BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL MLRTP 2050

Appendix Six| Population Projections

McLEAN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION | 2022

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McLean County Population Projections 2020 – 2050

August 16, 2022

Prepared by:
Andrew J. Greenlee, Ph.D.
Greenlee Consulting, LLC

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Summary

Over the last decade, there's been a major shift in the population trends in McLean County. A period of steady population growth from 1960 to 2010 has given way to much slower net population growth between 2010 and 2020, with a net decline in the county's population between 2015 and 2020. Prior Illinois state population projections based upon earlier data are very optimistic about regional growth, and news about proposals for growth amongst the county's industry are likewise promising. Yet demographic trends from 2015 to 2020 reveal underlying demographic processes that are likely to blend together with future growth.

- Between 2015 and 2020, McLean County lost 2,160 people (0.25 percent), resulting in a 2020 population of 170,594.
- Net population growth in Bloomington and Normal over the period 2010 – 2020 (1.99 percent and 0.47 percent respectively) was countered by a modest decline in population in the remaining portions of the county (a decline of 0.96 percent).
- Population change trends between 2015 and 2020 show net outmigration for working-age households and children, and strong growth amongst the post-retirement population.
- Declining state and local fertility rates mean that potential long-run future population growth will likely be driven by labor migration to the region.
- If the population trends of 2015 to 2020 continue without any major changes to the population structure, McLean County's 2050 population will decline to levels similar to what they were around the year 2000.
- A modest increase in labor migration to the region has the potential to reverse the trends of 2015 to 2020, with stronger impacts projected to the populations of Bloomington and Normal.

Historical Population Trends

Since 1900, McLean County has experienced three distinct population change trends. During the period 1900 to 1950, the county experienced slow but steady population growth at a rate of 175 individuals per year. Between the period 1960 and 2010, that rate increased nearly tenfold to 1,714 per year. Between 2010 to 2020, the rate has slowed considerably to 138 per year, with much of this slowdown occurring between 2015 and 2020. The comparatively quick change in trends over the last ten years leads to many questions about the population futures for McLean County – the analysis and projections contained within this section are designed to examine some of the issues and potential policy considerations.

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McLean County Population: 1900 - 2020

Phase 3 - 138 / Year

Phase 2 - 1,714 / Year

Phase 1 - 175 / Year
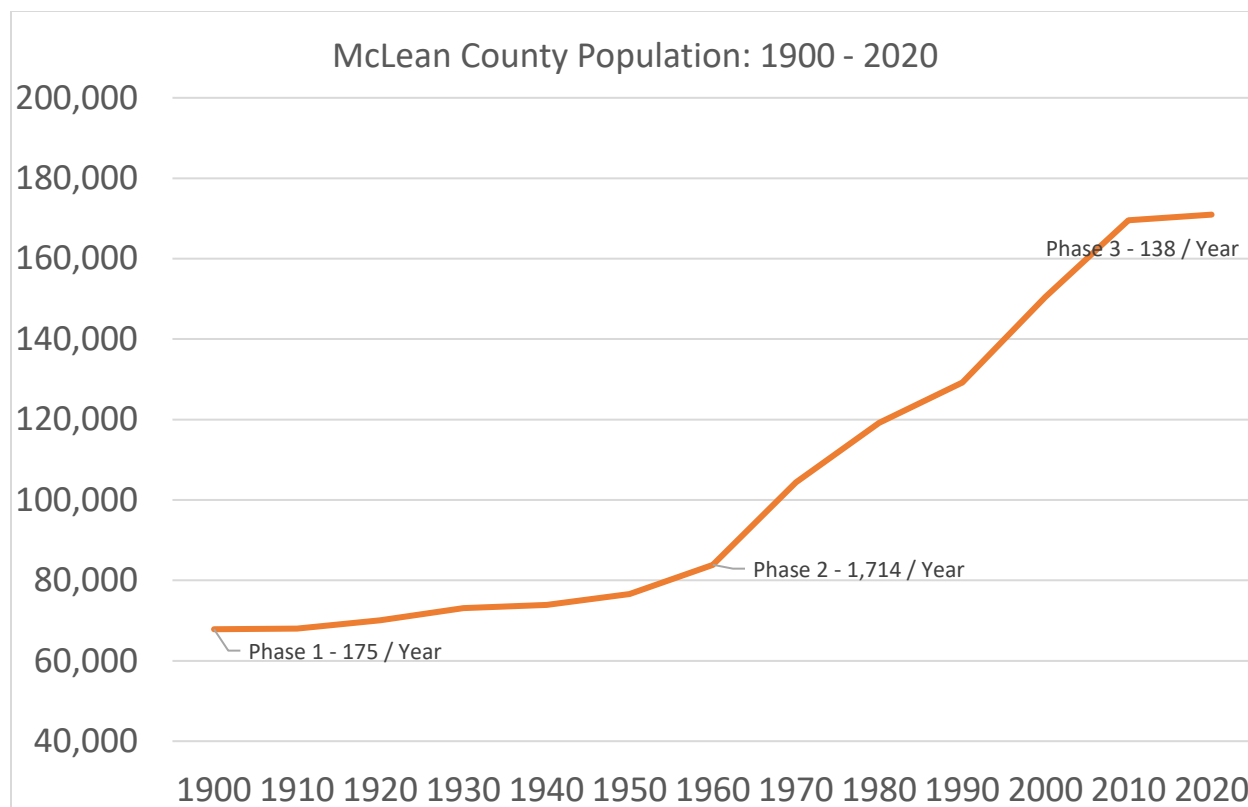
Contemporary Population Trends

McLean County's 2020 population was 170,954, which represents a loss of 2,160 people since 2015 (loss of 0.25 percent or 432 people per year), and a gain of 1,382 since 2010 (gain of 0.08 percent or 138 people per year). This represents a major change from the prior ten years (2000-2010) when the population grew by 19,139, or 1.27 percent (1,914 people) per year.

Period	Change	Period Rate	Annual Change	Annual Rate
2000 - 2010	19,139	12.72%	1,914	1.27%
2010 - 2020	1,382	0.81%	138	0.08%
2010 - 2015	3,542	2.09%	708	0.42%
2015 - 2020	-2,160	-1.25%	-432	-0.25%

This change over the last five years is due to a combination of factors – it reflects more general statewide trends, the impact of economic restructuring within the local economy, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the state and region.

The recent shift in rates of population change has particularly important implications for the types of "what if" scenarios involved in projecting future population. Using historical rates to extrapolate the future population of McLean County illustrates this challenge:

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- Using the growth rate from 2000-2010 (1.27 percent) results in population growth that does not align with the substantially lower growth rates observed between 2010 and 2020.
- Using the growth rate from 2010-2020 (0.08 percent) indicates very slow population growth over the next 30 years.
- Using the growth rate from 2015 – 2020 (-0.25 percent) indicates moderate loss of population over the next 30 years.

McLean County Historic Population Growth Rates and Projected Future Population 2020-2050
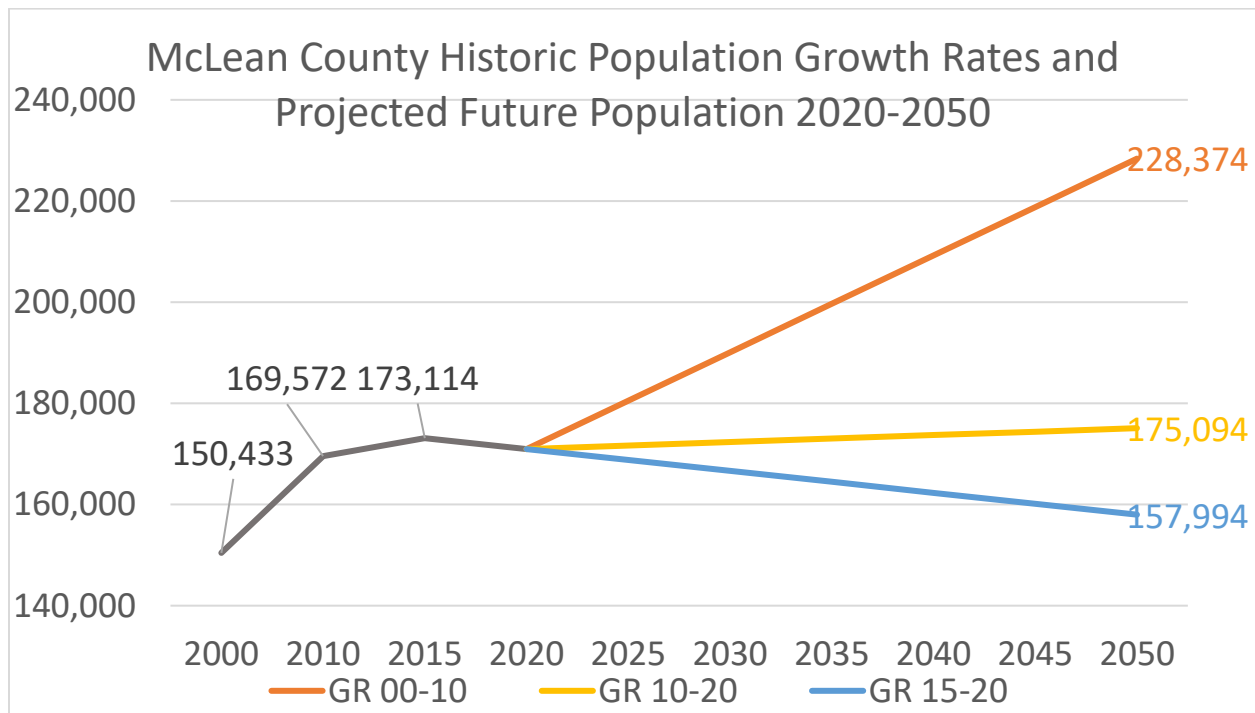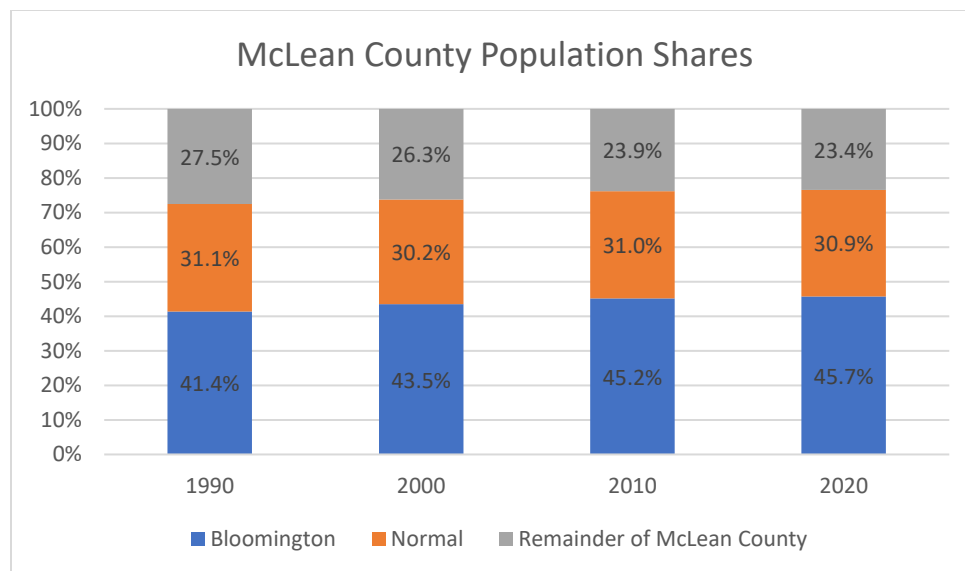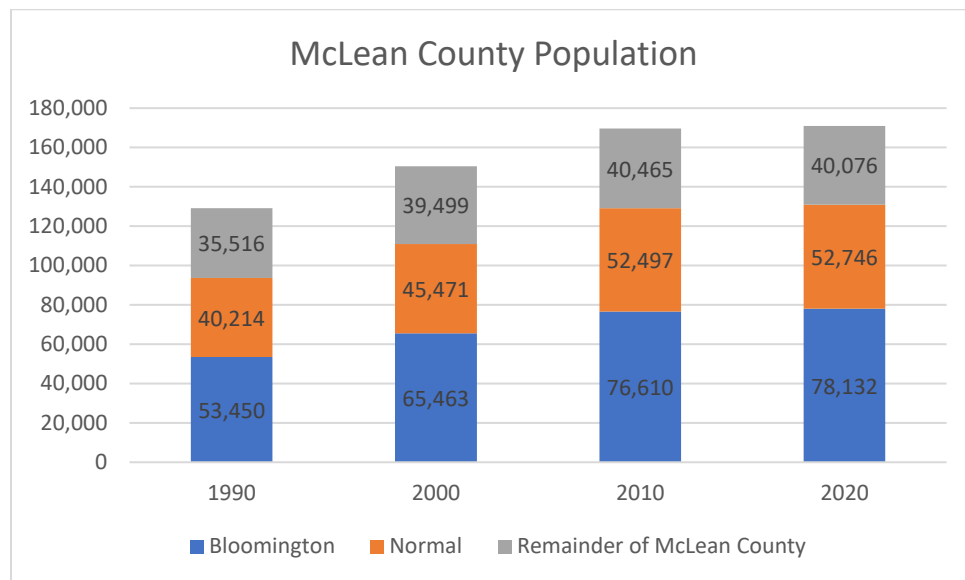
These three growth rates define a reasonable bound within which we may expect population projection models to fall. Despite recent local growth led by several major employers, it is unlikely that the region will see growth rated return to those seen between 2000 and 2010. A lag in demographic data reporting means that recent rapid growth in industries is also not yet reflected in the demographic trends of 2015-2020. This suggests that it is plausible to expect modest population growth, akin to that seen between 2010 and 2020, assuming major changes in demographic trends when compared to the past five years.

