

Missouri Economy Indicators

Commuting Patterns and Hybrid Work

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Although commuting can be a hassle, Missourians tend to have shorter commuting times and mileage compared to the rest of the United States. In 2022, Missourians had an average 23.7 minutes of travel time to work, nearly three minutes less than the national average (26.4). Similarly, Missourians had an average one-way commute of 17.6 miles in 2020, below the national average (18.1); however, commuting mileage varied by area, age and business sector. As hybrid work arrangements become more common, some employees will continue to benefit from less time on the road.

Missouri Nonmetro and Trade Service Commuters Travel Farthest

The U.S. Census Bureau provides commuting data for payroll workers (those employed by private firms or public entities), which includes information on where people live and work and excludes most self-employed workers.

In 2020, Missouri metro residents had an average commute of 15 miles, compared to nearly 27 for nonmetro residents. Nonmetro workers may enjoy the benefit of rural living but must travel additional miles for employment opportunities.

An interesting finding from the analysis was the longer commutes for *Trade Services* employees (mostly retail workers). The sector is generally lower paid than employees in other sectors. Sixty-two percent of *Trade Services* workers made less than \$40,000 a year, compared to 57% and 44% for *Other Services* and *Goods-Producing* employees, respectively. It is assumed that people are willing to commute longer distances for higher-paying jobs, but this data shows that workers in lower-paying sectors traveled more miles on average than employees in higher-paying industries.

Average One-Way Commute

(In Miles, 2020)

Category	Average Commute (in Miles)
Missouri	17.6
By Area	
Metro	15.2
Nonmetro	26.8
By Age Group	
Age 29 or younger	18.4
Age 30-54	17.4
Age 55 or older	17.2
By Large Sectors	
Goods-Producing (<i>Manufacturing, Constr., Agric.</i>)	18.0
Trade Services (<i>Retail, Wholesale, Transp.</i>)	21.9
Other Services (<i>Health, Business Serv., Educ.</i>)	16.1

Source: MU Extension graphic using 2020 U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data and Univ. of Missouri CARES calculations.

While urban workers may face shorter distances in their commutes, congested urban roadways often lead to more time spent in traffic. Crowded urban highways are one of the reasons hybrid work arrangements (working two to three days remotely per week) have continued after the pandemic. In an [October 2023 survey](#), 25% of Missouri households reported someone working from home at least one day a week, up from 23% in 2022. A separate U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [telework survey](#) for the same month showed that U.S. telework arrangements are more likely found in the *Other Services* (24%), while only 13% and 11% of *Goods-Producing* and *Trade Services* workers, respectively, telecommuted in October. Many occupations found in

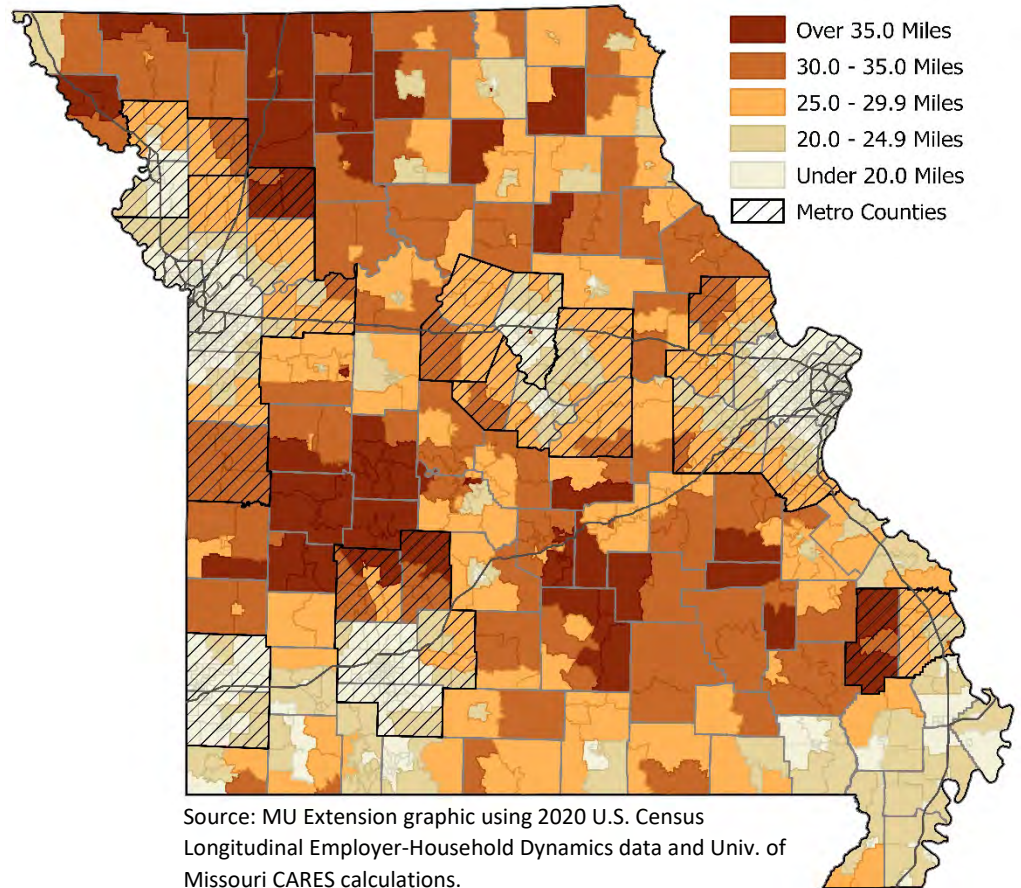
Other Services, such as information technology and business and financial operations jobs, had over half of employees working from home at least some hours a week during that month. The implications from these surveys are: 1) hybrid work options are likely to continue for roughly a quarter of Missouri workers, 2) those most likely to have telework options are within shorter commutes of cities where these jobs cluster, and 3) telecommuting is less of an option for lower-paid *Trade Services* workers, even though they often have longer mileage commutes.

The map highlights the average one-way commute of Missouri payroll workers by Census tract. Commuting miles are generally lowest in metro counties, except for the Bootheel and parts of southwest Missouri. Communities in west central Missouri show long commutes to cities like Springfield, Sedalia and towns around the two lakes. In northwest Missouri, residents commute longer distances to cities like St. Joseph or suburban Kansas City communities.

Notes and Additional Resources

- Commuting times are from the Census 2022 American Community Survey 1-Year estimates. The average commute distances, calculated from 2020 Census data with adjustments for known [outlier issues](#), reflects the straight-line distance between a worker's home and workplace. Straight-line calculations will be lower than actual road mileage, so figures should be viewed as conservative estimates.
- 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 by county or Census tract.

Average One-Way Commute by Census Tract, 2020



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

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