

Housing



Transportation

NORTHEAST GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mark Beatty, Project Manager (Project Lead)

Stephen Jacques, Project Specialist (Project Lead)

Eva Kennedy, Director of Planning & Government Services

John Devine, Principal Planner

This document was created by the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

Planning and Government Services Division

www.negrc.org

June 2020



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Northeast Georgia Regional Housing & Transportation Analysis

INTRODUCTION

This document offers a brief local analysis of the Northeast Georgia region's housing and transportation sectors. Housing and transportation are two of the most influential components of our economy, urban form, and daily life. Where and how we live is directly linked to an extensive variety of positive and negative socioeconomic outcomes (<https://www.opportunityatlas.org/>, 2020). For instance, our mode of transportation has far reaching impacts on our mental health (Avila-Palencia, 2018) and economic mobility (Bullard, 2003). Also, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation, housing costs are the single largest expense for most households. When combined, these two necessities account for approximately half of the average U.S. household budget

(<https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/housing-and-transportation-affordability>, 2015).

For local governments, providing infrastructure and public services to meet the housing and transportation needs of residents has an innumerable impact on the fiscal, environmental, and social health of the community. However, crafting suitable policies is difficult because of the interrelatedness these complex systems. This document offers a local analysis of the Northeast Georgia region's housing and transportation systems and associated costs to assist local leaders with gathering data and selecting tools to address their communities' needs.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to inform housing and transportation policies at the local government level. The governing principle of these recommendations is to enhance the long-term prosperity, quality of life, and resilience for residents and communities in the Northeast Georgia region. Specifically, this report will offer an analysis of available data and recommend policy items geared toward helping communities lower the cost of housing and transportation for their residents.

The methodology includes an analysis of current housing development and transportation infrastructure conditions at the regional and local level. A 12-county regional overview is provided to identify correlations between jurisdictions. Following the regional overview, an individual brief of each county provides distinguishing characteristics. The attributes identified in these analyses, combined with current best management practices seen at the state and national level, inform the Policy Recommendations section to

provide a tailored list of options for local policy decisions.

The policy recommendations are not written to provide draft-ready ordinances for local adoption. Instead, they are a set of launching points for the kinds of policies that would enhance the regulatory framework of each community. The Planning & Government Services (PGS) Division of the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission is available to provide technical assistance in relation to these topics to any local government in the region. Furthermore, a local attorney should be consulted prior to enacting any local policy changes.

How To Use this Document

OVERVIEW

The Regional Overview and County Comparisons provide baseline data to use as a reference for current conditions and affordability of local housing and transportation. Use these sections as a launching point to guide further research into each topic and identify if your community is struggling with a particular issue. This can also be used to generate discussion among elected officials and community members. Furthermore, local governments may want to conduct in-depth studies of housing and transportation needs to tailor solutions to the needs of each community.

The Policy Recommendations chapter provides tools to encourage the development of equitable, affordable housing and transportation options. Each policy should be customized based on the observed needs of citizens within a community. No one-size-fits-all solution exists to solve the complex challenges of housing and transportation policy. Conceptually, transportation and housing costs can be reduced overall when a community's

housing supply is diverse, and the transportation network enables destinations to be close together and accessible via multiple modes of transport. This can be achieved at scales from small towns to large cities.

The data sources referenced in this document (such as the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), U.S. Census, American Community Survey, the Housing + Transportation Index, and the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL)) are publicly available; references and additional resources are provided in the Appendix. These resources can be used in combination with more fine-grained approaches, such as local surveys, to obtain more precise data. The Northeast Georgia Regional Commission is available to provide guidance for local surveys and other data collection, upon request.



Regional Overview

POPULATION

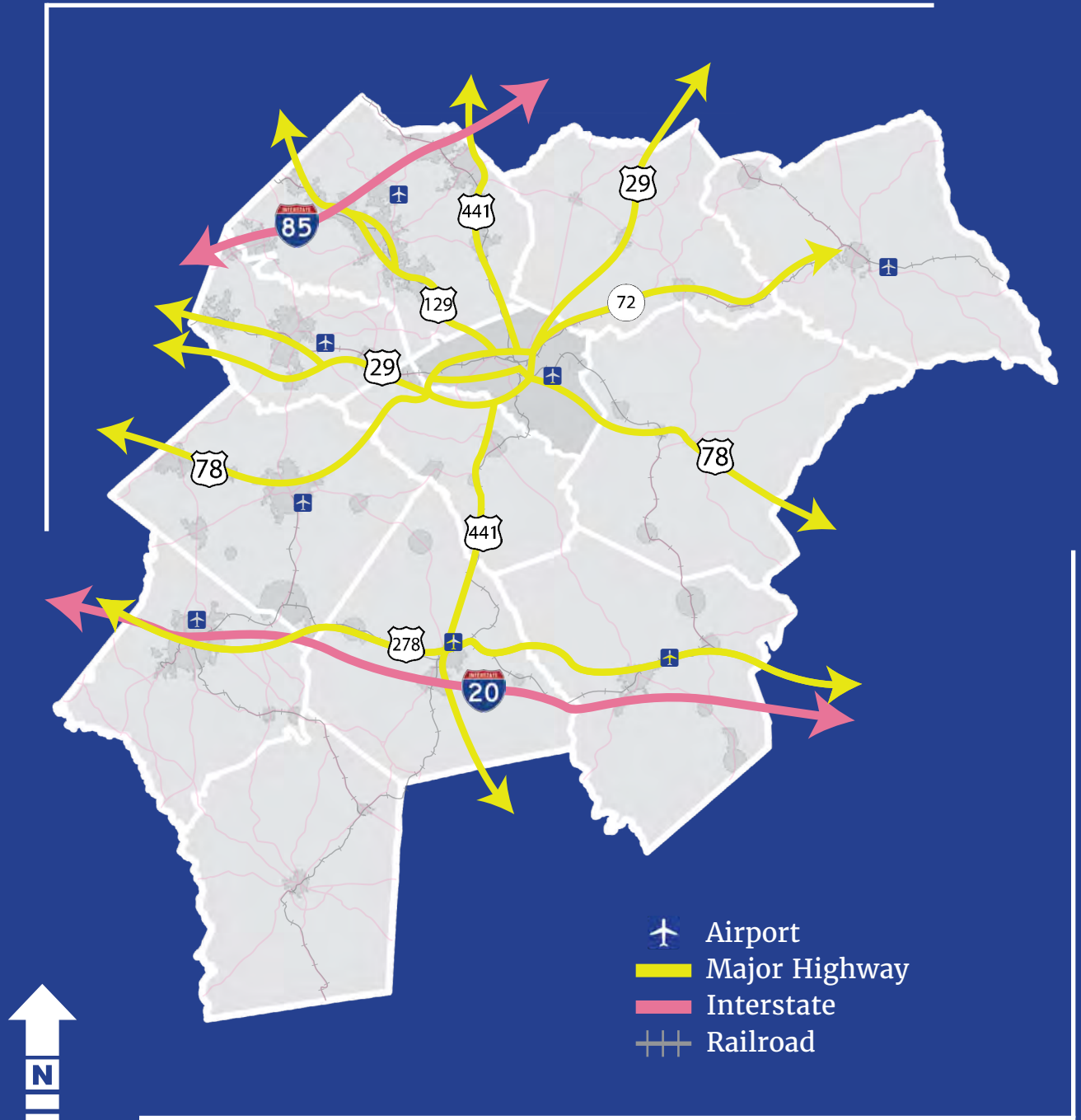
The Northeast Georgia region encompasses 12 counties: Athens-Clarke, Barrow, Elbert, Greene, Jackson, Jasper, Madison, Morgan, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, and Walton. Approximately 612,000 people live in the region. Nearly 43% of those residents live in an urban area (places with a population above 50,000) and a further 15% live in an urban cluster (places with between 50,000 and 2,500 people) (Esri Business Analyst Online (BAO) 2017). The other 42% of residents live in rural areas of the region. While this study aims to provide broadly applicable recommendations, it will be the responsibility of individual communities to tailor the recommendations to suit their context, whether that is urban, rural, suburban, or a mixture of development patterns.

The top employment sectors in the region are in services (47%), manufacturing (12%), and retail trade (12%) (Esri BAO 2017). Approximately 57% of workers are classified as white collar, 26% are classified as blue collar, and a further 17% are in services (Esri BAO 2017). Close attention should be paid to the location of jobs in relation to the homes that those workers can afford to live in.

Approximately 26% of regional residents are 55-and-older and this population is projected to grow to 28% by 2024 (Esri BAO 2017). Meanwhile, the population of children under 15 is expected to remain at 19% throughout that five year period (Esri BAO 2017). Nearly one-third of Northeast Georgia households are drawing Social Security income. As the population ages, this will have implications for transportation and housing systems throughout the region, especially since the dominant form of transportation, the automobile, and the dominant form of housing, detached single-family, may not be best suited to aging in place.

