

Commutes Are Shorter in Alaska

Times vary widely around the state



In the March 2011 issue of *Alaska Economic Trends*, we examined how Alaskans get to work, and how we compare with the rest of the nation. This is the other half of that story: how long it takes these people to get to work.

It probably isn't a surprise that Alaska is an outlier when it comes to the length of our commutes — and in this case, it's good news.

Maybe shorter also means happier

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, Alaskans spend 5.6 million minutes a year commuting to work. In daily terms, that means those who don't work at home spend an average of 17.9 minutes in transit to their jobs. That's not bad when we compare ourselves to our national counterparts, who spend 25.2 minutes getting to work. (See Exhibit 1.)

These are somewhat surprising results, given the size of our state. Maybe it also means Alaskans are happier than average, because according to

2 When We Leave for Work

Alaska, ACS 2005 to 2009

Time	Workers surveyed	Percent
12:00 a.m. to 4:59 a.m.	10,319	3.3%
5:00 a.m. to 5:29 a.m.	8,498	2.7%
5:30 a.m. to 5:59 a.m.	14,781	4.8%
6:00 a.m. to 6:29 a.m.	23,332	7.5%
6:30 a.m. to 6:59 a.m.	30,350	9.8%
7:00 a.m. to 7:29 a.m.	38,723	12.5%
7:30 a.m. to 7:59 a.m.	52,050	16.8%
8:00 a.m. to 8:29 a.m.	31,182	10.0%
8:30 a.m. to 8:59 a.m.	21,974	7.1%
9:00 a.m. to 9:59 a.m.	22,054	7.1%
10:00 a.m. to 10:59 a.m.	10,731	3.5%
11:00 a.m. to 11:59 a.m.	5,086	1.6%
12:00 p.m. to 3:59 p.m.	20,832	6.7%
4:00 p.m. to 11:59 p.m.	20,730	6.7%
Total	310,642	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey

some recent research on what makes us happy, the daily activity that is most "injurious to happiness" is commuting.

Not only is the average Alaskan's commute shorter than our national counterparts, but we rank 47th in the nation for time spent commuting to work. Only residents of Montana and the Dakotas spend less time in transit. Alaskans either drive shorter distances or face less traffic congestion — or probably both. Over the past decade, the average commute time in Alaska hasn't changed much. It's up slightly from 1980, when it was 16.7 minutes.

Commutes are shortest in Skagway

The amount of time Alaskans spend getting to work varies widely by location.¹ Skagway resi-

1 Longest and Shortest Commutes

United States, ACS* 2005 to 2009

Longest duration	Time in minutes	Shortest duration	Time in minutes
1 New York	31.4	41 Oklahoma	20.5
2 Maryland	31.1	42 Idaho	20.0
3 New Jersey	29.6	43 Kansas	18.7
4 Illinois	28.1	44 Iowa	18.3
5 Massachusetts	27.1	45 Wyoming	18.1
6 Georgia	27.0	46 Alaska	17.9
7 California	27.0	47 Nebraska	17.7
8 Virginia	26.9	48 Montana	17.3
9 Hawaii	25.6	49 South Dakota	16.4
10 New Hampshire	25.4	50 North Dakota	16.0
U.S.	25.2		

*American Community Survey data often have significant margins of error. For more on using the ACS data, see the March issue of *Trends*.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2005-2009.

¹For a detailed breakdown of the methods people use to travel to work in Alaska and nationwide, see the March issue of *Trends*.

dents spend the least amount of time getting to work, at just 4.4 minutes a day. The longest commute is 33.6 minutes for residents of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Neither of these figures is a surprise. Skagway is a small, compact community where over a third of its residents walk to work and the rest don't have far to go. On the other hand, approximately a third of Mat-Su residents commute to work in Anchorage, and another 10 to 15 percent work on the North Slope or elsewhere in the state. The Mat-Su is also the only place where Alaskans

spend more time getting to work than our national counterparts. Generally, the commutes are longer in Alaska's larger cities and shorter in smaller communities, although there are exceptions.

Most leave for work in the morning

The ACS commuter data also include information about when people leave for work. Over half start their travels between 6:00 and 8:30 in the morning. (See Exhibit 2.) However, there are relatively large pockets of commuters who head to work at all times of the day. For example, 6.7 percent leave for work between 4:00 and 11:59 p.m.

