METRO TRENDS

Economic Review and Outlook

DECEMBER 2025

The Future of Energy

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METROPLAN

Metroplan's *Economic Review and Outlook* is an annual chronicle providing economic data and insight for the Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway MSA.

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Lynn Bell—layout, editing, and illustrations*

Photographs by Metroplan staff except where noted.

Acknowledgments
This edition of the *Metrotrends* newsletter, like all others, was helped along by many hands (and minds). We'd like to thank the professionals we interviewed for their insights, photos, and data. And, as always, several members of the Metroplan staff provided vital help with maps (Jeff Runder), building permit data (Iris Woods), and editing (Casey Covington, Tammy Gillis, and Bernadette Rhodes).

This report was funded in part through grant(s) from the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation. The views and opinions of the authors expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

*Digital drawings of solar panels from iStockphoto.com.

About this Edition

This edition of the *Metrotrends Economic Review and Outlook* newsletter covers the customary economic data, but puts its focus on emerging trends in renewable energy. Advancements in solar and electic vehicle technology have brought costs down, creating abundant resources that are good for the environment while creating jobs and saving money for companies and municipalities. The cover art illustrates the burgeoning residential and agriculture uses of solar, as well as electric vehicles and efficient trucks and equipment.

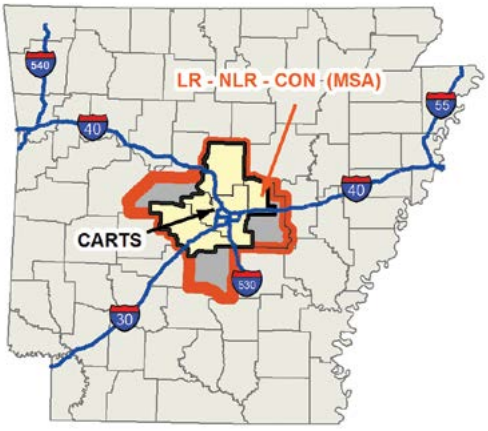
About Metroplan

Metroplan is a voluntary association of local governments that has operated by interlocal agreement since 1955. Originally formed as the Metropolitan Area Planning Commission of Pulaski County, Metroplan now has members in five counties of the six-county metro area. Metroplan is the designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) under Title 23 of the United States Code.

Metroplan serves as the regional voice on issues affecting Central Arkansas, develops transportation plans required by federal law, convenes stakeholders to deal with common issues, and provides information and staff resources to our member local governments, the business community, and the public. As part of that mission, Metroplan publishes *Metrotrends* twice yearly. The spring/summer edition is the *Demographic Review and Outlook*; the fall/winter edition is the *Economic Review and Outlook*.

About CARTS

The Central Arkansas Regional Transportation Study, or CARTS, is the cooperative effort by the participating communities, transportation providers and many other interested parties to develop a long-range transportation plan for the metropolitan area.



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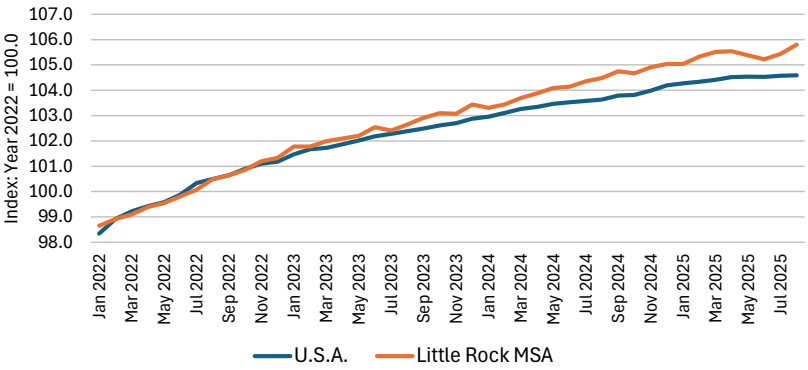
THE REGIONAL ECONOMY IN 2025

Central Arkansas continues with its track record for steady growth. Job growth has slowed since 2022 but remains above the U.S. average for the 2022–2025 period. In August 2025 the region hosted 402,000 jobs, with a growth rate of 1.3 percent compared with August 2024. U.S. job growth was 0.9 percent over the same interval.

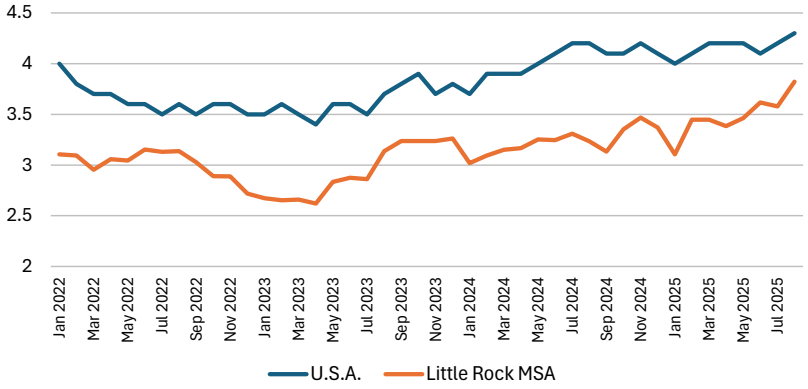
Unemployment has ticked up, but only slightly, from a post-pandemic low around 2.6 percent locally to around 3.8 percent in August 2025. This remains a bit lower than the 4.3 percent U.S. average.

Employment Trend January 2022–August 2025



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Seasonally adjusted index.

Unemployment Trend January 2022–August 2025



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, seasonally adjusted.

The table at right conveys Location Quotient (LQ) of regional economic sectors, in comparison with the U.S. average. Any LQ score above 1.0 suggests greater-than-average emphasis, while sectors with scores below 1 are smaller than the U.S. average. You can quickly see the region's highest score is in the Transportation, Warehouse and Utility sectors. It is also above average in the closely related Wholesale Trade sector.

