

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

FORWARD



REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN



*A Unified Plan for Connecting
Northwest Arkansas through
Transportation Choice*

Approved February 2026



NWARPC MEMBERSHIP & PLANNING PARTNERS

Jurisdictions:

Avoca	Johnson
Bella Vista	Lincoln
Bentonville	Little Flock
Cave Springs	Lowell
Centerton	Pea Ridge
Decatur	Pineville, MO
Elkins	Prairie Grove
Elm Springs	Rogers
Farmington	Siloam Springs
Fayetteville	Springdale
Garfield	Springtown
Gateway	Sulphur Springs
Gentry	Tontitown
Goshen	West Fork
Gravette	Winslow
Greenland	Benton County
Highfill	Madison County
Hindsville	Washington County
Huntsville	McDonald County, MO
Jane, MO	

Other Agencies:

Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT)
Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT)
Beaver Water District (BWD)
NWA National Airport Authority (XNA)
Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) Authority
Razorback Transit
University of Arkansas

Non-Voting Transportation Planning Partners:

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)
Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
Arkansas Highway Commission
Human Service Agencies
Arkansas Missouri Railroad

NWARPC RESOLUTION 2026-05

A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE NORTHWEST ARKANSAS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION FORWARD 2050 METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION PLAN (MTP)

WHEREAS, the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC), as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, AR-MO urbanized area, is responsible for the development of a long-range, multimodal transportation plan for the area and its future environs; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to 23 U.S.C. § 134 and 49 U.S.C. § 5303, metropolitan transportation plans must be developed through a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process; be updated at least every five (5) years in air quality attainment areas; and maintain a planning horizon of no less than twenty (20) years; and

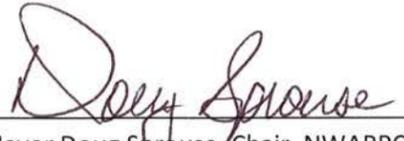
WHEREAS, the Forward 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan represents an update to the previously adopted 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan and has been developed through extensive public involvement, stakeholder engagement, and coordination with local governments, state and federal agencies, and modal partners; and

WHEREAS, the Forward 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan establishes the region's long-term transportation vision, goals, strategies, and project priorities to support anticipated growth and economic vitality through the year 2050.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE NORTHWEST ARKANSAS REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION/POLICY COMMITTEE:

That the Forward 2050 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) is hereby approved and adopted as the long-range transportation plan for the metropolitan planning area.

PASSED AND APPROVED BY THIS 25TH DAY OF FEBRUARY, 2026.



Mayor Doug Sprouse, Chair, NWARPC

ATTEST: 



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC), as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Northwest Arkansas region, extends its sincere appreciation to all individuals, agencies, and organizations that contributed to the development of the *Forward 2050 Regional Transportation Plan*. This plan reflects the collaboration, insights, and expertise of partners across the region and beyond.

NWARPC would like to thank the following contributors for their time, participation, review, and input throughout the planning process:

- **Forward 2050** Steering Committee
For providing strategic guidance, regional insight, and coordination throughout the development of the Plan
- **Forward 2050/TAS** Stakeholder Committee, for contributing time, expertise, and community perspectives that informed both the **Forward 2050** planning process and the Transit Alternatives Study.
- NWARPC staff who coordinated and supported all phases of the **Forward 2050** RTP and for their expertise in research, analysis, writing, and assembly.
- NWARPC Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)
- NWARPC Policy Commission (RPC)/ Board of Directors
- Local jurisdictions and their staff within Benton, Washington, and Madison Counties in Arkansas, and McDonald County in Missouri
- Regional transit partners, including Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) and Razorback Transit
- State partners, including the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) and the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT)
- Federal partners, including the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)
- Community organizations, stakeholders, and advocacy groups who participated in workshops, meetings, and outreach efforts
- Residents of Northwest Arkansas, whose feedback and perspectives helped shape the plan
- Component plan consultant teams whose work helped the region define key needs and develop the strategies that guided the RTP

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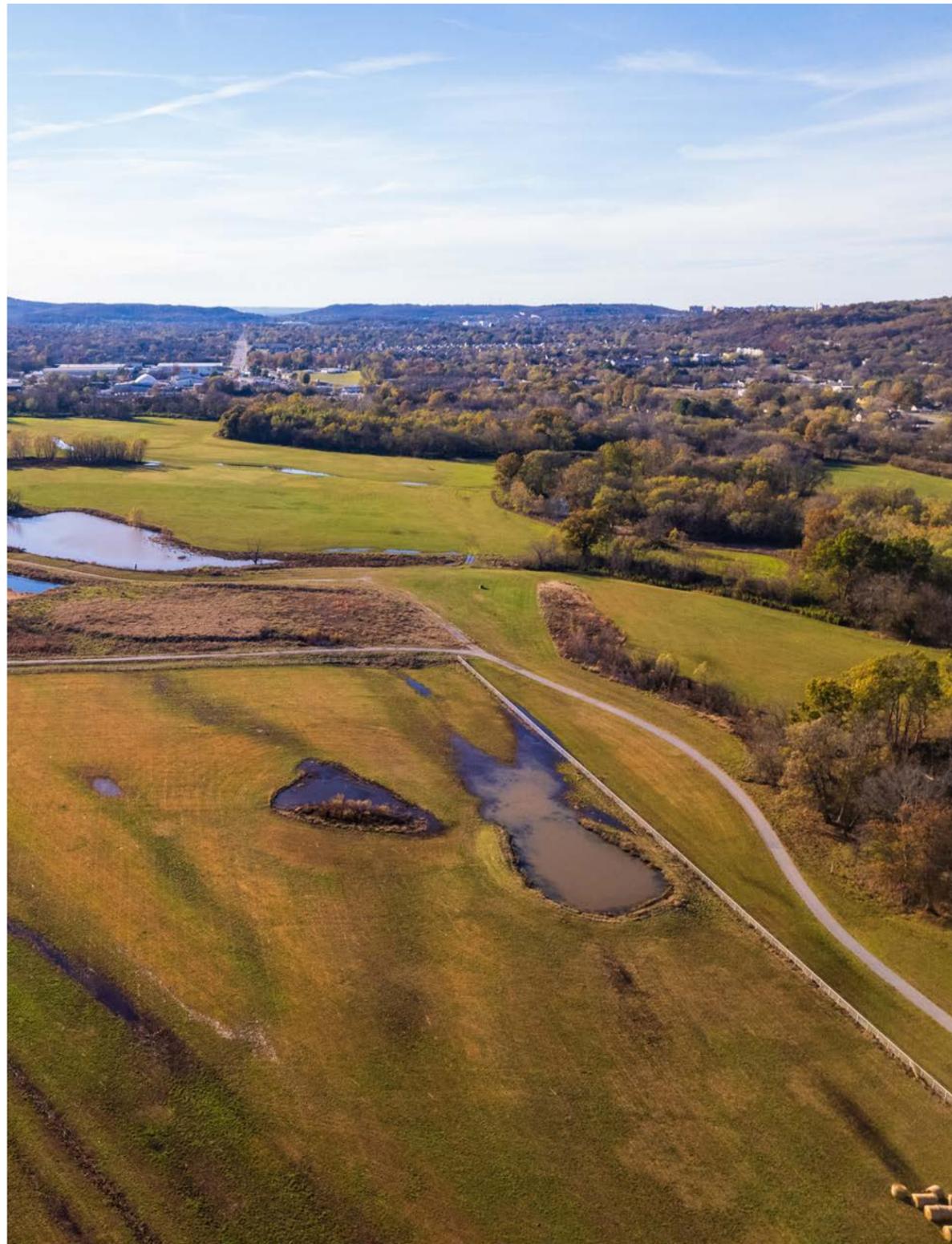
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The *Forward 2050* RTP covers the Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA), which includes all of Benton and Washington counties in Arkansas, and a portion of McDonald County in Missouri, and the municipalities within them.

Preparation of this report was financed in part through grants from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT), under the Metropolitan Planning Program, Section 104(f) of Title 23, U.S. Code. Additional support was provided by the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) and Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT).

The views and opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of ARDOT, MoDOT, or the U.S. Department of Transportation.



FORWARD



Connecting Northwest Arkansas through Transportation Choice



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Northwest Arkansas is one of the fastest-growing regions in the United States, with a population projected to **surpass one million residents by 2050 – nearly doubling the region’s population from 2020 levels.** This growth brings tremendous opportunity but also increasing demands on the transportation system that connects communities, supports economic vitality, and shapes regional quality of life.

Forward 2050 is the federally required **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)** for Northwest Arkansas. It establishes the region’s long-range vision, strategies, and transportation investment priorities for the next 25 years, providing a coordinated framework for local governments, transit agencies, state partners, and regional stakeholders to plan for growth, improve mobility, and strengthen transportation choice.

OUR GROWING REGION

The region’s population has grown rapidly over the past three decades, **adding more than 100,000 new residents each decade since 1990.** Between 2010 and 2020 alone, the population increased from 424,398 to 533,342, and by 2024 it had reached an estimated 587,750, adding another 50,000 residents in just four years. Looking ahead, forecasts anticipate the region will **gain an additional 436,250 residents in the next 25 years,** bringing the total population to over 1,024,000 in 2050. This growth represents an increase of more than 92% from the 2020 Census count, highlighting the need for a transportation system that can meet increasing demand while supporting resilient, connected communities.

RTP = MTP Forward 2050 is the region’s long-range transportation plan, guiding investments through 2050. The terms **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)** and **Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)** are used interchangeably throughout this document to refer to this federally required, fiscally constrained plan.

Population growth remains concentrated in the four largest cities (Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, and Bentonville), yet small towns are also expanding rapidly, in some cases doubling or tripling in size. Major employers such as Walmart, Tyson Foods, J.B. Hunt, and the University of Arkansas continue to attract talent, reinforcing strong employment demand and the need for a transportation system that can support a diverse and expanding workforce.

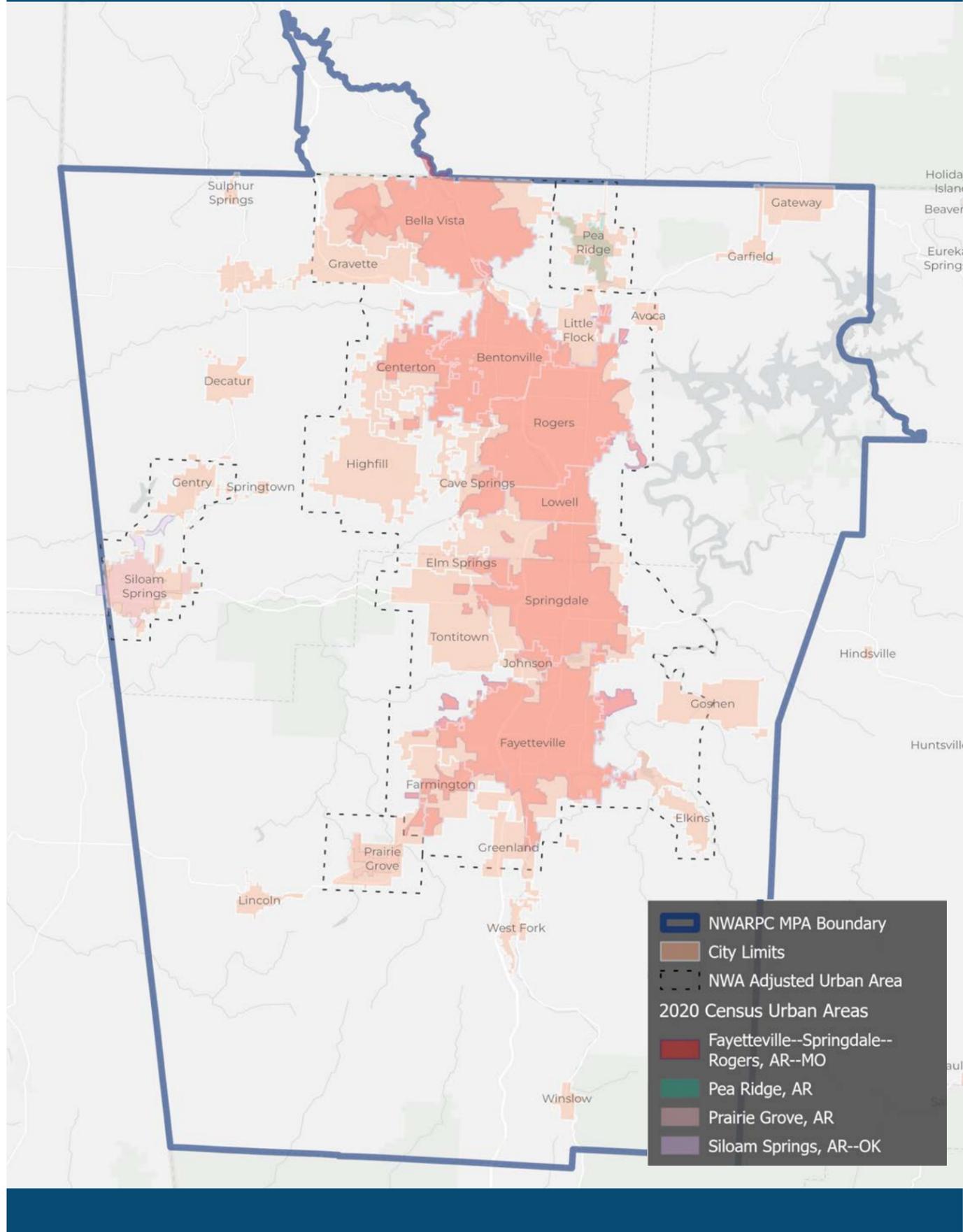
Northwest Arkansas is a polycentric region, without a single dominant core city. Growth and travel patterns are distributed across multiple communities, with development largely aligned along the I-49 corridor. As housing expands outward, travel distances are increasing, and the region remains highly auto-dependent – 75.9% of workers drive alone while only 0.3% use public transit. These patterns underscore the need for a multimodal system that provides more choices and improves access for all residents.

In 2050 ●●●▶ **56% of new residents** are projected to locate in Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, and Bentonville

Many smaller communities (e.g., Gravette, Greenland, Highfill) are projected to

more than double or triple their population

Smaller communities are expected to increase their share of the total population from 29% in 2024 to 32% in 2050



COMMUNITY PRIORITIES AND SHARED VALUES

Over 1,300 residents participated in surveys, open houses, focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and community events to inform *Forward 2050*. Across all engagement, people expressed a desire for a transportation system that responds to current pressures while protecting the qualities that define Northwest Arkansas: its scenic landscapes, natural beauty, and sense of place.

Residents expressed clear frustration with congestion and strong support for roadway safety improvements. Many voiced substantial interest in regional high-capacity transit, particularly between Fayetteville and Bentonville, and sought safer, more connected bicycle and pedestrian routes. Participants also highlighted the importance of supporting mobility needs for underserved communities, including carless households and older adults. Across the region, there was consistent support for coordinated planning to manage growth effectively, reduce long-term costs, and safeguard environmental resources.

Over 1,300 residents participated in surveys, open houses, focus groups, stakeholder meetings, and community events

A REGIONAL VISION

The plan is guided by four themes that reflect community values and regional priorities: fiscally responsible development patterns, a connected multimodal region, a safe and resilient natural and built environment, and healthy, inclusive communities that contribute to a thriving regional economy.

These themes translate into three *Forward 2050* goals:

- G1** Implement a safe, efficient, and reliable multimodal transportation system
- G2** Advance plans and policies that enable transportation choice, respect the natural and human environment, and enhance quality of life
- G3** Foster regional collaboration and reinforce economic competitiveness

In the 2024 statistically representative survey:

85% supported expanding transit, and **82%** supported potential tax-based funding for improvements.

Residents rated **congestion** as worsening, and satisfaction with **transit** as lagging behind other modes.

■ CURRENT CONDITIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

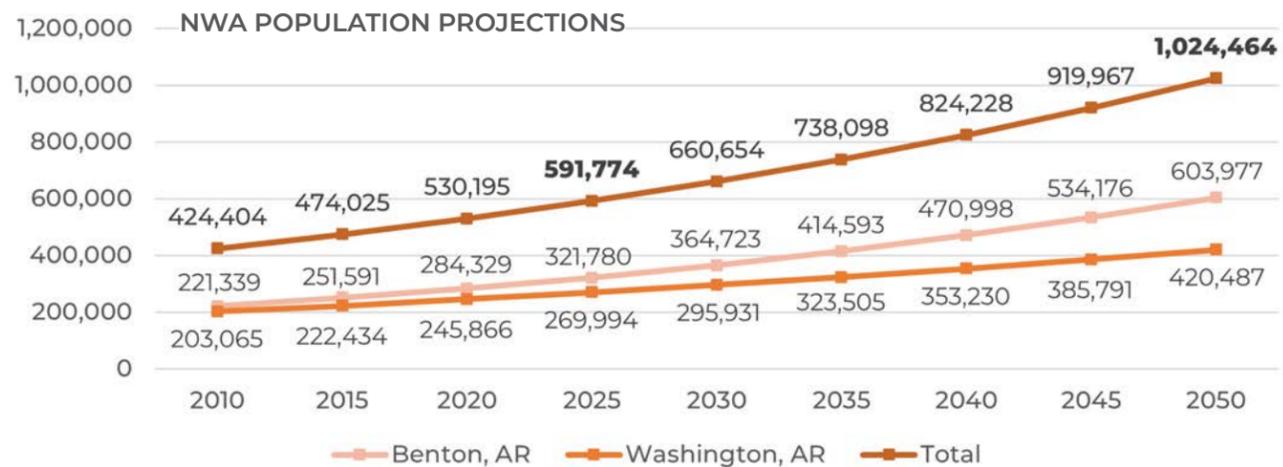
Northwest Arkansas continues to experience rapid population and employment growth, reshaping travel patterns and placing new demands on the transportation system. Chapter 2 of *Forward 2050* highlights several intersecting trends that are creating pressures on roads, transit, and active transportation networks.

Traffic volumes are increasing along the region's major north-south and east-west corridors, and congestion is intensifying during peak periods. Safety concerns remain high across all modes, with pedestrians and cyclists facing disproportionately severe crashes in

areas with incomplete or disconnected infrastructure. Expanding industrial and logistics activity adds freight traffic to corridors already operating near capacity, further challenging system performance.

Gaps in sidewalks, bikeways, and trails limit access to safe alternatives. Many residents, particularly in smaller or rapidly growing communities, have few transportation options beyond driving. Rising housing and transportation costs affect affordability, and environmental pressures from development, including increased impervious surfaces, flooding risk, and strain on local watersheds, underscore the importance of resilient, sustainable planning.

To better understand how these trends will shape the region's future, *Forward 2050* evaluates three growth scenarios: **Suburban, Planned, and Urban**. Each scenario explores how different development patterns influence congestion, safety, transit viability, and the long-term demand for roads, freight infrastructure, and multimodal networks. This analysis not only informs strategies to enhance regional mobility, resilience, and quality of life but also identifies where adjustments to current planned growth may be needed to enable high-capacity transit and more efficient land use.



Data Sources: Census Bureau and AEDI Projections

SUBURBAN GROWTH (STATUS QUO DEVELOPMENT)	PLANNED GROWTH (NODAL DEVELOPMENT – “BASELINE” SCENARIO)	URBAN GROWTH (HIGH-CAPACITY TRANSIT-SUPPORTIVE DEVELOPMENT)
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Suburban Growth continues outward, low-density, auto-oriented development patterns that increase infrastructure costs, vehicle miles traveled, and environmental impacts. This scenario highlights the long-term trade-offs of uncoordinated growth.

Key takeaway: Sprawling development increases congestion, public costs, and environmental impacts.

Planned Growth reflects adopted regional and local plans, emphasizing compact, mixed-use development centered on cities and towns, with transportation investments aligned to support safe, efficient travel across modes. It serves as the baseline for travel demand modeling and policy evaluation.

Key takeaway: Coordinated land use and transportation planning supports balanced growth and system efficiency.

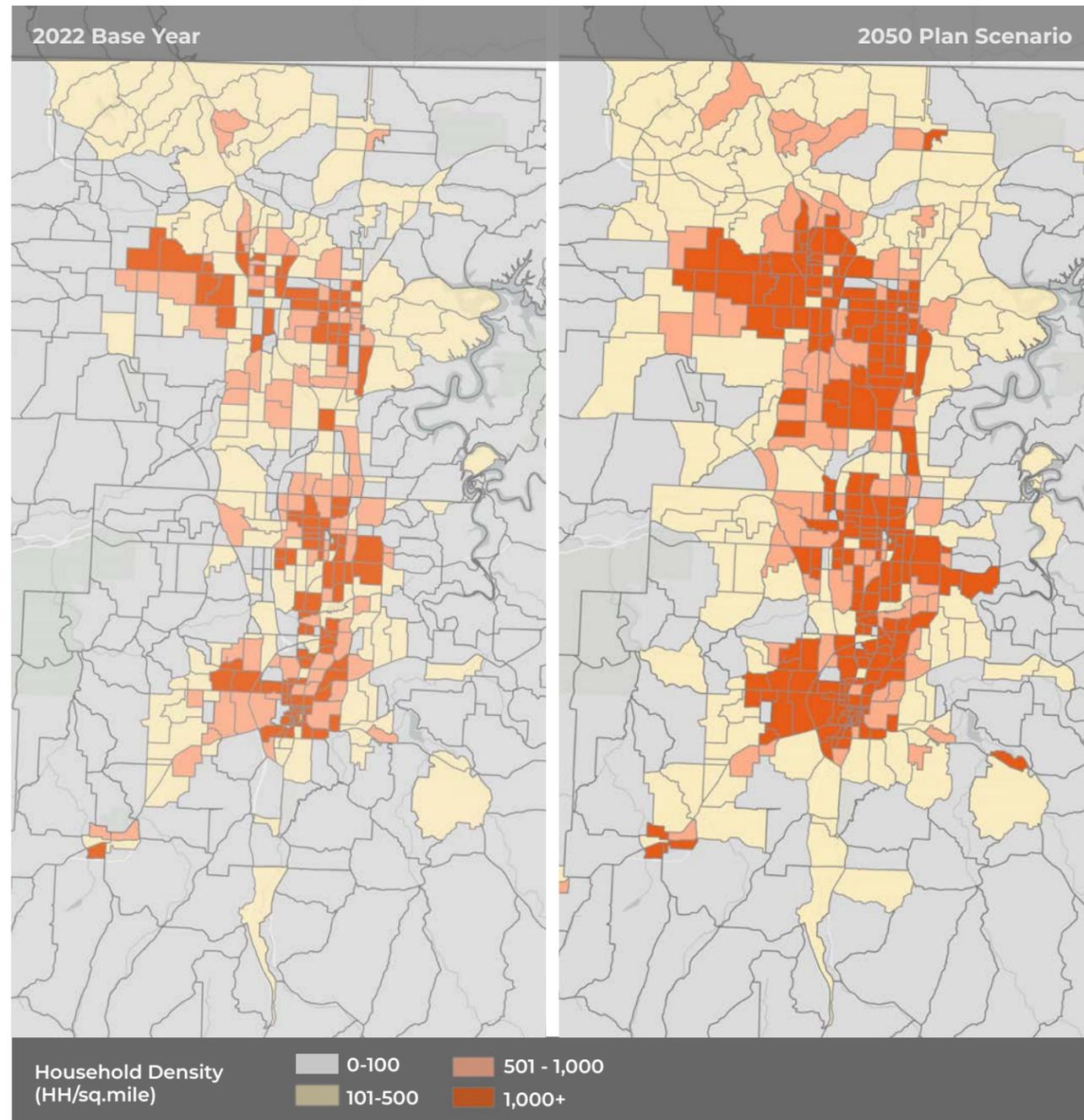
Urban Growth concentrates development in urban centers and along high-capacity transit corridors, prioritizing accessibility, transit use, and active transportation. This approach reduces congestion and emissions while preserving the natural environment.

Key takeaway: Transit-oriented, compact growth boosts mobility and resiliency but requires a coordinated regional shift in land use, transportation investment, and development priorities.

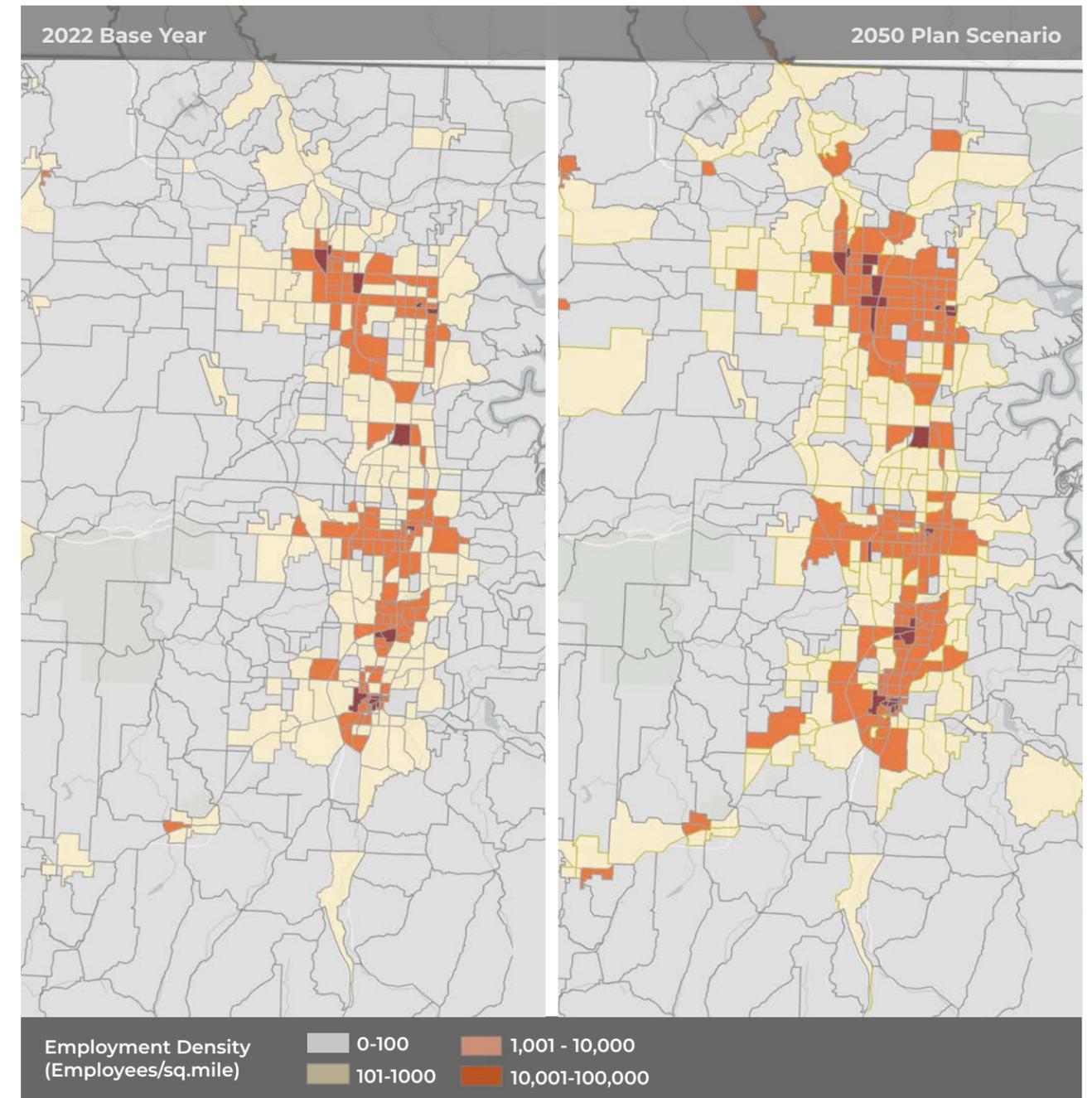
NORTHWEST ARKANSAS FAST FACTS

<p>1 Interstate I-49 +(Future I-42)</p>	<p>3 U.S. Hwys. 12 State Hwys. 0 Toll Hwys.</p>	<p>6 Airports 1 Nat. Airport (XNA) 5 Municipal Airports</p>	<p>874 Bridges</p>	<p>2 Transit Agencies Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) Razorback Transit (U of A)</p>	<p>234 Shared Use Paved Trail Miles</p>	<p>2 Railroads CPKC (Class I) AM (Class III)</p>
				<p>300+ Bus Stops</p>		

Households Density Change from 2022 to 2050



Employment Density Change from 2022 to 2050



STRATEGIES FOR THE 2050 REGIONAL NETWORK

The strategies outlined in *Forward 2050* are grounded in and informed by the region's adopted plans, studies, and policy frameworks. These strategies synthesize previously identified regional needs, priorities, and investments into a coordinated set of actions that translate established objectives into three key strategy areas, advancing the region's long-term vision for safe, efficient, and resilient mobility (see Chapter 3).

Forward 2050 also introduces the **2050 Regional Network**, a tiered, policy-level framework for regional connectivity. Derived from current travel patterns and projected growth, it identifies corridors of regional significance to guide long-term transportation decisions, investments, and land use.



SAFETY AND SYSTEM INTEGRATION

Advance Vision Zero principles, implement complete streets, enhance multimodal safety, maintain bridges and pavements, and integrate nature-based solutions to improve overall system resilience.



OPERATIONS AND CONGESTION MANAGEMENT

Improve corridor performance and reliability through intelligent transportation systems, corridor management strategies, and targeted operational enhancements to address congestion points.

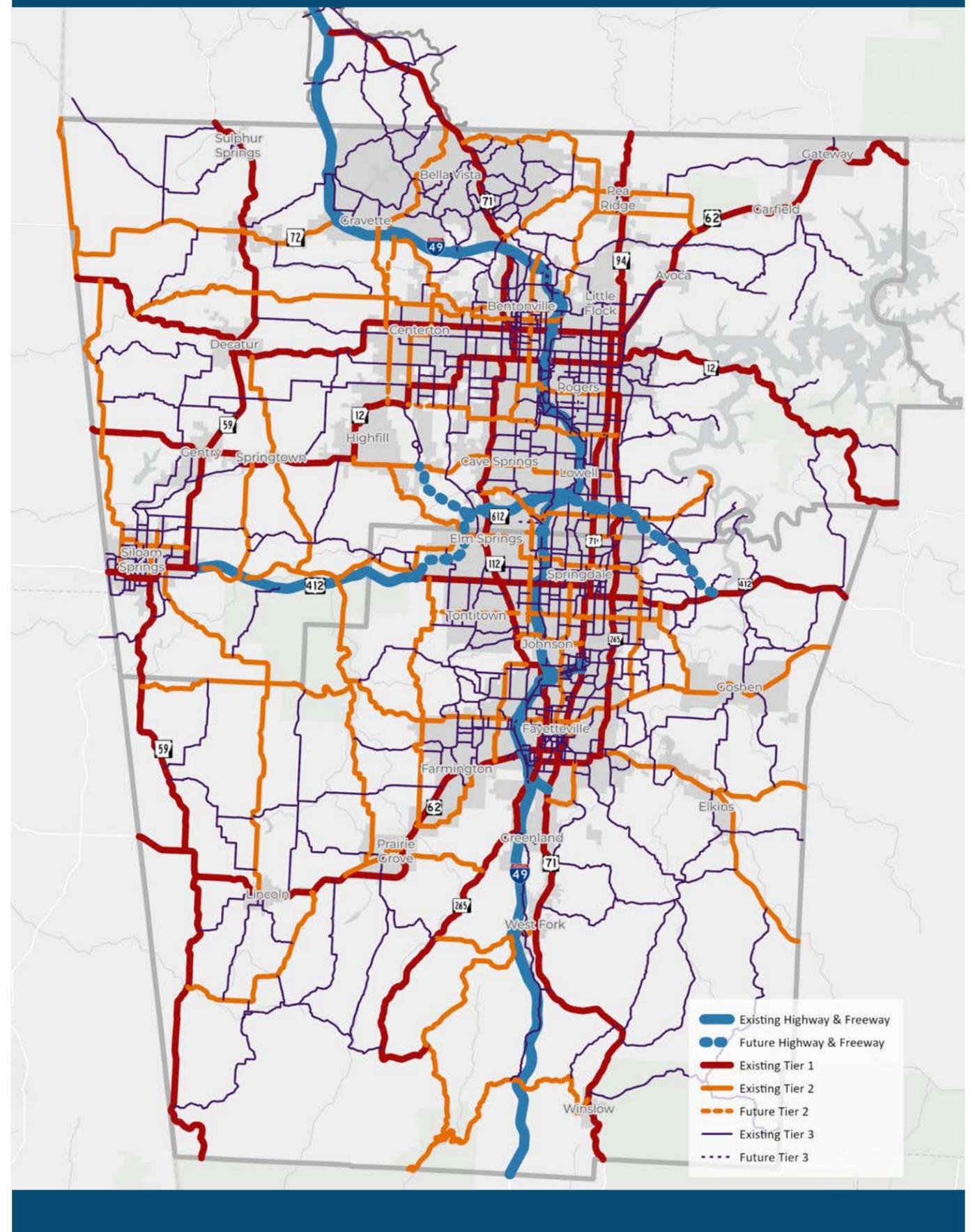


SECURITY AND SYSTEM RESILIENCE

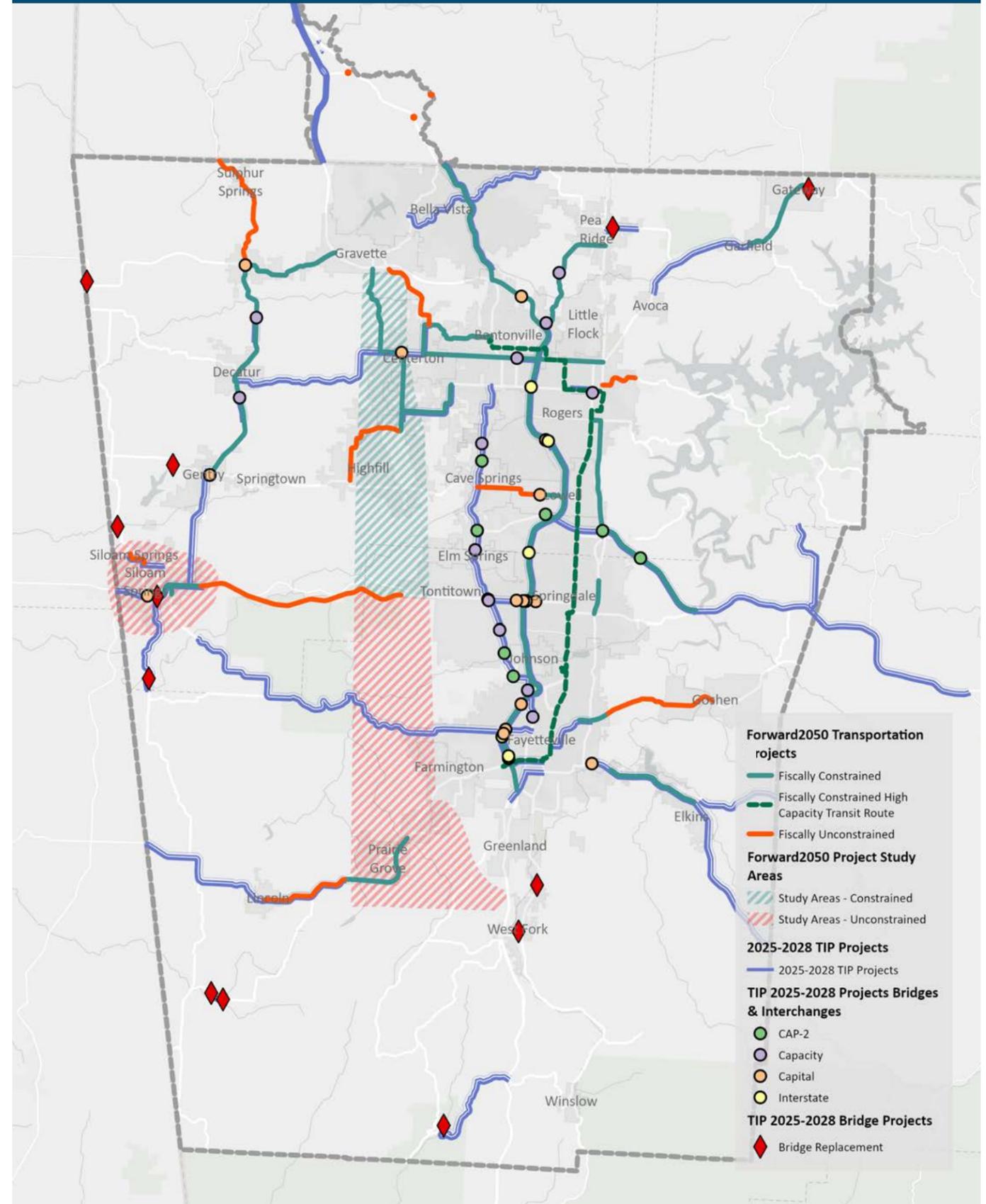
Strengthen the network against flooding, extreme weather, and other hazards; support emergency management and response; protect environmental resources; and incorporate natural infrastructure to ensure long-term system resilience.

	Function (typical)
Interstate/ Freeway System	<i>Inter-state connectivity (backbone)</i> — High-speed, high-capacity fully controlled access (little-to-no regional control of facility design).
Tier 1 Corridors	<i>Inter-regional connectivity (external trips)</i> — High-capacity connectors, providing “gateway” for region, link major employment hubs/regional nodes; primary freight and regional trips, some local trips.
Tier 2 Corridors	<i>Intra-regional connectivity (internal trips)</i> — Increased complexity of land use contexts along the corridor; provides urban/suburban connection; more local trips.
Tier 3 Corridors	<i>Sub-regional connectivity (alternate routes)</i> — Primary connectors for local mobility, placemaking, mixed-use support; highly integrated transportation and land use; provide system redundancy through alternative routes.

2050 Regional Network



Forward 2050 Project List (2025-2050)



INVESTING IN THE 2050 NETWORK

Forward 2050 outlines how the region will fund and deliver priority projects over the next 25 years, ensuring safe, connected, and resilient mobility. The plan relies on federal, state, and local resources, supplemented by private and philanthropic contributions, to support highways, bridges, transit, and multimodal infrastructure. Assumed future mechanisms, including tolling, FTA Capital Investment Grants, and a potential dedicated regional transportation tax, provide additional flexibility for high-priority projects (see Chapter 4).

A **fiscally constrained project list** identifies investments that can be reasonably funded with projected revenues. Projects are prioritized using performance metrics tied to safety, congestion relief, multimodal connectivity, resilience, and economic vitality.

However, the region faces a significant delivery gap: **\$6.08 billion** in identified needs and only **\$2.97 billion** in available revenue, leaving a **\$3.12 billion** shortfall. This gap highlights the need for innovative funding approaches to meet the region's long-term mobility, safety, and multimodal needs.

Forward 2050 includes a set of **vision projects**, which are unfunded, long-term priorities such as new connector corridors, Future I-42, and additional regional network connectivity, intended to guide future action as new partnerships and funding sources emerge.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING DELIVERY GAP (2029-2050)

Est. Investment Needs
\$6.08 Billion

Est. Existing Revenues
\$2.97 Billion (49%)

Delivery Gap
\$3.12 Billion (51%)

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE

The plan employs a three-tiered assessment framework to ensure investments advance regional and national goals. This structure links individual projects with broader regional outcomes and supports transparent, data-driven decision-making.

THREE-TIERED PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

- **Project Level:** At the project level, each constrained project is evaluated using weighted criteria aligned with *Forward 2050* goals and objectives.
- **Plan Level:** At the plan level, the collective impact of investments is assessed against *Forward 2050* goals, providing a system-wide picture of how the region's investments are anticipated to perform over time.
- **System Level:** At the system level, performance is monitored through federally required measures, including safety outcomes, infrastructure conditions, congestion, reliability, freight efficiency, environmental sustainability, and project delivery timelines.

G1 Implement a safe, efficient, and reliable multimodal transportation system

G2 Advance plans and policies that enable transportation choice, respect the natural and human environment, and enhance quality of life

G3 Foster regional collaboration and reinforce economic competitiveness

NATIONAL PLANNING GOALS (23 USC 150)

Safety	To achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads.
Infrastructure condition	To maintain the highway infrastructure asset system in a state of good repair.
Congestion reduction	To achieve a significant reduction in congestion on the National Highway System.
System reliability	To improve the efficiency of the surface transportation system.
Freight movement and economic vitality	To improve the National Highway Freight Network, strengthen the ability of rural communities to access national and international trade markets, and support regional economic development.
Environmental sustainability	To enhance the performance of the transportation system while protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
Reduced project delivery delays	To reduce project costs, promote jobs and the economy, and expedite the movement of people and goods by accelerating project completion through eliminating delays in the project development and delivery process, including reducing regulatory burdens and improving agencies' work practices.

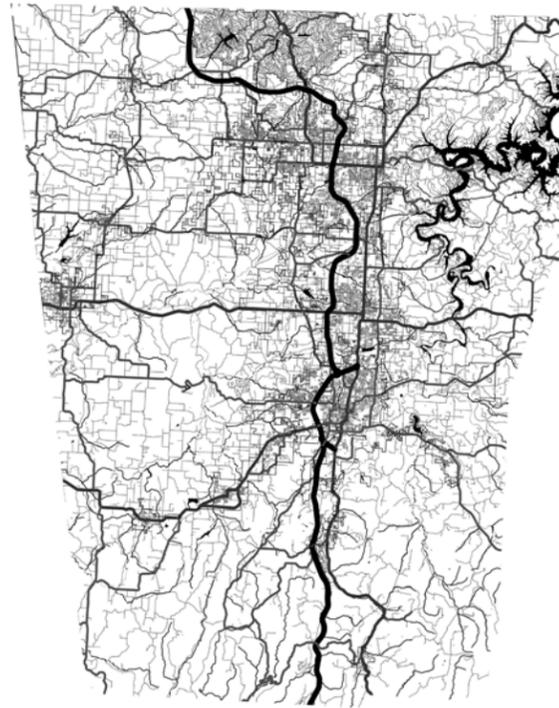
FEDERALLY REQUIRED TRANSPORTATION PERFORMANCE MEASURES (TPM) SUMMARY

	Arkansas Statewide Performance			Missouri Statewide Performance		
	Target	Actual	Meets Target	Target	Actual	Meets Target
PM 1: Safety (2019-2023)						
Number of Fatalities	704.9	617.4	✓	948.2	986.4	
Fatality Rate per 100 Million VMT	1.895	1.654	✓	1.212	1.26	
Number of Serious Injuries	2,790.1	2659.2	✓	4848.7	4965.6	
Serious Injury Rate per 100 Million VMT	7.815	7.126	✓	6.205	6.336	
Number of Non-motorized Fatalities and Serious Injuries	274.4	264.8	✓	499.2	566.2	
PM2: Bridge and Pavement Conditions 2022 Performance Period						
Percentage of pavements of the Interstate System in Good Condition	72%	65.2%		77.50%	79.90%	✓
Percentage of pavements of the Interstate System in Poor Condition	5%	1.3%	✓	0.1%	0.00%	✓
Percentage of non-Interstate NHS Pavements in Good Condition	59%	65.9%	✓	61.1%	61.3%	✓
Percentage of non-Interstate NHS Pavements in Poor Condition	7%	7.7%		1%	0.9%	✓
Percentage of NHS Bridges Classified as in Good Condition	42%	43.6%	✓	26.4%	27.2%	✓
Percentage of NHS Bridges Classified as in Poor Condition	6%	3.5%	✓	8.2%	7.1%	✓
PM3: Freight and Reliability 2022 Performance Period						
Interstate Travel Time Reliability Measure: Percent of Reliable Person-Miles Traveled on the Interstate	93%	98.5%	✓	87.1%	98.4%	✓
Non-Interstate Travel Time Reliability Measure: Percent of Reliable Person-Miles Traveled on the Non-Interstate NHS	92%	95.5%	✓	87.8%	95.5%	✓
Truck Travel Time Reliability (TTTR) Index	1.4	1.24	✓	1.45	1.18	✓

■ IMPLEMENTATION AND THE PATH AHEAD

Bringing *Forward 2050* to life requires coordinated action among NWARPC, member governments, state agencies, transit providers, and private and philanthropic partners. Implementation occurs across these stakeholders through programming cycles, discretionary grants, comprehensive plan updates, zoning and development decisions, and public-private partnerships.

NWARPC's implementation matrix tracks responsibilities, timelines, and progress across key initiatives, including:



Responsible Growth and Land Use Coordination

Guide future growth by aligning land use, housing, and transportation planning and directing infrastructure investments to support the NWA Growth Strategy.

A Connected, Resilient Regional Network

Complete the 2050 Regional Network grid to improve regional connectivity, provide route redundancy, and enhance system resilience for daily travel, freight, and emergency response.

Strategic Corridor Investments

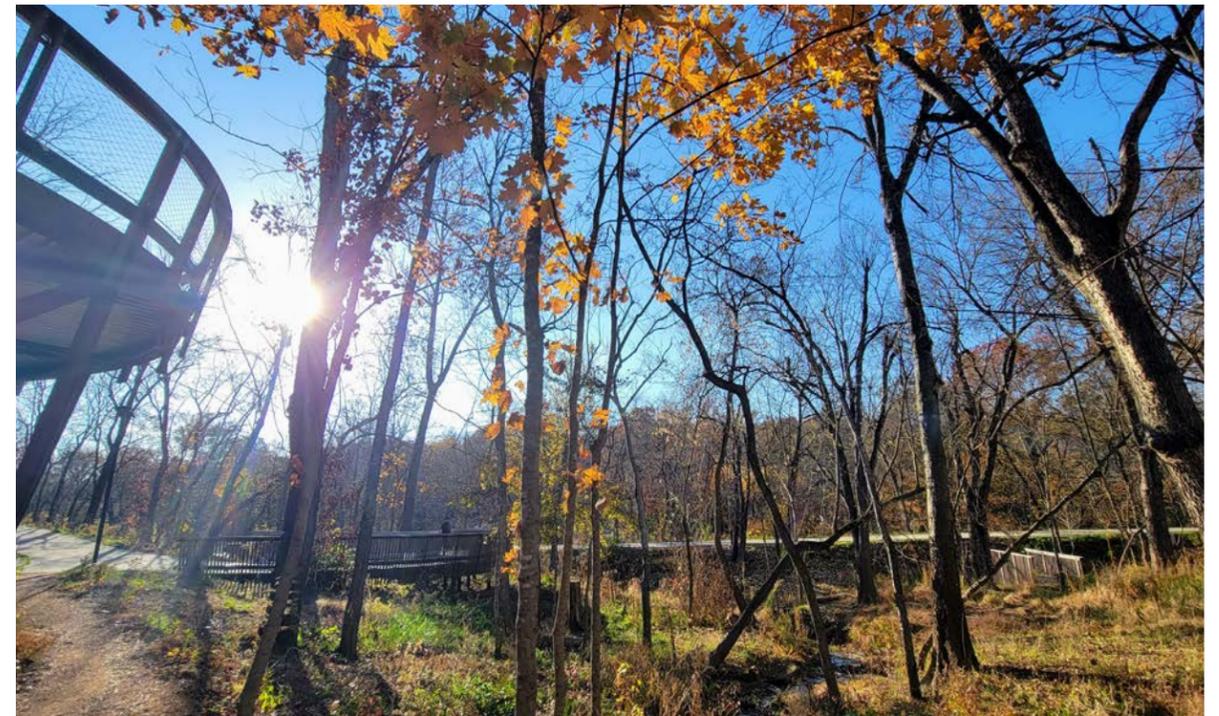
Improve regional mobility through I-49 expansion with managed lanes (HOV/HOT) and targeted corridor studies to address capacity, safety, and freight efficiency (e.g., I-49, I-42, Western N-S Connector, Highway 59/72).

Integrated Transit, Multimodal Access, and Operations

Advance a high-capacity BRT system along U.S. 71B and MLK supported by Complete Streets, traffic calming, ITS, cybersecurity, traveler information, and travel demand management to deliver a safer, more reliable, and more flexible transportation system.

Resilience Through Natural Infrastructure

Implement the NWA Blue-Green Network as part of a Regional Resilience Plan, using nature-based solutions to manage stormwater, protect natural systems, and expand active transportation connectivity.



■ A UNIFIED, REGIONAL PATH FORWARD

As a polycentric region with 39 interconnected communities contributing to economic activity and daily travel patterns, Northwest Arkansas depends on transportation solutions that cross jurisdictional boundaries. Critical corridors such as I-49, Highway 71B, and future high-capacity transit routes serve multiple communities and require regional coordination. The **Northwest Arkansas Regional Mobility Authority (RMA)** offers a framework for regional collaboration, including project planning, funding, and delivery. The RMA could accelerate corridor projects and regional transit investments, leverage state and federal grants more effectively, and provide transparent governance and accountability.

Closing the region's delivery gap will require strategic planning, regional collaboration, and exploration of new revenue tools. *Forward 2050* links near-term actions to long-term goals, including documenting unfunded needs, developing a Regional Mobility Investment Framework, strengthening public engagement, and evaluating funding models and educate policymakers on options that align legal authority with the region's long-term mobility needs.

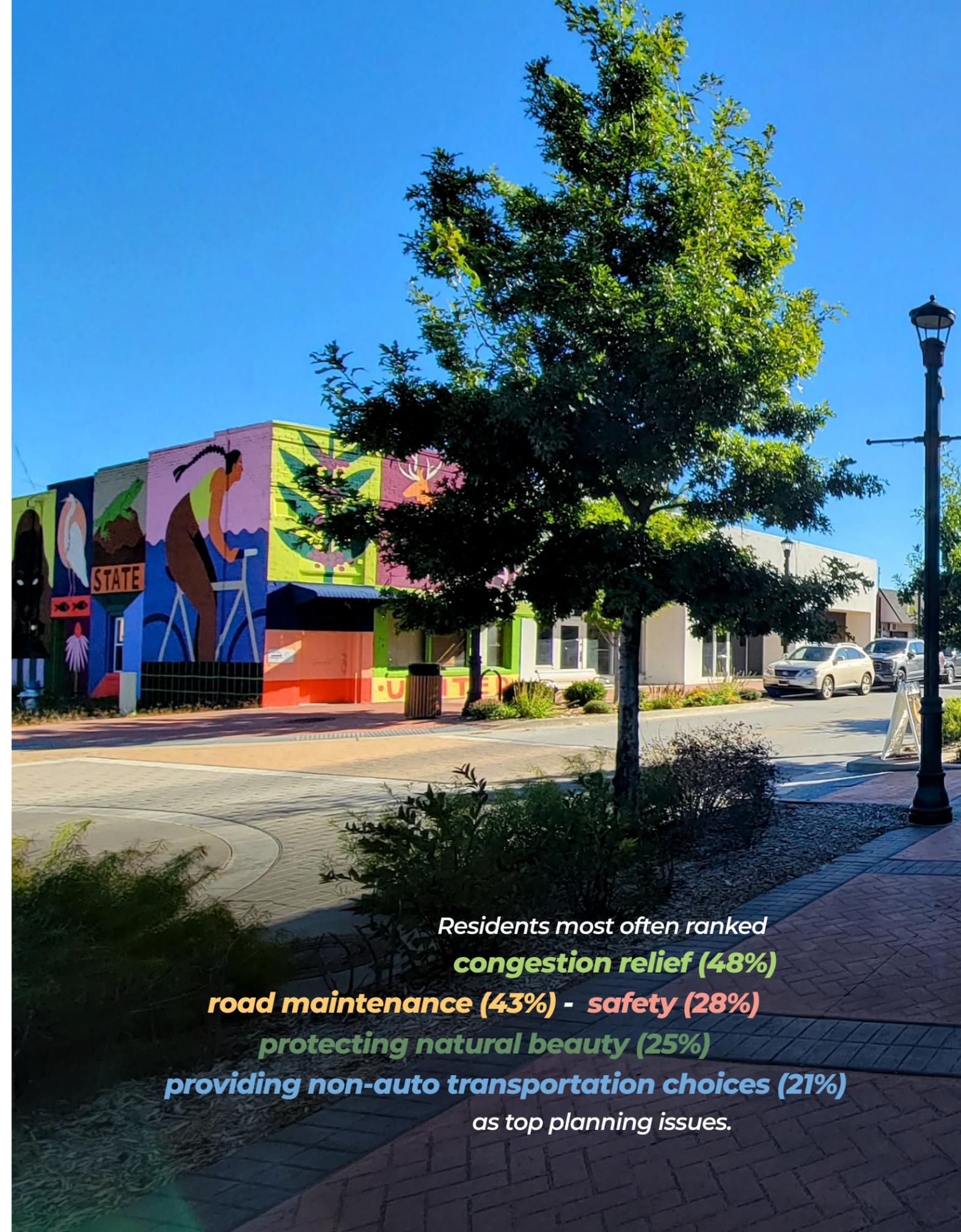
■ CONCLUSION

Forward 2050 charts a long-term vision for a safe, connected, and resilient transportation system that supports Northwest Arkansas' continued growth and protects the region's unique natural character. Its success relies on ongoing collaboration among local governments, transit providers, state partners, and community stakeholders, all working together to align investments, policies, and land use decisions with shared regional priorities.

As the region evolves, *Forward 2050* provides a framework for making informed, transparent decisions that reflect both immediate needs and long-range goals.

But it is not a static document. *Forward 2050 is a living plan.* NWARPC monitors progress through performance measures, updates travel demand models, and integrates findings from emerging studies. Continued public engagement, transparent reporting, regular updates, and adaptive decision-making ensure the plan remains responsive to community values, technological advancements, and new opportunities as they arise.

Guided by this approach, Northwest Arkansas can navigate rapid growth while preserving mobility, strengthening economic vitality, and maintaining the natural beauty that defines the region, advancing a unified, regional path forward to 2050 and beyond.



Residents most often ranked
congestion relief (48%)
road maintenance (43%) - safety (28%)
protecting natural beauty (25%)
providing non-auto transportation choices (21%)
as top planning issues.

Chapter 01

BUILDING THE FRAMEWORK: PURPOSE, VISION, AND ENGAGEMENT

*This chapter explains the purpose and organization of **Forward 2050**, outlines the region's vision and goals, and highlights how public input and stakeholder engagement shaped the plan.*



Northwest Arkansas is one of the fastest-growing regions in the country, where vibrant communities, a strong economy, and natural beauty continue to attract new residents and businesses every day.

By 2050, the population is projected to nearly double – surpassing one million residents.

With this rapid growth comes both opportunity and challenge. Building a strong, connected transportation network that provide choice is essential to support the region's economy, expand access to jobs and education, enhance quality of life, and preserve the unique character that defines Northwest Arkansas.

Forward 2050, the region's ***Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)***, charts a course for the next 25 years. It serves as the blueprint for regional transportation investments and policies, guiding how Northwest Arkansas will plan, prioritize, and fund projects that keep the region moving.

■ ABOUT THE PLAN

- Identifies current and future transportation challenges and opportunities.
- Evaluates options for addressing them.
- Establishes a vision and strategies to move the region forward.

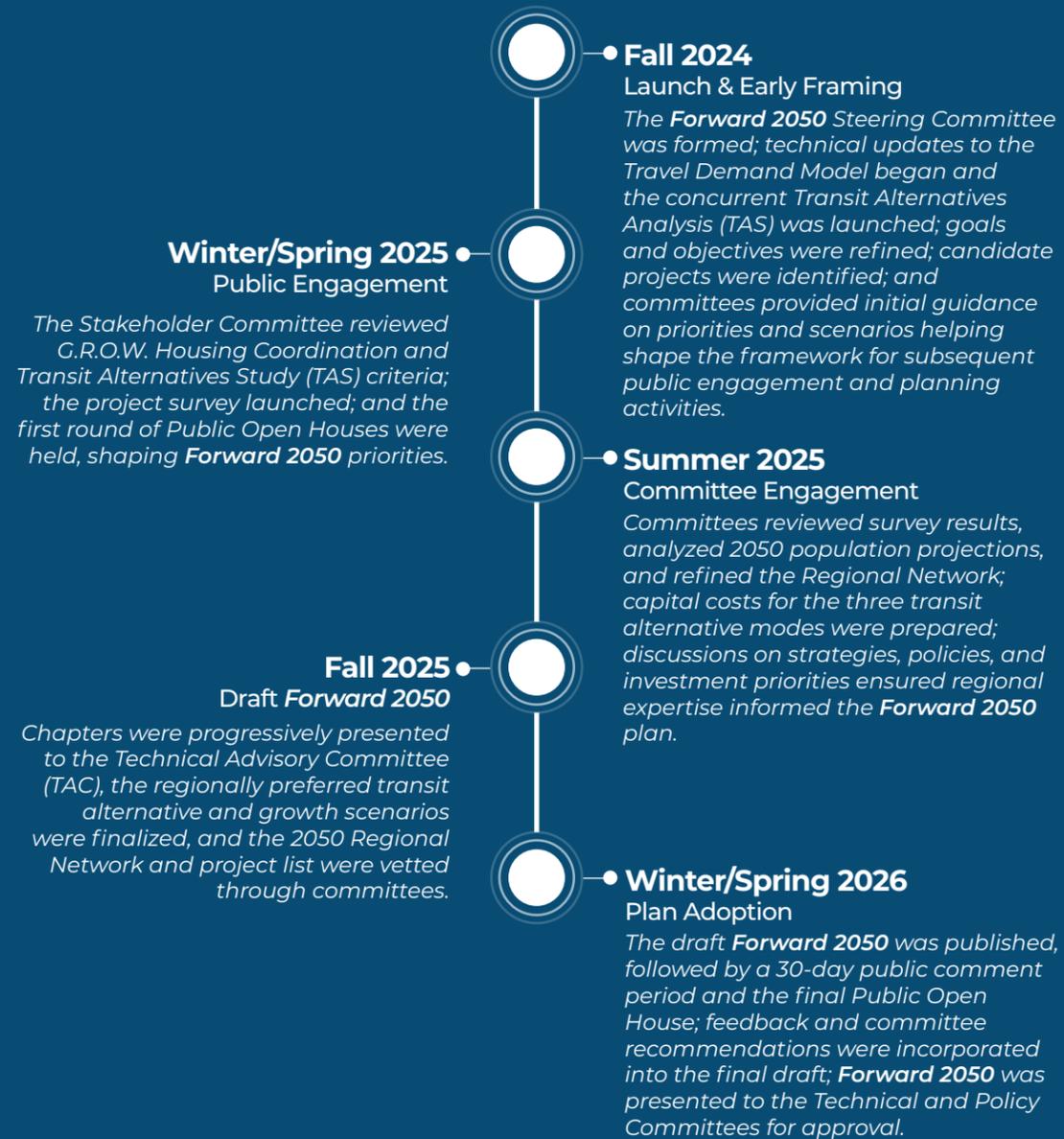
The MTP is federally required for urbanized areas with populations greater than 50,000 and is updated every five years. ***Forward 2050*** provides a framework for coordinated decision-making, allowing local governments, state agencies, and transportation partners to align resources and priorities. By establishing a regional vision with shared goals, the MTP ensures that Northwest Arkansas is prepared to adapt to growth while advancing safety, access, transportation choice, and resilience.

