**RPC** Regional Planning Commission
of Greater Birmingham

**Regional Planning Commission
of Greater Birmingham**
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# HUMAN SERVICES COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN

**Update: July 2017**

# RESOLUTION 2017-0816-1

## Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan
## As Prepared and Adopted by the
## Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB)

WHEREAS, the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) has contracted with the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) to draft the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan (HSCTP), for the counties of Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair and Walker; and

WHEREAS, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) requires that projects funded through the Federal Transit Administration's Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program (Section 5310) be derived from a locally developed plan; and
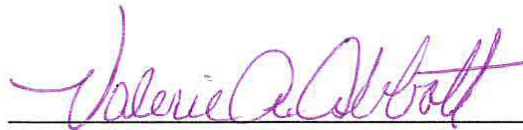
WHEREAS, the HSCTP is the instrument by which the RPCGB staff describes the current state and future plans for human services transportation planning; and

WHEREAS, the RPCGB staff has updated the HSCTP for FY 2017, which includes new demographic and regional context information; and

WHEREAS, the RPCGB Board of Directors is responsible for providing the staff and matching funds to administer the HSCTP.
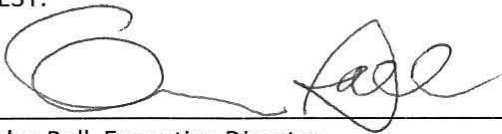
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, representing Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair, and Walker counties, hereby endorses the FY 2017 Update of the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan as presented.

Adopted this 16th day of August 2017.

_____
Honorable Valerie Abbott, Chairman
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

ATTEST:

_____
Charles Ball, Executive Director
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

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## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

To be eligible for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) program funds, including but not limited to Section 5310 (Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities), proposed projects must be derived from a local human services coordinated transportation plan (HSCTP). The plan will guide the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) in decision-making regarding the allocation of funds.

The RPCGB serves six counties—Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby, and Walker (see Figure 1)—and developed its first plan in 2006. The plan's purpose is to address mobility issues for transportation disadvantaged individuals. Many people mistakenly assume that transportation disadvantaged individuals comprise only those people with disabilities or people using wheel-chairs. In fact, transportation disadvantaged includes those who are unable to transport them-selves or to purchase transportation due to their age, income, health, or physical limitations.

While the HSCTP aims to improve quality, efficiency, and mobility of transportation services for all citizens in the Greater Birmingham area, it is specifically designed to improve services for transportation disadvantaged individuals by ensuring that communities coordinate transportation resources. Coordination enhances transportation access and facilitates the most appropriate and cost-effective transportation possible with available resources. In accordance with FTA guidelines, key elements of this plan include:

- Goals and Standards
- Inventory of Services
- Demographics
- Needs and Barriers
- Strategies to Address Needs

**FIGURE 1**
**Map of Greater Birmingham Region**

## GOALS

Obviously, all human service coordinated transportation plans should strive to improve coordination, even if that goal seems lofty and unattainable. Not having coordination as a goal defeats the purpose of the plan and any associated funding. Additional goals specified herein are intended to be supportive of coordination and lay the foundation for that goal.

### [Goal 1] Coordinate transportation within and across boundary lines

Coordination of regional transportation eliminates jurisdictional boundaries and seeks to provide quality service for its patrons. Multiple transportation providers or programs with different purposes, qualifications, and boundaries cause trips to be confusing, lengthy, inefficient, and sometimes impossible.

### [Goal 2] Improve efficiencies by sharing resources and using collective purchasing power

Pooling resources allows for greater accessibility to more people and improves efficiencies. Sharing personnel resources, as well as physical resources such as garages and maintenance facilities, will lower the cost of providing human service transportation.

### [Goal 3] Increase availability of service, including expansion of capacity, service area, days/hours of service, and accessibility (sidewalks, ramps, etc.)

