Section XII

Quality of Life

Figure 12.1 Hampton Roads Cost of Living 113

Figure 12.2 Violent Crime Rate in the U.S. and Hampton Roads 113

Figure 12.3 Disability Status in Hampton Roads and Reference Metro Areas 114

Figure 12.4 Gini Coefficient in Hampton Roads and Reference Metro Areas 114

Figure 12.5 Poverty Status in the U.S. and Hampton Roads 115

Figure 12.6 Poverty Status in Hampton Roads and Reference Metro Areas 115

Figure 12.7 Air Pollutants in Hampton Roads 116

Figure 12.8 Ozone Levels in Hampton Roads Compared to the Primary Standard-
3-Year Moving Average 116

Quality of Life in Hampton Roads

Several economic and demographic measures are used as surrogate measures of the region's general well-being. It is important to realize there are many conditions that influence quality of life, all of which must be included when assessing benefits accrued to the region.

Unfortunately, many measures of quality of life are difficult to quantify. This includes the quality of amenities and cultural experiences in the region, the sense of community that exists throughout Hampton Roads, and the happiness of its residents.

Other indicators related to quality of life have been spread throughout this study, including measures of income and employment, education, and transportation. This section attempts to evaluate some measures that lie beyond the scope of others in this report.

Cost of living is a significant factor in the lives of the residents of Hampton Roads. It has been used in other graphics to provide a more robust comparison of income across metro areas. Hampton Roads' cost of living falls close to the national urban area average, which has been largely driven by the decline in housing prices.

Levels of crime also impact life in Hampton Roads. Following the national trend, the level of violent crime in the region has been steadily falling for a number of years.

Understanding relative measures of inequality, disability, and poverty across the region is beneficial when evaluating and setting priorities to address the challenges that face Hampton Roads' vulnerable communities.

Lastly, two measures of air quality attempt to evaluate the environment in the region, which continues to improve.

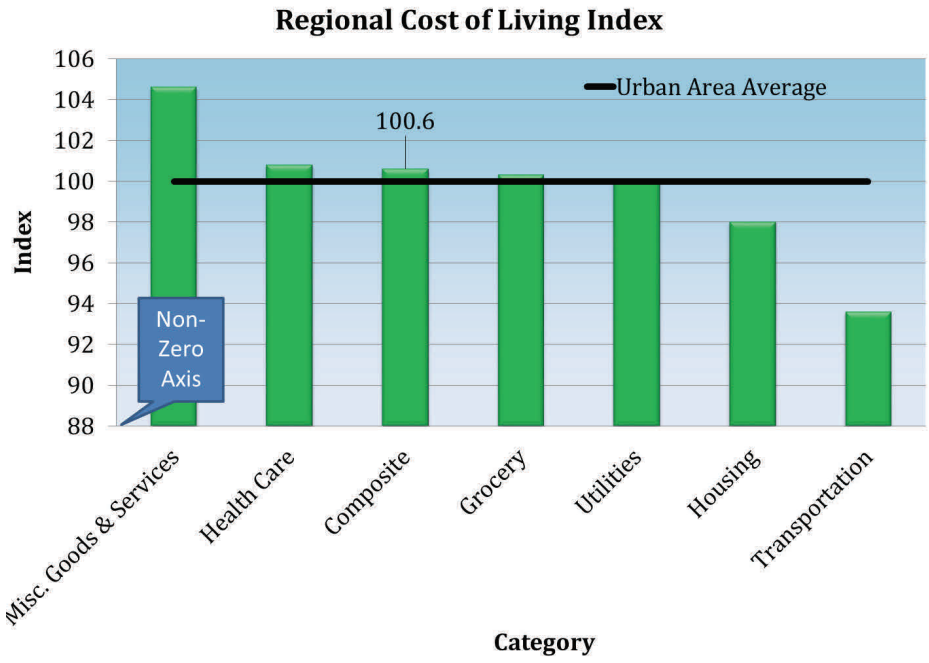
Figure 12.1 Hampton Roads Cost of Living

Why is it important?

Variations in cost of living are not constant across the country but can vary by commodity from region to region and city to city.

