COMMUTERS AND COMMUTING IN THE BALTIMORE REGION

Most of our highway and public transportation problems are related to peak period traffic congestion – the traffic jams, delays and rolling backups that occur as commuters travel to and from work.

- **Who** are the commuters in the Baltimore region?
- **Where** are they going?
- **How** do they get there?
- **How** long does it take?

The staff of the Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC), working on behalf of the Baltimore Regional Transportation Board (BRTB), gathers and examines data to identify the issues that affect travel in the Baltimore region. To answer these questions about commuting, staff turned to the BMC Household Travel Survey conducted in 2007-08 as well as census data.
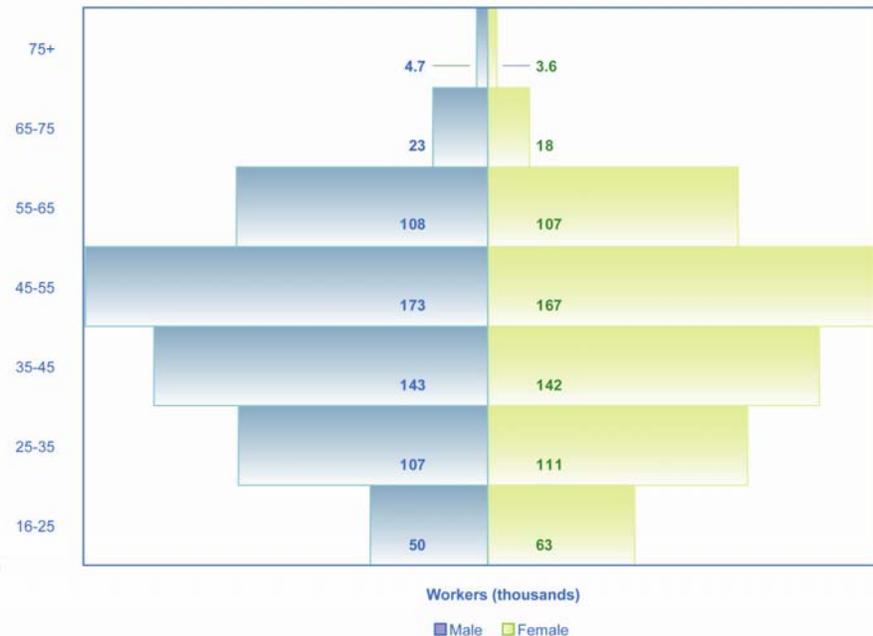
Who are the commuters in the Baltimore region?

Most of the people who work in the Baltimore region also live here. There are about 1.2 million workers[1] and 1.7 million jobs[2] in the Baltimore metropolitan area. Most of the jobs are filled by residents of Baltimore City or one of the five surrounding counties, although some jobs are filled by commuters from outside the region.

Labor force participation for those between the ages of 25 and 55 is over 80 percent, but because there are more Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964) in the population, there are more Baby Boomers in the work force. Labor force participation falls off above age 55.

Male and female labor force participation rates are the same for the Baby Boomers and younger age groups. For older age groups, male participation rates are higher, despite their higher mortality rates.

As the Baby Boomers retire, the economy will require replacement workers to continue to grow. The Baby Boomers, though, are expected to live longer and enjoy a more healthy old age. They may decide to remain in the workforce longer, possibly part-time. This is relevant to commuting because older workers are more likely to reside closer to work and use public transportation.

Male and Female Workers by Age Group

Age	Male	Female
75+	4.7	3.6
65-75	23	18
55-65	108	107
45-55	173	167
35-45	143	142
25-35	107	111
16-25	50	63

Workers (thousands)

Male   Female

Where are they going?

For the first half of the 20th Century, people lived in neighborhoods in the city or nearby suburbs and commuted to jobs in the central business district. Streetcar lines and then highways were designed to take people into and out of downtown. But now, with the growth of suburban town centers, most commuting trips in the Baltimore region are between one suburb and another.

More than one-third of workers in Carroll County, and a quarter of workers in Harford County, commute to other suburban counties. Notable exceptions are Baltimore City, where almost two-thirds of commuter trips are internal, and Baltimore County, where about one-third of the workforce commutes to jobs in the city. Some residents of the region, mostly from Anne Arundel and Howard counties, commute to jobs outside the region, mostly in Washington, DC, and its suburbs.

