

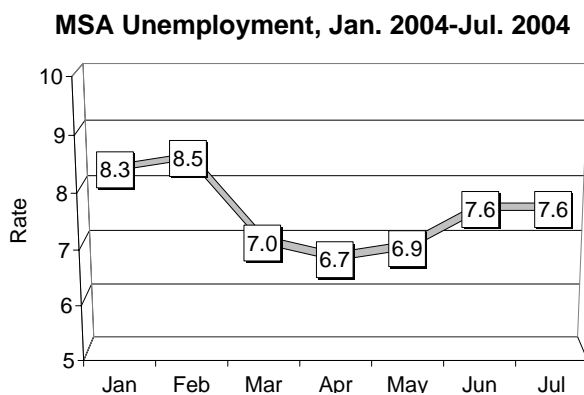
Economic Indicators Newsletter

Reporting Economic Trends in the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir NC Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)

Civilian Labor Force

After declining to 6.7% in April 2004, the Hickory MSA's unemployment rate rose to 7.6% in July (Figure 1). This increase appears to have been caused by continued losses in the region's manufacturing sector. The trend is also unusual since seasonal summer employment tends to drop unemployment rates. As of July 2004, only the Rocky Mount MSA had a higher unemployment rate than the Hickory Metro (Table 1). Unemployment rates by County for July 2004 were Alexander 8.0%, Burke 6.9%, Caldwell 8.8% and Catawba 7.2%.

Figure 1.



Source: NC Employment Security Commission, 2004.

Asheville	3.3%
Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill	3.6%
Wilmington	3.9%
Jacksonville	4.4%
Fayetteville	4.7%
Greensboro-Winston-Salem-High Point	5.3%
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill	6.0%
Goldsboro	6.2%
Greenville	6.5%
Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir	7.6%
Rocky Mount	8.0%

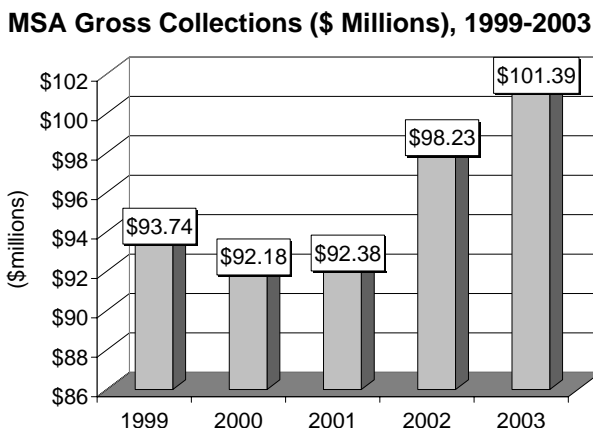
Source: NC Employment Security Commission, 2004.

Gross Collections

Gross collections data provided by the North Carolina Department of Revenue include money from registration fees, penalties, interest, and sales and use taxes. Local sales tax collections are not included. Weaker economic conditions caused gross collections in the Hickory MSA to fall from \$93.7 million in 1999 to \$92.4 million in 2001 (Figure 2). In 2002 gross collections increased to \$98.2 million in response to the half-cent sales tax increase passed in October 2001.

State gross tax collections inside the Hickory MSA exceeded \$100 million for the first time in 2003.

Figure 2.



Source: NC Department of Revenue, 2004.

Gross collections for each of the four MSA counties from 2001 to 2003 is shown in Table 2. State gross tax collections have increased in all four counties over the past two years due to the half cent sales tax increase.

Counties	2001	2002	2003
Alexander	\$3,821,097	\$4,198,194	\$4,505,737
Burke	\$15,705,209	\$16,167,047	\$17,029,315
Caldwell	\$14,246,018	\$15,641,527	\$16,124,845
Catawba	\$58,611,946	\$62,227,026	\$63,726,380

Source: NC Department of Revenue, 2004.



“EIN Spotlight”

Hickory MSA Demographic Change, 2000-2003

Net job losses of over 20,000 workers in the Hickory MSA over the past three years have been well documented by the North Carolina Employment Security Commission (NCESC) and the *Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN)*. How these employment losses may have affected the demographics of the four-county area has not been discussed. This addition of the “EIN Spotlight” will focus on population and housing estimates from the US Census Bureau. The estimates will be compared with data from the 2000 Census to determine how job losses have impacted the Greater Hickory Metro area. Comparisons of demographic change will also be made with other MSAs in North Carolina.

Population Trends, 2000-2003

Table 3 shows Hickory MSA population estimates from the US Census Bureau as well as the other 13 metro areas in North Carolina. The population analysis will be conducted using the new NCMSAs as defined by the 2000 Census (see box below and footnotes of Table 3 for an explanation of new metro designations). The estimates indicate that a 10% decline in total employment has not led to a 10% decline in the region's population. Population in the Hickory Metro grew from 341,820 in 2000 to 350,140 in 2003. The results do indicate, however, that the job losses have significantly slowed the rate of total population growth in the Hickory Metro. Only the Fayetteville, Rocky Mount, Goldsboro and Jacksonville MSAs had lower growth rates or population declines.

