

## Regional Growth Trends and Forecasts

During the Great Recession, the Atlanta Region experienced a challenge to the fundamental conditions that had propelled the Region to prosperity and growth over the previous decades. Traditionally, the Atlanta Region has grown and expanded largely on the basis of the long-term trends of:

- National migration trends to the Southeast
- Federal funding programs that supported roadway construction and growth in a decentralized manner
- Access to one of the world's busiest airports
- Inexpensive land values relative to many national peers
- Low cost of living, business costs and wages
- Proximity to major ports, substantial opportunity for higher education, homegrown and new Fortune 500 business headquarters, as well as national facilities such as the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

These enduring conditions resulted in Atlanta being one of the fastest growing regions in the nation, accommodating large amounts of population and employment growth. This growth brought many benefits to the Region, including an evolution from a regional center to a major international player economically.

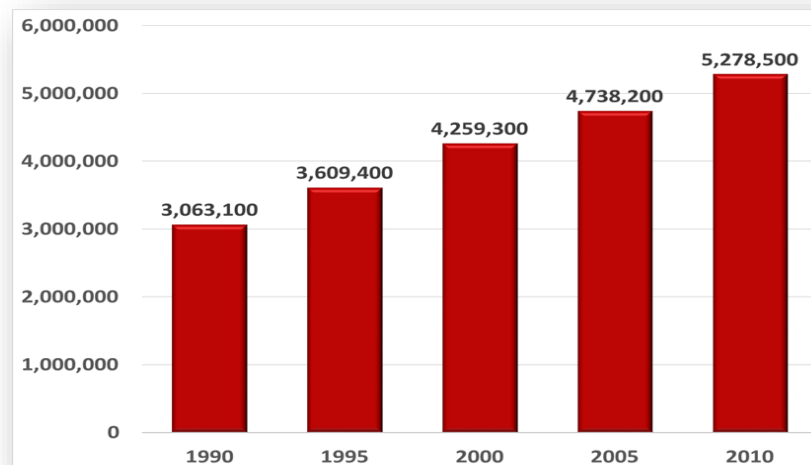
The Region has largely recovered from the lingering effects of the Great Recession over the past few years, with employment levels higher today than before the Great Recession. The real estate market has rebounded, and interest rates remain historically low. While it is still unclear whether a sustained and robust economic recovery will continue, trends in the recovery are encouraging. The overall transportation and land development patterns built to accommodate growth in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are strained and will be challenged to sustain growth going forward.

### Trends

As the Southeast's premiere metropolis, the Atlanta Region's growth was a primary driver of the Sunbelt's population explosion in the post-World War II era. Between 1950 and 1970, the Region maintained a robust rate of growth that averaged over 3% annually - more than twice the rate of the Depression years of the 1930s and almost a percentage point higher than during the war years of the 1940s. Apart from brief periods of slower growth during economic downturns in the 1970s and 1980s, the Region maintained the 3% average annual growth rate up until the early 1990s, when the economic recession that hit the nation slowed the Region's growth rate to less than 2% annually.

As the Atlanta Region ramped up efforts in preparation for hosting the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, the Region quickly shook off the effects of the recession, recording its largest single-year population increase

### Atlanta Region Historical Population Trends



ever in 1994-1995: 123,477 persons. After the Olympics, the Region experienced a very robust level of growth, adding an average of 100,000 new residents annually during the latter half of the 1990s.

In 2001, the national and regional economies drifted into recession with the Region's annual population growth slowing to only 46,800 in 2003-2004. In the mid-2000s, the Region resumed the robust rates of growth that it experienced in the 1990s, registering an increase of 97,600 persons between 2004 and 2005, followed by an increase of 111,700 in 2005-2006. However, this most recent boom was short lived due to the onset of the recession in late 2007.

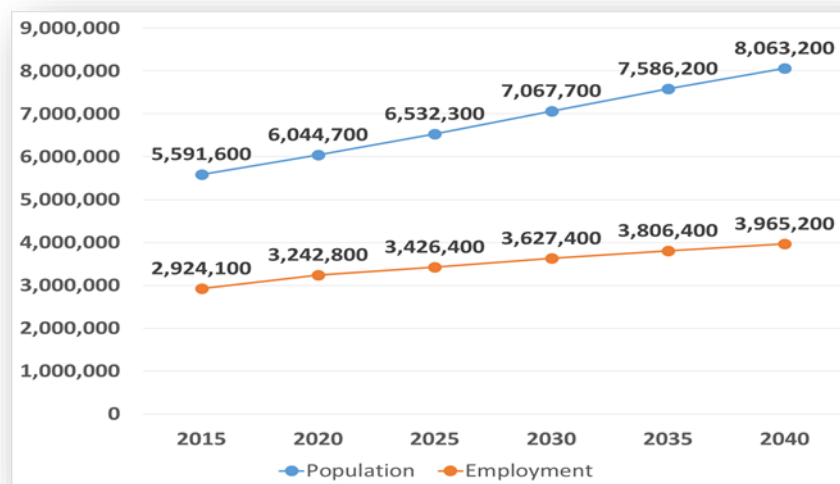
Despite the fact that the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was bookended by two recessions, the Atlanta Region saw the addition of approximately 1 million new residents over the ten-year period – resulting in a total population of 5.26 million residents in the 20 county Region in 2010. This is a healthy annual growth rate of 2.1% from 2000-2010 but represents a slowing from the 3.4% average annual population increase from 1990-2000. Further, from 2010-2015, our population has increased at the even slower average annual rate of 1.2%.

