
Chapter 2:

Regional Trends

Growth and development are not interchangeable terms. *Growth* is simply an increase, whereas *development* can occur in a community regardless of whether it is growing; it is a process that involves enhancement of existing resources, sometimes by combining them or using them in a different way.

This is important to recognize when reflecting on the fact that Beckley and surrounding communities were designated as an urbanized area after the 2010 Census. Although this census category requires a minimum population of 50,000, it is not all about size. It also indicates the region has reached a certain stage of development – one which often generates new challenges and opportunities.

In fact, the population of the Fayette-Raleigh MPO region did not grow between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, as shown in **Table 2-1**. However, the region did maintain a more stable population base than many other parts of the state which saw significant losses over the period.

Working in the region's favor is a combination of good location and a growing understanding of how to capitalize on the pristine natural resources of the New River Gorge National River and associated federal lands. By attracting new residents, the region has been able to offset other population losses.



With a median age of 41, Raleigh County has one of the younger populations among the state's counties. (**Table 2-2**) The gradual aging of the nation's population is a common theme in today's news, but the trend is particularly notable in West Virginia and it could significantly influence the type of transportation needed over the next 20 to 25 years. The state already has an above-average number of persons who have left the workforce due to disability or other factors. As the baby boomer generation reaches retirement age, state demographic experts project the total number of people in the state's workforce will drop by as much as 90,000.

This may not necessarily lead to lower traffic volumes; instead, it is likely to change the nature of the trips that people make. Local travel may be spread more throughout the day if an older population is able to schedule shopping, medical services and participation in community activities at their discretion without adhering to a specific workplace schedule. On the other hand, a growing older population may also mean the region should begin to adapt its transportation network to better meet the needs of older drivers and people who do not drive at all. This could include larger, more legible road signs, better road lighting and pavement markings, as well as improvements and expansion of the public transit services available in Fayette and Raleigh counties.

Table 2-1: Population Change in the MPO Region, 2000 to 2010

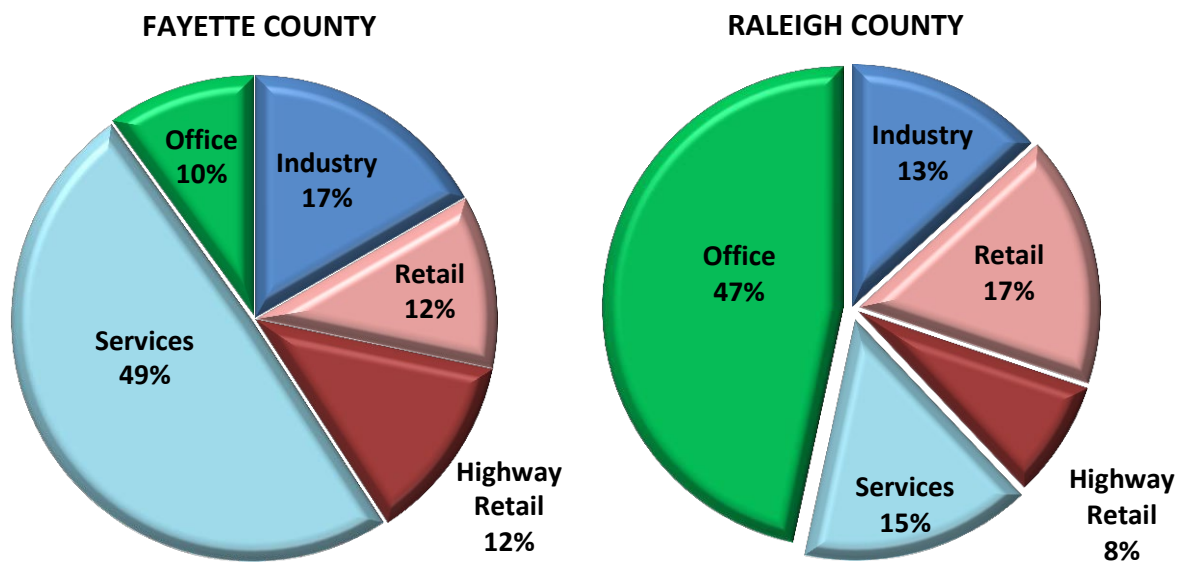
	2000 Census	2010 Census	Pct. Change, 2000-2010
Fayette County	47,579	46,039	(3.2%)
Raleigh County	79,220	78,859	(0.5%)
MPO Total	126,799	124,898	(1.5%)