Population Centers and Location of Change

In 2020, for every ten residents in the county, 5 lived in Bloomington, 3 lived in Normal, and 2 lived elsewhere in McLean County. Looking over the last 30 years, the population shares for Bloomington, Normal, and the remainder of McLean County are consistent over time. Between 1990 and 2000, strong population growth was present throughout the county. Between 2000 and 2010, this rate slowed slightly in Bloomington, increased in Normal, and slowed substantially across the remainder of the county. Between 2010 and 2020, both Bloomington

and Normal saw modest growth (1.99 percent and 0.47 percent respectively), while the remainder of the county saw a modest decline in population (a decline of 0.96 percent).

McLean County Population

Year	Bloomington	Normal	Remainder of McLean County
1990	53,450	40,214	35,516
2000	65,463	45,471	39,499
2010	76,610	52,497	40,465
2020	78,132	52,746	40,076

McLean County Population Shares

Year	Bloomington	Normal	Remainder of McLean County
1990	41.4%	31.1%	27.5%
2000	43.5%	30.2%	26.3%
2010	45.2%	31.0%	23.9%
2020	45.7%	30.9%	23.4%

As the county contends with forecasting where new growth may occur, it is valuable to revisit historic trends regarding residential building permits. Permit activity began to decline just before the Great Recession – since that time, permit rates have remained relatively low with rates between 95 and 220 single family permits per year during the period 2015 and 2020 and 77 and 172 multifamily permits per year during the same period.

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McLean County: Residential Building Permits by Structure Type (1980 - 2021)

■ Single Family Units   ■ Multi-Family Units
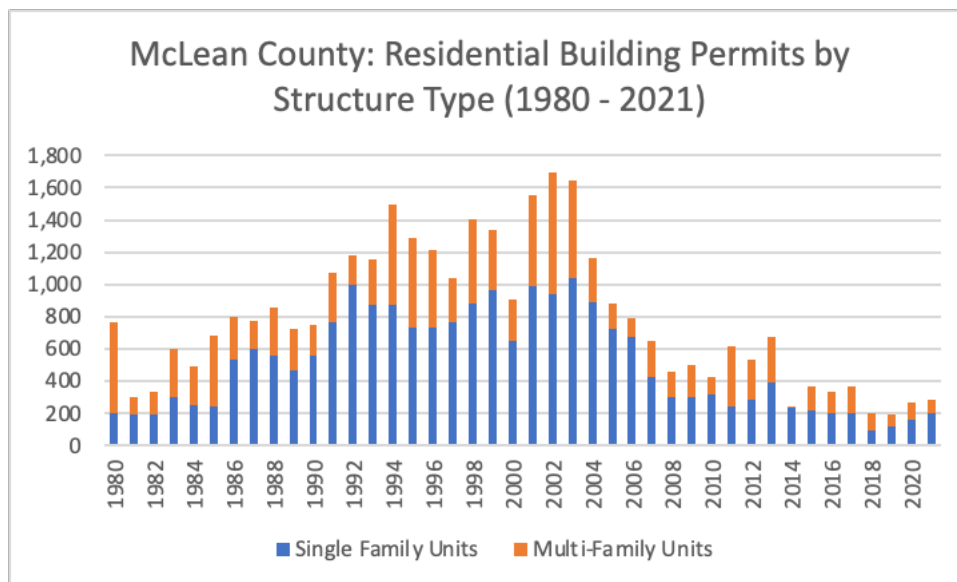
More recent permit data for the period 2020 through 2022 underscore that much of the current permit activity is concentrated in Bloomington and Normal. During that period, 48 percent of permits went for construction in Bloomington, 39 percent of permits went for construction in Normal, and 13 percent of permits went for construction in other portions of McLean County.

City of Bloomington

Permit Type	2020	2021	2022	Total
Single Family Detached	114	95	78	287
Single Family Attached	2	0	0	2
Duplex	0	0	0	0
Multifamily	5	5	1	11
Mobile Home	0	0	0	0
Total	121	100	79	300

Town of Normal

Permit Type	2020	2021	2022	Total
Single Family Detached	57	63	43	163
Single Family Attached	5	3	32	40
Duplex	16	14	0	30
Multifamily	1	5	0	6
Mobile Home	0	2	2	4
Total	79	87	77	243

Remainder of McLean County

| Permit Type	2020	2021	2022	Total
Single Family Detached	27	34	19	80
Single Family Attached	0	0	0	0
Duplex	0	0	0	0
Multifamily	0	0	0	0
Mobile Home	0	0	0	0
Total	**27**	**34**	**19**	**80**

Age Structure

McLean County has a unique age structure that is somewhat distorted by the large presence of students in residence at institutions of higher education such as Illinois State University. University-aged students in the age cohorts 15-19 and 20-24 represent around 9 and 12 percent of the population, yet the next two population cohorts (25-29 and 30-34 represent around 7 and 6 percent of the population, respectively, meaning that many individuals in their early 20s tend to migrate away from the county in their late 20s or early 30s.
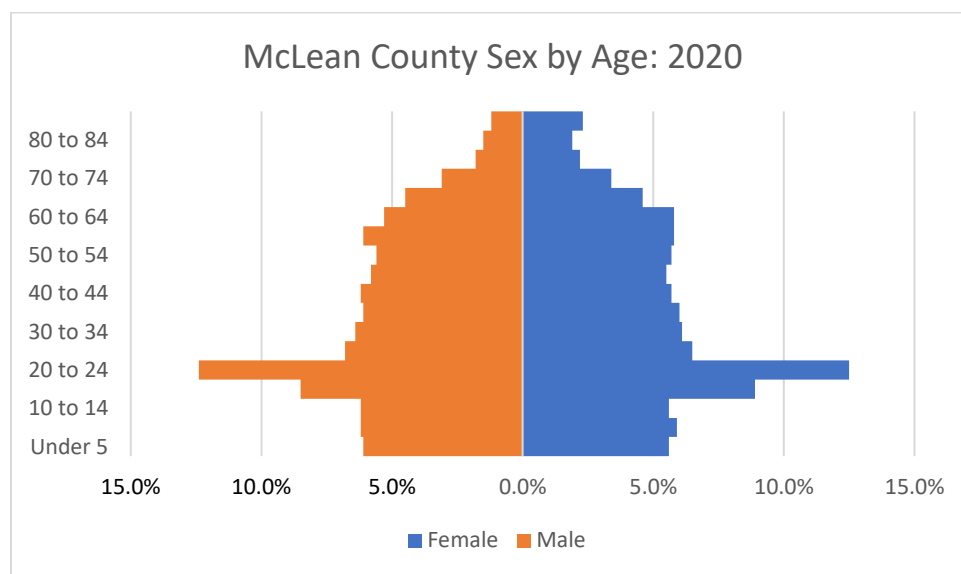
In addition to a consistent outsized population of adults aged 15-24, the county's population is growing older. Between 2010 and 2015, the population over age 65 increased by 10 percent, and between 2015 and 2020 by 19 percent. By contrast, modest gains in the younger population between 2010 and 2015 transitioned into modest population loss between 2015 and 2020. At the same time, the working-age population (20-64) remained relatively constant at around 60 percent of the population.

These unique features of the population hold important implications for consideration in making projections about the county's population futures – amidst the backdrop of a global pandemic and recent meteoric growth in new local industry will more young adults choose to remain in McLean County? Will the county continue to age due both to population remaining in McLean County coupled with in-migration to the county of older adults? Will rapid growth across some industries result in stable growth in new families within the region?

Between 2015 and 2020, the county saw modest population losses for all age cohorts up to age 40 (a net loss of 3,699) and growth amongst the population ages 60 and older (a gain of 4,463).[1] Should such trends continue, a combination of population loss amongst working-age adults and an increase in the number of older adults is likely to set the stage for a continued decline in population. However, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that population losses could be offset by growth due to employment migration and retention of young adults locally in a reversal of a significant outmigration trend.