RTP = MTP

Forward 2050 is the region's long-range transportation plan, guiding investments through 2050. The terms ***Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)*** and ***Regional Transportation Plan (RTP)*** are used interchangeably throughout this document to refer to this federally required, fiscally constrained plan.

PLAN TIMELINE

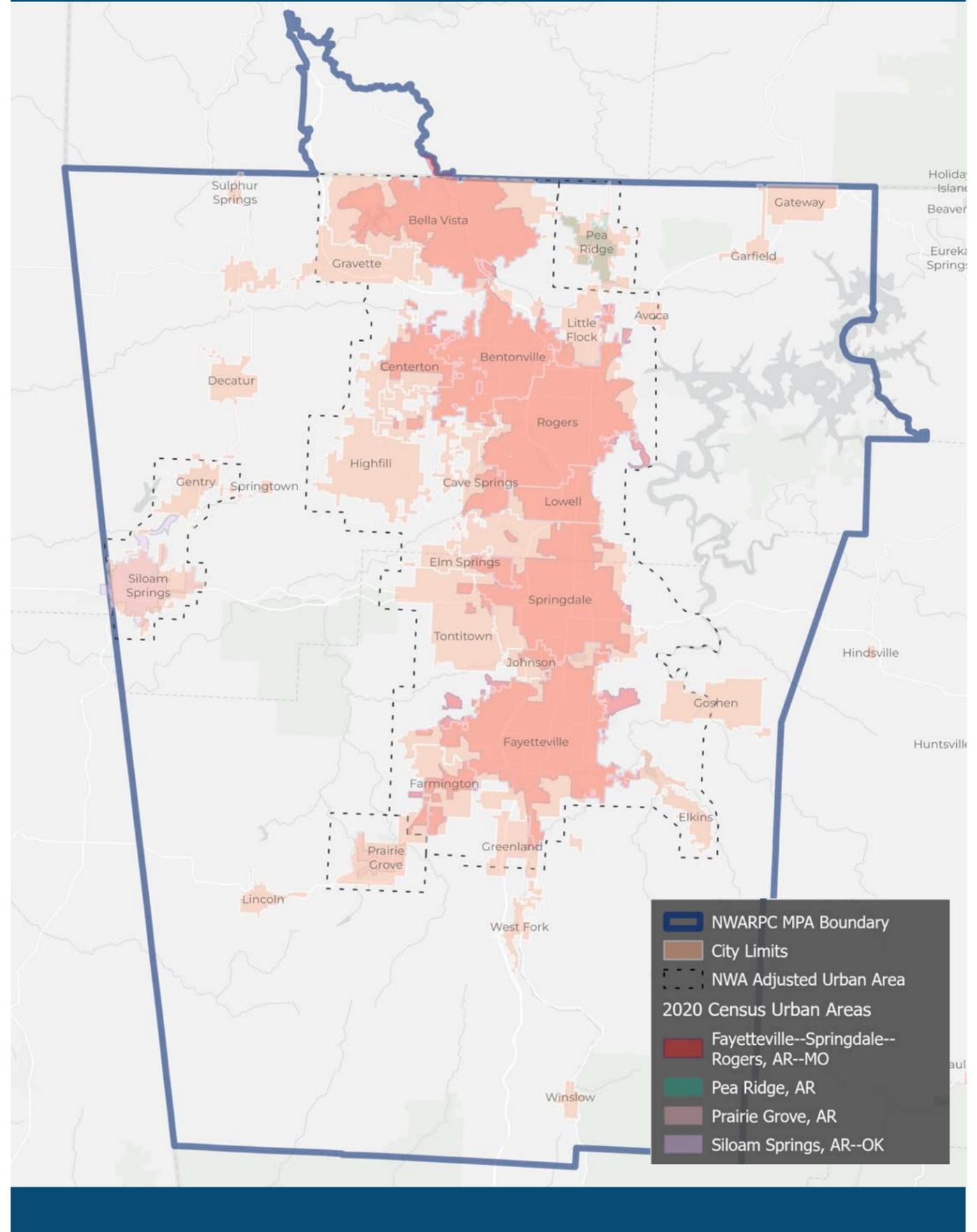
Work on *Forward 2050* began prior to its official launch in Fall 2024, building a strong foundation of data analysis and technical preparation to support a community-informed planning process. The effort officially kicked off in October 2024 with the creation of the Steering Committee, launching a structured, multi-phase approach to shaping the region's transportation future. Over the following year, the plan moved forward through active committee collaboration, meaningful public engagement, careful scenario planning, and culminated in the adoption of a shared vision for 2050.



HOW THE PLAN IS ORGANIZED

Forward 2050 is organized to move from big-picture vision to actionable strategies and investments, showing how regional goals translate into real-world projects and measurable results. Each chapter builds on the last, connecting analysis, community input, and strategies into one cohesive regional vision for the future of transportation in Northwest Arkansas.





WHO WE ARE: NWARPC'S ROLE IN PLANNING FOR OUR REGION

The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC) serves as a Council of Governments and the region's **Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)**, the federally designated entity responsible for carrying out the transportation planning process across the metropolitan area. MPOs were established to ensure that transportation decisions in urban areas are made **cooperatively**, grounded in **data**, and reflect the region's **shared priorities**.

As the MPO for Northwest Arkansas, NWARPC connects **local governments, transit providers, state departments of transportation (ARDOT and MoDOT), federal partners, and regional stakeholders** to shape an integrated, forward-looking transportation system. Through collaboration and coordination, NWARPC helps the region plan for growth, improve mobility, and invest in a safe, efficient network that supports people and places.

NWARPC'S CORE RESPONSIBILITIES



PLAN

Advance long-range and short-range transportation plans and policies that enable travel choice, respect the natural and human environment, and enhance the region's quality of life. This includes developing and implementing the **MTP and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** while fostering a shared regional vision.



COLLABORATE

Build and sustain regional partnerships among local governments, transit agencies, state and federal partners, and community stakeholders to align priorities, reinforce economic competitiveness, and ensure transportation decisions reflect the regional vision and shared goals.



CONNECT

Deliver a safe, reliable, and multimodal transportation system by using technical analysis, public engagement, and performance monitoring to ensure data-driven, responsive decisions that meet regional needs.



NWARPC is governed by a **Board of Directors** from local jurisdictions and partner agencies throughout the region. This structure ensures that planning is collaborative, transparent, and inclusive so that every community, large and small, has a voice in shaping Northwest Arkansas' transportation future.

LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The **Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)** is developed within a framework established by federal and state transportation law, ensuring that regional planning is consistent, transparent, and performance-based.

Under federal law (23 U.S.C. 134), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) are required in all urbanized areas with populations over 50,000. MPOs must:

- Maintain a **continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive (“3-C”)** planning process.
- Prepare and update a **long-range MTP** (covering at least 20 years).
- Develop a **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** that identifies near-term projects.
- Ensure compliance with federal and state transportation and environmental regulations.

The **Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)** is the current federal surface transportation authorization, enacted in 2021 and set to expire in 2026. As Congress

works toward the next authorization, the guiding principles are expected to remain the same:

- Regional collaboration
- Integrated systems management, and
- A focus on safety, resiliency, and system performance.

At the state level, the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) leads the **Statewide Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)**, which establishes goals, policies, and investment strategies for Arkansas’s transportation system as a whole. The **Forward 2050** MTP is developed in coordination with this statewide plan to ensure that regional priorities in Northwest Arkansas align with broader state goals for safety, mobility, connectivity, and economic vitality.

This legal and policy framework ensures that **Forward 2050** meets federal and state requirements but also reflects the needs, values, and priorities of Northwest Arkansas communities.



FEDERAL PLANNING FACTORS

Federal regulations (23 CFR 450.306(b)) require Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to demonstrate how their metropolitan transportation plan addresses the ten key federal

planning factors. These factors ensure that transportation planning is comprehensive, coordinated, and performance-driven, promoting safety, accessibility, sustainability, and regional economic vitality.

10 FEDERAL PLANNING FACTORS 23 CFR 450.306 (b)



Support the **economic vitality** of the United States, the States, non-metropolitan areas, and metropolitan areas, especially by enabling global competitiveness, productivity, and efficiency.



Protect and enhance the **environment**, promote energy conservation, improve the quality of life, and promote consistency between transportation improvements and State and local planned growth and economic development patterns.



Increase the **safety** of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.



Promote efficient **system management** and operation.



Increase the **security** of the transportation system for motorized and non-motorized users.



Emphasize the **preservation of the existing transportation system**.



Increase the **accessibility** and mobility of people and freight.



Improve transportation system **resiliency and reliability** and reduce (or mitigate) the stormwater impacts of surface transportation.



Enhance the **integration and connectivity** of the transportation system across and between modes throughout the State, for people and freight.



Enhance **travel and tourism**.



The 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) introduced new planning factor language that increases emphasis on housing in transportation planning. MPOs are encouraged to consult affordable housing organizations and integrate an optional **housing coordination** process to align housing, transportation, and economic development for connected, equitable, and sustainable growth.



A REGIONAL VISION: THEMES, GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Northwest Arkansas is at a critical moment in its growth. Transportation decisions made today will determine how effectively the region can manage growth, support economic development, and maintain a high quality of life for generations to come. To meet these challenges, *Forward 2050* is guided by four broad themes:

FORWARD 2050 THEMES



Predictable and Fiscally Responsible Development Patterns

Encouraging development that makes efficient use of infrastructure and maximizes public investment.

A Connected Multimodal Region

Expanding safe and convenient transportation choices across driving, transit, biking, and walking.

A Safe and Resilient Natural and Built Environment

Advancing Vision Zero goals for safety while protecting natural resources and ensuring resilience against future risks.

Healthy, Inclusive Communities and a Thriving Regional Economy

Supporting access to opportunities while strengthening the region's economic vitality.

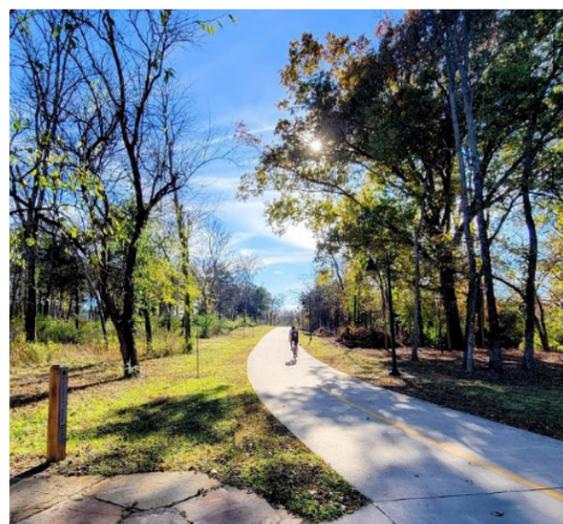


Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

FORWARD 2050 GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives of *Forward 2050* translate the plan's themes into clear priorities for transportation decision-making. They provide a framework for evaluating investments and policies to ensure they align with the region's values, federal planning factors, and previously adopted plans and regional priorities. By establishing these priorities, the plan creates a shared understanding of what matters most for Northwest Arkansas and how decisions today will shape the region's future.

The plan is guided by three goals:

G1 Implement a safe, efficient, and reliable multimodal transportation system

G2 Advance plans and policies that enable transportation choice, respect the natural and human environment, and enhance quality of life

G3 Foster regional collaboration and reinforce economic competitiveness

Each goal is supported by specific objectives that are measurable, actionable, and focused on areas where NWARPC can make a tangible impact.

Together, the goals and objectives provide a foundation for aligning local, state, and regional efforts, guiding investments, and tracking progress over time—making *Forward 2050* both a vision for the future and a practical tool for creating a safe, connected, and sustainable region.



G1 Implement a Safe, Efficient, and Reliable Multimodal Transportation System

G1 Objectives

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1.01 Prioritize the preservation of the existing transportation system in good condition.</p> <hr/> <p>1.02 Support projects and strategies to manage or reduce congestion.</p> <hr/> <p>1.03 Encourage design features that minimize crash potential, severity, and frequency and support efforts to eliminate transportation-related fatalities and serious injuries.</p> <hr/> <p>1.04 Develop policies, plans, and programs that promote a resilient and secure transportation system.</p> <hr/> <p>1.05 Enable the adoption of new transportation technologies.</p> <hr/> <p>1.06 Support project development that promotes pedestrian and bicycle safety and connectivity.</p> <hr/> | <p>1.07 Increase access to sustainable transportation modes and mobility options.</p> <hr/> <p>1.08 Support a connected multimodal transportation system that is safe, minimizes delay, and increases travel time reliability.</p> <hr/> <p>1.09 Improve network connectivity by reducing barriers and improving multimodal access to activity and employment centers.</p> <hr/> <p>1.10 Implement roadways that utilize complete street design standards.</p> <hr/> <p>1.11 Support affordable and convenient public transportation services.</p> <hr/> |
|---|--|

FEDERAL PLANNING FACTORS

economic vitality

integration and connectivity

system preservation

travel and tourism

safety

environment

resiliency and reliability

housing coordination

security

system management

accessibility

G2

Advance Plans and Policies that Enable Transportation Choice, Respect the Natural and Human Environment, and Enhance Quality of Life

G2 Objectives

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>2.01 Integrate transportation and land use policies, focused on housing, density, mixed-use, and transit-oriented development.</p> <hr/> <p>2.02 Plan transportation facilities with context-sensitive design standards that align with community and environmental needs.</p> <hr/> <p>2.03 Support transportation facilities that connect neighborhoods and encourage active, healthy living.</p> <hr/> <p>2.04 Support investments that protect air and water quality and build resilience into the transportation infrastructure.</p> <hr/> | <p>2.05 Interconnect transportation infrastructure systems with natural infrastructure to provide a range of benefits including preservation of natural areas, improved public health and safety, mitigation of flood hazards, air and water quality protection, and habitat improvement.</p> <hr/> <p>2.06 Support opportunities for underserved populations, including economically disadvantaged, minority, aging, and disabled populations, with convenient transportation options to employment, education, healthcare, fresh food options, and other essential services.</p> <hr/> <p>2.07 Develop strategies to engage residents underserved by traditional planning processes.</p> <hr/> |
|--|--|

FEDERAL PLANNING FACTORS

economic vitality

integration and connectivity

system preservation

travel and tourism

safety

environment

resiliency and reliability

housing coordination

security

system management

accessibility

G3

Foster Regional Collaboration and Reinforce Economic Competitiveness

G3 Objectives

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>3.01 Foster innovative financing and partnerships for project development and implementation.</p> <hr/> <p>3.02 Support an integrated freight system for the efficient movement of goods.</p> <hr/> <p>3.03 Support coordination between local, state, and federal planning partners to develop shared goals and policies and enhance data sharing.</p> <hr/> | <p>3.04 Participate in regional planning efforts initiated by other agencies and organizations.</p> <hr/> <p>3.05 Lead and partner on planning efforts crossing multiple jurisdictions within NWARPC's planning area.</p> <hr/> |
|--|---|

FEDERAL PLANNING FACTORS

economic vitality

integration and connectivity

system preservation

travel and tourism

safety

environment

resiliency and reliability

housing coordination

security

system management

accessibility





”

I am grateful for the regional interconnectivity of the greenway trail. I want to use transit more, but it is inconvenient/unsafe to get to a stop and cannot get where I need to go without adding a lot of travel time. I am from NWA and will finish grad school soon. I want to live in a place with good public transit.
 – NWA Resident

YOUR VOICE IN THE PROCESS: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND STAKEHOLDER COORDINATION

Forward 2050 was a collaborative effort, shaped by input from residents, stakeholders, and regional partners across Northwest Arkansas. Anchored by the NWARPC’s **Public Participation Plan (PPP)**, these efforts ensured that regional priorities, local insights, and community values directly informed the goals, strategies, and projects in the plan. For more details see **Appendix B: Public & Stakeholder Engagement**.

NWARPC’s engagement process for *Forward 2050* was guided by the **Public Participation Plan (PPP)**, adopted by the NWA Policy Committee in February 2025. The PPP establishes principles that ensure engagement is meaningful, inclusive, and effective throughout all regional planning activities:

By integrating these principles, NWARPC ensures that *Forward 2050* is grounded in the lived experiences and priorities of the people it serves – residents, cities, counties, and travelers across the region. Early and meaningful participation helped shape the plan’s goals, strategies, and project recommendations to reflect what matters most to the community.

- **Continuous:** Encourage community input from the beginning and throughout each project, fostering lasting relationships beyond a single plan or study
- **Comprehensive:** Provide multiple opportunities and methods for participation to reach a broad, diverse audience.
- **Inclusive:** Ensure that diverse perspectives are represented in decision-making, adapting methods to meet different needs.
- **Effective:** Seek broad representation and meaningful input, regularly evaluating outreach strategies and promoting innovation for continuous improvement.

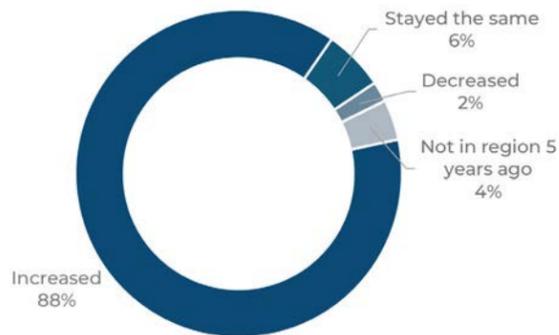


Connecting Northwest Arkansas through Transportation Choice

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE TO MOVE?
WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Public Perspective Snapshot: Views on Mobility Are Shifting

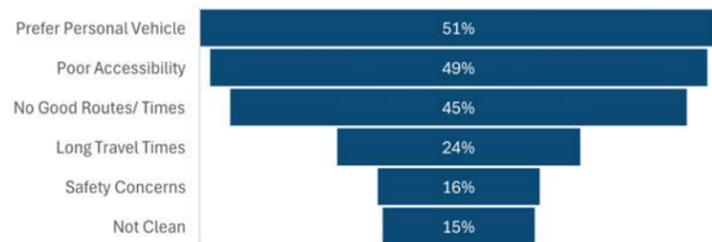
Compared to five years ago, would you say that traffic congestion in the region has...



Please rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of transportation in the region.



What are the main reasons you do not use public transportation more often?



Data Sources: 2024 Regional Transportation Survey

We need to prepare now to make it convenient for the future to travel around, not only to and from work but also to other points – downtown, shopping, museum or other points of interest.
– NWA Resident

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES

NWARPC hosted three public open houses across Northwest Arkansas to share planning progress, present draft materials, and gather feedback from residents and local officials.

- April 9, 2025 – Fayetteville Public Library
- April 10, 2025 – Bentonville Public Library
- December 8, 2025 – Jones Center, Springdale

Each event provided an opportunity for participants to review data, maps, and draft concepts while engaging directly with NWARPC staff. The open houses demonstrated that *Forward 2050* is a living, evolving document—not a predetermined plan. Interactive activities encouraged participation across ages and backgrounds, improving understanding of how transportation planning works and how community input informs regional priorities.

Discussions at the open houses emphasized the importance of regional collaboration to address shared challenges such as congestion, sprawl (rapid, low density expansion of urban areas into surrounding undeveloped land), and mobility inequities – issues that no single community can solve alone.

PUBLIC SURVEYS

To better understand public perceptions, priorities, and needs, NWARPC conducted two major surveys between 2024 and 2025:

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SURVEY (2024)

Conducted in August 2024, this random sample survey (statistically significant) gathered input from 420 residents to evaluate satisfaction with the region's transportation system and understand priorities for future investment. The survey was weighted by county, gender, income, ethnicity, and Latino ancestry to ensure representativeness. It followed a similar survey completed in 2019, enabling comparison over time.

Key Findings:

- Congestion remains a persistent concern, and the lack of non-auto infrastructure is increasingly problematic.
- Transportation infrastructure continues to be a top priority for residents.
- Satisfaction with public transit lags behind other modes.
- Support for funding public transit and active transportation increased compared to 2019.
- Residents' views on the importance of long-range planning remain consistent with previous findings.

FORWARD 2050 PUBLIC SURVEY (2025)

In March 2025, NWARPC launched a self-selected online public survey promoted through member jurisdictions, social media, and public events, including the *Forward 2050* open houses. The survey received 891 responses, providing valuable insight into regional perceptions and preferences.

Key Findings:

- Roadway Improvements: Residents expressed strong frustration with traffic congestion and safety issues, calling for road widening, signal improvements, and better traffic flow management.
- Transit Options: Strong public interest exists in high-capacity regional transit, especially connecting Fayetteville and Bentonville.
- Bicycling Infrastructure: While many residents see the regional trail system as a strength, some believe bike investments should be balanced with roadway and transit needs.
- Equity and Access: Respondents highlighted the lack of transit options for lower-income and carless residents, particularly in growing areas like Pea Ridge, Centerton, and Siloam Springs.
- Integrated Planning: Residents called for more proactive, coordinated regional planning to support multimodal, walkable communities and reduce car dependency.



RESIDENT FOCUS GROUP STUDY (2024)

In July 2024, NWARPC partnered with Ariel Strategic Communications to conduct a series of focus groups across Washington and Benton Counties. The sessions explored residents' experiences and expectations related to transportation, transit access, and regional growth. The results informed both *Forward 2050* and NWARPC's ongoing communications and engagement strategies.

STAKEHOLDER AND STEERING COMMITTEES

In addition to public engagement, NWARPC convened two key advisory groups to support *Forward 2050*:

STAKEHOLDER COMMITTEE:

A cross-sector, cross-jurisdictional group representing local governments, transit providers, advocacy organizations, major employers, and institutional partners, the *Stakeholder Committee* provided technical insight, reviewed data and policy recommendations, and helped identify and prioritize projects. It also reviewed findings from the concurrent *Transit Alternatives Study (TAS)*, to ensure integration with regional planning efforts.

STEERING COMMITTEE:

Comprised of representatives from NWARPC's Technical and Policy Committees, the *Forward 2050 Steering Committee* guided the overall direction of the project. It helped refine goals, review milestones and drafts, and ensure that the plan aligns with local and regional priorities.

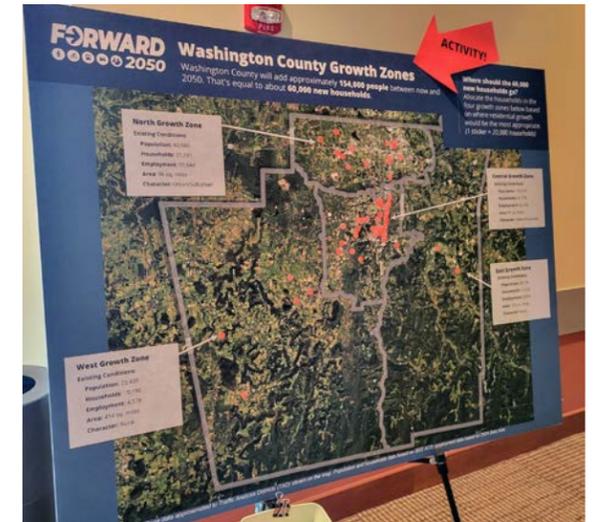
LOCAL GOVERNMENT COORDINATION

To ensure *Forward 2050* reflects both regional and local perspectives, NWARPC staff met individually with member cities to discuss their growth plans, development expectations, and transportation challenges. These discussions helped identify locally significant projects, verify assumptions used in modeling and forecasting, and strengthen alignment between local priorities and the region's long-range transportation vision.

OTHER ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

NWARPC also engaged with the public, stakeholders, and regional planning partners through additional community events and forums, expanding opportunities for participation and awareness:

- Urban Land Institute (ULI) Place Summit Infrastructure Workshop – **November 21, 2024**, Bentonville
- NWA Real Estate Investors Group – **February 11, 2025**, Rogers
- Sundays on the Square – **March 30, 2025**, Fayetteville
- NWA Vulnerable Road Users Safety Summit – **June 3, 2025**, Fayetteville
- Square to Square Bike Rides – **May 3, 2025, and October 11, 2025**, Springdale
- Urban Land Institute (ULI) Place Summit Plenary – **November 14, 2025**, Fayetteville
- Rogers Winter Farmer Market - **December 6, 2025**, Rogers



Chapter 02

SETTING THE STAGE: CURRENT CONDITIONS AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

This chapter looks at how the region's population, economy, land use, and environment shape mobility today and into 2050, including the potential impacts of different growth scenarios.

The Northwest Arkansas region is one of the fastest-growing areas in the central United States. Its strong economic base, high quality of life, and access to natural amenities have contributed to sustained population growth, expanding employment opportunities, and rapid development across a diverse and dynamic landscape. Unlike many metropolitan regions organized around a single core city, Northwest Arkansas is **poly-centric** – anchored by **four major cities** (Bentonville, Rogers, Springdale, and Fayetteville) and surrounded by **27 smaller**, fast-growing towns and cities.

The region's urban area (Fayetteville–Springdale–Rogers, AR-MO) is largely clustered along the **I-49 corridor**, where development has concentrated around key employment centers, universities, and commercial hubs. This corridor serves as the spine of regional mobility,

connecting communities across Benton and Washington Counties and extending north into a **portion of McDonald County, Missouri**. Broader definitions of the region, such as the Northwest Arkansas Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), encompass Benton, Washington, and Madison Counties in Arkansas and reflect the area's expanding economic and social ties.

This poly-centric form contributes to a resilient and dynamic regional economy but also presents distinct transportation challenges. Growth is occurring in multiple directions and at varying intensities, creating a need for coordinated planning to connect people and places efficiently. Understanding current conditions and anticipating where the region is headed are essential for shaping a future network that supports safe, efficient, and accessible mobility for all.

In Northwest Arkansas, growth is guided by a shared commitment to community and quality of life.



DEFINING THE CONTEXT: POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Northwest Arkansas continues to attract new residents at a rate far exceeding state and national averages, reflecting both its economic vitality and high quality of life. The region's population has more than doubled since 2000, with sustained growth in Benton and Washington Counties driving expansion along the I-49 corridor. Today, a growing number of residents are drawn by employment opportunities, affordability relative to larger metros, and the region's distinctive blend of urban and natural environments.

The region is home to numerous large national and international employers including Wal-Mart, JB Hunt International, and Tyson Foods. Along with major employers, the area is also a regional hub for higher education with the University of Arkansas (U of A) located in Fayetteville. The university and large employer headquarters are major engines for the region's rapidly growing population.

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

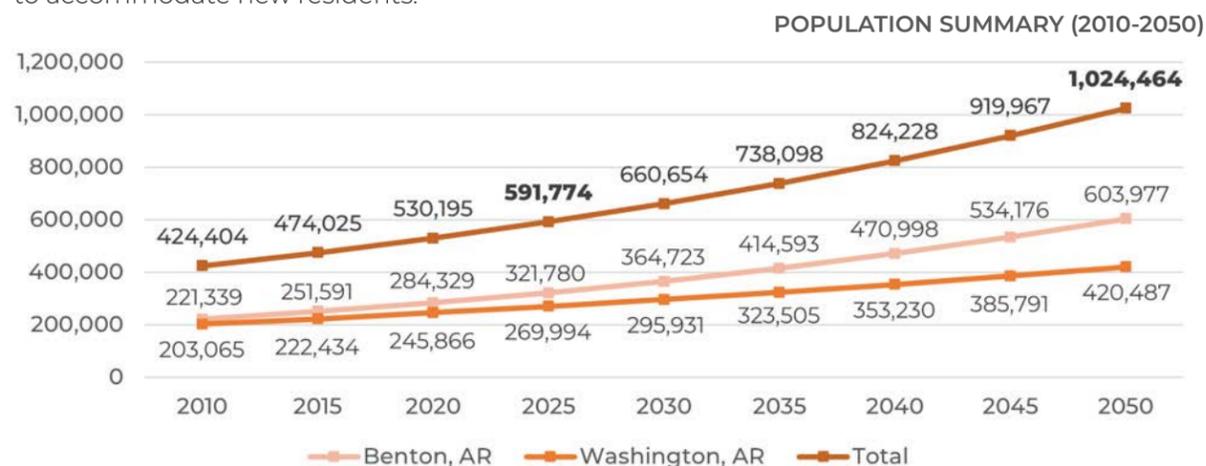
POPULATION GROWTH

The Washington and Benton counties' population **grew by more than 25%** between 2010 and 2020 from 424,398 in 2010 to over 533,343 in 2020 according to US Census data.

Recent demographic shifts point toward a more diverse and younger population, with steady in-migration of families and professionals from other parts of the U.S. and abroad. Household sizes have remained relatively stable, but the number of housing units has increased significantly to accommodate new residents.

Communities such as Bentonville, Rogers, and Springdale have become key population centers, while smaller towns are also experiencing steady growth as development extends outward from the regional core.

Population forecasts anticipate continued growth, with the region's population expected to approach or exceed **one million residents by 2050**. This growth will reinforce existing travel corridors and heighten the importance of coordinated transportation and land use planning.



Data Sources: Census Bureau and AEDI Projections

2024 DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

BENTON & WASHINGTON COUNTIES

- TOTAL POPULATION = 587,750**
(Census Bureau, July 1, 2024 Estimate)
- TOTAL HOUSING UNITS = 235,064**
(Census Bureau, July 1, 2023 Estimate)
- TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS = 203,134**
(Census Bureau, 2019-2023 Estimate)
- TOTAL EMPLOYERS = 13,669**
(Census Bureau, 2022 Estimate)
- TOTAL EMPLOYMENT = 227,781**
(Census Bureau, 2022 Estimate)



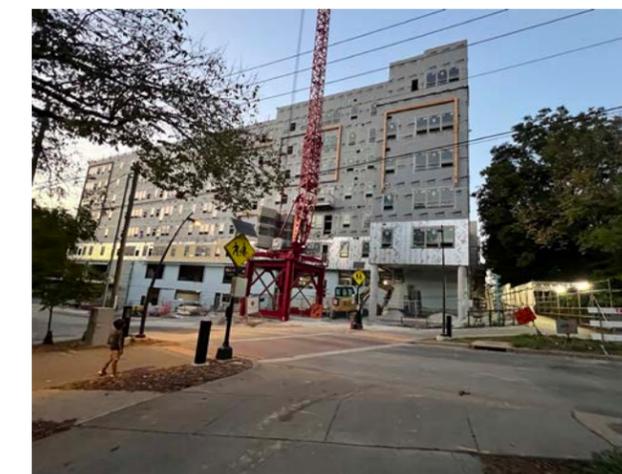
Photo Courtesy of Groundwork



Photo Courtesy of Groundwork

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

- Benton County is growing at a faster rate than Washington County, with Bentonville's population density increasing more rapidly than other major cities in the region.
- Smaller cities are acquiring a larger share of the urban area.
- NWA is becoming more diverse.
- Over 75% of NWA residents use personal vehicles for travel.
- NWA commute times are slightly lower than the state average.



NWARPC 2050 POPULATION PROJECTIONS FOR JURISDICTIONS IN BENTON & WASHINGTON COUNTIES

Jurisdiction	2020 Census*	Census July 1, 2024 Population Estimate	NWARPC 2050 Population Forecast	Numeric Change (2024 Est. to 2050)	Population Growth Rate (2024 Est. to 2050)	Population Ave. Annual Growth Rate AAGR (2024 Est. to 2050)
Avoca	487	501	849	348	69%	2.05%
Bella Vista	30,104	33,274	44,335	11,061	33%	1.11%
Bentonville	54,164	61,791	142,969	81,178	131%	3.28%
Cave Springs*	5,761	6,304	16,052	9,748	155%	3.66%
Centerton	17,792	25,745	49,272	23,527	91%	2.53%
Decatur	1,773	1,723	3,835	2,112	123%	3.13%
Elkins	3,602	4,025	7,052	3,027	75%	2.18%
Elm Springs	2,361	2,872	5,581	2,709	94%	2.59%
Farmington	7,584	10,473	18,421	7,948	76%	2.20%
Fayetteville*	94,311	103,134	153,358	50,224	49%	1.54%
Garfield	593	622	837	215	35%	1.15%
Gateway	436	452	1,155	703	156%	3.67%
Gentry*	3,801	4,672	10,208	5,536	118%	3.05%
Goshen	2,102	2,383	4,269	1,886	79%	2.27%
Gravette	3,547	3,826	13,215	9,389	245%	4.88%
Greenland*	1,542	1,240	5,028	3,788	305%	5.53%
Highfill	1,587	2,793	12,813	10,020	359%	6.03%
Johnson	3,609	3,705	6,672	2,967	80%	2.29%
Lincoln	2,294	2,371	5,295	2,924	123%	3.14%
Little Flock	3,055	3,040	5,542	2,502	82%	2.34%
Lowell	9,839	11,568	28,201	16,633	144%	3.49%
Pea Ridge*	6,613	10,190	20,013	9,823	96%	2.63%
Prairie Grove	7,045	8,589	15,631	7,042	82%	2.33%
Rogers	69,908	75,639	130,650	55,011	73%	2.12%
Siloam Springs*	17,400	20,075	32,341	12,266	61%	1.85%
Springdale*	87,320	89,368	157,543	68,175	76%	2.20%
Springtown	83	89	220	131	147%	3.54%
Sulphur Springs	481	475	1,202	727	153%	3.64%
Tontitown	4,301	7,941	13,476	5,535	70%	2.05%
West Fork	2,331	2,356	5,810	3,454	147%	3.53%
Winslow	365	364	488	124	34%	1.14%
Total (Cities)	446,191	501,600	912,332	410,732	82%	2.3%
Benton County	284,333	321,566	603,977	319,644	88%	2.5%
Washington County	245,871	266,184	420,487	174,616	58%	1.8%
Unincorporated Areas 2 Counties	84,013	86,150	112,132	27,687	30%	1.0%
Total 2 Counties	530,204	587,750	1,024,464	494,260	74%	2.2%

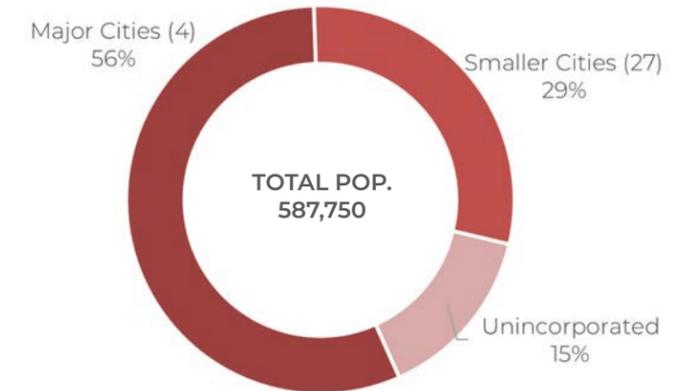
*These counts reflect boundary updates reported to the U.S. Census Bureau after January 1, 2023, as well as any changes previously made to 2020 Census counts under the U.S. Census Bureau's Count Question Resolution Program and were developed as part of the Census Bureau's Geographically Updated Population Certification Program (GUPCP).

POPULATION DISTRIBUTION

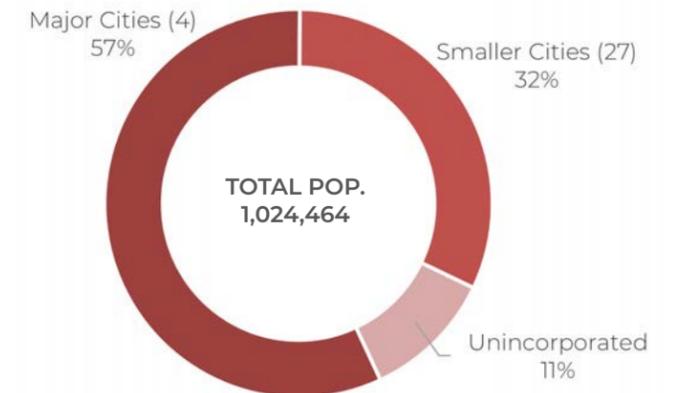
More than half of the region's projected growth – 56% – is expected to occur within Northwest Arkansas's four largest cities: Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, and Bentonville. Together, these communities are anticipated to add over 254,000 new residents by 2050.

At the same time, smaller communities across the region are growing at an unprecedented pace, with their share of the regional population projected to rise from 29% in 2024 to 32% by 2050. In many of these towns, just one or two major housing or mixed-use developments can double the local population, transforming once-rural areas into population centers. This combination of urban expansion and small-town transformation highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of Northwest Arkansas's regional growth.

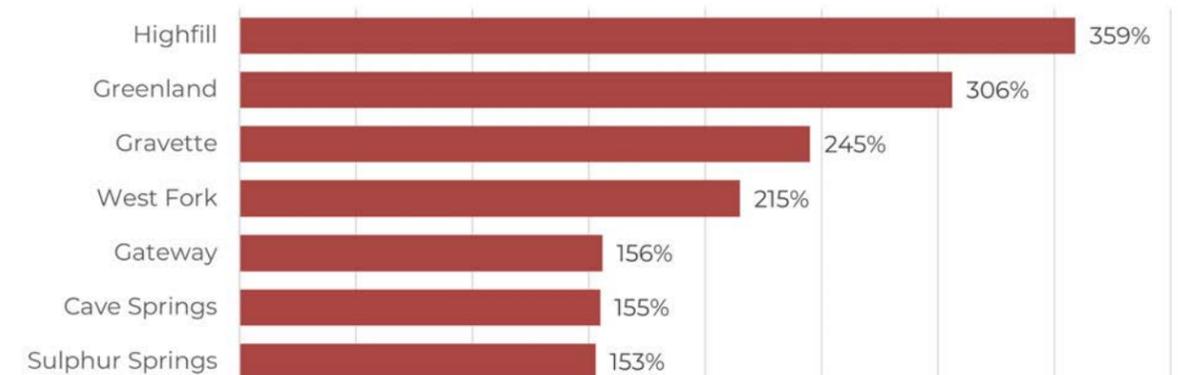
2024 SHARE OF THE POPULATION



2050 SHARE OF THE POPULATION



TOP 10 FASTEST GROWING CITIES (2024 TO 2050)



Data Sources: Census Bureau, ACS and NWARPC Forecasts

MINORITY POPULATION TRENDS

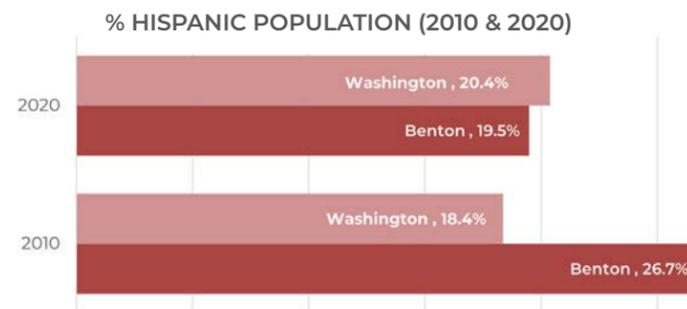
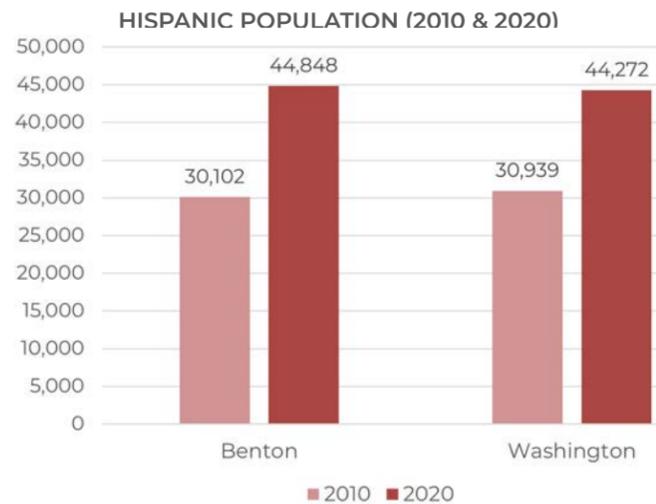
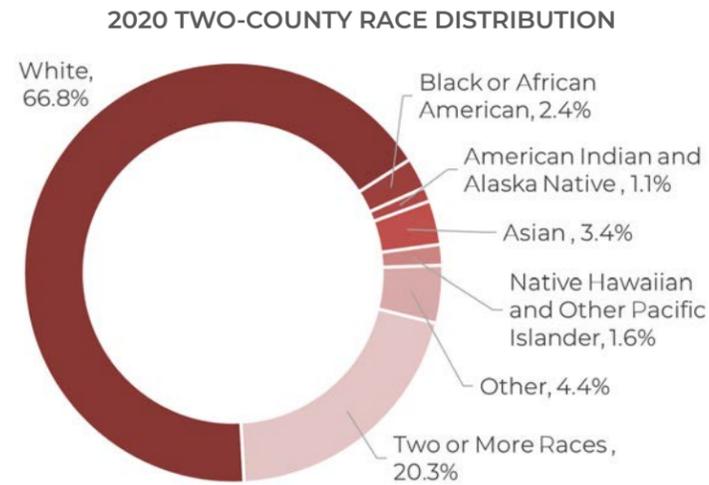
While the region's population remains predominantly White (Non-Hispanic), a sizable and growing share of the population is Hispanic or Latino, and the foreign-born share is rising. As diversity is increasing: the jump in Hispanic/Latino share and multiple-race categories suggests that the region is becoming **more ethnically diverse**. Compared to many U.S. metros, a **10.9% foreign-born** share is slightly below national average (approximately 13%–14%), but still significant for a region in Arkansas.

Between 2010 and 2020, the total population of the region increased by nearly 25%, while the Hispanic population grew from 65,741 to 95,295, representing a **45% increase**. The Hispanic population continues to expand at a **significantly faster rate than the overall population**. According to the 2020 Census, Hispanic residents numbered 95,295, comprising **18% of the combined two-county** population of 424,404. The proportion of Hispanic residents is **higher within the incorporated municipalities** of Northwest Arkansas than in unincorporated areas, accounting for 20.4% of the population in cities within Washington County and 19.5% in those within Benton County.

The ACS data shows that in 2019–2023, an estimated **88.3%** of the people living in Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, AR Metro Area were **U.S. natives** and **45%** were **living in the state where they were born**.

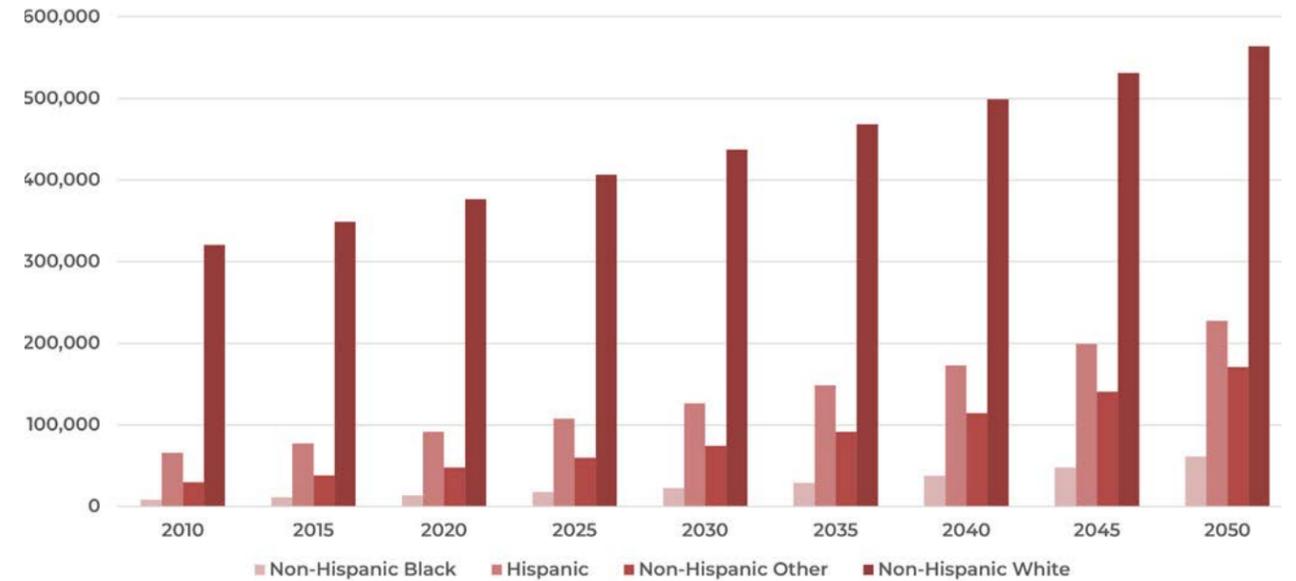
NATIVITY & FOREIGN-BORN

The region's **10.9%** foreign-born population is slightly below the national average of roughly **13–14%**, yet remains notable for a metro area in Arkansas. These residents represent a diverse range of countries and cultures, contributing to the region's growing economic and cultural vitality.

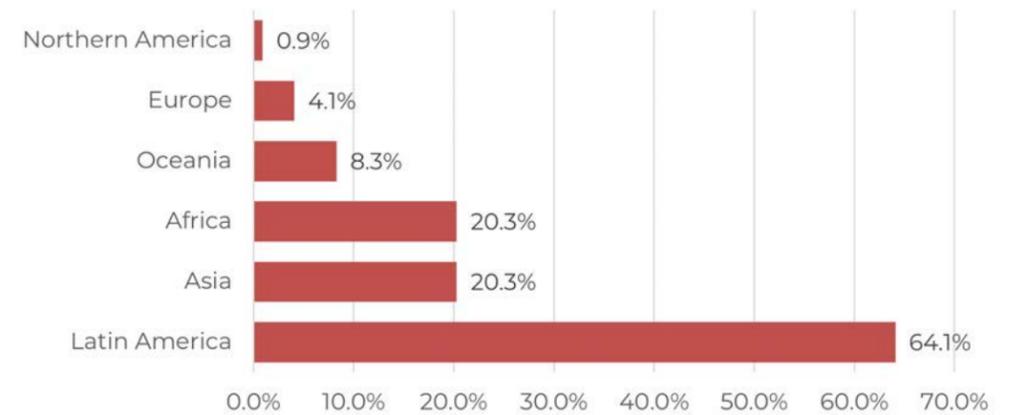


Data Sources: Census Bureau and ACS

POPULATION GROWTH - RACE AND NATIVITY WASHINGTON AND BENTON COUNTIES



% FOREIGN-BORN FROM EACH WORLD REGION IN 2019-2023 (MSA)

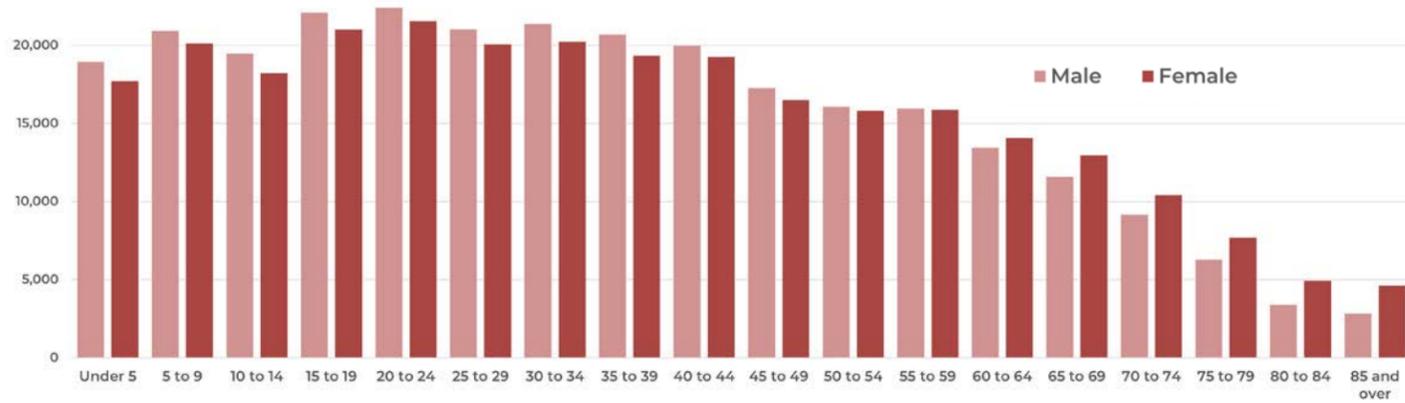


Data Sources: Census Bureau, ACS and AEDI Projections



AGE

In 2019-2023, Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, AR Metro Area had a total population of 563,436 — 280,499 (49.8 percent) females and 282,937 (50.2 percent) males. The median age was 34.6 years. An estimated 24.8 percent of the population was under 18 years, 40.0 percent was 18 to 44 years, 22.2 percent was 45 to 64 years, and 13.1 percent was 65 years and older.



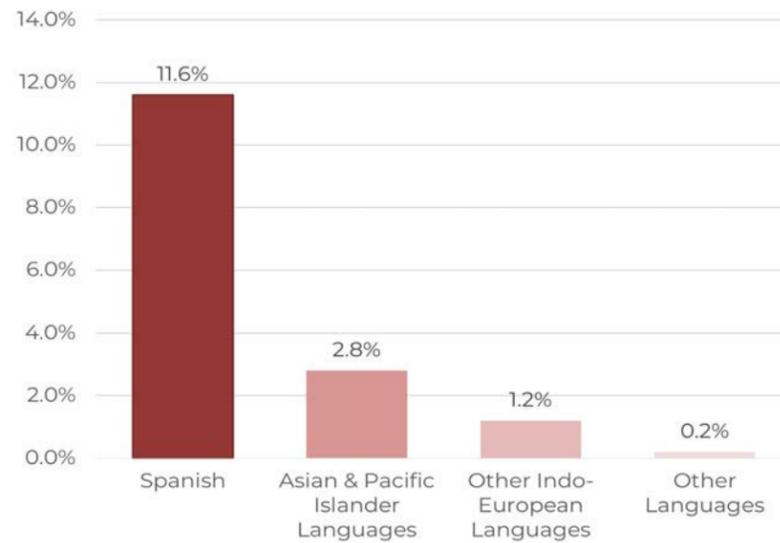
POVERTY

In 2019-2023, 11% of people in the Fayetteville–Springdale–Rogers, AR–MO Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) area were in poverty. An estimated 12.7% of children under 18 were below the poverty level, compared with 8.6% of people 65 years old and over. An estimated 10.8% of people 18 to 64 years were below the poverty level.

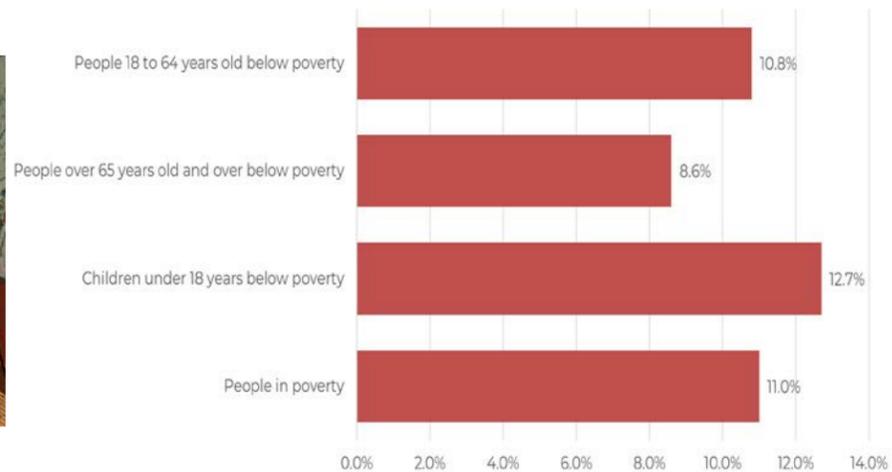
LANGUAGE

Among people at least five years old living in Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, AR Metro Area in 2019-2023, **15.8%** spoke a language other than English at home. Spanish was spoken by **11.6%** of people at least five years old; **7%** reported that they did not speak English “very well.”

% POPULATION 5 YRS AND OVER WHO SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH IN 2019-2023 (MSA)



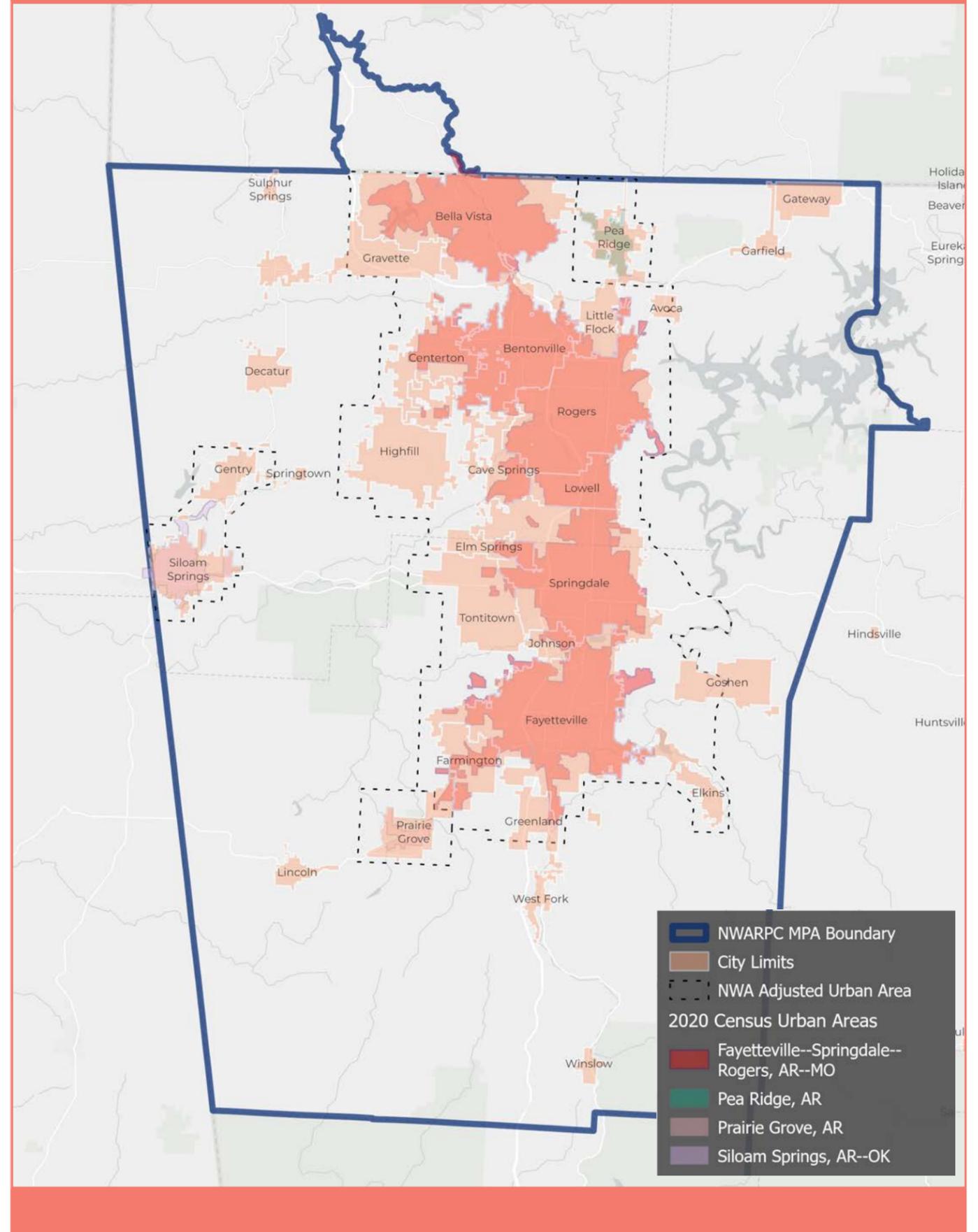
POVERTY RATES IN 2019-2023 (MSA)



Data Sources: Census Bureau and ACS



NWARPC Metropolitan Planning Area



MCDONALD COUNTY PLANNING AREA OVERVIEW

McDonald County is located in the Southwest corner of Missouri, bordering Arkansas and covers about 539 square miles of mostly rural land. The portion of McDonald County that is part of the NWA Metropolitan Planning Area covers approximately 33.3 square miles. Pineville (population 802) and Jane (population 359) are the two small communities located in this portion of the MPA. This area is traversed by I-49 and U.S. Highway 71 and is largely rural in nature, similarly to the rest of the county.

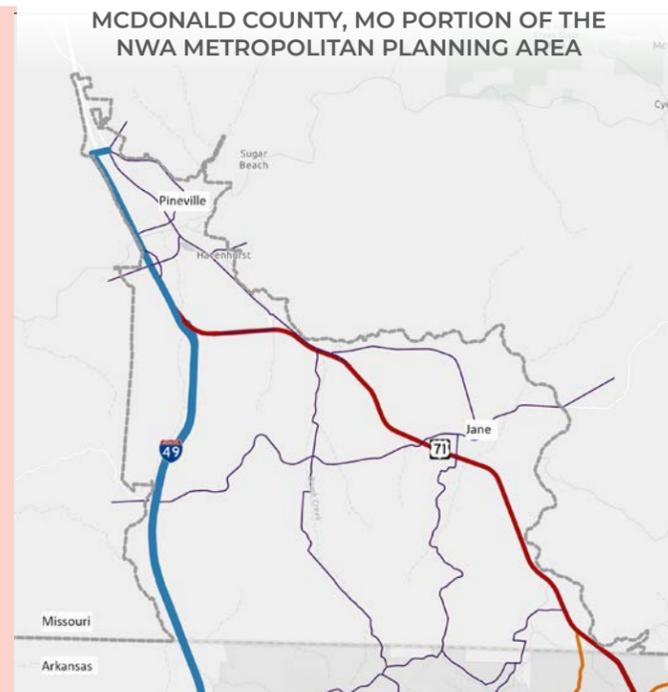
PINEVILLE, MISSOURI

Pineville is the county seat in McDonald County and is part of the NWA MPA. It is a small but steadily growing community with deep ties to the Ozark geography.

