



Northeast Georgia Rural and Human Services Transportation Plan Phase II 2019



Prepared by: Northeast Georgia Regional Commission
Planning & Government Services Division

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Eva Kennedy, Planning & Government Services Director
Mark Beatty, Planner
Monica Sagastizado, Project Specialist
Charles Palmer, Options Counselor/Transportation
NEGRC Rural Transit Providers
NEGRC Human Services Transportation Providers
Georgia Department of Transportation

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1 Executive Summary

Phase II of the Northeast Georgia Rural and Human Services Transportation (RHST) Plan was prepared by the Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC), under contract with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). The purpose of the Phase II amendment is to develop an updated vision of the 2012 Rural and Human Service Transportation Plan. This phase incorporates information from existing transit systems and plans, regional demographics, the updated NEGRC 2035 Regional Plan and other local and regional plans. The Plan also includes a review of data collected from the 2011 Technical and Public Visioning Sessions and a 2019 Rural and Human Service Transit Survey. This data, combined with national literature reviews and state GDOT, DHS, and DCH, assisted the NEGRC in developing a list of short- and long-term goals. Key topics identified during the process of creating the NEGRC RHST Plan are noted below:

- Demographic analysis presents a clear need for additional transit service across all rural ridership groups, including:
 - Seniors - 22.0% of region's population by 2040
 - Low-income household's - regional average is 18.7% of population
 - Disabled persons – 13% of the region's population
 - Persons without vehicles – about 5% of the regional population
- Technical and higher education institutions and students need additional transportation options.
- Development is occurring primarily in places that transit does not currently serve.
- Students and Universities/Colleges outside the City of Athens have few transportation choices.
- Regional key activity centers are poorly served by transit.
- The region's employers are poorly served by transit.

- Regional coverage does not exist as only limited areas in the region are served by public transit.
- Coordination of rural and human service transportation exists in areas where public transit exists.
- There is a need for 24/7 service in some regional areas.

1.1 NEGRC RHST Vision

Based on the demographic analysis, the review of the 2011 Technical and Public Visioning, and results from the 2019 Rural and Human Service Transit Survey, the following vision statement was created:

Affordable public transit service is available to all areas within the 12-county region. Demand response systems operate throughout the region to address the transportation needs of all residents. Ridership demographics in this system are diverse, due to a range of vehicle types used, positive public opinion, and punctual service.

The region's public transit systems maintain a coordinated RHST System that provides regional coverage and is convenient, safe, efficient, and reliable. The RHST system addresses the needs of the transit-dependent and choice populations; responds to changing demographics, development and employment trends; and adapts to meet the region's needs.

Phase II of the RHST Plan is a reflection of the region's existing transit services and the potential for growth in rural-public and human service transportation. The following sections describe how this future transportation system in the region will be shaped.

2 Introduction

The Northeast Georgia Human Services Transportation Plan (RHST Plan [prepared June 2012, revised 2013]) outlined the Rural and Human Services Transit (RHST) vision, through identification of specific elements of a strategic plan and documentation of the public engagement activities involved in the process. Phase II of the RHST Plan provides an updated assessment of the region's unmet transit needs and a strategic plan to address those needs.

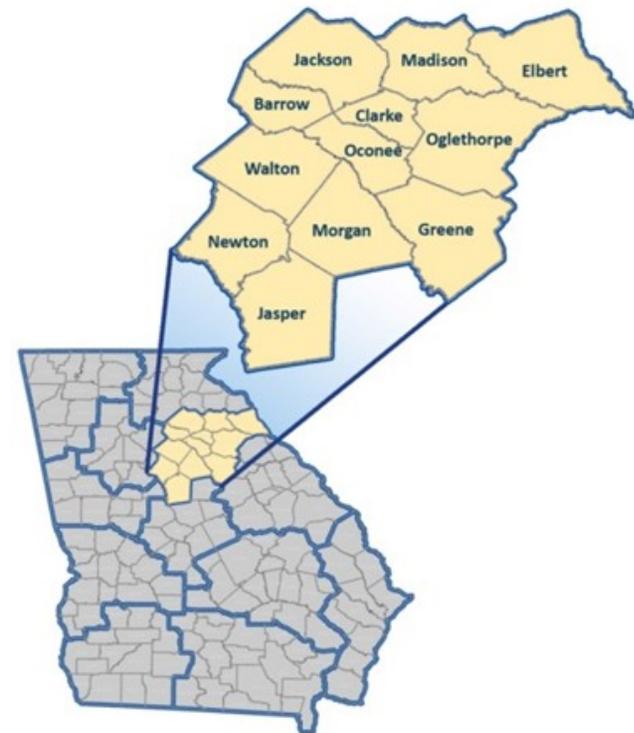
To accomplish this, Phase II includes:

- An updated assessment of existing available transit services throughout the region, identifying the RHST providers and other available transit services.
- Updated analyses of regional demographics and activity centers.
- An updated review of regional transit-related plans (including Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) and Northeast Georgia Regional Commission (NEGRC) plans).
- An updated Gap Analysis examining updated transit service, demographic, and planning document information in order to develop the strategies included in the Action Plan. This analysis also includes an inventory of existing inter-jurisdictional/regional transit systems in Georgia.
- An Action Plan describing the desired method of establishing and maintaining inter-jurisdictional/regional transit system(s) in Northeast Georgia and identifying associated Short- and Long-term Action Items.
- An informal survey distributed to current RHST service providers that was used to update the vision for transit in the region.

The strategies identified for Phase II were prioritized based upon the existing RHST Plan and updated information gathered through the additional research and stakeholder input described above.

This Plan is intended to be a living document and should be updated and modified as future issues and opportunities arise.

Figure 1: Northeast Georgia Region



3

NEGRC Study Area

The Northeast Georgia Region is nestled in the Georgia Piedmont between the Atlanta Region (west), the Georgia Mountains Region (north), and the Middle Georgia and Central Savannah River Regions south/southeast). The following 12 counties make up the diverse Northeast Georgia Region, boasting a unique mixture of urban, rural, and small-town communities: Athens-Clarke, Barrow, Elbert, Greene, Jackson, Jasper, Madison, Morgan, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, and Walton.

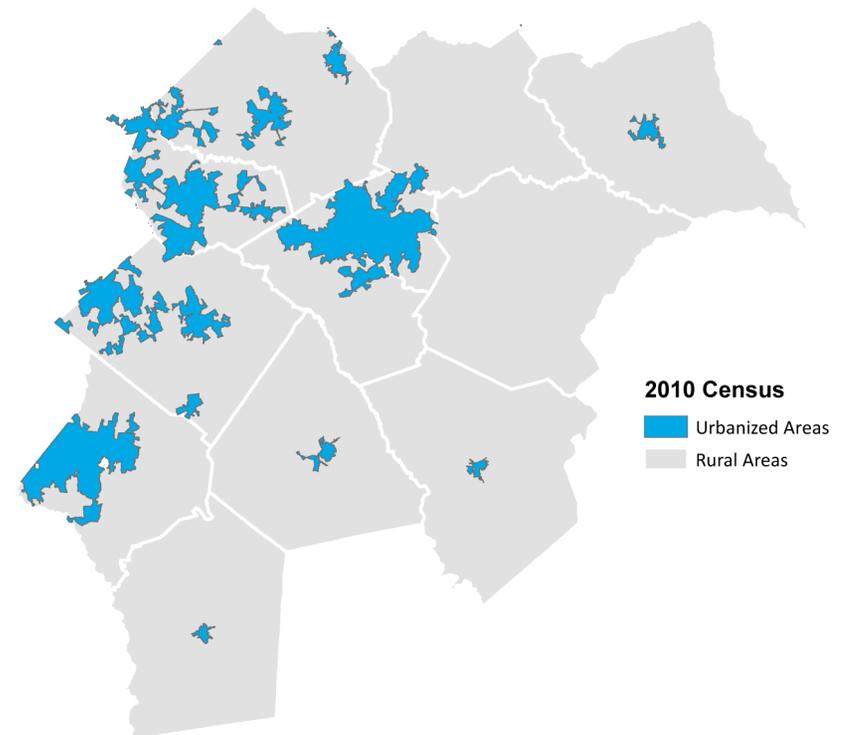
Athens-Clarke County is centrally located in the region and represents the largest concentration of urban development in Northeast Georgia. Barrow, Jackson, Newton, and Walton counties also contain urbanized areas, as a result of growth extending outward from Atlanta along the I-85, I-20, and SR-316 corridors. The Census-designated Urbanized Areas are projected to grow within those counties, following the upcoming 2020 Census.

Historically, the region was primarily agricultural, with Athens, which has been (home to the University of Georgia since 1785), as the activity center. Outside of the Atlanta and Athens metropolitan areas, Northeast Georgia remains primarily rural, with many communities prioritizing protection of cultural and natural resources to maintain their small town atmospheres.

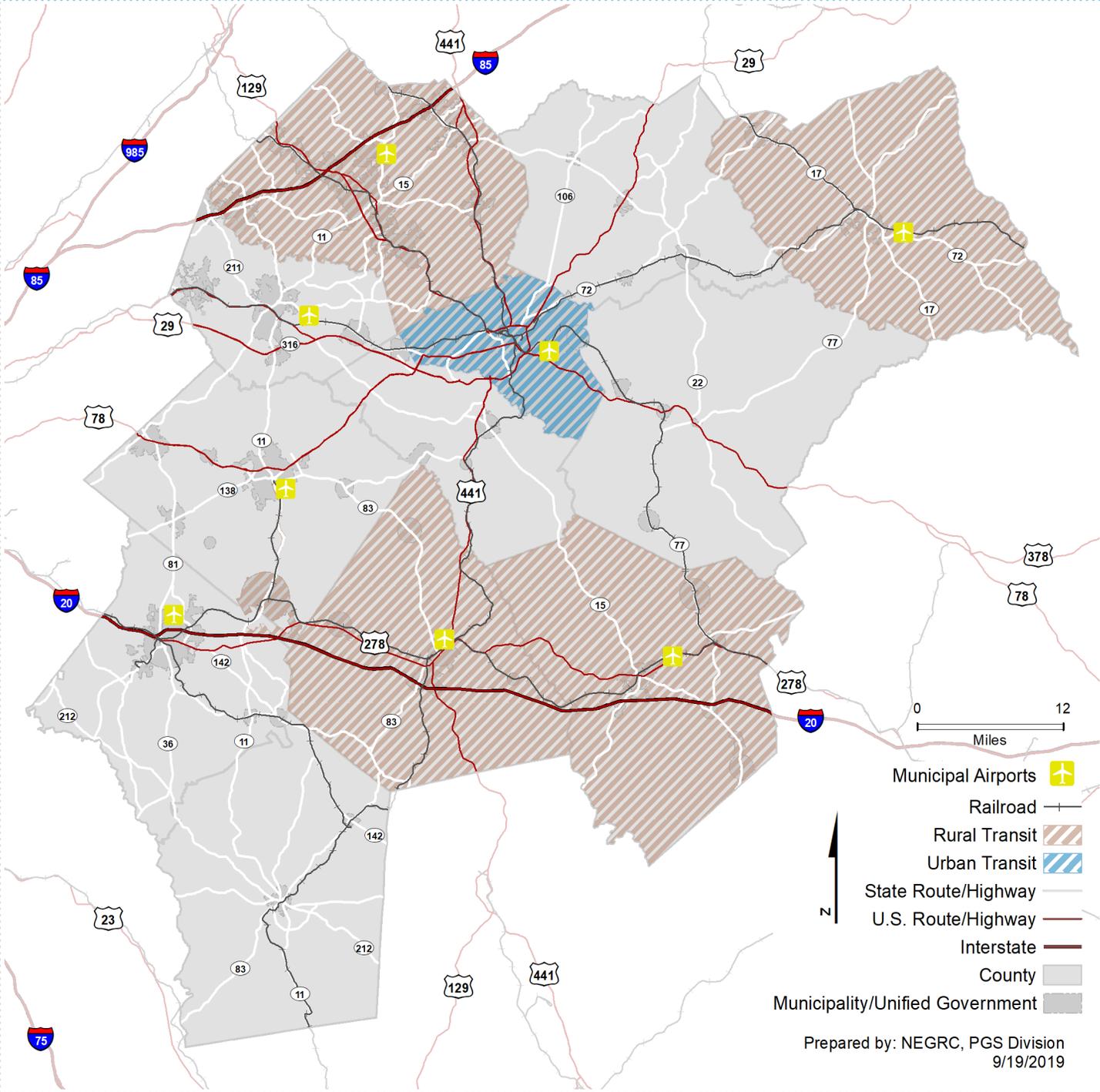
Northeast Georgia has a well-defined network of state and other highways connecting areas of major population to employment centers. Interstates I-85 and I-20 run through portions of Northeast Georgia, connecting to Atlanta, South Carolina, and broader areas of the Southeastern US. SR-316 and US-78 serve as additional connections to the Atlanta metropolitan area.

