

Missouri Economy Indicators

Commuting Trends

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In 2023, Missourians had an average commute time of 23.5 minutes, which is more than three minutes shorter than the national average (26.8). Over the past decade, the average commute time in Missouri has remained relatively stable, measuring 23.2 minutes in 2013. Similarly, an analysis of commuting distances from 2011 to 2021 found little change in overall mileage, though mileage varied significantly based on workers' locations and the economic structure of their home counties.

Missouri Nonmetro and Lower-Income Commuters Travel Farthest

An analysis of one-way travel mileage from 2011 to 2021 reveals that the average commute distance for Missourians has remained relatively stable in recent years.

In 2021, Missouri metro residents had an average commute of 17.4 miles, a modest 4% increase from 2011. In contrast, nonmetro workers traveled nearly twice as far, averaging 30 miles—a distance that has barely changed from 2011.

Interestingly, income level had minimal impact on commute distances. Workers earning \$1,250 or less monthly averaged 20.3 miles per trip, slightly more than those earning \$3,334 or more, who averaged 19.8 miles. This trend suggests that lower-income individuals may be commuting longer distances out of necessity rather than financial incentive. Factors such as the higher cost of housing and other living expenses in urban areas likely contribute to this pattern.

Average One-Way Commute (In Miles, 2011 and 2021)

Area	2011	2021	Percent Change
Missouri	19.7	20.0	1%
By Urbanization			
Metro	16.8	17.4	4%
Nonmetro	29.9	30.0	0%
By Earnings			
Over \$3,334/Month	19.2	19.8	3%
\$1,251-\$3,333	19.7	20.0	2%
Under \$1,250/Month	20.3	20.3	0%
By County Economic Type*			
Diversified economy	17.3	17.8	3%
Government-dependent	24.6	25.6	4%
Manufacturing-dependent	25.6	25.9	1%
Recreation-dependent	32.4	29.7	-8%
Farm-dependent	35.1	34.8	-1%
Mining-dependent	42.9	38.7	-10%

*Economic type from U.S. Dept. of Agriculture county classifications. Source: MU Extension graphic using 2011-21 U.S. Census Local Employment Dynamics data and UM CARES network calculations.

Using U.S. Department of Agriculture [economic dependency](#) county classifications (see map on next page), Missouri's diversified economies—led by large metro counties with higher populations—have the shortest worker commute distances (17.8 miles). In contrast, counties dependent on mining or farming, which make up a quarter of all Missouri counties, see the longest one-way commutes. Farming-dependent counties, mostly in

northern Missouri, offer fewer local employment opportunities compared to other economically structured counties, leading to longer commutes for work. In 2021, the average Missouri county had 54 payroll jobs for every 100 residents in the labor force (age 16 and older). Farming-dependent counties had just 29 payroll jobs for every 100 residents in the labor force, the lowest ratio among all county economic classifications. Diversified and government-dependent counties had the highest ratios, at 56 and 52 jobs per 100 labor force residents, respectively, along with the shortest commutes.

The accompanying map highlights the average one-way commute distances for Missouri payroll workers by Census tract. Commutes are generally shortest in metro counties, where job opportunities are more concentrated and accessible. An exception is in the Bootheel, where commuting distances are also relatively low. Communities in west-central Missouri show long commutes to employment hubs like Springfield, Sedalia and towns near the lakes. Similarly, residents in northwest Missouri commute longer distances to cities like St. Joseph or suburban Kansas City communities.

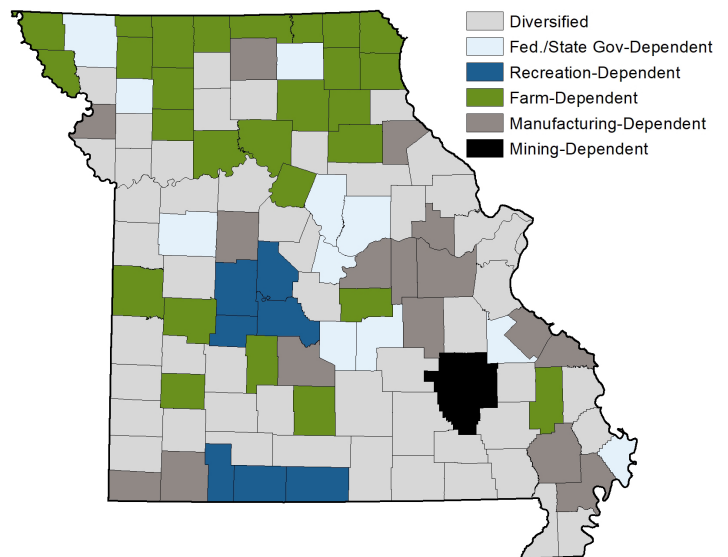
Additional Notes and Resources

- Commuting times are based on the Census 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year estimates. The average commute distances, calculated from 2011 and 2021 Census data with adjustments for known [outlier issues](#), reflect the distance by road network between a worker's home and workplace.
- MU Extension's All Things Missouri Map Room, developed by the Center for Applied Research and Engagement Systems (CARES), has an interactive [average commute miles map](#) where you can explore commuting patterns by county or Census tract using recently released 2022 data.

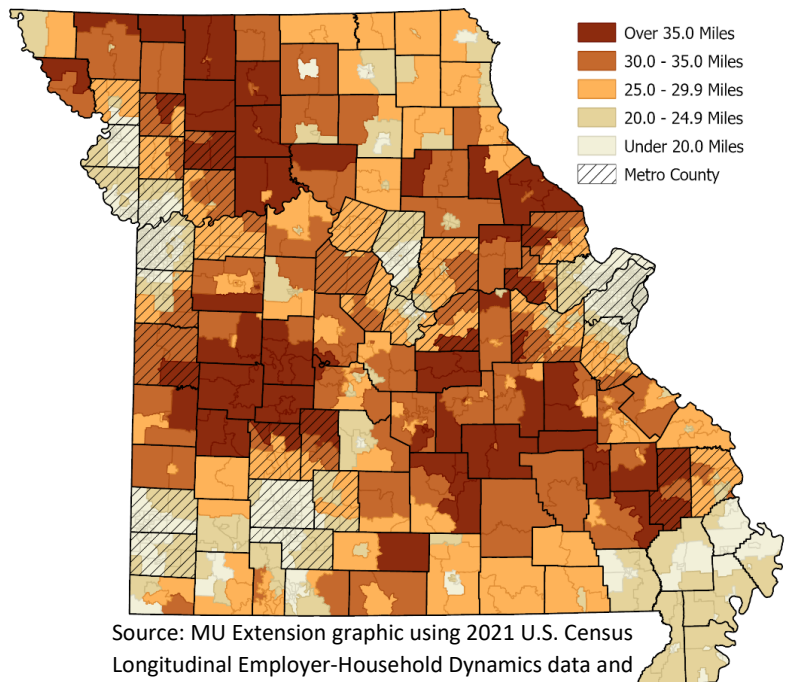
All Missouri Economy Indicators briefs in this series are available at <http://muext.us/MissouriEconomyIndicators>

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Missouri County Economic Types



Average One-Way Commute by Census Tract,



Source: MU Extension graphic using 2021 U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data and Univ. of Missouri CARES network calculations.