



Chapter 3: Regional Setting and Travel Patterns

This chapter provides projections on population, housing, and employment and how these affect the regional setting and travel patterns.

GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

San Benito County is a rural and agricultural community in the Central Coast Region, south of Silicon Valley. The County is surrounded by the Counties of Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Monterey, Fresno, and Merced. Land area is 1,389 square miles. Terrain varies from flat valley floor to hilly rangeland in the east, to 5,450-foot peaks far south.

The City of Hollister where the County seat is located is at an elevation of 229 feet. The north and northwest segments of the County are comprised of urban areas, leaving the southern portion of the County primarily rural. The population in the County was 55,269 according to the 2010 U.S. Census.



Figure 3-1 Map of San Benito County

The County has two incorporated cities – Hollister, population 35,000, and San Juan Bautista, population 1,700 – and various unincorporated communities (Aromas, Tres Pinos, Panoche, Ridgemark, and Paicines). Major transportation routes bisecting the County include State Routes 129, 156, 25 and U.S. 101.

Community Character

One of San Benito County’s distinguishing characteristic is its rural, small-town character. Surrounded by large open spaces composed of agrarian landscapes and natural areas, the county’s traditional communities and residential settlements were relatively compact and self-contained. Unincorporated communities, including the census designated places of Aromas, Ridgemark, and Tres Pinos, and the community of Paicines, have a historical land use pattern and historical structures. Preserving this community character requires both the preservation of historical structures and development patterns, as well as the preservation of the surrounding agricultural land and open space. It also requires promoting infill development within existing communities that fosters the maintenance and improvement of community character, in addition to the development of new neighborhoods and new communities that reflect traditional development patterns.

DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the 2010 United States Census data, of the County’s 55,269 residents, 31,186 identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino, as further illustrated in Figure 3-3.

Population by Ethnicity	
Hispanic or Latino	31,186
Non Hispanic or Latino	24,083

The remaining 24,083 San Benito County residents identify themselves as non-Hispanic or Latino. The population by race is further broken down in Figure 3-3.

Population by Race	
White	35,181
African American	483
Asian	1,443
American Indian and Alaska Native	895
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	94
Other	14,471
Identified by two or more	2,702

Figure 3-3 San Benito County Population Data

Source: 2010 U.S. Census

Income

There are 16,785 households in San Benito County. In the County, the median household income was \$65,570, while the Per Capita Income was \$26,300. Additionally, 11.3% of the

County’s population is considered to be below or at the Federal Poverty Level. Of the total number of households, 646 households do not own a personal vehicle.

Social Equity

The Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) Draft 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) / Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) identifies portions of San Benito County as Low-income, Minority, and Low-income and Minority. The low income and minority areas are shown in Figure 3-4.

Distribution of Transportation Investments

The RTP includes investments in the transportation system across the Cities of San Juan Bautista and Hollister, and County of San Benito, see Chapter Ch. 6 - Investments in Our Transportation Future.

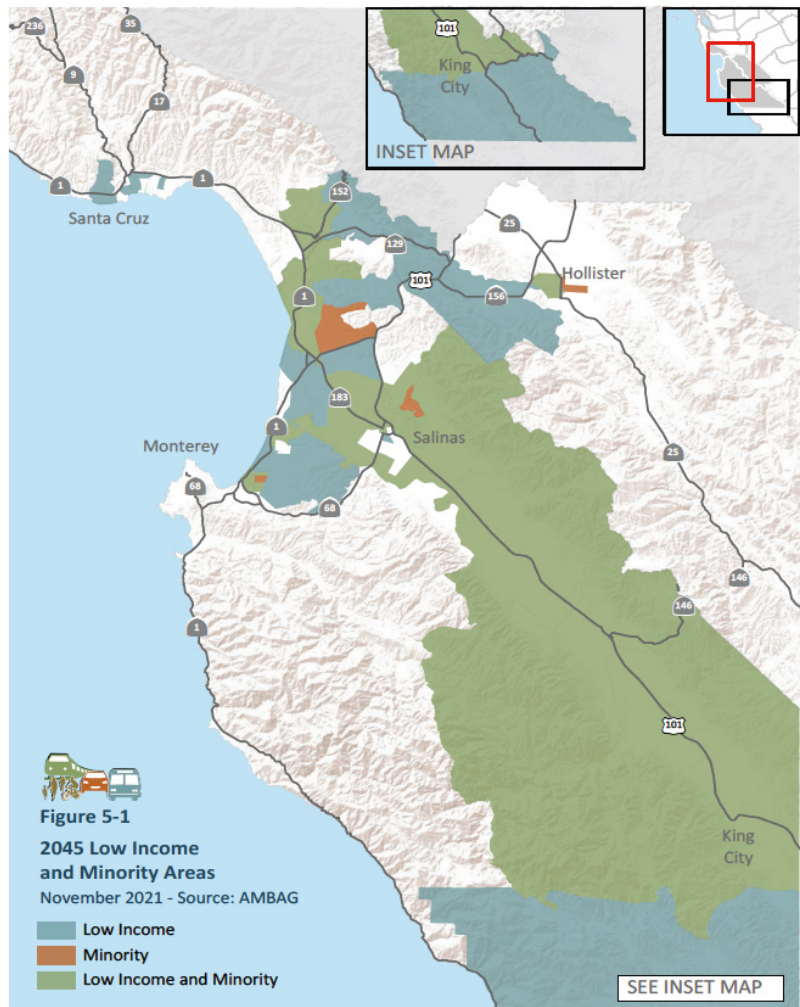


Figure 3-4 Map of Low-Income Minority Areas

Source: AMBAG 2045 MTP/SCS

Population Growth Forecast

Population growth is one of the main drivers and indicators of travel behavior in the Monterey Bay Area region. According to AMBAG, the population in the region is growing at a lower rate than California as a whole.

In 2020, AMBAG reported 774,729 people living in the tri-county region spread over an area of 5,767 square miles. By 2045, the population is expected to reach 869,776, as illustrated in Figure 3-5.

County	2020 (Year)	2045 (Year)	Percent Increase
San Benito	62,353	83,366	34%
Monterey	441,143	491,443	11%
Santa Cruz	271,233	294,967	9%
Total	774,729	869,776	12%

San Benito, as a whole, will be the fastest growing County in the AMBAG region.¹ The County’s geographical advantages, housing market, and quality of life contribute to the growth. Specifically, the population in San Benito County is expected to increase by 34 percent between the years 2020 and 2045 from 62,353 to 83,366. When compared to Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, San Benito will have the greatest absolute growth percent (34 %) with more than 21,013 people projected through the year 2045.

