

Summary Report of Conditions in Hancock County

Planning For Prosperity

Revised December 2002



Hancock County Planning Commission

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Introduction

The “Planning for Prosperity” initiative was started through a 2001 Symposium that brought together agency representatives and Hancock County residents who were concerned that growth in Hancock County was occurring in a haphazard manner, perhaps to the detriment of some of our most valued resources. In an effort to understand better and manage the short and long-term impacts of economic, environmental and social trends in our region, the Hancock County Planning Commission (HCPC), in collaboration with various community stakeholders and assistance provided through a NOAA grant, is furthering this initiative.

This brief summary of conditions in Hancock County, prepared for the Planning For Prosperity Policy Committee, is intended to bring attention to just a few of the characteristics reflecting relatively rapid changes experienced by the Hancock County region in recent decades. It should stimulate dialogue regarding priority growth-related issues.

Growth patterns and community characteristics included in this summary were compiled from U.S. census data; they are not independent of each other and do not by any means reflect all of the issues affecting Hancock County.

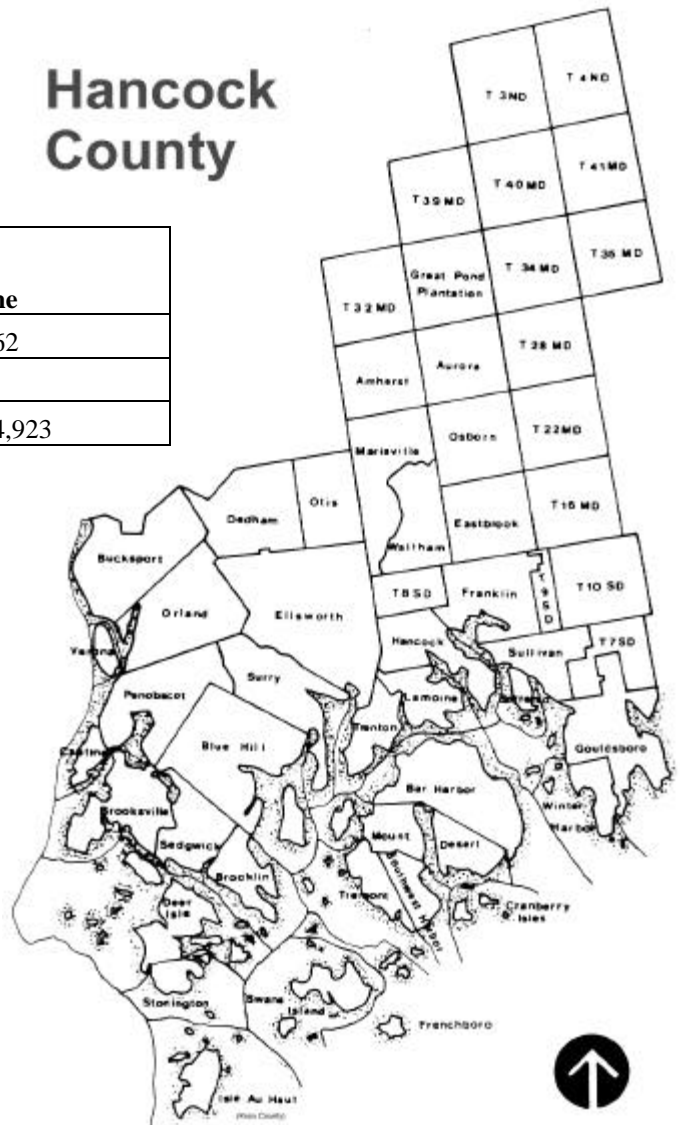
Hancock County

I. Fast Facts

	Hancock County	Maine
Land area	1,588	30,862
Persons/square mile	33	41
2000 population	51,791	1,274,923

II. Regional Divisions

Several projects underway in Hancock County (i.e. MDI Tomorrow and Schoodic Peninsula) involve a regional approach; however, these “regions” do not have clearly defined borders. For instance, MDI Tomorrow is a community planning group for the MDI region involving four towns whereas the MDI League of Towns is a municipal group with representatives from seven towns in addition to Acadia National Park. For the purpose of this report, Hancock County has been broken down into the following five regions:



Blue Hill Peninsula

- Blue Hill
- Brooklin
- Brooksville
- Castine
- Deer Isle
- Penobscot
- Sedgwick
- Stonington
- Surry

