NEBRASKA

COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT - HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN

NEBRASKA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEBRASKA
Public Transit

AUGUST 2023

SRF

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Introduction

Purpose and Role of the Coordinated Plan

Federal transit law mandates that the projects selected for funding under the Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310) Program be included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan. The Nebraska Statewide Coordinated Public Transit and Human Services Transportation Plan (the Coordinated Plan) is developed and approved through a process that includes participation by seniors; individuals with disabilities; representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation and human services providers; and other members of the public utilizing transportation services.

The Coordinated Plan is the framework for prioritizing mobility needs within the state. The Nebraska Department of Transportation (NDOT) develops this plan and includes not only services funded through Section 5310, but also services funded through the other program for which it is a direct recipient, Section 5311 (Formula Grants for Rural Areas).

Following guidance laid out in FTA Circular 9070.1G, the key elements of the Coordinated Plan include:

- An assessment of needs, gaps and barriers in transportation for individuals with disabilities, older adults and persons with limited income;
- An inventory of existing transportation services that identifies public and private organizations currently involved in serving the needs of transportation-disadvantaged populations;
- Coordination strategies to address identified gaps in service and to utilize resources more efficiently;
- Mechanisms to prioritize use of resources for implementation of identified coordination strategies, including federal 5310 funds.

As the plan is developed on a statewide level, it is based on stakeholder and public involvement activities conducted across the state. The goal of the Coordinated Plan is to provide a framework for state and local organizations and agencies involved in human service transportation and public transit service providers to better coordinate programs and actions in the delivery of services. The objective is to identify and implement strategies to address identified gaps in services to meet the diverse needs of transportation-disadvantaged individuals.

Representatives from the following stakeholder groups participated in the various coordination and public engagement activities:

- Nebraska Department of Transportation
- Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services

- Nebraska Association of Transportation Providers
- Community Action of Nebraska
- Nebraska Public Service Commission
- Veterans Administration
- Area Agencies on Aging
- University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), Center for Public Affairs Research
- Nebraska Department of Education
- Rural Prosperity Nebraska
- League of Human Dignity
- Metropolitan Area Planning Agency
- Statewide Olmstead Advisory Council
- Local public transit providers
- Private transportation providers
- Local government officials
- Human service organizations

Previous Statewide Work

NDOT has commissioned several studies in the last decade addressing transportation needs and transit service coordination in the state of Nebraska. These studies include:

- Nebraska Statewide Mobility Management Project (2013-present): This project began in 2013 with a concept development report produced by SRF and URS Corporation for NDOT. In Phase 2, the state was organized into six regions, each with its own Regional Coordinating Committee. This resulted in new intercity service between Lexington and North Platte. Phase 3 launched in 2019. It has included studies of intercity service between Kearney, Grand Island, and Hastings; a study of intercity service between Lincoln and Omaha; intensive mobility management activities in the Northeast region; and an ongoing project to upgrade trip planning software statewide.
- Statewide Coordinated Public Transit Human Services Transportation Plan (2018): This was the first coordinated plan, to which the current document represents a five-year update. In 2018, SRF Consulting Group on behalf of NDOT developed a plan which included existing socio-demographics, available transportation services, current transportation needs, and an action plan for coordination.
- Assessment of Intercity Bus Services in Nebraska (2020): In August 2020, the UNO Center for Public Affairs Research on behalf of NDOT completed a statewide intercity bus study. Action items focused on implementation of the Grand Island and Lincoln-Omaha plans described earlier. Surveys of intercity providers indicated underserved groups include veterans, college students, people with limited mobility, and the Hispanic population as a whole. Funding for employee compensation was an area of concern.

FTA Section 5310 Funding Program Linked to the Coordinated Plan

Per the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Section 5310 is the primary capital funding program for elderly and disabled transportation. This program provides formula funding to states[1] for the purpose of assisting private non-profit groups and certain public bodies in meeting the transportation needs of elders and persons with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting these needs. The funds can be used for items such as vehicles, radios and communication equipment, vehicle shelters, wheelchair lifts and restraints; contracted transportation services; and programs such as travel training, accessible paths and signage, vanpooling, and mobility management.

For formula funds apportioned to NDOT, Section 5310 recipients receive 80 percent federal funding for capital purchases of vehicles, which means a 20 percent local match is required. All local match funds for Section 5310 must be provided from sources other than those provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Generally speaking, such sources may include:

- State or local appropriations
- Non-transportation federal funds that are eligible to be used for transportation, e.g.:
    - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
    - Medicaid
    - Employment training programs
    - Rehabilitation services
    - Administration on Aging grants
- Tax revenues
- Private donations
- Revenues for human service contracts
- In-kind donations such as volunteered services, as long as the values of the donations are documented and supported and represent costs that would otherwise be eligible under the program
- Income from contracts to provide human service transportation or other net income generated by social service agencies.

Since NDOT limits using 5310 formula funds to capital and contract-service procurement, some of the fund sources listed above may not work for the 5310 match – they may be limited to, or more helpful as, operating assistance. However, the list does provide ideas for further diversifying transportation providers' funding streams.

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[1] As of the passage of the FAST Act in 2015, local governmental entities that operate public transportation services are also eligible direct recipients. In Nebraska the state is the only direct recipient of 5310 funding.

State Demographics

Nebraska is a predominantly agricultural state, with farms and ranches covering over 44.8 million acres or about 92 percent of the state's total land area. Based on the 2020 Census, Nebraska has a population density of 25.5 people per square mile, making it one of the least dense states in the country. Moreover, almost 80 percent of counties in Nebraska have population densities of fewer than 25 people per square mile, with over 34 percent of counties having fewer than five people per square mile. As shown in Figure 1 (page 5), denser populations are concentrated in southeastern Nebraska. Hence, providing public transportation in much of the state involves moving a small number of people over longer distances.

Population Change

From 2010 to 2020, Nebraska's population increased at the same rate as the national population, 7.4 percent. Figure 2 (page 6) shows that the highest rates of population growth are clustered in counties near the metropolitan areas of Omaha and Lincoln. This is especially apparent in Sarpy County just south of Omaha, which grew 19.5 percent. Lancaster County (Lincoln) and Douglas County (Omaha), the two largest counties in the state by population, grew 14.1 percent and 12.1 percent, respectively. Buffalo County also grew 9.9 percent over this period. Only 8 of Nebraska's 93 counties outpaced the statewide rate of population growth, though these counties alone contain over 61 percent of the state's population. Throughout the state, most counties' populations experienced very little change, though some rural counties experienced more significant declines. These trends suggest urbanization of Nebraska's population.

Urban/Rural Population Change

Consistent with the trend in the United States, the urban population share in Nebraska increased and rural population share decreased from 2010 to 2020. In Nebraska, the rural population in 2020 accounts for 27 percent of the population, down from 46.2 percent in 2010. The shift in population between rural and urban areas within Nebraska is shown in Table 1. The table also shows that there is a growing percentage of the population living in urban areas – from 53.8 percent in 2010 to 73 percent in 2020. With that said, much of this change has taken place in only a few counties. Currently, 61 out of 93 counties in Nebraska have no urban population, and about 58 percent of Nebraska's population resides in the Omaha and Lincoln metropolitan areas.

Table 1. Shift in Urban and Rural Population

	2010		2020		Change	Percent Change
Urban	1,335,686	53.8%	1,432,003	73.0%	96,317	7%
Rural	490,665	46.2%	529,501	27.0%	38,836	8%
Total	1,826,341		1,961,504		135,163	7%

Figure 1. Population Densities of Counties and Distribution of Census Designated Places, 2020

Legend

CDP

Population Density

- 0 - 11
- 12 - 29
- 30 - 107
- 108 - 664
- 665 - 1708
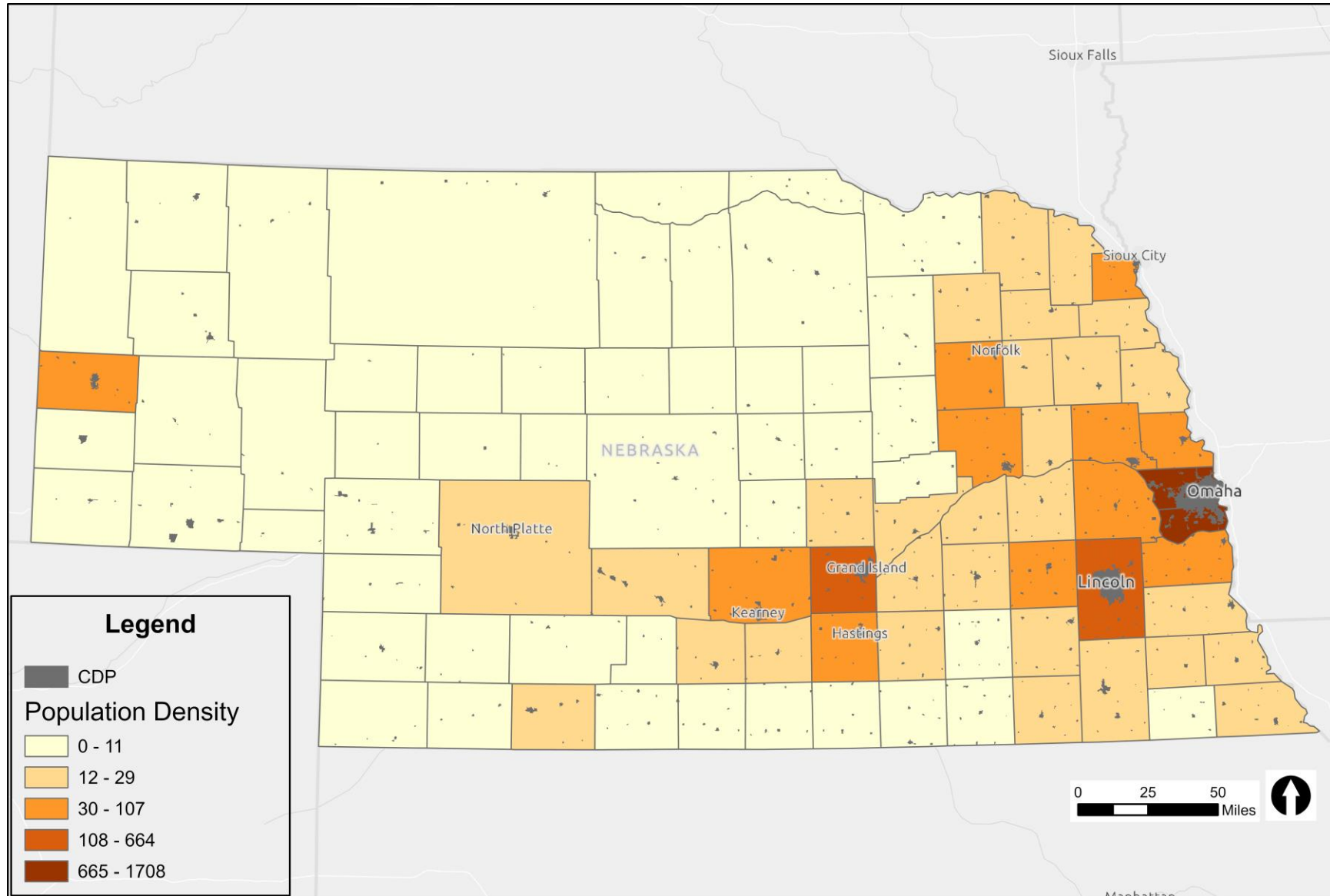
Figure 2. Population Change by County, 2010 to 2020

Legend

Population Change

- ⬜ -5.7% to -1.1%
- ⬜ -1.0% to 1.0%
- 🟧 1.1% to 8.0%
- 🟥 8.1% to 24.8%
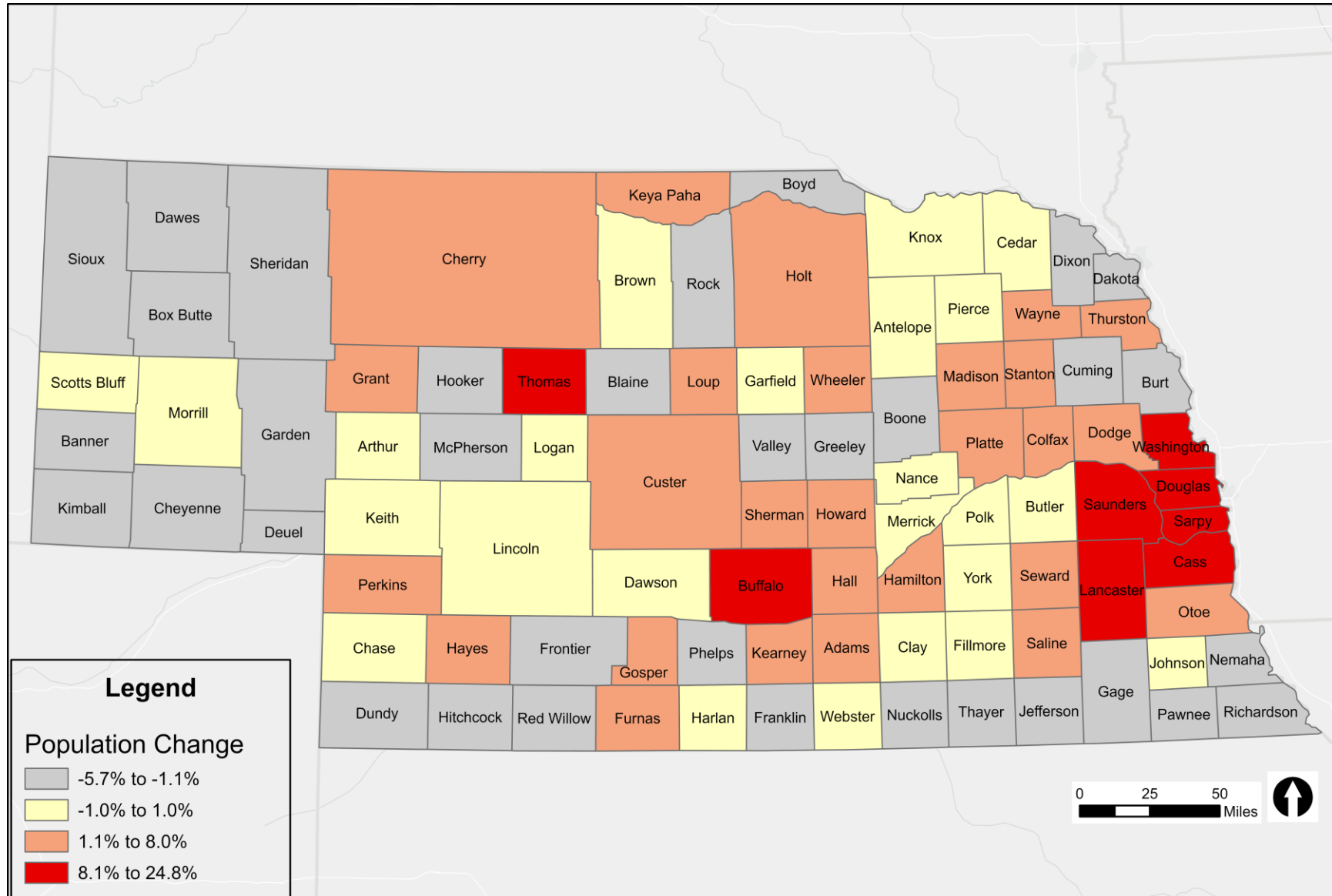
Transportation-Disadvantaged Population

Population Below Poverty Level

Based on ACS 5-Year 2021 estimates, 10.3 percent of the state's population has an income below the federal poverty level, lower than the national rate of 11.6 percent. Concentrations of poverty tend to exist outside of metropolitan areas; all 13 counties with poverty rates above 13 percent are rural. Among all Nebraska counties, Thurston County in northeast Nebraska has the highest percentage of population below poverty (20.5 percent), followed by Franklin County (18.1 percent), Pawnee County (16.8 percent), and Grant County (15.8 percent). These counties all have populations below 10,000. Figure 3 shows the distribution of population below poverty level for Nebraska counties.