Transportation options other than personal vehicles remain limited; the Transportation Systems Map illustrates Northeast Georgia's major road network, municipal airports, and active rail lines. Counties with existing public transit (bus) systems and counties with at least 5 miles of bicycle/pedestrian facilities are highlighted. *Note: Currently, there is no commercial air carrier or commuter rail service within Northeast Georgia.*

Figure 2: 2010 Census Urbanized Area Map



Transportation System Map



4 Document Review

In compiling Phase II, several regional planning documents were reviewed to develop the foundational elements for the RHST Action Plan and to ensure a consistency with regional and state planning efforts. The key documents that were reviewed are:

- Northeast Georgia Regional Plan, NEGRC 2018
- Georgia Rural and Human Services Transportation Plan 2.0, GDOT 2011
- Northeast Georgia Regional Assessment – NE Georgia Plan 2035, NEGRC 2011
- Northeast Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2017-2021

Other county and local transportation plans within the region were also reviewed. These include:

- Transit Development Plan for Greene County, NEGRC, 2008
- Jackson County Transit Development Plan, NEGRC, 2010
- Transit Development Plan for Oglethorpe County, NEGRC, 2009
- Transit Development Plan for the City of Social Circle, NEGRC, 2007
- Transit Development Plan for Walton County, NEGRC, 2007
- Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) 2030 Regional Transportation Plan, ARC, 2007
- 2030 Long Range Plan 2007 Update, Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2007

- Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study (MACORTS) Year 2035 Transportation Plan Update, Athens-Clarke County Planning Department, 2009
- Public Transportation study for the MACORTS Region, MACORTS, 2009
- One Athens Plan, Partners for a Prosperous Athens, 2006

In addition, the NEGRC staff has attended focus group meetings for the development of the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) Statewide Transit Plan (SWTRP). Phase II reflects many of the topics discussed at the meetings such as regionalism and statewide transit coverage.

These planning documents were used to verify existing and forecasted demographic information, existing transit service and infrastructure and planned transportation improvements. A review of the documents also revealed current and future transit needs and deficiencies within the region.

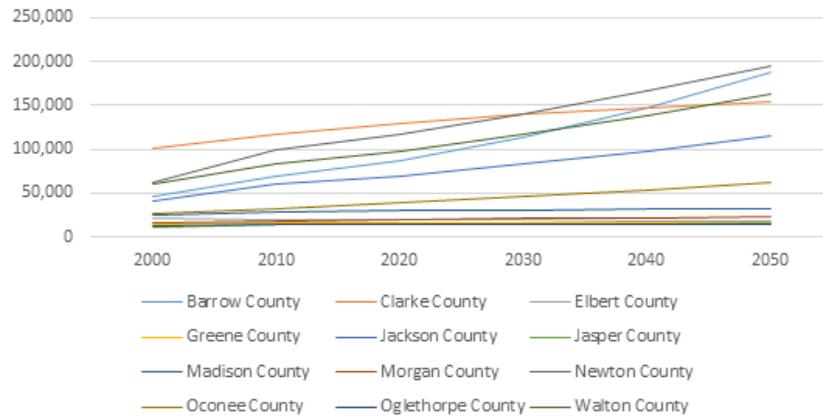
5 Demographic Analysis

The following Northeast Georgia demographic analysis serves as a guide for the future of RHST services in the region. These analyses examine trends in population change, RHST clientele, and employment statistics, as they pertain to the need and demand for expanded rural transit services.

5.1 Total Population of Northeast Georgia

Northeast Georgia’s total population is 603,232, a 5.1% increase since 2010 (ACS 2017, 5-year estimates). Graph 1 provides a county-by-county breakdown of the region’s population estimates, as well as population comparisons between 2000 and 2010 Census data and 2020, 2030, 2040, and 2050 projections.

Graph 1: Historical and Projected Total Population



Source: Governor’s Office of Planning & Budget, 2015 Series

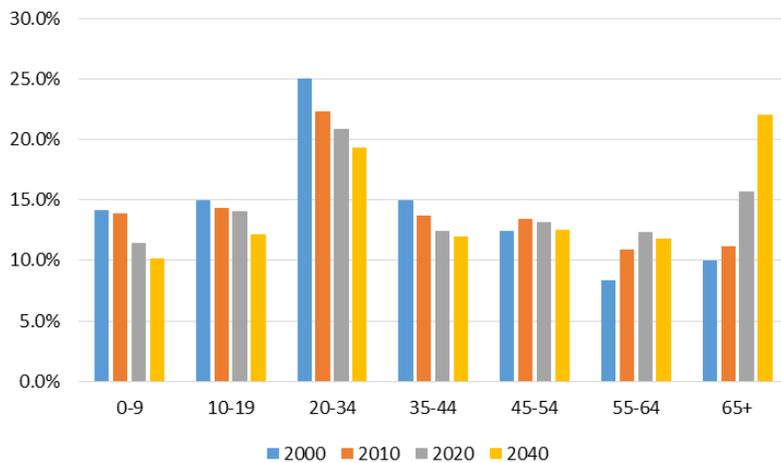
Northeast Georgia’s population is expected to grow by 32.8% between 2020 and 2040, with a projected total of 800,000 residents in 2040 (Governor’s OPB, 2015). This continuing population growth will increase the demand on transportation infrastructure and transit services. Table 1 shows the historical and projected population growth rates within Northeast Georgia.

Table 1: Historic and Projected Growth Rates

County	Percentage Change (2000 –2010)	Percentage Change (2010-2017)	Percentage Change (2017-2040)
Barrow	50.3%	8.3%	218.4%
Clarke	15.0%	5.9%	45.0%
Elbert	-1.7%	-4.4%	-13.0%
Greene	11.0%	4.6%	13.1%
Jackson	45.4%	5.6%	135.3%
Jasper	21.7%	-1.2%	32.1%
Madison	9.3%	1.7%	22.2%
Morgan	15.6%	0.8%	40.1%
Newton	61.2%	5.1%	167.6%
Oconee	25.1%	9.6%	105.1%
Oglethorpe	17.9%	-1.6%	14.7%
Walton	38.0%	5.9%	128.1%
Northeast Georgia	31.0%	5.4%	97.8%

Sources: ACS 2017 5-year estimates; OPB 2015 Series

Graph 2: Age Distributions by Population



Source: Governor’s Office of Planning & Budget, 2015 Series

5.2 Senior Population

Currently, persons over the age of 65 represent 18.7% of the region’s total population. Projections indicate that, by 2040, this group will grow to 22.0% (Graph 2). It is likely that the need for transit service will increase with the growing senior population. This may be compounded by the need of those between the age of 20 and 34, who are projected to have lower incomes than older age groups.

5.3 Low-Income Households and Employment Statistics

The national poverty rate is 14.6%, compared to the 16.9% of persons living below the poverty line in Georgia (ACS 5-year Estimates, 2013-2017). Over half of the counties in the Northeast Georgia Region have poverty rates higher than both the state and the nation (Table 2, Appendix).

Athens-Clarke County has the highest poverty rate in the region (34.1%). Even when the 18-24 age population is removed to account for the University of Georgia and neighboring colleges’ student populations, the county’s poverty rate remains significantly above the state and the nation (ACS 2017 5-year estimates, 2013-2017). Furthermore, Athens-Clarke County has the highest poverty rate in the Region for children under 18 (39.6% ACS 2017 5-year

estimates, 2013-2017).

Elbert and Greene counties also have poverty levels that significantly exceed national and state trends (22.4% and 21.9%, respectively). These counties’ poverty rates for children under 18 exceed national and state rates as well (Elbert: 33.8%, Greene: 34.6%).

In contrast, Oconee County’s poverty rate falls significantly below the state and the nation, at 6.9%, with a 4% poverty rate for children under 18.

5.4 Disability Population

Disability can impact an individual’s mobility and transportation options. According to the ACS 2017 estimates, 13% of the region’s population is disabled. Although disability projections are unfeasible, the region’s growing senior population suggests an increasing disability rate in the future.

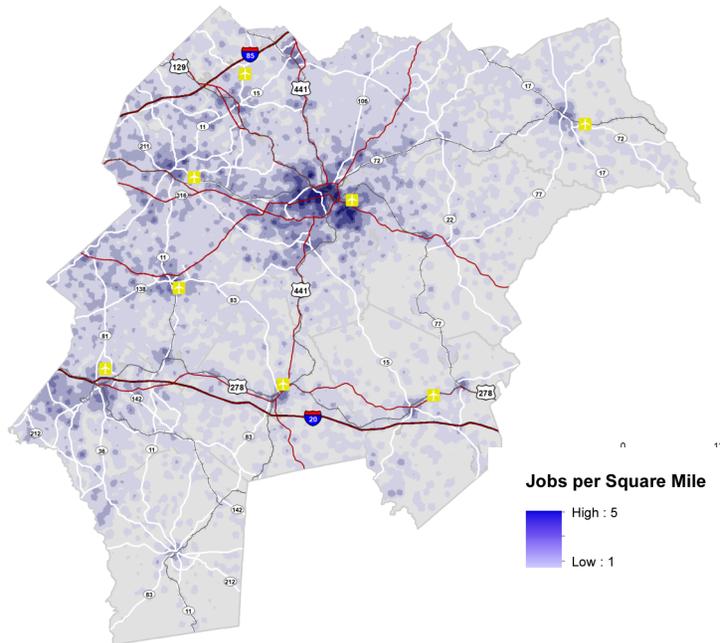
5.5 Transit Dependency

Transit-dependent is defined as the population that relies on transportation for healthcare, work, school, shopping, and other services. According to ACS estimates, 5% of the population in Northeast Georgia do not own a vehicle (5-year estimates 2014-2017). While some municipalities and urbanized areas within Northeast Georgia have bicycle and pedestrian facilities, the vast majority of travel within the region is reliant on motorized vehicles.

5.6 Employment and Workflow

Reliable transportation to and from work is an essential component to quality of life and economic mobility. Therefore, understanding employment and workflow patterns is important when examining the need for rural transit services. Figure 4 illustrates the region’s job density patterns (U.S. Census On the Map). This can be used to determine where the most demand is related to workforce transit development. In addition, data shows that approximately 125,306 residents commute outside the region for employment, while 72,397 commute into the region for work (Georgia Department of Labor, Esri Business Analyst, U.S. Census). This higher proportion of commuters exiting region shows that there is a need for commute service options.

Figure 4: Job Density Map



Source: U.S. Census On the Map

The unemployment rate in Northeast Georgia is currently 3.1%, which is lower than the state unemployment rate of 3.7% (Georgia Department of Labor). With such low unemployment rates, area employers are finding it especially difficult to attract and retain reliable, skilled employees. Conversely, during times of economic recession, employee access to reliable transportation is often affected. Transit options that get workers to jobs on time can be powerful tools for both employers and employees, regardless of the state of the economy.

5.7 Rural Areas v. Urban Areas

The Northeast Georgia Region is 42% rural and 58% urban (ESRI BOA). Figure 7 (pg. 6) depicts these areas and shows that the majority of urbanized areas border the Atlanta Metropolitan Region, with the exception of Athens-Clarke County.

When the resident population of urban and rural areas in the region are compared, the data shows that rural areas’ largest age cohort is 65+ (17.1%), while the largest age cohort for urban areas are ages 5-19 (20.5%) (ESRI BOA). While these two age cohorts are in different life stages they both have similar hardships when it comes to reliable access to vehicles.

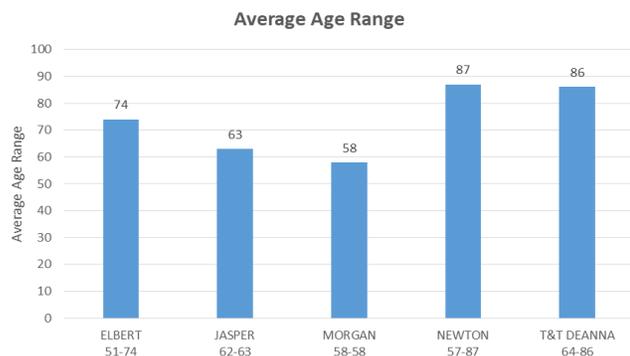
Residents in both urban and rural areas of Northeast Georgia have relatively high annual transportation costs (greater than \$11,000), compared with the 2019 per capita income for the region (\$26,696). The annual transportation costs comprise slightly less than half of the per capita income (Graph 5 and Figure 7, see Appendix).

According to the Housing and Transportation Index, income spent on transportation exceeds housing expenditures for residents that live in the following eight of the twelve Northeast Georgia counties: Walton, Oglethorpe, Barrow, Elbert, Jasper, Madison, Morgan, and Newton counties. This significant portion of residents’ income spent on transportation throughout the region, as well as young and senior populations requiring reliable access to transit, demonstrates that there is a need to increase the availability of public transit throughout Northeast Georgia.

6 Human Services Transportation Analysis

The NEGRC Area Agency on Aging distributed a Customer Satisfaction Survey to RHST clients that used transit services for a minimum of six months. The survey was conducted from January 2019 to April 2019. The results found that there is an increased demand in RHST services. It is important to note that the survey did not include RHST clients from Jackson County because there were no clients from that county that used RHST for six months. The following sections show the age, trip purposes, and the type of assistive device usage of RHST clients.

Graph 3: Age Range of RHST Clients



Source: NEGRC Area on Aging DHS Coordinated Customer Satisfaction Survey (Consumer) Services Provided January 1, 2019, through April 30, 2019.

6.1 Age of Human Service Transportation Users

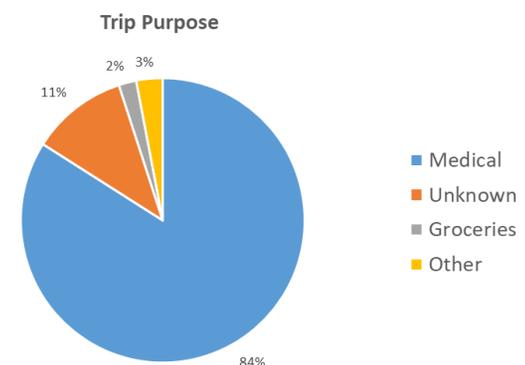
The Customer Satisfaction Survey found that the average age range of RHST clients was from 51-86 (Graph 3, Appendix). The survey also found that Newton County and T&T Deanna (NEGRC Third party operator) clients, on average, are older in comparison to clients that use Elbert, Jasper, or Morgan transit services. The average age of Newton and T&T Deanna clients are 87

and 86, respectively. Therefore, it appears that Newton and T&T Deanna provide services to more elderly clients in comparison to other counties, and thus will have an increased demand in RHST services as a that segment of the population grows.

