State of the Region

Where are we today, and what do we need to plan for our shared future?

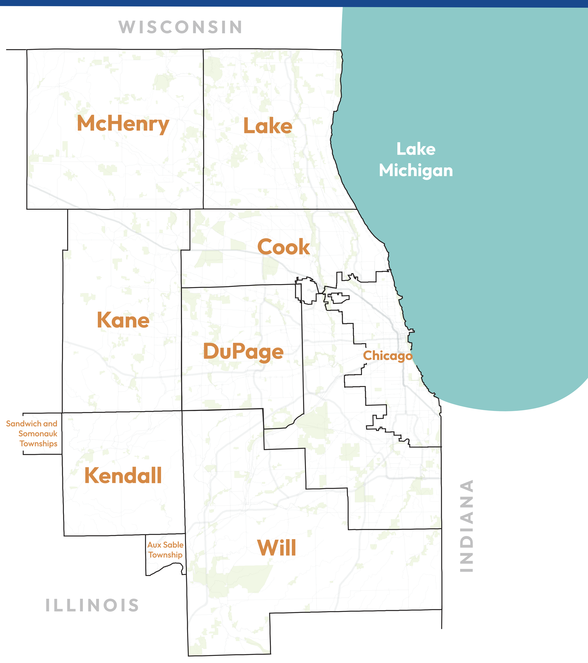
THE CENTURY PLAN
SOLVING FOR TOMORROW, TODAY

The Century Plan is a long-term vision for a better, stronger future for northeastern Illinois

As Daniel Burnham, co-author of the 1909 *Plan of Chicago,* said more than a century ago: "Make no little plans."

On behalf of the region, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) is leading the development of The Century Plan — northeastern Illinois' next BIG plan — a shared overarching vision for our region.

Voices from government, civic spheres, businesses, and communities will come together to prioritize what the region will need to thrive decades into the future.



Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning

CMAP is a regional government planning agency that works on behalf of the 7 counties, 284 municipalities, and 8.5 million residents of northeastern Illinois.

Together, we can answer tough questions and achieve more

We're bringing together decision-makers and action-takers to answer these questions (and more!), build consensus, and secure bold commitments on a path to 2060 and beyond.



Where will people live and work in our region, and what new industries will emerge?



How can we anticipate challenges and seize opportunities to provide a high quality of life in cities, suburbs, and rural communities across northeastern Illinois?



How will transportation evolve over the next several decades?



Thank you for joining us on this journey!



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STATE OF THE REGION SNAPSHOT

How has our population changed?

The region remains a national and international destination as overall growth slows

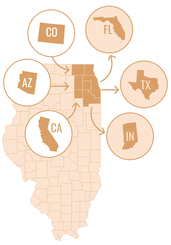
With slowing natural population growth, migration into and out of northeastern Illinois is the main driver of overall population change. While some have left the region, new residents continue to move here to take advantage of the high quality of life, diverse economy, and amenities of a global city.

Since 2010, the region's population has remained stable, with international immigration offsetting slight decreases in recent years. This trend highlights the importance of building strong communities that attract residents and foster regional growth — and how changes to federal policy could affect the region's future.



Most people move to and from northeastern Illinois from other parts of the state

Outside of Illinois, the top states for net migration to the region are Colorado, Arizona, and California; and the top states people move to are Florida, Texas, and Indiana.



80,000 Households moved into the region each year from 2011 - 2021

120,000 Households moved out of the region each year since 2020

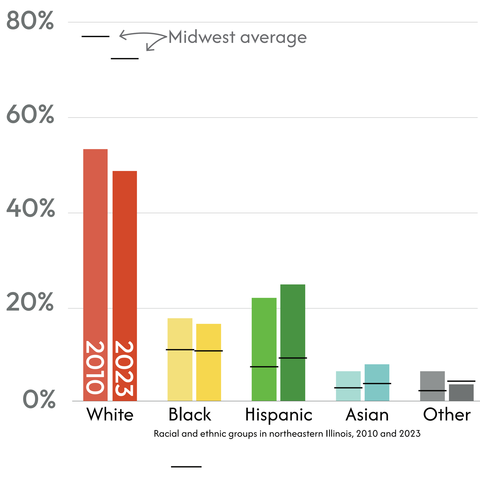
95,000 new residents moved to the region from other countries in 2024.

