

# Regional Transit Development Plan

## Northwest Georgia Regional Commission

### Existing Conditions Report

March 2024



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## List of Acronyms

<b>AADT</b>	Annual Average Daily Traffic	<b>MPO</b>	Metropolitan Planning Organization
<b>ACS</b>	American Community Survey	<b>MTP</b>	Metropolitan Transportation Plan
<b>ADA</b>	Americans with Disabilities Act	<b>NEMT</b>	Non-Emergency Medical Transportation
<b>BLS</b>	Bureau of Labor Statistics	<b>NOFO</b>	Notice of Funding Opportunity
<b>CCS</b>	Continuous Count Stations	<b>NTD</b>	National Transit Database
<b>DAC</b>	Disadvantaged Community	<b>NWGRC</b>	Northwest Georgia Regional Commission
<b>DCA</b>	Georgia Department of Community Affairs	<b>OPB</b>	Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget
<b>DCH</b>	Georgia Department of Community Health	<b>PAC</b>	Project Advisory Committee
<b>DFCS</b>	Georgia Department of Family and Children Services	<b>RHST</b>	Rural and Human Services Transportation
<b>DHS</b>	Georgia Department of Human Services	<b>RITIS</b>	Regional Integrated Transportation Information System
<b>DRI</b>	Developments of Regional Impact	<b>RTP</b>	Regional Transportation Plan
<b>EJ</b>	Environmental Justice	<b>SGR</b>	State of Good Repair
<b>FHWA</b>	Federal Highway Administration	<b>SR</b>	State Route
<b>FTA</b>	Federal Transit Administration	<b>SSTP</b>	Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan
<b>GDOL</b>	Georgia Department of Labor	<b>STIP</b>	State Transportation Improvement Program
<b>GDOT</b>	Georgia Department of Transportation	<b>SWTP</b>	Statewide Transportation Plan
<b>GPA</b>	Georgia Ports Authority	<b>SWTRP</b>	Statewide Transit Plan
<b>GSTDM</b>	Georgia Statewide Travel Demand Model	<b>TADA</b>	Traffic Analysis and Data Application
<b>HUD</b>	United States Department of Housing and Urban Development	<b>TAM</b>	Transit Asset Management
<b>IJA</b>	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act	<b>TDM</b>	Travel Demand Model
<b>LEHD</b>	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics	<b>TDP</b>	Transit Development Plan
<b>LEP</b>	Limited English Proficiency	<b>ULB</b>	Useful Life Benchmark
<b>LIHTC</b>	Low-Income Housing Tax Credit	<b>USDA</b>	United States Department of Agriculture
<b>LODES</b>	LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics	<b>USDOT</b>	United States Department of Transportation
<b>LOS</b>	Level of Service	<b>UZA</b>	Urbanized Area
<b>MATS</b>	Mountain Area Transportation System	<b>V/C</b>	Volume to Capacity Ratio

## 1.0 Introduction

In 2020, the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) published the Statewide Transit Plan (SWTRP), which recommended strategies to address rural and regional transit needs across the state. In addition to highlighting 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 (MPOs), 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 Northwest Georgia Regional Commission (NWGRC), GDOT is preparing a Regional TDP for Northwest Georgia.

The following SWTRP strategies directly inform this plan:

- **10.1.1.1** Develop Transit Development Plan Guidance and Regional TDPs
- **10.2.3.1** Regionalize Transit Service

### 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 five-year renewal cycle. Though they have a 20-year horizon, TDPs should identify achievable transit projects that can be implemented within five years.

The first part 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 U.S. Census Bureau, and GDOT. This report documents demographic and employment trends, travel patterns, transportation options, and land use and development patterns for Northwest Georgia.

This report also includes a performance review of the region's current transit providers, their funding situation, and a comparison of Northwest Georgia transit providers to other peer transit systems in the state.

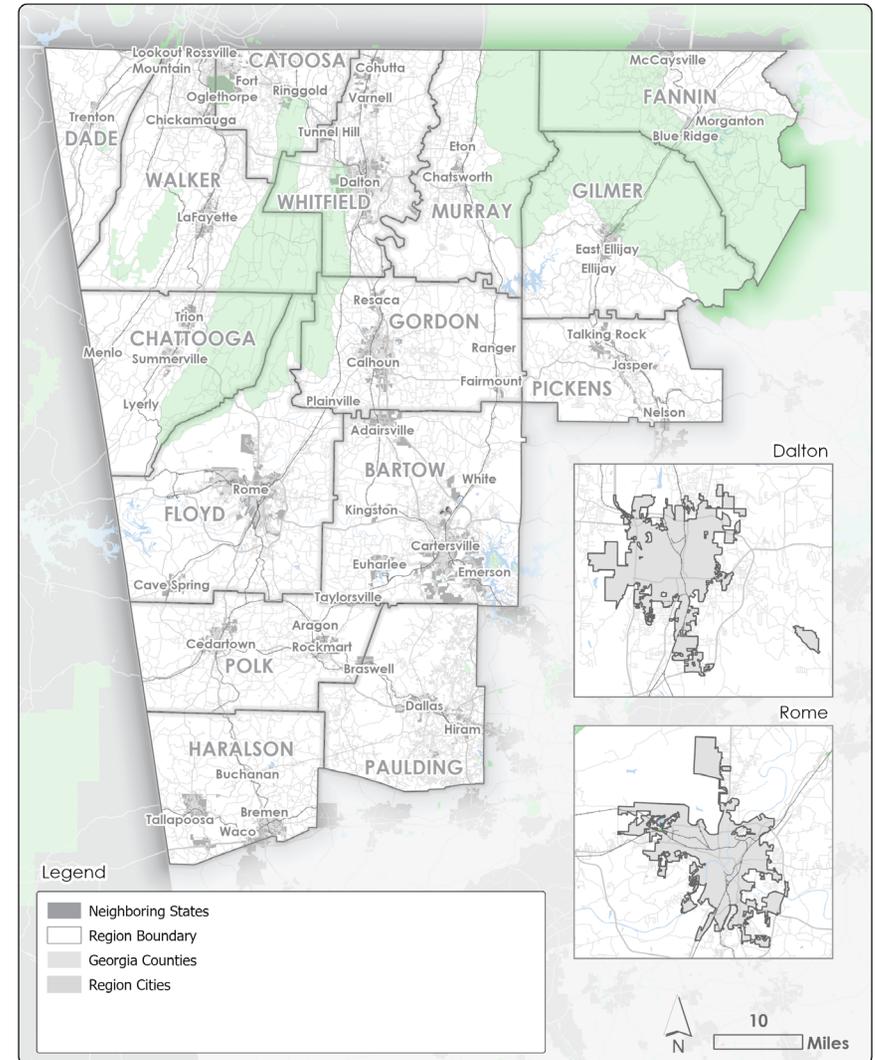
A Project Advisory Committee (PAC) has also been established as a group of stakeholders in the region to provide insight and comment on the TDP throughout the development.

## 1.2 Overview of Northwest Georgia Regional Commission

The NWGRC is a multi-county organization tasked with regional transportation and community planning in accordance with the Georgia Planning Act of 1989. NWGRC membership includes 15 counties, five metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), and 48 municipalities all located in the northwest region of Georgia, along the state borders of Alabama, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Major cities respective to population size and economic activity include the Cities of Dalton and Rome. The regional study area is displayed in **Figure 1**. The NWGRC assists local members with comprehensive plans, transportation plans, and meeting economic, community, land use, and natural resource goals.

The NWGRC participates in the transportation planning activities of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County/North Georgia Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), the Floyd County-Rome MPO, the Greater Dalton MPO, the Cartersville-Bartow County MPO, and the Atlanta Regional Commission. The regional coordination allows the NWGRC to maintain a position of providing both regional guidance and granular support for planning initiatives.

Figure 1: Northwest Georgia



Source: Northwest Georgia Regional Commission

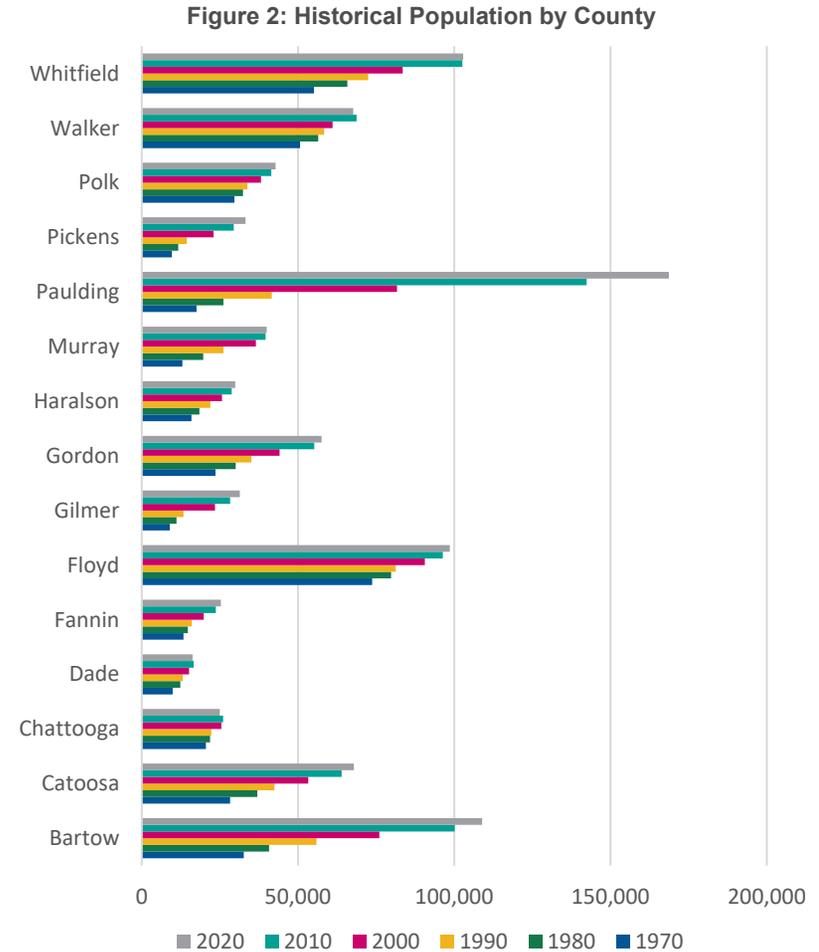
## 2.0 Demographic Trends

Demographic trends show growth patterns within Northwest Georgia. This section depicts the historical, current, and future population trends for the region and provides a breakdown of demographic characteristics across the region.

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.

### 2.1 Historical Population

NWGRC population has more than doubled between 1970 and 2020, as seen in **Table 1**. The growth decade over decade is near or exceeding the statewide population growth during the same period. **Figure 2** shows population growth for each of the 15 counties. Paulding County experienced the highest growth rate in Northwest Georgia, particularly between 1990 and 2020. Other counties that experienced high population growth include Bartow, Catoosa, Gordon, and Whitfield Counties. No counties lost population over the last 50 years; however, Walker County had a slight decline in population between 2010 and 2020.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Historical Population Change Data

Table 1: Historical Population and Population Change

Geography	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	1970–1980	1980–1990	1990–2000	2000–2010	2010–2020
NWGRC	402,518	478,167	548,220	697,410	863,217	915,929	18.8%	14.7%	27.2%	23.8%	6.1%
Georgia	4,589,575	5,463,105	6,478,216	8,186,453	9,687,653	10,711,908	19.0%	18.6%	26.4%	18.3%	10.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Historical Population Change Data (1910–2020)

## 2.2 Demographic Trends within the Past Decade

Over the last decade (2011–2021), the Northwest Georgia region has continued to grow, with an overall population increase of 6.3 percent over the ten-year period. More recently, the region has seen a 4.0 percent growth from 2016 to 2021, as observed in **Table 2**. While the growth rate is slightly lower than the rest of the state, the population continues to increase in Northwest Georgia.

**Table 2: Population and Population Change from the Last Decade**

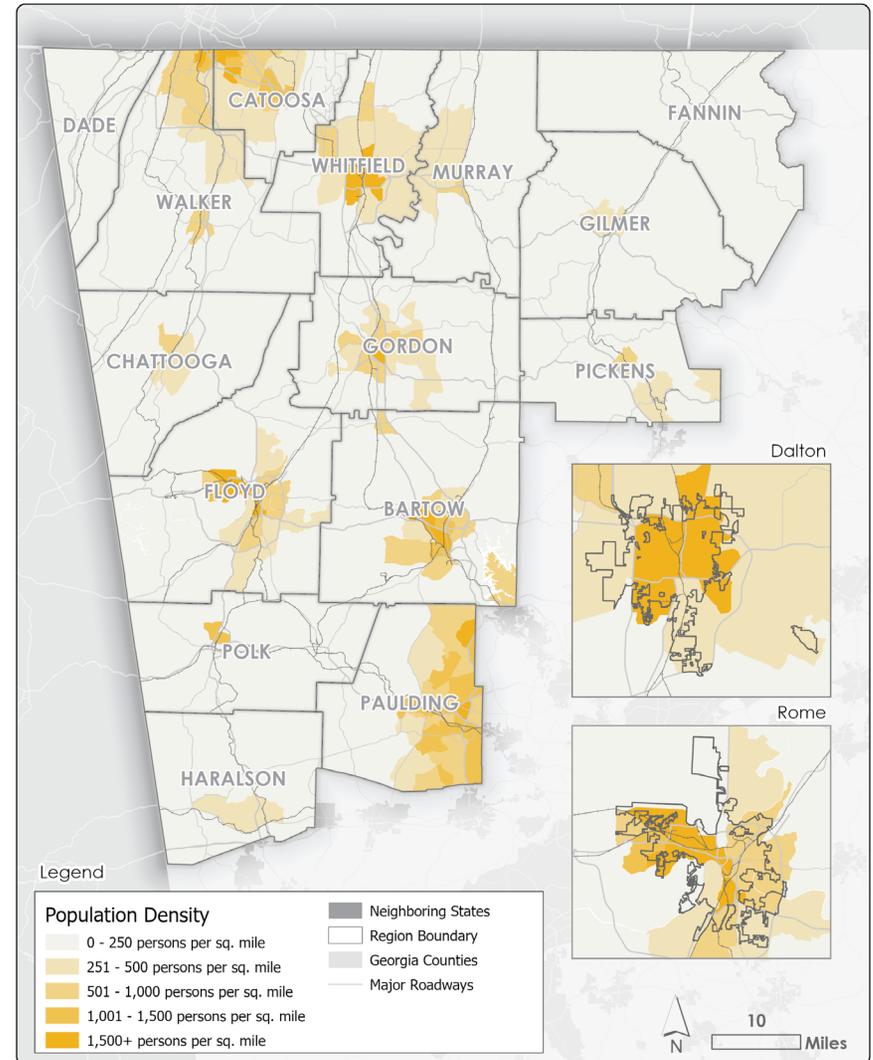
Geography	2011	2016	2021	2011–2016	2016–2021
NWGRC	855,430	875,146	909,670	2.3%	4.0%
Georgia	9,600,612	10,099,320	10,625,615	5.2%	5.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Data (S0101)

## 2.3 Current Demographics

Currently, there are nearly 910,000 people living in Northwest Georgia. Most of the population lives in and near cities, with the highest population densities in eastern Paulding County near Hiram and Dallas, Rome in Floyd County, and Dalton in Whitfield County, as illustrated in **Figure 3**. Other pockets of higher densities include the outskirts of Chattanooga, TN in Catoosa and Walker Counties, and Calhoun in Gordon County. Density is significantly lower beyond the region’s cities, with less than 250 people per square mile, indicating more rural development in these areas. This lower density is partly due to the mountainous topography in the northeast portion of the region (Murray, Pickens, Gilmer, and Fannin Counties).

**Figure 3: Population Density by Census Tract**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B01001)

## 2.4 Transit Market Demographics

Selected demographics were chosen for analysis to find populations that could benefit from public transportation. These demographics are: Low-Income and Impoverished Population, Elderly Population: Individuals Ages 60+, Youth Individuals: Ages 15-19, Zero-Car Households, and Populations with a Disability.

The ACS has differing methodologies for how population is totaled 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 **Chapter 2.0**.

### 2.4.1 Low-Income and Impoverished Population

Poverty thresholds are set by the U.S. Census Bureau by family size and yearly income. Nearly 13 percent of the Northwest Georgia population is considered below poverty, which is slightly less than the statewide poverty rate at nearly 14 percent. As shown in **Table 3**, the median household income of \$52,439 for the region is 24 percent less than the statewide median.

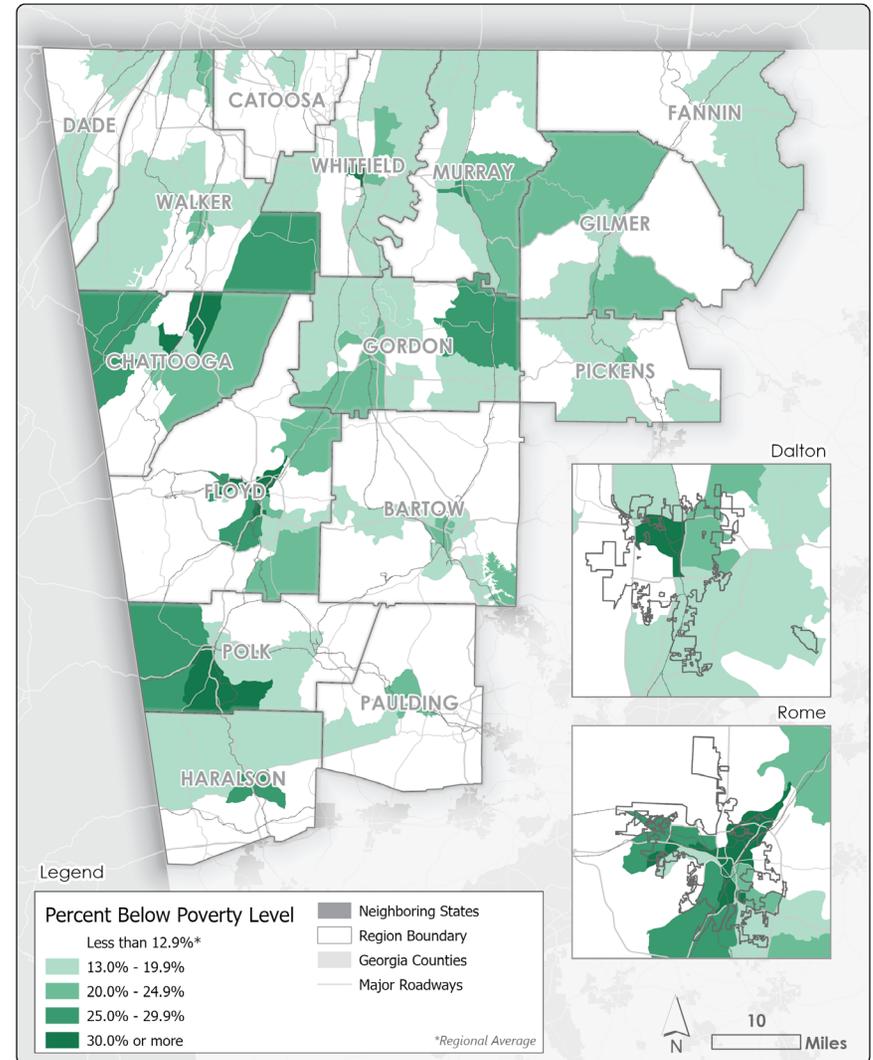
**Figure 4** illustrates areas with a higher percentage of the population below the poverty level. These areas are found in more rural parts of the region, including in central Haralson County, west Polk County, north and northwest Chattooga County, east Walker County, and east Gordon County.

**Table 3: Low-Income Population**

Geography	Total Population for Poverty	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Median Household Income
NWGRC	893,577	115,133	12.9%	\$52,439
Georgia	10,356,895	1,441,351	13.9%	\$65,030

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (S1701 & S1901)

**Figure 4: Low-Income Population by Census Tract**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B17020)

### 2.4.2 Elderly (60+)

The Regional TDP considers the elderly population to be individuals 60 years of age and older.

Overall, the Northwest Georgia region has a higher percentage of elderly population compared to the state at 22.0 percent and 19.8 percent, respectively as outlined in **Table 4**. The Northwest Georgia region is home to almost 10 percent of all seniors (60+) in the state.

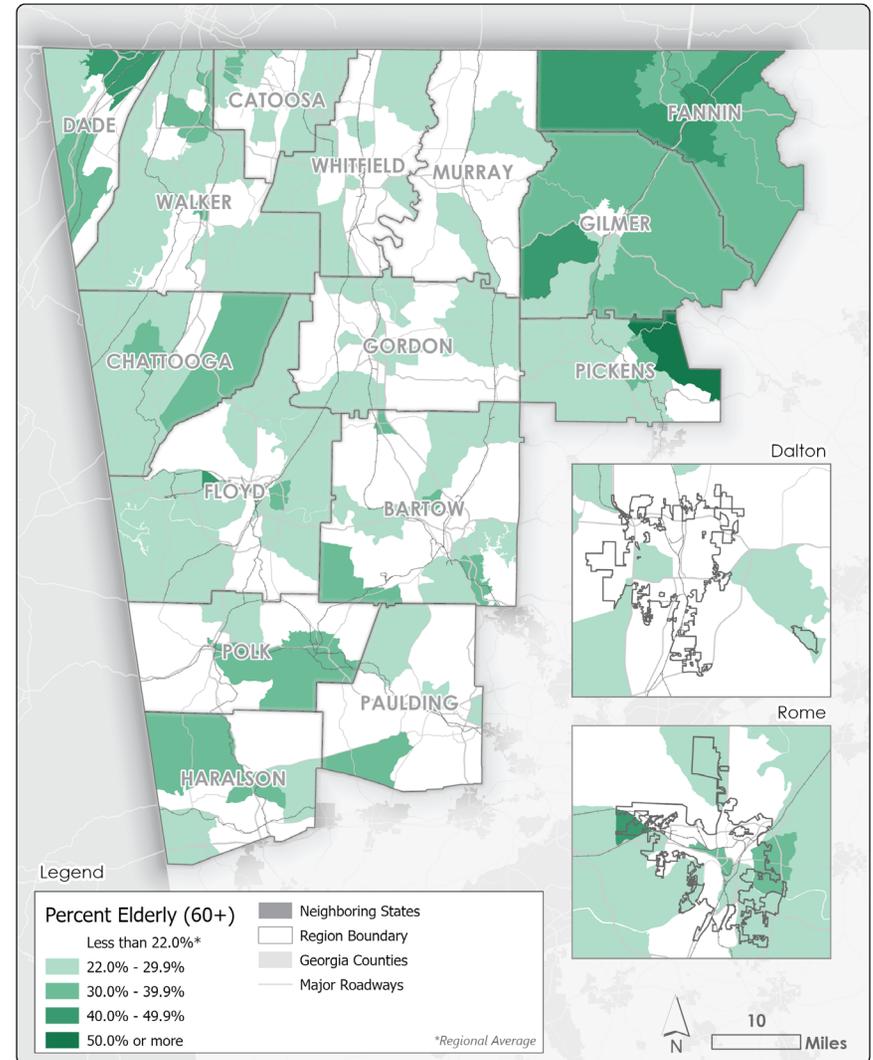
The elderly populations are distributed throughout the region, and generally live in more rural areas outside of the cities. There is, however, a significant concentration of a high percentage of seniors living in the northwest mountainous areas in Pickens, Gilmer, and Fannin Counties. Most of the larger cities such as Rome, Dalton, Dallas, Hiram, Cedartown, and Cartersville have the lowest percentages of elderly populations. **Figure 5** shows the distribution of elderly populations in the region.

**Table 4: Elderly Population**

Geography	Total Population	Total 60+	Percent 60+
NWGRC	909,967	200,513	22.0%
Georgia	10,625,615	2,102,664	19.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (S0101)

**Figure 5: Elderly Population by Census Tract**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B01001)

### 2.4.3 Youth (15–19)

The Regional TDP considers youth to be individuals between the ages of 15 and 19.

At 6.8 percent, the youth population is slightly lower than the statewide average of 7.1 percent, as outlined in **Table 5**. This is an expected pattern given the high percentage of elderly populations over 60 years of age. Northwest Georgia is home to 8 percent of all youth in Georgia.

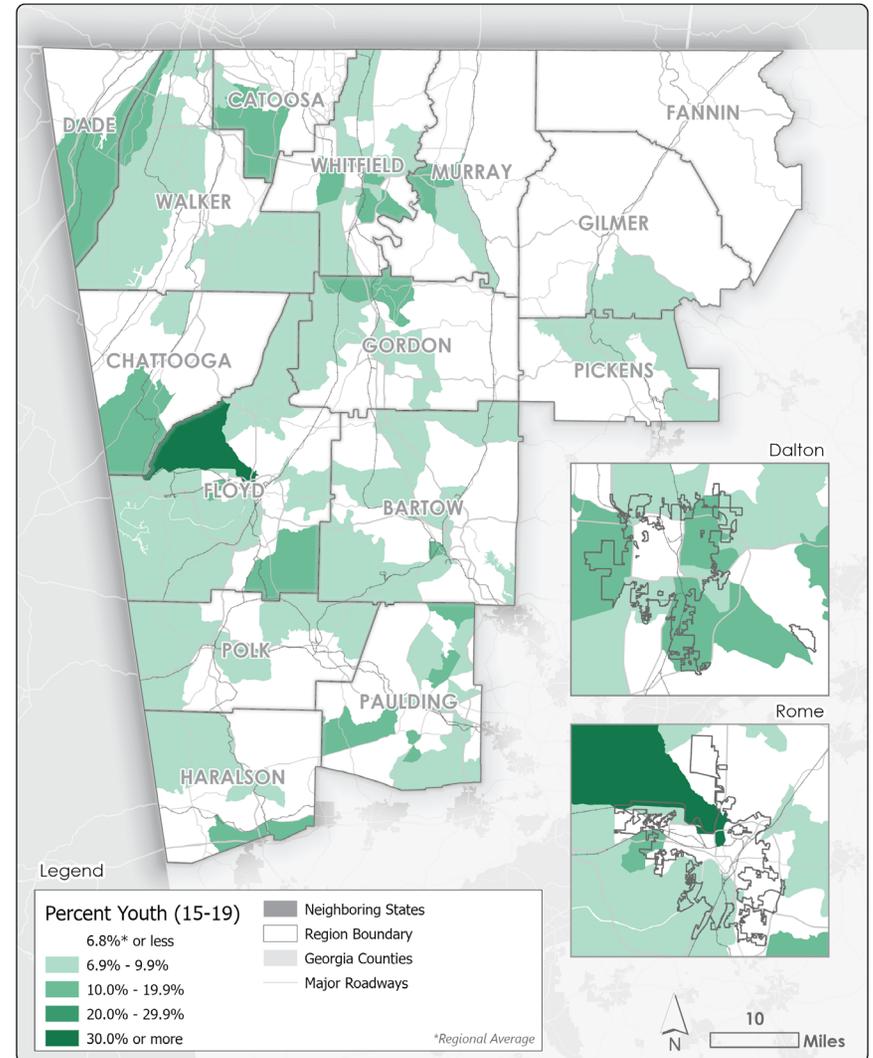
**Figure 6** illustrates the distribution of youth populations. The high percentage of youth population near Rome, represented in darker green, is the location of Berry College and accounts for nearly 2,500 students as of fall 2022 enrollment.<sup>1</sup> Outside of the Berry College campus, youth populations are distributed across the region evenly, with a noticeable lack of youth living in the northeast portion of the region in east Murray, north Gilmer, and Fannin Counties.

