

2015 Update

Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan



Regional Planning Commission
of Greater Birmingham
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February 2015



RESOLUTION 2015-0218

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

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

WHEREAS, the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century act (MAP-21) requires that projects funded through the Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program be derived from a locally developed plan; and

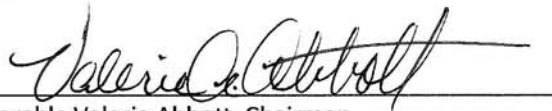
WHEREAS, the HSCTP is the instrument by which the RPCGB staff describes the current status and future plans for human services transportation planning; and

WHEREAS, the RPCGB staff has updated the HSCTP for FY 2015, which includes new demographic and regional context information; and

WHEREAS, the RPCGB Board of Directors is responsible for providing the staff and matching funds to administer the HSCTP.

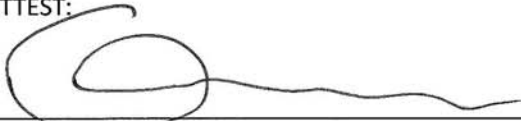
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, representing Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair, and Walker counties, hereby endorses the FY 2015 Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan as presented.

Adopted this 18 day of February 2015.



Honorable Valerie Abbott, Chairman
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

ATTEST:



Charles Ball, Executive Director
Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

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HUMAN SERVICES COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

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

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

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

- Goals and Standards
- Demographic Analyses
- Inventory of Services
- Public Involvement
- Activity Centers
- Needs and Barriers
- Strategies to Address Needs