McLean County Age Structure (2000 - 2020)
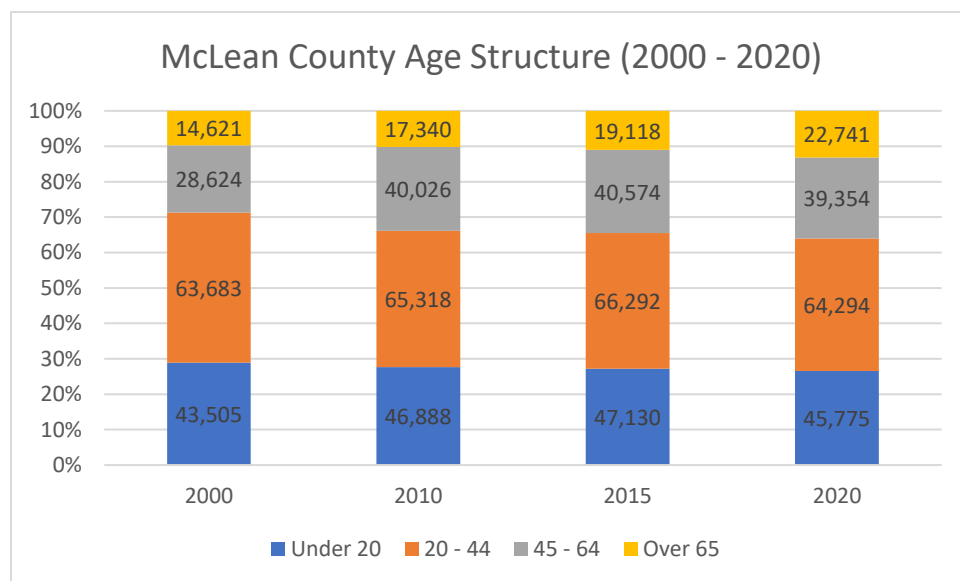
Age Range	2000	2010	2015	2020	% △ 2010-2015	% △ 2015-2020
Under 20	43,505	46,888	47,130	45,775	0.52%	-2.88%
20 - 44	63,683	65,318	66,292	64,294	1.49%	-3.01%
45 - 64	28,624	40,026	40,574	39,354	1.37%	-3.01%
Over 65	14,621	17,340	19,118	22,741	10.25%	18.95%
Total	**150,433**	**169,572**	**173,114**	**172,164**	**2.09%**	**-0.55%**

Like the rapid change in the county's population growth rate over the past ten years, the county's age structure is at a crossroads. It is highly likely that the proportion of older adults in the county will continue to increase, due to high quality of life within the region. Recent rapid

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[1] These estimates are based upon comparisons between 2015 5-year ACS data and 2020 5-year ACS data. Detailed age breakdowns based upon 2020 decennial census data will not be released until May 2023.

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employment growth in firms such as Rivian have not yet translated into major changes in the county's demographic structure, but such growth is likely to translate into new migration to the region which will impact demand for housing, increase the number of working-age adults in the region, and will eventually translate into a greater share of children and young adults in the region. The uncertainty around these trends will be explored in more depth in examining considerations for population projections.

Employment Trends

McLean County has a stable and diversified economy anchored by several major employers including State Farm, Rivian, Illinois State University, Country Financial, Unit 5 Schools, and several major healthcare providers. It is important to note a few important transitions within the local employment market over the past ten years:

- State Farm transitioned a portion of its workforce from offices in downtown Bloomington to other facilities in McLean County and other regional offices throughout the United States.
- Electric vehicle producer Rivian has rapidly expanded its footprint within the region, growing to more than 5,000 employees over the course of three years, with the prospects of additional expansion over the next few years.
- Candymaker Ferrero has also committed to expansion in both facilities and workforce in the region, adding an additional 200 jobs to the 350 already present in their Bloomington facility.

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Employment by Industry (2010-2021)
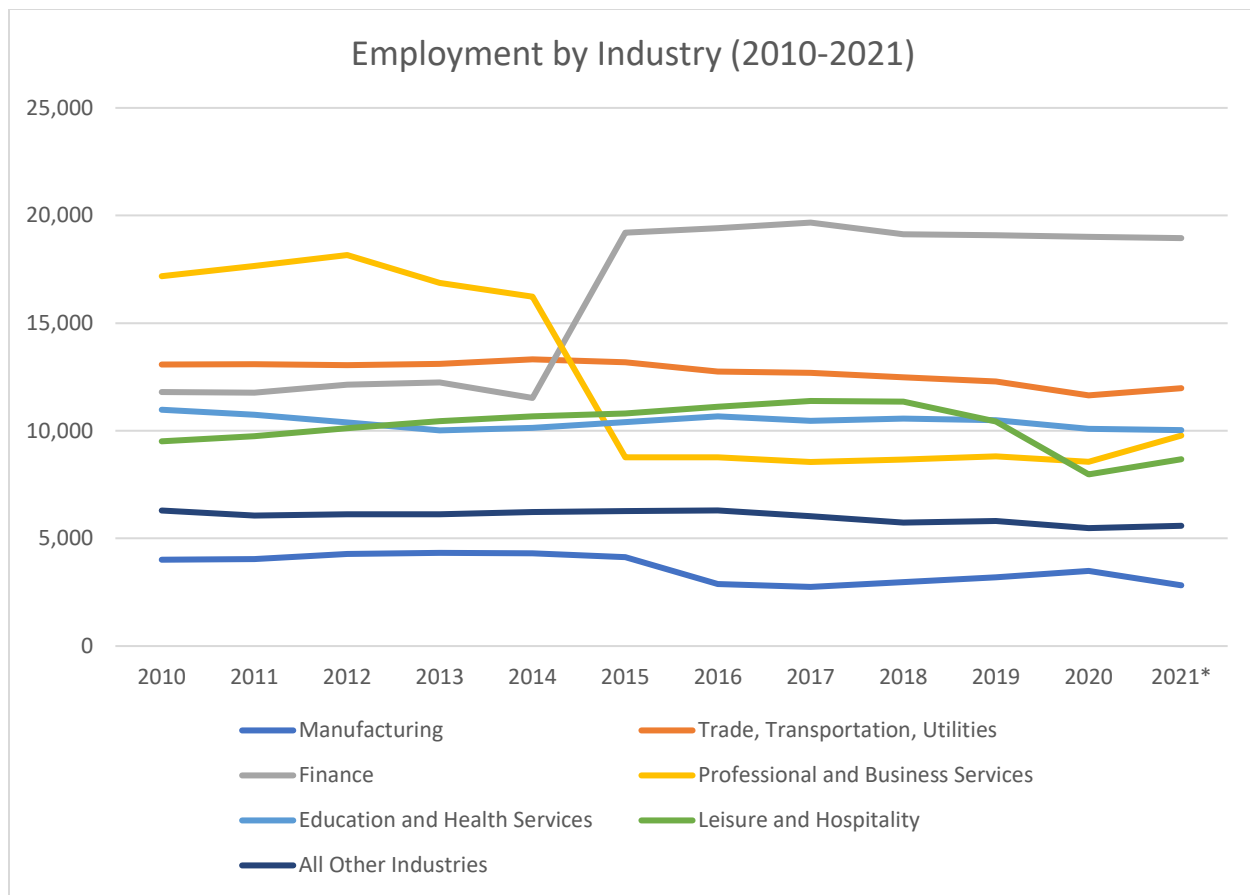
Historical trends in employment by industry show a diversified and stable local economy. Restructuring at State Farm around 2014 did result in a major shift in the classification of workers in the finance and professional business services sector. A growing leisure and hospitality sector also saw major declines starting between 2019 and 2020, likely because of economic challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most other industries show stable shares of employment within the county. Given lags in reporting of data on employment by industry, recent rapid growth at Rivian and planned growth in other firms are not yet reflected in these employment by industry trends.

Given the recent news stories regarding Rivian's rapid growth, it is important to acknowledge the impact of rapid growth of the company on the local labor market. In March 2021, Rivian employed around 890 people at its Normal location. In March 2022, that number was around 5,000, and by July 2022, around 5,900. Over the course of a few years, Rivian has grown to become the third largest employer in the county, yet this rapid growth is yet to be reflected in the types of data employed in projecting future population.

Rivian Employees at Normal Plant
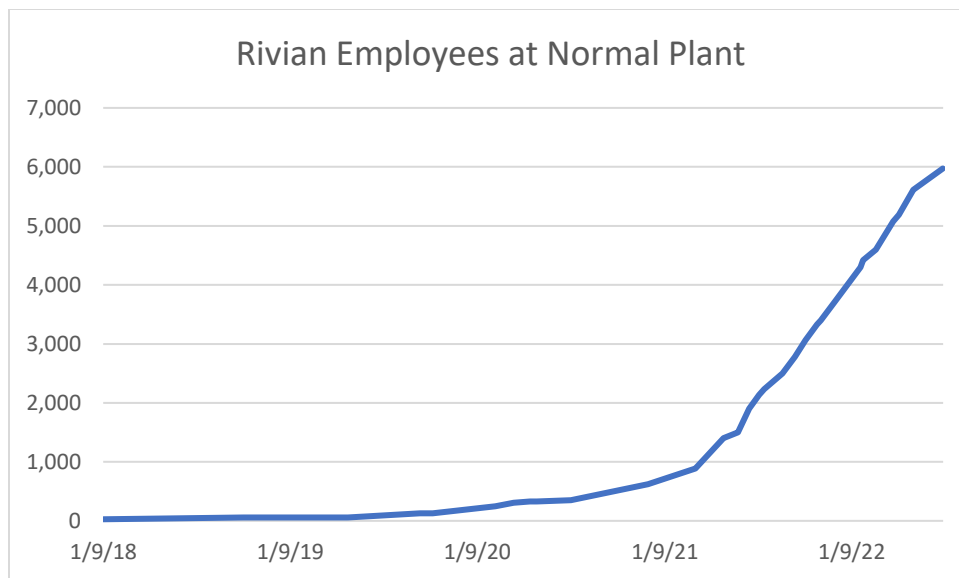
Projection Assumptions and Limitations

Population projections rely upon data about the past to tell us about the likely future. Projections should be viewed as a window into *what could be* as opposed to *what will be*. While projections help us to learn about what the future may look like given the recent past, they are designed to facilitate careful conversation and understanding of the potential ways in which changes in current circumstances may greatly alter the relevance of past trends.

All projections are based on a set of assumptions. The following assumptions were employed in making these projections:

1. Projections assume overall economic stability at the national, state, and local level throughout the forecast period, including no major changes in the frequency or nature of local natural or human disaster risk, and no major changes with regards to war or conflict impacting the Nation.
2. Projections assume freedom of mobility and migration over the forecast period.
3. Projections assume no major changes in policies or trends related to public health, housing, or immigration.
4. Projections assume no major changes in technology, especially technologies that might influence healthcare (factors impacting birth and death rates) or reproduction (factors impacting birth rates).

Projection Strategies

Two projection strategies are employed to look at population trends for McLean County for the period 2020-2050. Both strategies divide the population into 18 5-year cohorts by age and gender. Observed demographic data for the prior five years (in this case, 2010 – 2015 ACS data and 2015-2020 ACS data) is used to develop rates of change for each cohort for the next five

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years. By "ageing" the population forward in time, estimates of future population can be derived based upon information regarding past trends. Two projection strategies are combined based upon their relative strengths and weaknesses to develop scenarios for further discussion and conversation.

