

2 Demographics Profile¹

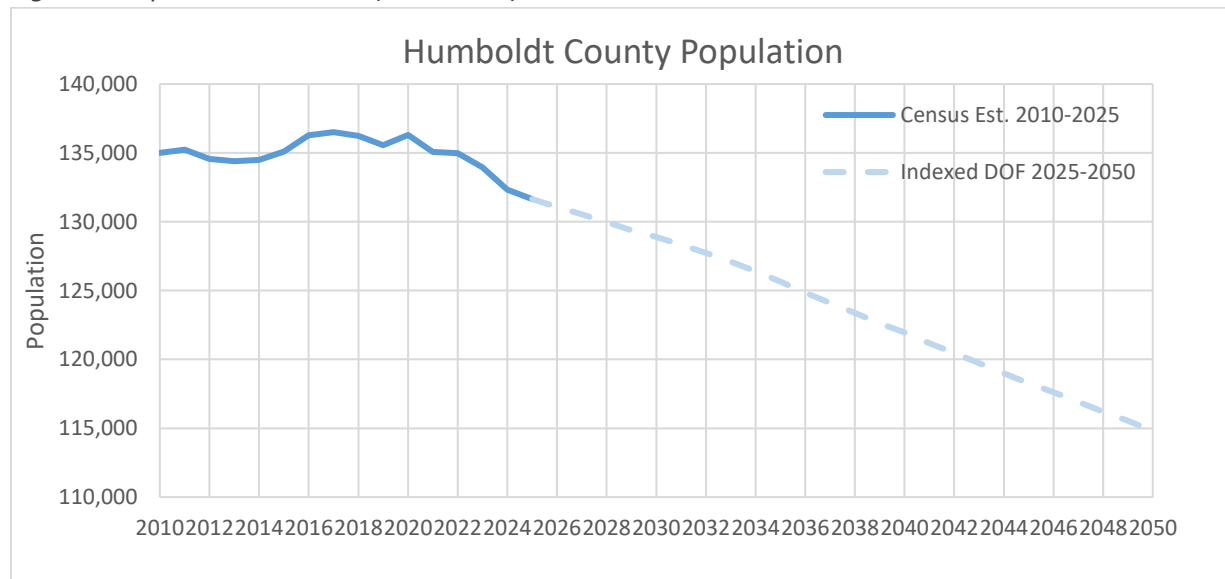
Humboldt County is located on California’s North Coast, approximately 270 miles north of San Francisco, bordered by Del Norte County to the north, Siskiyou and Trinity Counties to the east, Mendocino County to the south, and the Pacific Ocean to the west. The county encompasses approximately 3,568 square miles of largely mountainous and heavily forested terrain that is home to some of California’s most notable natural areas, such as Redwood National and State Parks, Humboldt Redwoods State Park, and the King Range National Conservation Area. Most residents live in the communities surrounding Humboldt Bay, including Eureka, the county seat and largest city, and Arcata, home of Cal Poly Humboldt. The county’s seven incorporated cities range in population from Trinidad, with around 300 residents, to Eureka, with roughly 26,000.²

2.1 Target Population Characteristics

County Data

Nationwide, transit system ridership is drawn largely from various groups of persons who make up what is often called the “transit-dependent” population. This category, also described as transportation disadvantaged, includes elderly persons, persons with disabilities, and low-income persons. In addition, veterans, members of households with no available vehicles, and passengers with limited English proficiency may have transportation needs that differ from the general public.

Figure 1: Population Trendline (2010-2050)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties, 2010-2025.
California Department of Finance, Vintage 2026 County Population Projections (indexed to the Census Bureau’s July 1, 2025 population estimate).

¹ The structure of this section follows the county’s 2021 Coordinated Plan. Data have been updated using the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey and Population Estimates Program, California Department of Finance Vintage 2026 population projections, and other current sources.

² Humboldt County Association of Governments, VROOM 2026-2046: Variety in Rural Options of Mobility - Humboldt County Regional Transportation Plan (adopted 2026).

