Civilian Labor Force

The Hickory MSA's October 2023 unemployment rate was 3.4%. Over the past year, the Hickory MSA's unemployment rate has increased slightly to 3.5% as of October 2024 (Figure 1). Between October 2023 and October 2024, the estimated number of employed persons decreased from 168,796 to 166,860 (-1,936), while the civilian labor force fell from 174,685 to 172,850 (-1,835). In October 2024, the Hickory MSA had the eighth lowest (eighth highest) unemployment rate among North Carolina MSAs (Table 1). October 2024, unemployment rates by county were Alexander 3.2%, Burke 3.8%, Caldwell 3.6%, and Catawba 3.3%.
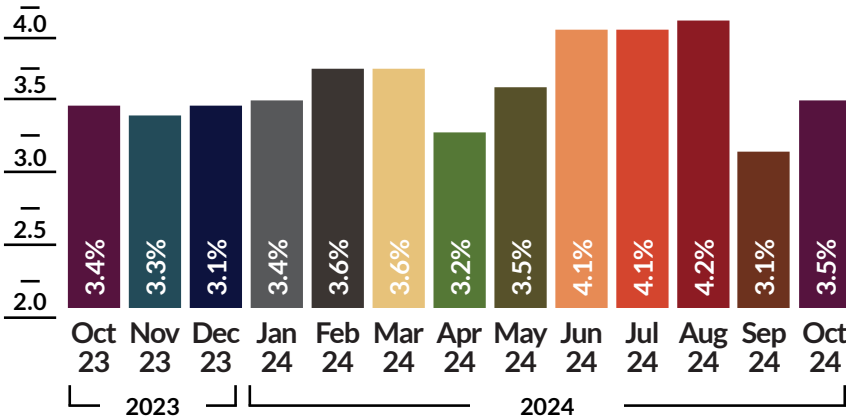
Figure 1. MSA Unemployment, Oct. 2023 - Oct. 2024
Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2024.

	Oct 23	Nov 23	Dec 23	Jan 24	Feb 24	Mar 24	Apr 24	May 24	Jun 24	Jul 24	Aug 24	Sep 24	Oct 24
Rate	3.4%	3.3%	3.1%	3.4%	3.6%	3.6%	3.2%	3.5%	4.1%	4.1%	4.2%	3.1%	3.5%

Table 1.
MSA Unemployment Rate, October 2024

Durham-Chapel Hill	**2.9%**
Wilmington	**2.9%**
Raleigh	**3.0%**
Burlington	**3.2%**
New Bern	**3.3%**
Charlotte-Concord-Gastonia	**3.4%**
Winston-Salem	**3.4%**
Hickory-Lenoir-Morganton	**3.5%**
Goldsboro	**3.6%**
Greenville	**3.6%**
Greensboro-High Point	**3.7%**
Jacksonville	**3.8%**
Fayetteville	**4.4%**
Rocky Mount	**4.6%**
Asheville	**7.3%**

Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2024.

Hickory Metro Average Annual Wages

Average annual Hickory MSA wages grew from $41,808 in 2019 to $51,324 in 2023 (Figure 2). The percentage increase in Hickory MSA average yearly salaries between 2019 and 2023 (22.8%) was 3.7 percentage points higher than the US inflation rate from 2019 to 2023 (19.1%) (Table 2). The Hickory MSA's wage growth rate between 2019 and 2023 was lower than the NC average (25.3%), but was higher than the national average (22.2%). The Hickory Metro's average annual wage growth rate from 2022 to 2023 (1.9%) was lower than the US inflation rate (3.2%), and the NC salary growth rate (3.9%). Average wage growth in the Hickory MSA between 2022 and 2023 is due in part to job growth in higher-paying sectors, such as health care (475 workers) and construction (150 workers).

Table 2. Change in Wages Versus Inflation, 2019-23
Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Census and NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2024.

County	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2019-2023
US Inflation Rate	1.0%	5.4%	8.5%	3.2%	19.1%
Hickory MSA Wages	5.6%	7.2%	6.5%	1.9%	22.8%
NC Wages	7.3%	5.9%	6.1%	3.9%	25.3%
US Wages	8.1%	5.6%	3.5%	3.4%	22.2%

Figure 2. Hickory MSA Average Yearly Wages per Worker
Source: NC Labor and Economic Analysis Division, 2024.

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
$41,808	$44,148	$47,320	$50,440	$51,324
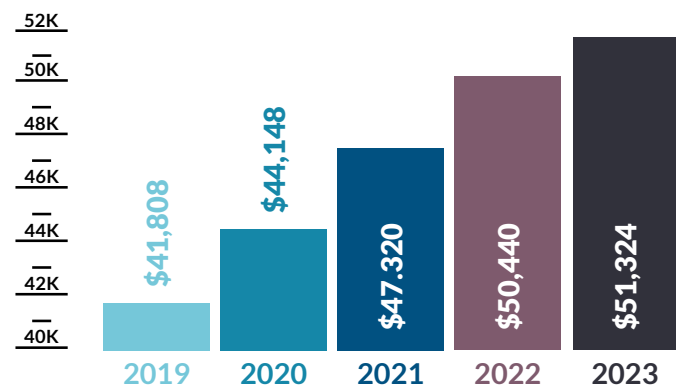
EIN Spotlight – Hickory Traffic Counts

North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) traffic counts are based on average daily vehicle traffic (ADT) volumes, which are defined as the average amount of traffic that moves past a location in both directions over a 24-hour period seven days a week. ADT results are currently produced once every other year (the odd number years) in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties (due to the higher number of traffic counts that need to be collected).

An updated analysis of ADT counts helps economic developers, transportation planners, and local officials determine the need for road improvements and possible new thoroughfares in the Hickory Metro area. It also reveals how new roads or road construction can affect the existing transportation network. Changes in traffic count data also show how economic conditions, such as commercial, industrial, or retail growth, and changes in gasoline prices have influenced commuting and traffic patterns.

This edition of the "EIN Spotlight" examines traffic count trends throughout the four-county region. The Hickory MSA will be separated into several "sub-regions" to analyze traffic count changes more easily. Maps and tables will show the highest traffic counts in each Hickory MSA County, as well as where the largest increases and decreases in traffic counts occurred between 2013 and 2023 and from 2021 to 2023.

Hickory–Newton–Conover Area Traffic Counts

Table 3 reveals the highest 2023 traffic counts in the Hickory-Newton-Conover area. The highest traffic count in the Hickory Metro region of 68,000 vehicles per day occurred along I-40 between US 321 (Exit 123) and McDonald Parkway (Exit 126). The 68,000 average daily traffic count is more than the highway's estimated capacity of 59,000 vehicles per day. Estimated capacity is defined as the maximum number of vehicles that can pass on that segment of I-40 without gridlock occurring.

A 2023 count of 36,000 per day was identified along US 321 near the Catawba River Bridge. This traffic count was the fifth highest on US 321 in the region. The estimated capacity of the bridge is currently 40,000 vehicles per day, so the current traffic count at the bridge is close to its estimated capacity. An average daily traffic count of 43,000 vehicles was located on US 321 between I-40 and US 70. A traffic count of 36,500 occurred on US 321 near the River Road Exit just south of Hickory.

Traffic counts on Lenoir-Rhyne Boulevard just north of I-40 in 2023 were determined to be about 31,000 per day. The practical capacity of L-R Blvd is about 25,000 per day, so the road's capacity is being surpassed by 6,000 vehicles. The highest traffic count on NC 127 was near 16th Avenue NE (37,500). Traffic volume at this location is higher than their recommended capacity of 25,000. Springs Road NE's highest average daily traffic count (just east of 29th Ave Dr NE) was 31,500.