**Table 5: Youth Population**

Geography	Total Population	Total 15–19	Percent 15–19
NWGRC	909,967	61,534	6.8%
Georgia	10,625,615	752,682	7.1%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (S0101)*

**Figure 6: Youth Population by Census Tract**



*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B01001)*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.berry.edu/about/quick-facts>

### 2.4.4 Zero-Car Households

Zero-car households are households that do not have access to a vehicle for transportation. These populations may rely on transit or another form of transportation to meet their daily needs.

Nearly 5 percent of households in Northeast Georgia are without personal vehicles, indicating these households must rely on other means of transportation such as transit, rideshare, walking, biking, or rides from family and friends as their primary mode of transportation. This is slightly lower than the statewide average of 6 percent, as shown in **Table 6**.

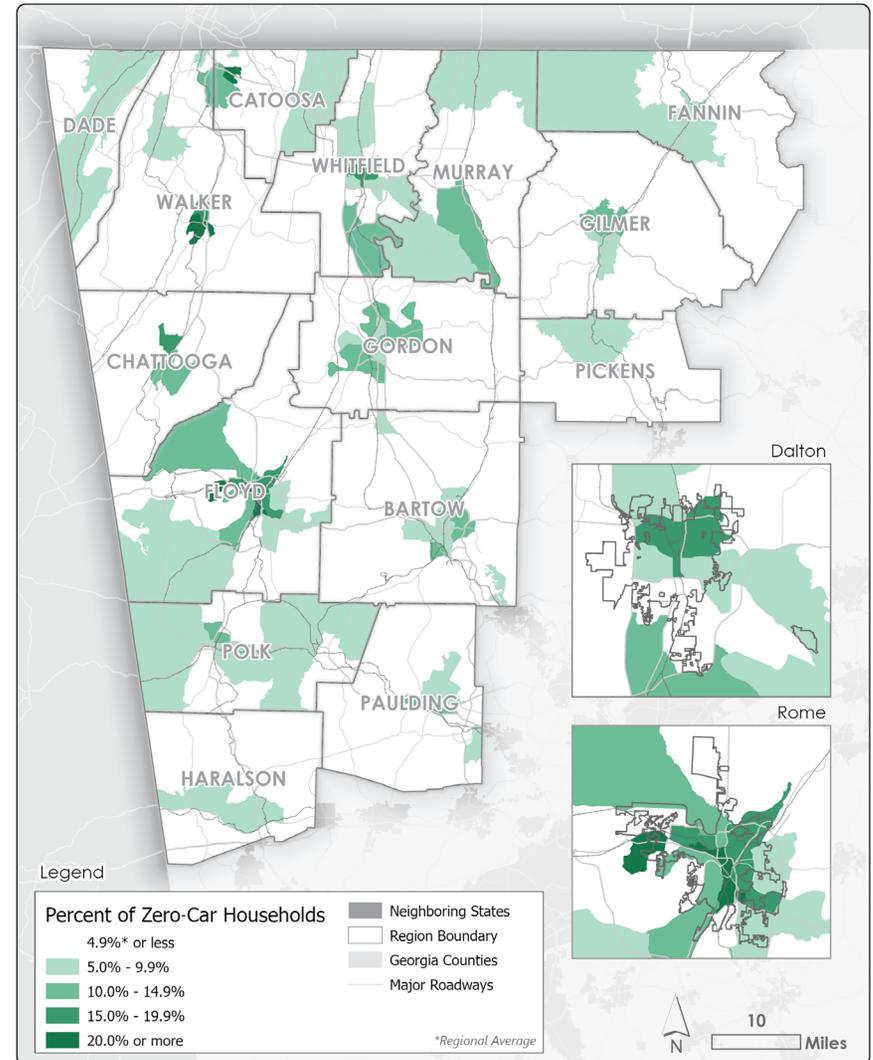
**Figure 7** illustrates the distribution of zero-car households. Areas with a high percentage of zero-car households are in Fort Oglethorpe (Catoosa County), LaFayette (Walker County), Rome (Floyd County), Blue Ridge (Gilmer County), and Summerville (Chattooga County). Notably, Floyd and Polk Counties (outside Rome and Cedartown) have several census tracts with 5-10 percent of the households without cars while there are currently no public transportation services available outside of Rome and Cedartown city limits.

**Table 6: Zero-Car Households**

Geography	Total Households	Total Zero-Car Households	Percent Zero-Car Households
NWGRG	328,360	15,925	4.9%
Georgia	3,885,371	236,209	6.0%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B08201)*

**Figure 7: Zero-Car Households by Census Tract**



*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B08201)*

### 2.4.5 Population with a Disability

Populations with a disability may rely on transit to access destinations and provide mobility. The U.S. Census Bureau defines populations with a disability as individuals having hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, or independent living difficulties.

Nearly 10 percent of Georgia’s disabled population lives in the region. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 14.4 percent of the Northwest Georgia region’s population has a disability, which is higher than the state average of 12.4 percent, as illustrated in **Table 7**. The distribution of populations with a disability is similar to elderly population trends, which indicates that seniors in Northwest Georgia may also have a disability.

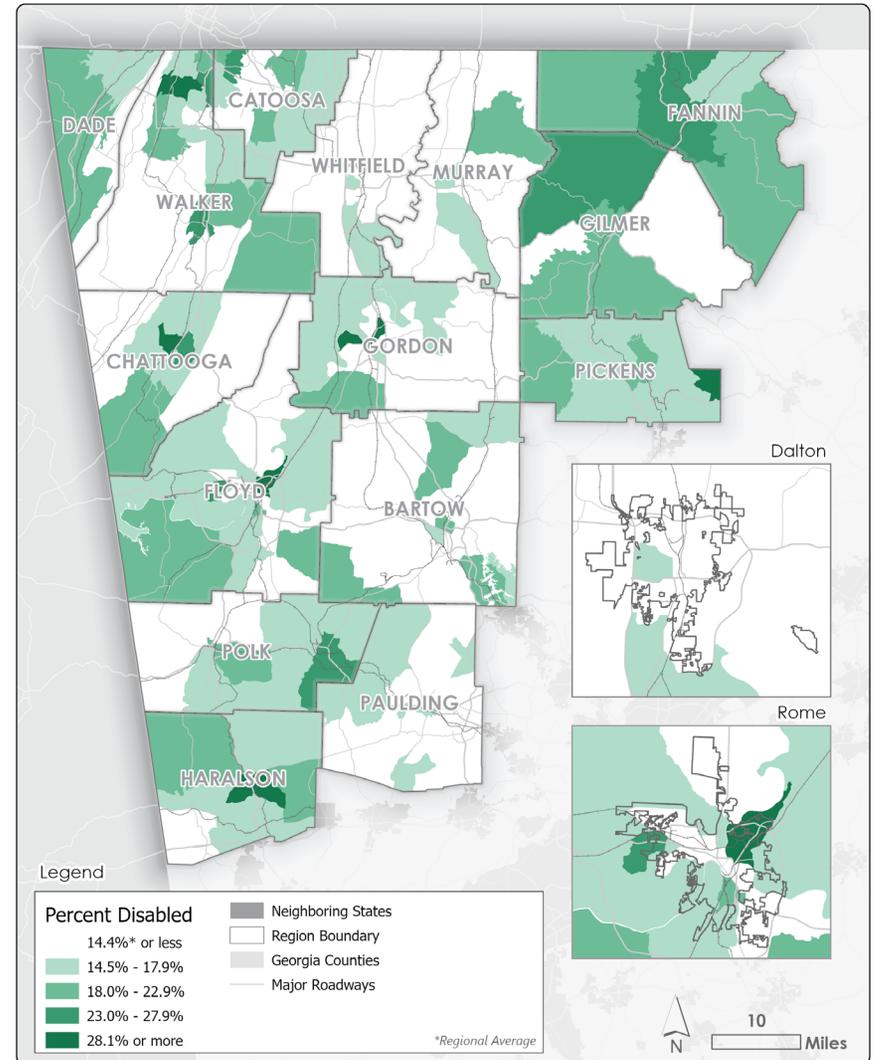
**Figure 8** shows the distribution of populations with a disability. The areas with a high percentage of the population living with a disability are in the northwest mountainous areas in Gilmer and Fannin Counties. There are some pockets of high percentage census tracts near Buchanan (Haralson County), Rome (Floyd County), Rockmart (Polk County), Calhoun (Gordon County), and Lookout Mountain (Walker County). Floyd and Polk Counties do not provide public transportation services, while Census data indicates a higher percentage of individuals with a disability than regional average are present in these areas.

**Table 7: Populations with a Disability**

Geography	Total Population for Disabled	Total Disabled	Percent Disabled
NWGRC	899,460	129,424	14.4%
Georgia	10,438,528	1,297,020	12.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (DP02)

**Figure 8: Populations with a Disability by Census Tract**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B18101)

## 2.5 Title VI

According to Federal Transit Administration Circular 4702.1B, Title VI prohibits recipients of federal financial assistance (e.g., states, local governments, and 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

The U.S Census Bureau defines minority as populations with an ethnicity of Hispanic and Latino and/or those who identify as the following:

- Black or African American
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Other
- Two or More Races

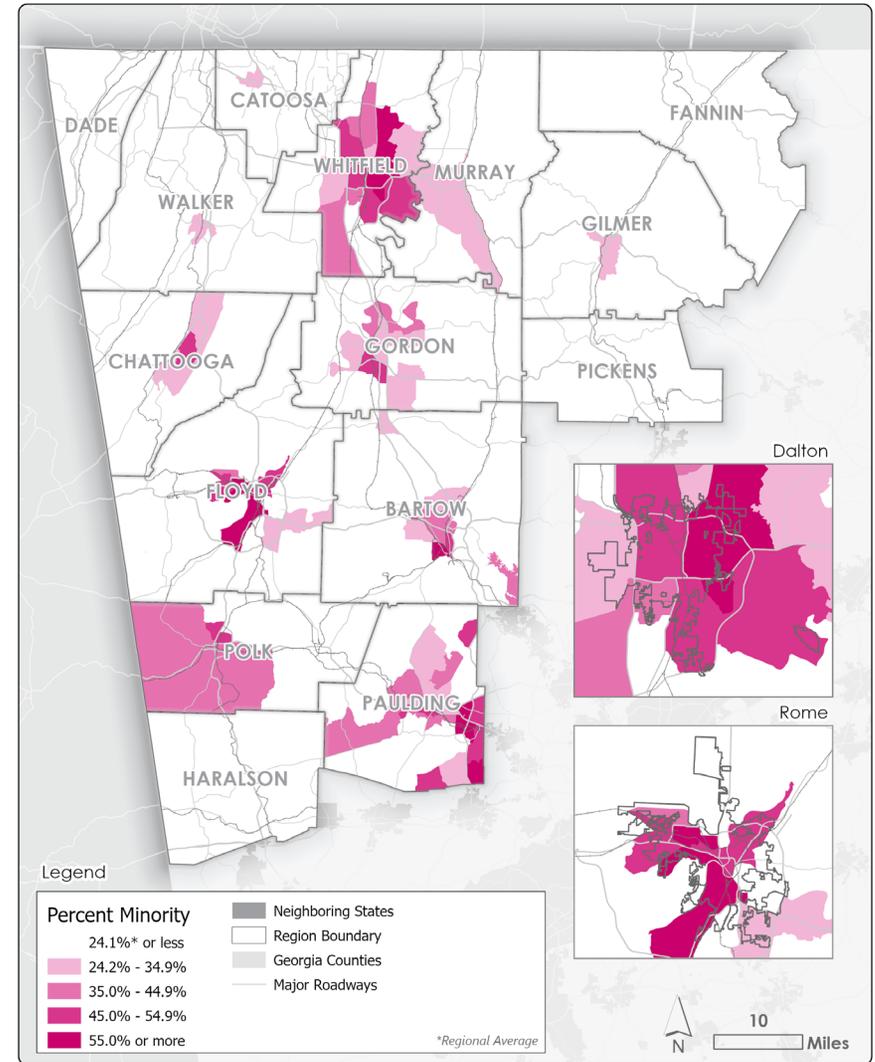
While Northwest Georgia’s minority population is 24.1 percent compared to the statewide 48.6 percent, there are high percentages of minority populations in Polk, Paulding, Bartow, Gordon, Whitfield, and Murray Counties and in the City of Rome (Floyd County) (**Table 8** and **Figure 9**).

**Table 8: Minority Population**

Geography	Total Population	Total Minority	Percent Minority
NWGRC	909,967	219,310	24.1%
Georgia	10,625,615	5,162,942	48.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (DP05)

**Figure 9: Minority Population by Census Tract**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B03002)

### 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 five years of age and older.

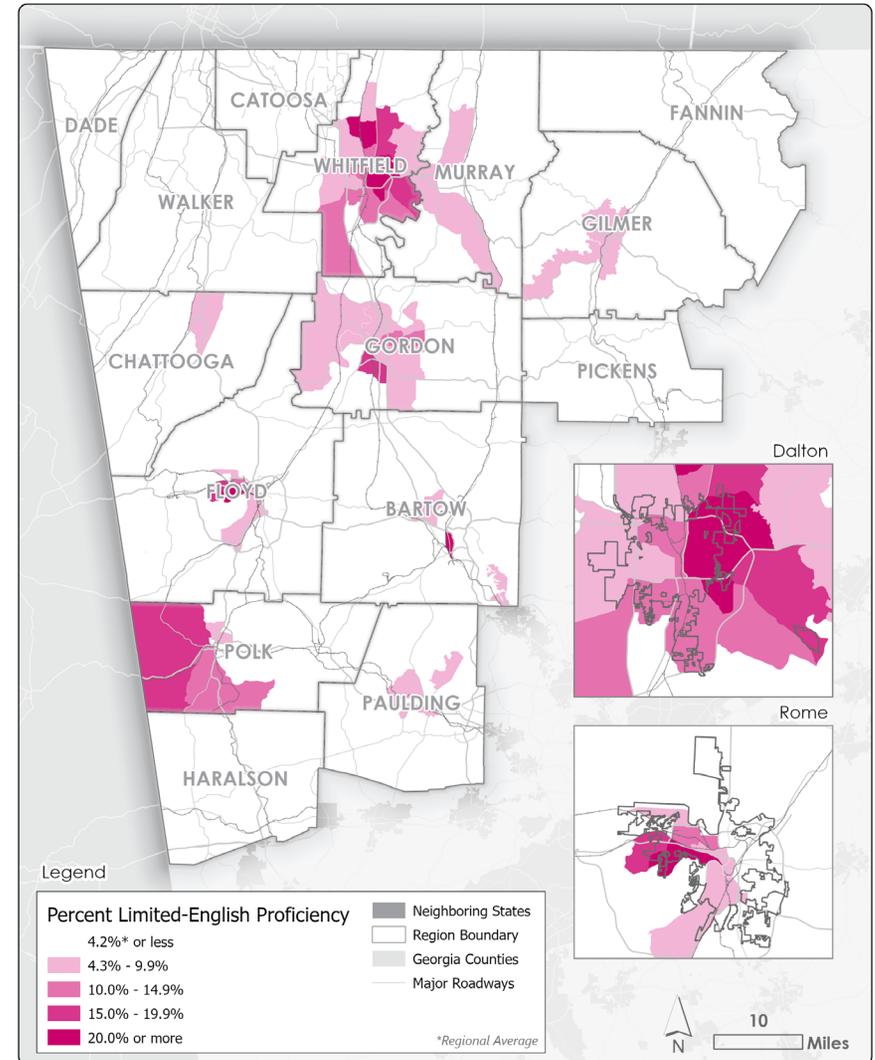
As shown in **Table 9**, 4.2 percent of the Northwest Georgia region has limited English proficiency, slightly lower than the statewide average of 5.4 percent. The highest concentrations, as illustrated in **Figure 10**, are in western Polk County; central Gordon County, including the City of Calhoun; the City of Rome (Floyd County); central Whitfield County, including the City of Dalton; and central Gilmer County, including the cities of Ellijay and Blue Ridge. There are also smaller pockets in Chattooga, Bartow, and Paulding Counties. The most common other language used among LEP populations is Spanish.

**Table 9: LEP Populations**

Geography	Total Population Ages 5+	Total LEP	Percent LEP
NWGRC	855,987	35,564	4.2%
Georgia	9,981,897	541,595	5.4%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (DP02)*

**Figure 10: LEP Populations by Census Tract**



*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B16003)*

### 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<sup>2</sup> from indicators collected at the census tract level, USDOT grouped disadvantages into five different components:

- **Transportation Insecurity:** communities spend more and take longer to get where they need to go.
- **Health Vulnerability:** communities have higher incidences of adverse health outcomes, disabilities, and environmental exposures.
- **Environmental Burden:** communities have disproportionately high levels of certain air pollutants and a higher potential presence of lead-based paint in housing units.

- **Social Vulnerability:** areas and populations have high poverty, low wealth, lack of local jobs, low homeownership, low educational attainment, high inequality, and communities that have a high percentile of persons over the age of five who speak English “less than well.”
- **Climate and Disaster Risk Burden:** communities are vulnerable to hazards caused by climate change.

For each component, an index score is created from the various measures. Component index scores at the 65<sup>th</sup> percentile or above are considered to indicate a disadvantage of that component. A final index is calculated by combining the component scores, with transportation insecurity receiving twice the weight as the others. Census tracts with a combined final index score over 65 percent are considered to be disadvantaged census tracts, and therefore receive USDOT’s designation as DACs.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.  
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<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/svi/index.html>

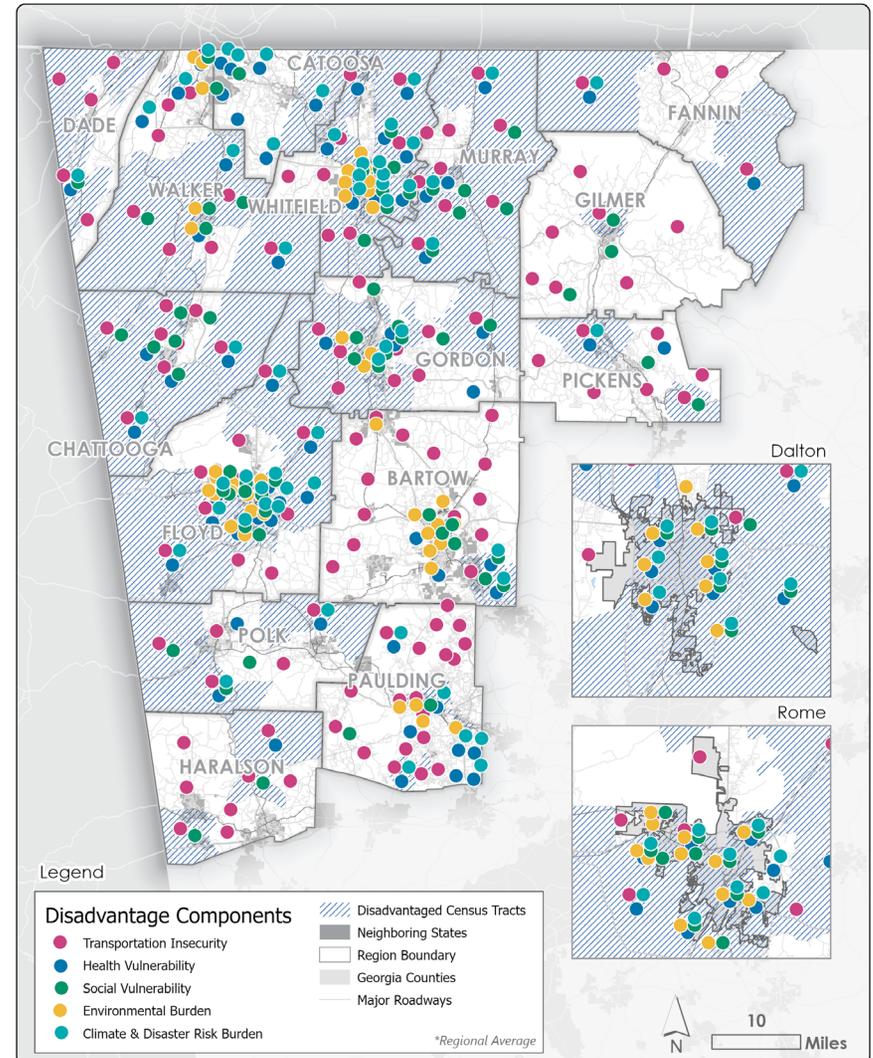
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 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. *Location Affordability Index*. <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/location-affordability-index/>  
 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. *EJSCREEN: Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool*. 2021. <https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen>

**Figure 11** displays the disadvantage components for each census tract in Northwest Georgia where the component is at or above the 65<sup>th</sup> percentile. Disadvantaged census tracts that meet the threshold for USDOT disadvantaged designation are also identified in the same figure with blue hatching.

41 percent of census tracts in Northwest Georgia are considered to be disadvantaged, with at least one disadvantaged census tract being present in all counties. Nearly all of the census tracts in the region have at least one disadvantaged component, with many having two or three, and 57 percent of the census tracts have populations experiencing transportation insecurities as illustrated by the pink circles in Figure 11. Given the rural nature of much of Northwest Georgia, it is understandable that many of the people who live in the area experience longer travel times and increased costs to access their destinations.

Areas with disadvantaged census tracts may be more competitive for federal discretionary grants under the Justice40 program, as some Notices of Federal Funding Opportunities (NOFOs) stipulate requirements or give preference for projects in disadvantaged communities.

**Figure 11: Transportation Disadvantages by Census Tract**



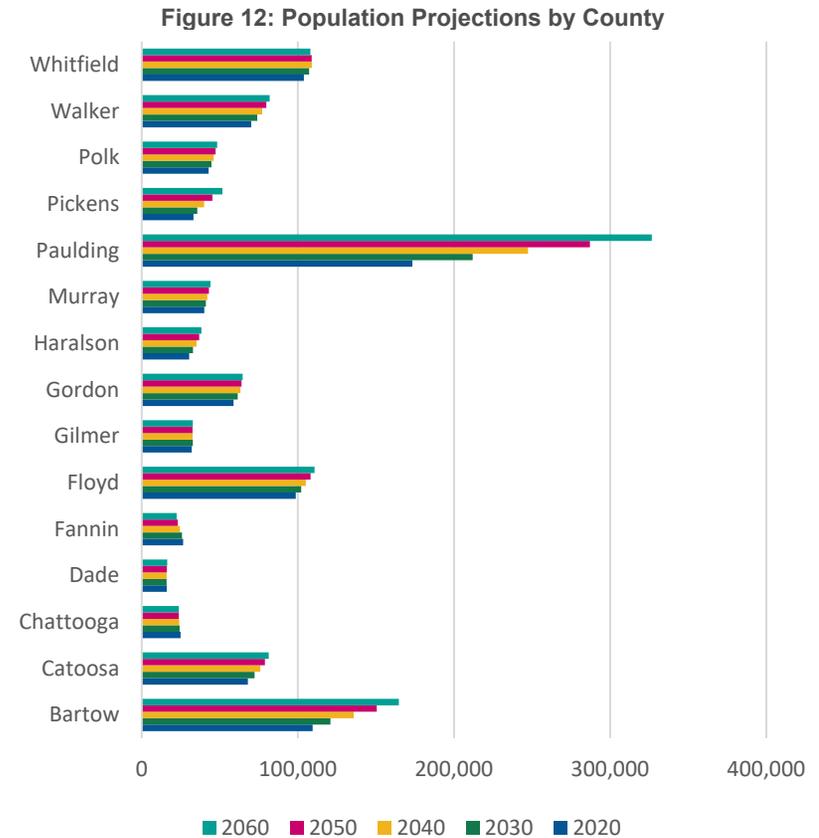
Source: U.S. Department of Transportation Justice40 Initiative

## 2.6 Future Demographics

Population projections provide insight on the growth of geographic areas. The Georgia Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) issues a population projection series by county. This data is used to show the region’s population for each decade from 2020 to 2060.

The Northwest Georgia region is expected to grow another 31 percent by 2060 from 927,899 to over 1.2 million people. This growth is on track with Georgia’s projected growth as illustrated in **Table 10**. Counties with the highest projected growth are Paulding, followed by Bartow, Floyd, Pickens, and Walker Counties. Chattooga, Dade, and Gilmer Counties are all projected to remain at populations levels similar to today, while Fannin County is projected to lose population. As illustrated in **Figure 12**, Paulding County will account for most of the region’s growth from 175,000 residents in 2020 to nearly 325,000 in 2060.

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.



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

Table 10: Population Projections

Geography	2020	2030	2040	2050	2060	2020–2060
NWGRC	927,899	1,002,755	1,073,532	1,144,822	1,215,551	31.0%
Georgia	10,710,017	11,742,622	12,632,994	13,390,283	14,041,287	31.1%

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

### 3.0 Employment Trends

#### 3.1 Current Employment

This subsection provides an overview of the total employed population as indicated by labor participation. Unemployment is discussed in detail on the following page.

Employment opportunities are distributed across the region, as shown in **Table 11**. The county with the highest employment is Paulding County, accounting for nearly 20 percent of the total employed population in Northwest Georgia. Additionally, Bartow, Whitfield, and Floyd Counties collectively account for 33 percent of employed persons in the region. The remaining counties each account for less than 10 percent of the regional total employment.

