

REGIONAL BACKGROUND & TRENDS

I. Overview

S RTPA serves as one of the Regional Planning Affiliations (RPA) for the northwestern Iowa region. S RTPA is located in an area of highly productive soils and generally adequate rainfall thus spawning a vibrant agricultural industry that is the backbone of the economy. The chapter explores various demographic and economic trends¹ and issues in the region that is anticipated to have a noticeable effect on S RTPA's transportation system.

A. Population

The population of the region has been gradually decreasing over the decades with the declines being more concentrated in the rural counties of Cherokee, Ida, and Monona. Sorting the population of the region as either urban² or rural, the distribution greatly favors urban. The population of the region being primarily urban is attributed to the population of Woodbury County overwhelmingly being urban and more populated than S RTPA's four other counties combined. It must be noted that a significant proportion of

Woodbury County's urban population is not within S RTPA; Woodbury County's population located within the region is more rural, similar in nature to the other four counties. Due to the nature of Woodbury County, it would be uncharacteristic to classify it as rural and discard the fact that it contains a major metropolitan area. The region's population is not anticipated to grow over the duration of this plan keeping in line with past trends. An extrapolation equation³ was used to forecast the 2020 to 2045 population based on decennial population figures dating back to 1940. According to the equation's MEAN/AVERAGE



S RTPA's Avg. Growth per Decade since 1940

-0.8%

S RTPA's % Change 2000 - 2010

-2.3%

S RTPA's Urban Population (2010)

64.9%

S RTPA's Rural Population (2010)

35.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

¹ Demographic & Economic Trends – More in-depth data on this chapter's data can be viewed in Appendix A.

² U.S. Census Bureau defines an Urbanized Area as a population of 50,000 or more. Outside of an Urbanized Area, a population greater than 2,500 is defined as an Urban Cluster. The Urbanized Area and Urban Cluster population figures in Region IV was used to illustrate the urban and rural population distribution.

³ Extrapolation Equation is a method that takes aggregated data from the past to project into the future. The equation uses multiple projections which include the MINIMUM Projection, MEAN/AVERAGE Projection, and MAXIMUM Projection.

projection, the population of the region is forecasted to be 144,314 in 2020 and decline to 119,258 in 2045. An additional population trend in the region is the gradual aging. From 2000 to 2010, the median age of each of the five counties increased. Overall the median age of the region increased from 39.64 to 43.15 during the timespan and has since stabilized. Furthermore, the median age of the region is higher than both the state and the nation. Given the aging of the “baby-boom” generation, it can be forecasted that the median age will continue to increase due to the sheer size and dominating influence of this cohort in the population.