Table 3. Hickory-Newton-Conover Area Average Daily Traffic Counts of 30,00 or More Vehicles Per Day, 2023		
Traffic Count	**Road**	**Location**
68,000	I-40	Between L-R Blvd (Exit 125) & McDonald Parkway (Exit 126)
68,000	I-40	Between US 321 (Exit 123) & L-R Blvd (Exit 125)
62,500	I-40	Between McDonald Parkway (Exit 126) & Fairgrove Church Rd (Exit 128)
56,000	I-40	Between Fairgrove Church Rd (Exit 128) & Old Hwy 70 (Exit 130)
56,000	I-40	Between Old Hwy 70 (Exit 130) & NC 16 (Exit 132)
54,000	I-40	Between the Long View (Exit 121) & US 321(Exit 123)
51,000	I-40	Catawba/Burke County line
46,000	I-40	Between NC 16 (Exit 132) & Rock Barn Rd (Exit 133)
43,000	US 321	Between I-40 and US 70
41,000	US 321	Between NC 127 and I-40
38,500	US 321	Between US 70 and 2nd Ave NW
36,500	US 321	Just north of 2nd Ave NW (Starbucks)
36,000	US 321	Near Catawba River Bridge
37,500	NC 127	Near 16th Ave NE
36,500	US 321	Near the River Rd Exit
33,000	US 321	Just north of NC 10 Exit
32,500	NC 127	Near 16th Ave NE
31,500	NC 127	North of 25th Ave NW
31,500	Springs Rd NE	Just east of 29th Ave Dr NE
31,000	L-R Blvd	Just north of I-40

Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.

Analyzing current ADTs only tells part of the story concerning transportation patterns in the region. It is also important to analyze which areas in the Hickory MSA are experiencing increases or decreases in traffic flow and determine why these fluctuations occur. Changes in the Hickory-Newton-Conover area's traffic volume between 2013 and 2023 are displayed in Figure 3. Green circles represent growth in average daily traffic at a particular location. The larger the green circle, the greater the volume increase. The red circles shown in Figure 3 represent traffic volume declines between 2013 and 2023. Small brown circles indicate no net traffic volume change between 2013 and 2023.

The largest average daily traffic growth between 2013 and 2023 occurred on Springs Road in northeast Hickory. Traffic along Springs Road just south of Kool Park Road NE increased 8,000 vehicles per day to 28,000 (Table 4, Page 4). The ADT at US 321 north of NC 10 grew by 7,000 vehicles per day to 33,000 due to more traffic between the Hickory and Gastonia/Charlotte areas. Along NC 16, traffic volume near Emmanuel Church Road increased by 6,500 vehicles since 2013 to 16,500 in 2023 as more commuters are using NC 16 to travel to the Charlotte Metro area.

Figure 3. Hickory Urban Area Volume Change 2013-2023 Average Daily Traffic
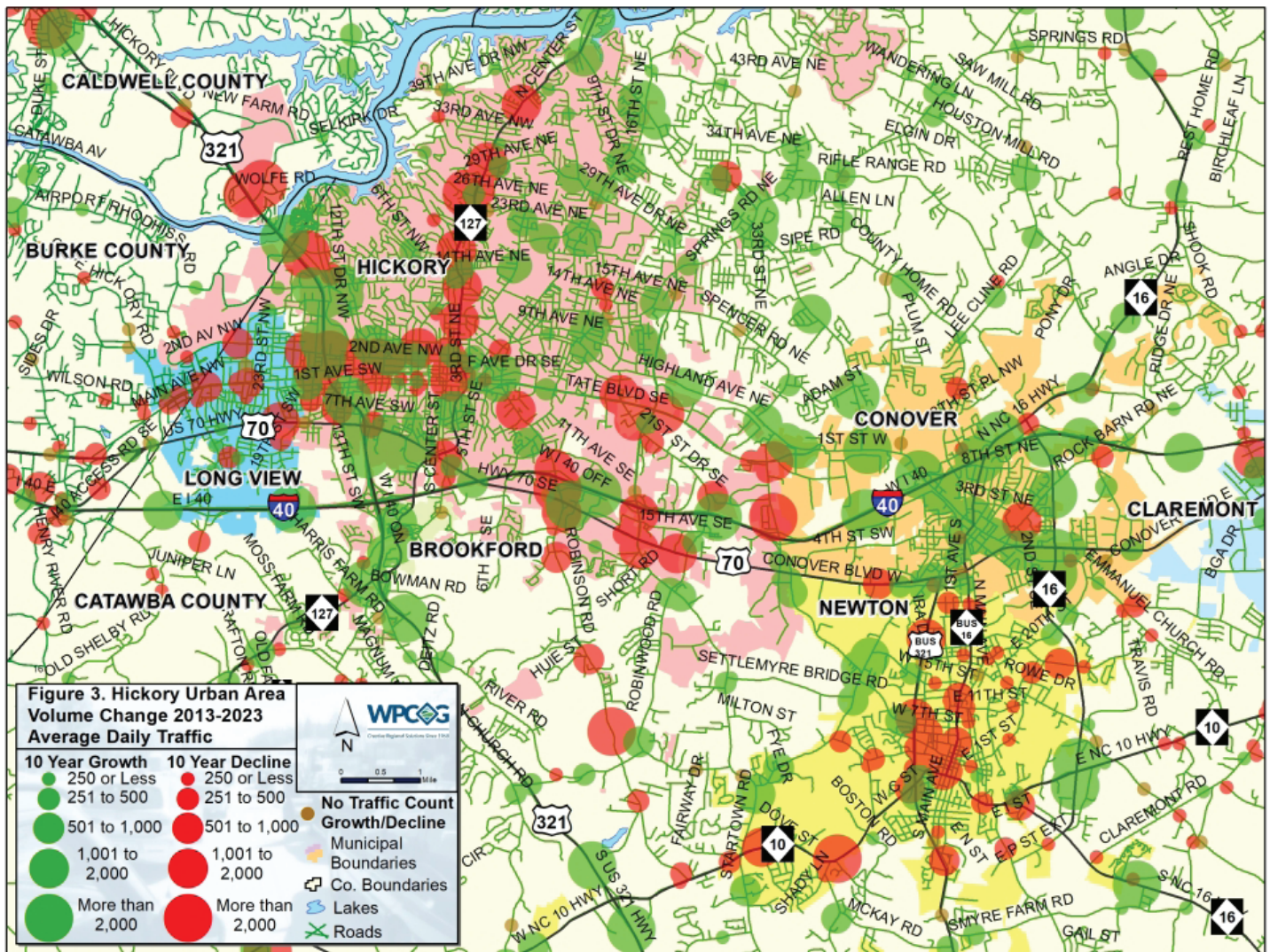
Traffic volume growth of 6,000 vehicles per day occurred along US 321 just north of River Road from 2013 to 2023, which indicates more traffic flow heading towards Hickory. A traffic gain of 5,000 vehicles per day between 2013 and 2023 took place along US 70 just east of 16th Street SW in Hickory. US 321 traffic between north of Highway 70 in Hickory increased by 4,500 vehicles per day from 2013 to 2023.

Many of the largest traffic decreases between 2013 and 2023 are located on older existing roads in the Hickory-Newton-Conover area due to the construction of new thoroughfares. For instance, the loss of 6,000 vehicles per day at Lenoir-Rhyne Blvd from 2013 to 2023 matches with the opening of McDonald Parkway. A traffic decrease of 3,400 vehicles occurred in Hickory along 2nd Avenue NW just east of US 321, while a traffic decline of 3,200 vehicles per day took place at 25th Avenue NW west of NC 127. A loss of 2,400 vehicles per day happened on Old Lenoir Road just south of US 321 and 15th Avenue NW.