Jobs in Little Rock MSA
August 2025

Seasonally adjusted	402,400
Not seasonally adjusted	401,000

Unemployment Rate Comparison
August 2025

	U.S.	Little Rock MSA
Seasonally adjusted	4.3	3.8
Not seasonally adjusted	4.5	3.9

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
Jobs data from Nonfarm payroll jobs series.

Location Quotients of Regional Economic Sectors

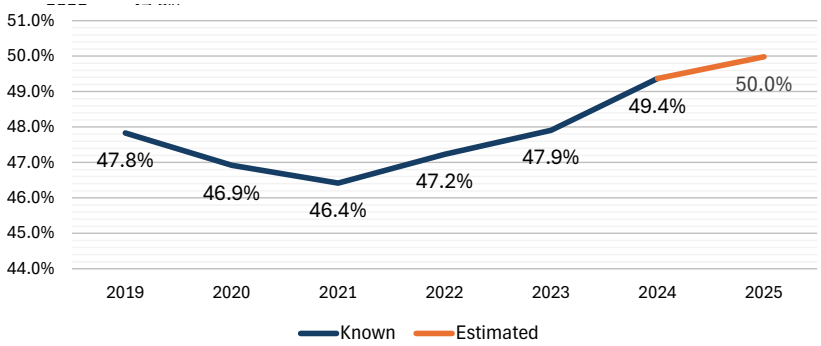
Little Rock MSA Industry Sectors	Location Quotient
Mining + Construction	0.93
Manufacturing	0.68
Wholesale Trade	1.15
Retail Trade	1.01
Transp., Warehouse, Utility	1.27
Information	0.67
Financial	1.21
Professional / Bus. Svcs.	0.84
Health / Education	1.03
Leisure + Hospitality	0.85
Other Services	1.23
Government	1.21

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The region continues to develop its role in logistics and transportation. Major shifts in the international trading order have fed recent demand for logistical and warehousing services, and the local area has responded with shovel-ready site availability and a quick approval process. Local labor force participation continues growing, reaching 50 percent of population in 2025. The labor force matched its 2019 pre-Covid peak by 2023 but has continued making gains as a share of population. While low local unemployment rates could suggest a labor shortage, participation growth suggests ambitious firms can find a growing supply of willing workers.

Central Arkansas plays a prominent role in a business sector that gets little public attention: power grid management. Recent data analysis has revealed that the region holds about 6 percent of all U.S. jobs in NAICS category 221121, "Bulk Electric Power Transmission." Two firms, MISO and the Southwest Power Pool, dominate this local sector, with about 1,750 jobs by the most recent count. This amounts to a local LQ of over 25.0—probably the highest in the regional economy, and hence a

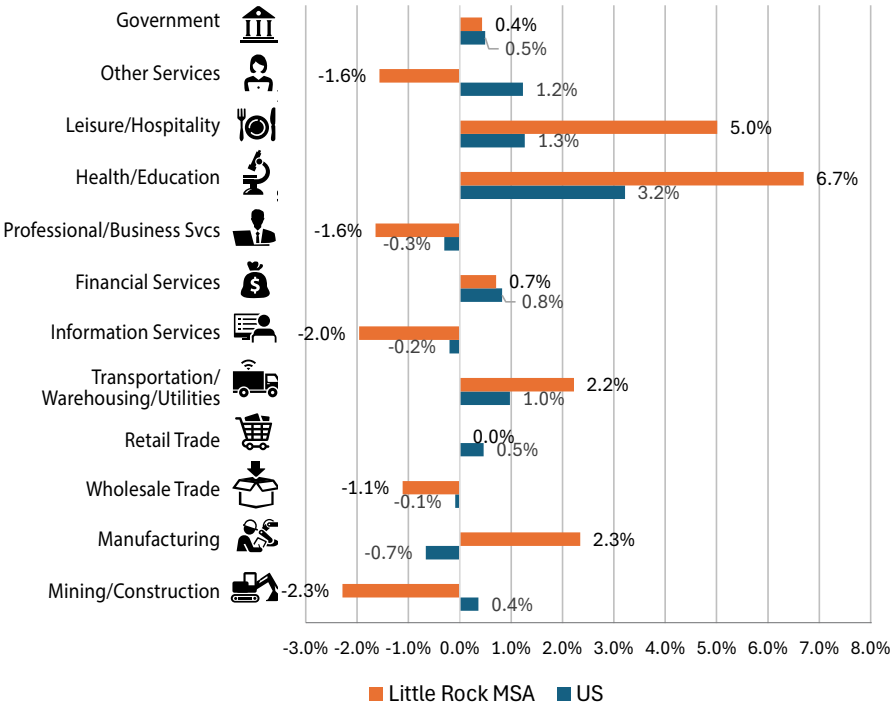
Central Arkansas Labor Force Share of Population 2019–2025



Sources: Decennial Census 2020. Metroplan population estimates and interpolations. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Warehousing and transportation have been winners for the regional economy in recent years.

Percent Job Change by Sector 2024–2025



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

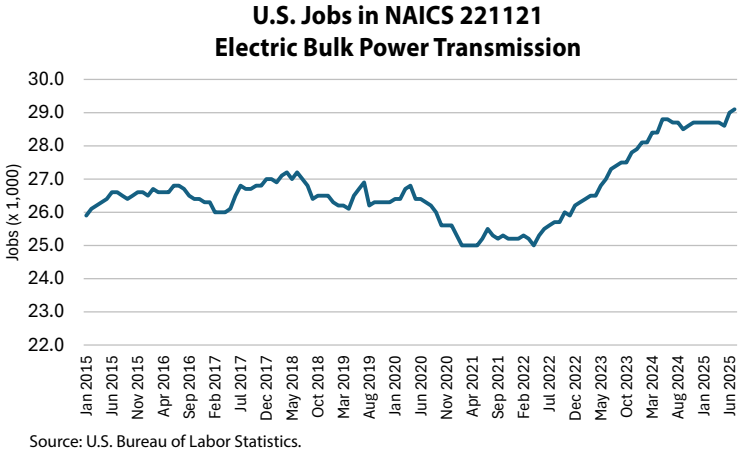
Jobs by Industry

The chart at left compares job change by industry for the U.S. and Central Arkansas economies. Over the past year the regional economy has been gaining jobs faster than the U.S. average in most sectors. Local outperformance has been notable in the large health/education sector, as well as leisure and hospitality, manufacturing, and in the transportation, utility and warehousing sectors. It also continues to gain jobs in finance and government.

major economic driving force. This important sector has seen substantial national job growth since about 2022. This growth has been driven by demand growth (data centers) and the need to improve transmission response for outages related to extreme weather.

