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Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
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# MEMORANDUM

**Date**: March 18, 2004

**To:** ctpp-news@chrispy.net

**From:** Thabet Zakaria

**Subject:** Interesting Results from ACS

Elaine Murakami of the FHWA warns us that it is not appropriate to compare the decennial census 2000 numbers with the ACS 2002 results but to compare the ACS 2000 results with the ACS 2002 to determine if there has been significant change. The ACS results should be compared with the decennial census 2000 because the 2000 census data are the most accurate estimates of the variables we use in transportation planning studies and because the Census Bureau (CB) promised to produce comparable data to the decennial census. It is not correct to compare ACS 2000 with the ACS 2002 results because all ACS estimates could be inaccurate. I found that to be the case in the ACS estimates for the Delaware Valley region. For example, the 2000, 2001, 2002 ACS estimates for the population of Mercer County, NJ are all wrong as is apparent from the following tabulation:

| Year | 2000 Census | Annual Estimates Census | Difference From Census | ACS Estimates | Difference From Census |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000 | 350,761 | 351,650 | 0.25% | 329,669 | -6.01% |
| 2001 | | 355,432 | | 322,437 | |
| 2002 | | 359,463 | | 338,371 | |

As shown in this tabulation, the annual population estimates prepared by another group in the CB are reasonable and compare very well with the 2000 census figure.

Users of the Census data are interested in receiving accurate estimates that lead to rational conclusions in their studies. They are not interested in getting involved in the discussion of the methodological and statistical differences among the various data collection procedures used in the decennial census, ACS, annual population estimates, economic census, and many others.

Since the CB is planning to conduct a more comprehensive ACS in FY 2005 that will result in “overall quality data” for “small area reporting” such as census tracts, I hope that the CB in cooperation with the FHWA will conduct in FY 2006 or FY 2007 a thorough evaluation of the 2005 ACS results from the proposed larger sample (3,000,000 Households).