"I have no one to take me anywhere during the day during the week. I live with a family member who works and is only available on weekends when some of the services I need are not available."

– Survey Respondent from Maury County

Mobility and Accessible Transportation Annual Report

March 2021

Mission Statement

Provide resources and expertise for expanding and improving accessible transportation and mobility across the state.

Priorities

Mobility Management initiatives will provide opportunity to unite a broad collaborative of stakeholders through development of local, regional, and statewide solutions to fit community and user needs.

- The State will provide administrative support and oversight for the process of shrinking gaps in access to appropriate transportation options.

- The State will establish a pathway to integrated policies and cooperative activities that support a flexible and comprehensive transportation programs.

- Tennesseans will gain transportation independence and livability in their communities.

Project Partners include: Council on Developmental Disabilities, Commission on Aging and Disability, Commission on Children and Youth, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Health, Department of Economic and Community Development, Department of Human Services, Department of Transportation, TennCare, Area Agencies on Aging and Disability, Human Resource Agencies, Tennessee Association of Public Transportation, The Arc of Tennessee, Disability Rights Tennessee, Tennessee Disability Pathfinder, Amerigroup, Urban Public Transit Systems, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, local public transportation providers, human services providers, non-profit organizations, other advocates, users of accessible transportation, and the general public.

Strategic Goals

The Mobility and Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan identifies five strategic goals to support the long-term vision and on-going motivation to reduce barriers to transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and the general public.

Goal #1: Expanded Access. Support local solutions for expanding and improving access to transportation services.

Goal #2: Service Solutions. Identify where barriers to transportation overlap and develop quality solutions that meet travelers' needs.

Goal #3: Collaboration. Establish a structure and collaborative culture that maximizes financial resources for transportation across multiple programs and departments.

Goal #4: Technology Solutions. Prioritize user-focused public information systems and transit technology tools to diversify access to services.

Goal #5: Communication. Facilitate communication and coordination between transportation providers and users for a more seamless mobility network.

36% of survey respondents who rely on public or agency transportation programs sometimes need a ride and no service is available.

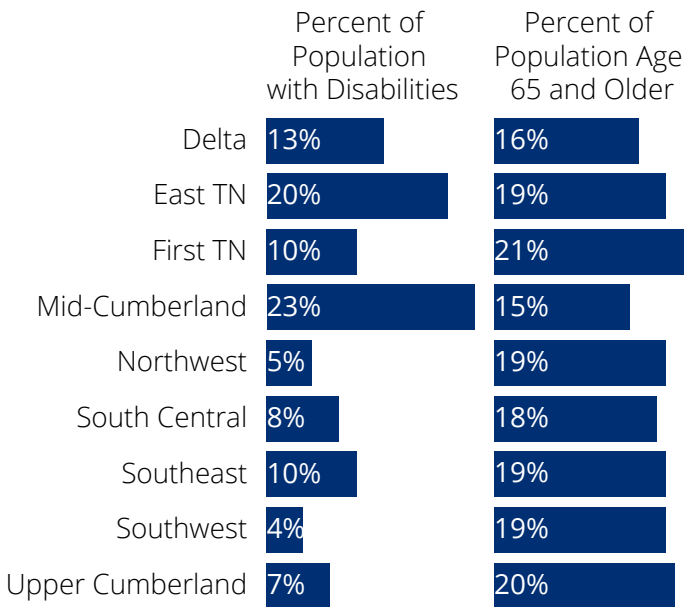Tennessee Transportation Providers by County
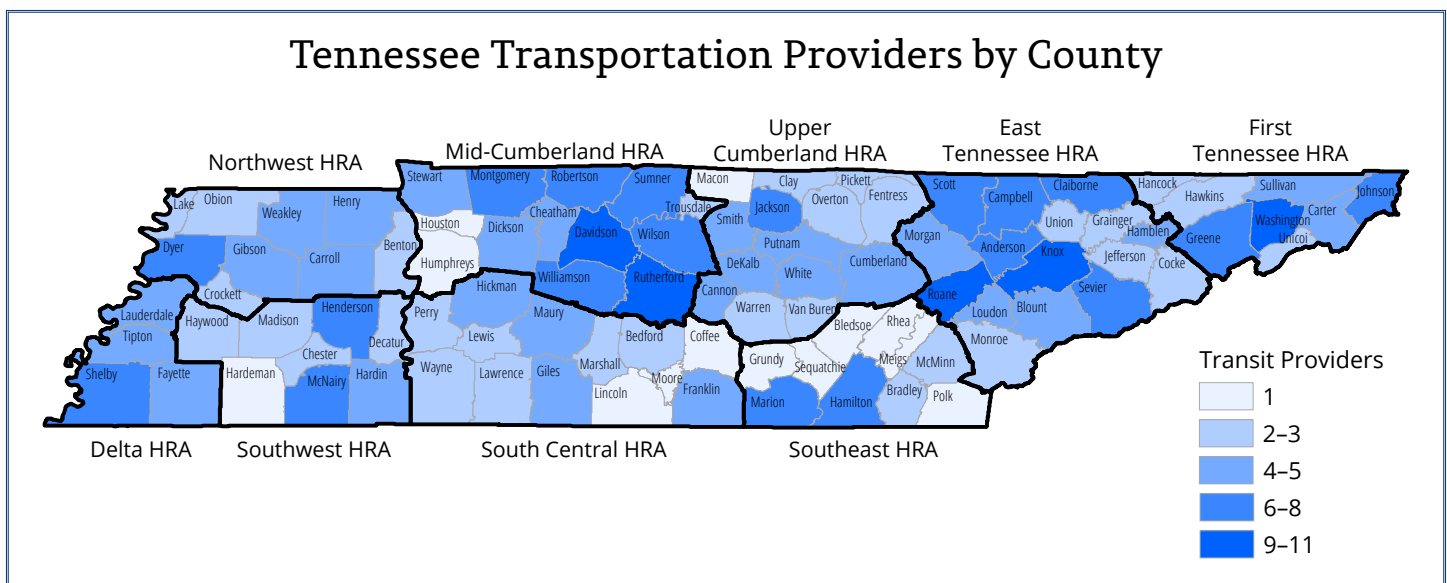
Existing Transportation Services

Public transportation, human service agencies, non-emergency medical transportation, veteran's transportation, public- or private-non-profits, and private transportation operators make up the network of transportation options. Public transportation is available in all 95 counties and every urbanized area. Urban transit is operated within specific local boundaries. Rural public transportation is operated regionally through Human Resource Agencies (HRAs). The current availability and structure of services directly impacts the State's mobility management work, and how future investments and actions are taken also influences how these growing needs are met.

Comparison of Transportation Needs and Existing Services

Despite the State's comprehensive supply of transportation services, unmet transportation needs remain. Many people choose to use transportation services above their other options. Others ride because it is their only option. Those who need transportation services tend to be older adults or individuals with disabilities.

	Percent of Population with Disabilities	Percent of Population Age 65 and Older
Delta	13%	16%
East TN	20%	19%
First TN	10%	21%
Mid-Cumberland	23%	15%
Northwest	5%	19%
South Central	8%	18%
Southeast	10%	19%
Southwest	4%	19%
Upper Cumberland	7%	20%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2015-2019 5-Year Estimates

Assessment of Unmet Transportation Needs and Gaps in Services

The gaps and unmet needs in access to transportation are temporal (hours of the day/days of the week), spatial (from Point A to Point B), funding, and/or policy related. The solutions must also be flexible enough to appropriately respond to the nature of the problem. For example, adding more vehicles is not a solution to a policy-related challenge. Likewise, changing a policy about the allowable use of State or Federal funding may not address the need for more service on weekends if the transit provider is struggling to hire drivers.

"I often think about the people with more needs than I have. If I see this as a problem, what about them? I often consider moving, and the primary reason why is lack of transportation options."

— Survey Respondent from Davidson County

The State is strategically analyzing transportation-related unmet needs and gaps in service so that it can make collaborative decisions about the most effective use of existing resources across multiple departments while meeting transportation needs for Tennesseans. The nature and degree of unmet transportation needs varies throughout Tennessee with no single or consistent underlying root cause but several common themes.

The most significant themes identified through the initial phases of the strategic planning process are outlined below.

- **Personal Assistance.** Even in urban areas, where fixed route public transit is available, passenger assistance is limited to specific forms of assistance mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act. This level of assistance sometimes is inadequate for individuals who require a certain level of flexibility and customization in order to use transit service. As a result, an otherwise independent person may not be able to access medical care, get to work, or manage daily errands, even when a vehicle is available.

- **Misperceptions.** There is a widespread perception that transportation is not available to take people to work or other necessary errands. In some cases, this perception is reality. In many cases, however, it is a misperception. The real challenge here is making sure that information is consistent and easily available because not knowing how to schedule a ride is the same as having no service at all.

- **Independence.** Users are forced to accommodate the system at the expense of independence. In urban and rural areas alike, passengers are scheduling trips for curb-to-curb transportation weeks or, at minimum, days in advance so that they can accommodate the transporter's availability to provide the trip. The options are even more limited for individuals who need a vehicle that can accommodate them and their mobility device. Planning transportation weeks in advance limits inclusion and responsiveness and is not customer-friendly.

- **Limited Weekend or Nighttime Options.** Transportation options are extremely limited on weekends and evenings even in areas with fixed route bus service. Wheelchair accessible options are especially limited on weekends and

at night. Limited access to reliable and affordable transportation during weekends and nights also limits access to employment and/or education/ job training options.

- **Limited Funding.** Limited funding balanced with the expense of on-demand transportation restricts the amount of service that can be offered. The cost of long-distance trips is too great and is typically not available for users in programs that involve destinations far from home.

- **Affordable Fares.** On-demand transportation options such as taxis and other private transportation operators are cost-prohibitive for people living within a limited budget and there are no affordable alternatives for short-notice or point-to-point services.

- **Infrastructure.** Crumbling sidewalks or no sidewalks can be a barrier to accessing bus stops or walking to community resources. In rural areas there are even fewer sidewalks and often not even roadside shoulders. These conditions prevent people from walking or using a wheelchair to their destination or even getting to a bus stop.

- **Options for Specialized Services.** Transportation options are not multi-faceted enough to include services for individuals with a variety of needs ranging from wheelchair accessible vehicles to safe transportation for individuals with cognitive or behavioral disabilities.

- **First/Last Mile Options.** First/Last mile transportation options are needed in areas surrounding fixed route bus service so that people can get from their origin or destination to the fixed route transportation option.

- **Volunteer Transportation.** The waiver protecting volunteer drivers of older adults does not extend to volunteer drivers of individuals with disabilities. Therefore, volunteer transportation services for individuals with disabilities are not as widely available. With a waiver, volunteer services could be expanded.

Half of survey respondents sometimes do not have a ride to medical appointments or essential errands.

Solutions to Accessible Transportation

The State is moving closer to having a clearinghouse for Federal and State programs that fund transportation. Even opening the doors for more connectivity at a district level or in two- or three-county groups at a time could be effective; every solution doesn't have to have a statewide impact. Performance measures will be established to accompany every objective created in the coming months.

A larger investment in transportation options that include more drivers and operating dollars and more personalized and/or assisted transportation would enable more people who need accessible features to get in and out of their homes independently. The investment could come from 'braiding' or combining existing funds from multiple Federal programs so that transportation providers can operate more efficient service, and/or identification of new funding sources.

Clarification of eligibility rules tied to Federal grant programs that support transportation may lead to more multi-agency partnerships. Beyond clarification, the State will be in a stronger position to advise Federal-level policymakers of the policies and rules that limit the effectiveness of specific programs.

Finally, enabling technology that improves access to information and scheduling of transportation will improve the lives of all Tennesseans who need or choose to use available resources. The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is actively working on improvements in enabling technology and access to employment for individuals with disabilities. TDOT is working on improvements to scheduling technology for public transit providers. These and other such solutions will enable communication about important transportation options everywhere and help reduce misperceptions about gaps in service.

The State, together with its partner organizations, transit providers, and users of the services will grow these successful strategies and cultivate new opportunities to make transportation more accessible for all Tennesseans.

TN TDOT
Department of
Transportation

Mobility and Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan

Planning for the Future

Tennessee Department of Transportation | March 29, 2021

MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION STRATEGIC PLAN

Contents

MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION STRATEGIC PLAN

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The Mobility and Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan includes the State of Tennessee's mission, goals, and priorities for supporting transportation services that provide mobility while making effective use of existing dollars and resources.

Strong local transportation services promote balanced communities and reliable access to the opportunities and programs that support quality of life in Tennessee. With this plan, the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) and its partners establish a pathway to integrated policies and cooperative activities that foster a flexible and comprehensive transportation program. It will help give local transportation providers the tools and direction to close gaps and prepare for the future. Through this effort, Tennesseans will gain transportation independence that supports livability in their communities. This is a five-year initial plan.

Realizing the importance of access to transportation, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Arc of Tennessee, Disability Rights Tennessee, and TDOT successfully worked with Tennessee lawmakers to create and establish the Tennessee Accessible Transportation and Mobility Act of 2020. The Act pertains to improving access to transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities. This Act, the first of its kind in the country, opened doors to sustainable expansions and improvements in accessible transportation for communities and individuals throughout Tennessee.

The State is poised to make the intentions of the Act a reality through TDOT and a statewide mobility management program. The Act provides direction for incorporating certain functions into the mobility and accessibility plan, including:

♦ Relationships between State government agencies as they pertain to transportation;
♦ Existing mobility management structures for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and the general public; and,
♦ Advancements in technology and creative service structures utilized by public transit systems.

Improving access to transportation service within the current fragmented approach presents many challenges and will require transformational changes to achieve optimal results. Tennessee's timing for moving forward in its implementation of plans to increase accessibility is timely on a national perspective as well as a local one. The Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM), an interagency federal initiative that supports states and their localities in developing coordinated human service delivery systems, notes "Increased accessibility is an expansion of transportation options that result from coordination among Federal and state funding recipients."

Federal and State support is a critical element in success. On October 1, 2020, the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) provided clear direction and support for States and localities when it released of a Final Report of the CCAM. The report identifies challenges and barriers to improving access to transportation for people with disabilities, older adults, and individuals of low income. The report also outlines activities the CCAM has undertaken to improve coordination across federally-funded transportation services for these populations. Alignment of policies at the Federal level will aid State-level agencies in development of their own coordinated goals and policy alignment activities.

In conjunction with coordinated transportation goals is the need to fully utilize and embrace mobility management activities and technology improvements. These improvements will drive better effectiveness of in human service agencies, private, non-profit, and public transportation services and efficiency of Tennessee's financial. The demand for accessible transportation will continue to surpass resources, so it is vital that wheelchair accessible vehicles are available in adequate supply in the community and are fully utilized. Consolidation of long-distance trips from multiple to fewer providers, when feasible will help to maximize vehicle and driver time. Coordination of training and vehicle maintenance between multiple organizations, when practical, will improve the consistency of performance and customer service. Finally, collaboration on effective marketing strategies and coordinated outreach will enhance the public's awareness of transportation services throughout the state.

Legislative direction to coordinate transportation can unite a broad collaborative of transportation providers, health and human service agencies, customers, and stakeholders in the design of local, regional, and statewide solutions to fit Tennessee's community needs and visions.

Tennessee is a great place to live and work. With transportation services available in every county of the state, residents in all communities have options. These services are the foundation for the State to promote a new and better way to support its residents.

By working collectively, stakeholders can identify and strategically apply resources to overcome the ongoing challenges to mobility even with a plethora of services. These mobility challenges keep transportation providers from being able to hire enough drivers to meet demands; prevent passengers from having a ride when they need it; keep a person with a disability or mobility limitation from leaving home because the extra assistance they need getting to and from their destination is not available; and many other realities.

Cooperation, leadership, knowledge, planning, and trust within the State-level partners and among other stakeholders are the key pillars for success in this journey for improved access and mobility throughout Tennessee.

PLANNING PRINCIPLES

This Mobility and Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan includes a number of key principles:

- ❖ **Taking an Integrated Approach among State Departments that serve older adults, individuals with disabilities and the general public and, therefore, have shared priorities.** The concepts discussed in this strategic plan go beyond the any single State department. The State is incorporating priorities of multiple departments to find transportation solutions rather than continuing to develop targeted solutions in isolation for individual programs. Collaboration among the State agencies will allow for the development of viable solutions and efficiencies.

- ❖ **Aligning policies at the state, regional, and local level to better support access to community resources.** The delivery of transportation services is largely influenced by Federal funding requirements and State and local decisions. Local transportation policies and decisions are influenced by economics, user demographics, and preferences of administrators and leaders. Transportation services can be as much about organizational culture and local resources as about policies. These factors must be taken into consideration when moving toward greater levels of cooperation and collaboration.

- ❖ **Maximizing the existing transportation infrastructure and services to strengthen travel opportunities.** While the Tennessee Accessible Transportation and Mobility Act of 2020 focused on improving access to transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities, the State understands that it will gain momentum by first removing barriers and supporting innovations and service enhancements through the existing public, private, non-profit, and human service agency transportation programs. The solutions that are appropriate for older adults and individuals with disabilities, also improve transportation for users.

- ❖ **Delivering Customer Focused Transportation.** Coordinated design thinking from state, regional and local partners, and users of accessible transportation will ensure that services are always developed and delivered with a customer focus.

- ❖ **Managing performance of funding programs.** More than 130 Federal grant programs support transportation for the public or people who meet specific eligibility requirements. Historically, in Tennessee and nationally, these funding programs have been planned and delivered in silos resulting in significant overlap in the services being funded. The State will work toward structured cost allocation or cost sharing practices that comply with Federal and State funding requirements, encourage fund braiding, and also allow transportation providers to maximize use of resources.

METHODOLOGY

The approach to the strategic plan and needs assessment encompassed opportunities for input from stakeholders representing organizations that serve older adults and individuals with disabilities, their consumers, and members of the public. The planning process also included discussions and surveys of transportation providers and local public entities. Demographic research and review of prior plans complemented the input received from various stakeholders. This multi-faceted approach was selected because it provided the broadest opportunity for input and analysis while meeting project

timelines. The implementation phase of the plan and refinements to the strategic plan itself will continue over the coming year with larger progress over the duration of the plan horizon.

Stakeholder Involvement

The Strategic Plan is built upon public and stakeholder input as well as an assessment of existing services and demographic conditions. Key stakeholder and public involvement activities were structured around the following activities:
♦ Monthly Transportation Workgroup meetings
♦ Interviews with key stakeholders
♦ Transportation Provider Survey
♦ Public Survey
♦ Nine Regional Focus Groups
♦ Public Transit Provider Focus Group

Appendix A and B contain full copies of the surveys.