Energy demand has been a prominent news issue lately, with growing concerns about constrained electricity supply. Whether the problem stems from growing power demand from data centers, crypto-mining, automation-related electrification of machinery and tools, or general economic growth, customer bills are showing the strain. Over the short term, there is a looming anxiety about electric power shortage.

Despite today's electricity market pressures—or because of them—a revolution is underway in renewable energy that has the potential to transform shortfall into abundance. Solar is already one of the lowest-cost energy sources, and performance continues improving. This edition of the *Metrotrends Economic Review and Outlook* will describe this unexpected energy metamorphosis.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

MOVING CARGO EFFICIENTLY AT LSI

Logistic Services, Inc. (LSI) uses cranes to lift cargoes from barges and trains onto trucks, a small but indispensable part of operations at the Port of Little Rock. LSI participates in a 2024 Sustainability Plan sponsored by its corporate owners, reducing emissions while improving productivity. Its new Manitowoc crane—built in the U.S.A.— operates with about 60 percent less diesel fuel, on an hourly basis, than the crane it replaced. In 2026, another crane will be retired and a more efficient one added. LSI's new systems include a link belt material handler that yields 35 to 40 percent lower carbon emissions, while moving materials faster than the former machine. LSI also emphasizes dust mitigation with bulk products, reducing emissions while also cutting down on wastage. LSI manages a wide variety of products, including steel and aluminum coils, fertilizer, petcoke, wetcake, and bauxite.

This new crane at LSI lifts steel coils more quickly, with less energy use, than its predecessor. Photo credit: Logistic Services.

LSI is also in the warehousing business, a growing market segment in today's trading environment. It offers bonded warehouses, meaning self-contained storage space giving customers the same advantages as a foreign trade zone, but on a more economical scale.

Carrix, LSI's parent company, is the world's largest privately-held marine and rail terminal operator. It manages over 250 locations on five continents.[1]

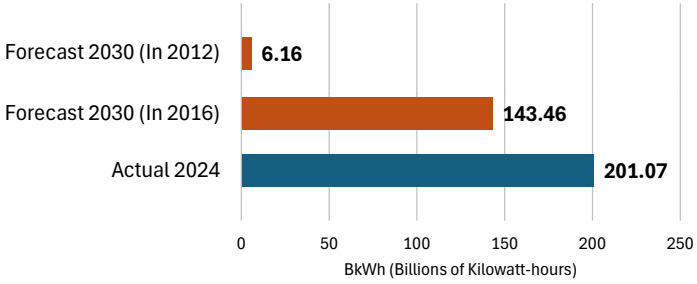
[1]portoflittlerock.com/2024/01/logistics-services-inc-the-port-of-little-rocks-stevedoring-partner/

GET READY FOR AN ENERGY REVOLUTION

In 2012, photovoltaic (PV) electricity was a tiny but fast-growing industry. In that year, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) forecast that PV capacity would triple in less than three decades: the U.S. would generate 6.16 BkWh[1] of grid electricity from PV power by 2030. Instead, solar went exponential. By 2016 PV electricity generation had zoomed above 19 BkWh—more than five times the amount forecast for the year 2030 by the EIA back in 2012.

The forecast-shattering trend has not stopped. In 2024, the U.S. generated over 201.7 BkWh of solar power. This is 40 percent more than the IEA forecast back in 2016 for the year 2030. U.S. solar generation grew by a factor of nine from 2014 to 2024. In short, forecasts in recent years have consistently undershot the exponential growth that is occurring in solar energy.

U.S. Energy Information Administration
PV Electricity Forecasts

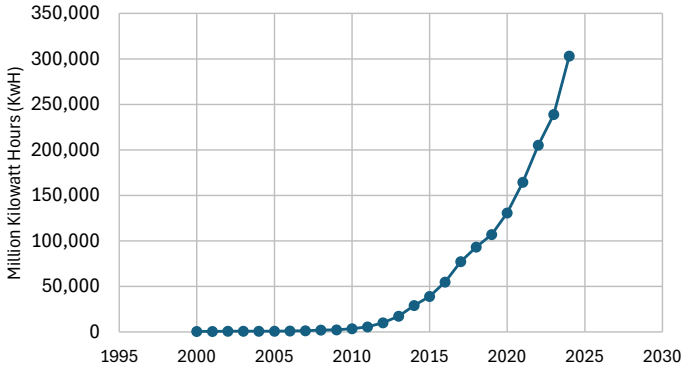


Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration.

There are qualifying factors. Solar electricity is affected by weather and season. Solar requires storage, and must be balanced with other sources to maintain steady power flow. Technologies for countering these issues are also growing exponentially—especially battery storage. Federal policies have shifted over the past year, and this will slow the growth in solar energy—but only slightly.[2]

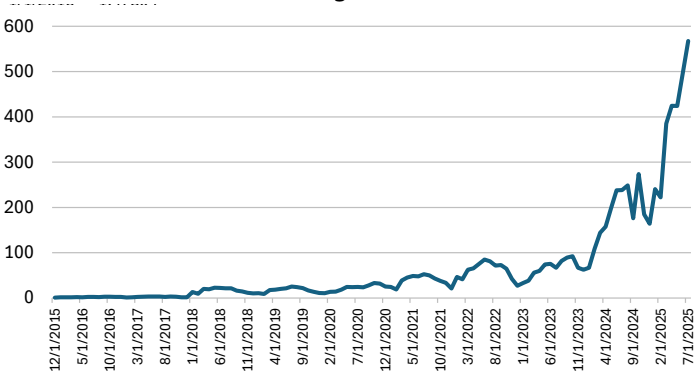
What about Arkansas? It lags in clean energy trends, right? Yet state solar electricity has roughly quadrupled in the past two years.[3] Solar output that was negligible as recently as 2017 is now powering factories, EV charging stations, houses, offices, and farms.