Despite Floyd County’s higher youth population attending Berry College, the county is still one of the highest employment areas in Northwest Georgia. Whitfield County is also where the City of Dalton is located, which is known as “The Carpet Capital of the World,” producing the majority of the world’s carpet and rugs.<sup>34</sup>

Table 11: Employment by County

County	Total Employed Population	Percent of Region’s Total Employed Population
Bartow	50,523	12.2%
Catoosa	32,323	7.8%
Chattooga	9,301	2.2%
Dade	7,061	1.7%
Fannin	9,966	2.4%
Floyd	42,819	10.3%
Gilmer	12,850	3.1%
Gordon	25,807	6.2%
Haralson	13,890	3.4%
Murray	17,508	4.2%
Paulding	82,377	19.9%
Pickens	15,308	3.7%
Polk	18,244	4.4%
Walker	30,164	7.3%
Whitfield	46,489	11.2%
<b>NWGRC</b>	<b>414,630</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (DP03)

<sup>3</sup>Explore Georgia. “Dalton”. Accessed 2023. <https://www.exploregeorgia.org/city/dalton>

<sup>4</sup>Dalton, Georgia: Carpet Capital of America. Accessed 2024. [https://www.gpb.org/georgiastories/stories/tufted\\_bedsread\\_industry](https://www.gpb.org/georgiastories/stories/tufted_bedsread_industry)

### 3.2 Current Unemployment

The U.S. Census Bureau considers all civilians over 16 years old as unemployed if they are without work during the reporting timeframe, are actively looking for work within four weeks of the questionnaire, and would be able to accept a job if offered. Nearly five percent of the population is unemployed in Northwest Georgia. This is slightly lower than the state’s unemployment percent of 5.4 percent, as shown in **Table 12**. It should be noted that this data is based on 2021 ACS 5-Year Data. Georgia’s unemployment rate according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is around 3.4 percent as of November 2023.

There are large pockets of low unemployment in Gordon, Gilmer, and Fannin Counties.

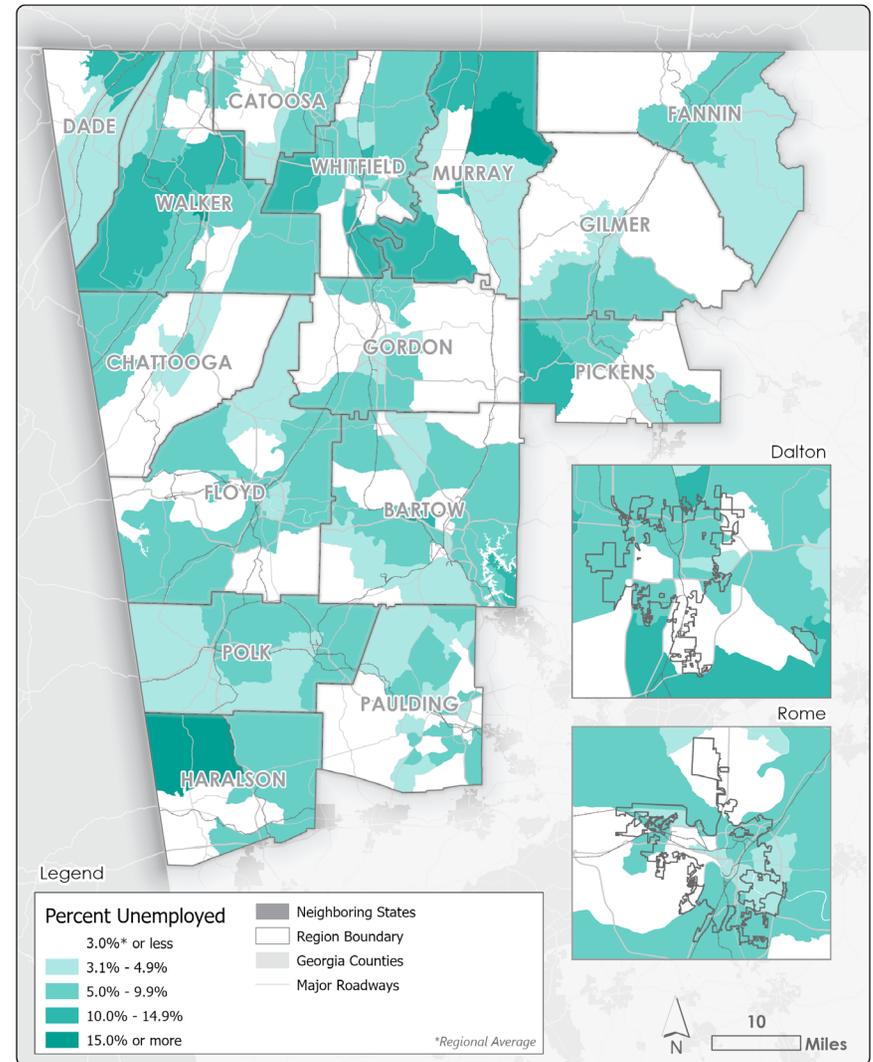
The highest concentrations of unemployment are in more rural areas of Walker, Whitfield, Murray, Pickens, and Haralson Counties (**Figure 13**).

**Table 12: Unemployed Population**

Geography	Total Population 16+	Total Labor Force	Total Unemployed	Percent Unemployed
NWGRC	720,095	437,341	21,684	5.0%
Georgia	8,385,039	5,329,864	290,843	5.4%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (DP03)*

**Figure 13: Unemployment by Census Tract**



*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Data (B23020)*

### 3.3 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 by places of employment in 2020 available from LODES, the most recently available.

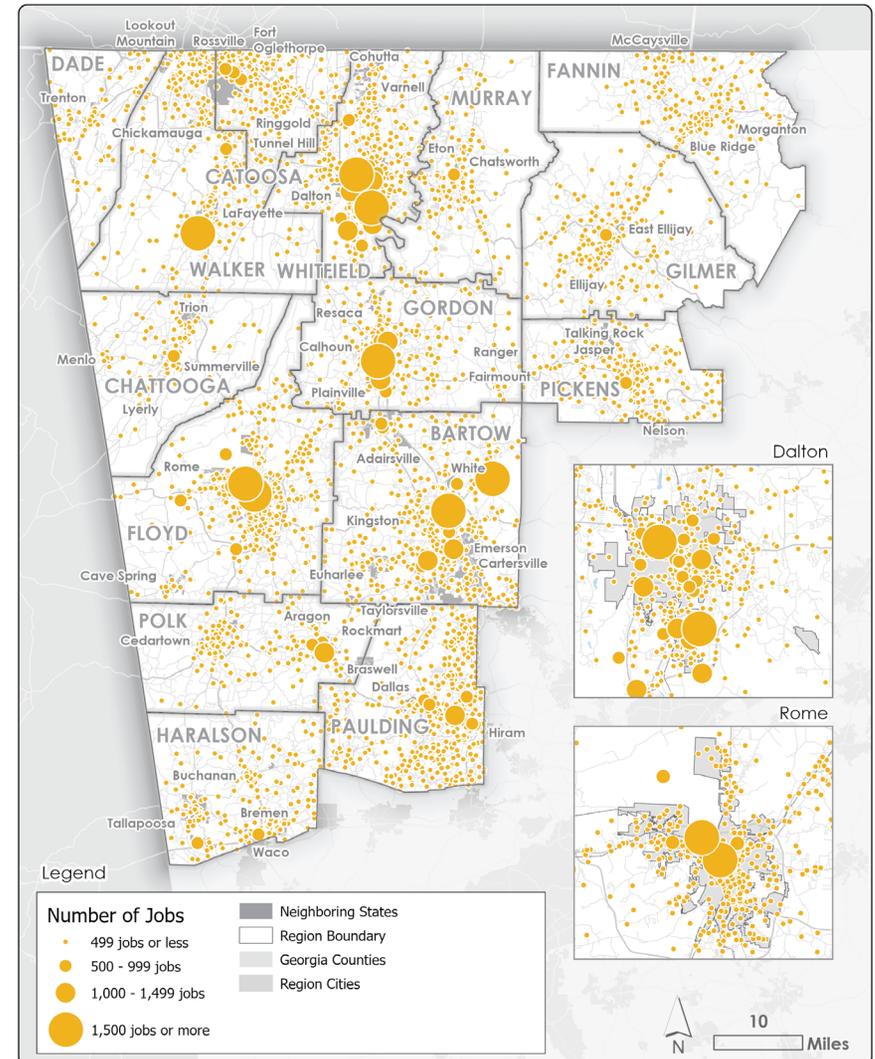
The highest concentrations of jobs are near larger cities such as Dalton, Rome, Calhoun, Dallas, Hiram, Cartersville, and the southern edge of Chattanooga, TN in Walker and Catoosa Counties. **Table 13** shows jobs by county.

Table 13: Jobs by County

Geography	Jobs	Percent of Region’s Jobs
Whitfield	53,325	21.50%
Bartow	38,168	15.40%
Floyd	33,010	13.30%
Paulding	24,752	10.00%
Gordon	21,015	8.50%
Catoosa	13,087	5.30%
Walker	12,155	4.90%
Polk	10,376	4.20%
Murray	7,316	3.00%
Pickens	7,334	3.00%
Haralson	7,265	2.90%
Gilmer	6,089	2.50%
Fannin	5,486	2.20%
Chattooga	4,847	2.00%
Dade	3,344	1.40%
<b>NWGRC</b>	<b>247,584</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

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

Figure 14: Job Concentration by Job Location



Source: U.S. Census Bureau LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistic, 2020

### 3.4 Major Industries

The three top employment industries in Northwest Georgia are medical, industrial (manufacturing, warehouse, and transportation), and commercial (shopping/retail). These industries account for 57.2 percent of all jobs in the region. Education and government are also notable industries, at 11.8 percent and 4.4 percent, respectively.

Medical facilities are most prevalent in Rome, which includes the only major hospital in Northwest Georgia. Major industrial and manufacturing facilities are clustered in Whitfield County, which supports the carpet industry. There are other major manufacturing companies in the region, such as Budweiser.

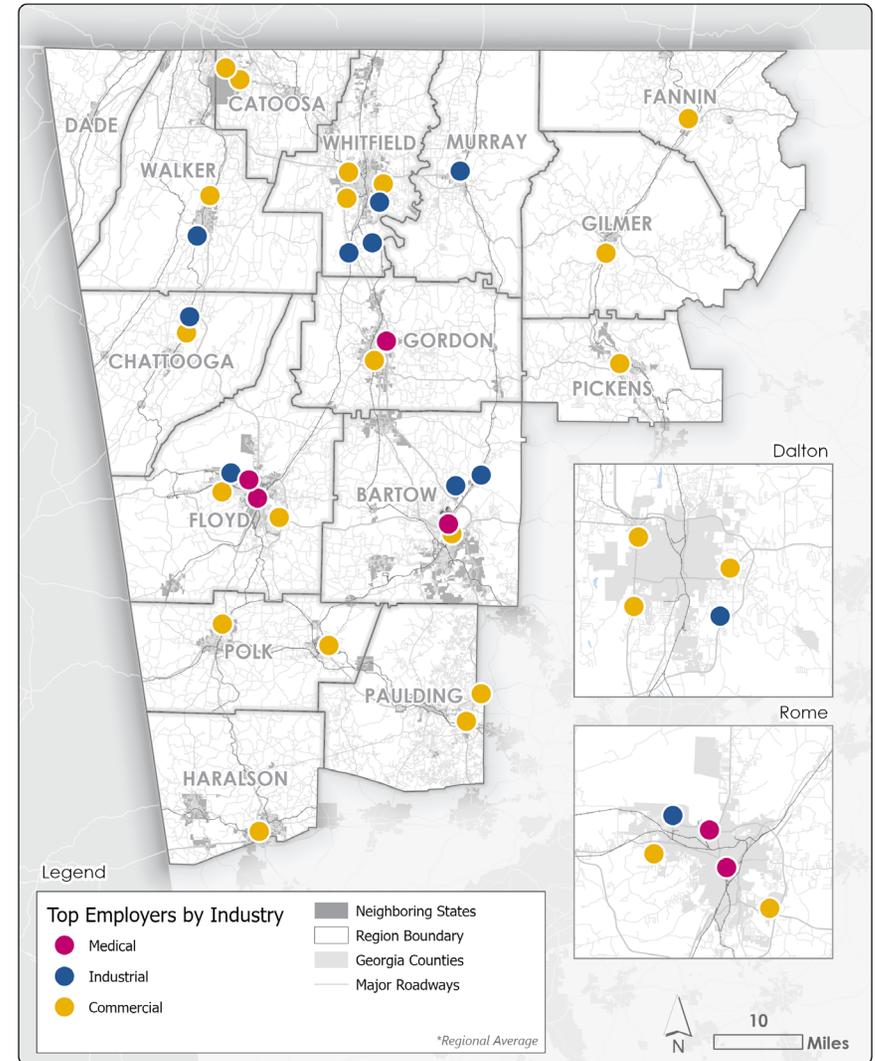
Commercial locations are major shopping venues, such as Wal-Mart, and grocery stores where people do most of their grocery and home goods purchasing. These are distributed across the region with at least one commercial location in each county except Dade and Murray. The region’s top private sector employers by industry are shown in **Figure 15**.

The five largest private employers in the region, including their location and industry, are:

- Shaw Industries, Inc., Dalton, Industrial
- Mohawk Industries, Inc., Calhoun, Industrial
- Floyd Medical Center, Rome, Medical
- Engineered Floors, LLC, Dalton, Industrial
- Mount Vernon Mills, Inc., Alto, Industrial

PAC members also noted several important industries to the region during the first PAC meeting on October 4, 2023. Participants ranked medical services, manufacturing, and education as the top three most important industries. Others include forestry, construction, and retail.

Figure 15: Major Employers in Northwest Georgia



Source: Georgia Department of Labor Area Labor Profile, NWGRC

### 3.5 Future Employment Trends

**Table 14** provides the Georgia Department of Labor’s industry projections through 2028. The industry with the expected largest increase in total jobs is healthcare and social assistance, which the PAC indicated is a major industry and an overall greater need as there are not many medical facilities in the region. The industries with the highest projected percentage change are arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services; and healthcare. Manufacturing is expected to decrease (-0.9 percent) while transportation and warehousing is expected to increase (23.8 percent).

The PAC indicated that there is significant development growth along the I-75 corridor, particularly in Bartow County, in which NWGRC is estimating over 6,500 new jobs across multiple industries, primarily industrial and warehousing, because of these developments. There was also discussion around growing tourism and recreation in the area, with the PAC citing the recently developed LakePoint Sports complex in Emerson (Bartow County) and other new recreational facilities that support growing participation in team sports such as softball, pickleball, and disc golf.

Table 14: Industry Projections

Industry Title	2018–2028 Employment Change	
	Total	Percent
Accommodation and Food Services	7,136	29.3%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	2,413	21.4%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	-266	-4.5%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	924	40.8%
Construction	629	6.5%
Educational Services	2,294	9.6%
Federal Government	-57	-3.6%
Finance and Insurance	693	13.4%
Health Care and Social Assistance	7,529	24.6%
Information	36	2.8%
Local, Excluding Education and Hospitals	934	8.0%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	69	8.9%
Manufacturing	-553	-0.9%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	41	8.3%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,146	17.0%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	993	13.0%
Public Administration	171	4.6%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	275	13.1%
Retail Trade	5,823	16.9%
Transportation and Warehousing	2,332	23.8%
Utilities	113	9.2%
Wholesale Trade	1,314	12.7%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor Long-Term Industry Projections

## 4.0 Travel Trends

This section includes information on travel patterns within Northwest Georgia. Understanding regional travel patterns will help identify intra- and cross-county traffic flows as well as transit demand in the region.

### 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 RITIS INRIX origin-destination trip dataset for one year between January 2022 and December 2022 (the most recently available full year).

### 4.2 Geographic Areas for Travel Trends Analysis

The analysis of travel trends in Northwest Georgia includes all 15 counties within the region and all counties that share a border with the region, including the following:

- Eight counties in Georgia: Carroll, Cherokee, Cobb, Dawson, Douglas, Forsyth, Lumpkin, and Union
- Four counties in Alabama: Cherokee, Cleburne, DeKalb, and Jackson
- Four counties in Tennessee: Bradley, Hamilton, Marion, and Polk
- One county in North Carolina: Cherokee

### 4.3 Travel Patterns within the Region

Approximately 85 percent of all trips are intra-county, meaning trips that originate and have their destination within the same county. **Table 15** shows the number of trips and percent of total trips that occur within each county.

**Table 15: Total Trips and Intra-County Percentage (2022)**

County	Total Trips	Percentage Intra-County Trips
Paulding County	20,332,067	94.00%
Bartow County	20,037,985	87.00%
Floyd County	18,883,600	88.40%
Whitfield County	16,131,500	84.80%
Gordon County	10,897,231	80.00%
Catoosa County	9,564,888	77.20%
Walker County	7,615,275	76.20%
Polk County	7,577,884	80.20%
Pickens County	5,397,103	89.80%
Gilmer County	4,999,487	83.80%
Fannin County	4,837,076	91.00%
Murray County	4,802,010	73.30%
Haralson County	3,821,207	90.60%
Chattooga County	3,362,167	81.00%
Dade County	1,915,751	89.70%

*Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS), Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected: All months of 2022.*

Inter-county travel also represents a significant number of trips in the region, with approximately 15 percent of trips starting and ending in different counties. The most common inter-county trips within the Northwest Georgia region are between:

- Walker and Catoosa Counties;
- Whitfield and Murray Counties;
- Bartow and Gordon Counties; and
- Bartow and Floyd Counties.

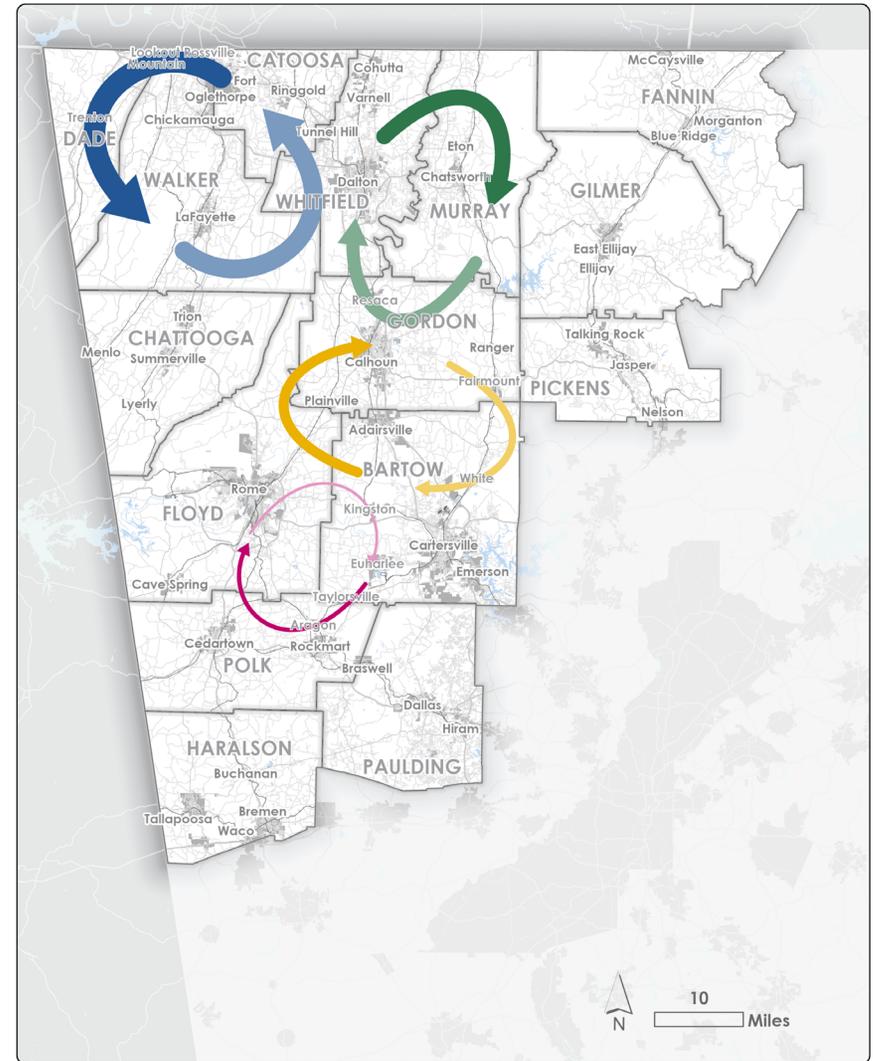
**Figure 16** illustrates inter-county travel patterns, and **Table 16** provides the origin-destination pairs and total number of trips for all months of the year 2022.

**Table 16: Top 10 Inter-County Trips in the Region (2022)**

Origin	Destination	Total Trips
Catoosa	Walker	1,286,304
Walker	Catoosa	1,230,267
Whitfield	Murray	935,421
Murray	Whitfield	914,980
Bartow	Gordon	768,799
Gordon	Bartow	742,368
Bartow	Floyd	659,979
Floyd	Bartow	654,132
Floyd	Polk	632,003
Polk	Floyd	626,742

*Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS), Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected: All months of 2022.*

**Figure 16: Inter-County Travel in the Region (2022)**



*Source: RITIS INRIX Origin-Destination Data, 2022*

### 4.4 Travel Patterns between the Region and Surrounding Areas

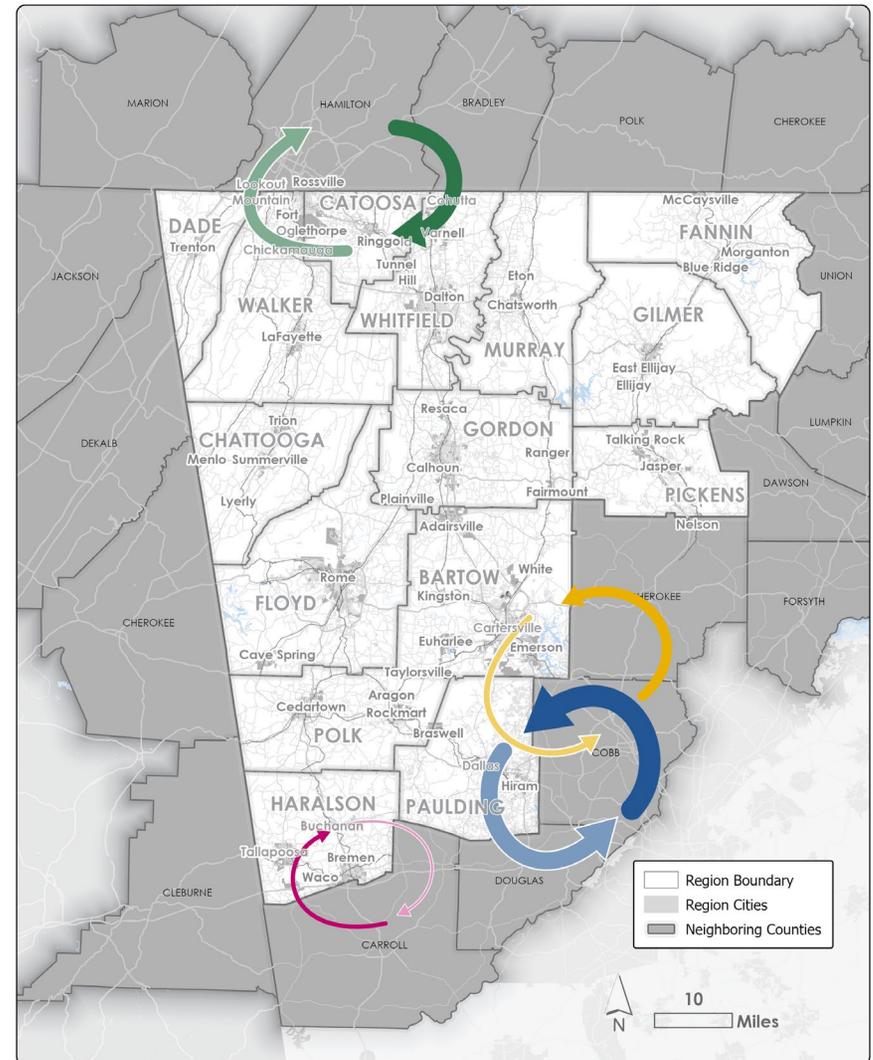
Inter-region and inter-state travel are important to analyze as key components of Northwest Georgia’s overall travel trends. **Figure 17** illustrates these inter-region and inter-state travel trends for 2022. Additionally, **Table 17** and **Table 18** provide an overview of the total trips between the region and neighboring counties or states.

Analyzing the total trips within the region and surrounding areas, 9.7 percent of the trips cross the region’s boundary, with 4.9 percent of trips coming into the region and 4.8 percent leaving the region to the surrounding areas.

The counties in Northwest Georgia with the greatest number of trips to a destination outside the region are Paulding, Catoosa, and Bartow Counties. Most external trips, or trips with an origin outside the region, are coming from Cobb and Cherokee Counties in Georgia and Hamilton County in Tennessee.

The same top destinations for interregional travel are also the top origins for interregional travel, with destinations to Cobb and Cherokee Counties in Georgia and Hamilton County in Tennessee. As these external counties have high concentrations of jobs and services, it is likely these trips represent commutes to and from employment.

Figure 17: Inter-Regional Travel (2022)



Source: RITIS INRIX Origin-Destination Data, 2022

**Table 17: Origin-Destination Pairs where Destination is Outside of the Region (2022)**

Origin	Destination	Total Trips
Paulding County (GA)	Cobb County (GA)	4,307,811
Catoosa County (GA)	Hamilton County (TN)	2,282,231
Bartow County (GA)	Cobb County (GA)	1,487,413
Haralson County (GA)	Carroll County (GA)	1,274,593
Walker County (GA)	Hamilton County (TN)	1,080,123
Paulding County (GA)	Douglas County (GA)	995,411
Pickens County (GA)	Cherokee County (GA)	830,482
Bartow County (GA)	Cherokee County (GA)	689,849
Paulding County (GA)	Carroll County (GA)	574,056
Whitfield County (GA)	Hamilton County (TN)	489,645
Dade County (GA)	Hamilton County (TN)	415,973
Fannin County (GA)	Union County (GA)	247,696
Floyd County (GA)	Cherokee County (AL)	238,756
Paulding County (GA)	Cherokee County (GA)	226,213
Gordon County (GA)	Hamilton County (TN)	172,442

Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS), Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected: All months of 2022.

