

NORTHWEST LOUISIANA COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan

FOR NORTHWEST LOUISIANA

Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne
DeSoto, Lincoln, Natchitoches, Red
River, Sabine, and Webster Parishes

FISCAL YEAR 2025

Adopted XXX, 2024

DISCLAIMER:

The preparation of this document was financed through grants from, and disseminated under the sponsorship of, the Federal Highway Administration, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, and the Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments. The United States Government and the State of Louisiana assume no liability for its contents or use thereof.

NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments (NLCOG) complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and other federal equal opportunity laws and, therefore, does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, age, national origin, religion or disability; in admission to, access to, treatment in or operations of its programs, services, or activities. NLCOG does not discriminate in its hiring or employment practices.

Questions, concerns, complaints, or requests for additional information regarding the non-discrimination policies may be directed to the designated Title VI, ADA and Section 504 Compliance Coordinator:

Lisa M. Frazier
Public Involvement Coordinator
(318) 841-5950 (voice)
Lisa.frazier@nlcog.org
625 Texas Street, Suite 200
Shreveport, LA 71101

These policies are intended to cover the most common situations not already covered by the Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments (NLCOG) Bylaws or Personnel Policies. In situations not specifically detailed herein, NLCOG, its committees, supervisors, and employees, shall use its respective best judgment in responding to unusual situations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	3
Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments	4
Required Elements of the Coordinated Plan	4
Coordinated Special Needs Transportation	5
A Closer Look	7
Coordination at the Regional Level	7
Transportation Assets of Our Community	7
Figure 1 – Service Providers	9
Transportation Disadvantaged Populations	20
Figure 2 – Population Estimates of People With a Disability	21
Figure 3 – Map of Population Estimates of People With a Disability	23
Figure 4 – Population Estimates of Low-Income Individuals	24
Figure 5 – Map of Population Estimates of Low-Income Individuals	25
Figure 6 – Population Estimates of Veterans	26
Figure 7 – Map of Population Estimates of Veterans	27
Figure 8 – Population Estimates of Persons With Limited English Proficiency	28
Figure 9 – Map of Persons With Limited English Proficiency	29
Figure 10 - Population Estimates of Zero Vehicle Households	30
Figure 11 – Map of Zero Vehicle Households	31
Figure 12 – Population Estimates of Seniors	32
Figure 13 – Map of Estimates of Seniors	33
Figure 14 – Population Estimates of Minorities	34
Figure 15 – Map of Population Estimates of Minorities	35
Public and Human Service Transportation Needs	37
Unmet Needs of Transportation Disadvantaged	37
Gaps in Service	38
Duplications	41
Challenges	41
Future Mobility	44
Stakeholders	45
Goals, Objectives and Strategies	46
Figure 16 – LaDOTD Statewide Strategies and Actions	52
Figure 17 - Regional Goals Correlated to Statewide Strategies and Actions	55

Implementing Goals, Objectives, and Strategies	60
Measuring Success	60
Next Steps	61
Appendix A – Definitions	
Appendix B – Elements of a Memorandum of Understanding	
Appendix C – Public Transportation Travel Training Program	
Appendix D – Human Services Needs and Direction Technical Memorandum	
Appendix E – Mailing List for Quarterly Meetings	
Appendix F – Ridership Survey Results	

DRAFT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Planning Coalition is to work collaboratively to improve transportation services for persons with lower incomes, older adults, and individuals with disabilities by identifying needs, understanding resources, maximizing mobility, and minimizing costs for the entire community.

The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments, along with public transportation providers and human service agencies across the ten-parish region of Northwest Louisiana, developed this plan as required by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) under federal law and as part of the continuing, coordinated, and comprehensive planning process. The plan serves as a unified, comprehensive strategy for public transportation service delivery that identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with limited incomes. It lays out strategies for meeting those needs and prioritizes ways to meet them. The vision includes goals and action steps that support a service concept for regional and community-based service networks.

Identifying the needs and gaps in current service are the cornerstones of this plan. Public transportation is particularly important to people who are considered transportation disadvantaged. Transportation-disadvantaged people, otherwise known as individuals with special transportation needs, are those who are unable to transport themselves due to their age, income, or health condition. Partnering with local human services agencies, including the councils on aging, agencies assisting those with disabilities, medical and mental health providers, organizations addressing the needs of the homeless, community service agencies, and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development enabled this plan to address the needs within the community.



The first step in developing a coordinated plan was to understand the background and history of coordinated planning, both locally and nationally. Taking a closer look at the regional transportation landscape provided a way to forge a common vision, avoid working at cross-purposes, and align work programs toward common goals. Coordination among the many service providers leads to an opportunity to identify mobility needs. The goal of this coordinated planning was to stretch scarce resources and improve the mobility of everyone in our communities.

To move forward in the planning process, obtaining an inventory of existing transportation assets of the region was the next critical step. Based on a two-fold approach – data-driven and observation-derived – the coalition visualized areas of greatest need, along with areas of concentrated populations of the transportation disadvantaged. After evaluating unmet needs, coordination challenges, and existing assets, the coalition established goals and objectives that outline the region’s approach for moving forward with coordinated transportation planning in Northwest Louisiana.

This page intentionally left blank.

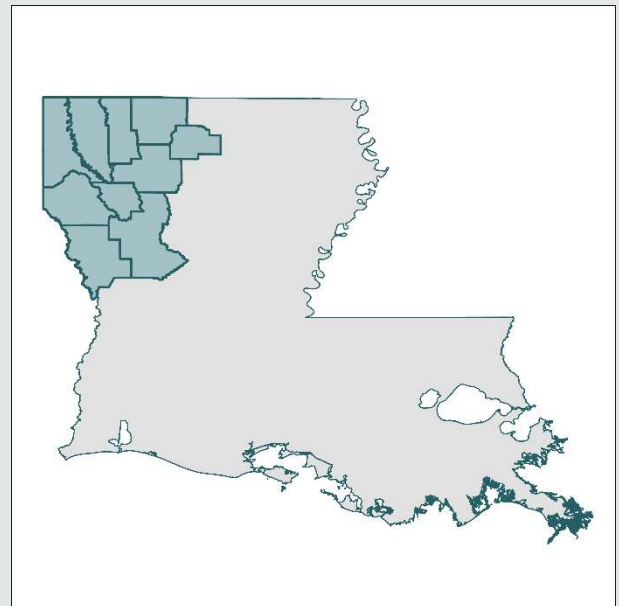
INTRODUCTION

A robust public transportation and enhanced mobility network is essential to focused regional growth, an increased quality of life for all residents, and a healthy environment and economy. Public transportation offers an affordable means of transportation and an alternative to personal vehicle ownership.

Public transportation and enhanced mobility transportation serve many purposes for a range of people – teens traveling to their first jobs, young adults who are pinching pennies or who choose not to own a vehicle, seniors who can no longer drive safely, people with physical or mental limitations, and those who cannot afford the expenses of owning a vehicle or choose to conserve resources.

Public transportation includes various types of multiple-occupancy vehicle services, such as bus, charter, and demand-response options within the ten-parish region of Northwest Louisiana. These parishes include Bienville, Bossier, Caddo, Claiborne, DeSoto, Lincoln, Natchitoches, Red River, Sabine, and Webster.

This document is the region’s Coordinated Public Transportation – Human Services Transportation Plan. It serves as a unified, comprehensive strategy for public transportation service delivery that identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, youth, and individuals with limited incomes. It lays out strategies for meeting those needs and prioritizes ways to meet them.



Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation Planning Area

The vision includes goals and action steps that support a service concept for regional and community-based service networks.

The plan was originally developed in response to new requirements for planning for special needs transportation in the 2005 federal transportation law, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). This update covers federal fiscal years 2025–2028 and addresses updated requirements and guidance contained in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, signed by President Biden on November 15, 2021. The legislation reauthorizes surface transportation programs for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 through FY 2026.

The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments (NLCOG) is an intergovernmental association of local governments established to assist in planning for common needs, cooperating for the mutual benefit, and coordinating for sound regional development. NLCOG serves as the Regional Planning Council and its purpose is to strengthen both the individual and collective power of local governments and to help them recognize regional opportunities, eliminate unnecessary duplication, and make joint decisions for the benefit of the community. This is achieved by developing and implementing constructive and workable policies and programs for solving area wide problems. These issues include, but are not limited to, matters affecting transportation, economic, health, safety, welfare, education, and regional development issues. As an association of cities, towns, parishes, ports, and state agencies that serves as a forum for developing policies and making decisions about regional growth and transportation issues, NLCOG does not provide any direct services to the population of Northwest Louisiana. However, NLCOG encourages public comment on its policies, programs, and funding cycles, and seeks to increase opportunities for public comment, particularly by historically underserved populations and those that are transportation disadvantaged.

To comply with the federal requirements, NLCOG developed the Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan) in cooperation with public, private, and non-profit transportation providers; human service agencies; passengers and their advocates; and other stakeholders who have an interest. This plan serves as a strategy to map a course for improving coordination between transportation systems and providers, as well as strengthening transportation services for those with special needs. By continuing to cover a diverse set of transportation topics pertinent to individual localities and the region, the Coordinated Plan offers an inclusive snapshot of the region's available services and a comprehensive vision of special needs transportation now and in the future.

REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF THE COORDINATED PLAN

- Inventory of current services.
- Assessment of transportation needs for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and persons with limited incomes.
- Identification of coordination actions to eliminate or reduce duplication in services and strategies for more efficient utilization of resources.
- Strategies to address identified gaps in services.
- The prioritization of implementation strategies.

COORDINATED SPECIAL NEEDS TRANSPORTATION

It is a given that the primary mode of transportation for most people in the Northwest Louisiana region is a private vehicle. However, for those with special transportation needs, driving a car is not always an available or viable option. Special needs transportation is any mode of transportation used by those defined as transportation-disadvantaged or with a special transportation need. This includes buses that have regular stops (i.e., fixed-route transit for the general public, and schools), specialized services such as vans, buses, and taxis that pick-up people at the curb or door (i.e., demand response or dial-a-ride), rideshare programs, volunteer driver services, or any federal, state, and local publicly funded transportation.

Coordinated special needs transportation is when multiple organizations work together for their mutual benefit, gaining economies of scale, eliminating duplication of, expanding, and/or improving the quality of service to better address the transportation needs of the special needs population their agencies serve. According to United We Ride, coordination makes the most efficient use of limited transportation resources by avoiding duplication caused by overlapping individual program efforts. It encourages the use and sharing of existing community resources. There are many levels of coordination, ranging from the basic sharing of training resources to the full integration of services. Examples of coordinating transportation include:

- Establishing feeder services to connect to fixed transit routes.
- Identifying barriers to coordination and advocating for change.
- Making greater use of technology to find providers and schedule trips.
- Finding ways to group riders on the same vehicle even when they are sponsored by different funding agencies.
- Leveraging purchasing power for vehicles, fuel, maintenance, or training.

Regardless of the type of coordination, it can involve the cooperation of:

- Transportation providers — transit agencies, school districts, social service agencies, transportation brokers, private providers, non-profit transportation programs.
- Service providers — such as doctors scheduling medical appointments based on transportation availability, land use planners including mobility options as part of zoning decisions, developers building “walkable” communities.
- People with special transportation needs.

As such, this plan brings together service providers, transportation funders, riders, and the community-at-large to improve special needs transportation throughout Northwest Louisiana. Several elements are involved in the Coordination Plan:

- Assessing transportation needs for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and persons with limited income;
- Inventorying available services to identify areas of redundancy and gaps in service;
- Identifying strategies to reduce or eliminate gaps in and duplication of services; and
- Developing strategies to create a more efficient utilization of resources.