Table 2-2: Selected Population Characteristics of the MPO vs. State, 2010

		Statewide Ranking (out of 55 counties)		
	Median Age	Median Age	Pop. Growth	Share of 65+
Fayette County	43.0	31	38	40
Raleigh County	41.1	11	26	30
U.S. Average	37.2	-	-	-

The nature of the region's workforce is also evolving. Industrial jobs, once the core of the economy, now make up less than a quarter of each county's total employment (**Figure 2-1**). Job growth now occurs primarily in the service sector, particularly in Fayette County where local economic development initiatives have specially targeted adventure tourism to capitalize on visitors to the New River Gorge area. Hospitality and leisure services are also a fast-growing component of the local job market in Raleigh County, along with health care. Raleigh County employment also includes a significant percentage of office workers due to Beckley's traditional role as a crossroads commercial center, where many state and federal agencies have regional headquarters and field offices.

Figure 2-1: Composition of Regional Employment, 2010



PROJECTED CHANGE IN POPULATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Transportation demand is primarily influenced by the number of people, where they live, and where they work. Planning for future transportation needs thus requires some understanding of how and whether population and employment will change significantly in the future.

According to West Virginia University's Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER), which provides population and other data forecasts for the state, regional population will continue to decline over the next two decades. A trendline was used to extend the forecast to 2040, resulting in the regional population projections shown in **Table 2-3**. The projected change is also shown geographically in **Figure 2-3**.

Table 2-3: MPO Regional Population, 2010 to 2040

	2010	2020	2030	2040
Fayette County	46,039	44,611	42,795	41,311
Raleigh County	78,859	78,028	75,813	75,217
MPO Total	124,898	122,639	118,608	116,528

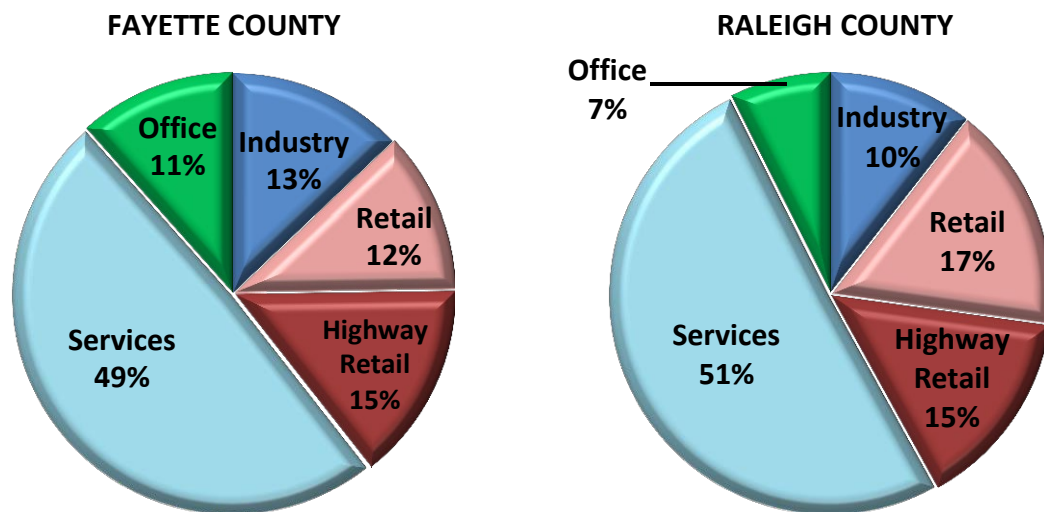
In contrast, regional employment is projected to increase by about 24 percent over the same period, as shown in **Figure 2-2**. As discussed earlier, a growing proportion of the region's jobs are in the service sector,

and this trend is expected to continue based on the area's success in attracting visitors for outdoor recreation, as well as growth in retirement and second home communities.

Table 2-4: MPO Regional Employment, 2010 to 2040

	2010	2040	Percent Change
Fayette County	12,197	14,482	18.7%
Raleigh County	31,501	39,557	25.6%
MPO Total	43,698	54,039	23.7%

Figure 2-2: Composition of MPO Regional Employment, 2040



Source: 2012 Woods & Poole projections, with adjustments.

Employment growth projections are shown geographically in **Figure 2-4**.