International immigration offset what would have been net population loss in 2023 and 2024

Northeastern Illinois is becoming more diverse

The region's residents have a wide range of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. While the total number of people living in the region did not change significantly between 2010 and 2023, there has been dynamic movement in and out of the region. These shifts have affected the racial and ethnic composition of the population — making us more diverse overall.

The region's population is more diverse than the Midwest as a whole and saw shifts in racial and ethnic groups over the past decade



Racial and ethnic groups in northeastern Illinois, 2010 and 2023

Sources: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2023), Decennial Census (2010), and SB Friedman



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STATE OF THE REGION SNAPSHOT

What does it take for me to live here?

Most jobs that pay a living wage now require a college degree

As the regional economy continues to evolve, workers without post-secondary education face fewer opportunities for stable, well-paying jobs. With economic growth increasingly concentrated in high-skill industries, residents with less education are experiencing greater financial pressure and limited upward mobility.

Jobs and skills in the region are mismatched

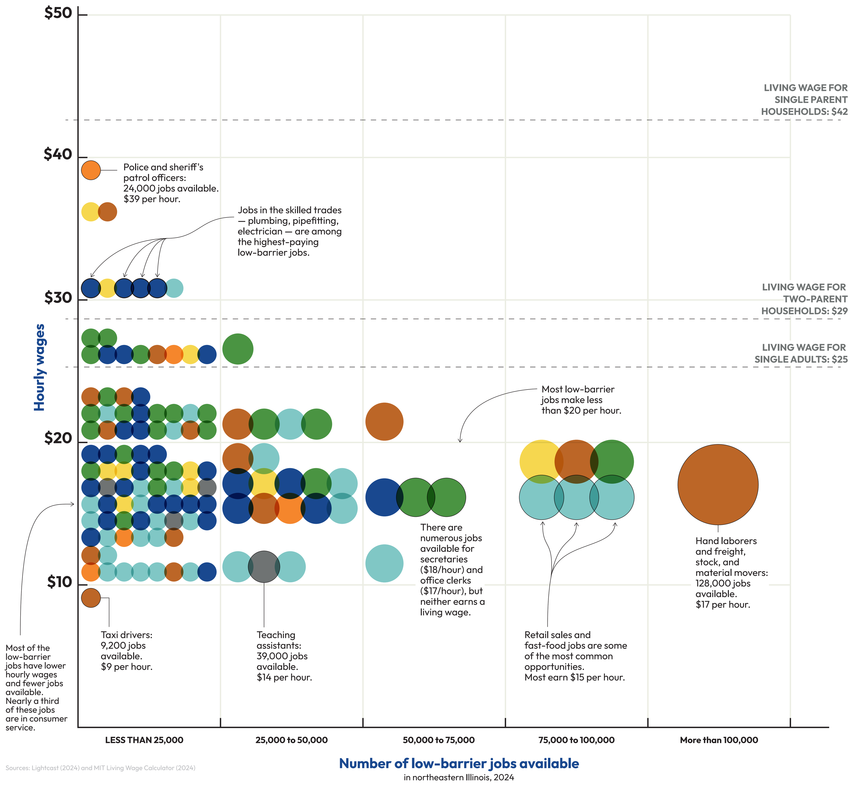
60% of adults over 25 do not have a bachelor's degree

24% of jobs do not require a bachelor's degree



Most low-barrier jobs do not provide a living wage to individuals, let alone people supporting families

Low-barrier jobs do not require a bachelor's degree or extensive experience



What's considered a "living wage" depends on people's household arrangements. For example, a single adult can make ends meet with less income than someone who has young children.

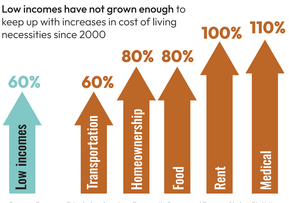
Sources: Lightcast (2024) and MIT Living Wage Calculator (2024)

The cost of essential goods and services has been rapidly rising

The cost of living in northeastern Illinois has risen in recent years, mirroring broader national trends that are straining household budgets. Significant increases in the cost of essentials like healthcare, education, childcare, groceries, and housing put pressure on residents' financial wellbeing — particularly for low- and middle-income households.

For households whose earnings fall in the 25th percentile — meaning 75% of households earn more — incomes are not growing enough to keep up with the rising cost of living. The gap between household incomes and the regional cost of living continues to shape where residents live and how they travel.