The 2020-2024 American Community Survey estimates Humboldt County’s total population at 134,541, or approximately 0.34% of California’s population, ranking it the 35th largest of the state’s 58 counties. Compared to state and national averages, a higher proportion of the county’s population is transit-dependent. After decades of slow growth, the county’s population has declined since 2020, and the California Department of Finance projects a continued gradual decline, to approximately 123,029 residents by 2040.³ Caltrans’ 2026 long-term socio-economic forecast anticipated a nearly identical path, at 122,957 residents in 2040.⁴ HCAOG’s adopted Regional Transportation Plan, VROOM 2026-2046, anticipates an aging population and, using the Department of Finance’s prior projection series, notes a projected county population of 100,940 by 2070.⁵ Figure 1 and Table 1 provide population characteristics for the key demographic groups for this report, with California and United States comparisons.

Table 1: Target Population Characteristics

Area	Total Population	% persons aged 65+	% persons w/ disability	% poverty level*	% veterans	% speak English less than “very well”
Humboldt	134,541	19.8%	18.9%	18.0%	6.0%	3.7%
California	39,287,377	15.7%	11.6%	11.8%	4.3%	17.5%
United States	334,922,499	17.2%	13.3%	12.1%	6.2%	8.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey (ACS), 2020-2024 5-year Estimate.

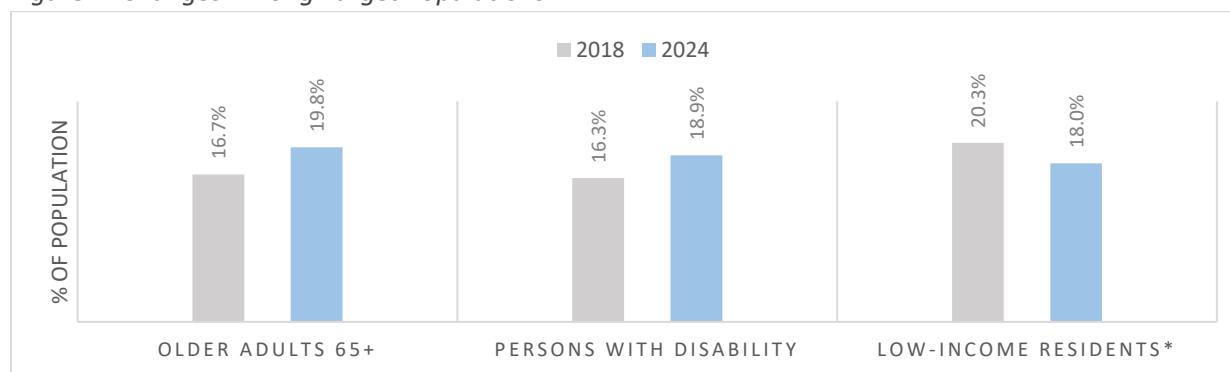
*Source: U.S. Census Bureau: Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE), 2024.

Note: Percentages reflect each indicator’s Census universe: total population (age 65+), civilian noninstitutionalized population (disability), civilian population 18 and over (veterans), population 5 and over (English proficiency), and SAIPE model estimates (poverty).

Population Changes among Target Populations

Figure 2 provides information reflecting the changes among target populations between 2018 and 2024. Compared to 2018, a larger share of Humboldt County’s residents is now over the age of 65 and a larger share lives with a disability, while the county’s poverty rate has eased somewhat but remains well above state and national levels.

Figure 2: Changes Among Target Populations



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: ACS, 2018 and 2024 5-year Estimates.

³ California Department of Finance, P-3. Vintage 2026 (2026.03.13) State and County Population Projections.

⁴ California Department of Transportation, 2026 Long-Term Socio-Economic Forecasts by County.

⁵ Humboldt County Association of Governments, VROOM 2026-2046: Variety in Rural Options of Mobility - Humboldt County Regional Transportation Plan (adopted 2026).

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau: SAIPE, 2018 and 2024.