Buckspport:

- Buckspport
- Orland
- Verona

Schoodic Region

- Franklin
- Gouldsboro
- Sorrento
- Sullivan
- Winter Harbor

MDI

- Bar Harbor
- Cranberry Isles
- Frenchboro
- Mt. Desert
- Southwest Harbor
- Swan's Island
- Tremont

Greater Ellsworth

- Aurora
- Dedham
- Eastbrook
- Ellsworth
- Great Pond
- Hancock
- Lamoine
- Mariaville
- Osborn
- Otis
- Trenton
- Unorganized Territories
- Waltham

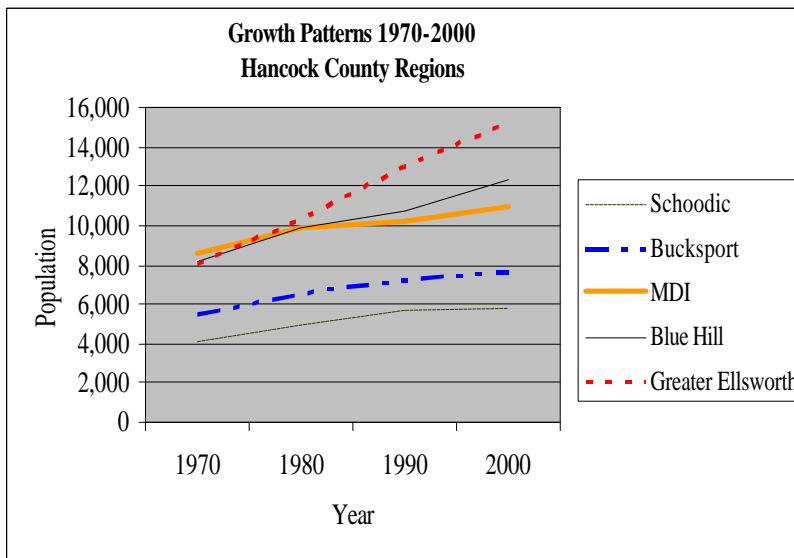
II. Regional Population Change 1970-2000

Table 1 Regional Population Change Summary 1997-2000					
Maine	Total	993,722	1,124,660	1,227,928	1,274,923
	Change		130,938	103,268	46,995
	% Change Over Previous Census		13.2%	9.2%	3.8%
Hancock County	Total	34,590	41,781	46,948	51,791
	Change		7,191	5,167	4,843
	% Change Over Previous Census		20.8%	12.4%	10.3%
Schoodic Peninsula	Total	4,069	4,916	5,697	5,774
	Change		847	781	77
	% Change Over Previous Census		20.8%	15.9%	1.4%
Bucksport Area	Total	5,500	6,549	7,145	7,575
	Change		1,049	596	430
	% Change Over Previous Census		19.1%	9.1%	6.0%
MDI	Total	8,600	9,842	10,199	10,917
	Change		1,242	357	718
	% Change Over Previous Census		14.4%	3.6%	7.0%
Blue Hill Peninsula	Total	8,207	9,878	10,768	12,320
	Change		1,671	890	1,552
	% Change Over Previous Census		20.4%	9.0%	14.4%
Greater Ellsworth	Total	8,104	10,286	13,001	15,205
	Change		2,182	2,715	2,204
	% Change Over Previous Census		26.9%	26.4%	17.0%

Source: U.S. Census

Figure 1

The rate of population growth for Hancock County has been greater than the overall rate of growth for the state of Maine during each decade between 1970 and 2000. The greater Ellsworth area has held the highest rate of growth for each decade during the 30-year period of time. Populations in the Blue Hill and MDI regions decreased between 1970 and 1990 only to have increased between 1990 and 2000. Much like the state trend, the population rate of growth continued to decline in other regions over each decade with the