In addition, about 20 percent of the commuters interviewed for the Household Travel Survey indicated that they make stops of less than 30 minutes on their way to or from work. This practice is referred to as trip chaining. Stops along the way typically include the dry cleaner, day care or picking up a spouse. Another 20 percent of the commuters surveyed made stops longer than 30 minutes.

Trip chaining increases the number of miles driven during peak travel periods, adding to traffic congestion. It also presents a challenge for public transportation, which must compete with the personal vehicle and the greater convenience and flexibility it provides.

Commuter Destination by Jurisdiction
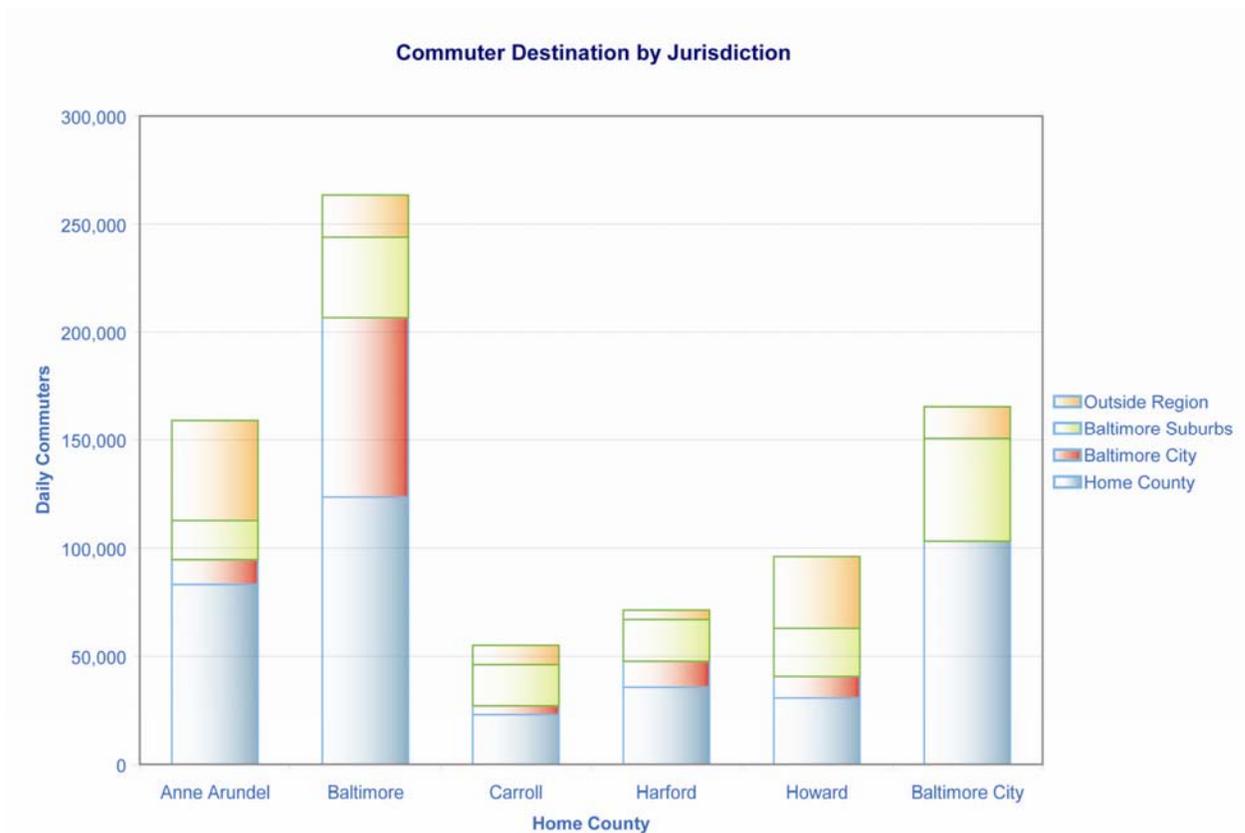
How do they get there?

Most commuters in the Baltimore region drive to work – and they drive alone. Nine out of ten suburban commuters and seven out of ten Baltimore City commuters travel to their jobs in a personal vehicle.

