



CHAPTER 2: COUNTY PROFILE

FEATURING:

- DEMOGRAPHICS OVERVIEW
- HOUSING TRENDS
- TRANSPORTATION & MOBILITY
- ECONOMIC PROSPERITY

DEMOGRAPHICS OVERVIEW

PLANNING FOR ST. CLAIR COUNTY'S FUTURE

The Metropolitan Planning Commission has the responsibility to review the County Master Plan every five years and consider the conditions and trends affecting the County. A wide variety of planning processes and techniques have been utilized in crafting the plan in years past; however, every update to the plan has been grounded in a desire to document current trends in St. Clair County, to gain a clear understanding of the issues affecting the County and its local units of government, and to set a promising course for managing change in the future. With each new rendition of the St. Clair County Master Plan comes an opportunity to proactively shape policy, guide decision making, and improve the quality of life for St. Clair County's citizens.

The St. Clair County Master Plan is intended to have a lasting impact on the community. Relying on a strong foundation of data, research, and public policy analysis, it is reflective of a County with significant assets and emerging challenges. While the plan identifies a number of goals and strategies meant to positively influence the overall quality of life in St. Clair County, it is built on a framework that focuses on action strategies that can actually be implemented. The vision, goals, and strategies identified in this plan will require cooperation and collaboration among community leaders and dedicated stakeholders in all sectors of the community. Just as planning cannot occur in a vacuum, the responsibility of implementing this plan does not rest solely with county government. Instead, the county and its community partners must build upon our community's strengths, anticipate and adapt to change, and work collaboratively to strengthen St. Clair County's people, places, and economic prosperity.

POPULATION OVERVIEW

St. Clair County has the largest population of all the counties in the thumb. In 2013, St. Clair County had a total population of 161,865, a decrease of 1.4% from the 2000 population of 164,235. The majority of the St. Clair County communities experienced a loss in population between 2000 and 2013.

The majority of St. Clair County residents are in what is considered the "baby boomer" generation, which is comprised of persons that were born between 1946 and 1964. As the baby boomers move into their fifties and sixties in the next decade and their sixties and seventies in the following decade, there will be a significant increase in the already expanding elderly population.

The aging of the "baby boomer" generation is changing the age structure of communities across the state of Michigan. The loss of young adults in the state of Michigan has been well documented in recent years. In 1990, St. Clair County had 14,090 persons between the ages of 18 and 24. During the next decade, that number decreased by 8% to 12,932 in 2000. The exodus of young adults is continuing in the present decade.



ST. CLAIR COUNTY'S POPULATION

St. Clair County is among the 15 most populated counties in Michigan. United States Census Bureau statistics show that St. Clair County had:

- 145,607 people in 1990
- 164,235 people in 2000 (12.8% increase from 1990)
- 163,040 people in 2010 (0.7% decrease from 2000)

The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) estimated that St. Clair County's population was 160,506 in December 2014, representing a 1.5% decline since the 2010 Census. *SEMCOG is projecting the county's population to be 167,721 by 2040.*

Population Change, 2000-2013

Jurisdiction	2000 Census	2013 ACS 5-Year Estimate	# Change	% Change
St. Clair County	164,235	161,865	-2,370	-1.44%
SEMCOG Region	4,833,368	4,707,345	-126,023	-2.61%
State of Michigan	9,938,444	9,886,095	-52,349	-0.53%

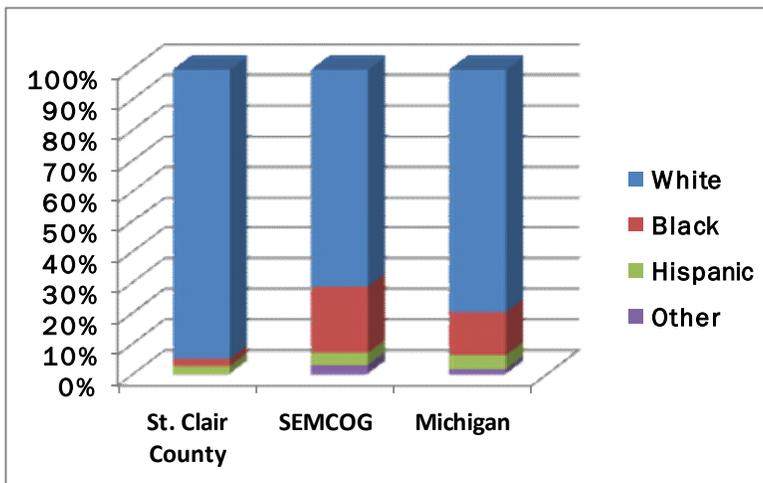
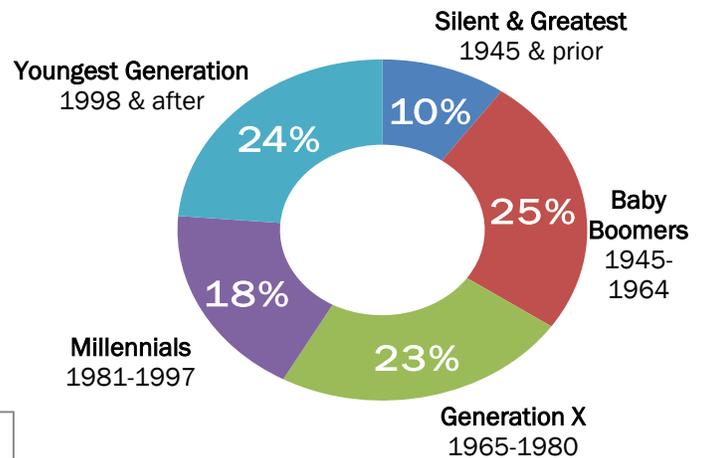
Source: US Census Bureau, Census 2000 and 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Our Population is Declining...

Since 2000, St. Clair County's population has declined. Similar to the rest of Southeast Michigan and the state as a whole, much of this population loss can be attributed to the Great Recession, which lasted from 2007 through early 2010. This economic downturn brought with it high unemployment, an increase in foreclosures, and an exodus of people to other regions and states.

St. Clair County has an Aging Population...

Baby boomers - or those born between 1946 and 1964 - represent the largest age group in St. Clair County. They are followed by kids under the age of 18 (24%) and Generation X (23%), which represents those born between 1965 and 1980.



St. Clair County Lags in Diversity...

St. Clair County is less diverse than the seven-county SEMCOG region and the state overall; however, it is growing more diverse with a growing Hispanic population since 2010.

Housing Units 2013				
Jurisdiction	Housing Units	% Occupied	Built 1970 or prior	Built after 1970
St. Clair County	71,819	89.6%	47.9%	52.2%
SEMCOG Region	2,062,065	88.1%	55.8%	44.0%
State of Michigan	4,529,311	84.0%	51.3%	48.7%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

The number of housing units has remained stable...

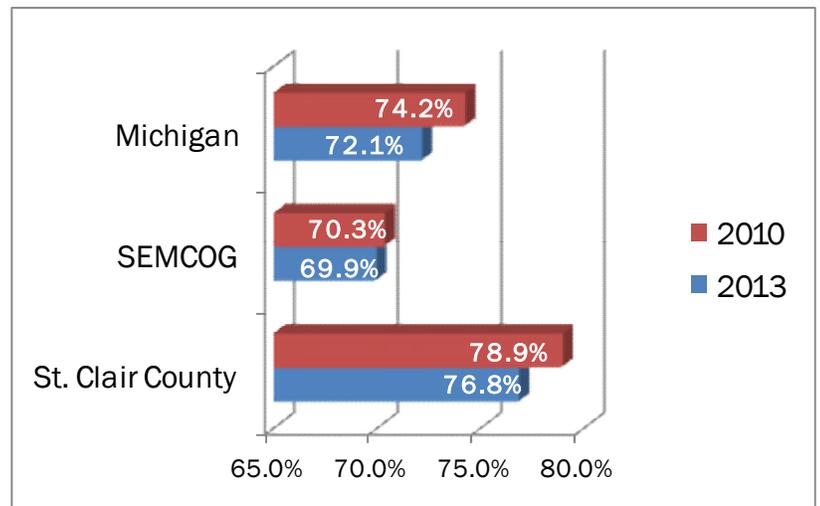
The county experienced a slight decline in the total number of housing units from 2010 to 2013. However, the percentage of occupied units has been stable at 89%. A little over half of the county's housing stock was constructed after 1970.

