

SOCIOECONOMIC DATA

This section discusses long-term trends in population, housing, and employment within the NATS region. It presents relevant data from past and present U.S. Census datasets to provide a snapshot of how the population, housing and employment situation in the NATS area arrived at its current state. The Travel Demand Model and Deficiency Analysis follows this section by projecting these trends and observations from local officials to anticipate future transportation needs.

A LOOK AT THE REGION'S PAST AND PRESENT SOCIOECONOMIC TRENDS

Information from various datasets shown in the graphics throughout this section draws from SWMPC's Data Extract, a regional profile which will be available by the summer of 2013. The Extract uses the County and municipality, rather than the MPO, as its unit of analysis. Still, examining trends in demographics and housing throughout Berrien and Cass Counties and at the municipal level can help explain conditions at the MPO level. The Extract also often compares Berrien and Cass Counties to economically similar counties throughout the United States to examine whether particular trends reflect national patterns.

POPULATION

Census data on total population between 1950 and 2010 show clearly that Berrien County has experienced a net loss in total population since 1980, although there was a slight increase in county population between 1990 and 2000. Figure 1 shows the share of the county population living in townships increased substantially between 1950 and 2010, while the share living in incorporated cities and villages declined. This shift of the population towards the townships has not been uniform however, and some townships even experienced a notable decline in population between 2000 and 2010.

In contrast, Figure 2 of Cass County's population trends show that the County's population continued to increase between 1990 and 2010 adding to the significant growth that occurred between 1950 and 1980. Like Berrien County, the share of Cass County's population living in townships has increased substantially, while the share living in cities and villages has declined. Of particular note to the NATS study area, Mason, Milton, and Ontwa Townships saw significant growth in population between 2000 and 2010.

Figure 1 - Berrien County Population, 1950-2010

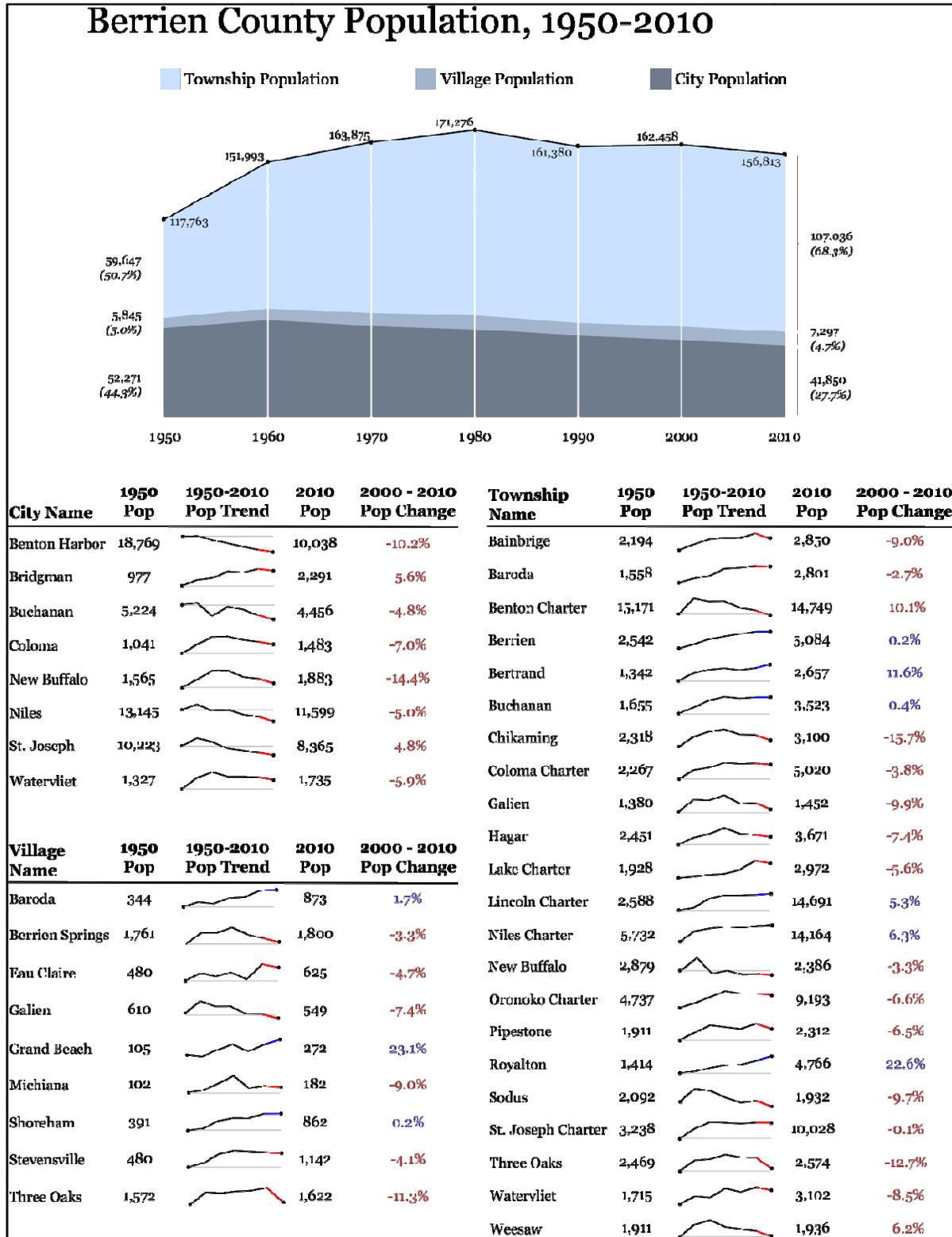
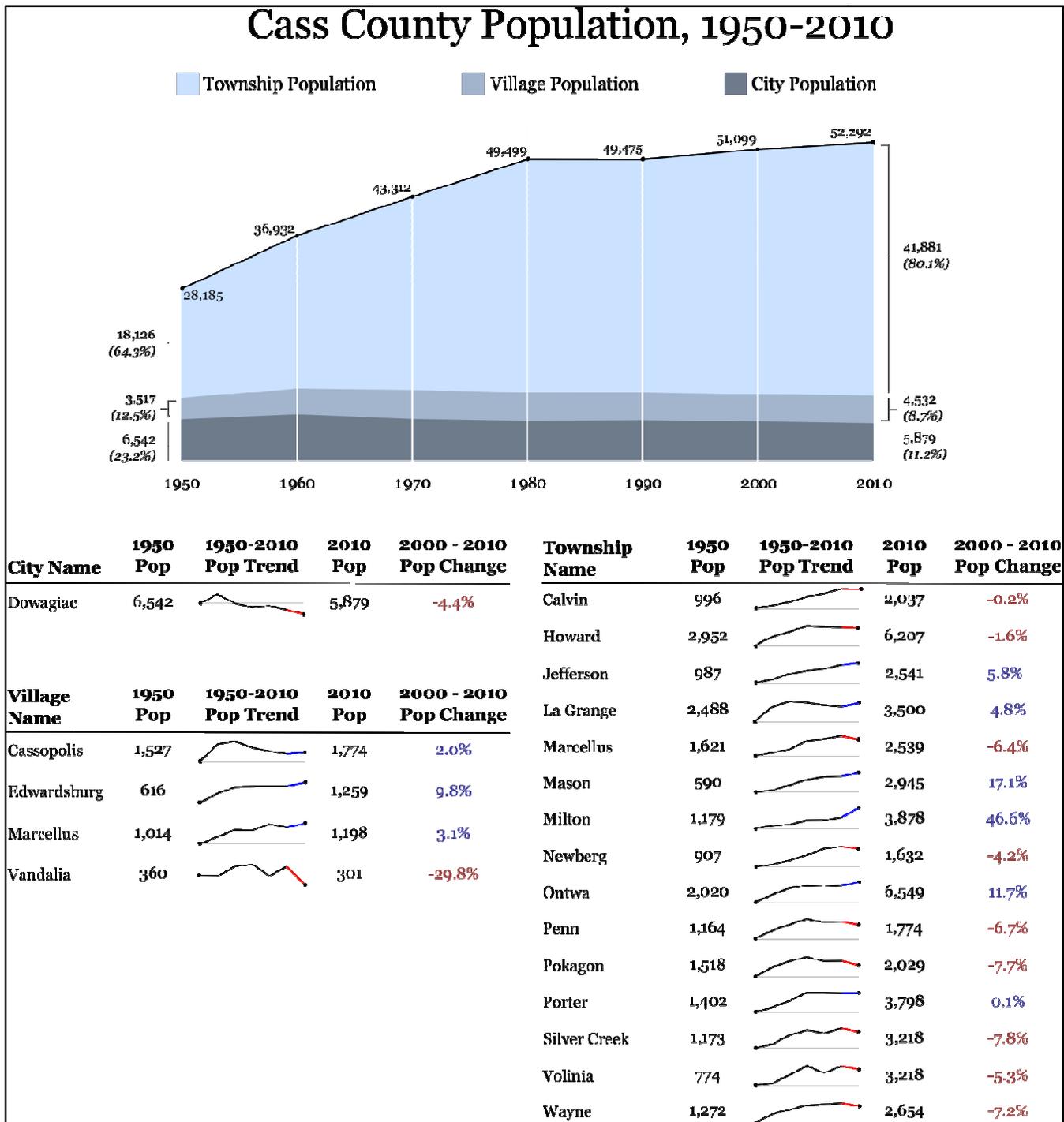


