

Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan Michigan Planning Region 8

March 2024

Region 8 Counties:

Allegan

Barry

Ionia

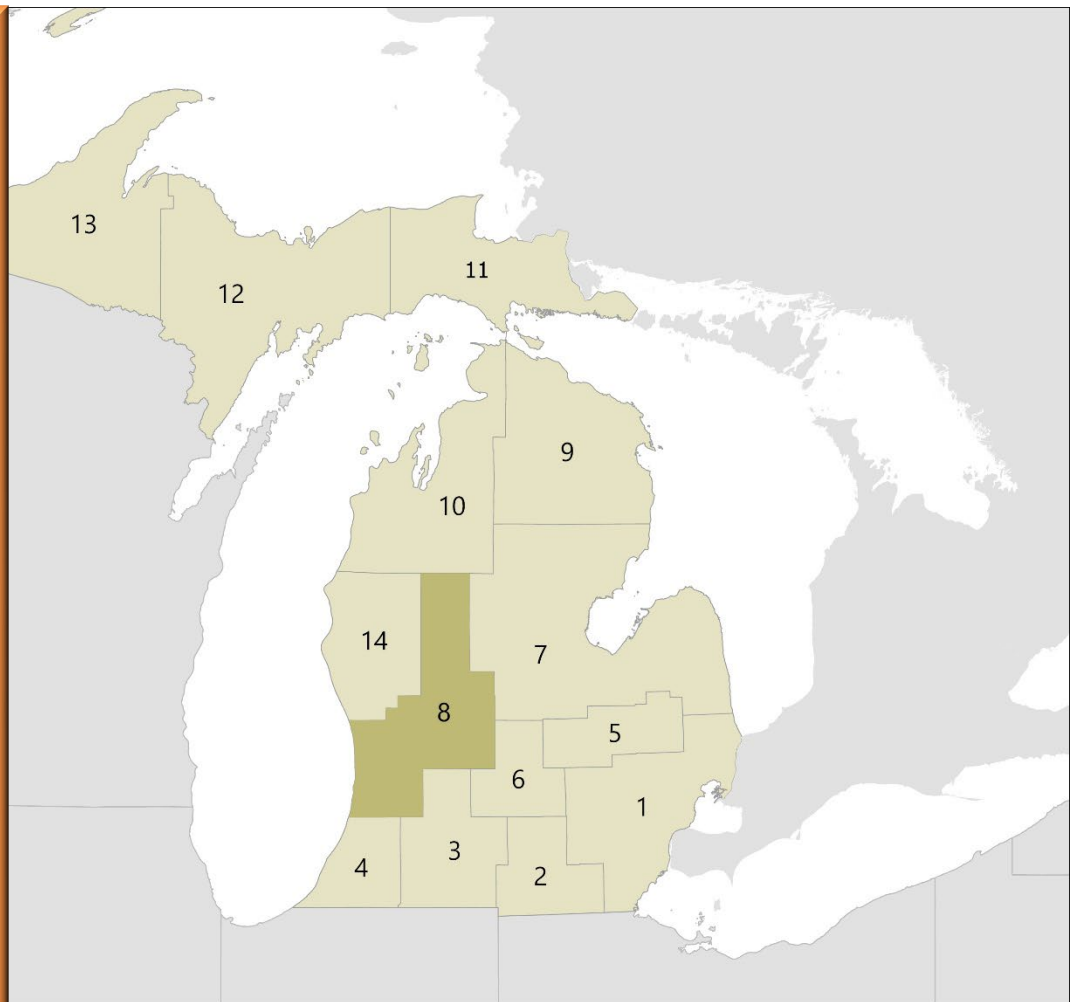
Kent

Mecosta

Montcalm

Osceola

Ottawa



KFH

◆ GROUP ◆

Bethesda, MD | Austin, TX

Acknowledgements

Input from a wide range of stakeholders was a key component in the development of this plan. Special thanks to the stakeholders who participated in regional focus groups and provided input throughout the planning process. Their input was especially beneficial in the assessment of transportation needs in the region, and in the development of potential strategies, activities and projects to improve mobility. In addition, appropriate information and pictures were obtained from the websites of some regional stakeholders.

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Chapter 1

Background

Introduction

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

One of the federal requirements of the Section 5310 program is that projects selected for funding must be included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan (coordinated transportation plan). In Michigan coordinated transportation plans are primarily based on the fourteen regional planning agencies across the state, and this is the plan for the West Michigan Regional Planning Commission (WMRPC) – Region 8 that includes Allegan, Ionia, Kent, Mecosta, Montcalm, Osceola, and Ottawa Counties. The region is shown in Figure 1-1 on the next page, and in relation to the other planning regions in Michigan. Barry County also works with Region 8, but is considered part of Region 3 by MDOT and is included in the plan for that region.

Plan Contents

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

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

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

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

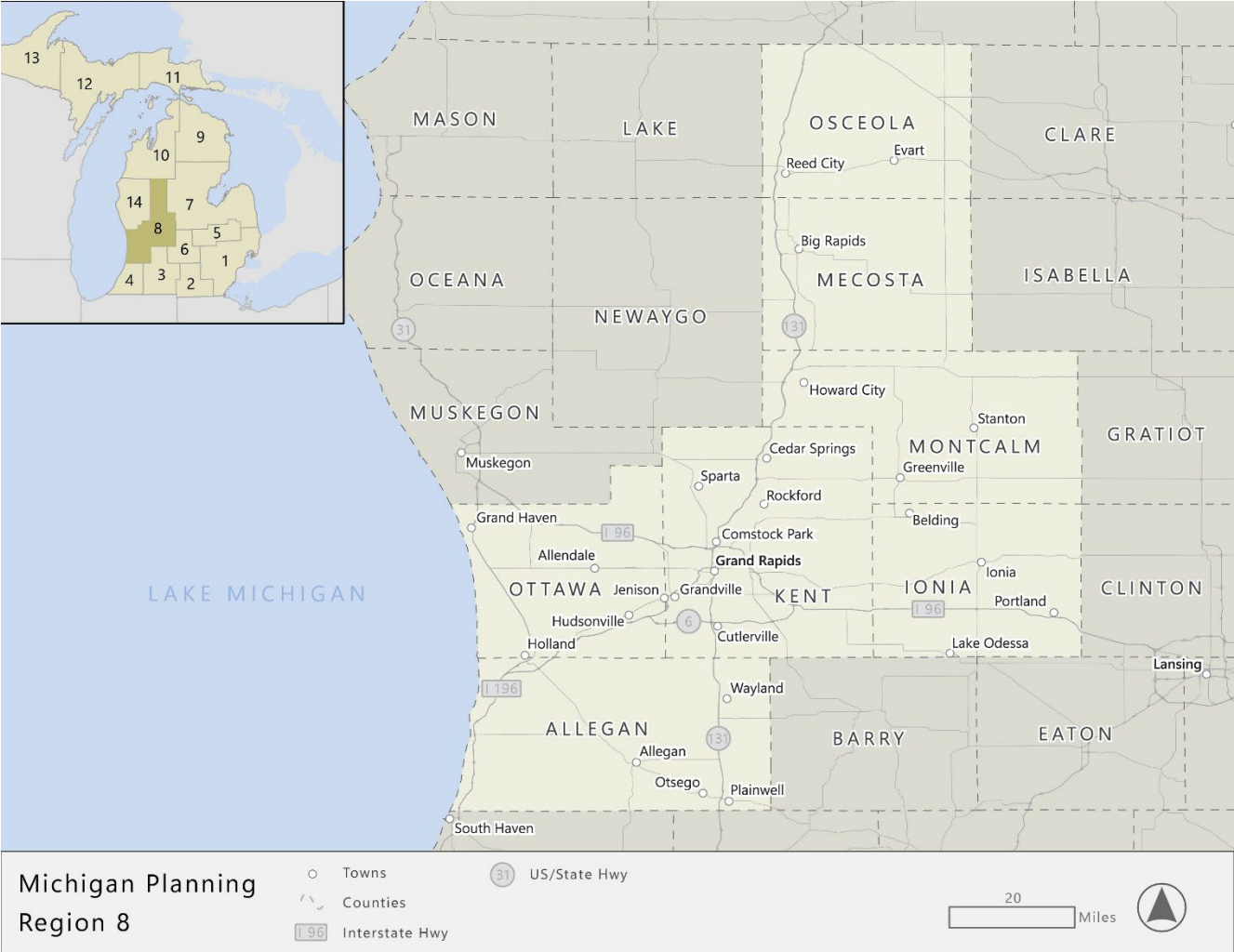
Chapter 5 provides an assessment of the transportation needs in the region based on input from key stakeholders.

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

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

Chapter 8 discusses the process for approval of this plan.

Figure 1-1: Michigan Planning Region 8



Coordinated Transportation Planning Requirements

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

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

Coordination with Other Federal Programs

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

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

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

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

Going Beyond the Federal Requirements

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

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

Overall, this plan is designed to serve as a blueprint and a practical document for future discussions and efforts in Region 8 to improve regional mobility and coordination.

Chapter 2

Outreach and Planning Process

Introduction

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

Regional Outreach Efforts

The primary outreach effort for the statewide coordinated transportation planning process involved two rounds of online regional workshops that provided the opportunity to engage a variety of stakeholders, to confirm transportation needs, and to discuss potential strategies, projects, and services to improve regional mobility. In Region 8 WMRPC distributed an invitation to numerous agencies and organizations that serve older adults, people with disabilities, people with lower incomes, and others facing transportation challenges, and seeking their involvement in the focus groups and their input on mobility needs and potential improvements in the region. These stakeholders were encouraged to pass the invitation along to their individual contact lists to help ensure an even broader outreach effort.

Region 8 Focus Groups

In Region 8 an initial focus group was conducted on March 16, 2023, and attracted 26 registrants that included representatives from:

- Aging programs
- Chambers of Commerce
- Community colleges
- Community development agencies
- Economic development agencies
- Human service agencies
- Local citizens
- Local communities
- Local governments
- Local transit systems
- Michigan Department of Transportation
- Planning agencies and commissions
- Road commissions
- Workforce development agencies

The focus group began with a review of the coordinated transportation planning process and the Section 5310 Program, and discussion on the important role of stakeholders in providing their input on transportation needs and potential solutions and in the collection of appropriate information and data for the plan. The majority of the focus group workshop was then focused on obtaining feedback from participants through three breakout groups, and in particular on:

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

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

At the conclusion of the focus group participants were invited to stay involved with the coordinated planning process by participating in a second regional focus group. This event was conducted on May 18, 2023, and provided the opportunity to review the transportation needs and gaps identified through the initial focus group and to discuss preliminary strategies for meeting these needs.

Ongoing Stakeholder Input

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

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

Michigan Coordinated Transportation Planning Website

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

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



Chapter 3

Previous Plans and Studies

Introduction

This chapter summarizes recent plans and studies in the region that are relevant to the study process, or provide information on community transportation needs and potential solutions. The issues and needs identified by previous planning processes were similar to those identified during outreach efforts in Region 8. Key issues from the previous planning reports and projects, along with stakeholder input and the demographic analysis discussed in later chapters, help to provide a broad transportation needs assessment.

Coordinated Mobility Plan: Prosperity Region 4

The May 2016 Coordinated Mobility Plan for Prosperity Region 4 included Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Lake, Kent, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newago, Oceana, Osceola, and Ottawa Counties, and served as the previous coordinated transportation plan for the counties included in this plan for Region 8. Similar to the current planning efforts, the plan utilized regional workshops and stakeholder input to understand current needs in the region. The high priority goals identified through the planning process included:

- Regional connectivity
- Maintaining existing transportation services
- Expanding and improving local transit services
- Securing additional funding to provide expanded transportation services

Allegan County Transportation Five-Year Strategic Plan (2011)

The Allegan County Transportation Workgroup is composed of local directors, employees, elected officials, and residents serving or living throughout the Allegan County region. The Workgroup developed improvements for a five-year strategic plan to meet the growing transportation needs of the general public living in Allegan County. The recommendations included:

- Providing a Reserve-A-Ride transportation system to the general public in Allegan County
- Implementing community service areas that allocate transportation service to each of the five regions in Allegan County

- Connecting ACT with public transportation systems in the surrounding counties of Kalamazoo, Ottawa, Kent, and Van Buren
- Maintaining the current fare structure of \$2 per trip for general public transportation and \$1 per trip for seniors, Americans with Disabilities Act passengers, and children
- Providing transportation services Monday through Friday from 5:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., with limited employment related service from 9:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m.
- Providing Saturday and Sunday service on a limited basis up to 115 hours per weekend
- Maintaining a user-friendly ACT website with current information on service, fares, updates and contact information
- Creating an ACT annual report with year-end updates, successes and trends to share with riders and stakeholders
- Working with the local press outlets to secure earned media on ACT updates and trends
- Maintaining ongoing dialogue with ACT customer and stakeholders to gather feedback on whether the system meets their needs and research requests for service enhancements as appropriate
- Seeking funding to support implementation of the improvements outlined in the plan

The Workgroup came up with five service options and a sixth dependent on the first two proposed options. The proposed service options include:

1. Maintaining the current ACT system
2. Dedicating transportation to connect Allegan City with Wayland/Hopkins and the Interurban in Saugatuck/Douglas, and providing transportation to Casco Township
3. Dedicating 113,235 rides for public transportation service by creating a county-wide zone transit system in Allegan County
4. Dedicating 177,228 rides for public transportation service by creating a county-wide zone transit system in Allegan County
5. Dedicating 260,247 rides for public transportation service by creating a county-wide zone transit system in Allegan County
6. Expansion of Route Radius for option 1 and 2

The final recommendation made by the Workgroup was a hybrid version of options 3 and 4.