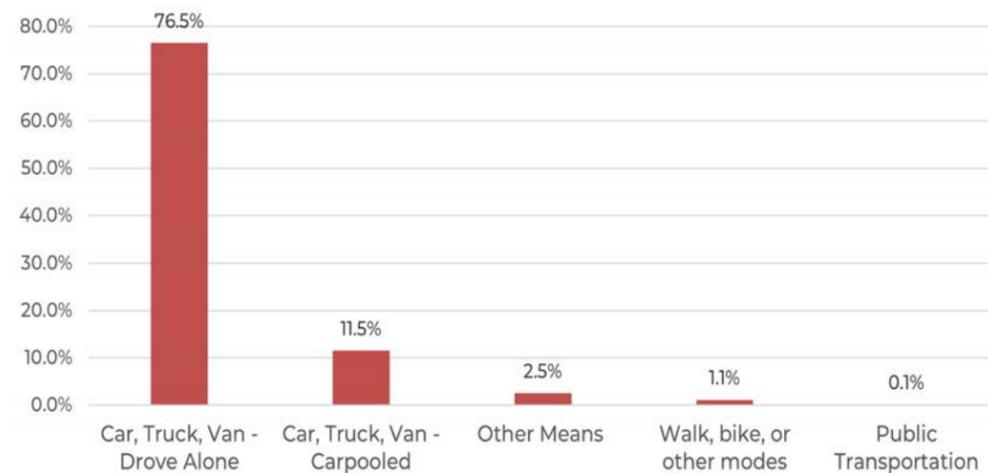
Its population is predominantly white and aging slightly above county and state medians.

Economically, Pineville has modest incomes and a labor force engaged across education, manufacturing, and retail sectors, with commuting patterns typical of rural communities (most drive alone, moderate commute times).

Pineville's proximity to Northwest Arkansas positions it as part of a broader functional economic region, where residents may access jobs and services in faster-growing metro centers while enjoying more affordable living in Pineville and McDonald County.



MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION IN MCDONALD COUNTY (ACS 2019-2023)



Data Source: ACS

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT

MCDONALD COUNTY, MO

-  **TOTAL POPULATION = 24,054**
(Census Bureau, July 1, 2024 Estimate)
-  **MEAN COMMUTE TIME = 26-27 MIN**
(Census Bureau, July 1, 2024 Estimate)
-  **TOTAL HOUSING UNITS = 9,887**
(Census Bureau, July 1, 2024 Estimate)
-  **TOTAL EMPLOYERS = 312**
(Census Bureau, 2022 Estimate)
-  **TOTAL EMPLOYMENT = 5,178**
(Census Bureau, 2022 Estimate)



Photo Courtesy of McDonald County



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

- Population growth has been relatively modest since 2010 (from ~23,083 to ~24,054 by 2024).
- Employment data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates slight recent declines in jobs for McDonald County compared to many rural counties, reflecting broader rural employment volatility.
- Forecast to 2050: Population likely to remain stable or grow modestly under favorable conditions; continued declines are possible if out-migration persists.
- Slight growth tied to the nearby Northwest Arkansas metro area expansion (Rogers/Springdale), which may modestly boost jobs/housing demand in neighboring McDonald County over decades.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Employment trends provide essential insight into the region's future transportation needs. Over the past five years, the Fayetteville–Springdale–Rogers MSA has **consistently recorded some of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation**, underscoring a strong and resilient regional economy that continues to drive demand for mobility, commuting, and access to key destinations.

UNEMPLOYMENT

The region saw a sharp but brief spike in unemployment during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching nearly **7.5% in April 2020**. Since then, the labor market has steadily strengthened, with unemployment averaging 4.6% in 2020, 2.9% in 2021, and approximately 2.4% in 2022. In 2023 and 2024, rates generally ranged between 1.8% and 3%, and by mid-2025, unemployment stood around 3%, **well below the national average**. These trends reflect a tight labor market and a **robust post-pandemic employment recovery**.

OVERALL EMPLOYMENT GROWTH

Employment growth in Northwest Arkansas has been broad-based, spanning key industries including manufacturing, construction, professional and business services, education, health care, transportation, and hospitality.

Between 2020 and 2025, total non-farm employment grew by roughly **3% annually**,

reflecting both the region's economic expansion and population growth.

Major employers such as Walmart, Tyson Foods, and J.B. Hunt, along with the University of Arkansas, continue to attract workforce talent, while smaller firms and start-ups are **driving diversification** in technology, logistics, and professional services.

Despite a robust and resilient labor market characterized by low unemployment, steady job creation, and broad industry participation, the region faces ongoing challenges. These include labor shortages in certain service sectors and rising housing costs linked to rapid population growth.

Historically, employment growth in Northwest Arkansas was even more pronounced between **2010 and 2018**, with total non-farm employment increasing by **over 32%**, reflecting a period of accelerated regional development and economic diversification.



EMPLOYMENT SNAPSHOT

MAJOR EMPLOYERS

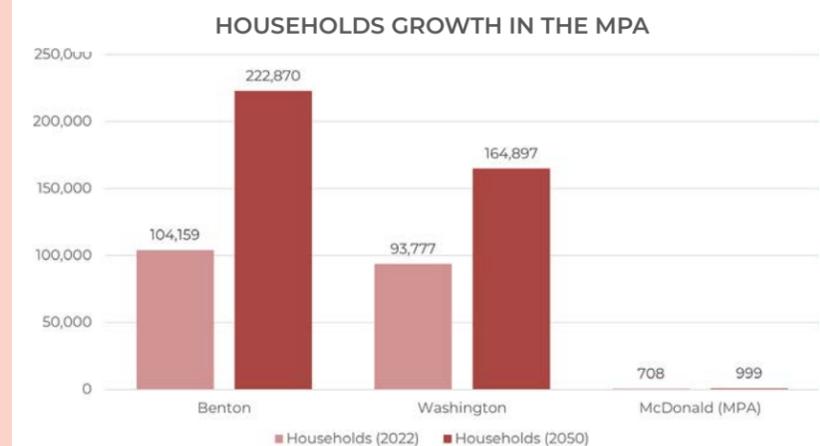
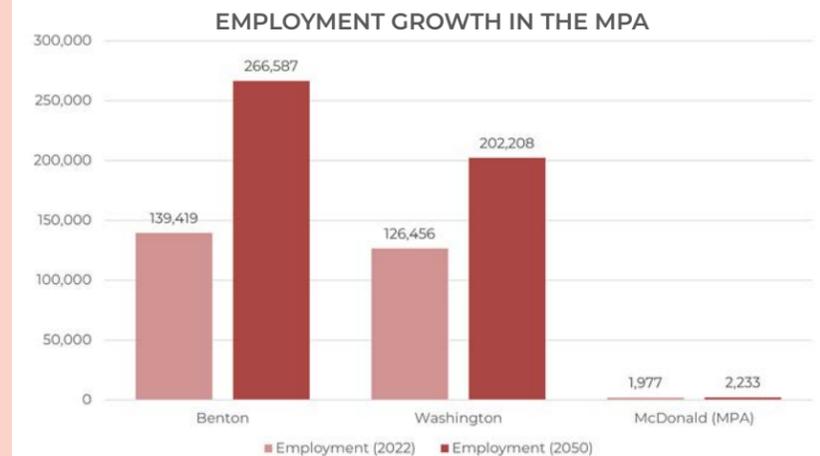
- Walmart
- J.B. Hunt
- Tyson Foods
- Univ. of Arkansas
- Growing small businesses and start-ups in technology, logistics, and professional services

EMPLOYMENT GROWTH

- **2020–2025:** ~3% annual non-farm employment growth
- **2010–2018:** Over 32% total non-farm employment increase

CHALLENGES & CONSIDERATIONS

- Labor shortages in specific service sectors
- Rising housing costs due to rapid population growth and increased construction costs.



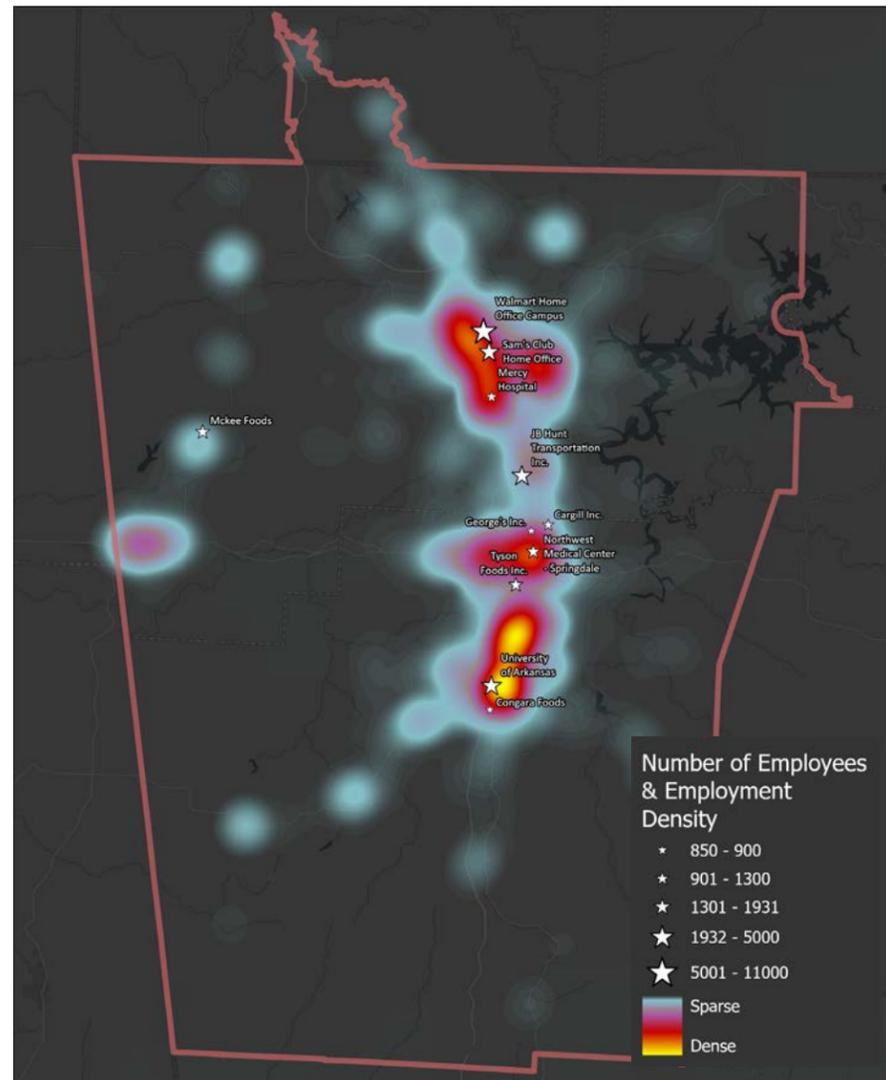
Data Source: NWARPC Travel Demand Model



KEY INDUSTRIES

- **Manufacturing & Construction:** Steady expansion driven by infrastructure projects and regional population growth.
- **Transportation & Logistics:** Supported by J.B. Hunt and Walmart's supply chain operations.
- **Professional & Business Services:** Growth fueled by corporate headquarters and regional entrepreneurship.
- **Education & Health Services:** Continued hiring from the University of Arkansas and healthcare providers.
- **Hospitality & Retail:** Recovered strongly post-pandemic, though still facing staffing challenges.

BUSINESS DENSITY HEAT MAP & MAJOR EMPLOYERS



Data Source: Data Axle

HOUSING, LAND USE, AND ACCESS

Understanding the region's housing and land use patterns is essential for examining how housing availability and land use intersect with transportation access, economic opportunity, and overall community livability. According to the 2019–2023 American Community Survey (ACS), the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers, AR Metropolitan Area was home to 209,515 households, with an average household size of 2.63 people. During the same period, the metro area contained 229,369 housing units, reflecting ongoing residential development and a diverse mix of housing options across the region.

HOUSING UNIT TYPES AND DISTRIBUTION

In recent years, local jurisdictions have taken steps to promote more compact and connected development. Many communities are encouraging infill and mixed-use projects that strengthen walkability, reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles, and better align housing with employment centers and transit access. Despite these efforts, housing remains limited in core areas, and rising prices continue to push some residents farther from jobs and services.

HOUSING + TRANSPORTATION (H+T)

The Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation (H+T) Affordability Index shows that housing affordability is often underestimated because it excludes transportation, typically a household's second-largest expense. Transportation costs are shaped by neighborhood factors such as land use, job access, and transit and walkability.

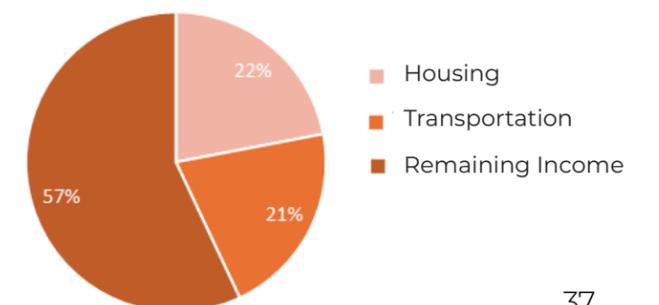
The H+T Index defines affordability as combined housing and transportation costs below **45 percent of household income**, highlighting the importance of compact, walkable, transit-accessible neighborhoods.

In Northwest Arkansas, these combined costs average approximately **44 percent of household income**—nearly at the affordability threshold—suggesting that even small cost increases could burden many households. This underscores the need for efficient, walkable, and transit-supported development as the region grows.

The relationship between housing, transportation, and access to opportunity is increasingly central to regional planning.

High housing costs, limited supply near major employment centers, and the spatial separation of jobs and affordable housing contribute to longer commutes and greater transportation expenses for many households. Future land use decisions that balance affordability with accessibility will be critical to ensure that all residents can live, work, and thrive in the region.

NWA AVERAGE HOUSING+TRANSPORTATION COST PERCENT OF INCOME



Data Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology

TYPES OF HOUSING UNITS IN MSA



Data Source: ACS 2019-2023

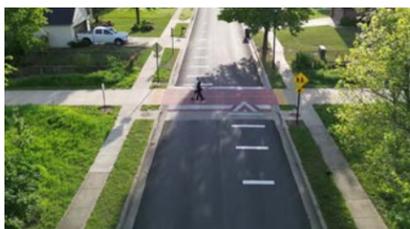


During the 2019–2023 period, the Fayetteville–Springdale–Rogers, AR Metro Area contained 209,515 occupied housing units and 19,854 vacant units. Owner-occupied housing accounted for 62.3 percent of all occupied units, while renter-occupied housing comprised 37.7 percent. The average household size was 2.76 persons for owner-occupied units and 2.42 persons for renter-occupied units.

Among householders, 12.9 percent moved into their current residence in 2021 or later, whereas 4.7 percent had occupied their homes since 1989 or earlier. Regarding vehicle availability, 3.4 percent of households reported having no vehicle, while 24.9 percent had three or more vehicles available for use.

The median income of households in Fayetteville–Springdale–Rogers, AR Metro Area was \$77,979. An estimated 4.2 percent of households had income below \$10,000 a year and 11.7 percent had income of \$200,000 or more.

The four largest cities in the two-county area are continuing to add population in their jurisdictions, with **Fayetteville, Springdale and Rogers** continuing to be the most populated cities in the area. **Bentonville** is also projected to grow at a faster rate than previous projections.



HOUSING & HOUSING COSTS

AGE AND TYPE OF HOUSING UNITS

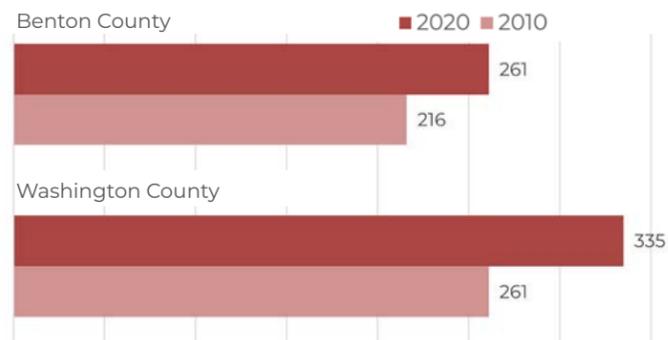
- Built since 2010: 20.6%
- Built in 1939 or earlier: 2.9%
- Median property value (owner-occupied): \$273,400
- Owners with a mortgage: 63.0%

HOUSING COSTS

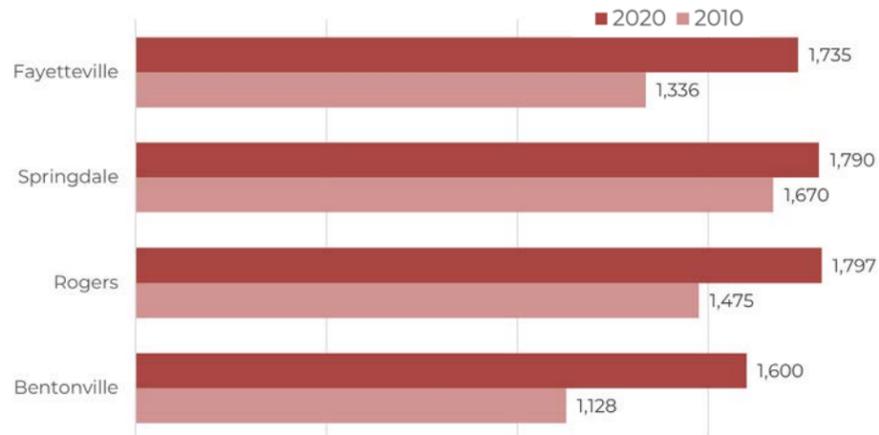
- Median monthly cost (with mortgage): \$1,589
- Median monthly cost (without mortgage): \$484
- Median gross rent (renters): \$1,094

Includes rent plus utilities (electricity, gas, water, sewer, fuel).

COUNTY POPULATION PER SQUARE MILE

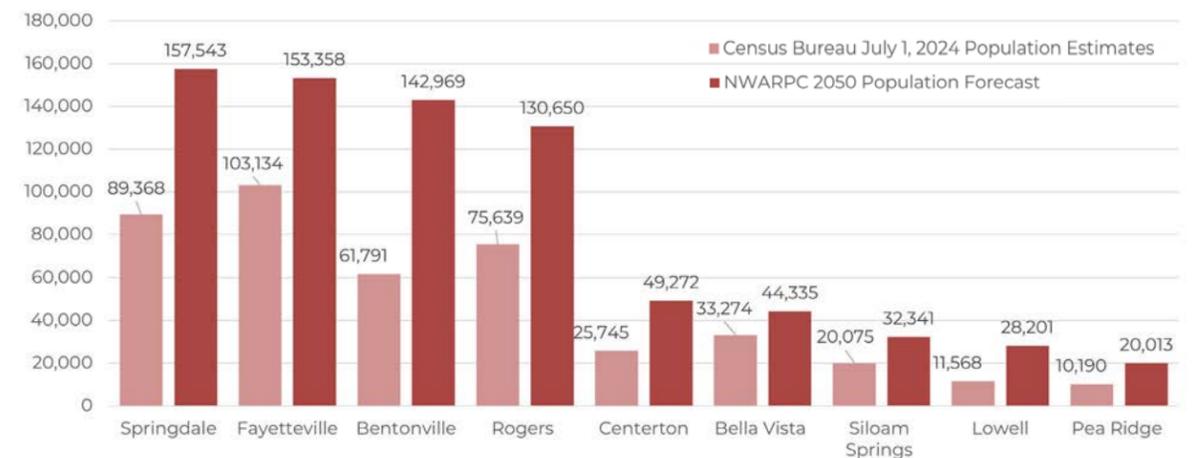


4 LARGEST CITIES POPULATION PER SQUARE MILE



Data Sources: Census Bureau

LARGEST CITIES IN NWA 2050 POPULATION FORECAST (NWARPC)



Data Sources: Census Bureau and NWARPC Forecasts

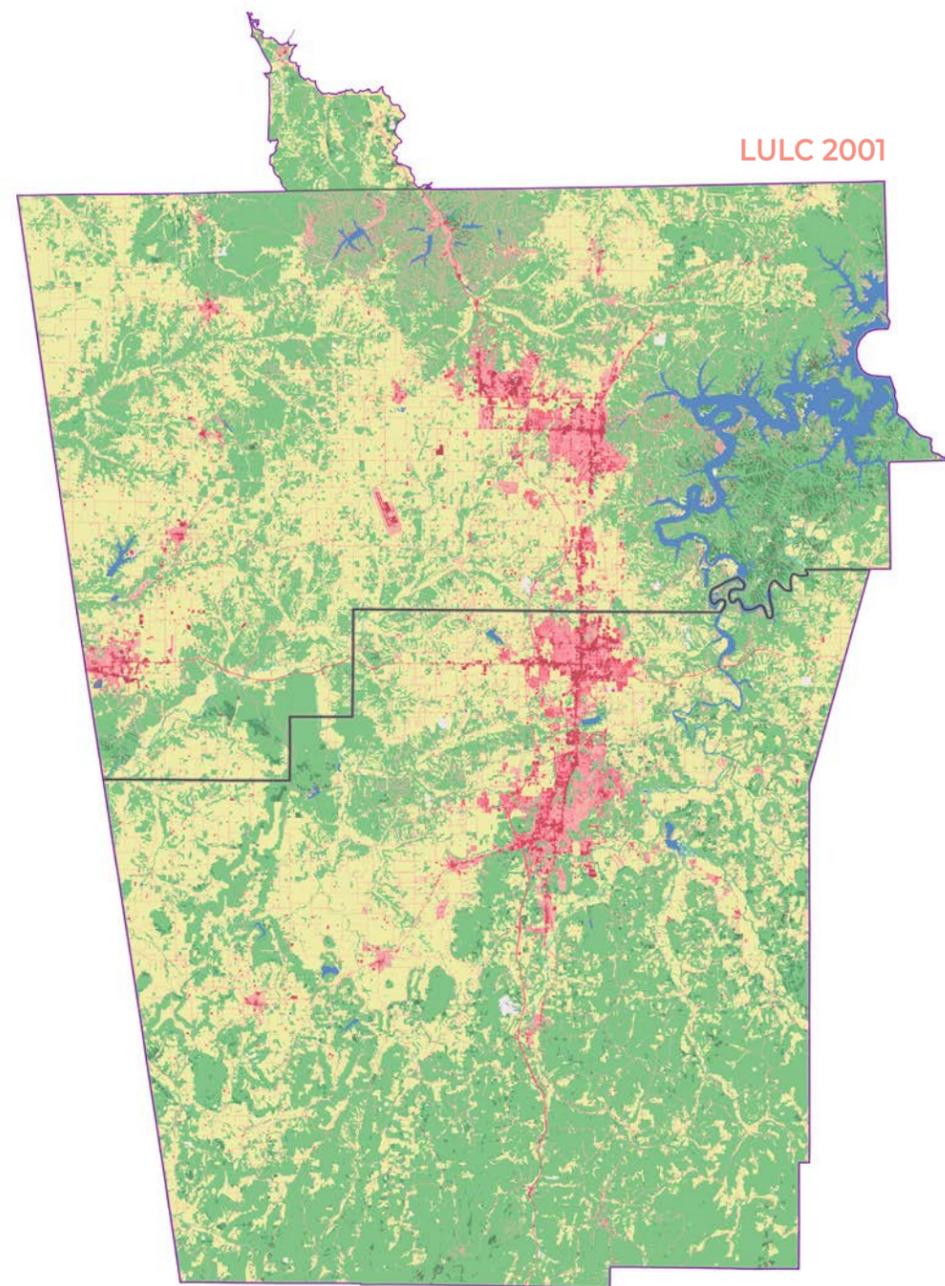
LAND USE & LAND COVER

As Northwest Arkansas continues to experience increasing population and economic growth, data suggests that land and resources are becoming less and less available for continuing increased and steady growth and development. The landcover maps featured here illustrate land use land cover (LULC) change from 2001 to 2021 based on the National Land Cover Database (NLCD). The developed

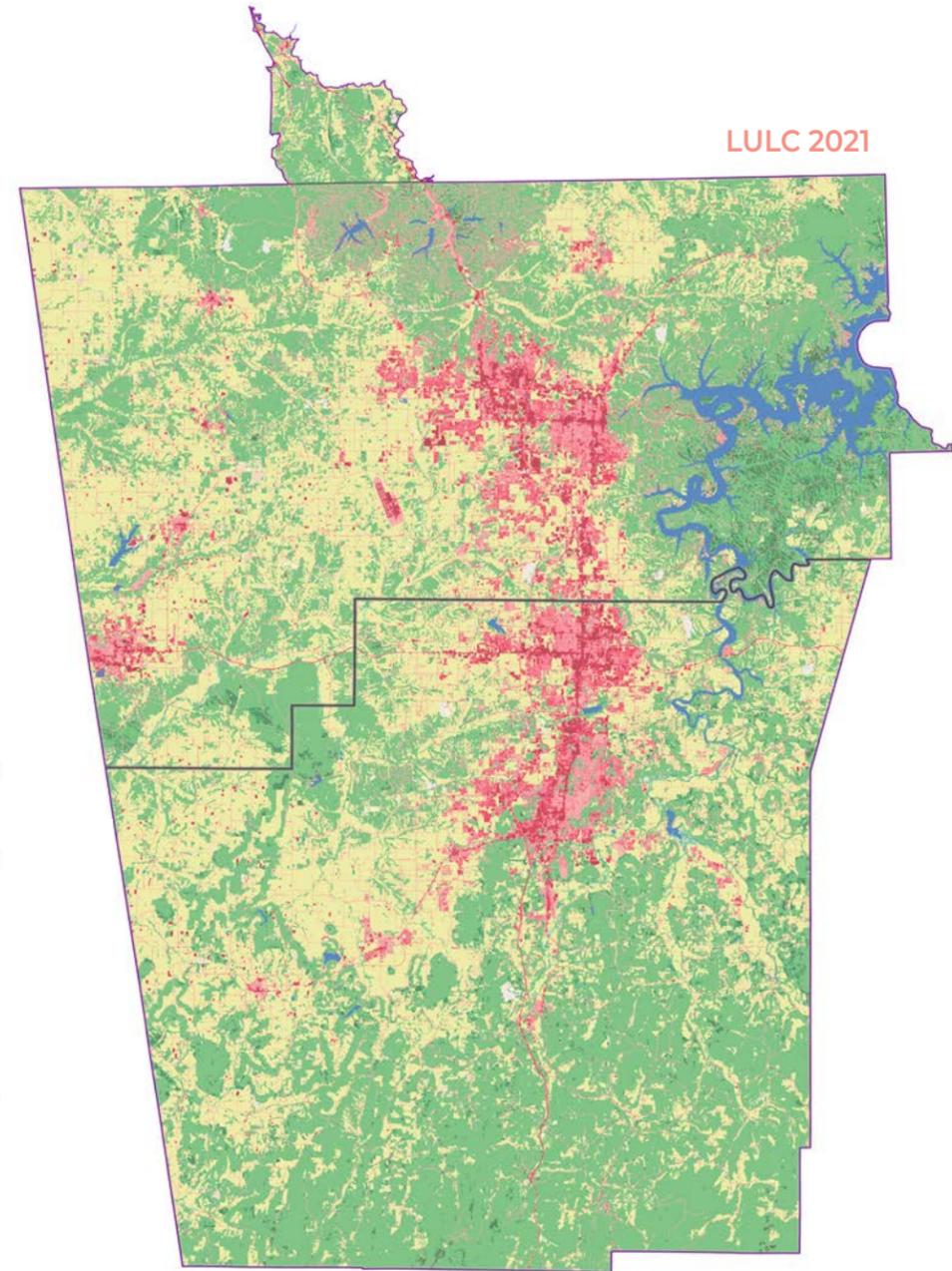
land can be easily depicted as it continues to expand in the urban corridor as well as other communities out in the western portion of the two-county area. As the region continues to grow with new residential and commercial development, it is important to ensure that this growth does not impact key natural, cultural and historic resources that make the region unique and attractive.

In recent years, local jurisdictions have taken steps to promote more compact and connected development. Many communities are encouraging infill and mixed-use projects that strengthen walkability, reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles, and better align housing with employment centers and transit access. Despite these efforts, housing remains limited in core areas, and rising prices continue to push some residents farther from jobs and services.

NATIONAL LAND USE AND LAND COVER (LULC)



- USA NLCD Land Cover
- Open Water
 - Perennial Snow/Ice
 - Developed Open Space
 - Developed Low Intensity
 - Developed Medium Intensity
 - Developed High Intensity
 - Barren Land
 - Deciduous Forest
 - Evergreen Forest
 - Mixed Forest
 - Dwarf Scrub
 - Shrub/Scrub
 - Grassland/Herbaceous
 - Sedge/Herbaceous
 - Lichens
 - Moss
 - Pasture/Hay
 - Cultivated Crops
 - Woody Wetlands
 - Emergent Herbaceous Wetlands



- USA NLCD Land Cover
- Open Water
 - Perennial Snow/Ice
 - Developed Open Space
 - Developed Low Intensity
 - Developed Medium Intensity
 - Developed High Intensity
 - Barren Land
 - Deciduous Forest
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 - Sedge/Herbaceous
 - Lichens
 - Moss
 - Pasture/Hay
 - Cultivated Crops
 - Woody Wetlands
 - Emergent Herbaceous Wetlands

Data Source: USGS National Land Use Land Cover Dataset 2001 & 2021

Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

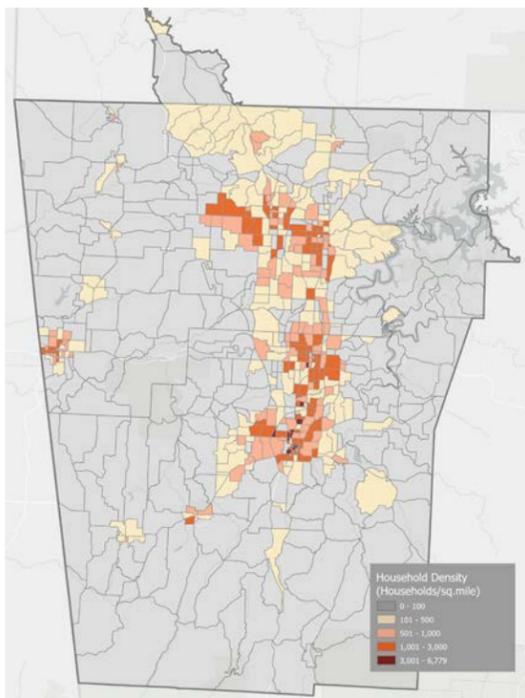


Urbanization and built-up areas - Northwest Arkansas has the most significant land use transformation among Arkansas's major metropolitan areas, with a large expansion of built-up areas over the last two decades. This growth is fueled by economic activity and population influx. As built-up areas expand, forest and pastureland are being converted to other uses. Studies have shown significant transitions from forest to grassland/shrubland and built-up land, and a net loss of forest area in some periods.

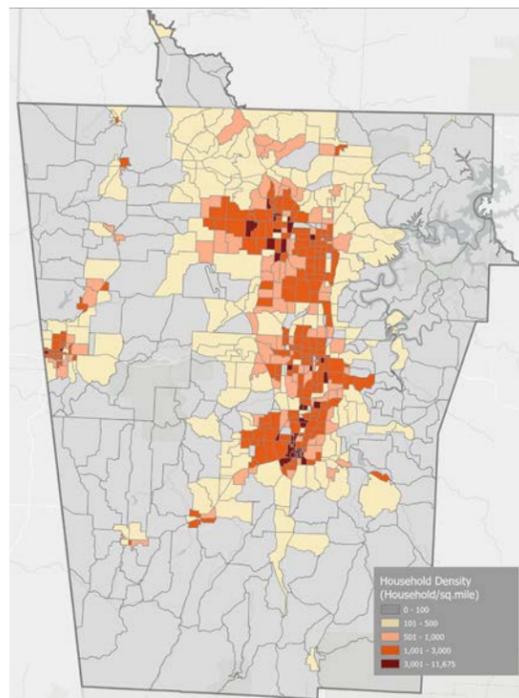
HOUSEHOLD DENSITY & EMPLOYMENT DENSITY

As part of the Northwest Arkansas Travel Demand Model upgrade, household and employment data were allocated to the traffic analysis zones and also forecasted to 2050 as illustrated below for the 2050 Plan scenario below. The household allocation for the 2050 Plan scenario reflected land use plans for jurisdictions in the two-county area and based on the AEDI forecasted total population for 2050.

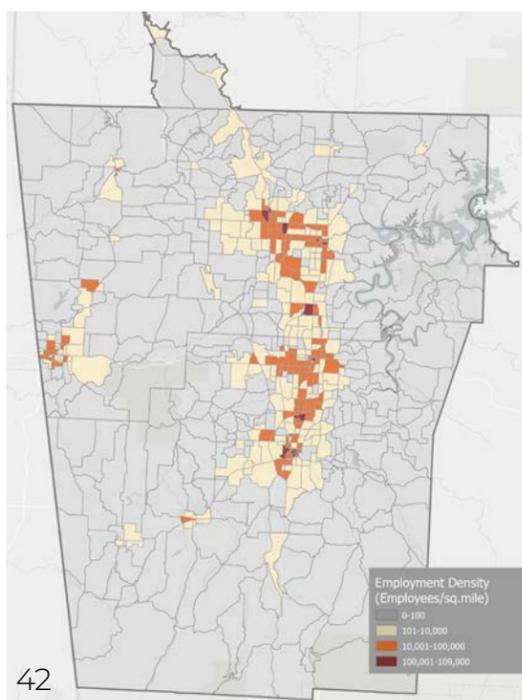
Households Density 2022 Base Year



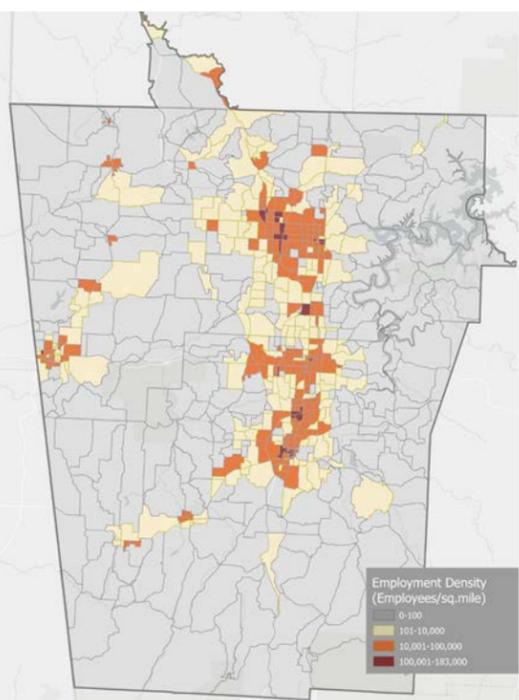
Households Density 2050 Plan Scenario



Employment Density 2022 Base Year



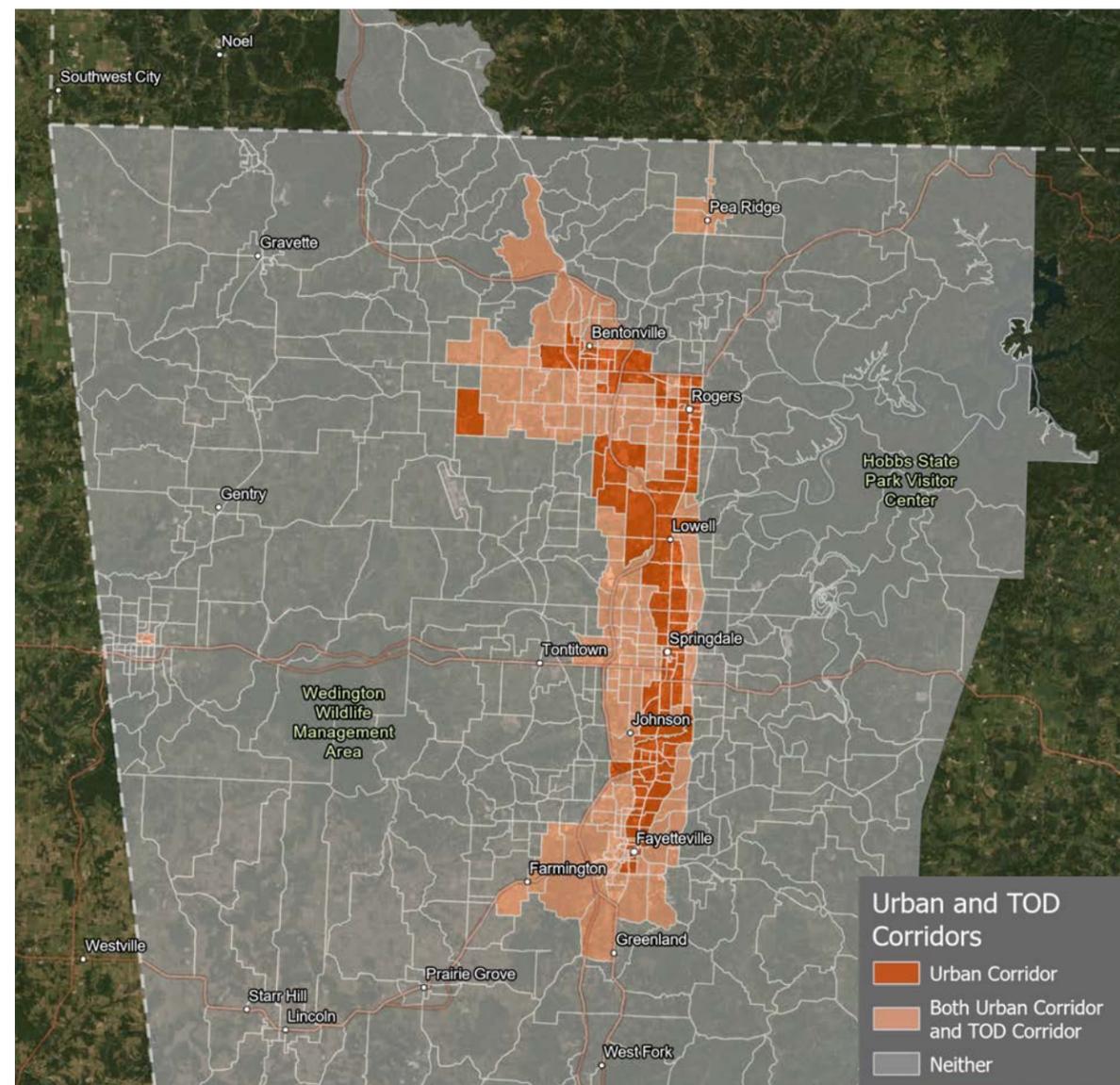
Employment Density 2050 Plan Scenario



URBAN GROWTH SCENARIO

In the Urban Scenario, the urban corridors receive more household and employment growth in 2050, while areas outside of these corridors receive little or no household and employment growth. Employment and Household adjustments used separate methods due to different desired behavior, as well as differing initial distributions. The growth methodologies conserved number total households and total employment across all **Transportation Analysis Zones (TAZ)** in the region while re-distributing new employment and households to the target TAZs for the Urban or Suburban scenarios.

As part of the Northwest Arkansas Travel Demand Model update, and urban and Transit Oriented Development (TOD) corridor was developed for the 2050 Urban growth scenario. Population and employment allocated to TAZs that were identified as an urban environment supportive of high capacity transit. Model scenarios are analyzed to infer what such a land use would mean for transit and travel demand in general.



ENVIRONMENTAL AND NATURAL RESOURCE CONTEXT

The region's geography and natural resources play an integral role in shaping development patterns. Northwest Arkansas' karst topography, forested hills, and network of rivers and streams create both environmental constraints and opportunities for nature-based infrastructure solutions. The region's open spaces, parks, and trail systems also enhance livability and support the local economy through recreation and tourism.

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

In 2024 NWARPC formed a tri-region coalition with Metroplan, the MPO for Central Arkansas, and the City of Fort Smith to submit a single tri-regional Carbon Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) application totaling \$99.999 million. Northwest Arkansas was awarded \$36.25 million by the EPA as part of the Arkansas Tri-Region CPRG Implementation Grant to advance the NWA Green Network. The Northwest Arkansas identified a NWA Green Network aimed at:

1. Sequestering carbon and reducing transportation emission by protecting and restoring natural infrastructure cores and corridors and increasing access to active transportation networks.

2. Connecting low-income and disadvantaged communities (LIDACs) to jobs, education, and essential services through safe and convenient access to bicycle-pedestrian facilities, e-bike vouchers, and the natural environment.

3. Acquiring, protecting, and restoring critical natural lands, including wetlands, riparian zones, forested lands, and prairies, as well as strategic segments of trail construction.

4. Reducing GHGs by reducing vehicle miles traveled and sequestering carbon in restored natural lands to ensure that LIDAC residents reap physical, mental, and financial benefits.



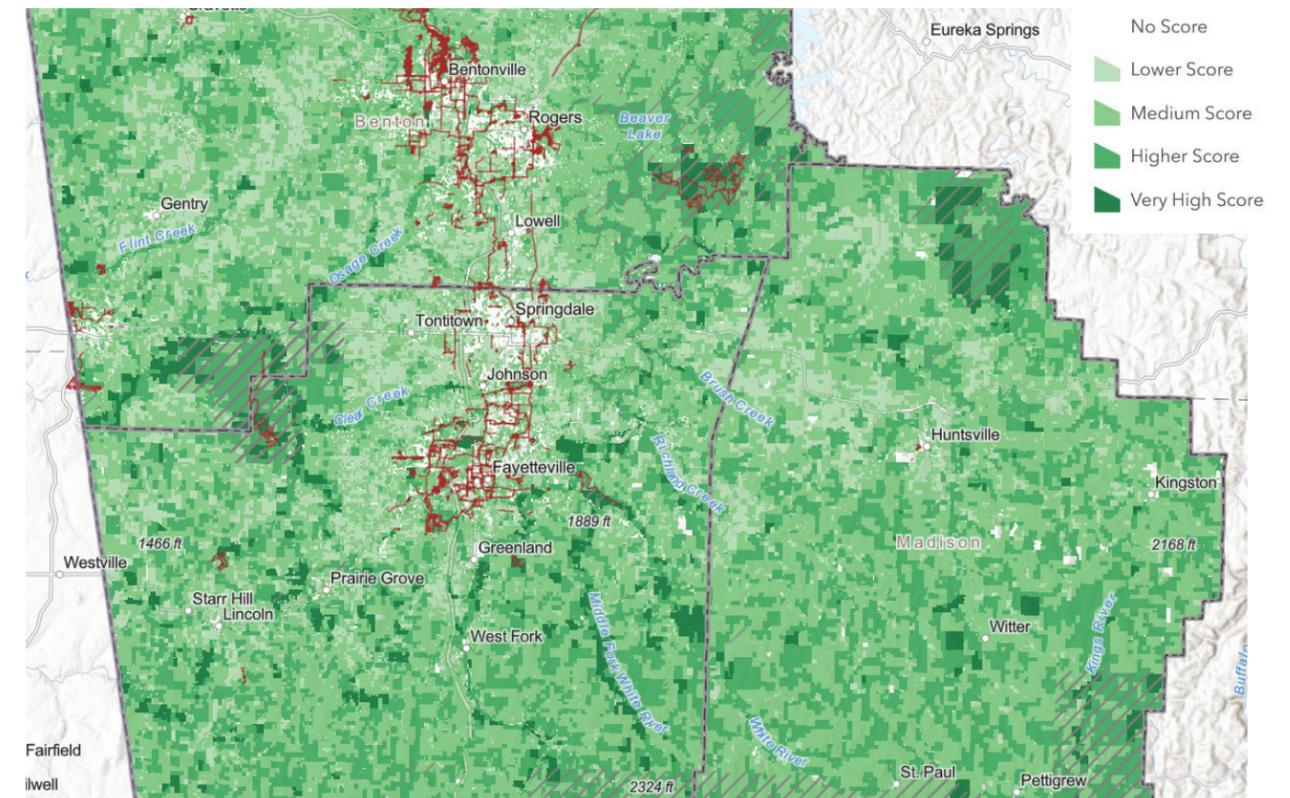
To strengthen sustainability and resilience in Northwest Arkansas, it is essential to understand the region's natural landscape and its capacity to support nature-based solutions that enhance environmental quality. As part of the grant, NWARPC developed a Nature Base Solution GIS Model which identifies land parcels that offer key ecosystem services, carbon storage, and ecological resilience, as well as areas where social equity should guide future actions under the Northwest Arkansas Energy & Environment Innovation Plan.

With its rich natural resources, the region is well positioned to implement proactive, nature-based strategies that protect environmental quality and maintain a high

quality of life. Land ranked High or Very High for nature-based potential should be prioritized for preservation or conservation to sustain biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and resilience to extreme weather. Protecting a diversity of landscapes—from uplands and valleys to wetlands—will further strengthen ecological health.

Additionally, conserving corridors that connect high-value natural areas will promote species migration, maintain ecosystem integrity, and enhance regional resilience. Addressing sustainability and resilience should also include applying nature-based solutions in disadvantaged communities, particularly those in flood-prone or urban heat island areas.

NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS MAP



■ HOW THE SYSTEM IS PERFORMING

TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Northwest Arkansas' transportation system, anchored by I-49, connects communities, jobs, schools, and recreational destinations through a network of highways, local streets, transit routes, shared-use trails, and sidewalks. This system supports both daily travel within communities and longer regional trips, while accommodating the movement of goods throughout the area.

With increasing travel demands, balancing local access with regional mobility is critical. Major highways and arterials facilitate freight movement and long-distance trips, while local streets and multimodal facilities provide safe, convenient travel within communities for all modes, ages, and abilities.

Residents recognize these needs: in the 2024 public opinion survey, **85% indicated a need for expanded transit services, and 82% expressed support for funding such improvements through a local tax.** This level of community support highlights a shared vision for investing in transportation enhancements that maintain connectivity, improve access to opportunities, and support sustainable growth in Northwest Arkansas.

Longer travel distances, rising congestion, and household transportation costs underscore the importance of providing viable alternatives.

MODES SHARE AND COMMUTING PATTERNS

The region's development pattern has historically reflected an **auto-oriented form**, with low- to moderate-density growth radiating from major corridors. As the growth has accelerated, housing and employment have expanded into previously rural areas, creating a **patchwork of suburban and exurban development.** While these patterns provide housing choice, they also contribute to longer travel distances, higher household transportation costs, and increased infrastructure demands.

An estimated **75.9%** of the region's workers drove to work alone in 2019-2023, and **12.4%** worked from home. Among those workers who commuted, it took an average of **21.2 minutes** to travel to work from home.

Travel behavior remains predominantly auto-oriented, with most residents commuting by **personal vehicle.** However, longer travel distances, rising congestion, and household transportation costs underscore the importance of providing viable alternatives that enhance accessibility and reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles.



REGIONAL VS. NATIONAL PATTERNS

Analysis of commuting behavior reveals notable differences between Northwest Arkansas and national trends. According to a recent report by the **Center for Understanding Future Travel Behavior and Demand (TBD)**, approximately **69%** of workers in the US commute alone, compared with **78%** of workers in NWA.

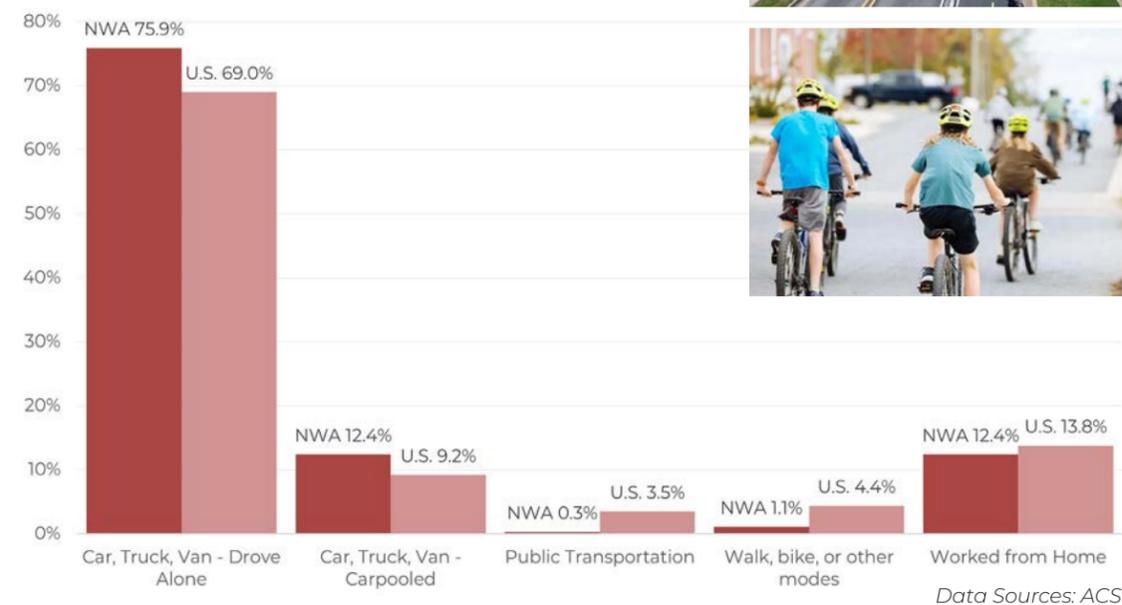
Public transportation usage in the region is markedly lower, at **0.3%**, versus **3.5%** nationwide, while the proportion of commuters who walk, bike, or use other modes is only **1.0%**, compared to **4.4%** across the U.S. The share of residents working from home is slightly below the national average, with **12.4%** in the region compared to **13.8%** nationally. Conversely, carpooling is more prevalent locally, accounting for **12.4%** of commuters, relative to **9.2%** nationwide.

These patterns highlight a region that is more car-dependent, with lower adoption of public transit and active commuting modes than the national average, but higher engagement in shared commuting arrangements.

Multimodal travel options are expanding across the region. Shared-use trails and sidewalks provide opportunities for walking, biking, and recreational travel, while transit services connect residents with employment centers, educational institutions, and community amenities. Interest in **alternative modes of travel is growing, particularly in denser areas where proximity to jobs, shopping, and services allows for more active or transit-based trips.**



COMMUTING PATTERNS IN 2019-2023 NWA MSA COMPARED TO NATIONAL AVERAGE



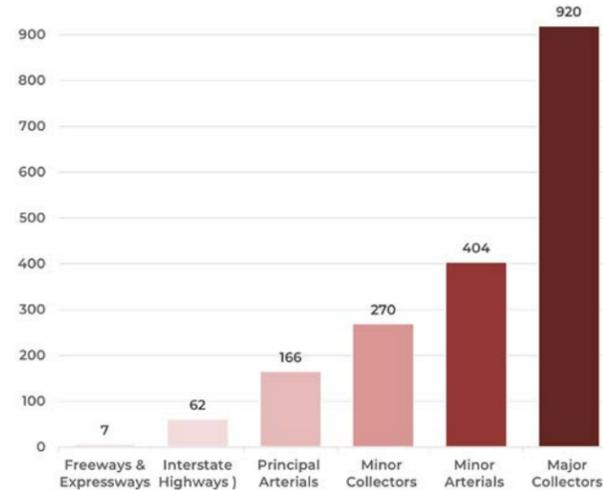
MEASURING SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

System performance is assessed through measures such as travel time reliability, roadway congestion, and accessibility to jobs and services. Safety analysis identifies intersections and corridors with higher crash rates, guiding investments that improve safety for all users. Freight and logistics are also critical considerations, as the region's economy depends on efficient connections to distribution centers, major employers, and regional markets. **More information in Appendix E System Performance Report.**

ROADS AND ROADS SAFETY

Forward 2050 emphasizes Vision Zero principles, safer street design, multimodal safety investments, and education campaigns. As part of the development of the [Vision Zero Plan](#), NWARPC conducted descriptive crash analysis to systematically analyze killed and serious injury (KSI) crashes using the injury classification codes KA as well as all reported crashes that have occurred throughout the region from 2017 - 2021. The analysis also examined crashes by mode. Crashes involving pedestrians resulted in a KA outcome 36.3% of the time compared to 1.6% of the time for a motor vehicle.

MILES OF FUNCTIONALLY CLASSIFIED ROADS IN BENTON AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES



Data Source: ARDOT

NUMBER OF CRASHES & CRASH TYPE BY YEAR (2017-2021)

Year	Total # of Crashes	% Crashes by Year	# KA Crashes	% KA Crashes by Year	% Crashes resulting in KA
2017	12,154	20.64%	284	20.75%	2.34%
2018	11,664	19.80%	266	19.43%	2.28%
2019	12,309	20.90%	264	19.28%	2.14%
2020	10,433	17.71%	280	20.45%	2.68%
2021	12,336	20.95%	275	20.09%	2.23%
Total	58,896	100.00%	1,369	100.00%	2.32%

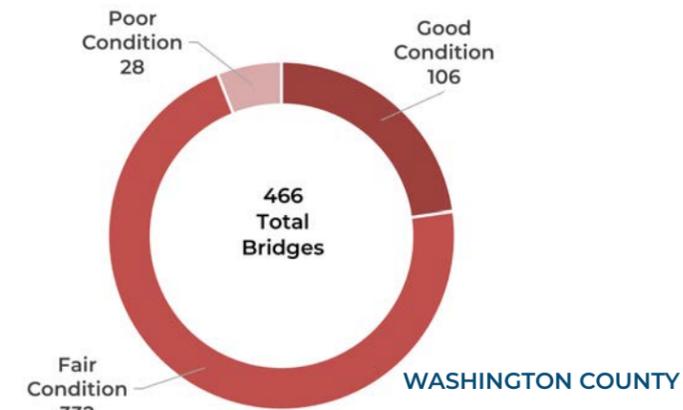
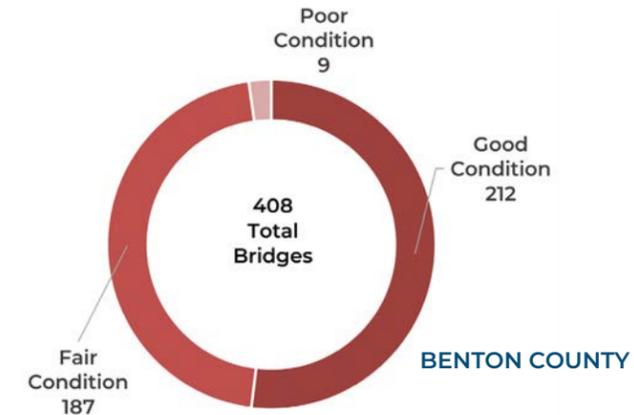
NUMBER OF CRASHES BY CRASH SEVERITY 2017-2021

Injury Severity	# Crashes	% Crashes
Fatal injury (K)	220	0.37%
Suspected serious injury (A)	1,149	1.95%
Suspected minor injury (B)	4,705	7.99%
Possible injury (C)	7,186	12.20%
No apparent injury (O)	45,636	77.49%
Total	58,896	100.00%

Data Source: NWA Vision Zero Comprehensive Safety Action Plan; ARDOT



BRIDGE CONDITION ASSESSMENT



Data Source: ARDOT

Bridges are a critical element of transportation infrastructure which provide a way across water bodies or valleys. Just as importantly, they provide access by spanning other infrastructure elements such as rail lines and intersecting roadways. While pavement can deteriorate in quality without fully losing its most basic function, a bridge must be safely constructed and adequately maintained to remain a viable travel option. Research shows that bridges in good condition allow access to essential services and have a positive impact on the economy, making their construction and maintenance worthwhile.

Research utilizing historical data demonstrates that proper maintenance and preservation prolong service life in a cost effective manner. The fiscal efficiency of preventative care leads to better management of the transportation infrastructure and less disruptions to the traveling public.

ARDOT measures bridge condition through federal standards-based inspections that rate the deck, superstructure, and substructure on a 0-9 scale, with the lowest rating determining the overall bridge condition.

Reliability is measured through risk assessments that identify threats to bridge performance, risk mitigation planning, and asset management plans that detail funding and investment strategies.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

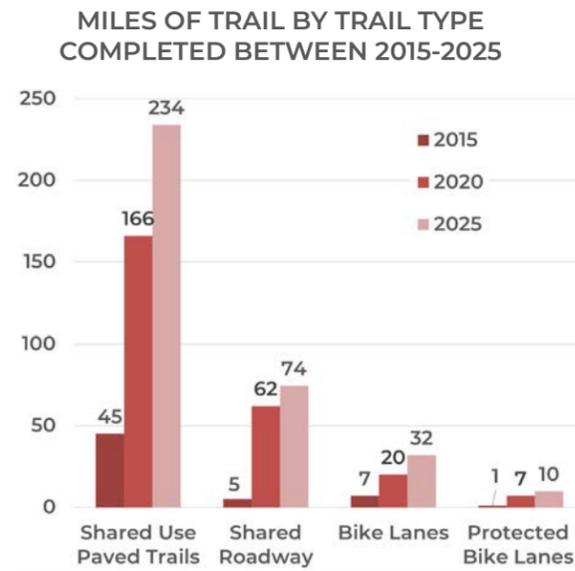
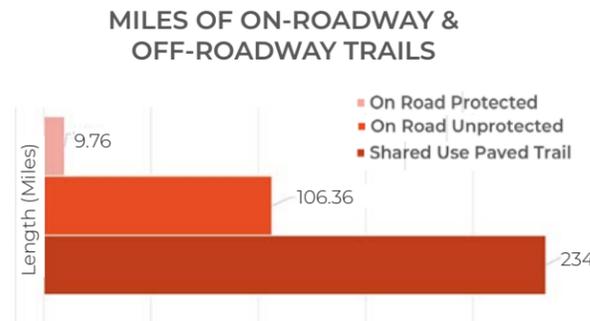
Forward 2050 and the NWA Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan

The NWA Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan's vision states:

NWA's trail and roadway system will comfortably, safely, and efficiently accommodate bicycle and pedestrian transportation. The linking of local and regional attractions will make the area a world-class bicycle and pedestrian destination. Walking and bicycling will become a common, enjoyable, and viable transportation and recreation choice that promotes active living and a high quality of life in NWA.