Related Planning Efforts

The Strategic Plan would be incomplete if developed in isolation from other related studies and ongoing efforts. The assessment of needs and evaluation of gaps in existing services incorporated a review of local and statewide planning efforts that include transportation needs assessments. Related plans reviewed for this process included but were not limited to: Regional and Local Coordinated Public Transit-Human Service Transportation Plans, Tennessee Senior Volunteer Transportation Network Annual Report and Summary Report, and Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability Plan (TCAD) 2017 – 2021.

Goals and strategies included in this Strategic Plan also coincide with TDOT's ongoing statewide procurement of transit technology, including trip planning software. The software will ultimately support the State and transit agencies in efforts to address the mobility needs of riders locally, regionally, and statewide.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Conditions Analysis

Analysis of needs and gaps in service includes a statewide review of key demographic and socio-economic factors that influence a person's likelihood to need and use transportation services. Demographic analysis includes resources such as U.S. Census Bureau, Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), and samples of major destinations served by public transportation providers and human service agency programs. Data is compiled and analyzed to reveal potential levels and types of need and to help quantify the potential unmet demand for transportation.

Implementation of the Plan

Successful implementation of the plan will rely on continued involvement from key stakeholders at all levels of government as well as other interested parties and users of accessible transportation. Transportation providers and other stakeholders will expect to see efforts made to reduce the barriers and challenges to transportation and mobility that are brought forward in this plan and named in the goals and priorities. TDOT will be a leader and partner by continuing collaborative efforts, rather than imposing decisions in isolation. The dialogue initiated from this planning process will continue and stakeholders must proactively and cooperatively work together in addressing identified needs and challenges.

MISSION STATEMENT

Provide resources and expertise for expanding and improving transportation and mobility across the state.

GOALS

TDOT and the Transportation Workgroup have identified five goals.

1. Expand Access: Support local solutions for expanding access to transportation services.

2. Service Solutions: Identify the areas where barriers to transportation overlap and develop solutions that meet travelers' needs.

3. Collaboration: Establish a structure and collaborative culture that maximizes financial resources for transportation across multiple programs and departments.

4. Technology Solutions: Prioritize user-focused public information systems and transit technology tools to diversify access to services.

5. Communication: Facilitate communication and coordination between transportation providers and users for a more seamless mobility network.

In conjunction with these strategic goals, the State will embrace mobility management activities and technologies that will maximize resources and expand service.

The following chapter summarizes the existing transportation resources across Tennessee. Subsequent chapters provide a broad assessment of unmet transportation needs and gaps in services identified through stakeholder involvement activities and demographic analysis. The assessment of unmet needs and gaps in services will be expanded upon as the Strategic Plan is finalized.

EXISTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

These transportation services are part of Tennessee's accessible transportation network.

Public Transportation services are the heart of the state's transportation network. With various modal options, public transportation providers in Tennessee offer options for anyone in their service areas including fixed routes and demand response services. Public transportation is available in all 95 counties. Public transportation in rural Tennessee is provided through Human Resource Agencies (HRAs) that have a regional service area. Public transportation in urban areas typically serves one city or county.

Specialized transportation programs and services offered by other agencies were created to address transit gaps. and meet specific needs of riders. These include trips with origins or destinations outside of the public transit bus routes and ADA paratransit service area boundaries; door-through-door trips for people with mobility limitations preventing them from accessing public transit; on-demand transportation for trips that cannot be scheduled in advance or to address the need for travel directly from origin to destination; and/or group trips to meet agency program client needs.

Human service agencies (HSAs) have developed specialized transportation programs to fill gaps and unmet transportation needs. HSA transportation programs provide rides to individuals who meet specific eligibility requirements such as older adults, individuals with disabilities, and/or people with low incomes. They are operated by public or private non-profit organizations that provide transportation as an ancillary service to their clients or an eligible segment of the population. An example of an HSA program is vehicles operated by senior centers to bring passengers to/from nutrition sites and/or to run errands. These trips are typically operated within a limited geographic service area immediately surrounding the senior center and with limited hours of operation. Some, but not all, of these programs have wheelchair accessible vehicles.

> In the case of senior nutrition program transportation, the service is funded, in part, with Federal Older Americans Act funds that are allocated through the Administration on Aging to the Tennessee Department of Human Services and then passed through for senior services. Some programs also utilize Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 Grant Program funding to purchase vehicles for transporting seniors.

Non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) for Medicaid eligible trips is also funded through the Department of Human Services.

Veterans have access to transportation programs that are funded locally or at the Federal level.

Many **Government or Private Non-Profit** agencies provide transportation with specific eligibility requirements because other available transportation programs do not meet transportation needs of an identified group of people or for a specific trip need. These agencies often operate services with specialized aspects such as volunteer drivers, drivers with additional training for unique passenger

requirements, or single passenger per trip services for passengers that may need a direct trip due to health or other conditions. The MyRide TN program in Tennessee is an example of a successful senior-friendly volunteer transportation program for older adults. MyRide TN was initiated and funded through the TCAD and Older Americans Act funds.

Finally, **private transportation** services such as taxis, medical transportation services, and transportation network companies (TNCs)/rideshare services (e.g., Uber and Lyft) provide specialized transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities as well as for the general public. Private companies exist on passenger fares and/or contracts with public or private entities.

Together, this network of transportation options supports mobility in Tennessee for trips that are not completed with a personal vehicle, friend or family member.

Exhibit 1 illustrates the number of transportation providers serving the general public, older adults, and/or individuals with disabilities in each county. The map does not include all private transportation providers because no reliable data source is available to accurately account for them. Rural public transportation services are operated regionally through the Human Resource Agencies (HRAs). The HRAs strive to provide the level of transportation demanded in each county but are sometimes limited by driver availability. As regional operators, HRAs are able to provide regional administrative oversight and allocate available vehicles and driver resources across the region. When analyzing these services at the regional level, the strategic plan needs assessment will breakdown the services in each county by passenger eligibility and/or modes of service. It is also noted here, that some transportation providers operate within service area boundaries that are multi-county or limited to portions of a county (i.e., city limits). For the purpose of illustrating the presence of transportation services, each provider operating within a county is counted.

Exhibit 1

Tennessee Transportation Providers by County
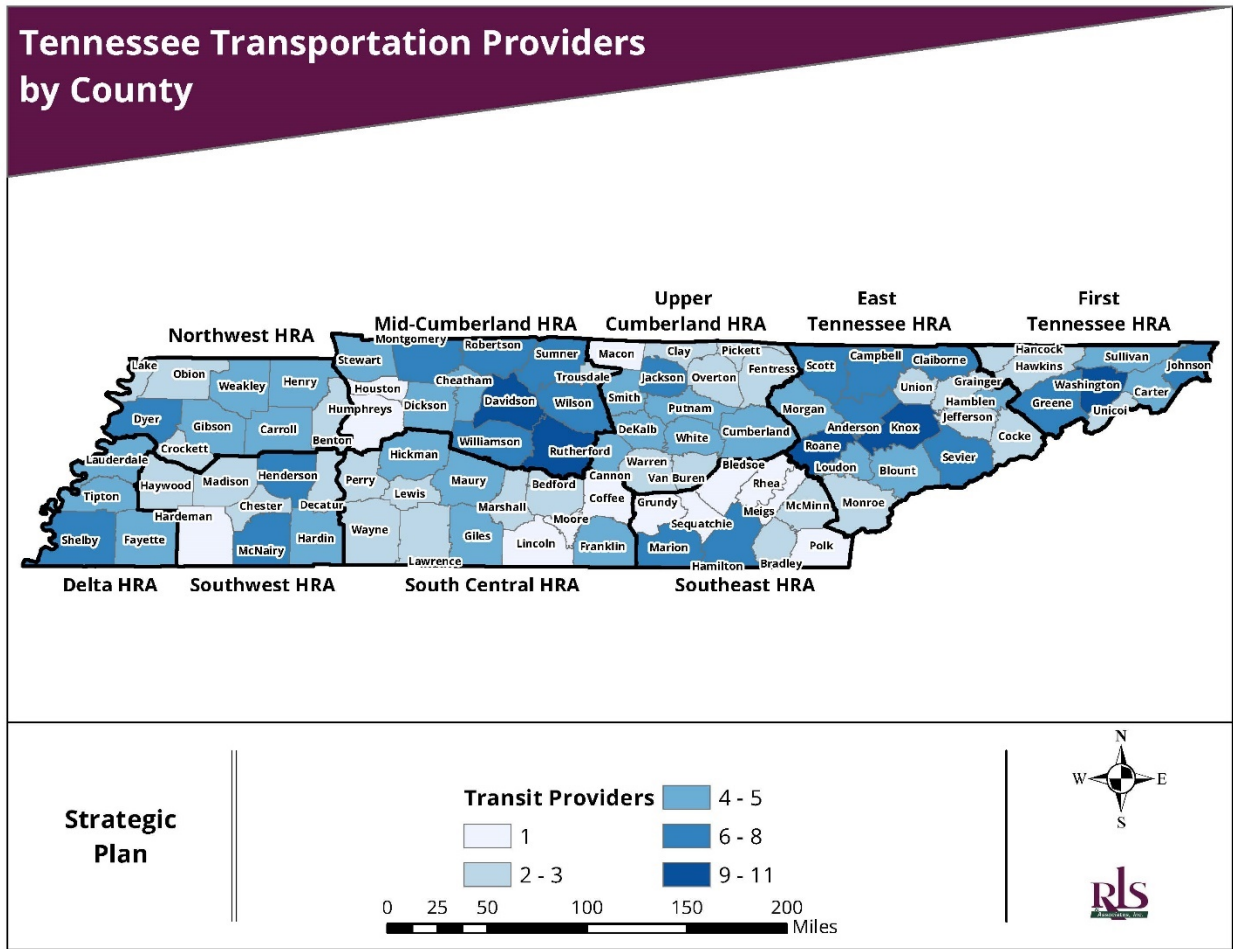
Number of Vehicles Operated by the Transportation Providers

Exhibit 2 illustrates the size of vehicle fleets for public and non-profit transportation providers. It demonstrates the range in program sizes from one vehicle to serve eligible clients, to the largest urban public transit systems that operate with more than 100 vehicles to serve their area.

In addition to the vehicles in Exhibit 2, volunteer programs utilize vehicles owned by the individual volunteer drivers. Volunteer program and private transportation provider fleets are not included in the following chart because the number fluctuates but they are included in Exhibit 1 above.

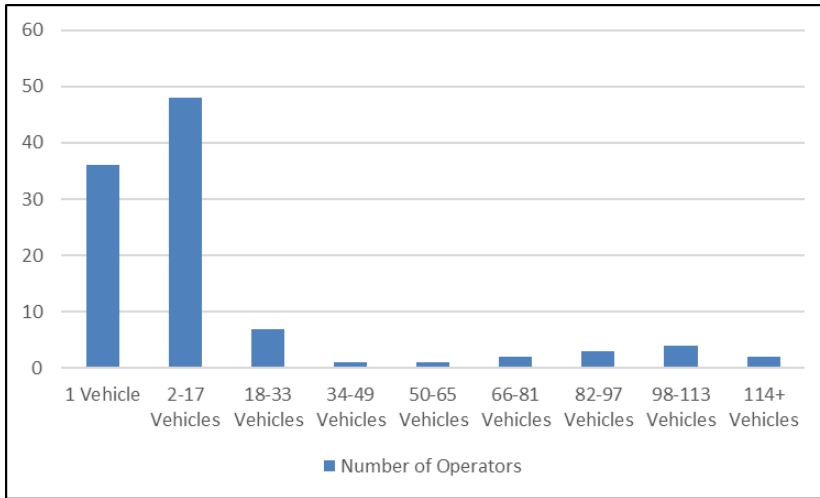**Exhibit 2: Number of Vehicles per Operator Fleet**

Exhibit 3 illustrates the distribution of vehicles by region. Each dot equals one vehicle. Dots are distributed randomly within each region and do not depict the actual county where the vehicle operates. The image is intended to provide general comparison of vehicle availability in each region.

Exhibit 3

Tennessee Vehicle Availability by HRA Region
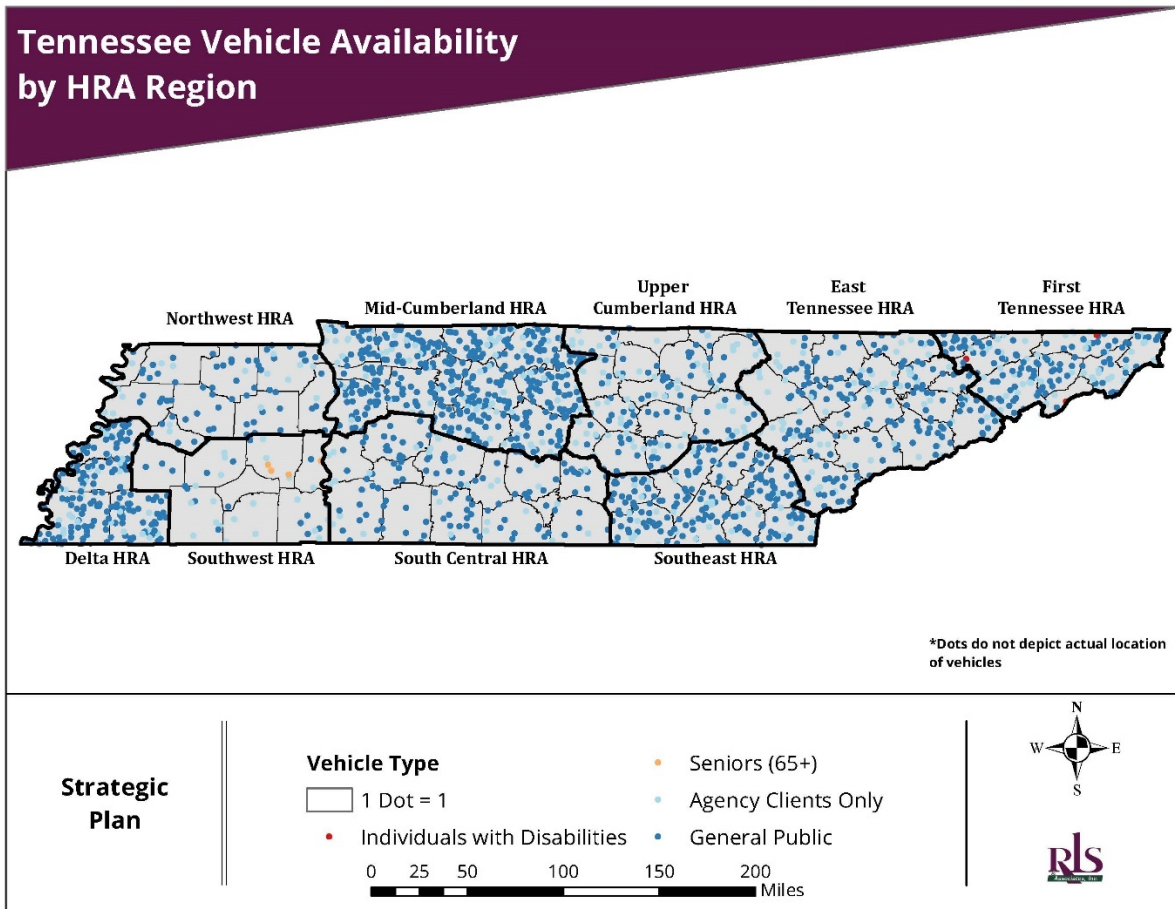
Existing Services Summary

The analysis of existing services is in progress to include analysis at the regional level. Preliminary results indicate that transportation services are available throughout the state and transportation operators range in size from one vehicle to over 114 vehicles. Within the inventory of services, there are a wide range of options ranging from public transit fixed routes to on-demand or volunteer driver services. A preliminary review of the unmet transportation needs is discussed in the following chapter and will be analyzed in depth over the next few months.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Despite the State's comprehensive supply of transportation services, unmet transportation needs remain. Identifying the nature of these needs is the first step in the Needs Assessment process. This chapter describes how the State solicited public and stakeholder input and analyzed the input to determine the nature or cause of the identified needs. Next, the State evaluated if the identified needs are reasonable to meet within their mission and, if so, how to address them through existing or expanded resources.

The needs assessment is intended as a resource to guide decision making around the State's opportunities for mobility management. It can also assist in informing the State's prioritization of transportation funding and future studies that support progress toward the State's collaborative efforts in improved mobility and accessible transportation throughout Tennessee.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The needs assessment process involved various opportunities for public and stakeholder input. The activities were condensed into a three-month period for this report and will continue throughout 2021 as the strategic plan objectives are further developed and refined. Stakeholder and public involvement opportunities to date included:

- ♦ Nine regional focus groups structured around the Human Resource Agency regions
- ♦ Interviews with key transportation stakeholders such as State Departments that are leading human service agency and public transportation initiatives, and regional or local organizations and groups
- ♦ A transportation provider survey about needs and existing services
- ♦ Transportation needs assessment survey for the public
- ♦ Monthly meetings of the Transportation Workgroup

The process also included review of recent and relevant plans, surveys and studies, such as locally developed Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plans and the Council on Developmental Disabilities Transportation Needs Survey.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT – FOCUS GROUPS

Nine virtual focus groups were held over three weeks, several with breakout sessions to make sure large attendance didn't interfere with discussing individual and community needs. One meeting was facilitated for each of the State's HRA regions. Each meeting was facilitated by the consulting team and TDOT. In total the meetings attracted 228 attendees (see Table 1). These sessions allowed for dedicated time to delve into regional issues and specialized transportation challenges faced by older adults and individuals with disabilities.

Table 1: Virtual Focus Group Attendance

HRA Regions	Date	Attendees
Southwest	2/11/2021, Noon	15
East	2/11/2021, 5:30 p.m.	35
Mid-Cumberland	2/12/2021, Noon	44
First TN	2/16/2021, Noon	13
Southeast	2/16/2021, 5:30 p.m.	36
Upper Cumberland	2/18/2021, 12:30 p.m.	23
South Central	2/19/2021, Noon	23
Delta	2/22/2021, 5:30 p.m.	9
Northwest	2/23/2021, 5:30 p.m.	19
Transportation Providers	3/8/2021, 10:00 a.m.	11
Total Attendance		**228**

*Some attendees joined multiple focus groups.

Needs and Challenges Identified in by Stakeholders

Participants were asked to discuss their transportation challenges and unmet needs, and then to suggest potential solutions that they believe to be most appropriate. The most commonly indicated needs and challenges faced by attendees are listed below in order of most to least often mentioned. The complete list of stakeholder feedback is available in the Appendix C.

