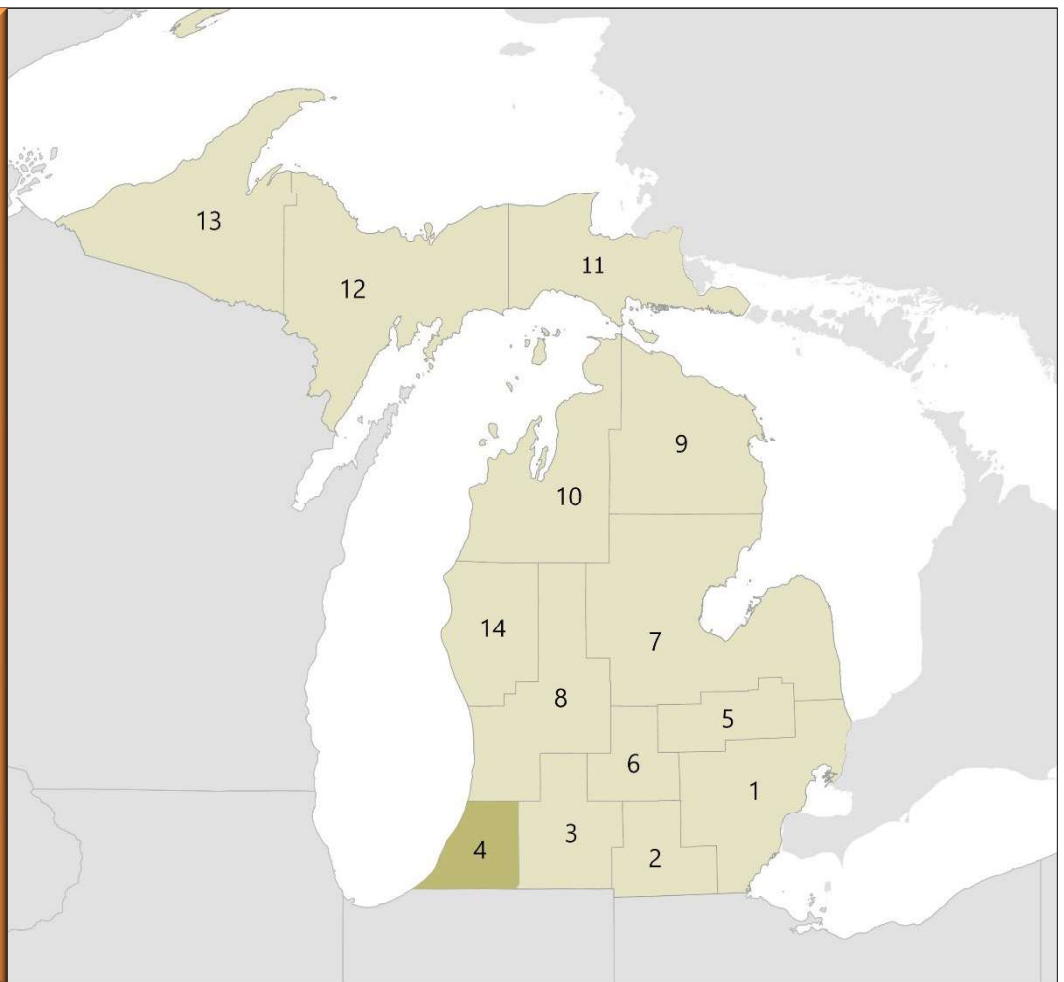


Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan Michigan Planning Region 4

Final Plan
July 2024

**Region 4
Counties:**
Berrien
Cass
Van Buren



Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Background

Introduction

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, enacted as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), maintained formula grants through the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) Program. This program funds transportation services planned, designed, and provided to meet the needs of older adults and people with disabilities. As noted by FTA Section 5310 Program funding can be used for "traditional" capital projects and for "nontraditional" capital and/or operating projects that go beyond the scope of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit service or public transportation alternatives designed to assist older adults and people with disabilities.

One of the federal requirements of the Section 5310 program is that projects selected for funding must be included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan (coordinated transportation plan). In Michigan coordinated transportation plans are primarily based on the fourteen regional planning agencies across the state, and this is the plan for the Southwestern Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) – Region 4 that includes Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties. The region is shown in Figure 1-1 on the next page, and in relation to the other planning regions in Michigan.

Plan Contents

Chapter 1 (this chapter) provides background information on the planning process and the Section 5310 Program.

Chapter 2 discusses outreach efforts and the involvement of regional stakeholders in the planning process.

Chapter 3 provides a review of recent plans and studies in the region that are relevant to the planning process.

Chapter 4 provides a review of current transportation services and resources in the region.

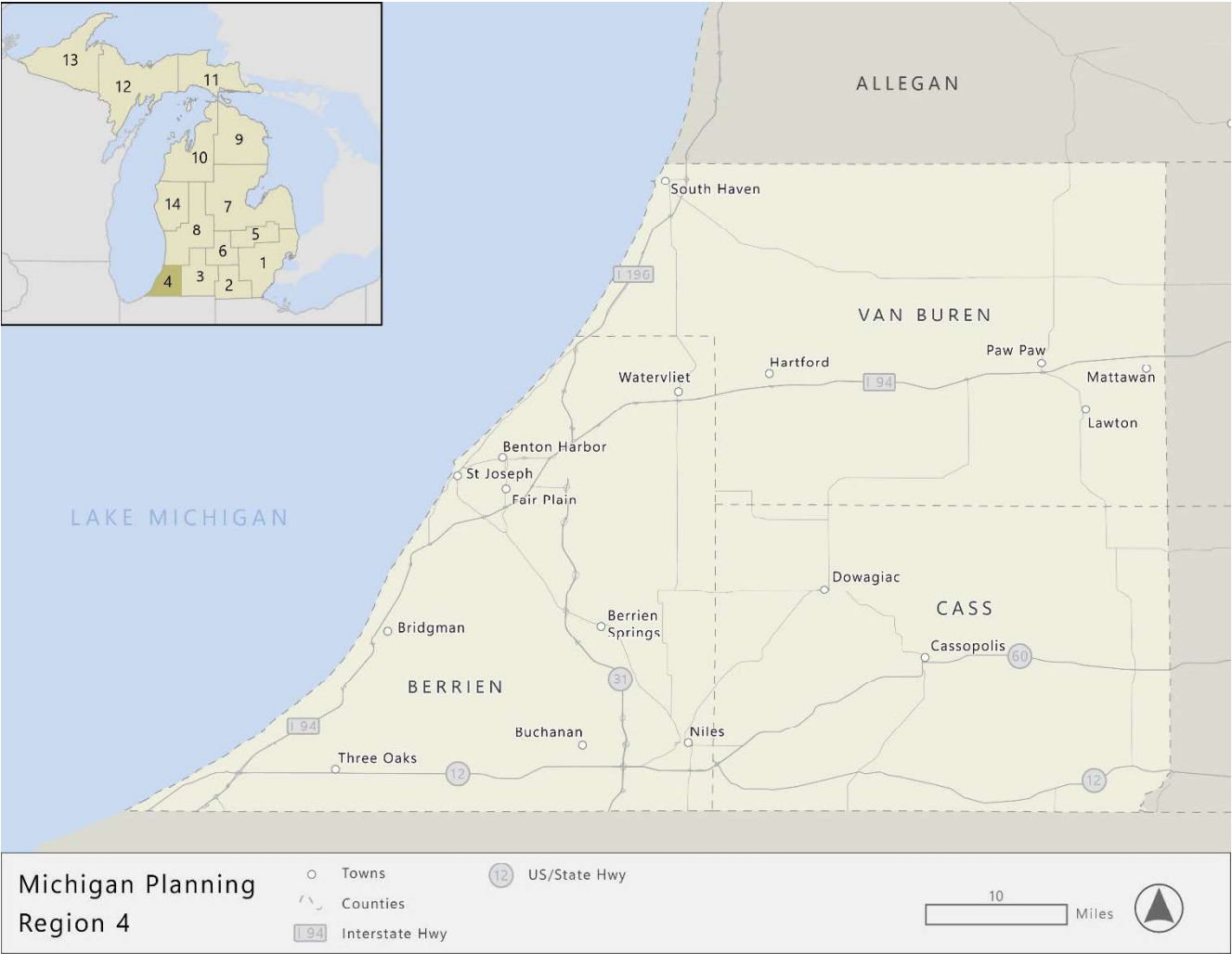
Chapter 5 provides an assessment of the transportation needs in the region based on input from key stakeholders.

Chapter 6 provides an assessment of transportation needs in the region through a demographic analysis.

Chapter 7 presents strategies and potential projects to meet transportation needs as identified and prioritized by regional stakeholders.

Chapter 8 discusses the process for approval of this plan.

Figure 1-1: Michigan Planning Region 4



Coordinated Transportation Planning Requirements

FTA guidance defines a coordinated public transit-human service transportation plan as one that identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, seniors, and people with low incomes; provides strategies for meeting those local needs; and prioritizes transportation services and projects for funding and implementation. There are four required plan elements:

- (1) An assessment of available services that identifies current transportation providers (public, private and non-profit).
- (2) An assessment of transportation needs for individuals with disabilities and seniors. This assessment can be based on the experiences and perceptions of the planning partners or on more sophisticated data collection efforts, and gaps in service.
- (3) Strategies, activities, and/or projects to address the identified gaps between current services and needs, and opportunities to achieve efficiencies in service delivery.
- (4) Priorities for implementation based on resources (from multiple program sources), time, and feasibility for implementing specific strategies and/or activities identified.

Coordination with Other Federal Programs

The Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) is a Federal interagency council that works to coordinate funding and provide expertise on human services transportation for three targeted populations: people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals of low income. The CCAM works at the Federal level to improve coordination of transportation resources and to address barriers faced by states and local communities when coordinating transportation. The CCAM's mission is to issue policy recommendations and implement activities that improve the availability, accessibility, and efficiency of transportation for CCAM's targeted populations, with the vision of equal access to coordinated transportation for all Americans.

As part of the coordination efforts CCAM encourages Federal fund braiding for local match that allows grant recipients to use funds from one federal program to meet the match requirements of another, such as the Section 5310 Program. The CCAM Federal Fund Braiding Guide provides information to potential grantees on acceptable fund braiding arrangements on transportation-related projects. The guide defines Federal fund braiding for local match and examines whether Federal fund braiding is allowable for 61 programs across CCAM agencies that may fund transportation. More information on CCAM and access to the braiding guide can be found at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/coordinating-council-access-and-mobility>. This website also provides links to multiple FTA-funded transportation technical assistance centers that can also offer guidance with coordination efforts.

In addition, in March 2022 FTA posted guidance clarifying coordination on human services transportation on a new transportation coordination webpage. As noted by FTA, coordinated transportation involves multiple entities working together to deliver one or more components of a transportation service to increase capacity. The transportation coordination guidance aims to reduce overlap between the federal programs across nine agencies that may fund human services transportation and incentivize collaboration by clarifying eligible reporting into the National Transit Database (NTD). This new guidance addresses the following topics as they relate to NTD reporting: definition of public transportation; paratransit; charter service; incidental use of transit assets; and trip brokering. This guidance can be found at

<https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-programs/access/ccam/about/transportation-coordination>.

Going Beyond the Federal Requirements

While this coordinated plan meets federal coordinated transportation planning requirements, it is also consistent with FTA guidance that encourages broad efforts that incorporate activities offered under a variety of transportation programs sponsored by federal, state, and local agencies to greatly strengthen its impact. Therefore, this plan takes a broad approach that includes:

- Documenting the variety of transportation services offered in the region, and beyond those funded through the Section 5310 program.
- Incorporating and building upon ongoing and recent extensive planning efforts in the region.
- Placing an emphasis on moving people and expanding mobility options, by whatever means possible and through a variety of services.
- Providing strategies and potential projects beyond services funded through the Section 5310 program.

Overall, this plan is designed to serve as a blueprint and a practical document for future discussions and efforts in Region 4 to improve regional mobility and coordination.

Chapter 2

Outreach and Planning Process

Introduction

This chapter discusses outreach efforts conducted in the development of this coordinated transportation plan, and the involvement of regional stakeholders in the planning process. Federal coordinated planning guidance served as the foundation in the development of a broad approach that provided the opportunity for a diverse group of individuals, agencies, and organizations to be involved.

Regional Outreach Efforts

The primary outreach effort for the statewide coordinated transportation planning process involved two rounds of online regional workshops that provided the opportunity to engage a variety of stakeholders, to confirm transportation needs, and to discuss potential strategies, projects, and services to improve regional mobility. In Region 4 SWMPC distributed an invitation to numerous agencies and organizations that serve older adults, people with disabilities, people with lower incomes, and others facing transportation challenges, and seeking their involvement in the focus groups and their input on mobility needs and potential improvements in the region. These stakeholders were encouraged to pass the invitation along to their individual contact lists to help ensure an even broader outreach effort.

Region 4 Focus Groups

In Region 4 an initial focus group was conducted on March 15, 2023, and attracted registrants that included representatives from:

- Aging programs
- Disability organizations
- Human service agencies
- Local transit systems
- Michigan Department of Transportation
- Planning agencies and commissions
- Faith-based non-profit

The focus group began with a review of the coordinated transportation planning process and the Section 5310 Program, and discussion on the important role of stakeholders in providing their input on transportation needs and potential solutions and in the collection of appropriate information and data

for the plan. The majority of the focus group workshop was then focused on obtaining feedback from participants through three breakout groups, and in particular on:

- Existing transportation services provided by their organization/agency (if applicable)
- Their sense of the awareness of transportation services in the region for older adults, people with disabilities, people with lower incomes, and other population groups that may have limited mobility options
- Strengths and weaknesses of current transportation services
- Opportunities to improve transportation services and mobility options in the region
- Specific transportation services or resources that would expand mobility in the region

As a follow-up to the focus group regional stakeholders were provided with the opportunity to complete a questionnaire and to offer additional feedback on community transportation needs and potential coordination efforts. Information from that survey was incorporated into the needs identified through the focus group.

At the conclusion of the focus group participants were invited to stay involved with the coordinated planning process by participating in a second regional focus group. This event was conducted on May 25, 2023, and provided the opportunity to review the transportation needs and gaps identified through the initial focus group and to discuss preliminary strategies for meeting these needs.