Table 4. Largest Hickory-Newton-Conover Area Traffic Volume Increases and Decreases, 2013-2023
(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)

Traffic Volume Increase	Road	Location	Traffic Volume Decrease	Road	Location
8,000	Springs Rd NE	South of Kool Park Rd NE	-6,000	Lenoir-Rhyne Blvd SE	South of I-40
7,000	US 321	North of NC 10	-3,400	2nd Ave NW	East of US 321
6,500	NC 16 (Thornburg Ave SE)	South of Emmanual Church Rd	-3,200	25th Ave NW	West of NC 127
6,000	US 321	North of River Rd	-2,900	Robinson Rd	North of Sandy Ford Rd
5,500	NC 16 (Thornburg Ave SE)	South of Emmanual Church Rd	-2,500	Fairgrove Church Rd	North of 14th Ave SE
5,000	US 70	East of 16th St SW	-2,400	Old Lenoir Rd NW	South of 15th Ave NW
4,500	US 321	North of US 70	-2,000	US 70	West of 22nd St SW

Figure 4 shows traffic count changes for the Hickory-Newton-Conover area between 2021 and 2023. A significant traffic volume increase (6,000) to 56,000 vehicles per day occurred at I-40 between Exit 130 (Old US 70) and Exit 132 (NC 16) in Conover (Table 5, Page 5). Significant traffic growth from 2021 to 2023 also took place at locations along I-40 near Lenoir-Rhyne Blvd in Hickory and 1st Street W in Conover.

Figure 4. Hickory Urban Area Volume Change 2021-2023 Average Daily Traffic
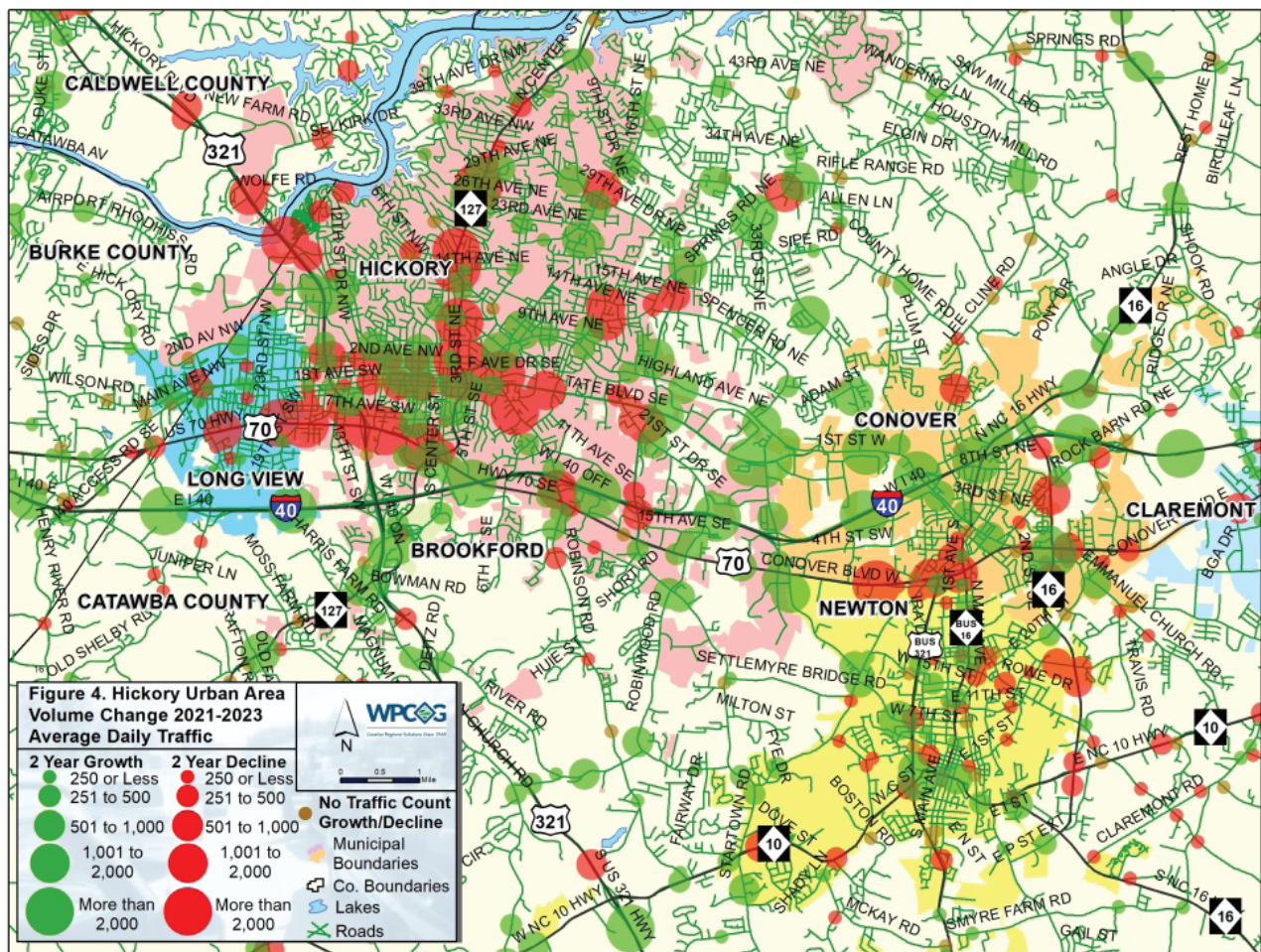
Several thoroughfares in the Hickory-Newton-Conover area experienced traffic declines over the past two years, perhaps due to residents using alternate routes to work or shopping destinations. The biggest traffic volume decline from 2021 to 2023 (7,000 vehicles per day) took place at NC 127 (North Center St) just south of 29th Avenue NE in Hickory (Table 5, Page 5). Traffic counts at US 70 just west of Boundary Street were 5,900 vehicles per day less in 2023 than in 2021. A traffic count loss of 5,500 vehicles per day also occurred at McDonald Parkway just north of 21st Street SE. About 5,000 fewer vehicles were counted at US 70 just east of US 321 in 2023 (20,500) than in 2021 (25,500).

Table 5. Largest Hickory-Newton-Conover Area Traffic Volume Increases and Decreases, 2021-2023
(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)

Traffic Volume Increase	Road	Location	Traffic Volume Decrease	Road	Location
6,000	I-40	Between Exit 130 (Old US 70) & Exit 132 (NC 16)	-7,000	NC 127 (N Center St-Viewmont)	South of 29th Ave NE
5,000	1st St W (Conover)	North of I-40	-5,900	US 70 (Conover Blvd W)	West of Boundary St
3,500	I-40	Between Exit 123 (US 321) & Exit 125 (L-R Blvd)	-5,500	McDonald Pkwy	North of 21st St SE
3,500	I-40	Between Exit 125 (L-R Blvd) & Exit 126 (McDonald Pkwy)	-5,000	US 70	East of US 321
3,500	NC 127 (N Center St)	North of 25th Ave NW	-4,000	NC 127 (2nd St NE)	North of 2nd Ave NE
5,000	US 70	East of 16th St SW	-2,400	Old Lenoir Rd NW	South of 15th Ave NW
4,500	US 321	North of US 70	-2,000	US 70	West of 22nd St SW

Taylorsville/Alexander County Traffic Counts

Six locations in Alexander County had 2023 average daily traffic counts of 11,000 or more (Table 6). The highest Alexander County traffic count in 2023 (13,500) was located at NC 127 just south of Gazebo Road in the Bethlehem community. The highest count on NC 16 was located just south of US 64 in Taylorsville (13,000). Other 2023 traffic counts on NC 16 in Alexander County include 12,500 north of US 64, 12,000 south of Millersville Road, and 11,500 north of Fairgrounds Road. An ADT of 11,000 was recorded along NC 127 north of Shiloh Church Road.

