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NWA REGIONAL STRATEGY

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A Regional Growth Strategy to Guide Northwest Arkansas as it Prepares for 1 Million Residents.

Growth Strategies | April 2026

Acknowledgments

This strategy reflects the collective effort of cities, counties, institutions, businesses, and partners across Northwest Arkansas. It was developed to support informed decision-making as the region grows, grounded in local knowledge, technical analysis, and long-term stewardship of shared resources.

This document was prepared with support from the **Walton Family Foundation** as part of an ongoing commitment to the long-term vitality, affordability, and resilience of Northwest Arkansas.

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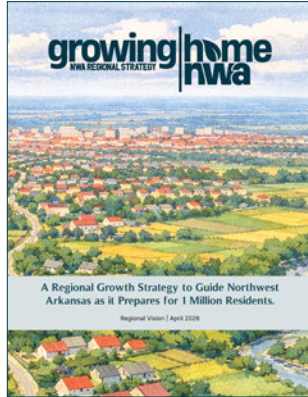
Concurrent & Ongoing Efforts

Northwest Arkansas has not been idle. Cities and regional agencies are addressing many of the concerns, strategies, and goals reflected in this and related documents. While this report was produced in 2025-26, the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission advanced Forward 2050, the region's long-range transportation plan, alongside studies for bus rapid transit, greenway improvements, and numerous additional efforts. Fayetteville established a stormwater utility. The Northwest Arkansas Council partnered with the state on a regional wastewater study, and communities in western Benton County have explored forming a combined wastewater utility.

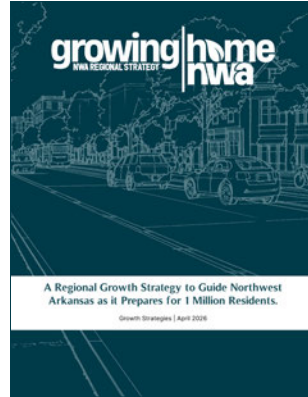
Many cities have taken additional steps aligned with the solutions outlined here, such as zoning code changes and downtown master plans. Together, these efforts—both recent and ongoing—demonstrate the region's commitment and its capacity to act. This document builds on that foundation by examining challenges holistically, across jurisdictions and systems, and by elevating the need for stronger coordination, shared goals, clear accountability, and a common regional vision.

Accompanying Documents

This document, **Growth Strategies**, is one in a pair of reports that comprise the Regional Growth Strategy for Northwest Arkansas. These and supporting analytical documents are available from the Northwest Arkansas Council.

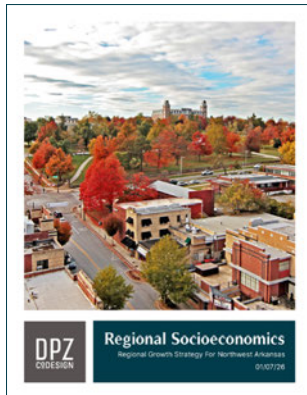


Regional Vision
Companion Report

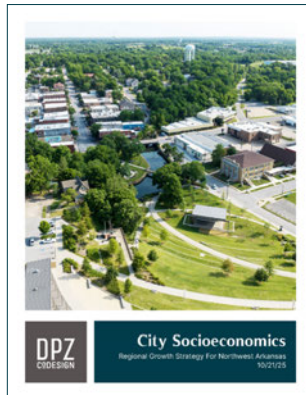


Growth Strategies
This Report

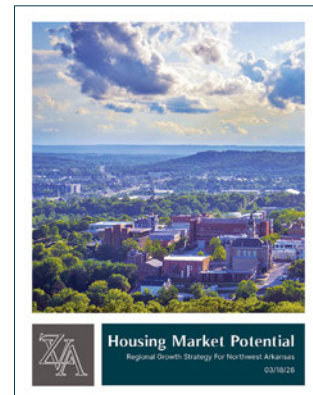
Supporting Documents: Analysis of Current Conditions in Northwest Arkansas, 2025



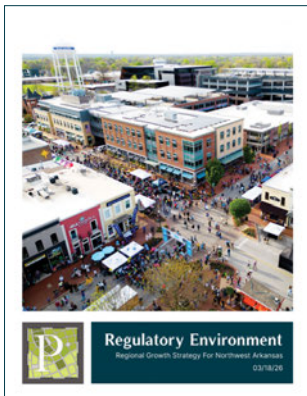
Regional Socioeconomics
Prepared by: DPZ CoDesign



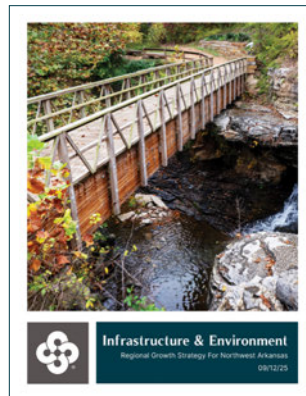
City Socioeconomics
Prepared by: DPZ CoDesign



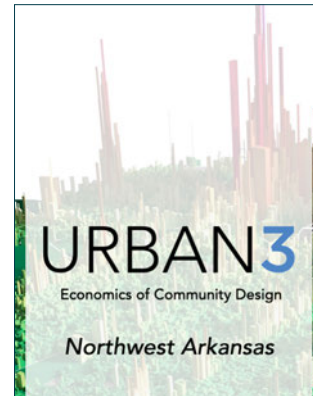
Housing Market Potential
Prepared by: Zimmerman/Volk Assoc.



Regulatory Environment
Prepared by: PlaceMakers









Infrastructure & Environment
Prepared by: Crafton Tull



Economics of Community Design
Prepared by: Urban3

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Imagined future complete neighborhood in Gravette, providing housing choice and location efficiency.

Housing & Development

Support complete communities where housing choice, vibrant centers, and modern development rules work together to bring daily life within reach, strengthen local identity, and make growth financially sustainable.

The goals below support increased housing choice, balanced housing supply and demand, and focused resources that accelerate growth where it is efficient for both households and cities.



Deliver diverse housing types in every city, matching production with need.

Reduce unnecessary friction in financing, approvals, and regulations so mixed-use projects and a wider range of housing are available for households throughout the region.



Build where infrastructure and services exist.

Prioritize development in areas already served by roads, utilities, and public facilities to reduce costs, leverage existing investments, and accelerate the delivery of housing and services.



Accelerate housing supply in high demand areas, stabilizing cost.

Reduce housing cost volatility by increasing supply in high-demand areas and narrowing the gap between housing cost growth and income growth.



Grow with complete neighborhoods.

When expansion is needed, direct new growth toward the creation of integrated neighborhoods rather than isolated subdivisions by prioritizing street connectivity, accessible services, and diverse housing types.



Reduce the combined cost of housing and transportation.

Intentionally support housing that's close to job centers and other destinations to reduce commute times and lower the true cost of living in Northwest Arkansas.

Without changes to where and how development occurs, growth will become less responsive to the needs of households and employers, and increase the cost burden on families, cities, and the region as a whole.

Housing & Development Concerns

Rising housing, transportation, and service costs stem from a development, financing, and regulatory system that is misaligned with goals and needs.

Development across Northwest Arkansas reveals gaps between what the market delivers and what households want. Housing is concentrated in a narrow range of formats, locations, and price points, even as demand diversifies.

Evidenced by a 2025 housing target market analysis, market gaps in Northwest Arkansas match those seen in much of the country. This mismatch increases pressure on transportation networks, raises household costs, and limits access to jobs and services.

These issues are not the result of individual developments. They stem from how financing, land availability, infrastructure timing, and regulations interact. Current systems reward faster returns, narrow product ranges, and larger developments rather than community building. As a result, housing that meets diverse and changing needs is often slower, riskier, or more expensive to deliver.

The pages that follow examine this issue and how it shapes long-term costs, housing access, and economic resilience across the region.

The Result of Misalignment and Unplanned Growth

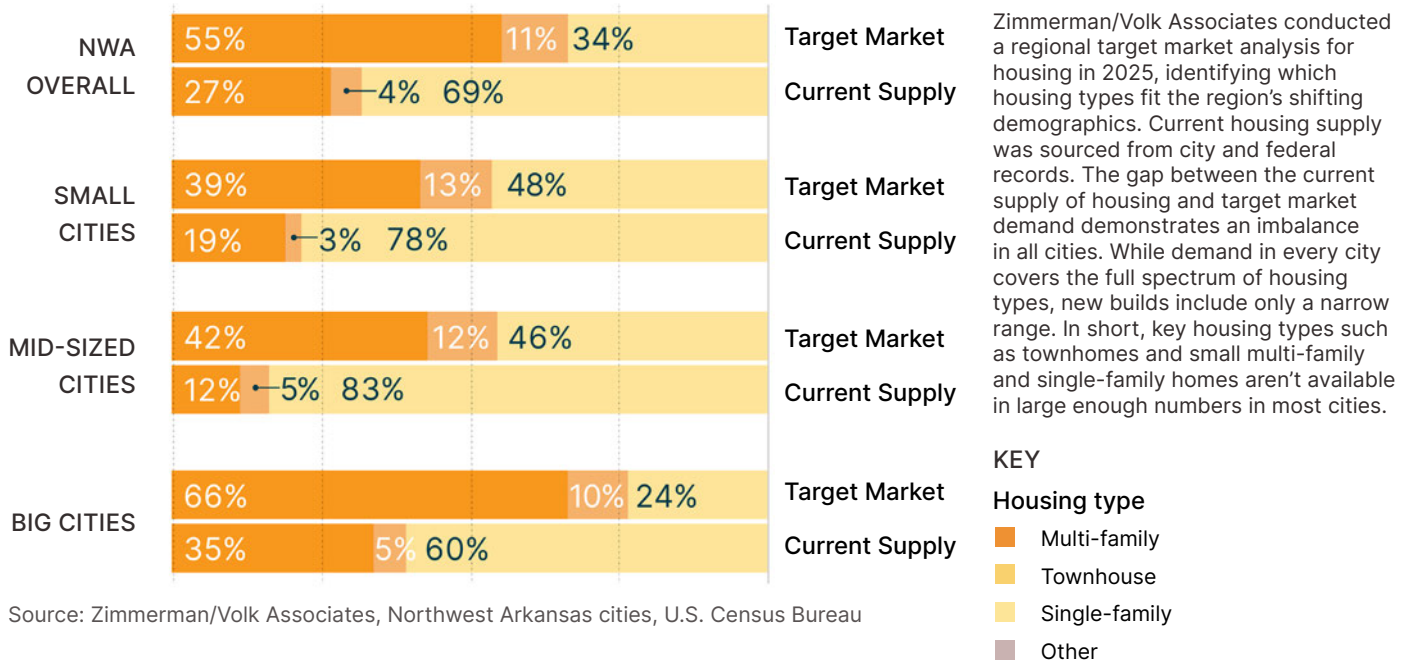


Regulations, financing, and development norms tend to produce isolated subdivisions, each appealing to a narrow segment of market demand. The image above shows this condition, where most of what is needed to build a connected and vibrant

community exists, but the development pattern separates and isolates neighborhoods and their residents. This leads to increased traffic, inefficient use and duplicated of infrastructure, limited housing variety, and ultimately increasing household costs.

Source: Google Earth

Housing Supply and Demand Comparison



Source: Zimmerman/Volk Associates, Northwest Arkansas cities, U.S. Census Bureau

Supply and Demand Are Misaligned

When housing options are limited, households adjust by settling for homes that do not match their needs. Young professionals may occupy larger homes when apartments are unavailable. Growing families may move farther from jobs and services to find suitable housing. Older adults may want to downsize but remain in their neighborhood, staying in homes that are larger than they need or can maintain.

In a balanced system, households have choices within a diverse local market and can move into homes that better fit their needs over time. This movement frees up housing for others. When key housing types are missing, that process slows or breaks down, pushing households into less suitable formats, locations, and price points. Competition intensifies for limited supply, displacing residents and driving up costs across multiple housing types.

Most new housing in Northwest Arkansas is concentrated in a narrow range—primarily large single-family homes and large multi-family complexes. As households become more diverse in age, composition, and background, housing needs have broadened. A 2025 target market analysis, which identifies the best fit between an area’s socioeconomic groupings and household relocation patterns, shows small and mid-sized cities have a 50% market for single-family homes but 80% supply, while larger cities have 60% supply but only 24% demand.

This mismatch limits choice and increases competition across the market. Expanding the range of housing options in every city, especially near jobs and services, helps restore this balance.

The supply housing types has not kept pace with changing demographics, leaving the workforce, young professionals, and seniors with few options.

Ownership Patterns Shape Opportunity

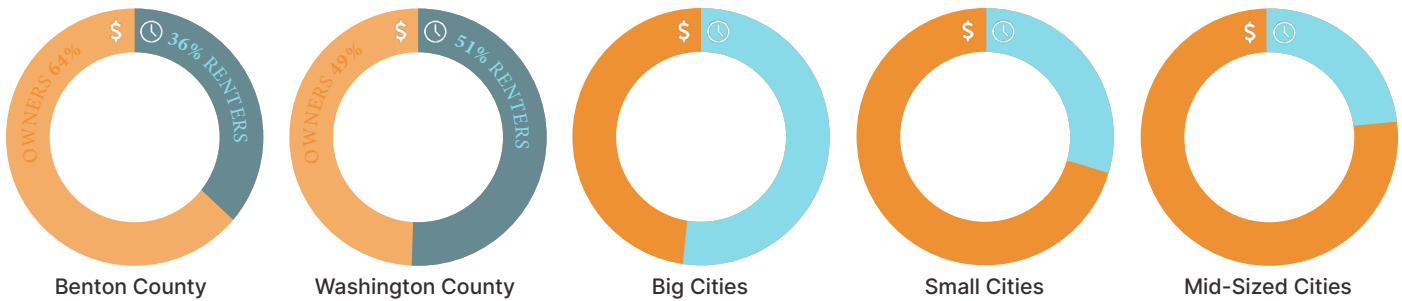
Northwest Arkansas remains a region where homeownership is common, especially in smaller and mid-sized cities. In many areas, owning a home is the primary path to housing, with limited rental options. Larger cities offer a more balanced mix, reflecting broader housing choices.

Limited rentals can make it hard for young workers, new residents, and smaller households to enter the market. Areas with more rentals offer flexibility but may lack access to long-term stability if ownership is out of reach.

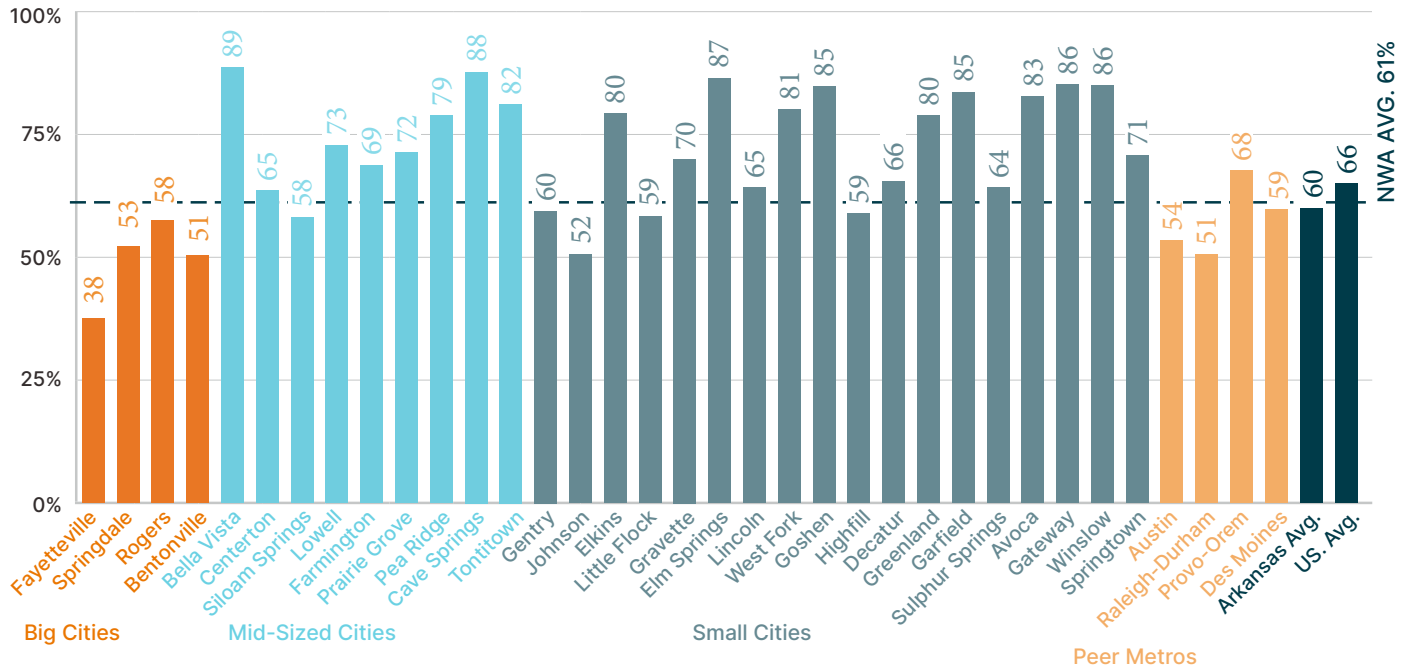
These patterns reflect how housing is built. Where development is dominated by single-family homes for sale, ownership remains high but choice is limited. A broader mix of housing type and tenure creates balance, allowing households to move between renting and owning as needs change.

A healthy housing system supports those who own and those who rent. Expanding options helps households enter the market, build stability, and remain in their communities over time.

Homeownership Rate Across Northwest Arkansas



Homeownership Rate by City



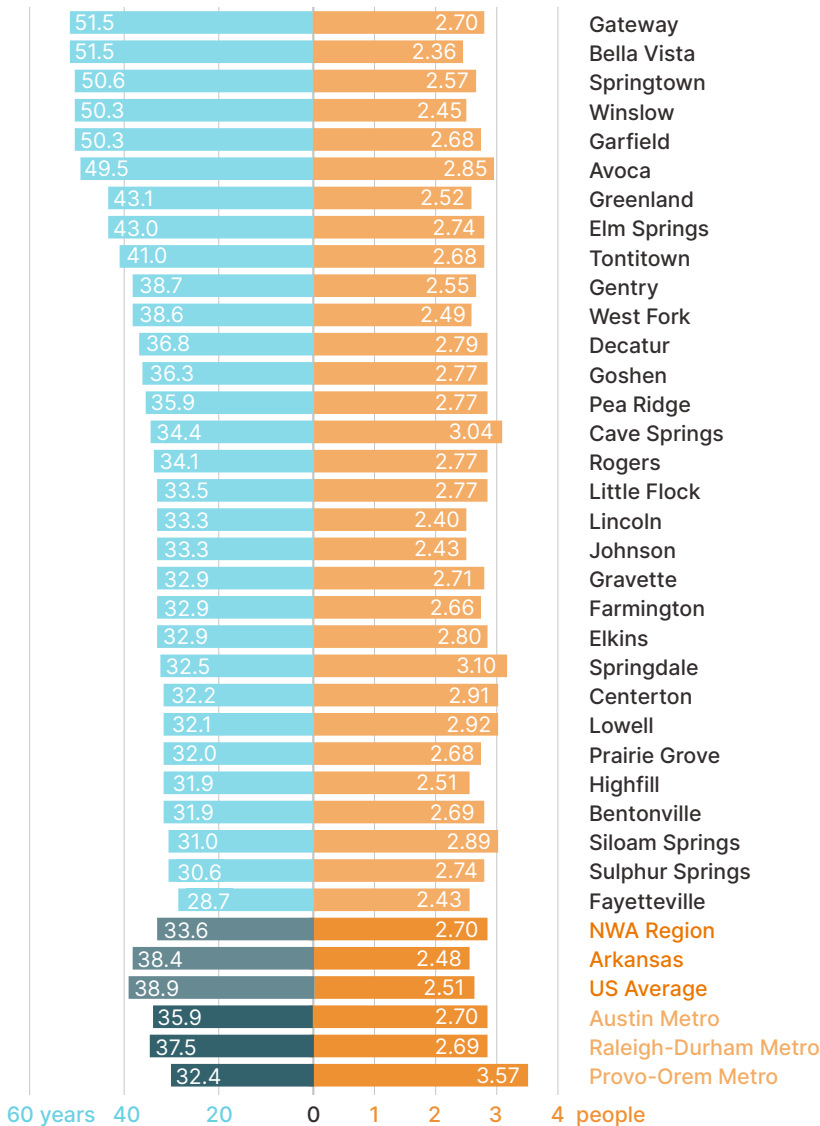
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Housing Needs Differ Across Life Stages

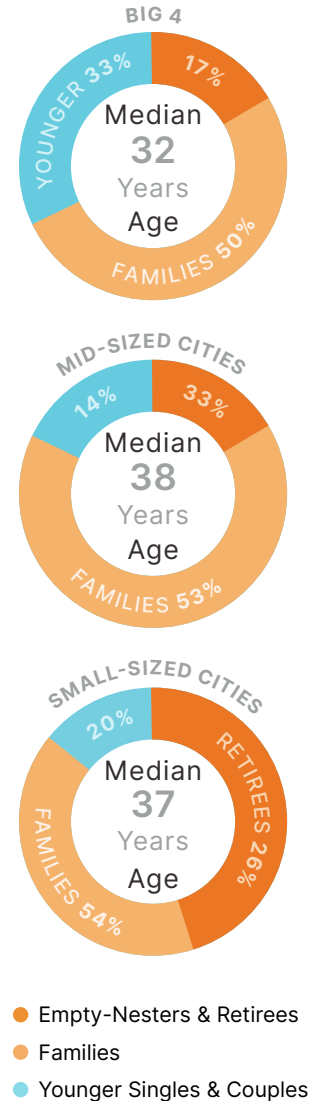
Northwest Arkansas is a young region compared with the state and nation, similar to peer regions. Younger demographics are most significant in larger cities, while many smaller and mid-sized communities have older populations. Family households remain a key demographic, but no longer dominate everywhere. Single-person households, couples without children, and older adults make up a growing share of residents, with needs that vary by life stage and location.

These differences drive housing demand: younger households are more likely to need rentals and entry-level ownership options, families need a range of choices, and older adults need options to downsize within their community. When communities offer mostly one type of housing, they cannot respond to changing demographics. A broader mix allows rental and ownership options to better match demand, helping communities adapt and remain stable as they grow.

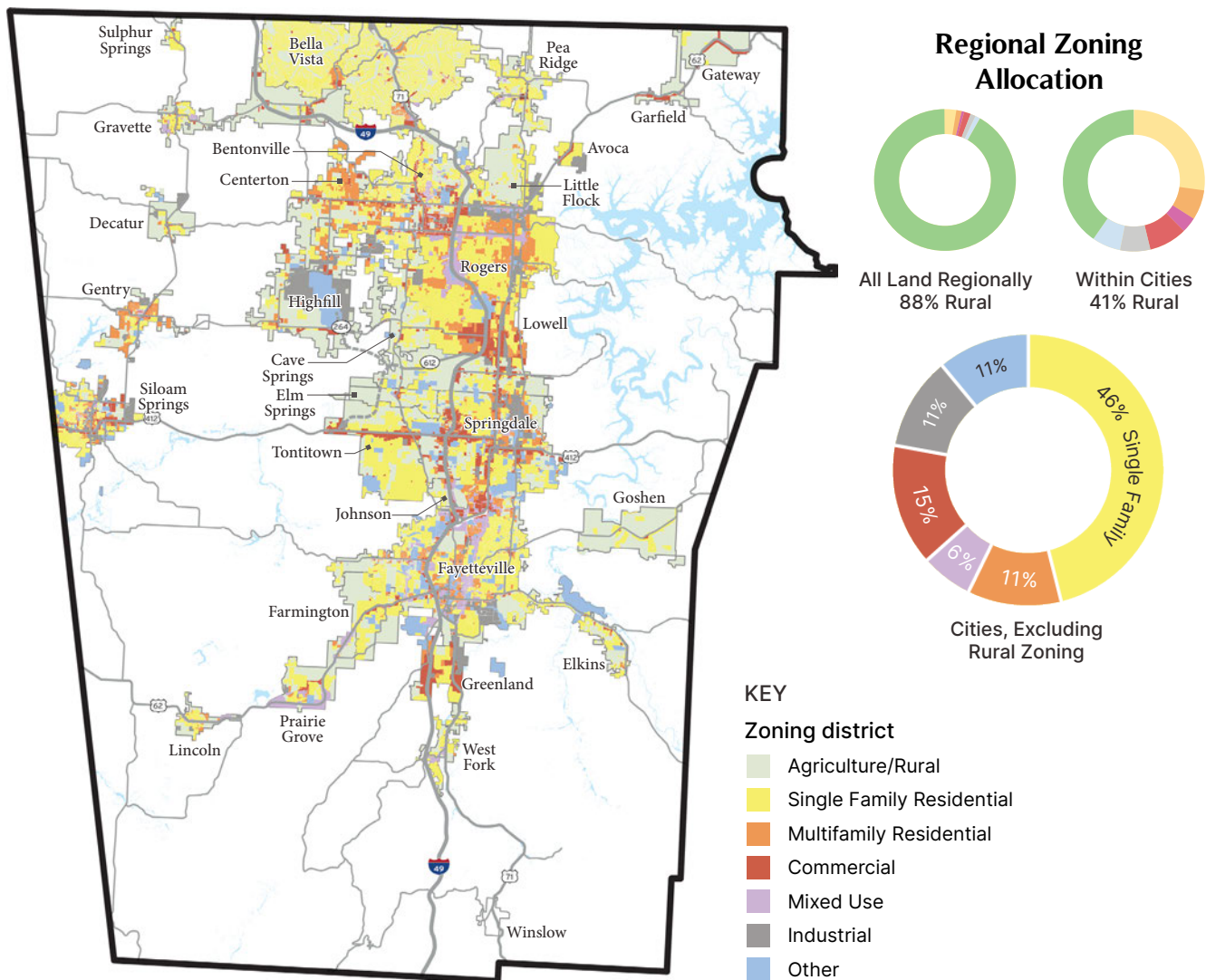
Median Age & Average Household Size



Household Composition



Source: U.S. Census Bureau



Source: NWARPC, Benton and Washington counties, Northwest Arkansas cities, State of AR GIS Office

Regulations Don't Align With Goals

Many local regulations were written when suburban, single use development was the norm, and zoning still reflects that pattern. Across Northwest Arkansas, a large share of residential land remains reserved for single family housing, while only a small portion allows a broader mix of residential types. Some cities, including Bentonville, Rogers, and Fayetteville, have begun updating their codes to permit more housing diversity. Even so, most neighborhoods across the region are still legally limited to one housing format, single-family, regardless of changing demand or community goals.