Holland Township Comprehensive Land Use Master Plan (2020)

The Holland Township Comprehensive Plan discusses a Transportation Plan within Chapter 5. The plan lays out the existing transportation network and the state of the roadways. In regards to public transportation, the plan discusses the need to increase and upgrade the public transportation network to support the growth in population and enhancement of the commercial and industrial areas. Some recommendations that plan set out in regards to public transportation include:

- Continue enhancing the relationship with MAX to assess locations in which bus routes or stops should be added.
- Assess current routes to identify future routes that are linear and not large loops to decrease travel time.
- Establish a partnership with the BRT line in the City of Grand Rapids as the population in the greater Holland area increases.
- Consider ridesharing and carpooling as transportation network enhancement opportunities.

City of Ionia Master Plan (2019)

The City of Ionia Master Plan was created through the use of online surveys, planning commissioners meetings, and public hearings. In regards to motorized and non-motorized transportation, the Master Plan included three goals:

1. Provide for the safe and efficient movement of vehicles, pedestrians, bicyclists, and other users of the streets, sidewalks, and trails in the City of Ionia
2. Continue to implement traffic calming measures or pedestrian safety measures in those areas where driver and/or pedestrian safety is of concern in order to make the City a walkable, pedestrian friendly community
3. Analyze streets to determine which would be good candidates for incorporating the design concepts of "Complete Streets" as required by the Michigan Planning Enabling Act

Kent County Transit Needs Assessment (2011)

The Kent Count Transit Needs Assessment was conducted to determine the overall demand for transportation service in the areas of the county with minimal public transportation service or without any altogether. The study area was defined as the portion of Kent County located outside the ITP/The Rapid's core service area (discussed in Chapter 4).

The needs assessment identified the following system shortcomings:

- A patchwork of transportation services exist in Kent County with much of it having program eligibility requirements.
- Both program and non-program related transportation services are limited and often rationed. This variety of transportation services can be difficult for the public to understand.
- Development continues to accelerate in areas outside of the current service district of ITP/The Rapid, leaving major destinations and residential areas without public transportation.
- Population in Kent County is aging with the over 65 age group increasing over the next ten years.
- There is no long term, adequate and stable funding source for public transportation outside ITP/The Rapid's service area.

The study recommended an expansion of countywide demand response services, commuter services, and ADA paratransit services, as well as extension of The Rapid's routes. A financial plan noted the need for a county millage to support these service expansions.

Mecosta County Master Plan (2014)

The Mecosta County Master Plan, which was updated in 2014, lays out goals and objectives for multiple aspects for 10 years, including, land use, economic development, housing, community facilities and services, lake areas, and transportation. The overall goal for transportation in Mecosta County is to provide an efficient, safe, well maintained, and cost effective Countywide transportation system. In order to achieve the goal, the Master Plan set out 11 objectives:

1. Continue to maintain and improve the County's existing road system
2. Prioritize improvements to existing roadways based on traffic volumes, safety, development pressure, and availability of funds
3. Promote and coordinate the reconstruction and resurfacing of M-20 from Remus west to Big Rapids with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT)
4. Encourage the County Road Commission to continue roadway improvements that facilitate more direct East-West through the County
5. Encourage the continued maintenance and expansion of the Big Rapids Roben-Hood Municipal Airport to maintain air related transportation services within Mecosta County
6. Promote the use and expansion of the County's on-call bus service

7. Promote sign regulation along major transportation corridors to reduce visual clutter, ensure safety, and protect the County's rural agricultural character
8. Carefully regulate access management along arterial and primary roads to minimize conflicts and increase efficiency and safety
9. Promote reasonable private road requirements to insure a minimum level of construction and maintenance standards for efficient access and safety
10. Encourage coordination of the County's planning road commission, and economic development agencies to avoid potential duplication of efforts and to provide appropriate time for future transportation system improvements
11. Periodically update traffic count data and annually update road condition inventories

Montcalm Township Master Plan (2004)

The Montcalm Township Master Plan main goal is to establish a basis for future land use and public services in Montcalm Township. With the increase of housing and land use development, the plan discussed that if left unchecked, it runs the risk of increasing congestion, increasing travel times, and muting the rich rural panoramic views. Therefore the goal in regards to transportation is to maintain a transportation network throughout the Township that encourages efficient and safe travel, consistent with the rural character of the community and coordinated with the planned future land use pattern. The plan also discusses the need to focus on roadways usage for traffic flow as high density land use increases within the Township.

Chapter 4

Transportation Services and Resources

Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of public transit, human services transportation, private transportation services, and non-motorized transportation services provided in Region 8. The process to identify transportation resources available in the region included:

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

Public Transit

Region 8 is served by the following public transit systems:

- Allegan County Transportation
- Belding Dial-A-Ride
- Big Rapids Dial-A-Ride
- Greenville Transit
- Interurban Transit Authority
- Ionia Dial-A-Ride
- Macatawa Area Express-Max Transit
- Mecosta Osceola Transit Authority
- The Rapid

Allegan County Transportation

Allegan County Transportation is a reservation bus service that provides transportation to/from your home or place of work. ACT operates Monday through Friday from 5:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Children who are accompanying passengers will be dropped off at daycare at no extra charge.

Fares for Allegan County Transportation Authority are shown in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1: Fares for Allegan County Transportation Authority

	One-Way
Adults and Children 13 and over	\$2.00
Seniors and Children 5-12	\$1.00
Children under 5	Free

Belding Dial-A-Ride

Belding Dial-A-Ride provides dial-a-ride transportation services weekdays from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. and Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Special routes and times are available on weekdays between the cities of Belding, Greenville, Ionia, and the Village of Orleans.

Fares for Belding Dial-A-Ride are shown in Table 4-2.

Table 4-2: Fares for Belding Dial-A-Ride

	One Way Trip
Adult	\$3.00
Student	\$2.50
Seniors or Disabled	\$1.50

Big Rapids Dial-A-Ride

Big Rapid Transit Dial-A-Ride operates a shared ride, demand response service around Big Rapids with eight vehicles. The service operates Monday through Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Fares are shown in Table 4-3.

Table 4-3: Fares for Big Rapids Dial-A-Ride

	Fares
Regular	\$2.50
Age 16 and Under	\$1.25
Seniors	\$1.25
Disabled	\$1.25
Aides	Free

Greenville Transit

Greenville Transit provides demand response services throughout the City and neighboring Eureka Township. Greenville Transit operates a fleet of 7 service vehicles and provides transportation for Community Events, Education, Employment, Enhanced Mobility for Independent Living, Recreation, Retail and Services. The services operate Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Fares for Greenville Transit services are shown in Table 4-4.

Table 4-4: Fares for Greenville Transit Services

	Adult	Children under 12	Senior	Disabled	Student (Middle/High School)
City Routes	\$3.50	\$2.50	\$1.75	\$1.75	\$3.50
Eureka Twp	\$4.20	\$3.00	\$2.10	\$2.10	\$4.20

Intraurban Transit Authority

Intraurban Transit Authority is a demand response public bus system providing transportation for Saugatuck, Douglas, and Saugatuck Township. The services operate Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Saturday 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and Sunday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. between November and February. The system also has a Park and Call service that runs during regular business hours where riders can park at the High School for \$1.00 and get picked up. Fares are shown in Table 4-5.

Table 4-5: Fares for Intraurban Transit Authority

	Fares
Adults and Children 12 and Over	\$1.00
Seniors 62+	\$0.50
Children under 12	\$0.50
Disabled	\$0.50

Ionia Dial-A-Ride

Ionia Dial-A-Ride provides shared demand response transportation for Community Events, Education, Employment, Enhanced Mobility for Independent Living, Recreation, Retail, and Services. I-DART operates Monday through Friday 6:00 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. and Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. I-DART services are within City of Ionia limits, Berlin Township, Ionia Township, Easton Township, and Orange Township.

Fares for Ionia Dial-A-Ride services are shown in Table 4-6.

Table 4-6: Fares for Ionia Dial-A-Ride Services

	One Way Trip
Adult	\$3.00
Children (pre-k)	\$1.50
Student	\$2.00
Disabled	\$1.50
Seniors	\$1.50

Macatawa Area Express-Max Transit

Macatawa Area Express-Max Transit is a small urban transit that services the greater Holland/Zeeland area. MAX operates hourly fixed bus routes and an evening Twilight Route Monday through Saturday. Fixed route depart from the Padnos Transportation Center at the top of the hour every hour.

MAX offers paratransit service with advance reservations for eligible passengers. Only ADA cardholders and those who originate and/or destinations that are farther than ½ mile from a bus stop are eligible. Passengers traveling in the evening after the fixed bus routes stop operating at 7:00 p.m. also are eligible for rides on the Night Owl Service. Reservations must be made by 4:00 p.m. The services operate weekdays between 6:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. and Saturdays 8:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m.

Fares for Macatawa Area Express-Max Transit are shown in Table 4-7.

Table 4-7: Fares for Macatawa Area Express-Max Transit

	One Way Trip
Adult	\$5.50
Children	\$2.30
Seniors, ADA, and Children under 5	\$2.30

Mecosta Osceola Transit Authority

Mecosta Osceola Transit Authority offers door-to-door service within Mecosta and Osceola Counties. The MOTAs buses are lift equipped to assist any passenger with special mobility needs. MOTAs offers day ahead bookings for all riders. All routes within Mecosta and Osceola Counties are demand response. Buses operate between 5:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.

Fares for Mecosta Osceola Transit Authority services are shown in Table 4-8.

Table 4-8: Fares for Mecosta Osceola Transit Authority Services

	Fare
Adult	\$2.00
Senior (60-79)	\$1.00
Senior over 80	Free
Children (6 - 15)	\$1.00
Disabled	\$1.00
Veterans	\$1.00

The Rapid

The Rapid provides fixed route, GO!Bus, DASH, PASS, and RideLink services. The Rapid has 26 fixed routes that provide fixed route service throughout Grand Rapids.

The GO!Bus offers door-to-door service for seniors 65+ and persons with disabilities who cannot ride a fixed-route bus. Reservations must be made in advance for this service. Riders share trips if they are generally traveling in the same direction and at the same time. GO!Bus services are available during The Rapid's regularly scheduled bus services.

Passenger Adaptive Suburban Service (PASS) provides curb to stop rides for those who live within more than 1/3 of a mile off a bus line. The service will pick you up at your curb and deliver you to the nearest bus stop for only \$3.50. Reservations must be made at least one day in advance. Eligibility is required for PASS.

RideLink participates in RideLink, a network of area transportation providers that offer transportation to persons aged 60 or older to any necessary destination, including doctors' visits, recreational visits, and shopping trips throughout Kent County.

The City of Grand Rapids offers DASH routes to connect key downtown destinations and parking lots. Service is free and open to the general public. DASH operations Wednesday to Friday 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m., Saturday 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m., and Sunday 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The service runs in both directions.

Fares for The Rapid services are shown in Table 4-9.

Table 4-9: Fares for The Rapid Services

	Fare or Cap Increment	Single-Day Max	Calendar Month Max
Adult	\$1.75	\$3.50	\$47.00
Youth	\$1.25	\$2.50	\$33.75
Reduced	\$0.85	\$2.25	\$30.00
Partner	\$1.25	\$2.50	\$33.75
ADA	\$0	-	-
10-Ride	\$13.50	-	-

Regional Overview

Table 4-10: Public Transit Services in Region 8

System	Service Type	Primary Service	Service Hours
Allegan County Transportation	Door-to-Door	Allegan County	Monday - Friday 5:30 a.m. - 7:00 p.m. Saturday 8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Belding Dial-A-Ride	Dial-A-Ride	Ionia County	Monday - Friday 6:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Saturdays 9:00 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Big Rapids Dial-A-Ride	Dial-A-Ride	Big Rapids	Monday - Friday 6:30 a.m. - 6:30 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Greenville County Transportation	Demand Response	City of Greenville and Eureka Township	Monday - Friday 7:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Intraurban Transit Authority	Demand Response	Saugatuck, Douglas, and Saugatuck Township	Monday - Friday 7:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Sunday 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Ionia Dial-A-Ride	Demand Response	City of Ionia, Berlin Township, Ionia Township, Easton Township, Orange Township	Monday - Friday 6:00 a.m. - 4:45 p.m. Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Macatawa Area Express-MAX Transit	Fixed Route, Paratransit	Macatawa County	Monday - Friday 6:00 a.m. - 11:59 p.m. Saturday 8:00 a.m. - 11:59 p.m.
Mecosta Osceola Transit Authority	Door-to-Door	Mecosta and Osceola Counties	5:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
The Rapid	Fixed Route, Demand Response, Door-to-Door	Kent County	Monday - Saturday 5:30 a.m. - 10:30 p.m. Sunday 6:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.

