The wholesale and retail trades are important parts of the economy. In Megalopolis they employ a significant number of workers. In New York alone 222,878 workers were employed in the two sectors, according to the 1997 Census. Another area of very high absolute numbers is Middlesex MA with 127,978.

The New York metro area is a significant area of employment. The seven New York metro counties of Bergen, Nassau, New York, Suffolk, Kings, Queens, and Westchester employ a combined 784,908 workers in the two sectors. In contrast, some of the more peripheral counties such as Orange NY, Berkshire MA, New Castle DE, and Sussex NJ have employment numbers so low that they are not released to prevent revealing individual employers.

The retail and wholesale trades are concentrated close to the major urban centers in the region. Wholesale trades are found in urban locations because of the ease of distribution. In New York, of the almost quarter of million-workers in the two sectors, more than half are in the wholesale sector. In more peripheral areas such as Franklin MA the 3,662 workers in both sectors only 782 are in wholesale, whereas in Suffolk County, NY on the eastern tip of Long Island and close to the New York metro, 38% are in wholesale.