Plan Elements

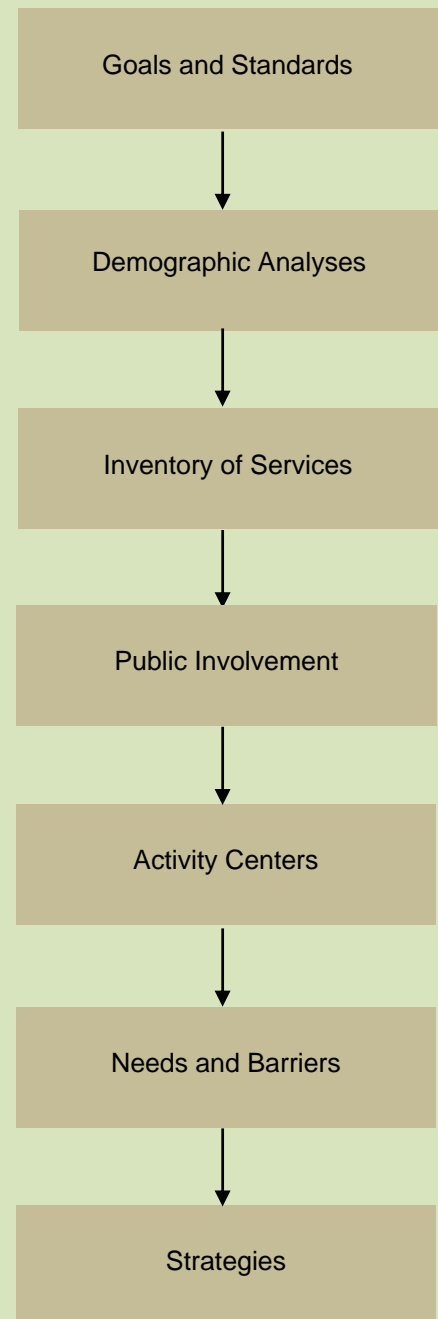
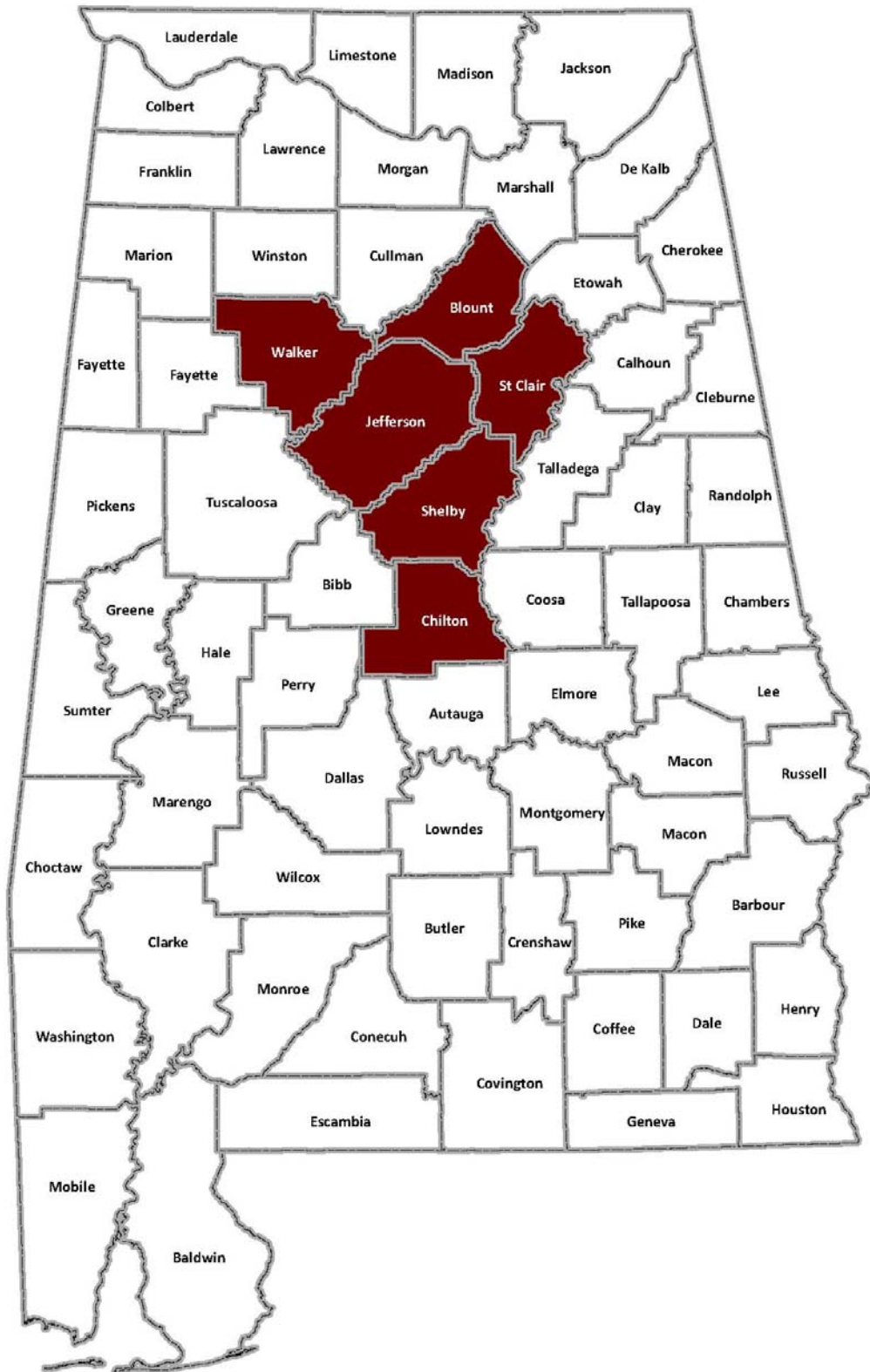


Figure 1
Map of Greater Birmingham Region



GOALS

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

Goal 1

Coordinate transportation within and across boundary lines

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

Goal 2

Improve efficiencies by sharing resources and using collective purchasing power

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

Goal 3

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

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

Goal 4

Increase public awareness of mobility options and funding

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





STANDARDS FOR FUNDING

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

1. All projects must seek to address service barriers and conform to or be harmonious with one or more of the plan goals stated above.
2. All applications for funding must (1) provide service to a broad range of people; (2) expand service area, days, or hours of operation; and/or (3) coordinate with an other agency for provision of service. Coordination may include contracts for fuel, insurance, drivers, etc.
3. In the Greater Birmingham region, only nonprofit or government agencies will be eligible to initiate a voucher program. Most agencies have specialized functions and clients must be deemed eligible to receive agency services. Therefore, certification of eligibility and validation of trips can be conducted most efficiently and without duplication through participating agencies.
4. All applicants must identify a secure source for matching funds.
5. Applicants requesting vehicles will be required to have a minimum of one lift-equipped vehicle or ten percent of their fleet, whichever is greater.
6. All agencies that receive funding to purchase vehicles must participate in efforts to coordinate the use of the vehicle(s) during down times and in emergency situations.