St. Clair County has a high rate of homeownership...

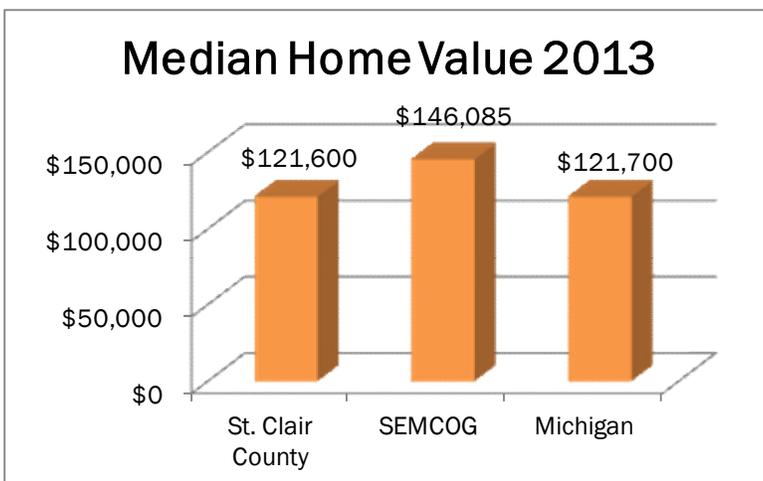
The ratio of owner-occupied units in St. Clair County continues to be higher than that of the region and the state.

Home Ownership

As a Percentage of Occupied Units

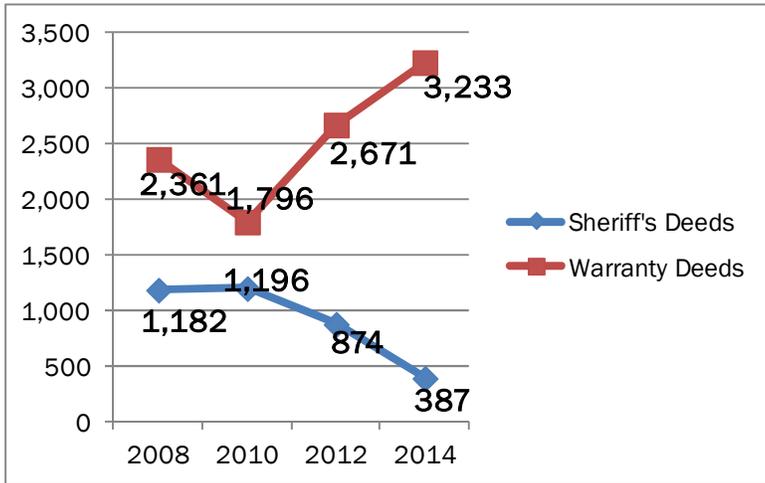


Median Home Value 2013



Home Values in St. Clair County are on par with the state, but lag behind the SEMCOG region...

The ratio of owner-occupied units in St. Clair County continues to be higher than that of the region and the state.



The housing market continues to improve...
The number of Sheriff's Deeds each year peaked in 2011 with 1,211 foreclosures (not shown on graph). Since that time, the number of Sheriff's Deeds has decreased each year. In 2014, there were 387. During that same time period, the number of home sales (warranty deeds) has gone up each year. In 2014, there were 3,233 warranty deeds recorded in St. Clair County.

Nearly 60% of county residents are age 35 or older. Over the next 20 years, the County will continue to see its residents grow older, which has numerous implications for planning. The most obvious include improved emergency services, availability of health facilities, affordable housing, and transportation, especially in rural areas. Housing for senior citizens will likely have to be integrated into the community transportation system, which encompasses a whole other set of planning issues. A key implication of the county's aging population is the movement toward "Aging In Place," which refers to living where you have lived for years, as opposed to living in a health care environment or nursing home. In short, aging in place allows elderly residents to live safely and independently in the home of their choice.

While the County's population is aging, it also has a large population of children under the age of 18. This cohort of young children brings with it a separate set of planning implications for both the county and local units of government, including planning for parks and recreation, ways to keep kids active and healthy, and creating communities that kids will want to return to later in life after they graduate from college or start families of their own.

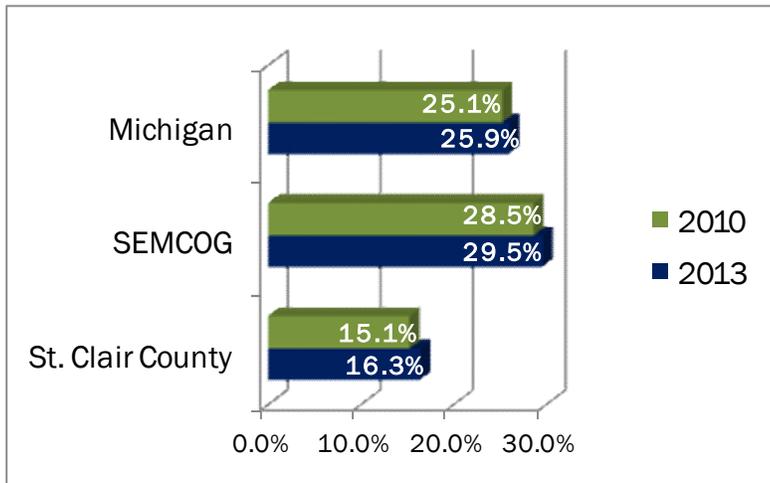
Many Millennials are the children of the Baby Boomers, and are generally considered to be born between 1981 and 1997. In 2013, Millennials made up about 18% of St. Clair County's population.

HOUSEHOLDS IN ST. CLAIR COUNTY

Households are getting smaller...

Between 2009 and 2013, St. Clair County's average household size dropped from 2.54 to 2.49, slightly below the average for the SEMCOG region (2.54) and the state of Michigan (2.53). The two most common household types in St. Clair County are married couple families at 52.6 percent, and single homeowners living alone at 25.9 percent. Combined, these two groups make up 78.5 percent of St. Clair County households. This shift to smaller households follows a national trend and can be attributed to changing family dynamics and societal characteristics. People are waiting longer to get married, women are delaying having children to focus on careers, divorce is more commonplace than it was in previous decades, and people generally have more mobility and financial means to live on their own. Moreover, Americans are favoring having fewer children than in past decades, according to a 2011 Gallup research poll. From that study, Gallup indicated that "after a brief reversal a decade or so ago in the contemporary trend toward preferring smaller families, Americans are again growing less likely to favor having three or more children and, correspondingly, more likely to say having two or fewer is ideal."

Population Age 25 or Older with 4-Year Degree or Higher



Education levels are increasing...

The number of St. Clair County residents age 25 or older who have attained a Bachelor's degree or higher increased between 2010 and 2013. However, the County still lags behind the Southeast Michigan region and the State when it comes to educational attainment.

Single-parent households are increasing...

Along those same lines, single-parent households are increasing. This is a trend nationally and regionally. In St. Clair County, 67.6% of households with children are headed by married couples, down from 72% in 2010. Single-parent families with children under 18 increased from 27.9% in 2010, to 32.4% in 2013.

HOUSING MARKET

Nationally, the housing market was a weak segment of the economy during the Great Recession, with a great degree of fluctuation on a market-by-market basis. Housing sales activity and values began showing signs of improvement in the first quarter of 2012 compared to the same period in 2011. Nationally, analysts believe that home values reached their bottom in February of 2012 and have since been slowly rising since.

In St. Clair County, the number of Sheriff's Deeds each year peaked in 2011 with 1,211 foreclosures. Since that time, the number of Sheriff's Deeds has decreased each year. In 2014, there were 387 sheriff's deeds. During that same time period, the number of home sales (warranty deeds) has gone up each year. Sales activity and prices have been improving over the past few years in St. Clair County. In 2014, there were 3,233 warranty deeds recorded in St. Clair County compared to 1,796 back in 2010 - an increase of roughly 80% in five years.

