

New Hampshire's Latest Commuting Patterns

based on American Community Survey Estimates



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The U.S. Census Bureau published the commuting flow data based on the 2016-2020 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates in 2023¹. The 2016-2020 ACS estimates depict a commuting picture that occurred mostly prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic there was an increased level of residential movement; for some it was temporary and for others it was permanent. Many workers were asked to work remotely by their employers and some workers chose to move further away from their original work

location. Initially, the pandemic also led to the closure of many nonessential businesses which caused a very high level of layoffs. As a result of this major labor market disruption, many workers changed jobs and for some it required a residential move. Though the residential movement and other employment disruption caused by the pandemic has dissipated, the long-term impact of the COVID-19 recession on commuting patterns will not be known for a while.

When comparing the 2016-2020 commuting data from a decade earlier², a similar pattern in terms of the direction and magnitude of commuter flow emerges.

The Big Picture – the commute in and out of New Hampshire to neighboring states

Commuting flow data from the 2016-2020 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates³ indicate that, there were 715,564 working residents in New Hampshire. Of these working New Hampshire



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residents, 105,355 commuted out of state for work, accounting for 14.7 percent of working residents. In comparison to the commuting patterns based on the 2006-2010 ACS estimates, the share of workers commuting out-of-state declined by one percentage point. The largest group of out-of-state working residents traveled to Massachusetts with 82,855 commuters, followed by Vermont with 8,961 commuters, and Maine with 8,216 commuters.



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1 U.S. Census. 2016-2020 5-Year ACS Commuting Flows.

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/metro-micro/commuting-flows-2020.html>

2 In the May 2013 edition of New Hampshire Economic Conditions, ELMU published an article illustrating the county-to-county commuting flows based on the ACS 2006-2010 5-year estimates.

3 The data contained in these data products are based on the American Community Survey (ACS) samples interviewed from January 1, 2016 through December 31, 2020.

New Hampshire

Commuting into NH	73,566	Residents Working Within NH	Commuting Out of NH	105,355
from Massachusetts	38,897		to Massachusetts	82,855
from Vermont	13,737	610,209	to Vermont	8,961
from Maine	17,316		to Maine	8,216

From the reverse commute direction, there were 73,566 out-of-state residents traveling to New Hampshire for work. Of these, the largest group commuting into New Hampshire was from Massachusetts with 38,897 workers, followed by Maine with 17,316 workers, and by Vermont with 13,737 workers. These out-of-state residents commuting to New Hampshire for work made up 10.8 percent of New Hampshire workers.

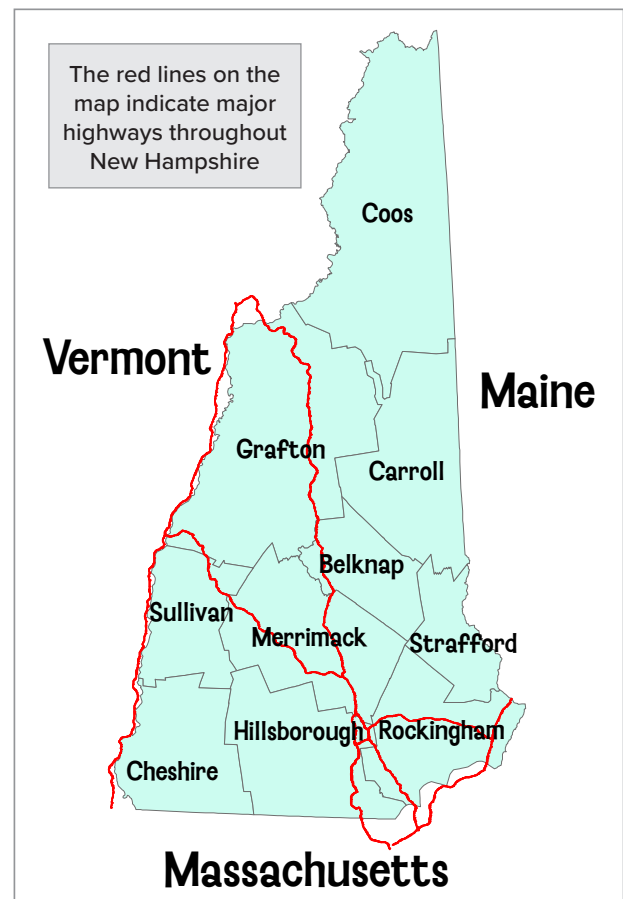
The commuting flow dynamic between New Hampshire and its neighboring states is similar over time, with substantially more New Hampshire residents traveling to Massachusetts for work than the number