Since 2010, regional policy debate has centered around the adverse impacts of congestion, limited water resources and economic challenges from the Great Recession on growth. While the Region does continue to grow, it does so on a slower average annual rate than in earlier higher growth periods.

### Forecasts

Long-range transportation planning is informed by estimates of future population and employment conditions that drive trip-making patterns and travel needs. Regional population and employment forecasts were prepared for this update of *The Atlanta Region's Plan* for the 20 county transportation and air quality planning domain.

### Atlanta Region Population and Employment Forecasts



Over a 25-year period from 2015 through 2040, the 20 county Atlanta Region is forecast to add 2.5 million residents, resulting in a total population of more than 8 million. Although such a population increase could be labeled as robust, this is actually a departure from historical trends as the average annual growth rate during this period is forecasted to be a modest 1.5%. The Region maintained annual growth rates of 3% between the 1950s and the 2000s. This forecasted growth rate represents an average annual growth of nearly 99,000 people. Thus, despite the fact that growth rates have slowed compared not only to past trends but also to previous forecast series, this forecast growth is significant enough to place a heavy burden on regional infrastructure, which is already strained by the robust growth experienced over the past 60 years.

Employment for the 20 county Atlanta Region is projected to increase by 1.04 million jobs between 2015 and 2040, for a total job base of almost 4 million. The average annual employment growth rate during this period is forecast at 1.2%.

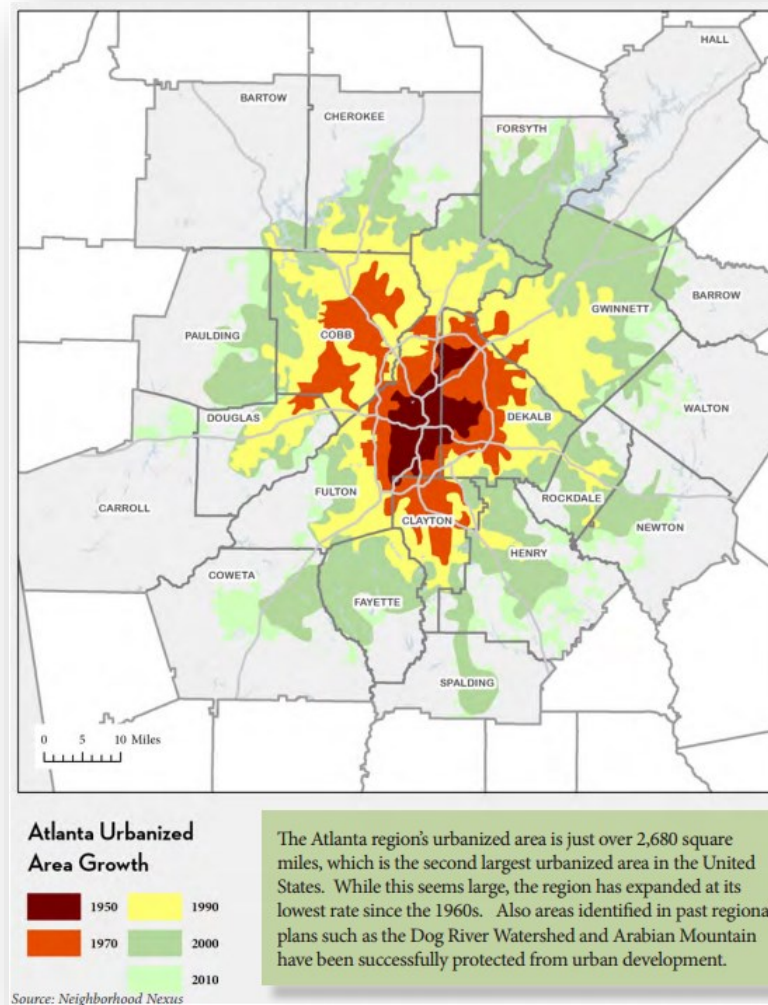
At the county level, growth in the core counties of Gwinnett and Fulton will be the primary driver of the Region's overall population growth over the next 30 years. Both counties are forecast to add 490,600 and 294,100 new residents, respectively. Combined, this is approximately 32% of the Region's total population growth in the years 2015-2040.

Two of the fastest growing counties in the nation over the last two decades – Cherokee and Henry – will continue to grow rapidly over the forecast period. Cherokee County will grow by 68% from 2015 to 2040, leading the 10 county Regional Commission (RC) area in percentage increase. It is forecast to add 159,200 people, while Henry will add 133,300, a 61% increase. The City of Atlanta's recent population surge will also continue.