Human Service Transportation Providers

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

Allegan County

- Allegan County Transit provides a senior and disability volunteer driver program through Senior Transportation.
- Area Agency on Aging provides needed service to seniors in specified geographic regions.
- Community Action of Allegan County provides volunteer driver transportation for seniors to and from appointments in order of priority for medical, legal, nutritional or social purposes.

Kent County

- American Red Cross of West Central Michigan provides transportation for senior citizens, low-income, and disabled individuals to medical, mental health, and social service appointments.
- Area Agency on Aging provides needed service to seniors in specified geographic regions.

Ionia County

- Ionia County Commission of Aging provides information and services to citizens within geographical areas who are 60 years of age and older for medical transportation, nutrition programs, home delivered meals, health and wellness programs, in-home assistance services and supportive services.
- Area Agency on Aging provides needed service to seniors in specified geographic regions.

Ottawa County

- Pioneer Resources receives New Freedom Program and Specialized Services Program funding through MDOT that is used to provide supportive transportation for individuals with disabilities.

- Senior Resource provides needed services to seniors in specified geographic regions.
- Ottawa County Department of Jobs and Family Services provided non-emergency transportation for Medicaid eligible residents, to and from Medicaid- covered services.

Mecosta County

- Area Agency on Aging provides needed service to seniors in specified geographic regions.

Montcalm County

- Montcalm County Commission on the Aging provides services to citizens 60 years and older with volunteer driver program.

Private Transportation Providers

Intercity Bus Services

There are a variety of intercity private transportation routes serving Region 8. Routes consist of interstate and intrastate connections from the following providers:

- Greyhound Lines
- Indian Trails

Taxi/Shuttle Providers

There are several taxi companies that operate across the region.

Amtrak Services

Within the region, Amtrak provides service from Chicago to Grand Rapids/East Lansing. Called the Pere Marquette Line. This service makes stops in New Buffalo, Holland, Bangor, and St. Joseph. From Chicago to Grand Rapids, the train departs at 6:30 p.m., while the train departs from Grand Rapids towards Chicago at 6:00 a.m.

Chapter 5

Assessment of Transportation Needs

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the transportation needs and gaps in mobility identified by regional stakeholders during the Region 8 focus groups. While many transportation needs are interrelated, they are broken out by the following key categories and themes that were expressed by regional stakeholders. It should be noted that these issues vary from one jurisdiction to another in the region, largely based on transportation resources, travel distance to key locations, and a variety of other factors:

- Expanded Transportation Services
- Coordination
- Outreach, Marketing, and Education
- Funding
- Operational Challenges
- Other Needs and Issues

Expanded Transportation Services

Transportation Gaps in Rural Areas – Many participants expressed that there are significant transportation gaps in rural areas, particularly to access services and employment in urban centers. Wait times, due to the rural nature of areas, is a complaint from customers.

Expanded Transportation Options for Older Adults – Stakeholders expressed the need for additional transportation options for older adults in accessing congregate meal sites, medical appointments, and social events. Transportation to medical appointments for treatment of chronic illnesses (e.g., dialysis, chemotherapy) was also identified as a major need.

Access to Employment Opportunities - Another area that was noted by regional stakeholders was for expanded employment transportation services, especially for workers needing to access jobs that require second and third shifts. Stakeholders also noted the need for employment transportation that accommodates multiple stops (e.g., childcare and job site).

It was mentioned that some employers have considered obtaining their own vehicles since there is no available late-night service for people to get to work at those times of night. It was reported that many employers located in industrial parks are facing challenges in finding employees due to a lack of transportation options.

Coordination

Limited Opportunity for Regional Connectivity and Coordination - In some parts of the region, there are little or no transportation services available for people without access to a car, and therefore, limited opportunities to collaborate with others to identify improvements and to bridge gaps between systems that are in place. One of the overriding challenges noted by regional stakeholders was the lack of transportation services that cross county lines, and that greater regional transportation services are needed.

Need for Community Framework for Discussion of Transportation Issues and Priorities – Through the questionnaire, stakeholders were asked if a framework existed that provided the opportunity to bring together community organizations, leaders, and consumers to discuss transportation issues within the context of other community priorities. The majority of respondents noted that actions were needed in this area, as well as identifying how better to coordinate existing transportation services.

Limited Opportunity for Regional Connectivity and Coordination - A limited communications framework exists to bring together community organizations, leaders, and consumers to discuss transportation issues within the context of other community priorities.

Outreach, Marketing, and Education

Lack of Awareness of Available Transportation Services - Some stakeholders noted that in some areas there is a lack of awareness of available services open to the public. It was also mentioned that many people may think trips are operated through specific agencies or require specific medical insurance, and are unaware of the availability of these services to the general public.

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

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

Funding

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

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

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

Operational Challenges

Challenges with Recruiting and Retaining Drivers – Similar to communities across the country, many of the transportation providers expressed challenges with recruiting and retaining a sufficient number of drivers. As a result, providers are looking to modify their fleets and as noted earlier, switch to vehicles that do not require a driver with a CDL. In addition to maintaining current services the driver shortage prevents the ability to expand services.

Increased Operating Expenses – A number of factors have led to transit systems and transportation providers to incur significant increases in operating expenses, and it is expected that this will continue in the future with the need to improve driver salaries and benefits. Some transportation providers in the region noted operating costs increasing by 30%, while funding has not changed, and they are being asked to increase capacity with the same amount of resources.

Additional Needs and Issues

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

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

Chapter 6

Demographic Analysis

Introduction

This chapter analyzes demographic data and land use to assess the need for transit in Region 8. Data ranging from major trip generators to underserved and unserved population subgroups are documented and analyzed. Data sources include the 2020 Census and American Community Survey (ACS) 2016-2021 5-year estimates.

Population Profile

The following section provides a general population profile for Region 8 and will identify and evaluate underserved population subgroups as well as review demographic characteristics pertinent to a Title VI analysis.

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

Table 6-1: Historical Populations for Region 8

County	2000 Pop.	2010 Pop.	2020 Pop.	2000-2010 % Change	2010-2020 % Change	2000-2020 % Change
Allegan	105,665	111,408	120,502	5.4%	8.2%	14.0%
Ionia	61,518	63,905	66,804	3.9%	4.5%	8.6%
Kent	574,335	602,622	657,974	4.9%	9.2%	14.6%
Mecosta	40,553	42,798	39,714	5.5%	-7.2%	-2.1%
Montcalm	61,266	63,342	66,614	3.4%	5.2%	8.7%
Osceola	23,197	23,528	22,891	1.4%	-2.7%	-1.3%
Ottawa	238,314	263,801	296,200	10.7%	12.3%	24.3%

SOURCE: US DECENNIAL CENSUS

The general trend across the region is significant population growth. Three of the seven counties experienced double-digit growth over the past two decades, led by Ottawa County at 24.3%, and only two – Mecosta and Osceola County – experienced population decline.

Table 6-2 features population projections from the University of Michigan’s Institute for Research on Labor, Employment, and the Economy. This data suggests that the overall trend of high growth is expected to continue with four counties projected to see double-digit growth by 2040. Only Ionia County is projected to lose population at a modest rate of 4.3%.

Table 6-2: Future Population Trends for Region 8

County	2020 Pop.	2030 Pop. Estimate	2040 Pop. Estimate	2020-2040 % Change
Allegan	120,502	132,040	142,005	17.8%
Ionia	66,804	65,085	63,941	-4.3%
Kent	657,974	746,921	813,672	23.7%
Mecosta	39,714	44,589	44,703	12.6%
Montcalm	66,614	68,045	70,348	5.6%
Osceola	22,891	23,878	23,835	4.1%
Ottawa	296,200	331,723	362,938	22.5%

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

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

Figure 6-1 shows Region 8’s population at the census block group level. Block Groups with populations greater than 2,000 can be found in every county except Osceola.

Figure 6-2 provides population density for Region 8. Areas with a population density of over 2,000 people per square mile include Grand Rapids and its suburbs, Holland, Grand Haven, Big Rapids, Greenville, and Ionia.

Figure 6-1: 2020 Census Population

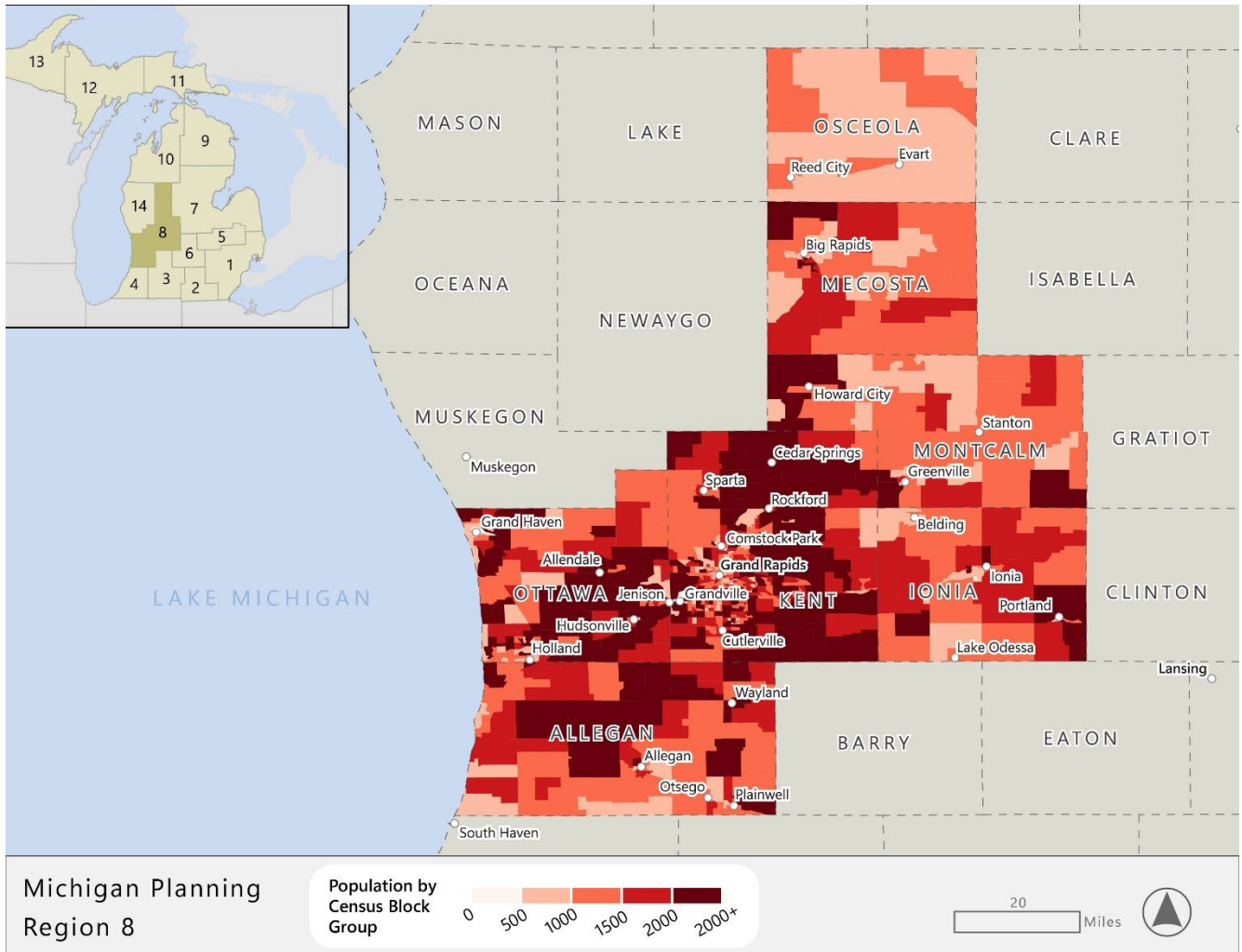
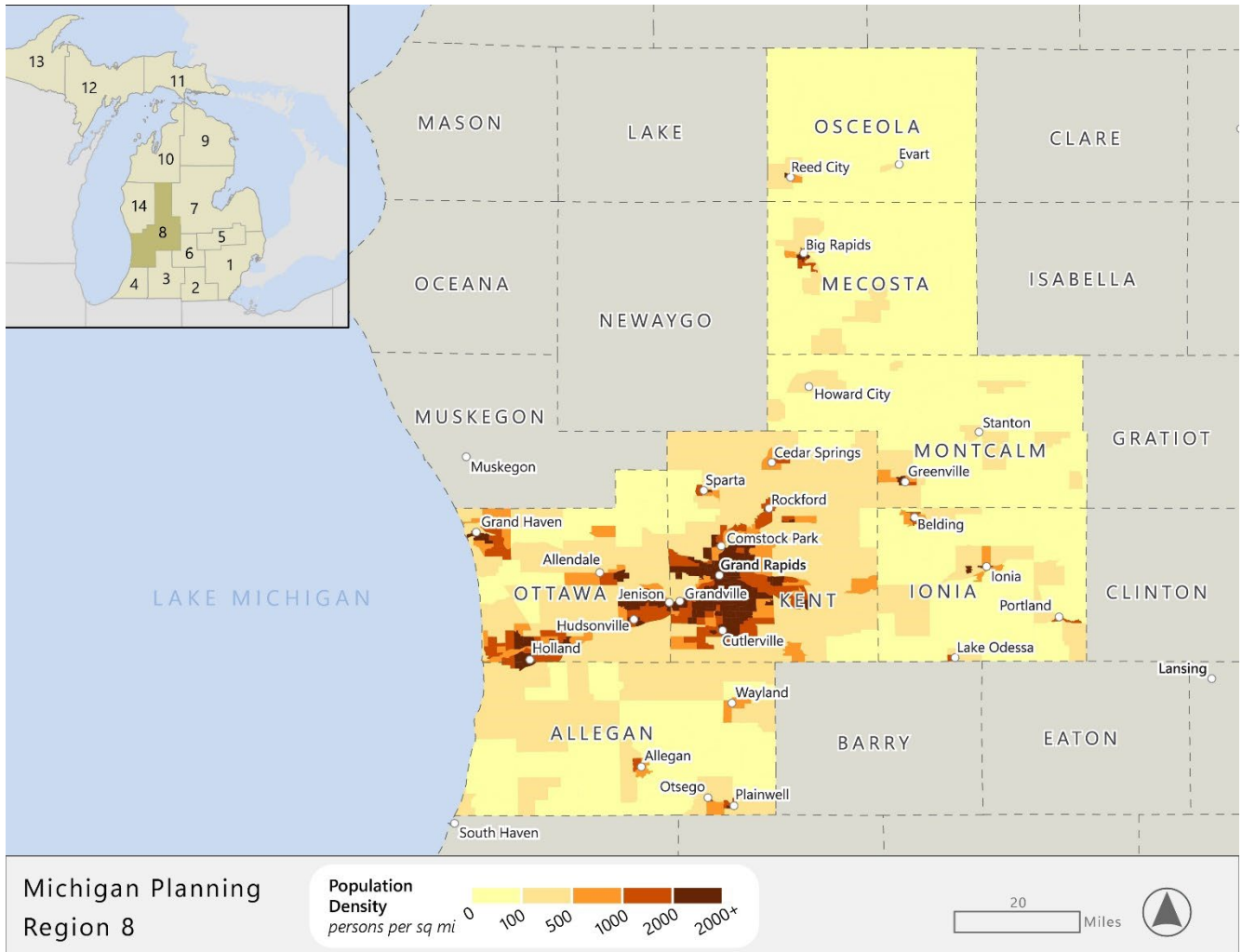