of Massachusetts residents commuting into New Hampshire for work. But the commuting flows between New Hampshire and its two other neighbors (Vermont and Maine) are reversed, with more in-flow of workers to New Hampshire than New Hampshire residents commuting for work in Maine and Vermont. When comparing these most current commuting patterns to the 2006-2010 ACS estimates, the in-flow and out-flow between New Hampshire and Maine and Vermont were very similar, whereas there was a significant increase in the number of New Hampshire workers coming from Massachusetts, while the number of New Hampshire residents commuting to Massachusetts decreased slightly.

Geography matters: The location of the county is a major factor

The journey to work files from U.S. Census Bureau indicate the commuting flows from residence to workplace and from workplace to residence. This information can help community and transportation planners understand the interconnectedness between counties in New Hampshire. Geographic location, distance, employment opportunities and transportation infrastructure determine the degree of flow between counties.

From a county perspective, Rockingham County had the highest share of residents commuting out of the county for work as well as the highest share of workers commuting into the county. About 43 percent of Rockingham residents left the county for work and similarly about 41 percent of workers in Rockingham County came from outside the area. This county is located on the border to Massachusetts, with many residents commuting to jobs in the



Greater Boston metropolitan area. Likewise, Rockingham County is attracting workers from outside the area to supply workers to businesses on New Hampshire's seacoast as well as other communities in the region.

Coös County had the lowest share of workers coming from outside of the county. Due to the remote location of Coös County, fewer workers are enticed to travel the longer distances required for pursuing a job in Coös County. Only 16.8 percent of the workers came from outside of the county. In addition, the county borders Canada to its north, limiting the supply of workers from the northerly direction.

Grafton County had the lowest share of residents leaving the county for work. New Hampshire's larger communities are a significant distance from Grafton County, hence only 19.6 percent of the Grafton County residents leave the county for work.

For simplicity, those workers that commute into the county for work are defined as *inbound commuters* and those residents that commute out of the county for work are described as *outbound commuters*. The remaining group are those working within their county of residence.

Most of these working residents still commute to work, though not outside their county of residence.

The in-flow and out-flow of commuters is defined by the destination of the flow to either *another* New Hampshire county or *to and from* another state. Depending on the geographic location of the county, the number of commuters who travel into or out of the state varies.

	Share of Workers Commuting into the County	Share of Working Residents Commuting out of the County
Belknap	29.6%	37.4%
Carroll	21.3%	25.5%
Cheshire	18.3%	23.2%
Coös	16.8%	21.5%
Grafton	36.2%	19.6%
Hillsborough	27.1%	32.7%
Merrimack	38.4%	36.4%
Rockingham	41.3%	42.9%
Strafford	29.7%	41.3%
Sullivan	22.0%	41.8%

The following tables illustrate the commuter flows for each of New Hampshire's ten counties:

Belknap County

Residents Working Within County	19,341
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	7,854
From Out of State	294
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	10,505
To Out of State	1,036

- More residents from Belknap County commute out of the area for work than the number of workers that commute into the area for work. More than half of

Belknap County residents commuted to Merrimack County for work and slightly less than half of those workers commuting into Belknap County came from Merrimack County as well.