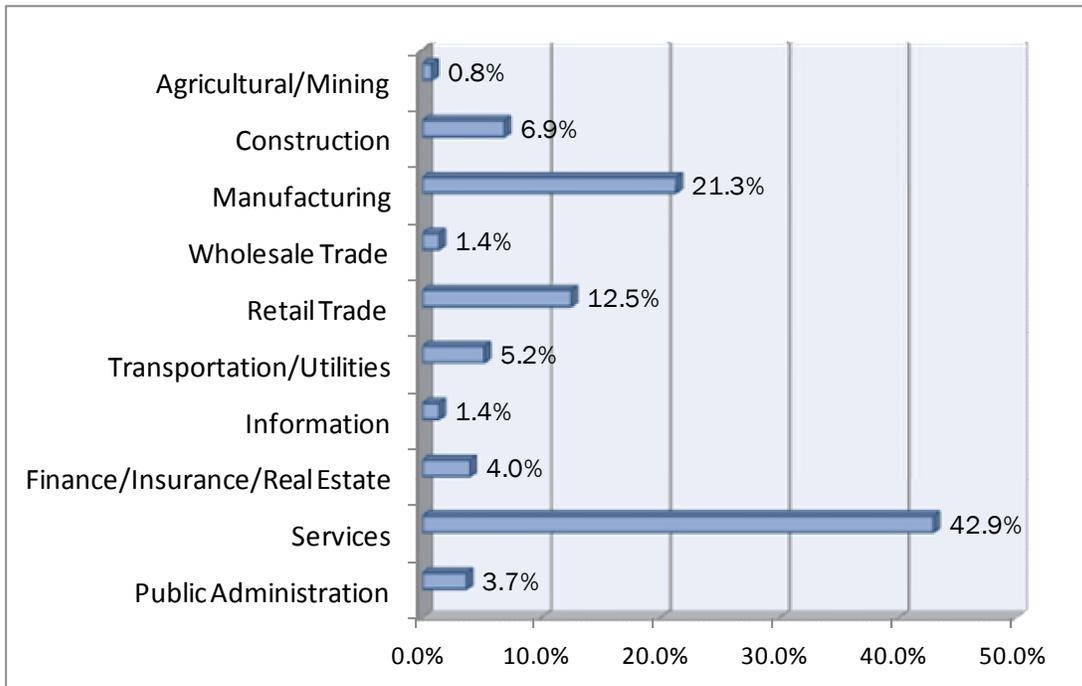
While housing market activity has improved in the past few years, median home values have gone down since 2009: \$121,600 in 2013 compared to \$156,100 in 2009.

EDUCATION

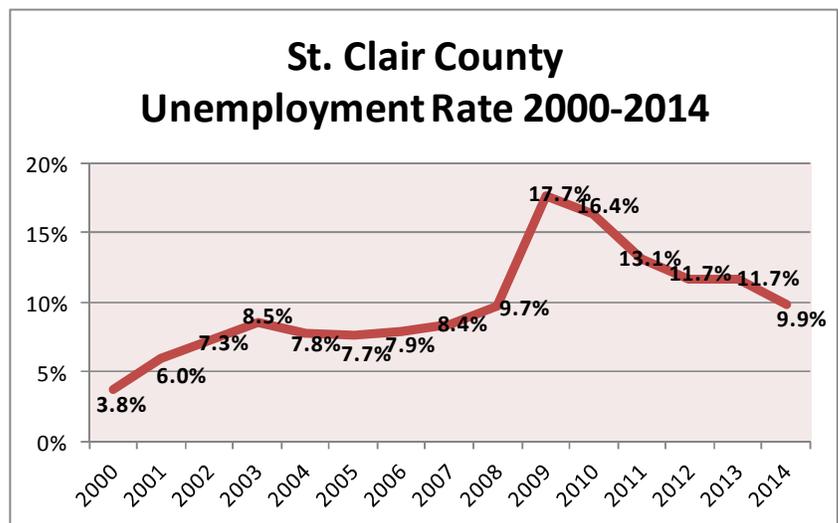
Education levels of St. Clair County residents continue to lag behind regional and statewide levels, especially in the percentage of college graduates. According to 2013 American Community Survey estimates, the percentage of persons age 25 or older with a Bachelor's degree or higher was 16.3%, compared to 29.5% in the SEMCOG region, and 25.9% in Michigan.

Nearly 37% of St. Clair County residents have only a high school education, compared to 30% statewide. The County's percentage of people age 25 or older with only a high school education has remained stable since 2009.

2015 Employed Population Age 16 and Up by Industry in St. Clair County

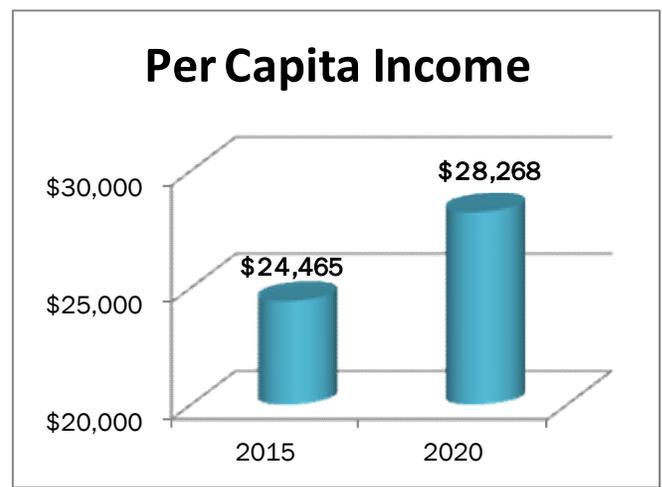
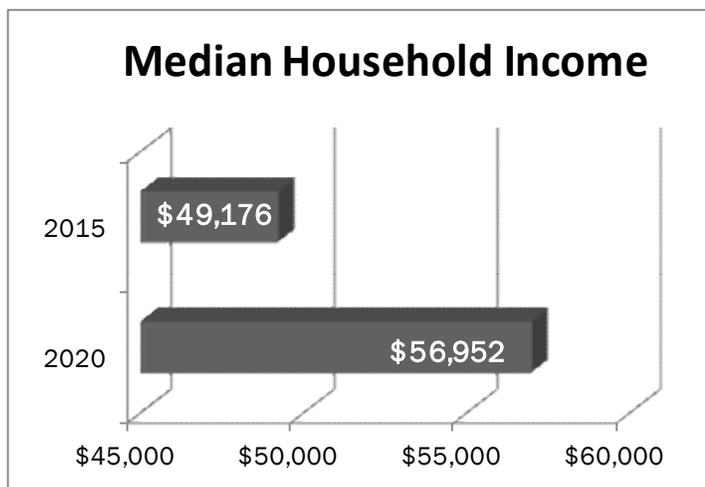


Unemployment is trending down...
 The county's annual unemployment rate has been declining each year since 2009.



EMPLOYMENT

In 2015, roughly 50% of St. Clair County residents were employed in “white collar” industries. White collar industries include management, professionals, educational workers, social service occupations, health care technicians and computer occupations, as well as business, financial, legal, medical, engineering and architectural professionals. As a group, they tend to be highly educated, receive higher salaries, and live in areas with higher housing values. Another 30.4% of residents worked in “blue collar” industries, such as production, manufacturing, construction, and transportation.



As noted in the graph on page 19, the majority of St. Clair County residents (42.9%) worked in the services sector. The next largest sector was manufacturing, which employed 21.3% of St. Clair County workers over the age of 16.

St. Clair County’s employment has, for the most part, relied on manufacturing in the past, with a focus on the automotive and plastics industries. Employment trends in the county have followed the patterns of the larger state economy for the last few years. Manufacturing layoffs in the automotive industry as well as job losses in construction and retail trade contributed to the high unemployment rate in the area’s economy and have acted to increase unemployment in St. Clair County as well. The level of educational attainment in St. Clair County must increase in order to attract new economy companies to the area. The county can no longer afford to rely on the manufacturing sector alone to provide jobs, which makes earning a Bachelor’s degree even more important than ever. The reliance on manufacturing jobs has begun to shift, as indicated by the high number of residents working in the services sector.

The unemployment rate is going down...