Between 2013 and 2023, traffic volume increases of 800 vehicles per day occurred at US 64 east of Liledoun Road, east of Liberty Grove Church Road, east of Old Mountain Road, north of Lentz Road, and west of Crestview Drive (Figure 5, Page 6). The largest Alexander County traffic count declines were located on Macedonia Church Road east of NC 16, NC 90 (W Main Ave) east of NC 16, and NC 16 east of 7th Street SW in Taylorsville (Table 7).

Unlike other areas in the region, many traffic count locations in Alexander County experienced traffic volume decreases between 2021 and 2023 (Figure 6, Page 6). The largest traffic count decrease of 3,000 vehicles per day occurred at NC 16 north of Fairgrounds Road in Taylorsville (Table 8). From 2021 to 2023, a traffic volume decrease of 2,400 vehicles per day took place along NC 16 (W Main Ave) in Taylorsville east of 7th Street SW. A traffic loss of 2,000 vehicles per day occurred at NC 127 south of Gazebo Road in Bethlehem.

Table 6. Alexander County Area Average Daily Traffic Counts of 11,000 Vehicles or More, 2023
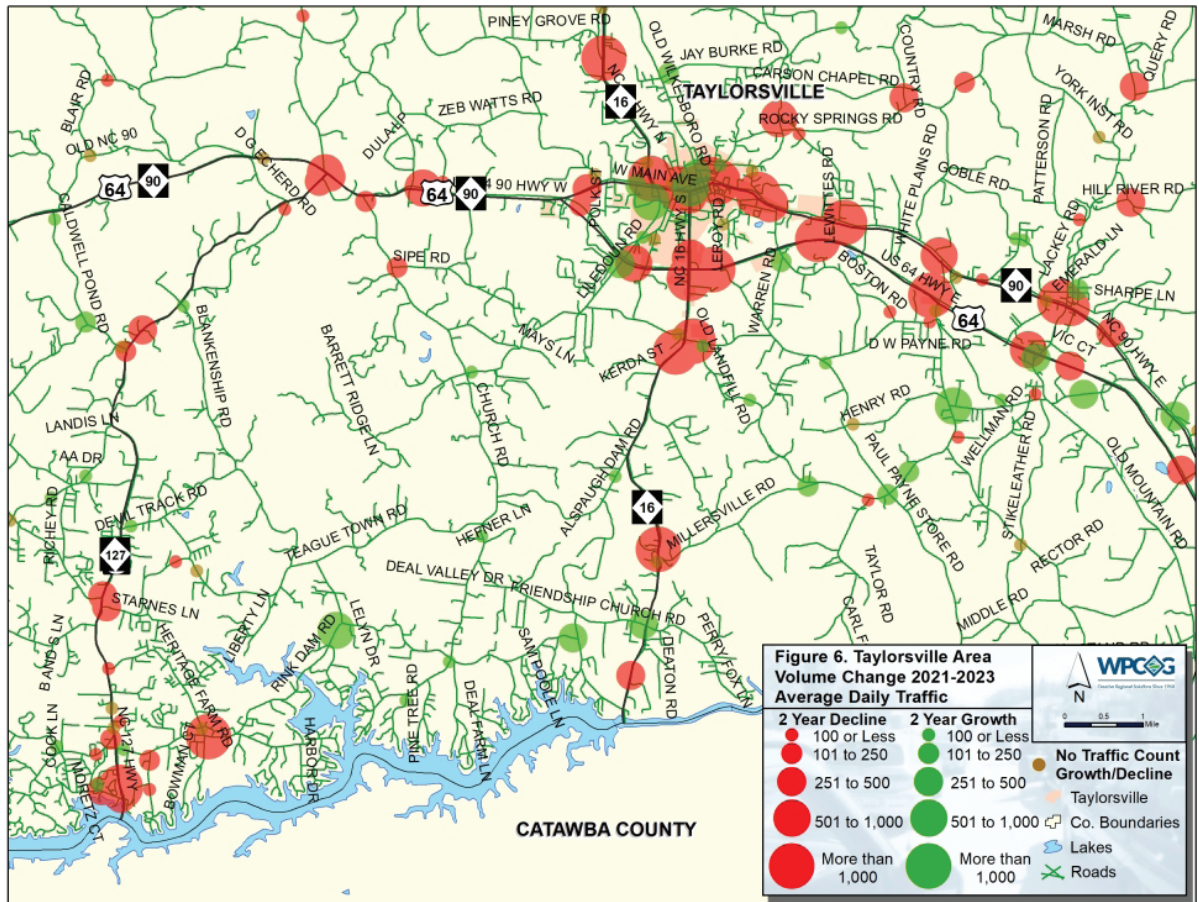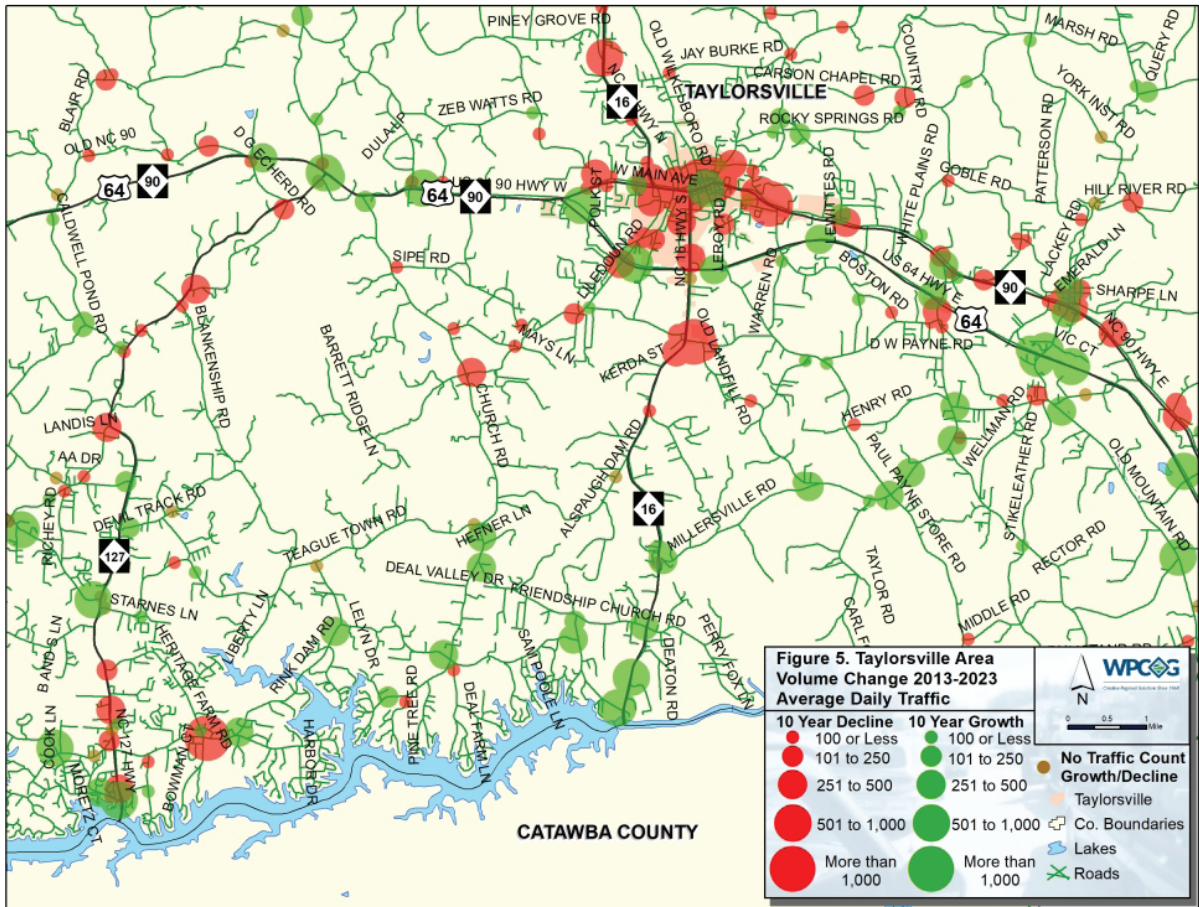*(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)*