Strategy 1: Hamilton-Perry Projections

Hamilton-Perry projections are simple in that they rely solely upon age cohort information to infer *cohort change ratios* – the proportion of individuals from the prior five years who transition into the next age cohort in the next five years. The cohort change ratio for each age cohort is calculated as follows:

$$Cohort\ Change\ Ratio_{2015-2020} = \frac{Population_{2020}}{Populaion_{2015}}$$

To project each cohort's population for the next period (in this case, 2025), the cohort change ratio for each age cohort is applied to the 2020 population in the age cohort being aged forward to derive the expected population for 2025 in that age cohort.

Cohort change ratios are useful because they can effectively control for consistent age structure aberrations such as the large proportion of college-aged residents who migrate from the region between the ages of 25 and 35. The simplicity of this approach, however, does not provide major insight into the specific underlying processes or components of population change which are occurring. Cohort change ratios are employed as a baseline to measure change without any major assumptions around what factors may influence change in the future.

Strategy 2: Cohort-Component Projections

Cohort-component projections represent a more complex model of population change. Where the Hamilton-Perry approach uses only observed data on past age structure, the cohort-component model itemizes specific components of population change including births, deaths, and migration. This approach provides more information regarding the contribution of each component to population change for each age cohort. Outputs from cohort-component projections allow for more fine-grained interpretation of the drivers of population change, as well as the underlying assumptions behind those drivers. To project the future population of each age cohort, the cohort-component model looks at cohort-specific birth and death rates, as well as net migration, applying fertility rate information to the female population of childbearing age to derive new births to the population, using mortality data to derive the number of deaths, and using data on prior migration rates to derive net migration within each age cohort. Applying these rates to each cohort "ages" the cohort's population to its expected number five years in the future. Chaining together projections of each five-year period allow for

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the estimation of the future population given the continuation of past trends – in this case, from year 2020 – 2050 by 6 rounds of "ageing" the population.

Projection Components and Data

The population projection methodologies employed in this report draw heavily on insight from recent trends in population structure to make inference about future population. These projections work by examining population age structure by five-year cohorts (e.g., 0-4, 5-9, 10-14 … 80-84, 85+). By observing trends in cohorts over the past five years (in this case 2015-2020), future trends can be projected by "ageing" each observed population cohort in five-year intervals. Harris-Perry models do this by applying the cohort change ratio. Cohort-component models do this by adding new births to the population, subtracting deaths from each age cohort, and adding the net number of migrants within each age cohort thereby resulting in the projected population for the next time period.

Population Estimates

Data Source

Population estimates for McLean County and for Bloomington and Normal come from the American Community Survey (ACS). 2015 data are proxied by 2010-2015 5-year ACS data. 2020 data are proxied by 2016 – 2020 5-year ACS data. Typically, decennial census estimates would be used for the even years in 5-year projections, however, while decennial census redistricting data files have been released based upon 2020 population estimates, the U.S. Census Bureau has delayed the release of detailed tables (including age structure) until May 2023. This delay in release is due in part to higher than normal nonresponse rates to the decennial census reported directly by the census bureau. Census bureau estimates of error in the decennial census indicated, for instance, that Illinois' population was underreported by nearly 250,000 people – resulting in a net gain in the state's population from 2010. The census bureau reports error at the state level, making it impossible to estimate the impacts of that error on a given county.

Contribution to Population Projections

Population estimates are the main source of information for the size and rates of change associated with each age cohort. Given the uncertainty around the true population number, projections are derived for the population estimate as well as the lower and upper bounds of the margin of error. This provides a reasonable range within which the true population values are most likely to lie given the uncertainty inherent in ACS data.
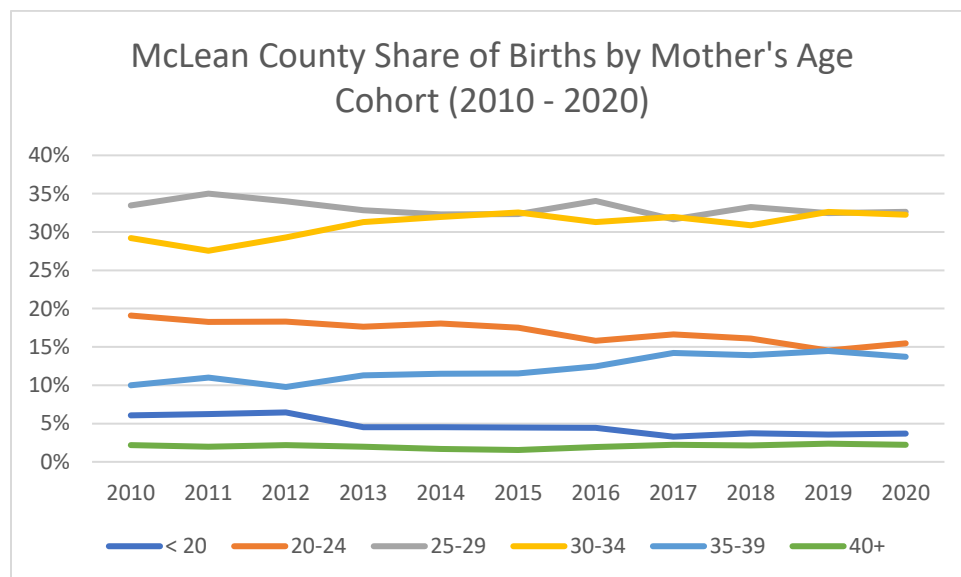
Births

Data Source

Birth data and birth rates for McLean County came from the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH). Where IDPH truncates reported births for those under 20 and those over 40, the projections utilized in this report require data on births for women ages 10 through 54. Data on

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births for the cohorts aged 10-14 and 15-20 are allocated proportionately to those populations. Likewise, births to mothers over age 40 are allocated proportionately to those populations. In 2020, births to those under the age of 20 represented 3.71 percent of all births to mothers in the county, and births to those over the age of 40 represented 2.24 percent of all births to those in the county.

Birth Trends

Between 2010 and 2020, the number of births in McLean County declined by 19.8 percent – from 2,121 in 2010 to 1,700 in 2020. This decline in births parallels a drop in births for the state of Illinois during the same period of 19.2 percent. Paralleling a decline in teen pregnancy across the state, the proportion of births to women under age 20 declined over the last decade, paralleling a decline in the share of births to women in their early 20's. 65 percent of births are to women between the ages of 25 and 34.

McLean County Share of Births by Mother's Age Cohort (2010 - 2020)

Contribution to Population Projections

Following state trends, a declining birth rate coupled with an ageing population means that births will contribute less to population growth than what has historically occurred in the county. While the county has a large proportion of women in the 20-30 age range, due largely to regional institutions of higher education, birth rates for this population are low while they are in pursuing their education, and many of these individuals are likely to leave the county after they complete their degree.

Deaths

Data Source

Deaths are estimated from national data coming from the National Center for Vital Statistics in 2019. These data look across the nation at the likelihood that an individual in a particular age

range is going to die during the next year. The rates from these data are applied to each age cohort to determine the population at risk to die between projection periods.

Death Trends
Death trends for McLean County remain stable, despite a slight uptick in deaths in 2019 and 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In general, McLean County fares better than the state of Illinois regarding death rate, likely due to an abundance of healthcare opportunities and relative wealth within the region. As aforementioned, the models make use of national data for deaths from 2019 to avoid capturing the COVID-19 pandemic in projecting future trends.
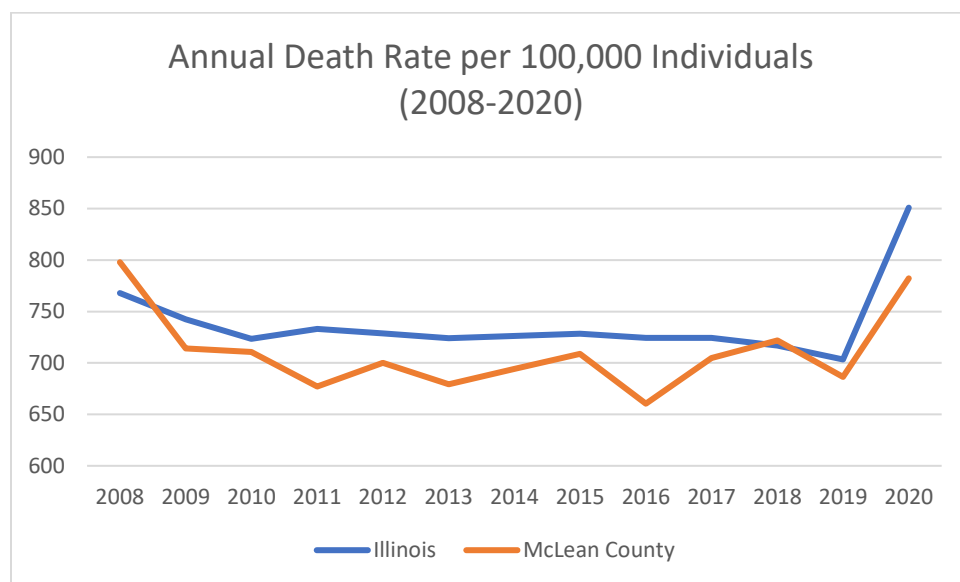
Contribution to Population Projections
Mortality rates help us to understand how many people we should expect to age from one age cohort to the next in each projection period. Stable mortality rates imply a relatively consistent proportion of individuals who will die between projection periods. Lower mortality rates tend to have the most impact on an ageing population, and ageing individuals live longer.

Migration

Migration is the most challenging component to estimate within population projections as reliable data is often a challenge. In our cohort-component modules, net migration is estimated as the observed residual of natural increase (the difference between the 2015 minus deaths plus births and the 2020 population).