Figure 2 - Cass County Population, 1950-2010



Regardless of whether the population lives in townships, cities, or villages, Berrien and Cass Counties have been experiencing significant demographic changes that will affect desired travel destinations and transportation needs.

In particular, Figures 3 and 4 illustrates the share of the total population that is aged 65 and over is higher in Berrien County and in Cass County than in the nation as a whole and many other economically similar counties.

Figure 3 - Berrien County, Population Age 65 and Over, 2010

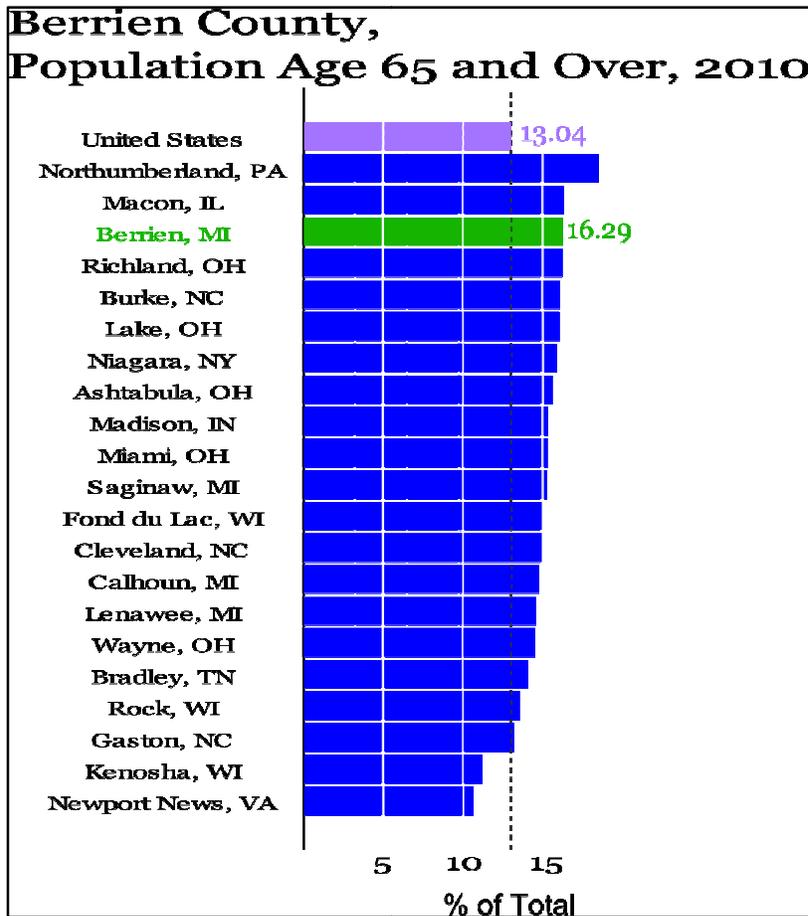
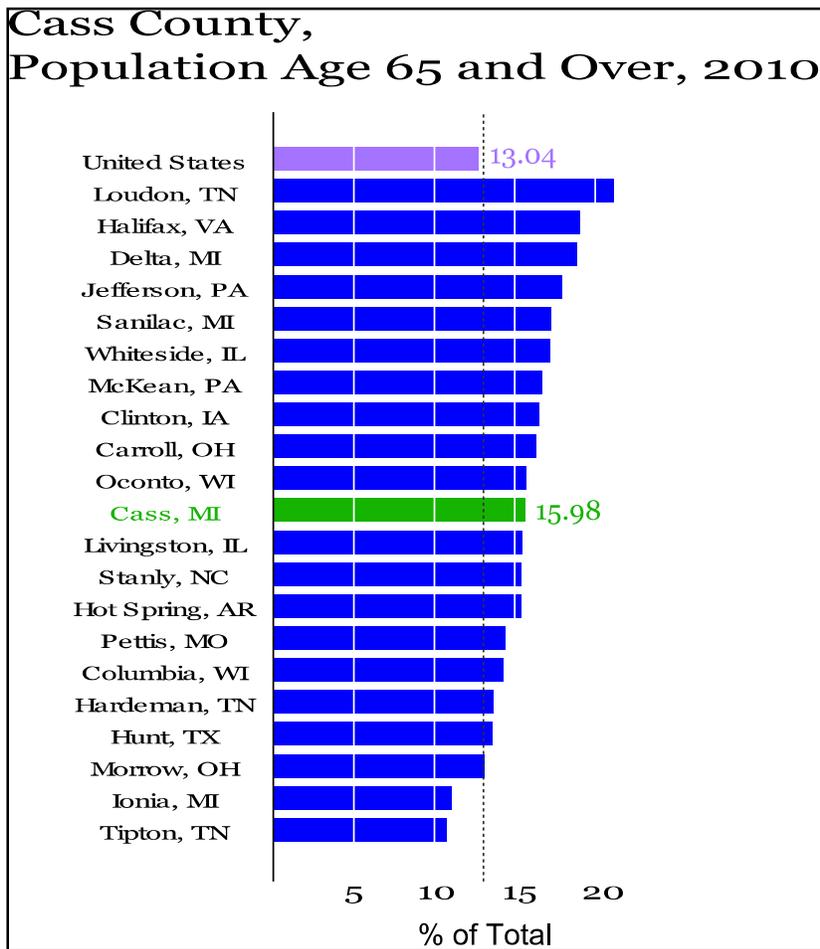


Figure 4 - Cass County, Population Age 65 and Over, 2010



This share of the population aged 65 and over represents an increase from 2000. Indeed, Berrien and Cass County's population in older age groups continues to increase, while its population aged 25-44, often considered the prime demographic group for new employment, declined. Figures 5 and 6, Berrien and Cass County population tree graphics show that the changes in age distribution of the population in Berrien County and Cass County from 2000-2010 both mirror national trends toward an older population.