INVENTORY OF SERVICES

The Greater Birmingham area offers various resources to meet the transportation needs of its citizens, including fixed route public transit (and ADA complementary paratransit), demand response public transportation, nonprofit agencies that

FTA Section 5310

transport clients, private transportation providers such as local taxi services, and in terregional service via Greyhound and Amtrak. It should be noted that no taxi service is available for residents of Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, and Walker counties.

Fixed Route

The BJCTA provides fixed route transit service in the Birmingham area, with complementary ADA paratransit service within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of the fixed route.

Walker County has two deviated fixed route services operated through ClasTran. Weekday service is available within the City of Jasper and a weekly service runs between various municipalities and the City of Jasper.

Demand Response

In the counties of Jefferson and Shelby, ClasTran purchases transportation from providers in order to operate curb-to-curb demand response service. ClasTran receives grant funding for capital equipment, administration, and operations under FTA Sections 5310 (urban) and 5311 (rural), along with local contributions for match.

Blount, Chilton, and St. Clair counties each provide transportation that is primarily funded by the representative county government.

Interregional

Amtrak has train service to/from Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, and Anniston. However, scheduling does not allow a round trip to be completed in the same day. Greyhound bus serves 43 cities in Alabama.

Vanpool

Vanpooling is one of the programs operated by CommuteSmart. The vanpool program provides a van, financial subsidy to riders, and other supporting services including guaranteed ride home, training, vehicle maintenance, insurance, fuel, and tires. In September 2014 there were 36 CommuteSmart vans serving the Birmingham metropolitan area.

School Bus

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





Indirect Providers

Indirect providers bring services to a person's home so a trip is not needed or they transport certain people under certain circumstances. These organizations generally focus on a specific client group, for example:

- Grocery stores and pharmacies that make home deliveries
- Hot meal delivery services
- Personal services, companion, and in-home care services
- Hospitals and medical clinics
- Residential long term care facilities and group homes
- Senior and community centers
- Churches and faith-based organizations
- Child and adult care facilities
- Job training/employment development services
- Social service agencies

Direct Providers

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

- Taxicabs
- Private and nonprofit
- Nonemergency medical
- Airport shuttles
- Charter services



DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSES

Typical demographic indicators help determine the likelihood of residents to be dependent on others for transportation. Those include: age 65 and over, disabled, no high school education, and income. At the time of this update, the most recent population data available was from the 2013 American Community Survey. The combined population of the six-county region makes up 23% of the state's population. Jefferson is the most populous county, having 14% of the state's population.

