

NORTH CENTRAL WEST VIRGINIA

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK 2018-2022



North Central West Virginia Economic Outlook

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Executive Summary

Despite significant losses in one of the region's counties over the past few years, North Central West Virginia has managed to remain one of the state's healthiest economic regions, as evidenced by steady gains in income and improvements in several indicators for the overall area's labor market. In this report, we present a detailed discussion of North Central West Virginia's economy along with our forecast for regional conditions for the next five years.

Several key facts behind the recent economic performance of North Central West Virginia are as follows:

- **North Central West Virginia businesses added nearly 7,000 jobs between the first quarters of 2010 and 2015, for cumulative growth of more than 6 percent.**
- **The region as a whole has seen little change in payrolls overall since 2015, but moderate job gains have been registered over the past few quarters.**
- **Among the region's four counties, Monongalia County has shown the strongest economic growth in recent years.** Marion is the only county in the region to suffer significant job loss over the past decade.
- **Many of the region's sectors have outperformed statewide growth by sizable margins in recent years.** Performances have been particularly strong within healthcare, retail trade and leisure and hospitality.
- **Not all sectors have added a significant number of jobs over the past few years.** Employment within the energy sector has declined as a result of struggles for the area's coal and natural gas producers, though conditions have improved in recent quarters.
- **Unemployment in the region is consistently lower than the statewide average by a sizable margin.**
- **Labor force participation is higher in the area compared to the balance of West Virginia.** However, the region does lag the nation as a whole in terms of workforce participation.
- **Per capita personal income has increased more rapidly since 2010 compared to the statewide average.** Three of the region's counties rank among the state's top-10 counties in terms of income levels.
- **Regional demographic trends are also favorable. More than 27,000 residents have been added to the area since 2000.** The area's population is also younger and more highly-educated versus statewide norms.

Our forecast calls for North Central West Virginia as a whole to grow at rates well above its regional performance of the last couple of years. Key aspects of our North Central forecast are as follows:

- **We expect employment to grow at an annual rate of 0.8 percent per year in North Central WV during the outlook period.** This rate is higher than expected growth for West Virginia overall (0.7 percent) but slightly lags expected growth nationally (0.9 percent).
- **Monongalia County is expected to exhibit the highest rate of job growth among the region's four counties in coming years.** Harrison County is expected to grow at a below-average rate, but also has significant upside potential for stronger growth.
- **The energy sector, professional and business services and construction are a few of the sectors that will likely lead in terms of overall regional job growth going forward.**
- **Unemployment is expected to ease slightly lower in coming years and will likely remain lower than the statewide average throughout the outlook period.**
- **Real per capita personal income is expected to increase at an annual average rate of more than 2.1 percent over the next five years.** This rate of growth is better than the nation and West Virginia as a whole.
- **The region's population is expected to continue to grow in coming years, though most of the anticipated growth will occur in Monongalia County.**

Recent Economic Performance

In a period when many of West Virginia’s economic regions have struggled, North Central West Virginia¹ has enjoyed a relatively stable performance over the past several years. After a prolonged period of sluggishness that coincided with the Great Recession, the four-county region saw employers add roughly 7,000 jobs between the first quarters of 2010 through 2015. The region as a whole did see job growth stall over the past two years, which even resulted in the calendar year average for 2016 declining slightly from 2015. However, this recent slowdown can be attributed almost solely to significant losses concentrated within one particular county in the region. Furthermore, conditions appear to have improved more broadly as of late as preliminary data indicate all four counties have registered job growth over the last few quarters.²

PERFORMANCE BY COUNTY Monongalia County represents the primary economic engine for North Central West Virginia. West Virginia University, with its 26,000 on-campus students and 6,600 faculty and staff members, acts as a stabilizing force amid the ups and downs of the national business cycle. In addition, WVU has generated growth opportunities in the region’s economy thanks to the long-term upward trend in student enrollment and a host of recent large-scale construction and renovation projects across the three campuses in Morgantown.

The private sector has also bolstered Monongalia County’s economy, driven in part by substantial commercial development in the University Town Centre TIF District and the Suncrest Area. Also, expansion projects by WVU Medicine and the Mon Health System have generated additional growth in recent years. Overall, Monongalia County employers have added more than 3,500 jobs since the beginning of 2012, a period which coincides with a cumulative loss of roughly 21,000 jobs for the state as a whole.

After Harrison County provided a relatively steady contribution to growth in the North

Central West Virginia regional economy, as local employers added approximately 2,000 jobs between early-2010 and mid-2014. Conditions started to become more volatile by late-2014 as total payrolls in the county have bounced around due to prolonged bear market conditions for natural gas prices. Indeed, with regional hub spot prices for natural gas remaining at exceptionally low levels for much of 2015 and 2016, sizable layoffs occurred for not only gas drilling and exploration firms but also a range of other support industries such as engineering, contract labor and legal services. These losses were offset in large part by growth stemming from commercial