Figure 3-5 Population Forecast
Source: AMBAG Regional Growth Forecast

As shown in Figure 3-6, the highest percent growth rate will occur in the unincorporated parts of the County (80%, approx. 15,736 people) followed by the City of San Juan Bautista (15%, approx. 324 people), and with less percentage growth forecasted for the City of Hollister (12%, approx. 4,953 people). With the projected growth, there will be a greater demand for housing, employment, and improved transportation infrastructure to accommodate the additional traffic.

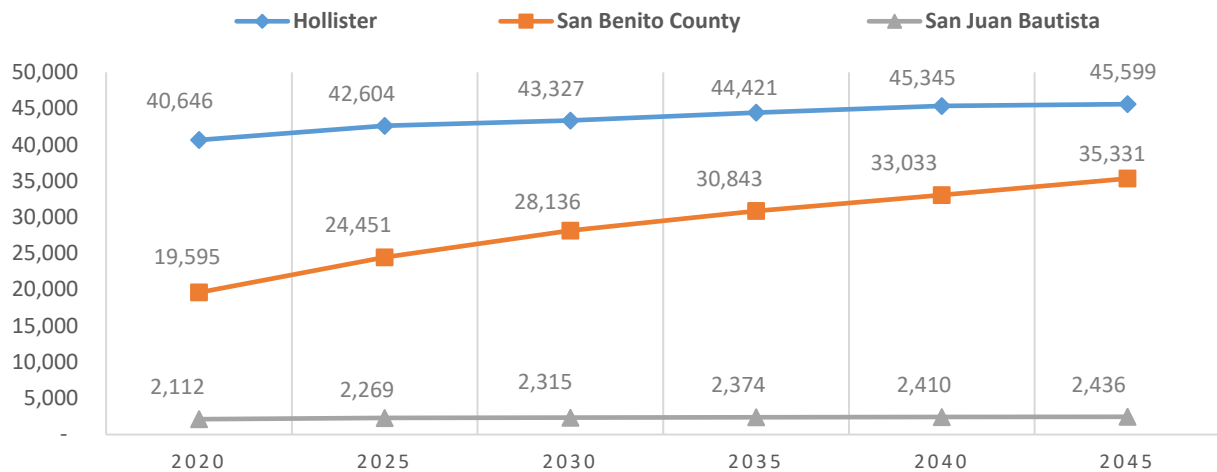


Figure 3-6 Population Forecast by San Benito Jurisdiction
Source: AMBAG Regional Growth Forecast

¹ 2018 Regional Growth Forecast

HOUSING GROWTH FORECAST

Primarily due to the availability of housing at lower costs than surrounding communities to the north and to the west of San Benito, the County is a place where many residents travel long distances for employment.

The housing market will continue to develop to accommodate future growth. Currently, the Monterey Bay Area region supports an estimated 267,812 housing units. Forecasts suggest that by 2045, the housing market will grow to 304,900 - accommodating an additional 37,088 housing units, as illustrated in Figure 3-7.

County	2020 (Year)	2045 (Year)	Percent Increase
San Benito	19,913	25,775	29%
Monterey	141,764	165,328	17%
Santa Cruz	106,135	113,797	7%
Total	267,812	304,900	14%

Figure 3-7 Housing Projections
 Source: AMBAG Regional Growth Forecast

The San Benito region as a whole is projected to have a 29 percent (5,862 housing units) increase between 2020 and the year 2045. The breakdown of units includes a 18.5 percent (2,205 housing units) increase in the City of Hollister, 19 percent (156 housing units) in the City of San Juan Bautista, and 49 percent (3,501 housing units) in the unincorporated areas of the County, as illustrated in Figure 3-8. The County of San Benito will have the greatest absolute growth with 3,501 housing units projected through the year 2045.

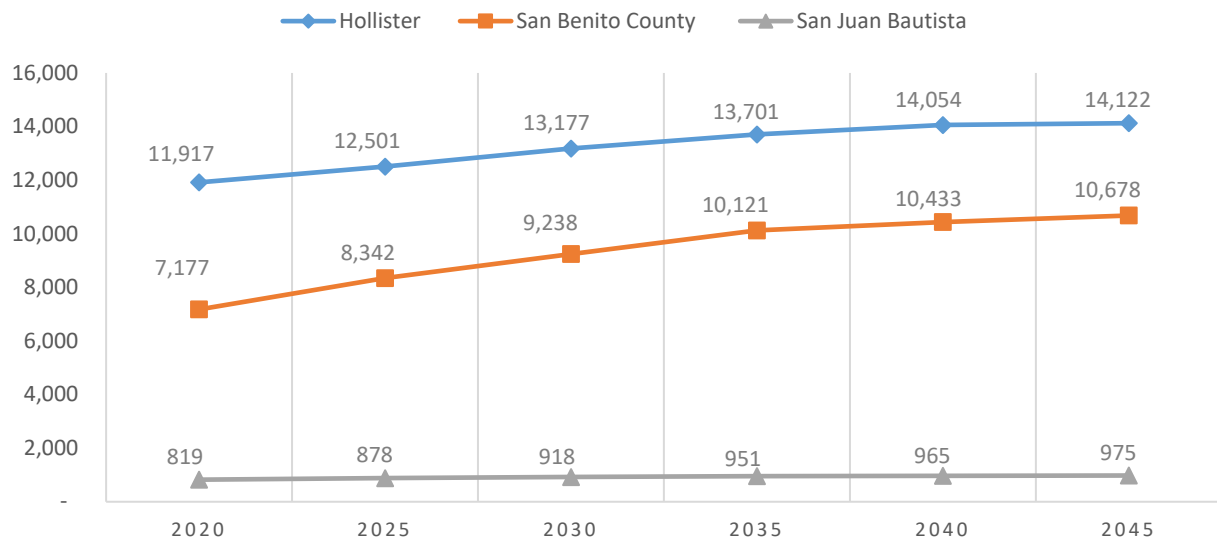


Figure 3-8 Housing Projections by San Benito Jurisdiction
 Source: AMBAG Regional Growth Forecast

Employment Growth Forecast

The Regional Transportation Plan forecasts shows a 12 percent (2,863 jobs) increase in employment within the San Benito region over the next 25 years, as illustrated in Figure 3-9. The neighboring Counties of Monterey and Santa Cruz are forecasted to have an employment growth rate of 8 percent and 9 percent, respectively.

County	2020 (Year)	2045 (Year)	Percent Increase
San Benito County	23,263	26,126	12%
Monterey County	243,015	263,437	8%
Santa Cruz County	140,002	153,261	9%
Total	406,280	442,824	9%

Figure 3-9 Employment Projections

Source: AMBAG Regional Growth Forecast

As illustrated in Figure 3-10, the employment projections’ aggregate data shows a 14 percent (2,121 jobs) increase in the City of Hollister, a 10 percent (55 jobs) in the City of San Juan Bautista, and a 10 percent (687 jobs) in the County of San Benito jurisdictions through the year 2045.