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

Figure 2
Zero-Vehicle Households

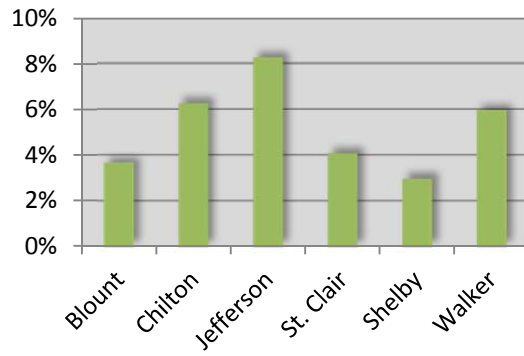


Figure 3
Population 65+

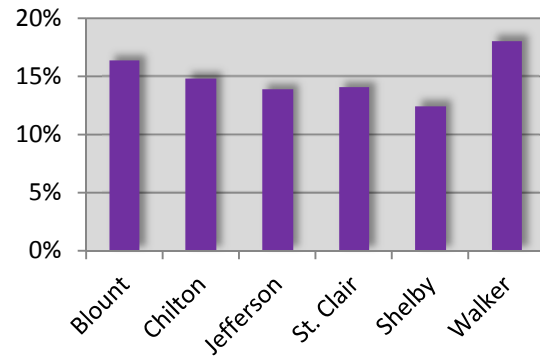


Figure 4
Poverty

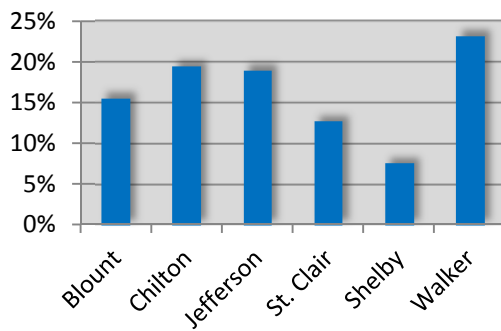


Figure 5
18+ With Disability

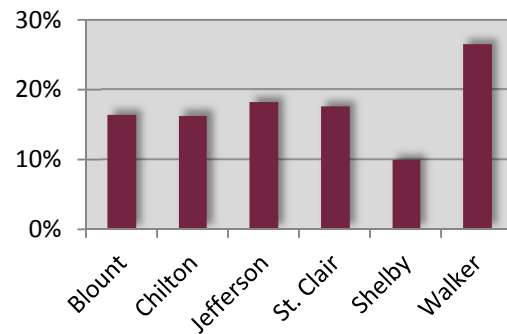


Figure 6
25+ No High School Diploma

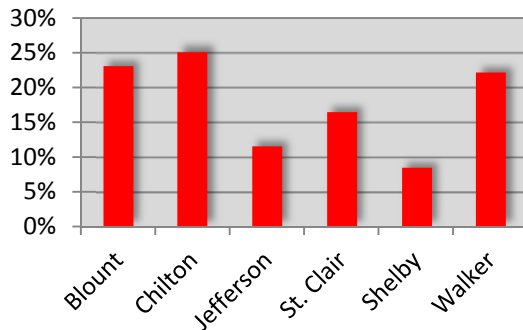
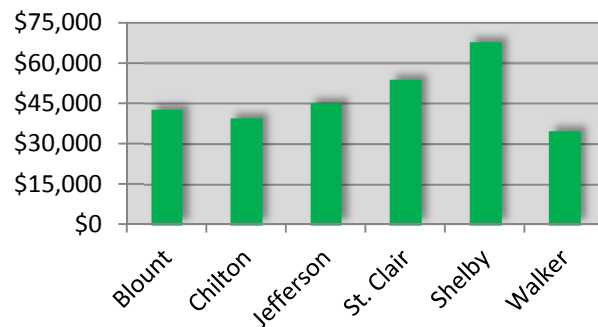


Figure 7
Median Household Income



NOTE: 2013 estimates for Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair, and Walker counties derived from 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates; Blount and Chilton counties derived from 2010-2012 ACS 3-year estimates.

TABLE 1: Cohort Comparison of Counties

Cohort	Blount	Chilton	Jefferson	Shelby	St Clair	Walker
Zero Vehicle Households	3.7%	6.3%	8.3%	3.0%	4.1%	6.0%
Population 65+	16.4%	14.9%	13.9%	12.5%	14.1%	18.1%
Poverty	15.6%	19.5%	19.0%	7.7%	12.8%	23.2%
18+ with Disability	21.6%	21.7%	18.2%	13.3%	22.9%	34.5%
25+ No High School Diploma	23.1%	25.2%	11.6%	8.5%	16.5%	22.2%
Median Household Income	\$42,863	\$39,553	\$45,013	\$67,800	\$53,803	\$34,810
Population Growth 2000-2013	13.4%	11.0%	-0.4%	42.5%	33.3%	-6.7%

TABLE 2: Population and Growth (2000-2013)

County	Population 2000	Population 2010	Population 2013 (est.)	Growth 2000-2013
Blount	51,024	57,322	57,872	13.4%
Chilton	39,593	43,643	43,951	11.0%
Jefferson	662,047	658,466	659,479	-0.4%
St. Clair	64,742	83,593	86,308	33.3%
Shelby	143,293	195,085	204,180	42.5%
Walker	70,713	67,023	65,998	-6.7%
Region	1,031,412	1,105,132	1,117,788	8.4%
State	4,447,100	4,633,360	4,833,722	8.7%

Blount County

Blount County covers 651 square miles, mostly rural, having an average density of 89 people per square mile. The county seat is Oneonta. The county is known for its picturesque covered bridges and Rickwood Caverns, which has limestone formations and an underground pool.

Blount County's 2013 estimated population was 57,872, growing 13.4% since 2000. This is very healthy when compared to the region, state, and U.S. at 7.1%, 7.5%, and 9.7%, respectively.

