Supporting Employment Transportation in Southern Georgia

Karalyn Clouser
Natalie Villwock-Witte, Ph.D., P.E.
of
Western Transportation Institute
Montana State University

Carrie Kissel
Bret Allphin
of
National Association of Development Organizations

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents ii
1 Introduction 1
2 Background Information 3
2.1 Study Area 3
2.2 Demographic Information 3
2.2.1 Population 4
2.2.2 Economic Factors 5
2.2.3 Employment and Commute Characteristics 12
2.2.4 Regional Employment Transportation Patterns 16
2.2.5 Transportation Disadvantaged Communities 18
2.3 Major Employers 19
2.4 Existing Transportation Providers 21
2.4.1 SGRC Regional Transit (https://www.sgrc.us/public-transit-services.html) 21
2.4.2 Valdosta On-Demand (https://www.valdostacity.com/public-works/valdosta-demand) 21
2.5 Regional Planning 21
2.5.1 Southern Georgia Regional Commission, Regional Plan Update 2023 21
2.5.2 2022-2026 Southern Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 22
2.5.3 2018-2022 Southern Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 23
2.5.4 Regional Transit Plan 23
2.6 Background Summary 24
3 Literature Review 28
3.1 Vanpool Models 28
3.2 Benefits 29
3.3 Funding Sources Utilized 30
3.4 Things to Consider 30
3.5 Keys to Success 31
3.6 Rural Vanpool Program Examples from the Literature 31
3.6.1 iRide Vanpool, Missoula, MT (http://www.mrtma.org/) 32

3.6.2 Ben Franklin Transit Vanpool Program, Tri-Cities, Washington (https://www.bft.org/services/vanpool/) 32
3.6.3 Black Butte Ranch, Bend, Oregon (https://www.commuteoptions.org/vanpool/) 33
3.6.4 CommuteInfo, Southwestern Pennsylvania (https://commuteinfo.org/) 33
3.6.5 Go NEWhere, Nebraska (https://www.nebraskatransit.com/statewide-vanpool) 33
3.6.6 Kings Area Rural Transit (KART), King County, California (https://www.kartbus.org/vanpool/) 33
3.7 General Steps to Establish a Rural Vanpool Program 34
4 Contemporary Case Studies of Vanpools 35
4.1 Commuter Co-Op (Vermont) 35
4.2 Go NEWhere (Nebraska) 37
4.3 iRide (Montana) 38
4.4 Lowcountry Go (South Carolina) 40
4.5 511NY Rideshare (New York) 41
4.6 Case Study Lessons Learned 42
5 Outreach to Employers 44
6 Employment Transportation Roundtable 48
7 Recommendations for SGRC 51
7.1 Additional Considerations 58
7.1.1 Funding Program Requirements 58
7.1.2 Driver Considerations 59
7.1.3 Marketing 59
7.1.4 Performance Metrics 60
8 Conclusions 61
9 Appendix A: Additional Demographic Data 62
10 Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography 66
10.1 Employment Transportation Program Toolkits and Fact Sheets 66
10.2 Examinations of Vanpooling Opportunities 69
10.3 Vanpool Program Examples 72
11 Appendix C: Vanpool Program Case Studies 75
12 Appendix D: Outreach to Employer Surveys 100
12.1 Employee Survey 100

12.2 Employer Survey 103
13 Appendix E: Employment Transportation Roundtable Materials 107
14 Appendix F: Commute with Enterprise Summary 120
15 Appendix G: Vanpool Program Stakeholders 125
15.1 Major Employers: Manufacturing and Transportation & Warehousing 125
15.2 Major Employers: Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting and Retail Trade 127
16 References 129

List of Tables

Table 1. Population Age 18 to 24 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 5
Table 2. Labor Force Activity – 2022 (Georgia Department of Labor, 2023) 6
Table 3. Percentage of People Below the Poverty Level and Median Household by County (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2023) 8
Table 4. Southern Georgia, Housing and Transportation Costs for a Regional Typical Household (Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2022) 11
Table 5: Summary of Background Information 26
Table 6. Thirty Key Employers of the SGRC Area 44
Table 7. Estimated Costs for a Vanpool Pilot 56
Table 8. Estimated Vanpool Commuter Costs 57
Table 10. Southern Georgia County Population and Population Density (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 62
Table 11. Southern Georgia, Vehicles Available (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 63
Table 12. Southern Georgia, Place of Work (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 64
Table 13. Southern Georgia, Commute Mode (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 65

List of Figures

Figure 1. SGRC Area 1
Figure 2. SGRC Area Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Micropolitan Statistical Areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 3
Figure 3. Southern Georgia, Population by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 4
Figure 4. Southern Georgia, Unemployment by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 7
Figure 5. Southern Georgia, Population Below the Poverty Level by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 9
Figure 6. Median Household Income by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 10
Figure 7. Southern Georgia, Zero Vehicle Households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 12
Figure 8. Southern Georgia, Mean Commute Time by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 13
Figure 9. Southern Georgia, Worked Outside County of Residence (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 14
Figure 10. Southern Georgia, Worked Outside State of Residence (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 15
Figure 11. Southern Georgia, Commute by Carpool by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020) 16
Figure 12. Inflow/Outflow Job Counts (2020) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023) 17
Figure 13: Job Counts by Distance/Direction in 2020, All Workers (2020) W.S. Census Bureau, 2023 18
Figure 14. Transportation Disadvantaged Areas (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2023) 19
Figure 15. Major Employers in the SGRC Area 20
Figure 16. SGRC Regional Transit Webpage (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2023) 21
Figure 17. Facebook Ad for SRGC Regional Transit (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2022) 24
Figure 18. Six Rural Vanpool Program Examples 32
Figure 19. Case Study Locations 35
Figure 20. Advertisement for Employment Transportation Webinar 48

Figure 21. Southern Georgia Black Chambers Members 50
Figure 22. Potential Stakeholder Counties and Major Employers 53
Figure 23. Thirty Mile Commute sheds Compared to Major Employers in the Manufacturing and Transportation and Warehousing Industries 54
Figure 24. Thirty Mile Commute sheds Compared to Major Employers in the Agricultural and Retail Trade Industries 55
Figure 25. Commuter Co-Op (Vermont) Vanpooling Saves Flyer (Go! Vermont, 2023) 60

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAA	American Automobile Association
ACS	American Community Survey
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
BCDCOG	Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments
BFT	Ben Franklin Transit
BWC	Best Workplaces for Commuters
CEDS	Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
CDL	Commercial Driver's License
CMAQ	Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality
CNT	Center for Neighborhood Technology
CRP	Carbon Reduction Program
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
F-M COG	Fargo-Moorehead Metropolitan Council of Governments
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GDOT	Georgia Department of Transportation
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GRH	Guaranteed Ride Home
ICF	ICF International, Inc.
KART	Kings Area Rural Transit
LEHD	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics
MAFB	Moody Air Force Base
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MRTMA	Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Association
MSA	Metropolitan Statistical Area
MTA	Metropolitan Transportation Commission
NADO	National Association of Development Organizations
NADORF	National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation

NDOT	Nebraska Department of Transportation
NTD	National Transit Database
NYSDOT	New York State Department of Transportation
RFP	Request for Proposal
SGRC	Southern Georgia Regional Commission
SPC	Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission
SUV	Sport Utility Vehicle
TDPs	Transit Development Plans
TNC	Transportation Network Company
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
VTrans	Vermont Agency of Transportation

Executive Summary

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) is a regional planning agency that conducts economic development, regional transportation and environmental planning, local government services, aging programs, workforce development, geographic information systems (GIS), and other services for an eighteen-county region. The region includes Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware Counties.

Within its rural regional transportation program, SGRC develops rural transit development plans (TDPs) under contract to the Georgia Department of Transportation. SGRC also administers coordinated human services transportation for clients of agencies within Georgia's Department of Human Services. In the summer of 2021, SGRC began to operate rural public transit services on a regional basis called SGRC Regional Transit, providing a mobility option for 15 of the 18 counties in the region.

One of the region's goals in establishing region-wide rural public transit is to address economic development, including providing mobility to existing and potential employment sites. The region's 2020 update to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) notes: "While some growth has been experienced within the region, persistent poverty, underemployment, and unemployment continue to plague the area." Several goals and strategies in the CEDS relate to these issues of addressing poverty and employment. These include encouraging the establishment of transportation systems and facilities that support residents and visitors to broaden mobility options. In addition, some employers have already begun transportation services at their own expense. Others, including food processing business, have expressed to area workforce development and economic development professionals that they could create additional jobs if they had access to additional workers.

Establishing SGRC Regional Transit has helped to improve mobility and address transportation needs in the region. SGRC expressed interest in expanding transportation to include employment-specific services to better connect residents who need jobs with affordable and reliable transportation to work. Upon a kickoff meeting with SGRC an interest in vanpool services was expressed as this type of service would provide direct connections to employment and allow SGRC to potentially contract with a third-party provider.

The National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation (NADORF) Team worked in cooperation with SGRC to examine the need for employment transportation services in the region, with a focus on vanpools. A demographic analysis of the SGRC area was completed as well as a literature review focusing on rural vanpools, outreach to employers, outreach to interested stakeholders, and case studies were developed highlighting lessons learned from five vanpool programs across the United States.

Through a demographic analysis, review of existing planning documents, outreach to employers, and outreach to interested stakeholders in the region, the need for improving mobility to employment can be seen. As a result, the research team recommends that SGRC pursue a two-year vanpool pilot program in coordination with a third-party operator (e.g., Commute with Enterprise), which would allow SGRC to gauge demand for such a service in the region in a relatively low-cost, flexible way.

Allowing for up to ten vans, the vanpool pilot is estimated to cost between $24,000 to $144,000 depending on how much of a subsidy is provided per van. The amount of subsidy would need to be agreed upon between SGRC and Commute with Enterprise prior to initiating a vanpool pilot. Providing a

larger subsidy could help to offset costs to commuters and help grow interest in the vanpool program. If public funds are used to pay for the vanpool program, then Commute with Enterprise can provide the required data needed to report to the National Transit Database (NTD) which would allow SGRC to access funding options like Federal Transit Administration (FTA) formula funds (Section 5311 or 5307) providing a sustainable federal funding source for long term success of the vanpool program.

Several potential stakeholders stand out and should be engaged in any future vanpool project. The demographic data analysis of the SGRC area highlighted three counties (Clinch, Lanier, and Turner) which could particularly benefit from a vanpool program due to high levels of unemployment, a limited number of major employers, and high levels of poverty. Additionally, Clinch, Echols, and Lanier Counties are not currently served by the existing public transit system. This provides a total of four counties which could stand to benefit from a vanpool program: Clinch, Echols, Lanier, and Turner. During outreach it was noted that Federal employment sites like a military base could benefit from a vanpool option due to a Federal employee benefit which provides funding for public transit. Through the literature review and case study development, it was found that employers who operate in shifts (e.g., manufacturing, food processing) were more likely to utilize vanpool services. Through an analysis of major employers in the SGRC area, there are a total of 106 major employers within 30 miles of Valdosta, Douglas, Tifton, and Waycross (SGRC's larger municipalities). Finally, during regional stakeholder outreach, the Southern Georgia Black Chambers expressed interest in vanpooling for their members.

Potential funding sources for a vanpool program include the FTA Section 5311 and 5307 formula funding. These two funding sources were commonly utilized by case study participants and in the literature review. In order to access these funds, SGRC would need to report vanpool program data to the NTD including total annual revenue, sources of revenue, total annual operating costs, fleet size, fleet type, revenue vehicle miles, and ridership. FTA uses NTD data from two years before apportioning funds.

In addition to these funds SGRC could consider Surface Transportation Block Grants and local funding utilizing Georgia's Transportation Investment Act or Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax which would allow SGRC to leverage a one percent transportation sales tax. SGRC should consider working with their local FTA representative and the Georgia Department of Transportation to identify other funding opportunities to support a vanpool program.

During the two-year vanpool pilot, SGRC should plan for marketing of the program. This marketing should utilize a consistent brand. Marketing can include vehicle wraps, social media, press releases, and informational flyers. Marketing that highlights the potential cost savings of vanpooling were found to be beneficial by case study participants.

If SGRC moves forward with a vanpool pilot, they should develop performance metrics that would help determine the success of the program. Potential performance metrics include number of vanpools, number of employees served by vanpools, number of employers served by vanpools, and vanpool duration. Additionally, SGRC should consider collecting surveys to obtain participant feedback during the pilot to examine who is utilizing the vanpool and what features of the program could be improved over time.

1 Introduction

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) is a regional planning agency that conducts economic development, regional transportation and environmental planning, local government services, aging programs, workforce development, geographic information systems (GIS), and other services for an eighteen-county region. The region includes Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Clinch, Coffee, Cook, Echols, Irwin, Lanier, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware Counties (Figure 1). Several goals and strategies in the region's recent Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) are intended to address poverty and unemployment. One example is encouraging the establishment of transportation systems and facilities that support residents and visitors to broaden mobility options.

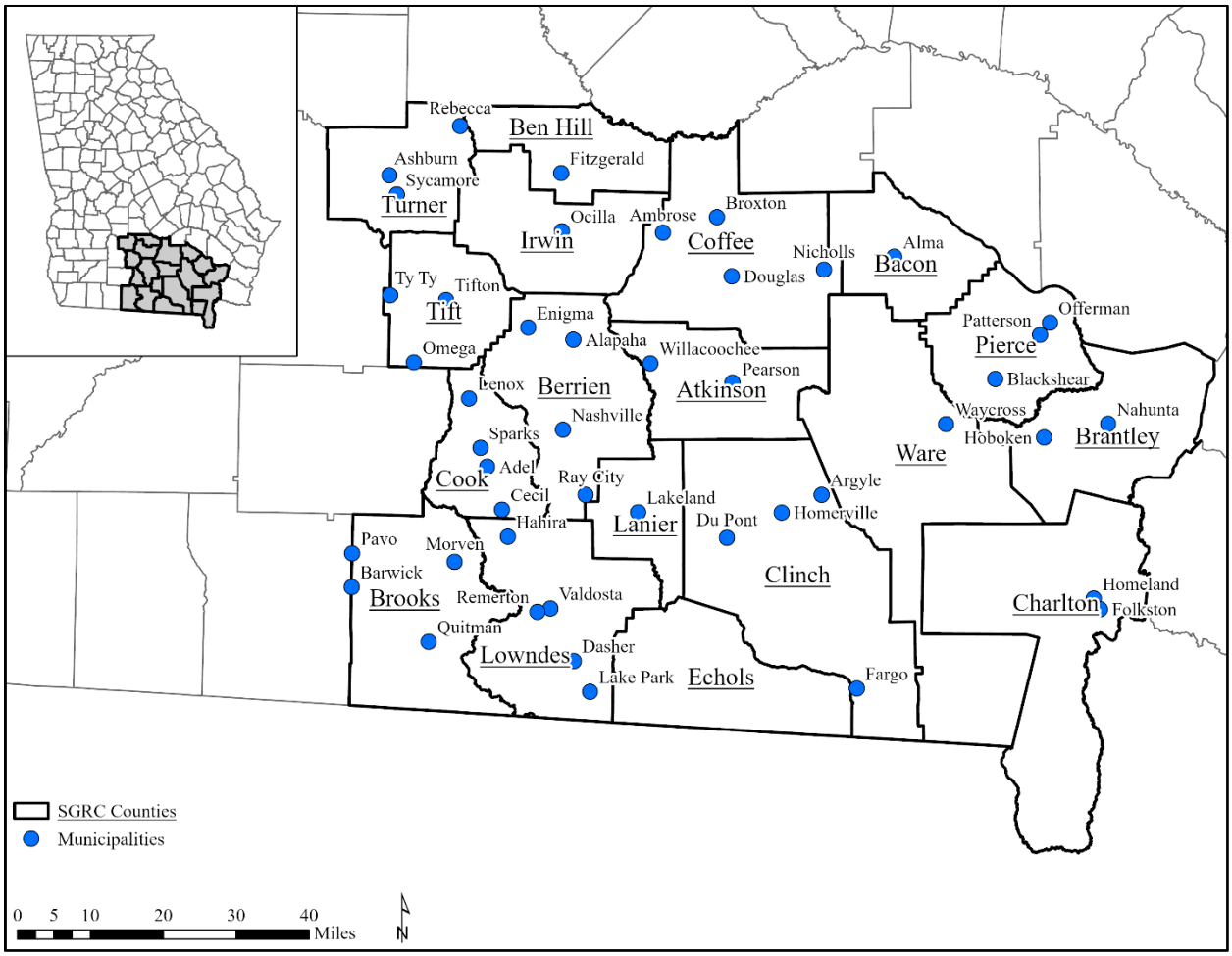


Figure 1. SGRC Area

This report will detail efforts conducted by the National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation (NADORF) team, working in cooperation with SGRC, to examine the need for employment transportation services in the region. Furthermore, it will provide recommendations for employment transportation service opportunities that could best meet demand. During the kickoff

meeting, the scope of this project was narrowed to focus specifically on the use of vanpools which could be used to complement the existing public transit service in the area.

Project Goals

1. Examine the potential demand for a vanpool program within the SGRC area.
2. Identify lessons learned from peer vanpool programs.
3. Create recommendations for a vanpool program for the SGRC area.

2 Background Information

2.1 Study Area

The SGRC area encompasses over 7,810 square miles, consisting of eighteen counties and forty-five municipalities. The region is primarily rural, but, also contains one metropolitan statistical area (MSA) (Valdosta), a portion of an MSA (Brantley County, which is a part of the Brunswick MSA), and four micropolitan statical areas (Douglas, Fitzgerald, Tifton, and Waycross) (Figure 2). The region is home to a combined population of 413,869 people, a robust agricultural and manufacturing industry, the Moody Air Force Base, and numerous colleges and universities.

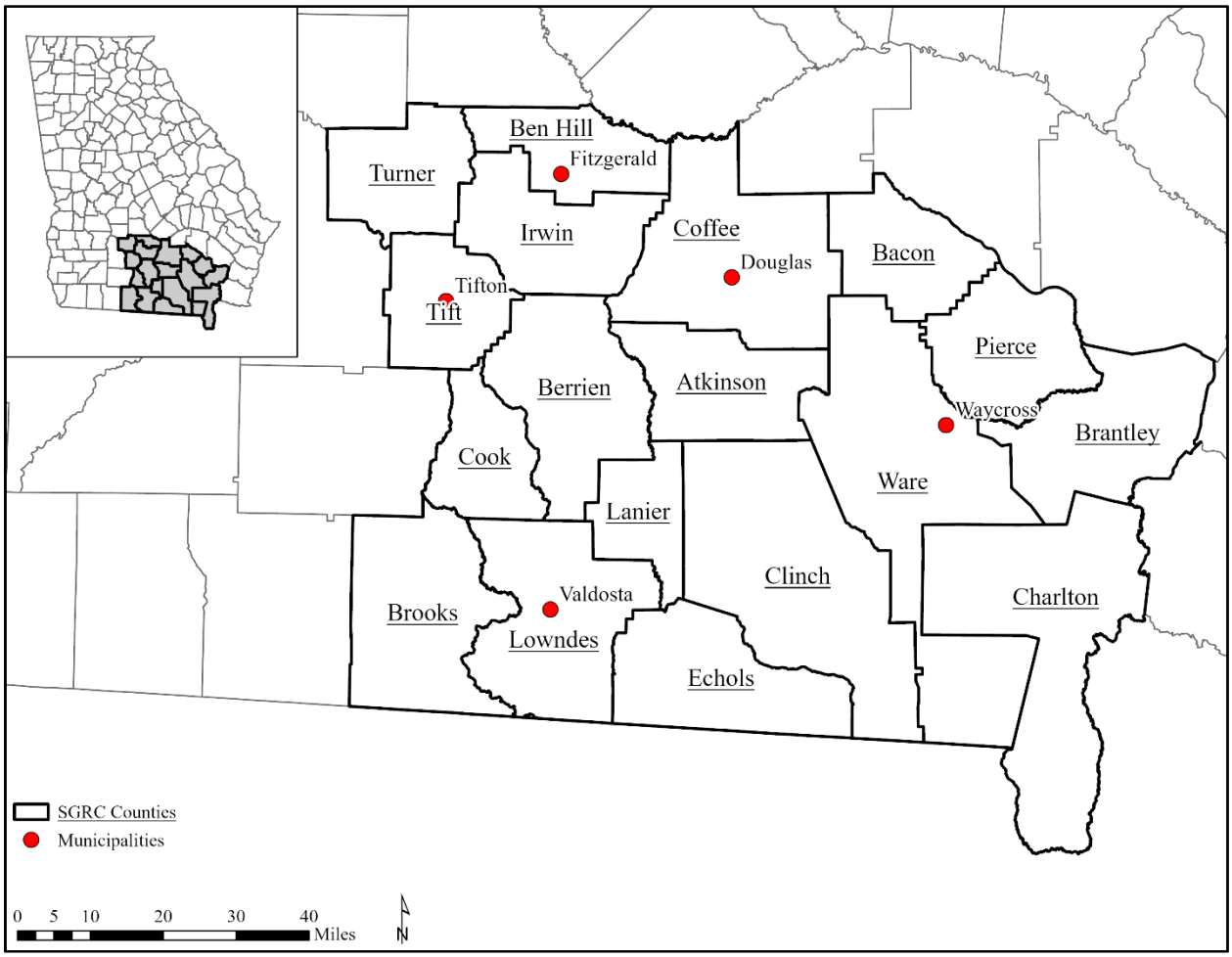


Figure 2. SGRC Area Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Micropolitan Statistical Areas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

2.2 Demographic Information

Sociodemographic factors can be used to estimate the number of people that may be more likely to use public transit systems such as a vanpool (Chaudhari, Lonsdale, & Kack, 2016). Understanding where these populations live within the SGRC area can help determine locations where public transit or vanpools may be more feasible. The primary source of information for this section is the US Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates for 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Highlights of

this demographic data analysis are provided in this section. Additional detailed demographic data for the SGRC area can also be found in Appendix A: Additional Demographic Data.

2.2.1 Population

Lowndes County, which is at the heart of the Valdosta MSA, has the greatest population and population density within the SGRC area (Figure 3). This is followed by Coffee County, then Tift County which is home to the Tifton MSA. Detailed information on population and population density for each county can be found in Appendix A: Additional Demographic Data.

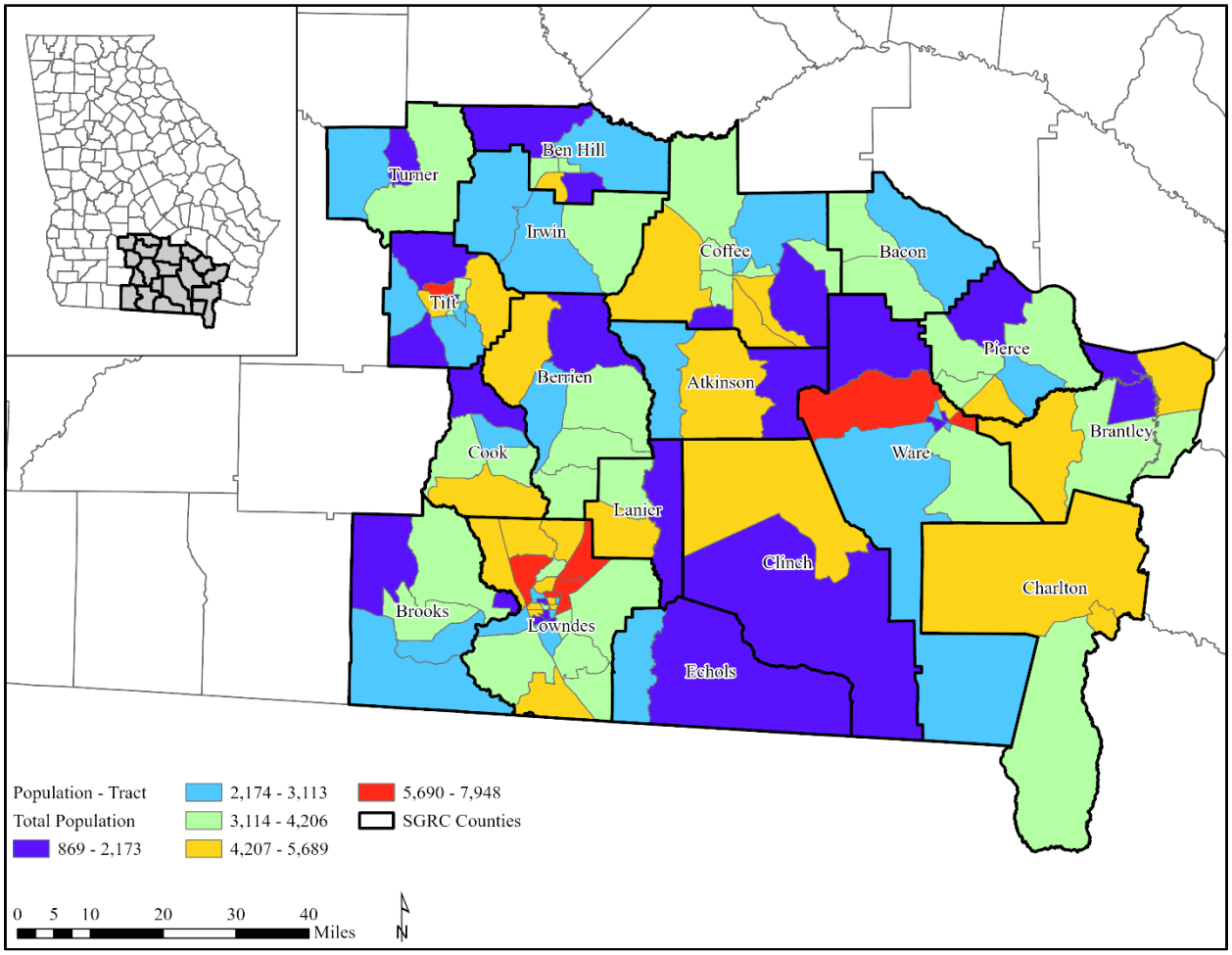


Figure 3. Southern Georgia, Population by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

Younger populations between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four or those that are just entering the workforce following graduation may not have access to reliable transportation or may be limited to entry level employment opportunities which may require longer commutes depending upon job availability. The data in Table 1 is presented by county instead of census tract. Lowndes County sees the highest percentage of this age group with 16.5% of the county population being between the age of eighteen and twenty-four, followed by Tift County, and Cook County.

Table 1. Population Age 18 to 24 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

County	Total Population Age 18 to 24	Percent of Population Age 18 to 24
Atkinson	813	9.8%
Bacon	984	8.8%
Ben	1,361	7.9%
Berrien	1,196	6.6%
Brantley	1,260	7.0%
Brooks	1,312	8.1%
Charlton	1,044	8.4%
Clinch	432	6.4%
Coffee	4,071	9.5%
Cook	1,731	10.1%
Echols	297	8.0%
Irwin	876	9.1%
Lanier	894	9.1%
Lowndes	19,394	16.5%
Pierce	1,571	8.0%
Tift	4,598	11.2%
Turner	481	5.4%
Ware	2,687	7.4%

2.2.2 Economic Factors

Several economic factors may indicate a greater propensity to using a public transit system or vanpool program, including lower income residents, areas with high transportation and housing costs, and zero vehicle households.

On average, SGRC has seen growth in the total number of people employed in the region and a decrease in the number of people unemployed. SGRC saw an average unemployment rate of 3.2% in 2022, which is slightly above the state's unemployment rate (Table 2). Several counties in the region, Ben Hill, Irwin, Turner, and Coffee, have a higher unemployment rate than the region's average.

The unemployment rate varies at the census tract level. Therefore, considering each county in more detail, the areas just south of Douglas, Georgia (Coffee County) and Folkston, Georgia (Charlton County) had the largest percentage of unemployed population (Figure 4). Furthermore, pockets of unemployment can be seen in each county across the region, particularly in areas outside of municipal areas.

Table 2. Labor Force Activity – 2022 (Georgia Department of Labor, 2023)

Area	Employed (2021)	Employed (2022)	Percent Change of Employed	Unemployed (2021)	Unemployed (2022)	Percent Change of Unemployed	Unemployment Rate (2022)
Atkinson County	4,372	4,254	-2.70%	131	120	-8.4	2.7
Bacon County	4,680	4,736	1.20%	157	143	-8.90%	2.9
Ben Hill County	5,276	5,350	1.40%	292	242	-17.10%	4.6
Berrien County	7,363	7,525	2.20%	285	247	-13.30%	3.1
Brantley County	7,030	7,159	1.80%	266	256	-3.80%	3.2
Brooks County	6,566	6,493	-1.10%	255	208	-18.40%	2.9
Charlton County	4,802	4,918	2.40%	157	158	0.60%	2.8
Clinch County	2,933	2,947	0.50%	89	84	-5.60%	3
Coffee County	18,079	18,128	0.30%	766	664	-13.30%	3.9
Cook County	7,957	7,968	0.10%	280	255	-8.90%	2.9
Echols County	1,845	1,826	-1%	52	47	-9.60%	2.2
Irwin County	3,407	3,397	-0.30%	161	140	-13%	4.2
Lanier County	3,703	3,653	-1.40%	147	130	-11.60%	3
Lowndes County	49,616	48,914	-1.40%	2,103	1,651	-21.50%	3.1
Pierce County	8,354	8,657	3.60%	269	244	-9.30%	2.5
Tift County	20,501	20,469	-0.20%	724	584	-19.30%	2.7
Turner County	3,073	3,043	-1%	210	129	-38.60%	4.1
Ware County	14,837	15,389	3.70%	567	471	-16.90%	3
SGRC	**174,394**	**174,826**	**0.20%**	**6,911**	**5,773**	**-16.50%**	**3.2**
Georgia	4,983,732	5,075,093	1.80%	203,237	159,182	-21.70%	2.9

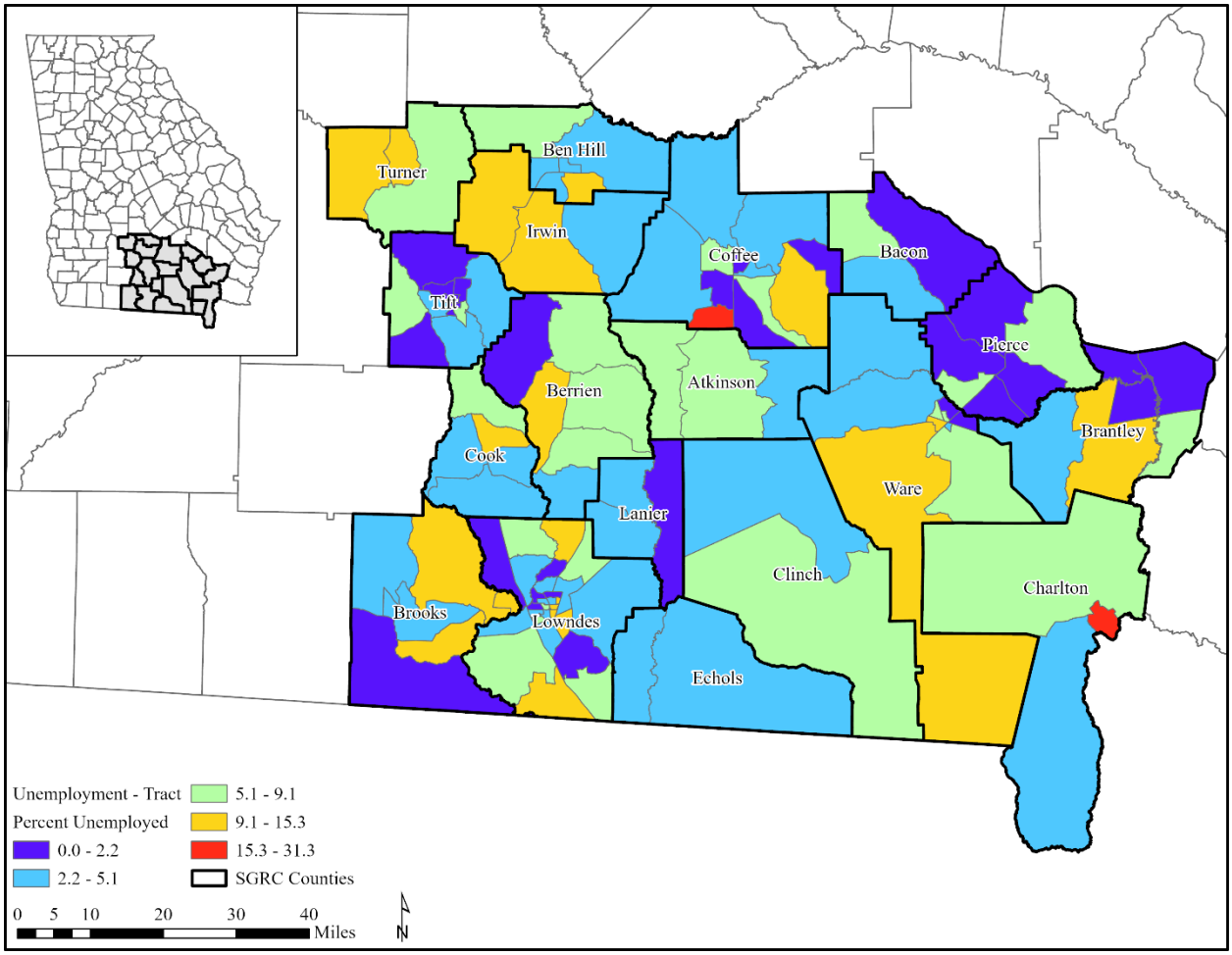


Figure 4. Southern Georgia, Unemployment by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

The SGRC region sees a higher percentage of people under the Federal poverty level than the statewide percentage (Table 3 and Figure 5), with Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Clinch, Lanier, and Turner Counties all seeing poverty levels greater than the region's average. All eighteen counties in the SGRC region have a median household income lower than the Georgia statewide median household income, ranging from a low of about 52% of the statewide median household income to a high of 80%. Census tracts near Valdosta (Lowndes County), Tifton (Tift County), and Fitzgerald (Ben Hill County) see higher median household incomes (Figure 6).