Figure 1: Total Employment

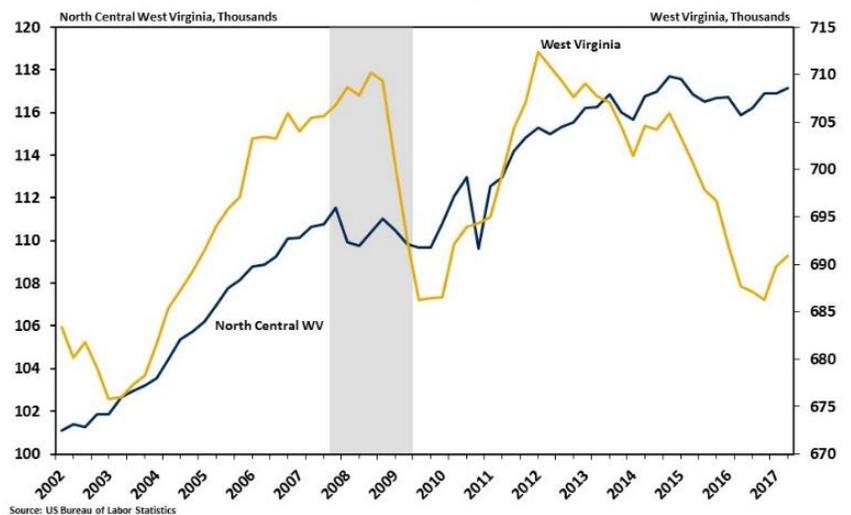
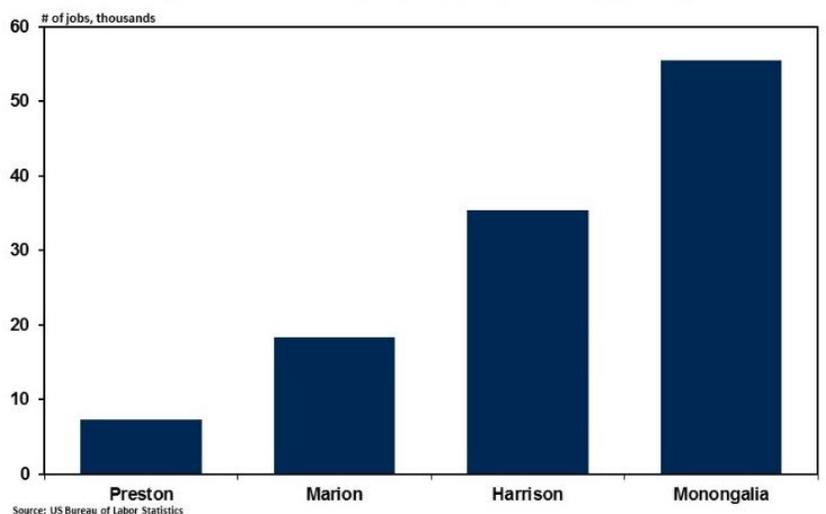


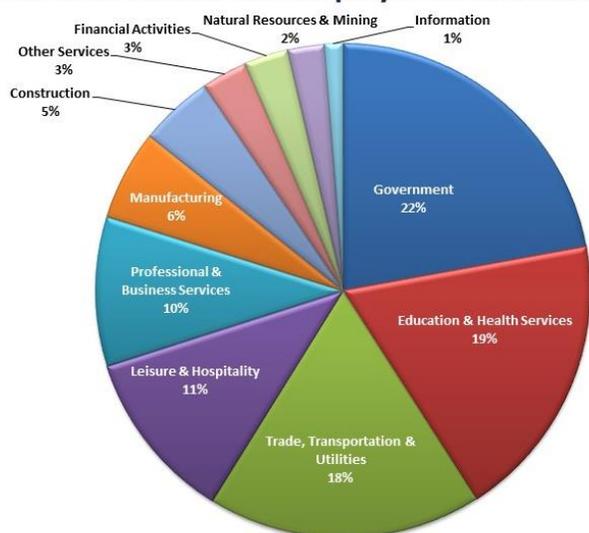
Figure 2: Total Employment by County (2016)



¹ For the purposes of this report, North-Central West Virginia consists of Harrison, Marion, Monongalia and Preston counties.

² Sources for historical information are noted in each figure.

Figure 3: North Central WV Employment Distribution by Sector



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics; 2016 data.

development in the Charles Pointe and White Oaks and expanded hiring at the FBI’s Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) facility in Clarksburg.

Preston County’s employment situation has generally been stable for the past three years, following a solid pace of recovery in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Unfortunately, Marion County has encountered the most significant economic struggles in recent years, as total payrolls in the county have shrunk by more than 12 percent (roughly 2,000 jobs) between early-2013 and late-2016. Many of the job losses recorded in the area have been linked to the coal industry, as a sharp decline in domestic coal-fired electricity generation led to sizable production cuts and layoffs at Marion County mining operations and precipitated job losses by some local manufacturing industries as well as some auxiliary support services. Even with the recent bounce-back in thermal coal production and hiring by some of the county’s mining companies, overall employment in Marion County remains at levels observed during the mid-1990s.

PUBLIC SECTOR The public sector is a major feature of North Central West Virginia’s economic landscape. In addition to the presence of public higher education institutions, namely WVU and Fairmont State University, several major federal installations can be found in the area, including the FBI’s CJIS facility, Department of Energy’s National Energy Technology Laboratory, Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and US Bureau of

Prisons. Overall, government employment combined at the federal, state and local levels accounts for just above 1 in 5 jobs (22 percent) locally. In addition to the protracted problems for the West Virginia state budget, public sector employment in the region has generally been under pressure in recent years due to sequestration and slow growth in federal spending. However, total government payrolls have increased by approximately 500 since late-2015, much of it associated with the expanded hiring activity at the FBI CJIS facility.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH Education and healthcare services also represents another linchpin to the North Central Region’s economy. J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital and the Mon General Hospital System employ well

above 8,000 people in Monongalia County alone and WVU Medicine has aggressively expanded its operations, including the 114-bed tower at Ruby Memorial that is nearing completion and the new facilities at University Town Centre that opened earlier this year. Moreover, WVU Medicine has mergers with other hospitals operating in the region and elsewhere in the state. Mon General has undertaken several projects in recent years, including the Mon Health Medical Park facilities adjacent to Route 705 in Morgantown. The sector as a whole has added roughly 2,600 jobs on net since the beginning of 2010, with these gains coming mostly in Monongalia and Harrison counties.