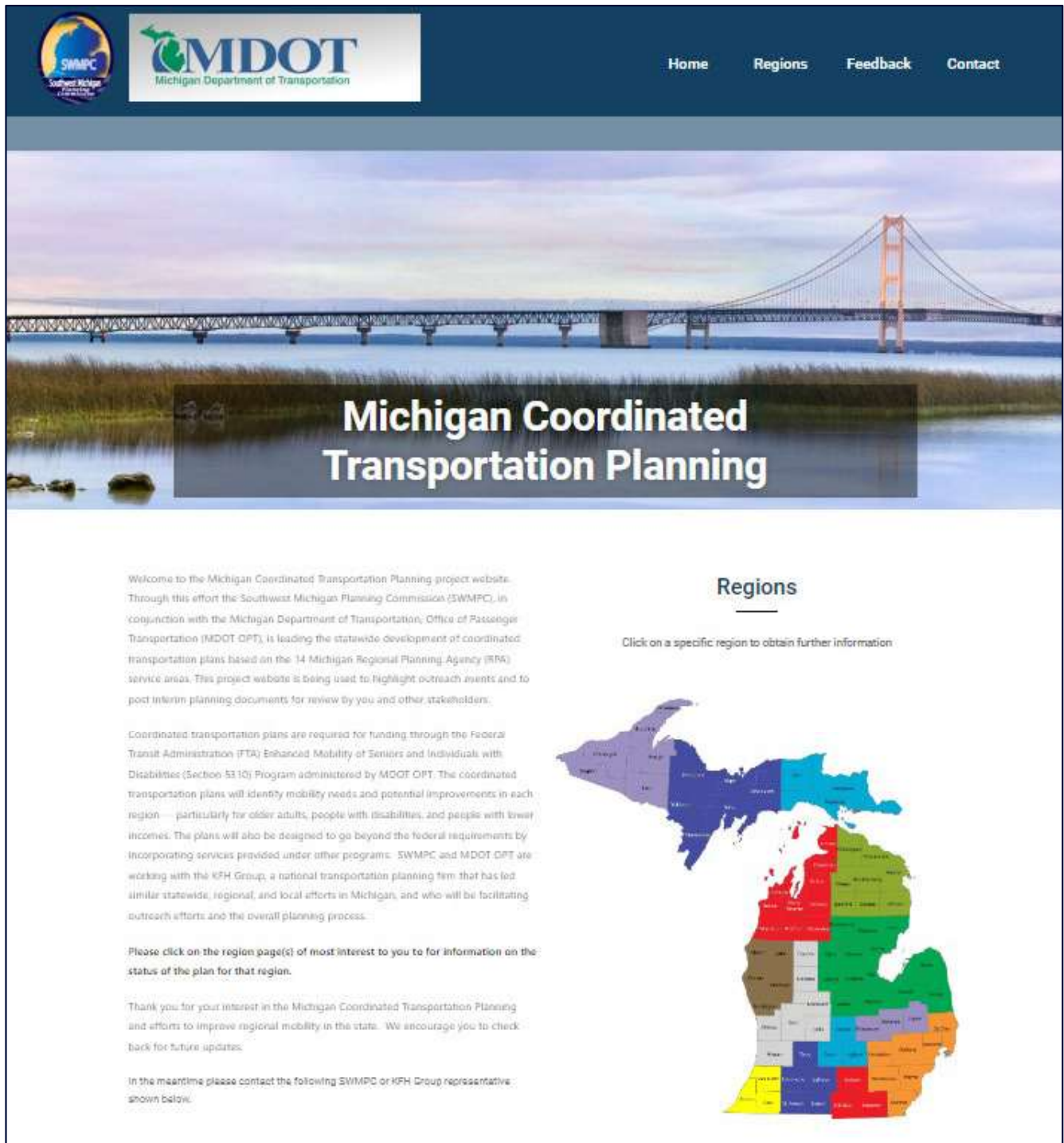
Ongoing Stakeholder Input

While the two focus groups served as the formal gathering of regional stakeholders, they had multiple opportunities throughout the planning process to review interim documents and provide their input. This ongoing involvement included:

- Reviewing and commenting on a summary of the transportation needs from the regional workshop and the questionnaire.
- Reviewing and providing input on potential strategies, activities, and projects to be included in the regional plan.
- Prioritizing strategies identified as the most appropriate for improving mobility in the region.
- Reviewing and providing input on a draft version of this plan.

Michigan Coordinated Transportation Planning Website

To assist in outreach and planning efforts a project website was established at <https://michigancoordinationplans.com>, and is shown in Figure 2-1. This website offered background information on the study and details on regional online focus groups and was used to promote these events and for stakeholders to register.

Figure 2-1: Home Page of the Michigan Coordinated Transportation Planning Website

Chapter 3

Previous Plans and Studies

Introduction

This chapter summarizes recent plans and studies in the region that are relevant to the study process, or provide information on community transportation needs and potential solutions. The issues and needs identified by previous planning processes were similar to those identified during outreach efforts in Region 4. Key issues from the previous planning reports and projects, along with stakeholder input and the demographic analysis discussed in later chapters, help to provide a broad transportation needs assessment.

Moving Forward: A Plan for Public Transit in Berrien County - 2014

When the 2014 Transit Development Plan for Berrien County was produced, there were four transit systems operating within the County. The plan used extensive data and information that lead to opportunities to improve transit services through expanded coordination or mobility management efforts. Overall, there were multiple reasons to consolidate services into one countywide transit system, including:

- Saving money by reducing administration and management costs
- Reducing overall operating costs
- Providing seamless connections for County residents
- Fulfilling current and future unmet transportation needs
- Increasing ridership
- Increasing funding opportunities
- Ensuring more efficient use of resources
- Providing safer public transit services
- Residents were forced to transfer between multiple providers, endure long travel times, and paying multiple fares

Connect Berrien Transit Service Integration Plan Final Report - 2018

The Connect Berrien Transit Service Integration Plan builds off the work completed in 2014 for the Moving Forward report. This plan gathered information on existing transit services, transportation markets, and major concerns to both understand what type and level of transit service needed in the

county and to propose a system that improves the delivery of transit service in the county. The overall goals of the plan included making transit more convenient, connecting people to more places, making transit easier to use, and ensuring the financial and long-term sustainability of all transit systems.

The plan proposed a countywide public transportation system, called GoBerrien, which would use scheduled fixed-route service for longer trips between urban areas. GoBerrien would also use a demand-response system to handle shorter trips, either point-to-point or as feeder service to the fixed-route network. The services would operate seven days a week, although some would only operate on alternating days. The GoBerrien system would have a single one-way fare of \$2.00 for any trip.

Berrien County Coordinated Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan - 2009

The Coordinated Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan was created through Berrien County Transportation Forum, Outreach Meetings, and Berrien County Coordinated Planning Committee, and Public Comment on the Plan.

The plan included five strategies:

- Establish a structure to build and sustain coordination efforts
- Expand outreach to customers, human service agency staff, employers and others, and provide simplified access to information regarding existing transportation options
- Expand fixed route public transportation services
- Use current demand-response services more efficiently to expand capacity of current services offered to individuals who need human service and specialized transportation
- Improve integration between countywide rural service and small urban dial a ride services

Van Buren County Coordinated Transit Plan - 2007

The Van Buren County (VBC) Coordinated Transit Plan was derived to complement the Van Buren Public Transit Study and Implementation Handbook. The plan was developed through public outreach and stakeholder input, an assessment of available need and services, strategies to improve service, and recommendations for implementation. The six strategies developed include:

1. Increasing coordination
2. Implementing technology
3. Utilizing technology to increase coordination
4. Improving public education
5. Instituting flex routes to serve certain geographic areas or targeted populations
6. Achieving funding stability for public transit

Cass County Transportation Authority County-Wide Transit Service Plan - 2021

The completed County-Wide Transit Service Plan serves to guide Cass County Transportation Authority. A summary of needs was compiled through rider surveys, community surveys, and stakeholder interviews. The current list of needs within Cass County were concluded to be:

- Expanded service hours in evenings and on weekends
- Expanded service are to access destinations outside Cass County
- Scheduled services that reduce or eliminate the need to make a reservation
- Opportunities for same day service
- On-demand service options
- Greater flexibility with scheduling trips
- Consideration of one entity for managing and operating transit services in Cass County
- Increased marketing efforts to raise awareness of available transit service options

The recommendations within the plan were split between service alternatives and organizational alternatives. The service alternatives focused on scheduled connector routes, modified demand response service, expanded evening service, new Saturday service, and on-demand services. The organizational alternatives focused on assessing the opportunity to further coordinate or consolidate CCTA and Dowagiac Dial-A-Ride organizational structures, expanded marketing efforts, consideration of a millage campaign, and greater use of a local advisory committee.

Coordinated Mobility Plan: Prosperity Region 8 - 2016

Prosperity Region 8 included Berrien, Branch, Calhoun, Cass, Kalamazoo, St. Joseph, and Van Buren Counties. One of the major needs within Region 8 included regional connectivity including:

- Crossing jurisdictional lines
- Coordination between Berrien County, Cass County, and Van Buren County
- Providing employment transportation service to expanding facilities
- Locating eligible drivers for van-pools
- Commuter service to and from Kalamazoo

Some of the other needs included expanded transportation services, improved and expanded outreach, marketing, and education, improved coordination, and additional funding. The strategies included:

1. Expand and improve local transit services
 - a. Expansion of coordinated service
 - b. Expansion of service hours
 - c. Countywide service and beyond

2. Secure additional funding to provide expanded transportation services
 - a. Seek grant opportunities
 - b. Develop sponsorships and partnerships and identify new public/private opportunities
 - c. Advocate for additional funding
 - d. Work with Medicaid to seek transit solutions
3. Improve coordination of public, private and human services transportation
 - a. Improve coordination of services among providers through mobility management activities
 - b. Developing a mentoring program
4. Regional connectivity
 - a. Identify and prioritize connectivity needs
 - b. Work with community leaders to plan, prioritize and seek funding
5. Maintain existing transportation services
 - a. Continue to support services that efficiently and effectively meet identified transportation needs
 - b. Continue to support capital needs
6. Improve and expand outreach, marketing and education
 - a. Establish or expand programs that educate leaders, stakeholders, and customers
 - b. Establish or expand programs that educate customers and stakeholders
 - c. Expand coordination efforts with Michigan 2-1-1
 - d. Clarity related to crossing of jurisdictional lines

Chapter 4

Transportation Services and Resources

Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of public transit, human services transportation, private transportation services, and non-motorized transportation services provided in Region 4. The process to identify transportation resources available in the region included:

- Using information from previous planning efforts
- Obtaining input from regional stakeholders through the on-line focus groups
- Reviewing reports produced by MDOT
- Conducting on-line research and obtaining appropriate information on current transportation services

Public Transit

Region 4 is served by a total of 6 individual transit systems including:

- Berrien County Public Transportation
- Cass County Transportation Authority
- Dowagiac Dial-A-Ride
- Niles Dial-A-Ride
- Twin Cities Area Transportation
- Van Buren Public Transit

Berrien Bus

Berrien County Public Transportation, locally known as Berrien Bus, is a non-urban system that provides demand response service within Berrien County that are not served by dial-a-ride services. The service includes both flex-fixed service and demand-response service. Berrien Bus runs Monday through Friday 5:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Fares for Berrien Bus services are presented in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1: Fares for Berrien Bus

	Demand Response	Flex Route
Regular	\$5.00	\$2.50
Seniors/Disabled	\$2.50	\$1.25
Children under 3	Free	Free

Cass County Transportation Authority

Cass County Public Transportation Authority (aka Cass County Public Transit) is a shared ride transportation system for Cass County residents, with special reduced fare for seniors and individuals with disabilities. All riders must call 24 hours in advance. The services are available Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Cass County Public Transit coordinates with Dowagiac Dial-A-Ride system, as well as other neighboring counties.

Fares for Cass County Public Transit services are presented in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2: Fares for Cass County Public Transit Services

	Within 5 miles from Base	Beyond 5 miles from base
Regular	\$3.50	\$5.50
Seniors/Disabled	\$1.75	\$2.75
Youth/Students	\$1.75	\$2.70
Children under 5	Free	Free

Dowagiac Dial-A-Ride

Dowagiac Dial-A-Ride (DART) operates within City limits, with additional service area to include Southwestern Michigan College. Service is provided to township residents as follows:

- North to the Dowagiac Conservation Club
- South to Dowagiac Auto
- West to Apostolic Lighthouse Church
- East to Daily Road

Fares for Dowagiac Dial-A-Ride services are presented in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3: Fares for Dowagiac Dial-A-Ride Services

	Within City Limits One-Way	To/From Outside City Limits One-Way
Regular	\$2.00	\$4.00
Senior/Disabled	\$1.00	\$2.00
Youth/Student (under 18)	\$1.00	\$2.00
SMC Student	-	\$2.00

Niles Dial-A-Ride

Niles Dial-A-Ride Transportation (DART) serves both Niles and Buchanan with demand response service and one deviated fixed route. DART operates the demand response service Monday through Friday 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The deviated fixed route service runs Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Fares for Cass County Public Transit services are presented in Table 4-4.

Table 4-4: Fares for Niles Dial-A-Ride Services

	Demand Response			Deviated Fixed Route
	Within Niles City Limits	To, From, Within Townships, including to/from, Buchanan	Within Buchanan City Limits	
Regular	\$3.00	\$4.00	\$1.50	\$2.00
Reduced Fare	\$1.50	\$2.00	\$0.75	\$1.00

Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority

Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority (TWATA) provides fixed-route, dial-a-ride, and paratransit services throughout Benton Harbor. The Demand-Response service provides curb-to-curb same day services within the City of Benton Harbor, St. Joseph, Benton Township, and Royalton Township medical offices. Calls are taken Monday through Friday from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m..

Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority provides two fixed-routes. The Blue Route makes a one-hour loop through Benton Harbor and the Benton Township retail area, running twice an hour. The Red Route makes an hour loop through Benton Harbor, St. Joseph, St. Joseph Township, and Stevensville. The two routes operate Monday through Friday 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m..

The paratransit services operate within TCATA service area. Regular service within the service area operates Monday through Friday 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.. The paratransit service for the blue route operates Monday through Friday 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.. The paratransit service for the red route operates from Monday through Friday 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m..

The fares are shown in Table 4-5.

Table 4-5: Fares for Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority

	Fixed-Route	Demand-Response
Regular	\$1.00	\$4.00
Seniors/Disability	\$0.50	\$2.00
Youth (1-11)	\$0.50	\$2.00
Children (1 or under)	Free	Free

Van Buren Public Transit

Van Buren Public Transit operates county-wide services, out-of-county reservations, veterans shuttle, and a dial-a-ride service. The Dial-A-Ride service operates curb-to-curb Monday through Friday within the Paw Paw areas and Monday through Sunday in the South Haven area. The County-Wide services run Monday through Friday between 8:45 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. and 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. The out-of-county reservations are available Monday through Friday. The Veterans shuttle runs Tuesday and Thursday with drop offs at 9:00 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. and returns at 12:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Fares for Van Buren Public Transit services are presented in Table 4-6.

Table 4-6: Fares for Van Buren Public Transit Services

	In Zone	Zone to Zone	Flex Routes	Demand Response	Out of County*
General	\$4.00	\$6.00	\$2.50	\$1.00	\$20.00
Half Fare	\$2.00	\$3.00	\$1.25	\$0.50	\$10.00

*OUT-OF-COUNTY VA TRIPS ARE FREE

Regional Overview

Table 4-7: Public Transit Services in Region 4

System	Service Type	Primary Service Area	Service Hours	Regional Services/Connectivity
Berrien County Public Transportation	Fixed Route and Demand Response	Berrien County	Weekdays 5:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Connections with Benton Harbor and Niles
Cass County Transportation Authority	Fixed Route and Demand Response	Cass County	Weekdays 6:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Intra-County
Dowagiac Dial-A-Ride	Demand Response	City of Dowagiac	Weekdays 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	Intra-City
Niles Dial-A-Ride	Fixed Route and Demand Response	City of Niles. City of Buchanan and Buchanan Township	Weekdays 7:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.	Intra-City, Connections between Buchanan and Niles
Twin Cities Area Transportation Authority	Fixed Route and Demand Response	Benton Harbor	Weekdays 6:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m. Saturdays 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m.	Intra-City
Van Buren Public Transit	Flex Route and Demand Response	Van Buren County	Weekdays 8:45 a.m. - 9:45 p.m., 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m.	Intra-County

Human Service Transportation Providers

This section provides an overview of non-profit and human service transportation providers identified in the region. Transportation services are specialized in nature, and typically provided only to agency clients for a specific trip purpose, generally either medical or to access agency locations. These services may be modified due to funding or other changes.

Berrien County

- Department of Health and Human Services reimburses for transportation for medical appointments for those who use Medicaid
- Region IV Area Agency on Aging is a regional planning, advocacy, and administrative agency that plans and provides needed services to seniors in specified geographic regions of the state. They also have a call center that people can call for help finding transportation.
- Central County Center for Senior Citizens in Berrien Springs provides adult day care services including organized daily activities, transportation, meal delivery and professional supervision to seniors in Niles, Buchanan, St. Joseph, and Benton Harbor. Transportation program hours - Monday-Friday (Transporting for appointments between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.).
- Comfort Keepers of St. Joseph provide senior care and in-home care in St. Joseph, South Haven, Bridgman, and surrounding areas in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties.
- Buchanan Area Senior Center provides senior care in Buchanan, Niles, and South Bend, IN. Transportation program hours - Monday-Friday (First pick up 9:00 a.m. and last pick up 3:00 p.m.).
- Niles Senior Center provides transportation to seniors in Niles, Buchanan, St. Joseph, Benton Harbor, Dowagiac, Cassopolis, and Mishawaka, IN. Transportation program hours - Monday-Friday (First pick up 7:30 a.m. and last pick up 3:00 p.m.).
- St. Joseph Lincoln Senior Services provides transportation to seniors in St. Joseph, Benton Harbor, and Stevensville. Transportation program hours – Monday, Wednesday and Friday (First pick up 8:00 a.m. and last pick up 12:30 p.m.), and Tuesday and Thursday (First pick up 8:00 a.m. and last pick up 2:30 p.m.).
- Benton Harbor/Benton Twp. Senior Center provides transportation for seniors to St. Joseph, Benton Harbor, and Stevensville. Transportation program hours - Monday-Friday (First pick up 9:00 a.m. and last pick up 3:00 p.m.).
- Greater Niles/Buchanan Committee on Aging provides transportation to medical appointments only. Regional service includes Mishawaka, Granger and South Bend.