Contribution to Population Projections
Net migration is a particularly important component to pay attention to in this series of projections in that it captures two major local population dynamics – the influx of college-aged adults to the region, and the potential labor migration associated with rapid expansion of
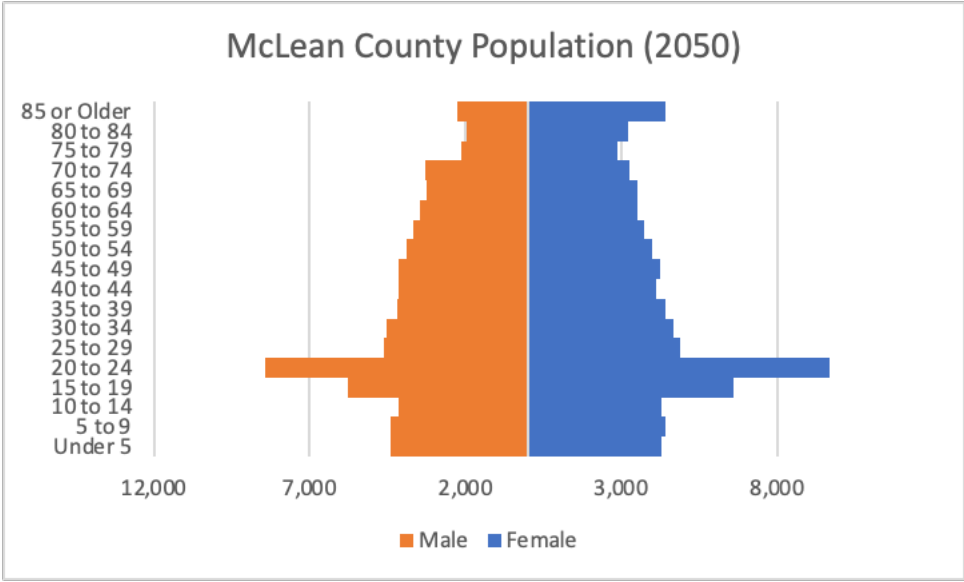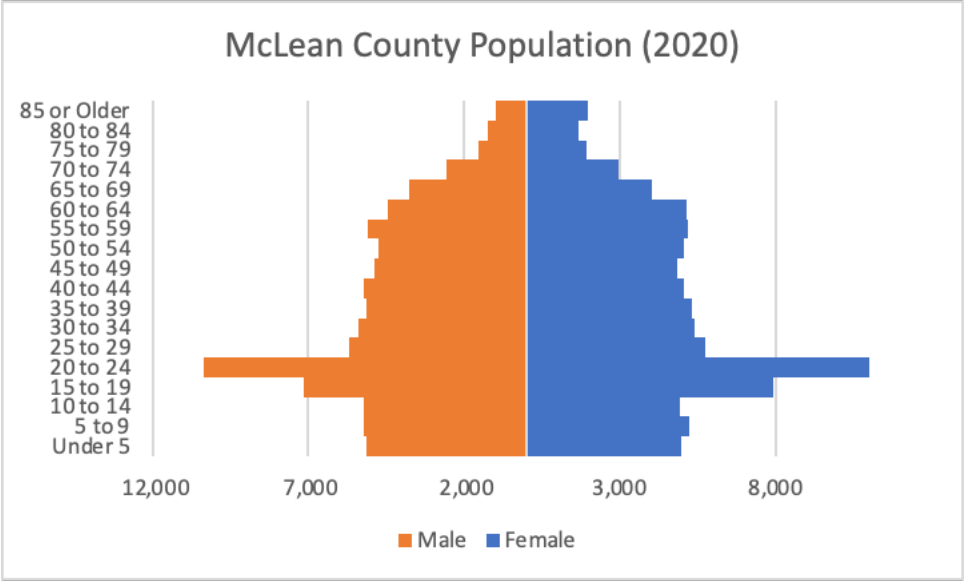
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regional employment opportunities. Given the declining birth rate in McLean County and Illinois more generally, it is likely that migration will represent an increasingly important pathway for population growth within the region.
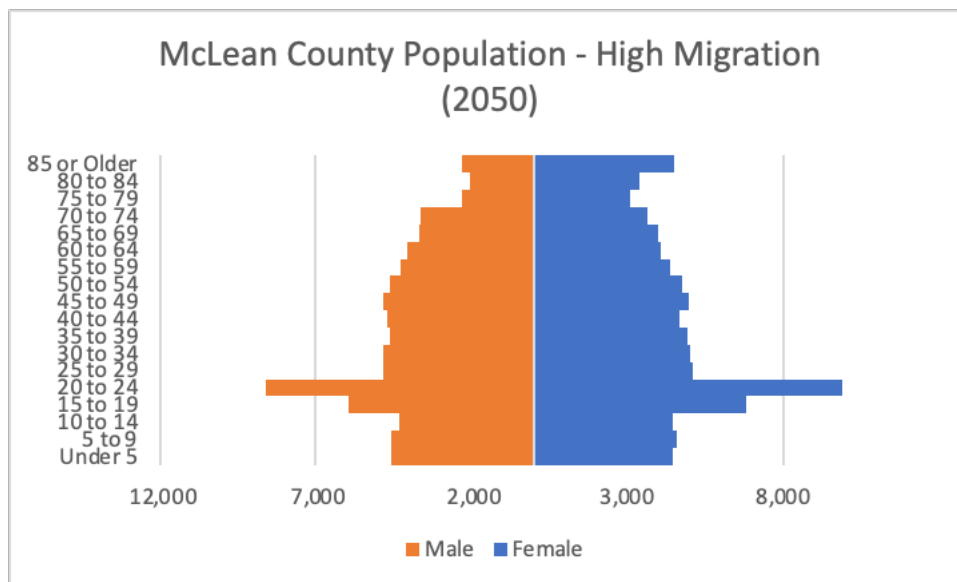
Projection Results

Between 2015 and 2020, McLean County's estimated population declined by 0.55 percent. If these trends continue, the county's 2050 population is likely to continue to decline. Both the Hamilton-Perry and baseline cohort-component projections indicate a decline in population in 2050 to levels just slightly above what they were in the year 2000 (14.85 and 11.22 percent decline in population from 2020 to 2050 respectively) – a population of between 146,603 and 152,846. It is important to recognize that these projections are contingent upon trends continuing as they have between 2015 and 2020 based upon population estimates. The main drivers of the decline in population beyond 2020 were high rates of net outmigration for the population under age 50, a county decline in birth rate between 2015 and 2020, and high net migration for older adults which compounds over time.

McLean County Projected Population (County as a Whole)
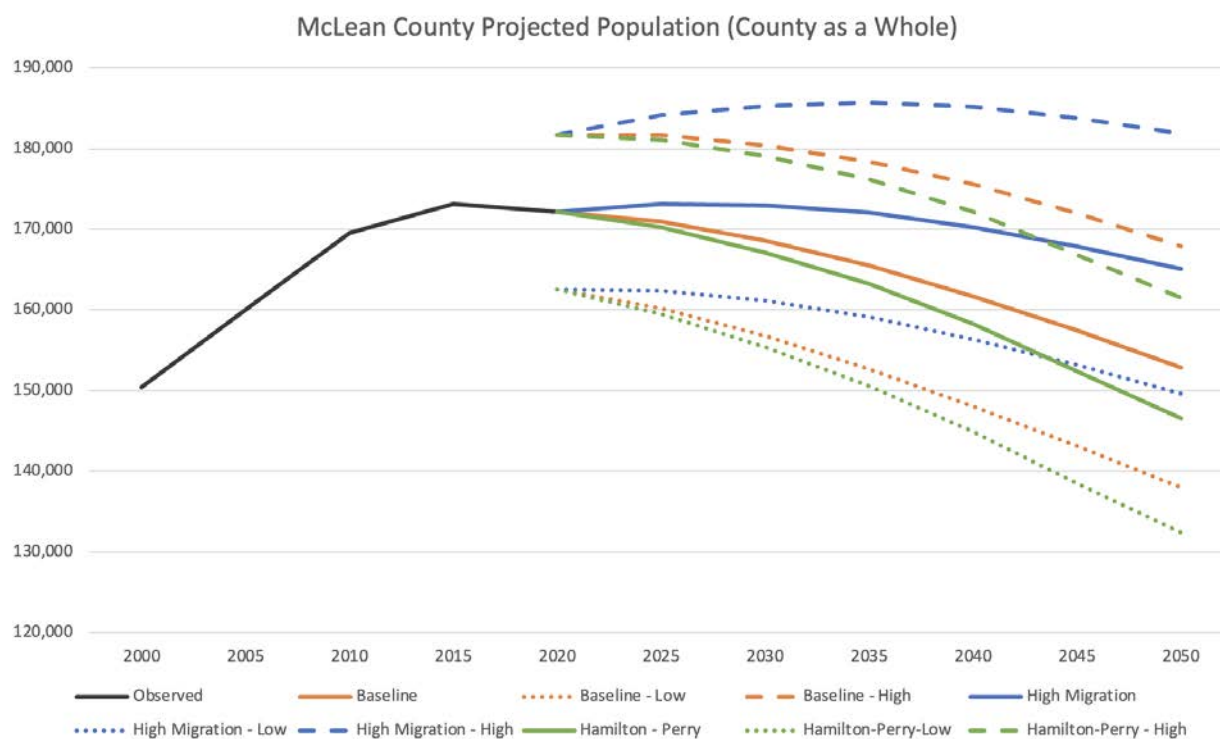
The projected age structure for 2050 shows the impact of declining birth rates to the region. A population experiencing high rates of natural increase (more births than deaths) would be expected to have a wider base with more children entering the population. The squared-off shape of the base of the pyramid indicates low rates of natural increase. The squared off shape at the top of the pyramid indicates a high proportion of older adults within the population – a continuation of the current trend.

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McLean County Population (2020)

Age groups (top to bottom): 85 or Older, 80 to 84, 75 to 79, 70 to 74, 65 to 69, 60 to 64, 55 to 59, 50 to 54, 45 to 49, 40 to 44, 35 to 39, 30 to 34, 25 to 29, 20 to 24, 15 to 19, 10 to 14, 5 to 9, Under 5

X-axis: 12,000 — 7,000 — 2,000 — 3,000 — 8,000

Legend: ■ Male ■ Female

McLean County Population (2050)

Age groups (top to bottom): 85 or Older, 80 to 84, 75 to 79, 70 to 74, 65 to 69, 60 to 64, 55 to 59, 50 to 54, 45 to 49, 40 to 44, 35 to 39, 30 to 34, 25 to 29, 20 to 24, 15 to 19, 10 to 14, 5 to 9, Under 5

X-axis: 12,000 — 7,000 — 2,000 — 3,000 — 8,000

Legend: ■ Male ■ Female

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McLean County Population - High Migration (2050)

Baseline scenarios do not account for potential adjustments to population rates beyond observed data for births, deaths, and migration. Given the recent trends associated with industry growth within the region, a "high migration" scenario was developed which considers a 2.5% increase in net migration rates for the age cohorts 20-60 – working age adults. Given that Rivian's growth alone over the past few years represents an expansion of more than 7 percent of the private labor market, it is likely that population growth which is not yet captured in either jobs or population data will result in more favorable net migration trends, especially for working-aged adults. Despite the potential for a labor migration boom, a conservative approach was taken to factoring labor migration into population projections. Under the high migration scenario, McLean County's population grows slightly and then exhibits a very minor decline after 2030 (a net decline of 4.12 percent from 2020 to 2050, or -0.26 percent per year).

The age structure for the high migration scenario is largely like that in the baseline scenarios, with higher numbers of working-aged adults, and a slightly higher number of children due to the higher number of women of childbearing age in the population.

Projecting Local Population

The above projections are based upon estimates for McLean County as a whole. Sub-projections were also done for Bloomington and Normal based upon population estimates from the American Community Survey, and Bloomington and Normal projected populations were subtracted from the projections for the county as a whole to yield projected population for rural McLean County. Based upon this strategy, the overall projected population from the two sub projections, plus the estimated rural population will add up to the population estimates in the county projections. Because the margin of error for the rural portions of the county minus Bloomington and Normal is not known, high and low scenarios were not projected for the rural portions of the county.