**Table 18: Origin-Destination Pairs where Origin is Outside of the Region (2022)**

Origin	Destination	Total Trips
Cobb County (GA)	Paulding County (GA)	4,381,358
Hamilton County (TN)	Catoosa County (GA)	2,352,217
Cobb County (GA)	Bartow County (GA)	1,507,662
Carroll County (GA)	Haralson County (GA)	1,287,498
Hamilton County (TN)	Walker County (GA)	1,034,631
Douglas County (GA)	Paulding County (GA)	1,008,711
Cherokee County (GA)	Pickens County (GA)	864,089
Cherokee County (GA)	Bartow County (GA)	705,146
Carroll County (GA)	Paulding County (GA)	579,739
Hamilton County (TN)	Whitfield County (GA)	484,054
Hamilton County (TN)	Dade County (GA)	423,768
Union County (GA)	Fannin County (GA)	249,946
Cherokee County (AL)	Floyd County (GA)	231,472
Cherokee County (GA)	Paulding County (GA)	219,164
Cobb County (GA)	Gordon County (GA)	179,715

Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System (RITIS), Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected: All months of 2022.

## 4.5 Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2020 impacted all areas of life across the globe, and the effects of it are still seen today. Northwest Georgia experienced a variety of challenges while enforcing regulations to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including impacts on travel patterns from the change in demands at workplaces, education facilities, and recreational activities. The effects on residential demand, medical access, and transit still linger, even a few years later.

In the region, travel demand saw a quick return by 2021, after regulations were eased. **Table 19** in **Section 5.1.1** contains traffic count data from 2019 and 2022. Since 2019, the majority of stations in 2022 recorded an increase in traffic. This section explores some of the factors impacting travel demand in the region.

Workplace regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed essential services to continue while other industries required strict distancing policies, resulting in revenue disruptions and layoffs. According to the NWGRC Economic Impact Analysis report, Manufacturing and Food Service industries reported the most unemployment claims of any sector in the region.<sup>5</sup> This resulted in unemployment rates increasing from approximately 3.5 percent in 2019 to nearly 6.0 percent in 2020, according to the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL).<sup>6</sup> The increase in unemployment and teleworking contributed to an overall decrease in travel demand during this period.

Colleges throughout the country also implemented virtual classes, which decreased travel demand and returned students to their families' residential locations. The region's higher education establishments, like Berry College, provided virtual classes and greatly reduced the presence of students who were usual patrons of local restaurants and retail.

However, a revival of outdoor recreation and small-town residential communities has benefited Northwest Georgia. Due to the indoor social restrictions during COVID-19, individuals explored more outdoor recreational activities, which exist in several locations in Northwest Georgia, and particularly the hiking trails of the Blue Ridge Mountains. The lasting effects of remote work opportunities have also allowed individuals to relocate to residential locations outside of urban centers with more affordable homeownership while maintaining high-wage jobs.

Transit services experienced unique challenges to continue providing essential medical trips while maintaining distancing regulations. Stakeholders and service operators expressed confusion and difficulty complying with quickly changing regulations and few administrative guidelines due to the extraordinary circumstances.

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<sup>5</sup> Economic Impact Analysis – Impact of COVID on Northwest Georgia, April 2021. Accessed from <https://nwgrc.org/publications/nwgrc-economic-impact-analysis-impact-of-covid-19-on-northwest-georgia/>

<sup>6</sup> Georgia Department of Labor: Area Labor Profile for Northwest Georgia. Nov. 2023. Accessed from <https://explorer.gdol.ga.gov/vosnet/mis/Profiles/rc/01 - Northwest Georgia RC.pdf>

## 5.0 Existing Transportation Network

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

### 5.1 Transportation System Overview

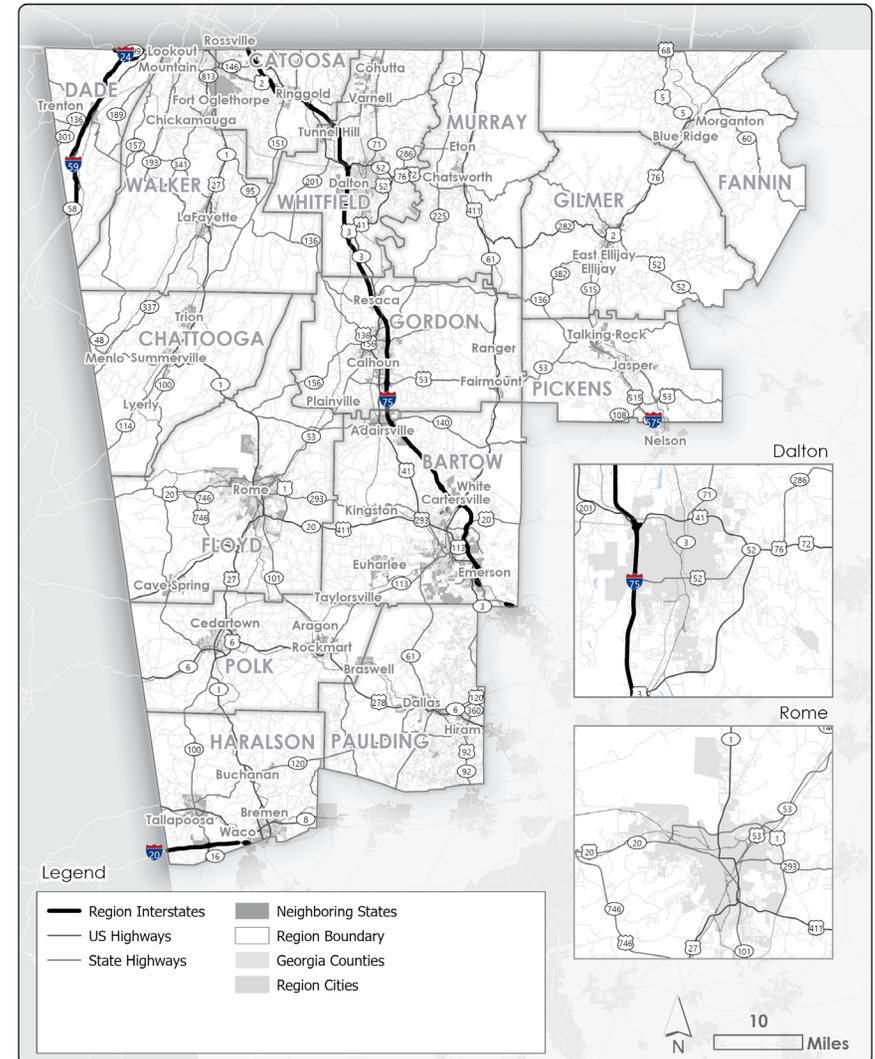
The transportation system in Northwest Georgia primarily consists of the roadway network, commercially owned railroads, and rural (on-demand) transit service. The region features limited fixed-route transit and non-motorized facilities (sidewalks and bike lanes), which are primarily located in downtown areas. As shown in **Figure 18**, there are several US and State Routes in the region that provide connectivity for passenger vehicles.

Major corridors that serve the region include:

- Interstate 75 (I-75), which bisects the region and has the highest traffic volumes. It provides access to almost all the highest population and job densities in the region including those in Paulding, Bartow, Gordon, Whitfield, and Catoosa Counties.
- I-75 becomes State Route (SR) 515 / SR 5 in Pickens County and supports high traffic volumes, providing access to the northeast portion of the region.
- US Route 411 / SR 20 and US Route 27 / SR 1 provide access to the City of Rome and Cartersville.
- US Route 278 / SR 6 and SR 120 move traffic within and through Paulding County.

I-75, I-20, I-24, and I-59 are all high-volume roadways that pass through the region. However, because these corridors are along the periphery of the region, they do not contribute greatly to intraregional travel.

**Figure 18: Existing US and State Highway Network**



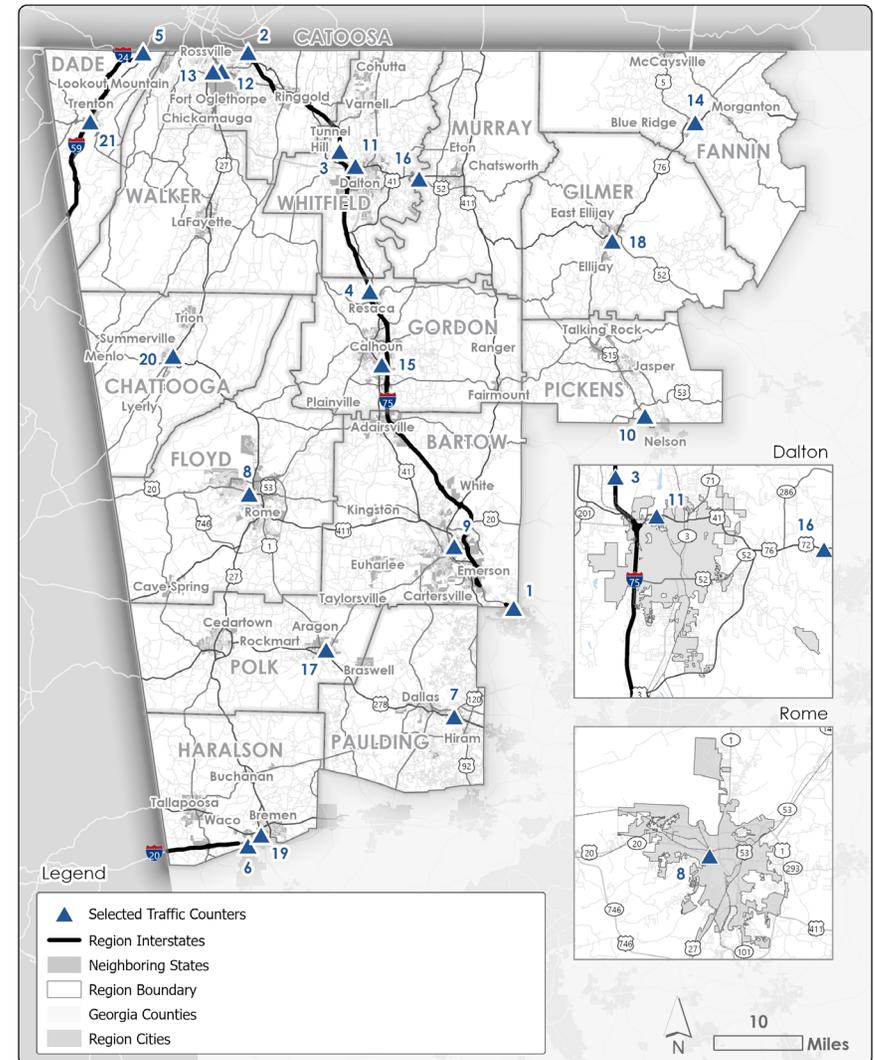
Source: GDOT, U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics

### 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 of Georgia 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.

**Figure 19** shows the location of selected count stations. For the purposes of this analysis, count stations were selected along the major routes and spread out geographically across the region. Each county has at least one count station. The busiest counter in the region, along I-75 in Bartow County, had an AADT of 115,000 in 2022, a 5.5 percent increase over 2019 counts. Most of the sampled counters saw increases during this time period. Complete details for these counters are provided in **Table 19**.

**Figure 19: Annual Average Daily Traffic (2022)**



Source: GDOT Road and Traffic Data

Table 19: Average Annual Daily Traffic and 2019–2022 AADT

Map ID	GDOT Traffic Counter ID	Roadway Name	County	Roadway Functional Class	2019	2022	AADT Percent Change (2019–2022)
1	015-0265	I-75	Bartow County	Interstate	109,000	115,000	5.50%
2	047-0114	I-75	Catoosa County	Interstate	98,200	101,000	2.85%
3	313-0112	I-75	Whitfield County	Interstate	78,300	87,000	11.11%
4	129-0112	I-75	Gordon County	Interstate	73,900	76,800	3.92%
5	083-0214	I-24	Dade County	Interstate	67,200	68,200	1.49%
6	143-0132	I-20	Haralson County	Interstate	40,600	41,800	2.96%
7	223-0111	US 278	Paulding County	Urban Principal Arterial	37,600	40,400	7.45%
8	115-0072	US 20	Floyd County	Urban Principal Arterial	31,600	35,500	12.34%
9	015-0114	US 41	Bartow County	Urban Principal Arterial	31,600	34,300	8.54%
10	227-0235	US 515	Pickens County	Rural Principal Arterial	30,500	33,400	9.51%
11	313-0611	US 41	Whitfield County	Urban Principal Arterial	32,600	32,300	-0.92%
12	047-0016	US 2	Catoosa County	Urban Principal Arterial	30,700	31,700	3.26%
13	295-0060	US 27	Walker County	Urban Principal Arterial	27,400	29,600	8.03%
14	111-0265	US 76	Fannin County	Rural Principal Arterial	26,900	28,500	5.95%
15	129-0154	Fairmount Hwy	Gordon County	Urban Local	29,200	27,600	-5.48%
16	213-0127	US 76	Murray County	Urban Principal Arterial	25,000	24,400	-2.40%
17	233-0444	US 278	Polk County	Urban Principal Arterial	23,300	23,200	-0.43%
18	123-0252	US 515	Gilmer County	Rural Principal Arterial	20,600	21,800	5.83%
19	143-0246	US 27	Haralson County	Urban Principal Arterial	19,300	19,700	2.07%
20	055-0025	US 27	Chattooga County	Urban Principal Arterial	18,800	18,200	-3.19%
21	083-0141	SR 136	Dade County	Rural Major Collector	17,800	14,400	-19.10%

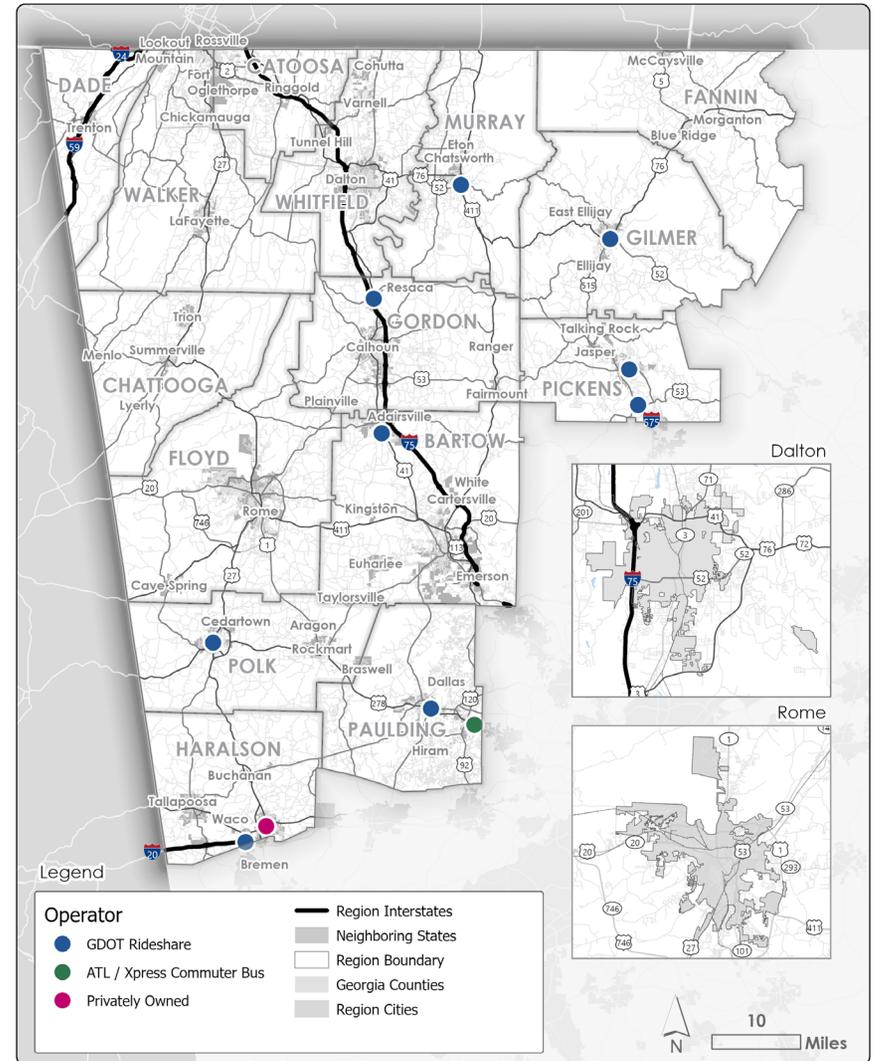
Source: GDOT Road and Traffic Data

## 5.2 Park and Ride Lots

Park and ride lots allow users to park and transfer to other modes of transportation, typically public transportation. There are eleven park and ride lots in the Northwest Georgia region on GDOT's Statewide Park and Ride Lot list. These lot locations are illustrated in **Figure 20**.

- The Hiram Park and Ride facility in Paulding County is the only access in the region to the ATL Xpress commuter bus service to Downtown Atlanta. This lot has 160 parking spaces.
- Nine park and ride lots scattered throughout the region are locally owned and part of GDOT's Rideshare program. These lots are not in coordination with the local transit agencies, though they could be used as on-demand pick-up or drop-off locations in accordance with local service operations.
- A single parking lot on GDOT's Statewide Park and Ride Lot list is owned by the Higgins General Hospital in the City of Bremen in Haralson County. This parking lot is open to the public but is adjacent to the hospital parking lot and has no signs to advertise free parking or enforce parking regulations.

Figure 20: Park and Ride Lot Locations



Source: GDOT, ARC, Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority

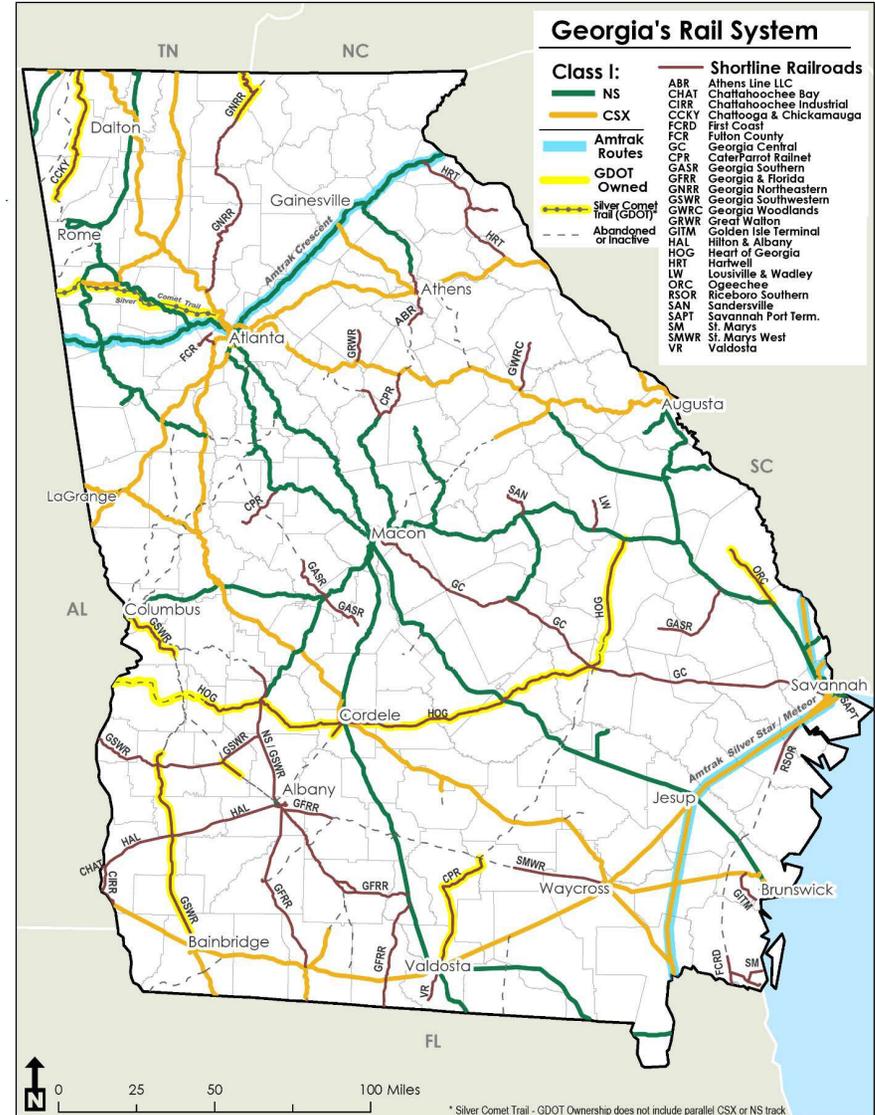
### 5.3 Rail

The Northwest Georgia region has two Class I railroads operated by CSX Transportation (CSX) and Norfolk Southern (NS), as illustrated in **Figure 21**. These lines provide commercial goods movement through the region from Atlanta and to neighboring destinations. There are also Class II and III private and GDOT-owned shortline railroads in the northern counties of the region providing goods movement and access into Tennessee. These rail lines are leased to private companies.

For goods and freight movement, there are rail yards and inland ports in the region. The Georgia Ports Authority (GPA) operates the Appalachian Regional Port in Murray County along a CSX rail line. Three CSX rail yards exist in the region, two in Bartow County and one in Whitfield County. One NS rail yard exists in Floyd County.

There is currently no passenger rail service available within Northwest Georgia. Amtrak rail passes through the region near I-20, but there are no service stations available to embark/disembark. There have been previous studies of a high-speed ground transportation from Atlanta to Chattanooga with potential stations in the City of Cartersville (Paulding County) and City of Dalton (Whitfield County). This route is currently not a federally designated high-speed rail corridor.

Figure 21: State Rail Network



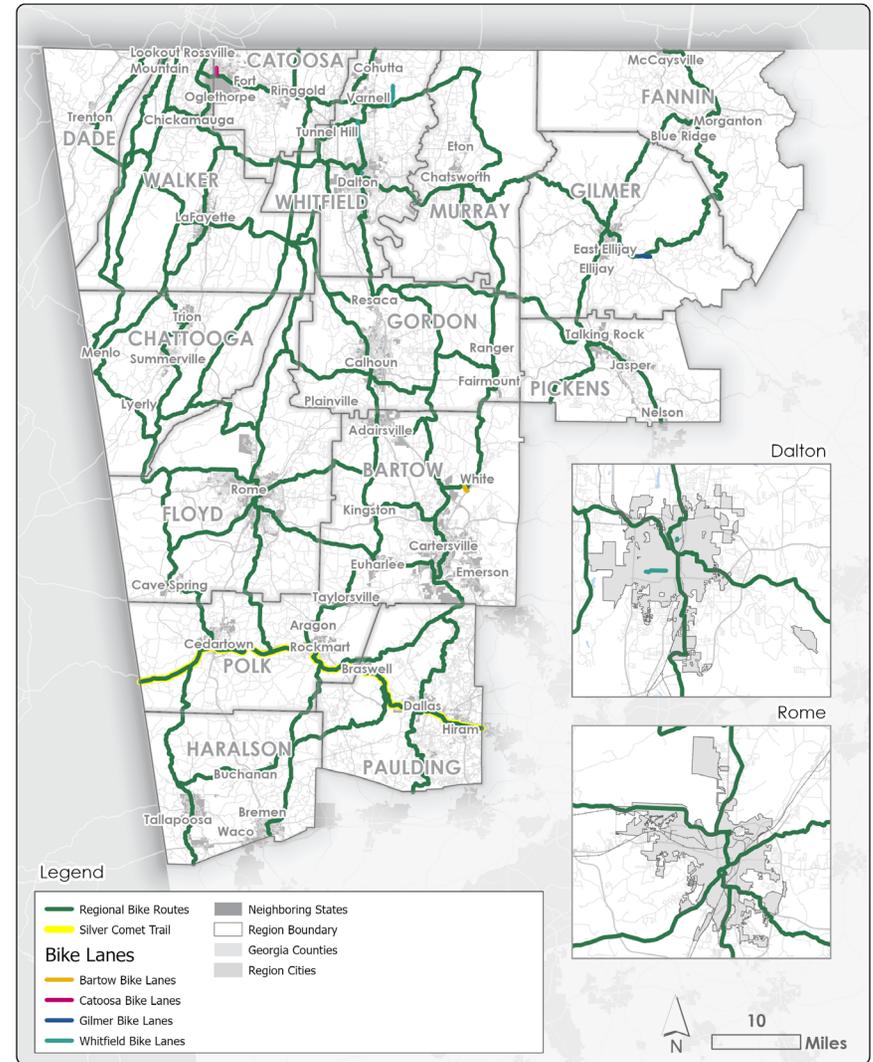
Source: Georgia Department of Transportation 2021 Georgia State Rail Plan

### 5.4 Active Transportation

Active transportation refers to the concept of using walking or biking as a means of transportation. Walking is typically a localized mode of transportation that occurs within the bounds of a city or between destinations that are within a half-mile of each other. Biking can occur along longer routes and can even account for inter-county travel. Most Northwest Georgia cities have some degree of existing sidewalks, and the downtown areas of Dalton, Cartersville, and Rome have the greatest amount of sidewalk and crosswalk facilities present, providing walkability near their commercial centers. Overall, the region is predominantly rural with very limited pedestrian access outside of these city centers.

**Figure 22** shows the region’s existing state bike route designations and the existing bike lanes in Bartow, Catoosa, Gilmer, and Whitfield Counties. The Silver Comet Trail passes through Paulding and Polk Counties and continues into Alabama. This trail is owned by GDOT and provides regional biking and pedestrian access, primarily for recreational use. The existing state bike routes pass through all counties in the region and go through all major cities.

Figure 22: Regional Bike Routes and Existing Bike Lanes



Source: NWGRC, ARC

## 6.0 Existing Transit Services

There are currently 11 public transit services operating within the Northwest Georgia region and one non-profit shared regional transportation system. The public services include one regional commuter bus service, one urbanized service including a fixed-route, and nine rural demand-response services. Eight of these demand-response services are countywide with occasional trips to areas outside the service county, and the ninth includes a semi-fixed route for senior centers. The transit agencies that provide these services are detailed in the sections below. All services in the region, excluding the ATL Xpress, are shown in **Figure 23**.