Table 3. Percentage of People Below the Poverty Level and Median Household by County (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2023)

Area	% of People Below the Poverty Level	Median Household Income
Atkinson County	28.2%	$35,703
Bacon County	26.1%	$36,692
Ben Hill County	29.1%	$32,077
Berrien County	22.6%	$42,089
Brantley County	18.8%	$34,679
Brooks County	22.9%	$37,516
Charlton County	23.2%	$42,743
Clinch County	29.8%	$38,844
Coffee County	20.4%	$42,526
Cook County	21.0%	$40,943
Echols County	23.5%	$44,454
Irwin County	22.1%	$41,484
Lanier County	28.6%	$32,158
Lowndes County	22.7%	$46,113
Pierce County	18.5%	$48,969
Tift County	22.5%	$44,827
Turner County	29.5%	$34,514
Ware County	23.3%	$37,041
SGRC	24.0%	$39,632
Georgia	14.3%	$61,224

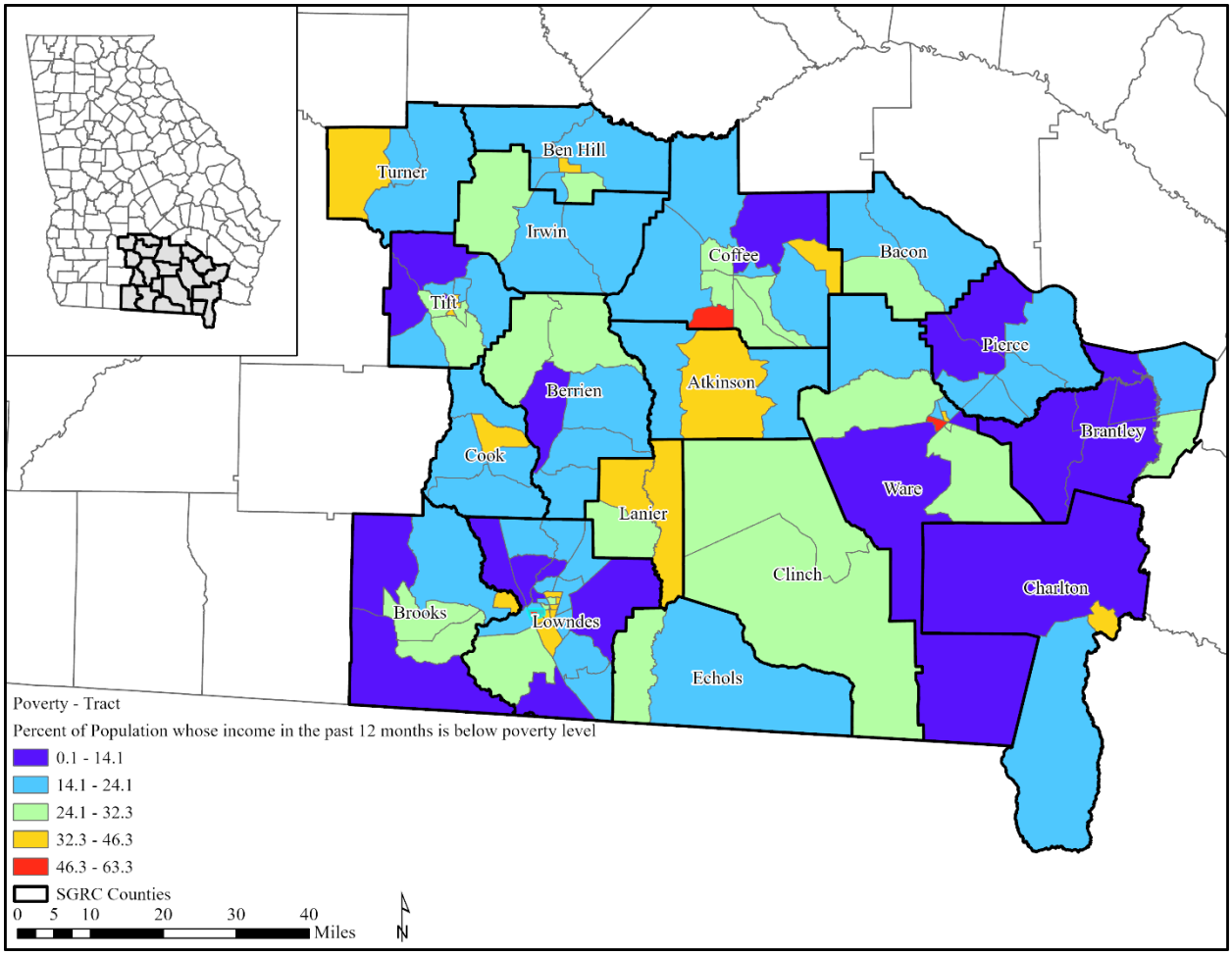


Figure 5. Southern Georgia, Population Below the Poverty Level by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

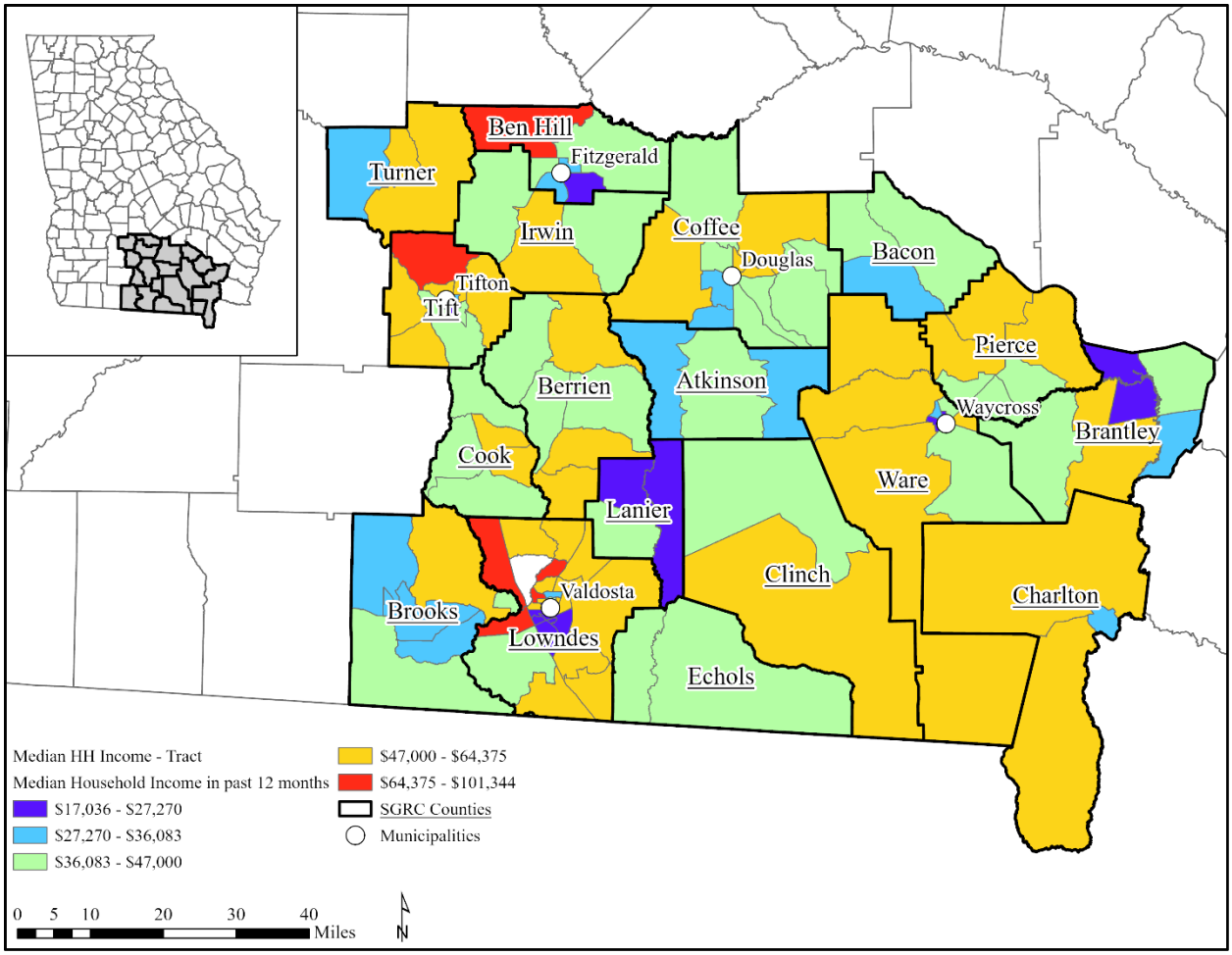


Figure 6. Median Household Income by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

Housing and transportation are the two largest expenses for a household. When combined, housing and transportation generally cost an average U.S. household nearly half of the household budget (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2015). The Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) provides a housing and transportation affordability index which examines a typical household in a region. For the SGRC region, housing and transportation costs account for 57% to 95% of a typical household (Table 4). Clinch County sees the highest proportion of a typical household budget going to housing and transportation, with transportation alone accounting for 52% of a typical household's budget.

Table 4. Southern Georgia, Housing and Transportation Costs for a Regional Typical Household (Center for Neighborhood Technology, 2022)

County	Housing + Transportation Costs % Income for the Regional Typical Household	Housing Costs % Income for the Regional Typical Household	Transportation Costs % Income for the Regional Typical Household
Atkinson	74	30	44
Bacon	62	26	36
Ben Hill	70	30	40
Berrien	70	29	41
Brantley	56	25	32
Brooks	67	30	37
Charlton	59	24	35
Clinch	95	43	52
Coffee	66	29	37
Cook	66	29	37
Echols	65	27	38
Irwin	67	29	38
Lanier	70	34	36
Lowndes	66	32	34
Pierce	65	30	35
Tift	57	26	33
Turner	74	35	39
Ware	59	27	32

Households without access to a vehicle may be more inclined to use a public transit system. Generally, census tracts with a higher percentage of households without access to a vehicle align with municipalities, albeit in many of these rural counties, these municipalities are small (e.g., Lakeland in Lanier County has a population of 2,762 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)) (Figure 7). At 11.1%, Turner County sees the largest percentage of workers living in households without a vehicle available. Clinch (6.8%), Lanier (5.7%), and Irwin (5.2%) Counties all have a relatively large percentage of households with workers living in households without vehicles. Detailed information on the vehicle availability by county is included in Appendix A: Additional Demographic Data.

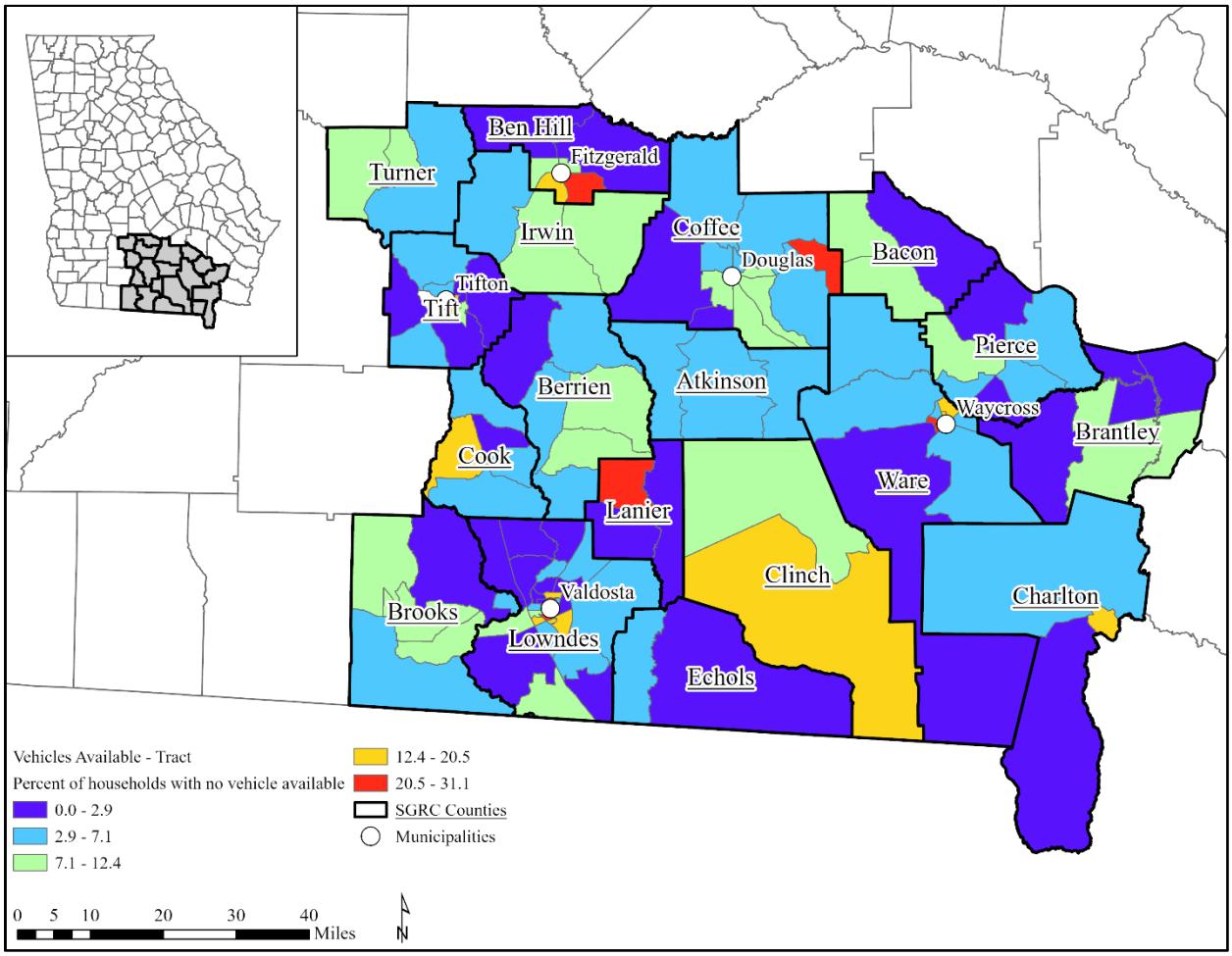


Figure 7. Southern Georgia, Zero Vehicle Households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

2.2.3 Employment and Commute Characteristics

When considering census tract, mean commute times range from 8.3 minutes to 40.5 minutes (Figure 8). For more details about each county's mean travel time to work and whether or not they worked in the state or county, see Table 11 in Appendix A: Additional Demographic Data. Longer commute times can be seen across the SGRC region with Brantley and Charlton Counties experiencing countywide average commute times around 30 minutes (Figure 8). Drilling down further, it appears that many workers living in Brantley County work outside the county (Figure 9) and many workers living in Charlton County work outside the state (Figure 10). With the average cost to own a car nearing $11,000, long commutes can be quite costly (American Automobile Association, 2022).

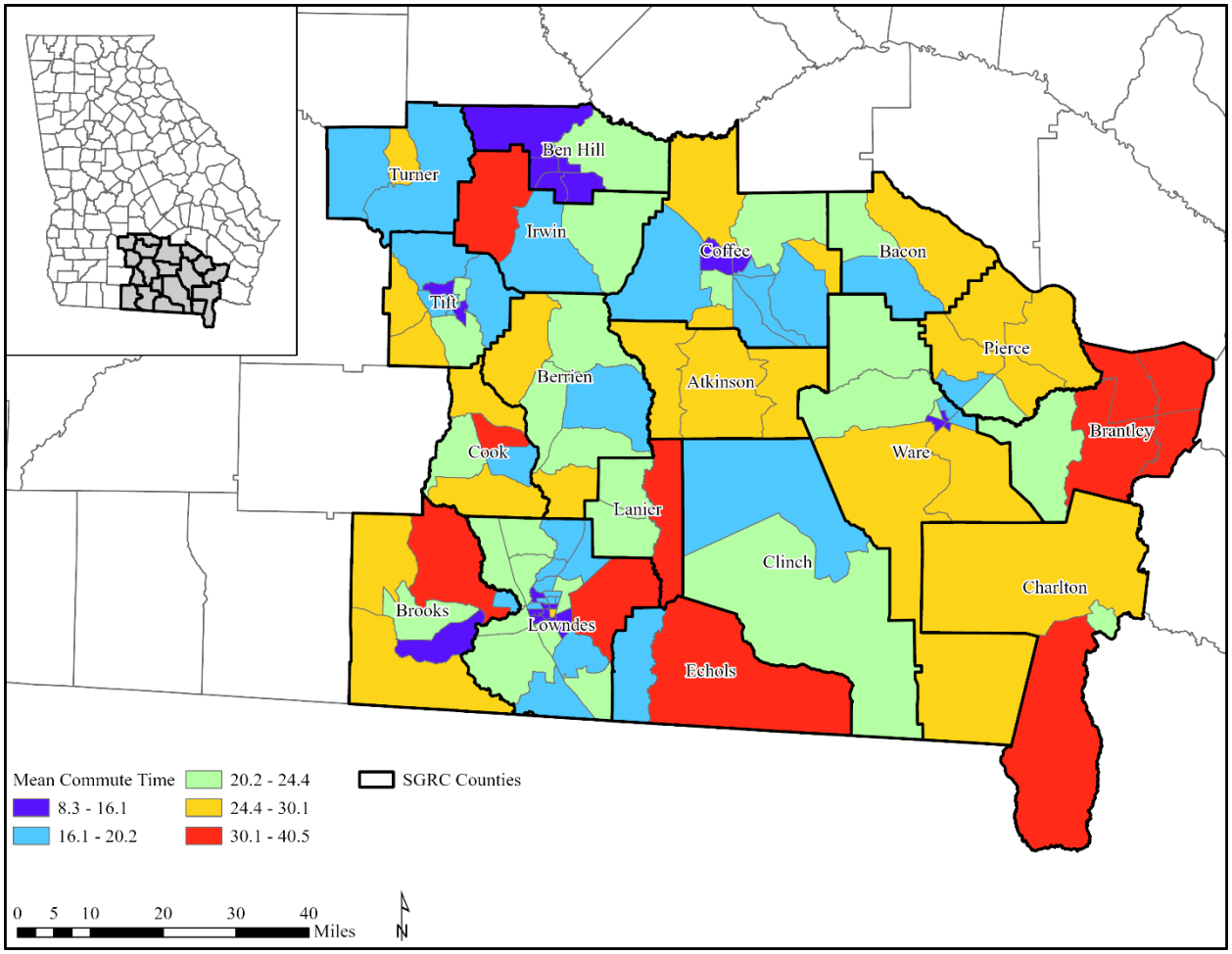


Figure 8. Southern Georgia, Mean Commute Time by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

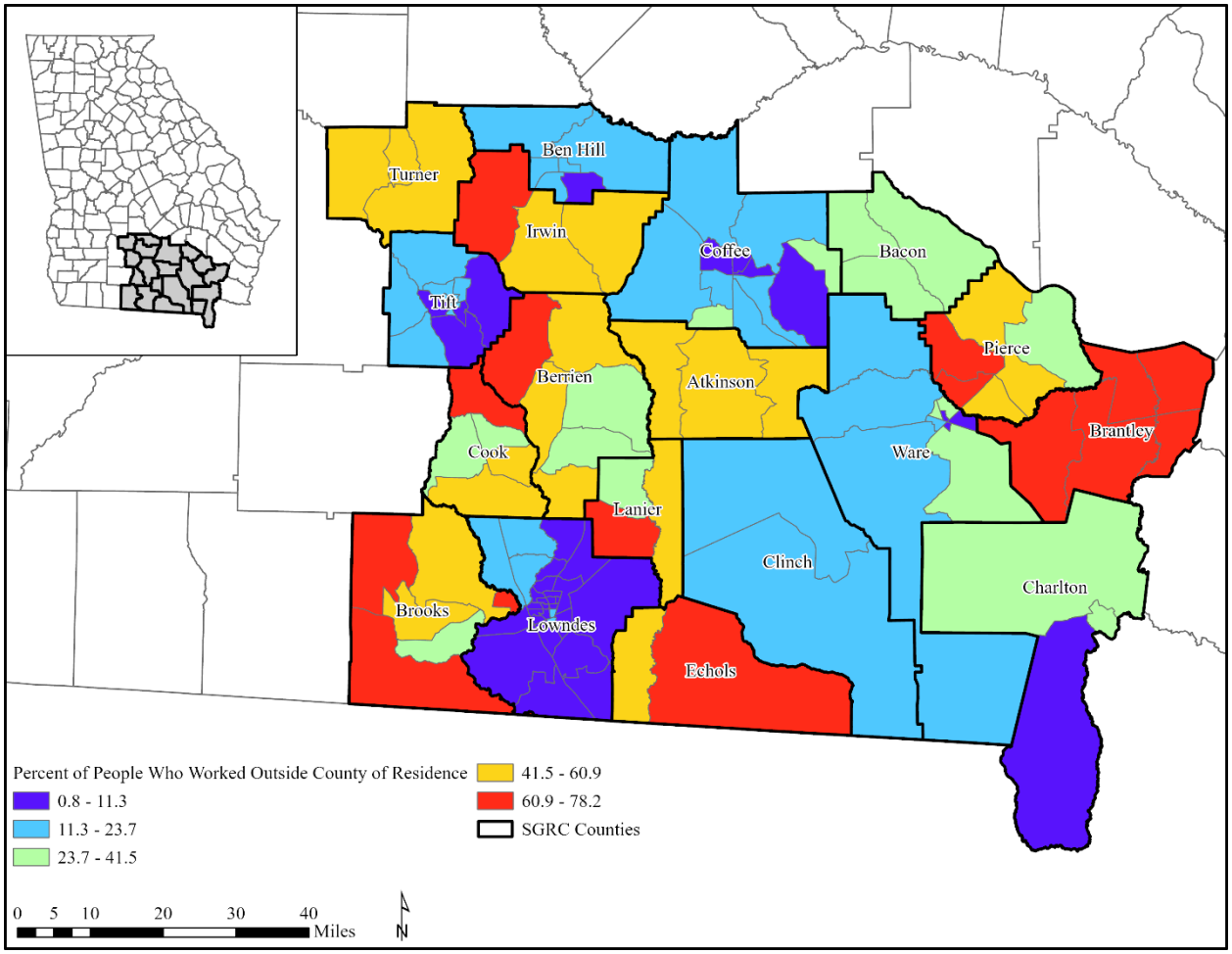


Figure 9. Southern Georgia, Worked Outside County of Residence (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

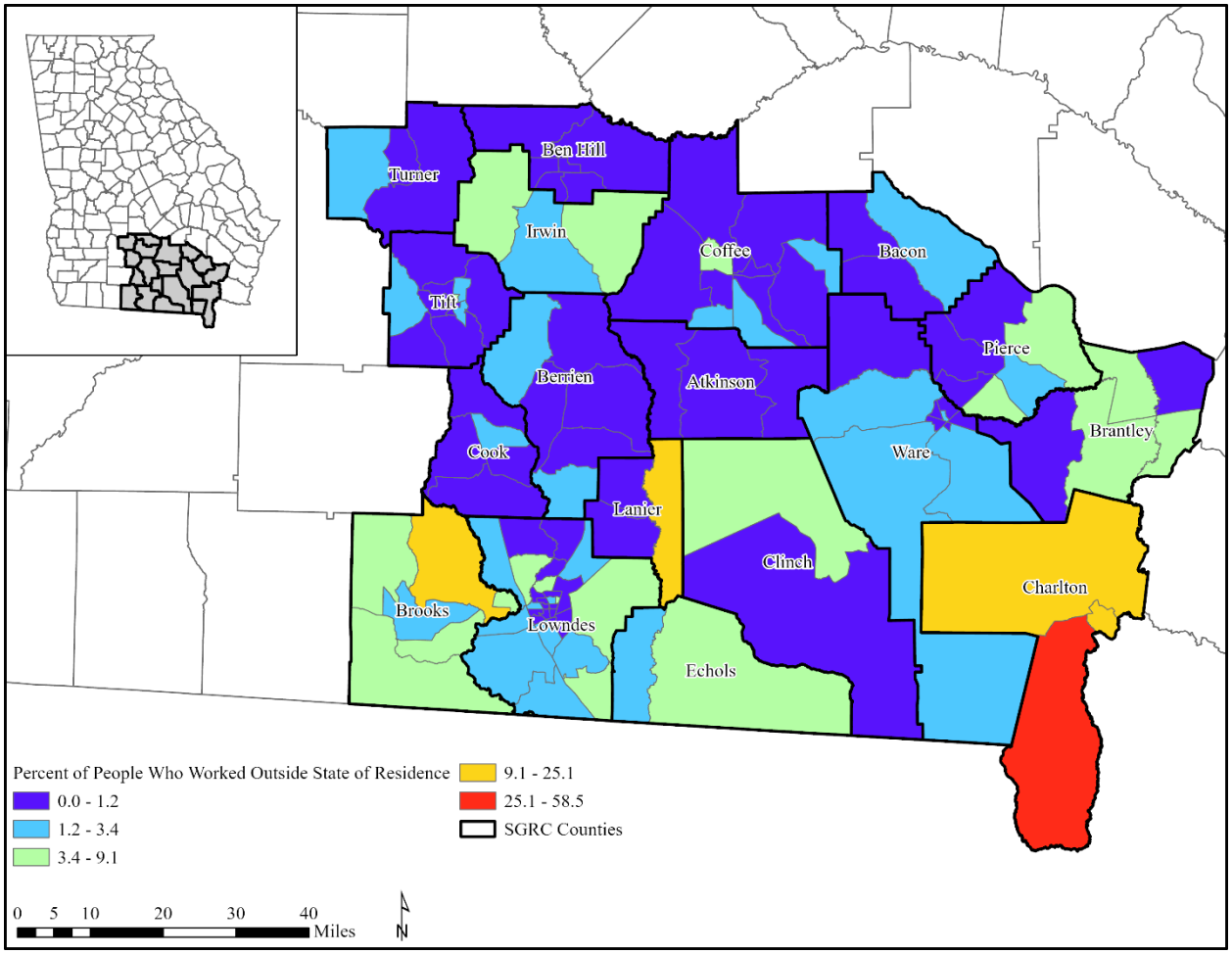


Figure 10. Southern Georgia, Worked Outside State of Residence (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

Most workers in the SGRC region (85.5% or greater) are commuting via a private vehicle. However, several census tracts near municipal areas, particularly areas around Valdosta (Lowndes County), Ashburn (Turner County), and Fitzgerald (Ben Hill County), have higher percentages of people commuting via carpool (Figure 11). For more details on commute mode of transportation to work for each county, see Table 12 in Appendix A: Additional Demographic Data.

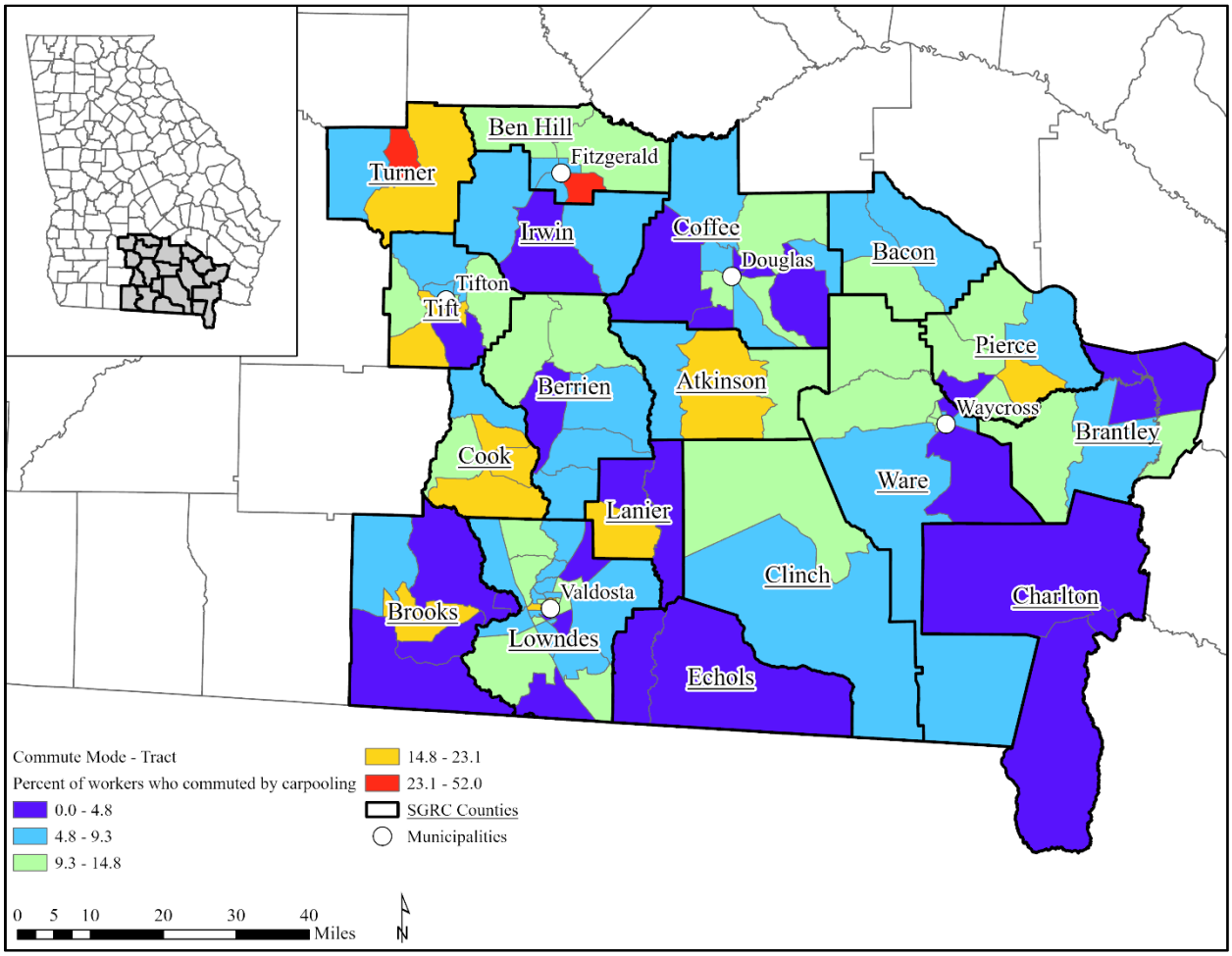


Figure 11. Southern Georgia, Commute by Carpool by Census Tract (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

2.2.4 Regional Employment Transportation Patterns

The United States Census Bureau provides tools to help understand commuting patterns in locations across the country. The 'OnTheMap' tool provided as part of the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data program provides visualization tools available to assist in correlating home and work locations for analysis. Based on data available for 2020, Figure 12 below illustrates that 73,847 individuals lived and worked in the SGRC region, 28,447 individuals entered the region for employment, and 36,056 individuals left the region for employment. There were 102,294 total jobs reported in the SGRC region as part of this data set, 2,600 fewer than were observed in the 2019 data. Of those jobs reported in 2020, 44% of individuals lived within ten miles of their primary place of employment. Conversely, over 24,000 individuals in the region traveled greater than 50 miles to their primary place of employment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

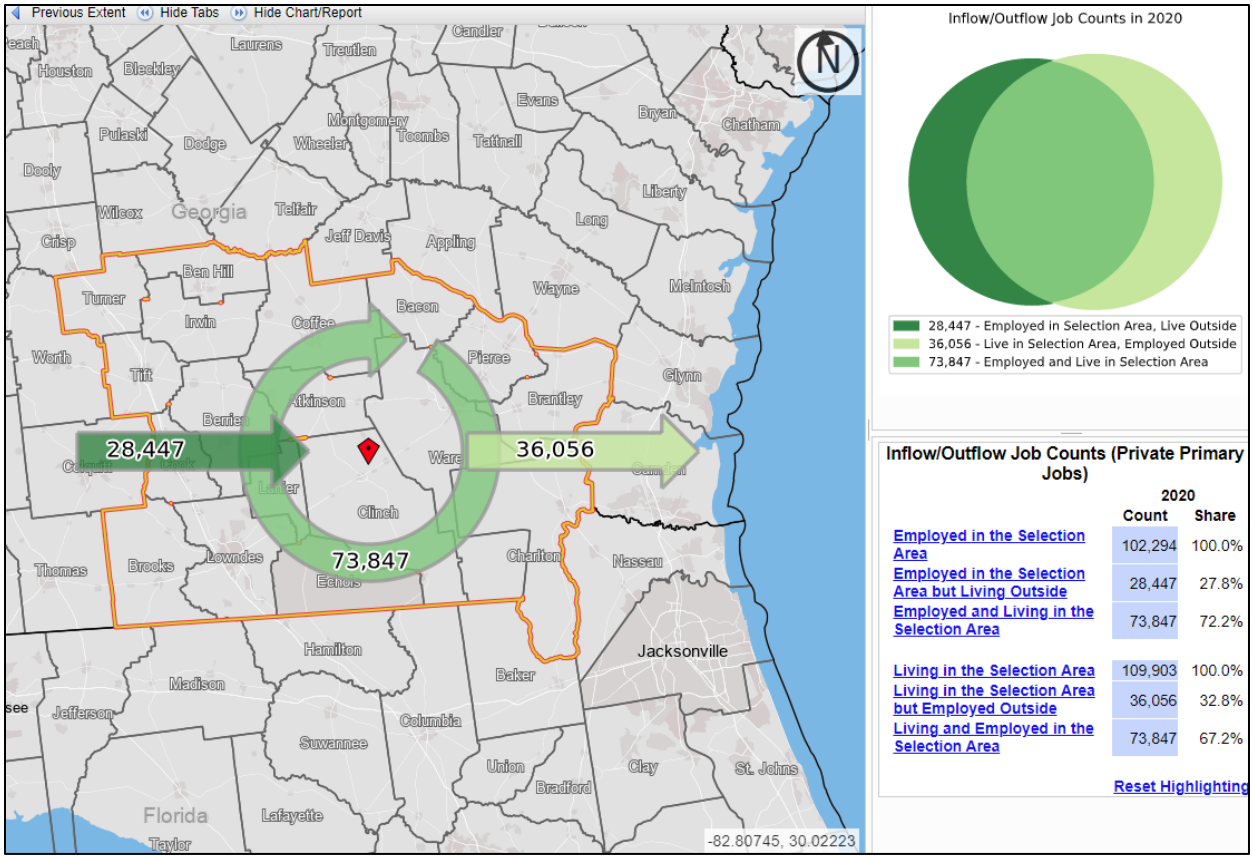


Figure 12. Inflow/Outflow Job Counts (2020) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)

Corresponding data regarding the distance and direction individuals travel between their home and work locations is also available as part of the LEHD data. For 2020, the radar chart in Figure 14 below indicates that individuals residing in the SGRC region were travelling primarily north and northwest, toward the cities of Valdosta (Lowndes County), Douglas (Coffee County), and Waycross (Ware County). Together these destinations comprised 29.6% of all the jobs reported in the SGRC region. The City of Albany (Dougherty County) was the only signifigant single location of job concentration indicated on the report outside of the SGRC region, with 1,562 positions reported in 2020.

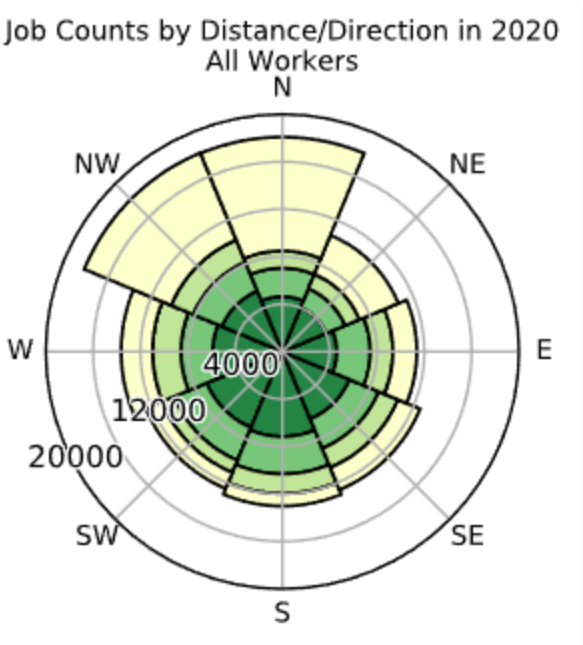


Figure 13: Job Counts by Distance/Direction in 2020, All Workers (2020) W.S. Census Bureau, 2023

2.2.5 Transportation Disadvantaged Communities

As part of the Justice40 Initiative, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has developed definitions for highly disadvantaged communities using publicly available data (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2023). Under this methodology, transportation disadvantaged communities are those that spend more time and money to get to their destination (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2023). This is based off of 22 indicators including commute time over 30 minutes, lack of vehicle access, walkability, transportation costs as a percentage of income, unemployment, poverty, air quality hazards, and other sociodemographic factors (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2023).