Table 3.
NCMSA Population Estimates, 2000-2003

MSA Title*	2000	2003	chg 2000-03	% chg 2000-03
Raleigh-Cary	797,031	884,489	87,458	11.0
Charlotte	1,165,784	1,259,357	93,573	8.0
Wilmington	274,550	293,207	18,657	6.8
Durham	423,803	447,066	23,263	5.5
Burlington	130,794	136,773	5,979	4.6
Greenville	152,693	158,680	5,987	3.9
Winston-Salem	421,961	437,550	15,589	3.7
Asheville	369,171	381,789	12,618	3.4
Greensboro	643,447	661,530	18,083	2.8
Hickory	341,820	350,140	8,320	2.4
Fayetteville	336,609	341,596	4,987	1.5
Rocky Mount	143,024	144,627	1,603	1.1
Goldsboro	113,329	113,104	-225	-0.2
Jacksonville	150,355	147,524	-2,831	-1.9

* NCMSAs Counties

Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord-Anson, Cabarrus, Gaston, Mecklenburg and Union Counties, **Raleigh-Cary**-Franklin, Johnston and Wake Counties, **Greensboro-High Point**-Guilford, Randolph and Rockingham Counties, **Asheville**-Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson and Madison Counties, **Wilmington**-Brunswick, New Hanover and Pender Counties, **Durham**-Chatham, Durham, Orange and Person Counties, **Winston-Salem-Davie**, Forsyth, Stokes and Yadkin Counties, **Fayetteville**-Cumberland and Hoke Counties, **Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir**-Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba Counties, **Rocky Mount**-Edgecombe and Nash Counties, **Greenville**-Greene and Pitt Counties, **Jacksonville**-Onslow County, **Burlington**-Alamance County, **Goldsboro**-Wayne County
Source: US Census Bureau, 2004.

Explanation of Changes to NCMSA Designations

While no changes occurred with respect to the counties within the Hickory MSA, many other MSAs in North Carolina added counties due to increased commuting to the principal city, while other designated MSAs were split into two or three MSAs. The following is a summary of the changes made to NCMSA designations for the 2000 Census.

- Haywood and Henderson Counties were added to the Asheville MSA.
- Anson County was added while Lincoln and Rowan Counties were removed from the Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord MSA.
- Hoke County was added to the Fayetteville MSA.
- The old Greensboro-Winston-Salem-High Point MSA was split into the Burlington, Greensboro-High Point, and Winston-Salem MSAs.
- Greene County was added to the Greenville MSA.
- The old Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill MSA was split into the Durham and Raleigh-Cary MSAs.

Population growth rates and rankings for the individual Hickory MSA counties are displayed in Table 4. Catawba County's 3.7% growth rate was the fastest of the four Hickory Metro counties. Compared to other areas in North Carolina, Catawba had the 29th fastest growth rate and the 16th greatest population gain of the



Hickory MSA Population and Housing Estimates

Hickory MSA County	2000	2003	chg 2000-03	% chg 2000-03	Growth Ranking	% Growth Ranking
Alexander	33,603	34,784	1,181	3.5	46	33
Burke	89,145	89,657	512	0.6	62	74
Caldwell	77,386	78,728	1,342	1.7	43	60
Catawba	141,686	146,971	5,285	3.7	16	29
Total	341,820	350,140	8,320	2.4		

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004.

State's 100 counties. Alexander County grew from 33,603 to 34,784, or 3.5% between 2000 and 2003. Burke and Caldwell grew at much slower rates (0.6% and 1.7% respectively) than Alexander and Catawba thus indicating that job losses had a significant effect on population growth in these counties.

Besides examining total population growth, additional information about the impacts of job losses on the Hickory MSA can be analyzed by looking at the types or "components" of population change across the region. Population can grow in three different ways. Natural population growth is defined by an area having more births than deaths. International migration is defined by the Census Bureau as: (1) net migration of the foreign-born, (2) net movement from Puerto Rico, (3) net movement of the U.S. Armed Forces and (4) emigration of the native born. The largest component of international in-migration, net migration of the foreign-born, includes lawful permanent residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (such as students), humanitarian migrants (such as refugees), and people illegally present in the United States. Internal migration, on the other hand, consists of movements of the persons born in the United States within the United States.

MSA Title*	Births	Deaths	Natural Growth	International Net In-migration	Internal In-migration	Total Net In-migration
Raleigh-Cary	43,137	15,601	27,536	18,154	41,061	59,215
Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord	63,196	29,061	34,135	21,664	37,523	59,187
Wilmington	11,102	8,467	2,635	1,641	14,145	15,786
Durham	20,429	10,630	9,799	11,406	2,199	13,605
Asheville	14,005	13,780	225	2,947	9,533	12,480
Winston-Salem	19,727	12,661	7,066	5,764	3,169	8,933
Greensboro-High Point	29,338	18,302	11,036	10,075	-2,345	7,730
Burlington	6,184	4,321	1,863	2,318	1,859	4,177
Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir	14,644	10,562	4,082	3,463	610	4,073
Greenville	7,431	3,909	3,522	1,414	1,194	2,608
Rocky Mount	6,940	4,883	2,057	730	-1,019	-289
Goldsboro	5,748	3,449	2,299	907	-3,417	-2,510
Fayetteville	20,019	7,463	12,556	1,798	-9,541	-7,743
Jacksonville	10,298	2,596	7,702	188	-10,982	-10,794

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004.

The components of population change for the 14 MSAs in North Carolina is shown in Table 5. About 51% of the Hickory MSA's population increase is attributable to natural growth (Figure 3). In the fastest growing areas of the state, in general, natural growth was a much smaller proportion of total population growth. In the Raleigh Cary MSA, for example, only 31.5% of its population rise was caused by natural growth.