Zero-Vehicle Households

Based on ACS 5-Year 2021 estimates, 5.1 percent of Nebraska households do not have access to private vehicles, lower than the national rate of 8.3 percent. The highest percentage of zero-vehicle households is found in Dakota County, part of the Sioux City Metropolitan Area. However, highly populated urbanized counties, such as Douglas, Sarpy, and Lancaster, tend to have average or below-average rates of zero-vehicle households (6.4 percent, 3 percent, and 5.1 percent, respectively).

Counties with above-average rates of zero-vehicle households tend to be rural; among these rural counties, the leaders are Pawnee, Keith, and Thurston Counties (all at least 7.5 percent). Figure 4 (page 9) shows the distribution of zero-vehicle households by county.

Figure 3. Percentage of Population Below Federal Poverty Level

Legend

Percent Below Poverty Level

- 0% - 8%
- 9% - 11%
- 12% - 14%
- 15% - 19%
- 20% - 30%
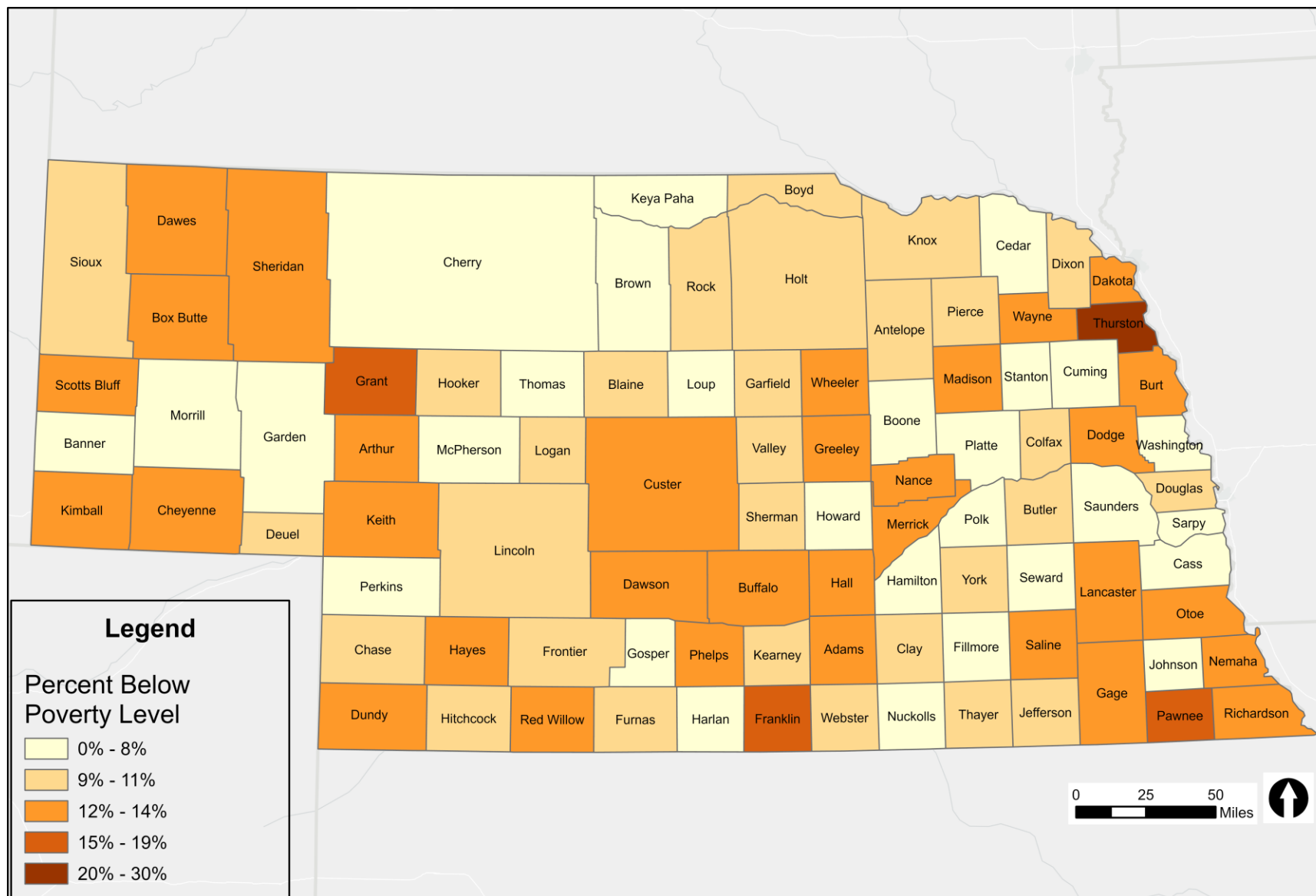
Figure 4. Percentage of Households Without Vehicle Access

Legend

Percent Zero-Vehicle Households

- 0.0% - 1.9%
- 2.0% - 3.5%
- 3.6% - 4.9%
- 5.0% - 6.9%
- 7.0% - 11.0%
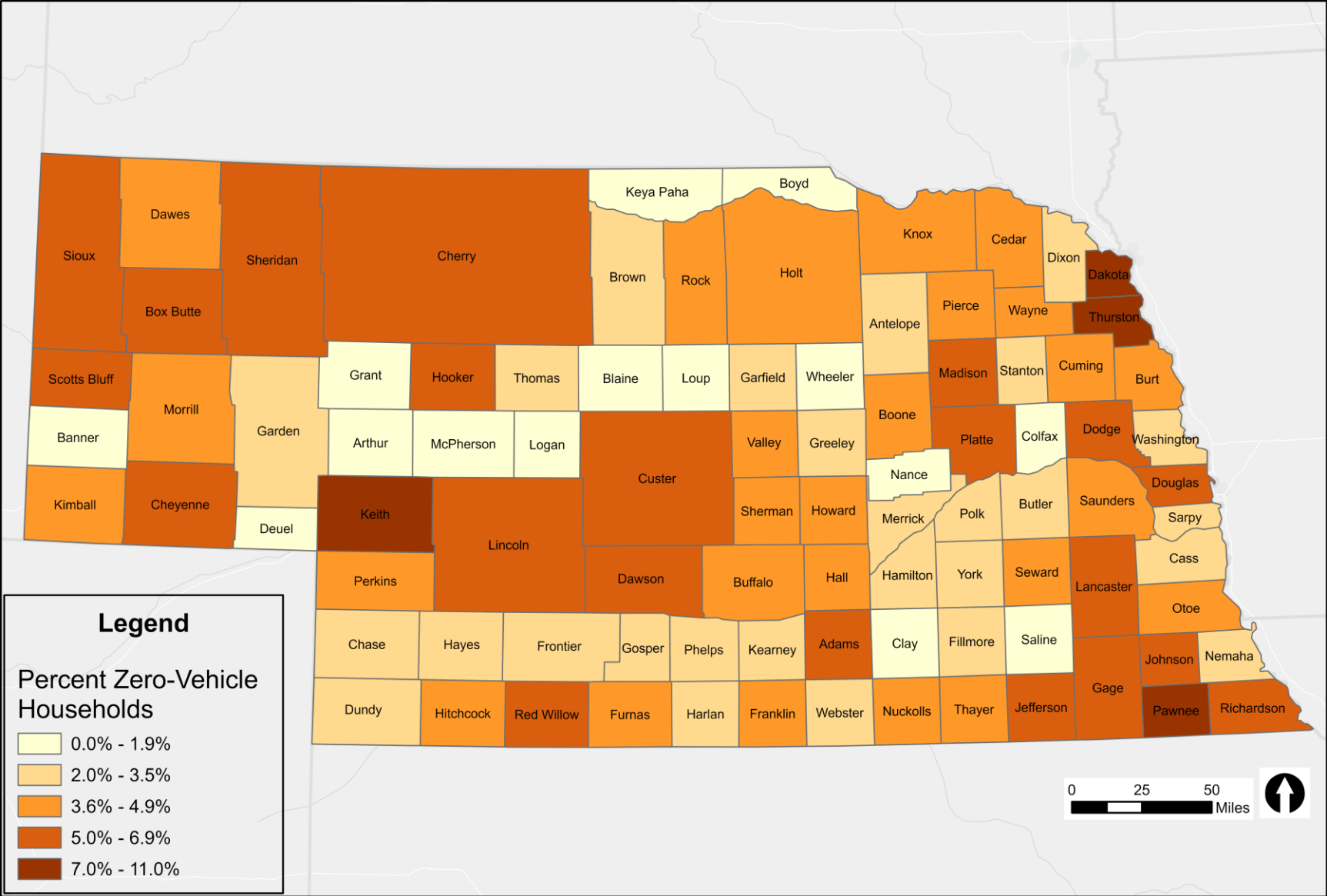
Percentage of Individuals Experiencing Disability

Based on ACS 5-Year 2021 estimates, 11.7 percent of Nebraska's population experiences some form of disability. The percentage of the population over age 65 experiencing disability is much higher at 32.4 percent. Rural counties tend to have higher rates of disability than urban counties, and all 12 counties with rates over 17.5 percent are rural. Figure 5 (page 11) shows the percentage of the population experiencing disability by county.

Population Age 65 and Over

Based on 2020 Census data, the percentage of the population 65 years and over in Nebraska is 15.4, below the national rate of 16.8 percent. Similarly to other transportation-disadvantaged groups, seniors reside disproportionately in rural counties. Only 10 of Nebraska's 93 counties come in below the average rate, with these counties alone composing over 65 percent of the state's total population. Highly populated urbanized counties Sarpy, Douglas, and Lancaster have below-average rates of populations 65 and over, with 11.9 percent, 12.9 percent, and 14.0 percent, respectively. Figure 6 (page 12) shows the distribution of these populations by county.

The 2020-2023 Nebraska State Plan on Aging developed by the Department of Health and Human Services states that Nebraska is likely to have a 36.5 percent increase in its population 65 and over between 2020 and 2035, followed by a small increase of 6.9 percent between 2035 and 2050.

Figure 5. Percentage of Population Experiencing Disability

Legend

Percent Experiencing Disability

- 0% - 8%
- 9% - 11%
- 12% - 15%
- 16% - 18.%
- 18% - 24%
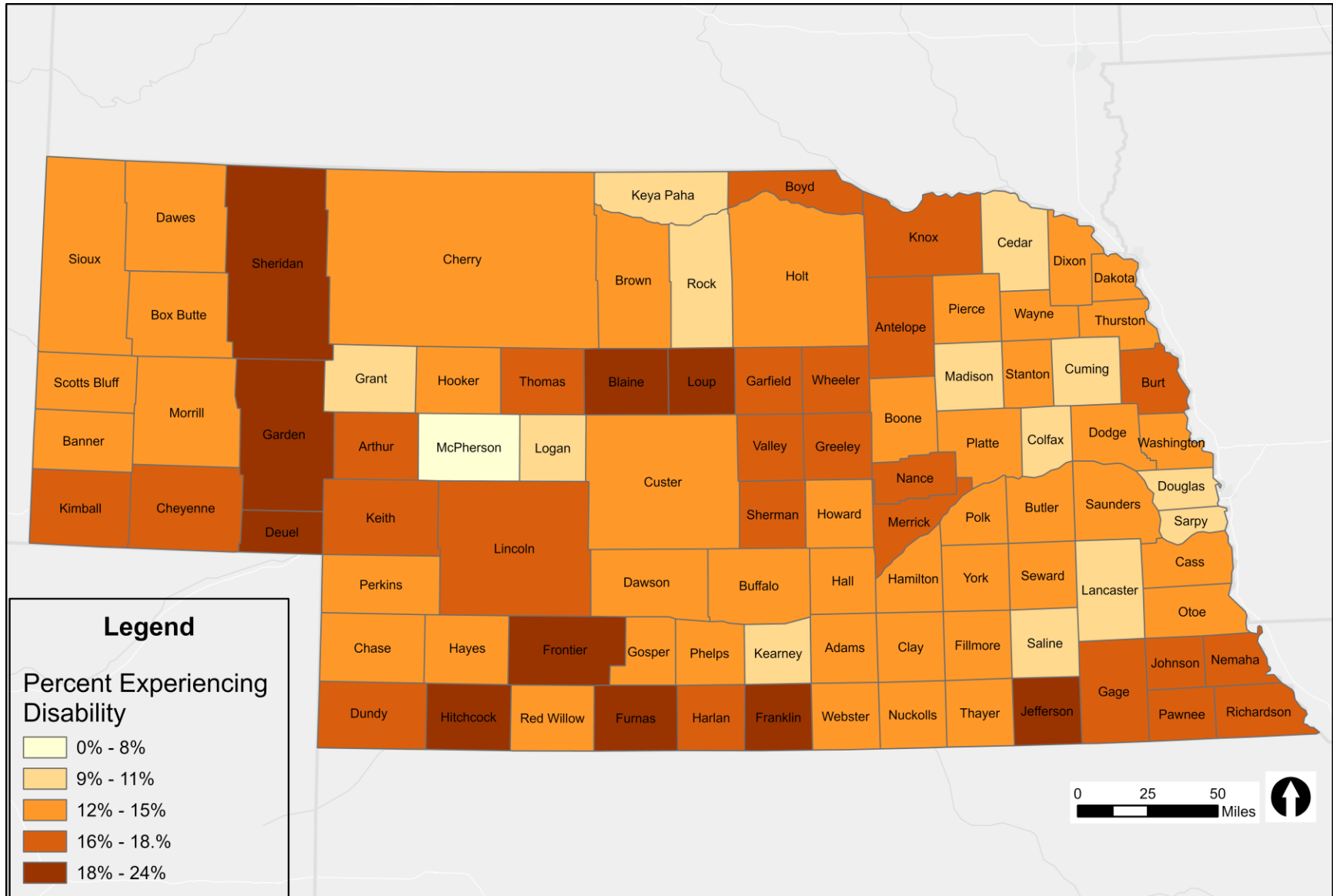
Figure 6. Distribution of Senior Population
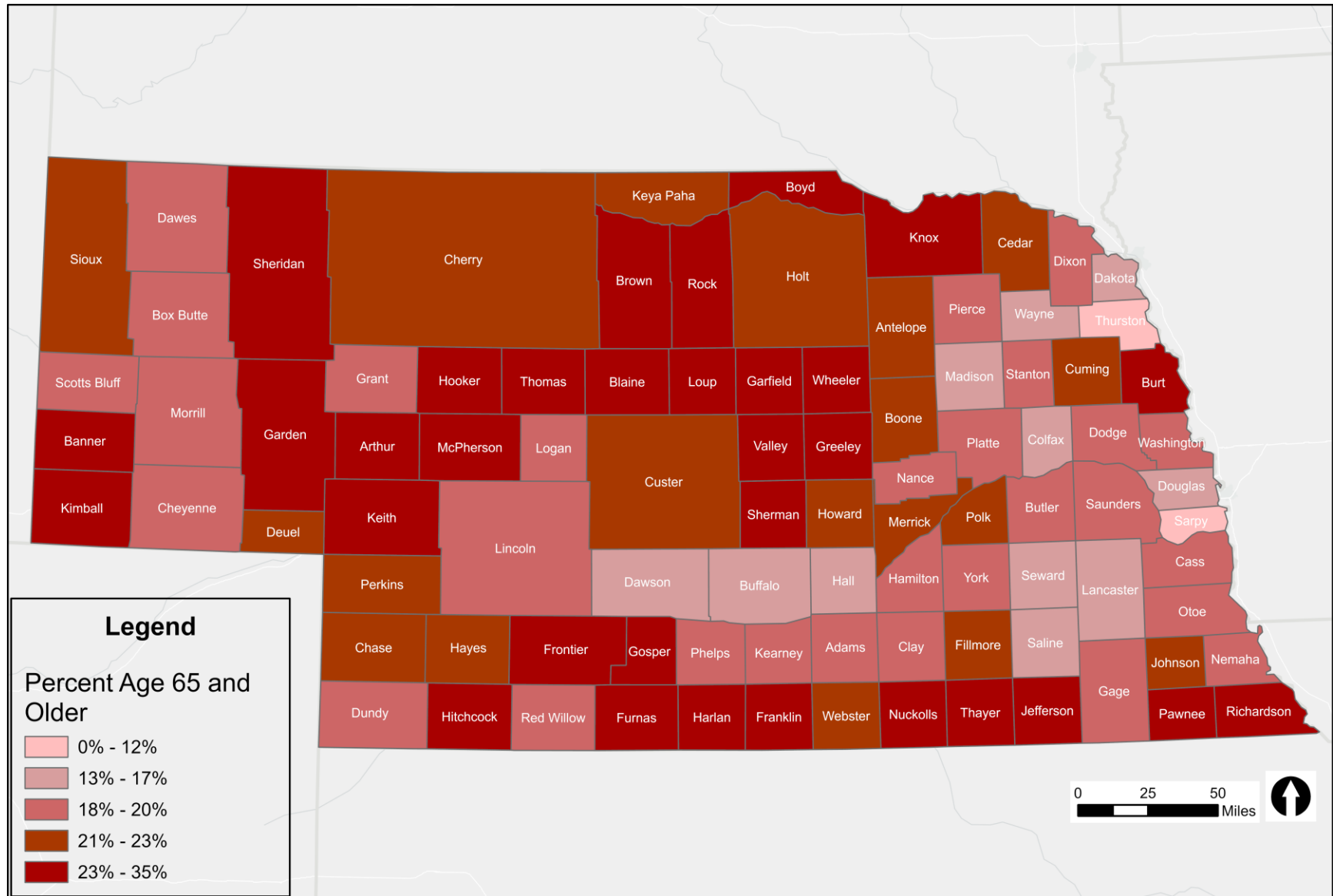
Assessment of Existing Services

