Assessment of Regional Population and Economic Trends

Capital District Transportation Authority
Transit Development Plan

August 2024

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Introduction

This technical memorandum provides context for evaluating existing services and developing future services under the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA), the principal regional transit authority for New York State's Capital Region. It reviews data on area demographics, including population, income, and age. Additionally, it offers a profile of recent trends in real estate development, changes in sectors of employment, and overall development trends. The possible economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are also considered.

Population

Population changes provide important context for economic trends in a geographic area, influencing employment, unemployment, spending, real estate trends and other factors. This section shows current and past population data, project future population data, and where the changes are taking place.

Population Changes

Based on US Census data since 2010, the overall population of the five counties comprising the existing CDTA service area (Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady, Saratoga, and Montgomery) has grown from 885,055 people in 2010 to 924,178 people in 2022, an increase of about 4%. Population growth was approximately 1% from 2010 to 2019 and about 3% from 2019 to 2022.[1]
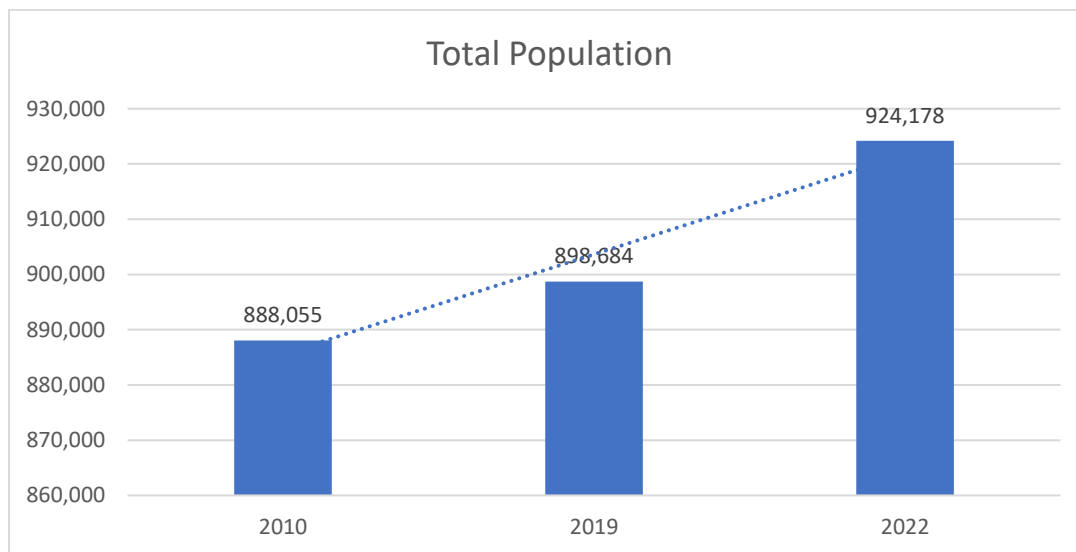
Figure 1: Total Population

This population growth was distributed around the five counties, as shown in Figure 2. Overall, Saratoga County saw the most growth with approximately nine percent. Montgomery County lost population overall and saw a population decrease of approximately one percent.

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[1] U.S. Census Bureau. "Age and Sex." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0101, 2022, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2019.S0101?g=050XX00US36001,36057,36083,36091,36093.