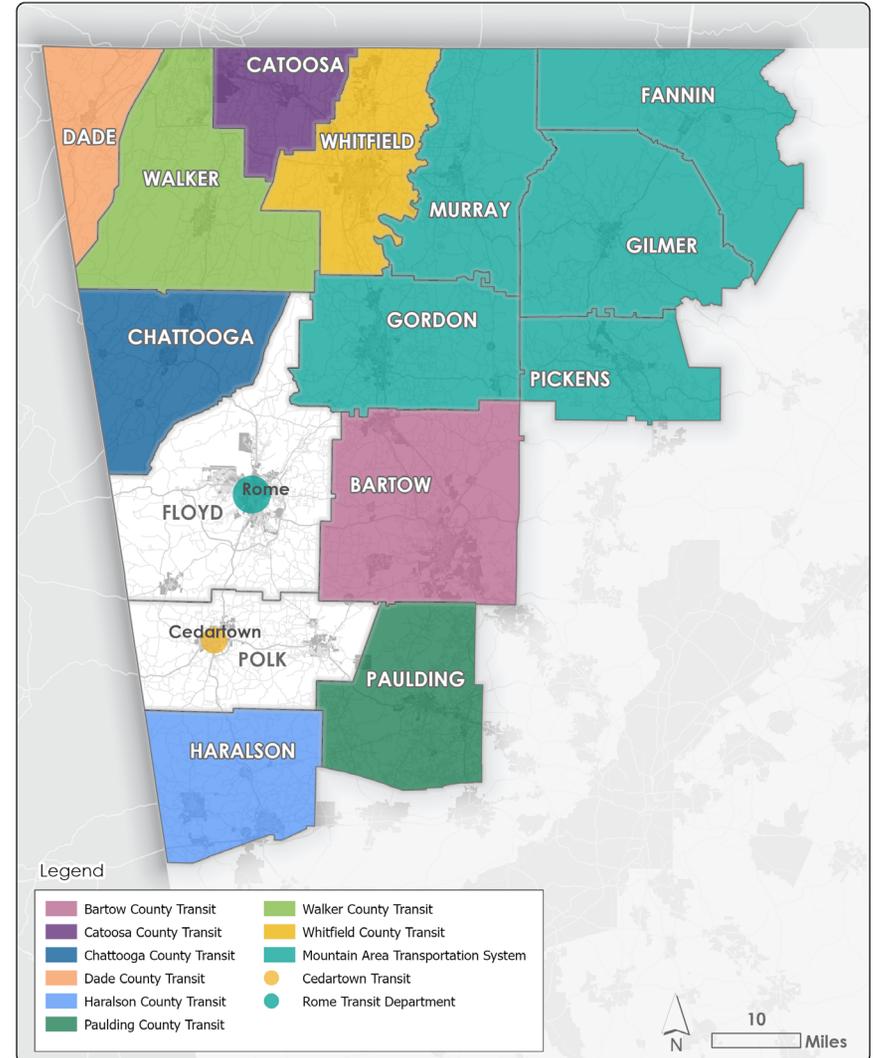
### 6.1 Regional Public Services

The ATL Xpress commuter bus service operates in 12 metro Atlanta counties and includes a single station in the City of Hiram within Paulding County. This is the only regional commuter bus service that serves any of the Northwest Georgia counties.

Service is provided weekdays during the morning and evening commute hours, from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., depending on the routes. Fares are \$4.00 for a one-way trip from Paulding County, or \$7.00 for a round trip. Pick-up times at the Hiram Park and Ride are 5:20 a.m., 6:05 a.m., 6:35 a.m., and 7:05 a.m. Drop-off times are 4:23 p.m., 5:40 p.m., 6:12 p.m., and 6:30 p.m.

The ATL also coordinates a vanpool program operated by COMMUTE with Enterprise to offer commuters vanpool options in the 13-county metropolitan region of Atlanta. Service statistics and performance measures for Xpress are shown in **Figure 24** at the end of this section.

**Figure 23: Existing Transit Services**



Source: NWGRC, GDOT, County Websites

## 6.2 Local Public Services

Local services are operated by the public entities within the region and receive federal grant funds for operation and capital costs. Most local services in the region receive Section 5311 funding for rural services, with the exception of Rome Transit Department, which receives Section 5307 funds for urban areas. GDOT provides program guidelines and eligibility based on federal requirements. More details about transit funding are provided in **Section 9.0**.

An overview of each local public transit service is provided below.

### Bartow County Transit

Bartow County Transit provides demand-response service to the public in Bartow County with occasional trips to the cities of Rome and Acworth. Service is provided weekdays between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Fares are \$1.00 for individuals over six years old for one-way in the County, \$5.00 for one-way trips to Rome, and \$2.50 for trips one-way from Acworth to Adairsville.

Service statistics and performance measures for Bartow County Transit are shown in **Figure 25** at the end of this section.

### Catoosa County Trans-Aid

Catoosa County Trans-Aid provides demand-response service to the public in Catoosa County. Most of the current riders are seniors or individuals with disabilities. The service does not provide trips outside of the county. Service is provided weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and is free for all users.

Service statistics and performance measures for Catoosa County Trans-Aid are shown in **Figure 26** at the end of this section.

### Chattooga County Transit

Chattooga County Transit provides fixed-route service between senior living facilities and common retail locations, as well as demand-response service throughout the county. Round trips are provided to Rome for medical and dialysis treatments. Service is provided weekdays from 6:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Fares are \$2.00 per one-way trip within the county and \$10.00 for a round trip to Rome.

Service statistics and performance measures for Chattooga County Transit are shown in **Figure 27** at the end of this section.

### Dade County Transit

Dade County Transit provides demand-response service to the public in Dade County with occasional trips to Chattanooga. The Dade County Comprehensive Plan states the purpose of the county's transit is to serve educational needs, employment, shopping, social activities, and medical appointments. Service is provided weekdays from 4:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Fares are \$2.00 per trip within the county and \$3.00 per trip out of the county. Members of the Dade County Senior Center are exempt from fares.

Service statistics and performance measures for Dade County Transit are shown in **Figure 28** at the end of this section.

### Haralson County Transit

Haralson County Transit operates demand-response service for the public in Haralson County for medical appointments, shopping, and social activities, but does not provide trips for work or school. They will provide trips outside the county, including to Carrollton and Bremen. They provide trips to Rome on Thursdays. Service is provided weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Fares are \$3.00 per trip within the county and range between \$4.00 and \$5.00 per trip to nearby cities. Round trips to Rome are \$10.00.

Service statistics and performance measures for Haralson County Transit are shown in **Figure 29** at the end of this section.

### Paulding County Transit

Paulding County Transit provides demand-response service to the public within Paulding County. Currently, most users are seniors and individuals with disabilities and the top destinations include the Paulding Senior Center, WellStar Paulding Hospital, and four dialysis centers in the county. Riders in northwest Paulding County have limited access due to the rural development of the area and the impact the trip would have on the service schedule. Traffic congestion in southeastern Paulding County also affects service response time and requires consolidated pick-up times to maintain trip schedules. Service is provided weekdays from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and is free for all users.

Service statistics and performance measures for Paulding County Transit are shown in **Figure 30** at the end of this section.

### Walker County Transit

Walker County Transit provides demand-response service to the public within Walker County, advertising trips for appointments and grocery shopping. Service is provided weekdays from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Fares are \$4.00 per trip.

Service statistics and performance measures for Walker County Transit are shown in **Figure 31** at the end of this section.

### Whitfield County Transit

Whitfield County Transit provides demand-response service to the public within Whitfield County for errands, appointments, to the senior center, and other trips. Commute trips to work are not provided. Service is provided weekdays between 6:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Fares are \$4.00 per one-way trip with the option to buy a \$30.00, 10-ride pass.

Service statistics and performance measures for Whitfield County Transit are shown in **Figure 32** at the end of this section.

### City of Cedartown Transit

Cedartown Transit provides demand-response service to the public within the city limits of Cedartown. Major drop-off locations include Polk County's Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS), the Nutrition Center, employment, doctor offices, pharmacies, and shopping centers. Service is provided weekdays between 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Fares are \$2.00 per trip.

Service statistics and performance measures for Cedartown Transit are shown in **Figure 33** at the end of this section.

### Rome Transit Department (RTD)

Rome Transit Department provides fixed-route service for the public and paratransit service for ADA-eligible riders in Rome. The fixed service includes six routes; two bidirectional overlapping routes, covering most of the urbanized area; and two single-direction routes, providing access to additional residential locations and the Mount Berry Square Mall. The routes run with a one-hour headway. Routes exist along state roads and major roadways with all routes having at least one stop at the Midtown Transit Station in downtown Rome. The paratransit service operates within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile outside of the fixed-route service. Rapid on-demand services are currently being studied for implementation. Service is provided weekdays from 5:40 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Regular fares are \$1.25 per trip with discounts for seniors, students, children under five, and individuals with disabilities. Multi-ride passes are also available providing a per-ride discount.

Service statistics and performance measures for RTD are shown in **Figure 34** at the end of this section.

## 6.3 Non-profit Regional Services

### Mountain Area Transportation System (MATS)

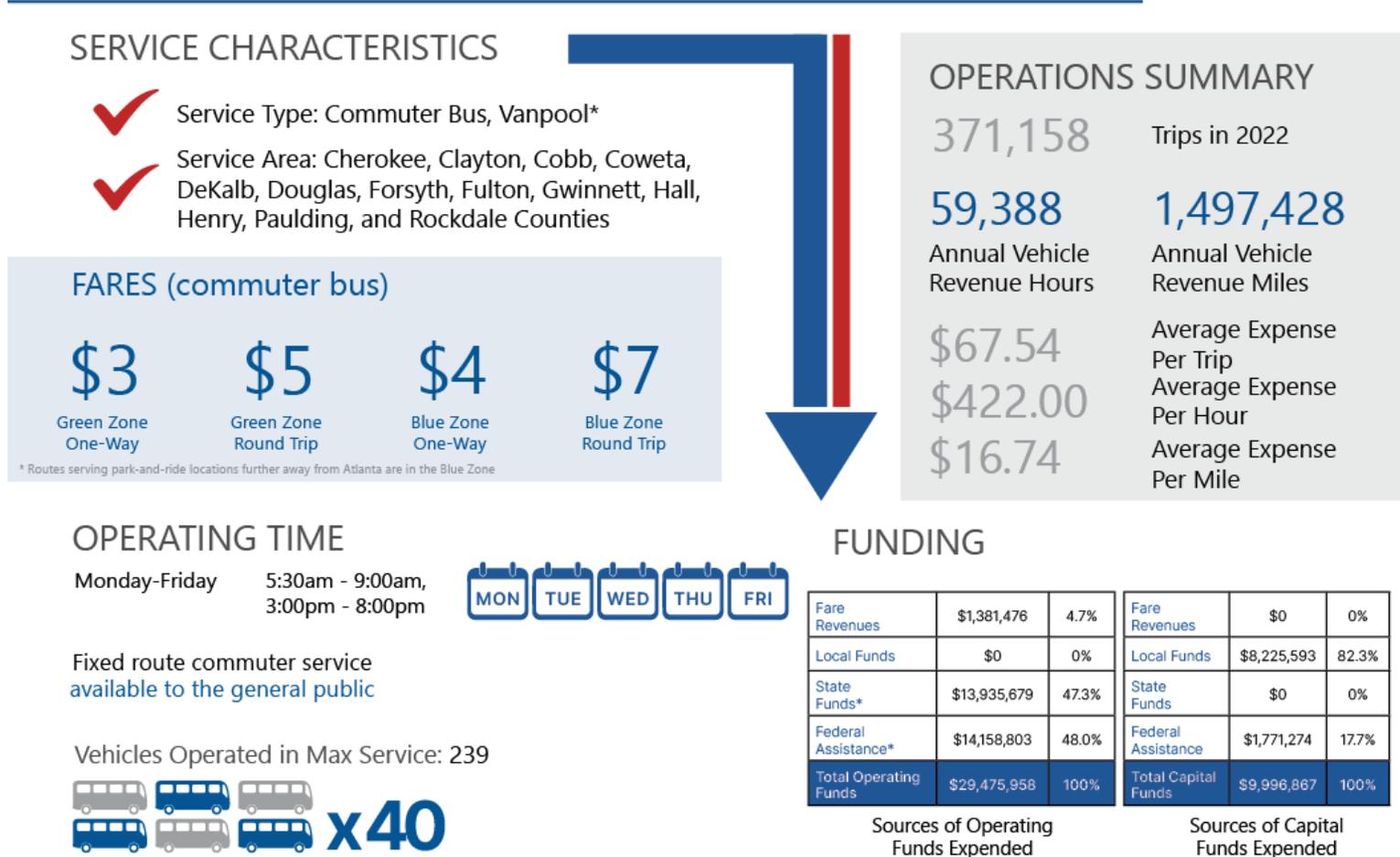
The MATS service is operated through the non-profit North Georgia Community Action, Inc. The system provides demand-response service for all citizens within Gilmer, Gordon, Fannin, Pickens, and Murray Counties. Service is provided weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Fares are \$2.00 one way up to ten miles and \$3.00 for one-way trips of more than ten miles.

Service statistics and performance measures for MATS are shown in **Figure 35** at the end of this section.

Figure 24: Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority: Xpress Summary

## Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority (Xpress)

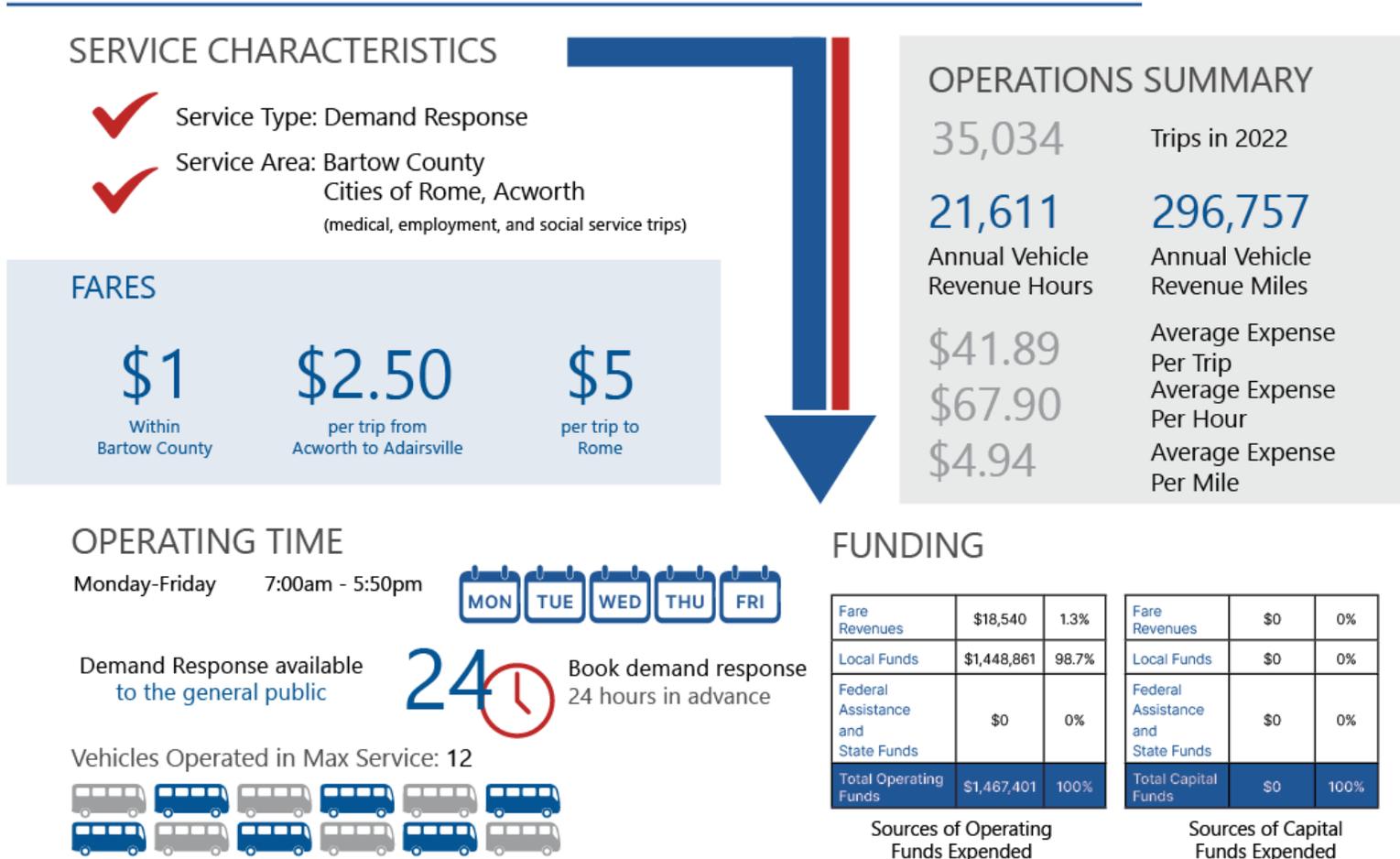
FTA Urbanized Area Funds, Capital Program, & State of Good Repair (Section 5307, 5309, 5337)



\*Vanpool service not included in infographic data except for state and federal funding  
Sources: Xpress Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports

Figure 25: Bartow County Transit System Summary

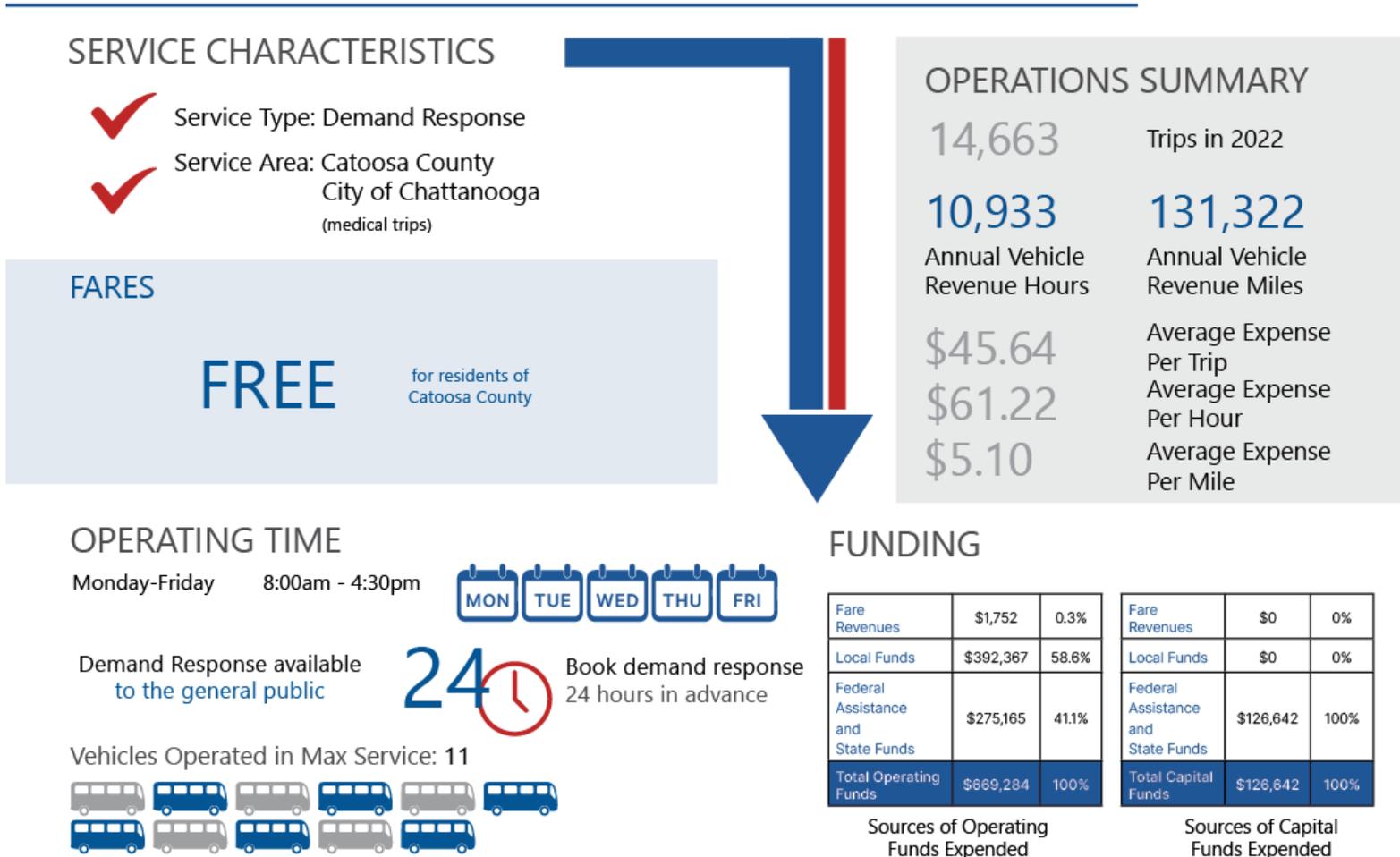
## Bartow County Transit System FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: Bartow County Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 26: Catoosa County Trans-Aid System Summary

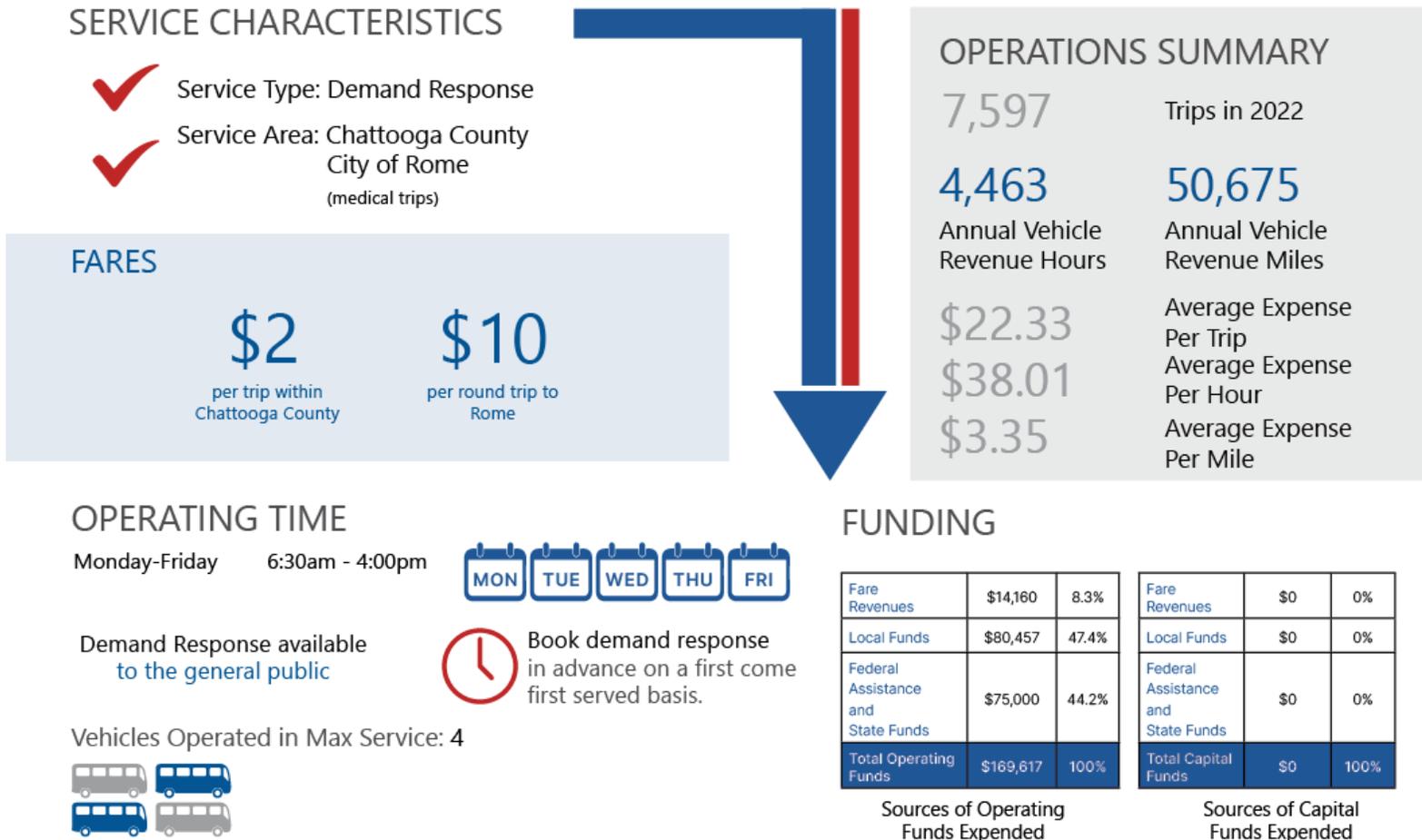
## Catoosa County Trans-Aid FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: Catoosa County Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 27: Chattooga County Transit System Summary

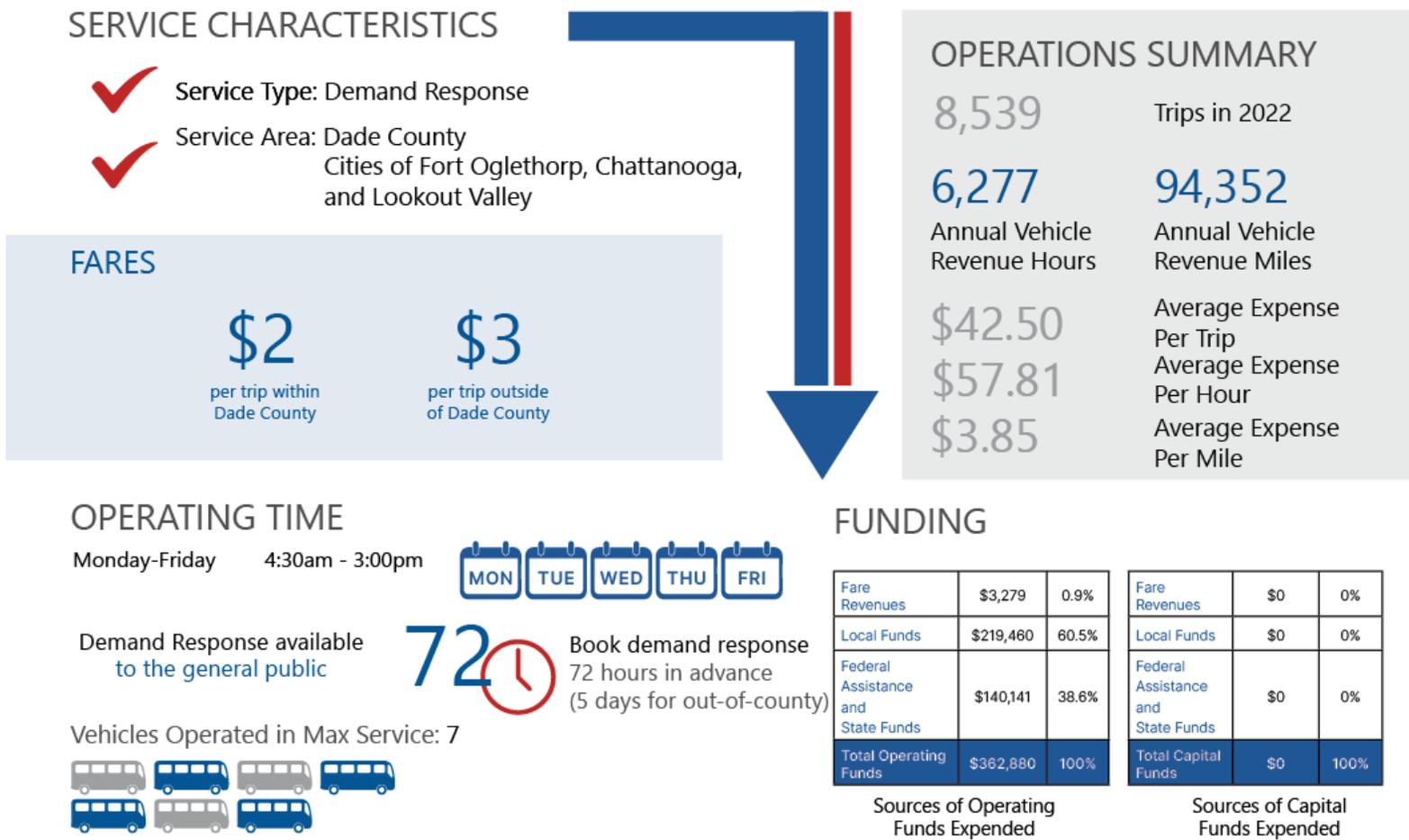
## Chattooga County Transit FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: Chattooga County Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 28: Dade County Transit System Summary

