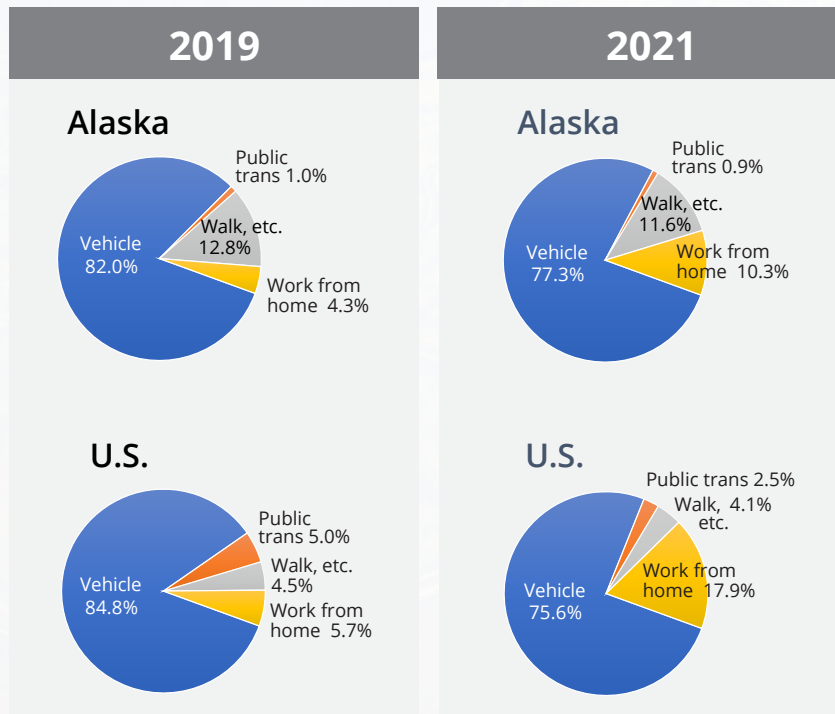


# Commutes look different in Alaska

## Pandemic shifted the patterns everywhere slightly

### The pandemic altered the commute mix

By ROB KREIGER



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2019 and 2021

Commuting in Alaska has always looked different from the Lower 48, and while the pandemic altered patterns for both, the overall differences remain.

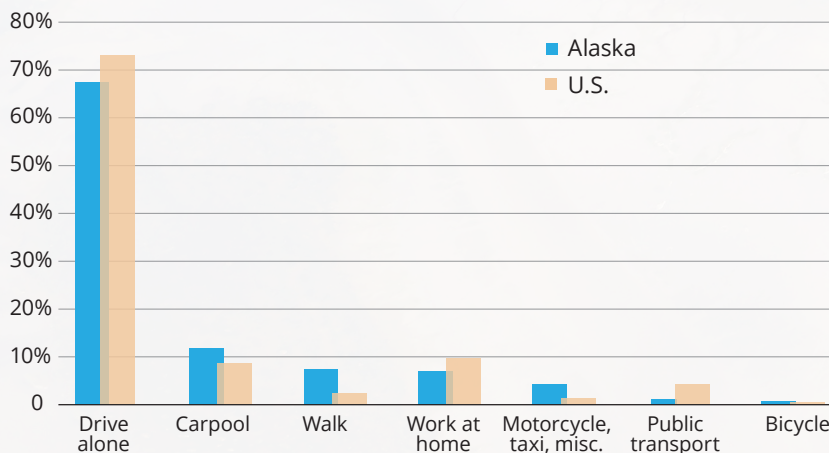
A smaller share of Alaskans work at home than they do nationally, although the number of telecommuters has increased substantially everywhere since 2019.

Driving remains the most common way to get to work both here and down south, but Alaskans are more likely to walk and less likely to use public transportation.

Average commutes are also shorter in Alaska, although Alaskans who do commute longer distances tend to work in a different part of the state than where they live. The typical suburb-to-city commute is rare here, with one exception: the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to Anchorage drive.

The lack of suburbs and limited connectivity of road systems in Alaska are the main reasons for these differences, and availability is another — common U.S. public transit systems are neither present nor practical in Alaska.

### How Alaska and U.S. commutes compare



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021

### Telework became more common

While the percentage of people who work at home has increased

significantly since 2019 in both Alaska and the U.S., it's more common for the rest of the country.

A comparison of 2019 and 2021 commuter data showed that before the pandemic, remote work represented an estimated 4.3 percent of Alaska workers and 5.7 percent nationwide. By 2021, teleworking in Alaska had more than doubled, to 10.3 percent, and more than tripled nationally, to 17.9 percent.