U.S. Solar Electricity Generation 2000–2024



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Arkansas Utility-Scale Solar Energy Generation
(thousand megawatt hours)



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration.

1 Billion Kilowatt-hours.
2 Rachel Dobbs, "The Power of Positive Tipping Points," Economist August 15, 2025.
3 Conservative estimate, making allowance for seasonal variations.
4 "The Sun Machines," Economist, June 22 2024.

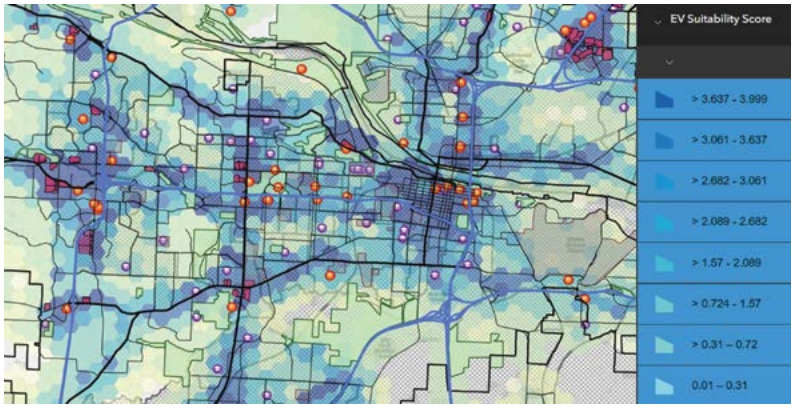
What is happening with solar power today is less a clean energy agenda than a technological revolution, propelled by continuing cost reductions to inputs like the polysilicon for solar panels. Impacts will go far beyond potentially reducing carbon emissions. When energy gets cheaper, people use it more. Power-intensive practices that were once too expensive will become affordable.[4] Just as the advent of coal energy once jump-started industrialization, PV electricity has the potential to transform the world as we know it.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

While EVs remain a small portion of the vehicle fleet, their use is growing rapidly. With the help of a CPRG grant* from the EPA, Metroplan is assisting with funding for charging stations across Central Arkansas. So far, nine have been installed. You may be driving an electric vehicle sooner than you think, thanks to a continuing revolution in energy and battery technology. These chargers will help make the transition.

Through the CPRG grant, Metroplan is helping fund charging stations in towns like Keo (Mayor Stephanie White pictured at left) and England and assisting cities such as Little Rock with the costs of an EV fleet.

EV Charger Suitability Tool Heat Map Preview



This screenshot illustrates the tool's interactive heat map interface, highlighting zones scored for high-priority charger deployment based on combined criteria like residential density and traffic flow.

The image on the left depicts the Suitability Analysis Tool developed by Metroplan. It is a web-based heatmap tool that assists with identifying likely sites for EV charger deployment based on factors like multi-family housing density and workforce concentration.

* This refers to a $99.9 million Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG) from EPA to Metroplan in a tri-regional coalition of Central Arkansas with the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission and the City of Fort Smith.
Total Funding: $99,999,999 Central Arkansas Award: $49,250,000

LEADING THE TREND AT SEAL SOLAR

In 2012, Seal Energy Solutions opened for business, providing energy audits and insulation upgrades for businesses and homes—the term "seal" refers to sealing leaks for improved energy efficiency. The business was highly successful, but around 2016 its team grew excited about the promising trends in solar energy, and by 2019, with a name adjustment, the switch to solar was complete. Today Seal Solar installs photovoltaic (PV) solar panels and batteries with a staff of about 40 employees.

As solar energy gains economic prominence, it offers job opportunities for installation and maintenance.

Seal Solar does most of its business with commercial customers. Solar is particularly effective in agriculture, with critical activities like irrigation water-pumping and grain drying that demand heavy (and expensive) power loads. Solar pays back quickly for these customers.

We talked with Josh Davenport and J.D. Poole at Seal Solar, and gained crucial insights into their business and the future of solar energy in Arkansas. Electrical demand is surging, propelled in part by the rapid expansion in data centers for AI. Also, more energy users are switching to electric power. Electric systems tend to last longer than fossil fuel alternatives. For example, a typical solar array has a warrantied life cycle of about 25 years. Even after the warranty expires, panels typically remain about 80 percent efficient.

Grain drying is energy-intensive and often located in remote areas. This makes it a good match for "behind the grid" solar power.

With the help of USDA Rural Development, Rusty Tractor is Arkansas' first 100 percent solar powered vineyard.

All photos on this spread courtesy of Seal Solar.

> "Solar will continue to grow despite changes in federal policy. There are multiple utility scale projects to be constructed over the next few years."
>
> —J.D. Poole, Vice President of Special Projects and Marketing, Seal Solar

With a compact battery like this, residential users get a backup generator for emergencies when the grid goes down.

State law on "net metering" changed in late 2024, meaning solar providers selling electricity back to the grid are compensated at lower wholesale rates, rather than retail rates. This has tended to shift the business toward larger solar arrays to gain economies of scale. More operations are now "behind the meter," i.e. providing power directly and off the main grid.

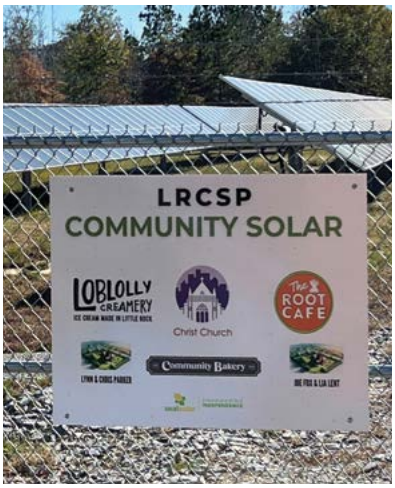
At the same time Seal Solar also does business with residential customers. Higher interest rates since 2022 have increased costs and dampened demand, but Seal Solar still serves residential customers, often filling the gap as other businesses exit the sector in face of altered federal policies.