Figure 6-2: 2020 Census Population Density



Transit Dependent Populations

Transit Dependence Index

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

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

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

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

Figure 6-3 displays the TDI rankings for Region 8. The areas recognized to have Very High transit need with respect to density are Grand Rapids and Holland.

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

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

Figure 6-4 shows the TDIP rankings for Region 8. Block groups with "Very High" and "High" levels of dependence are found primarily in the northeastern area of the region in Osceola, Mecosta, and Montcalm Counties.

Figure 6-3: Transit Dependence Index Density

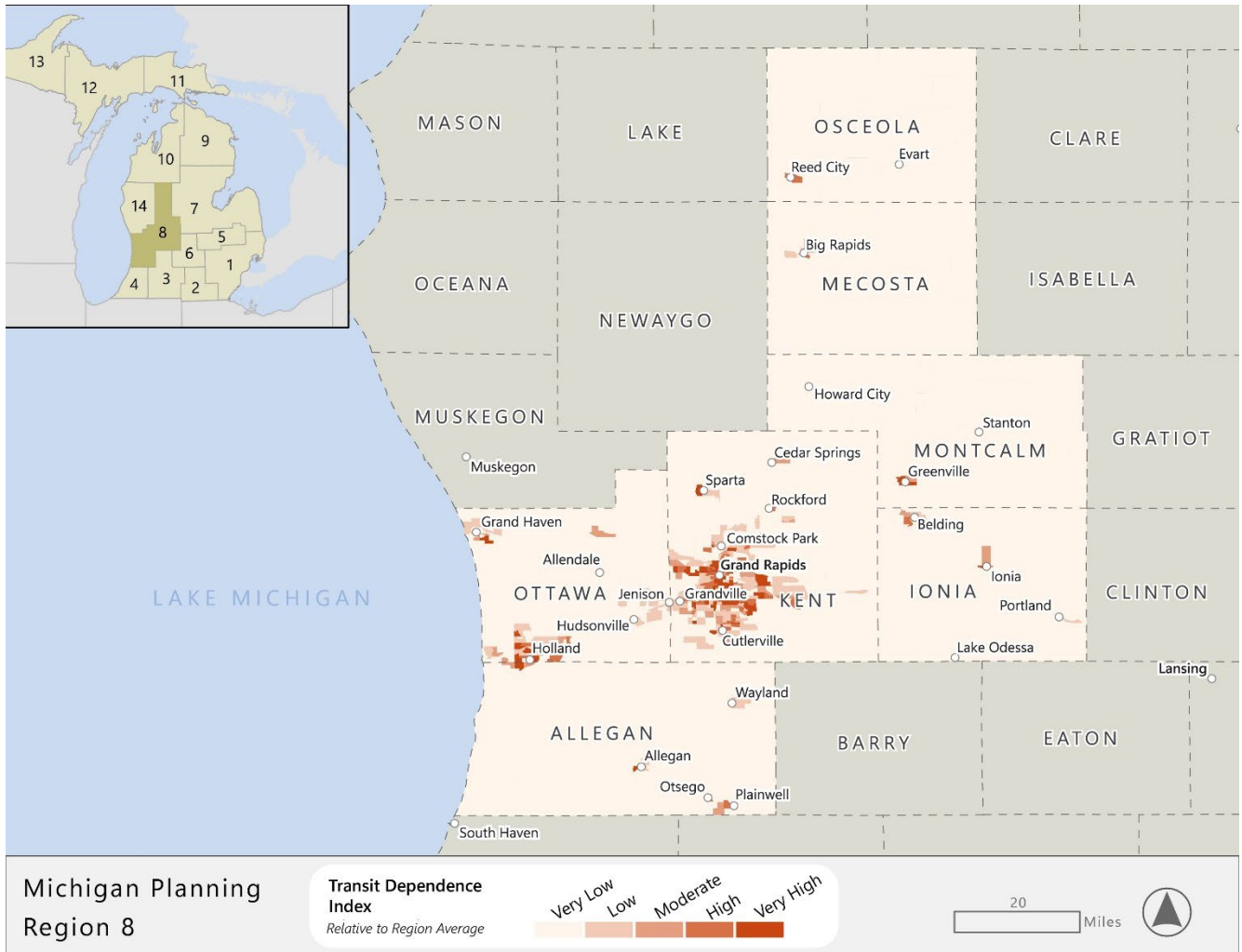
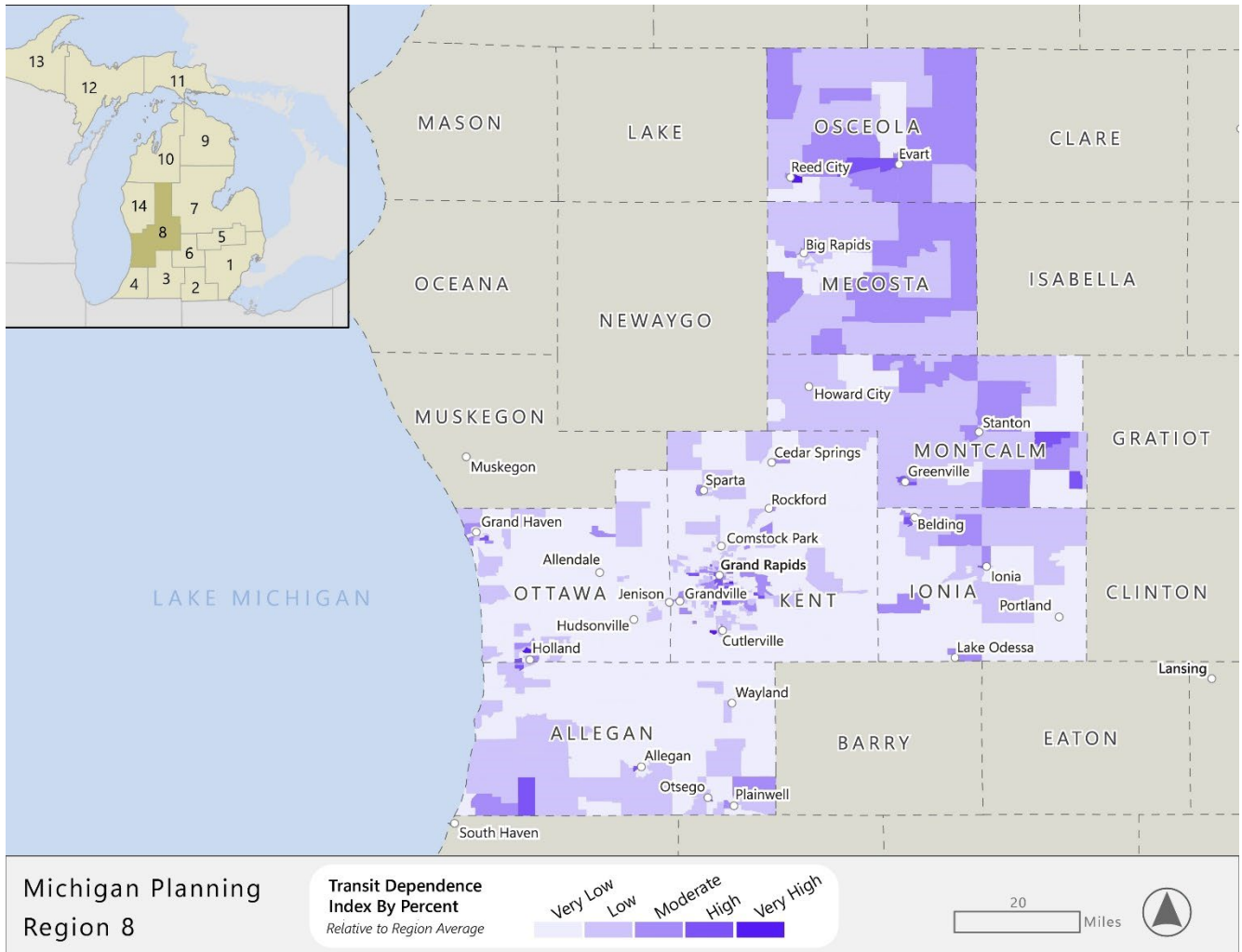


Figure 6-4: Transit Dependence Index Percentage



Transit Dependence Index Factors

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

Youth Population

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

Senior Adult Population

The senior adult population, which includes individuals 65 years and older, was used in the TDI measure. Persons in this age group may begin to decrease their use of a personal vehicle and begin to rely more on public transit. Figure 6-6 shows the relative distribution of seniors in Region 8. Areas with “Very High” senior populations can be found dispersed throughout much of the region but are notable in Mecosta and Allegan Counties.

Individuals with Disabilities

Figure 6-7 illustrates the disabled population in Region 8. The American Community Survey was used to obtain data for the disabled population. Persons who have disabilities that prevent them or make it more difficult to own and operate a personal vehicle often rely on public transit for their transportation needs. Areas with “Very High” and “High” concentrations of individuals with disabilities may be found most prominently in Osceola, Mecosta, and Montcalm Counties.