Older Adults

To better understand how the older adult population in Humboldt County is changing, refer to Table 2, which shows the number of residents by age group in 2020 along with Department of Finance projections for every decade to 2070. As is the case nationwide, Humboldt County's population is aging. In fact, the county's 65-and-older population is projected to grow from about 23,530 in 2020 to 30,055 in 2070, which represents an increase of roughly 28%, even as the under-65 population declines by about 38%. By 2070, nearly three in ten county residents are projected to be 65 or older, and the number of residents 85 and older grows especially rapidly.

Table 2: Population Projections for Older Adults

Age Group	2020	2030	2040	2050	2060	2070	Population Change 2020-2070
Under 65	112,696	102,709	96,232	87,907	78,590	70,369	-37.6%
65-74 (Young Retirees)	15,344	13,362	10,768	13,091	12,981	11,672	-23.9%
75-84 (Mature Retirees)	5,986	11,161	10,140	8,502	10,654	10,982	83.5%
85+ (Seniors)	2,200	2,791	5,889	6,305	5,871	7,401	236.4%
Subtotal Pop: Age 65+	23,530	27,314	26,797	27,898	29,506	30,055	27.7%
% Older Adults	17.3%	21.0%	21.8%	24.1%	27.3%	29.9%	

Source: California Department of Finance, State and County Population Projections by Major Age Groups, March 2026

People with Disabilities

According to the American Community Survey (ACS) 2020-2024 5-Year data,⁶ 18.9% of the civilian noninstitutionalized population of Humboldt County has a disability, which is substantially above both the California average and the national rate (see Table 1).

In Humboldt County, the top three disability issues for those disabled under 18 are cognitive, self-care, and vision difficulties. For those disabled between ages 18 and 64, the top three disability issues are cognitive, independent living, and ambulatory difficulties. For those 65 and older, the top three disability issues are ambulatory, independent living, and hearing difficulties.⁷

Disability rises steeply with age, with 27.5% of county residents aged 65-74 and 46.9% of those 75 and older reporting a disability, which underscores the connection between the county's aging trend and future demand for accessible and specialized transportation.

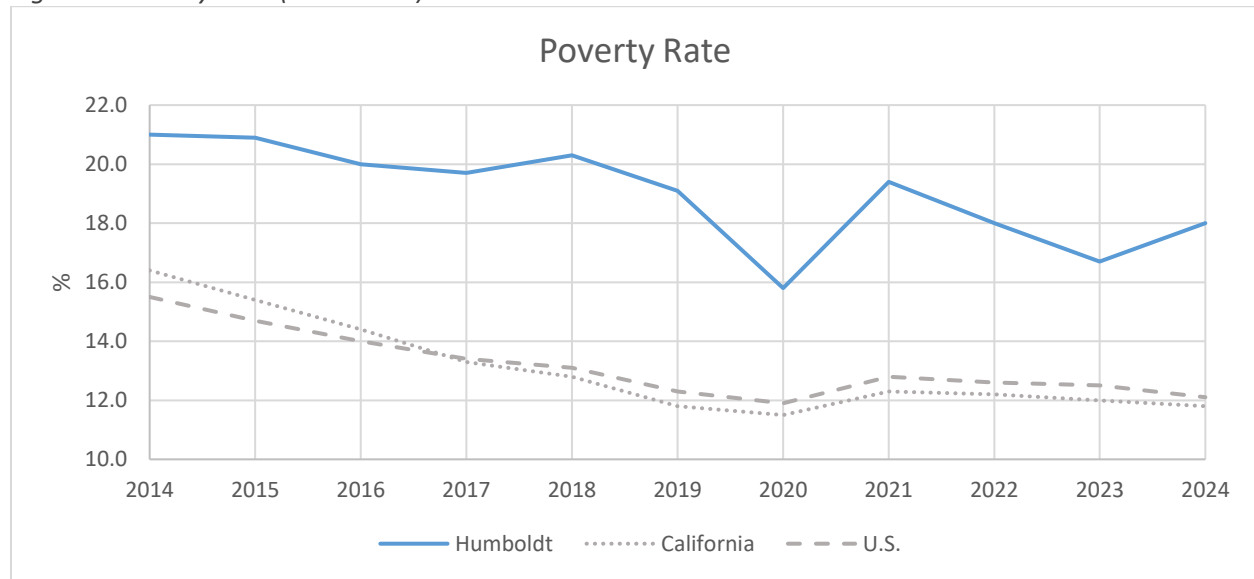
⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020-2024 5-Year Estimates, Table S1810 (Disability Characteristics).