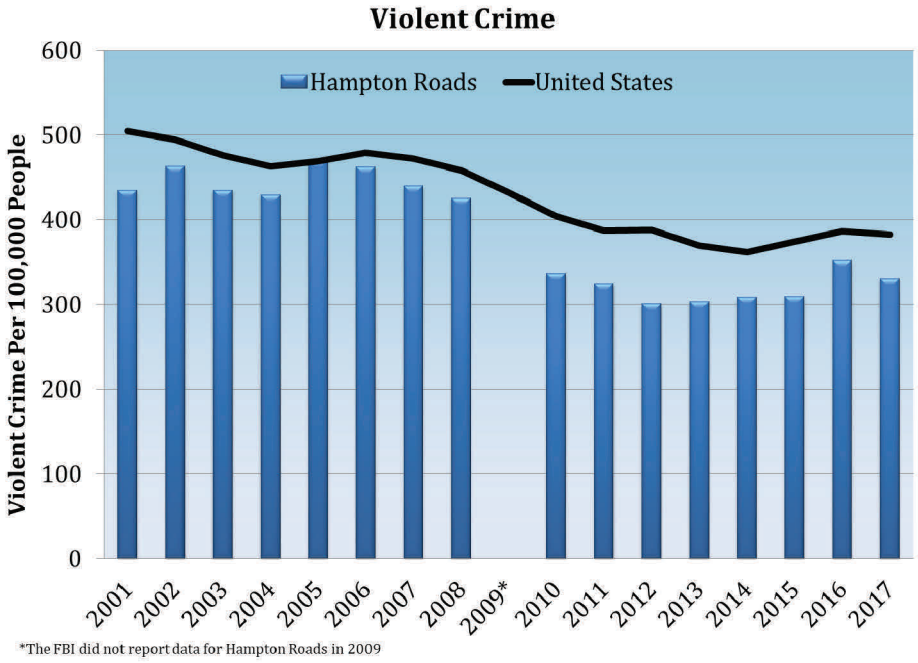
How are we doing?

According to the most recent ACCRA survey, the cost of living in Hampton Roads is just above the urban average. The region's costs are above the national urban area average in Miscellaneous Goods & Services, Health Care, Groceries, and Utilities..



Source: The Council for Community and Economic Research, HRPDC

Figure 12.2 Violent Crime Rate in the U.S. and Hampton Roads



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation, HRPDC

Why is it important?

Crime statistics are a reflection of social conditions and quality of life. Crime trends reflect underlying social issues, including inequality and lack of opportunity.

How are we doing?

The rate of violent crime in Hampton Roads has traditionally fallen below the national average. The crime rate in Hampton Roads and the nation was falling for a number of years, though there was an uptick both nationally and regionally in 2016. Violent crime in the region declined again in 2017.

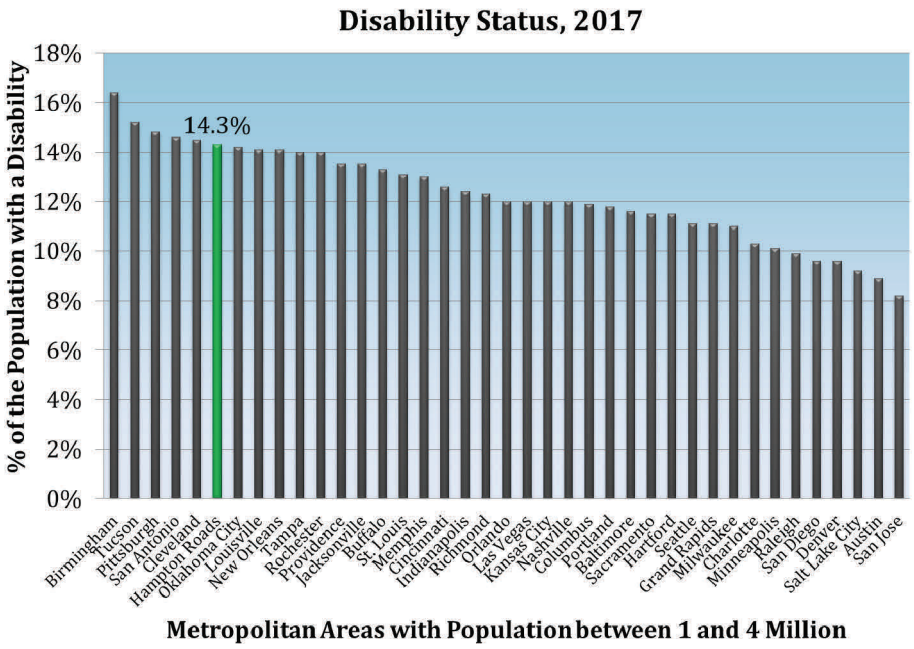
Figure 12.3 Disability Status in Hampton Roads and Reference Metro Areas

Why is it important?

