Mega Commuting in the U.S.
Time and Distance in Defining Long Commutes using the 2006-2010 American Community Survey
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Introduction

With a changing employment landscape, some U.S. commuters are traveling long distances to get to work. One study by Mogia and Gong (2012) noted that “super” commuters are on the rise in the U.S. where a super commuter is defined as working in the central county of a metropolitan area, commuting long distances by air, rail, bus, or some combination. This is a definition based on distance. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, super commuters are those who travel 90 minutes or more to work, one-way – a definition based on time. The Census Bureau defines super commuters as “extreme” commuters, workers who commute 90 minutes or more to work, one-way – a definition based on distance.

Using the 2006-2010 5-year American Community Survey (ACS), we examine the patterns, demographics, and geographic characteristics of commuters who travel 50 or more miles and 80 or more minutes to get to work, utilizing the mean long distances and average block-to-block distances traveled for individual home-to-work flows.

The data used in this analysis are derived from the 2006-2010 5-year American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS collects information on travel from respondents’ place of work to the place they reside, whether this information is available on the ACS tapes. The ACS data are available in a variety of formats, including detailed tabulations and estimates for national, state, and local areas.

Data and Methodology

The ACS is an ongoing survey conducted annually by the U.S. Census Bureau that captures characteristics of the social, economic, and geographic characteristics of communities across the United States and Puerto Rico. The ACS questions related to travel focus solely on commuting and do not ask about leisure travel or other non-work trips. The ACS asks respondents to report on the time and distance they travel to work, the mode(s) of transportation they use, and the time of day they leave for work.

We use both time and distance to analyze commuting patterns for the U.S. and Washington, D.C. We define long-distance commuters as those who travel 90 minutes or more to work, one-way, using 2006-2010 5-year ACS data. We utilize geographic information from the 2006-2010 5-year ACS to calculate the Census block centroids and map the block-to-block distances between each individual home-to-work flow pair based on Euclidean distance (i.e., “as the crow flies”).

Results and Conclusions

• Megacommuters are more likely to commute to work or reside in other metro areas at work, as opposed to the one in which they reside.12
• Megacommuters are more likely to commute 50 or more miles to work, one-way, using the ACS data. The ACS does not ask about travel distances to work. To obtain travel distances, we utilize geographic information from the 2006-2010 5-year ACS to calculate the Census block centroids and map the block-to-block distances between each individual home-to-work flow pair. The ACS does not ask about travel distances to work. To obtain travel distances, we utilize geographic information from the 2006-2010 5-year ACS to calculate the Census block centroids and map the block-to-block distances between each individual home-to-work flow pair.

References & Footnotes


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