The data does show that the Hickory Metro continues to have a migration of foreign-born persons in the region. The US Census Bureau estimates that 3,463 foreign-born persons have moved into the Hickory MSA



Hickory MSA Population and Housing Estimates

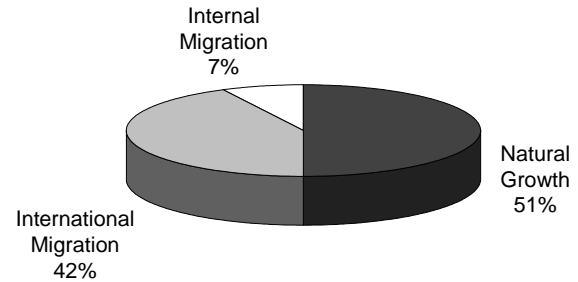
since 2000. Although not shown in the Census estimates, undoubtedly the majority of persons moving into the region are either Hispanic or Hmong.

It would appear the region's job losses have had the greatest impact on the Hickory Metro's rate of internal (US-born residents) migration. Only a net of 610 persons are estimated to have been added through internal migration to the Hickory Metro since 2000. The fastest growing areas of the state (Asheville, Charlotte, Raleigh and Wilmington) all had high percentages of growth from internal migration as well as natural growth and international migration. In general, the areas with more internal migration have suffered fewer job losses, which might cause an out-migration of some residents. Some of the quicker growing areas are also able to attract retirees to their areas at a faster rate than the Hickory Metro.

According to estimates from the US Census Bureau, migration patterns vary widely within the Hickory MSA counties (Table 6). In Alexander County, for instance, internal in-migration was the largest component of population change (Figure 4). The County had little international net in-migration while natural growth made up about one-third of all population growth during the past three years.

Figure 3.

Type of Population Growth inside the Hickory MSA, 2000-2003



Source: US Census Bureau, 2004.

County	Births	Deaths	Natural Growth	International Net In-migration	Internal In-migration	Total Net In-migration
Alexander	1,379	961	418	153	649	802
Burke	3,485	2,683	802	761	-1,019	-258
Caldwell	3,154	2,551	603	331	121	452
Catawba	6,626	4,367	2,259	2,218	859	3,077
Total	14,644	10,562	4,082	3,463	610	4,073

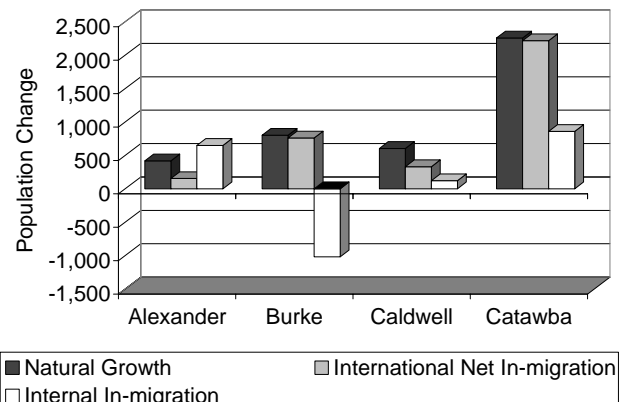
Source: US Census Bureau, 2004.

In contrast to Alexander, estimates for Burke indicate an out-migration of residents from the county. While Burke received a net of 761 foreign-born persons, the county lost 1,019 persons who were born in the United States. If not for gaining 802 persons through natural growth, Burke would have experienced a net population decrease over the past three years.

More than 60% of Caldwell County's total population increase since 2000 was through natural growth (802 persons). The County experienced very little internal in-migration (121 persons) between 2000 and 2003. This is probably due to the loss of over 4,000 jobs in Caldwell County since January 2001. Caldwell County gained only 331 persons via international net in-migration.

Figure 4.

Hickory MSA County Level Population Change by Type, 2000-2003



Source: US Census Bureau, 2004.



Hickory MSA Population and Housing Estimates

Census Bureau estimates show that Catawba County's population change is being equally driven by two different factors, natural growth and international net in-migration. Between 2000 and 2003, Catawba County gained 2,259 through natural growth and 2,218 through in-migration of foreign-born persons to the County. Internal (US-born residents) net in-migration equaled only 859 persons. These estimates show that the net loss of over 10,000 jobs in the County since 2000 may have contributed to slowing the rate of internal in-migration. The losses, however, has apparently not slowed down the rate of international net in-migration.

Change in Hickory MSA Ethnicity, 2000-2002

The impacts of net international in-migration on the Hickory MSA are clearly reflected in the change of ethnicity data shown in Table 7. The region's Hispanic population (note: Hispanic can be any race) has grown from 13,988 in July 2000 to 16,481 persons in July 2002. As seen during the 1990s, Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the Hickory MSA. The 17.8% increase the region's Hispanic population over the past two years also correlates with the growth in international net in-migration seen in Table 5. It further shows that despite the region's job losses, the Census Bureau believes that Hispanics continue to enter the area.