Figure 2-3: Projected Change in MPO Population, 2010 to 2040

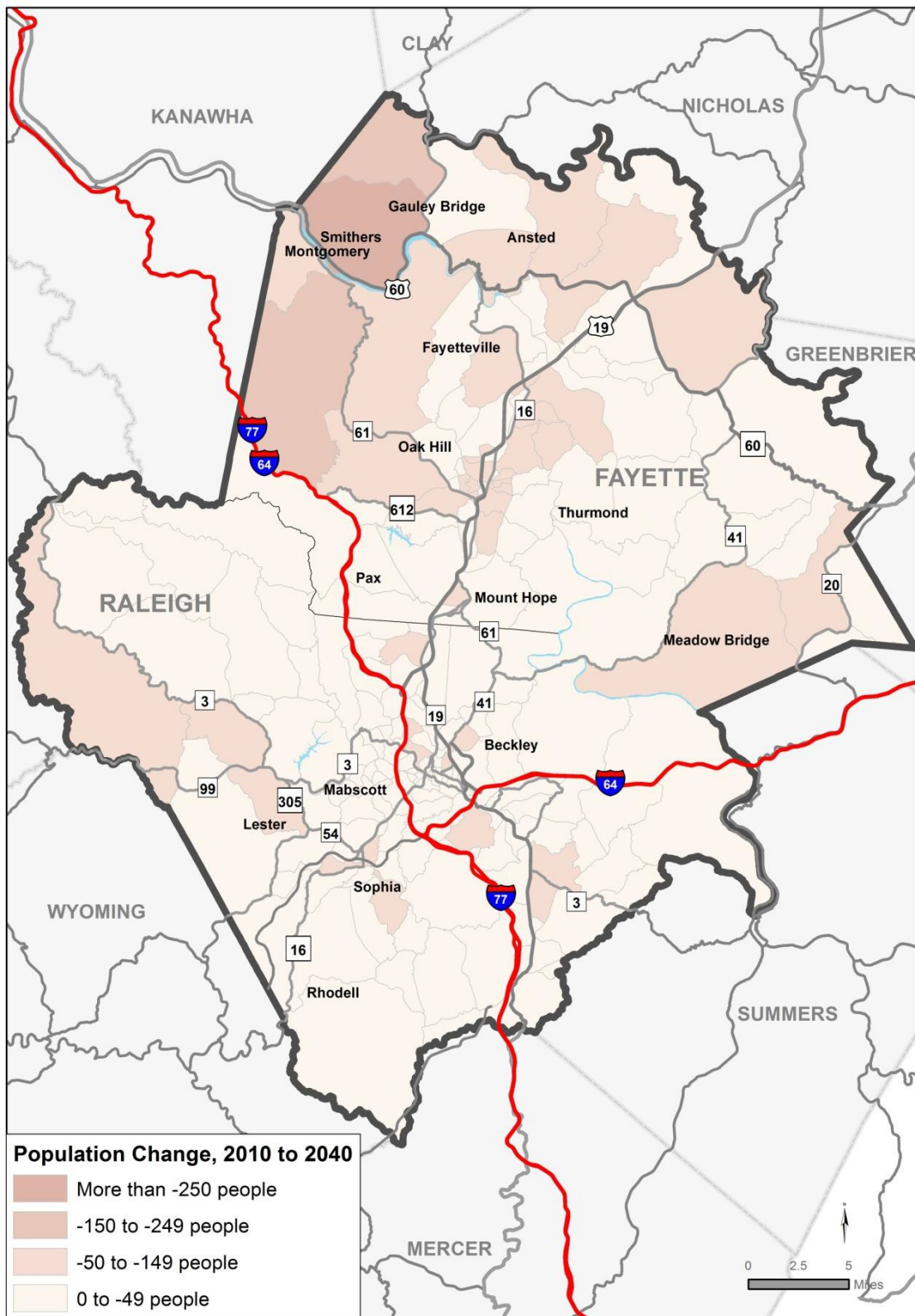
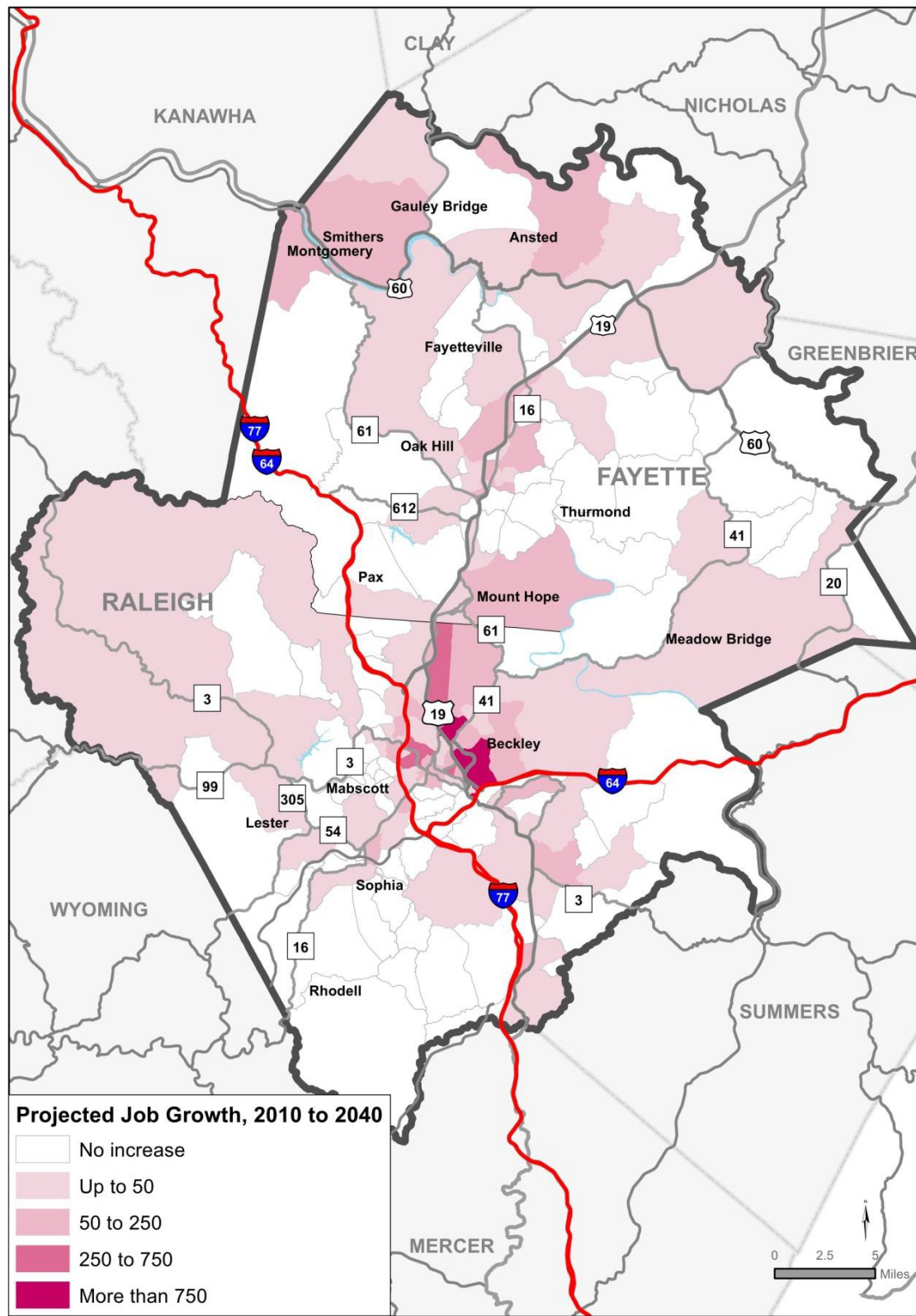