Seal Solar sees opportunity in its Arkansas home environment. The state gets a lot of sunshine, with plenty of flat land without shade, especially in the Delta region. Despite criticism about displacing land, solar only occupies about 0.2 percent of the state's agricultural land, and even in case of an "extreme level of solar development," would still use less than 1 percent.

There is a niche to develop a "green collar" workforce around the local solar industry. Tariff requirements give an edge to domestic manufacturing, and the state is notable for its rapid-response workforce development.

Solar installations tend to repay their costs quickly, with a lengthy service life of low-cost power.

The winding down of federal tax incentives has added some headwinds for the solar industry. Solar costs have nevertheless fallen below those of fossil fuels, and will keep dropping.[1] The business prospect remains promising.



The LRCSP Community Solar array powers Loblolly Creamery, Christ Episcopal Church, Root Café, the Community Bakery, and two private residences.

"We're proud of our team's ability to work together in high pressure situations to meet our common goals."

—The Seal Solar Team

[1] Economist, September 16, 2025.
Renewable Power Generation Costs in 2023, International Renewable Energy Agency.
Annual Energy Outlook 2025, U.S. Energy Information Administration.

POWERING FROM SOLAR AT LEXICON

Lexicon, Inc. is headquartered in Little Rock and employs 3,400 workers nationwide. It runs steel fabrication shops—one at the Port of Little Rock and two in Blytheville— and is also an industrial contractor and a builder of golf courses. Lexicon does not make steel; it assembles steel parts into units like industrial beams and girders. While much fabrication is done on-site, the company also builds industrial facilities, like data centers and giant warehouses. It builds huge industrial sites for steel and auto manufacturers, including all the steel mills in northeast Arkansas near Blytheville.

This business of assembling steel parts demands a lot of electric power. A few years ago, boosted by federal incentives, Lexicon contracted with Seal Solar to build two solar arrays shown in the table:

Location	Acreage	Capacity
Lonoke County	20	2.5 mw
Mississippi County	10	0.95 mw

This has proven a winner, even after changes in state net-metering laws that have reduced compensation for solar contributions to the grid. In economic terms, by using solar, Lexicon offsets 70% of its electric usage in Arkansas, albeit with some variability due to monthly weather. This is more than good budgeting. It also helps win contracts to build industrial facilities from Hyundai, Volkswagen, Tesla and others— international companies which have pledged to reduce emissions.

Making sparks, shaping steel, and helping build the future one weld at a time at Lexicon.

All photos on this page courtesy of Lexicon.

Lexicon hard at work on one of the nation's most environmentally advanced steel mills.

While robots do about 20 percent of the work, Lexicon nurtures its human workforce and partners with local education providers—especially Mills High School—to train youthful programmers, welders and fabricators. The company now flies drones over its construction sites to perform quality checks and measurements that speed production and improve overall efficiency. Work has shifted in just a few years from manual measurement and riveting to using CNC machines that assemble parts with unprecedented precision at speeds considered impossible a few short years ago. Solar energy is quietly behind the scenes, powering a thriving and growing enterprise.

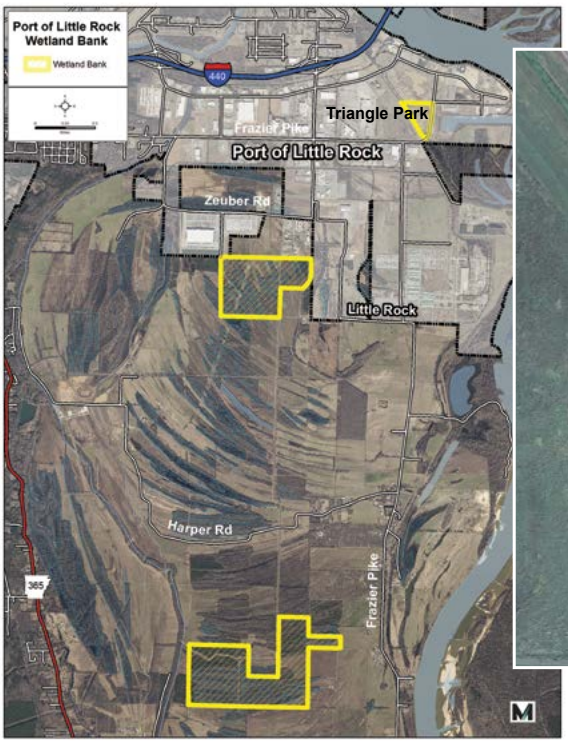
> "It's already paid for itself, after only four or five years."
>
> —Jeff Weatherly, Lexicon CFO

Viji Kuruvilla, VP of Quality, speaking with students and teachers at Mills High School after the grand opening of their new welding lab—proudly sponsored by Lexicon.

TRIANGLE PARK AND WETLANDS AT THE PORT

It doesn't look like much right now, but the Port of Little Rock is working with the Audubon Society and Applied Land Restoration (ALR) to convert 29 acres of former soybean fields into a wetland nature preserve. It will become a birding habitat featuring native trees and plants, with an emphasis on pollinator species. A boardwalk will allow the visiting public to cross the wetland on foot, bike or wheelchair, enjoying the colors, as well as the tweets, chirps, and croaks of nature. Wetlands are rich and vital natural habitats, also filtering and improving water quality while reducing flooding problems nearby.

By adding the Triangle Park to the Fourche Bayou Mitigation Bank, stream and wetland offset credits will be sold to private developers permitting building sites elsewhere within the port. Over coming years, the Port of Little Rock intends to develop three additional wetland sites, tallying up to 500 additional acres. Since the Port's land area includes sizeable wetland areas, having 500+ acres of stream and wetland credits on offer will make it easier for firms to move in and develop their sites for manufacturing and warehousing, with economic benefits for the entire Central Arkansas region.