Table 7.
Hickory MSA Population by Ethnic Group, July 2000-July 2002

Hickory MSA	July 2000 Population	% of 2000 Population	July 2002 Population	% of 2002 Population	Change 2000-2002	% Change 2000-2002
Total Population	343,094	100.0%	349,241	100.0%	6,147	1.8%
Whites	307,267	89.6%	312,509	89.5%	5,242	1.7%
African Americans	24,020	7.0%	23,948	6.9%	-72	-0.3%
American Indians	994	0.3%	1,002	0.3%	8	0.8%
Asian & Pacific Islander	8,603	2.5%	9,424	2.7%	821	9.5%
Mixed Race	2,210	0.6%	2,358	0.7%	148	6.7%
Hispanics (Any Race)	13,988	4.1%	16,481	4.7%	2,493	17.8%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004

Asians and Pacific Islanders is currently the second fastest growing minority group in the Hickory MSA. Its population has increased 9.5% since 2000 to 9,424 persons. Comparing the Asian and Hispanic groups, it appears from the data that for every three Hispanics moving into the area, one Asian is migrating into the region. The African American group is the largest minority group in the Hickory MSA with a 2002 estimate of 23,948 persons. While African Americans are the largest ethnic group, the Census Bureau estimates a slight loss in its population between 2000 and 2002. It may be more interesting to note, however, that at its present rate of growth, Hispanics could become the largest minority in the region by 2012.

The degree of ethnic diversity varies widely within the Hickory MSA. In Alexander County, for example, more than 93% of the population is white (Table 8). Of the 727 person population gain in Alexander between 2000

Table 8.
Alexander County Population by Ethnic Group, July 2000-July 2002

Alexander County	July 2000 Population	% of 2000 Population	July 2002 Population	% of 2002 Population	Change 2000-2002	% Change 2000-2002
Total Population	33,673	100.0%	34,400	100.0%	727	2.2%
Whites	31,488	93.5%	32,189	93.6%	701	2.2%
African Americans	1,591	4.7%	1,573	4.6%	-18	-1.1%
American Indians	47	0.1%	38	0.1%	-9	-19.1%
Asian & Pacific Islander	362	1.1%	403	1.2%	41	11.3%
Mixed Race	185	0.5%	197	0.6%	12	6.5%
Hispanics (Any Race)	840	2.5%	951	2.8%	111	13.2%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004



Hickory MSA Population and Housing Estimates

and 2003, 701 were white. African Americans and American Indians lost population while the Asian and mixed race categories showed minimal gains. The County's Hispanic population grew by only 111 persons. These results coincide with the components of population growth data in Table 6 showing most of Alexander's population rise was through natural growth and internal migration.

Census Bureau estimates reveal a minimal increase of 356 persons in Burke County between 2000 and 2002 (Table 9). The County's white population increased by 438 people, while the African American population declined by 164 persons. Interestingly, Burke's Asian population grew by only 51 persons since 2000 after growing rapidly during the 1990s. The lack of Asian population growth could be caused by a lack of job opportunities in Burke County over the past three years.

Table 9.
Burke County Population by Ethnic Group, July 2000-July 2002

Burke County	July 2000 Population	% of 2000 Population	July 2002 Population	% of 2002 Population	Change 2000-2002	% Change 2000-2002
Total Population	89,282	100.0%	89,638	100.0%	356	0.4%
Whites	78,761	88.2%	79,199	88.4%	438	0.6%
African Americans	6,070	6.8%	5,906	6.6%	-164	-2.7%
American Indians	351	0.4%	359	0.4%	8	2.3%
Asian & Pacific Islander	3,498	3.9%	3,549	4.0%	51	1.5%
Mixed Race	602	0.7%	625	0.7%	23	3.8%
Hispanics (Any Race)	3,196	3.6%	3,491	3.9%	295	9.2%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004

Burke's Hispanic population did grow by 295 persons from July 2000 to July 2002. The Census Bureau currently estimates that Asians are the second largest minority group in Burke County after African Americans. If the current rate of Hispanic population growth continues, however, Hispanics will become the second largest minority group in the County by 2005.

Like Alexander, Caldwell County's population is over 90% white (Table 10). Between 2000 and 2002 the County's population grew by 886 persons, 744 of which were white. Caldwell's Hispanic population grew from 1,945 in 2000 to 2,495 in 2002 despite the net loss of 3,000 jobs in the County. While Hispanics are by far the fastest growing ethnic group in Caldwell County, population gains occurred in all other minority groups. Estimates for Caldwell's Asian population, for example, show an 18.7% increase since 2000 to 406 persons.

Table 10.
Caldwell County Population by Ethnic Group, July 2000-July 2002

Caldwell County	July 2000 Population	% of 2000 Population	July 2002 Population	% of 2002 Population	Change 2000-2002	% Change 2000-2002
Total Population	77,627	100.0%	78,513	100.0%	886	1.1%
Whites	72,450	93.3%	73,194	93.2%	744	1.0%
African Americans	4,270	5.5%	4,313	5.5%	43	1.0%
American Indians	191	0.2%	196	0.2%	5	2.6%
Asian & Pacific Islander	342	0.4%	406	0.5%	64	18.7%
Mixed Race	374	0.5%	404	0.5%	30	8.0%
Hispanics (Any Race)	1,945	2.5%	2,495	3.2%	550	28.3%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004

Catawba County's rate of international net in-migration is reflected in data seen in Table 11. The County's Hispanic population has grown 19.2% since 2000 to 9,544 persons. This estimate shows that Hispanics continuing to immigrate to Catawba even though the County has lost more than 10,000 jobs since 2000. At its current rate of growth, the number of Hispanics could outnumber African Americans (currently the largest minority group) by 2006 or 2007.