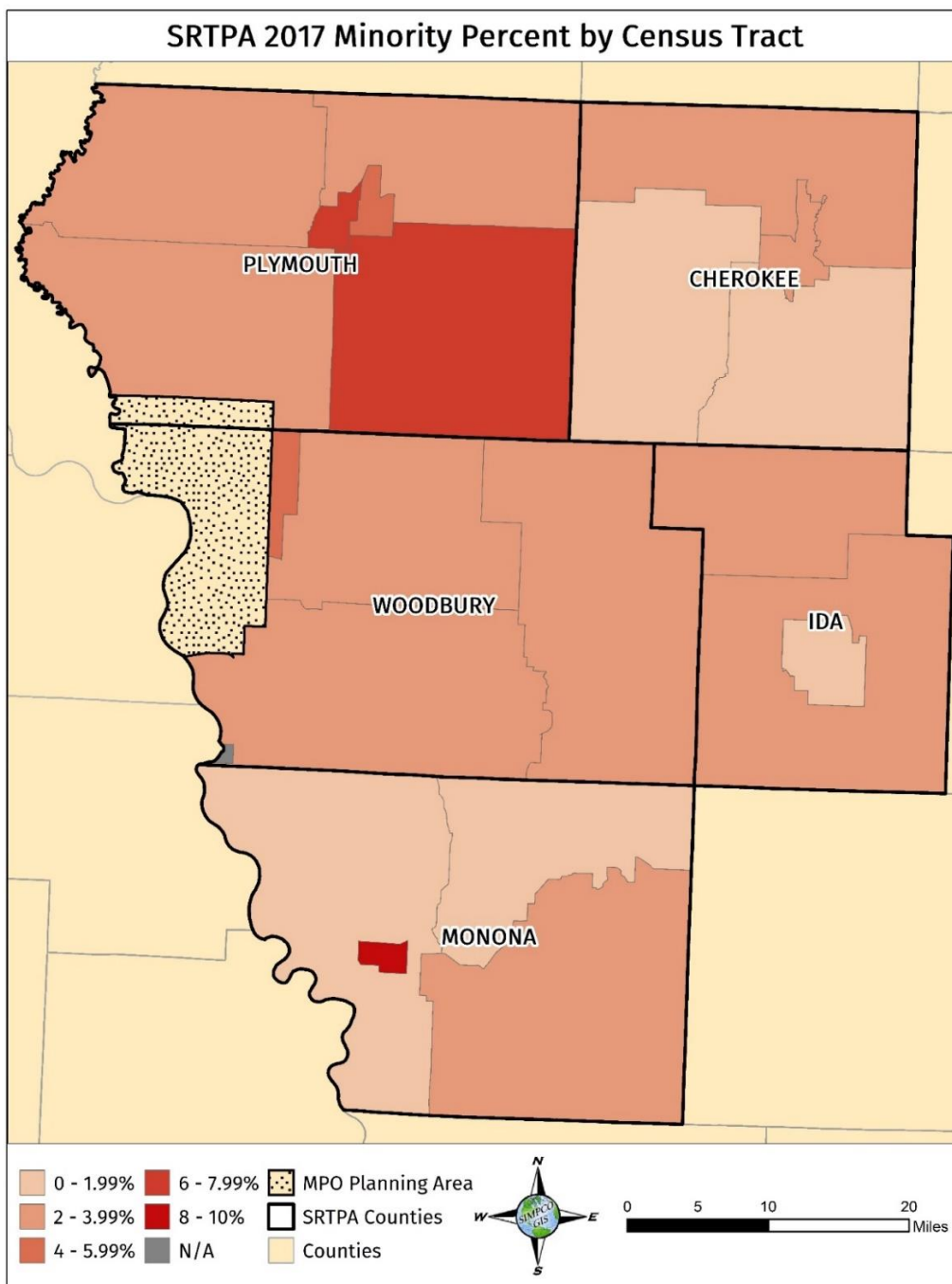


This scenario of an increasingly aging population will pose difficulties for SRTPA’s transportation system going forward. As the population ages, mobility decreases and this will be especially acute in rural areas where mobility is principally provided by personal automobiles. Isolation of persons who are no longer able to drive will become more common and will be a central theme to be focused on. The challenge for long term planning in this area will be, in addition to maintaining and improving the existing transportation system, the provision of alternative transportation modes for this older population. Maximum creativity will be


demanding in planning in such an environment given the well-known limitations of traditional transit in very low population density (rural) areas. Ideas like carpooling (using electronic technology to assemble rides) or simple neighborliness and SRTS on demand access can help in this regard.

As the importance of the agricultural processing industry has become more prevalent, SRTPA has gradually steered away from traditionally consisting of areas with low minority concentrations. A recent increase amongst the foreign-born population has become more evident as a larger proportion of the non-white population has begun to emerge throughout many of the towns within the region. The minority population accounts for roughly 10% of the region’s population. The minority population is well-diverse as the Black or African American, Asian, Some other Race, and Two or More Races population each account for roughly a fifth of the total minority population. On the following map, concentrations of the minority population amongst the region is displayed by Census Tracts. The highest


concentrations of the minority population reside in one census tract located in Monona County, and two census tracts located in Plymouth County ranging between six and ten percent. Among the three most diverse census tracts, the American Indian or Alaska Native population accounted for 81.8% of the minority population in the census tract located in Monona County and the Some Other Race population accounted for 65.4% and 46.3% in the census tracts located in Plymouth County.



