

# Economic Development: Population Growth, Planning, and Improvements

Rogers & Lowell  
Arkansas

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Rogers and Lowell are cities located in Northwest Arkansas that are experiencing a period of growth that is giving local business owners a boost economically. The advancement of Wal-Mart Stores is benefiting the area, as Northwest Arkansas is becoming a global hub for suppliers to locate their businesses. JB Hunt and Tyson are also impacting Rogers and Lowell by providing jobs to support the strong economic development and population increase.

### Population Growth

Population growth is a factor that worries, but excites many economic development analysts. According to the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Arkansas in Table 1, population growth of 33.5% between 2000 and 2010 is the highest of any of the peer regions with the exception of the Austin-Round Rock metropolitan area. An increase in jobs will have to be provided to meet the growing population base in the area.

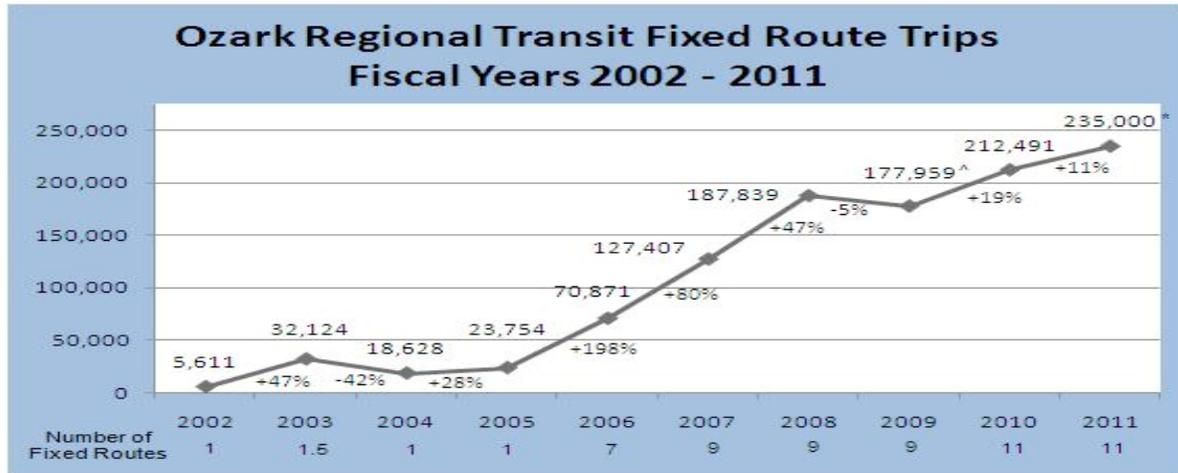
**Table 1**

| Peer Regions              | 2010 Population | Percent of State's Population | Growth 2000-2010 |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Northwest Arkansas</b> | <b>463,204</b>  | <b>15.9%</b>                  | <b>33.5%</b>     |
| Lexington-Fayette MSA     | 472,099         | 10.9%                         | 15.6%            |
| Gainesville MSA           | 264,275         | 1.4%                          | 13.7%            |
| Huntsville MSA            | 417,593         | 8.7%                          | 22%              |
| Austin-Round Rock MSA     | 1,716,289       | 6.8%                          | 37.3%            |

### Transportation

The Ozark Regional Transportation system provides bus services to area bus stops across Northwest Arkansas. Many citizens of the community rely on the bus system to take them to the doctor, Wal-Mart, and other area locations. As shown in Table 2 from the ORT website, the demand for the bus services is increasing. The demand has increased 11% from 2010 to 2011 and is projected to increase another 10.6% from 2011 to 2012. The current bus system is on the foundation of federal funding. As the population increases, the system will not be eligible for federal funding and an additional tax will have to be implemented. An action plan must be put in place to show the community residents of Northwest Arkansas how important the bus system is to the economic vitality of Rogers and Lowell.

**Table 2**



<sup>^</sup> - Lost 3/4 of Route 43 and Boys & Girls Club shuttle

<sup>\*</sup> - Projected Total

## **Lowell Marketing and Identity**

The city of Lowell is a small city in Northwest Arkansas that is located in the center of one of the fastest growing areas in the country. When people think of Lowell, they need to have an image of a small, but growing area with job opportunities. There are several areas that must be improved in order to market the city of Lowell in a positive light.

- Incentives for small businesses to locate in Lowell. Medical and retail offices, suppliers, and business owners should be encouraged to join the community of Lowell.
- Street projects that will provide the community residents with quicker access to Bentonville and Rogers. There are many people who live in Rogers and will commute to work in Lowell. Road and infrastructure improvements will be essential for the perception of Lowell.
- Residential and Commercial development that will identify Lowell as a forward-thinking hub.
- Public Safety and Municipal Services. A fire station, post office, police facility, and a local ambulance system will need to be developed for the city of Lowell.
- Recreational programs and community groups that can make Lowell a green city.

## **Downtown Rogers**

Thirty years ago Downtown Rogers was the most energized and maintained areas of the city. As time has gone by, the area has become less exciting and more of a wonder to why it isn't how it used to be. Most local small businesses are no longer in business or have shifted their shops to different locations. The rise of the Pinnacle Hills Promenade has shifted the attention to the Southwest part of town. In order for Downtown Rogers to become rejuvenated and regain the economic prosperity that it once had, measures will need to be taken.

As seen in the following data from 2008 taken from the Vision 2025 report from the Rogers Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce, there are many opportunities for small businesses:

Total Downtown Rogers Households: 2,275  
Estimated Downtown Rogers Population: 5,938  
Total Downtown Rogers Businesses: 375  
Total Downtown Rogers Employees: 5,753  
Additional Employees within 1 - 3 miles: 3,000

*Sources: U.S. Postal Service (Rogers), U.S. Census Bureau (2008),  
Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce physical counts, inquiries and estimates*

Promotional activities, improvement in the perception of the area, and innovation of downtown Rogers are vital for the rejuvenation of the area. The goals will need to be implemented by the agreement between the area residents, business owners, and stakeholders.

## **Conclusion**

I was born and raised in Rogers and have lived here throughout my entire life. I have seen a vast change in the landscape of the area in my twenty-two years of living in the area. The biggest reality is that Wal-Mart, JB Hunt, and Tyson have transformed and broadened the scope of opportunity. Rogers and Lowell are becoming global communities where people around the world will look to locate to the area. There has never been a time better in Rogers or Lowell for economic development. The planning, analysis, and vision for Northwest Arkansas is critical for the community and the residents of the region.