

# Planning Information Center

# Census Data Bulletin

RHODE ISLAND  
STATEWIDE  
PLANNING  
PROGRAM



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## Journey to Work: Commuting in Rhode Island

With MBTA commuter trains now operating between Wickford Junction, Warwick, Providence, and Boston, planners expect that more Rhode Islanders will become rail commuters, choosing to take at least part of their journey to work on board a train. Trends in how people commute to work affect many planning variables, such as transportation allocations, the location of development and redevelopment, and climate change mitigation.

The most recent data show that four out of five workers who live in Rhode Island drive to work alone, which is fairly typical among U.S. states. Rhode Island has a larger-than-average share of residents who ride public transportation or walk to work, but the state has among the lowest shares of workers who carpool (45th in the nation, but ahead of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire).

### Most of us still use cars

The 2010 1-year American Community Survey (ACS) estimates find that of 479,988 workers age 16 and over who live in Rhode Island, 424,877 or 88.5% travel to work in a personal vehicle, which includes 39,358 workers who arrive at work as part of a carpool. Rhode Island's share

## BY THE NUMBERS

**80.3%** R.I. workers 16 and over who commute to work in a car, van, or truck by themselves ("single occupant vehicle")

**8.2%** Workers who carpool

**3.3%** Workers who work at home

*Source: 2010 American Community Survey*

of residents who drive to work alone is 80.3%, slightly more than the 80.1% who did so in 2000. Rhode Island is close to the U.S. state median of workers who commute in single-occupant vehicles, 79.8%. Several New England states have similar rates of residents who drive to work alone, although Massachusetts and Vermont have lower percentages, 72.8% and 74.9%, respectively.

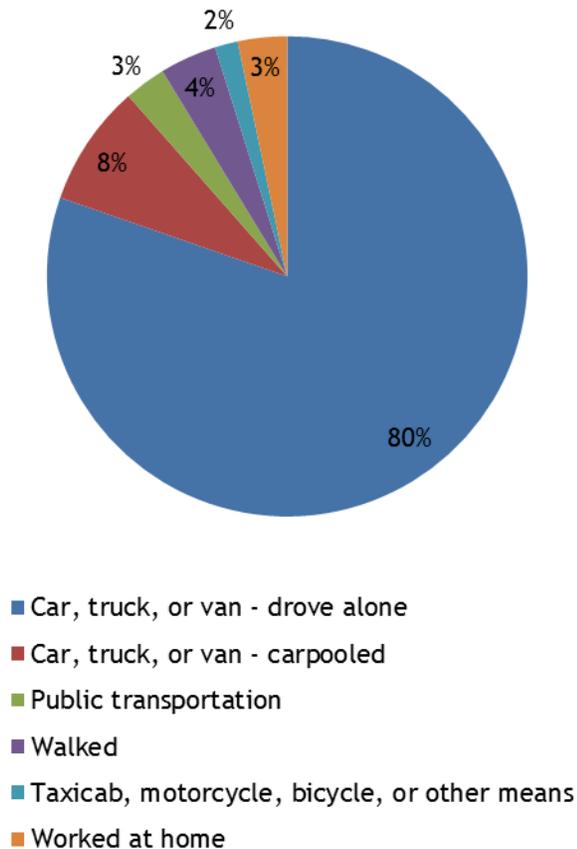
### It depends on where you work

Not surprisingly, residents who work out of their county of residence or out of state have different transportation patterns than those who work in their home county. Of commuters who work out of state, a smaller share drives alone than those who work in state (80%, versus 84%), while a greater share take public transportation (6% versus 2%) or carpool (11% versus 8%). Many commuters to out-of-state workplaces manage the expense and hassle of the commute by using the MBTA Commuter Rail or carpooling.

## ABOUT THE DATA

Data in this Bulletin are drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2010 one-year estimates and from Census 2000's "long form" data, or Summary File 3, which is no longer in use. Both collect surveys from a sample of residents and generate *estimates* of population characteristics. These estimates have associated margins of error (MOEs). Some estimates at the town and county level, and even some of the smaller estimates at the state level (like the number of workers who commute by bike), have relatively large MOEs. Some of the small estimates in this Bulletin have MOEs between 10 and 20% of the estimate or estimated percentage. For exact MOEs, visit the American FactFinder website, listed on page 2.

## Workers 16 and over residing in Rhode Island



Source: U.S. Census

Residents who work in Rhode Island but in different county than the one where they live have the greatest share of commuters who drive to work alone: 90.9%. Those who work in their county of residence have the lowest share, 77.0%.

### Public transportation

The ACS estimates that 13,400 Rhode Island residents travel to work via public transportation, which accounts for 2.8% of all Rhode Island workers 16 and over, up from 2.5% estimated by Census 2000. This percentage is lower than that of New England states that have extensive commuter rail systems—Massachusetts and Connecticut—but more than twice the share of all

other New England states. Again, with the expansion of commuter rail in Rhode Island and the resulting development near commuter rail nodes, this percentage is expected to increase.

### Walking

Compact development patterns in many Rhode Island cities and towns make walking to work possible. Walking shoes are the vehicle of choice for 18,400 commuters in the state, or 3.8% of workers 16 and over. Rhode Island ranks tenth among all U.S. states for percentage of commuters who walk to work.

### Working at home

Of course, the “commutes” with the smallest carbon footprints belong to those who work at home. The ACS estimates that 15,900 Rhode Island residents work at home, or 3.3% of workers 16 and over. This estimate has been growing over the past decade, up from the Census 2000 estimate of 10,995 or 2.2% of workers. Those who work at home do not add to commute-related use of transportation infrastructure (roads, transit, etc.). Planners will likely want to keep an eye on this trend because it could have implications for economic development, location of commercial development and housing, and length and type of non-commute trips.

## TO LEARN MORE...

For additional information about Rhode Island’s commuters, including estimates at the city and town level, visit the U.S. Census website, *American FactFinder*, at <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml>

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation offers a wealth of information on transportation modes and conditions at <http://www.dot.ri.gov/index.asp>

For further information about Planning Information Center resources, contact Amanda Martin at Rhode Island Statewide Planning: [amanda.martin@doa.ri.gov](mailto:amanda.martin@doa.ri.gov) or (401) 222-4720.