

# Regional Transit Development Plan

## Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region

Executive Summary

August 2024



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## Table of Contents

- 1.0 Overview ..... 1-1
  - 1.1 Regional Context..... 1-1
  - 1.2 Impetus for Regional TDP ..... 1-2
  - 1.3 Planning Process ..... 1-4
- 2.0 Existing Transit Services ..... 2-1
- 3.0 Existing Conditions Overview ..... 1
  - 3.1 Existing and Future Trends Analysis..... 1
  - 3.2 Key Destinations and Development Patterns..... 3
  - 3.3 Comparison to Peer Transit Agencies..... 3-3
- 4.0 Regional Transit Vision and Goals..... 1
- 5.0 Needs, Recommendations, and Implementation ..... 5-1
  - 5.1 Implementation Plan..... 5-1
  - 5.2 Demand-Response Modifications ..... 5-3
    - 5.3 Commuter and Fixed Route Service ..... 5-7
  - 5.4 Administrative Tools and Guidance..... 5-7
  - 5.5 Funding..... 5-8
  - 5.6 Next Steps ..... 5-8

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region Context..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Figure 2: Statewide Transit Planning Context..... 1-3

Figure 3: TDP Planning Phases ..... 1-4

Figure 4: Existing Transit Service in Heart of Georgia Altamaha ..... 2-1

Figure 5: Major Destinations ..... 3-3

Figure 6: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional TDP Vision Statement ..... 1

Figure 7: Heart of Georgia Altamaha TDP Goals..... 2

Figure 8: Public Survey Rankings of TDP Goals ..... 2

Figure 9: Implementation Tiers ..... 5-2

## List of Tables

Table 1: Transit Agency Characteristics for GDOT Administered Systems..... 2-2

Table 2: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region and State Statistics for Transit-Dependent Populations..... 1

Table 3: High-Impact Demand-Response Transit Recommendations ..... 5-3

Table 4: Mid-Impact Demand-Response Transit Recommendations ..... 5-5

Table 5: Fundamental Tier Recommendations ..... 5-7

## List of Acronyms

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>CEDS</b>   | Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy   |
| <b>DCH</b>    | Georgia Department of Community Health        |
| <b>DHS</b>    | Georgia Department of Human Services          |
| <b>FTA</b>    | Federal Transit Administration                |
| <b>GDOT</b>   | Georgia Department of Transportation          |
| <b>HOGA</b>   | Heart of Georgia Altamaha                     |
| <b>HOGARC</b> | Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission |
| <b>LEP</b>    | Limited English Proficiency                   |
| <b>PAC</b>    | Project Advisory Committee                    |
| <b>SWTRP</b>  | Statewide Transit Plan                        |
| <b>TCRP</b>   | Transit Cooperative Research Program          |
| <b>TDP</b>    | Transit Development Plan                      |
| <b>TTFP</b>   | Transit Trust Fund Program                    |

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## 1.0 Overview

The Heart of Georgia Altamaha (HOGA) Regional Transit Development Plan (TDP) is a guide for the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission (HOGARC) and its 17 counties, along with their implementation partners, to work together to advance a regional transit system that aligns with the regional transit vision and goals. The plan provides robust documentation of mobility conditions within the Region and identifies next steps to advance specific transit service recommendations and, where relevant, alternative service options that require further regional consideration. The overarching goal of the TDP is to ensure public transit accessibility to all in the Region with a particular focus on residents who are transit dependent.

This Executive Summary provides an overview of the HOGA Region TDP planning process and key components of the Plan. Companion plan documents include the **Existing Conditions Report, Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report**, and the supporting **Public Involvement Documentation Appendix**. These documents are available on the HOGARC TDP website: <https://regionaltdp-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>.

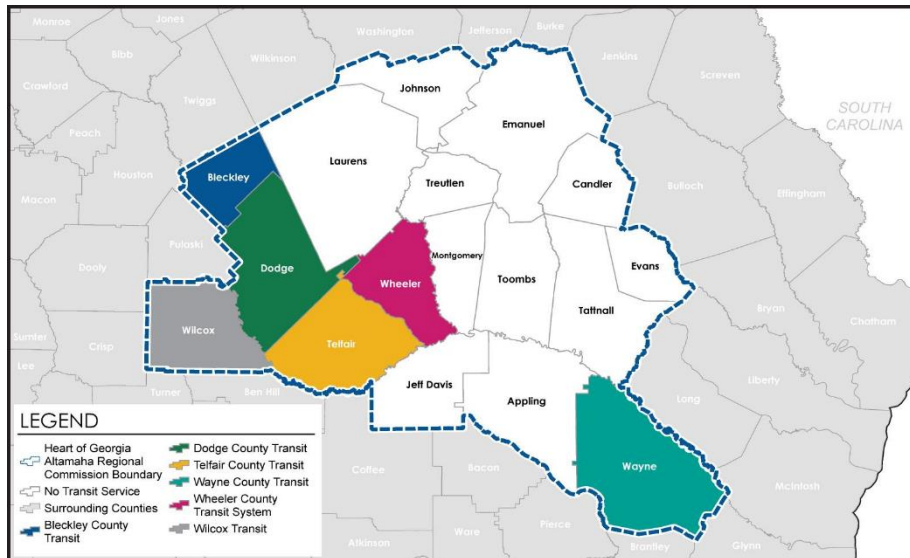
### 1.1 Regional Context

The HOGA Region, located in rural South Georgia, includes the major transportation corridors of I-16, U.S. Route 1, U.S. Route 310, U.S. Route 341, and U.S. Route 441. The Region consists of 17 counties: Appling, Bleckley, Candler, Dodge, Emanuel, Evans, Jeff Davis, Johnson, Laurens, Montgomery, Tattall, Telfair, Toombs, Treutlen, Wayne, Wheeler, and Wilcox, as shown in **Figure 1: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region Context**. The HOGA Region encompasses both the upper and lower

Coastal Plains in the south-central and southern parts of the state, and much of the HOGA Region falls within the Altamaha River Basin.