By NEAL FRIED, Economist

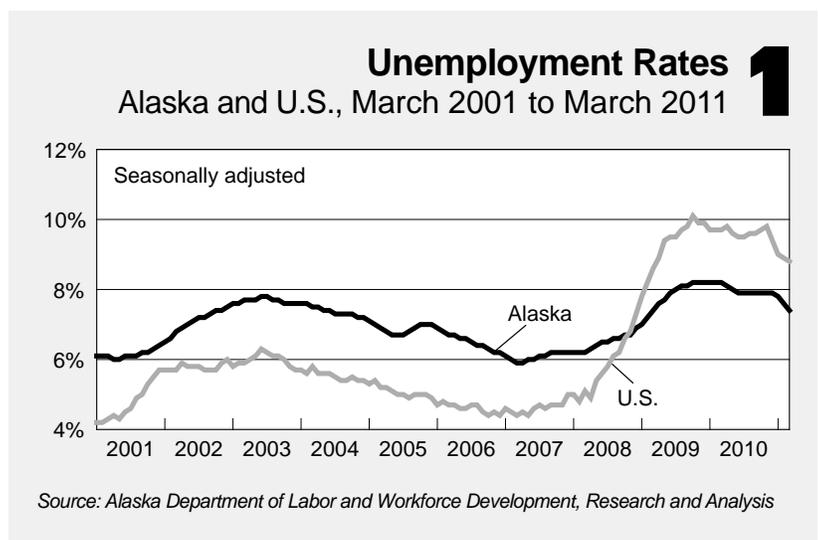
Employment Scene

Unemployment rate at 7.4 percent in March

Alaska's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for March was 7.4 percent, down from February's revised rate of 7.6 percent. The comparable national rate in March was 8.8 percent, a slight decrease from the revised rate of 8.9 percent in February. The Alaska and U.S. rates for March both came in below year-ago levels, and both have trended downward for many months.

The peak jobless rate for the nation was 10.1 percent in October of 2009, and Alaska's unemployment hit 8.2 percent during the last three months of 2009 and the first three months of 2010. As of March, Alaska's jobless rate has been lower than the nation's for 28 months in a row. However, the difference between the two has narrowed in recent months. Both rates are still above average, but show an improving labor market for job seekers.

The not-seasonally adjusted jobless rates around the state either did not change or fell slightly in March, which is typical of this time of year. While



rates declined slightly in four Alaska regions and held steady in the remaining two in March, all regional rates are below year-ago levels. Unemployment rates will probably begin to fall as the busy summer season begins.

2 Statewide Employment

Nonfarm wage and salary

	Preliminary		Revised		Year-Over-Year Change		90% Confidence Interval	
	3/11	2/11	3/10	3/10	3/10	3/10	Low	High
Alaska								
Total Nonfarm Wage and Salary ¹	317,600	315,500	309,500	8,100	717	15,483		
Goods-Producing ²	41,000	40,100	39,400	1,600	-1,284	4,484		
Service-Providing ³	276,600	275,400	270,100	6,500	-	-		
Mining and Logging	15,700	15,400	14,500	1,200	407	1,993		
Mining	15,300	15,200	14,300	1,000	-	-		
Oil and Gas	12,900	12,900	12,200	700	-	-		
Construction	12,800	12,200	12,900	-100	-2,683	2,483		
Manufacturing	12,500	12,500	12,000	500	-494	1,494		
Seafood Processing	9,000	8,700	8,600	400	-	-		
Trade, Transportation, Utilities	60,800	60,400	59,000	1,800	-572	4,172		
Wholesale Trade	5,900	5,900	6,000	-100	-656	456		
Retail Trade	33,900	33,800	33,700	200	-1,828	2,228		
Food and Beverage Stores	6,000	6,000	6,100	-100	-	-		
General Merchandise Stores	9,800	9,800	9,700	100	-	-		
Transportation, Warehousing, Utilities	21,000	20,700	19,300	1,700	662	2,738		
Air Transportation	5,500	5,300	5,300	200	-	-		
Truck Transportation	3,300	3,200	2,900	400	-	-		
Information	6,300	6,400	6,300	0	-581	581		
Telecommunications	4,200	4,200	4,100	100	-	-		
Financial Activities	15,100	15,000	14,300	800	-1,143	2,743		
Professional and Business Services	25,500	25,500	25,200	300	-1,493	2,093		
Educational⁴ and Health Services	43,200	43,200	41,300	1,900	632	3,168		
Health Care	31,100	31,000	29,600	1,500	-	-		
Leisure and Hospitality	29,400	28,500	27,200	2,200	163	4,237		
Accommodations	6,500	6,300	6,000	500	-	-		
Food Services and Drinking Places	19,300	18,700	17,600	1,700	-	-		
Other Services	11,300	11,300	11,100	200	-2,976	3,376		
Government	85,000	85,100	85,700	-700	-	-		
Federal Government ⁵	16,600	16,400	17,100	-500	-	-		
State Government	26,400	26,300	26,300	100	-	-		
State Government Education ⁶	8,600	8,600	8,500	100	-	-		
Local Government	42,000	42,400	42,300	-300	-	-		
Local Government Education ⁷	25,100	25,400	25,000	100	-	-		
Tribal Government	3,600	3,500	3,600	0	-	-		

