Fiscal Conditions & Trends
Morris County

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and

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THE KANSAS FISCAL DATABASE

Financial management is one of the most challenging responsibilities facing county government. To help local officials meet this responsibility, the Office of Local Government, a unit of K-State Research and Extension, developed the *Kansas Fiscal Database*. The database contains detailed financial information from 1989 to 2007 for all Kansas counties. This information was drawn from county budgets on file at the Kansas Department of Administration's Division of Accounts and Reports.

Expenditures in the database are sorted by function (e.g., general, road and bridge, law enforcement), and revenues by source (e.g., property taxes, sales taxes, special highway). There is no connection between expenditures and revenues. That is, the database does not allow for the analysis of expenditures by revenue source or vice versa. The database contains actual, rather than budgeted, numbers from 1989 to 2007. Table 5 (p. 11) displays all expenditure categories in the database and Table 8 (p. 16) all revenue categories.

The Kansas Association of Counties, the Division of Accounts and Reports, and others knowledgeable about local government financial management assisted in the design of the database. Though budgeting and reporting often vary across counties, the data represents consistent accounting, and county officials can feel confident in their use of this information. Specific accounting conventions adopted in the construction of the database are described on pages 23 and 24.

This report will help local officials understand revenue and expenditure trends in their county. It examines public service demand and provision, providing valuable information for evaluation and planning.

Additional studies are available using information in the *Kansas Fiscal Database*. Detailed analysis of a specific expenditure trend (e.g., solid waste or health) relative to other county expenditures and similar counties is one example. Evaluations of overall financial condition and performance are also available. Contact the Office of Local Government to obtain information about these and other technical services.

The *Kansas Fiscal Database* represents a commitment by the Office of Local Government and K-State Research and Extension to develop programs and provide assistance to local governments in Kansas. These services are made possible by local support of the county Extension network. The Office of Local Government will update the database annually and distribute updated reports in cooperation with county Extension offices.

The Office of Local Government welcomes any questions, comments, or suggestions about this report or any of their other services. Contact your county Extension office or:

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FISCAL CONDITIONS AND TRENDS
MORRIS COUNTY, KANSAS

INTRODUCTION

Local fiscal conditions are influenced by demographic, economic, and social trends; state and federal mandates; and local needs and preferences. This makes it difficult for county officials and others to find reliable data to evaluate county fiscal conditions and performance. This report provides a starting point. It uses information from the *Kansas Fiscal Database* to examine expenditure and revenue trends from 1999 to 2007, with the Kansas county average as a benchmark.

The report begins with a presentation of population, income, and assessed valuation trends. These characteristics influence the responsibilities and capacity of county governments and establish a context for understanding fiscal trends. Total and per capita revenues and expenditures are then presented. Per capita values represent revenues or expenditures per person in the county. They can be compared to state averages and are a useful indicator of performance, especially when the county's population has changed significantly over time.

Nearly all dollar amounts in this report are "real" amounts. The value of a dollar declines over time due to inflation. Inflation, then, distorts trends over time, because a dollar today does not have as much purchasing power as a dollar one year or five years ago. To make fair comparisons of dollar amounts over time, the data must be adjusted to a single year's value using an inflation index. In this report, values are adjusted to 2007 dollars (2007$) using the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) chain price index. Actual and real dollar amounts are equal in the base year (2007). By removing the effects of inflation, the focus shifts to the "real" forces affecting budget trends – economic conditions, changing wants and needs, and mandates.

As readers observe trends in the report, they naturally ask why these trends occurred. While we can make some generalizations based on federal and state mandates, broad economic conditions, and general preferences for public services, unique circumstances in the county are often responsible. Every county periodically requires significant capital investment to maintain service delivery. Such capital expenditures may result in a significant deviation from a normal trend line.

Similarly, changes in local accounting practices over time (for example, reporting expenditures in greater or lesser detail) may influence trends. The lack of comprehensive uniformity requirements in local government budgeting permits considerable latitude in reporting greater or lesser detail, in shifting revenues and expenditures between accounts or, in some cases, reporting certain activities at all. While we strive to provide the greatest detail possible, local budgeting conventions often dictate just how good of a job we are able to do.

Budget documents alone do not allow us to identify all of the circumstances facing a particular county. Therefore, we encourage readers to look beyond the information presented in this report to fully understand why revenue and expenditure trends look as they do. This report is a tool to help elected and appointed local officials enhance decision-making and meet the needs of their county efficiently and equitably. The information presented may reinforce their assumptions about local conditions or show previously unrecognized trends. In addition, it may help officials identify the causes and implications of these conditions and trends.

LEGISLATION AFFECTING COUNTY FINANCES

Changes in state and federal legislation and mandates may be partly responsible for shifts in county revenues and expenditures from 1999 to 2007. Following is a brief summary of major legislation that may have affected the county fiscal trends presented in this report.

Community College Tuition. County out-district tuition is paid when a student from another county enrolls in a community college. Prior to the passage of the Higher Education Coordination Act in 1999, the state and counties shared the cost of tuition accompanying a student. With passage of the Act, the county portion of out-district tuition was phased out over a four-year period and replaced by state aid. FY 2006 was the last year for out-district tuition.

Local Extension Program Organization. Over the past several years, Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service has aggressively promoted the creation of multi-county Extension districts as a cost-savings measure. When formed, an Extension district becomes a special purpose form of government with its own taxing authority separate from county government. Thus, Extension allocations have disappeared from many county budgets. Currently, seven districts cover 21 counties.

Demand Transfers. Demand transfers is the term applied to the combination of several state aids to local government. They include City/County Revenue Sharing, Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction (LAVTR), and Special Highway Aids. Following a national recession in 2001, the state began phasing out City/County Revenue Sharing and LAVTR beginning in 2002 in response to a downturn in state revenues. Revenue Sharing was cut by approximately half in 2002 and both Revenue Sharing and LAVTR were suspended in 2003. Special Highways Aids were preserved, but adjusted in a way that pushed the total available funding down.

Truth in Taxation. After nearly 30 years, the Aggregate Tax Levy Lid was replaced by a different type of tax limitation, the 1999 Truth in Taxation Law. The law permits greater flexibility in raising the property tax levy to respond to local needs. The new law generally requires affected taxing subdivisions to pass a resolution or ordinance acknowledging increases in property tax dollars levied over the prior year. This "sunshine" provision requiring public disclosure of tax increases would be considered a soft property tax lid.

Juvenile Justice. In 1995, the Legislature authorized counties to pay for inter-county juvenile justice and care programs out of the general fund. Legislation in 1997 expanded juvenile justice funding, including a new grant program for counties to develop and implement juvenile community corrections.

Motor Vehicle Tax. In 1995, the Legislature enacted a five-year phase down in the assessment rate on motor vehicles, from 30 percent to 20 percent of market value.

Reappraisal. In 1999, the Legislature changed the statewide reappraisal program such that every parcel of real property will be viewed and inspected by the county or district appraiser once every six years, rather than every four.

POPULATION AND PER CAPITA INCOME

County fiscal trends are often closely related to population and income trends. In general, as population increases, county revenues and expenditures rise. As income increases, county revenues tend to increase. County expenditures may also rise as income increases if residents demand more services.