Low incomes have not grown enough to keep up with increases in cost of living necessities since 2000



Sources: Consumer Price Index, American Community Survey, and Bureau of Labor Statistics



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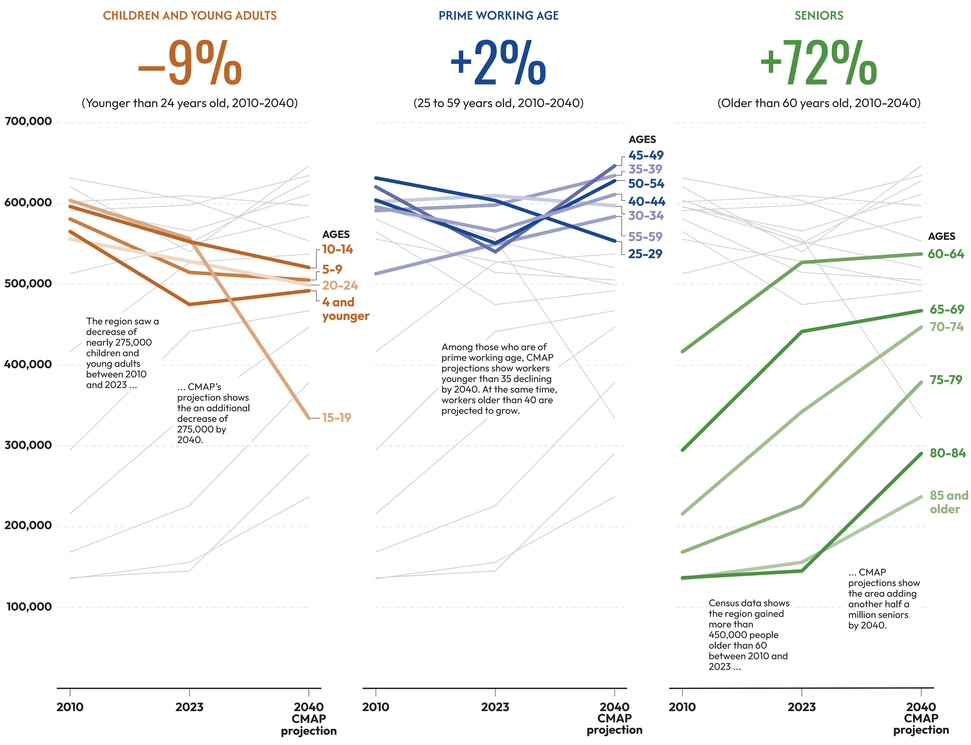
Can I thrive here at all stages of life?

The region is getting older.

Northeastern Illinois is experiencing changes that reflect a national trend: seniors make up a larger share of the population today. Multiple factors contribute to this shift — for example, the huge "baby boomer" generation is nearly all above retirement age, and younger generations are choosing to have fewer children, later in life. In our region, seniors increased from 11% of the population in 2010 to 15% of the population in 2023. At the same time, the share of children in the region's total population declined — with these trends forecasted to continue for decades to come.



An older population with less children is an enduring trend



Sources: Decennial Census (2010), American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, CMAP projections

A population with fewer children and working adults will have far-reaching impacts

Shifts in the age of people who live here will impact economic and civic life in complex ways. More people aging-in-place will require more housing and transportation options that meet their needs. A wave of retirements could mean a loss in experience and institutional knowledge, while fewer working adults may put pressure on the local workforce and tax base. Decreases in the number of children will result in fewer students enrolled in schools. These interconnected shifts will challenge institutions to adapt to changing demands — and the costs and opportunities that come with them.



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Can I find housing that meets my needs?

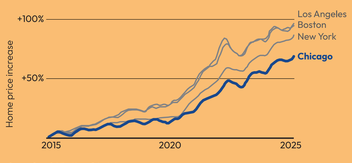
Housing costs are a challenge for people across the region

Residents are burdened by housing costs in nearly every part of the region **— with renters being especially affected.**

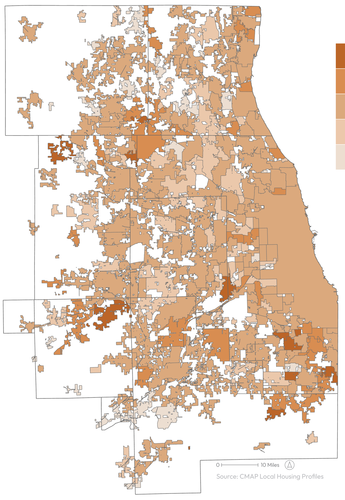
In 2023, 45% of the region's households were renters, and nearly half were considered cost-burdened — meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on rent.