Figure 2-4: Projected Change in MPO Employment, 2010 to 2040

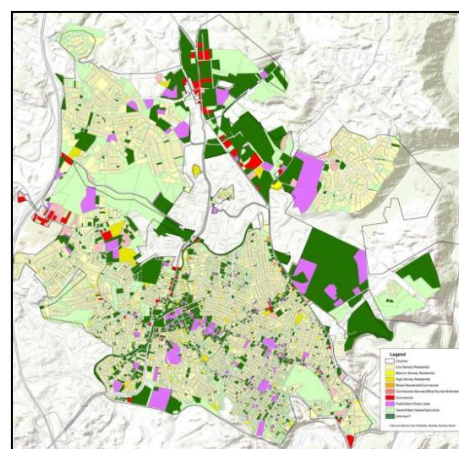


LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Transportation is an essential ingredient for community and economic development because of the access it provides to local land and because it provides mobility to, from, and within a region. Transportation also constitutes the largest public investment that is made in many communities, other than utilities and major building projects such as schools. Road projects in particular are often the most dramatic changes that occur in a community, whereas most other development patterns are created gradually through a series of independent decisions by private property owners. For these reasons it is vital that the regional transportation plan be developed with an understanding of community goals and plans.

Local land use plans identify areas where new development and redevelopment are desired and where other supporting infrastructure (such as water and sewer) is planned. Thus these plans help to predict where population and employment changes will occur – and therefore where changes to the transportation system may be needed. Coordinating the MPO’s regional transportation plan with local land use plans helps ensure that federal transportation dollars are used to further public goals rather than working independently of them.

Comprehensive planning in West Virginia is authorized under Chapter 8A of the West Virginia Code. The Code identifies the process for developing and adopting a comprehensive plan as well as the purposes of planning, and provides guidance for study areas, mandatory components, supplementary components and other provisions. **Table 2-5** shows the elements that a comprehensive plan must address.



Future land use plan for Beckley

Comprehensive plans for several jurisdictions in the MPO region have been recently completed –several for the first time since the late 1960s – due to changes in state planning law that now require updates on a 10-year cycle. (Current practices in West Virginia have typically used a 20-year general planning cycle, with periodic updates every five years or as needed.)

Table 2-5: Mandatory Elements of a Comprehensive Plan

Land Use	Transportation
Housing	Community & Economic Development
Natural and Cultural Resources	Capital improvements
Implementation	

Notwithstanding these mandatory elements, comprehensive plans for local governments within the MPO vary greatly in how they address critical community needs and issues. With the exception of Beckley, most jurisdictions have small populations and are not experiencing growth pressures; in fact, most jurisdictions are experiencing long term population declines. These conditions contribute to the low priority jurisdictions have placed on community planning.

Chapter 8 of the West Virginia Code also provides guidance on adoption and enforcement of zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations and building codes. At the present time, not all jurisdictions administer zoning ordinances or do so in an ad-hoc manner. Fayette County has historically been at the forefront of planning and zoning in the MPO area. Raleigh County has not developed a comprehensive plan.

Since some local plans are policy-based rather than data-based, it is not currently feasible to use them to compile consistent region-wide demographic data, projections, land use maps and zoning ordinances. Demographic data used for the Plan therefore reflects information from recent Census surveys, the State Data Center, public records on businesses and employment, and purchased datasets maintained by the private sector. (For more detail on sources and methodology, see the travel demand model documentation in Appendix A.)

Local comprehensive plans are still important, however, in providing guidance about where the community wishes to focus its investments and the particular economic goals that transportation decisions could help achieve. Each of the available local plans for the MPO area was therefore reviewed as part of developing the 2045 Plan. Below is a brief summary for each plan reviewed, including descriptions of key land use or transportation issues that should be considered in the regional transportation plan. As discussed below, many of the MPO's local jurisdictions are focused on improving linkages to the New River Gorge lands in order to maximize the benefits of tourism and amenities that attract retirees and other new residents to the area.

Beckley, 2014 Comprehensive Plan Update. As the largest jurisdiction in the MPO, Beckley's land use and transportation strategy represents a major factor in long range transportation planning. The 2014 comprehensive plan updates the 2001 plan, which was Beckley's first plan since 1969. Demographically, Beckley's population is anticipated to remain stable through the planning period. City population growth may occur in small amounts due to annexations which typically relate to infrastructure extensions.

The new comprehensive plan identifies four Preferred Development Areas for major investment, each with related transportation infrastructure issues.

- **East Beckley Bypass Area.** Access to the Woodlands Pinecrest Business and Technology Park, whose Phase 2 includes 700 development-ready acres, has been opened by the construction of the East Beckley Bypass. The southern portion of this new 5-lane route was completed in late 2013. Construction is now underway to extend the bypass northward, tying into Robert C. Byrd Drive at the Industrial Drive/Pinewood intersection.

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- **New River Drive Corridor.** Beckley's comprehensive plan identifies the land surrounding Pikeview Drive and New River Drive as the city's only remaining large area for development. Market study results indicate a demand for upscale housing for empty nesters and active retirees, according to the plan. Land along the New River Drive corridor is proposed for such planned community developments, incorporating large natural areas and a network of walking and biking trails.