This zoning structure acts as a barrier to meeting today's housing needs. Households increasingly seek smaller homes, attached options, and locations near jobs, schools, and services. Yet relatively little land across the region is zoned to allow those formats. Builders cannot deliver what is not permitted, even when demand is clear. The result is higher prices, fewer choices, and longer commutes for households priced out of preferred areas.

Financing Favors Familiar Projects Over Needed Housing

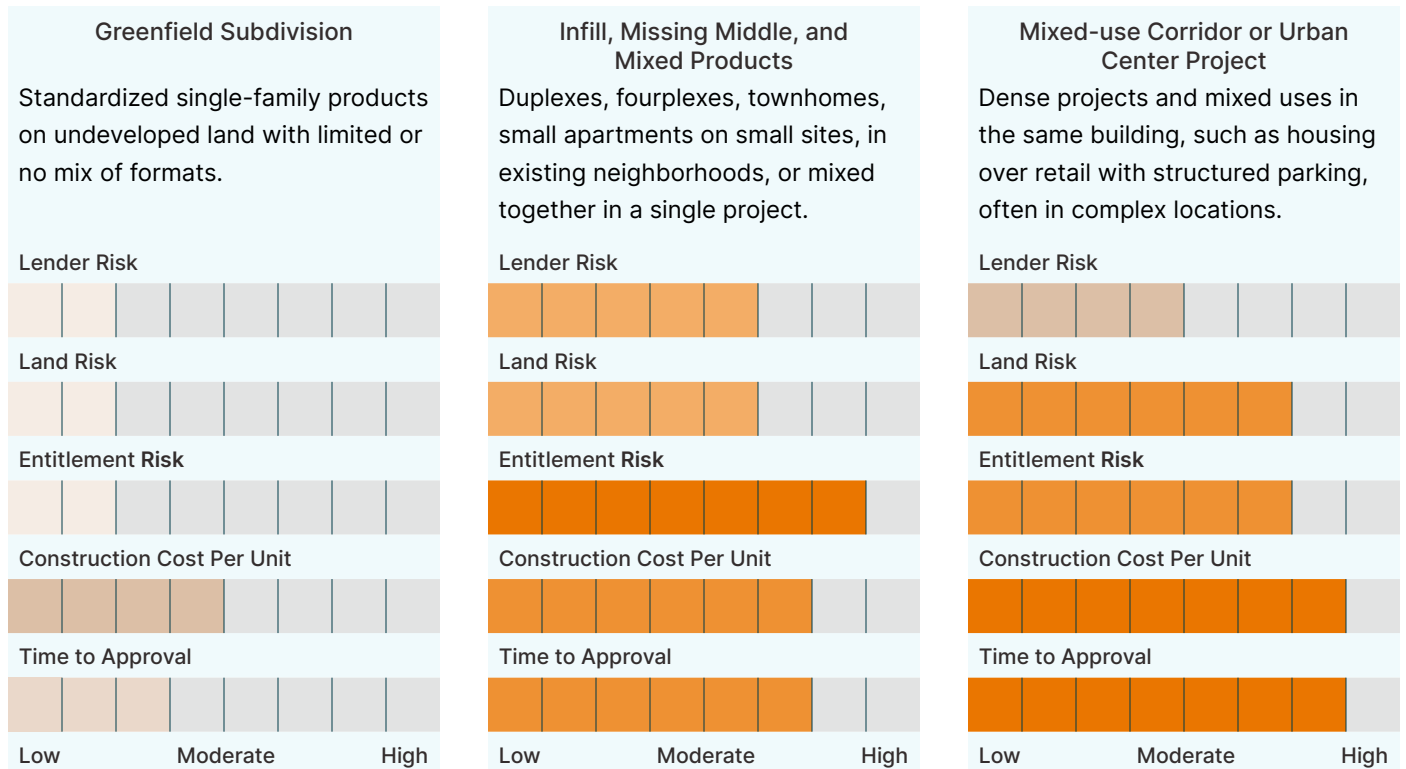
The financing system does not oppose better housing, but it consistently rewards what is easiest to repeat. Standardized projects like large subdivisions or single-use developments are simpler to underwrite because their costs, timelines, and returns are predictable. Market studies often reinforce this pattern by evaluating only what has been built before locally, not the housing types that are missing.

Housing that better reflects today's needs, including smaller-scale infill, mixed-use development, a range of price points, and both

rental and ownership options, faces greater barriers. These projects are often viewed as higher risk, require more coordination, and encounter longer approval and financing timelines, even when demand is strong.

As a result, the housing that is easiest to finance is not always the housing that households need. This disconnect limits the supply of homes in walkable locations near jobs and services, reduces housing diversity, and makes it harder for communities to respond to changing demographics and affordability pressures.

How Housing Is Financed Today



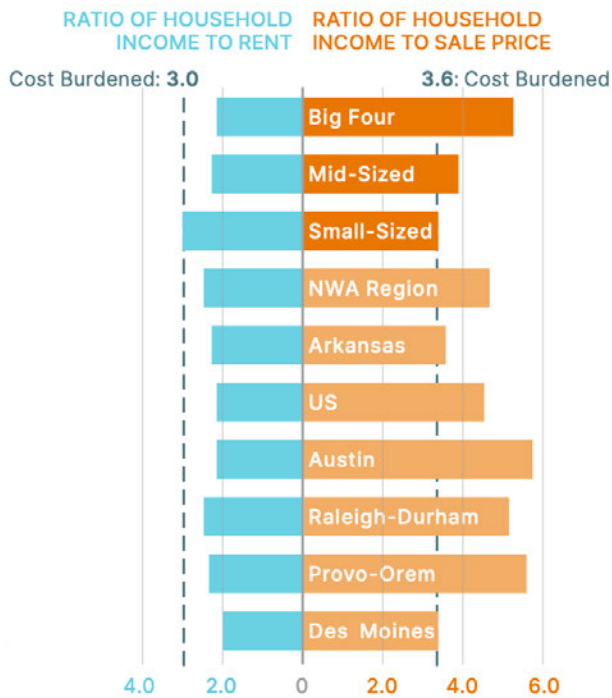
Note: Bars represent relative underwriting risk and predictability under typical 2025 U.S. real estate conditions based on entitlement complexity, project scale, cost variability, and lender behavior. They do not represent precise numeric indices but are grounded in industry underwriting conventions that lenders use when pricing construction and permanent debt.

Projects that best align with regional housing goals face the highest entitlement uncertainty and longest approval timelines.

Cost Burdened Households

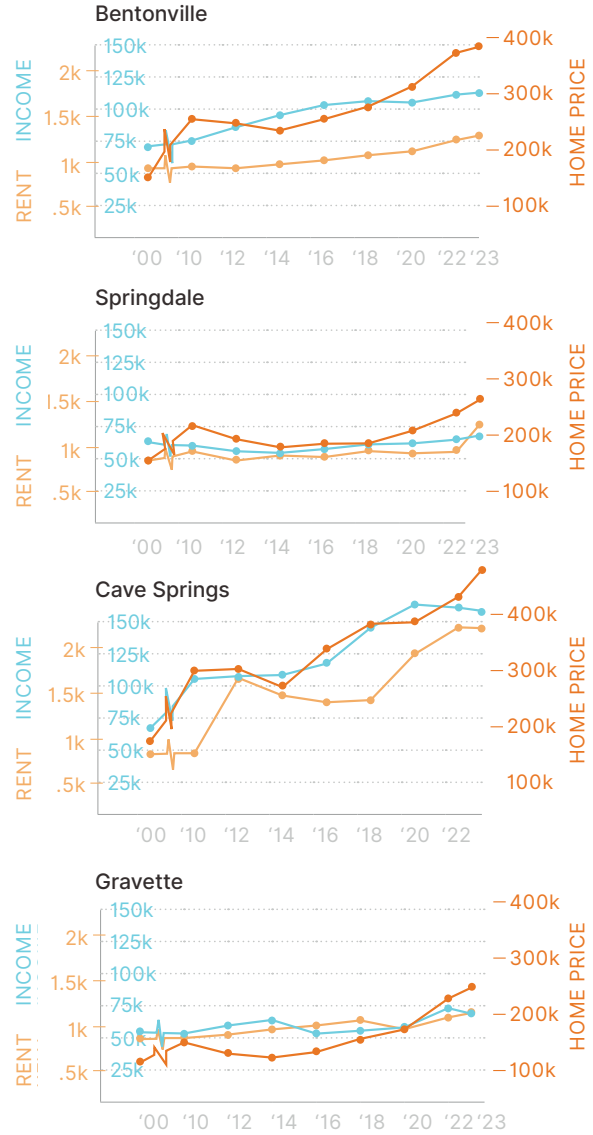


Cost Burden Peer Comparison



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Housing Cost & Income Trajectory



Housing Costs Outpace Wages

Housing costs are rising faster than wages across Northwest Arkansas. In several cities, more than 40% of households are cost burdened, with Fayetteville exceeding 50%. Lower-income households face the greatest strain, but pressure is spreading to moderate-income families as well. Nearly every city's average home cost now exceeds affordable levels for the median household income.

Regionwide, 35% of homeowners are cost burdened, well above the national rate of 23%. Home prices in the Big Four have climbed steadily, with Bentonville now the most expensive. As prices outpace incomes, affordability challenges are spreading outward to small and mid-sized cities, making it harder for households to live near jobs, schools, and daily needs.

Distance Adds Cost to Daily Life

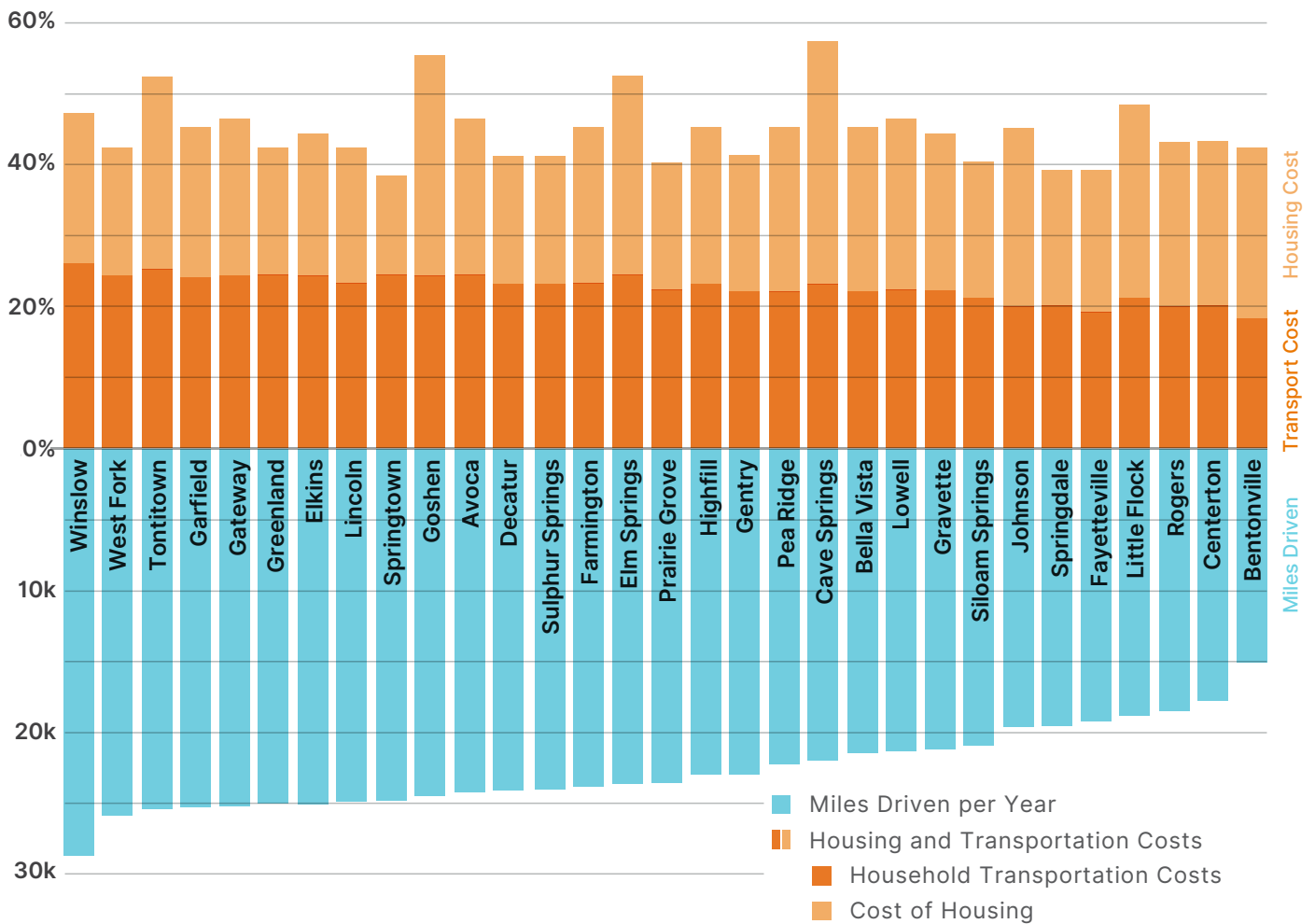
In Northwest Arkansas, housing and transportation costs are closely linked. Households spend about as much on transportation as they do on housing, so location plays a major role in overall affordability. When homes are farther from jobs and services, travel increases and costs rise.

Many households move outward to find lower home prices, a pattern often called “drive until you qualify.” While this can reduce upfront housing costs, it often raises total expenses over time. Longer trips mean more fuel, more vehicles, and higher maintenance costs per household, and more time spent commuting.

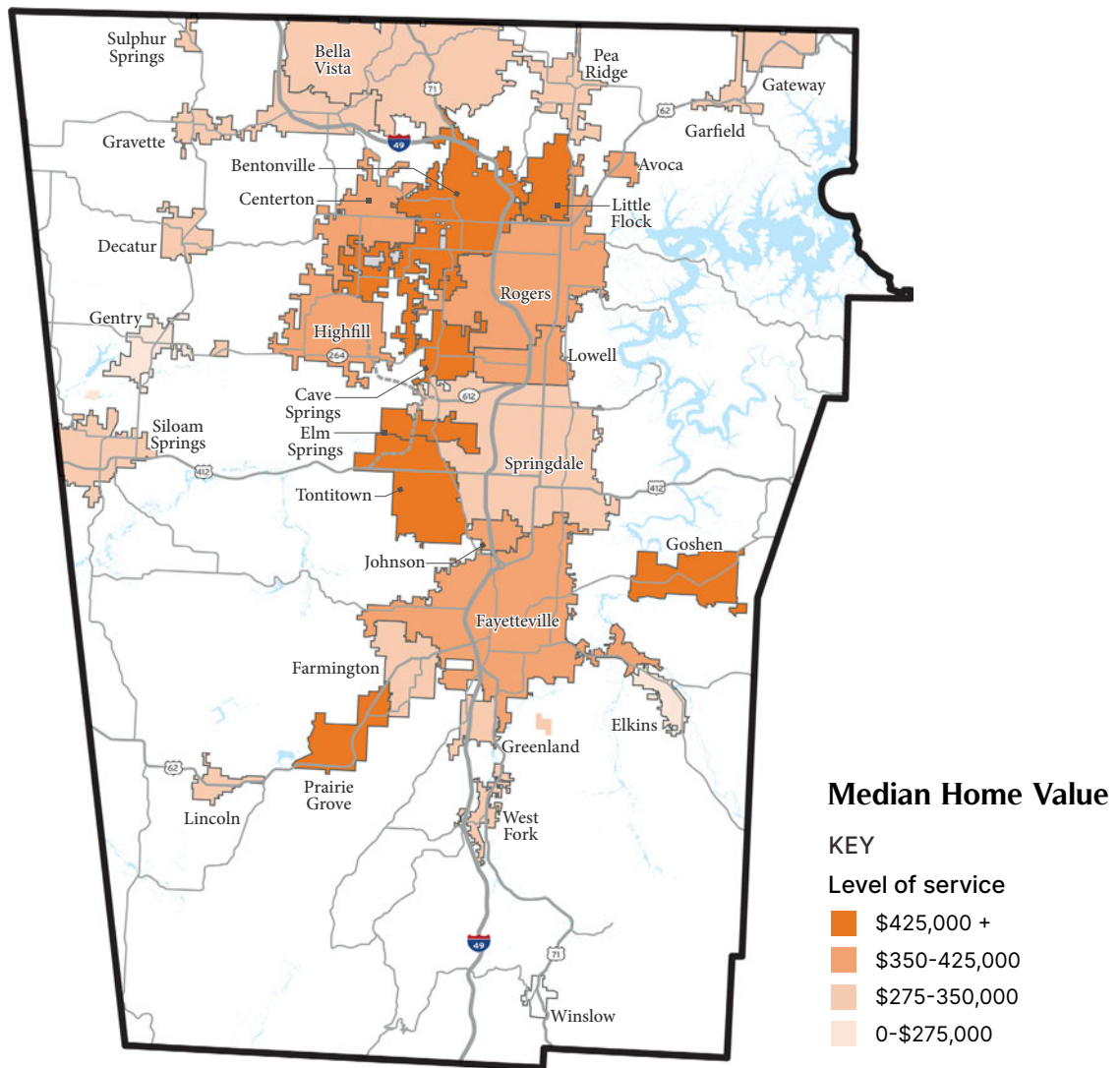
When homes are closer to jobs and services, households drive less and spend less, freeing up more of their budget for housing and other needs. Communities like Bentonville show how proximity can offset higher housing costs, where low transportation costs offset higher housing costs. Places with both access and housing variety, such as Springdale and Fayetteville, can lower both housing and transportation costs.

Over time, these differences compound. Households that drive farther face higher and less predictable costs, while those with shorter trips benefit from greater financial stability and more time in their daily lives.

Annual Cost of Housing and Transportation By City



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Center for Neighborhood Technology's H+T Index



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Where Concerns Meet Reality

Median home prices across the region have climbed steadily, particularly where many of the region's highest paying jobs are located. While household incomes in those communities have also grown, the cost of entering the housing market has risen faster than many workers across the corridor can comfortably afford.

In cities with lower median incomes, a larger share of residents work in manufacturing, logistics, food production, health care, and service industries that support the regional

economy. These workers increasingly compete for a limited supply of attainable homes near employment centers.

As prices rise in the communities closest to major job clusters, many households look to the edges of the urban area to find homes within reach of their budgets. Over time, this pattern links housing affordability directly to commuting distance, household transportation costs, and the long term performance of the region's transportation network.

Turning Pressure Into Opportunity

The housing challenges facing Northwest Arkansas are not the result of a single policy or market shift. They reflect systems working out of alignment. Demand has diversified across life stages, incomes, and household types, yet much of the housing delivered remains limited in type, location, and tenure. At the same time, jobs and services are concentrated along the corridor and in historic centers, while new housing continues to spread outward.

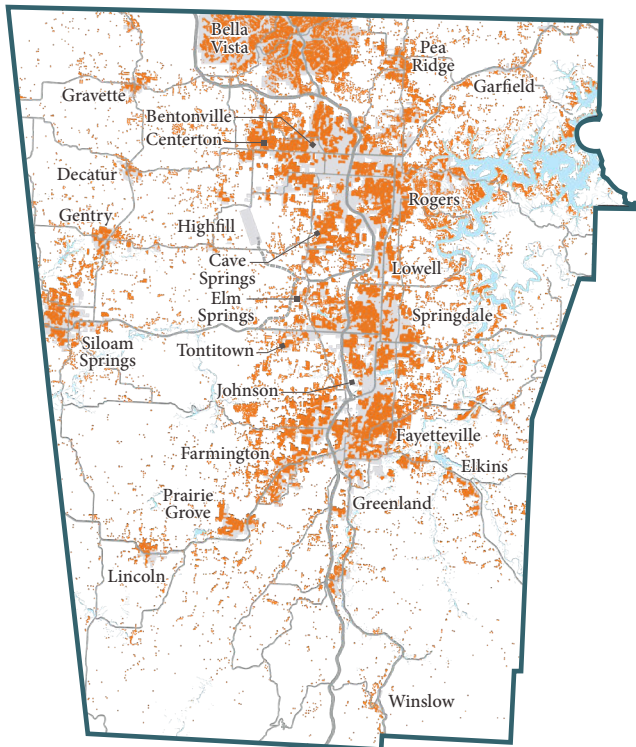
Financing, land use regulations, and development patterns reinforce this mismatch. They tend to favor large, predictable projects in lower-cost locations, while smaller-scale, mixed, and infill housing—often closer to jobs

and services—faces more barriers. The result is fewer housing choices, rising combined housing and transportation costs, and growing distance between where people live and daily life.

This is not a failure of planning. It is a coordination problem.

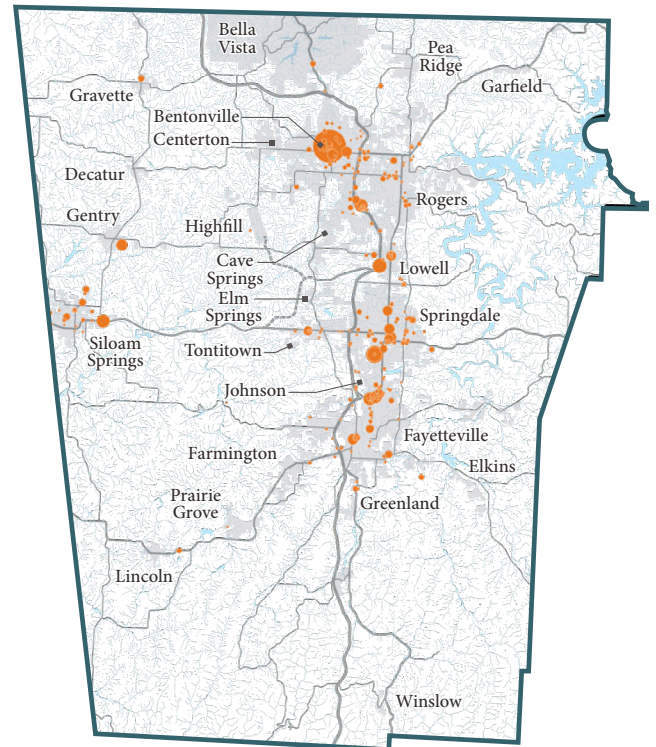
The strategies that follow focus on bringing these systems into alignment. By coordinating capital, land, regulations, infrastructure, and regional priorities, Northwest Arkansas can expand housing options, support walkable centers, and better connect homes to jobs and services—making growth more affordable and resilient.

Housing Concentrations



KEY ■ Housing Developed area

Job Concentrations



KEY ● Job centers Developed area

These maps show how housing is widely dispersed while jobs concentrate along the Interstate 49 corridor and in Siloam Springs. Development patterns reinforce this separation—housing growth at the edges of cities rather than infill near jobs and services.

The growing distance between where people live and where many employment opportunities are located is the root of increasing housing and transportation costs, traffic congestion, utility expansion and rate hikes, and growing municipal debt.

Source: Crafton Tull, NWARPC, Benton and Washington counties, Northwest Arkansas cities




Housing & Development Strategies




STRATEGY D1

Expand Housing Choice in Every Community

Make it easier to build more types of homes that fit different needs and budgets.

Housing markets function best when a range of home sizes, formats, and price points are allowed. When neighborhoods are limited to a single type, supply cannot adjust to changing needs or rising demand. Expanding housing choice means allowing modest density increases and a broader mix of formats, especially in areas already served by infrastructure. These actions reduce barriers to incremental, neighborhood-scale housing. They enable gradual additions that help stabilize prices, support workforce access, and give residents more options within the communities they value.