For the SGRC area, all eighteen counties in the region have census tracts that are considered transportation disadvantaged (Figure 14). For 11 counties in the area, the entire county meets the definition of transportation disadvantaged.

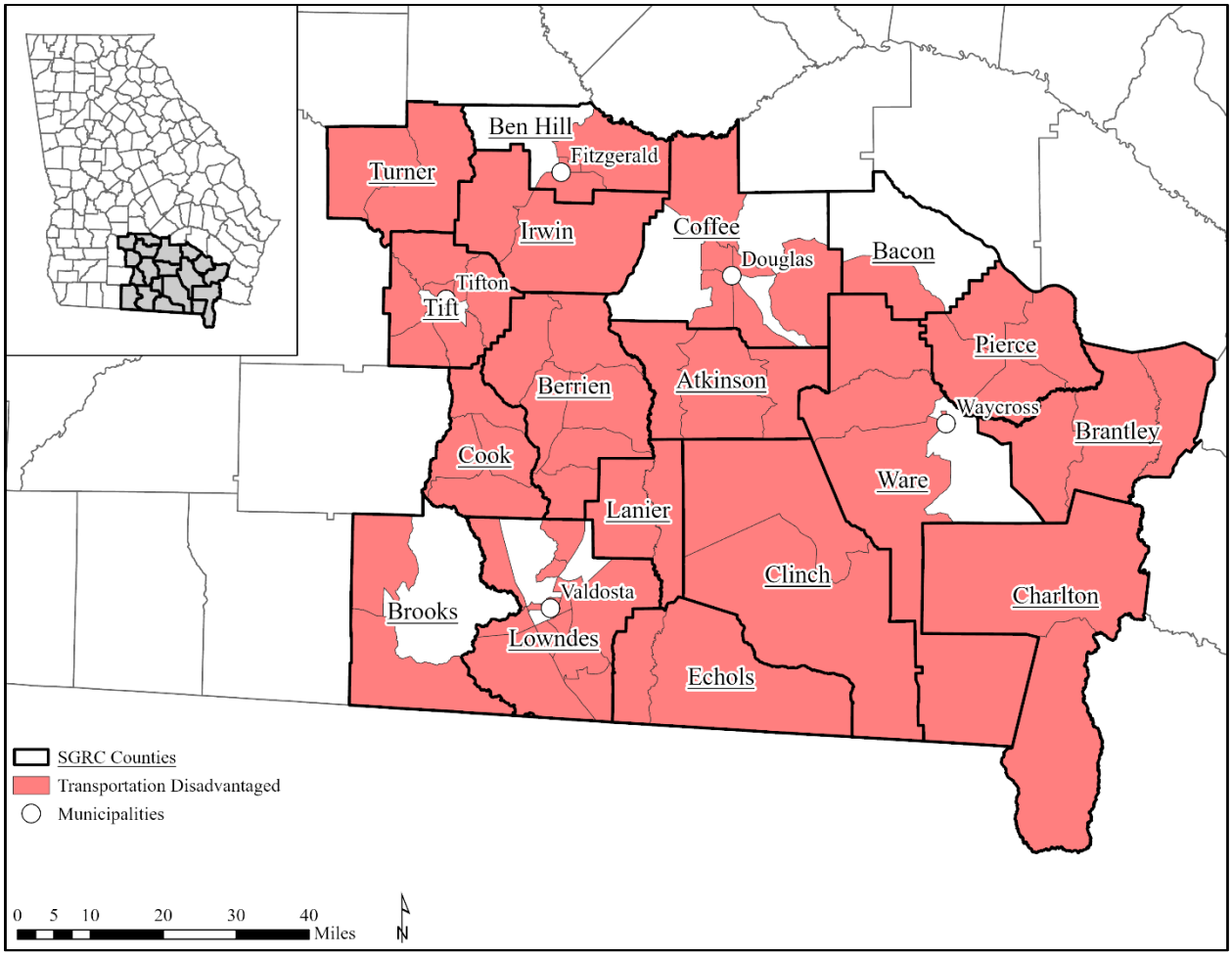


Figure 14. Transportation Disadvantaged Areas (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2023)

2.3 Major Employers

Major employers in the region are primarily categorized as: health care and social assistance; manufacturing; retail trade; education services; and accommodation and food services industries (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2023). According to the Georgia Department of Labor, the top ten employers in the region include (Georgia Department of Labor, 2023):

1. Chaparral Boats, Inc.
2. Coffee Regional Medical Center, Inc.
3. Lowe's Home Center, Inc.
4. OASIS OutSourcing V, Inc.
5. Pilgrim's Pride Corporation
6. Target
7. The Cobalt Group, Inc.
8. The Home Depot
9. Valdosta State University
10. Walmart

The Georgia Department of Labor hosts a tool entitled the 'Georgia Labor Market Explorer' which contains labor force profiles for each county (Georgia Department of Labor, 2023). Within these profiles, the top ten employers for each county in the state are outlined. The research team utilized this information and attempted to spatially locate each of these employers. Of the 180 employers included in the SGRC region, 157 were successfully identified and geocoded for mapping and analysis purposes (Figure 15).

While major employers can be found throughout the SGRC area, there is a gap of major employers in the southeast portion of the region including Charlton, Clinch, Echols, and Ware Counties. This area is primarily occupied by the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. However, some smaller rural communities exist in the region including Fargo, Georgia in Clinch County (population 254 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)) and several unincorporated communities (e.g. St. George, Georgia; Moniac, Georgia).

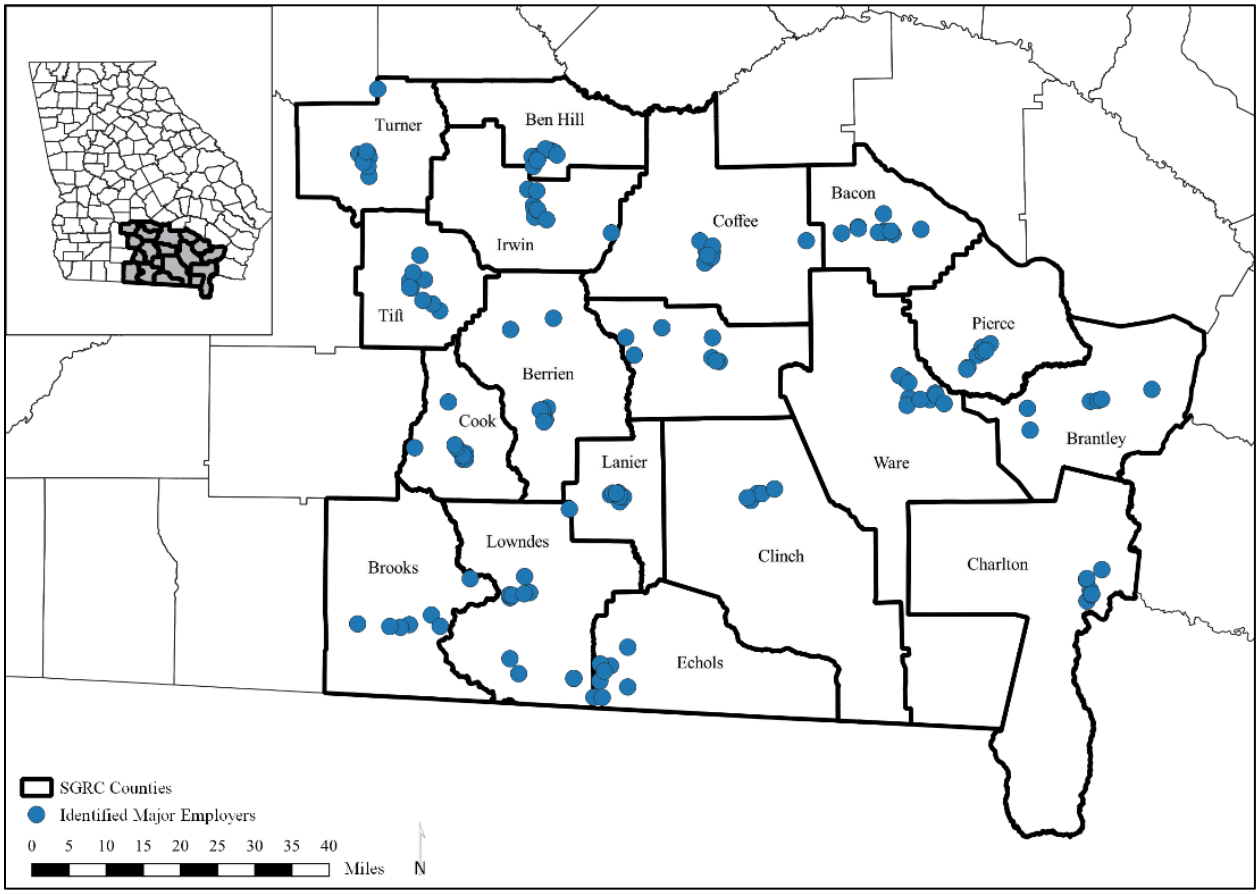


Figure 15. Major Employers in the SGRC Area

2.4 Existing Transportation Providers

2.4.1 SGRC Regional Transit (https://www.sgrc.us/public-transit-services.html)

Fifteen of the eighteen counties within SGRC (Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Coffee, Cook, Irwin, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware) are currently part of the SGRC Regional Transit program. The service is not available in Clinch, Echols, and Lanier Counties. Operating as a demand response system, a 24-hour advanced notice is required to schedule a ride. Riders can request a ride via phone or through the smartphone application "Let's Ride." The service is currently available Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm. A one-way ride up to 10 miles costs $3.00 with an additional $0.50 per mile then after. Trips originating in the urban area within the Valdosta use the local on-demand microtransit service, "Valdosta On Demand."



Figure 16. SGRC Regional Transit Webpage (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2023)

2.4.2 Valdosta On Demand (https://www.valdostacity.com/public-works/valdosta-demand)

Begun in 2021, Valdosta On Demand is an on-demand microtransit service operating within the City of Valdosta. The service is available Monday through Friday from 5:30 am to 9:00 pm. A ride costs $2.00 per trip and $1.00 per extra passenger (riders can bring up to 2 additional passengers). A ride can be requested through the Valdosta On Demand smartphone application or by phone. Popular destinations for the system include: Walmart, South Georgia Regional Library, South Georgia Medical Center, Castle Park Shopping Center, Valdosta State University, Valdosta Mall, Downtown Valdosta, Mildred Hunter Community Center, and Azalea Business Park (City of Valdosta, 2023).

2.5 Regional Planning

Recent planning documents were reviewed to analyze and better understand existing conditions in the SGRC region. This section refers to findings from these planning documents including any relevant goals or objectives which could potentially provide support for a vanpool program.

2.5.1 Southern Georgia Regional Commission, Regional Plan Update 2023

Economic Development Goal: "Enhance economic competitiveness while advancing the Region's workforce, job opportunities, and quality of life for all segments of the community."

Land Use and Transportation Goal: “Encourage land development in suitable areas adjacent to existing infrastructure and support the maintenance and expansion of transportation networks consistent with regional goals.”

Two policies under this goal could include vanpooling as a potential solution:

- Promote alternative transportation choices
- Encourage sharing of parking spaces to address parking needs

The plan notes several areas of rapid development or areas that are seeing higher-than-average growth. Several of these rapid development areas mention business development or industrial park development which may benefit from transportation opportunities like public transit, carpooling, and vanpooling.

- Ben Hill Industrial Airport Area: This location has seen a new industrial park, commercial development, and is the location of a local airport. This area is expected to continue to grow over the coming years.
- Cook County Interchange: This location is close to a large industrial park, an airport, a new Walmart, and an outlet mall. This area sees concerns with ensuring that development does not negatively impact the surrounding community.
- Troupville, Georgia (Brooks County): While Brooks County population is in decline, this area has seen recent business and residential development due to proximity to Valdosta and a direct connection to a major commercial corridor.
- Lowndes County and Moody Air Force Base: Growth along the US 41 North corridor has occurred both north of Valdosta near Moody Air Force Base (MAFB) and south of Valdosta near Lake Park. The MAFB employs over 5,500 military and civilian personnel and the area around the base is expected to continue to grow.
- Ware County Industrial Park (North of Waycross, Georgia): This part of Ware County has seen increased growth in industrial employers due to its proximity to rail and the US 84 corridor.

2.5.2 2022-2026 Southern Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

In 2023 SGRC published an annual update to their comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS). This plan sets goals to solve economic development challenges in the region and sets metrics to define progress. The plan is created in collaboration with regional city and county officials and economic, community, and workforce development stakeholders.

From 2010 to 2020 the region saw a 1.79%increase in population. However, nine counties (Atkinson, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brooks, Clinch, Echols, Irwin, Turner, and Ware) in the SGRC region saw a loss of population. The CEDS notes that this could be due to a lack of job opportunities in this region which has resulted in young professionals leaving the area.

As the region continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, they have found that businesses struggle to recruit and retain employees. The majority of employment opportunities are within the counties of Lowndes, Ware, Coffee, Tift, and Charlton. Not surprisingly, these counties also are represented least in the demographic descriptions where vanpool would be appealing.

The CEDS sets goals to support economic development and resilience in the region with an emphasis on four focus areas: 1) State of the Regional Economy, 2) Transportation, Community Facilities, Infrastructure and Broadband, 3) Education and Workforce Development, and 4) Population and Housing. The plan notes several strategies related to providing resources for employers to fill vacant positions and improving transportation access which additional employment transportation opportunities (like vanpool) could complement.

2.5.3 2018-2022 Southern Georgia Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

This CEDS update came at an interesting time, as the SRGC area starts to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic during which time the SGRC saw skyrocketing unemployment, business closures, supply chain disruptions, and educational gaps due to limited broadband access (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2021). As the region continues to recover, the CEDS aims to support economic development and resilience in the region with a focus on four primary goals:

1. Support the regional economy including existing industry, tourism, and attracting new employers to the region.
2. Support and expand critical infrastructure and future growth including transportation, community facilities, and broadband.
3. Support an educated and skilled workforce through workforce development initiatives.
4. Support community livability in order to retain and attract community members to the region.

Several strategies in the CEDS emphasize a need to provide adequate transportation systems to meet the needs of existing employers and to attract new employers to the region.

2.5.4 Regional Transit Plan

The SGRC completed a regional transit plan that examined the feasibility of a regional public transit system to improve mobility for residents across their eighteen-county region. At the time, while all eighteen counties had some form of human service transportation services (which do not address work-related transportation), only eleven counties were served by a general public transit system.

Public input was gathered via an online survey and stakeholder interviews. Findings showed that most respondents did not utilize the public transit in the region noting that there was either not a service available in their area or that they had access to a private vehicle. For those that did utilize the public transit system in the region, many noted a desire for a more reliable schedule (riders need to request a trip twenty-four hours in advance) and that they would like to see fixed routes implemented in the future. Suggestions for fixed route services included routes which would serve several major apartment complexes and local food markets. It was noted that those living in rural counties without access to transportation could create a “downward spiral in that no transportation meant no access to other services” (Southern Georgia Regional Commission). A regional public transit system was viewed as a net positive by most respondents; however, county officials noted concerns with how to implement such a system. An additional concern was related to counties that border the SGRC area as residents in these counties often travel outside of the region to access services (for example, those in Charlton County often travel to Camden County or Jacksonville, Florida).

A transit demand analysis was conducted to examine socioeconomic factors in the region that may indicate a need for public transit including total households, low-income households, zero-vehicle households, population aged 60 and older, and populations with mobility limitations. Using the Transportation Research Board's TCRP Report 161: Methods for Forecasting Demand and Quantifying Need for Rural Passenger Transportation, the SGRC estimated a need for nearly 195,700 annual one-way trips for general rural public transit across the region (Southern Georgia Regional Commission). The SGRC recommended developing a regional transportation system in order to improve mobility in the region. Potential avenues for future improvements were examined including employment transportation services. It was noted that offering reliable transportation to employment can ensure employees arrive to work on time and that there is an opportunity for public-private partnerships to support employment transportation programs.

Ultimately a demand response regional public transit system, SGRC Regional Transit, was launched in fourteen counties across the region (Atkinson, Bacon, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Coffee, Cook, Irwin, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware) in July 2021. Fares are based on trip distance: trips cost $3.00 plus $0.50 per mile over ten miles. Trips must be booked twenty-four hours in advance either by phone or through a smartphone application (Let's Ride). As of February 2022, the system had provided over 6,391 trips across the region with trips serving those accessing medical appointments and employment (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2022).



Figure 17. Facebook Ad for SRGC Regional Transit (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2022)

2.6 Background Summary

As highlighted by the USDOT Justice40 Initiative, all counties in the SGRC region have some level of transportation disadvantaged communities or those that spend more and take longer to get to their destination (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2023).

Demographically, Lowndes County has the largest population and population density in the region, followed by Tift County. Overall, the region experiences higher levels of poverty compared to the statewide percentage, with Atkinson, Clinch, and Lanier Counties experiencing particularly high levels. Median household income is lower than the statewide median in all eighteen counties. Housing and transportation costs account for a significant portion of a typical household budget in the region, most notably in Clinch County, but overall ranging from 57% to 95%.

Economically, the region has seen overall growth in employment and a decrease in the number of unemployed individuals. However, some counties, including Ben Hill, Coffee, Irwin, and Turner, continue to have higher unemployment rates than the regional average. Disaggregating the data from the county-level to the census tract level, two census tracts - one within Coffee County and one within Charlton County - report some of the highest unemployment rates in the region.

Mean commute times across the SGRC region range from 8.3 minutes to 40.5 minutes. Longer commute times can be seen across the SGRC region with Brantley and Charlton Counties seeing countywide average commute times around 30 minutes. With the average cost to own a car nearing $11,000, long commutes can be quite costly (American Automobile Association, 2022), promoting the potential cost savings that can occur with vanpooling is one potential avenue to market such a program.

While recent planning documents do not specifically mention vanpooling, a vanpool program could be one option in a portfolio of potential transportation programming focused on addressing regional transportation needs and supporting economic development in the SGRC region. Several plans note a need to promote additional transportation choices and address parking needs (Southern Georgia Regional Commission, 2023). Vanpooling is one mobility solution which could address these needs while improving access to employment which can benefit both employers and their employees.

The regional transit plan conducted by SGRC recognizes the need for a regional public transit system. Public input focused on the desire for a more reliable schedule and fixed routes that serve residential and commercial areas. The plan also acknowledges the importance of transportation access in rural counties and the potential for public-private partnerships to support employment transportation programs. As a response, in 2021, the SGRC launched the SGRC Regional Transit System, a demand response regional public transit system, in fifteen counties. The system provides trips for medical appointments and employment, helping improve mobility and address transportation needs in the region. Implementation of a vanpool program could complement the local public transit system by widening the pool of potential riders as vanpooling could provide a more expedient connection to work when compared to traditional public transit methods.

Considering all of the above information, a clearer picture emerges of where there may be gaps in providing transportation to those needing to access employment as shown in Table 5. The cells marked with an “X” and shaded in Table 5 indicate counties associated with each criteria (column header) which may benefit from a vanpool program.

Table 5: Summary of Background Information

County	Metropolitan Statistical Area or Micropolitan Statistical Area Present	Higher Unemployment Rates	Higher Percentage of People Living Under the Federal Poverty Level	Higher Percentage of Population Age 18 to 24	Higher Housing & Transportation Costs	Higher Percentage Zero Vehicle Households	Higher Percentage of Carpool Commuters	Counties Opting Out of Demand Response Regional Public Transit System	Employment Opportunities Noted in Regional Planning
Atkinson			X		X		X		
Bacon			X						
Ben Hill	X	X	X						
Berrien							X		
Brantley	X								
Brooks									
Charlton									
Clinch			X		X	X	X	X	
Coffee	X	X							X
Cook				X			X		
Echols								X	
Irwin		X				X			
Lanier			X		X	X		X	
Lowndes	X			X					X
Pierce									
Tift	X			X			X		X
Turner		X	X		X	X	X		
Ware	X								X

Overall, the following counties appear to exhibit comparatively lower levels of transportation need: Brantley, Brooks, Lowndes, Pierce, Tuft, and Ware. Based on the data and research provided here, the Counties of Clinch, Lanier, and Turner would stand to benefit the most from new employment transportation options like vanpools. Additionally, residents in Echols County could see benefits from a vanpool program since they are not currently part of the existing public transit system.

3 Literature Review

Employers and employees have a shared interest in ensuring that commuting to work is affordable and accessible. While many choose to commute to work using a private automobile, there are often economic or practical reasons that this may not be feasible, including high gas prices, congestion, or limited parking. Alternative modes exist for commuters and can be very beneficial for those facing long commutes to work. These include public transit, carpooling, and vanpooling.

Public transit like buses, trains, and light rail can provide access to employment. However, these modes often do not exist in more rural areas or do not operate during certain hours (e.g., early morning, late night, weekends).

Carpooling involves a group of people (at least two occupants) sharing a vehicle to commute to work. The 2022 Transportation Statistics Annual Report notes that nearly 7.79%of Americans carpool to work (Hu, et al., 2022).

Vanpooling offers another reliable and affordable option to commute to work. Similar to carpooling, vanpooling allows larger groups of individuals (typically between 5-15 passengers) to share a ride to work in a common vehicle. This commute option can be extremely cost effective compared to commuting via a single occupancy vehicle since vanpooling allows members to share all associated costs. Commute with Enterprise estimates that vanpool members can save around $6,000 per year by commuting via vanpool (Commute with Enterprise, 2022). Findings from a survey of vanpool users found that that drivers with an income of $25,000 to $75,000 are slightly more likely to consider a carpool or vanpool (Deitrick, 2010). Shift workers and those with limited access to a personal vehicle or public transit are more likely to consider a vanpool.

All of these modes can be used together to improve access to employment and reduce the financial burden of commuting to work. For the SGRC area, public transit is available and can serve individuals on an on-demand basis. However, the public transit system does require a twenty-four-hour advance notice to schedule. Additionally, the system does not currently operate late into the evening or on weekends. Vanpooling is an option that could complement the current public transit in the SGRC region by helping to fill the gaps and provide service during these hours for overnight shift workers and those who work on weekends. Additionally, vanpooling is an efficient mode for those with long distance commutes. In fact, vanpools had the longest average trip length nationally of all modes at 39 miles. (Federal Transit Administration, 2022)

This section provides a high-level overview of literature review findings which focus on vanpool models, benefits, funding sources, best practices, and case studies. An annotated bibliography is provided in Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography

3.1 Vanpool Models

Vanpool can be described as being represented by one of the following four models:

- **Third Party** – a third-party would operate and lease vanpools and vanpool operations. The third-party can engage in a number of services including, acquiring vehicles, vehicle maintenance,

vanpool invoicing, vanpool recruitment, driver checks/training, etc. This model is becoming increasingly popular; Commute with Enterprise is most prevalent in this arena.

- **Employer Sponsored** – a company would purchase or lease vanpool vehicles for use by their employees. It can increase employee recruitment and retention by providing a cost-effective means to travel reliably to work.
- **Public Transit Operated** – a public transit system would operate the vanpool program as a part their services offered.
- **Owner Operator** – individuals would purchase or lease the vanpool vehicle and would collect fares from riders. This model is less common as it places the risk upon a private individual.

3.2 Benefits

- Cost Effective
    - The costs of commuting via private vehicle can be costly, particularly for those in a rural area where commute distances are typically longer (StreetLight Data, 2018). Utilizing AAA's average ownership costs per mile from 2021 ($0.67), findings show that the average person commuting using a private vehicle to travel 50 miles roundtrip, five days a week, spends about $33.50 per day, about $703.50 per month, or $8,442 annually (American Automobile Association, 2021). This cost includes fixed and variable costs like fuel, maintenance, insurance, etc. The average vanpool member spends around $90-$120 per month. Therefore, the monthly cost savings are $580 or more. Recall that the median SGRC area household income is $39,632 (Table 3). By saving $580 monthly, an SGRC resident acquires approximately 18% back into their monthly budget. Furthermore, these cost savings can increase drastically with soaring fuel prices.
    - Of all public transit modes reported in the National Transit Database, vanpool had the lowest reported cost to operate per hour at $39.49 in 2021 (U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration, 2022).
- Improves Personal Mobility
    - Vanpooling provides users with a cost effective and reliable form of transportation to work. A vanpool can open employment opportunities to those without access to a private vehicle or public transit.
- Increases Potential Employment Pool
    - A vanpool program can increase the pool of potential employees to employers by providing a reliable form of transportation to employment.
- Reduces Employee Absenteeism and Turnover
    - Providing a reliable form of transportation to work can reduce employee absenteeism and turnover. A 2016 study by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that companies lose around $1,685 per employee, per year due to absenteeism (University of Nebraska, Omaha - Center for Public Affairs Research, 2019). Employee turnover is estimated to exceed 100%of an employee's annual salary (Bryant & Allen, 2013). These costs include the need to train new employees, loss of organizational knowledge, and loss of productivity (Bryant & Allen, 2013).
- Reduces Wear and Tear on Private Vehicles

    - Utilizing a vanpool program reduces the number of miles driven in a private vehicle. This not only reduces wear and tear on an individual's private vehicle but can also make that vehicle available to others in a household.
- Flexible
    - Vanpool programs provide flexibility to members when compared to fixed route public transit systems which have set stops and cannot deviate from a route. Vanpool members can decide where members can be picked up and dropped off (at home vs. at a park-n-ride or other shared destination) and even whether the pool will deviate on occasion (coffee run, late start at work, social gathering at the end of a week, etc.).

3.3 Funding Sources Utilized

- Passenger Fares
    - Passenger fares are generally set based on the number of vanpool members and commute distance.
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA) – Section 5307, Urbanized Area Formula Grants
    - Section 5307 funding can be utilized by urbanized areas for transit capital, planning, and operating assistance and for transportation-related planning in urbanized areas (incorporated areas with a population of 50,000 or more) (Federal Transit Administration, n.d.). The program provides an 80% federal share for capital projects and a 50% share for operating assistance (Federal Transit Administration, n.d.).
- FTA – Section 5311, Formula Grants for Rural Areas
    - Section 5311 funding can be utilized for capital, planning, and operating assistance to support public transit in rural areas (population less than 50,000) (Federal Transit Administration, n.d.). The program provides an 80% federal share for capital projects and a 50% share for operating assistance (Federal Transit Administration, n.d.).
- Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) Funds
    - CMAQ provides funding to areas that are in nonattainment or maintenance (former nonattainment areas) for greenhouse gas emissions. Those within and outside of attainment can be found here: CMAQ funding can be used for capital expenses otherwise eligible for FTA funding as long as they provide benefits related to improving air quality (Federal Transit Administration, n.d.). These funds are generally available to communities within a metropolitan planning organization (MPO) area; *NOTE: Only Lowndes County is within an MPO for the SGRC area. However, they are ineligible for this funding source because they meet the required standards for air quality.*

3.4 Things to Consider

- Organizational Control
    - Local or regional control may provide better opportunities to tailor a program to fit area commuter needs, whereas state or third-party control may provide better visibility to a program and provide better access to resources (labor, funding, etc.).
- Small vs. Large Vehicles
    - While larger vans can help keep passenger fares lower, smaller vans are easier to maneuver and may also allow for more flexibility in where riders are picked up (door-to-door vs. van-and-ride).

- Vanpool Fares
    - The most common fares were based on number of riders and commute distance.
- Vanpool Drivers
    - Vanpool drivers are typically volunteers. Some vanpool programs mentioned utilizing a single driver with one or two backup drivers identified in case they are needed, whereas other programs utilize a driver rotation. A driver often needs to take a driver safety or defensive driving course. A program should consider what incentives will be provided to vanpool drivers (generally vanpool drivers ride for free) and what requirements will be placed upon drivers (training, invoicing, etc.).

3.5 Keys to Success

- Promote the Program
    - A vanpool program is not a one-and-done process; this type of program will require long-term promotion in order to remain successful. Employers can market the program as part of their recruitment package, through employee events, and through employee communications (newsletters, flyers in employee breakroom, etc.). Unified branding, including an easily identifiable program logo, website, and branded vehicles, is common practice.
- Guaranteed Ride Home Programs
    - A guaranteed ride home (GRH) program provides peace of mind for vanpool participants that they will be able to get a ride home in case of emergency. *All programs reviewed had some form of GRH program.* These programs had a set number of times per year that a participant could utilize a GRH. Example emergencies included illnesses, family emergencies, and working overtime. Although there may have been a few instances where a transportation network company (TNC) (e.g., Lyft, Uber) was utilized, overall, these programs were generally utilizing local taxi companies, company vehicles, or rental vehicles in order to provide rides, as TNCs often do not exist in the rural context.
- Employer Incentives
    - Several incentives were considered by employers to promote vanpool use by employees. These included preferred parking, a vehicle made available for emergency trips, and employee subsidies. Additionally, under the IRS Transportation Fringe Benefits, employees can use pre-tax salary towards public transit or vanpool commuting costs (Internal Revenue Service, 2023). Currently, an employee can set aside up to $300 per month to pay for combined commuter highway vehicle transportation (which includes vanpool) and transit passes and an additional $300 per month for qualified parking (Internal Revenue Service, 2023).

3.6 Rural Vanpool Program Examples from the Literature

Information about six rural vanpool programs was found in the literature: Ben Franklin Transit Vanpool Program, Black Butte Ranch, CommuteInfo, Go NEWhere, iRide Vanpool, and Kings Area Rural Transit (Figure 18). This section provides a short description of them based on the literature. In a subsequent section, the contemporary experience of two of these rural vanpool programs is discussed: Go NEWhere and iRide Vanpool.



Figure 18. Six Rural Vanpool Program Examples

3.6.1 iRide Vanpool, Missoula, MT (http://www.mrtma.org/)

iRide is operated by the Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Association (MRTMA). This vanpool program began in response to expected congestion related to planned road construction in 1997 and is still going strong today (Mielke, 2006). iRide Vanpool currently runs 15 routes serving three counties. Monthly fares range from $82 to $141 depending on commute distance (Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Assocaition, n.d.). The program leverages CMAQ funding, and match from the city of Missoula, Missoula County, the Missoula Parking Commission, and the University of Montana (Mielke, 2006). A GRH program is offered for members which utilizes local taxi companies and transportation network companies. *This vanpool program is unique in that it allows occasional riders to join a vanpool on a space-availability basis* (Mielke, 2006). Potential riders just need to call MRTMA if they need a ride and will be put in touch with a local pool if there is availability.

3.6.2 Ben Franklin Transit Vanpool Program, Tri-Cities, Washington (https://www.bft.org/services/vanpool/)

Ben Franklin Transit (BFT) in the Tri-Cities area of Washington State has been running a successful vanpool program since the 1980's – the program will be fifty years old in the near future! BFT owns,

maintains, manages, insures, and licenses 6-, 12-, and 15-passenger vans to commuters who have rides that start or end within their service area (Conrick, 2008). In order to start a vanpool, a group must have at least five commuters. Each group needs to designate a coordinator/bookkeeper and two drivers. Fares are based on the number of round-trip miles, days per week, and number of vanpool members. A GRH program is offered to members (Ben Franklin Transit, n.d.).

3.6.3 Black Butte Ranch, Bend, Oregon (https://www.commuteoptions.org/vanpool/)

Black Butte Ranch is a popular resort destination in Central Oregon, where employees were commuting nearly sixty miles from Redmond, Oregon (UrbanTrans, n.d.). To address employee recruitment and retention, Black Butte Ranch worked with the nearby Bend Oregon Commute Options Program. This program partnered with a third-party provider, VPSI, Inc., to implement a vanpool program for seasonal employees. The program has since been acquired by a new third-party provider, Commute with Enterprise. Vanpools receive a subsidy of $500 per month from the Commute Options Program (Commute Options, 2022).

3.6.4 CommuteInfo, Southwestern Pennsylvania (https://commuteinfo.org/)

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission (SPC) operates a vanpool program across ten counties in southwest Pennsylvania (CommuteInfo, n.d.). SPC launched the vanpool program in 1973 during the energy crisis and the program is still successful today, more than fifty years later! SPC contracted with the third-party provider, VPSI, Inc., to implement the program. VPSI, Inc. has since been acquired by Commute with Enterprise. Fares are based on the number of people in the vanpool and the commute distance. A GRH program, with a variety of options (taxi, rental cars, public transit) is offered to members (Deitrick, 2010).

3.6.5 Go NEWhere, Nebraska (https://www.nebraskatransit.com/statewide-vanpool)

The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) contracted with Commute with Enterprise to provide a statewide vanpool program. The Go NEWhere Program offers up to a $400 monthly subsidy to each vanpool to reduce out of pocket costs to vanpool riders (Shared Use Mobility Center, 2019). As of 2019, twenty-nine groups were registered through the Go NEWhere program (Shared Use Mobility Center, 2019). The most common form of vanpool was urban workers traveling to rural factory jobs (twenty-six vanpools). Once a vanpool group is formed, they can sign up for a vanpool using the NebraskaTransit.com website. This website allows participants to choose a vehicle (van or a sport utility vehicle (SUV)) and provides a monthly cost estimate (including the $400 per month subsidy from NDOT) (Nebraska Public Transit, 2023). A GRH program is offered through Commute with Enterprise, which members can use up to twice a year.

3.6.6 Kings Area Rural Transit (KART), King County, California (https://www.kartbus.org/vanpool/)

KART partnered with Commute with Enterprise to provide residents and students with a method to commute to work or education (Kings Area Regional Transit, 2023). Vanpools receive a monthly subsidy of $350 from KART to help reduce out of pocket costs (Community Transportation Association of America, n.d.). The program has been utilized by students to access a local community college.

3.7 General Steps to Establish a Rural Vanpool Program

Drawing from the rural vanpool program examples identified above, a basic outline of steps required to initiate a vanpool program are offered for consideration below.

1. Identify Resources
    a. Consider funding and staff available to support a program.
2. Identify Employee Transportation Needs
    a. Gather information on employee needs through surveys, focus groups, or lunch sessions. This feedback can help an agency understand how employees currently commute to work and at what time, potential commuting challenges including a lack of transportation options or lack of reliable options, and what could compel an employee to change their current commute mode.
3. Review Commute Mode Alternatives and Determine Which Option Can Best Fit Your Needs
    a. Alternatives could include things like vanpool, rideshare, public transit, and other modes of transportation. Consider which options are available in your region and which can best meet your needs.
4. Set Program Goals
    a. Some examples Include: increase pool of potential employees, reduce employee absenteeism, improve the economics of the region's residents and consequently the region by putting more money back into resident's monthly budgets.
5. Market and Launch Program
    a. Consider how you will tell people about the program; a variety of methods is best. Marketing can include brochures, posters, emails, lunch presentations, resource fairs, employee onboarding guides, and more. Once you launch the program, continue to market the program.
6. Periodically Evaluate the Program
    a. Evaluate the program using employee surveys or focus groups to gather feedback on what's working and what may need improvement.

4 Contemporary Case Studies of Vanpools

Short case studies were developed following a series of in-depth interviews with five vanpool programs across the United States: Commuter Co-Op (Vermont), Go NEWhere (Nebraska), iRide Vanpool (Montana), Lowcountry Go (South Carolina), and NY511 Rideshare (New York) (Figure 19). Case studies provide an overview of the vanpool program; program operations; current ridership; funding; marketing; challenges and lessons learned; and next steps for the program. Important aspects of these case studies and lessons learned are provided in this section. The full case studies are provided in Appendix C: Vanpool Program Case Studies.