Ongoing evaluation of active transportation investments throughout the region is essential to demonstrate the value of continued investments in the Razorback Regional Greenway and in the implementation of the Bike&Ped Plan and its recommendations.

In recent years several cities in the region have advanced in the League of American Bicyclists' Bicycle Friendly Community (BFC) program rankings, reflecting both their construction of new active transportation facilities and their adoption of supportive policies and programs. In 2022, Fayetteville was designated as the first gold level Bicycle Friendly Community in Arkansas. Bentonville was upgraded to a silver level designation in 2024, with Rogers and Springdale retaining their respective silver and bronze level designations.



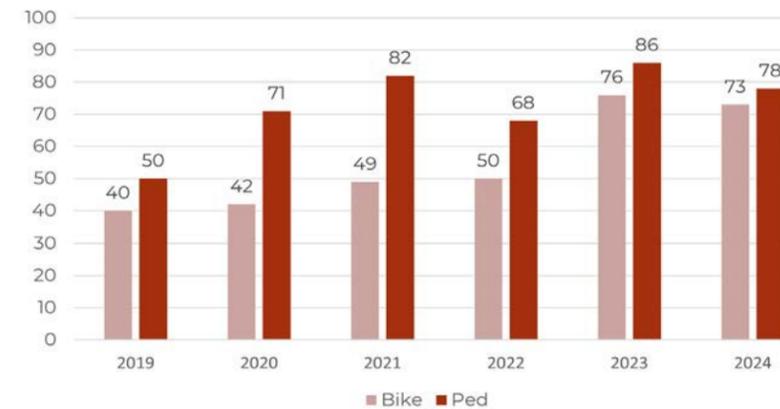
The region built **189 miles** of shared use paved trails between 2015 and 2025 (an increase of 420%)

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE & SAFETY

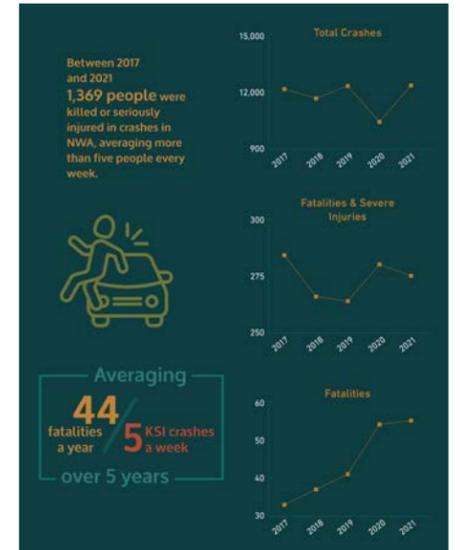
While Northwest Arkansas has earned national recognition in recent years for its exceptional recreational cycling trails and amenities, recent investments in active transportation infrastructure complement these assets by creating safe, accessible bicycle and pedestrian networks. These networks allow cycling and walking to function as viable transportation options for residents and visitors alike. In a 2022 Trail User Intercept Survey conducted by NWARPC, lack of connected multi-use paths and unsafe street crossings were the most cited factors that discourage bicycling or walking in the region. Results from the online version of the 2022 Survey showed 62% of respondents prefer to ride their bike off the street either on paths and trails or multi-use paved paths.

Through implementing the vision of the region's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan, and investing in safe and complete streets informed by NWA's Regional Complete Streets Design Guide and Comprehensive Safety Action Plan, Northwest Arkansas can build upon its recreational infrastructure success to further increase access to cycling and walking. Addressing the region's demand for safer and more connected multimodal facilities can help our communities manage traffic congestion while maintaining a high quality of life amid rapid population growth.

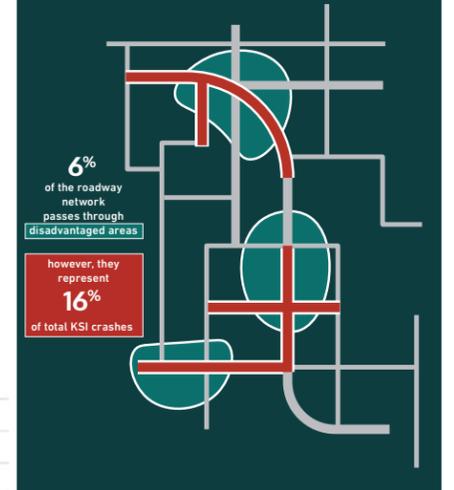
NUMBER OF NON MOTORIST CRASHES 2019-2024



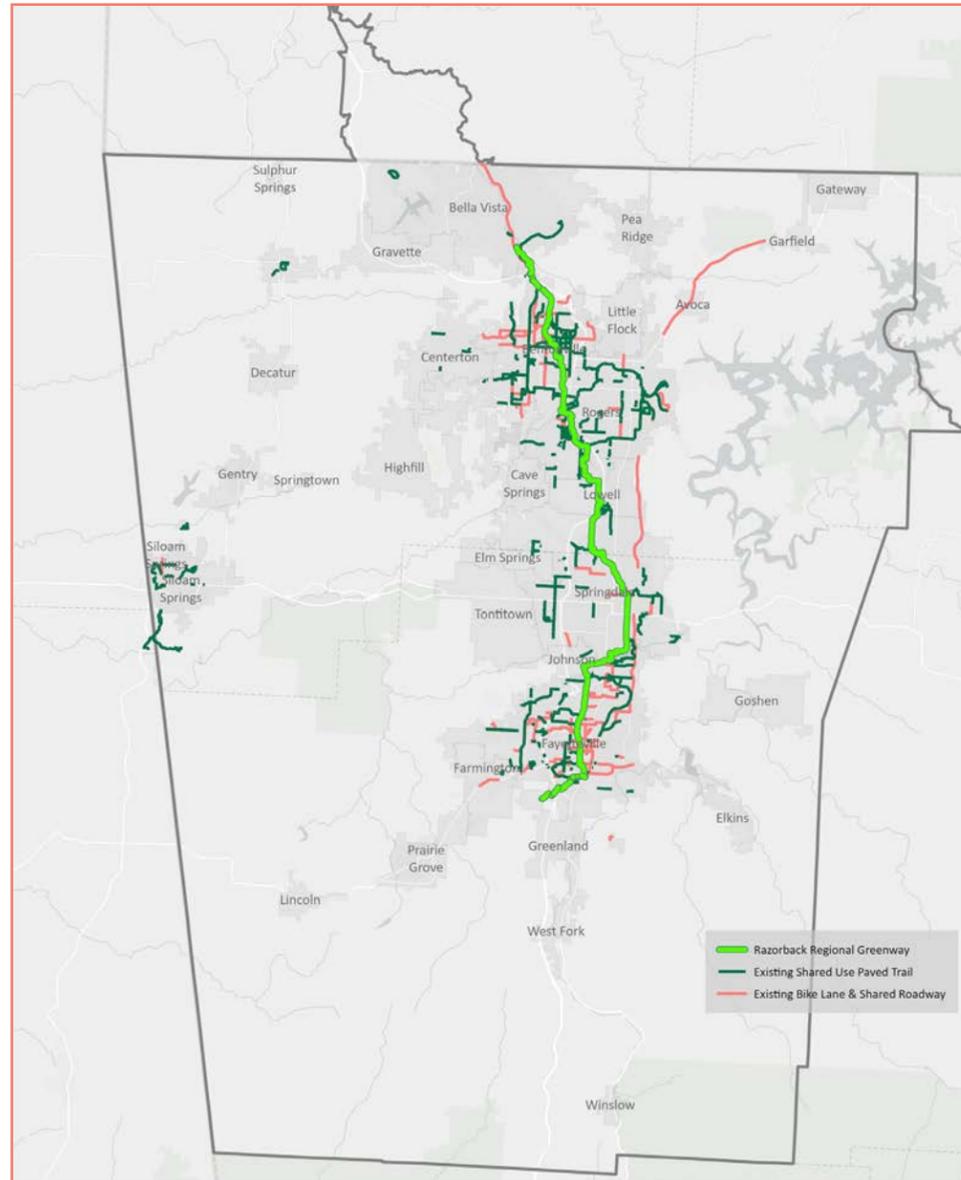
Between 2019 and 2024 there were 33 more bicycle related crashes (an increase of 83%) and 28 more pedestrian related crashes (and increase of 56%) which signals that the region has to continue to address safety and risks of vulnerable roadway users in the region.



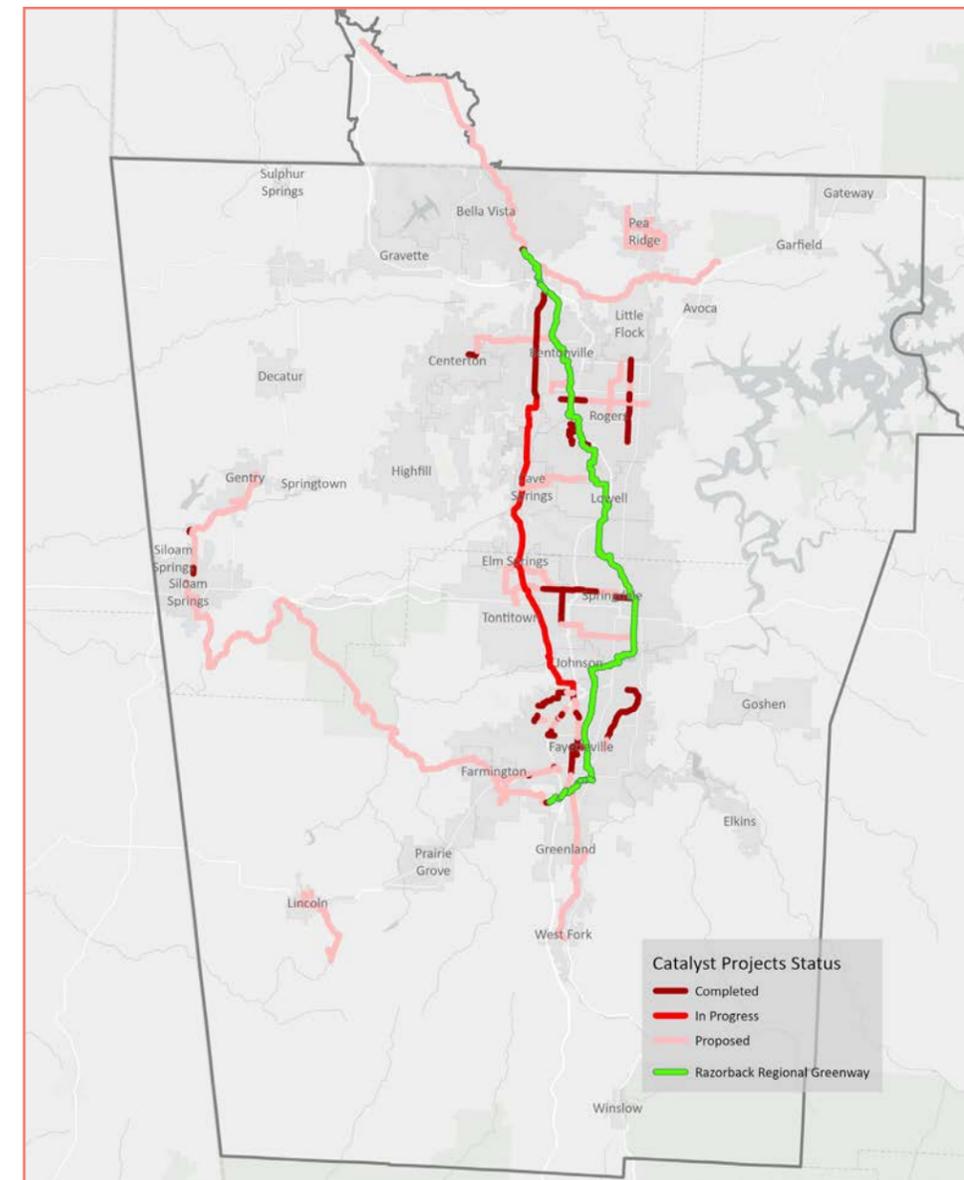
Vulnerable roadway users that live in disadvantaged areas are overrepresented in fatal and serious injury crashes.



NORTHWEST ARKANSAS ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE MAP



NORTHWEST ARKANSAS CATALYST TRAIL PROJECTS



Developed and published as an interactive map in 2014, the Northwest Arkansas Active Transportation infrastructure database has been continuously updated with the trail and bikeway data through the joint effort and collaboration among NWARPC and multiple organizations in the region including the **Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies at the University of Arkansas, Trailblazers and local municipalities.**

The interactive trails online map can be accessed at <https://trails.cast.uark.edu>.



The implementation of **17 distinct bicycle and pedestrian catalyst projects** can deliver transformative benefits for Northwest Arkansas by creating safe, connected networks for walking and biking across a diverse range of communities. These strategic investments can demonstrate how pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improves quality of life, public health, and both local and regional connectivity—building the case and momentum for continued expansion of the region’s active transportation network. These projects will provide residents and visitors with safe corridors for active transportation both within and between cities, while strengthening access to the renowned **Razorback Greenway Corridor.**

By showcasing these tangible benefits, catalyst projects inspire continued investment in a more walkable, bikeable, and livable Northwest Arkansas. **Eight of the seventeen** catalyst projects identified in 2015 have seen meaningful progress over the past decade, primarily in **Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, and Bentonville.** The projects identified in unincorporated Benton and Washington Counties have yet to be initiated.

FREIGHT MOVEMENT AND ECONOMIC VITALITY

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY FREIGHT NETWORK?

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) directed the FHWA Administrator to establish a National Highway Freight Network (NHFN) to strategically direct Federal resources and policies toward improved performance of highway portions of the U.S. freight transportation system.

The NHFN includes the following subsystems of roadways:

Primary Highway Freight System (PHFS):

This is a network of highways identified as the most critical highway portions of the U.S. freight transportation system determined by measurable and objective national data. PHFS is managed by the Office of Freight Management and Operations.

Other Interstate portions not on the PHFS (non-PHFS):

These highways consist of the remaining portion of Interstate roads not included in the PHFS. These routes provide important continuity and access to freight transportation facilities.

Critical Rural Freight Corridors (CRFCs): These are public roads not in an urbanized area which provide access and connection to the PHFS and the Interstate with other important ports, public transportation facilities, or other intermodal freight facilities. Arkansas has not designated any CRFCs.

Critical Urban Freight Corridors (CUFCs):

These are public roads in urbanized areas which provide access and connection to the PHFS and the Interstate with other ports, public transportation facilities, or other intermodal transportation facilities. Arkansas has not designated any CUFCs.

AIR QUALITY AND RESILIENCE

AIR QUALITY AND OZONE ATTAINMENT MONITORING

Northwest Arkansas currently meets all National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The region's ozone levels, monitored at stations in Springdale and Fayetteville, continue to trend below the 2015 ozone standard of 0.070 parts per million (ppm). Preliminary 2025 data indicate three-year design values of approximately 0.059 ppm and 0.057 ppm, demonstrating continued attainment and improvement in air quality.

Maintaining this attainment status is essential for protecting public health and sustaining economic growth. Areas designated as "non-attainment" face stricter federal oversight and limits on the use of federal transportation funds for capacity-expanding projects. NWARPC, in coordination with the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, continues to monitor ozone trends and incorporate emission-reduction strategies into its transportation planning processes. These include the implementation of the Carbon Reduction Program (CRP), promotion of electric vehicle readiness, support for multimodal transportation options, and collaboration with local governments on land use and green infrastructure practices that reduce vehicle miles traveled and associated emissions.

Arkansas' Multimodal Freight Network



Map Source: 2022 Arkansas State Freight Plan



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT



By embracing a forward-thinking public transit system, Northwest Arkansas could not only alleviate congestion and improve air quality but also foster a stronger, more connected community. As a rapidly growing area with a vibrant economy, it is time for the region to step up and lead the way in creating a more sustainable, efficient, and livable future.

Public Comment from the Forward 2050 Survey



TRANSIT RIDERSHIP

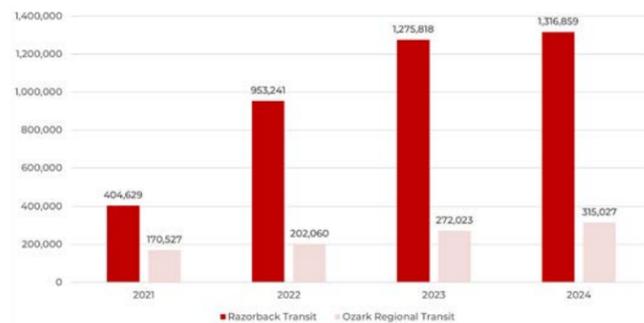
Northwest Arkansas has two public transit providers that currently operate in the urban and rural areas of the region: [Ozark Transit Authority \(ORT\)](#) and [University of Arkansas' Razorback Transit](#).

Transit performance and ridership are key indicators of how well the regional transportation system is meeting public mobility needs. NWARPC monitors trends in transit service delivery, investment, and utilization through coordination with ORT and Razorback Transit.

A primary data source for tracking transit performance is the Federal Transit Administration's National Transit Database (NTD), which collects standardized information from all federally funded transit providers. NTD data include ridership, operating expenses, fleet size and condition, service coverage, and capital investment. The NTD's Agency Profiles for ORT and Razorback Transit provide a consistent and transparent basis for evaluating system performance over time. NWARPC uses these data, along with local reports, to:

- Track annual ridership and service levels by route and mode
- Monitor the relationship between investment, service frequency, and passenger demand
- Support federal reporting requirements and grant applications

Unlinked Passenger Trips 2021-2024



Operating Expenses 2021-2024



Trips are reported to the National Transit Database (NTD) and the term "unlinked trips" is used to track the number of trips made by system and are reported by transit agency. The American Public Transportation Association defines unlinked trips as "...the number of times passengers board public transportation vehicles. Passengers are counted each time they board vehicles no matter how many vehicles they use to travel from their origin to their destination."



Photo Courtesy of ORT



Photo Courtesy of Razorback Transit

Regular monitoring of transit ridership helps ensure that the region's investment in public transportation continues to expand access, support economic opportunity, and reduce dependence on single-occupancy vehicle travel.

As new services such as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) are implemented, ridership data will play an even greater role in evaluating performance and refining future service strategies.

The relationship between public transit service and pedestrian infrastructure across Northwest Arkansas is illustrated in the map to the right. By overlaying Ozark Regional Transit and Razorback Transit routes, including on-demand service, with existing sidewalk coverage it becomes evident where transit is currently available and how well the routes are supported by safe, continuous walking connections.

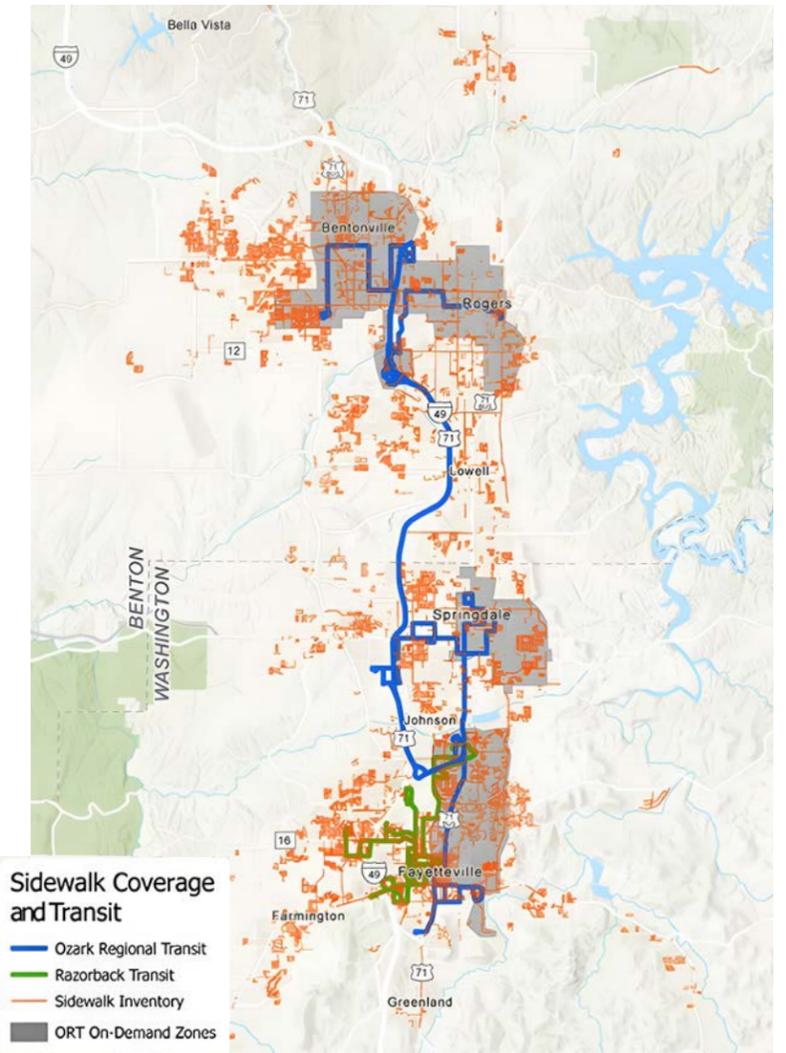
The map also illustrates both connections and gaps in the region's multimodal transportation network and the interdependence between transit and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Public transit does not function in isolation. Nearly every transit trip begins and ends as a walking or bicycling trip, whether that is walking from home to a bus stop, crossing a street to transfer between routes, or biking to a park-and-ride.

As a result, the quality, continuity, and safety of the pedestrian and bicycle network directly influence who can access transit and how convenient and attractive accessibility can be. Areas with robust sidewalk coverage and connected bike facilities are more likely to support higher transit ridership, shorter access times, and a broader range of users, including seniors, students, and people with disabilities.



Photo Courtesy of Razorback Transit



By comparing transit routes with sidewalk coverage, the map helps identify priority corridors where transit service exists, but pedestrian infrastructure is incomplete or missing. These gaps can create real barriers, even when a bus route is nearby, by forcing riders to walk in the street, cross uncontrolled intersections, or navigate discontinuous sidewalks. Conversely, areas where strong sidewalk networks align with transit routes demonstrate how coordinated investments can create a seamless, low-stress experience for users.

Planning for multimodal transportation has to address investments in sidewalks and bicycle facilities are also investments in transit. Strengthening the bike and pedestrian network expands the effective reach of transit, improves safety, and supports more access to jobs, education, services, and recreation across Northwest Arkansas.

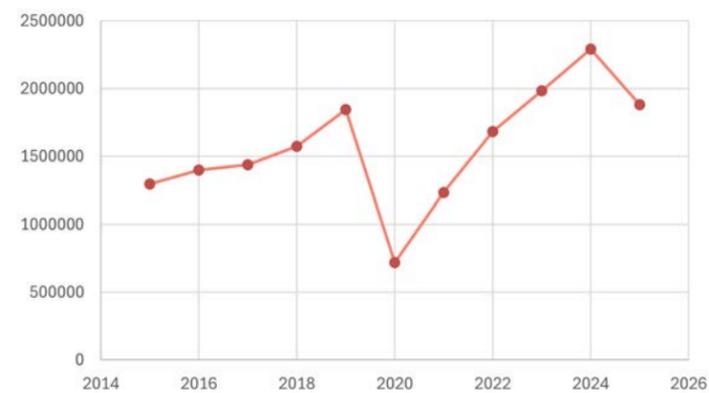
AIR TRAFFIC

The NWA region is served by one national airport: Northwest Arkansas National Airport (XNA), located in Highfill, and five municipal airports located in Fayetteville, Springdale, Rogers, Bentonville and Siloam Springs.

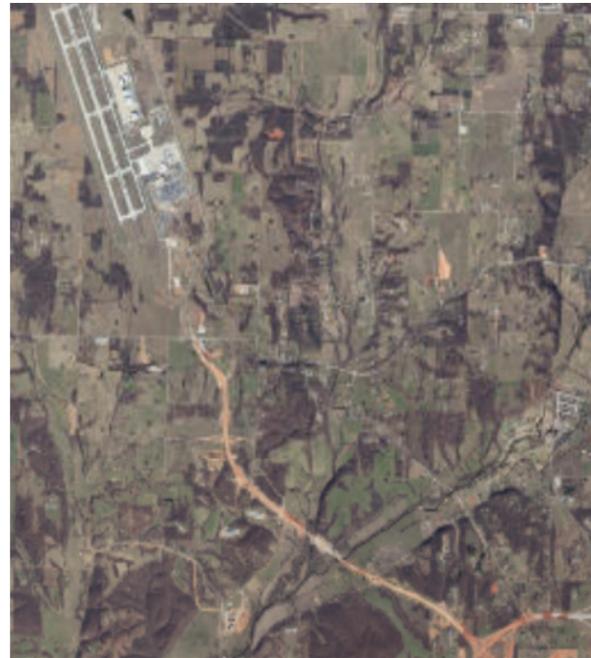
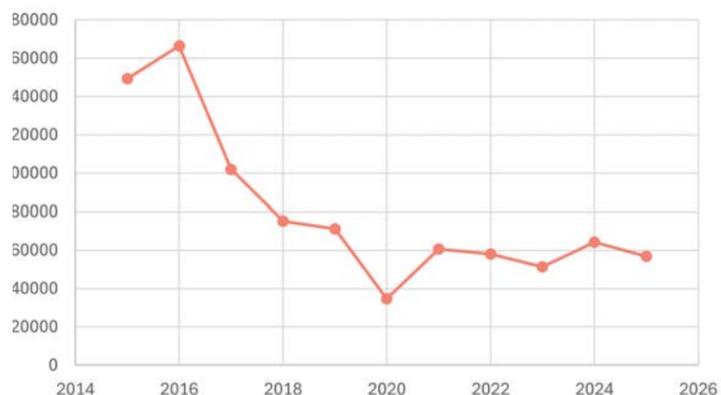
XNA is managed by the Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport Authority, representing multiple cities and counties in the region. XNA has seen significant and steady growth, in the past five years year, reflecting its role as a key travel gateway.

The XNA Airport Connector is a major infrastructure project designed to improve highway access to the airport and reduce congestion on local roads. The XNA Airport Connector Road is under construction and is expected to be completed by mid-2027. The project is a four-mile, four-lane interstate-style highway that will connect Northwest Arkansas National Airport to the Springdale Bypass (Highway 612).

XNA TOTAL NUMBER OF PASSENGERS BY YEAR



XNA TOTAL NUMBER OF CARGO FLIGHTS BY YEAR



XNA AIRPORT CONNECTOR

PURPOSE

Build a modern, four-lane interstate-style road directly connecting XNA to the Springdale Bypass (Highway 612) and Highway 264, enhancing access to and from I-49 and surrounding communities.

LENGTH & DESIGN

The project spans nearly 4 miles with 11 bridges, an interchange at its southern end, and connections to key regional routes.

BENEFITS

It will reduce travel time, improve traffic flow and safety, and support regional economic growth by making travel to XNA more efficient for travelers and freight.

TIMELINE

Construction began in 2024, with completion expected by 2027.



RAIL

The Arkansas & Missouri Railroad (AM) is a 286,000-pound standard, double-stack cleared Class III railroad operating 150 miles between Fort Smith and Monet, Missouri. Of the total mileage, 111 miles are operated within Arkansas including through both Washington and Benton Counties.

The railroad, founded in 1986, also provides rail-to-water intermodal services at Fort Smith and Van Buren along the Arkansas River, in addition to transloading services across its geography. Key commodities transferred include grain and feed supplements, paper products, sand, plastic, food products, scrap steel, lumber, aluminum, and bauxite. The AM interchanges with BNSF at Monette, and KCS, UP, and Fort Smith Railroad at Fort Smith/Van Buren.

The Arkansas and Missouri Railroad also offers excursion trips from Springdale to Van Buren, using vintage heavyweight passenger cars.



Photo Courtesy of A&M Railroad Website

ARKANSAS FREIGHT RAIL NETWORK MAP



In 2025 ARDOT published the Arkansas State Rail Plan. The Plan emphasizes that railroads remain a vital component of Arkansas' economy, providing one of the most efficient and cost-effective way to move bulk and heavy commodities across long distances. These shipments include essential materials that support daily life—from construction products to food ingredients and manufactured goods.

Although Arkansas' economy has grown and diversified since the early days of rail, the industry continues to underpin major sectors such as aerospace, chemicals, rice, plastics, steel, timber, and general manufacturing.

In 2019, railroads transported more than 160 million tons of freight through Arkansas, valued at approximately \$300 billion. Passenger rail also plays a role in the state's transportation network. Amtrak's Texas Eagle route connects Arkansas to the major economic corridor between Dallas and Chicago, carrying more than 37,000 passengers in 2024.

Rail in Northwest Arkansas:

Rail freight in Northwest Arkansas plays a valuable supporting role in the region's economy by linking local industries to national and international markets. The Arkansas & Missouri Railroad provides freight service that interchanges with major Class I railroads, enabling cost-efficient movement of commodities and products beyond the immediate region. While trucking remains the dominant mode for freight in and out of Northwest Arkansas, rail enhances the multimodal freight network, supports industrial competitiveness, and is integrated into regional transportation and safety planning.



LOOKING AHEAD: TRAVEL DEMAND FORECASTS & EXPLORING GROWTH SCENARIOS

TRAVEL DEMAND FORECASTS

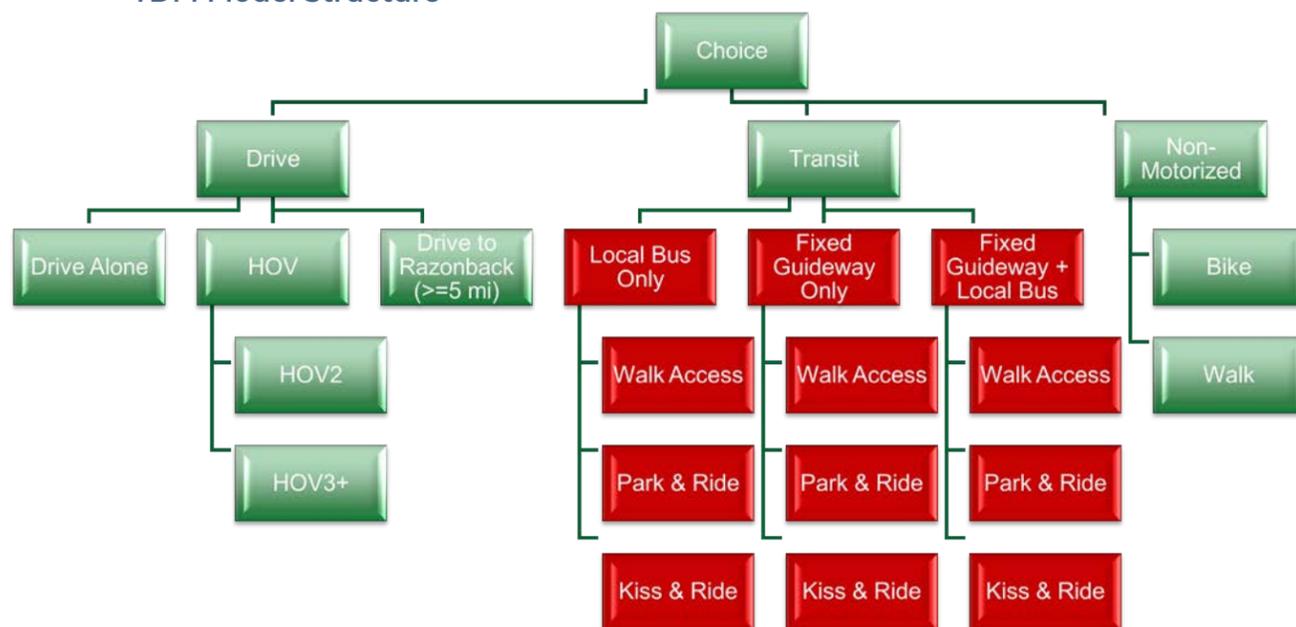
The Northwest Arkansas travel demand forecasting model is an essential analytical tool used in the development of the MTP to anticipate future travel patterns and assess the performance of the transportation system. By integrating regional data on land use, demographics, socioeconomic conditions, and travel behavior, the model simulates how people and goods are likely to move across the network in future years in Northwest Arkansas.

These forecasts help identify potential system deficiencies, evaluate alternative investment strategies, and assess the impacts of transportation and land use policies.

The travel demand model (TDM) supports data-driven decision-making, ensuring that the MTP promotes an efficient, equitable, and sustainable transportation system that meets the region's long-term mobility and growth needs.

In addition, the model supports the evaluation of proposed roadway projects, helps evaluate potential impacts of proposed development projects and supports other studies of the region, subareas, corridors and other planning activities. ARDOT also uses the travel model to support studies related to improvements on the state highway systems in the region.

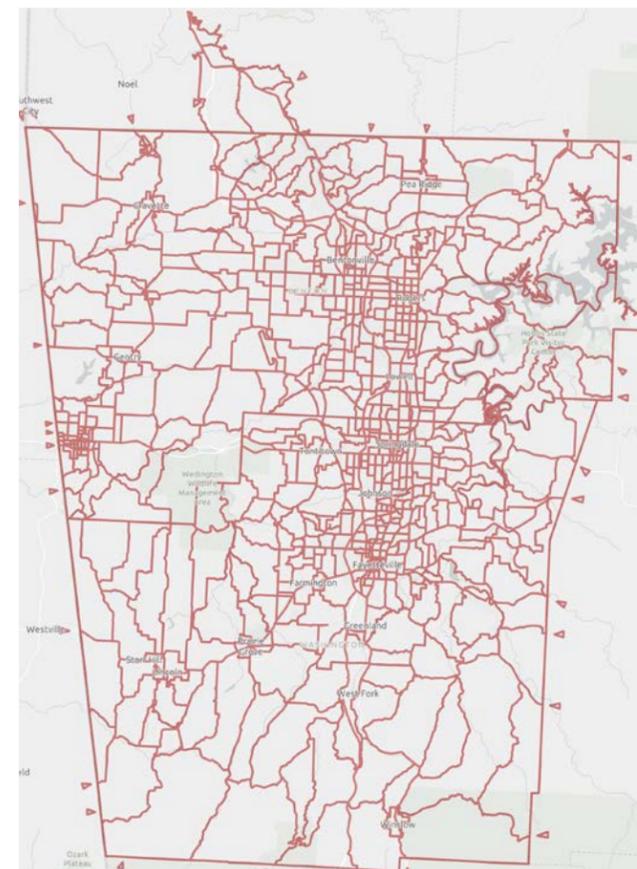
TDM Model Structure



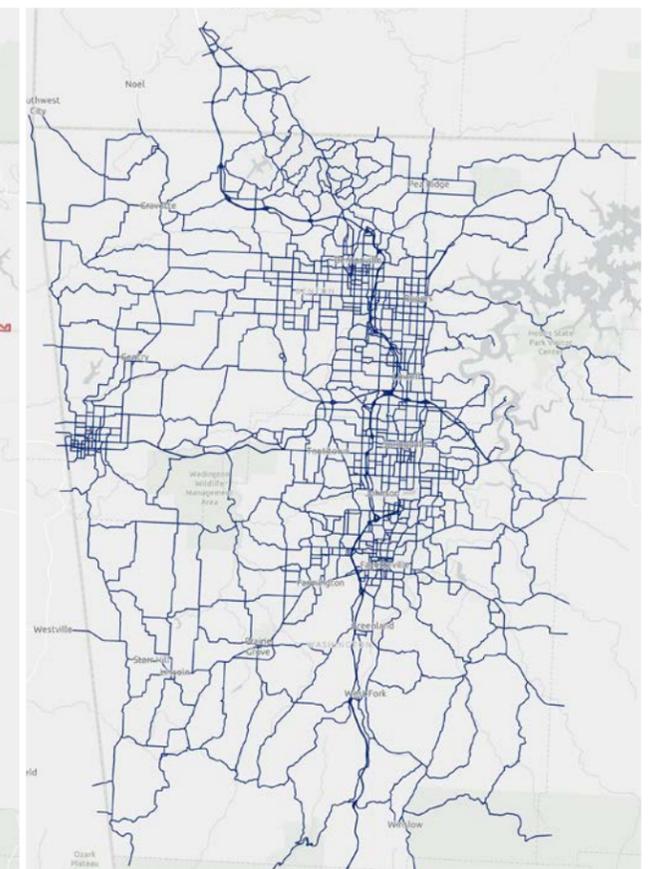
In 2024-2025 the Northwest Arkansas Travel Forecasting Model was updated with the development of a new base year - 2022 - and forecast scenario years 2030, 2040 and 2050. In addition, three land use scenarios for the 2050 forecast year were developed, which are discussed in detail in the following section.

The travel demand model update was developed in tandem with the Transit Alternatives Study and it added three high capacity transit alternatives – Bus Rapid Transit, Commuter Rail, and Light Rail to support the study and model potential future new mode choices for the region.

TDM Model TAZs



TDM Model 2050 Network



The NWA travel demand forecasting area includes Washington and Benton Counties in Arkansas and the McDonald County, Missouri portion of the MPA. This area includes **701 internal TAZs (Transportation Analysis Zones)**, of which **369 in Benton County, 326 in Washington County and 6 in McDonald County**. The road network includes roads classified as **Interstate, Arterials, and Collectors**.

The main model steps are **Trip Generation, Destination Choice, Mode Choice and Assignment** (both highway and transit). There are several initial steps, like setting the initial speed and capacity of highway links based on area type and determining the number of households in each zone that own 0, 1, 2 or 3+ cars, that are executed prior to the main steps. In addition, the NWA TDM models external trips, special generator trips and truck/commercial vehicle trips.

TYPES OF TRIPS

In the NWA Travel Forecasting Model, trips are classified by trip purpose. Broadly, trips are grouped into the following purposes:

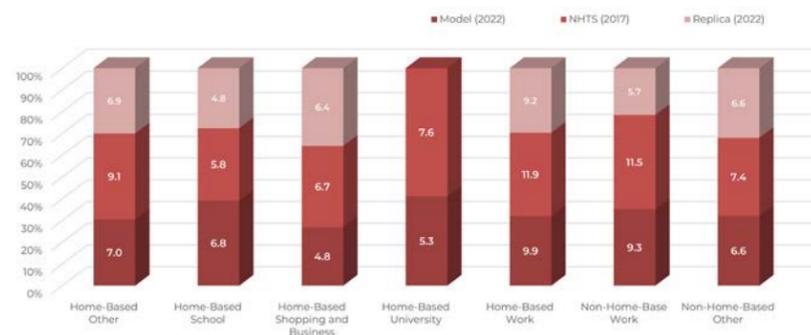
Home-Based Work (HBW): These trips are from home to work and from work back to home. They occur more in peak hours and are a large component of congestion.

Home-Based Shop/Personal Business (HBSB): These trips begin or end at home and cover the range of other trips that people make - shopping, visiting friends, or appointments.

Non-Home-Based (NHB): These are the trips made while people are out of their residence, either at work (e.g., a trip to lunch), or between stops while running errands (e.g., a trip from the grocery store to the cleaners). Generally, given their nature, non-home-based trips are shorter than home-based trips and are often made at off-peak travel times.

In addition to these trips, the model also includes the following types of trips: **Home-Based School (HBSC), Home-Based University/College (HBU) and Home-Based Other (HBO) as well as Non-Home-Based Work (NHBW).**

TRIP PURPOSE (OBSERVED VS. MODELED) - NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD TRAVEL SURVEY (NHTS) AND REPLICA DATA FOR COMPARISON



BASE YEAR MODEL (2022) VALIDATION

The model was updated to a 2022 base year and calibrated using observed data to ensure that all model components continued to produce highway and transit assignments consistent with actual travel patterns in 2022.

Some of these validation/calibration data included vehicles miles traveled observed/ modeled data.

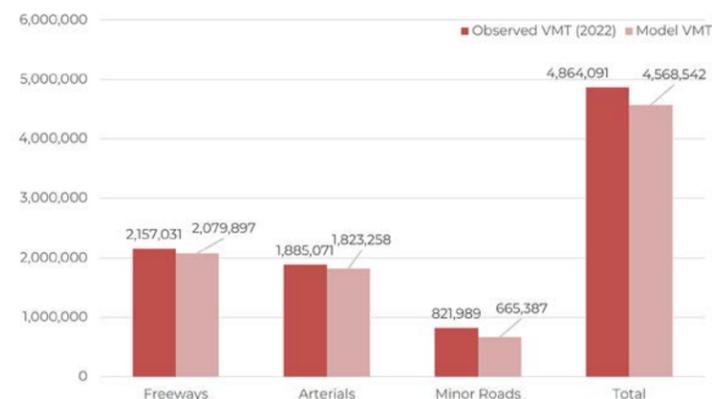
2050 FORECAST YEARS

As Northwest Arkansas continues to grow, the way communities plan and manage that growth will play a defining role in shaping the region's future mobility, livability, and resilience.

To understand the transportation implications of different development patterns, the region uses travel demand modeling (TDM) to forecast how growth affects roadway congestion, vehicle miles traveled (VMT), transit demand, and accessibility.

By applying TDM to alternative growth scenarios, planners can evaluate the performance of the transportation system under different land-use assumptions and identify where investments in roads, transit, and multimodal infrastructure will have the greatest impact. These scenarios are therefore not predictions but planning tools that illustrate the interplay between growth patterns, land use, and the future transportation network.

VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED BY FACILITY TYPE (OBSERVED VS. MODELED)

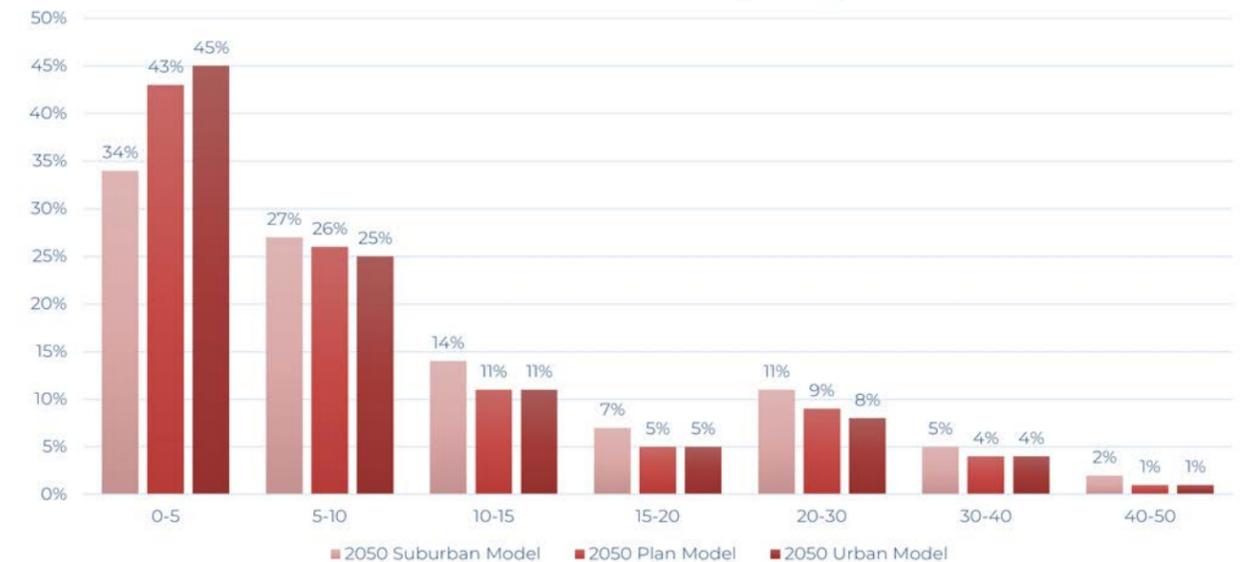


THREE LANDUSE GROWTH SCENARIOS FOR 2050

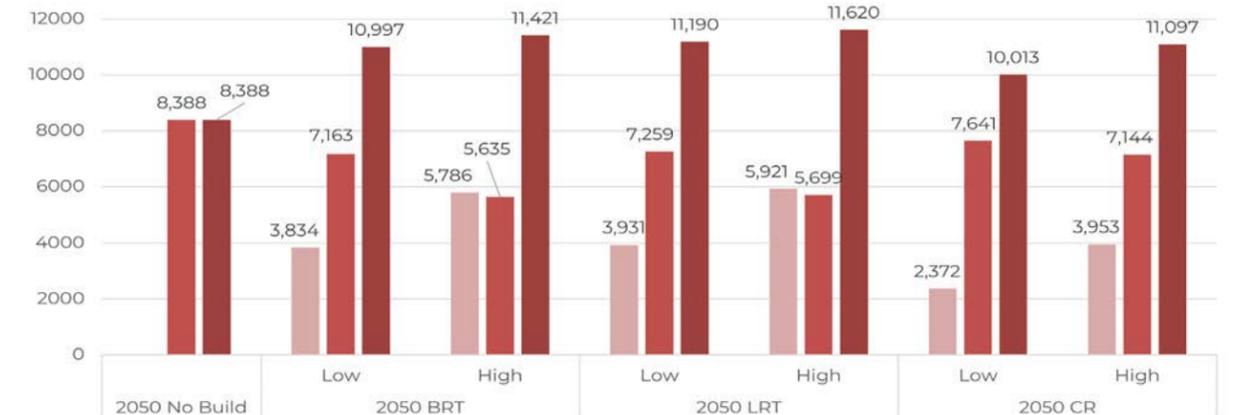
Three distinct growth scenarios—Planned Growth, Suburban Growth, and Urban Growth—were developed to illustrate how different development approaches can shape population and employment growth and guide investment in the transportation system. Comparing these scenarios provides a framework for evaluating the region's growth trajectory, assessing alignment with local and regional plans, and identifying the infrastructure, policies, and strategies needed to support a growing population while maintaining an efficient, connected, and resilient transportation system.

2050 forecast years are based on fiscally constrained projects that can reasonably be expected to be funded with Federal-aid funds during the 25-year planning period. This is determined by estimates of Federal-aid funds that can reasonably be expected to come to the area given the area's highway network, urban area, population, etc. These estimates are provided by ARDOT and MoDOT and are not limits, nor are they *guarantees of funding*. They are conservative, reasonable estimates of future funding to guide development of the **Forward 2050 RTP**. The *Fiscally Unconstrained List* includes projects not limited to the estimated available funding.

HOME BASED WORK TRIP LENGTH FOR 2050 MODEL SCENARIOS



AVERAGE WEEKDAY DAILY PASSENGER TRIPS MODELED FOR TRANSIT, BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT), LIGHT RAIL (LRT) AND COMMUTER RAIL (CR)



2050 GROWTH SCENARIOS

PLANNED GROWTH (NODAL DEVELOPMENT – “BASELINE” SCENARIO)

The Planned Growth scenario reflects the collective vision embodied in adopted regional and local plans. It emphasizes compact, mixed-use, and connected communities, with city and town centers serving as focal points for living, working, shopping, and recreation. In this scenario, transportation infrastructure is aligned with land use, providing safe and efficient connections through roads, transit, and trails.

Key features of Planned Growth include:

- **Mixed-Use Development:** Encouraging a balance of residential, commercial, and recreational uses to reduce trip lengths and promote transportation choice.
- **Transit-Oriented Development (TOD):** Focusing growth near existing and planned transit corridors to strengthen regional transit viability and reduce auto dependence.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Preserving open spaces, promoting green building standards, and incorporating nature-based solutions to protect environmental quality and community character.

Planned Growth serves as the baseline scenario for TDM, providing a reference point to measure system performance, identify areas for improvement, and validate policy directions.

SUBURBAN GROWTH (STATUS QUO DEVELOPMENT)

The Suburban Growth scenario represents a continuation of the region’s prevailing development patterns over the past several decades. Characterized by outward expansion, low-density residential subdivisions, and automobile-oriented commercial areas, this pattern reflects a “status quo” approach to growth. While suburban development has supported housing availability and economic expansion, it also presents long-term challenges for transportation and the environment.

Larger geographic footprints require more extensive roadway networks and public service extensions, increasing maintenance costs and creating barriers to efficient multimodal travel.

Key characteristics and implications of Suburban Growth include:

- **Increased Automobile Dependence:** Dispersed land uses result in longer commutes and limited travel options beyond the private vehicle.



Photo Courtesy of Groundwork

- **Infrastructure Strain:** Extending and maintaining infrastructure to support low-density growth places greater fiscal pressure on local governments and public utilities.
- **Environmental Impacts:** Expanding impervious surfaces and encroachment on natural areas contribute to habitat loss, water quality impacts, and increased emissions.

Under this scenario, congestion levels and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) are expected to increase significantly, highlighting the tradeoffs of uncoordinated or sprawling development patterns.

URBAN GROWTH (HIGH-CAPACITY TRANSIT SUPPORTIVE DEVELOPMENT)

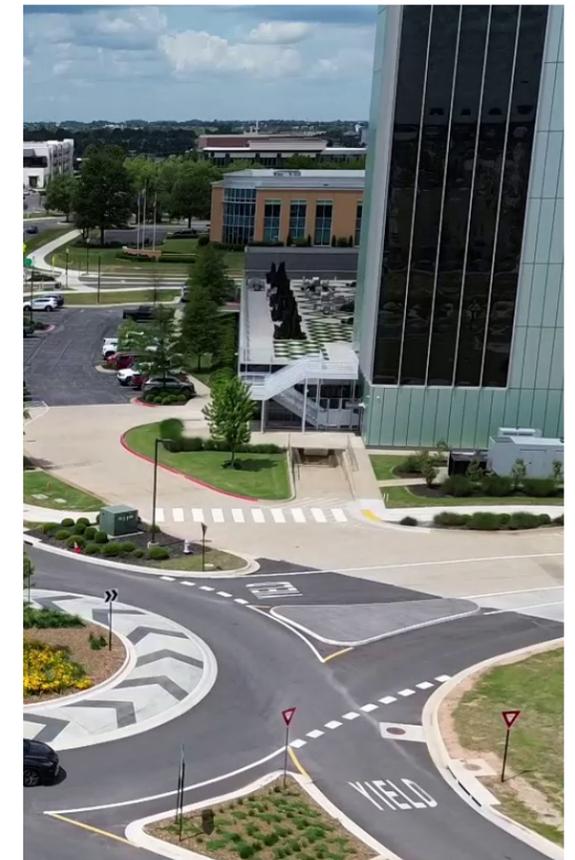
The Urban Growth scenario envisions a more compact regional form that supports the introduction and success of high-capacity transit (HCT) systems. Development is concentrated in existing urban centers and along major transit corridors, creating a regional framework of dense, mixed-use activity nodes connected by frequent and reliable transit service. This approach emphasizes accessibility over distance—ensuring that residents can easily reach employment, education, and recreation opportunities without depending solely on cars. Urban Growth patterns also encourage active transportation, enhance the viability of public transit, and preserve the region’s natural landscapes by reducing outward sprawl.

Key benefits of Urban Growth include:

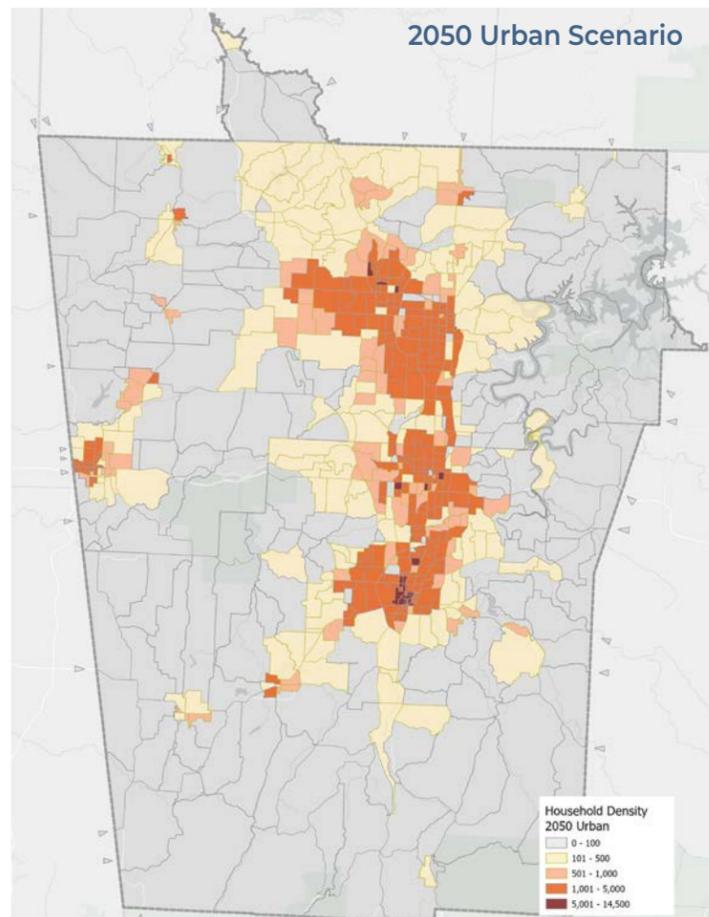
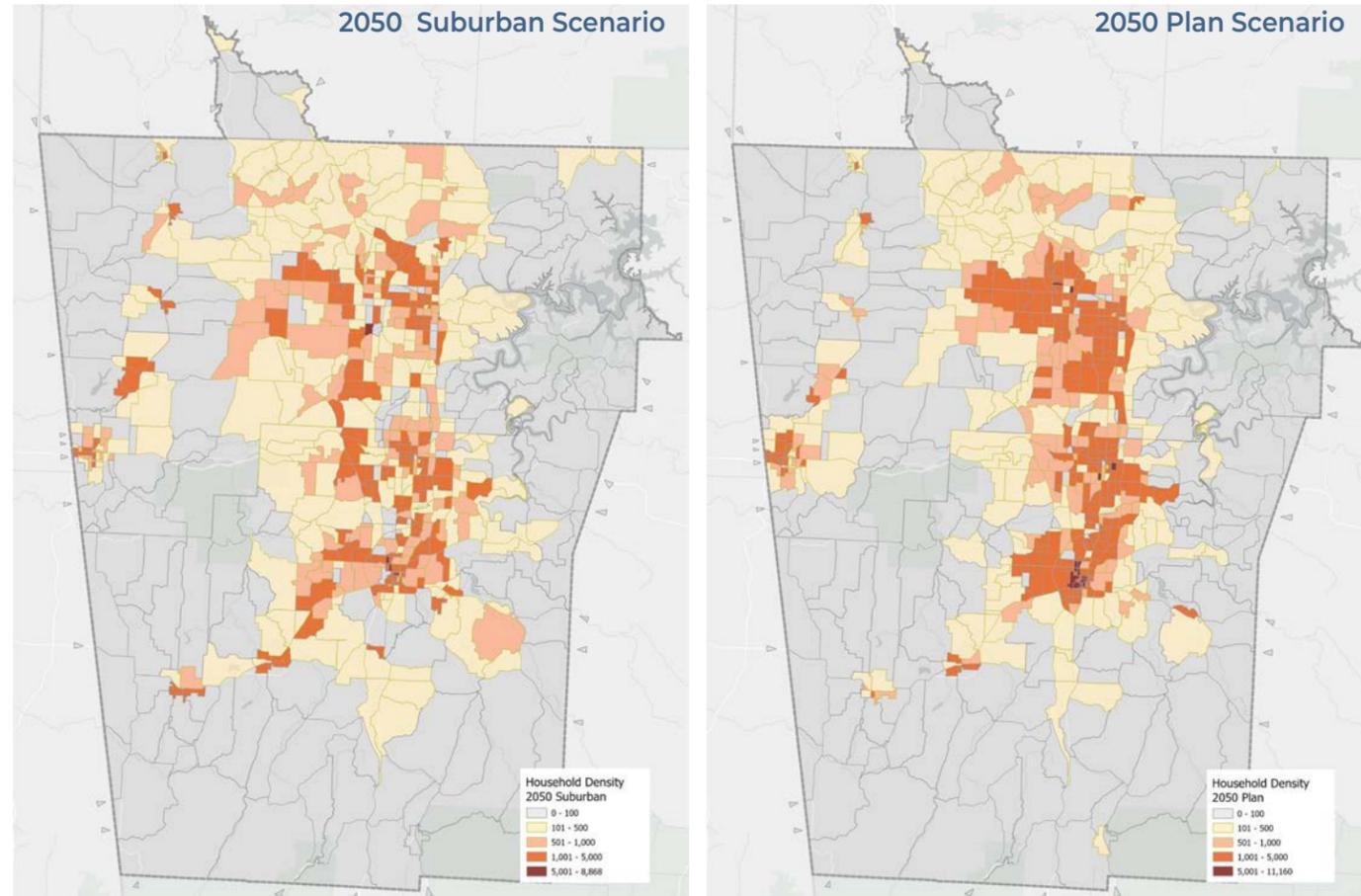
- **Reduced Traffic Congestion:** Concentrating development along transit corridors provides viable alternatives to personal vehicle use and reduces pressure on major highways.
- **Improved Accessibility:** Compact, mixed-use areas enable more people to live near jobs, schools, and services, improving access for all travel modes.
- **Sustainability:** Concentrating development in urban areas minimizes land consumption, protects open space, and reduces carbon emissions through increased transit use and shorter trip lengths.

Northwest Arkansas is not a collection of isolated towns. Its strength lies in its interconnectedness. The inability of workers to reliably commute between Springdale, Fayetteville, Bentonville, and Rogers limits the available workforce and stifles economic growth.

Public Comment from the Forward 2050 Survey



2050 Growth Scenarios - Household Density



The *Forward 2050* long-range plan incorporates the three future land-use scenarios to assess the performance of proposed transportation projects. Consistent with practices in other MPOs, the goal is to understand how different development patterns may influence, and be influenced by, long-range transportation investments.

NWARPC developed the baseline 2050 forecasts using household and employment growth rates derived from the Arkansas Economic Development Institute (AEDI) and Woods & Poole.