Subrecipients of federal formula funding are only one segment of the total transportation landscape in Nebraska, which includes intercity bus service, public transit, and local services run by private organizations (both for-profit and non-profit). The following section gives an overview of the transportation options available to Nebraskans.

Taxi and Ride-Hailing

Private taxi companies and ride-hailing apps such as Uber and Lyft are available in metropolitan areas, but they have limited availability outside urban centers. Small cities may have one or two cab companies. Ride-hailing has a small driver pool that makes it functionally unusable in most of Nebraska.

Intercity Bus Service

Intercity transportation in Nebraska is primarily provided by private scheduled bus service. There are eight entities offering scheduled intercity bus service around the state of Nebraska and to neighboring states. These services connect to each other at major cities. Using these services, Nebraskans can travel to most of the more densely populated portions of Nebraska and neighboring states. The service providers are as follows:

- Open Plains Transit serves the Panhandle region of Nebraska. The service provides connections to the Panhandle communities of Alliance, Scottsbluff, Gering, Minatare, Bayard, Angora, Chadron, Hemingford, Bridgeport, Dalton, Gurley, Sidney, Sunol, Lodgepole, Chappell, Brule, Ogallala, Hay Springs, Rushville, Crawford, Hyannis, Antioch, Bingham, Ellsworth, Lakeside, and Gordon; Valentine in Cherry County, which is considered part of the Panhandle region for Mobility Management purposes; and Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

- KCTS operates two bus routes from Kimball to Scottsbluff and Chappell, respectively. A third route to Cheyenne, Wyoming is planned for later in 2023. KCTS also operates an airport shuttle between Western Nebraska Regional Airport (BFF) and Denver International Airport (DIA), with stops in Scottsbluff and Kimball.

- Burlington Trailways provides fixed-route service to and from Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, Kearney, Lexington, North Platte and Ogallala.

- Express Arrow provides scheduled bus service between communities in Nebraska, Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming. The communities served in Nebraska include Columbus, Fremont, Grand Island, Humphrey, Kearney, Lexington, Lincoln, Madison, Norfolk, North Bend, North Platte, Ogallala, Omaha, and Schuyler.

- Jefferson Lines provides service from Sioux Falls, SD to Chanute, KS via Omaha and Sioux City, IA along Interstate 29.

- Megabus service connects Lincoln and Omaha with the Quad Cities in Iowa/Illinois, Chicago and Peoria in Illinois, and Des Moines and Iowa City in Iowa.

- Navigator Airport Express provides six trips a week to Eppley Airport in Omaha from Kearney, Grand Island, Hastings, York, and Lincoln.

- Omalink provides shuttle service to and from central locations in Lincoln or Omaha including their airports on a frequent schedule. Omalink also provides town car service for Nebraska and Western Iowa.

Section 5311 Providers

There are 52 rural transit providers operating with federal formula funds under the Section 5311 program, which provides capital, planning, and operating assistance to states to support public transportation in rural areas with populations of fewer than 50,000 people. NDOT is the direct recipient of Section 5311 funding and administers the program on behalf of its rural subrecipients.

5311 Provider Performance by Region

The following overview of 5311 providers is organized by region and includes the performance data they report to NDOT, to help understand how well resources are being distributed and utilized across the state. The two metrics used are service effectiveness (measured through passenger trips per revenue hour) and cost efficiency (operating cost per revenue hour). These measures help indicate if the services provided are cost-effective and right-sized to rider demand.

North Central

The North Central Region is made up of 12 counties and has four 5311 providers, listed below and marked in red in Figure 7. The North Central providers have the lowest number of passenger trips per revenue hour (Figure 8) and the lowest operating cost per revenue hour (Figure 9). Since these are both low, mobility coordinators should further investigate whether this is the result of naturally low demand in a sparsely populated region or if there is additional demand that is not being met due to limited resources being invested in the communities.

Figure 7. North Central Providers

Providers:

- Avera St. Anthony Hospital
- City of Loup City
- Community Memorial Health Center
- Valley County Health Systems

Figure 8. North Central Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour

Average: 26.1 (2017), 26.2 (2018), 26.7 (2019), 24.7 (2020), 27.2 (2021)
North Central: 8.3 (2017), 8.6 (2018), 8.8 (2019), 4.8 (2020), 7.2 (2021)

Figure 9. North Central Operating Cost per Revenue Hour

Average: $291.92 (2017), $298.84 (2018), $357.75 (2019), $376.21 (2020), $409.96 (2021)
North Central: $133.76 (2017), $161.42 (2018), $206.10 (2019), $197.42 (2020), $204.64 (2021)

Northeast

The Northeast Region is made up of 15 counties and has 11 Section 5311 providers (Figure 10). The region's trips and operating costs per revenue hour are very consistent with the statewide averages for those values and have changed only moderately over the five-year period (Figure 11 and Figure 12).

Providers:
- Avera Creighton Hospital
- Cedar County
- City of Columbus
- City of Neligh
- City of Oakland
- City of Plainview
- City of Schuyler
- City of Wayne
- Community Concern of Norfolk
- Ponca Tribe
- Wolf Memorial Good Samaritan Public Transit

Figure 10. Northeast Providers
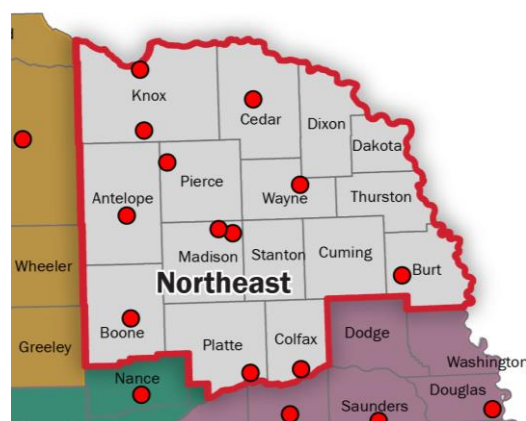
Figure 11. Northeast Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour

Legend: Average, Northeast

Data points (Northeast): 31.1 (2017), 33.4 (2018), 32.3 (2019), 29.9 (2020), 30.8 (2021)
Data points (Average): 26.1 (2017), 26.2 (2018), 26.7 (2019), 24.7 (2020), 27.2 (2021)

Figure 12. Northeast Operating Cost per Revenue Hour

Legend: Average, Northeast

Data points (Northeast): $308.18 (2017), $317.14 (2018), $378.83 (2019), $407.11 (2020), $456.79 (2021)
Data points (Average): $291.92 (2017), $298.84 (2018), $357.75 (2019), $376.21 (2020), $409.96 (2021)

Panhandle

The Panhandle region is made up of 12 counties and has nine 5311 providers (Figure 13). The region outperforms the other four by the chosen performance measures. This region has one of the highest trips per revenue hour, though costs have remained just above or near the statewide average (Figure 14 and Figure 15).

Figure 13. Panhandle Providers

Providers:

- City of Alliance Public Transit
- City of Chadron
- City of Crawford
- City of Sidney
- Garden County Transportation
- Kimball County
- Morrill County
- Open Plains Transit
- Scotts Bluff County
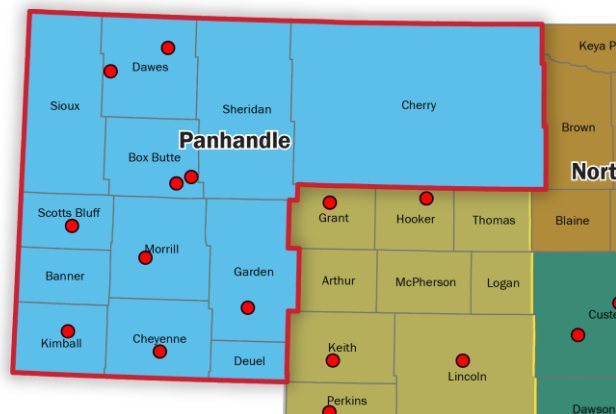
Figure 14. Panhandle Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour

Data labels: 34.8, 32.5, 36.8, 31.1, 33.2 (Panhandle); 26.1, 26.2, 26.7, 24.7, 27.2 (Average)

Legend: ● Average ● Panhandle

Figure 15. Panhandle Operating Cost per Revenue Hour

Data labels: $369.41, $397.20, $424.83, $418.64, $409.96 (Panhandle); $291.92, $298.84, $357.75, $376.21, $395.10 (Average)

Legend: ● Average ● Panhandle
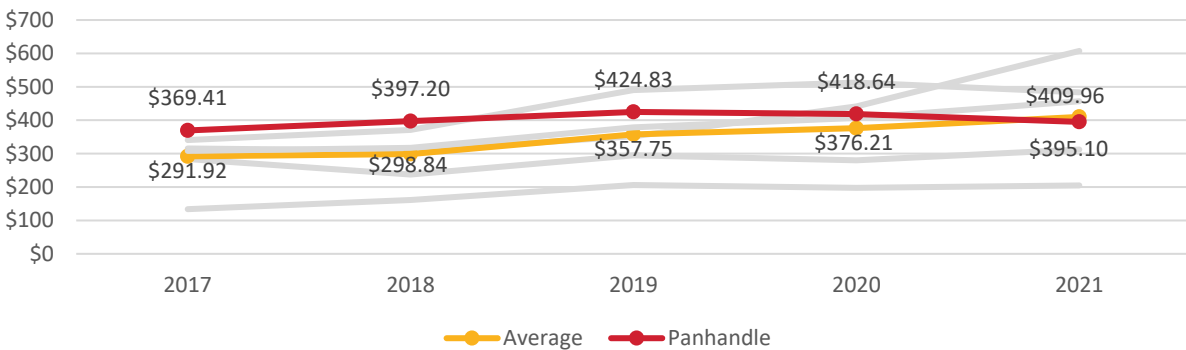
South Central

The South Central Region is made up of 17 counties and has six 5311 providers (Figure 16). As in the North Central Region, trips and operating costs per hour are lower than average (Figure 17 and Figure 18). However, this region has also experienced more recent population growth and has relatively high population density around Kearney and Grand Island. This population growth may be reflected in the demand for service that providers need to meet.

The current count of six providers represents a consolidation from eight total in the 2022 fiscal year. The City of Broken Bow consolidated operations with Callaway Hospital Public Transit Services, and the Village of Guide Rock consolidated operations with Midland AAA. As this section uses historical data, the previously existing transit agencies have been included in the analysis; however, their operating statistics in future periods will be combined with the consolidated agencies.

Providers:

- Callaway Hospital Public Transit Services
- Community Action Partnership of Mid-NE
- CRANE
- Harlan County
- Midland AAA
- NanceTrans
- City of Broken Bow
- Village of Guide Rock
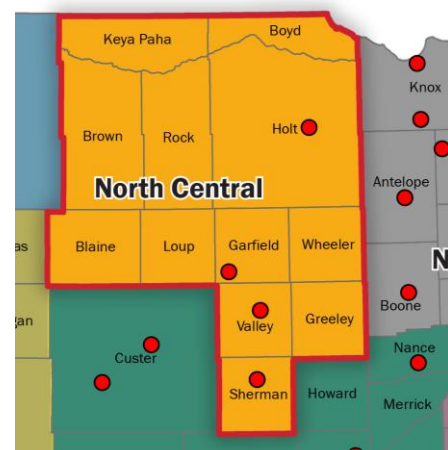