Increased availability and accessibility of transportation allows more people to travel for more trip purposes. Accessibility includes capital improvements, such as sidewalks, ramps, and bridges, as well as travel training, which enable people to walk or use mobility devices to access public transportation.

### [Goal 4] Increase public awareness of mobility options and funding

In the Greater Birmingham area, more usage means more efficiency, and choice/competition encourages quality of transportation services. Public education of transportation options and funding should be an ongoing process.

## STANDARDS FOR FUNDING

The RPCGB, in cooperation with the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority (BJCTA), has the responsibility for conducting the competitive process for funding projects in the urbanized area under FTA's Section 5310 program, Enhanced Mobility for Senior and Individuals with Disabilities. The following standards will guide approval for project funding in the six-county Birmingham region.

1. All projects must seek to address service barriers and conform to or be harmonious with one or more of the plan goals stated above.

2. All applications for funding must (a) provide service to a broad range of people; (b) expand service area, days, or hours of operations; and/or (c) coordinate with another agency for provision of service. Coordination may include contracts for fuel, insurance, driver, etc.

3. In the Greater Birmingham region, only nonprofit or government agencies will be eligible to initiate a voucher program. Most agencies have specialized functions and clients must be deemed eligible to receive agency services. Therefore, certification of eligibility and validation of trips can be conducted most efficiently and without duplication through participating agencies.

4. Applicants must identify a secure source for matching funds.

5. Applicants requesting vehicles will be required to have a minimum of one lift-equipped vehicle or ten percent of their fleet, whichever is greater.

6. All agencies that receive funding to purchase vehicles must participate in efforts to coordinate the use of the vehicles(s) during down times and in emergency situations.

# INVENTORY OF SERVICES

The Greater Birmingham area offers various resources to meet the transportation needs of its citizens, including fixed route public transit (and ADA complementary paratransit), demand response public transportation, nonprofit agencies that transport clients, private transportation providers such as local taxi services, and interregional service via Greyhound and Amtrak. It should be noted that no taxi service is available for residents of Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, and Walker counties.

## Fixed Route
The BJCTA provides a fixed route transit service in the Birmingham area, with complementary ADA paratransit service within ¾ miles of the fixed route.

Walker County contracts with ClasTran to provide a deviated fixed route service within the City of Jasper.

## Demand Response
In the counties of Jefferson and Shelby, ClasTran operates curb-to-curb demand response service. ClasTran receives grant funding for capital equipment, administration, and operations under FTA Sections 5310 (urban) and 5311 (rural), along with local contributions for match.

Blount, Chilton, and St. Clair counties have transportation primarily funded by the representative county government.

## Interregional
Amtrak has train service to/from Birmingham and over 40 cities in Alabama. However, scheduling does not allow a round trip to be completed in the same day.

## Vanpool/Carpool
CommuteSmart organizes the local vanpool and carpool program. CommuteSmart maintains a database to match riders, will provide a van, financial subsidy to riders, and other supporting services including a guaranteed ride home in case of emergency. In July 2017, there were 31 CommuteSmart vanpools serving the Birmingham metropolitan area.

## School Bus
School districts provide transportation to school for students of their own district who are in grades K-12. They may also transport children for education assistance programs, including children who live outside of the district who need to access programs not available in their home district.

## Indirect Providers
Indirect providers bring services to a person's home so a trip is not needed. They may also transport certain people under certain circumstances. These organizations generally focus on a specific client group, for example:
- Grocery stores and pharmacies that make home deliveries
- Hot meal delivery services
- Personal services, companion, and in-home care
- Hospitals and medical clinics
- Residential long-term care facilities and group homes

- Senior and community centers
- Churches and faith-based organizations
- Child and adult care facilities
- Job training/employment development services
- Social service agencies

## Direct Providers

Direct transportation providers are those organizations whose primary purpose is to transport people. In addition to the transit providers mentioned above, direct transportation providers contribute to overall community mobility. These include:

- Taxicabs and private drivers (Uber, and Lyft)
- Private and nonprofit
- Nonemergency medical
- Airport shuttles
- Charter services

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic indicators help determine the likelihood of residents to be dependent on others for transportation. Those include: age 65 and over, no vehicle in the household, no high school education, and poverty. At the time of this update, the most recent population data available was from the 2015 American Community Survey. The combined population of the six-county region makes up 23% of the state's population. Jefferson is the most populous county, having 14% of the state's population.