DRAFT

A CLOSER LOOK

Coordinating at the service delivery phase means coordinating also at the planning phase. Coordinated planning is a way to forge a common vision, avoid working at cross-purposes, and align work programs toward common goals. Over the past decade, governments at all levels have placed increasing emphasis on the need to coordinate transportation services. The primary goal in this coordination effort is to create efficiencies that will lead not only to improved service but expanded service.

COORDINATION AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL

Regional plans address cross-jurisdictional issues and facilitate connectivity for a service, such as transportation or education. Regional bodies involve local agencies from multiple jurisdictions as regional plans are developed. Regional plans give direction to local plans, and local plans also feed into regional plans. Coordination provides an opportunity to identify mobility needs and better manage mobility than just providing rides. During the coordination process, two or more organizations interact to accomplish their transportation objectives and to achieve greater cost-effectiveness in their service delivery. The goal of coordination is to stretch scarce resources and improve the mobility of everyone.

In addition, the Coordinated Plan serves as the framework for the prioritization of projects seeking funding through the FTA Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) and FTA Rural Public Transportation Program (Section 5311).

TRANSPORTATION ASSETS OF OUR COMMUNITY

The region's transit system is a network of services provided by a variety of agencies within the urban, suburban and rural areas. The figure of transportation assets of the region primarily focuses on the major public/non-profit transportation providers.

Urban and Rural Transit

SporTran provides transit service for the city of Shreveport and parts of Bossier City every day with varying hours of operation. The system is operated by Shreveport Transit Management. SporTran maintains a fleet of over 50 buses equipped to handle all passengers, including those

with disabilities. The buses are equipped with the latest emission reduction systems and include dual-fuel (hybrid) buses, and buses are powered by compressed natural gas (CNG). OnDemand is SporTran's demand-responsive service for qualifying persons. OnDemand offers a direct route from designated OnDemand stop to OnDemand stop for riders in one of the OnDemand locations/zones. OnDemand vehicles are specially equipped with wheelchair lifts/ramps and other accessibility features.

OnDemand replaced SporTran's former LiftLine service, providing direct transport for those in need of Paratransit (ADA) accessibility. OnDemand provides faster service for the OnDemand locations, bypassing the stops and hubs riders don't need. OnDemand is an opportunity for SporTran to build rural connectivity. For residents in outlying areas without access to a standard bus line, OnDemand can get them to another OnDemand stop or connect to one of the hubs. OnDemand fares are free through 2024.

Most rural residents continue to rely on personal vehicles to get around, but some people can't afford a car or truck. Others are elderly or have illnesses that impede driving. Rural Americans skew older; have more health problems; and must travel greater distances for social visits, health care, and daily chores than city-dwellers. And rural residents—especially African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans—are generally poorer than their urban counterparts. Bienville, Claiborne, DeSoto, Lincoln, Red River and Webster Parishes provide accessible and affordable transit services in their respective parishes for people of all ages. These providers primarily serve destinations in the community including grocery stores, banks, medical facilities, work sites, job training sites, and senior centers.

Specialized Transit

Many of the transit providers that currently participate in the Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation program fall under the category of specialized transit. The characteristics of these organizations and agencies can be summarized as demand-responsive and tailored to meet the personal needs of the residents in the service area. Councils on Aging provide transportation to meal sites across their parishes while ARCs provide transportation for their clients to work sites.

Figure 1 – Service Providers and Service Data (07/01/2023 – 06/30/2024)

BIENVILLE PARISH			
Agency	Bienville Parish Council on Aging		
Funding	FTA Section 5311 – Rural Transportation		
Service provided	The Bienville Parish Public Transit provides demand-response public transportation for Bienville Parish. This transportation is available to all persons of all ages.		
Geography served	Bienville Parish		
Operating hours	6:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	7		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours
8,963	144,287	12,537	0

BOSSIER PARISH			
Agency	Bossier Parish Council on Aging		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	The Bossier Parish Council on Aging provides demand-responsive transportation for the elderly and disabled in Bossier Parish.		
Geography served	Bossier Parish with trips to Shreveport		
Operating hours	4:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday (routes may differ on operating times)		
Vehicles	7 / 7 (all lift-equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours
7,379	63,127	15,989	0

CADDO PARISH			
Agency	Shreveport Area Transit System (SporTran)		
Funding	FTA Section 5307 – Urbanized Area Formula Program		
Service provided	SporTran has a fleet of over 50 buses equipped to handle all passengers, including those with disabilities. OnDemand is the demand-responsive paratransit service with wheelchair lifts/ramps and other accessibility features that allow maximum mobility for customers with disabilities that are unable to use SporTran's fixed route buses because of their disabilities. An application must be made to SporTran for this service. When qualified, a client must schedule service 24 hours in advance.		
Geography served	Shreveport and Bossier City		
Operating hours	Fixed Route – 4:55 a.m.-1:15a.m. Monday through Friday 5:30 a.m.-1:15a.m. Saturday; 7:55 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Sunday Paratransit: 5:30 a.m. - 1:15 a.m. Monday through Friday 7:15 a.m. - 1:15 a.m. Saturday; 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Sunday		
Vehicles	125		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Agency	Socialization Services, Inc.		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Demand-responsive and fixed for the elderly and those with disabilities		
Geography served	Cedar Grove, Mooretown and Hollywood neighborhoods in Shreveport		
Operating hours	8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	1 lift-equipped		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Agency	The ARC Caddo-Bossier		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Demand-responsive services to qualified clients with disabilities.		
Geography served	Bossier and Caddo Parishes		
Operating hours			
Vehicles	7		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Agency	New Horizons Independent Living Center		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	New Horizons serves adults with all types of disabilities, as well as high school students with disabilities who are transitioning to the community and to the workforce.		
Geography served	Bossier and Caddo Parishes		
Operating hours			
Vehicles			
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

CLAIBORNE PARISH			
Agency	Claiborne Parish Office of Community Services		
Funding	FTA Section 5311 – Rural Transportation		
Service provided	Claiborne Parish Police Jury Office of Community Services operates transportation available to all residents of the parish.		
Geography served	Claiborne Parish with trips to Bossier and Caddo Parishes most days (will also transport to Minden, Arcadia, and Ruston if needed)		
Operating hours	5:45 a.m. – 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	5 (all lift equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours
3,866	76,869	3,847	436

DESOTO PARISH			
Agency	DeSoto Parish Council on Aging		
Funding	FTA Section 5311 – Rural Transportation		
Service provided	DeSoto Public Transit provides full-service, demand-response public transportation in DeSoto Parish.		
Geography served	DeSoto Parish with trips to Bossier and Caddo Parishes		
Operating hours	4:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday (Dialysis on Saturdays route times may vary)		
Vehicles	6 (3 lift equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours
6,295	74,029	9,599	0

Agency	DeSoto Habilitation Services		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	DeSoto Habilitation Services provides transportation for the clients in the Day Hab program. Transportation includes the ride to the Day Hab from their homes and back, to work sites, shopping, doctor appointments, events, activities and field trips.		
Geography served	DeSoto Parish		
Operating hours	5:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	5		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

LINCOLN PARISH			
Agency	Humanitarian Enterprises of Lincoln Parish		
Funding	FTA Section 5311 – Rural Transportation		
Service provided	Humanitarian Enterprises of Lincoln Parish operates the only public transportation system in Lincoln Parish that is accessible and open to all residents of the parish, regardless of age or income.		
Geography served	Lincoln Parish		
Operating hours	6:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	6		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Agency	Lincoln Council on Aging		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Demand-responsive service for the elderly and disabled		
Geography served	DeSoto Parish		
Operating hours	8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	3		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Agency	Louisiana Center for the Blind		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Fixed-route service for blind and visually impaired clients		
Geography served	DeSoto Parish		
Operating hours	8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Monday through Sunday		
Vehicles	4 (2 lift-equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Agency	People Centered Support Services, Inc.		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Route-deviation service for the disabled and Medicaid waiver supported employment services.		
Geography served	Lincoln and Jackson Parishes		
Operating hours	7:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	4 (2 lift-equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

NATCHITOCHE PARISH			
Agency	Natchitoches ARC		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Route-deviation service for the disabled and developmentally disabled.		
Geography served	Natchitoches Parish		
Operating hours	5:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. Monday through Friday 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	2 (1 lift equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Agency	Rapides Area Planning Commission Rural Public Transit Cooperative		
Funding	FTA Section 5311 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	The first phase consists of short-term pilot (2-years) and includes procurement of four vehicles and operating assistance to begin rural curb-to-curb demand response transit service in Natchitoches and Grant Parishes.		
Geography served	Natchitoches Parish		
Operating hours	7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	3 (all lift-equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours
6,381	119,609	3,388	0

RED RIVER PARISH			
Agency	Red River Parish Council on Aging		
Funding	FTA Section 5311 – Rural Transportation		
Service provided	Demand-response for the general public for employment, training and non-emergency medical trips.		
Geography served	Red River Parish		
Operating hours	6:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	5		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours
3,195	66,682	7,369	0

Agency	Red River ARC		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Demand-response for the elderly and disabled		
Geography served	Red River Parish		
Operating hours	6:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., Monday through Sunday		
Vehicles	3		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

SABINE PARISH			
Agency	Sabine Parish ARC		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Route deviation for the mentally disabled.		
Geography served	Sabine Parish		
Operating hours	7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	2 lift-equipped		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Agency	Sabine COA		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Demand-response for the elderly and disabled		
Geography served	Sabine Parish with trips to Bossier, Caddo, DeSoto, and Rapides Parishes, and Natchitoches and Vernon		
Operating hours	6:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday (route times may vary)		
Vehicles	10 (8 lift equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours
14,533	238,673	16,001	0

WEBSTER PARISH			
Agency	Webster Parish Office of Community Services		
Funding	FTA Section 5311 – Rural Transportation		
Service provided	Webster Parish Office of Community Services provides transportation for Title XIX non-emergency medical transportation, welfare to work participants, and for all residents of Webster Parish.		
Geography served	Webster Parish		
Operating hours	6:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	7 (6 lift equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours
5,366	85,371	8,145	96

Agency	Minden ARC		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Fixed-route for the elderly and developmentally disabled		
Geography served	Webster Parish and part of Claiborne Parish		
Operating hours	8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Monday through Sunday		
Vehicles	5 (2 lift equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Agency	Webster COA		
Funding	FTA Section 5310 – Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Disabled		
Service provided	Demand-responsive service for the elderly and disabled		
Geography served	Webster Parish and part of Claiborne Parish		
Operating hours	8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday		
Vehicles	2 (2 lift equipped)		
Vehicle Hours	Vehicle Miles	Passenger Trips	Volunteer Hours

Transit coverage is measured by how many residents live within a half-mile of a transit route or stop. It is used to measure progress toward transit system expansion. Transit coverage analysis also considers the number of jobs located within proximity of transit routes.

TRANSPORTATION DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS

Public transportation is particularly important to people who are considered transportation disadvantaged. Transportation-disadvantaged people, otherwise known as individuals with special transportation needs, are those who are unable to transport themselves due to their age, income, or health condition. For the purposes of this plan, the term “transportation-disadvantaged” and “persons with special transportation needs” are used interchangeably. Transportation-disadvantaged people may have different types of transportation requirements. They may include a frail elderly woman trying to get to a specialized health center or an evening concert, a homeless elementary student trying to get to his or her school, a person with epilepsy trying to get to a social activity, an unemployed student trying to complete an internship, a single mom without a reliable car who works a graveyard shift at a minimum wage job, or a visually impaired individual with a guide dog traveling to visit his parents after working all day.