Beckley's comprehensive plan also discusses New River Drive in the context of the city's continuing challenges with east-west connectivity, and suggests that more drivers might use it as an alternative to congested Harper Road if safety improvements were made to its intersection at Robert C. Byrd Drive.

- **Pikeview Drive.** Also based on market study results, the Beckley Comprehensive Plan identifies the opportunity to develop new arts, entertainment, and recreational venues to attract visitors driving along I-77 as well as local residents. Suggested attractions range from a wildlife habitat or zoo, a discovery/science center, resort hotel with indoor water park, and similar high traffic-generating developments. Given the existing level of traffic congestion at the I-77/Harper Road interchange, there is some discussion that Hylton Lane could be extended north to intersect New River Drive and provide additional connectivity for the area.

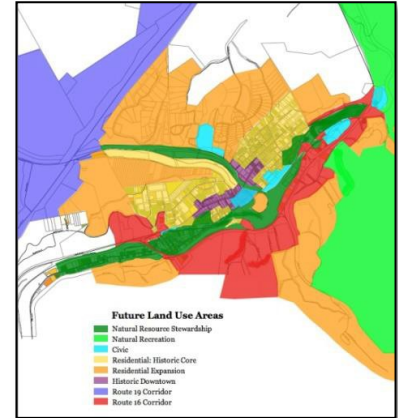


- **Downtown Beckley.** Much of the comprehensive plan's discussion of transportation in the downtown district is focused on improving walkability by managing traffic speeds. Converting one-way streets to two-way travel is mentioned as a strategy that has been found to slow down traffic in some communities.

City of Oak Hill Comprehensive Plan (2012). This document is an abbreviated update to the 1968 community plan. Land use and transportation issues are addressed by policy recommendations based upon goals and associated assets and opportunities. The White Oak Rail Trail is identified as a non-motorized transportation asset with good opportunities for linkage to other travel modes. As with Beckley and Mount Hope, several of Oak Hill's plan recommendations relate to leveraging the city's proximity to federal lands at the New River Gorge National River.

Town of Fayetteville Comprehensive Plan Update (2013). Fayetteville is strongly identified with outdoor recreation associated with the New River and enjoys a 'brand' unique to other area jurisdictions. Community population is projected to increase slightly over the 10-year comprehensive planning period. Fayetteville land use strategies focus on managing growth along portions of US 19 within the city. Improving access to New River federal lands is proposed at the Town Park Trailhead.

City of Mount Hope, Reinventing the Future 2030 Plan (2013). Prior to the 2013 update, Mount Hope's most recent planning study was completed in 1968. Typical of many jurisdictions in the region, changes in mining practices have led to employment loss which is projected to continue, albeit at a slower pace. Community economic vitality was negatively impacted with relocation of WV Route 16/19 which effectively bypassed downtown. Mount Hope is located immediately adjacent to the Boy Scouts of America Bechtel Summit Reserve and High Adventure Camp, which the community hopes to leverage for economic benefit.

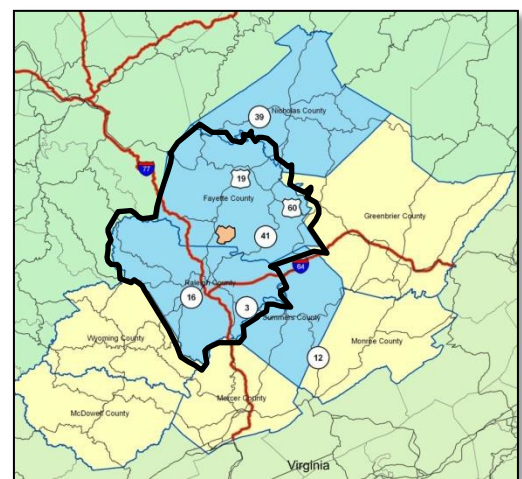


Fayette County, 2011 Comprehensive Plan Amendment. This document is an abbreviated update to the consolidated plan and zoning ordinance of 2001. As noted, Fayette County is a leader in West Virginia planning and zoning, having adopted its initial zoning ordinance in 1972. A major focus of the 2011 update was identifying community needs in the four districts that comprise Fayette County. Consistent with the 2001 plan, major challenges are stimulating development in along the New/Gauley River Corridor, delivering improved public services countywide, and the protection of natural resources. Fayette County prepared a corridor plan for US Highway 19 in approximately 2005 but it is considered out of date. Planning issues considered in the plan were congestion management, access control, land use and visual quality maintenance.