- Medic 1 Ambulance of Benton Harbor provides emergency and non-emergency medical treatment and transportation. They also operate the Wheelchair Express division, which has been designed to transport patients who are confined to a wheel chair or who cannot get around like they used to. The fleet of vehicles has been designed to transport patients who are confined to a wheelchair or who cannot get around like they used to. Vans are equipped with a lift to allow for easy loading and unloading and can accommodate up to two wheel chairs and three ambulatory clients. The destination of a wheelchair cannot be an emergency room or other acute care setting. Transportation is available for dialysis appointments, radiation or physician appointments, hospital admissions and discharges, nursing homes, rehabilitation hospitals, scheduled family events, Home for the Holidays events, or other destinations as scheduling and service area allows. The vans can accommodate up to two wheelchairs at time and up to three ambulatory clients.
- North Berrien Senior Center in Coloma provides volunteer drivers who donate their time to drive the center's vehicles bringing seniors to medical appointments, grocery shopping and to the center for lunch. Transportation is available Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Service is limited to areas of Berrien County.
- River Valley Senior Center in Harbert provides transportation service to seniors ages 60 over living in Bridgman, New Buffalo, Lakeside, Union Pier, Sawyer, Harbert, Three Oaks, New Troy, Grand Beach, and Galien. Transportation program hours - Monday-Friday (First pick up 8:00 a.m. and last pick up 3:00 p.m.).
- Pride Care offers non-emergency medical transportation in southwest Michigan.
- Sanders Non-Emergency Medical Transportation provides wheelchair transportation for routine non-emergency medical appointments within Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties.
- Southwest Michigan Community Ambulance Service is a non-profit, municipally owned and operated advanced life support ambulance service serving the residents and visitors of the Greater Niles and Buchanan area.

Cass County

- Cass County Council on Aging provides limited transportation services out of Cassopolis for out-of-county medical appointments.
- Comfort Keepers of St. Joseph provides senior care and in-home care in St. Joseph, South Haven, Bridgman, and surrounding areas in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties.
- Region IV Area Agency on Aging is a regional planning, advocacy, and administrative agency that plans and provides needed services to seniors in specified geographic regions of the state.
- Pride Care offers non-emergency medical transportation in southwest Michigan.
- Sanders Non-Emergency Medical Transportation provides wheelchair transportation for routine non-emergency medical appointments within Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties.

- Southwest Michigan Community Ambulance Service is a non-profit, municipally owned and operated advanced life support ambulance service serving the residents and visitors of the Greater Niles and Buchanan area.
- Area Wide Transport is a private sector transportation company offering door to door, non-emergency transportation.

Van Buren County

- Van Buren Emergency Medical Services provides non-emergency medical treatment transportation.
- Comfort Keepers of St. Joseph provides senior care and in-home care in St. Joseph, South Haven, Bridgman, and surrounding areas in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties.
- Region IV Area Agency on Aging is a regional planning, advocacy, and administrative agency that plans and provides needed services to seniors in specified geographic regions of the state.
- Pride Care offers non-emergency medical transportation in southwest Michigan.
- Sanders Non-Emergency Medical Transportation provides wheelchair transportation for routine non-emergency medical appointments within Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren Counties.
- Area Wide Transport is a private sector transportation company offering door to door, non-emergency transportation.

Private Transportation Providers

Intercity Bus Services

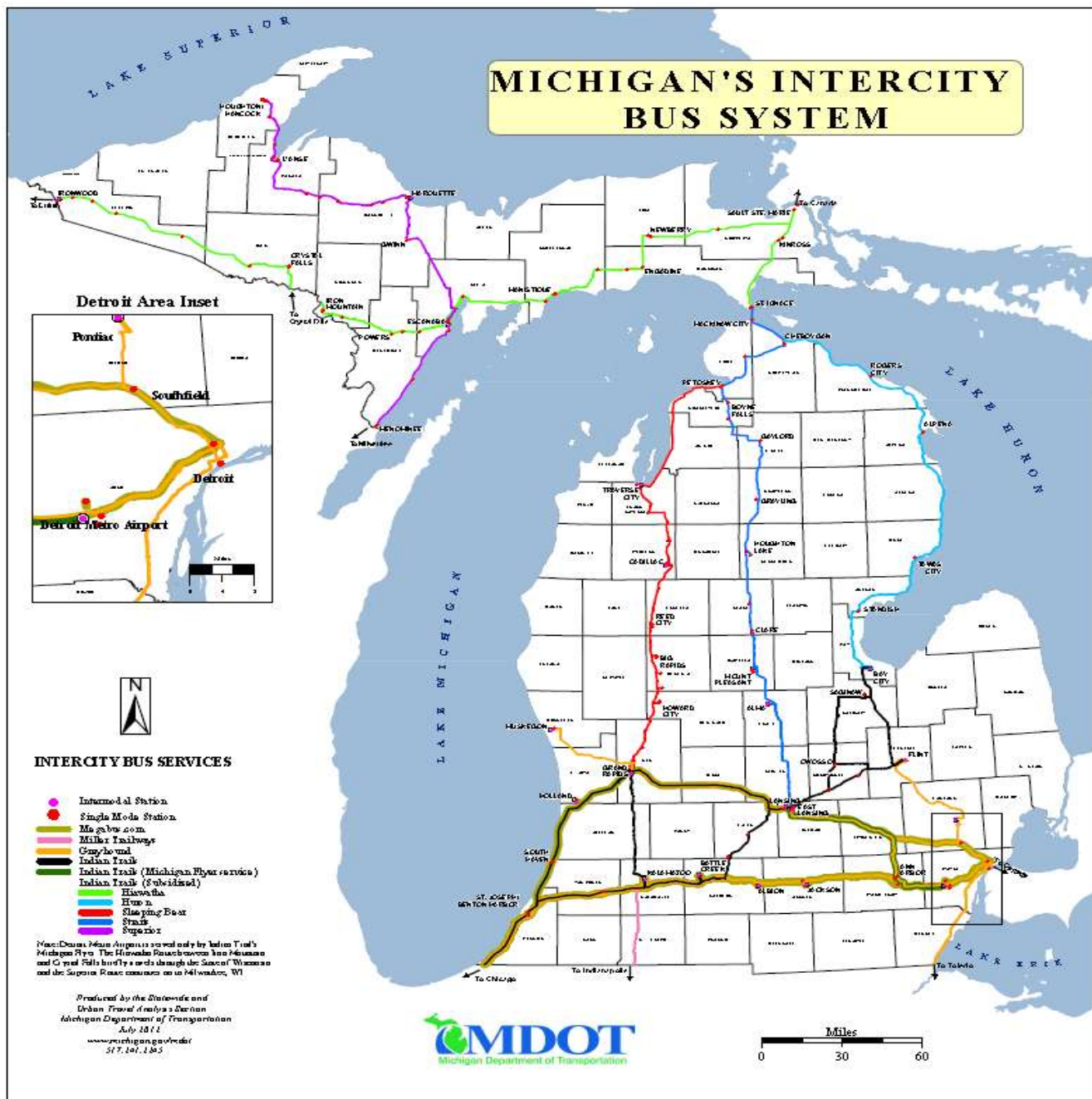
Within the study area there are three intercity bus providers. Typically intercity bus service provides scheduled service to cities over much longer distances than local transit agencies. Indian Trails, Greyhound Bus Lines and Coach USA provide regularly scheduled service from six locations. Greyhound and Indian Trails serve the communities of: Benton Harbor, Paw Paw, South Haven and South Bend. From these locations people can reach various destinations that include Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, Holland, Grand Rapids, Elkhart and Chicago without transferring to another route. For example, there are four daily connections from Benton Harbor to Kalamazoo with the first trip departing Benton Harbor at around 9:00 a.m. to Kalamazoo and the last return trip from Kalamazoo to Benton Harbor departing at 8:40 p.m. There are also several other destinations that passengers can reach within the state of Michigan by transferring to other routes in the cities of Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Battle Creek. Please see Figure 4-1.

Issues

Service and Connectivity:

For the majority of trips arriving after 5:00 p.m. there is no local public transit service available to connect people to their final destinations within the communities they reside. There is no intercity bus service within the county of Allegan. Residents must travel to Holland or South Haven, which requires crossing county boundaries.

Figure 4-1: Michigan Intercity Bus System



Amtrak and Commuter Rail

Amtrak

Travel across county and state boundaries within the study area is very limited. While public or private vehicle is the predominant mode of travel, interstate and intercity rail transportation options are available between cities within and outside of the study area. Amtrak operates three passenger train routes that serve communities within the study area. The Pere Marquette Route provides daily service between Chicago and Grand Rapids with stops in New Buffalo, St. Joseph, Bangor, Holland, and Grand Rapids. This service is limited to one trip daily, leaving Grand Rapids in the morning and returning from Chicago in the evening.

The Wolverine and Blue Water Route provides daily service between Chicago and Pontiac, Michigan with stops in New Buffalo, Niles, Dowagiac, Kalamazoo and Battle Creek in Southwest Michigan. There is thruway service, provided by Indian Trails Intercity Bus, that stops in Kalamazoo and provides connections north along the US 131 corridor to Sault Ste. Marie. The East Lansing stop provides another connecting point for thruway service to Flint, Saginaw, and Bay City.

The Wolverine and Blue Water service offer opportunities for travel in between cities of New Buffalo, Niles, Dowagiac and Kalamazoo and could provide another option for cross county boundary travel. For example; the first of three trains departs Niles at 10:14 a.m. and arrives in Kalamazoo at 11:00 a.m., returning from Kalamazoo at 2:36 p.m. and 9:18 p.m. back to Niles. This same trip utilizing public transportation would require three different transit systems and would prove to be logistically impossible to complete in one day.

South Shore Line

The South Shore Line, operated by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, provides interurban electric commuter train service between South Bend and Chicago, IL. The South Bend boarding site, located at the South Bend Regional Airport, links the South Shore with domestic airline service and inter- and intra- city bus service. Seven daily trains leave from South Bend bound for Chicago, with five trains offering return service. The weekend and holiday schedule offers eight trains that originate from South Bend and seven trains that provide return service. The South Bend Regional Airport is the only multimodal passenger facility operating in the Michiana area. South Bend Regional Airport offers connecting air service through Chicago, Cincinnati, Detroit, Atlanta and Minneapolis, intercity bus service to Chicago, Indianapolis, commuter rail service to Chicago and local bus service to the South Bend-Mishawaka area.

Taxi/Shuttle Providers

- A Cab n Limo Services
- A1 Bumble Bee Cab
- Yellow Cab of Berrien County

Chapter 5

Assessment of Transportation Needs

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the transportation needs and gaps in mobility identified by regional stakeholders during the Region 4 focus groups. While many transportation needs are interrelated, they are broken out by the following key categories and themes that were expressed by regional stakeholders. It should be noted that these issues vary from one jurisdiction to another in the region, largely based on transportation resources, travel distance to key locations, and a variety of other factors:

- Expanded or Improved Transportation Services
- Coordination
- Outreach, Marketing, and Education
- Funding
- Operational Challenges
- Additional Needs and Issues

Expanded or Improved Transportation Services

Transportation Gaps in Rural Areas – Many participants expressed that there are significant transportation gaps in rural areas, particularly to access services and employment. All three counties in the region are very rural, therefore it is often difficult to make efficient routes.

Expanded Transportation Options for Older Adults – Stakeholders expressed the need for additional transportation options for older adults in accessing congregate meal sites, medical appointments, and social events. Transportation to medical appointments for treatment of chronic illnesses (e.g., dialysis, chemotherapy) was also identified as a major need. It was noted that agency staffing is often a challenge since it turns over so much, thus agencies are tasked with retraining.

Access to Employment Opportunities - Another area that was noted by regional stakeholders was for expanded employment transportation services, especially for workers needing to access jobs that require second and third shifts. It was mentioned that some employers have considered obtaining their own vehicles since there is no available late-night service for people to get to work at those times of night. Discussion pointed to people that do not have cars or reliable cars, make it very challenging to find a job or get to work.

Coordination

Limited Opportunity for Regional Connectivity and Coordination - In some parts of the region, there are little or no transportation services available for people without access to a car, and therefore, limited opportunities to collaborate with others to identify improvements and to bridge gaps between systems that are in place. One of the overriding challenges noted by regional stakeholders was the lack of transportation services that cross county lines, and that greater regional transportation services are needed. Not all townships participate because it is based on millage and some have opted out of millage, very confusing to residents.

Need for Community Framework for Discussion of Transportation Issues and Priorities – Through the questionnaire, stakeholders were asked if a framework existed that provided the opportunity to bring together community organizations, leaders, and consumers to discuss transportation issues within the context of other community priorities. The majority of respondents noted that actions were needed in this area, as well as identifying how better to coordinate existing transportation services. Cass County does not have lots of places for people to work so they have to go out of county which is why collaboration between county transportation systems is so imperative. Additionally, previous studies have stated the region needs a countywide system to meet the needs but no movement on resolving the issues has occurred – a county and urban political impasse.

A limited communications framework exists to bring together community organizations, leaders, and consumers to discuss transportation issues within the context of other community priorities. Particularly from a regulation standpoint as well as mileage issues. Need to minimize territorialism, and establish agreements to cross into other agencies' jurisdictional boundaries.

Outreach, Marketing, and Education

Lack of Awareness of Available Transportation Services - Some stakeholders noted that in some areas there is a lack of awareness of available services open to the public. It was also mentioned that many people may think trips are operated through specific agencies or require specific medical insurance and are unaware of the availability of these services to the general public. Appears to be lack of information about who is eligible for services (seniors living on their own, people without a car, students getting around).

Improved Marketing of General Public Transportation Services – While services designed to meet the needs of older adults and people with lower incomes are essential, there is a need for effective marketing efforts to offset the perception that public transit services are only available for specific populations and not open to everyone in the community. Lack of public input from the public is a challenge especially when major changes are being made.

Effective Advocacy and Educational Campaigns – Ongoing educational efforts are needed to ensure local leaders and decision makers are aware of the impact of community transportation services and overall buy-in for the needs for these services. Campaigns that stress that transit services are part of robust community are particularly important in efforts to educate people who do not use current services but would be voting on specific millages. It was mentioned that while most transit systems in Michigan have had success getting millages passed, there may be push back in some areas and some voters may be hesitant to renew them, and therefore ongoing education campaigns are needed.

Funding

Community Desire for More Transit Options – While it can vary from one community to the next, stakeholders noted that there is general support for increasing mobility options and expanding transit services in the region.

Funding Challenges – There is a need to identify new funding to support service expansions. Funding can be restrictive, but it was noted that this presents an opportunity to be creative and think up different and new solutions. Some stakeholders also noted the need to expand current vehicle fleets and transition to smaller vehicles that do not require drivers a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) so that the driver hiring pool can be expanded, and this has an impact on capital expenses and needed funding.

While some millages are in place that support transit services, they can also cause challenges to coordination efforts and to cross jurisdictional travel needs – as they may limit trips to specific geographic boundaries. Overall, it was noted that any service expansion or improvement will most likely come down to funding.

Federal funding regulations also preclude certain services. In particular, urban area services are in demand but limited services are provided due to compliance issues. This is pertinent to all services, but most critical for people who need to get to medical appointments or hospitals.

Operational Challenges

Challenges with Recruiting and Retaining Drivers – Similar to communities across the country, many of the transportation providers expressed challenges with recruiting and retaining a sufficient number of drivers. Often, there's competition between schools and transit agencies and both have shortages in the morning and evening during rush hours. As a result, providers are looking to modify their fleets and as noted earlier, switch to vehicles that do not require a driver with a CDL. In addition to maintaining current services the driver shortage prevents the ability to expand services.

Increased Operating Expenses – A number of factors have led to transit systems and transportation providers to incur significant increases in operating expenses, and it is expected that this will continue in the future fuel prices higher and the need to improve driver salaries and benefits.

Vehicle Shortages – It was noted that the timeframe for delivery of new or replacement vehicles is longer than before the pandemic, creating fleet inventory shortages that challenge transportation providers with maintaining services and hamper efforts to implement expanded services.