ACTIONS	
 D 1.1	Enable housing choice. Allow housing variety in existing and new growth areas, including cottages and cottage courts, duplexes, fourplexes, townhomes, and small-scale multi-family.
 D 1.2	Create pre-approved plans. Reduce time and risk by offering pre-approved building plans that can be adopted locally for applicable zoning districts.
 D 1.3	Grow the small developer pipeline. Cultivate small local developers to deliver incremental housing, adding a few homes at a time where large projects are not feasible.




ACTIONS	
 D 2.1	Coordinate land use and transportation. Align housing, job locations, and transportation investments to shorten trips and reduce household transportation costs, and support bikeway and public transportation expansion.
 D 2.2	Redevelop greyfields and aging corridors. Encourage reinvestment in aging commercial corridors and underused retail sites to add housing and mixed-use development where infrastructure already exists.
 D 2.3	Align growth with service capacity. Match annexation and zoning decisions to realistic utility and street network capacity.

STRATEGY D2

Focus Growth in the Right Places

Put more homes and jobs where infrastructure exists and long-term costs are lower.

Where growth occurs determines how much it costs to serve. Concentrating development in areas with existing infrastructure, transit access, and connected streets reduces long-term obligations and shortens trips. Aligning development with system capacity avoids costly extensions into areas that are expensive to maintain. Coordinating land use with transportation, supporting diverse housing, and reinvesting in corridors and greyfields allows the region to add supply without increasing strain. Over time, this strengthens fiscal stability and improves access to jobs and services.

KEY  Not started  Planned / Portions started  In progress / Portions completed

STRATEGY D3

Modernize Development Rules

Update rules and regulations to support housing choice, infill, and mixed-use growth.




Development outcomes depend on the clarity and consistency of local regulations. When zoning, engineering standards, and permitting vary or rely on discretion, uncertainty increases cost and delays projects. Modernizing codes to allow moderate-density and mixed-use development in walkable areas reduces risk and expands opportunity. Aligning standards and review processes across jurisdictions lowers costs and simplifies compliance. Streamlined permitting and clearer expectations shorten timelines and make needed projects easier to deliver.





STRATEGY D4




Align Land, Capital, and Capacity

Organize funding tools, land, and resources to deliver development more effectively.

Housing production depends on land control, capital structure, and local capacity. When public, private, and nonprofit resources operate separately, projects stall and financing gaps persist. Aligning these tools reduces friction and improves feasibility for well-located housing and mixed-use development. By coordinating capital, leveraging public and nonprofit land, and strengthening development capacity, the region can create a more predictable housing pipeline that supports long-term resilience.

ACTIONS	
 D 3.1	Develop a model zoning and land development code. Develop a model unified development code targeted for small and mid-sized cities.
 D 3.2	Coordinate engineering and utility standards. Align street design, stormwater, utility, and site engineering standards across cities to reduce project costs and improve consistency.
 D 3.3	Improve permitting processes. Streamline and coordinate development review to increase speed and predictability, while reducing unnecessary discretionary approvals.

ACTIONS	
 D 4.1	Develop a regional capital stack. Align public funds, philanthropy, employer investment, and private lending into tools to close financing gaps for projects that support regional priorities.
 D 4.2	Leverage public and nonprofit land. Coordinate infill development with available public land, churches, schools, and nonprofit holdings to support attainable housing and compact, mixed-use development.
 D 4.3	Coordinate housing resources. Align assistance programs, employer housing initiatives, and financial tools to focus investment on shared regional goals.
 D 4.4	Expand training and technical assistance. Grow the skills necessary to carry out the Regional Growth Strategy through expanded education, training, and technical assistance.

KEY  Not started  Planned / Portions started  In progress / Portions completed

STRATEGY D1

Expand Housing Choice in Every Community

D 1.1 ENABLE HOUSING CHOICE

Allow housing variety in existing and new growth areas, including cottages and cottage courts, duplexes, fourplexes, townhomes, and small-scale multi-family.

- **Draft zoning and land development quick fixes.**
Build simple, objective, and adoption-ready ordinances that enable housing choice without rewriting regulations entirely.
- **Train staff and applicants.**
Expand training to assist staff, planning commission members, and applicants in designing and evaluating infill and new development proposals.
- **Update local rules and requirements**
Support city staff in adopting housing choice ordinances, targeted to locations near jobs, services, and regional transportation corridors.
- **Develop regional case studies.**
Collect best practice examples, planning commission decisions and processes, and financial and market performance of built projects.

D 1.2 CREATE PRE-APPROVED PLANS

Reduce time and risk by offering pre-approved building plans that can be adopted locally for applicable zoning districts.

- **Develop a regional library of pre-approved IRC plans.**
Create pre-approved plans for buildings governed by the International Residential Code (IRC), such as cottages, accessory dwellings, duplexes, and townhouses. Fayetteville has a pre-approved plans program and other cities are considering the strategy, a regional collection would help smaller cities and enable more uptake among the development community.
- **Develop a regional library of pre-approved IBC plans.**
Create pre-approved plans for building governed by the International Building Code (IBC), such as small multi-family, and mixed-use buildings.
- **Train staff and applicants**
Expand training to assist staff, planning commission members, and applicants in designing and evaluating infill and new development proposals.
- **Develop pre-approved plan ordinances.**
Enable the regional library through local ordinances, targeted to locations near jobs, services, and regional transportation corridors.
- **Document regional case studies**
Collect best practice examples, planning commission decisions and processes, and financial and market performance of built projects.

D 1.3 GROW THE SMALL DEVELOPER PIPELINE

Cultivate small local developers to deliver incremental housing, adding a few homes at a time where large projects are not feasible.

- **Offer small developer training.**
Hold regular training sessions throughout the region to onboard and support more small-scale developers.
- **Provide mentorship and technical assistance.**
Convene a cohort of developers, designers, engineers, and financiers to share best practices from ongoing infill development efforts.
- **Develop infill design guidelines.**
Provide sample designs for various sites and market conditions, ensuring compatibility, constructibility, and financial performance.
- **Create a small project loan fund.**
Establish low interest revolving loans for projects under ten units, modeled on community development funds supporting small scale developers.

Fayetteville Permit-Ready Building Design Program

The City of Fayetteville established a Permit-Ready Building Design Program, applicable to the Downtown and Walker Park neighborhoods. The program includes over 20 designs for small houses (cottages), moderately sized houses, duplexes, and townhouses. Similar pre-approved plan programs have been discussed elsewhere in Northwest Arkansas. A regional approach could increase the number of available plans and expand program access to smaller cities. Pre-approved plans simplify permitting, clearly communicate community goals, and lower development barrier. Shared, repeatable designs between jurisdictions and in new development areas can extend program uptake to larger sites and a broader pool of developers, increasing the opportunity for housing type diversity.



STRATEGY D2

Focus Growth in the Right Places

D 2.1 COORDINATE LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION

Align housing, job locations, and transportation investments to shorten trips and reduce household transportation costs, and support bikeway and public transportation expansion.

- **Develop model future land use categories.**
Create model categories to support compact growth, mixed-use, housing diversity, and trail- and transit-oriented development.
- **Coordinate future land use maps.**
Align future land use between cities, counties, and along planned public transportation corridors and future regional streets, balancing jobs and housing.
- **Provide training and technical assistance.**
Train staff and elected and appointed officials in future land use planning and model categories.

D 2.2 REDEVELOP PARKING LOTS AND AGING CORRIDORS

Redevelop parking lots and aging corridors. Encourage reinvestment in aging commercial corridors and underused retail sites to add housing and mixed-use development where infrastructure already exists.

- **Map corridor opportunities.**
Identify priority sites with strong access and redevelopment potential.
- **Organize site assembly and phased redevelopment.**
Convene cities, agencies, and large land owners to assemble redevelopment-ready properties.
- **Expand online review tools.**
Provide training and technical assistance implementing modern, online application and review tools.
- **Provide training and technical assistance.**
Train staff, elected and appointed officials, and applicants in model development and design review processes.

D 2.3 ALIGN GROWTH WITH SERVICE CAPACITY

Match annexation and zoning decisions to realistic utility and street network capacity. (actions are detailed in Infrastructure & Stormwater strategies)

STRATEGY D3

Modernize Development Rules

D 3.1 DEVELOP A MODEL ZONING AND LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE

Develop a model unified development code targeted for small and mid-sized cities. NWARPC is currently pursuing this strategy.

- **Produce a model unified development code.**
Create a code framework that will work for small cities and scale up as needed, guiding infill and new development.
- **Develop support materials.**
Create a code manual, examples of code outcomes for common development conditions, and presentation materials to support community education.
- **Provide training and technical assistance.**
Train staff and elected and appointed officials in the model code.
- **Convene staff workshops.**
Share progress, lessons learned, best practices, and code improvements between multi-jurisdictional staff.

D 3.2 COORDINATE ENGINEERING AND UTILITY STANDARDS

Align street design, stormwater, utility, and site engineering standards across cities to reduce project costs and improve consistency.

- **Develop model street specifications.**
Standardize street construction and specifications for regional complete streets, a collection of recommended local street sections, and alleys.
- **Create a model stormwater criteria manual.**
Standardize a minimum approach to stormwater management, including green infrastructure standards and infill sites.
- **Produce utility placement standards.**
Standardize the location of utilities in streets and alleys to reduce wasted land and variation from city to city.
- **Provide training and technical assistance.**
Train staff and elected and appointed officials in model development and design review processes.

D 3.3 IMPROVE PERMITTING PROCESSES

Streamline and coordinate development review to increase speed and predictability, while reducing unnecessary discretionary approvals.

- **Develop objective design guidelines.**
Create objective building and site design guidelines, ready for the model code, with optional levels of increased specificity and rigor.
- **Create model development review processes.**
Create model processes, timelines, and checklists to streamline and standardize development review for all scales of projects.
- **Expand online review tools.**
Provide training and technical assistance implementing modern, online application and review tools.
- **Provide training and technical assistance.**
Train staff, elected and appointed officials, and applicants in model development and design review processes.

STRATEGY D4

Align Land, Capital, and Capacity

D 4.1 DEVELOP A REGIONAL CAPITAL STACK

Align public funds, philanthropy, employer investment, and private lending into coordinated tools to close financing gaps for projects that support regional priorities. (Actions detailed in Funding & Financing strategies)

D 4.2 LEVERAGE PUBLIC AND NONPROFIT LAND

Coordinate infill development with available public land, churches, schools, and nonprofit holdings to support attainable housing and compact, mixed-use development.

- **Produce nonprofit land development guidelines.**
Develop model site design, financing, partnership, and management options for adding housing to nonprofit lands.
- **Create a regional land bank authority.**
Coordinate land assembly and strategic development with regional transportation, utility, and land use initiatives.
- **Coordinate community land trust support.**
Align property and fund sourcing between cities, agencies and nonprofits with regional transportation, utility, and land use initiatives.
- **Provide training and technical assistance.**
Assist nonprofits, including community land trusts, and staff with development strategies, partnerships, and financing.

D 4.3 COORDINATE HOUSING RESOURCES

Align assistance programs, employer housing initiatives, and financial tools to increase investment.

- **Adopt a regional housing compact.**
Define affordable housing needs and targets, and coordinate strategies and outcomes regionally.
- **Launch employer housing initiatives.**
Partner with major employers and anchor institutions to expand workforce housing efforts across the region.
- **Convene cities and nonprofits.**
Coordinate efforts within the nonprofit community and with cities to reduce redundancy and increase funding efficacy.
- **Coordinate state policy advocacy.**
Advocate for legislation supporting housing choice and affordability, while avoiding restrictions on local control.

D 4.4 EXPAND TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Grow the skills of elected officials, city staff, developers, and design professionals to carry out the Regional Growth Strategy through expanded education, training, and technical assistance.

- **Build a coordinated development education program focused on regional priorities.**
Establish a cross-discipline development education program focused on infill development, greyfield redevelopment, and compact growth. Tracks should include real estate development, site planning and urban design, and engineering. Coordinate with the University of Arkansas Community Design Center and upcoming planning program.
- **Coordinate training and technical assistance programs.**
Work with the Arkansas Municipal League, NWARPC, nonprofits, and educators to coordinate program offerings and delivery, fill gaps, and align program content with regional priorities.



PRAIRIE GROVE



Supporting Compact Growth

Cities across Northwest Arkansas increasingly support compact and mixed-use development through future land-use plans, zoning updates, and land development code changes. However, permissive regulations alone are not enough. Nationally, development finance, engineering practices, and professional training remain geared toward producing separated uses – strip commercial corridors and single-use subdivisions separated by market segment. As a result, compact growth remains at a disadvantage, even though it is essential for expanding housing choice and strengthening the long-term financial health of cities.

The concepts and illustrations shown for Prairie Grove and Gravette illustrate how compact growth can deliver walkable districts and a broader mix of housing. These outcomes are achievable, yet few developers in the region specialize in this type of product, and financing more complex, mixed-use projects remains challenging. This is despite clear market demand, supported by a 2025 target market analysis and National Association of Realtor surveys showing strong consumer preference for walkable neighborhoods.

Closing this gap requires aligning regulations, training, and financial tools. While this is a national challenge, Northwest Arkansas is well positioned to lead.

KEY

- Commercial, mixed-use, and larger multi-family
- Townhomes and small multi-family
- Single-family and duplex



GRAVETTE



Housing & Development Examples

Denver Regional TOD Fund

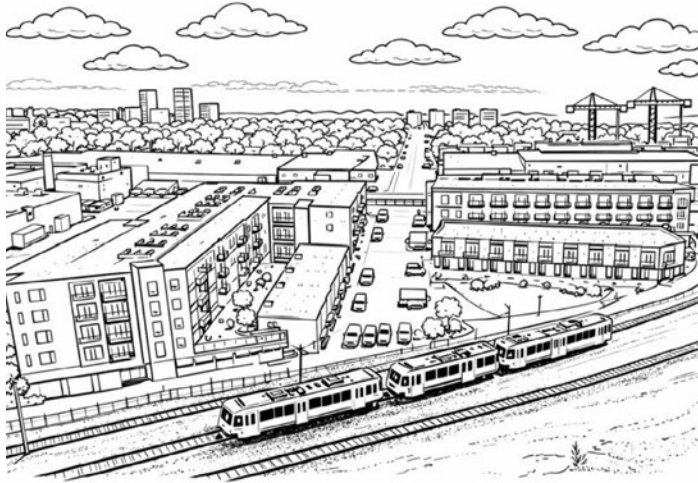
Location: Denver, Colorado

Participants: Enterprise Community Partners CDFI

Topics: Housing, Capital Alignment

Information: [Enterprise](#)

Year: 2010-Current



The Denver Regional Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Fund is a revolving loan fund designed to create and preserve affordable housing near transit corridors across the seven-county Denver metro region. The fund brings together public agencies, philanthropic foundations, private lenders, and mission-driven partners, including the Urban Land Conservancy and Colorado Housing and Finance Authority. Its primary goal is to provide flexible, below-market acquisition financing that allows developers to secure sites within a half-mile of current or planned rail stations before land prices escalate.

To date, the Fund has invested more than \$50 million in transit-connected properties, supporting the development or preservation of over 2,000 affordable homes.

Charlotte Housing Opportunity Investment Fund

Location: Charlotte, North Carolina

Participants: Bank of America, Wells Fargo, Ally, Truist, etc.

Topics: Housing, Capital Alignment, Philanthropy

Information: [LISC](#)

Year: 2019-Current



CHOIF was launched as a privately capitalized affordable housing fund designed to complement the City of Charlotte's Housing Trust Fund. Initiated by Foundation For The Carolinas and managed by LISC Charlotte, the fund raised more than \$50 million from major financial institutions and corporations.

CHOIF provides flexible, below-market financing to support the development and preservation of affordable and mixed-income housing, primarily serving households earning up to 80 percent of Area Median Income. The fund has supported the creation or preservation of more than 1,900 affordable units. A second phase, launched in 2023, continues to expand its capital base and housing impact. To date, the Fund has invested more than \$50 million in transit-connected properties, supporting the development or preservation of over 2,000 affordable homes.

Ohio County Land Banks

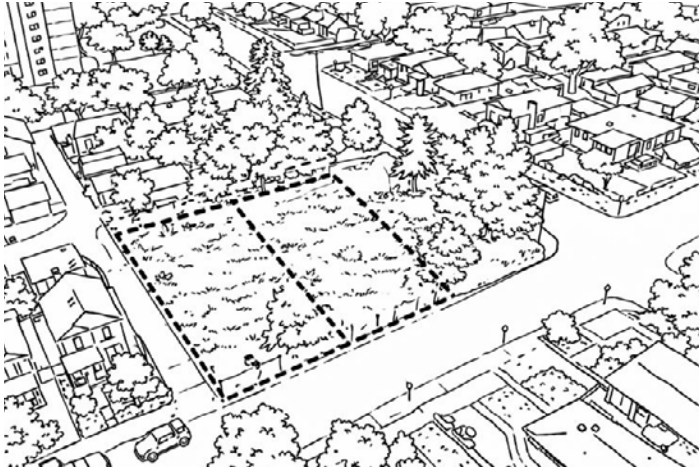
Location: Cuyahoga County, Ohio

Participants: Ohio Land Bank Association, 71 counties

Topics: Housing, Land Stewardship

Information: [OLBA](#)

Year: 2009-Current



Ohio's county land bank program consists of locally created county land reutilization corporations. Established by county commissioners and governed by boards that include public officials and community representatives, land banks operate in more than 70 counties. Their core mission is to acquire vacant, abandoned, and tax-foreclosed properties, clear title, and return them to productive use aligned with local development goals.

Land banks help stabilize neighborhoods, reduce blight, assemble land for redevelopment, and support affordable housing and economic development. Collectively, Ohio land banks have facilitated tens of thousands of demolitions and property transfers, leveraging substantial state funding to remediate distressed properties and promote long-term community revitalization.

Atlanta Land Trust

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

Participants: City, Bank of America, etc.

Topics: Housing, Land Stewardship

Information: [ALT](#)

Year: 2009-Current



The Atlanta Land Trust (ALT), founded in 2009, is a nonprofit community land trust focused on creating and preserving permanently affordable homeownership opportunities in Atlanta, particularly near the Atlanta BeltLine and other rapidly appreciating neighborhoods.

ALT retains ownership of land while homeowners purchase the homes through long-term ground leases that maintain affordability and limit resale prices. Working with public agencies, philanthropic partners, and private supporters, ALT acquires land and develops mixed-income housing. It has completed projects in neighborhoods such as Oakland City and East Lake, raised nearly \$14 million in capital, and built about 120 homes, with a development pipeline of roughly 300 units, supporting long-term housing stability and wealth-building.



Imagined future for Eighth Street near Walnut Street in Rogers.

Mobility & Transportation

Expand and connect streets, sidewalks, trails, and transit so people can reach work, school, and errands with more direct trips and more choices.

The goals below define the conditions the transportation system must meet to support growth, quality of life, transportation choice, and regional competitiveness.



Balance land uses to support more efficient mobility networks.

Build homes, employment hubs and other destinations near one another. Increase housing near jobs and bus routes to reduce trip length and increase public transportation ridership.



Shorten regional trips with more connections and route options.

Reduce the distance and time required for everyday trips by increasing regional routes and connections, providing multiple ways to reach common destinations.



Expand and connect local street networks.

Fill gaps and add connections in local street systems so short trips can bypass overloaded corridors and use more travel modes.



Build more safe, connected bike and pedestrian routes.

Create continuous and complete walking and biking networks that make everyday trips convenient and safe without a car.



Expand public transportation access and services.

Improve public transportation frequency, coverage, and last-mile connections so travel does not require driving for every trip.



Invest in transportation that supports community and financial resilience.

Prioritize transportation investments in complete streets, bike/pedestrian trails, and corridors in areas that provide the highest public benefit through increased transportation access or increased tax revenue.

If transportation goals are unmet, travel times will rise, costs will increase, and access to jobs, services, and opportunity will become harder across the region.

Mobility & Transportation Concerns

Rising travel costs, congestion, and limited mobility options reflect a transportation system misaligned with how the region is growing.

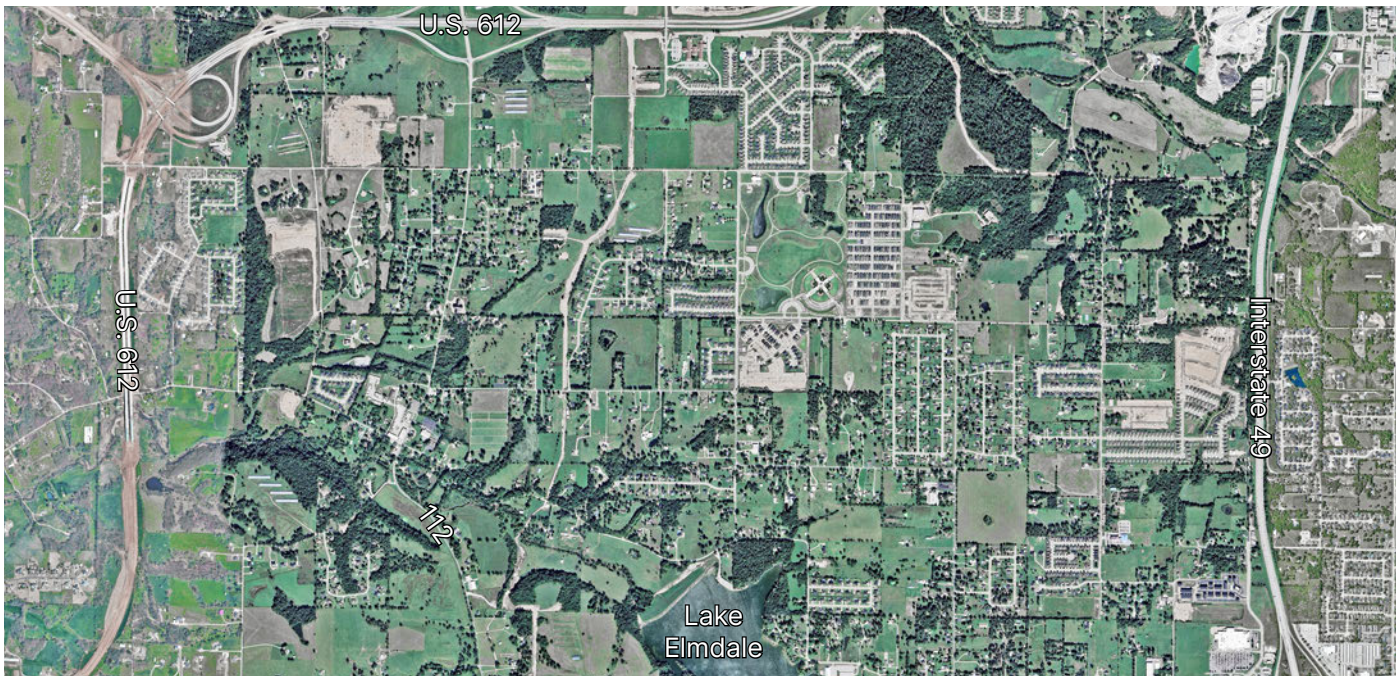
Transportation challenges in Northwest Arkansas are no longer isolated. Homes, employment centers, and services are spreading farther apart, while the transportation network connecting them has not kept pace. Destinations remain concentrated along major corridors and established centers, while new housing expands outward, increasing travel distances and dependence on regional routes.

As a result, traffic is funneled onto a limited number of highways and major roads, contributing to growing congestion. Local street networks often lack connections, and walking, biking, and public transportation are not practical alternatives in most cities. These conditions increase delay, reduce reliability,

and raise safety concerns while driving up household costs. Longer daily trips mean higher expenses, less access to jobs and services, and less time for family and community life.

These issues stem from how land use, transportation, and infrastructure decisions interact. The Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission's (NWARPC) Forward 2050 plan, developed alongside this strategy, reinforces the need for improved connectivity, expanded transportation options, and coordinated investment. Together, they highlight the importance of regional coordination in local decision-making and the role of land use and local networks in shaping long-term mobility, access, and cost.

