

Regional Transit Development Plan

Heart of Georgia Altamaha

Existing Conditions Report

February 2024



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Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	1-1	2.6	Future Demographics	2-14
1.1	Purpose and Methodology	1-1	3.0	Employment Trends.....	3-1
1.2	Overview of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region.	1-2	3.1	Current Employment	3-1
2.0	Demographic Trends.....	2-1	3.2	Current Job Concentration	3-3
2.1	Historical Population	2-1	3.3	Major Industries.....	3-4
2.2	Demographic Trends within the Past Decade	2-3	3.4	Future Employment Trends	3-5
2.3	Current Demographics.....	2-3	4.0	Travel Trends	4-1
2.4	Transit Market Demographics.....	2-4	4.1	Background.....	4-1
2.4.1	Senior (60+) Population.....	2-6	4.2	Geographic Areas for Travel Trends Analysis	4-1
2.4.2	Youth (15-19) Population.....	2-7	4.3	Travel Patterns within the Region.....	4-1
2.4.3	Zero-Car Households	2-8	4.4	Travel Patterns between the HOGA Region and Surrounding Areas	4-4
2.4.4	Populations with a Disability	2-9	4.5	Impacts of COVID-19 on Travel Patterns	4-6
2.5	Disadvantaged Communities	2-10	5.0	Existing Transportation Network	5-1
2.5.1	Minority Population	2-10	5.1	Transportation System Overview.....	5-1
2.5.2	Limited-English Proficiency.....	2-12	5.1.1	Annual Average Daily Traffic.....	5-7
2.5.3	Transportation Disadvantaged Communities ..	2-13	5.2	Park and Ride Lots.....	5-9

5.3 Active Transportation..... 5-11

5.4 Rail 5-12

6.0 Existing Transit Plans..... 6-1

6.1 GDOT Georgia Statewide Transit Plan 6-1

6.2 GDOT Georgia Statewide Transportation Plan/
Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan..... 6-2

6.3 GDOT Rural and Human Services Transportation
Plan 6-2

6.4 GDOT Group Transit Asset Management Plan 6-3

Regional Comprehensive Plans 6-3

6.5 HOGARC Regional Plan..... 6-4

6.6 HOGA Comprehensive Economic Development
Strategy (CEDS) 6-4

6.7 Multi-Region River Corridor Feasibility Study..... 6-5

County Comprehensive Plans 6-5

6.8 Tattnall County Joint Comprehensive Plan 6-5

6.9 Wilcox County Joint Comprehensive Plan 6-6

6.10 Johnson County Joint Comprehensive Plan..... 6-6

6.11 Laurens County Joint Comprehensive Plan 6-7

6.12 Toombs County Joint Comprehensive Plan 6-7

6.13 Evans County Joint Comprehensive Plan.....6-8

6.14 Wheeler County Joint Comprehensive Plan6-8

7.0 Existing Transit Services.....7-1

7.1 Regional Services7-1

7.2 Local Services.....7-1

7.2.1 Bleckley County Transit.....7-1

7.2.2 Dodge County Transit7-1

7.2.3 Telfair County Transit.....7-1

7.2.4 Wayne County Transit.....7-1

7.2.5 Wheeler County Transit.....7-1

7.2.6 Wilcox County Transit7-2

7.3 Transit Services in Surrounding Communities7-9

7.3.1 Banks County Transit.....7-9

7.3.2 Habersham County Transit7-9

7.3.3 Lumpkin County Transit7-9

7.3.4 Union County Transit7-9

7.3.5 Dooly County Transit.....7-9

7.3.6 Chattooga County Transit7-10

7.4 Performance Measures7-10

- 8.0 Transit Supportive Land Use and Development 8-1
 - 8.1 Existing Land Use..... 8-1
 - 8.2 Future Land Use / Projected Development Patterns 8-2
 - 8.3 Key Destinations and Essential Services 8-4
 - 8.4 Developments of Regional Impact 8-9
 - 8.5 Affordable Housing Initiatives 8-12
 - 8.6 Aging Initiatives / Senior Centers 8-15
 - 8.7 Broadband Access..... 8-17
- 9.0 Transit Funding 9-1
 - 9.1 Existing Funding for Transit 9-1
 - 9.1.1 Section 5311 Rural Formula Funding 9-1
 - 9.1.2 Section 5307 Urban Formula Funding 9-1
 - 9.1.3 Georgia Transit Trust Fund..... 9-1
 - 9.1.4 Mobility for All Pilot Program..... 9-2
 - 9.2 Transit Funding Opportunities..... 9-2
- 10.0 Key Findings and Next Steps 10-1
 - 10.1 Key Findings..... 10-1

List of Figures

Figure 1: Heart of Georgia Altamaha (HOGA) Region..... 1-3

Figure 2: Historical Population by County 2-2

Figure 3: Population Density by Census Tract 2-4

Figure 4: Low-Income Population by Census Tract..... 2-5

Figure 5: Senior Population by Census Tract..... 2-6

Figure 6: Youth Population by Census Tract..... 2-7

Figure 7: Zero-Car Households by Census Tract 2-8

Figure 8: Populations with a Disability by Census Tract..... 2-9

Figure 9: Minority Population by Census Tract..... 2-11

Figure 10: LEP Populations by Census Tract..... 2-12

Figure 11: Population Projections by County 2-14

Figure 12: Population Projections 2-14

Figure 13: Unemployment by Census Tract 3-2

Figure 14: Job Concentration by Census Block..... 3-3

Figure 15: Major Private Sector Employers..... 3-4

Figure 16: Intra-County Travel Distribution..... 4-2

Figure 17: Inter-County Travel Distribution 4-3

Figure 18: Inter-Regional Travel / Nearby Counties 4-4

Figure 19: Inter-Regional Travel / Farther Away Counties 4-5

Figure 20: Existing US and State Highway Network 5-7

Figure 21: Bleckley County Transit Summary 7-3

Figure 22: Dodge County Transit Summary..... 7-4

Figure 23: Telfair County Transit Summary 7-5

Figure 24: Wayne County Transit Summary 7-6

Figure 25: Wheeler County Transit Summary 7-7

Figure 26: Wilcox County Transit Summary..... 7-8

Figure 27: Existing Land Use..... 8-2

Figure 28: Projected Development Patterns 8-3

Figure 29: Key Destinations and Essential Services 8-8

Figure 30: Places of Worship..... 8-8

Figure 31: Developments of Regional Impact 8-11

Figure 32: Affordable Housing Initiatives 8-13

Figure 33: Aging / Senior Center Facility Locations 8-16

Figure 34: Broadband Access 8-17

List of Tables

Table 1: Historical Population and Population Change.....	2-1	Table 17: Park and Ride Lot Locations and Details	5-10
Table 2: Population and Population Change from the Last Decade	2-3	Table 18: Performance Metrics for Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region Counties (2019).....	7-11
Table 3: Low-Income Population.....	2-5	Table 19: Performance Metrics for the Selected Transit Agency Peers (2019)	7-12
Table 4: Senior Population.....	2-6	Table 20: Higher Education Campuses	8-5
Table 5: Youth Population.....	2-7	Table 21: Hospitals.....	8-5
Table 6: Zero-Car Households	2-8	Table 22: Major Medical Centers.....	8-6
Table 7: Populations with a Disability	2-9	Table 23: Key Destinations and Essential Services	8-7
Table 8: Minority Population.....	2-10	Table 24: Developments of Regional Impact	8-10
Table 9: LEP Populations.....	2-12	Table 25: Affordable Housing Initiatives	8-12
Table 10: Employment by County	3-1	Table 26: Short- and Long-Term Nursing Homes, Rehabilitation Centers, and Senior Centers by County (Continued on the next page)	8-15
Table 11: Unemployed Population	3-2	Table 27: 2024 Georgia Transit Trust Fund Program Distributions	9-2
Table 12: Industry Projections.....	3-5		
Table 13: Total Trips and Intra-County Percentage.....	4-2		
Table 14: Inter-County Trips in the Region.....	4-3		
Table 15: Origin-Destination Pairs where Destination is Outside of the Region	4-4		
Table 16: Annual Average Daily Traffic (2019).....	5-7		

List of Acronyms

AADT	Annual Average Daily Traffic	IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
ACS	American Community Survey	LEHD	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	LEP	Limited English Proficiency
BLS	United States Bureau of Labor Statistics	LIHTC	Low-Income Housing Tax Credit
CCS	Continuous Count Stations	LODES	LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics
DAC	Disadvantaged Community	MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
DAV	Disabled American Veterans	NEMT	Non-Emergency Medical Transportation
DCA	Georgia Department of Community Affairs	NTD	National Transit Database
DCH	Georgia Department of Community Health	OPB	Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget
DHS	Georgia Department of Human Services	RHST	Rural and Human Services Transportation
DRI	Developments of Regional Impact	RITIS	Regional Integrated Transportation Information System
EJ	Environmental Justice	RTP	Regional Transportation Plan
EV	Electric Vehicle	SGR	State of Good Repair
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration	SWTP	Statewide Transportation Plan
FTA	Federal Transit Administration	SWTRP	Statewide Transit Plan
GDOL	Georgia Department of Labor	TADA	Traffic Analysis and Data Application
GDOT	Georgia Department of Transportation	TAM	Transit Asset Management
GICH	Georgia Initiative for Community Housing	TDP	Transit Development Plan
GS	Georgia Southern University	USDOT	United States Department of Transportation
HOGA	Heart of Georgia Altamaha		
HUD	United States Department of Housing and Urban Development		

1.0 Introduction

In 2020, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) published the Statewide Transit Plan (SWRTP), which recommended strategies to address rural and regional transit needs across the state. In addition to stressing the need for regionalized transit service in Georgia, the plan also called for a two-pronged strategy to assist the preparation of transit development plans (TDPs) across the state.

The TDP Guidebook, published in 2021, equips regional commissions, metropolitan planning organizations (MPO), rural transit providers, and small urban transit providers with the methodologies, resources, and data necessary for a TDP. GDOT is currently implementing the second part of this strategy through the development of several Regional TDPs. With the support of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region Commission (HOGARC), GDOT is preparing a Regional TDP for the Heart of Georgia Altamaha (HOGA) region.

1.1 Purpose and Methodology

A Regional TDP identifies transit needs and opportunities and informs future transit system investments. The TDP process assists communities in developing a transit vision and evaluating transit alternatives that move communities closer to these goals. TDPs typically have a 20-year horizon and are intended to be updated on a 5-year renewal cycle. Though they have a 20-year horizon, TDPs should identify achievable transit projects that can be implemented within 5 years.

The first section of the Regional TDP, the Existing Conditions Report, compiles current information from a variety of sources, including existing plans and studies and the latest data from agencies like the Georgia Department of Labor, the Georgia Department of Transportation, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the National Transit Database (NTD).

This Existing Conditions report documents demographic and employment trends, major employers, travel patterns, transportation options, and land use and development for the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region. The report also includes a performance review of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region's current transit providers, their operations and fundings, and a comparison of Heart of Georgia Altamaha region transit providers to other peer transit systems across the state. The last section of the Existing Conditions report includes key findings and insights that will help inform the transit alternatives and recommendations report.

1.2 Overview of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region

The Heart of Georgia Altamaha (HOGA) region, located in rural south Georgia, encompasses both the upper and lower Coastal Plains in the south-central and southeastern parts of the state. Spanning 7,670 square miles and with a population of 293,437, per the 2021 Census, this region is defined by its natural splendor, ecological significance, and rich historical tapestry. Much of the HOGA region falls within the Altamaha River Basin.

Although the HOGA region does not include any metropolitan regions, it is home to a handful of prominent cities, including Dublin (Laurens County), Jesup (Wayne County), and Vidalia (Toombs and Montgomery Counties). These cities have a larger population density and concentration of jobs than the rest of the region.

As shown in Figure 1, the HOGA region comprises 17 counties: Appling, Bleckley, Candler, Dodge, Emanuel, Evans, Jeff Davis, Johnson, Laurens, Montgomery, Tattnall, Telfair, Toombs, Treutlen, Wayne, Wheeler, and Wilcox. This sprawling region is bordered by five other regional commissions within Georgia. Laurens County, the largest of these counties, boasts a population of 49,202 and covers an area of 724 square miles. Evans County is the smallest county in the region, with an area of 187 square miles, and Treutlen County has the smallest population of 6,410 residents. Notably, Toombs County is celebrated for being the home of Georgia's state vegetable, the Vidalia onion.

The HOGA region is well-connected to the surrounding areas through a network of transportation routes, including Interstate 16, U.S. Route 1, U.S. Route 319, U.S. Route 341, and U.S. Route 441. The HOGA region has a Class I freight railroad, a GDOT owned rail line, and an Amtrak station. Six counties currently offer GDOT administered demand-response public transit service.

The region is also crisscrossed by numerous rivers and creeks, such as the Altamaha River, Oconee River, Ocmulgee River, Rocky Creek, and Swift Creek. These waterbodies not only enhance the region's natural allure but also provide valuable resources.

A notable characteristic of this region is its predominantly rural nature, with approximately 85 percent of the land dedicated to agriculture and forests. On average, each county within the region allocates around 70 percent of its land to the agricultural focused industries, which play a pivotal role in shaping the region's economic foundation. Outside of agriculture, jobs and services are concentrated in the region's handful of cities; however, a few of the counties do not have essential services such as grocery stores and medical facilities. Residents must travel across county boundaries to access these services.

The region's residents hold a strong commitment to preserving its rural ambiance, agricultural traditions, and small-town ethos while seeking a balance between sustainable growth and economic development.

Figure 1: Heart of Georgia Altamaha (HOGA) Region



Source: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission

2.0 Demographic Trends

Demographic trends show growth patterns within the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region.

2.1 Historical Population

Population figures over the span of 50 years were used to evaluate historical population trends. From 1970 to 2020, the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region has grown from 208,743 people to 292,759 people, an increase of 40.2%. The state of Georgia saw a higher increase, from 4,589,575 people to 10,711,908 people, growing by 133.4%.

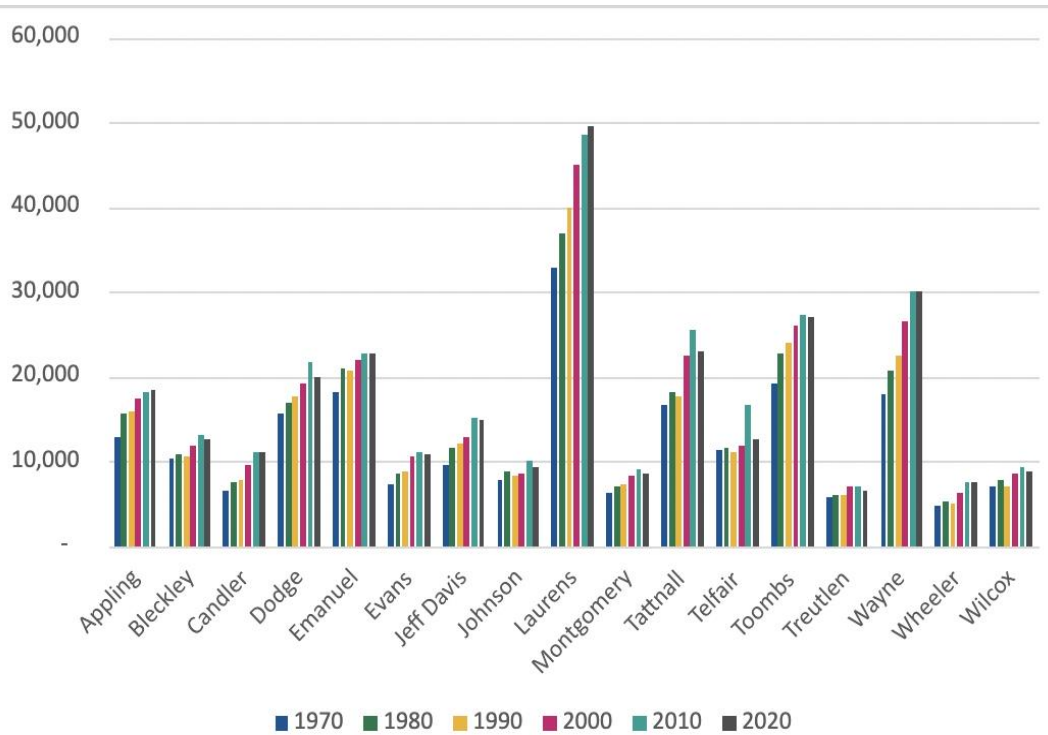
Table 1 illustrates that the region saw the most growth in the 1970s (13.05%) and the 1990s (13.08%). This same trend is true for most counties in the region and the state. Figure 2 shows that Laurens and Wayne Counties have grown the most over the past 50 years by 45.05% and 68.04%, respectively.

Table 1: Historical Population and Population Change

Geography	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020
HOGA	208,743	236,007	241,362	272,894	303,199	292,759	+13.05%	+2.27%	+13.08%	+10.99%	-3.43%
Georgia	4,589,575	5,463,105	6,478,216	8,186,453	9,687,653	10,711,908	+19.06%	+18.55%	+26.41%	+18.35%	+10.55%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 2: Historical Population by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

2.2 Demographic Trends within the Past Decade

Disclaimer: This report uses U.S Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year data to analyze various population trends and demographic characteristics. The 5-year estimates are "period" estimates that represent data collected over a period of time. These datasets use different collection methods and methodologies to provide more demographic detail than the Decennial Census. There may be variation in figures such as total population across ACS datasets.

The 2021 population of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region was 293,437 people which is lower than the population of 300,812 in 2011. As shown in Table 2, there has been a decrease in the population of the HOGA region, especially in recent years.

In 2021, Laurens County has the highest population of 49,202, and Treutlen County has the lowest population of 6,410 residents.

Table 2: Population and Population Change from the Last Decade

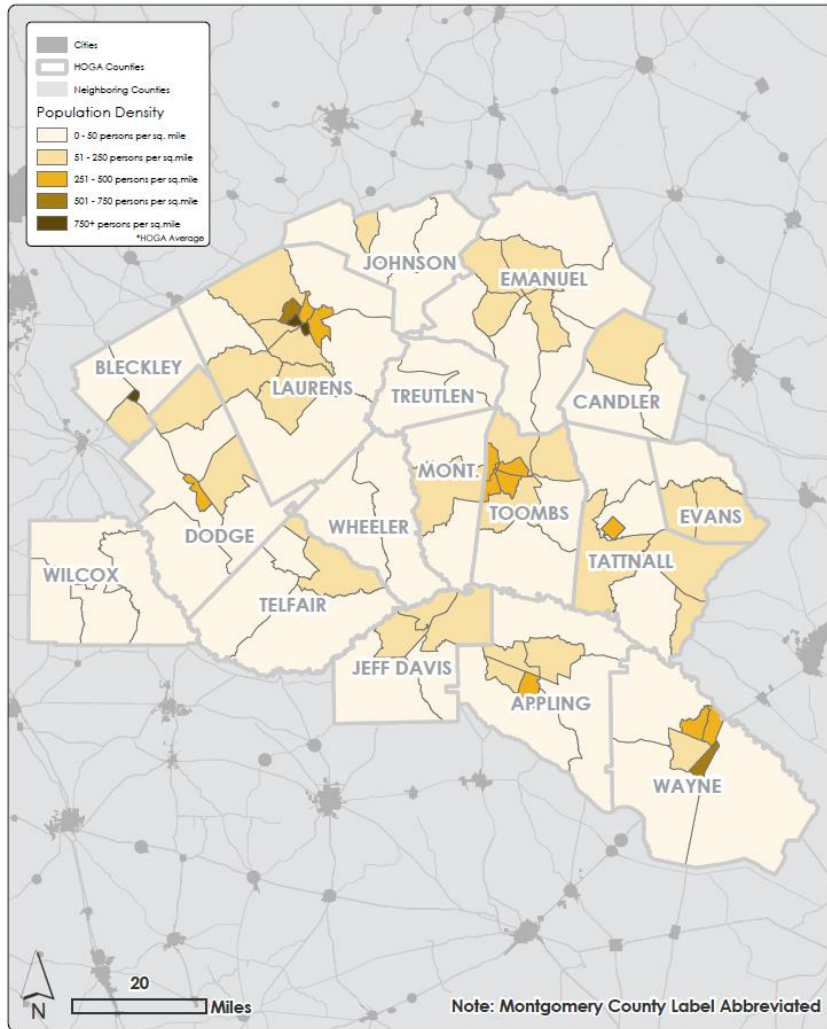
Geography	2011	2016	2021	2011-2016	2016-2021
HOGA	300,812	300,470	293,437	0.1%	- 2.3 %
Georgia	9,687,653	10,006,693	10,711,908	3.3%	7.0%

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

2.3 Current Demographics

Laurens County has the highest population density and Wheeler County has the lowest population density. Figure 3 shows the population distribution of the region based on their census tracts. Laurens and Bleckley Counties have the most densely populated census tracts in the region. Most of the region has a very low population density (0-50 persons/square mile). A few of the census tracts in Wayne County, Toombs County, Appling County, Dodge County and Tattnall County have a moderate population density in their city centers.

Figure 3: Population Density by Census Tract



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

2.4 Transit Market Demographics

*Disclaimer: The American Community Survey has differing methodologies for how total population is determined when a person’s status cannot be determined (such as for poverty or disability). This can lead to figures that vary from the total population presented in **Section 2.2**.*

The HOGA region has six (6) GDOT administered, rural demand response transit systems to serve transit dependent populations. The populations that most benefit from public transportation are reviewed in this section and include the following:

- Low-Income Populations
- Senior Populations: Individuals Ages 60+
- Youth Individuals: Ages 15-19
- Zero-Car Households
- Populations with a Disability

Additional demographic groups, including minority and Limited-English Proficiency populations, also benefit from the availability of transit services and are discussed in an upcoming section.

The HOGA region has 22.5 percent of the population classified as low-income or living below the poverty line. This percentage is higher than the percentage of Georgia residents (14.3 percent) that are low-income, as shown in Table 3. Figure 4 shows the distributions of low-income populations across the region by census tract. Most of the counties in the HOGA region have a few tracts with 25 percent of the population below the national poverty level which for an individual is \$14,580 and for a family of 4 is \$30,000¹. A few census tracts in Appling, Telfair,

¹ <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines>

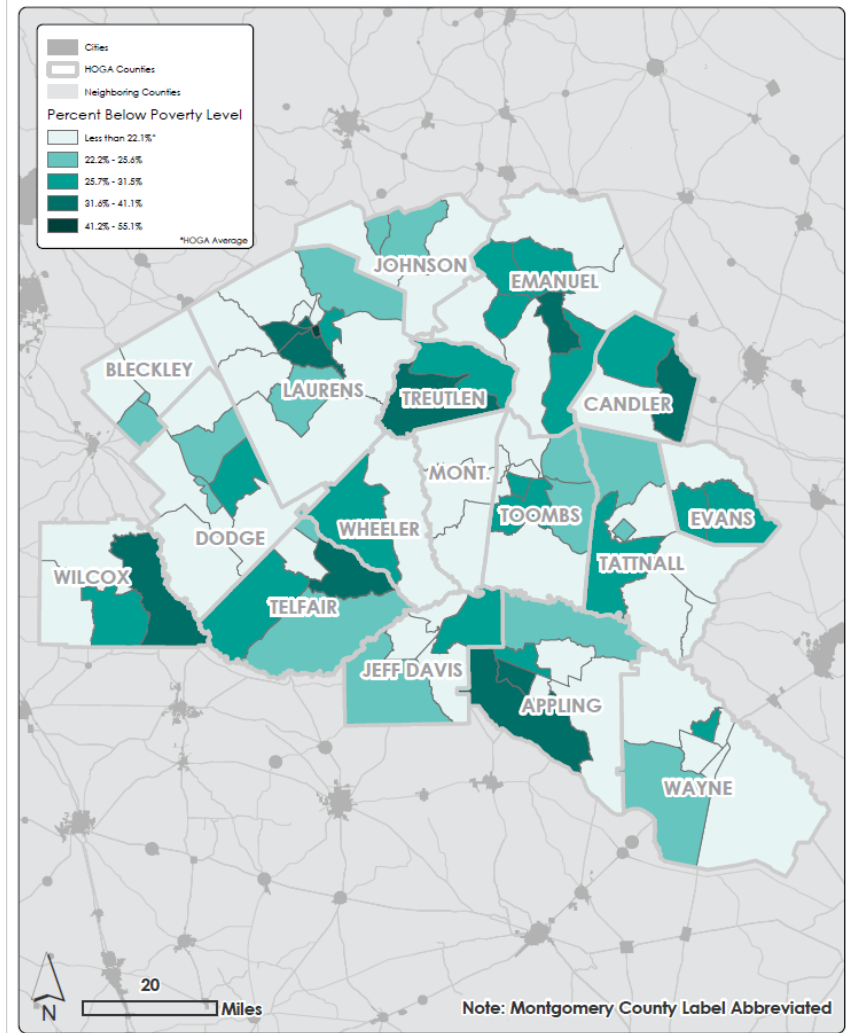
Wilcox, Laurens, Emanuel, and Candler Counties have more than 31 percent of residents living below the poverty level.

Table 3: Low-Income Population

Geography	Total Population for Poverty	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Median Household Income
HOGA	273,734	61,590	22.5%	\$ 43,369
Georgia	10,238,369	1,461,572	14.3%	\$ 61,224

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

Figure 4: Low-Income Population by Census Tract



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

2.4.1 Senior (60+) Population

The senior population is considered to be individuals 60 years of age and older. As shown in Table 4, 14.6% of the population in the HOGA qualifies as senior. HOGA has a lower share of seniors than the state of Georgia which has a senior population share of 19.6 percent.