Traffic Count	Road	Location
13,500	NC 127	South of Gazebo Rd
13,000	NC 16	South of US 64
12,500	NC 16	North of US 64
12,000	NC 16	South of Millersville Rd
11,500	NC 16	North of Fairgrounds Rd
11,000	NC 127	North of Shiloh Church Rd

Table 7. Largest Alexander County/Taylorsville Area Traffic Volume Increases and Decreases, 2013-2023
(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)

Traffic Volume Increase	Road	Location	Traffic Volume Decrease	Road	Location
800	US 64	East of Liledoun Rd	-2,450	Macedonia Ch. Rd	East of NC 16
800	US 64	East of Liberty Grove Ch Rd	-1,700	NC 90 (W Main Ave)	East of NC 16
800	US 64	East of Old Mountain Rd	-1,400	NC 16 (W Main Ave)	East of 7TH ST SW
800	US 64	North of Lentz Rd	-1,200	Rink Dam Rd	East of Heritage Farm Rd
800	US 64	West of Crestview Dr	-1,200	NC 90	West of Linneys Mtn Rd

Figure 5. Taylorsville Area Volume Change 2013-2023 Average Daily Traffic

Figure 6. Taylorsville Area Volume Change 2021-2023 Average Daily Traffic

The largest traffic count increase (1,000 vehicles per day) occurred at Liberty Church Road east of Millersville Road. A net gain of 600 vehicles per day occurred at NC 16 south of NC 90. Two other Alexander County locations experienced traffic increases of 600 per day between 2021 and 2023 (Rink Dam Road west of Bowman's Cutover Road and School Drive west of Liledoun Road in Taylorsville).

Table 8. Largest Alexander County/Taylorsville Area Traffic Volume Increases and Decreases, 2021-2023
(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)

Traffic Volume Increase	Road	Location	Traffic Volume Decrease	Road	Location
1,000	Liberty Church Rd	East of Millersville Rd	-3,000	NC 16	North of Fairgrounds Rd
600	NC 16	South of NC 90	-2,500	NC 16	South of US 64
600	Rink Dam Rd	West of Bowman's Cutover Rd	-2,400	NC 16 (W Main Ave)	East of 7th St SW (Taylorsville)
600	School Dr	West of Liledoun Rd	-2,000	NC 127	South of Gazebo Rd
500	Friendship Church Rd	West of NC 16	-1,900	NC 127	East of NC 16

Caldwell County Traffic Counts

Twelve traffic count locations in Caldwell County had ADTs greater than 25,000 vehicles per day in 2023 (Table 9). All these counts occurred on US 321 between Lenoir and the Catawba River Bridge. The highest Caldwell County ADT (36,000) was located on US 321 north of Grace Chapel Road south of Granite Falls. A 33,000 traffic count was calculated at US 321 north of US 321-A in Granite Falls. An ADT of 31,000 occurred at US 321 north of Cedar Valley Road in Hudson. A traffic count of 30,500 occurred on US 321 just north of Smith Crossroads in Lenoir.

Figure 7 (Page 8) shows Caldwell County traffic volume changes between 2013 and 2023. Many of the locations with the greatest traffic volume gains since 2013 can be found along US 64-NC 18 (Morganton Blvd) (Table 10). For example, the ADT count on US 64-NC18 west of Playmore Beach Road grew from 7,100 in 2013 to 10,000 in 2023 as traffic between Morganton and Lenoir increased. Three other spots along US 64-NC-18 (Morganton Blvd) between Gamewell and Lenoir grew by at least 2,000 vehicles per day.

Table 9. Caldwell County Average Daily Traffic Counts of More than 25,000 Vehicles, 2023
*(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)*

Traffic Count	Road	Location
36,000	US 321	North of Grace Chapel Rd south of Granite Falls
33,000	US 321	North US 321 A (Granite Falls)
32,500	US 321	North of Falls Ave (Granite Falls)
32,000	US 321	South of Falls Ave (Granite Falls)
31,000	US 321	North of Cedar Valley Rd (Hudson)
30,500	US 321-NC 90	North of Smith Crossroads (Lenoir)
29,000	US 321	South of Innovated Ln (Sawmills)
28,500	US 321-NC 90	North of Hospital Ave (Lenoir)
28,500	US 321-NC 90	South of Hospital Ave (Lenoir)
28,000	US 321	South of Smith Crossroads (Lenoir)
27,000	US 321	North of Mt. Herman Rd (Hudson)
27,000	US 321	North of Pine Mtn Rd (Hudson)

Table 10. Largest Caldwell County Traffic Volume Increases and Decreases, 2013-2023
(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)

Traffic Volume Increase	Road	Location	Traffic Volume Decrease	Road	Location
2,900	US 64-NC 18 (Morganton Blvd)	West of Playmore Beach Rd	-6,500	US 321-NC 90 (Blowing Rock Blvd)	North of Smith Crossroads (Lenoir)
2,600	US 321-A (S Main St)	South of Duke St (Granite Falls)	-6,500	US 321-NC 90 (Blowing Rock Blvd)	South of Hospital Avenue (Lenoir)
2,500	US 321 (Blowing Rock Blvd)	North of Yadkin River Rd	-5,000	US 321 (Hickory Blvd)	North of Pine Mountain Rd (Hudson)
2,400	US 64-NC 18 (Morganton Blvd)	South of Hartland Rd (Gamewell)	-4,500	US 321-NC 90 (Blowing Rock Blvd)	North of Nuway Circle (Lenoir)
2,000	US 64-NC 18 (Morganton Blvd)	South NC 18 Bus-Harper Ave (Lenoir)	-4,200	US 321-A (Main St)	North of Mt. Herman Rd (Hudson)

Several locations along US 321 had significant traffic count decreases between 2013 and 2023. Traffic volume fell by 6,500 vehicles per day at US 321 north of Smith Crossroads in Lenoir from 2013 to 2023 (Table 10, Page 7). The traffic count at US 321 north of Pine Mountain Road in Hudson fell from 32,000 in 2013 to 27,000 in 2023. On US 321-A (Main St) just north of Mount Herman Road, the average daily traffic count in 2023 was 4,200 less than in 2013.