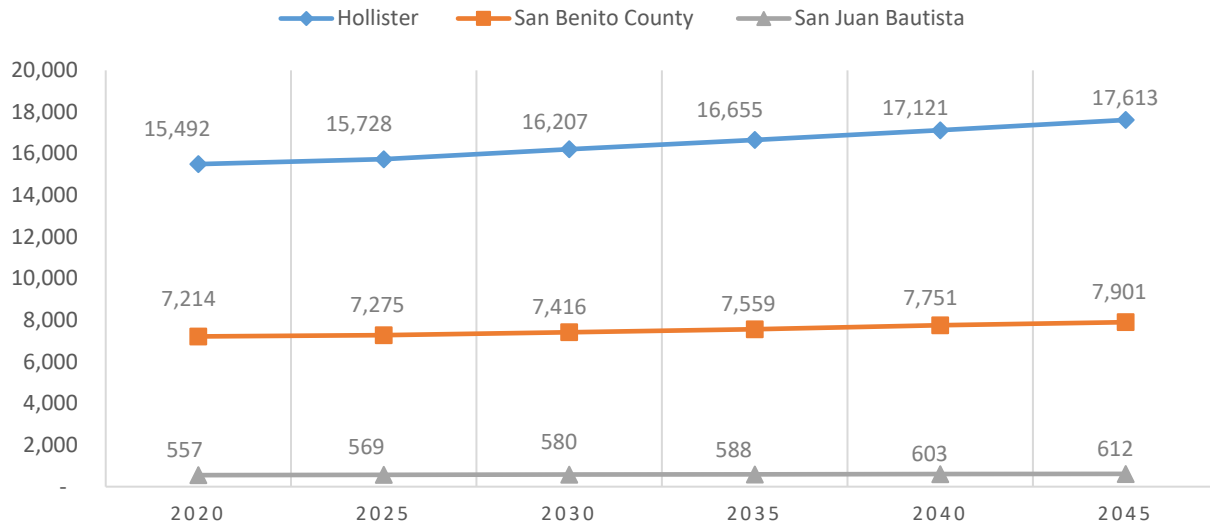


Figure 3-10 Employment Projections by San Benito Jurisdiction

Source: AMBAG Regional Growth Forecast

The location of employment and where people live directly influences the choices made in how they travel within the San Benito region.

As shown in Figure 3-11, the COVID 19 Pandemic caused a significant shift in unemployment rates from 7.0 in March of 2020 to 18.8 in the following month in April of 2020. As of August 2021, the unemployment rate in San Benito County is 6.9.

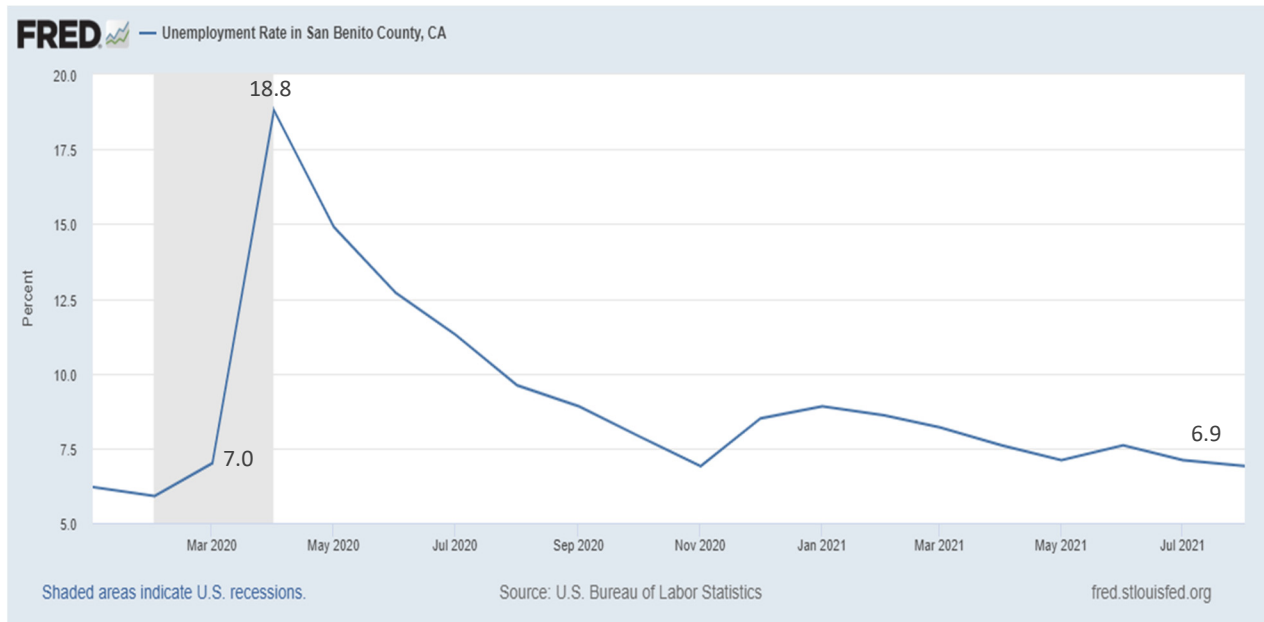


Figure 3-11 San Benito County Unemployment Rate

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 2021

The most common job groups, by number of people living in San Benito County are Office & Administrative Support Occupations (11.9 %), Sales & Related Occupations (9.6 %), and Management Occupations (9.3 %). Figure 3-12 illustrates the share breakdown of the primary industries for residents of San Benito County, some of these employees may live in the County but work outside the County. Census data is identified to a residential address, not an employment address.

