

2020 CENSUS CRITERIA CHANGE IMPACTS ON THE KINGSTON URBANIZED AREA & UCTC

Proposed Urban Area Delineation Criteria:

The Census Bureau is proposing two changes that impact how urbanized areas are designated.

The first change is to how urban census blocks are qualified. This change would use 385 housing units per square mile rather than a population density count that totals 50,000 people.

The second change would alter the distance between populated areas and those areas that are not populated that could be jumped so as to be included in the urbanized area. The change would reduce the distance from 2.5 miles to 1.5 miles.

Each of these changes in and of themselves will reduce the urbanized population in the Kingston UZA below required 50,000 population to be considered as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The change to housing unit density versus population will eliminate the fringe areas of Kingston UZA such as Hurley, Rosendale, and Esopus. The change in the distance allowed for jumps over unpopulated areas will eliminate the Saugerties and Woodstock areas.

It should be noted that the actual size of the Kingston UZA and its population increased between the 2000 and 2010 census to where it stands at 57,442. The County anticipates that the 2020 population will show a small increase within this geographic area; however, the new census methodology will not consider many of them to be urban.

Ulster County's topography with numerous streams and steep slopes creates broad flood plains and other areas that are unbuildable. As such, the lands in the City of Kingston represent a unique opportunity for concentrated development. As we move to the fringes, commercial development intervenes in the corridors with residential development more scattered due to the unbuildable nature of the land. The Census changes are likely to mean that Ulster County will continue to be unable to meet the definition of an Urbanized area well into the future, if at all.

Urbanized areas have been counted by people per square mile since the 1960's.

Impact on Available Funding

Census data informs how federal funds are to be distributed to states and local communities. The following funding allocations and distributions are based upon an urbanized area of 50,000 or more.

- Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Funding. These funds are used for to support Ulster County Public Transit System's (UCAT) operations and capital needs. Current annual allocations that would be lost are over **\$1.2 million dollars annually**.

UCAT would be forced to rely on allocations of rural transit dollars that are already limited. Current allocation of rural funding for UCAT that covers the more than 40

percent of the County that is rural is less than \$250,000 per year.

- Federal Transportation Planning Funds. The Ulster County Transportation Council (UCTC) is the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Kingston UZA. The failure to meet the 50,000-population threshold would mean that that the MPO would cease to exist and its annual allocation of \$447,468 would be lost and with it the ability to perform locally driven analysis of the area’s transportation needs.

Suggested Solutions

1. Require the Census Bureau to continue to utilize the 2010 census methodology for the 2021 Census.
2. Require the Census Bureau to produce population statistics for the 2021 Census based on the 2010 methodology to be used for the allocation of funding for the transportation related programs. Essentially, a ‘two sets of books’ approach whereby FHWA programs utilize the 2010 methodology.
3. Insert into the Surface Transportation Reauthorization language that all urban areas that fall below the required 50,000 threshold due to a change in the census methodology shall be *held harmless* and formula federal funding shall be based either on 2010 census populations and or the 2020 total of the block group population that lies within the 2010 urbanized area boundary

It further remains to be seen what steps states must take to address any urbanized areas that may drop below the traditional 50,000 threshold. It is not certain that such MPOs in will necessarily ‘go away.’

Schedule

Spring 2021	US Commerce Dept. published proposed urban/rural criteria in the Federal Register ¹
May 20, 2021	Deadline for Comments on the Federal Register Notice
Summer 2021	Review of Proposed Changes, Development of final criteria
Winter 2021	Publish final urban/rural criteria in Federal Register
Summer 2022	Execute analysis using 2020 data and announce new 2020 UAs

¹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/19/2021-03412/urban-areas-for-the-2020-census-proposed-criteria>