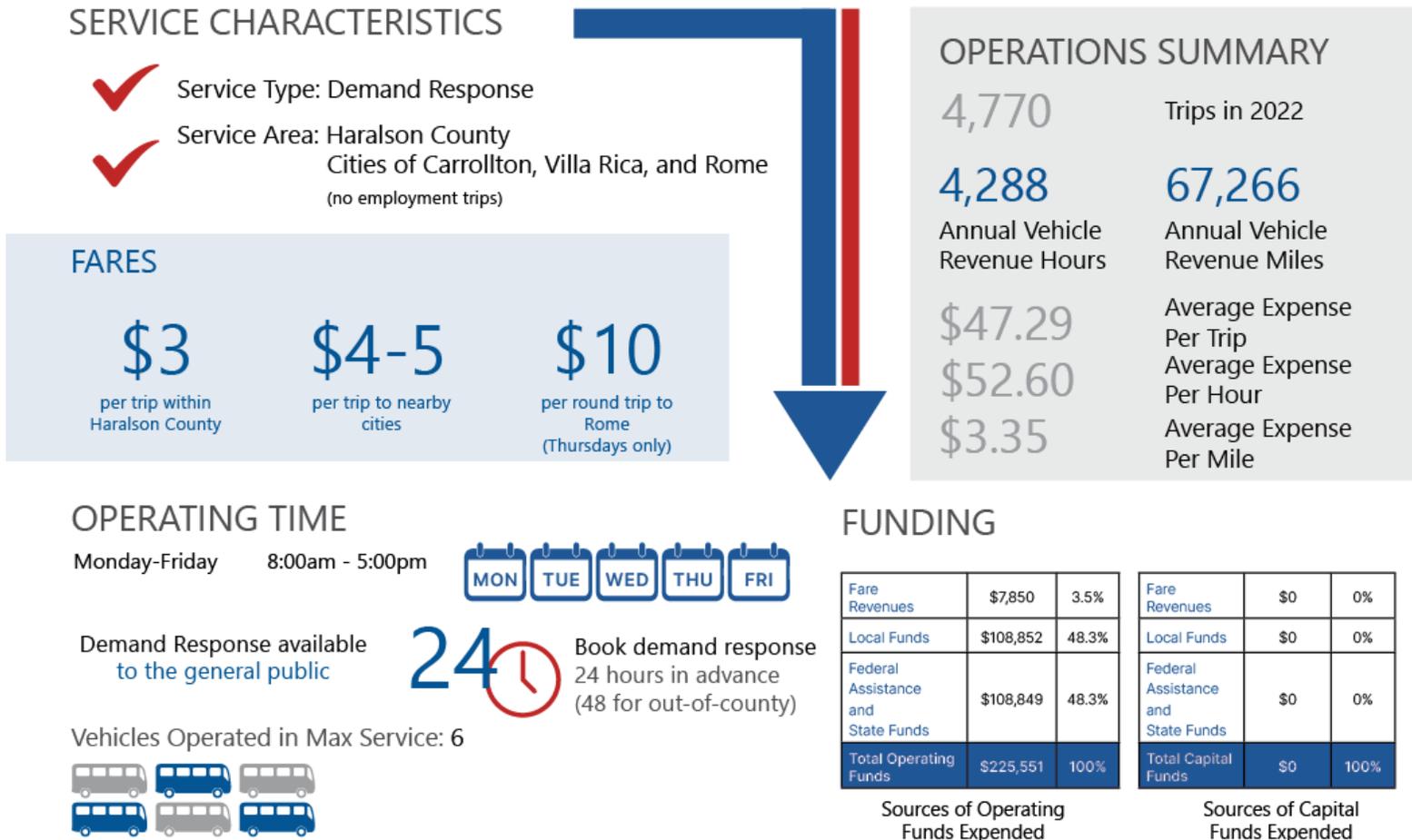
## Dade County Transit FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: Dade County Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 29: Haralson County Transit System Summary

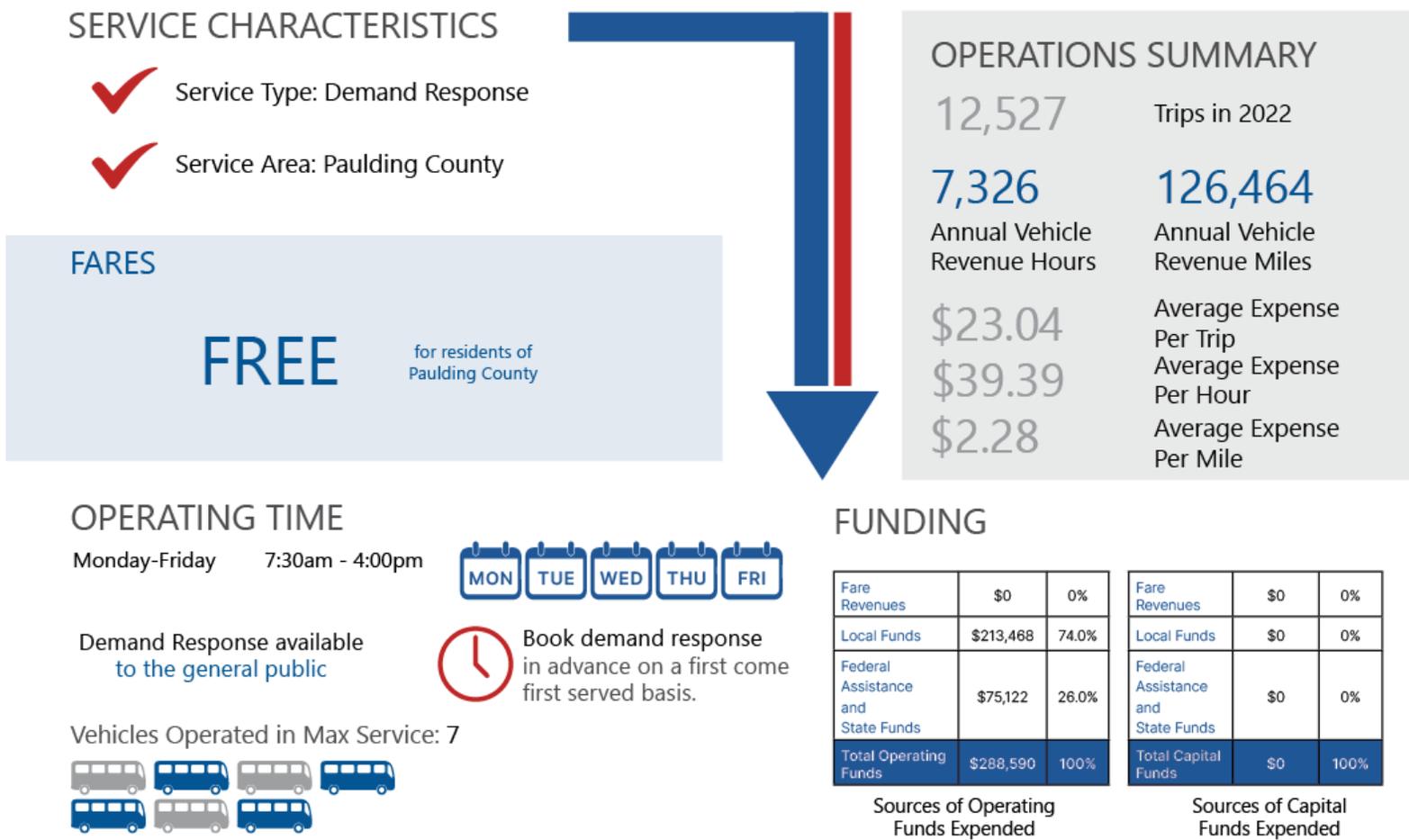
## Haralson County Transit FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: Haralson County Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 30: Paulding County Transit System Summary

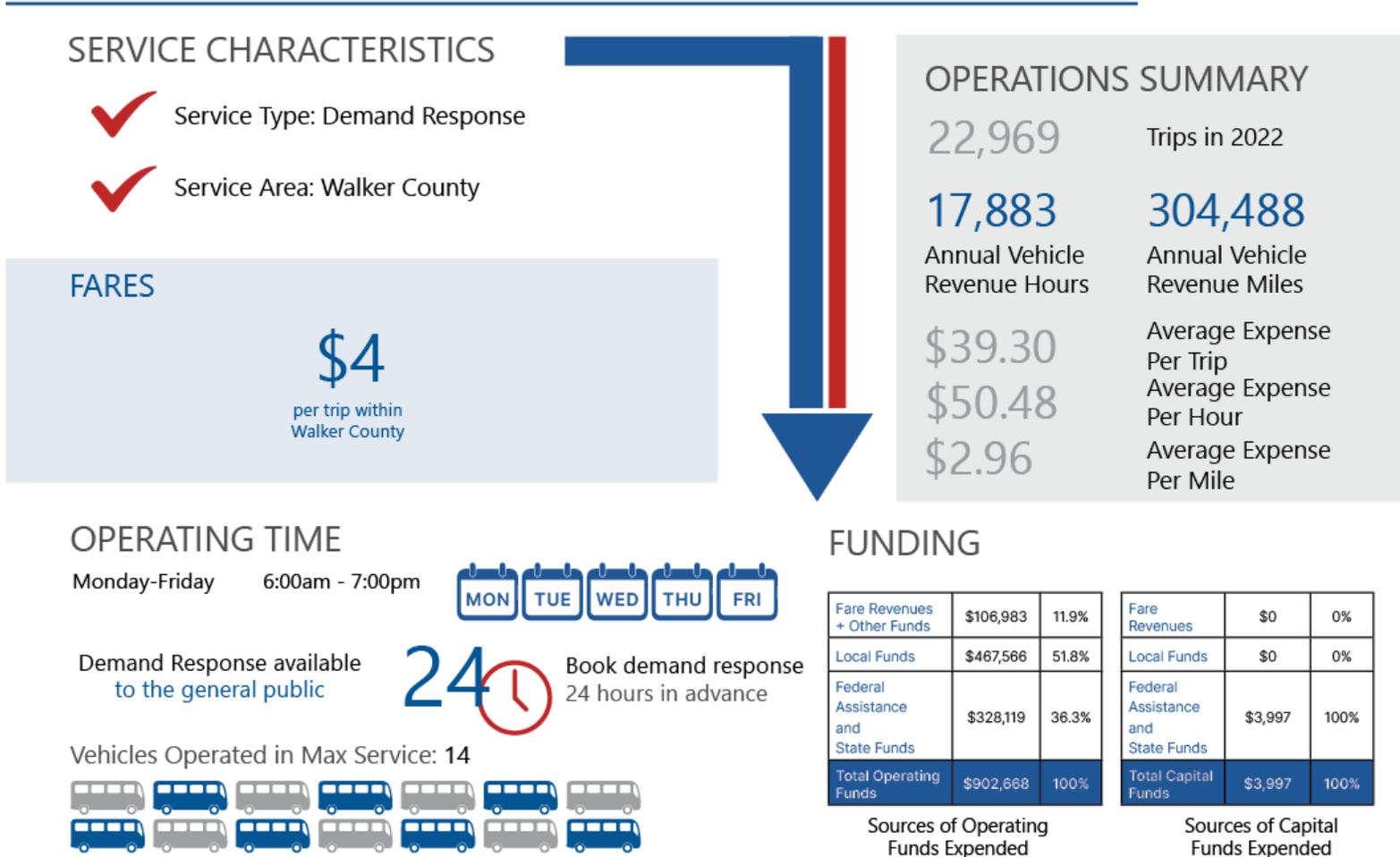
## Paulding County Transit FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: Paulding County Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 31: Walker County Transit System Summary

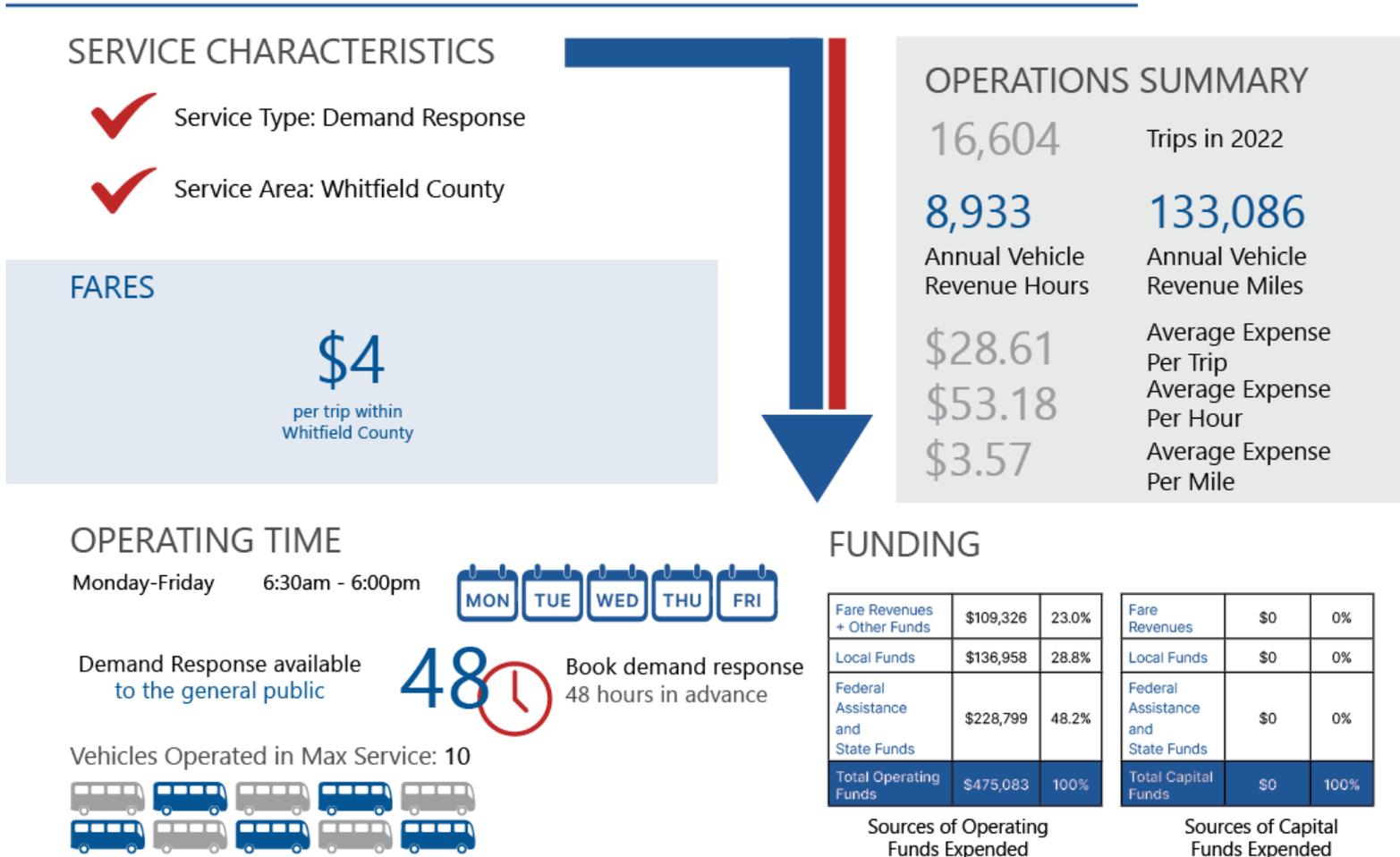
## Walker County Transit FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: Walker County Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 32: Whitfield County Transit System Summary

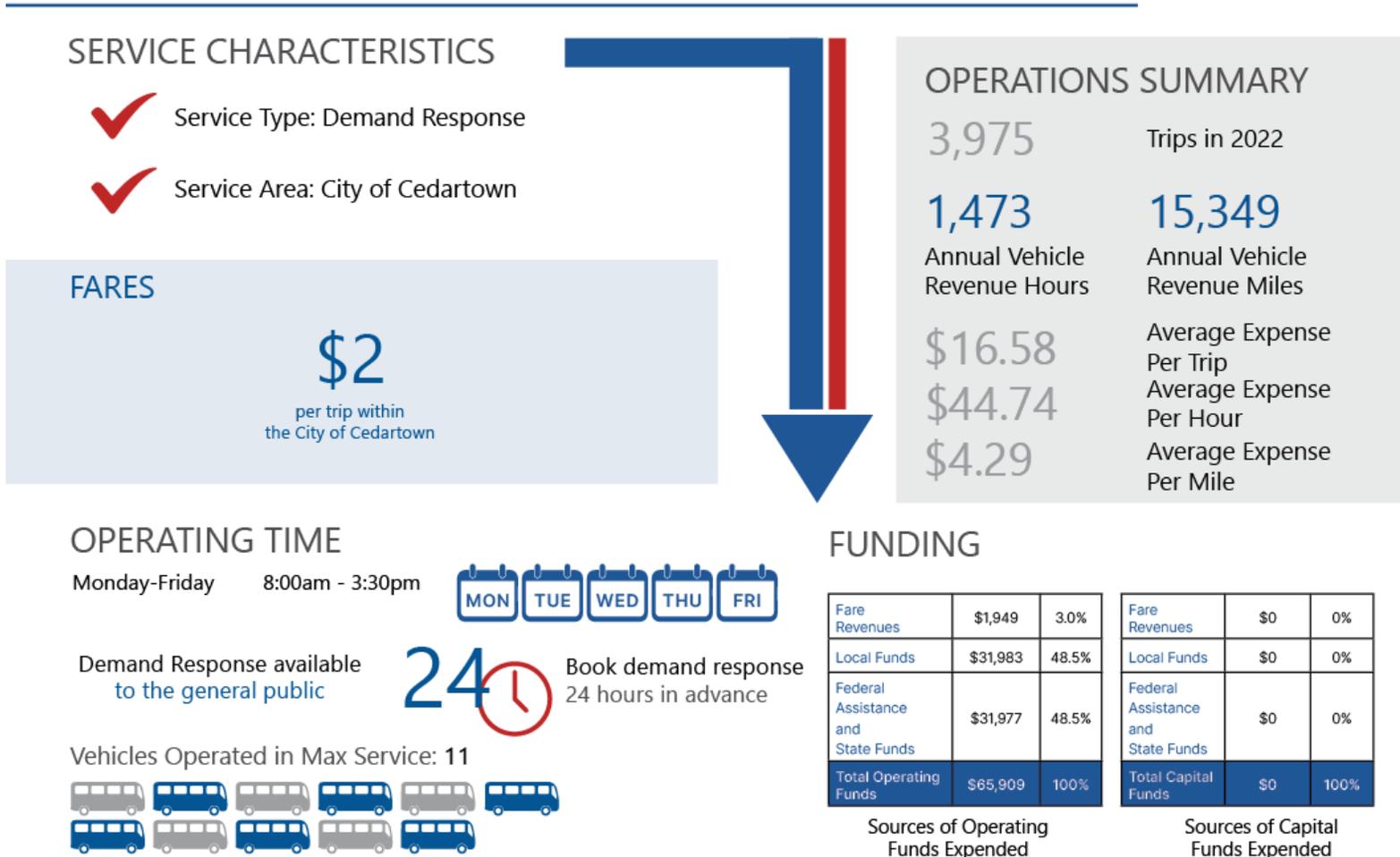
## Whitfield County Transit FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: Whitfield County Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 33: City of Cedartown Transit System Summary

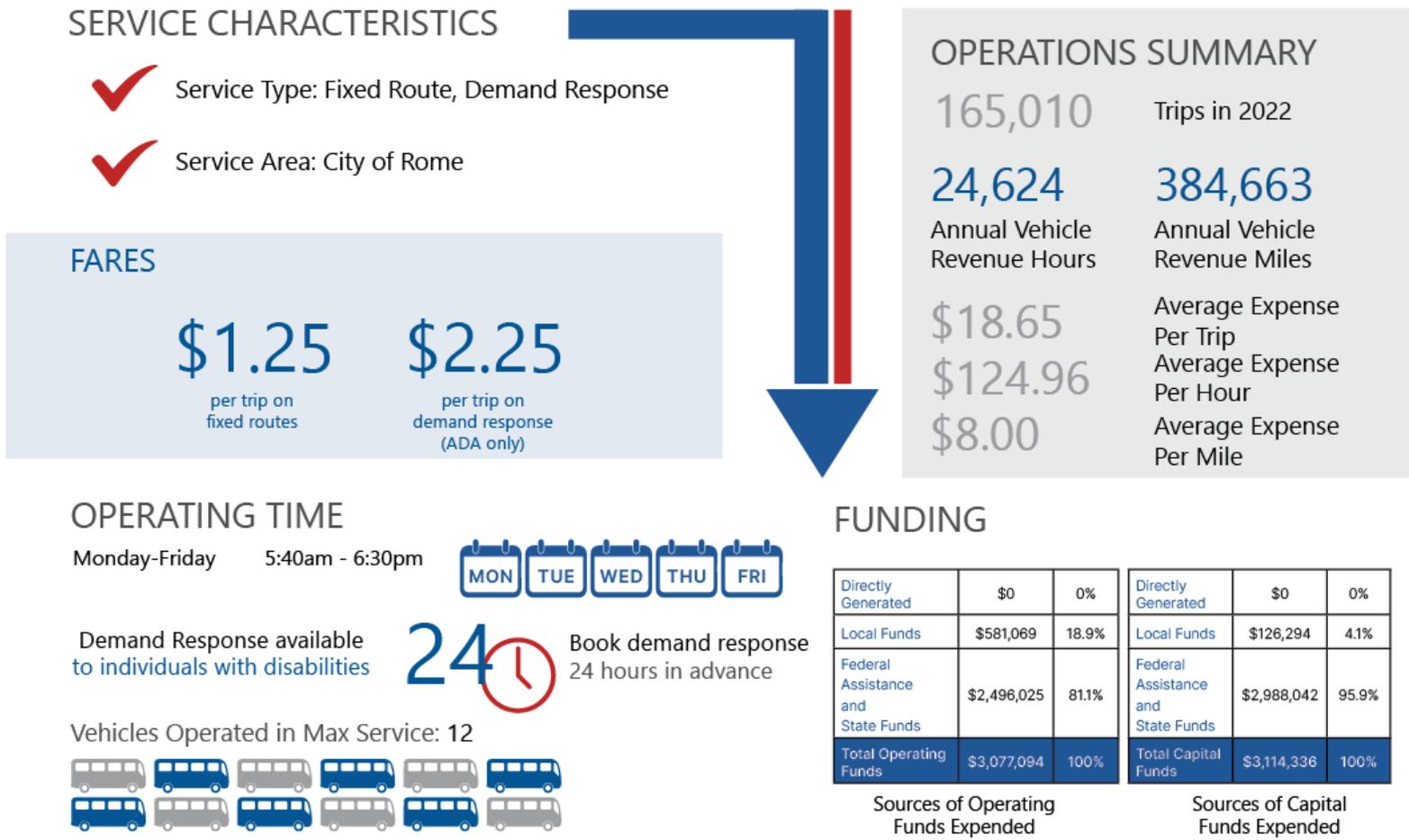
## City of Cedartown Transit FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: City of Cedartown Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 34: Rome Transit Department System Summary

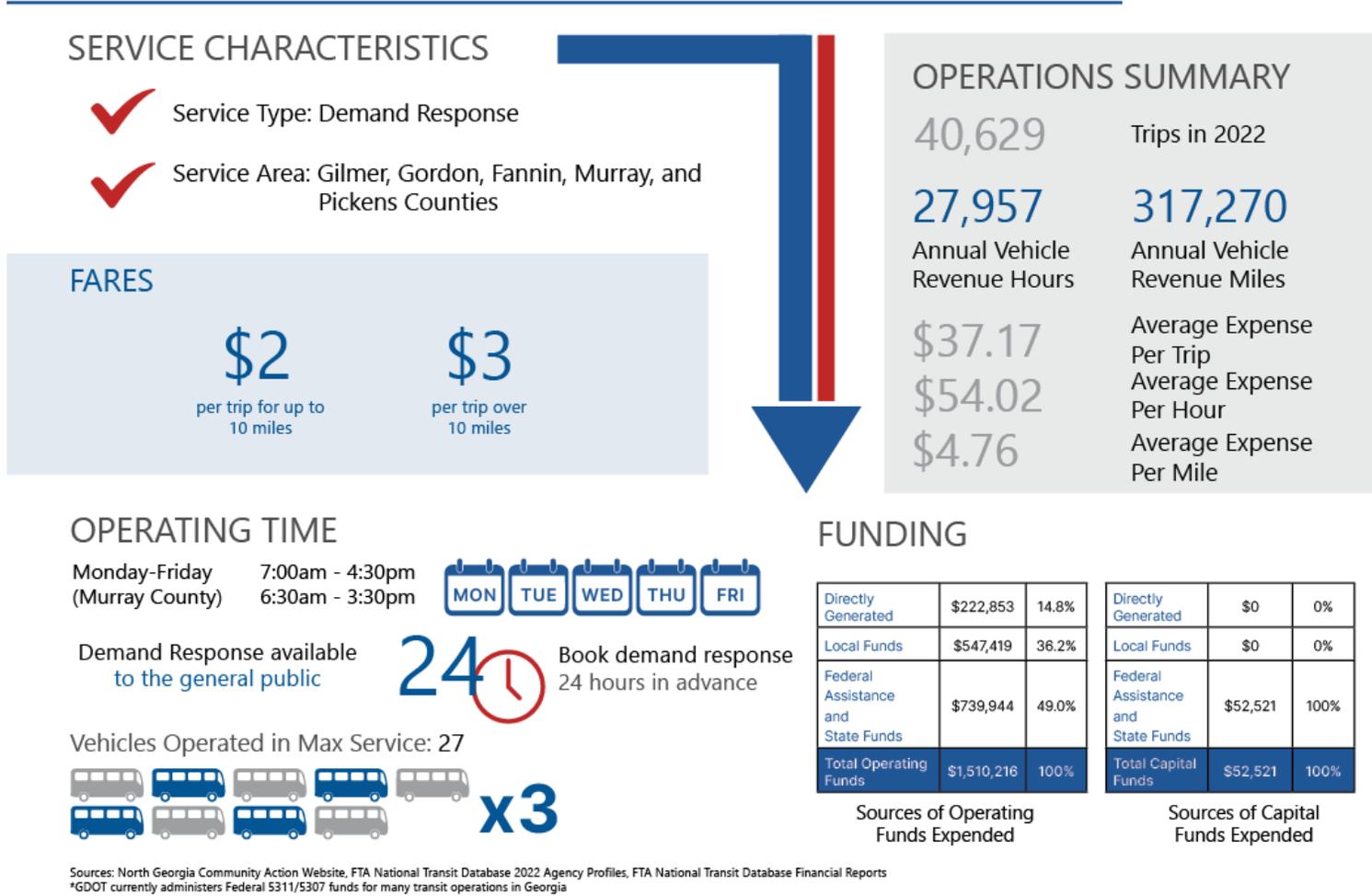
## Rome Transit Department FTA Urbanized Area Funds (Small Urban Area) (Section 5307)



Sources: City of Rome Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

Figure 35: Mountain Area Transportation System Summary

## Mountain Area Transportation System FTA Rural Program Funding (Section 5311)



Sources: North Georgia Community Action Website, FTA National Transit Database 2022 Agency Profiles, FTA National Transit Database Financial Reports  
\*GDOT currently administers Federal 5311/5307 funds for many transit operations in Georgia

## 6.4 Transit Services in Surrounding Communities

Several transit agencies throughout Georgia were identified for peer comparison purposes. These agencies have similarities to the various systems located within Northwest Georgia 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.

