rankings for Pittsylvania County and Danville were 83 and 118; and Franklin County ranked 67. The challenge will be for communities to identify factors contributing to poor overall health, and to address them to the greatest extent possible. Efforts to improve residents’ health are underway. Several organizations and local officials, including the West Piedmont Planning District Commission, have taken part in the creation of the Community Health Strategic Plan: A Collaborative Vision, a Harvest Foundation initiative to improve health in Martinsville and Henry County through efforts to promote knowledge of community health resources, enhance residents’ transportation options for health-related activities, and educate residents regarding healthy lifestyles, among others. This initiative can serve as an effective model by which other communities throughout the region and across the Commonwealth can work to improve their residents’ health. The Martinsville-Henry County Coalition for Health and Wellness provides resources to enhance citizens’ health and well-being. The organization’s website may be found at http://www.healthycommunitymhc.org/.

Local Foods Initiative Gains Traction in Region

In an earlier era in the United States, food was produced locally out of necessity—transportation systems were very limited in scope. Contemporary America—Virginia is no exception—has been re-adopting this food production paradigm out of concerns for food security, rising energy and concurrent transportation costs, and a growing desire among Americans for organic and locally-produced food. In fact, Virginia has experienced a 72 percent increase in direct sales between farmers and consumers from 2002 to 2007. With an abundance of agricultural land available, the West Piedmont Planning District is well-positioned to capitalize on this growing trend. The WPPDC is a proponent of local food production, as it not only benefits the region’s residents, but is likely to result in local economic development, as well as preservation of farmland from development pressures. The WPPDC can provide technical assistance, including mapping services, to local communities in their efforts to promote local food production.
The WPPDC administers the Danville-Pittsylvania Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which is responsible for continuing, comprehensive, and cooperative transportation planning.

**Adoption of the 2012 CEDS**

In May 2012, the West Piedmont Planning District’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) will be adopted by the West Piedmont Planning District Commission. The CEDS is the economic development blueprint for the region and contains information relating to regional project priorities; demographics; regional inventories and trends pertaining to agriculture, land use, recreation, transportation, etc.; community profiles; economic strengths and weaknesses; and goals and strategies to facilitate economic development. The 2012 edition of the CEDS includes discussions of ambitious redevelopment initiatives in uptown Martinsville, downtown Danville, and Rocky Mount; transportation initiatives such as the proposed Interstate 73 from the North Carolina line north to Roanoke; industrial park developments; and numerous other activities throughout the region.

**GIS Activities**

WPPDC GIS staff has been busy, highlighted by the creation of:
- Hydrology maps;
- Maps illustrating minority concentration and low-income concentration for the region;
- Smith Mountain Lake Demographic Profile;
- Maps to support Danville Transit and Piedmont Area Regional Transit (PART) initiatives;
- Existing land use and future land use maps along Corridors of Statewide Significance;
- Radius maps around county seats and central cities illustrating total population and total labor force; and
- 2010 Census demographics.

**WPPDC Welcomes New Board Members**

The West Piedmont Planning District Commission welcomes three new members to its Board of Commissioners, elected in November 2011. The new members include Roger Hayden, of Patrick County, who replaces Lock Boyce; Dan Foley, also of Patrick County, who replaces Karl Weiss; and Jessie Barksdale, of Pittsylvania County, who replaces William Pritchett.

Mr. Foley, who serves on the Patrick County Board of Supervisors, is also a member of the Patrick County Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Barksdale has more than three decades of experience at the federal level, first working for the U.S. Department of the Army, and then the Federal Aviation Administration. Mr. Hayden also serves on the Patrick County Board of Supervisors. He was a machinist by trade, worked in management, and worked with computer technology.

**Fiscal Year 2012 Elected Officers**

- **Chairperson**—Kathy C. Lawson, City of Martinsville
- **Vice Chairperson**—Albert K. “Buddy” Rawley, Jr., City of Danville
- **Treasurer**—James E. Astin, Jr., Pittsylvania County

**Did you know?**

The West Piedmont Planning District is comprised of approximately 2,587 square miles, which is nearly 38 times the size of the District of Columbia and more than eight times the size of New York City, including all five boroughs. The population density in the region is about 96 persons per square mile.

Pittsylvania County is the largest county in the state, at 982.89 square miles. Franklin County is the seventh largest county in the state, at 692.1 square miles.

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