Residents of Baltimore City have more commuting options than their neighbors in the suburbs. Ten percent use transit to travel to a job in the city, and another six percent ride transit to a job outside the city. Seven percent are able to walk to work, and six percent carpool. These alternative commutes help reduce traffic congestion in the city.

Seven percent of commuters in Anne Arundel, Baltimore and Howard counties use public transportation to get to work. Most of these workers are long-distance commuters who drive to a MARC station and take a train to jobs in Washington, DC, and its suburbs.

MARC ridership has increased dramatically over the last decade. Annual ridership on the Penn Line, which runs from Perryville in Harford County to Washington, DC, via Baltimore's Penn Station, rose from 3.28 million in 2000 to 4.64 million in 2007, an increase of nearly 42 percent.

How long does it take?

A comparison of the 2007/08 Household Travel Survey with the same survey in 2001 indicates that commuters are spending more time getting to and from work. The average travel time increased during that period from 30.1 to 35.1 minutes. The data also indicate that the proportion of trips under 20 minutes decreased by almost five percent, while the share of extreme commutes of more than 60 minutes increased by more than three percent.

Some commuters are traveling longer distances to get to work because housing and jobs have migrated into formerly rural areas. However, travel times have increased at all distances from work, suggesting that at least some of the change is due to traffic congestion.

Average Travel Time to Work by Travel Distance

---
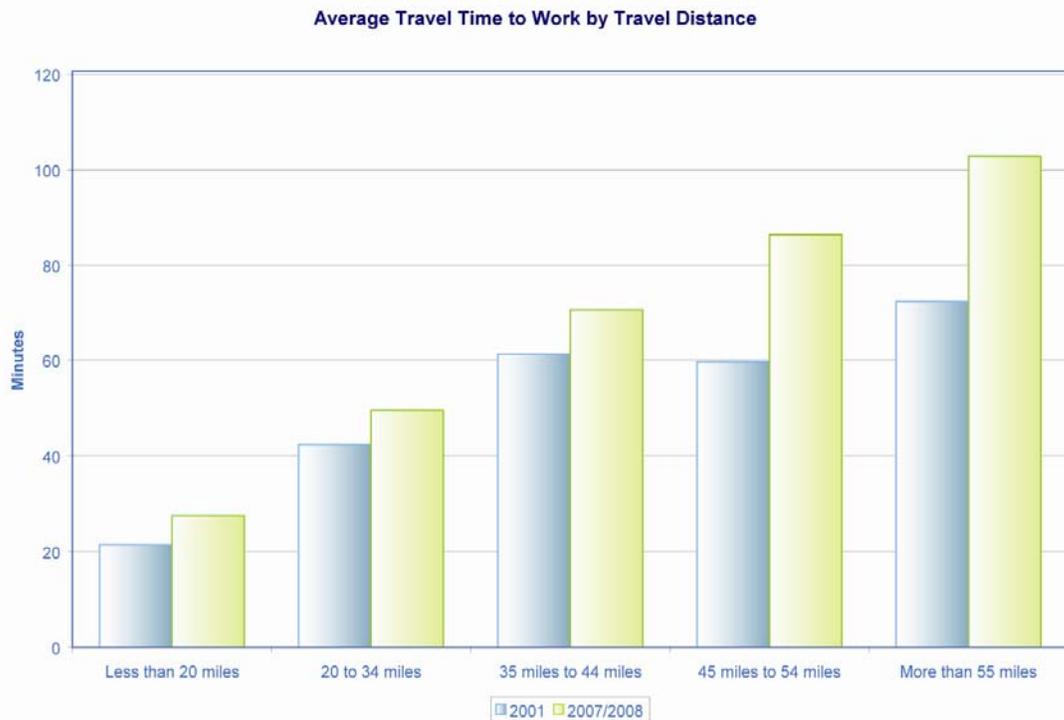
[1] Estimate, 2007-2008 BMC Household Travel Survey.
[2] Data is for 2008, Maryland Department of Planning, Planning Data Services, from U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

For information contact:

Robert Berger
Senior Transportation Planner - Policy
Baltimore Metropolitan Council
The Offices @ McHenry Row
1500 Whetstone Way,
Suite 300
Baltimore, MD 21230

410-732-0500 x 1037