CONSUMER SECTOR Given the headwinds caused by job losses in coal, natural gas and some other high-wage industries over the past few years, consumer spending in many parts of West Virginia has been under significant pressure. In addition, a sizable part of the state’s leisure and hospitality sector faces major competition for spending by out-of-state visitors after new gaming venues have been introduced in Maryland, Ohio, and Pennsylvania over the years. Despite these broader statewide trends, consumer-oriented sectors operating in the North Central Region have enjoyed relatively stable growth since the end of the Great Recession thanks to comparatively healthier labor market conditions and strong income growth. Gains have been realized in each of the region’s four counties, but the build-out of new retail, lodging and other commercial businesses in the University Town Centre TIF district along with new retail and dining options in the Suncrest area in Monongalia County, along

with Charles Pointe and White Oaks in Harrison County, stand out as key consumer-oriented developments.

CONSTRUCTION With numerous large-scale construction projects throughout the region, construction payrolls have been quite volatile in North Central West Virginia for the past several years. A significant portion of the region’s construction activity has been centered in Monongalia County and much of it has been associated with WVU, WVU Medicine and Mon Health System. In addition to the healthcare-related projects, other major projects include the University Park and UPlace student residences, Evansdale Crossing, the College of Physical Activity and Sports Sciences building, and new buildings for both engineering and agricultural sciences. Approximately \$100 million in renovations and upgrades have been performed on several athletic department facilities.

Aside from the WVU-related and healthcare construction activity, the University Town Centre (UTC), Suncrest Towne Centre and Fort Pierpont developments have accounted for a sizable portion of the region’s commercial construction activity, but the build-out of the Charles Pointe and White Oaks developments in Harrison County have also spurred growth in construction payrolls in recent years. Additional commercial development work is ongoing within the UTC TIF district, as site development is under way for the large multi-use WestRidge Development project and the \$40 million Mountaineer Center, which will include swimming and track & field facilities for WVU at Mylan Park.

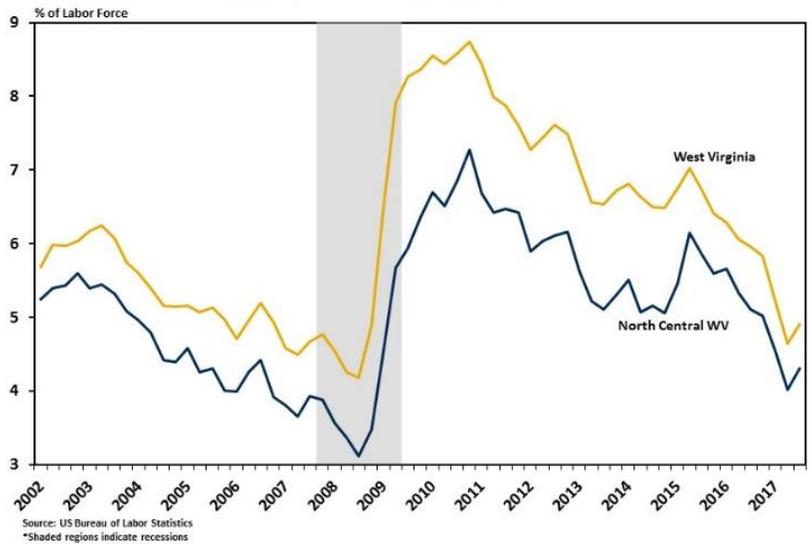
Infrastructure spending has been relatively limited across much of West Virginia over the past several years due to the state’s protracted budget difficulties. Major projects such as the addition of Exit 153 and interchange off of on I-79 in Monongalia County and the extension of White Oaks Boulevard have bolstered the region’s transportation access and infrastructure and should set the stage for future commercial and residential development along the I-79 corridor.

NATURAL RESOURCES & MINING The natural resources and mining sector accounts for only 2 percent or so of jobs in the region, but cyclical and structural changes in energy production have had noticeably larger impact on the North Central regional economy in recent years. Harrison County

has traditionally been among the state’s top producers of natural gas, but even as growth in withdrawal volumes and exploration activity have not kept pace with Doddridge, Ritchie, Tyler and Wetzel counties, many drilling and field service firms operating in these outlying counties are headquartered in and around the Clarksburg area.