Zero Car Households

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

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

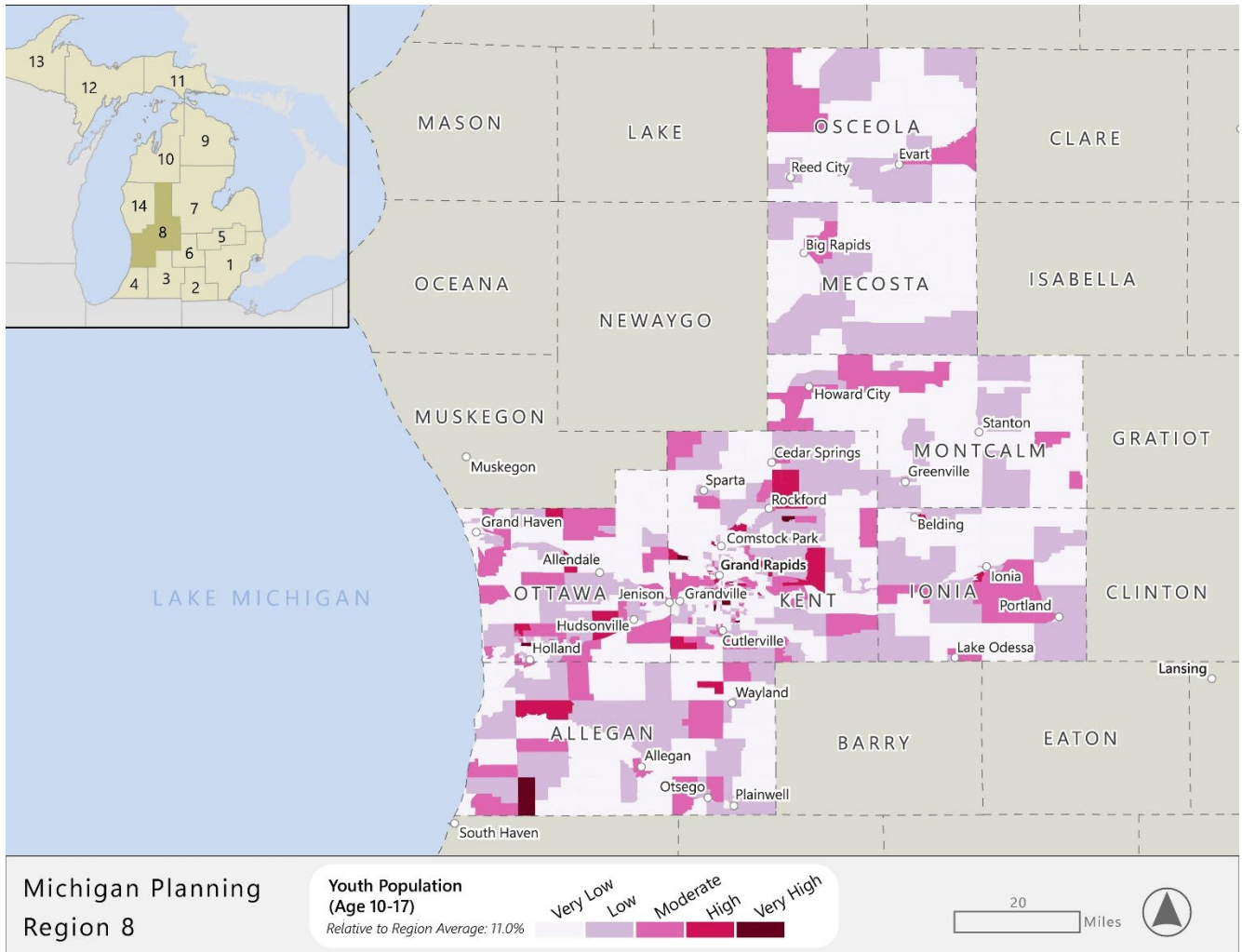


Figure 6-6: Distribution of the Senior Adult Population (Aged 65 and Above)

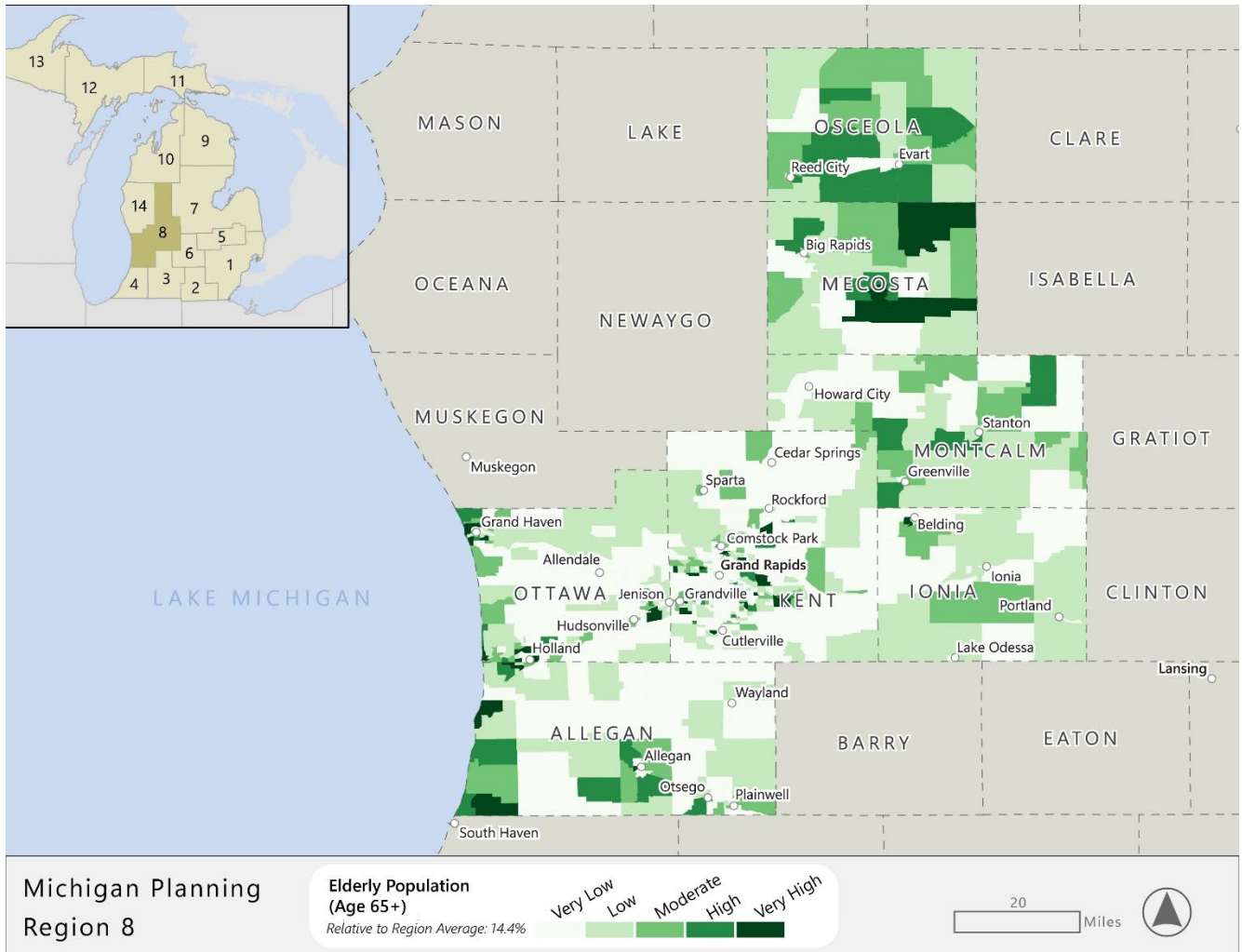


Figure 6-7: Distribution of the Disabled Population

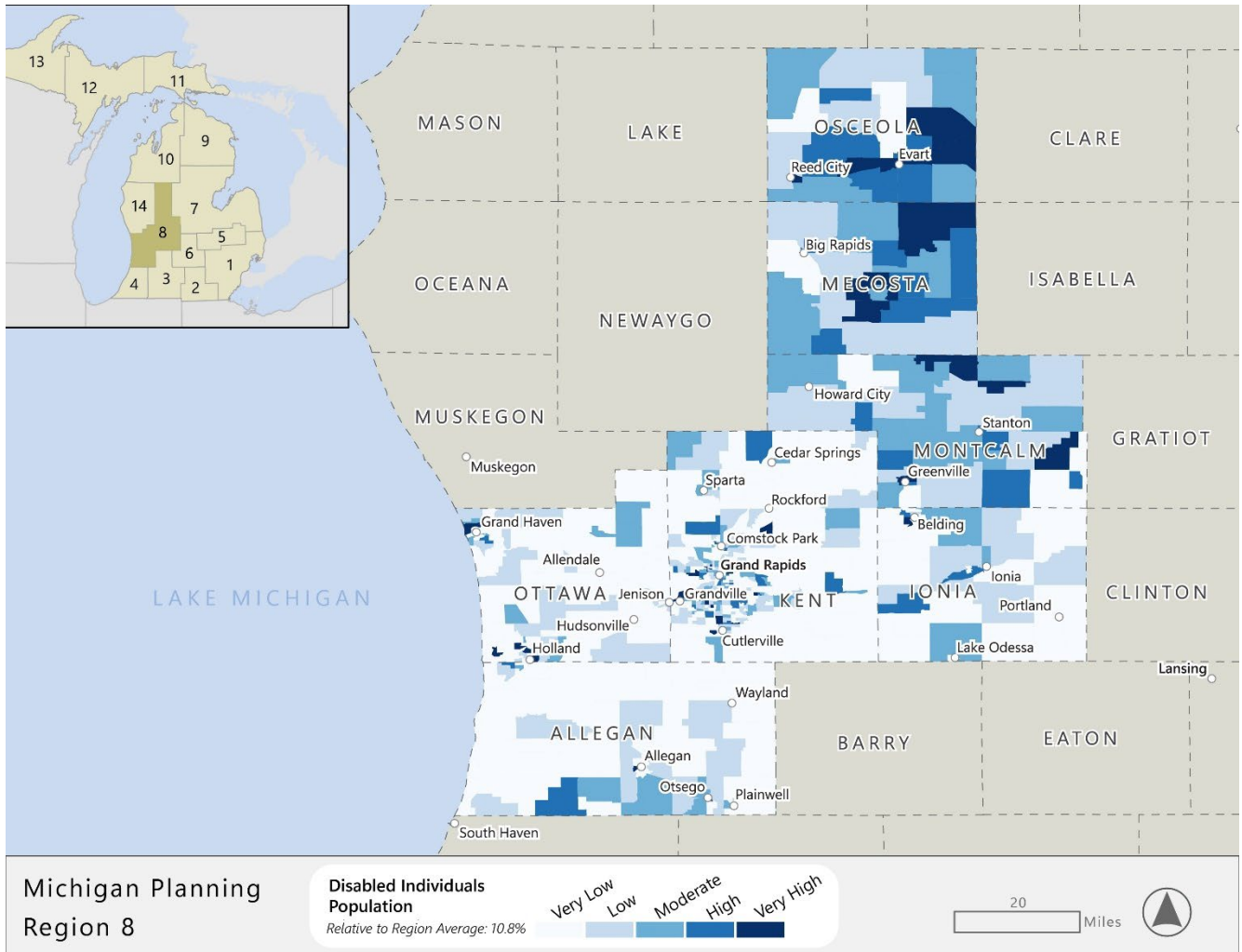
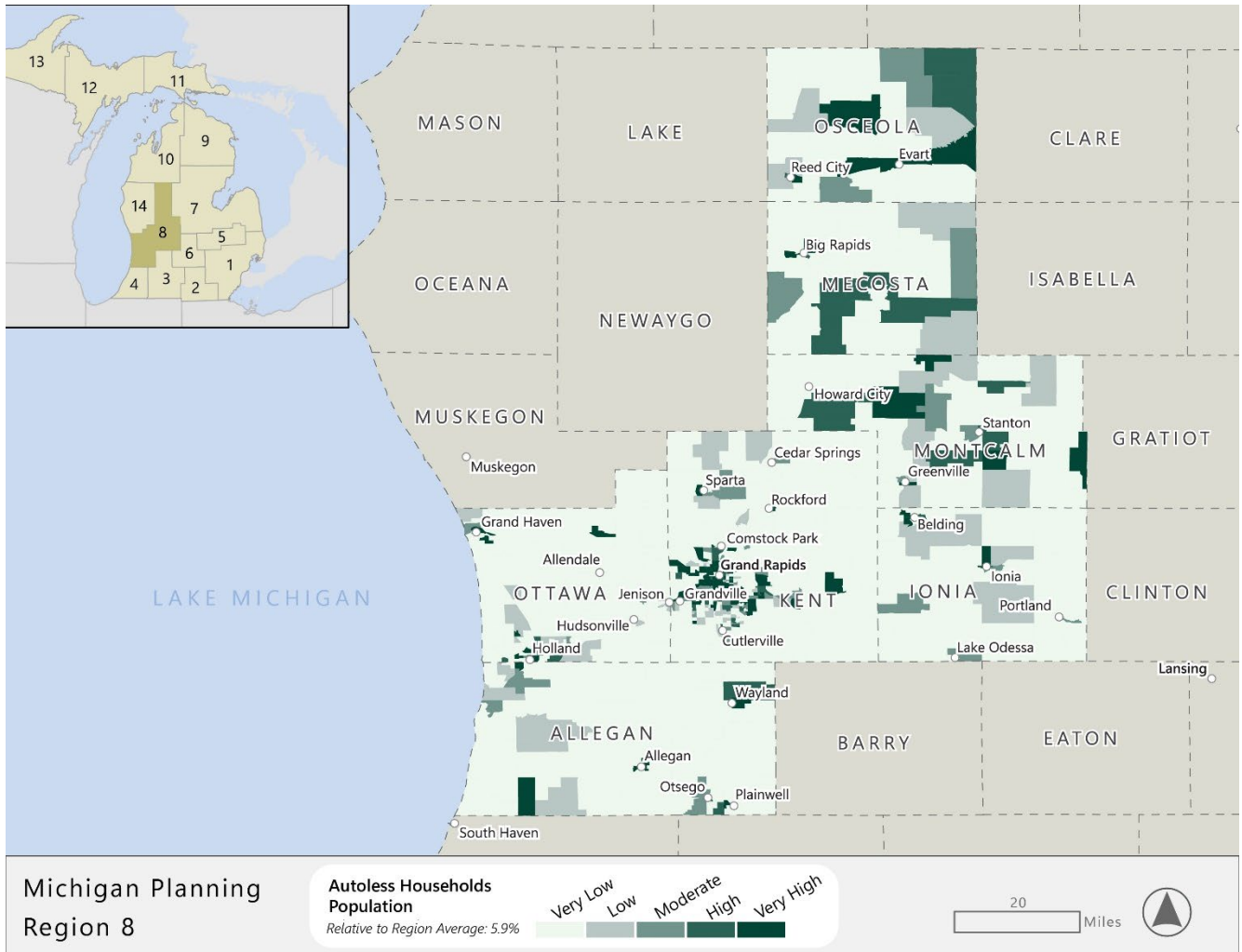


Figure 6-8: Zero Car Household Distribution



Title VI Demographic Analysis

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs and activities receiving federal subsidies. This includes agencies providing federally funded public transportation. The following section examines the minority and below poverty level populations in Region 8.