B. Income



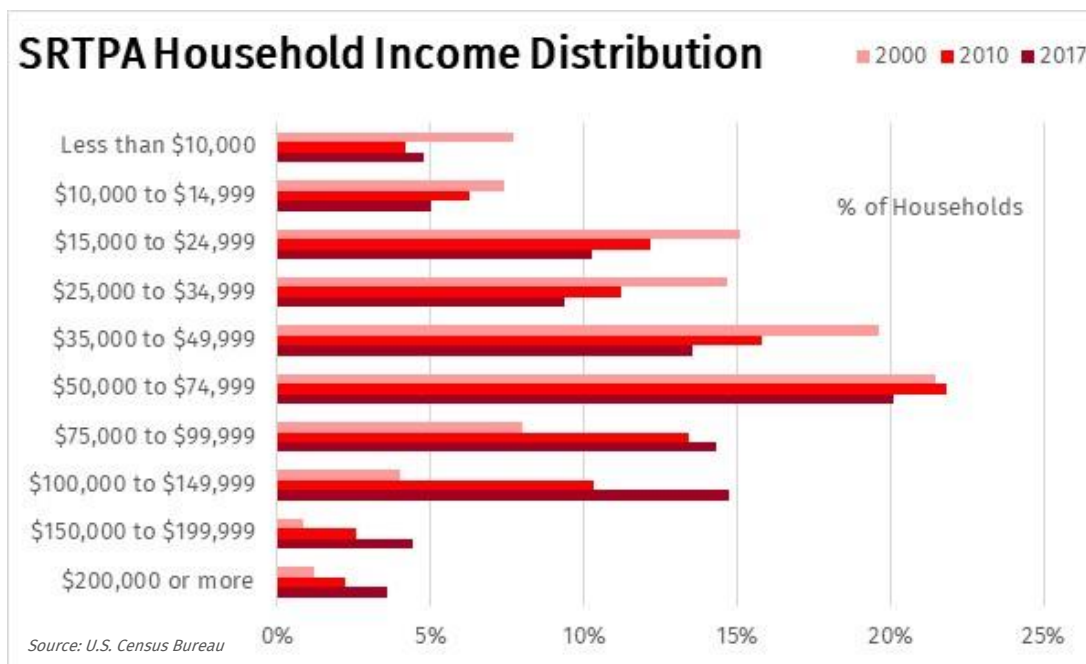
SRTPA's Median Household Income (2017)
\$54,894