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Given the unique population structures for each of these regions, subprojections provide useful insight for the population future of each place, and also allow for a more complete picture of the shared population future for the county. The projected population resulting from the three subprojections was compared to a countywide projection, and trends agreed. The cumulative population totals for subprojections do indicate a higher overall population in 2050 when compared to the county-level projection model. While smaller-area projections inherently come with more uncertainty, the consistency of overall trends suggest that these models represent a valuable approach to understanding the factors contributing to shared population futures in the county.
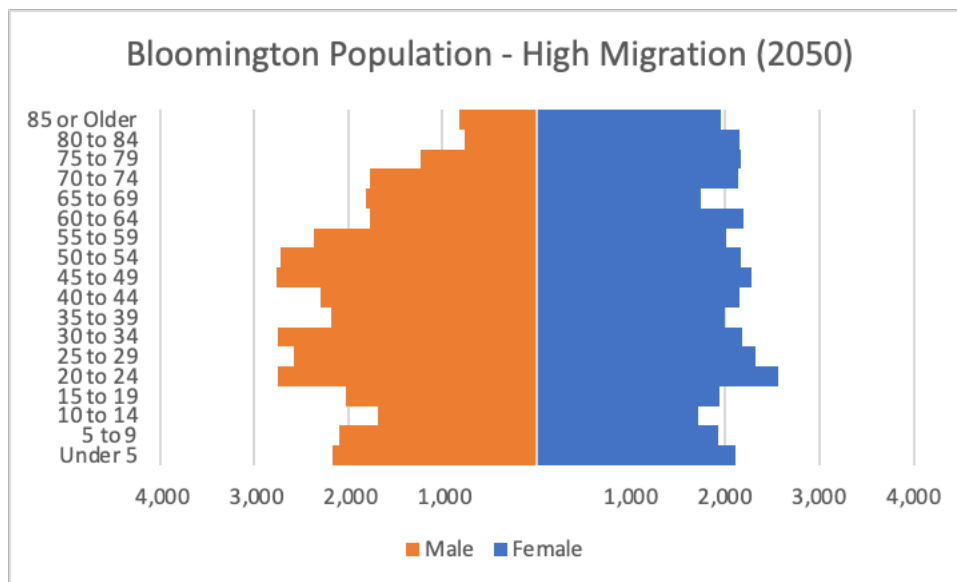
Bloomington

Between 2015 and 2020, Bloomington's population declined by 0.62 percent from 78,206 to 77,725. Baseline cohort-component and Hamilton-Perry projections estimate a 2050 population of 68,662 and 65,398 respectively (a loss of 11% and 15% from 2020 respectively). Under the high migration scenario, Bloomington's population increases slightly through 2035 and then declines for a net decline from 2020 of 5.03 percent.
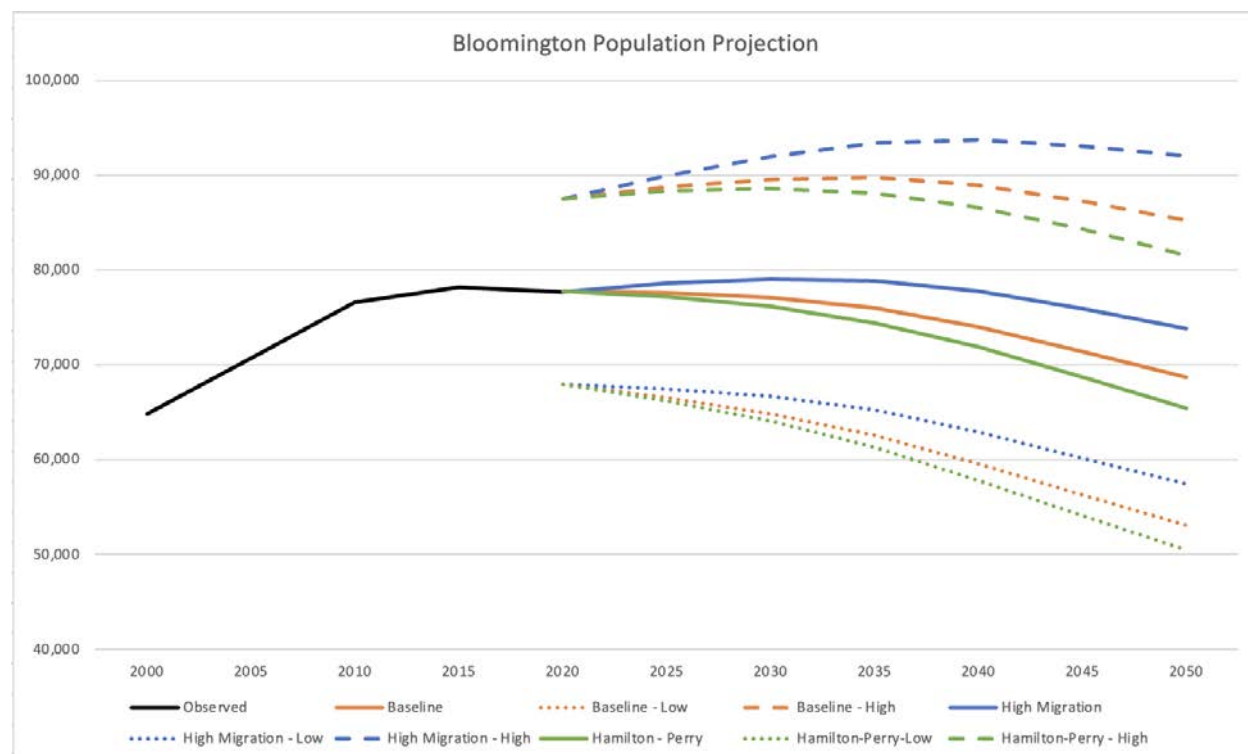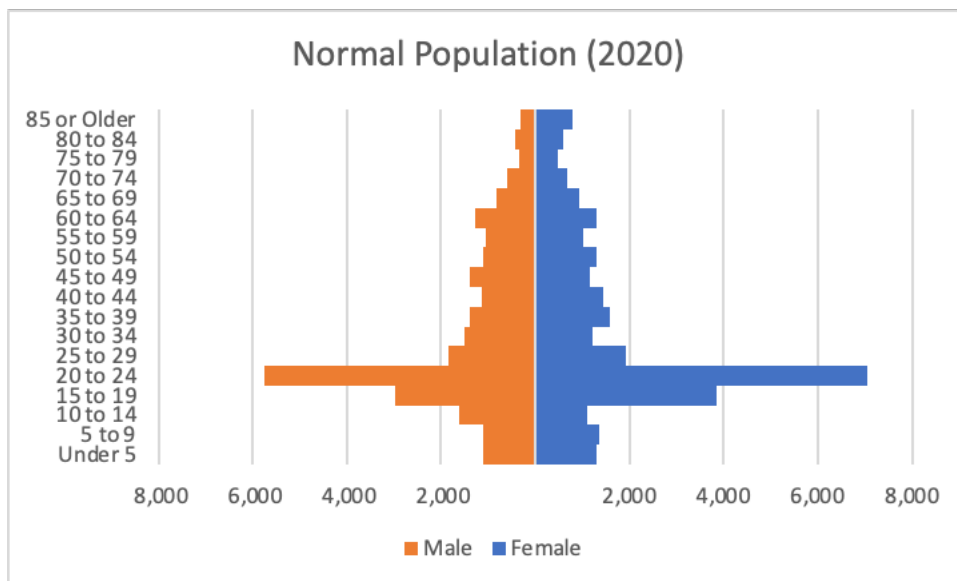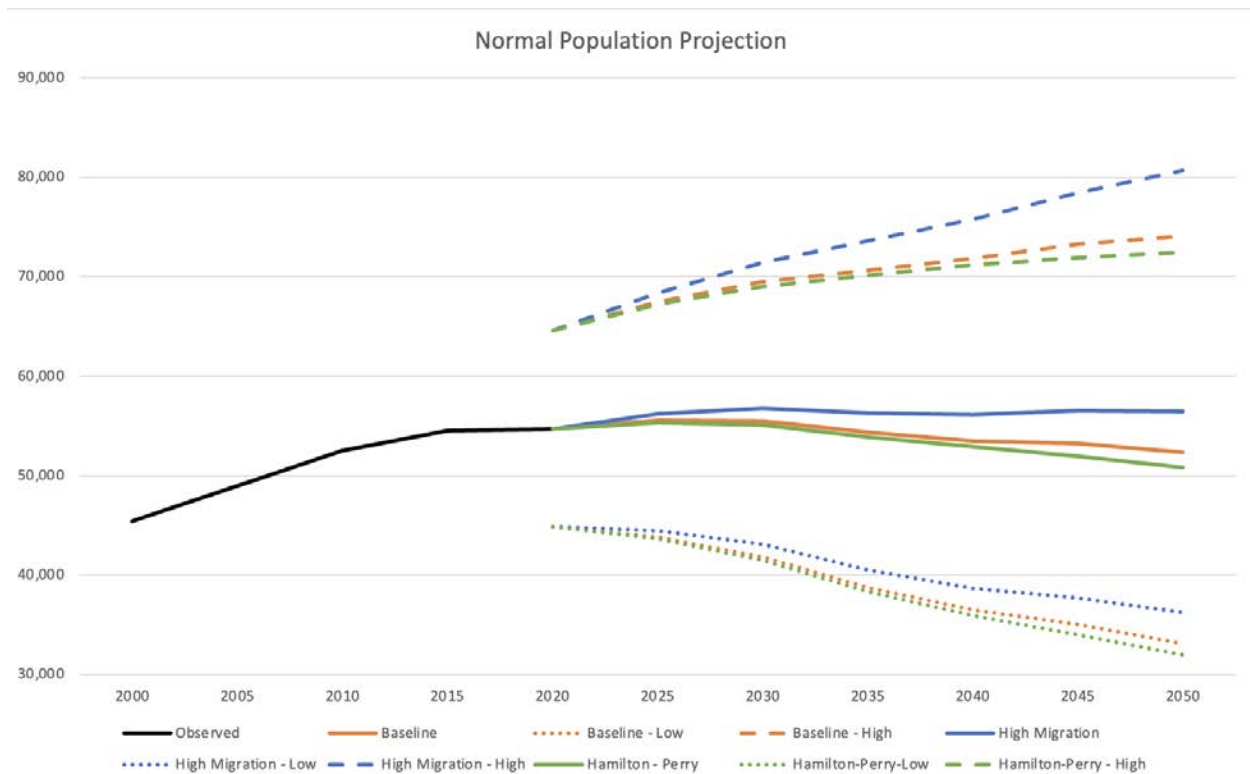

Bloomington's age structure is projected to become relatively "flat" – a reflection of the ageing of the population and overall low county-level rates of births to mothers of childbearing age. The overall age structure remains consistent under the high migration scenario, with a slight increase in the number of working-age adults in the population, and a slight increase in children being born to females of childbearing age.