4 Regional Employment

Nonfarm wage and salary

	Preliminary		Revised		Changes from		Percent Change		90% confidence interval	
	3/11	2/11	3/10	2/11	3/10	2/11	3/10	Low	High	
Anch/Mat-Su	167,600	167,300	166,000	300	1,600	0.2%	1.0%	-1,952	5,152	
Anchorage	148,350	148,100	147,200	250	1,150	0.2%	0.8%	-	-	

A dash indicates that confidence intervals aren't available at this level.

¹Excludes the self-employed, fishermen and other agricultural workers, and private household workers. For estimates of fish harvesting employment, and other fisheries data, go to labor.alaska.gov/research/seafood/seafood.htm.

²Goods-producing sectors include natural resources and mining, construction, and manufacturing.

³Service-providing sectors include all others not listed as goods-producing sectors.

⁴Private education only

⁵Excludes uniformed military

⁶Includes the University of Alaska

⁷Includes public school systems

⁸Fairbanks North Star Borough

Sources for Exhibits 1, 2, and 3: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

Sources for Exhibit 4: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section; also the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, for Anchorage/Mat-Su and Fairbanks

3 Unemployment Rates

Borough and census area

	Prelim.		Revised	
	3/11	2/11	3/10	3/10
SEASONALLY ADJUSTED				
United States	8.8	8.9	9.7	
Alaska Statewide	7.4	7.6	8.2	
NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED				
United States	9.2	9.5	10.2	
Alaska Statewide	8.3	8.4	9.2	
Anchorage/Mat-Su Region	7.3	7.3	8.4	
Municipality of Anchorage	6.5	6.5	7.6	
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	10.2	10.3	11.0	
Gulf Coast Region	10.3	10.6	11.2	
Kenai Peninsula Borough	11.1	11.4	12.3	
Kodiak Island Borough	6.5	6.5	7.2	
Valdez-Cordova Census Area	11.2	12.2	11.3	
Interior Region	8.4	8.5	9.2	
Denali Borough	18.9	18.9	18.8	
Fairbanks North Star Borough	7.3	7.4	8.2	
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	11.9	12.2	12.9	
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	16.9	18.3	18.0	
Northern Region	9.6	9.6	10.4	
Nome Census Area	12.3	12.5	13.5	
North Slope Borough	4.4	4.4	5.4	
Northwest Arctic Borough	15.3	15.1	14.7	
Southeast Region	8.6	9.0	9.3	
Haines Borough	11.2	13.1	13.3	
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area ¹	24.8	26.2	23.9	
Juneau, City and Borough of	5.9	5.9	6.6	
Ketchikan Gateway Borough ¹	8.8	9.1	9.9	
Petersburg Census Area ¹	12.6	13.7	-	
Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area ¹	18.3	19.0	-	
Prince of Wales-Outer Ketchikan CA ¹	-	-	18.7	
Sitka, City and Borough of ¹	6.6	7.0	7.0	
Skagway, Municipality of ¹	23.0	27.6	24.2	
Wrangell, City and Borough of ¹	10.1	10.9	-	
Wrangell-Petersburg Census Area ¹	-	-	12.6	
Yakutat, City and Borough of	13.4	14.6	13.1	
Southwest Region	12.6	12.8	12.8	
Aleutians East Borough	7.6	7.4	7.2	
Aleutians West Census Area	3.9	4.0	3.9	
Bethel Census Area	15.9	15.9	16.2	
Bristol Bay Borough	10.3	11.2	10.6	
Dillingham Census Area	11.5	11.3	11.6	
Lake and Peninsula Borough	11.8	12.8	11.4	
Wade Hampton Census Area	20.8	21.7	21.5	

