
Feature Article: Regional Migration Outlook

Summary

BC STATS prepares population projections for the province as a whole, as well as for various areas within the province, such as development regions (8), regional districts (28) and local health areas (88). The projections are updated annually to reflect the most recent information on regional trends in fertility, mortality and migration, as well as specific events that could affect population growth. This article presents the major migration assumptions underlying the latest update (P.E.O.P.L.E. 26) to the sub-provincial projections.

The short-term outlook for this projection is for an improving provincial economy, which in turn will result in a return to positive net interprovincial migration flows to British Columbia. The resource sectors are showing signs of recovery, but are still experiencing some difficulties. There is likely to be below average net migration to communities that are resource-dependent for at least a few years. Over the longer-term, it is expected that the resource sectors will recover and that people will return to these communities.¹

Vancouver Island-Coast Region

This region has most of the population concentrated in its south-east corner, particularly within the Capital and Nanaimo regional districts. Most of the smaller communities in the northern portion of the region, and many in the more southerly areas as well, are heavily dependent on the forest sector. Consequently, migration patterns to these areas tend to fluctuate with trends in this sector. Accordingly, the short-

The British Columbia-level population projection 01/04 forms the control total population for P.E.O.P.L.E. 26 to which all regions must sum.¹ Regional migration is projected using a combination of historical trends and information on future major projects that are certain to have an impact on population. In general, the long-term (beyond five years) forecasts are based on historical trends with some very broad assumptions used to modify these trends. In the short-term, consideration is given to more specific events that will drive migration patterns. Examples are mine openings and closures, changes to the Allowable Annual Cut for various Timber Supply Areas and Tree Farm Licenses, major construction activity, or other major projects.

¹ See "Population Forecast 01/04 Technical Appendix: Forecast Assumptions," Population Section, BC Stats, Ministry of Management Services, Government of British Columbia, April 2001.

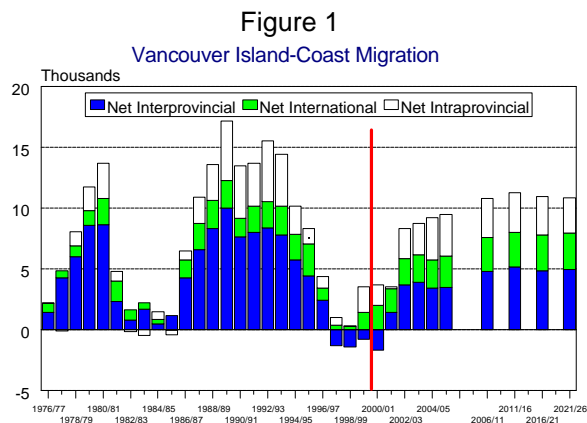
term outlook for this region is for lower than normal net migration as the forest sector continues to work through a slump, rising as export markets recover and prices for forest products rise.

Over the longer-term, it is expected that the onset of retirement for the baby boom generation will lead to somewhat larger net inflows of migrants to areas such as the Capital and Nanaimo regional districts (as well as other retirement centres such as the Okanagan). The increase in migration to these areas will likely be modest, since the elderly tend to move less than younger people. However, of those that do move, proportionately more will choose these established retirement centres and this should result in an increase in the amount of migration. Within the most heavily populated areas, there will likely be some spread outward to nearby communities, particularly as housing prices escalate in the core areas. For example, in the Capital

¹ PEOPLE 26 projections are based on information available up to May 31, 2001 and do not consider any effects of the softwood lumber countervailing duty or the effects of September 11, 2001.

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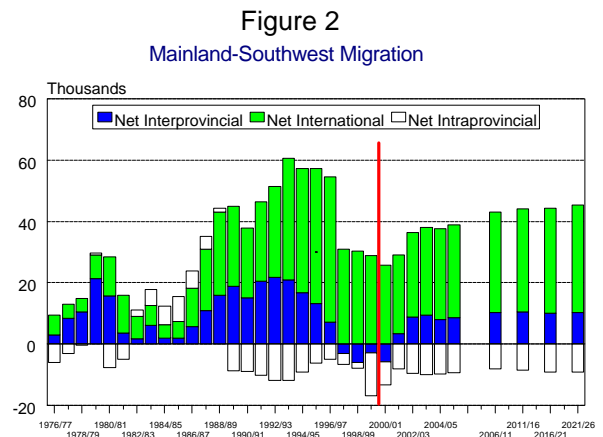
region, there will be increased growth in the Western Communities relative to the core and peninsula municipalities.



Mainland-Southwest Region

This is the most populous region in the province and receives the bulk of immigrants and interprovincial in-migrants. Over half of net interprovincial migrants to British Columbia and almost 90 percent of net international migrants to the province choose to settle in the Mainland-Southwest region. Conversely, in terms of intraprovincial migration, or migration within the province, there are generally more people moving out of the area than are moving in. In the past, when the resource sectors were in a downturn, intraprovincial outflows from the Lower Mainland have tended to decline as a result of weaker economic opportunity in the rest of the province. The short-term outlook is that current tightening in the resource sectors will lead to intraprovincial outflows from resource-dependent communities and into the Lower Mainland similar to what happened in the mid-eighties, but likely not with the same severity. This will ensure that net migration levels to this region will remain high despite significantly lower net interprovincial migration to the province.