In 2021, the HOGA Region's total population was 293,437 residents. The Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget projects the Region's population to increase by about 31 percent to 303,425 by 2060. The Region's population is highest in Laurens County (~49,000) followed by Wayne County (~31,000) and Toombs County (~27,000). The most populous municipalities in the Region include the City of Dublin in Laurens County (~16,000), the City of Vidalia in Toombs County (~11,000), and the City of Jesup in Wayne County (~10,000).

Figure 1: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region Context



## 1.2 Impetus for Regional TDP

The Georgia Department of Transportation’s (GDOT’s) Statewide Transit Plan (SWTRP) and its TDP Guidebook laid the groundwork for the HOGA Region TDP. A primary recommendation of the SWTRP was the development of regional transit plans throughout the state of Georgia to comprehensively identify transit needs, coordination, and implementation actions across county boundaries. Currently there are 10 TDPs that have been completed or are in progress. The HOGARC TDP is a GDOT-funded project.

Figure 2 gives more insight into the SWTRP’s context, including its vision statement.

Figure 2: Statewide Transit Planning Context

## Statewide Transit Planning Context






### Georgia Statewide Transit Plan (SWTRP)

The SWTRP was an extensive effort to document and assess existing transit conditions and needs throughout the state and develop a set of implementable recommendations. The SWTRP included a long-term vision statement and five overarching goals for the future of transit in Georgia. As champions of the SWTRP, local and regional transit agencies each play a role in bringing the vision to fruition.

### Vision Statement

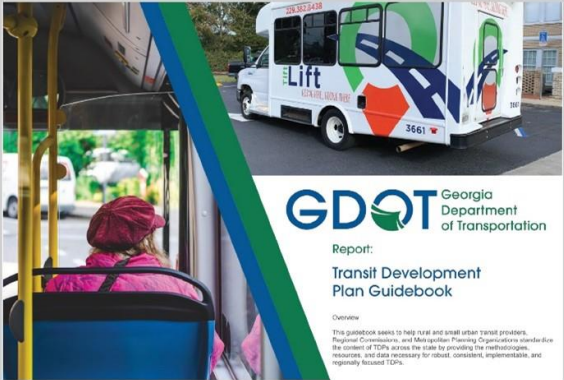
Improve the quality of life and economic opportunities for all Georgians by supporting an innovative, connected, reliable, and accessible multimodal public transportation network.

### Goals

-  Provide a safe and sustainable public transit network
-  Optimize public transit programs to best meet public transit systems' and travelers' needs
-  Ensure public transit coverage across the state to support mobility and access for all
-  Connect rural transit to regional and urban centers
-  Leverage innovation and technology to support public transit ridership and performance

### GDOT Transit Development Plan Guidebook

The Georgia Department of Transportation TDP Guidebook is a resource to help transit agencies, regional commissions, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and other organizations with their long-term planning for transit investments. The Guidebook provides detailed direction regarding processes and analyses that make up a robust transit plan. The TDP Guidebook laid the foundation for Georgia Mountains Regional TDP process and content.



### 1.3 Planning Process

The HOGARC TDP project commenced in June 2023 and spanned a 15-month period. A Project Team, comprised of GDOT, HOGARC, and the consultant team, shepherded the process from start to finish, with monthly meetings to keep the project on schedule. The planning process kicked off with the establishment of a schedule, a public and stakeholder engagement plan, and a review of existing conditions and trends. Figure 3 shows the five key phases of the planning process.

Figure 3: TDP Planning Phases



The first months of the planning process included the launch of outward-facing project communications and a GDOT-hosted website, data collection and existing conditions analysis, and the identification of key stakeholders to participate in a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) and stakeholder interviews. Interviews verified current transit services within jurisdictions, discussed travel patterns within the Region as well as to areas outside the Region (primarily for medical services), uncovered unmet mobility needs, and identified challenges or barriers to improving access to transit across the Region.

From October 2023 to February 2024, several project milestones occurred:

1. The Project Team held numerous virtual stakeholder interviews, the first virtual PAC meeting, and the first virtual public meeting. Following these meetings, an online public survey was deployed, which intended to introduce people to the TDP planning process, as well as to help identify and verify regional transit needs and opportunities. A total of 75 people responded to the survey.
2. The Project Team finalized the Existing Conditions Report, which included travel trends inside counties, between counties, and to areas outside the Region. Additionally, a detailed profile of each of the GDOT-administered transit systems in the Region was developed.
3. The Project Team drafted the regional transit vision and goals statements.

The following key activities occurred from March 2024 to July 2024:

1. The Project Team finalized the regional transit Vision and Goals Statement and Report.
2. The Project Team held the second round of key stakeholder and public input via an in-person PAC meeting in Vidalia and a virtual public meeting. Following these meetings, a second online public survey was launched. This survey gathered feedback from the public regarding proposed transit alternatives and desires for the future of HOGA transit. A total of 213 people responded to the survey.
3. The Project Team conducted several analyses to evaluate transit needs and inform the alternatives development. These analyses considered population density, areas with higher-than-average proportions of vulnerable populations, and unmet transit demand of the existing transit systems. Additionally, survey responses were taken into consideration and resulted in several alternatives. The consultant team developed over 40 alternatives that address demand-response system performance, commuting, and administration of transit programs. Alternatives were grouped into three categories: transit expansion, transit enhancements, and administrative tools and guidance.
4. With input from GDOT and HOGARC, the alternatives in each category were refined into a prioritized list of recommendations. The Needs Assessment, Alternatives Analysis and Evaluation, and final Recommendations are captured in the Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report.