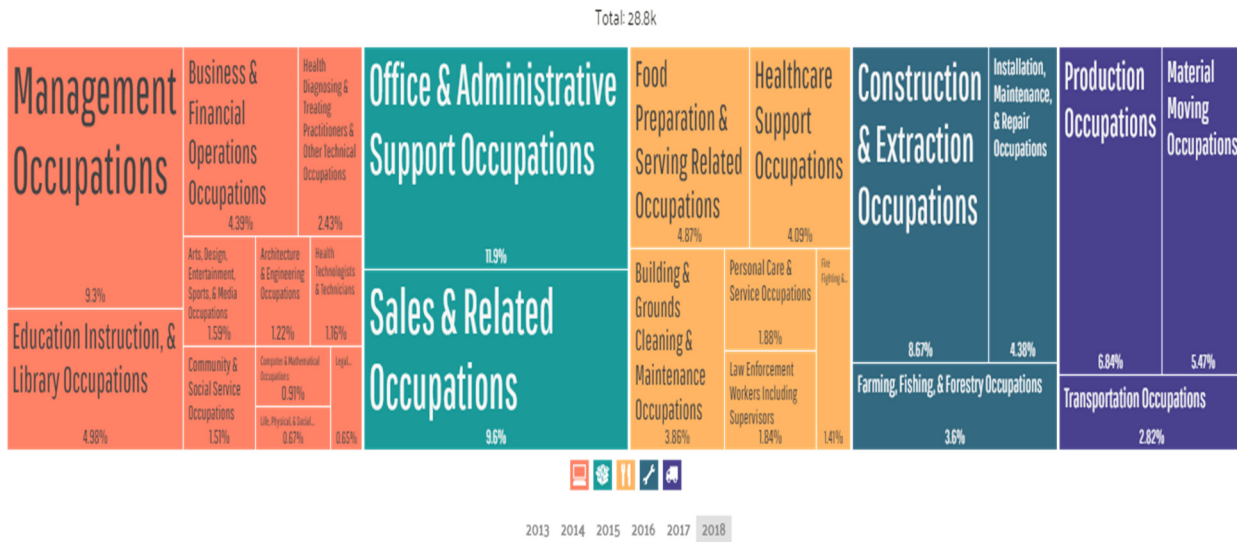


Figure 3-12 Employment Industries by All San Benito County Residents (Includes Commuters) (2010-2015)
 Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimate 2018,
<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/san-benito-county-ca>

Travel Patterns

Outbound Commuting

As previously stated, the primary influence on commuting is the relationship between where people live and where they work. This relationship has become an increasingly important issue locally as the spatial mismatch between jobs and affordable housing is causing growing numbers of workers to reside farther from their workplaces.

The San Benito region is home to a high percent of commuters. According to the Employment Development Department’s Labor Market Information Division, approximately 48.9 percent of San Benito County employed residents commute to jobs outside of the County for employment.²

According to a 2017 Special Report released by the American Community Survey, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that for the period between 2009 to 2013 of the total San Benito County workforce (29,367) regardless of residency, 12,499 or (42%) of them commuted outside the County for employment (Figure 3-13).

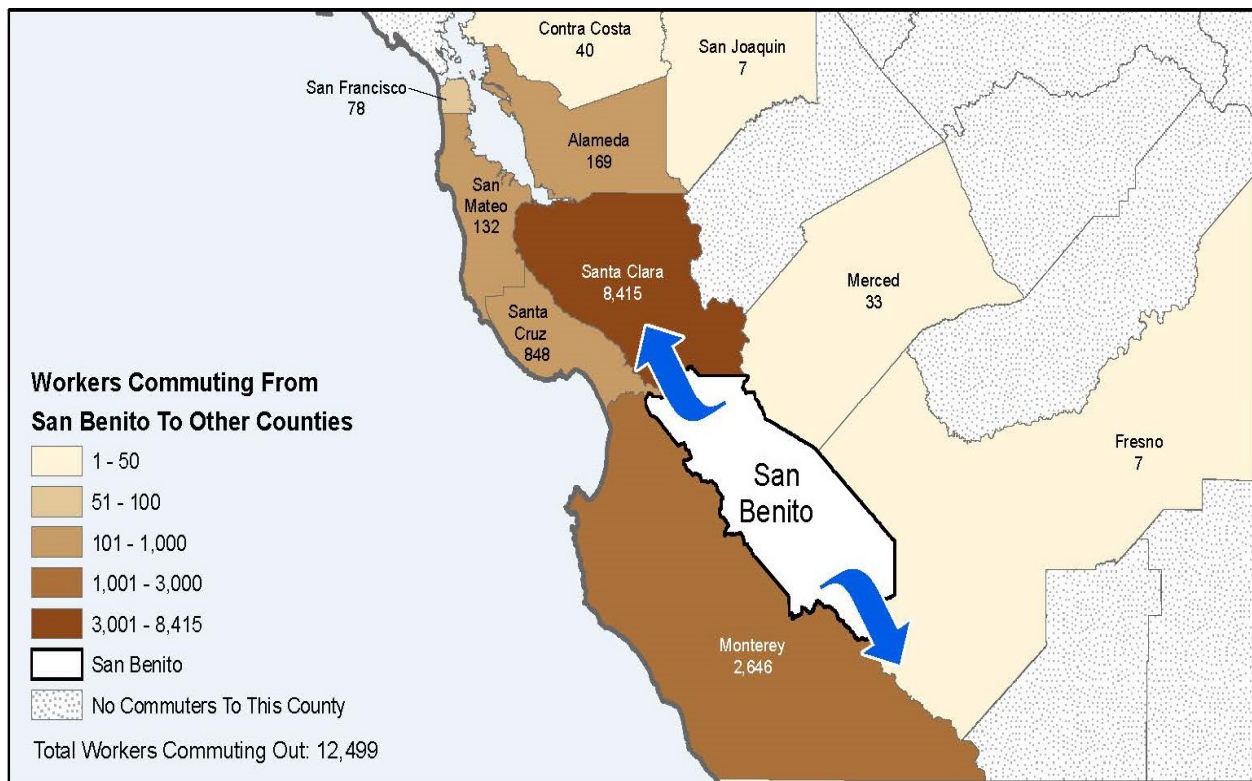


Figure 3-13 Workers Commuting from San Benito County to Other Counties

Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2017

Note: Special Report of 2009 to 2013 County-to-County Commuting Flows

² Special Report of 2006 to 2010 County-to-County Commuting Flows

Of that 42 percent (12,499) of San Benito residents that travel outside the County for employment, the majority commute into Bay Area and Central Coast Counties in search of higher paying jobs (Figure 3-14).