¹ Because of the creation of new boroughs, this borough or census area has been changed or no longer exists. Data for the Skagway Municipality and Hoonah-Angoon Census Area became available in 2010. Data for Wrangell Borough, Petersburg Census Area, and Prince of Wales-Hyder went into effect January 2011. Prior to January, data were published for Wrangell-Petersburg Census Area and Prince of Wales-Outer Ketchikan Census Area.

Changes in Producing the Estimates

Beginning with the production of preliminary estimates for March 2011, production of state and metropolitan area Current Employment Statistics estimates has transitioned from state workforce agencies to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Concurrent with this transition, the BLS implemented several changes to the methods to help standardize estimation across states. While these changes reduce the potential for statistical bias in state and metropolitan area estimates, they may increase month-to-month variability. More detailed information on the CES changes is available on the BLS Web site at <http://www.bls.gov/sae/cesprocs.htm>.

For more current state and regional employment and unemployment data, visit our Web site: laborstats.alaska.gov

Employer Resources

Increased immigration and customs enforcement could cost employers

Employers should be aware that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, an investigative unit of the Department of Homeland Security, is cracking down on employers of illegal immigrants.

The Employment Compliance Inspection Center, an ICE office, has been created to focus on auditing businesses with large numbers of employees. The center's 15 forensic auditors will help agency field offices expedite Form I-9 audits of businesses selected for compliance inspections.

According to government estimates, there are approximately 11 million illegal immigrants living in the United States. In fiscal year 2010, ICE audited more than 2,740 companies, imposed a record \$7 million in civil fines, and increased criminal prosecution of businesses that employed illegal workers. All employers, large and small, should anticipate more audits and prepare for possible inspections.

To avoid potential liability, employers must implement detailed I-9 handling procedures. To help with compliance, Homeland Security created E-Verify, a free online employment eligibility verification program. E-Verify is

fast, free for employers, and easy to use. This program allows businesses to confirm that newly hired employees are authorized to work in the U.S.

Employers can also protect against fraudulent use of documents by ensuring that only trained individuals process the I-9s and use E-Verify. Businesses may add another layer of protection by including a review of the completed documents by a second person.

"Ultimately, it is in a company's best financial interest to proactively comply with the law now rather than to face potential fines or criminal prosecution for noncompliance in the future," an ICE spokeswoman said.

A video demonstration of E-Verify is available online at: www.uscis.gov/USCIS/E-Verify/Videos/e-verify-i-9-passport.swf.

Employers may also participate in free webinars on I-9 and E-Verify by visiting www.dhs.gov/E-Verify and clicking on "Sign up for a Webinar."

To contact E-Verify's customer support center, call (888) 464-4218, or e-mail E-Verify@dhs.gov.

A Safety Minute

Free health hazard evaluations can help employers cut medical costs

In an era of budget shortfalls, reducing expenses is a primary concern for many employers. Health care is one area that commands attention because of its continually rising costs.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 60 percent of Americans who have health coverage obtain it through their employers. Depending on the size of an organization and the number of employees, the annual increases in an employer's health insurance costs can be very high. And when employees take sick time, this can also affect daily operations and budgets.

Ensuring a healthy workforce can increase productivity and help mitigate medical costs — and a safe and healthy work place is a good place to start. To protect

the health of workers, Alaskans can minimize or prevent exposure to health hazards. Hazards that are chemical, physical, ergonomic, and biological can be prevented or minimized before they lead to death or serious illnesses such as asbestosis, lung cancer, chemical sensitivity, work-related musculoskeletal disorders, and hearing loss.

Safety and health consultants with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development are available to help employers identify, evaluate, and control workplace health hazards. They provide free assistance such as air and noise monitoring, audits, and other tools to help prevent or reduce work site injuries, illnesses, and deaths. For more information, please call (800) 656-4972.