Nearly 17% of the population has had income below the poverty line in the last 12 months (Esri BAO 2017). This is worth noting because the dominant type of housing (single-family) and transportation (automobiles) in the region also tend to be the most expensive.

Transportation



Network

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation serves as a means of connection between destinations primarily through the following modes: walking, biking, transit, and automobiles. While some people will make conscious choices to travel via a certain mode (ex. for health, environmental, or financial reasons), most will select the transportation option that is quickest and most convenient. For the vast majority of the population in Northeast Georgia, that mode of transportation is the personal automobile. Certain populations, including disabled, elderly, and low-income individuals, rely on public (bus/van) transit as their primary option, although it is generally not faster or more convenient than other modes of transportation. While public Human Services transit is available in all 12 Northeast Georgia counties, it is only available to limited segments of the population including disabled residents and residents over the age of 60. Only five of the 12 counties and one city offer public transit services for the general public. In select neighborhoods, walking or biking may be the most convenient option, especially for short trips. However, the majority of the region lacks truly functional bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure networks.

Transportation networks can be assessed based on two broad categories: mobility and accessibility. Mobility measures how far someone can travel within a given amount of time. Accessibility measures how many destinations can be reached within a given amount of time. The Northeast Georgia region is bracketed by Interstates-85 and -20 and has an extensive network of state-controlled highways intended for long-distance travel (see Table 1 for a list of state and federal roadways within the region). These major thoroughfares experience the highest traffic volumes for both commuting and freight. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 128,000 residents leave the region for work and 73,000 commute into the region for work on a given day (U.S. Census Bureau On the Map (Census OTM), 2017). Approximately 112,000 people live and work within the region (Census OTM 2017). Furthermore, the number of people commuting between the region's counties significantly outweighs the number of people that live and work in the same county (Census OTM 2017). Even Athens-Clarke County, the regional employment hub, has nearly the same number of residents leaving the county for work as those who live and



work within the county. Approximately 40% of Northeast Georgia residents commute 30 minutes or more to work, including 11.6% who commute in excess of 60 minutes (Esri BAO 2017). An estimated 80% of these trips are taken in single-occupancy vehicles. Mobility is high throughout the region as evidenced by these numbers. However, the high degree of mobility may indicate that accessibility to local jobs is low or that there is a mismatch between the workforce of a county and the jobs available within that county.

The regional average for vehicle miles traveled (VMT) is 23,733, according to the Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing and Transportation Index (H+T Index, 2017). With the exception of Athens-Clarke County, households throughout the region have an average of two personal vehicles. Both statistics are key drivers of an average annual transportation cost of \$13,865 per household. The Center for Neighborhood Technology describes transportation costs as the sum of "auto ownership, auto use, and transit use".

Table 1: Regional Inventory: State and Federal Roads

Interstates

I-20
I-85

U.S. Highways

US-29
US-78
US-129
US-278
US-441

State Highways

SR-8	SR-44	SR-98	SR-186
SR-10	SR-53	SR-106	SR-191
SR-11	SR-60	SR-124	SR-211
SR-12	SR-72	SR-138	SR-212
SR-15	SR-77	SR-142	SR-281
SR-16	SR-81	SR-162	SR-316
SR-17	SR-82	SR-172	SR-330
SR-36	SR-83	SR-174	SR-334

HOUSING

The housing stock in Northeast Georgia consists of a majority of single-family, detached housing types. The total number of housing units in the region is 189,614. Of this, approximately 82% are detached homes, including single-family (72%) and mobile homes (10%) (U.S. Census ACS, 2018). Duplexes come in a distant third at 4% of the supply, while all other types of housing (including multi-family) account for less than 3% of the market. The majority of the region's housing units are owner-occupied (65%) with 80% of detached single-family houses owner-occupied. Refer to Table 2 and 3, below, for a breakdown of housing unit types and occupancy data.

The western portion of the region and some areas within and around Athens are experiencing growth, particularly in a suburban format, while the rural, eastern portion of the region is experiencing more idle population trends. While

most Northeast Georgia communities are grappling with affordable housing concerns, many are also dealing with poorly maintained properties and blight, often due to owners lacking the means to maintain them. On average, regional housing costs consume \$13,498 annually per household, or 29% of a household's income (H+T Index 2017). The Center for Neighborhood Technology calculates housing costs based on the following description: "Median selected monthly owner costs for owners with a mortgage and median gross rent, both from the 2015 American Community Survey, are averaged and weighted by the ratio of owner- to renter-occupied housing units from the tenure variable for every block group in a CBSA" (H+T Index Methods 2017). While this is a positive trend in respect to general affordability, the statistic varies widely by community and within specific neighborhoods of each community.

Table 2: Housing Type by Owner/Renter Occupancy

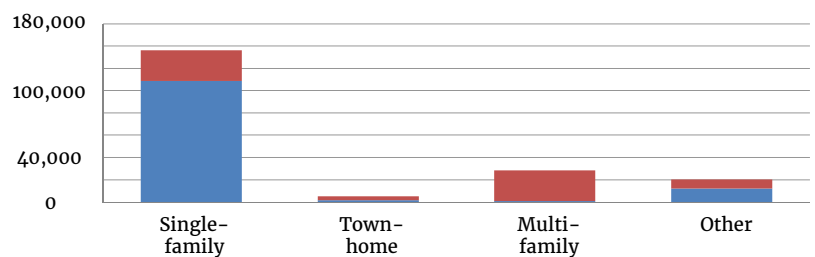
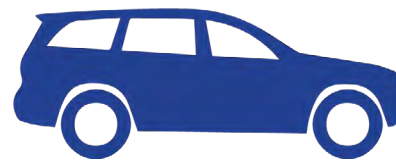


Table 3: ACS B250032: Tenure by Units in Structure

	Estimate	owner/renter by units in structure
Total:	189,614	
Owner-occupied housing units:	123,467	
1 (detached)	108,810	88%
1 (attached)	1,583	1%
2 units	177	0%
3 or 4 units	129	0%
5 to 9 units	266	0%
10 to 19 units	166	0%
20 to 49 units	92	0%
50 or more units	64	0%
Mobile home	11,999	10%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	181	0%
Renter-occupied housing units:	66,147	0.535746394
1, detached	27,304	41%
1, attached	3,521	5%
2	7,117	11%
3 or 4	4,396	7%
5 to 9	5,329	8%
10 to 19	4,710	7%
20 to 49	3,176	5%
50 or more	2,688	4%
Mobile home	7,755	12%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	151	0%
Total		
1 (detached)	136,114	72%
1 (attached)	5,104	3%
2 units	7,294	4%
3 or 4 units	4,525	2%
5 to 9 units	5,595	3%
10 to 19 units	4,876	3%
20 to 49 units	3,268	2%
50 or more units	2,752	1%
Mobile home	19,754	10%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	332	0%

Combined Costs

HOUSING & TRANSPORTATION REGIONAL



The average regional housing and transportation costs, combined, are \$27,363 per household, annually. Housing, at an average of \$13,498 per year, costs slightly less than the average \$13,865 households spend annually on transportation. To achieve minimal financial burden, households should spend no more than 30% of their income on housing and no more than 15% on transportation, for a combined total of 45% (H+T Index Methods 2017). None of the household averages for any county within the region currently meets this target (H+T Index 2017).

Across the Northeast Georgia region, there are three types of development patterns: urban, suburban,

