

Socioeconomic Analysis

Over the past several decades the Columbia metropolitan area has experienced considerable population growth which has been accompanied by changes in residential and commercial development patterns. As these trends extend into the future, the Columbia area will be faced with increased pressure on its regional transportation system. Adequately planning for future transportation demand will entail preserving mobility, providing accessibility to all citizens, and protecting the natural and social environment. These goals are important for sustaining the long term economic vitality of the region and enhancing its overall quality of life. The socioeconomic analysis chapter of the Long Range Transportation Plan examines current and future trends in population, employment and environmental justice issues.

Existing and Future Conditions

- The population for the COATS area is expected to increase by 47% over the next thirty years from 567,101 to 845,664.
- Population growth rates are the highest on the fringes of downtown Columbia in the unincorporated portions of Richland and Lexington Counties.
- Existing and future employment trends are closely tied with population growth and are increasingly dependent on the regional transportation system.
- Environmental Justice and Title VI considerations are extremely important for the COATS region as 46% of the population lives in areas with above average concentrations of socially vulnerable populations.

Recommendations & Strategies

1. Encourage regional collaboration in planning for future growth and development and mitigating against the environmental and social impacts of transportation investments.
 - Continue to support the CMCOG Regional Planning and Development Committee
 - Provide support to all projects and programs that work towards the protection and enhancement of the natural environment
 - Ensure that all citizens and communities within the Columbia Metropolitan Area are equitably served by the regions transportation system and have equal opportunity for participating in the decision making process
 - Continue to improve data collection efforts and analysis techniques that assess the needs of and potential impacts on socially vulnerable populations
2. Promote economic vitality by investing in infrastructure improvements that increase the potential for job creation and retention, improve linkages between housing and employment opportunities, and support regional economic development strategies.
 - Encourage expanded and enhanced transit service to meet regional employment needs
 - Encourage the development of affordable housing opportunities in proximity to existing and future transit service areas and employment centers
 - Encourage coordination between local governments, the SC Department of Commerce, and the MPO to implement projects identified in the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)
 - Support projects and programs that enhance the efficient movement of freight