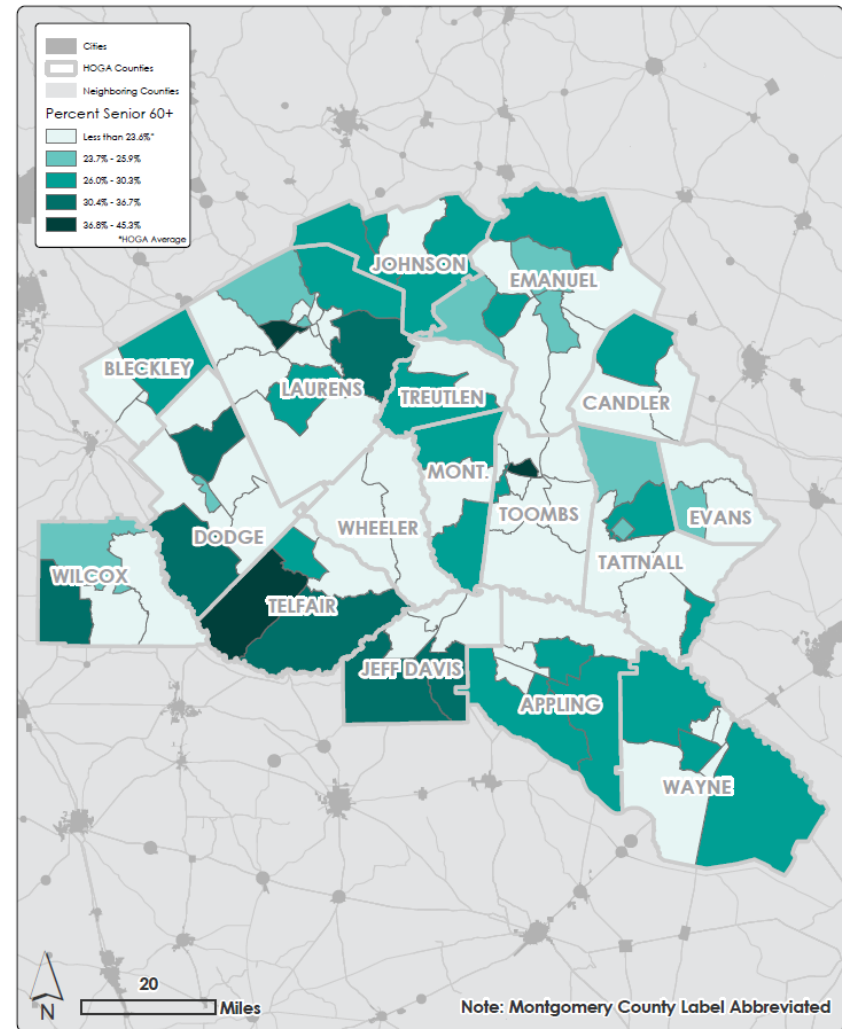
Figure 5 shows the distribution of seniors across the region. Higher concentrations of seniors are located in the southwestern and northern counties. Three census tracts in Laurens, Toombs, and Telfair Counties have the highest percentages (36.8 percent - 45.3 percent) of residents aged 60 or over.

Table 4: Senior Population

Geography	Total Population	Total 60+	Percent 60+
HOGA	293,437	42,871	14.6%
Georgia	10,516,579	2,064,966	19.6%

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

Figure 5: Senior Population by Census Tract



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

2.4.2 Youth (15-19) Population

This study considers youth to be individuals between the ages of 15 and 19 who are either in school or working. As shown in Table 5, HOGA’s population is comprised of 7.03 percent youth which is in line with the Georgia average of 7.0 percent.

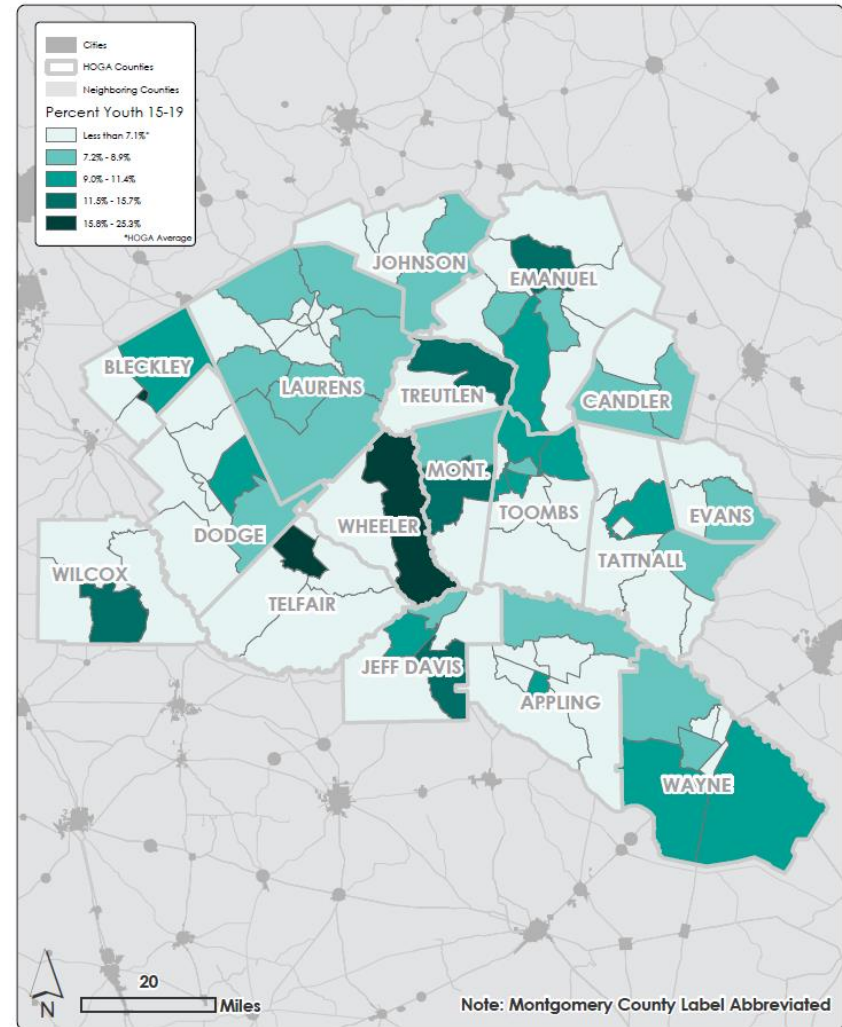
Most of the region has a fairly low percentage of youth residents, below 7 percent. Figure 6 shows the distribution of the youth population throughout the region. It is interesting to note that this map is almost the inverse of the geographic distribution of seniors as shown in Figure 6. The highest percentages of residents aged 15-19 are in Wheeler and Telfair Counties.

Table 5: Youth Population

Geography	Total Population	Total 15-19	Percent 15-19
HOGA	293,437	20,629	7.03%
Georgia	10,516,579	735,465	7.0%

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

Figure 6: Youth Population by Census Tract



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

2.4.3 Zero-Car Households

Zero-car (or zero-vehicle) households are those that do not have access to a vehicle for transportation purposes. These populations may rely on transit or another form of transportation to meet their daily needs. Table 6 shows that the HOGA region has 7.5 percent of residents in this category which is slightly higher than the Georgia average of 7.0 percent.

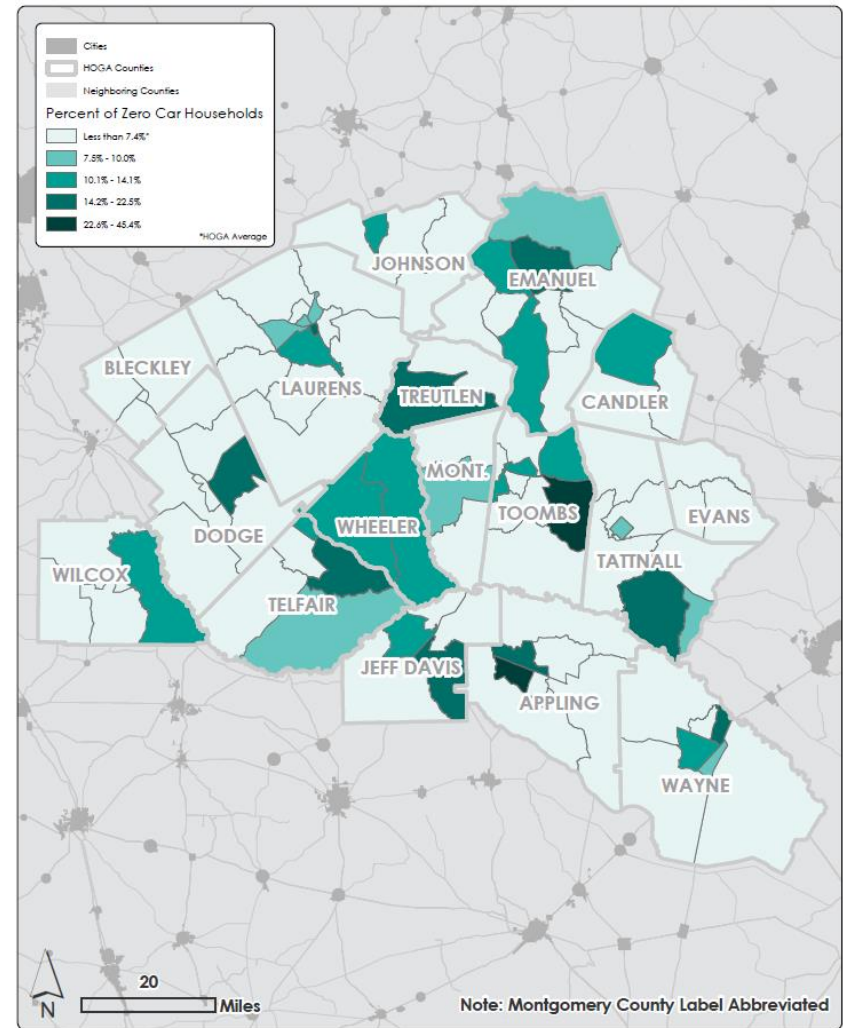
Figure 7 shows the distribution of zero-car households across the region. Most of the census tracts have less than 7.4 percent (the HOGA average) of households without access to a vehicle. Toombs, Treutlen, Appling, Emanuel, Wayne, and Jeff Davis Counties have census tracts with a highest percentages of zero-car households in the region.

Table 6: Zero-Car Households

Geography	Total Households	Total Zero-Car Households	Percent Zero-Car Households
HOGA	99,681	7,516	7.5%
Georgia	10,516,579	735,465	7.0%

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

Figure 7: Zero-Car Households by Census Tract



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

2.4.4 Populations with a Disability

Populations with a disability may rely on transit for mobility options and access to destinations. The U.S. Census Bureau defines populations with a disability as individuals having hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, or independent living difficulties. Table 7 shows the number of disabled individuals in the region. The percentage of disabled population is higher at 17.2 percent in the HOGA region compared to the state of Georgia average of 12.5 percent.

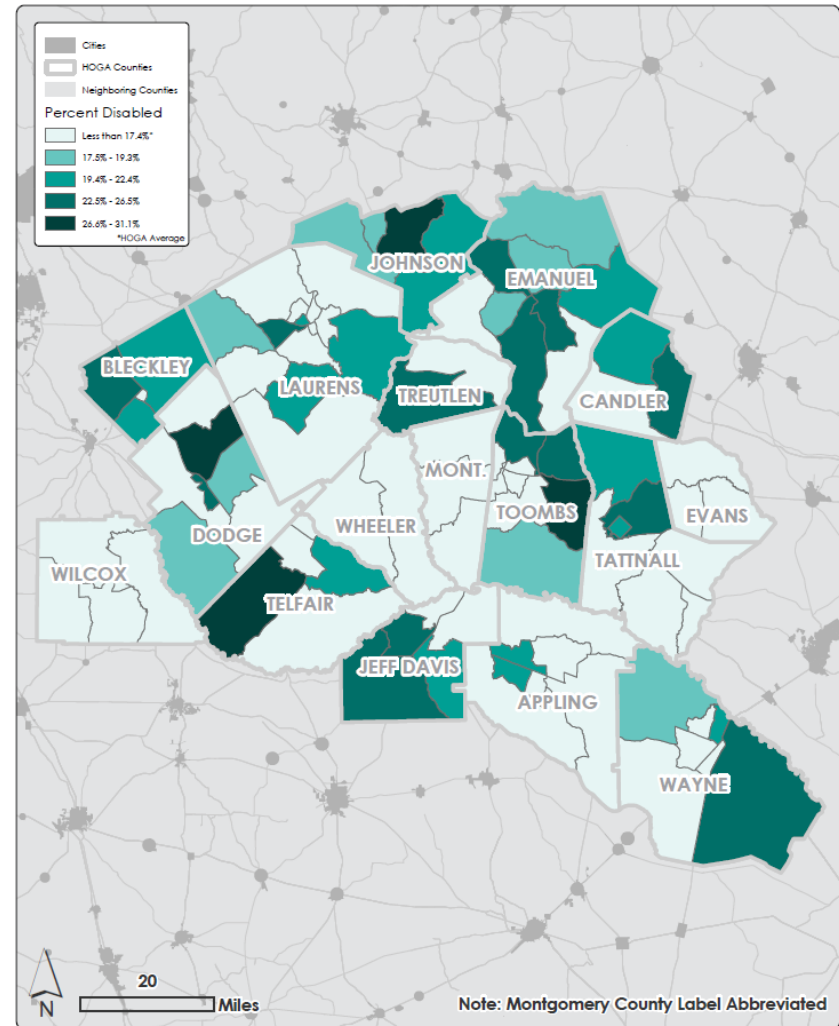
Figure 8 shows the distribution of disabled population in the region. Areas in Dodge, Telfair, Johnson, and Toombs County have over a quarter of residents with a disability.

Table 7: Populations with a Disability

Geography	Total Population for Disabled	Total Disabled	Percent Disabled
HOGA	275,858	47,448	17.2%
Georgia	10,321,846	1,286,329	12.5%

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

Figure 8: Populations with a Disability by Census Tract



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

2.5 Disadvantaged Communities

According to Federal Transit Administration Circular 4702.1B, Title VI prohibits recipients of federal financial assistance (e.g., states, local governments, transit providers) from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin in their programs or activities. Title VI also obligates federal funding agencies to enforce compliance. Two demographic groups covered by Title VI, Minority and Limited-English Proficiency populations, are discussed below.

2.5.1 Minority Population

The U.S. Census Bureau defines minority as populations with an ethnicity of Hispanic and Latino and/or identify as Black or African American, American Indian, and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Other, or Two or More Races.

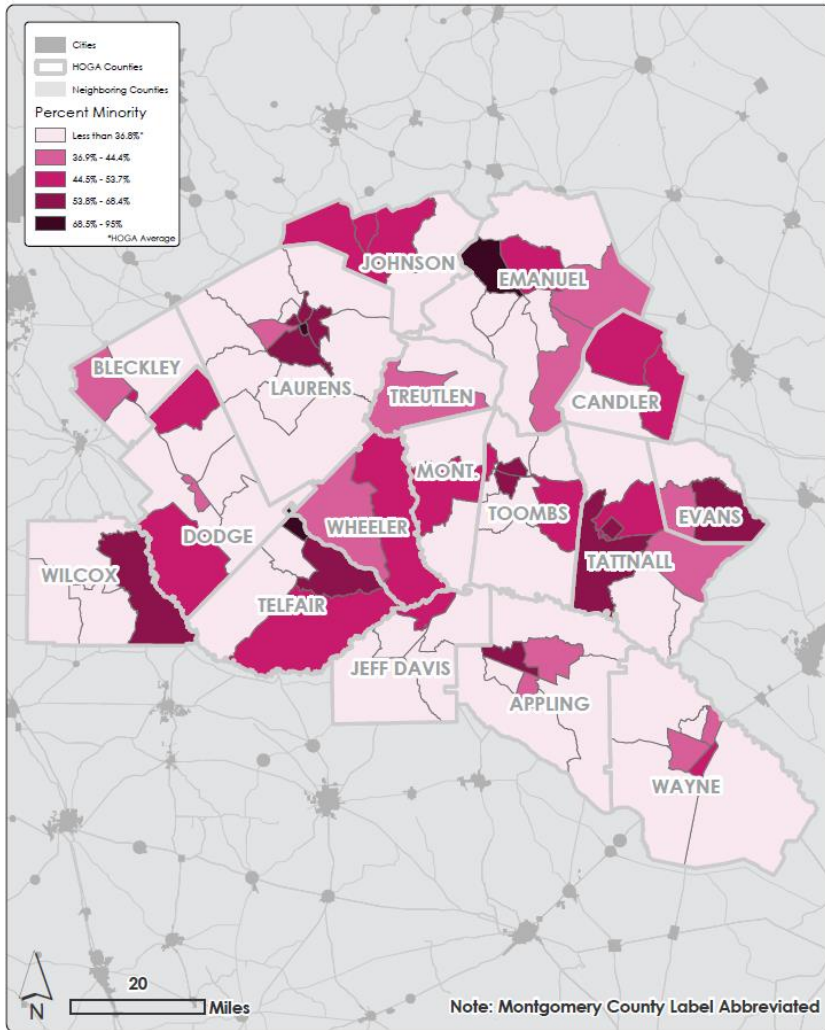
As illustrated in Table 8, the percentage (36.8 percent) of minority population in HOGA is lower than the Georgia average (47.9 percent). With that said, Figure 9 illustrates that the HOGA region is still fairly diverse in terms of minority and ethnicity. Data aggregated to the region shows a population that is 28.3 percent Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) and 7.5 percent Hispanic. As shown in Figure 9, several counties have one or more census tracts with a population that is over 50 percent minority. And three census tracts that have over 68.5 percent minority populations. These areas are in Laurens, Emanuel, and Telfair Counties.

Table 8: Minority Population

Geography	Total Population	Total Minority	Percent Minority
HOGA	293,437	107,985	36.8%
Georgia	10,516,579	5,038,290	47.9%

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

Figure 9: Minority Population by Census Tract



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

2.5.2 Limited-English Proficiency

Limited-English Proficiency (LEP) populations are populations that speak English less than very well (i.e., well, not well, or not at all). The U.S. Census Bureau collects this information for people 5 years of age and older.

Table 9 shows the number and percentage of individuals in the HOGA region with Limited-English Proficiency. The percentage of the HOGA Limited-English Proficiency population, 1.9 percent, is lower than the 5.4 percent average in the state of Georgia.

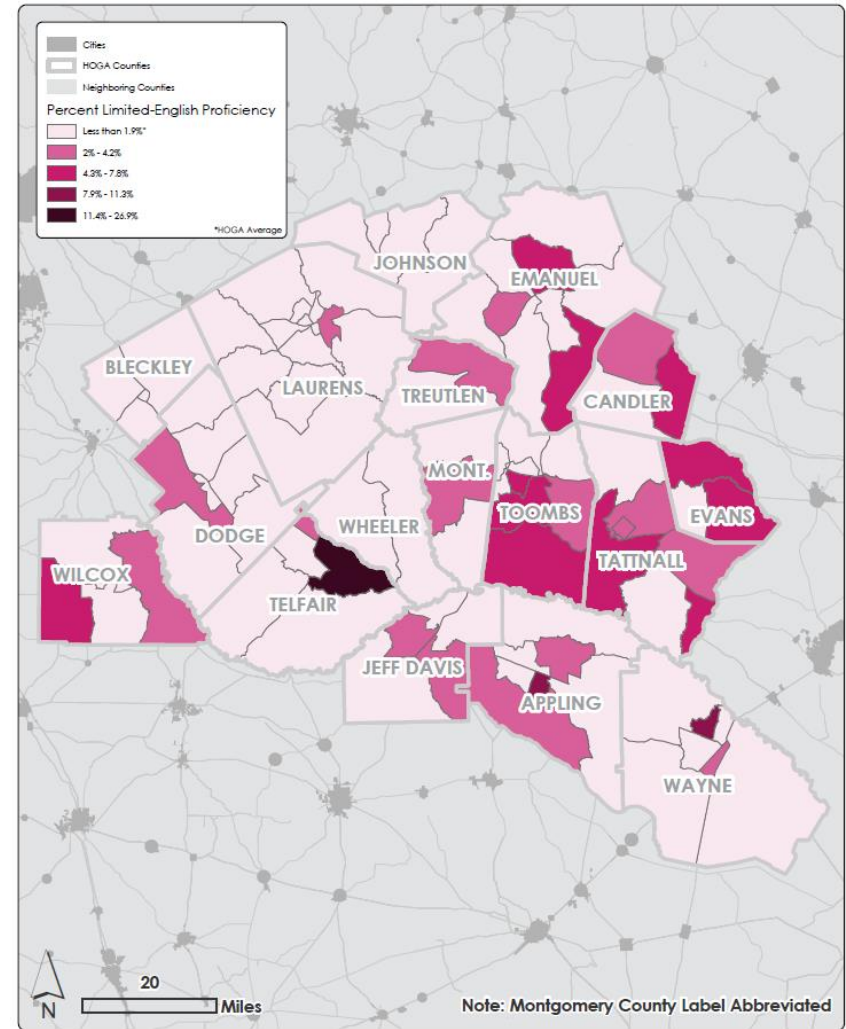
Figure 10 shows the distribution of the HOGA residents with Limited-English Proficiency. Most of the region has a Limited-English Proficiency population of 1.9 percent or less. One census tract in eastern Telfair County stands out with a higher percentage of LEP individuals. In 2021, this tract reports 22 percent Spanish speakers. The counties on the east side of the region also have a higher concentration of residents with Limited-English Proficiency as compared to the other counties.

Table 9: LEP Populations

Geography	Total Population Ages 5+	Total LEP	Percent LEP
HOGA	276,391	5,251	1.9%
Georgia	9,864,494	536,491	5.4%

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

Figure 10: LEP Populations by Census Tract



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

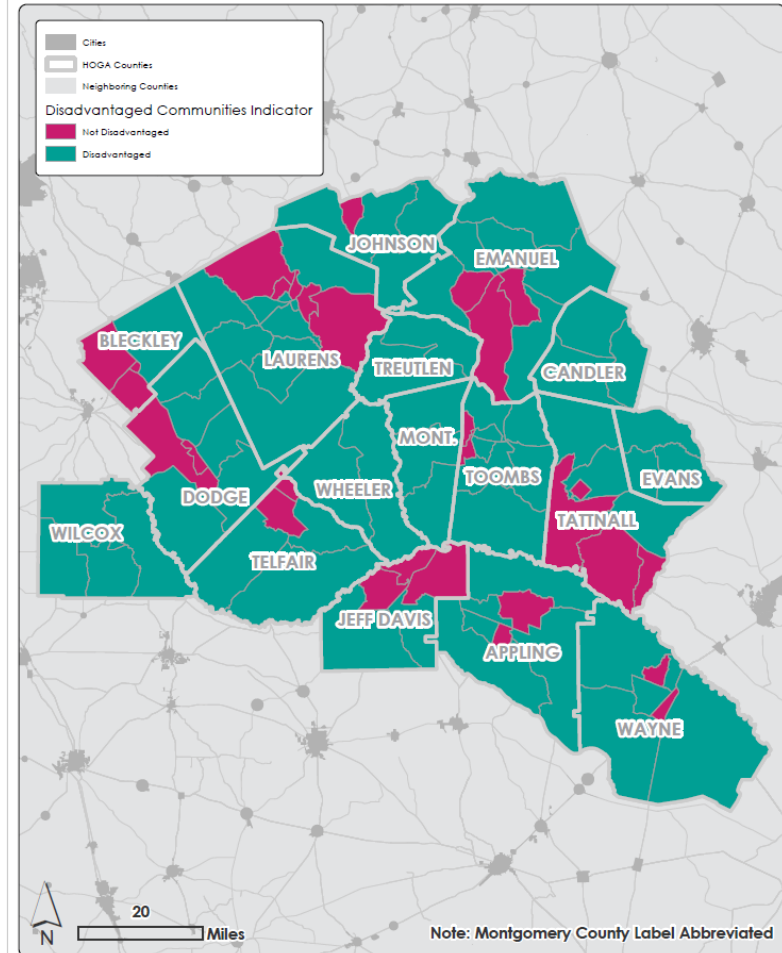
2.5.3 Transportation Disadvantaged Communities

The Biden Administration issued Executive Order 14008 establishing the Justice40 Initiative, which seeks to ensure that disadvantaged communities (DACs) receive 40 percent of the overall benefits of federal investments in climate and clean energy programs, including sustainable transportation. As part of implementing Justice40, the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) developed working definitions of these DACs through an internal and external collaborative research process. Using data from indicators collected at the census tract level, the USDOT grouped disadvantages into six different categories such as transportation access, health, environmental, economic, resilience, and social/equity disadvantages.

A census tract is considered to have transportation disadvantages if it has a score of four (4) or higher, interpreted as ranking in the top 50 percent of the average scores in each category where higher scores represent more disadvantage.

Figure 11 illustrates the areas with (green) and without (pink) transportation disadvantages for each census tract in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region. A large portion of the region falls under the transportation disadvantaged category including all of Wilcox, Wheeler, Montgomery, Candler, and Evans Counties. A portion of the other counties are transportation disadvantaged communities as well.

Figure 11: Transportation Disadvantaged Populations



Source: U.S. Department of Transportation Justice40 Initiative

² Ramsey K, Bell A. *Smart Location Database: Version 2.0*. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2014.
 U.S. Census Bureau. *American Community Survey ACS 5 Year Estimates 2015-2019*. 2019.
 USDOT Justice40 Screening Tool

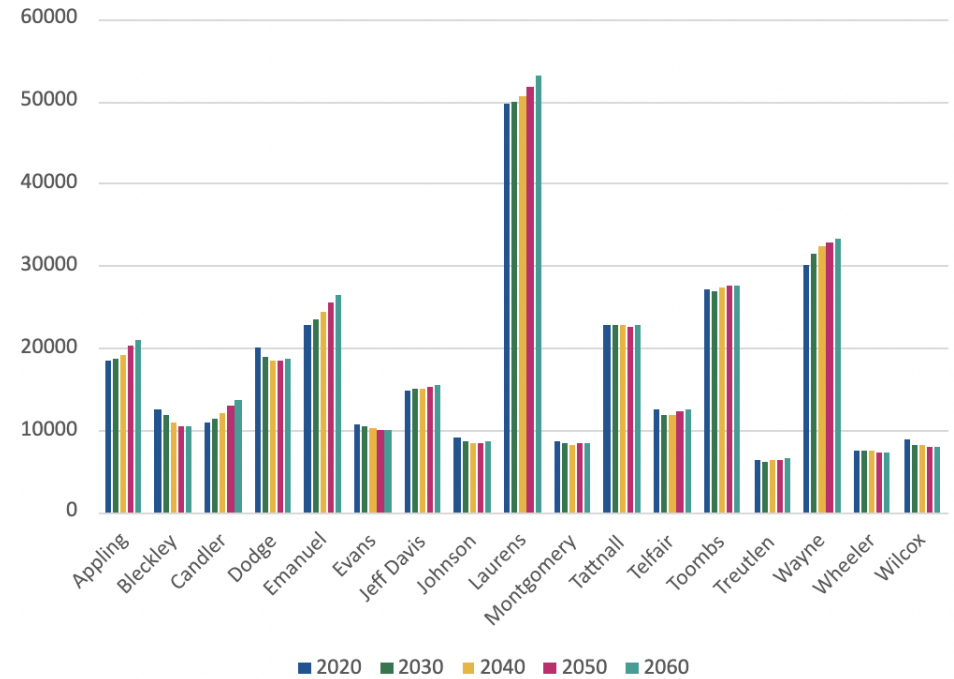
2.6 Future Demographics

Disclaimer: Population projections provide insight on the growth of geographic areas. The Georgia Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget issues a population projection series by county. Based on the 2020 Census count, these data use birth rates and other growth factors to extrapolate population for each year from 2022 to 2060. Much like the differences seen between US Census and ACS data, differences in methodology can lead to variations across datasets.

Population projections provide insight on the growth of geographic areas. The Georgia Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget issues a population projection series for the state and each county. These datasets extrapolate population for each decade from 2030 to 2060.

