

Oregon's Economic Engines

SOUTHERN WILLAMETTE VALLEY



For much of its history, Oregon has been a rural state with an economy centered on the timber, agriculture and mineral industries. Today, Oregon's major urban areas have become the state's economic engines and are increasingly the focus of growth and investment. These vital economic centers are concentrated in three areas of the state:

- Willamette Valley
- Rogue Valley
- Central Oregon

The Southern Willamette Valley includes the cities of Corvallis, Albany, Eugene and Springfield. The following is an overview of the greater Southern Willamette Valley region and the issues that face this rapidly growing area.

Unique geography

The Southern Willamette region consists of two main urban areas, the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area and the Corvallis-Albany area. The Eugene-Springfield area falls within Lane County while the Corvallis-Albany area includes both Benton and Linn counties. The region is physically defined by the Coast Range on the west and south, the Cascade Range on the east, and Salem Hills to the north that separate the region from the Northern Willamette Valley. Characterized by a mild climate and rich soil, the Willamette Valley is one of the most productive and diverse farming areas in the nation and a world leader in seed and specialty crops. Oregon State University in Corvallis and the University of Oregon in Eugene serve as the population, cultural, economic and academic magnets in the region.



Employment and economy

Local history

The Southern Willamette Valley, with its ideal agricultural climate, proximity to a natural landscape and large timber reserves, was first settled in the mid-1800s. The Oregon Trail led pioneers looking for good growing conditions to the Willamette Valley where they found rich soil and a mild climate. The first wagon train to follow the Oregon Trail set out in 1841 with 70 settlers; and by 1845 the number of emigrants moving to the Northwest reached 3,000. The history of the tourist-based economy in the lower Willamette Valley region can be traced back to the late 1800s. As early as the 1870s, two of the more popular vacation spots were the hot springs located on the McKenzie River and the Middle Fork of the Willamette River.

However, it was the building of the railroads in the 1880s that opened the region to markets for timber and other goods. Timber was essential to shaping the area's importance due to its location on the edge of Oregon's largest stand of timber. Timber and agriculture drove the region's economy until the 1980s when the decline of the timber industry and the escalating development of agricultural lands for housing shifted the direction of the region's economic growth. Today, wood products are still a part of the economy, but are surpassed by high-tech manufacturing and tourism.

The Southern Willamette Valley is home to a diverse economic base and an educated workforce. The economies of Benton, Linn and Lane counties are interrelated, sharing commuters, trends and strengths. Historically, the economies of Lane, Benton and Linn counties were driven by timber and agriculture. Today, Lane County is the nation's largest producer of lumber and plywood products with agriculture ranking a close second. Tourism and public sector employment are also important economic drivers for the region.

The presence of large universities in Corvallis and Eugene has helped expand the regional economy to include health care, engineering and high-tech industries. The top three industries for employment in the Corvallis-Albany and Eugene-Springfield metro areas are state government and education, educational and health services, and manufacturing.

In Benton and Linn counties, education, health services and professional and business services are the fastest-growing industries. The transportation, warehousing and

utilities industries are expected to grow rapidly in the Corvallis-Albany area, while the natural resources, mining and manufacturing industries experienced a drop in employment from 2007 to 2008. New industries built off the area's existing economic base are expected to assume a larger role in the regional economy. These emerging clusters include a growing wine industry, bicycle and coach production, specialty foods production, nurseries, and nano and micro technology.

Transportation facts

- About 13 percent of residents in Benton and Linn counties commute between the two counties.
- 5 percent of Linn County residents commute to Lane County for work.
- The City of Corvallis has the highest rate of bike commuting in the state.
- The Eugene-Springfield area has the highest rate of bike commuting of any region in the country.