Triangle Park

Conceptual stream design image (above) courtesy of Applied Land Restoration. At left: Property dedicated to Fourche Bayou Mitigation Bank.

PULASKI COUNTY REAPS THE SOLAR HARVEST

With solar arrays at the Port of Little Rock and near the County Detention Center, Pulaski County government generates about 90 percent of the electricity it uses. This saves about $250,000 every year. As Pulaski County Judge Barry Hyde said, "To be innovative requires commitment and belief that there are more efficient ways to do things. Flipping the switch and bringing this solar array online is the result of a tremendous amount of resolve, planning and a desire to propel Pulaski County into the 21st Century."

HOUSING CONSTRUCTION

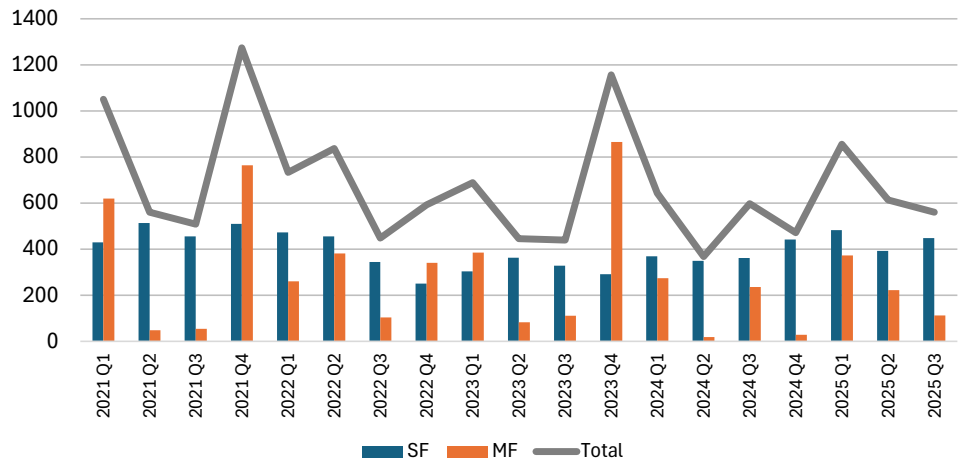
Regional housing construction is making steady progress. Single-family construction rose about 29 percent over the past year, while multi-family was down 47 percent. Total new housing units were down slightly compared with the previous year. The chart below shows the quarterly trend. As usual, single-family has churned along steadily in recent years while multi-family construction has more up-and-down bounce to it.

Most cities in the region made gains in single-family construction over the past year. Sherwood saw an 86 percent gain, Little Rock rose 61 percent, and Vilonia climbed 43 percent. Only Bryant and Cabot saw fewer new homes built, compared with the previous year.

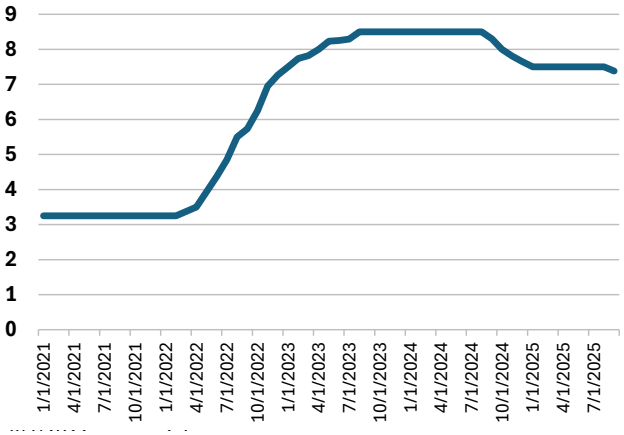
Multi-family construction remains focused in the region's largest cities, with Little Rock, Conway and North Little Rock leading the pack. In multi-family most cities were down, although North Little Rock saw a big jump mainly boosted by more units at the Pointe North Hills in Lakewood. Little Rock is seeing multi-family growth in its southwest region.

Single-family housing in the area ran a bit above the national trend in 2023 and 2024. Although the local trend sees upward and downward ticks, it is tracking the national average and will respond positively to a decline in the Federal Reserve's prime rate in the summer of 2025.

Little Rock MSA Quarterly New Housing Unit Permits 2021 Q1–2025 Q3

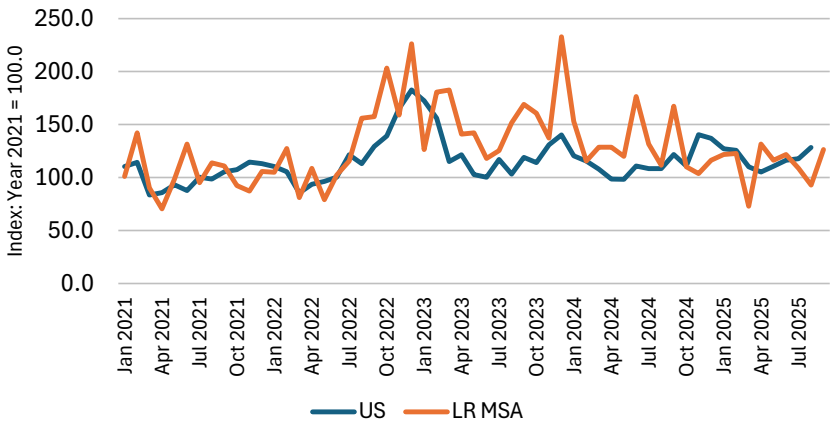


Federal Reserve Prime Interest Rate
January 2021 to September 2025



Multi-family housing in North Little Rock's Argenta neighborhood continues an expanding trend of infill housing in Central Arkansas.