The TDP planning process culminated with a 30-day public review period in August 2024 and a presentation of the Plan to

the HOGARC Council in September 2024, in anticipation of the Plan's adoption. Following adoption, the Plan will serve as an implementation guide and tool to prioritize transit expansion and access additional funding that will be required to implement the Plan.

## 2.0 Existing Transit Services

Six of the 17 counties within the HOGA Region have GDOT-administered rural, public, demand-response transit systems, which include Bleckley, Dodge, Telfair, Wayne, Wheeler, and Wilcox Counties.

Beginning in 2024, Dodge County assumed responsibility for servicing the Telfair County trips with the assistance of funding from the Georgia Transit Trust Fund Program (TTFP). In addition, Treutlen County established demand-response transit service fully funded by the county.

Hours of service vary across the transit agencies but are generally during weekday business hours (7:00 AM or 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM or 5:00 PM). Evening and weekend services are currently unavailable except for Wayne County Transit, which allows riders to schedule trips on a 24-hour, 7-day basis. These trips must be scheduled during business hours (8:00 AM - 4:00 PM) and at least three days in advance.

Fares are either distance-based or destination-specific. Bleckley County, for example, charges a flat rate for an in-county trip, and a slightly higher flat rate for an out-of-county trip to the Taylor Regional Hospital in neighboring Pulaski County. Dodge, Telfair, and Wheeler Counties charge a flat rate for in-county trips and do not provide out-of-county services. Wayne County's fares are tiered in price based on distance traveled, and trips can be up to 100 miles including out-of-county trips. Lastly, Wilcox County fares are a flat rate within the county and a higher flat rate for an out-of-county trip, up to 40 miles.

**Table 1:** Transit Agency Characteristics for GDOT Administered Systems provides further information about the existing transit services, including the number of trips in 2019, operating hours, fleet size, and which agencies serve locations outside of their county jurisdiction.

**Table 1: Transit Agency Characteristics for GDOT Administered Systems**

| County   | Name of Transit Agency  | Unlinked Transit Trips (2019) | Operating Hours            | Fleet Size  | Service Area  |
|----------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|---|
| Bleckley | Bleckley County Transit | 5,397                         | 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM; Mon-Fri | 3 vehicles  | Bleckley County and to/from the Taylor Regional Hospital in Pulaski County. |
| Dodge    | Dodge County Transit    | 15,300                        | 7:00 AM – 4:00 PM; Mon-Fri | 3 vehicles  | Dodge County*   |
| Telfair  | Dodge County Transit*   | 9,660                         | 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM; Mon-Fri | 2 vehicles  | Telfair County  |
| Wayne    | Wayne County Transit    | 45,739                        | 24/7                       | 12 vehicles | Wayne County; up to 100 miles   |
| Wheeler  | Wheeler County Transit  | 4,049                         | 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM; Mon-Fri | 2 vehicles  | Wheeler County  |
| Wilcox   | Wilcox County Transit   | 5,622                         | 6:00 AM – 6:00 PM          | 3 vehicles  | Wilcox County; up to 40 miles out-of-county                                 |

\*As of 2024, Dodge County is servicing all of Telfair County’s trips with the help of Georgia Transit Trust Funds.

These six rural transit agencies receive funding through the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTA) Section 5311 rural area formula grant program. As of 2024, Treutlen County is using county funds for a newly established rural demand-response transit system. **Figure 4** depicts the types of transit systems in the HOGA Region.

**Figure 4: Existing Transit Service in Heart of Georgia Altamaha**

**Counties  
WITH AND WITHOUT  
Transit Service**

**10** Counties DO NOT HAVE GDOT Administered rural, public transit services.

**1** County (Treutlen) initiated county funded demand-response transit service in 2024.

**6** Counties (Bleckley, Dodge, Telfair, Wayne, Wheeler, and Wilcox) have GDOT administered (Section 5311 funded) demand-response service.

Beginning in 2024, Dodge County is servicing all Telfair County trips, using Georgia Transit Trust Fund Program (TTFP) funds for one year.

The Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) and the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS) also provide transit services in the HOGA Region using the county transit agencies’ staff, drivers, and vehicles. These services are available only to specific groups, such as low-income families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. DHS/DCH trips play a critical role in helping residents access healthcare and other essential needs.

GDOT’s mission is to expand mobility options for all members of the public, so this TDP primarily focuses on public transit services available to all residents, along with some ideas surrounding potential coordination between DHS, DCH, and GDOT/HOGARC-administrated transit.

### 3.0 Existing Conditions Overview

The Project Team performed a thorough analysis of existing conditions, resulting in the **Existing Conditions Report**. The team identified trends and opportunities that will shape the future of transit in the Region by evaluating relevant plans and studies, demographic and socioeconomic trends, transportation and transit system characteristics, and current funding allocations.

#### 3.1 Existing and Future Trends Analysis

Relative to the state of Georgia percentages, the HOGA Region contains higher-than-average proportions of households below the poverty line, persons with disabilities, zero-car households, and youth ages 15 to 19 assumed to be in school or working. Each of these groups are considered transit-dependent populations. Additionally, minority groups comprise over one-third of the regional population and are more likely to use or depend upon transit services. **Table 2** shows the percentages of each transit-dependent demographic compared to the Georgia statewide average based on US Census 2021 American Community Survey data.