The HOGA region and Georgia at large are anticipated to grow 18.41 percent and 31.1 percent from 2030 to 2060, respectively. Overall, the region is expected to grow by 10,666 people over the span of 40 years. Between 2050 and 2060, the region will see the most growth of any decade during this period, increasing by 1.68%. Based on this dataset, the most dramatic population increases in the region are expected in Appling, Emanuel, Laurens, and Wayne Counties. Most counties, including Bleckley, Dodge, Evans, Johnson, Montgomery, Wheeler, and Wilcox Counties are expected to decrease in population. Counties such as Tattnall, Telfair, Treutlen, and Wheeler are expected to have very little change in population over the next 40 years (0.3 percent.) All other counties are expected to decrease in population.

Figure 11: Population Projections by County



Source: Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget, Series 2

Figure 12: Population Projections

Geography	2020	2030	2040	2050	2060
HOGA	292,759	291,255	293,651	298,361	303,425
Georgia	10,710,017	11,742,622	12,632,994	13,390,283	14,041,287

Source: Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget, Series 2021

3.0 Employment Trends

3.1 Current Employment

Laurens County accounts for approximately one-sixth of the region’s employed residents (17.2 percent). Other counties with high percentages of the region’s employed residents include Wayne County (10.0 percent) and Toombs County (9.4 percent), followed by Emanuel (8.1 percent), and Tattnall (7.7 percent) Counties. Table 10 shows each county’s total employed population.

As seen in Table 11, the approximate size of the HOGA population 16 years of age and older in 2021 was 232,778. An estimated 116,953 people were classified in the American Community Survey as part of the labor force by being employed or actively seeking employment, for a labor force participation rate of about 50.2 percent. The remaining 115,825 people represent 49.7 percent of the region’s total population 16 years of age and older that are “not in the labor force.”

There are few contributing factors to this population including the region’s aging population, student populations at universities and technical colleges, and people staying out of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 10: Employment by County

County	Total Employed Population	Percent of Region’s Total Employed Population
Appling County	7,675	6.56%
Bleckley County	4,950	4.23%
Candler County	4,628	3.96%
Dodge County	7,901	6.76%
Emanuel County	9,509	8.13%
Evans County	4,841	4.14%
Jeff Davis County	5,984	5.12%
Johnson County	3,751	3.21%
Laurens County	20,097	17.18%
Montgomery County	3,653	3.12%
Tattnall County	9,060	7.74%
Telfair County	3,730	3.19%
Toombs County	11,009	9.41%
Treutlen County	2,352	2.01%
Wayne County	11,796	10.09%
Wheeler County	3,096	2.65%
Wilcox County	2,921	2.50%
HOGA	116,953	100.00%

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

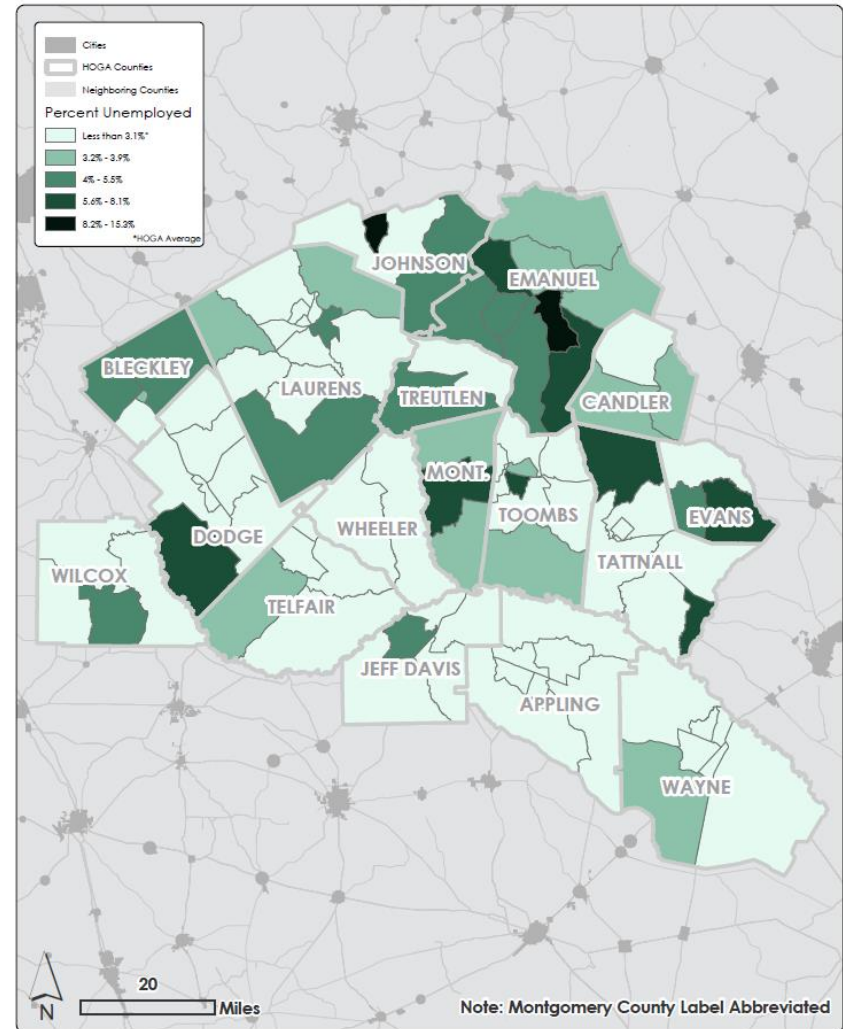
Table 11 shows that approximately 7,104 (3.1 percent) of the population 16 years of age and older in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region was unemployed in 2021. This percentage is slightly lower than that of Georgia’s unemployed population for 2021 (3.5 percent). Figure 13 displays the unemployed populations by census tract in HOGA. The highest concentrations are located in Dodge, Montgomery, Johnson, Emanuel, Candler and Evans Counties. Emanuel County has the highest concentration of unemployment when compared to the rest of the region.

Table 11: Unemployed Population

Geography	Total Population 16+	Total Labor Force	Total Unemployed	Percent Unemployed
HOGA	232,778	116,953	7,104	3.1%
Georgia	8,296,817	5,254,983	291,506	3.5%

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

Figure 13: Unemployment by Census Tract



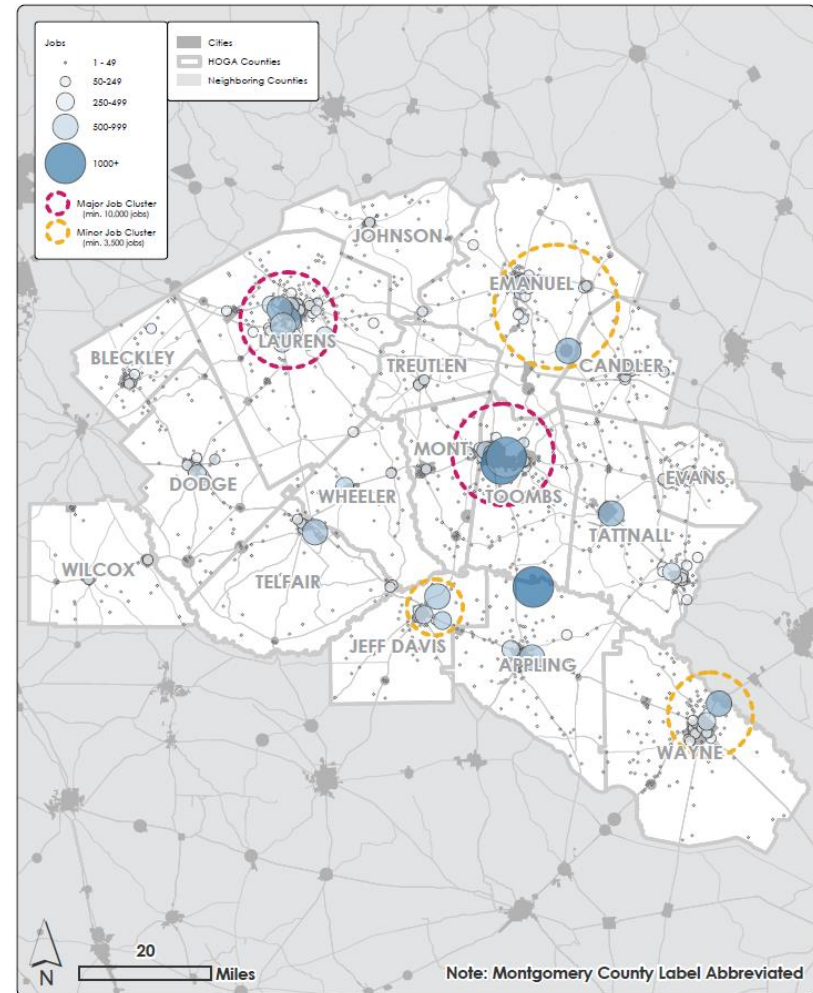
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Data

3.2 Current Job Concentration

The U.S. Census Bureau’s Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program provides workforce data through its LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, or LODES. Figure 14 shows the number of jobs for each census block in 2022 available from LODES with the major and minor job clusters illustrated in pink and yellow, respectively.

The two major job clusters (with at least 10,000 jobs) are located in Laurens (Dublin) and Toombs Counties (Vidalia and Lyons). The minor job clusters with at least 3,000, but less than 10,000, jobs are located in Jeff Davis (Hazelhurst), Emanuel (Swainsboro), and Wayne (Jesup) Counties. There are other locations with 250-1,000 jobs, and agricultural jobs are spread across the region. In fact, based on information provided by the Georgia Department of Labor, it is estimated that agricultural jobs make up about 22 percent³ of the industry mix in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha.

Figure 14: Job Concentration by Census Block



Source: U.S. Census Bureau LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Status

³ Georgia Department of Labor
<https://explorer.gdol.ga.gov/vosnet/mis/Profiles/rc/09%20-%20Heart%20of%20Georgia%20Altamaha%20RC.pdf>

3.3 Major Industries

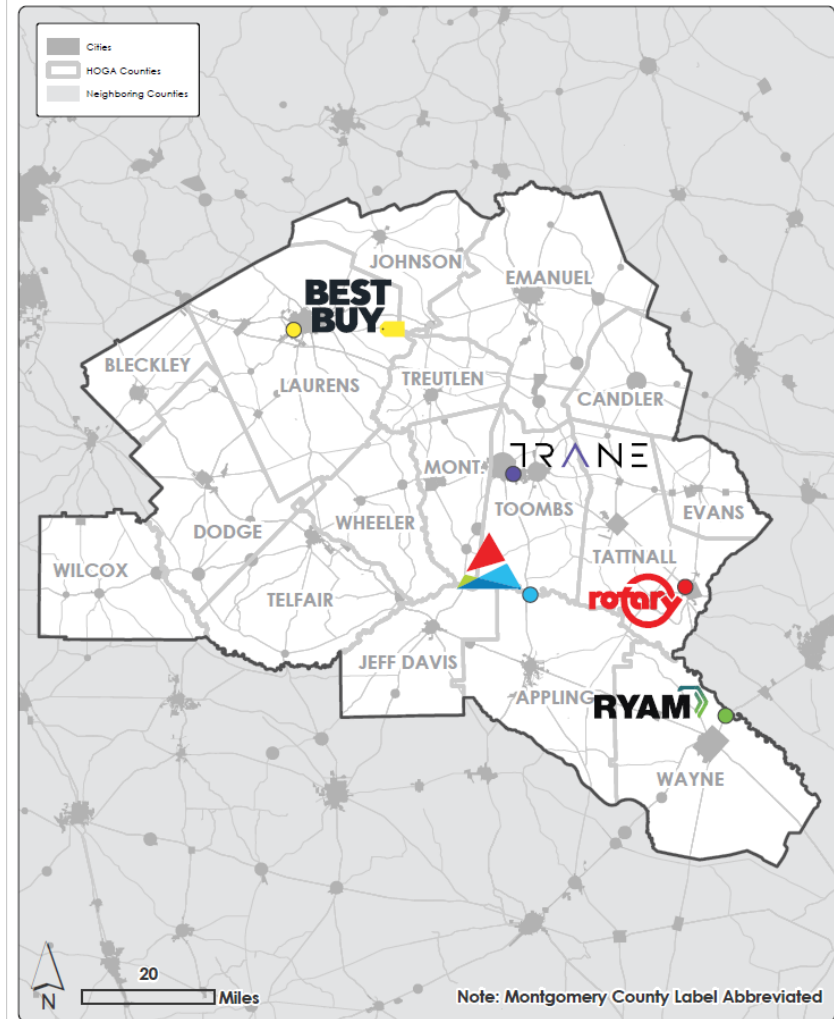
The major employment industries in the HOGA region include: manufacturing and industrial facilities, lumber and wood products, food processing and agriculture, and transportation and logistics. The HOGA region is home to major logistics, manufacturing, and industrial companies such as Rayonier Advanced Materials, Trane Technologies, Best Buy Distribution Center, Arconic Architectural Products, Rotary Corporation, and Steelfab, among others. These companies are involved in manufacturing a range of products from high purity cellulose to the fabrication of steel. Lumber and wood products constitute another major industry for the region, with employers such as Beasley Forest Products, West Fraser, Tanner Timber Harvesting, and Ben Attaway Logging. Companies such as Chicken of the Sea and Claxton Poultry Co are major employers in the food processing and agriculture space, and Williams Brothers Trucking and Dot Foods specialize in trucking and food distribution, respectively.

Figure 15 includes the top five private sector employers (by number of employees) in the region. And, according to the Georgia Department of Labor, the top ten employers in the HOGA region are:

- Claxton Poultry Co.
- Coastal Plains Education Center
- Crider Inc.
- Day & Zimmermann NPS, Inc.
- Fairview Park Hospital
- Georgia Department of Corrections
- Rayonier (RYAM) Performance Fibers
- Southern Nuclear Operating Co.
- Trane U.S., Inc.

- Walmart

Figure 15: Major Private Sector Employers



Source: Georgia Department of Labor Area Labor Profile

3.4 Future Employment Trends

Table 12 provides the Georgia Department of Labor’s “Long-Term Industry Projections,” through 2030. Based on these projections, the industries with the greatest expected increase in the number of employees include the Health Care and Social Assistance industry (+1,970 people), the Accommodation and Food Services industry (+1,530 people), and the Retail Trade industry (+1,420 people).

The industry anticipated for the highest percentage of growth is the Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation industry, with a growth rate of 33 percent and 80 new employees between 2020 and 2030. The Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing industry expects a 29.4 percent positive growth in employment with 100 new employees over the next decade, and the Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services industries are expected to grow 30.5 percent between 2020-2030, with over 1,000 new employees in the region.

The Heart of Georgia Altamaha Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) report also identifies healthcare and social assistance as the region’s largest employment sector, followed by manufacturing and retail trade. Per the CEDS report, the region’s employers have a need to hire heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers (in the Transportation category) as well as registered nurses, physical therapists, licensed practical nurses, and nursing assistants (under the Healthcare category).

Table 12: Industry Projections

Industry Title	2020-2030 Employment Change	
	Total	Percent
Health Care and Social Assistance	1,970	17.3%
Accommodation and Food Services	1,530	22.7%
Retail Trade	1,420	12.4%
-Administrative and Support and -Waste Management and Remediation Services	1,060	30.5%
Manufacturing	660	5.4%
Educational Services	310	3.3%
Transportation and Warehousing	280	14.0%
Wholesale Trade	230	9.1%
Other Services (except Government)	200	11.8%
Construction	150	4.3%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	140	9.2%
Finance and Insurance	120	5.5%
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	100	29.4%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	80	33.2%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	20	3.5%
Information	-20	-3.7%
Government	-40	-0.5%
Utilities	-130	-8.4%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor Long-Term Industry Projections

4.0 Travel Trends

This section includes information on travel patterns within and beyond the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region. Understanding regional travel patterns will help identify intra-county, cross-county, and out-of-region traffic flows.

4.1 Background

The Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS) platform and the INRIX Analytics suite provide information on travel patterns based on millions of data points collected daily. For this report, the data trends covered in the following subsections are based on a 2022 RITIS INRIX origin-destination trip dataset.

4.2 Geographic Areas for Travel Trends Analysis

The analysis of travel trends in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region includes all counties within the region, all counties that share a border with the region, and four counties that are a farther distance but have known travel patterns with HOGA.

- Bordering counties including Bacon, Ben Hill, Brantley, Bryan, Bulloch, Burke, Coffee, Crisp, Dooly, Glynn, Houston, Jefferson, Jenkins, Liberty, Long McIntosh, Pierce, Pulaski, Turner, Twiggs, Washington, and Wilkinson
- Counties located a farther distance, but have significant medical / hospital facilities, include Bibb, Chatham, Lowndes, and Richmond.

4.3 Travel Patterns within the Region

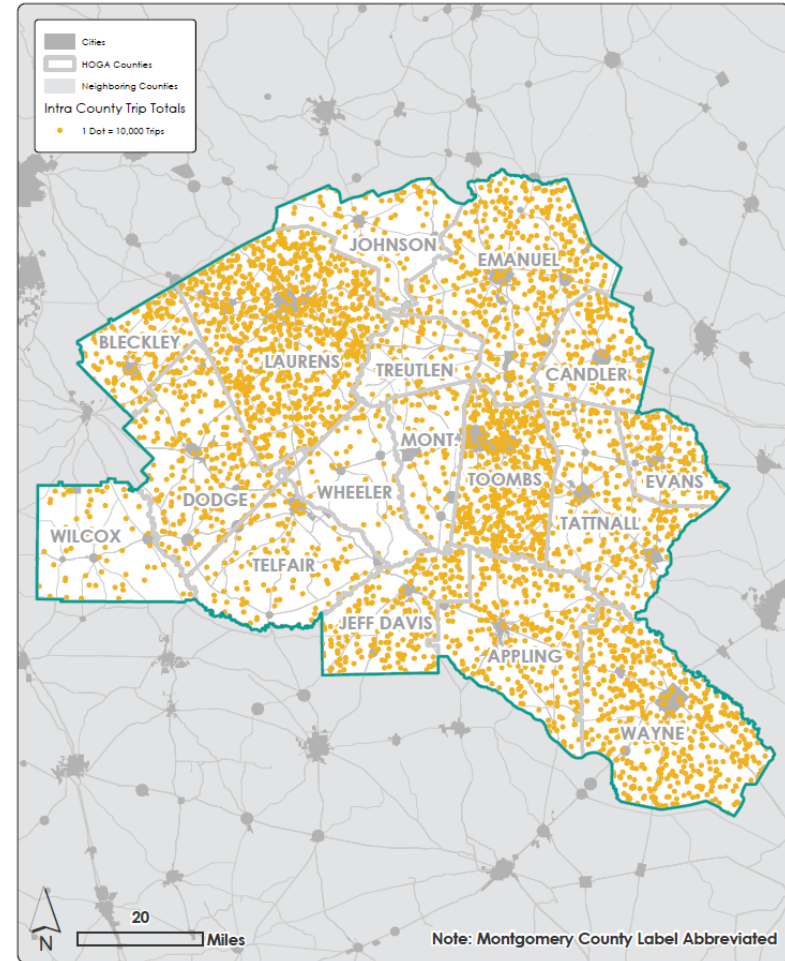
The most common travel pattern is intra-county trips with all Heart of Georgia Altamaha counties having 50% or more of trips staying within county boundaries. The regional average intra-county trip percentage is 80%. As shown in Table 13, residents of Wayne, Wilcox, and Laurens Counties had 90% or more of their trips within their residential county. On the lower end, Montgomery and Wheeler residents stayed in their county 51.4% and 59.6% of the time, respectively.

Table 13: Total Trips and Intra-County Percentage

County	Total Trips	Intra-County Trip Percentage
Appling	3,534,579	86.0%
Bleckley	1,873,215	85.4%
Candler	1,860,663	79.8%
Dodge	2,963,306	83.2%
Emanuel	4,854,092	88.6%
Evans	1,706,82	82.1%
Jeff Davis	2,778,776	83.1%
Johnson	1,105,407	71.6%
Laurens	10,215,783	91.3%
Montgomery	1,484,828	51.4%
Tattnall	3,230,339	80.5%
Telfair	1,623,666	73.4%
Toombs	7,003,082	81.0%
Treutlen	1,018,554	65.4%
Wayne	5,433,416	96.5%
Wheeler	849,828	59.6%
Wilcox	723,897	94.5%

Figure 16 represents the intra-county trip distributions in a dot density format. Each dot represents 10,000 trips that started and ended within the county. Laurens and Toombs Counties have the highest number of intra-county trips with 10,215,783 and 7,003,082 trips, respectively.

Figure 16: Intra-County Travel Distribution



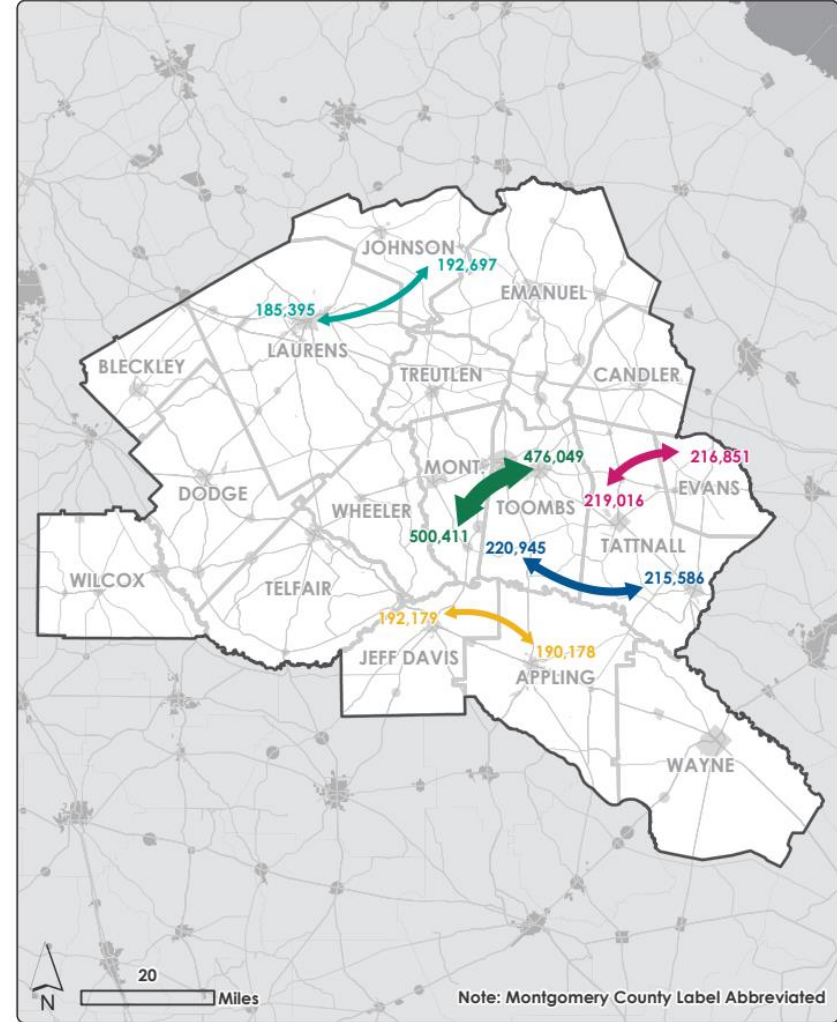
Source: RITIS INRIX Origin-Destination Data

Inter-county travel is also a major contributor of trips in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region. Table 14 shows the significant county pairs with trips that originate in one county and terminate in a different county. The highest number of trips between two counties is Toombs and Montgomery Counties followed by Toombs and Tattnall Counties. Figure 17 shows that there are more inter-county trips in the middle and eastern areas of the region.

Table 14: Inter-County Trips in the Region

Origin	Destination	Total Trips
Montgomery	Toombs	500,411
Toombs	Montgomery	476,049
Toombs	Tattnall	220,945
Evans	Tattnall	216,851
Tattnall	Evans	219,016
Tattnall	Toombs	215,586
Johnson	Laurens	192,967
Jeff Davis	Appling	192,179
Appling	Jeff Davis	190,178
Laurens	Johnson	185,395

Figure 17: Inter-County Travel Distribution



Source: RITIS INRIX Origin-Destination Data

4.4 Travel Patterns between the HOGA Region and Surrounding Areas

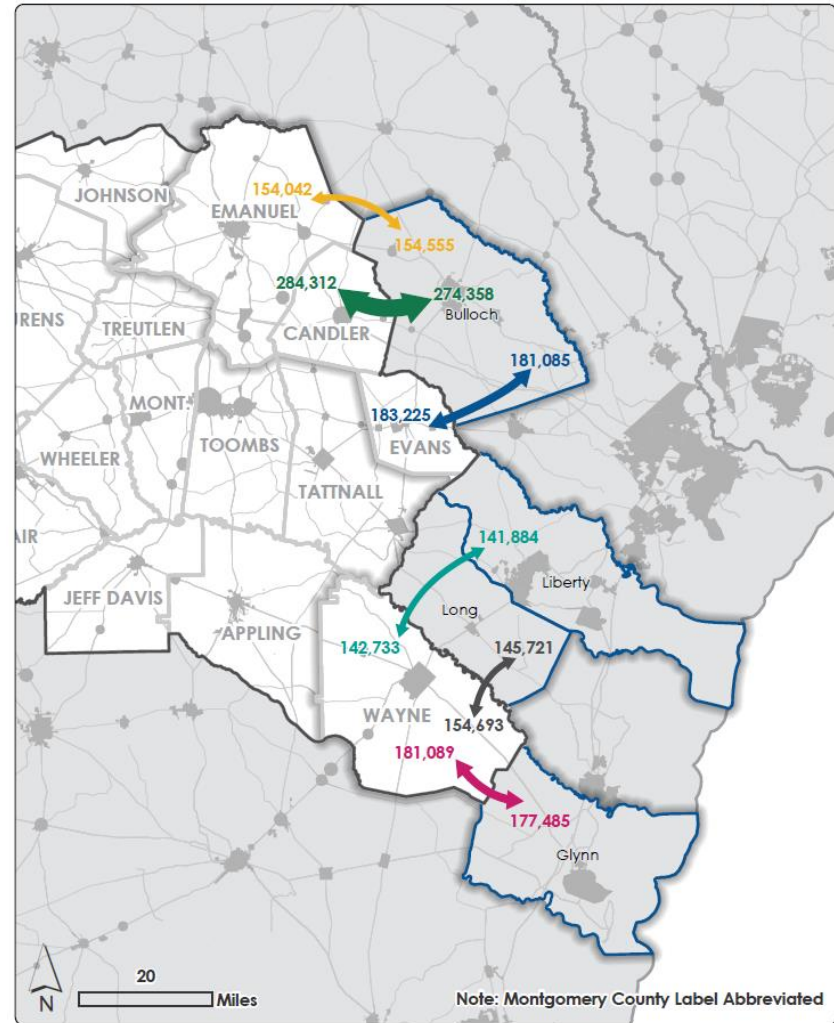
Inter-region travel is important to analyze as a key component of the HOGA region’s overall travel trends, and Figure 18 illustrates these inter-regional travel trends in 2022. Table 15 and Figure 18 show the highest trip totals to neighboring counties that are outside the HOGA region. There are a significant number of trips from Emanuel, Evans, and Candler Counties destined for Bulloch County (and vice versa). Wayne County residents are traveling to Glynn, Liberty, and Long Counties, in that order. The other HOGA counties had lower numbers of trips out of the region.