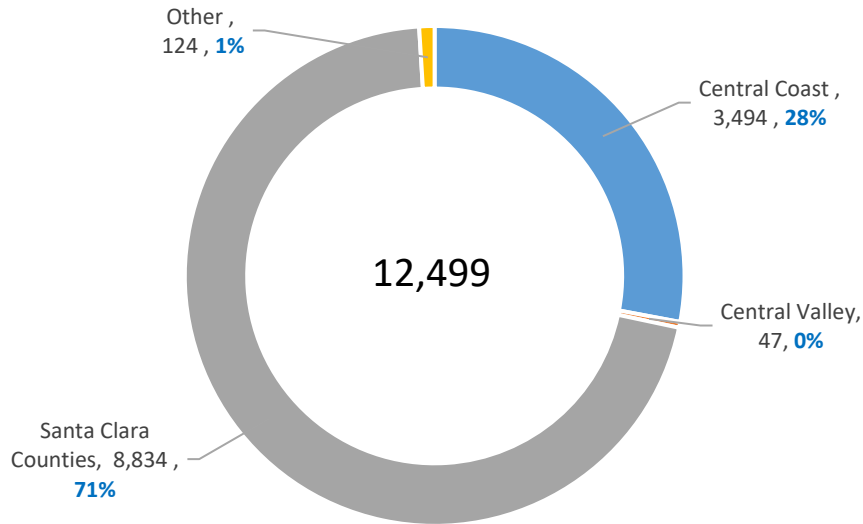


Figure 3-14 Workers Commuting from San Benito County to Other Counties by Percent

Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2017

Note: Special Report of 2009 to 2013 County-to-County Commuting Flows

High commute rates and interregional travel are the leading cause of congestion on 156 during commute peak times. State Routes 25 also experiences congestion during commute peak times, which is primarily attributed to local commute traffic traveling to Counties north of San Benito County.

Long-distance commuting (>30 miles) has become an increasingly common mobility necessity among San Benito County’s resident workforce. This situation is not unique to San Benito County, long-distance commuting in sparsely populated areas continues to surge, as increase in housing prices in more urbanized areas causes a population shift toward rural areas.

Inbound and Local Commuting

While it is important to track outbound commute patterns, it is also necessary to factor in people who both live and work in San Benito County and those traveling into San Benito County for employment from other counties.

The data from the most recent 2017 U.S Census Special Report, 2009 to 2013 County-to-County Commuting Flows, indicates that 11,644 people both live and work in San Benito County. The data also shows that an additional 5,224 people commute from other Counties into the County for employment. The majority of commuters traveling into the County are primarily traveling from Monterey, Santa Clara, and Merced Counties, Figure 3-15.

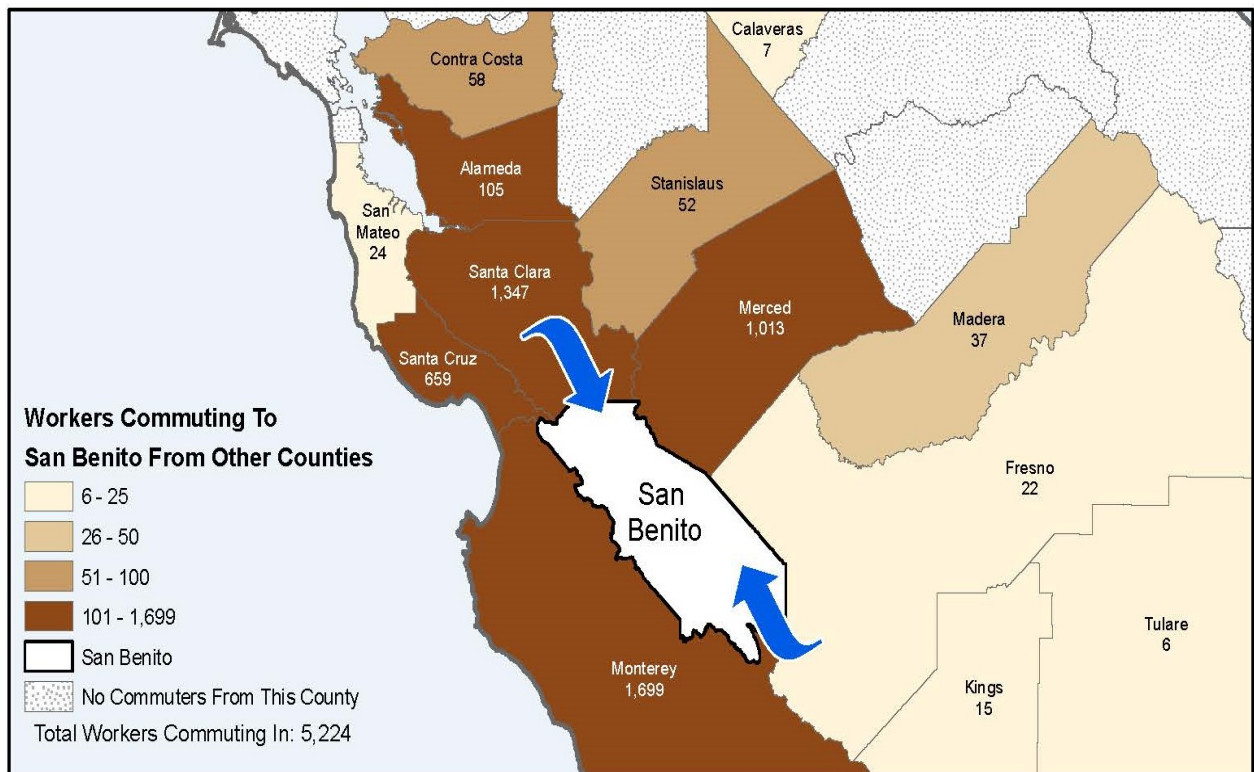


Figure 3-15 Workers Commuting from Other Counties into San Benito County

Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2017

Note: Special Report of 2009 to 2013 County-to-County Commuting Flows

The above-mentioned aggregate data is critical to understanding travel patterns and local economic impacts. In particular, the data shows that 16,868 (11,644 Total Workers Who Live And Work in San Benito + Total Workers Commuting in 5,224) jobs were provided by the local

economy. That includes commuters traveling into the County from other regions (5,224 people) and people who both live and work in the County (11,644 people).

The number of workers residing in the San Benito region continue to exceed the number of employment opportunities available locally– resulting in a high percent of commuters traveling out of the county for employment. The most common commute modes of those that commute outside the County for employment and those who live and work in San Benito County included *driving alone* and *carpooling*.

In 2018, of San Benito County’s total workers 22,000 (79.7%) of them *drove alone* to work, followed by those who *carpooled* to work at 3,540 (12.8%), and those who *worked at home* (3.7%). Precisely 446 *walked* to work (1.6%), 161 workers (0.6%) chose public transit and 74 (0.3%) *biked* to work. Lastly, those traveling by motorcycle and by other means had a combined total of 361 (1.3%) workers who chose mode as their preferred option.

The following chart shows the number of workers using each mode of transportation over time, using a logarithmic scale on the y-axis to help better show variations in the smaller means of commuting. As noted, nearly 80 percent of San Benito County workers are traveling alone as their preferred mode of transportation. Single-occupancy vehicles and limited capacity infrastructure are a significant contributor to congestion within the region.