The Coordinated Plan for Northwest Louisiana identifies special needs transportation populations as individuals with a disability, low-income individuals, and seniors age 65+. The Coordinated Plan also includes the addition of veterans, individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP), and zero-vehicle households as subset target populations. While not necessarily having a special transportation need, both population groups tend to be correlated with one or more special needs categories at a higher rate than the general population.

People with disabilities often have the most varied transportation needs. Disabilities may be physical, mental, emotional developmental, or a combination of these. The ability to access daily needs, including education, employment, and health care, is crucial to maintaining quality of life. Individuals with a disability are often at a disadvantage as their disability may limit their mobility and impede access to services and employment opportunities. In addition to social isolation, limited mobility can lead to higher levels of unemployment and poverty among disabled populations. When compared to the general population, individuals with a disability are more likely to be low-income or unemployed. In the ten-parish region, 25 percent of individuals with a disability are low-income, compared to 20 percent for the general population.

Figure 2 – Population Estimates of People with a Disability

Parish	Total civilian noninstitutionalized population	With a disability	Percent with a disability
Bienville Parish	12,632	2,596	2060.0%
Bossier Parish	123,153	16,315	13.2%
Caddo Parish	231,728	40,538	17.5%
Claiborne Parish	12,273	1,803	14.7%
De Soto Parish	26,610	5,283	19.9%
Lincoln Parish	47,619	6,209	13.0%
Natchitoches Parish	36,715	6,005	16.4%
Red River Parish	7,437	1,523	20.5%
Sabine Parish	21,880	4,662	21.3%
Webster Parish	35,881	5,645	15.7%
Region Totals	555,928	90,579	16.3%

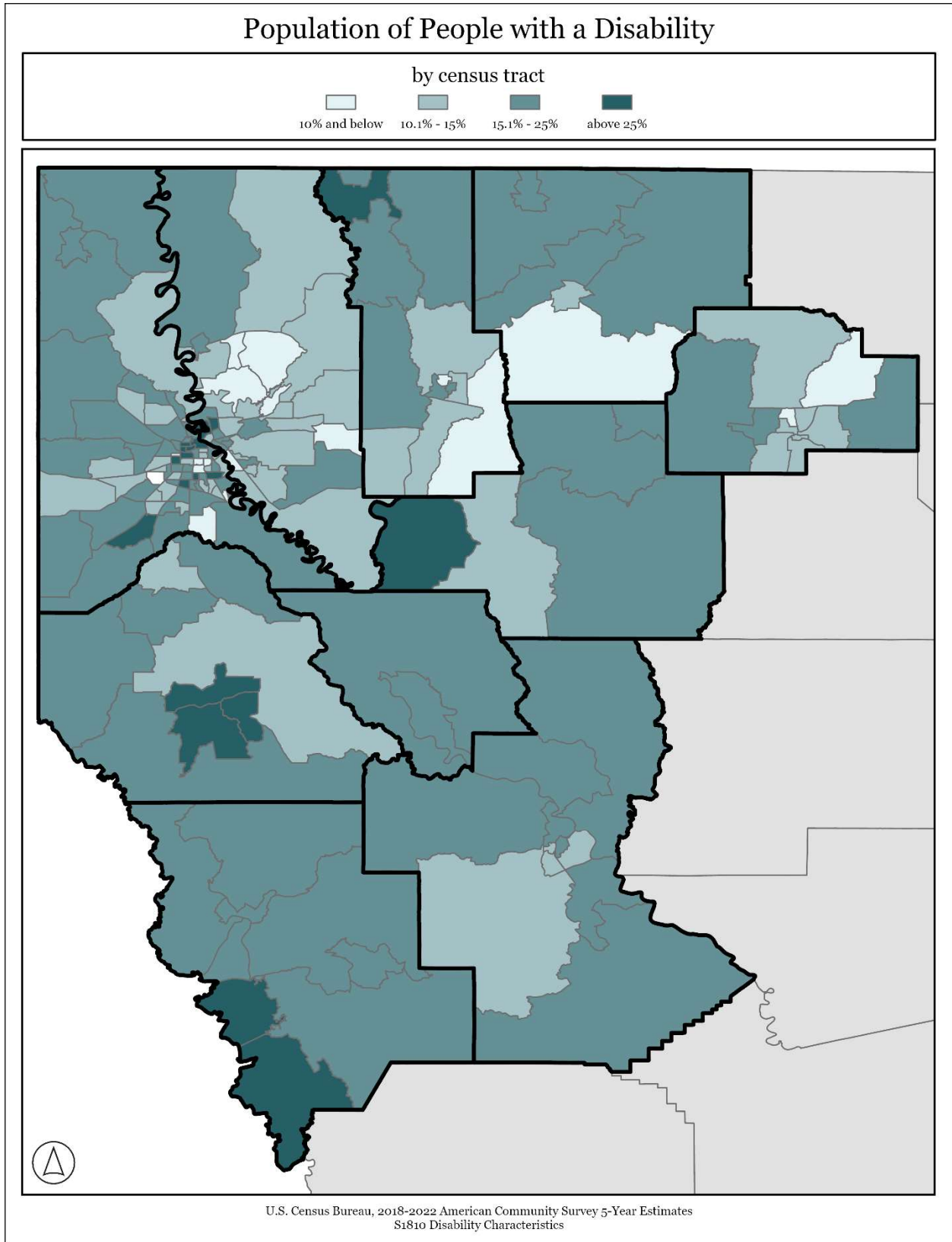
2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S1810: Disability Characteristics

Beyond employment, the transportation needs of individuals with a disability can be life threatening. If a medically vulnerable person is unable to get the medical attention he or she needs, lack of mobility may put a life at additional risk.

In addition to employment and medical treatment, the ability to actively engage in a social life is an important part of life, regardless of ability. Individuals with a disability are more likely to be transit-dependent or rely on another specialized transportation service.

IT IS CRUCIAL TO PROVIDE
APPROPRIATE TRANSPORTATION
OPTIONS, TO ENSURE DISABLED INDIVIDUALS
CAN ACCESS THE SAME LEVEL OF SERVICES
AND OPPORTUNITY AS THE
GENERAL POPULATION.

Figure 3 – Map of Population Estimates of People with a Disability



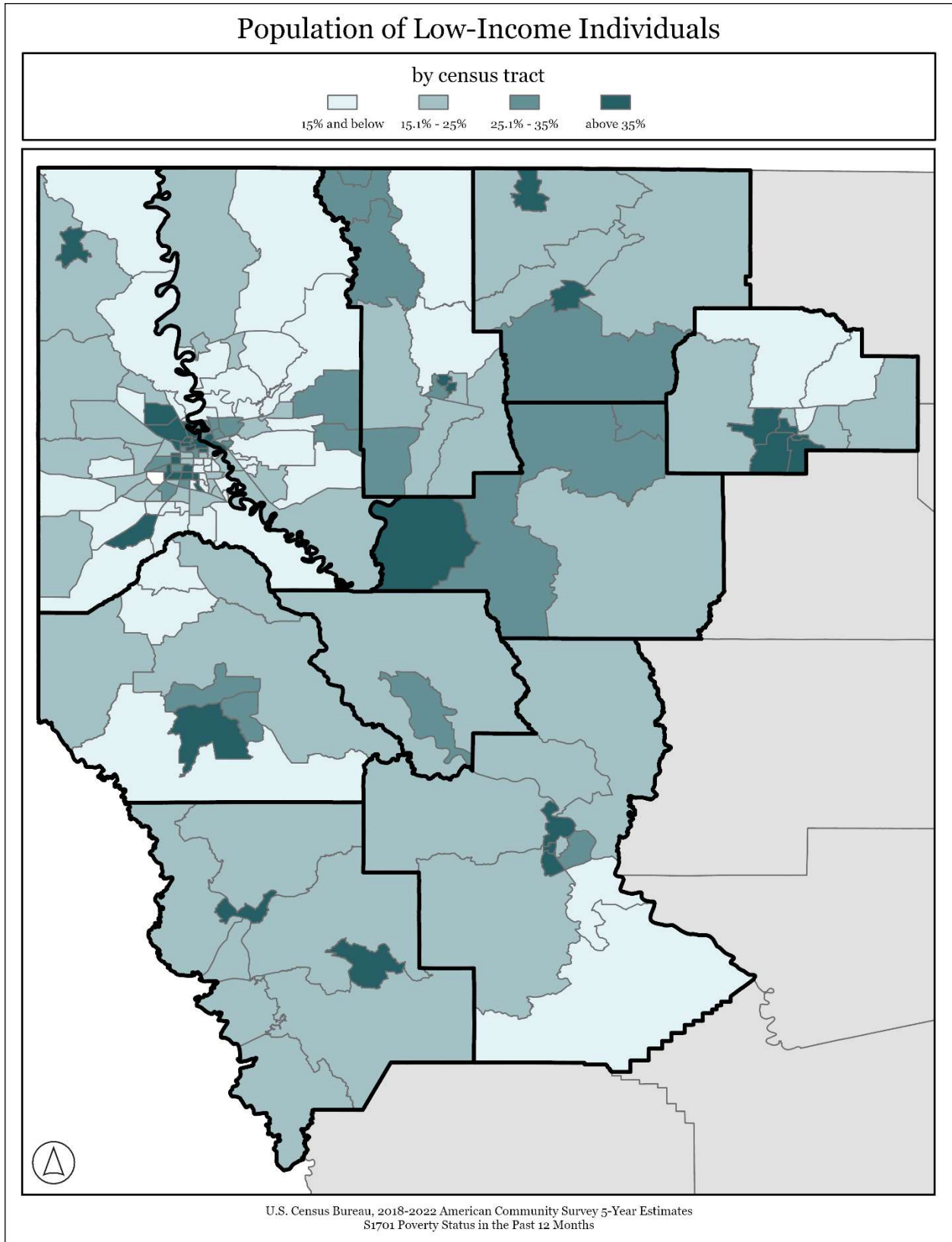
Transportation costs put a tremendous strain on the budgets of individuals with low incomes. A study by the Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution found that the working poor spend a much higher portion of their income on commuting and that the combined cost of commuting and housing make up a larger portion of household budgets of the working poor than other households. For many people in this situation, owning a private vehicle, or being able to maintain a private vehicle, is not a reasonable option. Retaining employment can be difficult for low-income populations if they do not have a reliable private automobile and there are no transportation options. Transit dependent employees who work late night or early morning hours are at a disadvantage due to inconsistent or unavailable transit service.

Figure 4 – Population Estimates of Low-Income Individuals

Parish	Total	Below poverty level	Percent below poverty level
Bienville Parish	12,638	3,928	31.1%
Bossier Parish	126,478	21,074	16.7%
Caddo Parish	231,637	50,825	21.9%
Claiborne Parish	12,280	4,005	32.6%
De Soto Parish	26,614	5,381	20.2%
Lincoln Parish	44,477	13,210	29.7%
Natchitoches Parish	35,426	9,184	25.9%
Red River Parish	7,269	1,800	24.8%
Sabine Parish	21,890	5,237	23.9%
Webster Parish	35,828	9,888	27.6%
Region Totals	554,537	124,532	22.5%

2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S1701: Poverty Status in the Past 12 months

Figure 5 – Map of Population Estimates of Low-Income Individuals



While veterans are not traditionally considered a transportation-disadvantaged group, they often face transportation barriers and have other transportation-disadvantaged characteristics. With Barksdale Air Force Base as an anchor, Northwest Louisiana is home to many military veterans. Transitioning from military service to civilian life can be a difficult process for many returning veterans. At the same time, World War II veterans are well into their 80's and 90's and Korean and Vietnam War veterans are nearly 70 or older. For some veterans and their families, routine transportation is a challenge because of a disability or financial hardship. Many veterans returning home are entering the work force or going back to school with the intent of entering the workforce later.