Figure 7. Caldwell County Area Volume Change 2013-2023 Average Daily Traffic
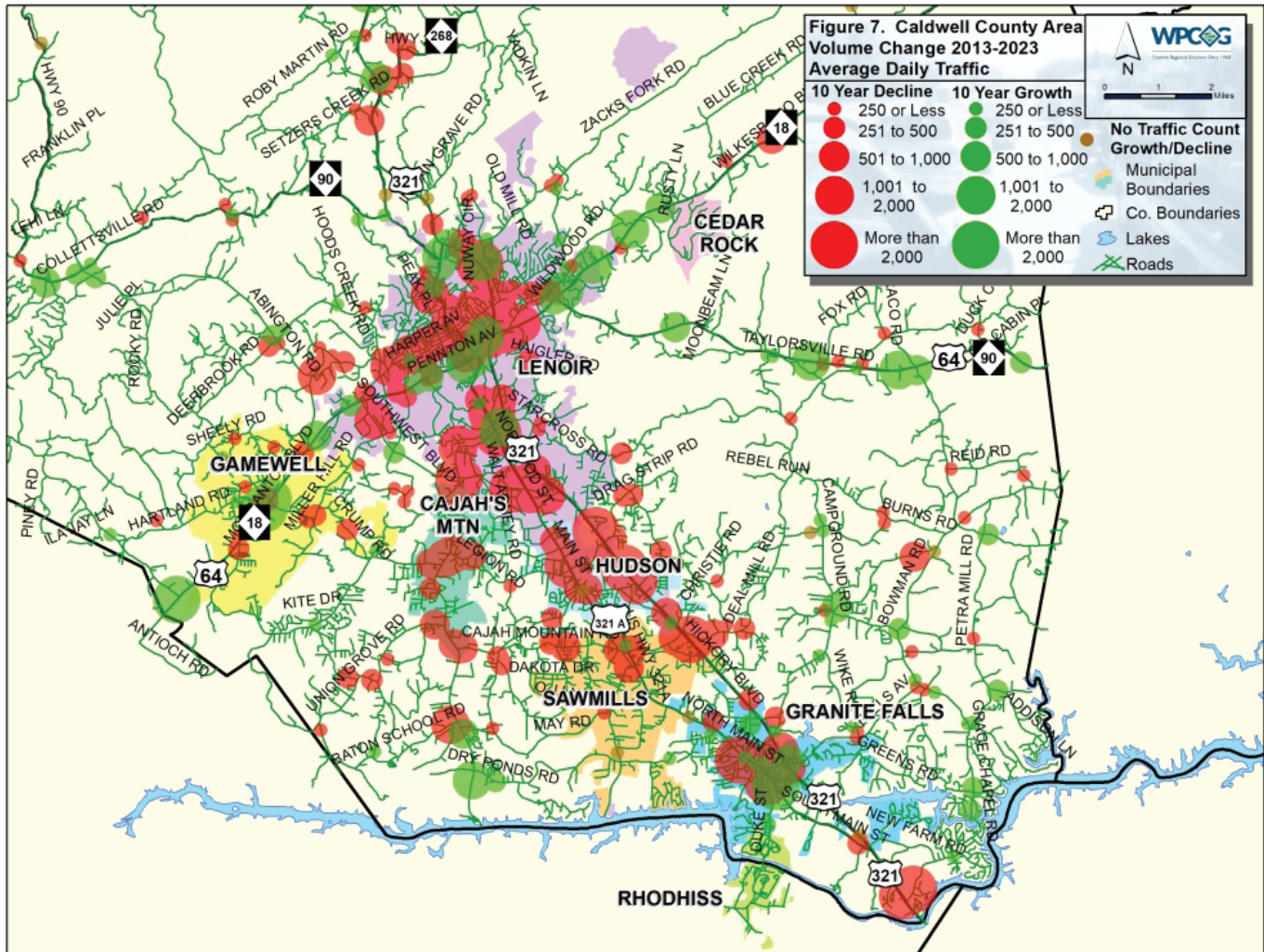
Caldwell County traffic volume changes between 2021 and 2023 are displayed in Figure 8 on page 9. Traffic counts along US 321-NC 90 (Blowing Rock Blvd) have decreased over the past two years as commuters use alternative routes (Table 11). The largest two-year decrease (9,500 vehicles per day) happened at US 321-NC 90 (Blowing Rock Blvd) just north of Nuway Circle in Lenoir. An ADT decline of 9,000 vehicles occurred on US 321-NC 90 just north of Smith Crossroads.

Table 11. Largest Caldwell County Traffic Volume Increases and Decreases, 2021-2023
(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)

Traffic Volume Increase	Road	Location	Traffic Volume Decrease	Road	Location
3,500	Southwest Blvd	East of Bradford Mtn Rd	-9,500	US 321-NC 90 (Blowing Rock Blvd)	North of Nuway Cir
1,300	Duke St	South of Duke Power Rd	-9,000	US 321-NC 90 (Blowing Rock Blvd)	North US 64/NC18-90 (Smith Crossroads)
600	US 321-A (South Main St)	South of Falls Ave	-8,000	US 321-NC 90 (Blowing Rock Blvd)	South of Nuway Cir
500	US 64-NC 18 (Morganton Blvd)	South NC 18-Bus 90	-7,500	US 321-NC 90 (Blowing Rock Blvd)	North of Hospital Ave
500	US 64-NC 18 (Morganton Blvd)	South of Hartland Rd	-6,500	US 64-NC 18 (Morganton Blvd)	West of Industrial Ct

The largest Caldwell County ADT increase between 2021 and 2023 (3,500) took place along Southwest Boulevard in Lenoir east, of Bradford Mountain Road (Table 11). The ADT count at Duke Street south of Duke Power Road in Granite Falls grew from 4,900 in 2021 to 6,200 in 2023. Traffic volume growth of 500 occurred along US 64-NC 18 at several locations between Gamewell and Lenoir between 2021 and 2023.

Figure 8. Caldwell County Area Volume Change 2021-2023 Average Daily Traffic
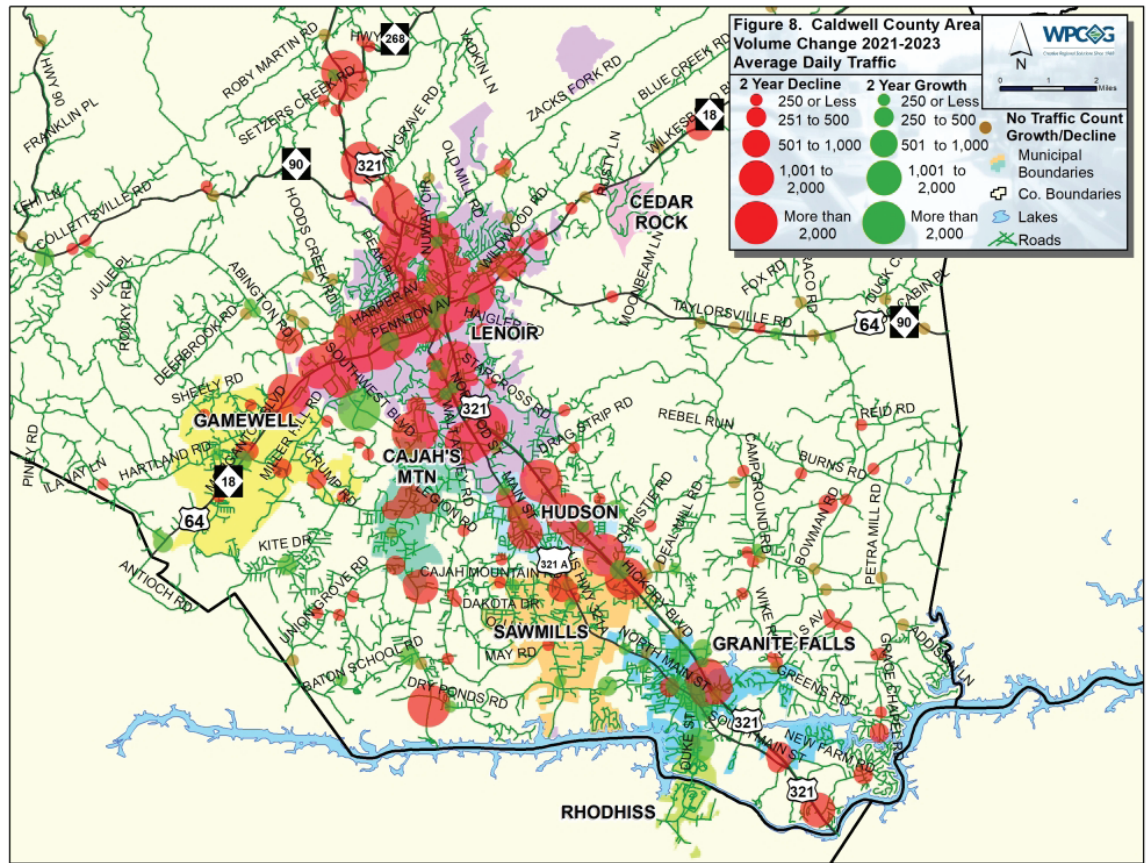
Burke County/Morganton Area Traffic Counts