Figure 16. South Central Providers
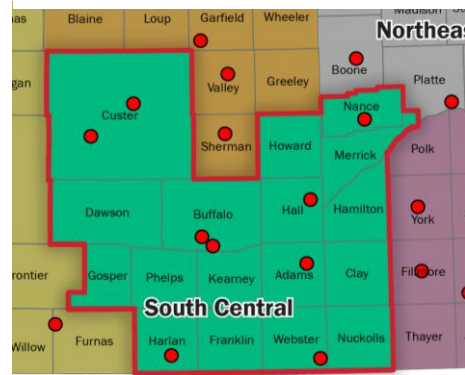
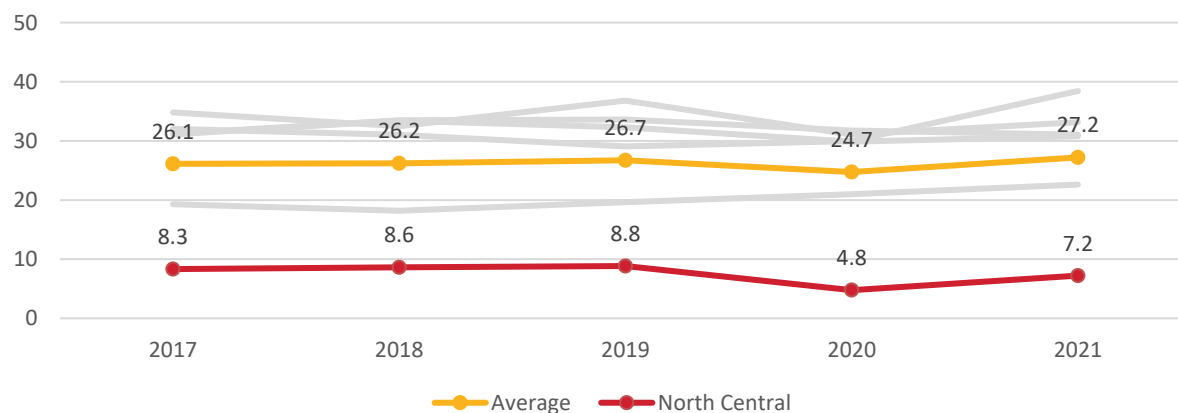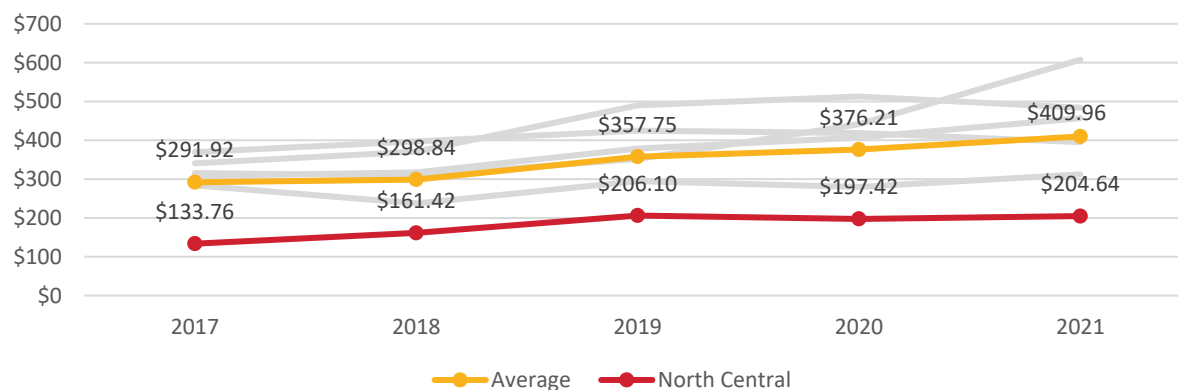Figure 17. South Central Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour
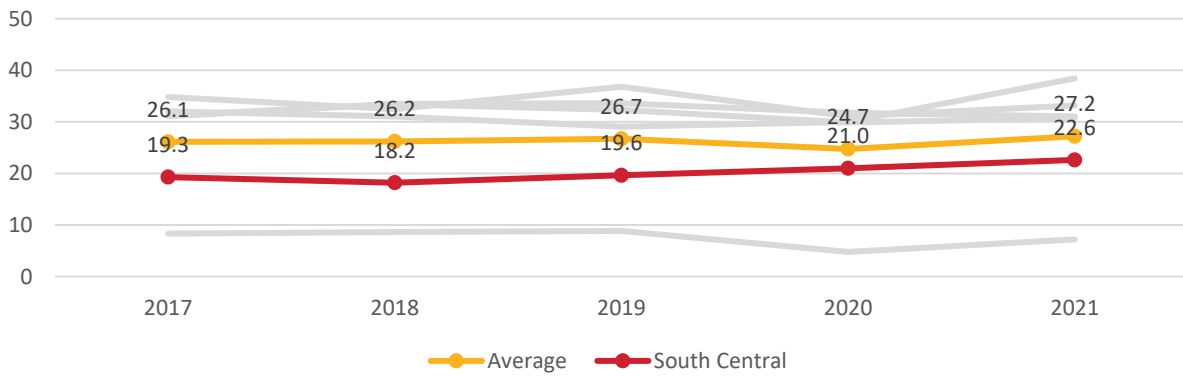
Figure 18. South Central Operating Cost per Revenue Hour
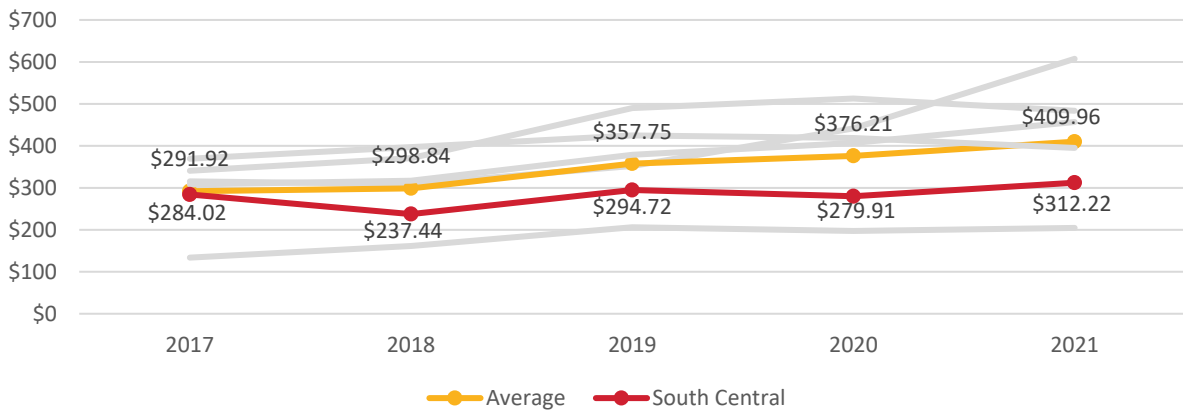
Southeast

The Southeast Region is made up of 21 counties and has 10 current 5311 providers (Figure 19). In 2021 the region performed near the statewide average for trips and cost per revenue hour (Figure 20 and Figure 21). The analysis includes historical data from 11 providers; however, the Eastern Nebraska Organization on Aging ended service in July 2023.

Figure 19. Southeast Providers

Providers:

- Blue Rivers AAA
- Blue Valley Community Action Partnership
- Butler County Rural Service
- City of Tecumseh
- Lancaster County
- Saline County Area Transit
- Saunders County
- SENCA
- Seward County
- York County
- Eastern NE Office on Aging

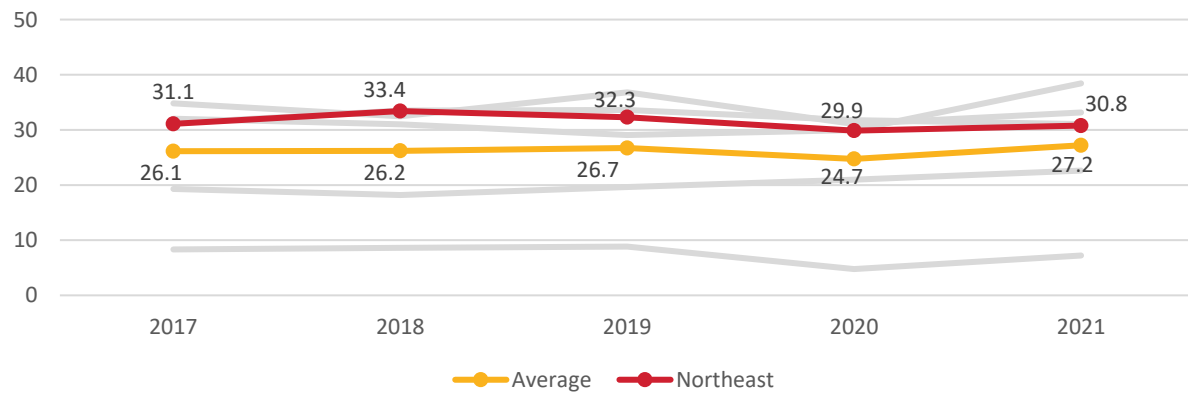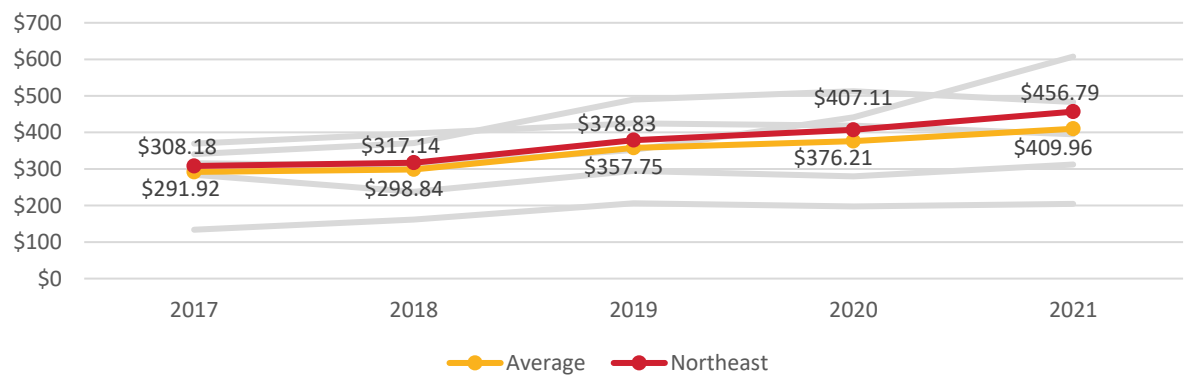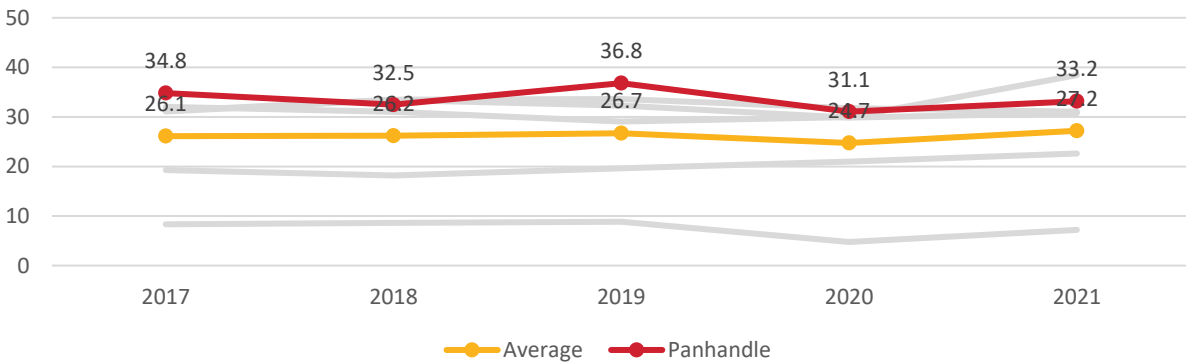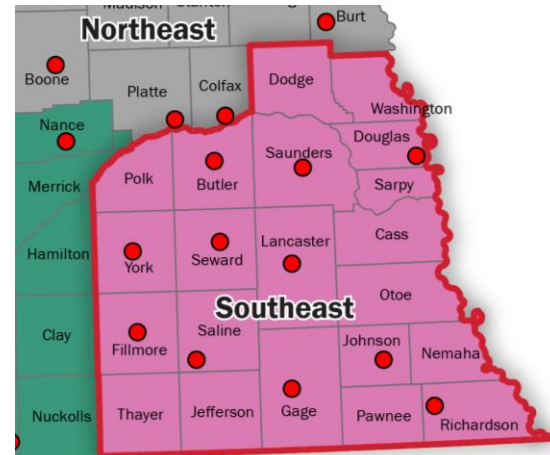**Figure 20. Southeast Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour**
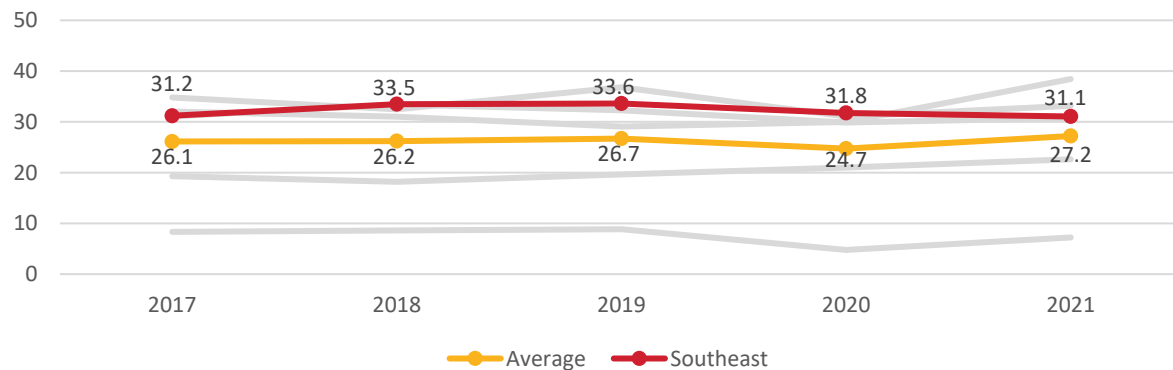
Figure 21. Southeast Operating Cost per Revenue Hour
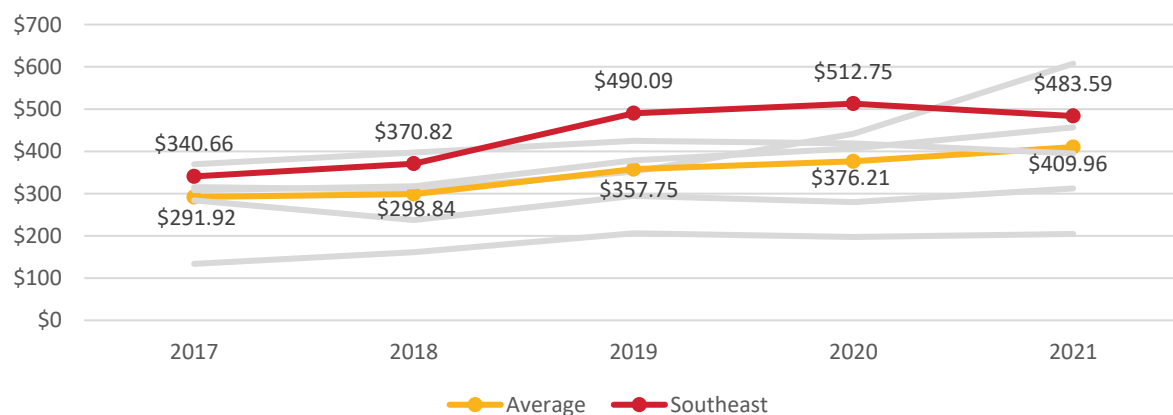
Southwest

The Southwest Region is made up of 16 counties and has nine 5311 providers (Figure 22). Trips and operating costs per revenue hour have both increased over time (Figure 23 and Figure 24), largely in the time period between 2020 and 2021. This may indicate that service is increasing to meet growing demand.