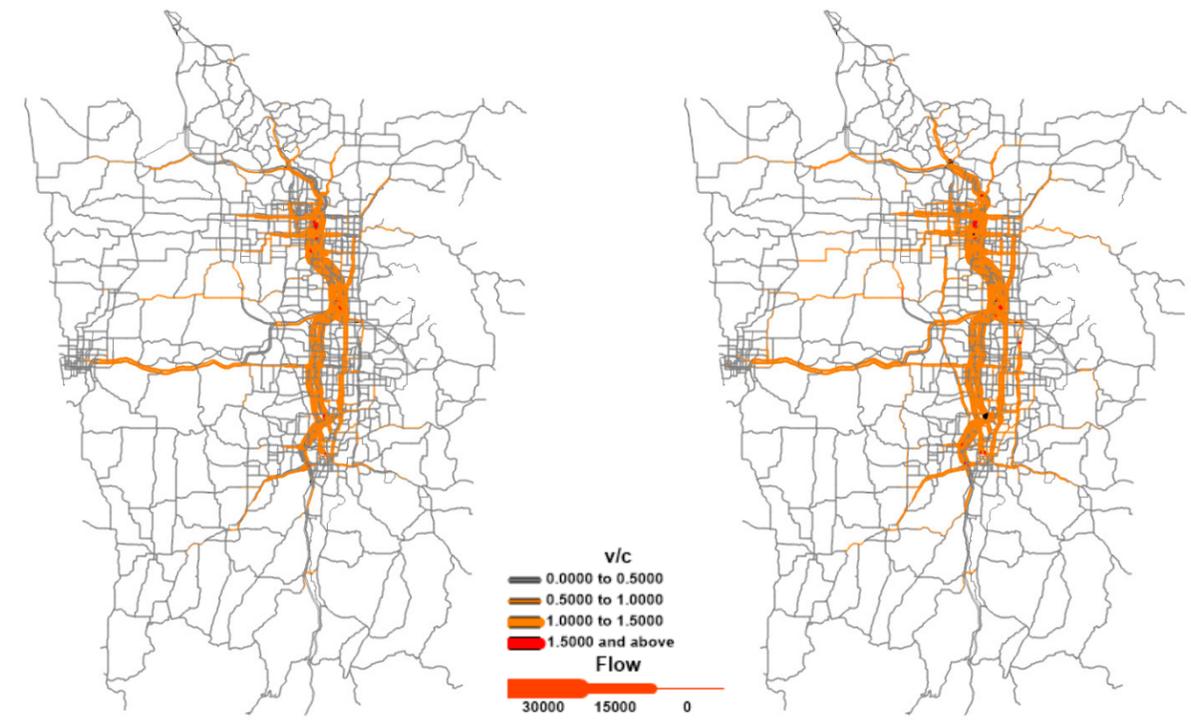
Employment and Household adjustments used separate methods due to different desired behavior, as well as differing initial distributions. The methodologies below conserved total households and total employment across all TAZs in the region while re-distributing new employment and households to the target TAZs for the Urban or Suburban scenarios.

The two scenarios were identified as follows:

Urban Scenario: Assumes a greater share of household and employment growth occurs within the region's urban core.

Suburban Scenario: Assumes a greater share of household and employment growth occurs in suburban areas of the region.

As their names imply, these two scenarios represent divergent growth paths relative to the baseline 2050 forecast. In the Urban Scenario, the urban corridors receive more household and employment growth in 2050, while areas outside of these corridors receive little or no household and employment growth.



2050 Volume/Capacity - AM

2050 Volume/Capacity - PM



Revitalized Emma Avenue in Downtown Springdale

Emma Avenue is evolving into a dynamic center, blending its rich history with modern urban design, attracting new residents, businesses, and visitors, and creating a strong sense of place. Emma Ave. is transforming into a vibrant, mixed-use destination with significant public/private investment, new housing (like the VIA Emma or Big Emma projects), retail, improved infrastructure (including the Razorback Greenway), and iconic business revivals. These investments are all guided by the 2022 Downtown Springdale Master Plan which provides the roadmap to create a walkable, historic, and modern community hub by focusing on housing, parking, art, and parks (like Luther George Park), and connecting history with future aspirations.



Mixed Used Development in Uptown Fayetteville

USING SCENARIOS TO GUIDE REGIONAL DECISIONS

Together, these scenarios provide a lens for understanding how land use and transportation decisions interact. They demonstrate that the shape of growth—not just the pace—will determine the region’s ability to manage congestion, maintain affordability, protect natural systems, and deliver mobility choices.

By comparing outcomes across the three scenarios, planners and policymakers can evaluate whether the region’s Planned Growth trajectory can support a high-capacity transit system, identify where infrastructure investments yield the greatest benefit, and explore how coordinated planning can sustain the region’s high quality of life as it continues to grow.

Chapter 03

FROM NEEDS TO SOLUTIONS: STRATEGIES FOR THE 2050 NETWORK

This chapter identifies the key transportation needs of Northwest Arkansas and presents targeted strategies to address them over the next 20+ years.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

Northwest Arkansas faces a complex set of transportation challenges, including congestion, safety risks, gaps in multimodal options, freight movement pressures, and evolving land use and development patterns. This chapter translates those challenges into actionable strategies designed to improve mobility, enhance community well-being, and support long-term economic growth across the region. By linking needs directly to strategies, it demonstrates how investments can advance **Forward 2050** goals and objectives, ensuring that every effort contributes to a safe, connected and resilient transportation system.



MOVING 2050 GOALS FORWARD

G1 *Implement a Safe, Efficient, and Reliable Multimodal Transportation System*

G2 *Advance Plans and Policies that Enable Transportation Choice, Respect the Natural and Human Environment, and Enhance Quality of Life*

G1 *Foster Regional Collaboration and Reinforce Economic Competitiveness*

OVERVIEW OF THE FRAMEWORK: ROOTED IN REGIONAL PLANS

These strategies build on the region's adopted plans and studies, creating a coordinated, data-driven framework that integrates safety, mobility, environmental stewardship, technology, and resilience.

Leveraging existing efforts helps align regional priorities, avoid duplication, and ensure every investment advances *Forward 2050* objectives.

FRAMEWORK CATEGORIES



SAFETY AND SYSTEM INTEGRATION

Strategies in this category emphasize building safer, more connected, and multimodal networks. They are informed by regional initiatives that set design standards, expand walking and biking access, improve transit options, and strengthen Vision Zero goals.



OPERATIONS AND CONGESTION MANAGEMENT

These strategies focus on improving system reliability and managing congestion through operational enhancements and new technologies. They are supported by plans that identify and prioritize performance-based solutions for traffic flow, safety, and system efficiency.



SECURITY AND SYSTEM RESILIENCE

Strategies here strengthen the region's ability to prepare for and respond to flooding, severe weather, and other hazards, while also addressing ecological protection and cybersecurity. They draw from plans that integrate environmental safeguards with infrastructure and system operations.

REGIONAL STRATEGY GUIDES

- NWA Vision Zero Comprehensive Safety Action Plan (2023)
- NWA Regional Complete Streets Design Guide (2025)
- WalkBikeNWA: Regional Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan (2015)
- ConnectNWA: Transit Development Plan (2021)
- Transit Alternatives Study (2026)
- Razorback Greenway Corridor Plan (2026)

- Congestion Management Process (CMP) (2022)
- Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) Plan (2023)
- Regional Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Architecture (2023)

- Energy & Environment Innovation (EEI) Plan (2025)
- NWA Open Space Plan (2016)
- Cave Springs Area Karst Resource Conservation Study (2015)
- Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) Plan (2023)
- Regional Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Architecture (2023)
- Razorback Greenway Corridor Plan (2026)

STRATEGY EVALUATION

To ensure strategies deliver broad and lasting benefits, each is evaluated against four key impact areas. This framework ensures that each strategy not only addresses immediate operational or mobility needs but also advances the broader vision of a safe, accessible, resilient, and economically vibrant Northwest Arkansas

LAND USE AND COMMUNITY FORM

Supports complete compact, walkable, transit-oriented development, diverse and affordable housing, and mixed-use neighborhoods (advancing MTP objectives 2.01, 2.02, 2.03, 1.06–1.10)

ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

Reduces emissions, protects air and water quality, improves energy efficiency, and enhances the region's ability to withstand hazards (advancing objectives 2.04–2.05, 1.04).

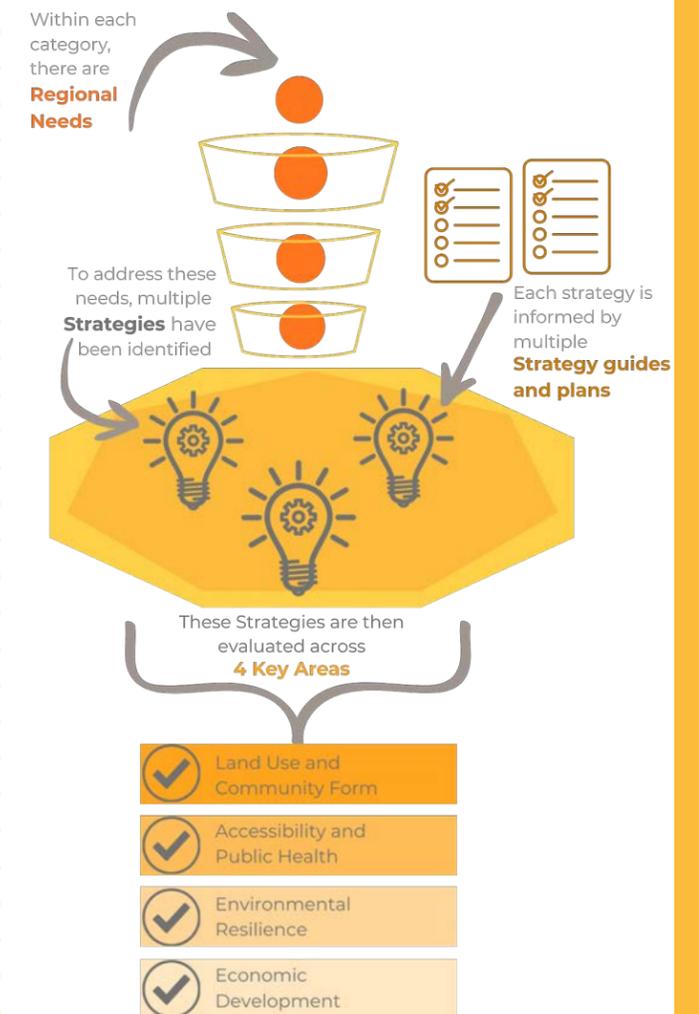
ACCESSIBILITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Improves access to jobs, services, education, and recreation, particularly for underserved populations (including seniors, youth, low-income residents, and people with disabilities), and promotes safe, active transportation, (advancing objectives 1.07, 2.06–2.07, 1.11).

ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS AND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Improves freight and commuter reliability, supports business competitiveness, and promotes sustainable economic growth through responsible growth management and efficient use of resources (addressing objectives 3.01–3.05, 3.02).

HOW THIS CHAPTER WORKS...





REGIONAL NEEDS & STRATEGIES

Northwest Arkansas is experiencing persistent safety challenges and uneven multimodal connectivity that limit mobility choices and put vulnerable users at risk. Despite progress with the Razorback Greenway and ongoing city-led initiatives, existing regional roadways largely remain auto-oriented, and gaps in walking, biking, and transit infrastructure continue to impede safe access.

REGIONAL NEEDS



Reducing Traffic Fatalities and Serious Injuries

NWA averages more than 40 roadway deaths annually.

Vision Zero efforts are grounded in the **Safe Systems Approach**, which emphasizes that no loss of life is acceptable and calls for proactive and systemic safety improvements, ensuring that when collisions occur that they do not result in death or serious injury.



Connecting Safe Multimodal Infrastructure

Gaps in sidewalks, trails, and bike facilities reduce safe access to destinations, particularly where highways and arterials act as barriers.

The **Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan** highlights the need to extend the Razorback Greenway spine and build on and off-street community connectors, expanding the region's access to the Greenway and supporting mode shift toward active transportation.



Complete Streets Integration

Many regional corridors lack safe crossings, bike lanes, or context-sensitive designs.

The **Complete Streets Design Guide** empowers communities to implement street design standards that accommodate all travelers regardless of mode or trip purpose.



Network Accessibility

Underserved populations, including seniors, youth, low-income, and people with disabilities, face disproportionate safety and access barriers.

All supporting plans emphasize strategies that can work together to improve access to safe and affordable travel choices.



Connected Transit

Many residents lack safe, convenient options to reach transit stops, limiting the effectiveness of regional transit.

ConnectNWA highlights that safe and reliable first-/last-mile connections are critical to making transit viable, requiring integrated bike, walk, and street network improvements.



SAFETY AND SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

REGIONAL STRATEGIES

1 Adopt Vision Zero and Safe System Approach Practices

- Prioritize safety over speed through appropriate roadway design utilizing traffic calming elements, speed management, and safety focused intersection improvements.
- Leverage crash data and high-injury network analyses to prioritize investments in projects that demonstrably improve safety and reduce fatalities and serious injuries

2 Implement Complete Streets Across the Region

- Prioritize context-sensitive design solutions that reflect urban, suburban, and rural needs.
- Apply the *NWA Regional Complete Streets Design Guide* to ensure that new and reconstructed roadways safely accommodate people of all ages and abilities, whether they are walking, biking, using transit, or driving.

3 Expand the Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Network

- Extend the Razorback Greenway and implement catalyst projects from the *WalkBikeNWA Plan* to connect neighborhoods, schools, employment centers, and regional destinations.
- Implement the Targeted Bicycling Priority Network projects outlined in the *NWA Bike Infrastructure Plan*, connecting key corridors in the region to specifically accommodate active transportation.
- Provide safe crossings at major barriers (e.g. I-49, highways) and integrate multimodal facilities into roadway resurfacing and reconstruction projects.

4 Advance Transit Integration and First-/Last-Mile Access

- Coordinate with *ConnectNWA* to close gaps in the multimodal network by providing sidewalks, bike facilities, and safe crossings at transit stops and mobility hubs.
- Deploy wayfinding, real-time information, and Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) tools to improve transit access and encourage transit use by providing a more seamless and convenient experience.



Source: NWA Vision Zero Safety Action Plan



Source: NWA Regional Complete Streets Design Guide

MOVING 2050 GOALS FORWARD

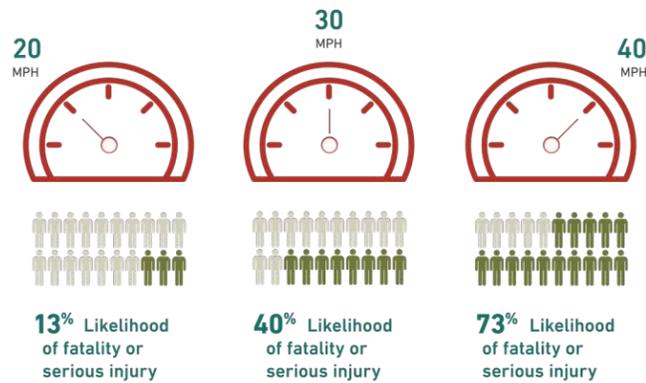
<p>G1 Supports Objectives: 1.03 (safety), 1.04 (resilient), 1.10 (complete streets)</p>	<p>Supports Objectives: 1.01 (preserve system), 1.06–1.10 (multimodal connectivity, complete streets)</p>	<p>Supports Objectives: 1.06–1.09 (bike/ped safety, multimodal connectivity, access to centers)</p>	<p>Supports Objectives: 1.07–1.11 (transit access, affordability, multimodal integration)</p>
<p>G2 2.02 (context-sensitive design), 2.03 (healthy living)</p>	<p>2.01 (land use integration), 2.02–2.03 (context-sensitive, active travel)</p>	<p>2.01 (land use/housing), 2.03 (active living), 2.05 (natural infrastructure connections)</p>	<p>2.01 (housing and TOD), 2.06–2.07 (access & engagement)</p>
<p>G3 3.03–3.05 (coordination in safety planning)</p>	<p>3.04–3.05 (regional partnerships in design standards)</p>	<p>3.01 (partnerships for trail investments), 3.04–3.05 (regional planning)</p>	<p>3.02 (workforce access & economic vitality), 3.03 (coordination)</p>



SAFETY AND SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

5 Promote Accessibility

- Prioritize investments in areas with higher crash rates, lower car ownership, and underserved populations, including seniors, youth, and low-income residents.
- Incorporate universal design and accessibility standards in all multimodal projects.



6 Foster Collaboration in Performance-Based, Data-Driven Planning

- Align implementation through NWARPC and local governments to ensure coordinated deployment of *Vision Zero*, *Complete Streets*, *ConnectNWA*, and *Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian* initiatives.
- Monitor progress with a multimodal “report card” including metrics for safety, access, and mode share indicators.

Pedestrian vulnerability when struck by a vehicle at this speed

Data Citation: Tefft, B.C. (2011). *Impact Speed and a Pedestrian's Risk of Severe Injury or Death* (Technical Report). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

Source: NWA Vision Zero Safety Action Plan



MOVING 2050 GOALS FORWARD

G1 Supports Objectives: 1.07–1.11 (mobility options, public transit)	Supports Objectives: 1.05 (adoption of new technologies for safety & access)
G2 2.06–2.07 (access and engagement)	2.04 (data-driven resilience), 2.07 (community engagement)
G3 3.01 (partnerships, shared investments)	3.01–3.05 (regional coordination, shared goals, joint planning)



AT A GLANCE: WHY SAFETY AND SYSTEM INTEGRATION MATTER

- **Safety First:** More than 40 people lose their lives on Northwest Arkansas roads each year. Vision Zero and Complete Streets strategies aim to make roads safe for everyone—whether walking, biking, riding transit, or driving.
- **Transportation Choices for All:** A connected multimodal network means families, seniors, and people with disabilities have more affordable and reliable options to reach jobs, schools, healthcare, and daily needs.
- **Healthy Communities:** Walking and biking infrastructure encourages active lifestyles, reduces traffic stress, and improves public health.
- **Stronger Economy:** Safer, more reliable transportation supports workforce access, freight efficiency, and the region's overall competitiveness.
- **Future Ready:** Integrated, multimodal planning ensures that housing, transit, and community design grow together – creating vibrant, connected neighborhoods.



Takeaway: A safe, well-connected multimodal transportation system does more than move people – it protects lives, promotes healthier, more active communities, and builds a stronger, more resilient future for Northwest Arkansas



EVALUATION OF STRATEGY IMPACTS

The regional strategies for safety and multimodal system integration were evaluated across four key areas: land use and community form (including housing), accessibility and public health, environmental resilience, and economic development. This evaluation highlights how investments in implementing recommendations of the *NWA Vision Zero Safety Action Plan, Complete Streets Design Guidelines, ConnectNWA*, and *Walk Bike NWA* create broad benefits that extend beyond safety alone.



LAND USE AND COMMUNITY FORM

Safety-focused and multimodal strategies encourage complete, compact, connected, and transit-oriented development. *Complete Streets* designs and expanded bike/pedestrian networks integrate transportation with land use, reducing barriers created by major corridors and linking neighborhoods to activity centers. By improving access to multimodal options, these strategies also support diverse and affordable housing opportunities near jobs, schools, and transit hubs.



ACCESSIBILITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Expanding safe walking, biking, and transit connections improves access for all users, particularly underserved populations such as seniors, youth, low-income residents, and people with disabilities. *Vision Zero* strategies reduce crash risk and severity, while multimodal infrastructure, in the form of *Complete Streets*, promotes active travel that supports healthier lifestyles. Enhancing first-/last-mile connections to transit expands access to employment, healthcare, and essential services.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

Safety and multimodal investments reduce vehicle dependence and encourage shifts toward more sustainable modes of travel, lowering emissions and energy use. Integrated bicycle, pedestrian, and transit networks also reduce the need for costly roadway expansions by managing increases in demand for vehicular travel. Complete Streets and green infrastructure designs improve stormwater management, mitigate urban heat effects, and enhance the region's resilience to flooding and extreme weather.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Safe, connected multimodal systems expand workforce access to major employment centers, strengthen downtown vitality, and improve quality of life—key factors in regional competitiveness. Expanded trail and bicycle/pedestrian networks also support tourism and recreation, while improved safety reduces economic losses from crashes and congestion. Collaboration across jurisdictions, supported by regional policies, ensures that multimodal investments generate lasting economic value for both businesses and residents.

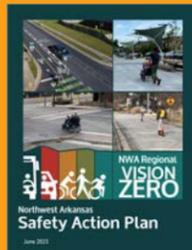


Together, these strategies demonstrate measurable progress toward the region's goals—strengthening collaboration, advancing equity and accessibility, and guiding investments where they make the greatest impact. Through continued evaluation and partnership, Northwest Arkansas is building a transportation system that delivers lasting value for its communities and economy.



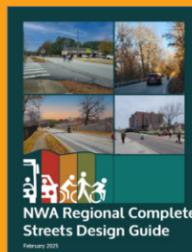
SAFETY AND SYSTEMS INTEGRATION

STRATEGY GUIDES (REGIONAL)



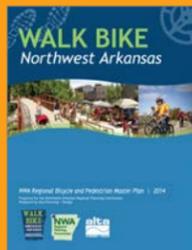
NWA Vision Zero Comprehensive Safety Action Plan (2023)

The Vision Zero Plan guides regional efforts to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries through data-driven safety improvements. Using crash and high-injury network analysis, it prioritizes roadway design changes, traffic calming, and speed management that protect all users, particularly people walking and biking. The plan advances Complete Streets through a multimodal street typology and design strategies that improve separation of modes and system connectivity, while centering equity by directing investments to communities with the greatest safety needs.



NWA Regional Complete Streets Design Guide (2025)

The Complete Streets Design Guide provides context-sensitive guidance to ensure roadways safely serve all users—people walking, biking, riding transit, and driving—across urban, suburban, and rural settings. It promotes integrating Complete Streets principles into local plans, development standards, and maintenance programs to expand facilities for alternative transportation and strengthen multimodal connectivity. The guide emphasizes ADA-accessible design for sidewalks, crossings, and transit stops, and advances safety by encouraging physical separation of modes and roadway designs that reduce the severity of crashes for vulnerable users.



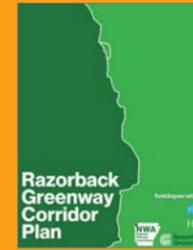
WalkBikeNWA: Regional Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan (2015)

WalkBikeNWA guides the expansion of safe, connected walking and biking networks across Northwest Arkansas to improve access to destinations and support multimodal travel. The plan uses transit-informed demand analysis and project evaluation criteria to identify high-impact infrastructure, prioritizing connections to schools, parks, shopping centers, and underserved communities. It establishes a regional network of on- and off-road trails while creating context-specific community action plans that advance the broader vision of active transportation throughout the region.



NWA Bike Infrastructure Plan (2019)

The Bike Infrastructure Plan guides the implementation of safe, connected bicycle facilities by combining best practices with local corridor knowledge to fill critical network gaps. It prioritizes high-impact routes that provide safe, reliable first- and last-mile connections for transit users and strategically links key destinations—including downtowns, parks, employment centers, and existing bike networks—to support a regional shift toward bicycling.



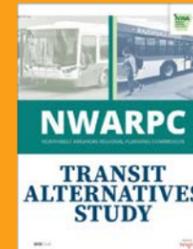
Razorback Greenway Corridor Plan (2026)

The Razorback Greenway Corridor Plan establishes a shared vision for how the Greenway functions as an active transportation spine, public space, and organizing element for growth in Northwest Arkansas. It identifies opportunities to expand the bicycle network, enhance connectivity, and support a regional shift toward multimodal travel.



ConnectNWA: Transit Development Plan (2021)

Creates a “Blueprint” for improving and expanding transit services provided by Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) and Razorback Transit (RT) in the Northwest Arkansas Region.



Transit Alternative Study (2026)

Assesses alternative transit modes and examines the benefits and costs of fixed rail, bus rapid transit, and light rail to determine the best method of rapid transit for Northwest Arkansas.



Ozark Regional Transit Bus Stop Enhancements Plan (2022)

Evaluates the existing conditions of bus stops throughout the region and highlights a path forward towards improving the accessibility and comfortability of bus stops for riders.

Razorback Transit Bus Stop Enhancement Plan (2025)

Assesses current conditions, gaps in infrastructure and amenities, and formulates strategies to improve rider comfort, safety, accessibility, and convenience.

NWA Heritage Trail Plan (2020)

Describes a regional network of proposed bicycle and pedestrian facilities in Northwest Arkansas which link historic routes including the Butterfield Stagecoach Route, Trail of Tears, and Civil War trails into connected multi-modal corridors to promote heritage, recreation, culture, health, and community.

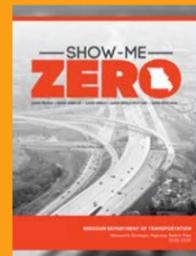


STRATEGY GUIDES (STATE)



Arkansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan (2022)

Outlines the Arkansas Department of Transportation's approach to reduce serious injuries and deaths by embracing the Safe System approach, applying Safe System principles and making progress toward zero deaths on Arkansas Highways.



Show Me Zero: Driving Missouri Towards Safer Roads (2021)

Establishes strategies for different groups of people including businesses, families, cities and counties to work collectively towards zero deaths on Missouri roads. Encourages public works and engineering departments to adopt a "safe system" approach.



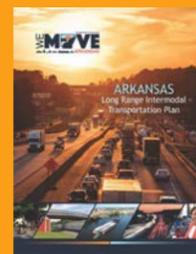
Arkansas Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment (2023)

Evaluates the safety performance of all public roads in the state for pedestrians, bicyclists, other cyclists, people using personal conveyances (e.g., skateboards, scooters), and highway workers on foot in work zones. It provides a statewide perspective to guide policies and infrastructure improvements that protect the most at-risk road users.



Missouri Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment (2023)

Analyzes intersections, roadway segments, and high-crash locations statewide, evaluating factors such as equity, unhoused pedestrians, transit access, and lighting. It also reviews proven safety countermeasures to guide strategies that protect vulnerable road users across the state.



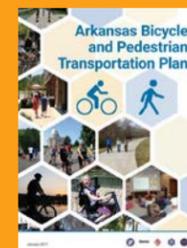
Arkansas Long Range Intermodal Transportation Plan (2017)

Emphasizes incorporating multimodal options into all project development and continuing capital support for transit vehicle purchases, guiding the state's long-term transportation investments.



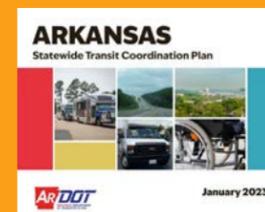
Missouri's Transportation Long Range Plan (2018) (Currently being updated)

Prioritizes safety for all travelers, regardless of mode, and emphasizes expanding transportation choices through strategic investment in multimodal facilities.



ARDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan (2017)

Promotes policies and strategies to achieve zero pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities while advancing a statewide network that supports bicycling and walking for transportation and recreation, strengthening the economic and social vitality of Arkansas communities.



Arkansas Statewide Transit Coordination Plan (2023)

Makes recommendations to meet the transportation needs of seniors, persons with disabilities, and people with limited mobility options.

ARDOT Carbon Reduction Strategy (2023)

Emphasizes the role of an integrated multimodal transportation system in reducing carbon emissions, highlighting bicycle and pedestrian safety, planning, and network expansion, as well as strengthening public transit. The strategy identifies projects and supportive measures that advance walking, biking, and transit to create a lower-emission transportation system across Arkansas.

MoDOT Carbon Reduction Strategy (2023)

Identifies strategies geared toward reducing on-road highway carbon dioxide emissions by prioritizing non-motorized transportation. It identifies strategies and investments in walking and biking facilities to provide safe, accessible options for short trips, supporting a shift toward lower-emission travel across the state.

Arkansas State Rail Plan (2025)

Rail is one of the safest modes of travel for freight and passenger transportation. The plan highlights opportunities for improved system safety such as increased capacity, improvement and elimination of at-grade crossings, system enhancements, and improving track quality.

Missouri Sate Rail Plan (2012) (Currently being updated)

Emphasizes rail as a safe mode for freight and passenger travel, promoting system improvements such as increased capacity, upgraded track quality, and elimination of at-grade crossings. The plan also supports efficient passenger movement and encourages intermodal connectivity across the state.



REGIONAL NEEDS & STRATEGIES

Northwest Arkansas's rapid population growth, increasing freight demand, recurring congestion, and persistent safety challenges are placing unprecedented demands on the transportation system. To address these pressures, the region must maximize the performance of existing infrastructure, expand multimodal options, and coordinate across jurisdictions

REGIONAL NEEDS



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

System Performance and Reliability

Congestion on I-49 and major arterials already costs drivers over 30 hours in annual delays, with freight volumes projected to grow by more than 50% by 2050.

Population growth, tourism, and major events – such as University of Arkansas football games drawing 70,000+ attendees – intensify pressure on the network. Without coordinated operations strategies, travel time reliability will continue to decline, raising costs for households, businesses, and freight carriers while undermining regional economic efficiency.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

Safety and Incident Management

Crashes, roadway incidents, and hazardous weather are leading causes of nonrecurring congestion across the region.

Limited coordination and data sharing among agencies can slow emergency response and prolong recovery times. Strengthening incident management, data integration, and real-time communication across jurisdictions is essential to improving safety and keeping the regional network moving.



Multimodal Access

Most regional trips are made by single-occupant vehicles, while transit, walking, and biking remain limited by infrastructure gaps, disconnected networks, and inconsistent information.

Expanding multimodal options, supported by intelligent transportation systems (ITS) and first-/last-mile connections, can reduce congestion, improve access to jobs and services, and make non-auto modes more practical and reliable options, providing more transportation choices for the region.



Freight and Economic Vitality

The Northwest Arkansas economy depends on the efficient movement of goods and workers.

Growing congestion and unreliable travel times threaten the competitiveness of key employers such as Walmart, Tyson, and J.B. Hunt. Targeted operations and ITS investments can improve freight mobility, lower logistics costs, and strengthen the region's economic resilience.



Environmental and Quality of Life

Growing congestion increases vehicle emissions, fuel consumption, and household transportation costs while reducing the quality of life for residents.

Longer, less reliable commutes contribute to stress and air pollution in growing communities. Smarter operations strategies can help alleviate these impacts, improving both environmental outcomes and daily travel experiences.



Collaboration and Integration

Operations investments are often pursued independently by individual jurisdictions, which can limit efficiency and regional impact.

A coordinated approach to planning, data governance, and ITS deployment, supported through cost and resource sharing, can enhance interoperability, reduce duplication, and stretch limited funding.



Source: NWARPC Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) Plan



REGIONAL STRATEGIES

1 Optimize System Operations

- Implement coordinated traffic signal systems and pursue regional consistency in signal controller technology.
- Develop city-based and regional Traffic Management Centers (TMCs) supported by fiber-optic communications and real-time detection systems.
- Deploy access management and operational improvements to address recurring bottlenecks.

2 Expand Traveler Information and Data Tools

- Establish a regional transportation data governance framework and centralized data hub.
- Expand traveler information systems to include local roadways, integrated with ARDOT's IDrive Arkansas platform.
- Provide real-time information to travelers for on roadway closures, construction, transit service, and special events.
- Develop performance dashboards to track congestion and system reliability.

3 Improve Incident and Emergency Response

- Strengthen multi-agency coordination for responding to crashes, hazardous weather, and special events.
- Expand the deployment of Dynamic Message Signs (DMS), queue warning systems, and roadway hazard detection (ice/flood sensors).
- Enhance data and video sharing across ARDOT, cities, counties, transit agencies, and emergency services providers.
- Implement Freeway Incident Detection and Management Systems – using video monitoring to improve emergency response time and alleviate nonrecurring congestion.

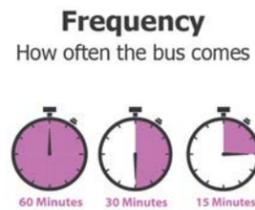
4 Support Transit and Multimodal Options

- Continue to deploy Automatic Passenger Counting (APC), real-time passenger information, and ITS-enabled fleet management for transit agencies.
- Develop Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) applications integrating transit, rideshare, bikeshare, and other options to increase access to alternative modes of travel.
- Expand multimodal facilities (sidewalks, bike lanes, trails) through encouraging the development of complete streets at the local level, especially adjacent to corridors served by transit.
- Apply ITS technologies to improve detection and warning systems for pedestrians and cyclists at key crossings to improve safety, reducing barriers to mode shift.

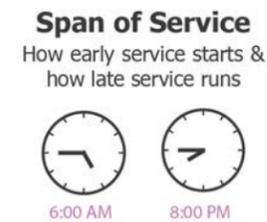
How do you design transit?



Improving transit is often a balancing act of deciding where the bus picks you up, how often the bus comes, and when service runs. In other words, frequency, span of service, and route design are all important aspects of delivering effective transit service.



Route Design
Where the bus goes and how it gets there



Source: Connect NWA Transit Development Plan

MOVING 2050 GOALS FORWARD

G1 Supports Objectives: 1.01–1.02, 1.05 (preserve system, manage congestion, ITS technologies)	Supports Objectives: 1.05, 1.06–1.11 (ITS & multimodal info systems)
G2 2.01 (land use & demand management)	2.06–2.07 (access & engagement)
G3 3.03–3.05 (regional coordination)	3.01 (shared investments & partnerships)

Supports Objectives: 1.03–1.04 (safety & resilience)	Supports Objectives: 1.06–1.11 (multimodal connectivity, transit, MaaS, APC)
2.04–2.05 (resilience)	2.02–2.03, 2.06–2.07 (active travel, access, engagement)
3.03–3.05 (interagency coordination)	3.01 (partnerships & shared multimodal investments)



5 Manage Travel Demand

- Promote carpooling, vanpooling, and employer-based commuter programs.
- Support multimodal commuting, telecommuting, and flexible work arrangements.
- Encourage Transportation Management Associations (TMAs) as a mechanism to manage travel demand around employment centers.
- Evaluate and implement managed lanes on I-49—HOV, HOT, or bus-on-shoulder—to improve reliability, prioritize high-occupancy and transit vehicles, and support corridor operations.

6 Targeted Capacity Investments

- Where operational and multimodal strategies are insufficient, pursue selective capacity projects to address critical bottlenecks and enhance travel time reliability.
- Apply context-sensitive design solutions to increase capacity while balancing regional mobility, safety, and community needs.

7 Strengthen Policy and Collaboration

- Integrate operations, ITS, and CMP strategies into the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).
- Develop formal frameworks and establish agreements for interagency and public-private data sharing.
- Align strategies with federal performance measures and continue to monitor, evaluate, and adapt investments over time.

MOVING 2050 GOALS FORWARD

G1 Supports Objectives: 1.02 (congestion management)	Supports Objectives: 1.01–1.02 (strategic congestion relief where operations insufficient)
G2 2.01–2.03 (land use integration, context-sensitive, healthy travel)	2.02–2.03 (context-sensitive, complete streets)
G3 3.02 (freight reliability by reducing peak congestion)	3.02 (strategic investments for economic efficiency)

Why does transit matter?

- Save Money**
A household can save \$10k by living with one less car.
- Environment Friendly**
Public transit saves the country 4.16 billion gallons of fuel per year.
- Reduce Congestion**
Congestion costs Northwest Arkansas residents \$103M per year. Transit helps reduce the number of vehicles on roadways.
- Travel Safely**
Transit is 10x safer than traveling by automobile.

Supports Objectives:
1.05 (ITS integration), 1.03–1.04 (safety & resilience)

2.06–2.07 (access & engagement)

3.01, 3.03–3.05 (partnerships, coordination, regional planning)

What supports transit?

Density



Transit works best when stops are located near a variety of destinations where people want to go such as job centers, schools, medical facilities, & housing complexes.

Ease of Use



Transit should be easy to navigate and convenient to use. Great transit is integrated with technology to make taking transit an easy choice for travel.

Connectivity



Transit should provide seamless transitions to other routes, park & rides, sidewalks, and bicycle routes. This ensures ease and comfort for passengers navigating the system.

Community Support



Whether you advocate for transit at city hall or simply choose to ride the bus, support from the community encourages local leaders to invest in great transit.

Source: Connect NWA Transit Development Plan



OPERATIONS AND CONGESTION MANAGEMENT



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT



AT A GLANCE: WHY OPERATIONS & CONGESTION MANAGEMENT MATTER

- **Smarter, Not Just Bigger:** Building new roads alone can't keep up with growth. Smarter operations—like coordinated traffic signals, real-time data sharing, and traveler information systems—help efficiently reduce congestion in the transportation network without always adding lanes.
- **Safety & Quick Response:** Faster crash detection, better emergency coordination, and warning systems reduce delays and help save lives.
- **Choices for Travelers:** Real-time transit info, carpool programs, and bicycle, pedestrian, and micromobility improvements make it easier to choose affordable, healthy, and alternative travel options.
- **Stronger Economy:** Reliable travel times keep freight moving, connect workers to jobs, and support the economic competitiveness of the region.
- **Protecting Quality of Life:** Reducing congestion cuts stress, fuel use, travel times, and emissions, making daily travel more reliable and communities more livable.



Takeaway: Smarter operations and congestion management make every trip—whether by car, bus, bike, or on foot—safer, faster, and more reliable, while strengthening the region's economy and protecting quality of life.

EVALUATION OF STRATEGY IMPACTS

The regional strategies for operations and congestion management were evaluated across four key areas: land use and community form, accessibility and public health, environmental resilience, and economic development. These strategies—drawn from the *Congestion Management Process (CMP)*, *Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) Plan*, and *Regional Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Architecture*—demonstrate how smarter system management complements traditional infrastructure investments.



LAND USE AND COMMUNITY FORM

By improving the efficiency and reliability of existing corridors, operations strategies reduce pressure for sprawling roadway expansion and support more compact, mixed-use development patterns. Demand management tools and real-time traveler information such as transit and Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) platforms can increase the viability of transit, walking, and biking as transportation options, complementing denser, more connected neighborhoods that provide affordable and reliable access to jobs and amenities.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

ACCESSIBILITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Enhanced incident response, real-time travel tools, and congestion management strategies improve reliability and reduce travel stress for all users. Expanded multimodal information and ITS-enabled safety tools enhance accessibility for transit riders, pedestrians, and cyclists, particularly in underserved areas. Demand management programs that promote active transportation, carpooling, and flexible schedules also contribute to healthier lifestyles and improved community well-being.



OPERATIONS AND CONGESTION MANAGEMENT

STRATEGY GUIDES (REGIONAL)

ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

Smarter operations reduce idling and stop-and-go traffic, lowering emissions and improving air quality. Advanced hazard detection and coordinated emergency response improves system resilience to severe weather, flooding, and other disruptions. By emphasizing technology and management strategies over roadway expansion, the region minimizes land consumption and environmental disruption.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Reliable travel times and improved freight efficiency strengthen the competitiveness of the regional economy. Congestion management strategies reduce delays on critical corridors, while operations investments help keep goods, workers, and services moving efficiently. Shared ITS infrastructure and data tools foster innovative partnerships and encourage cost-effective regional investment, ensuring the transportation system remains reliable to support long-term growth.



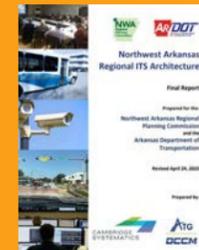
Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

Operations and congestion management strategies deliver broad system-wide benefits, extending the life of existing infrastructure, improving safety and reliability, reducing environmental impacts, and supporting economic competitiveness. Together, CMP, TSMO, and ITS strategies provide a foundation for building a smarter, safer, and more resilient transportation system for Northwest Arkansas.



NWA Regional TSMO Plan (2023)

Improves the reliability and efficiency of the transportation system by focusing on traffic signal and intersection operations and advancing the development of a regional Transportation Management Center (TMC). It establishes a coordinated strategy for data governance, a centralized data hub, modernized communications infrastructure, and improved traveler information to support more efficient system operations across Northwest Arkansas.



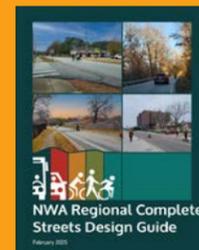
Northwest Arkansas Regional ITS Architecture (2023)

Outlines a coordinated strategy to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and safety of traffic and transit management in Northwest Arkansas. It inventories existing systems, identifies shared traffic management functions, advances fiber-optic and signal system connectivity, and prioritizes high-impact ITS investments such as transit passenger counting, asset management, maintenance scheduling, and personalized traveler information.



Congestion Management Process (2022)

The Congestion Management Process identifies Northwest Arkansas's most congested corridors and establishes a data-driven framework for monitoring system performance and managing congestion. It recommends strategies such as advancing TSMO and ITS initiatives, supporting Complete Streets and bicycle and pedestrian planning, and encouraging intelligent transportation systems to improve safety, emergency response, system reliability, and targeted capacity investments.

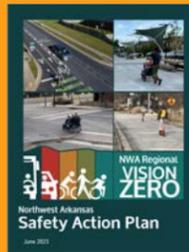


NWA Regional Complete Streets Design Guide (2025)

The Complete Streets Design Guide provides a regional framework for designing context-sensitive streets that support multimodal travel. It integrates transit into street design through dedicated lanes, transit signal priority, and varied stop typologies, and defines 13 regional street typologies that help local governments align street design with land use to improve connectivity and provide capacity for the right modes in the right corridors.

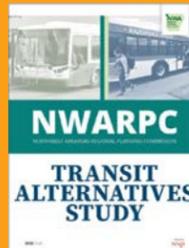


STRATEGY GUIDES (REGIONAL)



NWA Vision Zero Safety Action Plan (2023)

Highlights the component of the Safe System Approach of post-crash care which entails streamlining emergency response through improved traffic management and use of CAD and GIS.



Transit Alternative Study (2026)

Seeks to address the transportation challenges of rapid regional growth and conduct analysis to develop a locally preferred alternative for public transportation. The study identifies Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along the 71B corridor as the preferred alternative.



ConnectNWA: Transit Development Plan (2021)

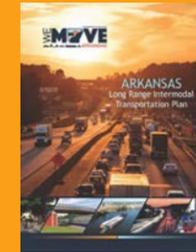
Identifies proposed mobility hubs throughout the region, to provide users with areas where several modes of travel converge to create an integrated and convenient multimodal site.



Travel Demand Model (2025)

Forecasts transportation needs for the years 2030, 2040, and 2050 to support the development of a fiscally constrained project list and examine alternative transportation modes.

STRATEGY GUIDES (STATE)



We Move Arkansas Long Range Intermodal Transportation Plan (2017)

Promotes investment in an integrated multimodal transportation system to reduce congestion, increase mobility, and improve reliability, while supporting the use of intelligent transportation technologies and smart transportation criteria to guide project evaluation and long-term planning.



Missouri's Transportation Long Range Plan (2018) *(Currently being updated)*

Explains MODOT's use of dynamic message signs, and Closed-Circuit Television Cameras on State Highways as well it's a Traveler Information Portal map and mobile application which provides the traveling public with traffic updates, road conditions and closures, as well as winter road conditions.



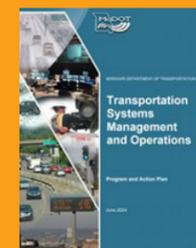
Arkansas Strategic Highway Safety Plan (2022)

Proposes to develop a framework to utilize Intelligent Transportation System elements and a Traffic Management Center to restore traffic flow at crash scenes to reduce secondary crashes.



Show Me Zero: Driving Missouri Towards Safer Roads (2021)

Encourages the utilization of technology to reduce the likelihood of crashes such as Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and the installation of Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) strategies to improve work zone safety and traffic incident management areas.

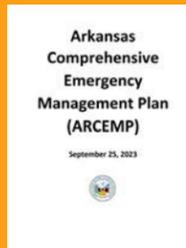


MODOT TSMO Plan (2024)

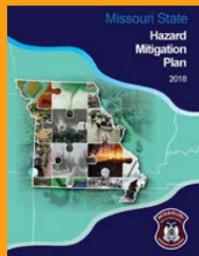
Applies integrated strategies to optimize the performance of existing infrastructure through the implementation of systems, services, real-time information, and using signal operation coordination and traffic management centers to preserve capacity and improve the safety and reliability of transportation systems.



STRATEGY GUIDES (STATE)



Arkansas Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (2023)
 Supports the collaboration of the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management and the Arkansas Department of Transportation to deploy communications and provide staff to the Traffic Management Center (TMC) in the event of a disaster.



Missouri State Hazard Mitigation Plan (2018)
 Details collaboration strategies through the integration of State and Regional Planning initiatives including a partnership with the Department of Transportation to use mitigation strategies in capital improvement planning and environmental planning.



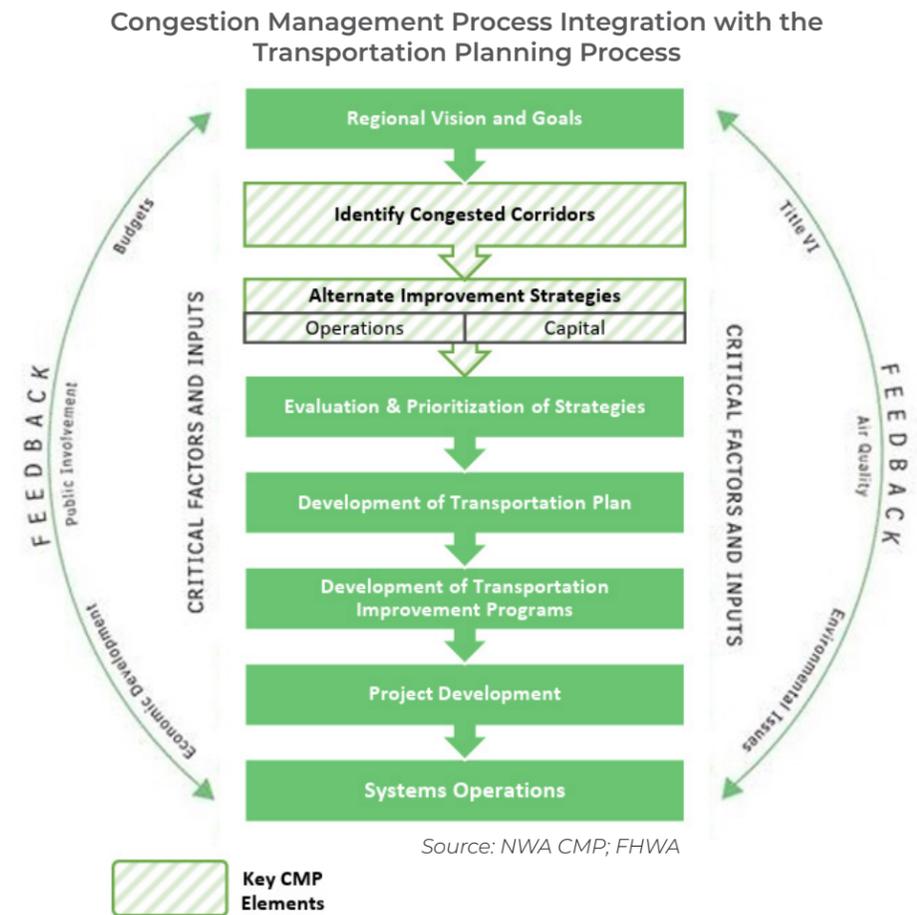
Arkansas Statewide Transit Coordination Plan (2023)
 Recommends transportation service coordination strategies and conducts analysis to leverage limited transportation resources and funding.



MoDOT Transit State Management Plan (2016)
 Provides an overview of federal and state programs administered by MoDOT for public and specialized transportation including the Statewide Planning and Non-Metropolitan Transportation Planning, the Intercity Bus Program, the Buses and Bus Facilities Program, and more.

Arkansas State Freight Plan (2022)
 Highlights that investment in Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) and Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) is an important strategy to reduce congestion and improve mobility and system reliability.

Missouri State Freight Plan (2017)
 Identifies strategies to improve freight movement including the development of MoDOT Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) plans and architecture, the improvement and expansion of ITS technology along key corridors, and the development of data protocols.





REGIONAL NEEDS & STRATEGIES

Northwest Arkansas faces evolving risks to transportation and infrastructure from natural hazards, severe weather, and emerging security threats. These challenges include flooding, extreme storms, and potential disruptions to intelligent transportation systems (ITS), as well as cybersecurity and data security risks associated with increasing reliance on technology-driven operations. Addressing these needs requires a coordinated, multi-jurisdictional approach that integrates environmental protection, infrastructure resilience, and emergency management.

REGIONAL NEEDS



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

Infrastructure Resilience

Key corridors, bridges, and transit facilities are increasingly exposed to flooding, erosion, and other natural hazards.

This underscores the need for investments that enhance durability, redundancy, and access during extreme events. Regional Plans – such as the EEI Plan, Open Space Plan, and Cave Springs Area Karst Study – identify where infrastructure intersects with sensitive systems, including karst formations, floodplains, and open spaces. County Hazard Mitigation Plans further outline how hazards like flooding, winter storms, and wildfires affect these assets. Coordinating these efforts ensures protective measures that balance resilience, security, and environmental stewardship.



Environmental and Community Preservation:

Wetlands, karst areas, riparian corridors, and open spaces face increasing pressures from development and environmental change.

Preserving and restoring these natural systems enhances ecological resilience, mitigates flood impacts, protects biodiversity, and maintains scenic and recreational value. Integrating environmental stewardship with transportation and infrastructure planning strengthens hazard mitigation, supports community well-being, and promotes long-term quality of life.



Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Security

Transportation networks are increasingly dependent on ITS and TSMO systems that are vulnerable to outages, cyberattacks, and data breaches.

Disruptions to these systems can affect traffic management, traveler information, incident response, and overall network efficiency. Safeguarding ITS assets, real-time communications, and transportation data is essential to maintain safe, reliable, and resilient operations, ensuring that both routine and emergency transportation functions can continue uninterrupted.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

Hazard Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness

Communities, critical facilities, and transportation systems remain vulnerable to natural hazards, requiring proactive planning and coordinated response.

County-level Hazard Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness Plans identify these risks, while integrating them into regional transportation planning enhances readiness, supports emergency operations, and facilitates efficient recovery. The focus is on ensuring public safety and minimizing disruption across the network, complementing the physical improvements addressed through infrastructure resilience.



Cross-Jurisdictional Coordination

Emergency response and resilience efforts are fragmented and less effective when municipalities, counties, transit agencies, and regional partners plan in isolation.

Collaborative approaches improve coordination, streamline response and recovery, and enhance long-term resilience across transportation networks and communities.

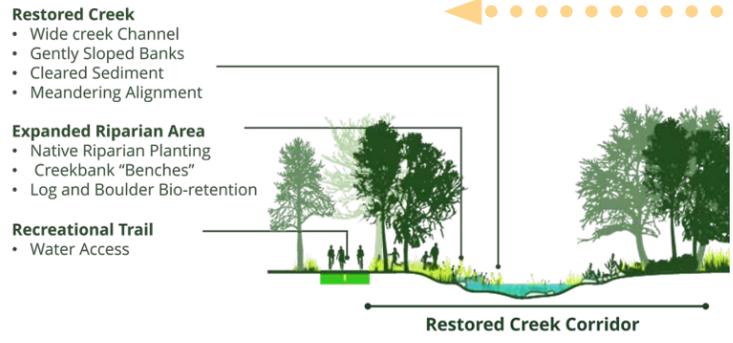


SECURITY AND SYSTEM RESILIENCE

REGIONAL STRATEGIES

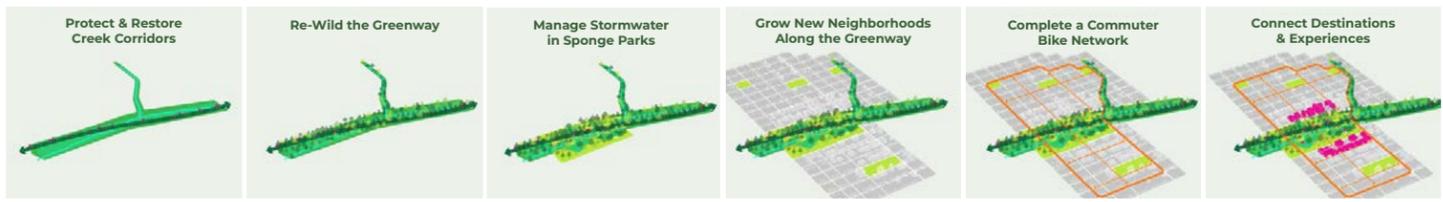
- 1 Enhance Infrastructure Resilience with Environmental Co-Benefits**
- Prioritize resilience upgrades in environmentally sensitive or hazard-prone areas (floodplains, karst formations, open space corridors).
 - Implement nature-based, engineering solutions, such as permeable pavements, bioswales, vegetated swales, and floodable open space, which combine technical elements with ecosystem-based solutions to simultaneously manage stormwater and protect ecosystems.
 - Integrate resilience and environmental impact considerations into long-range planning, corridor studies, and project prioritization to ensure cost effective investment and mitigate risks to infrastructure.

- 2 Protect and Restore Natural and Cultural Resources**
- Integrate Open Space Plan recommendations and Cave Springs Karst Study findings into project siting, design, and mitigation measures.
 - Preserve and restore natural areas as part of the transportation network to provide co-benefits for stormwater management, flood reduction, biodiversity protection, and recreation access.
 - Employ context-sensitive, low-impact designs to maintain scenic beauty while enhancing system resilience.



- 3 Strengthen ITS and Data Security**
- Expand ITS monitoring, hazard detection, and incident response capabilities to maintain operational reliability.
 - Seek opportunities to leverage ITS to optimize emergency response strategies regionally.
 - Implement cybersecurity protocols to protect transportation communications and data systems.
 - Coordinate real-time data sharing, automated alerts, and redundancy planning through TSMO and CMP programs.

- 4 Integrate Hazard Mitigation, Emergency Management, and Nature-Based Solutions**
- Align transportation investments with county Hazard Mitigation Plans to reduce risk to infrastructure and communities.
 - Incorporate emergency access, redundancy, and rapid response considerations into project design.
 - Utilize natural systems as protective infrastructure, including wetlands, riparian buffers, and karst features, to absorb floodwaters and reduce storm impacts.
 - Conduct vulnerability assessments that include both built and natural system capacities.



Source: Razorback Greenway Corridor Plan

MOVING 2050 GOALS FORWARD

G1 Supports Objectives: 1.01–1.02 (durable infrastructure), 1.04 (resilient operations)	Supports Objectives: 1.04 (resilience in hazard-prone areas)
G2 2.04–2.05 (stormwater/flood management, ecosystem protection)	2.04–2.05 (ecosystem protection, open space preservation, co-benefits)
G3 3.01–3.02 (regional planning for resilient corridors)	3.05 (regional collaboration for resource stewardship)

Supports Objectives: 1.04 (resilient system), 1.05 (technology adoption)	Supports Objectives: 1.01–1.02 (system preservation, reliability), 1.04 (resilient system)
2.04 (data-driven hazard response)	2.04–2.05 (hazard resilience, environmental protection)
3.03 (regional coordination for ITS/security)	3.03–3.05 (cross-jurisdictional coordination for hazard response)



SECURITY AND SYSTEM RESILIENCE

5 Foster Regional Coordination and Collaborative Resilience Planning

- Develop a Regional Resilience Improvement Plan that integrates hazard mitigation, emergency management, cybersecurity, infrastructure, and nature-based solutions.
- Establish cross-jurisdictional protocols for communication, training, and coordinated emergency drills.
- Engage municipalities, counties, transit agencies, and environmental stakeholders to identify shared priorities, leverage resources, and maximize resilience and environmental co-benefits.



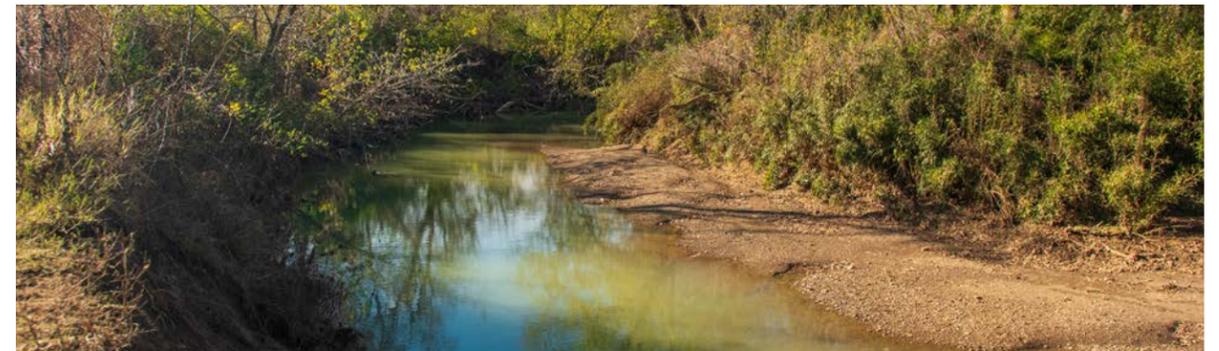
Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

MOVING 2050 GOALS FORWARD

G1 Supports Objectives:
1.04 (resilient system planning)

G2 2.01 (land use integration, hazard-informed planning)

G3 3.03–3.05 (shared emergency response, regional resilience)



AT A GLANCE: WHY SECURITY AND RESILIENCE MATTER

- **Protecting People and Assets:** Hazard mitigation and infrastructure resilience reduce risks from flooding, storms, and other natural hazards and help direct development away from hazard-prone areas.
- **Nature as Infrastructure:** Preserving open space, wetlands, and karst systems provides natural defenses against flooding and erosion while protecting the beauty of the region.
- **Reliable Operations:** Redundant routes, emergency access planning, and resilient design keep people, goods, and services moving during disruptions.
- **Stronger Systems:** Investments in ITS and cybersecurity protect critical data, ensure quick hazard detection, and maintain reliable operations.
- **Regional Coordination:** Cross-jurisdictional planning enhances emergency response, reduces redundancy, and leverages shared resources.
- **Future Ready:** Integrating hazard, security, and resilience planning into long-range projects ensures Northwest Arkansas can adapt to emerging threats while supporting growth and economic vitality.



Takeaway: Security and resilience strategies protect lives, safeguard natural systems, and keep Northwest Arkansas moving – ensuring the region remains safe, resilient, and beautiful for future generations.



SECURITY AND SYSTEM RESILIENCE

EVALUATION OF STRATEGY IMPACTS

The regional strategies for security and resilience were evaluated across four key areas: land use and community form (including housing), accessibility and public health, environmental resilience, and economic development. These strategies – drawn from the *Energy & Environment Innovation (EEI) Plan*, *Open Space Plan*, *Cave Springs Area Karst Resource Conservation Study*, *Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) Plan*, *Regional Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) Architecture*, *Congestion Management Process (CMP)*, and *county Hazard Mitigation Plans* – demonstrate how balancing physical infrastructure upgrades with protection of natural systems strengthens both community safety and regional quality of life.

