1-5 ADVERTISING AGE
WKLY. 62,800

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New Bedford-Fall River, Mass.

Population	461,000
Population rank	78th
Personal income ...	$2,045,500,000

The future growth of this SMSA depends on the economy, say observers who note record high unemployment of 16.6% in New Bedford (as of last July) and 13.9% in Fall River.

Although the region had a higher than average crime rate in 1973 and although federal environmental hearings experts have identified New Bedford's drinking water supply as a location of seriously toxic polychlorinated biphenal industrial leakage, both cities are nearing the completion of downtown road construction projects which have cut wide swaths through their urban communities, but promise transportation incentives for more suburban growth.

In the suburbs, the opening of Swansea Mall and Somerset Mall this year added zest to what some media, particularly broadcasters, see as bullish retail growth ahead. One station predicts 25% annual growth in the next few years, compared to 28% experienced this year. Newspapers haven't fared quite that well, one problem being this year's closings of Fall River downtown retailers McWhirr Co., Gilcrest, Stafford Furniture and Boston Baby. Yet, "We're optimistic, and expecting unemployment to settle down," said one local advertising expert.

■ Actually, Fall River has an admirably low unemployment rate, compared to all of Massachusetts, one source maintained. He added that New Bedford, an old whaling community, is another story, however, that it is "crumbling" and suffering one of the highest unemployment rates in the state. It is widely believed that the area's overwhelming Democratic party dominance means it's ignored by state politicians who might otherwise put funds into the towns.

Fall River-New Bedford is an SMSA that's been staging a comeback, however halting in recent decades, stung as it was by the movement of textile mills to the south. Textiles have been the dominant industry, followed by lighting fixtures and furniture.

Heavy Portuguese immigration into New Bedford and the leveling of much of downtown in a combined urban renewal-road building project, and a bad fishing year in 1975 are said to add to that town's woes. Yet now, companies are calling back laid-off workers, says the local chamber of commerce. The population, now locally estimated at 480,000, could grow to 490,000 by 1980, with some observers seeing a slight reversal of a usual trend—suburbs growing at the expense of the downtown area.

■ Other new construction, besides that promised for the $12,000,000 downtown renewal project, has included Royal Crest Apartments and Mitchell Ave. middle-income apartments, the local chamber said. A newly formed public transit authority has bought 60 new buses to serve the two-city metroplex.

Next year calls for completing a new $22,000,000 high school, five new buildings for collegiate education, and continued interstate construction. Already completed are a professional building, a medical building, a bank building, industrial park construction, new apartments, and a filtration plant. In New Bedford, a showcase project has been the new City Hall spanning the new expressway, which is said to serve as a "psychological link" across the highway that splits the town.

On the commercial end, Sears and Edgars department stores have opened new outlets, and seven-year-old Battleship Cove in Fall River just received a decommissioned PT boat to expand this popular tourist attraction run by the USS Massachusetts Memorial Committee.

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