Source: U.S. Census

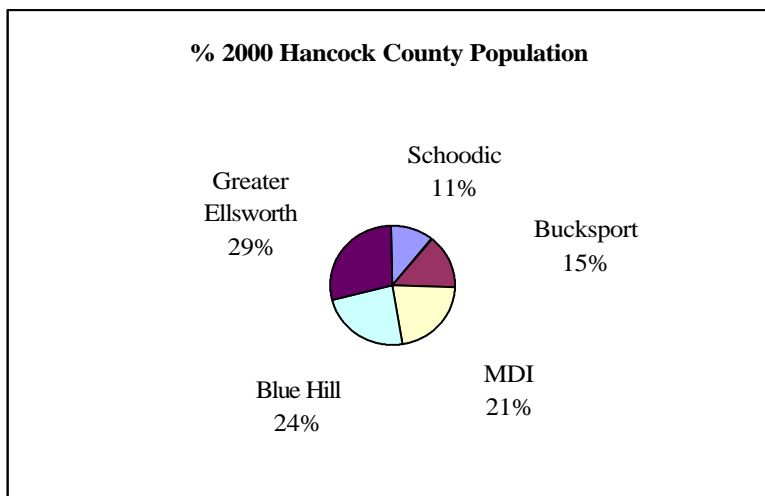
most noticeable decrease occurring in the Schoodic Region between 1990 and 2000.

III. Population Distribution.

According to the 2000 census figures, the largest portion of Hancock County's population, 29 percent, is located in the Greater Ellsworth region. The next highest percentages of the population are located in Blue Hill, MDI, Bucksport and the Schoodic Peninsula.

Figure 2

Ellsworth (pop. 6,456), Bucksport (pop. 4,908) and Bar Harbor (pop. 4,820) are the three most populated towns in Hancock County. These figures don't show the population change amongst individual towns in Hancock County. For example, between 1990 and 2000, several towns lost population. These included the three island communities of Cranberry Isles, Swan's Island and Frenchboro. This is probably due to the difficulty of sustaining a year-round living on an island. The coastal towns of Gouldsboro, Winter Harbor, Sorrento and Stonington also lost population.



Source: U.S. Census

The population drop in the first two towns was probably due to the expected closure of the Navy Base in 2002. It should be noted that since the 2000 census, the town manager estimates that the population for Winter Harbor alone has decreased by approximately 50 percent. Sorrento, which lost five residents, has a limited housing stock at affordable prices. Stonington, which lost 100 residents between 1990 and 2000, has faced a declining economy due to problems with the fishing industry.

While the remote inland towns of Osborn and Great Pond lost population, Mariaville and Otis both saw increases of 53 percent between 1990 and 2000. Aurora's population increased by 48 percent. These increases are at least partially related to the high cost of housing in coastal communities causing more people to move to less expensive inland towns.

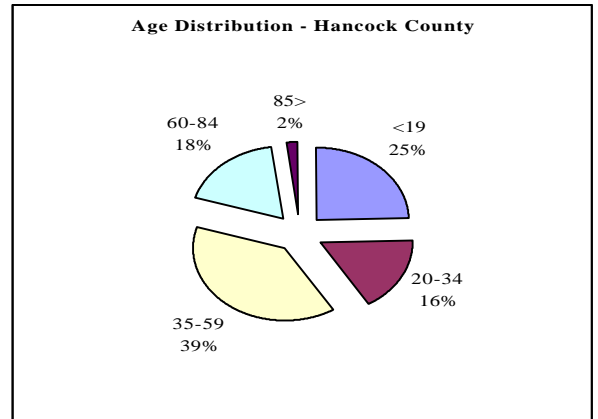
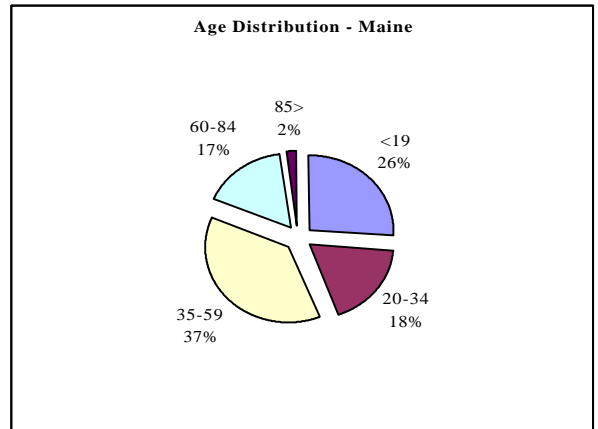
IV. Population Age Distribution

The median age in Hancock County increased from 35.8 in 1990 to 40.7 in 2000, an increase of 13.6 percent. By contrast the median age for the state as a whole increased from 33.9 to 38.6, a 13.8 percent increase. While the rate of increase is nearly comparable, Hancock County has a somewhat older population.