For the most part, Blount County falls within the median range of the demographic data in the six-county region. One notable exception is seen in education. More than 23% of Blount County's population age 25 and over has no high school diploma. For the State of Alabama that number is 15.5%. This cohort is high when compared with the six-county region as well (19.4%). It is surprising that, in spite of this indicator, the median household income is in the average range for the region and the state.

It should be noted that the Birmingham urbanized area (UZA) has expanded into a small portion of Blount, contributing to the county's healthy growth rate.

TABLE 3: Demographic Comparisons for Blount County

Cohort	Blount	Region	Alabama	U.S.
Zero Vehicle Households	3.7%	5.1%	6.5%	9.1%
Population 65+	16.4%	14.5%	14.9%	14.1%
Poverty	15.6%	17.3%	18.7%	15.8%
18+ with Disability	21.6%	17.0%	19.5%	15.2%
25+ No High School Diploma	23.1%	19.4%	15.5%	13.4%
Median Household Income	\$42,863	\$43,938	\$42,849	\$52,250
Population Growth 2000-2013	13.4%	8.4%	8.7%	9.7%





Chilton County

Chilton County covers 701 square miles and is the most rural county in the region with an average density of 63 people per square mile. Cities include Jemison, Maplesville, and Thorsby, and the county seat of Clanton. The county is known for its peaches and other produce.

Chilton County's 2013 estimated population was 43,951, making it the least populous county in the region. However, Chilton's growth rate is good, with an 11.0% increase from 2000-2013. It should also be noted that Chilton County's Hispanic population nearly tripled in count since 2000, and went from 2.9% of total county population to 7.8%.

Within the six-county region, Chilton County ranks the second highest in overall transportation dependent cohorts. Chilton is located the farthest from Birmingham and the services offered in the metropolitan area. In fact, residents in Chilton County are about half-way between Birmingham and Montgomery. The location, combined with the demographic factors, indicate an increased need for transportation assistance.

TABLE 4: Demographic Comparisons for Chilton County

Cohort	Chilton	Region	Alabama	U.S.
Zero Vehicle Households	6.3%	5.1%	6.5%	9.1%
Population 65+	14.9%	14.5%	14.9%	14.1%
Poverty	19.5%	17.3%	18.7%	15.8%
18+ with Disability	21.7%	17.0%	19.5%	15.2%
25+ No High School Diploma	25.2%	19.4%	15.5%	13.4%
Median Household Income	\$39,553	\$43,938	\$42,849	\$52,250
Population Growth 2000-2013	11.0%	8.4%	8.7%	9.7%



Jefferson County

Jefferson County covers 1,119 square miles, mostly urban, having an average density of 589 people per square mile. Birmingham is the most populous city in Jefferson County, with 659,479 people. Like most metropolitan areas, Jefferson County offers a variety of services and amenities. Because of its geography, it also offers unique and plentiful recreational opportunities that are not usually available within a city.

Jefferson County is the largest county in the six-county region and the most populous county in the state. Like many other major metropolitan areas, its growth rate has declined for the past 20 years. However, the latest population estimate for 2013 indicates nominal growth.

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

TABLE 5: Demographic Comparisons for Jefferson County

Cohort	Jefferson	Region	Alabama	U.S.
Zero Vehicle Households	8.3%	5.1%	6.5%	9.1%
Population 65+	13.9%	14.5%	14.9%	14.1%
Poverty	19.0%	17.3%	18.7%	15.8%
18+ with Disability	18.2%	17.0%	19.5%	15.2%
25+ No High School Diploma	11.6%	19.4%	15.5%	13.4%
Median Household Income	\$45,013	\$43,938	\$42,849	\$52,250
Population Growth 2000-2013	-0.4%	8.4%	8.7%	9.7%





St. Clair County

The 2013 population for St. Clair County was 86,308 . It has consistently experienced the second highest growth rate in the region. But with 654 square miles, St. Clair County remains largely rural, having an average population density of 132 people per square mile. Interstates 59 and 20 go through the county, encouraging convenient development expansion from Jefferson County. Since 2010, the southernmost portion of St. Clair County has been included in the Birmingham urbanized area. As such, growth in this area is expected to continue.

St. Clair is the only county in Alabama with two county seats—one in Ashville and one in Pell City.