Table 1. Population and real per capita income, Morris County, 1999-2007

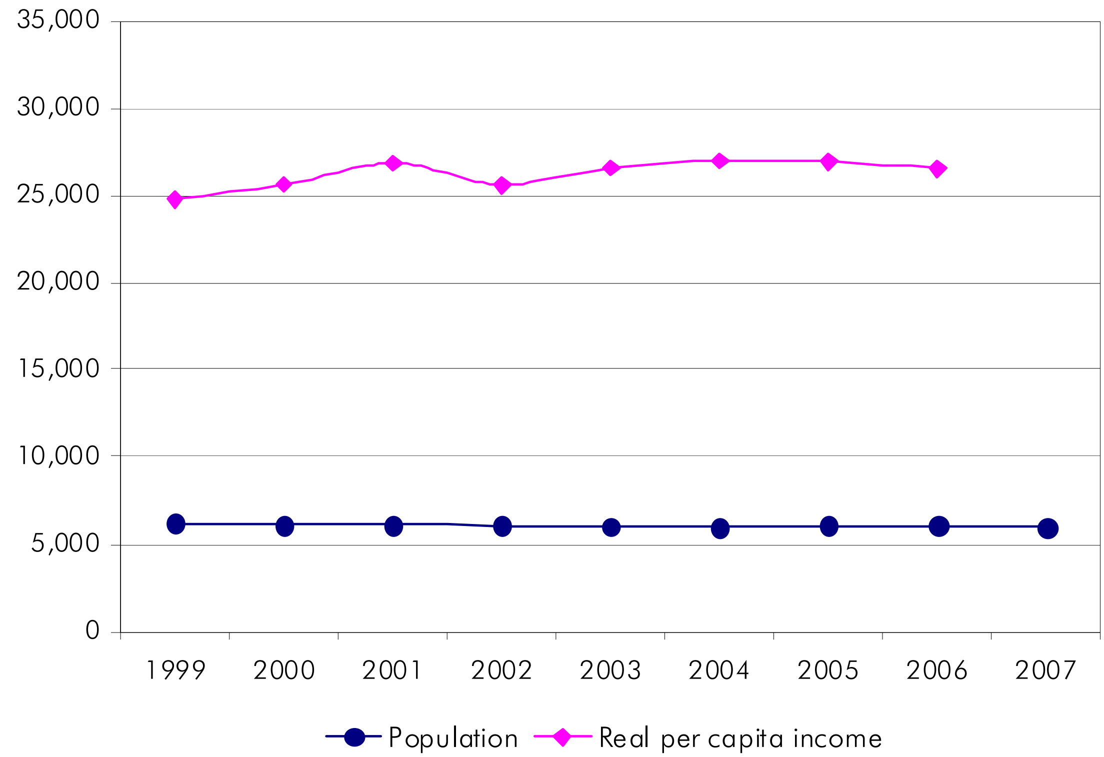
Year	Population[a]	Annual % Change	Real Per Capita Income (2007$)[b]	Annual % Change
1999	6,173		24,781	
2000	6,104	-1%	25,591	3%
2001	6,112	0%	26,836	5%
2002	6,082	0%	25,581	-5%
2003	5,995	-1%	26,572	4%
2004	5,977	0%	26,957	1%
2005	6,049	1%	26,944	0%
2006	6,046	0%	26,540	-1%
2007	5,967	-1%	Not Yet Available	
	% change 1999-2003	-3%	% change 1999-2003	7%
	% change 2003-2007	0%	% change 2003-2007	0%
	% change 1999-2007	-3%	% change 1999-2007	7%

[a] Though the U.S. Census Bureau supplied all population estimates, three data sources are represented. The Bureau's county population estimates are the source of population values for 2001, while values for 1999 and 2002-2007 are from their estimates for places and minor civil divisions. This change brings our population data in line with the certified Kansas population produced by the Division of the Budget. Year 2000 population data is from Census 2000. For those counties with a federal or state correctional facility, each population value is adjusted downward by the corresponding annual inmate population. This adjustment accounts for the fact that, though residents, prisoners do not pay taxes to support the costs of services provided by county government. These population values are used in all per capita calculations.

[b] Annual personal income estimates were obtained from the Bureau of Economic Analysis' Regional Economic Information System. Personal income is generally higher than measures such as adjusted gross and money income because it consists of income received by both individuals and nonprofit institutions serving individuals. Specifically, personal income includes wages and salaries, income from rent, self-employment earnings, dividends, interest, government employee retirement benefits, social security benefits, and nontaxable transfer payments, such as Medicaid, Medicare, and welfare benefits.

Morris County's population declined 3 percent between 1999 and 2007 to 5,967. Over the same period, the population of the average Kansas county increased 5 percent to 25,107. From 1999 to 2007, the county's real, inflation-adjusted per capita personal income increased 7 percent, and the Kansas county average real per capita income increased 4 percent to $28,957. Table 1 and Figure 1 summarize population and income trends in Morris County from 1999 to 2007.

Figure 1. Population and real per capita income, Morris County, 1999-2007



TANGIBLE ASSESSED VALUATION

Local property taxes remain the major source of revenue for county governments, accounting for 54 percent of total revenue in the average Kansas county in 2007. Thus, trends in property values can significantly impact county revenues and expenditures. Declining property values push tax rates up and force counties to either find alternate revenue sources or cut spending. Changes in population, business conditions, and state mandates may affect local property values.

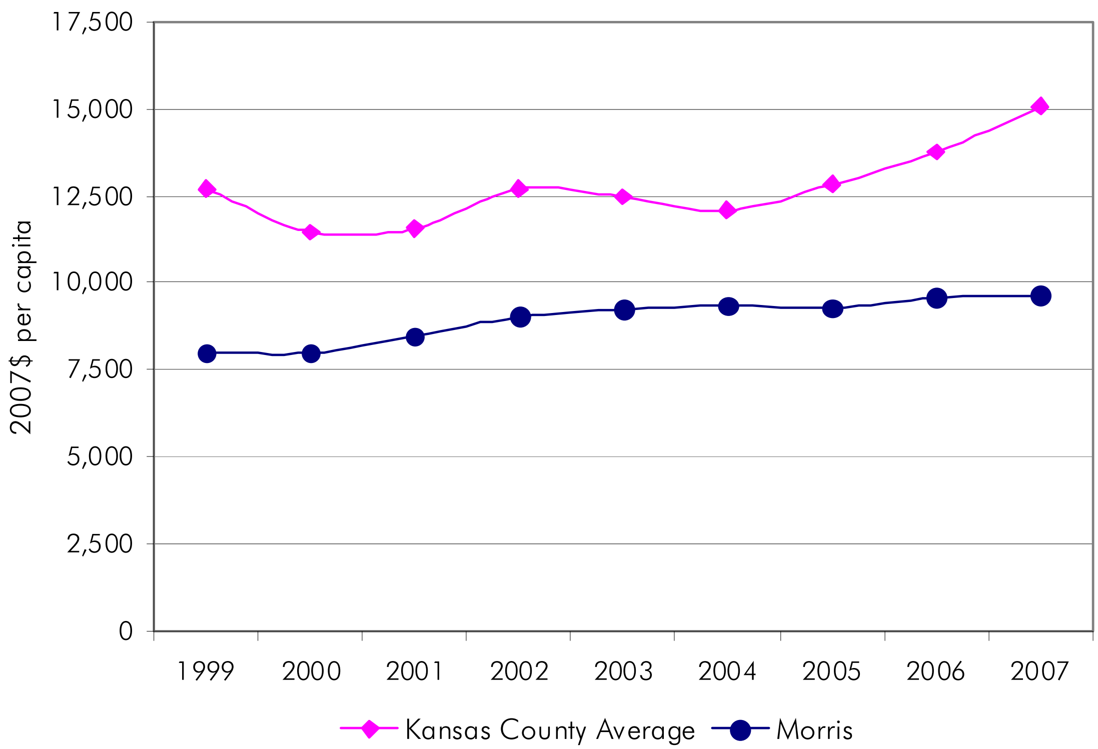
Between 1999 and 2007, Morris County's real, inflation-adjusted tangible assessed valuation increased 17 percent, from $49,447,111 to $57,645,214. The county's real per capita tangible assessed valuation increased from $8,010 in 1999 to $9,661 in 2007, a change of 21 percent. The Kansas county average real per capita assessed valuation increased 19 percent over the same period. Table 2 and Figure 2 summarize assessed valuation trends in both Morris County and the average Kansas county from 1999 to 2007.

