Commuting Patterns for the City of Santa Fe
Ashley Leach, Economist

Why Commuting Pattern Information Is Important

Commuting patterns are one of many factors that impact the varying components of community and regional planning and management, such as economic development; infrastructure planning and maintenance; public finance and fiscal policy; emergency preparedness; and government service planning (for example, in education and workforce development). Therefore, it is important to understand how the shape, size, make-up, and dynamics of New Mexico’s communities are changing as population and workforce grow.

For the purposes of this analysis, commuting patterns for the city of Santa Fe are analyzed for 2002 through 2011 (the most current data available). Santa Fe is typically known to be a major commuting city, with worker inflow mainly driven by state government employment in New Mexico’s capital. This article presents data on commuting patterns to look in more depth at the change in commuting patterns over time, residence and work location of commuters, and demographic characteristics of those leaving and commuting to Santa Fe.

The U.S. Census Bureau’s Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES) data, collected through the “OnTheMap” data tool, is the source for the analysis completed in this article. The “OnTheMap” tool measures worker inflow—the number of workers living outside of the city but commuting in for work—and worker outflow—those workers living inside the city but commuting outside of it for work. For more information on the LEHD LODES data and the OntheMap tool visit http://lehd.ces.census.gov/.

Commuting Patterns in the City of Santa Fe

Recent and Historical Trends

Chart 1 and the corresponding pie charts provide information on the inflow and outflow of Santa Fe’s workers. Santa Fe has historically experienced a net inflow of workers, meaning that more people were commuting into the city for work than were commuting out. In 2011, about 29,140 people were commuting to Santa Fe for work. This represented just over 50 percent of all commuters (coming into and leaving the city) and persons remaining in Santa Fe to work. The number of people commuting into the city exceeded those that left the city to work elsewhere (10,800). Persons leaving the city for work represented about 19 percent of all commuters and persons staying in Santa Fe for work. About 17,050 Santa Fe residents stayed in the city to work, representing 30 percent of the commuter and non-commuter population.

The number of workers commuting into the city for work has increased in recent years. Between 2002 and 2011, inflow commuters increased by about 23 percent. In 2011, workers commuting into the city represented around 51 percent of all workers, compared to 42 percent in 2002. The number of employed residents leaving the city for work also increased over the nine-year period. Workers commuting out of Santa Fe grew by about 26 percent, with the share of total workers increasing from 15 percent in 2002 to 19 percent. Persons living and working in Santa Fe decreased by about 30 percent over the period, with the share of total workers dropping from 43 to 30 percent.

Where Are the Employed Working?

We know that there is a net inflow of workers commuting into Santa Fe from other areas. But where are these workers coming from? On the other hand, where do Santa Fe residents that
 commute outside of the city? Knowing the residence and work location for these populations is necessary to understand demands on individual communities, especially when evaluating transportation infrastructure needs and overall mobility of the workforce.

Chart 2 provides the top 10 places commuters travelling into Santa Fe for work are coming from and the top 10 places to which commuters leaving Santa Fe are going. In 2011, 15 percent (4,310) of commuters travelling into Santa Fe for work were coming from Albuquerque, while about 7 percent were coming from Rio Rancho. About 9 percent of inflow commuters travelled from Eldorado at Santa Fe, La Cienega, or Agua Fria into Santa Fe for work. This is expected, as all three CDPs are in close vicinity to the city. Finally, about 2 percent of Santa Fe inflow commuters travelled from Las Vegas for work. Approximately 36 percent of all inflow commuters were coming from the top 10 locations listed in Chart 2.

Communities with a large amount of both commuting inflow and outflow include Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, Española, Los Alamos, and Las Cruces. Approximately 88 percent of all Rio Rancho commuters going either to or from Santa Fe were Rio Rancho residents travelling to Santa Fe for work (as of 2011); approximately 1,720 more people commuted from Rio Rancho to Santa Fe than from Santa Fe to Rio Rancho. About 55 percent of all Albuquerque, Española, and Pojoaque commuters (both in and out) travelled to Santa Fe for work. Both Las Cruces and Los Alamos had a larger percentage of Santa Fe persons travelling to their communities for work than residents travelling to Santa Fe for work (47 and 39 percent, respectively).

Characteristics of Santa Fe Workers, Commuting and Not Commuting

LODES data provides some demographic information on commuters. Chart 3 provides information on age and earnings of commuters and non-commuting workers, as well as the industry of employment. Outflow commuters (leaving Santa Fe for work) had the largest concentration of younger workers (less than 29), compared to inflow commuters and non-commuters. Non-commuters claim a larger concentration of workers 55 or older as compared to the commuters. When looking at earnings, outflow commuters leaving Santa Fe had the largest concentration of both workers that earn less than $1,250 a month and workers that earn over $3,333 a month. Inflow commuters and non-commuters had similar concentrations of workers by earning level. Finally, outflow commuters had the largest concentration of workers in goods-producing industries, while non-commuters had the largest concentration of workers employed in service industries (excluding trade, transportation, and utilities). In summary, persons leaving Santa Fe for work were more likely to be younger, fall within the lowest or highest earnings bracket, and work in goods-producing industries than workers commuting into Santa Fe for work and workers that were living and working in Santa Fe.