The disability rate measures the number of persons in a region that have additional challenges that need to be accommodated.

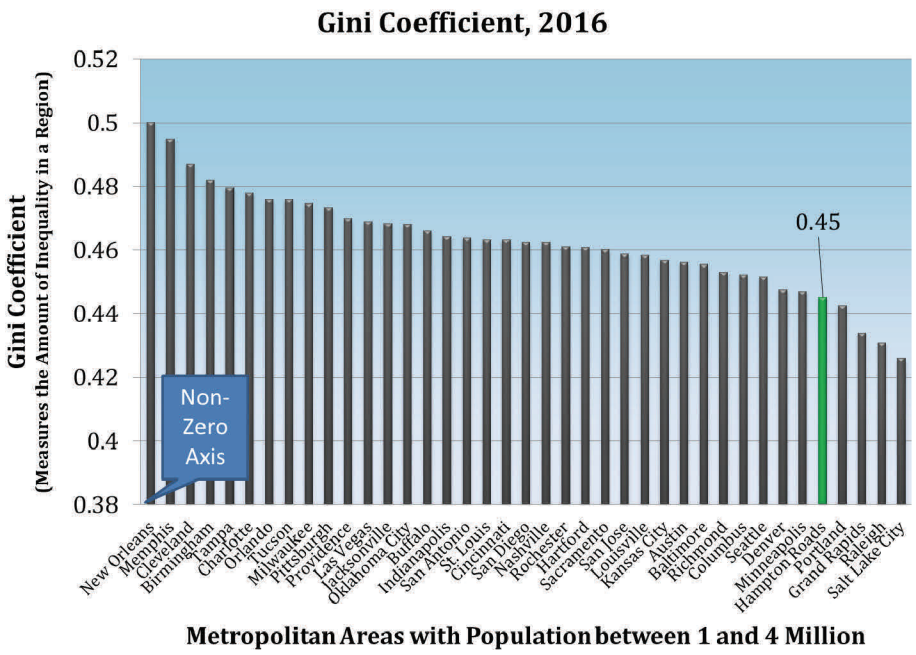
How are we doing?

The civilian disability rate for Hampton Roads was 14.3% in 2017, which was high for this region's reference MSAs. Two things make this particularly interesting. One, the regional disability rate declined from 14.8% in 2016, and this region was much closer the median of its reference MSAs in 2016. Two, the disability rate has been declining as the strong economy has been encouraging the disabled to enter the workforce.



Source: American Community Survey, HRPDC

Figure 12.4 Gini Coefficient in Hampton Roads and Reference Metro Areas



Source: American Community Survey, HRPDC

Why is it important?

The Gini coefficient measures a region's inequality by comparing it to a theoretical perfect equality scenario. The greater the inequality in the region, the higher the Gini coefficient will be.

How are we doing?

Hampton Roads has an extremely low level of income inequality, with one of the lowest Gini coefficients in its reference group of MSAs. The strong opportunities provided to individuals with a high school education likely contribute to the low level of inequality in the region.

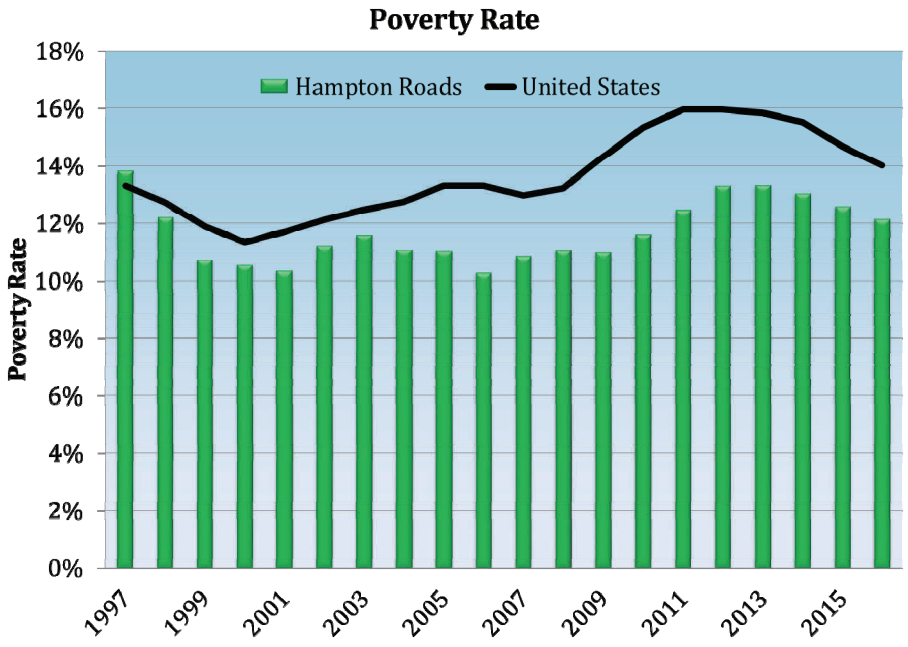
Figure 12.6 Poverty Status in Hampton Roads and Reference Metro Areas