**Table 2: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region and State Statistics for Transit-Dependent Populations**

| Demographic Category                               | Regional Statistic | Statewide Statistic | Regional Average Above or Below the Statewide Statistic |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|---|
| Minority Individuals                               | 36.8%              | 47.9%               | Below   |
| Households Below the Poverty Line                  | 22.5%              | 14.3%               | Above   |
| Individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) | 1.9%               | 5.4%                | Below   |
| Disabled Persons                                   | 17.2%              | 12.5%               | Above   |
| Zero-Car Households                                | 7.5%               | 7.0%                | Above   |
| Seniors  | 14.6%              | 19.6%               | Below   |
| Youth (15-19)                                      | 7.03%              | 7.0%                | Above   |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data

Of all HOGARC counties, Laurens County makes up the largest percentage of the Region’s total labor force at 17.2 percent. Other counties with high percentages of the Region’s employed residents include Wayne County (10.0 percent), Toombs County (9.4 percent), Emanuel County (8.1 percent), and Tattnall County (7.7 percent).

The major employment industries in the HOGA Region include manufacturing and industrial facilities, lumber and wood products, food processing and agriculture, and transportation and logistics. Additionally, the HOGA Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report identifies healthcare/social assistance as the Region’s largest employment sector, followed by manufacturing and retail trade.

Major job clusters in the Region (with at least 10,000 jobs) are in Laurens County (City of Dublin) and Toombs Counties (Cities of Vidalia and Lyons). Minor job clusters (3,000 to 9,999 jobs) are in Jeff Davis County (City of Hazlehurst), Emanuel County (City of Swainsboro), and Wayne County (City of Jesup). Agricultural jobs are spread across the Region. According to the Georgia Department of Labor, agricultural jobs constitute 22 percent of the industry mix in the HOGA Region.

Major employers in the Region include Claxton Poultry Co., Crider Inc., Trane Residential Systems, Southern Nuclear Operating Co., Fairview Park Hospital, Rotary Corporation, RYAM, Best Buy Distribution Center, and Walmart. In May 2023, Hyundai Motor Group and LG Energy Solution announced a \$4.3 billion-dollar electric vehicle (EV) battery plant to be built in Bryan County, Georgia, just east of the HOGA Region along I-16. This plant, along with multiple satellite and supporting facilities, is expected to bring thousands of jobs to the surrounding area in the coming years. This development is expected to have an impact on the workforce in the HOGA Region.

According to the Georgia Department of Labor’s “Long-Term Industry Projections” through 2030, the industries with the greatest expected number of employees include Health Care and Social Assistance (+1,970 people), Accommodation and Food Services (+1,530 people), and Retail Trade (+1,420 people). The industries anticipated for the highest percentages of growth include Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation (+33 percent), Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing (+29.4 percent), and Administrative and Waste Management/Remediation Services (+30.5 percent).

The most common travel pattern is the Region is intra-county trips with all Heart of Georgia Altamaha counties having 50 percent or more of trips staying within county boundaries. The regional average intra-county trip percentage is 80 percent. And residents of Wayne, Wilcox, and Laurens Counties had 90 percent or more of their trips within their residential county. On the lower end, Montgomery and Wheeler residents stayed in their county 51.4 percent and 59.6 percent of the time, respectively.

Inter-county travel is also a major contributor to trips in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region. Significant county pairs with trips that originate in one county and terminate in a different county include Montgomery and Toombs Counties, Tattnall County and its neighbors Evans and Toombs Counties, and Laurens and Johnson Counties, and Appling and Jeff Davis Counties.

Destinations outside the Region also generate a high number of trips especially on the eastern side to Bulloch, Long, Liberty, and Glenn Counties; farther destinations include Macon/Bibb County and Savannah/Chatham County. There are prominent hospitals and medical facilities as well as shopping destinations which may be responsible for these trips.

### 3.2 Key Destinations and Development Patterns

In addition to jobs, **Figure 5** shows the other types of key destinations which include medical facilities, schools and educational campuses, small downtown areas, and natural areas. There are 10 hospitals and county health departments in 15 of the 17 counties, and over 10 major medical centers in the HOGA Region. Major hospitals include Fairview Park Hospital in the City of Dublin, Carl Vinson VA Medical Center in the City of Dublin, Memorial Health Meadows Hospital in the City of Vidalia, and Appling Healthcare Center in the City of Baxley. Medical trips are the current primary destination for demand-response trips in the region. Residents are traveling within and out of the Region for medical care, with inter-region destinations for these services including the Cities of Hawkinsville, Statesboro, Macon, and Savannah.