Single-Family Construction Trend January 2021 to September 2025



Little Rock MSA Quarterly Housing Units by Type 2021–2025

	SINGLE-FAMILY	MULTI-FAMILY	TOTAL HOUSING UNITS
2021 Q1	430	620	1,050
2021 Q2	513	48	561
2021 Q3	455	54	509
2021 Q4	510	764	1,274
2022 Q1	473	260	733
2022 Q2	455	382	837
2022 Q3	344	104	448
2022 Q4	251	341	592
2023 Q1	304	385	689
2023 Q2	363	83	446
2023 Q3	329	111	440
2023 Q4	292	865	1,157
2024 Q1	369	274	643
2024 Q2	350	18	368
2024 Q3	362	236	598
2024 Q4	442	29	471
2025 Q1	483	373	856
2025 Q2	392	222	614
2025 Q3	448	113	561

Total Units Permitted Over Previous Year-to-Date

	Oct 23 - Sep 24	Oct 24 - Sep 25
Single-Family	1,373	1,765
Multi-family	1,393	737
Total Units	**2,766**	**2,502**

Single-family Housing Units Permitted Over Previous Year-to-Date

City	Oct 23 - Sep 24	Oct 24 - Sep 25	Percent Change
Benton	223	248	11.2%
Bryant	139	122	-12.2%
Cabot	97	70	-27.8%
Conway	129	138	7.0%
Jacksonville	80	112	40.0%
Little Rock	342	551	61.1%
Maumelle	89	110	23.6%
N Little Rock	175	230	31.4%
Sherwood	99	184	85.9%
Vilonia	75	107	42.7%

Multi-family Housing Units Permitted Over Previous Year-to-Date

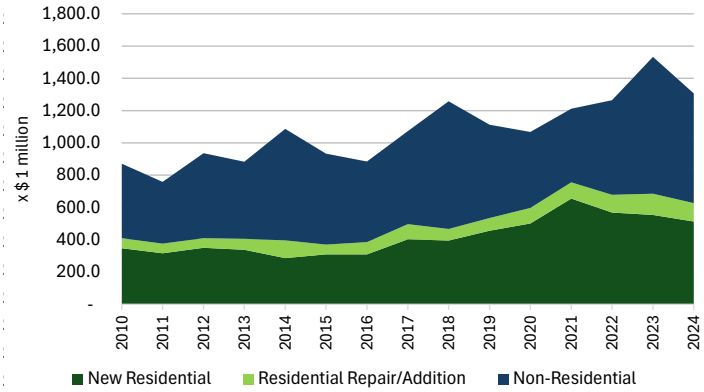
City	Oct 23 - Sep 24	Oct 24 - Sep 25
Benton	180	0
Bryant	2	8
Cabot	0	17
Conway	668	80
Jacksonville	24	38
Little Rock	500	399
Maumelle	0	0
N Little Rock	19	185
Sherwood	0	10
Vilonia	0	0

CONSTRUCTION VALUE

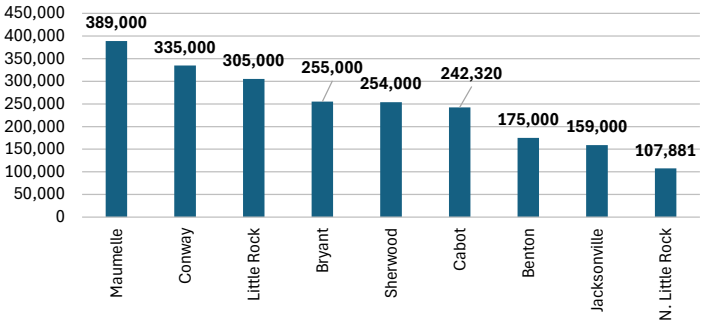
Regional construction value receded by about 14 percent in 2024 compared with the previous year. This reflects a moderate economic slowdown due to high interest rates. The region nonetheless saw $1.3 billion in new construction. Residential construction only dropped by 7.6 percent, reflecting continued demand for new housing in a growing regional economy.

The median value for new homes climbed to $254,680. As always, this is the median value calculated from building permit records; market observation suggests the initial selling price for homes is roughly double the stated permit value. The chart at right depicts new homes by stated value. Maumelle was highest at $389,000, followed by Conway ($335,000) and Little Rock ($305,000). The lowest values – at the permit stage - were found in North Little Rock at $107,881, and Jacksonville at $159,000. These figures reflect local conditions and permitting procedures, sale values run higher and may follow a differing pattern.

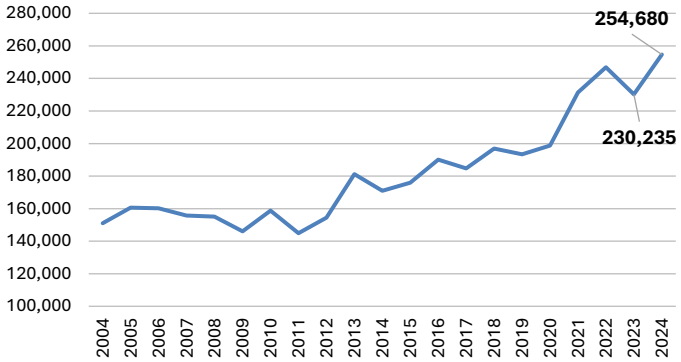
Central Arkansas Construction Value by Type 2010–2024



Median New House Permit Value 2024



Little Rock MSA Median Permitted Value of New Single-family Homes



Central Arkansas Construction Value ($ millions) 2023 and 2024

Year	New Residential	Residential Repair + Additions	Commercial and Non-Residential	Overall
2023	554.0	131.1	848.1	1,533.2
2024	512.4	114.3	679.6	1,306.4
Percent Change	-7.5%	-12.8%	-19.9%	-14.8%

With a median value of $254,680 at the permitting stage in 2025, newly-built homes in Central Arkansas sell for nearly twice as much.

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK 2026

The regional economic engine continues ticking over smoothly and delivering steady growth. Demographic factors present a labor shortage challenge but so far business startups and expansions in the region have always managed to draw in workers and thrive, demonstrated by a steady rise in regional labor force participation since 2021.