Figure 2: Total Population by County

Figure 3 shows a map representing population growth or decline by city and town within the six-county area using decennial Census data from 2010 and 2020. Jurisdictions are color-coded by their rate of population change.
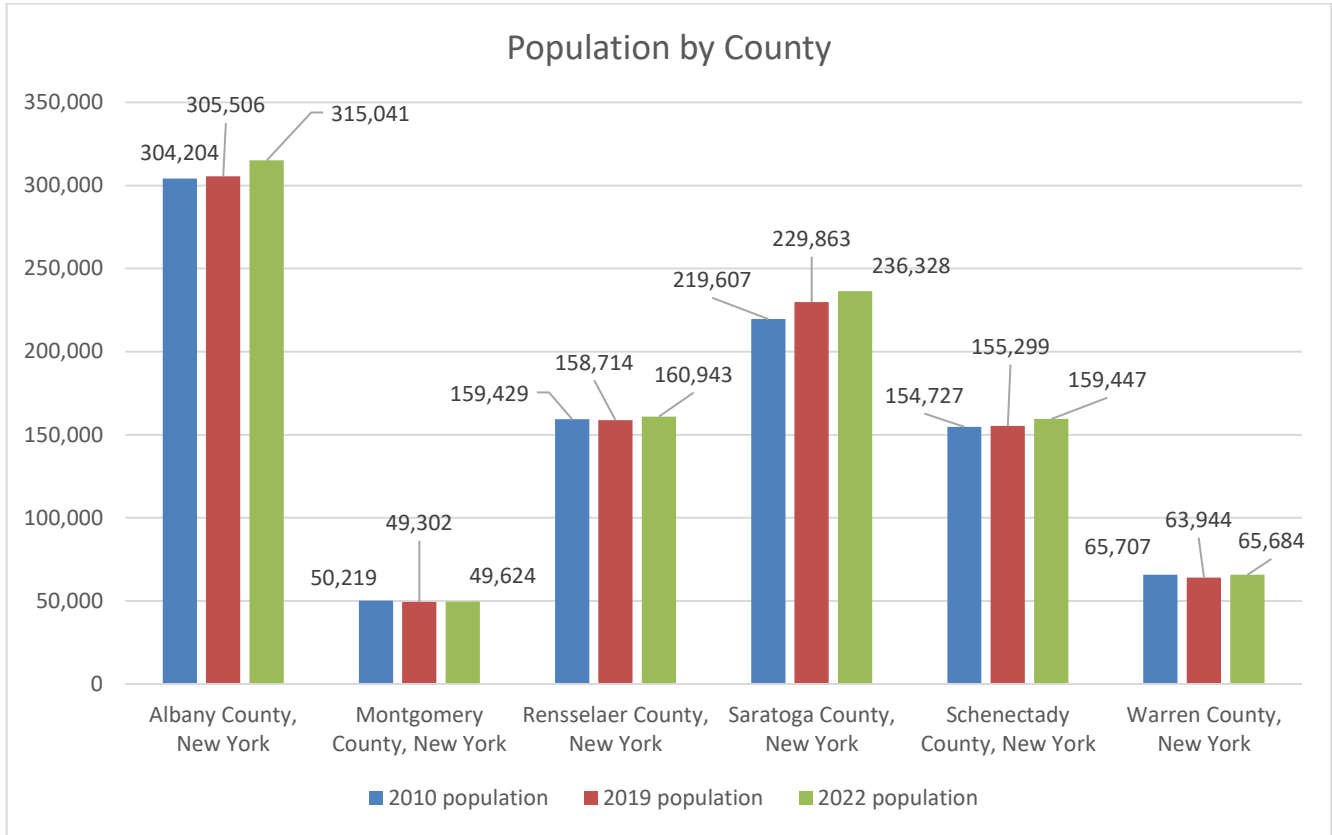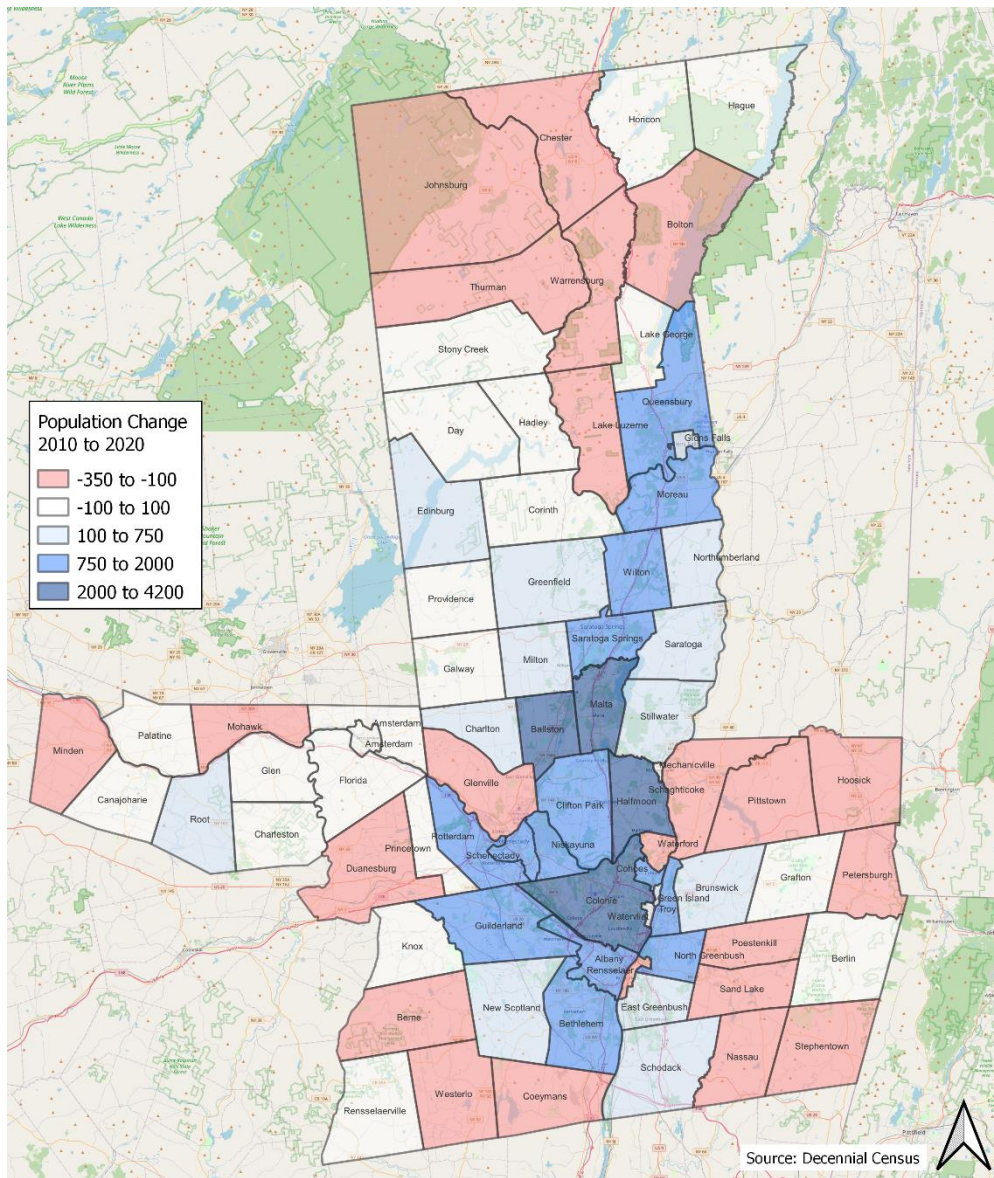
Figure 3: Population Change, 2010 – 2020

County	Percent Population Change 2010 to 2020
Saratoga	7.2%
Albany	3.5%
Schenectady	2.2%
Rensselaer	1.1%
Warren	0.0%
Montgomery	-1.4%

Overall, CDTAs original four counties are growing while CDTAs two new counties are stable or declining. Growth is centered around Saratoga and Albany Counties. Total population growth is approximately 29,000. Outlying and rural areas have lost population, as has nearly all of Montgomery

County. Growth is mainly centered around I-87, Albany, Schenectady, and Troy. Several neighboring towns in eastern Saratoga County gained significant population.[2]

Population Growth Projections

The Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) provides objective analysis of data trends, opportunities, and challenges relevant to the Capital Region's economic development and planning communities. CDRPC's population projections are based on a two-stage model. The first stage is a quantitative analysis using a log-linear regression projection model on historic Census data. The second stage is qualitative, using non-quantitative judgments about the likelihood and extent of future population change in specific areas.[3]

Historic trends beyond simple population, such as household size, apartment unit construction, immigration and emigration patterns, journey-to-work data, and labor force data provide indications of future population changes.

Figure *4* depicts CDRPC's population projections through the year 2050, made in 2012[4]. It's notable that CDRPC predicted regional growth until 2020, followed by some population regression. Based on 2022 data, growth is slightly ahead or in line with projections.