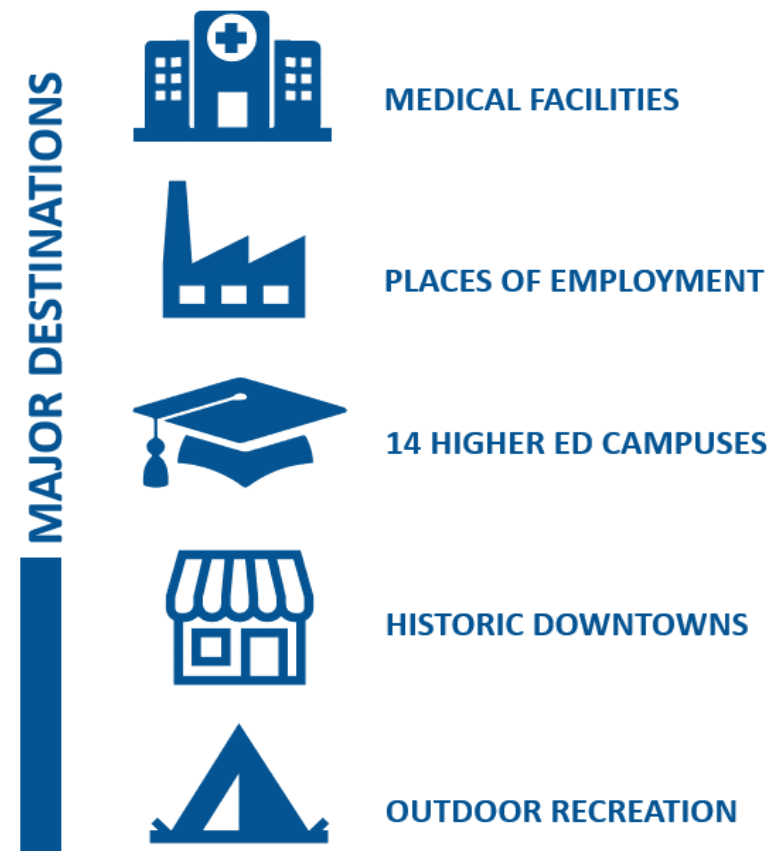
The Region has 14 higher education campuses including Coastal Pines Technical College, East Georgia State, Oconee Fall Line Technical College, Middle Georgia State University, and Southeastern Technical College campuses. Recreational resources including camping, caravan, and picnic sites, playgrounds, swimming pools, and other spaces used for sports and recreation, make up about 14.5 percent of the HOGA Region’s key destinations and services. The Region is home to the Altamaha River on its southern border, the Gordonia-Altamaha State Park, and the historic Wiregrass Trail.

### 3.3 Comparison to Peer Transit Agencies

To provide a point of comparison with peer transit agencies, the Project Team analyzed service characteristics of various peer transit systems located in Georgia, but outside of the HOGA Region. Most of these peer systems operate demand-response services at comparable fares and similar hours to the existing

services in the HOGA Region. In addition to service characteristics, the comparative analysis looked at several performance measures, such as total vehicle revenue miles and cost per trip for both HOGA and peer transit systems. More details are available in the **Existing Conditions Report**.

Figure 5: Major Destinations



## 4.0 Regional Transit Vision and Goals

The regional transit vision and goals resulted from an extensive analysis of existing conditions, a thorough review of stakeholder and public engagement forums, and an understanding of the larger state and regional context for transit development.

Levels of participation varied between the PAC meetings, stakeholder interviews and questionnaires, public meetings, and online surveys, but the feedback gleaned from these tools led to the following conclusions:

- Medical trips in and out of the Region are the highest demand trip type in the HOGA Region currently, predominantly for seniors.
- Primary reasons for not using transit include owning a personal vehicle and lack of service awareness.
- Easier scheduling, traveling farther distances, and increasing fleet sizes were identified as top goals by the PAC members.
- Participants identified transit opportunities that included increasing availability, serving underserved communities, providing affordable transit for medical trips, and supporting workforce transportation needs as key needs.
- Public officials are hesitant to spend more local funding on transit due to other important needs in the Region such as paving dirt roads.
- The highest-rated draft alternatives focused on enhancing transit services, particularly expanding scheduling to include longer weekday hours, starting weekend service, and accessibility improvements such as wheelchair lifts and storage space for personal items on all vehicles.
- There is a need for demand-response transit service for various types of travel needs, including school-related travel to and from school and daycare, student travel for individuals in college/university/technical schools to access school as well as for personal needs; shopping or personal

trips for the public; and regular medical trips.

With these considerations in mind, the Project Team developed the vision statement shown in **Figure 6**.

**Figure 6: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional TDP Vision Statement**



To guide the implementation of the TDP and ensure progress toward this vision, the Team also created the goals listed and described in **Figure 7**.

Figure 7: Heart of Georgia Altamaha TDP Goals

**Goal 1: Maximize Funding & Provide Connections**

Maximize funding resources to ensure long-term viability and sustainability of regional demand-response transit, while providing local and regional connections to essential services and daily needs.

**Goal 2: Promote Agency Coordination**

Promote regional coordination and resource sharing to enable efficiencies, best practices, and expand demand-response transit coverage across county lines and throughout the region.

**Goal 3: Increase Public Awareness**

Build meaningful partnerships between transit providers, major employers, and government and other agencies to increase public awareness of available demand-response transit options.

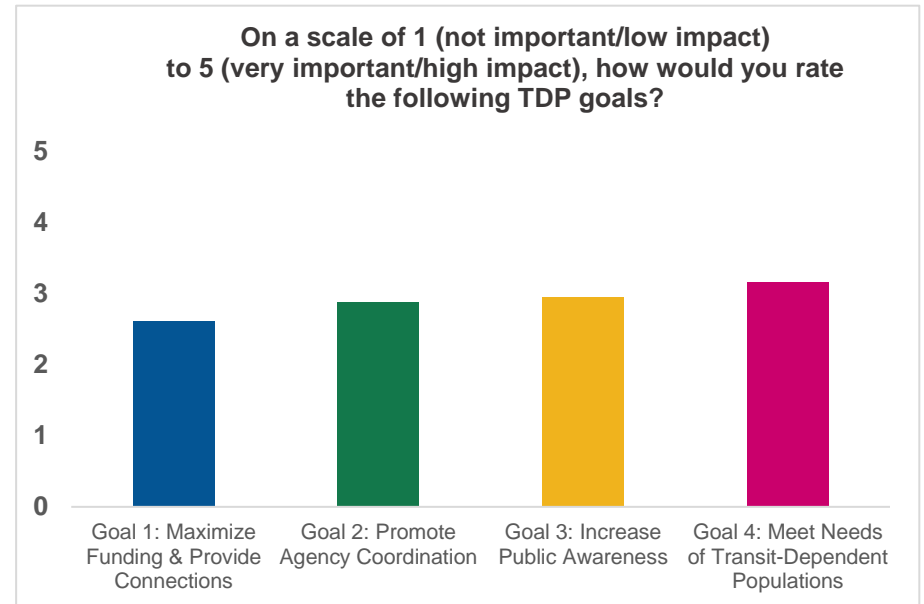
**Goal 4: Meet Needs of Transit-Dependent Populations**

Ensure that system capacity adequately serves the region's transit dependent populations in an equitable and accessible manner.

