

## Miles Driven by Rural District Court Judges in Nevada, Fiscal Years 2000-04

### Introduction

One of the most important aspects of justice, in any community, is quick and reliable access to the judicial system. No matter whether a citizen lives in a rural or an urban community, each has a reasonable expectation of access to the court system.

Rural communities face many challenges in the judicial system, including some seldom faced in more urban areas. Judges must be sensitive to the close-knit nature of the communities they serve while fairly administering the law. To provide expedient access to the judicial system without forcing individuals to travel great distances, provisions must be made to bring judges to the rural communities. Generally, providing access to the judicial system requires that rural court judges travel many miles from their own communities to assist in other communities within their jurisdiction. This travel averages about 22 percent of the multi-county, rural District Judge's time.

The connection between the issues of access to the courts and traveling judges may not be readily apparent. As judges spend more time traveling, less time is available to perform their judicial responsibilities. Currently, within the judiciary, all District Court Judges may be called upon to assist outside of their own district.

To determine the amount of judicial time needed for travel, the Supreme Court of Nevada, Administrative Office of the Courts, has compiled mileage claimed by rural judges during the last 5 fiscal years (FY). This information is then used to provide a larger perspective on the travel time by District Court Judges in rural jurisdictions.

This report does not include occasional travel taken by judges in the one-county Judicial Districts of the Second (Washoe County), Fourth (Elko County), Eighth (Clark County), or Ninth (Douglas County). Additionally, the First Judicial District (Carson City and Storey County) was not included because of the proximity (15 miles) between the two county seats. Also not included is air travel. The amount of time spent at airports and in flight, traveling to judicial assignments, training, and meetings would add mileage and time to the figures presented herein. However, such information is not quantifiable at this time.

### Data Sources

The data used in this analysis has been extracted from the monthly mileage and travel claims submitted by judges in four multi-county judicial districts to the Administrative Office of the Courts. All data are organized by judicial district for FY00-04. The four judicial districts included in this study on rural judges travel include 77,292 square miles (mi<sup>2</sup>) of area. The courthouses are in the county seats, which are shown on Figure 1.

- Third Judicial District covers about 6,923 mi<sup>2</sup> and includes Churchill and Lyon Counties. The county seat of Churchill County

(4,929 mi<sup>2</sup>) is Fallon. The county seat of Lyon County (1,994 mi<sup>2</sup>) is Yerington.

- Fifth Judicial District covers about 25,531 mi<sup>2</sup> and includes Esmeralda, Mineral, and Nye Counties. The county seat of Esmeralda County (3,589 mi<sup>2</sup>) is Goldfield. The county seat of Mineral County (3,757 mi<sup>2</sup>) is Hawthorne. The county seat of the largest county in Nevada, Nye County (18,185 mi<sup>2</sup>), is in Tonopah.

- Sixth Judicial District covers about 21,150 mi<sup>2</sup> and includes Humboldt, Lander, and Pershing Counties. The county seat of Humboldt County (9,648 mi<sup>2</sup>) is Winnemucca. The county seat of Lander County (5,493 mi<sup>2</sup>) is Battle Mountain. The county seat of Pershing County (6,009 mi<sup>2</sup>) is Lovelock.

- Seventh Judicial District covers about 23,688 mi<sup>2</sup> and includes Eureka, Lincoln, and White Pine Counties. The county seat of Eureka County (4,176 mi<sup>2</sup>) is Eureka. The county seat of the third largest county in Nevada, Lincoln County (10,635 mi<sup>2</sup>), is Pioche. The county seat of White Pine County (8,877 mi<sup>2</sup>) is Ely.

Rural judges who must travel by car have two options available to them - drive a State Motor Pool vehicle or their personal vehicle. The decision of which to use is made by the individual judge. Because the State's reimbursement schedule for mileage compensates a driver for an average of fuel, wear, and tear on personal vehicles driven, the cost to the State of Nevada for either method is approximately the same.