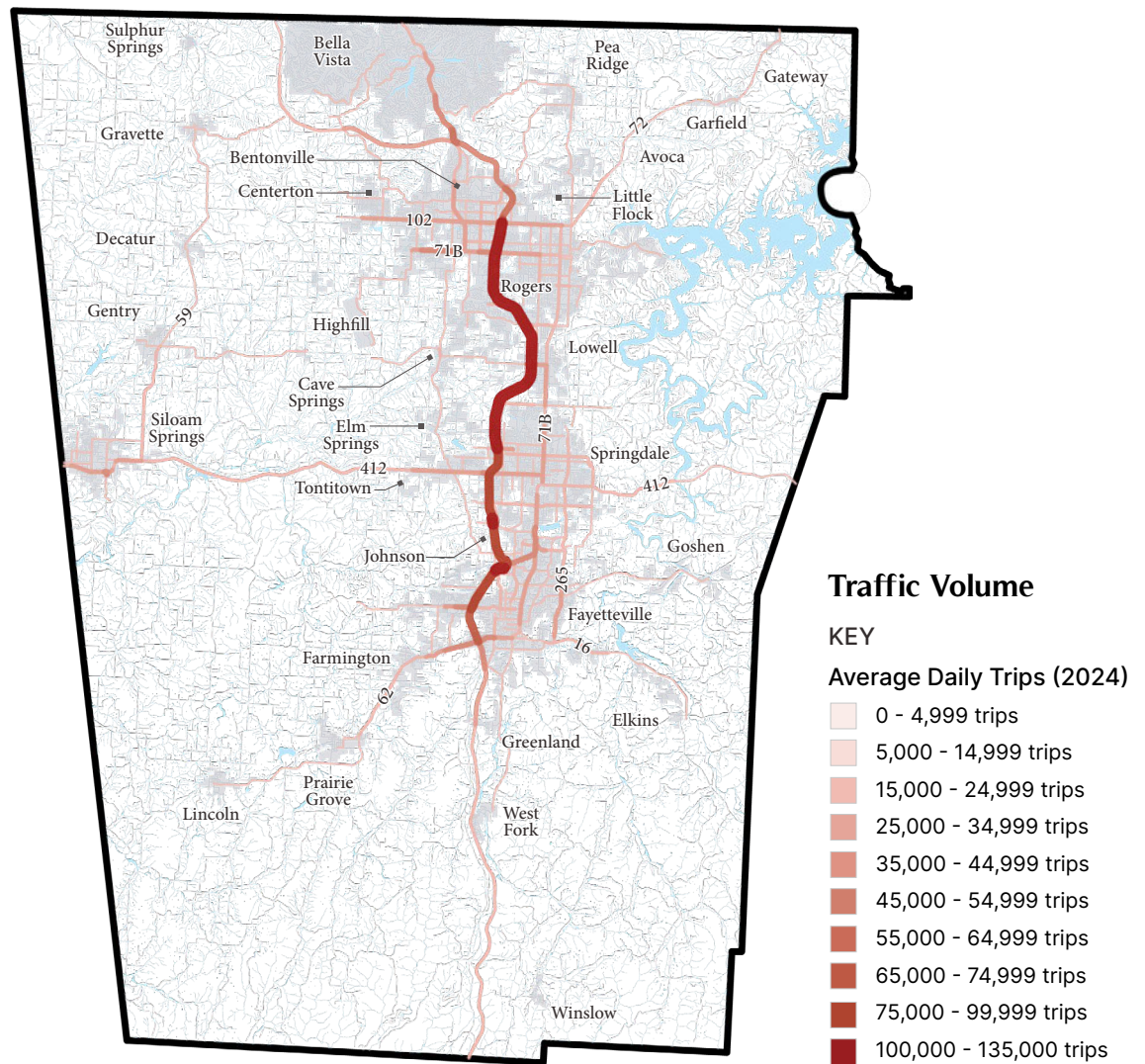
The Result of Misalignment and Unplanned Growth



Across Northwest Arkansas, differing standards and priorities between jurisdictions often produce disconnected growth, as seen in the image above that includes portions of Springdale, Elm Springs, and Tontitown. Subdivisions, commercial areas, and street networks frequently fail to align, with few cross-boundary

connections. Homes, jobs, and services may be close but are not easily reachable, as local streets stop short and sidewalks and bikeways are limited. As a result, even short trips are pushed onto major roads, increasing congestion and safety risks and requiring a car for nearly every trip.

Source: Google Earth



Source: Arkansas Department of Transportation

Traffic Concentrated on Too Few Regional Routes

Traffic volumes across Northwest Arkansas show a system heavily dependent on a limited number of major corridors. I-49 serves as the backbone, connecting the region's largest cities and primary job centers, while a small network of regional arterials links to surrounding communities. The interstate, highways, and major arterials carry the highest average daily traffic (ADT), reflecting how most trips rely on a limited set of roads and few alternatives exist for regional travel.

While I-49 clearly carries a high volume of traffic, several four- and five-lane roadways exceed 30,000 vehicles per day, surpassing recommended capacity at 25,000 vehicles. Those include U.S. 62 in Farmington, U.S. 412 in Tontitown, Highway 102 between Centerton and Rogers, and most sections of U.S. 71B between Bentonville and Fayetteville. As homes continue to spread outward and connections remain limited, more trips pressure these busy corridors.

Concentration Creates Delay and Risk

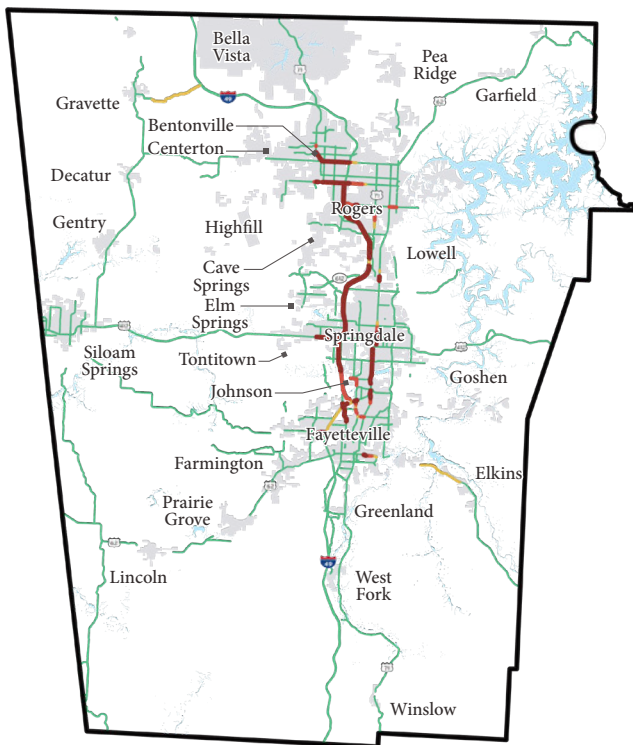
Where high volumes exceed capacity, delay and safety risks concentrate. These patterns concentrate at key segments and intersections where multiple types of trips converge.

Congestion is most visible where so-called “level of service” has declined, indicating unstable flow and recurring delay. The greatest stress occurs along I-49, U.S. 71B through Fayetteville, Springdale, and Bentonville, Highway 102 between Centerton and Bentonville, and U.S. 412 through Tontitown and an eastern area of Springdale where level of service is frequently rated F. I-49 experiences delay mainly due to demand while other corridors carry both regional and local trips, creating bottlenecks where capacity is limited,

demand is high, and local access needs are disruptive, particularly during peak periods.

Crash patterns follow a similar geography. The highest concentrations occur where major routes intersect and connect to job centers, particularly in Fayetteville, Springdale, and Bentonville, with smaller crash clusters in Lowell, Rogers, and Siloam Springs. U.S. 71B ranks highest with 3,580 crashes over a five-year period, followed by U.S. 412 (2,565), both exceeding I-49 (2,048). Those locations combine high traffic volumes, turning movements, and local access, increasing both frequency and severity of crashes and reinforcing systemwide safety concerns.

Traffic Congestion (2025)

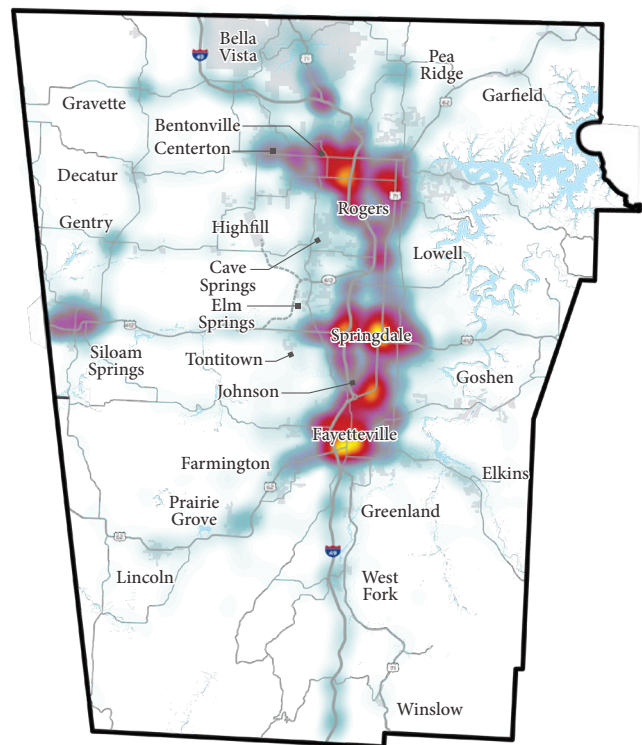


Source: Arkansas Department of Transportation

KEY Peak hour level of service

■ LOS C	■ LOS E
■ LOS D	■ LOS F

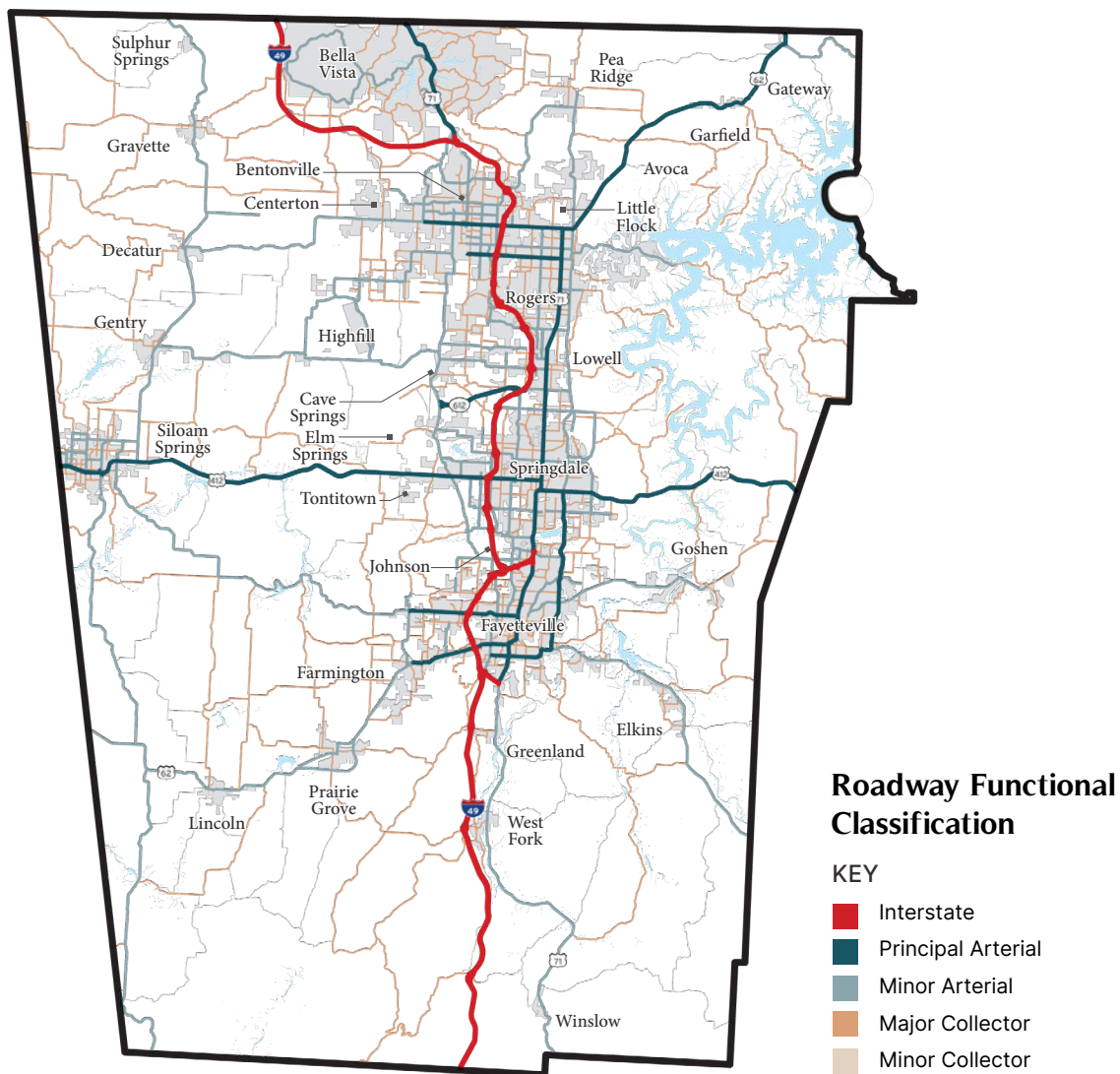
Vehicle Crashes (2019-2023)



Source: Arkansas Department of Transportation

KEY

Frequent Infrequent



Source: NWARPC

Incomplete Networks Limit Options

The road system is intended to function as a hierarchy, where local streets connect to collectors, which feed into arterials and regional corridors designed for higher volumes and longer distances. In Northwest Arkansas, the regional network and the supporting local connections are incomplete. Growth has outpaced planning and route acquisition, leaving gaps in major corridors while also producing disconnected local networks. As a result, regional routes are overburdened with the shorter trips that make up most Americans' daily travel.

This imbalance is compounded by how land use is arranged. Homes, jobs, and services are often separated, while limited local and collector connections provide few alternatives for shorter trips. Together, these conditions push both local and regional travel onto the same corridors, concentrating traffic on a small number of roads. Without more connected networks and better alignment between development and transportation, pressure will continue to build on these routes, reinforcing congestion, safety risks, and rising travel costs.

Commuting Patterns Stress Households and Routes

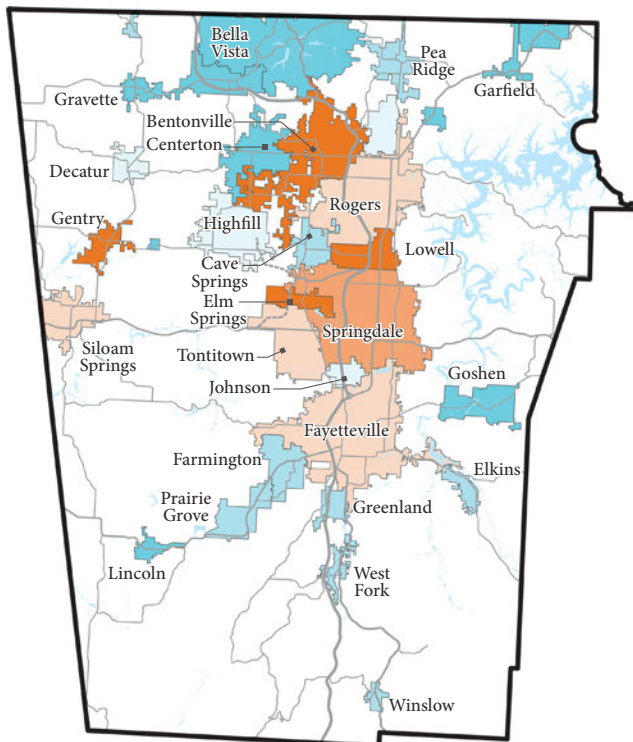
Housing fit and availability and employment hub location shapes commuting patterns across Northwest Arkansas. Cities such as Bentonville and Lowell have high job concentrations, drawing workers from across the region. Others, including Bella Vista, Gravette, and Lincoln, have more homes than jobs, meaning most residents must drive across the region for employment.

Of Bentonville's 55,000 daytime workers, 80% commute into the city, while 80% of Bella Vista's 12,650 workforce leaves daily. Fayetteville has the highest number living and working locally at 19,000, yet 23,000 leave and 42,000 commute in. Across the region, 77% of workers cross city lines, driven by job access, wages, and available housing options and price points.

This imbalance funnels 200,000 commuters onto a limited number of regional corridors, creating congestion on roads also carrying local traffic. Commuting patterns create delays and increase wear on roadways, raising maintenance costs for cities as traffic volumes and travel distances grow.

Long commutes also increase annual miles driven per household. The average household in Tontitown drives 26,309 miles annually compared to rates 30% lower in Rogers (18,515) and 40% Bentonville (15,060). With the cost of driving now equal to the cost of housing for the median household in Northwest Arkansas, commuting places growing pressure on household budgets.

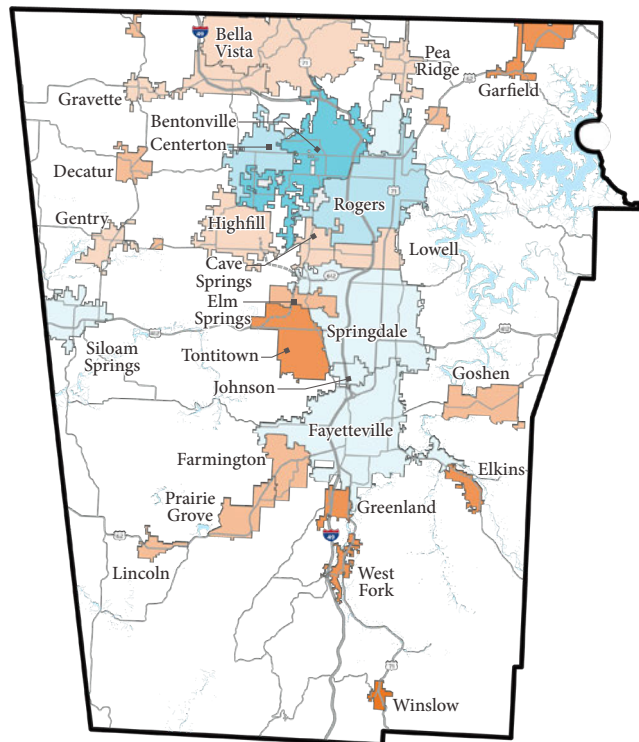
Jobs & Housing Balance



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

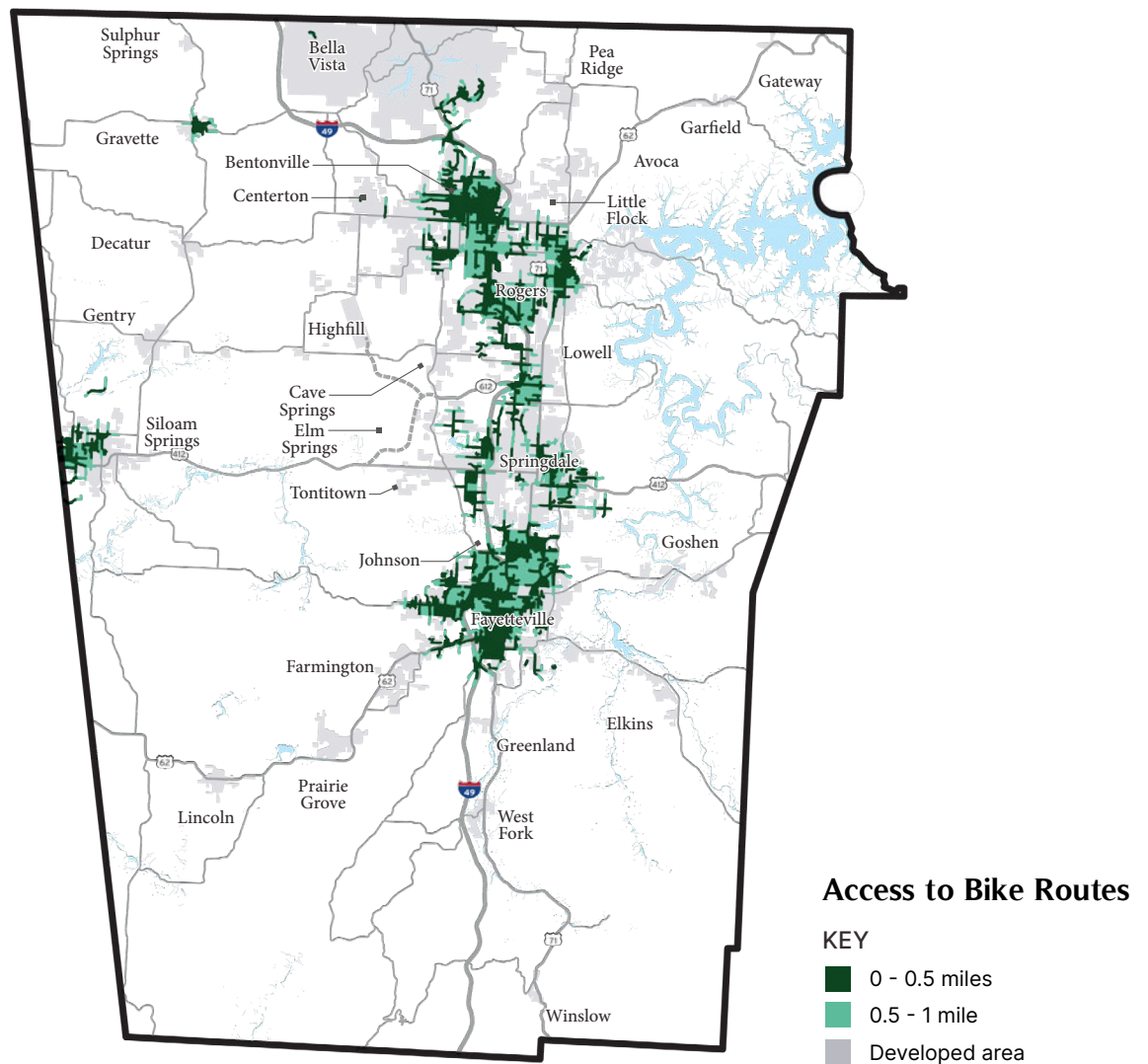
KEY Number of jobs per home in the city	
Dark Orange	2.0 + jobs
Orange	1.5 - 1.9 jobs
Light Orange	1.0 - 1.5 jobs
Light Blue	0.75 - 0.99 jobs
Medium Blue	0.25 - 0.75 jobs
Dark Blue	0 - 0.25 jobs

Annual Miles Driven Per Household



Source: Center for Neighborhood Technology's H+T Index

KEY	
Dark Orange	27,000 +
Orange	25,000 - 26,999
Light Orange	23,000 - 24,999
Light Blue	21,000 - 22,999
Medium Blue	19,000 - 20,999
Dark Blue	17,000 - 18,999
Very Light Blue	15,000 - 16,999
Lightest Blue	0 - 14,999



Source: NWARPC

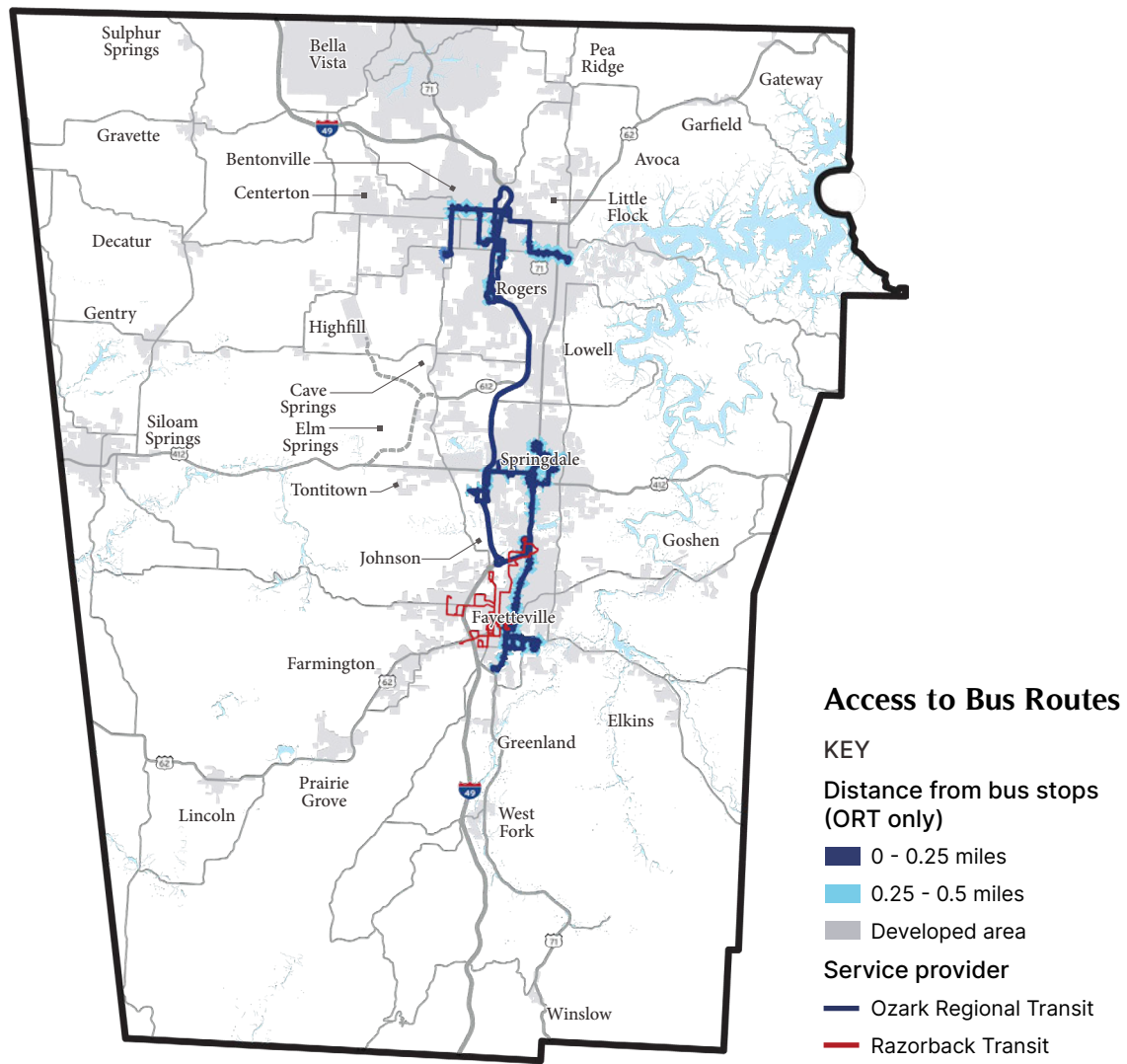
Bike Networks are Growing but Daily Use Remains Limited

Bike infrastructure is expanding across Northwest Arkansas, but daily use remains limited by how the region is built and connected. Routes are often not linked to daily destinations, and even strong networks cannot overcome long distances or indirect connections.

