

Missouri Economy Indicators

Commuting Across Counties

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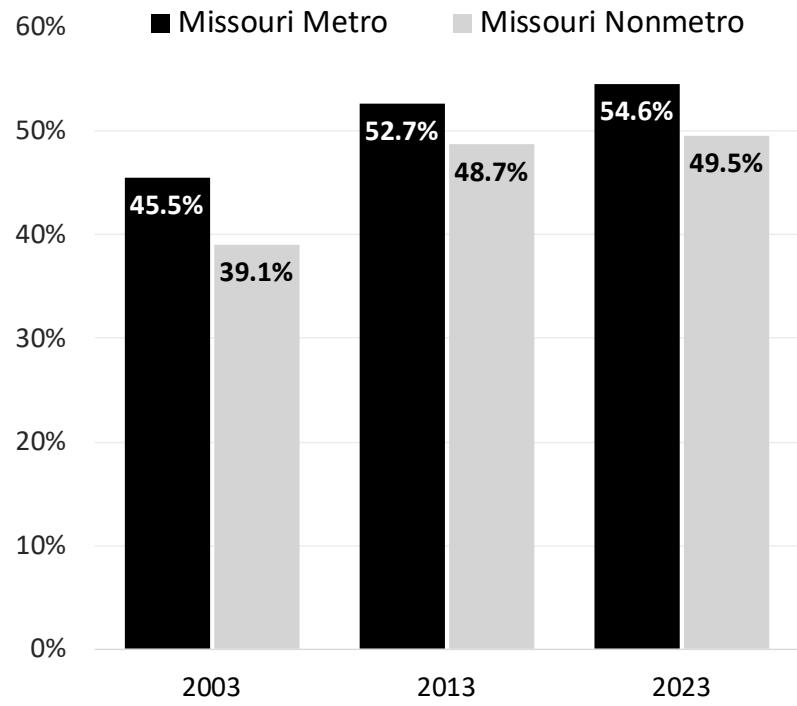
Like it or not, commuting remains a fact of life for most employed Missourians. In 2024, only 10% of the state's workforce worked entirely from home, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). And despite many job seekers' desire for fully remote work, just 5% of Missouri employment ads in 2025 offered that option, down from 11% in 2021, based on an analysis of Lightcast posting data. While commuting is here to stay, communities often underestimate how many of their workers travel in from neighboring counties. This inbound commuting extends a county's labor market reach and underscores the need to think regionally when considering economic and workforce development efforts.

Missouri Businesses Rely on Out-of-County Commuters

In 2003, just over four in 10 Missouri payroll jobs were filled by commuters who lived outside the county where they worked. Over the following decade, commuting increased to the point that over half of the state's employment opportunities were filled by residents of another county. By 2023, that share had climbed to 53.7%.

This growth occurred across both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. In 2023, 54.6% of Missouri's metro county workers came from outside the county, a 9-percentage-point increase since 2003. In nonmetro areas, half (49.5%) of nonmetro workers commuted to another county for employment in 2023, a 10-percentage-point increase over the past 20 years.

Share of Jobs Held By Out-of-County Commuters



Source: MU Extension graphic using U.S. Census Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) payroll worker commuting data for Missouri.

In 2003, Missourians traveled an average of 15 miles one way to work. Metro commuters averaged 13 miles, whereas nonmetro workers traveled considerably farther — 21 miles. By 2023, the average one-way commute had increased to 18 miles; however, commuting mileage was much higher for nonmetro workers (28 miles) than for metro drivers (16 miles). The increase in commuting distance is supported by Missouri's extensive road network. Although Missouri is the nation's 19th-most-populous state, it maintains the seventh-largest highway system, with nearly 34,000 miles of state highways. Together, those miles and Missourians' willingness to drive for the job allow businesses to draw from a broad labor shed when filling positions.

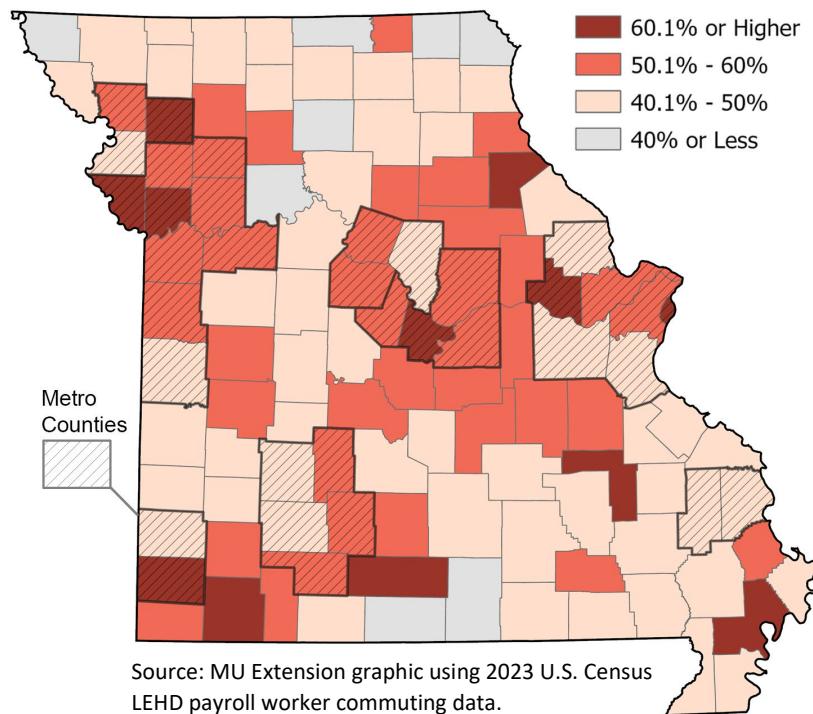
Commuters Increasingly Connect Missouri's Regional Economies

An analysis of 2023 commuting patterns for payroll workers shows that only a small number of counties (8), have less than 40% of their daily workforce coming from another county. Even among these, inbound commuting remains substantial: Clark County in northeast Missouri—the county least dependent on outside workers—still draws nearly one in three employees from beyond its borders.

Inbound commuting is most pronounced in the state's largest metropolitan areas. The City of St. Louis, for example, relies on workers from outside its city limits for roughly three-quarters of its daily workforce, a pattern mirrored in Platte County within the Kansas City metro.

Counties where more than half of the workforce commutes in from elsewhere reveal distinct commuting hotspots beyond the state's metros. Counties located between St. Louis and Jefferson City see higher levels of in-commuting. This is also true between Springfield, Joplin, and Arkansas's Fayetteville metro, where larger populations travel to adjoining counties for work. Many of these communities are also highly concentrated in manufacturing, which tends to draw workers from a wider range of counties. These patterns underscore the important bonds between Missouri's urban and rural communities, as the shared labor markets benefit both workers' livelihoods and the businesses that employ them.

Share of Workers Commuting Into a County



Source: MU Extension graphic using 2023 U.S. Census LEHD payroll worker commuting data.

Additional Notes and Resources

- The data in this brief are from the U.S. Census Bureau's [Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics \(LEHD\) program](#), which tracks commuting for payroll workers—wage and salary workers employed by a business or organization. LEHD data will generally show higher commuting levels than data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS), which includes estimates for the self-employed.
- 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 2023 data.

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