



NYS Commuting (Part 1): Tompkins County Walks

Posted by [Glenn](#) on September 8, 2005 - 8:13pm in [The Oil Drum: Local](#)

Topic: [Demand/Consumption](#)

Walking is one of the most energy efficient and healthy means of transportation (besides biking) since it relies completely on your own two feet. Not long ago in our nation's history, before WWII, walking was the most common form of transportation to work. Factories and offices were built in towns where there was enough labor nearby to walk to work. Workers lived in close proximity to major centers of employment in dense housing and living situations where communities could build around them. While Manhattan (New York County) has the largest percentage (22%) of residents walking to work, the runner-up may surprise you: In Tompkins County in central upstate New York, 16% of residents walk to work, more than triple the state average.

This is the first part of a series of posts I will be doing on how New Yorkers Commute to work. I rely heavily on some of the 2000 Census Data I downloaded recently on New York State. New York is diverse state in terms of geography, urbanization, household income, local economics, etc. These all factor into our overall energy consumption and in particular, how we commute to work. The reason I will be focusing on commuting to work is that is one of the few areas that people will be less elastic in their consumption of gas.

The secret of this high rate of walking is Ithaca, the County seat of Tompkins. Ithaca, NY is not just the home of Cornell University and Ithaca College, it is also a very progressive small town of 28,775 (without students!) that makes up about 30% of the county's total population. Tompkins County is ranked 29th in the state in terms of total population out of 63 Counties.

What makes Tompkins county different from the rest of upstate New York - including much bigger urban areas like Albany, Buffalo and Syracuse - is the density of the housing in Ithaca and the surrounding areas combined with an employment base that is still located withing walking distance for many people. Less than half of Tompkins county residents live in single detached houses. Instead, 37% live in buildings with more than 2 units and 14% live in attached one family units. Dense housing creates less dependence on cars. And probably less obesity (I'm still looking for county level health data like that).

Cornell is a major employer and many of the workers live near campus. The town has resisted numerous threats to its downtown retail and commercial district from large big box retailers. Most employers have realized that people value their ability to work in the downtown area, near shops, restaurants, the library, etc.

Good zoning laws, sensible urban planning and co-locating businesses and residents makes for a more sustainable living environment. Walk on Ithaca! Walk on Tompkins County!

[peak oil](#), [sustainable living](#), [Tompkins County](#), [Ithaca](#), [Housing](#), [Gas Prices](#),



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