As with population growth rates, there is considerable variation in median age among the 37 municipalities. Castine had the lowest median age (23.6 years) in 1990 due primarily to the Maine Maritime Academy. Winter Harbor (31.3 years) had the second lowest. The inland towns of Mariaville, Aurora and Waltham also had low median ages. Brooksville had the highest median age (48.6). Cranberry Isles, Brooklin and Sorrento also had high median ages.

Hancock County birth and death rates are about equal, indicating that migration is a driving population force behind population growth. There are currently fewer children under the age of 10 than there has been in many decades, but more adults ages 40 to 55.

Figures 3 and 4



Source: US Census, 2000

V. Workforce

It is useful to compare labor force and income trends in Hancock County to the state as a whole. As shown in Table 2, the income gap between the county and the state has been closing since 1980. In 1980, median household income in Hancock County was 88 percent of the state median compared to 96 percent in 2000.

Year	1980	1990	2000
Hancock County	\$12,146	\$25,247	\$35,811
Maine	\$13,816	\$27,854	\$37,240
Percentage County to Maine	87.9%	90.6%	96.1%

Source: U.S. Census

While incomes in Hancock County are below the state median, there is also a lower poverty rate. According to the 2000 Census, Hancock County had a poverty rate of 10.2 percent compared to 10.9 percent statewide. However, there was minor increase in the county's poverty rate from the 10 percent level reported in the 1990 Census.

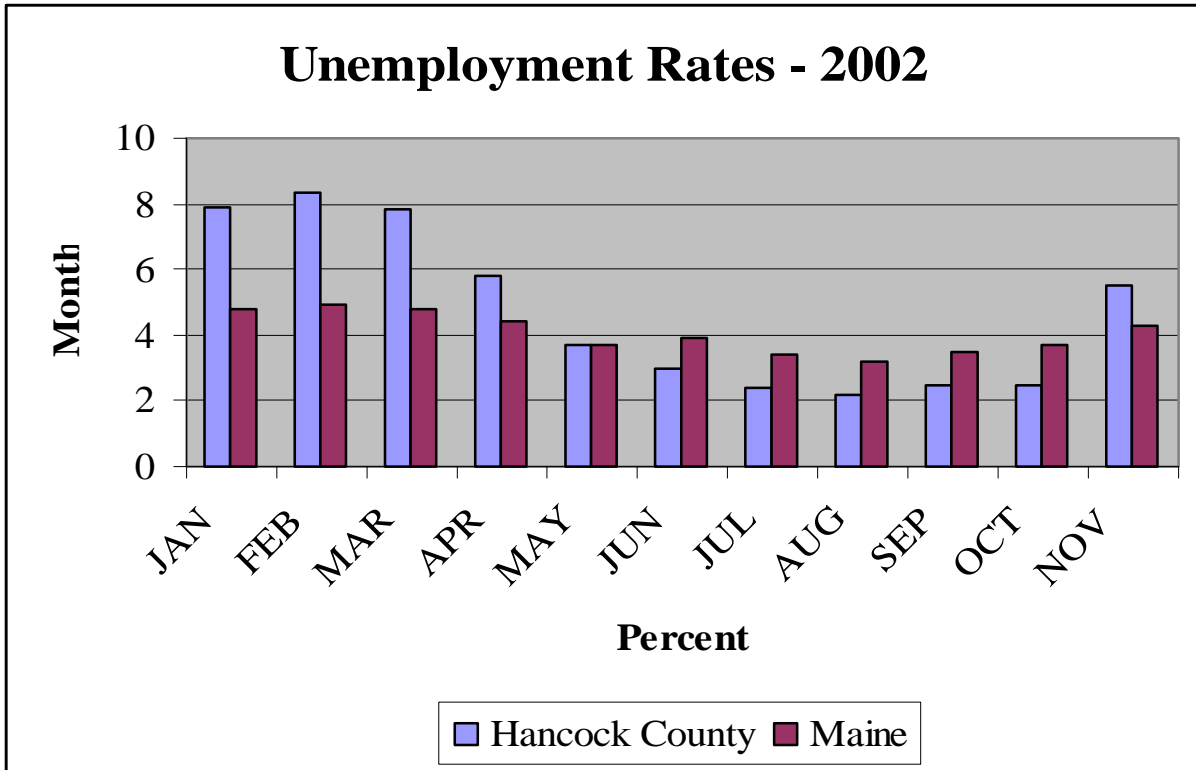
There are limited Census data on sources of income. According to the 2000 Census, the median annual income in Hancock County from earnings was \$42,206 compared to the statewide median of \$46,990. The median retirement income was \$16,973 compared to a statewide median of \$15,211. Earned income in Hancock County is thus below the state median while retirement income is above state levels. This is reflective of the importance of retired persons to the area economy.