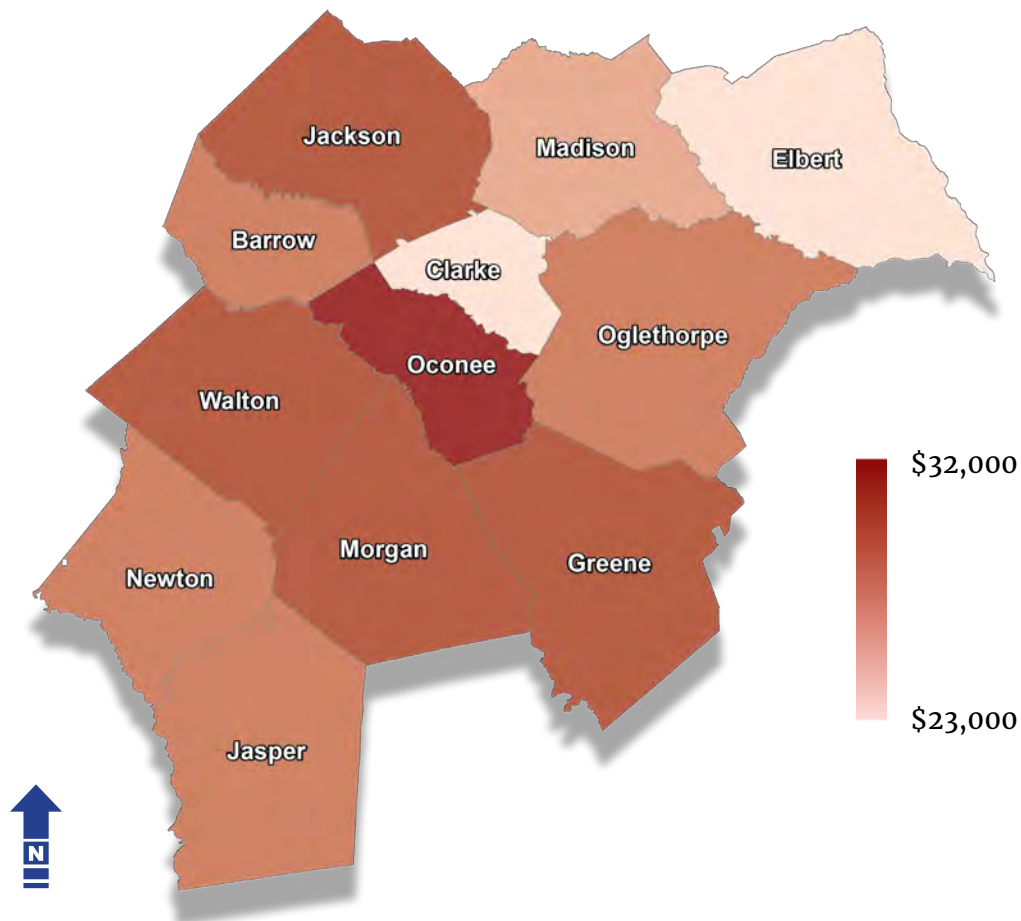
and rural. The urban pattern is characterized by compact development and highly connected—usually gridded—street networks such as one might find in various main streets throughout the region. Athens–Clarke County has the highest proportion of this kind of development. The suburban pattern is characterized by a prevalence of strip malls, subdivisions comprised of low-density detached single-family homes, and a curvilinear street network terminating in cul-de-sacs. Most of the population in the western and central counties of Jackson, Barrow, Walton, Newton, and Oconee County live in suburban development patterns. The rural pattern is

characterized by sparse development (usually widely-spaced single-family houses), large tracts of farmland and woodland, and a limited road network. This pattern is common throughout the region, especially in counties like Morgan, Greene, Oglethorpe, Jasper, Madison, and Elbert.

By comparing the development patterns and transportation costs of the region's counties, we find a general decline in costs as one moves from rural to urban areas. Housing, on the other hand, is cheapest at each end of the spectrum.

That is, housing per dwelling unit tends to be cheapest in the very rural and highly urban areas of Northeast Georgia and is most expensive in the suburban-middle of the spectrum. Therefore, regionally, suburbs have the highest housing and transportation costs combined. This regional trend stays true at the individual county-level: the Northeast Georgia counties that contain the most suburban-style development have the highest combined transportation and housing costs (H+T Index).

Figure 2: Annual Housing & Transportation Costs



County Comparisons

OVERVIEW

The following individual county comparisons are provided to identify the unique characteristics of each community in relation to regional data. As shown at the regional level, there are two major trends that are consistent throughout all Northeast Georgia counties: (1) single-family detached (SFD) homes account for the vast majority of housing types; and (2) in most counties, the number of residents who commute outside of their county for work is higher than the number of residents who live and work within that county. This influences the fact that in all counties, except for Oconee County, transportation costs are higher than housing costs on average.

According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, households are considered cost-burdened when they pay more than 30% of their annual income for housing. In addition, they are considered cost-burdened when they spend more than 15% of their income on transportation. Therefore, a household is considered cost-burdened for both housing and transportation when they spend more than 45% of their income on those two needs. These recommendations are taken into account when determining the general conditions of each county.

*Unless otherwise noted data is collected from Esri Business Analyst and the Center for Neighborhood Technology's Housing + Transportation Index.

Athens–Clarke

COUNTY

The unified government of Athens–Clarke County, population 128,791, is the economic hub of the region and contains the largest city in the region (Athens) as well as the City of Winterville. The annual median household income is \$42,909 while the poverty rate is 31.6%, the highest in the region.

ACC has the third lowest average annual housing cost per household in the region at \$12,182, and it has the highest density of residential units per acre at 3.3 units per acre. The average household spends 30% of their income on housing—right at the threshold of affordability. At 3.3 units-per-acre Athens, is far denser than the regional average of 0.98 units-per-acre. Additionally, the County has the greatest diversity of housing types in the region including more multi-family units and townhomes. According to estimates,

the county's housing stock by housing unit is comprised of 50% single-family detached and 50% of some other form of attached or multi-family format (U.S. Census). The relatively high density and diversity of housing options helps reduce the cost of housing. That said, only 36% of residential units are owner-occupied while 56% are renter-occupied. This is likely influenced by several factors including the high percentage of college students and the high poverty rate.

The county's transportation network is best described as a hub-and-spoke system with major thoroughfares disseminating outward to all surrounding counties. This network centers on downtown Athens and the SR-10 loop. The local government and the University of Georgia have been proactive in building a functional, active transportation network within the urban area,

including bicycle paths, sidewalks, and fixed-route public transportation systems.

The average annual vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in ACC is 19,596 miles, the lowest in the region by at least 3,000 miles. Undoubtedly, this is a key reason why Athens-Clarke has the lowest average annual transportation cost within the region at \$11,278 per household. However, ACC households still spend 29% of their income on transportation, far above the recommended threshold of 15%. While it is possible to live and work in the County without a car, much of the community is still car-dependent. Also, as expected, there are a significant amount of regional residents who commute into Athens for employment. An estimated 41,415 people commute into ACC for work, while approximately 21,000 people leave the county for work and an additional 21,000 live and work within the County.

Combined, housing and transportation costs consume 59% of the average ACC annual household income, which is right at the regional average. While the costs of housing and transportation are low by regional standards, the percentage of household income devoted to those two needs is above the cost-burdened threshold of 45%, likely due to the high number of low-income households in the county.

Athens-Clarke County has the highest concentration of jobs, the highest residential density, and a relatively robust public transit system. Therefore, it can be expected that transportation and housing costs would be lower than surrounding counties due to the proximity

of destinations and the greater supply of housing options. The data bears this hypothesis out as Athens-Clarke has the lowest average annual transportation costs and the third-lowest average annual housing costs. By continuing to encourage the construction of a diverse supply of housing types as well as expanding transit, bicycle, and pedestrian access, the County can continue lowering the cost of housing and transportation for residents.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population:	128,791
Workforce Population 16+ Employed:	84.4%
Annual median household income:	\$42,909.00
Total cost of housing and transportation per household:	\$23,460
Commuter flow by number of people:	(In) 41,415
	(Out) 21,164
	(Within) 21,841
Average vehicle miles traveled per household:	19,596
Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):	59%
Annual housing costs per household:	\$12,182
Housing costs as a percentage of income:	30%
Owner-occupied housing units:	36.0%
Renter-occupied housing units:	55.8%
Average residential units per acre:	3.3
Poverty rate:	31.6%

Barrow

COUNTY

Barrow County, population 85,104, is experiencing rapid growth and development, nearly doubling in population between 2000 and 2020. Specifically, its location along the major US-29/SR-316 transportation corridor, between the Atlanta and Athens-Clarke Metropolitan areas has attracted growth. Historically, Barrow was characterized by rural farms and railroad towns that grew along the CSX rail line. Although the railroad is still active, the development pattern has shifted to a suburban pattern of single-family detached (SFD) subdivisions and shopping centers. Barrow County residents have a median household income of \$63,759 and has the third lowest poverty rate in the region at 9.5%.

Barrow County has the fifth lowest average annual household housing costs in the region at \$12,779. The average household spends 24% of its income on housing, tied for second lowest in the region. The average residential units per acre is 0.82, which is below the regional average of 0.98 and reflects the rural and suburban development pattern that characterizes the county. Approximately 70% of homes are owner-occupied, while 24% are renter-occupied.

The county's transportation network is built off the parallel linear routes of the CSX railroad,

US-29 BUS/Atlanta Highway, and US-29/SR-316. Like much of the region, this network is auto-dependent, which results in an average VMT per household that is slightly above the regional average at 24,127 per year, and an average annual household transportation cost of \$13,972. Barrow County households spend an average of 26% of their income on transportation. Likely, the need to commute outside of the county for work contributes to this cost. Consistent with its status as a bedroom community, 28,913 people leave the county for work, while 12,807 commute into the county for work and only 5,412 live and work within the county. There are no public transit services within Barrow County.

Combined, housing and transportation costs consume 50% of the average Barrow County annual household income, tied for the second lowest in the region. This is likely due to relatively affordable housing, the low rate of poverty, and the higher than average median income. However, it is still above the recommended affordability threshold of 45%. While development at and around highways tends to create congestion, the presence of SR-316 could be used to attract jobs to nearby towns, reduce the need to leave the county for work, and reduce transportation costs.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population:	85,104
Workforce Population 16+ Employed:	86.8%
Annual median household income:	\$63,759
Total cost of housing and transportation per household:	\$26,751
Commuter flow by number of people:	(In) 12,807
	(Out) 28,913
	(Within) 5,412
Average vehicle miles traveled per household:	24,127
Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):	50%
Annual housing costs per household:	\$12,779
Housing costs as a percentage of income:	24%
Owner-occupied housing units:	68.9%
Renter-occupied housing units:	23.6%
Average residential units per acre:	0.82
Poverty rate:	9.5%

Elbert

COUNTY

Elbert County, population 20,074, is located along the South Carolina border in the northeast corner of the region, and is rural in character with the exception of the county seat of Elberton. The City of Bowman is the only other local municipality, and is located in the northernmost portion of the county. Unlike much of the region, the Elbert County experienced a slight population decrease from 2014–2018 (ESRI BAO). The median household income is \$42,142, the lowest in the region, and the poverty rate is 18.5%, the third highest in the region.