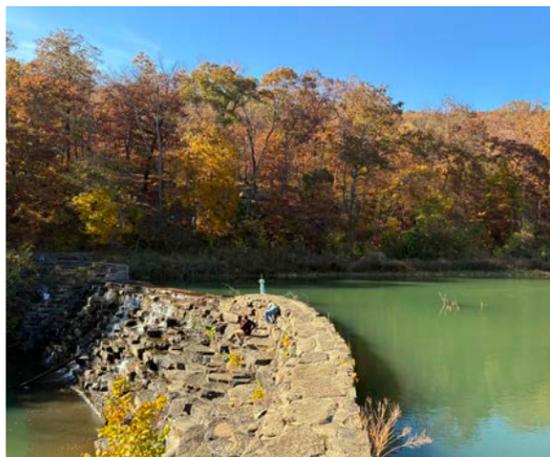


Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

LAND USE AND COMMUNITY FORM

By aligning transportation planning with hazard mitigation and open space preservation, resilience strategies help direct growth away from floodplains, karst formations, and other high-risk areas. This reduces risk to life and safety, long-term costs associated with property damage, and disaster recovery, while protecting community investments in housing and infrastructure. Nature-based solutions such as floodable open space, sponge parks, and green infrastructure also integrate stormwater management into community design, supporting more sustainable and livable neighborhoods.

ACCESSIBILITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Stronger emergency response capabilities, redundancy in critical corridors, and protection of ITS systems improve the region's ability to maintain mobility during disruptions. This ensures that residents, including those in rural and underserved areas, retain access to jobs, schools, and essential services during severe weather or emergencies. Co-benefits such as reduced flooding and improved stormwater management also support healthier environments, lowering risks to public health and community safety.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

Resilience strategies directly address environmental vulnerabilities by integrating green infrastructure, preserving open space, and protecting sensitive natural systems. Wetlands, riparian corridors, and karst formations function as natural defenses, absorbing stormwater and reducing the severity of flooding and erosion. These nature-based solutions lower infrastructure maintenance costs, extend asset life, and reinforce the region's long-term resilience while preserving the scenic landscapes valued by Northwest Arkansas residents.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Reliable transportation networks and coordinated hazard preparedness protect businesses, freight movement, and workforce mobility from costly disruptions. Investments in resilient infrastructure reduce long-term repair and recovery costs, while cybersecurity and ITS protections safeguard the digital backbone of the regional economy. Additionally, the preservation of open space and natural amenities enhances regional attractiveness, supporting talent retention, tourism, and economic competitiveness.



Security and resilience strategies provide wide-ranging benefits that extend beyond hazard protection. By blending engineering solutions with nature-based approaches, the region can reduce its vulnerability to flooding, storms, and cyber threats while protecting natural assets that contribute to community identity and livability. Coordinated planning across jurisdictions ensures efficient emergency response, cost-effective investment, and long-term system reliability. Together, these strategies create a safer, more resilient, and environmentally balanced transportation system for Northwest Arkansas.



SECURITY AND SYSTEM RESILIENCE

STRATEGY GUIDES (REGIONAL)



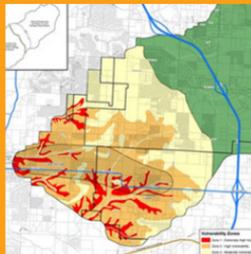
NWA Energy and Environment Innovation Comprehensive Action Plan (2025)

Advances regional strategies that link environmental resilience, green infrastructure, and emissions reduction. It promotes interconnected green corridors and trails to manage stormwater and reduce flooding, recommends nature-based solutions and restoration programs to strengthen natural infrastructure, and provides tools to guide land use and investment decisions. The plan emphasizes collaboration among public, private, and nonprofit partners to protect environmental quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions across Northwest Arkansas.



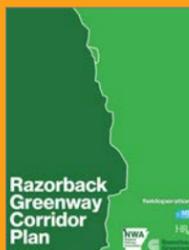
NWA Open Space Plan (2016)

Provides a regional framework for conserving and connecting open spaces to manage growth and enhance environmental resilience. It calls for protecting natural floodplains from development to preserve the region's ability to absorb stormwater runoff, reduce flood risk, and protect people and property, while supporting recreation and regional biodiversity.



Cave Springs Area Karst Resource Conservation Study (2015)

Assesses the condition of local karst systems that support threatened and endangered species and protect groundwater quality. It identifies increasing risks from land and infrastructure development and emphasizes the need for coordinated conservation planning to safeguard sensitive habitats and the region's environmental integrity.



Razorback Greenway Corridor Plan (2025)

Establishes a long-range vision to build on the region's 40-mile Greenway as a foundational active transportation spine. It aligns land use, housing, sustainability, and development strategies with the trail system to support continued growth, while prioritizing protection and restoration of river and stream corridors through a connected Blue and Green Network that delivers transportation, environmental, and recreational benefits.



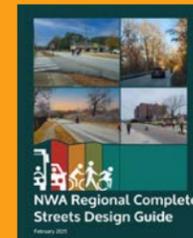
Northwest Arkansas Intelligent Transportation Systems Architecture Plan (2023)

The ITS Architecture Plan outlines a regional framework to improve traffic management and emergency response through enhanced data capture, cybersecurity, and interagency communication. It establishes protocols for data sharing, software integration, and performance monitoring to support coordinated operations and improved system readiness across Northwest Arkansas.



Northwest Arkansas Regional Transportation Systems Management and Operations (TSMO) Plan (2023)

The Regional TSMO Plan advances strategies to improve transportation system performance through expanded real-time data collection and sharing. It promotes connected vehicle technologies, centralized data hubs, and regional Transportation Management Centers, along with modernization of communications networks to enhance system security, resiliency, and operational efficiency across Northwest Arkansas.



NWA Complete Streets Design Guidelines (2025)

Identifies street design elements such as access management features and multimodal facilities that can be implemented to allow emergency vehicle access while restricting other motor vehicle traffic.



Benton County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021)

Emphasizes the need for comprehensive land use planning and implementation of hazard mitigation projects in the county, such as ensuring transportation projects in flood prone areas are raised to reduce community and asset risk to flooding.



NWA Heritage Trail Plan (2020)

Describes a regional network of proposed bicycle and pedestrian facilities in Northwest Arkansas serving as cultural corridors, linking historic routes including the Butterfield Stagecoach Route, Trail of Tears, and Civil War trails into connected multi-modal corridors to promote historic and cultural preservation alongside recreation and community health.



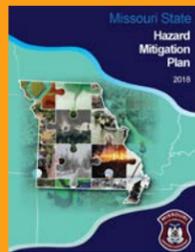
SECURITY AND SYSTEM RESILIENCE

STRATEGY GUIDES (STATE)



Arkansas State Hazard Mitigation Plan (2023)

Assesses vulnerabilities to natural, man-made, and cyber hazards and identifies mitigation strategies to enhance resilience across state, regional, and local governments. It outlines collaborative actions such as streambank restoration, land use planning, and green infrastructure—including bioswales, rain gardens, and permeable pavements—to reduce flood risk and protect infrastructure. The plan also emphasizes upgrading flood-prone roads and bridges and highlights opportunities to strengthen cybersecurity for critical infrastructure through federal grant programs and standardized threat detection protocols.



Missouri State Hazard Mitigation Plan (2018)

Assesses vulnerabilities to natural, man-made, and emerging cyber hazards and identifies mitigation strategies to enhance resilience at state, regional, and local levels. It inventories hazard-prone areas and critical infrastructure, provides guidance for prioritizing mitigation actions, and emphasizes open space and floodplain planning, greenways, and capital improvement coordination to reduce risks to people and property. The plan also highlights opportunities for state and federal support to strengthen cybersecurity, infrastructure resilience, and interagency collaboration.



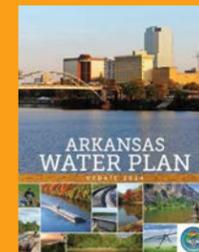
ARDOT Carbon Reduction Strategy (2023)

Calls for increased cooperation with MPO's in the state around implementing emissions reduction measures, including advancing transit access, expanding bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and electric vehicle infrastructure, and advancing partnerships to redevelop the corridors to increase the resilience of transportation networks.



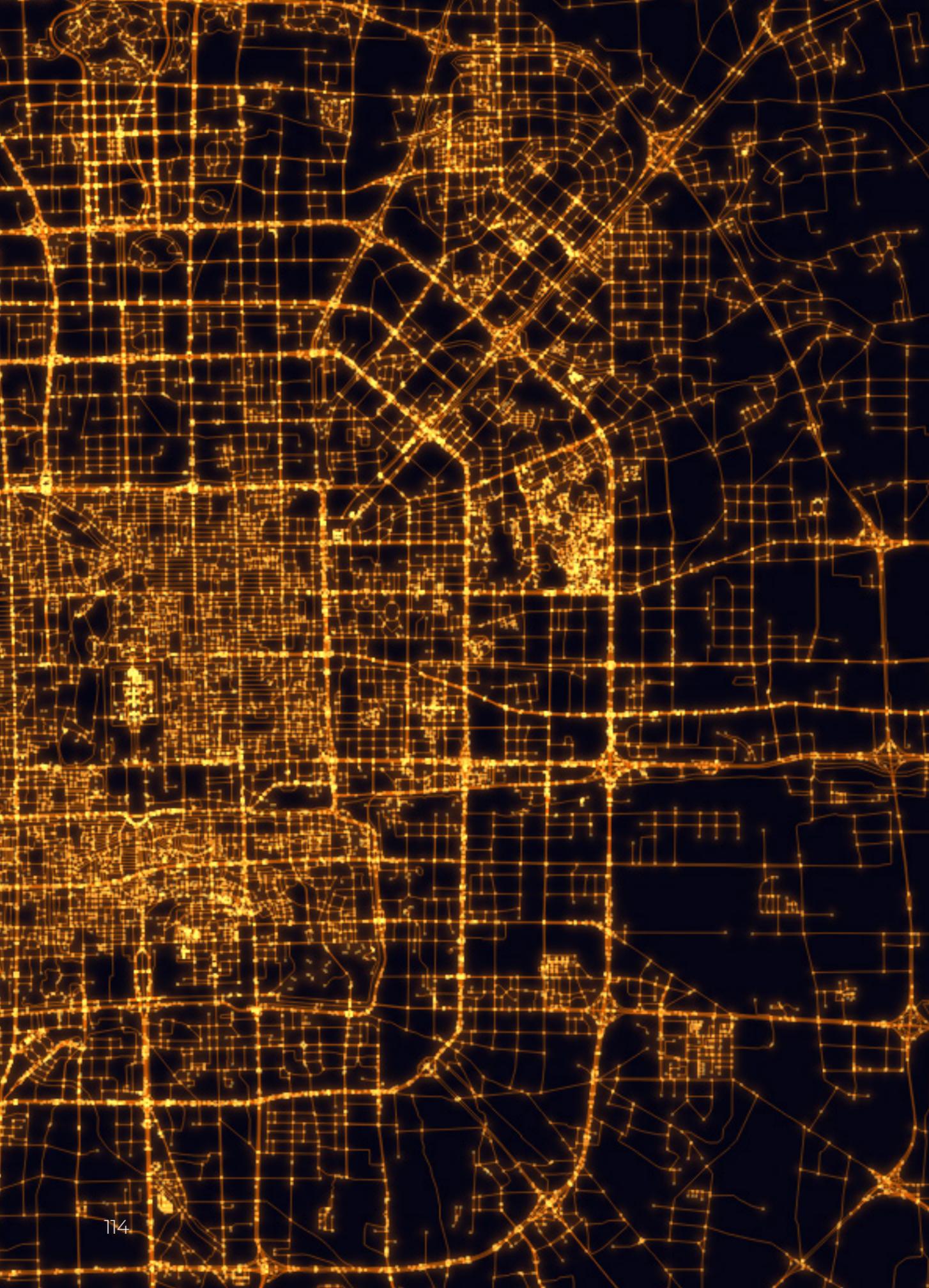
HSTCC SW Missouri Regional Transportation Plan (2025)

Developed by the Harry S Truman Coordinating Council (HSTCC), this serves as a forward-looking blueprint for transportation across Southwest Missouri. The plans goals include consideration of ecological preservation in all transportation decisions and multiple priority projects are identified specifically to reduce infrastructure risks to flooding.



Arkansas Water Plan (2014)

Outlines strategies and recommendations to prioritize investments in water infrastructure, drinking water protection, and wastewater service required to support growth and economic development in Arkansas. This plan identifies methods to optimize existing water, wastewater, and flood control infrastructure, preserving and protecting the state's water supply. The plan include identifies opportunities to cooperatively address regional water and wastewater needs.



THE 2050 REGIONAL NETWORK: A TIERED FRAMEWORK FOR REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

The 2050 Regional Network provides a framework for evaluating connectivity across Northwest Arkansas, guiding investment priorities and design strategies to build a regional grid system.



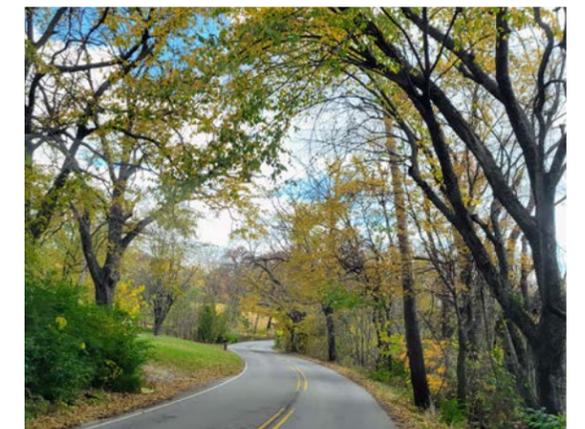
Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

Gridded street networks offer alternative routes to destinations:

- Providing system redundancy
- Enhancing mobility and access
- Improving travel efficiency
- Distributing traffic to reduce congestion on major roadways.

Derived from the **regional travel demand model**, the regional network incorporates current travel patterns and projects future needs based on expected growth. As a data-driven, policy-level planning tool, it informs long-range transportation decisions at the regional, state, and local levels. The network does not prescribe specific projects but instead defines corridors of regional significance to shape future investments, coordination, and land use decisions.

The framework organizes facilities into four system types – **Interstate/Freeway System and Tiers 1, 2, and 3 corridors** – each serving distinct mobility, access, and land use functions. Together, these layers create an integrated network that balances efficiency, safety, and multimodal access while supporting the region's long-term growth and development vision.



**INTERSTATE/FREEWAY SYSTEM:
THE REGIONAL SPINE**

The Interstate/Freeway system provides the backbone of regional and **inter-state connectivity**, enabling high-speed, high-capacity movement of people and freight. These facilities operate with fully controlled access, minimal regional design control, and modal emphasis on high volume/high speed vehicle and freight movement. Bicycle and pedestrian activity are prohibited, and transit service is generally limited to specialized applications (e.g. bus-on-shoulder operations, High Occupancy Vehicle or High Occupancy Toll lanes).

The 2050 Intersection/Freeway System includes:

- I-49
- Future I-42
- Highway 612 (Northern Bypass)
- XNA Connector
- Fulbright Expwy – North & South



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

**TIER 1 CORRIDORS:
INTER-REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY**

Tier 1 corridors function as high-capacity connectors linking major employment hubs, regional nodes, and act as **gateways** for the region. They serve significant **freight and long-distance** regional travel needs while also accommodating some local trips. Managed access, higher speeds, and modal priority for vehicle and transit trips characterize these facilities, with bicycle and pedestrian accommodations provided through **separated facilities** (e.g. side paths, protected bike lanes) and safe crossing opportunities (e.g. bike-ped tunnels, bridges, Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons).

Key Tier 1 corridors include:

East-West: US 62, Highway 102, Highway 12, US 412

North-South: Highway 59, Highway 112, US 71/71B, Highway 265



**TIER 2 CORRIDORS:
INTRA-REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY**

Tier 2 corridors connect cities, neighborhoods, and suburban activity centers, serving a higher proportion of local trips within a regional context. These facilities operate at lower speeds, with proven access management strategies – such as raised medians and roundabouts – to enhance safety and efficiency. Transit is a common priority, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities such as shared-use paths and grade-separated crossings are regularly integrated.

Key Tier 2 corridors include:

East-West: Highway 72, Highway 264, Highway 45, Highway 16

North-South: Highway 43, Highway 279 / Future Western North-South Connector

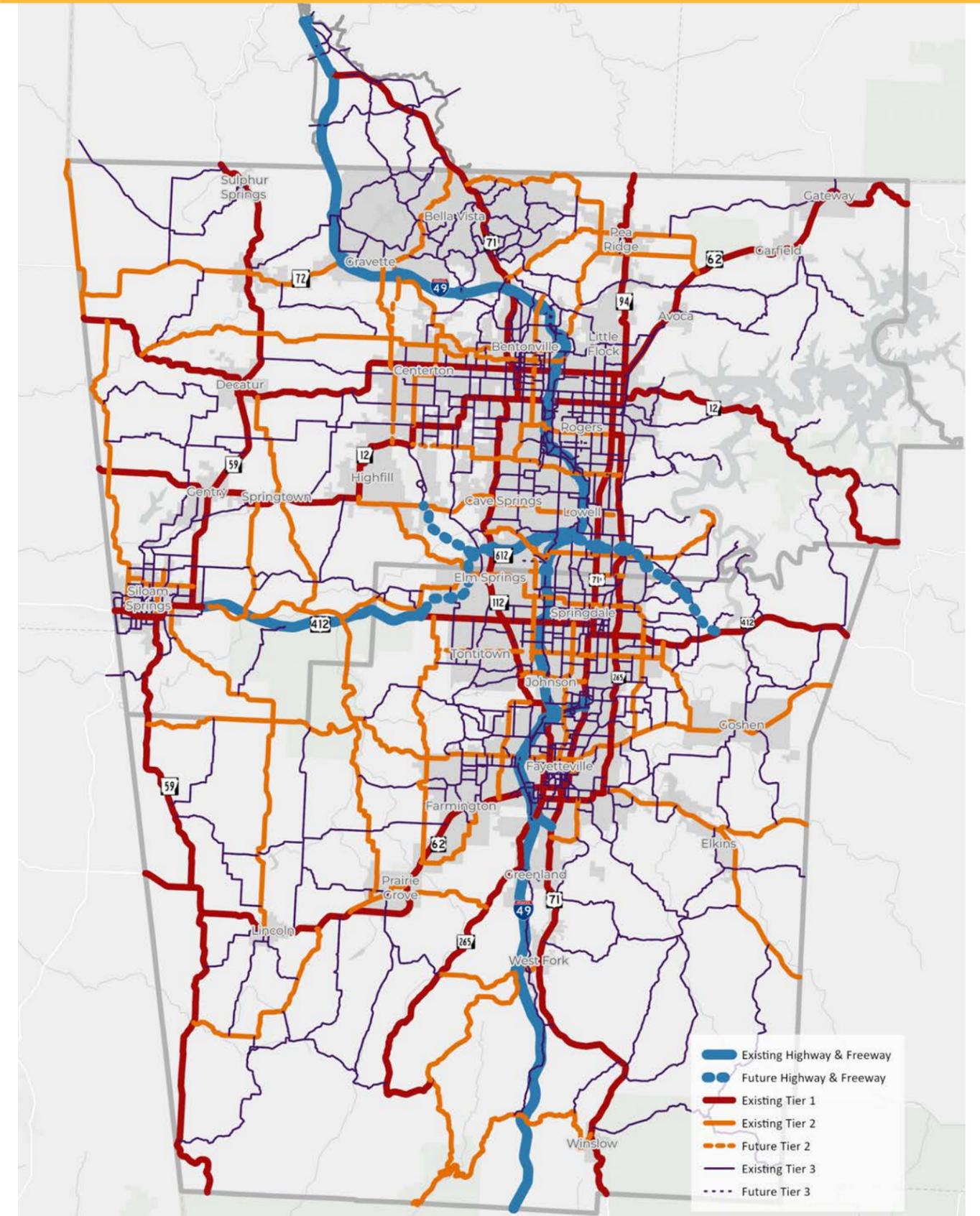


**TIER 3 CORRIDORS:
SUB-REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY AND
SYSTEM REDUNDANCY**

Tier 3 corridors support local mobility, placemaking, and mixed-use development by emphasizing highly managed **multimodal access** and closely integrating transportation and land use to serve both daily travel and quality-of-life goals. These streets often have **complex and variable land use contexts**, with high modal priority for transit, walking, and biking alongside vehicular movement. They also intend to provide **system redundancy** by offering **alternate routes** that relieve pressure on congested freeways and high-capacity corridors. By dispersing trips across a finer-grained network, Tier 3 corridors strengthen resilience, improve reliability, and enhance access to local destinations.



2050 Regional Network



	Function (typical)	Modal Context (typical)
Interstate/ Freeway System	Inter-state connectivity (backbone) — High-speed, high-capacity fully controlled access (little-to-no regional control of facility design).	High vehicular and freight priority; bike/ped prohibited.
Tier 1 Corridors	Inter-regional connectivity (external trips) High-capacity connectors, providing “gateway” for region, link major employment hubs/regional nodes; primary freight and regional trips, some local trips.	High vehicular, freight, and transit priority; bike/ped on separated facilities and safe crossing accommodations.
Tier 2 Corridors	Intra-regional connectivity (internal trips) Increased complexity of land use contexts along the corridor; provides urban/suburban connection; more local trips.	High vehicular and transit priorities; commuting and recreational bike/ped accommodations common.
Tier 3 Corridors	Sub-regional connectivity (alternate routes) — Primary connectors for local mobility, placemaking, mixed-use support; highly integrated transportation and land use; provide system redundancy through alternative routes.	High vehicular and transit priorities; commuting and recreational bike/ped accommodations common.



CORRIDOR GRADIENT FRAMEWORK

The tiered network is further supported by a *Corridor Gradient Framework* that links roadway design to surrounding land use complexity and speed context. Four gradients—ranging from high-speed, low-complexity freeways and rural roads (G1 and G4) to lower-speed, high-complexity urban corridors (G2 and G3)—help practitioners match multimodal design features with the function and setting along each corridor. This framework ensures that facilities operate uniformly across the region, even as land use patterns vary.

G1: Lower-Speed / High Complexity

These corridors are closely associated with regional nodes, town centers, and mixed-use districts. They emphasize local access, placemaking, and pedestrian activity, with frequent intersections and active street frontages. Transit service is a priority, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities are integral to design. Speed is intentionally managed to support safety and a vibrant public realm.

G2: Moderate-Speed / Transitional Complexity

Serving as buffers between high-mobility corridors and high-activity zones, G2 facilities balance mobility with access. They often run through mixed-use areas with residential, commercial, and light industrial development. Transit, walking, and biking activity are more common, and access management strategies are used to support both safety and flow. These corridors absorb and distribute traffic from higher-speed routes into local networks.

G3: Higher-Speed / Low Complexity

These facilities operate in proximity to freeways and other high-speed corridors, prioritizing the safe and efficient movement of vehicles and freight. While multiple modes may be present nearby, G1 corridors emphasize physical separation of modes—such as grade-separated crossings, dedicated shoulders, and controlled access—to minimize conflicts and enhance safety. Local access is limited, and land use is generally low-complexity, such as logistics centers or large-format retail.

G4: Rural / Higher-Speed, Low Complexity

Found outside the urban area, G4 facilities serve low-density or undeveloped contexts such as agricultural or natural lands. They are designed for through movement and dispersed local interaction, with limited multimodal demand. While vehicle mobility is the focus, these corridors are still expected to maintain safe access for rural residents and freight.

Gradient	Land Use Context	Modal Priorities	Primary Function
G1: Lower-Speed / High Complexity	Town centers, mixed-use districts, activity hubs	Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit-focused	Local access, placemaking, vibrant public realm
G2: Moderate-Speed / Transitional Complexity	Suburban/mixed-use, residential, commercial, light industrial	Balanced: vehicles, transit, walking, biking	Transitioning traffic from high-speed routes to local networks
G3: Higher-Speed / Low Complexity	Freeway-adjacent, logistics centers, large-format retail	Vehicle-focused; minimal transit, walking, biking	Regional mobility, freight movement
G4: Rural Higher-Speed / Low Complexity	Rural, agricultural, undeveloped lands	Primarily vehicles, some freight; limited multimodal	Through movement, safe rural access

RELATIONSHIP WITH NETWORK TIERS

While the network tiers define the corridor's role in the regional system, the gradient framework designates *how that corridor should function in a specific context*. For instance:

- A Tier 1 corridor may operate as G1 in rural areas but transition to G2 near urban nodes.
- A Tier 2 corridor may blend G2 and G3 depending on surrounding density.
- Tier 3 corridors are most often G3, emphasizing multimodal access and placemaking.

By combining the tier framework with the gradient framework, the 2050 Regional Network ensures that each corridor not only serves its intended role in the transportation system but also ensures consistency across communities while respecting unique local contexts.



APPLICATION IN PLANNING AND DESIGN

The **2050 Regional Network** serves as a performance-based planning and design framework that the region's long-range goals into coordinated, on-the-ground outcomes. By defining corridors through **tiers** (establishing connectivity) and **gradients** (reflecting local context), the network links regional system planning to corridor- and project-level design.

The **corridor gradient framework** organizes corridors by speed, complexity, and surrounding land use, guiding design treatments, access management, and multimodal integration. It works in tandem with the **Regional Complete Streets Design Guide**, whose street typologies support context-sensitive design and balance mobility and safety across the regional transect.

This coordinated approach allows a single corridor to evolve naturally along its length. For example, a Tier 1 corridor may function as **G4** in rural areas, transition to **G2** through suburban communities, operate as **G3** within an activity center, and shift to **G1** as it approaches an interstate. These transitions help manage travel speeds, clarify modal priorities, and provide safer, more predictable conditions for all users.

Implementing the 2050 Regional Network will require sustained regional collaboration and commitment to shared priorities, including:

- Defining regional significance: Establishing which facilities warrant regional prioritization and coordinated investment.
- Developing implementation mechanisms: Exploring tools such as a Regional Mobility Authority (RMA) or interlocal agreements to support funding and delivery of priority projects.
- Applying Complete Streets principles: Ensuring consistent multimodal design and speed management across corridors to enhance safety, access, and operational performance.

By integrating corridor function, multimodal access, and land use context with the Metropolitan Transportation Plan goals – safety, reliability, accessibility, resilience, and economic competitiveness – the network provides a coordinated approach to building a connected, equitable, and future-ready transportation system for Northwest Arkansas.

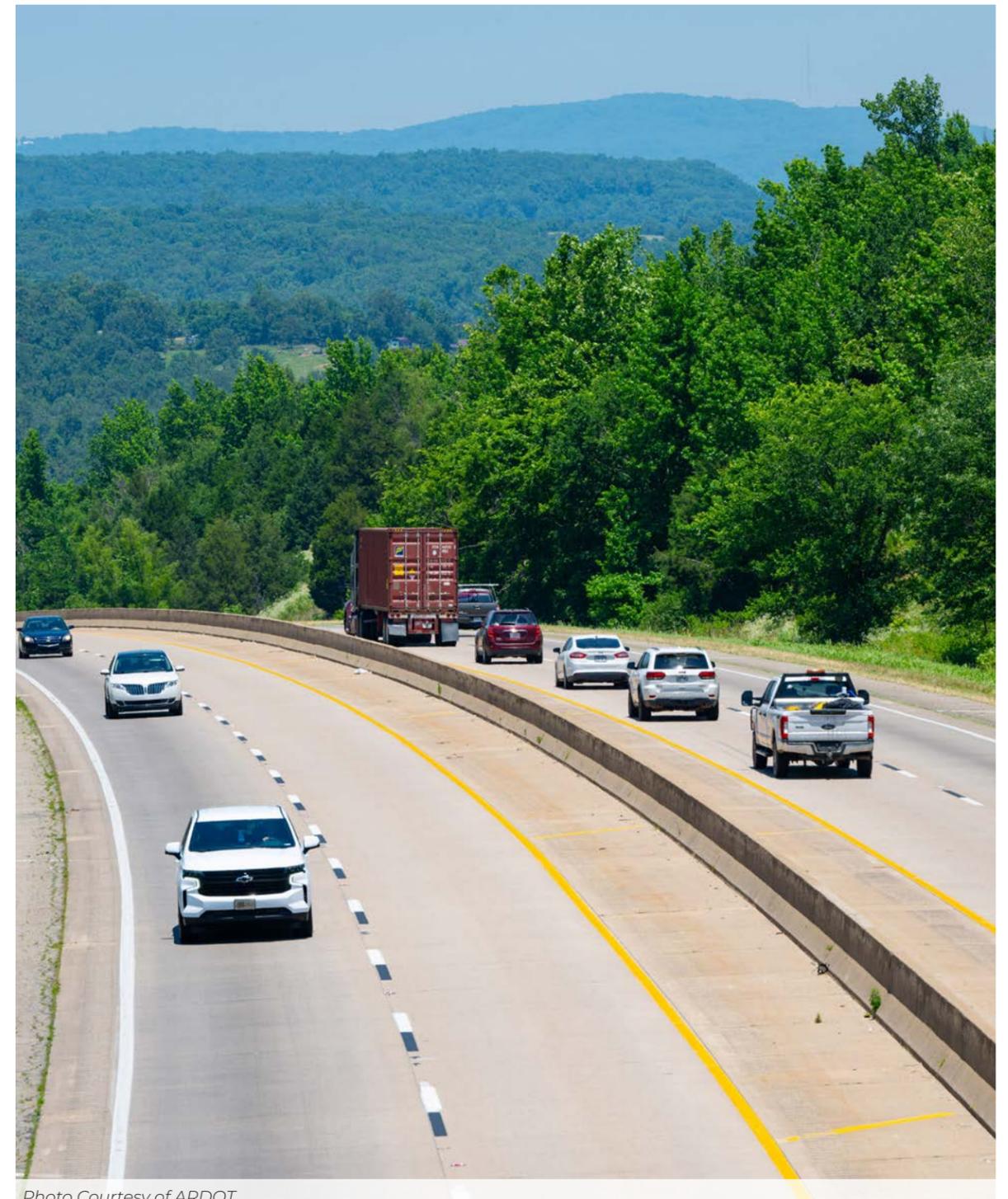


Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

Chapter 04

MOVING FORWARD: INVESTING IN THE 2050 NETWORK

This chapter outlines how we plan to fund, prioritize, and implement the regional network over the next 25 years, ensuring safe, connected, and resilient mobility for all residents.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

Building the transportation system envisioned in **Forward 2050** requires strategic, coordinated investment. The plan builds on past plans and identifies how anticipated funding will be used to maintain and improve the region's infrastructure, enhance safety, expand travel choices, and support responsible growth. This chapter outlines how we fund the plan, how projects are prioritized, and how the region will continue to prepare for future opportunities as funding landscapes evolve.

■ FUNDING SOURCES: WHERE THE DOLLARS COME FROM

Northwest Arkansas's transportation system relies on a diverse mix of federal, state, and local resources to build, maintain, and improve roadways, bridges, transit, and multimodal infrastructure. Coordinated investments from these funding sources,

supplemented by private and philanthropic contributions, support both regional priorities and local community needs, enabling the region to advance mobility, safety, and economic development across the 2050 planning horizon.

FEDERAL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Federal transportation funding underpins the region's highways, transit, bridges, and multimodal projects. It includes formula-based programs distributed to states and regions based on population, roadway miles, and other criteria, as well as competitive discretionary programs that support innovative projects, freight and highway improvements, and resilience initiatives. Funding is administered through ARDOT, MoDOT, NWARPC, or direct grants to state DOTs, MPOs, and local transit agencies, often paired with state and local matching funds to maximize regional investment.

KEY FORMULA PROGRAMS

- National Highway Performance Program (NHPP):** Supports NHS pavement and bridge preservation, system reliability improvements, and performance-based upgrades. Funding is distributed based on NHS lane miles, bridge deck area, and unreliable vehicle miles traveled.
- Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP):** Funds safety improvements to reduce fatalities and serious injuries.
- Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP):** Flexible funding for state and local projects, including bridges, pavement preservation, and safety improvements. A portion is suballocated to urbanized areas over 200,000 population (STBGP-GT 200K) for regionally significant projects, managed by NWARPC with ARDOT and local jurisdictions.
- Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP):** Supports bicycle, pedestrian, and trail projects. State-administered TAP funds and TAP-GT 200K allocations for large urbanized areas are managed regionally by NWARPC to fund locally prioritized active transportation improvements.
- Carbon Reduction Program (CRP):** Funds projects that lower transportation related emissions, including electrification, multimodal improvements, and congestion mitigation. A portion is suballocated to urbanized areas and managed by NWARPC for regionally significant emission-reduction projects.
- Federal Transit Programs (FTA Sections 5307, 5339, 5310, 5311):** Fund local transit operations, vehicle replacement, infrastructure, and enhanced mobility for seniors and people with disabilities. NWARPC is the designated recipient for regionally allocated 5307 and 5339 funding.
- Metropolitan Planning Program (PL and FTA Section 5303):** Provides NWARPC funding to carry out federally required metropolitan planning, including the MTP, TIP, performance-based planning, public engagement, and coordination among local, state, and federal partners.
- Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP):** Supports projects that provide access to and within federal and tribal lands, such as the Ozark National Forest and Pea Ridge National Military Park. FLTP funds improve safety, connectivity, and asset condition for roadways and bridges serving federally owned lands within the region.

KEY DISCRETIONARY PROGRAMS

- Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Program:** Competitive federal grants that support major roadway, bridge, and multimodal transportation projects. These grants prioritize projects that improve safety, state-of-good-repair, economic competitiveness, and quality of life.
- Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Program:** Provides discretionary funding to plan and implement initiatives aimed at reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries. Eligible projects include infrastructure improvements, education campaigns, and safety enforcement programs.
- Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) Program:** A discretionary program that funds innovative and emerging transportation technologies, including connected and automated vehicle projects, advanced mobility solutions, and pilot programs to improve system efficiency and multimodal access.
- Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) Program:** A competitive grant program supporting highway and freight projects of national and regional significance, prioritizing improvements that enhance safety, efficiency, and economic mobility.
- Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-Saving Transportation (PROTECT) Program:** Provides formula funding to states and competitive grants for projects that enhance the resilience of

transportation infrastructure, improve safety, and reduce vulnerability to climate and weather related hazards.

- National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program:** Provides formula funding to states to build out electric vehicle charging corridors along designated highways, supporting a national network of fast-charging stations.

OTHER FEDERAL SOURCES

- Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) Loan Program:** Provides low-interest, long-term federal credit assistance for eligible surface transportation projects, helping large-scale projects secure financing and leverage private and other funding sources.
- Emergency Relief (ER) Programs:** Federal funding to repair or restore highways and bridges damaged by natural disasters or catastrophic events, ensuring the safety and resilience of the transportation network.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

STATE TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

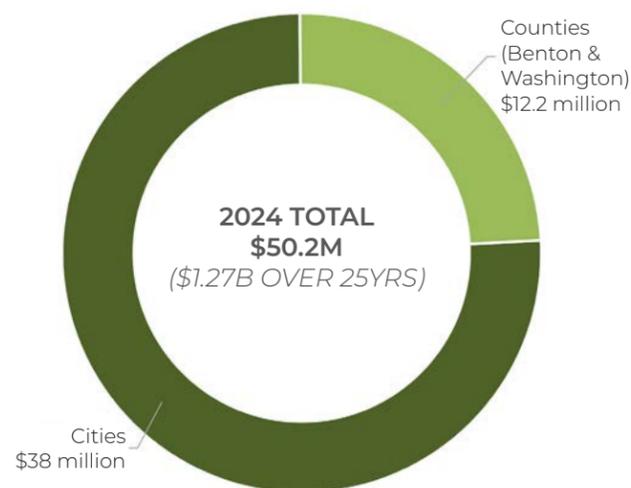
State funding provides a stable, predictable source of revenue to support highway, county road, city street, bridge, and system preservation projects. These resources complement federal and local funds, enabling both regional and community-specific transportation improvements.

- Connecting Arkansas Program (CAP), Act 416, and Issue 1:** These programs provide dedicated state funding for transportation infrastructure. Approximately 70% of revenue is directed to state highway projects, while the remaining 30% is returned to local governments (split evenly at 15% each for cities and counties), creating a reliable funding stream for both state-managed and locally managed improvements.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

2024 STATE STREET & SEVERANCE TAX TURN BACK (CITIES & COUNTIES)



Note: this includes the permanent half-cent sales tax approved by voters in 2020 (Issue 1)

FAST FACTS – HWY FUNDING IN ARKANSAS

- In 2012, voters approved a 10 year ½ cent sales tax under Issue 1 (2012), which helped fund the **Connecting Arkansas Program (CAP)**.
- Act 416** of 2019 increased fuel taxes by 3¢ (gas) and 6¢ (diesel), added hybrid (\$100) and EV (\$200) fees, and redirected excess casino revenue. Act 416 was estimated to raise about \$95 million annually for the state highway system.
- Issue 1** of 2020 made the ½-cent tax permanent, with revenue split 70% to the state, 15% to cities, and 15% to counties – providing roughly \$205 million yearly for ARDOT and \$43 million for cities and \$43 million counties.

KEY LOCAL TRANSPORTATION FUNDING SOURCES

In addition to federal and state funding, Northwest Arkansas relies on local resources and private contributions to build, maintain, and enhance the regional transportation system. Local governments provide revenue through dedicated sales taxes, voter-approved bond programs, and other funding mechanisms that support roadways, bridges, sidewalks, trails, and transit enhancements. These local funds are critical for matching federal and state programs and for addressing city and county specific priorities that may not be eligible for federal funding.

- Local Transportation Bonds:** Many cities in the region have voter-approved sales tax bond programs to support major roadway, bridge, and multimodal projects. Bond proceeds provide up-front capital for construction and rehabilitation projects, allowing municipalities to accelerate improvements while leveraging federal and state matching funds.
- Local Sales Taxes and Dedicated Fees:** Local jurisdictions collect revenue through sales taxes, special assessments, and fees dedicated to transportation improvements. These funds are often used for resurfacing, road widening, bridge maintenance, and pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure projects.
- Turnback and State-Aid Street Funds:** Through programs such as Issue 1 (2020 half-cent sales tax), a portion of state transportation revenue is returned to local governments (approximately

15% each to cities and counties) to fund locally prioritized projects. These funds provide ongoing support for maintenance, rehabilitation, and small-scale capital improvements.

- Local Match Contributions:** Local funds are required as matches for federal and state programs, including STBGP, TAP, CRP, and transit grants. These contributions allow communities to access larger pools of funding while ensuring alignment with regional priorities.
- Private and Philanthropic Contributions:** Public-private partnerships, developer impact fees, and philanthropic funding support transportation projects such as trail networks, transit enhancements, and safety improvements. These sources can provide additional flexibility for innovative or high-priority local initiatives and often help leverage public funds to maximize impact.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

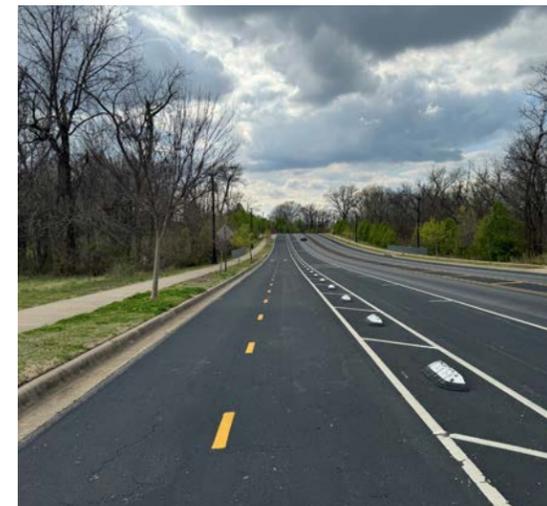
Photo Courtesy of ARDOT



REVENUE PROJECTIONS: WHAT WE EXPECT OVER THE PLANNING HORIZON

NWARPC estimated total revenues available for transportation purposes through 2050, in coordination with the Arkansas and Missouri Departments of Transportation, local governments, and local transit agencies. Forecasts are expressed in year-of-expenditure (YOE) dollars to reflect the value of funds at

the time they will be spent. **Forward 2050** assumes historic funding levels will continue, adjusted for inflation. These forecasts guide the plan's **Constrained Project List**, ensuring all funded projects can reasonably be delivered within available resources, along with adequate resources to maintain the system.



What is "Fiscal Constraint"?

Federal law requires long-range transportation plans to be fiscally constrained – meaning the total cost of funded projects cannot exceed anticipated revenues. In other words, the Constrained Project List reflects what the region can realistically afford based on projected funding, while Vision Projects (unconstrained) identify additional needs that may advance if new funding becomes available.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

FUNDING OUTLOOK

YEAR OF EXPENDITURE & COST BANDS

Federal regulations (23 CFR 450.324) require that revenue and cost estimates supporting the metropolitan transportation plan reflect “Year of Expenditure (YOE)” dollars, which incorporate inflation and cost escalation based on reasonable financial principles. These assumptions are developed cooperatively by the MPO (NWARPC), state departments of transportation (ARDOT & MoDOT), and public transportation operators (ORT & Razorback Transit) to ensure consistency and fiscal accountability.

For the outer years of the plan (beyond the first ten years), federal guidance allows the use of aggregate cost ranges or **cost bands**, provided that the future funding sources are **reasonably expected** to be available to support those projected costs.

In *Forward 2050*, project costs are expressed in YOE terms using assumptions

developed by ARDOT and MoDOT, ensuring that revenues and expenditures remain balanced through 2050. Projects are grouped into **staging periods** to align anticipated revenues with project timing and programming cycles. This approach provides a realistic, phased investment framework that meets federal fiscal constraint requirements while supporting **transparent, performance-based regional planning**.

These estimates project revenues for four staging periods:

- 2025–2028 (representing the adopted 4-year TIP, or as amended)
- 2029–2034
- 2035–2039
- 2040 -2050

FEDERAL FUNDING ESTIMATES

Approximately \$2.99 billion in FHWA formula funds is anticipated to be available from 2029 through 2050 to support the management, operation, preservation, maintenance, and expansion of the region’s multimodal transportation system.

A portion of FHWA National Highway Performance Program (NHPP) funds is set aside for pavement and bridge preservation to maintain the existing system in a state of good repair. State turnback revenues, commonly used by local jurisdictions for roadway and bridge maintenance, further support these preservation activities.

After accounting for dedicated preservation and bridge funding, the total estimated federal funding revenue available from 2029 through 2050 for broader system capital investments is **approximately \$2.97 billion, including matching funds**. These revenues are allocated by staging period and programmed toward priority projects.

THE TIP: THE FIRST FOUR YEARS OF CONSTRAINED PROJECTS

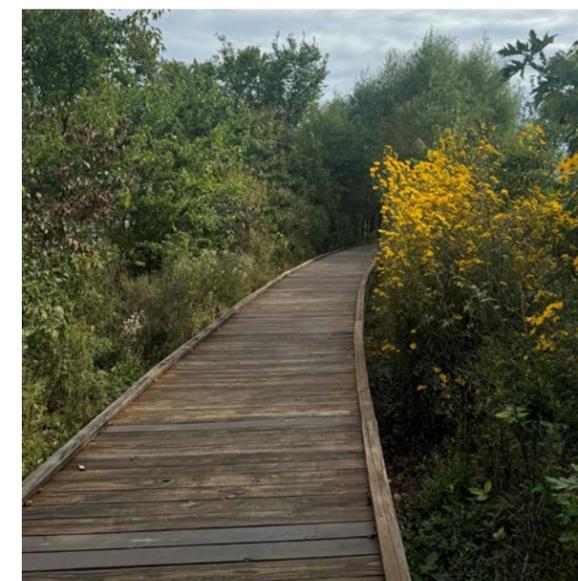
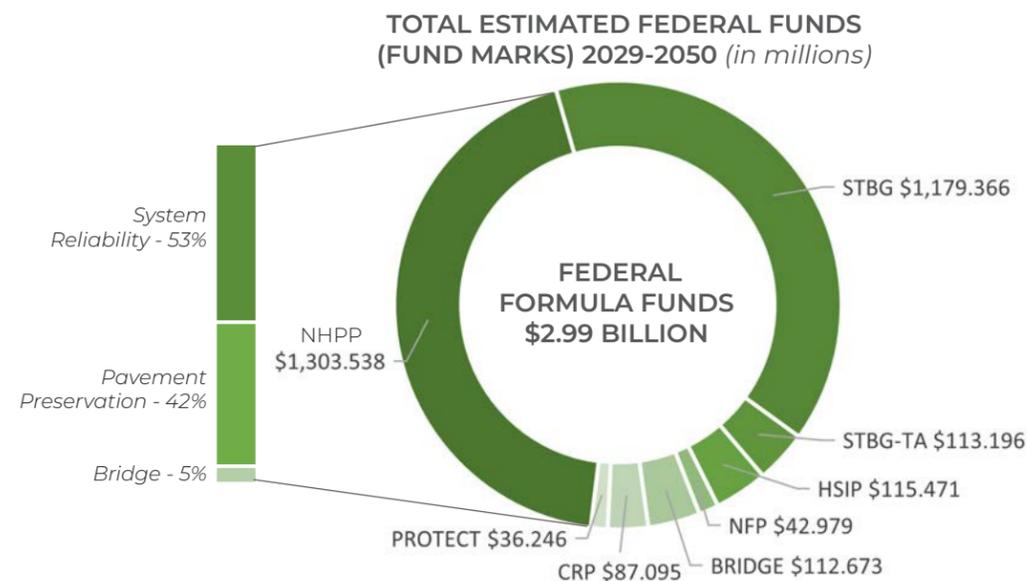
The **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)** is a critical tool for advancing long-range planning priorities in the near term. By identifying specific projects, allocating funding, and setting implementation timelines, it provides transparency, accountability, and a framework for coordinated investment across cities, counties, and regional and state agencies. It also allows the public and stakeholders to see which projects are funded and ready for construction, guiding regional growth and transportation decisions.

Projects from the currently adopted TIP – or subsequent amendments – represent the first four years of the fiscally constrained list. All funding categories listed in the TIP are constrained and available for expenditures.

Including the currently programmed TIP funding, the **total estimated revenue from 2025 through 2050 is \$3.85 billion** in federal funds, plus the corresponding local match.

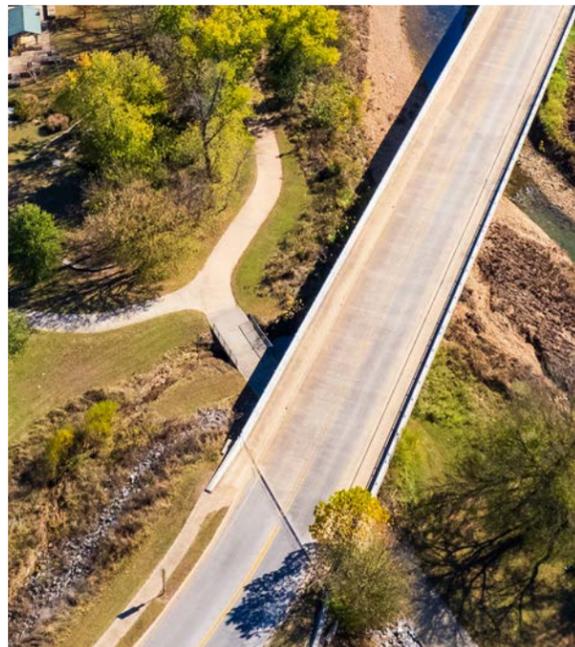
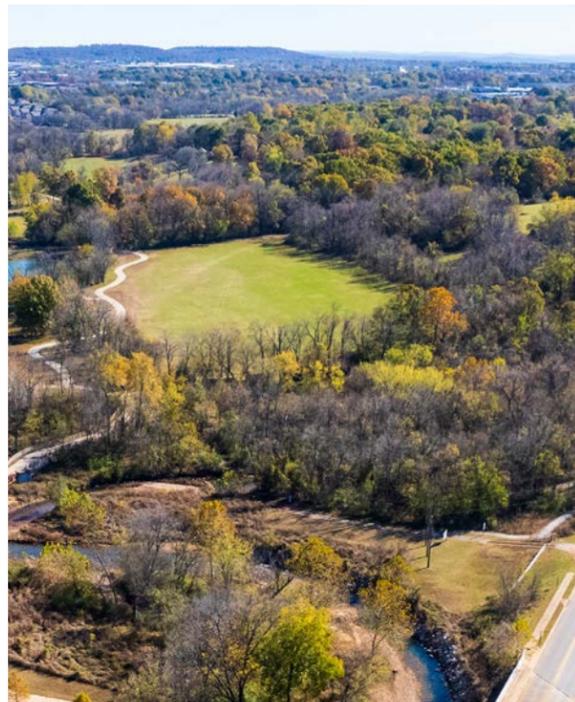
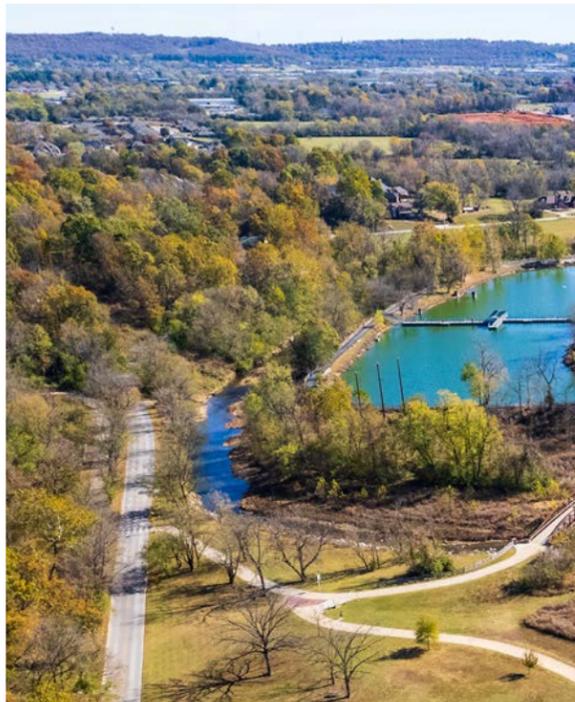
ESTIMATED FHWA REVENUE +MATCH BY STAGING PERIOD (2025-2050)

Staging Period	Average per Year	Total per Period
2025 to 2028 (TIP)	\$221,373,000	\$885,492,000
2029 to 2034	\$114,000,000	\$685,000,000
2035 to 2039	\$127,000,000	\$637,000,000
2040 to 2050	\$149,000,000	\$1,644,000,000
		\$3,851,492,000



\$3,851,492,000

estimated FHWA funds, including matching funds, from 2025-2050 (including funds currently programmed in the 4-year TIP)



DELIVERY GAP

The *Forward 2050* financial analysis **estimates total transportation investment needs of approximately \$6.08 billion through 2050**, reflecting the estimated cost of all priority projects, including constrained and vision projects.

Based on forecasted revenues of approximately \$2.97 billion from federal formula funds and required matching funds, the region is projected to face a **funding shortfall of approximately \$3.12 billion**.

be insufficient to meet rising infrastructure demands – risking worsening congestion, declining system performance, and reduced quality of life for residents and businesses alike.

BRIDGING THE GAP

To begin bridging this gap, *Forward 2050* incorporates **several assumed future funding mechanisms**, including continued pursuit of federal discretionary grants, potential toll or managed lane revenues, participation in the FTA Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program for a high-capacity bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor, and the establishment of a dedicated regional transportation tax. These assumptions align with practices used in peer metropolitan areas, where sustainable, multimodal transportation systems are supported through **diversified local funding such as dedicated regional taxes, regional mobility authorities, and public-private partnerships**.

Moving forward, closing the region's transportation funding gap will require collaboration and proactive financial planning by a regional authority. Northwest Arkansas will explore and expand dedicated regional revenue options similar to successful models in other states that can be referred directly to voters and paired with state and federal funding opportunities. **Chapter 6 outlines the path forward**, detailing strategies to advance implementation, pursue new funding sources, and ensure transportation investments continue to strengthen a prosperous, connected, and resilient Northwest Arkansas.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING DELIVERY GAP (2029-2050)



Only 49% of total \$6.08 billion transportation investment needs can be met with identified funding sources.

Additional revenue mechanisms or discretionary programs will be needed to close the remaining \$3.12 billion gap.

Northwest Arkansas continues to experience one of the **fastest growth rates in the central United States**, with population and employment projected to rise sharply by 2050. Sustaining this growth will require substantial investments in roadway capacity, multimodal infrastructure, and transit expansion to maintain mobility and support economic vitality. Without **new or expanded funding mechanisms**, existing revenue streams will

FORECAST ASSUMPTIONS

NWARPC developed forecasts based on historical trends, existing program structures, and reasonable assumptions about future federal and state authorizations, discretionary grants, and potential new revenue mechanisms. Estimates account for inflation and represent the best available information at plan adoption.

These assumptions provide a starting point to help bridge the funding gap but address only a small portion of the total need. Estimated revenues increase from \$2.97 billion to **\$3.718 billion**—raising the funded share from 49% to approximately 61% of the \$6.08 billion total. Significant additional funding will still be needed to deliver all regional priority projects.

TOTAL ESTIMATED REVENUE SOURCES FOR USE 2029-2050:

- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Formula Funding And Local Match - \$2.79 billion:** Federal formula programs administered by ARDOT, MoDOT, and NWARPC provide the majority of highway, bridge, and multimodal funding. These include: NHPP, STBGP, HSIP, TAP, and CRP. Federal funds generally require a 20% non-federal match from state or local sources and form the backbone of the region's constrained revenue forecast.

- Transit Capital and Operating Funding - \$330 million:** Transit funding in Northwest Arkansas relies on a mix of federal formula programs, discretionary grants, and potential local revenue sources. NWARPC is the FTA-designated recipient for Sections 5307 and 5339 funds, which support operations, maintenance, and capital improvements for Ozark Regional Transit (ORT) and Razorback Transit,

including bus replacement, facility upgrades, and enhanced services for seniors and individuals with disabilities. Local matching funds come from cities, counties, the University of Arkansas, and other regional partners.

- Discretionary Grant Programs (Assumed) - \$75 million:** In addition to formula funds, the *Forward 2050* assumes the continued availability of competitive federal grant programs such as the INFRA, BUILD, and SS4A. These programs provide opportunities to accelerate regionally significant capital projects, innovative safety initiatives, and multimodal infrastructure that enhance resiliency and reduce emissions. Given the region's history in securing competitive grants, NWARPC assumes these programs will continue to supplement formula programs over the planning horizon.

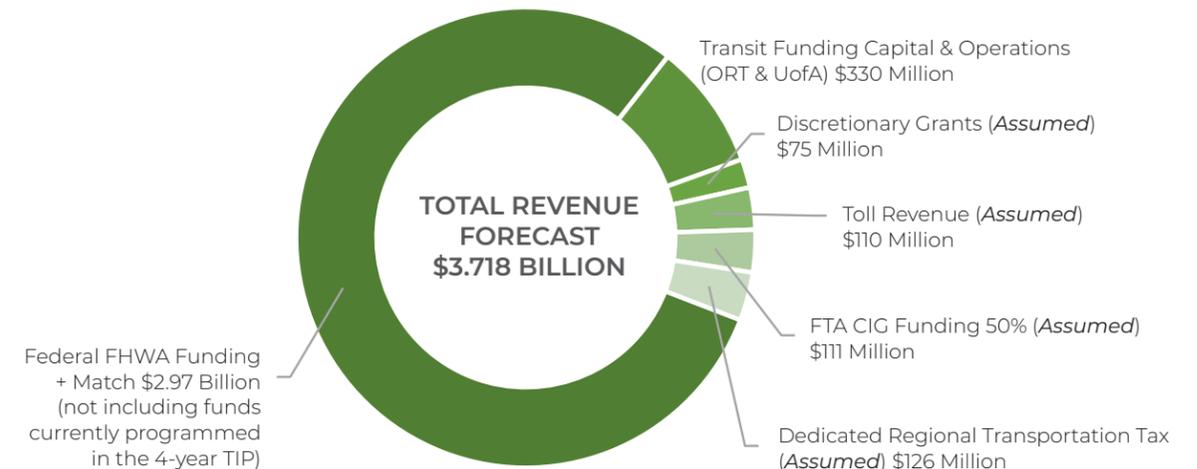
- FTA CIG Funding (Assumed) - \$111 million:** *Forward 2050* anticipates potential participation in the FTA Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program to support the regionally preferred bus rapid transit (BRT) system along US 71B from Fayetteville to Bentonville, providing up to 50% federal funding for eligible transit capital projects, contingent on local readiness and commitment.

Recognizing strong community support for expanded transit service –

85% of residents say there is a need for expanded transit, and 82% would support funding via a local tax

– the plan assumes the potential establishment of a voter-approved dedicated transportation tax to provide a 50-50 local match for CIG funding, supporting operations, service expansion, and fleet modernization.

TOTAL ESTIMATED REVENUES AVAILABLE FOR USE 2029-2050



- Toll Revenue (Assumed) - \$110 million:** While no toll facilities currently operate within the NWARPC region, the plan assumes the potential future use of tolling or managed lanes for major highway or regional connector projects. Tolling could provide a sustainable revenue stream to support large-scale infrastructure investments, including debt repayment or match requirements for federal loans or grants.

Specifically, the plan anticipates future studies to evaluate High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes on I-49, which could provide congestion relief and generate revenue for corridor improvements. Additionally, a proposed toll feasibility study for Hwy 412 / Future I-42 would explore tolling to fund construction, improve mobility, and integrate the corridor into the regional network.

Toll or managed lane implementation would be contingent on thorough corridor-level studies, public engagement, and cost-benefit analyses to ensure equity, efficiency, and regional connectivity. These potential revenue sources provide flexibility for advancing high-priority projects that may otherwise face funding constraints, particularly for major arterial, interstate, and regional connector investments.

- Dedicated Regional Transportation Tax (Assumed) - \$126 million:** The *Forward 2050* plan assumes a voter-approved regional transportation tax to provide a predictable, locally controlled revenue stream for long-term transportation investment. Funds would support multi-jurisdictional corridor projects, multimodal infrastructure, and transit improvements, while leveraging federal formula and discretionary grants, including potential FTA CIG funding for bus rapid transit. A regional governance structure would oversee prioritization, allocation, and accountability to ensure alignment with regional goals and community priorities.