6.2 Trip Purposes and Distance for Human Service Transportation

The Customer Satisfaction Survey also examined the purposes of the trips that clients requested. Figure 5 shows that 84% of the clients use RHST for medical purposes, and 2% use RHST for groceries. The survey also found that clients that live in the counties of Elbert, Morgan, and Oglethorpe travel an average distance of 30 or more miles per trip (Graph 4, Appendix). This illustrates residents' need for reliable access to medical care as well as far-reaching transit services.

Figure 5: Trip Purposes and Distance for Human Service Transportation

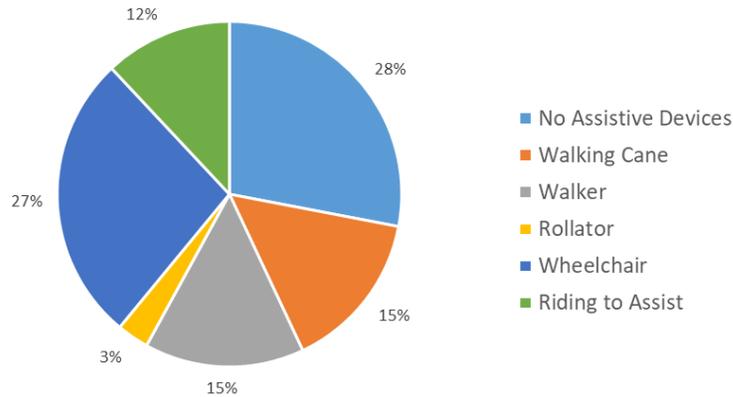


Source: NEGRC Area on Aging DHS Coordinated Customer Satisfaction Survey (Consumer) Services Provided January 1, 2019, through April 30, 2019.

6.3 Assistive Devices Usage on Human Service Transportation

RHST is designed to assist individuals that use assistive care devices. In Northeast Georgia, 72% of riders use a form of an assistive device, while 27% do not use any form of assistive device. Figure 6 shows that of those 72% that use an assistive device, 27% use wheelchair, 15% use a walking cane or walker, and 3% use a rollator device. This demonstrates that RHST serves a high amount of disabled individuals and the demand for RHST services for disabled elderly will be needed in the future.

Figure 6: Assistive Device Use



Source: NEGRC Area on Aging DHS Coordinated Customer Satisfaction

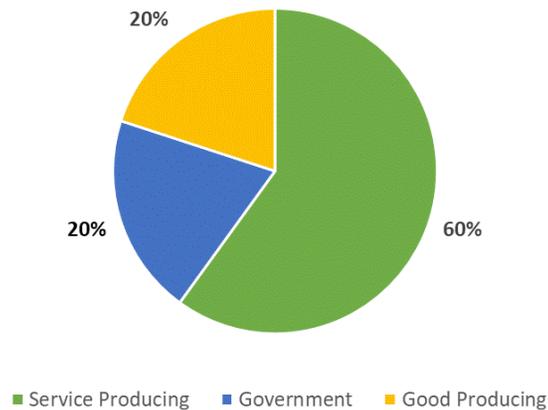
7 Choice Riders

Getting people from remote areas to activity centers in Northeast Georgia is currently a challenge, particularly for those without reliable access to personal vehicles. The following sections describe the various activity centers in the region, which include major employers, medical facilities, educational facilities and retail districts as well as known future developments.

7.1 Employers

Northeast Georgia’s economy is relatively diverse with a mixture of several industrial sectors including service, manufacturing, and public service. The breakdown, as shown below in Figure 8, shows that over half of the current jobs in the region are in the service industry.

Figure 8: Breakdown of Jobs by Industry Type in Northeast Georgia



Source: Northeast Georgia Regional Plan 2035, NEGRC 2018

The 10 major industry sectors and employer types currently in the region are shown below in Table 3. In addition, the ten largest employers in the region are shown in table 4.

Table 3: Ten Largest Industry Sectors within Northeast Georgia

Rank	Sector
1	Manufacturing
2	Retail Trade
3	Local Government
4	Accommodation and Food Services
5	Health Care and Social Assistance
6	State Government
7	Admin, Support, Waste Mgmt., Remediation
8	Wholesale Trade
9	Construction
10	Transportation and Warehousing

Northeast Georgia Regional Plan 2035, NEGRC 2018; Georgia DOL Labor Market Explorer Industry Mix, 2018

Table 4: Ten Largest Employers within Northeast Georgia

Employers	
Amazon.Com.Dedc, LLC	St. Mary’s Hospital
Athens Regional Medical Center	The Kroger Company
HG Georgia Merchants, Inc.	University of Georgia
Hire Dynamics, LLC	Walmart
Pilgrims Pride Corporation	Wellpoint, Inc.

Source: Northeast Georgia Regional Plan 2035, NEGRC 2018; Georgia DOL Labor Market Explorer Industry Mix, 2018

7.2 Medical Facilities

Over a dozen medical facilities are located throughout the region. Facilities range from large regional hospitals and medical centers to smaller health care clinics. Major medical facilities within the region include:

- St. Mary’s Health Care System, Clarke County
- Athens Regional Medical Center, Clarke County
- Walton Regional Medical Center, Walton County
- Northridge Medical Center, Jackson County
- Morgan Memorial Hospital, Morgan County
- Morgan County Healthcare Clinic, Morgan County
- Newton Medical Center, Newton County
- Jackson County Health Care Clinic, Jackson County
- Oglethorpe Health Care Clinic, Oglethorpe County
- Madison County Georgia Health Services, Madison County

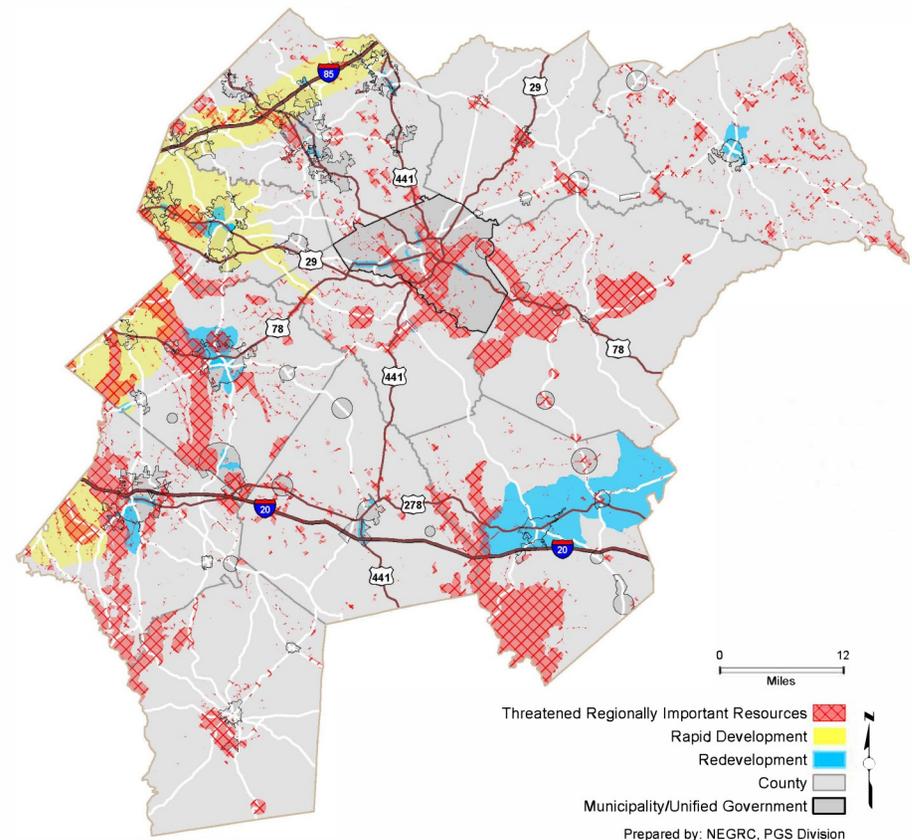
7.3 Educational Facilities

Several large educational facilities are located within the Northeast Georgia Region. The largest institution, the University Of Georgia, employs 10,000 people and has a student population of approximately 35,000 people. Several other technical and community colleges, as well as satellite campuses for other institutions, are located throughout the region. The key facilities are listed below (Northeast Georgia Regional Plan 2035, NEGRC 2018; Georgia DOL Labor Market Explorer Industry Mix, 2018):

- The University of Georgia in Athens
- Athens Technical College
- Piedmont College
- Oxford College of Emory University
- Lanier Technical College, Barrow and Jackson County Branches
- Georgia State University’s Perimeter College- Newton Campus
- Georgia Piedmont Technical College- Covington Campus
- University of North Georgia-Oconee Campus
- Georgia Military College- Madison Campus
- Southern Crescent Technical College- Monticello Campus