Figure 5 - Berrien County Population Tree

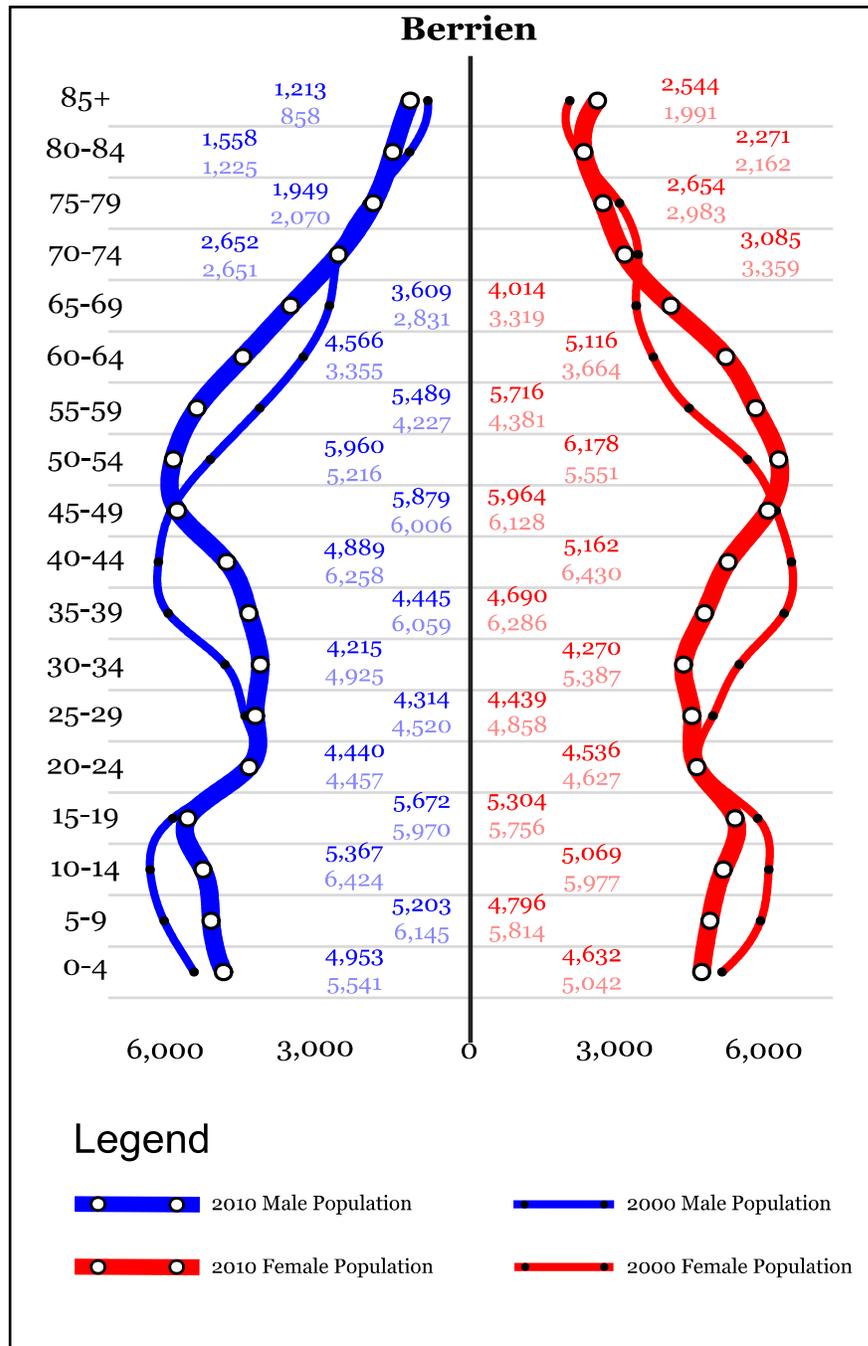


Figure 6 - Cass County Population Tree

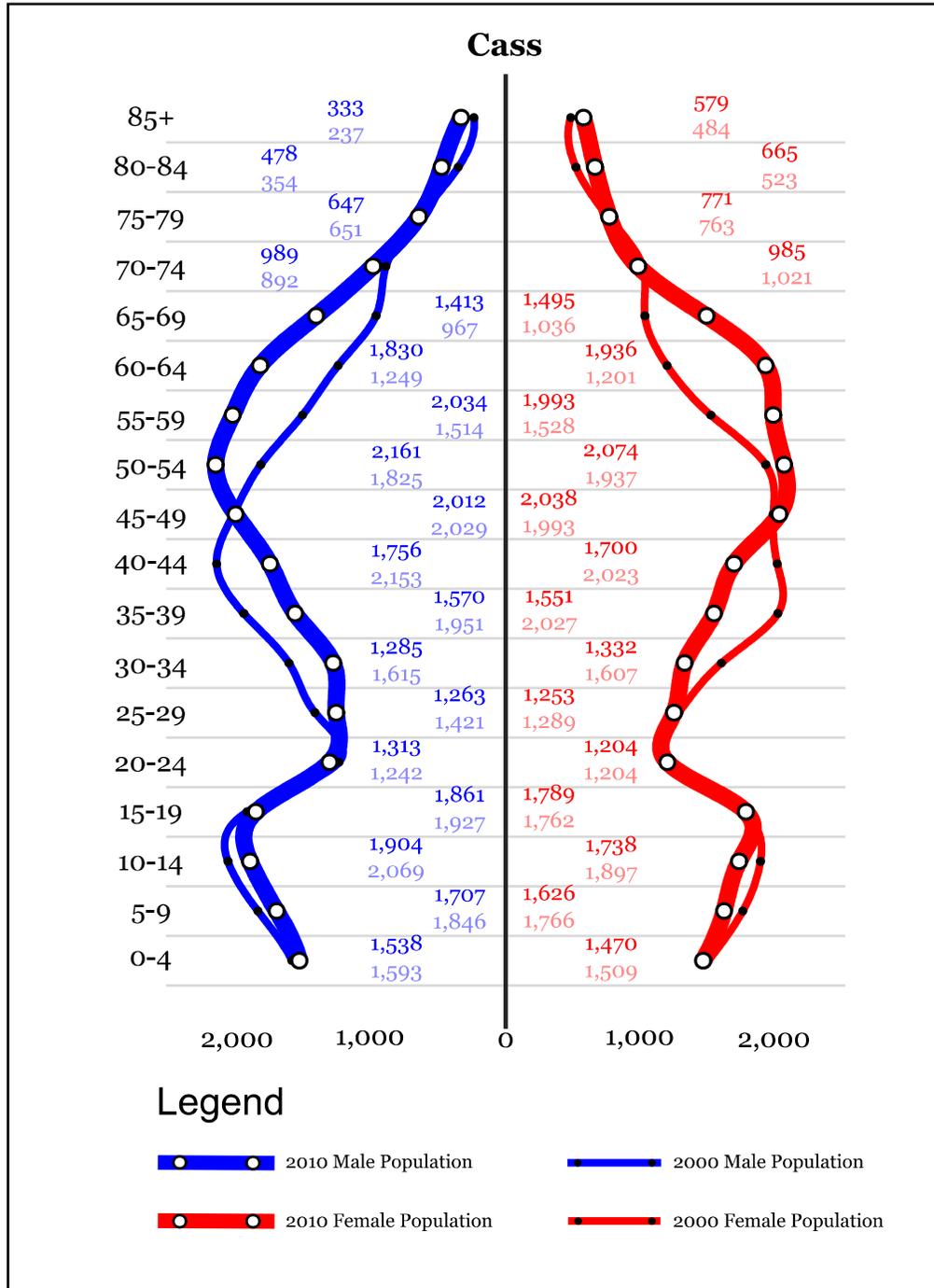
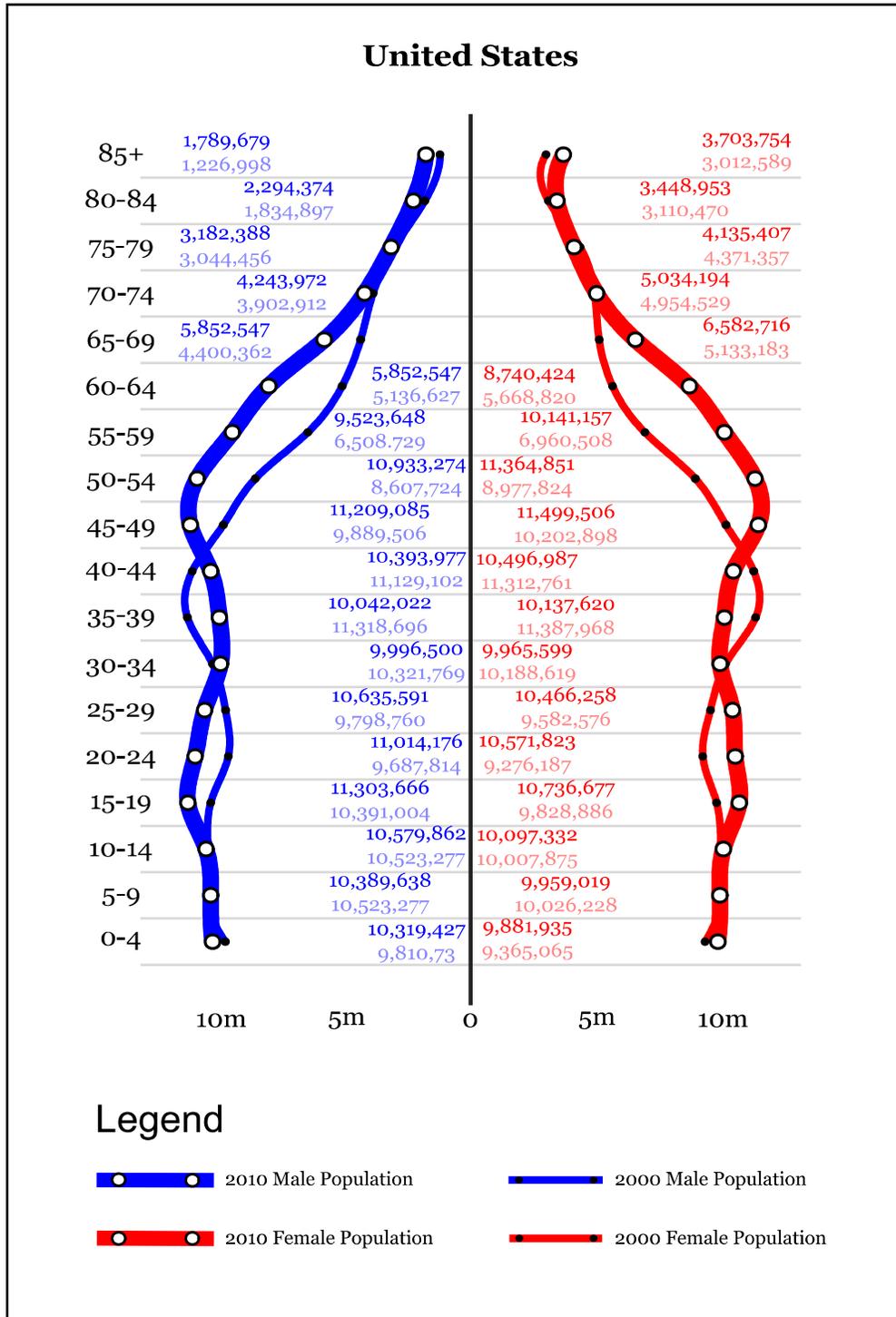
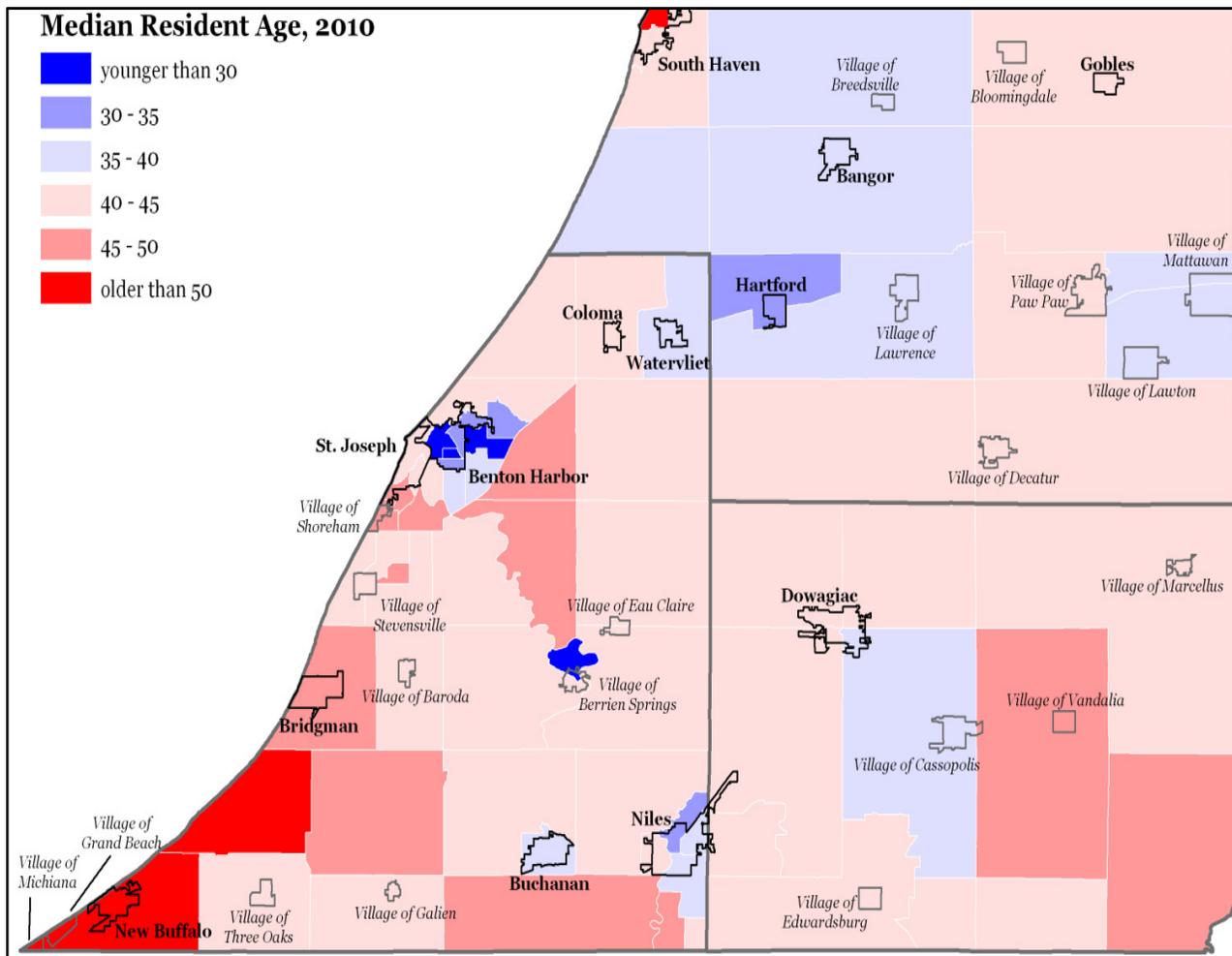


Figure 7 - United States Population Tree



This age distribution is not uniform throughout all the cities, villages, and townships of Berrien and Cass Counties. Map 3 shows the median age in each Census Tract of the SWMPC planning area. Berrien County still has a high level of age diversity among its communities. While municipalities in Cass County tend to have a generally older population, both counties will continue to require a variety of transportation solutions to truly service the entire NATS and southwest Michigan regions.