Cities like Fayetteville, Bentonville, Rogers, and Siloam Springs have built extensive networks, and the Razorback Greenway connects communities along the I-49 corridor, but infrastructure alone does not drive use. A 2023–24 analysis showed Rogers riders logged as much usage as Bentonville despite 70% fewer bike paths per capita. In Bella Vista, by

contrast, riders logged 60% fewer miles ridden than Rogers despite having about double the bike paths per capita. Land use and proximity are just as important for biking efficiency as cars. This is evident in the primarily recreational use of the Greenway and recent efforts by NWARPC to increase daily ridership through land use alignment and access to destinations.

Expanding bike networks and aligning land use can make biking more viable and reduce pressure on major roads. Across the country similar efforts are underway, facing increasing public pressure despite proven results. Bikes are a solution where land use is supportive.



Source: NWARPC, Ozark Regional Transit, Razorback Transit

Transit Access is Limited and Fragmented

Public transportation in Northwest Arkansas serves a limited share of the region and does not yet function as a connected system. Service is concentrated along the I-49 corridor, with separate city-based routes requiring transfers between systems. Most developed areas remain beyond a practical distance to access transit. Weekend service is limited, and while on-demand options exist, they lack the consistency and reliability of fixed routes.

Land-use patterns compound these challenges. Housing growth is occurring outside transit service areas, while western job centers remain

unserved. Even where transit exists, low-density and dispersed development limits ridership and efficiency. Much of the region is built at 30% or less of the 8–15 households per acre typically needed to support bus service. Razorback Transit provides more frequent service in Fayetteville, but primarily serves the University of Arkansas, limiting its broader regional impact.

Bus rapid transit along U.S. 71B would improve connections, but its success would depend on aligning housing, destinations, and service.

Growth Will Add Pressure to the Network

Projected growth across Northwest Arkansas is significant, but where that growth occurs will determine its impact on the transportation system. While some small cities outside the I-49 corridor are expected to grow at faster rates, they represent a relatively small share of total population increase. Most growth will continue to concentrate in large cities where jobs, services, and infrastructure are located.

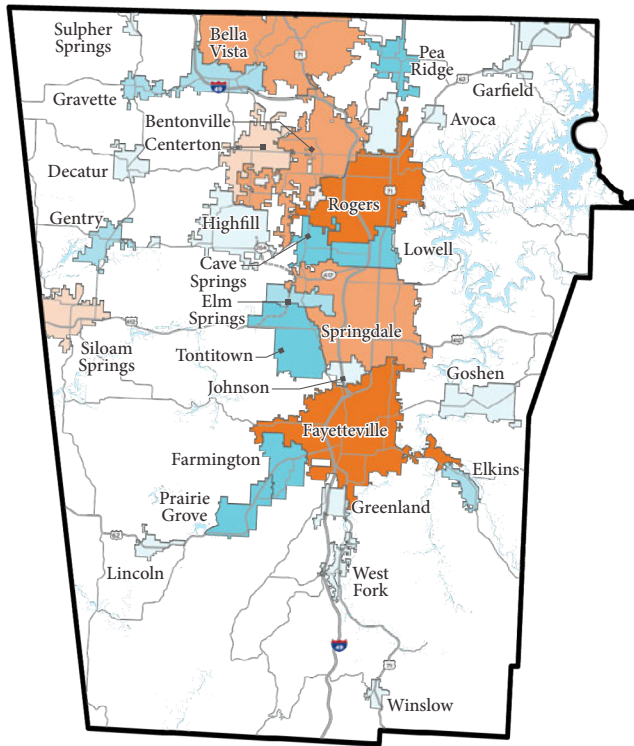
This distinction matters. High growth rates in smaller communities draw attention, but the majority of new residents will be added in places already experiencing the greatest transportation demand. Without changes to

how growth is distributed and connected, this will add more trips to an already stressed network. For public transportation, this reinforces the importance of aligning housing with existing and planned service, driving the ridership necessary to support operational budgets.

This pattern affects biking and walking as well; when homes and destinations are spread out, alternatives to driving are less viable. Growth will add pressure to strained systems, but it can support public transportation, biking, walking, and increase tax base if directed towards employment and transportation corridors.

Projected Growth in Population Per Year

Most important measure



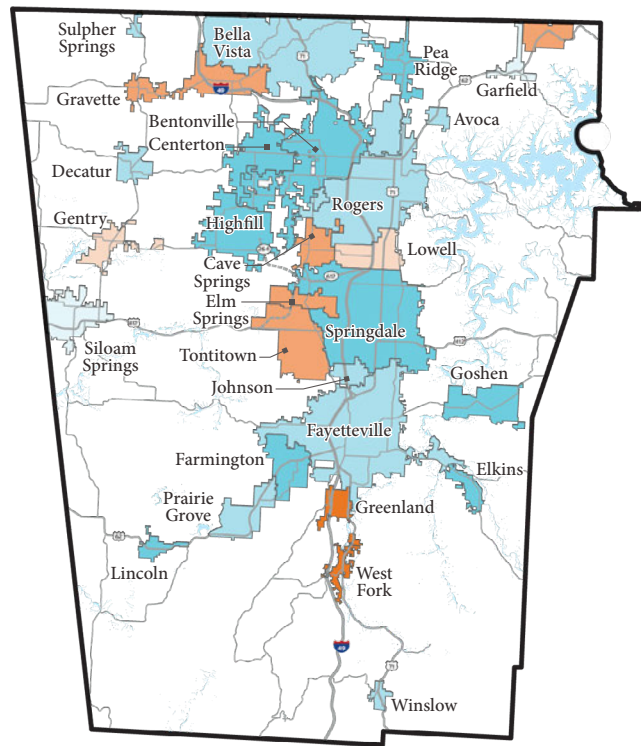
Source: NWARPC, Zimmerman/Volk Associates

KEY Yearly average population growth to 2050

1,000 + people	200 - 299 people
500 - 999 people	100 - 199 people
300 - 499 people	0 - 99 people

Projected Growth Rate Per Year

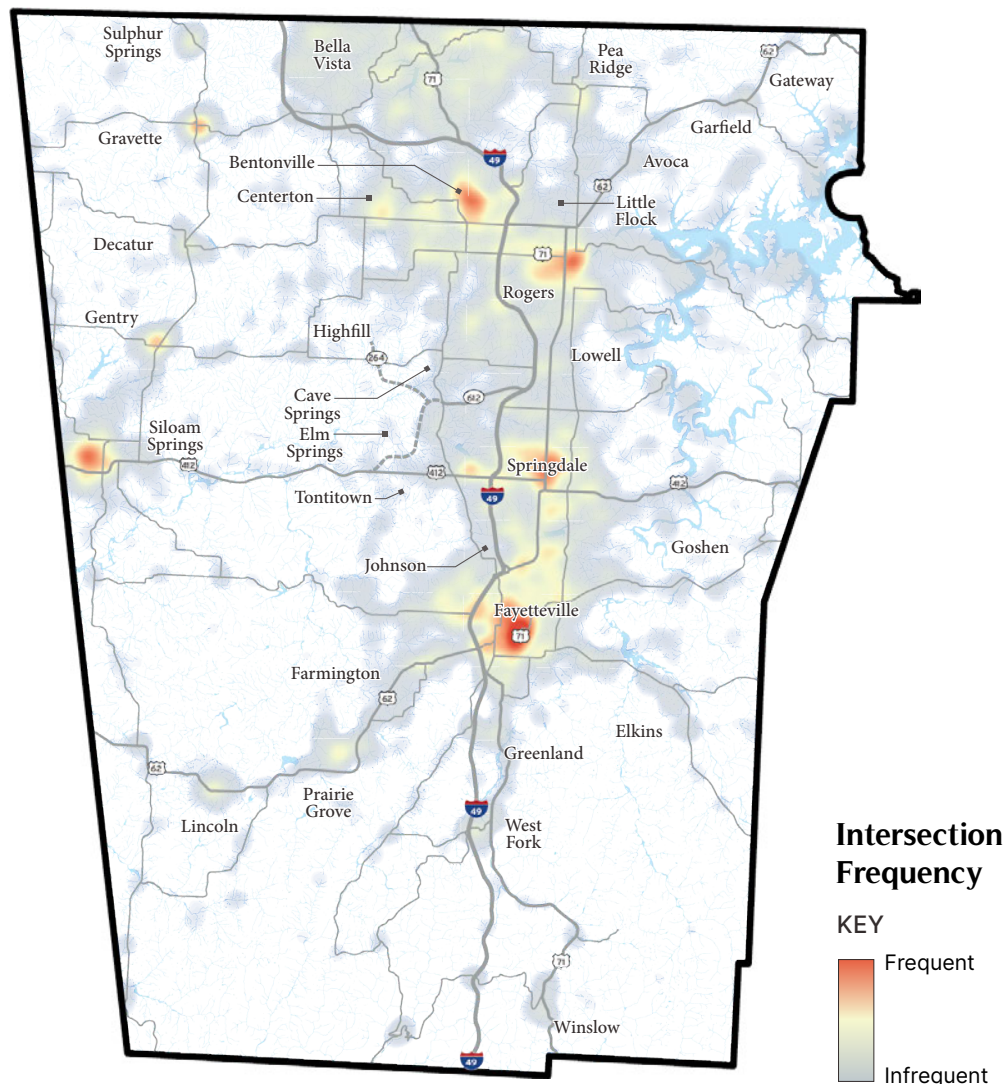
Less important measure



Source: NWARPC, Zimmerman/Volk Associates

KEY Yearly average population growth rate to 2050

15% +	6 - 8.9%
12 - 14.9%	3 - 5.9%
9 - 11.9%	0 - 2.9%



Source: Arkansas Department of Transportation

Where the Concerns Meet Reality

Across Northwest Arkansas, transportation challenges reflect how the region has grown. Intersection frequency reveals this pattern. Areas with more intersections have more connections, distributing trips across multiple routes. Each street shares a small portion of vehicle trips, at low speeds. Destinations are closer and bus stops are easier to access. These places result in less driving and lower household transportation costs: 22% of income in Pea Ridge compared with lower costs in Rogers (20%) and Fayetteville (19%).

Much of the region, however, has developed with fewer connections and infrequent intersections. This pattern concentrates traffic, increases crash risk, and reinforces longer, more expensive trips. Transportation costs rise, such as in Decatur (23% of income), Highfill (25%), and Elm Springs (27%). As growth continues, repeating this pattern will intensify these challenges. Reversing it by building connected networks and aligning land use with transportation is essential to improve mobility, safety, and affordability.

Transportation Strategies

STRATEGY T1

Build a More Connected Street Network

Add more crossings, connections, and routes so traffic is not forced onto just a few roads.

A resilient transportation system depends on multiple routes between destinations, not a handful of overloaded corridors. Expanding local connections, completing missing links, adding bridge crossings, and reserving future right-of-way allows cities and the region to create a network that distributes traffic rather than concentrating it. Redundancy improves emergency access, shortens everyday trips, and reduces pressure on major roads.

Prioritizing connectivity in funding decisions and subdivision standards ensures that new development strengthens the grid by adding connections to existing roads and future development sites, instead of limiting entrances and exits.





STRATEGY T2





Extend Walking and Biking Routes




Connect and expand sidewalk and bikeway networks so short trips are practical.

A connected walking and biking network allows many everyday trips to occur without driving, especially near schools, parks, downtowns, and job centers. Closing gaps in sidewalks, crossings, and bikeways creates routes that are safe, direct, and practical rather than fragmented. These connections improve safety, reduce short car trips, and expand access for all people.

Prioritizing network completion in funding decisions and coordinating improvements with roadway, utility, and redevelopment projects ensures that each investment builds toward a connected system over time.

ACTIONS	
T 1.1 	Adopt street connectivity standards. Require connected street patterns in new development.
T 1.2 	Fill street network gaps. Build missing links that create alternate routes between neighborhoods and destinations.
T 1.3 	Plan for an expanded network. Ensure new growth areas have frequent, well-connected local and regional corridors.
T 1.4 	Coordinate bridge and interchange improvements along I-49. Coordinate future crossing and interchange improvements with regional route planning and network gap analysis to distribute traffic along more connections.

ACTIONS	
T 2.1 	Connect regional active transportation priority plans. Identify key links that connect homes to schools, parks, transit, and centers between jurisdictions.
T 2.2 	Expand the regional greenway network. Connect regional greenways to more cities, neighborhoods, and destinations.
T 2.3 	Fill priority sidewalk and crossing gaps. Identify and fill high-priority pedestrian gaps, especially around schools, parks, and downtowns.
T 2.4 	Implement complete streets in local regulations. Update city roadway specifications, master street plans, and land use plans to implement the Regional Complete Streets Guide.

KEY  Not started  Planned / Portions started  In progress / Portions completed

STRATEGY T3

Expand Public Transportation Access

Create a regionally coordinated transit system that connects people to daily destinations.

A dependable transit system requires coordination, frequency, and strong connections to where people live and work. Establishing a frequent transit spine along U.S. 71B, supported by feeder routes, mobility hubs, and improved stops, creates a network that is easier to use and more reliable. Aligning governance, funding, and service standards allows transit to operate as a unified regional system.

Coordinating transit investment with land use, especially by focusing housing and destinations near major corridors and stops, strengthens ridership and supports long-term system expansion.





STRATEGY T4




Convert Corridors to Multiway Boulevards




Increase traffic capacity, tax base, and transit ridership through coordinated corridor design.

A high-functioning corridor can do more than move vehicles. Multiway boulevards separate through traffic from local access, improving flow while creating space for housing, businesses, and transit along the corridor. This approach increases capacity, supports transit ridership, and allows more development near jobs and services without extending infrastructure. It also strengthens the tax base by concentrating value in accessible locations.

Coordinating design and funding strategies between cities and between public and private sector partners creates a repeatable model that can be used to reimagine major regional routes, building upon standards already established in Rogers and Bentonville.

ACTIONS	
T 3.1 	Optimize transit governance. Reorganize regional transit operations and governance to increase efficiency and access.
T 3.2 	Build a frequent transit spine. Establish bus rapid transit service along U.S. 71B to serve as the centerpiece of an expanded public transportation network.
T 3.3 	Create mobility hubs and last-mile options. Make transfers easy and solve access gaps between bus stops and homes, jobs, and services.
T 3.4 	Expand feeder routes and flexible service. Improve access to the frequent network from neighborhoods and job areas outside of the primary transit corridor.

ACTIONS	
T 4.1 	Create multiway boulevard design guidelines. Develop repeatable designs for new multiway boulevards and retrofits for major arterials to increase housing and tax-productivity.
T 4.2 	Pilot corridor improvements. Redevelop and improve operations on one corridor segment at a time through coordinated public and private activities.
T 4.3 	Coordinate local policy and regional transportation priorities. Align local zoning and land development standards with major corridor redevelopment and support of regional transit and vehicle flow.

KEY  Not started  Planned / Portions started  In progress / Portions completed

STRATEGY T1

Build a More Connected Street Network

T 1.1 ADOPT STREET CONNECTIVITY STANDARDS

Require frequent street network connections in new development.

- **Develop a model connectivity standard.**
Recommend minimum intersection spacing and density, maximum block length, and cul-de-sac limits goals for local adoption.
- **Produce street connectivity guidelines.**
Provide city staff and applicants with clear examples of successful projects to reduce rework and clarify interpretations.
- **Support updates to city policies and regulations.**
Provide technical assistance to city staff in support of city zoning, land development, and master street plan updates.

T 1.2 FILL STREET NETWORK GAPS

Build missing links that unlock alternate routes between neighborhoods and destinations.

- **Develop a regional gap map and priority list.**
Coordinate with cities to map gaps in local, collector, and arterial networks, and develop a list of priority improvement based on regional mobility impact.
- **Secure network gap rights-of-way.**
Use dedication, easements, or purchase to secure needed rights-of-way to close network gaps to prevent missed opportunities, future delays, and cost increases.
- **Tie gap priorities to funding and work plans.**
Use the priority list to guide regional grants and coordinate with local capital improvement plans.

T 1.3 PLAN FOR AN EXPANDED NETWORK

Ensure new growth areas have frequent, well-connected local and regional corridors.

- **Develop a long-range transportation network plan in new growth areas.**
Coordinate with cities and counties to develop a regional plan to extend the network of major and minor corridor connections into future growth areas.
- **Secure future transportation network rights-of-way.**
Reserve easements and purchase rights-of-way to ensure the long-range transportation network is not interrupted.
- **Support updates to city policies and regulations.**
Provide technical assistance to city staff in support of master street plan updates to expand networks and integrate the Regional Complete Streets Guide.

T 1.4 COORDINATE BRIDGE AND INTERCHANGE IMPROVEMENTS ALONG I-49

Coordinate future crossing and interchange improvements with regional route planning and network gap analysis to distribute traffic along more connections.

- **Identify priority crossings.**

Develop a crossing and interchange improvement priority list, coordinated with regional route planning and network gaps.

- **Develop priority crossing concepts.**

Produce preliminary, repeatable designs for priority crossings and improvements, including cost estimates, timing, and funding strategies. Consider recent crossings built in Fayetteville, Rogers, and Springdale.

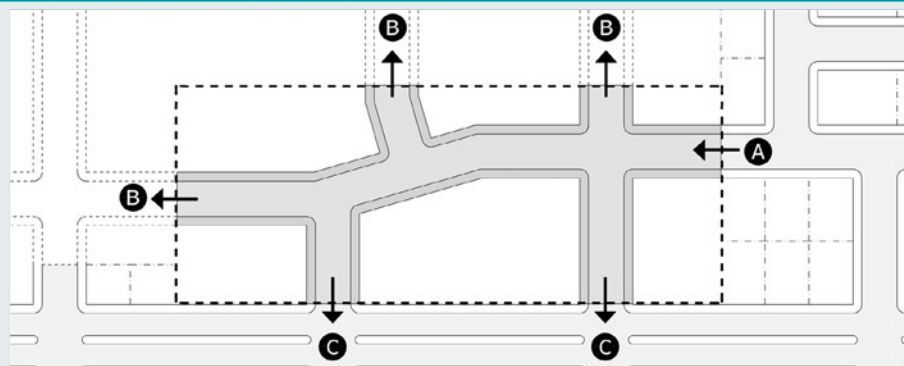
- **Tie funding to work plans.**

Use priority list to guide regional grants, partnerships, and state and federal advocacy.

Local Street Connections

Whether and how frequently new development projects connect to existing streets or provide for future street connections is determined by local land development rules. Connected networks of local streets provide multiple routes to reach destinations, for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians, reducing traffic on major roadways. Multiple routes also help emergency response, providing alternative options when streets are blocked or clogged. While existing residents often fear that connected streets will result in traffic and reduced safety, highly connected street networks result in fewer vehicle trips along most streets and can operate effectively at slower speeds. Street connection requirements such as those included in Bentonville's Community Code ensure that new growth areas will increase route options and support transportation choice.

FIGURE 5.3 EXTERNAL CONNECTIONS



A Street and trail stubs abutting site boundaries continued within the site.

B Street and trail stubs made to abutting properties.

C Street and trail stubs made to abutting streets, except where restricted by natural features.

Source: City of Bentonville, Community Code

STRATEGY T2

Make Walking and Biking Safe and Continuous

T 2.1 CONNECT REGIONAL ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PRIORITY PLANS

Identify key links that connect homes to schools, parks, transit, and centers between jurisdictions.

- **Coordinate existing active transportation plans.**
Compile bike and pedestrian plans across communities and coordinate inter-jurisdictional connections and regional routes.
- **Map missing sidewalks, crossings, and bikeway gaps.**
Create a prioritized list of active transportation network gaps across regional jurisdictions.
- **Tie gap priorities to funding and work plans.**
Use the priority list to guide regional grants and coordinate with local capital improvement plans.

T 2.2 EXPAND THE REGIONAL GREENWAY NETWORK

Connect regional greenways to more cities, neighborhoods, and destinations.

- **Coordinate greenway expansion with a future blueway network.**
See Infrastructure & Stormwater for the recommended blueway network. Expand the greenway network along regional blueways.
- **Continue current greenway efforts.**
Extend access to the Razorback Greenway, coordinate land use, integrate stormwater, and expand routes. Efforts in progress.

T 2.3 CONNECT SCHOOLS, PARKS, AND CENTERS

Identify and fill high-priority pedestrian gaps, especially around schools, parks, and downtowns.

- **Launch a Healthy Schools and Parks program.**
Modeled on “safe routes to schools,” coordinate cities, school districts, and parks on priority routes and features.
- **Identify high-priority gaps around schools, parks, and centers.**
Coordinate with Safe Routes to School programs and Vision Zero initiatives to create a priority list of connections for access to Healthy Schools and Parks.
- **Establish tactical urbanism programs.**
Develop model policies and programs, and connect advocates to expand the safe implementation of community-priority safety projects.
- **Tie to funding and work plans.**
Prioritize Safe Routes to School and Healthy Schools and Parks priorities in regional grants and coordinate with local capital improvement plans.

T 2.4 IMPLEMENT COMPLETE STREETS IN LOCAL REGULATIONS

Update city roadway specifications, master street plans, and land use plans to implement the Regional Complete Streets Guide.

- **Update local plans and policies to implement Regional Complete Streets.**

Support city staff with standards, regulatory approaches, examples, and communications materials to assist in local implementation of the Regional Complete Streets Guide.

STRATEGY T3

Expand Public Transportation Access

T 3.1 OPTIMIZE TRANSIT GOVERNANCE

Reorganize regional transit operations and governance to increase efficiency and access.

- **Develop a new governance structure.**

Convene operators and authorities to design a new governance model, addressing funding, operations, maintenance, modes, and routes.

- **Update interlocal agreements.**

Revise interlocal agreements to support the new operational model, authorities, financing, and the role of cities, operators, and authorities.

- **Develop coordinated service branding.**

Brand future services — rapid transit, secondary routes, on-demand service, last-mile — with coordinated marks, names, and other communications and visual standards.

- **Consolidate fare and route tracking systems.**

Consolidate passes, fare collection, route tracking, notifications, and last-mile services in a single system for rider convenience.

T 3.2 BUILD A FREQUENT TRANSIT SPINE

Establish bus rapid transit service along U.S. 71B to serve as the centerpiece of an expanded public transportation network.

- **Develop a frequent transit corridor plan.**

Specify station locations, station design, traffic operations, and general corridor improvements, phasing, and costs.

- **Create station area guidelines.**

Guide land use, zoning, and mobility improvements for frequent transit stations areas to support access and ridership.

- **Support updates to city policies and regulations.**

Support local implementation of station area guideline in local zoning, land use, master street plans, transportation, and city policies, along with transit phasing.

- **Establish frequent transit service.**

Secure funding and establish service along the frequent transit spine.

T 3.3 CREATE MOBILITY HUBS AND LAST-MILE OPTIONS

Make transfers easy and solve access gaps between bus stops and homes, jobs, and services.

- **Develop a mobility hub and last-mile plan.**
Identify locations and routes to close access gaps between bus stops, neighborhoods, downtowns, campuses, hospitals, transfers, and bikeways.
- **Implement pilot projects.**
Secure sponsorship and funding to implement 1 or 2 pilot last-mile mobility hubs to test and demonstrate effectiveness.
- **Coordinate last-mile programs.**
Work with cities, transit operators, and last-mile sponsors to develop best practices and shared policies to support mobility hub and last-mile plan implementation.
- **Establish a mobility hub partnership program.**
Secure corporate and municipal sponsorship for hubs and equipment, and establish pass and fair reduction programs with employers, schools, and institutions.

T 3.4 EXPAND FEEDER ROUTES AND FLEXIBLE SERVICE

Improve access to the frequent transit spine from neighborhoods and job areas outside of the primary corridor.

- **Develop a secondary transit network plan.**
Identify and prioritize phased fixed and on-demand service routes that connect job centers, hospitals, campuses, and cities that are not proximate to the primary corridor.
- **Create secondary transit corridor guidelines.**
Guide land use, zoning, and mobility improvements for secondary transit routes and stops to support access and ridership.
- **Support updates to city policies and regulations.**
Support local implementation of station area guideline in local zoning, land use, master street plans, transportation, and city policies, along with transit phasing.
- **Expand operations.**
Follow secondary transit plan phasing to establish secondary service when the frequent transit spine is operational.

STRATEGY T4

Convert Corridors to Multiway Boulevards

T 4.1 CREATE MAJOR CORRIDOR DESIGN GUIDELINES

Develop repeatable designs for new multiway boulevards and retrofits for major arterials to increase housing and tax-productivity.

- **Draft a list of existing priority corridors.**
Determine which major corridors will begin design within the next 10 years.
- **Develop major corridor design guidelines.**
Provide designs for different land use contexts that balance mobility, access, and land use productivity for typical existing and future corridors.
- **Study the performance of alternative designs.**
Evaluate design alternatives for multiple corridors, comparing future performance for: life-cycle financing, traffic safety and capacity, and public health.