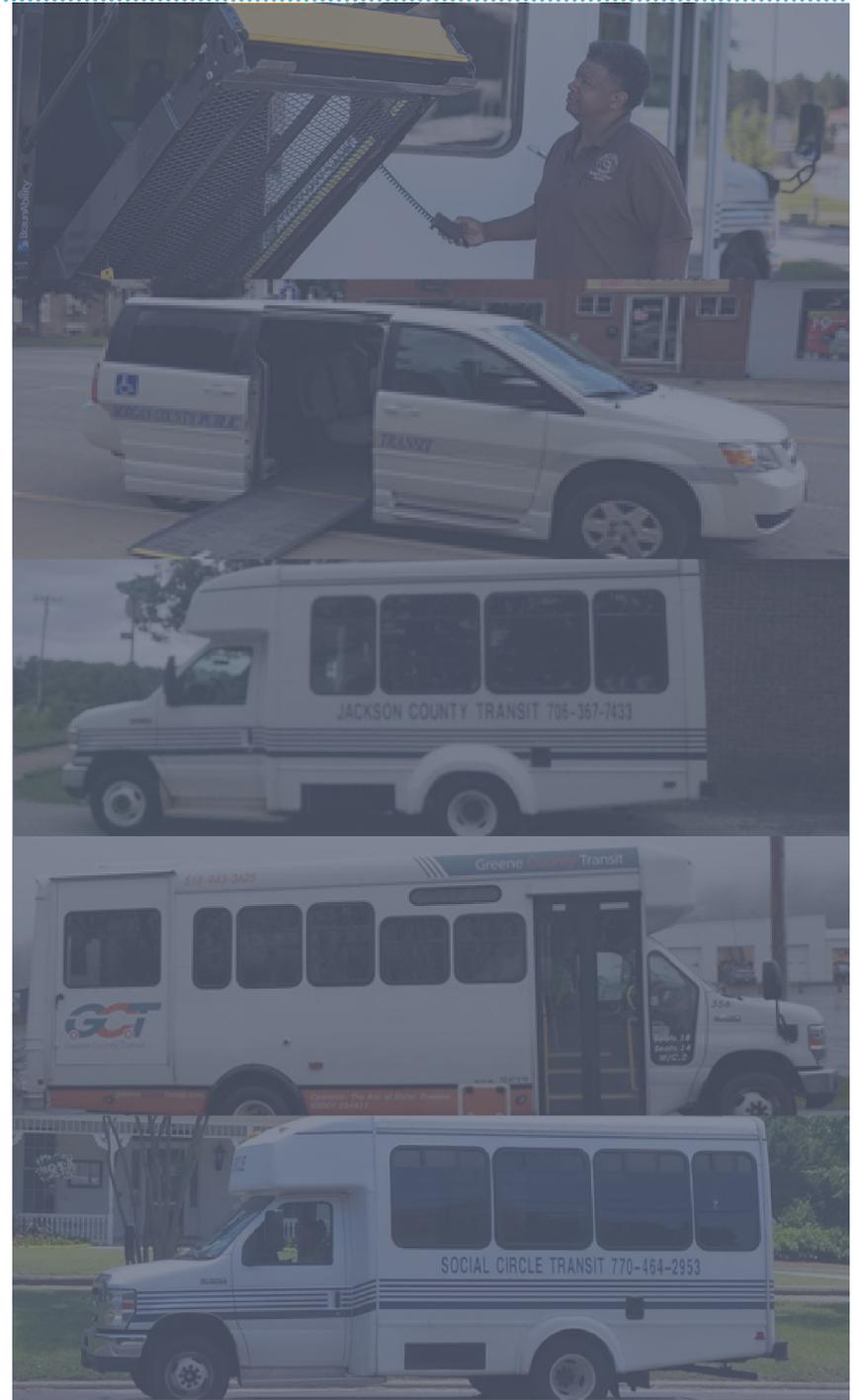
7.4 Areas of Development

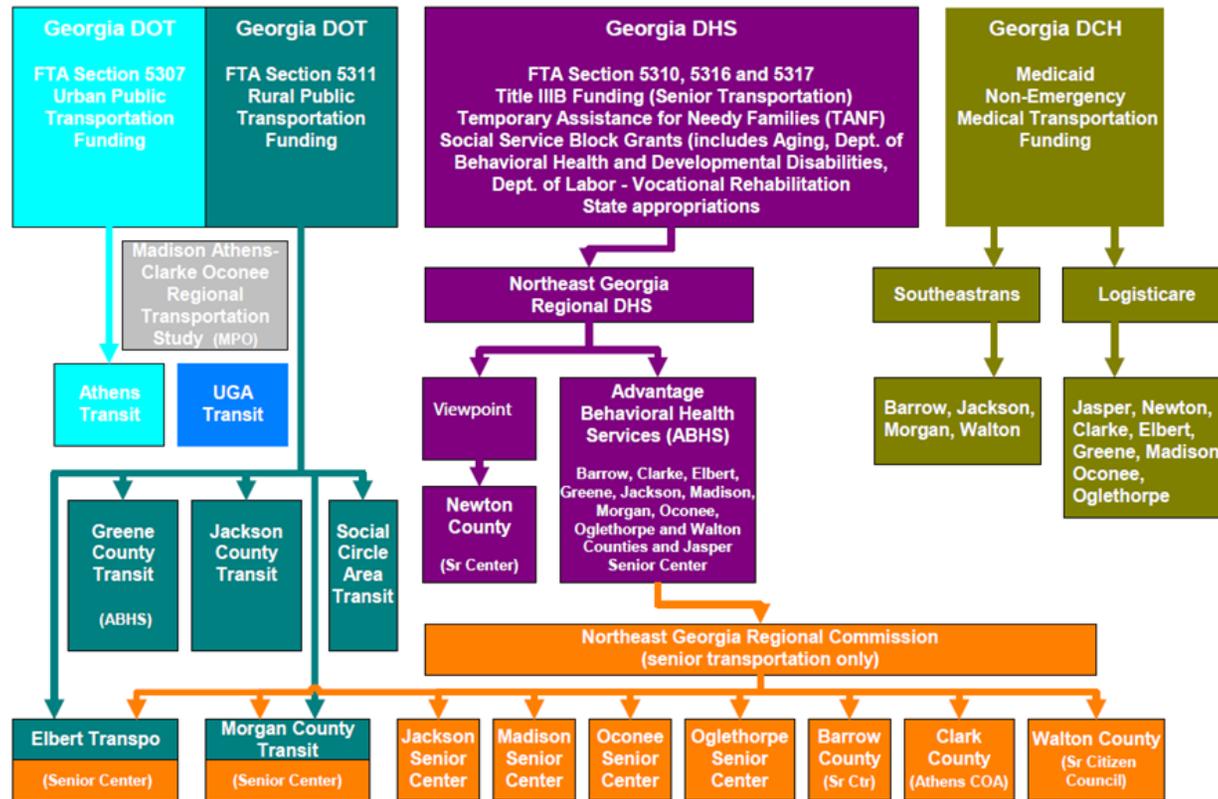
In the 2018 updated Northeast Georgia Regional Plan, 2035, an inventory of existing development was reviewed. A map showing Areas of Special Attention was developed by overlaying the region’s important natural and cultural resources with areas experiencing development pressures. This map shows the possible conflict between future development and the natural and cultural resources within the region. In addition, areas of redevelopment and infill are shown. The development areas provide a geographic understanding of where potential transit opportunities exist. The Areas of Special Attention Map is shown in Figure 9.



8 Existing Transit Services

The Northeast Georgia Region contains an assortment of transit services and providers. The following sections will describe the Urban, Rural, and Department of Human Services (DHS) Transit services in the region. An analysis of the transit providers will show the current and future needs of transit services in the region.





* Bus passes can be provided by Logisticare (Clarke County residents only) so that members can use public transit.

Figure 10: Northeast Georgia RHST Service Structure

8.1 Public Urban Transit

Urban public transit is provided by Athens Transit for Athens-Clarke County. It is a fixed-route service with 30 routes throughout the community. In addition, a demand-response service is provided for those with disabilities and is available within one mile of a fixed route. Support for this service is provided by FTA Section 5307 Urban Public Transportation Funding, administered by GDOT. According to The ACC FY19 Budget, Athens Transit has an annual operating budget of approximately \$5.5 Million.

The University of Georgia (UGA) also provides fixed-route and paratransit services within Athens-Clarke County, focused on serving the UGA community in and around downtown Athens. The service is free to the public, funded by the UGA student transportation fee. ACC employees and UGA students

receive unlimited free trips on Athens Transit buses, through an agreement between UGA and The Athens-Clarke County government.

7.2 Rural Public Transit

Rural public transit is available in Elbert, Greene, Jackson, and Morgan counties, as well as in the City of Social Circle (in Walton County). These rural transit systems operate on a demand-response system; the service is by request and charges users a fee. Typically, users must request a ride 24-hours in advance. Each vehicle is handicap accessible. Support for these services is largely provided by FTA Section 5311 Rural Public Transportation Funding, administered by GDOT and local governments. The amount of funding varies for each system.

8.4 Human Services Transit

Human Services Transit is provided throughout the Northeast Georgia Region in the form of Department of Human Services (DHS) and Medicaid services. Each is provided on a county-by-county basis and receives a variety of State and Federal funds. DHS and Medicaid transportation funds are administered by the Georgia DHS and Department of Community Health (DCH), respectively.

Presently, DHS transportation is provided by two operators within Northeast Georgia: Advantage Behavioral Health Systems (ABHS) and ViewPoint. As shown in Figure 10, ViewPoint provides services to Newton County and ABHS provides DHS transportation to the region’s 11 remaining counties. The NEGRC’s Area Agency on Aging typically administers Division of Aging trips and utilizes a third-party provider for transit. Division of Aging trips are generally limited to transporting users to and from each respective County Senior Center.

Table 5: Human Services Transit Providers

DHS Contract Operator	Operation Area	Provider
Elbert County	Elbert County	Elbert County
Greene County	Greene County	Greene County
Newton County	Newton County	Senior Center
NEGRC	Athens-Clarke, Barrow, Jackson, Jasper, Madison, Morgan, Oconee, Oglethorpe, & Walton counties	Deanna Transportation

Table 6: Northeast Georgia Medicaid Transportation Providers

Broker	Provider	Area Served
Southeast Trans	Velstar Medical Transportation	Clarke, Greene, Jackson, Morgan, Oconee, Oglethorpe
	Master Care	Madison
	Georgia Medical Care	Barrow and Walton

Medicaid transportation in Northeast Georgia is provided through Logisticare Transportation and Southeastern Transportation (See Figure 10).

Table 7: Northeast Georgia Medicaid Transportation Brokers

Broker	Area Served	DCH Region
Southeast Trans	Barrow, Jackson, Morgan, and Walton counties	North
Logisticare	Clarke, Elbert, Greene, Jasper, Madison, Oconee, Oglethorpe, and Newton counties	East & Central

7.4 Rideshares

Georgia Rideshare is a GDOT-sponsored program that provides a system where commuters can find carpool and vanpool services to provide a safe and convenient way of commuting to and from jobs. The State of Georgia also operates park-and-ride lots where commuters can gather to ride carpools, vanpools, or other forms of transit. In Northeast Georgia, there are park-and-ride lots in Barrow, Athens-Clarke, and Newton counties, which are operated and maintained by GDOT Transportation District One.

9

Overview of Findings & Foundational Elements

The conclusions identified in sections 1-7 served as a starting point for the public engagement discussion. The public engagement process, as described in the next section, was a key part of developing the plan vision for transit in the Northeast Georgia Region.

- The region has adequate transportation infrastructure with good road connectivity between population and employment centers.
- The senior citizen population within the region is increasing and will continue to increase in the future as the “baby boomer” generation ages, placing a greater burden on existing transit service. Senior Transit is available region wide, but will need to continue accommodating this population and must plan for the increased demand.
- Transit-dependent populations, such as poor and disabled residents, are likely to remain steady or increase, placing an increased demand on transit service. This population should be recognized as a target group when identifying transit needs and planning improvements.
- Lack of transportation options for workforce training effects the job opportunities available to transit-dependent population.
- There is limited rural public transit within the region. Only four of the 12 counties and the City of Social Circle have rural transit service. There is also a lack of connectivity as there is no coordination between regional county systems or with the urban transit system in Athens.
- DHS and Medicaid transportation is available region-wide, but transportation funding is fragmented; this leads to lack of coordination and duplication of service in some areas.
- Future transit and development planning should recognize the location of new businesses and locate in proximity to these sites.

10 Public Engagement Activities

Public engagement was a major part of the planning process for the 2012 comprehensive RHST Plan update and helped to identify existing transit needs and deficiencies. Phase II amendment process included an informal survey distributed to the current RHST services providers that was used to update the vision for transit in the region. Phase II also takes into account discussions from the NEGRC Rural-Transit Roundtable and Planning and Government Services (PGS) committee. This section describes the steps taken in the public engagement process as well as the outcomes and input received from the meetings. Full documentation of these meetings is located in the appendix.

10.1 Stakeholder and Community Engagement Plan

The project team developed a plan for stakeholder and community engagement activities to provide a systematic approach to meeting and communicating with stakeholders as well as to maximize feedback and input into overall vision.

The objective was to present the RHST planning process to stakeholders and solicit input on whether the right foundational elements were being considered as the planning process moved forward. The RHST plan must address the transit needs of Northeast Georgia emphasizing the mobility needs of the transit-dependent, providing access to skilled job and creating a more coordinated and efficient service.

The engagement plan was designed to include the following facilitated meetings:

- Technical Stakeholders Focus Group with NEGRC and other Technical staff
- Visioning Sessions with Key Regional Stakeholders
- Report-Back Session to NEGRC Board

In addition, a brief questionnaire was distributed to stakeholders unable to attend any of the above meetings, and a survey was distributed to update the RHST plan. Both the questionnaire and survey are located in the appendix.

10.2 Technical Stakeholder Focus Group

The technical stakeholder focus group meeting was intended to set the foundation for the visioning meetings and included a core group of NEGRC and other key transit stakeholders. The meeting was held at Northeast Georgia Regional Commission offices on May 17th, 2012.

The intent of this focus group meeting was to ensure that foundational elements that have been were correct and agreeable to the core group. The meeting was also used to seek input into where further analysis may be needed and what important issues need to be addressed by the RHST Plan prior to the visioning sessions.

The meeting also focused on the leveraging and coordinating of resources and assets. Because of the complexity of funding streams and the various agencies that administer them, the region's transit is a fragmented system which in some cases leads to inefficiencies and duplication of service.

The final item of discussion in the focus group meeting was to determine how best to engage the community during the visioning sessions and on the RHST Plan. It was determined that assuring a broad cross-section of participants was key to understanding all unmet need and soliciting input on solutions.

Some of the key outcomes of this meeting were as follows:

- The foundation elements were generally correct. The lack of connectivity between transit systems must be addressed. The poor and underemployed must be recognized as any analysis of transit dependent riders. The disabled population should also be recognized as transit-dependent as they do not necessarily qualify for Medicaid or Medicare transit service.
- The small positive inflow of workers into the region may be a result of lack of transportation to the small businesses throughout the region.
- The transit system needs to be more affordable and more flexible. It should also be better marketed, as many people are not aware that any current service exists.
- Assistance and training on a regional level would be useful for owners and operators of transit service to fully understand rules, regulations and best practices relative to leveraging and coordinating resources and assets.
- It is important to stress that the RHST plan is not about cutting service, but maximizing resources and creating a more efficient service that operates efficiently and in a cost-effective manner.

Based on the input received at this meeting, the planning approach was refined in advance of the visioning sessions.

10.3 Visioning Statements

Following the technical stake focus group meetings, two visioning sessions were held to engage additional members of the transit community and other interested parties. These sessions were held on June 12th and 14th, 2012 in Madison and Comer, GA, respectively.

The information sought at these visioning sessions was based on the following questions which had also been asked of and agreed upon by the technical stakeholder focus group:

- Is the project team looking at the right foundational elements for the RHST plan?
- Is the information presented in these sessions accurate?
- What existing transportation services issues are important to address?
- Are there any ideas for solutions?

- What is your vision for RHST service?
- What should be done immediately to address current needs?
- What should be done to encourage transit use?
- How can services be better coordinated?
- What are some ideas for long-term funding?

The visioning groups were in general agreement that the foundation elements of the plan and the information presented in this plan was accurate. Attendees felt that several transit service issues should be addressed as part of the plan. Some of the key issues included:

- There is a need for rural public transit within the region, though it is not necessarily a region wide issue. There are some areas needing more public transportation solutions than others. Due to the changing demographics and development patterns within the region, the demand is fluid.
- The region could benefit from a higher level of coordination relative to transit service; however coordination efforts should consider impacts on the transit providers from an operational and service delivery aspect. Stakeholders voiced concern of coordination relying on too broad of a “regionalizing” of service. They noted that regional approaches in the past have often benefited the large population centers while neglecting more remote parts of the region.
- Any planned transit coordination should be mindful of the senior transportation funded by DHS. Senior Transportation provides a personalized service which will be affected by cuts in DHS funding. Any centralized and coordinated service which seeks better trip efficiencies may reduce the personalized service that senior centers can provide.
- A plan should address current needs while accounting for the ability to expend transit service in the future based on demand. The plan must also identify the target demographic for transit ridership and successfully meet the needs of this group.
- One of the biggest issues identified with current transit service is the lack of awareness within the community. Transit needs to be better marketed in the region along with any proposed coordination improvements.
- Transit needs to be given higher priority with local elected officials. Current service potential is not being maximized.

Several ideas for transit solutions and visions for RHST service were voiced at the visioning sessions. These included:

- Service needs to be marketed effectively and the public needs to be better educated on the advantages of transit. Outreach efforts need to alleviate people’s apprehensions and stereotypes of public transportation and those who typically use transit. All riders need to feel they are using a safe, comfortable and convenient service.
- Existing coordination between transit providers needs to be supported and encouraged. The region should also partner with major employers to seek innovative ideas for encouraging transit use as well as funding initiatives.
- An effective transit service should exist irrespective of county and political boundaries and provide intra-regional trips.
- NEGRC should establish a RHST committee which meets at a suitable frequency to put ideas for transit solutions into action.
- There were several other transportation-related suggestions made during the meetings which, while very useful, are beyond the scope of this document. A full set of meeting minutes is available in the Appendix.

10.4 Questionnaire

For stakeholders unable to attend the visioning sessions, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed. The questionnaire responses were generally in line with the input received at the visioning sessions and support the foundational elements that were developed. As with the visioning sessions, several other useful transportation-related suggestions were made through the questionnaire responses. A full set of the responses is available in the Appendix.

10.5 Phase II Visioning Statements

Based on the 2013 document review, stakeholder input, and technical analysis, the vision for RHST and rural public transit in Northeast Georgia was updated to reflect the short- and long-term goals outlined in this document.