Unemployment refers to people in the labor force who are not employed. These include people who are laid off and waiting to be recalled to work and people who are available for work, except for illness, and actively attempting to find work. The Bureau of Labor Statistics defines unemployment as people who are jobless, actively seeking work, and available to take a job. In 2014, there were 73,900 people age 16 or older in the labor force in St. Clair County; however, only 66,598 (90%) of those people were employed. The annual unemployment rate in 2014 was 9.9%, which was 7.8% less than the County’s unemployment rate in 2009 at the peak of the Great Recession.

The number of unemployed people is a gauge of economic health. A lower unemployment rate is a sign of a good economy; however, an unemployment rate that is too low means a lack of qualified workers, which can limit expansion. For St. Clair County as a whole, the annual unemployment rate has been declining each year since 2009, when it was at 17.7 following the housing crisis and the struggles of the automotive sector in Michigan. As of August 2015, the unemployment rate in St. Clair County was 6.6%, which was slightly higher than the 5.2% unemployment rate of both the state and nation.

The trends in county employment patterns have important consequences. The job loss that has taken place over the last 6-7 years has meant a number of things. Lower incomes caused by joblessness have increased affordability pressures on households that were already spending a large percentage of their income on housing. Job loss also changes commuting patterns and therefore changes evaluations of residential neighborhoods. As unemployment began to affect more and more families, many communities experienced a rise in housing vacancies and a decline in community character.

THE GREAT RECESSION: REGIONAL AND COUNTYWIDE IMPACT

The U.S. is slowly recovering from one of the deepest and longest recessions since World War II. In what is being called the Great Recession (period between December 2007 and June 2009), the U.S. lost between 7 million and 8 million jobs. From a more regional perspective, St. Clair County and SEMCOG region experienced increased unemployment, declining personal incomes, growing rates of home foreclosures, an eroding tax base, and reductions in government services. Due to the restructuring of the domestic auto industry, the region was in an almost decade-long recession, losing employment every year from 2001 to 2010.

As noted in SEMCOG's "Increasing Jobs and Prosperity in Southeast Michigan" report:

"...in 2005, the region's economy was 680 percent more concentrated in auto manufacturing employment than the national economy – a gross disproportion. Population stagnated, and then declined; continued decline is expected into the next decade.

The region's economy – highly dependent on a restructuring, domestic automotive industry – was thrown into turmoil in 2009 with the bankruptcies of Chrysler and General Motors. Numerous suppliers and support firms also went bankrupt or restructured. Unemployment – already among the highest in the nation at eight percent in 2008 – skyrocketed to more than 15 percent in 2009. Personal income regressed, poverty and housing vacancies increased, and the region's property tax base – the primary revenue source for local governments – has been declining since 2009. All of this came at a time when the region was trying to transform its economic base, as well as plan for future needs, such as an aging population and aging infrastructure."

INCOME AND POVERTY

According to forecasts by ESRI Inc., the median household income for St. Clair County was \$49,176 in 2015, which is lower than both the SEMCOG region (\$53,201) and Michigan (\$49,402). ESRI projects that the county's median household income will jump to \$56,952 in 2020 - an increase of \$7,776, or 16%. The county's per capita income was \$24,465 in 2015 and is projected to be \$28,268 by 2020. The current per capital personal income is down 18% from 2009, when the per capita person income was \$29,922. This decrease can be attributed to the large wave of job losses during the Great Recession and wages in general not keeping up with inflation. Many people had to take employment opportunities that simply paid lower wages. In general, wages in St. Clair County tend to be lower than in other counties in the SEMCOG region.

Disposable income is the amount of money that households have available for spending and saving after income taxes have been paid. In 2015, St. Clair County's median disposable income was \$39,425 according to ESRI forecasts.

The Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to define poverty levels. If a family's total income is less than the Census Bureau's threshold, then that family, and every individual in it is considered below poverty level. The poverty thresholds are updated annually for inflation using the Consumer Price Index.

ALICE Data for St. Clair County

ALICE is a United Way acronym which stands for "Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed" and represents the growing number of individuals and families who are working, but are unable to afford the basic necessities of housing, food, child care, health care, and transportation. Building on a project first initiated in 2009 at United Way of Northern New Jersey, United Ways in several other states, including Michigan, joined the United Way ALICE Project in 2014. Using realistic measures of the financial survival threshold for each county in Michigan, the report reveals that Michigan has 605,210 households below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) but also has 930,503 ALICE households, which have income above the FPL, but below the ALICE threshold. From the Michigan ALICE Report: 40% of the households in Michigan - 1.54 million in all - are struggling to support themselves.

St. Clair County, 2012		
Town	Total HH	% ALICE & Poverty
Algonoo City	1,797	47%
Berlin Township	1,189	18%
Brookway Township	675	36%
Burloville Township	1,623	40%
Casco Township	1,451	34%
China Township	1,206	27%
Clay Township	3,905	33%
Clyde Township	2,034	24%
Columbus Township	1,487	28%
Cottleville Township	1,428	42%
East China Township	1,639	33%
Emmett Township	948	30%
Fort Gratiot Charter Township	4,678	36%
Grant Township	663	32%
Greenwood Township	560	26%
Ira Township	2,174	38%
Kenosha Township	888	27%
Kimball Township	3,696	36%
Lynn Township	470	37%
Marine City	1,715	45%
Marysville City	4,202	35%
Memphis City	136	46%
Mussey Township	1,435	46%
Port Huron Charter Township	4,097	46%
Port Huron City	12,119	60%
Riley Township	1,190	23%
St. Clair City	2,268	36%
St. Clair Township	2,478	23%
Wales Township	1,243	36%
Yale City	711	50%

NOTE: Municipal-level data may not match county-level data; municipal-level data often relies on 3- and 5-year averages, is not available for the smallest towns that don't report income, and may overlap with Census Designated Places (CDP).

ALICE IN ST. CLAIR COUNTY

Population: 160,644 | Number of Households: 65,075
 Median Household Income: \$44,518 (state average: \$46,859)
 Unemployment Rate: 11.9% (state average: 9.1%)
 Gini Coefficient (zero = equality; one = inequality): 0.44 (state average: 0.46)

How many households are struggling?

ALICE, an acronym for Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, are households that earn more than the U.S. poverty level, but less than the basic cost of living for the county. Combined, the number of poverty and ALICE households equals the total population struggling to afford basic needs.

Poverty 9,783 HH 15%	ALICE 17,937 HH 28%	STROUBLING	Above ALICE 37,355 HH 57%
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What are the economic conditions?

The Economic Viability Dashboard evaluates community conditions for ALICE in three core areas. Each is an index with a scale of 1 (worst) to 100 (best).

Housing Affordability poor (42)	Job Opportunities poor (53)	Community Support poor (48)
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What does it cost to afford the basic necessities?

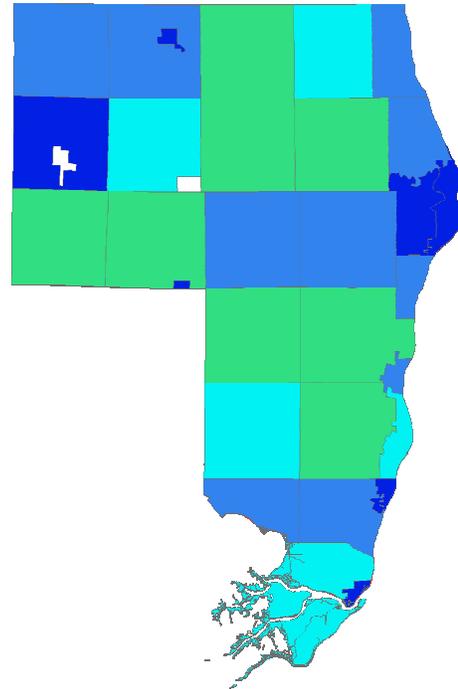
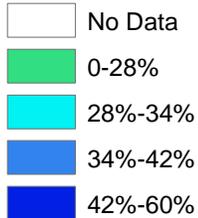
This bare-minimum budget does not allow for any savings, leaving a household vulnerable to unexpected expenses. Affording only a very modest living in each community, this budget is still significantly more than the U.S. poverty rate of \$11,170 for a single adult and \$23,050 for a family of four.