Hickory MSA Population and Housing Estimates

Table 11.
Catawba County Population by Ethnic Group, July 2000-July 2002

Catawba County	July 2000 Population	% of 2000 Population	July 2002 Population	% of 2002 Population	Change 2000-2002	% Change 2000-2002
Total Population	142,512	100.0%	146,690	100.0%	4,178	2.9%
Whites	124,568	87.4%	127,927	87.2%	3,359	2.7%
African Americans	12,089	8.5%	12,156	8.3%	67	0.6%
American Indians	405	0.3%	409	0.3%	4	1.0%
Asian & Pacific Islander	4,401	3.1%	5,066	3.5%	665	15.1%
Mixed Race	1,049	0.7%	1,132	0.8%	83	7.9%
Hispanics (Any Race)	8,007	5.6%	9,544	6.5%	1,537	19.2%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004

Besides Hispanic population increases Catawba County is also experiencing strong growth in its Asian population. The ethnic group has grown 15.1% from 4,401 in 2000 to 5,066 in 2002. It would appear from the data in Table 11 that the large number of job losses suffered in the region is not negatively affecting the growth of Hispanic and Asian populations, at least in Catawba County.

Hickory MSA Housing Growth

Table 12 compares 2000 and 2003 housing growth in the Hickory MSA to the other 13 NC Metros between 2000 and 2003. According to the US Census, the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir MSA gained 6,700 dwelling units over the past three years. While this number may seem impressive, a comparison with other areas in North Carolina shows that the Hickory MSA had the third slowest rate of housing growth among the State's 14 metro areas. The 4.6% increase in the Hickory Metro was less than half the rate of the fastest growing Metros in the state, the Raleigh-Cary and Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord MSAs (11.4%), in terms of new housing. Only the Rocky Mount and the Goldsboro MSAs had slower housing growth rates than the Hickory Metro. The rate of housing growth in the Hickory Metro (4.6%) was also nearly double the rate of the region's population increase (2.4%). This data correlates with the increase in the number of vacant units (from 10,908 in 2000 to 16,259 in 2002) across the Hickory MSA.

Table 12.
North Carolina MSA Housing Unit Growth, 2000-2003

MSA Title	July 1, 2000	July 1, 2003	Change	% Change	Growth Ranking	% Growth Ranking
Raleigh-Cary	333,026	371,090	38,064	11.4%	2	1
Charlotte-Gastonia-Concord	485,298	540,732	55,434	11.4%	1	2
Wilmington	152,816	166,056	13,240	8.7%	5	3
Greenville	66,229	71,853	5,624	8.5%	10	4
Durham	181,141	195,537	14,396	7.9%	4	5
Jacksonville	56,014	59,356	3,342	6.0%	11	6
Greensboro-High Point	276,234	292,069	15,835	5.7%	3	7
Burlington	55,708	58,775	3,067	5.5%	12	8
Asheville	176,035	185,467	9,432	5.4%	7	9
Winston-Salem	184,033	193,479	9,446	5.1%	6	10
Fayetteville	131,470	137,861	6,391	4.9%	9	11
Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir	145,526	152,226	6,700	4.6%	8	12
Rocky Mount	61,293	63,852	2,559	4.2%	13	13
Goldsboro	47,473	48,951	1,478	3.1%	14	14

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004.

Hickory MSA county-level housing growth trends are displayed in Table 13. Nearly 600 housing units have been added in Alexander County since 2000. A total of 1,068 homes were built in Burke County over the