T 4.2 PILOT CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS

Redevelop and improve operations on one corridor segment at a time through coordinated public and private activities.

- **Pilot corridor retrofits.**
Retrofit key corridor segments, coordinating transportation, utility, zoning, development, and site engineering practices.
- **Document regional case studies.**
Show the impact of improvements and use lessons learned to improve future projects.

T 4.3 COORDINATE LOCAL POLICY AND REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

Align local zoning and land development standards with major corridor redevelopment and support of regional transit and vehicle flow.

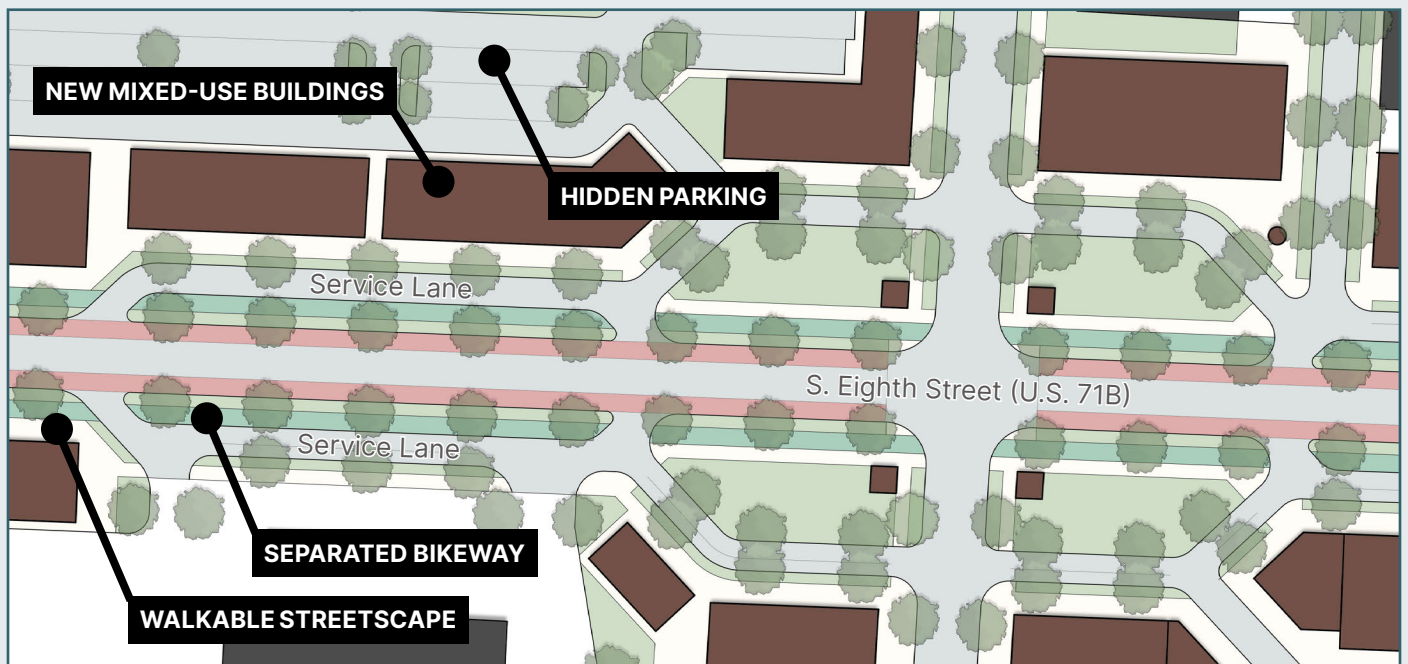
- **Develop cost, lifecycle, and impact criteria.**
Use simple long-term cost and multimodal impact estimates to compare projects fairly.
- **Update TIP scoring criteria.**
Reward connectivity, safety, multimodal access, and land use compatibility over widening alone.



Multiway Boulevards

Multiway boulevards are presented throughout the Regional Growth Strategy in illustrations and plans. DPZ CoDesign utilized multiway boulevards to envision how U.S. 71B could be the heart of a walkable transit corridor in Rogers, depicted here, as well as U.S. 62 in Prairie Grove. This street type accommodates both the high-volume and long-distance traffic needs of major regional arterials and the slow-speed and high-frequency access needs of walkable neighborhoods and districts. This is an important consideration for U.S. 71B which must balance regional traffic volume and bus rapid transit in the future while also being a pleasant location for housing.

Bus routes, especially rapid routes, require certain minimum thresholds of housing density near stops. Presently the region's housing density along the corridor is less than half that is required. This document provides strategies to plan for, finance, and build the housing and business density needed to support bus rapid transit. Multiway boulevard options should be investigated for the U.S. 71B corridor and other regional arterials in order to support traffic flow, transit, growth, and an increased tax base. Rogers and Bentonville have taken steps to support multiway boulevards. This report recommends collaborative steps towards regional models.



Transportation Examples

Wake County, NC Transit Plan

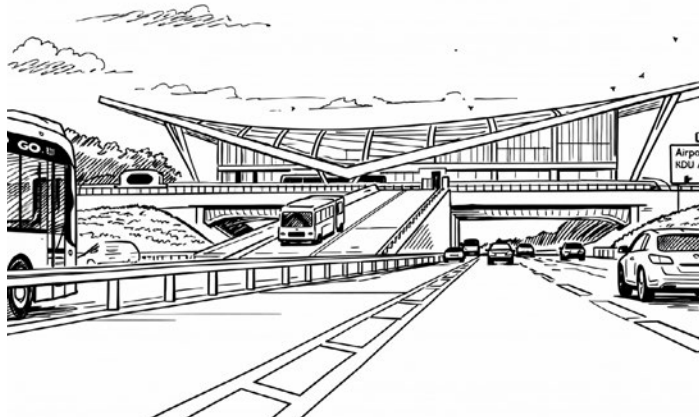
Location: Wake County, North Carolina

Participants: County, MPO, Transit Agencies

Topics: Transportation, Funding, BRT

Information: [GoTriangle Transit Plan](#)

Year: 2016-Current



The Wake County Transit Plan is a long-term strategy to expand and coordinate public transportation across the Raleigh–Wake County region. Adopted in 2016 by the Wake County Board of Commissioners, CAMPO, and GoTriangle, the plan is supported by voter-approved funding and updated every four years.

Key partners include Wake County, GoTriangle, GoRaleigh, and other municipal systems. The plan aims to improve mobility, expand access, and provide more frequent, reliable service through investments in bus service, bus rapid transit, commuter rail planning, and transit-supportive infrastructure. Since implementation began in 2017, the program has expanded service hours, increased frequency, and advanced major transit projects county-wide.

Broward County, FL Complete Streets Retrofit Program

Location: Broward County, Florida

Participants: Broward MPO, FDOT, Municipalities

Topics: Transportation, Regional Networks

Information: [Broward MPO](#)

Year: 2009-Current



Broward County's Complete Streets Retrofit Program is a coordinated effort to transform auto oriented roadways into safer, multimodal corridors. Led by Broward County with the Broward MPO, FDOT, Broward County Transit, and local municipalities, the program embeds Complete Streets principles into planning, design standards, and capital investment decisions.

The initiative focuses on reducing traffic injuries, improving pedestrian and bicycle access, strengthening transit connections, and prioritizing safety on high crash corridors. Adoption of countywide design guidelines and the 2019 Complete Streets Master Plan directs funding to priority projects. More than \$300 million has been invested, while quick build "BTactical" pilots have produced measurable safety improvements and earned recognition for suburban roadway retrofit leadership.

St. Louis, MO Brickline Greenway I-64 Crossing

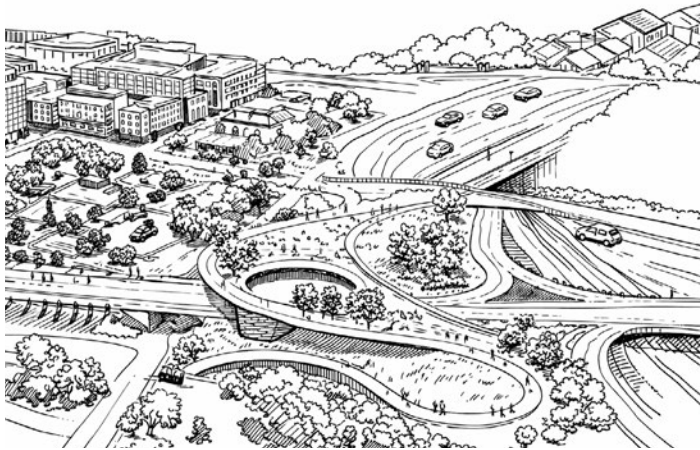
Location: St. Louis, Missouri

Participants: Great Rivers Greenway, City, MoDOT

Topics: Transportation, I-49 Crossings

Information: [Brickline RAISE Grant](#)

Year: 2022-Current



The Brickline Greenway I-64 Crossing is a key segment of St. Louis's broader Brickline Greenway initiative, led by Great Rivers Greenway in partnership with the City of St. Louis, MoDOT, and federal agencies. The larger project envisions a 10-mile network connecting 14 neighborhoods and major destinations. The I-64 Crossing will construct a dedicated pedestrian and bicycle bridge spanning Interstate 64, linking Midtown destinations including Saint Louis University and the Grand MetroLink station.

A feasibility study was completed in 2022, and the project secured \$9.9 million in federal Reconnecting Communities funding in 2024. Currently in design, the crossing aims to improve safety, repair historic neighborhood divisions, and expand multimodal access across a major highway barrier.

Tucson–Pima County, AZ Regional Transportation Authority

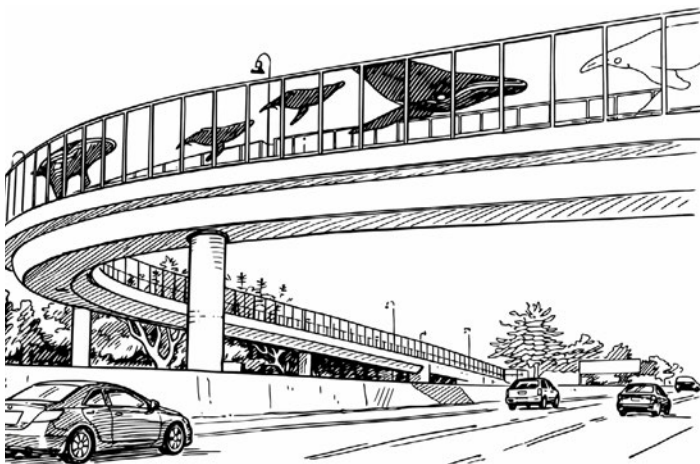
Location: Tucson–Pima Metro, Arizona

Participants: Local Governments, AZDOT, Pima Associations of Governments

Topics: Transportation, Funding

Information: [Tucson-Pima RTA](#)

Year: 2006-Current



The Tucson–Pima County Regional Transportation Authority is a regional transportation initiative funded through a 20-year, voter-approved half-cent sales tax. The RTA coordinates major transportation projects across the Tucson metropolitan area, working with the Pima Association of Governments, Pima County, the City of Tucson, surrounding municipalities, the Arizona Department of Transportation, and tribal governments.

The program aims to improve mobility, reduce congestion, expand transit options, and enhance bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure while supporting economic development and environmental goals. The RTA has funded over \$1.6 billion in improvements and more than 1,000 projects, including major corridor upgrades, intersection improvements, and transit investments such as the Sun Link streetcar.



Imagined natural stormwater system integrated with parks, neighborhoods, and active transportation.

Infrastructure & Stormwater

Align infrastructure investment, governance, and growth across Northwest Arkansas to deliver reliable service, manage long-term costs, and support resilient, connected communities at a regional scale.

If accomplished, the goals below will allow Northwest Arkansas to expand on the infrastructure systems that already exist in the region, increasing reliability and resilience.



Manage infrastructure as regional systems.

Align planning, funding, and operations across jurisdictions to reflect how infrastructure systems function regionally, reducing duplication, improving cost efficiency, and protecting downstream conditions.



Standardize infrastructure operations, maintenance, and specifications.

Coordinate service levels, design expectations, and performance benchmarks so residents and businesses experience reliable infrastructure, reducing service disruptions and unplanned costs.



Align growth with infrastructure capacity.

Direct growth to areas where infrastructure capacity exists or can be efficiently expanded, reducing development delays, avoiding system extensions for inefficient development patterns, and stabilizing long-term utility rates.



Manage stormwater for shared regional benefits.

Manage waterways and stormwater at the watershed scale, aligning flood mitigation, water quality, and coordinated regional storage to reduce downstream impacts and create multi-benefit stormwater and recreation corridors.



Sustain infrastructure as long-term assets.

Shift from reactive repair to regular maintenance and long-term management, ensuring upgrades to existing systems are financially sustainable.

Without coordinated infrastructure investment and management, costs will rise, service reliability will diverge between communities, and growth will outpace system capacity, increasing long-term fiscal and environmental risk.

Infrastructure Concerns

Capacity constraints, rising costs, and increasing risk reflect infrastructure management that is not regionally scaled.

Northwest Arkansas already functions as a shared infrastructure system. Water is sourced, treated, and distributed across city boundaries. Wastewater capacity in one community affects what can be built in another. Stormwater moves across entire watersheds, linking upstream and downstream conditions. Solid waste systems, utilities, and transportation corridors all operate at a regional scale, even when planning and funding remain local.

The challenge is not a lack of investment or capability, but how decisions are made. Infrastructure planning, expansion, and maintenance remain organized city by city

and utility by utility, even as growth continues to connect these systems physically and financially. As development spreads across Benton and Washington counties, each extension of infrastructure adds long-term obligations that extend beyond jurisdictional lines and compound future costs.

The pages that follow examine how this misalignment shapes system performance. They highlight where fragmented governance, uneven standards, and disconnected investment decisions increase costs, strain capacity, and limit the region's ability to align infrastructure with growth.

One Region, Many Systems



Growth across Northwest Arkansas is reshaping natural systems and rural areas. As development expands, it alters watersheds, increases runoff, and places pressure on waterways, open space, and the rural landscapes that define the region's character. These impacts extend beyond city limits, affecting downstream conditions and overall system health.

Much of the region's development has merged into a continuous system, with neighborhoods and infrastructure connecting across jurisdictions. Yet water, wastewater, and stormwater systems are still planned city by city, disconnected from the landscapes they affect. Fragmented management increases costs, reduces efficiency, and increases strain on both built and natural systems.

Regional Systems, Fragmented Service

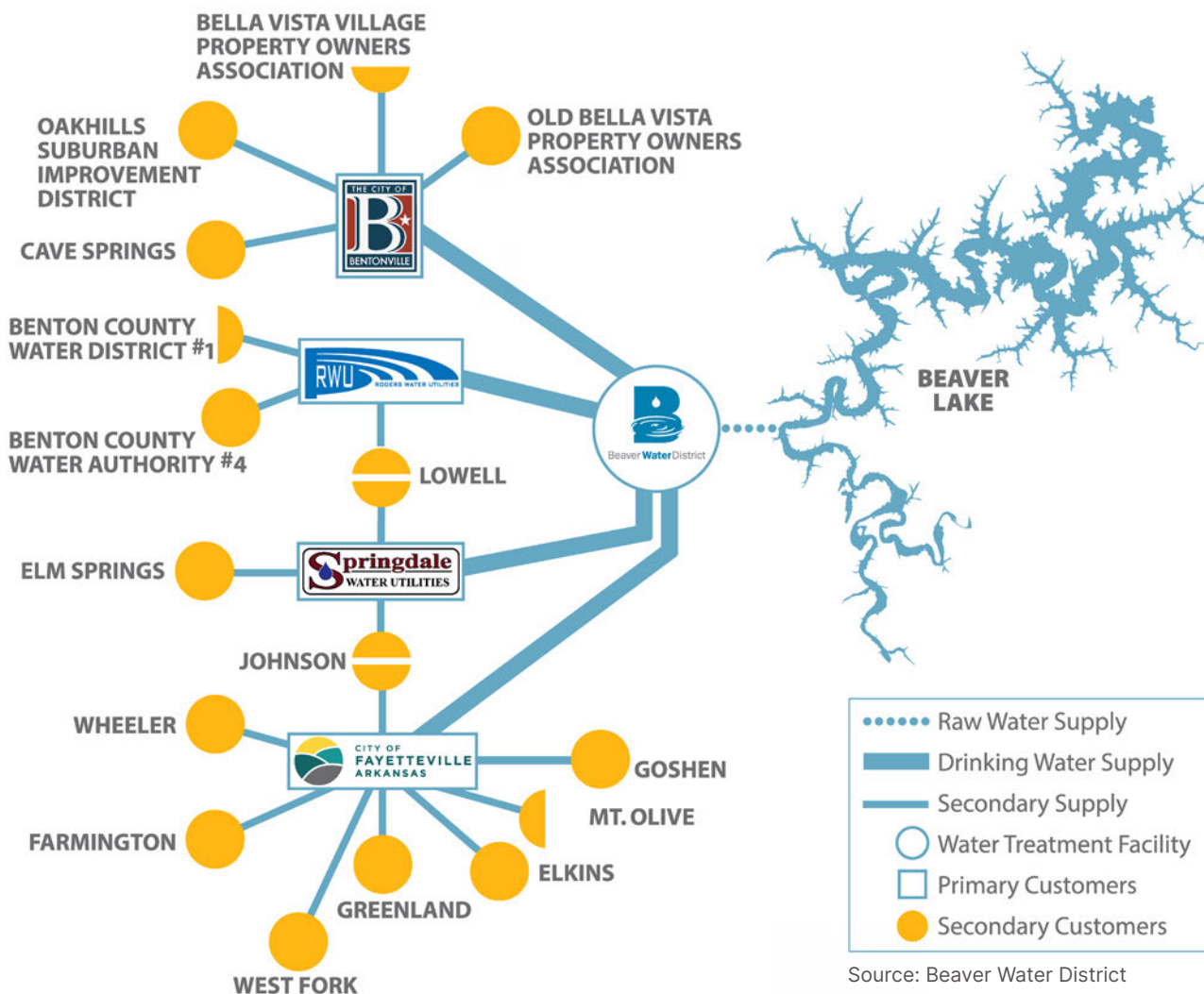
Utility systems operate across jurisdictional boundaries, even when management does not. While water and sewer districts may serve individual cities, supply sources, treatment facilities, and outfalls are often shared. With continued regional growth, these artificial boundaries introduce inefficiencies and begin to shape where and how development occurs.

The planning decisions in one city don't consistently assess the impact of those decisions in downstream cities, and that pattern repeats itself over and over in Northwest Arkansas. Investments in one jurisdiction, such as sewer upgrades, may run into capacity limits in another. In Rogers, limited city sewer

access restricted housing density near a major employment hub in Bentonville, despite nearby sewer from another provider. By coordinating land use planning between cities, sewer access was prioritized to support more housing near jobs. This situation highlights how fragmented systems can limit growth in logical locations.

Water distribution reflects similar patterns, with larger cities supplying smaller ones based on historic growth. Today, communities along the I-49 corridor are physically connected, yet systems and decision-making remain fragmented—reducing efficiency, increasing costs, and influencing growth in ways that can conflict with regional priorities.

Beaver Water District Drinking Water Distribution



Source: Beaver Water District

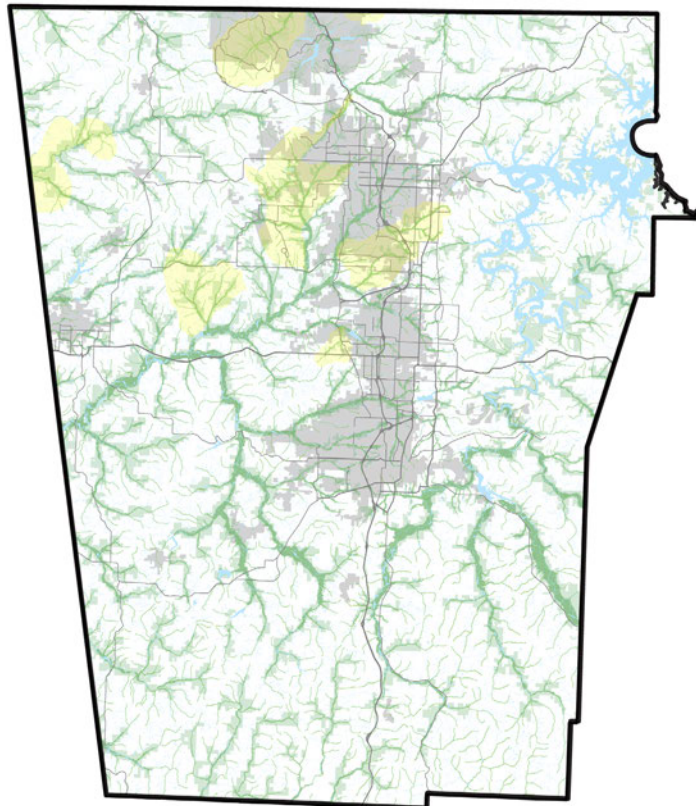
Growth, Capacity, and Connections Out of Sync

Wastewater capacity across Northwest Arkansas reflects a system shaped by rapid growth, complex geography, and fragmented service delivery. Treatment flows discharge into four primary watersheds—Beaver Lake, Elk River, Illinois River, and Lower Neosho—with the Illinois River carrying the largest share. This pattern is not accidental. Much of the region’s population is concentrated along a north–south ridge, where water flows north, east, and west into different basins. Some cities discharge wastewater into multiple watersheds as a result. The Beaver Lake watershed, which serves as the region’s primary drinking water source, has limited treatment outflows, but advances in wastewater treatment technology make it more practicable for Beaver Lake to receive additional treated wastewater.

The chart on the following page illustrates how capacity and growth are increasingly out of sync. Some cities, including Springdale and Fayetteville, retain available treatment capacity in areas well-positioned near jobs and major transportation corridors. Others are nearing or exceeding limits. Bentonville, for example, is addressing both treatment capacity and upstream constraints in pipes and lift stations through a \$239 million expansion. In several cities, capacity constraints have led to development moratoriums in recent years, slowing housing construction and growth.

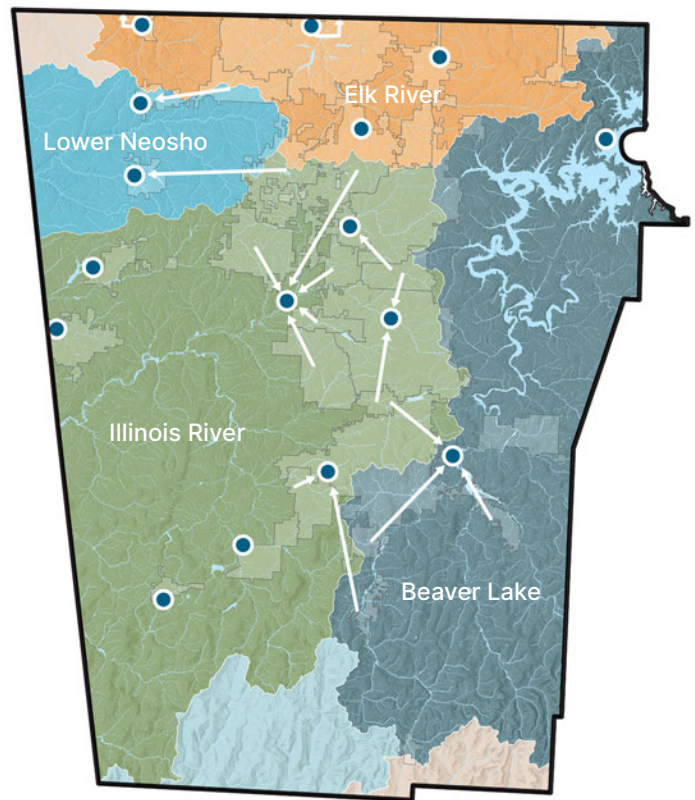
Capacity challenges extend beyond treatment plants. In many areas, sewer lines and lift stations are too small to accommodate projected growth, limiting how much wastewater can reach existing facilities.