Why is it important?

Impoverished persons lack the means to acquire adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Poverty rates are indicative of a region's ability to combat the social and economic conditions that result in poverty.

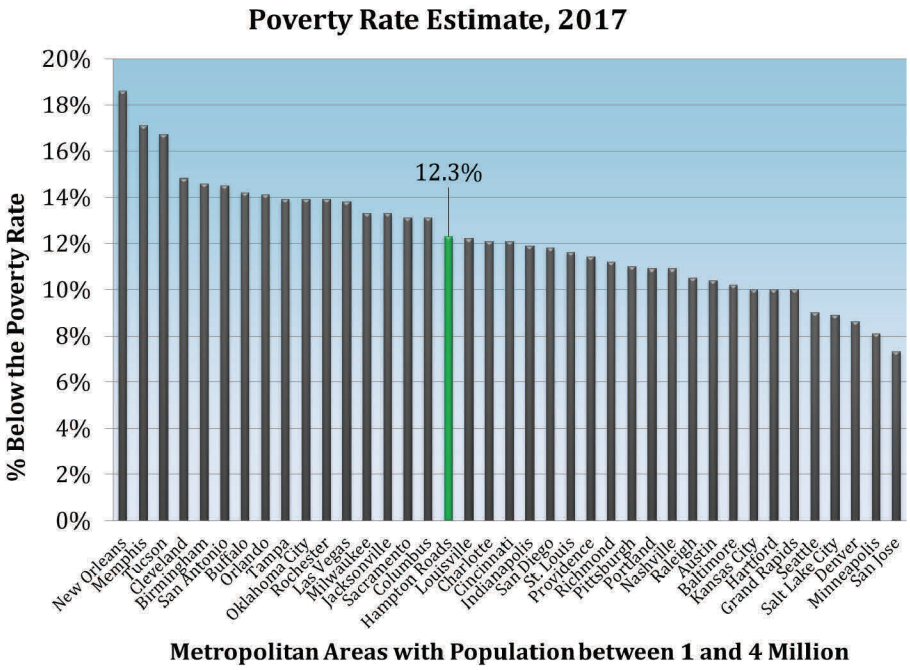
How are we doing?

Historically, poverty rates in Hampton Roads tended to follow the national trend. The region's poverty rate has remained below the national average since 1997. The poverty rate increased at the start of the recession in 2009, but has declined over the past three years.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Small Area Income and Poverty Est., HRPDC

Figure 12.6 Poverty Status in Hampton Roads and Reference Metro Areas



Why is it important?

High levels of poverty can create significant issues for a jurisdiction, as individuals in poverty contribute less in tax revenue, but consume a higher level of services than an average resident.

How are we doing?

Hampton Roads used to have a significantly lower poverty rate in relative to its reference MSAs, but has seen its status erode even as its poverty rate improves, because many of this region's reference MSAs have seen stronger economic growth during the recovery.