Map 3 - Median Resident Age, 2010



HOUSEHOLDS AND HOUSING TRENDS

Census data between 1970 and 2010 shows a continuous decline in household size in Berrien County, mirroring national trends towards smaller families and more single-person households. The graphics below shows household size over time in Berrien County and Cass County, along with economically-similar counties, and the United States as a whole.

Households and Housing Trends

Census data between 1970 and 2010 shows a continuous decline in household size in Berrien County, mirroring national trends towards smaller families and more single-person households. The graphics below show household size over time in Berrien County and Cass County, along with economically-similar counties, and the United States as a whole.

Figure 8 - Average Household Size, Berrien and Comparison Counties, 1970-2010

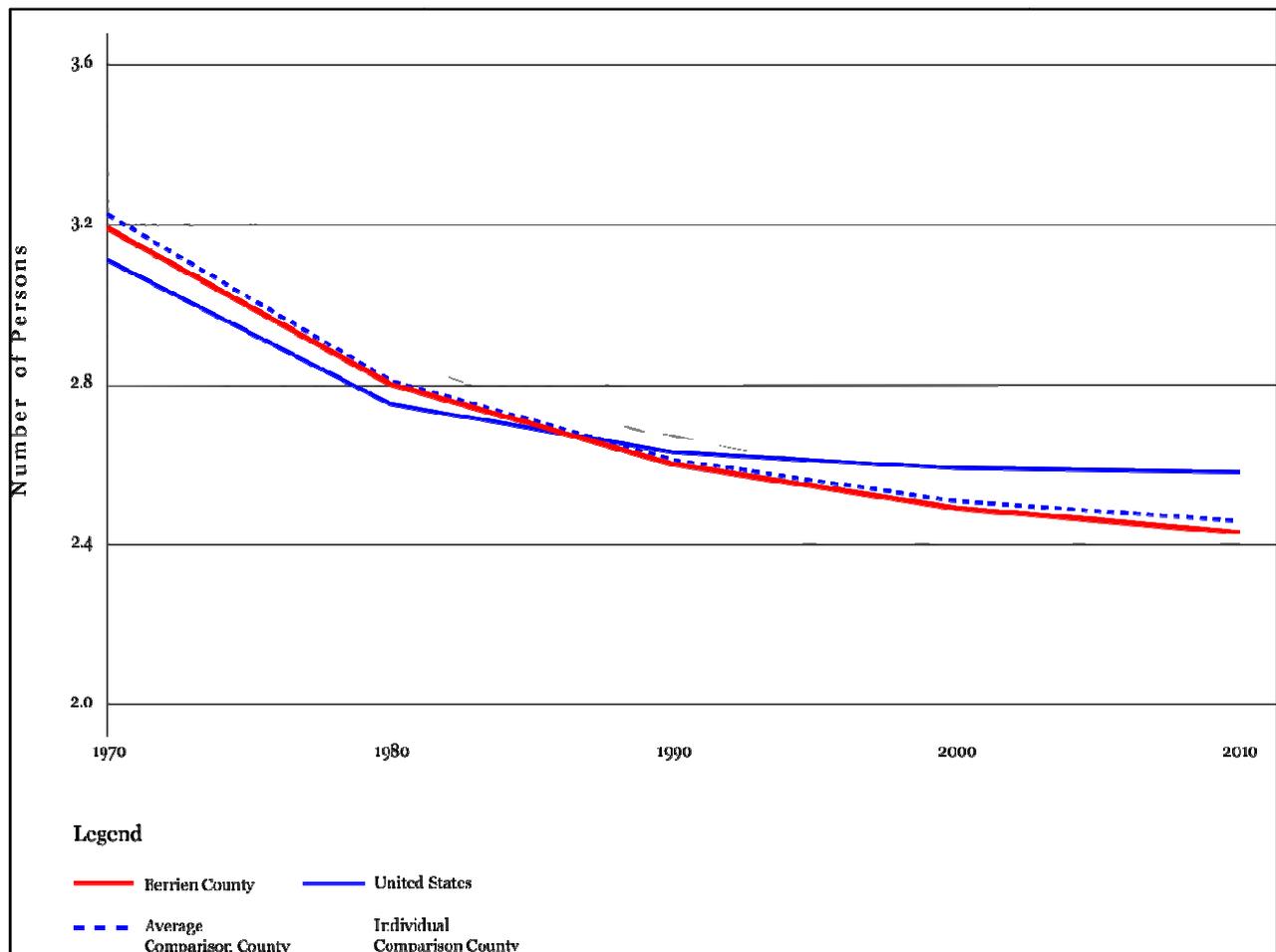
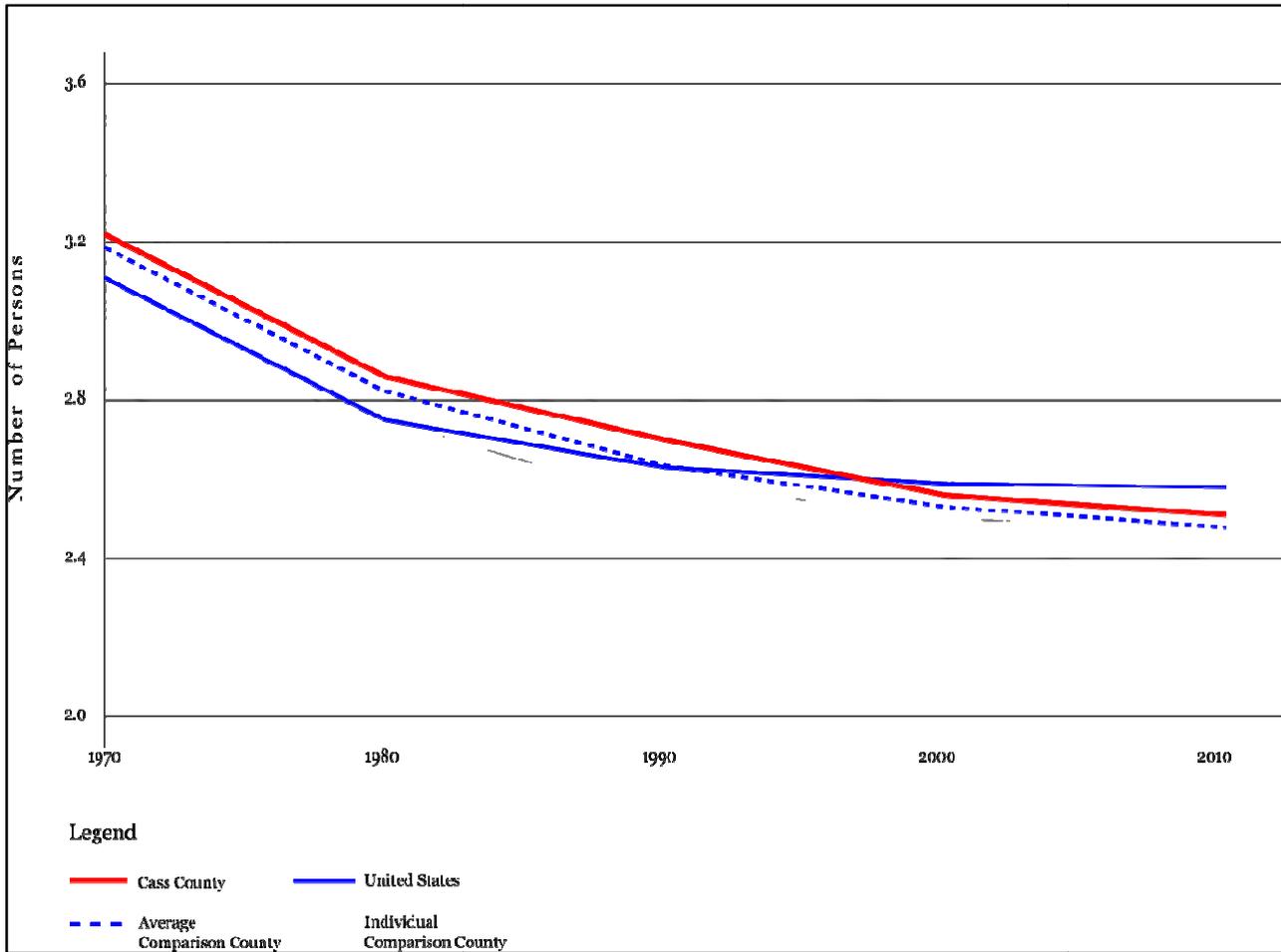
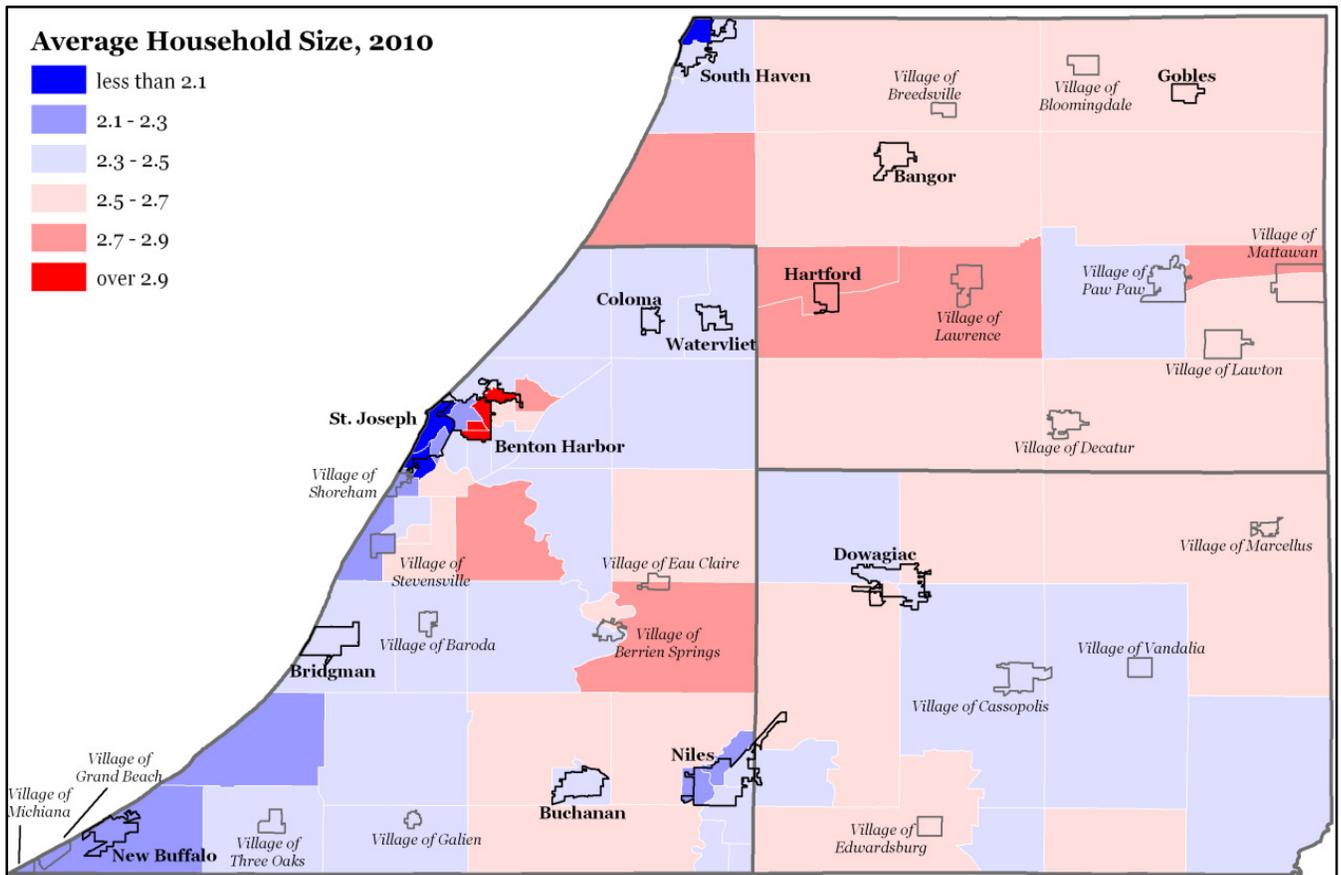


Figure 9 - Average Household Size, Cass and Comparison Counties, 1970-2010



Throughout the NATS area, average household size appeared to be relatively uniform. However, on a broader regional level, household size still varied considerably. Map 4, Average Household Size by Census Tract, shown below, illustrates the variety in household size throughout southwest Michigan, indicating a need to provide a transportation network that supports families and single persons of all ages.

Map 4 - Average Household Size, 2010



Despite shrinking household size, new housing construction between 2000 and 2010 in Berrien and Cass Counties appears to have been predominantly single-family, mirroring the continued national trend. The graphic in Figure 10 below illustrates new housing construction starts between 2000 and 2010, and the share of those starts that were single family for Berrien County and Cass County, as well as economically similar counties, and the United States as a whole.