In addition to local comprehensive plans, the following other planning studies have been completed by public and non-public agencies:

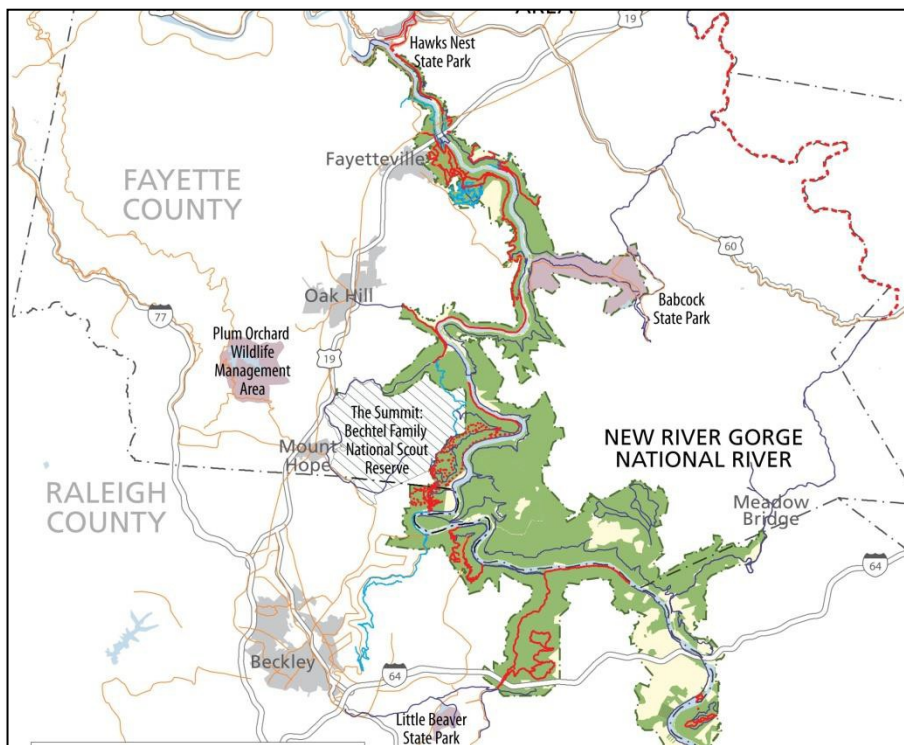
New River Gorge Regional Development Authority Strategic Plan (2013). In anticipation of the Boy Scout Bechtel Summit Reserve and High Adventure Center which opened in 2013, a private foundation underwrote preparation of a strategic plan to assist communities in preparing for opportunities and challenges presented by The Summit. The plan recommended specific projects and policies related to three themes: economic sustainability, environmental stewardship and thriving communities. Four strategies are described to implement major plan goals.

Priority recommendations include the development of a corridor management plan for the major gateway corridors of I-77 and US 19. Goals of the corridor plan include protection of scenic corridors and implementation of uniform development guidelines irrespective of political boundaries. The MPO was being established as the 2013 plan was being completed, and can play an important role in plan implementation.



*New River Gorge RDA study area
(MPO boundary outlined in black)*

New River Gorge National River General Management Plan (2011). Federal lands associated with the New River Gorge total approximately 72,000 acres and encompass more than 53 miles of major waterways. Annual visitation is approximately one million visitors per year, including a high percentage of out-of-state visitors. The preferred alternative of the general management plan is a continued focus on resource conservation and visitor use, consistent with the federal enacting legislation.



Plan strategies recommend increased non-vehicle connections with gateway communities and investigating the feasibility of a north-south trail collector through the park.

The thru-trail is a major feature of the plan and would enable hikers to travel end to end through the park, along the river for most of the trail length. A few sections of the trail would overlap with scenic road segments, increasing accessibility to remote areas of the park.

Longer-term plan recommendations envision trails on both sides of the river to create a loop route to enable multi-day hikes in the park.

National Coal Heritage Area Trail Plan for Greenways and Blueways (2010). The National Coal Heritage Area Authority is a public corporation and governmental instrumentality established to aid in development and implementation of integrated cultural, historic and land resource management policies. The trail plan identifies more than 2,200 miles of single purpose and multi-use trails within the 13-county study area, which includes both Fayette and Raleigh counties. Fewer than 60 miles of identified trails are managed by local jurisdictions or private entities; the majority is managed and maintained by state and federal agencies.