- A survey was sent out to all rural transit providers in the region on August 29th, 2019, which was used to update the Vision of The Phase II RHST Plan. The updated Vision is also a reflection of GDOT’s Statewide Transit Plan Focus Group discussions.

Vision Statement

Affordable public transit service is available to all areas within the 12-county region. Demand-response systems operate throughout the region to address the transportation needs of all residents. Ridership demographics in this system are diverse, due to a range of vehicle types used, positive public opinion, and punctual service.

The region’s public transit systems maintain a coordinated RHST System that provides regional coverage and is convenient, safe, efficient, and reliable. The RHST system addresses the needs of the transit-dependent and choice populations; responds to changing demographics, development and employment trends; and adapts to meet the region’s needs.

11

Gap Analysis

Based on the information provided in GDOT, NEGRC, and other planning documents as well as during the public engagement process, it is apparent that there is a need for improvement to the Rural and Human Services Transit system in Northeast Georgia. This section of the Plan aims to address the needs while understanding the challenges of funding and political support. During the public engagement process, it was clear that the region is seeking a transit solution that is tailored to them and not a mandated set of rules that inhibit flexibility on operation of transit service. It was also clear that a wide-ranging overhaul was neither necessary nor desired for the entire region. It was determined that coordination, efficiency, and prioritization should be the key steps for improving RHST in the region. Each of these strategies is discussed below along with an action plan to guide the process from planning to realization.

11.1 Coordination Efficiency

Coordination of RHST can be achieved through an array of strategies. It was clear in the visioning sessions that a “one size fits all” solution to coordination of service was not desirable to the region.

The “Coordination Continuum” illustrates the extent of potential coordination efforts and can range from exchange of information to coordinating the purchase of services and equipment. Figure 11 shows a graphical representation of the continuum.

The scope of coordination efforts can range from an exchange of information among agencies to coordinating purchase of services. Regional approaches to coordinated service delivery have proved successful in other Georgia regions.

The level of coordination can be tailored to the existing structure of service or used to expand service to address unmet demand.

Coordinated service delivery focuses on three themes:

- Administration/Oversight
- Operations/Service Delivery
- Funding

Coordination of administration and oversight can provide opportunities for service bundling, inter-agency coordination, a regional approach to transit, and coordinated reporting systems and requirements. These coordination efforts can lead to improved efficiencies, particularly important given the probability of further funding constraints.

Coordination of operations and service delivery can lead to improved transit service quality. Such efforts may include the coordination of purchasing, maintaining, and insuring vehicle fleets; scheduling and information technology services for operators and users; and improved utilization of vehicle fleets.

Coordination of funding activities can provide the most efficient use of limited monetary resources. These activities may include bundling of funds, payment of service, wise and efficient use of public funding, and leveraging of funds to attract federal dollars.

The visioning sessions indicated that administration and oversight coordination is desirable to eliminate service duplication and inefficiencies and provide a more coordinated, streamlined approach to regional transit.

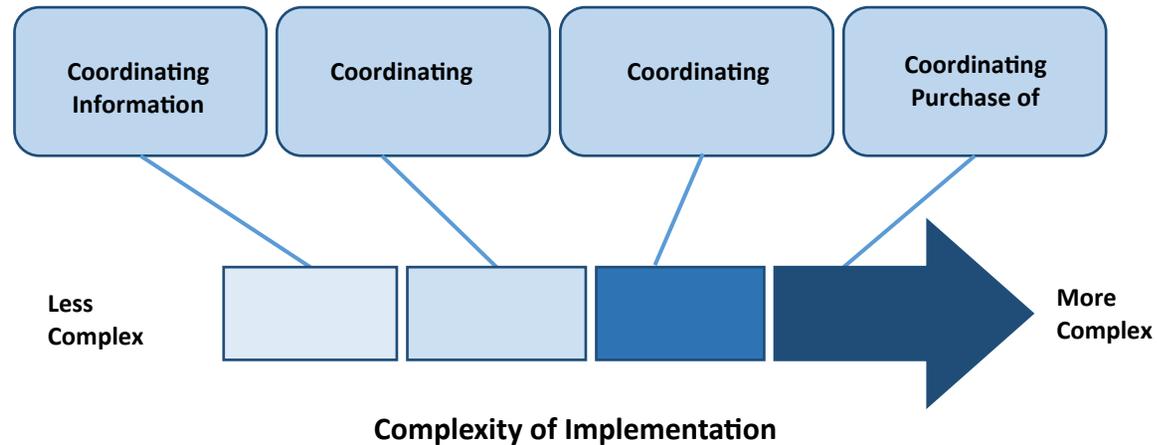


Figure 11: Coordination Continuum

Any coordination efforts, however, must be mindful of not cutting essential service for the transit dependent, particularly seniors. The stakeholders were also concerned that a regional approach may favor the larger cities and neglect the more remote parts of the region. However, as section 5.7 rural v. urban areas shows, residents in Northeast Georgia region, have similar travel expenditures, which affects their housing costs. Therefore, a regional transit system would address the needs of all communities. The stakeholders were receptive to coordination of funding to ensure that the limited resources available are used as efficiently as possible.

11.2 Multi-Jurisdictional Transit

Examples of multi-jurisdictional transit systems can be found throughout the State of Georgia. These systems are commonly administered by regional commissions, authorities, or non-profit agencies. The following sections outline the different working models for multi-jurisdictional transit systems in Georgia.

Regional-Commission-Administered Transit System

In this model, the local regional commission administers the funding for the multi-jurisdictional transit system and either provides or contracts out the

transit service. Examples in Georgia include:

- Coastal Regional Commission (CRC) which administers and provides rural transit service to ten counties
- Three Rivers Regional Commission (TRRC) which administers 5311 funding for eight counties and uses third-party operators (TPO) for transit service

Authority- or Non-Profit-Administered Transit System

A local transportation authority or non-profit agency can successfully operate as administrator and service provider for a multi-jurisdictional transit system. For example, the Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority is the administrator and service provider for the Patula Transit System, currently providing rural transit service to the counties of Stewart, Quitman, and Randolph. The Mountain Area Transportation Service is a 501(c)3 organization that administers and provides rural transit services for three counties in Northwest Georgia.

12

NEGRC Action Plan

This section presents the Action Plan for public transit and RHST in Northeast Georgia, based on the vision that has emerged through stakeholder input and Phase I of the RHST. This Action Plan provides the region with tangible goals and objectives for improving transit services while addressing the economic and development needs of the region. Building from the short- and long-term goals outlined in Phase I, the Phase II Action Plan is comprised of a report of accomplishments, a short-term work program, and long-term goals.

12.1 Report of Accomplishments

The 2013 NEGRC Short-term RHST Activities provided a series of low-investment opportunities for the NEGRC and RHST Committee to accomplish. These goals were meant to lead the region toward the achievement of long-term interests identified in the Phase I document. The report of accomplishments for these goals is outlined in the following Table 8.

Table 8: 2013 NEGRC Short-term RHST Activities—Report of Accomplishments

2013 Short-term NEGRC RHST Activities – Report of Accomplishments			
Action Item	Responsibility	Targeted Completion Date	Status
Appoint NEGRC staff to form and assist RHST Committee (at least 25% of the time)	NEGRC	September 2012	Complete
Establish a regional RHST Committee including providers, users, GDOT, DHS & DCH to foster coordination and efficient RHST operations	NEGRC	October 2012	Complete
Determine feasibility to fund and employ RHST Mobility Manager in 2013	NEGRC	June 2013	Complete
Promote RHST to Policymakers	RHST Committee	December 2012 to December 2013	Ongoing
Investigate additional efforts by and between GDOT, DHS, DCH, and others	NEGRC	December 2012 to December 2013	Ongoing
*Marketing and Public Awareness to employers, educational facilities, and activity centers	RHST Committee	Ongoing	Ongoing
*Establish RHST Regional Forum (meet quarterly or more often as determined)	NEGRC	Ongoing	Complete
Seek and leverage new with existing funding	NEGRC	2013-2014	Ongoing
*Determine feasibility and/or motivation to establish additional rural public transit within the region	NEGRC	June 2014	Ongoing
*Dialogue with other regions	NEGRC	2013	Ongoing
Better leverage existing RHST funding	NEGRC	June 2014	Ongoing
Create updated NEGRC Short-term RHST Plan	NEGRC	June 2014	Complete

**Items marked with an asterisk identify short-term activities that are carried over to the 2019 short-term work program and edited to match current needs.*

Table 9: NEGRC Short-term Work Program Action Items

Short-term NEGRC Work Program		
Action Item	Responsibility	Targeted Completion Date
Determine feasibility and/or motivation to establish rural public transit authority within the region	NEGRC	2022
Dialogue with other regions on rural transit implementation	NEGRC	2020
Coordinate annual rural transit roundtable sessions for providers in the region.	NEGRC	Ongoing
Assist regional providers with marketing strategies to grow/diversify ridership base	NEGRC	2022
Discuss coverage expansion with ACC Transit to include entire MPO jurisdiction	NEGRC	2020
Develop recommendations for hours of operation for all rural transit providers to maximize workforce ridership	NEGRC	2021
Coordinate with GDOT to address counties without transit service	NEGRC, GDOT	2019
Assist municipalities transition into “urban” status with 2020 U.S. Census	NEGRC	2021

12.2 NEGRC Short-term Work Program

Short-term goals can be achieved through immediate and tangible initiatives and do not require significant investment for implementation. As these goals are met, they can serve to build momentum for further investment in accomplishing long-term goals and will demonstrate the region’s commitment to improving public transportation. A summary of the short-term action items, responsibilities, and targeted completion dates are shown in Table 9.

12.3 NEGRC Long-term Action Steps

Long-term goals, while requiring more substantial investment, will need to be set and achieved to address unmet transit demand as the region grows and develops. The economic and demographic analysis performed for this update indicates that there is a significant population unserved by public transit services. Long-term goals seek to address gaps in service and to improve access to equitable transportation options crucial to the region’s prosperity.

Long-term Goals are as follows:

- Develop transit system(s) in areas without service. All rural transit should be coordinated across county lines and provide a seamless transition to

the nearest urban public transit system. Consider both regional and local methods for developing service.

- Expand outreach to promote subscription services with major employers and higher education centers for skilled workforce training opportunities.
- Coordinate with NEGRC Workforce Development and the Joint Development Authority of Northeast Georgia (JDANEG) to determine pre-existing programs.
- Planning efforts should continue to identify the target demographic for transit dependency and meet that group’s needs. Planned improvements should account for future expansion based on future need.
- Maintain a coordinated approach to DHS and public transit in the counties that have a transit system.
- Examine transit opportunities with major employers and major planned developments through the Joint Development Authority of Northeast Georgia (JDANEG) and other major organizations. Provide informational incentive packets for employers and developers who will promote and assist with the funding of transit service. Such incentives may include tax benefits for employers and employees and regional promotion of businesses and developments. Further, in exchange for having a transit option, the employer may be willing to subsidize the transit costs either directly to the employee or to the transit system.

13 Appendix

- Table 2: Poverty Rates for Northeast Georgia
- Figure 5: Trip Purposes and Distance for Human Service Transportation
- Table 7: Per Capita Income for Northeast Georgia Region
- Graph 4: Average Distance to Destination of RHST Clients
- Graph 5: Annual Transportation Costs
- Graph 6: Housing + Transportation Index—Housing, Transportation, and Income Comparisons
- Questionnaire: Summary Report: 09/09/2019
- Technical Stakeholder Focus Group Meeting Minutes
- June 12, 2012 Visioning Focus Group Meeting Minutes
- June 14, 2012 Visioning Focus Group Meeting Minutes
- Questionnaire Summary Report: 06/2012