Using the demographic indicators , St. Clair County ranked fifth in the region for overall transportation need. These are positive indicators from an economic standpoint.

TABLE 6: Demographic Comparisons for St. Clair County

Cohort	St. Clair	Region	Alabama	U.S.
Zero Vehicle Households	4.1%	5.1%	6.5%	9.1%
Population 65+	14.1%	14.5%	14.9%	14.1%
Poverty	12.8%	17.3%	18.7%	15.8%
18+ with Disability	22.9%	17.0%	19.5%	15.2%
25+ No High School Diploma	16.5%	19.4%	15.5%	13.4%
Median Household Income	\$53,803	\$43,938	\$42,849	\$52,250
Population Growth 2000-2013	33.3%	8.4%	8.7%	9.7%



Shelby County

Shelby County covers 810 square miles with a mix of urban and rural areas. The average population density is 252 people per square mile. Shelby County is home to Oak Mountain State Park, Alabama's largest state park, covering nearly 10,000 acres.

Located south of Jefferson County, Shelby County is the fastest growing county in the State of Alabama, increasing 42.5% since 2010 for a total population of 204,180. Notably, the Hispanic population increased 400%, accounting for 2.0% of total population in 2000, but 6% in 2013. As a comparison, the Hispanic population in the State of Alabama increased 145% and currently accounts for 3.9% of the population.

Compared to the region, Shelby County ranked the lowest in every demographic cohort measured. However, Shelby County's rapid growth rate may have future ramifications with regard to transportation dependency, particularly in light of its corresponding rapid employment rate. Most notable is Shelby County's high median household income.

TABLE 7: Demographic Comparisons for Shelby County

Cohort	Shelby	Region	Alabama	U.S.
Zero Vehicle Households	3.0%	5.1%	6.5%	9.1%
Population 65+	12.5%	14.5%	14.9%	14.1%
Poverty	7.7%	17.3%	18.7%	15.8%
18+ with Disability	13.3%	17.0%	19.5%	15.2%
25+ No High School Diploma	8.5%	19.4%	15.5%	13.4%
Median Household Income	\$67,800	\$43,938	\$42,849	\$52,250
Population Growth 2000-2013	42.5%	8.4%	8.7%	9.7%





Walker County

Walker County covers 805 square miles and is largely rural. It has a population of 65,998, making the density 82 people per square mile. Jasper is the county seat and is located in the center of the county. Approximately 20 percent of Walker County's total population is located in Jasper. Coal and timber are major resources.

In the six-county region, Walker has the highest overall score for transit dependency cohorts. Of particular note is the very high percentage of individuals age 18 and over with a disability—more than twice the national average. Also notable is that Walker County has nearly double the national average of individuals age 25 and up without a high school diploma.

Walker County lost 5.2% of its population from 2000-2010, and an additional loss of 6.7% in the past three years (2000-2013).

TABLE 8: Demographic Comparisons for Walker County

Cohort	Walker	Region	Alabama	U.S.
Zero Vehicle Households	6.0%	5.1%	6.5%	9.1%
Population 65+	18.1%	14.5%	14.9%	14.1%
Poverty	23.2%	17.3%	18.7%	15.8%
18+ with Disability	34.5%	17.0%	19.5%	15.2%
25+ No High School Diploma	22.2%	19.4%	15.5%	13.4%
Median Household Income	\$34,810	\$43,938	\$42,849	\$52,250
Population Growth 2000-2013	-6.7%	8.4%	8.7%	9.7%



PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

In an effort to get widespread input into this plan, the RPCGB held public meetings in each county. Input was received from a diversity of representatives, including local politicians, agency employees, general public, transportation providers, and individuals who are transportation disadvantaged.

All six counties in the Greater Birmingham region offer some form of public transportation. In this current state of economic distress, when many transportation systems have experienced a decrease in service, the demand-response services in this region have actually increased.

Information gathered was used to develop the Goals, Transportation Needs, and Barriers sections of this plan. There were similarities across counties with regard to needs, barriers, and solutions, although it is clearly much more problematic for people in the rural counties to access services, especially when many of those services are in other counties.

ACTIVITY CENTERS

Most trips revolve around five purposes: employment, education, medical, social/shopping, and recreation. The following is not meant to be an exhaustive list of destinations, but rather is an indication of destinations that draw a larger number of people/trips.