Table 2. Real tangible assessed valuation, Morris County, 1999-2007

Year	Morris County[a] (2007$)	Morris County Per Capita (2007$)	County Average Per Capita (2007$)
1999	49,447,111	8,010	12,702
2000	48,752,298	7,987	11,459
2001	51,783,042	8,472	11,561
2002	54,924,686	9,031	12,685
2003	55,385,572	9,239	12,464
2004	55,903,565	9,353	12,070
2005	56,097,071	9,274	12,820
2006	57,859,174	9,570	13,751
2007	57,645,214	9,661	15,058
% change 1999-2007	17%	21%	19%

[a] Tangible assessed valuation is from county budgets and may differ from Kansas Department of Revenue equalized adjusted amounts.

Figure 2. Real per capita assessed valuation, Morris County and Kansas County Average, 1999-2007



EXPENDITURES

Total expenditures can be considered a measure of the overall responsibility of county government. In general, this responsibility has increased over the past decade in response to changes in economic conditions, state and federal mandates, and local needs and preferences. The shift to greater county responsibility has proven particularly challenging for the many counties where population, property values, and state and federal funding have remained constant or declined over time.

Table 3. Total and per capita expenditures, actual and real, Morris County, 1999-2007

Year	Total Expenditures (actual$)	Per Capita Expenditures (actual$)	Real Expenditures (2007$)	Real Per Capita Expenditures (2007$)
1999	4,386,942	711	5,289,912	857
2000	4,475,066	733	5,265,318	863
2001	4,727,278	773	5,447,987	891
2002	4,433,637	729	5,038,123	828
2003	4,504,383	751	5,018,904	837
2004	4,851,160	812	5,265,911	881
2005	4,867,650	805	5,132,799	849
2006	5,688,236	941	5,836,252	965
2007	5,124,185	859	5,124,185	859
% change 1999-2003	3%	6%	-5%	-2%
% change 2003-2007	14%	14%	2%	3%
% change 1999-2007	17%	21%	-3%	0%

Between 1999 and 2007, Morris County's total expenditures, unadjusted for inflation, increased 17 percent. The county's unadjusted per capita expenditures increased 21 percent from 1999 to 2007, while the Kansas county average increased 55 percent to $1,253. In real, inflation-adjusted terms, Morris County's expenditures (2007$) declined 3 percent, and per capita expenditures increased from $857 in 1999 to $859 in 2007. Meanwhile, real per capita expenditures in the average Kansas county increased 28 percent. Table 3 and Figure 3 summarize Morris County's actual and real expenditures from 1999 to 2007.

Figure 3. Per capita expenditures, actual and real, Morris County, 1999-2007

Real Expenditures by Major Function

Three major functional expenditure categories in most Kansas counties are general, road and bridge, and law enforcement. General expenditures include those to support the county commission, clerk, treasurer, attorney, register of deeds, coroner, and facilities. Road and bridge consists of expenditures in both the road and bridge fund and special road and bridge accounts. Law enforcement expenditures are typically those for the sheriff's department but may also include jail and juvenile justice expenditures, depending on local accounting practices.

From 1999 to 2007, Morris County's real general expenditures increased 3 percent, road and bridge expenditures increased 1 percent, and law enforcement expenditures increased 26 percent. Real per capita general expenditures grew from $149 in 1999 to $158 in 2007. Meanwhile, per capita road and bridge expenditures increased 4 percent to $260 and per capita law enforcement expenditures increased 31 percent to $71. Table 4 summarizes Morris County's real total and per capita expenditures by function from 1999 to 2007.

Table 4. Real total and per capita expenditures by major function, Morris County, 1999-2007[a]

Year	General (2007$)	Per Capita (2007$)	Road & Bridge (2007$)	Per Capita (2007$)	Law Enforcement (2007$)	Per Capita (2007$)
1999	918,083	149	1,537,774	249	336,706	55
2000	973,183	159	1,495,416	245	358,198	59
2001	1,273,130	208	1,379,207	226	383,242	63
2002	967,510	159	1,417,295	233	387,358	64
2003	734,273	122	1,698,428	283	386,851	65
2004	818,722	137	1,788,046	299	393,178	66
2005	786,359	130	1,712,009	283	400,336	66
2006	823,753	136	1,998,664	331	405,401	67
2007	941,759	158	1,549,527	260	425,647	71
% change 1999-2007	3%	6%	1%	4%	26%	31%

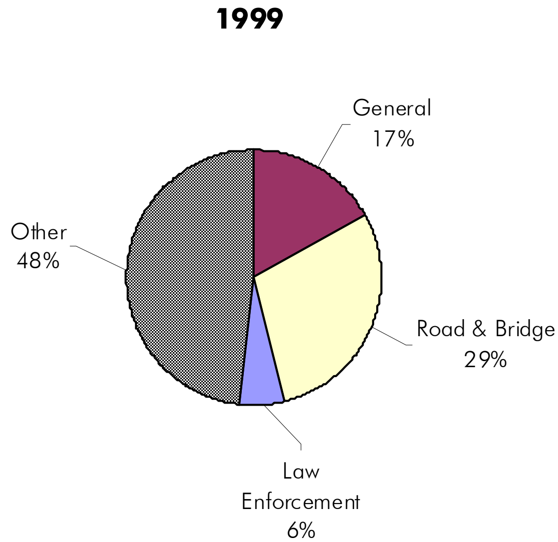
[a] Sudden, large changes in expenditures typically indicate a special circumstance, such as a capital outlay or change in local accounting practices.