Elbert County households pay the least amount for housing in the region at \$10,282 annually. However, households pay 27% of their income in housing costs annually, which is the median percentage for the region. This is likely due to low incomes. The average density of residential units per acre is 2.71, an unexpected number given the low population and rural setting. Further examination reveals that one census block group in downtown Elberton has a residential density of 40 units per acre. Outside of this block, unit density drops to a more typical 0.75 per acre. Approximately 60% of residences are owner-occupied while 22% are renter-occupied.

The county's transportation network is mostly composed of rural roads that connect in the City of Elberton. State Route-72 and -17 are the most heavily used thoroughfares in the county and serve as heavy freight corridors. The VMT per household is estimated at 22,565 per year, while the average cost of transportation is \$12,845 annually. This is below the regional averages of 23,773 VMT and \$13,865 respectively. However, at 36%, the cost of household transportation is tied for most expensive in the region with Oconee and Oglethorpe County. An estimated 4,995 workers leave the county for work, while 2,217 commute into the county and 2,735 live and work in Elbert. There is a rural demand-response public transit service throughout the county.

Combined, housing and transportation costs consume 63% of household incomes, fifth highest in the region. While the cost of housing and transportation may not be high, the percentage of income spent on those necessities far exceeds the recommended threshold of 45%. This is likely due to the low incomes and low density of job opportunities in the county. Expanding the employment base could help raise incomes and reduce the percentage of income devoted to housing and transportation.

Numbers At A Glance:

<i>Population:</i>	20,074
<i>Workforce Population 16+ Employed:</i>	86.8%
<i>Annual median household income:</i>	\$42,142
<i>Total cost of housing and transportation per household:</i>	\$23,126
<i>Commuter flow by number of people:</i>	(In) 2,217
	(Out) 4,995
	(Within) 2,735
<i>Average vehicle miles traveled per household:</i>	22,565
<i>Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):</i>	63%
<i>Annual housing costs per household:</i>	\$10,282
<i>Housing costs as a percentage of income:</i>	27%
<i>Owner-occupied housing units:</i>	60.7%
<i>Renter-occupied housing units:</i>	22.1%
<i>Average residential units per acre:</i>	2.71 / 0.75
<i>Poverty rate:</i>	18.5%

Greene

COUNTY

Greene County is located in the southeastern corner of the region, and is one of the few with extensive Interstate access; I-20 runs east-west through its center. Despite the presence of I-20, the county has remained rural with a significant portion of the county federally-owned as the Oconee National Forest. Greene County is home to the wealthy lakefront community of Lake Oconee, however, it has the second highest poverty rate in the region at 19.3%. Given these disparities, the statistics for Greene may not be as reflective of household expenses as they are in other counties. The county has a total population of 18,498 with an annual median household income of \$58,630.

Greene County households spend an average of \$15,270 on annual housing expenses, second highest in the region. The average residential units per acre stands at 0.5, the median density in the region. Greene County households spend an average of 35% of their income on housing, also the second highest in the region. Housing options are overwhelmingly comprised of single-family detached units with very few other options. Approximately 50% of residences are owner-occupied, while 22% are renter occupied. These numbers are likely influenced by the expense of lakefront housing and the lower incomes of the rest of the county.

The county's transportation network is bifurcated by Interstate 20, providing a high-speed connection to Atlanta and Augusta. The rest of the network is mostly rural roads and two-lane state routes. The average VMT per household is 22,654, annually, third lowest in the region. The average cost of transportation per household is estimated at \$13,426. Transportation costs as a percentage of household income stand at 32%, far above the affordability threshold of 15%. This is likely driven by the rural nature of the county and the low incomes of some of its residents. The number of commuters leaving the county compared to those who leave the county is relatively balanced. An estimated 3,534 people commute into the county for work, while 4,142 leave for work and 2,116 live and work in the county.

Combined, transportation and housing costs consume 67% of household income, third highest in the region. The combination of high-priced lakefront real estate and low incomes in the rest of the county are likely key drivers behind the high cost of housing and transportation. Encouraging a greater diversity of housing types could help lower housing costs and give greater flexibility to meet the housing needs of residents.

Numbers At A Glance:

<i>Population:</i>	18,498
<i>Workforce Population 16+ Employed:</i>	84.9%
<i>Annual median household income:</i>	\$58,630

<i>Total cost of housing and transportation per household:</i>	\$28,696
<i>Commuter flow by number of people:</i>	(In) 3,534
	(Out) 4,142
	(Within) 2,116

<i>Average vehicle miles traveled per household:</i>	22,654
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<i>Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):</i>	67%
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<i>Annual housing costs per household:</i>	\$15,270
<i>Housing costs as a percentage of income:</i>	35%
<i>Owner-occupied housing units:</i>	50.8%
<i>Renter-occupied housing units:</i>	21.8%
<i>Average residential units per acre:</i>	0.50
<i>Poverty rate:</i>	19.3%

Jackson

COUNTY

Jackson County is experiencing significant suburban residential and industrial growth, with its population growing 56% between 2000 and 2020 to a total of 73,789. Its location between Atlanta, Gainesville, and Athens, on the busy Interstate-85 corridor is transforming this traditionally rural county. For now, the eastern portion of the county remains primarily rural, agricultural land. Local municipalities include the Cities of Arcade, Commerce, Nicholson, Pendergrass, Talmo, Hoschton, Jefferson and the Town of Braselton. The annual median household income is \$72,403, the second highest in the region, and the poverty rate is 8.7%.

The average Jackson County household spends \$14,224 on housing annually, fifth highest in the region. Households spend an estimated 28% of their income on housing, just below the affordability threshold of 30%. At a residential density of 0.45 units per acre, the county is below the regional average of 0.98. Nearly 73% of residences are owner-occupied, while 18% are renter-occupied. While housing costs are above the regional average, it appears that the population is wealthy enough to own homes—mostly single-family detached units—without exceeding the affordability threshold.

Jackson County's transportation network is built on major highways like I-85, US-129, and US-441. Each of these roads handle significant daily vehicular travel, including freight. The average VMT and transportation cost per household is above average for the region at 24,621 VMT and \$14,375 spent, annually. Equal to housing, households spend an estimated 28% of their income on transportation. The county has a significant number of commuters where nearly 19,000 people leave the county for work, almost 18,000 people enter the county for work, and only 6,400 people live and work in the county. While the county has a growing employment base, commuting patterns indicate a potential mismatch between available jobs and residents. Jackson County does offer public transit service throughout the county.

Combined housing and transportation costs consume 56% of household income, slightly below the regional average, but above the affordability threshold of 45%. This totals to a total combined cost of \$28,599, annually. Easy access to highways may encourage people to live in Jackson and commute elsewhere, raising transportation costs. Continuing to attract jobs for locals could reduce the need to leave the county for work and lower transportation costs.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population:	73,789
Workforce Population 16+ Employed:	86.9%
Annual median household income:	\$72,403
Total cost of housing and transportation per household:	\$28,599
Commuter flow by number of people:	(In) 17,752 (Out) 18,924 (Within) 6,390
Average vehicle miles traveled per household:	24,621
Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):	56%
Annual housing costs per household:	\$14,224
Housing costs as a percentage of income:	28%
Owner-occupied housing units:	72.6%
Renter-occupied housing units:	17.8%
Average residential units per acre:	0.45
Poverty rate:	8.7%

Jasper

COUNTY

Jasper County is the southernmost county in the region, with two municipalities: the City of Monticello and the City of Shady Dale. The county is almost entirely rural, with a significant southern portion of the county federally owned as the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge. Although largely rural, the City of Monticello has a significant residential architectural heritage that has been well preserved. The total population of Jasper County is 14,887 with a median household income of \$42,711 and a poverty rate of 15.4%.

Household types consist mostly of single-family detached homes, similar to the region, with a residential density of 0.41 units per acre. The average cost of housing is \$12,200 annually. This is estimated to account for 22% of household income. The annual cost of housing and the median household income are both lower than the regional average, translating to the generally balanced affordability of housing. Approximately 64% of homes are owner-occupied, while 18% are renter occupied.

The transportation network is made up of two-lane state highways and local roads, including a number of unpaved roads. All state routes receive less than 5,000 trips per day on average (GDOT

Traffic Counts). Total VMT per household are 24,946 on average, annually. This is slightly above the regional average, likely due to the low residential density and lack of regional manufacturing, retail, or medical centers. The average cost of transportation per household is also slightly above the regional average at \$14,809 per year and is estimated to account for 27% of annual income. There are no public transit services within the county.