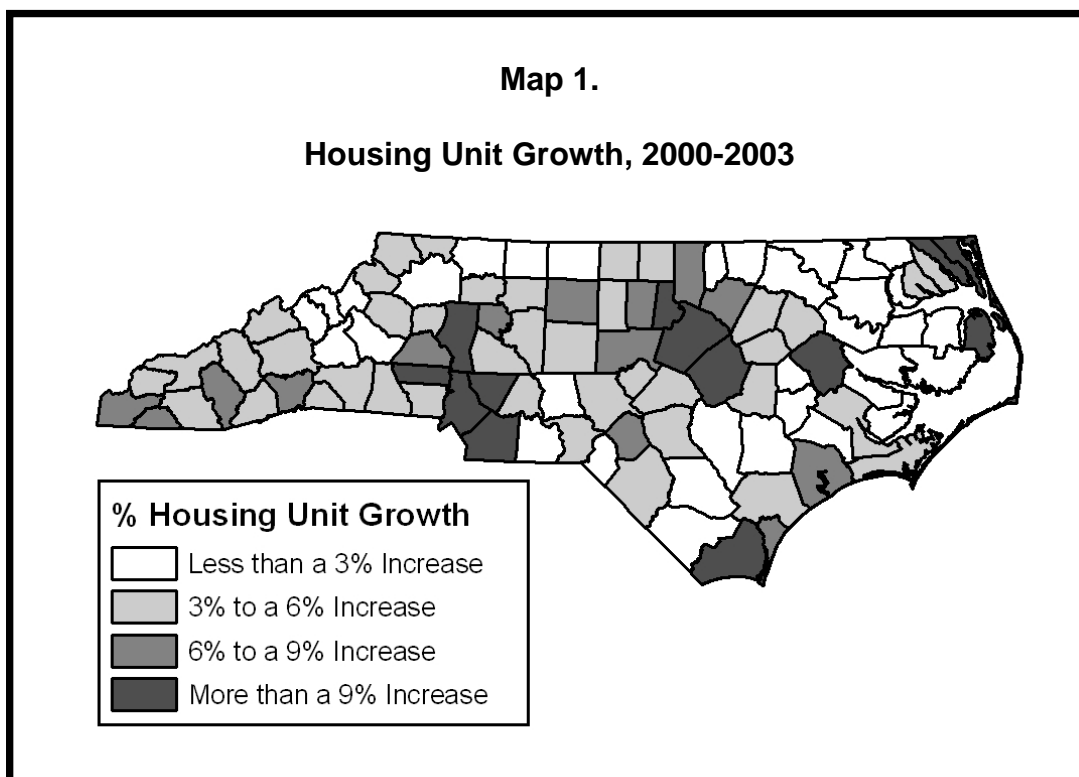


Hickory MSA Population and Housing Estimates

County	July 1, 2000	July 1, 2003	Change	% Change	Growth Ranking	% Growth Ranking
Alexander	14,161	14,754	593	4.2%	62	48
Burke	37,547	38,615	1,068	2.8%	45	71
Caldwell	33,555	34,858	1,303	3.9%	39	52
Catawba	60,263	63,999	3,736	6.2%	15	24
Total	145,526	152,226	6,700	4.6%		

Source: US Census Bureau, 2004.

past three years; however, Burke County's rate of housing growth rate (2.8%) was cited as the slowest in the region and among the slowest in the state (Map 1). The number of estimated units in Caldwell County grew from 33,555 to 34,858 units in 2000. Over 56% of all housing growth in the Hickory MSA since 2000 has occurred in Catawba County. The 3,746 housing unit increase was the fifteenth highest among North Carolina's 100 counties.



Summary

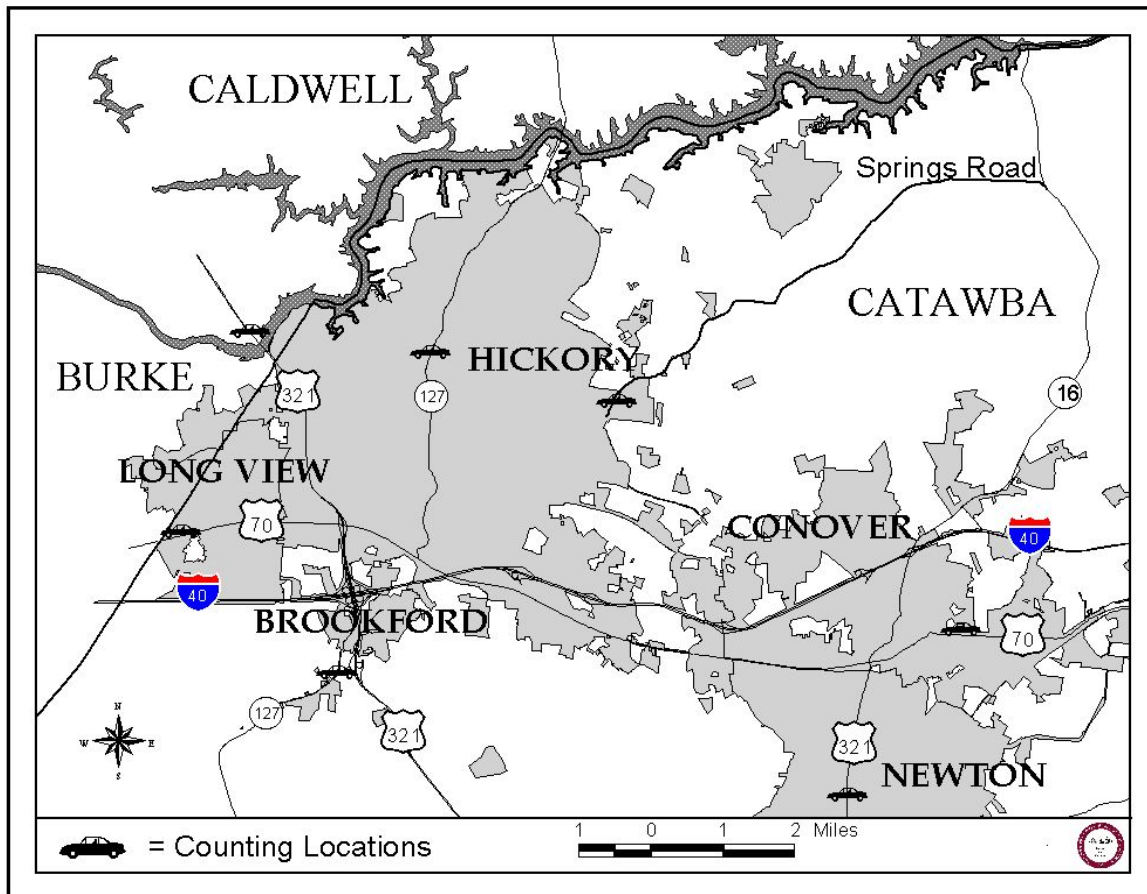
The loss of over 20,000 jobs in the region has certainly slowed, but has not eliminated population and housing growth in the Greater Hickory Metro. About half the region's population increases is the result of net in-migration with the balance caused by natural growth (more births than deaths). The fastest growing areas of the state have a much greater percentage of population growth from in-migration compared to the Hickory MSA. Census estimates show that most of the international in-migration is from Hispanics moving in the area seeking service sector and construction jobs. Based on its current growth rates, Hispanics are likely to become the biggest minority group in the Hickory MSA by 2012 and in Catawba County by 2006 or 2007. In spite of weak economic conditions, 6,700 homes were built in the Hickory Metro since 2000.