These goals were presented to the PAC members during the in-person meeting and to the public in a virtual meeting. A list of the draft goals was also included in the second public survey, and respondents were asked to rank them on a scale of 1 (not important/low impact) to 5 (very important/high impact). One-hundred thirty-nine participants answered this question.

The TDP goal that was given the highest importance by survey respondents was Goal 4: Meet Needs of Transit-Dependent Populations (score: 3.15). The remaining three goals were scored as follows: Goal 3: Increase Public Awareness (score: 2.94), Goal 2: Promote Agency Coordination (2.88), and Goal 1: Maximize Funding & Provide Connections (score: 2.61), as depicted in **Figure 8**.

Figure 8: Public Survey Rankings of TDP Goals



## 5.0 Needs, Recommendations, and Implementation

The Project Team developed a range of alternatives to improve transit service and coverage throughout the HOGA Region.

Transit needs were identified through qualitative and quantitative methods, including technical analyses, PAC, stakeholder, and public input. GDOT and HOGARC feedback was also impactful to understanding regional as well as specific community needs.

Using methodologies established by the Transportation Research Board’s *Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP)*, the Project Team evaluated several indicators of transit need, such as population density, transit-dependent populations, and unmet demand of the existing transit services. The rural transit needs analysis helped the Project Team understand the landscape of current and potential transit users in the Region. Based on this analysis, demand-response transit is the most appropriate type of service. In the future, there may be opportunities for small, fixed route systems in the downtown areas of the cities of Dublin, Cochran, and Jesup. The Regional Commission should monitor the population and employment growth in these areas. Additional details about this analysis are included in the **Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report**.

The PAC played an integral role in helping to evaluate the merits and feasibility of each transit alternative. During the in-person PAC meeting held in February 2024, the Project Team asked questions and gathered feedback on the most important draft transit alternatives. Along with this facilitated group discussion, PAC members also filled out a scoring packet, rating each alternative on a scale of 1 to 5 from little importance/impact to high importance/impact. The scoring packet also included space for comments.

The PAC members also participated in a coloring activity where they identified desired long-term county partnerships and regionalization opportunities on an 11” x 17” map. These scoring sheets and maps were analyzed after the meeting to direct further development of the alternatives.

Public feedback on the alternatives was also collected via a virtual meeting on Zoom and through an online public survey. Meeting summaries and key takeaways from the PAC and public engagement sessions are discussed in detail in the **Public Involvement Documentation Report**.

Feedback from the PAC and the public not only guided the further development of the alternatives, but it also factored into the scoring methodology that was utilized to rank and prioritize the final list of recommendations. The four scoring criteria to score recommendations included the following:

1. Alignment with the SWTRP goals and objectives,
2. Compatibility with each of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha TDP goals,
3. Positive reception by the Project Team including GDOT and the HOGARC, and
4. Positive reception and feedback by the PAC, stakeholders, and the public.

This scoring methodology yielded a maximum composite score of eight points.

### 5.1 Implementation Plan

To help with prioritization and implementation, the consultant team organized the recommendations into tiers based on their

composite score. Recommendations with a score of 7 or 8 are considered “high impact,” and those that received a score between 3 and 6 are considered “mid impact.” None of the evaluated alternatives scored lower than a 3. An additional tier of recommendations, characterized as the “fundamental tier,” consists of a set of administrative tools and initiatives that cannot be directly compared to recommendations that propose changes to existing transit services or the addition of new services. The three tiers are shown below in **Figure 9**.

While high impact recommendations are anticipated to have the greatest impact and reach, mid impact recommendations may be easier to implement in the short term. All recommendations will require local government endorsement and administrative capacity to move forward.

Figure 9: Implementation Tiers



**High Impact Recommendations Tier:** These recommendations received a composite score of 7 or 8, meaning they were highly prioritized by the stakeholders/public, and they have a regional or multi-county benefit.



**Mid Impact Recommendations Tier:** These recommendations received a composite score between 3 and 6, meaning they were rated as medium priority by the stakeholders/public, or they achieved fewer of the HOGARC TDP goals.



**Fundamental Recommendations Tier:** These recommendations offer administrative tools and guidance for the various implementation actors. These recommendations were not scored against the project recommendations in the other two tiers.

## 5.2 Demand-Response Modifications

Demand-response refers to a transit system where passenger trips are generated by calls from passengers or their agents to the transit operator, who then dispatches a vehicle to pick the passengers up and transport them to their destinations. Most recommendations in this TDP are focused on improvements to demand-response services since this is the sole type of transit currently available in the HOGA Region. There are numerous recommendations that are aimed at regionalization of the demand-response service.

The high impact recommendations for demand-response services are covered in **Table 3** and mid impact recommendations for demand-response service are listed in **Table 4**. These recommendations are further categorized by whether they are a “new service,” “service expansion,” or a

“service enhancement.” Service expansion recommendations take the form of new service in counties that currently do not offer public transit, coordination between adjacent service providers to increase their geographic reach, and the creation of a regionalized service. Service enhancement recommendations are geared toward increasing the efficiency, reliability, ease-of-use, and safety of the public transit service. Further information about the recommendations and additional implementation details are included in the **Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report**.