The highest 2023 traffic count in Burke County, not in the Morganton area (48,500 vehicles per day), was located on I-40 between the Old NC 10 Exit (118) and the Hildebran Exit (119). Several other locations on I-40 between Valdese and Hildebran had average daily traffic counts between 46,000 and 48,000. In the Morganton area, all 2023 traffic counts greater than 25,000 or more vehicles per day, except for one, were found along I-40 (Table 12). The two highest Morganton area traffic counts in 2023 (47,500 and 47,000) occurred between Bethel Road (Exit 106) and NC 114 (Drexel-Exit 107) and between US-64-Burkemont Avenue (Exit 103) and Enola Road (Exit 104).

Table 12. Morganton Area Average Daily Traffic Counts of 25,000 or more Vehicles Per Day, 2023 *(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)*		
Traffic Count	**Road**	**Location**
47,500	I-40	Between Bethel Rd (Exit 106) and Drexel Exit (NC 114) (Exit 107)
47,000	I-40	Between US 64-Burkemont Ave (Exit 103) and Enola Rd (Exit 104)
46,000	I-40	Between NC 18 (South Sterling St) (Exit 105) and Bethel Rd (Exit 106)
45,000	I-40	Between Enola Rd (Exit 104) and NC 18 (South Sterling St) (Exit 105)
37,500	I-40	Between Jamestown Rd (Exit 100) and Burkemont Ave (US 64) (Exit 103)
37,000	I-40	Between Causby Rd (Exit 98) and Jamestown Rd (Exit 100)
36,000	I-40	Between Kathy Rd (Exit 96) and Causby Rd (Exit 98)
25,000	US 64	North of I-40

Other 2023 I-40 ADTs of 45,000 or higher were located between Enola Road and NC 18 (South Sterling Street-Exit 105) and NC 18 and Bethel Road. A 2023 ADT of 37,500 was calculated on I-40 between the Jamestown Road and US 64-Burkemont Avenue exits, while a count of 37,000 occurred on I-40 between the Causby Road (Exit 98) and Jamestown Road exits (Exit 100). The highest 2023 Morganton area traffic count not on I-40 was located at US 64 (Burkemont Ave) just north of I-40 (25,000).
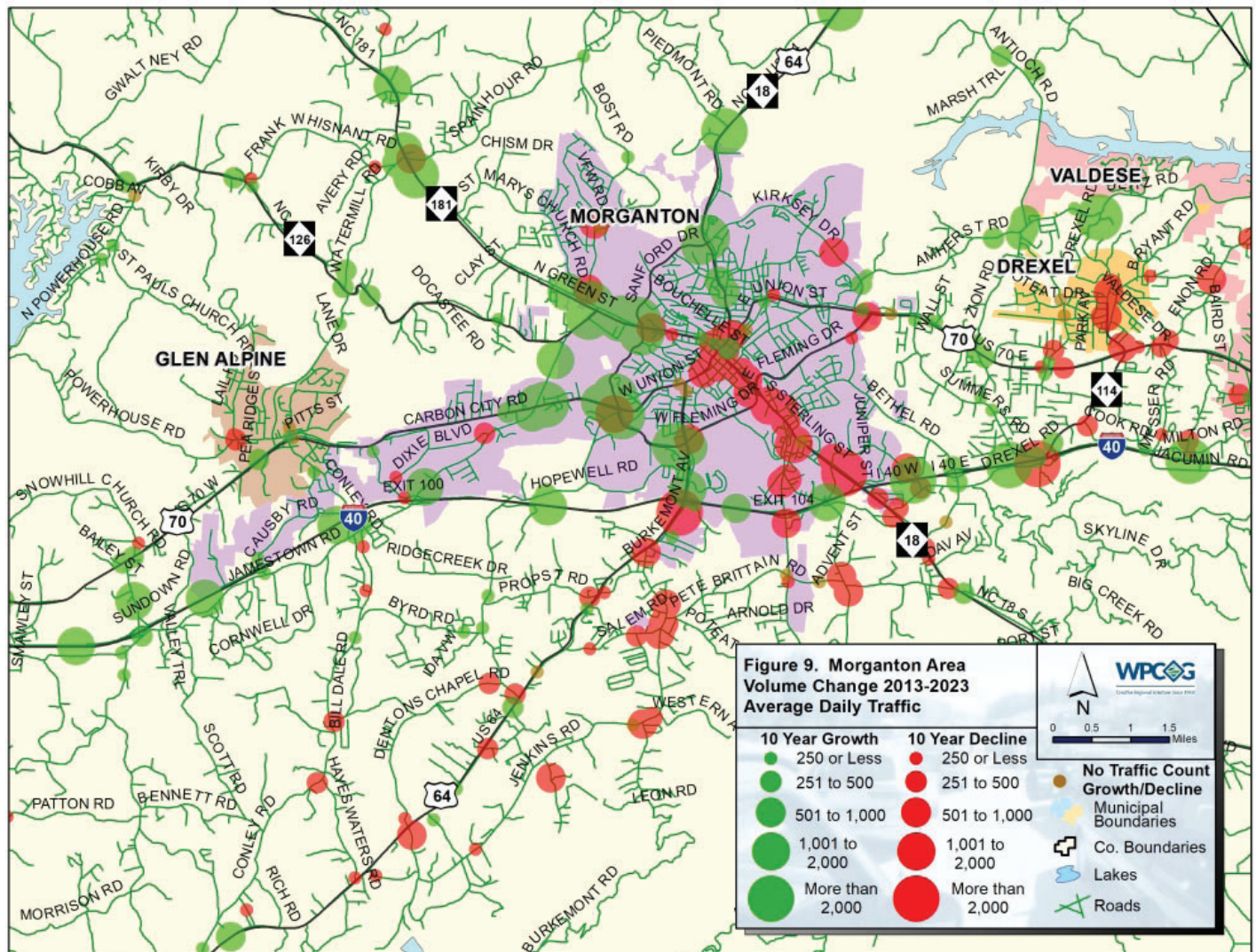
The largest traffic count gain in the Morganton Area between 2013 and 2023 (7,500) occurred at Fleming Drive (US 64-70) just west of Burkemont Avenue due to the construction of the Morganton Heights Shopping Center (Table 13). The average daily count at North Green Street (NC 181) north of NC 126 grew from 17,000 in 2013 to 22,500 in 2023. Two locations along Lenoir Road (US64-NC 18) north of downtown Morganton increased by more than 4,000 vehicles per day from 2013 to 2023 (Figure 9).