Hickory Area Vehicle Occupancy Rates

Changes in economic activity can be detected by analyzing the Hickory's morning commute patterns. The Western Piedmont Council of Governments has been collecting information on morning commuting patterns into Hickory since 1984. For 20 years data has been collected at seven locations in the Hickory area: US Highway 321 North at the Catawba River Bridge; US Highway 321 Business South in Newton; NC Highway 127 North in Viewmont; NC Highway 127 South in Mountain View; US Highway 70 West in Long View; US Highway 70 East in Conover and Springs Road in Northeast Hickory (Map 2). Data is collected each July on the number of total vehicles (passenger cars, buses, trucks, police cars) and occupants in passenger cars passing through each of the seven locations between 6:30 and 8:30 A.M. Vehicle occupancy rates for each location are calculated by dividing the total number of occupants by the total number of passenger vehicles.

Map 2.

Hickory Area Morning Commute Counting Locations



In 1984 fewer than 10,000 vehicles went through the seven commuting locations surrounding Hickory (Table 14). In July 2004 a total of 13,865 cars were counted entering the City for a 38.8% increase. While the overall growth trend over the past 20 years is impressive, a closer look at the data reveals some interesting trends that have occurred since 1984. The data show, for instance, that the majority of the commuting growth took place from 1984 to 1994 with an increase from 9,992 to 12,775 vehicles.

Good economic conditions and more jobs in the mid to late 1990s caused the total vehicle count to rise to 13,824. Between 1999 and 2004, however, little commuting growth occurred for several reasons. The new

Table 14. Morning Commute Total Vehicles, 1984-2004										
Location	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	Chg. 94-04	% Chg. 94-04	Chg. 84-04	% Chg. 84-04	
US 321 N	2,235	3,007	2,992	3,854	3,542	550	18.4%	1,307	58.5%	
US 321 S	1,180	1,323	1,327	1,780	1,792	465	35.0%	612	51.9%	
NC 127 N	1,566	1,686	2,106	2,394	2,213	107	5.1%	647	41.3%	
NC 127 S	1,703	2,215	2,425	2,135	2,207	-218	-9.0%	504	29.6%	
US 70 W	790	928	905	1,000	957	52	5.7%	167	21.1%	
US 70 E	440	425	494	499	1,146	652	132.0%	706	160.5%	
Springs Rd	2,078	2,470	2,526	2,163	2,008	-518	-20.5%	-70	-3.4%	
Totals	9,992	12,054	12,775	13,824	13,865	1,090	8.5%	3,873	38.8%	

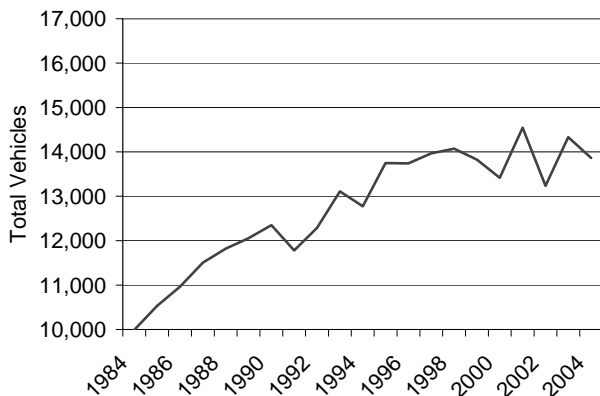
Source: WPCOG Data Center, 2004.

US Highway 321 diverted some traffic from US Highway 321 Business. This contributed to no net growth in traffic at US 321 Business over the past five years. A new short cut in front of the Springs Road location helped to cause a 5% drop in vehicles between 1999 and 2004.

The biggest reason behind the lack of growth appears to be the job losses the region has suffered since 2000 (Figure 5). This is particularly the case at the US 321 North location. Between 1984 and 1999 the total vehicle count for US Highway 321 North grew from 2,235 vehicles to 3,854 spurred by increased commuting from Caldwell County into Hickory as well as an increase in truck traffic. Since 1999 morning traffic along US 321 North has declined 8.1% to 3,542 vehicles. Employment losses may have also impacted vehicle counts coming from Alexander County into Hickory. A 7.6% decline in vehicle traffic (from 2,394 to 2,213) has occurred at NC 127 North during the past five years.

Figure 5.

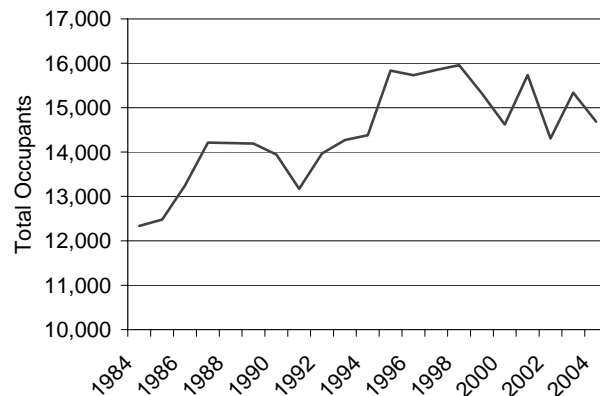
Hickory Area Total Vehicles



Source: WPCOG Data Center, 2004.