**Table 3: High-Impact Demand-Response Transit Recommendations**

| Category                              | Recommendation   |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| New Transit Expansion                 | Establish service between the eastern side of the Region and Bulloch County (Statesboro) with FTA Section 5311 funding.  |
| Transit Enhancements - Schedule       | All transit providers extend service hours from 6 AM to 6 PM (or a longer time period to meet the needs of riders).  |
| Transit Enhancements - Accommodations | All demand-response vehicles include wheelchair lifts.   |
| Transit Enhancements - Accommodations | All demand-response vehicles have ample space for personal belongings, medical equipment, and shopping bags for each rider.  |
| Transit Enhancements - Technology     | Each county, sub-region, or regionalized transit service provider partners with GDOT to implement the Let’s Ride application for booking, tracking, updates, and cancellations, in tandem with other mediums used. |

| Category                               | Recommendation  |
|--|---|
| Transit Enhancements - Technology      | Implement phone call and text message services for riders that allow them to receive reminders, updates, and cancellation options.  |
| Transit Expansion – Commuter Service   | Establish a commuter service to Bryan County for the Hyundai Plant located in Ellabell, Georgia; fitting to implement in an eastern county such as Evans County.  |
| Transit Expansion Through Partnerships | Continue to support and locate funding for the Dodge and Telfair County partnership.  |
| Transit Expansion Through Partnerships | Establish resource-sharing partnerships between the existing western transit authorities including Bleckley, Dodge / Telfair, Wilcox, and Wheeler Counties.   |
| Transit Expansion Through Partnerships | Create a resource-sharing partnership between Wayne County and Appling (first) and Jeff Davis (second) Counties.  |
| Transit Expansion - Regionalization    | <p>“Starting Point”:</p> <p>Sub-Region 1: Wayne, Appling, and Jeff Davis Counties, Sub-Region 2: Johnson, Laurens, Bleckley, Dodge, Telfair, and Wilcox Counties, Sub-Region 3: Emanuel, Treutlen, Wheeler, Montgomery, Toombs, Candler, Tattnall, and Evans Counties.</p>                      |
| Transit Expansion - Regionalization    | <p>“Western Focus”:</p> <p>Sub-Region 1: Wayne, Appling, and Jeff Davis Counties, Sub-Region 2: Johnson, Laurens, Treutlen, Bleckley, Dodge, Telfair, Wheeler, and Wilcox Counties, Sub-Region 3: Emanuel, Montgomery, Toombs, Candler, Tattnall, and Evans Counties.</p>                       |
| Transit Expansion - Regionalization    | <p>“Eastern Focus”:</p> <p>Sub-Region 1: Wayne, Appling, Jeff Davis, Tattnall, Evans, and Candler Counties, Sub-Region 2: Johnson, Laurens, Bleckley, Dodge, Telfair, and Wilcox Counties, Sub-Region 3: Emanuel, Treutlen, Wheeler, Montgomery, and Toombs Counties.</p>                       |
| Transit Expansion - Regionalization    | <p>“The Quad”:</p> <p>Sub-Region 1: Wayne, Appling, and Jeff Davis Counties, Sub-Region 2: Bleckley, Dodge, Telfair, Wheeler, and Wilcox Counties, Sub-Region 3: Montgomery, Toombs, Tattnall, and Evans Counties, Sub-Region 4: Laurens, Johnson, Treutlen, Emanuel, and Candler Counties.</p> |

**Table 4: Mid-Impact Demand-Response Transit Recommendations**

| Category                        | Recommendation   |
|---------------------------------|--|
| New Transit Expansion           | Continue to foster Treutlen County Transit Service with FTA Section 5311 funding.  |
| New Transit Expansion           | Laurens County initiates a rural public transit service with FTA Section 5311 funding.   |
| New Transit Expansion           | Toombs County initiates a rural public transit service with FTA Section 5311 funding.  |
| New Transit Expansion           | Montgomery County initiates a rural public transit service with FTA Section 5311 funding.  |
| New Transit Expansion           | Emanuel County initiates a rural public transit service with FTA Section 5311 funding.   |
| New Transit Expansion           | Establish service to locations west of Bleckley County, including Hawkinsville (Pulaski County), Middle Georgia Technical College, Ocmulgee Wildlife Area, etc. with FTA Section 5311 funding. |
| Transit Enhancements - Schedule | All transit providers offer weekend service from 8 AM to 3 PM on Saturdays.  |
| Transit Enhancements - Schedule | All transit providers offer weekend service from 8 AM to 3 PM on Saturdays and 7 AM to 2 PM on Sundays.  |
| Transit Enhancements - Schedule | Decrease the mandatory booking window from 72 hours to 24 hours.   |
| Transit Enhancements - Fares    | Standardize fares across transit agencies.   |
| Transit Enhancements - Fares    | Implement fare discounts for seniors, mobility limited, children, college students, disabled individuals, frequent riders, and veterans.   |
| Transit Enhancements - Fares    | Establish a fare structure with increasing unit cost for different mileage thresholds outside of the “core service area”.  |
| Transit Enhancements - Schedule | Pilot 24/7 service in Dodge County.  |