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[2] U.S. Census Bureau. "AGE AND SEX." American Community Survey, ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0101, 2010, https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S0101?g=050XX00US36001,36057,36083,36091,36093
[3] CDRPC, https://cdrpc.org/data/population/population-projections
[4] Note that CDRPC projections do not include Montgomery County. Projections for Montgomery County are based on historical growth trends.
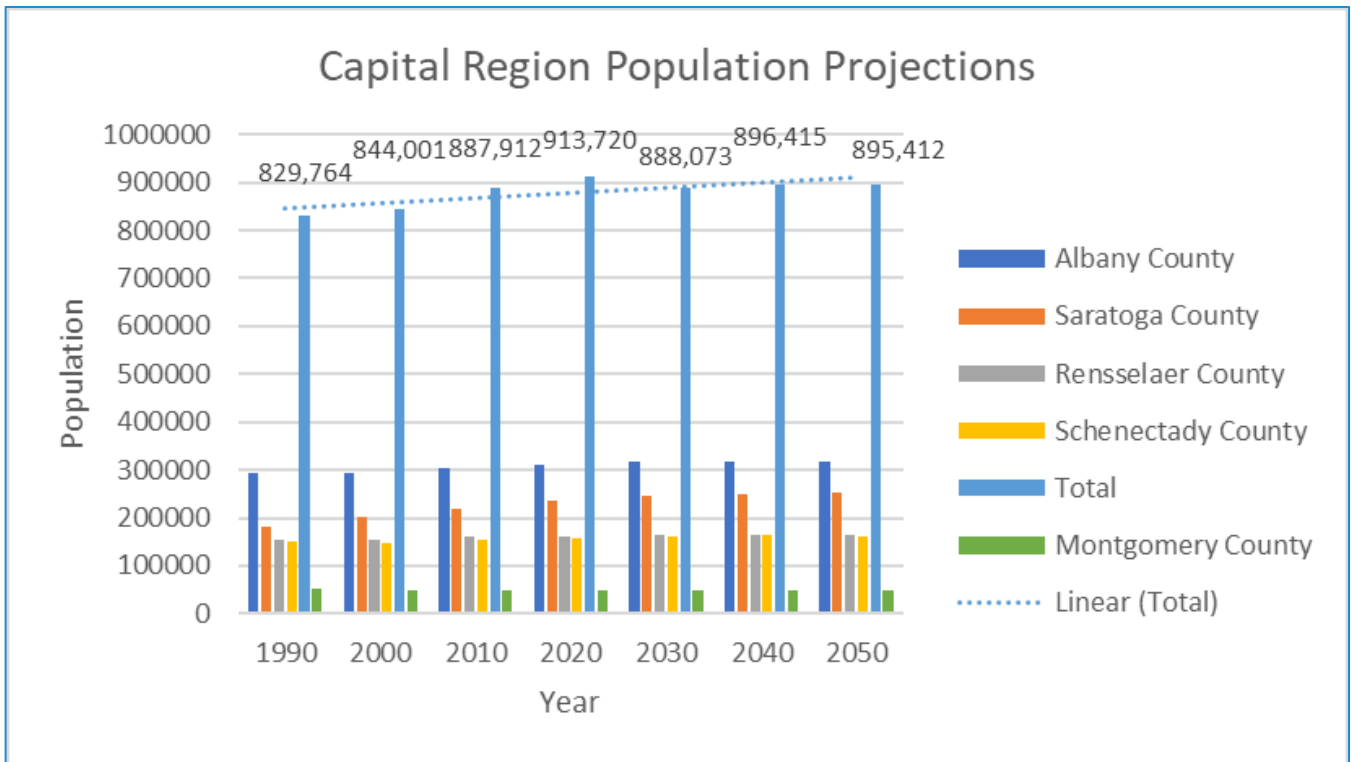
Figure 4: Capital Region Population Projections

Warren County was not included in CDRPCs analysis, but Cornell University produces its own population change estimates for every county in New York. This source predicts decline for Warren County.[5] It should be noted that so far Warren County has declined less than Cornell predicted.

Key Takeaways

Regional population has increased steadily since the 1990s and is expected to continue to grow until 2050, although at a modest pace. Transportation continues to be a major influence on development as most growth is centered around I-87. The areas which are losing population generally already do not have transit service and the areas with transit service are generally growing, both of which are good signs for CDTA. However, some areas which receive little or no transit service are also growing, mainly in Saratoga County, but also Renssealer and Albany Counties. These are also generally suburban and hard to serve efficiently or competitively with transit.

Income and Age Characteristics

Using comparisons of demographic data collected through the US Decennial Census and the American Community Survey, this section outlines changes in income and age over time. Data for this comparison was drawn from the US Census Albany/Schenectady/Troy Metropolitan Statistical Area, the Glens Falls Metro Area, and the Amsterdam Micro Area.

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[5] https://pad.human.cornell.edu/counties/projections.cfm