Additional Needs and Issues

Technology Challenges – Stakeholders noted the need for technology advancements, though this can be a significant cost barrier for many smaller organizations who lack the funding to acquire technology that may allow them to provide more efficient, effective, and coordinated services.

At the same time, it was mentioned that any technological advancements need to be considered by the user, and that requiring them to utilize technology may be a weakness. For instance, it was noted that some older adults may prefer a call center structure over the use of an app or software platform.

Chapter 6

Demographic Analysis

Introduction

This chapter analyzes demographic data and land use to assess the need for transit in Region 4. Data ranging from major trip generators to underserved and unserved population subgroups are documented and analyzed. Data sources include the 2020 Census and American Community Survey (ACS) 2016-2021 5-year estimates.

Population Profile

The following section provides a general population profile for Region 4 and will identify and evaluate underserved population subgroups as well as review demographic characteristics pertinent to a Title VI analysis.

Table 6-1 shows the census population counts from 2000-2020.

Table 6-1: Historical Populations for Region 4

County	2000 Pop.	2010 Pop.	2020 Pop.	2000-2010 % Change	2010-2020 % Change	2000-2020 % Change
Berrien	162,453	156,813	154,316	-3.5%	-1.6%	-5.0%
Cass	51,104	52,293	51,589	2.3%	-1.3%	0.9%
Van Buren	76,263	76,258	75,587	-0.0%	-0.9%	-0.9%

SOURCE: US DECENNIAL CENSUS

All three counties experienced population decline over at least one decade in the last twenty years and only Cass County has experienced a population increase, albeit a negligible one (485 from 2000-2020). Van Buren County has experienced a comparably negligible decline of -0.9% over the same time period while Berrien County's population has dropped by 8,137 or -5.0%.

Table 6-2 features population projections from the University of Michigan's Institute for Research on Labor, Employment, and the Economy. This data suggests that the overall trend of modest population decline should reverse with all three counties experiencing projected population increases of 2-5%.

Table 6-2: Future Population Trends for Region 4

County	2020 Pop.	2030 Pop. Estimate	2040 Pop. Estimate	2020-2040 % Change
Berrien	154,316	156,590	159,501	3.4%
Cass	51,589	53,143	54,116	4.9%
Van Buren	75,587	77,172	77,083	2.0%

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU AND THE INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON LABOR, EMPLOYMENT AND THE ECONOMY, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Population and its density are often used as an indicator for public transit services that are feasible within a specific area. While exceptions will always exist, an area with a density of 2,000 or more persons per square mile will typically be able to sustain daily fixed route transit service. An area with a population density below 2,000 but above 1,000 persons per square mile may be a better candidate for deviated fixed route and areas with densities below 1,000 are typically best suited for demand response service.

Figure 6-1 shows Region 4's population at the census block group level. Overall, Region 4's population is tied to the tri-city area of St. Joseph, Fair Plain, and Benton Harbor, with lesser concentrations around eastern Van Buren County and the Niles-Dowagiac-Berrien Springs region.

Figure 6-2 provides population density for Region 4. Areas with a population density of over 2,000 people per square mile include South Haven, the Twin Cities (Benton Harbor and St. Joseph), Paw Paw, Dowagiac, Niles, Buchanan, and Berrien Springs.

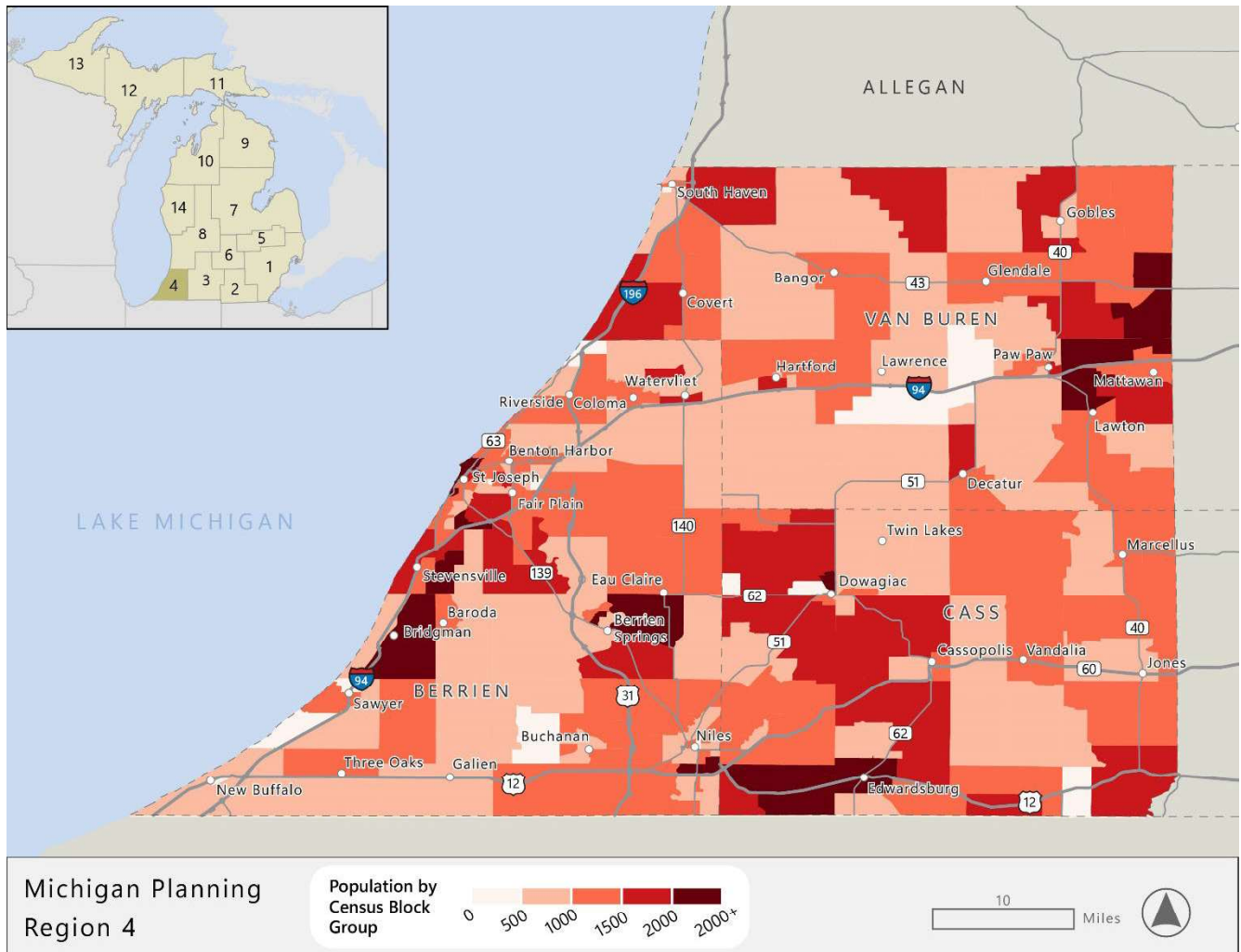
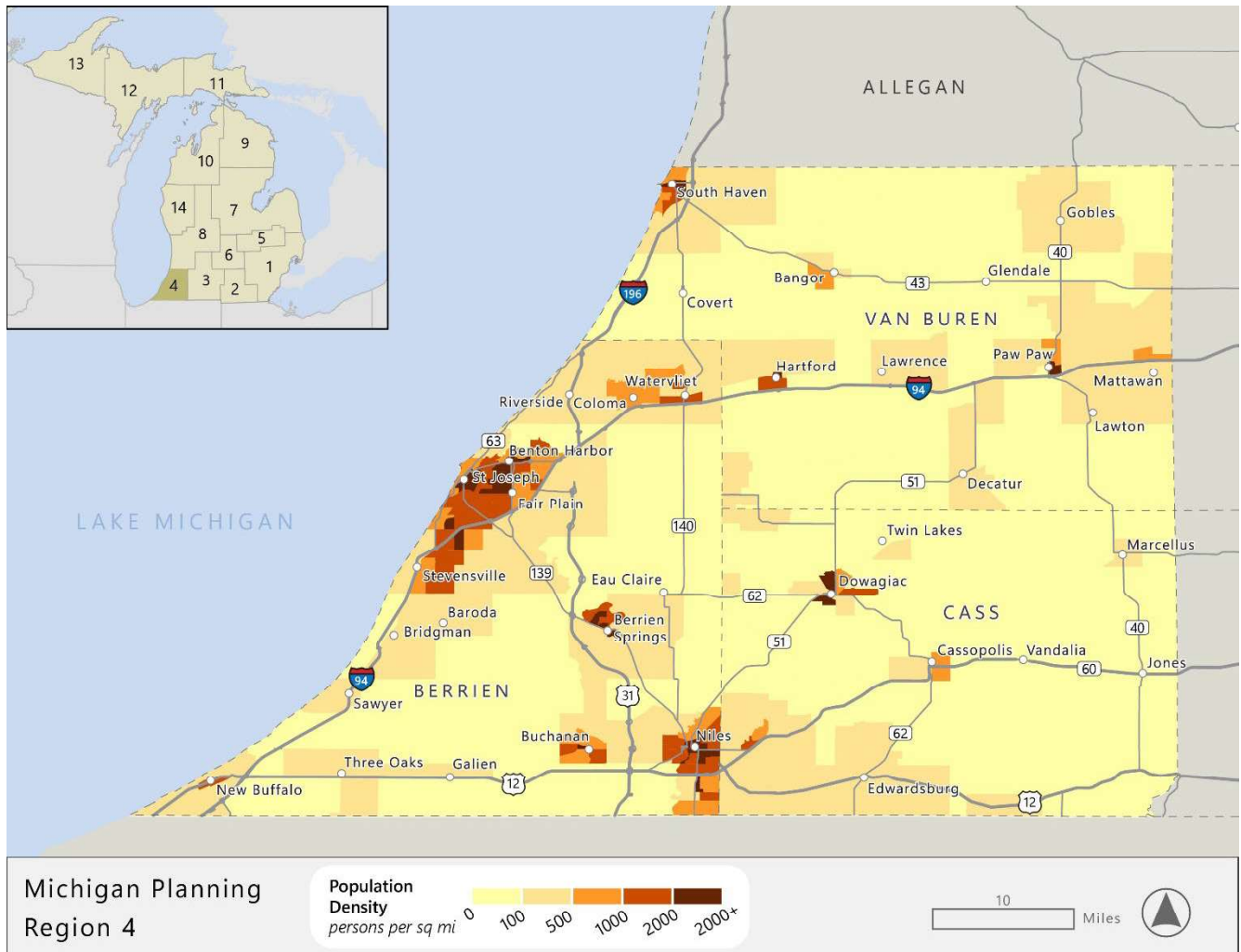
Figure 6-1: 2020 Census Population

Figure 6-2: 2020 Census Population Density

Transit Dependent Populations

Transit Dependence Index

The need for public transportation is often derived by recognizing the size and location of segments of the population most dependent on transit services. Transit dependency can be a result of many factors, i.e., no access to a personal vehicle, age, and income. Establishing the location of transit dependent populations aids in the evaluation of the current population while identifying potential gaps in transit services.

The Transit Dependence Index (TDI) is an aggregate measure displaying relative concentrations of transit dependent populations. Five factors make up the TDI calculation including population density, autoless households, elderly populations (ages 65 and over), youth populations (ages 10-17), and below poverty populations.

In addition to population density, the factors above represent specific socioeconomic characteristics. For each factor, individual block groups were classified according to the frequency of the vulnerable population relative to the county average. Factors were then put into the TDI equation to determine the relative transit dependence of each block group.

The relative classification system utilizes averages in ranking populations. For example, areas with less than the average transit dependent population fall into the “Very Low” classification, where areas that are more than twice the average will be classified as “Very High.” The classifications “Low, Moderate, and High” fall between the average and twice the average. These classifications are divided into thirds.

Figure 6-3 displays the TDI rankings for Region 4. The areas recognized to have Very High transit need with respect to density are the Twin Cities, Niles, South Haven, and Dowagiac.

The Transit Dependence Index Percent (TDIP) provides a complementary analysis to the TDI measure. It is similar to the TDI measure however it excludes the population density factor. The TDIP for each block group in the study area was calculated based on autoless households, elderly populations, youth populations, and below poverty populations.

By removing the population density factor, TDIP is able to measure the degree or percentage of vulnerability. It follows the TDI’s five-tiered categorization of Very Low to Very High. The results of this analysis are typically much more dispersed than the TDI because many of the larger, or rural, block groups may have a larger percentage of certain populations when compared to heavily populated areas.

Figure 6-4 shows the TDIP rankings for Region 4. Block groups with “Very High” and “High” levels of dependence are found primarily around the Twin Cities.