| Category                               | Recommendation   |
|--|--|
| Transit Expansion - Commuter           | Public-private partnership between county, sub-regional, or regional agencies and large employers to offer employer-specific shuttles.   |
| Transit Expansion - Commuter           | Establish commuter service to Warner Robbins Air Force Base in Houston County.   |
| Transit Expansion - Commuter           | Establish commuter service to major college/university campuses such as Middle Georgia State Campus for faculty, employees, and commuting students.  |
| Transit Expansion - Commuter           | Partnerships between employers, hospitals, and universities with county, sub-regional, or regional transit agencies to utilize park and ride lots for services (as discussed in Transit Hub Alternatives). |
| Transit Expansion - Fixed Route        | Establish a fixed route near the City of Dublin (Laurens County), a core to key services and downtown businesses.  |
| Transit Expansion - Fixed Route        | Implement a twice-weekly shuttle to the City of Macon.   |
| Transit Expansion - Fixed Route        | Implement a twice-weekly shuttle to City of Savannah.  |
| Transit Expansion - Fixed Route        | Establish a fixed route service to the Atlanta Hartsfield Jackson International Airport.   |
| Transit Expansion Through Partnerships | Create a partnership between Dodge / Telfair Transit and Laurens County prior to Laurens County establishing its own service.  |
| Transit Expansion Through Partnerships | Create a partnership between Dodge / Telfair Transit and Laurens County after Laurens County has established its own service.  |

### 5.3 Commuter and Fixed Route Service

Commuting refers to a person’s travel between a residence and a place of school or employment. The HOGA Region currently does not have any dedicated commuter services. However, the Project Team identified a handful of commuter alternatives that the Regional Commission in tandem with the HOGA Workforce Development should further explore over time.

Fixed route public transit services follow a specified route and picks up riders at designated stops. The HOGA Region does not currently have dedicated fixed route services, but the Project Team has identified potential fixed route alternatives that should be further explored and studied for feasibility in the long-term. The areas that may be suitable for a fixed route in the future (likely the Cities of Dublin, Vidalia, and Cochran) depend on future population growth to be positive and sufficient to support this type of transit long-term. These commuter and fixed route alternatives can be seen in **Table 3** and **Table 4**, as well as in the **Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report**.

### 5.4 Administrative Tools and Guidance

**Additional details** about the recommendations are included in the **Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report**.

Table 5 lists recommendations related to administrative tools and guidance (Fundamental Tier). These recommendations identify ways that GDOT and HOGARC can provide support to local transit agencies on planning, marketing, and funding. This TDP carries forward a key recommendation from the SWTRP, which is the creation of a new “Regional Mobility Manager” position at the HOGARC. The Regional Mobility Manager will be

a centralized point of contact for transit coordination in the Region, and will facilitate grant funding, technical assistance, driver training/retention, and fleet management. Additionally, the person serving in this role would support implementation of the TDP, coordinate future stakeholder meetings, and facilitate best practice sharing. This recommendation should be a high priority for implementation, given its importance to the execution of remaining recommendations. Additional details about the recommendations are included in the **Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report**.

**Table 5: Fundamental Tier Recommendations**

| Category                          | Recommendation   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Hire a Regional Mobility Manager to be part of the RC staff. The Regional Mobility Manager will be a centralized point of contact for transit coordination in the Region and will facilitate grant funding, technical assistance, driver training/retention, and fleet management                        |
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Hold bi-annual meetings including GDOT’s Mobility Manager, GDOT Directors, HOGARC Planning Director, HOGARC Mobility Manager, and transit agencies to make sure marketing is happening, website information is updated, and the RC can move the needle on the implementation of demand-response transit. |
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Embark on a consistent marketing campaign for transit services in the Region. Utilize the National RTAP rural marketing transit tool kit for facilitation, along with social media, website postings,  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | newsletters, utility bills, radio ads, physical posters, signage/wording on transit buses/vans, and other mediums for public awareness. |
|--|---|

| Project ID                        | Recommendation  |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Embark on a marketing campaign specifically on higher education campuses (colleges, technical schools, cosmetology schools, etc.) for demand-response transit in the Region.                                      |
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Partner with HOGA Workforce Development Area to initiate a driver hiring/retention marketing campaign and program.  |
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Establish a centralized transit website for all transit agencies in the Region. Each agency will update their information at least quarterly.   |
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Establish an internal resources portal/listserv for HOGARC, GDOT, and transit agencies.   |
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Regional Mobility Manager facilitates public-private partnerships to establish/plan for future vanpool services   |
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Regional Mobility Manager facilitates feasibility study to consider micro-transit service in a more urban area in the Region.   |
| Administrative Tools and Guidance | Each transit agency, along with the Regional Mobility Manager, reviews their fleet needs and plans for replacement and/or added fleet over time. This needs to be done in conjunction with having enough drivers. |

## 5.5 Funding

Funding is an essential factor for TDP implementation. The Federal Transit Administration’s Section 5311 funds make up the largest single source of funding for most rural public transit agencies. State and local sources of funding may also be available, such as the Georgia Transit Trust Fund Program (TTFP), local general funds, special transportation taxes, fares, leveraged income from other transportation programs, and others. GDOT has information about the TTFP program on its website and is available to discuss projects that are applicable.

## 5.6 Next Steps

Throughout this planning process, the HOGARC and transit agencies have emphasized the desire for greater collaboration amongst transit agencies and with DHS/DCH. The PAC established for this planning process was a starting point for bringing transit agencies together. Future stakeholder meetings, following the adoption of this Plan, will be integral for advancing the TDP vision and goals. This TDP’s primary recommendation is to identify resources to dedicate consistent HOGARC staff time to advancing the regional transit vision and goals, and, ultimately, to work toward hiring a Regional Mobility Manager. The “First-Year Action Plan” section of **the Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report** identifies additional initiatives that HOGARC should prioritize in the near term. As plan implementation advances, all TDP initiatives should be monitored to track progress and effectiveness and to facilitate Plan refinement in the future.