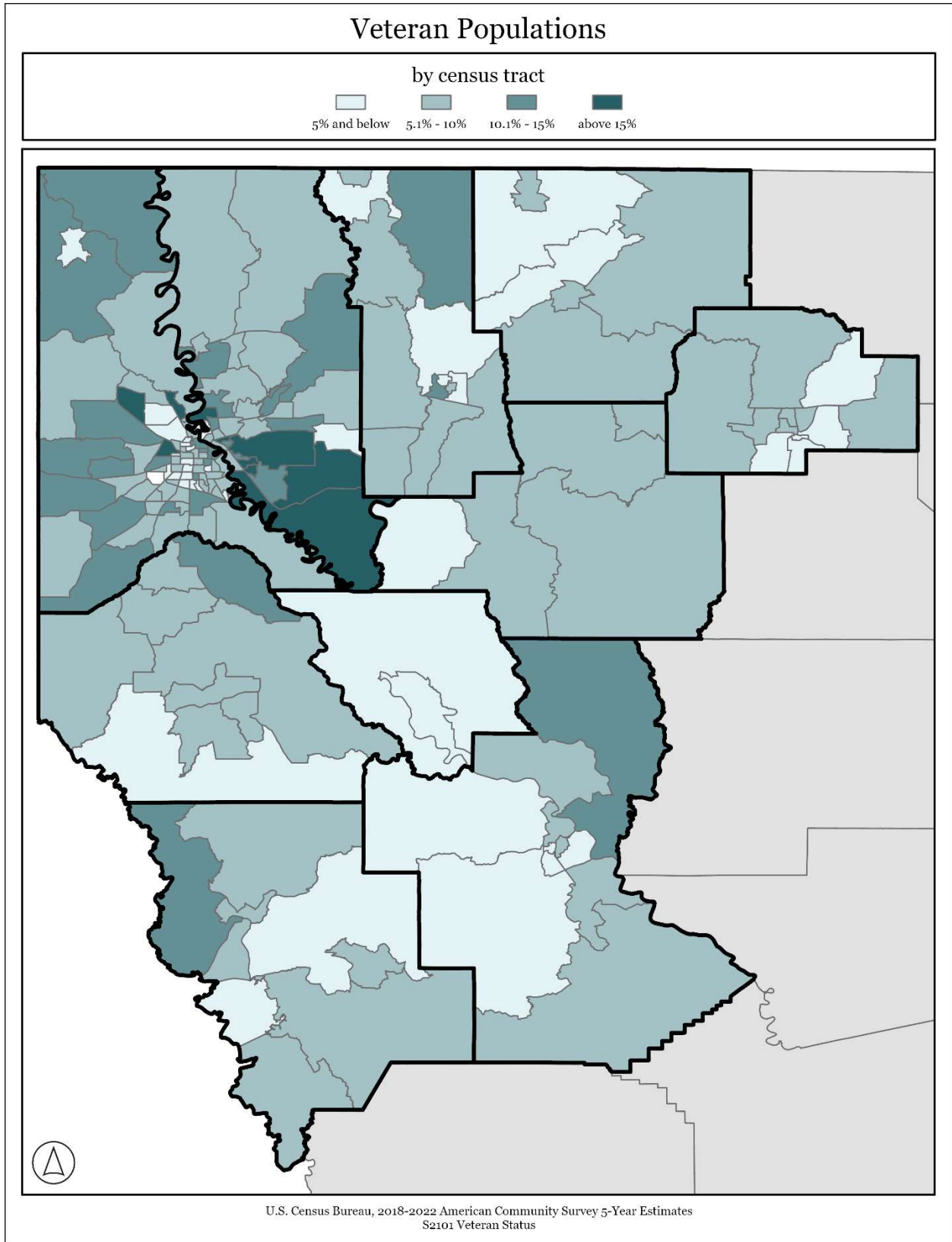
Nationally, veterans make up 9 percent of the population; in the ten-parish region that figure remains the same. Nearly 43 percent of the region's veterans live in Caddo Parish. When compared to the general population, a disproportionately higher percentage of veterans have a disability. This is evident in figure 4 which shows that, in Northwest Louisiana, the proportion of veterans with a disability is 27 percent compared to 19 percent for the region.

Figure 6 – Population Estimates of Veterans

Parish	Civilian population 18 years and over	Veterans	Percent
Bienville Parish	10,047	560	5.6%
Bossier Parish	92,714	10,140	10.9%
Caddo Parish	179,779	14,643	8.1%
Claiborne Parish	11,497	701	6.1%
De Soto Parish	20,413	1,346	6.6%
Lincoln Parish	38,803	2,257	5.8%
Natchitoches Parish	28,953	1,658	5.7%
Red River Parish	5,832	242	4.1%
Sabine Parish	17,038	1,214	7.1%
Webster Parish	28,315	1,967	6.9%
Region Totals	433,391	34,728	8.0%

2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S2101: Veteran Status

Figure 7 – Map of Population Estimates of Veterans



Limited English proficient (LEP) individuals are defined as people who either do not speak English well or do not speak any English. Language difficulties create substantial barriers to accessing employment opportunities, engaging in community or cultural activities, and performing daily tasks. Because they do not speak English well, LEP individuals tend to work lower-wage jobs and are more likely than the general population to have limited incomes.

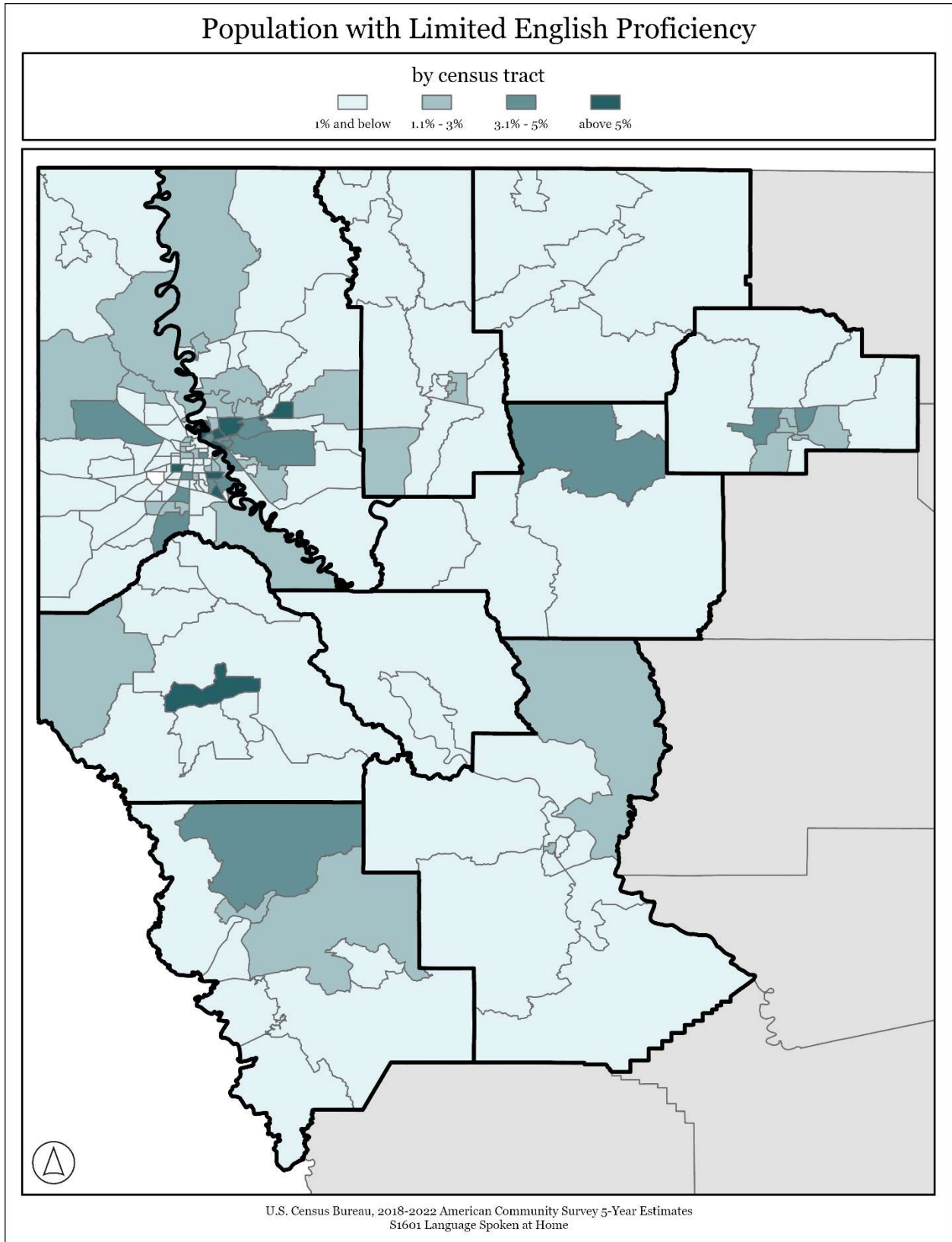
In Northwest Louisiana, more than half of LEP individuals are low-income. Because of this lower-income status, LEP individuals are more likely to depend on public transportation as the cost of owning a vehicle is too expensive. According to the 2018 American Community Survey, more than 11 percent of LEP individuals reported public transportation as their primary means of getting to work compared to 8 percent for fluent English speakers. In addition, many LEP individuals also face barriers in accessing transportation information resources, which can prevent them from utilizing the transportation options that do exist.

Figure 8 – Population Estimates of Persons with Limited English Proficiency

Parish	Pop over 5	Speak English less than very well	Percent	Speak Spanish	Speak Other Indo-European language	Speak Asian and Pacific Island languages
Bienville Parish	12,197	71	0.6%	68	1	2
Bossier Parish	120,462	3,762	3.1%	2,794	300	572
Caddo Parish	221,346	2,920	1.3%	1,574	529	784
Claiborne Parish	13,530	10	0.1%	1	5	4
De Soto Parish	25,232	188	0.7%	63	79	46
Lincoln Parish	45,776	721	1.6%	339	103	156
Natchitoches Parish	35,192	155	0.4%	64	62	29
Red River Parish	7,163	12	0.2%	12	-	-
Sabine Parish	20,916	254	1.2%	174	26	25
Webster Parish	34,620	242	0.7%	119	83	40
Region Totals	536,434	8,335	1.6%	5,208	1,188	1,658

2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S1601: Language Spoken at Home

Figure 9 – Map of Population Estimates of Persons with Limited English Proficiency



Zero-car household data provides a snapshot of the number of people who either cannot afford car ownership or choose to not own a car. Transportation-disadvantaged populations include both groups because even those who choose not to own a car may be vulnerable in an emergency. In the ten-parish region, Bienville Parish has the highest percentage of zero-vehicle households.