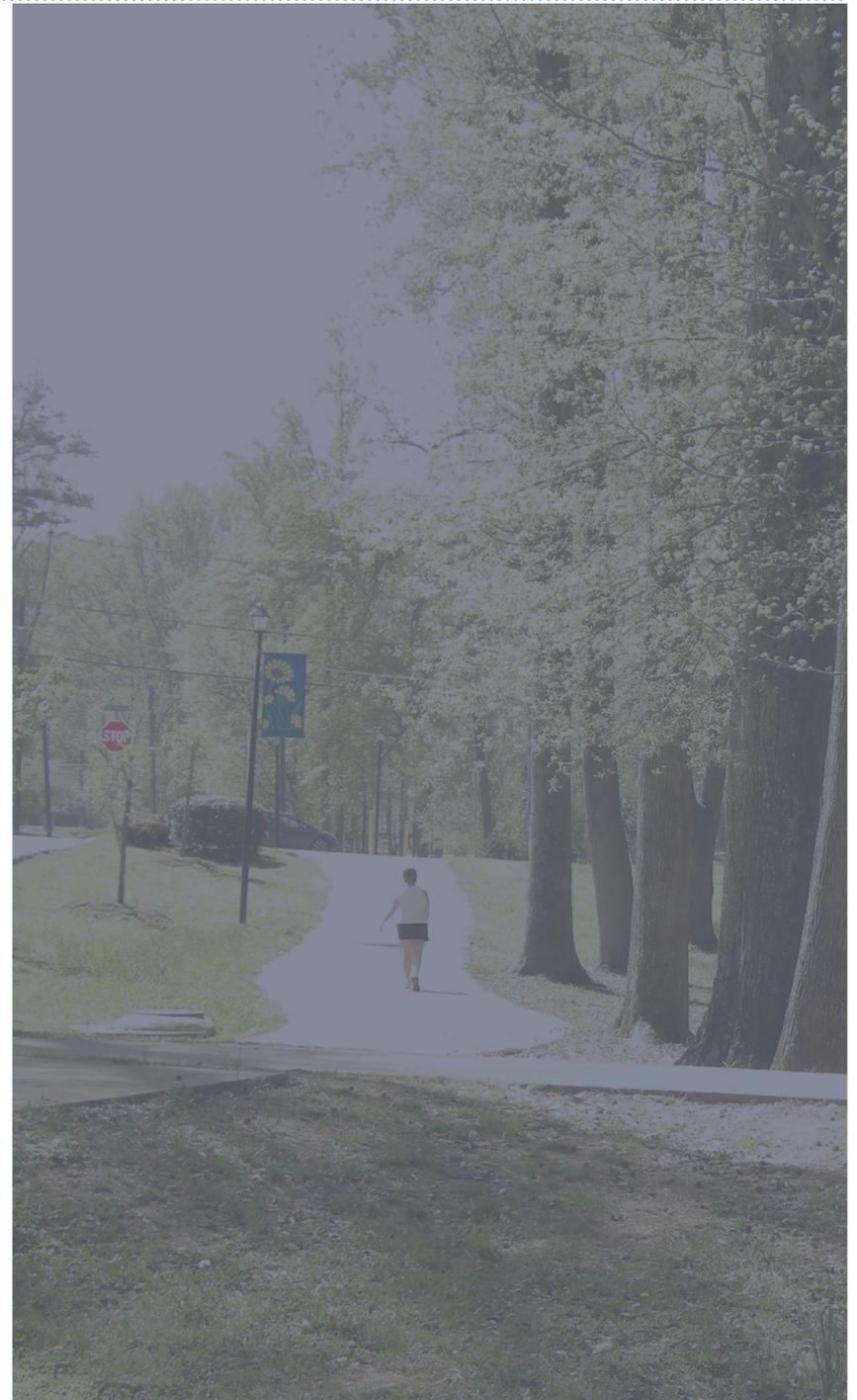


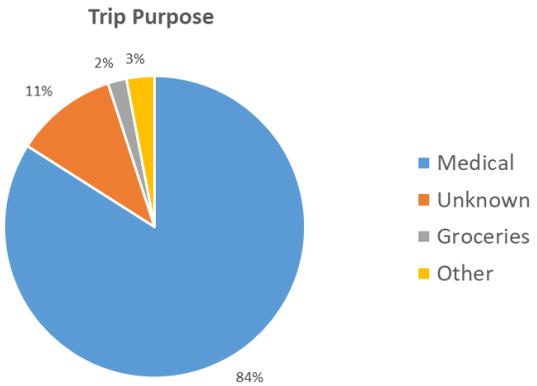
Table 2: Poverty Rates for Northeast Georgia

	Poverty Population		Children Under 18 Years of Age	
	#	%	#	%
USA	45,650,345	14.6	14,710,485	20.3
GA	1,679,030	16.9	592,450	24.0
Barrow	9,829	13.2	3,616	18.1
Clarke	38,618	34.1	8,377	39.6
Elbert	4,246	22.4	1,415	33.8
Greene	3,623	21.9	1,115	34.6
Jackson	7,898	12.5	2,263	14.0
Jasper	2,623	19.4	764	24.4
Madison	4,977	17.6	1,562	24.1
Morgan	2,374	13.4	777	19.2
Newton	17,328	16.7	6,788	24.4
Oconee	2,476	6.9	978	10.2
Oglethorpe	2,543	17.6	963	30.6
Walton	11,200	12.8	4,065	18.5

Source: ACS 2017, 5-Year Estimates

Table 2 shows the poverty rates for all twelve counties in Northeast Georgia, including poverty rates for the state of Georgia and USA.

Figure 5: Trip Purposes and Distance for Human Service Transportation



Source: NEGRC Area on Aging DHS Coordinated Customer Satisfaction Survey (Consumer) Services Provided January 1, 2019, through April 30, 2019.

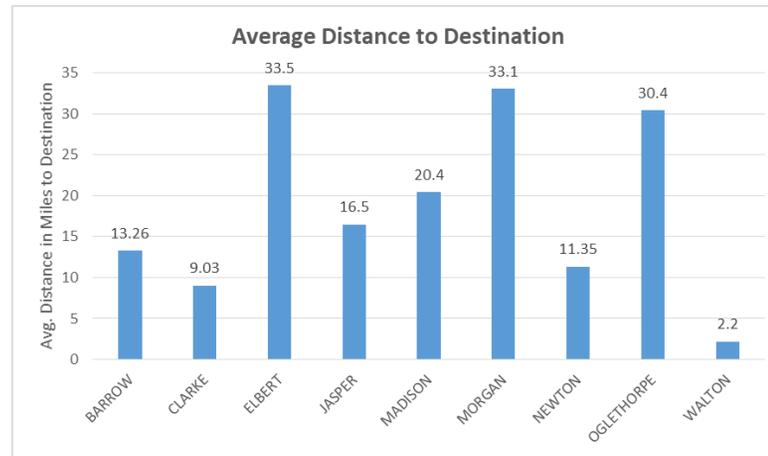
Figure 5 was taken from the RHST Survey conducted by NEGRC Area Agency on Aging. The figures shows RHST clients trip purposes.

Table 7: Per Capita Income for Northeast Georgia Region

Per Capita Income	
2019	\$26,696
2024	\$30,507

Source: ESRI BOA, 2019

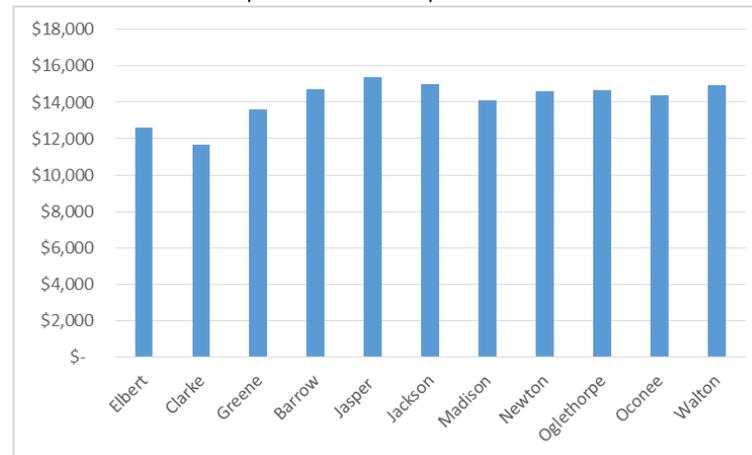
Graph 4: Average Distance to Destination of RHST Clients



Source: NEGRCA Area on Aging DHS Coordinated Customer Satisfaction Survey (Consumer) Services Provided January 1, 2019,

Graph 4 was taken from the RHST Survey conducted by NEGRCA Area Agency on Aging.. The figure shows the average distance to destination that RHST clients request.

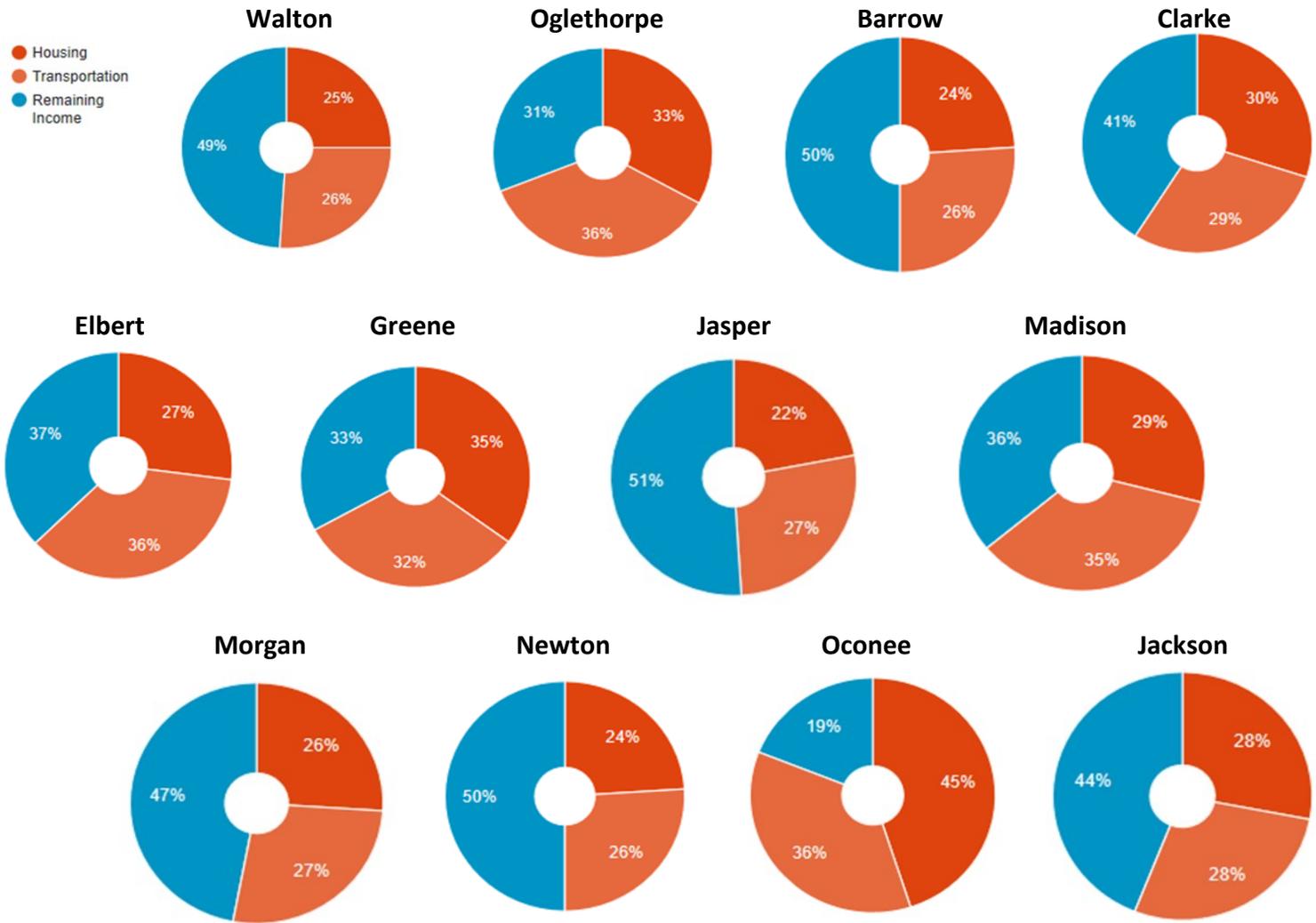
Graph 5: Annual Transportation Costs



Source: H+T Fact Sheets. <https://htaindex.cnt.org/fact-sheets/> Accessed 9/12/2019

Graph 5 was generated using annual transportation costs from the Housing and Transportation affordability index. The graph shows the annual transportation costs for the twelve counties in the region.

Graph 6: Housing + Transportation Index—Housing, Transportation, and Income Comparisons; 2015 ACS



Source: Housing + Transportation Index, <https://htaindex.cnt.org/>; 08/29/2019

Graph 6 shows the distribution of income between housing and transportation costs. The pie graphs were retrieved from the Housing and Transportation Index

Questionnaire: Summary Report: 09/09/2019

Rural and Human Service Transi...

Survey Results

Question	Answers	Skips
01 What is the future vision for your county transit system? (Mandatory)	2 100%	0 0%
Unknown 224.873.980	Wednesday, Sep 4th 11:22AM	
We are a City system and the council is very much in favor of continuing to grow our system. 224.601.600	Thursday, Aug 29th 2:24PM	
02 Is there local support/interest in developing a multi-jurisdictional transit service? (Mandatory)	2 100%	0 0%
possibly 224.873.980	Wednesday, Sep 4th 11:22AM	
Not at this time. 224.601.600	Thursday, Aug 29th 2:24PM	
03 What is your system's greatest current need? How could that need be met? (Mandatory)	2 100%	0 0%
unknown 224.873.980	Wednesday, Sep 4th 11:22AM	
More passengers. More marketing and changing the idea that the transit is only for seniors and the disabled. 224.601.600	Thursday, Aug 29th 2:24PM	
04 Does your county's/municipal's transit system experience any difficulties in meeting demand? (Mandatory)	2 100%	0 0%
timing is the biggest problem - work and program start times are very close/coincide creating difficulty in meeting on time services for the number of clients that need transportation 224.873.980	Wednesday, Sep 4th 11:22AM	
Not at this time. 224.601.600	Thursday, Aug 29th 2:24PM	
05 On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being almost no demand and 5 being high demand) is there a need to provide transportation so that residents can get to and from work? (Mandatory)	2 100%	0 0%
5 224.873.980	Wednesday, Sep 4th 11:22AM	
4 224.601.600	Thursday, Aug 29th 2:24PM	
06 On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being no coordination and 5 being frequent coordination with numerous entites) is there coordination between your transit system and major employers/educational institutions (local) (Mandatory)	2 100%	0 0%

2 224.873.980	Wednesday, Sep 4th 11:22AM
1 224.601.600	Thursday, Aug 29th 2:24PM
07 Is there a need to expand Human Services Transportation (HST) service? (Mandatory)	Answers: 2 (100%), Skips: 0 (0%)
0% 50% 100%	COUNT PERCENT
No	2 100%
Yes	0 0%
08 If you answered yes to question #7, what additional services are needed?	Answers: 0 (0%), Skips: 2 (100%)
There is no data to display.	
09 Provide three suggestions for improving transit in your county:	Answers: 1 (50%), Skips: 1 (50%)
More hours - we are 8-4, but have had requests from passengers for 7am and 6pm 224.601.600	Thursday, Aug 29th 2:24PM
10 How can advertising for transit services be improved (excluding increased funding)?	Answers: 1 (50%), Skips: 1 (50%)
help in how to change the perception of the transit 224.601.600	Thursday, Aug 29th 2:24PM
11 What type of assistance from Northeast Georgia Regional Commission is or would be most beneficial for your county's transit system? (Mandatory)	Answers: 2 (100%), Skips: 0 (0%)
training 224.873.980	Wednesday, Sep 4th 11:22AM
Walton County, where we are located, does not have a transit system. I know there is an interest in the areas outside of Social Circle, but not support or funding. 224.601.600	Thursday, Aug 29th 2:24PM

PAGE 3

**Northeast Georgia Region Rural Human Service Transportation Plan
Technical Stakeholders Focus Group
Northeast Georgia Regional Commission
Athens, Georgia
May 17, 2012**

In Attendance:

CHA

Daniel Foth
Phillip Guthrie

C&M

Clara Axaam
William McFarland

NEGRC

John Devine
Burke Walker

Technical Stakeholders

See attached sign-in sheet

Are these the right foundational elements?