Urbanized Area and Waterways



KEY ■ Drainage Way ■ Karst ■ Developed Area

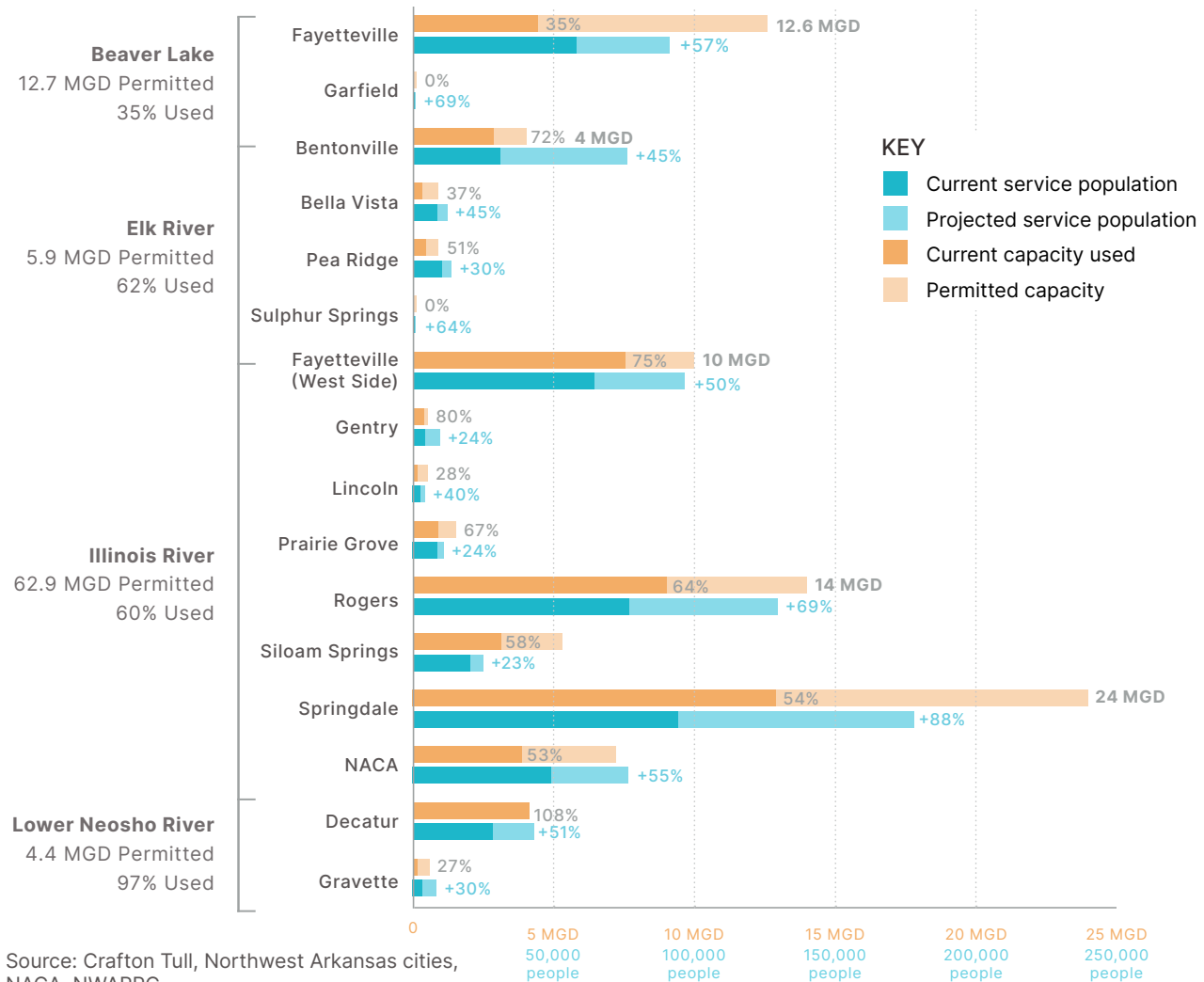
Watersheds and Wastewater Flows



KEY ● Treatment plant ← Cross-jurisdictional flow

Source: Crafton Tull, Northwest Arkansas cities, NACA, NWARPC

Wastewater Treatment Capacity and Anticipated Service Demand Growth

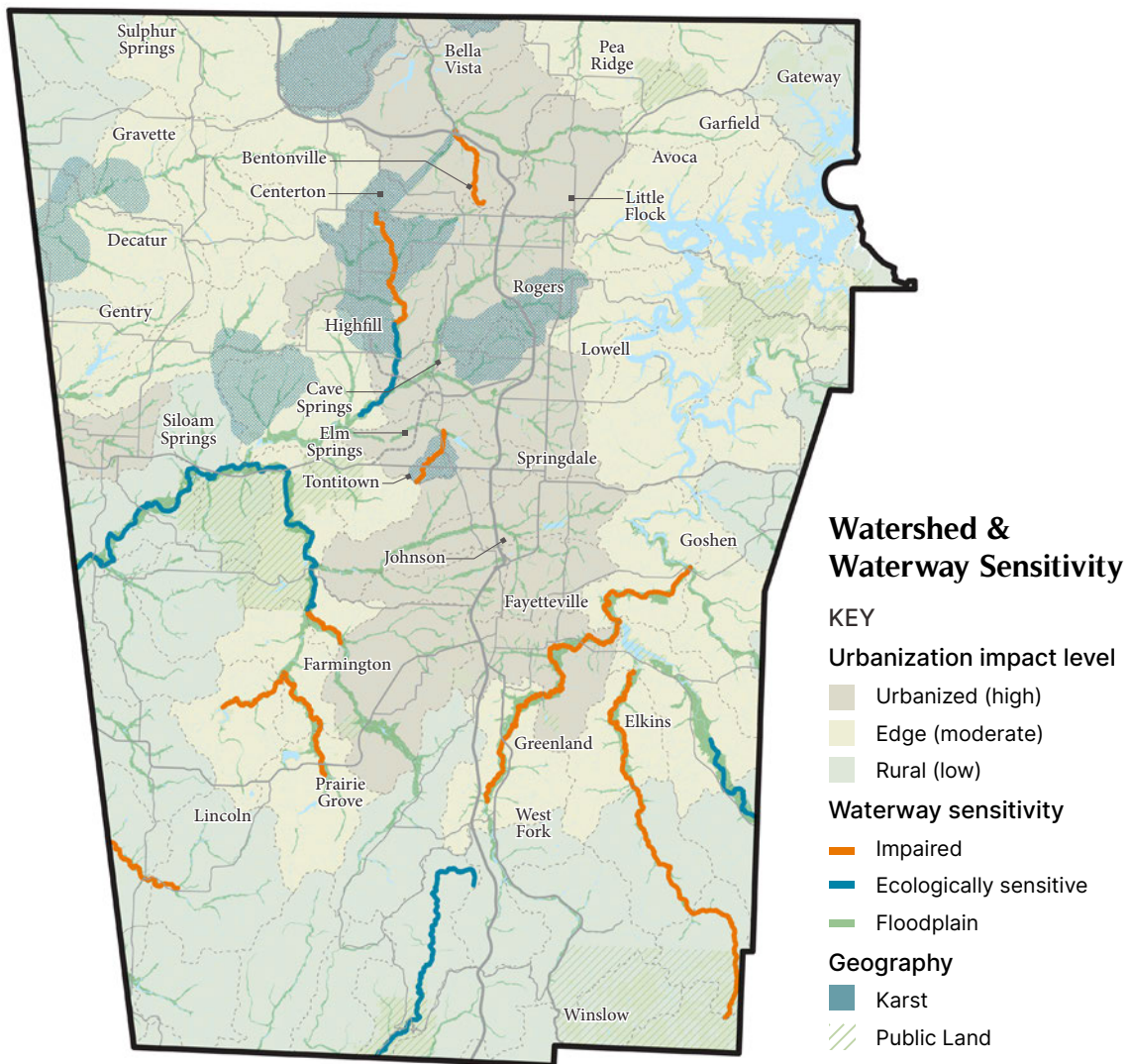


In some cases, wastewater is routed inefficiently across jurisdictions to reach distant plants due to legacy service agreements and boundaries. At the same time, regional assets such as the Northwest Arkansas Conservation Authority, designed to accommodate growth in multiple cities, operate well below capacity because of access limitations and fragmented service areas. Smaller cities in northwest Benton County have begun exploring shared service models, recognizing the inefficiencies of maintaining separate systems.

These conditions highlight a broader structural issue. Infrastructure is interconnected, but planning and investment remain localized. With systemwide wastewater needs estimated at \$2 billion or more, costs are rising as cities respond independently rather than collectively.

Investments are often reactive, timed to immediate constraints rather than long-term regional performance. A more integrated, aligned approach would improve efficiency, reduce costs, and better position Northwest Arkansas to support growth.

After the work on this Regional Growth Strategy started, the Northwest Arkansas Council and regional leaders in partnership with the State of Arkansas began pursuing a study focused entirely on regional wastewater infrastructure. That study's findings won't be known until later this year. Preliminary analysis supports the recommendations of this report: wastewater is one of the areas where Northwest Arkansas could see some of the highest cost savings and significant overall benefits by pursuing more regional solutions.



Source: Crafton Tull, NWARPC, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality

Stormwater Pressures are Increasing Across the Region

Stormwater challenges are intensifying as development expands and impervious surfaces increase. Many older areas were built before modern stormwater standards, with limited consideration for how runoff accumulates across entire watersheds. The map highlights streams that have become degraded over time, reflecting the need to collectively manage, treat, and slow stormwater.

In Northwest Arkansas, urbanized areas require stormwater system improvements and green infrastructure to address existing runoff, while rapidly developing areas need coordinated standards to prevent future impacts. The map also identifies sensitive karst areas in Benton

County, where subsurface conditions make water quality protection critical.

Current approaches often manage stormwater at the site level, missing cumulative impacts. Without coordination, runoff increases flooding, erosion, and strain on downstream systems. Watershed protection organizations such as the Illinois River Watershed Partnership and Beaver Watershed Alliance can contribute to watershed-focused stormwater solutions.

A watershed-based approach—aligning land use, infrastructure, and natural systems—can improve water quality, reduce risk, and support more resilient, systemwide performance.

Misaligned Standards and Expectations

Infrastructure across Northwest Arkansas is designed and operated under varying standards depending on jurisdiction, utility, or provider. Differences in pipe sizing, stormwater requirements, and utility placement create inconsistencies that complicate development and long-term operations. What is permitted in one city may not align with adjacent systems, even when serving the same market. Some cities also rely on multiple providers for the same service—such as water and wastewater in Johnson or electricity in Rogers and Fayetteville—adding further complexity.

Most developers work across multiple cities, making inconsistent requirements a significant challenge in permitting and construction. In some cases, utility standards are not aligned

with development regulations, creating delays, added costs, and business risk. Development impact fees illustrate this variation: cities like Bentonville include most categories, while others, such as Johnson, have none. These differences not only complicate development but can influence where growth occurs. Every developer has an opinion about which Northwest Arkansas cities are best to work in, and it's often related to requirements, rules, and varying expectations from city to city.

Best practices emphasize standardization where systems function regionally. Consistent design and service expectations reduce cost, improve coordination, and support long-term system performance.

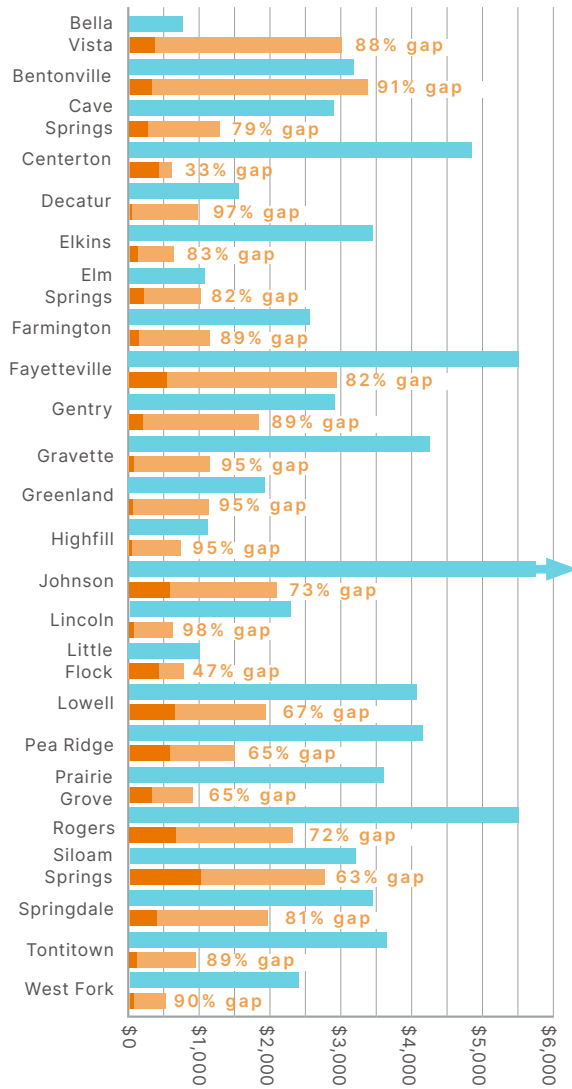
Development Impact Fees

	Fire	Police	Parks	Library	Sewer	Water	Storm	Streets
Bella Vista	◆	◆		◆				
Bentonville	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆		
Cave Springs					◆	◆		
Centerton	◆	◆	◆					◆
Decatur								
Elkins	◆	◆			◆	◆		
Elm Springs					◆	◆		
Farmington					◆			
Fayetteville	◆	◆			◆	◆		
Gentry					◆	◆		
Gravette								
Highfill			◆		◆	◆		
Lowell	◆							
Pea Ridge					◆	◆		
Prairie Grove	◆	◆						
Rogers					◆	◆		
Siloam Springs								◆
Springdale					◆	◆		
Tontitown	◆	◆			◆	◆		◆

Fees differ between cities across Northwest Arkansas which can influence where growth occurs, often at the expense of long-term infrastructure maintenance and city service delivery. The chart above illustrates variability of fees from city-to-city. Information was gathered in 2025 and is subject to change.

Source: Northwest Arkansas cities

Tax Revenue and Annualized Road Maintenance Spending Gap

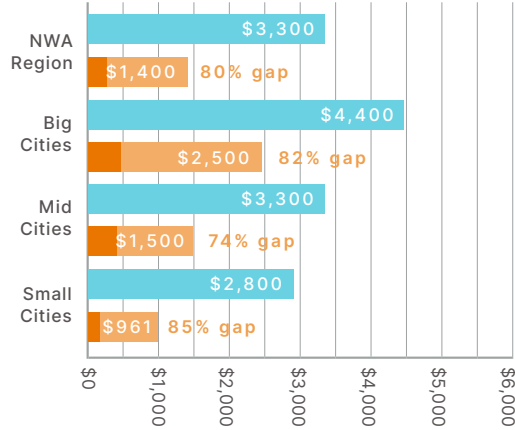


KEY

All measures are per developed acre

- Tax revenue
- Road spending
- Annualized road spending needs

Regional averages



Urban3 compared city budgets to the annualized lifecycle maintenance costs of roadways in each jurisdiction and found that most cities fund 20% or less of what is needed. Roads typically last 50 to 70 years before full reconstruction, but their condition depends heavily on consistent upkeep. Regular maintenance extends the life of the asset, preserves performance, and can reduce total lifecycle costs by roughly 20% compared to deferred maintenance.

Source: Urban3, Crafton Tull, Northwest Arkansas cities, Arkansas State Auditor, tax assessors in Benton and Washington counties

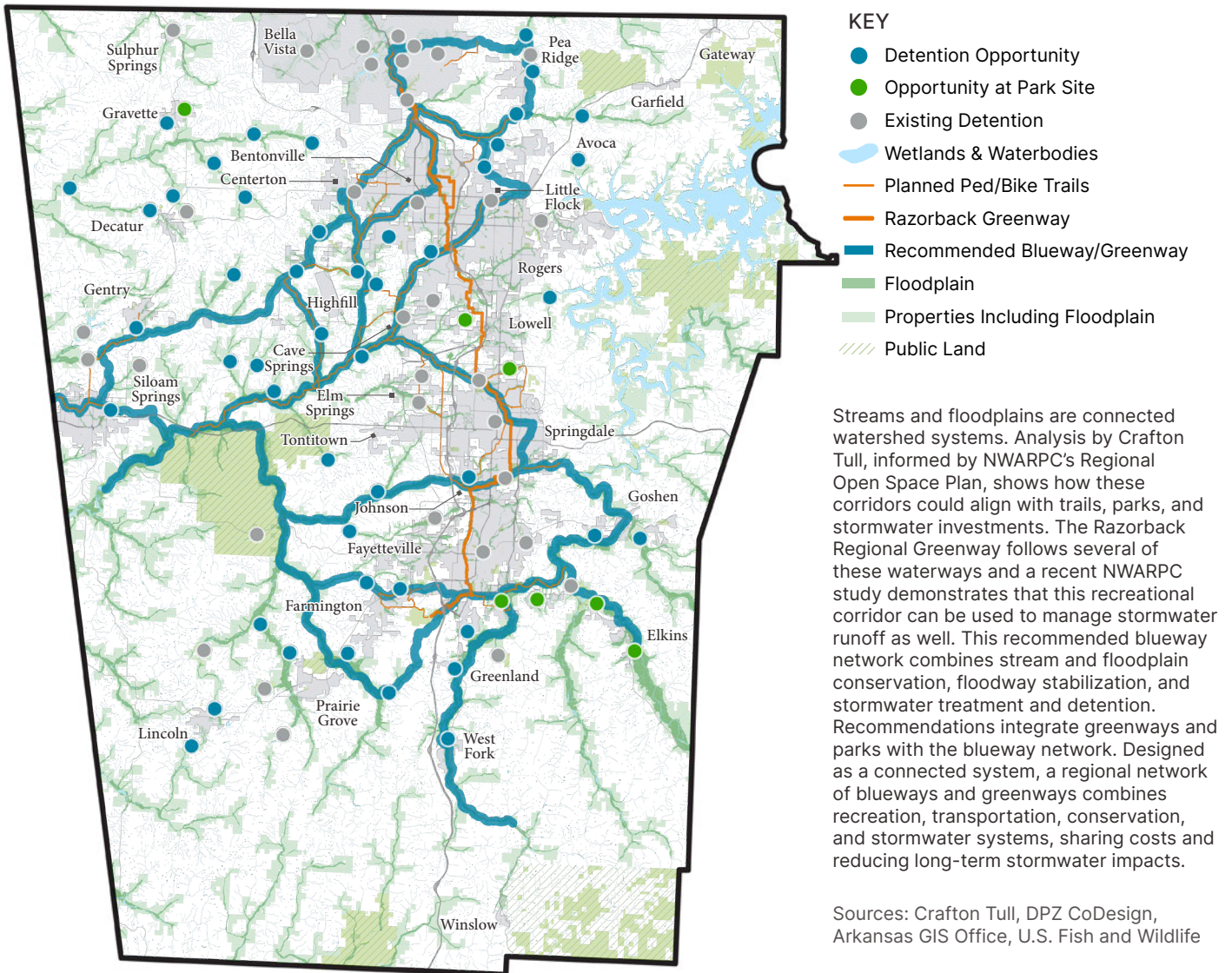
Where Concerns Meet Reality

Infrastructure across Northwest Arkansas is expanding to support growth while older systems are neglected. Recent investments in Bentonville highlight the maintenance needs of aging infrastructure, including water system losses leading to inefficiencies—a growing concern as systems reach their end of life.

This creates a compounding challenge. Expansion adds long-term obligations, while maintenance competes for funding. When upkeep falls behind, small issues lead to reactive repairs that are more costly and disruptive. Across systems—roads, water, sewer, power, and stormwater—backlogs are growing. Using roadway spending as a

proxy, cities fund only about 20% of lifecycle maintenance needs, leaving an 80% gap regionwide. This pattern is common across the country where new growth is prioritized over maintenance. Currently, Portland, Ore., is planning to charge residents an annual roadway maintenance fee to close funding gaps, a measure other communities are likely to follow.

Growth does not fully cover these long-term costs. Instead, it often extends compounding future liabilities. Without proactive planning and reinvestment, reliability declines, financial pressure increases, and the system becomes harder to sustain over time.



From Fragmented Systems to Coordinated Solutions

Infrastructure decisions shape the region long before the outcomes are visible. Where capacity is added and how systems are extended and maintained determine not only how places grow, but how they perform over time—affecting cost, reliability, and long-term outcomes. Today, water, wastewater, and stormwater systems function across shared landscapes but are planned, funded, and governed separately, creating inefficiencies and missed opportunities.

A more coordinated approach can align these systems as shared infrastructure. Investments in capacity, maintenance, and stormwater management can be planned together, reducing redundancy while improving performance.

Blueway and greenway corridors offer a framework to integrate water systems with parks, mobility, and open space, allowing infrastructure to serve multiple purposes.

Stronger coordination across jurisdictions, consistent standards, and proactive asset management are essential to sustain existing systems while guiding future growth. Aligning governance, funding, and operations can ensure that infrastructure supports regional priorities.

The strategies that follow focus on managing infrastructure as a connected system, improving efficiency, resilience, and long-term value through coordinated action.

Infrastructure Strategies

STRATEGY I1

Strengthen Regional Infrastructure Coordination

Bring infrastructure systems under stronger regional coordination to reduce duplication, improve reliability, and optimize investments.

Infrastructure systems already function at a regional scale, even when decisions are made locally. Water crosses boundaries, wastewater capacity in one city can constrain growth in another, and stormwater flows through entire watersheds. As growth accelerates, fragmented planning drives up costs, duplicates infrastructure, and creates uneven service levels. Stronger coordination can align these systems more effectively. By consolidating services where appropriate, coordinating long-range plans, and standardizing design and maintenance practices, the region can reduce redundancy, improve reliability, and ensure investments support regional growth priorities.

ACTIONS

- I 1.1**  **Establish regional infrastructure governance.** Develop a coordinated structure to align planning, investment, and standards across jurisdictions.
- I 1.2**  **Consolidate infrastructure systems.** Create regional infrastructure systems through consolidation to improve efficiency and service delivery.
- I 1.3**  **Create a regional infrastructure plan.** Develop a long-range plan that aligns regional infrastructure investments.
- I 1.4**  **Align infrastructure design, maintenance, and performance standards.** Standardize infrastructure requirements, maintenance practices, and performance benchmarks to reduce inconsistency between jurisdictions.

STRATEGY I2




Balance Infrastructure Maintenance and Strategic Growth

Shift from reactive repairs to lifecycle management and strategic expansion to protect assets and prepare for future demand.

Much of the region's infrastructure requires significant maintenance and eventual replacement. While cities have invested heavily in expansion, maintenance has lagged, creating backlogs that drive rising repair costs and emergency upgrades. This reactive spending strains budgets and limits the ability to invest in future improvements. Shifting to long-term lifecycle management can reverse this trend. By planning for maintenance alongside expansion and aligning upgrades with revenue generation, cities and regional utilities can reduce systemwide costs, improve reliability, and ensure that new infrastructure can be sustained over time.

ACTIONS

- I 2.1**  **Quantify system impact of growth.** Understand how new development affects long-term system performance and cost.
- I 2.2**  **Coordinate infrastructure management programs.** Coordinate lifecycle management practices focused on asset preservation, preventive maintenance, capital planning, and replacement scheduling.
- I 2.3**  **Coordinate utility strategies.** Standardize utility corridor design and franchise agreements to coordinate utility installation and maintenance.
- I 2.4**  **Grow capacity strategically.** Expand capacity where growth is planned and systems can be efficiently extended, avoiding scattered investments.

KEY  Not started  Planned / Portions started  In progress / Portions completed



STRATEGY 13

Improve Water and Wastewater System Performance

Protect regional capacity by reducing systemwide inefficiencies and coordinating expansion planning with regional growth.

Inefficiencies in one city's water and wastewater systems affect costs and performance across the region. Drinking water leakage and stormwater infiltration reduce available capacity and increase treatment demands. Strategies like water reuse, low-flow standards, and efficiency measures can lower demand on supply and treatment systems. Proactive capacity planning also helps align investment with growth, limiting cost impacts on ratepayers. By improving performance and managing demand, the region can accommodate growth while reducing strain on existing infrastructure.

ACTIONS

- I 3.1**  **Reduce system demand to extend capacity.** Improve system performance by reducing leakage and introducing modern efficiencies into water and wastewater systems.
- I 3.2**  **Plan and phase regional capacity.** Align water supply and wastewater treatment expansion with projected growth and land use plans.






STRATEGY 14




Manage Stormwater as a Regional Asset

Treat stormwater with a watershed-based approach that supports resilience, water quality, and regional connectivity.

Stormwater is often managed separately for each development. As the region grows, uncoordinated runoff increases flood risk, degrades waterways, and adds pressure downstream. These impacts cross city boundaries, requiring regional management. A watershed-based approach aligns planning, policy, and investment with how water flows. Critical corridor protection, rule standardization, and regional management can improve performance and reduce costs. Integrating stormwater management with parks and active transportation can create a regional asset. By treating stormwater as shared infrastructure, the region can improve resilience and deliver multiple benefits through a coordinated system.

ACTIONS

- I 4.1**  **Align stormwater governance and operations.** Create a regional stormwater system and utility. See Actions I 1.1 and I 1.2.
- I 4.2**  **Plan at the watershed scale.** Use watershed-based planning to guide growth, investment, and performance.
- I 4.3**  **Protect critical watersheds and corridors.** Use policy, regulation, and targeted actions to safeguard natural water systems.
- I 4.4**  **Expand green stormwater approaches.** Implement consistent green stormwater systems and standards.
- I 4.5**  **Build a blueways and greenways network.** Connect regional stormwater in a coordinated system with recreation, habitat, and mobility corridors.

KEY  Not started  Planned / Portions started  In progress / Portions completed

STRATEGY I1

Strengthen Regional Infrastructure Coordination

I1.1 ESTABLISH REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE GOVERNANCE

Create a coordinated structure to align infrastructure planning, investment, and standards across jurisdictions. The NWARPC board recently authorized staff to establish a Regional Stormwater Management Coordinating Council Strategy setting the groundwork for this action.