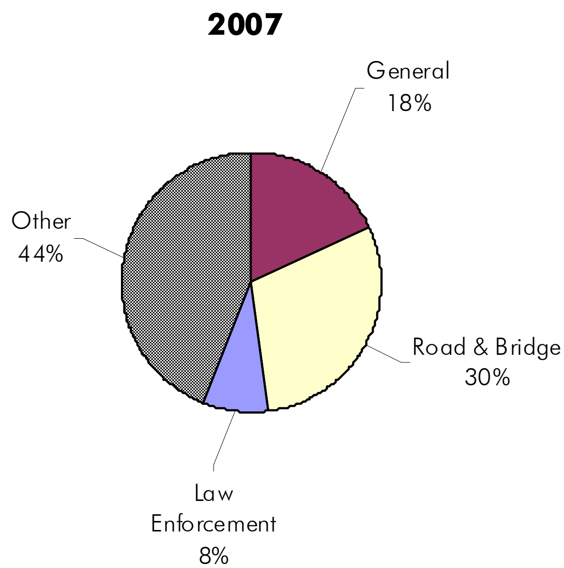
General, road and bridge, and law enforcement expenditures accounted for 52 percent of Morris County's total expenditures in 1999 and 56 percent in 2007. General expenditures increased as a percent of total expenditures from 17 percent in 1999 to 18 percent in 2007. Meanwhile, road and bridge expenditures grew from 29 percent of total expenditures in 1999 to 30 percent in 2007, and law enforcement expenditures grew from 6 percent of total expenditures to 8 percent. Figure 4 compares Morris County's expenditures by major function as a percent of total expenditures in 1999 and 2007.

In general, the share of total county expenditures devoted to the three traditional expenditure categories (general, road and bridge, and law enforcement) has steadily declined in recent years while "other" expenditure categories have grown as a proportion of total expenditures. This implies that Kansas counties were doing more in 2007 than they were in 1999.

Additionally, we observed particularly strong growth in several expenditure categories. Public safety-related expenditures (sheriff, jail and corrections, juvenile justice, and district courts), for example, grew strongly over the period in most Kansas counties. This may reflect both growing public concern about crime and safety and new state and federal mandates. Similarly, health and related expenditures (county health department, ambulance, emergency 911 service, services for the aged, and hospital) showed strong growth in many counties, likely reflecting efforts to maintain quality health care as the state's population ages. County solid waste expenditures have also experienced strong growth, following a federal mandate that solid waste be disposed of in a more environmentally sensitive fashion.

Figure 4. Expenditures by major function as percent of total expenditures, Morris County, 1999 and 2007





Real Expenditures by Detailed Function

Table 5 summarizes Morris County's real expenditures by function from 1999 to 2007. Significant changes over time may be due to shifts in local needs or priorities, administrative reorganization, or changes in state and federal mandates. Large percentage changes, however, may also result from either a low level of expenditure for a given function or unusual circumstances in the years used to calculate the percentage (1999 and 2007).

Table 5. Real expenditures by function, Morris County, 2003-2007

Function[a]	2003 (2007$)	2004 (2007$)	2005 (2007$)	2006 (2007$)	2007 (2007$)	% change 2003-2007
Total Expenditures[b]	5,018,904	5,265,911	5,132,799	5,836,252	5,124,185	2%
General	734,273	818,722	786,359	823,753	941,759	28%
Airport	0	0	0	0	0	
Alcohol & drug abuse	0	0	0	0	0	
Ambulance	135,610	133,472	131,962	131,747	130,128	-4%
Appraisal	133,308	133,926	135,508	140,930	140,785	6%
Bond & interest	306,478	289,033	276,686	809,094	263,301	-14%
Comm. college tuition[c]	36,368	32,571	23,710	7,735	0	
Computer/data proc.	0	0	17,027	0	9,534	
Conservation	17,828	18,453	18,453	18,468	18,500	4%
District court	41,536	40,668	40,803	33,164	38,912	-6%
Economic development	42,909	41,802	40,608	36,947	35,010	-18%
Election	13,137	22,622	16,106	26,089	20,348	55%
Emergency 911	28,345	16,758	16,420	12,213	39,552	40%
Employee benefits	423,508	507,670	446,473	421,916	487,779	15%
Extension council	99,166	97,695	97,539	97,754	98,133	-1%
Fair	29,527	28,766	27,943	27,190	26,500	-10%
Fire	0	0	0	0	0	
Health	98,343	98,737	98,219	98,915	98,128	0%
Historical	0	0	0	0	5,813	
Hospital	109,703	110,634	112,080	115,749	114,610	4%
Jail/corrections	112,652	180,181	170,413	97,968	130,257	16%
Juvenile justice	17,512	14,282	29,306	36,643	18,848	8%
Law enforcement	386,851	393,178	400,336	405,401	425,647	10%
Library	0	0	0	0	0	
Mental health	37,538	36,570	35,525	34,567	33,218	-12%
Mental retardation	16,713	16,282	12,654	12,312	12,000	-28%
Noxious weed	163,248	146,732	151,070	100,947	165,052	1%
Parks & recreation	2,228	2,171	0	0	0	
Road & bridge	1,698,428	1,788,046	1,712,009	1,998,664	1,549,527	-9%
Services for the aged	50,052	48,762	56,040	57,874	58,128	16%
Solid waste	269,481	248,178	279,552	290,213	262,716	-3%
Tort liability/risk mgt.	14,161	0	0	0	0	
Weather modification	0	0	0	0	0	

[a] Capital expenditures are included in the functional category they were intended to support. Additional detail is provided on page 23.
[b] In budgets, interfund transfers are considered expenditures. In this database, transfers are subtracted from functional expenditure categories and total expenditures to avoid double counting.
[c] With passage of the Higher Education Coordination Act in 1999, the county portion of out-district tuition was phased out over a four-year period and replaced by state aid. FY 2006 was the last year for out-district tuition.

REVENUES

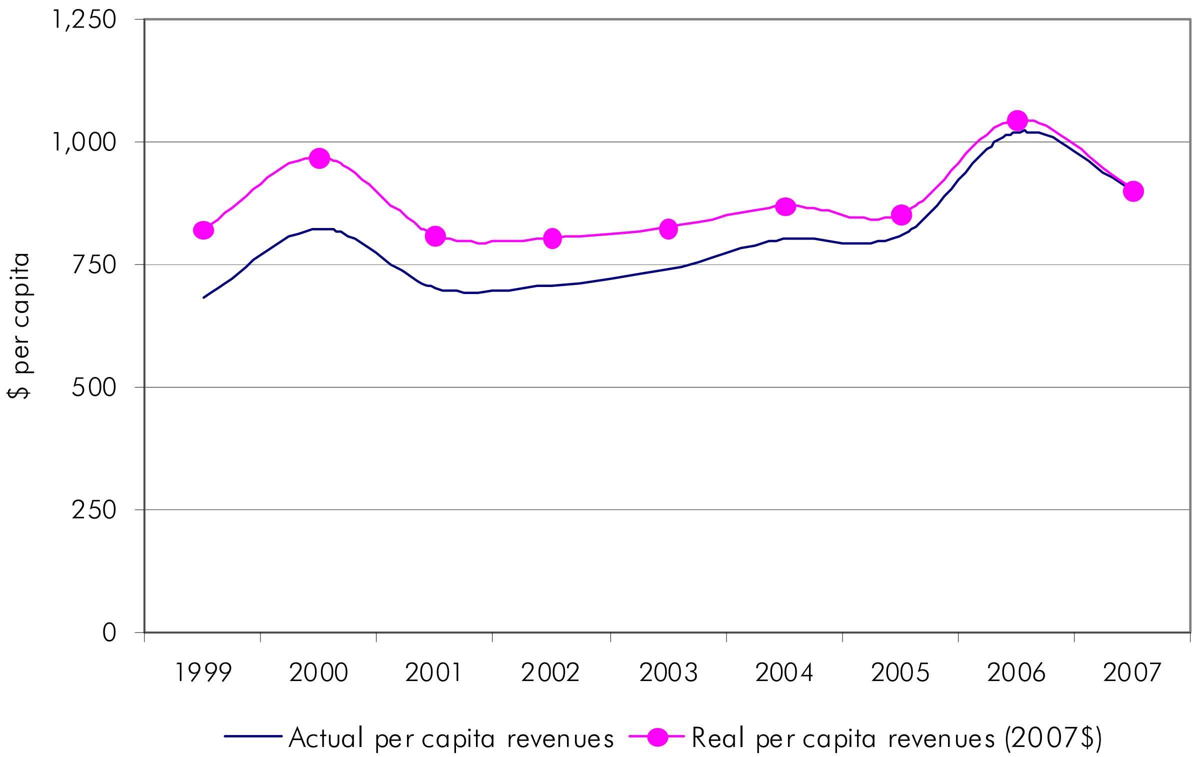
Total revenues can be considered a measure of the monetary resources available to the county to carry out its responsibilities. As with expenditures, county revenues have generally increased over the past decade. The composition of revenues, however, has shifted in many counties as general dissatisfaction with the property tax combined, in many cases, with declines in population, income, property values, retail sales, or state and federal funding has forced many counties to seek alternate sources of revenue and limit spending.