High rates of housing cost-burden make it difficult to achieve financial stability and pursue goals that deepen connections to the region like starting a business, raising a family, or owning property.

Yet, home prices in northeastern Illinois remain more affordable than in other large U.S. metros, making the region an attractive place to put down roots.



Source: Case-Schiller Home Price Index



Percentage of renters who spend more than 30% of their income on housing

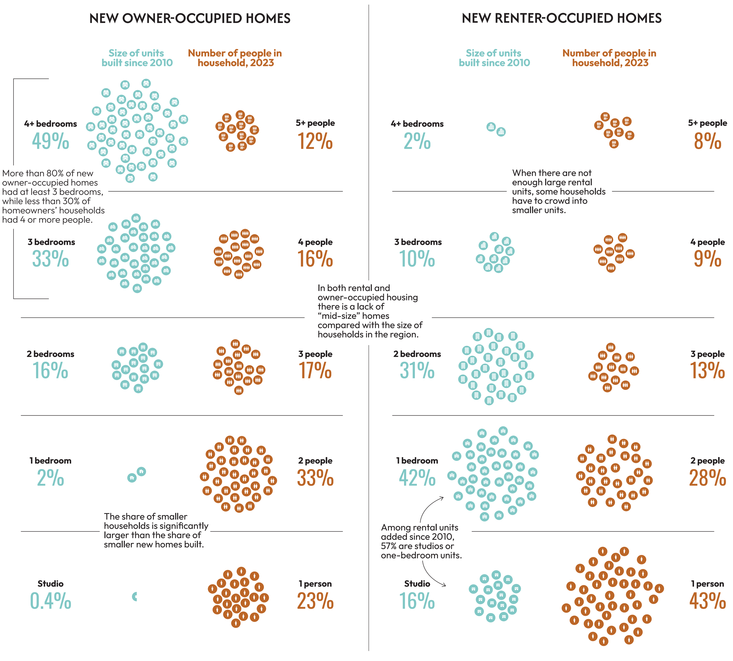
Source: CMAP Local Housing Profiles

Newer housing development favors the ends of the spectrum — large single-family homes and small apartments/condos — with fewer options in the middle

New housing has not kept pace with residents' needs

In recent years, the region has seen an increase in the total number of households. Despite the population largely remaining steady between 2010-2023, the region added nearly 240,000 new households.

Most of these new households have fewer people — primarily those living alone, couples without children, or roommates living together.



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau Building Permits Survey, American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates, ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS)



STATE OF THE REGION SNAPSHOT

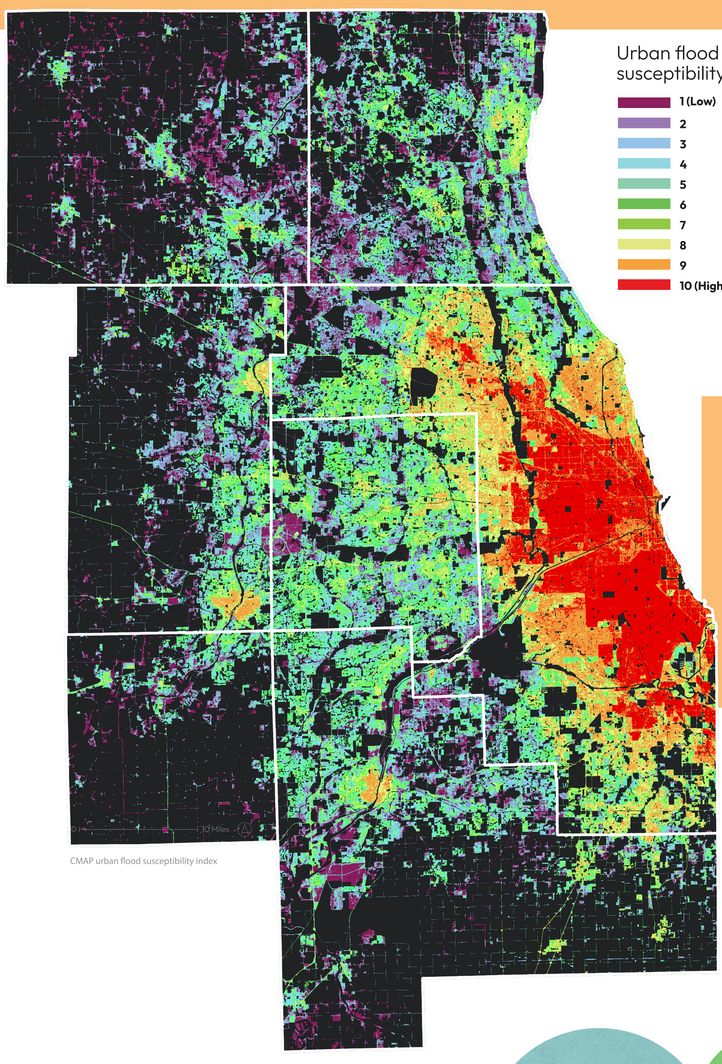
How does flooding impact me?