SRTPA's Per Capita Income (2017)
\$29,862

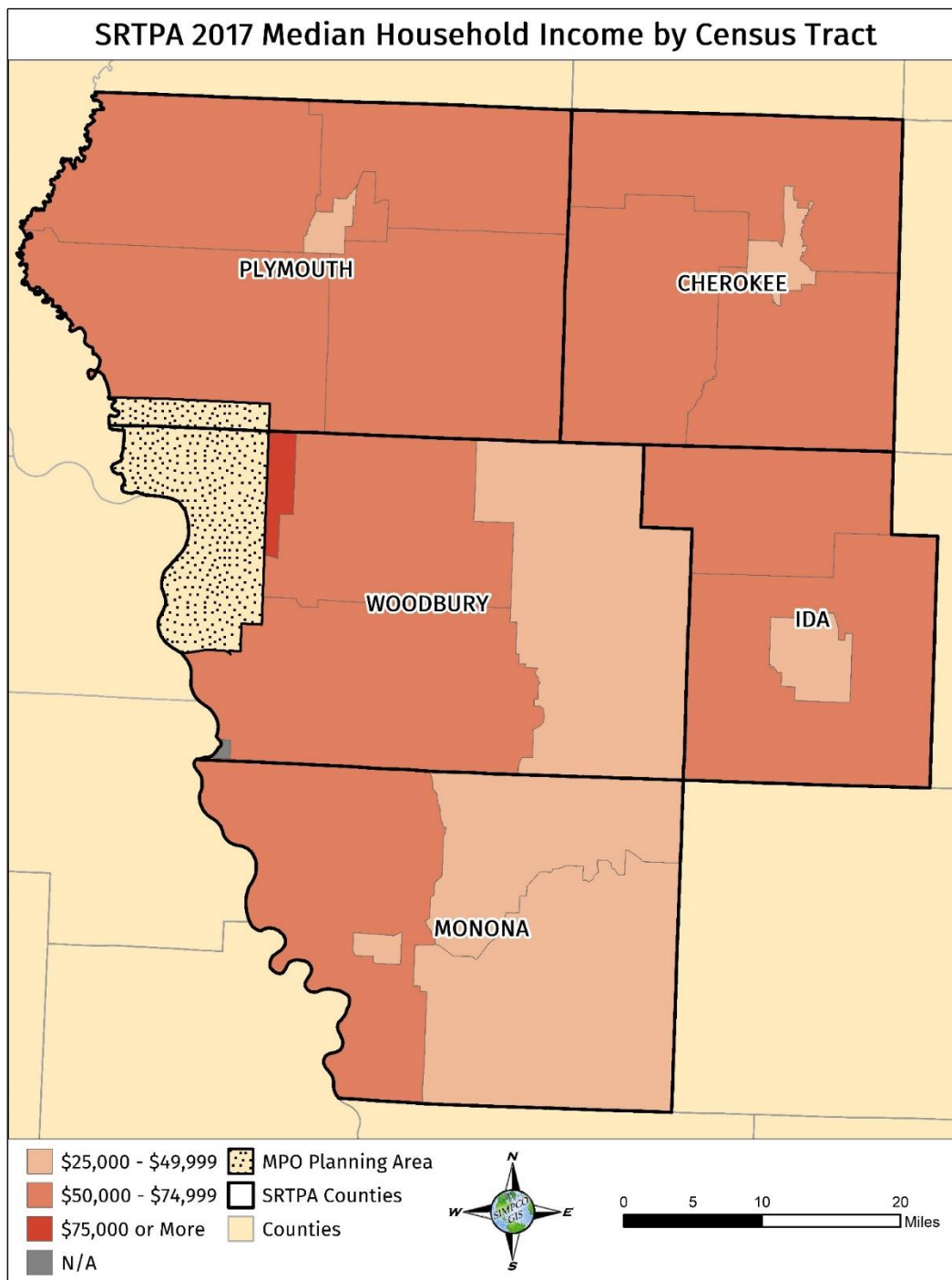
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

SRTPA has continued its trend of averaging a lower median household and per capita income than both the state and the nation, which stretches across multiple decades. At the county level, Plymouth County has been the rare exception, averaging a higher median household income than the state since 1990 and has recorded a higher average than the nation since 2000. Regarding per capita income, Plymouth County has recorded a higher average than the state since 2010 and Ida County's 2015 figures were higher as well. Despite averaging lower figures than the state and nation, the median household and per capita income of the region has continued to gradually increase in similar nature as the state and nation has over the past several decades.



The degree of income amongst the region has been trending upward since 2000. The U.S. Census sorts the degree of income into ten groups. Since 2000, households earning \$50,000 to \$74,999 has accounted for the largest proportion of the region's population. The proportion of households within this range has remained stable, accounting for on average 20% of the population. Although households earning \$50,000 to \$74,999 has consistently

accounted for the largest proportion of the population, the region overall on average has been earning more. Since 2000, the proportion of the population in each income range higher than households earning \$50,000 to \$74,999 has increased and the proportion of the population in each income range lower has decreased. On the following page, a map breaks down SRTPA's range of median household incomes by Census Tracts.