Table 6. Total and per capita revenues, actual and real, Morris County, 1999-2007

Year	Total Revenues (actual$)	Per Capita Revenues (actual$)	Real Revenues (2007$)	Real Per Capita Revenues (2007$)
1999	4,212,417	682	5,079,465	823
2000	5,035,023	825	5,924,158	971
2001	4,297,327	703	4,952,487	810
2002	4,307,824	708	4,895,156	805
2003	4,446,273	742	4,954,156	826
2004	4,791,509	802	5,201,160	870
2005	4,894,688	809	5,161,310	853
2006	6,168,821	1,020	6,329,342	1,047
2007	5,386,511	903	5,386,511	903
% change 1999-2003	6%	9%	-2%	0%
% change 2003-2007	21%	22%	9%	9%
% change 1999-2007	28%	32%	6%	10%

Between 1999 and 2007, Morris County's total revenues, unadjusted for inflation, increased 28 percent. During the same period, the county's unadjusted per capita revenues increased 32 percent and the Kansas county average increased 62 percent. In real, inflation-adjusted terms, Morris County's revenues (2007$) increased 6 percent, and real per capita revenues increased from $823 in 1999 to $903 in 2007. Meanwhile, real per capita revenues in the average Kansas county increased 35 percent. Table 6 and Figure 5 summarize Morris County's actual and real revenues from 1999 to 2007.

Figure 5. Per capita revenues, actual and real, Morris County, 1999-2007



Real Revenues by Major Source

Property taxes, retail sales taxes, and special highway funds from the state are major revenue sources for many Kansas counties.

From 1999 to 2007, Morris County's real property tax revenues increased 33 percent and per capita property tax revenues grew from $389 to $536. Morris County's retail sales tax revenue increased 7 percent. Special highway funds declined 16 percent from 1999 to 2007, while per capita special highway funds fell from $63 to $55. Table 7 summarizes Morris County's real total and per capita revenues by major source from 1999 to 2007.

Table 7. Real total and per capita revenues by major source, Morris County, 1999-2007

Year	Property Tax (2007$)	Per Capita (2007$)	Sales Tax[a] (2007$)	Per Capita (2007$)	Special Highway (2007$)	Per Capita (2007$)
1999	2,399,147	389	336,894	55	391,976	63
2000	2,322,555	380	311,654	51	419,214	69
2001	2,368,948	388	323,925	53	400,560	66
2002	2,831,087	465	327,134	54	400,685	66
2003	2,822,515	471	318,698	53	359,510	60
2004	2,848,326	477	330,540	55	344,113	58
2005	2,965,284	490	337,978	56	342,643	57
2006	3,114,255	515	335,064	55	330,872	55
2007	3,197,443	536	358,832	60	329,640	55
% change 1999-2007	33%	38%	7%	10%	-16%	-13%

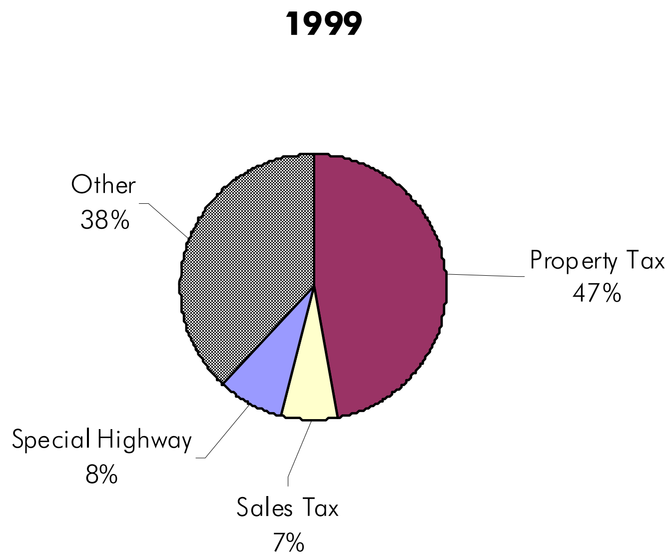
[a] Sales tax includes only county general purpose and/or dedicated sales taxes, not those levied by the state or other municipalities.

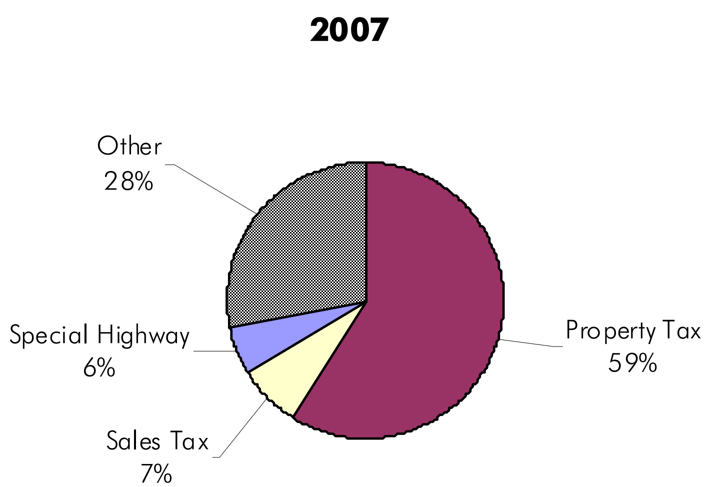
Property tax, sales tax, and special highway funds accounted for 62 percent of total revenues in 1999 and 72 percent in 2007. Property tax revenues increased as a percent of total revenues from 47 percent in 1999 to 59 percent in 2007. Meanwhile, sales tax revenues were unchanged at 7 percent of total revenues, and special highway funds fell from 8 percent of total revenues to 6 percent. Figure 6 compares Morris County's revenues by major source as a percent of total revenues in 1999 and 2007.