Table 15: Origin-Destination Pairs where Destination is Outside of the Region

Origin	Destination	Total Trips
Bulloch	Candler	284,312
Candler	Bulloch	274,358
Bulloch	Evans	183,225
Glynn	Wayne	181,089
Evans	Bulloch	181,035
Wayne	Glynn	177,485
Long	Wayne	154,693
Emanuel	Bulloch	154,555
Bulloch	Emanuel	154,042
Wayne	Long	145,721
Liberty	Wayne	142,733
Wayne	Liberty	141,884

Source: RITIS INRIX Origin-Destination Data

Figure 18: Inter-Regional Travel / Nearby Counties

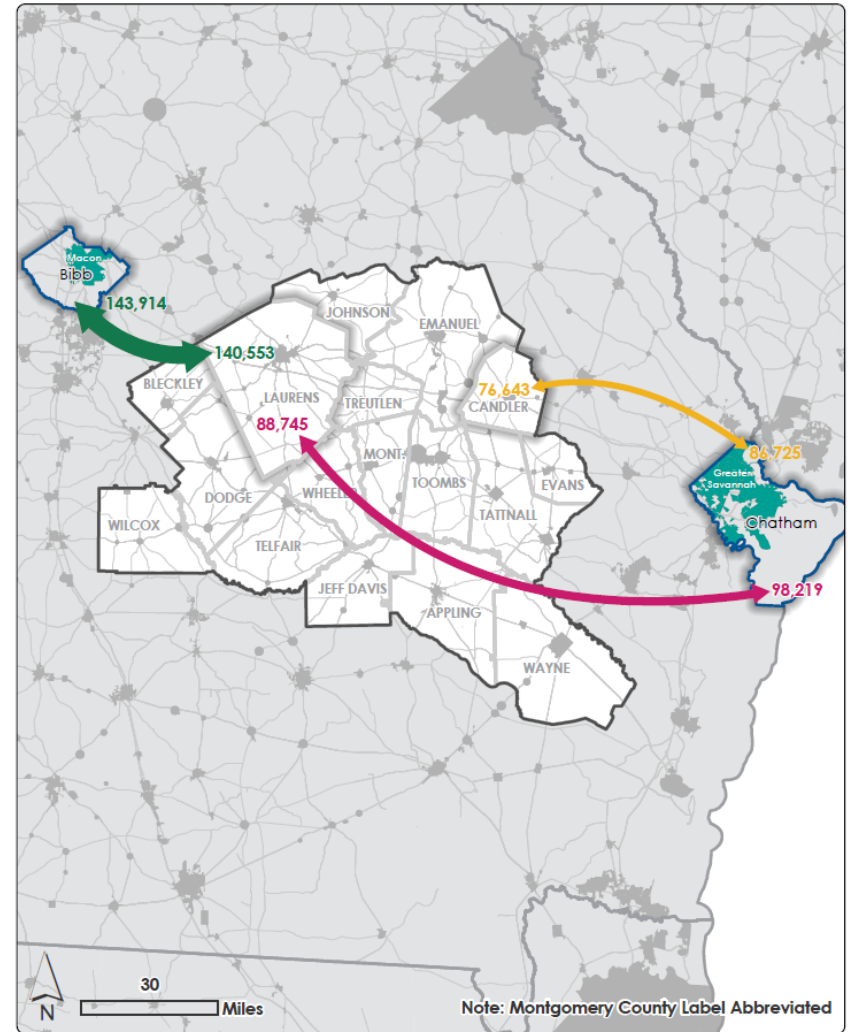


Source: RITIS INRIX Origin-Destination Data

Based on conversations with stakeholders, trips to farther counties that have significant medical facilities were analyzed. As mentioned above and shown in Figure 19 trips to four counties were analyzed but only trips to Bibb and Chatham showed strong travel patterns. There are prominent hospitals and medical facilities in these counties, and it is reasonable to assume that HOGA residents are seeking advanced medical care in proximity to Macon and Savannah. It is important to note that these trips have long distances. Laurens County is 120 miles from Chatham County.

Additionally, there may be work trips being made between Candler and Chatham Counties as well as Laurens and Bibb Counties with distances around 60 to 70 miles for each county pair.

Figure 19: Inter-Regional Travel / Farther Away Counties



Source: RITIS INRIX Origin-Destination Data

4.5 Impacts of COVID-19 on Travel Patterns

COVID-19 has altered travel patterns across the country, including throughout the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region. Trips that are normally classified as “essential,” such as medical appointments, occurred less frequently during the pandemic. Healthy individuals put off routine healthcare visits or were able to take advantage of telehealth appointments. Emergency medical trips, especially those resulting from COVID-19, were common over the last couple years.⁴

As for work trips, many industries shifted to “work-from-home” at the beginning of the pandemic. Where possible, the “work-from-home” lifestyle continued even as pandemic restrictions lifted. Many jobs in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region, such as manufacturing and industrial facilities, lumber and wood products, and food processing and agriculture are not conducive to “work-from-home” flexibility.

In early 2020, pandemic precautions limited and discouraged in-person gatherings, particularly in densely populated areas. As a result, many in-state college students returned home and completed their classes virtually. This situation resulted in lower

activity in the vicinity of the region’s colleges and universities, particularly in Emmanuel County, which is home to Southeastern Technical College and East Georgia State College. Laurens county experienced the same scenario at Middle Georgia State University – Dublin Campus.

Leisure travel was impacted at the beginning of the pandemic, but the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region is known for its wealth of outdoor experiences that people can enjoy safely. National reports found that camping, particularly recreation vehicle camping, surged during the pandemic as individuals sought ways to travel in an isolated manner.⁵ There are two major state parks and many campgrounds with recreational vehicle parking in the region.

Across the US, public transit experienced lower ridership during the pandemic as many people were concerned about traveling in the same vehicle as others. As the pandemic ebbed and flowed, transit services also experienced waves of increased and decreased ridership.⁶ According to transit providers in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region, transit ridership has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels as of fall 2023.

⁴ Abdullah, Muhammad, et al. “Exploring the Impacts of COVID-19 on Travel Behavior and Mode Preferences,” November 2020. Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives, Volume 8.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590198220301664>

⁴ Khan, Mahnoor. “Roadtrips and RV Travel Exploded During the Pandemic. This Company is Leading the Way,” February 17, 2022.

<https://fortune.com/2022/02/17/rv-travel-covid-sun-outdoors/>

⁴ American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Ridership Update. April 27, 2022. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Transit-Ridership-Brief-April-2022.pdf>

⁵ Khan, Mahnoor. “Roadtrips and RV Travel Exploded During the Pandemic. This Company is Leading the Way,” February 17, 2022.

<https://fortune.com/2022/02/17/rv-travel-covid-sun-outdoors/>

⁶ American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Ridership Update. April 27, 2022. <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Transit-Ridership-Brief-April-2022.pdf>

5.0 Existing Transportation Network

The following section has information on the transportation network which includes an overview of the roadway system, traffic volumes, and the traffic count percent change over time.

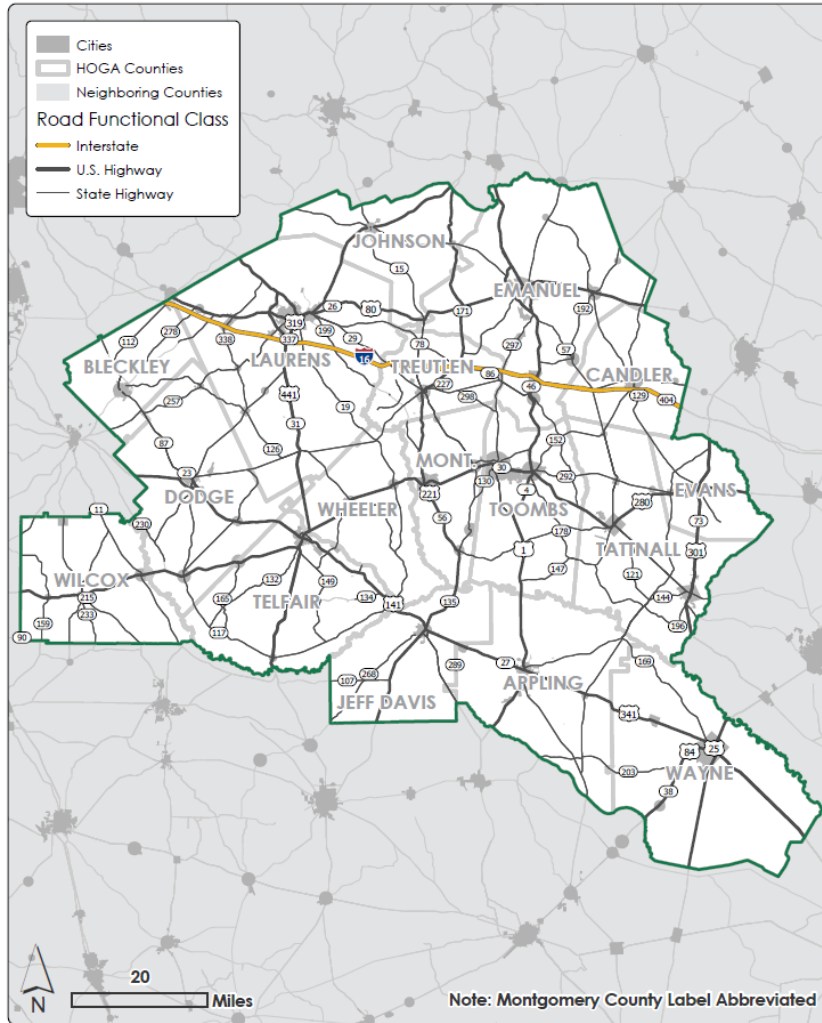
5.1 Transportation System Overview

The transportation system in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region primarily consists of the roadway network, demand-response transit service and non-motorized facilities (sidewalks and bike lanes) which are primarily located in downtown areas. In addition, there is a Class I freight railroad, a GDOT owned rail line, and an Amtrak station in the region. As shown in Figure 20, there are several highly traveled US and State Routes in the region that provide connectivity for all modes.

Major corridors that serve the region include:

- Interstate 16 (I-16): This east-west interstate runs from downtown Macon, Georgia, to downtown Savannah, Georgia. It passes through the heart of the HOGA region, connecting cities like Dublin, Vidalia, Metter, and Swainsboro.
- U.S. Route 441 (US 441): This north-south highway stretches from Miami, Florida, to Athens, Georgia and locations further north. In the HOGA region, US 441 passes through the cities of McRae-Helena and Dublin.
- U.S. Route 341 (US 341): Running in a generally north-south direction, this highway connects the City of Brunswick, Georgia, to Barnesville, Georgia. It passes through Hazlehurst and McRae-Helena in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha.
- U.S. Route 319 (US 319): Starting in the coastal city of Brunswick, Georgia, this highway travels north to the state capital, Atlanta. In the HOGA region, it passes through Hazlehurst and McRae-Helena.
- Georgia State Route 57 (SR-57): This state highway runs east-west in the HOGA region, connecting Swainsboro and Reidsville.
- Georgia State Route 15 (SR-15): Extending from the Florida state line to the South Carolina state line, GA-15 is a major north-south highway in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region. It passes through cities such as Vidalia and Sandersville.
- Georgia State Route 29 (SR-29): This state highway runs north-south through the HOGA region, connecting several cities including Dublin, Eastman, and Vidalia.

Figure 20: Existing US and State Highway Network



Source: GDOT, U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics

5.1.1 Annual Average Daily Traffic

GDOT collects and reports traffic volume for all vehicle classes (car, single-unit truck, multi-unit truck) throughout the state from traffic count stations, measured as Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT). This traffic volume provides valuable data and critical information for Federal reporting and for analyzing traffic patterns and other statistics. The Heart of Georgia Altamaha region contains numerous traffic count stations.

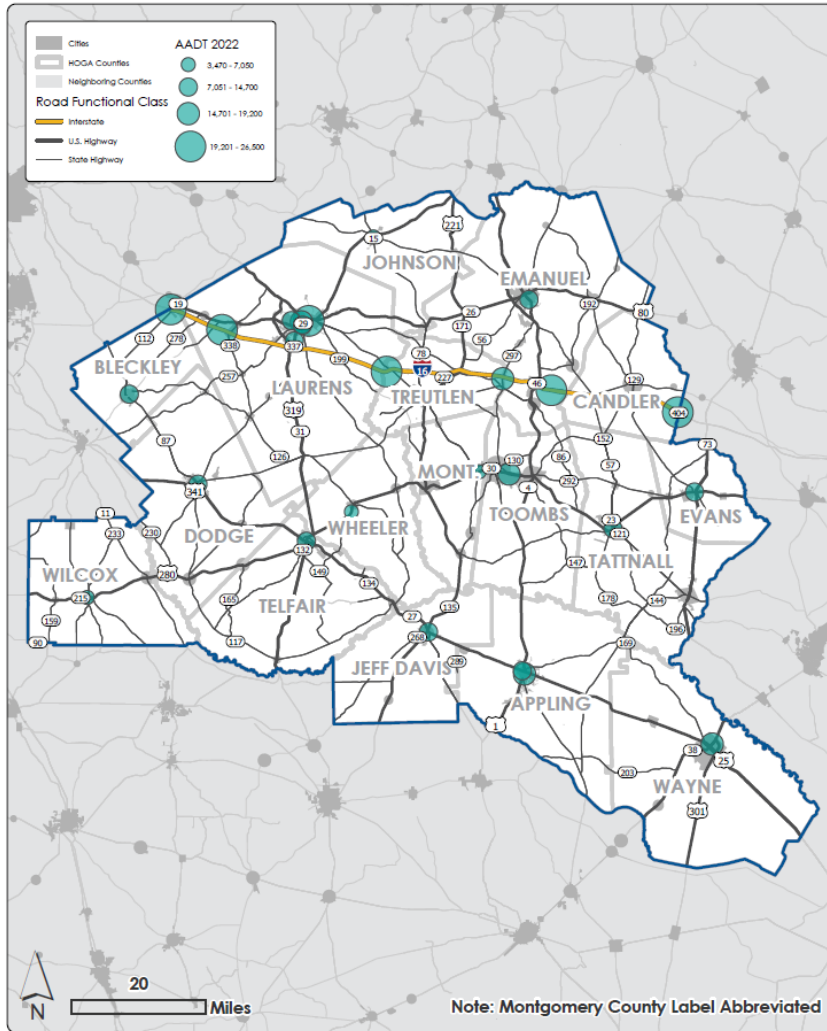
Figure 20 and Table 16 show the location of selected count stations and Mean AADT at these stations. For the purposes of this analysis, count stations were selected on the major routes and spread out geographically across the region. Each county has at least one count station. The 2022 AADT at these count stations ranges from 2,470 – 26,500 vehicles with the higher volumes along I-16. Figure 21 illustrates the percent change in AADT from 2019-2022. The size of the circle indicates the degree of percent change while the color shows the direction of that change.

Table 16: Annual Average Daily Traffic (2019)

Route	Mean AADT
I-16	23,028
US 25	8,496
US 84	7,198
US 319	6,609
US 80	6,608
GA 29	6,496

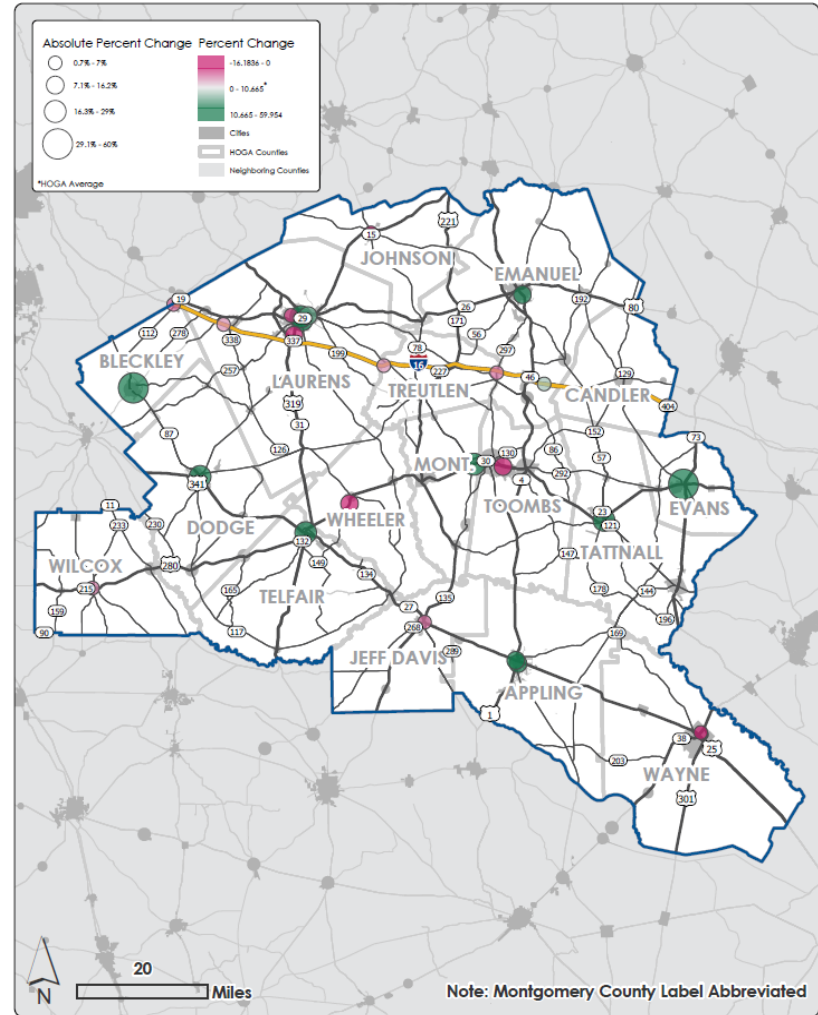
Source: GDOT Traffic Analysis and Data Application

Figure 20: GDOT Traffic Counter Stations and 2022 AADT



Source: GDOT Traffic Analysis and Data Application

Figure 21: Percent Change in AADT from 2019 to 2022



Source: GDOT Traffic Analysis and Data Application

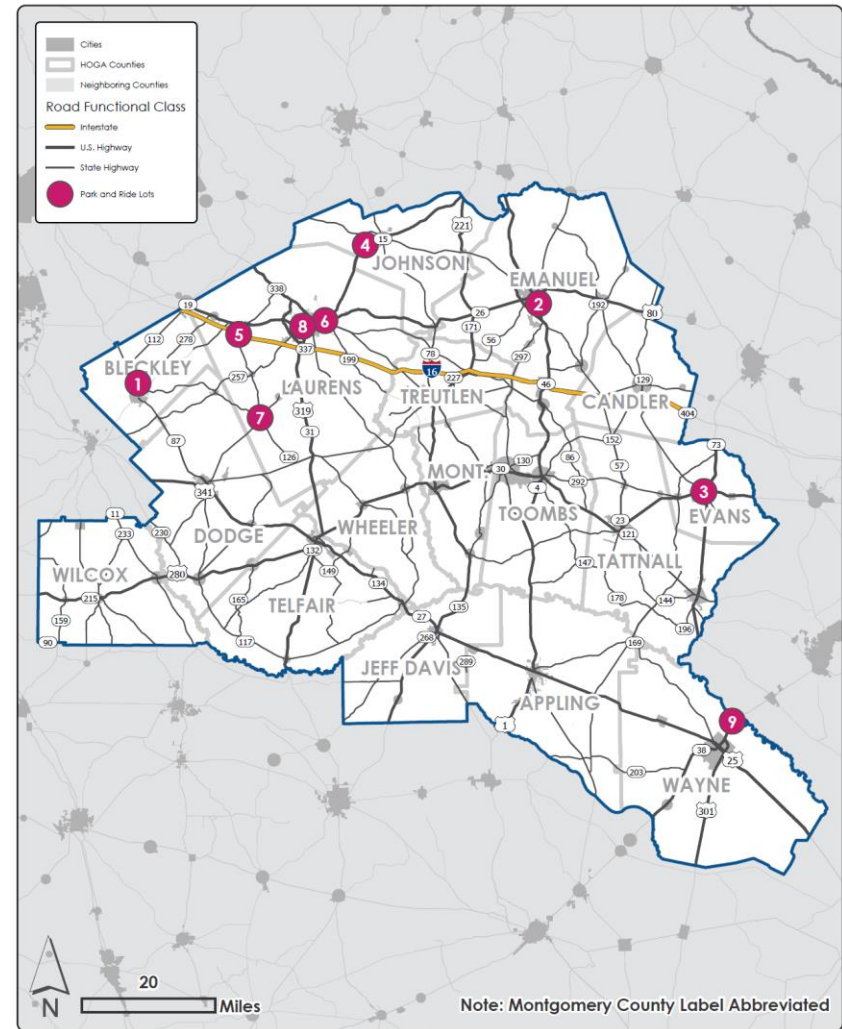
5.2 Park and Ride Lots

Park and ride lots allow users to park and transfer to other modes of transportation. There are nine park and ride lot locations in the HOGA region. Four out of these nine locations are concentrated in Laurens County, and the remaining five are in Bleckley, Emanuel, Evans, Johnson, and Wayne Counties. These nine park and ride lots are shown and numbered in Figure 24.

Eight of the nine park and ride lots are considered to be “Active” by GDOT. Location details on each of these lots can be found in Table 18. Notably, the I-16/SR 338 (ID# 5) park and ride is used regularly, particularly by workers traveling to / from the Warner Robins Air Force Base. The SR 26/SR 29 (ID# 6) park and ride near East Dublin is located on private property. According to the Regional Commission, it is still in use even though it is not officially maintained. Park and ride SR 126 (ID# 7) is maintained by the City of Cadwell, but it is not frequently used. The park and ride lot (ID# 9) in Wayne County is located in close proximity to the Rayonier Materials (RYAM) plant, a wood-based cellulose manufacturing plant, and may be utilized by its eight-hundred workers.

These lots may be opportunity sites for future multi-modal transportation hubs.

Figure 24: Park and Ride Lot Locations



Source: Atlanta Regional Commission Open Data Portal

Table 17: Park and Ride Lot Locations and Details

ID #	Location	Street Address	County	# Spaces	Location Details
1	SR 87 By-Pass - Cochran (ACTIVE)	377 US-23, 31014	Bleckley	70	Located on US-23 near Bleckley County Sheriff's Office, a U-Haul Neighborhood Dealer, and Heartland EMS Inc. The last inspection in May 2022 of the lot contains notes saying "well maintained" and "good usage".
2	Harmon Park –Swainsboro (INACTIVE)	W Meadowlake Pkwy & Harmon Park, 30401	Emanuel	49	This lot is the Harmon Park parking lot, which is part of the rec department. The last inspection in May 2022 of the lot contains notes saying "no sign in front of lot", "cars park next to the tennis court".
3	Courthouse St. - Claxton (ACTIVE)	201 Freeman St, 30417	Evans	28	Located near the United States Postal Service, Evans County Superior Court, the Evans County Sheriff Office, and the Claxton Bank. Last inspected in June 2022.
4	SR 319 @ County Rd 243	SR 319 @ County Rd 243, Tucker Grove Church Rd, 31096	Johnson	10	Located on Tucker Grove Church Road near US-319, southwest of Wrightsville. The lot was last inspected in May 2023 and was noted to be "well maintained" with "one car parked".
5	I-16 & SR 338 – Dudley (ACTIVE)	Hogan Farm Rd & SR 338, 31022	Laurens	13	Across from a field, adjacent to GA-338, near the SR-404/I-16 entrance. Just southwest of Dudley on Second St/GA-338, which runs through Dudley. The last inspection of the lot in March 2023 contains notes saying "needs striping" and "lots of trash".
6	SR 26/29 @ SR 31 - East Dublin (ACTIVE)	106 Savannah Ave, 31027	Laurens	20	Near Shamrock Honda Kawasaki and East Dublin City Hall between Savannah Ave/US-80 and Wrightsville Ave/US-319 in East Dublin. The last inspection of the lot in June 2022 contains a note saying "needs striping".
7	SR 126 @ Burch St. Walnut St – Cadwell (ACTIVE)	SR 126 @ Burch Walnut St, 31009	Laurens	10	Near the intersection of Walnut Ave and Burch St/SR-126 in downtown Cadwell. Last inspected in May 2022.
8	US 80 & Rice Ave – Dublin (ACTIVE)	US-80 & Rice Ave, 31021	Laurens	31	Parking spots are parallel to US 80 in front of Leprechaun Car Wash. The last inspection of the lot in June 2022 contains notes saying "lots of weeds", "needs striping", and "spots not well marked."
9	US 301 North - Northeast of Jesup (ACTIVE)	Rayonier Rd & SR 23, 31545	Wayne	40	Northeast of Jesup following Savannah Hwy/SR-23 across the road from Rayonier Advanced Materials (RYAM) and next to Parker's convenience store/gas station.

Sources: Georgia Department of Transportation, Atlanta Regional Commission Open Data Portal, and Google Earth

5.3 Active Transportation

Active transportation refers to the concept of using walking or biking as a means of traveling from an origin to a destination. Per the Regional HOGARC 2019 Plan, alternative transportation networks remain scarce within the HOGA region. Sidewalks are primarily limited to central business and residential areas in or near the historic downtown cores. There is typically little to no connection to newer commercial or residential developments.

State Bicycle Route 40, also known as the Trans-Georgia Route between Columbus and Savannah, traverses the region. State Bicycle Route 40 travels through Laurens, Treutlen, Emanuel, and Candler counties. The 2005 and 2016 Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans for the HOGA region distinguished possible bike routes and connectivity needs, which has since led to some ongoing improvements within the region such as shoulder paving projects along US 341 and US 1, as they are widened.

The Yamassee Bike Trail in Montgomery County is a formally designated bike trail in the HOGA region. In addition, US Bicycle Route 15, a project that began in 2018, currently spans 92 miles and is meant to connect Florida to North Carolina. Currently, the route begins at the Florida-Georgia Line, traveling north and ending in Rochelle, which is located Wilcox County. The upcoming segments will span through Pineview, also in Wilcox County, and continue toward the North Carolina border.

The HOGA region has a formally designated scenic byway, the Enduring Farmlands Scenic Byway, also located in Wilcox County. The Multi-Region River Corridor Feasibility Study, mentioned in Chapter 6.7, identifies potential additional scenic byway routes in the HOGA region. Other areas in the HOGA region that include recreational trails or paths include the Altamaha Regional Park, the Ocmulgee River Water Trail, the Blueberry Hill Nature Trail, and the Little Ocmulgee State Park.