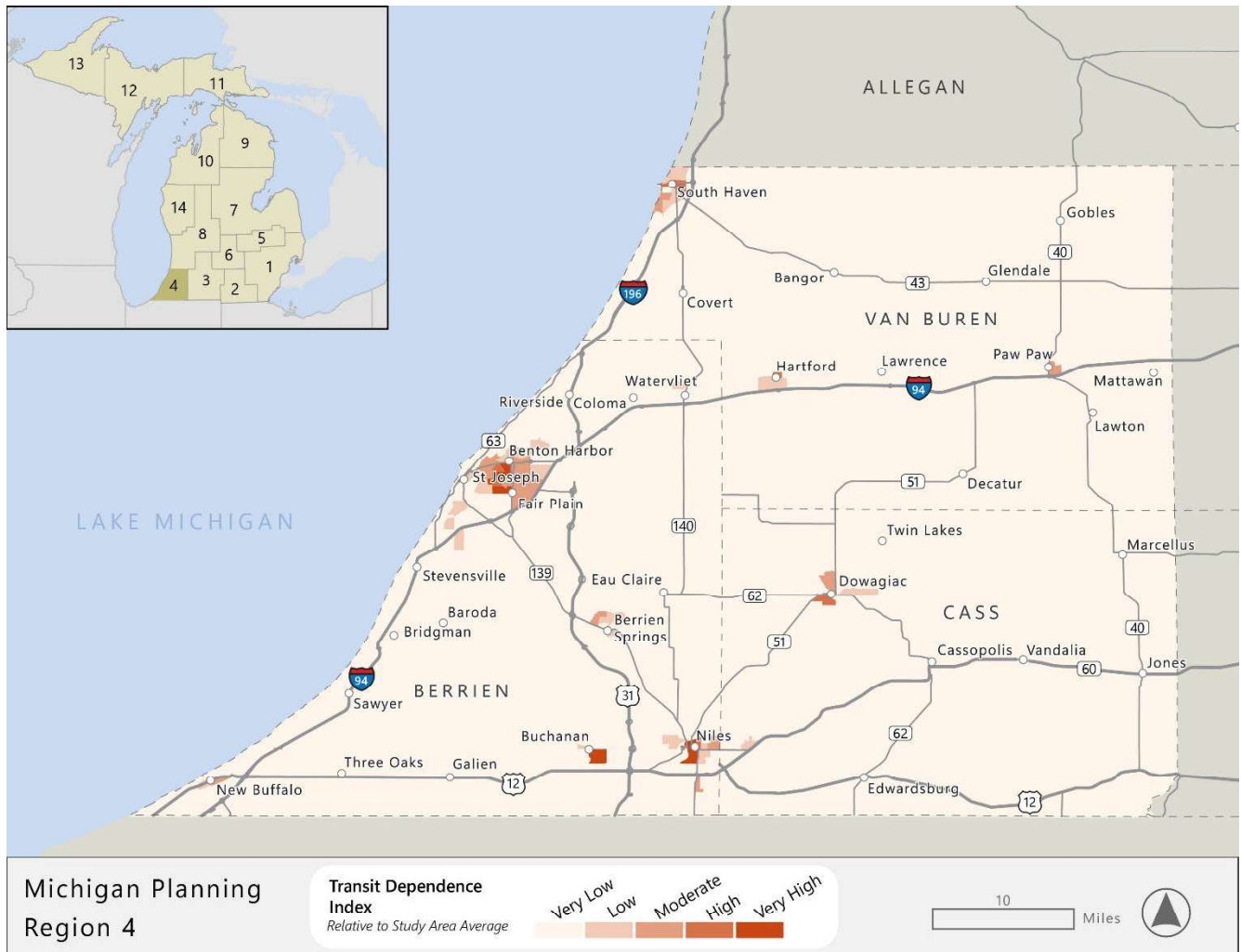
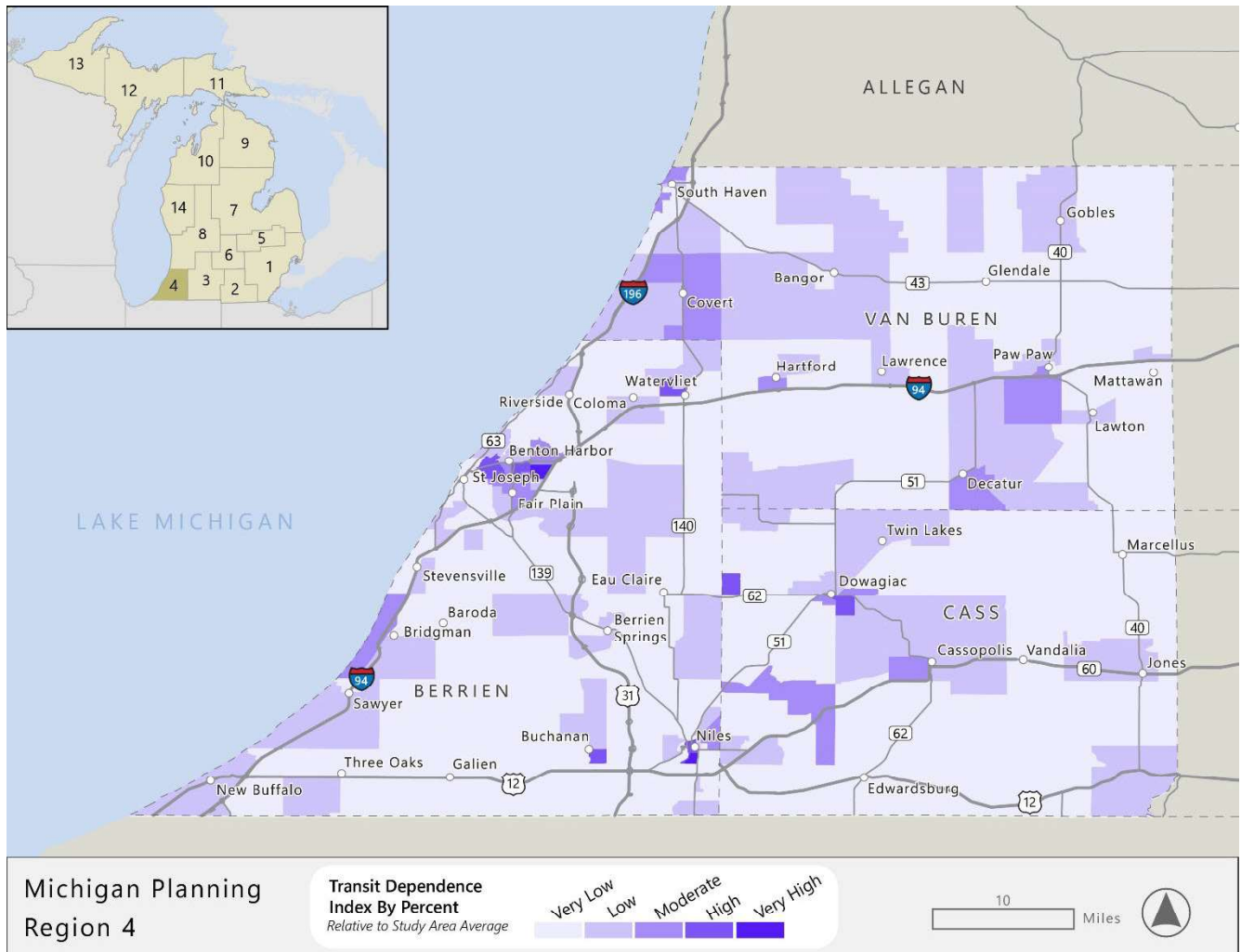
Figure 6-3: Transit Dependence Index Density

Figure 6-4: Transit Dependence Index Percentage

Transit Dependence Index Factors

This subsection will review three of the five factors which make up the transit dependence index: youth population, senior adult population, and zero car households. Other than population, the fifth factor, individuals living at or below the poverty level, will be reviewed in the following section, Title VI Demographic Analysis. This section also provides a similar index for individuals with disabilities. While this data is not included in the TDI it is still important to review as those with disabilities may have difficulty driving a personal automobile.

Youth Population

Persons ages 10 to 17 either have not yet learned to drive or are just beginning to drive and often do not have a personal automobile accessible to them. For this population, public transit is often the means that offers mobility. Figure 6-5 illustrates the concentrations of youth populations relative to the study area. All three counties have block groups with “Very High” distributions of youth populations. These block groups are found just south of Watervliet, south of Paw Paw, and in the surrounding area of Niles.

Senior Adult Population

The senior adult population, which includes individuals 65 years and older, was used in the TDI measure. Persons in this age group may begin to decrease their use of a personal vehicle and begin to rely more on public transit. Figure 6-6 shows the relative distribution of seniors in Region 4. Areas with “Very High” senior populations include the coastal block groups of Berrien County and the South Haven area.

Individuals with Disabilities

Figure 6-7 illustrates the disabled population in Region 4. The American Community Survey was used to obtain data for the disabled population. Persons who have disabilities that prevent them or make it more difficult to own and operate a personal vehicle often rely on public transit for their transportation needs. Areas with “Very High” concentrations of individuals with disabilities may be found around Niles, Dowagiac, Paw Paw, and Watervliet.

Zero Car Households

Households without at least one personal vehicle are more likely to depend on the mobility offered by public transit. Although autoless households are reflected in both the TDI and TDIP measures, displaying this segment of the population separately is important since most land uses in Region 4 are at distances too far for non-motorized travel. Figure 6-8 displays the relative number of autoless households. Areas with “Very High” numbers of zero car households include the Twin Cities, Niles, Buchanan, Paw Paw, and Watervliet.

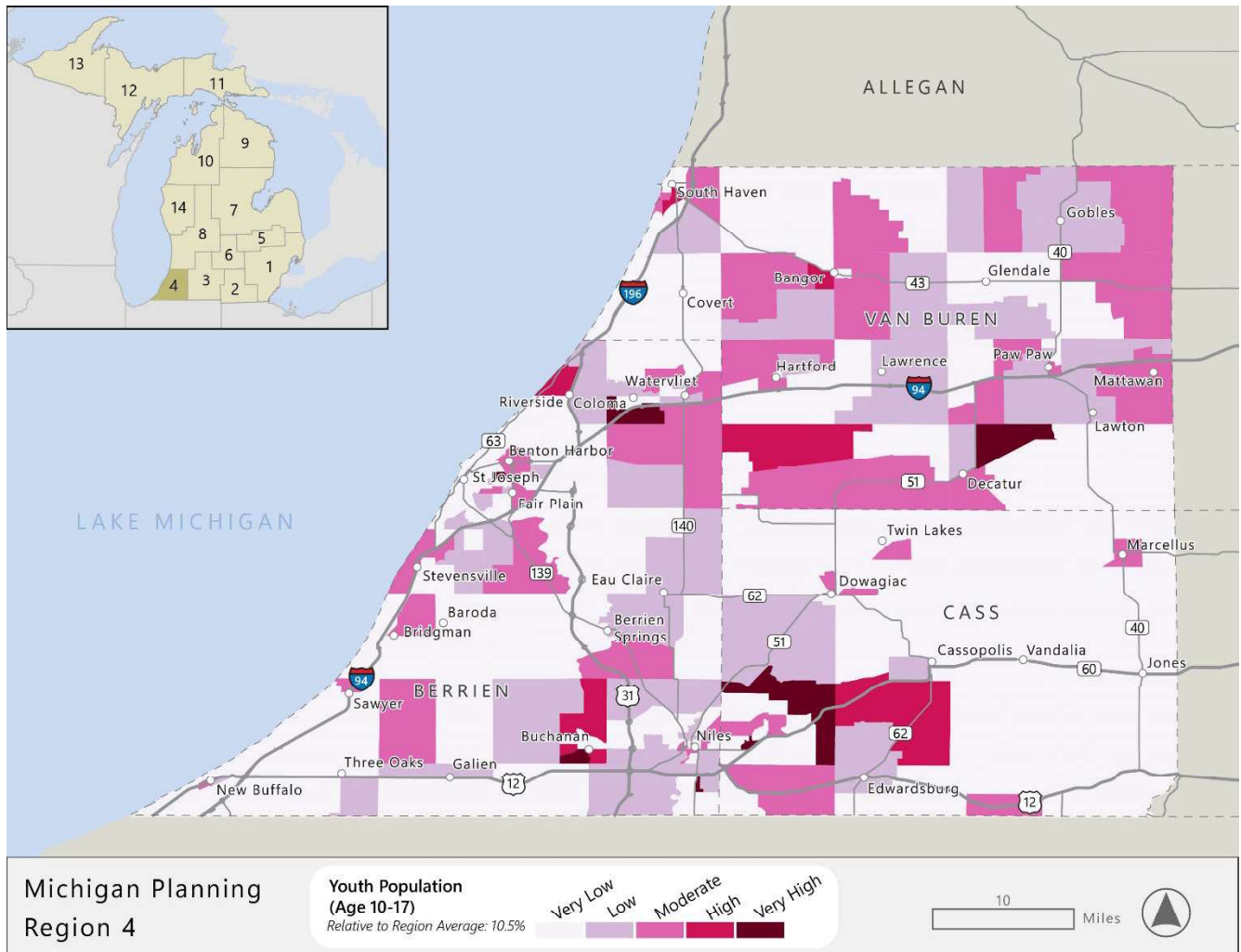
Figure 6-5: Distribution of the Youth Population (Ages 10 to 17)

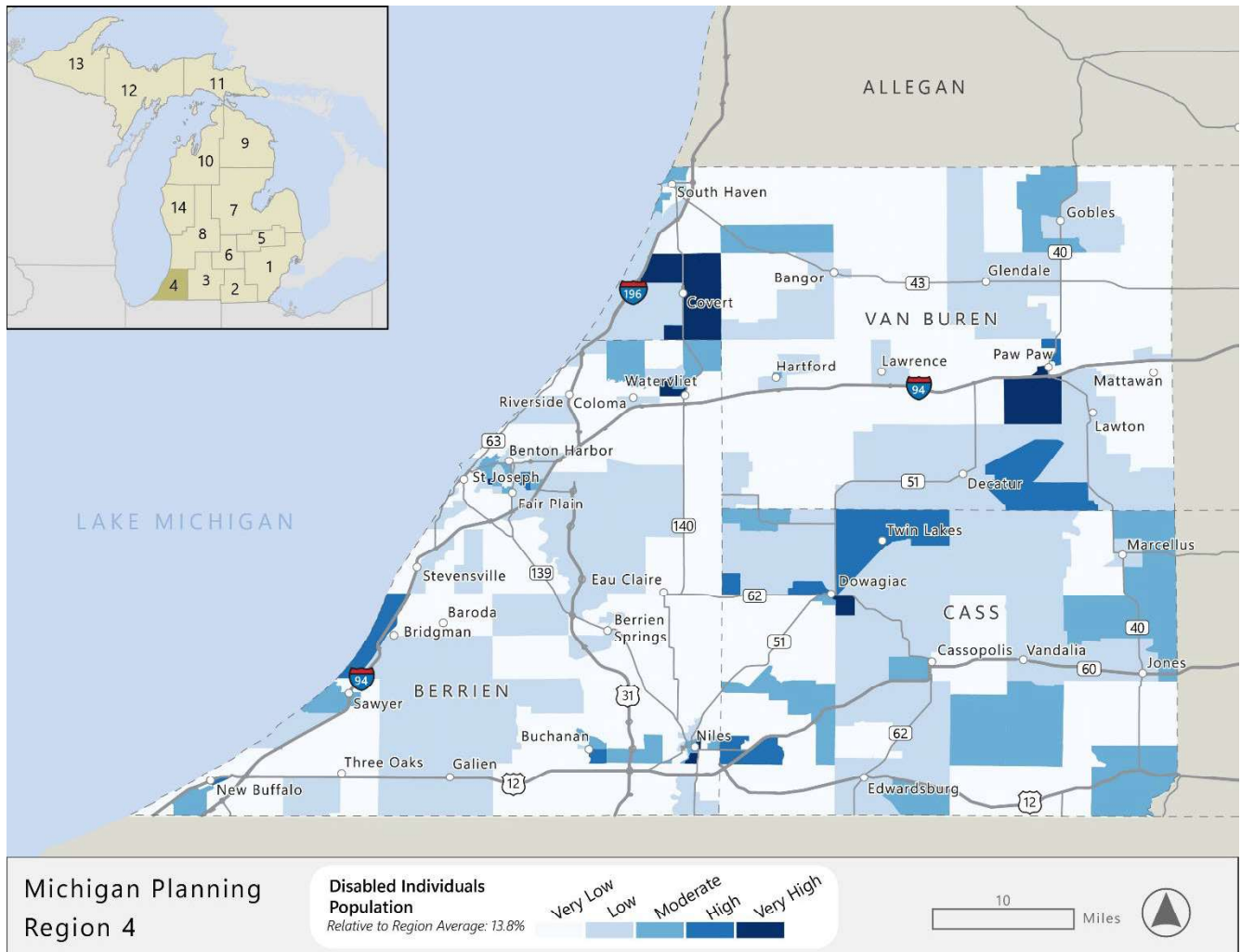
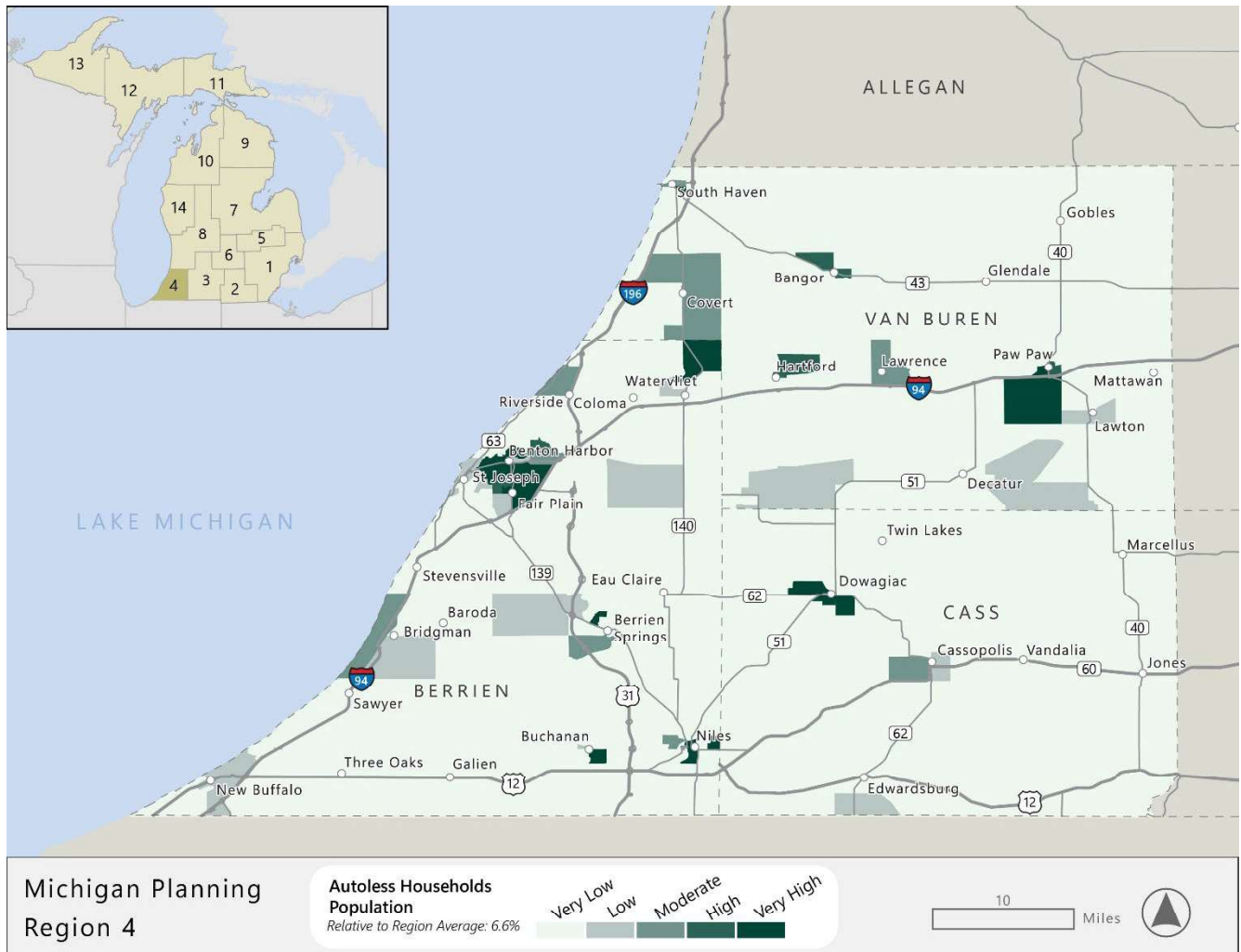
Figure 6-7: Distribution of the Disabled Population