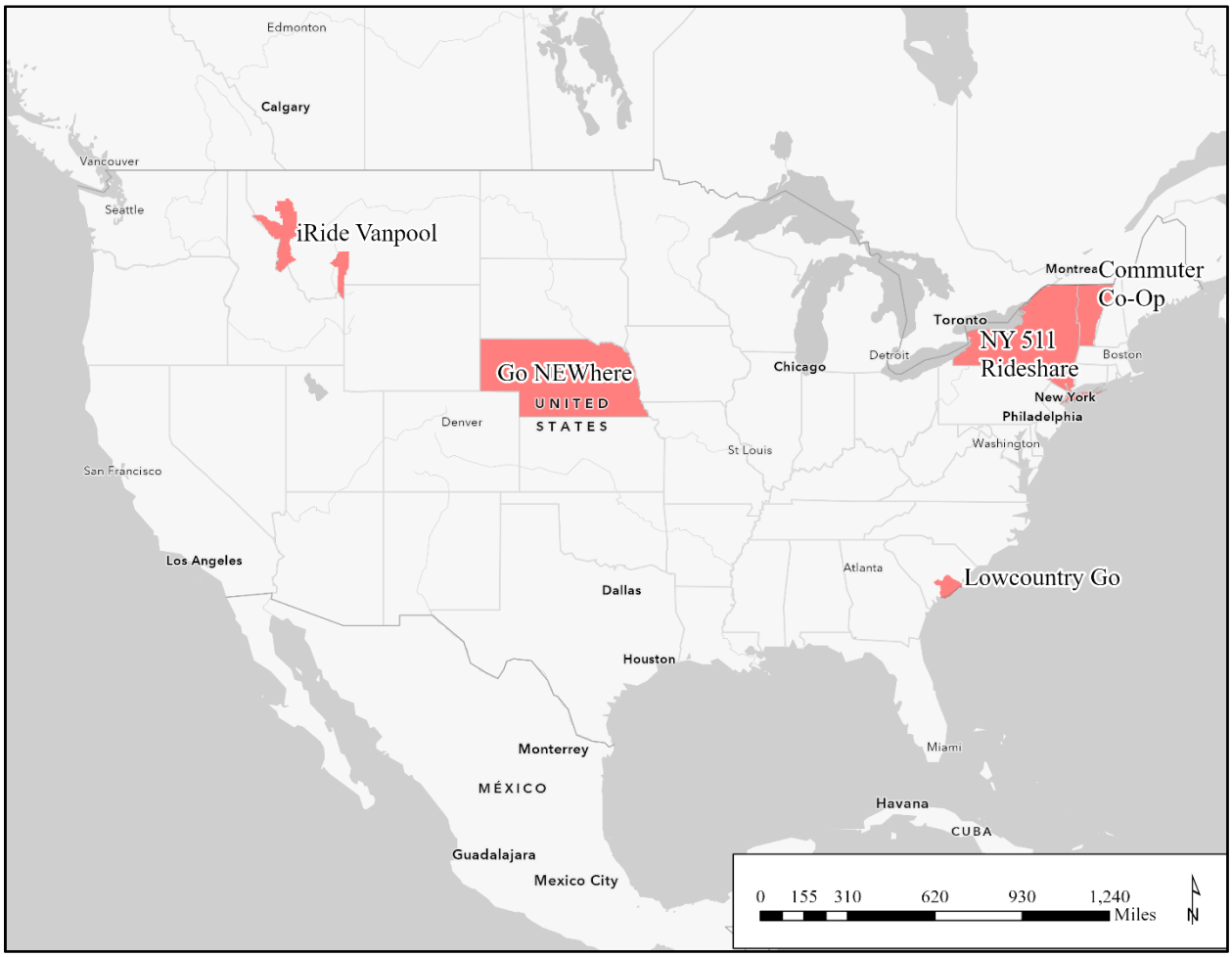


Figure 19. Case Study Locations

4.1 Commuter Co-Op (Vermont)

The Vermont Commuter Co-Op statewide vanpool program was implemented to fill in the gaps found within public transit service across this very rural state. This program is a part of the Vermont Agency of Transportation's (VTrans') Go! Vermont Program and has been in operation for over ten years.

Commute with Enterprise operates and recruits members to the Vermont Commuter Co-Op program. Currently, an estimated seventeen vanpools are in operation across the state, with only one vanpool

traveling to Vermont's largest city (Burlington). Most of the vanpools (approximately 90%) are serving rural areas across the state. The program has found success with larger employers (200+ employees) and shift work employers (warehouses, distribution centers, manufacturing). Additionally, the program has found success providing vanpools for seasonal employees to ski and snowboard resorts which are located in very rural areas.

If an employer is interested in creating a vanpool, Commute with Enterprise will work with anonymized employee data to identify employees who live in close proximity to one another (around five miles) which would enable the development of a vanpool. Commute with Enterprise will then work with the employer to facilitate a meeting with these employees to allow Commute with Enterprise to explain the vanpool program and its benefits, often noting the cost savings with vanpool over driving a personal vehicle to work. The employer will act as the vanpool sponsor. A vanpool coordinator will record mileage, gas expenses, and collect fares from vanpool members to send to Commute with Enterprise.

Vanpools must have at least four people; however, vanpool vehicles must have at least seven seatbelts to meet federal funding requirements. Each vanpool must identify a driver and a back-up driver. Drivers must be at least twenty-five years old and be able to pass a driver records check. Vanpool members must be at least eighteen years old. Vanpool members collectively choose pick-up and drop off locations and times. Vanpools tend to use a central location like a park-n-ride, big box retailer, or a church parking lot.

The vanpool lease includes full collision coverage, liability insurance, vehicle maintenance, and twenty-four-hour roadside assistance. As an incentive, drivers are allowed to use the van for personal use up to 10% of the total mileage a vanpool travels per month. VTrans utilizes both FTA Section 5307 and 5311 Formula Funds and CMAQ Funds to pay for the vanpool program. CMAQ funds cannot be used to fund operations, instead these funds are used to pay for administrative support for the vanpool program. FTA Section 5307 and 5311 Formula Funds can be utilized to pay for operations of the program. VTrans subsidizes up to 75% of the cost of the vanpool for the first three months, and 50% then after to help reduce costs to vanpool members. This subsidy amounts to around $600 per month.

Go! Vermont offers a GRH through the vanpool program which can be utilized in case of emergency. The GRH program is utilized, on average, only once a month.

The vanpool program is marketed on a dedicated program website which includes information and a video which describes vanpool and how to get started. In addition, the vanpool program is marketed on social media, through local media campaigns, and during business outreach. All marketing includes the Go! Vermont, VTrans, and Commute with Enterprise logos which create consistency across marketing efforts. VTrans has found that word of mouth is their most successful form of marketing. For example, once one ski and snowboard resort saw the benefits of vanpooling, other resorts wanted to try out the program.

The Vermont Commuter Co-Op vanpool program shared several lessons learned.

- **Consider Additional Program Provisions When Developing Your Request for Proposal (RFP)**: Vermont needed to consider winter driving conditions particularly for employees traveling to ski and snowboard resorts. VTrans currently pays additional funds to ensure that vanpools have snow tires during the winter and intends to include this provision in future RFPs.
- **Engaging Employers Takes Time**: Commute with Enterprise noted that it can be challenging finding the right person within an organization to promote the program. They found success in being persistent and highlighting vanpool benefits and the flexibility of the program.
- **Word of Mouth Is Your Best Marketing**: Commuter Co-Op has seen program growth due to word of mouth, particularly for ski and snowboard resorts across the state.

4.2 Go NEWhere (Nebraska)

Seeking a turnkey vanpool program to address gaps in public transit across the state, the Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) spent two years crafting a request for proposals (RFP) which was released in 2017. When planning for the program, NDOT assumed that it would be primarily utilized by commuters traveling between two of Nebraska's largest cities, Lincoln and Omaha; however, this program was been most successful in Nebraska's rural areas.

The Go NEWhere program is operated by Commute with Enterprise. Commute with Enterprise handles procuring vanpool vehicles, vehicle maintenance and replacement, driver training, coordination of vanpool members and drivers, and program reporting. Any individual with a valid driver's license who can pass a driver record check can serve as a vanpool driver. Vanpool drivers are responsible for safely operating the vehicle and taking the vehicle for regular maintenance (Commute with Enterprise covers the maintenance costs). As an incentive, the program allows a driver to utilize the vanpool vehicle for personal use up to around 1,000 miles monthly. Driver fares (e.g., discounts) are chosen collectively by vanpool members. Most vanpools meet at a central location (e.g., big box retailer, church, park-n-ride) and Commute with Enterprise will assist with identifying an appropriate pick-up location if needed.

Commuters lease the vanpool vehicle from Commute with Enterprise. The monthly cost per vehicle ranges from $1,000 to $1,200. NDOT provides a subsidy of $400 per month to help reduce costs to commuters. NDOT funds the vanpool program via FTA Section 5311 Formula Funds and CMAQ funds.

In January 2023, around fifty vanpools were in operation across the state; however, NDOT noted that the total number of vanpools tends to fluctuate over time. Commute with Enterprise leases vehicles on a month-to-month basis which allows for interested employers to try out the formation of vanpools without a long-term commitment. Most employers who utilize and support the vanpool program are food processing plants, manufacturing plants, and other industrial employers. These employers often offer an additional subsidy for the vanpool and often fund GRHs.

The Go NEWhere program utilizes a consistent brand logo on all marketing materials along with the NDOT logo and the Commute with Enterprise logo. The program is advertised on a dedicated program website, via vehicle wraps, and statewide press releases. NDOT has found that the most successful form of marketing is word of mouth. NDOT notes that identifying the appropriate contact within an organization (often a human resource representative or high-level manager) can be the most challenging aspect of promoting and coordinating a vanpool.

NDOT shared several lessons learned.

- **Consider Additional Program Provisions When Developing Your RFP**: For NDOT this included the need to include provisions to meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Through an internal state review, NDOT determined that information on accessibility needed to be prominent on vanpool program materials.
- **Vanpools Fluctuate and Take Time to Evolve**: The total number of vanpools has changed over time. Commute with Enterprise's month-to-month leasing of vehicles allows for flexibility where commuters can try out vanpool and if it does not work out, they can easily return the vehicle.
- **Turnkey Programs Mean Fewer Staff Resources**: Commute with Enterprise handles the day-to-day challenges of vanpool operations allowing for fewer NDOT staff to keep the program operational.
- **Urban Areas May Not Be Primary Users**: NDOT found that most their vanpools are traveling to or from a rural area, not between the two largest cities in the state.
- **Engaging Employers Takes Time**: NDOT noted that it can be difficult to find the right person within an organization to promote the vanpool program, particularly within larger employers. Often the appropriate person is a human resources representative or a higher-level decision maker.

4.3 iRide (Montana)

The iRide Vanpool is operated and administered by MRTMA. iRide Vanpool was originally implemented to reduce congestion during planned construction on US 93 in the Missoula Ravalli County area but has since grown and expanded multimodal transportation offerings in the region.

MRTMA has two full-time staff and two part-time staff who provide administrative support to the vanpool program. Interested commuters can fill out a rideshare application on the vanpool program website. These applications are reviewed by MRTMA to pool together potential riders. Vanpools can also form when employers reach out to MRTMA to have someone explain the benefits of vanpooling. Some employers will also sponsor a vanpool.

The program utilizes seven-passenger hybrid minivans (Toyota Siennas) and thirteen-passenger gasoline-powered vans. At least four passengers commuting to work at least four days a week are required to start a vanpool. Vanpools riders typically meet at one of the twenty-seven park-n-ride lots in the region located along major corridors. MRTMA allows the vanpools to have some level of flexibility on the route as long as all riders agree. For example, one vanpool asked for permission to travel to a movie as a group on a Friday before heading home; this request, or a similar request, typically only comes in about once a month. Drivers have also been allowed to use the van to travel to a medical appointment during their workday.

Currently iRide has sixteen vanpool routes serving sixty-seven commuters in Ravalli, Mineral, Lake, and Missoula Counties. Routes are designed to best accommodate riders' needs. Vanpool fares are based on distance traveled and the total number of days traveled per week. On average, it costs $0.09 per mile to ride the vanpool. A primary driver and two to three backup drivers are required to initiate a vanpool. Generally, the primary driver will operate the van three days a week and a backup driver will cover two days. An individual must be twenty-five years old and pass a driver records check to be a vanpool driver.

MRTMA allows individuals under the age of twenty-five to serve as a vanpool driver if they have a commercial driver's license (CDL), as a vanpool consists of drivers for the University of Montana's bus system. Individuals under the age of eighteen can ride the vanpool. However, if they do not have a driver's license, MRTMA will require the rider to be accompanied by a parent or guardian. This policy was created because a situation occurred where a minor was not picked up from the park-n-ride at the end of the day, resulting in a safety concern for MRTMA.

Van maintenance is handled by MRTMA staff while vanpool riders are at work. MRTMA has investigated transitioning so that the driver would handle the maintenance but were told by drivers that they would end their participation in the program if such a change was made. For instances if van maintenance will take longer than normal (e.g., parts are not available), MRTMA will replace the vanpool's vehicle with one of their spare vehicles so there are no commute disruptions. Vanpool vehicles are equipped with an in-vehicle monitoring system from T Mobile which records if the driver speeds, brakes hard, or takes a corner at a high speed. If such behavior is reported, MRTMA proactively reaches out to the driver to correct their behavior.

MRTMA provides a GRH program which allows vanpool users to be reimbursed for trips home once per month utilizing local taxi service, public transit, or TNC (e.g., Lyft or Uber). It was noted that while provided, the GRH program is rarely utilized.

MRTMA uses FTA Section 5311 Formula Funding and CMAQ funds from the local metropolitan planning organization (MPO) to fund the vanpool program. Section 5311 funds are used to cover administrative and preventative maintenance costs. CMAQ funds are used to cover vanpool operations. The first vehicles for the iRide Vanpool program were leased from an FTA Section 5307 fleet. Since then, MRTMA received earmarked funds from a state senator to purchase vehicles for the program. On average, a minivan costs MRTMA around $550 per month and the larger thirteen-passenger van costs around $750 per month. These costs include insurance, fuel cards, a cell phone, and vehicle maintenance.

iRide Vanpool is marketed using vehicle wraps, radio advertisements, brochures, and a dedicated website which provides basic information on how to use the program. MRTMA has noted that word of mouth has been their best form of advertising.

MRTMA shared several lessons learned from the iRide Vanpool Program.

- **Create Rider and Driver Policies**: Conflicts between vanpool members can occur. MRTMA has Rider and Driver Policies in place to handle any challenges that may arise and will often meet with individuals involved to discuss options. The in-vehicle monitoring system helps MRTMA be proactive in ensuring the safety of vanpool members and helps reduce insurance costs for the program.
- **Reduce Requirements on Drivers**: The iRide Vanpool program requires drivers to collect and send passenger fares to MRTMA. Drivers must also send rider reports which note who is riding the van and on which days. MRTMA helps reduce demands on the drivers by handling maintenance for the vanpool during the workday. As an incentive, if a driver operates the van two full days per week, their fare is covered for the entire week.

4.4 Lowcountry Go (South Carolina)

The Lowcountry Go vanpool program was implemented as a five-year, grant-run vanpool program serving the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG) region in South Carolina. The South Carolina Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) serve as partners for the program, which formally launched in 2020 amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of the vanpool program was to provide high-quality, affordable service which would complement existing public transit in the region by filling the gaps (e.g., outside of current operating hours and to areas not currently served by existing routes) as well as reduce congestion and parking needs in employment areas.

At least four commuters are required to start a vanpool. Vans can accommodate seven to fifteen passengers. The vanpool vehicles can only be used for trips to and from work. The program is open to any commuters over the age of eighteen and those under eighteen years old may participate with a guardian signature. Drivers must be at least twenty-five years old and have had their license for at least three years. Drivers are responsible for safe operation of the van, basic maintenance (which is paid for by BCDCOG), collecting passenger fares for submission to BCDCOG, and completing a monthly mileage and expense report. Vanpool members choose their route and where the van is stored. Vans for the program were acquired from a nearby transportation provider. A GRH program can be leveraged by vanpool members no more than three times a year for up to $55 each time.

Vanpool participants pay $30 per month for the first six months of the vanpool. Then after, the cost of the vanpool is based on average daily round-trip miles, the number of days the vanpool operates in a week, and the number of riders in the van. Funding for the vanpool program was obtained through FTA Section 5307 Formula Funds. The grant funding was used to purchase the vehicles, pay for vehicle maintenance, and pay for the program administrator's salary. BCDCOG considered contracting through a third-party; however, they found that the costs to the vanpool members were significantly lower if they ran the program in-house.

Currently the program has only two vanpools in operation, as growth has been slow due to challenges of launching a program amid the COVID-19 pandemic. One vanpool serves employees working the night shift at a big box retailer when public transit service is not available. The second vanpool serves employees at a local restaurant that has no nearby public transit service and limited parking during the peak tourist season. The restaurant hires international students who live in an apartment building during the tourist season. While the students cannot serve as the vanpool driver (as they do not have a U.S. driver's license), the restaurant's general manager and another server drove for the vanpool. This vanpool is subsidized by the restaurant and only operates during the tourist season. BCDCOG continues to work to expand the program through outreach to major employers in the region and places like malls and manufacturing districts where numerous employers are located at a single location.

The Lowcountry Go vanpool program is marketed on the BCDCOG's website. Riders can also sign-up using a third-party application called RideAmigos. The vans are wrapped with the vanpool program logo. BCDCOG uses a more grass roots approach to advertising through attending local events (e.g., local fairs)

to share information about the program. Through this approach, they found a need to better explain what a vanpool program can provide and its benefits. BCD has worked to advertise the vanpool program on online employment recruitment websites (e.g., Indeed) to include information about the vanpool program in concert with job postings.

As a newer program, the Lowcountry Go vanpool program had a unique insight on what it looks like to get a vanpool program implemented. BCDCOG provided several lessons learned.

- **Obtaining Insurance**: As a new vanpool program, Lowcountry Go faced challenges with obtaining insurance due to a lack of operational data and because insurance companies view vanpools as being similar to a TNC. Lowcountry Go was able to obtain insurance from an out-of-state provider who will re-evaluate the cost of insurance after three years of operational data is available.
- **Organizing Program Information**: Administering a vanpool program requires a lot of paperwork (e.g., maintenance schedules, expenditure reports, mileage reports). When implementing the program, Lowcountry Go found success in utilizing documents and information shared from other vanpool programs, even more urban-focused programs, and taking small steps to modify these documents and forms to best fit their needs.
- **Find the Right Language**: Lowcountry Go found that many in their service area were not familiar with how a vanpool program operates. The program reframed the conversation around vanpool and described it as a public rideshare program for commuters and developed marketing materials to help explain what the program is and how it can be utilized.
- **Consider the Benefits to Your Users**: Originally Lowcountry Go considered contracting through a third-party for vanpool operations; however, they found that they could provide a more cost-effective service in-house. They ultimately decided to keep the program in-house to keep the costs to users down.

4.5 511NY Rideshare (New York)

511NY Rideshare provides a statewide vanpool program in New York State as a part of their transportation demand management strategy. The program was launched in 2010 and is a collaboration between the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) and ICF International, Inc. (ICF). Goals of the program include reducing single occupancy vehicle commutes, addressing parking challenges, and improving employee recruitment and retention.

ICF administers the program on behalf of NYSDOT. ICF subcontracts with Commute with Enterprise who operates the program. When opportunities for potential vanpools are identified, ICF will work with Commute with Enterprise to finalize details and work with employers to provide a vanpool vehicle for lease. NYSDOT provides a monthly subsidy to reduce costs to vanpool members. Vanpool members decide pick-up and drop off locations. In some cases, ICF will work to identify central locations for vanpools to utilize as a pick-up spot including church parking lots, park-n-rides, and big box retailers.

The 511NY Rideshare program currently has seventy-five vanpools in operation in New York's more urban areas. Nearly thirty of these vanpools are traveling to Federal worksites (e.g., military bases), as Federal employees receive a subsidy which drastically reduces the costs to participate in a vanpool.

511NY Rideshare noted that vanpool is also popular at military bases and at other employers with a large campus (e.g., casinos) because the vanpool allows for a more direct connection whereas public transit may only be allowed to drop people off at an entry point far from the user's destination. 511NY Rideshare has also found that the vanpool program is popular with second and third shift employees when public transit does not operate or operates infrequently.

The 511NY Rideshare vanpool program provides a guaranteed ride program (not specifically a GRH program), noting that the final destination may not always be home. Instead, some riders may need to get to another destination (e.g., doctor's office). Vanpool members can be reimbursed for up to $300 annually via the guaranteed ride program.

The 511NY Rideshare vanpool program utilizes state planning funds and CMAQ funds. The vanpool program has chosen not to report to the National Transit Database (NTD) so as not to draw funding from an already limited pot of funding for public transit in the region.

The 511NY Rideshare vanpool program is marketed on a program website, printed flyers, social media, and via magnets and signs on the vehicles. ICF noted that word of mouth is their most effective form of marketing. Once an employer begins a vanpool, there is often a snowball effect.

The 511NY Rideshare vanpool program shared several lessons learned.

- **Buy America Requirements Can Be Challenging**: ICF found that leasing vehicles through Commute with Enterprise is the easiest way to comply with Buy America requirements, as they offer several vehicle options.
- **Vanpool Programs Can Be Difficult to Implement: Marketing the Cost Savings and Leveraging Word of Mouth Advertisement Is Key**: ICF found that marketing cost savings is a great way to recruit vanpool members. In particular, once a vanpool starts, it is often by these users sharing their experience that helps the program grow.
- **Certain Companies May Be More Effective for Vanpool**: ICF has found that employers who are a good fit for vanpool include those who employ shift workers of any kind or who manage late night or overnight job sites; Federal employers; employers located on large campuses (e.g., industrial parks); and companies where the first/last mile can make the trip difficult (e.g., military bases, casinos).
- **NTD Reporting Benefits and Drawbacks**: NTD allows vanpool programs to generally access FTA formula funding; however, there is a two-year funding lag for new programs. In some areas, accessing these funds can be a political challenge, as the vanpool may be viewed as another agency drawing from already limited funds.

4.6 Case Study Lessons Learned

Several key lessons learned were shared from the five vanpool program case studies which can be considered when looking to implement a similar program.

- Vanpool is often implemented to fill in operational gaps of public transit, including, but not limited to, where public transit does not exist (e.g., often in rural areas), and during times when public transit does not operate (e.g., for second and third shift employees and for those working during the weekend).

- Vanpool seems particularly suited to the following types of employers:
    - Manufacturing/Processing/Industrial Employers
    - Seasonal Employers (ski and snowboard resorts)
    - Federal Employers (military bases)
    - Large “Campus” Employers (casinos, colleges)
- Vanpool program growth takes time. When doing employer outreach, finding the appropriate person is often time consuming. Often, a human resource representative or high-level decision maker is the right person to start with. Outreach can often take persistence.
- Word of mouth is your best form of marketing. Several vanpool programs noted that once one employer sees the benefits of vanpooling, there tends to be a snowball effect where others want to join.
- Marketing efforts should use a consistent brand. Vehicle wraps or vinyl lettering were considered a best practice amongst all vanpool programs interviewed.
- Third-party operators can reduce staffing needs for day-to-day operations of a vanpool program.
- When developing an RFP to implement a vanpool program, consider your region’s unique needs and whether any special provisions must be included. Several vanpool programs noted the need for special provisions including ADA requirements and snow tires during the winter.
- Do not forget about your users. Ensuring that vanpools remain as convenient as possible is key. Reducing the requirements related to fare collection, reporting, and vehicle maintenance is a good practice. Some vanpool programs offer incentives to drivers (e.g., free fares) to help to compensate them for driving the van.

5 Outreach to Employers

The research team worked closely with staff from SGRC to curate a list of thirty key employers from across the region to obtain feedback regarding employment transportation issues. These employers were selected from the list of 180 top employers in the region, as described earlier (Major Employers). The identified employers are provided in the table below.

Table 6. Thirty Key Employers of the SGRC Area

Name	Industry	City	County
Live Oaks Homes	Manufacturing (manufactured homes)	Willacoochee	Atkinson
Willacoochee Industrial Fabrics Inc.	Manufacturing (textiles)	Nashville	Atkinson
Spartan Cargo Trailers LLC	Manufacturing (trailers)	Alma	Bacon
Titan Modular Systems Inc.	Manufacturing (modular structures)	Alma	Bacon
Polar Corp	Drink Bottling	Fitzgerald	Ben Hill
Southern Veneer Products	Manufacturing (veneer products)	Fitzgerald	Ben Hill
Chaparral Boats, Inc.	Manufacturing (boats)	Nashville	Berrien
Coyote MFG Co.	Manufacturing (trailers)	Nashville	Berrien
Cal Maine Foods, Inc.	Food Processing/Egg Products	Hoboken	Brantley
Langboard, Inc.	Manufacturing (wood products)	Quitman	Brooks
AJM Packaging Corporation	Packaging Products	Folkston	Charlton
UFP Folkston, LLC	Manufacturing (wood products)	Folkston	Charlton
Bway Corporation, Inc.	Manufacturing (plastics)	Homerville	Clinch
Lee Container Corps	Manufacturing (plastics)	Homerville	Clinch
Pcc Airfoils, Inc.	Manufacturing (aviation)	Douglas	Coffee
Pilgrim's Pride Corporation	Food Processing/Poultry	Douglas	Coffee
Basf Corporation	Manufacturing	Sparks	Cook
J-M Manufacturing Co, Inc.	Manufacturing (plastics, PVC)	Adel	Cook

Affinity Building Systems, LLC	Manufactured homes	Lakeland	Lanier
Georgia Printco, LLC	Printing	Lakeland	Lanier
Packaging Corp Of America	Manufacturing (cardboard)	Clyattville	Lowndes
Wild Adventures	Amusement Park	Valdosta	Lowndes
Cal Maine Foods, Inc.	Food Processing/Egg Products	Blackshear	Pierce
Sundance Boats, Inc.	Manufacturing (boats)	Blackshear	Pierce
Heatcraft, Inc.	Manufacturing (refrigeration products)	Tifton	Tift
Orgill, Inc.	Wholesale distribution	Tifton	Tift
Phoenix Wood Products	Manufacturing (wood products)	Ashburn	Turner
UFP Ashburn, LLC	Manufacturing (wood products)	Ashburn	Turner
CMH Manufacturing, Inc.	Manufacturing (manufactured homes)	Waycross	Ware
Simmons Bedding Company	Manufacturing (mattresses and bedding)	Waycross	Ware

Contact information for each of these entities was identified by leveraging existing relationships between SGRC staff and each company. Each employer was contacted via email by both the research team and SGRC to schedule brief interviews regarding employment transportation issues. Of the thirty key employers, four responded to inquiries, with ultimately only three agreeing to be interviewed. A brief summary of the feedback gathered from these interviews is offered below.

All three interview respondents shared that their facilities were not well served by sidewalks, bike lanes, public transit, or other infrastructure that would support workers travelling in anything other than a private vehicle. In all three cases, despite the limited supporting infrastructure, some individuals were riding bikes or walking to work.

Public transit was generally not available in the areas where the three responding employers were located. One employer did express a desire for public transit to be offered to allow employees to connect to their location in the future.

Informal carpooling or ridesharing was observed by all three interview participants. However, these individuals reported not trying to quantify how much carpooling and/or ridesharing was occurring.

Two of the three employers do not, and have never, offered any kind of transportation service for employees. All three interviewees reported that there had never been a request for this type of service.

Two of the three interviewees cited having to discipline or dismiss employees due to sustained transportation challenges.

At the time of the interview, one employer was providing shuttle service for employees. Started in 2018, the shuttle service is fully supported by the company. Employees ride for free and can be picked up at several predetermined locations across the region. (This employer was featured in the Employment Transportation Roundtable event, which will be covered in a subsequent section.) This employer stated that approximately one third of their employees at the location in question arrived via the shuttle service. While the service has been highly successful, there have been challenges, specifically related to daytime emergencies and ensuring that rides are available when needed.

As a result of the limited engagement by the key employers in the SGRC area, the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) facilitated a member inquiry in March 2023. This four-question inquiry was sent via email to the over 400 members of NADO that represent regions and communities across the United States. The four questions asked are provided below.

- In your professional opinion, what is the top workforce issue facing your region?
- As employers across the country work to attract and maintain a quality workforce, have you become aware of transportation issues that are impacting these efforts? If so, what types of transportation issues are employers in your area expressing?
- How are employers addressing these transportation issues? Are they encountering success in supporting employment and retention challenges?
- Are there any notable solutions (employer based or otherwise) that you might consider to be a best practice (e.g., vanpool programs, ridesharing, pre-tax contributions to employee transportation expenses)?

A summary of responses from this member inquiry is offered here for discussion.

A general lack of available workers was emphasized as the top workforce issue among NADO member regions. Common responses also contained descriptions of related challenges including low wages, a lack of available housing, and a lack of pertinent skills in the available workforce.

In relation to attracting and maintaining a quality workforce, respondents consistently noted three key employment transportation issues: 1) a general mismatch between locations of workers and employment opportunities, 2) escalating costs related to personal vehicle ownership and operation, and 3) public transit being insufficient in terms of availability and hours of operation to support commuting.

A key finding reported by respondents was that employers were not actively engaged in addressing transportation issues for employees. Rather, they were depending on public and private external parties to resolve this issue on their behalf. There were a few reported employer-provided transportation options including employers providing shuttle services, employers sponsoring transit rides where service was available, and, in limited cases, employers supporting ridesharing and vanpooling opportunities. Some regional partners reported that other issues concerning employment were more pressing then whether or not an employee had transportation.

A limited number of notable solutions were identified. Common solutions included voucher programs for TNCs, limited ridesharing/vanpooling, and incentive pay and other bonuses that could be used for transportation expenses by employees. There were also several examples of individual businesses using private vehicles to pick up employees when needed.

The research team also contacted (via email) fourteen chambers of commerce in the SGRC region, generally representing areas where the thirty regional employers were identified. None of the chambers of commerce responded to requests for interviews or information as part of this project.

To supplement this targeted outreach to regional employers, the research team also created two online surveys – one focused on employers and one focused on employees. The goal of this was to provide additional opportunities for other employers in the SGRC area who were not on the initial target list to participate in the study effort. There were eight responses to the employer survey, and two to the employee survey. The summary of feedback received is offered below. The survey questionnaires are provided in Appendix D: Outreach to Employer Surveys. Responses were received from Modern Dispersions South Inc., Elixir Door and Metals Company, Beach Timber Company Inc., Twin Oaks Convalescent Center, Jacuzzi Luxury Bath, Orgill, Ace Pole, and one anonymous respondent.

Responses were received from Bacon County (2), Ben Hill (1), Coffee (1), Lowndes (1), Pierce (1), and Tift (1). Seven of eight employers indicated that they employed between 100 and 500 people. Four employers indicated utilizing shift schedules, while three indicated generally first shift (daytime) schedules only. When asked where their current workers are located, four employers responded with 'regional' which was defined as neighboring counties and beyond. All respondents stated that personal vehicles were the primary form of travel to work, with four respondents also identifying carpooling, four identifying walking or biking, and two mentioning public transit. Seven employers indicated that they had never offered any type of transportation services for employees.

Four employers also answered affirmatively that transportation was a barrier to employee attraction or retention. Specific feedback on this included commentary around applicants needing to walk or bike to work but were unwilling or unable to do that in early morning hours to comply with shift times. General commentary on the ability to afford a personal vehicle was also offered. Ultimately four of the eight employers (Elixir Door and Metals Company, Beach Timber Company Inc., Twin Oaks Convalescent Center, and Orgill) that responded to the survey indicated that they would be interested in working with SGRC to develop transit options that may assist with employment transportation.

The three responses to the employee form indicated that transportation was not an issue with getting or keeping employment, and that current public transit services were adequate to meet their needs.

6 Employment Transportation Roundtable

On April 20, 2023, the research team hosted an Employment Transportation Roundtable webinar, which was open to any interested parties and businesses operating in the SGRC area (Figure 20). Approximately twenty-five individuals attended the event. Attendees included representatives from eight employers, seven local governments, six individuals from various interested party entities, as well as members of the research team.

The speakers during the event were Bret Allphin from NADO, Darlene Tait from AJM Packaging, and Courtney Cherry from Lowcountry Go. Mr. Allphin provided an overview of workforce, commuting, and earnings data for the SGRC region, as well as best practices and additional resources for rural transportation programming. Ms. Tait shared an overview of the employee shuttle service AJM Packaging has been providing to employees of their Waycross facility since 2018. This service is unique within the region and could be used as a model for other employers to consider as they work to address employee attraction and retention challenges. Ms. Cherry reported on the Lowcountry Go vanpool program, a service offered and operated by BCDCOG in Charleston, South Carolina. She shared details of how the program started, how it operates, and where they hope to take the program in the future. The power point slide presentation used for the Roundtable is represented in Appendix E: Employment Transportation Roundtable Materials



Figure 20. Advertisement for Employment Transportation Webinar

Following the presentations, the attendees were split into small groups for more focused conversation and an opportunity to ask questions relevant to their own interests and concerns.

Small groups were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. What are your top workforce challenges?
2. How do transportation challenges impact employers' ability to attract and maintain a quality workforce?

3. What potential transportation solutions resonate?
4. What are some next steps to address transportation challenges and what is needed to take next steps?

Several themes emerged in the small group discussions including:

- Challenges with employee recruitment and retention.
- Challenges related to a lack of childcare.
- A lack of reliable transportation to work, especially amongst lower-income employees.
- A lack of transportation options for different shifts (e.g., second shift, overnight)
- Employees needing to travel long distances to work with one employer noting that their work shed reaches nine counties.
- Employers facing high costs of employee turnover.
- Employee turnover impacting the customer experience as newer employees are less familiar with an organization.
- From the vanpool provider perspective, it was noted that most vanpool members stay active with a vanpool for around four years.
- Vanpool is generally helping those that live fifteen miles or further from their place of employment.
- Transportation options that provide a door-to-door style pick up and drop off resonated with participants.
- Next steps included searching for grants to fund transportation options.

After the roundtable, the research team followed-up with the Southern Georgia Black Chambers (SGBC), who felt their members were struggling to attract and retain employees at a volume that would allow them to sustain success. SGBC was very interested in learning more about transportation options that may be available to member businesses across the region. Members of the SGBC within the SGRC area can be found in Figure 21. Not all Southern Georgia Black Chambers members are within the SGRC area. As of this report, the research team is still in contact and sharing information with the SGBC.