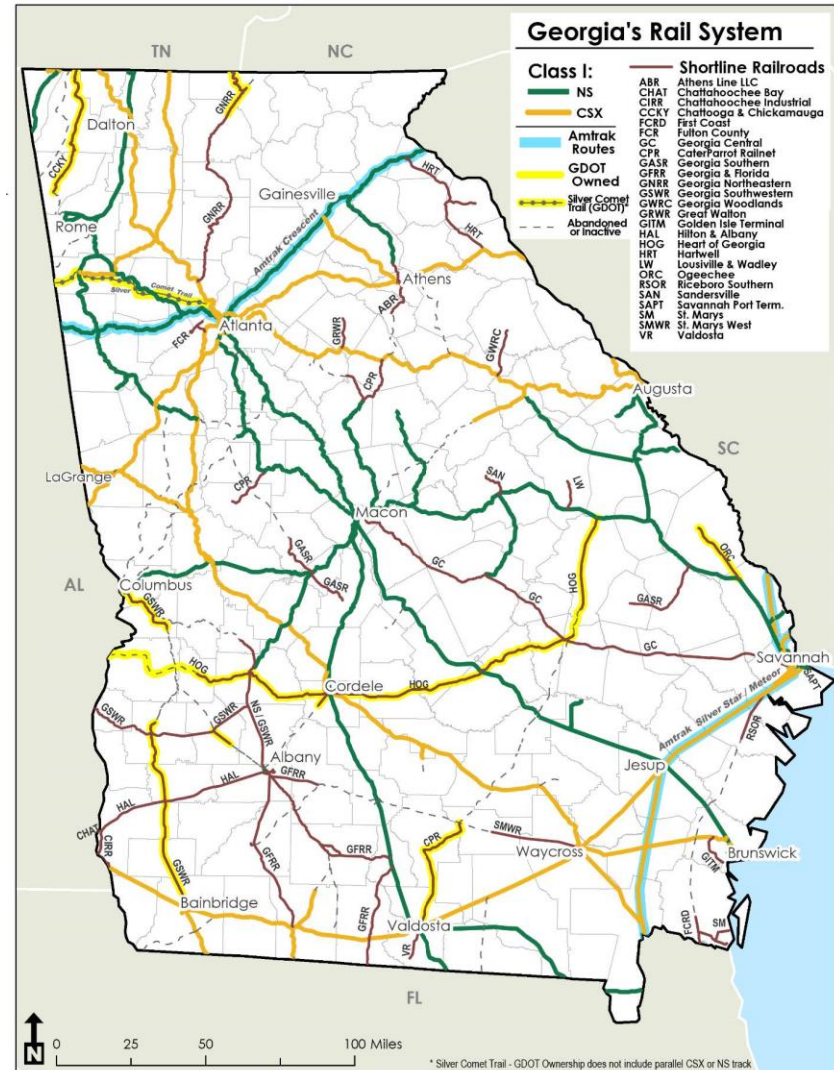
There are many recreational, economic, connectivity, and environmental benefits to expanding the HOGA region's active transportation network. Mobilizing the population of the HOGA region and those around it allows for movement to local businesses, residential neighborhoods, recreational spaces, schools, and places of worship. Furthermore, non-motorized transit options allow for more equitable access to key destinations and services, while providing an alternative to vehicular transportation.

5.4 Rail

There is one Class I freight railroad within the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region owned by Norfolk Southern (NS). This mainline passes through the western part of the region (Bleckley, Dodge, and Telfair Counties) and provides a connection between the Port in Brunswick, GA to Macon and Atlanta, north of the HOGA region. There is also a GDOT owned shortline rail line that connects the western portion of Georgia (south of Columbus) with a NS mainline. This shortline travels through Telfair, Wheeler, Montgomery, Toombs, and Emanuel Counties. Figure 22 shows this rail network.

Additionally, Amtrak passenger service runs through the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region, and there is an Amtrak station located in Jesup (Wayne County).

Figure 22: State Rail Network



6.0 Existing Transit Plans

A review of studies pertinent to the region was conducted to understand the issues, opportunities, and recommendations that have been previously identified for the region and its individual municipalities. The Regional TDP will take previous planning efforts into consideration to identify comprehensive transit solutions for REGION.

6.1 GDOT Georgia Statewide Transit Plan

Georgia's first Statewide Transit Plan (SWTRP) was developed in 2020. The SWTRP identifies transit needs and opportunities, reviews local, county, and regional plans, and recommends policy and priority projects for implementation across the state. The plan describes the different types of transit service provided in the state, including:

- Demand-response
- Fixed route
- Vanpool
- Flex Route
- Micro transit
- Express bus
- Intercity transit
- Heavy rail
- Streetcar
- Ferry

Demand-response refers to small bus operations that require advance reservation and provide door-to-door service. Demand-response service does not operate on a fixed route or schedule but rather meets passengers' needs by picking up and dropping off at desired locations. In rural areas of Georgia, transit service is focused on the demand-response model.

The SWTRP notes that there are 80 transit systems across the state which provide demand-response service. Five of these eighty cover multiple counties (twenty-six counties). The demand-response systems provided 1.8 million trips to Georgians in 2017.

Fixed route typically refers to small bus operations that follow a determined route with known stops and a set schedule. Fixed route service is a good option for an urbanized area with multiple destinations, such as a downtown shopping area or route with businesses. The SWTRP reported that there were 76,667 transit trips in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region in 2017. This is the third lowest number of trips compared to other regions across the state.

Other trends reported in the SWTRP include the following:

- ***The rising populations of low-income, elderly, disabled, and zero-car households.*** For Southwest Georgia, low-income, elderly, and disabled populations were higher than the state average in several counties. LEP and youth populations were largely below the state average.
- **Advances in transportation-related technological advances.** Ride sharing programs are becoming more accepted as a viable means of travel and both accompany transit as well as compete with it. Digital platforms that aid trip scheduling have the potential to meaningfully impact ride scheduling and reliability. Connected and autonomous vehicles need to be part of the transit conversation.

- **Rural areas that are growing in population may be absorbed into urban areas.** This changes the federal funding calculation.

Additionally, the SWTRP contains an Implementation Report that is updated annually to report on transit performance. The 2022 SWTRP Implementation Report was published in January 2023. This report details statewide goals, performance measures, and strategies. Goals identified in this report that are relevant to the Heart of Georgia Altamaha include the following:

- Increasing regional and multi-county transit systems
- Coordination between GDOT and Department of Human Services (DHS) transit systems
- Allowing rural providers to cross county lines
- Increasing revenue service hours and trips per service hour
- Utilizing Smartphone Apps (such as GDOT’s Let’s Ride App) for trip planning.

6.2 GDOT Georgia Statewide Transportation Plan/ Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan

Updated in 2021, the combined Georgia 2050 Statewide Transportation Plan (SWTP) and Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan (SSTP) plans focus on how GDOT will carry out Governor Kemp’s strategic goals for the state, specifically focused on meeting the transportation needs for all Georgians. These plans detail the status of the statewide transportation system and future trends, opportunities, and challenges through 2050.

The public outreach of these planning efforts identified Georgia residents’ top three transportation concerns for the future, which include:

- More public transportation options
- Reduction in traffic congestion
- Better roadway system connectivity

The plans are divided into sections such as Statewide Freight and Logistics, People Mobility in Metro Atlanta, and People Mobility in Emerging Metros and Rural Georgia. One of Governor Kemp’s goals is to strengthen rural areas in the state, and GDOT sees regional teaming and partnerships as vital to improve life in rural communities. Additionally, increasing access to jobs, goods, and services throughout emerging metro areas and rural areas is a theme that runs through this report. In terms of transit and shared mobility, these reports focus on the state’s urban transit systems but present a wealth of content regarding the changing dynamics in rural areas. These trends include, but are not limited to, increasing population and employment, an aging population, an increase in individuals with disabilities, and a high vehicular crash rate.

6.3 GDOT Rural and Human Services Transportation Plan

The Georgia 2050 Rural and Human Services Transportation (RHST) Plan, finished in February 2023, is a five-year update to the state’s RHST Coordination Plan, authored by GDOT, DHS, and the Department of Community Health (DCH). This plan provides a framework for coordination among Georgia’s agencies interested in delivering rural mobility services. The focus of the plan is the state’s three systems for rural mobility services: rural public transit, administered by GDOT; human

services transportation, administered by DHS; and Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT), administered by DCH.

6.4 GDOT Group Transit Asset Management Plan

The 2022 Group Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan Update is currently underway. TAM is a business model which prioritizes funding for transit projects based on the condition of assets, with the goal of maintaining a State of Good Repair (SGR) for all participating transit networks.

As required by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the TAM Plan covers a four-year period. The most recent Group TAM Plan from 2018 ends in fiscal year 2022, and consists of the following elements:

- **Inventory of Capital Assets:** The three categories of public transit assets are Rolling Stock, Equipment, and Facilities
- **Condition Assessment:** Each asset within a provider's inventory for which it has direct capital responsibility is evaluated
- **Decision Support Tool:** This section analyzes data from the previous sections and comes up with a methodology for prioritizing SGR re-investment needs among the assets
- **Prioritized List of Investments:** Based on the decision support tool and projected funding over the four-year period, this section concludes the TAM Plan

Federal law requires GDOT, as the Group Plan sponsor, to set annual SGR performance targets for each type of asset, which

are updated on an annual basis. These performance measures are as follows:

- **Rolling Stock:** Percentage of revenue vehicles that have either met or exceeded their Useful Life Benchmark (ULB), as determined by their asset type
- **Equipment:** Percentage of non-revenue, support-service, and maintenance vehicle equipment that has either met or exceeded their ULB
- **Facilities:** Percentage of facilities rated below condition 3.0 on the Transit Economic Requirements Model scale

Each county providing transit with the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region was included in the 2018 TAM plan. All the providers were Rural Program Section 5311 Subrecipients, for which federal funding is disbursed through GDOT. Cutaway buses were proposed investments for each county, with Bleckley and Wayne Counties also having vans as proposed investments. Most of these projects were prioritized for either Fiscal Year 2021 or 2022. The Bleckley and Wayne Counties vans were prioritized for fiscal year 2020 and 2019, respectively.

Regional Comprehensive Plans

In addition to transit plans, there are a few plans created by the HOGA Regional Commission that are helpful to understand the existing conditions, ongoing developments, and the vision and goals of the region.

6.5 HOGARC Regional Plan

In 2013, the most recent regional plan was released. The Regional Assessment is required by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and covers a variety of subjects, including:

- A list of potential issues and opportunities that the Region may choose to address,
- An assessment of current policies, activities, and development patterns in the Region to determine their consistency with DCA's State Planning Goals and Quality Community Objectives,
- An analysis of current development patterns, and
- An analysis and summary of relevant socio-economic data and information, especially for refinement and corroboration.

6.6 HOGA Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

The Heart of Georgia Altamaha Economic Development District's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was created to comply with the U.S. Economic Development Administration's standards for regional financing to assist economic development projects, such as public infrastructure upgrades and economic adjustment planning. The plan is revised every five years. The Heart of Georgia Altamaha Economic Development District has appointed HOGARC as its employment agency.

The most recent plan was released in 2022 and covers:

- Regional goals and policies
- Population breakdowns
- Economic development
- Community facilities and services
- Transportation services
- Projected development patterns map,
- Areas in need of redevelopment
- Land use
- Housing
- Opportunity and Risk Analysis

Healthcare and social assistance rank first in the region's economic sectors, then manufacturing and retail trade. Most of the region's profits come from providing services. The following in-demand jobs have the largest employer needs:

- Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers (under the Transportation Category)
- Registered nurses, physical therapists, licensed practical nurses, and nursing assistants (under the Healthcare Category)

To ensure a diverse and expanding economy that can fend off the risks from concentration in a single industry, the Economic Development District (EDD) of the region has made a special effort to attract jobs in the healthcare, aerospace, and advanced manufacturing sectors, as well as by increasing tourism and recreational opportunities.

6.7 Multi-Region River Corridor Feasibility Study

A two-phase Multi-Region River Corridor Feasibility Study was carried out between 2010 and 2012 by the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission with funds provided by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The project finds, assesses, and suggests options for greater connectivity through bike lanes, multi-use trails, greenways, and other means along or near the Altamaha, Ocmulgee, Oconee, and lower Ohoopsee Rivers. The study's conclusions supported and confirmed the Region's enormous, largely untapped, potential for increased nature-based, heritage, and recreational tourism through the development of new local, regional, and multi-regional venues and events as well as the promotion of existing ones. The region's natural and cultural resources have the potential to produce significant economic advantages for nearby communities as well as improved knowledge of and protection for the resources themselves with careful and suitable usage, development, and marketing.

County Comprehensive Plans

There are seven joint county comprehensive plans in the region. All seven of these plans were created in accordance with the Georgia Planning Act's Minimum Planning Standards and Procedures.

⁷ <https://georgiadata.org/topics/agriculture/farm-gate-value#:~:text=Farm%20gate%20value%20is%20the,caes.uga.edu%2F>.

6.8 Tattnall County Joint Comprehensive Plan

The latest Tattnall County Joint Comprehensive Plan was completed in August 2018. It is a cooperative plan for Tattnall County and its local governments, including the cities of Cobbtown, Collins, Glennville, Manassas, and Reidsville. Tattnall County, a rural county in southeast Georgia, with an estimated 25,520 residents as of the 2010 Census, places it 72nd in Georgia. In 2010, 19 percent of Tattnall's inhabitants lived in communal housing, almost entirely (95 percent) in one of the county's three state prisons. Per the 2016 American Community Survey, this has not changed. Tattnall County, in 2016, ranked the 6th highest in Georgia for its total Farm Gate value of over \$300 million, with \$82 of that \$300 million stemming from vegetable production. The Farm Gate value is defined as "the price of farm produce directly from the producer, not including transportation or marketing costs."⁷

In terms of transportation, Tattnall County boasts two designated scenic highway trails (The Wiregrass Trail [SR 57] and The Woodpecker Trail [SR 121]), and lush natural landscapes with access to the Altamaha River State Park (referred to as Georgia's Amazon). Transportation needs and opportunities for the cities of Cobbtown, Collins, Glennville, Manassas, and Reidsville include street and sidewalk improvements, as well as a bicycle trail along the Wiregrass Trail (SR 57), a 70-mile scenic highway route traversing Southeastern Georgia, from Macon to The Golden Isles.

The existing DCA planning standards aim to promote local plans, which demonstrate a heightened awareness of individual

needs and foster a sense of local ownership, pride, and use. These principles were central in the creation of the Tattnall County Joint Comprehensive Plan, envisioned as a locally initiated strategy with the primary focus of addressing regional concerns while fostering widespread community engagement, support, and buy-in, all while adhering to state-mandated criteria.

6.9 Wilcox County Joint Comprehensive Plan

The latest Wilcox County Joint Comprehensive Plan was published in August 2018. It is a collaborative plan for the communities in Wilcox County, including the cities of Abbeville, Pineview, Pitts, and Rochelle. The county's size of 377.7 square miles places it in the 64th place out of 159 counties in Georgia, with a population density of 23 people per square mile. Per the 2010 Census, about one-fifth of the Wilcox population resides in group quarters, with nearly all (91%) of said population residing in the Wilcox State Prison. According to Census Bureau data, the county's anticipated population decline from 2010 to 2017 was 4.9%, antiparallel to Georgia's anticipated 7.6% growth.

Wilcox County offers two scenic roads through its lands, the Jefferson Davis Trail and the 65-mile Enduring Farmlands Georgia Scenic Byway. The cities of Pitts and Rochelle present opportunity in their proximities to I-75 and the Cordele Inland Port, with its corresponding active rail lines. Additionally, US Bike Route 15 (as mentioned in Section 1.3) traverses through Rochelle and Pineview, with plans to connect Florida to North Carolina. The Wilcox County Joint Comprehensive Plan's goals include protecting its rural character, conserving its working fields and forests, improving its infrastructure and road conditions (i.e., pavements, drainage, water, and sewer),

implementing bike infrastructure (wash and repair stations), and growing tourism.

6.10 Johnson County Joint Comprehensive Plan

The latest Johnson County Joint Comprehensive Plan was released in August 2018. It is a collaborative plan for Johnson County and its communities, including Kite and Wrightsville. The City of Adrian officially plans with Emanuel County because it is in both Johnson and Emanuel counties.

In 2017, Johnson County had an estimated population of 9,788 with a population density of 32 people per square mile, reflecting a 2% decline from 2010. Over 92% of the land area in the county is devoted to forests and farmland. The region is home to a unique natural landscape, featuring the Ochopee, Little Ochopee, and Oconee rivers, as well as their winding tributaries. These slow-moving blackwater streams are flanked by sandbars, offering a diverse range of species and recreational opportunities. Johnson County is home to numerous historic homes and buildings that date back to the community's thriving heyday at the turn of the 20th century. Notably, the early growth and development of Johnson County can be attributed to the Wrightsville and Tennille railroads, along with the county's abundant yellow-pine forests.

The plan notes desire for safety improvements at the intersection of U.S. 221/GA 171 and GA Highway 57, which traverse the county. There is also an interest in developing and marketing the Georgia Civil War Heritage Trail, which involves the creation of a rails-to-trails multi-use path to be linked to Dublin. The vision for the county's comprehensive plan encompasses retaining its small-town charm, revitalizing streetscapes and pedestrian infrastructure, and rehabilitating

structures to house businesses that appeal to both local residents and visitors. This vision also includes upgrading water and drainage infrastructure, beautifying gateways, improving recreation facilities, and rehabilitating housing to enhance the overall quality of life.

6.11 Laurens County Joint Comprehensive Plan

The latest Laurens County Joint Comprehensive Plan was completed in September 2019. It is a collaborative plan for Laurens County and its municipalities including, Cadwell, Dexter, Dublin, Dudley, East Dublin, Montrose, and Rentz.

Laurens County, situated in Georgia's Upper Coastal Plain along I-16 between Savannah and Atlanta, serves as a regional leader and economic hub for a large rural area in south-central and southeast Georgia. With an estimated population of nearly 50,000, it's a designated micropolitan statistical area, contributing significantly to a labor market area of nine counties with a labor force of nearly 55,000 and over 52,000 employed individuals. The county encompasses 818.5 square miles, is primarily characterized by forest and agricultural use, and maintains a population density of 57.8 persons per square mile. Notably, Laurens County leads Georgia in forestry Farm Gate value and boasts natural features including the Oconee River and state wildlife management areas.

The Laurens County Joint Comprehensive Plan has a main objective to “Concentrate Development to Create Walkable, Enjoyable Communities,” emphasizing how the implementation of a “Complete Streets Policy” can prioritize pedestrian considerations, develop sidewalk connectivity, increase tourism

interactions, and stimulate economic activity. Additional amenities to consider include trails like the Dublin Riverwalk, State Bike Route 40, pedestrian crossings, bike lanes, bike parking, pump stations, and lockers.

Current DCA planning standards allow local governments to develop local plans based on individual needs and provide avenues for local input, pride, ownership, and use. This plan was intended to be a locally driven plan principally addressing local needs and cultivating widespread community interest, support, and buy-in while meeting state standards.

6.12 Toombs County Joint Comprehensive Plan

The latest Toombs County Joint Comprehensive Plan completed in September 2019. It is a collaborative plan for Toombs County and its municipalities including, Lyons, Santa Claus, and Vidalia.

Toombs County, a progressive rural community in Southeast Georgia, is positioned just south of the I-16 interchanges along U.S. 1 and Georgia 297. Its advantageous location places it between the metropolitan areas of Augusta, Macon, and Savannah, with a population of nearly 30,000 people per the 2010 Census. The county features an airport boasting 6,000-foot runways, is home to Southeastern Technical College, hosts two public school systems and two private academies, and offers a variety of expansive recreational areas.

The community is well-served by highway and rail access with U.S. 1, U.S. 280, and Georgia highways 15/29, 56, 292, and

297, allowing it easy access to I-16 and both of Georgia’s coastal ports.

This comprehensive plan aims to preserve the county’s character while embracing commercial opportunities tied to the 4-lane expansion of U.S. 1 South and Bypass highway frontage and expanding broadband capabilities. A key focus of the plan lies in enhancing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, with future plans for bicycle connectivity on U.S. 1 and local roadways leading to Gray’s Landing on the Altamaha River. The plan also includes visions of a "Complete Streets Policy," and increased development of local bicycle/pedestrian infrastructure. Furthermore, it is recommended for non-motorized trails to be constructed to connect to planned bicycle trails in Toombs County, and for transportation access and quality to be improved and promoted.

In fall 2023, a Toombs County Transit Development Plan (TDP) was created with the purpose of evaluating the viability of demand-response public transit in the county. The plan analyzed demographics, local policies, and included a cost assessment. It recommended that Toombs County be integrated into a regional transportation network to address inter-county needs more feasibly, potentially utilizing park and ride locations.

6.13 Evans County Joint Comprehensive Plan

The latest Evans County Joint Comprehensive Plan was finished in September 2019. It is a collaborative plan for Evans County and its communities including Bellville, Claxton, Daisy, and Hagan.

Evans County boasts a well-equipped hospital providing a wide range of medical services, both public and private school

systems in addition to Ogeechee Technical College's campus, a general aviation airport featuring a 5,000-foot runway and new hangars, an expansive industrial park with essential services, and convenient access to four-lane highways. The active rail line that runs through all four municipalities further enhances its connectivity. With an estimated 2018 Census population of 10,721, Evans County maintains a population density of around 58 people per square mile within its 183 square miles of land, emphasizing its rural character. Although its population growth from 2000 to 2010 was 4.8%, nearly 13% less than the state's growth rate, the community remains dedicated to preserving its past while preparing for the future. Evans County has a vibrant history of tourism along U.S. 301 during the golden age of motoring and a legacy of family entrepreneurial success on a regional scale, with famous names like Claxton fruitcake and Claxton Poultry.

The plan aims to preserve the historic railroad depot, develop a conservation and nature preserve along U.S. 280, adopt a "Complete Streets Policy," boost the tourism sector, upgrade commercial zones, address substandard housing, enhance the overall aesthetics of the county, and pursue various transportation improvements, including highway, airport, rail, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure.

6.14 Wheeler County Joint Comprehensive Plan

The latest Wheeler County Joint Comprehensive Plan was completed in August 2019. It is a collaborative plan for Wheeler County and its communities including Alamo and Glenwood.

The 2018 Census reported Wheeler County to have a population of 7,879, representing a 6.2% increase from the 2010 Census. Spanning 300 square miles, the county ranks 100th in Georgia, resulting in a remarkably low population density of only 26 people per square mile. Wheeler County experienced a population growth rate of 20.1% from 2000 to 2010, exceeding the state's growth rate by about 2%. Wheeler County enjoys convenient access to nearby communities like Dublin and Vidalia, facilitated by U.S. 280, U.S. 441, and Georgia 19, as well as proximity to U.S. 341 and I-16. Travelers frequently choose Georgia Highway 19 through Wheeler County, not only as a less-traveled shortcut but also to savor its rural allure and beauty.

The Wheeler County Joint Comprehensive Plan sets forth goals geared towards enhancing the county's overall infrastructure and appeal, including, prioritizing street improvements, sidewalks, and landscaping projects to foster a more attractive and pedestrian-friendly environment, addressing the future widening of U.S. 280, and enhancing Georgia 19 as a tourism hub. Additionally, the plan envisions the creation of a dedicated bike route connecting Little Ocmulgee with other state parks in the region, including Gordonia-Altamaha and George L. Smith. Together, these goals reflect Wheeler County's commitment to creating a more vibrant and accessible community for residents and visitors alike.

7.0 Existing Transit Services

There are currently six public, demand-response transit services operating within the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region. These services are in Bleckley, Dodge, Telfair, Wayne, Wheeler, and Wilcox counties. The transit agencies that provide these services are detailed in the section. There is no fixed route, commuter bus, or rail transit services within the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region.

7.1 Regional Services

There is no regional transit service located within the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region at this time.

7.2 Local Services

7.2.1 Bleckley County Transit

Bleckley County Transit provides demand-response transit service to the general public within Bleckley County. Transit services are provided on weekdays between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4 p.m. Fares are a flat rate of \$5.00 for a round trip and \$8.00 for an out-of-county trip to Taylor Regional Hospital, which is located in Pulaski County, outside of the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region southwest of Bleckley County. An operational summary of Bleckley Country Transit can be found in Figure 21.

7.2.2 Dodge County Transit

Dodge County Transit provides demand-response transit services to the general public within Dodge County.

Transit services are provided on weekdays between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 4 p.m. Fares are a flat rate of \$2.00 for a round trip and \$2.00 for a delivery trip. Dodge Country Transit does not provide out-of-county services. An operational summary of Dodge County Transit can be found in Figure 22.

7.2.3 Telfair County Transit

Telfair County Transit provides demand-response transit services to the general public within Telfair County. Transit Services are provided on weekdays between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Fares are \$2.00. Telfair County Transit does not provide out-of-county services. An operational summary of Dodge County Transit can be found in Figure 23.

7.2.4 Wayne County Transit

Wayne County Transit provides demand-response transit services to the general public within Wayne County. Transit Services are provided 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Fares are \$4.00 for a trip between 0-10 miles, \$6.00 for a trip between 10-25 miles, \$13.00 for a trip between 26-50 miles, \$20.00 for a trip between 51-100 miles. These prices are all doubled when it is a round trip. For the elderly, handicapped individuals, or children five and under, the prices are half of what is listed for each section except for a trip between 26-50 miles, where the cost for a one-way trip is \$6.00. Wayne County Transit provides out-of-county transit services based on the fares listed above. An operational summary of Wayne County Transit can be found in Figure 24.

