

2. Social, Environmental and Cultural Resources

Overview

Kanawha and Putnam Counties comprise an area of 1,255 square miles, with a 2010 population of 248,558. The terrain is generally hilly, giving rise to a settlement pattern which follows the Kanawha, Elk, Coal, and Pocatalico Rivers, as well as Teays Valley. Scattered development is also found along the many creeks and hollows adjacent to these river valleys. Most industrial development, as well as much of the residential development has occurred in the Kanawha Valley. The central city and economic center of the study area is Charleston, which had a 2010 population of 51,400.

Population Trends

Between 1880 and 1920, the population of Charleston ballooned from 4,192 to 39,608. The population of Kanawha County grew just as fast, increasing from 32,466 to 119,650. Growth of urban jobs, population, and traffic continued at a brisk pace throughout the Great Depression and World War II.



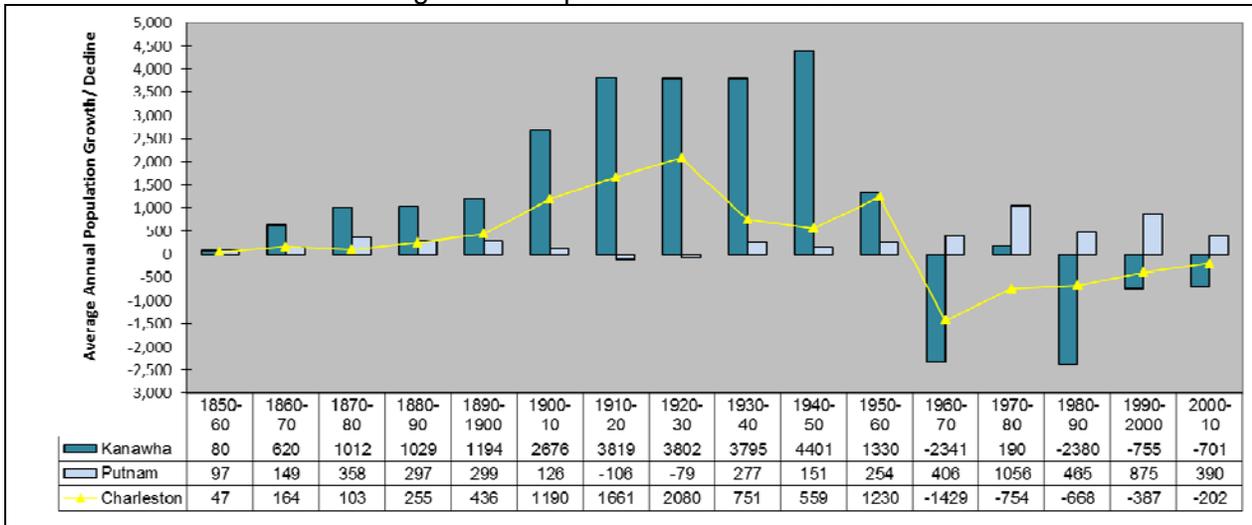
Downtown Charleston, circa 1900.

Source: www.mywvhome.com

Post-World War II regional growth patterns underwent an inverse shift from the previous era of urban-centric living to suburban-oriented development. After more than a hundred years of continuous growth, culminating in a 1960 population of more than 250,000, Kanawha County entered a 50-year era of population decline. Dramatic drops occurred in the 1960s and again in the 1980s, when the County's population shrank by more than 2,300 people per year. After 1990, the rate of decline slowed considerably; the average annual loss between 2000 and 2010 was about 700 people. Almost half of this population drain was from the central city of Charleston, which declined by 11.0% (a reduction of 5,887).

While Kanawha County experienced dramatic ebbs and flows, Putnam County continued to grow. The only county in West Virginia to have grown continuously for the past 50 years, Putnam increased 135.0% from 27,625 people in 1960 to 55,486 in 2010 – an average of 640 additional people every year. In other words, Putnam has added, on average, two new residents every single day for the past half century, while Kanawha lost four people every day between 1960 and 1990, after which the rate dropped to a loss of about two per day.