Minority Population

It is important to ensure that areas with an above average percentage of racial and/or ethnic minorities are not negatively impacted by any proposed alterations to existing public transportation services. In Region 8, 18.7% of the population are part of minority populations. Figure 6-9 illustrates the concentration of minority populations based on the region's average. As seen in the figure, areas with above average concentrations of minorities are found around Grand Rapids and otherwise scattered throughout the region.

Below Poverty Level Population

The second group included in the Title VI analysis represents those individuals who earn less than the federal poverty level. This segment of the population may find it a financial burden to own and maintain a personal vehicle, thus relying on public transit as their primary means of transportation. In Region 8, the percentage of those living below the federal poverty level is 11.7%. Figure 6-10 depicts the concentration of population above or below the average relative to the study area. As seen on the map, those living below the poverty line are heavily dispersed and widespread throughout the region. Clusters of above average poverty levels are present throughout Osceola, Mecosta, and Montcalm County.

Figure 6-9: Distribution of the Minority Population

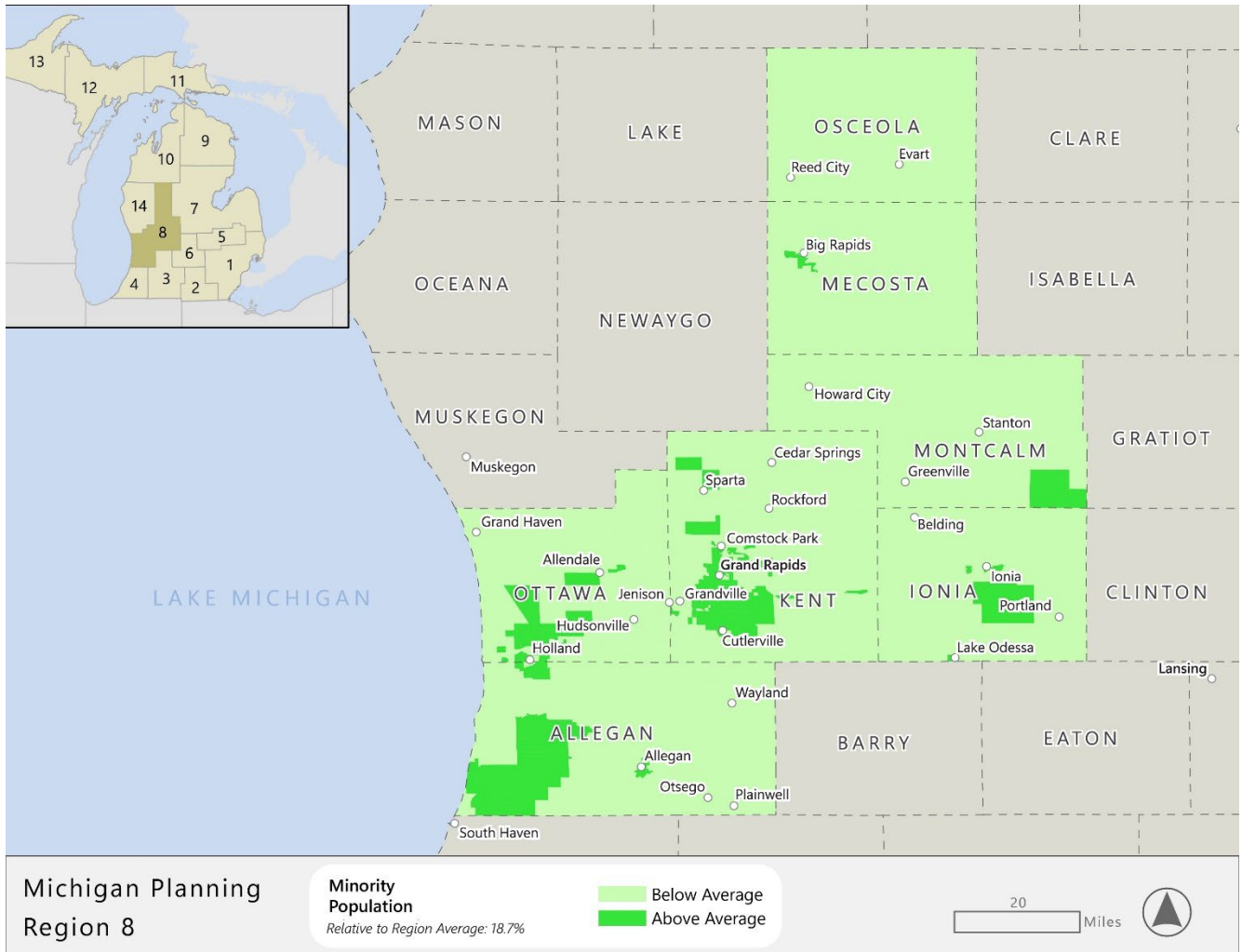
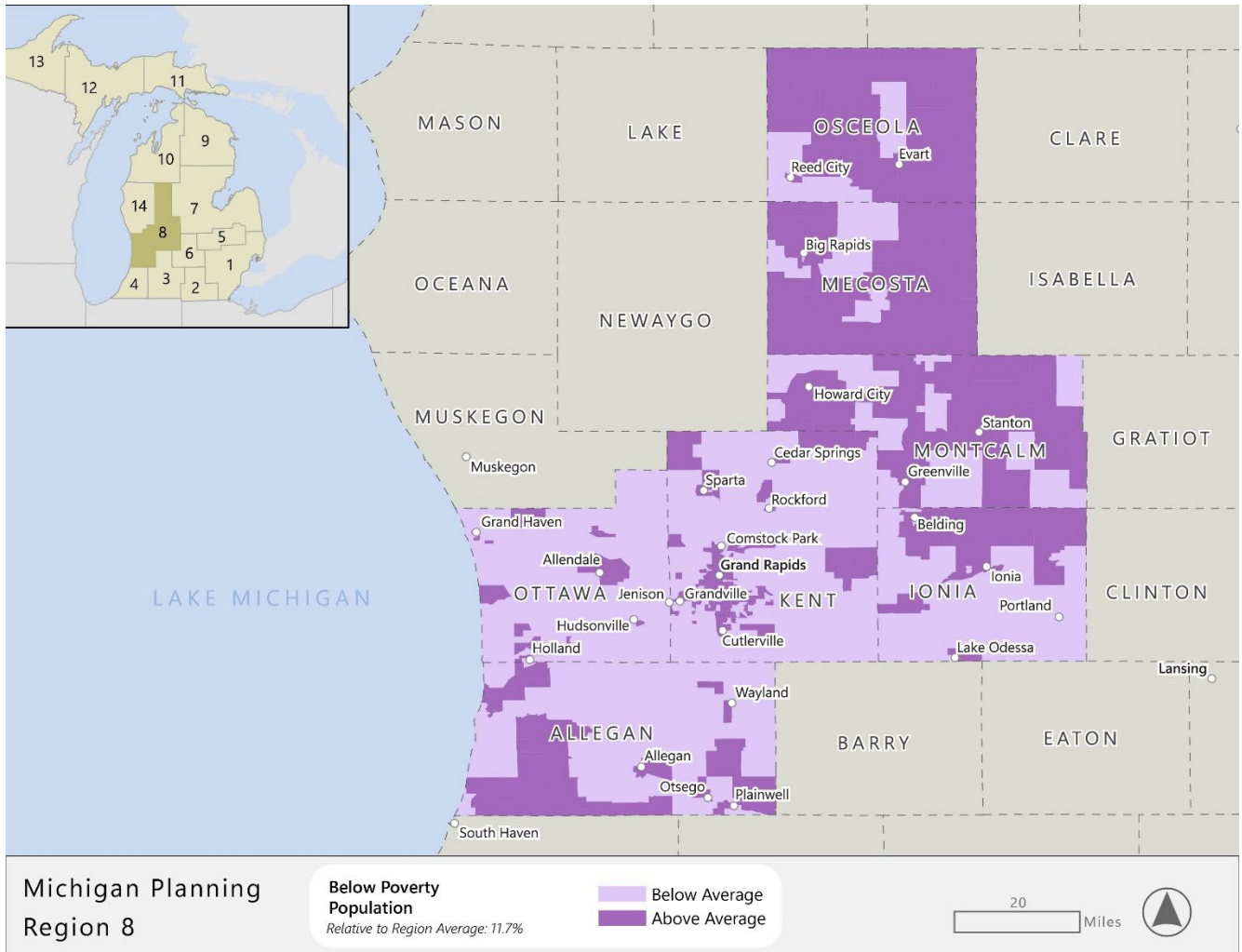


Figure 6-10: Distribution of Individuals Living Below the Poverty Level



Limited-English Proficiency

In addition to providing public transportation for a diversity of socioeconomic groups, it is also important to serve and disseminate information to those of different linguistic backgrounds. As shown in Table 6-3, the Western Michigan Region's residents predominately speak English. In all three counties, English is the primary language for over 87 percent of the residents. The most prevalent language in the region after English is Spanish with 7% of Kent County considering it their primary language. Of those who primarily speak languages other than English the overwhelming majority is able to speak English "Very Well." Nevertheless, it must be noted that Kent County contains a relatively high percentage who speak English less than "Very Well" at 5.2%.

Table 6-3: Limited English Proficiency for Region 8

County	Allegan		Ionia		Kent		Ottawa	
Population (Age 5+)	112,229		62,898		612,297		276,179	
Languages Spoken	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
English	104,785	93.4%	61,182	97.3%	537,039	87.7%	254,423	92.1%
Speak Non-English	7,444	6.6%	1,716	2.7%	75,258	12.3%	21,756	7.9%
Spanish	5,696	5.1%	1,112	1.8%	42,932	7.0%	14,403	5.2%
Indo-European languages	1,252	1.1%	294	0.5%	13,274	2.2%	2,653	1.0%
Asian/Pacific languages	460	0.4%	273	0.4%	11,198	1.8%	4,025	1.5%
Other	36	0.0%	37	0.1%	7,854	1.3%	675	0.2%
Ability to Speak English:	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
"Very Well"	5,221	4.7%	1,167	1.9%	43,539	7.1%	14,246	5.2%
Less than "Very Well"	2,223	2.0%	549	0.9%	31,719	5.2%	7,510	2.7%

County	Mecosta		Montcalm		Osceola	
Population (Age 5+)	38,066		62,742		21,679	
Languages Spoken	#	%	#	%	#	%
English	36,507	95.9%	60,790	96.9%	20,646	95.2%
Speak Non-English	1,559	4.1%	1,952	3.1%	1,033	4.8%
Spanish	419	1.1%	1,128	1.8%	197	0.9%
Indo-European languages	862	2.3%	638	1.0%	766	3.5%
Asian/Pacific languages	252	0.7%	120	0.2%	42	0.2%
Other	26	0.1%	66	0.1%	28	0.1%
Ability to Speak English:	#	%	#	%	#	%
"Very Well"	1,147	3.0%	1,354	2.2%	734	3.4%
Less than "Very Well"	412	1.1%	598	1.0%	299	1.4%

Land Use Profile

Regional Trip Generators

Identifying regional trip generators serves to complement the previous demographic analysis by indicating where transit services may be most needed. Trip generators attract transit demand and include common origins and destinations. Examples include higher level educational facilities, major employers, regional medical facilities, and Veteran Affairs Medical Centers and Clinics. Figure 6-11 provides a map of the regional trip generators in Region 8. The trip generator categories are briefly detailed below.