Figure 10 – Population Estimates of Zero-Vehicle Households

Parish	Occupied Housing Units	With no vehicle available	Percent with no vehicle available
Bienville Parish	5,375	696	12.9%
Bossier Parish	48,651	2,967	6.1%
Caddo Parish	94,475	9,764	10.3%
Claiborne Parish	5,060	643	12.7%
De Soto Parish	10,235	932	9.1%
Lincoln Parish	18,043	1,111	8.0%
Natchitoches Parish	13,866	1,656	11.3%
Red River Parish	2,934	142	4.8%
Sabine Parish	8,339	711	8.5%
Webster Parish	14,801	1,289	8.7%
Region Totals	221,779	19,911	9.0%

2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, S2504: Physical Housing Characteristics for Occupied Housing Units

Figure 11 – Map of Zero-Vehicle Households

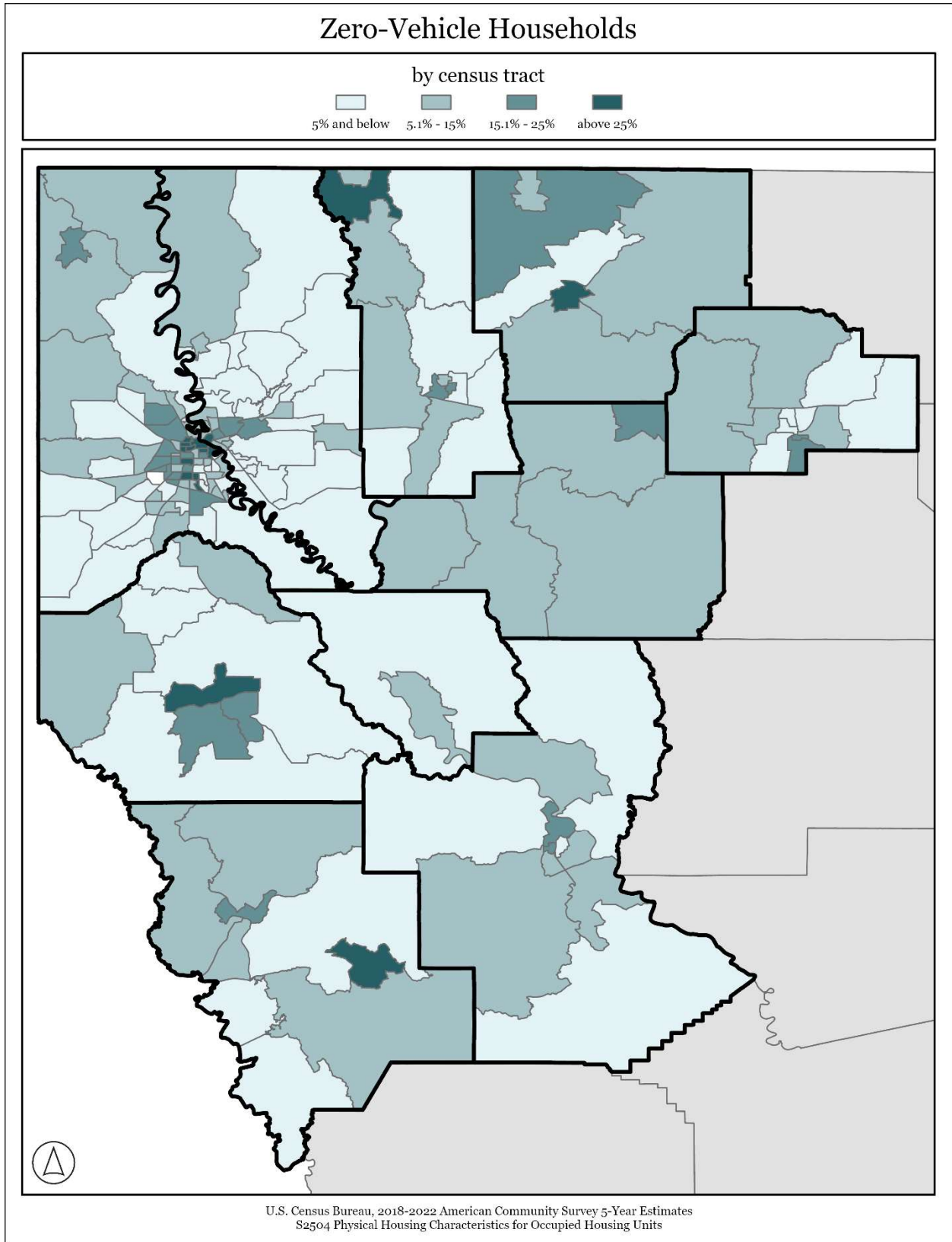


Figure 12 – Population Estimates of Seniors

Parish	Total Population	Population 65 and over	Percent 65 and over
Bienville Parish	12,958	2,706	20.9%
Bossier Parish	128,877	19,042	14.8%
Caddo Parish	236,259	42,364	17.9%
Claiborne Parish	14,203	2,981	21.0%
De Soto Parish	26,821	4,870	18.2%
Lincoln Parish	48,323	6,664	13.8%
Natchitoches Parish	37,478	6,205	16.6%
Red River Parish	7,631	1,464	19.2%
Sabine Parish	22,209	4,607	20.7%
Webster Parish	36,761	7,412	20.2%
Region Totals	571,520	98,315	17.2%

2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP05: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates

Figure 13 – Map of Senior Populations

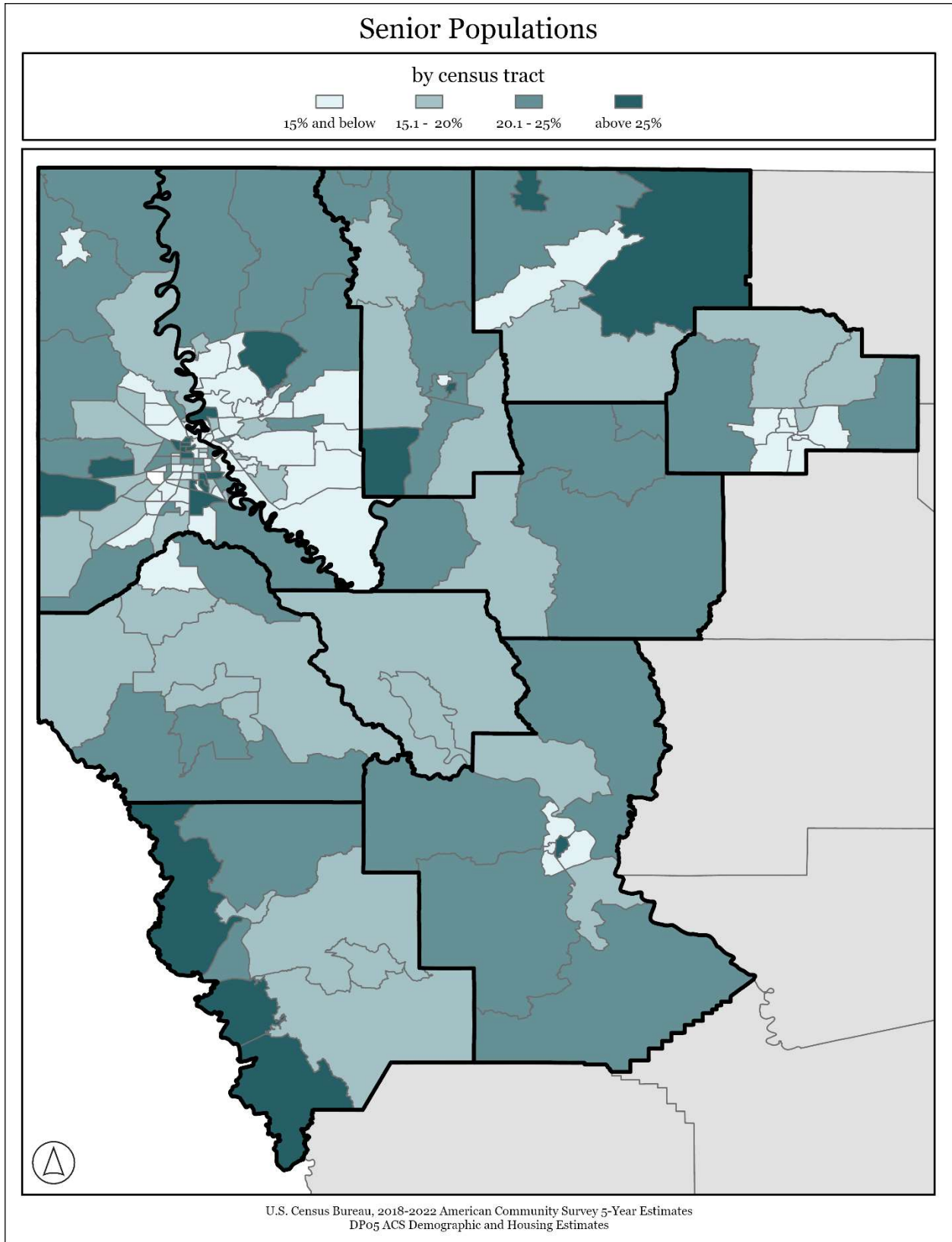
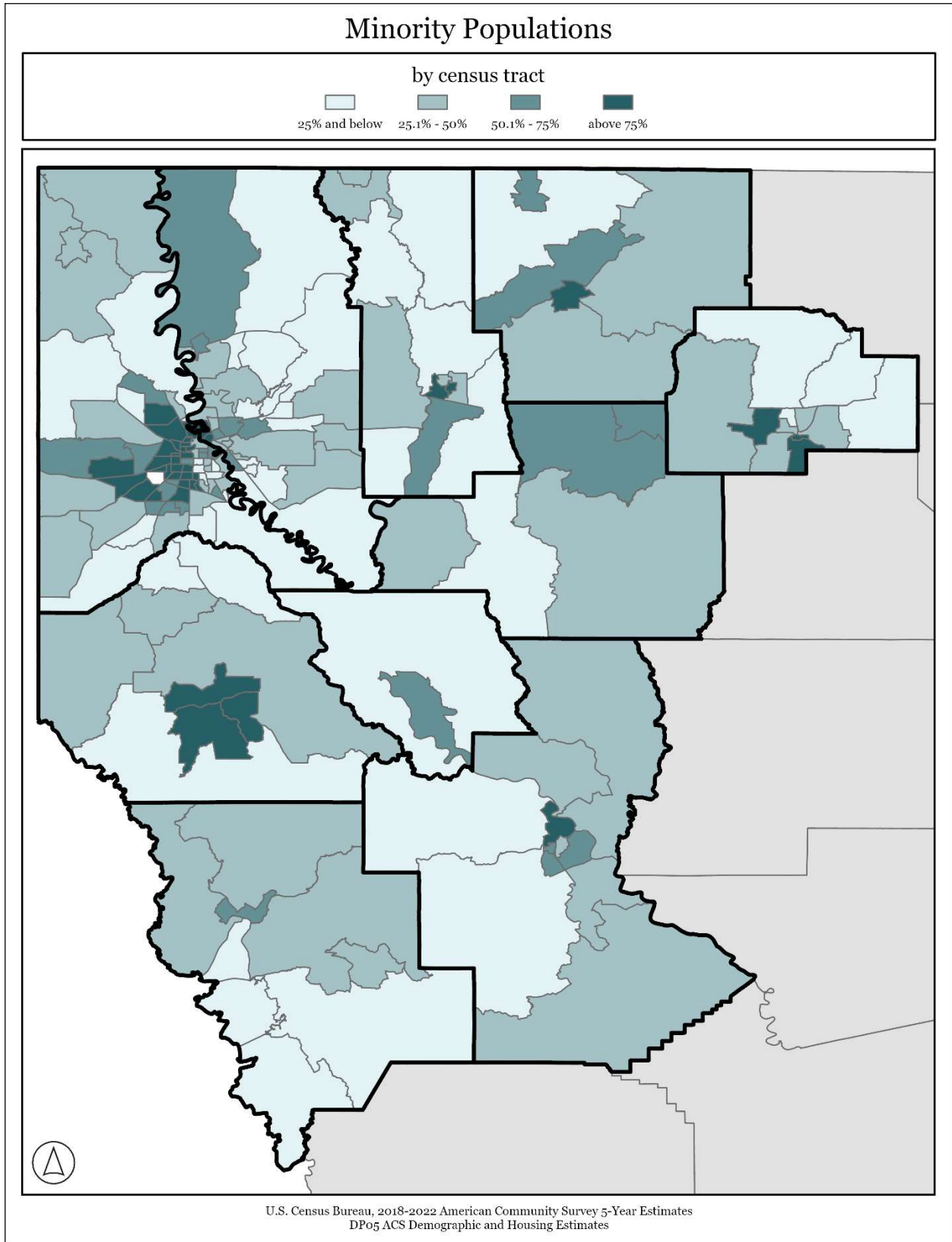