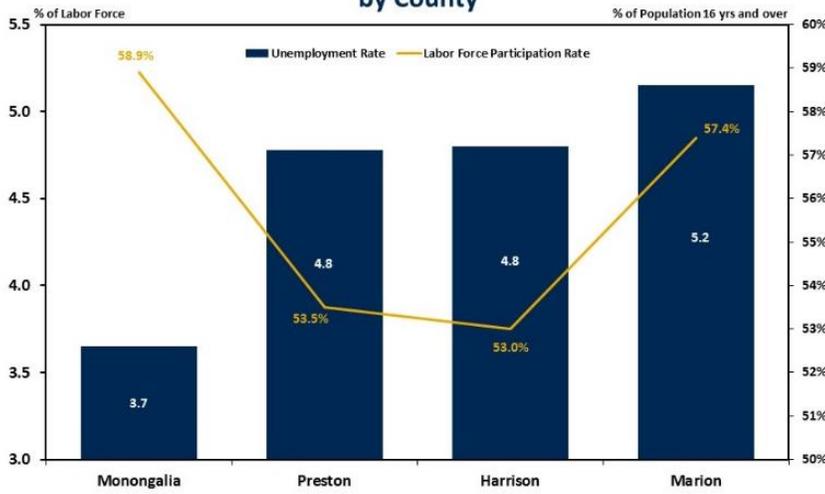
Even after losing jobs on net since 2014, the oil and gas industry still employs roughly double the number of workers (excluding contract labor) that it did in early-2010. Furthermore, hiring activity has picked up moderately thanks to rising production and exploration activity that has been fostered by solid growth in domestic and international demand, higher regional hub prices and several major pipeline projects that have already entered or will enter service within the next couple of years.

Figure 4: Unemployment Rate



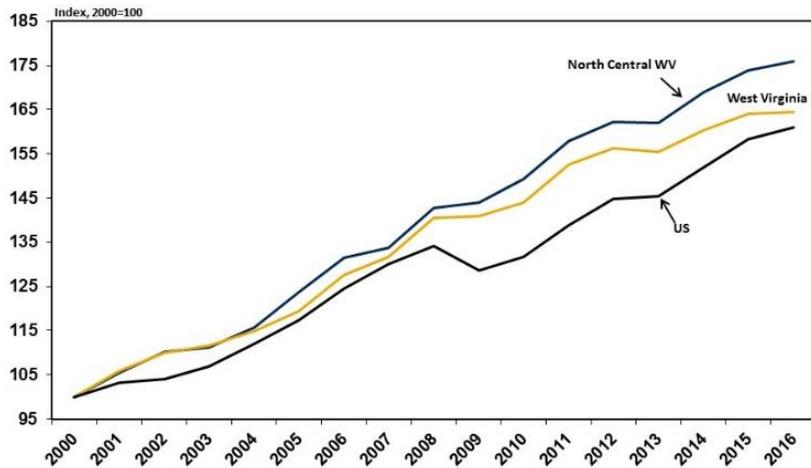
In addition to the region’s natural gas assets, North Central West Virginia contains an appreciable amount of coal production. During 2016, mines in the region produced 16.8 million short tons of coal, or a near-16 percent drop from 2015, which itself was a 12 percent decline from the previous calendar year. On a positive note, an increase in domestic coal-fired generation and stronger export demand for thermal coal have helped to improve regional coal production somewhat. Mine output through the first three quarters of 2017 is 13 percent above the same period from 2016 and employment is up by a slightly-smaller rate. Nonetheless, at current rates, regional coal output will fall somewhere between 2015 and 2016 tonnage levels in 2017.

Figure 5: Unemployment and Labor Force Participation by County



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; US Census Bureau
 Note: Unemployment rate represents 2017Q3; Labor force participation rate is from 2015.

Figure 6: Per Capita Personal Income



Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis
 *Note: The 2016 figure for North Central West Virginia is an estimate.

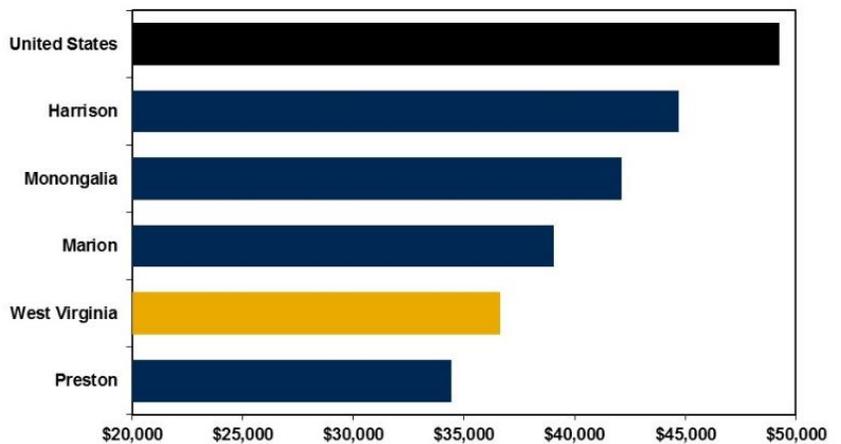
the four counties, Monongalia possesses the lowest rate in the region at 3.6 percent, while Marion County contains the highest incidence of unemployment at 5.2 percent.

Workforce participation tends to exceed statewide averages in North Central West Virginia. Overall, the four-county region's labor force has expanded by 3,000 since the first quarter of 2012, with nearly two-thirds of that gain coming since late-2015. This stands in contrast to the rest of West Virginia, where the adult-aged workforce has contracted by 30,000 people since early-2012. In terms of the share of residents aged 16 and older that actively participate in the workforce, Monongalia County has the highest at 59 percent either holding a job or actively seeking employment. Harrison County is the one county in the region with labor force participation below the statewide average, but all four counties lag the national average by at least five percentage points.