Providers:

- Cambridge Memorial Hospital Inc.
- Chase County Transit
- City of McCook
- City of North Platte
- City of Ogallala
- Grant County
- Hooker County
- Perkins County
- Phelps County
- Stratton Industrial Commission

Figure 22. Southwest Providers
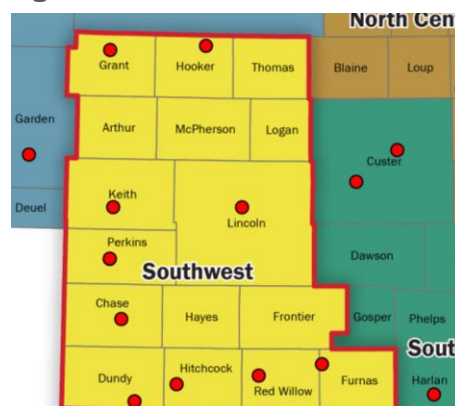
Figure 23. Southwest Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour

Legend: Average, Southwest

(Southwest values: 32.0, 31.0, 29.1, 30.0, 38.4)
(Average values: 26.1, 26.2, 26.7, 24.7, 27.2)
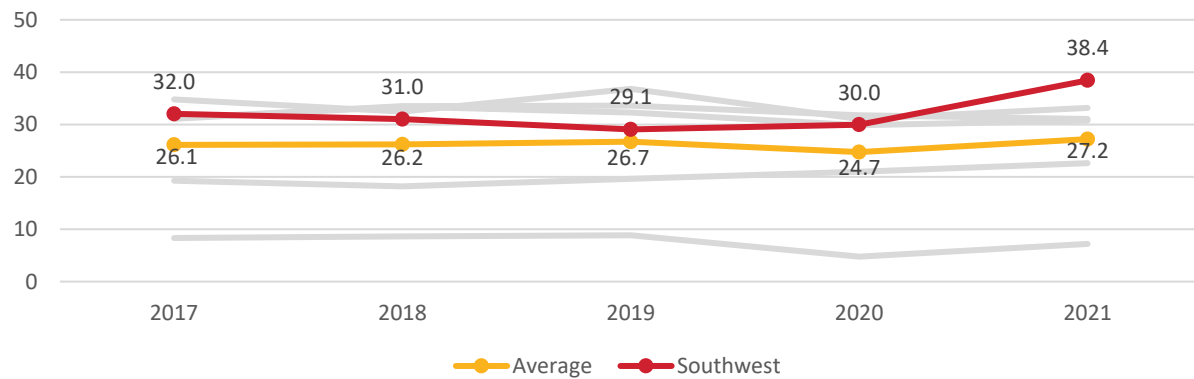
Figure 24. Southwest Operating Cost per Revenue Hour

Legend: Average, Southwest

(Southwest values: $315.52, $308.99, $357.75, $441.47, $607.41)
(Average values: $291.92, $298.84, $351.95, $376.21, $409.96)
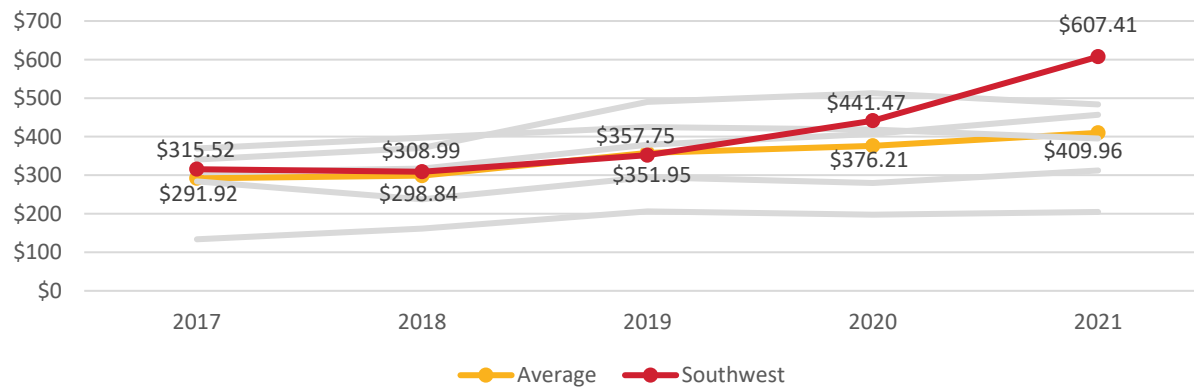
Changes Since 2018

As indicated earlier, several services have either reorganized under larger agencies or discontinued since the last Coordinated Plan in 2018. Table 2 lists each change.

Table 2. Changes to 5311 Providers, 2018-2023

2018 Independent Agency Location/Name	Consolidation Agency	Consolidation Year	Terminated Service Date
Eastern Nebraska Organization on Aging			July 1, 2023
Guide Rock Transit	Midland AAA	FY23	
Webster County	Midland AAA	FY20	
Broken Bow	Callaway District Hospital Public Transit	FY23	
Sheridan County	Open Plains Transit	FY21	
Central City	Midland AAA	FY22	

Vehicles Statewide

Among other forms of assistance, the 5311 program helps fund vehicle purchases for subrecipients. Out of the 407 vehicles operated by 5311 providers, the majority (333) were purchased using 5311 dollars. Figure 25 shows the approximate size and location (by home county) of 5311 provider fleets. Only 28 of the 333 vehicles are based in metropolitan areas.

Formula 5310 Providers

Vehicle purchases are also supported through Section 5310 funds, which are distributed annually to states. NDOT has 91 subrecipients under the 5310 program. The subrecipients are non-profit organizations and government agencies that use the funding to purchase equipment. Figure 26 shows the distribution of 5310-funded vehicles in Nebraska.

Other Providers

There are other organizations that provide transportation to their clients without the use of 5311 or 5310 funds. These include some hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, assisted living and independent living institutions. Although it is more difficult to identify these providers because they exist outside NDOT's reporting structure, their input is sought when identifying unmet transit needs. Known transportation providers were invited to participate in stakeholder engagement during the 2023 update.

Figure 25. Location of Vehicles Operated by 5311 Providers

Legend

5311 Vehicles

- 1.0 - 3.0
- 3.1 - 6.0
- 6.1 - 11.0
- 11.1 - 19.0
- 19.1 - 63.0

Figure 26. Location of Vehicles Funded through the 5310 Program
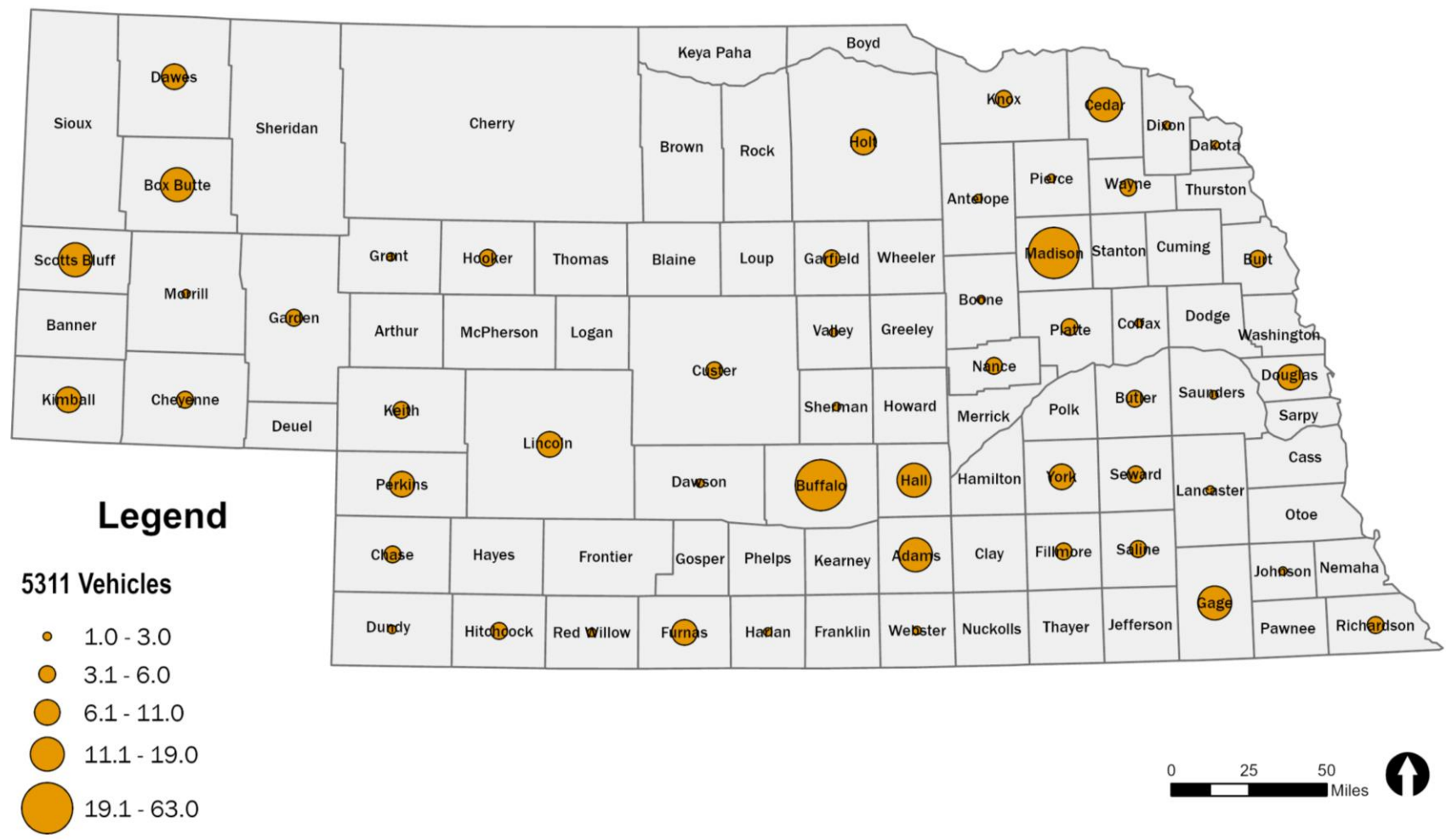
Legend

5310 Vehicles

- 1 - 2
- 3 - 6
- 7 - 17
- 18 - 32
- 33 - 48

Current Coordination Activities, Transit Needs and Challenges

The Mobility Management Project has been guiding coordination among service providers for approximately 10 years. The following sections provide a brief overview of current coordination activities, describe engagement conducted for this plan update, and conclude with the final list of priority needs identified through multiple rounds of meetings.

Existing Coordination Activities

Statewide Mobility Management Project

The statewide Mobility Management team includes NDOT and consultant staff who provide structure and support for providers. The project is focused on improving mobility in rural areas and addressing the needs of the elderly, disabled and low-income people who form most of Nebraska's rural population. Through this statewide approach to addressing mobility needs, alternatives that fill in service gaps can be identified and implemented.

As discussed in earlier sections, new local and intercity bus service and technology upgrades have been studied and/or introduced under the auspices of Mobility Management. In 2020, NDOT began subsidizing the purchase and installation cost of new scheduling and dispatch software for any interested agency, resulting in the expansion of software use from eight to 26 providers. Several providers in the Panhandle and Northeast regions are participating in a pilot trip planning website.

Regional Structure

The regions created in Phase 2 considered political borders as well as the general service areas of county- and community-based transit agencies. While most regions have lapsed into inactivity since they were first organized, the Panhandle and Northeast regions have been holding Regional Coordination Committee meetings on a quarterly basis and collaborating on service improvements.

Cherry County, originally included in the North Central Region, has been more involved with agencies based in the Panhandle. Therefore, the boundary map has been updated as shown in Figure 27.

Figure 27. Six Regions Used for Structuring Mobility Management
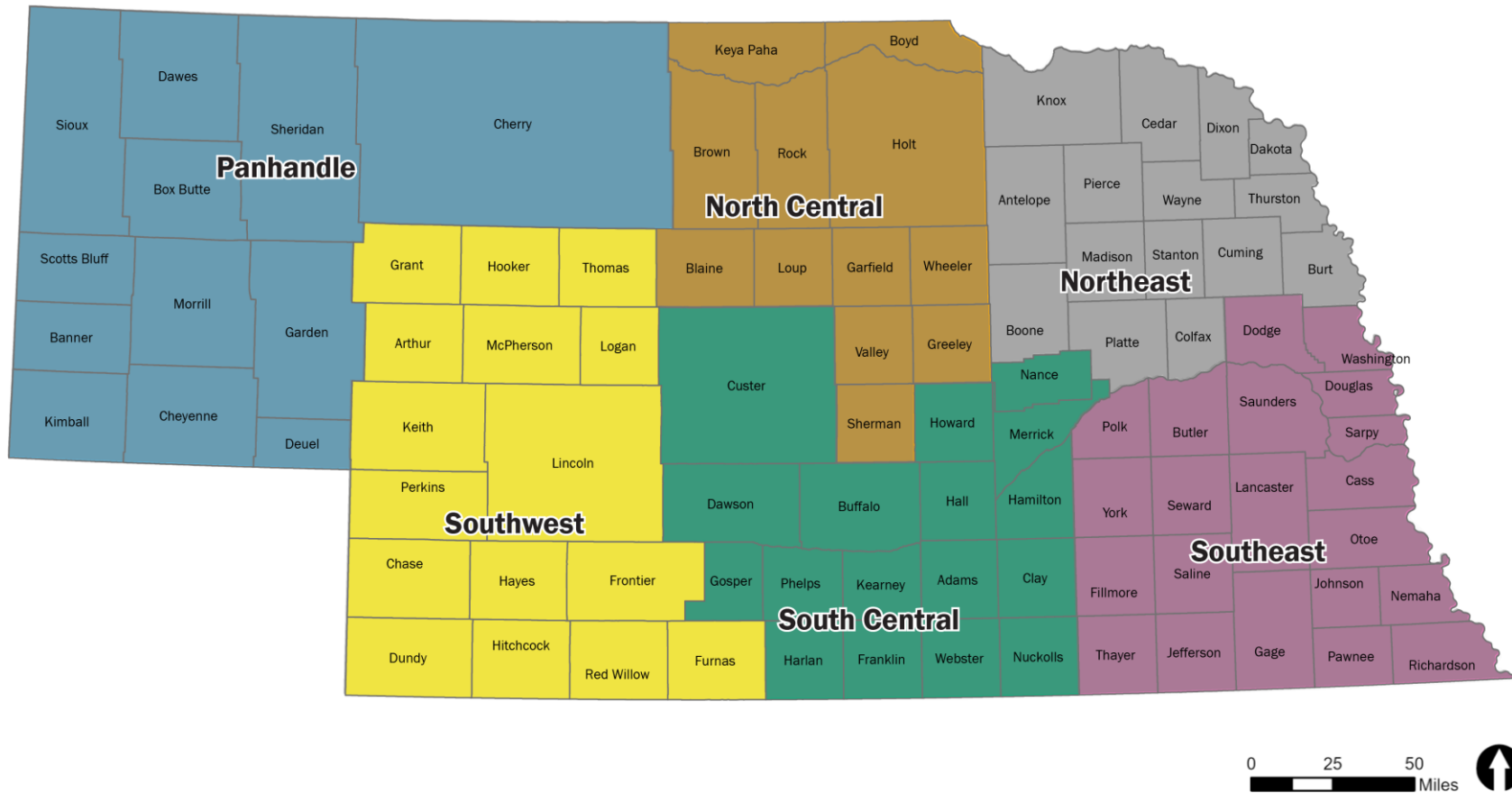
Statewide Coordination Committee

To provide structure to the conversations about coordination, transit stakeholders with a statewide perspective were invited to participate in a statewide coordination committee. The statewide committee met via Zoom three times over the course of the update to provide input for coordination activities and keep others informed of programs and funding. Input is summarized in the appendix. The members of the committee included representatives from:

- Nebraska Association of Transportation Providers
- Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
- Veterans Administration
- Nebraska State Unit on Aging
- Northeast Nebraska Area Agency on Aging
- Nebraska Public Service Commission
- Department of Economic Development
- Community Action Nebraska
- University of Nebraska
- Nebraska Department of Education
- Rural Prosperity Nebraska
- League of Human Dignity
- Nebraska Department of Transportation
- Metropolitan Area Planning Agency
- Great Plains Tribal Epidemiology Center
- Statewide Olmstead Advisory Council

Regional Committees

Separately, regional stakeholders met to discuss their needs, challenges, and preferred coordination strategies. The two most active regions, the Panhandle and the Northeast, met two times each in hybrid Zoom/in-person meetings in their respective regions.

Stakeholders in the remaining four regions did not form regional committees for this plan update. Because it proved difficult to align schedules, they were instead invited to their choice of a series of Zoom meetings. Thus, representatives from several different regions participated together in the plan update activities. There were two rounds of meetings; the first covered participants' main needs and challenges, and the second covered potential coordination strategies going forward.