Employment

Job access is particularly difficult for individuals who are transportation disadvantaged. It has a cyclical effect, because a job will help a person to access transportation, but without transportation, it is difficult to get a job. It is important to identify large employers so that there might be opportunity to coordinate transportation and/or coordinate financial assistance for transportation.

In any given county in the United States, the largest employers are typically the board of education and local governments. Therefore, only the next largest employers will be identified herein.

University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) is the largest employer in Jefferson County, followed by AT&T, and Regions Bank. Children's Health is predominant in Shelby and Walker Counties, and Walmart is one of the largest employers in Blount, St. Clair, Shelby, and Walker. The St. Clair Correctional Facility is also a major employer. In Chilton County, CRH and Kumi manufacturers employ the most people.





Education

All public schools in the Greater Birmingham region have buses to pick up their students, except those living within relatively close proximity of the school. Because schools serve the local residents, it is fairly easy to coordinate or share transportation responsibilities with other families. Some large private schools offer transportation for an additional fee, but most private schools do not have the financial resources to provide transportation. As a result, options may be limited for a person who desires private school education for their children.

The Greater Birmingham region offers many opportunities for higher education. UAB is the largest university in Jefferson County, with Samford, Birmingham Southern, and Miles College all within 7 miles of UAB. Jefferson State Community College has campuses in Jefferson, Shelby, Chilton, and St. Clair counties. Walker County is home to Beville State Community College.

Medical

There are numerous medical facilities in the region, but Birmingham has the largest concentrated medical center area. The medical center area has a number of hospitals and medical facilities, including UAB, Children's, Veterans Administration, Cooper-Green, St. Vincent's and others. Located just south of the downtown business district, the medical center area draws people from all over the State of Alabama. Another major medical center area is Brookwood, located at Lakeshore and Highway 31 in Homewood.

Baptist Health has hospitals in Jefferson, Shelby, and Walker counties and St. Vincent's has locations in Blount and St. Clair. Medical facilities are located in every county, but at some point most people in the region will find it necessary to come to Birmingham for treatment.

Social/Shopping

Shopping and restaurants go hand in hand, and both are plentiful in the six-county region. Jefferson County includes the Galleria in Hoover, Summit in Birmingham, Pinnacle in Trussville, Promenade in Bessemer, and the Shops of Grand River outlet mall in Leeds.

For a more personalized, walkable experience, the region has several quaint, small towns, including Helena in Shelby County, Pell City in St. Clair County, Oneonta in Blount County, Jasper in Walker County, and Clanton in Chilton County.



Recreation

Greater Birmingham has a variety of natural resources, offering outdoor recreational opportunities for nearly everyone. Oak Mountain State Park and Cahaba River in Shelby County, Ruffner Mountain in Jefferson, and Logan Martin Lake in St. Clair (to name a few) offer biking, hiking, swimming, fishing, camping, golfing, horseback riding, boating, canoeing, picnicking, and bird watching. Rickwood Caverns in Blount County is a unique natural wonder of limestone formations with an underground pool.

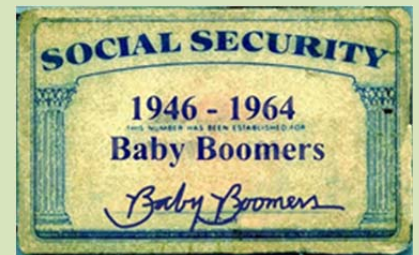
Indoor recreation is also plentiful, with all six counties offering one or more of the following: ice skating, roller skating, arcades, museums, swimming pools, bowling, etc.

TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

In general, income, age, and physical disability are the primary determining factors in being transportation disadvantaged. In the United States, zero vehicle households make up 26% of those having an income under \$20,000, while zero vehicle households make up only 5% of those having an income of \$20,000 to \$39,999.¹ Similarly, high income households make longer trips than low income households.²

Seniors

As health care improves and Baby Boomers age, transportation for the senior population in America is a vital concern. Seniors rely on their automobiles to enable preservation of their mobility and independence. In the Greater Birmingham area, there are few, if any, viable alternatives to the private automobile. This compels people to drive, whether or not they should. Contrary to popular belief, older drivers are more likely to be harmed than to harm others.³ Older drivers are about three times more likely to crash per mile drive, and the risk of dying after an automobile accident increases significantly with age.⁴



¹ Pucher, John and John L. Renne. "Socioeconomics of Urban Travel: Evidence from the 2001 NHTS." *Transportation Quarterly*. 5.3 (2003), p. 55.