While the population of the county is aging, the labor force is also increasing in size. Between 1990 and 2000 the number of employed persons in the civilian labor force aged 16 years and older increased from 21,000 to 25,034, a 19 percent increase. This is more than double the 9.1 percent increase for the state as a whole (from 571,842 employees to 624,011). As will be discussed below, incomes are most meaningful when view in the context of the cost of living, particularly housing.

Reflecting the seasonal nature of a significant portion of locally available jobs, unemployment rates in Hancock County drop considerably during the summer months when tourism picks up and increases greatly during winter months when there is a decreased demand for tourist services. The Hancock County unemployment rate exceeded state levels during the first four months of 2002. Rates were equal to state levels during the month of May, and dropped lower than the state unemployment rate

through October. November rates again exceeded the state level and are expected to grow even more in December.

Figure 5



Source: Maine Department of Labor

VI. Education

According to the 2000 Census, between 1990 and 2000, Hancock County had a higher rate of high school graduates among people 25 and older, and people who have furthered their education than the state of Maine as a whole. Hancock County also has a higher rate of people who have completed a bachelor degree and graduate or professional degree. In recent years, Maine has had difficulty retaining educated young people as jobs outside of the state often pay more and provide more benefits. The higher educational attainment rates of people 25 years or older in Hancock County might therefore be attributed to people who are older and wealthier retiring to the region from outside areas. People able to afford retirement homes in the area, often located in coastal locations, are more likely to have been involved in a career for which a post-secondary education was a prerequisite.

Table 3				
Education Attainment Levels - Persons 25 Years and Older				
Level	1990		2000	
	State	Hancock County	State	Hancock County
No High School Diploma	21.2%	16.7%	14.6%	12.3%
High School Graduate	37.1%	37.8%	36.2%	34.4%
Some College	16.1%	17%	19%	19.5%
Associates Degree	6.9%	7.2%	7.3%	6.7%
Bachelor's Degree	12.7%	13.8%	14.9%	17.1%
Graduate or Professional Degree	6.1%	7.5%	7.9%	10.1%

Source: U.S. Census

VII. Housing

According to the 2000 Census, the median value of a owner-occupied house in Hancock County was \$108,600 compared to the state median of \$98,700. Housing values are thus 10 percent higher than the state median, while county household incomes are only 96 percent of the state level. This is one indicator of the extent of housing need in Hancock County.

There is considerable variation in housing need within the county. The Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) divides the area into three housing markets, Bucksport, Blue Hill-Stonington and Ellsworth-Bar Harbor. MSHA calculates housing needs through the affordable housing index, which compares median household income to median sales price. An index of 1.00 would indicate that incomes are sufficient to purchase the median priced home. An index under 1.00 indicates a shortfall. The indices for these three markets are shown in Table 4.

Table 4		
Home Purchase Affordable Housing Indices - 2002		
Bucksport Area	Blue Hill Stonington Area	Ellsworth-Bar Harbor Area
1.45	0.76	0.88

Source: *State of Maine's Housing 2002* Maine State Housing Authority

The Blue Hill-Stonington area faces the most serious shortfall in home purchase opportunities with an index of 0.76. In the Ellsworth-Bar Harbor area, one in five homeowners pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing. There is also a shortfall in rental opportunities, one in three renters pays more than 30 percent of income for housing. As seen in the rental indices shown in Table 5, the Blue Hill-Stonington area faces a similar rental shortfall.

Table 5		
Rental Affordable Housing Indices, 2002		
Bucksport Area	Blue Hill Stonington Area	Ellsworth-Bar Harbor Area
1.21	0.97	0.97

Source: State of Maine's Housing 2002 Maine State Housing Authority

The housing market areas cover many towns. For example, the Ellsworth-Bar Harbor market goes as far inland as Bradley in adjoining Penobscot County and Great Pond. This is reflective of how far people must commute due to the shortage of affordable homes near their jobs. Between 1990 and 2000 the average commuting time in Hancock County increased by 24.4 percent from 18 minutes to 22.4 minutes. The average time for the state as a whole increased by 19.4 percent from 19 minutes to 22.7 minutes. Commuting times are at least partially related to lack of affordable housing near jobs.