Household Survival Budget, St. Clair County		
	SINGLE ADULT	FAMILY (INFANT AND PRE-K)
Housing	\$588	\$798
Child care	\$-	\$1,196
Food	\$196	\$592
Transportation	\$403	\$805
Health care	\$115	\$458
Miscellaneous	\$145	\$425
Taxes	\$153	\$404
Monthly total	\$1,597	\$4,678
ANNUAL TOTAL	\$19,164	\$56,135
Hourly wage	\$9.58	\$28.07

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and state Treasury, and ChildCare Aware, 2012; American Community Survey, 5 year estimate.

Households with problems affording basic needs

PERCENT



A key characteristic of ALICE households is that these households are working or have worked; however, ALICE and poverty-level households only earn 39% of the income needed to reach the ALICE threshold for basic economic survival. The Michigan Report goes on to say that public and private assistance is not enough to stabilize ALICE households.

According to the Michigan ALICE Report, the prevalence of ALICE households is caused by multiple factors:

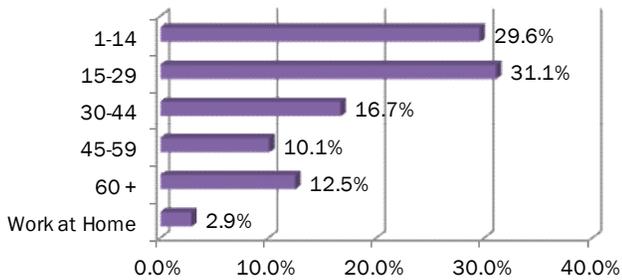
- The cost of basic household expenses exceeding what most jobs can support.
- The cost of housing, child care, transportation, food, and health care in Michigan increased by 9% during the Great Recession.
- Economic conditions worsened for ALICE households in all counties during the Great Recession.
- Michigan’s housing stock does not match current needs. There are not enough affordable rental units and many households cannot afford a down payment and/or cannot qualify for a mortgage on a home.

In St. Clair County, 15% of households were in poverty in 2012 and 28% were ALICE households - meaning 43% of the households in the county were struggling. The communities that had the highest percentage of ALICE and poverty households were the city of Port Huron (60%), Yale (50%), and Algonac (47%). The ALICE data for St. Clair County included an Economic Viability Dashboard that evaluated community conditions in three core areas: Housing Affordability, Job Opportunities, and Community Support. Each of those areas was scored on an index of 1 (worst) to 100 (best). All three core areas were rated as being poor.

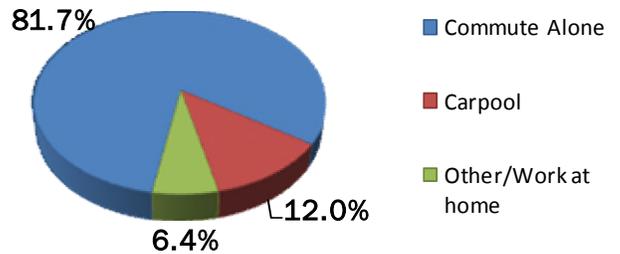
According to the 2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 14.9% of the population fell below poverty level. Furthermore, just over 21% of children under the age of 18 were below poverty. Roughly 14% of people between the ages of 18-64 and 7.8% of people ages 65 and over were below poverty.

The concentration and suburbanization of poverty has serious implications for St. Clair County communities, including safety, quality of education, health of residents, stability of neighborhoods, resources available for services, and overall quality of life.

Workers Commute Time in Minutes



How People Travel to Work, 2013

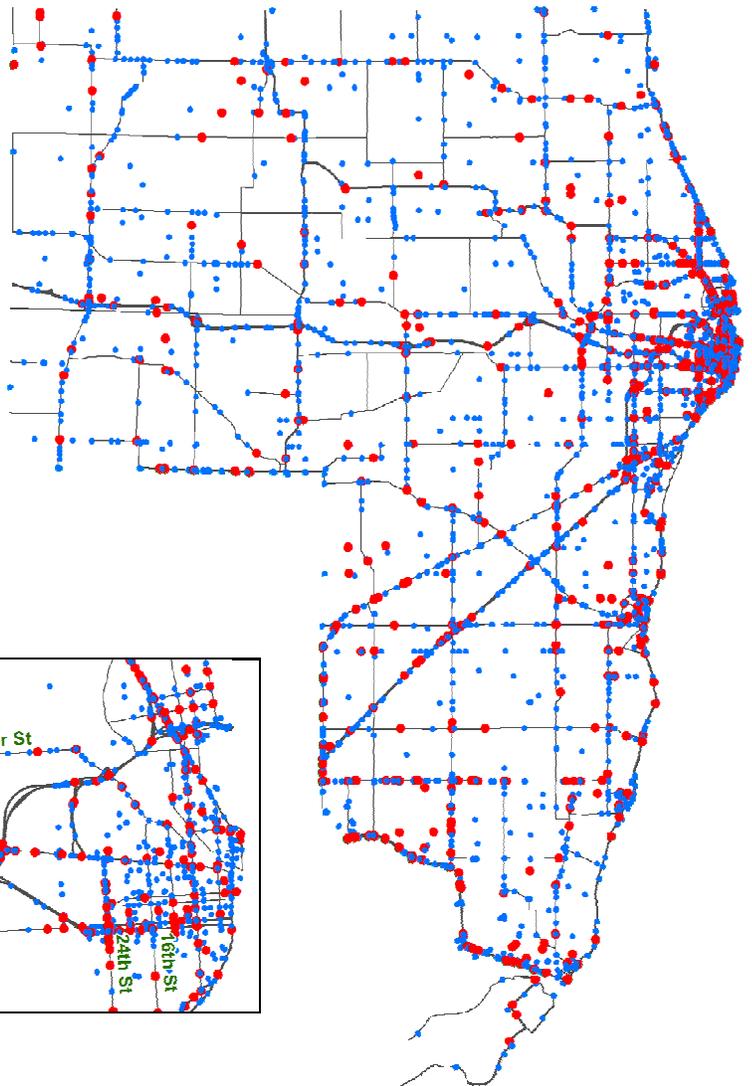


Transportation Quick Facts...

2,232
Miles of Public Roads

68
Miles of Freight Railway

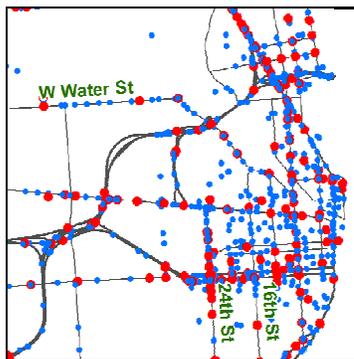
326
Bridges



St. Clair County

2014 Crashes

- Crash Location
- Injury Crash



TRANSPORTATION OVERVIEW

WHY, WHEN, AND HOW PEOPLE TRAVEL

Knowing why, when, and how people travel helps transportation planners examine existing traffic volumes, safe or unsafe conditions, required roadway improvements, and alternative or non-motorized means of transportation. Comparing current transportation information with projected population and land use trends helps determine future transportation requirements; and where and when transportation improvements should be made.

Why People Travel

Most people travel, on a daily basis, to and from work and school. Non-work travel is for shopping, social, or recreational purposes. The percentage of the labor force traveling to jobs outside St. Clair County - over 35.7% - is higher than the state average (28.4%) of people who work outside their home county. Most of these St. Clair County residents commute to jobs in Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties.

When People Travel

Residents of St. Clair County tend to leave for work earlier than the state average, which means that morning peak hours are earlier than in most counties. The departure time from work is more evenly distributed than the state average. Therefore, roads are generally more congested in the morning rush hours than in the evening return-home hours.

For St. Clair County residents who work within the county, the amount of time it takes to get to work is less than the state average. This is due to the relative compactness of employment centers in Port Huron, Marysville, and St. Clair. However, residents who commute to work outside the county travel approximately one hour, each way, to and from their jobs. The majority of workers in the county (31%) have commute times between 15 and 29 minutes. Another 30% have commute times less than 15 minutes. These commute times have remained relatively stable since 2000, when 31% of workers commuted less than 15 minutes and about 28% had commute times between 15 and 29 minutes.