7.2.5 Wheeler County Transit

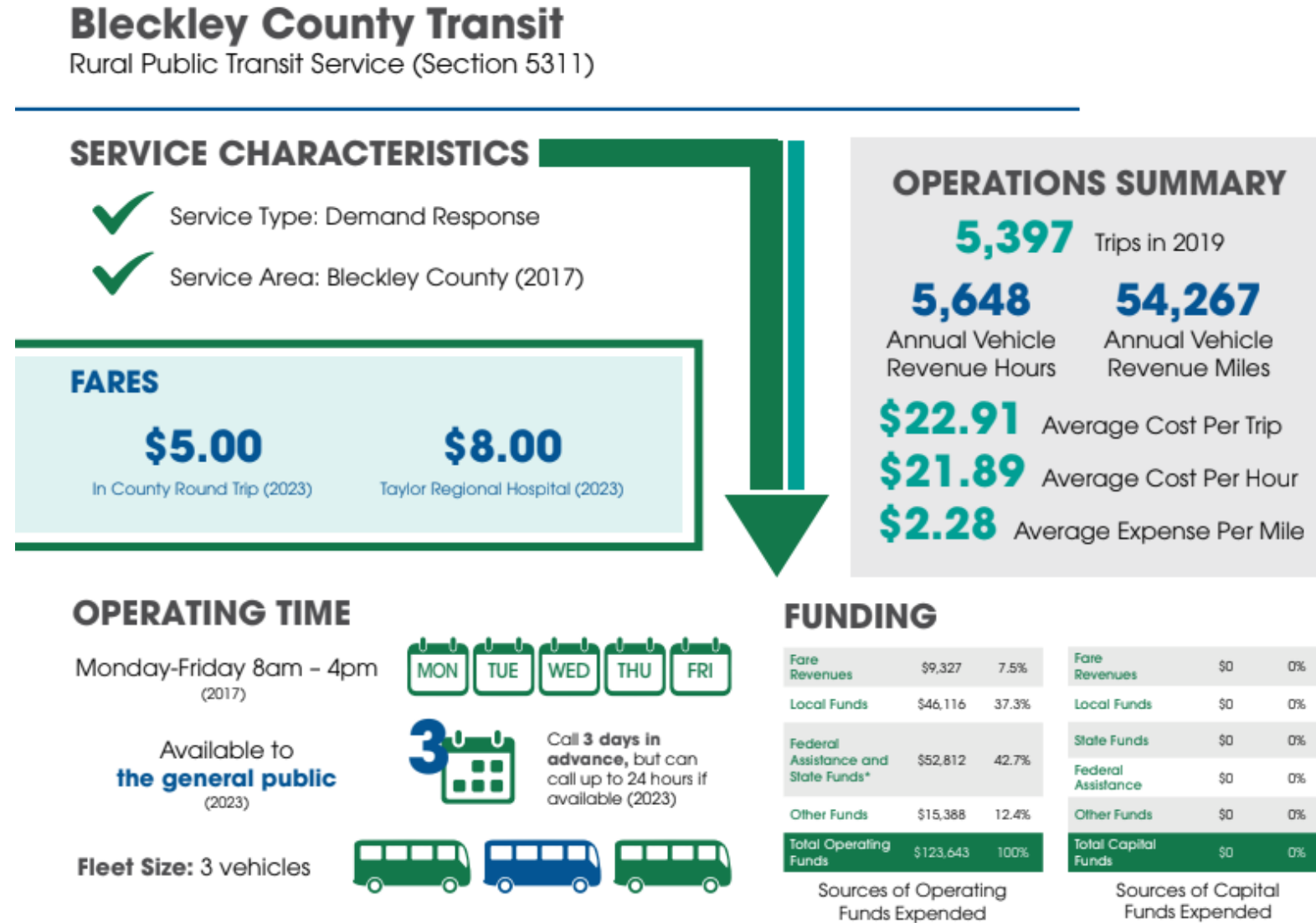
Wheeler County Transit provides demand-response transit services to the general public within Wheeler County.

Transit services are provided on weekdays between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Fares are \$2.00. Wheeler County Transit does not provide out-of-county services. An operational summary of Wheeler County Transit can be found in Figure 25.

7.2.6 Wilcox County Transit

Wilcox County Transit provides demand-response transit services to the general public within Wilcox County. Transit services are provided on weekdays between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 6 p.m. Fares are \$4.00 for a one-way trip within the county and \$6.00 for a one-way trip out-of-county up to 40 miles. An operational summary of Wilcox County Transit can be found in Figure 26.

Figure 21: Bleckley County Transit Summary



OPERATING TIME

Monday-Friday 8am – 4pm
(2017)

Available to
the general public
(2023)

Fleet Size: 3 vehicles

MON

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3

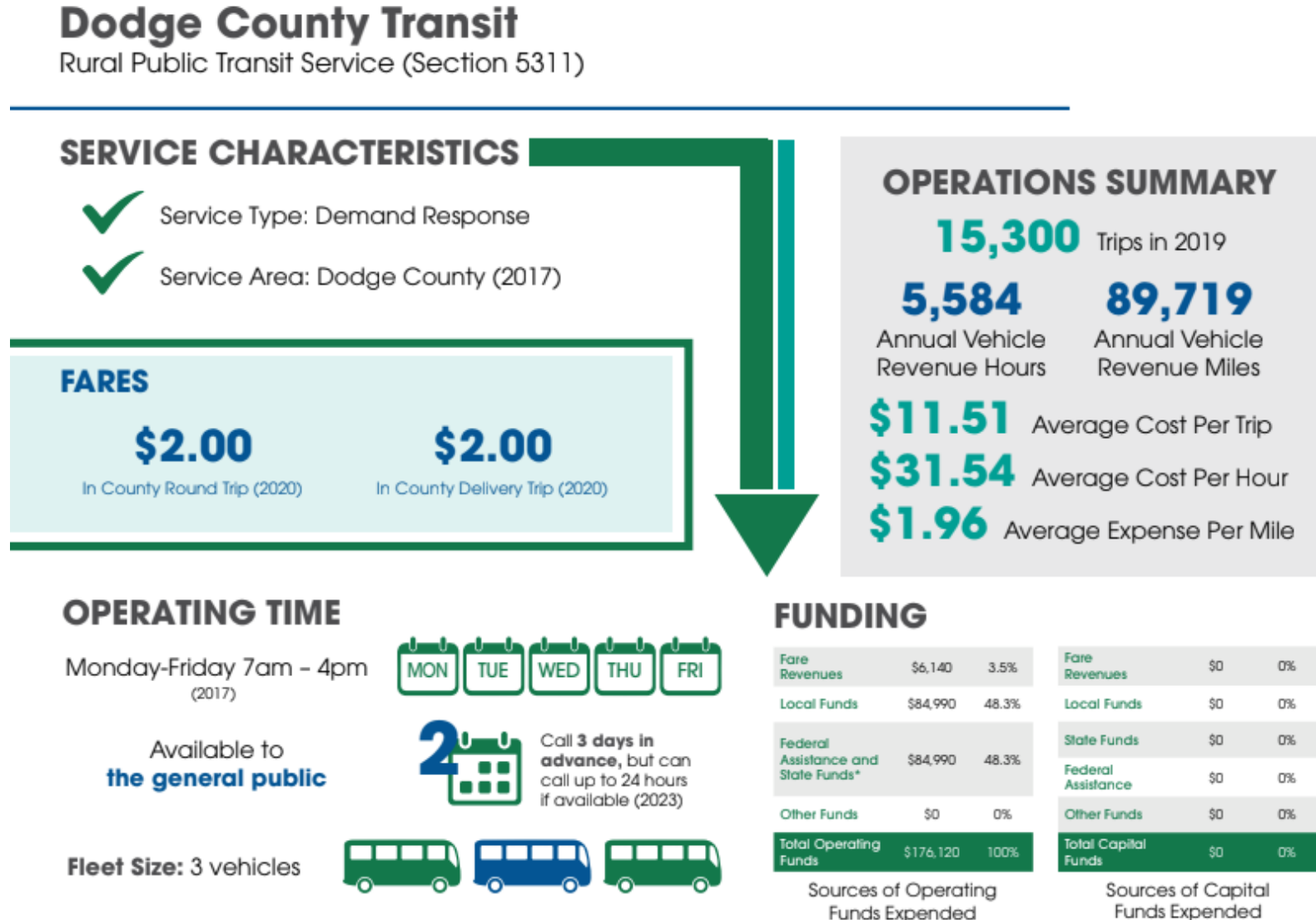
Call **3 days in advance**, but can call up to 24 hours if available (2023)

FUNDING

Sources of Operating Funds Expended			Sources of Capital Funds Expended		
Fare Revenues	\$9,327	7.5%	Fare Revenues	\$0	0%
Local Funds	\$46,116	37.3%	Local Funds	\$0	0%
Federal Assistance and State Funds*	\$52,812	42.7%	State Funds	\$0	0%
Other Funds	\$15,388	12.4%	Federal Assistance	\$0	0%
Total Operating Funds	\$123,643	100%	Other Funds	\$0	0%
			Total Capital Funds	\$0	0%

Sources: National Transit Database (NTD) (2019), Bleckley County Transit Policy (2023), GDOT Statewide Transit Profiles (2017)
*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for transit operators in Georgia.

Figure 22: Dodge County Transit Summary



OPERATING TIME

Monday-Friday 7am – 4pm (2017)

Available to
the general public

Call **3 days in advance**, but can call up to 24 hours if available (2023)

Fleet Size: 3 vehicles

FUNDING

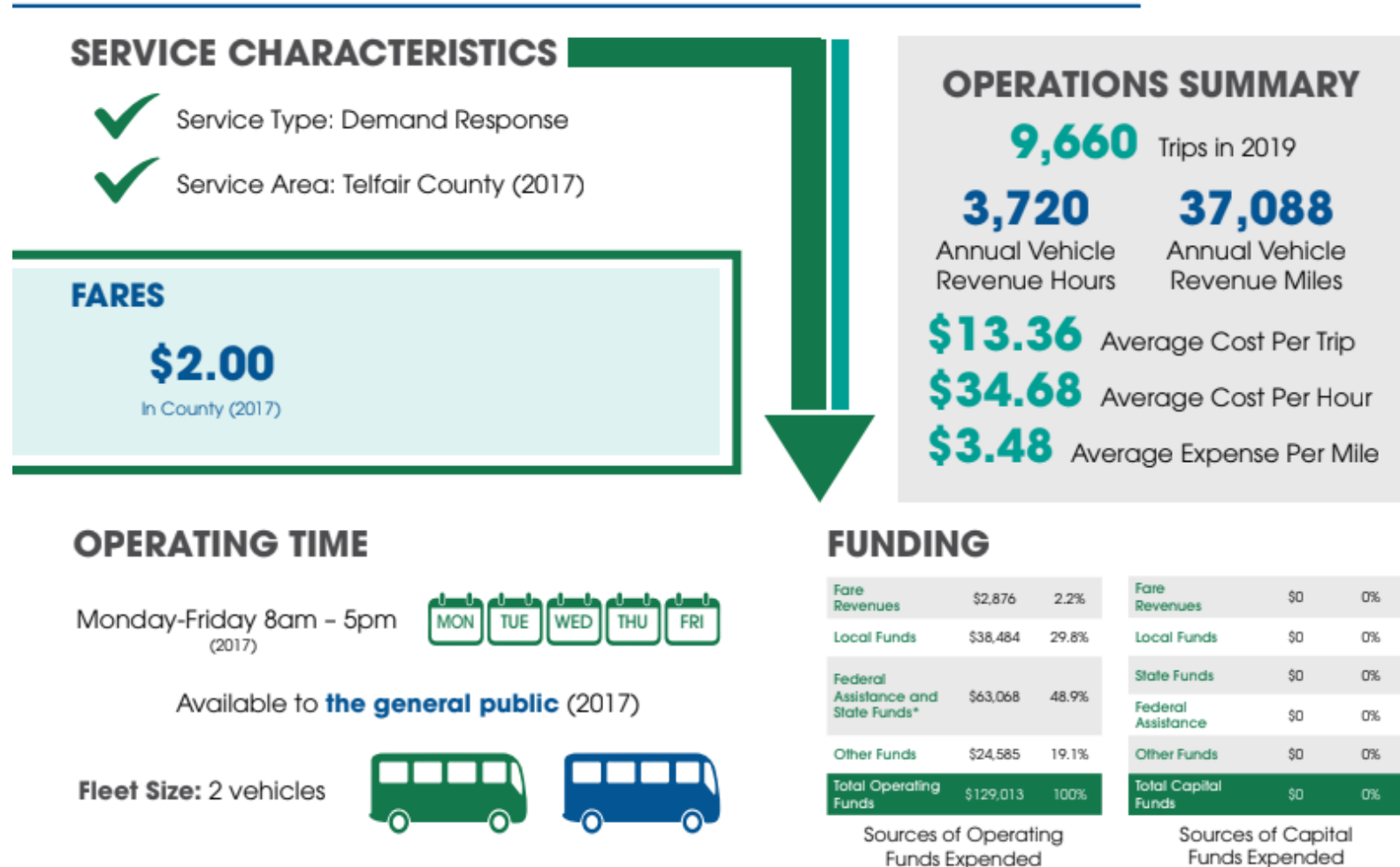
Sources of Operating Funds Expended			Sources of Capital Funds Expended		
Fare Revenues	\$6,140	3.5%	Fare Revenues	\$0	0%
Local Funds	\$84,990	48.3%	Local Funds	\$0	0%
Federal Assistance and State Funds*	\$84,990	48.3%	State Funds	\$0	0%
Other Funds	\$0	0%	Federal Assistance	\$0	0%
Total Operating Funds	\$176,120	100%	Total Capital Funds	\$0	0%

Sources: National Transit Database (NTD) (2019), Dodge County Transit Website (n.d.), Dodge County Transit Profiles (2020), GDOT Statewide Transit Profiles (2017) *GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for transit operators in Georgia.

Figure 23: Telfair County Transit Summary

Telfair County Transit

Rural Public Transit Service (Section 5311)



Sources: National Transit Database (NTD) (2019), GDOT Statewide Transit Profiles (2017), content.gatech.edu/ (Georgia Tech Thesis from 2019) *GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for transit operators in Georgia.

Figure 24: Wayne County Transit Summary

Wayne County Transit

Rural Public Transit Service (Section 5311)

SERVICE CHARACTERISTICS

- ✓ Service Type: Demand Response
- ✓ Service Area: Wayne County (2017)

FARES

Regular Fares					
0-10 miles	\$4.00	1-Way Trip	\$8.00	Per Round Trip	
11-25 miles	\$6.00	1-Way Trip	\$12.00	Per Round Trip	
26-50 miles	\$13.00	1-Way Trip	\$26.00	Per Round Trip	
51-100 miles	\$20.00	1-Way Trip	\$40.00	Per Round Trip	
Over 100 Miles Charged at Charter Prices - .30 Per Mile					
Elderly, Handicap, and Children 5 and Under Fares					
0-10 miles	\$2.00	1-Way Trip	\$4.00	Per Round Trip	
11-25 miles	\$3.00	1-Way Trip	\$6.00	Per Round Trip	
26-50 miles	\$6.00	1-Way Trip	\$12.00	Per Round Trip	
51-100 miles	\$10.00	1-Way Trip	\$20.00	Per Round Trip	

OPERATIONS SUMMARY

45,739 Trips in 2019

16,997 Annual Vehicle Revenue Hours

368,694 Annual Vehicle Revenue Miles

\$10.91 Average Cost Per Trip

\$29.37 Average Cost Per Hour

\$1.35 Average Expense Per Mile

OPERATING TIME

24 hours/day, 7 days/week



Fleet Size: 12 vehicles



3 Book 3 days in advance

Available to the general public

FUNDING

	Amount	Percentage
Fare Revenues	\$53,374	10.7%
Local Funds	\$96,883	19.4%
Federal Assistance and State Funds*	\$348,895	69.9%
Other Funds	\$0	0%
Total Operating Funds	\$499,152	100%

Sources of Operating Funds Expended

	Amount	Percentage
Fare Revenues	\$0	0%
Local Funds	\$13,882	8.6%
State Funds	\$130,807	81.2%
Federal Assistance	\$16,351	10.2%
Other Funds	\$0	0%
Total Capital Funds	\$161,040	100%

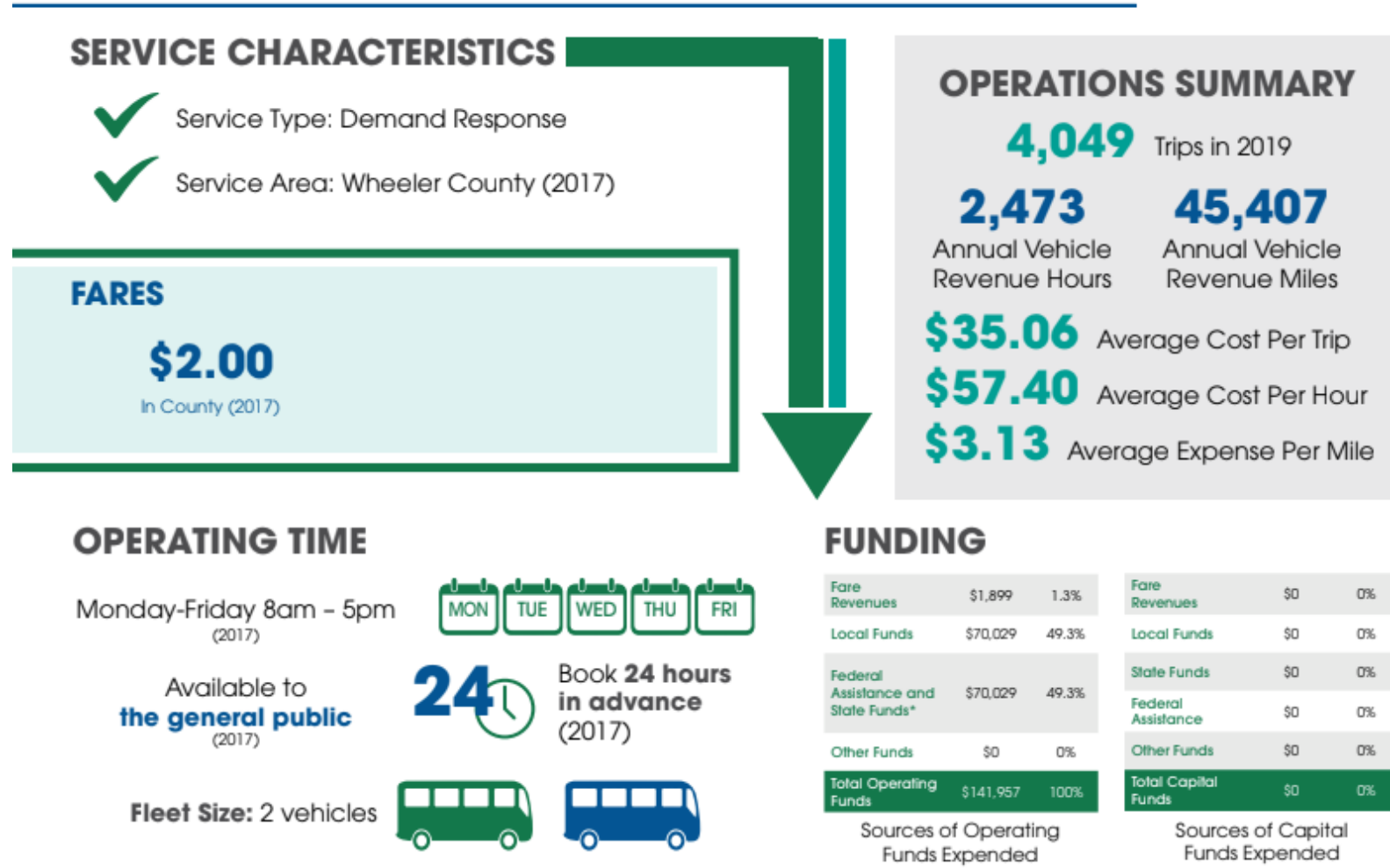
Sources of Capital Funds Expended

Sources: National Transit Database (NTD) (2019), Wayne County Transit Website (n.d.), GDOT Statewide Transit Profiles (2017) *GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for transit operators in Georgia.

Figure 25: Wheeler County Transit Summary

Wheeler County Transit

Rural Public Transit Service (Section 5311)

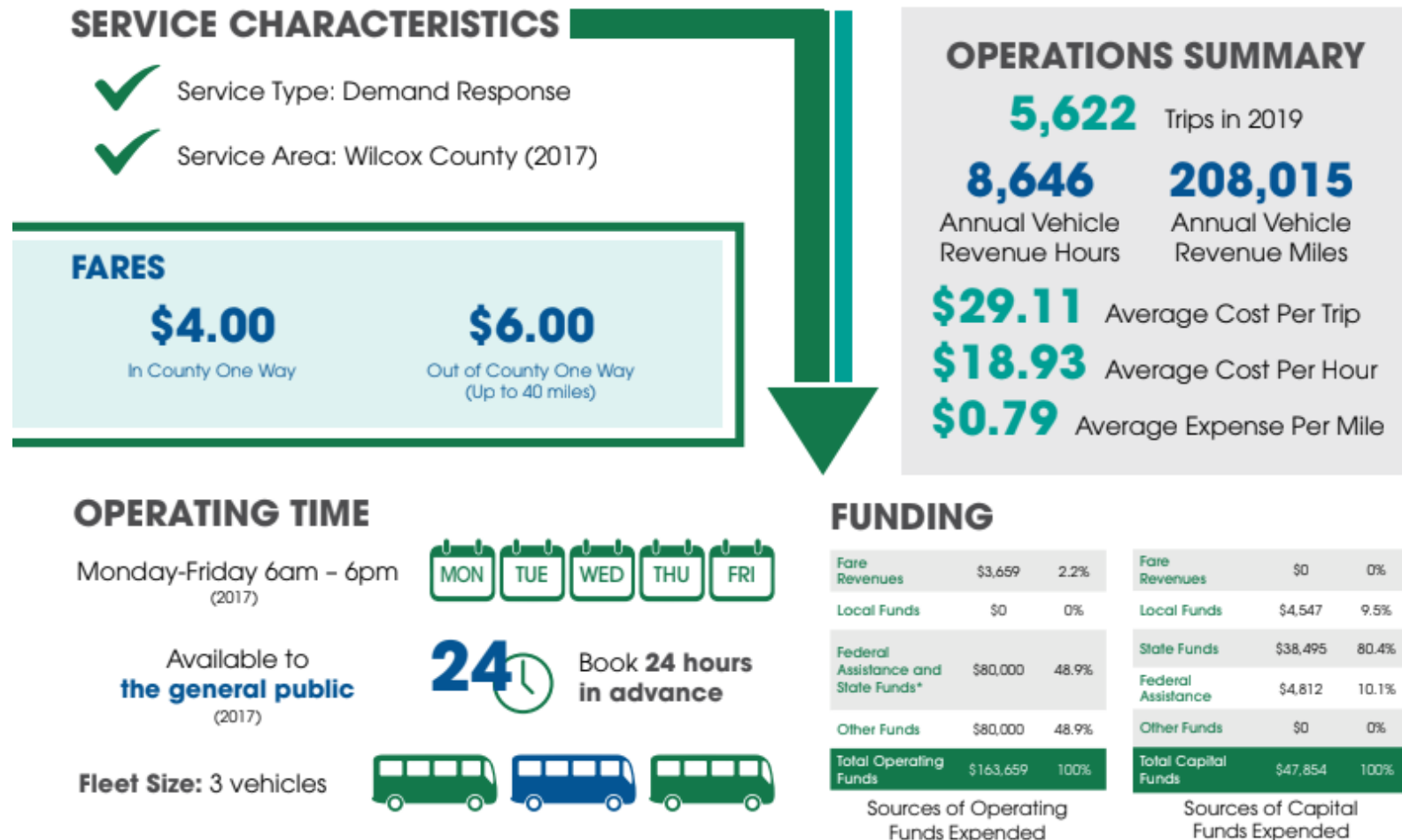


Sources: National Transit Database (NTD) (2019), GDOT Statewide Transit Profiles (2017)
*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for transit operators in Georgia.

Figure 26: Wilcox County Transit Summary

Wilcox County Transit

Rural Public Transit Service (Section 5311)



Sources: National Transit Database (NTD) (2019), Wilcox County Transit Website (n.d.), GDOT Transit Profiles (2017)
 *GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for transit operators in Georgia.

7.3 Transit Services in Surrounding Communities

Several transit agencies in surrounding communities were identified for peer comparison purposes. These agencies have similarities to the various systems located within the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region and can provide useful performance measure comparisons and potential best practices.

The National Transit Database (NTD) provides standardized performance data for all federally-funded transit agencies in the United States. Though the most recent available NTD dataset is from 2021, this report uses 2019 data. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, transit ridership was greatly reduced, so 2021 data will not provide an accurate representation of transit funding and operations.

Six peer systems, geographically spread throughout Georgia, were selected due to their similar size and rural location. These systems are detailed below.

7.3.1 Banks County Transit

Banks County Transit, located in the Georgia Mountains Region, is a county-wide demand response transit system that also provides service to outside destinations including Homer, Lula, Commerce, Cornelia, Demorest, Athens, Gainesville, Toccoa, Royston, and Jefferson. Service is provided from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekdays.

The 2019 operating budget for Banks County Transit totaled \$110,832, with an average cost per trip of \$30.00. Banks County Transit provided a total of 3,695 passenger trips.

7.3.2 Habersham County Transit

Habersham County Transit, located in the Georgia Mountains Region, is a county-wide demand response transit system. Service is provided from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekdays.

The 2019 operating budget for Habersham County Transit totaled \$132,891, with an average cost of \$15.87. Habersham County Transit provided a total of 8,374 passenger trips.

7.3.3 Lumpkin County Transit

Lumpkin County Transit, located in the Georgia Mountains Region, is a county-wide demand response transit system. Service is provided from 8:15 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. on weekdays.

The 2019 operating budget for Lumpkin County Transit totaled \$126,667, with an average cost per trip of \$23.32. Lumpkin County Transit provided a total of 5,431 trips.

7.3.4 Union County Transit

Union County transit, located in the Georgia Mountains Region, is a county-wide demand response transit system. Service is provided from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on weekdays.

The 2019 operating budget for Lumpkin County Transit totaled \$87,989, with an average cost per trip of \$14.24. Union County Transit provided a total of 6,180 passenger trips.

7.3.5 Dooly County Transit

Dooly County Transit, located in the Georgia River Valley Region, is a county-wide demand response transit system that services the City of Vienna and surrounding communities in

Dooly County. Service is provided from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays.

The 2019 operating budget for Dooly County Transit totaled \$598,378, with an average cost per trip of \$25.83. Dooly County Transit provided a total of 23,164 passenger trips.

7.3.6 Chattooga County Transit

Chattooga County Transit, located in the Northwest Georgia Region, is a county-wide demand response transit system that also provides a continuous route from senior centers to other neighborhoods and stores. Service is provided from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. from Monday to Saturday.

The 2019 operating budget for Chattooga County Transit totaled \$148,245, with an average cost per trip of \$12.56. Chattooga County Transit provided 11,804 passenger trips.

7.4 Performance Measures

Along with US Census data, NTD datasets can be used to analyze performance measures that track how efficiently or effectively transit systems operate. Though performance measures are effective in quantifying operational characteristics of transit operators, every community and every transit operator face a different series of operating conditions and challenges. Recognizing that these performance measures cannot convey every aspect of a system's operation is an important factor in analyzing a system's past operation.

The peer counties were selected mainly on their classification as rural transit by the Georgia Department of Transportation and having a similar fleet size as the counties with transit within the

Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region. Various counties in regions throughout Georgia were identified to provide the broadest scope of counties. These counties are far from the 13-county Atlanta Region to have similar populations and quality of transit. Four counties were chosen from the Georgia Mountains Region, one county was chosen from the Georgia River Valley Region, and one county was chosen from the Northwest Georgia Region.