20

Bloomington Population (2020)

Bloomington Population (2050)

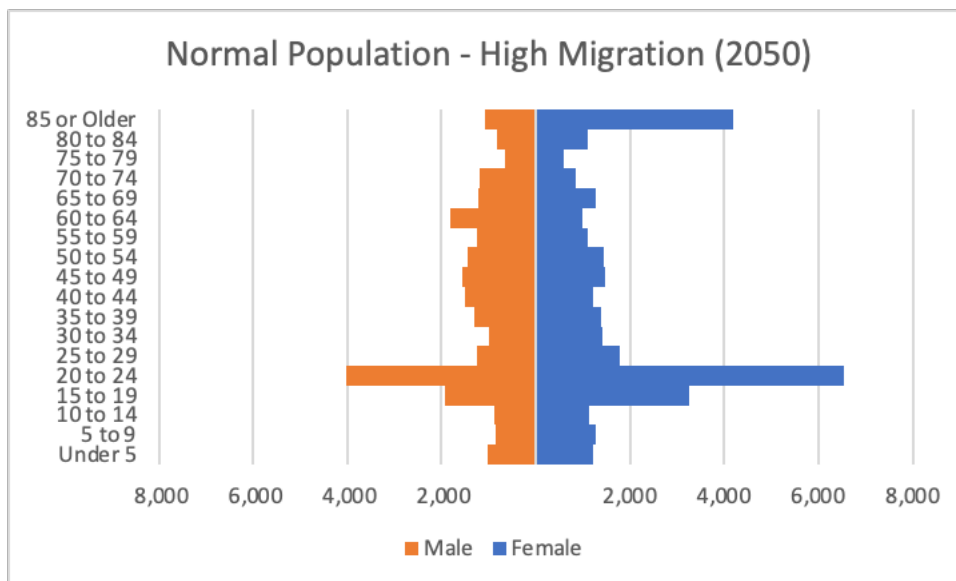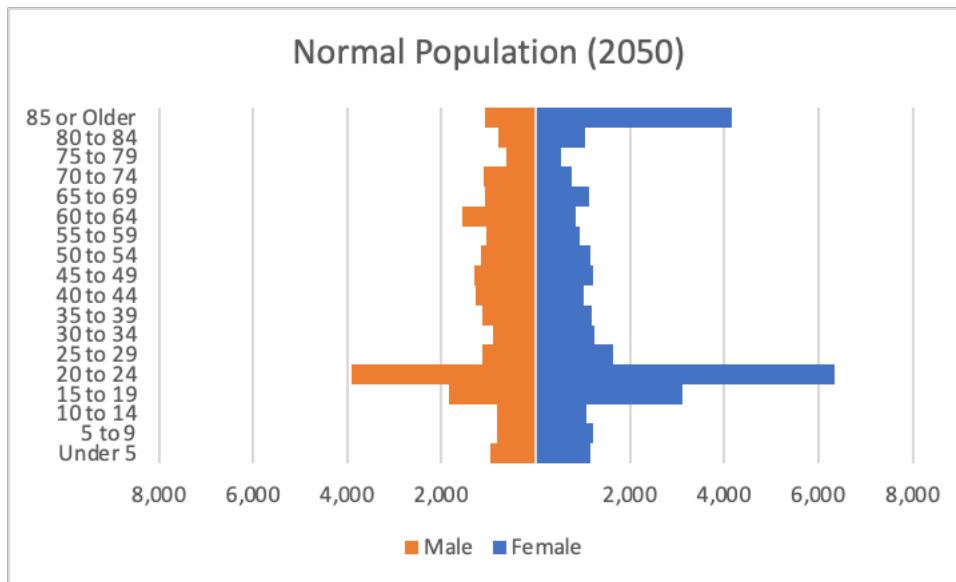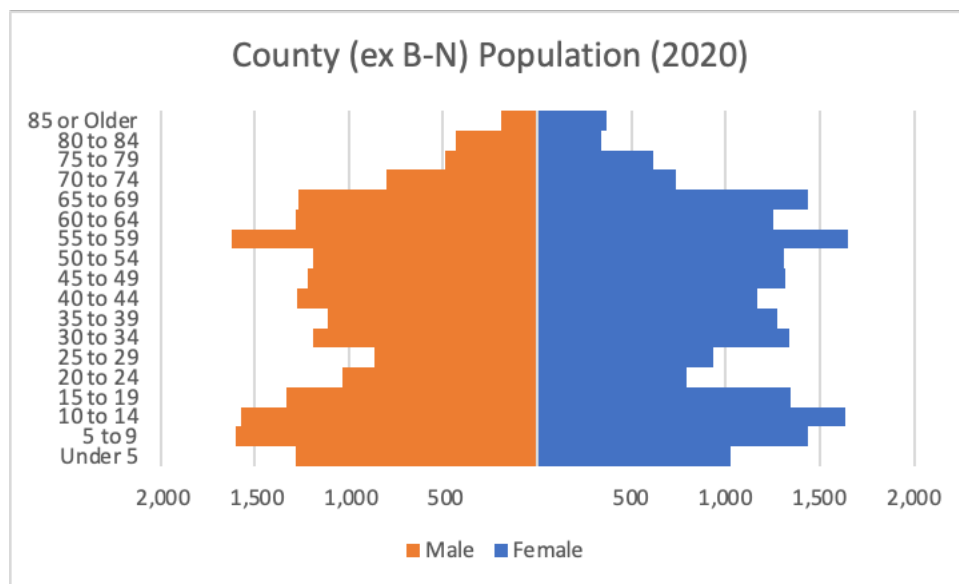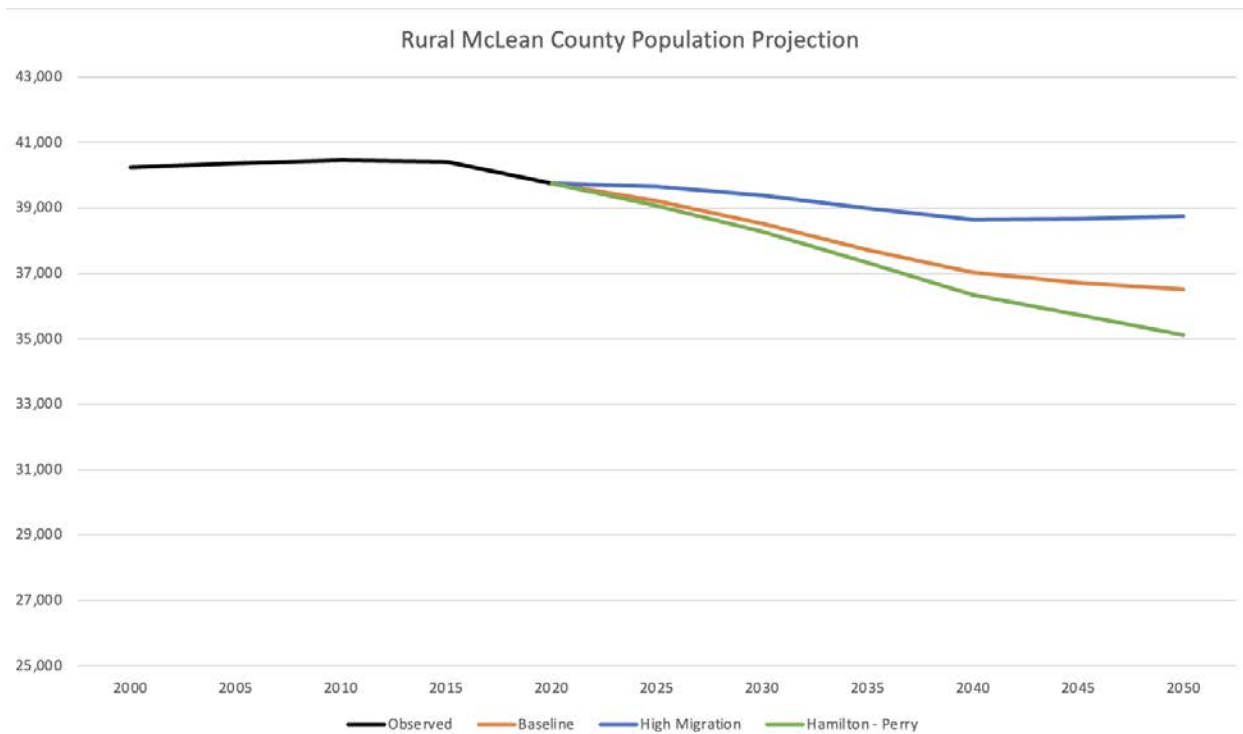**Bloomington Population - High Migration (2050)**
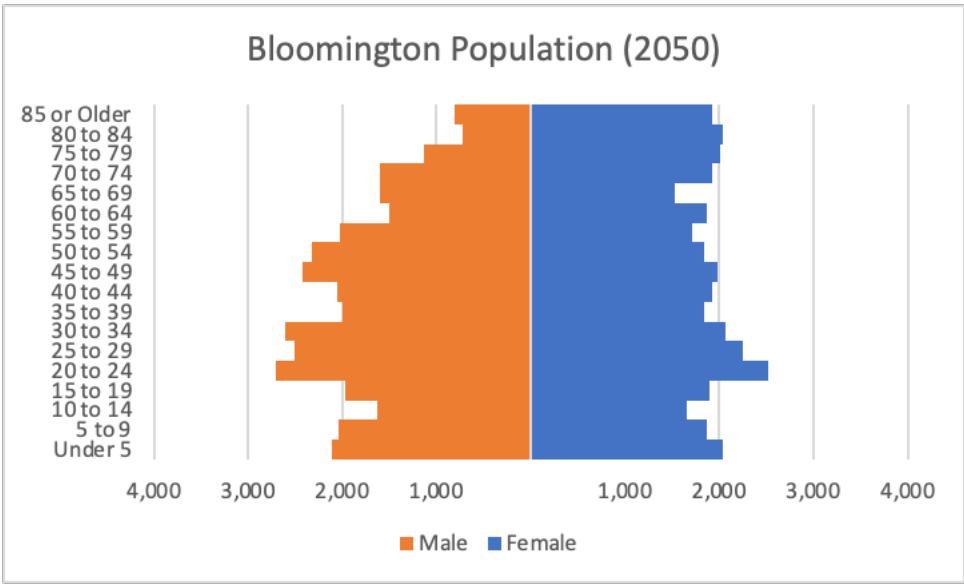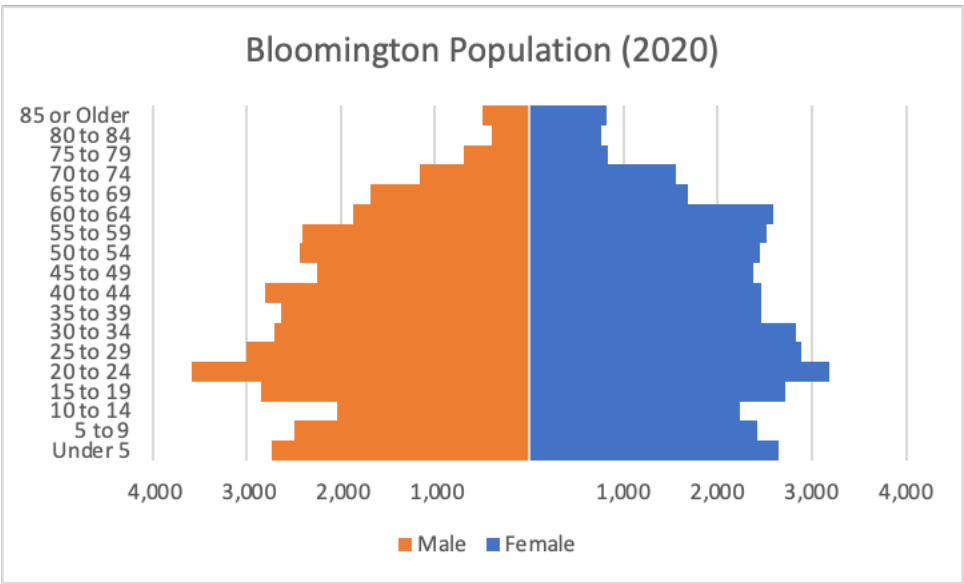
Normal

Between 2015 and 2020, Normal's population grew by 211 residents - 0.39 percent. Baseline cohort-component and Hamilton-Perry projections estimate a 2050 population of 52,301 and 50,842 respectively – a loss of 4.38 percent and 7.05 percent of the population from 2020. Under the high migration scenario, Normal's population increases to 56,456 in 2050 – a 3.21 percent increase (0.11 percent per year).