Figure 6.

Hickory Area Total Occupants



Source: WPCOG Data Center, 2004.

Going against the overall trend of fewer morning commuters are two locations, NC 127 South and US Highway 70 East. After declining from 2,415 to 2,135 vehicles between 1994 and 1999, due to the opening of the new US 321, the total number of vehicles at the Mountain View location has recovered to 2,207 vehicles. US 70 East has increased from 499 in 1999 to 1,146 in 2004. This change is harder to explain, but it may be caused by an increase in local traffic between Claremont and Conover as alternative route to using I-40.

Trends for total occupants in vehicles are shown in Figure 6 and Table 15. During the past 20 years the number of occupants going to work has grown from 12,335 to 14,685 for a 19.1% increase. Since 1994 only a net 2.1% gain occurred in total occupants. After peaking above 16,000 occupants in the late 1990s, the

Location	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	Chg. 94-04	% Chg. 94-04	Chg. 84-04	% Chg. 84-04
US 321 N	2,794	3,533	3,503	4,177	3,677	174	5.0%	883	31.6%
US 321 S	1,534	1,588	1,565	1,964	1,776	211	13.5%	242	15.8%
NC 127 N	1,879	1,973	2,370	2,692	2,379	9	0.4%	500	26.6%
NC 127 S	2,129	2,614	2,425	2,391	2,393	-32	-1.3%	264	12.4%
US 70 W	964	1,141	1,019	1,123	1,007	-12	-1.2%	43	4.5%
US 70 E	541	501	599	533	1,213	614	102.5%	672	124.2%
Springs Rd	2,494	2,841	2,896	2,438	2,240	-656	-22.7%	-254	-10.2%
Totals	12,335	14,191	14,377	15,317	14,685	308	2.1%	2,350	19.1%

Source: WPCOG Data Center, 2004.

number of occupants in 2004 equaled only 14,685. The job layoffs that occurred in the area since 2001 have no doubt played a role in the decline of total commuters into Hickory. The most dramatic impacts occurred at US 321 North and NC 127 North which experienced a 12.0% and 11.6% decline in total occupants between 1994 and 2004.

The vehicle occupancy rate (VOR) is calculated by dividing the number of residential vehicles by the number of occupants. It measures the amount of carpooling taking place within the Hickory area. The closer the VOR is to one, the less carpooling is taking place. Changes in VOR are shown in Table 16. In 1984 Hickory area VOR averaged 1.24 persons per vehicle. By location VOR rates ranged from 1.20 at NC 127 North and Springs Road to as high as 1.30 at US 321 South.

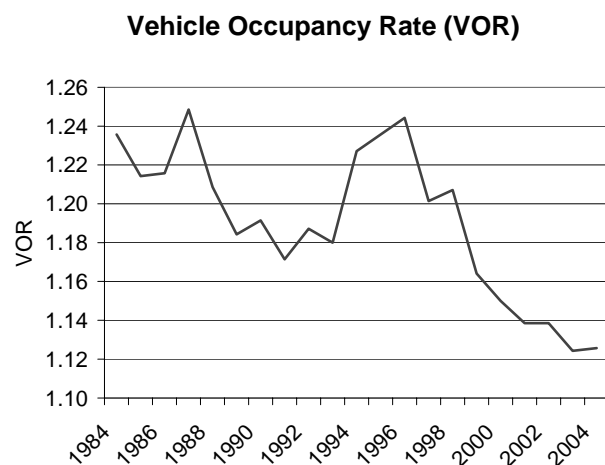
Location	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	Chg. 94-04	% Chg. 94-04	Chg. 84-04	% Chg. 84-04
US 321 N	1.25	1.18	1.20	1.16	1.11	-0.09	-7.5%	-0.14	-11.2%
US 321 S	1.30	1.20	1.32	1.19	1.12	-0.20	-15.2%	-0.18	-13.8%
NC 127 N	1.20	1.17	1.15	1.14	1.10	-0.05	-4.3%	-0.10	-8.3%
NC 127 S	1.25	1.18	1.19	1.16	1.11	-0.08	-6.7%	-0.14	-11.2%
US 70 W	1.22	1.23	1.19	1.16	1.10	-0.09	-7.6%	-0.12	-9.8%
US 70 E	1.23	1.18	1.36	1.18	1.19	-0.17	-12.5%	-0.04	-3.3%
Springs Rd	1.20	1.15	1.18	1.16	1.15	-0.03	-2.5%	-0.05	-4.2%
Totals	1.24	1.18	1.23	1.16	1.13	-0.10	-8.3%	-0.11	-8.9%

Source: WPCOG Data Center, 2004.

As Figure 7 shows, since 1994 VOR has precipitously dropped across the region signaling a decline in carpooling in the Hickory area. By 2004 VOR number equaled 1.13 compared to 1.23 in 1994. The decline in carpooling could be caused by a number of factors including more families owning more than one vehicle and job losses in manufacturing, which typically have more commuting than service sector employment.

VOR at five of the seven locations was between 1.10 and 1.12 in 2004. The most dramatic drop in VOR has occurred on US 321 Business South, which has declined from 1.30 in 1984 to just 1.10 in 2004. The highest VOR rates were calculated at US Highway 70 East (1.19) and at Springs Road (1.15).

Figure 7.



Source: WPCOG Data Center, 2004.

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