How People Travel

Ninety-four percent of St. Clair County workers commute via private automobile. This is comparable to the state average. Nearly 82% of St. Clair County commuters travel alone to and from work. Twelve percent carpool, most of these with only one other person. Just over 6% of workers either get to work by some other means or work at home.





TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

There are 2,232 miles of public roadways in St. Clair County, including gravel, asphalt, and concrete roads. I-94 is the principal route between Port Huron and Detroit. I-69 is the principal route between Port Huron and Lapeer, continuing on to Flint, Lansing, Battle Creek, and Indianapolis, Indiana. These interstates traverse 52-miles within St. Clair County.

Pine Grove Avenue (M-25) in northern Port Huron and Gratiot Avenue through Marysville are the two principal arterials within St. Clair County. M-19 is a principal arterial in the rural, western part of the county that connects Yale, Emmett, and Memphis; it also extends north into Sanilac County and south into Macomb County.

There are a number of minor arterials that move traffic between nearby communities within St. Clair County. M-29 is a minor arterial that serves communities along the St. Clair River.

Collectors connect arterials with local roads and residential streets and provide access to abutting properties. Collectors are divided into three categories: major collectors in rural areas, minor collectors in rural areas, and urban collectors. Many individual subdivisions or neighborhoods contain one or more collectors that funnel traffic between adjacent neighborhoods.

Local streets provide access to property and homes. These streets are generally short and discontinuous, often running no farther than to the nearest collectors.

The St. Clair County Road Commission is responsible for maintaining most of the roads within the county, including interstate highways, Michigan highways, and township section-mile roads. Cities and villages are responsible for roads within their respective jurisdiction. Townships are generally not responsible for road maintenance.

Capacity and Congestion

Under optimum conditions, a two-lane road has a capacity for up to 12,000 vehicles per day. The majority of roads in St. Clair County have two lanes and carry less than 8,000 vehicles per day. The county's only four and five-lane roads are within the urbanized areas of Port Huron, Marysville, Marine City, and St. Clair. Most of these carry 10,000 to 20,000 vehicles per day. The heaviest volume road in the county (other than I-94 and I-69) is Pine Grove Avenue (M-25 in northern Port Huron) which carries roughly 43,000 vehicles per day.

Projections through 2035 show an increase in traffic in and around Port Huron and on some roads in the southern part of the county due to increased suburbanization there. These increases may be substantial as a result of accelerated development (Marine City Highway) or regionally significant transportation improvements (Blue Water Bridge Plaza).

Projections also show that the most severe congestion will occur on M-29 between New Baltimore and Algonac and on M-25 along Pine Grove and Lakeshore Drive. More congestion will also occur on Marine City Highway and Fred W. Moore Highway.

Congestion can be minimized by adequately spacing traffic signals and by controlling the number and frequency of driveways and driveway locations.

Safety

As might be expected, more accidents occur on major roads and intersections. Therefore, how an intersection is designed and how well traffic moves through it are major safety considerations. Unobstructed sight distance is an important safety factor. In St. Clair County, the majority of intersections with the highest occurrence of crashes are located within Port Huron.

The crash rate, defined as number of traffic crashes per 1,000 vehicle miles traveled (VMT), provides an alternative method of examining traffic crash trends. In 2012, St. Clair County had a crash rate of 9.73 per 1,000 VMT.

In 2014, approximately 19% of crashes in St. Clair County resulted in some degree of injury. Sixteen fatalities were recorded in 2014. In 2014, 3,859 traffic crashes were reported in St. Clair County. This represents a 1.6% increase over reported crashes in 2012.

BLUE WATER BRIDGE

The Blue Water Bridge is a unique and key element in St. Clair County's transportation network because it links, not only this area, but much of the United States and Mexico with Ontario, Canada. The initial span was completed in 1938; an additional span was completed in 1997.

The bridge serves as a conduit for international trade between Canada and the United States. It is also the fourth busiest crossing between the U.S. and Canada, and the second busiest truck crossing between the two countries. While the number of personal vehicle trips has declined in recent years, this gateway remains a critical access point for passenger vehicles and freight traffic between St. Clair County and Canada.

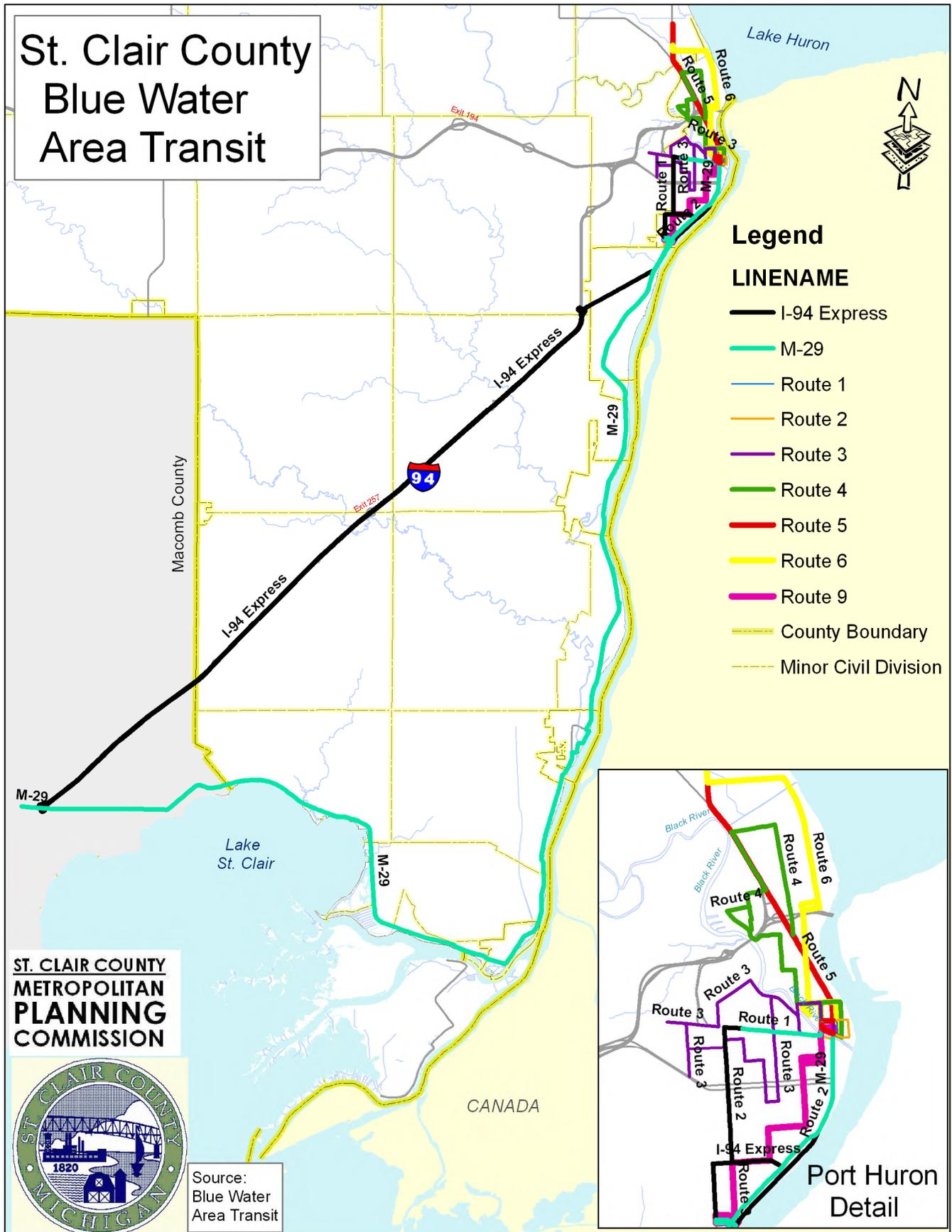
Almost \$70 billion of trade is completed via the Blue Water Bridge. On a typical weekday, approximately 10,000 cars and 6,000 trucks use this facility.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

The Blue Water Area Transportation Commission (BWATC) provides transit services to several communities within St. Clair County, including the city of Port Huron and the townships of Port Huron, Fort Gratiot and Burtchville. BWATC operates a combination of fixed route, demand response and contract services.