Table 19 and Table 20 show several performance measures for the six transit operators in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region, as well as data for the peer systems discussed above.

Table 18: Performance Metrics for Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region Counties (2019)

	Bleckley County Transit	Dodge County Transit	Telfair County Transit	Wayne County Transit	Wheeler County Transit	Wilcox County Transit
Service Data						
Service Area Population	12,562	20,089	12,860	30,118	7,568	8,841
Population Density (per sq mi)	57.33	39.93	28.96	46.39	25.20	23.14
Annual Operating Budget	\$123,643	\$176,120	\$129,013	\$499,152	\$141,957	\$163,659
Unlinked Passenger Trips	5,397	15,300	9,660	45,739	4,049	5,622
Vehicle Revenue Miles	54,267	89,719	37,088	368,694	45,407	208,015
Vehicle Revenue Hours	5,648	5,584	3,720	16,997	2,473	8,646
Population Metrics						
Trips per Capita	0.43	0.76	0.75	1.52	0.54	0.64
Revenue Hours per Capita	0.45	0.28	0.29	0.56	0.33	0.98
Cost Metrics						
Cost per Trip	\$22.91	\$11.51	\$13.36	\$10.91	\$35.06	\$29.11
Cost per Mile	\$2.28	\$1.96	\$3.48	\$1.35	\$3.13	\$0.79
Cost per Hour	\$21.89	\$31.54	\$34.68	\$29.37	\$57.40	\$18.93
Fare Metrics						
Fare Revenue per Trip	\$1.73	\$0.40	\$0.30	\$1.17	\$0.47	\$0.65
Recovery Ratio	8.0%	3.0%	2.0%	11.0%	1.0%	2.0%

Source: FTA National Transit Database, 2019 Annual Data Tables

Table 19: Performance Metrics for the Selected Transit Agency Peers (2019)

	Banks County Transit	Habersham County Transit	Lumpkin County Transit	Union County Transit	Dooly County Transit	Chattooga County Transit
Service Data						
Service Area Population	18,035	46,031	33,488	24,632	13,390	24,965
Population Density (per sq mi)	76.94	164.95	99.24	74.85	33.70	79.62
Annual Operating Budget	\$110,832	\$132,891	\$126,667	\$87,989	\$598,378	\$148,245
Unlinked Passenger Trips	3,695	8,374	5,431	6,180	23,164	11,804
Vehicle Revenue Miles	53,000	65,728	36,222	43,688	509,546	81,544
Vehicle Revenue Hours	3,413	4,374	3,169	3,878	20,571	5,717
Population Metrics						
Trips per Capita	0.20	0.18	0.16	0.25	1.73	0.47
Revenue Hours per Capita	0.19	0.10	0.09	0.16	1.54	0.23
Cost Metrics						
Cost per Trip	\$30.00	\$15.87	\$23.32	\$14.24	\$25.83	\$12.56
Cost per Mile	\$2.09	\$2.02	\$3.50	\$2.01	\$1.17	\$1.82
Cost per Hour	\$32.47	\$30.38	\$39.97	\$22.69	\$29.09	\$25.93
Fare Metrics						
Fare Revenue per Trip	\$1.54	\$0.69	\$1.07	\$1.97	\$0.49	\$1.63
Recovery Ratio	5.0%	4.0%	5.0%	14.0%	2.0%	13.0%

Source: FTA National Transit Database, 2019 Annual Data Tables

Dooly County Transit stands out as the highest performing peer comparison for the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region transit services. Dooly County has a trip per capita of 1.73, which is higher than all other counties including the six counties in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region. While it does have a cost per trip that is higher than most other counties, it also enjoys the highest revenue hours per capita out of all counties in Table 26 and 27 at 1.54 hours. Some reasons for Dooly County's success are its high annual operating budget of \$598,378, which allows it to provide more robust transit service. Another reason that Dooly County is a strong peer is because the county has a low population density of 33.7 persons per square mile. This density is similar to the HOGA rural services. Dooly County has operating hours from 8:00 a.m. to 5 p.m., which also makes it similar to all the counties with transit in HOGA. However, it still manages to have significant usage compared to other counties in the region, suggesting that people are more likely to use Dooly County Transit.

Another strong peer is Union County Transit as it has a lower cost per trip at \$14.24 than many of the other peer counties and counties in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region, which makes it more efficient. What makes Union County Transit stand out is that it has a high fare revenue per trip at \$1.97, which is the highest of both sets of counties. This is impressive for a system that has a lower number of trips (6,180). However, this should not be the only metric looked at. Union County has operating hours from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. yet still has an efficiently running system.

When determining an optimal system, all these factors should be considered. Other important factors are a high number of trips per capita as that shows that people are using the system and high revenue hours per capita. Fare price, system reliability, and operating hours also encourage the use of transit services.

While not one transit agency in the peer list meets all these factors perfectly, they provide relevant and helpful information in what the transit agencies in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region should aim for.

8.0 Transit Supportive Land Use and Development

This section analyzes land uses to determine where transit supportive land uses are within the region and where future development will occur. In addition to land uses, key destinations and essential services, developments of regional impact, affordable housing, and senior centers are also identified and discussed in this section.

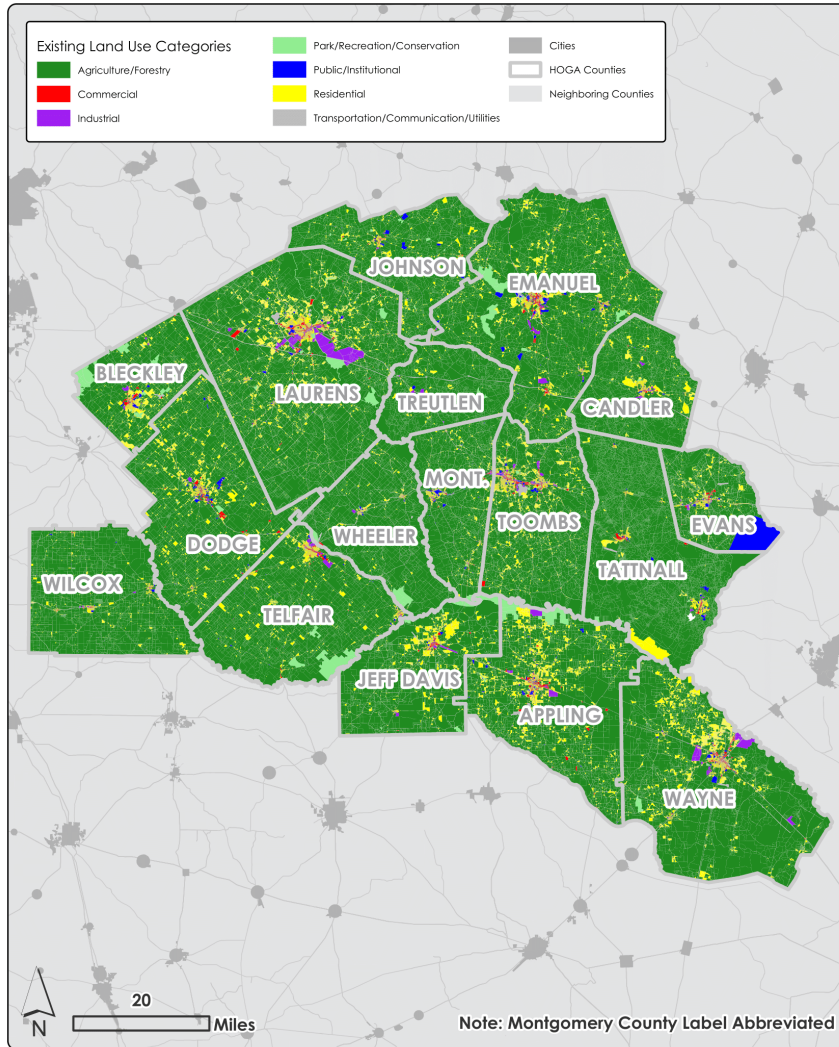
8.1 Existing Land Use

As shown in Figure 27, Existing Land Use for the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region contains 8 categories: Agriculture/Forestry, Commercial, Industrial, Park/Recreation/Conservation, Public/Institutional, Residential, Transportation/Communication/Utilities. The largest land use in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region is Agriculture/Forestry, as shown in Figure 27. The second-largest land use is Industrial, followed by Public/Institutional. High concentrations of Industrial can be found in central Laurens County, north Telfair County, central Wayne County, and southern Emanuel County.

Transit-supportive land uses consist of Residential, Commercial, and Industrial. For Residential, high concentrations are in central Wayne, Appling, Toombs, Jeff Davis, Emanuel, and Laurens County, as well as southern Tattnall. Most Residential and Commercial land uses are located along major US Highways and city-centers.

Existing land use indicates that the region is largely rural except for cities like Jesup, Baxley, Hazelhurst, Eastman, Dublin, Lyons, and Swainsboro, which each have a large distribution of Residential and Commercial land uses. The city of Dublin, located in Laurens County, has the highest concentration of Industrial land use. Evans County contains the largest concentrations of Residential and Public/Institutional Land use. Wayne, Appling, Jeff Davis, and Laurens County also contain very large clusters of Residential Land Use. Bleckley, Telfair, Wheeler, Laurens, and Emanuel County also all have high areas of Park/Recreation/Conservation Land use.

Figure 27: Existing Land Use



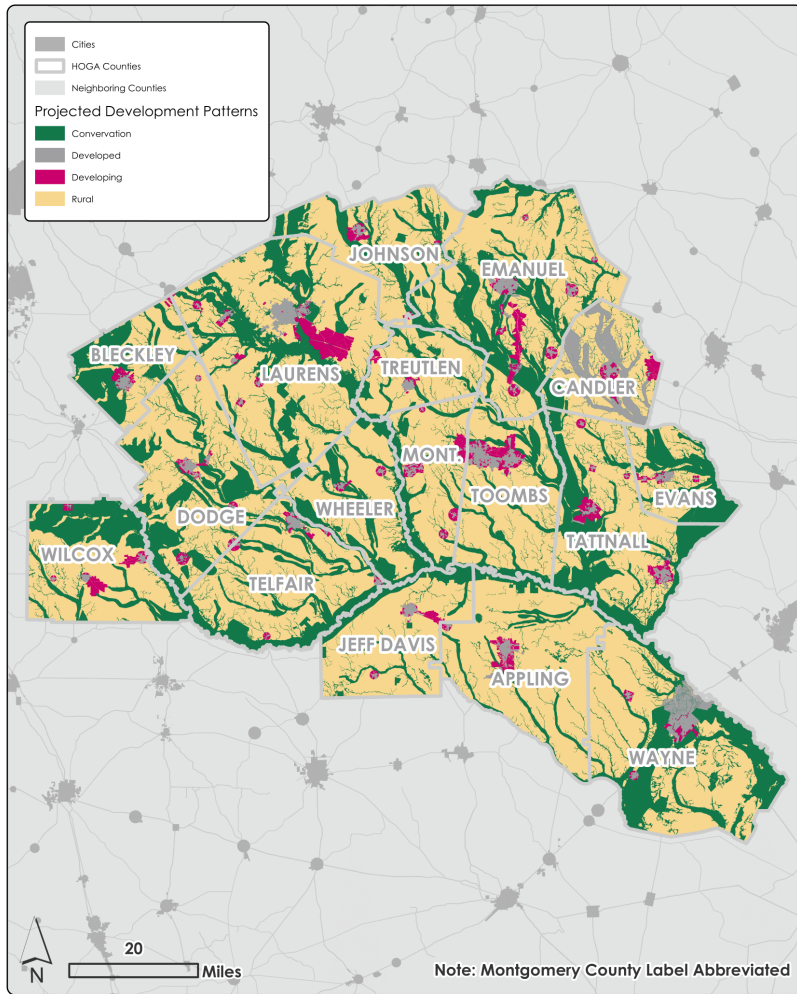
Source: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission Geographic Information Systems Existing Land Use Dataset

8.2 Future Land Use / Projected Development Patterns

The Heart of Georgia Altamaha Future Land Use dataset consists of conservation, developed, developing, and rural areas. Figure 28 shows where the region desires to stay rural, with land throughout the region dedicated to conservation and the locations where development is welcome. Many small cities have already been developed in the region, but there are areas where development is occurring. The largest developing area is in central Laurens south of the city of Dublin. Other developing areas surround the following cities: Baxley in Appling County, Lyons in Toombs County, Rochelle in Wilcox County, and Reidsville in Tattnall County. There is another long stretch of developing areas connecting the City of Swainsboro to the City of Oak Park in Emmanuel County. Another large area of development is located on the eastern side of Candler County. Developed and developing areas with compact and dense land uses could support transit by increasing ridership.

Land uses that support multi-family housing units, commercial uses, public/institution uses, and light industrial in high density or in close proximity of one another can be beneficial for transit. Developing areas have opportunities for planned new development, whereas developed areas may have to undergo a process of updating zoning laws to create or change existing zoning to transit-supporting zoning and land uses. However, many county plans do not favor this approach as they seek to preserve their rural and small-town character in the region.

Figure 28: Projected Development Patterns



Source: Heart of Georgia Altamaha Regional Commission Geographic Information Systems Future Land Use Dataset

8.3 Key Destinations and Essential Services

Key destinations and essential services are used by residents or visitors for commercial, social, religious, public safety, recreation, or governmental needs. Table 27 shows the different categories of services in the HOGA region, excluding places of worship, which are seen in Figure 33. The majority of key destinations and services, 49 out of the 311 total, are in the most populous county in the HOGA region, Laurens County, near the city of Dublin. The county with the second most key destinations and services is Tattnall County, home to Reidsville, with 40 out of the 311 total destinations.

Other major key destinations and attraction hubs include Jesup in Wayne County, Hazlehurst in Jeff Davis County, Swainsboro in Emanuel County, and Vidalia in Toombs County. Wilcox and Treutlen Counties are two of the three least populous counties in the HOGA region and hold the lowest count of key destinations and essential services, both with seven.

The most common facility in the HOGA region is schools, making up 23.1% of all key destinations and services. Each of the 17 counties in the HOGA region are home to at least one school, and higher education centers are in 10 of the 17 counties. Laurens County stands out with 19 of the 72 schools and 3 of the 14 higher education centers, Oconee Fall Line Technical College, Georgia Military College – Dublin Campus, and Middle Georgia State University – Dublin Campus. Table 21 includes the higher education facilities (colleges and universities) in the region.

Of the 14 higher education campuses in the HOGA region, only three advertise a shuttle or demand-response transit service:

- There is shuttle service between the Middle Georgia State University Cochran and Eastman campuses Monday-Thursday with two stops in Cochran and one in Eastman. There are five departures from each location respectively, per day.
- Ogeechee Technical College allows students to order a demand-response car ride provided by Coastal Regional Coaches, advertised around ~\$3 per ride.
- While there is currently no shuttle service on the East Georgia State Swainsboro Campus, it is worth noting that there used to be a shuttle service that took students to a grocery store as there is nothing within walking distance. Today, the Swainsboro Campus does not maintain a shuttle service, but the students on the Statesboro Campus (in Bulloch County, adjacent to the HOGA region and directly east of Candler County) may park at Paulson Stadium and ride the Georgia Southern University (GS) bus that runs a route inside the East Georgia State College Statesboro Campus.

Table 20: Higher Education Campuses

Name	Location	Shuttle Service
Brewton-Parker College	Mount Vernon (Montgomery Co.)	No
Coastal Pines Technical College - Baxley Campus	Baxley (Appling Co.)	No
Coastal Pines Technical College - Hazlehurst Campus	Hazlehurst (Jeff Davis Co.)	No
Coastal Pines Technical College - Jesup Campus	Jesup (Wayne Co.)	No
East Georgia State College – Swainsboro Campus	Swainsboro (Emanuel Co.)	No
Georgia Military College - Dublin Campus	Dublin (Laurens Co.)	No
Georgia Military College - Eastman Campus	Eastman (Dodge Co.)	No
Middle Georgia State University - Cochran Campus	Cochran (Bleckley Co.)	Yes
Middle Georgia State University - Dublin Campus	Dublin (Laurens Co.)	No
Middle Georgia State University - Eastman Campus	Eastman (Dodge Co.)	Yes
Oconee Fall Line Technical College - Dublin Campus	Dublin (Laurens Co.)	No
Ogeechee Technical College- Hagan Campus	Hagan (Evans Co.)	Yes
Southeastern Technical College - Swainsboro Campus	Swainsboro (Emanuel Co.)	No
Southeastern Technical College - Vidalia Campus	Vidalia (Toombs Co.)	No

There are ten hospitals in nine of the HOGA counties, as seen in Table 22. Appling Healthcare in Appling County, Bleckley Memorial Hospital in Bleckley County, Candler County Hospital in Candler County, Dodge County Hospital in Dodge County, Evans Memorial Hospital in Evans County, Jeff Davis Hospital in Jeff Davis County, Fairview Park Hospital and Carl Vinson VA Medical Center/Hospital in Laurens County, Memorial Health Meadows Hospital in Toombs County, and Wayne Memorial Hospital in Wayne County. The Carl Vinson VA Medical Center is the only facility for which shuttle service was located on the website. This Center offers shuttle service via the Disabled American Veterans (DAV). Rides must be arranged 48 hours in advance.

Table 21: Hospitals

Name	Location
Appling Healthcare Center	Baxley (Appling Co.)
Bleckley Memorial Hospital	Cochran (Bleckley Co.)
Candler County Hospital	Metter (Candler Co.)
Carl Vinson VA Medical Center	Dublin (Laurens Co.)
Dodge County Hospital	Eastman (Dodge Co.)
Evans Memorial Hospital	Claxton (Evans Co.)
Fairview Park Hospital	Dublin (Laurens Co.)
Jeff Davis Hospital	Hazlehurst (Jeff Davis Co.)
Memorial Health Meadows Hospital	Vidalia (Toombs Co.) ¹¹
Wayne Memorial Hospital	Jesup (Wayne Co.)

Table 22: Major Medical Centers

Name	Location
CareConnect Convenient Care and Pediatrics	Eastman (Dodge Co.)
CareConnect Family Practice	Cochran (Bleckley Co.)
CareConnect Family Practice	Rochelle (Wilcox Co.)
Community Health Care Systems	Dublin (Laurens Co.)
Community Health Care Systems	McRae-Helena (Telfair Co.)
East Georgia Healthcare Center	Swainsboro (Emanuel Co.)
East Georgia Healthcare Center	Metter (Candler Co.)
East Georgia Healthcare Center	Reidsville (Tattnall Co.)
East Georgia Healthcare Center	Vidalia (Toombs Co.)
East Georgia Healthcare Center	Soperton (Treutlen Co.)
Emanuel Medical Center	Swainsboro (Emanuel Co.)
Medical Center Preventive Care & Wellness	Dublin (Laurens Co.)
Medical Wellness Center of Georgia	Hazlehurst (Jeff Davis Co.)
Optim Medical Center	Reidsville (Tattnall Co.)

As seen in Table 23, major medical centers (not including hospitals, urgent care facilities, small medical centers/solo practitioners, or county health departments) are in 15 of the 17 counties.

Additionally, County Health Departments are located in the following counties:

- Emanuel County Health Department, Swainsboro
- Appling County Health Department, Baxley
- Candler County Health Department, Metter
- Evans County Health Department, Claxton
- Dodge County Health Department, Eastman
- Jeff Davis County Health Department, Hazlehurst
- Laurens County Health Department, Dublin
- Tattnall County Health Department, Reidsville
- Telfair County Health department, McRae-Helena
- Toombs County Health Department, Lyons
- Treutlen county Health Department, Soperton
- Wheeler County Health Department, Alamo
- Wilcox County Health Department, Rochelle

There are no grocery stores located in Bleckley, Candler, Evans, Johnson, Treutlen, or Wilcox counties. Nine tourist attractions are spread out among six counties in the HOGA region, with Jeff Davis, Tattnall, and Toombs counties each having two and Emanuel, Montgomery, and Telfair counties having one.

Table 23: Key Destinations and Essential Services

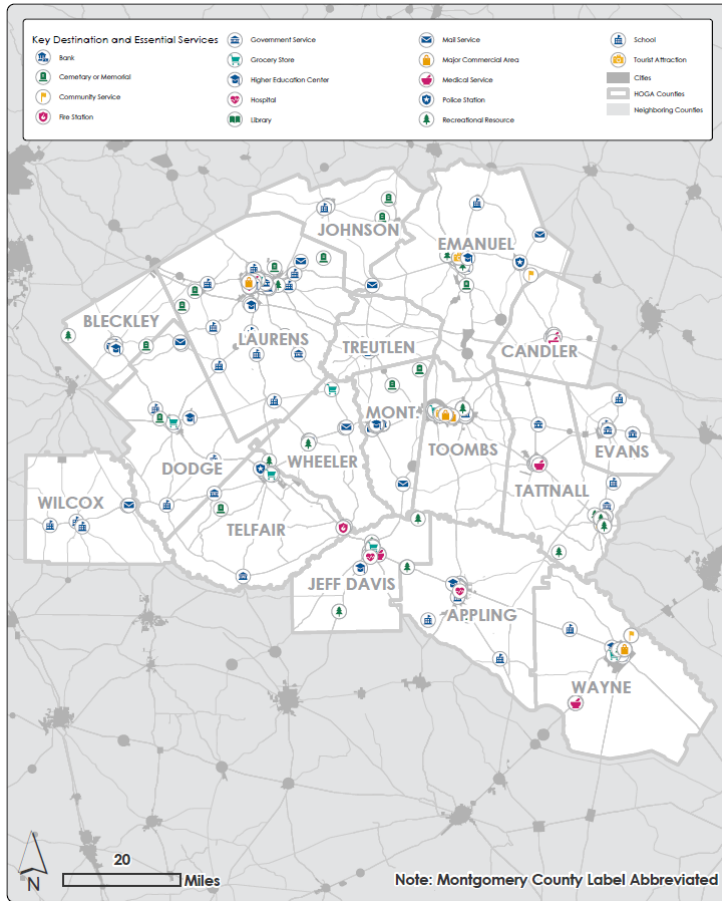
Type	Number of Services	Percent of Total Services
Bank	9	2.8%
Cemetery or Memorial	13	4.1%
Community Service	5	1.6%
Fire Station	5	1.6%
Government Service	35	11.2%
Grocery Store	19	6.1%
Higher Education Center	14	4.5%
Hospital	10	3.2%
Library	9	2.8%
Mail Service	29	9.3%
Major Commercial Area	4	1.2%
Medical Service	27	8.6%
Police Station	6	1.9%
Recreational Resource	45	14.7%
School	72	23.1%
Tourist Attraction	9	2.8%
Total	311	100%

Source: Open Street Map www.openstreetmap.org

Recreational resources, including camping, caravan, and picnic sites, playgrounds, swimming pools, and other spaces used for sports and recreation, make up about 14.5% of the HOGA region’s key destinations and services. As seen in Figure 32, with its southern border running along the Altamaha River, Tattnall County is home to one-third of all recreational resources in the HOGA region, with various places to fish, hunt, golf, camp, canoe, paddleboat, and swim. Tattnall County is also home to the Gordonia-Altamaha State Park and the historic Wiregrass Trail, which travels along SR 57 and is the shortest distance from Atlanta to the Golden Isles of the coast.

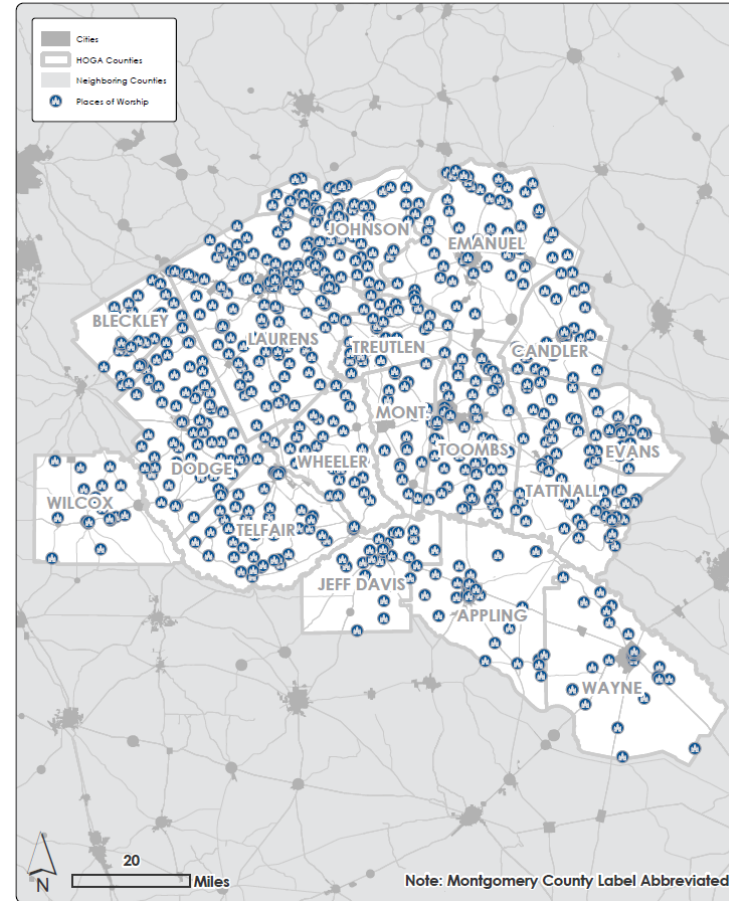
The HOGA region at large is home to 768 places of worship, with all 768 places of worship belonging to a facet of Christianity. Each county in the HOGA region has at least 18 places of worship, with the average being 45 places of worship per county, and the maximum being 130 places of worship, in Laurens County.

Figure 29: Key Destinations and Essential Services



Source: Open Street Map Points of Interest (POI) Dataset

Figure 30: Places of Worship



Source: Open Street Map Points of Interest (POI)

8.4 Developments of Regional Impact

A total of seven projects in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region have been submitted for consideration under the Developments of Regional Impact (DRI) program, as outlined in Table 28. DRIs are large-scale developments that are likely to have regional effects beyond the local government jurisdiction in which they are located, according to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA). These projects, illustrated in Figure 31, encompass two truck stops, three industrial developments comprising various building spaces, one landfill expansion initiative, and one dairy farm project. All these projects have been successfully completed, apart from the Alan Scarbrough project, a Speedway truck stop, which has submitted its initial DRI form to the DCA for review.