Corvallis-Albany

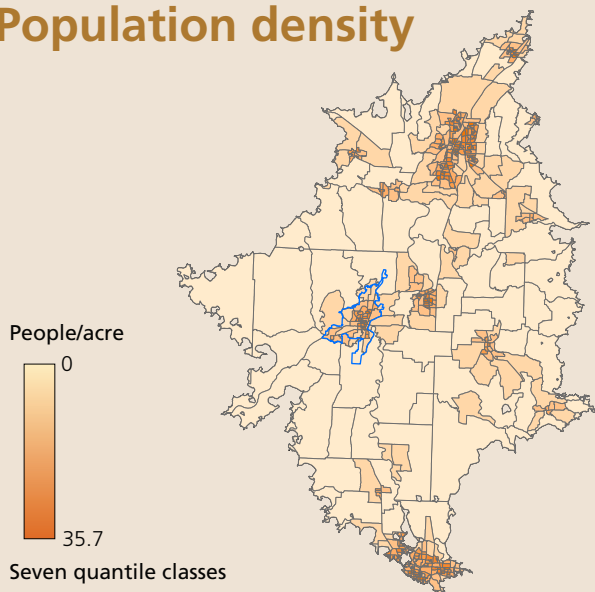
A look inside the 45-minute travelshed

The Corvallis-Albany area, with a population over 100,000, is shaped by the presence of Oregon State University. The median age of 31 in Benton County is much lower than the state average of 36.8, reflecting the influence of the university. The population of Benton County has a large percentage of individuals pursuing college degrees.

Linn and Benton Counties are each home to a population that is more than 90 percent white and 5 percent Hispanic, with very small percentages of African American and American Indian populations.

- The Benton County area has the highest education rate per capita in the state.
- 8.8 percent of the population within the travelshed resides within the MPO boundary.
- 7.5 percent of the urbanized land within the travelshed lies within the MPO boundary.
- Less than one percent of the farmland within the travelshed lies within the MPO boundary.

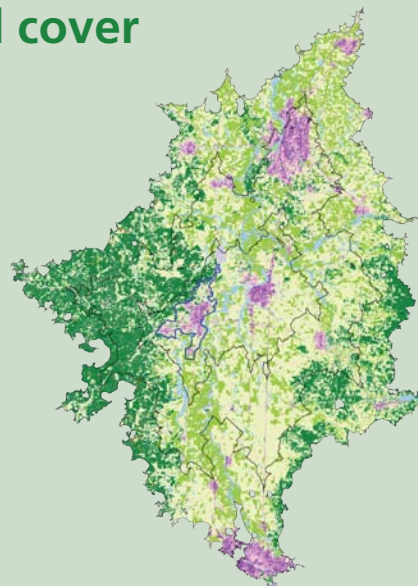
Population density



	Population	Density (pop/acre)	Total acres
Inside MPO	54,899	2.18	25,131
Outside MPO	566,879	0.37	1,514,897
Within 15 minutes of city	116,113	0.56	208,558
15-30 minutes from city	239,590	0.44	541,360
30-45 minutes from city	266,076	0.34	785,830

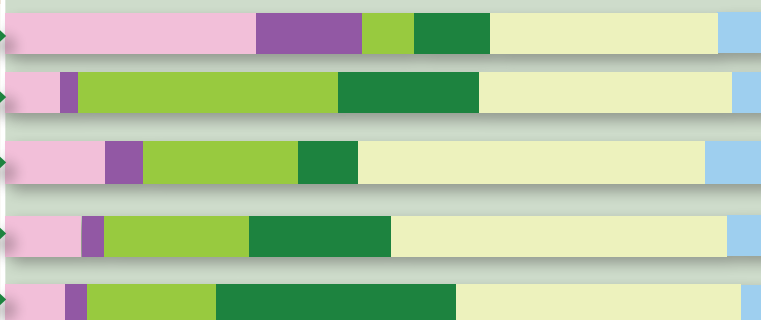
*Population figures from 2000 US Census block groups

