



# NPTS BRIEF

March 2006

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Highway Administration

## Long-Distance Travel

Overall, about 2.6 billion long-distance trips are taken by U.S. residents every year. These are trips of 50 miles or more away from home (100 miles in round-trip distance) for people of all ages, by all modes of travel, and for any purpose. Many people never travel that far from home--169 million people (61 percent of the population) do not make any long distance trips in an average year. In fact, just 5 percent of the population takes 25 percent of the long distance trips.

People in the Mid-Atlantic region have the lowest per capita trip rates and people in the West North Central region the highest. Exhibit 1 shows the per capita annual trip rates for each of the Census Divisions.

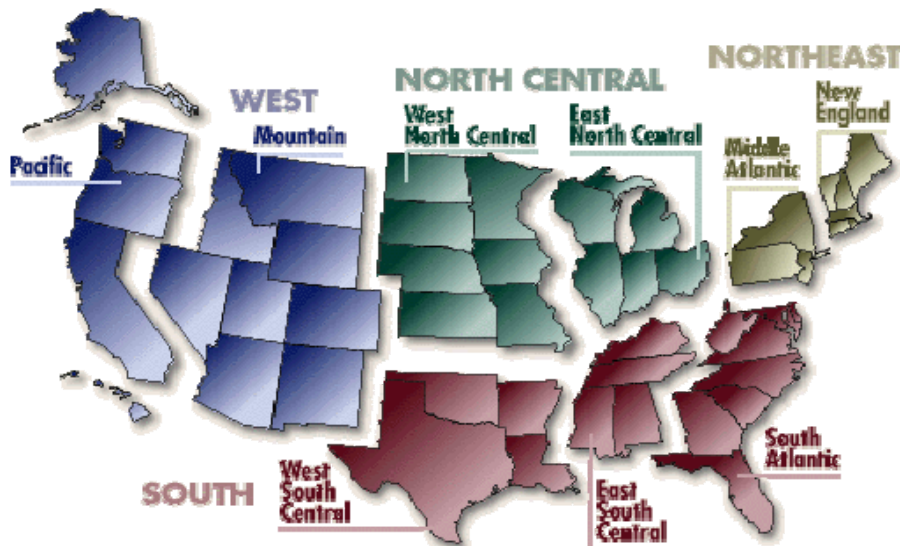
Higher-income people in rural areas take more trips of 50 miles or more than all others (nearly 20 per year), while low-income people in large cities take the fewest long-distance trips (less than four each year).

Those living in the largest metro areas (3 million or more in population) are twice as likely to take a trip of 1000 miles or more than people in small towns or rural areas.

Exhibit 1 – Per Capita Trip Rates by Census Region

| Region of the Country (9 Census Regions) | Long-Distance Trips per Capita per Year (All 50 miles and more) |
|--|---|
| New England                              | 10.3  |
| Mid Atlantic                             | 8.4   |
| East North Central                       | 9.3   |
| West North Central                       | 11.2  |
| South Atlantic                           | 9.2   |
| East South Central                       | 10.4  |
| West South Central                       | 10.0  |
| Mountain                                 | 9.3   |
| Pacific                                  | 8.7   |
| <b>All</b>                               | <b>9.4</b>  |

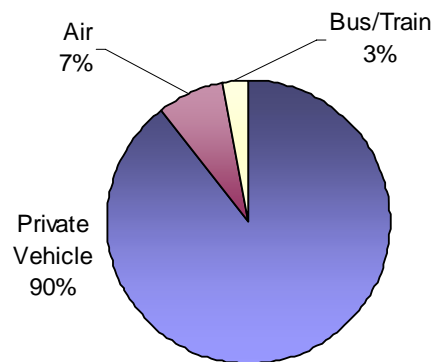
However, the majority of the long distance trips are not that long—58 percent are less than 250 miles in round-trip distance. The average trip by private vehicle is 220 miles one-way, bus or train trips average 400 miles, and air trips nearly 1500 miles.



The vast majority of long-distance travel is on the highway, as shown in Exhibit 3. But the choice of means is dependent on income and trip distance.