♦ In every region, stakeholders expressed the need for **expanded services**; more and/or varied transportation options, particularly in rural areas; more frequency of fixed route service; and more vehicles (and drivers) to provide scheduled ride and on-demand service.

♦ Many communities in and around urban areas are left unserved because of **jurisdictional service area boundaries** honored by the transit systems – particularly suburban and exurban job centers.

♦ Stakeholders also indicated that there are gaps in access to transportation for younger adults or individuals who are not clients of particular agencies. The gaps are created by **eligibility requirements** that are typically tied to local agency policies or Federal funding requirements.

♦ **Personal assistance** is needed for individuals who have difficulty navigating a trip on their own. This higher level of assistance is not needed for every passenger but it is the difference between being able to travel or staying home for some. The types of extra assistance mentioned during the meetings included:

  o escorts or travel companions;
  o assistance getting from the door of the pick-up or drop-off location to/from the vehicle;
  o assistance with through-the-door service by providing assistance from inside the pick-up and through the door of the drop-off location;
  o assistance getting on and off the vehicles;
  o assistance with packages or special shopping runs;
  o family access with multiple kids or when using a car seat; and,

- crisis services for emergency weather (bringing supplies) or emergency health conditions (stretcher service, waiting in pain for an 'advance schedule' ride, and rides home after discharge).

♦ **Regional, intercounty, and out-of-state** transportation is a challenge, including getting between rural destinations which are far away and may require a higher fare that is unaffordable for the passenger; getting from rural areas into a central city for services; and finding work across a city/county/state line and not being able to get there.

♦ In most rural areas of Tennessee, regional transportation is available but the public **misperception** may be that services do not exist, are available only to those who meet certain eligibility, or are too expensive.

♦ Trip scheduling discussions raised the need for **on-demand transportation** so that passengers can make same-day trips. Most demand response transportation services require a reservation at least one day and sometimes several days in advance of the trip.

♦ **Reliability** of transportation was raised repeatedly as a concern. Passengers need on-time service, especially when traveling to and from work or for medical appointments.

♦ Passengers need transportation that is **flexible** enough to allow them to run multiple errands, even when sharing rides. Chaining trips (ex. going to multiple medical providers on a trip to the city, getting prescriptions after a doctor's appointment, running several errands) would help passengers complete necessary errands in a single day. Currently, the travel time or wait time for a vehicle can make the trip so long that only one appointment can be accomplished.

♦ **Customer service** is also an issue. Concerns were expressed about schedulers/dispatchers not being helpful, and there was a frequent concern from people scheduling trips to work that they will be bumped due to prioritized medical trips.

♦ Accessible **community infrastructure** is needed such as sidewalks, crosswalks, accessible bus stops/pads/shelters, accessible traffic signals, curb ramps and other ramps for access to buildings.

♦ Funding for service included discussion around providing a **living wage to retain drivers** as well as **driver pay comparable with similar industries**, and the need for coordination to match funding from different programs (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) for example, or insurance benefits), and addressing funding match dictating service boundaries.

♦ Availability of service **information** was lacking. Access to online scheduling or a one-call service is needed for people with visual impairments and others with disabilities

♦ Vehicle accessibility was mentioned as a need, including **wheelchair equipped vehicles** with ramps or lifts, particularly for use by volunteer programs and TNCs. Households are challenged if they do not have a personal vehicle available or individuals cannot drive.

Other important issues that were frequently mentioned included:

♦ **Communication and coordination** between providers would improve service.

♦ **Volunteer programs** need additional drivers and a way to accommodate wheelchair-users.

- ◆ **Political climate** that ignores or de-prioritizes transit and other public transportation creates underfunding. Information is needed to address lack of government/political support and demonstrate the value (and underfunding) of public transit.

The challenges and barriers to coordinating transportation from the providers' perspective and the challenges to mobility for passengers are important factors in the development of coordinated transportation strategies.

Potential Solutions

Potential solutions discussed by the focus groups addressed many of the issues and challenges presented above. The HRA and urban public transportation providers, volunteer programs, private operators and other participants were active in the group discussions, sharing their concerns and hopes for improvements. Some ongoing coordination efforts were mentioned such as partnerships between city and regional services, coordinated technology development and purchases, and transfer points between some agencies. Working with businesses on rideshare, vanpool and sponsored bus transportation was suggested. The idea of creating policy and addressing insurance issues to allow providers to loan or share vehicles would increase transit capacity.

Volunteer recruitment and service provision will look different following the COVID-19 pandemic and participating stakeholders broadly supported expanding volunteer services throughout the state. The volunteer programs need flexibility to fit the different demands in counties and regions, and perhaps the supplement of paid drivers and wheelchair accessible vehicles. Working with faith-based partners to create transportation networks was also recommended. One participant warned against replacing the responsibility of the State to support and subsidize permanent and sustainable transportation solutions with volunteer enthusiasm, which ebbs and fades.

Working with planning, development, and builders' organizations was suggested to incentivize sidewalk development and expedite implementation of ADA transition plans that would address some infrastructure issues.

Several groups discussed public private partnerships and private sector investment as a lever to break down service barriers and overcome the restrictions of Federal or local tax funding. Voucher programs are also leveraged in other areas of the country to overcome poverty and isolation.

Traditional and online scheduling needs could be met with a one-call, one-click solution. On-demand options need to be fostered, along with more robust travel training. Common community services such as 2-1-1 telephone helpline would be a good fit for partnership, as their call-takers are trained in triaging calls and assessing multiple needs. A point person was recommended for funding, grants, and matching programs.

Other non-traditional and innovative suggestions included:

- Working with trade schools and truck driver training programs to add second shift bus driver practicums as part of their curriculum, or drive a passenger van in an internship arrangement.
- Expanding Micro-transit options and Mobility as a Service (MaaS) in neighborhoods rather than restoring fixed routes after the COVID pandemic.
- Involving media in an organized transit voices campaign.
- Creating and marketing a statewide transportation logo or brand that would make transportation options easily identifiable.
- Creating rural hubs where transfers and services could be gathered regularly.
- Re-evaluating the rural/urban division of services and funding.
- Directly coordinating with dialysis centers and health care providers to improve service and scheduling.
- Working through Health Department officials to study transportation in a 'social determinants of health' framework which is a holistic approach to assessing and understanding key societal conditions and systems that directly and indirectly impact the health of all persons.
- Conducting a market study for on-demand wheelchair accessible service.
- Studying the impact of livable wages for drivers and potential offsets for business and non-profits to make up revenue.
- Working with the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security's Tennessee Highway Safety Office on their Older Driver Programs.

Partner Organizations

The focus groups discussed potential partner relationships, and identified some of the organizations that would be useful allies in building mobility. Several groups discussed having a structure like the Governor's Council on Disability Issues. The organizations and people mentioned included

- People with Disabilities, and people closely associated with disability services;
- Seniors, and people closely associated with senior services;
- Engineers;
- Transportation providers;
- Economic development organizations;
- Medical service providers;
- People from the business community; and
- Influencers, people with social connection.

Another suggestion was to have a user focus group that would meet to advise the State twice a year.

Other suggestions on partners included the following organizations, in no particular order:

HRA providers
MyRide programs
Area Agency on Aging

Department of Mental Health and Substance
Abuse in each county
Department of Public Health

Mayors, Commissioners, and Elected Officials

Empower TN (Center for Independent Living)

SeniorRide Nashville

Metropolitan Planning Agencies, Regional Planning Commissions, Councils of Government

SmileOn60+

BCBS Blue Care, United Health and other Managed Care Organizations

Chambers of Commerce

National Federation for the Blind

Major companies

TN Sherriff's Association

Disability Rights of Tennessee

TN Office of the Courts

Department of Education

TN Association of Mental Health Organizations

TN Association of Alcohol, Drug & other Addiction Services

Department of Labor and Workforce Development

TennCare

Veterans Associations

Role of the Office of Mobility and Accessible Transportation

The focus groups suggested a variety of roles for the new office in implementing mobility improvements across the state. The need to improve both the variety and consistency of services provided in all regions indicated an oversight role. Establishing communication and complaint resolution centers that are separate from the transit providers was recommended. Understanding the differences and integration of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 and Section 5311 funded programs and communicating the value of those programs to the legislature were discussed, and helping to ensure the voices of transit users are heard at the legislature and Governor's level. There was a desire to see accountability set at the highest levels to address the identified transportation needs.

Being able to secure community and State resources was also identified as a role for the State, building partnerships with the goal of generating or connecting funding streams, and breaking down silos and policy barriers.

Creating analysis tools was identified as another task, and also focusing community investment and development of sidewalks, trails and accessibility infrastructure.

TRANSPORTATION NEEDS SURVEY INPUT

Survey data were collected through two online surveys. One **provider survey** was directed to organizations that purchase, provide, or fund transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and/or the general public. Another **traveler survey** was available to the general public but directed toward individuals using one or more of the public or human service agency transportation programs.

A comprehensive inventory of public and human service agency transportation providers was utilized to distribute the provider survey. Therefore, the provider survey results include information from all organizations that chose to participate. In total, approximately 78 individuals representing 67 different organizations participated in the transportation provider survey. Private transportation providers are included in the survey results. However, no comprehensive inventory of private transportation providers exists in the state. Therefore, representation from private providers is not as comprehensive as that of publicly funded organizations.

"I have no one to take me anywhere during the day during the week. I live with a family member who works and is only available on weekends when some of the services I need are not available."

-Survey Respondent from Maury County

A separate public needs assessment traveler survey was distributed to agencies and focus group participants with a request to share the survey with clients and users of their services. The populations of particular interest in the traveler survey research could not be derived entirely from registers or rosters, which meant a probabilistic sampling design could not be used. Likewise, neither funding nor time would allow for a statistically valid survey of the entire state population. As a result, the survey data reflects the experiences of those who responded to the survey, as opposed to being representative of the population of interest. As of March 11, 2021, 659 individuals responded to the public survey. The survey will remain open until April 1, 2021.

Location of Traveler Survey Respondents

Participants in the traveler survey were invited to provide their zip code. The following map illustrates the locations where survey respondents lived. Strongest participation was from within the following regions:

♦ Southwest HRA
♦ South Central HRA
♦ Mid-Cumberland HRA
♦ Upper-Cumberland HRA
♦ East Tennessee HRA

All HRA regions are represented in the survey, but responses from some regions are minimal and others are not represented. Efforts will be made to encourage participation from the under-represented areas of the state by April 1, 2021.

Exhibit 4

Traveler Survey Responses by Zip Code
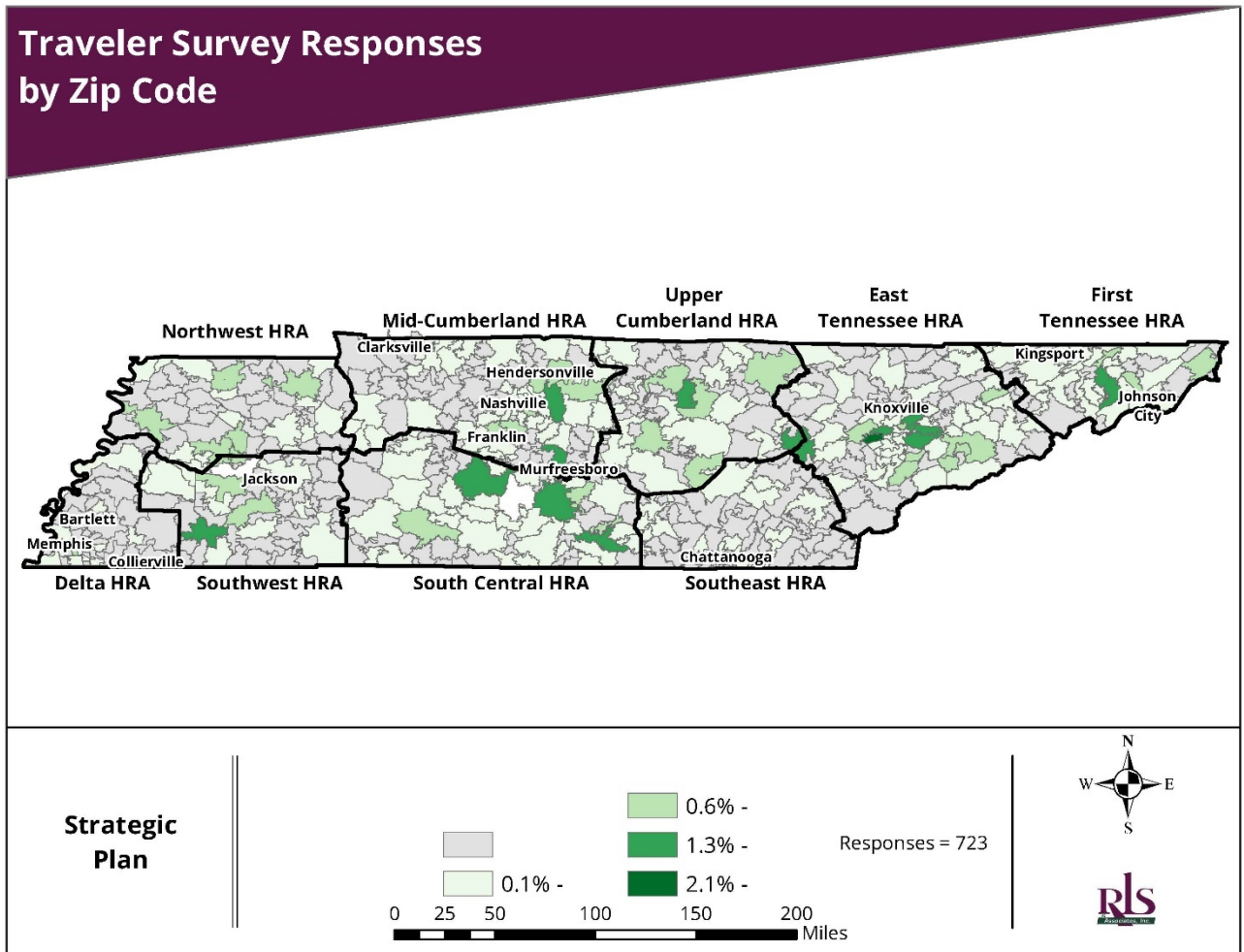
Household Income

A significant number of survey respondents live below the Federal Poverty Level. More than half of the respondents from households with one adult earned a household income below the Federal Poverty Level. Approximately one quarter of households with two or three adults earned incomes below the Federal Poverty Level. Approximately 43 percent of households with four adults earned less than the Federal Poverty Level. On average, survey respondents lived in households with three adults.

Table 2: Traveler Survey Respondent Household Income and Size

Number of Adults per Household	Federal Poverty Level	Respondent Households Below 100% of Federal Poverty Level (Approximately)
One Adult	$23,606	55%
Two Adults	$31,894	24%
Three Adults	$40,182	28%
Four Adults	$48,470	43%

*Source of Federal Poverty Level: TN Department of Health Income Guidelines

Transportation Provider Survey Characteristics

Approximately 67 percent of transportation provider's that participated in the provider survey represent public, non-profit organizations (e.g., government or human service agencies). Private, non-profit organizations (e.g., community-based non-profits) make up 12 percent (9 respondents) of the responses. Private, for-profit organizations (e.g., taxis) account for seven percent. Organizations that selected "other" types of authority include quasi-governmental organizations, local governments, and State government programs (14 percent).
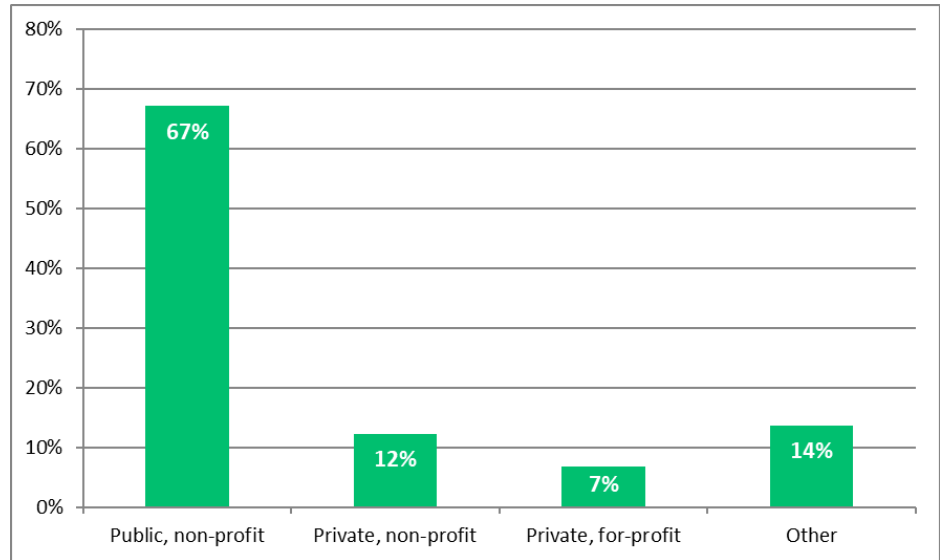
"I often think about the people with more needs than I have. If I see this is a problem, what about them? I often consider moving, and the primary reason is lack of transportation options."
-Survey Respondent from Davidson County

PUBLIC TRAVELER SURVEY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The following charts and tables illustrate transportation-related characteristics of public traveler survey respondents.