Figure 6-8: Zero Car Household Distribution



Title VI Demographic Analysis

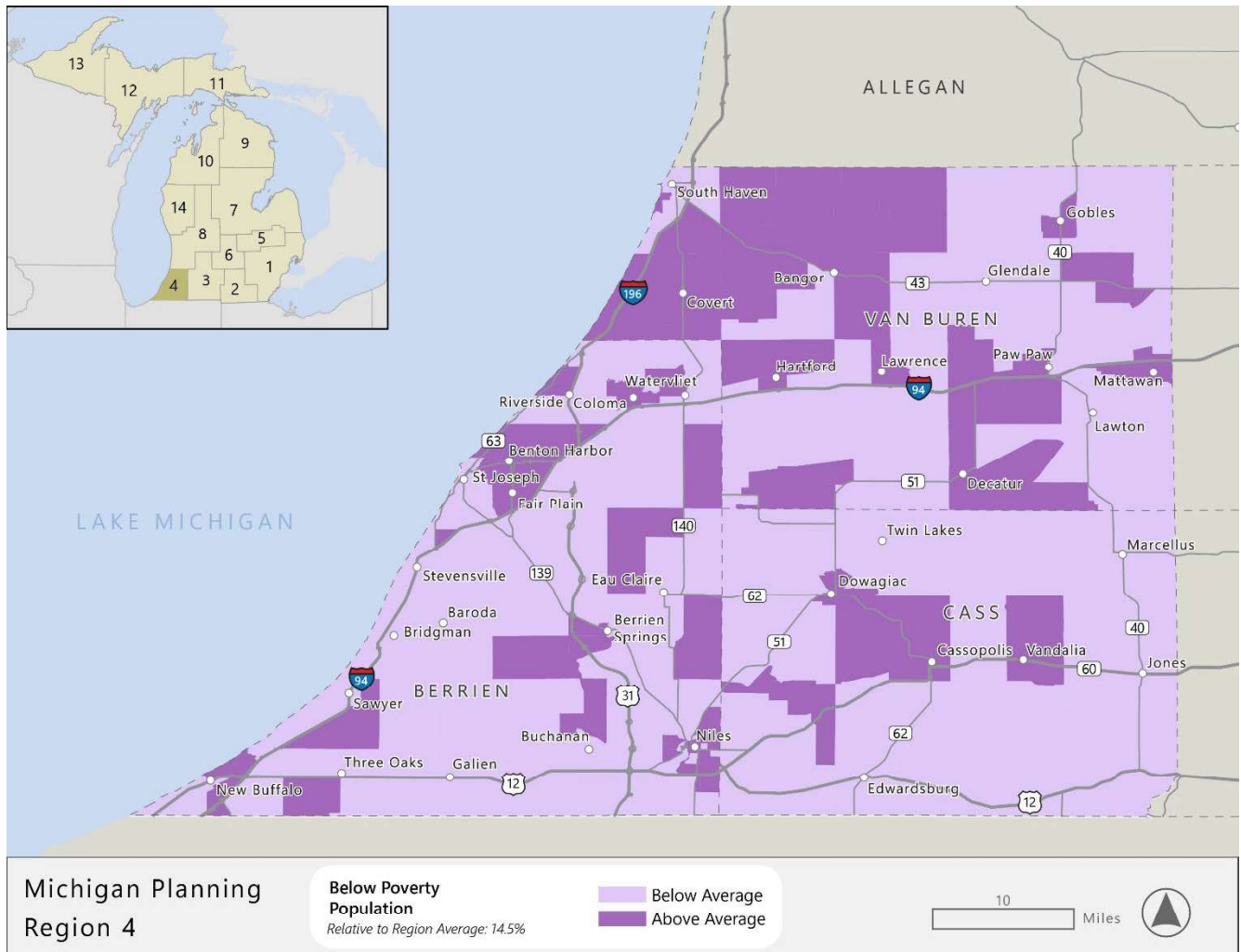
The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs and activities receiving federal subsidies. This includes agencies providing federally funded public transportation. The following section examines the minority and below poverty level populations in Region 4.

Minority Population

It is important to ensure that areas with an above average percentage of racial and/or ethnic minorities are not negatively impacted by any proposed alterations to existing public transportation services. In Region 4, 20.6% of the population are part of minority populations. Figure 6-9 illustrates the concentration of minority populations based on the region's average. As seen in the figure, areas with above average concentrations of minorities are around the Twin Cities, Niles, Cassopolis, Berrien Springs, and Hartford.

Below Poverty Level Population

The second group included in the Title VI analysis represents those individuals who earn less than the federal poverty level. This segment of the populations may find it a financial burden to own and maintain a personal vehicle, thus relying on public transit as their primary means of transportation. In Region 4's census block groups, the average percentage of those living below the federal poverty level is 14.5%. Figure 6-10 depicts the concentration of population above or below the average relative to the study area. As seen on the map, those living below the poverty line are heavily dispersed and widespread throughout the region.

Figure 6-10: Distribution of Individuals Living Below the Poverty Level

Limited-English Proficiency

In addition to providing public transportation for a diversity of socioeconomic groups, it is also important to serve and disseminate information to those of different linguistic backgrounds. As shown in Table 6-3, the Western Michigan Region's residents predominately speak English. In all three counties, English is the primary language for over 90 percent of the residents. The most prevalent language in the region after English is Spanish with just over eight percent of Van Buren County considering it their primary language. Of those who primarily speak languages other than English the overwhelming majority is able to speak English "Very Well." For the entire region, only 2.2% of the population is unable to speak English "Very Well" with the highest concentration in Van Buren County at 3.7%.

Table 6-3: Limited English Proficiency for Region 4

County	Berrien		Cass		Van Buren	
Population (Age 5+)	145,664		49,114		71,002	
Languages Spoken	#	%	#	%	#	%
English	135,047	92.7%	47,389	96.5%	64,073	90.2%
Speak Non-English	10,617	7.3%	1,725	3.5%	6,929	9.8%
Spanish	5,501	3.8%	823	1.7%	5,742	8.1%
Indo-European languages	2,950	2.0%	470	1.0%	709	1.0%
Asian/Pacific languages	1,529	1.0%	317	0.6%	370	0.5%
Other	637	0.4%	115	0.2%	108	0.2%
Ability to Speak English:	#	%	#	%	#	%
"Very Well"	7,621	5.2%	1,493	3.0%	4,310	6.1%
Less than "Very Well"	2,996	2.1%	232	0.5%	2,619	3.7%

Land Use Profile

Regional Trip Generators

Identifying regional trip generators serves to complement the previous demographic analysis by indicating where transit services may be most needed. Trip generators attract transit demand and include common origins and destinations. Examples include higher level educational facilities, major employers, regional medical facilities, and Veteran Affairs Medical Centers and Clinics. Figure 6-11 provides a map of the regional trip generators in Region 4. The trip generator categories are briefly detailed below.

Educational Facilities

Many of the individuals that comprise the school age population are unable to afford or operate their own personal vehicle; therefore, it may be assumed that this segment of the population is one that is reliant upon public transportation. Additionally, many faculty and staff members are associated with these institutions as a place of employment. Region 4 features a number of colleges and universities including Andrews University, Lake Michigan College, and Southwestern Michigan College.

Major Employers

This section examines the top regional employers in Region 4; employers included in this category are those among the 100 largest employers in the state of Michigan. Providing transit services to major employment locations is advantageous to both the employee, as the individual is provided with direct access to their occupation and subsequent source of income, and the employer, as this entity will have assurance that their current or potential workforce will have diverse options of accessing the destination. Many of the major employers in Region 4 include numerous colleges and universities as well as the regional medical facilities. Manufacturing is a large part of the region's economy with major employers including Whirlpool, Bosch Rexroth, and KitchenAid.

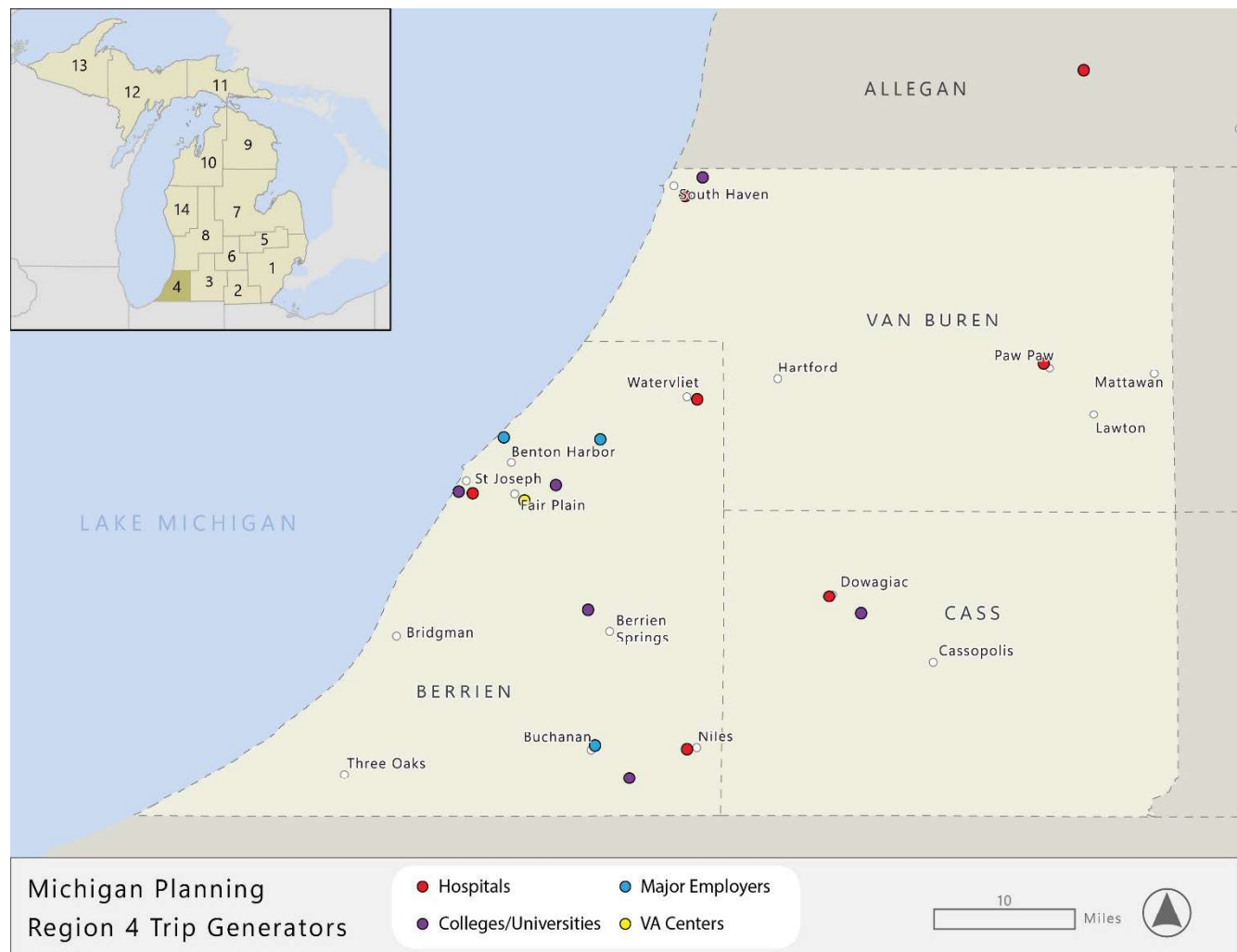
Major Medical Facilities

Major medical facilities, classified as regional and general hospitals, represent a significant destination for users of public transportation. Older adults and persons with disabilities often rely more heavily upon services offered by medical facilities than other population segments. Since older adults and persons with disabilities represent a large fraction of the transit dependent population, it is imperative that these facilities are made accessible through public transit services.

Veteran Affairs Medical Facilities

The Department of Veterans Affairs oversees a network of medical centers and smaller community-based outpatient clinics. Locating transportation to these facilities can be a major barrier for veterans who rely on healthcare that these facilities provide. Region 4 is home to the Benton Harbor VA Clinic and the Cass County VA Office in Cassopolis. VA facilities in Battle Creek and South Bend, IN are also major destinations for residents of the region.

Figure 6-11: Regional Trip Generators



Local Trip Generators

In addition to major regional trip generators, it is also important to identify communities containing local trip generators. Local trip generators attract transit demand and include common origins and destinations, like colleges and universities, multi-unit housing, non-profit and governmental agencies, major employers, medical facilities, and shopping centers. Table 6-4 shows local trip generators.

Table 6-4: Local Trip Generators

Trip Generators	Shopping Destinations	College /University	High Density Housing	Human Service Agency	Major Employer	Medical Facility
Berrien County						
Baroda				X		
Benton Harbor		X	X	X	X	X
Benton Heights						
Berrien Springs	X	X	X	X		
Bridgman	X					X
Buchanan	X		X	X	X	X
Coloma				X		
Eau Claire				X		
Fair Plain	X		X			
Galien				X		
Grand Beach						
Lake Michigan Beach						
Michiana						
Millburg						
New Buffalo	X		X	X		X
New Troy						
Niles	X	X	X	X		X
Paw Paw Lake	X					X
Shoreham						
Shorewood-Tower Hills-Harbert						
St. Joseph	X		X			X
Stevensville	X					
Three Oaks	X			X		
Watervliet				X		X

Trip Generators	Shopping Destinations	College /University	High Density Housing	Human Service Agency	Major Employer	Medical Facility
Cass County						
Cassopolis	X					X
Dowagiac	X	X		X		X
Edwardsburg						X
Marcellus						X
Vandalia						
Van Buren County						
Bangor	X					
Bloomington						
Breedsville						
Decatur						
Gobles			X			
Hartford	X					
Lawrence						
Lawton			X			
Mattawan	X		X			
Paw Paw	X		X	X		X
South Haven	X	X	X	X		X

Employment Travel Patterns

In addition to considering locations of major employers, it is also beneficial to account for the commuting patterns of residents intra and inter-regionally.

Table 6-5 presents results of the Census Bureau's Journey to Work data which provides location of employment (in-county vs. out-of-county and in-state vs. out-of-state) and means of transportation to work. Residents in Region 4 typically work in their county of residence (65%) and predominately drive alone to work (80%). The county with the highest percentage of out of state commuters is Cass County at 40%, likely due to the proximity of South Bend, IN. While the majority of residents drive alone to work, a small minority carpool (9%), making it the second largest means of commuting in the region. Public transportation garners approximately one percent or less of the employment commuting in all three counties.

Table 6-5: Journey to Work Patterns for Region 4

County	Berrien		Cass		Van Buren	
Workers 16 Years and Older	70,443		23,515		33,754	
Location of Employment	#	%	#	%	#	%
In state of residence	60,547	86.0%	14,006	59.6%	33,173	98.3%
In county of residence	55,177	78.3%	8,655	36.8%	18,585	55.1%
Outside county of residence	5,370	7.6%	5,351	22.8%	14,588	43.2%
Outside state of residence	9,896	14.0%	9,509	40.4%	581	1.7%
Means of Transportation to Work	#	%	#	%	#	%
Car, truck, or van - drove alone	56,636	80.4%	19,133	81.4%	26,523	78.6%
Car, truck, or van - carpooled	5,798	8.2%	2,310	9.8%	3,802	11.3%
Public transportation	413	0.6%	63	0.3%	100	0.3%
Walked	1,777	2.5%	584	2.5%	773	2.3%
Taxicab, motorcycle, bicycle, other	855	1.2%	248	1.1%	274	0.8%
Worked from home	4,964	7.0%	1,177	5.0%	2,282	6.8%

Another source of data that provides an understanding of employee travel patterns is the Census Bureau's Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) dataset. Table 6-6 provides the results of this analysis for the region. As the table shows, employment destinations are heavily dispersed throughout the region. Niles and South Bend are significant employment hubs for Berrien and Cass County, while Kalamazoo is the primary draw for Van Buren County.