Household Income

Household income in the CDTA service area has grown considerably.[6]
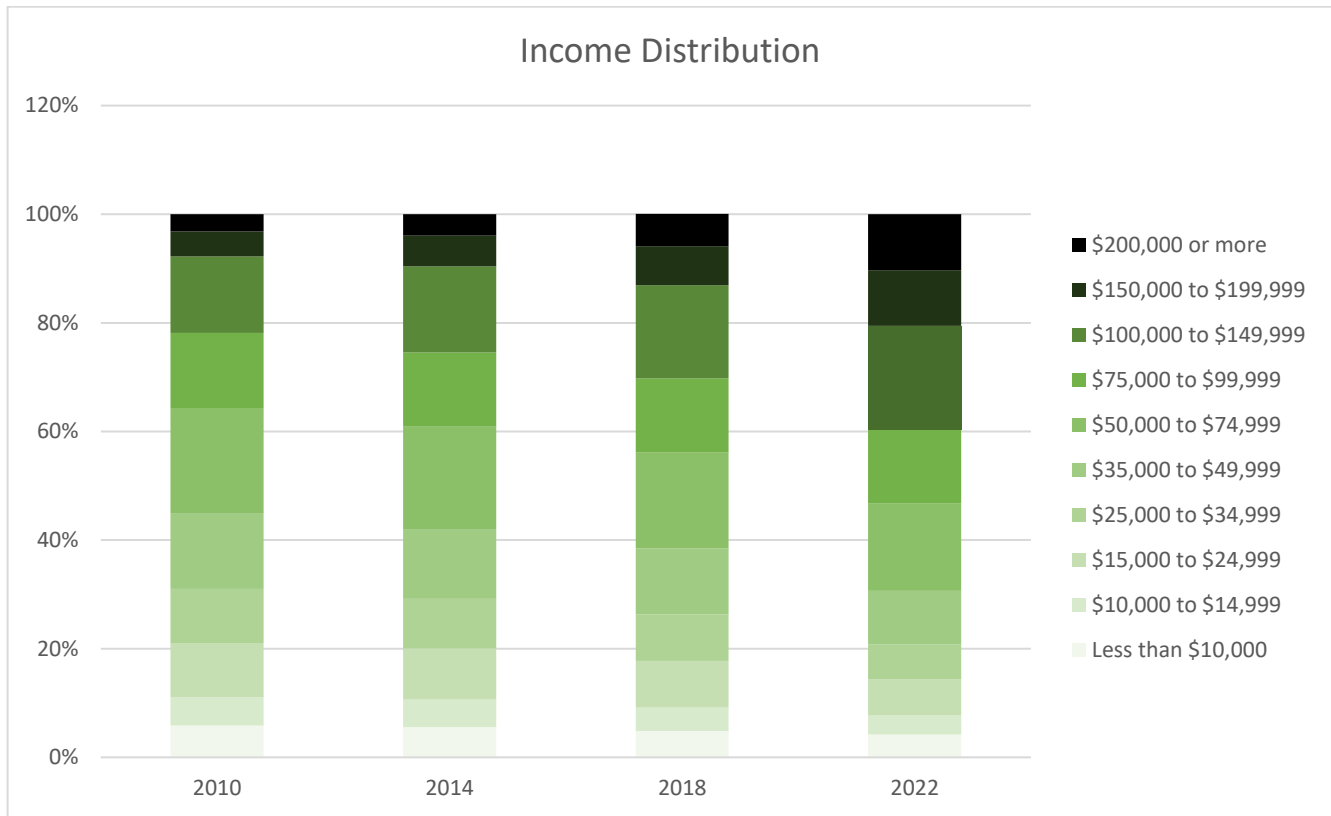
The share of households making less than $50,000 has dropped from 45% to 31%. However, inflation over the same timeframe also increased costs by about 30%. Below is a table of the median income of each MSA in 2022 inflation controlled dollar amounts. The effective growth since 2010 is also included as a percentage of 2010 income.

Table 1: Household Income in 2022-inflated adjusted dollar amounts.

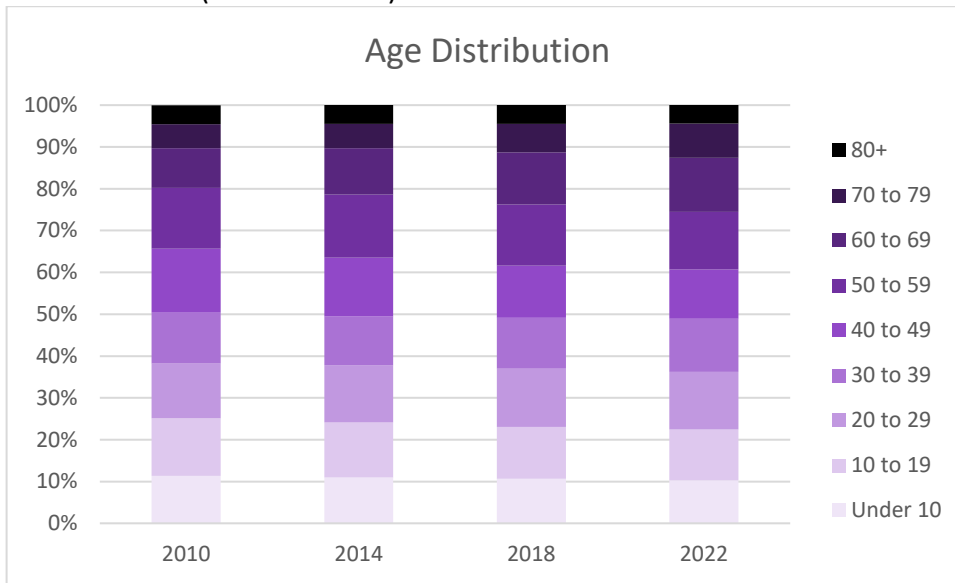|	2010	2014	2018	2022
Albany-Schenectady-Troy Metro Area	$74,970	$74,328 (-0.68%)	$77,869 (+3.08%)	$83,360 (+8.92%)
Amsterdam Micro Area	$55,277	$53,085 (-3.10%	$51,992 (-4.65%)	$58,033 (+3.90%)

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[6] U.S. Census Bureau. "Income in the Past 12 Months." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S1901.

Glens Falls Metro Area		$65,038 (-0.04%)	$64,693 (-.47%)	$71,380 (+7.96%)
	$65,068			

This data shows that the Albany MSA is the wealthiest and the Amsterdam MSA is the least. Amsterdam also experienced the least income growth in this timeframe.

Age

The elderly share of the population has increased (60+ from 19.7% to 25.6%) while the 40-49 bracket has decreased (15.3 to 11.8%).

Median age has stayed roughly the same, except in Glens Falls, where it has risen by about 3 years.

	2010	2014	2018	2022
Albany-Schenectady-Troy Metro Area	39.2	39.9	40	40.3
Amsterdam Micro Area	40.6	41	41.4	40.6
Glens Falls Metro Area	42.2	43.8	45.2	45.7

It is generally true across all reigons that the under 20 population has declined while the 60+ population has increased. The under 20 population has decreased the least in Amsterdam. Amsterdam has the highest percentage of population under 20 and Glens Falls has the least. Glens Falls has the largest share of 60+ population and Albany has the least.