Overall, the U.S. industry mix is better suited to telework, with more large corporate and tech companies than Alaska, although industry makeup varies by state.

## Most workers still drive, but Alaskans are more likely to walk

While more people are working at home, driving to work — usually alone — remains the most common method by far for Alaskans and Americans in general. People who drive themselves or carpool represent about 80 percent of commuters in Alaska, similar to the U.S.

Alaska workers walking might seem surprising at first, given the state is so spread out, but even jobs in remote areas tend to be close to people's homes. Alaska doesn't have many cities surrounded by smaller communities, unlike the major metropolitan areas throughout the rest of the country.

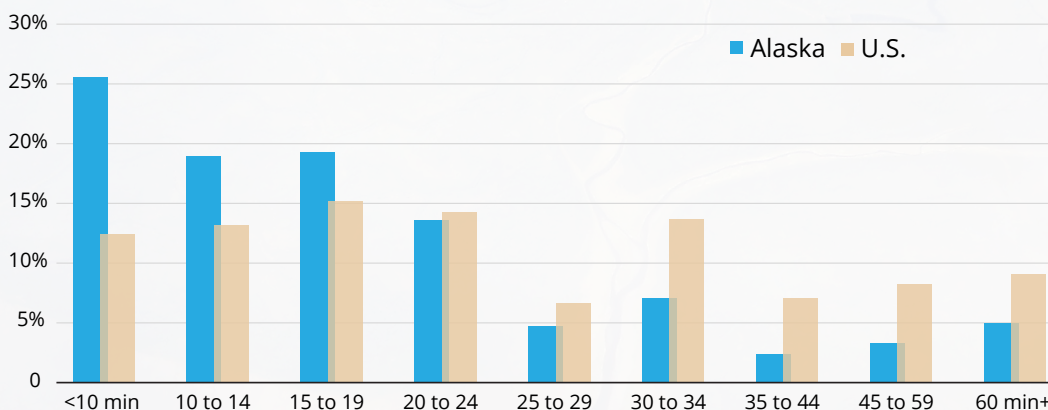
Fewer Alaskans use public transportation, for similar reasons. While larger cities in Alaska offer some public transport — mainly buses — mass transit such as light rails and subways isn't available here. Most places don't have the population to support it.

## Average one-way commutes by Alaska area, 2017-2021

Borough or Census Area	Commute, minutes
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	36.1
Copper River Census Area	27.2
<b>U.S. average</b>	<b>26.8</b>
Kenai Peninsula Borough	20.6
Fairbanks North Star Borough	19.5
<b>Alaska</b>	<b>19.5</b>
Anchorage, Municipality	19.0
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	16.0
Denali Borough	15.7
Juneau, City and Borough	15.5
Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	15.2
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	14.7
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	14.2
Bristol Bay Borough	12.2
Haines Borough	11.2
Kodiak Island Borough	11.1
Sitka, City and Borough	11.0
Chugach Census Area	9.7
Dillingham Census Area	9.3
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	9.1
Bethel Census Area	7.5
Petersburg Borough	7.3
North Slope Borough	7.2
Wrangell, City and Borough	7.1
Kusilvak Census Area	6.8
Aleutians West Census Area	6.2
Nome Census Area	6.0
Northwest Arctic Borough	5.9
Lake and Peninsula Borough	5.7
Aleutians East Borough	5.7
Skagway, Municipality	5.5
Yakutat, City and Borough	4.7

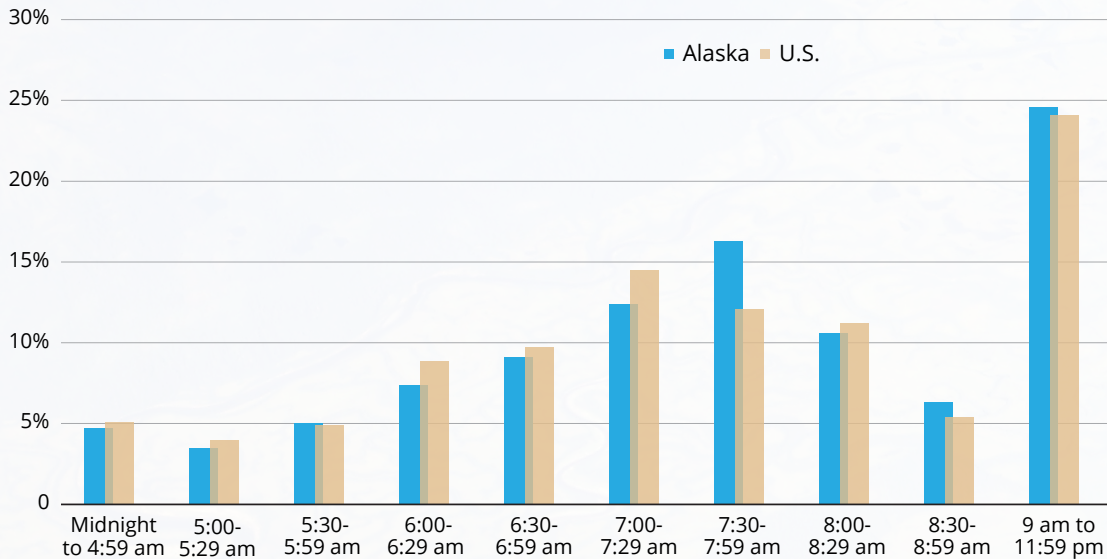
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021