Graphics and tables of demographic cohorts follow, each showing a comparison of all six counties (Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 2 through 7). The figures visually demonstrate the array of differences among the counties. Each county's demographic data are individually reviewed and presented later in this section.

### TABLE 1: Cohort Comparison of Counties

| Cohort | Blount | Chilton | Jefferson | Shelby | St Clair | Walker |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Zero Vehicle Households | 3.7% | 6.3% | 8.3% | 3.0% | 4.1% | 6.0% |
| Population 65+ | 16.5% | 14.9% | 13.9% | 12.5% | 14.1% | 18.1% |
| Poverty | 16.7% | 19.5% | 19.0% | 7.7% | 12.8% | 23.2% |
| 25+ No High School Diploma | 21.5% | 25.2% | 11.6% | 8.5% | 16.5% | 22.2% |
| Median Household Income | $45,813 | $41,627 | $45,610 | $70,187 | $51,859 | $35,843 |
| Population Growth 2000-2015 | 13.1% | 10.7% | -0.5% | 42.0% | 32.6% | -6.8% |

### TABLE 2: Population and Growth (2000-2015)

| County | Population 2000 | Population 2010 | Population 2015 (est.) | Growth 2000-2015 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blount | 51,024 | 57,322 | 57,710 | 13.1% |
| Chilton | 39,593 | 43,643 | 43,819 | 10.7% |
| Jefferson | 662,047 | 658,466 | 659,026 | -0.5% |
| Shelby | 143,293 | 195,085 | 203,530 | 42.0% |
| St. Clair | 64,742 | 83,593 | 85,864 | 32.6% |
| Walker | 70,713 | 67,023 | 65,923 | -6.8% |
| Region | 1,031,412 | 1,105,132 | 1,115,872 | 8.2% |
| State | 4,447,100 | 4,633,360 | 4,830,620 | 8.62234% |

NOTE: From 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates.
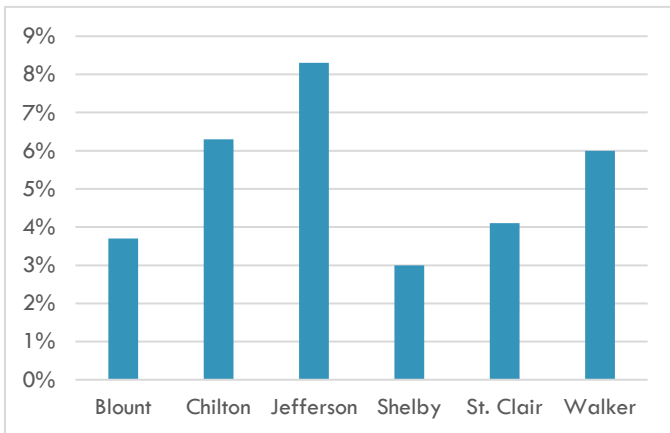
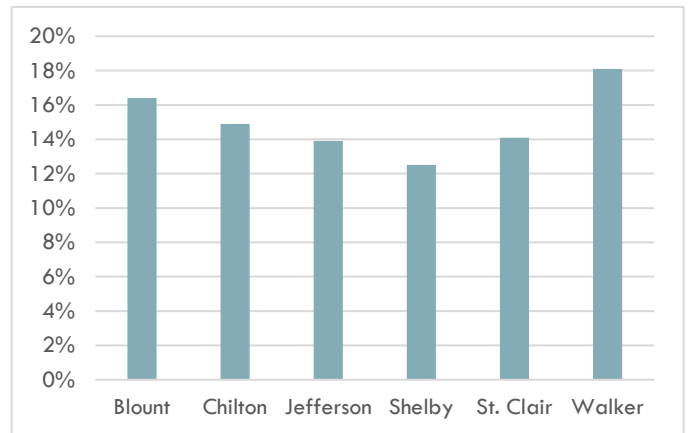**FIGURE 2: Zero-Vehicle Households**