Region	Under 20				60+			
	2010	2014	2018	2022	2010	2014	2018	2022
Albany-Schenectady-Troy Metro Area	25.2%	24.3%	23.3%	22.6%	19.3%	21.0%	23.2%	24.9%
Amsterdam Micro Area	26.5%	25.2%	24.9%	25.6%	22.4%	23.0%	24.9%	26.2%
Glens Falls Metro Area	24.1%	22.3%	20.9%	20.0%	21.5%	24.5%	27.3%	29.8%

Cost of Living

The Capital District Regional Planning Commission, in partnership with the Center for Economic Growth and the Capital Region Chamber has established regional cost of living data using the ACCRA Cost of Living Index created by the Council for Community and Economic Research, as shown in Figure 7. The ACCRA Cost of Living Index is the most reliable source for region-to-region quarterly comparisons of key consumer costs and is referenced in the Census Bureau's Statistical Abstract of the United States. The data for the Capital Region, which includes Albany, Rensselaer, Schenectady, and Saratoga counties, is collected quarterly by graduate students enrolled in the Department of Geography and Planning at the University at Albany. The methodology, data requirements and parameters of the data collected are consistent nationwide to ensure comparability among the participating regions.

The Index measures relative price levels for consumer goods and services in participating areas. The average for all participating places, both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan equals 100, and each participant's index is read as a percentage of this average.
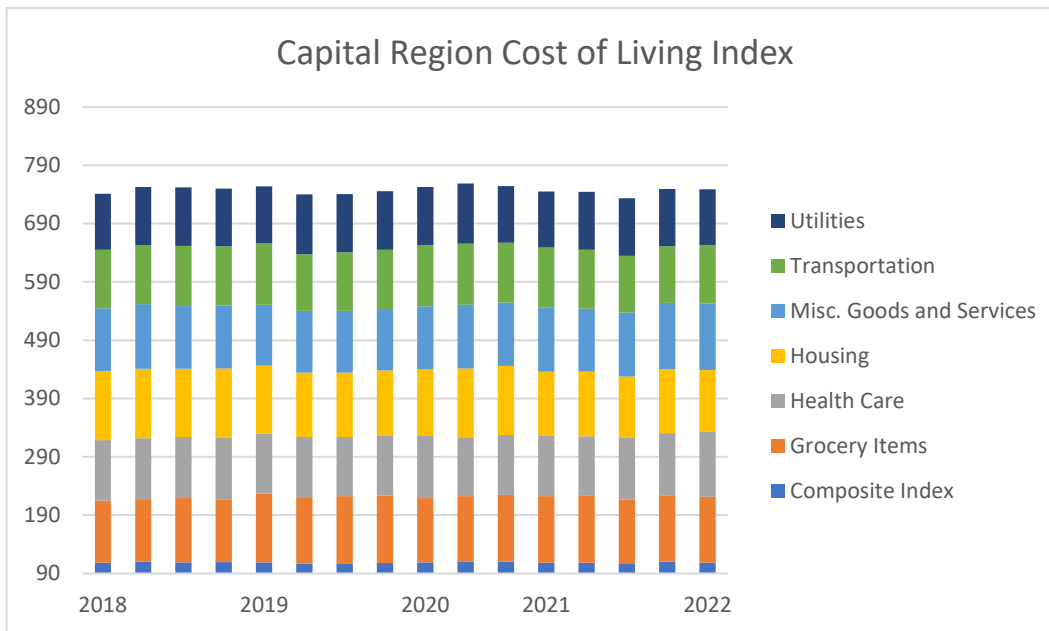
Figure 5: Cost of Living Index[7]

Despite the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, during the study period, the cost-of-living composite index remained relatively stable from 2018 to 2022 for the CDTA service area. Compared to other upstate regions, the cost of living is 3.10 percent lower in Rochester, and 7.84 percent lower in Buffalo. However, the cost of living is significantly higher in areas of the New York Metropolitan Region such as Nassau County on Long Island (33.40 percent), and Stamford, Connecticut (24.01 percent).[8]

A similar study was not found for Amsterdam or Glens Falls, but the lack of change in the Albany region may indicate a steady state in the other regions as well.

Employment

Based on the number of people gaining employment per year, the Capital Region has been on an upward trend in the last few years. CDRPC's study area for this data included Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady counties. Figure 6 shows the number rising since 2020. Based on American Community Survey estimates[9] from the same period, population in the four county Capital District Region grew at a much slower pace, from 869,971 to 873,504, or approximately .4 percent. The larger job growth could be attributable to the technology sector and in particular, jobs associated with the Albany Nanotech Complex.[10]

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[7] CDRPC, https://cdrpc.org/data/economic/cost-of-living-index
[8] https://www.bankrate.com/real-estate/cost-of-living-calculator/
[9] https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-counties-total.html
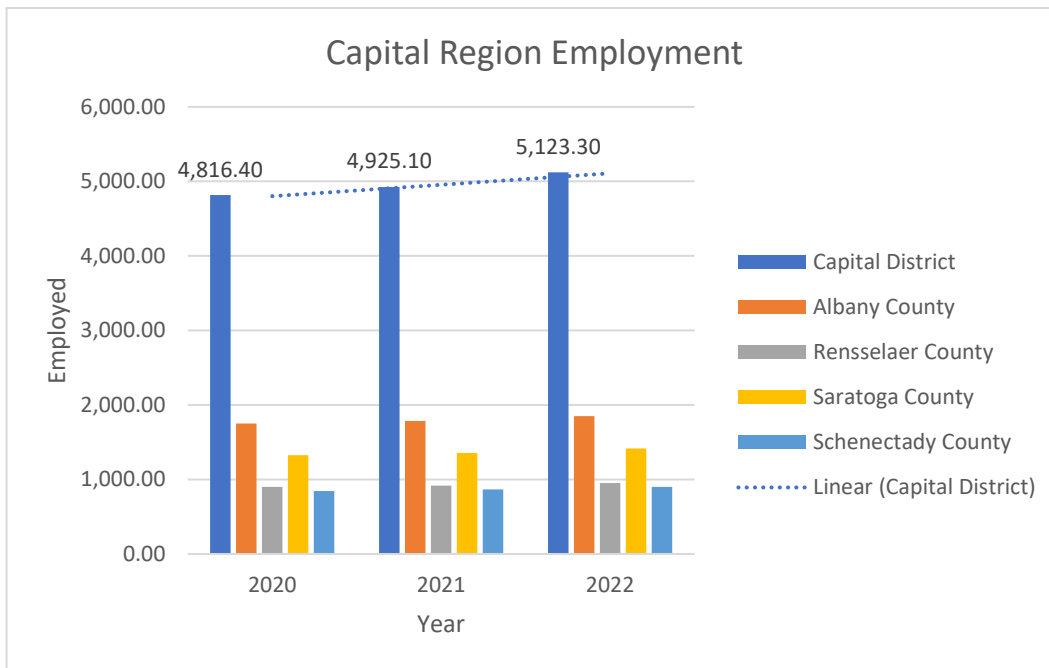[10] https://wnyt.com/capital-region-news/employment-in-tech-sector-surges-in-capital-region/