Figure 14 – Population Estimates of Minorities

Parish	Total Population	Population One Race, White	Percent Minority
Bienville Parish	12,958	7,066	45.5%
Bossier Parish	128,877	86,183	33.1%
Caddo Parish	236,259	105,210	55.5%
Claiborne Parish	14,203	6,479	54.4%
De Soto Parish	26,821	16,276	39.3%
Lincoln Parish	48,323	26,152	45.9%
Natchitoches Parish	37,478	19,170	48.8%
Red River Parish	7,631	4,398	42.4%
Sabine Parish	22,209	14,882	33.0%
Webster Parish	36,761	23,275	36.7%
Region Totals	571,520	309,091	54.1%

2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP05: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates

Figure 15 – Map of Minority Populations



IDENTIFYING THE NEED FOR
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES IS THE FIRST STEP
IN DETERMINING HUMAN SERVICES PUBLIC
TRANSPORTATION GAPS.

PARISHES WITH HIGHER PERCENTAGES
OF TRANSPORTATION-DISADVANTAGED
TARGET POPULATIONS.

Public and Human Service Transportation Needs

In the Louisiana Statewide Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan, four of the ten parishes in Northwest Louisiana were identified as parishes with the highest needs for public and human services transportation:

- Caddo
- Claiborne
- Natchitoches
- Red River

Identifying the need for transportation services is the first step in determining human services public transportation gaps. Parishes with higher percentages of transportation-disadvantaged target populations.

Unmet Needs of the Transportation-Disadvantaged

A closer look at the location of people with known transportation-disadvantaged characteristics shows locations where public transportation services are most needed. Figure 7 illustrates which parts of the region have service deficiencies and which areas have adequate service capacity to meet current demands. Analysis was conducted for each census tract with service-dependent populations and data was normalized with the number of persons per acre.

Many types of enhanced mobility services exist, but the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit services provide the greatest number of one-way trips. Federal regulations require that each transit provider operating fixed-route services must also provide

ADA-complementary paratransit service for any person with a disability whose trip origins and destinations fall within three-quarters of a mile on either side of any local fixed-route service. Regulations define minimum service thresholds for this service to be considered equivalent to the fixed-route service it complements. ADA-complementary paratransit services are demand-response services, and passengers generally schedule door-to-door trips through a call center.

Federal law requires that the Coordinated Plan identify needs and gaps in the special needs transportation network. The needs and gaps outlined below were assessed throughout the planning process through outreach to transportation providers and local mobility coalitions. In addition, human services providers gave invaluable insight into the needs and gaps throughout the special needs transportation network. The intent was to inform the creation of strategies that will guide transportation and information service providers in overcoming these gaps. These strategies can be found in the next chapter of this plan — “Mobility Tomorrow.”

Transportation needs differ among special needs transportation populations – senior, low-income, and individuals with a disability. At the most basic level, all residents of the ten-parish region need to access daily necessities without an undue financial or time burden. However,

everyone's unique transportation needs are shaped by a variety of factors, including but not limited to where they live and work, personal or cultural obligations, and medical conditions.

Through consultation with human service transportation providers and local coalitions in the region, the following transportation needs have been identified for the region's special needs transportation populations:

- Affordable transportation options.
- Reliable transportation.
- Safe and secure transportation.
- Reliable public transportation outside of peak hours.
- Clear information on available transportation options.
- Reasonable travel times.
- Accessible transportation infrastructure.

Gaps in Service

Gaps in the special needs transportation network have been identified as falling into one of the following five categories: spatial, temporal, institutional, infrastructure, or awareness. This section of the Coordinated Plan explains each gap in greater detail and identifies the specific gaps in the region. Each gap was either identified through outreach to human service transportation providers and local mobility coalitions or was carried over from the previous Coordinated Plan.

Spatial Gaps

Spatial gaps refer to locations that are underserved, or not served at all, by transportation services. To be cost-efficient, public transportation service is oriented towards serving the region's urban centers and major employment centers. This type of service provision creates spatial gaps in suburban and rural locations where transit service is either unavailable or inadequate to meet the daily needs of special needs populations. For special needs transportation populations, these gaps can be especially disruptive as alternative transportation options may not be available.

Spatial Gaps in Northwest Louisiana

- Transit service reductions have made it increasingly difficult to connect rural clients and riders to areas well served by fixed-route transit.
- Transit service to destinations outside of major activity centers is inadequate to meet the needs of special needs populations.

- Direct transit service between medical facilities in the region is lacking. This is especially problematic for patients who need to travel between multiple medical facilities in one day.

Temporal Gaps

Temporal gaps are caused when transportation service is not available at times when it is needed by special needs transportation populations. With public transit's commute-hour focus, a substantial portion of the region's transit service does not operate early enough in the morning or late enough in the evening for low-income individuals on alternative work schedules.

Temporal Gaps in Northwest Louisiana

- Transportation options are inadequate outside of peak hours — very early in the morning, middle of the day, after 7 p.m., and on weekends.

Institutional Gaps

Institutional gaps are caused by the rules, regulations, and requirements that govern transportation service provision. Many institutional gaps go unnoticed by riders and clients yet can inadvertently create obstacles to their mobility. Institutional gaps are not always clearly defined and can take many forms.

Institutional Gaps in Northwest Louisiana

- Paratransit systems generally do not provide same-day service, which means riders must always plan trips in advance and cannot be spontaneous about travel.
- Common standards do not exist among agencies, including but not limited to vehicle safety, driver training, and driver licensing.
- Transportation providers do not group trips or offer shared rides among different special needs populations. This can result from eligibility requirements preventing shared trips, perceived increased liability, or an agency's concern that funding will be jeopardized if they transport someone who is not their client.
- It is challenging for new projects to compete for funding. As a result, new projects that effectively respond to recent changes in the special needs transportation landscape (e.g., transit service reductions) may not get off the ground.
- Cross-parish trips within and outside of the ten-parish region are difficult due in part to a lack of coordination among service providers.
- Transfer between different special needs transportation services is cumbersome and may result in additional wait time for a customer to complete a trip.

Infrastructure Gaps

Infrastructure gaps are areas where a lack of physical or technological infrastructure prevents individuals from accessing needed transportation options. Infrastructure gaps can take the form of a major roadway acting as a barrier to accessing daily necessities, a lack of sidewalks adjacent to transit stops, or intersections not meeting ADA standards.

Infrastructure Gaps in Northwest Louisiana

- Transit facilities and bus stops without accessible walkways and safe crossings.
- Sidewalk ramps that are not level or too steep.
- Bus stops and other transportation waiting areas lack benches.
- Bus stops lack adequate weather protection.
- Rural and suburban roads are unsafe for pedestrian and wheelchair users.
- Special needs populations have limited access to new travel information resources, including mobile and web-based applications.
- Public spaces lack amenities for seniors and individuals with disabilities.
- Pedestrian crossing times at signalized intersections are not long enough for seniors, children, and individuals with mobility impairments.
- Lack of affordable, accessible, or lift-equipped vehicles for people who are disabled, but who are not eligible for Medicaid or ADA paratransit services.

Awareness Gaps

Learning how to access and utilize transportation options can be a daunting task for individuals unfamiliar with all transportation programs and services available in the region. Gaps in awareness occur when individual riders and social service agencies are not fully informed on available transportation options. While awareness gaps can take many forms, they all stem from a lack of information.

Awareness Gaps in Northwest Louisiana

- Language and cultural barriers prevent riders from accessing transportation options.
- Traveler information technologies are too advanced or difficult to acquire for some users.
- Social service agencies do not always have adequate information regarding available transportation choices for their clients, particularly if transportation is not offered by the social service agency. This may result in a referral to less efficient transportation options than those that are available.
- Fixed-route transit is marketed to commuters and not to special needs populations. Furthermore, funding is not available to meet the demand for specialized paratransit, volunteer and other community transportation, and hence marketing is not encouraged.
- Rural communities are not aware of available transportation options due to limited funding available for marketing and coordination.
- Misinformation and unfounded fears create a negative perception of transit among older populations.
- Decision makers do not have full knowledge of where special needs populations reside in their community and may not be fully aware of their mobility needs.

- Special needs populations are not aware of all available information resources.
- There is no access to transportation option information available online.

Duplications

Demand for transportation service is increasing among special needs populations, competition is growing for limited funding opportunities, and substantial cuts to fixed-route transit service have occurred throughout the region. Each of these facts makes it increasingly difficult for special needs transportation providers to meet demand for their services. In some cases, duplicative services fill gaps where available options are inadequate to meet demand. However, there are instances where removing duplications could improve delivery of special needs transportation service. Various funding sources restrict different transportation services to specific populations for specific purposes. This results in service duplication and redundancy in multiple areas.

Examples of Duplications

- Vehicles from different agencies may be traveling in the same corridor at the same time but may be offering different services or serving different populations and cannot pick up additional riders.
- Public transit agencies and Medicaid brokers operate separate but similar training programs for drivers.
- Public transit systems and other transportation providers having their own in-house maintenance programs for vehicles when they could take advantage of economies of scale by combining resources.
- Human service agencies, transit systems, senior programs, and other agencies each have their own call center for people to call to arrange for transportation instead of having a one-stop shop.
- Each transportation system has different eligibility requirements. A person who may qualify for more than one type of service may need to apply for several different programs with each having different requirements and processes.

Challenges

Suburbanization of Poverty

Populations that most often need public transportation, especially low-income residents, are no longer heavily concentrated in the region's urban core where transit services are more plentiful. The region is experiencing a suburbanization of poverty, similar to many peer metropolitan areas. The suburban-style development patterns create challenges for convenient transit services.

One of the greatest current and future challenges is responding to the region's public transportation service needs.

Funding

Financial challenges further compound the difficulty of providing reliable transit services in the region. State and federal resources have largely funded the construction of road and highway infrastructure in the region, with less significance placed on long-term operations and maintenance costs. However, the expansion of public transit and enhanced mobility service has not received the same level of continuous funding. Funding for operations and maintenance of services is particularly difficult to come by, and a dedicated local funding source is typically required.

An Aging Population

With an aging demographic, the Northwest Louisiana ten-parish region is – and will continue to be – faced with an increasing demand for more transit and on-demand specialized, paratransit services in the coming years. Currently, older adults who cannot use fixed-route transit service have very few affordable transportation alternatives. Although more than 40 transportation services work to meet the needs of disadvantaged populations, including older adults, some limitations exist due to inadequate capacity, high costs, narrow geographic service coverage and limited hours of operation. Evaluation of service availability and the locations of transit-dependent population locations are steps toward progress. A collaborative assessment of public transit needs has been undertaken through a peer exchange among many service providers in the region. Stakeholder input from users and providers suggests that the unmet need is great, and the gaps between needs and available capacity will continue to climb as the region's population ages and disperses, as life expectancies increase, as the population of the infirm and disabled increases, and as income gaps widen.