Regular Access to Technology

Nearly all survey respondents (93 percent) have regular access to a cell phone. Seventy-nine percent have access to a computer and 85 percent have internet service. The fact that 93 percent of respondents have regular access to a cell phone is indicative of a shift toward mobile devices and internet-based search capabilities. (n=648)
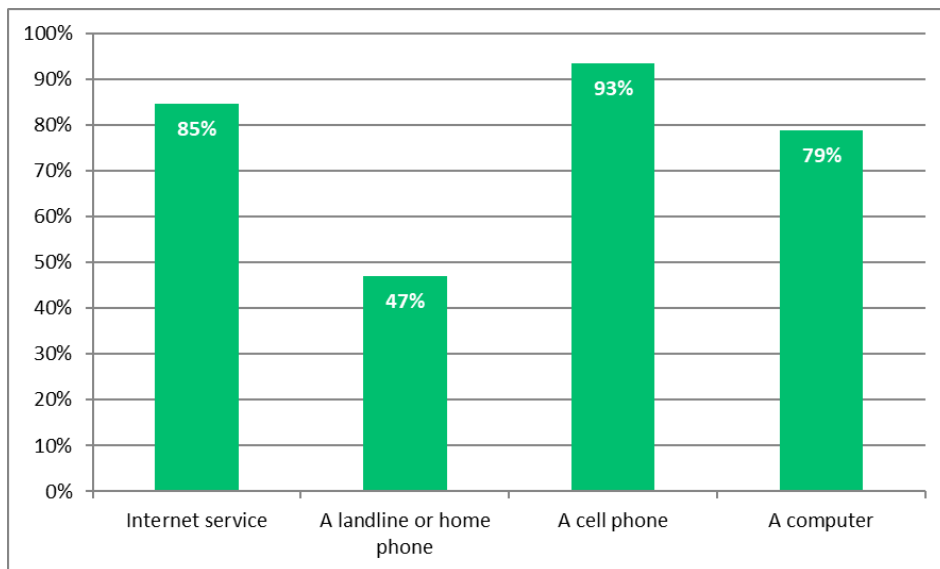
Information Resources

When asked how they find information about available transportation services, most respondents search the internet or ask a friend or relative to help. Other common resources included calling the local public transit provider, county/local government or community center, or asking a case manager. Approximately four percent of respondents contact Tennessee 211. (n-636)
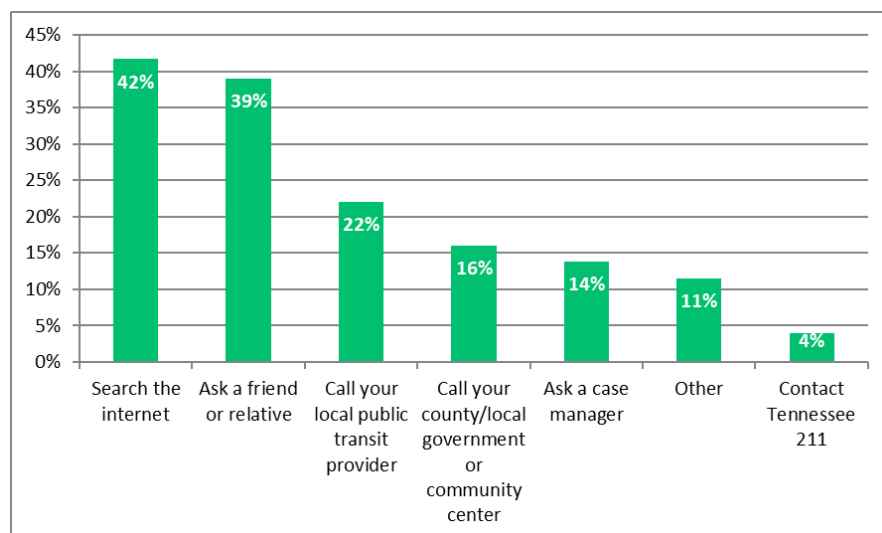
Modes of Transportation

More than one-half of survey respondents indicated that the single mode of transportation they use is their personal vehicle. The needs assessment looked at those who sometimes or always do not drive themselves; all results below are for the 41 percent of respondents who do not drive themselves. Factoring out exclusively driving a personal vehicle, the most commonly selected mode of transportation (54 percent of the 41 percent) was getting a ride from someone they know (i.e., friends or family members). Approximately 22 percent sometimes drive a personal vehicle but also frequently use other modes of service. Twenty percent use transportation provided by an agency. All other modes of transportation received less than 20 percent of responses. "Other" response included walking and riding with a parent.

Most Common Modes of Transportation
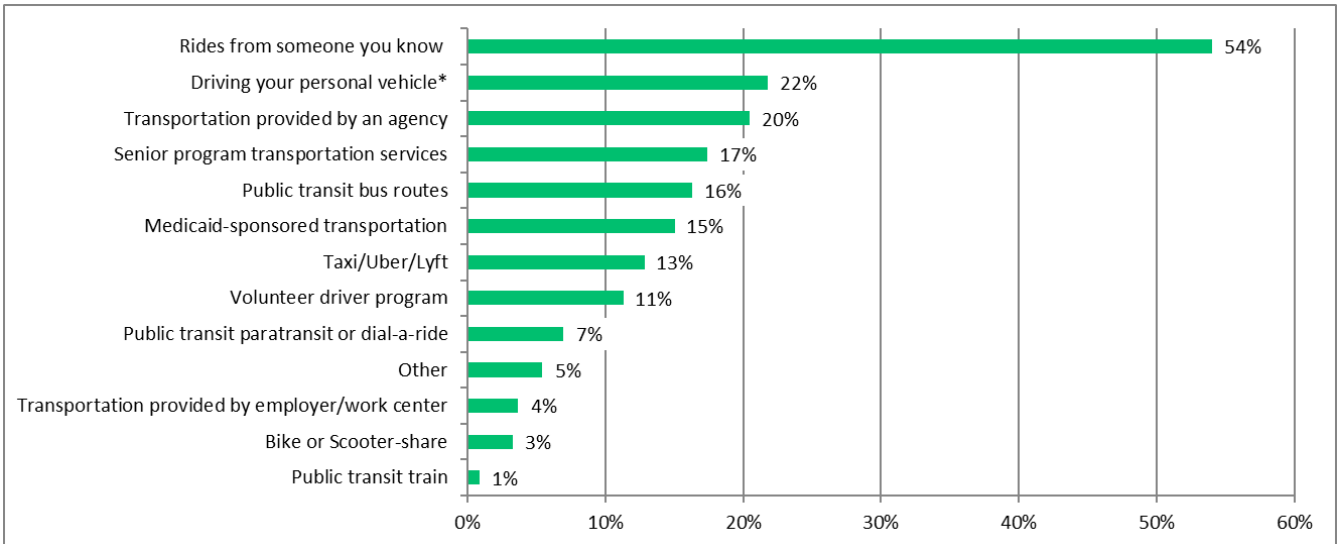
*Includes respondents who indicated that they drive a personal vehicle and use other services as their primary mode of transportation.

Percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents could select multiple answers.

Even with the numerous modes of transportation used, more than half (57 percent) of non-drivers indicated that sometimes they need a ride and do not have one. (n=355)

Do You Ever Need A Ride and Not Have One?
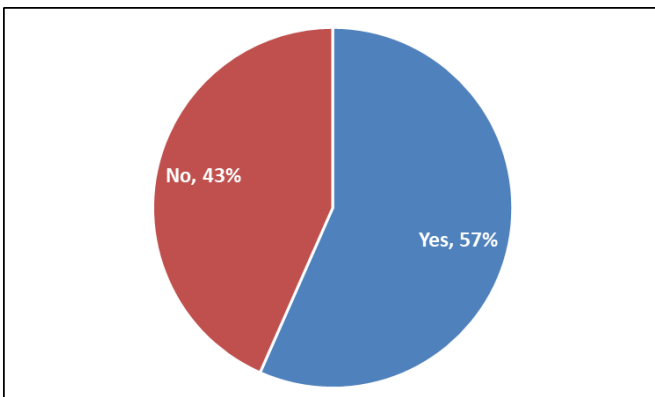
## Satisfaction with Transportation Services

Again, after filtering out respondents who only drive, survey results indicate that 35 percent of remaining respondents are satisfied with the available transportation services and those services meet essential transportation needs but not all transportation needs. Another 27 percent stated that the transportation services they use meet all of their transportation needs. Conversely, 23 percent stated that the transportation services they use only meet some of their transportation needs and they must find other options for most of their transportation needs. Fifteen percent indicated that they do not have access to transportation services that meet their needs, and they almost never have a ride when they need it. (n=353)

Level of Satisfaction with Existing Transportation Services
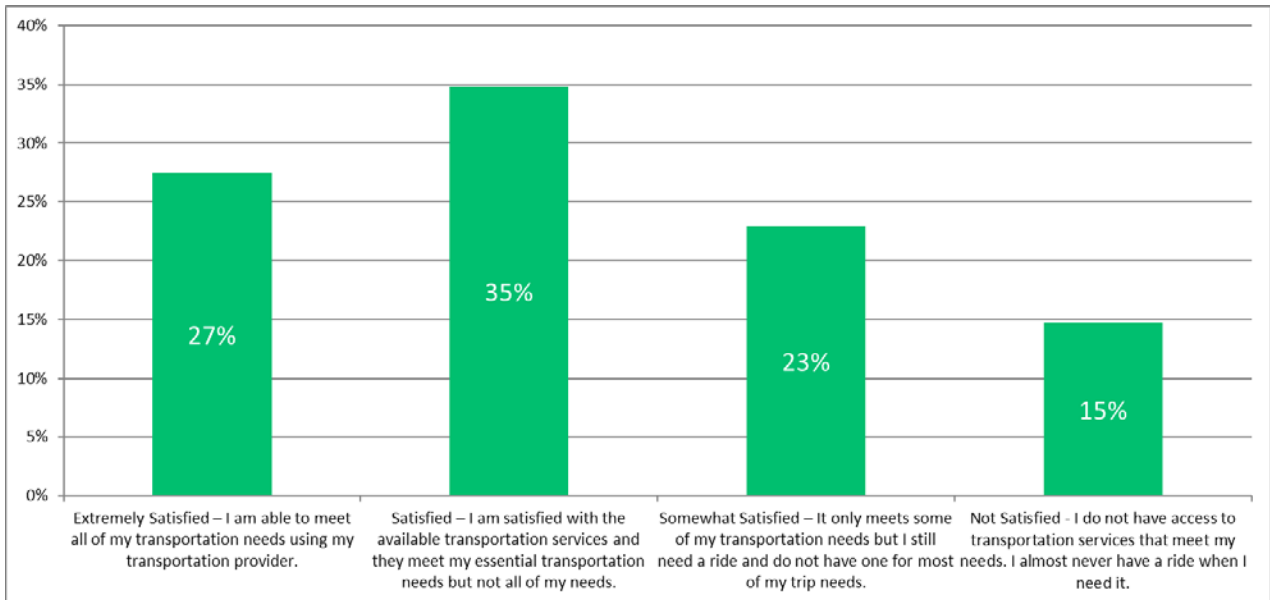
## Days and Times When A Trip Is Needed and Not Available

The time of day when trips are needed but not available ranges throughout the day but a significant number are during mid-morning to evening hours. Unmet trip needs occur every day of the week, and most often on weekends. Forty-four percent to Forty-eight percent of non-drivers have unmet trip needs on weekends. During weekdays the range is from 60 to 67 percent.
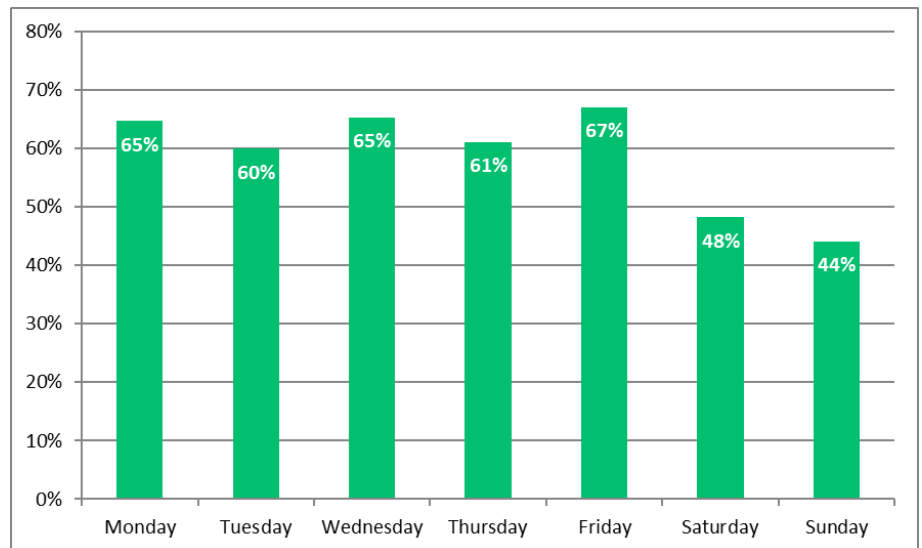
Trip Purposes

Non-drivers were also asked to indicate where they need to go but do not have a ride. Each person could select more than one answer. Medical appointments, essential errands, and work were the trip needs that most often go unserved. (n=205)

Most Unserved Trip Purposes
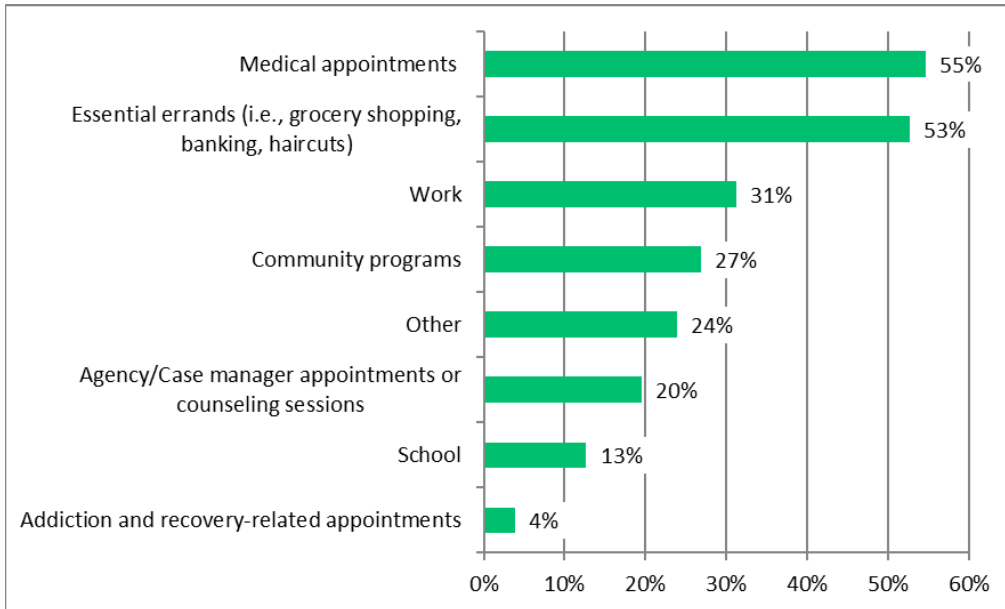
Asking a Friend or Family Member for Transportation

Some non-drivers ask a friend or family member to drive them to an errand or essential trip. This occurs at least weekly for more than half of the respondents (53 percent) and as often as daily for a quarter of respondents (52 percent). The remaining respondents (48 percent) indicated this occurs at least monthly (23 percent) or less than once a month (24 percent).

Frequency of Needing to Ask for a Ride
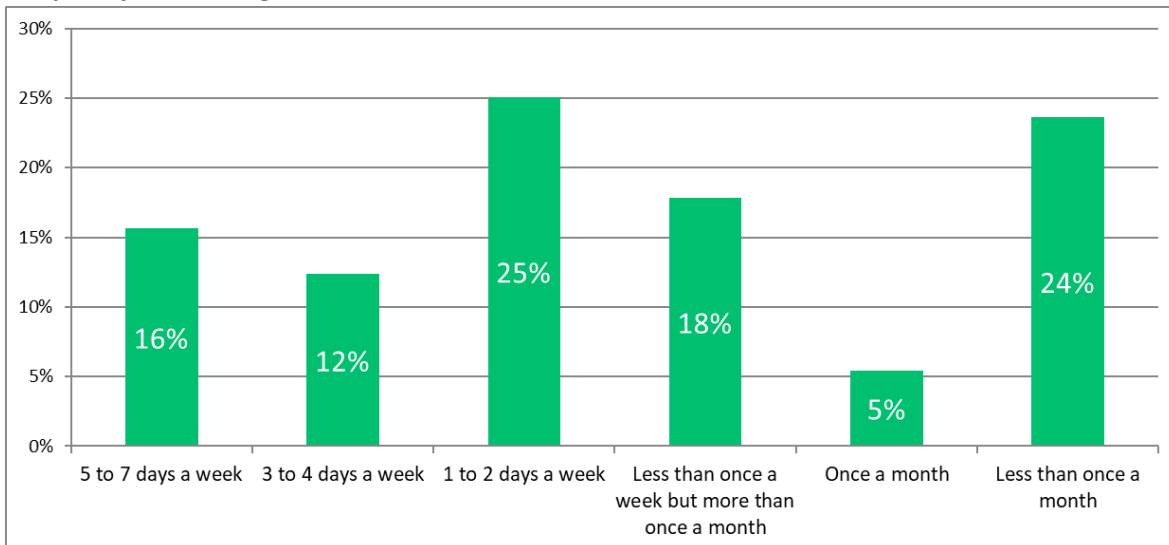
Personal Transportation Expenses

Everyone must monitor their personal transportation budget. As previously mentioned, a significant number of survey participants are living below the Federal Poverty Level. Agency-sponsored transportation services are often provided by the agency at no cost to the rider. Public transportation fares are relatively low compared to private operators that rely on fare income and therefore must charge a higher rate. However, the needs assessment indicates that the lower cost options are not always available or do not meet every need.

Approximately 28 percent of non-driver survey respondents spend less than $20 per month on transportation. Another 22 percent spend $21 to $50 per month. On the higher end, 19 percent are spending $51 to $100 per month on transportation and 31 percent spend more than $100 per month. (n-495)
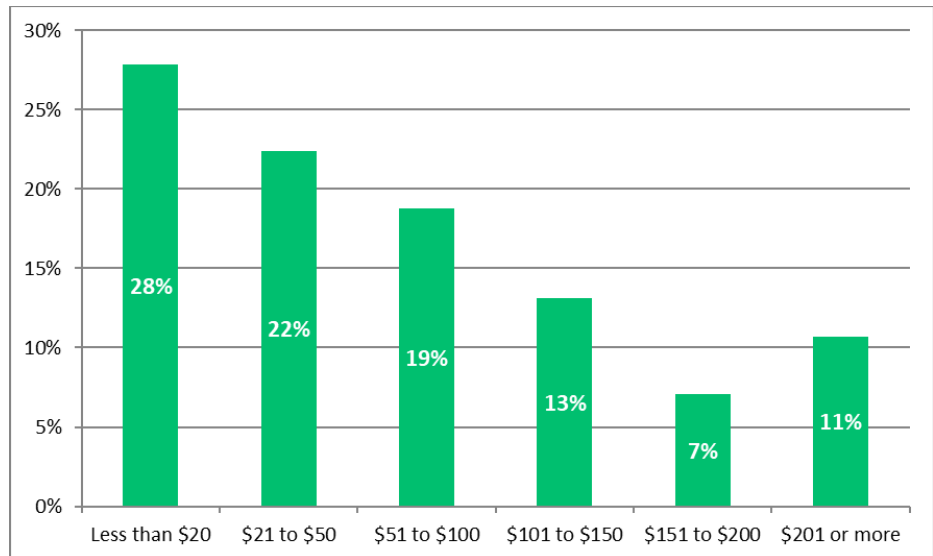
Specific Transportation Needs

All survey respondents were invited to list specific transportation challenges or unmet needs that they experience. A complete list of responses is included in Appendix D. In summary, the comments addressed user concerns about safety when walking to/from the bus stop; lack of reliability; and limited access created either by the transportation providers hours of operation or the level of personal assistance provided by drivers.

COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT - HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLANS

Organizations receiving Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 funding must complete locally developed Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plans (CPT-HSTPs) and update those plans on regular intervals. Through these plans, local stakeholders develop coordinated goals and strategies to address identified needs and gaps in transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Many plans also include transportation needs and goals for general public service. The needs identified in Tennessee CPT-HSTPs were considered as part of this Strategic Plan Needs Assessment.

Transportation needs identified in Tennessee CPT-HSTPs have a local or regional focus and differ across the state. In all areas, needs pertain to breaking down jurisdictional boundaries that limit service areas or organizational policies that limit eligibility. Access to employment, particularly second and third shifts, was also frequently noted in the regional plans.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Transportation users include people who choose to use public transportation as well as people who ride because it is their only option. The former most often, but not always, live in urbanized areas where fixed route bus service and other transit options are available. Riders that participate in human service agency programs may also choose to use their transportation. People who use transportation services because they do not drive and/or have limited mobility options may rely on mass transportation, friends, family, or programs for support. High quality services benefit all communities and travelers.

Demographic and socio-economic conditions often determine whether a user chooses to ride or needs to ride. Typically, age, income, households with one or zero vehicles, and disability status are strong indicators of transportation needs. These factors also often determine the user's eligibility for human service agency, non-profit, or specialized public transportation services. Likewise, high population densities often generate the highest levels of demand for transportation services. For example, higher population density in urban areas create higher demand for transportation compared to rural areas where population density is lower. The higher demand and higher density areas can be more effectively served with routes that operate on a fixed schedule and with larger vehicles and the volume of trips can also support private, on-demand services such as Taxis, and Transportation Network Companies (i.e., Uber and Lyft). In rural areas, the distance between trip origins and destinations is typically longer and there are fewer people and fewer travel options, making use of advance reservation service, smaller vehicles, and customized trips more necessary.

For the purpose of this study, older adults are defined as individuals age 65 and older. Older adults have a higher likelihood of using public or human service agency transportation services, or relying on friends or family members to drive them to appointments or daily errands. Income is also an indicator of a person's need for public or human service agency transportation because these services are often more cost effective than owning and operating a car.

Mobility limitations caused by a disability are also indicators of a person's likelihood to use specialized transportation including vehicles that are wheelchair accessible or services that pick-up/drop-off at the curb or door, or have a bus stop within ¼ mile or less of the person's residence. Accurately measuring the geographic densities of individuals with mobility limitations is challenging because the U.S. Census Bureau does not segregate the nature of a person's disability. Therefore, data includes all types of disability reported to the Census, even if it does not involve a mobility limitation. Furthermore, the smallest level of data about the geographic location of individuals with disabilities is the Census Tract level.

Older Adult Population

Individuals age 65 and older make up approximately 17 percent of Tennessee's total population. By 2026, this age group will reach 20 percent of the State's total population. When analysis is expanded to include individuals age 60 and older, the larger age cohort makes up nearly one quarter of Tennessee's population. As the population of older adults increases, it is likely that the demand for accessible transportation will also increase. With access to appropriate transportation, older adults are more likely to have the option to continue living independently in their homes and communities.

**Exhibit 5: Population Projections for Ages 65 and Older, 2020 through 2026**
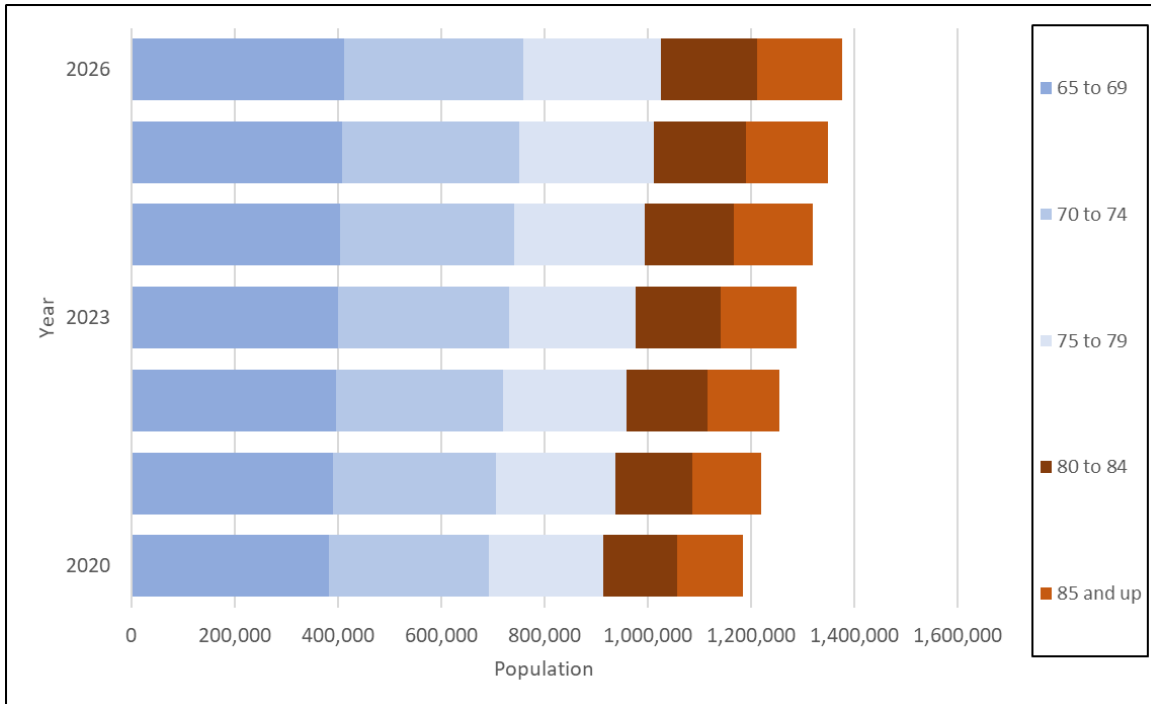
Source: Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research, University of Tennessee, Knoxville - October 2019. Projections are based on 2018 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates.

When looking at the percent of the population age 65 and older by HRA region, American Community Survey data indicates that between 16 and 21 percent of the population in each multi-county region is age 65 or older.

Exhibit 6 illustrates the population densities per square mile of older adults. High densities in the urban areas are consistent with higher overall population density. Densities in the counties surrounding Chattanooga, Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville have moderate levels. More counties within the First Tennessee Human Resource Agency (HRA), East Tennessee HRA, and Mid-Cumberland HRA have higher densities of older adults compared to other HRAs. Northwest HRA, South Central HRA, and Upper Cumberland HRA counties range from moderately low to low densities. Higher densities of older adults are one indicator of the potential for additional resources and/or modes of service that are appropriate for higher-density areas (i.e., services operated on fixed schedules or short-distance on-demand trips). The densities of older adults are low in many of the rural counties but transportation needs faced by

older adults in rural areas require providers to drive longer distances, and those trips are provided for two or three passengers per vehicle. In the more densely populated areas it is possible to serve five or more people at a time with a single vehicle.

Exhibit 6

Tennessee Older Adult Density by County
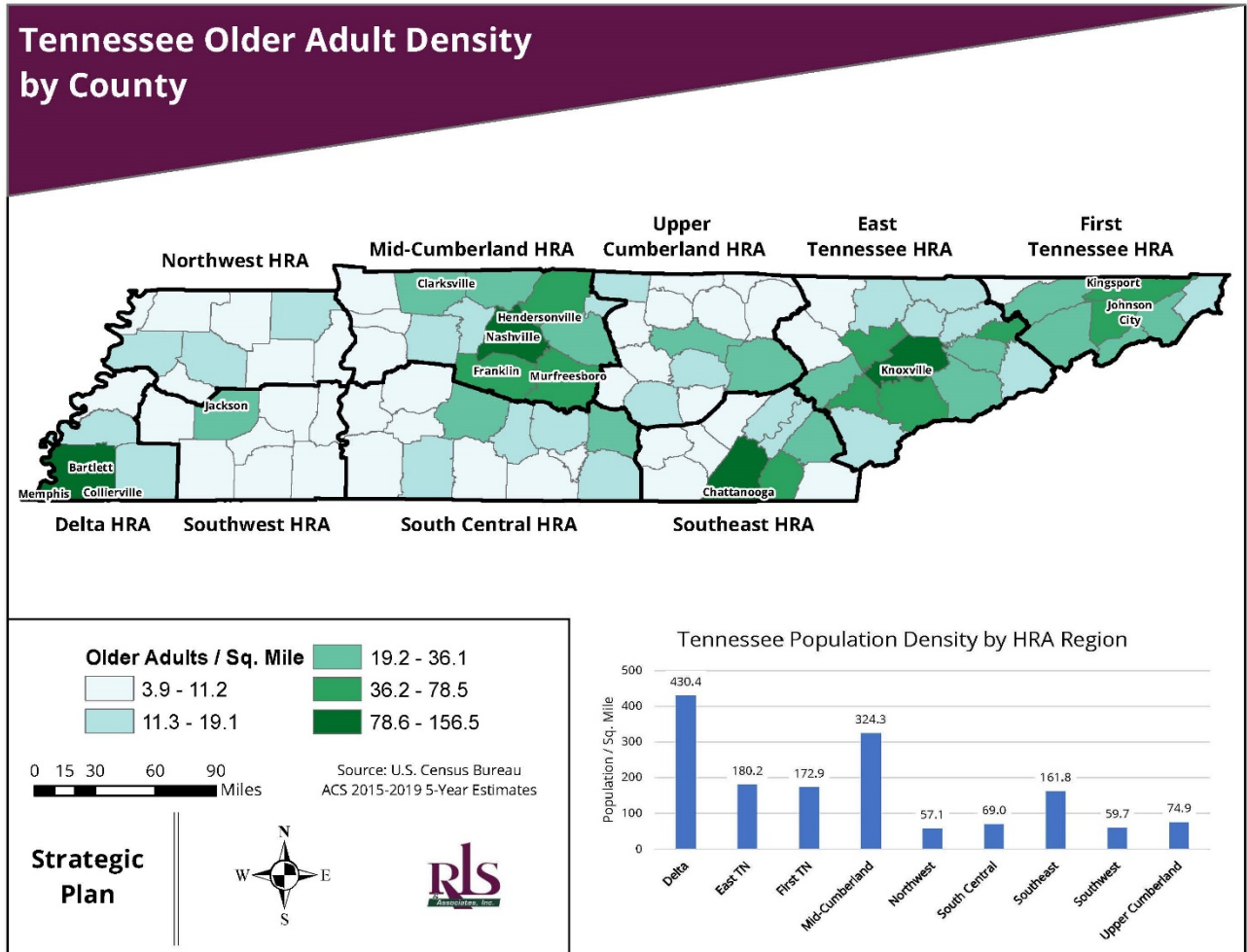
Individuals with Disabilities

Approximately 15 percent of Tennessee's total population has a disability according to the American Community Survey 2019 1-Year Estimates. The older adult population has a higher percentage of individuals with disabilities than younger groups when considering Census totals. ACS questions about disability include hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty. Respondents who report any one of the six disability types are considered by the Census to have a disability. While the ACS definition of a disability does not directly correlate to a person's need for transportation, it is the most reliable data available.

Exhibit 7 illustrates the population density per square mile of individuals with disabilities. Similar to the older adult densities, the urban areas have the highest densities of individuals with disabilities as well as the highest population density over all. The Northwest HRA, South Central HRA, and Upper Cumberland HRA counties have the lowest total population per square mile and have only moderately low to low densities of individuals with disabilities. Conversely, Mid-Cumberland HRA, East Tennessee HRA, and First Tennessee HRA have several counties with high to moderately high densities. The Delta HRA region has the highest total population per square mile of all regions. Most of the population is concentrated around the Memphis area. In Delta HRA, the density of individuals with disabilities is high in the Memphis area but drops to moderately low or low in the surrounding Tennessee Counties.

Exhibit 7
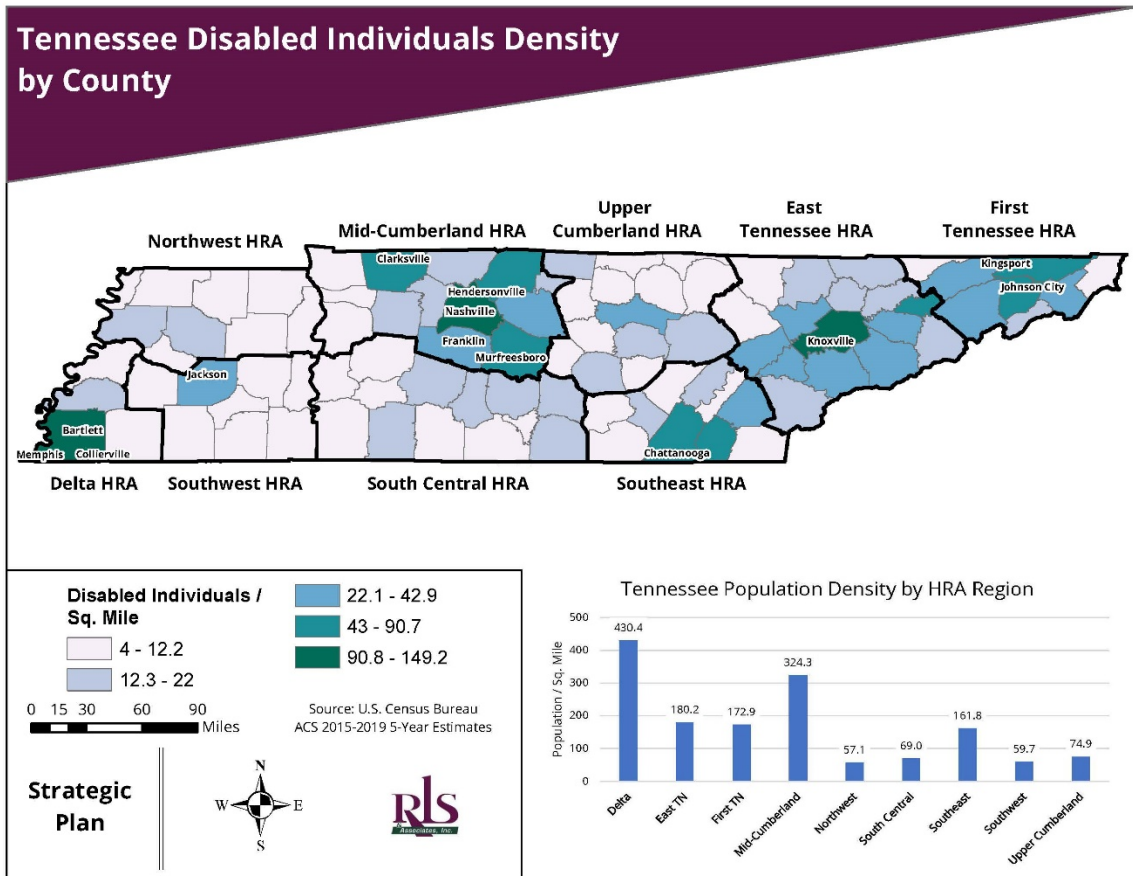
A transportation needs assessment conducted by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities found that transportation is a priority for nearly half of the 729 survey respondents who have a disability or have a family member with a disability.
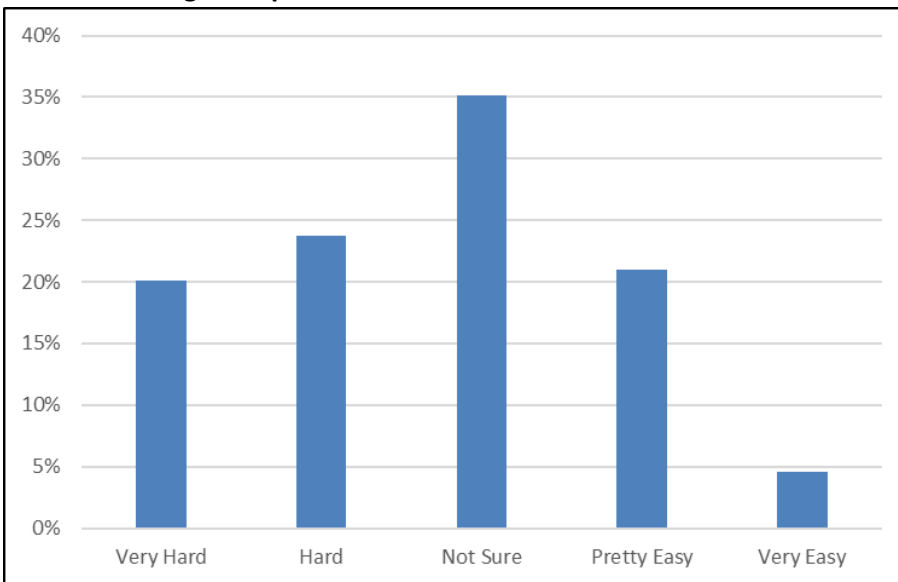
Exhibit 8: Transportation Priority
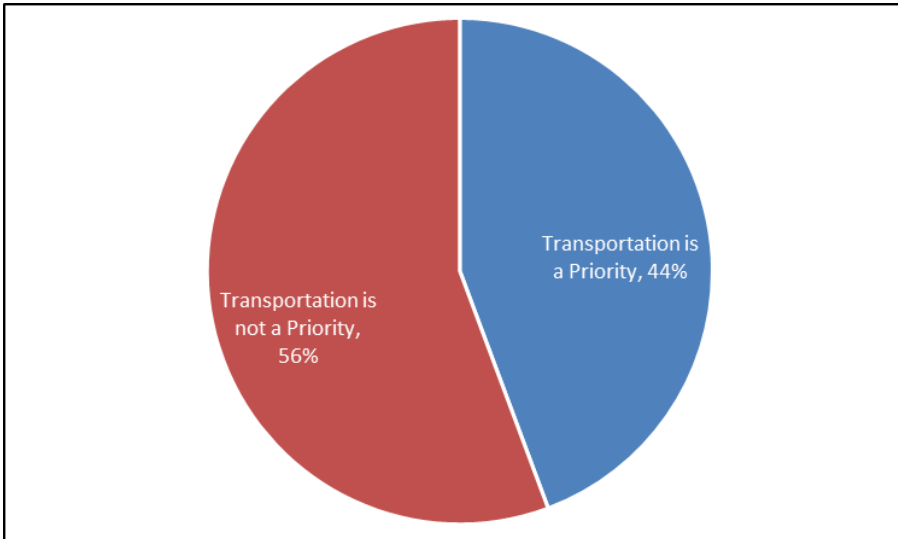
Source: Transportation Needs Assessment Survey, TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, Feb. 2021

Approximately 43 percent of the Council on Developmental Disabilities survey respondents felt that using local transportation services was hard or very hard. Approximately 25 percent felt that using transportation was pretty easy or easy. Other respondents were not sure.