Over the longer-term, the distribution of growth in the Mainland-Southwest region will be influenced by the implementation of the *Livable Region Strategic Plan* for the Greater Vancouver Regional District. This plan proposes a “growth concentration area” comprised of Burnaby, Coquitlam, Port Moody, Port Coquitlam, New Westminster, Vancouver, North Surrey, and North Delta. The plan is to concentrate growth in these areas and to reduce traffic congestion by locating jobs near where people live. The patterns of growth will depend largely on the timing of transportation projects such as the proposed Skytrain lines. The longer-term outlook is for reduced growth rates for areas outside the growth concentration area, but as long as migration to the province continues to be strong, all areas within this region will continue to experience growth.



Thompson-Okanagan Region

This region is generally known for agriculture and tourism, but it also has a strong dependence on forestry, and activities in that sector will have an effect on migration flows to the area. Mining is also an important economic driver, and the closure of

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four mines in the last few years will contribute to a reduction in migration to this region in the short-term. When the Highland Valley mine closes some time after 2010, there could be a significant reduction in migration into this area. This mine is currently the largest in the province and employs over a thousand people. The sheer size of the mine will ensure that there will be an increase in movement from the area when the closure occurs. Movement into the region will probably still outnumber movement out, but the net migration level will be reduced.

Conversely, there could be an increase in migration around 2005 when baby boomers begin to retire. This area is a popular retirement centre, and the increase in the proportion of retirees in the population will benefit this region. Over the longer-term, this area can expect to receive strong migration growth, on average, with the economic cycle in the resource sectors exerting some influence on the magnitude of migration flows.

Figure 3
Thompson-Okanagan Migration

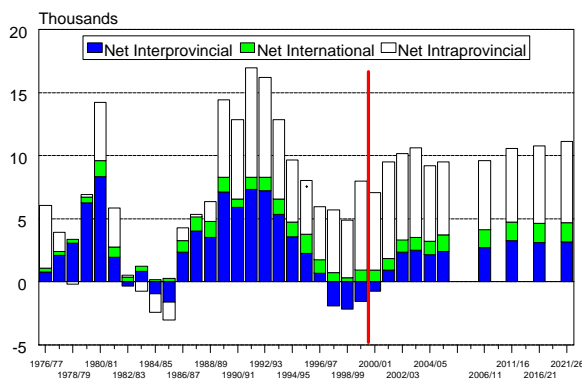
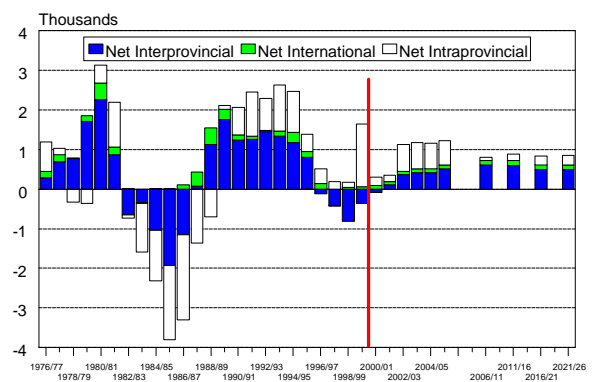


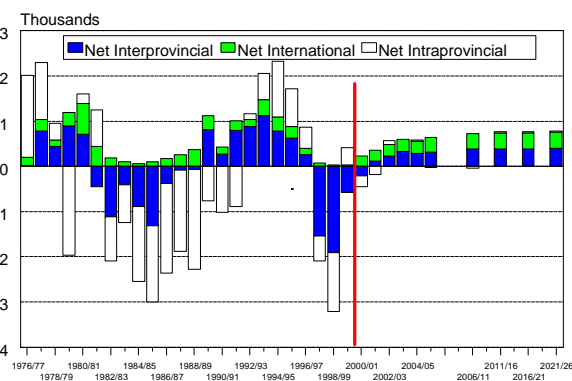
Figure 4
Kootenay Migration



Cariboo Region

This region experienced strong population growth through much of the nineties, but with the downturn in the resource sectors, there was significant net out-migration in the last few years. The Cariboo is home to a large number of sawmills and pulp mills and as such, is highly dependent on the fortunes of the forest industry. It is expected that migration to this area will slow considerably over the short-term until the resource sectors begin to recover, with some net migration outflows for at least the next year. There are some significant mineral deposits that will bring people into the area once they are developed, but until metal prices improve, it is unlikely that any new mines will be constructed. Over the longer-term, the outlook is for relatively strong positive net inflows, on average.