People in low-income households are more dependent on private vehicles to make long-distance trips than people in high-income households, and the gap widens as the trip length increases. For people with an annual income of \$100,000 per year, flying becomes a significant option for trips of 600 miles (roundtrip) or 300 miles away from home. For lower income people flying doesn't become a significant option until roundtrip distances approach 1,000 miles (see Exhibit 5).

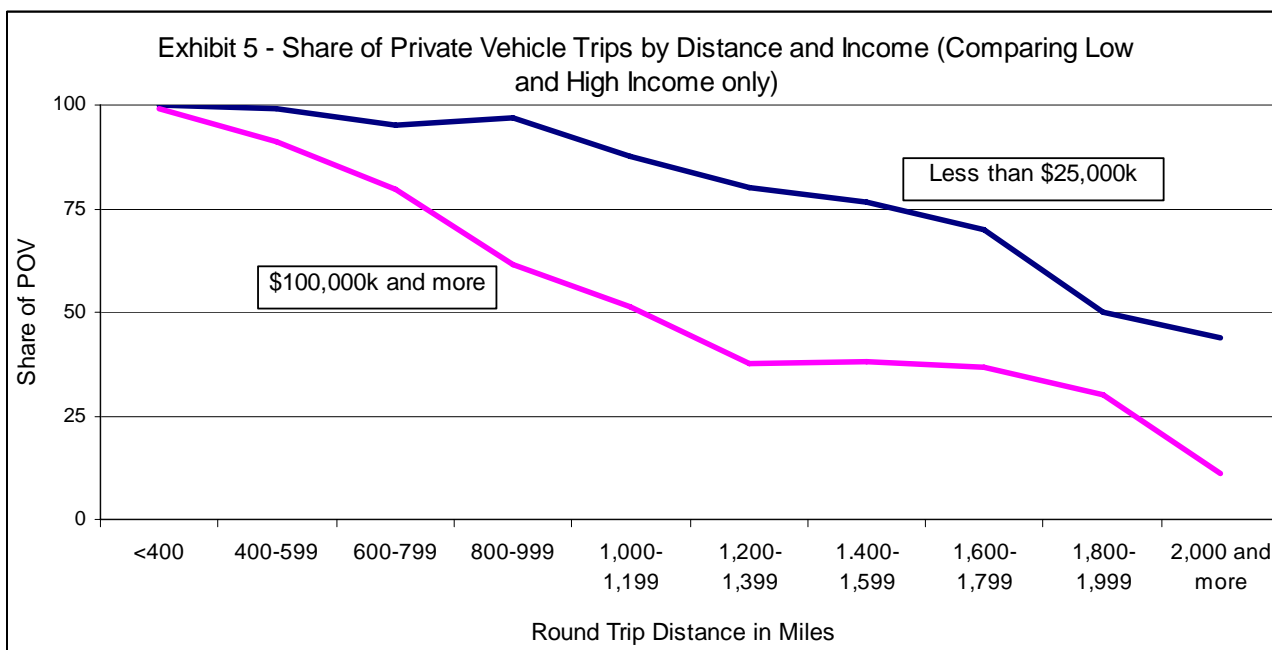
Exhibit 3 - Percent of Long-Distance Trips (50 miles or more Away from Home) by Mode



The reasons people travel vary as much as the people themselves, and the data include trips for business, family vacations, weddings, or to shop. Business trips (including long commutes, conferences and meetings, and combined business and pleasure) comprise nearly 30 percent of the long-distance trips, visiting friends and relatives just over 25 percent, and leisure trips, sight-seeing, and vacations nearly another 25 percent. For people who make long-distance trips, the average annual trips by purpose are shown in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4 – Mean Number of Trips by Purpose – Travelers Only

| Main Reason for the Trip:                | Mean # Trips/Year |
|--|-------------------|
| Business and Bus/Pleasure                | 3.8               |
| Visit Friends and Relatives              | 1.5               |
| Vacation/Leisure                         | 1.4               |
| Personal Business, inc. Shop and Medical | 1.7               |
| Other Reasons                            | 1.8               |



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