The housing shortfall varies considerably among individual towns. For example, Brooklin had an index of 0.45; Southwest Harbor, 0.50; and Castine, 0.68. In other towns, indices were well above the average. For example, Otis had an index of 1.53 and Franklin had 1.60. It should be noted that the index depends in part on the number of homes sold in a given year. If few homes were sold, the index for an individual town may be less representative.

Table 6 shows the number of year-round housing units in Hancock County increased by 15 percent between 1990 and 2000. This is a faster rate than the 10 percent growth shown among the year-round population. There seems to be a strong demand for second homes. In addition to planning for year-round home construction, towns need to anticipate the impacts of second home development. Seasonal homes can be converted to year round use and vice versa. This means that some communities with large numbers of second homes may become more popular as year-round communities. Public opinion surveys conducted in various towns by the HCPC show that many seasonal residents plan to retire to the town where their summer home is located. At the same time, island communities face continued challenges in maintaining their viability as year-round communities.

Table 6
1990-2000 Change in Housing Units - Hancock County

Municipality	Year-Round Units, 1990	Year-Round Units, 2000	Percent Change	Second Homes, 1990	Second Homes, 2000	Percent Change
Amherst	95	125	32%	38	28	-26%
Aurora	41	61	49%	60	58	-3%
Bar Harbor	2,132	2,281	7%	454	524	15%
Blue Hill	911	1,074	18%	421	412	-2%
Brooklin	375	391	4%	287	306	7%
Brooksville	344	430	25%	363	361	-1%
Bucksport	1,940	2,145	11%	138	137	-1%
Castine	371	395	6%	181	254	40%
Cranberry Isles	91	67	-26%	234	277	18%
Dedham	469	576	23%	495	479	-3%
Deer Isle	792	860	9%	681	715	5%
Eastbrook	111	174	57%	296	252	-15%
Ellsworth	2,636	2,879	9%	566	543	-4%
Franklin	470	617	31%	290	285	-2%
Frenchboro	26	27	4%	27	32	19%
Gouldsboro	746	857	15%	412	471	14%
Great Pond	22	30	36%	44	37	-16%
Hancock	767	983	28%	193	217	12%
Lamoine	546	626	15%	146	177	21%
Mariaville	102	168	65%	134	150	12%
Mount Desert	930	1,017	9%	770	883	15%
Orland	732	933	27%	336	320	-5%
Osborn	27	35	30%	97	73	-25%
Otis	137	247	80%	462	431	-7%
Penobscot	444	568	28%	134	155	16%
Sedgwick	415	505	22%	146	166	14%
Sorrento	136	136	0%	137	146	7%
Southwest Harbor	923	962	4%	343	326	-5%
Stonington	576	571	-1%	282	338	20%
Sullivan	461	522	13%	174	187	7%
Surry	437	575	32%	325	338	4%
Swan's Island	177	161	-9%	208	260	25%
Tremont	633	705	11%	314	370	18%
Trenton	468	597	28%	202	219	8%
Verona	201	260	29%	25	22	-12%
Waltham	97	118	22%	16	58	263%
Winter Harbor	399	425	7%	116	133	15%
Hancock County*	20,260	23,273	15%	10,136	10,672	5%

*NOTE: Includes unorganized territories

Source: US Census

VII. Transportation

A. Traffic Flows

Thompson Island		Hancock	
Year	AADT	Year	AADT
1980	6,259	1978	5,068
1996	12,139	1996	11,075
1997	12,324	1997	11,256
1998	12,952	1998	11,187
1999	13,396	1999	11,287
2000	13,437	2000	11,387

Source: Permanent traffic counters, MDOT

The Maine Department of Transportation has permanent traffic counters at two locations in Hancock County, on Route 1 west of Route 182 in Hancock and Route 3 at the Thompson Island Bridge in Trenton. These counters are used to record Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT). In a tourist-dependent economy, AADT is subject to some short-term fluctuations since peak summer travel will vary according to how much tourist traffic there is a given year.