INCOME Per capita personal income (not adjusted for inflation) in the North Central West Virginia Region was estimated at nearly \$41,200 during calendar year 2016. This marked a 1.2 percent rate of growth in from 2015 average income levels, which surpassed statewide growth and trailed the national figure. Indeed, North Central West Virginia has seen per capita income increase at an average annual rate of 2.8

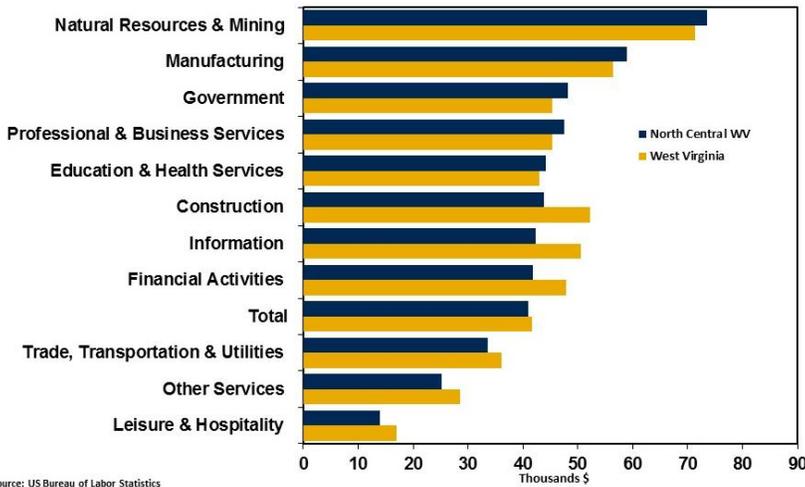
UNEMPLOYMENT North Central West Virginia consistently has an unemployment rate that comes in well below the statewide average. The four-county region's jobless rate reached its lowest level on record in mid-2008 at just above 3 percent before more than doubling to a peak of 7.3 percent by the end of 2010. After falling steadily over the subsequent four years to a low of 5 percent in the fourth quarter of 2014, energy industry layoffs and uncertainty in the public sector caused upward pressure on the region's unemployment rate. Indeed, the jobless rate surged more to 6.2 percent by mid-2015, but has since fallen more than two percentage points over the subsequent two years. Among

Figure 7: Per Capita Personal Income by Area (2016)



Source: US Bureau of Economic Analysis
 Note: 2016 income figures for counties are preliminary.

Figure 8: Average Annual Salary by Major Sector (2016)



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

percent since 2010, which falls in between state and national figures of 2.2 and 3.4 percent, respectively, during this time period

Harrison County has the highest per capita income of all four counties in the region at approximately \$44,700 in 2015, followed by Monongalia, where residents earned around \$42,000 on average. Per capita income in the region still continues to lag the national figure by an appreciable amount, but the region’s average income deficit with the nation has been much less volatile than the state as a whole by comparison thanks to a diverse mix of high-wage industries and the stabilizing presence of WVU and several federal government installations.

POPULATION Although many economic regions in West Virginia have suffered from sustained population losses,

North Central West Virginia has tended to see gains in the number of residents, adding roughly 1,700 people per year since 2000. Monongalia County represents the region’s most populous county and is the third largest statewide at nearly 105 thousand residents. Moreover, Monongalia has been the region’s leader in population growth over the past decade or so, offsetting the moderate losses occurring in Harrison and Marion counties in recent years.

DEMOGRAPHICS Many underlying demographic characteristics for North Central West Virginia offer a fairly noticeable contrast when compared to the state as a whole. To some extent, however, these differences are driven in large part by Monongalia County, as the other three counties in the region tend to resemble the state by most demographic measures. For example, while the region’s overall median age is 37.6 years, the presence of West Virginia University helps to place nearly 40 percent of Mon County’s population under the age of 25 and make the area’s overall age distribution appear measurably younger even though Harrison, Marion and Preston counties have age distributions quite similar to the state as a whole.

Finally, rates of educational attainment for the region are noticeably higher versus other parts of the state as 26.5 percent of residents 25 and older have a college degree compared to less than 20 percent for West Virginia. Monongalia County contains the state’s highest concentration of college graduates, wherein 40 percent of 25-and-older residents hold at least a four-year degree.