- This county has the lowest number of workers commuting into the county from out-of-state, and it has the second lowest number of residents commuting out-of-state for work. As this county is located in the center of the state, a low workforce integration with neighboring states is due to the geographic distance between the county and the New Hampshire state borders.

Carroll County

Residents Working Within County	17,553
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	2,186
From Out of State	2,567
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	4,364
To Out of State	1,649

- Overall, more Carroll County residents commute out of the area for work than

the number of workers that commute into the area. The majority of Carroll County outbound commuters went to Strafford County or Belknap County.

- More workers commute into Carroll County from out-of-state than commute into the county from another New Hampshire county. Carroll County borders Maine and half of all workers commuting into Carroll County are from the neighboring state of Maine.

Cheshire County

Residents Working Within County	29,731
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	2,973
From Out of State	3,690
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	3,727
To Out of State	5,233

- More Cheshire County residents commute out-of-state than commute to another county in New Hampshire. More than half of Cheshire County residents commuting out-of-state went

to Vermont and about 40 percent of the residents commuting out-of-state went to Massachusetts.

- Also, more out-of-state workers commuted into Cheshire County than came from another county in the state. Of those workers commuting into Cheshire County for work, more than half came from Massachusetts and about a third came from Vermont.
- Cheshire County borders both Vermont and Massachusetts and the proximity to Interstate Highway 91 facilitates such interstate commuting.

Coös County

Residents Working Within County	11,051
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	1,290
From Out of State	935
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	2,294
To Out of State	727

- More residents from Coös County commute out of the area for work than the number of workers that commute into the county for work. About two-thirds of the Coös County residents commuting to another county in

New Hampshire went to Grafton County, while one in four went to Carroll County.

- There were more workers commuting into Coös County from out-of-state than there were residents commuting out-of-state. Of those workers commuting into Coös County from out-of-state, three out of four came from Vermont. And about two-thirds of the Coös County residents commuting out-of-state went to Vermont. Although Coös County shares a border with both Vermont and Maine, there were much stronger commuting flows (both ways) between this northern county and Vermont than there were with Maine.

Grafton County

Residents Working Within County	36,694
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	10,128
From Out of State	10,693
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	5,154
To Out of State	3,780

- For every Grafton County resident leaving the area for work, there were two workers commuting into the county. Of those New Hampshire workers commuting into Grafton County, about 40 percent came

from Sullivan County and 20 percent came from Merrimack County.

- More workers commuting into Grafton County came from out-of-state than came from another county in New Hampshire. More than nine out of ten workers from out-of-state commuted to Grafton County from Vermont. Similarly, four out of five Grafton County residents commuting out-of-state went to Vermont. These commuting ties reflect the interconnection between communities across the NH-VT border in the “Upper Valley”.

Hillsborough County

Residents Working Within County	151,320
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	38,116
From Out of State	18,075
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	35,908
To Out of State	37,484

- Hillsborough County has the most working residents (224,712) – a reflection of being the most populous of the ten counties. Manchester and Nashua, New Hampshire’s two largest cities, are located in Hillsborough County. There were more New Hampshire workers commuting into the county than there were residents commuting to another county in the state. Of those workers

commuting into Hillsborough County, half came from Rockingham County and about a third came from Merrimack County. Similarly, of those Hillsborough County residents commuting out to other counties in the state, about half commuted to Rockingham County and about 40 percent commuted to Merrimack County.

- There were two Hillsborough County residents commuting out-of-state for work for every worker commuting into the county from out-of-state. About 95 percent of residents commuting out-of-state went to Massachusetts. Approximately 90 percent of workers commuting to Hillsborough County from out-of-state came from Massachusetts.

Merrimack County

Residents Working Within County	49,716
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	29,281
From Out of State	1,723
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	25,109
To Out of State	3,337

- There were more New Hampshire workers commuting into the Merrimack County than there were residents commuting to another county in the state. Concord, the capitol city of New Hampshire, is located in Merrimack County and is home to many government agencies. Of those workers commuting into Merrimack County, slightly less than half came from Hillsborough County, and from the reverse commute direction,

more than half of Merrimack County residents commuted to Hillsborough County. This shows a high workforce integration between Merrimack and Hillsborough counties.