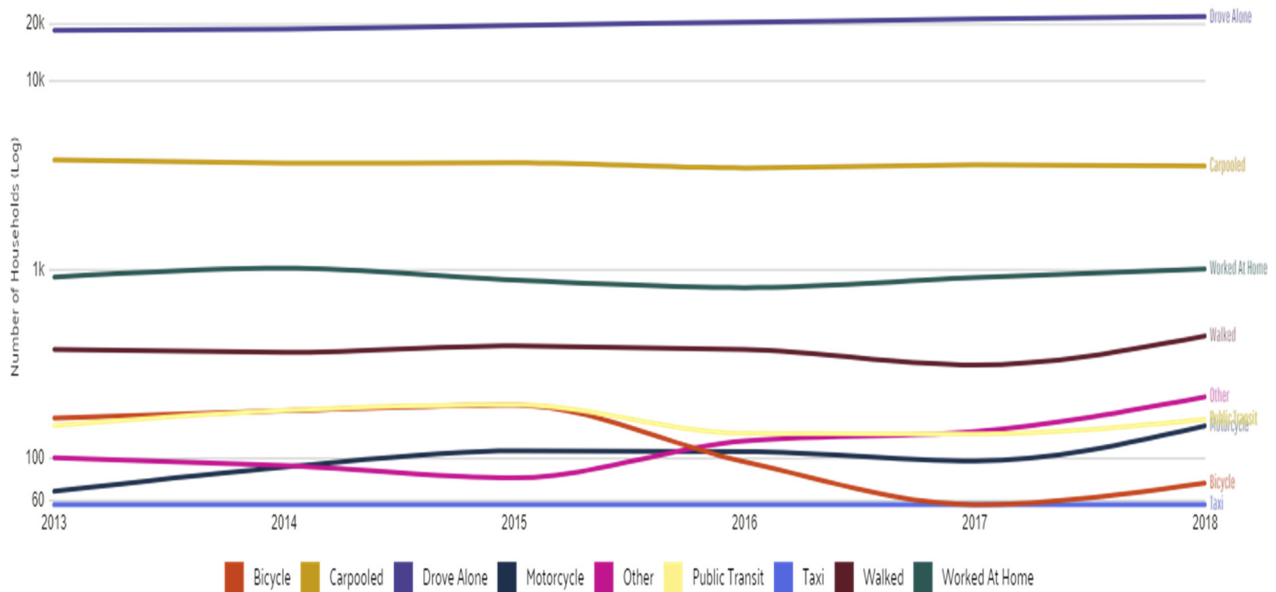


Figure 3-16 Mode Choice Peer Comparison by Percent

Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimate 2018,

<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/san-benito-county-ca>

In a peer comparison, Figure 3-17, with Tuolumne (pop. 53,932) and Calaveras (pop. 45,235) Counties, San Benito County’s “drove alone” mode choice ranked comparable. However, when compared with larger populated Counties, such as Yolo (pop. 214,977) and Santa Cruz (pop. 274,255), San Benito County had a higher percent of commuters driving alone.

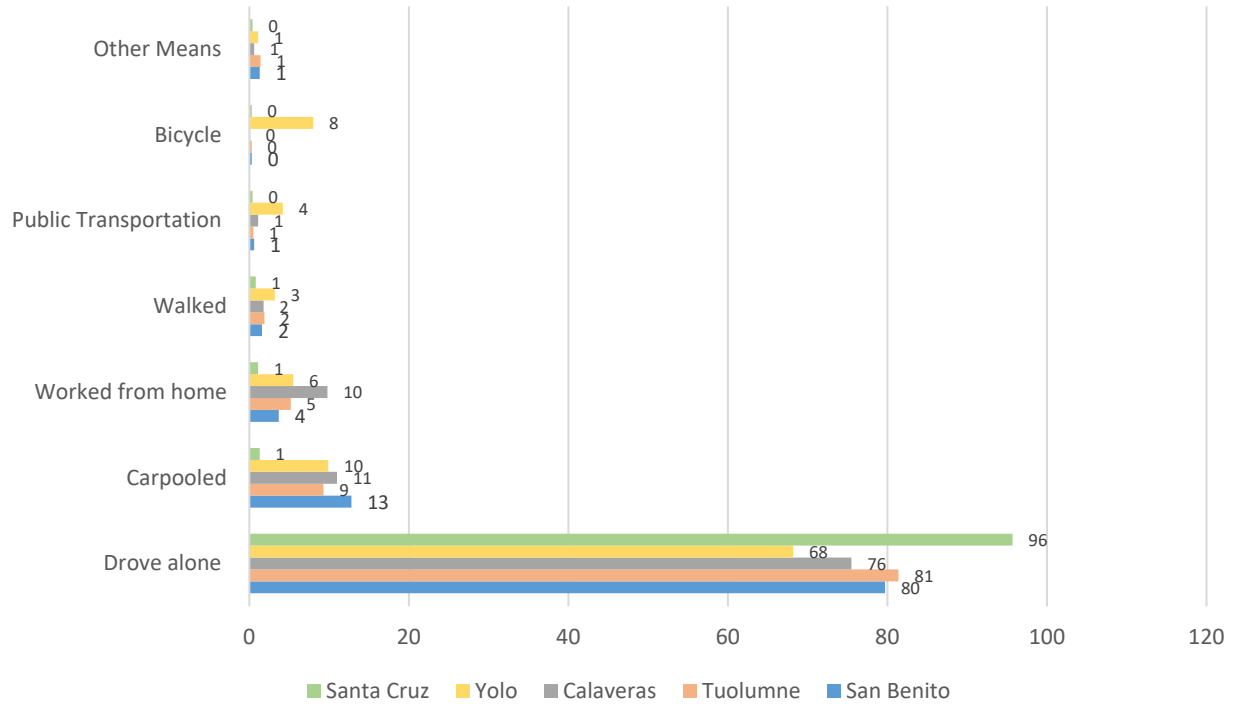


Figure 3-17 Mode Choice Peer Comparison by Percent

Source: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimate 2018, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/san-benito-county-ca>

The continued reliance on single occupant vehicles adds to the congestion during peak commute times. Within the San Benito region, the majority of all workers, 46 percent, travel between 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.³ Another 13.9 percent commute between 5:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.