Figure 9: Summary Population Profiles

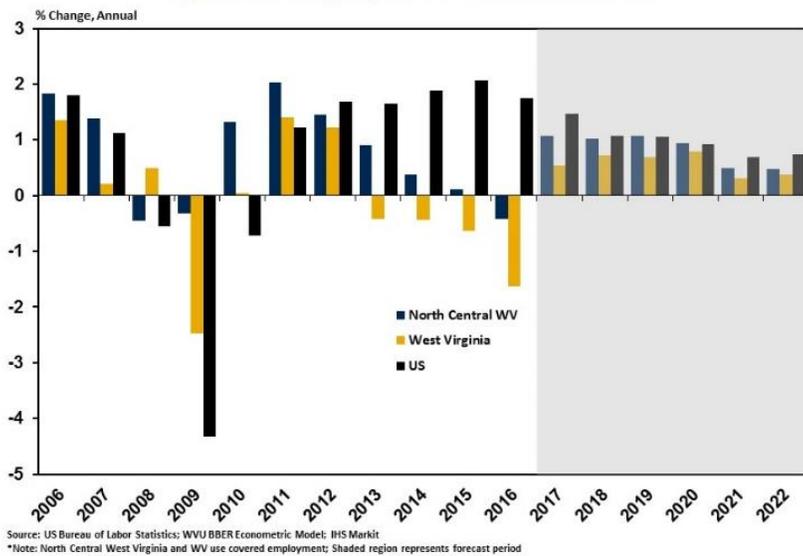
	North Central WV	West Virginia	United States
Total Population (2016)	263,318	1,831,102	323,127,513
% Population Under 18 (2016)	19.0%	20.4%	22.8%
% Population 65 Years + (2016)	15.7%	18.7%	15.2%
Population with Less than High School Diploma (2015, 25 yrs. +)	11.6%	14.0%	12.8%
Population with High School Diploma, No College (2015, 25 yrs. +)	37.5%	40.7%	27.6%
Population with Some College (2015, 25 yrs. +)	24.4%	25.7%	28.9%
Population with Bachelor’s Degree or Higher (2015, 25 yrs.+)	26.5%	19.6%	30.6%
Median Age (2016)	37.6	42.2	37.9
Mean Household Income (2015)	\$60,363	\$56,568	\$78,378
Average Household Size (2016)	2.65	2.49	2.73

Source: US Census Bureau

Economic Outlook

Expectations for the US and West Virginia economies during the forecast horizon will have a significant impact on the North Central Region’s economic performance. Our forecast calls for the region to continue expanding over the next five years. Anticipated improvements in economic conditions for the rest of the state and continued growth for the national economy, provide a solid backdrop that should enable one of West Virginia’s stronger economic regions to enjoy growth that exceeds the statewide average and only slightly lags the national figure during the outlook period.

Figure 10: Employment Growth Forecast

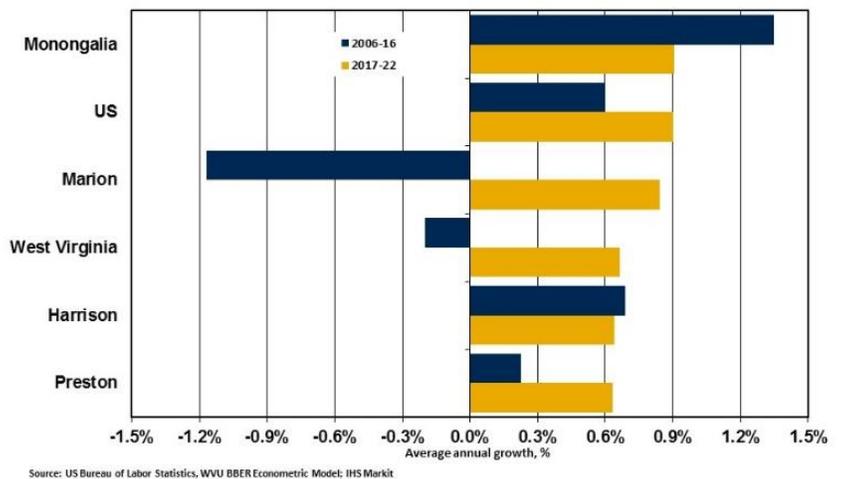


EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK We anticipate total employment in the four-county region will increase at an average annual rate of 0.8 percent. This pace of job growth is slightly ahead of what occurred during the past decade and will lead North Central West Virginia to account for an increasingly larger share of aggregate state economic output going forward. Moreover, regional-level growth should be stronger over the first half of the outlook period as the forecast calls for payroll increases to average more than 1 percent annually through 2020. Gains associated with the rebounding natural gas industry should serve to boost what was already expected to be a period of diversified economic growth for the area over the next several years.

Monongalia County is expected to enjoy the strongest rate of job growth (0.9 percent per year) among any county in the region during the outlook period, falling roughly in line with national-level growth. While the baseline forecast calls for Marion County to expand, with payrolls increasing at an average annual rate of 0.8 percent, this growth largely reflects a moderate recovery in the county’s labor market given the depth of losses recorded in recent years. Harrison and Preston counties will trail statewide growth slightly over the next five years, averaging roughly 0.6 percent per year through 2022. At the same time, however, Harrison likely has the most opportunity for growth to exceed or lag expectations should the natural gas industry and area manufacturing activity differ significantly from the baseline forecast.

SECTOR OUTLOOK Our forecast calls for the natural resources and mining sector to lead overall regional growth during the outlook period, with payrolls growing at an expected average annual gain of 2.8 percent through 2020. Some of this growth reflects a rebound for the natural gas industry as payrolls begin to rise as drilling and exploration activity bounce back from a sustained period of weakness, but the industry as a whole is expected to perform well over the next several years as rising domestic and international demand for natural gas bolsters production activity throughout the Marcellus and Utica Shale plays. In addition, the addition of downstream