Implementation would require voter approval, a defined multi-year investment plan, and ongoing public engagement. The tax would enhance financial stability, leverage additional funds, and enable high-priority regional projects that might otherwise face funding constraints. See Chapter 6 for challenges, opportunities, and the path forward.

These estimated revenue source forecasts guide the plan's **Constrained Project List**.

ESTIMATED PROJECT COSTS

NWARPC relies on planning-level cost estimates from agencies that design and construct projects. Estimates include, as appropriate: **preliminary engineering, environmental, right-of-way, utility relocation, and construction**. Costs are escalated from current-year (2025) dollars to the appropriate future year of expenditure to account for inflation and provide a realistic projection at the time of implementation. Additional allowances include 4% for engineering, 20% for right-of-way and utilities, and 8% for construction engineering.

Estimated 2025 Construction Costs (per mile)

Freeway Interstate with bridges	\$33 million
Arterial 4 Lane with bridges	\$15 million
Collector 2-3 lane with bridges	\$11 million
Interstate - additional lane	\$9 million



■ PRIORITIZING NETWORK INVESTMENTS: THE CONSTRAINED PROJECTS LIST

The Constrained Project List identifies major capital improvements that can reasonably be funded by 2050. NWARPC coordinated with state DOTs, transit agencies, local governments, and regional stakeholders to develop the fiscally constrained project list for *Forward 2050*. The process reviewed priorities identified at the local, regional, and state levels and incorporated transportation performance measures continued under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), including safety, congestion, air quality, and pavement and bridge conditions.

Building from the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) – the region’s short-range project pipeline – while incorporating longer-term priorities, the Constrained Project List forms the foundation of the 2050 regional network.

Projects included are those that can be implemented within forecasted funding and generally fall into the following categories:

- **TIP Projects:** Projects from the currently adopted TIP, or as amended, representing the first four years of the constrained list.
- **Major State and Regional Corridors:** Highway and transit projects with committed federal and state funding.
- **NWARPC-Awarded Projects:** STBGP-A, TAP, and Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) projects selected through the regional competitive process.
- **Local Transportation Bond Projects:** City- and county-approved bond-funded improvements.
- **Grouped Preservation Projects:** Pavement and bridge preservation initiatives to maintain the existing system.



PROCESS FOR PROJECT SELECTION & PRIORITIZATION

PRIORITY PROJECT SELECTION

Priority projects were identified through a combination of methods, drawing from previous long-range transportation plans, local and regional corridor studies, and ongoing coordination. Projects were evaluated through the regional planning process to ensure they address both current needs – such as congested or high-crash corridors – and anticipated future demands driven by population growth, employment, and development patterns.

Consideration was given to projects that advance multiple regional priorities, including completing the regional network grid, supporting transportation choice, and delivering critical capital improvements that advance multimodal system integration. Factors influencing project selection included:

- **Existing ARDOT Job Numbers and Partner Agreements:** Projects already identified in the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) system or with formal agreements with local jurisdictions are prioritized. This ensures coordination with state and local partners and leverages existing planning, design, and funding commitments.

- **Projects from Completed or Ongoing Corridor Studies:** Priority projects are drawn from corridors that have undergone detailed study and public involvement, including traffic analysis, safety assessments, and environmental review. Incorporating these studies ensures that improvements are grounded in robust technical analysis and reflect long-term regional planning goals.

- **Segments Completing the Regional Arterial Network or Serving Areas of Projected Growth:** Projects that close gaps in the four-lane arterial network in urbanized areas, anticipate future demand in rapidly growing communities, or expand multimodal options are emphasized. This approach supports regional connectivity, accommodates forecasted increases in traffic, population, and employment, and enhances mobility choice for residents and freight.

- **Projects Addressing High-Traffic Arterials Exceeding Capacity Thresholds in 2050 Travel Forecasts:** Using the 2045/2050 travel demand model, roads projected to exceed traffic thresholds – such as two-lane arterials with forecasted daily traffic above 18,000 vehicles or four-lane roads approaching 36,000–60,000 vehicles

per day – are identified. Projects that alleviate congestion on these critical routes are prioritized to maintain mobility and system reliability.

- **Multimodal Connectivity:** The *Forward 2050* network emphasizes integration across modes – linking roads, trails, transit, and emerging mobility options. Selected projects support a balanced system where people can travel safely and efficiently by car, bus, bike, mobility device, or on foot. Other multimodal investments will also include:

- Transit expansion and vehicle replacement for Razorback Transit and Ozark Regional Transit
- Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure funded through TAP and local initiatives, implementing the Northwest Arkansas Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan

- **Environmental Resilience and Responsible Growth:** Projects were selected for their ability to support compact and sustainable development patterns, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and enhance the transportation system's resilience to environmental challenges, including flooding, air quality impacts, and climate-related hazards.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

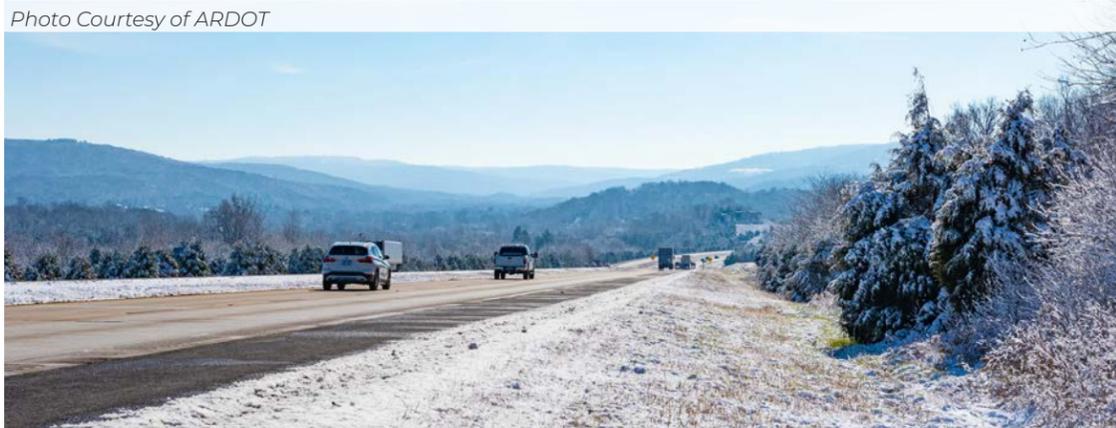


Photo Courtesy of ARDOT



EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Priority projects were assessed using regionally established performance metrics, aligned with the 2050 MTP goals and objectives, and informed by stakeholder and community input. The evaluation framework ensures that investments address the full spectrum of transportation needs while supporting safe, efficient, and sustainable mobility across the region.

- Safety and System Preservation (High Injury Network):** Projects were evaluated for their ability to improve safety outcomes and maintain the integrity of the transportation network, including pavement, bridges, and other critical infrastructure. Emphasis was placed on reducing crashes and addressing locations identified in the High Injury Network (HIN).
- System Reliability and Congestion Relief (Average Daily Traffic):** Investments were assessed based on their effectiveness at reducing congestion, improving traffic flow, and enhancing reliability along key

corridors. Projects addressing high-demand routes and corridors that have experienced significant increases in Average Daily Traffic (ADT) received particular consideration.

- Resilience and Responsible Growth: (Urban Area):** Projects were reviewed for their ability to support complete, compact development patterns, reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and enhance the region's resilience by improving network redundancy and connectivity. Consideration was given to whether a project is located within or adjacent to the urban area, where coordinated land use and transportation investments can reinforce responsible growth.
- Freight and Economic Vitality:** Projects were evaluated for their role in supporting freight movement, access to regional employment centers, and economic competitiveness. Consideration was given to corridors with high truck volumes, recognizing both their importance to goods movement and regional prosperity and the need to enhance safety outcomes for freight and passenger traffic.

Factor	Method	Max Points
High Injury Network	Y/N (Y=40 points)	40
High Volume ADT	Over 40,000 = 8 Points 30,000 – 40,000 = 6 points 20,000 – 30,000 = 4 points 10,000 – 20,000 = 2 points	8
Percent Increase in Volume 2014 – 2024	% Increase / 10 = points	10
Urban Area	Y/N (Y=10 points)	10
Freight	Y/N (Y=10 points)	10



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

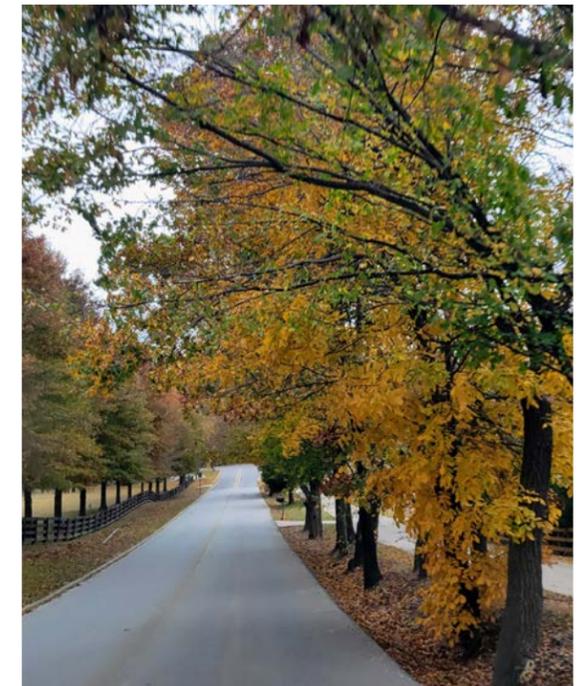


Photo Courtesy of ARDOT



VISION PROJECTS: IMPORTANT LONG-TERM PRIORITIES

Not every priority project can be funded through 2050 with forecasted and assumed revenues. The **Vision (unconstrained) Projects** are critical to the region's long-term mobility but fall outside expected revenues over the 25-year horizon (i.e. the delivery gap). These projects are positioned to advance as additional funding, partnerships, or policy actions become available.

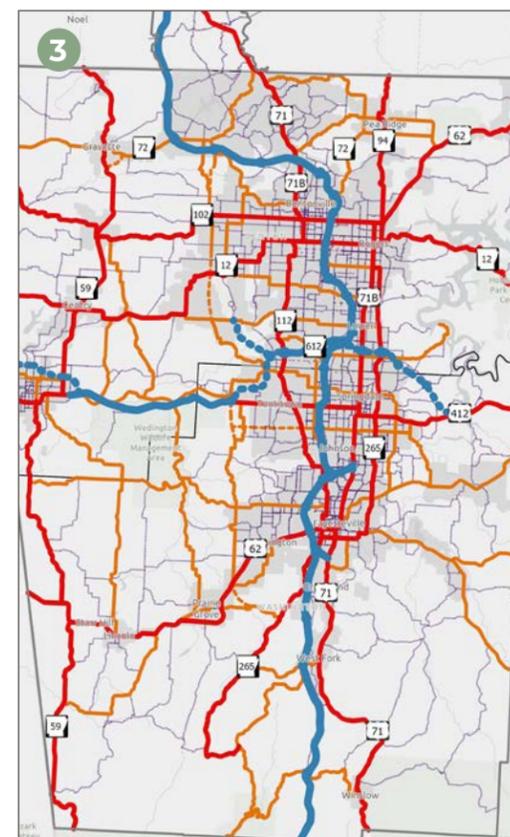
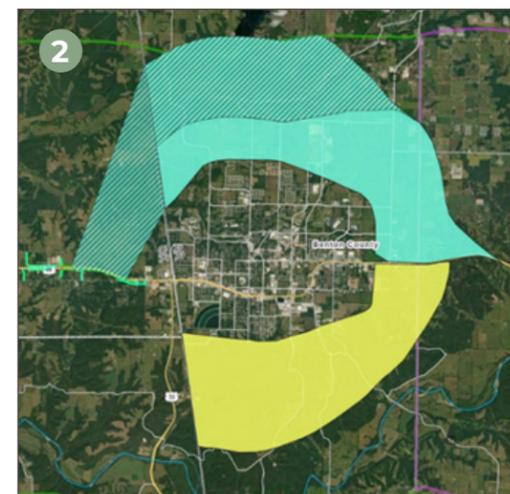
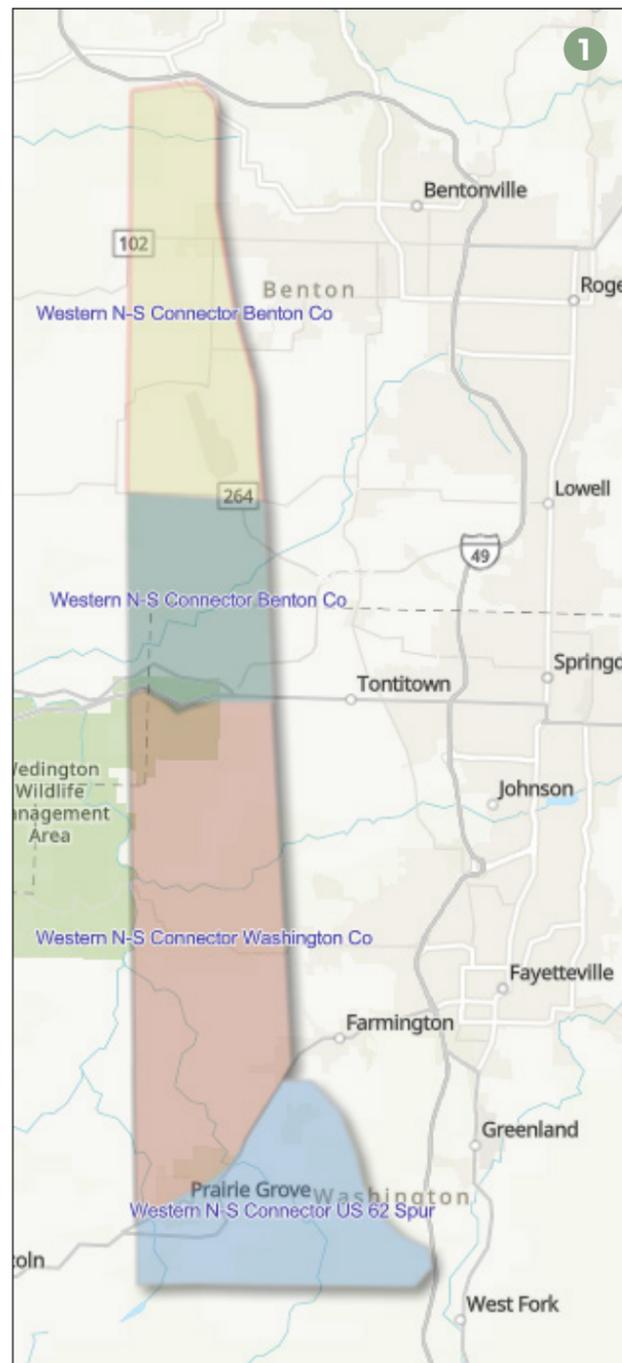
Examples include:

- 1 **Western North-South Connector (Washington County):** A new interchange and arterial connector spur from I-49 between Greenland and West Fork to US 62 near Prairie Grove and further from Prairie Grove to Highway 412 is envisioned as a southern extension of the Western NS Connector currently programmed for project development in the TIP that extends from I-49 near Centerton to connect south to XNA and Highway 412.
- 2 **Future I-42:** Interstate facility extending from the state line near Siloam Springs to Highway 612 in Tontitown. This corridor will connect I-35 in Oklahoma to I-49 in Springdale, utilizing segments of Highway 612 currently under construction.
- 3 **Complete Network. Complete Streets:** Potential new connectors and segments designed to respond to growth and fill in critical gaps in the regional grid in urbanizing areas, paired with essential multimodal improvements—such as transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure—that enhance connectivity, improve travel options, and support a fully integrated, resilient regional transportation network.

KEY TAKEAWAYS – INVESTING IN THE 2050 NETWORK

- The 2050 MTP is fiscally constrained, meaning projects are matched to realistic funding forecasts.
- Federal, state, and local funds remain the foundation for transportation investment.
- Priority projects need \$6B through 2050; with \$3B in existing forecasted revenues, a \$3B delivery gap remains.
- Without new or expanded funding mechanisms, existing revenue streams will be insufficient to meet rising infrastructure demands
- Project prioritization aligns with safety, access, and resilience goals.
- Multimodal projects strengthen the region's connectivity across all travel modes.
- Vision Projects outline the next generation of opportunities as funding evolves.

Forward 2050 sets the stage for understanding how planned investments will shape the region. While Chapter 4 identifies what can be funded and prioritized, the next chapter explores how these projects interact with one another and the broader transportation system, highlighting the trade-offs, opportunities, and expected impacts on *mobility, safety, and regional connectivity*. This analysis provides a foundation for informed decision-making and strategic planning as Northwest Arkansas continues to grow.



Forward 2050 Priority Projects (2029-2050)

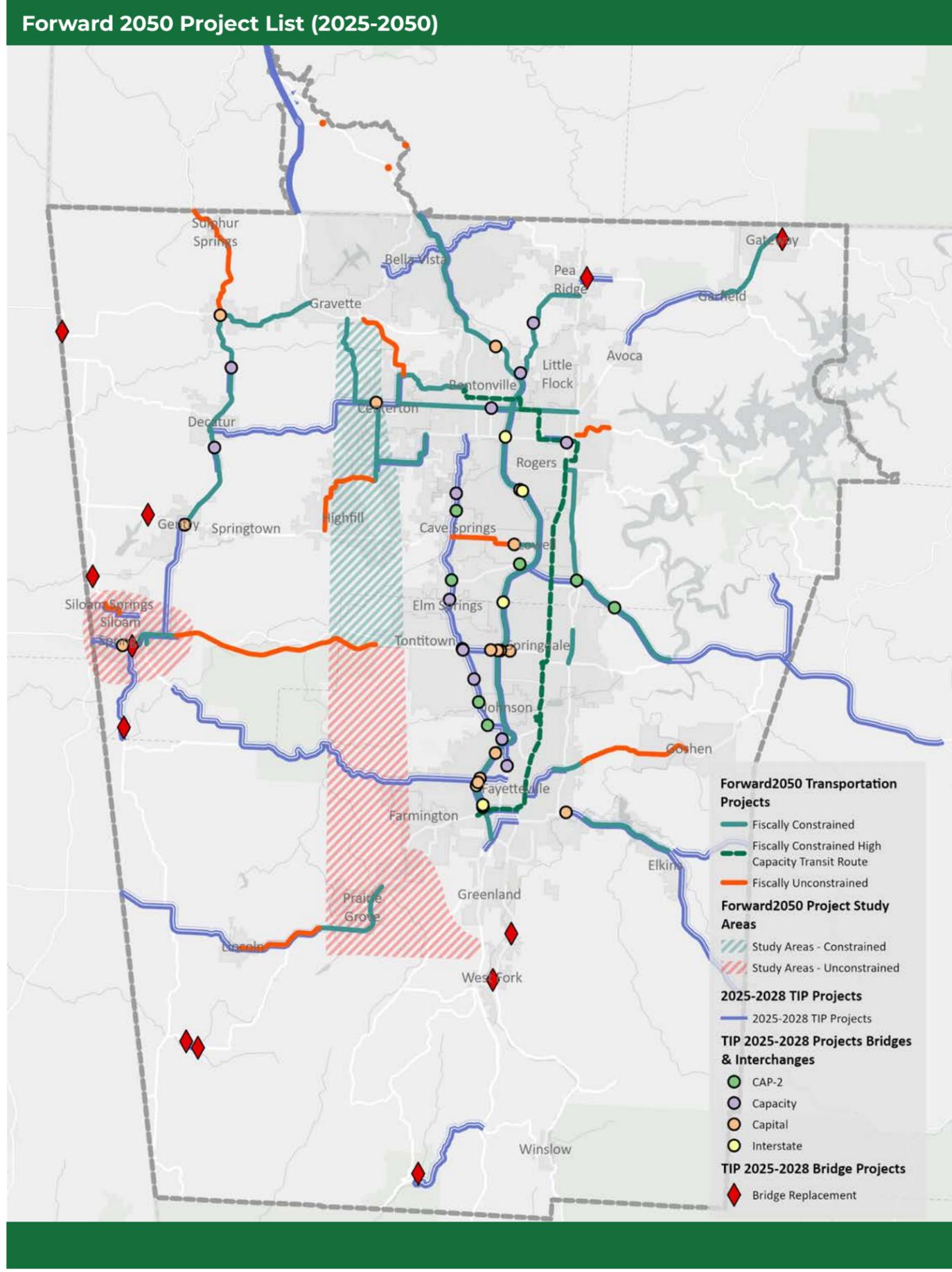
Project Name/Corridor	From	Dir.	To	Project Description	County	Length (miles)	Est. Cost by Year of Expenditure	Staging Period
Constrained Projects								
Hwy 265	Hwy 412	North	Mountain St.	Widen to 5 Lanes (4 to 5)	Washington	1.25	\$ 21,975,000	2029-2030
Hwy 72	Hwy 59	East	I-49	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	5.27	\$ 138,305,000	2029-2034
I-49	Fayetteville	North	Bentonville	Widen to 8-lanes with managed High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes Notes: Study and Implementation Funded Scenario (Phased)	Benton Washington	26	\$ 475,400,000	2034-2050
US 412 Bypass (612)	Hwy 265	East	412 East (Sonora)	New Freeway - 4 Lanes	Benton	6.7	\$ 345,400,000	2029-2034
Hwy 72	I-49	East	Little Sugar Creek Bridge	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	1.87	\$ 47,000,000	2029-2034
BRT on US 71B and MLK	Fayetteville	North	Springdale	Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on US71B and MLK (Phase 1) Fayetteville to Springdale & Rogers to Bentonville Note: Partially Funded Scenario (Phased Approach) - Assumes a dedicated regional non-Federal funding source to operate and maintain	Benton Washington	18	\$ 177,000,000	2029-2034
	Rogers	West	Bentonville					
Hwy 264	Goad Springs Rd.	West	Belview Rd.	Widen 3-lane Divided	Benton	0.98	\$ 18,700,000	2029-2034
Hwy 16	E. Roberts Road	East	Middle Fork - White River	Widen 4-lane Divided	Washington	3	\$ 48,800,000	2029-2034
Hwy 45	Lisa Lane	East	Starr Rd.	Widen to 3 Lanes	Washington	1.07	\$ 18,900,000	2029-2034
Hwy 12	Shell Rd.	South	Regional Dr.	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	5	\$ 142,600,000	2035-2039
US 71	US 71B	North	AR-MO State Line	Various Imps. per Study Rec.	Benton		\$ 15,000,000	2035-2039
AR 59	3rd St/Gentry	North	Decatur	Widen 2-5 Lanes	Benton	5.54	\$ 156,503,000	2035-2039
N/S-Hwy 279	Hwy. 102	South	Hwy 12	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	2.92	\$ 82,503,000	2035-2039
Hwy 102	Hwy. 279 N	East	Hwy 279 S	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	1.26	\$ 32,200,000	2035-2039
Hwy 72	Little Sugar Creek Bridge	East	Curtis Ave	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	4.64	\$ 131,000,000	2035-2039

Forward 2050 Priority Projects (2029-2050)

Project Name/Corridor	From	Dir.	To	Project Description	County	Length (miles)	Est. Cost by Year of Expenditure	Staging Period
BRT on US 71B	Springdale	North	Rogers	Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on US71B (Phase 2) Springdale to Rogers Note: Partially Funded Scenario (Phased Approach) - Assumes a dedicated regional non-Federal funding source to operate and maintain	Benton Washington	12	\$ 45,000,000	2040-2050
Hwy 102-62 Centerton to Rogers	Hwy 102B	East	2nd Street	Widen 4/6-lane Divided - Access Mgmt	Benton	9.47	\$ 85,600,000	2040-2050
Hwy 102B	Hwy 102	North	Hwy 72	Widen 3/4-lane Divided	Benton	1.76	\$ 43,309,000	2040-2050
Hwy 94	U.S. 71	East	1st Street	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	0.66	\$ 13,117,000	2040-2050
US 412	Siloam Springs City Limits	West	Existing 6 lanes	Widen to 6 lanes	Benton	3.1	\$ 57,440,000	2040-2050
US 62	S. Wimpy Jones Rd	East	Hwy 37	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	4.5	\$ 141,100,000	2040-2050
Hwy 72	US 71B	West	Hwy 102B	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	3.7	\$ 134,187,000	2040-2050
Hwy 16	US412	South	Kenwood	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	0.5	\$ 18,200,000	2040-2050
I-49	Hwy 72	North	US 71 North Walton Blvd.	Widen to 6 lanes	Benton	4	\$ 73,141,000	2040-2050
Hwy 265	Pleasant Grove	North	Hwy 94/New Hope Rd.	Widen 4-lane Divided (3 to 4)	Benton	2	\$ 81,892,000	2040-2050
Hwy 265	Hwy 264	North	1st Street / Pleasant Grove	Widen 4-lane Divided (3 to 4) Phase 2	Benton	4	\$ 80,900,000	2040-2050
N/S-Hwy 279	Hwy. 102	North	I-49	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	4.66	\$ 167,400,000	2040-2050
Hwy 16	Middle Fork - White River Bridge	East	Hwy 74	Widen to 4 Lanes	Washington	3.04	\$ 72,800,000	2040-2050
US 62 Bypass	US 62 Bridge (Illinois River)	West	US 62B	Widen to 4 Lanes	Washington	4.78	\$ 103,000,000	2040-2050
AR 59	Decatur	North	Gravette	Widen 2-5 Lanes	Benton	6.7	\$ 205,600,000	2040-2050
Regional Transit Services (ORT and Razorback Transit)	Transit Funding Capital and Operating - Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers AR-MO Urban Area - Ozark Regional Transit and U of A Razorback Transit Note: The amount shown is currently \$15,000,000 per year - both systems combined				Benton Washington		\$ 330,000,000	2029-2050

Forward 2050 Priority Projects (2029-2050)

Project Name/Corridor	From	Dir.	To	Project Description	County	Length (miles)	Est. Cost by Year of Expenditure	Staging Period
Various New Interchanges and Freeway Crossings	Nine (9) interchange projects, and seven (7) various crossing/overpass projects on I-49 and US 612 (Future I-42)							
						Benton Washington		\$ 115,000,000
Various Intersection Projects	Various intersection projects							
Various Safety Projects	Various safety projects							
Vision Projects (Unconstrained)								
Western North-South Connector (US 62 Spur)	I-49	Northwest	US 62	New Interchange and Connector Spur from I-49 between Greenland and West Fork to US 62 near Prairie Grove.	Washington	6	\$ 215,505,000	Beyond 2050
Hwy 45	Starr Rd.	East	Oakland Zion Rd.	Widen to 3 lanes	Washington	0.76	\$ 23,100,000	Beyond 2050
I-42	Tontitown	West	Oklahoma	Future Interstate facility	Benton Washington	17	\$ 967,000,000	Beyond 2050
Hwy 264	Bellview Rd.	West	Hwy 112	Widen to 3 lanes	Benton	3.25	\$ 84,100,000	Beyond 2050
Hwy 12	Regional	West	Hwy 264	Widen 4-lane divided	Benton	4.84	\$ 173,729,000	Beyond 2050
Hwy 12	2nd St.	East	City Limits (Rogers)	Widen 4-lane divided	Benton	1.89	\$ 37,500,000	Beyond 2050
Hwy 45	Oakland Zion Rd.	East	White River	Safety and Capacity Improvements	Washington	5.37	\$ 17,000,000	Beyond 2050
Hwy 72	102B	West	I-49	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	4.27	\$ 151,000,000	Beyond 2050
AR 59	Gravette	North	AR-MO Stateline	Widen 2-5 Lanes	Benton	6.7	\$ 205,600,000	Beyond 2050
Hwy 43	Cheri Whitlock Parkway	West	Sycamore Heights	Widen 4-lane Divided	Benton	1.13	\$ 34,300,000	Beyond 2050
Western North-South Connector (Wash.Co.Ext.)	Prairie Grove	North	US412	Improved Western Arterial Connector	Washington	14	\$ 495,000,000	Beyond 2050



Chapter 05

UNDERSTANDING IMPACTS: ASSESSING PROJECT, PLAN, & SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

This chapter examines the constrained project list from multiple levels – project, plan, and system performance – to show what these investments mean for the region now and in the future.



Forward 2050 is built on accountability – and this chapter shows what that looks like in practice. With major investments identified in Chapter 4 now on the table, Chapter 5 examines how these projects collectively advance national and regional goals. To do this, the plan uses a three-tiered assessment approach that evaluates performance at the **project, plan, and system levels**.

- At the **project level**, each project is scored using weighted evaluation criteria that directly support the *Forward 2050* goals and objectives.
- At the **plan level**, performance measures assess the expected future outcomes of all constrained projects collectively, providing a system-wide picture of how the region's investments are anticipated to perform over time.
- At the **system performance level**, NWARPC monitors the current condition of the transportation network using the federally required measures established by FHWA for states and MPOs.

Together, these three levels of assessment provide a comprehensive understanding of how individual investments, the overall plan, and today's transportation system align with national performance goals and regional priorities. This chapter explains how the constrained project list advances federal performance areas defined in **23 U.S.C. 150** and how NWARPC and its partners measure, monitor, and report progress to ensure that *Forward 2050* delivers measurable results for Northwest Arkansas.

*Although more residents in 2024 compared to 2019 say **NWA rush hour congestion** is better than other metros – **almost half** still say congestion is getting worse.*

PROJECT-LEVEL ASSESSMENT

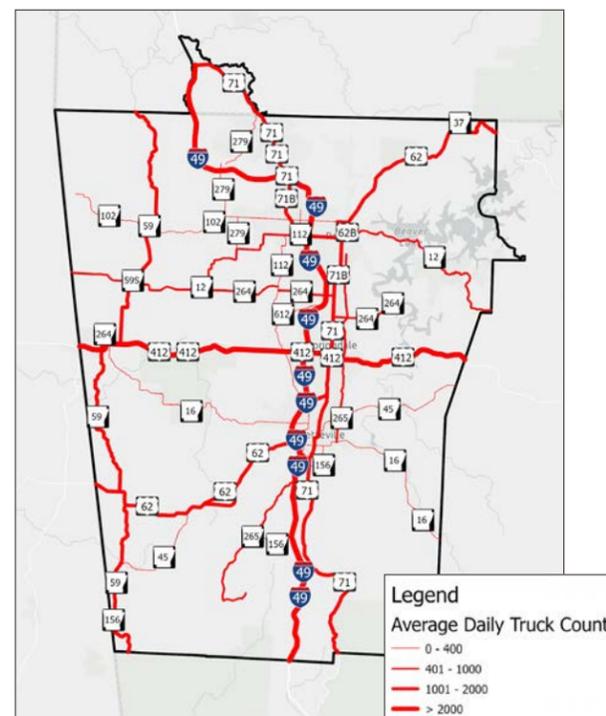
At the project level, each investment on the constrained project list is evaluated to understand its potential contribution to *Forward 2050*'s objectives. A structured, weighted scoring system was used to provide an objective framework for assessing and comparing projects across multiple dimensions of performance. This system helps prioritize investments while ensuring alignment with the region's safety, mobility, and resilience goals.

The project-level evaluation draws on several key categories, reflecting both regional priorities and measurable transportation system characteristics:

- Urbanized Area Location** – Projects located within the region's urbanized area receive recognition for serving higher-density corridors and supporting concentrated multimodal travel.
- High Injury Network** – Projects on or diverting traffic from segments identified as high-risk are prioritized to address safety concerns and reduce serious crashes and fatalities.
- Traffic Volume and Growth** – Average daily traffic levels and historic growth trends (2014–2024) are considered to identify corridors experiencing significant demand or rapid increases in traffic.
- Freight Significance** – Projects serving corridors with heavy truck volumes are prioritized for their importance to regional commerce and economic vitality, as well as their role in enhancing safety and operational performance for freight and passenger traffic.

Scores are assigned for each category and weighted according to regional priorities, providing a quantitative perspective on potential benefits. Importantly, scoring serves as **guidance rather than prescription**: input from planning partners, public engagement, and qualitative considerations are also integrated into project prioritization decisions. By combining objective scoring with expert and community input, the project-level assessment identifies investments that deliver the greatest benefits, address critical needs, and advance *Forward 2050*'s vision.

NWA AGGREGATED AVERAGE DAILY TRUCK VOLUME ON STATE SYSTEM (2024)



FORWARD 2050 PROJECT ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Project Name/Corridor	From	To	Urban Area	HIN	High Volume Score	ADT % Increase Score	Freight Score	Staging Period
Hwy 265	Hwy 412	N Mountain St.	10	40	4	2	10	2029-2034
Hwy 72	Hwy 59	E I-49	5	40	2	8	10	2029-2034
I-49	Fayetteville	N Bentonville	10	40	2	3	10	2034-2050
US 412 Bypass (612)	Hwy 265	E 412 East (Sonora)	10	40	No value	No Value	10	2029-2034
Hwy 72	I-49	E Little Sugar Creek Bridge	10	40	2	7	0	2029-2034
BRT on US 71B and MLK	Fayetteville Rogers	N Springdale W Bentonville	10	40	6	2	0	2029-2034
Hwy 264	Goad Springs Rd.	W Bellview Rd.	10	40	2	2	10	2029-2034
Hwy 16	E. Roberts Road	E Middle Fork -White River	10	0	2	3	0	2029-2034
Hwy 45	Lisa Lane	E Starr Rd.	10	0	2	0	0	2029-2034
Hwy 12	Shell Rd.	S Regional Dr.	10	0	2	10	10	2035-2039
US 71	US 71B	N AR-MO State Line	10	40	6	No Value	10	2035-2039
AR 59	3rd St/Gentry	N Decatur	0	40	2	4	10	2035-2039
N/S-Hwy 279	Hwy. 102	S Hwy 12	10	0	0	10	10	2035-2039
Hwy 102	Hwy. 279 N	E Hwy 279 S	10	0	0	3	0	2035-2039
Hwy 72	Little Sugar Creek Bridge	E Curtis Ave	0	0	2	5	0	2035-2039
BRT on US 71B	Springdale	N Rogers	10	40	6	2	0	2035-2039
Hwy 102-62	Hwy 102B (Centerton)	E 2nd Street (Rogers)	10	40	6	0	0	2040-2050
Hwy 102B	Hwy 102	N Hwy 72	10	40	2	1	0	2040-2050
Hwy 94	U.S. 71	E 1st Street	10	40	2	1	0	2040-2050
US 412	Siloam Springs City Limits	W Existing 6 lanes	0	40	2	2	10	2040-2050
US 62	S. Wimp Jones Rd	E Hwy 37	0	40	0	4	10	2040-2050
Hwy 72	US 71B	W Hwy 102B	10	40	2	1	0	2040-2050
Hwy 16	US412	S Kenwood	0	40	0	2	0	2040-2050
I-49	Hwy 72	N US 71 North Walton Blvd.	10	0	8	3	10	2040-2050
Hwy 265	Pleasant Grove	N Hwy 94/New Hope Rd.	10	0	2	7	10	2040-2050
Hwy 265	Hwy 264	N 1st Street / Pleasant Grove	10	0	2	No Value	10	2040-2050
N/S-Hwy 279	Hwy. 102	N I-49	10	0	0	2	10	2040-2050
Hwy 16	White River Bridge	E Hwy 74	10	0	2	3	0	2040-2050
US 62 Bypass	Illinois River Bridge	W US 62B	0	No Value	2	2	10	2040-2050
AR 59	Decatur	N Gravette	0	0	0	1	10	2040-2050
Western NS Connector (US 62 Spur)	I-49	NW US 62	10	40	3	4	10	Beyond 2050
Hwy 45	Starr Rd.	E Oakland Zion Rd.	10	0	2	3	0	Beyond 2050
I-42	Tontitown	W Oklahoma	0	40	4	2	10	Beyond 2050
Hwy 264	Bellview Rd.	W Hwy 112	10	40	0	0	10	Beyond 2050
Hwy 12	Regional	W Hwy 264	10	0	0	7	10	Beyond 2050
Hwy 12	2nd St.	E City Limits (Rogers)	10	0	2	0	10	Beyond 2050
Hwy 45	Oakland Zion Rd.	E White River	10	0	2	4	0	Beyond 2050
Hwy 72	102B	W I-49	10	0	0	3	0	Beyond 2050
AR 59	Gravette	N AR-MO State line	0	0	0	0	10	Beyond 2050
Hwy 43	Cheri Whitlock Pkwy	W Sycamore Heights	0	0	0	3	0	Beyond 2050
Western NS Connector (Wash.Co.)	Prairie Grove	N US412	5	40	3	4	10	Beyond 2050

■ PLAN-LEVEL ASSESSMENT

The plan-level analysis considers the collective impact of all constrained projects to assess anticipated outcomes. **Forward 2050's** goals were developed with national transportation performance goals in mind, creating a framework that aligns regional priorities with federally required performance measures. While the federally mandated System Performance Report focuses on current conditions and progress toward national targets, the plan-level measures assess the anticipated outcomes of all constrained projects collectively.

G1: IMPLEMENT A SAFE, EFFICIENT, AND RELIABLE MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM.

Forward 2050 prioritizes a transportation system that is safe, reliable, and resilient for all users. The constrained project list focuses on investments that enhance safety, reduce congestion, and strengthens the regional network.

Safety-focused projects support Vision Zero goals by addressing segments on the High Injury Network (HIN) with high rates of serious crashes and fatalities. Constrained projects include roadway and intersection upgrades, multimodal safety enhancements, and countermeasures that reduce risk for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.

Complete Streets strategies are incorporated through projects that expand pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, improve transit accommodations, and strengthen connectivity in urban areas. These investments improve multimodal safety, support active transportation, and promote compact, equitable development, which builds reliability across an integrated regional transportation system for all modes.

Resiliency is reinforced by building out the region's grid network, where key corridors – including Interstate/Freeway, Tier 1, and Tier 2 routes – provide multiple options for travel, emergency response, and evacuation when primary routes are disrupted. By connecting routes and filling network gaps, these projects enhance mobility, reduce congestion, and provide reliable alternative routes for everyday travel and emergency situations.



Photo Courtesy of Benton County

G2: ADVANCE PLANS AND POLICIES THAT ENABLE TRANSPORTATION CHOICE, RESPECT THE NATURAL AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENT, AND ENHANCE QUALITY OF LIFE.

Forward 2050 emphasizes a transportation system that provides choice, promotes equity, and supports sustainable, compact development. Constrained projects advance this goal by enhancing public transit, active transportation, and Complete Streets infrastructure, creating a multimodal network that integrates with land-use planning and supports fiscally responsible growth.

Investments such as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) along US 71B, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, and transit enhancements demonstrate a commitment to providing viable alternatives to single-occupancy vehicle travel and reducing household transportation costs.

Project selection prioritizes location within or adjacent to urbanized areas, where coordinated transportation and land-use investments can maximize accessibility and support compact, mixed-use development. By focusing on areas with higher population density and multimodal demand, these projects strengthen connectivity, improve travel options, and reduce the need for expansion into undeveloped areas, helping curb sprawl and protect the natural environment.

Projects were evaluated for their impacts on seniors, youth, low-income residents, people with disabilities, and

zero-car households, ensuring that all residents have access to employment, education, healthcare, and essential services. Investments in paratransit, transit expansions, and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure enhance mobility for historically underserved populations and help integrate these communities into the broader regional network.

Prioritizing multimodal improvements, compact development, and urbanized-area investments supports reductions in vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and associated emissions, helping advance the region's Energy & Environment Innovation (EEI) Plan. Constrained projects are also coordinated with regional initiatives such as the Northwest Arkansas Open Space Plan and the NWA Green Network and Blue-Green Network, which seeks to connect natural cores and corridors with active transportation infrastructure.

Aligning transportation investments with these plans and resource-specific studies helps minimize impacts on sensitive natural areas—including water, riparian corridors, and karst resources—and ensures that system expansion supports long-term environmental stewardship.



G3: REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

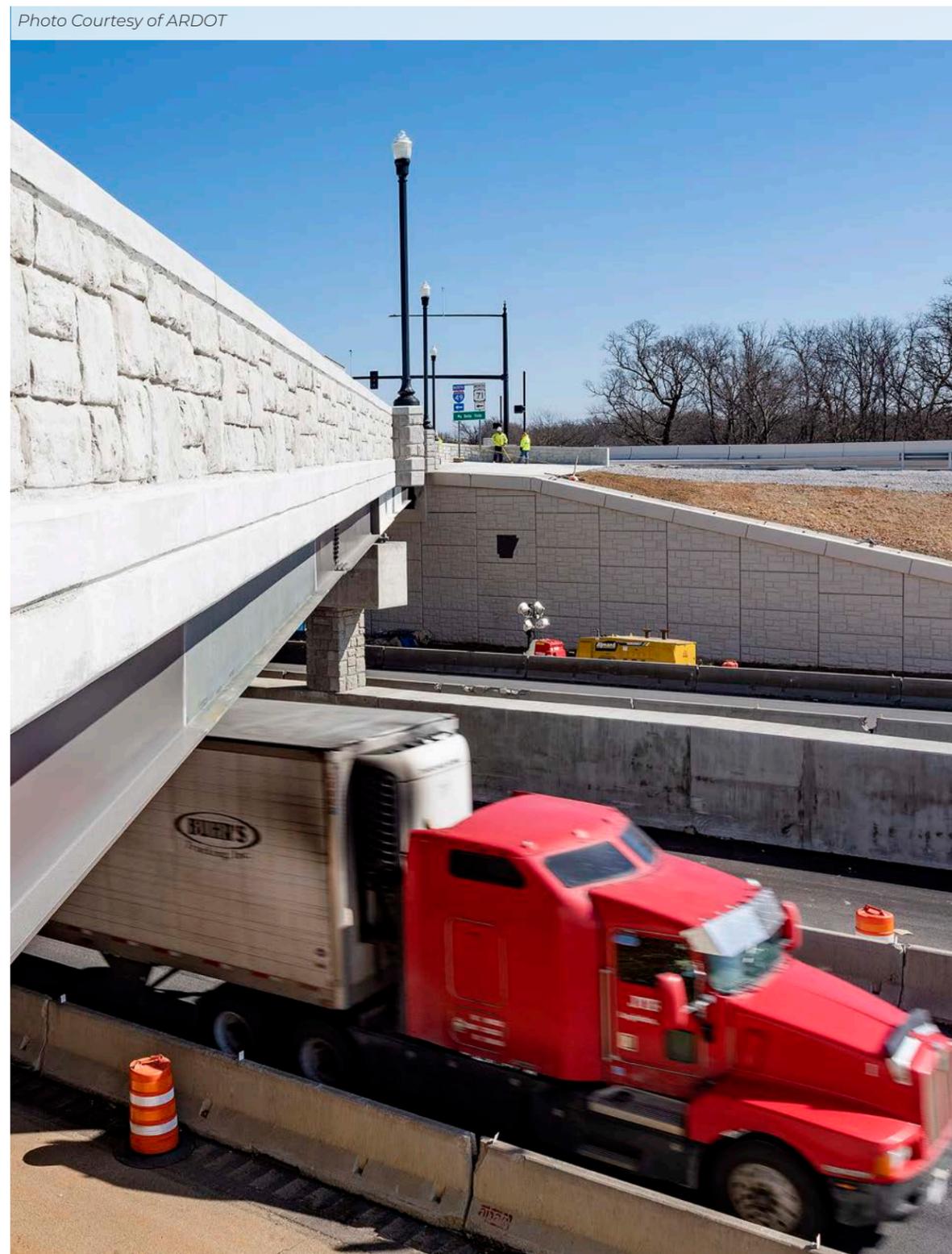
Northwest Arkansas functions as a polycentric region where people, jobs, freight, and natural systems regularly cross municipal boundaries. Because movement and impacts are regional rather than jurisdictional, transportation strategies must be collaborative and aligned across the region. *Forward 2050*'s constrained project list reflects this reality by prioritizing investments that strengthen cross-boundary connectivity and support shared regional priorities.

Many constrained projects are drawn from completed or ongoing corridor studies, locally developed plans, and regionally adopted strategies. These studies include traffic analyses, safety assessments, and environmental reviews, and public input, providing a technical foundation for project selection. By building on this analysis, the constrained project list ensures that investments are data-driven, advance long-term regional planning goals, and coordinate with state, regional, and local priorities.

The constrained project list advances regional economic competitiveness by improving the reliability and efficiency of the multimodal freight and commuter network. More than half of the selected segments cross jurisdictional boundaries, reinforcing the linkages that allow residents to access major employment centers and enabling goods to move efficiently throughout the region.

Freight efficiency is critical to the region's economic vitality. High volumes of freight traffic on inappropriate routes can create congestion and unsafe conditions for all users. Many constrained projects target key regional freight corridors to improve safety and system performance, while other investments provide alternative routes for non-freight travel, enhancing reliability and connectivity across the regional network. *Forward 2050* also supports long-term strategies to maintain reliable access along I-49 – the region's economic spine – through added capacity and potential demand-management tools such as HOT or HOV lanes. Paired with expanded multimodal choices identified in other plan goals, these improvements help ensure that the region can sustain economic growth while maintaining dependable regional mobility.

Photo Courtesy of ARDOT



SYSTEM-LEVEL ASSESSMENT

The last three federal transportation bills, Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, and the current Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act (IIJA), contain requirements for State Departments of Transportation (DOTs), Transit operators, and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to establish and conduct performance-based planning and programming.

Forward 2050 evaluates regional projects and plan outcomes within the context of national transportation priorities through the federal Transportation Performance Management (TPM) framework, established in **23 USC 134 and 23 CFR 450.324**. This framework emphasizes coordination, target-setting, and performance reporting to ensure that transportation investments achieve measurable outcomes. For more information, see **Appendix E: System Performance Report**.

State DOTs, transit agencies, and MPOs are required to work together to set performance targets and report progress toward national goals.

NATIONAL PLANNING GOALS (23 USC 150)

Safety	To achieve a significant reduction in traffic fatalities and serious injuries on all public roads.
Infrastructure condition	To maintain the highway infrastructure asset system in a state of good repair.
Congestion reduction	To achieve a significant reduction in congestion on the National Highway System.
System reliability	To improve the efficiency of the surface transportation system.
Freight movement and economic vitality	To improve the National Highway Freight Network, strengthen the ability of rural communities to access national and international trade markets, and support regional economic development.
Environmental sustainability	To enhance the performance of the transportation system while protecting and enhancing the natural environment.
Reduced project delivery delays	To reduce project costs, promote jobs and the economy, and expedite the movement of people and goods by accelerating project completion through eliminating delays in the project development and delivery process, including reducing regulatory burdens and improving agencies' work practices.

Forward 2050 aligns its regional objectives with these national goals and planning factors, providing a foundation for measuring progress and guiding investment decisions. MPOs may establish their own targets or adopt statewide and transit agency targets; NWARPC has consistently chosen the latter approach to maintain a coordinated, bi-state strategy across Arkansas and Missouri.

The federal TPM program encompasses five major performance areas, with more than 20 specific measures, covering both highway and transit systems:

- Highway Safety (PM1)
- Pavement and Bridge Condition (PM2)
- System Reliability (PM3)
- Transit Asset Management (TAM)
- Transit Safety

FEDERALLY REQUIRED TRANSPORTATION PERFORMANCE MEASURES (TPM) SUMMARY

	Arkansas Statewide Performance			Missouri Statewide Performance		
	Target	Actual	Meets Target	Target	Actual	Meets Target
PM 1: Safety (2019-2023)						
Number of Fatalities	704.9	617.4	✓	948.2	986.4	
Fatality Rate per 100 Million VMT	1.895	1.654	✓	1.212	1.26	
Number of Serious Injuries	2,790.1	2,659.2	✓	4,848.7	4,965.6	
Serious Injury Rate per 100 Million VMT	7.815	7.126	✓	6.205	6.336	
Number of Non-motorized Fatalities and Serious Injuries	274.4	264.8	✓	499.2	566.2	
PM2: Bridge and Pavement Conditions 2022 Performance Period						
Percentage of pavements of the Interstate System in Good Condition	72%	65.2%		77.50%	79.90%	✓
Percentage of pavements of the Interstate System in Poor Condition	5%	1.3%	✓	0.1%	0.00%	✓
Percentage of non-Interstate NHS Pavements in Good Condition	59%	65.9%	✓	61.1%	61.3%	✓
Percentage of non-Interstate NHS Pavements in Poor Condition	7%	7.7%		1%	0.9%	✓
Percentage of NHS Bridges Classified as in Good Condition	42%	43.6%	✓	26.4%	27.2%	✓
Percentage of NHS Bridges Classified as in Poor Condition	6%	3.5%	✓	8.2%	7.1%	✓
PM3: Freight and Reliability 2022 Performance Period						
Interstate Travel Time Reliability Measure: Percent of Reliable Person-Miles Traveled on the Interstate	93%	98.5%	✓	87.1%	98.4%	✓
Non-Interstate Travel Time Reliability Measure: Percent of Reliable Person-Miles Traveled on the Non-Interstate NHS	92%	95.5%	✓	87.8%	95.5%	✓
Truck Travel Time Reliability (TTTR) Index	1.4	1.24	✓	1.45	1.18	✓

1 SAFETY

Safety is a top regional priority, reflected in investments guided by Vision Zero principles and the *NWA Regional Complete Streets Design Guide*. Constrained projects target High Injury Network corridors and incorporate multimodal safety improvements to reduce fatalities and serious injuries for all roadway users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.

Performance indicators:

- Number of Fatalities
- Fatality Rate (per 100 million VMT)
- Number of Serious Injuries
- Serious Injury Rate (per 100 million VMT)
- Number of Non-Motorized Fatalities and Serious Injuries

Data from the Arkansas Crash Analytics Tool (ARDOT), MoDOT databases, and Fatality and Injury Reporting System Tool (FIRST) informs the indicators above.



2 INFRASTRUCTURE CONDITION

Maintaining pavement and bridge infrastructure in a state of good repair is essential for safety, mobility, and long-term fiscal responsibility. Projects on the constrained list prioritize rehabilitation and preservation based on state and local asset management assessments.

Performance indicators:

- Percent of Pavement in Good/Poor Condition (on National Highway System (NHS))
- Percent of Bridges in Good/Poor Condition (on NHS)



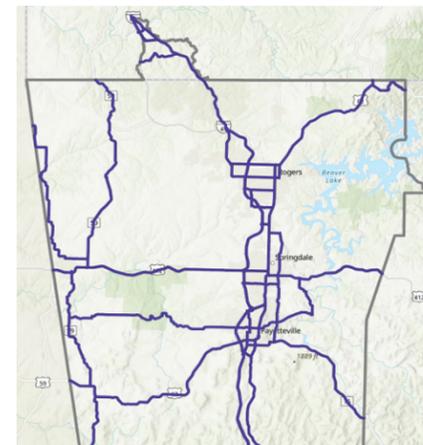
3 CONGESTION REDUCTION

Reducing congestion supports economic productivity, quality of life, and reliability across the network. The Congestion Management Process (CMP) identifies high-delay corridors and evaluates both Transportation System Management (TSM) and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies, including signal coordination, intersection improvements, high-occupancy vehicle lanes, and travel demand reductions.

Key CMP Measures are tracked on the CMP Network created based on the National Performance Management Research Data Set (NPMRDS) data availability:

- Percent of Roadways Providing Reliable Travel Times
- Annual Hours of Peak-Hour Excessive Delay Per Capita
- Transit Access and Service Metrics Commute Mode Share

2022 NWARPC CMP Network



4 SYSTEM RELIABILITY

Reliable travel times are critical for both people and freight. *Forward 2050* projects support improved corridor performance and interchange operations to reduce non-recurring delay and enhance predictability.

Performance indicators:

- Level of Travel Time Reliability (LOTRR) on Interstate and Non-Interstate NHS

5 FREIGHT MOVEMENT AND ECONOMIC VITALITY

Efficient freight movement is essential to the region's economy. Constrained projects target key freight corridors to improve safety, reliability, and overall system performance. Projects also support broader economic connectivity by maintaining reliable access to employment centers.

The Truck Travel Time Reliability Index (TTTRI) measures variability in truck travel times on the Interstate system, indicating whether freight moves consistently and predictably across the region.

Performance indicators:

- The Truck Travel Time Reliability Index (TTTRI)



6 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Forward 2050 seeks to reduce transportation-related environmental impacts by prioritizing transit, bicycle, and pedestrian investments and by improving roadway efficiency to lower VMT and emissions. Progress toward regional sustainability goals – including the Energy and Environment Innovation Plan’s net-zero target for 2050 – is monitored through GHG data, VMT trends, multimodal usage, and air-quality indicators.

Maintaining the region’s attainment status under federal air-quality standards is essential. By reducing congestion, supporting mode shift, and coordinating with ARDOT, MoDOT, and the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, the region proactively protects air quality and eligibility for key federal programs.

Collaboration with the NWA Green Network, Open Space Plan, and resource-specific studies ensures that transportation investments minimize impacts to sensitive natural areas while strengthening ecological and active-transportation connectivity.

Transportation accounts for roughly 28 percent of regional GHG emissions. Achieving long-term reduction targets will require substantial emission decreases through greater multimodal access and system efficiency. **Forward 2050** incorporates a proposed GHG reduction pathway to guide progress toward the region’s net-zero goal and align future investments with broader environmental commitments.

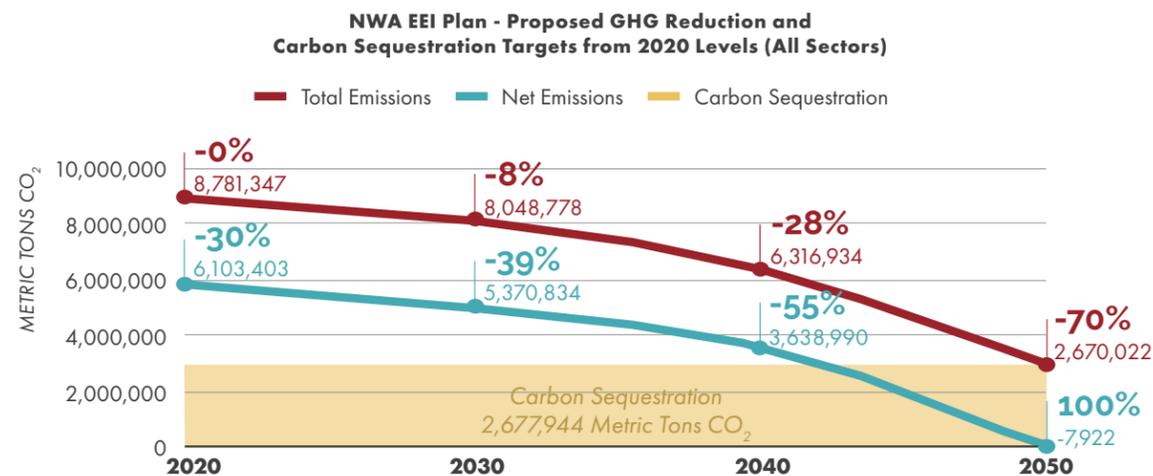
Year	% Reduction from 2020 Levels	Metric Tons CO ₂ emitted per year
2020	Baseline	2,470,208
2030	10%	2,223,187
2040	30%	1,729,140
2050	75%	617,552

7 PROJECT DELIVERY EFFICIENCY

Efficient project delivery ensures timely benefits, cost-effective use of public funds, and alignment with federal performance-based planning requirements. **Forward 2050** supports strategies that accelerate implementation while maintaining high-quality outcomes. These include streamlined environmental reviews, early coordination on design and right-of-way needs, and the use of innovative delivery methods such as design-build, construction manager/general contractor (CM/GC), and public-private partnerships where appropriate. Ongoing monitoring of delivery timelines helps ensure that investments remain fiscally responsible and responsive to community needs.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT



Chapter 06

LOOKING AHEAD: IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

This chapter outlines how NWARPC and its partners will translate plan recommendations into real improvements, measure progress, and adapt over time to build a connected, safe, and resilient region.



Bringing *Forward 2050* to life requires coordinated investments and collaboration among NWARPC, member governments, state agencies, transit providers, and private and philanthropic partners. These stakeholders use the plan's strategies to guide funding, policies, and programs that shape the region's transportation future.

Implementation occurs through multiple avenues:

- **Federal and State Programming Cycles:** Aligning *Forward 2050* priorities with the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), and other adopted planning documents.
- **Programmatic Grant Programs:** Administering competitive Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBGP), Carbon Reduction Program (CRP), and Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding to advance regional priorities.
- **Discretionary Grant Opportunities:** Positioning local governments and regional partners to pursue federal discretionary grants such as BUILD Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A).
- **Local Implementation Tools:** Integrating plan principles and priorities into comprehensive plans, zoning updates, and local capital improvement programs.
- **Private and Philanthropic Partnerships:** Leveraging philanthropic initiatives and public-private partnerships to accelerate project delivery and innovation.

The *Implementation Matrix* identifies key actions, responsible parties, and timeframes for progress.