Educational Facilities

Many of the individuals that comprise the school age population are unable to afford or operate their own personal vehicle; therefore, it may be assumed that this segment of the population is one that is reliant upon public transportation. Additionally, many faculty and staff members are associated with these institutions as a place of employment as Region 8 features a number of colleges and universities.

Major Employers

This section examines the top regional employers in Region 8; employers included in this category are those among the 100 largest employers in the state of Michigan. Providing transit services to major employment locations is advantageous to both the employee, as the individual is provided with direct access to their occupation and subsequent source of income, and the employer, as this entity will have assurance that their current or potential workforce will have diverse options of accessing the destination. Many of the major employers in Region 8 include the numerous colleges and universities as well as the regional medical facilities. Food distribution is a large part of the region's economy with major employers including Meijer, Amway, and SpartanNash.

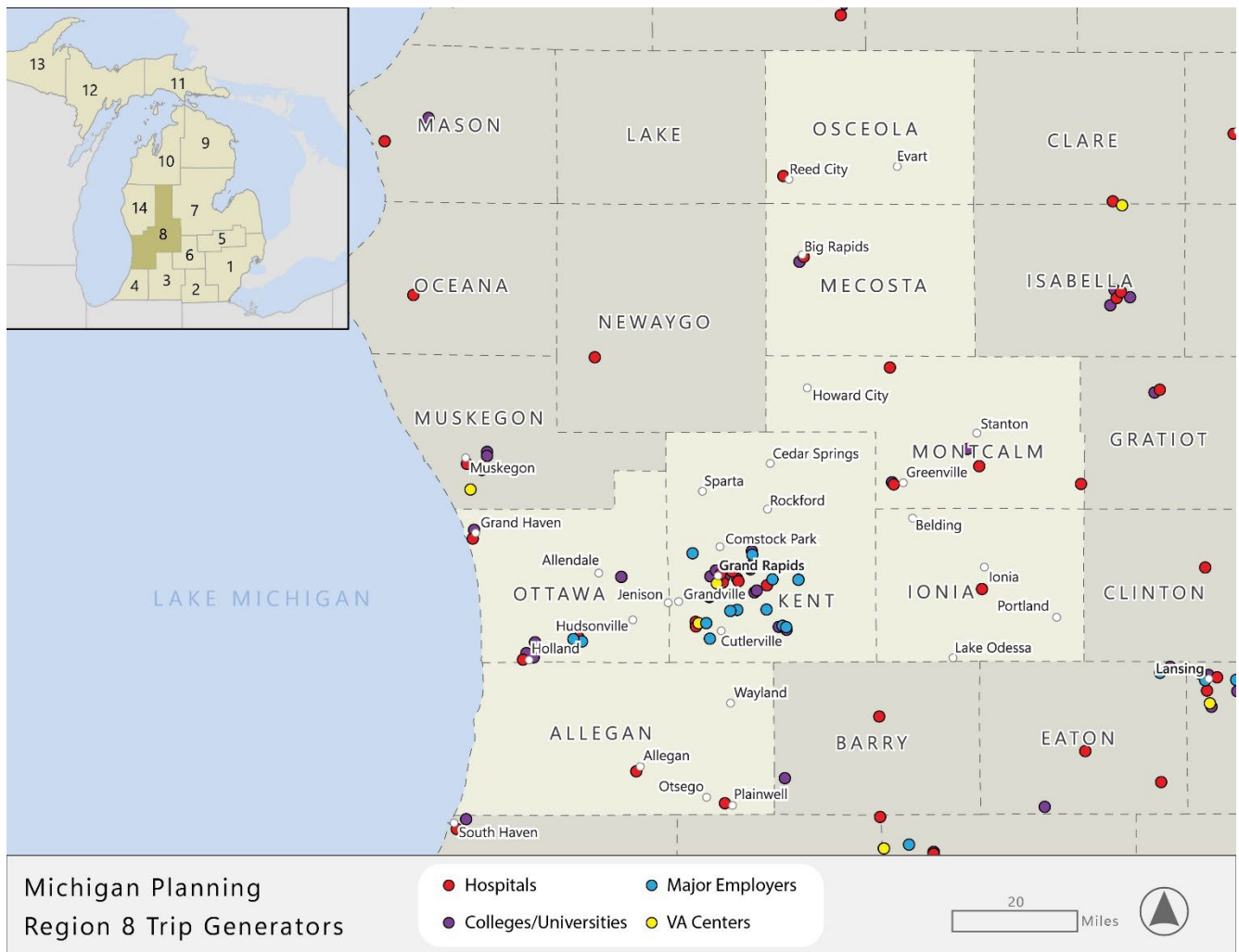
Major Medical Facilities

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

Veteran Affairs Medical Facilities

The Department of Veterans Affairs oversees a network of medical centers and smaller community-based outpatient clinics. Locating transportation to these facilities can be a major barrier for veterans who rely on healthcare that these facilities provide. Region 8 is home to the Wyoming VA Outpatient Clinic and the Century Avenue VA Clinic.

Figure 6-11: Regional Trip Generators



Local Trip Generators

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

Table 6-4: Local Trip Generators

Trip Generators	Shopping Destinations	College /University	High Density Housing	Human Service Agency	Major Employer	Medical Facility
Allegan County						
Allegan	X					X
Dorr						X
Douglas						
Fennville						
Holland	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hopkins				X		
Martin						
Otsego						
Plainwell	X		X	X		X
Saugatuck			X			
Wayland	X			X		
Ionia County						
Belding	X		X	X		
Clarksville						
Hubbardston						
Ionia	X					X
Lake Odessa	X			X		X
Lyons						
Muir	X					
Palo	X					
Pewamo						
Portland				X		X
Saranac						

Trip Generators	Shopping Destinations	College /University	High Density Housing	Human Service Agency	Major Employer	Medical Facility
Kent County						
Byron Center	X		X	X	X	
Caledonia			X	X	X	X
Cannonsburg						
Casnovia						
Cedar Springs			X			X
Comstock Park			X			X
Cutlerville	X					X
East Grand Rapids						X
Forest Hills	X		X	X		
Grand Rapids	X	X	X	X	X	X
Grandville	X		X	X		X
Kent City						
Kentwood	X		X	X		X
Lowell				X		
Northview	X		X	X		X
Rockford			X			
Sand Lake			X	X		
Sparta			X	X		X
Walker	X		X	X		X
Wyoming	X	X	X			X
Mecosta County						
Barryton						
Big Rapids	X	X	X	X		X
Canadian Lakes						
Mecosta						
Morley						
Paris						
Stanwood						
Montcalm County						
Carson City				X		X
Crystal						
Edmore						
Greenville	X	X	X	X		X
Howard City						
Lakeview						X
McBride						
Pierson						
Sheridan						X
Stanton				X		

Trip Generators	Shopping Destinations	College /University	High Density Housing	Human Service Agency	Major Employer	Medical Facility
Trufant						
Osceola County						
Evart	X		X			X
Hersey						
Le Roy	X					
Marion				X		
Reed City			X	X		X
Tustin						
Ottawa County						
Allendale	X	X	X			X
Coopersville				X		
Ferrysburg	X		X	X		
Grand Haven	X	X	X	X		X
Hudsonville			X			X
Jenison	X		X			
Nunica				X		
Spring Lake	X		X			X
Zeeland			X	X	X	X

Employment Travel Patterns

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

Table 6-5 presents results of the Census Bureau's Journey to Work data which provides location of employment (in-county vs. out-of-county and in-state vs. out-of-state) and means of transportation to work. Residents in the Southwestern Michigan Region typically work in their county of residence (75%) and predominately drive alone to work (79%). It is important to note, however, that across such a broad region, there is high variation in the percentage of residents working in their county of residence. The lowest is found in Allegan County at 47% and the highest in Kent County at 87%. Both extremes can likely be explained by Grand Rapids' presence as an employment hub for residents both within Kent County and in more rural counties outside of it. With the exception of Kent County at 1.7%, public transportation garners approximately less than one percent of the employment commuting in all counties.

Table 6-5: Journey to Work Patterns for Region 8

County	Allegan		Ionia		Kent		Ottawa	
Workers 16 Years and Older	55,380		29,859		332,643		149,647	
Location of Employment	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
In state of residence	54,609	98.6%	29,772	99.7%	331,404	99.6%	148,834	99.5%
In county of residence	26,328	47.5%	14,791	49.5%	296,436	89.1%	94,337	63.0%
Outside county of residence	28,281	51.1%	14,981	50.2%	34,968	10.5%	54,497	36.4%
Outside state of residence	771	1.4%	87	0.3%	1,239	0.4%	813	0.5%
Means of Transportation to Work	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Car, truck, or van - drove alone	45,500	82.2%	25,003	83.7%	257,292	77.3%	121,346	81.1%
Car, truck, or van - carpooled	4,369	7.9%	2,098	7.0%	29,089	8.7%	12,275	8.2%
Public transportation	165	0.3%	231	0.8%	5,676	1.7%	956	0.6%
Walked	923	1.7%	646	2.2%	6,918	2.1%	3,753	2.5%
Taxicab, motorcycle, bicycle, other	720	1.3%	175	0.6%	3,972	1.2%	1,248	0.8%
Worked from home	3,703	6.7%	1,706	5.7%	29,696	8.9%	10,069	6.7%

County	Mecosta		Montcalm		Osceola	
Workers 16 Years and Older	16,465		27,511		8,822	
Location of Employment	#	%	#	%	#	%
In state of residence	16,428	99.8%	27,397	99.6%	8,781	99.5%
In county of residence	11,701	71.1%	14,564	52.9%	4,770	54.1%
Outside county of residence	4,727	28.7%	12,833	46.6%	4,011	45.5%
Outside state of residence	37	0.2%	114	0.4%	41	0.5%
Means of Transportation to Work	#	%	#	%	#	%
Car, truck, or van - drove alone	12,860	78.1%	22,953	83.4%	7,175	81.3%
Car, truck, or van - carpooled	1,504	9.1%	2,524	9.2%	891	10.1%
Public transportation	53	0.3%	35	0.1%	33	0.4%
Walked	868	5.3%	513	1.9%	235	2.7%
Taxicab, motorcycle, bicycle, other	273	1.7%	199	0.7%	142	1.6%
Worked from home	907	5.5%	1,287	4.7%	346	3.9%

Another source of data that provides an understanding of employee travel patterns is the Census Bureau's Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) dataset. Table 6-6 provides the results of this analysis for the region. As the table shows, employment destinations are heavily dispersed throughout the region though Grand Rapids is a major hub both within Kent County and in the surrounding areas.

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

Allegan County			Ionia County			Kent County			Ottawa County		
Place	#	%	Place	#	%	Place	#	%	Place	#	%
Holland city, MI	2,210	5.50%	Ionia city, MI	1,169	6.4%	Grand Rapids city, MI	61,263	16.6%	Holland city, MI	7,349	6.5%
Grand Rapids city, MI	1,044	2.60%	Belding city, MI	619	3.4%	Wyoming city, MI	24,322	6.6%	Grand Rapids city, MI	5,582	4.9%
Allegan city, MI	945	2.40%	Portland city, MI	417	2.3%	Kentwood city, MI	17,845	4.8%	Wyoming city, MI	3,696	3.3%
Kalamazoo city, MI	832	2.10%	Greenville city, MI	248	1.4%	Forest Hills CDP, MI	8,735	2.4%	Allendale CDP, MI	2,717	2.4%
Wyoming city, MI	758	1.90%	Grand Rapids city, MI	239	1.3%	Walker city, MI	8,149	2.2%	Muskegon city, MI	2,297	2.0%
Otsego city, MI	624	1.60%	Lansing city, MI	232	1.3%	Cutlerville CDP, MI	5,511	1.5%	Grand Haven city, MI	2,161	1.9%
Portage city, MI	488	1.20%	Lake Odessa village, MI	227	1.3%	Northview CDP, MI	5,088	1.4%	Jenison CDP, MI	2,136	1.9%
Wayland city, MI	483	1.20%	Kentwood city, MI	157	0.9%	Grandville city, MI	4,853	1.3%	Norton Shores city, MI	2,029	1.8%
Plainwell city, MI	425	1.10%	Saranac village, MI	117	0.6%	Jenison CDP, MI	3,947	1.1%	Zeeland city, MI	1,632	1.4%
Kentwood city, MI	340	0.90%	Waverly CDP, MI	110	0.6%	Comstock Park CDP, MI	3,576	1.0%	Hudsonville city, MI	1,327	1.2%
All Other Locations	31,676	79.50%	All Other Locations	14,594	80.5%	All Other Locations	225,377	61.1%	All Other Locations	82,176	72.7%

Mecosta County			Montcalm County			Osceola County		
Place	#	%	Place	#	%	Place	#	%
Big Rapids city, MI	984	9.5%	Greenville city, MI	1,087	7.7%	Reed City, MI	321	4.9%
Canadian Lakes CDP, MI	303	2.9%	Belding city, MI	292	2.1%	Ewart city, MI	296	4.5%
Grand Rapids city, MI	236	2.3%	Grand Rapids city, MI	210	1.5%	Big Rapids city, MI	197	3.0%
Reed City, MI	118	1.1%	Stanton city, MI	183	1.3%	Cadillac city, MI	90	1.4%
Mount Pleasant city, MI	77	0.7%	Edmore village, MI	159	1.1%	Marion village, MI	83	1.3%
Wyoming city, MI	66	0.6%	Lakeview village, MI	152	1.1%	Hersey village, MI	50	0.8%
Mecosta village, MI	55	0.5%	Ionia city, MI	118	0.8%	Canadian Lakes CDP, MI	49	0.7%
Kentwood city, MI	52	0.5%	Crystal CDP, MI	105	0.7%	Grand Rapids city, MI	39	0.6%
Lake Isabella village, MI	47	0.5%	Howard City village, MI	89	0.6%	Tustin village, MI	28	0.4%
Morley village, MI	44	0.4%	Kentwood city, MI	82	0.6%	Baldwin village, MI	27	0.4%
All Other Locations	8,415	80.9%	All Other Locations	11,672	82.5%	All Other Locations	5,408	82.1%

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

Chapter 7

Prioritized Strategies

Introduction

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

This chapter presents strategies that were initially reviewed by Region 8 stakeholders, and then prioritized based on their comments. The development of these strategies considered input received through the two rounds of focus groups discussed in Chapter 2, along with strategies that were included in the previous plan for the counties in the region.