Figure 10 - Total and Single Family Housing Starts, Berrien County

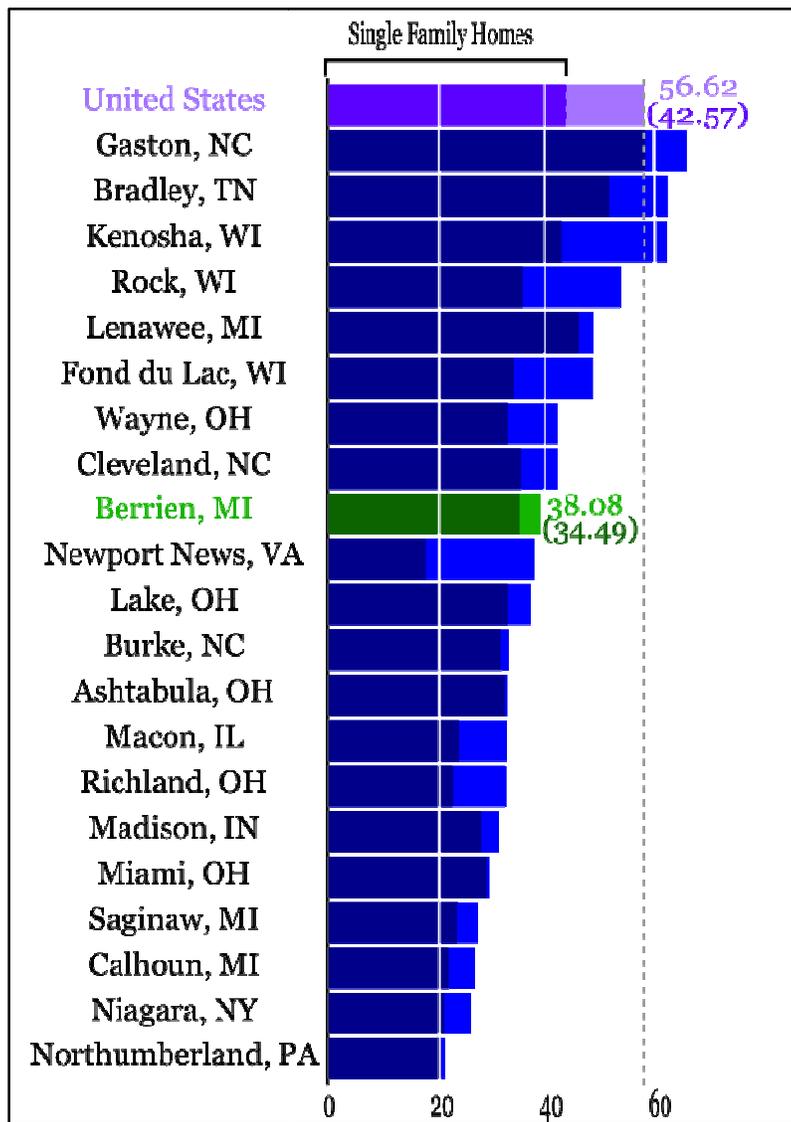
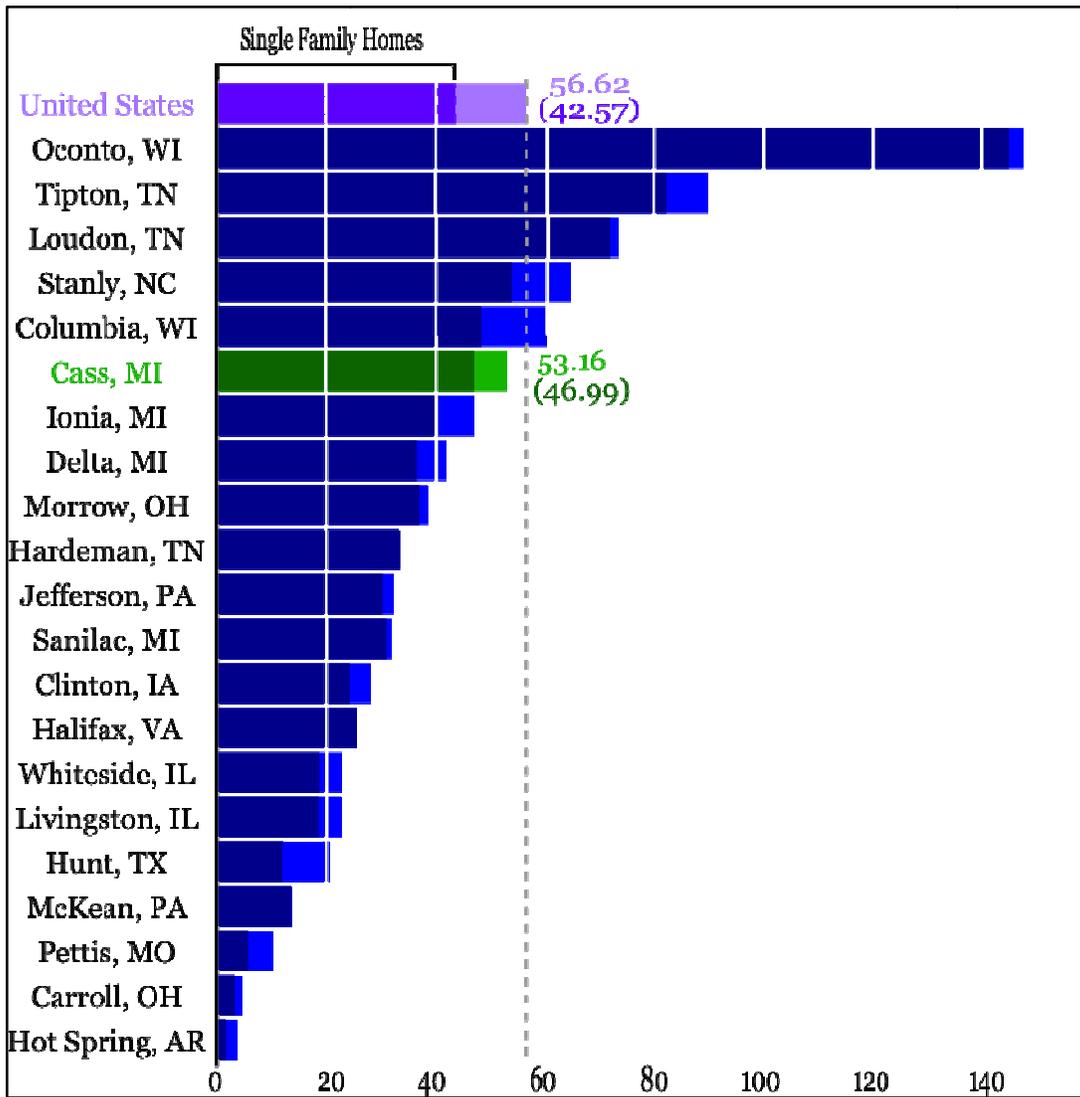


Figure 11 - Total and Single Family Housing Starts, Cass County



EMPLOYMENT

Examining employment by economic sector in Figures 12 and Figures 13, Berrien County had continued to experience a decline in manufacturing jobs between 1998 and 2010. While the total number of workers in Berrien County had declined, the share of total employment that falls in both the healthcare and social assistance and the retail sectors had increased during that time. In Cass County, the number of workers in manufacturing decreased most sharply out of all the sectors. However, unlike Berrien County, Cass County has not seen a significant increase in the share of employment in other sectors, and as such, total non-farm employment has declined far more steeply between 2006 and 2010.

This employment distribution would suggest that areas within the NATS region that have job opportunities in healthcare, social assistance, or retail might be poised to see an employment growth, and therefore, a potential increase in travel to these areas for work related purposes in the future. However, the total number of workers in Cass County continues to decline dramatically, indicating that movement of population towards some portions of the NATS area may be for residential purposes only.