**FIGURE 3: Age 65 and Over**



**FIGURE 4: Poverty**



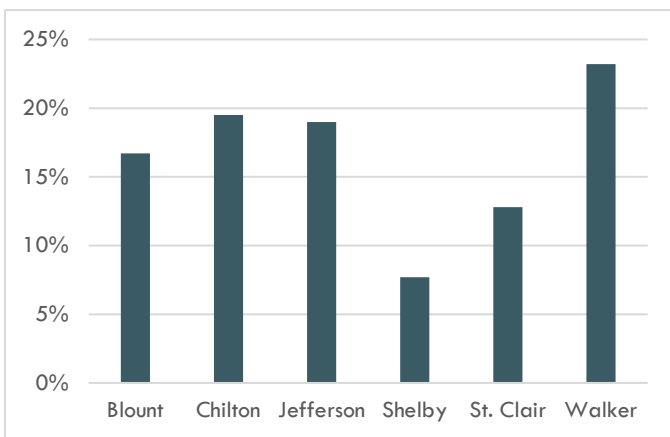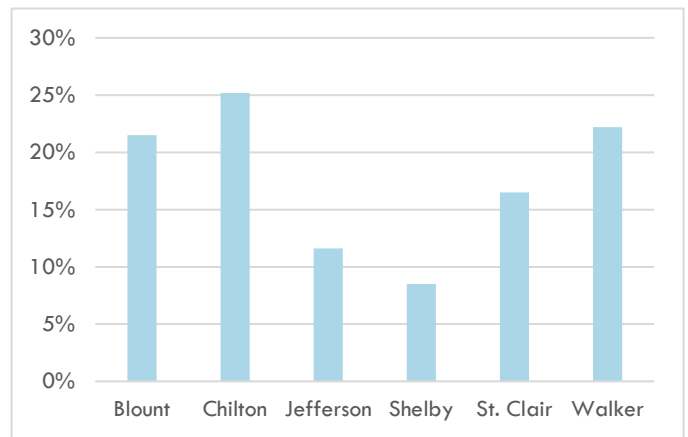**FIGURE 5: Age 25+ No High School Diploma**



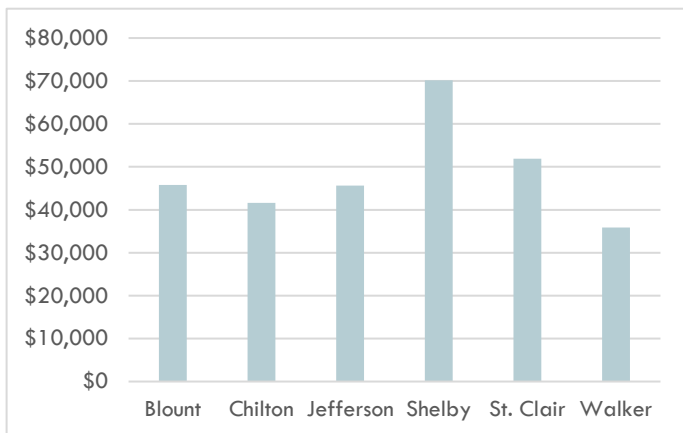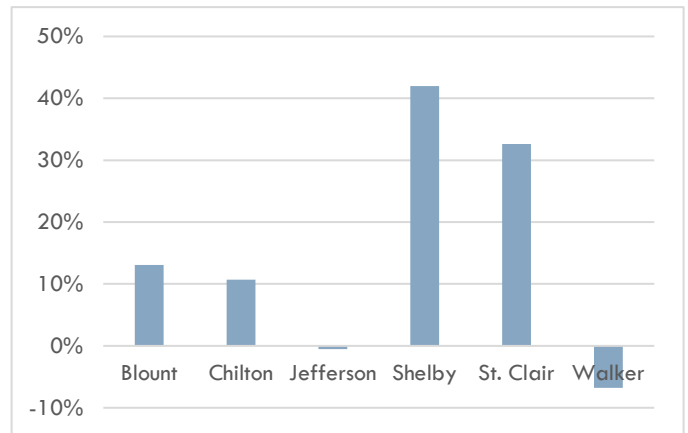**FIGURE 6: Median Household Income**