FORWARD 2050 IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Actions	Agency	Timeline / Frequency	Purpose / Outcome
Programs			
Develop Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)	ARDOT and MoDOT in coordination with NWARPC	Every 2 years	Align state and regional investment priorities with available funding and performance targets
Maintain and update the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)	NWARPC	Every 2 years	Implement the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and ensure consistency with federal requirements
Monitor and report performance measures and targets	NWARPC, ARDOT, MoDOT, FTA, FHWA	Annually	Track progress toward federal performance goals and regional outcomes
Coordinate with transit providers on TAM and PTASP updates	NWARPC, Ozark Regional Transit, Razorback Transit, ARDOT		Integrate safety and asset management goals into regional planning and programming
Conduct annual coordination with local governments and partners	NWARPC, cities, counties, transit agencies, utility providers	Annually	Maintain alignment between local and regional priorities; identify emerging needs
Review and amend regional performance-based planning procedures	NWARPC, ARDOT, MoDOT	Every 2 years	Ensure compliance with federal guidance and continuous improvement in outcomes tracking
Administer and award Transportation Alternatives (TAP), Surface Transportation Block Grant Program-Attributable (STBGP-A), and Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) funds	NWARPC (coordination with ARDOT and local jurisdictions)	Annually	Support locally sponsored projects that advance regional priorities for safety, multimodal connectivity, and emissions reduction
Provide technical assistance to member jurisdictions for TAP, STBGP-A, and CRP applications	NWARPC staff	Ongoing	Help local governments successfully prepare competitive grant applications that align with regional priorities
Evaluate outcomes of awarded TAP, STBGP-A, and CRP projects	NWARPC (coordination with ARDOT and local jurisdictions)	Annually	Assess project performance, ensure funds meet intended safety, mobility, and sustainability objectives, and inform future funding cycle
Continue to build out the 2050 Regional Network	NWARPC, Cities, Counties, ARDOT, NWA Regional Mobility Authority	Ongoing	Safe, connected, and efficient transportation network providing alternative routes across NWA
Projects			
Advance the Transit Alternatives Study (TAS) locally preferred alternative - BRT on Hwy 71b	NWARPC, Cities, transit agencies, local partners, NWA Regional Mobility Authority	Ongoing	Frequent, reliable, and convenient transit service for residents of NWA
Identify new and innovative funding opportunities to advance regionally significant transportation projects	NWARPC, ARDOT, MoDOT, NWA Regional Mobility Authority	Ongoing	Completed transportation projects to improve the Regional Network
Complete Highway 612 Bypass	ARDOT	Medium term	Improved regional east - west connectivity
Complete Highway 112 Improvements	ARDOT	Medium term	Improved regional north - south connectivity
Advance the Blue-Green Network identified in the Razorback Greenway Corridor Plan and Open Space Plan	NWARPC, cities, watersheds, NWA Land Trust	Ongoing	Protection of natural infrastructure, improved stormwater management
Update the regional travel demand model and socioeconomic forecasts	NWARPC	Every 5 years	Support data-driven decision-making and plan updates

Actions	Agency	Timeline / Frequency	Purpose / Outcome
Assist ARDOT and MoDOT with studies and projects including I-42, I-49, and the Western N-S Connector	NWARPC, Cities, Counties	As needed	Ensure regional transportation plans align with statewide goals, and to maximize local knowledge and public input
Pursue discretionary grant opportunities (e.g., BUILD, MEGA, INFRA, Safe Streets for All)	NWARPC, local governments, ARDOT	Ongoing	Leverage competitive federal and philanthropic funding to advance regional priorities
Safety and Security			
Prioritize safety over speed through appropriate roadway design	NWARPC, Cities, ARDOT, MoDOT	Ongoing	Traffic calming elements, speed management, and safety focused intersection improvements will result in fewer fatal and serious injury crashes
Coordinate regional safety initiatives, including the Comprehensive Safety Action Plan	NWARPC, Cities	Ongoing	Advance data-driven strategies to reduce fatalities and serious injuries
Apply the NWA Regional Complete Streets Design Guide	NWARPC, cities, ARDOT, MoDOT	Ongoing	New and reconstructed roadways safely accommodate people of all ages and abilities
Implement cybersecurity protocols for intelligent transportation systems identified	Cities, Counties, NWARPC, ARDOT, MoDOT	Ongoing	To strengthen and protect ITS and data systems from cyber threats
Expand the deployment of Dynamic Message Signs (DMS), queue warning systems, and roadway hazard detection as identified in the Regional Intelligent Transportation System Architecture	ARDOT, MoDOT, cities	Medium term	Improve incident and emergency response
Operations and System Resilience			
Expand the Razorback Greenway and implement catalyst projects from the WalkBike NWA Plan	NWARPC, cities, local partners	Ongoing	Connected neighborhoods, schools, employment centers, and regional destinations
Advance ConnectNWA by providing sidewalks, bike facilities, and safe crossings at transit stops.	NWARPC, cities, transit agencies	Ongoing	To close gaps in the multimodal network
Expand traveler information systems as described in Northwest Arkansas Regional TSMO Plan and Regional ITS Architecture to include local roadways, integrated with ARDOT's IDrive Arkansas platform	ARDOT, cities	Medium term	Expand traveler information and data tools
Promote carpooling, vanpooling, and employer-based commuter programs as described in the Congestion Management Process	NWARPC, ARDOT, Cities, local partners	Ongoing	Manage travel demand
Support multimodal commuting, telecommuting, and flexible work arrangements as described in the Congestion Management Process	NWARPC, ARDOT, Cities, local partners	Ongoing	Manage travel demand
Integrate Open Space Plan recommendations and Cave Springs Karst Study findings into project design and mitigation measures	Cities, Counties, NWARPC, Watersheds, Local Partners	Ongoing	Protect and restore natural resources
Utilize natural systems as protective infrastructure, including wetlands, riparian buffers, and karst features as described in the Energy and Environment Innovation Plan	Cities, Counties, NWARPC, Watersheds, Local Partners	Ongoing	To absorb floodwaters and reduce storm impacts



■ SHAPING THE FUTURE: ONGOING AND UPCOMING PLANS & STUDIES

Forward 2050 establishes a long-term framework, but implementation begins with focused, data-driven studies that define the region's next generation of projects and priorities. Over the coming years, NWARPC and its partners will lead or support targeted corridor studies, multimodal planning efforts, and resilience initiatives that guide future investments. These studies will:

- Identify solutions to emerging congestion, safety, and access challenges.
- Explore opportunities for multimodal connectivity, including transit and active transportation.
- Evaluate strategies to improve freight mobility and system reliability.

- Integrate resilience, environmental stewardship, and community priorities into project design.

Together, these efforts will translate *Forward 2050*'s vision into a coordinated program of near- and long-term investments—ensuring that Northwest Arkansas continues to grow in a way that is connected, adaptable, and regionally aligned.

The following section highlights the key plans and studies that will guide implementation and shape transportation decisions through 2050.



Photo Courtesy of ARDOT

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH THE 2050 REGIONAL NETWORK

Completing the 2050 Regional Network is central to improving both the functionality and resilience of Northwest Arkansas's transportation system. The network is designed to provide multiple, interconnected routes that link communities, employment centers, and regional destinations.

As the region continues to grow, reliance on a limited number of primary corridors, particularly I-49 and Highway 71B, creates vulnerabilities to congestion, incidents, and weather-related disruptions. Expanding the arterial network and strategically filling gaps will provide alternative travel paths for commuters and freight, reducing delay when incidents occur and maintaining reliable access for emergency response, goods movement, and daily travel.

By fully building out the 2050 Regional Network, Northwest Arkansas strengthens its ability to adapt to both short-term disruptions and long-term change. A connected, multimodal system supports redundancy and flexibility key characteristics of resilient infrastructure.

This approach also complements *Forward 2050*'s environmental and economic goals by dispersing travel demand, enabling more efficient land use patterns, and supporting safe, multimodal connections between growing population centers. In essence, network completion is not just about expanding capacity, it's about creating a more adaptable, reliable, and regionally integrated transportation system capable of sustaining Northwest Arkansas's growth through 2050 and beyond.



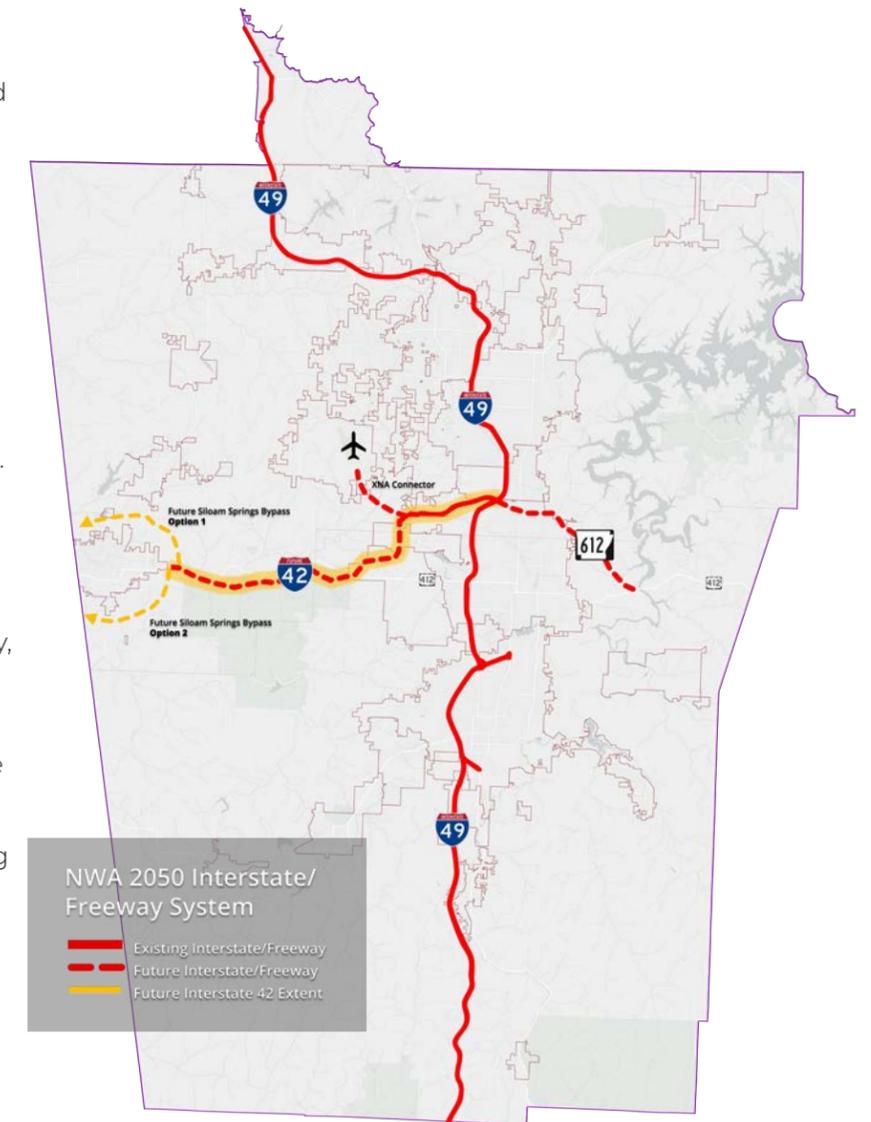
COORDINATED CORRIDORS TO SUPPORT RESPONSIBLE GROWTH

Northwest Arkansas is planning for a cross-regional freeway framework anchored by I-49 (north-south) and the future I-42 (east-west). Together, these facilities form the backbone of regional mobility, supporting economic vitality, freight movement, and reliable regional and interstate connections.

Distinct from a traditional looped freeway concept, *Forward 2050* recognizes that Northwest Arkansas's topography, environmental assets, and established development patterns limit feasible outer corridors. A beltway approach also risks encouraging outward, auto-dependent growth that increases long-term infrastructure costs and impacts to the region's natural landscape.

Instead, *Forward 2050* advances a responsible growth strategy that aligns transportation investment with coordinated land use, infrastructure efficiency, and environmental stewardship. The freeway spine is supported by a strengthened grid of Tier 1 and Tier 2 arterials that distribute traffic, provide alternative routes, support freight and local access, and reinforce development along regionally significant corridors.

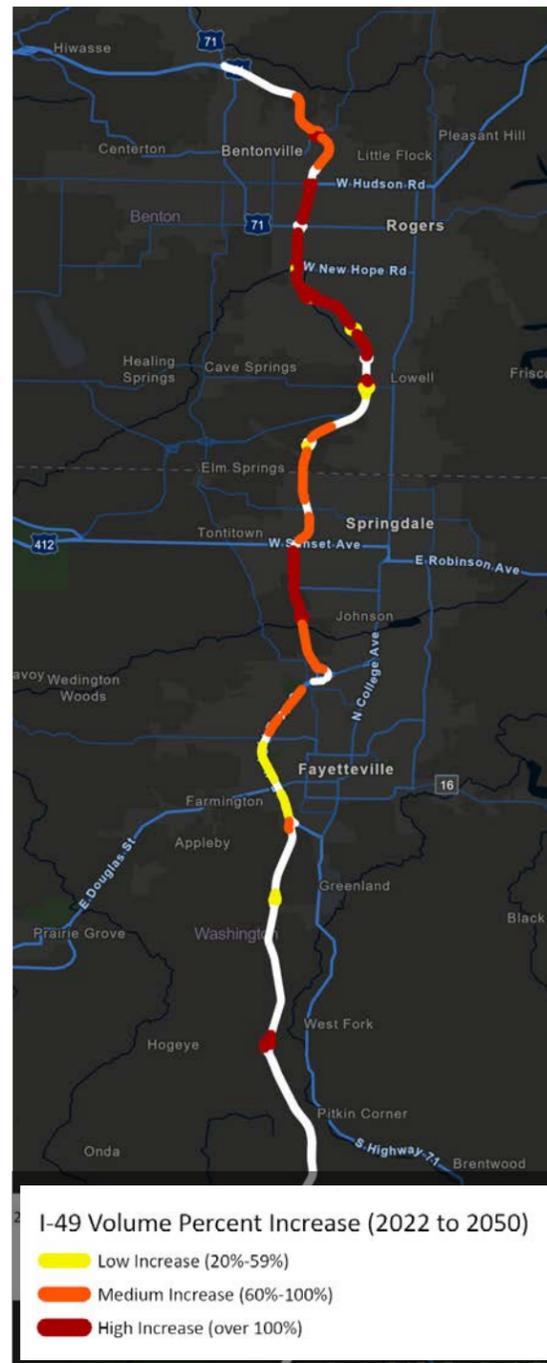
This coordinated corridor approach enhances system redundancy, improves travel time reliability, supports multimodal access, and ensures that transportation infrastructure reinforces Northwest Arkansas's environmental assets and long-term development vision through 2050.



I-49 CORRIDOR STUDY

The I-49 Corridor is a critical component of the regional transportation network, supporting daily commuter travel, freight movement, and economic activity across Northwest Arkansas. However, the corridor as currently designed and constructed will not adequately accommodate the region's future mobility needs. Since the last comprehensive study of the corridor was completed by ARDOT in 2006, Northwest Arkansas has experienced substantial population and employment growth, leading to higher travel demand and congestion along I-49. To ensure that the corridor continues to function efficiently and safely, a new I-49 Corridor Study is needed to evaluate future capacity needs and assess opportunities for managed lanes that prioritize high-occupancy vehicles (HOV), transit service, and high-occupancy toll (HOT) options. In October 2025, NWARPC transmitted a formal letter to ARDOT requesting an update to the study, per NWARPC Resolution #2025-21.

Completing the new I-49 Corridor Study will be an important step in advancing regional system reliability, supporting multimodal travel choices, and guiding investment decisions that align with the *Forward 2050* goals and performance measures.



INTERCHANGES AND FREEWAY CROSSINGS

The *Forward 2050* Constrained Project List includes eight new interchange projects and one interchange upgrade that advance a core objective of the plan: completing and strengthening the regional transportation grid. Strategic investments in interchanges and freeway crossings are essential to transforming the freeway system from a barrier and bottleneck into an integrated component of the broader network.

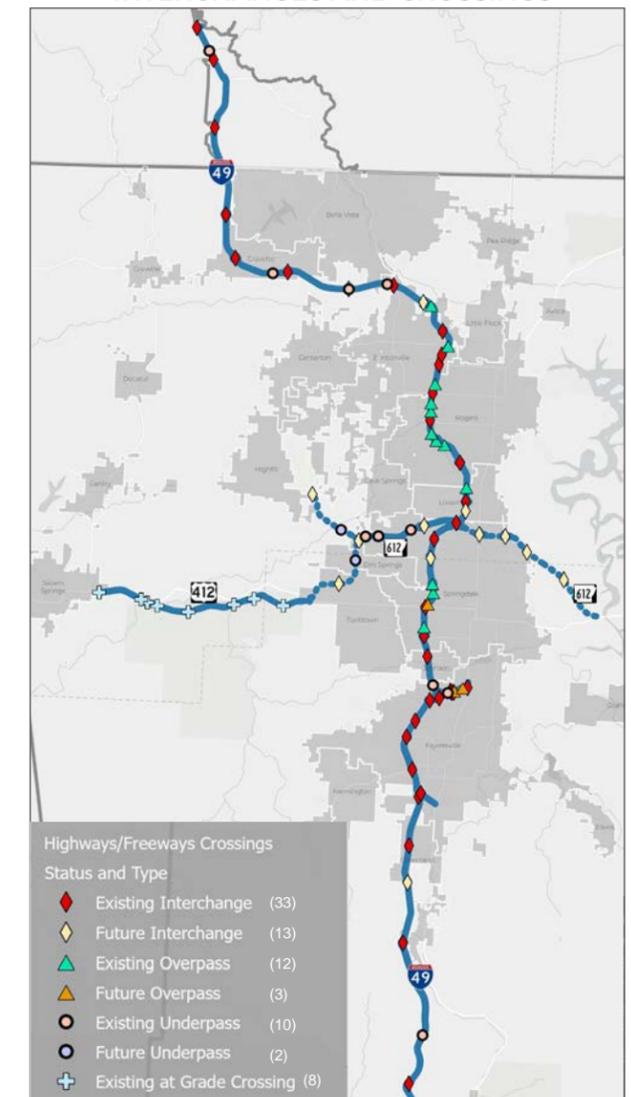
New and improved interchanges add critical access to the freeway system, reducing the extent to which travel is funneled onto a small number of arterial corridors or existing access points. By dispersing traffic across a broader network, these projects improve travel time reliability, relieve congestion at existing interchanges, and provide more direct routing for both local and regional trips. This added redundancy strengthens system resilience by ensuring alternative routes are available during incidents, maintenance, or emergencies.

Overpasses and freeway crossings play a complementary role by allowing local and cross-town trips to move through the network without entering the freeway or relying on interchange ramps. By carrying through-traffic across the freeway, these connections reduce unnecessary demand on interchanges, simplify ramp operations, and improve overall safety and efficiency. At the same time, additional crossings help bridge communities divided by freeways, improving access between neighborhoods, employment centers, and services on both sides.

When strategically located and designed with appropriate spacing and access management, interchange investments can further enhance safety and system performance by reducing congestion-

related conflicts and improving traffic operations. Over the long term, coordinated investments in interchanges and crossings support efficient movement of people and goods, strengthen connections between residential areas, employment centers, and freight corridors, and contribute to a more resilient, connected Northwest Arkansas Regional Network.

ASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL INTERCHANGES AND CROSSINGS



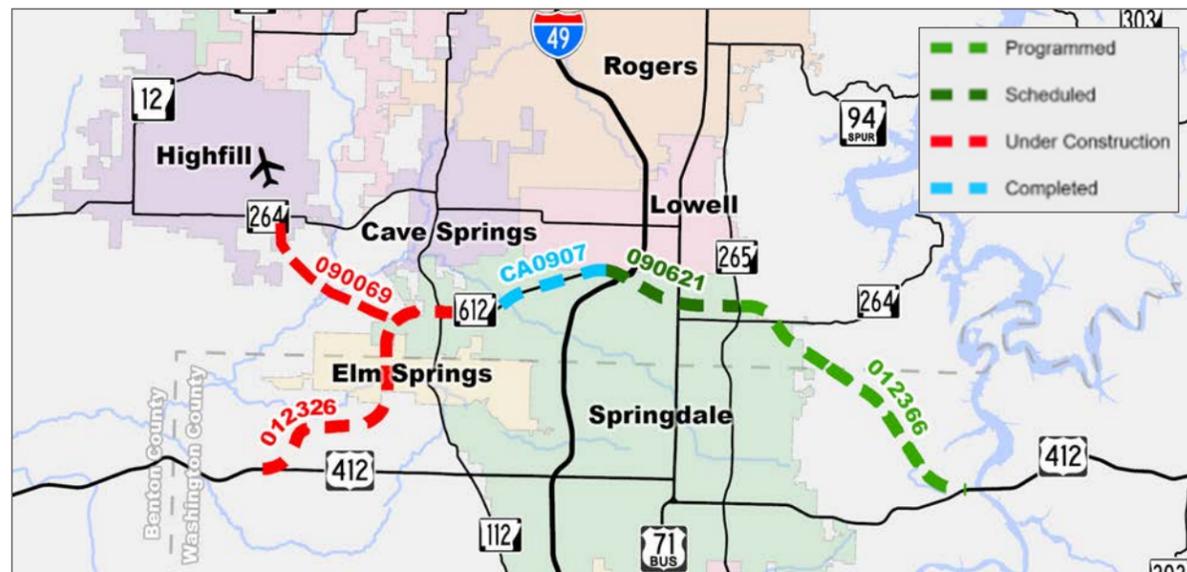
HIGHWAY 612 NORTHERN BYPASS (FUTURE I-42) & XNA CONNECTOR

Arkansas Highway 612, known as the Springdale Northern Bypass, is a long-planned regional investment designed to address current and future traffic demand on U.S. Route 412, improving mobility, reliability, and safety across northern Washington County and southern Benton County. The bypass is being built as a four-lane, fully access-controlled freeway that will ultimately reroute US 412 around Springdale's core. The segment west of I-49 is planned for future Interstate designation as I-42. Once complete, the bypass will relieve congestion, divert through truck traffic around Springdale's core, and enhance regional connectivity, including direct access to the Northwest Arkansas National Airport via the XNA Connector.

When fully built, the project will create a continuous 20-mile corridor connecting Tontitown to Sonora. As a major capacity and connectivity investment, the Springdale Northern Bypass is expected to

influence regional travel patterns, support freight movement, and shape long-term land use and development across Northwest Arkansas.

Project delivery is occurring in four segments. Segment 1, a 4.57-mile section connecting I-49 to Highway 112, was completed in 2018. Segment 2, a 6.15-mile segment extending from Highway 112 to US 412, is currently under construction and is scheduled for completion in 2027. Segment 3, a 2.93-mile section connecting I-49 to Highway 265, is programmed in the Arkansas Department of Transportation's State Transportation Improvement Program, with \$209 million allocated for construction beginning in 2028. Planning is underway for Segment 4, a 6.63-mile segment that will connect Highway 265 to US 412 near Sonora; ARDOT held a public meeting on January 22, 2026, to present a proposed alignment and gather public input.



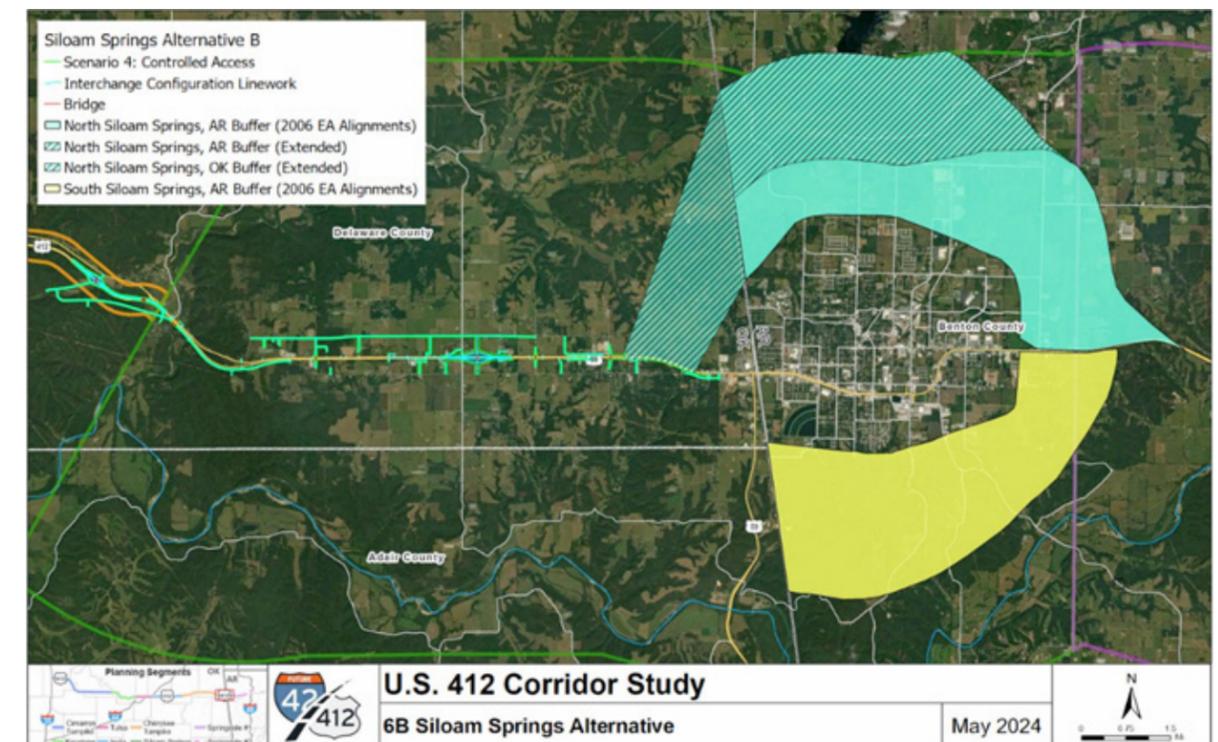
FUTURE I-42 STUDY

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Arkansas Department of Transportation (ARDOT) recently completed a Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) Study for U.S. 412 between I-35 in Noble County, Oklahoma, and I-49 in Benton County, Arkansas — a 190-mile corridor that is planned for future interstate designation under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

As part of this corridor, the Siloam Springs segment of U.S. 412 currently functions as a high-traffic, four- to six-lane urban corridor. To meet interstate design standards and support the proposed I-42 designation,

a new route will need to be identified to provide full access control and improved mobility through the area. A future study will evaluate whether the preferred alignment should bypass Siloam Springs to the north or to the south.

The IIJA designation of U.S. 412 as a future interstate presents an opportunity for ODOT, ARDOT, and regional partners to envision an interstate corridor designed for the next generation of travel — one that integrates safety, freight efficiency, and multimodal connectivity. The forthcoming I-42 study will be a critical step in advancing that vision.

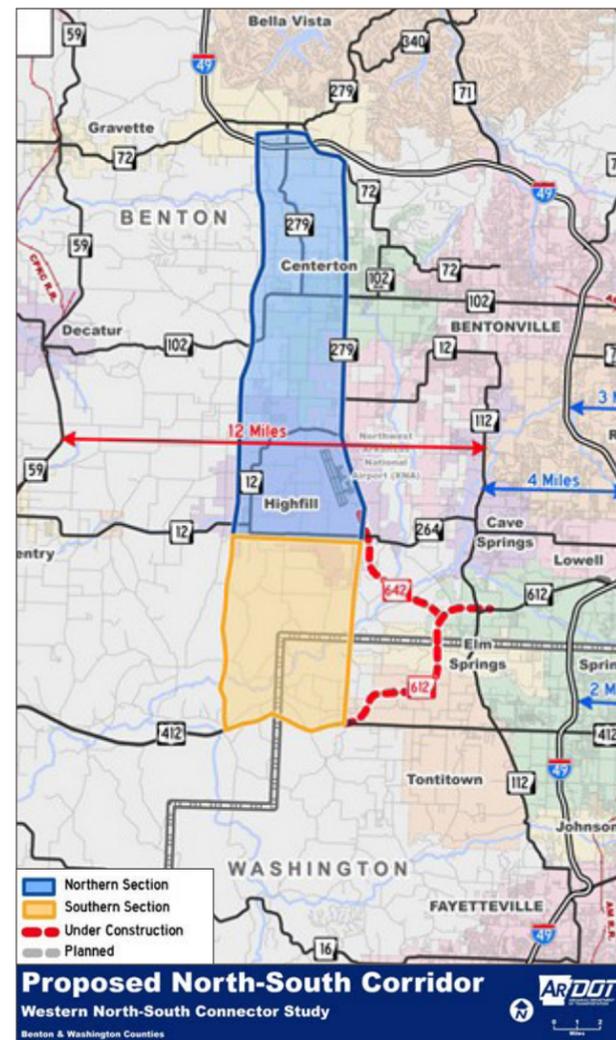


WESTERN NORTH-SOUTH CONNECTOR

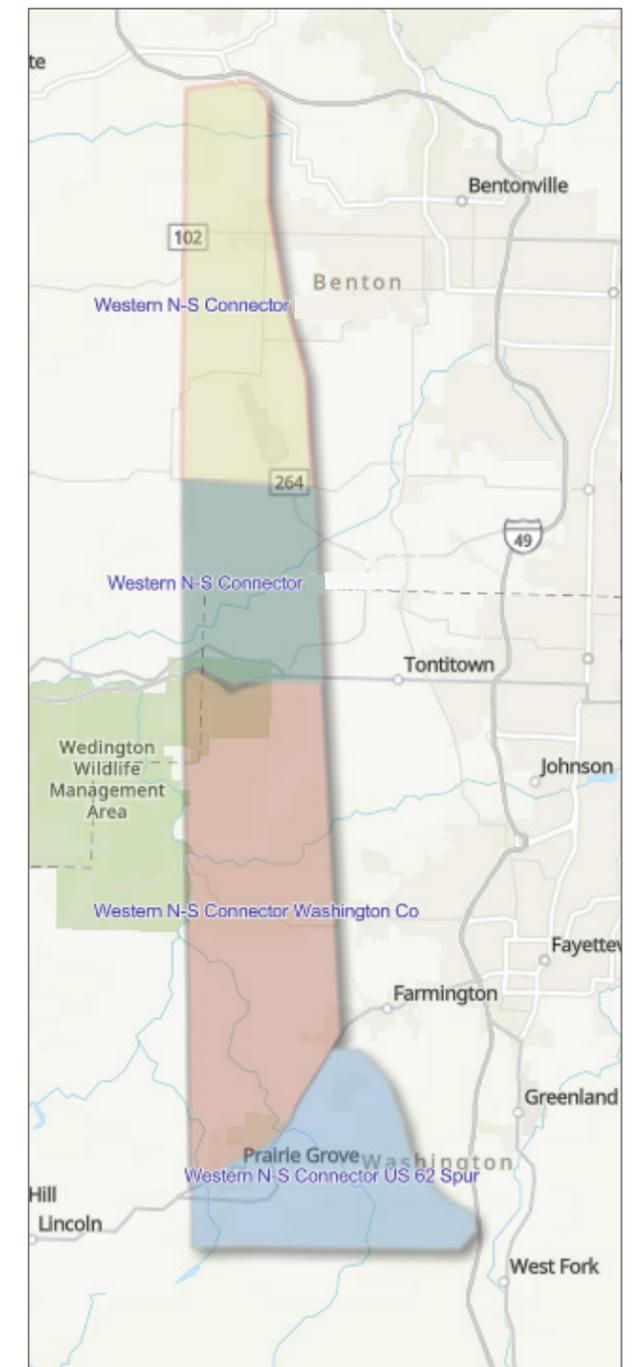
In 2025, ARDOT adopted the Western North-South Connector Study as a planning guide for future transportation improvements within the study area. The study was initiated in response to significant growth in Benton County west of I-49 and the absence of continuous north-south routes between Highway 112 and Highway 59.

The study identified a long-term need to improve north-south connectivity between Bentonville, Gravette, Centerton, Highfill, Tontitown, and the Northwest Arkansas National Airport. Currently, there is no direct route linking these communities, requiring motorists to rely on a network of indirect local roads.

Analysis indicates that a new or improved roadway would primarily serve residents of adjacent communities, with only moderate levels of through traffic. As a result, the study recommends arterial-level facilities that balance moderate travel speeds with local access. In many locations, this need could be addressed through targeted improvements to existing roadways, minimizing environmental and property impacts. Development of a high-speed freeway is not recommended due to its comparatively higher impacts.



In Washington County, local leaders have identified a southern extension of the Western North-South Connector as a new priority project in *Forward 2050*. Building on the findings of the ARDOT study, this concept would extend the connector south from Highway 412 to US 62 near Prairie Grove, with a future connection to I-49 via a new interchange between Greenland and West Fork. The proposed extension is intended to improve regional connectivity, support planned growth, and enhance access between western Washington County communities and the broader regional transportation network.

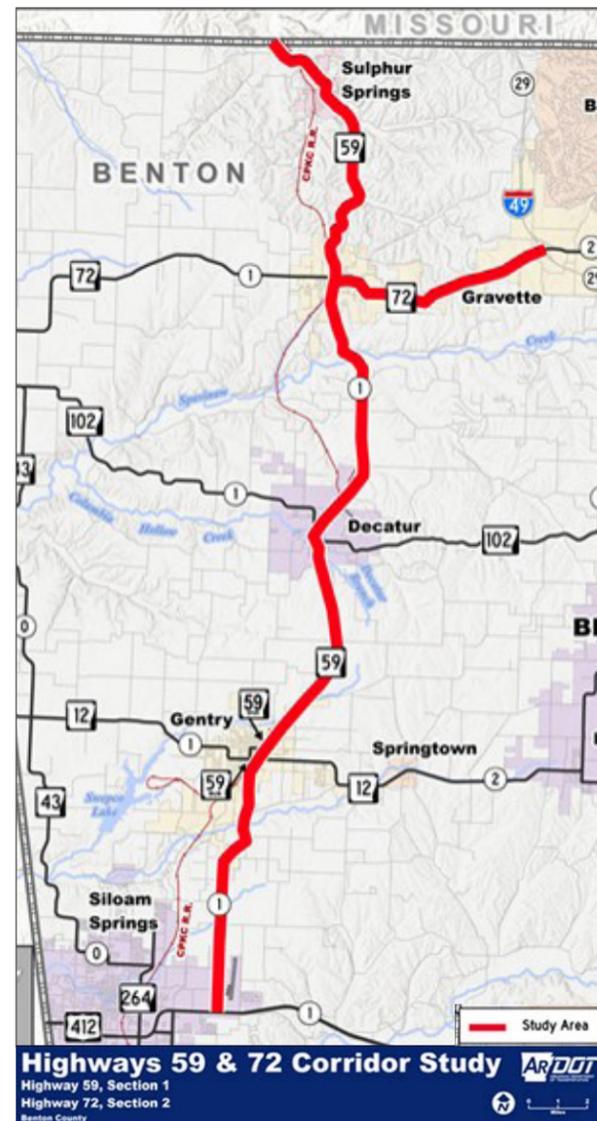


HIGHWAY 59 & HIGHWAY 72 CORRIDOR

The Highway 59 and Highway 72 Corridor Study evaluated existing and future transportation needs along two key north-south and east-west routes in western Benton County. The study area extended along Highway 59 from Highway 412 in Siloam Springs to the Missouri state line, and along Highway 72 from Highway 59 to Interstate 49 in Gravette.

The purpose of the study was to determine the need for and feasibility of improvements to enhance safety, mobility, and freight efficiency along these corridors. Preliminary findings indicate that several major intersections currently experience congestion during peak hours, largely driven by increasing truck volumes and regional growth. Crash patterns have also been identified at multiple locations, particularly near curves and high-conflict points.

As traffic volumes continue to increase, the study assessed a range of strategies to improve operations and safety, including intersection upgrades, roadway widening or realignment, and curve improvements. The recommendation is to maintain these routes as high-performing arterial roadways that provide reliable local and regional connectivity while supporting the movement of goods and people. Final recommendations considered the surrounding land use context, environmental conditions, and community priorities.



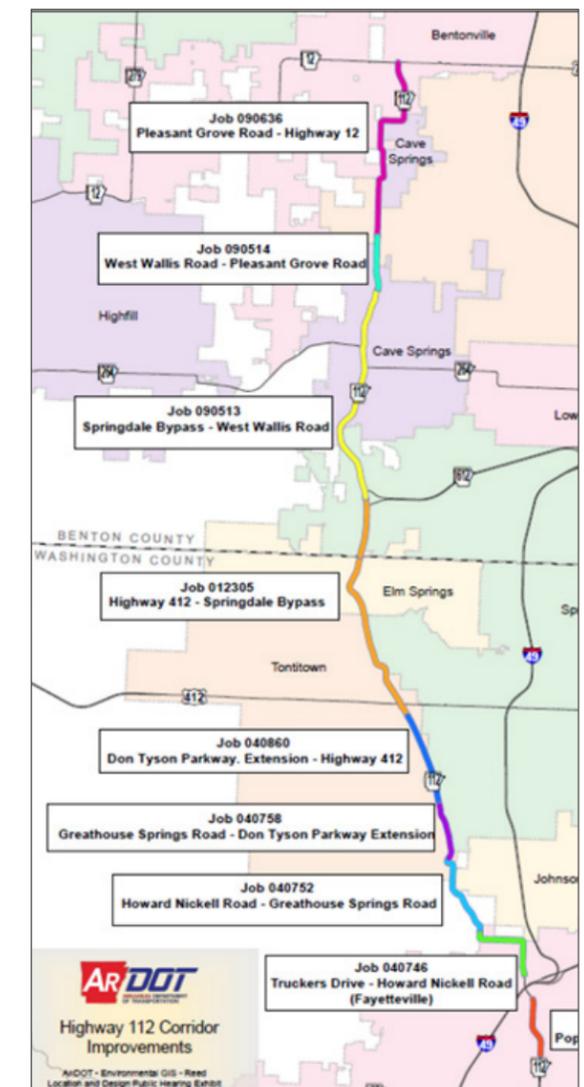
HIGHWAY 112 CORRIDOR

Highway 112 is a critical north-south corridor west of I-49 and the only continuous route serving both local and regional travel between Fayetteville and Bentonville. As growth has accelerated, the corridor has evolved from a largely rural roadway into an increasingly urban arterial, now passing through the city limits of eight municipalities. With limited capacity, narrow lanes, and minimal shoulders along most of its length, Highway 112 has become a focal point for improving regional mobility, safety, and reliability.

At the request of the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, the Arkansas State Highway Commission authorized a corridor study in 2012 to evaluate improvement options along the approximately 20-mile corridor. The study examined how to address capacity and safety needs while supporting all modes of transportation. Recommended improvements include widening to four travel lanes and implementing a complete street cross-section with a 12-foot shared-use sidepath, improved roadway geometry, and access management strategies consistent with FHWA Proven Safety Countermeasures, such as raised medians and appropriate driveway spacing.

Highway 112 improvements are programmed in the current 2025-2028 Transportation Improvement Program. In 2025, NWARPC was awarded a \$25

million federal RAISE grant to advance construction and support project delivery in coordination with ARDOT. Construction of the first phase began in late 2025, with a 1.44-mile segment from Truckers Drive to Howard Nickel Road now underway. This initial phase represents a \$43.9 million investment and marks an important step toward transforming Highway 112 into a safer, multimodal urban corridor consistent with the goals of *Forward 2050*.



TRANSIT ALTERNATIVES STUDY BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT) ON US 71B

The Transit Alternatives Study (2025) examined new public transit modes and alignments along a general north/south planning area to improve mobility, and connectivity, and provide transportation choices in the Bentonville, Rogers, Lowell, Springdale, and Fayetteville areas. With growth occurring in Northwest Arkansas, increased roadway and highway congestion have occurred. The key objective of the TAS was to develop and assess three transit alternatives that can provide more mobility options for residents, employees, and visitors to the region, and to take pressure off existing roadways by shifting some travel trips onto a future high-frequency transit service. The three transit alternatives identified for the study were commuter rail sharing the existing Arkansas-Missouri Railroad Right-of-Way, light rail on the Highway 71B corridor, and Bus Rapid Transit on the Highway 71B corridor. The alternatives were evaluated based on impacts around mobility improvements, congestion benefits, environmental benefits, land use benefits, demographics and socioeconomic benefits, and cost-effectiveness. Of the three alternatives, Bus Rapid Transit emerged as the most balanced and practical option for the region. It scored the highest and outperformed the other alternatives.

The BRT alternative is a corridor-based BRT operating primarily on local streets and US-71B, between Fayetteville and Bentonville.



**Conceptual Alignment for Locally Preferred Alternative*

BRT services are envisioned to operate in mixed traffic with Transit Signal Priority (TSP) enabled at most intersections. Dedicated bus lanes may be added in areas where ROW permits and where traffic congestion may otherwise prohibit the service from achieving reasonable on-time performance. The service would have unique branding to separate it from the existing local bus services. Stop spacing is assumed to be around 0.25 mi in dense

urban areas and may be stretched to around 0.5 mi in lower-density suburban areas. Each stop would feature a raised platform for level boarding, a reinforced concrete bus stopping pad in the street (to avoid the wear and tear that buses often place on asphalt streets), pylons and signs to visually identify the BRT service, real-time information display for arrivals, lighting, shelters, benches, and trash receptacles.

Bus Rapid Transit on Highway 71B Phase 1 Conceptual Operation Plan					
Day of Week	Service Span	Headway (minutes)			
		AM Peak	Midday	PM Peak	Evening
Weekday	6AM – 10PM	15	30	15	30
Saturday & Sunday	8AM – 7PM	60			

Bus Rapid Transit on Highway 71B Phase 1 Costs	
Total Capital Costs	\$210,000,000
Annualized Capital Costs	\$7,300,000
Total Annual Operating Costs	\$6,430,000



RESILIENCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND THE BLUE-GREEN NETWORK

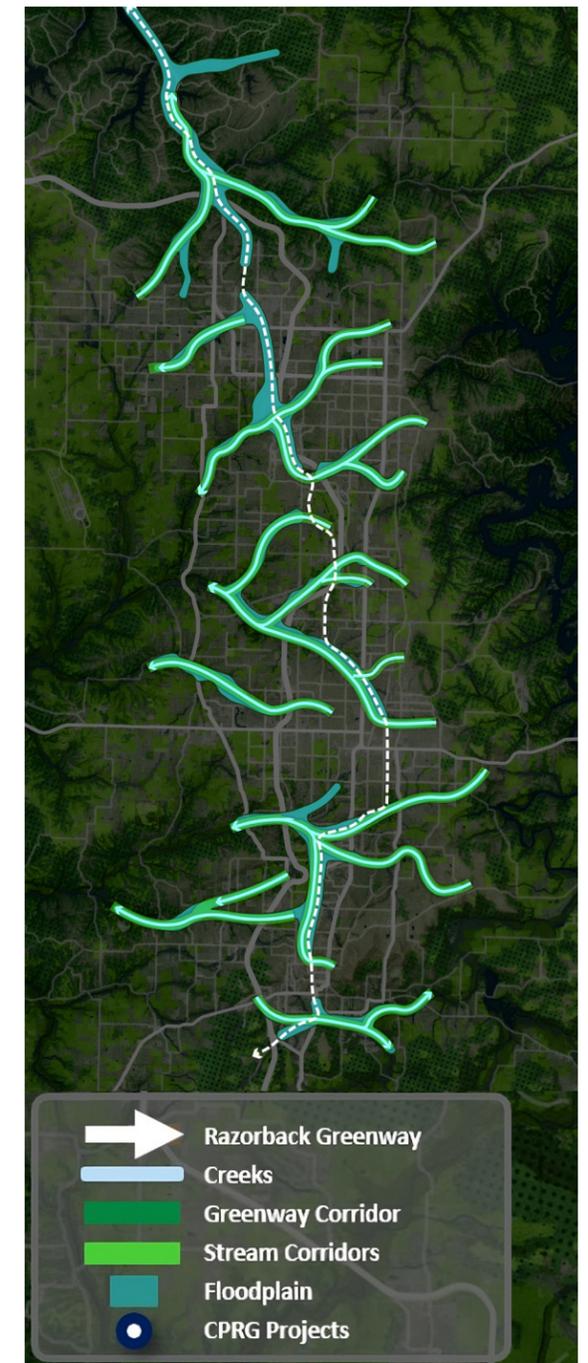
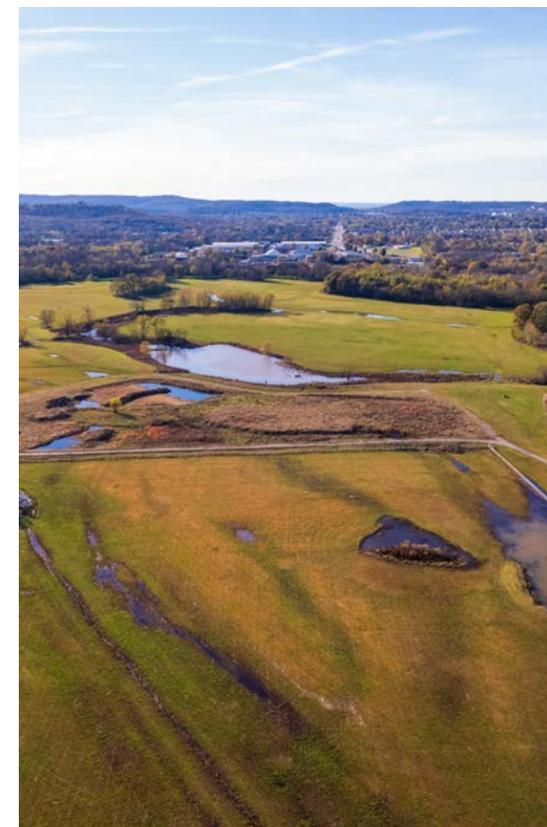
The Blue-Green Network concept highlights Northwest Arkansas's rich system of open spaces, the natural cores and corridors that connect the region's landscapes, waterways, and communities. These interconnected areas form the backbone of a resilient region, supporting nature-based solutions that manage stormwater naturally, protect wildlife habitat, and expand the regional network of trails, greenways, and greenbelts.

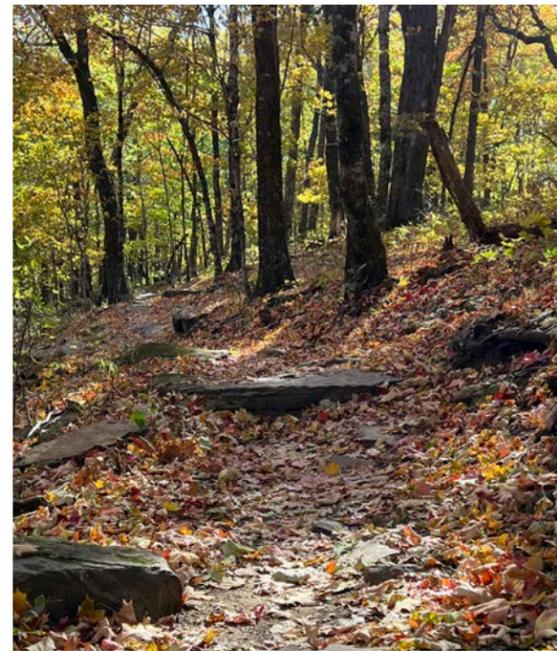
Grounded in best practices from the Northwest Arkansas Open Space Plan and the Evaluating and Conserving Green Infrastructure Across the Landscape: A Practitioner's Guide; Arkansas Edition by Firehock, this framework provides a roadmap for protecting and connecting the natural assets that make Northwest Arkansas a great place to live.

Forward 2050 supports the development of a Regional Resilience Improvement Plan that advances the Blue-Green Network through coordinated projects and policies. Restoring and conserving natural systems, such as floodplains, wetlands, prairies, and riparian corridors, enhances the capacity of the built environment to withstand flooding, extreme weather, and other climate-related stressors. These nature-based strategies complement infrastructure investments by providing co-benefits such as improved water quality, reduced heat island effects, increased biodiversity, and new outdoor recreational opportunities.



Incorporating transportation alternatives into the Blue-Green Network strengthens the link between environmental resilience and mobility. Strategic investments in trails, greenways, and multimodal corridors not only improve air quality but also connect communities to jobs, education, and essential services. By coupling ecological restoration with sustainable transportation design, Northwest Arkansas can create a truly resilient regional system that protects its natural landscapes, enhances public health and safety, and sustains the environmental and economic vitality of the region through 2050 and beyond.





■ FREIGHT AND PASSENGER RAIL OPPORTUNITIES IN NWA

The *2025 ARDOT State Rail Plan* identifies several freight and passenger rail opportunities that could strengthen regional connectivity and support multimodal mobility in Northwest Arkansas.

Freight Rail Capacity and Access

Expanding freight rail capacity can enhance Arkansas's ability to move goods efficiently while supporting industrial growth. The State Rail Plan notes:

- Increasing capacity may involve constructing additional mainline track, upgrading substandard rail segments, expanding yards and terminals, and adding sidings or spurs for industrial access.
- Land surrounding the *Northwest Arkansas National Airport (XNA)* offers strong potential for rail-served industrial development, where extending rail service could complement highway and air freight facilities.

Passenger Rail Interest and Regional Vision

Through stakeholder engagement, ARDOT documented growing interest in expanding passenger rail service statewide – particularly in Northwest Arkansas, where rapid growth has increased regional travel demand.

Key themes from the 2023 Springdale listening session hosted at NWARPC included:

- Passenger rail could help alleviate regional congestion, potentially through high-speed or intercity service.
- Corridor ID designation from the Federal Railroad Administration could help evaluate feasibility for future corridors.
- Participants encouraged state participation in a multi-state passenger rail coalition, similar to the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission.
- Long-term interest exists in a Kansas City-to-Shreveport corridor via Northwest Arkansas, building on Southern Rail Commission initiatives linking Dallas and Atlanta.
- A potential rail connection to XNA was identified as an opportunity to spur economic development and multimodal freight access.



REGIONAL FUNDING OPTIONS TO ACCELERATE PRIORITY PROJECTS

THE DELIVERY GAP

Northwest Arkansas's constrained project list identifies the investments the region can complete with anticipated funding. However, current federal, state, and local revenue projections **will not deliver those projects quickly enough** for the region's pace of development. Critical corridors

and multimodal projects, including some unconstrained roadway projects and transit investments such as the locally preferred high-capacity transit alternative, Highway 71B Bus Rapid Transit, **require new, reliable funding approaches** if the region is to accelerate delivery and close mobility gaps before 2050.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING DELIVERY GAP (2029-2050)



Only 49% of total \$6.08 billion transportation investment needs can be met with identified funding sources.

Additional revenue mechanisms or discretionary programs will be needed to close the remaining \$3.12 billion gap.



REGIONAL MOBILITY AUTHORITY IN CONTEXT

Under the Regional Mobility Authority Act (**Ark. Code Ann. § 27-76-101 et seq.**), counties and municipalities in Arkansas may collaborate to form a **Regional Mobility Authority (RMA)**, a public corporation empowered to plan, construct, operate, and fund transportation projects across jurisdictional boundaries.

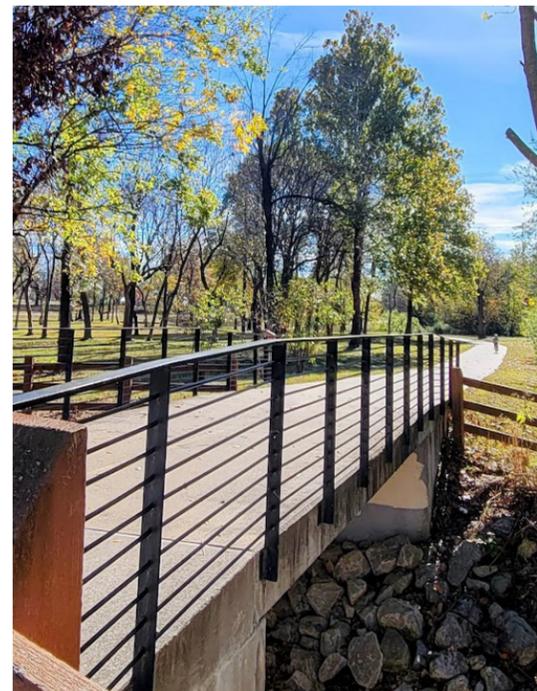
The **Northwest Arkansas RMA, established in 2008 under Act 389 of 2007**, includes Washington and Benton Counties and 14 cities. Governed by a Board of Directors, and staffed by the NWARPC, the RMA can contract, issue revenue bonds, acquire property, and coordinate with local governments, the Arkansas Department of Transportation, and the State Highway Commission.

While RMAs can receive revenue from local sales taxes, motor-vehicle fees, user charges, or bond proceeds, they **do not possess independent taxing authority**. Instead, a county or city must first adopt and refer a local tax to voters on the RMA's behalf. The RMA in NWA cannot enact a single, region-wide funding initiative without coordinated action among multiple local governments and their voters.

In contrast, some states enable regional transportation entities such as Arizona's Regional Transportation Authority to:

- A long-range transportation plan that identifies projects to be completed and
- A dedicated regional tax source to fund it.

This integrated model allows for more cohesive and predictable funding of cross-jurisdictional projects.



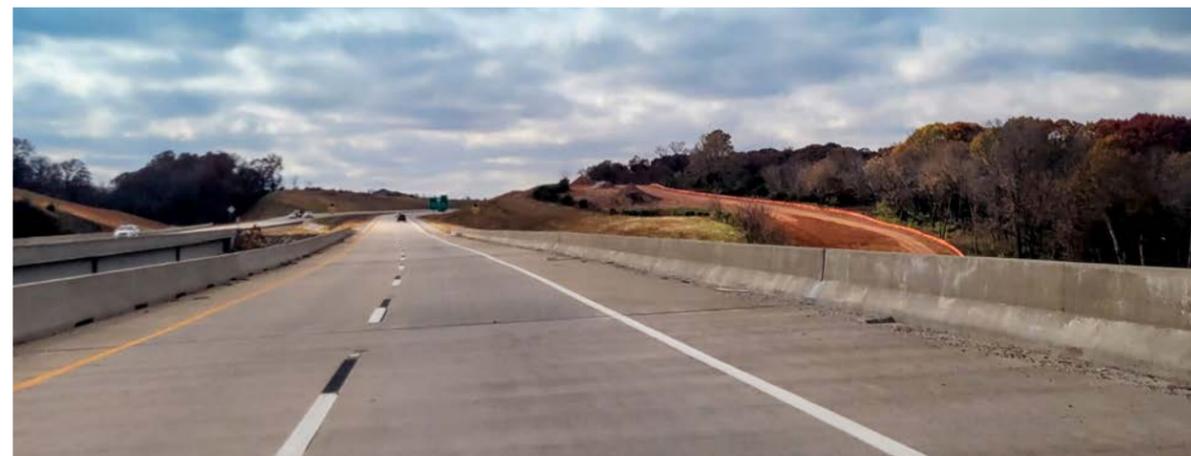
■ WHY IT MATTERS FOR NORTHWEST ARKANSAS: A POLYCENTRIC REGION

Northwest Arkansas is not organized around a single dominant urban center but functions instead as a polycentric region, a network of interconnected communities each contributing uniquely to the region's economy, housing, and mobility systems. This distributed pattern of growth has produced a highly integrated travelshed: tens of thousands of daily trips cross city boundaries for work, education, shopping, and recreation.

Because of this structure, transportation challenges and solutions in Northwest Arkansas are inherently regional in scale but locally implemented. Corridor improvements such as Highway 71B, I-49, or future high-capacity transit lines serve multiple jurisdictions simultaneously. Yet, under current Arkansas law, funding mechanisms and decision-making authorities remain largely city- or county-based, with no single entity empowered to coordinate or finance region-wide projects.

In other states with similar multi-center regional structures, the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) model provides a framework for multi-jurisdictional collaboration and voter-approved regional funding. That structure aligns the geographic scale of transportation investments with the functional scale of regional mobility. In contrast, the Arkansas Regional Mobility Authority (RMA) statute, while enabling regional cooperation, lacks an equivalent regional revenue mechanism.

This mismatch between governance scale and mobility scale matters acutely in Northwest Arkansas. Without a unified regional funding mechanism, major transportation corridors risk being implemented piecemeal or delayed as local governments work independently to assemble project funding. A modernized or regionally coordinated approach consistent with *Forward 2050*'s collaborative and comprehensive vision would help ensure that transportation investments keep pace with growth and reflect the shared priorities of the entire region.



■ AN EDUCATIONAL PATH FORWARD FOR NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

- **Continue to document the need and delivery gap.** NWARPC and local partners should clearly document which unfunded or unconstrained projects (for example, BRT on Hwy 71B and critical corridor investments) cannot be accomplished within the current constrained revenue forecast and at what pace these projects must be accelerated to meet regional goals.
- **Continue to evaluate RMA authorities and limits.** Conduct a legal and fiscal assessment that maps RMA powers under Ark. Code § 27-76-101 et seq., identifies which project types and financing instruments (tolls, bonds, concession agreements, project revenues) are immediately available, and clarifies where state statutory changes, local voter approval, or intergovernmental agreements would be needed to expand revenue options.
- **Compare models and lessons learned.** Prepare a neutral comparison of regional funding models showing how voter-approved excise taxes, bond programs, or other dedicated revenue tools have been used elsewhere to

accelerate regional packages. This should emphasize governance, public accountability, project delivery outcomes, and the legal prerequisites required in each state.

- **Develop a Regional Mobility Investment Framework.** Using the RMA as a potential delivery vehicle, develop a conceptual financing and governance framework that identifies prioritized projects, potential revenue streams (tolls, bonds, grants, local match, public-private partnerships, and any voter-authorized revenue), and how NWARPC would coordinate programming and oversight with ARDOT, MoDOT, transit agencies, and local jurisdictions.
- **Public engagement and transparency.** Any effort to expand regional funding options must begin with clear public information, transparent project lists, benefit/cost summaries, and an open engagement process so residents can weigh priorities and trade-offs.
- **Policy and legislative education.** Gaps exist between Arkansas statutory authority and NWA regional objectives. NWARPC and local jurisdictions can present factual analyses and options to state policymakers.

■ WHY AN RMA-BASED APPROACH IS WORTH STUDYING

An RMA-centered financing and delivery strategy could offer Northwest Arkansas additional flexibilities to accelerate large corridor projects and leverage state and federal grants more effectively. Studying this approach does not commit the region to a particular revenue decision; it simply provides a rigorous, legally grounded way to evaluate whether a regional financing mechanism could help deliver *Forward 2050* priorities sooner and with clearer accountability.



■ ADAPTING, IMPROVING, MOVING FORWARD

Forward 2050 is designed to evolve as Northwest Arkansas grows, technology advances, and community priorities shift. Implementation and performance monitoring are not static checklists but continuous, adaptive processes that ensure the plan remains responsive to changing conditions and emerging opportunities.

NWARPC will continue to:

- Integrate new data, updated performance targets, and study findings into future planning and programming cycles.
- Use performance monitoring, public engagement, and regional studies to refine investment priorities and align strategies with measurable results.
- Coordinate closely with partner agencies to maintain consistency between *Forward 2050*, the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and local Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs).

- Report progress transparently, highlighting how investments are improving safety, mobility, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality across the region.

This process of continual evaluation and collaboration ensures that *Forward 2050* remains both relevant and actionable linking near-term decisions to long-term goals. It reflects Northwest Arkansas's shared commitment to data-driven decision-making, accountability, and partnership.

As the region grows more interconnected and complex, the plan provides a unified roadmap for shaping how people and goods move, how communities develop, and how quality of life is sustained. Its success depends on continued cooperation among local governments, state agencies, transit providers, private partners, and the public.

Together, these efforts will carry the *Forward 2050* vision into action: building a safe, connected, and resilient region where mobility supports prosperity and resilience for generations to come.

