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San Diego Commute Times Similar to National Average

NOVEMBER 18, 2016 / EVAN COMEN

The average resident of the San Diego-Carlsbad metro area spends 26.1 minutes commuting to work, roughly equivalent to the national average of 26.4 minutes and shorter than the statewide average of 28.9 minutes. San Diego residents have the 12th shortest commute of any metro area in California.

Two of the main factors that determine commute time are the distance to be traveled and traffic congestion. In large, dense cities, commuters likely travel longer distances from home to work and do so at slower speeds.

In San Diego, there are 13,170 people per square mile, a greater population density than the average across all U.S. metro areas of 6,088 Americans per square mile. The metro is comprised of 4,526 square miles of land and water, making it the 62nd largest U.S. metropolitan area by land mass.

Metropolitan areas often consist of a core principal city with strong economic and social ties to their surrounding regions. In the San Diego-Carlsbad metro, San Diego is the principal city and economic hub for adjacent municipalities and townships. The more concentrated a metropolitan area population is within its principal city, the less time residents spend commuting to work. Nationwide, 38.3% of metro area residents live within their principal city, and the remaining 61.7% in surrounding communities. An estimated 47.7% of San Diego-Carlsbad residents live in San Diego, a larger share than the national figure.

Denser cities often have comprehensive public transit systems that can connect residents to their jobs and in some cases shorten the commute to work. In San Diego, 3.5% of residents commute via public transportation, a smaller share than the national public transit ridership of 5.2%. On average, those who take public transit in San Diego take 25 minutes longer getting to work than those who drive. Nationwide, taking public transit adds 25 minutes to the average commute.

One indication of a good transit system is an economically diverse ridership. If ridership in a metropolitan area is primarily just low-income residents, the system is less likely to operate smoothly or be maintained well. In San Diego, the typical public transit commuter earns \$20,763 a year, roughly 54% of the \$38,437 median earnings of commuters who drive to work alone in the metro area. Nationwide, the median earnings for public transit commuters is 89% that of workers who commute in a car, truck, or van alone.

Traffic is a complicated phenomenon, and there is little consensus among economists and transportation planners as to the best method for curbing traffic congestion. While new highways are often constructed or widened to decrease congestion, there is evidence that additional highway capacity increases traffic volume. The average San Diego resident drives 23.7 miles a day, also among the most of any large city.

Rank	Metro Area	Commute Time
10	Vallejo-Fairfield, CA	30.9

KEY STATS

Income & Output		Rank*
Median household income	\$67,320	25
Poverty rate	13.8%	128
GDP (millions)	\$198,550	16
GDP growth	2.5%	126

Housing		
Median home value	\$485,900	12
Median rent	\$1,427	9
Homeownership rate	52.2%	367

Education		
Pct high school grads	86.6%	266
Pct college grads	37.2%	44
Pct graduate or prof. degree	14.5%	48

Population		
Population	3,299,521	17
Pct white	47.0%	340
Pct black	4.7%	224
Pct asian	11.2%	11
Pct hispanic or latino	32.9%	37
Pct other	4.1%	72

Labor		
Employment (Nov-16)	1,523,904	17
Unemployment (Nov-16)	4.5%	148
Employment growth	2.3%	113

Social Characteristics		
Avg. commute time (min)	26.1	318
Median age	35.5	282
Pct under 18	22.0%	219
Pct over 65	13.1%	285
Population density	6,920.5	8

Crime		
Violent crime rate	325.2	173
Murder rate	2.3	234
Robbery rate	83.1	132
Aggravated assault rate	216.4	166

Health		
Life expectancy	80.9	16
Smoking rate	11.8%	12
Obesity rate	20.2%	11
Physical inactivity rate	14.8%	11

*Rank of 381 metropolitan statistical areas

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9	Stockton-Lodi, CA	31.1
8	Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	31.3
7	Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	31.4
6	Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	31.8
5	Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario, CA	31.9
4	San Francisco-Oakland-Hayward, CA	33.2
3	Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	34.4
2	New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	36.3
1	East Stroudsburg, PA	39.6

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