BWATC currently operates eight regularly scheduled bus routes (routes #1 to #6, #9, and shopper shuttle) within the City of Port Huron and Fort Gratiot Township. Although there are fixed stops along each route, the service operates a flag system where necessary to allow bus riders to catch the bus anywhere along route. Headways are generally 45 minutes and all vehicles for the fixed route service are lift or ramp equipped and are equipped with bicycle racks.

A commuter service runs to Chesterfield Township, a community in northern Macomb County that is home to many suburban office parks, twice a day Monday through Friday. This service also links up with the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) buses so commuters can make a connection to their final destination in Southeast Michigan and/or downtown Detroit. This route is called the I-94 Express Route. It has 4





Blue Water Area Transit operates the majority of its fleet on compressed natural gas (CNG), which greatly reduces pollution and saves about a dollar per gallon on the cost of fuel. During the summer months, BWATC operates a trolley route that highlights historic and scenic sites in downtown Port Huron. Photos courtesy of Blue Water Area Transit Commission.

stops in St. Clair County before reaching its final destination at 23 Mile Rd. and Gratiot. Commuters can also take the M-29 Route that will take customers to New Baltimore, in Macomb County.

RAIL TRANSPORT

Rail Transport/Freight

CSX Transportation and CN North America Railroad provide Class I rail service to the County. The Class I rail routes in St. Clair County provide U.S. freight connections to Canada through the International Railroad Tunnel in Port Huron, as well as service to industrial sites throughout Michigan. In 2012, nearly 233,000 loaded containers and nearly 165,000 empty containers were shipped across the United States-Canadian border.

The CN North America's primary line runs east to west through the communities of Port Huron, Emmett, and Capac. CN North America also has a route through the communities of Columbus Township and Smiths Creek on a SW-NE Detroit line. The CSX line runs from Marine City through St. Clair, Marysville, and Port Huron.

International Rail Tunnel

Canadian National Railroad owns the tunnel under the St. Clair River that connects Port Huron with Sarnia, Ontario. The tunnel opened in April 1995, and is a major link in the most direct route between Halifax, Nova Scotia, Toronto, Ontario, and Chicago, Illinois. Trains passing through the tunnel transport high-priced manufactured goods and prepackaged food items from Europe to the United States industrial heartland. The tunnel accommodates high-clearance, multilevel auto carriers and double-stacked containers that can be carried on either train cars or semi-trucks.

Passenger Rail

In addition to freight, the CN east-west route provides passage for Amtrak passenger rail service. The Port Huron depot station is the only scheduled stop in the County for daily round trip service between Port Huron and Chicago. And as this service continues to grow, more trips are likely to be added. The current Amtrak station is located on 16th Street in Port Huron and has a number of deficiencies that detract from the passenger experience and the functioning of the station itself.

Overall, the existing Amtrak station is inadequate to serve Amtrak passengers. The property on which the station is located is a narrow parcel that does not provide enough parking for passengers. Additionally, there is currently no connection to public transportation and there are further deficiencies from a security standpoint.

A collaborative group of community officials and local stakeholders have convened meetings to begin discussing the potential for developing a new Amtrak station to serve the Port Huron/St. Clair County area. Initial

discussions have highlighted potential opportunities that a new Amtrak station could bring to the community. A likely location for a new station is the area between 24th Street and Michigan Street, at the site of the existing CN Tiffin Yard.

There is overwhelming community support for a new station that would be part of a larger development that would complement the services of the Amtrak station - amenities such as food, retail and hospitality services, potential for serving as a regional transportation center with connections to Blue Water Area Transit service, and other features that could make the new station part of a transit-oriented development (TOD). Both CN Railroad and Amtrak have taken part in these initial discussions and are amenable to further discussions about a new location, development as a larger transportation center, and establishment of other retail and hospitality amenities that will provide additional economic development opportunities. The Port Huron Township Downtown Development Authority (DDA) has taken the lead in this effort.

FREIGHT TRANSPORT

Southeast Michigan's unique geographic position, and specifically St. Clair County, forms an integral gateway to Canada, Chicago and the Midwest, Mexico, and beyond. Given the geography of the region, the efficiency of the transportation system is determined by the quality and effectiveness of the state and regional highway and road system as well as by the efficiencies at the international border crossings.

St. Clair County is likely to experience significant increases in truck volume due to its status as a U.S. port/border gateway. The additional volume will place greater pressure on the county's transportation network by trying to balance the concerns of freight companies with local commuters and tourists. Due to the changes in truck volume, MDOT has worked to improve the Blue Water Bridge Plaza and continues to work to improve the interstate in and around the Blue Water Bridge. In 2015, a new Michigan Welcome Center was constructed off of westbound I-94 in Port Huron Township. MDOT will complete further expansion of the Bridge Plaza as funding becomes available.

AIRPORTS

The St. Clair County International Airport (SCCIA) primarily functions as a cargo airport providing 24-hour customs/immigration services. The SCCIA is equipped with Pilot Controlled Lighting, an Automated Weather Observation System and an Instrument Landing System. The SCCIA's primary runway is 5,103 feet long by 100 feet wide and the secondary runway is 4,100 feet long by 75 feet wide. Major roadways that serve the airport include I-94, I-69, and Gratiot Avenue.



AGENCIES THAT INFLUENCE TRANSPORTATION IN ST. CLAIR COUNTY

- St. Clair County Metropolitan Planning Commission (SCCMPC)
- St. Clair County Transportation Study (SCCOTS)
- St. Clair County Road Commission
- St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission (PARC)
- Local Units of Government/Road Agencies
- Blue Water Area Transportation Commission (BWATC)
- Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)
- Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG)
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)



Directly adjacent to the airport is the 80-acre St. Clair County Airport Industrial Park. This industrial park is geared towards attracting applied research and technology with 12,000-20,000 square foot facilities available. This location is considered ideal for corporate research and development, rapid prototyping, or related industrial activity due to the convenience of airport facilities for corporate and time sensitive logistics.

The Marine City Airport is a privately owned airport. The airport is classified as a general-utility airport. The I-94/26 Mile Road interchange is the closest major access point to serve this airport.

FERRIES

There are three ferry services in and around the city of Algonac that provide access to the community. Auto ferry service across the St. Clair River is available from the Walpole Algonac Ferry, which connects Algonac to Walpole Island in Ontario, Canada - the closest route between the Detroit area and the Chatham/Wallaceburg/London/Toronto region in Ontario.

There is also passenger (but not automobile) ferry service from Algonac to Russell Island via the Russell Island Ferry, which shares a dock with the Walpole Algonac Ferry. There is a large parking lot for Russell Island Ferry passengers located near where M-29 bends through Algonac's central business district on the east side of St. Clair River Drive. This lot is immediately south of the Seafarers International Union headquarters.

Just west of the Algonac city limits on M-29 in Clay Township is Champions Auto Ferry, which connects mainland Clay Township to Harsens Island. Additionally, there is a fourth ferry service located further north in Marine City, connecting Marine City and Downtown Sombra, Ontario, Canada.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING PROCESS

The St. Clair County Transportation Study (SCCOTS) is the federally-designated transportation planning agency responsible for identifying future transportation needs and then developing and evaluating proposed solutions to maximize the effectiveness of system investments throughout St. Clair County. SCCOTS is comprised of representatives from local units of government throughout St. Clair County.

The St. Clair County Board of Commissioners appoints eleven citizens to serve as the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC). MPC representation is countywide, with appointees from various sectors of the community and two members at-large. A staff of professional planners, analysts, technicians and administrative support staff

assist the MPC. MPC staff members also serve as staff to SCCOTS.

In order to fulfill its federal and state mandates, SCCOTS, in conjunction with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), is engaged in the following ongoing transportation planning activities:

- Plan Monitoring
- Planning Studies
- Planning Services
- Plan Implementation
- Program Administration

In addition to the five transportation elements outlined above, SCCOTS staff also develops the four-year prioritized project list for inclusion into the regional *Transportation Improvement Program* (TIP). Work also includes any necessary amendments to the adopted TIP throughout the year. The TIP document ensures compliance with federal, state and regional requirements regarding financial feasibility and the planning process. It is in the TIP document that federal-aid transportation projects in St. Clair County are prioritized in a coordinated process involving all the road agencies in the county.