**FIGURE 7: Population Growth 2000-2015**

## Blount County

Blount County covers 651 square miles, mostly rural, having an average density of 89 people per square mile. Cities include Oneonta (county seat), Hayden, Allgood, Nectar, Blountsville, Locust Fork, Cleveland, Susan Moore, Snead, Rosa, and Highland Lake. The county is known for its picturesque covered bridges and Rickwood Caverns, which has limestone formations and an underground pool.

For the most part, Blount County falls within the median range of the demographic data in the six-county region. One notable exception is seen in education. More than 21.5% of Blount County's population age 25 and over has no high school diploma. For the State of Alabama that number is 16.4%. It is surprising that, despite this indicator, the median household income is in the average range for the region and state.

Blount County's 2015 estimated population was 57,710, growing 13.1% since 2000. This is very healthy when compared to the region and state at 8.2% and 8.7%, respectively. It should be noted that the Birmingham urbanized area (UZA) has expanded into a small portion of Blount, partially responsible for the county's healthy growth rate.

### TABLE 3: Demographic Comparisons for Blount County

| Cohort | Blount | Region | Alabama |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zero Vehicle Households | 3.7% | 5.2% | 6.5% |
| Population 65+ | 16.5% | 15.0% | 14.9% |
| Poverty | 16.7% | 16.5% | 18.8% |
| 25+ No High School Diploma | 21.5% | 17.6% | 16.4% |
| Median Household Income | $45,813 | $48,490 | $43,623 |
| Population Growth 2000-2015 | 13.1% | 8.2% | 8.6% |

Chilton County covers 701 square miles and is the most rural county in the region with an average density of 63 people per square mile. Cities include Clanton (county seat), Jemison, Maplesville, and Thorsby. The county is known for its peaches and other produce. Chilton County's 2015 estimated population was 43,819, but its growth rate is good, having a 10.7% increase from 2000-2015.

Within the six-county region, Chilton County ranks the second highest in overall transportation dependent cohorts. Of note is the number of individuals without a high school diploma; however, this must be considered in light of its agricultural environment.

Chilton is located the farthest from Birmingham and services offered in the metropolitan area. In fact, residents in Chilton County are about half-way between Birmingham and Montgomery. The location, combined with the demographic factors, indicate an increased need for transportation assistance.

**TABLE 4: Demographic Comparisons for Chilton County**

| Cohort | Chilton | Region | Alabama |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zero Vehicle Households | 6.3% | 5.2% | 6.5% |
| Population 65+ | 14.9% | 15.0% | 14.9% |
| Poverty | 19.5% | 16.5% | 18.8% |
| 25+ No High School Diploma | 25.5% | 17.6% | 16.4% |
| Median Household Income | $41,627 | $48,490 | $43,623 |
| Population Growth 2000-2015 | 10.7% | 8.2% | 8.6% |

## Jefferson County

Jefferson County covers 1,119 square miles, mostly urban, having an average density of 589 people per square mile. Birmingham is the most populous city in Jefferson County, with 212,211 people out of the total Jefferson County population of 659,026. Like most metropolitan areas, Jefferson County offers a variety of services and amenities. Because of its geography, it also offers unique and plentiful recreational opportunities that are not usually available within a city.