⁷ These disability statistics, which cover six disability types, are based on questions introduced to the ACS in 2008. Because of changes in questions, one must be cautious when comparing older Census/ACS disability data. For more information, please visit the Census Bureau's page on disability data and the American Community Survey at <https://www.census.gov/topics/health/disability/guidance/data-collection-acs.html>.

Low-Income Residents

According to the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) produced by the U.S. Census Bureau, 23,414 persons, or 18.0% of the population for whom poverty status is determined, lived below the federal poverty level in 2024. As shown in Figure 3, the county's poverty rate has consistently exceeded state and national rates over the past decade, though the gap has narrowed modestly since the late 2010s.

Figure 3: Poverty Rate (2014-2024)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: SAIPE, 2014-2024.

Vehicle Access

The vehicle availability of Humboldt County households is examined in Table 3. While ACS 2020-2024 data show that the majority of the county's 54,922 occupied households have access to one or more vehicles, 6.1%, or about 3,330 households, do not.

Table 3: Household Vehicle Availability

Households with:	
0 vehicle	6.1%
1 vehicle	35.9%
2 vehicles	35.5%
3 or more vehicles	22.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: ACS, 2020-2024 5-year Estimate, Physical Housing Characteristics for Occupied Housing Units.

Table 4 summarizes the means of transportation used by the working population. About 68.8% of Humboldt County workers drove alone, 12.8% worked at home, and 0.9% used public transportation.

Table 4: Means of Transportation to Work

Working population (16 years and over in households)	55,468
Travel to work by:	
Car, truck, van – drove alone	68.8%
Car, truck, van – carpooled	10.9%

Working population (16 years and over in households)	55,468
Travel to work by:	
Public transport	0.9%
Walked	3.9%
Taxi, motorcycle, bike, other	2.7%
Work at home	12.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: ACS, 2020-2024 5-year Estimate, Means of Transportation to Work by Vehicles Available.