Table 6-6: Top Ten Employment Destinations for County Residents

Berrien County			Cass County			Van Buren County		
Place	#	%	Place	#	%	Place	#	%
St. Joseph, MI	2,109	4.2%	Dowagiac, MI	756	8.1%	Kalamazoo, MI	747	4.3%
Fair Plain, MI	1,866	3.7%	Niles, MI	402	4.3%	Portage, MI	737	4.3%
Benton Harbor, MI	1,601	3.2%	South Bend, IN	243	2.6%	South Haven, MI	470	2.7%
Niles, MI	1,572	3.1%	Cassopolis, MI	180	1.9%	Paw Paw, MI	384	2.2%
Buchanan, MI	808	1.6%	Elkhart, IN	174	1.9%	Mattawan, MI	261	1.5%
Paw Paw Lake, MI	796	1.6%	Granger, IN	163	1.8%	Bangor, MI	246	1.4%
Benton Heights, MI	674	1.3%	Mishawaka, IN	135	1.5%	Hartford, MI	236	1.4%
Bridgman, MI	604	1.2%	Edwardsburg, MI	87	0.9%	Lawton, MI	227	1.3%
South Bend, IN	601	1.2%	Marcellus, MI	73	0.8%	Decatur, MI	177	1.0%
Michigan City, IN	504	1.0%	Benton Harbor, MI	63	0.7%	Westwood, MI	143	0.8%
All Other Locations	38,798	77.7%	All Other Locations	7,024	75.5%	All Other Locations	13,602	78.9%

SOURCE: CENSUS BUREAU, ONTHEMAP APPLICATION AND LEHD ORIGIN-DESTINATION EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS, 2020.

Chapter 7

Prioritized Strategies

Introduction

A key element required in the coordinated transportation plan involves identifying strategies that address gaps between current services and needs, as well as opportunities to achieve efficiencies in service delivery. While all of the strategies discussed by stakeholders are important and would support efforts to expand mobility in the region, a major step in the coordinated transportation planning process and one of the required elements of the plan is priorities for implementation based on resources, time, and feasibility for implementing specific strategies and/or activities.

This chapter presents strategies that were initially reviewed by Region 4 stakeholders, and then prioritized based on their comments. The development of these strategies considered input received through the two rounds of focus groups discussed in Chapter 2, along with strategies that were included in the previous plan for the counties in the region.

To summarize, the process for the development of prioritized strategies for the region involved:

- Identification of potential strategies to help to address the identified gaps between current transportation services and unmet needs, expand regional mobility, and achieve greater efficiencies in service delivery. These preliminary strategies were based on input from regional stakeholders during the focus groups and recommendations included in recent plans and studies.
- Incorporating comments from regional stakeholders on the preliminary list of possible strategies, activities, and projects.
- Prioritization of potential strategies through an on-line survey. At the May 2023 focus group participants agreed to this process, and that the results would be used to develop a list that grouped strategies that were higher priorities, ones that were a medium priority, and strategies that were a lower priority.

Strategy Categories


While many of the strategies to improve mobility in the region are interrelated, through the initial development they were categorized by:

- **Organizational and Coordination Strategies** - It is critical that residents in the region are aware of the transportation services and mobility options that are available to them. It is also important that existing resources are coordinated to reduce any duplication. These strategies support maintaining and expanding coordination activities, to help ensure services are marketed effectively, and that regional stakeholders have a forum to identify opportunities to connect services and share information.
- **Operating Strategies** - These strategies are focused on efforts to increase mobility options throughout the region, and include efforts to improve public transit services, expand regional connectivity, build upon current human services transportation, and plan and implement on-demand microtransit services.
- **Sustainability and Financial Strategies** - While many strategies involve efforts to expand mobility in the region, it is vital that current transportation services that are meeting needs are maintained. This includes operating funds to support existing services, as well as capital funding to replace vehicles beyond their useful life. These potential strategies support efforts to seek ongoing and additional funding to maintain and expand transportation services. These strategies also include improvements to the current infrastructure to allow greater access to existing services.

Region 4 Strategies

Table 7-1 provides a list of the overall strategies based on these categories and that were developed based on feedback from regional stakeholders and provided to them for their consideration. The prioritized list with a description of each potential strategy is provided in the next section of this chapter.

Table 7-1: Summary of Strategies by Categories

Categories	Potential Strategies
 <p>Organizational and Coordination Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a regional coordinating committee to serve as an ongoing forum for discussions on coordination opportunities and to identify and prioritize regional connectivity needs. Expand outreach efforts to provide information on available transportation options, particularly public transit services that are open to the general public. Regional mobility management efforts Administer trainings for human service agency staff, medical facility personnel, and others in the availability of transportation services. Identify opportunities to utilize emerging technologies to improve customer information and with requesting services, while maintaining convenient access for people who would prefer other methods.
 <p>Operating Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a process for planning and implementing new regional services to fill current gaps in transportation. Support recommendations to improve public transportation identified through transit plans conducted in the region. Identify opportunities to expand scheduled services where feasible that can be marketed to local communities. Assess opportunities to implement on-demand microtransit services. Identify opportunities to implement or build upon current volunteer driver programs. Consider greater use of vanpool and long distance rideshare services.
 <p>Sustainability and Financial Strategies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain services that are effectively meeting identified transportation needs in the region. Continue to support capital needs that help to maintain existing services and ensure vehicles are safe and appropriate for the need. Work with community leaders to identify additional funding sources to support increasing expenses and enable transportation providers to maintain and expand mobility options in the region. Develop additional partnerships to identify new funding opportunities. Advocate for additional recommendations to improve public transportation identified through previous transit plans. Assess opportunities to improve recruitment and retention of vehicle operators. Improve infrastructure that supports accessibility and use of available transportation services.

High Priorities

Regional Mobility Management Efforts

A statewide mobility management plan effort is currently underway. This strategy would build upon this initiative to promote the use of public, human service, and private transportation in the region through a variety of outreach efforts, to include one-on-one trainings as well as through meetings, town halls, and conferences. Specifically, the regional mobility manager's overall responsibilities could involve:

- Travel training
- Marketing
- Public relations
- Advocacy on the use of public transportation
- Regional leader in initiating and managing coordination efforts, covering the areas designated in this plan
- Secret Shopper through which customers are surveyed about services

It was noted that many residents in the region are unaware of both public, private and human service transportation available to them, and the need for expanded marketing of transportation services was identified. Therefore, this strategy recommends an increased education campaign through an expanded mobility management effort. This effort could build upon the overall mobility management concept where the focus is on the customer and their needs, and the meeting of these needs through the coordinated use of a variety of providers. The inclusion of mobility management efforts in the region has the capability of greatly improving access to transportation services in the region, particularly for veterans, older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes.

Based on stakeholder input through the needs analysis, a mobility management program could take a variety of roles that include the following efforts:

- Assist customers to better understand rural scheduled services, and work with human service agencies staff so that they are knowledgeable of the transportation services in the region and are able to use this information when assisting the people they serve with their mobility options.
- Lead efforts to implement strategies outlined in the Region 4 Coordinated Transportation Plan
- Continue efforts to promote available services through social media campaigns and promotions.
- Continue work with larger employers on efforts to subsidize employee travel or subsidize vanpool programs.
- Help in the planning and implementation of improved technologies that allow customers to access information on available services or that help them understand better when a bus is going to arrive.
- Facilitate opportunities to coordinate trainings between transportation providers in the region.
- Assist with efforts to improve and expand regional connectivity such as regional fare collection systems.
- Lead interim updates of the regionally coordinated transportation plan.
- Develop and implement a sponsorship program (discussed later in the Sustainability and Financial Strategies section).
- Ensure funding for Region Mobility Management program to assist in implementing Coordinated Plan

Through the National Cooperative Research Program (NCHRP) the KFH Group produced “Successful Mobility Management Practices for Improving Transportation Services in Small Urban and Rural Areas,” a guidebook that identified best practices and analyzed successfully implemented rural and small urban mobility management programs. The guide is designed to serve as a “one-stop” central point of information for improving or implementing mobility management and coordination strategies, providing resources developed through the research as well as those available through the National Center for Mobility Management and other federal initiatives. Key sections of the guide include:

**Expanding Access to Our Communities:
A Guide to Successful Mobility
Management Practices in Small Urban
and Rural Areas**



January 2018

The four key attributes and characteristics of successful mobility management: Community Outreach and Engagement, Needs Assessment and Program Design, Program Evaluation and Assessment, and Funding

A checklist for implementing successful mobility management approaches and strategies.

Program profiles that highlight mobility management practices from across the country that can serve as potential models for other efforts.

The guidebook is available for download from the TRB website through this [link](#).

Form a regional coordinating committee to serve as an ongoing forum for discussions on coordination opportunities and to identify and prioritize regional connectivity needs.

This strategy supports a regional coordinating committee to ensure a broad group of representatives engage in discussions to improve and expand mobility in the region. While transportation providers in the region work well together, through the needs assessment and gap analysis opportunities to improve coordination were noted. This regional coordinating would provide an ongoing forum for members to:

- Explore opportunities to improve coordination between public transit, private transportation, non-emergency medical transportation, and other human service transportation in the region.
- Discuss improved connections between existing transit providers, and between senior center transportation providers and transit providers.

- Consider, plan, and implement cross county services.
- Assess and reduce barriers to regional transportation services.
- Review and discuss strategies for coordinating transportation services with adjacent regions.
- Exploring and updating committee members on new and ongoing funding opportunities
- Facilitate updates of the coordinated transportation plan for Region 4.

Maintain services that are effectively meeting identified transportation needs in the region.

While most proposed strategies are designed to improve and expand mobility options in the region, it is vital to maintain services and infrastructure that are currently meeting transportation needs. Maintaining existing capital infrastructure is vital to meeting community transportation needs. Financial resources are also needed to operate vehicles and continue current services. There is also a need to continuously reassess existing services for efficiency and effectiveness, and operators must ensure their services continue to meet the region's mobility needs.

This strategy involves providing capital and operating funds to support existing public transit services and human services transportation that are effectively meeting mobility needs identified in the region, especially those serving older adults and individuals with disabilities. Maintaining these services are vital to ensuring basic mobility in the region, though existing services can be monitored on an ongoing basis using typical industry performance standards that can serve as a tool to monitor effectiveness and efficiency, and include: (This data can be found on MDOT's Office of Passenger Transportation's website - <https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/travel/mobility/pub-transit/program-data>)

- Operating Cost Per Hour
- Operating Cost Per Mile
- Operating Cost Per Passenger Trip
- Farebox Recovery
- Passenger Trips Per Mile
- Passenger Trips Per Hour

Through this strategy, there would be continued support for public transit services operated in the region that are meeting these standards. It also allows for opportunities to identify existing services that are important to the community, but that could be improved through modifications or technical assistance. This strategy would also enable regional stakeholders to establish baselines to help determine if additional funding is warranted, and to consider modifications to previous industry metrics for measuring transit's full value in the region.

Transportation provided through human service agencies is more specialized and therefore is not monitored through these performance measures. Agencies that would like to evaluate their transportation programs to ensure that financial resources are being used effectively can utilize *Transportation by the Numbers*, a resource available through the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC). This tool provides human service organizations with ways to more easily

identify expenses, revenues and performance outcomes so that they can make more informed decisions about their future in the transportation business. This tool is available through the NADTC website at <https://www.nadtc.org/resources-publications/resource/transportation-by-the-numbers/>.

Continue to support capital needs that help to maintain existing services and ensure vehicles are safe and appropriate for the need.

Maintaining and building upon current capital infrastructure is crucial to continuing or expanding mobility options, especially for older adults and people with disabilities. Before the region can consider efforts for improving mobility for these population groups it is critical to ensure that the current foundation of services remains in place through a sufficient capital network. An aging vehicle fleet can be a potential barrier to improving transportation services.

This strategy involves the acquisition of replacement buses or vans, vehicle rehabilitation or overhaul, and other appropriate vehicle equipment improvements that support the current capital infrastructure in the region, especially for non-profit organizations that provide human services transportation. It is essential that current vehicles are maintained and remain safe and operable.

Assess opportunities to improve recruitment and retention of vehicle operators.

In order to safely operate service levels to meet community needs, transit agencies must have an adequate number of qualified operators. Many transportation providers across the state and nation have been faced with a significant shortage of operators, even prior to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The job of a professional transit operator is an essential worker with specialized skills, who faces daily challenges with potentially challenging passengers, pressure to keep on schedule with challenging driving conditions, long periods of time sitting, and safely assisting individuals with disabilities, all while ideally being the professional, courteous public face of the organization. Being a transit operator is a difficult job. Ideally, their pay should reflect this.

If a transit agency cannot attract quality candidates to apply and continue working, the quality of the services the organization provides will suffer. Without enough employees (high quality or otherwise), service levels cannot be maintained, and some members of the community will lose their ride to work, school, the doctor, and other essential destinations. Each time a transit organization must fill a vacant position, there is a cost to the organization to hire and train a new employee. Paying overtime to current employees can be a short-term solution but is not a sustainable strategy. Not only is a high rate of overtime utilization costly to the agency in terms of payroll (because the overtime pay rate is typically 150% of the regular pay rate), but frequent overtime can also lead to safety risks due to operator fatigue and employee burnout, leading to yet more vacancies.

Therefore, this strategy recommends the assessment of opportunities to improve driver recruitment and retention, taking into account national research and analysis of operator vacancy rates that shows:

- Higher pay leads to lower vacancies – Systems with higher minimum and maximum pay rates have lower vacancy rates on average.
- Reliable hours and pay attracts workers – Systems with a higher percentage of full-time drivers and with more generous overtime levels have lower vacancy rates.
- Workers want training, health benefits, and a quality work environment – Systems that offer healthcare benefits, offer CDL training, and that foster a quality working environment have lower vacancy rates.

Additional considerations to support driver recruitment include:

- If they are to restore and maintain staffing levels, transit agencies will need to provide competitive wages and benefits that are commensurate with the levels of risk, pressures, and responsibilities that come with the operator position. The compensation will need to be higher than that offered by low-risk, low-challenge jobs in their area, and competitive with other types of driving jobs such as school bus operators.
- To compete with other employers in the area in today's employment environment, transit agencies may need to offer hiring bonuses. Hiring bonuses could be paid in installments over the course of the first year to encourage continued employment. Bonuses for referrals from current employees should also be considered.
- In addition to offering competitive, higher entry-level wages, transit agencies need to offer regular cost of living increases so that operators can continue to earn a living wage, and periodic longevity increases and/or bonuses, rewarding operators for their years of service will help retain operators and reward them for continuing to work for the organization.
- Transit agencies with vehicles that require the operator to have a CDL can seriously consider providing paid training to prepare new hires to obtain their CDL. Offering a competitive wage as well as a meaningful sign-up bonus contingent upon a minimum period of employment can help prevent new CDL operators from taking a higher-paying job as soon as they have earned their CDL.
- Transit agencies offer an advantage over transportation network companies (such as Lyft or Uber) not only with benefits but also by being a trusted employer. Transit agencies can have an advantage in recruiting efforts by emphasizing the agency's mission and the importance of the job to the community. However, adequate pay is needed for the job to be attractive. Transit agencies with full-time operator positions (at least 35 hours per week) are likely to have lower operator vacancy rates.

Improve infrastructure that supports accessibility and use of available transportation services.

Stakeholders noted that in some parts of the region there are opportunities to improve bus stop amenities and infrastructure, and these efforts would help to improve access to available transportation services. This strategy supports an assessment of these opportunities and to identify and implement improvements. Potential components of this strategy include:

- Consider a bus stop accessibility assessment for public transit services throughout the region
- Continue and expand the presence of bus stop signs and customer amenities at local stops to encourage use of public transit services and to facilitate transfers between systems.
- Ensure transit services are under consideration during the initial planning stages of new area developments, including passenger amenities such as bus stops and shelters.
- Support the continued prioritization of the “Complete Streets Program” to improve first and last mile connections by creating new bike and pedestrian connectivity.
- Improve connectivity between land use planning and the location of community services that will need to be accessed by people who rely on public transit and human services transportation.