Input from the regional meetings can be found in the appendix. Participants in the regional meetings included:

- 5311 providers
- 5310 providers
- Intercity carriers
- Community stakeholders

Survey of Transportation Providers

To provide a data foundation for the Coordinated Plan and to further obtain input on providers' interests in coordination, all 5310 and 5311 providers were invited to fill out a brief questionnaire. Beginning on May 31, 2023, rural transit providers listed in NDOT's database of 5311 and 5310 subrecipients were invited via email to participate in the survey. The survey was open through July 19, 2023. Out of 60 responses, 34 were complete and used for the analysis.

The survey included 12 questions and a few key questions have been summarized below by topical area including Agency and Service Overview, System Information, Reservations and Technology, and Coordination.

Table 3. Survey Respondents by Region

Region	Respondents
North Central	5
Northeast	11
Panhandle	7
South Central	9
Southeast	19
Southwest	7

Agency and Service Overview

Figure 28. Responses: What is the classification of your agency?

- State agency
- Transit agency
- Human service agency
- Private nonprofit
- Private organization
- Other (please specify)
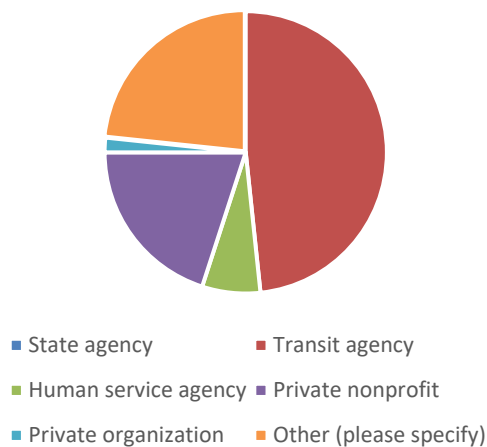
Almost half of surveyed agencies responded as 'Transit agency' and about a quarter marked themselves 'Private nonprofit'. The remainder of respondents were 'Human service agency', 'Private organization', or 'Other'. Zero respondents chose 'State agency.'

Figure 29. Responses: How do you charge for service?
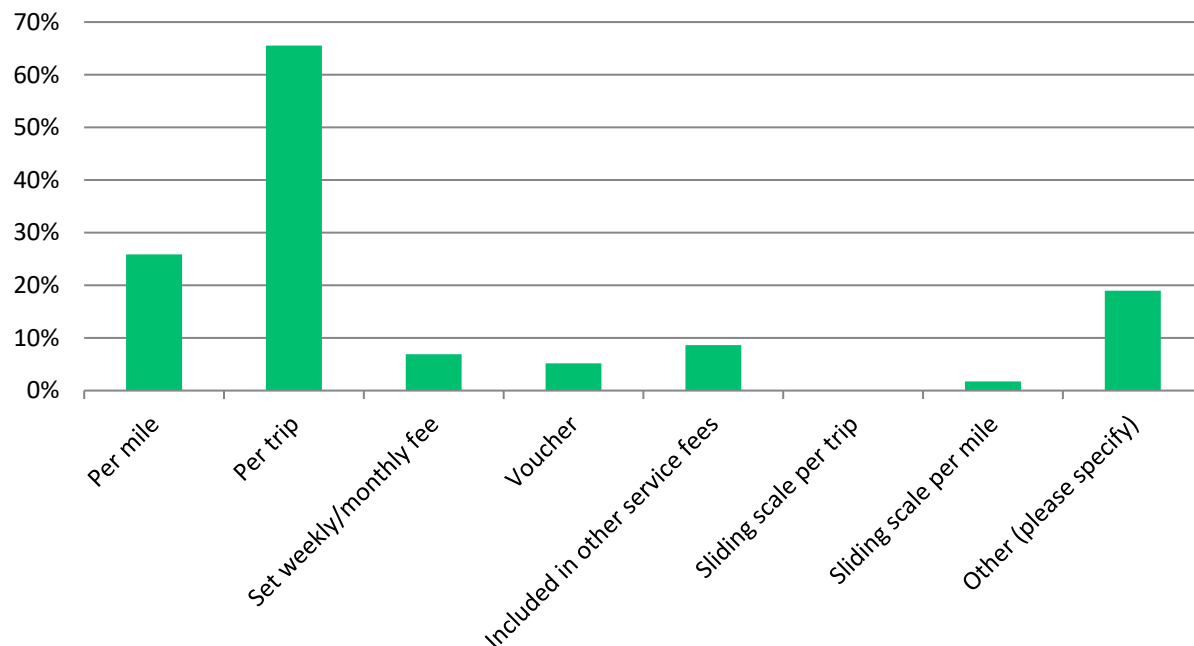
Most agencies (about 66 percent) charge their fares 'Per trip' and about 20 percent charge 'Per mile'. Another 20 percent selected 'Other'. Other payment methods like 'Voucher' and 'Included in other service fees' had lower response rates.

Figure 30. Responses: Do you currently have agreements with other agencies to pool resources?
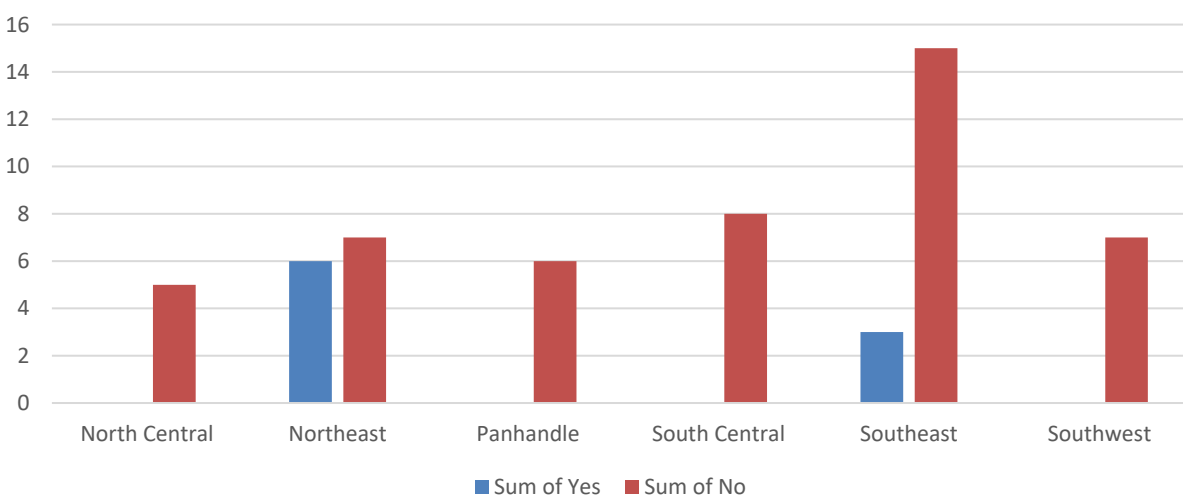
Agencies responded 'Yes' or 'No' to whether they have agreements with other agencies to pool resources. The only agencies that responded yes were in the Northeast and Southeast regions.

System Information

One question asked: "For each of the following, do you have capacity for additional work, and if so, are you interested in being a provider for neighboring services? If not, or if you contract out for these services, would you be interested in coordinating with other agencies to meet your needs?" Responses are shown in Figure 31.

Figure 31. Responses: Ability to coordinate/share resources and services
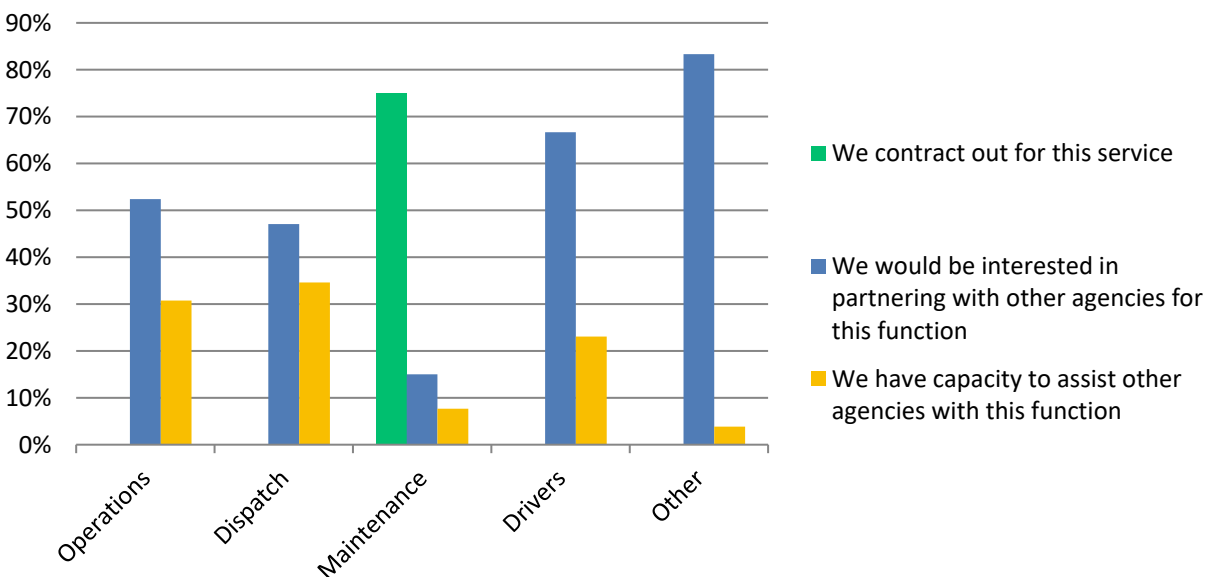
The only work that agencies responded that they contract out was maintenance. Most agencies responded that they would be interested in partnering with other agencies for 'Drivers', 'Operations', 'Dispatch' and 'other' forms of work. However, the only form of work that most agencies responded that they have the capacity to assist with was 'Dispatch'.

Figure 32. Responses: Do you provide trips outside your city?
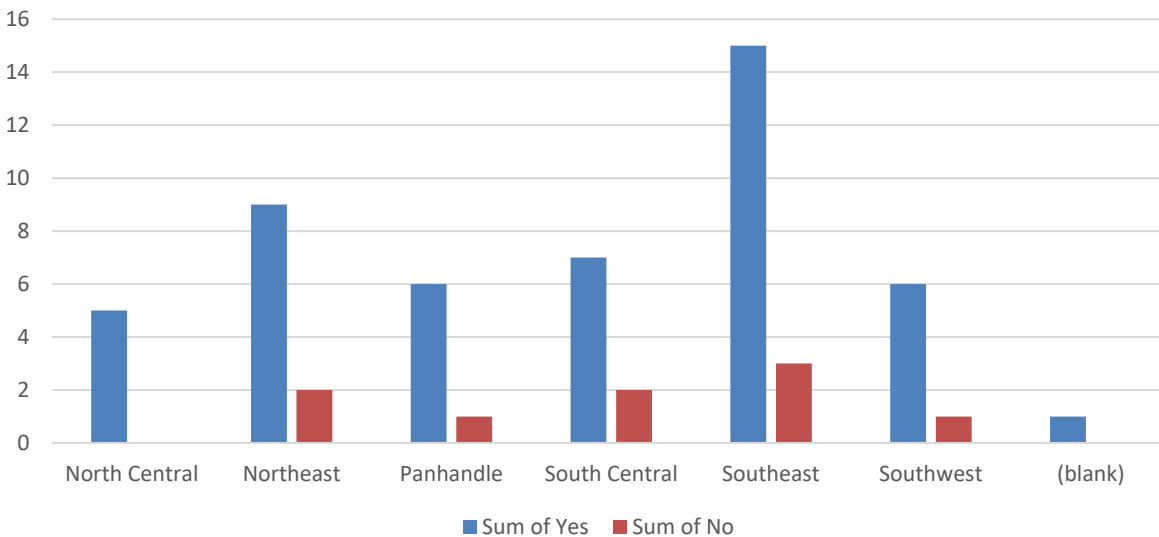
All six regions had agencies that responded 'Yes' to whether they provide service outside their service area/region. A minority of all respondents to the question responded 'No' and they were primarily located in the Southeast and Northeast, and South Central regions which have more providers overall.

Reservations and Technology

Figure 33. Responses: Please indicate your reservations procedure(s)
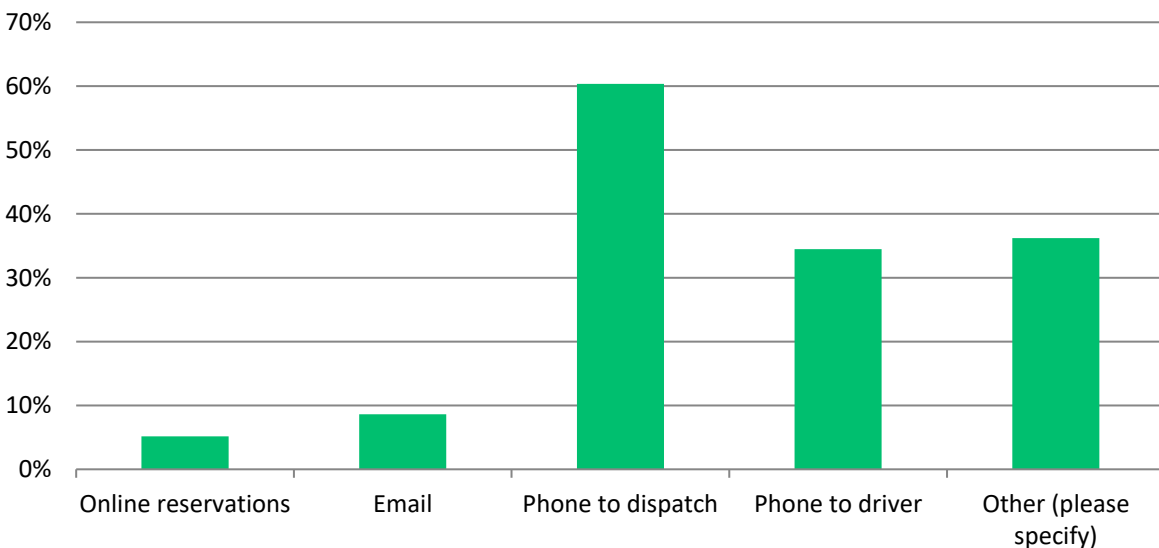
Most of the respondents chose 'Phone to dispatch' (over 60 percent). 'Phone to driver' and 'other' were closely matched in second place. 'Email' and 'Online reservations' scored lowest.

Figure 34. Responses: Please indicate the technology areas that would improve your system
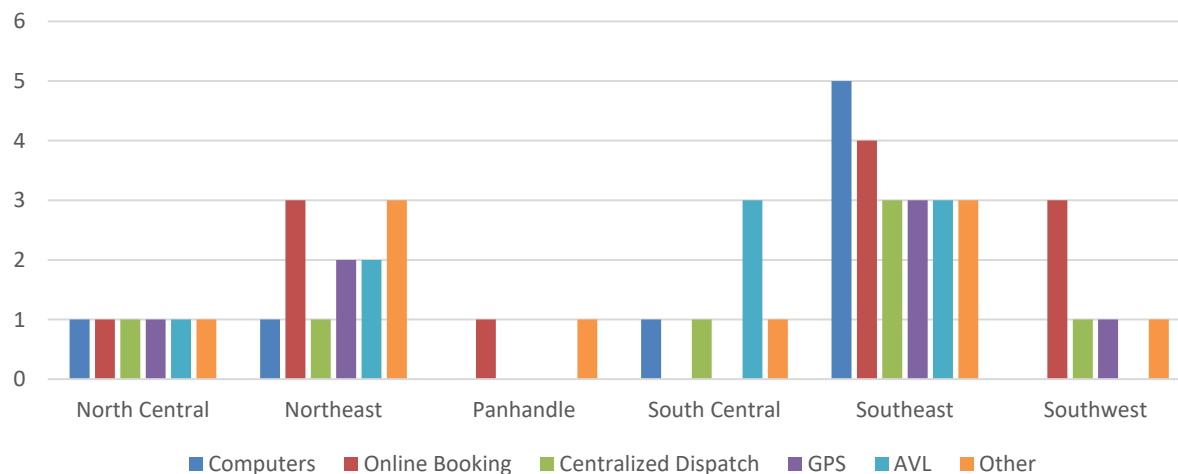
Online booking was identified as one of the top technology improvements across all regions except the South Central region. Other notably high scoring categories were 'Computers' and 'AVL'.