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

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

Strategy Categories

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

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

Region 8 Strategies

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

Table 7-1: Summary of Strategies by Categories

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

Prioritized Strategies for Region 8

High Priorities

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

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

This strategy involves providing capital and operating funds to support existing public transit services and human services transportation that are effectively meeting mobility needs identified in the region, especially those serving older adults and individuals with disabilities. Maintaining these services are vital to ensuring basic mobility in the region, though existing services can be monitored on an ongoing basis using typical industry performance standards that can serve as a tool to monitor effectiveness and efficiency, and include:

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

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

Transportation provided through human service agencies is more specialized and therefore is not monitored through these performance measures. Agencies that would like to evaluate their transportation programs to ensure that financial resources are being used effectively can utilize *Transportation by the Numbers*, a resource available through the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC). This tool provides human service organizations with ways to more easily identify expenses, revenues, and performance outcomes so that they can make more informed decisions about their future in the transportation business. This tool is available through the NADTC website at <https://www.nadtc.org/resources-publications/resource/transportation-by-the-numbers/>.

Additional resources that may be assist in assessing current transportation services and with coordination efforts include:

- The National Rural Technical Assistance Program (RTAP) provides a tool that enables rural transit agencies to allocate expenses using a two-variable methodology. The Cost Allocation Calculator tools guide user input of service, financial, and operational data to allocate expenses by routes, travel modes, jurisdictions, and other common transit designations. This tool is available at <https://www.nationalrtap.org/Technology-Tools/Cost-Allocation-Calculator/Support>.
- FTA and other agencies initiated a project seeking innovative solutions for a cost allocation method/technology that accounts for divergent federal requirements and funding sources by trip. The development of an allocated cost model for Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) is intended to support improved coordination across multiple Federal agency programs that provide funding to access human services transportation. A final report with this guidance ca is available at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/2020-09/Cost-Allocation-Technology-for-Non-Emergency-Medical-Transportation-Final-Report.pdf>.

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

Through the engagement with regional stakeholders through the coordinated planning process they expressed the need for transportation services to fill current gaps, particularly to access services and employment in Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids. One of the overriding challenges noted by regional stakeholders was the lack of transportation services that cross county lines, and that greater regional transportation services are needed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Often the barrier to implementation or expansion of transportation services is a lack of funding to support these improvements. Regional stakeholders noted that there is a need to identify new funding to support service expansions, and while some funding programs can be restrictive that there is also an opportunity to be creative and to consider different and new solutions. In addition, while some millages are in place that support transit services this local funding stream can also cause challenges when considering regional services that cross jurisdictional boundaries. As discussed in the needs assessment, overall regional stakeholders expressed that any service expansion or improvement will most likely come down to funding.

The federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) reports that CCAM agencies administer 130 programs that may fund transportation for older adults, people with disabilities, and/or people with lower incomes. While there are renewed coordination efforts at the federal level on these programs, much of the work to coordinate funds and to fully utilize resources through these programs occurs at the local and regional levels. Therefore, this strategy encourages coordination between key community leaders and stakeholders to discuss how current funding can be used most effectively to meet mobility needs and to identify new sources that would support additional transportation services. In positive news related to additional funding to support transportation services in the region and across the state, during the development of this current coordinated transportation plan the Michigan Legislature approved and sent to Governor Whitmer the 2024 State budget that includes increased operations funding for transits across the state. More details as they become available on this funding increase will be included in this section of the draft final plan for the region.

Develop additional partnerships to identify new funding opportunities.

This potential strategy would involve identifying partnership opportunities to leverage additional funding to support public transit and other mobility options in the region. It would include meeting multiple unmet needs and issues by tackling non-traditional sources of funding. Hospitals, supermarkets, and retailers who want the business of the region's riders may be willing to pay for part of the cost of transporting those riders to their sites. This approach is applicable to both medical and retail establishments already served, as well as to new businesses. While this plan helps to document the need for these additional services, some may need to be further quantified. It might also be necessary to document unmet needs and gaps in service as part of educating potential funders and sponsors.

Local funding has often been an issue for rural and small urban transit systems. However, transit has a long history of providing advertising on and in buses for additional revenue. Many systems have engaged in advertising over the years, but a sponsorship program is more than simply advertising. Instead of the usual selling of just one form of advertising, transit systems in the region can explore the selling of sponsorship packages. Since sponsorship and advertising funds are an important source of local funding, this program can help expand the service. Large corporations have been known to participate in sponsorship programs and typically these companies have far more money than all the cities and counties in the service area combined.

This potential strategy would involve identifying partnership opportunities to leverage additional funding to support public transit and other mobility options in the region. It would include meeting multiple unmet needs and issues by tackling non-traditional sources of funding. Hospitals, supermarkets, and retailers who want the business of the region's riders may be willing to pay for part of the cost of transporting those riders to their sites. This approach is applicable to both medical and retail establishments already served, as well as to new businesses. While this plan helps to document the need for these additional services, some may need to be further quantified. It might also be necessary to document unmet needs and gaps in service as part of educating potential funders and sponsors.

Medium Priorities

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

Region 8 stakeholders noted that there was a committee structure for discussing regional coordination efforts, but that this committee stopped meeting and more formal coordination discussions ended due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This strategy supports the renewal of this committee to ensure a broad group of representatives are involved in discussions to improve and expand mobility in the region.

This regional coordinating committee would provide an ongoing forum for members to:

- Explore opportunities to improve coordination between public transit, private transportation, non-emergency medical transportation, and other human service transportation in the region.
- Discuss improved connections between existing transit providers.
- Consider, plan, and implement cross county services.
- Assess and reduce barriers to regional transportation services.
- Review and discuss strategies for coordinating transportation services with adjacent regions.
- Exploring and updating committee members on new and ongoing funding opportunities
- Facilitate updates of the coordinated transportation plan for Region 8.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Assess opportunities to improve recruitment and retention of vehicle operators.

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

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

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

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

Additional considerations to support driver recruitment include:

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

A possible resource to assist with recruiting and retaining vehicle operators is the Transit Workforce Development Technical Assistance Center (TWC). A program of FTA, the TWC provides a variety of publications, trainings, webinars, and materials to assist with these efforts. The Center can be accessed at <https://www.transitworkforce.org>.

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

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

- Consider a bus stop accessibility assessment for public transit services throughout the region
- Continue and expand the presence of bus stop signs and customer amenities at local stops to encourage use of public transit services and to facilitate transfers between systems.

- Ensure transit services are under consideration during the initial planning stages of new area developments, including passenger amenities such as bus stops and shelters.
- Support the continued prioritization of the “Complete Streets Program” to improve first and last mile connections by creating new bike and pedestrian connectivity.
- Improve connectivity between land use planning and the location of community services that will need to be accessed by people who rely on public transit and human services transportation.

Assess opportunities to implement on-demand microtransit services.

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

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

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

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

- **Microtransit Zones** – Locations are identified as prime candidates for services based on the assessment of existing transit services, demographic, and other key factors.
- **Service Plan** - Various operational considerations for potential services are developed, including service days and hours, pickup and drop off locations, and the type of vehicles to be used in the delivery of services.
- **Capital and Technology Considerations** – These areas are assessed based on preferred service delivery and other service components.

- **Funding and Budget Considerations** – Potential costs and revenue sources for the microtransit service are identified.
- **Outreach Considerations** – Various opportunities to obtain community input on potential microtransit services are developed.
- **Procurement and RFP Considerations** – Process for obtaining a vendor to provide microtransit software and/or operate services is developed.
- **Service Evaluation Considerations** – Methods for measuring and assessing the efficacy and efficiency of microtransit services after implementation are identified.

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

Advocate for continued and expanded funding for public transportation services in the region.

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

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

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

Lower Priorities

Expand Regional Mobility Management Efforts

Mobility management is a term that has come to represent a formal definition of a transportation strategy that focuses more on the customer and their needs, and the meeting of these needs through the coordinated use of a variety of providers. Mobility management is an evolving concept that aims to improve specialized transportation, particularly for older adults, people with disabilities, veterans, and individuals with lower incomes through a range of activities. These activities look beyond a single transportation service or solution to a “family of services” philosophy that can offer a wide range of services and options to meet an equally wide array of community demographics and needs.

The National Center for Mobility Management (NCMM) notes that mobility management:

- Encourages innovation and flexibility to reach the “right fit” solution for customers
- Plans for sustainability
- Strives for easy information and referral to assist customers in learning about and using services
- Continually incorporates customer feedback as services are evaluated and adjusted

In Region 8 MDOT currently MDOT funds mobility management projects in Allegan and Ottawa Counties. Building upon these efforts this strategy supports an expanded regional mobility management program that could take on a variety of coordination and marketing roles discussed in the preceding strategies. Additional responsibilities that could be considered as part of a greater emphasis on regional mobility management activities include developing travel training programs, leading advocacy and partnership campaigns (discussed later in the Sustainability and Financial Strategies), and implementing sponsorship programs (also discussed in the Sustainability and Financial Strategies section). The expansion of mobility management efforts in the region has the capability of greatly improving access to transportation services in the region, particularly for residents with limited mobility options or access to a personal vehicle.

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

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

While MDOT does not require local transit systems in Michigan to develop transit plans as the basis for preparing their annual grant applications for transit funding, many systems across the state conduct these short-range plans. This strategy calls for support of recommendations included in current or future transit plans, as these recommendations will respond to a variety of the transportation needs expressed by Region 8 stakeholders through the coordinated transportation planning process. The individual transit plans typically include projected costs and a proposed timeline for implementing service improvements that may involve:

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

Other studies and plans may include assessments that highlight the need for expanded transportation services to access medical appointments, jobs, school, shopping, and other key destinations. This strategy also supports findings and recommendations from these studies and plans.

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

Regional stakeholders noted the need to assess current services and consider different modes that may be more effective in meeting mobility needs in the region. While demand response services are essential to provide mobility in rural areas, this strategy supports an assessment of these services operated within each county to determine if additional scheduled services are feasible. These schedules can be set up based on historical travel patterns and typical ridership patterns, and potentially implemented for different times and perhaps different days. The frequency of the service will be determined by existing and potential ridership, though the overall objective is to group trips that can reduce costs as opposed to constant one-on-one set of trips that is very expensive to operate.

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

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

The lack of awareness of available transportation services was noted by regional stakeholders, particularly services that are open to the general public. While services designed to meet the needs of older adults, people with disabilities, and people with lower incomes are essential, there is a need for effective marketing efforts to offset the perception that public transit services are only available for specific

populations and not open to everyone in the community. This strategy involves increased marketing of transportation services and options to counter any perception that public transit services are only available for specific populations and not open to everyone in the community.

Consider greater use of vanpool and long distance rideshare services.

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

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

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

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

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

There are numerous examples of volunteer driver programs throughout the country that can be used as models. This includes one in Region 8 in Allegan County. Other examples and resources for implementing a volunteer driver program are available through the National Volunteer Transportation Center's website at <https://ctaa.org/national-volunteer-transportation-center/>. Another helpful resource is the National Trends Report through the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC) that highlighted rural volunteer transportation programs. This report is available at – <https://www.nadtc.org/wp-content/uploads/7-Rural-Volunteer-Transportation-Programs.pdf>.

Chapter 8

Adoption Process

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

In Region 8 stakeholders who participated in development of this plan had the opportunity to:

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

These stakeholders also had the opportunity to review and provide input on a draft version of this plan. Their input was incorporated into this final version.

Helpful Resources

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

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

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