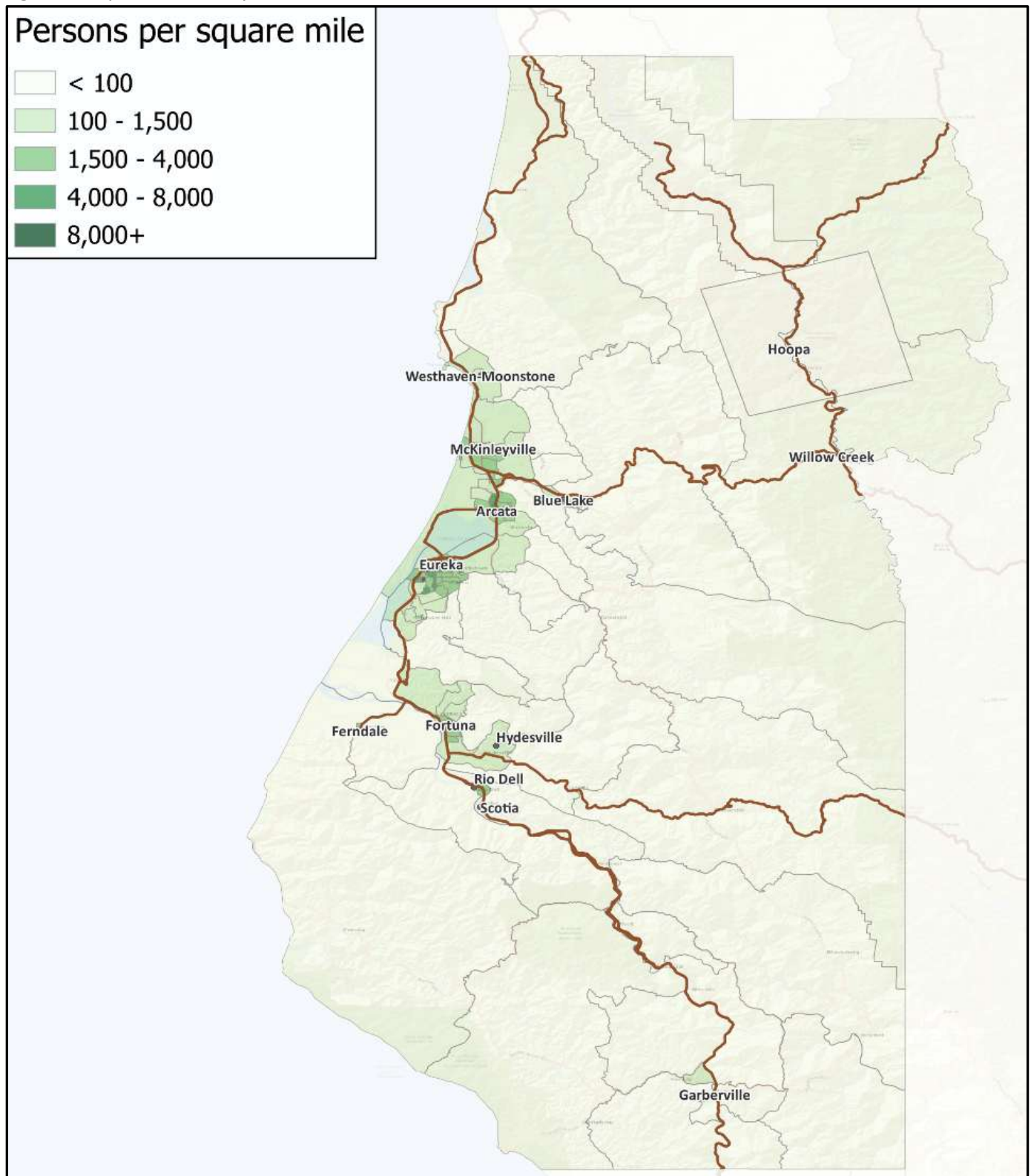
2.2 Distribution of Transit Services and Persons

Humboldt County has an estimated population density of approximately 37 persons per square mile, compared with roughly 253 persons per square mile statewide. Most of the county's population is concentrated in the low-lying coastal areas surrounding Humboldt Bay, as well as along the Eel and Mad River basins. The highest population and employment densities are found in Eureka and Arcata, with additional localized centers in McKinleyville, Fortuna, Blue Lake, Fields Landing, Ferndale, Rio Dell, and Redway. Most county residents live in the greater Humboldt Bay area stretching from McKinleyville through Arcata and Eureka to Fortuna along the U.S. Highway 101 corridor, while outlying communities such as Garberville and Redway in southern Humboldt, Willow Creek and the Hoopa Valley in the east, and Orick in the north are separated from the county's primary population center by long distances of mountainous terrain.⁸ U.S. Highway 101 is the county's primary transportation corridor, running generally parallel to the Pacific coast and connecting its major population centers. State Route (SR) 299 extends east from Arcata through the Trinity River corridor to Redding in Shasta County, where it connects with Interstate 5.

Figure 4 below provides a visual depiction of population density by census block group in Humboldt County.

⁸ Humboldt County Association of Governments, VROOM 2026-2046: Variety in Rural Options of Mobility - Humboldt County Regional Transportation Plan (adopted 2026).

Figure 4: Population Density



Source: U.S. Census Bureau: ACS, 2020-2024 5-year Estimate.
U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 Cartographic Boundary and TIGER/Line Files.
Basemap: Esri World Street Map.