Source: American Community Survey, HRPDC

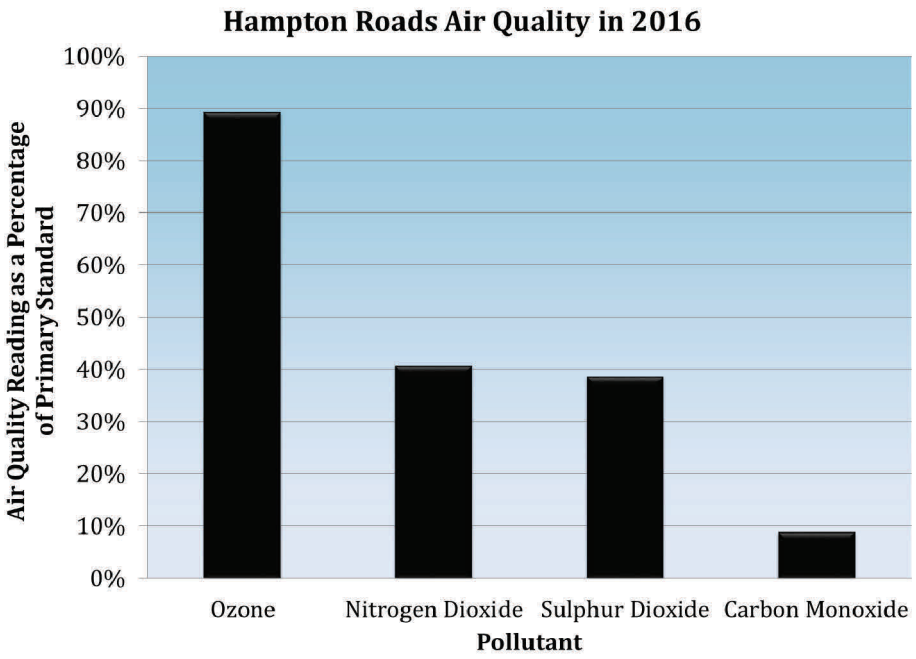
Figure 12.7 Air Pollutants in Hampton Roads

Why is it important?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) monitor air quality to protect the health and welfare of the public.

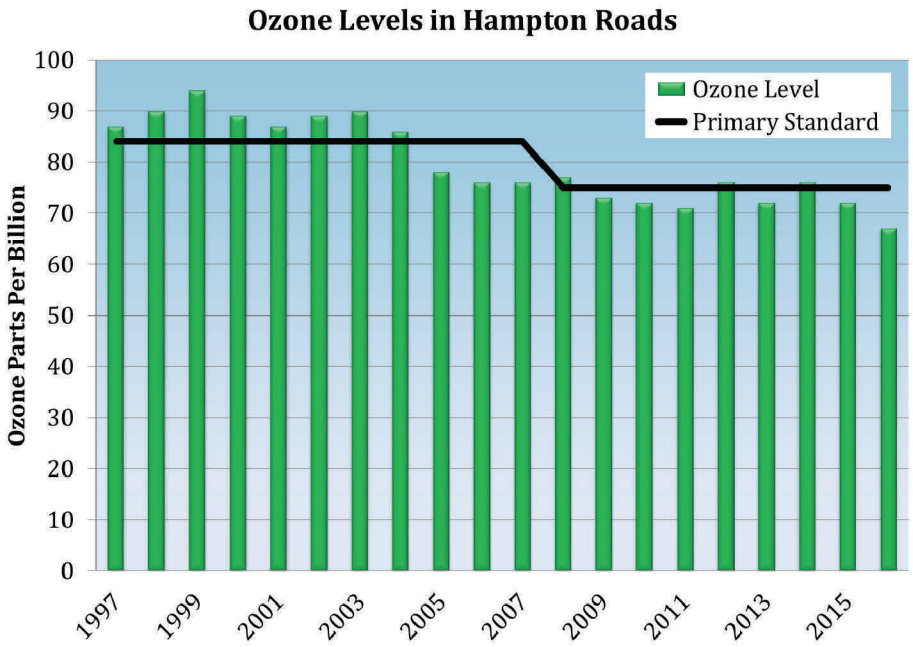
How are we doing?

Hampton Roads is in compliance with all four of the air pollutants tracked by the DEQ. The region is challenged by the ozone standard, likely due to summer weather patterns causing significant impacts to its formation.



Source: Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, HRPDC

Figure 12.8 Ozone Levels in Hampton Roads Compared to the Primary Standard- 3 Year Moving Average



Source: Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, HRPDC

Why is it important?

According to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, short-term exposure to ambient ozone can have serious health implications.

How are we doing?

The EPA increased the air quality standard for ozone, lowering the acceptable level to 75ppb in 2008, and down to 70 ppb in 2015. These tighter standards moved Hampton Roads just slightly out of compliance in 2008 and again in 2012. Ozone levels in the region have realized a steady decline since 2012.