² Ibid, p. 63

³ "Road Map to Wellness."

www.asaging.org/cdc/module4/phase1/phase1_1b.cfm (accessed January 2011).

⁴ Foley, MS, et al. "Driving Life Expectancy of Persons Aged 70 Years and Older in the United States." *American Journal of Public Health*. 92.8 (2002), p.1284.

When comparing driving life expectancies with total life expectancies, men will have about 6 years of dependency on transportation alternatives and women will have about 10 years.⁵ This fact is staggering in light of extended life expectancies, our cultural shift toward independence, and a decrease in public transportation services.

Disabled

The disabled population is diverse, ranging from minor to severe and infant to elderly. It does not discriminate among race, age, income, or education. In many cases, an inability to drive is the only thing that interferes with leading a relatively normal lifestyle. Even if there is adequate public transit and individuals are physically able to negotiate it, they may not be able to get to/from bus stops, due to lack of sidewalks or other features that interfere with accessibility. Great strides have been made since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991, but there remains much room for improvement.

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

Of course, there are a variety of other trip purpose needs, including employment, education, general personal business activities, and social. Because of limited resources, effort is usually concentrated on providing transportation for life-sustaining activities. But there has been much literature written about individuals who are homebound and their tendency to experience depression and poor health. When people experience a higher quality of life, it is beneficial for individuals and society, as a whole. In fact, one recent study asserts that the health risks of social isolation are equivalent to smoking and obesity.⁶ On the basis of this research, if more effort was spent on providing trips for all purposes, it could reduce the need for medical trips.

TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS

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

⁵ Ibid, p.1287.

⁶ Holt-Lunstad, Julianne, et al. "Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review." *PLoS Medicine*, July 2010.



Availability

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

In all six counties, people expressed a need for service hours and days to be expanded. Lack of dependability was also cited as a barrier, which included drivers as well as vehicles.

In-County Only

Of particular concern in Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, and Walker counties is the ability to get to and from other counties. The bulk of medical and social services are located in Jefferson County. People are denied services for which they are eligible, such as veterans, because they live in outlying areas and cannot get to the necessary facilities.

Public Awareness

Several people who attended the public meetings were totally unaware that public transportation was available in their county and felt a greater need for public education and marketing. Increased public awareness leads to increased efficiencies and overall effectiveness. Another benefit is when people can get to jobs and shopping, they contribute to an increased tax base.

Distribution of information about transportation funding mechanisms and consequent eligibility criteria was also identified as a need. It is often difficult for a person to know whether or not they can ride a particular system and whether or not an individual is eligible to participate in a subsidized program.

The public also needs to be educated with regard to overall funding of public transit. Most people are unaware of how public transportation is funded and how little the farebox collections contribute to the total cost.

Politics

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





Coordination

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

STRATEGIES

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

1. Enforce Standards for Funding for FTA Section 5310. This means that only those applications requesting capital equipment for projects that serve a broad range of people, expand service area, hours, and/or days of operation, and/or engage in coordinated contracts will be funded.
2. Explore options for developing and/or expanding public transit along corridors identified as having high transit potential. This can be done, in part, through alternatives analysis studies.
3. Work with rural counties to coordinate services across county lines.
4. Assist the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority in service development and route adjustment.
5. Continue to work with various groups to develop ways to expand services. In the urbanized area, this may include specialized service, express buses, and bus rapid transit.
6. Begin a public awareness campaign regarding available services and advocate for designation of funding.
7. Work with special interest groups, e.g., veterans, career centers, aging services, to identify and reduce duplication of services.
8. Continue working with employers to participate in CommuteSmart, the local ridesharing program.
9. Work toward development of a central call center (for Jefferson and Shelby).

10. Form volunteer programs to provide transportation services.
11. Look for partners to promote the benefits of public transportation services.
12. At a minimum under FTA Section 5310, sustain current levels of service, including vehicle replacement, where appropriate.
13. Other strategies or proposed projects not listed herein will be considered for funding if they demonstrate concurrence with stated Goals and movement toward resolution of Needs and/or Barriers.