Jefferson County is the largest county in the six-county region and the most populous county in the state. Like many other major metropolitan areas, its growth rate has declined for the past 20 years. However, the latest population estimate indicates nominal growth over the past five years.

Jefferson County has the highest percentage of zero vehicle households (8.3%) in the region. Although Jefferson County has a fixed-route transit system, the service area is limited and the frequency of service is poor. Therefore, the system does not accommodate many residents. This means there is a gap in available transportation services and many residents have unmet transportation needs.

**TABLE 5: Demographic Comparisons for Jefferson County**

| Cohort | Jefferson | Region | Alabama |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zero Vehicle Households | 8.3% | 5.2% | 6.2% |
| Population 65+ | 13.9% | 15.0% | 14.9% |
| Poverty | 19.0% | 16.5% | 18.8% |
| 25+ No High School Diploma | 11.6% | 17.6% | 16.4% |
| Median Household Income | $45,610 | $48,490 | $43,623 |
| Population Growth 2000-2015 | -0.5% | 8.2% | 8.6% |
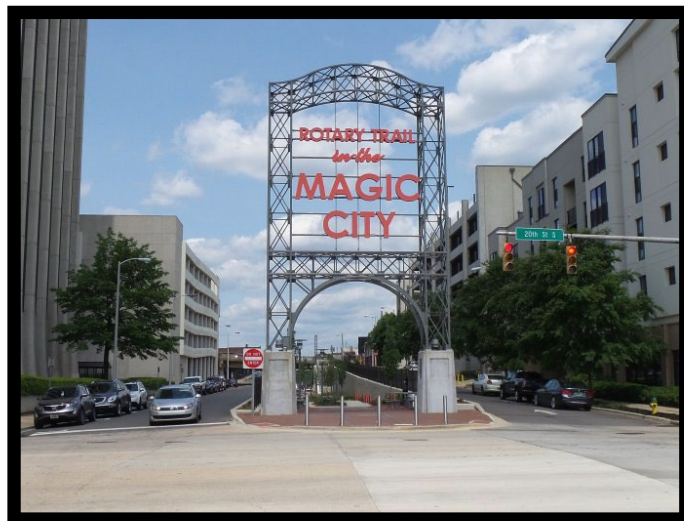
Shelby County covers 810 square miles with a mix of urban and rural areas. The average population density is 251 people per square mile. Shelby County is home to Oak Mountain State Park, Alabama's largest state park, covering nearly 10,000 acres.

Located south of Jefferson County, Shelby County has experienced a population increase of 42.0% since 2000. Concurrently, the Hispanic population has nearly tripled since 2000, from 2.0% of total population to 5.9%. As a comparison, the Hispanic population in the State of Alabama increased from 1.7% in 2000 to 3.9%.

Compared to the region, Shelby County ranked the lowest in every demographic cohort measured, meaning it has the least transportation need. However, Shelby County's rapid growth rate may have future ramifications regarding transportation dependency, considering its corresponding rapid employment rate. Most notable is Shelby County's high median household income of $70,187.

**TABLE 7: Demographic Comparisons for Shelby County**

| Cohort | Shelby | Region | Alabama |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zero Vehicle Household | 3.0% | 5.2% | 6.5% |
| Population 65+ | 12.5% | 15.0% | 14.9% |
| Poverty | 7.7% | 16.5% | 18.8% |
| 25+ No High School Diploma | 8.5% | 17.6% | 16.4% |
| Median Household Income | $70,187 | $48,490 | $43,623 |
| Population Growth 2000-2015 | 42.0% | 8.2% | 8.6% |

## St. Clair County

The 2015 population for St. Clair County was 85,864. It has consistently experienced the second-highest growth rate in the region. But with 654 square miles, St. Clair County remains largely rural, having an average population density of 131 people per square mile. Interstates 59 and 20 pass through the county, encouraging convenient development expansion from Jefferson County. Since 2010, the southernmost potion of St. Clair County has been included in the Birmingham urbanized area. As such, growth in this area is expected to continue.

