American Community Survey (ACS)
Why We Ask: Commuting/ Journey to Work

We ask questions about where people work, how they get there, when they leave, and how long it takes, to create statistics about commuting, or a person’s journey to work. This information is for planning improvements to roads and highways and planning emergency response routes.

The 1960 Census was the first to ask about how people get to work. In 1970, the Census added a question about where a person worked, and in 1980, the Census added a question about how long it took to get there. In order to calculate peak travel times, a time of departure question (What time did this person usually leave home to go to work last week?) was introduced to the 1990 Census, and retained for Census 2000.

Examples of Federal Uses
- Required in transportation planning to ensure compliance with various Federal regulations.
- Required to understand where people could reasonably commute from in order to work in a certain area. This information is then used for employment planning, protection against employment discrimination, defining banking and housing markets, planning emergency response, etc.
- Used in transportation planning to understand the current users of various transportation options, and forecast future use.

Examples of Other Uses
State Departments of Transportation (DOTs) and regional planning agencies use commuting information for long range transportation planning and travel demand forecasting. Local planning agencies and organizations use these statistics to address unmet transportation needs such as services for the disabled population, bicycle commuters, carpool and ride shares, and many other groups. Researchers use these estimates to study the effects of long commutes on health (obesity, hypertension, etc.), and on the environment (emissions, contaminants, etc.).