DRAFT

TO ENSURE THAT EXISTING AND NEW TRANSPORTATION SERVICES ARE MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE REGION'S SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATIONS, AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN SPECIAL NEEDS TRANSPORTATION WILL NEED TO CONTINUE COORDINATING AND PLANNING EFFORTS IN AN EFFECTIVE MANNER TO DELIVER THEIR SERVICES.

FUTURE MOBILITY

This chapter serves to outline the region’s approach for moving forward with coordinated transportation planning in Northwest Louisiana. The plan’s Vision and Mission provide a high-level summary of what the region is trying to achieve with coordinated planning. The primary intent of the Future Mobility chapter is to guide implementation of this vision and mission via the Coordinated Plan’s goals and prioritized strategies. These goals and prioritized strategies are intended to address the needs, gaps, and duplications in the special needs transportation network identified in this plan. To that end, they guide regional special needs transportation investment decisions, particularly for the federal programs.

The mission of the Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Planning Committee is to work collaboratively to improve transportation services for persons with lower incomes, older adults, and individuals with disabilities by identifying needs, understanding resources, maximizing access and mobility, and minimizing costs for the entire community.

To ensure that existing and new transportation services are meeting the needs of the region’s special needs populations, agencies and organizations involved in special needs transportation will need to continue coordinating and planning efforts in an effective manner to deliver their services. At the same time, the region will need to become increasingly innovative in delivering transportation services while working to preserve the essential transportation programs that currently serve special needs populations.

NLCOG promotes and maintains an open dialogue among local transportation funding agencies, providers, and human service agencies by facilitating discussions at the regional and local levels. NLCOG is also responsible for developing and updating the Coordinated Plan. The Coordinated Plan serves as the unified, comprehensive strategy for human services and special needs transportation service delivery. However, transportation for the region’s special needs populations is woven into many of NLCOG’s planning efforts, including Mobility 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

Mobility 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan Update

Long range transportation planning is a cooperative process conducted by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), in coordination with the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (LADOTD), transit operators, numerous stakeholders from throughout the region, and the public to create a vision for the future of the community. The process, which is prescribed by federal regulations, is designed to assist the MPO in prioritizing short- and long-term investments in the regional transportation system over the next 25 years through a proactive public participation process that involves all users of the transportation system.

NLCOG, the MPO for Bossier and Caddo Parishes, initiated an update to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) in 2020. During the development of the 2045 MTP for Bossier, Caddo, DeSoto, and Webster Parishes (adopted in April 2021), several rounds of public and stakeholder meetings were conducted, technical data was analyzed, existing plans and studies were compiled and reviewed, and potential projects were evaluated according to community goals and performance-based criteria.

In relation to public transportation, NLCOG distributed a survey to the service providers in Northwest Louisiana about some of the challenges these organizations face in providing transportation to rural and transit dependent populations within the area.

Respondents indicated that a lack of adequate funding, as well as reconciling the priorities and agendas of various service providers, were the biggest obstacles to mobility in the area. Furthermore, respondents see customer needs being adequately met, but that they could be met more cost effectively, and that one possible role providers could play in improving regional transportation services could be to offer data on the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities. In addition, a geospatial analysis was used to identify areas of service demand in rural parts of Bossier and Caddo Parishes and areas where service providers are concentrated, to identify likely transportation origins and destinations for populations depending on these demand responsive transit services.

Stakeholders

The Coordinated Plan was developed considering the principles and values of the stakeholders involved in special needs transportation: riders, transportation providers, and the community at large. Each of these stakeholder groups has different principles and values, depending on their viewpoint. These viewpoints have been balanced throughout planning efforts and the building of a coordinated special needs transportation system in the region.

Riders

People who need transportation, including those with physical and mental disabilities, youth, older adults, and people who simply can't afford to own or maintain a car, or are unable to operate a vehicle.

Riders Value:

- Choice: A range of mobility options that are usable, effective, and affordable.
- Easy: The ability to easily plan, arrange, and pay for trips, regardless of mode.
- Reliability: Transportation services that dependably and predictably arrive and depart.
- Safety: Safe and secure transportation services with drivers who are respectful and helpful.
- Service: Sufficient service levels to meet needs.
- Privacy: Confidentiality and respect regarding how their personal information is used.

Transportation Providers

Agencies that arrange and provide the trips, including transit agencies, school districts, transportation brokers, nonprofits, private transportation companies, volunteer driver programs, community shuttles, and social service agencies.

Transportation Providers Value:

- Fairness: Fair competition among those providing publicly funded rides.
- Simplicity: Simple and streamlined procedures for collecting fares, reporting data, and complying with regulations.
- Information: The ability to help people access different transportation programs without having to know the details about each program.
- Shared Resources: Leveraging opportunities to share resources with other providers, such as vehicles, training, maintenance, and drivers.
- Inclusion: Accessible communities with a full range of mobility options.
- System Approach: Sharing the responsibility of transportation with the community.
- Accountability: Community accountability for working together to meet mobility needs.
- Coordination: Coordinating transportation to ensure the least amount of work by riders.

Communities at Large

Those who serve people with special transportation needs, including hospitals, nursing homes, colleges and universities, pharmacies and medical facilities, retail and grocery stores, community programs, family and friends, government agencies, and employers.

Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The goals, objectives and strategies within the Coordinated Plan support the overall mission statement for coordinating special needs transportation in the ten-parish region of Northwest Louisiana. To continue to move the region closer to the vision of mobility, quality, and efficiency through regional coordination, this plan lays out five overarching goals and corresponding strategies. For each goal, a series of desired objectives have been identified which will serve to gauge progress in implementing the plan. The following goals and strategies will guide improvements to the region's public transportation and enhanced mobility services.

GOAL #1 – MOVE PEOPLE EFFICIENTLY BY INCREASING CAPACITY TO SERVE UNMET NEEDS.

To meet current and future demand, the region must develop the capacity to deliver more trips within a constrained funding environment. To stretch limited transportation dollars further, the region’s transportation providers to deliver.

Objective – Improve our ability to determine need for transit services across the ten-parish region while eliminating duplications and closing gaps.

Strategies

Determine what data is being collected and develop a plan for collecting data needed in a systematic format

Conduct needs assessment through existing agencies

Identify duplications, service gaps, underused assets, and coordination options

Desired Outcomes

- More mobility options for special needs populations.
- Increased geographic coverage of transportation services.
- Increased availability of transportation options outside of peak transit hours.
- Improved cross-jurisdictional connections.
- Improved access to transportation options and common destinations.
- Improved functionality of special needs transportation programs and services.
- Innovative approaches to service delivery and coordinated planning.
- More cost-efficient transportation options.
- Improved transportation reliability for special needs populations.

GOAL #2 – PUT PEOPLE FIRST BY MAKING SERVICES EASILY UNDERSTOOD AND ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL RIDERS.

People should be able to afford transportation, use it safely, and get to where they need to go without an overly burdensome process or trip time. Providers should ensure fairness, justice, and equity in delivering transportation programs and services.

Objective – Build awareness and encourage greater use of the available transit services by developing marketing, communication, and education programs.

Strategies

Determine what marketing strategies are currently being used by providers

Develop a coordinated marketing strategy

Identify marketing and consumer education “best practices”

Conduct consumer education and travel training programs for the public

Desired Outcomes

- Effective travel instruction programs that familiarize special needs populations with available transportation options.
- Easier to use transportation services and information resources.
- Innovative traveler information resources for special needs populations.
- Targeted marketing and travel instruction for special needs populations.
- Greater transportation independence for individuals with limited mobility options.

GOAL #3 – MOVE MORE PEOPLE BY ENSURING THAT THE COORDINATION PROCESS IS COMPREHENSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE.

Resources for regional special needs transportation should be maximized through coordination in planning, service delivery, and reporting. Networks should be created that are seamless for the customer, but operationally and organizationally sound for providers. Coordination creates efficiencies that enable more trips within available funds. Coordinating regional trips offers the greatest potential for efficiency, with fewer vehicles on the road and more people on each vehicle. Agencies can also coordinate such things as driver training, purchasing, standards, requirements, eligibility determinations, and technology.

Objective – Define the need for change and articulate the vision for delivery of coordinated transportation services.

Strategies

Build dialogue skills and develop shared definition of terms

Meet quarterly to discuss coordination possibilities and share information

Gather support among officials, human service agency administrators, and community leaders

Create new / maintain existing partnerships that address the needs and gaps identified in this plan

Desired Outcomes

- Better accounting of special needs transportation costs and benefits in state, regional, and local planning efforts.
- Improved resource coordination among existing transportation providers.
- Increased stakeholder coordination.

GOAL #4 – IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF SERVICES PROVIDED TO BOTH SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATIONS AND THE PUBLIC, IN BOTH THE URBAN AND RURAL ENVIRONMENTS.

With multiple human services organizations and transportation providers in the region working together for the shared benefit of the community, to eliminate duplications, expand services, and improve the quality of services to better address the regional transportation needs of the transportation disadvantaged in northwest Louisiana.

Objective – Increase public participation in evaluating services.

Strategies

Survey riders on existing systems as to quality of service and areas needing improvement

Update the CHSTP and hold public meetings on the plan

Desired Outcomes

- More affordable transportation options for special needs populations.
- Improved transportation reliability for special needs populations.
- Easier to use transportation services and information resources.
- Faster trips made by special needs populations.
- Improved accessibility at passenger facilities for special needs populations.
- Improved functionality of special needs transportation programs and services.
- Innovative approaches to service delivery and coordinated planning.

GOAL #5 – CREATE A MORE COST-EFFECTIVE DELIVERY SYSTEM TO MOVE PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY EFFICIENTLY, SAFELY AND SECURELY.

Through a fair and equitable transportation system, special needs populations, transportation disadvantaged communities, and the public can realize a higher quality of life.

Objective – Develop a method for prioritizing coordination activities.

Strategies

Collaboratively develop a set of proposed prioritization criteria

Solicit input from the public on criteria

Desired Outcomes

- Efficient use of existing special needs transportation resources.
- Fewer duplications in service and program delivery.
- Better assessment of program and service efficacy.
- Better use of limited resources as client and rider needs evolve.
- Common standards for service and program operations.