C. **Employment**

As mentioned previously, SRTPA has very rich soils (several inches to a few feet deep in many locations) created by the erosive effect of receding glaciation thousands of years ago. Additionally, the receding glaciation also affected the drainage patterns of rivers and led to regular alluvial flooding before the large upstream dams for flood control and hydroelectric power put an end to such occurrences. These flood events added many critical soil forming minerals further enhancing the soil. Thanks to this and regular, reliable rainfall, the principal economic activity in the region is agriculture and its related services and industries. In the following table, a comparison of the counties, region, and state agricultural data is displayed.

	Ag. Related Jobs	Number of Farms	Average Farm Size (acres)	Acres in Farmland	Total Land Area (acres)	Percent of Land in Farms
Cherokee	42.0%	805	419	337,334	369,220	91.4%
Ida	31.2%	547	477	260,962	276,165	94.5%
Monona	32.0%	538	629	338,164	444,206	76.1%
Plymouth	39.3%	1,331	407	541,817	552,250	98.1%
Woodbury	15.7%	973	458	445,641	558,614	79.8%
SRTPA	32.0%	4,194	478	1,923,918	2,200,455	87.4%
Iowa	21%	88,637	345	30,622,731	35,748,540	85.7%

Source: USDA Census of Agriculture 2012; Coalition to Support Iowa's Farmers

As the table indicates, farming has an overwhelming presence amongst SRTPA's economy with nearly 90 percent of all land uses being agriculture related. The principal crop items in the region features crop for grain and soybeans for beans. Total employment figures for farming are very difficult to come by given the informal and seasonal nature of farm work but the agriculture related job figure in the table as well as the number and size of farms gives some indication on the level of farm related employment activity. Supporting the farm output is a large agriculture processing and service industry. This industry takes the corn, soybeans, hogs/pigs, cattle, dairy etc. as input and manufactures processed food items for consumption nationally and internationally. Several well-known names in the food processing industry have large operations in or near the region. Examples include Tyson Foods Inc., BPI, Well's Dairy, Con Agra, Cargill, Sioux Honey Association and American Popcorn. Their products range from cut and ground beef, processed pork/ham, popcorn, milk, ice cream and other dairy products, soy oil, and processed cereal.

<u>SRTPA's Largest Employment by Industry (2017)</u>	<u>SRTPA's Unemployment Rate (2017)</u>	
1. Educational Services, & Health Care & Social Assistance – 23.6%	Region IV – 3.1%	
2. Manufacturing – 15.5%	Iowa – 4.1%	
3. Retail Trade – 12.7%	U.S. – 6.6%	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The distribution of employment by industry in the region has remained fairly consistent since 2000. Specifically, the three largest industries by employment has not changed from 2000 to 2017. Furthermore, their share of total employment amongst the region has undergone minimal change. Outside of the three largest industries, industries that experienced the largest growth during the timespan featured Public Administration (20.3%) and Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation, and Food Services (9.6%). Industries that underwent significant declines in employment included Information (-45.1%), Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, and Mining (-17.3%), and Wholesale Trade (-15.7%).

Regarding the unemployment rate, the region has fared well since 2010, recording lower rates than both the state and the nation. The unemployment rate has been trending down since then as well. Within the region, the unemployment rate for Cherokee, Ida, Plymouth, and the portion of Woodbury County outside the MPO boundary has remained lower than 5% since 2010. It is not anticipated that the unemployment figures will change significantly during the timeframe of this plan as economic change tends to occur slower in this region. Barring significant economic discontinuity, the unemployment rate is projected to remain between three and five percent.

II. Summary

In summary, it can be stated that SRTPA has an aging population with economic activity centered on agriculture, agricultural services and industry. The area is primarily rural in nature with income and wealth concentrated in the towns, and racial diversity gradually increasing. The socio-economic aspects discussed in this chapter should be kept in mind when discussion of the regional transportation infrastructure comes up in subsequent chapters.