Coordination

Figure 35. Responses: Are you pursuing/Would you like to pursue any of the following coordination activities?
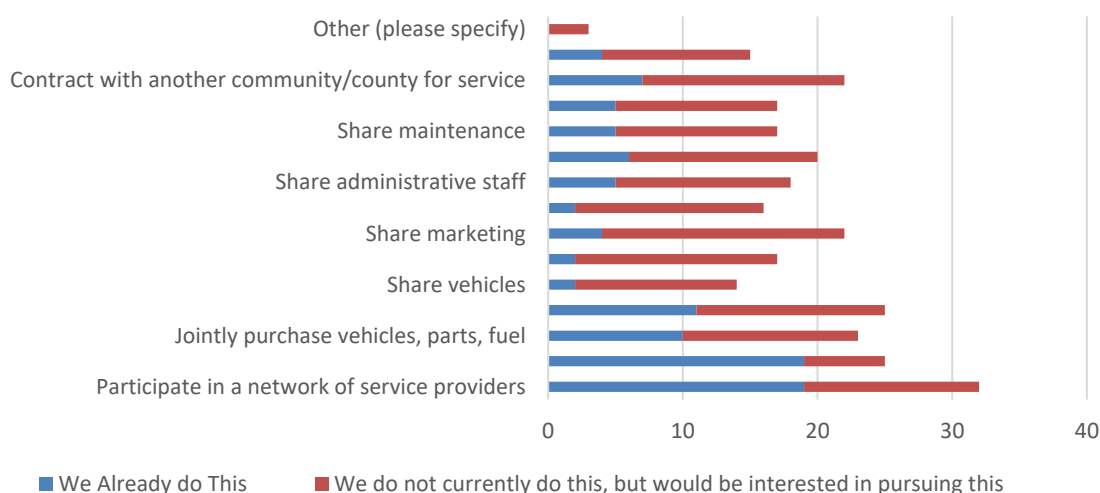
A larger portion of providers are already coordinating by participating in a network of service providers and by jointly purchasing vehicles and parts. However, according to the responses most are not participating in other activities for coordination including sharing administrative, marketing, and maintenance staff/resources.

High-Priority Needs

As the 2018 plan included a prioritized list of needs relevant to providers at that time, the original list was the starting point for identifying the most relevant needs in 2023. The regional and statewide committees were asked for input on this list, leading to an updated top 10 list of needs. These 10 needs are listed below in descending order of importance:

1. Increased Funding

To better serve current and potential transit users, providers generally agreed that finding enough money was their number-one challenge and their greatest need. Many agencies would like to expand their services but are resource-constrained.

2. Inter-Agency Communication/Coordination

In meetings, providers generally agreed that they needed both formal and informal ways to keep lines of communication open and better coordinate their services with one another. Several agencies brought up specific ways they would like to stay in closer contact. This is consistent with the survey results, which indicated a high level of interest in pursuing coordination activities.

3. Finding/Keeping Drivers

In a change from 2018, finding and retaining vehicle operators is now a top challenge in Nebraska, following national trends. Necessary pay increases for the existing driver pool and challenges in recruiting new drivers were cited by providers.

4. Broadening Awareness (Marketing)

There is a widespread perception that rural transit service is only for narrow segments of the population, when in fact it is usually open to everyone. Transit agencies need to market their services more broadly and effectively to unlock the full potential of rural transit. Some commented that demand for services explodes once people realize it is available.

5. Providing Service to Regional Centers

Long-distance transit trips tend to center on a few major trip generators, such as a school, hospital, or shopping center in one of the region's larger cities. This creates an opportunity and a challenge for transit providers. As survey and meeting input indicates, many of them do offer long-distance trips. The difficulty is in organizing these trips so that one vehicle can carry multiple passengers to and from the same destinations.

6. Extended Service Hours

Several providers indicated that they receive requests for service earlier in the morning or, more typically, later in the evening. Longer evening hours would allow for more diverse uses of transit and

meet more customer needs. Some of the challenges in meeting this need include funding and driver availability.

7. More Accessible Transportation Options

Accessible transportation is integral to every need in the list and is indeed the main goal of coordination efforts. People with disabilities are one of the three focus populations of the plan and represent an important user base for rural transit agencies. If transport is available at all, the vehicle used is very likely accessible by ADA standards, as rural transit providers purchase ADA-accessible vehicles before investing in non-accessible options. For this reason, plan participants discussed either moving this need higher in the prioritized list or dropping it from the list entirely and instead acknowledging that accessible service is a given in areas where service exists.

The decision was made to keep this need in its current position on the list. The reasons for this are: a) accessibility stays explicitly in the conversation; b) accessibility-specific strategies can be identified; and c) the factors that actually prevent providers from offering more accessible service, such as funding and driver recruitment, can be tackled as a first priority.

8. Commuter Trip Support

Trips to and from work, whether within a city/town or across longer distances, continues to be a key use of rural and small-urban transit. Consistently delivering service that can support work commutes is a challenge.

9. Providing Weekend Service

Several providers indicated that weekend service would help them support tourism, serve major cultural events, and otherwise meet riders' needs.

10. Providing School-Related Trips

In locations where yellow bus service is limited or non-existent, providing trips for school or after-school activities has become a priority for public transit.

Coordination Strategies

Concurrently with the engagement phase of the plan, the consultant team developed a set of potential strategies stakeholders could draw from to address the needs outlined in the previous section. The strategies were built around three themes:

- **Technical Support:** Strategies within this theme focus on providing more tools for local agencies to enhance coordination. Tools may include added personnel through expanding availability of mobility managers, providing material and programs for marketing service, and information on the benefits service provides locally that agencies can use to present their case for local matching funding.

- **Administrative Collaboration:** Concepts covered by this theme include a broad range of strategies where two or more agencies share responsibility for completing daily, weekly, monthly and/or annual tasks common to most every agency. These tasks may encompass management of the systems, providing service on the street, or facility and asset maintenance.

- **Service Improvement:** This category comprises the identification of various improvements to rural transit service to encourage growth in patronage and quality of service, as well as the role of NDOT in coordinating financial, technical, and administrative resources to facilitate that growth. Of note are those improvements most commonly identified in small urban or rural transit systems, e.g., service span, weekend service, and alternative booking options for demand-response trips. Other approaches that do not directly influence ridership but improve service quality and reliability include volunteer drivers/driver recruitment and the identification of new funding sources for expansion.

Coordination Strategies by Theme

The full list of 20 strategies is described in this section. The strategies are organized by theme but are otherwise not listed in any particular order.

For each strategy a lead agency or "champion" would need to be identified to implement and grow the strategy within a specific region or, when applicable, at the state level. This would need to take place during the implementation phase if the strategy were selected for advancement.

Technical Support

STRATEGY NUMBER	Expand Mobility Manager Coverage
1	Mobility managers/coordinators are staff dedicated to promoting and improving the mobility of residents and/or agency clientele. The Mobility Manager is responsible for coordinating transportation resources and providing public education regarding existing transportation resources. Mobility Managers also work to build awareness among decision makers, service providers, and riders on key issues related to the coordination of transportation and human services.

Individual Mobility Managers may be hired by a particular agency or may be shared among multiple agencies.

Mobility Managers typically:
- Serve as advocates for addressing the critical needs in transportation services to the general public and individuals with special needs
- Train agencies and individuals on local transportation options
- Develop and oversee outreach and education efforts on transportation resources

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Ensures staff resources are available to implement mobility and coordination strategies • Creates community resource to promote existing and available resources • Can highlight mobility challenges and opportunities and raise awareness • Implementing programs and creating awareness can result in improved effectiveness and efficiency	• Mobility Managers with full range of required skills may be difficult to find • Individual will need to adopt an entrepreneurial approach and be well supported by key institutions and organizations to be effective • Individuals will likely need training and support • Requires matching funding from sponsoring agency
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Marketing/Branding/Outreach

2

Transit demand doesn't fall neatly into city boundaries. Creating a regional or consistent statewide marketing program will provide the continuity needed to best serve clients. The program could include the following:

- Continuously updating the website (map-based) transit traveler information. This information would include the availability of service (by actual service area) and the parameters of that service. A phone number to the dispatch center would allow potential riders to easily book a ride. If the rider needs additional information, the contact information for the local mobility manager can also be provided.

- Another option for the statewide website/program would be to add transit to the existing 511 offerings. Multimodal 511 is a best practice offered in many urban regions across the country, but the concept can be tailored to a statewide implementation as well. The goal would be to allow a user to have a single local for all traveler information, whether they are a driver or a transit user.

The statewide program could integrate with targeted regional programs that enhance ridership options as well as the potential transit offerings. Options for targeted marketing at the regional level include:

- Providing fact-sheet type information that can be easily tailored by transit providers for use in their community.

- Offering sample marketing campaigns/presentations to encourage transit use and to encourage participation from the business/social service community.

- Coordinating strategies with non-public transit shared ride providers. Volunteer driver programs/Uber/Lyft/taxi programs (urban areas) should be seen as partners, not competitors.

- Implementing new transit options, such as employment transportation. The marketing plan can include fact sheets and information on how employers can benefit from offering vanpools and carpools or working with the public transit provider to subsidize services.

- Growing the service contract market: Service contracts are essential to growing the local match pool from the existing transit demand market. The marketing plan will provide a local user with methods for working with potential partners, getting them under contract and transitioning into operations smoothly.

The reasons for coordinating outreach and marketing regionally include:

- Limited local budgets: most agencies do not have the funding available to focus on outreach and marketing of their transportation program.

- Focusing on transportation services: many of the 5311/5310 agencies are non-profits serving a mission other than transportation (HHS and Senior Service Organizations make up a large proportion of the agencies). Marketing and outreach that is implemented at the local level generally focuses on the agency's menu of services and not solely transportation. Elevating the marketing activities to the region level provides the opportunity to include multiple agencies and a focus on transportation services.

- Encourages new riders: Marketing at the regional level will open services to eligible riders who are not current clients of the organization providing service, but who could benefit from transportation services.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Promotes a combined effort where limited individual agency/location resources are leveraged to a greater extent • Allows local providers to spend more time on service rather than designing and implementing their own outreach. • Builds awareness of the concept through a coordinated branding process	• Does not completely replace local efforts. • Could be local concern that a common brand dilutes the unique nature of individual service agencies • Loss of autonomy (must collaborate on certain elements) • In many locations, any investment into marketing/branding is more than they are investing today
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Regional Education/Workshops
3	Across the state there is a vast amount of expertise within various agencies that could be shared through coordination meetings. For example, many rural and urban agencies have developed outreach programs to potential funding partners that could benefit other agencies that have focused their efforts on requesting funds from one county or one community. Other agencies have successfully partnered with healthcare providers to coordinate medical appointments for a patient from a community that requires a regional trip. Still other agencies have developed outreach programs that promote their service such that most in the community know there is a partner to support them if needed. What is needed is a good understanding of where the internal experts are located and a means of getting their story out to other agencies across the state.

By developing a program to share expertise, a clearinghouse of people to lead discussions, sample material for educating others, and material that can be used to inform more people can be organized and promoted across the state. As more agencies are using video conferencing technology to conduct their meetings and training efforts, travel costs and time away from their primary task for the experts can be minimized. |

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Higher level of understanding of activities that lead to improving mobility for more people • Improved cost-effectiveness of transit service	• Identifying where experts reside • Keeping an up-to-date list of experts • Time for experts to develop and deliver training sessions
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Transit Research Coordination
4	Transportation research is a costly but rewarding investment that is most commonly conducted for large agencies and organizations with the necessary financial or administrative resources to undertake it. Small rural and urban transit systems are less able, by themselves, to coordinate and fund research projects suited to their current needs.

NDOT can coordinate with local agencies statewide to identify predominant research needs and can leverage its size to organize and solicit research from FTA-recognized University Transportation Centers (UTCs). This will introduce greater innovation into small town and rural area transit service provision and ensure that the issues being investigated are congruent with the research needs of the constituent agencies.

Final deliverables may take the form of best practices, technical recommendations, engagement summaries, and any other forms of research proper to understanding the conditions facing transit in the state of Nebraska. |

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Make formal research accessible to small transit systems that are otherwise under studied • Coordination between agencies ensures that research proposals will be best aligned with the needs of agencies • Can be effectively integrated with any UTC in the state of Nebraska or elsewhere in Region 7 •	• Identifying available funding sources for research, may require state and/or federal support • Dedicated staff may be required to coordinate research • Further effort may be required to bring results of research into practical efforts and strategic investments in local transit systems
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER

5

Rider Companion Program (Bus Buddy)

Some individuals rely on paratransit because they lack confidence or experience to use the fixed-route system. Some transit systems have instituted companion rider/bus buddy programs to support individuals transitioning away from paratransit to fixed route service use. A companion program involves not only training individuals to use transit but also pairing individuals with a "bus buddy" who will travel with them on the bus until the individual gains sufficient confidence to travel independently (or until it is determined that the concept is not appropriate).

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Programs help reduce demand for paratransit services by increasing consumer knowledge in using and independently navigating the fixed-route system • Programs build good community will through establishing a group of volunteers who act as advocates for the transit system	• The individualized nature of these programs makes it difficult to assess overall impact on paratransit usage • There is a need to provide administrative support and create the initial training regimen to be followed by volunteers • Volunteer retention can be an issue, creating an ongoing need to train new volunteers
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER

6

Travel Training

People who have never used public transportation often have real concerns and fears about using the public transportation network. This strategy has many of the same goals as a companion program but is more formalized. A training program that teaches consumers how to use public transportation and become confident transit riders can help encourage use of public transit. Travel training may be promoted as a marketing strategy to encourage key consumer groups (e.g. older adults) to use public transit; or in urban areas it may be targeted towards frequent users of paratransit to encourage individuals to use lower-cost fixed route services, as appropriate to the individual's circumstances.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Programs help reduce demand for paratransit services by increasing consumer knowledge in using and independently navigating the fixed-route system • Encourages and supports use of local fixed-route services • May reduce demand for paratransit services • Increases awareness and use of a variety of community transportation services • May support other regional priorities, such as workforce development	• Some audiences and individuals may require specialized training • May require multiple-agency cooperation and coordination to identify training opportunities (adds to complexity) • Training may require support from agencies that perceive little or no long-term gain
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Promote the Community Benefits of Service/Coordination

7

In rural areas public transit may be seen as a service focused on getting seniors and persons with disabilities to the doctor. Additionally, providing trips to larger regional centers to access goods/services that are not available locally is many times seen as an avenue to economic leakage because people are also doing some of their shopping that could be done locally. What is ignored/downplayed from this perspective is the local economic benefit, especially in small towns, that transportation provides in allowing seniors or persons with disabilities to remain in their preferred small town. Transit service (whether it is local or regional) has been shown to be a critical factor in the aging in place decision process. The dollars that transit users provide to the community through property taxes and sales taxes on goods they buy locally are not considered, many times, during the discussion of the cost of service.