According to estimates, housing costs tend to be lower in Jasper County than regional averages and lower than local transportation costs. The two major costs account for an estimated \$27,009, or 49% of household income annually. This indicates that the average income to cost is relatively balanced, according to the recommended 45% affordability threshold.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population:	14,887
Workforce Population 16+ Employed:	87.9%
Annual median household income:	\$42,711
Total cost of housing and transportation per household:	\$27,009
Commuter flow by number of people:	(In) 1,061
	(Out) 3,091
	(Within) 1,034
Average vehicle miles traveled per household:	24,946
Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):	49%
Annual housing costs per household:	\$12,201
Housing costs as a percentage of income:	22%
Owner-occupied housing units:	64.2%
Renter-occupied housing units:	18.2%
Average residential units per acre:	0.41
Poverty rate:	15.4%

Madison

COUNTY

Madison County is an agricultural community adjacent to Athens-Clarke County's northern border. Local municipalities include the City of Danielsville, Ila, and the railroad communities of Hull, Colbert, Comer, and Carlton. The population is 31,175 with a median household income of \$54,783 and a poverty rate of 16%.

Household types consist mostly of single-family detached homes, similar to the region, with a residential density of 0.22 units per acre, much lower than the regional average. The average cost of housing is the lowest in the region at \$11,716 annually. This is estimated to account for 29% of household income on average. This comparably lower housing cost could be a factor behind the number of commuter residents that Madison County has. Approximately 70% of homes are owner-occupied, while 22% are renter-occupied.

The transportation network contains several two-lane highway routes including SR-72, traversing east-west along the southern border of the county, and US-29 serving as the main thoroughfares. The average VMT per household are 23,997 and the average cost of transportation is \$13,802.94, annually. This is estimated to account for a significant 35% of household income annually.

The ratio of commuters leans heavily toward the 9,644 residents who commute out of the county for work compared to the 1,851 who commute in and 1,449 who live and work within the county.

Combined, annual housing and transportation costs are \$25,519 per household and are estimated to account for 64% of the average household income—much higher than the recommended 45%.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population:	31,175
<i>Workforce Population 16+ Employed:</i>	86.8%
Annual median household income:	\$54,783

Total cost of housing and transportation per household:	\$25,519
<i>Commuter flow by number of people:</i>	(In) 1,851
	(Out) 9,644
	(Within) 1,449

<i>Average vehicle miles traveled per household:</i>	23,997
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Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):	64%
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Annual housing costs per household:	\$11,716
<i>Housing costs as a percentage of income:</i>	29%
Owner-occupied housing units:	69.6%
Renter-occupied housing units:	22.0%
<i>Average residential units per acre:</i>	0.22
Poverty rate:	16.1%

Morgan

COUNTY

Morgan County is centrally located within the region and has a population of 19,465. The annual median household income is \$54,783 and the poverty rate is 16.1%. The county largely rural in character with large tracts of farmland and woodlands. Local municipalities include the City of Madison, Bostwick, Rutledge, and the Town of Buckhead.

Morgan County has an abundance of well-preserved, historic single-family housing types, primarily within the City of Madison. The annual cost of housing is slightly above the regional average at \$14,694.67 per household. This is estimated to account for 26% of household income on average—below the recommended 30%. The average residential density is 0.47 per acre, which is low compared to the regional average of 0.98 per acre. Approximately 68% of homes are owner-occupied, while 21% are renter-occupied.

The county's two most significant thoroughfares are US-441 (North-South) and Interstate-20 (East-West). The Morgan County section of US-441 sees on average 8,400 vehicles per day with approximately 20,400 vehicles per day at its busiest intersection. The portion of I-20 that runs through the county sees approximately

32,800 vehicles per day (GDOT Traffic Counts). Morgan County experiences a relatively even amount of in- and out-flow commuter traffic, with 5,514 residents commuting out of the county and 4,277 people commuting in from other counties. Approximately 2,224 residents live and work within the county. The average VMT per household is above the regional average at 25,170 miles per year. The average cost of transportation per household (\$15,014) is estimated to account for 27% of annual household income. Morgan County does offer public transit service, and has had success in increasing ridership in the local workforce.

The total combined cost of housing and transportation is the second highest in the region at \$29,708 annually. This is estimated to account for 53% of household income on average. One influencing factor could be the average value of owner-occupied housing units, \$320,936, which is much higher than the state average of \$255,635. Another influencing factor is the low-density development pattern throughout the county, limiting the viability of alternative transportation methods to driving.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population:	19,465
Workforce Population 16+ Employed:	86.7%
Annual median household income:	\$53,746

Total cost of housing and transportation per household:	\$29,708
Commuter flow by number of people:	(In) 4,530
	(Out) 5,259
	(Within) 2,247

Average vehicle miles traveled per household:	25,170
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Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):	53%
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Annual housing costs per household:	\$14,695
Housing costs as a percentage of income:	26%
Owner-occupied housing units:	68.2%
Renter-occupied housing units:	20.8%
Average residential units per acre:	0.47
Poverty rate:	12.7%

Newton

COUNTY

Newton County is a half-urban, half-rural county that is also located within the Atlanta-metro region. Its proximity to Atlanta and direct access to Interstate-20 has facilitated a significant amount of industrial development along the Eastern-central portion of the county. Newton has one of the highest populations in the region with approximately 112,756 residents with a median household income of \$58,246 and a poverty rate of 14.8%.

The average cost of housing is \$13,741 per household, annually. This is estimated to account for 24% of household incomes—below the recommended threshold for affordability. Housing densities vary due to the half-urban, half-rural development that characterizes the county. The average residential density is higher than the regional average, at 1.6 units per acre. The greatest housing variety can be found in the City of Covington, with multi-family housing and new-urbanist developments present. Nearby, the City of Porterdale offers a unique concentration of traditional-mill houses and adaptive re-use multi-family dwellings. Approximately 64% of homes are owner-occupied, while 28% are renter-occupied.

A high number of residents commute out of the county for work (33,410), compared to the only 8,795 who live and work within the county and 14,966 who commute into the county. This high commuter ratio is heavily influenced by interstate access (I-20) and proximity to downtown Atlanta. The annual VMT per household is estimated to be 24,224 and the average annual cost of transportation per household is \$14,141.50, roughly even with the regional average. Transportation costs are estimated to account for 26% of household income on average. Newton County does not currently offer a local public transit service, however, the City of Covington is in the planning process to become a new service provider.

Newton residents' combined average housing and transportation costs are \$27,882 annually, nearly even with the regional average of \$27,363. Households spend an estimated 50% of their income on total housing and transportation costs—close to the recommended 45%.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population: 112,756

Workforce | Population 16+ Employed: 85.6%

Annual median household income: \$58,246

**Total cost of housing and transportation
per household:** \$27,882

Commuter flow by number of people: (In) 14,966

(Out) 33,795

(Within) 8,795

**Average vehicle miles traveled per
household:** 24,224

**Total cost of housing and transportation
(% of income):** 50%

Annual housing costs per household: \$13,741

Housing costs as a percentage of income: 24%

Owner-occupied housing units: 63.8%

Renter-occupied housing units: 27.9%

Average residential units per acre: 1.6

Poverty rate: 14.8%

Oconee

COUNTY

Oconee County is a traditionally rural farming community that has experienced a fair amount of suburban growth from nearby Athens and as a bedroom community serving Atlanta since the late 1990s. The northern and northeastern portions of the county are more heavily developed while the southern-half of the county remains rural in character. The population is expected to nearly double from the years 2000–2024, from 26,225 to 43,704 residents. Oconee County has a median household income of 89,434 and a poverty rate of 13.8%. Local municipalities include the City of Watkinsville, Bishop, and North High Shoals.

Oconee County has the highest cost of housing in the region. The average value per housing unit is \$344,320, compared to the state median value of \$255,635. This translates to an average annual housing cost of \$17,555 per household. An average household is expected to spend 45% of their annual income on housing costs. The residential density is 0.39 residents per acre, lower than the regional average of 0.98. Approximately 77% of homes are owner-occupied, while 18% are renter-occupied.

There is a fairly robust roadway network within the county. Two U.S. highway routes (US-78 and US-441) and one major limited-access state

highway (SR-10) all receive heavy use in excess of 20,000 trips per day (GDOT Traffic Counts). According to estimates, 11,610 residents commute out of the county for work while 8,744 commute in and just 3,119 live and work within the county. The average vehicle miles traveled per household is 24,419 annually, slightly higher than the regional average of 23,773. The annual cost of transportation per household is estimated to be \$14,066.60. There is no local public transit service within the county.