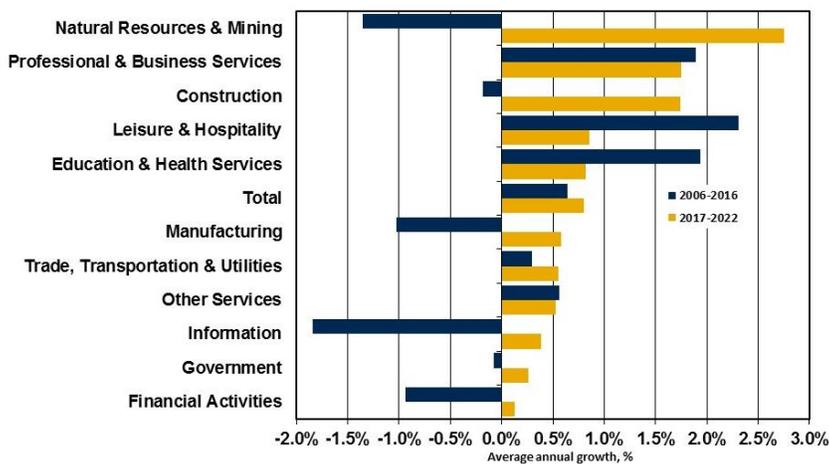
Figure 11: Employment Growth Forecast by Area



processing capacity via the ethane cracker under construction by Shell in Beaver County, PA, and the potential for another ethane cracker in Belmont County, OH, will boost natural gas production during the latter portion of the outlook period once these facilities come on line. In addition, new midstream capacity, in particular the Rover, Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast pipeline projects, as well as the nearly-complete liquefied natural gas (LNG) export terminals at Cove Point, MD, will likely buoy demand for the natural gas produced in North Central West Virginia going forward.

The professional and business services sector is expected to add jobs at a rate of 1.7 percent annually during the outlook period, benefiting in part from broader regional and national economic growth underpinning demand for business support firms. Also, WVU's presence along with the numerous federal and private research facilities located along the I-79 High-Tech Corridor will continue to facilitate technology transfer and innovation, which will lead to opportunities for entrepreneurship and job creation locally.

Figure 12: North Central WV Employment Growth Forecast by Sector



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, WVU BBER Econometric Model

At the same time, the professional and business services sector is expected to benefit directly from the energy sector's rebound and projected growth over the next several years. Indeed, contract labor services are utilized heavily by gas drilling firms and as production and exploration activities ramp up over the next couple of years these jobs should increase appreciably. Finally, given the many complexities involving the development and purchases of gas assets, rising natural gas production

bodes well for a range of firms specializing in legal, engineering and other technical services.

Construction activity is expected to remain strong during the outlook period, particularly over the next two to three years. Overall, the construction sector is expected to add jobs at 1.7 percent per year. Projects such as the WestRidge Development, along with WVU-related projects such as the Mountaineer Wellness Center at Mylan Park and even a planned new B&E building will continue to drive much of the commercial development in Monongalia County. Moreover, development along the region's southern portions of the I-79 corridor, such as Charles Pointe and White Oaks in Harrison County, will likely continue to attract development activity. Construction of pipeline infrastructure for the natural gas industry will also impact the region over the next couple of years. Indeed, the planned paths of the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines put them within the North Central West Virginia and will require significant site development, pipeline installation as well as the construction of compressor stations and other

infrastructure within the region. Finally, construction activity associated with various types of public infrastructure projects is expected to increase going forward. The voter-approved road bond provides for significant funding levels for several major highway projects in Harrison, Monongalia and Marion counties that would ease traffic conditions and/or facilitate access to areas with long-term development potential.

Airport infrastructure will also see gains during the outlook period, stemming from Bombardier expanding its aircraft services facility as well as plans by North Central WV Airport to expand the terminal and increase flight capacity. Also, the Morgantown Airport to extend the runway for the Air National Guard and potential for increased corporate and business travel is also Expansion plans by the Morgantown and North Central West Virginia Airports are additional sources of infrastructure investments anticipated for the region going forward.

After growing at a rate of 1.9 percent annually in the past decade, the education and healthcare services sector is expected to see job gains come in at less than half that pace during the outlook period. Most of these gains will

come during the earlier part of the forecast horizon, coinciding with increased hiring to staff the facilities expansion at J.W. Ruby Memorial Hospital. Other projects in the region backed by WVU Medicine will bolster hiring activity over the next few years, particularly the new outpatient facilities in Morgantown and Fairmont. From a longer term perspective, the region has become a hub for healthcare services for residents across West Virginia. This status will only be reinforced over the longer term as an aging population bids up demand for healthcare services statewide and some specialized services could be shifted entirely to the North Central Region as cost issues cause parts of West Virginia facing declining and/or highly-rural populations to focus on providing basic care.

The North Central Region’s consumer-driven sectors, namely leisure and hospitality and the retail portion of trade, transportation and utilities, are projected to see steady job gains over the next five years. Population growth and the anticipated gains in several high-wage industries in the region will drive most of these gains going forward. In addition, the build-out of developments within the University Town Centre TIF district and the Suncrest Area along with what is ultimately constructed at the WestRidge Development will drive activity in Monongalia County, as well as the Charles Pointe and White Oaks developments in Harrison County, will drive growth in new retail, dining, lodging and entertainment businesses.