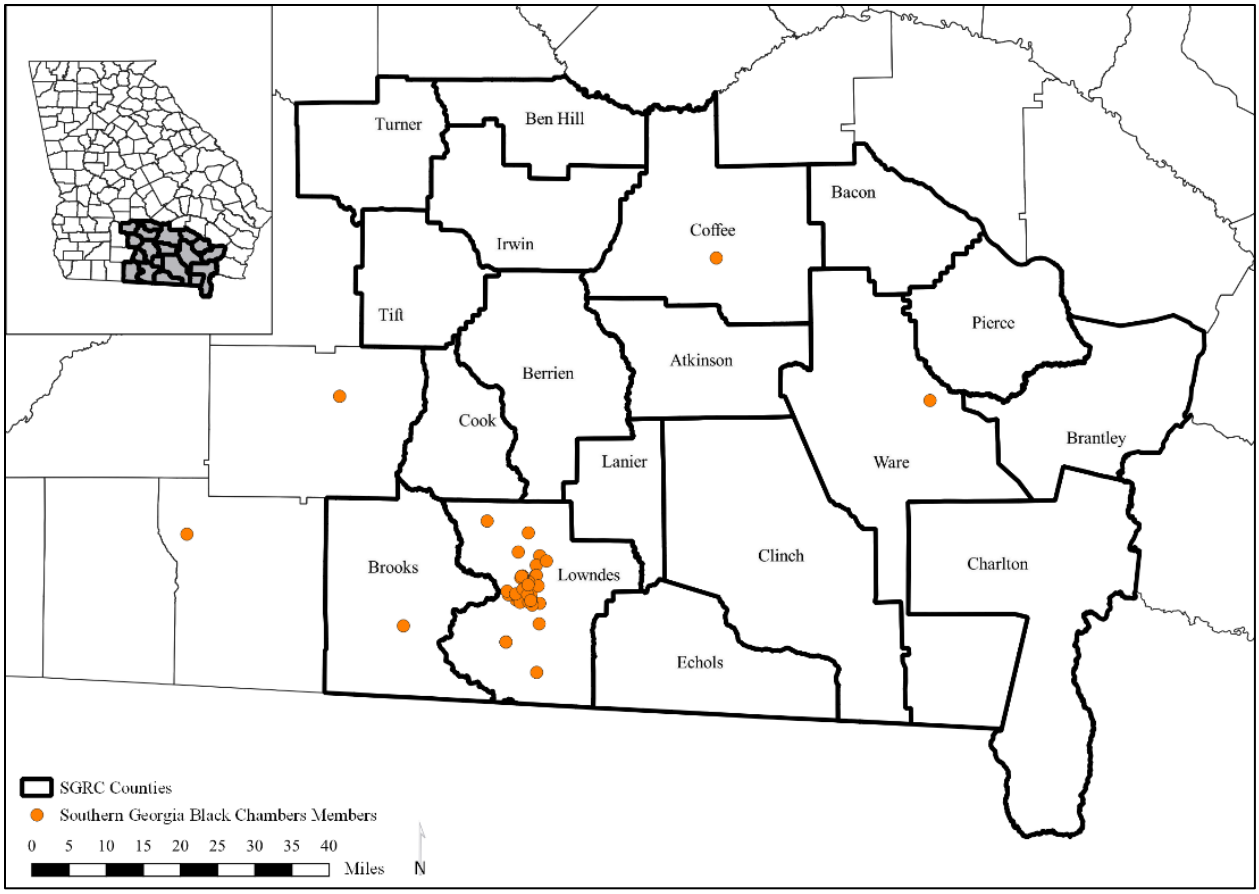


Figure 21. Southern Georgia Black Chambers Members

7 Recommendations for SGRC

Through the demographic analysis, review of planning documents, and outreach efforts the need for improving mobility to employment in the SGRC is evident. The research team recommends that SGRC conduct a two-year vanpool pilot program in coordination with a third-party operator (e.g., Commute with Enterprise). This section will provide information on the contracting process through Commute with Enterprise, potential stakeholders, estimated costs, and additional considerations.

Commute with Enterprise is mentioned in this report as a potential turnkey vanpool operator. This is because Commute with Enterprise is known to operate in and around the Southern Georgia region, it is utilized in multiple case studies from other rural regions that were written or reviewed for this research effort, and there may be few other providers operating in rural markets. However, this does not constitute an endorsement for Commute with Enterprise, and any decisions that SGRC or area employers make about vanpool should be made with due diligence.

SGRC currently administers regional rural transit. Traditional rural, demand-response public transit provides critical access to employment, services, and other destinations for residents. In many rural locations, the schedule is often designed to address medical trips or other periodic travel needs, which means that its availability does not often correlate well with employment needs (e.g., running during shift hours). However, all rural transit agencies experience resource constraints, including limited available funding for operations and capital, raising match to use Federal funds, and capacity challenges related to attracting and retaining drivers or other staff and obtaining or replacing enough vehicles to meet needs. Therefore, while the existing regional rural transit system brings many mobility benefits to users, there remain gaps. Consequently, vanpool is a service that can help fill those gaps.

Vanpools can be part of a suite of mobility options that meet a range of rural travel needs (as demonstrated by case study vanpool programs), where both vanpool and rural transit exist in the same region or are administered by the same agency. For example, vanpool programs can be structured with or without a subsidy through rural transit funding. Riders or their employers typically pay the remaining fare, making vanpool an efficient option for providing mobility within available funding. Vanpools require that each vehicle have its own driver, so this form of mobility can offer trips without creating more demands on the labor pool of transit drivers. Another benefit of vanpools as compared with traditional rural transit is that a user can expect that the mobility is available every work-day as compared with needing to schedule the ride. Vanpool also provides a more direct connection, often eliminating the last-mile trip that may be more common with traditional rural transit. An additional benefit of vanpooling is that availability of vehicles may be less of an issue. Furthermore, electric vehicles are more common in small vans which are often good fits for vanpools than they are for larger vehicles typically used for rural transit, fuel prices may impact a vanpool less if this vehicle-type is leveraged.

Vanpooling would not limit or replace any existing rural public transit. Rather, it can be an effective model to operate alongside rural transit, serving different types of rider needs and coordinating commute trips which may or may not have similar origins and destinations without compromising the resources of public transit to provide rides for any purpose.

Two approaches can be taken to leverage a third-party operator: 1) full procurement process where all potential third-party operators would respond to a request for proposals, or 2) contract with a third-party operator for a vanpool pilot. The vanpool pilot is the recommended option as it would allow SGRC to gauge demand for a vanpool prior to initiating the full procurement process. It also allows SGRC to identify aspects that were not initially apparent which may be beneficial to add to a final request for proposals. Since many are unfamiliar with vanpooling or multiple public transit options, vanpool program growth can be slow. During the pilot, the third-party operator provides support for the program and conducts outreach to local stakeholders to market vanpool and help to grow the program. At the end of the pilot, SGRC can decide whether they move forward to the full procurement process. A vanpool pilot would allow for a flexible, fairly low-cost option to examine the SGRC's demand for such a service. For more information about one potential third-party provider, see Appendix F: Commute with Enterprise Summary.

During the vanpool pilot the third-party entity will work to engage with stakeholders in the region to gauge demand and implement vanpools. Based on the findings from this research effort, there are several potential stakeholders that SGRC should consider when conducting outreach during this process.

While nearly all regions of the SGRC area face high housing and transportation costs and are designated as transportation disadvantaged by the U.S. Department of Transportation, not every county within the SGRC region can expect to benefit from vanpool based on findings from the case study (e.g., vanpools between more affluent counties housing Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska were not successful). The more populous areas of SGRC (e.g., Valdosta) and those areas already served by public transit may have less of a need for employment transportation, like vanpools. A demographic review of existing public transit within SGRC and review of planning documents, suggests that Clinch, Lanier, and Turner Counties could benefit from vanpools (see Demographic Information for more details). They have high levels of unemployment, limited employers, and high levels of poverty. Additionally, Clinch, Echols, and Lanier Counties are not currently served by the existing public transit system so a service like vanpool could help provide access to employment opportunities for residents in these areas. This provides four counties which could stand to benefit from a vanpool program: Clinch, Echols, Lanier, and Turner. As indicated in the Figure 22 below, only 32 of the top 157 employers in the region are found within these three counties where vanpool programming may be most impactful; seven in Clinch County, eight in Echols County, eight in Lanier County, and nine in Turner County. Notice also how in Clinch and Echols Counties the employers are clustered towards the north and west part of the counties, leaving the remaining populations located in other areas of these counties with potentially more limited access to employment.

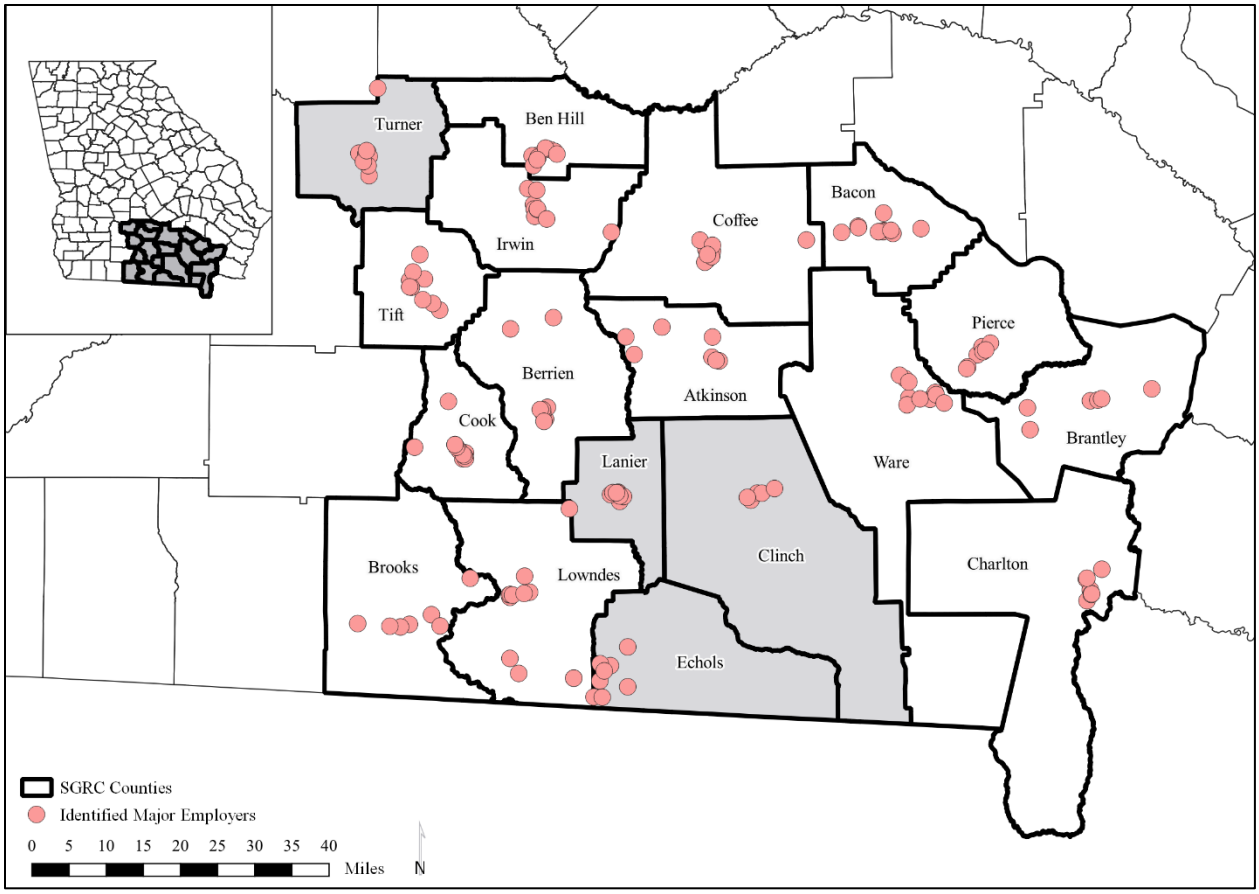


Figure 22. Potential Stakeholder Counties and Major Employers

SGRC could work directly with leadership within these counties to identify those currently unemployed to better understand the types of employment that they are looking for. SGRC should also work with those providing social services to these counties to ensure that populations that could benefit from vanpools are presented with this mobility option. This information could then be considered in concert with the needs of nearby employers (although for the rural context, nearby is relative) to develop vanpools which could connect these employees to employers. SGRC could reach out to each of these counties, determining if any would like to work cooperatively with SGRC. If all are interested, all could be involved in an initial vanpool pilot. If one or two are interested, these county(ies) could be part of a prioritized pilot.

Four employers in the region expressed interest in a vanpool program for their employees. These include Elixir Door and Metals Company (Clinch County), Beach Timber Company Inc. (Bacon County), Twin Oaks Convalescent Center (Bacon County), and Orgill (Tifton County). SGRC could work with each of these employers to better understand the skills that candidate employees need, and this information could be cross-referenced with what can be understood by entities providing social services to the priority counties (Clinch, Echols, Lanier, and Turner) to see if matches can be made and a vanpool formed.

Research and review of existing vanpool programming has illustrated that vanpools are often most utilized in scenarios where riders are travelling 30 miles or more to access employment (which is also

typically too far for traditional rural transit). Working under this assumption, the research team has identified thirty-mile commute shed areas from the communities of Valdosta (Lowndes County), Douglas (Coffee County), Tifton (Tift County), and Waycross (Ware County), and illustrated those in Figure 23. A commute shed is the boundary for the area a worker can commute within thirty minutes or less to a specific location (Maricopa Association of Governments, n.d.). These communities were selected for this exercise as they have significant densities of top regional employers as previously identified in the Major Employers section of this report and could draw workers to these employers if additional transportation services were available. To supplement this, the research team categorized top employers into 2022 NAICS code two-digit categories based on basic descriptions offered in the Georgia Department of Labor data (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Again, drawing on lessons learned from the case studies, employers that scheduled work in shifts appeared most likely to utilize vanpool services if they were available. Based on this observation, businesses found in NAICS codes 31-33 (manufacturing) and 48-49 (transportation and warehousing) could be considered first priority in any conversations conducted by SGRC seeking to consider the establishment of vanpool services due to their likelihood of organizing labor efforts in to shifts.

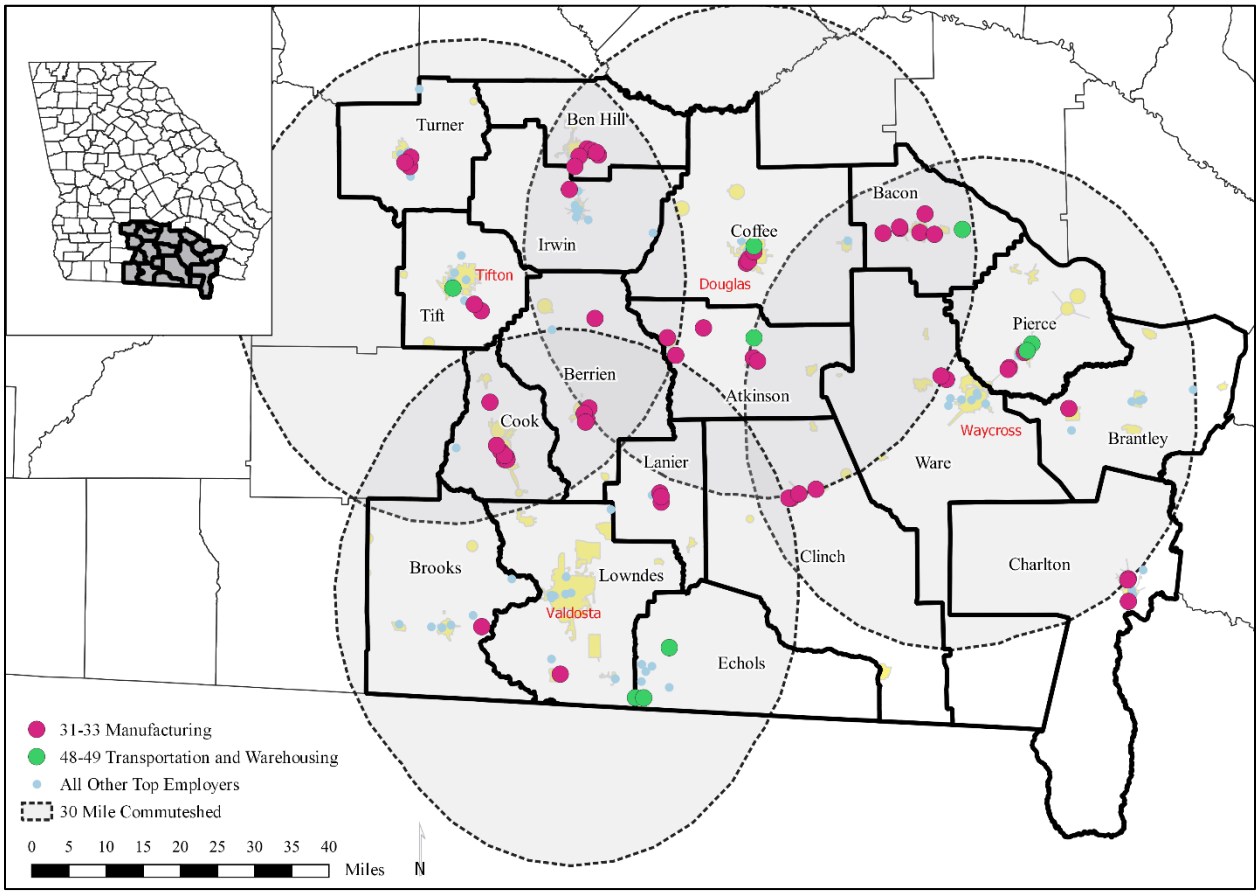


Figure 23. Thirty Mile Commute sheds Compared to Major Employers in the Manufacturing and Transportation and Warehousing Industries

Overall, there are sixty-six employers in these highlighted categories: fifty-seven in 31-33 manufacturing and nine in 48-49. These employers are identified in Appendix G: Vanpool Program Stakeholders.

Another grouping of employers identified as those in NAICS categories 44-45 (retail trade) and 11 (agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting) is illustrated in Figure 24 and represents a second tier of employers that may be well suited to explore possibilities with vanpool programming based on likely labor scheduling practices.

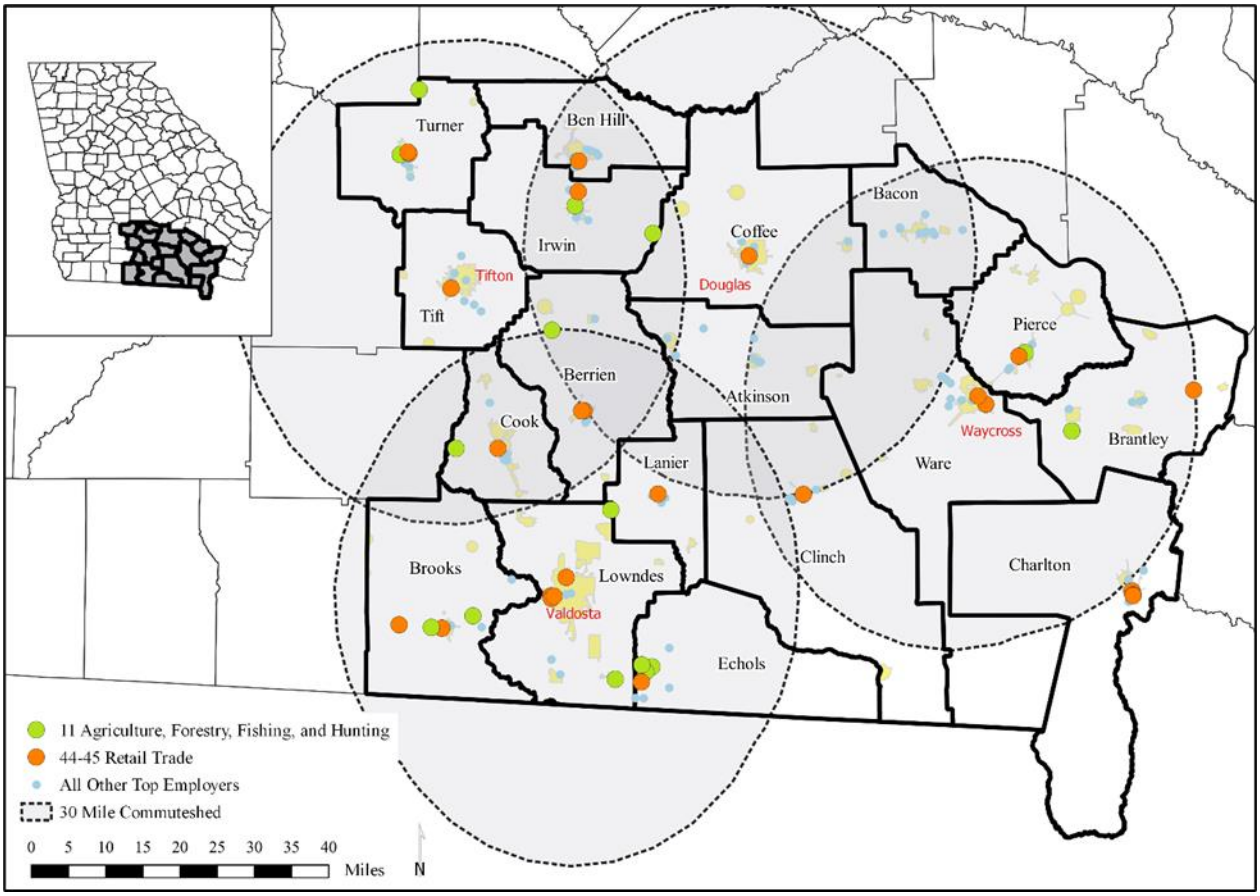


Figure 24. Thirty Mile Commute sheds Compared to Major Employers in the Agricultural and Retail Trade Industries

There are forty total employers in these categories in the SGRC region: fifteen in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting and twenty-five in retail trade. These employers are identified in Appendix G: Vanpool Program Stakeholders.

In addition, the research team recommends SGRC contact representatives at Moody Airforce Base, to inquire if there is a need for vanpools for some of their employees. As learned from the contemporary case studies, federal employment sites like military bases are particularly suited to vanpooling as the federal employees can use the Transit Subsidy Program to help pay for vanpooling fares. Additionally, while employees could travel to base via public transit, they often need to be dropped off at the gated entrance for security protocols whereas vanpools can enter and park within the facility, often providing a more direct last-mile connection which can be particularly appealing as many bases cover a large geographic area. The Moody Airforce Base could be included as a part of the pilot to better understand the interest and adoption by an entity supported by federal funding for vanpooling.

Finally, SGRC should work with the Southern Georgia Black Chambers who expressed interest in vanpooling for their members during the employment transportation roundtable. The Southern Georgia Black Chambers could help to identify member employers within the SGRC area that may be interested in being part of a pilot transportation project. This partnership could serve as an opportunity to learn how small local employers might interface with transportation services like vanpooling.

All three of these entities, a county (or counties), the Moody Airforce Base, and one or a few of the members of the Southern Georgia Black Chambers could then be part of a two-year vanpool pilot program conducted in cooperation with a third-party provider. The pilot would attempt to form at least one vanpool in each of the four categories (county, federal employer, Southern Georgia Black Chambers members, and local businesses that have expressed interest in vanpooling). While not required, stakeholders could be asked to contribute additional funding towards subsidizing the pilot beyond the subsidy that SGRC provides to the pilot program to help further reduce costs for commuters. If public funds are utilized to subsidize the vanpool pilot, this would allow the third-party provider to report the data required for the NTD and consequently the funding to make the vanpools more affordable would later be drawn from the FTA 5311 program.

It is also recommended that SGRC engage their local FTA representative to identify any other funding opportunities that may support a vanpool pilot program. Furthermore, SGRC may want to consider if a state representative would be interested in supporting their efforts to connect unemployed Georgians in their region to employers who have vacancies. SGRC should also reach out to the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to identify if any funding sources may exist to support a pilot program. GDOT may also be able to recommend an entity that could or would be able to assist with evaluating if pilot program goals were met. Ultimately, SGRC will need to determine criteria that would be evaluated to determine whether or not the vanpool program would continue to move forward after the pilot.

To support a vanpool pilot, a subsidy would need to be agreed upon between SGRC and the third-party provider. Data from the case studies as well as input from Commute with Enterprise would suggest that a subsidy of $500 to $600 per van per month is recommended. This level of support would assist with building interest in the vanpool program. Such incentives may be needed, as for many, participating in a vanpool requires a culture change. Human beings do not like to change, including how they travel, so they need to have incentives to change behavior. Table 7 provides the estimated costs for a 24-month vanpool pilot utilizing up to ten vans providing a subsidy ranging from $100 per van per month to $600 per van per month. Depending on the amount of monthly subsidy provided, total estimated costs range between $24,000 to $144,000.

Commute with Enterprise does not invoice for the vanpool until there is a van on the road so these estimated costs may be high when considering that it may take a few months to gauge interest in a vanpool and get a van on the road.

Table 7. Estimated Costs for a Vanpool Pilot

Per Van Monthly Subsidy	$100	$200	$300	$400	$500	$600
24 Month Pilot - Cost Per Van	$2,400	$4,800	$7,200	$9,600	$12,000	$14,400
24 Month Pilot - Cost for 10 Vans	$24,000	$48,000	$72,000	$96,000	$120,000	$144,000

Another option would be to heavily subsidize the vanpool program for the first six months then reduce the subsidy once vanpool participants are more familiar with the program. This option could help encourage new users to switch to vanpool and allow time for the users to understand the cost savings from the program before initiating a higher fare. This approach is used by both the Vermont Commuter Co-Op Vanpool and the Lowcountry Go Vanpool; more details can be found in the Contemporary Case Studies of Vanpools section.

When considering what level of subsidy to provide, the cost to commuters should be considered. The lower the monthly fare, the greater the interest in vanpool. This will be especially important when vanpooling is a new offering. Table 8 provides the monthly cost to vanpool commuters depending on subsidy amount and total number of passengers (which will vary by vanpool). This table also provides the estimated monthly savings for commuters when compared to the AAA Driving Costs Per Month of $894 (American Automobile Association, 2022). These potential savings should be used to market the vanpool pilot.

Vanpool commuters could save an estimated $544 to $837 per month by switching from commuting via a private vehicle to vanpool. For those that can leverage a vanpool to become employed, other social benefits will be attained. These savings increase with either a subsidy being provided to offset costs to commuters or with an increase in the total number of passengers in a vanpool.

Table 8. Estimated Vanpool Commuter Costs

Per Month Cost Per Van from Enterprise	$1,400	$1,400	$1,400	$1,400	$1,400	$1,400	$1,400
Subsidy Provided Per Van Per Month	$0	$100	$200	$300	$400	$500	$600
Total Cost of Van Per Month	$1,400	$1,300	$1,200	$1,100	$1,000	$900	$800
Monthly Fare (4 passengers)	$350	$325	$300	$275	$250	$225	$200
Monthly Fare (7 passengers)	$200	$185	$172	$157	$143	$129	$144
Monthly Fare (10 passengers)	$140	$130	$120	$110	$100	$90	$80
Monthly Fare (14 passengers)	$100	$92	$86	$79	$72	$64	$57
Potential Monthly Savings	$544-$794	$569-$802	$594-$808	$619-$815	$644-$822	$669-$830	$694-$837

When compared to other modes of public transit, according to the NTD, vanpool had the lowest reported cost to operate per hour at $39.49 in 2021 (U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration, 2022). In large part, the lower hourly cost is because a vanpool driver is part of the vanpool – they do not need to be hired and paid for separately. To examine the estimated costs to operate a vanpool program using statistics from existing vanpool programs, the research team reviewed 2021 metrics information published by the FTA as part of the NTD. This data was filtered to only include those reporting entities who indicated 'VP' (vanpool) as the mode of service delivery, and to only

include geographic areas with 'primary UZA population' values at or below 413,869, which was the population of the SGRC region according to the 2020 census. This filtering produced a result of fifty-three reporting entities representing nineteen states. In total, for 2021, these entities reported expenditures of $34,766,768 on operating expenses, an average of $655,977 each. These costs are related to the operation of a total of 2,711 vanpool vehicles across reporters, with an average of fifty-one vehicles in use per program. Using these totals, the average annual operating cost for a single vehicle across these reporting programs based on 2021 values was calculated at $12,824 or around $1,068 per month (U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration, 2022).

The fifty-three selected vanpool entities also reported $29,881,086 in fare revenues in 2021, an average of $563,794 each. Comparing this value with the reported average annual operating costs, this represents a nearly 86% cost recovery across the fifty-three reporting entities (U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Transit Administration, 2022).

7.1 Additional Considerations

If the above recommendations are utilized, below are additional considerations to ensure that SGRC is aware of.

7.1.1 Funding Program Requirements

For vanpool to be eligible for FTA funds, the program must: 1) use vehicles with at least seven seatbelts (including the driver), 2) 80% of the yearly vehicle mileage must be for commute trips, and 3) the program must be open to the public and be publicly sponsored. Additionally, a vanpool program must advertise the program to the public to fill available seats (U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, 2023).

Additionally, recipients and subrecipients of FTA funds are required to submit data to the NTD. The FTA uses NTD data to apportion funding through Section 5311 and 5307 Formula Grants. FTA uses NTD data from two years before apportioning funds. Items that must be reported to the NTD include total annual revenue, sources of revenue, total annual operating costs, fleet size, fleet type, revenue vehicle miles, and ridership. The NTD website provides guidance on reporting on their website: https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/manuals.

In both the literature review and development of the contemporary case studies, FTA 5311 and 5307 formula grants were often utilized to provide a subsidy for a vanpool program. Some additional funding sources that could be considered including Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and local funding utilizing Georgia's Transportation Investment Act (TIA) or Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST). iRide also leveraged a relationship with their state senator to provide start-up funds. SGRC may want to consider if a state senator or representative would be interested in supporting the pilot program as a way to connect unemployed Georgians to jobs.

The STBG provides funding to address state and local transportation needs including funding for transit capital projects (Federal Highway Administration, 2022).

The TIA would allow the SGRC area to levy a 1% transportation sales tax for up to ten years (Georgia Department of Transportation, n.d.). These funds could be used for new or existing transportation

projects including mass transit including operations and maintenance. They can also be used as local match for state and/or federal funding (Georgia Department of Transportation, n.d.).

7.1.2 Driver Considerations

All vanpool programs in the literature review and contemporary case studies required the vanpool to identify a primer driver and at least one backup driver. A vanpool driver is often required to undergo a driver's record check and take some form of training related to driver safety to ensure safe operation of the vanpool. Drivers are often twenty-five years old, however iRide (Montana) allowed younger drivers if they had a CDL. The driver will generally collect passenger fares, track vanpool metrics (e.g. mileage, number of users), and schedule vehicle maintenance. Due to these additional requirements on drivers several of the vanpool programs mentioned providing some sort of incentive to drivers. Commuter Co-Op (Vermont), Go NEWhere (Nebraska), and iRide (Montana) all allow the driver to utilize the vanpool vehicle for personal use up to a specific percentage of miles per month. Some programs provide free fares for the driver, while other programs allow the vanpool users to make that decision. iRide (Montana) handles vehicle maintenance when the driver is at work so that this does not need to be scheduled during the driver's personal time.

It is recommended that SGRC consider potential incentives for vanpool drivers and reduce requirements on drivers as much as possible. Additionally, SGRC should create a driver policy which outlines driver requirements, driver responsibilities, and any additional program guidelines.

7.1.3 Marketing

The research team recommends that SGRC plan for marketing the vanpool program throughout the vanpool program (including the two years of the vanpool pilot program) including recording testimonials from participants to help market and humanize the vanpool program. Marketing should include consistent branding across all methods. Marketing can include vehicle wraps, press releases, and social media posts. SGRC should pursue a short highlight about the program throughout the pilot on television and in the newspaper. Information about the program should be shared widely including posting informational flyers within libraries as well as shared by staffing agencies and social service case managers.

As many of the case study participants noted, vanpooling still seems to be an unknown transportation mode. Marketing that explains what a vanpool is and who can participate would be beneficial as this would be one mode in a suite of modes working to improve mobility in the region. Lowcountry Go in South Carolina had particular success with marketing vanpool as a rideshare program for commuters.

Additionally, marketing that draws attention to the potential cost savings of vanpooling (similar that shown in Figure 25) seems to be beneficial.

The National Rural Transit Assistance Program has created a free marketing toolkit which provides guidance and templates for a website, flyers, and other promotional materials. This resource could be utilized when creating marketing materials for a vanpool program. The toolkit can be accessed here: https://www.nationalrtap.org/Toolkits/Marketing-Toolkit/Marketing-Tools/Templates.

7.1.4 Performance Metrics

If SGRC decides to move forward with the pilot, at the outset, metrics of success (or failure) should be identified. The following are some examples: the number of vanpools in each focus area, how many vanpools have been retained over the duration of the pilot, how many employees served by the vanpools have been able to retain their positions, and how many employers participating in the pilot have been able to reduce the number of employees that they need to hire. Discussions should be held between pilot participants and SGRC when planning for the pilot to identify what metrics will be used and how the results will influence whether or not the vanpool continues after the pilot.

Additionally, SGRC should plan to collect vanpool pilot participant surveys to gather feedback from participants throughout the pilot to examine who is utilizing the vanpool program and any feedback which could be used to improve the program over time. Additionally, the survey should ask for information on participant demographics so that SGRC can better understand who is using the vanpool program as this might help to market the program to others in the region.

Demographics that may be of interest include age, gender, annual household income, and number of available vehicles.

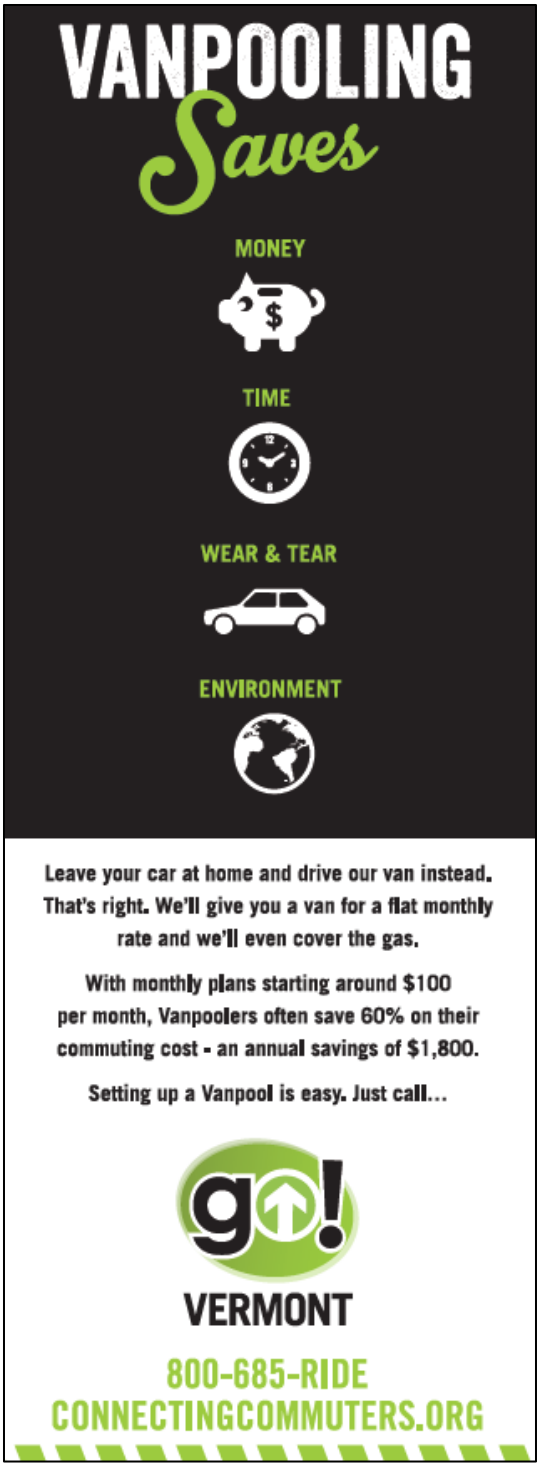


Figure 25. Commuter Co-Op (Vermont) Vanpooling Saves Flyer (Go! Vermont, 2023)

8 Conclusions

The research team recommends that SGRC move forward and initiate vanpool pilot program to gauge demand for such a service in the region. From the demographic analysis there are four counties (Clinch, Echols, Lanier, and Turner) which stand to particularly benefit from a vanpool program due to high levels of unemployment, limited employers, and high levels of poverty. Additionally, during employer and stakeholder outreach there were several entities that expressed interest in a mobility option like a vanpool for residents in the region.