Flooding is a growing regional challenge

Climate change is bringing more frequent and intense storms, making flooding the most significant climate hazard to the region's homes, businesses, and infrastructure. Since the adoption of ON TO 2050 in 2018, northeastern Illinois has experienced three federally declared flood disasters and numerous other major events — some with more than 8 inches of rain in just 12 hours.

Across the region, older, highly developed communities are especially vulnerable because their stormwater systems were not designed for today's rainfall patterns. Chicago and Cook County face the greatest exposure, but cities such as Joliet, Aurora, Waukegan, and Elgin are also at risk. Communities built along rivers and streams also see frequent flooding when these waterways overflow.

Where is flooding more likely to occur?



CMAP urban flood susceptibility index

Flooding impacts communities unequally

Flooding affects the entire region, but not all communities are impacted equally. Historically disinvested and underserved areas face greater risks and have fewer resources to recover. Flooding threatens lives, homes, infrastructure, and mobility. Reducing these inequities will require coordinated, regionwide climate action.

Federally declared flood-related disaster costs since the adoption of ON TO 2050 in 2018

$326.8M
Cook County
July 2023

$181.6M
Cook and Will counties
July 2024

$63.9M
Cook County
September 2023



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Can I get around reliably?

Some routes make your arrival time unreliable

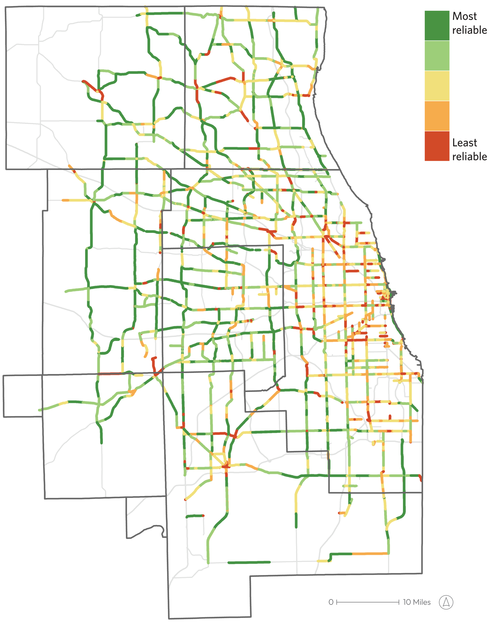
Unpredictable congestion causes disruptions for people and goods traveling on key corridors throughout the region. The least reliable routes are concentrated near the urban core, where dense residential areas, major job centers, and busy freight hubs converge.

These delays come at a steep economic cost: freight congestion alone cost an estimated $1.2 billion in 2022. They also affect our quality of life: congestion makes it harder for people to reach their destinations reliably, safely, and efficiently.

Regional collaboration will be essential to address the complex and location-specific causes behind low travel time reliability.



Route reliability is measured by comparing the worst delays to normal travel times



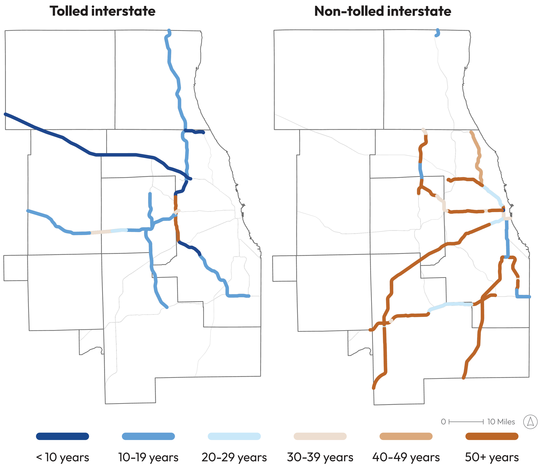
Source: FHWA national performance management research dataset

Many of our region's highways are decades old and will need investment in the future

Preserving the transportation system is necessary to reduce congestion caused by infrastructure failures and to support reliable travel options.