St. Clair is the only county in Alabama with two county seats—one in Ashville and one in Pell City. Using the demographic indicators, St. Clair County ranked fifth in the region for overall transportation need. These are positive indicators from an economic standpoint.

### TABLE 6: Demographic Comparisons for St. Clair County

| Cohort | St. Clair | Region | Alabama |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zero Vehicle Households | 4.1% | 5.2% | 6.5% |
| Population 65+ | 14.1% | 15.0% | 14.9% |
| Poverty | 12.8% | 16.5% | 18.8% |
| 25+ No High School Diploma | 16.5% | 17.6% | 16.4% |
| Median Household Income | $51,859 | $48,490 | $43,623 |
| Population Growth 2000-2015 | 32.6% | 8.2% | 8.6% |

## Walker County

Walker County covers 805 square miles and is largely rural. It has a population of 65,923, or 82 people per square mile. Jasper is the county seat and is in the center of the county. Walker County lost 6.8% of its population from 2000-2015. Approximately 20 percent of Walker County's total population is in Jasper. Coal and timber are major resources.

In the six-county region, Walker has the highest overall score for transit dependency cohorts. It is important to note the very high percentage of poverty. Also notable is Walker County's median household income of $35,843, the lowest in the region.

**TABLE 8: Demographic Comparison for Walker County**

| Cohort | Walker | Region | Alabama |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zero Vehicle Household | 6.0% | 5.2% | 6.5% |
| Population 65+ | 18.1% | 15.0% | 14.9% |
| Poverty | 23.2% | 16.5% | 18.8% |
| 25+ No High School Diploma | 22.2% | 17.6% | 16.4% |
| Median Household Income | $35,843 | $48,490 | $43,623 |
| Population Growth 2000-2015 | -6.8% | 8.2% | 8.7% |

# TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

To get widespread input, at least one public meeting was held in each county.  A diversity of representatives attended the meetings, including local politicians, agency employees, the public, transportation providers, caregivers, and individuals who are transportation disadvantaged. Information gathered was used to develop this plan.  Similarities were seen across counties regarding needs, barriers, and solutions.

## Seniors

As health care improves and Baby Boomers age, transportation for seniors is a vital concern. Seniors rely on their automobiles to enable preservation of their independence. In the Greater Birmingham area, there are few, if any, viable alternatives to the private automobile; this can compel people to drive when they are not able. Contrary to popular belief, older drivers are more likely to be harmed than to harm others[1]. Older drivers are about three times more likely to crash per mile driven, and the risk of dying after an automobile accident increases significantly with age[2].

## Disabled

The disabled population is diverse, ranging from minor to severe and infant to elderly. It does not discriminate among race, age, income, or education. In many cases, an inability to drive is the only thing that interferes with leading a relatively normal lifestyle. Even if there is adequate public transit and individuals are physically able to negotiate it, they may not be able to get to/from bus stops, due to lack of sidewalks or other features that interfere with accessibility. Great strides have been made since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, but there remains much room for improvement.

In addition to identifying population groups that may be likely to need transportation assistance, there are also trip purpose needs, as identified in the public involvement meetings. The most urgent needs are for life-sustaining activities, such as food and medical (including prescriptions, rehabilitation, and day care).

Of course, there are a variety of other trip purpose needs, including employment, education, general personal business, and social activities. Because of limited resources, effort is usually concentrated on providing transportation for life-sustaining activities. But there has been much literature written about individuals who are homebound and their tendency to experience depression and poor health. When people experience a higher quality of life, it is beneficial for individuals and society. In fact, one study asserts that health risks of social isolation are equivalent to smoking and obesity[3].

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[1] "Road Map to Wellness" www.asaging.org/cdc/module4/phase1/phase1_1b.cfm (accessed January 2011)

[2] Foley, MS, et al. "Driving Life Expectancy of Persons Ages 70 Years and Older in the United States." *American Journal of Public Health*. 92.8 (2002), p. 1284.