- There were more residents commuting out-of-state from Merrimack County than there were out-of-state workers commuting into Merrimack County, though both were relatively low numbers. Merrimack County had the second lowest share of workers from out-of-state as well as the county had the second lowest share of residents traveling out-of-state for work. Belknap County had the lowest shares of in- and out-flow to other states. Both Merrimack and Belknap counties are located in the center of New Hampshire, sharing no borders with any of the three neighboring states.

Rockingham County

Residents Working Within County	97,503
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	41,321
From Out of State	27,245
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	30,369
To Out of State	43,032

- There were 43,032 residents of Rockingham County commuting out-of-state for work, the most of any of the counties. About 90 percent of the resident commuting out-of-state worked in Massachusetts. Only 27,245 workers commuted into the county from out-of-state, creating a net outflow of workers of more than 15,000. Of those

workers commuting into Rockingham County for work, two-thirds came from Massachusetts and about 28 percent came from Maine. The commute flow reflects how two major highways (I-93 and I-95) traverse the county, creating easy commuting routes to Massachusetts and Maine.

- There were many more New Hampshire workers commuting into Rockingham County than there were residents commuting to another county in the state, making up for some of the outflow of workers to out-of-state. More than 85 percent of the New Hampshire workers commuting into Rockingham County came from Strafford and Hillsborough counties.

Strafford County

Residents Working Within County	40,196
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	10,020
From Out of State	6,997
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	21,369
To Out of State	6,892

- There were two residents leaving Stafford County for work in another New Hampshire county, for every New Hampshire worker commuting into the county. More than four out of five residents commuting to another county

in the state went to Rockingham County for work. This shows how Strafford County is an integral part of the vibrant economy of its neighboring county.

- There were roughly the same number of Strafford County residents commuting out-of-state for work than there were out-of-state workers commuting into Strafford County. But of those workers commuting into Strafford County from out-of-state, 84 percent came from Maine, whereas the share of Strafford County residents commuting out-of-state for work was split between Maine (56 percent) and Massachusetts (35 percent).