### 6.4.1 Peer Regional Demand Response Transit Service

The Coastal Regional Commission of Georgia operates a Transportation Services Department (Coastal Transit) that provides regional transportation services for any purpose across ten counties. Service is provided weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Reservations are made one day in advance and are priced by origin and destination, with fares of \$5.00 per trip within one county and an additional \$5.00 per county crossed for intercounty travel.

The service was chosen as a peer within Georgia that provides regional service across counties and is operated by the regional commission.

### 6.4.2 Peer Local Demand-Response Transit Service

Coweta County Transit southwest of Atlanta provides demand-response transportation services to business, commercial, and activity centers. Trips must be scheduled by 12:00 p.m. the day prior and must be within Coweta County. Service is generally provided between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. and costs \$3.00 per trip. Riders are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis depending on availability. The service was moved in-house in July 2023, but reporting years cover the transit service while it was operated by RMS Transit, Inc. and referred to as the Coweta County Rural Public Transportation Program (CCRPT). Operation service areas, hours, and fares were unchanged.

The service was chosen as a peer due to its proximity to the Atlanta metropolitan region and use of rural 5311 funding. The reporting and comparison year will provide insight into a third-party operated peer service.

### 6.4.3 Peer Local Urban Transit Service

Albany Transit System (ATS) provides a local urban service with fixed routes and paratransit services. Service hours are weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and fares generally cost \$1.70 per trip on fixed routes and \$2.50 for paratransit. Discounts are provided by age and for bulk pass purchases. Nine fixed routes service the general city and one pair of east-west routes provide trips to Albany State University. The demand-response ADA paratransit service provides curb-to-curb trips throughout the jurisdictional limits of Albany, Georgia.

The service was chosen as a peer due to having operations in an urban center within an otherwise rural county. The City of Albany has a population of approximately 71,000, compared to the City of Rome with approximately 38,000 residents.<sup>7</sup>

## 6.5 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 transit operator faces 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 systems' past operation.

**Tables 20, 21, and 22** show several performance measures for the transit operators in Northwest Georgia by their service type, as well as data for the peer systems discussed above.

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

**Table 20: Performance Metrics for Northwest Georgia Regional Transit Services and Selected Peer (2022)**

	NWGRC Transit Services - Regional Transit		Peer Service
	ATL Xpress	MATS	Coastal Transit
<b>Service Data</b>			
Service Area Population*	5,180,179**	186,186	725,856
Population Density (per sq. mi.)	1,957.74	106.64	145.03
Annual Operating Budget	\$28,122,323	\$1,510,216	\$4,743,004
Unlinked Passenger Trips	660,720	40,629	81,118
Vehicle Revenue Miles	4,470,617	317,270	1,007,572
Vehicle Revenue Hours	120,690	27,957	61,816
<b>Population Metrics</b>			
Trips per Capita	0.13	0.22	0.11
Revenue Hours per Capita	0.02	0.15	0.09
<b>Expense Metrics</b>			
Expense per Trip	\$42.56	\$37.17	\$58.47
Expense per Mile	\$6.29	\$4.76	\$4.71
Expense per Hour	\$233.01	\$54.02	\$76.73
<b>Fare Metrics</b>			
Fare Revenue per Trip	\$4.65	\$0.75	\$0.83
Recovery Ratio	10.92%	2.01%	1.41%

\* 2021 ACS 5-Year County/Region Populations

\*\* Atlanta Urbanized Area (UZA)

Source: FTA National Transit Database, 2022 Annual Data Tables. U.S. Census Bureau 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates.

Table 21: Performance Metrics for Northwest Georgia Local Rural Transit Services and Selected Peer (2022)

	NWGRC Transit Services – Local Rural Transit									Peer Service
	Bartow	Catoosa	Chattooga	Dade	Haralson	Paulding	Walker	Whitfield	Cedartown	Coweta
<b>Service Data</b>										
Service Area Population*	107,868	67,579	24,898	16,313	29,685	165,688	67,772	103,076	10,091	144,928
Population Density (per sq. mi.)	234.50	417.15	79.55	93.75	105.27	531.05	151.96	355.43	1,105.26	328.63
Annual Operating Budget	\$1,467,401	\$669,284	\$169,617	\$362,880	\$225,551	\$288,590	\$902,668	\$475,083	\$65,909	\$529,943
Unlinked Passenger Trips	34,034	14,663	7,597	8,539	4,770	12,527	22,969	16,604	3,975	30,521
Vehicle Revenue Miles	296,757	131,322	50,675	94,352	67,266	126,464	304,488	133,086	15,349	228,893
Vehicle Revenue Hours	21,611	10,933	4,463	6,277	4,288	7,326	17,883	8,933	1,473	13,035
<b>Population Metrics</b>										
Trips per Capita	0.32	0.22	0.31	0.52	0.16	0.08	0.34	0.16	0.39	0.21
Revenue Hours per Capita	0.20	0.16	0.18	0.38	0.14	0.04	0.26	0.09	0.15	0.09
<b>Expense Metrics</b>										
Expense per Trip	\$41.89	\$45.64	\$22.33	\$42.50	\$47.29	\$23.04	\$39.30	\$28.61	\$16.58	\$17.26
Expense per Mile	\$4.94	\$5.10	\$3.35	\$3.85	\$3.35	\$2.28	\$2.96	\$3.57	\$4.29	\$2.30
Expense per Hour	\$67.90	\$61.22	\$38.01	\$57.81	\$52.60	\$39.39	\$50.48	\$53.18	\$44.74	\$40.43
<b>Fare Metrics</b>										
Fare Revenue per Trip	\$0.54	\$0.00	\$1.86	\$0.38	\$1.65	\$0.00	\$1.48	\$1.05	\$0.49	\$10.81
Recovery Ratio	1.26%	0.00%	8.35%	0.90%	3.48%	0.00%	3.76%	3.68%	2.96%	62.26%

\* 2021 ACS 5-Year County/City Populations

Source: FTA National Transit Database, 2022 Annual Data Tables. U.S. Census Bureau 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates

**Table 22: Performance Metrics for Northwest Georgia Urban Transit System and Selected Peer (2022)**

	<b>NWGRC Transit Service – Local Urban Transit</b>	<b>Peer Service</b>
	<b>RTD (Rome)</b>	<b>ATS (Albany)</b>
<b>Service Data</b>		
Service Area Population*	60,403	85,960
Population Density* (per sq. mi.)	1,342.29	1,282.99
Annual Operating Budget	\$3,077,094	\$3,953,241
Unlinked Passenger Trips	165,010	299,333
Vehicle Revenue Miles	384,663	482,747
Vehicle Revenue Hours	24,624	28,545
<b>Population Metrics</b>		
Trips per Capita	2.73	3.48
Revenue Hours per Capita	0.41	0.33
<b>Expense Metrics</b>		
Expense per Trip	\$18.65	\$13.21
Expense per Mile	\$8.00	\$8.19
Expense per Hour	\$124.96	\$138.49
<b>Fare Metrics</b>		
Fare Revenue per Trip	\$1.41	\$1.82
Recovery Ratio	7.54%	13.77%

*\*2020 Primary Urbanized Areas as both systems are full reporters*

*Source: FTA National Transit Database, 2022 Annual Data Tables. U.S. Census Bureau 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates*

## 7.0 Existing Transit Plans

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

### GDOT Georgia Statewide Transit Plan

The Georgia Statewide Transit Plan (SWTRP) was last updated 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
- Microtransit
- 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 80 cover multiple counties (26 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 (UZA) with multiple destinations, such as a downtown shopping area or route with businesses.

The SWTRP reported that there were 262,208 transit trips in the Northwest Georgia region in 2017. This is within the higher range 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 Northwest 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 technology.** Ridesharing 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 last Implementation Report was published in 2022 and includes transit service information for 2021 and 2022. This report details statewide goals, performance measures, and strategies. Goals identified in this report that are relevant to the region 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

### **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 for 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 broken 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.

### **GDOT Rural and Human Services Transportation Plan**

The five-year update to the Georgia 2050 Rural and Human Services Transportation (RHST) Plan is in the process of being finalized by GDOT, DHS, and the Department of Community Health (DCH). This plan will provide 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.

### **GDOT Group Transit Asset Management Plan**

The 2022 Group Transit Asset Management (TAM) Plan Update is currently underway. TAM is a business model that 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 for each capital asset category 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

### Northwest Georgia Prospers! NWGRC Regional Plan

The Northwest Georgia Regional Plan Update is currently underway. The previous regional comprehensive plan was updated in 2019 and identifies the long-term regional goals, needs, and implementation program, including a five-year work program. Each year an implementation report is created to document progress, with the latest covering the year 2022. The most applicable plan goal is to provide coordinated transportation planning for access to work, health, and education. The identified priority transportation needs include:

- Provide safe, efficient movement of people and goods throughout Northwest Georgia to enhance economic growth
- Improve connectivity of bike and pedestrian pathways throughout the region
- Develop more trails and trail systems that connect to parks, neighborhoods, retail centers, libraries, workplaces and downtowns

Implementation activities related to transit include the development of a regional TDP and enabling coordination between member counties and MPOs.

### **Northwest Georgia Regional Vanpool Plan**

The Northwest Georgia Regional Vanpool Plan was completed in February 2022 with the purpose of evaluating the feasibility of a vanpool program serving the 15-county region. The plan reviewed existing service providers, land uses, and socioeconomic conditions in the region. It also evaluated three possible implementation scenarios, including a multi-employer sponsored vanpool, a single employer sponsored vanpool, or a private third-party contractor. The preferred scenario was for a private provider operating the vanpool program, with the best outcome in cost to user, cost to employer, market capture, and success rate of peer services.

### **Greater Dalton Metropolitan Transportation Plan**

Adopted in 2020 in accordance with federal regulations for MPOs, the Greater Dalton MPO's 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) outlines the goals, objectives, policies, and proposed improvements needed in Whitfield County and the urbanized areas of Murray County. The plan reviews previous studies for service expansions, like the 2012 Transit Feasibility Study. Transit priority scored the lowest amongst the project types, and the plan implementation only considered expected future available funding to continue evaluating expansion opportunities.

### **Rome-Floyd County Metropolitan Transportation Plan**

Currently underway, the Floyd-Rome MPO's 2050 MTP will set the community goals, review the existing conditions and needs assessment, and provide the unified work program for transportation improvements. In the draft plan, transit improvements are not specified for the MPO.

### **Chattanooga-Hamilton County/North Georgia 2050 Regional Transportation Plan**

The Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency (CHCRPA) is currently completing its 2050 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which analyzes current conditions, regional trends, and future conditions to assess transportation investment decisions. Public input is used to set community goals and priorities that guide the recommended improvement projects. The current draft recommendations include transit projects within Walker and Catoosa Counties, one of which is a GDOT-operated express bus route between the City of Ringgold and the City of Chattanooga.

### **Rome Transit Development Plan**

The Rome Transit Department completed a Transit Development Plan in 2020 after the school bus service, Tripper, was forced to close. The TDP reviewed the existing service demands and needs, setting the recommendations for the new city-operated service used today. The plan included several organizational and service operation recommendations, many of which have been implemented already like the rebranding and marketing materials update. One recommendation to partner with transportation network companies for subsidized rides in the service area is currently being reviewed with the additional option to operate rapid on-demand service in-house.

### **Cartersville-Bartow Transit Development Plan**

The Cartersville-Bartow Metropolitan Planning Organization (CBMPO) completed a TDP in 2017. This plan analyzed transit needs within the MPO, transit service types applicable to the community, and service and funding alternatives for implementation. The identified transit market emphasized the more urbanized areas of Cartersville and southeast Bartow County, and the high number of commutes to and from Cobb County. Public input indicated a need to provide transit service to low-income residential areas and connect them to employment, medical destinations, education, and shopping centers. Recommendations included three fixed routes serving Cartersville and one commuter route from Cartersville to a park and ride lot in Acworth.

### **County Comprehensive Plans**

**Table 23** provides highlights from the 15 NWGRC counties' comprehensive plans, including the plan date, vision and goals, and priorities related to transit.

Table 23: Northwest Georgia Counties' Comprehensive Plan Review

County	Year Completed	Vision and Goals	Transit Priorities
Bartow	2018	Provide quality services to all citizens, promote strategic economic development that both protects the county's natural resources and preserves its rich heritage, and educate the county's citizenry to meet future challenges.	Implement existing transit plans and create a Transit Asset Management Plan for CBMPO.
Catoosa	2021	Eight goals including the topics of economic development, housing needs, traffic, natural preservation, recreation activities, broadband access, historic resources, and education. Transit is acknowledged as part of traffic solutions.	Transit use and access is a component and should be considered in urban character areas. Emphasis is given to transit service for senior residents.
Chattooga	2021	Six community goals are set for Chattooga County including a resilient economy, controlled development, education and workforce development, attainable housing, broadband access, and multi-modal transportation.	Development of a Joint Countywide Multimodal Plan
Dade	2022	Seven community goals include focus on encouraging economic development, maintain natural resources and recreational opportunities, efficient land use, promote a sense of place, diverse housing options, maintain quality roads and promote alternative transportation including public transit, and provide education and workforce development.	Transit projects are not included in the workplan but mentioned as consideration within urban and higher density residential developments.
Fannin	2022	Eleven community goals include safety, business and industrial development, protection of rural landscape, support artistic and cultural development, preserve clean water, safe and affordable housing, expansion of utility infrastructure, fire and police services, support education and training, coordination with neighboring counties, and broadband access.	Transit priorities include expanding MATS service in number of vans, drivers, and hours of operation; and providing educational materials about the service at senior centers and the courthouse.
Floyd	2018	An update is currently underway. The 2018 plan set four goals to provide livable and equitable communities; a transportation network that meets everyone's needs; economic and industrial vitality; and the preservation of historic, cultural, and natural resources.	Coordination between the City of Rome and Floyd County to provide transit services in unincorporated Floyd.
Gilmer	2019	Eight goals were set for Gilmer County including development of a diverse economy, guidance for future development and conservation, attainable housing, broadband access, maintain public facilities, promote cooperation between cities, a modern and safe multimodal transportation network, and preservation of natural resources.	No transit activities were included in the work program.

County	Year Completed	Vision and Goals	Transit Priorities
<b>Gordon</b>	2023 (Draft)	Joint community goals were set for Gordon County and its municipalities that promote economic development; resource management; broadband access; efficient land use; a sense of place; diverse housing; transportation alternatives, including mass transit that is convenient and accessible; education opportunities; and health.	No transit activities were included in the work program.
<b>Haralson</b>	2022	Four goals set for Haralson County include providing quality infrastructure and utility services, economic and industrial development, maintaining a sense of place, and a safe family-friendly community.	No transit activities were included in the work program; however, economic development priorities include development of an industrial park and fostering transportation access to this destination.
<b>Murray</b>	2023 (Draft)	Ten community goals for Murray County include promoting a safe and well-maintained destination, a diverse economy, rural landscape, natural resources, workforce housing, emergency services, quality education, coordination with nearby agencies, broadband access, and active mobility options.	Continue the Murray County Rural Transit System and participate in the Greater Dalton MPO planning meetings.
<b>Paulding</b>	2022	Six community goals were set for Paulding County including to protect and preserve community resources, target growth to minimize unwanted development, leverage assets for economic development, create multimodal connections, maintain fiscal responsibility, and support broadband access.	Priorities include coordination with nearby communities to provide access to Paulding WellStar Hospital, create dense development centers for future ATL Xpress service pick-ups, and consider FTA Section 5307 funding.
<b>Pickens</b>	2023	Eight detailed goals were set for Pickens County that include the topics of economic development, diverse housing, infrastructure and utilities, transportation, natural and cultural resources, community facilities, land use development, and intergovernmental coordination.	No transit activities were included in the work program.
<b>Polk</b>	2022 (Amended 2023)	Polk County provided ten community goals including encourage development while minimizing impact, protect local farmland, promote the Silver Comet Trail and ancillary multi-modal access, affordable housing, expansion of infrastructure and utilities, provide emergency services, protect water supply, support education, coordinate with neighboring communities, and provide broadband access.	Explore options to provide public transit service in unincorporated Polk County.

County	Year Completed	Vision and Goals	Transit Priorities
<b>Walker</b>	2022	Community goals were set for each municipality and the county, including infrastructure development, downtown revitalizations, greenspace and natural resource preservation, balanced development, growth management, quality education, and regional collaboration.	Investigate the feasibility of using city-owned school buses for public transportation (City of Rossville).
<b>Whitfield</b>	2018	Nine community goals for Whitfield County include guiding future development to protect natural resources, development of walkable neighborhoods, providing recreational and educational activities, public transportation opportunities for all residents, historic preservation, safety, innovative and diverse economic development, higher education and workforce training, and development of neighborhood parks. Dalton included goals for growth management policies, downtown development, and residential development.	No transit activities were included in the work program.

## 8.0 Transit-Supportive Land Use and Development

This section analyzes zoning and land uses to determine where transit-supportive land uses are within the region and where future development will occur. Transit-supportive uses are considered higher density development areas that enable pedestrian and transit use. In addition to land uses and zoning, 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

Existing land use for Northwest Georgia can be divided into 11 over-arching categories: agriculture/forestry, commercial, industrial, mixed-use, multi-family residential, park/recreation/conservation, public/institutional, residential, rural residential, transportation/communication/utilities, and undeveloped/vacant.

Most of the land use in the region is characterized as rural residential and conservation. Large tracts of land are present throughout the region and typically increase in size further away from developed cities and major road corridors.

Concentrations of higher density residential and commercial development are within city limits, particularly in Dallas, Cartersville, Rome, and Dalton. The east half of Paulding County, towards Atlanta, and the northern portion of Catoosa County, towards Chattanooga, have much higher densities of residential and commercial land uses because they are within metropolitan areas.

Industrial land use is predominantly located along the I-75 corridor, most commonly in Bartow and Whitfield Counties.

### 8.2 Zoning

Zoning refers to the local regulations that permit specific land uses and development to specified geographic areas. An analysis of zoning provides insight about the future permitted uses. **Figure 36** on the following page shows the zoning for the cities of Dalton and Rome.

#### 8.2.1 City of Dalton Zoning

The most common zoning in the City of Dalton is low-density single-family residential (R-2), at 23.4 percent of the City's land area by acreage, which supports low-density residential properties with one unit per lot. Heavy manufacturing (M-2) represents 21.5 percent of the area zoning and supports the large number of industrial and manufacturing jobs in the area. General commercial (C-2), a broad commercial zoning that includes large shopping centers and strip mall development, and estate residential (R-1), low-density, large-acreage familial lots, are the next most prominent at 10.4 percent each.

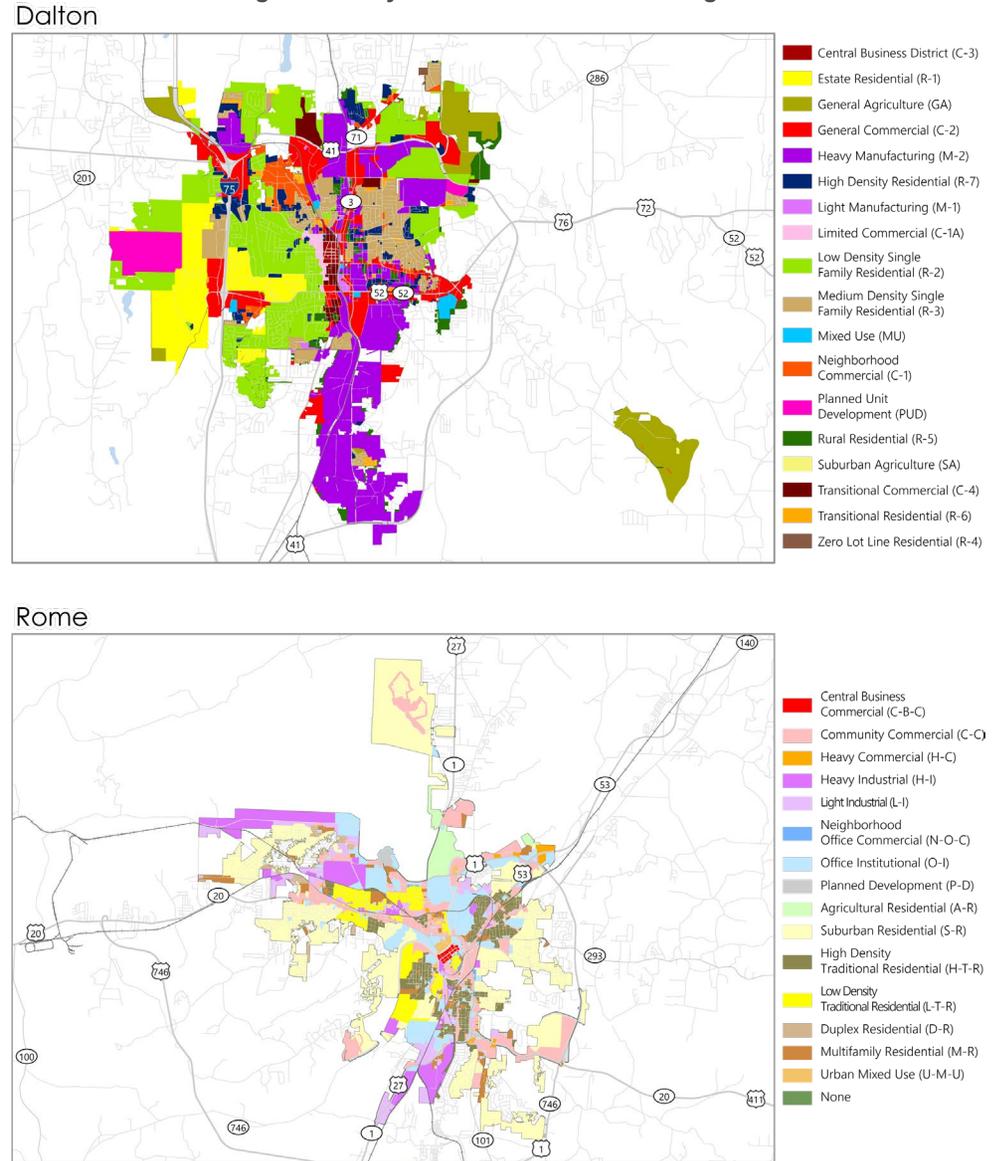
Much of the industrial-zoned land extends south from the city center along Abutment Road and the rail lines. General commercial zoning extends east-west alongside US 52 / SR 52 and US 41 / SR 3, then north-south along I-75 and Glenwood Avenue. Residential zoning is located adjacent to the city center, predominantly east of downtown. The concentration of land uses presents transit opportunities to connect residents to commercial activities and manufacturing jobs, depending on the affordability and accessibility of housing for the local workforce.

### 8.2.2 City of Rome Zoning

The most common zoning in the City of Rome is suburban residential (S-R) at 34.0 percent of the City’s land area by acreage, community commercial (C-C) at 12.9 percent, office institutional (O-I) at 10.4 percent, and heavy industrial (H-I) at 8.0 percent.

Residential locations are on the periphery of the city limits with commercial locations along the major routes of SR 1, US 53 / SR 53, and US 20 / SR 20. Heavy industrial is not as concentrated in the City of Rome as it is in the City of Dalton.