Land cover



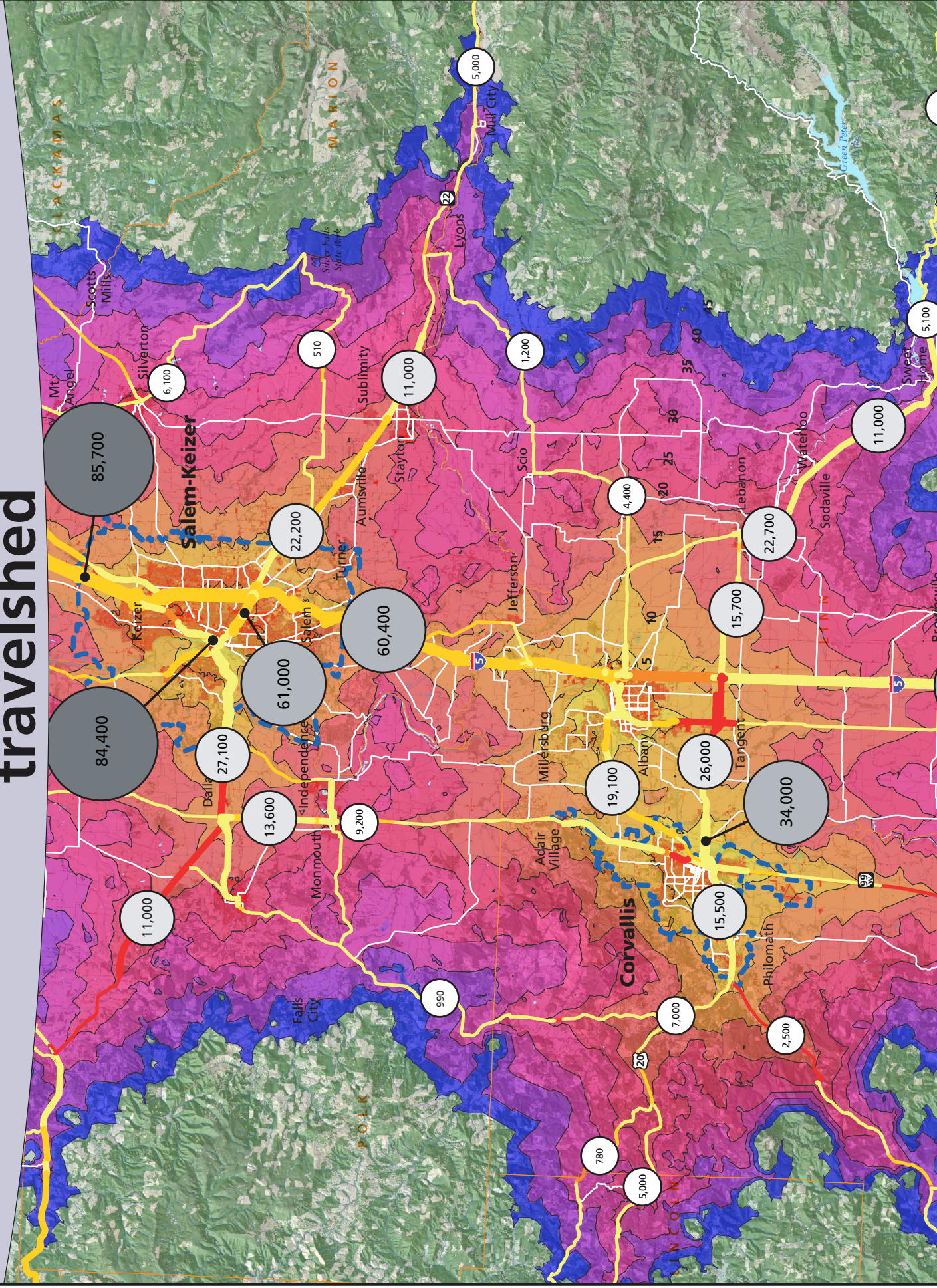
Land cover distribution

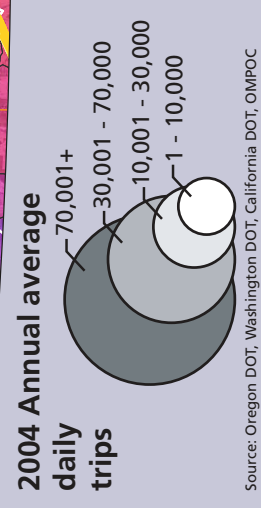
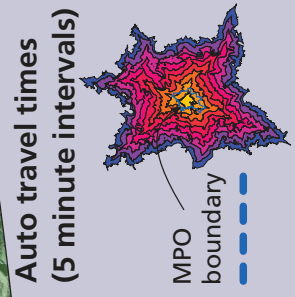