Oconee County is estimated to be the most expensive county to live in the region regarding combined housing and transportation costs. The combined cost per household is \$31,621 and is estimated to account for up to 81% of household income on average, with 45% going toward housing and 36% toward transportation. This data shows a severely cost-burdened population compared to the rest of the region. Influencers for this could be the low-density, large lot development style, and low rental availability. It is recommended that Oconee County perform further research to determine how to better assist cost burdened households moving forward.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population:	40,871
Workforce Population 16+ Employed:	88.6%
Annual median household income:	\$89,434
Total cost of housing and transportation per household:	\$31,622
Commuter flow by number of people:	(In) 8,744
	(Out) 11,610
	(Within) 3,119
Average vehicle miles traveled per household:	23,773
Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):	81%
Annual housing costs per household:	\$17,555
Housing costs as a percentage of income:	45%
Owner-occupied housing units:	76.8%
Renter-occupied housing units:	17.7%
Average residential units per acre:	0.39
Poverty rate:	5.7%

Oglethorpe

COUNTY

Oglethorpe County, located on the eastern border of the region, is one of the more rural counties in the region. Much of the county is covered in tracts of farmland and woodlands. Municipalities within the county include the cities of Arnoldsville, Crawford, Lexington, and Maxeys. Oglethorpe has a total population of 14,784 with a median income of \$47,765 and a poverty rate of 13.8%.

Housing costs, at \$13,015 per household annually, are below the regional average. According to estimates, Oglethorpe residents spend 33% of their income on housing, which is closely aligned with the recommendation of 30%. An average residential density of 0.16 residents per acre makes this the least dense county within the region. Approximately 69% of homes are owner-occupied while 20% are renter-occupied.

Several two-lane state highway routes form the backbone of the transportation network and connect Oglethorpe's four municipalities. US-78, at approximately 10,000 vehicle trips per day (GDOT Traffic Counts), is the county's most traveled thoroughfare. The average household travels 24,396 vehicle miles per year and spends approximately \$14,268 on total transportation costs annually. Most residents leave the county

for employment (5,558), likely to Athens-Clarke County. Relatively few people commute into Oglethorpe for work (954) and even fewer live and work within the county (752). Oglethorpe County does not have a local public transit system.

Oglethorpe residents' combined average housing and transportation costs are \$27,283, slightly below the regional average of \$27,363, annually. Households spend an estimated 69% of their income on total housing and transportation costs. Developing complete neighborhoods, centered around Crawford, Lexington, Maxeys, and Arnoldsville, where people can find employment and conduct daily activities within 15 minutes of their residence could decrease the need to leave the county for work and lower transportation costs.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population:	16,273
Workforce Population 16+ Employed:	89.2%
Annual median household income:	\$47,765
Total cost of housing and transportation per household:	\$27,283
Commuter flow by number of people:	(In) 954
	(Out) 5,558
	(Within) 752
Average vehicle miles traveled per household:	24,396
Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):	69%
Annual housing costs per household:	\$13,015
Housing costs as a percentage of income:	33%
Owner-occupied housing units:	69.2%
Renter-occupied housing units:	19.9%
Average residential units per acre:	0.16
Poverty rate:	13.8%

Walton

COUNTY

Walton County, located along the western border of the region, is home the municipalities of Monroe, Social Circle, Good Hope, Walnut Grove, Jersey, Between, and Loganville. The county is mostly suburban and rural in character. The western portion of the county becomes progressively more suburban due to its proximity to metro-Atlanta. The greatest diversity in urban form can be found within the City of Monroe. The total population is 95,441 with a median income of \$65,849 and a poverty rate of 11.9%.

Walton County has an average annual housing cost per household of \$14,319 and a low average residential density of 0.68 units per acre, despite being one of the more populous counties in the region. The average household spends 25% of total income on housing costs. The housing stock is largely comprised of single-family-detached houses with some multi-family and compact, traditional mill developments concentrated within the City of Monroe. Approximately 66% of homes are owner occupied, while 27% are renter occupied.

The transportation network receives heavy use, particularly in the western (suburban) portion of the county, influenced by the high number of out-of-county commuters. U.S. Route-78 is the most

significant thoroughfare in the county, serving as a limited-access highway in some portions. An estimated 30,287 people leave the county for work compared to 12,660 who commute into the county to work and 7,752 who live and work within the county. The average Walton County household travels 24,557 vehicle miles per year and spends approximately \$14,385 on transportation. There is one local public transit system within the City of Social Circle, however, there is not available service throughout the county.

According to averages, the combined costs of housing and transportation are well-balanced, with Walton County households spending approximately 52% of their income on these necessities—relatively close to the recommended 45%. This totals to a combined housing and transportation cost of \$28,705 per household annually.

Numbers At A Glance:

Population:	96,258
Workforce Population 16+ Employed:	87.2%
Annual median household income:	\$65,849
Total cost of housing and transportation per household:	\$28,705
Commuter flow by number of people:	(In) 12,660
	(Out) 30,287
	(Within) 7,752
Average vehicle miles traveled per household:	24,557
Total cost of housing and transportation (% of income):	51%
Annual housing costs per household:	\$14,319
Housing costs as a percentage of income:	25%
Owner-occupied housing units:	66.4%
Renter-occupied housing units:	27.2%
Average residential units per acre:	0.68
Poverty rate:	11.9%

Policy

Recommendations



The following policies seek to encourage pragmatic fiscal responsibility and a stronger regulatory framework for local governments in regard to housing and transportation policy. In addition, the following policy recommendations are intended to enable a range of housing types and transportation options that support the needs of individuals and families throughout all stages of life. It is the role of elected officials, planners, and other land use policy leaders to refine the following recommendations to match the needs of their community. Recommendation items are labeled to indicate how each recommendation can be implemented: Zoning Ordinance (Z), Operations (O), or Local Ordinance (L).

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For the policy recommendations that involve updates to the local zoning ordinances, ensure that you abide by the legal guidance outlined in “The Zoning Procedures Law” of Georgia (O.C.G.A. 36-66-1, et seq.; 36-67-1, et seq.; and, 36-67A-1, et seq.). The Zoning Procedures Law gives local governments the authority to use zoning to manage development activities. It also contains the statutes governing zoning hearings procedure and conflicts of interest in zoning actions.

Other recommendations are focused on local government operating policies such as road repaving procedures, the reduction of speed limits, or infrastructure placement. These policies would either be enacted by a local ordinance (not related to zoning) or would be included in a local operations policy. For the latter option, the director of each respective department and the city/county manager would be responsible for the oversight and implementation of the policy. In the case of an ordinance, city council or the board of commissioners would be responsible for all final decisions regarding implementation of the policy.

When considering local policy additions, ensure that the responsibilities for implementation and oversight are designated by employee or elected official title. This detail better preserves the momentum of implementation through transitions of personnel. In addition, consult with the local government attorney before any policy additions are adopted.

HOUSING POLICY

Variety in the density and form of a local housing stock can better accommodate the needs of all residents and improve the stability of the community. As this analysis shows, the cost of housing is one of the largest annual expenditures in a family, sometimes accounting for an average of 45% of annual household income or more. In addition to this, single-family homes tend to be more expensive per unit than multi-family homes. Approximately 88% of the Northeast Georgia region's housing stock is made up of single-family housing. Therefore, it would be beneficial for many communities to revisit local policies to determine if there are any barriers to obtaining a more balanced mixture of housing types. The following are a list of policies that can be used to specifically target the housing sector in that regard:

1. **(Z) Reduce or eliminate minimum lot sizes, lot coverage minimums, and minimum square footage requirements for new residential development**
 - These three related regulations, as currently seen, are used to raise the ratio of land per housing unit. The desired effect is to maintain conformance to existing

buildings and to preserve uniformity in housing values. An unintended consequence is their tendency to restrict development and raise housing prices to exclusive amounts. It is often one of many key drivers of suburban-style sprawl. Communities can enable more affordable homeownership by allowing smaller lot sizes between 2,500 sq. ft. – 5,000 sq. ft. Reductions to lot coverage requirements and minimum square footage requirements should accompany smaller lot sizes to ensure that one regulation does not negate the other. For example, an 800 sq. ft. minimum footprint on a 2,500 sq. ft. lot allows for small families and empty-nesters to have more affordable options with less maintenance.

2. **(Z) Legalize “missing middle” housing options and Accessory Dwelling Unit's (ADU)**
 - Replace single-family-only zoning districts with zoning districts that allow one to four units per lot by-right where water and sewer infrastructure allow. For example, an owner of a detached-single-

family home could add an accessory dwelling unit. The next-door neighbor could convert their house into a duplex, and a four-unit apartment consistent with the scale and character of the neighborhood could be constructed on a vacant lot on the same street. Construction of the units would still require design approval and any units surpassing this threshold would require a re-zoning approval. This zoning reform intends to enable aging in place, absorb growth through gentle density increases, open opportunities for local developers to create more affordable housing, and increase the efficiency and productivity of land use.