Figure 12 - Berrien County Non-Farm Employment by Industry, 1998-2010

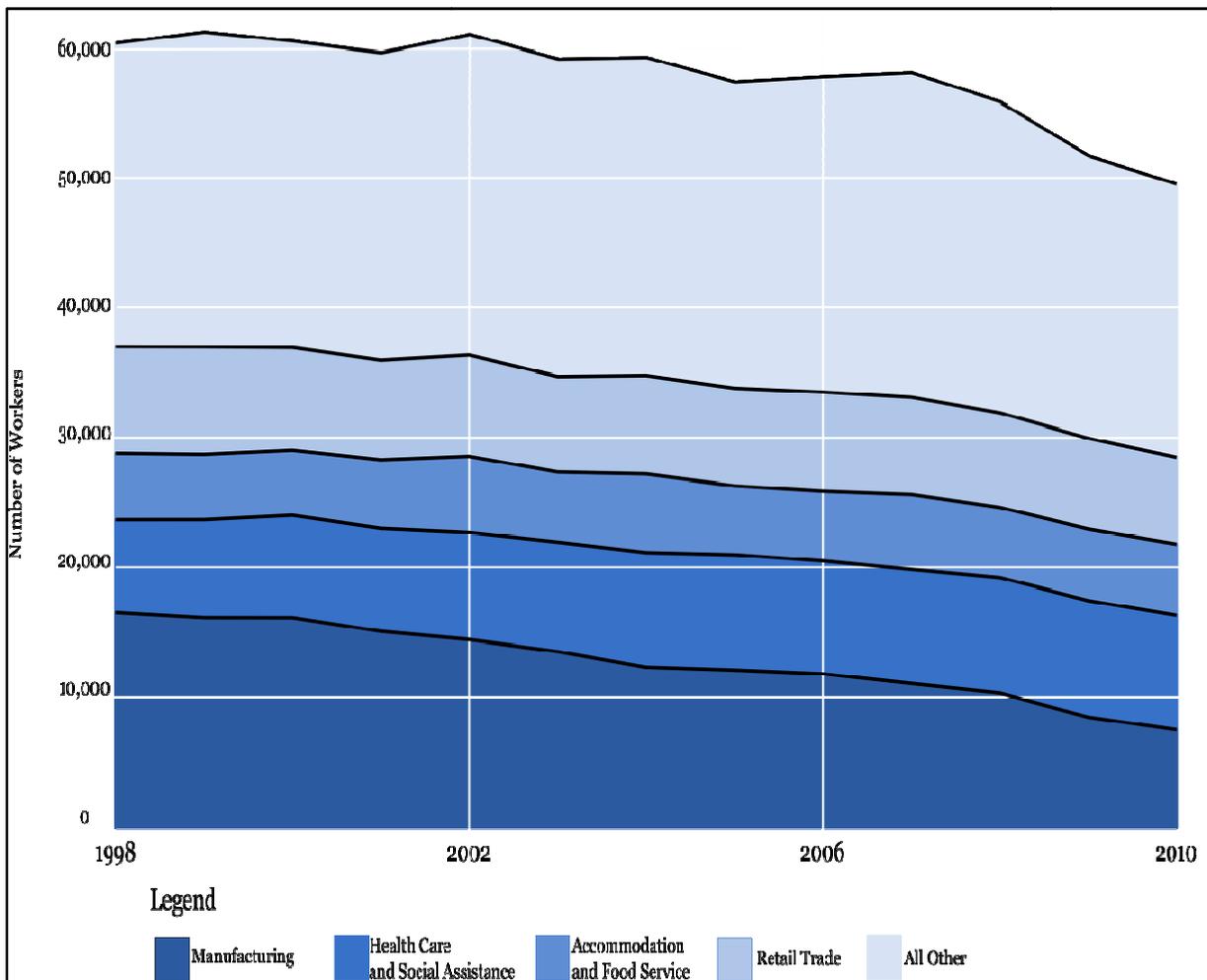
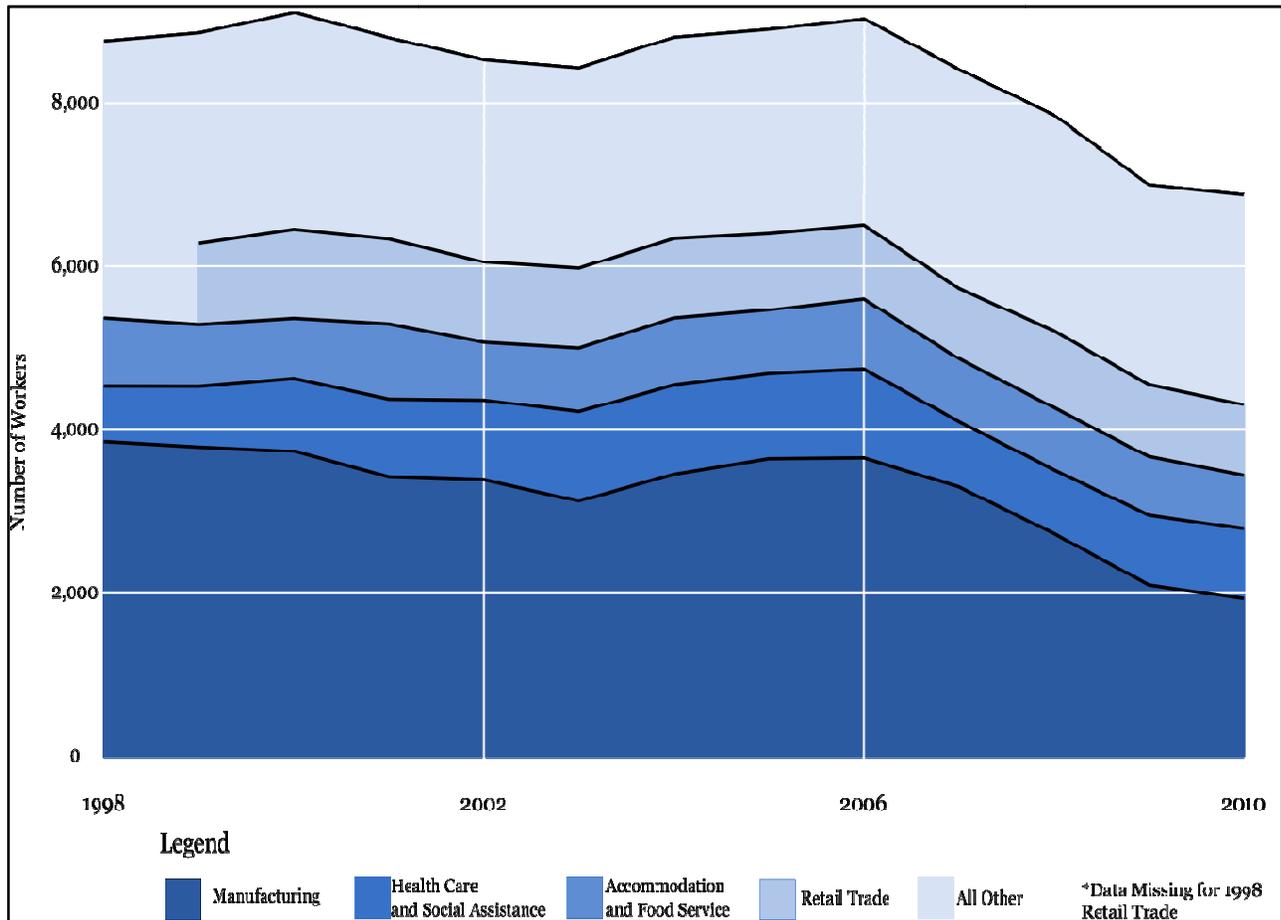


Figure 13 - Cass County Non-Farm Employment by Industry, 1998-2010



BUILDING A TRAVEL DEMAND MODEL AND DEFICIENCY ANALYSIS

This section has presented a brief snapshot of population, housing, and employment trends in Berrien and Cass Counties, based on observed data. In the section that follows, these data, along with information from local officials, are fed into a modeling process in order to forecast the location and volume of future travel demand throughout the NATS region.