- Improve the urban-rural transition element – recognize the need to thread the rural transit services that are available into the existing public transportation system in Clarke County
- The large disabled population must be recognized as a target population, as many of these residents may not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare
- Pay attention to the businesses that will likely develop and locate in proximity to major employers
- Recognize working poor/underemployment as a part of analysis that drives assumptions about transit dependent riders

Where do we need to do “deeper dives”?

Feedback on Employment Centers

Elbert County

- There is a large Pilgrim’s Pride plant which is the single largest employer in the county
- Hi Lo has a distribution center which currently employs 35 to 40 people. They are looking to expand to 100 employees in the near future
- Motor Tech has 100 employees

- Bubba Foods has seasonal jobs; they reach 100 employees at peak

Morgan County

- Small positive daily inflow of workers may be the result of a high number of small businesses, but is not because of large employment centers. There may be transportation needs to scattered small business sites.

Clarke County

- The One Athens study determined that there are a high number of employers who are paying low wages.
- Make the distinction that many people who are in poverty are the working poor.
- There is more “underemployment” than unemployment in the county.

Jackson County

- All located near Pendergrass, Ga.
 - BBB distribution center
 - Carters
 - TD Automotive (production line)

Newton County

- Baxter International (pharmaceutical firm, hiring large numbers)

Caterpillar plant is hiring approximately 100 by end of 2012 and 100 to 200 more in 2013 as they gear up for a 2015 opening

Feedback on Transportation Systems

Morgan County

- There is a 50/50 ridership split between seniors and other public transportation riders (like those going to work or to shop)
- Trip price is \$1.50 within county and \$1.25 within city?
- Service is intra-county only
- Demand-response trips are provided where possible.
- There have been efforts to market the service at larger employer sites, including the hospital
- The system has expanded hours to serve the needs of employers and employees
- The system has 4 vehicles
- The system is struggling because of gas prices
- System is stretched to capacity. There is more demand than ability to provide service

Elbert County

- Not many people use the system to get to work, mainly because of high cost

- Round trip prices average around \$12 daily – this is too expensive for many seniors to go to the Senior Centers every day, or as often as they'd like.
- The system has 3 vehicles
- Many people do not know that the service exists
- There likely would be demand if the cost was more reasonable and the service options were more flexible
- System will provide service outside of the county for a fee (\$50 to Atlanta)

What's important to address? What are the "got to haves" in a NEGR RHST plan?

- Inter-county transport
- What are you going to do about unmet need? What can you offer people whose needs are not currently being addressed?
- There is no service for 2nd & 3rd shift workers or on the weekend
- Sensitivity to the various needs of the senior population
 - Health care/medical services
 - Specialty treatment is typically offered in limited areas. This is a huge unmet need if transportation service does not cross county lines.
 - Getting day health care workers to senior residences
 - Other Senior citizen services
- Service must be both cost effective and affordable
- Ease of use, especially for disabled and feeble riders, who have problems with normal use and with transfers
- It's not just about abstract figures and dollars, the stories about people are important to remember.
- Rules/policies around appointments can be a barrier
 - DHS system requires 48 hour notice
 - There is some lack of flexibility in scheduling
 - Logistical difficulties occur
 - The 24 hour scheduling rule means that emergency transportation is usually an unmet need
- Systems are not meeting current demand even before demand (especially senior and employment related) begins dramatic growth
- Quantifying unmet need and demand is problematic
- Remember: "The loss of mobility signals the loss of many other things in life"

Leveraging & Coordinating Resources and Assets

- Increasing service flexibility could facilitate win-win partnerships with private industry (especially larger employers)
- Participants agreed that it would be useful to have regional level training or technical assistance on rules and regulations, best practices, etc. A session on matching funds was suggested as one

possible topic. (CHA agreed to contact the regional transportation systems to gather information on their operations and outline the information and technical assistance needs of each)

- Participants suggested that meeting with senior transportation managers from all counties would be a great source of information exchange. Note: afternoons are better logistically for this group. There is a monthly meeting of Senior Center Directors at NEGRC that may serve as a good forum.

What should we be aware of in engaging the community on a vision for the NEGR RHST plan?

- Let them know that the discussion is not focused on cutting service
- Be cognizant of the potential for literacy and language challenges when doing broader engagement
- Assuring a broad cross-section of stakeholders are invited (participants were encouraged to suggest stakeholders to add to the list).
- Some current riders believe that future increases in the senior population will cause senior transportation service needs to negatively impact the system's ability to provide service for them
- Riders often do not understand how funding restrictions constrain operation

**NEGRC RHST Plan
Visioning Focus Group
Madison, Georgia
June 12, 2012**

In Attendance:

CHA

Daniel Foth
Phillip Guthrie
Karl Smith

C&M

Clara Axam
William McFarland

NEGRC

John Devine

Stakeholders

See attached sign-in sheet

Are these the right foundational elements for the plan? Is the information accurate?

Attendees generally agreed that CHA was looking at the right elements for forming a planning foundation. Participants offered the following feedback:

- The GDOT ride share program should be considered as existing transportation service available to residents of the region.
- With regard to employment centers, the Baxter Plant will equal the employment at the Caterpillar plant. Baxter should be added to the inquiry as to whether the plant will generate enough ridership demand to warrant service.
- There is a lot of inter-regional travel, not just people going to Atlanta or out of State.

What existing transportation service issues are important to address?

- There was agreement that the region could benefit from a higher level of coordination, but caution about how coordination would be accomplished at the operational/service delivery level without negatively impact local service delivery and local service providers.
- The coordination methodology selected is very important. It should not be one size fits all
- What will be the effect of the RHST plan on senior centers where DHS currently reimburses for transportation?

- Senior centers are concerned with the possible loss of revenue that would result from shrinking DHS travel reimbursements. **Senior** center provided transportation has traditionally been a revenue stream for senior centers.
- Senior centers provide personalized service.
- DHS commented that reimbursements are dropping because of shrinking dollars. This revenue stream will likely drop in the future as well. DHS is currently working on more centralized and coordinated services to get better trip efficiencies, which could affect the level at which DHS can reimburse senior centers and the availability of personalized services
- DHS is hoping to make funds go further because of greater efficiencies.
- Planning for the RHST plan should consider need and not just look at “numbers”. The RHST plan should determine solutions to address needs.
- The plan should be designed to address current needs while building in the ability to expand service at a later time based on need.
- To be relevant, the plan must identify the target ridership. Who is the ridership? The plan must meet the needs of the rider.
- The RHST plan should improve service. Will the level and quality of service suffer from a regional approach?
- The most populated counties in the region seem to dominate decisions regarding regional approaches, especially in terms of funding for implementation. How do we make sure that will not happen here?
- It seems as though the level and type of services offered by local county providers provide will shrink. How will coordination resulting from the RHST plan affect the budgets of existing providers? Local county providers are doing their best to provide services needed and funding is already short.
- There is support for the hub and spoke system, which gives a larger role to local service providers, rather than an RHST plan that moves riders from point A to Point B on a single vehicle.
- The RHST plan should facilitate riders being able to get to Athens, then transferring to the public system
- Will all vehicles be ADA accessible?

Is there a need for additional rural public transit?

- There are pockets of areas that need public transportation
- The need and demand is very fluid. The region is changing rapidly.

Areas that are expected to see increased development currently have no public transit. Should the RHST Plan consider providing public transit to those areas?

- The Plan should consider potential development. Don't just look at GA. 316, look at the I-20 corridor as well.

- Don't just focus on regional development patterns that traditionally have been "pushed/marketed". The Plan should consider local development patterns as well.

How would you better coordinate services?

- There is already some level of coordination between existing transit systems. Understanding and support exists for piggyback trip service.
- Funding from State agencies should be pooled first. Coordinated or bundled funding might help improve service

What would you do to encourage transit use?

- Provide some flexibility in structure of service. Work type trips can be more like fixed route as opposed to demand response.
- Marketing is the big piece.
- Alleviate the fears of potential new riders about the population that typically rides transit. People (riders) have to be comfortable.
- Partner with major employers and employment centers. This could help with long term funding as well.
- Provide trips to higher education centers and employment training center. There is no adult workforce development facility in Morgan County, creating a demand for transit to training centers.
- DHS would like to see coordinated resources at the county level so that "everybody doesn't come to DHS" when local needs arise.
- "Gray" the county lines. The rider needs to get to a destination. The county line is unimportant to riders.
- More coordination

What are your ideas for long-term funding?

- Leveraging better to increase federal dollars

What are the advantages and disadvantages of creating a regional central organization for administrative and coordination oversight?

- Banding together in a fuel cooperative to keep operating costs down
- Reliance on county maintenance can be more costly than the private market
- Information and education (workshops and training) on maintenance standards

Note: Participants suggested hosting a presentation by the Coastal region on their coordination efforts

What is your vision for RHST service?

- Elected officials are educated and involved
- More informal coordination, communication and training
- NEGRC organizes a formal committee structure so that when ideas are generated, someone is charged with “doing” and making the ideas actionable
- Riders that represent a range of incomes. Even higher income people (especially seniors) need transportation
- Assistance getting information to residents about current or future service – there are problems with literacy, lack of use of the internet, lack of transportation to get to town-hall meetings about transportation!
- Use of volunteer drivers to address capacity (must solve the insurance dilemma)
- The Village concept, where neighborhoods get together to help others in need
- Piggy-backing and transfer points for service across county lines
- Need an action plan to implement ideas

How would you better coordinate services?

- Many service providers are protective about co-use of vans and equipment. Help is needed to understand the benefits of coordinated service.
- Some expressed caution about coordinating the purchase of vans through State contracts to save money. Counties find themselves at the mercy of the State’s life-cycle guidelines, and often cannot retire vans that should be out of service.
- There is also hesitation about using vans intended for local service to provide “regionally coordinated” trips across county lines, unless there is some provision to compensate for the additional wear and tear.

Long term funding ideas

- Mobilizing people to advocate for transit
- Foundations (such as the Beverly Foundation through AARP)

**NEGRC RHST Plan
Questionnaire Summary Report
July 10, 2012**

We wanted to provide any stakeholder who was not able to attend an outreach meeting, the opportunity to provide their input. The results of this questionnaire are noted below.

.....

In planning for future transportation services for the Northeast Georgia region, we have considered the following factors:

- Population demographics
- Income and poverty levels
- Percentage of population with vehicles
- Commuting and workflow patterns
- Current roadway system
- Location of:
 - Senior centers
 - Medical facilities
 - Education centers
 - Top employment centers
 - Retail centers
- Areas likely to be developed in the future

Are there other factors that should be taken into consideration when planning rural and human services transportation for the Northeast Georgia region? If so, please list them.

- Location of parks
- Location of protected land (avoid placing roads through protected land)
- Public health, e.g. levels of obesity
- Sustainability without large government input in the future
- Sustainability in the event of fuel shortages
- Sustainability if personal wealth diminishes
- Take into consideration corridors where agricultural production occurs. Explore the potential for agri-tourism and other tourism.
- Lack of mass transit opportunities within the region
- The foregoing factors are examples of statistical data. The majority wishes of the residents within each unit of local government should be a first priority factor determined by regional and state agencies, especially when preparing plans which involve local participation, funding, and use of local facilities. Plans developed at regional and state agencies should reflect a genuine effort to determine and respect the wishes of local majorities – those plans should not be

**NEGRC RHST Plan
Visioning Focus Group
Comer, Georgia
June 14, 2012**

In Attendance:

CHA

Daniel Foth
Karl Smith

C&M

Clara Axam
William McFarland

NEGRC

John Devine

Stakeholders

See attached sign-in sheet

Are these the right foundational elements for the plan? Is the information accurate?

Attendees generally agreed that CHA was looking at the right elements for forming a planning foundation. Participants offered the following feedback:

- Lack of transportation for job training is a real problem and should be a future focus area
- Lanier Tech in Jackson County should be added to the list of education centers

What existing transportation service issues are important to address?

- Make sure that funding is available before putting ideas forward in the RHST Plan
- Build interest and awareness with the right people. This includes riders as well as local elected officials, “the people who write the checks.”
- Counties are not maximizing service potential because transportation is a low priority with local politicians.
- Service providers having to “put all eggs (funding) in one basket” rather than being able to leverage multiple funding sources
- Crossing county lines. Geographic boundaries exist because of politics and money
- Would the lines drawn regionally have the same impact as the county lines do in terms of limiting service options for users?
- There is a need for more equitable reimbursement funding streams

disproportionally shaped by special interest groups desiring to influence the shape and direction of such plans or by predetermined formulas which only operate on statistical data.

- Walkable and bikeable pathways

- Traffic light on Hwy 53 @ Jamestown Blvd
- Bike lanes in appropriate places
- Bike paths
- Sidewalks
- Railway for public transportation

What three transportation service issues do you hope an RHST Action Plan will address in the Northeast Georgia region?