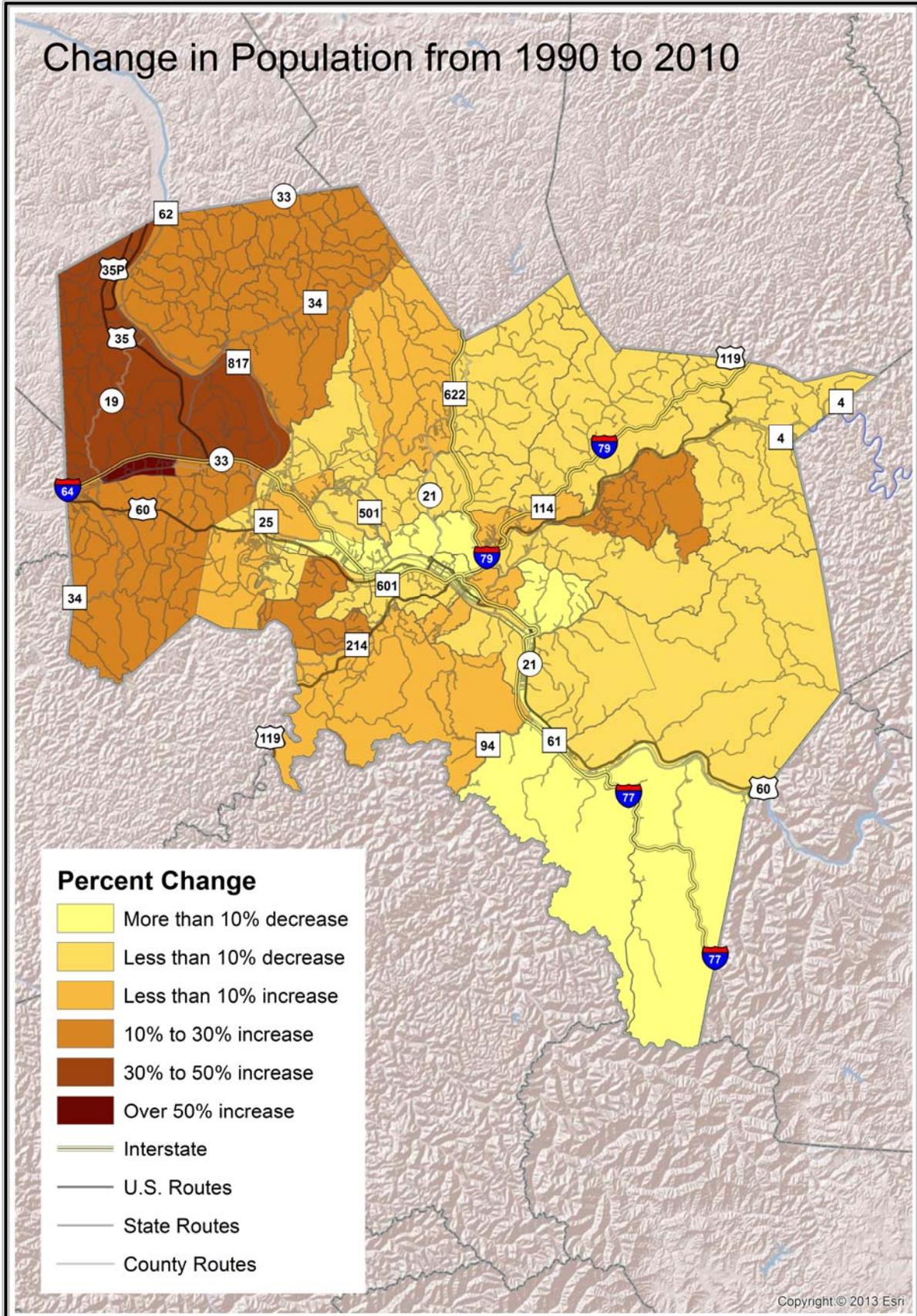
Figure 16: Population Trends: 1850 - 2010



Source: U.S. Census

Despite a declining population, Downtown Charleston still has some of the highest population densities in the region. The region’s long-term pattern of suburban migration is perhaps most strikingly evident in the unincorporated area of Teays Valley. Situated on I-64 halfway along the 50-mile stretch between Charleston and Huntington, Teays Valley is the emerging central “city” of Putnam County. Like Charleston (population 51,400), which houses 27.0% of Kanawha County’s residents, Teays Valley (population 13,175) is home to a quarter of Putnam’s population. Seven square miles in land area, Teays Valley is about one fifth the physical size of the capitol city, and its population is 74.0% smaller, but is more densely populated overall than Charleston (Teays Valley has 1,805 people / square mile while Charleston has 1,558 people/ square mile). Over the past ten years, Teays Valley grew by 4.0% (adding 471 residents), while Charleston declined by the same percentage (losing 2,021 residents).