[3] Holt-Lunstad, Julianne, et al. "Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review." *PLOS Medicine*, July 2010.

## Driver Training

Many disabilities are not visually observed or obvious. Drivers need better training on how to effectively assist passengers and how to react (or not react) to certain behaviors. Traveling independently can be confusing. It is important to make every passenger feel comfortable and able to reach their destination safely, without incident.

# TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS

At each of the public meetings, participants were asked to identify barriers to transportation. Interestingly, funding was usually at the end of the list.

### Availability
The barrier that participants cited most often was availability of transportation, which includes service area, hours of operation, and dependability. Public transportation service is limited, even in Jefferson and Shelby counties, where fixed route public transit exists. Many people are unable to use Section 5310 demand response service, due to capacity constraints and eligibility criteria.

### In-County Only
Of concern in Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, and Walker counties is the ability to get to and from other counties. The bulk of medical and social services are in Jefferson County. People are denied services for which they are eligible, because they cannot cross county lines to access facilities.

### Infrastructure
Sidewalks and bike lanes are, for the most part, nonexistent, making it necessary to walk and ride in streets or in other areas not designed for pedestrians or cyclists.  For individuals living within a few miles of a town or grocery store, walking or biking is an obvious and convenient choice.  But on a two-lane road where vehicles are traveling in excess of 55 miles per hour, it is not feasible.

### Public Awareness
Many people are unaware that public transportation is available in their county and whether or not they are eligible. Hence, there is a need for public education and marketing. Public awareness leads to increased efficiencies and overall effectiveness. Other benefits of access to jobs and shopping is an increased tax base and overall public health.

Additionally, the public needs to be educated about overall funding of transit. Most people are unaware of how much public transportation costs and how it is funded.

### Politics
Except in Jefferson County, nearly every elected official who attended the public involvement meetings indicated that they rarely, if ever, hear anything good or bad about public transportation in their jurisdiction.  If people do not express a need, public officials do not sense a responsibility to fund activities to address that need. Participants felt there was an overall public acceptance of lack of transportation service and most did not think of it as a political undertaking.

### Coordination
Another barrier is the lack of interest in sharing resources. There is a prevailing "what-comes-here-stays-here" mentality. Jurisdictions as well as agencies may be hesitant to share resources because they are worried about not getting their fair share. However, sharing resources increases funding efficiencies and allows more people to access more services.

## STRATEGIES

The following strategies will be used to address the transportation needs and barriers indicated above.

1.  Enforce Standards for Funding for FTA Sections 5310. This means that only those applications requesting capital equipment for projects that serve a broad range of people, expand service area, hours, and/or days of operation, and/or engage in coordinated contracts will be funded.

2.  Explore options for developing and/or expanding public transit along corridors identified as having high transit potential. This can be done, in part, through alternatives analysis studies.

3.  Work with rural counties to coordinate service across county lines.

4.  Assist the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority in service development and route adjustment.

5.  Continue to work with various groups to develop ways to expand services. In the urbanized area, this may include specialized service, express buses, and bus rapid transit.

6.  Begin a public awareness campaign regarding available services and advocate for designation of funding.

7.  Work with special interest groups (e.g., veterans, career centers, aging services) to identify and reduce duplication of services.

8.  Continue working with employers to participate in CommuteSmart, the local ridesharing program.

9.  Work toward development of a central call center (for Jefferson and Shelby counties).

10. Assist with the formation of volunteer programs to provide transportation services.

11. Look for partners to promote the benefits of public transportation services.

12. At a minimum under FTA Section 5310, sustain current levels of service, including vehicle replacement, where appropriate.

13. Other strategies or proposed projects not listed herein will be considered for funding if they demonstrate concurrence with stated Goals and movement toward resolution of Needs and/or Barriers.