Annual flows are shown on Table 7. While data before 1996 are not presently available, 1980 is used as a basis of comparison for Thompson Island and 1978 for Hancock. Traffic in both locations has doubled in roughly 20 years.

These figures do not reflect seasonal variations in traffic. In 1990 the average traffic in Hancock in January was 56 percent of the August volumes. By 1999, January volumes were 61 percent of August volumes. Due to a shift in the location of the Trenton counter, data for Route 3 are less reliable. However, the 1990 January count for the adjacent Bar Harbor site was 43 percent of the August count. The Trenton counts in 1999 were 34 percent of August levels.

Overall daily volumes in January for Bar Harbor Trenton increased from 4,549 to 8,549 in 1999. August volumes increased from 14,745 to 22,270. For Hancock, the January change was from 2,453 to 3,344. August volumes changed from 4,375 to 14,212. Thus both winter and summer volumes of traffic are increasing.

This increased traffic flow has affected Hancock County in several ways. First, as mentioned above, commuting times have increased. Second, traffic congestion has

slowed delivery times for area trucks. A survey of trucking firms, as part of the 1999 *Truck Route Study* prepared for the MDOT Region II (Hancock and Washington Counties) Regional Transportation Advisory Committee, indicated that traffic congestion in the Ellsworth area was one major concern. Third, some area merchants have expressed concern that traffic congestion has made it difficult for customers to patronize their businesses due to the difficulty of exiting and returning to heavily traveled roads.

B. Major Transportation Issues

A review of reports prepared for the Regional Transportation Advisory Committee reveals a number of transportation issues and opportunities:

1. Ridership on the *Island Explorer* bus system, which serves the MDI area in the summer, has far exceeded expectations. There are now preliminary discussions of extending this service into the off-season and also expanding its service area;
2. The shipment of freight is limited by seasonal posting of roads;
3. There are concerns about improving access to the Bangor area and southern Maine;
4. Apart from a line to Bucksport, there has been no rail service in Hancock County since 1985. There are proposals for the incremental restoration of freight rail service on the Calais Branch, which runs between Brewer and Calais. This line could serve businesses in Hancock County. There are preliminary proposals for the introduction of high speed passenger rail service between Bangor and Trenton; and
5. The Hancock County Airport requires further capital investment if it is to attract a greater share of regional scheduled passenger air service.

VII. Crime

The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR) provides crime counts for the nation, which can be broken down for regions, states, counties, cities and towns. Major categories of offense classification remain the same between the national and state levels.

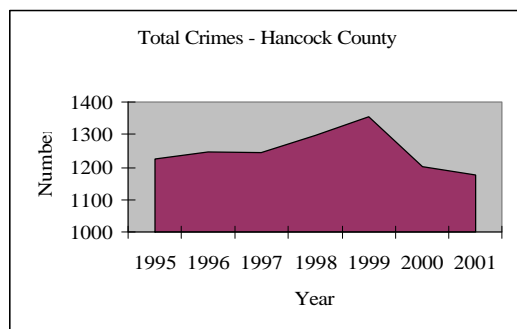
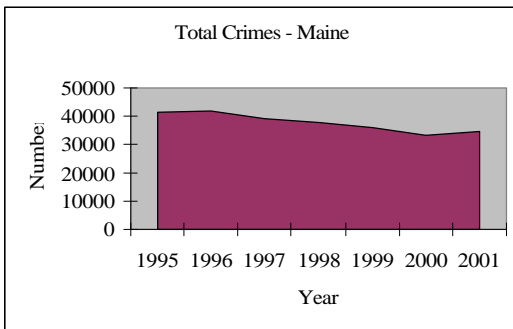
Table 8						
Total Crime Rate Changes 1995-2001						
	1995 - 1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Maine	1.7%	-7.1%	-2.6%	-5.6%	-6.9%	3.7%
Hancock County	2.0%	-0.2%	4.3%	4.2%	-11.2%	-2.2%

Source: Compiled from 2001 UCR data

The total number of Maine crimes recorded between 1995 and 1996 increased by 1.7 percent. Crimes then decreased each year between 1996 and 2000 only to increase again in 2001.

Hancock County crimes increased 2.0 percent between 1995 and decreased slightly between 1996 and 1997. Crimes increased by a notable percentage between 1997 and 1999 and have subsequently decreased.

Figures 6 and 7



Source: 2001 UCR Data