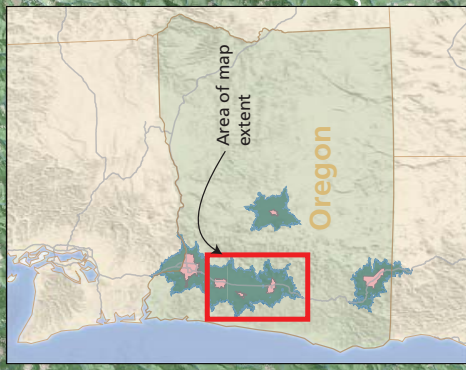
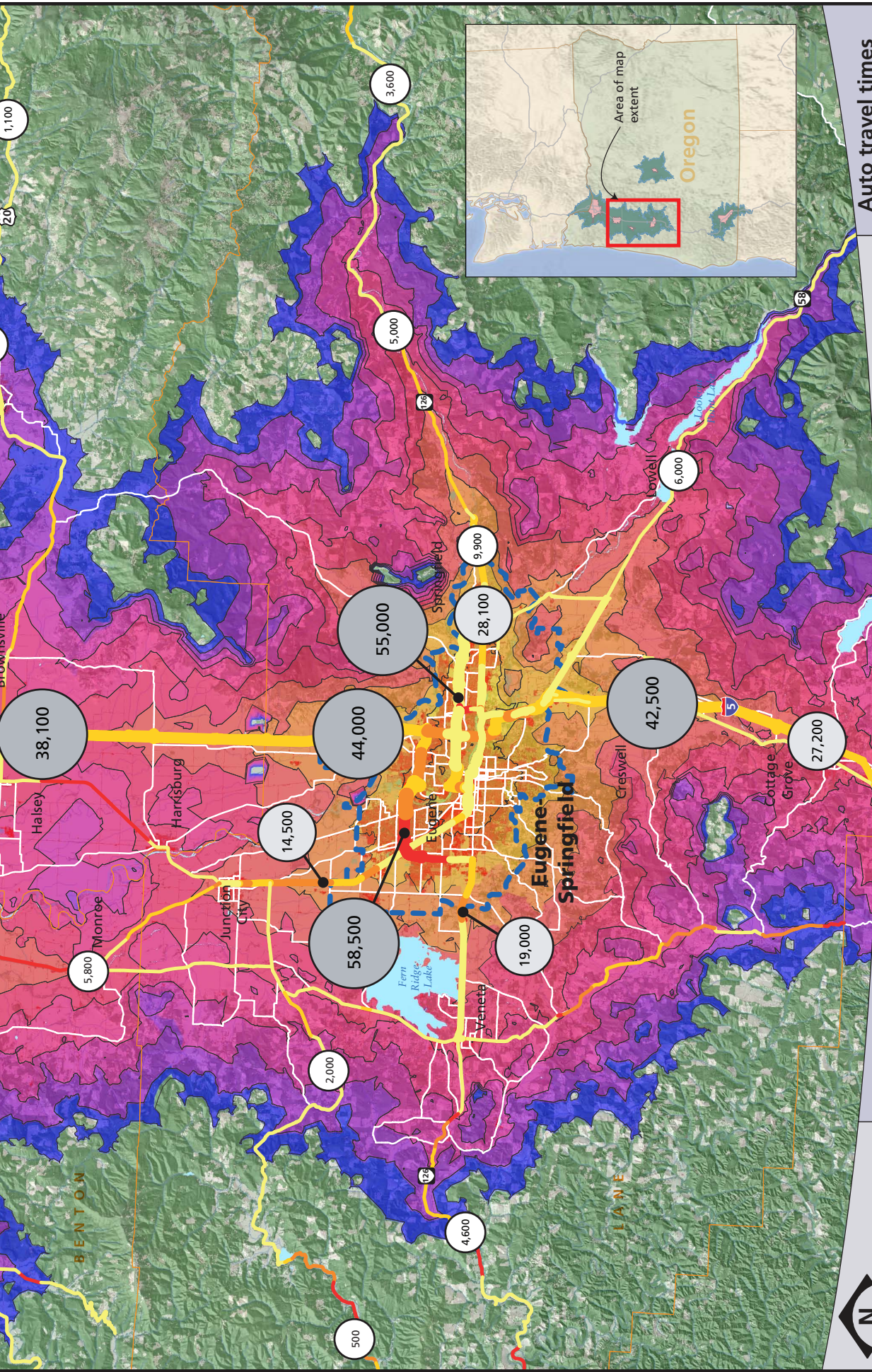
(bar graph represents the percentage of each land cover class within each section)