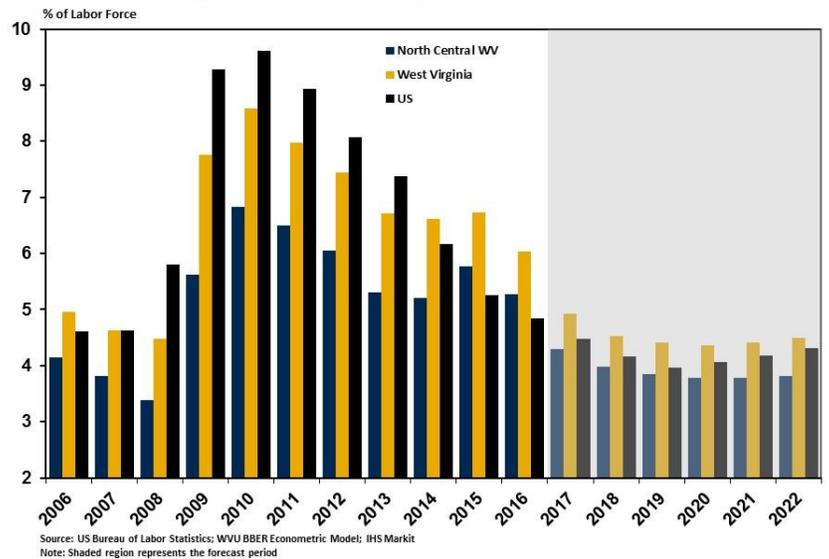
Public sector employment in the four-county area is expected to grow just over 0.3 percent annually between 2017 and 2022. State government payrolls will increase slightly over the next five years, reflecting the cyclical and structural problems that are anticipated to continue for several major sources of tax revenue collected by the state. Local government employment should see more potential for growth as increased revenue streams (local sales taxes and fees, natural gas, etc.) allow the area’s city and county governments meet the needs of a growing population that demands more local government services.

The FBI Criminal Justice Information Services Division in Bridgeport could potentially add more workers depending upon the agency’s needs for the facility to meet expanded mandates on background checks. Beyond that facility, we

do not anticipate any major changes for the region’s other federal employers, but downside risks are a factor that cannot be ignored given the partisan divide in Washington as well as the spending strain caused by Medicare and Social Security will continue to rise as more US residents reach retirement age.

UNEMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK Large revisions to historical data as well as any unanticipated changes in the labor force participation rate for North Central West Virginia could cause the forecast for the area’s unemployment rate to differ significantly from both its projected level and path. Nonetheless, expected job growth during the outlook period is expected to result in further declines in North Central West Virginia’s unemployment rate. After averaging just below 4.5 percent for all of calendar year 2016, our forecast calls for the jobless rate to trend lower

Figure 13: Unemployment Rate Forecast



over the next few years before settling to the upper-3.0 - percent range.

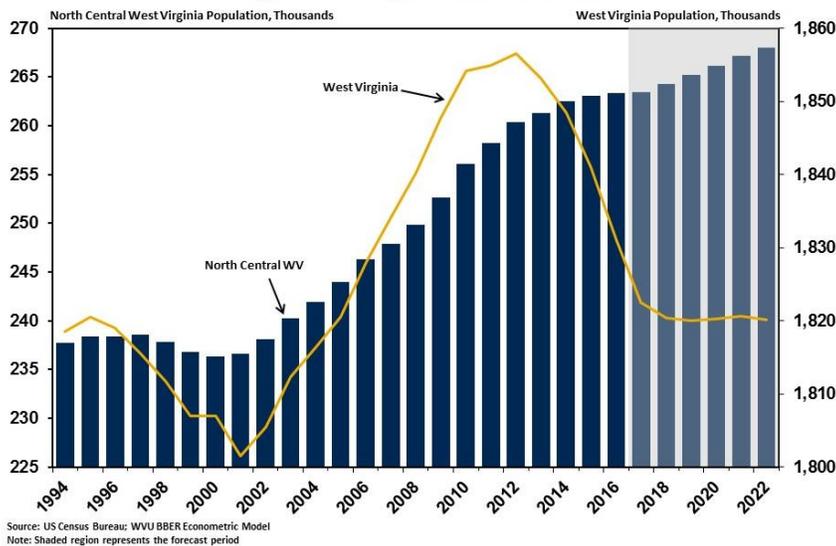
Monongalia County will maintain the lowest jobless rate among the region’s four counties throughout the forecast, edging lower to the low-3.0-percent range. Preston County’s unemployment rate will remain below the statewide average and eventually decline by late-2019. Harrison County’s jobless rate will generally track the statewide average while Marion County will see the largest percentage-point decline in its unemployment rate thanks to better job prospects within the county and healthy growth in neighboring Harrison and Monongalia counties.

INCOME OUTLOOK Inflation-adjusted per capita income in North Central West Virginia is projected to increase at an average annual rate of just above 2.1 percent through 2022, surpassing anticipated gains at the state and national level. Job growth in relatively high-wage sectors will translate into strong increases in real wages and salaries earned by workers and continued improvements in equity markets should bolster local households' investment income. Finally, growth in transfer payments will accelerate during the latter half of the outlook period as more people in the area enter retirement, particularly in Harrison, Marion and Preston counties.

its population shrink more over the next few years before continue to lose residents on net for the next couple of years before stabilizing at around 68,400 people.

POPULATION OUTLOOK The region's resident population is expected to increase between 0.3 and 0.4 percent per year during the outlook period, which will lag the rate of growth observed in the most recent decade. Monongalia County will account for virtually all of the area's population growth over the next five years, adding residents at nearly 0.9 percent per year. One downside risk to population growth in Monongalia County stems from potentially smaller inflows of international immigrants due to changes (or even proposed changes) to US immigration policy. Furthermore, infrastructure issues remain a major hindrance to residential development in several parts of the county.

Figure 14: Population Forecast



Preston County's population is also expected to see moderate gains over the next five years, though growth will trail what was recorded in the last ten years or so. By comparison, the number of residents in Marion County is expected to remain stable while Harrison County will see