Figure 36: City of Dalton and Rome Zoning



Source: Greater Dalton MPO, City of Rome

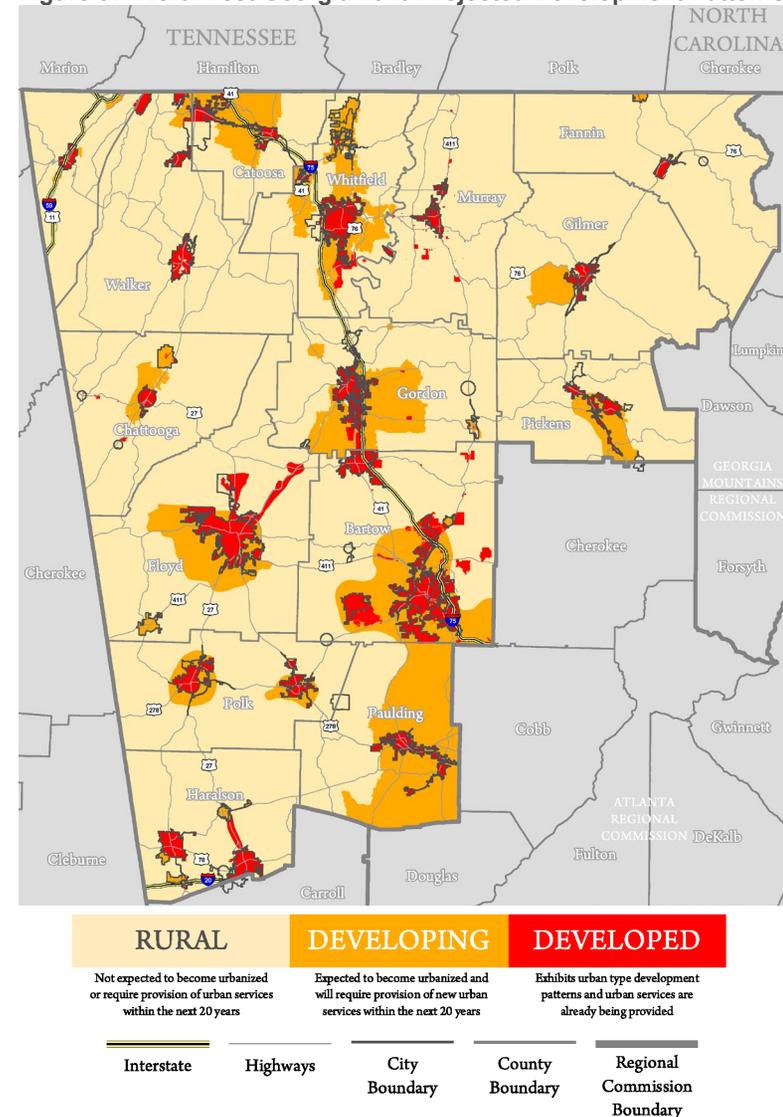
### 8.3 Future Land Use/Projected Development Patterns

The projected land use analysis utilizes three categories representing the expected forms of development in the region: developed, developing, and rural uses. **Figure 37** shows the projected development patterns for Northwest Georgia by the year 2040.

The majority of large, developed locations are within the cities of Cartersville, Rome, Calhoun, and Dalton. Developing areas are expected along the I-75 corridor, east Paulding County, north Catoosa County near the City of Chattanooga, and around the City of Rome. The remaining areas of the region are expected to remain rural except for small, urbanized developments in some city centers and county seats of each county.

Developed and developing areas with compact and dense land uses could support transit by increasing ridership. Land uses that support multi-unit housing, commercial uses, public/institutional uses, and light industrial in high density or in 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-supportive zoning and land uses.

Figure 37: Northwest Georgia 2040 Projected Development Patterns



Source: Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, Regional Plan (2019)

### 8.4 Key Destinations and Essential Services

Key destinations and essential services are used by residents and visitors for commercial, social, education, public safety, recreation, or governmental needs (Table 24 and Figure 38).

Services are clustered in the region’s cities with the greatest concentrations of services provided in Dalton, Rome, and Cartersville. Paulding County has more services scattered in the eastern half of the county, toward Atlanta.

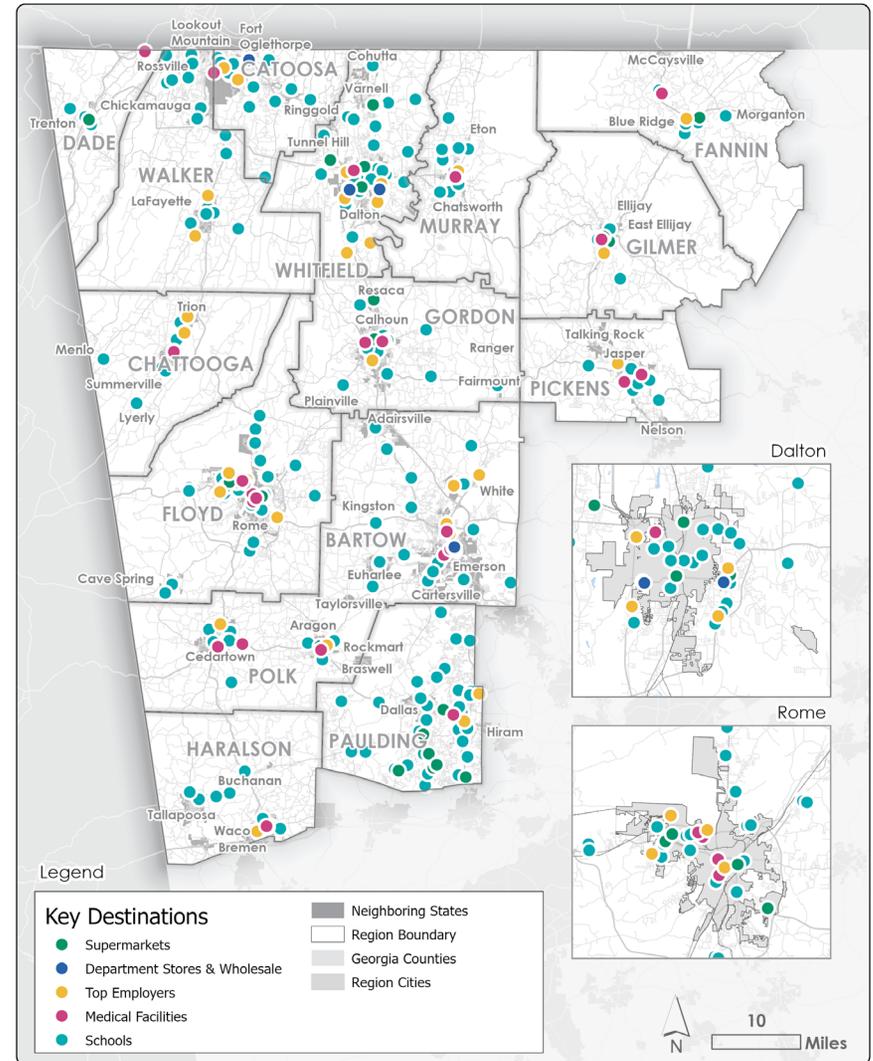
During stakeholder interviews and meetings with transit service operators, medical appointments and grocery shopping were identified as some of the most common destinations for transit users. Hospitals are located in major cities, like Cartersville, Rome, Calhoun, and Dalton. Polk and Pickens Counties have a higher number of medical facilities relative to their population size. As there are only 39 supermarkets across the region, patrons likely travel farther distances in more rural areas for basic shopping needs.

Table 24: Key Destinations and Essential Services

Type	Number of Services	Percent of Total Services
Schools	223	68.40%
Supermarkets	39	12.00%
Top Employers	32	9.80%
Medical Facilities	27	8.30%
Department Stores & Wholesale	5	1.50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, OpenStreetMap 2023

Figure 38: Key Destinations



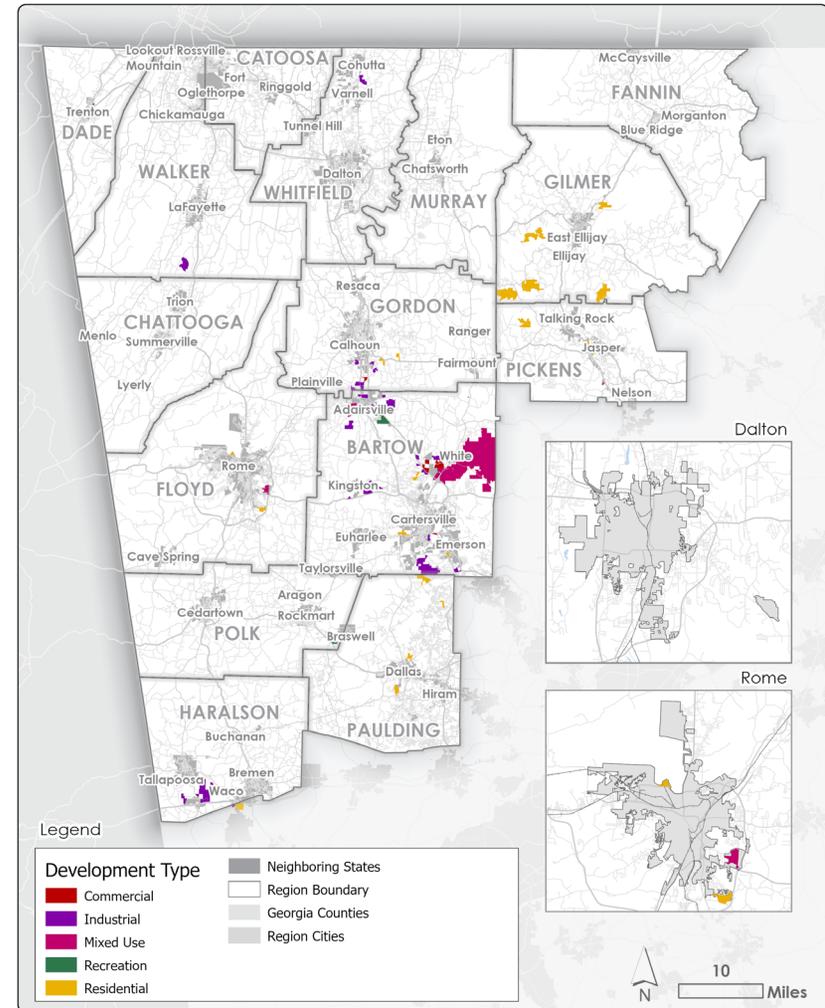
Source: Northwest Georgia Regional Commission, OpenStreetMap 2023

## 8.5 Developments of Regional Impact

Developments of Regional Impact (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).<sup>8</sup> DRIs must go through an application process for regional stakeholder review. Once that process is complete, the development may proceed. However, it is important to note that not all approved DRIs are constructed.

DRI application data from 2015 to present in Northwest Georgia was reviewed and is shown in **Table 25** and **Figure 39**. The majority of Northwest Georgia’s DRIs, by acreage, are in Bartow County (63.1 percent) and Gilmer County (15.5 percent). The largest types of developments are Mixed Use (43.0 percent) and Commercial or Industrial Development (28.5 percent). The largest DRI project by acreage is a mixed-use planned development in east Bartow County with residential, commercial, and industrial uses.

Figure 39: Developments of Regional Impact



Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs

<sup>8</sup> *Developments of Regional Impact*. Accessed 2024. <https://www.dca.ga.gov/local-government-assistance/planning/regional-planning/developments-regional-impact>

Table 25: Acreage for Developments of Regional Impact Applications by Type

County	Commercial and Industrial	Mixed Use	Recreational	Residential	Total
Bartow	17.06%	41.95%	1.69%	2.39%	63.08%
Catoosa	-	-	-	-	-
Chattooga	-	-	-	-	-
Dade	-	-	0.08%	-	0.08%
Floyd	-	0.80%	-	0.90%	1.70%
Gilmer	-	-	-	15.54%	15.54%
Gordon	2.77%	-	-	0.82%	3.59%
Haralson	5.95%	-	-	1.11%	7.05%
Murray	-	-	-	0.06%	0.06%
Paulding	0.03%	-	-	3.21%	3.24%
Pickens	-	0.24%	-	2.20%	2.44%
Polk	-	-	0.52%	-	0.52%
Walker	1.76%	-	-	-	1.76%
Whitfield	0.94%	-	-	-	0.94%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28.49%</b>	<b>42.98%</b>	<b>2.29%</b>	<b>26.23%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Northwest Georgia Regional Commission

## 8.6 Affordable Housing Initiatives

Affordable housing initiatives consist of Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) properties, public housing properties, and multi-family assisted properties. LIHTC properties are properties that have been acquired, rehabilitated, or newly constructed to provide rental housing for lower-income households in exchange for tax credits to the developers. Public housing properties are housing with aid administered from HUD for low-income residents at rents they can afford. Multi-family assisted properties consist of United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) subsidized multi-family 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 the purposes of this TDP, housing and properties for the elderly have been excluded from the affordable housing analysis and are instead included in **Section 8.7**.

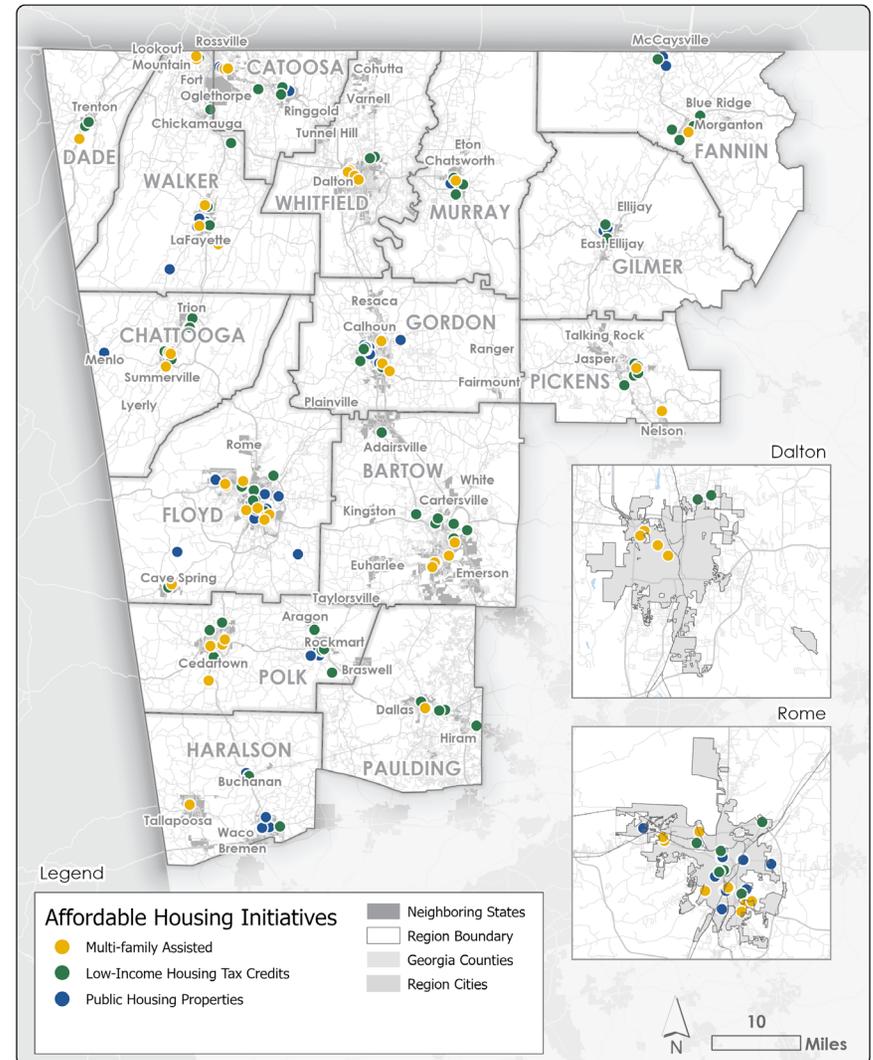
Affordable housing opportunities are predominantly within major cities, particularly the same cities that provide the most services and key destinations as mentioned in **Section 8.4**. **Table 26** provides an overview of these affordable housing initiatives, and **Figure 40** illustrates the locations.

**Table 26: Affordable Housing Initiatives**

Property Type	Number of Properties	Percent of Total Properties
Low-Income Housing Tax Credits	90	55.6%
Multi-Family Assisted	45	27.8%
Public Housing	27	16.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2023

**Figure 40: Affordable Housing Initiatives**



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

### 8.7 Aging Initiatives/Senior Centers

Nursing homes and assisted living residences are either publicly owned (in most cases by the county) or privately owned buildings with multiple dwelling units. They provide necessary housing options for senior residents in the region. In addition to the elderly assisted properties and nursing homes/assisted living residences, there are personal care homes that are privately owned and usually contain fewer than six beds for elderly persons. All these centers require a license from the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH). **Table 27** provides an overview of these initiatives, and **Figure 41** illustrates the locations.

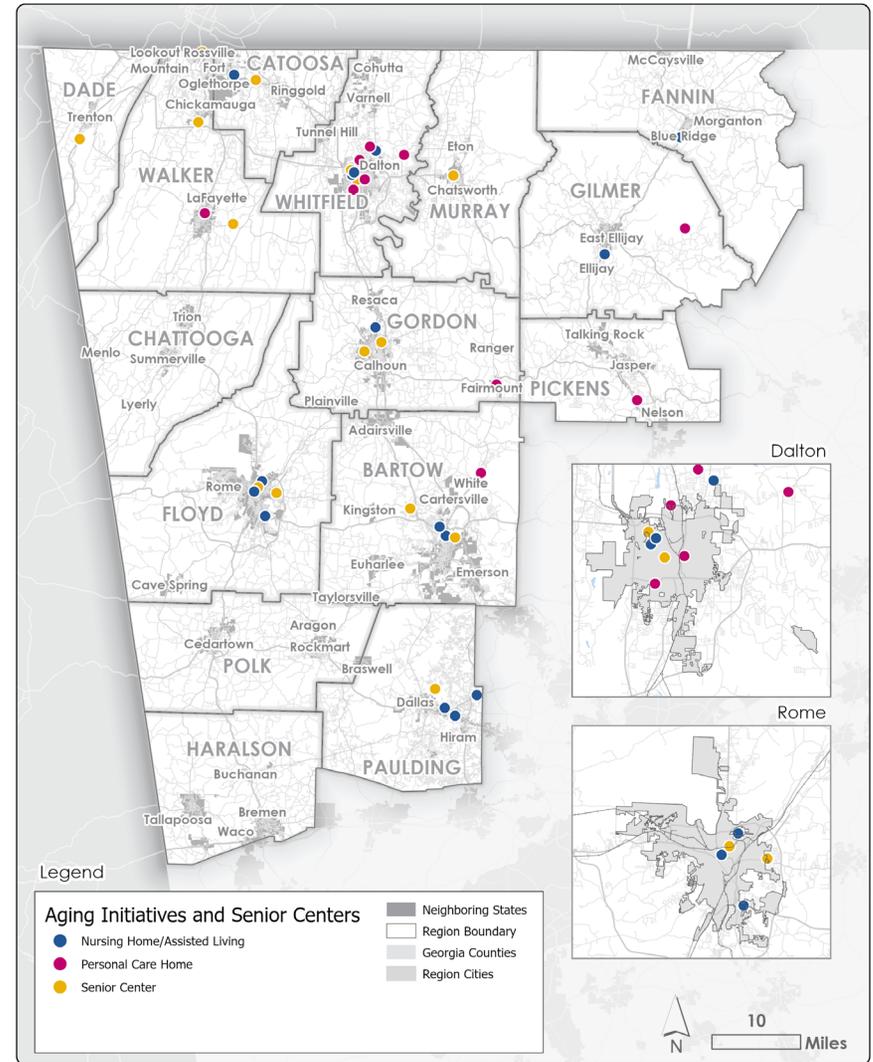
Most of the senior living facilities and senior centers are also located within the major cities of the region. This is likely due to the proximity of essential services and accessibility to necessary destinations. However, as seen in **Section 2.4.2**, the proportions of senior populations throughout northwest Georgia, particularly in Pickens, Gilmer and Fannin Counties, indicate that a large portion of seniors in the region are living without assistance and farther away from services.

**Table 27: Aging Initiatives and Senior Centers**

Property Type	Number of Properties	Percent of Total Properties
Senior Centers	16	38.1%
Nursing Homes/Assisted Living Residences	16	38.1%
Personal Care Homes	10	23.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Georgia Department of Community Health, 2023

**Figure 41: Aging Initiatives and Senior Centers**



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Georgia Department of Community Health

## 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, where implemented.

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 to apply for funding. 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 percent for capital projects and 50 percent for operating costs; local or state funds must be used to make up the remaining costs. Historically, the State of Georgia has provided 10 percent capital funds match for the purchase of rural transit buses. **Table 28** shows the Section 5311 funds awarded to agencies in Northwest Georgia for years 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Table 28: Section 5311 Rural Distributions in Northwest Georgia

Section 5311 Distributions	2020	2021	2022
Bartow County Transit	\$555,232	\$324,922	-
Catoosa Trans-Aid	\$295,198	\$581,880	\$401,807
Chattooga County Transit	\$76,587	\$144,589	\$75,000
Dade County Transit	\$199,404	\$228,238	\$130,455
Haralson County Transit	\$137,926	\$255,400	\$108,849
Paulding County Transit	\$58,951	\$117,902	\$58,951
Walker County Transit	\$517,427	\$933,544	\$332,116
Whitfield County	\$345,010	\$595,633	\$286,073
City of Cedartown	\$38,382	\$50,404	\$31,977
MATS	\$492,439	\$1,488,759	\$792,465

Source: National Transit Database

#### 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 percent 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 percent of operating budgets. **Table 29** shows the Section 5307 funds awarded to agencies in Northwest Georgia for years 2020, 2021, and 2022.

**Table 29: Section 5307 Urban Distributions in Northwest Georgia**

<b>Section 5307 Distributions</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
ATL Xpress*	\$22,054,868	\$14,047,408	\$17,935,002
RTD	\$2,560,836	\$2,962,450	\$5,366,026
Bartow County Transit	\$265,899	\$229,537	-

*\* Georgia State Road and Tollway Authority operated Xpress in 2020  
Source: National Transit Database*

### 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. 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.

## 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, Section 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 zero-emission or low-emission transit buses and the acquisition, construction, and leasing of required supporting facilities. Federal funds can cover up to 85 percent of the cost of acquiring transit buses and up to 90 percent of the costs associated with acquiring related equipment and facilities.

In January 2021, the Justice40 Initiative outlined the goal of providing 40 percent of federal transportation investment to disadvantaged communities. The largest of these programs is the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grants. RAISE grants are aimed at major capital projects that address climate change, equity concerns, and barriers to opportunity. Over \$5.4 billion in RAISE grants have been awarded over the past three years, with \$983 million awarded to 90 projects in 2021, \$2.2 billion awarded to 166 projects in 2022, and \$2.3 billion awarded to 162 projects in 2023.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> [www.transportation.gov/equity-Justice40](http://www.transportation.gov/equity-Justice40)

## 10.0 Key Findings and Next Steps

This section summarizes key findings from this 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 Northwest Georgia Regional TDP.

### 10.1 Key Findings

- Northwest Georgia is expected to grow by 31 percent in population by 2060, with the largest increases in Paulding, Bartow, and Floyd Counties.
- Senior populations, individuals with disabilities, low-income populations, and zero-car households are spread throughout the region with little overlap. The most overlapping demographics are individuals with disabilities and senior populations, with concentrations in the rural areas of Fannin, Gilmer, Pickens, and Floyd Counties.
- Minority populations and individuals with limited English proficiency are concentrated near city centers of Rome, Cartersville, Calhoun, and Dalton, as well as in the eastern half of Paulding County.
- The highest concentrations of unemployment are in more rural areas of Walker, Whitfield, Murray, Pickens, and Haralson Counties, while existing jobs are most prevalent in city centers along the I-75 corridor and the City of Rome.
- The region's largest industries and employers in industrial labor and healthcare services are projected to continue creating job opportunities for Northwest Georgia's labor force.
- Approximately 85 percent of trips made in the region are intra-county (within the same county). The highest number of inter-county trips occur between the counties of Walker and Catoosa, and Whitfield and Murray.
- Nearly 10 percent of all trips originating or ending in the region come from or go outside the region. Most external trips are coming from Cobb and Cherokee Counties in Georgia, and Hamilton County in Tennessee.
- The most-traveled routes in the region are along I-75 and routes which are parallel to the I-75 corridor or provide direct access to cities in the region including Rome, Dallas, Cartersville, and Jasper.
- There are park and ride lots throughout the region that could serve as regional, multimodal hubs or transit transfer points between county systems.
- Existing plans are generally uniform throughout the counties, sharing the goals of protecting the existing rural communities and managing diverse growth that supports affordable housing and economic development. Notably, both Polk and Floyd Counties, which do not currently offer transit services, included priorities to implement a transit service.
- Bartow County has identified three fixed-route services that they would like to implement to support industrial development.
- The Northwest Georgia Regional Vanpool Plan recommends a private provider operating a regional vanpool program, which has the greatest outcome in terms of cost to user, cost to employer, market capture, and success rate of peer services.
- Northwest Georgia has limited regional transit services with a small area serviced by Xpress, the Atlanta commuter bus service, and a third-party operator that provides service in five counties: Gordon, Pickens, Gilmer, Murray, and Fannin.

- Most transit operators in the region provide demand-response services throughout their jurisdictional boundaries with limited inter-county travel. Those that provide inter-county travel limit trip purposes to medical appointments and the days or times the trips are provided.
- There is currently one urban fixed-route system within the region in the City of Rome.
- Smartphone applications are not currently utilized for transit trip reservations and scheduling in the region.
- The following transit corridors have been identified due to the significance and number of destinations. These corridors also have high traffic volumes and report several crashes. These include the following:
  - **I-75 Corridor**, which provides regional access to large economic and residential cities, like Cartersville, Calhoun, and Dalton along I-75 between Atlanta and Chattanooga;
  - **US 441 / SR 20** between Cartersville and Rome;
  - **US 278 / SR 6 and SR 101** between Dallas, Cedartown, and Rome;
  - **SR 53** between Rome and Calhoun; and
  - **US 41 / SR 3** between Dalton and Chattanooga.
- Stakeholders identified the following existing challenges:
  - Need for efficiency and reduction on reporting, auditing, and administrative paperwork;
  - Delays in receiving new vehicles;
  - Streamline the process of transitioning from Section 5311 to Section 5307 funding including administrative tasks for a combined funding system;
  - Better communication with GDOT for guidance and information;
  - High demand for cross-county trips that cannot currently be provided;
- High demand for more medical and shopping trips that cannot currently be provided;
- Demand for workforce trips, while there are hubs for drop-off locations, pick-ups from homes pose scheduling challenges;
- Lack of input and discussion with support services for transportation such as medical facilities, employers, and senior services, needing more communication among all these groups;
- Jurisdictional challenges for cross-county trips, funding, and coordinated services, where removing these boundaries could improve communication and coordination; and
- Education trips are not provided in many counties, including trips for apprenticeships and on-the-job training.

## 10.2 Next Steps

The Existing Conditions Report provides a foundation to identify and prioritize the transit needs for each county as well as the Northwest Georgia region that will be utilized in the next part of the Regional TDP, the Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report.