- Opportunities for bike commuting and recreation
- Opportunities for pedestrian access to shopping, education, and recreation
- Regional transit
- Rail-to-trails
- Speed reduction
- Only projects involving at least two counties that improves commerce between their populations.
- Inter-county transportation for feeble, disabled or youth (i.e. students) to open employment and educational opportunities for non-drivers
- Develop alternatives to driving to ALL venues, i.e. walkable city blocks, park & ride systems, etc.
- Get 316 right
- Mass transit
- Alternative transportation opportunities
- Traffic control options besides traffic lights (roundabouts etc.)
- Safety through design (i.e. paving and widening highways)
- Interstate Hwy. between Athens and I-85
- Determine actual existing quantitative demand for services and realistic quantitative estimate for future needs on an individual basis for each county, list options for providing such services with related cost estimates over the applicable planning horizon then identify potential funding sources for the above needs.
- Widening Hwy 441 to 4 lanes all the way through
- Hwy 316 intersection upgrades
- Storm water management for paved surface area
- Rails2trails
- Mechanisms to reduce traffic congestion
- Commuter train to Atlanta
- Viability of Watkinsville bus route to Athens
- Bike route alternative for traveling Simonton Bridge Rd (because it is too dangerous for bikers)
- Walk and bikeability

Excluding funding, what are the three most critical transportation needs in your county?

- Improved traffic flow
- Adequate room for bikes either through paved shoulders or designated bike lanes
- Sidewalks
- A safer network of facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians
- More frequent transit service
- Traffic calming
- Affordable alternative to driving for feeble and physically disabled
- Walkable layout as alternative to driving
- Inter-county transportation plans to share services to conserve resources.
- Elimination of all at-grade intersections on GA 316
- Bishop bypass for Highway 44
- Making Simonton Bridge Road, and other county roads, safer for bicyclists and autos
- Alternative, safe transportation routes
- Walkable (sidewalks) options with connectivity to destinations, like parks to schools
- Paving width of roads
- One can only exclude funding if we first agree that a statewide, realistic, adequate, and fair funding solution is absent and that a concrete commitment from the State Legislature to achieving such a funding solution is profoundly critical to solving our statewide transportation needs. Assuming recognition of this fact, the following are critical transportation needs in Oconee County:
 - Maintenance of existing local roadways
 - Improvement of existing (older) local roadways to standard pavement widths, standard horizontal and vertical alignment based on accurate measure of existing volume, speeds, etc., and accurate, realistic projections of vehicle types. Obviously, right-of-way width and drainage facilities will be a factor in achieving this.
 - Coordinated planning for development, (land uses), water & sewer facilities and school facilities with our transportation facilities is essential if we expect to meet our future transportation needs in a sustainable way. This does not mean dictating housing type or transportation mode choices, but it does mean coordinated planning as to location, timing and required improvements for various land uses relative to roads, water, sewer and schools.
 - Mars Hill project
 - Widening Mars Hill Road
 - 316/Oconee Connector overpass
 - Highway 316 intersection upgrades
 - Intersection Safety - camera monitors at frequently run red lights
 - Mass Transit - Connectivity to Athens, the primary destination for commuters
 - Rail service extension to the Caterpillar plant to reduce associated truck traffic

What would you do immediately to address transportation needs in the Northeast Georgia region?

- Build sidewalks and bike lanes
- Inter-county transit
- Create a network of bicycle and pedestrian paved trails and rail-trails
- Stop widening the roads and increasing auto dependency
- Pilot a "mainline" park & ride system from hub to hub in the NE Georgia region to test viability, show alternative and grow awareness of sustainable conservation of resources for the longevity of growth in our region
- Find a better strategy than the TSPLOST to raise funds
- Develop a more useful mass transit plan
- Encourage alternative methods of transportation (carpooling)
- Bring business people into the budget planning of DOT.
- Plan a budget and meet the budget.
- The solution to this problem is beyond the financial capabilities of local government resources. States and the federal government have historically passed unfunded mandates to local government, and then limited revenue options for those same local governments. We need a coordinated effort from ACCG, GMA, Chambers of Commerce and a wide variety of other interests to lobby the state legislature for a comprehensive, workable, fair solution. Given the volume of interstate traffic through Georgia, the lowest gas tax of the 50 states, and the fairness of user fees, it seems that a gas tax increase and registration (tag) requirements for non-motorized vehicles should be included in that solution.
- Get list of projects for Oconee County on TSPLOST ballot
- No more road widening - increasing capacity creates more demand and more maintenance costs.
- Create and advertise mass transit routes to employment hubs from outlying rural areas to lessen commuter pressure.
- Create bike/scooter routes following electric utility lines - they are the most brutally efficient routes between towns.
- Create more walkable/bikeable areas
- Communicate with Caterpillar about any concerns/wishes they have

Is there a need for additional rural public transit?

Response	Percentage	Count
Yes	54%	7
No	46%	6
Total Responses		13

- This question asks for a simple Yes/No answer to a complicated question. Given a choice of yes or no, I chose the answer that I think best fits Oconee County. Please note this response is limited to my opinion for Oconee County. Each local government community must answer that question for itself.

What would you do to encourage more transit use in the Northeast Georgia region?

- Access to express buses to downtown and the university
- Parking structures instead of parking lots
- Shade and adequate bus stops
- To be seen as a viable alternative to private automobiles, transit must be frequent, consistent, clean, safe, affordable, predictable, and convenient
- Once alternative comes online I'd have "tour days" of reduced fares to promote awareness, increase parking fees and encourage vendors to offer bus pass discounts (i.e. show the pass for nominal discount). In the physically disabled community there is already a pent-up demand.
- Must meet other more critical needs before this is explored
- Connect the routes to common destinations and more populated areas initially. Then have designated pick up areas. Have community dialogue for buy-in and involvement
- Promote tourism.
- I am not sure that there is a good answer to that question. Having heard endless arguments on both sides of the issue over a 32 year career in planning, I am still profoundly conflicted between the idea of "public and social benefits" of government subsidized transit programs and a fundamental belief in limited government and user paid services. I have strong suspicions that private enterprise could do a more efficient job but we will probably never discover if that is true.
- Keep cost reasonable
- You need more density of population before this really becomes economical feasible.....once you get to a city you can walk to only small areas.....cities are so spread out that even with bus service they are not attractive to a lot of folks....you need denser retail areas with denser population around them to get mass transit in the region to work
- Work with the region's major employers to coordinate an incentive program for employees who take the bus to work.

- Develop a smartphone app with real-time bus location, route maps, etc.
- Dedicate underused parking lots on the bus route as park-and-ride locations.
- I just do not see how it is viable, but it is certainly worthy of a study
- Build public railway system

On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being almost no demand and 5 being high demand) is there a need to provide transportation so that residents can access job training?

Response	Percentage	Count
1 (Almost no demand)	31%	4
2	31%	4
3	15%	2
4	15%	2
5 (High demand)	8%	1
Total Responses	100%	13

On a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being almost no demand and 5 being high demand) is there a need to provide transportation so that residents can get to and from work?

Response	Percentage	Count
1 (Almost no demand)	31%	4
2	31%	4
3	15%	2
4	0%	0
5 (High demand)	23%	3
Total Responses	100%	13

How would you achieve better coordination?

- More government to government planning to promote sustainable growth of a networked system that takes into consideration how the region will grow. I think that a supply / major thorough fare could be improved, with alternatives to the individual per car method for the movement citizens.
- Presently, there is nothing to coordinate, and no interest among most to move on this issue
- Selection based on commitment to a long term initiative of research and proposal.
- Knowledge-based but include key groups representing diverse stakeholders
- Involve fewer agencies to reduce bureaucratic malaise
- We currently seem to have a great deal of coordination in the region. We have MACORTS, and the T-SPLOST committees. There is also a great deal of cooperation between County Commission Chairs. I would encourage the regional agencies to be very receptive to local government input on regional plans.
- Not qualified to answer
- I am not convinced that is the case.
- Need regional rail system for public transportation

What questions or concerns would you raise about more coordination of transit services across the region?

- Laws that prohibit inter-county transit service.
- Too many self-serving individuals without long term vision will make decisions based on short term advantage to too few and not the sustainable future citizen.
- How do we avoid counties like Oconee subsidizing counties like Oglethorpe?
- What is the initial timeline for planning, research and development, funding acquisition for each phase, and minimum commitment needed?
- Provide an outline from one recognized source and forward to county governments for review. Provide conclusion in a timely manner with definitive direction. Point to progress not pondering.
- We need to preserve local choice when it comes to funding, timing and priorities, especially for local facilities.
- Who pays for administration? Rural areas may not see the need
- Lack of transit access to the countryside is a de facto exclusionary setup that limits opportunities for employment and enjoyment for those without access to a car.
- Rural areas (i.e., non-Athens) naturally should be hesitant to cede local control
- Concern is that the focus is on building more roads to accommodate more vehicles instead of investing in a public rail system that will meet future needs.

What are your ideas for long-term funding of transit in the Northeast Georgia Region?

- Dedicated public funds should support public transit, as should the state gas tax.
- Fee per mile for vehicles, car inspection requirement for safety and fuel effectiveness, non-subsidized ticket price for mass transit except by application / reviewed special case for specified hardship cases, increase parking fees and reduce some areas to walking or cycling only to reduce maintenance cost of existing surfaces.
- Keep mass transit option open by forming study groups
- Gather a group that is geographically representative of area that will directly benefit. Facilitate and educate an organized group with representation of elected officials, economic development, and chamber of commerce personnel. Complete Federal grant application for study phase and utilization of existing research. Create goals and deadlines. Go beyond planning and put words to work.
- Re-define the "Gasoline Tax".
- Use and commit to the available budget
- Give priority consideration to the disabled and elderly. Explore options for user paid service for other rural transit needs.
- Transportation tax
- Regional sales tax
- Dense commercial areas which stand to benefit from a mass transit route should pay a fee equal to a certain percentage of the money they stand to save from reduced single passenger vehicle traffic. Somehow, individual motor vehicle operators need to subsidize the transit user - buses ought to be free to ride to incentivize use since the marginal cost of each additional passenger is negligible. Reducing the number of passenger vehicles will reduce the cost of services and make funding mass transit more realistic.
- TSPLOST (where appropriate)
- No toll roads

APPENDIX

North East Georgia Regional Commission Regional Human Services Transportation Plan: Stakeholder and Community Engagement Plan

Meeting Sign-In Sheets

**North East Georgia Regional Commission
Regional Human Services Transportation Plan: Stakeholder and Community Engagement Plan
April 11, 2012**

Objectives:

- Present the Regional Human Services Transportation Plan (RHST) Plan planning approach to targeted stakeholders, e.g., planning and government service agencies, relevant local staff, County Commissioners, GDOT, NGOs, et. al., and solicit input on whether the planning approach includes the right foundation elements to consider when creating a RHST plan which addresses Northeast Georgia regional transit needs and desires, with particular emphasis on the mobility needs of the senior population , access to employment centers and coordination of services and resources for better efficiency.
- Begin to connect the RHST planning with related areas such as economic development, human services and community development.

Design:

Host facilitated sessions to include:

- Context Meeting with NEGRC and other Technical Staff
- Visioning Sessions with Key Regional Stakeholders
- Report Back Sessions to the NEGRC Board to which the public is invited

Facilitated Sessions:

Context Meeting with Technical Staff

Probable Participants

John Devine will generate a list of stakeholder participants. Invited participants will be cross disciplinary staff level employees from organizations such as:

- Jackson County Transit
- Elberton County Transit
- Morgan County Transit
- Greene County Transit
- Athens Transit
- Northeast Georgia Regional Commission
 - Aging Division
 - Workforce Development Division
 - Planning and Government Services
- Georgia Department of Transportation
- Georgia Department of Community Affairs

- Georgia Department of Human Services
- Georgia Department of Community Health
- LogistiCare (Medicaid transportation contractor)
- MPOs (MACORTS, Gainesville-Hall-Jackson/Barrow, ARC)

Proposed Agenda

- Present the RHST Plan approach
- Driving Questions
 - Are these the right foundational elements?
 - Is the information accurate?
 - Based on your knowledge and experience what concerns are important for CHA to address in the Plan?
 - Do you have ideas for coordinating and leveraging resources?
- Preparing for the Visioning Meetings
 - As we engage stakeholders in visioning, what should we be aware of?

Logistics

- Time:
 - 10:00 am-12:00 noon
- Location:
 - Athens, GA (NEGRC office)

Visioning Meetings

Probable Participants

John Devine will generate a list of stakeholder participants to invite.

- Government and NGO's
 - Involvement of relevant state players
 - Agencies cooperating and working together
- 12 counties
 - County manager and staff level
- Cities in each county
- Chambers
- General public

Agenda

- Context/Framing
 - Project Background
 - Planning Process and Schedule
 - Foundational Elements for planning consideration
- Driving Questions
 - Are these the right foundational elements for the plan? Is the information accurate?
 - What existing transportation service issues are important to address? Do you have ideas?
 - What is your vision for RHST service?
 - What would you do immediately to address current needs?
 - What would you do to encourage transit use?
 - How would you better coordinate services?
 - What are your ideas for long-term funding?

Logistics

- Time:
 - Must be limited to no more than two hours
- Locations:
 - Madison, GA
 - Comer, GA

Feedback Meetings

Probable participants

- NEGRC Board
- Stakeholders who have participated in any of the first three sessions
- General Public

Proposed Agenda

- Highlights from the engagement discussions
- Presentation of a RHST Plan vision based on the visions of the regional plans, and the proposed action plan for implementation
- Driving Question:
 - Does the proposed action plan address the vision and the needs and desires expressed by the stakeholders?

Logistics

- Time:
 - Must be limited to no more than two hours

- 10:00 am -12:00 noon
- Location:
 - NEGRC Offices

Stakeholder Identification

John Devine and Burke Walker will provide lists and contact information.