- **Form a regional governance structure.**
Establish a formal intergovernmental coordination structure through an Intergovernmental Agreement or Joint Powers Authority with NWARPC, creating a standing forum for cross-jurisdictional decisions.
- **Clarify roles and responsibilities.**
Define roles for regional coordination, local implementation, and shared system management so responsibilities do not overlap or fall through across systems.
- **Align long-range infrastructure planning.**
Align infrastructure planning across jurisdictions through a shared regional framework that evaluates local capital plans against common growth and system expectations.
- **Coordinate capital priorities.**
Coordinate investment decisions so projects that unlock shared capacity or reduce system risk across multiple jurisdictions move forward with greater consistency.

I1.2 CONSOLIDATE INFRASTRUCTURE SYSTEMS

Connect and consolidate water, wastewater, and solid waste services and systems to reduce redundancy, improve efficiency, and better align expansion with regional growth patterns.

- **Establish sharing frameworks.**
Formalize consistent interlocal agreements, cost allocation strategies, and maintenance practices for shared systems.
- **Consolidate wastewater operations.**
Combine wastewater services into one or more regional wastewater utilities to optimize system performance.
- **Consolidate solid waste services.**
Continue exploring how to go about collaborating, consolidating, and potentially merge the region's two solid waste management districts. From a cost and services perspective, merger is likely to produce the best outcome.
- **Optimize utility boundaries & connections.**
Adjust utility service boundaries and add water interconnections and wastewater interceptors to optimize service delivery and redundancy, and reduce long-term costs.

I 1.3 CREATE A REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Develop a long-range plan that aligns regional infrastructure investments with projected growth, environmental constraints, and fiscal capacity.

- **Inventory regional assets and needs.**

Create and maintain a consolidated infrastructure database across water, wastewater, and stormwater utilities. The current wastewater study is one step in this process.

- **Create a regional infrastructure plan.**

Develop a plan to accommodate growth and optimize performance between systems, aligned with regional priorities.

- **Coordinate development fees.**

Establish consistent impact fees to fund shared services and infrastructure plan priorities.

I 1.4 ALIGN INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN, MAINTENANCE, AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Standardize infrastructure requirements, maintenance practices, and performance benchmarks to reduce inconsistency between jurisdictions.

- **Adopt baseline design standards.**

Establish shared minimum standards for water, wastewater, and stormwater systems to reduce variation that complicates integration and maintenance.

- **Align development requirements.**

Coordinate infrastructure-related design requirements and capacity calculations so projects are evaluated and constructed consistently across jurisdictions.

- **Coordinate environmental standards.**

Align watershed and resource protection requirements to ensure shared systems are managed with consistent expectations.

- **Maintain and update standards.**

Establish a regional process to establish and update infrastructure standards so requirements evolve as conditions, priorities, and technology change.

STRATEGY 12

Balance Infrastructure Maintenance and Strategic Growth

I 2.1 QUANTIFY THE SYSTEM IMPACT OF GROWTH

Understand how new development affects long-term system performance and cost.

- **Define system impact methods.**
Establish consistent approaches to evaluate how development affects capacity, maintenance needs, and long-term obligations across systems.
- **Apply impacts in decisions.**
Incorporate system impact analysis into development review and capital planning so decisions reflect real conditions.
- **Track cumulative impacts.**
Monitor how individual projects combine over time to affect overall system performance and capacity.
- **Guide growth patterns.**
Use system impact findings to influence where growth is encouraged or limited based on infrastructure conditions and regional housing & transportation priorities.

I 2.2 COORDINATE INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Coordinate lifecycle management practices focused on asset preservation, preventive maintenance, capital planning, and replacement scheduling across jurisdictions.

- **Inventory regional assets and needs.**
See Action I 1.3.
- **Prioritize maintenance needs.**
Focus on asset maintenance based on condition and system importance to reduce risk and improve reliability. This action is short-term, replaced by the regional infrastructure plan in Action I 1.3.
- **Align capital planning cycles.**
Coordinate capital improvement planning across jurisdictions where systems are interconnected.
- **Shift to planned reinvestment.**
Move from reactive repairs toward scheduled maintenance and replacement to reduce long-term costs.

I 2.3 COORDINATE UTILITY STRATEGIES

Standardize utility corridor design and interlocal and franchise agreements to coordinate utility installation and maintenance, and reduce disruption and long-term costs.

- **Align corridor standards.**
Standardize utility corridor design and placement practices to reduce conflicts and simplify maintenance.
- **Coordinate infrastructure placement.**
Plan infrastructure across systems together to avoid duplication and sequencing disruptions.
- **Update interlocal and franchise agreements.**
Revise existing agreements to reflect updated standards and support compact growth and shared system relationships.
- **Plan systems jointly.**
Coordinate planning where multiple utilities serve the same area to improve efficiency, performance, and reduce installation disruptions.

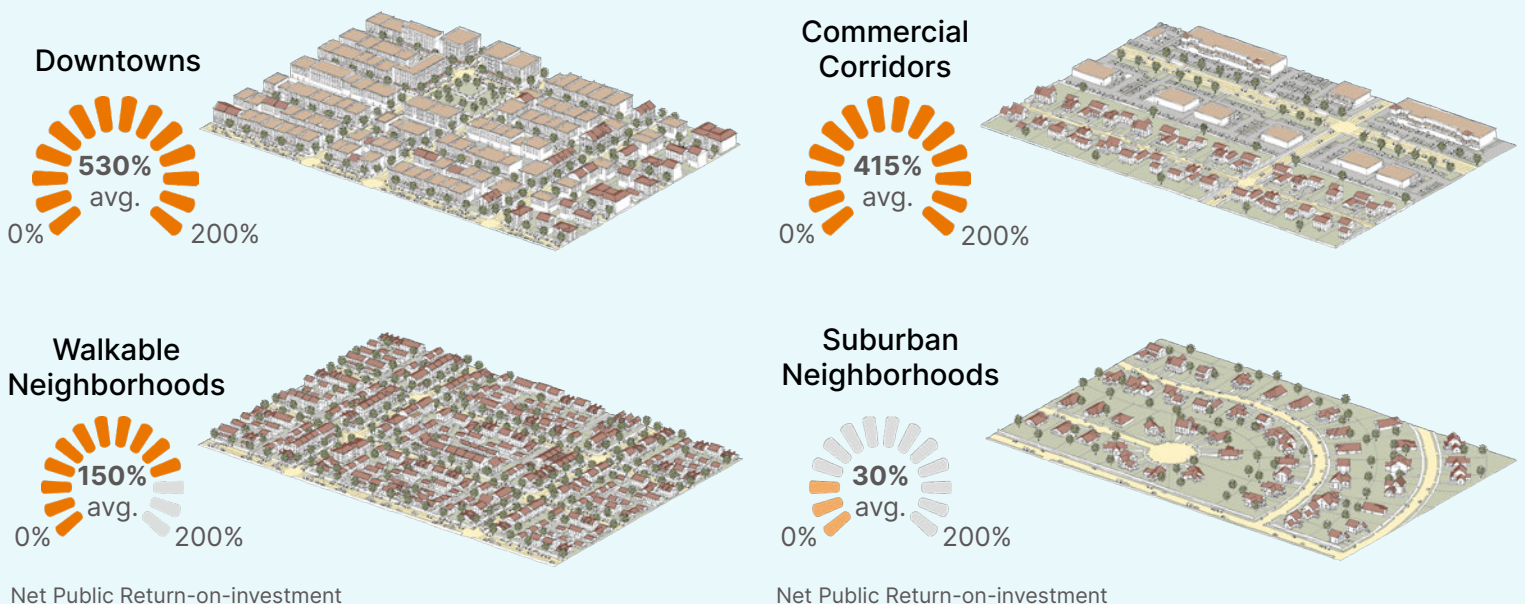
12.4 GROW CAPACITY STRATEGICALLY

Expand capacity where growth is planned and systems can be efficiently extended, avoiding scattered investments.

- Direct growth to served areas.**
 Coordinate with cities to prioritize land use expansion in areas where infrastructure can be extended efficiently from existing systems.
- Avoid premature extensions.**
 Coordinate with cities to limit land use expansion into areas without clear demand or supporting infrastructure to reduce long-term costs.
- Sequence system expansion.**
 Plan for infrastructure expansion in a contiguous pattern to improve efficiency and system performance. Integrate into the regional infrastructure plan in Action I 1.3.
- Evaluate long-term obligations.**
 Assist cities with evaluation of ongoing maintenance and replacement costs when considering system extensions and land use changes.

Growth Pattern Return-On-Investment

Successful lifecycle stewardship of infrastructure requires reliable long-term revenue. In aggregate, Northwest Arkansas is only funding 20% of annualized maintenance needs. State and federal grants comprise nearly all of that revenue. Filling the 80% maintenance gap requires increased service efficiency and land development patterns that pay their way. In Arkansas, sales tax is the highest revenue generator, demonstrated by the ROI for Northwest Arkansas downtowns and commercial corridors. But the region can't just add more retail indefinitely—residents will only spend so much. Low density growth patterns that don't cover their long-term costs, 30% on average for suburban neighborhoods in the region, must be offset by growth patterns that generate extra revenue, such as Johnson Square which produces 150% of its annual costs.



STRATEGY 13

Improve Water and Wastewater System Performance

I 3.1 REDUCE SYSTEM DEMAND TO EXTEND CAPACITY

Improve system performance by reducing inefficiency and introducing modern technologies and strategies into water and wastewater systems.

- **Coordinate water efficiency standards.**
Establish shared rules for efficient fixtures and materials to reduce system demand and extend the life of infrastructure.
- **Establish water reuse systems.**
Add non-potable water standards and services for irrigation, cooling, industrial processes, and other applications that do not require treated drinking water.
- **Reduce stormwater intrusion into wastewater systems.**
Prioritize maintenance to reduce stormwater intrusion into sewers, freeing capacity for growing wastewater demand.
- **Support development patterns that reduce long-term infrastructure demand.**
Remove barriers to compact development which requires less pipe, capacity, and long-term maintenance per home.

I 3.2 PLAN AND PHASE REGIONAL CAPACITY

Align water supply and wastewater treatment expansion with projected growth and system constraints. These steps should be coordinated with the regional infrastructure plan in Action I 1.3.

- **Map capacity gaps in growth areas.**
Identify existing and near-future capacity limitations in projected growth areas to guide system expansion.
- **Define shared thresholds to guide expansion.**
Establish a common decision making framework for proactive system expansion.
- **Sequence infrastructure investments to support contiguous, efficient growth.**
Prioritize expansion where growth is compact in form and contiguous with already developed areas.

STRATEGY 14

Manage Stormwater as a Regional Asset

I 4.1 ALIGN STORMWATER GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS

Create a regional stormwater system and utility. The NWARPC board recently authorized staff to establish a Regional Stormwater Management Coordinating Council Strategy setting the groundwork for this action. See Actions I 1.1 and I 1.2.

- **Establish a regional stormwater utility.**
Create one or more regional stormwater utilities to manage stormwater by watershed.
- **Create a stormwater coordination framework.**
Establish a framework to coordinate planning, funding, and maintenance of stormwater systems between cities, counties, and regional utilities.
- **Develop shared stormwater standards.**
Align stormwater manuals between jurisdictions, coordinating work currently underway by NWARPC and others.
- **Coordinate maintenance and performance standards.**
Develop consistent system performance targets and maintenance standards and schedules between cities, counties, and regional utilities.

I 4.2 PLAN AT THE WATERSHED SCALE

Use watershed-based planning to guide growth, investment, and performance.

- **Identify and map priority sub-basins.**
Evaluate current conditions throughout the region to prioritize interventions and identify emerging risks.
- **Develop sub-basin strategies.**
Tailor improvement strategies to common sub-basin conditions, differentiating urbanized, transitional, and rural conditions.
- **Produce watershed plans.**
Create management plans for each watershed to prioritize and coordinate improvements.

I 4.3 PROTECT CRITICAL WATERSHEDS AND CORRIDORS

Use policy, regulation, and targeted action to safeguard natural water systems.

- **Preserve high-risk waterways.**
Acquire property or easements along impaired and ecologically sensitive corridors to restrict development and retain access for future improvements.
- **Establish consistent corridor protection.**
Create shared development standards and restrictions to protect floodways and flood plains in both urbanized and rural conditions.

I 4.4 EXPAND GREEN STORMWATER APPROACHES

Implement consistent green infrastructure systems and strategies to management stormwater and develop shared regional standards.

- **Produce a green infrastructure manual.**
Identify regionally-appropriate green infrastructure strategies, design details, model standards, and examples.
- **Create a green infrastructure pilot program.**
Accelerate the local adoption of green infrastructure strategies through pilot installations in different jurisdictions.
- **Develop tree canopy standards.**
Set a tree canopy coverage target, model development standards, and future-focused tree list for different regional conditions.
- **Establish a tree planting program.**
Improve stormwater performance and heat island by increasing tree canopy through tree planting programs.

I 4.5 BUILD A BLUEWAYS AND GREENWAYS NETWORK

Connect regional stormwater in a coordinated system with recreation, habitat, and mobility corridors.

- **Establish a blueways and greenways management framework.**
Determine the management structure for system operations, maintenance, and funding between jurisdictions, utilities, and organizations.
- **Create a blueways and greenways network plan.**
Map and prioritize routes for coordinated active transportation and stormwater flows, and sites for combined recreation and stormwater storage in current and future parks.
- **Coordinate cross-sector improvements.**
Work with NWARPC, cities, counties, regional utilities, nonprofits, philanthropies, and state agencies to coordinate conservation, recreation, stormwater, and active transportation improvements.
- **Develop standard network details.**
Establish standard details for trails, bridges, markers, waterway projection, and stormwater storage and conveyance.



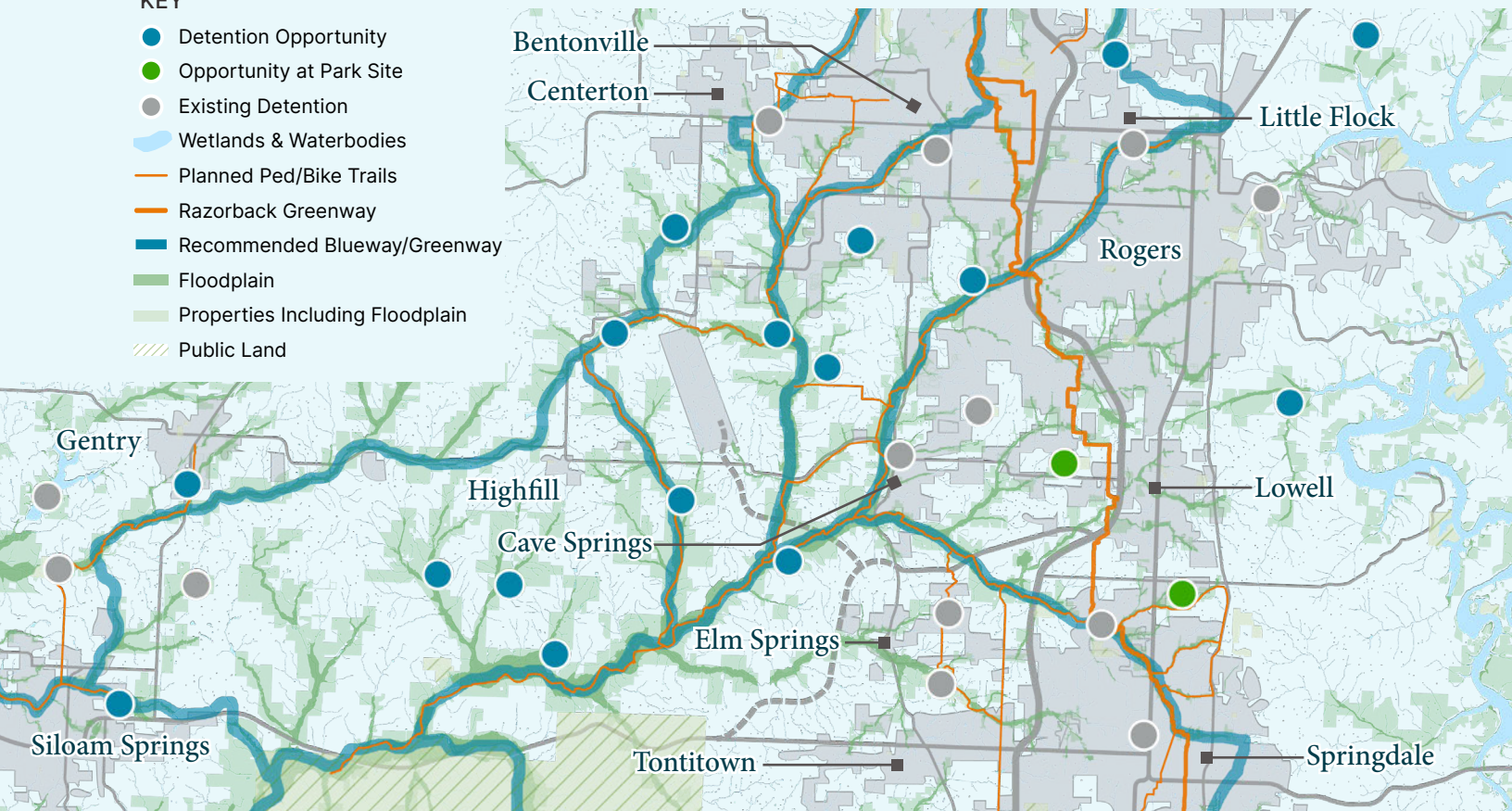
Blueway and Greenway Network

Northwest Arkansas is dealing with increasing stormwater management problems, demonstrated by Fayetteville's new stormwater utility. Cities require developers to manage stormwater site-by-site, which wastes land where it is most valuable for housing and economic development, and leads to long-term inefficiencies as each property owner or property owners' association is not skilled or qualified to maintain stormwater systems. Facing this exact issue, Orange County, Florida, took ownership overall all development-based stormwater systems in the county due to insufficient maintenance. Managing stormwater centrally across watersheds recognizes the full extent of stormwater impacts and allows the region to use the most efficient and effective strategies, which often occur downstream from the source. Regional management also enables consistent protection of floodways and streams, treating water naturally while reducing flow.

Benefits and funding of regional stormwater can be increased through strategic systems integration. City and regional parks can contribute to the stormwater system when located and designed appropriately. Osage Park in Bentonville integrates stormwater and recreation, one of many approaches to combine parks and stormwater management. NWARPC has recently studied how the Razorback Greenway can integrate both stormwater and creek bank restoration and protection. Stormwater, parks, and transportation systems can work together, spreading funding across sources and producing greater collective benefit. Planned regionally, a combined system would rival national models, providing both local benefit and increased tourism and economic development. Additionally, a regional stormwater system can benefit wastewater outflows with added treatment and flow reduction. The proposed blueway and greenway network compounds benefits, creating an invaluable regional asset.

KEY

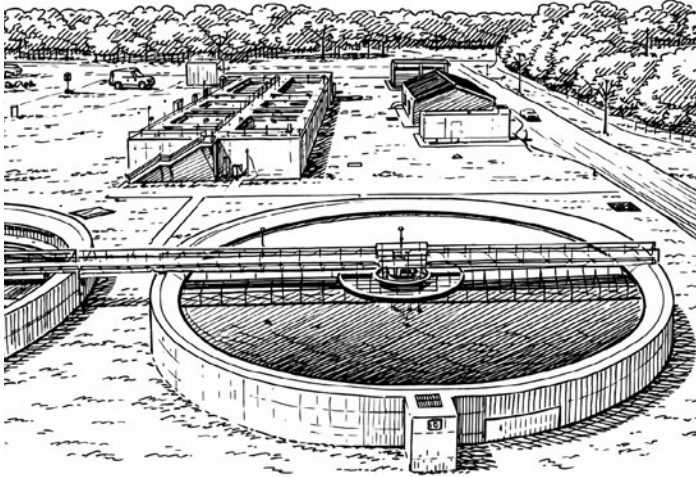
- Detention Opportunity
- Opportunity at Park Site
- Existing Detention
- Wetlands & Waterbodies
- Planned Ped/Bike Trails
- Razorback Greenway
- Recommended Blueway/Greenway
- Floodplain
- Properties Including Floodplain
- Public Land



Infrastructure Examples

Johnston County, NC Regional Water & Wastewater Plan

Location: Johnston County, North Carolina
Participants: Johnston County municipalities
Topics: Water, Waste Water, Regional Coordination
Information: [Johnston County Water and Sewer Policy](#)
Year: 2016-Current

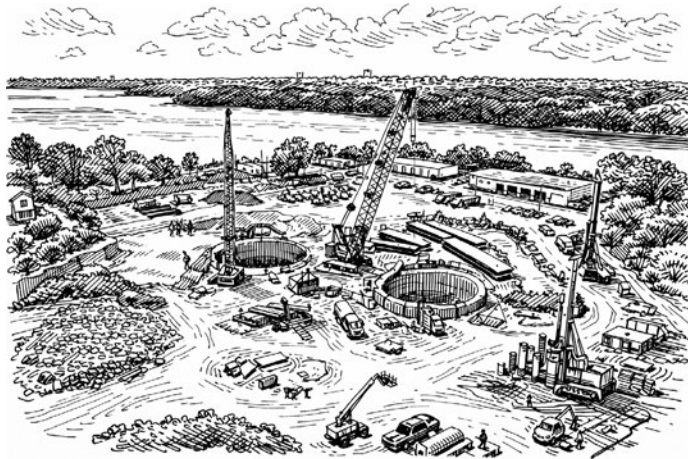


The Johnston County Regional Water & Wastewater Plan is a long-term strategy to coordinate water supply and wastewater services across Johnston County, North Carolina, one of the state's fastest-growing regions. Led by Johnston County Public Utilities, it includes partnerships with municipalities such as Clayton, Smithfield, Selma, Four Oaks, Pine Level, and Wilson's Mills, with oversight from the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

The plan focuses on expanding treatment capacity, improving regional transmission infrastructure, and promoting utility regionalization so communities can share facilities and reduce costs. Key accomplishments include upgrades to the Regional Wastewater Facility, expansion of water treatment systems, and construction of new pipelines and interceptors.

Narragansett Bay Commission, Rhode Island

Location: Providence, Rhode Island Metro
Participants: Wastewater Utility, State, EPA, etc.
Topics: Waste Water, Infrastructure, Regional Coordination
Information: [Narrabay](#)
Year: 1999-Current



The Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC) is a regional wastewater utility serving the Providence, Rhode Island metro area, created by the state in 1991 to manage and upgrade sewer infrastructure. Key partners include NBC, the State of Rhode Island, the U.S. EPA, and connected municipalities.

The Commission focuses on improving water quality in Narragansett Bay, expanding treatment capacity, and reducing pollution from combined sewer overflows. Its flagship CSO Abatement Program includes major tunnel and treatment projects to capture and treat stormwater and sewage. Since its creation, NBC has invested billions in upgrades, significantly reducing pollution and improving regional water quality.

Raleigh, NC Utility Coordination Manual

Location: Raleigh, North Carolina

Participants: City

Topics: Water, Regional Coordination

Information: [Utility Coordination Manual](#)

Year: 2014-Current



The Raleigh Utility Coordination Manual provides technical standards for coordinating the planning, design, and construction of water, sewer, and reclaimed water infrastructure in Raleigh, North Carolina. The program is led by Raleigh Water and overseen by the City of Raleigh, with participation from engineers, developers, contractors, and neighboring municipalities connected to the regional utility system.

The manual establishes uniform procedures for utility design, permitting, and construction to ensure safe, reliable infrastructure and efficient coordination between public agencies and private development. It supports consistent engineering practices and streamlined project approvals while guiding expansion of water and wastewater systems serving Raleigh and surrounding communities.

Lenexa, KS Rain to Recreation Program

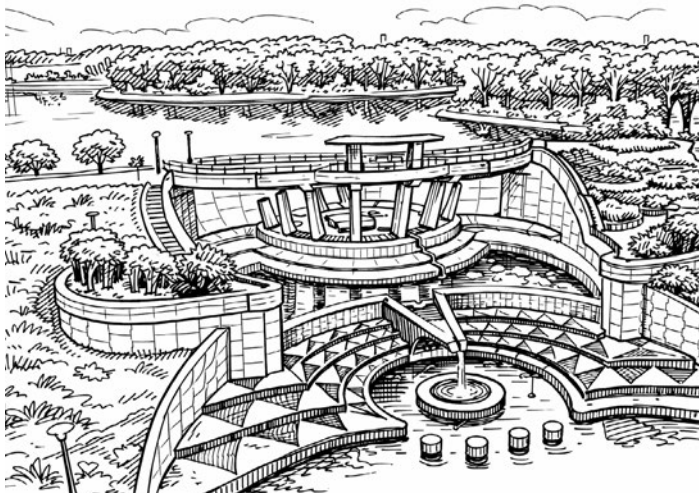
Location: Lenexa, Kansas

Participants: City

Topics: Water, Storm Water, Parks

Information: [Rain to Recreation Program](#)

Year: 2000-Current



The Rain to Recreation Program in Lenexa, Kansas is a watershed-based stormwater initiative launched in 2000 as part of the city's Vision 2020 plan. Led by the City of Lenexa, it includes partnerships with the Mid-America Regional Council, environmental regulators, and firms such as Black & Veatch.

The program aims to reduce flooding, improve water quality, restore ecosystems, and create recreational amenities by integrating stormwater systems with parks and open space. Key accomplishments include Lake Lenexa, stream restoration projects, and expanded park and trail networks that also manage stormwater. The program is widely recognized as a national model for linking environmental infrastructure with community development.