## Alaska commutes are short, most under 20 minutes



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021

## Most in Alaska and nationwide leave for work before 9 a.m.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021

## Alaska's in-state commuters, 2021

Borough or Census Area	Total AK residents living in the area	Pct commuting elsewhere in AK
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	45,365	41.5%
Copper River Census Area	1,191	30.1%
Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	2,425	21.8%
Kusilvak Census Area	3,470	21.7%
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	839	21.6%
Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	2,485	19.6%
Haines Borough	1,040	19.6%
Denali Borough	774	19.1%
Lake and Peninsula Borough	695	18.6%
Kenai Peninsula Borough	24,511	17.7%
Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	2,435	16.2%
Chugach Census Area	3,146	15.7%
Bristol Bay Borough	386	13.5%
Wrangell, City and Borough	795	13.5%
Fairbanks North Star Borough	36,778	11.1%
Yakutat, City and Borough	291	10.3%
Anchorage, Municipality	128,660	10.1%
Dillingham Census Area	1,998	9.8%
Ketchikan Gateway Borough	6,281	8.8%
Kodiak Island Borough	5,305	8.6%
Aleutians East Borough	646	8.4%
Petersburg Borough	1,252	8.2%
Juneau, City and Borough	15,545	8.0%
Skagway, Municipality	489	7.2%
Sitka, City and Borough	3,678	6.9%
Aleutians West Census Area	1,838	6.4%
Bethel Census Area	7,939	6.3%
Northwest Arctic Borough	2,992	5.7%
Nome Census Area	4,336	4.6%
North Slope Borough	3,305	3.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>311,523</b>	<b>15.7%</b>

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

While the likelihood of using an alternative commute, called “other means” in the commuter data — is about the same everywhere, the methods used differ in Alaska as well. Depending on where in the state someone lives, other transportation includes airplanes, boats, and snowmachines — transport seldom seen elsewhere.

In other states, common “other” methods include motorcycles, taxis, and rideshare services such as Uber and Lyft.

## Commutes are longer in most other states

About three-quarters of commuters nationwide head to work before 9 a.m., and the departure patterns look similar for Alaska and the nation, with one exception. A larger percentage nationally leave half an hour earlier — between 7 and 7:30 — likely because commutes are longer in the Lower 48, and on average, people need more time during the morning rush hour. Alaskans were more likely to leave for work between 7:30 and 8 a.m.

Similarly, the average one-way commute in Alaska is about seven minutes shorter. The typical drive to work takes 19.5 minutes in Alaska and 26.8 nationwide. About a quarter of Alaskan commuters get to work in less than 10 minutes, however, while national commuters are roughly half as likely to make that time.

It's probably not surprising, given the amount of traffic and longer commutes from the suburbs, that New Yorkers had the longest average commute followed by workers in Maryland, New Jersey, and Washington, D.C. All exceeded half an hour. Alaska's commutes were among the shortest, just over Nebraska, Montana, Wyoming, and the Dakotas.

## Mat-Su commute tops even the U.S. average

Within Alaska, commutes varied significantly, but in general, places on the road system took longer. Mat-Su's commute was longest at about 36 minutes, well above average for the state and the U.S. That's because so many working Mat-Su residents drive to Anchorage. The relationship between Anchorage and Mat-Su is like many in the Lower 48, where people often live in a suburb and work in the city.