The SCCOTS Advisory Committee works together to select projects to spend the federal funds that are allocated to St. Clair County. The Michigan Department of Transportation uses a formula for all of the small Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to distribute federal funds. SCCOTS also receives additional funding through its inclusion as part of the Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments.

All of this planning occurs under the guidance of a five-year Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) that the Metropolitan Planning Commission develops. The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) document is the short term implementation of the Long Range Transportation Plan. Additionally, the MPC develops a Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) each year to detail how federal transportation planning funds will be utilized.

PLANNING AND ZONING PROFILE

MANAGING CHANGE IN ST. CLAIR COUNTY

Widespread change, such as transforming farmland into residential land, is caused by thousands of decisions, made one at a time by individuals and families.

These decisions are influenced by fluctuating income levels, personal vehicles, energy costs, land costs, and the ability to safely and sanitarilly live without public sewers and water. Local zoning ordinances have allowed for construction of single-family homes almost anywhere in the county. Moreover, sprawl has been financially supported by federal, state, and local spending policies and tax incentives.

All of these factors contribute to change. The responsibility to manage change lies with each of us. Certainly, government officials can take a leadership role, but citizens can also vote, and then communicate their preferences to elected and appointed officials.

The St. Clair County Master Plan is based on input from both citizens and government officials. It was created at the county level to help people understand the benefits of managing change - and the ramifications of not managing change - and to help government officials, at all levels of government, make informed decisions for the benefit of the entire population.

Like land use, managing change also relates directly to the economic stability of our community and quality of life for our citizens.

PLANNING IN SCC: COMMUNITY MASTER PLANS

All St. Clair County community master plans were reviewed to examine the completeness of the inventory of resources, at whether the intent of the goals would be supported by other provisions of the plans and at the appropriateness of the location of different proposed land uses compared to standard planning principles. The following observations are based on the review:

- Several master plans (but not all) referenced the intended future land uses or zoning districts of adjacent communities. This permits a community to plan appropriately for lands at its edge and to anticipate and coordinate issues with adjacent communities. The discussion of the composite master plan and zoning maps identifies where there may be conflicts along jurisdictional boundaries.
- Preserving community character (and rural character) is the number one goal of a number of communities. This indicates that the rapidly changing face of St. Clair County is a widely held concern.
- Most township master plans encourage cluster development to preserve open space and agriculture, but few have implemented such tools. There seems to be a conflict between clustering objectives and preserving low-density character in rural communities.
- There is little connection made between housing development patterns and loss of community character or the cost of public services.
- The importance of protecting the environment and natural resources is expressed in many plans but no real provisions are made to ensure protection. Natural resources are seldom even mapped.
- Many communities specifically encourage farmland and open space preservation and participation in a purchase of development rights (PDR) program, but have not put any mechanisms in place to implement these programs.
- Many community master plans encourage a variety of housing types and a wide range of affordable housing options; however, zoning, development processes, and other policies often serve as barriers to affordable housing.
- There is no distinction between rural residential and agriculture. This suggests agriculture is only a holding zone for residential.
- In several instances, the low-density (not agriculture) residential district borders the agriculture district across jurisdiction lines. This presents a potential for conflicts over farming operations.
- The recreation, open space environmental areas seem largely resource driven. There is little substantive area designated as open space for future buffer between uses that potentially benefit from a buffer.
- Very few master plans contain zoning plans, which are detailed in Section 305 of the Michigan Zoning Enabling Act (PA 110 of 2006) and the Michigan Planning Enabling Act (PA 33 of 2008) . The zoning plan can be a separate plan, but is usually part of the master plan. It is usually best if the future land use chapter of a master plan precedes the zoning plan. The Casco Township Master Plan is a good example of a solid zoning plan within a community master plan.
- Some communities include a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) within their master plan; however, most do not.





ZONING IN SCC: ZONING ORDINANCES ACROSS THE COUNTY

All St. Clair County communities enforce their own zoning. There is a multitude of zoning districts. Several generalizations about local zoning ordinances can be made. These include:

- Much of the county is overzoned for small lots, considering that rural character is a high priority of the communities and no provision is made in the plans for substantial increases in public services as new residential development occurs. Four townships have ten-acre minimum lot size zoning and another seven have five-acre minimums for lot size. All other townships have minimum lot sizes of three acres or smaller. This translates in large quantities of land converted for each new residence. There is no systematic approach to managing access from public roads. Strip residential development is an extremely unsafe form of development along roads from a traffic safety perspective, yet virtually all communities permit it (if not indirectly encouraging it).
- There are no storm water ordinances at either the local or the county level. While the Drain Commissioner holds developers to the standard of no increase in runoff, not all proposed development is required to be reviewed and approved by the Drain Commissioner. Site condominium projects are only subject to permit review if the site includes or borders a county drain. A local ordinance can require site condominium project review but it appears no community has adopted such standards.
- There is no system to check on the condition of on-site septic systems. The soils in St. Clair County are so poorly drained that there is a very high chance for failure, which is a health hazard not only to individuals on properties where septic systems fail, but also to the general public. Several counties in Michigan require inspection of septic systems prior to the sale of property.
- The predominate zoning designation is agriculture, agriculture and rural residential combined, open space, or environmental, but a look at the zoning ordinance permitted use section and schedule of regulations shows these zones will not do the intended job of preserving rural character.
- There are enclosed pockets of agriculture and rural residential zones enclosed by more intensively zoned areas in Port Huron, Cottrellville, Kimball and Fort Gratiot townships.
- Higher intensity uses are only occasionally placed near interstate highway interchanges. Much of the land zoned for single-family residential use is near other corridors with less capacity.
- Of the 12 townships located in the county's Rural and Agricultural Conservation District, seven have zoning regulations that offer a low level of support for long-term viable farming. These townships include Mussey, Emmett, Berlin, Columbus, Kenockee, Lynn, and Riley. Low support for long-term viable farming is defined by the zoning ordinance containing a single agricultural zone that allows for residential development, as well as other uses, including golf courses. These ordinances do not explicitly allow roadside stands, farmers markets, or other value-added uses that would be beneficial to farmers.
- Three of the 12 townships located in the county's Rural and Agricultural Conservation District have zoning regulations that provide a high level of support for long-term viable farming. These townships include Greenwood, Grant, and Wales. A high level of support for long-term viable farming is characterized by the zoning ordinance offering some form of exclusive agricultural or open space zoning not permitting residential development. Moreover, roadside stands and other avenues for increased farm profitability are allowed.

Difficulties in Managing Change

It is often difficult for communities to manage change for a number of reasons. In today's world, the population is much more mobile. A person or family may live in one city, village, or township, send children to school in another, work in a third, and shop in a fourth - inside or outside of the county - all in the same day. In spite of functional interdependence, local citizens and their elected officials have often failed to realize how land use in the community affects neighboring communities.

Another factor that makes managing change more complex is that there is often inadequate planning leadership at the state level. Michigan government officials and legislative leaders say that planning is a good idea, but gaps exist between good intentions and practical implementation.

Additionally, the sheer number of autonomous government and policymaking bodies in St. Clair County makes managing change even more challenging. St. Clair County has:

- 32 city, village, and township bodies - plus an additional 12 similar bodies in other counties that abut St. Clair County - each exercising local planning and zoning authority (St. Clair County government is the 33rd government unit in the county).
- 13 school districts, plus the Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA).
- State agencies that deal with highways, public health, industry and consumer affairs, and others.
- County agencies such as the Road Commission, the Health Department, and the Parks and Recreation Commission.

Each of these entities carries out special responsibilities according to state and local legislation. In the past, each has made decisions without inviting the Metropolitan Planning Commission or affected or neighboring governmental bodies to participate in their decision making process.

Additionally, there has been too little communication between the county and local units of government. Public service projects funded by the county are not necessarily coordinated with local communities and local communities do not necessarily coordinate development projects with county government.

Lastly, there are inconsistencies in local master plans and zoning ordinances. Local master plans and zoning ordinances are the two main documents within each city, village, and township that affect land use. Unfortunately, zoning ordinances written by local units of government are often not consistent with the master plans adopted by those same governmental units. In particular, local master plans favor preserving farmland and rural character, but zoning ordinances within those same communities promote destruction of farmland in favor of sprawling development.