* Land cover classifications are aggregations of 2001 USGS NLCD classifications

Traffic volume and the 45-minute travelshed





Eugene-Springfield

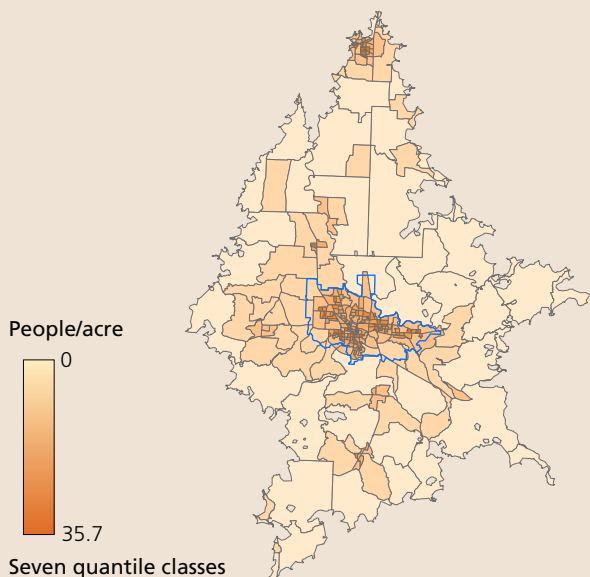
A look inside the 45-minute travelshed

The Eugene-Springfield area, with a population over 200,000, is shaped by the presence of the University of Oregon. The median age of 32.5 for the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area is much lower than the state average of 36.8, reflecting the influence of the university. Like Benton County, the population of

Lane County has a large percentage of individuals pursuing college degrees. Benton County is also home to a population that is more than 90 percent white, about 5 percent Hispanic, and very small percentages of African Americans and American Indians.

- 63.8 percent of the population within the travelshed resides within the MPO boundary.
- 43.6 percent of the urbanized land within the travelshed lies within the MPO boundary.
- 6.2 percent of the farmland within the travelshed lies within the MPO boundary.

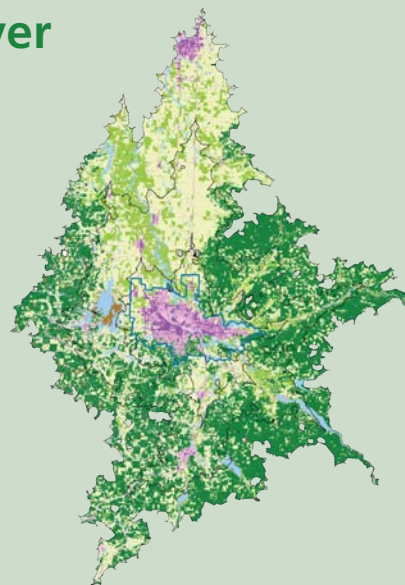
Population density



	Population	Density (pop/acre)	Total acres
Inside MPO	223,739	2.83	78,976
Outside MPO	126,768	0.11	1,148,288
Within 15 minutes of city	237,287	1.53	154,594
15-30 minutes from city	51,117	0.12	431,337
30-45 minutes from city	62,104	0.10	641,333

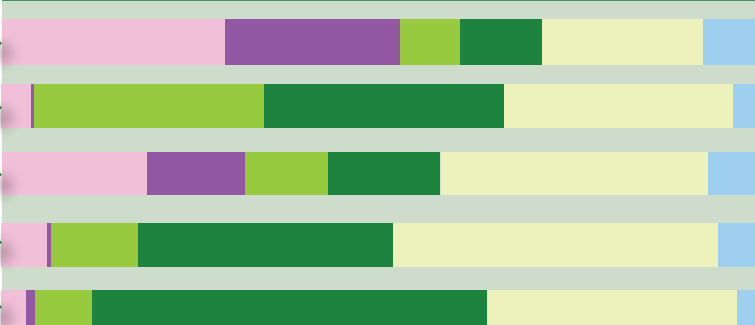
*Population figures from 2000 US Census block groups

Land cover



Land cover distribution

(bar graph represents the percentage of each land cover class within each section)