3. **(Z) Legalize limited size, light intensity “mixed-use” and commercial buildings in residential neighborhoods**

- By strictly segregating land-uses, the distance between destinations becomes too great to walk or bike comfortably. Without extensive pedestrian infrastructure installations, the expense of auto-dependency is projected on residents. Neighborhoods can allow non-residential entities offering daily services, such as corner stores, pharmacies, and small offices, to mix with housing without adverse community health impacts. Neighborhoods with daily destinations within walking distance reduce transportation costs and enhance local resilience in the face of a crisis like a natural disaster or pandemic

where vehicular travel to a larger urban area may be affected.

4. **(Z) Exchange setback minimums for setback maximums (build-to lines)**

- Most zoning codes mandate that buildings must be set back from lot lines by a certain distance so as to maintain a consistent urban pattern and façade orientation. Unfortunately, these large set-back requirements create gaps between the building and the area where pedestrians/cyclists travel and those gaps are often filled with a parking lot (adding pedestrian barriers). Traditional main streets feature a variety of reduced setbacks: buildings that abut the sidewalk (zero setback) draw visitors to and through a space, while widened sidewalks and minor setbacks create attractive places for people to gather while encouraging multiple forms of transportation. For residential areas, reduced setbacks should also be encouraged, but a greater maximum allowed setback distance (aka build-to line) may be appropriate, depending on desired density and character. Reduced setbacks can encourage neighborly interactions and reduce travel distances to adjacent services and amenities. To minimize barriers to pedestrian-friendly patterns of development, replace minimum setbacks with maximum setbacks or defined build-to lines. For example, the zoning regulation would require that buildings be

set back no more than 20 feet from the lot line.

5. Prioritize infill over greenfield development by maximizing the use of pre-existing infrastructure before extending new services into undeveloped parts of the community

- (L/Z) Each community can determine the ratio of private investment dollars needed to fund the cost of public obligations for infrastructure and service delivery. For example, the City of Fate, Texas has determined that a fiscally sustainable ratio of private value to public expense is between 20:1 and 40:1. In this equation, infrastructure is treated as a liability rather than an asset. When reviewing a proposed project, communities can weigh the tax value of the proposed development against the replacement value of the infrastructure serving those properties. By doing so, a community can determine if the project is fiscally sustainable and take that into account when deciding to approve or deny the proposal and whether to offer tax-based or other incentives. When reviewing existing zoning and development regulations, a community should determine whether the requirements allow for the achievement of a sustainable private value to public expense ratio. If not, the code can be adjusted to encourage development consistent with the desired investment ratio.

- (L) Some communities may find that land owners are unwilling to improve vacant or degraded properties in spite of favorable zoning. Adopting a blight tax can incentivize infill development on lots considered severely neglected. Georgia law allows local governments to enact a community redevelopment tax to property which has officially been identified as “maintained in a blighted condition.” This incentivizes the improvement of a blighted private property by way of a local ordinance. Note that the ordinance must specify ascertainable standards for rehabilitation through remedial actions or redevelopment with which the owner of a property may comply in order to have the additional ad valorem tax removed from their property. Guidelines for a blight tax ordinance can be found in O.C.G.A. Article IX, Section II, Paragraph VII.
- (Z) Pattern books, a frequent companion to form-based codes, can be used to streamline infill development through pre-approved designs that conform to existing zoning and neighborhood character. These books are especially helpful to small developers and planning departments because they save time, energy, and money during the application process. Improving the predictability of a project’s form also eases community angst about new infill. An example of the format of these resources can be found here:

- * U.S. Housing & Urban Development (HUD) Exchange Resource Library:
<https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/>
- * City of Bastrop:
<https://www.cityofbastrop.org/upload/page/0107/docs/B3%20PATTERN%20BOOK%20-%20Compressed.pdf>
- * City of Bryan:
<https://docs.bryantx.gov/projects/midtown-map/Midtown-Plan.pdf>

6. (L) Create development nodes via infrastructure placement

- Constructing infrastructure is a long-term commitment both financially and physically. The design and capacity of infrastructure will determine the evolution of the built environment for decades. Therefore, a comprehensive, strategic plan should be in place to guide the growth of an area. To implement this plan, a local ordinance can be adopted to require all infrastructure expansions (e.g. water/sewer) to correlate with a pre-determined strategy of implementation (i.e. master plan). This will work to prevent piecemeal, linear growth patterns and, instead, create concentrated development nodes. If any new developments, such as a subdivision, are proposed within the master-planned area, the developer would be required to conform to the guidelines of the plan for zoning/development approval.

7. (L/O) Area-Specific Development Fees

- This is defined as the practice of differentiating development fees based on the local ability to service new growth. These fees are intended to account for the real costs of infrastructure and to ensure that new development pays for itself in areas that are more difficult to service without increasing local taxes. Indirectly, it is used by some to guide development toward locations with pre-existing infrastructure. Studies have shown a 60% increase in the cost of service delivery to low-density suburban areas of approximately 16.2 people/acre compared to the cost of service delivery to a mid-density urban area of approximately 36 people/acre (Ryerson City Building Institute, 2020). The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) oversees the requirements associated with local impact fees and offers information on the Georgia Development Impact Fee Act (DIFA), here: <https://www.dca.ga.gov/local-government-assistance/planning/local-planning/development-impact-fees-capital-improvements>.
- *Note: Impact fees, by themselves, do not guarantee the fiscal sustainability of new growth. They must be carefully structured in conjunction with other development standards and requirements to ensure a positive fiscal return from new developments.*

TRANSPORTATION POLICY

Variety in transportation modes can be decisively shaped by policy. This is a critical insight for local governments because it signifies that local leadership can shift accessibility and cost toward a more financially inclusive format. As the data demonstrates, automobiles are also one of a household's largest annual expenditures and expanding transportation choice can help reduce transportation costs. The following are a list of policies that specifically target the transportation sector:

1. **(L) Adopt a complete streets ordinance**

- Adopting a complete streets ordinance provides legislative impetus to the effort of creating streets that are safe, comfortable, useful, and interesting for people of all ages. Generally, these kinds of streets are designed to ensure that cars do not travel faster than 15-30mph depending on the context of the surrounding environment. Urban and traditional main streets tend to compartmentalize users into designated spaces, while low-volume local roads and collector streets may enable users to share the same space provided that vehicles

travel slowly. In addition to guides produced by the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) and the Federal Highway Administration's Small Towns and Rural Multi-Model Networks Guide, the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission has produced a model ordinance and design guide for our local communities. The NEGRC's Planning & Government Services Division can provide technical assistance to communities that are interested in pursuing this policy recommendation further.

2. **(Z) Eliminate parking minimums and/or enact parking maximums based on contextual demand**

- Off-street parking has been overcompensated for during the past 70 years through local zoning ordinances and financial institutions. Generally, estimated peak traffic flows influence the minimum requirements set forth, leaving communities with vast amounts of unused parking throughout the average day. For example, one report, from the Mortgage

Bankers Association, found five parking spaces for every resident in the City of Seattle, 19.4 spaces per resident in the City of Des Moines, and 27.1 spaces per resident in the City of Jackson, Wyoming (Scharnhorst, 2018). This overabundance of parking has accompanied sprawling development patterns, leading to increased commute times, pollution, housing development costs, obesity, heat-island effects, and devalued tax bases (Speck, 2012). Removal of parking minimums can enable infill development on small lots, lower barriers to entry for local entrepreneurs¹, and enable adaptive reuse of old buildings that were grandfathered into new zoning codes (Shoup, 2017). Communities can start by eliminating parking minimums for commercial and residential buildings up to 5,000 sq. ft. Communities may also consider establishing parking maximums (e.g. 1.5 spaces per residential unit), particularly for large commercial and multi-family properties, to avoid excessive parking that may accompany these types of projects.

3. **(Z) Place off-street parking behind buildings**

- Locating off-street parking to the rear of a building reduces the space between pedestrians and the building's entryway, thereby improving walkability. In

addition, it creates a more engaging and safe environment between the building frontage and right-of-way.

- *Note: This policy loses a significant amount of impact if the business chooses to place their main entry to the rear of the building.*

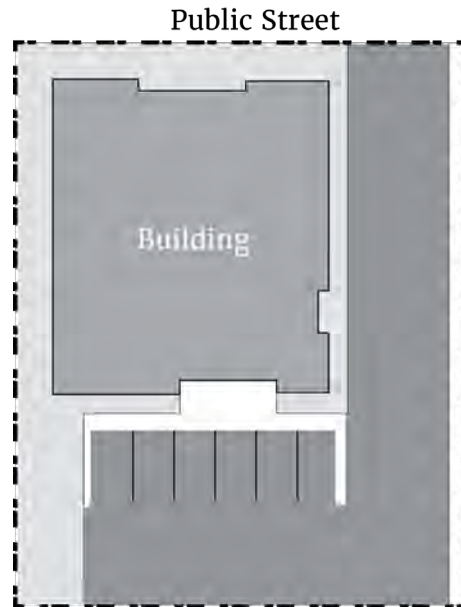


Figure 3: Example of rear parking

4. **(Z) Allow businesses to count on-street parking as part of their parking inventory (i.e. area inventory)**

- If a city or county is proactive in compensating for the reduction in off-street parking, it will begin an ongoing program of redesigning urban streets to include public, on-street parking.