While the 10 county RC area will capture more than 64% of the 20 county area's growth, larger percentage gains are found in the 10 counties falling outside the RC region. All but one of the counties outside of the ARC RC area are expected to increase by at least 50% in population between 2015-2040. Forsyth County is forecast to have the largest percentage population growth, increasing their population by 108%.

During each plan update cycle, ARC conducts extensive outreach and coordination with local governments to determine these county level estimates, as well as understand more precisely where people within each county are likely to live, work and shop in the future, based on major development announcements, building permits, zoning and other data. This information is then used in regional travel modeling efforts to simulate travel patterns within and between approximately 6,000 traffic analysis zones, essential to identifying and testing potential solutions. Technical aspects of the travel demand modeling process are described in the regional travel demand modeling section of ARC's website.

## Growth of the Atlanta Urbanized Area (1950-2010)



Forecasts



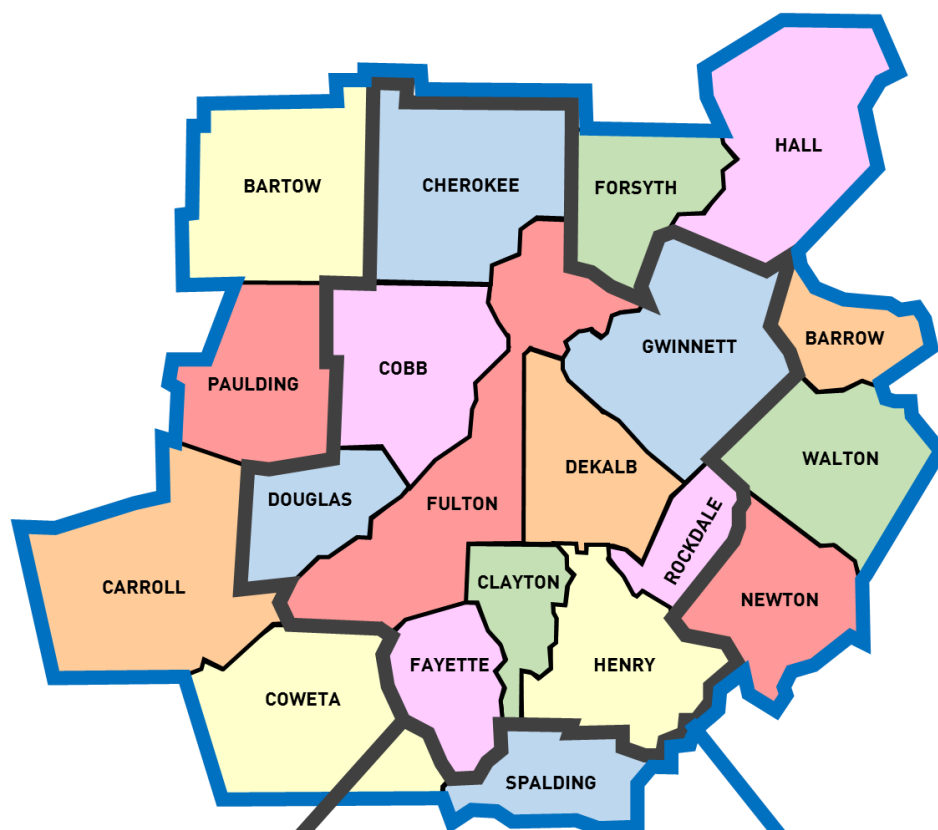
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Modeling Process



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## Forecast 2015-2040 Population Growth by County\*



## 10 COUNTY REGION TOTALS

2015 Population	4,332,200
2040 Population	5,918,700
Total Change	1,586,500
Percent Change	36.6%

## 20 COUNTY REGION TOTALS\*

2015 Population	5,591,600
2040 Population	8,063,200
Total Change	2,471,600
Percent Change	44.2%

\* ARC develops forecasts for counties within one more air quality nonattainment areas for modeling purposes. Forecasts are not prepared for the portions of Dawson County and Pike County which are within the MPO area.

COUNTY	2015	2040	CHANGE	% CHANGE
Cherokee	233,200	392,400	159,200	68.3%
Clayton	266,900	327,600	60,700	22.7%
Cobb	727,500	885,100	157,600	21.7%
DeKalb	718,400	874,400	156,000	21.7%
Douglas	137,300	201,300	64,000	46.6%
Fayette	111,000	143,300	32,300	29.1%
Fulton	970,300	1,264,400	294,100	30.3%
Gwinnett	859,800	1,350,400	490,600	57.1%
Henry	218,400	351,700	133,300	61.0%
Rockdale	89,400	128,100	38,700	43.3%

COUNTY	2015	2040	CHANGE	% CHANGE
Barrow	75,100	135,700	60,600	80.7%
Bartow	110,400	179,100	68,700	62.2%
Carroll	116,200	166,900	50,700	43.6%
Coweta	141,200	239,800	98,600	69.8%
Forsyth	206,700	430,300	223,600	108.2%
Hall	200,600	328,100	127,500	63.6%
Newton	106,500	166,200	59,700	56.1%
Paulding	149,400	259,600	110,200	73.8%
Spalding	66,300	100,100	33,800	51.0%
Walton	87,000	138,700	51,700	59.4%