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Major issues and challenges

Transportation needs

With few exceptions, the Southern Willamette Valley has enjoyed steady population growth in recent years, with the Corvallis metro area growing at an annual rate of 1.5 percent. While population trends for the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area have yet to outpace the Central Lane Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) plan for adequate transportation infrastructure, Springfield is experiencing a phase of significant growth and transportation system expansion. The Eugene-Springfield and Corvallis MPOs must address travelsheds that extend beyond the MPO boundaries. In the Southern Willamette Valley region, traffic flow between the metro areas and adjacent communities is expected to increase. Some of the smaller adjacent communities, such as Coburg, have been folded into the MPO. In other cases that is not so. Albany, a major partner in economic and social transactions with Corvallis, remains outside of the MPO area boundaries. This inconsistency with MPO boundaries limits the Corvallis MPO's transportation planning and travel demand management.

In the Southern Willamette Valley travelshed, traffic continues to increase on corridors to Salem and Portland, the Rogue Valley, Bend and the central Oregon Coast. However, the MPOs within the travelshed lack the data, modeling tools and staff to fully plan and coordinate the transportation system that commutes within this greater region.

Funding gaps

Inadequate funding for transportation systems continues to be a problem at all levels of government. The Eugene-Springfield metro area has experienced funding decreases due to the loss of federal timber payments, decreasing or flat payroll tax revenues, lack of voter support for transportation levies or fees and competing issues such as education and public safety. The Corvallis metro area, like small metro areas across the country, struggles to access federal and state funds for major transportation projects. Currently, the region is focused on addressing transit capacity and gaps in the urban rail system. The high number of multi-modal trips in the region requires significant spending of local dollars on these modes. However, the regional commitment to multi-modal transportation paired with the lack of federal funds adds to the funding gap.

Looking ahead

Communities within these travelsheds are collaborating to successfully provide more far-reaching public transit systems. The service boundaries of Lane Transit District extend outside of the MPO boundary, which helps address traffic issues in key corridors. The Central Lane MPO has recently endorsed the transit district's successful bid for Connect Oregon II funding for a Veneta Park and Ride. The Corvallis area is similarly committed to providing funding for a competitive transit system. However, the absence of a comprehensive regional vision and inconsistent interagency cooperation has hampered the region's ability to pursue more of the necessary funding and governance strategies. The lack of robust communication and conflicts between intercity passenger rail and freight trains limits effective problem solving and results in a mediocre rail alternative for intercity and interstate travel. Reliable and convenient connections to major national and international cities are important for attracting and maintaining good quality jobs in the Southern Willamette Valley's high tech and advanced research sectors.

The Oregon MPO Consortium

A metropolitan planning organization (MPO) is a transportation policy-making organization made up of representatives from local government and transportation authorities. Congress created MPOs in 1962, establishing them in urban areas with a population of more than 50,000. Oregon has six MPOs located in the Portland, Salem-Keizer, Eugene-Springfield, Rogue Valley greater Bend and Corvallis areas.

Congress created MPOs to:

- invest scarce transportation dollars appropriately
- create plans that reflect a shared regional vision
- examine investment alternatives
- facilitate collaboration of governments, interested parties and citizens.

To achieve these goals, the U.S. Department of Transportation helps fund the technical operation of MPOs, including the development of complex transportation models and gathering of travel data, and oversees consistency among MPOs through federal regulations. MPOs are required to demonstrate consistency annually.

MPOs also have a role in directly funding transportation projects through special grants from The United States Department of Transportation. Each MPO develops a program of transportation improvements using these funds, generally on a two- or four-year cycle. Because these funds are more flexible than Oregon's traditional gas tax, Oregon's MPOs have made creative use of these grants by targeting

transportation dollars for urban revitalization, transit improvements, bicycle and pedestrian facilities and transportation-related environmental restoration projects.

Oregon's MPOs are also regulated by the state's Transportation Planning Rule, which looks to MPOs to create local planning consistency across cities and counties in urban areas.

In 2005, Oregon's six MPOs formed the Oregon MPO Consortium, a collaborative group that seeks to share knowledge and experiences on urban transportation and advance urban issues at the state and federal level.

**Oregon Metropolitan Planning
Organization Consortium**
www.ompoc.org