### Total Miles Driven Each Year

The mileage of both Motor Pool and private vehicles driven by rural court judges is shown in Figure 2. The figures include all judicial travel activities during the year (such as travel to other courts, judicial seminars, and training).

In reviewing the totals, Figure 2 indicates that each district has some distinct trends. The Third Judicial District has steadily increased its miles driven from 17,698 in FY00 to 24,656 in FY04, with a peak of 32,175 in FY02. Possible events associated with this pattern are the development and expansion of the Western Region Drug Court in the First, Third, Ninth, and part of the Fifth Judicial Districts. The addition of a third judge in January 2001 may also explain a portion of the increase. The subsequent downturn in mileage traveled is partly attributable to a redistribution of duties and cases by geographic location.

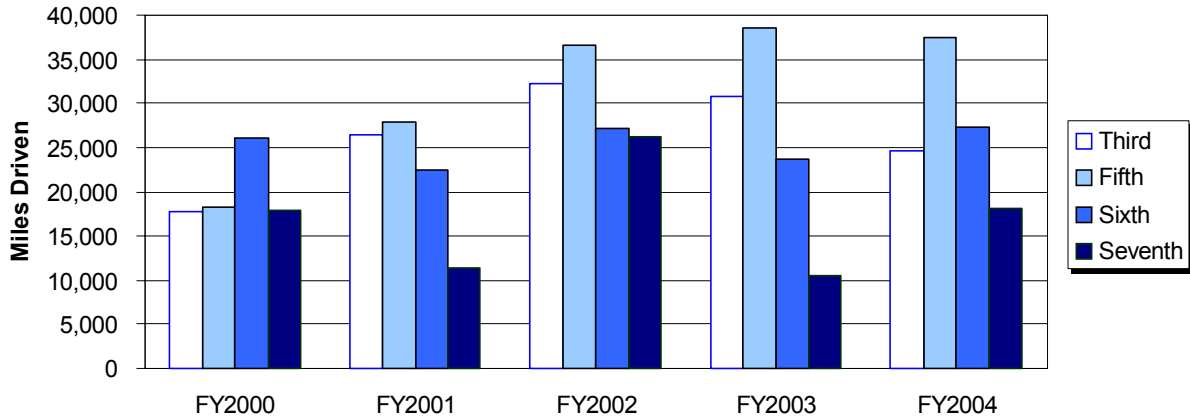
The Fifth Judicial District has the largest increase of the four rural districts, growing from 18,285 miles in FY00 to 37,414 miles by FY04. This increase can be attributed to the addition of a second judge in January 2001.

The Sixth Judicial District has minor variations in miles driven during the 5 years. The two judges traveled a low of 22,476 miles in FY01 and a high of 27,279 miles in FY04.





**Figure 2. Sum of Mileage Driven by Rural Judicial District Judges in Nevada, FY00-04**



The Seventh Judicial District had the largest fluctuations of the four districts for the 5 years observed. Judges in the Seventh Judicial District drove a low 11,344 miles in FY03 and a high of 26,198 miles in FY02. One major event that affected the mileage was the retirement of a judge from this district at the end of calendar year 2000. Before and after the retirement, senior judges from out of the area were used and their mileage is included as they were replacing the retired judge. After a replacement was appointed, that judge had to attend several training courses besides traveling the regular court circuit. Although not normal for most judicial districts, this example provides a glimpse of how circumstances can affect mileage (and thereby time) reported within a district during any period.