Figure 6: Employment by Year[11]

Reaching a high of over 12 percent in early 2020, the CDRPC's four county unemployment rate has stabilized to below four percent at the end of 2023. This is in line with national trends around the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite coming down significantly from the 2020 high, the rate has slowly risen in the past year. See Figure 7 for details.
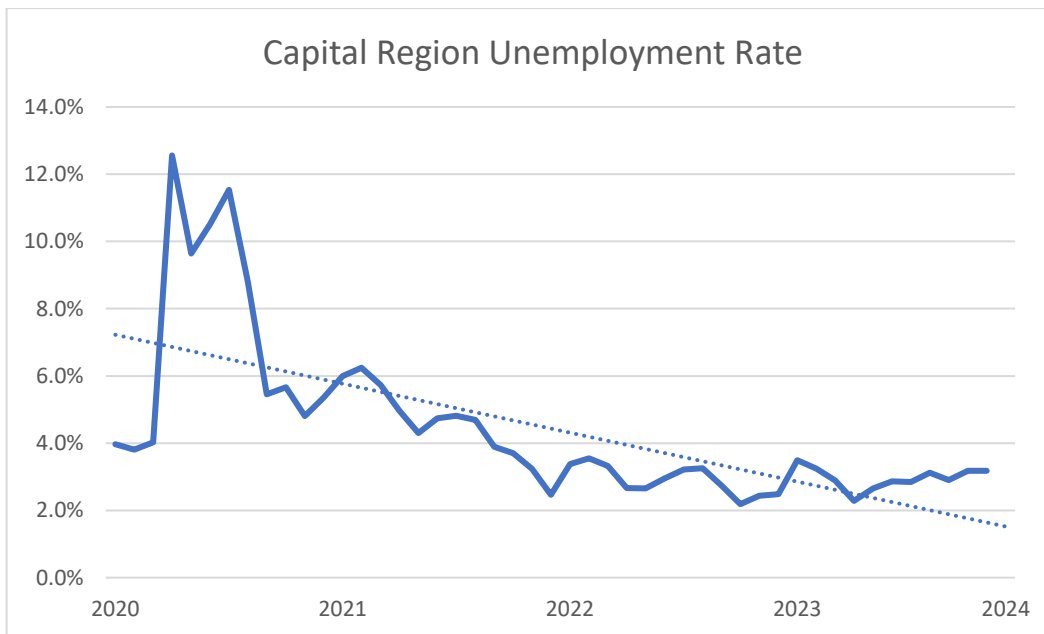

Figure 7: Unemployment Rate[12]

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[11] CDRPC, https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/cdrpc/viz/RegionalEmployment_0/EmploymentDashboard
[12] CDRPC, https://cdrpc.org/data/labor-force/employment-projections

In 2009, the Capital District Regional Planning Commission finalized employment projections which it had created under contract with the Region's Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Capital Region Transportation Council. The projections predict major industry group employment by place of work to the year 2040.[13] Figure 8 shows employment by sector, which is projected to remain relatively consistent between 2000 and 2040.
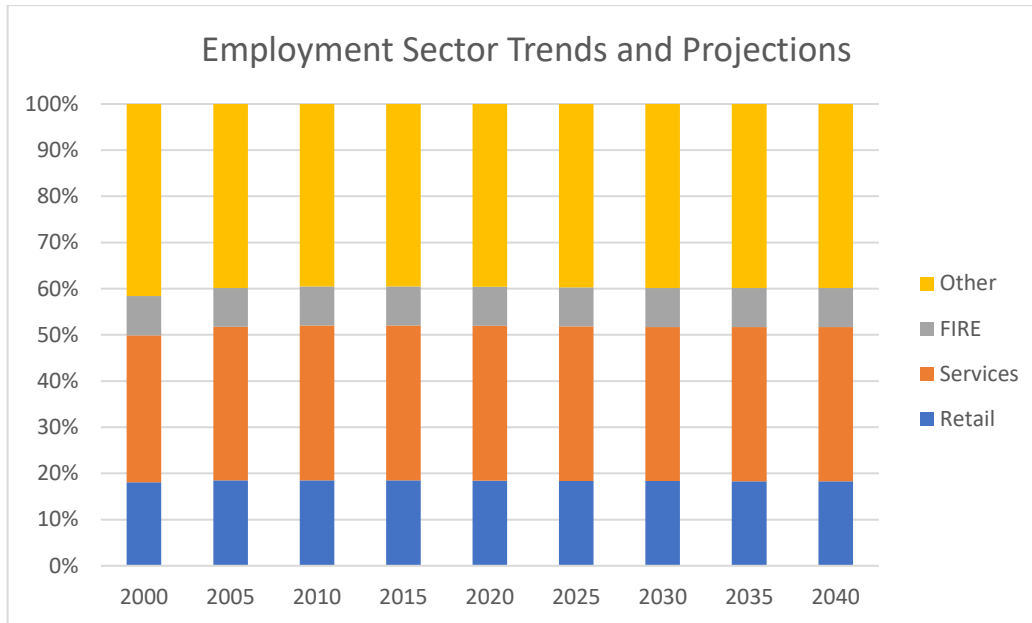

Figure 8: Employment by Sector

Again, no similar study could be found for Amsterdam or Glens Falls.

Key Takeaways

Income increased in the Capital region from 2010 to 2022, even after adjusting for inflation. The share of households with low incomes declined, as well. Amsterdam is the region with the lowest income and that gap appears to be growing. The share of elderly people increased in each of the three areas. The cost-of-living index remained stable since 2018. Unemployment significantly decreased since the 2020-2021 timeframe to under four percent. Employment also increased.