¹ A single surface parking space can cost \$5,000 to \$10,000 to construct. Structured parking can cost between \$25,000 and \$50,000 to construct (City Observatory, 2016).

These spaces can be added by the local government and by new development agreements. As the capacity is increased, businesses can be allowed to count on-street spaces as part of their inventory based on anticipated peak hours of business when obtaining zoning approval and private financing.

5. **(Z) Add block-size maximums to new developments**

- Block sizes are one of the major attributes of an urban node that factor into traffic speeds and walkability. Block size requirements for new road construction and major new developments can assist with improving the overall connectivity and safety of an area. The most common method for measuring block-size requirements in planning practice is block-face length, measured from through-street to through-street (Stangl, 2015). Within urban nodes, the recommended block-face length is between 400 and 800 ft. in length.

6. **(L/O) Require mid-block crossings for any in-town block greater than 1,000 ft. in length.**

- Mid-block pedestrian crossings can dramatically improve the walkability of an area by shortening the distance walkers must travel to their destination. The tactical urbanism approach (i.e., pilot projects with temporary materials like cones and paint) is ideal for testing out this type of improvement. Transportation

staff can identify optimum locations for mid-block crossings, deploy temporary crossings, measure feedback, and use that feedback to decide whether to permanently install a crossing.

- *Note: Crossings should not have more than 22 ft. of unprotected pavement for the pedestrian. Pedestrian safety islands or other design elements that provide safety “refuges” should be incorporated into all crossings that exceed 22 ft.*

7. **(Z) Require adjacent property connections in subdivision developments / street stubs for new developments**

- A highly interconnected street network is crucial to creating a community where people have multiple transportation choices and improved traffic flow. Requiring multiple connections and street stubs allows the network to grow organically over time. This is an alternative to laying out a master street plan. For a good example of this kind of policy, see the City of Davidson’s (N.C.) zoning and land development regulations for subdivisions, which requires street stubs to be built up to the property line for every 600 ft. of property boundary: <https://www.ci.davidson.nc.us/DocumentCenter/View/8078/Section-6-Sub-Infra-Standards-20170711?bidId=>



Figure 4: Example of street stub layout
Image Source: Davidson, N.C. Zoning and Land Development Regulations for Subdivisions

8. Focus on maintenance of existing infrastructure

- (O) Improve before expanding: Local governments can adopt an internal management policy that emphasizes “fix-it-first.” That is, resources should prioritize existing maintenance needs before being spent on new infrastructure capacity, particularly large projects. This will help ensure a solid fiscal foundation for the local government and discourage expensive, new sprawling development.
- (L/O) Dedicate all secondary transportation funds, such as the Local Maintenance & Improvement Grant (LMIG), to maintenance-only activities.

9. Plant and maintain street trees

- An urban canopy can reduce the effects of an urban heat island and improve the walkability of an area, especially during warmer months. According to research compiled by the Arbor Day Foundation,

street trees can reduce air conditioning and heating needs by 30%, among other benefits (Benefits of Trees: The Value of Trees to a Community, 2020) .

- (O) Local government public works departments can set annual street tree planting goals to expand the urban canopy.
- (Z) Requiring street trees and establishing streetscape guidelines in the local zoning ordinance can result in a joint public-private effort in increasing the urban canopy.

10. (O) Use “tactical urbanism” (i.e. temporary experiments and interim improvements to affordably test new infrastructure projects like bike lanes, car lane configurations, pocket parks, and mid-block crossings)

- These experiments typically last 1–30 days and can be very effective in gathering input. The “Tactical Urbanist Guide to Getting It Done” provides a resource for urban experimentation: <http://tacticalurbanismguide.com/about/>.

11. (O) Reduce speed limits to 25-miles per hour (mph) on all locally-owned residential and main streets

- According to Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Policy 6780-4, speed limits on public streets cannot be set below 25mph. However, the design and target speed of the street can be lower than 25mph by being engineered to include design interventions that encourage slower travel (i.e. speed bumps, curb bump-outs, narrower lanes, etc.). The NEGR Planning

& Government Services Division can provide guidance for communities who are interested in lowering local speed limits.

12. **(O) Fill gaps in the sidewalk and bike network (target priorities via a sidewalk/trail master plan)**

- Gaps in a sidewalk network are detrimental to an area's walkability and disproportionately affect older and disabled residents. A local government can start by prioritizing filling gaps in sidewalks and bike lanes based on proximity to businesses and road type. The NEGRC Planning & Government Services Division has experience with bicycle and pedestrian planning and can offer related services to interested communities.

13. **(Z) Preserve highway corridors by strictly limiting driveways and intersections**

- Major arterials represent a pivot point in the local transportation network. Mostly including state and federal highways, arterials receive high traffic volumes and are the vectors for heavy freight travel. The efficiency of these corridors is important to the local, state, and national economy. Therefore, limiting points of conflict with entering vehicles is crucial to the safety and cost of the corridor. Consult with the Georgia Department of Transportation regarding the recommended level of limitation of entryways.

14. **(L/O) Adopt policy or implementation guidelines that require road lane redesign, diet, or optimization when repaving activities**

occur

- The needs of residents are fluid and, therefore, the practice of rethinking the format of a corridor should be common. This implementation method offers a way to incorporate redesign costs such as lane striping into existing capital projects by combining two goals into one activity. This method will work to instigate change on a recurring basis and will allow the local government to improve transportation choice by improving safety.

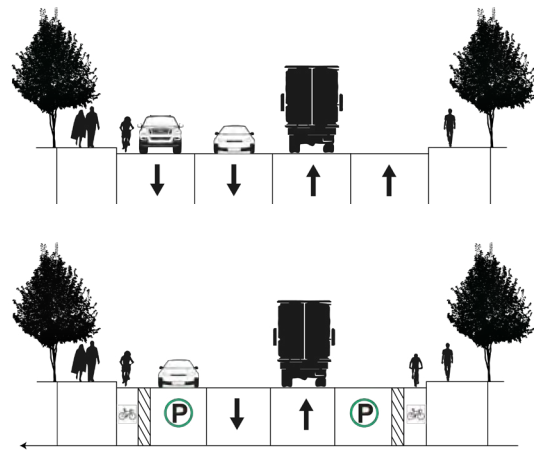


Figure 5: Example of road diet including accommodations for more user types and safety elements

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Appendix

Additional Resources: Housing

Georgia Department of Community Affairs
Safe & Affordable Housing
<https://www.dca.ga.gov/safe-affordable-housing>

U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Current Georgia Housing Assistance Resources
<https://www.hudexchange.info/sites/onecpd/assets/File/GA-H2-Current-Housing-Assistance-Resources.pdf>

Habitat for Humanity of Georgia
<https://www.habitatgeorgia.org/>

City of Elberton
Housing Authority
(706) 283-5801

City of Winder
Housing Authority
(770) 867-7495

City of Greensboro
Housing Authority
(706) 453-7371

City of Jefferson
Housing Authority
(706) 367-8311

City of Commerce
Housing Authority
(706) 335-3611

City of Monticello
Housing Authority
(706) 468-6201

Athens-Clarke County
Housing Services - Resources
<https://www.athensclarkecounty.com/404/Housing-Services>

Barrow County
Resource Guide - Homelessness / Housing & Rent
<http://www.barrowga.org/community/pdf/Resource-Guide-6-14.pdf?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

City of Madison
Housing Authority
(706) 342-3924

City of Rutledge
Housing Authority
(706) 557-2639

City of Comer
Housing Authority
(706) 783-4463

City of Danielsville
Housing Authority
(706) 795-3393

City of Loganville
Housing Authority
(770) 267-6591

City of Social Circle
Housing Authority
(770) 464-3130

Additional Resources: Transportation

State of Georgia

Transportation Options for the Elderly

[https://georgia.gov/blog/2016-12-22/
transportation-options-elderly](https://georgia.gov/blog/2016-12-22/transportation-options-elderly)

Georgia Department of Human Services

Division of Aging Services

[https://aging.georgia.gov/getting-where-you-
need-go](https://aging.georgia.gov/getting-where-you-need-go)

Georgia Department of Transportation

Programs

<http://www.dot.ga.gov/IS>

Athens-Clarke County Transit

(706) 613-3432

<https://www.athensclarkecounty.com/199/Transit>

Elbert County Transit

(706) 283-2034

<https://elberttransit.com/>

Greene County Transit

(518) 943-3625

<https://www.greenecountytransit.com/>

Jackson County Transit

(706) 367-5288

<https://www.jacksoncountygov.com/363/Transit>

Morgan County Transit

(706) 342-4052

[https://www.morganga.org/158/Public-
Transportation](https://www.morganga.org/158/Public-Transportation)

City of Social Circle Transit

(770) 464-2953

<https://socialcirclega.gov/services/bus/>

Georgia Transit Association

<https://www.gatransit.org/>

Northeast Georgia Regional Commission

Area Agency on Aging – Transportation

<https://negrc.org/aging/getting-started/>

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