The local manufacturing outlook is strong, benefiting from national economic policy and local competitive advantages. The Port of Little Rock is seeing promising and sizeable investments from firms like Welspun (steel pipe manufacturing), Elopak (sustainable food containers), and Amazon. Infrastructure improvements and transportation planning efforts are priming the area for a "Super Site" with region-wide economic benefits.

The national economy faces risks that the AI boom, coupled with a surge in under-regulated "creative financing," could yield an investment market correction.[1] Productivity gains from AI might defy these obstacles, powering through with little disruption. In any case, the regional economy looks sound. The table at right compares Central Arkansas GDP performance against other U.S. South Central metros from 2001 to 2023. As you can see, Central Arkansas was the only one that delivered positive growth in every interval.

[1] "How Markets Could Topple the Global Economy," Economist November 13, 2025.
[2] "Geothermal's Time Has Finally Come," Economist November 18, 2025.

Central Arkansas is a major player in power transmission, benefiting from centrality and low local energy costs. Shifting federal policies will barely slow the upward-sloping curve in renewable energy, which is undergoing an exponential trend. While solar energy is limited by seasonal and weather-related factors, electricity demand peaks during the same summer months that solar output maximizes.

Geothermal energy is now benefitting from recent technological advances in drilling and fracking for fossil fuels.[2] Once tightly restricted by location, it will soon become feasible in a far wider range of sites.

Energy demand is strong, and getting stronger, causing price pressures and disruptions in the short term. Technological advances in renewable energy are altering the cost equation, and power providers will adapt. We are seeing a transformation in energy abundance that will change the economy as we know it.

Metro Area GDP Change 2001–2023

Metro Area	2001–05	2005–10	2010–15	2015–20	2020–23
Baton Rouge, LA	36.6%	-5.9%	20.2%	-12.3%	9.5%
Fayetteville AR	33.0%	-0.7%	27.1%	19.5%	15.7%
Jackson, MS	13.0%	0.3%	8.0%	-1.9%	9.6%
Little Rock AR	**18.9%**	**1.2%**	**6.1%**	**3.6%**	**9.5%**
Memphis, TN-MS-AR	7.7%	-5.5%	7.3%	3.6%	7.3%
Tulsa, OK	7.1%	7.1%	23.1%	-7.1%	9.5%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

CLINTON NATIONAL AIRPORT GOES GEOTHERMAL

Construction is currently underway for a geothermal field at Little Rock's Clinton National Airport. Funded by Metroplan with the help of a CPRG grant from the EPA, the system will power the airport's heat and cooling needs. The land will help with transportation too, since once the underground geothermal field is complete, it will do double duty as a surface parking lot.

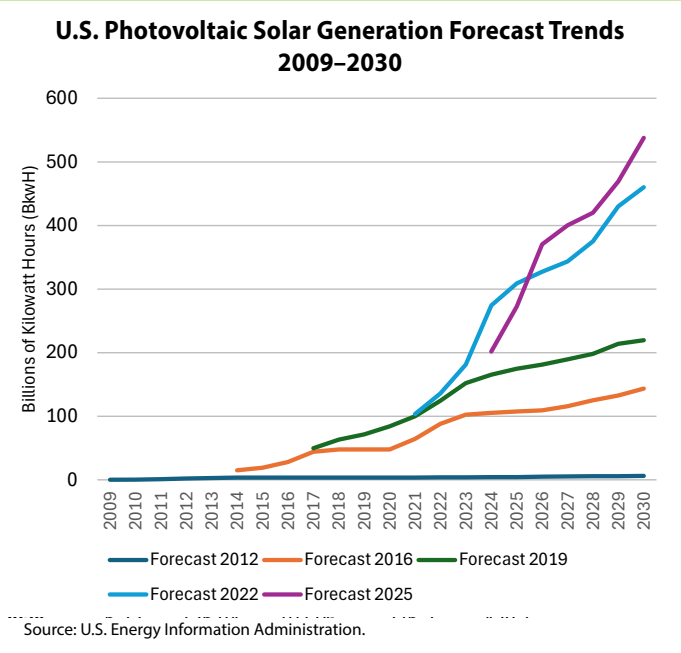
STATISTICAL SUPPLEMENT 2025

ENERGY OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

This newsletter edition points to a coming era of abundance in energy. While that sounds hypothetical and theoretical, opportunities exist here and now. Local government agencies can benefit from Metroplan's ESPC Cohort program, which offers technical assistance and stipends to reduce energy efficiency contract costs for cities, counties and schools.

Whether your goal is to insulate buildings, install solar panels, or many other potential cost-saving strategies, we can help you to develop a scope of work and to issue RFPs to qualified Energy Service Companies. The ESPC Cohort program can help you start saving costs within a short and practical time window.

SOLAR GENERATION FORECASTS



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The chart at left shows forecasts made for photovoltaic solar power (PV) by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) since 2012. As you can see, the EIA has repeatedly forecast exponential growth, yet actual PV solar output has grown even faster. The one exception in this chart is the 2022 forecast, which exceeded the real trend in 2024 and 2025. Yet even this forecast, done when federal policy favored solar power, runs lower than the 2025 forecast which was made after a reduction in subsidies. Market forces are at work.

Two warnings are in order: (1) no trend will go exponential forever, and (2) solar is not the only rule-changer in the game: other renewable power sources like wind have also repeatedly exceeded forecasts.

The key takeaway is that, despite cost hikes and constraints in today's electric power supply, the future of energy will depend less on fossil fuels and more on renewable sources. It will be a future not of scarcity, but of unprecedented abundance.

AMAZON UNCERTAINTY

As this edition reached the brink of publication, we learned that Amazon has announced "an indefinite closure of its Port of Little Rock fulfillment center," with the loss/relocation of about 4,600 jobs.[1] The fulfillment center, which requires "structural repairs," will reopen at a future date. In the meantime, Amazon is currently constructing its "LIT 3 cross-dock facility," with a forecast opening date in 2027.

[1] "Ex-employees of Amazon hit LR job market," Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Saturday 22 November 2025.

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