Figure 17: Population Change



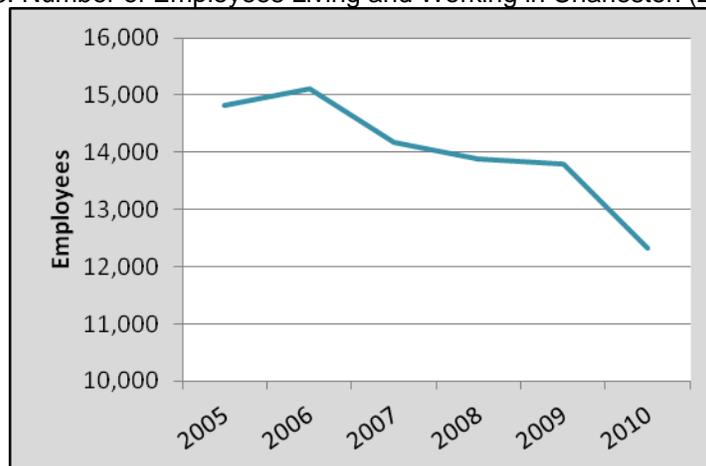
Employment

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Kanawha County accounts for 10.4% of the state's population and approximately 18% of the state's total employment. Meanwhile, Putnam County accounts for approximately 3.0% the state's population and 3.6% of the state's total employment.

In 2010, approximately 56.8% (60,066) of Kanawha County's employees worked in the City of Charleston (U.S. Census, LED). Since 2005, however, the number and share of employees living *and* working in Charleston has declined (Figure 1), from 14,817 in 2005 to 12,321 in 2010.

Just as Charleston is the major employment center in Kanawha County, Teays Valley is the largest job center in Putnam County, accounting for over one-third (6,126) of the county's total employment. Many Teays Valley residents, who live near the Teays Valley Industrial Park and CAMC Teays Valley Hospital in Hurricane, work locally in the health care industry and/or professional and managerial jobs. Approximately 37.0% of Teays Valley employed residents work in the Charleston/ South Charleston/Nitro area; 7.0% commute to Huntington.

Figure 18: Number of Employees Living and Working in Charleston (2005-2010)



The BLS data also indicate that unemployment rates have declined at the regional, state, and national levels. As of May 2013, the unemployment rates for Kanawha County (5.4%) and Putnam County (4.7%) were below those of the state (6.2%) and the nation (7.6%).

Commuting Patterns

U.S. Census data indicate that employees are traveling from greater distances to work in the city of Charleston. Approximately 16.0% (9,764) of all Charleston employees travel over 50 miles to work in the city. In 2005, 20,808 employees commuted from outside of Kanawha County. In 2010, 25,815 employees commuted from outside of Kanawha, a 24.0% increase. Commuting data also indicate that the majority of workers commute from locations west of Charleston, primarily from Putnam and Cabell counties.

From Teays Valley, a major population center in Putnam County, most commuters drive eastbound, rather than westbound. For example, 26.0% (1,648) of workers who live in Teays Valley commute daily to Charleston; only 6.5% (409) commute west to Huntington. Meanwhile, 10.8% (686) commute east to Nitro or South Charleston.

From a transportation perspective, suburban population growth means more traffic on rural roads and more people living in places where it is virtually impossible to travel anywhere without a car. The growing numbers of people living along I-64 and the Kanawha River account for more car trips from these areas to jobs and shopping centers in both the Charleston metro area and, increasingly, to the communities around Teays Valley. In addition, more cars and school buses make twice-daily rounds to fast-growing rural and suburban schools.

On average, workers in Teays Valley and throughout Putnam County spend nearly an hour a day driving to and from work (25 minutes median one-way travel time). Suburban commuters spend almost twice as much time on the road as Charleston and South Charleston residents (about 16 minutes median travel time), some of whom use public transit, bike, or walk to work.