Additionally, 72 percent of all San Benito workers travel more than 15 minutes to work, as noted in Figure 3-18. This data is important because most travel at the same time of day on the same roads and highways – exceeding road capacity during peak times. These workers also have longer than average commute time. San Benito commuters travel 34 minutes on average, which is above the national average of 25.3 minutes. Another 9 percent of the workforce in San Benito County have “super commutes” in excess of 90 minutes, which is higher than the national average of 2.8 percent.⁴

Travel Time to Work	
Time	Percent
Less than 5 minutes	3.5%
5 to 10 minutes	11.3%
10 to 14 minutes	13.4%
15 to 19 minutes	9.07%
20 to 24 minutes	7.11%
25 to 29 minutes	3.8%
30 to 34 minutes	10%
35 to 39 minutes	2.76%
40 to 44 minutes	5.19%
45 to 59 minutes	10.8%
60 to 89 minutes	13.8%
90 or more minutes	9.32%

Figure 3-18 San Benito Travel Time to Work
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2019 American Community Survey

Figure 3-19 shows how the average commute time for San Benito County commuters over a five-year time period, and compares it to that of its neighboring Counties. When compared to Santa Clara, Monterey, Merced, and Santa Cruz Counties, San Benito County’s average commute time in 2018 was 34 minutes, which is above its neighboring counterparts.

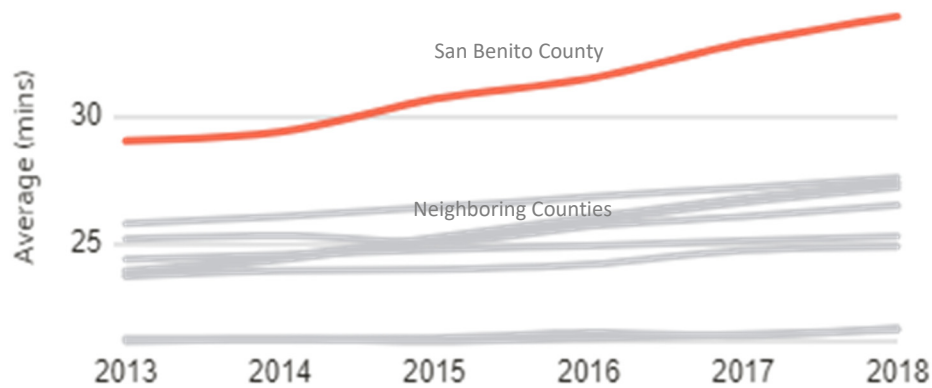


Figure 3-19 Average Travel Time to Work
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2018 American Community Survey

³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2018, Census Bureau ACS 5-year Estimate (<https://datausa.io/profile/geo/san-benito-county-ca#economy>)

Commute times are attributed to long-distance commuting, travel time, means of transportation, time of departure for work, vehicles available, and expenses associated with the commute. Accessibility to the transportation network goes beyond utilitarian trips to and from work. Providing people access to various destinations such as education, medical care, shopping, recreation, or other activities is essential to one's daily needs.

TRANSPORTATION AND LAND USE CONNECTION

Never before have the linkage and interrelationship between the regional transportation system and commercial and residential land uses have been more important. As the San Benito region transforms, locating employment opportunities where there is an increased potential for transit usage, as well as walking and biking opportunities, will become critical. This is supportive of a multimodal system, while also promoting mode alternatives to the single passenger car. Land use planning and transportation options will dictate how people travel within the San Benito region. Integrating the two will have a key role in shaping the region and in delivering social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

Ultimately, the San Benito Regional Transportation Plan aims at building a system that keeps pace with projected population, housing, and employment growth. The gradual upswing in employment and housing will allow public agencies to have more windows of opportunity to direct future development in urbanized areas and advance the sustainability goals of the Regional Transportation Plan and AMBAG's Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) and its Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

In keeping with this interconnection between land use planning and transportation, the San Benito Regional Transportation Plan was developed in close coordination with AMBAG's 2045 MTP/SCS.⁵ The SCS came about as a result of Senate Bill 375, Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008. The bill requires the 18 MPO's in California, which includes AMBAG, to reduce transportation related per capita greenhouse gas emissions through a coordinated land use and transportation plan. For example, the Plan identifies locations ideal for compact development with a focus on infill development, and access to travel options including transit and bike/pedestrian facilities.



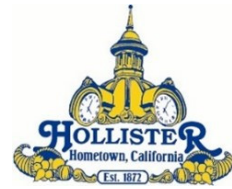
⁵ AMBAG Website: <http://www.ambag.org/programs-services/planning/metro-transport-plan>

Major Growth Corridors

The Regional Transportation Plan also assesses projected land uses in the region and identifies major growth corridors in order to plan for future transportation infrastructure.

City Of Hollister

The City of Hollister’s General Plan includes a phasing diagram that indicates the City’s priorities for locating future growth, as illustrated in Figure 3-20. The new residential areas include land northeast, south, east, and eventually northwest of the City respectively as the preferred progression of development. New employment growth is focused within the existing downtown, new retail gateways north and west of the downtown, and in the industrial park near the airport.



The City’s General Plan Circulation Element facilitates the orderly, efficient, and context sensitive expansion and development of Hollister’s circulation systems in support of the Land Use Element, as illustrated in Figure 3-21.

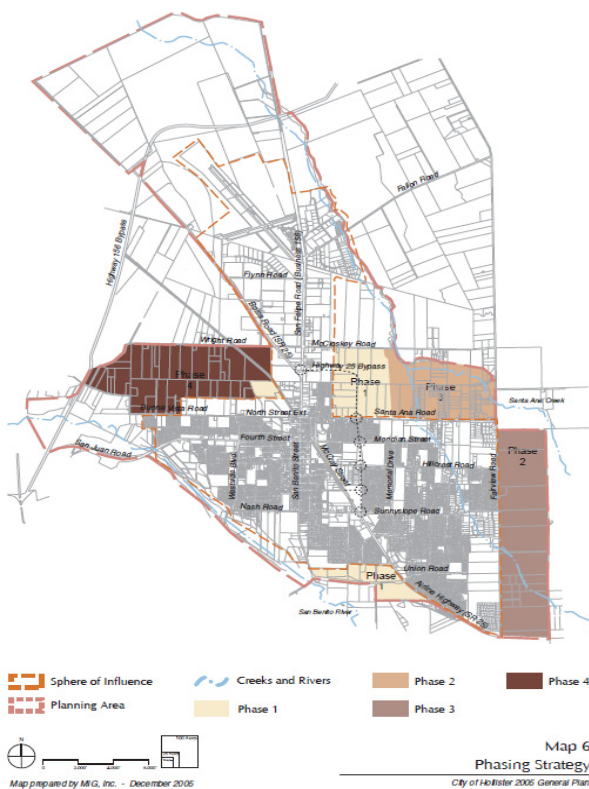


Figure 3-20 City of Hollister Phasing Strategy
Source: City of Hollister 2005 General Plan



Figure 3-21 City of Hollister Circulation Diagram
Source: City of Hollister 2005 General Plan

City of San Juan Bautista

The City of San Juan Bautista’s General Plan identifies a Clustered Growth Alternative, which focuses development on five key areas in the City. These areas were selected based on existing conditions, public opinion, and overall potential for creating accessible mixed-use areas.