The greatest Morganton area traffic count declines between 2013 and 2023 took place at locations south of I-40 (Figure 9). The largest ADT decrease (6,000 vehicles per day) occurred on Burkemont Avenue (US 64) south of I-40 due in part to new retail at the Morganton Heights Shopping Center. From 2013 to 2023, traffic volume decreased by 3,900 at Drexel Road south of I-40, while a traffic volume loss of 3,000 per day occurred at South Sterling Street south of US 70 (Fleming Dr).

Table 13. Largest Burke County/Morganton Area Traffic Volume Increases and Decreases, 2013-2023
(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)

Traffic Volume Increase	Road	Location	Traffic Volume Decrease	Road	Location
7,500	US 64-70 (W Fleming Dr)	West of US 64 (Burkemont Ave)	-6,000	US 64 (Burkemont Ave)	South of I-40
6,500	US 70 (W Fleming Dr)	South of Golf Course Rd	-3,900	Drexel Rd	South of I-40
5,500	NC 181 (N Green St)	North of NC 126	-3,000	NC 18 (S Sterling St)	North of I-40
4,200	US 64-NC 18 (Lenoir Rd)	North of Kirksey Rd	-2,000	NC 18 (S Sterling St)	South US 70 (Fleming Dr)
4,100	US 64-NC 18 (Lenoir Rd)	South of Piedmont Rd	-1,500	Golf Course Rd	West of US 64-90 (W Fleming Dr)

Figure 9. Morganton Area Volume Change 2013-2023 Average Daily Traffic

The largest traffic volume increase in the Morganton area between 2021 and 2023 (2,500 vehicles per day) happened at I-40 between Exit 98 (Causby Rd) and Exit 100 (Jamestown Rd) (Table 14). Another significant traffic volume gain (1,000 vehicles per day) occurred on North Green Street (NC 181) east of Independence Boulevard (NC 126), perhaps due to growth near and north of Lake James (Figure 10). A 2021 to 2023 traffic count increase of 1,000 also took place on Enola Road south of I-40 near Patton High School.

Table 14. Largest Burke County/Morganton Area Traffic Volume Increases and Decreases, 2021-2023
(Source: NCDOT and WPCOG Data Center, 2024.)

Traffic Volume Increase	Road	Location	Traffic Volume Decrease	Road	Location
2,500	I-40	Between Exit 98 (Causby Rd) and Exit 100 (Jamestown Rd)	-2,000	US 64 (Burkemont Ave)	South of I-40
1,500	I-40	Between Exit 103 (US 64-Burkemont Ave) and Exit 104 (Enola Rd)	-2,000	US 70 (W Fleming Dr)	East of US 64 (Burkemont Ave)
1,000	NC 18 (S Sterling St)	South of US 70 (W Fleming Dr)	-1,600	US 70 (W Fleming Dr)	South of NC 18 (S Sterling St)
1,000	NC 181 (N Green St)	East of NC 126 (Independence Ave)	-1,500	NC 181 (N Green St)	North (and West) of NC 126 (Independence Ave)
1,000	Enola Rd	South of I-40	-1,000	US 64 (Burkemont Ave)	North of I-40

Multiple locations along US 64 (Burkemont Ave) and US 70 (W Fleming Dr) in the Morganton area experienced traffic count losses from 2021 to 2023 due to the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and travelers using alternative routes (Table 14). The biggest decreases (-2,000) happened on Burkemont Avenue south of I-40 and West Fleming Drive east of Burkemont Avenue. Also, along West Fleming Drive, a net traffic drop of 1,600 vehicles per day took place just south of NC 18 (South Sterling St). Between 2021 and 2023, a traffic volume decline of 1,000 vehicles per day occurred at Burkemont Avenue north of I-40.

Figure 10. Morganton Area Volume Change 2021-2023 Average Daily Traffic
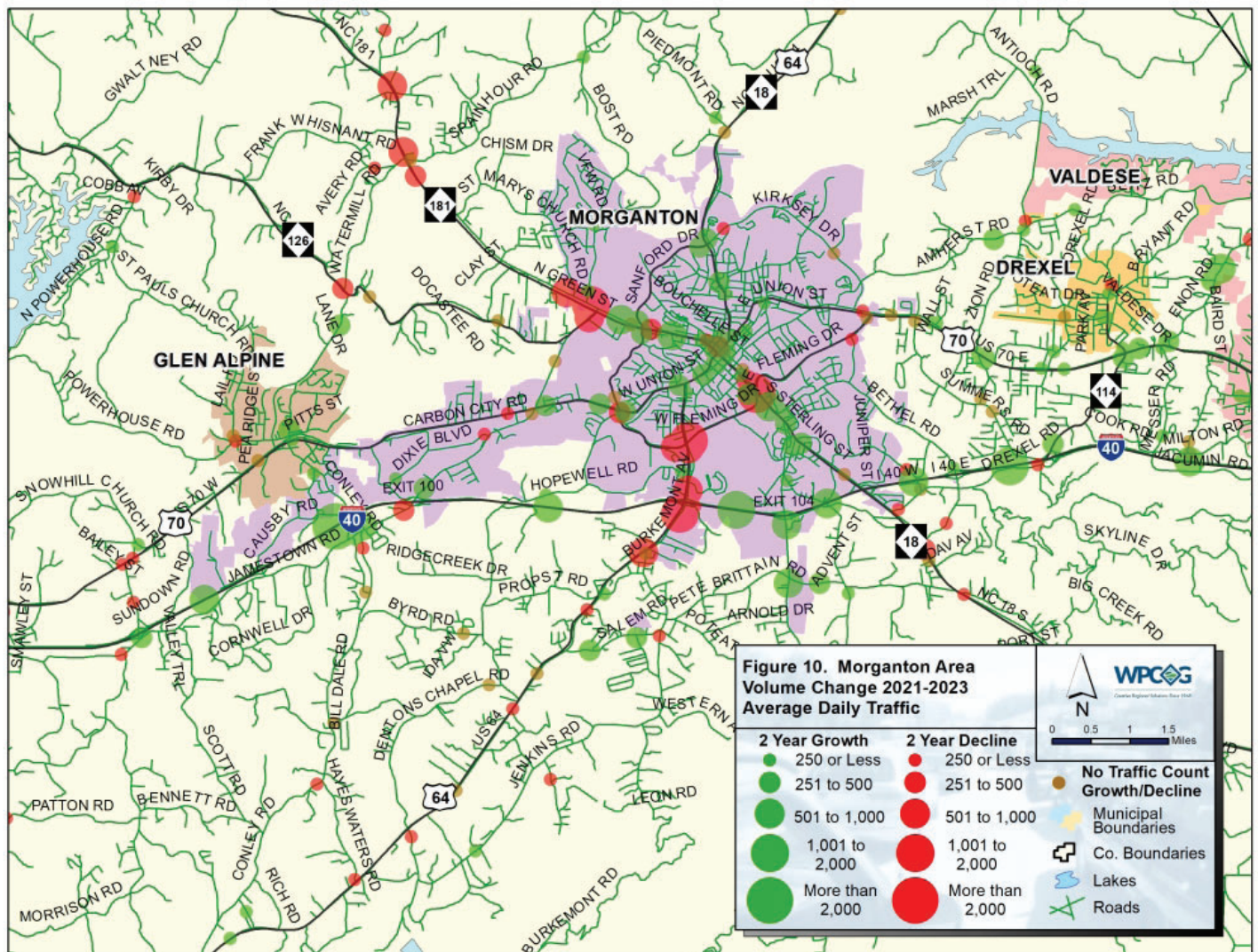
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