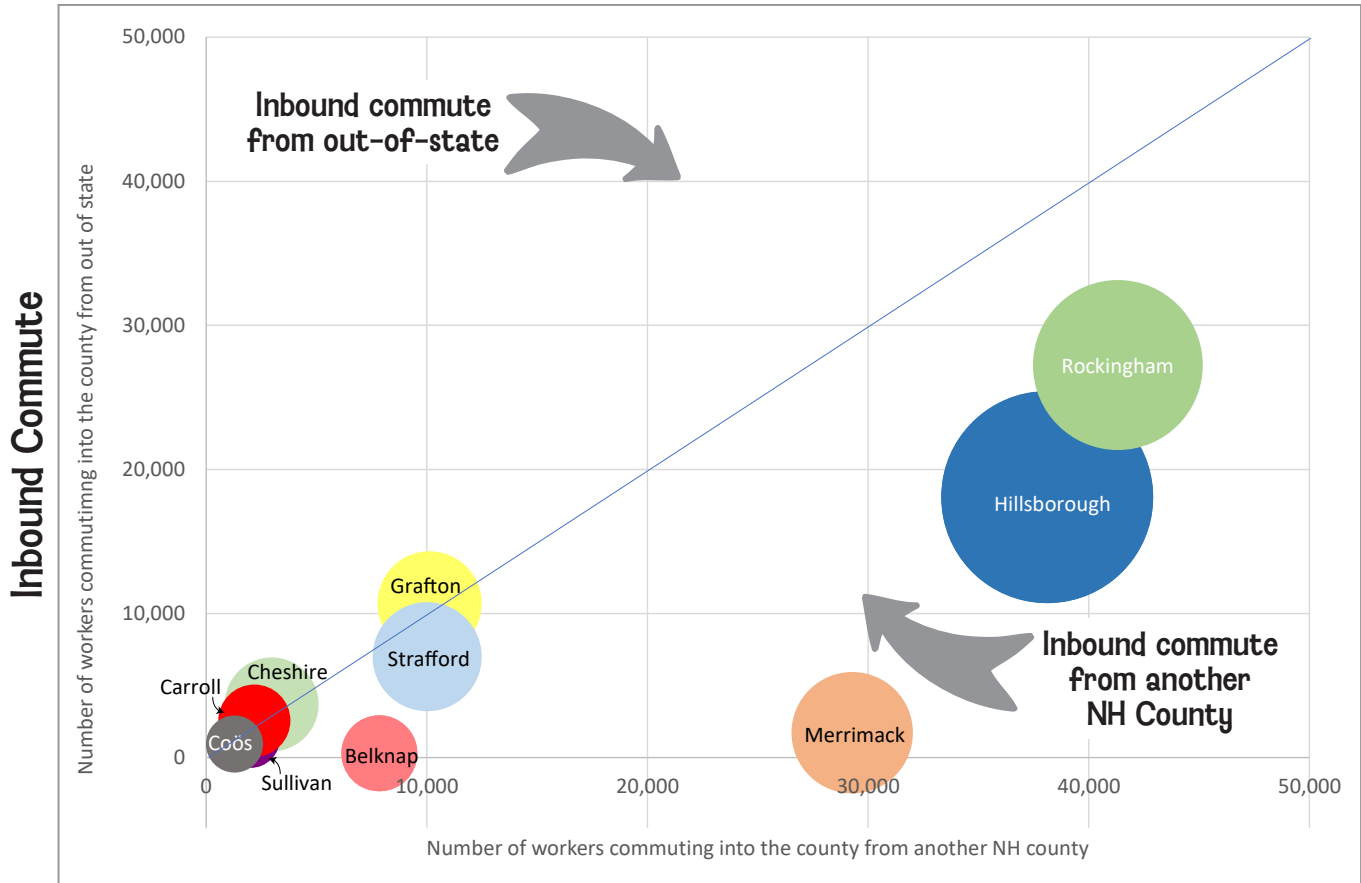
Sullivan County

Residents Working Within County	11,925
Inbound Commute	
From Another NH County	2,010
From Out of State	1,347
Outbound Commute	
To Another NH County	6,380
To Out of State	2,185