**Exhibit 9: Using Transportation Services**

Source: Transportation Needs Assessment Survey, TN Council on Developmental Disabilities

Poverty

Densities of individuals living below poverty are highest in the urban areas of Memphis, Nashville, and Knoxville. Jackson, Chattanooga, Johnson City, and Kingsport have moderately high densities as well. Exhibit 10 illustrates the density per square mile of individuals living below poverty throughout the state.

Exhibit 10
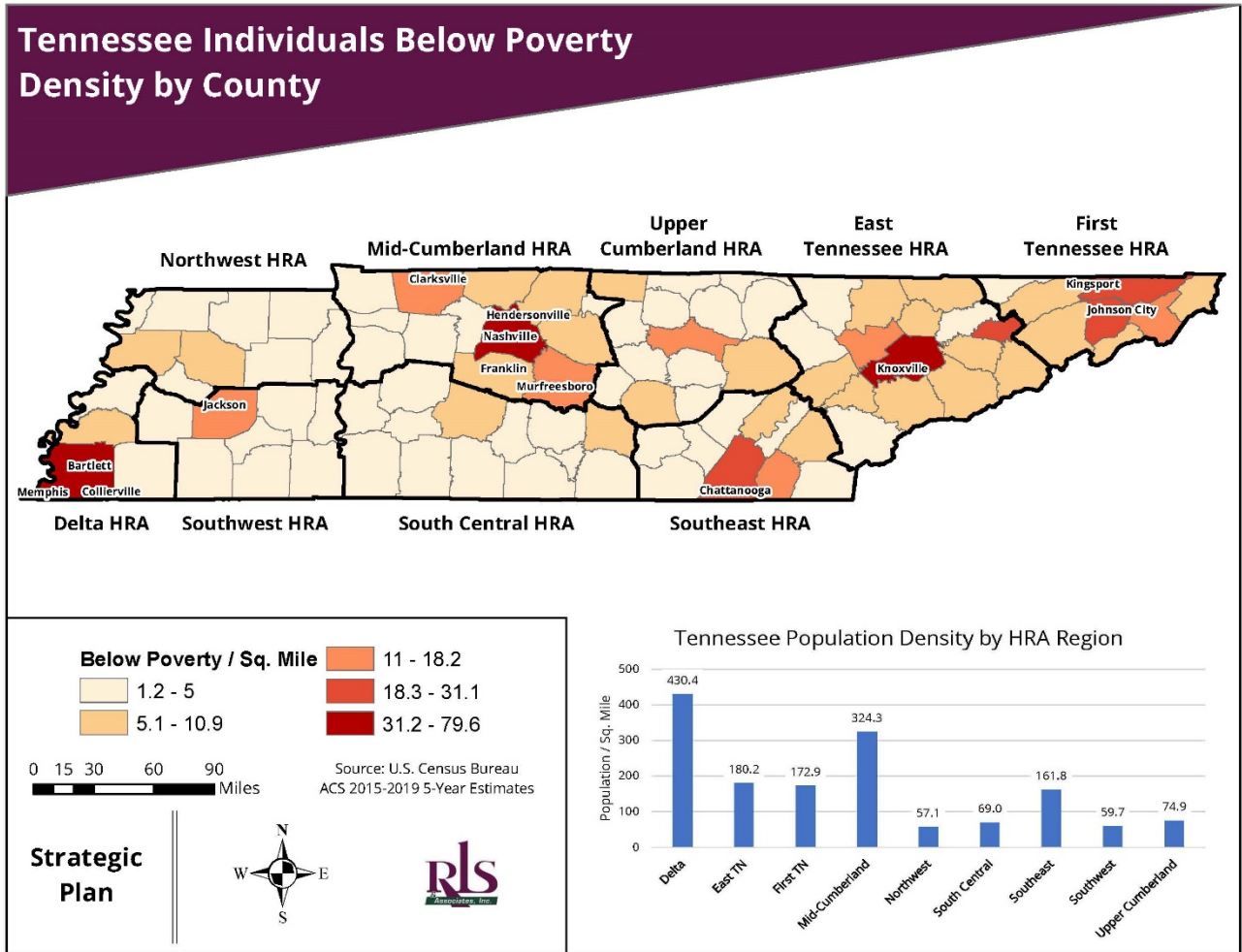
Employment

Transportation to and from work on a regular and reliable basis is one of the most significant transportation challenges faced by individuals who do not drive or do not have access to a reliable car. Regular transportation must be affordable, reliable, and safe. For some people with mobility limitations, the vehicles must also be accessible and/or operated by drivers with specialized training. The Tennessee

jobless rate in January 2021 was 5.1 percent. This is just 1.4 percentage points higher than the statewide rate for January 2020, month's before COVID-19 impacted the economy.[1]

The following exhibit illustrates the distribution of jobs in Tennessee. Urban areas have higher concentrations of employment compared to rural areas. However, each county has employment opportunities. Continuing research at the regional or local level will identify if these job locations are within public transit service area boundaries.

Exhibit 11
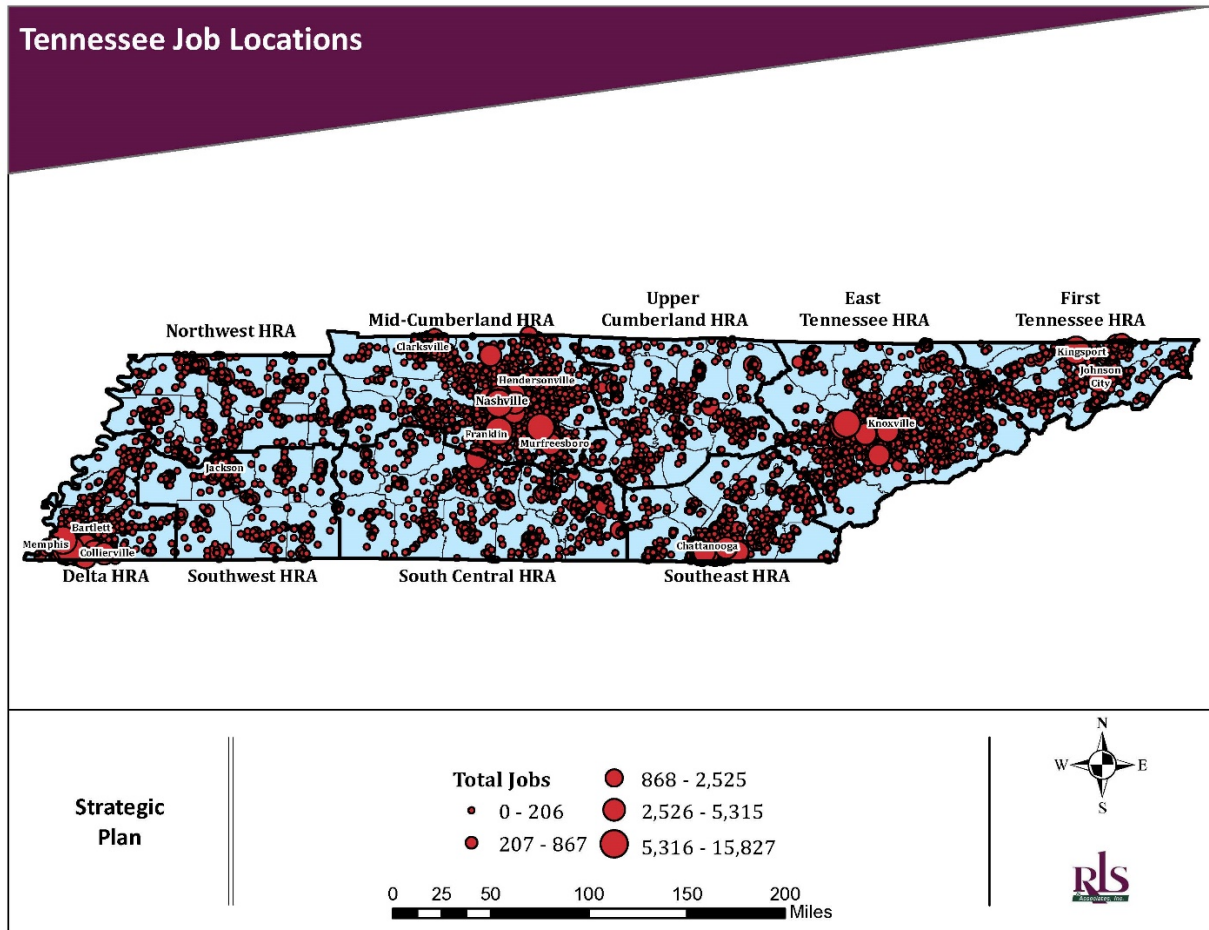
The following map illustrates the location of jobs filled by individuals age 55 and older.[2] At the statewide view, the distribution appears to be similar to total jobs, except for some slightly higher concentrations appearing in some rural counties. Additional analysis at the regional level will examine the relationship between where higher densities of older adults live and the location of jobs. This data will shed light on the potential commuter needs for this population group.

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[1] Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Thursday, March 11, 2021.
[2] LEHD data is not available in a data set for age 65 and older.

Exhibit 12

Tennessee Jobs Held by
Workers Over Age 55

Northwest HRA • Mid-Cumberland HRA • Upper Cumberland HRA • East Tennessee HRA • First Tennessee HRA

Clarksville, Hendersonville, Nashville, Franklin, Murfreesboro, Jackson, Bartlett, Memphis, Collierville, Knoxville, Chattanooga, Kingsport, Johnson City

Delta HRA • Southwest HRA • South Central HRA • Southeast HRA

Strategic Plan

Age 55+ Jobs
- 6 - 62
- 63 - 209
- 210 - 561
- 562 - 1,132
- 1,133 - 4,453

0 25 50 100 150 200 Miles

National statistics indicate that people who are using transportation services out of need and not choice, are often (but not always) working at entry-level positions or earning lower wages. The following map illustrates the concentrations of jobs for workers making $1,250 per month or less. In Tennessee, these jobs are commonly found throughout the state. When compared to the densities of individuals living below poverty (Exhibit 11), it would appear that the locations of jobs paying $1,250 per month or less are distributed similarly to where people who are earning low incomes live. However, reliable and accessible access to these jobs includes the need for transportation options during early mornings and late evenings, as many entry-level job opportunities are during second and third shifts. Unfortunately, most public or low-cost transportation options are not operating during the hours necessary to support shift work. The mismatch of available transportation hours of operation and shift start/end times presents a barrier to accessing employment for those who need a ride, even if the distance to work is short.

Exhibit 13

Tennessee Jobs that Pay $1250/Month or Less
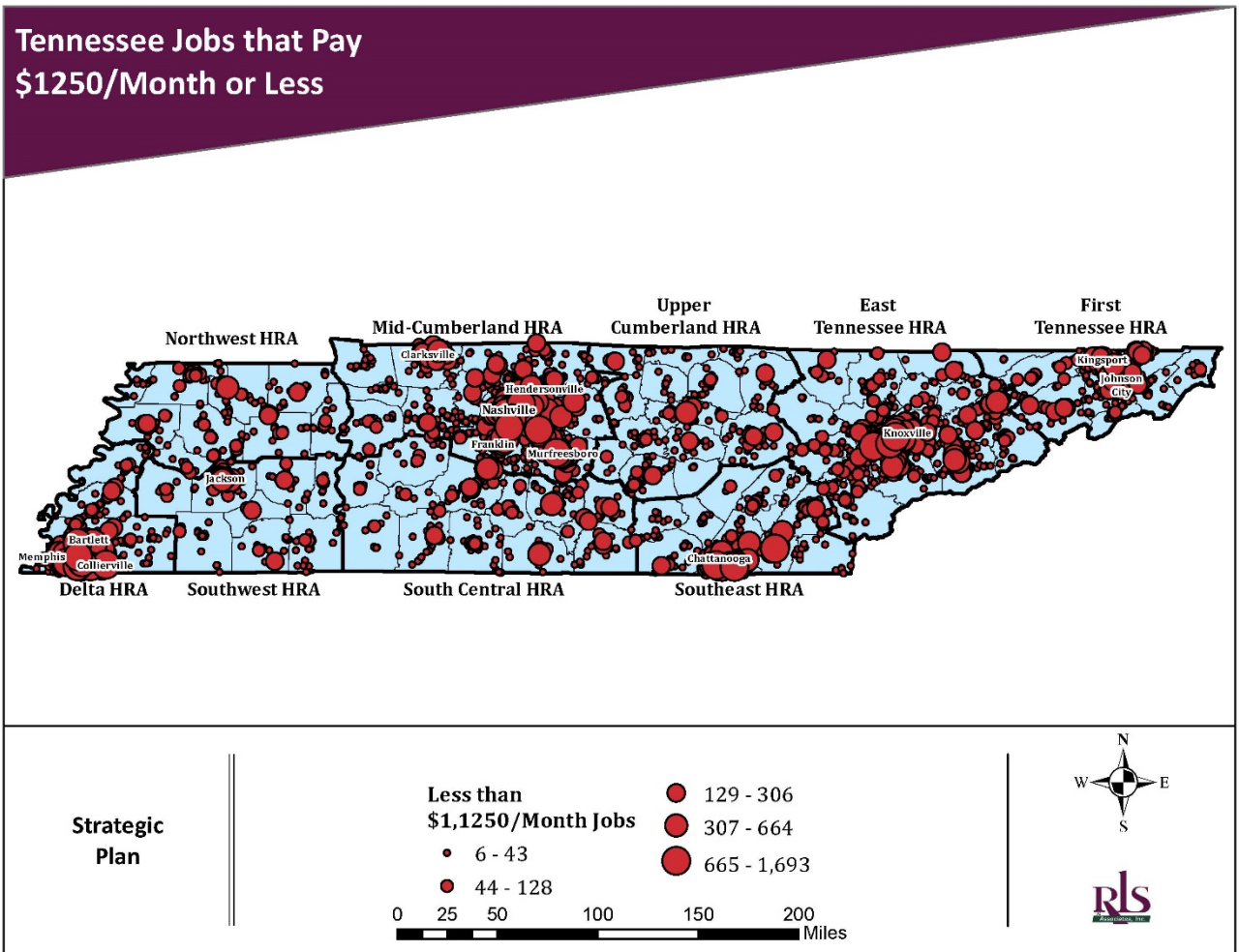
Major Trip Generators

In addition to employment locations, other major trip generators (or common destinations) in Tennessee for users of transportation services include medical, retail, low-income housing, human service agency appointments, education, recreation, and religious congregation. The following exhibit illustrates the trip generator totals and the frequency with which rural public transportation providers serve those locations.[3] Destinations included in the map are frequently served by public transit or non-emergency medical transportation providers. The exhibit on the top indicates the number of generators identified in each HRA region. The dots on the bottom map illustrate the actual location and number of trips provided by rural transit systems to the destinations. Medical facilities make up 62 percent of the trip purposes based on the sample. The number of trips provided (bottom of exhibit) is based on data provided by rural transit providers. Naturally, most generators are in and around urban areas with fewer destinations in

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[3] Frequency is based on a sample of rural transportation provider trip logs.

rural areas. However, it is important to note that many of the trips being provided may originate in a rural, suburban, or exurban area and end in an urban area where the regional health care provider or other agency is located. With the exception of "housing" trips, this exhibit only indicates the location of the trip's destination. At the statewide level, this data is important to compare the potential demand for different trip purposes which may or may not require advance scheduling or recurring trips. At the regional or local level, this data will be helpful to planners as they consider the level and types of transportation that are most appropriate to fill gaps in service.

Exhibit 14
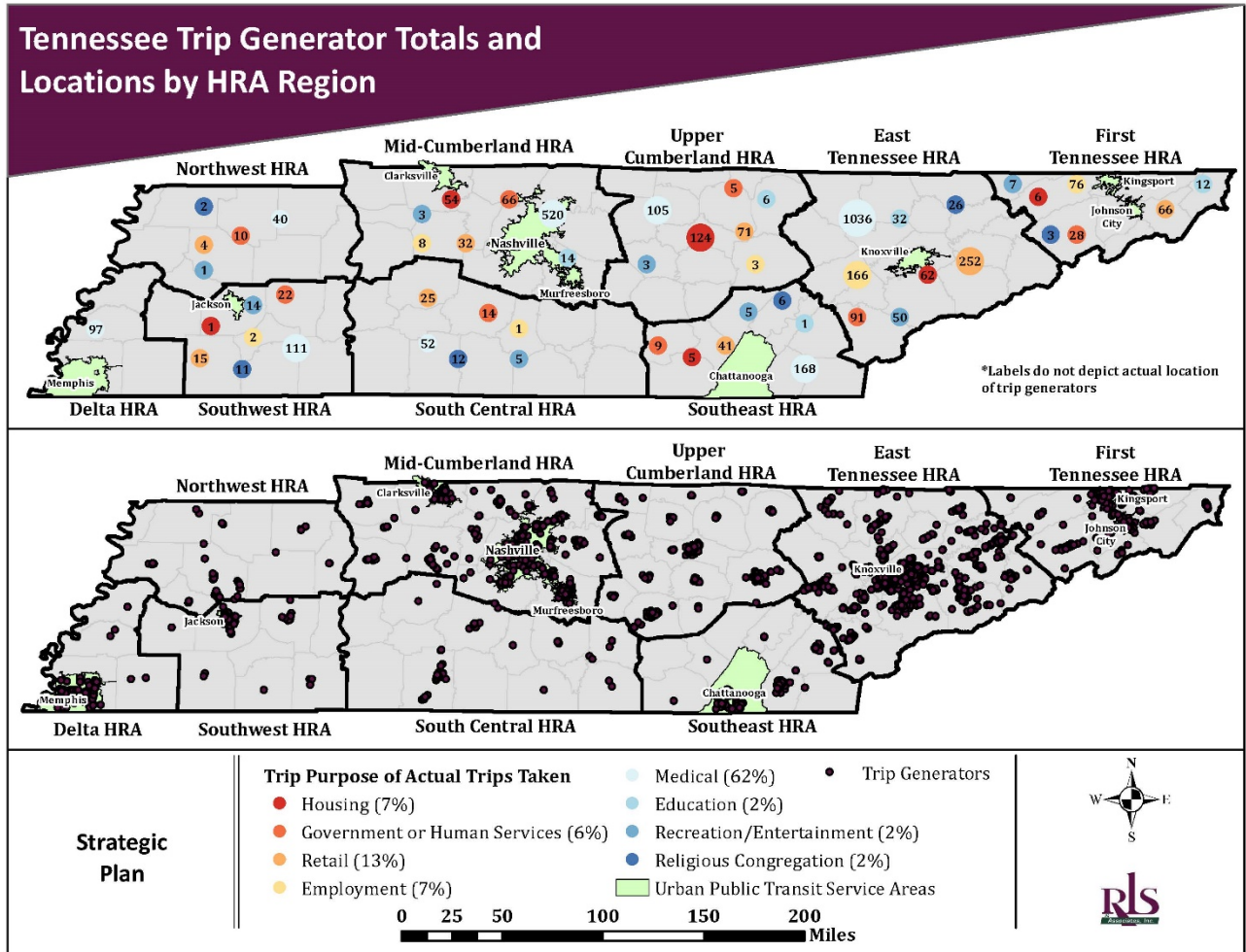
The next chapter provides a summary of unmet transportation needs and gaps in access to Transportation across Tennessee.