### Time on the Road

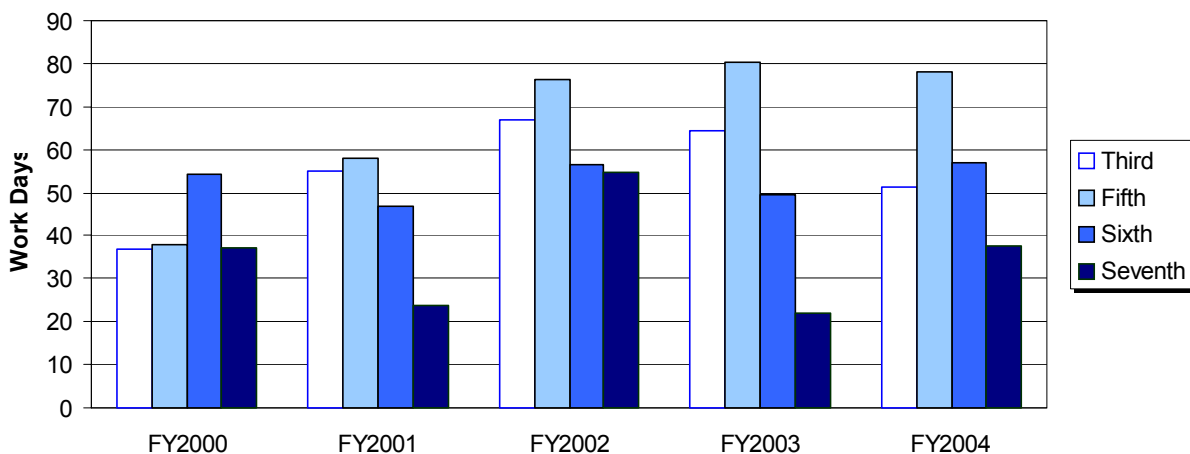
The issue of time spent on the road is important in considering time available to handle judicial responsibilities. The data gathered from mileage reports have been compiled to calculate the time used by travel, as shown in Figure 3.

In determining the rate of travel for this analysis, several values were considered including the speed limits and the usual travel time noted by staff and judges. The closest approximation to the average rate of travel with the rural judicial districts is 60 miles per hour (mph). This rate is meant to reflect the changes in speed limits along the different stretches of roadway traveled, as well as slowing down through smaller communities en route.

In analyzing time spent traveling, the first assumption is that the standard work year for Judges is 240 days.

At 60 mph, the Third Judicial District's travel time has increased from almost 37 workdays per year in FY00 to 51 workdays per year in FY04. That is an increase from 15 percent to 21 percent of the work year - approximately one-fifth JPE<sup>1</sup>. The Fifth Judicial District has had the largest increase in mileage and time spent on the road. Between FY00 and FY04, their time on the road more than doubled from 38 to 78 workdays per year, an increase from nearly 16 percent to 33 percent of the work year - approximately one-third JPE.

**Figure 3. Determination of Days on the Road by Rural Judicial District Judges Based on Mileage Driven with a Speed of 60 Miles Per Hour, FY00-04**



<sup>1</sup> JPE is Judicial Position Equivalent. One JPE equals one judge.

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The total miles traveled in the Sixth and Seventh Judicial Districts has increased slightly during the studied period. The Sixth Judicial District travel time increased slightly from 54 to 56 workdays during the 5 years. That is a minor increase from 22 percent to 23 percent of the work year - approximately one-quarter JPE. The Seventh Judicial District had no real increase over the 5-year period, staying relatively constant at 37 workdays, or 16 percent of the work year. However, this consistency does not illustrate the wide variations between the first and last years of the study.

## Conclusion

Although travel times vary among the judicial districts, one conclusion is clear: The rural court judges who must travel their circuit have notably less time available for their judicial obligations than their urban counterparts. On average, the judges in these four judicial districts spend about 22 percent of their time on the road (and out of the courtroom). This travel time reduces the quantity of cases that can be heard, as well as decreases the time judges are available and accessible, in general. The rural judges of Nevada face the increasing stress and fatigue of traveling throughout their districts after working already long days in the courthouse. Judges must still strive to meet the demands and expectations on the court system to maintain or improve productivity, meet statutory sentencing requirements, and hold specialty courts. Yet, as the stress and fatigue have increased, few additional resources have been made available to keep pace with these challenges.

## Supreme Court Of Nevada

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### Justices

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The Planning & Analysis Division of the Administrative Office of the Courts compiles and maintains data for the trial courts. Occasionally, areas of interest such as this will be analyzed and information published.

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