Figure 16 – LaDOTD Statewide Strategies and Actions

STRATEGY	ACTION	METRIC	TIMEFRAME
1. Invest in new technologies and methods to improve operations and public information about services	1a. Update and reissue the “Benefits of Transit” brochure Yes/No, # of resources shared/downloads	Yes/No, # of resources shared/downloads	Short-term
	1b. Update STTARS 2.0 to include data resources for regional coordinators to build reports with their regional data	Yes/No, # of regional coordinators who used it	Medium-term
	1c. Continue to share resources through ShareFile platform	Yes/No	Long-term
	1d. Disseminate information on emerging issues related to transportation / technology for climate and emergency response (singular platform for assisted evacuation services; coordinated tracking of assisted evacuation across jurisdictions)	Yes/No	Long-term
2. Support development of personnel pools that aid in service delivery	2a. Determine feasibility to establish personnel pools for financial efficiency	Yes/No, # of pools created	Short-term
	2b. Prepare white paper and host peer discussion on driver recruitment strategies / supplemental funding opportunities	Yes/No	Medium-term
	2c. Offer training opportunities for regional coordinators to learn about mobility management	Yes/No, # of sessions & attendees	Medium-term

3. Lend support to regions in their efforts to facilitate coordination activities	3a. Conduct statewide survey every other year	Yes/No, # of responses	Short-term
	3b. Host annual coordination meeting	Yes/No, # of attendees	On-going
	3c. Host annual stakeholder meeting	Yes/No; # of attendees	On-going
	3d. Continue to disseminate information on funding opportunities, especially federal grants (e.g., white papers, workshops)	Yes/No	Medium-term
4. Establish partnerships to share data and resources that support transit development	4a. Provide tools (workshops/resources) for coordinators to “speak GIS”	# of resources provided	Medium-term
	4b. Provide resources from the statewide plan analysis of market and demand to regions for use in their regional planning efforts	# of regions provided date	Short-term
	4c. Establish an annual report card to highlight activity on the various goals, strategies and activities completed – incorporate details on regional partners, stakeholders and community members engaged	# of goals and strategies achieved or with activity noted	Long-term
	4d. DOTD will seek participation in coordination efforts at the statewide level through outreach to Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, Louisiana Workforce Commission, Department of Children and Family Services, Governor’s Office of Elderly Affairs, and/or other state agencies who share in transportation need	# of coordinated events / meetings	On-going

5. Continue to fund needs using available FTA programs	5a. Encourage mobility management programs in each region	# of mobility manager positions	Short-term
	5b. Assist with funding applications for additional local research and data collection	# of providers accessing additional funds	Medium-term
6. Preserve and maintain vehicles and equipment	6a. Disseminate information about funding opportunities for vehicle replacement, maintenance, etc.	Yes/No	On-going
	6b. Support preservation of rolling stock through effective transit asset management planning	Useful Life Benchmarks (ULB)	On-going
	6c. Assist providers with acquiring rolling stock that provides highest quality service relative to the cost	# Of vehicles acquired	Long-term
7. Investigate regional services as an option to improve coverage and availability	7a. Provide resources to assist regional coordinators with determining feasibility to establish regional call centers for dispatch and customer service	Yes/No	Medium-term
	7b. Assess the capacity of regional mobility managers to coordinate fare structure, advertising, etc., to enhance rider experience	Yes/No	Medium-term

Figure 17 – Regional Goals Correlated to LaDOTD Statewide Strategies and Actions

GOAL #1 – MOVE PEOPLE EFFICIENTLY BY INCREASING CAPACITY TO SERVE UNMET NEEDS.				
<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Statewide Plan Strategies (1-7)</i>
8. Determine what data is being collected and develop a plan for collecting data needed in a systemic format	All regional 5310/5311 agencies	Re-design the Ridership survey to align with the data needed for 5310 vs 5311 agencies	Short-term (3-6 months)	1 4
9. Conduct needs assessment through existing agencies	All regional 5310/5311 agencies; all regional community service providers; statewide human services providers	Identify needs currently met versus unmet needs, both within parishes and within the region	Mid-term (6-12 months)	3 4
10. Identify duplications, service gaps, underused assets, and coordination options	NLCOG with input from 5310/5311 agencies and human services providers	Identify duplications in services among agencies, seek to reduce redundancies and utilize all assets to fill current gaps in service	Long-term (12-18 months) and on-going	1 4 5 7

GOAL #2 – PUT PEOPLE FIRST BY MAKING SERVICES EASILY UNDERSTOOD AND ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL RIDERS.

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Statewide Plan</i>
1. Determine what marketing strategies are currently being used by providers	All regional 5310/5311 agencies	Compare marketing plans/calendars among different agencies and develop a regional strategy	Short-term (3-6 months)	1 3 4 7
2. Develop a coordinated marketing strategy	All regional 5310/5311 agencies; all regional community service providers; statewide human services providers with NLCOG leading	Identify best practices and those that are cost-efficient to implement along with national campaigns	Short-term (3-6 months)	1 4
3. Identify marketing and consumer education best practices	NLCOG with input from 5310/5311 agencies and human services providers	Identify effective marketing and travel instruction programs to communicate with and educate the community	Mid-term (6-12 months)	1 4
4. Conduct consumer education and travel training programs for the public	All regional 5310/5311 agencies; all regional community service providers; statewide human services providers	Provide innovative communication and training resources to make public transit travel easier	Long-term (12-18 months) and on-going	1 4

GOAL #3 – MOVE MORE PEOPLE BY ENSURING THAT THE COORDINATION PROCESS IS COMPREHENSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE.

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Statewide Plan</i>
1. Build dialogue skills and develop shared definition of terms	NLCOG with input from 5310/5311 agencies and human services providers	Create a shared definition of terms across agencies to achieve mutual understanding and foster an atmosphere of open, effective communication	Short-term (3-6 months)	3 4
2. Meet quarterly to discuss coordination possibilities and share information	All regional 5310/5311 agencies; all regional community service providers; statewide human services providers with NLCOG leading	Continue quarterly (or more often as needed) meetings, seeking to include stakeholders not represented	Short-term (3-6 months) and on-going	3
3. Gather support among officials, human service agency administrators, and community leaders	NLCOG with input from 5310/5311 agencies and human services providers	Initiate letter-writing campaigns, letters-to-the-editor, and personal invitations	Long-term (12-18 months) and on-going	4
4. Create new / maintain existing partnerships that address the needs and gaps identified in this plan	All regional 5310/5311 agencies; all regional community service providers; statewide human services providers with NLCOG leading	Initiate letter-writing campaigns, personal invitations, and share transit stories on agency websites and at meetings	Short-term (3-6 months) and on-going	2 3 4 7

GOAL #4 – IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF SERVICES PROVIDED TO BOTH SPECIAL NEEDS POPULATIONS AND THE PUBLIC, IN BOTH THE URBAN AND RURAL ENVIRONMENTS.

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Statewide Plan</i>
1. Survey riders on existing systems as to quality of service and areas needing improvement	All regional 5310/5311 agencies; all regional community service providers; statewide human services providers with NLCOG leading	Create an easier-to-use ridership survey and distribute it to the public. Gather and evaluate responses with a report to the providers so that the coalition can develop better ways to deliver services and coordinate resources.	Mid-term (6-12 months)	1 3 4 7
2. Update the CHSTP and hold public meetings on the plan	NLCOG with input from 5310/5311 agencies and human services providers	Use all available data to update our CHSTP regularly and disseminate it to the public while obtaining feedback	Long-term (12-18 months) and on-going	3 4 7

GOAL #5 – CREATE A MORE COST-EFFECTIVE DELIVERY SYSTEM TO MOVE PEOPLE THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY EFFICIENTLY, SAFELY AND SECURELY.

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Statewide Plan</i>
1. Collaboratively develop a set of proposed prioritization criteria	NLCOG with input from 5310/5311 agencies and human services providers	Identify strategies to reduce duplications and better assess service delivery. Develop a prioritization matrix to objectively implement new and revised services.	Long-term (12-18 months) and on-going	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p> <p>6</p> <p>7</p>
2. Solicit input from the public on criteria	NLCOG with input from 5310/5311 agencies and human services providers	Gather input from the public on the prioritization criteria as well as any projects developed from it.	Long-term (12-18 months) and on-going	<p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p> <p>4</p> <p>5</p> <p>6</p> <p>7</p>

Implementation of Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The goals, objectives, and strategies will be implemented through a wide range of services and programs. These transportation services and programs cover the range of mobility options necessary for those needing transportation:

- Fixed-route bus service
- ADA paratransit
- Demand response
- Shared rides
- Program transportation (including school buses)
- Volunteer programs
- Travel training programs
- Technology
- Language assistance
- Financial subsidies
- Information, referral, and assistance

Many factors influence the program or service. Everything must be taken into consideration when developing, implementing, and operating services and programs, including an individual's specific need, geographic area, destination, costs, and existing transportation options.

Measuring Success

Performance measures aid agencies and planners in measuring success of the various transportation programs.

- Gaps in service filled through transportation options that would not otherwise be available for seniors and individuals with disabilities measured in numbers of seniors and individuals with disabilities given mobility they would not have without program support.
- Modification to geographic coverage of transportation service, the quality of transportation service or service times that increase the availability of transportation services for seniors and individuals with disabilities.
- Actual or estimated numbers of rides (as measured by one-way trips) provided annually for seniors and individuals with disabilities on Section 5310 supported vehicles and services, those in rural areas, and the transportation-disadvantaged.
- Accessibility improvements such as additions or changes to environmental infrastructure, technology, and vehicles that impact availability of transportation services because of projects implemented in the current reporting year.
- Other measures, as the planning committee determines appropriate.

While each funded project is expected to identify outcomes and measurements of performance, the overall performance indicators for coordinated transportation in the ten-parish region of Northwest Louisiana will continue to focus on the following measures:

Quality Measures

- Number of seniors and individuals with disabilities afforded mobility they would not have without program support.
- Transportation service customer comments.
- Vehicle dwell times.
- Customer wait time (at beginning of trip, and for transfers).
- Accident reports.
- Ability for the transportation dependent to meet medical, employment, and social needs.
- Ability for seniors and people with disabilities to remain independent.
- Rider satisfaction.

Efficiency Measures

- Average cost per trip, including administration and capital depreciation.
- Average cost per mile, including administration and capital depreciation.
- Average number of passengers per hour or per day.
- Level of integration in other plans.

Mobility Measures

- Actual or estimated numbers of rides provided annually.
- Number of people using public transportation in the region, by mode.
- Number of public transportation trips in the region, by mode.
- Ratio of trips to population density, by mode and area (rural and urban).
- Transportation is referenced as a barrier in human service needs assessments.
- Additions or changes to environmental infrastructure (e.g., transportation facilities, sidewalks, etc.), technology, and vehicles that impact availability of transportation services because of projects implemented in a grant funding cycle.

NEXT STEPS

Special needs transportation is an integral part of the long-range transportation vision. Federal transportation legislation requires that the Coordinated Plan be updated every four years. This Plan covers federal fiscal years 2017 to 2020. In addition to the regional planning efforts of NLCOG, the members of the ten-parish regional Coordinated Public Transportation – Human Services Transportation Planning Coalition has the primary responsibility to assess the needs of their local community and current transportation network and provide recommendations to improve the system, serving as the first step towards improvement. This local information is provided to NLCOG in its updates to the Coordinated Plan.

Further, this group serves an important role in the coordination of special needs transportation services, where they may use a combination of federal, state, and local funds to provide services to meet needs and fill gaps that exist. While there may not be a reliable way to include demand-response trips into traditional travel demand models, this does not mean that NLCOG cannot use other quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide useful data for special needs transportation planning. Going forward, NLCOG intends to leverage available resources and utilize the Special Needs Transportation Committee to obtain special needs transportation data that will enhance coordination and planning efforts.

The Northwest Louisiana Council of Governments is an intergovernmental association of local governments established to assist in planning for common needs, cooperating for the mutual benefit, and coordinating for sound regional development. NLCOG's purpose is to strengthen both the individual and collective power of local governments and to help them recognize regional opportunities, eliminate unnecessary duplication, and make joint decisions for the benefit of the entire Northwest Louisiana community. This is achieved by developing and implementing constructive and workable policies and programs for solving area-wide problems. These issues include, but are not limited to, matters affecting transportation, economic, health, safety, welfare, education, and regional development issues.

NLCOG is funded by a variety of funding sources including federal grants from the U. S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration, and Federal Transit Administration, the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development, as well as by NLCOG's local member governments.

625 Texas Street, Suite 200
Shreveport, LA 71101
www.nlcog.org