However, many transportation assets are nearing the end of their useful life. The non-tolled interstate system particularly needs investment: approximately 70% of its infrastructure is more than 50 years old, with many segments requiring reconstruction from the substructure up. In contrast, 90% of the tollway system has been constructed or rebuilt in the past 20 years.

This disparity in age highlights the need for stable funding to preserve and enhance the region's transportation resources — across all modes of travel — for generations to come.



Source: CMAP analysis of IDOT and Illinois Tollway construction records (2025)



STATE OF THE REGION SNAPSHOT

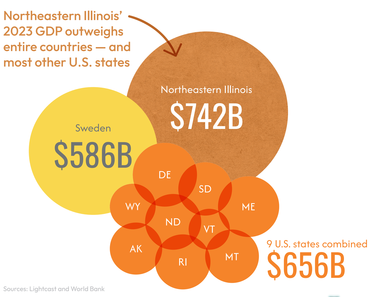
Will the region remain a global economic center?

Northeastern Illinois' economy is diverse and expansive

If the region's economy were considered a separate country, it would be in the **top 25 largest economies in the world**. Compared to national and international peers, the region's economy stands out as resilient and diverse.

A major competitive advantage for northeastern Illinois is our vast network of **transportation infrastructure** across aviation, freight, transit, waterways, and roads. These resources make the region a hub for the international movement of both people and goods — sustaining and growing our economy.

Regional growth remains steady but lags behind peers. The 2008 Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted economies across the world, and northeastern Illinois is still feeling the effects. Between 2010 and 2023, northeastern Illinois' economy grew by 71% — lagging behind growth in New York, Los Angeles, and the nation as a whole.



Sources: Lightcast and World Bank

Recent job growth has generally favored sectors that do not inject new money into our economy

Despite strong growth in key sectors, overall economic growth has been modest and most new jobs are in clusters that serve local residents rather than global markets, such as hospitality, health services, and real estate development. This trend has implications for workers and the broader regional economy.

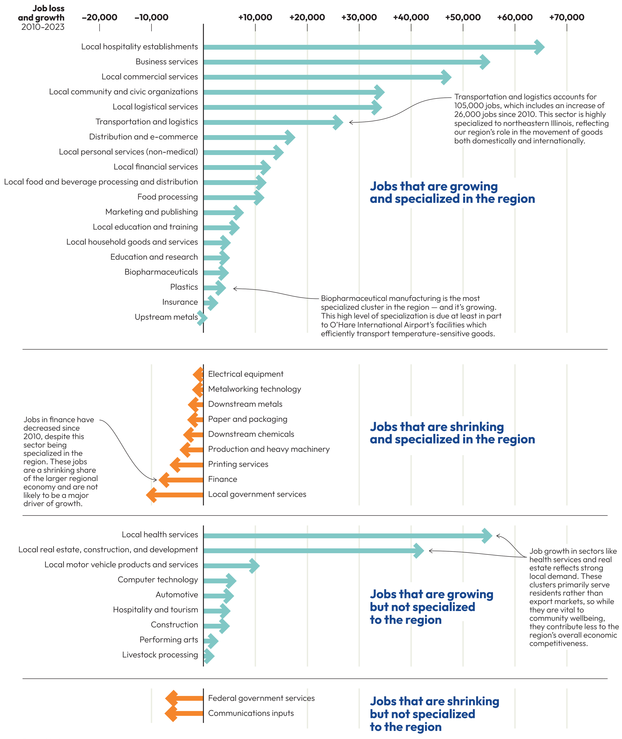
Traded clusters generate significantly more economic value: in 2023, these sectors accounted for just 40% of regional jobs but produced 56% of total economic output. While many local clusters are expanding, they contribute less to growing our regional economy and oftentimes offer entry-level jobs that do not provide a living wage.

Regional job growth
2010 - 2023

Source: CMAP, Lightcast, and SBFriedman



Specialized clusters support long-term economic growth



Source: Lightcast

What is an industry cluster?

An industry cluster is a group of businesses that benefit from operating near each other — with deeper labor pools, better access to customers and suppliers, and shared knowledge. Specialized clusters have regional job concentrations well above the national average.

Traded clusters produce goods or services sold outside of the region, spurring regional economic growth.

Local clusters support the everyday needs of residents and can generally be found in any region.



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