While the composition of revenues has not changed uniformly across Kansas counties, we have generally observed rapid growth in "other" revenues, particularly user fees and charges. The shift toward a user fee-based system of service delivery often reflects a conscious effort by local officials to limit use of the unpopular property tax.

Beginning in 2001 and more so through 2002-03, a countervailing trend has put pressure back on the property tax. In 2001, the United States entered a recession that lasted about a year. The time both before and after the recession was also characterized by lagging economic performance. This meant that any government revenue source that might be sensitive to general economic conditions would probably have been relatively weak through the 2001-03 periods. This was true for the state as well as local governments, and in 2002-03 the state balanced its budget, in part, by reducing aids to local governments. Thus, local revenues during this period were strongly influenced by the twin negative shocks of both the recession and the loss of an important source of revenue from the state. For most counties, and particularly for rural counties, there are few alternative sources of revenue to the property tax. While steady declines in the share of total revenue attributable to the property tax were observed through the late 1990s, we have seen a reversal in the early years of the 2000s with sharp increases in property tax dependence.

Figure 6. Revenues by major source as percent of total revenues, Morris County, 1999 and 2007





Real Revenues by Detailed Source

Table 8 summarizes Morris County's real revenues by source from 2003 to 2007. Again, significant changes over time may be due to shifts in local needs or priorities, administrative reorganization, or changes in state and federal mandates; and, large percentage changes from 2003 to 2007 may be due to a small revenue level or unusual circumstances in either year.

Table 8. Real revenues by source, Morris County, 2003-2007

Function	2003 (2007$)	2004 (2007$)	2005 (2007$)	2006 (2007$)	2007 (2007$)	% change 2003-2007
Total Revenues[a]	4,954,156	5,201,160	5,161,310	6,329,342	5,386,511	9%
Property Tax	2,822,515	2,848,326	2,965,284	3,114,255	3,197,443	13%
LAVTR[b]	930	0	0	0	0	
Delinquent Tax	40,566	50,632	32,557	54,975	45,613	12%
Interest on Delinquent Tax	16,450	13,904	18,144	21,902	22,699	38%
Motor Vehicle Tax	278,638	349,675	412,422	278,351	341,309	22%
Recreational Vehicle Tax	6,748	8,967	9,300	6,362	8,857	31%
16/20M Vehicle Tax	15,682	20,018	23,419	22,808	23,751	51%
City/County Rev. Sharing[c]	0	0	0	0	0	
In Lieu of Tax	0	0	0	0	0	
Retail Sales Tax	318,698	330,540	337,978	335,064	358,832	13%
Severance Tax[d]	2,637	2,661	3,346	4,026	1,606	-39%
Intangible Tax[e]	0	0	0	0	0	
Special Highway[f]	359,510	344,113	342,643	330,872	329,640	-8%
911 Tax[g]	33,359	41,908	38,399	31,413	36,567	10%
Bingo Tax	0	0	0	0	0	
Transient Guest Tax[h]	20,257	18,371	15,139	14,131	14,440	-29%
Mortgage Reg. Fee	56,794	38,815	59,434	51,725	67,383	19%
Motor Vehicle Reg. Fee	0	0	0	0	0	
Interest on Idle Funds	67,943	60,084	98,024	169,381	216,093	218%
Other Revenues[i]	913,430	1,073,147	805,221	1,894,075	722,278	-21%

[a] Revenues do not include unreserved fund balances carried forward from year to year.
[b] The state distributed Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction (LAVTR) funds to counties based 65 percent on population and 35 percent on tangible assessed valuation for the preceding year. In 2003, LAVTR was suspended due to a state budget shortfall.
[c] The state distributed city/county revenue sharing funds to counties based 65 percent on population and 35 percent on tangible assessed valuation. In 2002, revenue sharing was cut in half and then fully eliminated in 2003 in response to a state budget shortfall.
[d] State severance tax funds are distributed to counties based on their proportionate share of severance tax collections.
[e] The intangibles tax is an optional local tax on residents' interest earnings from investments.
[f] Counties initially receive $5,000 each from the county distribution of the state special highway fund. The remainder of the fund is distributed to counties based a formula that takes in to consideration the county's proportionate share of motor vehicle registration fees, average daily vehicle miles, and total road miles. In 2003, the funding for this aid program was adjusted in a way to reduce the total amount of aid available. This change was instituted in response to a state budget shortfall.
[g] The 911 tax is an optional local tax collected by local telephone companies on the basis of installed telephone lines.
[h] The transient guest tax is an optional local tax on hotel, motel, and bed and breakfast room rentals.
[i] Other revenues include bond proceeds and other debt, grants, user fees, and miscellaneous revenues. Additional detail is provided on page 24.

FISCAL PERFORMANCE

Fiscal capacity and fiscal effort are indicators of county fiscal performance. A discussion of each and their interpretation follows.

Fiscal capacity is a measure of a county's ability to raise revenues from a given source, such as property taxes. As such, fiscal capacity for a given county is the total amount of tax revenue that would result from applying the average tax rate to the county's tax base. To compare across counties, we divide the county's capacity per capita by the average Kansas county's capacity per capita. This results in an index around 100, where 100 represents the average Kansas county. A fiscal capacity above 100 indicates a county has a greater ability to raise revenues from a given source than the average Kansas county. The opposite is true for a value below 100.

Fiscal effort compares a county's fiscal capacity with its actual revenue collections and indicates how intensively a county is taxing its available revenue base. By expending more effort (e.g., increasing the rate at which local taxes are levied or reducing the proportion of the tax base that is exempt from taxation) counties may raise more revenue than their capacity. Similarly, by expending less effort, counties may raise less revenue than their capacity. As above, an index around 100 is used to make comparisons across counties. A value below 100 indicates the county has a lower tax rate and/or allows more tax exemptions than the average county. The opposite is true for a value above 100.

High fiscal capacity combined with low fiscal effort is generally considered the most desirable situation for county government. Greater fiscal capacity indicates that a county has greater "wealth" to draw upon and allows it more flexibility in structuring its revenue mix. A low fiscal effort suggests a county has untapped ability to raise new revenue if needed, but could also point to an over dependence on other revenue sources. The opposite situation, low fiscal capacity and high fiscal effort, typically signals a county is experiencing financial stress.

Fiscal capacity and effort are particularly valuable for evaluating revenue sources within the county's control. Following is a presentation of fiscal capacity and effort measures from 2003 to 2007 for property and sales taxes, as well as a discussion of user fees.

Property Tax

Property tax capacity reflects the county's relative assessed value per person. In 2007, Morris County had a fiscal capacity of 64, indicating that its per capita assessed valuation was 64 percent of that in the average Kansas county.

Property tax effort reflects the county's relative property tax rate. Morris County's fiscal effort was 103 in 2007. This indicates the county raised 103 percent of its property tax capacity by taxing its available property tax base at a higher rate than the average Kansas county.

Between 2003 and 2007, Morris County's property tax fiscal capacity declined from 74 to 64, and its fiscal effort increased from 97 to 103. Table 9 and Figure 7 summarize Morris County's property tax capacity and effort from 2003 to 2007.