The intent of such a vanpool program would not limit or replace any existing rural public transit. Rather, vanpools can operate alongside rural transit, serving different types of riders' needs, providing a reliable mobility choice for commuters (users do not have to schedule trips, it already exists), and potentially fill the gaps when public transit is not available (e.g., early morning, evenings) or where it is not currently available (e.g., Clinch, Echols, and Lanier Counties). Vanpools also have the flexibility to be offered seasonally.

SGRC should consider providing a subsidy for the vanpool pilot. Using public monies would allow SGRC to begin reporting data to the NTD which would provide a sustainable funding source for the program in the future. Commonly used funding sources for vanpool include FTA formula funds (Section 5307 and 5311).

Metrics for success should be utilized throughout the vanpool pilot as these will help determine whether to move forward towards full procurement at the end of the pilot program. Potential performance metrics include the total number of employers served by vanpool and the total number of commuters served by vanpool. Additionally, SGRC should consider surveying vanpool users to obtain feedback on who is using the vanpool program and gauge their satisfaction in the program to help improve the program over time.

9 Appendix A: Additional Demographic Data

Table 9. Southern Georgia County Population and Population Density (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

County	Population (2020)	Land Area (Sq Mi)	Population Density
Atkinson	8,311	342.7	24.3
Bacon	11,140	284.1	39.2
Ben Hill	16,889	250.1	67.5
Berrien	19,206	453.4	42.4
Brantley	18,924	443.2	42.7
Brooks	15,548	493.2	31.5
Charlton	13,032	780.1	16.7
Clinch	6,648	815.0	8.2
Coffee	43,070	592.3	72.7
Cook	17,217	228.5	75.4
Echols	3,944	420.4	9.4
Irwin	9,379	354.4	26.5
Lanier	10,534	196.5	53.6
Lowndes	116,436	497.2	234.2
Pierce	19,336	340.5	56.8
Tift	40,590	260.9	155.6
Turner	7,920	285.4	27.7
Ware	35,745	899.2	39.8
Southern Georgia	413,869	7,937.1	52.1
Georgia	10,711,908	57,717.0	185.6

Table 10. Southern Georgia, Vehicles Available (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

County	Workers Aged 16 or Older in Households…	No Vehicle Available	1 Vehicle Available	2 Vehicles Available	3 or More Vehicles Available
Atkinson	3,386	2.3%	24.4%	38.4%	34.9%
Bacon	4,090	1.4%	14.4%	35.9%	48.3%
Ben Hill	6,624	3.6%	39.4%	28.3%	28.7%
Berrien	7,579	1.4%	24.3%	42.1%	32.2%
Brantley	6,560	1.2%	20.1%	38.2%	40.5%
Brooks	6,173	1.6%	18.1%	36.4%	43.9%
Charlton	4,308	1.2%	18.8%	35.3%	44.8%
Clinch	2,106	6.8%	16.1%	37.8%	39.2%
Coffee	17,406	3.1%	18.7%	42.1%	36.1%
Cook	7,422	2.9%	16.5%	33.7%	47.0%
Echols	1,720	1.2%	15.3%	30.4%	53.1%
Irwin	3,752	5.2%	19.4%	27.7%	47.6%
Lanier	3,951	5.7%	13.2%	34.9%	46.3%
Lowndes	50,174	4.7%	20.7%	42.8%	31.7%
Pierce	7,780	2.0%	13.6%	50.5%	33.9%
Tift	17,344	4.7%	22.9%	43.4%	29.0%
Turner	3,058	11.1%	16.4%	42.6%	29.9%
Ware	13,139	1.8%	26.5%	46.9%	24.8%

Table 11. Southern Georgia, Place of Work (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

County	Population	Workers Aged 16 & Older	Worked in State of Residence	Worked in County of Residence	Worked Outside County of Residence	Worked Outside State of Residence	Mean Travel Time to Work
Atkinson	8,311	3,386	99.5%	49.2%	50.3%	0.5%	26.1
Bacon	11,140	4,092	98.2%	63.9%	34.3%	1.8%	22.0
Ben Hill	16,889	6,624	100.0%	81.5%	18.5%	0.0%	15.0
Berrien	19,206	7,579	99.3%	47.9%	51.4%	0.7%	22.9
Brantley	18,924	6,561	97.5%	24.1%	73.3%	2.5%	31.9
Brooks	15,548	6,182	93.7%	34.9%	58.8%	6.3%	24.5
Charlton	13,032	4,308	68.4%	44.1%	24.3%	31.6%	30.2
Clinch	6,648	2,131	94.0%	74.3%	19.7%	6.0%	20.1
Coffee	43,070	17,533	98.6%	82.1%	16.6%	1.4%	20.0
Cook	17,217	7,439	99.7%	54.1%	45.6%	0.3%	25.5
Echols	3,944	1,720	96.0%	36.0%	60.0%	4.0%	24.6
Irwin	9,379	3,752	96.2%	39.0%	57.2%	3.8%	23.1
Lanier	10,534	3,951	97.4%	35.8%	61.6%	2.6%	23.5
Lowndes	116,436	50,987	98.0%	91.7%	6.3%	2.0%	19.5
Pierce	19,336	7,785	97.0%	42.2%	54.7%	3.0%	24.9
Tift	40,590	17,923	99.1%	86.1%	13.0%	0.9%	18.5
Turner	7,920	3,064	98.9%	48.4%	50.5%	1.1%	21.2
Ware	35,745	13,152	98.8%	78.9%	19.9%	1.2%	21.0

Table 12. Southern Georgia, Commute Mode (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020)

County	Workers Aged 16 & Older	Car, Truck, Van	Drove Alone	Carpool	Public Trans	Walked	Bicycle	Taxicab, Motorcycle, or Other	Worked from Home
Atkinson	3,386	92.7%	80.8%	11.9%	0.0%	2.3%	0.0%	4.7%	0.3%
Bacon	4,092	93.4%	84.4%	6.5%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	1.9%	2.8%
Ben Hill	6,624	96.6%	89.4%	7.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	1.3%
Berrien	7,579	96.4%	85.6%	10.8%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	0.9%	1.8%
Brantley	6,561	96.1%	89.4%	6.7%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	1.5%
Brooks	6,182	88.7%	79.2%	9.5%	0.5%	3.9%	0.3%	2.7%	3.8%
Charlton	4,308	95.4%	91.5%	3.9%	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%	1.0%	3.1%
Clinch	2,131	94.3%	82.0%	12.3%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	4.8%	0.6%
Coffee	17,533	92.4%	84.6%	7.8%	0.3%	0.5%	0.0%	5.0%	1.8%
Cook	7,439	95.8%	83.2%	12.6%	0.2%	0.7%	0.0%	0.4%	2.9%
Echols	1,720	85.5%	80.0%	5.5%	0.4%	9.2%	0.0%	3.5%	1.3%
Irwin	3,752	91.3%	86.8%	4.6%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	4.4%	3.0%
Lanier	3,951	85.5%	77.4%	8.2%	0.0%	4.8%	3.7%	0.5%	5.4%
Lowndes	50,987	93.2%	83.7%	9.4%	0.3%	2.3%	0.2%	1.3%	2.7%
Pierce	7,785	95.3%	87.2%	8.1%	0.4%	1.1%	0.0%	1.8%	1.4%
Tift	17,923	95.5%	85.4%	10.1%	0.3%	1.7%	0.3%	0.8%	1.4%
Turner	3,064	97.9%	77.1%	20.8%	0.1%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.7%
Ware	13,152	94.7%	86.3%	8.4%	0.2%	1.1%	0.2%	1.2%	2.6%

10 Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography

This section provides an annotated literature review related to vanpool programs with a specific focus on vanpool programs in a more rural context. This section is divided into the following topics: employment transportation program toolkits and fact sheets, examinations of vanpool opportunities, and vanpool program case studies.

10.1 Employment Transportation Program Toolkits and Fact Sheets

Employer Toolkit: Designing and Promoting an Employee Commute Program

Citation: Wisconsin Department of Transportation. (n/d). Employer Toolkit: Designing and Promoting an Employee Commute Program. Retrieved April 26, 2022 from wisconsindot.gov website: https://wisconsindot.gov/Documents/travel/road/rideshare/EmployerToolkitWeb.pdf

This toolkit created by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation provides resources to employers to develop a transportation program for their employees. Transportation options beyond the private vehicle discussed included vanpool, carpool, public transit, bicycling/walking, telework, and flexible working schedules. The benefits of providing an employment transportation program included improving employee recruitment and retention, employer tax benefits, reduction of parking needs, improving employee productivity, and signaling employer contributions to a healthier environment.

This toolkit identified six steps to developing an employee transportation program, including: 1) identify available resources (staff, budget, etc.), 2) understand employee needs/wants, 3) review alternative transportation programs, 4) select program and program goals, 5) implement and promote program, and 6) evaluate program and determine if it is meeting goals.

Understanding employee needs could be completed via an employee transportation survey, focus groups, or through discussions with human resources.

The toolkit recommends implementing a pilot program or phased approach to an employment transportation program. This will allow an organization to gauge interest and modify a program to best fit their employees' needs.

Emergency ride home programs are suggested. This program provides a free or subsidized ride home in case of emergencies which is provided by the employer. Emergency ride home program or GRH program guidelines can be set by the employer. Guidelines should include the number of rides available per employee and when the program can be used (family emergency, illness, unexpected overtime, etc.).

Promotion of an employee transportation program is recommended during initial launch of the program and throughout program implementation to ensure participation. Promotion could include brochures, employee newsletters, a one-stop information hub on the company site, commuter challenge events, raffle prizes for participation, and providing dedicated parking for participants.

Interactive Employer Transportation Planning Handbook

Citation: Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). (n/d). Interactive Employer Transportation Planning Handbook. Retrieved April 26, 2022 from 511.org website: https://511.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/cbp/Interactive%20Employer%20Transportation%20Planning%20Handbook_0.pdf

The handbook identified four types of support for rural employment locations, including: 1) incentives to use transit, carpool, or active commutes, 2) complete and easy trip planning and ridematch information at their fingertips, 3) carpool formation support and promotion, and 4) providing personal storage and locker room worksite facilities for active commuters.

Benefits of providing worksite transit programs include accessibility and affordability. MTC suggests developing a roundtrip private shuttle service for transit deserts (areas where no public transit service is offered). Private transit service is "employer-funded and exclusive to" the employers' employees. It can also be funded by a business park. Such a program would need a fleet, operators, and human capital (i.e., drivers). It would also require scheduling and routing. Employers may also want to engage a full-service vendor if they feel that private transit service is a good option.

Vanpools were suggested as an alternative to a private shuttle. A vanpool can carry seven to fifteen people. They typically travel thirty or more miles between residences and the place of work. Vanpools may travel to job hubs or public transit hubs (i.e., first/last mile).

A GRH program is recommended with implementation of any worksite transit program. However, since this handbook is more urban-focused, Uber is the suggested option which may not be available in more rural portions of Georgia.

The handbook suggests that there is a greater need for resources, for research, for planning, and for program evaluation. Implementation of a worksite transit program is not a one-and-done operation. Instead, it is suggested that the program be evaluated over time using the data to make decisions and regularly reviewing if metrics are being achieved. Example metrics could include: 1) total program participants per period, 2) number of new participants per period, 3) rate of program satisfaction, 4) total participant trips taken, 5) average trip frequency of participants, 6) car trips reduced, and 7) volume of trips by origin.

Finally, a worksite transit program will require ongoing promotions to keep employees aware of the program. This could include digital or print marketing materials, events, etc. Information on the worksite transit program should be included in new employee onboarding.

Commuter Choice Maryland: Vanpool Toolkit for Employers and Commuters

Citation: Commuter Choice Maryland. (2019) Commuter Choice Maryland: Vanpool Toolkit for Employers and Commuters. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from mdot.maryland.gov website: https://www.mdot.maryland.gov/OPCP/MDOT%20Vanpool%20Toolkit.pdf

Commuter Choice Maryland is a statewide program in Maryland that encourages alternative modes of transportation to employment including transit, rideshare, vanpool, bicycling, or walking. This toolkit provides resources to employers and commuters considering vanpooling. For employees considering implementation of a vanpool, the following steps are described: 1) find a point of contact to help connect you with other employees in the company, 2) familiarize yourself with commuter benefits including any employer-provided benefits, 3) hold a meeting with vanpool providers, 4) develop a vanpool schedule, and 5) reach out to your company's human resources department to advertise the vanpool. For employers, the toolkit recommends choosing an employee who will coordinate the vanpool program, determine how much the company is willing to invest in vanpooling, choose a vanpool provider, and promote the vanpool program.

The Value of Vanpooling

Citation: Mangan, M. (2018) The Value of Vanpooling as a Strategic, Cost-Effective, and Sustainable Transportation Option.

This factsheet examines the state of vanpooling and its costs/benefits. Ridesharing (including vanpooling) grew during the energy crisis in the 1970's to support employees who struggled to get to work due to the increasing costs of driving. Over forty years later, the vanpool industry is still going strong due to it being a cost-effective form of commuting. This fact sheet estimates that an average commute of 100 miles per day saves vanpool members nearly $10,000 per year. Commute with Enterprise offers a vanpool program in more than seventy US cities.

Vanpool Program Best Practices: Telephone Survey of Vanpool Programs Nationwide and Summary of Current FTA Requirements

Citation: VHB, Inc. (2010) Vanpool Program Best Practices: Telephone Survey of Vanpool Programs Nationwide and Summary of Current FTA Requirements.

This report examined ten vanpool programs across the United States, synthesizing key themes, findings, and best practices. Interviews were focused on large, more urban focused vanpool programs. These programs ranged from publicly owned and operated programs to those using a turnkey contractor (Commute with Enterprise). Both options had pros and cons. Findings show that public programs generally required more staff than turnkey-contractor programs. Several programs were utilizing CMAQ funding, FTA Section 5307 funding (urban), and vanpool member fares to fund the program. A best

practice included limiting the number of rules to participation so as not to discourage people from becoming a vanpool member. Marketing the vanpool program helps the program recruit and retain members. The marketing should be multi-faceted including print and electronic media, outreach activities, and consistent branding.

Increasing the Recognition and Support of Employer-Provided Commute Benefits Via Best Workplaces for Commuters

Citation: National Center for Transit Research (2020) Increasing the Recognition and Support of Employer-Provided Commute Benefits Via Best Workplaces for Commuters. Center for Urban Transportation Research, University of South Florida.

This report examines the Best Workplaces for Commuters (BWC) program which aims to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of employer-based commuter benefits programs. BWC provides technical assistance and resources to promote transit and other travel choices to commute to work. As of the time of this report, BWC had 232 members. In order to qualify, an organization must provide one of several employee commuter benefits including a transit or vanpool pass, an emergency ride home program, and/or provide pre-tax options for employees to pay for a transit pass or vanpool fares.

10.2 Examinations of Vanpooling Opportunities

Vanpooling in North Dakota: Feasibility and Operating Scenarios

Citation: Mielke, Jon. (2006) Vanpooling in North Dakota: Feasibility and Operating Scenarios. Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute. Retrieved May 13, 2022 from rosap.ntl.bts.gov website: https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/60045

Vanpooling is generally defined as a group of people commuting to and from work together in a van. Vanpools are successful in situations where work schedules are regular and fixed, where there are a sufficient number of individuals traveling from a similar location, and where public transit is either unavailable or unable to meet worker needs. Commuting by personal vehicles is becoming increasingly expensive as vehicle and insurance costs increase and fuel costs exceed $3 per gallon. These costs are exacerbated in more rural communities where commute distances can range from 25 to 75 miles, one-way. In particular, rural areas like North Dakota may see an increase in the number of workers that are available to employers with programs like vanpools. This report reviewed the state of the practice in vanpool programs, surveyed major employers statewide in North Dakota, and made recommendations for developing a new vanpool program for the state of North Dakota.

Mielke reviewed several state vanpooling programs including Utah, New Jersey, Connecticut, Michigan, Hawaii, Maine, and Colorado. Several of these programs were using CMAQ funding to purchase vehicles and operate the program. All programs provided some form of a GRH program. While Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, New Jersey, and Utah state departments of transportation operated their programs

in-house, Michigan and Hawaii had contracted with a third-party, VPSI (since bought out by Commute with Enterprise), to operate the service.

A vanpool program based in the Fargo, North Dakota region was initiated in 2005. The Fargo-Moorhead Metropolitan Council of Governments (F-M COG) contracted with VPSI to promote and administer the program using FTA Job Access Reverse Commute (Section 3037) grant funding (which is no longer a program). A $50 per month subsidy was provided to each vanpool for the first year of operation to reduce costs, and drivers received an additional subsidy to cover 50% of the monthly lease-related fare. The program aimed to serve long distance commutes between Fargo-Moorhead and Wahpeton (56 miles one-way), Fargo-Moorhead and Gwinner (86 miles one-way), and Fargo-Moorhead and Grand Forks (78 miles, one-way).

The report specifically points out the iRide Vanpool program in the Missoula, Montana region operated by MRTMA. This program was implemented in response to expected congestion related to planned construction on Highway 93. The program was originally funded using CMAQ funding, and match from the city of Missoula, Missoula County, the Missoula Parking Commission, and the University of Missoula. MRTMA has nine, 13-passenger vans transporting nearly 120 workers per day on a regular basis. A GRH program is offered for riders to use up to four times per year; this program utilizes a local taxi company. The MRTMA vanpool program is unique in that it allows occasional riders to join a vanpool on a space-availability basis; riders just need to call into MRTMA if they need a ride and will be put in touch with a local pool if there is availability. Additionally, MRTMA utilizes vanpool vehicles during down times (generally 9am to 3pm) for noncommuter purposes like transporting elderly and people with a disability that are not served by other local transit services. During these times, transit service drivers will pick up a vanpool vehicle at a worksite. The vehicles are then refueled and returned to the worksite prior to the commuters' trip home.

Several recommendations were made to implement a new vanpool program in the state of North Dakota. It was suggested that the program contract with a third-party on a three-year trial basis using Federal funding. The estimated program costs were expected to be $112,700 for the first year, increasing to an estimated $243,600 by year three to accommodate additional ridership. The phased, trial approach to vanpooling would allow the state to re-examine what works and how to best meet resident needs.

Impacts of Vanpooling in Pennsylvania and Future Opportunities

Citation: Deitrick, S. (2010) Impacts of Vanpooling in Pennsylvania and Future Opportunities. Final Report Prepared for Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. Retrieved from ucsur.pitt.edu website: https://ucsur.pitt.edu/files/center/Impacts_of_Vanpooling_2010.pdf

This report conducted a survey to determine the feasibility of expanding vanpool operations in Pennsylvania. This report analyzed the state of the practice of vanpooling in the United States and vanpooling conditions in Pennsylvania, and conducted an employer-focused survey. Deitrick identified

several factors which can affect vanpooling decisions, including geographic, economic, and social/demographic. For example, longer commuting distances, areas with increased congestion, and areas with a concentration of employers in a common location can encourage vanpool usage. As fuel prices increase, this can encourage vanpool usage. Findings from the survey show that drivers with an income of $25,000 to $75,000 are slightly more likely to consider a carpool or vanpool. Shift workers and those with limited access to a personal vehicle or public transit are more likely to consider a vanpool. Generally, vanpooling can be better supported by larger employers.

Several vanpool programs are featured in this report, including examples operating in a rural area and those covering a large geographic region. One example was the SPC vanpool program which operates across ten counties in southwest Pennsylvania. SPC launched the vanpool program in 1973 during the energy crisis and the program is successful still today. Vans are leased from a third-party VPSI Inc. (now acquired by Commute with Enterprise). In 2010, SPC reportedly operated forty-three vanpools with over 500 participants. Vanpools averaged nine commuters per vehicle. SPC offers vanpool information on a website which allows for applications for those interested in forming a vanpool or employers seeking additional information.

For rural areas in Pennsylvania, the largest employers tend to be hospitals, manufacturing plants, correctional facilities, and institutions of higher education. Deitrick notes that a lack of knowledge can influence whether an employer will champion vanpooling or other commute options.

Vanpool – Connecting the Workforce to Work

Citation: University of Nebraska at Omaha Center for Public Affairs Research (2019) Vanpool – Connecting the Workforce to Work. Retrieved May 17, 2022 from nebraskatransit.com website: https://documentstndot.s3.amazonaws.com/NDOR_Documents/vanpool+infographic.pdf

This factsheet prepared for the NDOT analyzes the costs and benefits of vanpooling in the state of Nebraska. Nearly 28% of workers in Nebraska commute to work outside of the county they live in. These individuals provide a large potential user group for a vanpool program. Vanpools were seen as a method to expand potential employment pools and ensure reliable transportation to work. The costs of commuting via private vehicle were compared to the estimated costs to be a member of a vanpool utilizing average adjusted rate per mile from the U.S. General Services Administration ($0.58 per mile). Findings show that the average person commuting using a private vehicle to travel 100 miles roundtrip spends about $58 per day or $1,160 per month. This cost includes fixed and variable costs like fuel, maintenance, and insurance. The average vanpool member in Nebraska spends about $5.61 per day or $112 per month – less than a tenth of the cost of a private vehicle.

Employers also benefit from vanpool programs which include a larger pool of potential employees, less employee stress, reduction in employee absenteeism, and a reduction in parking needs. Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefits, which can allow employees to set aside $265 per month pre-tax, can decrease taxable payroll. Considering employee absenteeism which may be caused by the lack of

reliable transportation, in 2016 the Center for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that companies lose around $1,685 per employee per year due to absenteeism.

10.3 Vanpool Program Examples

Go NEWhere, Nebraska Statewide Vanpool Subsidy Program

Citation: Shared-Use Mobility Center. (2019) Go NEWhere, Nebraska Statewide Vanpool Subsidy Program. Retrieved April 26, 2022, from sharedusemobilitycenter.org website: https://learn.sharedusemobilitycenter.org/casestudy/8555/

In 2017, the NDOT partnered with Commute with Enterprise to launch Go NEWhere, an employee vanpool program. Under this three-year pilot program, NEDOT hoped to improve access to alternative modes of transportation to work. As of 2019, twenty-nine groups were registered through the Go NEWhere program. The most common form of vanpool was urban workers traveling to rural factory jobs (twenty-six vanpools). The monthly rental fee for a van is around $1,000 which includes lease, maintenance, and fuel. NDOT provides a subsidy of up to $400 per month to the vanpools, leaving around $600 per month that is divided up by vanpool participants or around a $40 monthly cost (assuming a 15-passenger vanpool).

To recruit vanpool members, Commute with Enterprise staff traveled to Nebraska to pitch the program to companies and their employees. Groups must contain between seven and fifteen passengers. Once a vanpool group is formed, they can sign up for a vanpool using the NebraskaTransit.com website. This website allows participants to choose a vehicle (van or SUV) and provides a monthly cost estimate (including the $400 per month subsidy from NDOT). Commute with Enterprise provides vanpool members with a gas card and invoices members for their share of the lease, maintenance, and fuel. Vehicles are equipped with Wi-Fi and display the NDOT logo.

A GRH program is offered through Commute with Enterprise which members can use up to twice a year.

Vanpools: A Viable Option in Rural Regions

Citation: Amy Conrick. (2008) Vanpools: A Viable Option in Rural Regions. Community Transportation, Vol. 26, Issue 4. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org website: https://nationalcenterformobilitymanagement.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ben_Franklin_Rural_Vanpool_10_08-1.pdf

BFT in the Tri-Cities area of Washington State has been running a successful vanpool program since the 1980's. Starting with just two fifteen-passenger vans, the program grew to 302 vans in 2009 with a waitlist of groups interested in joining the vanpool program waiting for an available vehicle. Vanpools must designate a driver. Drivers' employment and driving histories are checked at enrolment into the program, and all drivers are required to attend a driver's workshop and a refresher course every three

years. Drivers ride for free, whereas riders are billed monthly for a base-cost plus a per-mile rate which depends on the size of the vehicle and the number of the days the van operates per year. For example, a fifteen-passenger van traveling 100 miles a day costs $826.10 per month or an average of $59 per month per rider. Fares cover capital costs, insurance, maintenance, the cost of a GRH program, and fuel. Riders are able to bank free weeks of vacation credit after six months of participation so that they do not lose their spot on a van during personal travel.

Vanpool members have been surveyed to gauge satisfaction. The vanpool program received a 98% approval rating from members. Findings show that members enjoy the cost effectiveness of the program particularly for those with long distance, more rural commutes. Additionally vanpool members enjoy the flexible nature of a vanpool which allows the group to stop for coffee on the way to work.

BFT notes several challenges with operating and maintaining their vanpool program. First, BFT struggled with the limited number of vans available for the program and noted a struggle to keep up with demand. Additionally, BFT notes that a successful vanpool program needs a champion within the vanpool sponsoring agency.

Rural and Mountain Community Vanpools

UrbanTrans (n.d.) Rural and Mountain Community Vanpools: A Brochure Prepared for the Colorado Department of Transportation. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from codot.gov website: https://www.codot.gov/programs/innovativemobility/assets/commuterchoices/documents/cdot_brochure_print.pdf

This brochure prepared for the Colorado Department of Transportation provides guidance on rural vanpool programs and describes three rural vanpool examples: one in Colorado, one in Oregon, and one in Montana. Vanpooling programs provide a cost-effective travel choice for groups of employees commuting from a similar location to a central employer or area of employers. The brochure suggested three types of vanpool programs: employer-sponsored programs, third-party programs, and owner-operated programs. Rural vanpool programs have been successful in Colorado and across the nation.

Bank of Aspen in Aspen, Colorado recognized a job-housing imbalance in their region which had priced many good, reliable employees out of Aspen causing longer distance commutes. In an effort to retain employees, Bank of Aspen developed an employer-sponsored vanpool program. Initially the Bank charged $3 per day for trips from Rifle to Aspen; however, after realizing the impact the program had on retaining employees the Bank ultimately decided to drop the fee.

Black Butte Ranch in Central Oregon, a popular resort destination, had a similar challenge to the Bank of Aspen where employees were commuting sixty miles from Redmond, Oregon. In order to address employee recruitment and retention, Black Butte Ranch worked with the nearby Bend Commute Options Program. This program contacted Portland's VPSI program which helped Black Butte Ranch implement a seasonal employee vanpool program. Black Butte Ranch pays the cost of the vanpool

program and hired VPSI (now Commute with Enterprise) to operate and administer the vanpool. The program is offered free of charge to employees.

The Montana Department of Transportation supported the implementation of a vanpool pilot project in the Missoula, Montana area in conjunction with planned construction along Highway 93. The program was funded using CMAQ funds and local match from the City, County, Parking Commission, the local university, the local hospital, and private individuals. Riders are charged $0.08 per mile. The program continues to operate under the management of MRTMA.

Ridesharing to Work & Training: Options for Veterans Transitioning Service Members and Their Families

Citation: Community Transportation Association of America. (n.d.) Ridesharing to Work & Training: Options for Veterans Transitioning Service Members and Their Families. Retrieved May 11, 2022 from ctaa.org website: https://ctaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Veterans_Brief_Ridesharing_Transitioning_final.pdf

This brief prepared by the Community Transportation Association of America notes the numerous benefits of ridesharing/vanpooling including providing a cost-effective means to commute to work and reducing wear and tear on personal vehicles. In particular, ridesharing or vanpooling can be helpful for those with a long commute or for households with one vehicle. Vanpool programs have successfully been implemented at military bases around the county and are often administered by a third-party operator. In addition, a unique vanpool in California is described. KART provides a vanpool program to students to access a community college roughly thirty-five miles one-way. KART allows eligible riders who are twenty-one or older with good driving records to become drivers and has successfully set up a staggered schedule to allow students to return home at different times throughout the day.

11 Appendix C: Vanpool Program Case Studies

Fully formatted and accessible Case Studies may be found here:
https://westerntransportationinstitute.org/research_projects/supporting-employment-transportation-in-southern-georgia/



April 2023

Commuter Co-Op Vermont

Prepared By: Karalyn Clouser and Natalie Villwock-Witte, Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University

Prepared For: National Association of Development Organizations and the Southern Georgia Regional Commission

Program Overview

Commuter Co-Op is a statewide vanpool program administered by the Vermont Agency on Transportation's (VTrans') Go! Vermont Program (https://www.connectingcommuters.org/). Go! Vermont provides residents with information and resources for travel options from public transit, to bicycling and walking, to vanpool.

The Commuter Co-Op vanpool program in Vermont has been providing commuters with an alternative to single occupancy commute trips for ten years. The program was originally implemented using V Ride, a third-party vanpool operation. V Ride was then acquired by Commute with Enterprise who has since been providing vanpool services for the program. The program goal was to fill in the gaps where public transportation does not travel or during times when public transportation does not operate (e.g., during second or third shift commutes).

Program Operations

Commute with Enterprise handles program operations for the Commuter Co-Op program and a representative from Commute with Enterprise works to recruit employers to the program. Commute with Enterprise explains the benefits of vanpool and how a vanpool could work for an employer's specific needs. They have found success reaching out to larger employers (200+ employees) and those that tend to work shifts (warehouses, distribution centers, manufacturing). When an employer decides to partner with Commute with Enterprise, they will look at anonymized employee data to form clusters of employees that live close together, generally those living within five miles of one another. These employee clusters could be used by the employer to help promote a vanpool program containing 4 to 15 people. Single vehicle households and those without a vehicle seem to be more receptive to a vanpool program. Once a potential vanpool has been identified, Commute with Enterprise will ask the employer to put them into contact with the relevant employees so that they can explain the benefits of vanpools; this may be done through an on-site meeting at the company. A key point used to entice employee participation is the financial savings from commuting via vanpool versus commuting in a single occupant vehicle.

Commute with Enterprise provides the right sized vehicle for each vanpool; however, in order to qualify as a vanpool vehicle, the vehicle must have seven seatbelts. In addition, full collision coverage, liability insurance, vehicle maintenance, and 24-hour roadside assistance are provided. Commute with Enterprise requires a vanpool sponsor; for the Commuter Co-Op program, the employer acts as the sponsor. In addition to the sponsor, the vanpool must have a vanpool coordinator who will track mileage, gas expenses, and collect fees and send them to Commute with Enterprise. Generally, the employer or a vanpool participant will facilitate this coordination.



Photo Credit: Vermont Commuter Co-Op

Each vanpool must designate at least one driver and a back-up driver. A vanpool member must be twenty-five years or older to apply to become a driver; however, anyone eighteen years or older may participate as a vanpool rider. A benefit provided to drivers is that they can utilize the van for personal use up to ten percent of the total monthly mileage. Vanpool members then determine their pick-up and drop off locations and their normal route, and any other day-to-day operations (e.g., stopping for coffee). Most vanpools are utilizing a central pick-up location like a big box retailer's parking lot, a park-n-ride, or a church parking lot instead of picking up individuals from their home.

Vanpool members are provided with a guaranteed ride home (GRH) program that can be leveraged for up to a $70 reimbursement for an alternative ride to get the member home in case of an emergency (e.g., sudden illness, family emergency, unexpected overtime). If a taxi or the like cannot provide a ride, the GRH program will reimburse mileage at $0.65 per mile in cases where a family member, a friend, or a co-worker provides the ride. Go! Vermont estimates there to be minimal usage of the GRH program: approximately one person per month.

Commute with Enterprise provides Go! Vermont with the required National Transit Database (NTD) reporting each month. These reports include information documenting all vanpools in operation including mileage and fares collected.

Current Ridership

The Commuter Co-Op program currently operates around seventeen vanpools across the state of Vermont. Only one van is traveling to the Burlington area (Vermont's largest city). Nearly 90% of the vans are operating in rural areas where there are fewer public transportation options. The total number of vanpools tends to fluctuate due to a large number of ski and snowboard resorts utilizing the program to provide transportation to employees during the winter season.

Commuter Co-Op has also found success partnering with staffing agencies, as they can quickly form vanpools. The staffing agencies may be aware that for an employer to attract a broader pool of employees, they may also need to provide transportation to those candidates. When a staffing agency puts together a vanpool, they serve as the sponsor.

Program Funding

Go! Vermont has used Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) formula funding to pay for the vanpool program. CMAQ funding can be used for administrative support for the vanpool program and FTA formula funds can help pay for operations.

Go! Vermont subsidizes up to 75% of the cost of the vanpool for the first three months, and then subsidizes 50% then after to help reduce the costs to vanpool members. The proportion subsidized by Go! Vermont was increased from 50% to 75% during the pandemic as an effort to retain the vanpools. Approximately $600/month is the average subsidy provided.

Marketing

The vanpool program is promoted on the Go! Vermont website (https://www.connectingcommuters.org/information-and-schedules/ridesharing/commuterco-opvt/). The website provides basic information and short videos describing what a vanpool is, the benefits of vanpools, and how to get started. In addition, Go! Vermont promotes the program on their social media, local media campaigns, and during any business outreach. Go! Vermont works with Commute with Enterprise to ensure that all marketing is consistent. All marketing has the Go! Vermont, VTrans, and Commute with Enterprise logos.

Go! Vermont has developed several brochures and one-pagers on the program which are available on the Go! Vermont website. Promoting the savings to the commuter by utilizing taglines like “Give yourself a raise! Check out Go! Vermont, and we’ll show you how to save $2,500 on transportation this year!” has proven to be effective.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Consider Additional Program Provisions When Developing Your RFP:

When developing their Request for Proposal (RFP) for the vanpool program, Vermont needed to consider winter driving conditions, as some of the most significant users are employees traveling to and from ski and snowboard resorts. Go! Vermont currently pays additional funds to include snow tires on vehicles in the winter. While it was not required in the existing RFP, Go! Vermont intends to include it in the future.

Engaging Employers Takes Time:

Commute with Enterprise noted that the most difficult part of a vanpool program is finding someone at a worksite to speak with in order to promote the benefits of vanpool. They have found success in being persistent, highlighting program flexibility, and promoting the benefits

that may be unique to that employer such as: Are you struggling to hire employees?, Are you struggling to keep good employees?, and Is there public transportation in the area? In addition, Commute with Enterprise leases vanpool vehicles on a month-to-month basis, allowing an employer to try out the program and if they do not find it successful, their sponsored vanpool can return the vehicle the next month.

Word of Mouth Is Your Best Marketing:

Commuter Co-Op has experienced program growth due to word of mouth, particularly for the ski and snowboard resorts across the state. Once one resort saw the benefits of providing vanpool for their employees, others wanted to try out the program.