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Normal Population Projection

Legend: Observed · Baseline · Baseline - Low · Baseline - High · High Migration · High Migration - Low · High Migration - High · Hamilton - Perry · Hamilton-Perry-Low · Hamilton-Perry - High

Normal Population (2020)

Legend: Male · Female

Normal Population (2050)

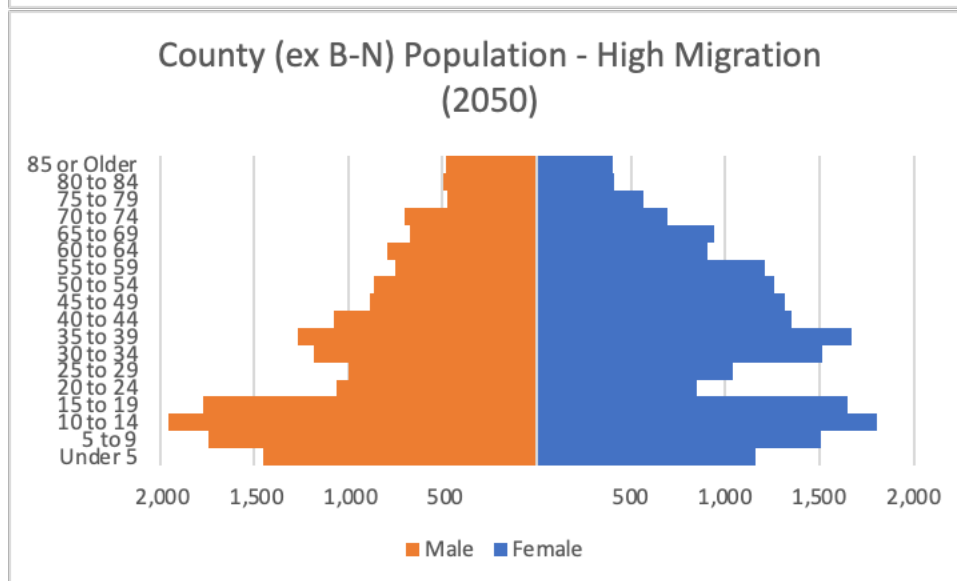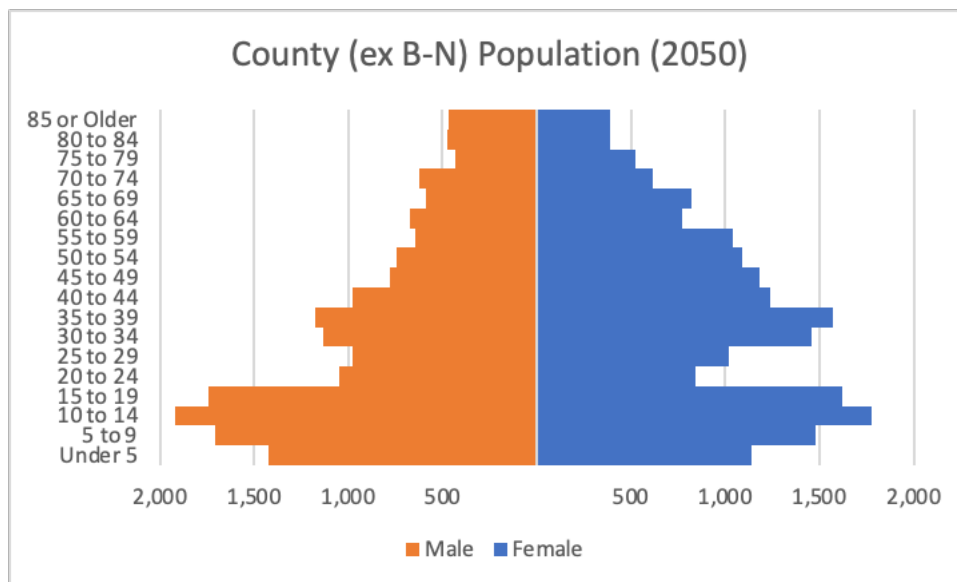**Normal Population - High Migration (2050)**

McLean County Excluding Bloomington and Normal

Between 2015 and 2020, the portion of McLean County excluding Bloomington and Normal lost 680 people – a loss of 1.68 percent. In 2020, the population stood at 39,740. Under baseline cohort-component and Hamilton-Perry projection scenarios, the 2050 population will be 36,511 and 35,120 respectively (a loss of 8.13% and 11.63% respectively). Under the high migration scenario, population losses are slower but still represent a loss of 2.53 percent of the population between 2020 and 2050.

Rural McLean County Population Projection

County (ex B-N) Population (2020)

County (ex B-N) Population (2050)

County (ex B-N) Population - High Migration (2050)

Making Sense of Projections

In interpreting the results of population projections, it is important to keep in mind that projections reflect what future is likely if the trends of the past five years continue. As discussed earlier, there is higher than unusual uncertainty reflected within population estimates resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and data available for projections. The past five years for the region represent the transition from a long-tailed recovery from the housing crisis and great recession into a global pandemic and period of substantial inflation. These confounding factors mute some of the contribution of the boom to the data used for population projections, and more generally, the recency of the boom means that some of the change being seen on the ground in McLean County are simply not yet reflected in available data. Employment growth and population growth tend to go hand in hand, however, drawing a direct link between job growth and population growth is challenging amidst a rapidly evolving environment for work

that allows for more remote work and that may see some workers commuting rather than moving, especially if inflationary trends persist into the future.

In the longer run, if past relationships between jobs and housing persist, job growth is likely to translate into growth in the working age population that will help grow the base of families with children in the county. Based upon recent trends, it is likely that this growth – and the resulting need for transportation infrastructure investments – will be concentrated in Bloomington and Normal.

Labor migration represents an important and likely influence on the county's population future, but so does the continued importance of the ageing population. High net migration to the region coupled with a national increase in the population reaching retirement age means that McLean County is likely to see a continued increase in the number of older adults in the county. High quality of life, strong healthcare facilities, and affordable housing all make McLean County an attractive place to retire and to age in place. Strategic investments that link transportation infrastructure investments with locations that are accessible to the ageing population lay an important groundwork to sustaining quality of life for McLean County's residents into the future.

Considerations for the Future

Bloomington-Normal's Economic Development Council's Regional Housing Market Analysis cites projections from the state of Illinois that show the County is projected to grow by more than 10,000 residents over the next 10 years. These projections rely upon earlier data than those employed in the projections contained here which show strong potential for growth at a lower rate than the state projections. McLean County has experienced a long-tailed recovery from the great recession and has also been impacted substantially by the COVID-19 pandemic. Economic signals suggest that the county is poised to continue to grow at rates above the baseline scenarios developed for these projections. While baseline scenarios based upon recent trends indicate an ageing population and outmigration that results in population losses over time, the high migration scenario illustrates the potential for highly plausible future population growth brought by labor migration to the region.

Review of multiple projections conducted by the state of Illinois that rely upon data from earlier periods show that population trends between 2015 and 2020 are substantially different than what was projected. The focus of LRTP 2050 projections is to account for these differences and examine what is plausible in the future given the substantial change in demographic trends over the last decade.

McLean County Projections (IDPH and DCEO)
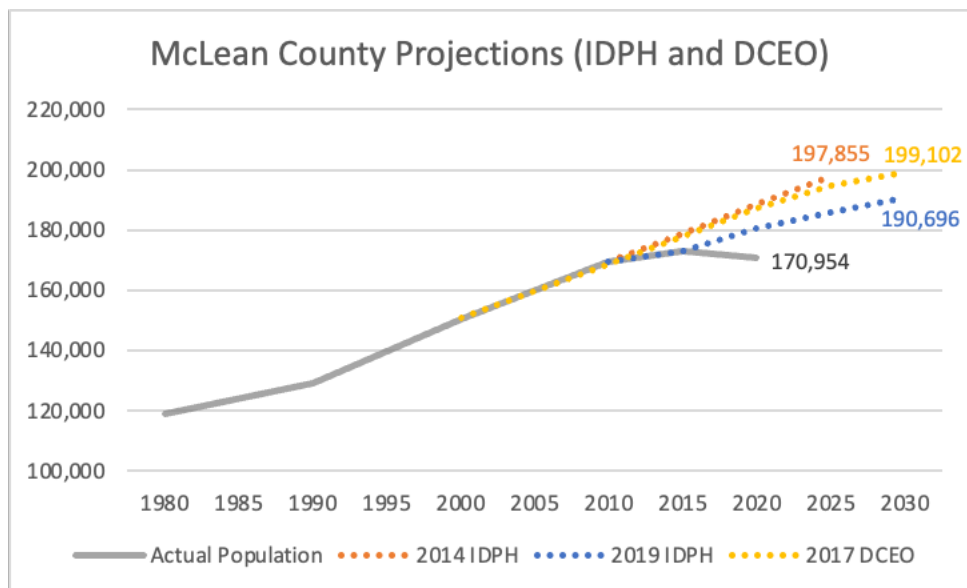
Like the Regional Housing Market Analysis, these projections underscore a regional deficit in population growth within the young professional segment, and this lack of growth drives a portion of the projected future population loss. Attracting more young professionals to the region will have important implications for future population growth, as will creating housing opportunities that can accommodate the needs of the ageing population. Given the presence of several major institutions of higher education, there are also important opportunities to focus on retaining a greater share of recent graduates within the local region – a segment where there is currently extremely high rates of net outmigration.

Projections also indicate that much of the potential for population growth is focused on the twin cities of Bloomington and Normal. Analysis of recent building permit activity indicates that these two cities are where most of the new construction activity is occurring. Given that these two cities represent primary employment centers and locations where future employment growth is likely to be concentrated, investments in infrastructure, and housing in these areas are likely to yield additional benefits to the region.