Travel Patterns

Transportation to Work

According to the US Census American Community Survey, commuting patterns have changed significantly since 2010 in the Capital Region. The graph below shows changes in commuting patterns over time. The main difference is in the growth of the "Worked at Home" category, due to COVID-19,

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[13] CDRPC, https://cdrpc.org/data/labor-force/employment-projections

and was at 11% of as of 2022. This growth mainly came from a drop in the "Drove Alone" category. All other categories are essentially unchanged.
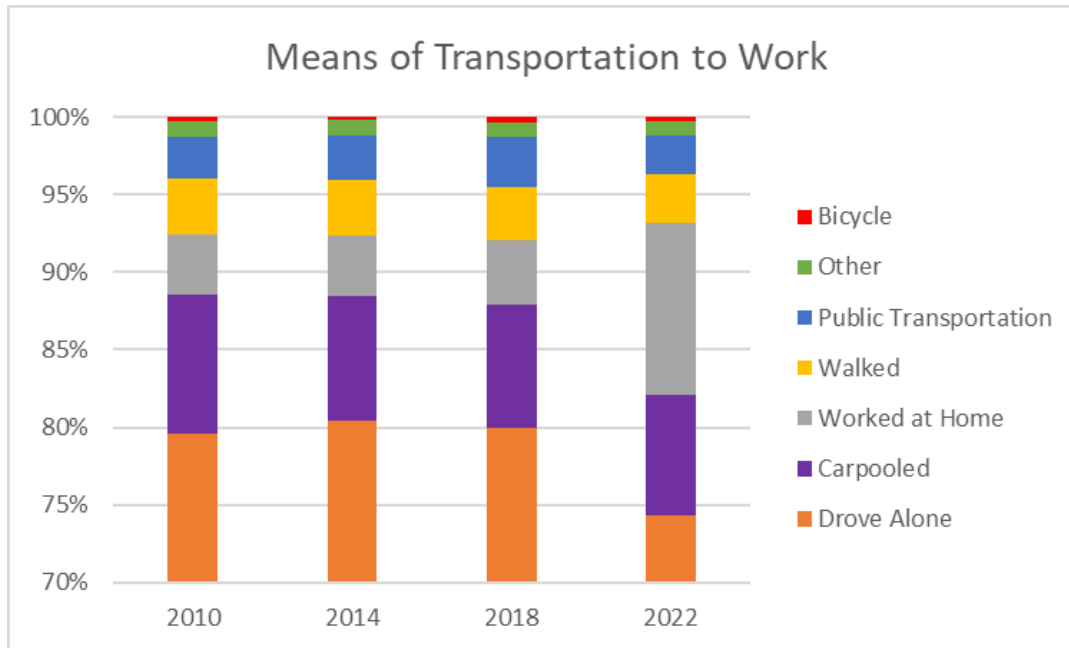

Figure 9: Means of Transportation to Work[14]

Additionally, slightly fewer workers used public transportation as their means of transportation to work; 3.1 percent in 2010 compared to 2.5 percent in 2022. The increase in working from home from 2019 to 2022 is largely reflective of a greater acceptance of remote work which had been widely tested during the pandemic. This trend is also reflected in the decline in transit use in the same period.

As of 2022, mode distribution for each area is as follows:

Mode	Albany-Schenectady-Troy, NY Metro Area	Amsterdam, NY Micro Area	Glens Falls, NY Metro Area
Drove Alone	74%	75%	80%
Carpooled	8%	10%	8%
Worked from home	12%	8%	7%
Walked	3%	4%	3%
Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	3%	0%	1%
Taxicab, motorcycle, or other means	1%	3%	1%
Bicycle	0%	1%	0%

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[14] U.S. Census Bureau. "Commuting Characteristics by Sex." American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0801, 2022.

It should be noted that this data largely predates CDTAs taking over in Amsterdam and Glens Falls. Glens Falls had transit service in 2022 but Amsterdam did not until September 2022. The main differences are:

- Working from home (12% in Albany versus 7-8% elsewhere)
- Drove Alone (80% in Glens Falls versus 74-75% elsewhere)

Key Takeaways

Following the pandemic, the Capital region witnessed a significant increase in working from home, consistent with many other regions of the country, from only 3.9 percent in 2019 to 11 percent in 2022. This growth appears to have drawn from all other modes fairly evenly.

Real Estate Development

CDRPC, with data collected from the online real estate platform Zillow, charted the number of housing units listed from October 2017 to June 2020. In an interesting illustration of relative listings over time, Figure 10 shows the difference between total listings in June of 2018, 2019, and 2020. Between the three years, the number of listings went down 45 percent to a low in 2020.
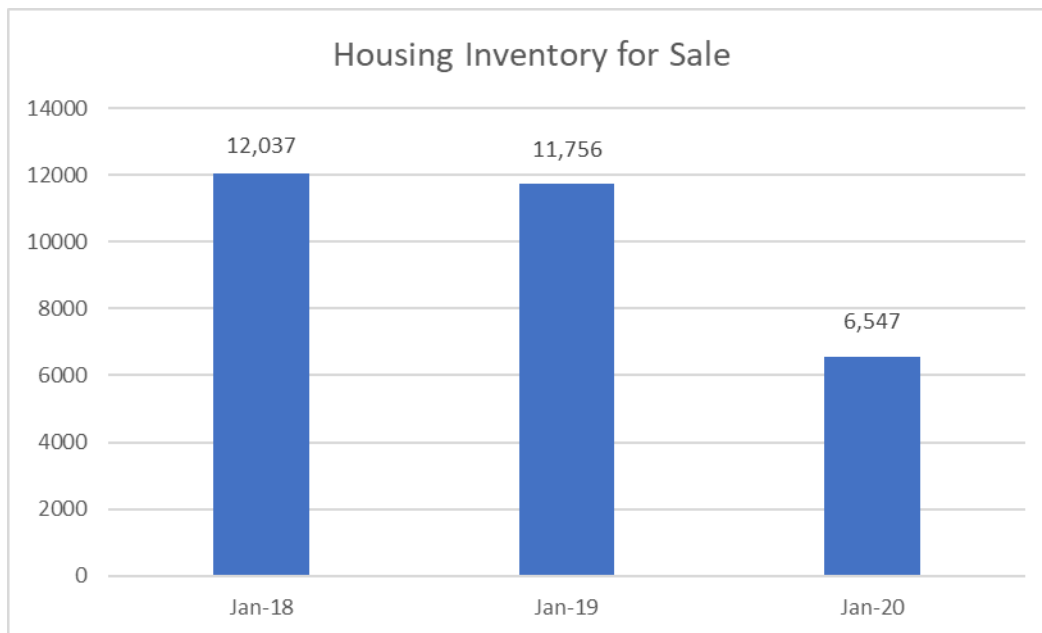