Next Steps



Photo Credit: Vermont Commuter Co-Op

The Commuter Co-Op program would like to see dynamic vanpooling in the future. This would allow for even more flexibility for both vanpools and vanpool members. It may also help to sustain vanpools that may otherwise have to sunset if they lose a member(s). The Commuter Co-Op program envisions trip planning software or transit planning applications that would allow for "seat discovery." For example, if someone were to miss the bus to work, they could use a trip planning application and see if there is a vanpool nearby that is headed to the desired destination. This will allow for more on demand trips and flexibility for commuters, similar to microtransit.

Learn More

To learn more about the Vermont Commuter Co-Op Vanpool Program, please visit the program website at: https://www.connectingcommuters.org/information-and-schedules/ridesharing/commuterco-opvt/

Contact Information

Dan Currier, Vermont Agency of Transportation, dan.j.currier@vermont.gov
Joe Traina, Commute with Enterprise, joseph.a.traina@ehi.com

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April 2023

Go NEWhere Vanpool Program

Prepared By: Karalyn Clouser and Natalie Villwock-Witte, Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University

Prepared For: National Association of Development Organizations and the Southern Georgia Regional Commission

Program Overview

Seeking a turnkey vanpool program, the Nebraska Department of Transportation (DOT) spent two years crafting a Request for Proposals (RFP) that they would ultimately release in 2017. Commute with Enterprise was chosen to implement the Go NEWhere vanpool program to serve the goal of, "*providing commuters with an alternative mode of transportation that is cost-effective, reliable and environmentally friendly*."

The vanpool program helps to fill the gaps that public transportation does not currently address. When originally planning for the program, the Nebraska DOT assumed it would be popular for commuters traveling between Lincoln and Omaha, two of Nebraska's largest cities. However, this program has been most successful in Nebraska's rural areas, with most of the vanpools either operating in or traveling to a rural area.

Program Operations

Commute with Enterprise handles the vanpool operations. The Nebraska DOT has a representative with Commute with Enterprise who helps line up vanpools for the entire state. It is up to Commute with Enterprise to procure vanpool vehicles, conduct training, and coordinate drivers. Generally, each vanpool has a designated driver and a back-up driver, and anyone within the pool can apply providing they have a valid driver's license and pass a driver records check. A significant incentive for drivers is that they may use the vehicle for personal use, up to around 1,000 miles per month. Some vanpools, depending on what the participants agree upon, will allow drivers to participate for free; this choice is up to the participants within each vanpool. The driver is also responsible for the vehicle's maintenance (e.g. oil changes). Commute with Enterprise typically replaces the vehicle annually. Vanpool participants also collectively determine where the vanpool will meet and drop off and hours for the vanpool. Most vanpools find a central meeting point or two, typically a location with underutilized parking during the week (e.g. big box retailers, a church, a park-n-ride). Commute with Enterprise assists the vanpools with identifying pick-up locations.

Commuters lease the vanpool vehicle from Commute with Enterprise. The cost per vehicle is around $1,000 to $1,200 per month. The Nebraska DOT provides a subsidy of $400 per month for each vanpool to help reduce costs. The remaining cost is divided up amongst vanpool members, so more riders means cheaper monthly costs. Commute with Enterprise works to provide appropriately sized vehicles to meet the needs of the group; however, in order to be eligible for federal reimbursement, each vehicle must have seven seatbelts. Vanpools generally range from seven to fifteen people; however, the Go NEWhere program does allow for smaller vanpools as needed. If a vanpool starts small and gains additional members, Commute with Enterprise provides a larger vehicle.



Photo Credit: N. Hetherington, WTI/MSU

Commute with Enterprise submits an annual report to Nebraska DOT which includes the total miles driven, total number of vanpools and commuters, savings to the environment, and savings to the commuter. In addition, Commute with Enterprise completes all required National Transit Database (NTD) reporting including data on costs. As the program administrative oversight entity, Nebraska DOT collaborates with Commute with Enterprise on NTD reporting.

Current Ridership

Go NEWhere vanpool is available statewide. Go NEWhere currently has around 50 active vanpools across the state, the majority of which are operating in proximity to Nebraska's two largest cities in the southeast. Vanpools traveling either to or from rural areas have remained strong even through the COVID-19 pandemic, as the vanpools were primarily transporting essential workers to food processing plants, manufacturing plants, and other industrial employers.

In Nebraska, particularly in more rural areas, employers often struggle to recruit employees due to transportation challenges. Consequently, some of these rural employers will provide an additional vanpool subsidy.

Program Funding

The vanpool program is subsidized with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311 formula grant funding for rural pools. Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds provide a pool of funding that can be used in more urbanized areas. None of the funding used for the program is state funding.

Some of the more rural employers may contribute to some or all of the remaining cost of the vanpool, as it assists them with attracting the employees that they need. Typically, the guaranteed ride home (GRH) is provided by the employer.

Marketing

The Go NEWhere program has created a consistent brand logo used on all marketing materials along with the Nebraska DOT logo and the Commute with Enterprise logo. To advertise the program, all vehicles are wrapped with GoNEWhere branding which includes a phone number for more information. Branding the vehicles has been a very effective advertising strategy. The Go NEWhere website (nebraskatransit.com) is dedicated to the vanpool program which includes information on the program and contact information for people to reach out to if they have questions or would like to start a vanpool.

The Nebraska DOT has issued statewide press releases that have helped gather interest. Directly reaching out to employers and riders sharing information about the program with their colleagues, friends, and family have been the most effective form of marketing.

The Nebraska DOT has tried to reach out to rural public transportation providers to make them aware that the vanpool program can address service needs outside of when their systems run. However, to date, there has been limited coordination.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Consider Additional Program Provisions When Developing Your RFP:

When developing their vanpool program RFP, the Nebraska DOT included provisions for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In particular, if a vanpool requests an ADA accessible vehicle, then one must be provided. However, a recent review of the vanpool ADA accommodations recommended that potential candidates be made aware of these provisions. Therefore, the Nebraska DOT is working with their Commute with Enterprise representative to create a standardized presentation that includes information on ADA accessibility and how to go about requesting accommodations.

The Nebraska DOT did not include within their RFP a request for demographic information, which may have allowed them to better understand the vanpool user group. An agency should try to fully consider all information that they desire and include it to the best of their ability in the RFP and make note of any additional information they should obtain for inclusion in future RFPs.

The majority of existing vanpool users are presumed to be work-week users. However, opportunities exist to add employees to existing vanpools that may be only working a few days a week.

Vanpools Fluctuate and Take Time to Evolve:

The Nebraska DOT began planning for the Go NEWhere program in 2014 and the system launched in 2017. Since 2017, the program has grown due to marketing efforts and word of mouth. The total number of vanpools and the total number of vanpool participants has fluctuated over time, which is very normal for vanpools. Vanpools are leased on a month-to-month basis from Commute with Enterprise. This allows for a lot of flexibility where participants can try out a vanpool and if it does not work out, they can return the vehicle. In another case, as a vanpool grows additional participants, Commute with Enterprise can accommodate these changes by providing a larger vehicle.

Turnkey Programs Mean Fewer Staff Resources:

Because of its turnkey nature, it is up to Commute with Enterprise to ensure that the vanpool program is running smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The benefit of this is that it requires fewer Nebraska DOT staff resources (e.g., staff hours) to keep the vanpool program operational.

Urban Areas May Not Be Primary Users:

The Nebraska DOT knows that there are a significant number of commuters between Lincoln and Omaha, the two largest cities in the state. Therefore, Nebraska DOT was surprised that only a few vanpools serve this corridor. However, this may potentially reflect the flexibility that a personal vehicle offers when compared with a vanpool. Consequently, higher income areas, which can more easily afford private vehicles, where congestion is not consistent, will likely not find vanpools to be of value.

Engaging Employers Take Time:

The Nebraska DOT has noted that with some employers, especially larger employers who may have multiple levels of management, identifying the appropriate person to discuss the advantages of and the need for a vanpool program can take time.

Next Steps

With COVID-19 restrictions lifting, both the Nebraska DOT and Commute with Enterprise are very positive about growth for the vanpool program, especially as fuel costs rise and more commuters seek to save money. In particular, the Nebraska DOT would like to look for opportunities to create vanpools in other regions of the state.

Learn More

To learn more about the Go NEWhere Vanpool Program, please visit the program website at: https://www.nebraskatransit.com/statewide-vanpool

Contact Information

Kari Ruse, Transit Manager, Nebraska Department of Transportation, kari.ruse@nebraska.gov

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June 2023

iRide Vanpool

Prepared By: Karalyn Clouser and Natalie Villwock-Witte, Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University

Prepared For: National Association of Development Organizations and the Southern Georgia Regional Commission

Program Overview

iRide Vanpool is a vanpool program operated and administered by the Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Association (MRTMA). iRide Vanpool was implemented to reduce congestion during planned construction on Highway 93 in the Missoula and Ravalli County area. Furthermore, the Friends of the Bitterroot, a nonprofit organization with a mission of preserving wildlands and wildlife, advocated for vanpool as a way to promote alternatives to single occupancy vehicle (SOV) commuting to help avoid future highway expansions in the region.



Photo Credit: MRTMA

The iRide Vanpool expands the multimodal transportation offerings for the region as well as meeting several regional goals including reducing parking congestion, protecting the environment, minimizing traffic, and improving quality of life.

Program Operations

MRTMA owns and operates iRide Vanpool. They have two full-time staff and two part-time staff who provide administrative support to the program.

There are three ways that a vanpool may form. First, someone desiring to join a vanpool must complete a rideshare application on the program website (http://www.mrtma.org/rideshare-application.html). MRTMA reviews applications to determine if an existing route will meet their needs. If not a wait list is reviewed for creation of a possible new vanpool route with potential riders or asked if they'd be interested in carpooling. Occasionally an employer or a group employees will reach out to MRTMA to have someone explain the vanpool program and its benefits at their place of employment. Employers may also sponsor a vanpool.

The program uses seven-passenger hybrid minivans (Toyota Siennas) and twelve-passenger gasoline-powered vans. To create a vanpool, at least four passengers (for the minivan) or eight passengers (for the thirteen-passenger van) must travel to work at least four days a week. Vanpool routes are created to serve passengers who live and work in close proximity to each other. Currently, iRide Vanpool serves 16 routes throughout Ravalli, Mineral, Lake, and Missoula Counties. Routes are designed to best accommodate riders' needs.

The vanpools riders typically meet at one of the 27 park-n-ride lots in the area which are located along the main corridors. The vans are generally parked at the park-n-ride lot at the end of the trip, except during the winter when MRTMA allows the vanpool driver to take the van home to ensure that frost does not develop on the windows as a result of riders entering a cold vehicle. It allows for routes to keep on-time schedules, as the driver can defrost and warm up the van before taking on riders.



Photo Credit: MRTMA

Vanpool fares vary based on distance traveled and the total number of days traveled per week. On average, it costs $0.09 per mile to ride the vanpool. The monthly fare from Hamilton to Missoula (47.1 miles one-way) is $140/month. A basic fare schedule is provided on the iRide Vanpool frequently asked questions website: http://www.mrtma.org/faqs.html.

While still adhering to Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations, MRTMA allows vanpools to have some level of flexibility on the route as long as the riders agree. For example, one vanpool asked permission to travel to a movie as a group before heading home one month. With permission from MRTMA, drivers have also been able to utilize the van to travel to medical appointment during their workday.

MRTMA handles the maintenance of the vehicles and adheres to the manufacturer recommended preventative maintenance schedule. Van maintenance is performed while the riders are at work so as not to cause lost work time for the driver or the riders. MRTMA manages a fleet of spare vehicles for instances where vehicle maintenance will take longer than normal (e.g. parts are unavailable). The vans are equipped with an in-vehicle monitoring system from T Mobile which records when the driver speeds, brakes hard, or takes a corner at a high speed. This allows MRTMA to proactively handle any driver safety issues and provides a reduced insurance rate for the vanpools. MRTMA provides studded snow tires or all-season tires in the winter.

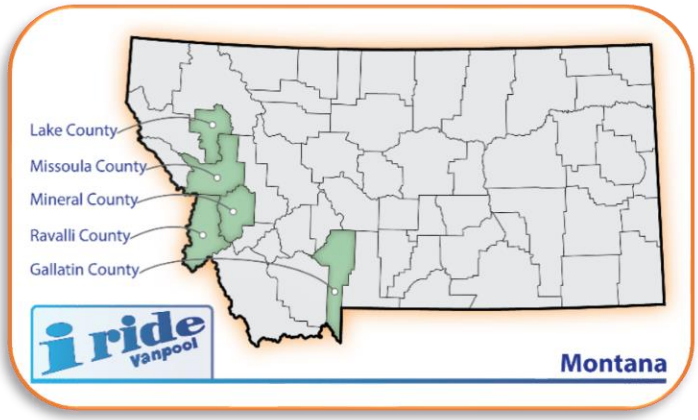
A primary driver and at least one backup driver are required to initiate a vanpool. If a driver operates the van two full days per week, their fare is covered for the entire week. Generally, the primary drivers will drive the van three days a week and a backup driver will cover two days. The

driving schedule is agreed upon between the drivers. An individual must be 25 years old and agree to a motor vehicle record check to serve in this capacity. If someone younger than 25 years old has a commercial driver's license (CDL), MRTMA's insurer will allow them to serve as a driver. For example, employees who had CDLs to drive buses for the university were also able to drive vanpools. Vanpool riders can be under the age of eighteen; however, MRTMA requires that riders who do not possess a driver's license or are under 16 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. MRTMA enacted this policy in response to safety concerns when children were not picked up at the park-n-ride at the end of the day and to remove any perceived conflicts with school bus regulations.

The vanpool provides a guaranteed ride home (GRH) program which allows vanpool users to be reimbursed for trips home in case of emergency once monthly. The GRH program allows vanpool riders to utilize local taxi services, public transportation, Uber, or Lyft. Previously, MRTMA previously contracted with a local taxi company, but due to changes in FTA regulations have changed the program. MRTMA noted that while provided, the GRH program is rarely utilized.

Current Ridership

Currently, iRide Vanpool serves 16 routes and 67 riders throughout Ravalli, Mineral, Lake, and Missoula Counties. Routes are designed to best accommodate riders' needs. Recently, a route serving commuters in Gallatin County was implemented through a partnership with the state Voc-Rehab Program to provide transportation to workers traveling from Manhattan to Three Forks to work at a popular local bakery/restaurant.



MRTMA has found that manufacturers utilize the program the most as these employers are generally located in rural counties. Most vanpool members are over the age of thirty-five; however, iRide Vanpool reported losing a lot of older members post-COVID as many of these individuals either permanently switched to telework or retired.

Each vanpool generally has a core group of members who utilize the vanpool all week and individuals that blend telework and in-office two to three days a week. MRTMA has found that people who vanpool like to know who they are riding with so generally riders will recruit additional vanpool members. MRTMA offers an Ad-Vantage program to members that provides free vanpool fares to members if they recruit new riders. In cases where vanpool ridership drops below the requirement, MRTMA will also reach out to employers in the area to help recruit additional members.

"The opportunity to be a driver on the iRide system has made it possible and feasible for me to have regular and reliable transportation to and from work on a daily basis. I am so grateful for this means of transportation. It is nice to have a ride on iRide!" - S. Tintinger

Program Funding

MRTMA utilizes FTA Section 5311 Formula Funding and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds from the local metropolitan planning organization (MPO) to fund the service. MRTMA structures their budget to take advantage of the lowest match rates. Their Section 5311 funds are used for administrative costs and preventative maintenance. CMAQ funding is used to cover vanpool operations, rather than 5311 since those funds require 47% match compared to the 20% local match rate of CMAQ. Thus, the entire program operates on a 20% local match requirement.

The first vanpool vehicle was leased from a local FTA Section 5307 fleet. Three years later MRTMA received earmarked funds from a state senator to purchase vehicles and build a transit facility for the program. Recently, MRTMA was approached by a third-party vanpool operator, but the third-party vanpool operator opted not to move forward as they found that they could not operate the vanpools at the same cost or convenience as offered by MRTMA to their vanpoolers.

The hybrid minivans (Toyota Siennas) utilized by iRide Vanpool would qualify for the Low or No Emission Vehicle Program through FTA. This program provides funds to state or local governments to purchase or lease zero or low emission transit vehicles.[1]

On average, a minivan costs MRTMA around $550 per month and the twelve-passenger vans cost around $750 per month. These costs include insurance, fuel cards for the vanpool riders, a cell phone, and vehicle maintenance.

Vanpool drivers are required to mail in vanpool fares and required reports (mileage – riders fill out a paper form letting the driver know which days they will be riding). MRTMA has offered a "tap" or cellphone log-in technology option; however, vanpool members reported a preference to remain with the current approach.

Insurance for the vanpool program is provided through Philadelphia Insurance. This company has a good understanding of volunteer driver programs. Coverage for the vanpool program currently costs around $72,000 per year. This policy covers riders and workers compensation for the vanpool drivers.

[1] FTA Low or No Emission Vehicle Program – 5339(c): https://www.transit.dot.gov/lowno

Marketing

iRide Vanpool is marketing using vinyl lettering, radio advertisements, and brochures. The website (http://www.mrtma.org/) provides basic information on how to utilize the program and a link to apply to become a rider. MRTMA has reported, however, that their best marketing is word-of-mouth.



Photo Credit: MRTMA

MRTMA participates in local employer, job fairs, and has targeted outreach to promote the program and recruit potential members. They have found that vinyl lettering vehicles is cost effective compared to vehicle wraps. It costs about $850 to letter a vehicle, a similar wrap would be approximately $6,000 to $7,000. It is also cheaper to replace a few letters due to animal strikes as opposed to having to replace an entire wrap. Both are noticeable as people drive on the road or past worksites and are guaranteed for 10-years not to fade.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Create Rider and Driver Policies:

Conflicts between vanpool members do occur. MRTMA has Rider and Driver Policies in place to help manage any challenges that may arise. When MRTMA becomes aware of conflicts, they offer to meet with the individuals involved at a coffee shop to discuss options. Traditionally, MRTMA has found that one rider typically drops out. Regarding drivers, in-vehicle monitoring systems help notify MRTMA of any driver issues. If MRTMA is notified that a driver is speeding, braking hard, or taking corners too fast, the driver is contacted by MRTMA to request a change in their driving practices. Upon a second infraction driving privileges may be suspended. If MRTMA contacts a driver for a third time, their driving privileges are revoked.

Reduce Requirements on Drivers:

For the iRide Vanpool program routes commuting from Missoula drivers must collect and send fares and rider logs into MRTMA. For routes commuting into Missoula MRTMA staff does collections from the vans on the 10th of each month. MRTMA handles any vehicle maintenance while the vanpool members are at work. This approach removes the responsibility of maintenance from the driver and gives MRTMA staff to inspect vehicles on a regular basis for any unreported issues.

Learn More

To learn more about the iRide Co-Op Vanpool Program, please visit the program website at: http://www.mrtma.org/

Contact Information

Lyn Hellegaard, Executive Director, Missoula Ravalli Transportation Management Association, mrtma2@montana.com

This work is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under a cooperative agreement. USDA is an equal opportunity provider. Any opinions, findings and conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.



April 2023

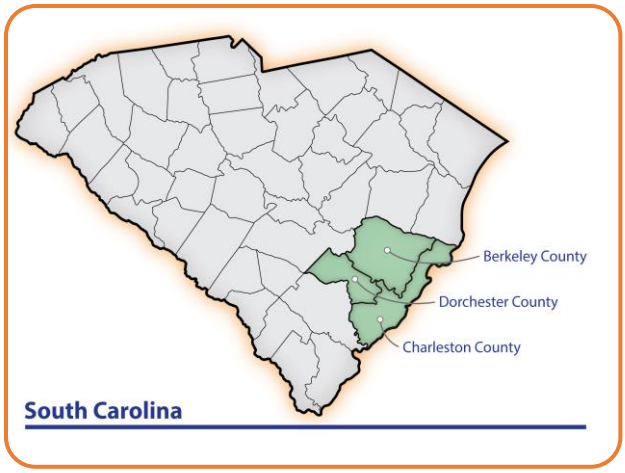
Lowcountry Go Vanpool Program

Prepared By: Karalyn Clouser and Natalie Villwock-Witte, Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University

Prepared For: National Association of Development Organizations and the Southern Georgia Regional Commission

Program Overview

The Lowcountry Go Vanpool Program was implemented as a five-year, grant-run vanpool program serving the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG) region in South Carolina. The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) also serve as partners with BCDCOG. The objective of the vanpool program is to provide a high-quality, affordable service which can complement two local bus services in the region: Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority (CARTA) which serves the metropolitan area of Charleston, South Carolina; and TriCounty Link which provides public transit service to the rural residents of three BCDCOG counties: Berkeley, Charleston, and Dorchester.



The Lowcountry Go Vanpool Program aims to fill in the gaps where the area's current public transit systems (CARTA and TriCounty Link) are unable to go, decrease congestion in the region, and for some, reduce parking in employment areas. The Lowcountry Go Vanpool Program follows this mission statement:

"The mission of the Lowcountry Go Vanpool Program is to deliver a high quality, affordable vanpooling service that will serve as a complement to CARTA and TriCounty Link's [TCL] transit services by linking people, jobs and communities in the most efficient manner possible."

Program Operations

The Lowcountry Go Vanpool Program provides groups of four or more commuters with a 7- or 15- passenger van which can only be used to commute to and from work. Vanpool participants

generally live in and commute to the same area and have similar work schedules. The program is open to any commuter over the age of eighteen but those who are under eighteen years old may participate with a guardian signature. A vanpool can be started by an individual or a company by reaching out to a mobility staff member at BCDCOG and by registering with the program website (https://ridelowgo.com/#/). Potential riders can also sign-up using Ride Amigos, which allows them to see if a current vanpool exists that may fit their commuting needs.

When starting a vanpool, BCDCOG requires designation of at least two drivers for each vanpool. Identifying two drivers allows for a back-up in case of emergencies. A driver must complete an application, be at least 25 years old, and have had their license for at least three years. A driver is responsible for operation of the van, basic maintenance (which is paid for by BCDCOG), collecting monthly fares for submission to BCDCOG, and completing a monthly mileage and expense report.

Once the vanpool has been initiated, the route, schedule, and van storage location is dependent on the needs of the vanpool group. The van can be housed at the driver's residence or at one of the region's nineteen park-n-ride lots.



Photo Credit: Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments

The Lowcountry Go Vanpool program offers an introductory rate of $30 per month per person for the first six months of vanpool membership. After the introductory rate, the vanpool fare is based on average daily round-trip miles, the number of days traveled each week, and the number of riders in the van. If a rider leaves the vanpool during the first six months, it will not affect the cost to other members. However, after that introductory rate ends, if a rider leaves a vanpool, the cost for everyone else will go up. When a rider leaves the program, they must provide BCDCOG and vanpool members with a fifteen-day notice so that the vanpool can attempt to acquire another rider to help balance costs. Riders currently pay fares using Lowcountry Go's website or by mail.

The program currently has four 7-passenger vans and seven 15-passenger vans which were purchased in 2019 from Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART). BCDCOG holds an account with a local auto-shop who completes regular maintenance check-ups. If an emergency occurs while the vans are in operation, there is an emergency contact and tow company information available in each van that the driver can contact for service and a back-up van is provided at no cost to vanpool members.

The program does offer an emergency ride home (ERH) program which vanpool members can utilize in case of emergencies (e.g. sick leave, family emergency) up to three times per year. The

ERH program will reimburse up to $55 per use for the cost of the ride home via public transit, taxi, or other transportation service (Uber or Lyft).

Current Ridership

Currently, the program has one vanpool in operation, with another beginning in early 2023. Implementing the program has been slower than expected as the program originated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lowcountry Go's first vanpool was implemented to provide access to a local restaurant, Taco Boy, in Folly Beach, South Carolina which does not have access to public transportation and has limited parking during the peak tourist season. The restaurant hires international students during the peak tourist season who stay in one apartment building, which allowed for easy implementation of a vanpool. The restaurant general manager and a server drove for the vanpool, as a U.S. driver's license is required. The restaurant subsidized the vanpool. This vanpool is expected to be revived again during the peak tourist season.

Lowcountry Go also has a vanpool going to a local big box retailer for the night shift as the local bus service (CARTA) ends at 9 pm. They are also in talks with the Coast Guard to provide vanpool for service members. The Coast Guard has a program which helps service members pay for transportation, including vanpool services which help to defer costs for vanpool members. The Coast Guard had investigated other options, but by far, the Lowcountry Go Vanpool Program was the most affordable.

Lowcountry Go continues to work to expand the program through outreach to major employers in the region and places like malls or manufacturing districts where numerous employers are located in a single location.

Program Funding

The Lowcountry Go Vanpool Program is funded using Federal Transit Administration Section 5307 – Urbanized Area Formula Grants. The program was implemented in partnership with BCDCOG, SCDOT, and FHWA. The program is currently funded for five years using these grant program funds which allowed BCDCOG to purchase the vans and put away money for van maintenance and salaries. Operation costs, with only one vanpool currently in operation, are $4,000. BCDCOG applies for grant funding throughout the year to help pay for advertising.

Marketing

Lowcountry Go has done extensive marketing of the program by creating local connections at meetings and events, promoting the program to local businesses, and posting to social media. Vans are wrapped with the program logo which serves as "free advertising," and provides authenticity to the program.

The current mobility manager has focused on meeting with local chambers of commerce to create connections and present information about the program at local meetings. She has also worked with the local transit department to assist potential passengers who are not currently able to access the bus system to determine if vanpool is a viable option. In addition, Lowcountry Go attends local events to help promote the program and answer questions.



Photo Credit: Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments

In addition to creating local connections, Lowcountry Go uses a Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/LowcountryGo/) to advertise the program, share upcoming events, and highlight program successes.

Lowcountry Go has met with local employers to encourage involvement, including promoting vanpool options for hiring new employees. They look for ways to participate in employer-focused events to increase awareness of the program. They have also worked with a local resume builder (e.g., Indeed) to add information about the vanpool program to job listings in the area so that potential applicants understand that they can apply for a job that they may otherwise have been unable to travel to.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Obtaining Insurance:

Obtaining vanpool program insurance was one of the largest hurdles when implementing the program. Obtaining insurance to operate a vanpool is difficult to find because many companies believe vanpools operate similar to Uber or Lyft. Professional fleet insurance covers employees only, and since passengers are not considered employees of a vanpool, they would not be covered. In addition, Lowcountry Go faced challenges obtaining insurance due to their inability to conduct a loss assessment as the program was new and no data was available. Lowcountry Go found coverage through Lancer Insurance in New York which provides vanpool specific insurance. After three years, Lancer Insurance will reevaluate their risks and losses to better calibrate the insurance coverage costs.

Organizing Program Information:

Administering the vanpool program requires a lot of paperwork (maintenance schedules, number of riders, mileage, expenditures, etc.). When implementing the program, Lowcountry Go faced challenges with determining the best way to organize the required information. Lowcountry Go found success in utilizing documents and information shared from other vanpool programs, even urban-focused ones (Seattle, WA, Washington, D.C.), and taking small steps to modify these forms to best fit their needs.

Find the Right Language:

Lowcountry Go found that many in their service region were not familiar with how vanpool programs operate. The program reframed the conversation around vanpool and described it as a public rideshare program for commuters. They have developed marketing materials such as flyers and fact sheets to explain what the program is and how it can be utilized. In addition, they attend local events to promote the program and answer any questions.

Consider the Benefits to Your Users:

When implementing Lowcountry Go, the program did consider options like contracting operations through a third-party company. While a third-party option could provide years of experience and flexibility in vehicle availability, Lowcountry Go found that they could provide a more cost-effective service if they administered and operated the program in-house. They ultimately decided to keep the program in-house in order to keep costs to users down.

Next Steps

The program is operating using funding from a five-year grant and plans to reapply for additional funding when the grant term ends. In the meantime, Lowcountry Go aims to continue to grow the program through marketing efforts and continued outreach to major employers in the region with the goal of seeing each van in use.

Learn More

To learn more about the Lowcountry Go Vanpool Program, please visit the program website at: https://bcdcog.com/vanpool/

Contact Information

Program Contact: Courtney Cherry, BCDCOG Vanpool Coordinator, vanpool@bcdcog.com

This work is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under a cooperative agreement. USDA is an equal opportunity provider. Any opinions, findings and conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.



April 2023

511NY Rideshare Program

Prepared By: Karalyn Clouser and Natalie Villwock-Witte, Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University

Prepared For: National Association of Development Organizations and the Southern Georgia Regional Commission

Program Overview

As one of a host of mobility options, 511NY Rideshare provides a statewide vanpool program in New York State. 511NY Rideshare was launched in 2010 by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT). The program is funded by New York State and the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration. The goal of the vanpool program is to convert single-occupancy commute trips to vanpools to reduce emissions, address parking challenges, and improve employee recruitment and retention.

Program Operations

ICF administers the vanpool program on behalf of the New York State Department of Transportation's (NYSDOT's) 511NY Rideshare program. When ICF identifies a potential vanpool opportunity, they reach out to the vanpool vendor, Commute with Enterprise, who works with the employer and employees to finalize the details and provide the van for leasing. Commute with Enterprise is responsible for operating the vanpool including program promotion, vehicle leasing, and vehicle maintenance. As a part of their administrative function, 511NY Rideshare program provides Commute with Enterprise with an allowance to lower the monthly lease costs for vanpool participants. In exchange, Commute with Enterprise must provide 511NY Rideshare with information on the number of vanpools in operation and passenger names, used to quantify trips and mileage reductions, and register vanpool participants in the Guaranteed Ride Program (GRP).

Individual vanpools are able to choose meeting and drop off points, usually at a common location such as a park-n-ride or a big box retailer. In one region, ICF coordinates with local churches to pay for parking spaces when necessary.

The Guaranteed Ride Program (GRP) program is provided for vanpool members. In case of an emergency, the GRP program enables a vanpool participant to use alternative travel modes (Lyft, Uber, public transit, taxi) to get home, to a doctor, or other emergency location. Members can

utilize up to $300 in total GRP program funds per year. GRP is somewhat different than GRH programs offered by other agencies in that the destination does not have to be one's home.

Current Ridership



New Coast Guard Vanpool, Photo Credit: ICF

The New York State Vanpool Program currently has around eighty-six vanpools operating across the entire state. Most of these vans are operating in more urbanized areas. Thirty of the vanpools are going to federal worksites (primarily military bases). Vanpools have been found to be popular with Federal employees as they are provided with a subsidy that drastically reduces the cost. The program has found success with providing vanpools to military bases and other employers that have a large campus-like location (e.g., casinos) as a vanpool can provide more flexibility in where participants get dropped off. In contrast, public transit may only be able to drop people off at an entrance, where the employee would then have to walk to their building. ICF has also seen success with setting up vanpools for overnight shift employment, which is generally when public transit does not operate.

Program Funding

The 511NY Rideshare program utilizes both Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds (CMAQ) and state planning funds. The program currently does not report to the National Transit Database (NTD). The NTD allows vanpools to report their mileage (just as public transit agencies report to the NTD) to access a regional pool of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds which are administered based on ridership. Since these funds are limited, NYSDOT has not seen this as a priority to date.

Marketing

Both ICF and Commute with Enterprise have developed marketing materials and conduct outreach and vanpool is promoted on the program website (https://511nyrideshare.org/vanpool). Additional marketing materials include printed flyers, social media campaigns, and magnets and signs that can be placed on the sides of the vans. Marketing on the vanpool vehicles includes both the 511NY Rideshare logo and the Commute with Enterprise logo.

ICF has found word of mouth to be a beneficial form of marketing, noting that many do not understand that a vanpool could work for their place of employment. Once an employer begins a

vanpool, a snowball effect is often observed, where other employees begin asking if a vanpool could work for them too.

Another way that ICF promotes the vanpool program is through writing short success stories. ICF asks a vanpool to take a group photo and they interview members to compile the vanpool's story. Success story participants are given a $25 gift card for participating. The success stories are shared to NYSDOT and help to put a human face on the program.

"I was tired of driving in traffic nightly. My eyesight was horrible during the winter months when it got dark early. Now I sit back and relax with my tablet. I only drive my car less than a mile from where our driver drops us off. Knowing that if my daughter got sick and I had a way to get home to her definitely made a difference in joining the vanpool. It gives me peace of mind knowing that I'm not stuck here at work if I need to leave." *– Cathy, Leviton employee, on vanpooling and GRP, which she learned about through 511NY Rideshare*



Members of the Stony Brook Southampton Hospital Vanpool, Photo Credit: ICF

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Buy America Requirements Can Be A Challenge:

ICF has found third-party leasing of vanpool vehicles to be the easiest way to comply with Buy America requirements, as Commute with Enterprise has multiple vanpool vehicle options. However, as of October 25, 2022, the FTA announced a two-year partial waiver for unmodified vans and minivans due to a lack of compliant vehicles[2].

Vanpool Programs Can Be Difficult to Implement, Marketing the Savings and Word of Mouth Is Key:

Vanpool programs require multiple individuals to live and work in a similar location and with similar schedules to commit to commuting together. ICF has found that marketing the savings is a great way to recruit vanpool members. Often, once one vanpool starts up it seems that word of mouth really helps to grow the vanpool program, as similar companies see the benefits that one employer is getting from implementing a vanpool.

[2] Federal Transit Administration, Buy America: https://www.transit.dot.gov/buyamerica

Certain Companies May Be More Effective for Vanpool:

The following employers have found to be good fits for vanpools: shift workers of any kind (manufacturing), late night/overnight shift job sites (no transit at night), Federal job sites (subsidy available), employers with large campuses (transit does not drop off at specific buildings, like an industrial park), and companies where that first/last mile can make the trip difficult (e.g., casinos, military bases).

National Transit Database (NTD) Reporting Benefits & Drawbacks:

The NTD is used by some vanpool programs to generate Federal Transit Administration (FTA) formula funding. However, for new programs reporting to NTD, there is a two-year funding lag. Additionally, in some areas, accessing these funds can be a political challenge, as the NTD generates funds to a regional pool of transit funding that eligible agencies can utilize. If a vanpool program begins using these funds, they can be viewed as just another agency taking a piece of an already small pie.

Learn More

For more information about the New York State Vanpool Program, please visit the program website at: https://511nyrideshare.org/vanpool

For more information about ICF, go to: https://www.icf.com/

Contact Information

Susan Heinrich, Lead Transportation Planner, ICF, Susan.Heinrich@icf.com

This work is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under a cooperative agreement. USDA is an equal opportunity provider. Any opinions, findings and conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders.

12 Appendix D: Outreach to Employer Surveys

12.1 Employee Survey

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) has partnered with the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation and the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University to investigate transportation challenges facing employers in the 18 county SGRC service region.

The goal of this exercise is to better understand these challenges and recommend strategies that SGRC and its stakeholders could consider to enhance services provided by employers and needed by employees.

This research study was reviewed by the Montana State University Institutional Review Board (irb@montana.edu). Participation in this survey is voluntary. You may skip any question you want, and you may stop at any time. Proceeding with the survey/interview/questionnaire indicates your consent to participate. We anticipate that it will take approximately 10 minutes to complete this survey. Please direct any questions about the survey to Karalyn Clouser at: karalyn.clouser@montana.edu or at 406-529-0654.