SUMMARY OF UNMET NEEDS AND GAPS IN ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION

TDOT, its partners and stakeholders are strategically analyzing unmet needs and gaps in transportation to make decisions about the most effective use of existing resources while providing the best possible transportation for Tennesseans. The nature and degree of unmet transportation needs varies throughout Tennessee with no single and consistent underlying root cause but several common themes.
The most significant themes identified through the initial phases of the strategic planning process are outlined below.

♦ **Personal Assistance** – Even in urban areas, where public fixed route transit and paratransit is available, passenger assistance is limited to specific forms of assistance mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Oftentimes, this level of assistance is inadequate for meeting the needs of individuals who require a certain level of flexibility and customization in order to use the transit service. As a result, an otherwise independent person living in an area with fixed route public transit service may not be able to get to work, manage daily errands, or access medical care even when transportation services are available.

♦ **Misperceptions** – There is a wide-spread perception that transportation is not available to take people to work or other necessary errands. In some cases, this perception is reality. In many cases, however, it is a misperception. The real challenge here is making sure that information about available transportation resources is available to every person in Tennessee because not knowing how to schedule a ride is the same as having no service at all. Tennesseans need to know what transportation options are available and how to access them.

♦ **Forced to Accommodate the System at the Expense of Independence** - Increases and enhancements in the capacity and accessibility of existing transportation are needed. In urban and rural areas alike, passengers are scheduling trips weeks or, at minimum, days in advance so that they can accommodate the transporter's availability to provide the trip. The options are even more limited for individuals who need a vehicle that can accommodate them and their mobility device. Planning transportation weeks in advance limits inclusion and flexibility and is not customer - friendly.

♦ **Limited Weekend or Night-Time Options** - Transportation options are extremely limited on weekends and weekday evenings in most service areas. Wheelchair accessible options are especially limited.
  o Limited access to reliable and affordable transportation during weekends and nights also limits access to employment and/or education/job training options.

♦ **Limited Funding** - Limited funding and the expense of on-demand transportation within a single county restricts the amount of service that can be offered. The cost of long-distance trips (across county lines) is too great and is typically not available for consumers in these programs.

♦ **Affordable Fares** – On-demand transportation options such as a taxi, Uber and Lyft-type services are cost-prohibitive for many people and there are no affordable options for short-notice or point-to-point services.

♦ **Infrastructure** - Infrastructure improvements, such as sidewalk conditions or lack of sidewalks can be a barrier to accessing bus stops or walking to community resources. In rural areas there are even

fewer sidewalks and often not even shoulders along the roadside. This prevents people from walking to their destination or even getting to a bus stop.

♦ **Options for Specialized Services** - Transportation options need to be multi-faceted and include services for individuals with a variety of needs ranging from wheelchair accessible transportation to safe transportation for individuals with cognitive or behavioral disabilities.

♦ **First/Last Mile Options** - First/Last mile transportation options are needed so that people can get from their origin or destination to the fixed route transportation option.

♦ **Volunteer Transportation** - Personal liability laws pertaining to volunteer drivers of individuals with disabilities are more restrictive than the laws that apply to volunteer drivers of older adults. Therefore, volunteer transportation services for individuals with disabilities are not as widely available. With a waiver, volunteer services could be expanded.

Challenges to Making Transportation More Accessible

Identifying the unmet needs is only part of the solution. The next step is to honestly evaluate the challenges and identify realistic performance measures for achieving results. Primary challenges to achieving goals are listed below.

♦ **Overcoming territoriality** among agencies and changing the perspective of only working for clients of individual agencies to a more all-encompassing perspective.

♦ The local public transportation system **may not be sufficient** to get people where they need to go; particularly trips to work. Even in urban areas, public transit has its limits and some people do not have access.

♦ Some clients are not allowed to travel independently because their loved ones do not trust the transportation system. **Trust** in the existing and new services is critical to success.

♦ Transportation has been **embedded** in the program operations of various agencies (i.e., day programs) and breaking away from the accepted practices of today is a structural challenge that will take time to change.

♦ **Funding** from multiple programs must be designed to coordinate. Policy-related changes require strong support from the State-level.

♦ Transportation providers must work together so that **jurisdictional boundaries** (county lines, etc.) are no longer a barrier.

♦ **Transportation requirements** are very strict and sometimes make it impossible for small nonprofit providers to participate in the program. However, many people, especially in rural areas, rely on the small transportation providers.

♦ Resistance to programs working together is more about **organizational culture** than policies. It is possible to make the policies work but the State-level and Federal-level leaders as well as the local programs must be willing to make the changes.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The strategic plan implementation and performance measures will continue to develop over the coming months and throughout 2021 as the State moves Tennessee closer to having a clearinghouse for Federal and State programs that fund transportation. Even opening the doors for more connectivity at a district level or in two- or three- county groups at a time could be effective; every solution doesn't have to have a statewide impact. Performance measures will be established to accompany every objective created in the coming months.

The State understands that a larger investment in transportation options that include more drivers and operating dollars as well as more personalized and/or assisted service would enable more people to independently get in and out of their homes. The investment could come from 'braiding' existing funds from multiple Federal programs so that transportation providers can operate more efficient service, and/or identification of new funding sources.

Simply clarifying or simplifying eligibility rules tied to Federal grant programs that support transportation for older adults and individuals with disabilities may encourage agencies to change their locally developed policies and expand eligibility for rides. Some rules that limit the transportation provider's ability to coordinate at the local level, however, are not within the control of the State or local agency to change. Such rules often create unnecessary duplications in service administration and operations, or gaps in service coverage. The State will inform the Federal-level program administrators of regulatory or rule changes that could be made to encourage the local programs that have the greatest need but the lowest administrative capability to make changes that improve access for their clients.

Finally, enabling technology that improves access to information and scheduling of transportation will improve the lives of Tennesseans who need or choose to use available resources. The Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) is actively working on improvements in enabling technology and access to employment for individuals with disabilities. TDOT is working on improvements to scheduling technology for public transit providers. These and other such solutions will enable communication about important transportation options everywhere and help reduce misperceptions about availability and gaps in service.

The State together with transit providers, and users of the services will grow these successful strategies and cultivate new opportunities to make transportation more accessible for Tennesseans. Preliminary objectives for achieving stated goals and supporting the implementation plan are outlined in the following points. Strategic Plan objectives are currently under development and will be solidified in the coming months and throughout 2021 supporting implementation of the Five-Year Strategic Plan and Needs Assessment.

NEXT STEPS

The State will continue to refine and expand upon the Draft Strategic Plan and Needs Assessment information through coordination with key stakeholders, research, and ongoing collaboration with the Transportation Workgroup. The planning team will work toward quantifying the gaps in service and developing priorities for addressing those gaps with additional resources to the extent possible. Additional funding for service expansions will be identified and recommended after gaps are quantified and refined with input from the State and the Transportation Workgroup.

Mobility and Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan

Appendix

PUBLIC SURVEY FOR TDOT OFFICE OF MOBILITY AND ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

Hello! This survey is part of an important study about transportation needs for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Specialized transportation includes services that you may be familiar with such as public transit or the ride provided by your employer, an agency, or senior services program. This survey will be used to plan for improvements over the next 5+ years to the network of transportation options available in the state. Information will be used by Tennessee Department of Transportation's Office of Mobility and Accessible Transportation. Survey results will be analyzed and presented in the aggregate. Individual respondents will not be identified. We will take less than 5 to 10 minutes of your time with these questions.

1. **Where do you live? Please provide your Zip Code:**
   _____

2. **Do you have regular access to the following technologies? Please select all that apply.**
   a. Internet service
   b. A landline or home phone
   c. A cell phone
   d. A computer

3. **Which type of transportation do you use most often? Please select all that apply.**
   a. Public transit bus routes
   b. Public transit paratransit or dial-a-ride
   c. Public transit train
   d. Volunteer driver program
   e. Senior program transportation services (i.e., to/from the senior center, to medical appointments, shopping, etc.)
   f. Medicaid-sponsored transportation
   g. Transportation provided by your employer or work center
   h. Transportation provided by an agency
   i. Rides from someone you know (ex. friend or family member)
   j. Taxi/Uber/Lyft
   k. Bike or Scooter-share
   l. Driving your personal vehicle
   m. Other: _____
   n. Not Applicable

4. **How satisfied are you with the transportation services you regularly use?**
   1. <u>Not Satisfied</u> – I do not have access to transportation services that meet my needs. I almost never have a ride when I need it.
   2. <u>Somewhat Satisfied</u> – It only meets some of my transportation needs but I still need a ride and do not have one for most of my trip needs.
   3. <u>Satisfied</u> – I am satisfied with the available transportation services and they meet my essential transportation needs but not all of my needs.
   4. <u>Extremely Satisfied</u> – I am able to meet all of my transportation needs using my transportation provider.

5. **How do you find information about available transportation services if you need them for yourself, a relative, or friend?**
   a. Call your county/ local government or community center
   b. Call your local public transit provider
   c. Contact Tennessee 211
   d. Search the internet
   e. Ask a case manager
   f. Ask a friend or relative
   g. Other _____

6. **Do you ever need a ride and not have one?**
   a. Yes
   b. No

If yes, please answer the following questions:

   c. What time do you need a ride and not have one? _____

   d. What day(s) of the week do you need a ride and not have one? _____

   e. Where do you need to go but do not have a ride? Please select all that apply.
   i. Medical appointments (i.e., doctor, dialysis, dentist, medical clinic)
   ii. Work
   iii. School
   iv. Essential errands (i.e., grocery shopping, banking, haircuts)

v. Community programs (i.e., meals, senior programs, etc.)
vi. Agency/Case manager appointments or counseling sessions
vii. Addiction and recovery-related appointments
viii. Other (please specify): _____

7. **How often do you ask a friend or family member drive you on an errand or essential trip?**
   a. 5 to 7 days a week
   b. 3 to 4 days a week
   c. 1 to 2 days a week
   d. Less than once a week but more than once a month
   e. Once a month
   f. Less than once a month

8. **How much do you spend on your personal transportation per month (or that of the individual you are representing in this survey, such as a child, parent, or grandparents)?**
   a. Less than $20
   b. $21 to $50
   c. $51 to $100
   d. $101 to $150
   e. $151 to $200
   f. $201 or more

9. **Do you have a mobility limitation that limits your ability to walk to a bus stop and/or board a vehicle without assistance?**
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. **What is your age?**
    a. Under age 18
    b. 19-39
    c. 40-54
    d. 55-59
    e. 60-64
    f. 65 or older

11. **How many people live in your household?**
    a. Number of Adults: ____
    b. Number of Children age 18 or under: ___

12. **What is the combined yearly income of everyone in your household?**
    a. Less than $12,500
    b. $12,500 to $20,500
    c. $20,600 to $30,000
    d. $30,100 to $35,000
    e. $35,100 to $40,000
    f. $41,000 to $45,000
    g. $45,100 to $55,000
    h. $55,100 to $65,000
    i. $65,100 to $75,000
    j. $75,100 or higher

16. **Please describe what transportation options work well for older adults and individuals with disabilities in your city/town, county, or region.**

17. **Please describe specific transportation needs and challenges for older adults and individuals with disabilities in your city/town, county, or region.**

18. **Please describe any potential solutions that you believe should be explored to increase mobility and accessible transportation in your region.**

19. **Please share any additional thoughts about transportation for individuals with disabilities and older adults.**

TDOT Office of Mobility and Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan Provider Survey

The Office of Mobility and Accessible Transportation of the Tennessee Department of Transportation is conducting a Strategic Plan to help determine its vision and goals for improving access to transportation resources.

Transportation providers that operate public and human service agency transportation in Tennessee connect people in urban, rural, and suburban areas to the services and resources they need for daily life. Public and human service agency transportation is the only resource for many people and a choice for others. Access to safe, reliable transportation leads to opportunity and freedom. It opens up opportunities for employment, medical care, nutrition, entertainment, and connectivity to wherever we need to go.

You are invited to participate in this survey designed to identify and quantify the gaps in available transportation resources for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and people with low incomes. The following survey questions ask about the experiences of human service agencies and transportation providers in meeting transportation needs of their local communities and regions. This survey includes questions about transportation operations, unmet needs, and visions for the future. It applies to agencies that do not operate transportation as well as those who do.

Please take time to complete this important survey for the Tennessee Office of Mobility and Accessible Transportation so that they may develop the most accurate Strategic Plan goals possible. The survey will take approximately 10 to 25 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for your time.

Please complete the survey by February 20, 2021. If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to contact Kjirsten Frank-Hoppe at kfrankhoppe@rlsandassoc.com or by phone at (937) 299-5007.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to participate in this important effort to improve the Department of Transportation's funding of transportation services.

1. Contact Information

Name

Title

Email Address

Phone Number

2. Agency Name and Address

Agency

Address

Address 2

City/Town

State/Province

ZIP/Postal Code

3. What is your organization's authority?

○ Public, non-profit

○ Private, non-profit

○ Private, for-profit

○ Other (please specify)

[   ]

4. Who is eligible for your agency's services? Please select all that apply.

☐ There are no eligibility requirements - anyone can use our services

☐ Age 65 and Older

☐ Age 60 and Older

☐ Individual with disabilities

☐ People with low incomes/poverty

☐ Youth

☐ Only local residents (i.e., living within the local county or region)

☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

5. How do people travel to desired locations in your local area? Please select all that apply.

☐ Driving

☐ Taxi or other on-demand transportation service (i.e., Uber or Lyft)

☐ Hiring a private van

☐ Human service agency program

☐ Volunteers

☐ Family member/Friend drives them

☐ Public transit

☐ Not getting there

☐ Unknown

☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

6. To your knowledge, do individuals living in your service area have adequate access to transportation services that offer wheelchair accessible vehicles?
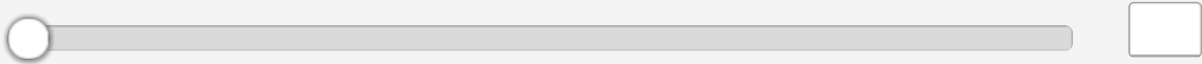
○ Yes

○ No

If no, what are the limitations of the existing wheelchair accessible services? (Examples might be that there are not enough providers, there are no services in the evenings or on weekends, the cost to the passenger is too expensive, reservations are required too far in advance, etc.)

(Questions 7-20): On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 meaning "not a problem" and 5 meaning "this needs to be addressed ASAP"), please rate the following challenges for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and people with low incomes with accessing transportation resources in your service area. Please consider not only the services your agency offers but also services operated by other organizations in your community.
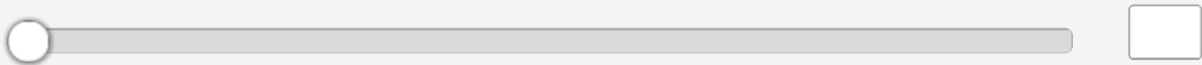
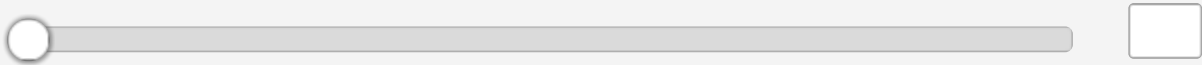7. Reservations require too much advance notice

1   5

8. No/Not enough wheelchair accessible vehicles are available on weekdays
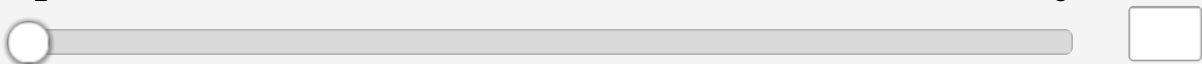
1   5

9. No/Not enough wheelchair accessible vehicles are available on weekends or evenings
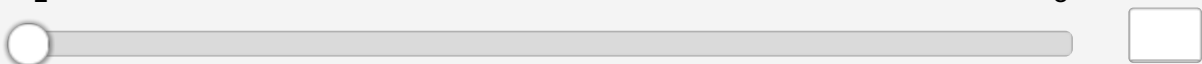
1   5

10. No/Not enough wheelchair accessible sidewalks and/or bus stops
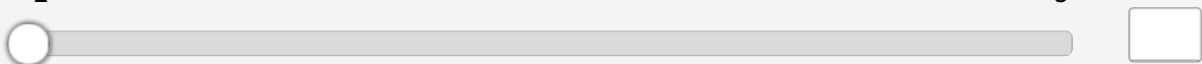
1   5

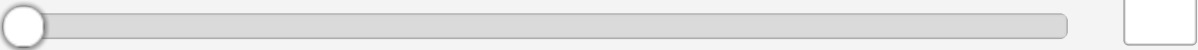11. People are not aware of their transportation options

1   5

12. Employment locations are outside of the local public or agency-sponsored transportation service area

1   5
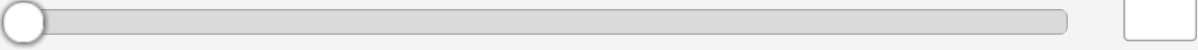
13. Medical or other services are outside of the local public or agency-sponsored transportation service area

1   5
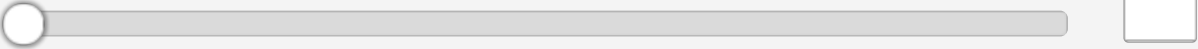
14. The cost of riding available transportation is too high for the passenger to afford on a regular basis (i.e., for employment)

1   5
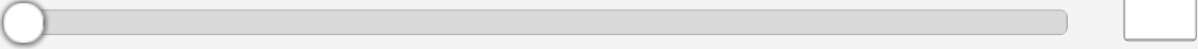
15. Transportation services are not considered to be reliable or safe

1   5
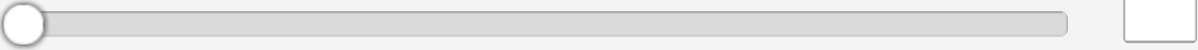
16. Transportation is not available where people who need it live

1   5

17. Transportation is not available to the places where people need to go

1   5
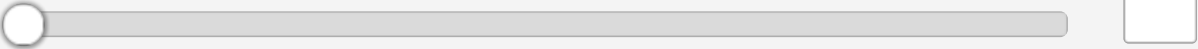
18. Transportation is not available during the days or hours when people need it

1   5

19. The level of passenger assistance that people need is not available (i.e., they need door-through-door or help with navigating at their destination)

1   5

20. Passengers have difficulty transferring between providers (i.e., at the county line)

1   5

21. Please list the name and location (address) of the top 10 most common destinations your customers visit or need to visit, including your own agency, for any reason (social, employment, medical, housing, etc.). Please be as specific as possible.