Sales Tax

The interpretation of sales tax capacity and effort is somewhat more complicated than that of property tax capacity and effort. First, 20 counties in Kansas did not have a retail sales tax as of December 31, 2007. These counties with a sales tax rate of zero strongly influence the average, resulting in a lower capacity and higher effort than might otherwise be expected for counties with a retail sales tax. For those counties without a retail sales tax, capacity still indicates the relative strength of the sales tax base, but effort is zero because they have no sales tax collections.

Second, sales tax effort reflects both the county's relative sales tax rate and the state's method of distributing county sales tax revenues to counties and cities. This distribution varies by county because it is based on a statutory formula that depends on both the percent of the county's population living in cities and city/county property tax revenues from the previous year. In general, counties with a high percentage of their population living in cities have a lower sales tax effort and vice versa.

Sales tax capacity reflects the county's relative taxable retail sales per person. In 2007, Morris County had a fiscal capacity of 59, indicating that its per capita taxable retail sales were 59 percent of those in the average Kansas county.

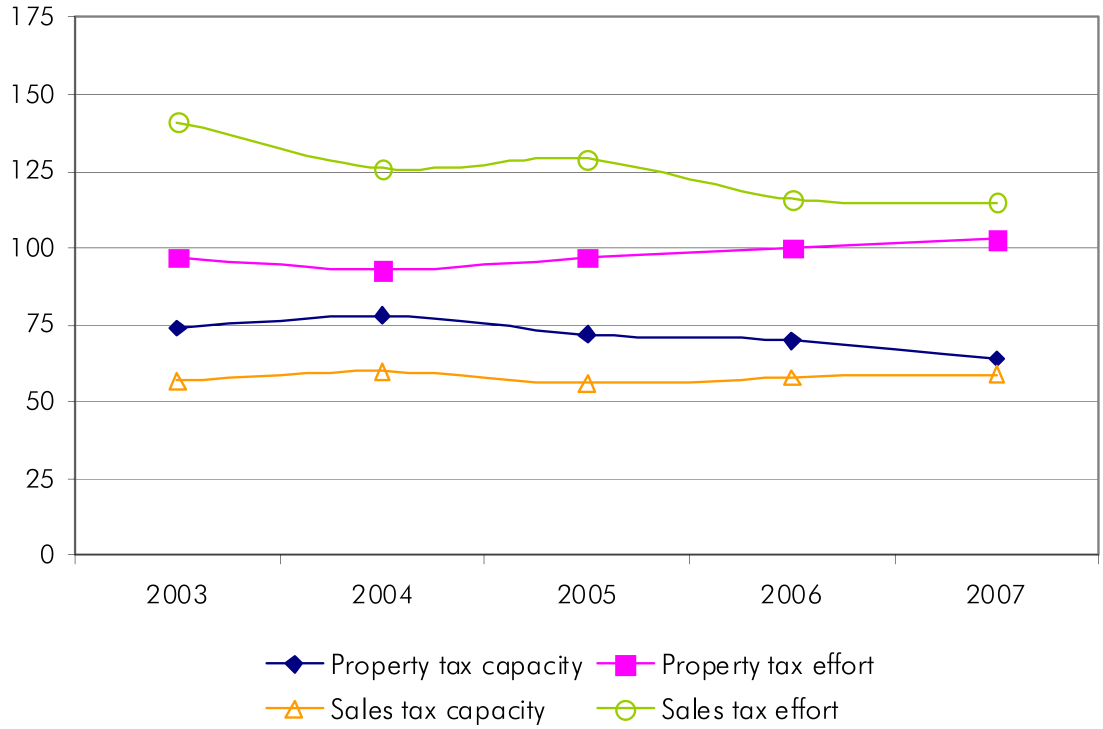
Table 9. Property and sales tax capacity and effort, Morris County, 2003-2007

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Property tax capacity	74	78	72	70	64
Property tax effort	97	93	97	100	103
Sales tax capacity	57	60	56	58	59
Sales tax effort	141	126	129	116	115

Sales tax effort reflects both the county's relative sales tax rate and the state's method of distributing county sales tax revenues. Comparing Morris County's 2007 fiscal capacity with its actual sales tax revenues yields a fiscal effort of 115. In other words, Morris County raised 115 percent of its sales tax capacity. As described above, this may indicate that the county is taxing its available retail sales tax base at a higher rate than the average Kansas county and/or that a lower than average proportion of the county's population lives within city limits.

Between 2003 and 2007, Morris County's sales tax fiscal capacity increased from 57 to 59, and its fiscal effort declined from 141 to 115. Table 9 and Figure 7 summarize Morris County's sales tax capacity and effort from 2003 to 2007.

Figure 7. Property and sales tax capacity and effort, Morris County, 2003-2007



User Fees

User fees are an increasingly important source of revenue for county governments. Data from the 1997 and 2002 Census of Governments indicates that, between 1987 and 2002, county government user charges more than tripled from $15 billion to $47 billion. By 2002, user fees accounted for 18 percent of total U.S. county revenue and 25 percent of total Kansas county revenue.

User fees have been a source of county revenue in Kansas for some time. State law requires the use of some user fees (i.e., motor vehicle and mortgage registration fees). Others are determined on a per use basis, though rates are often restricted by law (i.e., utility charges and solid waste tipping fees). Kansas counties are increasingly applying user fees to such "nonessential" local government services as parks and recreation, libraries, and public transportation, where they have more flexibility setting rates.

While somewhat limited in scope, user fees do offer counties another revenue source within their control. Plus, by charging only the beneficiaries of a service, fees provide an alternative to the often unpopular property tax.

LOCAL FISCAL POLICY

Local financial management is becoming increasingly complex. The responsibilities of local governments continue to grow, while public service expectations remain high. This challenges governments to raise sufficient revenues while controlling their expenditures.

Revenues

Four major revenue sources are within local control: property taxes, sales taxes, user fees, and intergovernmental transfers and aids. Each presents its own challenges.

Kansas county governments remain highly dependent on property taxes as a revenue source. But, increasing public dissatisfaction with the property tax is forcing counties to find other ways to fund local services.

Imposing or increasing a local sales tax is often greeted with opposition from citizens and the local business community based on fears that it may adversely affect retail competitiveness. Combining the sales tax with efforts to foster a healthy environment for business activity may reduce opposition and benefit county revenue by boosting both retail sales and sales tax revenues.

While their use is still somewhat limited, user fees are becoming an increasingly important revenue source for Kansas counties. As user fees apply to only the beneficiaries of a service, they can be a fair and efficient way to finance public services. Of course, there must always be a distinction between services subject to user fees and those that should be available to all citizens regardless of their ability to pay.

Many intergovernmental transfers and aids are formula-based, but others rely on local initiative. Grant funds are often available from the state and federal government for communities that go through an application process. Such applications, however, typically require a serious commitment of local resources and, if successful, provide funding for only a limited period of time.

Generally, a local government should use a revenue mix that provides adequate, stable funding without placing an unfair burden on any particular group. There is no universally optimal mix, however. It depends on local needs, preferences, and resources. The following should be considered when evaluating local revenue sources:

- Adequacy: Is the revenue source regular, reliable, and not susceptible to economic change?
- Adaptability: Can rates be easily adjusted to meet changing needs and avoid shortfalls?
- Administrative ease and economy: Is it simple and inexpensive to administer?
- Economic effects: How does it affect local resource use and growth?
- Social acceptability: How do citizens and businesses perceive the tax?
- Fairness: Does it treat people uniformly and conform to social definitions of fairness, such as ability-to-pay? Do those who benefit the most pay the most?