Medium Priorities

Expand outreach efforts to provide information on available transportation options, particularly public transit services that are open to the general public.

The lack of awareness of available transportation services was noted by regional stakeholders, particularly services that are open to the general public. While services designed to meet the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and people with lower incomes are essential, there is a need for effective marketing efforts to offset the perception that public transit services are only available for specific populations and not open to everyone in the community. This strategy involves increased marketing of transportation services and options to counter any perception that public transit services are only available for specific populations and not open to everyone in the community.

Work with community leaders to identify additional funding sources that support increasing expenses and enable transportation providers to maintain and expand mobility options in the region.

Often the barrier to implementation or expansion of transportation services is a lack of funding to support these improvements. Regional stakeholders noted that there is a need to identify new funding to support service expansions, and while some funding programs can be restrictive that there is also an opportunity to be creative and to consider different and new solutions. In addition, while some millages are in place that support transit services this local funding stream can also cause challenges when

considering regional services that cross jurisdictional boundaries. As discussed in the needs assessment, overall regional stakeholders expressed that any service expansion or improvement will most likely come down to funding.

The federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) reports that CCAM agencies administer 130 programs that may fund transportation for older adults, people with disabilities, and/or people with lower incomes. While there are renewed coordination efforts at the federal level on these programs, much of the work to coordinate funds and to fully utilize resources through these programs occurs at the local and regional levels. Therefore, this strategy encourages cooperation and coordination support between key community leaders and stakeholders to discuss how current funding can be used most effectively to meet mobility needs and to identify possible new sources that would support additional transportation services.

In positive news related to additional funding to support transportation services in the region and across the state, during the development of this current coordinated transportation plan the Michigan Legislature approved and sent to Governor Whitmer the 2024 State budget that includes increased operations funding for transits across the state. More details as they become available on this funding increase will be included in this section of the draft final plan for the region.

An additional approach is to initiate a private sector sponsorship program and develop additional partnerships to identify new funding sources. Local funding has always been an issue for rural and small urban transit systems. However, transit has a long history of providing advertising on and in buses for additional revenue. Many systems have engaged in advertising over the years, but a sponsorship program is more than simply advertising. Instead of the usual selling of just one form of advertising, transit systems in the region can explore the selling of sponsorship packages. Since sponsorship and advertising funds are an important source of local funding, this program can help expand the service. This potential strategy would involve identifying partnership opportunities to leverage additional funding to support public transit and other mobility options in the region. It would include meeting multiple unmet needs and issues by tackling non-traditional sources of funding. Hospitals, supermarkets, and retailers who want the business of the region's riders may be willing to pay for part of the cost of transporting those riders to their sites. This approach is applicable to both medical and retail establishments already served, as well as to new businesses. While this plan helps to document the need for these additional services, some may need to be further quantified. It might also be necessary to document unmet needs and gaps in service as part of educating potential funders and sponsors.

Identify opportunities to expand scheduled services where feasible that can be marketed to local communities.

Regional stakeholders noted the need to assess current services and consider different modes that may be more effective in meeting mobility needs in the region. While demand response services are essential to provide mobility in rural areas, this strategy supports an assessment of these services operated within each county to determine if additional scheduled services are feasible. These schedules can be set up

based on historical travel patterns and typical ridership patterns, and potentially implemented for different times and perhaps different days. The frequency of the service will be determined by existing and potential ridership, though the overall objective is to group trips that can reduce costs as opposed to constant one-on-one set of trips that is very expensive to operate.

One of the important considerations related to this strategy is that these services must be heavily promoted, and a clear schedule developed so that they are fully marketed, and information posted throughout each community/county. Fixed schedule service has proven to be far more productive and less expensive than other services by generating more trips with existing resources, and with the promotion of the scheduled services those interested in traveling in the region can be more aware of their travel options, ridership can increase, and productivity of these services improved.

Advocate for additional recommendations to improve public transportation identified through previous transit plans conducted in the region.

Coupled with the need to develop additional partnerships is a stronger advocacy campaign that highlights the impact public transportation has on residents of the region, and how they are vital components of the community transportation infrastructure. Regional stakeholders noted that ongoing educational efforts are needed to ensure local leaders and decision makers are aware of the impact of community transportation services and overall buy-in for the needs for these services. Campaigns that stress that transit services are part of a robust community are particularly important in efforts to educate people who do not use current services but would be voting on specific millages. It was mentioned that while most transit systems in Michigan have had success getting millages passed, there may be pushback in some areas and some voters may be hesitant to renew them, and therefore ongoing education campaigns are needed.

This strategy involves a regional and unified effort to inform elected officials, local and national decision makers and the general public of the need for additional funding to support current services. This advocacy campaign could be part of a national movement to stress the importance of community and public transit. The Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA) and the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) have developed a variety of resources that can be used in advocacy efforts with local offices of House and Senate members, local media and state and local elected officials.

There can be specific advocacy to support service recommendations included in transit plans conducted in the region and noted in a previous strategy. While the regionally coordinated transportation takes a broader review of mobility needs and options, this planning process conducted by transit systems is more detailed, and assesses current services, identifies unmet transit needs, and identifies specific service and/or organizational changes, improvements, and/or potential expansions. Detailed in each plan, these recommendations respond to a variety of transportation needs expressed by regional stakeholders such as improving access to work locations and employment opportunities.

Support recommendations to improve public transportation identified through transit plans conducted in the region.

While the coordinated transportation plan can serve as an important planning tool for regional efforts to expand mobility, local transit plans typically serve as the basis for more specific service improvements. These short-range transit plans are often conducted by transit systems and are designed to formulate goals and objectives for transit; review and assess current transit services; identify unmet transit needs; and develop an appropriate course of action to address needs, typically a five-year horizon. These transit plans can then serve as a guide for public transportation, providing a roadmap for implementing service and/or organizational changes, improvements and/or potential expansions. Often the process is guided by an advisory committee comprised of local stakeholders who are acutely aware of transit needs and can offer input on potential service improvements.

While MDOT does not require local transit systems in Michigan to develop transit plans as the basis for preparing their annual grant applications for transit funding, many systems across the state conduct these short-range plans – these include the Cass County Transportation Authority County-Wide Transit Service Plan (2021) and Connect Berrien Transit Service Integration Plan (2018). This strategy calls for support of recommendations included in current or future transit plans, as these recommendations will respond to a variety of the transportation needs expressed by Region 4 stakeholders through the coordinated transportation planning process. The individual transit plans typically include projected costs and a proposed timeline for implementing service improvements that involve:

- Rural service expansion
- Increased frequency of existing services
- Extended evening hours
- Weekend service expansions

Other studies and plans may include assessments of the need for expanded transportation services to access medical appointments, jobs, school, shopping and other key destinations. This strategy also supports findings and recommendations from these studies and plans, and inclusion in overall efforts to expand mobility in the region.

Lower Priorities

Identify opportunities to utilize emerging technologies to improve customer information and with requesting services, while maintaining convenient access for people who would prefer other methods

Stakeholders noted the need for technology advancements, though they also expressed that these advancements may be a significant cost barrier for agencies and organizations who lack the funding to acquire technology that may allow them to provide more efficient, effective, and coordinated services.

At the same time, it was mentioned that any technological advancements need to take into account the user and that requiring them to utilize technology may be a weakness. For instance, it was noted that some older adults may prefer a call center structure over the use of an app or software platform.

This strategy supports efforts to determine how emerging technologies more fully can be used to improve customer information and how customers access this information. Technologies that can help to coordinate services and trips between different transportation providers can also be a component of this strategy.

Identify a process for planning and implementing new regional services to fill current gaps in transportation.

Through the engagement with regional stakeholders through the coordinated planning process they expressed the need for transportation services to fill current gaps, particularly to access services and employment. Cass County does not have lots of places for people to work so they have to go out of county which is why collaboration between county transportation systems is so imperative. One of the overriding challenges noted by regional stakeholders was the lack of transportation services that cross county lines, and that greater regional transportation services are needed.

In conjunction with the formation of a regional coordinating committee that would work on regional efforts, this strategy supports a more formal process for planning and implementing new regional services that would help to fill gaps. There are a variety of considerations involved in the development of regional services that need to be taken into account, and that include:

- Prioritizing regional service corridors.
- Balancing commuter needs to larger employment centers with medical transportation and other needs.
- Identifying preferred mode of transportation, i.e., public transit, private transportation, vanpools, etc.
- Determining agency or organization that will operate services, i.e. will be responsible entities be a consortium of operators, a new regional transit system or one designated transit operator with support from other participating systems.
- Identifying funding sources and formalizing agreements on a cost sharing plan for regional services that would cross jurisdictional boundaries and serve multiple communities.

Assess opportunities to implement on-demand microtransit services.

One of the major changes in planning transit services since the last coordinated transportation plan for the region is the introduction of microtransit services. A growing number of public transportation providers have begun operating this service that features an on-demand, e-hailing component. These services use mobile technology to provide dynamic routing through which customers use a smartphone application (app) to schedule and/or pay for a ride within a specific geofenced zone. On-demand services can provide more flexibility to customers than traditional demand response services. Riders can individualize service by selecting both their pick-up and drop-off locations, while dynamic routing capabilities allow drivers to quickly adjust pick-up locations to provide more efficient service.

A variety of different needs and mobility challenges can be met through microtransit services. These included service industry workers who work second and third shift jobs and have mobility needs that are unable to be met during normal transit operational hours; and jobs outside of the current transit service areas that are therefore challenging to access. Microtransit services are also appealing to college students. While once designed for larger urban areas, on-demand services are now expanding to small urban and rural communities. On-demand services can be designed to make local service easier, and instead of customers having to call the day before the trip they can access the service in as little as one hour or less.

There are also operational advantages to on-demand microtransit services, as they can be useful where fixed route service may be ineffective. These services may make better use of the existing vehicles and often require almost no interaction with the dispatcher, reducing the demands on that position.

There are a variety of new microtransit services across the country that can be used as possible models in the planning and design of on-demand options in the region. While each project is unique, the following step-by-step planning process provides a possible guide for implementation:

- **Microtransit Zones** – Locations are identified as prime candidates for services based on the assessment of existing transit services, demographic, and other key factors.
- **Service Plan** - Various operational considerations for potential services are developed, including service days and hours, pickup and drop off locations, and the type of vehicles to be used in the delivery of services.
- **Capital and Technology Considerations** – These areas are assessed based on preferred service delivery and other service components.
- **Funding and Budget Considerations** – Potential costs and revenue sources for the microtransit service are identified.
- **Outreach Considerations** – Various opportunities to obtain community input on potential microtransit services are developed.
- **Procurement and RFP Considerations** – Process for obtaining a vendor to provide microtransit software and/or operate services is developed.
- **Service Evaluation Considerations** – Methods for measuring and assessing the efficacy and efficiency of microtransit services after implementation are identified.

This strategy proposes the planning and implementation of on-demand microtransit? services. More guidance in the planning and implementation of these services related to delivery, technology, and other key components can be provided in the draft plan for the region.

Administer trainings for human service agency staff, medical facility personnel, and others in the availability of transportation services.

Through the needs assessment it was noted that often staff at different human service agencies and medical facilities were unaware of the transportation services available to their clients. In addition to expanding transportation options in the region, it is vital that customers, caseworkers, agency staff and medical facility personnel that work with people with disabilities, older adults, and others are familiar with available transportation services.

While possibly a component of the broader marketing efforts discussed in the preceding strategy, this strategy is segmented to highlight the support for the implementation and administration of transportation training for these employees. These educational opportunities are particularly important for coordinating scheduling medical and other appointments with available transportation options, as transportation providers in the region have limitations on service hours and days.

These trainings could be especially helpful as marketing, outreach, and education tools with healthcare and social service providers. People who consistently rely on social programs and/or need regular medical care are likely to rely on public or human service transportation. If providers of these services are not well educated on the variety of transportation options in the region, it can be difficult to see their clients. Hosting trainings or information sessions for these individuals, as well as the general public, can increase the community's awareness of these services.

Consider greater use of vanpool and long distance rideshare services.

Regional stakeholders expressed the need for expanded employment transportation services, especially for workers needing to access jobs that require second and third shifts. Where feasible vanpool programs can be used and serve as a low-cost way to meet commuter demand.

Therefore, this proposed strategy calls for consideration of the implementation of vanpool services currently available in the region. The MichiVan program, sponsored by MDOT and operated by Enterprise Rideshare, supplies fully insured passenger vans to commuter groups, and can be the starting point for these efforts. The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission coordinates this service with Enterprise Rental.

Identify opportunities to implement or build upon current volunteer driver programs.

A variety of transportation services are needed to meet the mobility needs in the region, especially for older adults. Many of the needs identified by regional stakeholders can be handled through more specialized services beyond those typically provided through general public transit services. In addition, the rural nature and geographic makeup of some parts of the region are not always conducive for shared-ride services.

The use of volunteer drivers would offer transportation options that are difficult to meet through public transit and human service agency transportation and provide a more personal and one-to-one transportation service for customers who may require additional assistance. Volunteer driver programs can also relieve both public transit systems and human service agencies with the burden of providing labor-intensive one-on-one trips, thus freeing up resources for routes and services that serve greater numbers of people.

There are numerous examples of volunteer driver programs throughout the country that can be used as models. This includes one in Region 4 in Cass County, where the Cass County Council on Aging has dedicated transportation volunteers help to transport older adults and individuals with disabilities to and from out-of-county medical appointments. Four of the eight Senior Centers also have dedicated transportation volunteers that provide transportation utilizing the fleet of vehicles owned by each of the centers. Other examples and resources for implementing a volunteer driver program are available through the National Volunteer Transportation Center's website at <https://ctaa.org/national-volunteer-transportation-center/>. Another helpful resource is the National Trends Report through the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) that highlighted rural volunteer transportation programs. This report is available at – <https://www.nadtc.org/wp-content/uploads/7-Rural-Volunteer-Transportation-Programs.pdf>.

Chapter 8

Adoption Process

As discussed in Chapter 1, this coordinated mobility plan is designed to meet federal coordinated transportation planning requirements. The guidelines in these requirements state that the lead agency in consultation with planning participants should identify the process for approving and adopting the plan.

In Region 4 stakeholders who participated in development of this plan had the opportunity to:

- Review and comment on identified transportation needs in the region.
- Review and provide input on potential strategies, activities, and projects to be included in the regional plan.
- Prioritize strategies identified as the most appropriate for improving mobility in the region.

Through the next phase of the planning process these stakeholders will have the opportunity to review and provide input on the draft version of this plan. Their input will be incorporated into a final version.

Helpful Resources

This section provides links to a variety of resources, national technical assistance centers, and other organizations referenced throughout the plan; or that could be helpful with the implementation of the strategies identified in this plan and overall efforts to improve mobility in the region.

- Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 Program
 - <https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/grants/enhanced-mobility-seniors-individuals-disabilities-section-5310>
- Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) Office of Passenger Transportation (OPT)
 - <https://www.michigan.gov/mdot/travel/mobility/pub-transit>
- Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) Federal Fund Braiding Guide
 - <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-programs/ccam/about/coordinating-council-access-and-mobility-ccam-federal-fund>
- National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC):
 - www.natdc.org
- American Public Transportation Association (APTA)
 - www.apta.com
- Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA):
 - www.ctaa.org
- National Center for Applied Transit Technology (N-CATT)
 - <https://n-catt.org>
- National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM)
 - <https://nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org/by-topic/coordination>
- [National Rural Transit Assistance Program \(National RTAP\)](https://www.nationalrtap.org)
 - <https://www.nationalrtap.org>
- [Shared-Use Mobility Center \(SUMC\)](https://sharedusemobilitycenter.org)
 - <https://sharedusemobilitycenter.org>
- [Transit Workforce Development Technical Assistance Center \(TWC\)](https://www.transitworkforce.org)
 - <https://www.transitworkforce.org>

- National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP):
 - <http://www.trb.org/NCHRP/NCHRP.aspx>
- National Volunteer Transportation Center:
 - <https://ctaa.org/national-volunteer-transportation-center>
- Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP):
 - <http://www.apta.com/resources/tcrp/Pages/default.aspx>
- Transit Planning For All:
 - <https://transitplanning4all.org>