The Clustered Growth Alternative arranges growth into central areas, placing retail, jobs, services, and recreation in walkable and bikeable distances. The major linear corridor encompasses four of the five clusters, where development is focused on the proposed Muckelemi Street Gateway leading into the redevelopment of the 3rd Street Downtown Corridor. South of the City, the fifth cluster creates higher density housing, more commercial and mixed-use land uses, and a linear park connecting Old San Juan-Hollister Road to the Downtown Corridor. The dotted clusters are featured in order to provide a vision for growth beyond 2035. The three key growth areas are illustrated in Figure 3-22.

The City of San Juan Bautista’s Circulation Element has a critical impact on land use patterns, economic development, public health, and social interaction. A balanced multimodal system encourages compact land use, efficiency of access, commercial development, and increased physical activity, as illustrated in Figure 3-23.

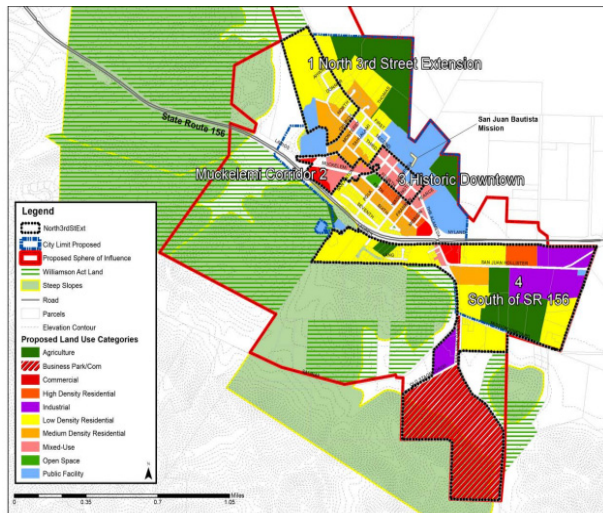


Figure 3-22 Clustered Development Key Growth Areas

Source: City of San Juan Bautista 2035 General Plan

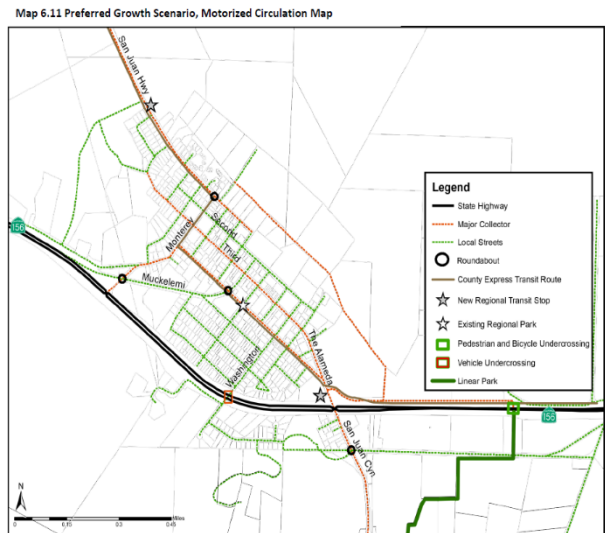


Figure 3-23 Preferred Growth Scenario, Circulation Map

Source: City of San Juan Bautista 2035 General Plan

COUNTY OF SAN BENITO

As noted in the County of San Benito’s General Plan, Figure 3-24, the County will focus future development in areas around cities where infrastructure and public services are available, within existing unincorporated communities, and within a limited number of new communities, provided they meet the goals of the General Plan and demonstrate a fiscally neutral or positive impact on the County.



The Circulation Element of the General Plan provides the framework for decisions in unincorporated San Benito County concerning the countywide transportation system. While the Circulation Element strives to encourage a multi-modal transportation system that serves the mobility needs of all residents, it also reflects the rural nature of the County. Policies encourage public transit and pedestrian and bicycle facility improvements in appropriate areas of the County where they will be most beneficial for linking residents to work, shopping, and leisure destinations. In rural areas of the County, policies in this Element encourage an efficient and economical transportation system to move goods for the agricultural and manufacturing industries.

The Circulation Element supports existing and proposed development under the Land Use Diagram for the General Plan horizon year of 2035, as illustrated in Figure 3-25. Circulation Elements play a critical role in how people travel and by what transportation mode.

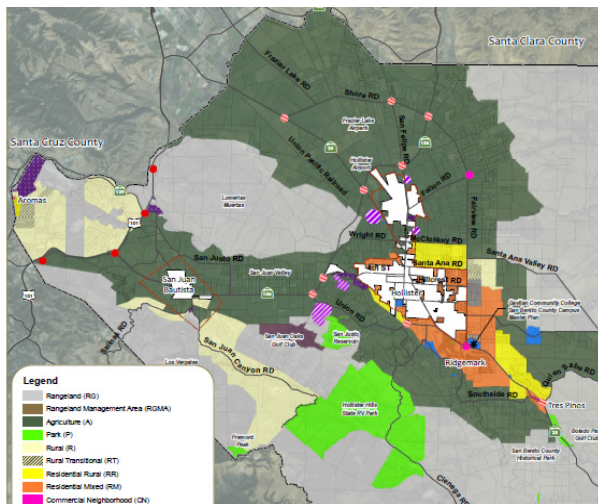


Figure 3-24 Specific Area Plan, County of San Benito
Source: 2023 City of Hollister General Plan

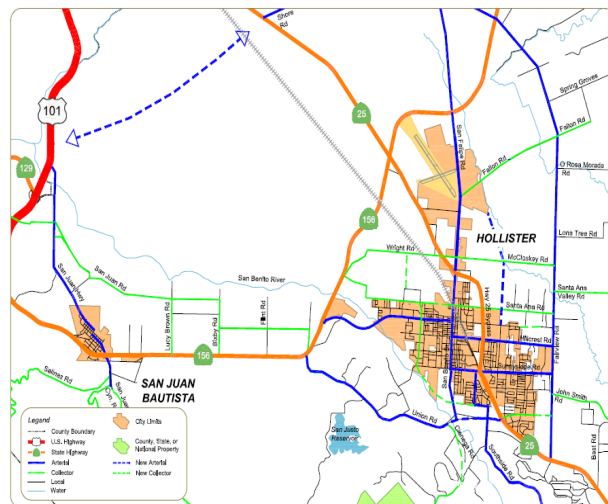


Figure 3-25 Circulation Diagram, County of San Benito
Source: 2035 San Benito County General Plan

Chapter 4 provides a snapshot of the existing transportation network, and its system needs.