Expenditures

Controlling expenditures is also an important component of local fiscal policy, as it helps keep taxes low. It should, however, be done with the level of service local government wants to provide in mind. Performance standards provide a means for local governments to ensure that a given level of expenditure is accomplishing their goals. Several strategies for controlling local expenditures are outlined below.

Cutting spending is, perhaps, one of the more obvious means of controlling expenditures. It is often very difficult, however, because it generally means reducing or eliminating services for certain constituents and inevitably affects local government employees. Some options include:

- Cutting programs across-the-board
- Cutting programs selectively
- Subcontracting operations, services, and programs
- Offering early retirement
- Reducing work hours
- Redefining departments and jobs
- Increasing worker productivity through training and technology

Counties, at times, attempt to reduce current spending by delaying infrastructure maintenance. This method generally proves ineffective, however, as rebuilding or replacing infrastructure is typically far more costly in the long-term than regular maintenance.

Changing the way services are provided is another means of controlling local expenditures. Privatizing services may make sense, but should be done only after careful study. Other alternatives include: public-private partnerships, collaborating with other units of local government, consolidating, and using local volunteers. While these strategies can be very effective, they require careful planning and feasibility analysis.

Long-term planning during budgeting can also help local governments control their expenditures. Planning means anticipating future needs, the timing of expenditures, and the total cost of projects and is particularly important for new development and capital expenditures. A capital improvements plan is often used to anticipate the order, timing, and financing of capital expenditures.

Effectively using debt is another strategy for controlling local government expenditures. Governments use debt primarily for long-term infrastructure investment. This amortizes costs over the life of the investment, reducing the immediate financial burden and allowing future beneficiaries to pay their fair share. Debt should never be used to reduce current property taxes. Financial advisors are available to assist local governments in their use of debt.

Fiscal Management

To be effective, fiscal management must be a regular part of local government operations. Tracking monthly revenues and expenditures is vital. Regular monitoring and immediate action throughout the year will reduce budgetary stress. Investing idle funds where they yield the greatest return is appropriate as long as the investments are safe and funds available when needed. Fiscal impact studies can help avoid unexpected costs. These studies anticipate all costs (direct and indirect) associated with a project. Perhaps most importantly, policymakers should regularly and formally discuss fiscal issues, evaluate current policy, and consider policy alternatives. A proactive, long-term approach helps to ensure quality services, low taxes, and fiscal stability for current and future generations.

CONCLUSION

Generally, Kansas counties are fiscally sound. Many factors affecting fiscal management and performance are largely beyond local control, including changes in demographics, economic conditions, state and federal mandates, and public needs and preferences. This report, however, provides a starting point for thoughtful discussion on matters that are within local control. Understanding conditions and trends is important for evaluating past performance and planning for the future. This information, combined with knowledge of the local situation, provides a basis for improving county fiscal management and performance.

NOTES ON OUR ACCOUNTING CONVENTIONS

The information found in this report reflects many of the characteristics of the budget documents used as the source for the *Kansas Fiscal Database*. Here we describe accounting conventions adopted in the construction of the database that may affect the trends presented in this report.

Interpreting Trends

At times, readers may observe large changes in the level of expenditures for a given function or revenues from a given source. Changes typically reflect either a large capital outlay or a change in local accounting practices. To distinguish a change in local accounting practices, it is often helpful to look for a corresponding shift in another revenue or expenditure category.

Comparison Across Places and Over Time

In general, we provide as much detail as possible in accounting for functional expenditure categories. That is, we present as many separate expenditure categories as possible. For some counties, it is possible to report activity in detail. Many counties, however, consolidate funds in an effort to maintain flexibility in meeting unexpected needs.

Local law enforcement activity provides a good example. Generally, the activity of the sheriff's department is placed in the "law enforcement" category, while activities related to the jail and juvenile justice are put in separate functional categories. In some counties, however, all of this activity is consolidated in the sheriff's budget making it impossible to account for jail and juvenile justice activities separately.

In addition, local accounting practices may have changed during the reporting period, presenting expenditures in either greater or lesser detail. Thus, the reader must have an appreciation of what is included in a particular category over time to best understand the trends associated with that function.

Capital Expenditures and Special Assessments

Another important accounting convention relates to our handling of capital expenditures. Capital expenditures are the investments in the physical infrastructure needed to provide a public service. These investments are often very large and occur only once in a great while. Examples of capital expenditures are a new fire truck, jail, or office computer.

In many cases, budget documents do not provide sufficient detail to fully and accurately account for all capital expenditure activity. Thus, rather than treating some counties differently than others, we group the capital expenditure with the function it was intended to support. For example, landfill closure costs are placed in the "solid waste" category, while installing an elevator in the courthouse is assigned to "general government." The only exception is that all debt costs incurred in making capital expenditures are placed in the "bond and interest" category, regardless of their source.

Since this convention mixes operating and capital expenditure budgets, we will sometimes see a large deviation from a normal trend line when capital expenditures are made. While capital expenditures may not represent the "normal" activity of county government, they do represent the full cost of providing a service. In accounting for capital expenditures in this way, however, it becomes relatively more important to understand details about the special needs of, or investments made by, the county.

In a similar way, we count grants and other special appropriations the county receives. This includes dedicated sales taxes that may "pass through" the county and funds related to special assessments. As with capital expenditures, these activities may not represent "normal" county revenues. Nonetheless, county government enables these activities to occur and without their involvement many important investments would not be made. In this way, the county makes an important contribution to enhancing local economic viability that we believe should be accounted for.

Other Revenues

The "other revenues" category consists of all revenues in the county budget that do not fall into one of the other 19 revenue categories in the database. This includes bond proceeds and debt, grants, user fees, and miscellaneous revenues. Rather than adding these items from each fund in the budget, we generally solve for "other revenues" as a residual. That is, we subtract the other 19 revenue categories from total revenues to obtain "other revenues." In most instances, these values are nearly identical although we add the "other revenues" items for several counties that typically have a large difference between the two.

Kansas County Average

Finally, when we calculate the Kansas county average for comparison purposes, we are averaging per capita values for the 104 Kansas counties. (Wyandotte County is excluded due to its status as a consolidated city/county government. We are no longer able to separate typical city verses county finances, thus making a fair comparison with other counties is impossible.) This approach minimizes differences in population size between counties. In Kansas, a few more-populous counties have significantly higher levels of revenues and expenditures than the less-populous majority of counties. Thus, we view averaging per capita values as the fairest way to make generalizations about public finances in Kansas.

Questions and Suggestions

Our objective is to provide a fair and accurate representation of county finances. Invariably, some degree of discretion is required to fit activity into the revenue and expenditure categories we have defined. We strive, however, to maintain the consistency of our accounting procedures.

This is not to say that our accounting procedures are static. In fact, we are continually refining them to present the most accurate and useful information possible. As a result, the information presented here may not match that in previous reports.

Questions about our accounting procedures and suggestions for how we can improve this information resource are always welcome. Please direct questions and comments to Dr. John Leatherman using the contact information on page 1.

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