The information you provide will be used for research purposes. Personal information about respondents will remain strictly confidential and will not be sold or shared per MSU's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

1. What Is The Name Of Your Employer?

2. What County Is Your Employer Located In?
    - Atkinson
    - Bacon
    - Ben Hill
    - Berrien
    - Brantley
    - Brooks
    - Charlton
    - Clinch
    - Coffee
    - Cook
    - Echols
    - Irwin
    - Lanier
    - Lowndes
    - Pierce
    - Tift

- Turner
- Ware

3. What Is Your County of Residence?
    - Atkinson
    - Bacon
    - Ben Hill
    - Berrien
    - Brantley
    - Brooks
    - Charlton
    - Clinch
    - Coffee
    - Cook
    - Echols
    - Irwin
    - Lanier
    - Lowndes
    - Pierce
    - Tift
    - Turner
    - Ware

4. What Days Of The Week Do You Normally Work?
    - Sunday
    - Monday
    - Tuesday
    - Wednesday
    - Thursday
    - Friday
    - Saturday

5. Do You Work Regularly Scheduled Shifts? *Share any details you feel comfortable sharing regarding typical state and end times.*

6. How Do You Generally Get To Work? (Check all that apply.)
    - ☐ Private Vehicle
    - ☐ Carpool
    - ☐ Vanpool

- ☐ Public Transportation
- ☐ Bicycle
- ☐ Walking
- ☐ Other (Please specify):

7. How Far Do You Travel To Your Workplace?
    - 0-5 Miles
    - 5-10 Miles
    - 10-20 Miles
    - 20-30 Miles
    - 30+ Miles

8. Has Transportation Been A Challenge To Maintaining A Steady Job?
    - Yes
    - No

9. Have You Ever Been Terminated Or Forced To Resign From A Job Due To Transportation Issues?
    - Yes
    - No

10. Are You Aware Of Rider Sharing Practices Like Carpooling And Vanpooling?
    - Yes
    - No (If No, skip to Question 13.)

11. Have You Ever Utilized Or Would Your Ever Consider Utilizing Carpooling or Vanpooling?
    - Yes (If Yes, skip to Question 13.)
    - No

12. If You Would Not Consider Utilizing Vanpooling Or Other Similar Service - What Are Your Concerns? What Might Help You Consider These Options?

13. Do You Feel Available Transportation Services Are Adequate For Your Individual Needs?
    - Yes (If Yes, end survey.)
    - No

14. How Could Transportation Services Be Improved To Better Meet Your Needs?

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

12.2 Employer Survey

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) has partnered with the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation and the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University to investigate transportation challenges facing employers in the 18 county SGRC service region.

The goal of this exercise is to better understand these challenges and recommend strategies that SGRC and its stakeholders could consider to enhance services provided by employers and needed by employees.

This research study was reviewed by the Montana State University Institutional Review Board (irb@montana.edu). Participation in this survey is voluntary. You may skip any question you want, and you may stop at any time. Proceeding with the survey/interview/questionnaire indicates your consent to participate. We anticipate that it will take approximately 10 minutes to complete this survey. Please direct any questions about the survey to Karalyn Clouser at: karalyn.clouser@montana.edu or at 406-529-0654.

The information you provide will be used for research purposes. Personal information about respondents will remain strictly confidential and will not be sold or shared per MSU's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

1. Business Name:

2. Business Street Address:

3. City:

4. County
    - Atkinson
    - Bacon
    - Ben Hill
    - Berrien
    - Brantley
    - Brooks
    - Charlton
    - Clinch
    - Coffee
    - Cook
    - Echols
    - Irwin
    - Lanier
    - Lowndes
    - Pierce
    - Tift
    - Turner
    - Ware

5. Number of Employees (*This location only*.)
    - 1-50
    - 51-100
    - 101-500
    - 501-1,000
    - 1,000 or more

6. Do Your Employees Work Regular Shifts?
    - Yes
    - No (If No, Skip to Question 8.)

7. What Is Your General Shift Schedule? *Please include state and end times*.

8. If Working Irregular Shifts, Please Describe Employee Working Hours

9. Where Are Your Workers Generally Located? *How far are workers generally travelling to reach your location.*
    - Local
    - Within the County
    - Regional (Neighboring Counties and Beyond)
    - Other (Please specify):

10. Generally, How Do Employees Commute To Work? (Check all that apply.)
    - ☐ Private Vehicle
    - ☐ Carpool
    - ☐ Vanpool
    - ☐ Public Transportation
    - ☐ Bicycle
    - ☐ Walking
    - ☐ Other (Please specify):

11. Would You Describe Transportation As A Barrier To Employee Attraction or Retention? *This could include transportation challenges leading to 'no shows,' tardiness, and/or terminations*.
    - Yes
    - No (If No, skip to Question 13.)

12. How Has Transportation Been A Barrier To Employee Attraction or Retention? *Describe any challenges you have encountered*.

13. Has Your Company Received Requests For Transportation Resources Or Services?
    - Yes
    - No (If No, skip to Question 15.)
14. Describe Any For Resources Or Services.

15. Are There Any Concerns With Transportation Options Or Capabilities At Your Current Location? *Is there access to transit (if it exists)? Is there sufficient parking? Are bike storage facilities available? Are sidewalks in the area adequate?*
    - Yes
    - No (If No, skip to Question 17.)

16. Describe Any Concerns With Transportation Options Or Capabilities At Your Location.

17. Has Your Company Ever Offered Any Employee Transportation Services Or Benefits?
    - Yes
    - No (If No, skip to Question 19.)

18. Describe Any Employee Transportation Services Or Benefits Offered By Your Company. *This could include anything currently being offered, or that has been offered in the past*.

19. Has Your Business Been Impacted By Employee Transportation Issues In Ways Not Addressed Here?
    - Yes
    - No (If No, skip to Question 21.)

20. Describe Other Ways Your Business Has Been Impacted By Employee Transportation Issues.

21. Are You Interested In Participating In Ongoing Conversations Related To Developing Transit Options In Partnership With SGRC?

- Yes
- No (If No, end the survey.)

22. Contact Name:

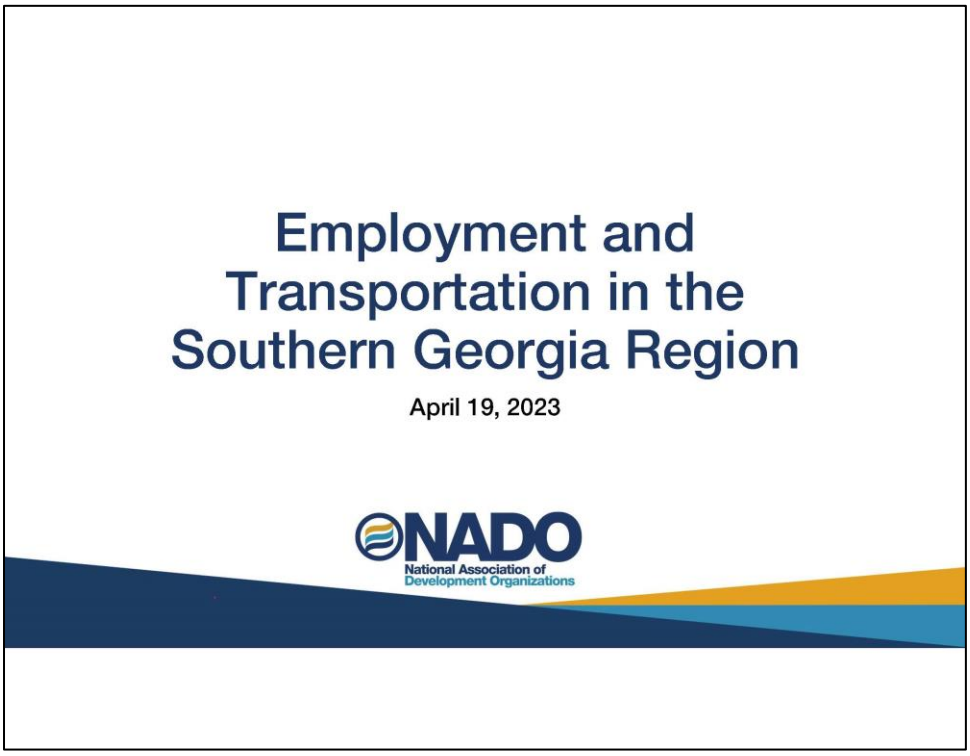
23. Contact Title:

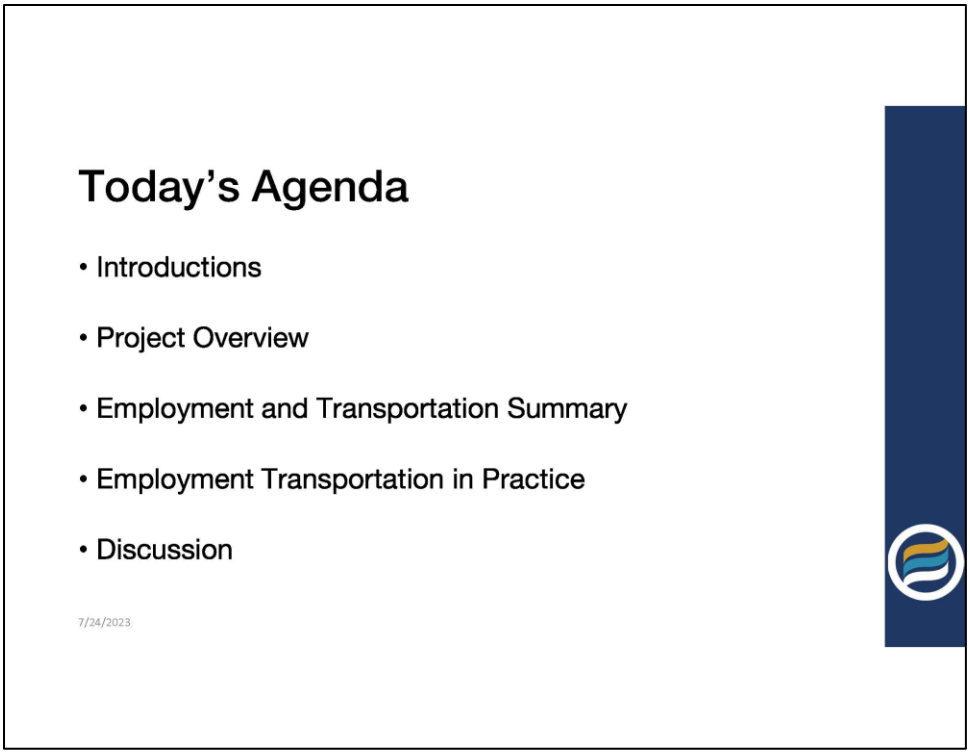
24. Contact Email:

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

13 Appendix E: Employment Transportation Roundtable Materials

The following images were pulled from the presentation given at the Southern Georgia Employment Transportation Roundtable. Full slides and additional materials can be found here: https://ruraltransportation.org/sgrc/





Project Partners



This workshop was supported through a cooperative agreement with the USDA Rural Development.

Project Partners

- Local Project Partners:

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

- Technical Assistance Partners:

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY | Western Transportation Institute

NADO National Association of Development Organizations

Project Overview

"Technical assistance activities will center on opportunities to expand transportation to include employment-specific services to better connect individuals who need jobs with an affordable and reliable way to get to work."

"The team will work with SGRC and its partners to develop alternatives for structuring potential operational strategies for employment transportation, including transit agency-operated routes, transit agency-administered vanpools, employer-provided transportation, rideshare services provided through a third party, assistance to employees to encourage informal carpooling, and other strategies."

Disclaimer: Any discussion of private parties or companies during the project period does not constitute an endorsement of those companies.

Information and sources

- American Communities Survey, Census Bureau
  - 5-year data, 2017-2021
  - Information on households, vehicles, commutes
  - Survey sent to some residents every year

  **Some data accessed through Headwaters Economics- Economic Profile System*

- Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics, Census Bureau
  - 2020 is the most recent year of data
  - Home and work Census blocks are matched
  - Information based on unemployment insurance data
  - Interactive Census On the Map tool

SGRC Population Data

- 2021 total population estimate: 384,440
- Households: 139,185
  - Average household size: 2.76
  - Residents under age 18: 24.5%
  - Residents over age 65: 14.9%
- Residents with a disability: 12.6%

- *ACS 2017-2021 Estimates*

7/24/2023

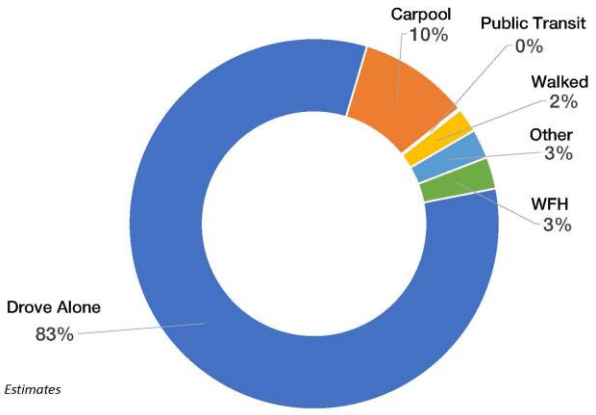
SGRC Workforce Data

- Residents aged 16 to 64 in labor force: 67.1%
- 84,636 men worked in the past 12 months
- 79,055 women worked in the past 12 months
- Worked 50 to 52 weeks: 54.7%
- Worked 1 to 26 weeks: 6.5%

- *ACS 2017-2021 Estimates*

7/24/2023

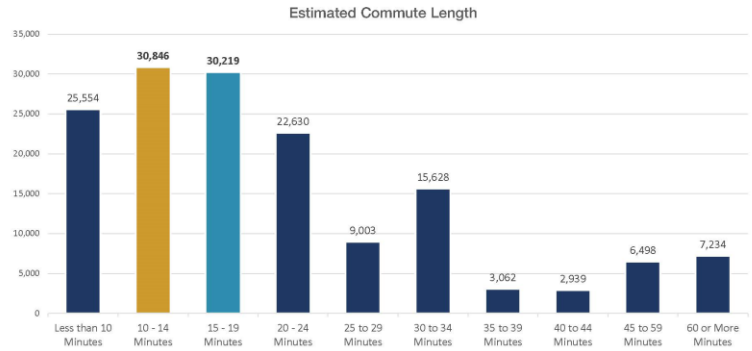
SGRC Commute Types 2021



ACS 2017-2021 Estimates

7/24/2023

Regional Commute Length 2017-2021



ACS 2017-2021 Estimates

7/24/2023

Vulnerable Populations

- Households w/individuals over 65 and living alone: **3.3%**
- Single female households w/children under 18: **10.9%**

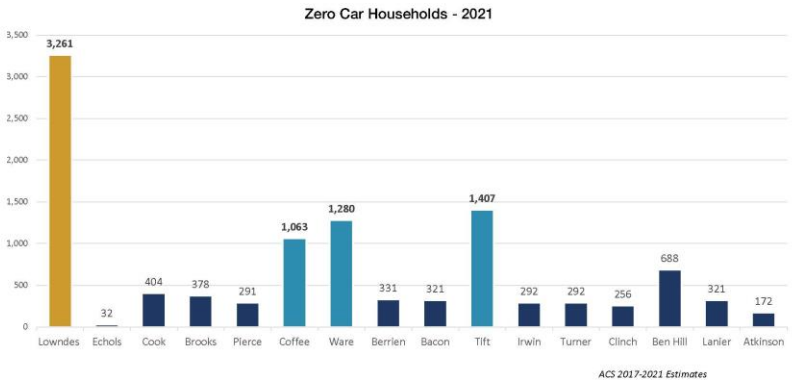
- Households with zero cars available: **7.8% (10,789)**

- *ACS 2017-2021 Estimates*

ACS 2017-2021 Estimates

7/24/2023

Vulnerable Populations

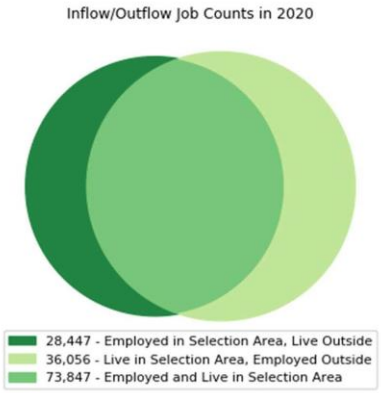


ACS 2017-2021 Estimates

7/24/2023

2020 Employment

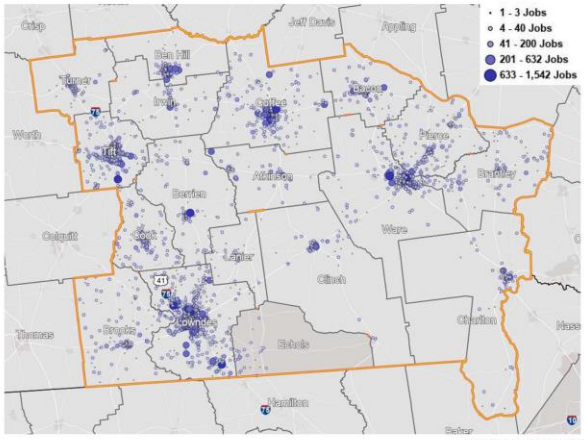
- 102,294 jobs located in SGRC Region
- 73,847 individuals work and live in the SGRC region



7/24/2023

U.S. Census Bureau – LEHD On the Map

Where are the Jobs?

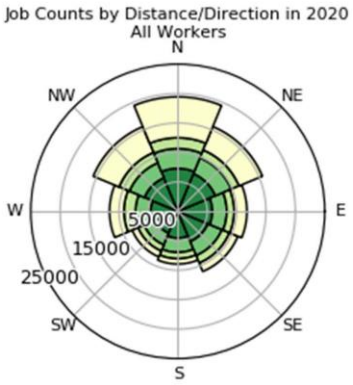


7/24/2023

U.S. Census Bureau – LEHD On the Map

Work Distance and Direction

Job Counts in Work Blocks by Distance, 2020		
	Count	Share
Total Primary Jobs	102,294	100.0%
Less than 10 miles	44,996	44.0%
10 to 24 miles	21,197	20.7%
25 to 50 miles	11,995	11.7%
Greater than 50 miles	24,106	23.6%



7/24/2023

U.S. Census Bureau – LEHD On the Map

Counties of Work - SGRC

Jobs Counts by Counties Where Workers are Employed, 2020		
	Count	Share
Lowndes County, GA	25,499	23.2%
Coffee County , GA	10,096	9.2%
Tift County, GA	8,599	7.8%
Ware County, GA	8,013	7.3%
Ben Hill County, GA	3,216	2.9%
Pierce County, GA	2,666	2.4%
Glynn County, GA	*2,509*	*2.3%*
Fulton County, GA	*2,308*	*2.1%*
Berrien County, GA	2,217	2.0%
Cook County, GA	2,143	1.9%
All Other Locations	42,637	38.8%

7/24/2023

U.S. Census Bureau – LEHD On the Map

Earnings

Total Primary Jobs, 2020	Count	Share
Total Primary Jobs	109,903	100.0%

Jobs by Earnings, 2020	Count	Share
$1,250 per month or less	28,553	26.0%
$1,251 to $3,333 per month	46,408	42.2%
More than $3,333 per month	34,942	31.8%

7/24/2023

U.S. Census Bureau – LEHD On the Map

SGRC Jobs and Industries

Jobs by NAICS Industry Sector, 2020 – All workers	Count	Share
Manufacturing	18,118	16.5%
Retail Trade	16,246	14.8%
Health Care and Social Assistance	14,412	13.1%
Accommodation and Food Service	12,599	11.5%
Admin. & Support, Waste Man. and Rem.	7,579	6.9%
Construction	6,927	6.3%
Wholesale Trade	6,233	5.7%
Transportation and Warehousing	6,062	5.5%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Svc.	3,897	3.5%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	3,794	3.5%
Finance and Insurance	3,363	3.1%
Other Services (excl. Pub. Admin.)	3,296	3.0%
Information	2,001	1.8%

Jobs by NAICS Industry Sector, 2020 –$1250 or less/mo.	Count	Share
Accommodation and Food Services	8,601	31.8%
Retail Trade	4,584	17.0%
Health Care and Social Assistance	2,888	10.7%
Manufacturing	2,317	8.6%
Admin. & Support, Waste Man. And Remed.	2,027	7.5%
Construction	974	3.6%
Other Services (excluding Public Admin.)	888	3.3%
Wholesale Trade	885	3.3%
Transportation and Warehousing	847	3.1%
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation	744	2.8%
Prof., Scientific, and Tech. Serv.	571	2.1%

7/24/2023

U.S. Census Bureau – LEHD On the Map

Employment Transportation Options

- Carpool:
  - HR could match employees by zip code for potential carpools?
  - Map and sticky notes in the break room?
  - Incentives to join?
- Vanpool:
  - Employer can purchase vehicles, create agreement for use by employees
  - 3rd party vanpool programs, such as Enterprise
  - Public transit agency can administer vanpools, driven by groups of employees
- Transit:
  - Employers could contract with transit for commute runs, driven by professional transit drivers on agency vehicles

7/24/2023

How Can Employment Transportation Work?

- Who pays? Employer, employee, both? Who provides the vehicle?
- An employer could pay for transportation:
  - Up to $300/month for transit passes or for vanpool (**not carpool*)
  - Up to $300/month for paid parking
  - On a pre-paid basis or a reimbursement basis
  - Or "de minimus" transportation $$ up to $21/month (*but not also the $300 benefit*)
- Employees can pay for transportation:
  - Directly to the transportation provider or carpool-mates
  - Through a compensation reduction agreement with the employer, so pre-tax wages are used to purchase transit fares or pay for vanpool
- Can combine an employer benefit with the pre-tax benefit, up to the $300 limit
  - https://www.irs.gov/publications/p15b#en_US_2023_publink1000193740

7/24/2023

Employment Transportation Considerations

- One licensed driver per carpool or vanpool, or could rotate
- Rural/small community park and ride sites and commuter transit stops:
  - Churches with minimal weekday parking needs?
  - Retail with more parking spots than are usually in use?
  - Community centers or government buildings with ample parking?
  - Where is convenient? Where is safe (and also feels safe)?



7/24/2023

Rural Transportation Management Associations

- Public-private partnership between businesses, communities, representatives of state and local government, and stakeholders to address transportation issues, often commute-focused
- Rural Transportation Management Association (TMA) Webinar (2023)
  - Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbVLVg0W4kM



7/24/2023

Additional Resources

- IRS Publication 15-B: Employer's Tax Guide to Fringe Benefits
- Qualified Transportation Fringe Details
- Maryland Commuter Tax Credit Brochure
- Commuter Tax Benefits – Policy Brief (TTI/Texas A&M)
- State Bonding Coordinators (At-Risk or Hard to Place Ind.)

7/24/2023

Next Steps

- Continue employer and stakeholder outreach and interviews
  - Employer Survey
  - Employee Survey
- Continue to explore best practices, connect with resource providers/operators and identify program examples
- Finalize potential solutions and recommendations as part of final reporting due in September 2023

7/24/2023

Contact

- Carrie Kissel, National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation
  - ckissel@nado.org | 202-643-9560
- Bret Allphin, National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation
  - ballphin@nado.org| 740-350-9431

7/24/2023

14 Appendix F: Commute with Enterprise Summary

Fully formatted and accessible fact sheet may be found here:
https://westerntransportationinstitute.org/research_projects/supporting-employment-transportation-in-southern-georgia/



July 2023

Commute with Enterprise

Prepared By: Karalyn Clouser and Natalie Villwock-Witte, Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University

Prepared For: National Association of Development Organizations and the Southern Georgia Regional Commission

Program Overview

Commute with Enterprise is the largest vanpool provider in the United States. As a third-party provider, Commute with Enterprise provides a completely turnkey service which includes the vanpool vehicle (of which they have several options ranging from seven passenger minivans (including hybrid options) to fifteen passenger vans), insurance, vehicle maintenance, and anything else that ensures efficient day-to-day operation of a vanpool program. Additionally, Commute with Enterprise will collect data on vanpool mileage and any other reporting requirements for the National Transit Database (NTD).

How to get started?

The vanpool process is easy to initiate and there are several approaches. Commute with Enterprise has a local operation team and local sales representative who work to engage with interested stakeholders in the region (e.g., regional planning organizations, local employers, chambers of commerce, public transit agencies). Once Commute with Enterprise engages with interested parties, they begin to coordinate vans on the road.

A vanpool program can begin through a full procurement process where Commute with Enterprise would respond to a request for proposals, or via a pilot program. Commute with Enterprise has documented success in both processes however, starting out with a pilot program with a public entity acting as the vanpool sponsor, allows an area to gauge demand for vanpools prior to going through the full procurement process. Partnering with a public entity through a contractual relationship can also establish access to public funds to help subsidize a vanpool program and would include reporting data to NTD, thereby creating a sustainable federal funding source after about two years of operation (per the federal process of data collection and budgeting). Areas not accustomed to multiple transit options (or where they do not understand the value), tend to be slower to adopt vanpools. Commute with Enterprise can provide support and outreach to local stakeholders in order to market the pilot and establish the vanpool program quickly.

A vanpool pilot program typically runs for two years. This time period allows enough time to deeply engage with stakeholders in a region, begin vanpool operations, and gauge demand.

Commute with Enterprise has found that employers prefer to follow rather than be the first to join a vanpool program, which is often why having a public agency, like a planning organization, helps to initiate such a program. Once the benefits are more tangible to employers, they typically join. Promoting the vanpool program and employer outreach is included as part of the Commute with Enterprise services. They will not invoice for the vanpool pilot program until there are vans on the road.

Regardless of the sponsor (public agency or employer), generally, Commute with Enterprise suggests that the vanpool sponsor provide a subsidy of around $500 to $600 per van per month. While this subsidy is not required, it does reduce costs to commuters which can help to build interest in vanpooling. A minimum number of vans are not required to begin a vanpool pilot program. Instead, Commute with Enterprise suggests setting a maximum number of vans (e.g., 20) which the vanpool sponsor will be able to subsidize.

At the end of a pilot, the vanpool sponsor can move forward to full procurement if they wish. This allows for a flexible, fairly low risk option to examine a region's demand for services. The almost door-to-door transportation from one's residence to work at a significantly lower cost than owning and operating a private vehicle, often makes vanpools very appealing to many Americans.

Does a public agency (e.g., planning organization, transit agency) need to be involved?

No, however, Commute with Enterprise will work to engage all local partners including the public sector as a part of the vanpool planning process. In cases where the public agency does not want to be involved, Commute with Enterprise works directly with employers. Ultimately, each vanpool program ends up being unique, as interest and needs change from program to program. In recent years, Commute with Enterprise has found chambers of commerce and economic development organizations leading the initiation of vanpools in terms of funding them alongside the local, public transportation provider.

How is the program funded?

Vanpool vehicles are leased at an estimated cost of $1200 to $1400 per vehicle per month, so for a group of four participants, costs would be $300 to $350 per month per participant or less as the average ridership in a vanpool nationwide is six. Compared to the American Automobile Association's (AAA's) estimated $9,000 for annual operating and maintenance costs for a vehicle, monthly cost savings of using a vanpool can be $400 or more, even without a subsidy. For low-income Americans, this can pay for groceries, utilities, or other basic needs. Generally, a public agency or employer will provide a subsidy to the vanpool program which helps to reduce costs for members which in turn makes vanpool and some of the perceived or real drawbacks such as lack of flexibility in case of emergency, worth the compromise. Commute with Enterprise recommends a $500 to $600 subsidy per vehicle per month.

If there is no public sector contractual relationship and financial assistance, then Commute with Enterprise cannot provide the reporting data for the NTD. Reporting vanpool program statistics to the NTD is required to access certain federal monies (e.g. FTA Section 5311 (rural) or 5307 (urban).

Several funding sources have been found to be effective for seed money to start a vanpool program. These include: Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) (although not all areas can leverage these funds), Carbon Reduction Program (CRP), FTA Section 5307 and 5311, American Rescue Plan Act (APRA), economic development funds, state dollars (e.g., commuter assistance funds (Florida); Long Range Transportation Funds (LRTP)) (including those for economic development), local dollars (e.g., Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)), and private sector (e.g. employer subsidized vanpool services).

Lessons Learned from Other Programs

Vanpool Needs to Be Open to All:

The most successful vanpool programs are those that are open to any commuter as this allows for a critical mass of potential riders. Furthermore, it also allows the vanpool to leverage public funding.

Always Fall Back on Education:

Engaging with local employers can take time and many do not want to be the first, as generally, employers are averse to risk. However, educating interested stakeholders on how the vanpool program works and its benefits can help to overcome this hurdle. Generally, once one employer tries out the vanpool program, other employers will start to see the benefits and the program will begin to see growth. Word of mouth can be your best form of marketing.

Transfer Penalties Will Result in Failure of a Vanpool:

Vanpools should not be viewed as a feeder for public transit, it is public transit. In other words, someone will not travel from their home to a vanpool pick-up location, take the vanpool to a transit stop, take the transit stop to the closest stop to their destination, and then complete the final trip by foot to their destination – there are too many transfer penalties in this scenario. It reduces the appeal of vanpools, which function more closely to a private vehicle commute, albeit at a steeply reduced cost. In contrast, vanpools should be viewed as a complementary service to existing public transit. It is part of a suite of mobility options for the public.

It Takes a Village:

Commute with Enterprise bears a majority of the responsibility for operating the vanpool program, but public agencies should work in cooperation with the vanpool provider to “get the word out.” For example, the public agency could develop press releases as well as encourage employer participation. Often the most successful vanpool programs are assisted by numerous public employees, from those tasked with getting people to work to those whose job functions are more purely transportation focused.

Learn More

To learn more about Commute with Enterprise, please visit the program website at: https://www.commutewithenterprise.com/

Contact Information

Sarah Garth, Commute with Enterprise, sarah.e.garth@ehi.com
Cheryl O'Connor, Commute with Enterprise, Cheryl.a.oconnor@ehi.com

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15 Appendix G: Vanpool Program Stakeholders

15.1 Major Employers: Manufacturing and Transportation & Warehousing

Name	NAICS	County
Boatright Trucking Inc.	48-49	Atkinson
Cardinal Glass Industries, Inc.	31-33	Atkinson
Georgia Printco, LLC	31-33	Atkinson
Metal Concepts, LLC	31-33	Atkinson
South Georgia Cargo Trailers	31-33	Atkinson
Sundance Boats, Inc.	31-33	Atkinson
Vmi Corporation	48-49	Atkinson
Beach Timber Company Inc.	31-33	Bacon
Bway Corporation, Inc.	31-33	Bacon
Dupont Pine Products, LLC	31-33	Bacon
Mulch Manufacturing, Inc.	31-33	Bacon
Packaging Corp Of America	31-33	Bacon
Triangle Chemical Company	31-33	Bacon
Willacoochee Industrial Fabrics Inc.	31-33	Bacon
American Blanching Company, Inc.	31-33	Ben Hill
Coyote MFG Co.	31-33	Ben Hill
Heatcraft, Inc.	31-33	Ben Hill
Pcc Airfoils, Inc.	31-33	Ben Hill
Simmons Bedding Company	31-33	Ben Hill
TLC Mouldings	31-33	Ben Hill
Atlas Manufacturing, Inc.	31-33	Berrien
CMH Manufacturing, Inc.	31-33	Berrien
D L Lee & Sons Inc.	31-33	Berrien
Southern Eagle Distributing, LLC	31-33	Berrien
United Parcel Service	48-49	Brantley
Lee Container Corps	31-33	Brooks
AJM Packaging Corporation	31-33	Charlton
Forest River, Inc.	31-33	Charlton
Pope Trucking Inc.	48-49	Charlton
Cady Bag Company LLC	31-33	Clinch
Elixir Door & Metals Company	31-33	Clinch
Live Oaks Homes	31-33	Clinch
Phoenix Wood Products	31-33	Clinch
Elixir Extrusions, LLC	31-33	Coffee
Esp Specialties & Fabrications, Inc.	31-33	Coffee
Polar Corp	31-33	Coffee

Sanderson Farms Inc Production Division	31-33	Coffee
United Parcel Service	48-49	Coffee
A R M, Inc.	31-33	Cook
Basf Corporation	31-33	Cook
Chaparral Boats, Inc.	31-33	Cook
J-M Manufacturing Co, Inc.	31-33	Cook
Langboard, Inc.	31-33	Cook
Modern Dispersions South, Inc.	31-33	Cook
Southern Veneer Products	31-33	Cook
Mid-South Feeds Inc.	31-33	Echols
Milliken & Company	31-33	Echols
Spartan Cargo Trailers LLC	31-33	Echols
Freedom Trailers LLC	31-33	Irwin
Affinity Building Systems, LLC	31-33	Lanier
Covered Wagon Trailers, LLC	31-33	Lanier
Gilman Building Products	31-33	Lanier
Pilgrim's Pride Corporation	31-33	Lowndes
Sandlin Forest Products, LLC	48-49	Pierce
Titan Modular Systems Inc.	31-33	Pierce
UFP Ashburn, LLC	31-33	Pierce
UFP Folkston, LLC	31-33	Pierce
Varn Wood Products, LLC	31-33	Pierce
American Textile Company	31-33	Tift
Hornet Steel Buildings, Inc.	31-33	Tift
Thom's Transport Co, Inc.	48-49	Tift
Long Branch Land & Timber, LLC	48-49	Turner
Lowndes Timber, Inc.	48-49	Turner
Quality Cargo, LLC	31-33	Turner
Connell Cabinets & Millworks, Inc.	31-33	Ware
Steel & Metal Systems, Inc.	31-33	Ware

15.2 Major Employers: Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting and Retail Trade

Name	NAICS	County
Walmart	44-45	Ben Hill
Dollar General	44-45	Berrien
Food Lion, LLC	44-45	Berrien
Southern Grace Farms, Inc.	11	Berrien
Cal Maine Foods, Inc.	11	Brantley
Satilla Grocery, Inc.	44-45	Brantley
AG-Pro, LLC	44-45	Brooks
Brooksco Dairy LLC	11	Brooks
Food Lion, LLC	44-45	Brooks
Southeast Milk, Inc.	11	Brooks
Burger King Folkston	44-45	Charlton
Dairy Queen of Folkston	44-45	Charlton
Harveys	44-45	Charlton
Homerville Grocery, LLC	44-45	Clinch
Walmart	44-45	Coffee
Pike Creek Turf Farms, Inc.	11	Cook
Walmart	44-45	Cook
Coggins Farm Supply Georgia, LLC	44-45	Echols
Corbett Brothers Farms, LLC	11	Echols
Grimmway Enterprises, Inc.	11	Echols
Sandlin Logging Co, Inc.	11	Echols
Tycor Farms, LLC	11	Echols
Hudson Pecan Co, Inc.	11	Irwin
J W Paulk Jr Farm	11	Irwin
Lasseter Tractor Company, Inc.	44-45	Irwin
McDonalds	44-45	Lanier
Strickland Farms, LLC	11	Lanier
Lowe's Home Centers, Inc.	44-45	Lowndes
Publix Super Market, Inc.	44-45	Lowndes
The Home Depot	44-45	Lowndes
Walmart	44-45	Lowndes
Cal Maine Foods, Inc.	11	Pierce
Farmers & Builders Supply	44-45	Pierce
Walmart	44-45	Tift
Calhoun Produce, Inc.	11	Turner
Carroll's Sausage & Meats, Inc.	44-45	Turner
Golden Peanut Co.	11	Turner

Zaxby's	44-45	Turner
Walmart	44-45	Ware
Wayne Frier Home Sales, Inc.	44-45	Ware

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