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Contact: Sydney Dozier  
Phone: 501.372.3300  
E-mail: [sdozier@metroplan.org](mailto:sdozier@metroplan.org)



**METROPLAN RELEASES *THE CENTRAL ARKANSAS ECONOMY IN 2026***

**LITTLE ROCK, AR, April 6, 2026** — Metroplan announces the release of *The Central Arkansas Economy in 2026*, chronicling economic trends for the Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

Central Arkansas is still outpacing the nation in job growth—but the pace is cooling. Jobs grew 1.0% over the past year, far ahead of the U.S. rate of 0.1%, even as hiring slows from previous highs. Unemployment ticked up midyear—partly due to the temporary closure of a major Amazon facility—but has already begun trending back down, signaling underlying resilience in the regional economy.

Job growth was most pronounced in the health/education sector, followed by the leisure/hospitality sector. The region also saw moderate gains in transportation/warehousing, as well as retailing, with small additional gains in financial and manufacturing sectors.

Growth is being powered by people-focused industries, with health care and education leading the way, followed by strong gains in leisure and hospitality. Transportation, retail, finance, and manufacturing also posted steady—if more modest—growth, signaling underlying resilience in the regional economy.

- Regional retail sales edged upward in 2025, reversing the previous year’s small decline the year before.
- The regional housing market continues thriving. In 2025, new single-family home construction hit its highest level since 2021.
- Local population trends will be a critical factor for housing markets looking forward. National population growth has slowed sharply amid shifting migration policies, dropping nearly by half from 2024 to 2025. The impact on local population growth will be smaller, since Central Arkansas’ share of foreign-born population runs about half the national average.
- The national and international economies are facing uncertainties. Global tensions—including the ongoing conflict with Iran—are rattling oil markets, while inflation, now around 2.4%, and interest rate decisions will be key factors to watch in 2026.

**Bottom line:** Central Arkansas isn’t just weathering change—it’s proving it can adapt, compete, and grow in an unpredictable economic landscape.

Read the full publication by visiting: <https://metroplan.org>

Metroplan publishes *The Central Arkansas Economy* once a year. All articles, tables and figures are available for republishing with credit. This issue is available as a PDF or paper copy from Metroplan.

Metroplan is the federally designated metropolitan planning organization for the four-county region of Faulkner, Lonoke, Pulaski, and Saline counties. It is a voluntary association of local governments that has operated since 1955.

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