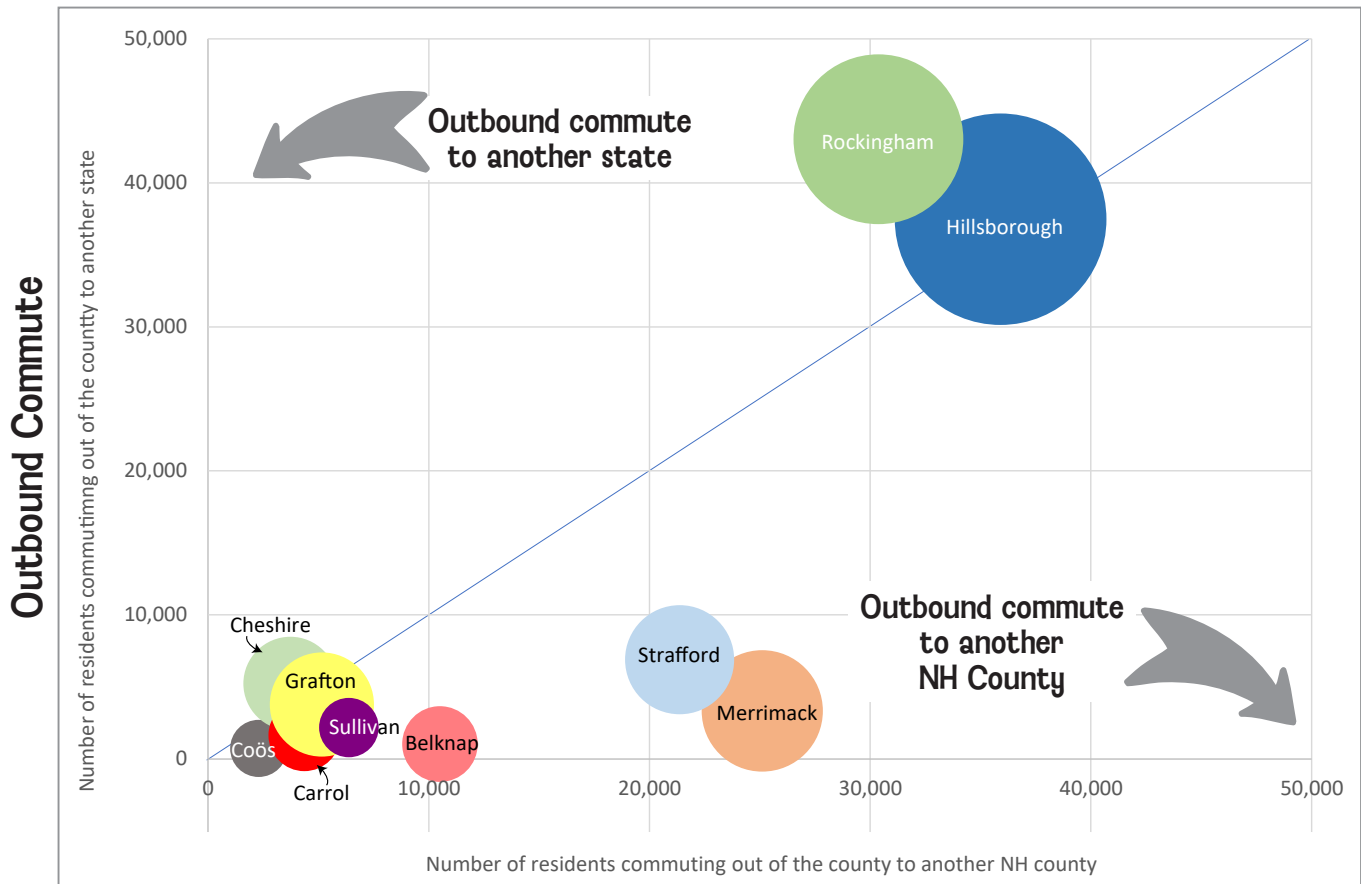
- There were three residents leaving Sullivan County for work in another county in the state, for every New Hampshire worker commuting into the county. Two-thirds of Sullivan County

residents commuted to Grafton County for work. The “Upper Valley” thriving labor market, represented by Lebanon and Hanover, are in close proximity to communities in Sullivan County.

- There were many more residents commuting out-of-state from Sullivan County than there were out-of-state workers commuting into Sullivan County. More the 90 percent of Sullivan County residents commuting out-of-state went to Vermont for work. Sullivan County shares a border with Vermont on its western side.



The size of the bubble represents the number of residents working within the county.



Highlights on Inbound and Outbound Commuting:

- New Hampshire's largest counties in terms of working residents, Hillsborough and Rockingham counties, follow similar commuting patterns with more working residents leaving to go out-of-state for work than are leaving one of the counties for work in another New Hampshire county. From the reverse commute direction, more New Hampshire workers are commuting into one of these two counties than the number of out-of-state workers.
- Merrimack and Belknap counties have weak commuting ties with areas out-of-state both in terms of workers commuting into one of the two counties as well as residents commuting out of one of these two counties.
- Grafton County inbound commuting ties to areas out-of-state and inbound commuting ties with other New Hampshire counties are similar, whereas the outbound commuting ties are stronger with other counties in New Hampshire than to areas out-of-state.
- Both the inbound and outbound commuting ties for Cheshire County are stronger with out-of-state areas than with other counties in New Hampshire.