This information is key to the purpose of the Strategic Plan. It is important to identify the places where people most often need to go.

22. Based on customer and staff feedback, what are the most important unmet transportation needs in the communities you serve and the surrounding areas?

23. In your opinion, what should be the focus of mobility management programs or initiatives to improve access to transportation options in your region and the state?

24. What percentage of your agency's customers use public transportation on a regular basis?

25. If they are not using public transportation, why not? Please select one or up to the top three reasons you've heard.

☐ Difficult to schedule trips with the public transportation providers

☐ Trips are not reliable for being on-time

☐ Trips are not available when needed

☐ Trips are not available to and/or from the the locations the rider needs

☐ Travel time is too long on public transporation

☐ Riders need to make trip requests with short notice and public transportation doesn't allow or accommodate it

☐ Riders are more comfortable or familiar with our agency's drivers and vehicles

☐ Riders need specialized services not available from the public transportation providers

☐ Bus stops/sidewalks are not accessible

☐ Many of our riders cannot navigate the public transit system due to a disability

☐ There is no public transportation in our local area

☐ Other (please specify)

[   ]

* 26. Does your organization directly purchase, operate or arrange transportation for clients or the public?

◯ Yes

◯ No

27. What are the geographic service area boundaries of your transportation program (i.e., specific county or city boundaries)?

28. Which of the following criteria must a passenger meet to be eligible for your transportation services? Please select all that apply.

☐ Anyone is eligible for our transportation services (general public)

☐ Seniors age 65 and Older

☐ Seniors age 60 and Older

☐ Individuals with disabilities

☐ People with low incomes/poverty

☐ Youth

☐ Only people registered for our agency's programs can use our transportation services

☐ ECF Choices program transportation eligible individuals

☐ Other Medicaid transportation program eligible individuals

☐ Other (please specify)

29. Please list the name and location (address) of the top 10 most frequently served locations in your service area. Please be as specific as possible.

This information is key to the purpose of the Strategic Plan. It is important to identify the places where people most often need to go. Ultimately, these locations will appear as dots on a regional or statewide map. No actual addresses will be identifiable. If you have the ability to email recent sample trip log without names or identifying information for the passenger for a two-week period, please share that log with kfrankhoppe@rlsandassoc.com.

30. Similar to the previous question, please use the space below to list the top 10 locations that people in your service area want or need to access but are outside of your service area or are difficult to serve and you cannot provide the trips. Please be as specific as possible.

31. Which mode of transportation best describes your methods of service delivery? Please select all that apply.

☐ Fixed route (fixed path, fixed schedule, with designated stops)

☐ Demand response (includes casual appointments and regular clients attending daily program activities)

☐ On-demand/immediate response (no advance reservation required)

☐ Route deviation

☐ Inter-city routes

☐ Other (please specify)

32. In what manner does your organization directly purchase, contract, operate, or arrange transportation? Please select all that apply.

	Services for the General Public	Client Only Services
Personal vehicles of agency staff	⇕	⇕
Agency employees using agency owned fleet vehicles	⇕	⇕
Provide pre-paid tickets, tokens, passes for other transportation provider services	⇕	⇕
Reimburse mileage or auto expenses to clients, families, or friends for eligible program activities	⇕	⇕
Volunteer drivers	⇕	⇕
Provide information and referral about other community transportation resources	⇕	⇕
Contract with other transportation provider(s) to operate the service. This includes Medicaid and non-Medicaid contracts	⇕	⇕

Other (please specify)

[   ]

33. Define the level of passenger assistance provided for users of your transportation service. Please select all that apply.

☐ Curb-to-Curb (i.e., drivers will assist passengers in and out of the vehicle only)

☐ Door-to-door (i.e., drivers will assist passengers at the destination, such as taking the passenger into the waiting room at the medical office)

☐ Drivers are permitted to assist passengers with a limited number of packages

☐ Drivers are permitted to assist passengers with an unlimited number of packages

☐ We provide personal care attendants or escorts to those passengers who require such services

☐ Passengers are permitted to travel with their own personal care attendants or escorts

* 34. Does your organization provide transportation services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?

○ Yes

○ No

35. What are the daily hours and days of operation for your transportation services? Check days and list hours of operation in the space provided.

Monday (Start time)

Time   AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⇕ |

Monday (End time)

Time   AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⇕ |

Tuesday (Start time)

Time   AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⇕ |

Tuesday (End time)

Time   AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⇕ |

Wednesday (Start time)

Time   AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⇕ |

Wednesday (End time)

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Thursday (Start time)

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Saturday (Start time)

Time

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Saturday (End time)

Time

AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⬍ |

Sunday (Start time)

Time

AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⬍ |

Sunday (End time)

Time

AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⬍ |

36. What are your typical peak hours of operation (the hours when you have the highest demand for transportation service)?

Monday (Peak start)

Time   AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⬍ |

Monday (Peak end)

Time   AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⬍ |

Tuesday (Peak start)

Time   AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⬍ |

Tuesday (Peak end)

Time   AM/PM

| hh | mm | - ⬍ |

Wednesday (Peak start)

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Saturday (Peak end)

Time

hh | mm

AM/PM

- ⬍

Sunday (Peak start)

Time

hh | mm

AM/PM

- ⬍

Sunday (Peak end)

Time

hh | mm

AM/PM

- ⬍

37. Are your transportation services typically used to capacity during peak weekday travel times?

○ Yes

○ No

38. How many vehicles do you typically operate during peak hours of service?

Number of wheelchair accessible vehicles operating during peak hours	
Number of non-accessible vehicles operating during peak hours	

39. How many vehicles are actively operating during off peak hours of service?

40. How many back-up vehicles do you have in the fleet? (Back up vehicles are your reserve fleet to access only when you need to replace another vehicle for some reason, such as a breakdown, accident, etc.)

Accessible vehicles	
Non-accessible vehicles	

41. How many one-way trips did your agency provide during FY2019 and FY2020?

A one-way trip is from the pick-up to drop-off location. The return trip is counted as a separate one-way trip. For example, if a passenger rides from home to the doctor and back home, he or she will have completed two one-way trips.

Total (or Estimated) Number of one-way trips provided (FY2019)	
Percent of total trips required an accessible vehicle (FY2019)	
Total (or Estimated) Number of one-way trips provided (FY2020)	
Percent of total trips required an accessible vehicle (FY2020)	

42. Is there a cost to the individual rider (fare, fee or suggested donation) to use your transportation services?

○ Yes

○ No

If yes, what is the passenger fare, fee, or suggested donation amount?

[   ]

43. What types of payment can passengers use to pay the fare (i.e., cash, taken, fare card, etc.)?

[   ]

44. What are your transportation operating revenues (Actual or Estimated, FY2020)?

Fares Collected from Passengers Through Cash, or Tickets/Tokens Purchased by Passengers (Include Client Fees and/or General Public Fares Here)	[ ]
Reimbursements for Services Obtained from Third Parties (e.g., Medicaid Reimbursements, Title III-B)	[ ]
Local Government	[ ]
State Government	[ ]
Federal Transit Administration	[ ]
Other	[ ]
Total Transportation Revenues - Total	[ ]

45. What are your transportation operating and capital expenses (Actual or Estimated, FY2020)?

Total Operating Expenses	[ ]
Total Transportation Operating and Capital Expenses	[ ]

46. What courses are required and provided for your driver training program? Please list all required courses.

[   ]

47. Do you require background checks for drivers and schedulers?

○ Yes

○ No

If yes, how often are the background checks updated?

[   ]

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48. Do you have any other feedback that you would like to provide?

Summary of Needs and Challenges Identified in by Stakeholders

Participants of the nine regional virtual focus group meetings held statewide were asked to discuss their transportation challenges and unmet needs, and then to suggest potential solutions that they believe to be most appropriate. Meeting participants included transportation providers, local government organizations, non-profit agencies, and members of the public. Common needs and challenges faced by attendees are listed below in order of most to least often mentioned.

♦ In every region, stakeholders expressed the need for expanded services; more and/or varied transportation options, particularly in rural areas; more frequency of fixed route service; and more vehicles (and drivers) to provide scheduled ride and on-demand service.

♦ Many communities are left unserved because of jurisdictional service area boundaries honored by the transit systems – particularly suburban and exurban job centers.

♦ Stakeholders also indicated that there are gaps in access to transportation for younger adults or individuals who are not clients of particular agencies. The gaps are created by eligibility requirements that are typically tied to local agency policies or Federal funding requirements.

♦ Personal assistance is needed for individuals who have difficulty navigating a trip on their own. This higher level of assistance is not needed for every passenger but it is the difference between being able to travel or staying home for some. The types of extra assistance mentioned during the meetings included:
  o escorts or travel companions;
  o assistance getting from the door of the pick-up or drop-off location to/from the vehicle;
  o assistance with through-the-door service by providing assistance from inside the pick-up and through the door of the drop-off location;
  o assistance getting on and off the vehicles;
  o assistance with packages or special shopping runs;
  o family access with multiple kids or when using a car seat; and,
  o crisis services for emergency weather (bringing supplies) or emergency health conditions (stretcher service, waiting in pain for an 'advance schedule' ride, and rides home after discharge).

♦ Regional, intercounty, and out-of-state transportation is a challenge, including getting between rural destinations which are far away and may require a higher fare that is unaffordable for the passenger; getting from rural areas into a central city for services; and finding work across a city/county/state line and not being able to get there.

♦ In most rural areas of Tennessee, regional transportation is available but the public misperception may be that services do not exist, are available only to those who meet certain eligibility, or are too expensive.

♦ In the suburban and exurban areas, service area boundaries of the fixed route system that serves the urban core present many challenges to individuals who need to travel to and from the city or within the suburban/exurban communities that are beyond the transit service area.

- Trip scheduling discussions raised the need for on-demand transportation so that passengers can make same-day trips. Most demand response transportation services require a reservation at least one day and sometimes several days in advance of the trip.

- Reliability of transportation was raised repeatedly as a concern. Passengers need on-time service, especially when traveling to and from work or for medical appointments.

- In some areas, passengers expressed concerns about the complaint/resolution process.

- Passengers need transportation that is flexible enough to allow them to run multiple errands, even when sharing rides. Chaining trips (ex. going to multiple medical providers on a trip to the city, getting prescriptions after a doctor's appointment, running several errands) would help passengers complete necessary errands in a single day. Currently, the travel time or wait time for a vehicle can make the trip so long that only one appointment can be accomplished.

- Customer service is also an issue. Concerns were expressed about schedulers/dispatchers not being helpful, and there was a frequent concern from people scheduling trips to work that they will be bumped due to prioritized medical trips.

- Accessible community infrastructure is needed such as sidewalks, crosswalks, accessible bus stops/pads/shelters, accessible traffic signals, curb ramps and other ramps for access to buildings.

- First/last mile infrastructure is needed to address bus stops that are a mile or more from the destination which may be too far to walk for some individuals or the distance from the bus stop to the destination is not pedestrian friendly. Pedestrian safety was a distinct concern, separate but hand-in-hand with the need for ADA accessibility in all development.

- Non-emergency medical Transportation needs included improvements to Medicaid transportation services provided through TennCare such as:
  - monitoring provider on-time performance;
  - reducing the long wait-time for pick-up after appointments;
  - lack of transportation for non-emergency medical and behavioral health care;
  - difficulties of recurring trips such as dialysis;
  - lack of coordination between the Veterans Affairs medical facilities and other services regarding transportation;
  - grouping or chaining trips (also mentioned in scheduling);
  - emergency health issues (mentioned in service enhancements); and,
  - the location of many medical offices in inaccessible areas.

- The lack of affordable transportation for early shift/2nd shift/weekend work is a barrier for potential employees. Also, when transportation is available, the length of trips with multiple riders to drop off makes the commute time excessive. Finally, many industrial parks are not located in areas that are easily accessible by public or shared-ride transportation services.

- Funding for service included discussion around providing a living wage to retain drivers, and the need for coordination to match funding from different programs (TANF for example, or insurance benefits), and addressing funding match dictating service boundaries.

- Service hours and days need to be expanded to cover early shift starts, 2nd and 3rd shift schedules, and weekends. In areas that have seasonal service, year-round options are needed.

Many participants described unmet needs for shopping, community, and religions trips that are outside of transit service hours, which can start as late as 9 a.m. and end as early as 4:30 p.m.

♦ Cost to the consumer and the need for affordable transportation options where Transportation Network Companies (TNCs like Uber and Lyft) and taxis are expensive for long trips, and where programs only support limited transportation. In reverse, some people are used to paying a transit rate for trips and will not spend more for private options, relying instead on family or friends, who may not be dependable. There is also a high cost when using multiple services for legs of a long trip.

♦ Availability of service information was lacking. Access to online scheduling or a one-call service is needed for people with visual impairments and others with disabilities. Discussion also highlighted the need for sharing information and accountability of service providers with elected officials at the local and state levels to demonstrate the value (and underfunding) of public transit.

♦ Issues around mixing passengers from different programs focused more on the delays from picking up and dropping off multiple riders, lengthening trip times dramatically, but also mentioned constraints where multiple people from the same household qualify for different services and must take separate vehicles. Shared rides also produce anxiety for the riders who feel vulnerable. One participant represented a non-profit program that was working with Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to provide on-demand/TNC-style service, but was looking for partners to pool funds and rideshare.

♦ Vehicle accessibility was mentioned as a need, including wheelchair equipped vehicles with ramps or lifts, particularly for use by volunteer programs and TNCs. Households are challenged if they do not have a personal vehicle available or individuals cannot drive.

♦ Transit vehicles are not equipped for hazardous weather, particularly now (during COVID) that they are not driving full of passengers.

♦ The need for electric transit vehicles was raised, as they are available to large systems, but not to small agencies.

Other important issues that were frequently mentioned include the following:

♦ Communication & coordination between providers would improve service.

♦ Volunteer programs need additional drivers and a way to accommodate wheelchair-users.

♦ Political climate that ignores or de-prioritizes transit and other public transportation creates underfunding. Information is needed to address lack of government/political support.

♦ Driver shortages are caused by a need for living wages, and the difficult conditions the drivers must deal with, including long days, difficult or unsatisfied riders, and a need for enhanced training and services.

♦ Medical offices are moving outside of Davidson County making it difficult to transport people from Davidson County to destinations in adjacent counties.

♦ Business opportunities to get additional TNCs, accessible start-ups, and sponsored employment transportation are needed and should be supported.

♦ Some participants indicated they do not feel safe or may be uncomfortable using their transportation service options.

- There is a lack of understanding about who can ride. Some people think public transit services are only for older adults.

- Two-way communication is needed. People need to understand what transit can and can't do within FTA regulations, and that improved services will require additional funding or reallocation of current funding from some other area of service.

APPENDIX D - PUBLIC SURVEY COMMENTS ABOUT SPECIFIC TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

Survey respondents were invited to list specific transportation challenges or unmet needs that they experience. A complete list of responses is included in the appendix. In summary, the comments addressed user concerns about safety when walking to/from the bus stop; lack of reliability; and limited access created either by the transportation providers hours of operation or the level of personal assistance provided by drivers.

I am not able to cross county lines using my transportation option.

The cost of transportation is too high.

Public transportation, specifically for those with disabilities, is not reliable.

I am concerned for my safety.

We need bus shelters and longer timed crosswalk lights.

The wait time before and after a doctor's appointment can be over an hour each time. It is difficult for many individuals wot be up and active for an hour before an appointment, an hour for the appointment, and another hour after while they wait for the vehicle.

There are not many options in the rural area.

Buses do not run where I live or where I need to go and I cannot get to a bus stop.

If shopping, I cannot haul all of my groceries on a bus.

It is hard to get on and off the vehicle sometimes.

The bus route takes too long and does not run during nights or weekends.

I need assistance getting out the door of my house, assistance getting in the car and out, and getting items off the shelf at the store.

I need affordable and reliable transportation that goes outside my county.

Lyft and Uber are not an option because these vehicles are not accessible and drivers do not provide assistance.

I don't have anyone to drive me.

There are only 2 cities in the counties that I cover in northeast TN that have a public bus system, which are Johnson City and Kingsport. The hours and days for these buses are limited to weekdays during business hours. The only form of transportation for most of my clients is NET Trans, and that is cost prohibitive for a lot of my clients, who are all disabled. While they are my client, I can pay for the tickets, for activities that are related to their program, but not for personal transportation. My clients are not often able to utilize Uber or Lyft, if that is even available in their area. They can't do cell phone apps and computers, and it is cost prohibitive. There are only 2 cab companies and they are unreliable and cost prohibitive. There are no good options for the disabled in northeast TN unless you have more money than most of my disabled clients have.

Many older adults and those with mobility disabilities need on-call transportation for needs that fall outside of the constraints of specific times with the other seniors' Transportation services currently being provided.

Transportation needs to be developed where it is available 24/7. Employment for example does not just occur Monday/Friday from 8-4. People of all abilities need to have the means to get to and from work as this will further assist their growth financially thus improving other aspects of their lives. NWTHRA and our agency assist many in the area but the way we are set up to operate and/or are funded limits the outreach we can provide. People in general who depend on public transportation face such a disadvantage to full inclusion in their communities simply because they cannot get to and from. This creates a poor quality of life and has a devastating effect on their emotional well-being.

We need transportation for errands, MD appts, church, visiting friends, supplies. We need late in the day rides because sometimes it takes a while to get going.

Just people like me without a car or can't drive needing to get groceries or heating oil and can't afford to pay much for transportation.

Current public transport is very limited and does not go door-to-door. Many clients need door-to-door, and sometimes need help getting on the bus or van.