Figure 10: Housing Inventory[15]

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[15] CDRPC, https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/cdrpc/viz/ForSaleInventory/Sheet2

As a proxy for development activity in the area, Figure 11 shows the number of building permits issued in 2019, 2020, and 2022. The number is consistently rising, leading to a significantly higher number of permits being issued in 2022.
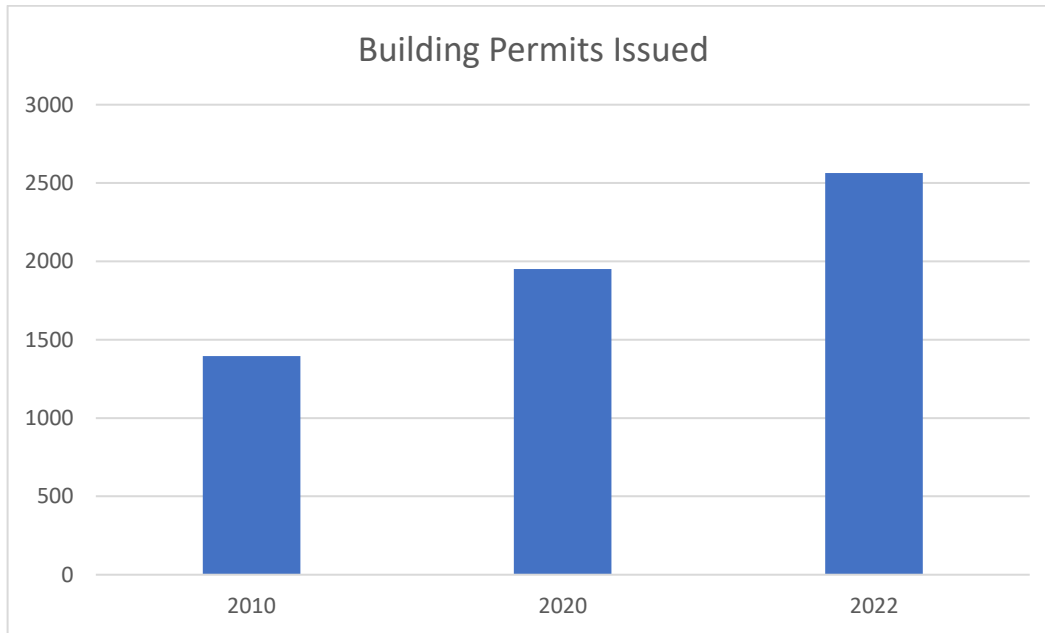

Figure 11: Building Permits[16]

Major Development Projects

Several development projects at various stages of the planning process are worth mentioning for how they could impact the demand for transportation services in the region:

The **One Monument Square** project in Troy is a multi-year effort to redevelop the vacant Monument Square property along Troy's newly revitalized downtown waterfront. The project will include a redesigned plaza, public space and waterfront connection to Riverfront Park.

Expansion of the **Albany International Airport Terminal** will increase the size of the concourse by 30,000 square feet and add two new passenger gates to Concourse A.

The **Adelphi Hotel** in Saratoga Springs is undergoing a rehab and reconstruction project that will combine the hotel with the former Rip Van Dam Hotel resulting in 150,000 additional square feet of hotel rooms and condos.

The **Apex at Crossgates** project will add 222 residences in townhouses and multistory apartments.

The University at Albany's new student housing planned at **1415 Washington Avenue,** known as the Hudso**n,** will accommodate 500 students.

At 97,200 square feet, the new **Mohawk Harbor Event Center** will accommodate Union College's hockey teams as well as concerts and other events and will have capacity for 2,200 spectators.

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[16] CDRPC, https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/cdrpc/viz/BuildingPermits_32/BuildingPermitActivity

The **Maple Avenue** medical offices and apartments in Wilton will consist of a two-story structure containing 120,000 square feet for medical offices and 136 apartments.[17]

Key Takeaways

Since the repeal of regulations and relative recession of the COVID virus, economic indicators are rising in the Capital Region. Employment is rising, development is increasing, and the population is projected to rise continuously. A range of development projects will provide a strong foundation for economic growth. Median incomes are rising while the cost of living remains stable. Though economic conditions have certainly changed in the past five years, the Capital Region continues to attract financial investment, people, and development.

Recommendations for Future Planning

Economic and development trends point to steady and continuing growth in the Capital region which will strengthen the market for a robust transportation system. Based on these trends, CDTA should consider strategies to improve service that enhance convenience, serve existing and emerging markets and draw new riders to transit. The following strategies are among those to be considered for future service planning:

1. **Enhancing Service Frequency:** To accommodate the growing and diversifying population, particularly in high-demand urban areas such as the Albany and Schenectady areas, and to meet the needs of new development projects. The increasing population indicates a significant demand for enhanced transit services.

2. **Targeted Services for Demographic Groups:** Including senior citizens, low-income households, and essential workers, to ensure equitable access to transit.

3. **Affordability Measures:** Considering the economic pressures identified, CDTA should explore fare policies and programs that make transit more affordable for all users. The findings suggested that higher living costs could deter ridership unless mitigated by fare policies that make public transportation financially accessible.

4. **Monitoring and Adaptation:** Continuously monitor demographic and economic trends to adapt services proactively.

Conclusion

The findings underscore the dynamic nature of the Capital Region and the evolving needs of its residents. CDTA must remain adaptive and forward-thinking in its service planning to address the growing and diversifying population, economic pressures, and changing demographic landscape. By implementing the recommended strategies, CDTA can enhance its transit services, ensuring they remain accessible, affordable, and equitable for all community members.

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[17] https://www.bizjournals.com/albany/news/2024/07/19/largest-construction-projects-albany-2024.html