Table 24: Developments of Regional Impact

Project	Development Type	County	City	Project Details
Heart of Georgia Mega Site	Industrial	Laurens	Unincorporated	Located at the northeast intersection of I-16 and Georgia Hwy 199, a 2000 acre industrial/commercial park designed for a broad range of facilities, from large scale warehouse manufacturing/distribution centers to smaller retail and commercial uses.
Alan Scarbrough	Truck Stops	Laurens	Dublin	A 4,600 square foot Speedway Fuel Station with 8 diesel pumps, 24 gas pumps, and 20 truck parking spots.
QuikTrip #7075	Truck Stops	Laurens	Dublin	A two-canopied, 8,292 square foot convenience store at the southwest intersection of US-441 and Firetower Road.
Hwy 257 at 441 Bypass Logistics Center	Industrial	Laurens	Dublin	A 50-acre industrial development to include 810,000 square feet of building space.
Broadhurst Environmental Landfill Proposed Expansion	Unknown	Wayne	Unincorporated	Proposed expansion of the existing MSW (Municipal Solid Waste) landfill to utilize approximately 312 acres of the 600-acre site.
Vanguard Renewables on Schaapman Holstein's Dairy	Other	Wilcox	Unincorporated	A +/- 7-acre anaerobic co-digestion system on the Schaapman Holsteins' Dairy Farm to manage their manure and produce value added agricultural by-products.
Dublin Logistics Center	Industrial	Laurens	Dublin	A 116-acre industrial development to include up to 1.6M square feet of building space.
Hyundai/LG EV Battery Plant	Industrial	Bryan	Savannah	A 17M square feet, \$4.3B electric battery plant by Hyundai Motor Group and LG Energy Solutions, set to provide 3,000 jobs and produce 300,000 batteries per year, aiming to begin production as soon as late 2025.

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, near the under-construction Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America site. The proposed facility is located just east of the HOGA region near Savannah, Georgia, and is part of an intended \$5-billion-dollar investment and 8,100 jobs endeavor by Hyundai. In addition to this battery plant, auto parts suppliers such as Hanon Systems and NVH Korea have pledged to invest an additional two-billion dollars and 4,800 jobs in the region surrounding the Hyundai site. Hanon Systems plans to hire at least 160 new employees by building a \$40 million dollar heating and cooling systems factory [for EVs] in a business park on the southern outskirts of Statesboro in Bulloch County. NVH Korea also plans to contribute 160+ employees with a 72-million-dollar EV parts plant in Locust Grove which is in Henry County, just south of Atlanta. While none of these plants reside directly in the HOGA region, they will influence employment trends of the residents within the HOGA region, highlighting an opportunity for transit to and from these facilities.

In addition to illuminating transit opportunities as a consequence of the Hyundai/LG Metaplant and related plants, a dire need for housing is to be anticipated. According to Zillow, the housing supply for the Ellabell, Georgia area in Bryan County shows less than 60 properties. With an anticipated 8,100 jobs coming to the region over the next several years, the lack of housing availability is likely to affect the location and work commutes of the labor force. Additionally, several towns and cities around the metaplant site region have zoning codes that discourage multi-family developments, mobile homes, or tiny home developments. This could mean a high percentage of a

commuting labor force from further the middle of the HOGA region or the coastal areas of the state.

Figure 31: Developments of Regional Impact



Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs

8.5 Affordable Housing Initiatives

Federal affordable housing initiatives consist of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) properties, multi-family assisted properties, and public housing properties. Table 26 shows the distribution of these initiatives in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region, and Figure 32 shows their locations across the region. LIHTC properties are properties that have been acquired, rehabilitated, or newly constructed from tax credits to provide rental housing for lower-income households. Multi-family assisted properties consist of United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) subsidized multifamily rental housing properties with five or more dwelling units. These typically include apartments or town houses, but can also include nursing homes, hospitals, elderly housing, mobile home parks, retirement service centers, and occasionally vacant land. For this section, housing and properties for seniors have been excluded. Public housing properties are housing with aid administered from HUD for low-income residents at rents they can afford.

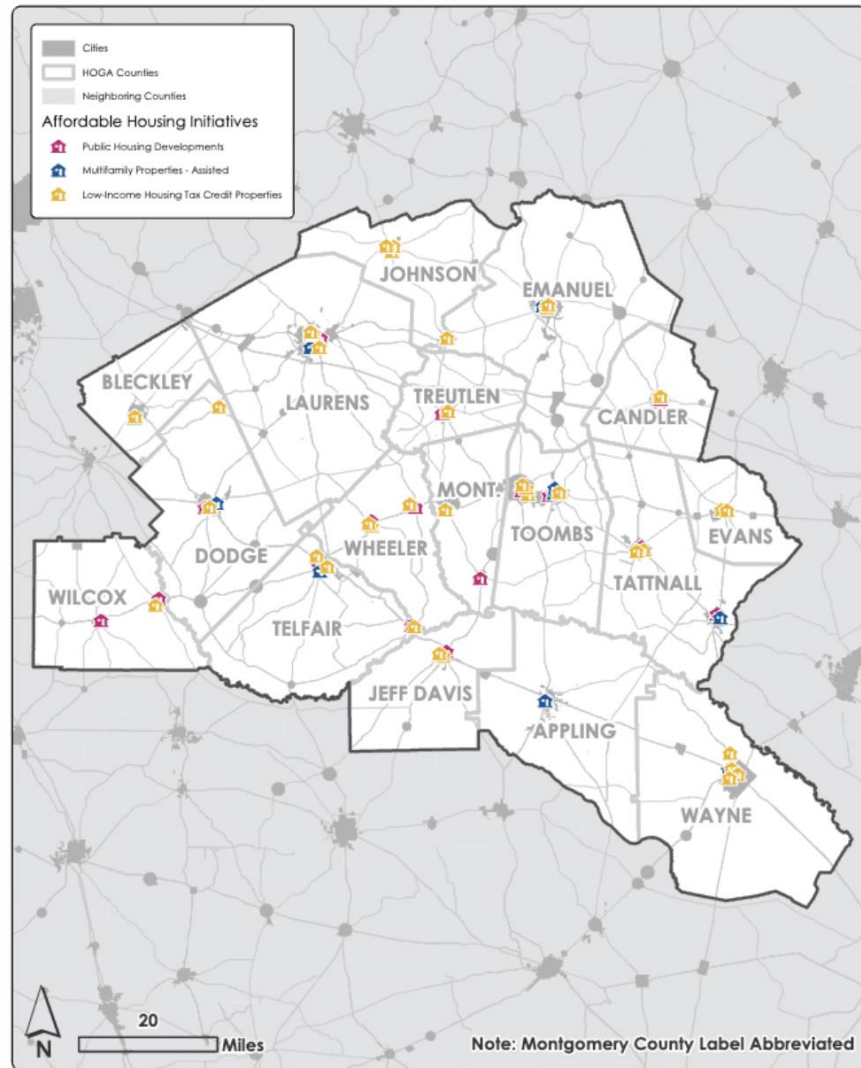
The Department of Community Affairs currently administers the rent assistance and tax credits described above via two federal funded programs: the Housing Choice Voucher Program (formerly known as Section 8) and the State of Georgia Rental Assistance Program. Additionally, the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing (GICH) is a program made up of various funding partners with the goal of helping communities improve their quality of life and economic vitality via locally driven housing and revitalization developments. There are currently two active GICH initiatives in the HOGA region, one in Metter (Candler County) and one in Cochran (Bleckley County).

Table 25: Affordable Housing Initiatives

Property Type	Number of Properties	Percent of Total Properties
Low-Income Housing Tax Credits	58	56.8%
Multi-family Assisted	22	21.6%
Public Housing	22	21.6%
Total	102	100.0%

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Figure 32: Affordable Housing Initiatives



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Homelessness has emerged as a notable concern in the HOGA region, predominantly in the cities Vidalia and Lyons (both in Toombs County), with Vidalia facing a particularly acute situation. A major contributor to the growing unhoused population is the lack of affordable housing supply. There is a low number of houses, apartments, and the like for rent in the region, and if an individual can find an open listing, rents are comparable to a much larger metropolitan area, due to the strain on supply. Additionally, the municipalities in the HOGA region have historically been, and currently express, an opposition to multi-family housing (especially apartments), which are alternatives to single family housing such as tiny homes, in-law suites, apartments, and other rental properties within their city limits, making it difficult to alter the affordable housing supply. As mentioned in section 2.4.1, the HOGA region has a notable low-income trend, with 22.5% of its residents living below poverty, which is 8.2% higher than Georgia’s percent below poverty, at large.

Unhoused individuals are forced to navigate the streets with their belongings, often in shopping carts or in piles, and some encampments have sprung up in various locations. Local businesses and private property owners have expressed concern with the unhoused population deterring business, accumulating trash, and litter on their properties, and contributing to cases of squatting and theft. The Vidalia Mayor Doug Roper has expressed that “We do not have the resources like a major metropolitan community to address the total need of that person [unhoused individual], so how do we partner with

local agencies to provide for those who want help? How do we get those out of our community who do not want help?”⁸
While homelessness is not unique to the HOGA region, it is a factor to consider with regards to demand-response transportation service.

⁸ The Advance News, June 14, 2023 Edition

8.6 Aging Initiatives / Senior Centers

The HOGA region has 37 facilities that are either nursing homes/hospice care, short- or long-term rehabilitation facilities, or senior centers. In addition to these 37 facilities, there are also seven “Action Pact Senior Centers” in Appling, Candler, Evans, Jeff Davis, Tattnall, Toombs, and Wayne counties, respectively. Action Pact, formerly known as Concerted Services, is a non-profit, community action agency that provides seniors (ages 55+) with places to socialize, develop interpersonal relationships, simulate physical and mental wellbeing, and have fun.

All seven of the HOGA Action Pact facilities operate from 8:00AM to 2:30PM Monday through Friday, providing hot lunches, nutrition education, health and fitness education, special occasion celebrations, field trips and recreation. Action Pact Senior Centers also home-deliver meals for up to 250 days a year for those who cannot visit a center. Dues are minimal and optional, typically around \$1.00 - \$5.00 for special events. Action Pact Senior Centers are funded via federal, state, and local governments, as well as private donations.

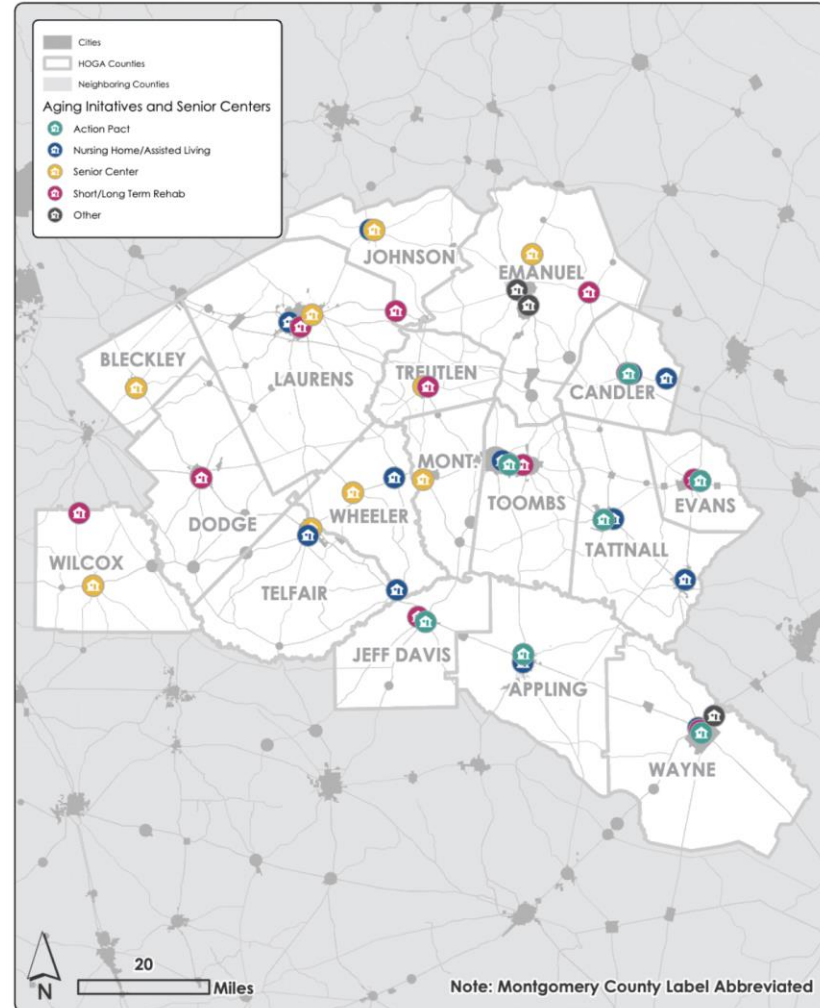
It is important to note that a few of the Action Pacts also operate the rural demand-response transit agencies including Bleckley and Telfair Counties.

Table 26: Short- and Long-Term Nursing Homes, Rehabilitation Centers, and Senior Centers by County (Continued on the next page)

County	Facilities
Appling	Appling Nursing and Rehabilitation Pavilion Action Pact: Appling County Senior Center
Bleckley	Action Pact: Bleckley County Senior Center
Candler	Action Pact: Candler County Senior Center Azalea Health & Rehabilitation Center Orchard Manor Nursing Home Pleasantview Nursing Center
Dodge	Dodge County Senior Center Heart of Georgia Nursing Home
Emanuel	Emanuel County Nursing Home Emanuel County Senior Center PruittHealth Twin View Health and Rehabilitation
Evans	Action Pact: Evans County Senior Center Camellia Health and Rehabilitation
Jeff Davis	Action Pact: Jeff Davis Senior Center Hazelhurst Court Care and Rehabilitation Center
Johnson	Johnson County Senior Center Scott Health and Rehabilitation Wrightsville Manor Health and Rehab
Laurens	Dublinair Health and Rehabilitation Laurens County Senior Center Southland Healthcare and Rehab Center

County	Facilities
Montgomery	Montgomery County Senior Center
Tattnall	Action Pact: Tattnall County Senior Center Glenvue Health and Rehab Tattnall Healthcare Center
Telfair	Mcrae Manor Nursing Home Telfair County Senior Center
Toombs	Meadows Park Health and Rehabilitation Oxley Park Health and Rehabilitation The Oaks - Bethany Skilled Nursing
Treutlen	Treutlen County Health and Rehabilitation Treutlen County Senior Center
Wayne	Action Pact: Wayne County Senior Center Altamaha Healthcare Center Harborview Health Systems Jesup Jesup Health and Rehabilitation
Wheeler	Wheeler County Senior Center Glenwood Healthcare
Wilcox	Crossview Care Center Wilcox County Senior Center

Figure 33: Aging / Senior Center Facility Locations

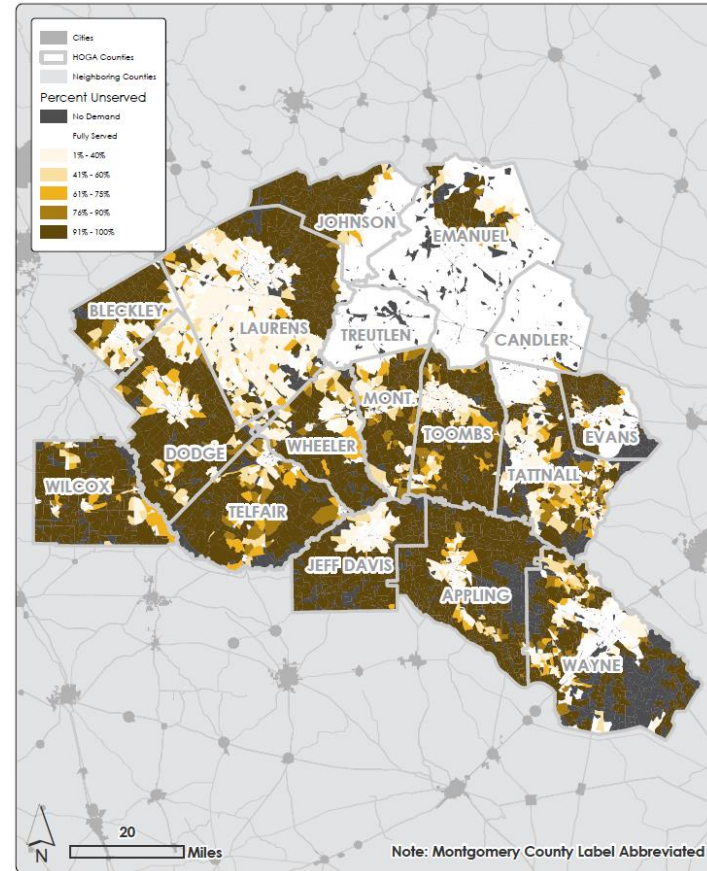


As seen in Figure 33, each of the seventeen counties in the HOGA region are home to at least one type of senior-care facility or aging initiative. Emanuel and Toombs counties have the most senior facilities/assisted living facilities, with 4 each, and Candler, Johnson, Laurens, and Wayne counties each have 3, respectively.

8.7 Broadband Access

Lack of broadband access is a significant community issue in rural areas across the state of Georgia. High speed internet is vital for economically thriving areas with a growing job base. The Heart of Georgia Altamaha region has numerous counties with areas experiencing low or no broadband service. Figure 34 shows these areas based on the US Census designation of percent underserved by broadband access. The darker colors indicate the areas with low or no broadband access. This is a consideration for internet-based, ridesharing apps in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region.

Figure 34: Broadband Access



Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA)

9.0 Transit Funding

9.1 Existing Funding for Transit

Public transit in the State of Georgia is funded through several sources, including federal, state, and local funds. Direct revenue, such as fares and coordinated purchased transportation, provide another source of income.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021 greatly increases federal outlays for transit funding. Federal grants fall into two categories: formula, which allocates funds based on certain characteristics of the areas receiving funding, and competitive, which require agencies or governments seeking funding to apply for it. In most cases, regardless of grant type, recipients must demonstrate the ability to provide local matching funds covering some portion of project costs.

9.1.1 Section 5311 Rural Formula Funding

FTA provides Section 5311 Rural Public Transportation Funding to GDOT to administer to non-urbanized areas with a population of less than 50,000. This funding requires a local match and can be used to provide transit services for all residents and trip types. Funds are allocated based on an area's size, population, low-income population, and revenue vehicle miles. Section 5311 funds can be used for capital, operating, planning, and job access related activities. The federal share is up to 80% for capital projects and 50% for operating costs; local or state funds must be used to make up the remaining costs. Historically, the State of Georgia has provided 10% capital funds match for the purchase of rural transit buses.

9.1.2 Section 5307 Urban Formula Funding

Formula funding for urban areas is provided through the Section 5307 Urban program. Within Georgia, GDOT serves as the designated recipient for Section 5307 funds allocated to urban areas with populations under 200,000. Section 5307 provides up to 80% of capital funding. Though large urban systems may not use Section 5307 funds for operating expenses, urban areas with populations below 200,000 may use Section 5307 to fund up to 75% of operating budgets. There are no areas in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region that receive Section 5307 funding at this time.

9.1.3 Georgia Transit Trust Fund

The Georgia Transit Trust Fund Program (TTFP) is a funding program administered by GDOT that uses a population-based formula to distribute state funds to Georgia's counties that have existing transit service. A breakdown of 2024 multi-county/regional funding recipients near the HOGA region can be seen in Table 28. At this time, the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region has not received any funds through the GTTF program.

Multi-county transit agencies also receive funding distributions based on population, and counties with household incomes below \$45,000 receive additional appropriations. The TTFP is funded through a tax levied on rideshare services and other for-hire ground transportation, as passed by the Georgia General Assembly in 2020. Georgia's fiscal year 2024 budget is the first budget to distribute these funds to transit agencies statewide, with funds eligible to be used to support both capital and operating expenses.

Table 27: 2024 Georgia Transit Trust Fund Program Distributions

Funding Recipient	2024 TTFP Funding Distribution
Chatham Area Transit	\$396,664
Coastal Regional Commission Transit	\$1,220,519
Liberty Transit	\$87,658
Total	\$1,704,841

9.1.4 Mobility for All Pilot Program

Mobility for All is a GDOT Rural Transit and Human Services Transportation Regional (RHST) Pilot Program. This program seeks opportunities for coordination among RHST systems administered by GDOT/DCH/DHS. In June 2020, the FTA announced \$3.5M in Mobility for All Grant Awards, of which GDOT was awarded \$120,000. The funding was directed to hire a GDOT Statewide Mobility Manager who is charged with implementing the RHST Pilot Program to begin the development of a Statewide Mobility Management Program. The grant ends in September of 2025.

The goals of this program are to fully coordinate transit and human services transportation at the regional level, improve accessibility and ease of use for riders, and to enhance regional partnerships.

9.2 Transit Funding Opportunities

FTA formula funds account for the bulk of transit funding, especially in rural areas. However, FTA provides a number of competitive grant programs that transit agencies may use to leverage additional funding. Section 5339, the Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Program, consists of one formula and two competitive grants. The first, 5339(a), allocates formula funding for capital projects involving the replacement, rehabilitation, or purchase of buses, vans, and bus-related equipment, or for the construction of bus-related facilities to support fixed-route transit service. The other grant under this program is 5339(c), the Low or No Emission Vehicle Program. This competitive grant program provides federal funding for the purchase or lease of or zero-emission or low-emission transit buses and the acquisition, construction, and leasing of required supporting facilities. Federal funds can cover up to 85% of the cost of acquiring transit buses and up to 90% of the costs associated with acquiring related equipment and facilities.

In January 2021, the Justice40 Initiative outlined the goal of providing 40% of federal transportation investment to disadvantaged communities. Many FTA grant programs are being retooled to meet these priorities. The largest of these programs is the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grants, which will provide \$1.5 billion in infrastructure investment in 2022. RAISE grants are aimed at major capital projects that address climate change, equity concerns, and barriers to opportunity. As additional competitive programs come online, FTA will update their Justice40 website.⁹

⁹ www.transportation.gov/equity-Justice40

10.0 Key Findings and Next Steps

This section summarizes key findings from the Existing Conditions Report. These findings, along with feedback from stakeholders and public involvement activities, are critical to identifying regional transit needs. This section also provides further guidance on the next stage of the Regional Transit Development Plan.

10.1 Key Findings

- The population increased in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha region every decade between 1970-2010 with a high of 303,199 residents in 2010. Between 2010-2020 the population decreased by 3% and was 292,759 in 2020. Like other rural areas in the state, it is expected that population decline may continue due to a lack of jobs and essential services.
- The percentage of low-income individuals in the Heart of Georgia Altamaha (22.5%) is higher than the state of Georgia average (14.3%). A few of the HOGA counties have up to 41% of residents living below the poverty level. Similarly, the percentage of individuals with disabilities is higher in HOGA than the state average. Aside from the above two metrics, the other transit dependent indicators are lower than the Georgia averages.
- The USDOT Justice40 indicator shows that a majority of the region is experiencing transportation disadvantages. All of the census tracts in Wilcox, Wheeler, Montgomery, Treutlen, Candler, and Evans Counties are classified as disadvantaged communities.
- 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. Major employers in the HOGA region exist within the healthcare, industrial facilities, manufacturing, and food processing sectors, with Claxton Poultry Co., Fairview Park Hospital, Rayonier (RYAM) Performance Fibers, Southern Nuclear Operating Co., Trane U.S. Inc., and Walmart existing in the top 10 employers list provided by the Georgia Department of Labor.
- The most common service/destination in the HOGA region are schools, making up 25% of all key destinations and services. Each of the 17 counties in the HOGA region are home to at least one school, and higher education centers are in 8 of the 17 counties. Laurens County stands out with 19 of the 72 schools and 2 of the 10 higher education centers, Oconee Fall Line Technical College and Middle Georgia State University – Dublin Campus.
- A total of seven projects in the HOGA region have been submitted under the DRI program in recent years. DRIs are large-scale developments that are likely to have regional effects beyond the local government jurisdiction in which they are located. These projects encompass two truck stops, three industrial developments comprising various building spaces, one landfill expansion initiative, and one dairy farm project. All these projects have been successfully completed, apart from the Alan Scarbrough project, a Speedway truck stop, which has submitted its initial DRI form to the DCA for review.

- There are nine park and ride lots in the HOGA region. Four are located in Laurens County, and the other five lots are in Bleckley, Emanuel, Evans, Johnson, and Wayne Counties. These lots provide potential opportunities for transportation hubs and transit transfer locations as demand-response transit expands across county boundaries.
- 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, near the under-construction Hyundai Motor Group Metaplant America site. The proposed facility is located just east of the HOGA region near Savannah, Georgia, and is part of an intended 5.5-billion-dollar investment and 8,100 jobs endeavor by Hyundai. In addition to this battery plant, auto parts suppliers such as Hanon Systems and NVH Korea have pledged to invest an additional two-billion dollars and 4,800 jobs in the region surrounding the Hyundai site.
- Homelessness has emerged as a notable concern in the HOGA region, predominantly in the cities Vidalia and Lyons (both in Toombs County), with Vidalia facing a particularly acute situation. Major contributors to the growing unhoused population include the lack of affordable housing supply, opposition to multi-family housing and rental properties, and a notable low-income trend among residents. While homelessness is not unique to the HOGA region, it is a factor to consider with regards to demand-response transportation services.
- There are ten hospitals in nine of the region's counties. Additionally, the HOGA region has 37 facilities that are either nursing homes/hospice care, short- or long-term rehabilitation facilities, or senior centers. There are seven "Action Pact Senior Centers" Action Pact, that provide seniors (ages 55+) with places to socialize, develop interpersonal relationships, simulate physical and mental wellbeing, and have fun.
- There are 14 colleges and universities spread throughout the region. Only a few of these higher education facilities have a shuttle service to transport students from campus to grocery stores or other personal shopping destinations.
- The HOGA region has over 750 churches/faith-based organizations with churches in each county. However, not every county has a grocery store or medical facilities.
- The largest developing area in the region is in central Laurens County south of the city of Dublin. Other future areas for development surround the following cities: Baxley in Appling County, Lyons in Toombs County, Rochelle in Wilcox County, and Reidsville in Tattnall County. There is a long stretch of developing areas connecting the City of Swainsboro to the City of Oak Park in Emmanuel County. Another large area of development is located on the eastern side of Candler County. Developed and developing areas with compact and dense land uses could support transit by increasing ridership.

- Six of the 17 counties within the HOGA region have GDOT administered demand-response public transit service. Eleven counties in the region do not offer this service which represents a significant area without demand-response transit.
- Wayne County has the most robust demand-response transit system within the HOGA region with a fleet of 12 vehicles. Wayne County Transit provided 45,739 trips in 2019.
- Demand-response transit service is focused almost exclusively on destinations within county boundaries. When out of county trips are made, fare rates increase. (But this increase is not standard across transit agencies.)
- All transit services within the six counties operate on weekdays. With the exception of Wayne County, there is no evening or weekend service. Rides must be booked between 24-72 hours in advance, depending on the agency.
- Broadband access is low in most counties across the region with large areas where the “percent unserved” is 75% or higher. The exception to this is the northeast corner of the region is well served with broadband service.
- FTA formula funds account for the bulk of demand-response public transit funding, especially in rural areas. New programs such as the Georgia Transit Trust Fund and the Mobility For All Pilot Program offer new, exciting opportunities for demand-response transit expansion and a regional approach to this vital service.