Figure 5
Cariboo Migration

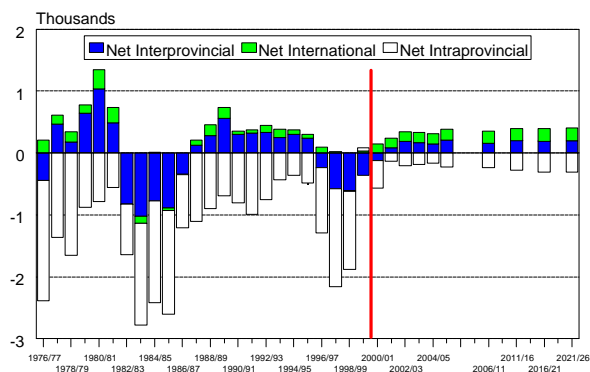


North Coast Region

This region has traditionally experienced net outflows of migrants, but with the major projects planned for the region, it is expected that there will be small net inflows of migrants over the longer-term. The Kitimat-Terrace area, in particular, should gain from one of the planned projects. The agreement between Alcan and the provin-

cial government concerning compensation for the cancellation of the Kemano Completion project should result in the expansion of the aluminum smelter at Kitimat. This project should result in net inflows of people to the region as the employment base is expanded. In addition to direct employment at the smelter, there will be significant indirect and induced employment as well, which should benefit Terrace as well as Kitimat. There are also several mineral deposits in this region that will likely be future mine sites, and this will create employment and bring people into the area as well.

Figure 6
North Coast Migration



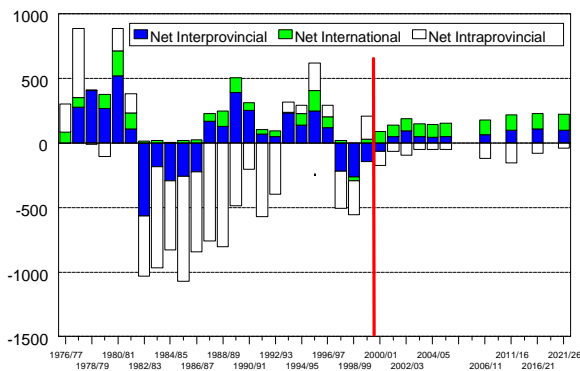
On the negative side, there will also be some mine closures during the projection period, and this could result in some net outflows of population, at least for the areas most directly affected. In the short-term, the downturn in the resource sectors will hurt this area and cause net outflows of population. The downturn in the forest sector, combined with declining fish stocks and poor metal prices will likely contribute to net population outflows in the short-term. Over the longer-term, however, the expectation is for net inflows of people due to the major projects that are planned for the area.

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Nechako Region

Most of the population lies in the Bulkley Valley, in the southern portion of this region. Mining plays an important role in migration patterns to the area. Not only is the region mineral rich, but Smithers is also one of the main supply and service points for mineral exploration and development in northern British Columbia, which means many of the benefits from mines in remote northern areas accrue to Smithers and the surrounding area. Currently metal prices are low, and this will likely hamper the development of new mines, which means it may be a couple of years before this area will see the benefits of new mine employment. However, over the longer-term it is likely that developments in the mining industry will be a significant driver of in-migration.

Figure 7
Nechako Migration



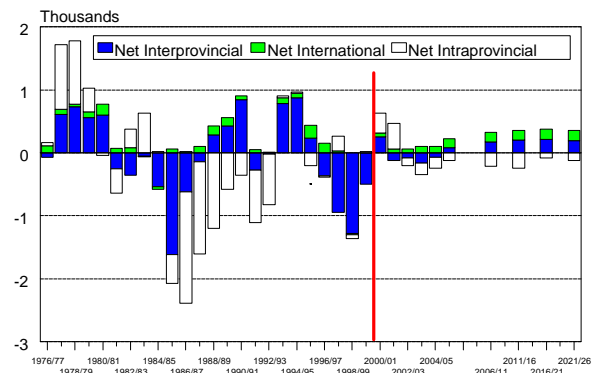
In addition to mining, the forest sector will also be a main determinant of migration levels to the region. A few years ago the Allowable Annual Cut of the Cassiar Timber Supply Area was increased threefold. If this timber is harvested, it could mean a significant economic boost for the northern portion of the Nechako region. The improved access resulting from new logging roads could lead to further discoveries of

mineral deposits and the development of new communities. This region has traditionally lost population due to migration, but with the potential of the resource sectors, it is expected that there will be net inflows of migrants over the long-term.

Northeast Region

The Northeast region has benefited from a booming oil and gas sector and this is expected to continue for some time. This region has traditionally had a net loss of migrants, but more recently, the activity in the resource sectors has brought more people into the area than have left the area. This trend of net in-migration to the area is expected to continue through the long-term as oil and gas exploration and other energy projects continue to provide employment in the region.

Figure 8
Northeast Migration



However, in the short-term, the developments with the two coal mines at Tumbler Ridge will lead to some significant net out-migration from the area, particularly since one mine closed in 1999 and the other is expected to shut permanently in 2003. Mitigating the employment losses from the coal mines is the occupation of houses purchased from the mine over the last year. Once the effects of the mine closures

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have worked their way through the system, the outlook is for net inflows of migrants over the remainder of the projection period.

The projections for the total population of each region are available on the BC STATS' web site (<http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca>), while the detailed age/gender projections can be purchased from BC STATS in either printed or electronic form.

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