## Mat-Su commuters and where they work

Mat-Su not only has the longest commute, but it also has the largest share of its workers commuting to other parts of the state. Eighty-four percent of Alaskans live and work in the same area, but it's only 58

Continued on page 22

## Mat-Su-Anchorage commuters by industry

Industry, 2021	Workers	Percent
Health Care and Social Assistance	2,146	16.8%
Construction	1,667	13.0%
Transportation and Warehousing	1,214	9.5%
State Government	1,179	9.2%
Retail Trade	1,013	7.9%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	782	6.1%
Local Government	704	5.5%
Accommodation and Food Services	686	5.4%
Admin/Support, Waste Mgmt, and Remediation Svcs	612	4.8%
Wholesale Trade	439	3.4%
Information	394	3.1%
Finance and Insurance	373	2.9%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	368	2.9%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	244	1.9%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	214	1.7%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	185	1.4%
Manufacturing	163	1.3%
Utilities	137	1.1%
Educational Services	111	0.9%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	101	0.8%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	41	0.3%
Unknown	7	0.1%

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

## Average commute by state, in minutes

State	Commute, minutes
New York	33.3
Maryland	32.5
New Jersey	31.5
District of Columbia	30.4
Massachusetts	29.6
California	29.5
Illinois	28.7
Georgia	28.6
Virginia	28.2
Florida	27.9
Washington	27.7
New Hampshire	27.1
Pennsylvania	26.9
Hawaii	26.8
<b>U.S. average</b>	<b>26.8</b>
Texas	26.6
Connecticut	26.5
West Virginia	26
Delaware	26
Louisiana	25.9
Colorado	25.8
Arizona	25.7
Tennessee	25.5
Mississippi	25.4
South Carolina	25.3
Rhode Island	25.3
Alabama	25.2
North Carolina	25
Nevada	24.7
Michigan	24.5
Maine	24.3
Indiana	23.9
Missouri	23.8
Ohio	23.7
Kentucky	23.7
Oregon	23.7
Minnesota	23.5
Vermont	23.3
New Mexico	22.9
Wisconsin	22.2
Oklahoma	22.2
Arkansas	22
Utah	22
Idaho	21.2
Iowa	19.6
Kansas	19.6
<b>Alaska</b>	<b>19.5</b>
Nebraska	19.1
Montana	18.6
Wyoming	18.1
North Dakota	17.6
South Dakota	17.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2017-2021

# TEACHERS

Continued from page 17

Public employees in Alaska and 14 other states also opted out of Social Security in favor of their own retirement systems. Not paying into Social Security adds another layer to Alaska's lack of a defined benefit plan, making Alaska the only state that doesn't offer at least some low-risk guaranteed retirement to its newer teachers.

## The nationwide challenge in recruiting and keeping teachers

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Looking at how teaching in Alaska has changed over the decades and how we compare to other states can shed light on Alaska's relative strengths and weaknesses. Difficulty recruiting new teachers is a national phenomenon, one that has led some states to relax the requirements to lead a classroom.

Compounding the staffing challenge in Alaska is that nearly an eighth of teachers are older than 60, and the number of teachers younger than 30 is the lowest in more than 20 years, as the graph on page 17 shows.

With teachers in such demand everywhere and so many near retirement, an additional option for Alaska is to recruit from the state's large supply of former teachers: more than 2,600 people have taught in the past 10 years, are younger than 58, and are still working in Alaska but in a different profession.

Multiple national sources have looked at factors

that might lead teachers to leave the profession or dissuade students from choosing it as a career. They show that many challenges teachers report aren't unique to Alaska.

The research firm Rand Corporation, for example, found complaints about lower morale and well-being during the pandemic, racial discrimination, and poor working conditions.

Rand also estimated teacher burnout at almost 60 percent, which was consistent across the three years they conducted the survey (2021, 2022, and 2023). The causes listed were managing student behavior, taking on extra work because of staff shortages, and feeling like goals and expectations at their schools are unattainable.

The EdWeek Research Center found that teacher satisfaction had fallen from a high of 62 percent in 2008 to just 20 percent in 2023. The share who said they were very likely or fairly likely to leave the occupation also went up considerably.

In 2022, Gallup found that K-12 workers had the highest job burnout rate in the U.S. — this poll estimated it at 44 percent — and the gap from other professions had increased.

Other reported issues included a lack of administrative support, new unfunded mandates, less support staff, constantly changing education policies, lack of respect, health and safety concerns, political attacks, too-large classrooms, inadequate planning time, and the fact that the pandemic exacerbated all of these problems.

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# COMMUTERS

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percent for the Mat-Su Borough.

Among Mat-Su's 45,000 employed residents, 28 percent work in Anchorage and 5 percent commute to the North Slope, usually for high-paying jobs in the oilfields. The rest work in Fairbanks or other areas.

Fewer Mat-Su residents commute than they did before the pandemic, however. In 2019, it was 44

percent, with 29 percent working in Anchorage and 6 percent on the Slope.

Among Mat-Su residents commuting to Anchorage, the largest percentage worked in the health care industry (just under 17 percent), followed by construction at 13 percent. Of the health care industry commuters, registered nurses made up nearly 20 percent followed by personal care aides at 5.4 percent and nursing assistants at 4.4 percent.

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