By preparing material to present to city councils, county boards, agency boards, etc. documenting the community benefits, the anecdotal argument of the benefit that is typically provided can be transformed into dollars and cents discussion.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Provides agencies with critical information that can support the request for matching funds • Brings an awareness that transit users are not a drain on limited local funds and that users support the community •	• Getting final funding decision makers to listen to the argument • Agencies having the opportunity/ audience to make the argument more than once a year
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Technologies to Improve Coordination

8

The provision of transit, paratransit, and human service agency transportation has long benefited from use of technology to lower operating costs, reduce customer travel times, and provide more convenient routes and schedules. Use of technology to improve services to the target populations can benefit both the transport provider and customer.

Technologies can include those that benefit customers (real-time traveler information, electronic fare payment, interactive voice recognition telephone systems, or surveillance/security systems) or transit provider organizations (automatic vehicle location, computer dispatch and scheduling, mobile data computers, and coordination/mobility management software).

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Technology can improve operational efficiency without increases in operating costs • Technology can improve all aspects of customer relations, improving the accuracy and timeliness of trip information providers to consumers • Technology can reduce administrative burdens associated with tracking and verifying trips and improve efficiency when billing human service agencies when service is provided under contract	• Some technologies are expensive to implement and require ongoing vendor maintenance and upgrade contracts • Integration of multiple technologies has proven difficult, even with general guidelines for an integrated architecture structure to ensure compatibility of technologies • Some users in the target populations may be reluctant to use an interactive information kiosk, automated telephone systems, etc.
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

Administrative Collaboration

STRATEGY NUMBER **9**	Centralizing Resources (Service Information, Reservations/Dispatch/Maintenance)

Centralized resource programs are designed to assemble information about available public, non-profit, and private sector transportation resources in a single location, source, or directory. In many communities, there are available services for persons with low income, seniors, and persons with disabilities, but it is up to the consumer to find out hours and days of operation, service areas, availability, eligibility, and how to access such services. In a centralized resource directory, information regarding all available providers is assembled in a single place. The directory can be in written, published form or in a searchable online database format.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
- Programs help reduce demand for paratransit services by increasing consumer knowledge in using and independently navigating the fixed-route system - Directories provide a one-stop resource for all public and private transit services and human service agency transportation - Directories provide easy contact and eligibility information, enabling consumers and advocates alike to identify potential service providers for specific members of the target populations - Resource directories are readily embraced by most coordination committees as a nonthreatening strategy that promotes enhanced mobility - Directories can be particularly useful in larger communities with multiple public and private sector transportation resources	- Requires a comprehensive data collection effort to create the directory - Keeping the directory up-to-date has proven problematic in some areas - A consumer education program on the directory's existence may be needed - Comprehensive directories may contain many listings, confusing consumers - Directories only alert consumers to the availability of a service provider; consumers and/or advocates must still inquire about eligibility and arrange for services
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER **10**	Shared Operations and Administration

The operations and administration of transit programs provide numerous opportunities for coordination with and across a regional structure.

Coordinating at the administrative level is a great strategy for solidifying early acceptance from transit providers who may otherwise be resistant to coordination. With the breadth of responsibility each manager has, and the time required to address the compliance requirements, identifying responsibilities that can be shared can be widely supported. These activities include:

- Shared reporting: coordinating reporting functions may reduce paperwork for smaller 5311 agencies. To see the value of this coordination, agencies must use similar methods for reporting trips and costs. A shared dispatching program that has monthly and annual reports automated can save agencies time and money.

- Shared training: small agencies may not have the financial capacity or staff resources to do all the training in house (and do not have the backup drivers to send staff to other parts of the state to receive training). Having larger transit providers offer to invite smaller agency staff to participate in-person or remotely in their training provides a cost saving and provides continuity in the level of training that all providers receive.

- Shared maintenance: developing shared maintenance agreements between smaller agencies and larger agencies that have facilities is beneficial because the mechanics working on the vehicles will have specialized training and the federally funded assets will be receiving the highest use possible. The arrangement can also provide an opportunity for the smaller agency to "borrow" a vehicle during the service period, which is not likely available when outsourcing maintenance to dealerships or other repair services.

- Shared dispatching: shared dispatching is the most often discussed method of operational coordination. There are many arrangements for shared dispatching that offer benefit, while maintaining autonomy for a local provider, should that be a priority. Some dispatching software, like that being used in Nebraska, can be run through a cloud-based network, which supports remote/centralized dispatching. In this type of scenario, the regional dispatcher is the keeper of the system. Alternate levels of sharing responsibility can be discussed as many agencies are initially skeptical of the quality of service that may be provided by others. A cloud-based system allows for smaller providers to do their own dispatching and scheduling locally when they have capacity, but also supports letting the central agency shore up the activity during busy periods.

- Working regionally to identify all the needs and all the providers can help the market determine the best way to serve trips. For example:
    - In rural areas, vehicles may be out of service all day for one person to go on a long distance trip for a medical service. This vehicle could serve dozens of people in one day locally. Are there volunteer driver programs that could support those long distance trips? If so, how can transit regularly connect individuals with volunteer drivers so that service is seamless?
    - A small town may have a taxi service but no interest in public transit. How can transit coordinate with this taxi service to allow riders to make connections regionally/locally and vice versa?
    - There may be a need for employer or education based service that is too expensive to serve, vehicles aren't available or isn't at the right time of day for transit. How can transit encourage other options, such as vanpooling and carpooling to show support for these needs?

By matching the level of need to the correct service type, transit capacity can be preserved for those services with the most demand.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Reduces (potentially) costs to individual agencies • Enhances the ability to coordinate regional trips • Improves feasibility of short term vehicle sharing to cover for an unexpected maintenance issue • Potential for fewer missed trips if can obtain loaner as others know maintenance schedule •	• Reduced autonomy • Concern over less flexibility given a cooperative structure • Incompatible with the view that "We are the only ones that can help our folks" • Maintenance may not be local – What happens when a vehicle is out of service?
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Centralized Reservations and Dispatch
11	Coordinating dispatch and/or call centers involves creating a one-stop call-in number and using a single dispatching center to schedule requested rides among the available providers, vehicles, or services. Providing consumers with one call-in number greatly increases customer convenience. To improve convenience may directly or indirectly include centralized Information and referral. Jointly scheduling trips also helps to organize trips efficiently and maximizes ride-sharing. Reducing individual trip costs means the ability to provide more rides to more people for the same amount of resources.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Enables passengers to make one call and access services provided by several providers • Improves productivity and efficiency with higher volumes and commingling of trips • Enables providers to schedule vehicles to fill service gaps.	• Determining which department will house technology and how to best share resource • Requires lead organization to take • responsibility to house and pay for staff
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Secure Non-Traditional Operational Funding from Public and Non-Profit Organizations
12	Among the greatest obstacles to improvement of rural transit systems is a lack of available funding from traditional sources. Many agencies have supplemented their budgets using creative sources of funds, including non-profit health and social service organizations who pay a lump sum to acquire transit service for their clients, as well as sourcing from state and federal agencies for healthcare, human services, veteran's affairs, and agriculture. Coordination under this objective comprises the identification of such funding sources, informing qualifying agencies, and any technical work required for the solicitation of those funds, such as grant writing. Leveraging new revenue sources will prove a catalyst in the expansion and improvement of rural transit systems and would further aid in the implementation of other strategies recommended herein.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• New revenue sources offer funds for service expansion and improvement • Improves feasibility of other recommendations	• Variability of available funds • Competition between agencies • Regular administrative and/or technical effort may be required
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Capital Equipment for Coordinated Agency/Program Services
13	Human service agencies, through the 5310 program, provide critical access to programs and services and play a key role in ensuring mobility for persons with low income, older adults, and persons with disabilities. When coordinated with publicly provided transportation, human service agency transportation can reduce the overall demand for ADA complementary paratransit services. As capital acquisition is often undertaken from operating funding, the purchase of new or replacement vehicles is problematic for organizations facing fiscal constraints. The Federal Transit Administration's Section 5310 Program is specifically designed to provide a source of capital funding for these organizations and will remain an important component in regional efforts to improve transportation services for the target populations.

Relative to enhancing coordination, two important strategies are:
1. To ensure the continuation of Section 5310 funding for vehicles replacing older 5310-funded vehicles that are being retired.
2. Consider weighing more heavily on the funding selection applications that demonstrate new vehicles are to be used in a coordinated fashion (e.g., vehicle-sharing) and/or will otherwise meet a specific unmet need identified in the Coordinated Plan.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Human service organizations provide vital access to programs and services to members of the target populations who do not qualify for ADA complementary paratransit services • Capital funding supports maintenance of existing community transportation services • Section 5310 creates opportunities for funding partnerships with health and human service (HHS) programs, with FTA supplying capital funding and HHS providing vehicle operations support • Non-profit agencies can represent a cost-effective option for meeting some transportation needs of the target populations	• Funding available through the 5310 program (including capital and operating), may not be adequate for some agencies to afford providing service.
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Affordable and Accessible Taxi Services
14	Purchase of accessible vehicles (ramp-equipped low-floor minivans or similar equipment, for example) for taxi or other commercial operators, with operators paying non-federal share. This strategy could also include development/expansion of taxi subsidy programs designed to expand/supplement existing community and human service transportation networks.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• More accessible taxi fleet • Source of service that could be used when fixed-route or demand-response services are not in operation • Source of service for trip types that are not eligible under other transportation programs • Could be used to complement taxi subsidy programs	• Taxi service is limited or not available outside metropolitan areas
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Services Clearinghouses and Shared Data
15	The central core of transit coordination is in information sharing, whether the information is about a passenger's unique circumstances, an FTA rule/process/policy, or the services provided by the next-closest agency. Coordination meetings create a perfect environment for information sharing between agencies or even individuals interested in gaining a better understanding of what services are available to partner with.

Creating a clearinghouse of information and distributing that information to each agency within a particular region and across the state will go a long way to making coordination more feasible. While the Nebraska Public Transit website contains basic information about providers, many of the details that are critical to supporting coordination are not provided. Most critical are details about regional service such as schedules, routes, fares, etc. Mobility Management has begun to collect GTFS for its trip planner. Assistance may include GTFS development for agencies lacking sufficient background or resources to produce their own.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Enhances the ability to coordinate regional trips as all know schedule • Allows creating a list of partners to help when the primary provider has vehicle or driver availability issue • Supports agencies sharing information about partners if asked by a local customer in need of service in another nearby community.	• Most agencies do not have scheduled regional service. Thus, cannot provide a definitive schedule. • Keeping the information up to date will require time.
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

Service Improvements

STRATEGY NUMBER	Transit Service Expansion and Improvements
16	Service expansions provide opportunities for members of the three target populations to access more support services, more job opportunities, and more trips for shopping, recreation, and faith-based activities.

The most common types of service expansions include:
1. Expand the daily hours of service or days of week service is provided
2. Spatial expansion of service – expanding the service area for pick-ups and drop-offs, and/or adding destinations beyond the established pick-up area

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Enhanced customer accessibility, mobility, and convenience • Opportunity to provide access to jobs that require work during non-traditional hours • Increased use of fixed-route services by the target populations and the general public	• Expanding service requires additional financial resources • Requires educating and training staff and customers to maximize benefits associated with cost
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Volunteer Driver/Escort Program
17	Volunteer drivers are individuals who, for low or no charge, drive people who lack other mobility options. A sponsoring organization, such as a transportation provider, human service agency or other entity often helps match volunteer drivers with individuals who need rides. Volunteer drivers will typically use their private vehicle but will be reimbursed, usually based on mileage driven, by the sponsoring agency. Sponsoring agencies may also arrange for insurance coverage. Volunteer driver programs have proven to be an effective and important resource to help supplement community transportation programs.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Provides low cost transportation option • Some programs will reimburse friends or family members for providing rides • Volunteers can provide a flexible source of transportation that can be useful for longer distance, out of area trips • Escorts can work to improve on-time performance when using existing public transit modes • Escorts can provide a higher level of passenger assistance than can be provided by public transit	• Some technologies are expensive to implement and require ongoing vendor maintenance and upgrade contracts • Setting up a volunteer driver network requires time and effort to recruit, screen, train and reward volunteer drivers • Riders need to be introduced to and appreciate concept of volunteer drivers • Real or perceived driver liability and insurance issues • Retention of volunteers can be an issue
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

STRATEGY NUMBER	Enhanced Transit Traveler Information
18	Public transportation could improve travel options, particularly for older adults, by improving transit route and schedule information. This could include improving the readability and comprehension of route and schedule brochures by publishing such documents using large, bold fonts and color-coded maps with contrasting primary colors indicating the different routes.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Improvements in consumer comprehension of available services can increase transit utilization by seniors and persons with disabilities • Enhanced schedules and route information will generally aid usability by the general public as well	• Wholesale revisions to all system route and schedule information are expensive • There is no industry standard or consensus regarding the style and presentation of more comprehensible route and schedule information
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

19

For people with disabilities or seniors with mobility limitations, inaccessible bus stops or the lack of an accessible pathway to the bus stop represent a hindrance to the greater utilization of accessible fixed-route services. These individuals may opt to use more expensive paratransit services.

Potential infrastructure improvements may include removing barriers on sidewalks, improving or adding sidewalks, adding curb cuts, adding or improving pedestrian crossing and signals (including accessible signals and countdown signals), and adding signage, lighting, benches, shelters, and other pedestrian enhancements, especially near bus stops. In addition, technological solutions focusing on wayfinding might help persons with visual impairments locate bus stops.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Increases mobility and travel options for persons with disabilities • Reduces demand for ADA paratransit • Service and improves system wide costs	• Improvements are typically expensive • Transit system may not control rights-of-way and may lack authority to make improvements • Long lead time to implement and potential for disruptions to existing service and travelers during construction
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)

20

For those living in rural and small-town environments, connections to metropolitan areas form an important equity consideration for any transit system. Access to specialist care, civic services, and other community destinations is improved when rural and urban areas are well-connected and their services well-integrated.

The most effective and easily implementable improvement of this category is ensuring local transit services connect with intercity bus stops or rail stations, and that transit service is available to facilitate intercity departures and arrivals (e.g. cab or demand-response options at the arrival of an intercity train, even if it falls outside the normal service span). For agencies in relative proximity to metropolitan areas, coordination with MPOs and urban agencies can yield well-integrated transit connections at regional park-and-rides.

Potential Benefits/Need Addressed	Potential Obstacles/Challenges
• Increases access to a variety of destinations, especially specialist medical care • Encourage transit use for more trip purposes	• Intercity service can be highly irregular and arrive at inopportune times • If no regional or intercity connections are locally available, operating service to the nearest location may be prohibitively expensive.
Potential Champion Organization(s)	(To Be Completed with Input from NDOT/ Mobility Manager)f

Action Plan for Coordination

One of the key products of the Coordinated Plan is the prioritized list of strategies to address the mobility needs and service gaps identified for target populations. The Coordinated Plan's prioritization process, results, and recommendations are based on a comparative evaluation of the strategies associated with each of the prioritized needs. Input obtained through Regional Committee and Statewide Committee meetings and stakeholder surveys set the foundation of critical needs of target populations as well as the feasibility of identified strategies to address needs.

In the previous chapter, multiple applicable concepts to address identified needs were presented. The 20 strategies outlined in the previous chapter represent the toolbox of alternatives available for consideration by agencies and NDOT to address gaps in service. As new needs arise or new technologies become available, the coordination toolbox will be expanded.

Strategy Priorities to Address Needs and Gaps

A prioritized list of strategies to address identified travel needs was established by:

- Considering strategies that support the highest importance needs.

- Considering strategies that support multiple needs.

- Incorporating input from stakeholders, including Regional Committee members, Statewide Committee members and NDOT staff.

As needs for targeted populations have been presented in an order of importance to address, a first screening of which strategies most critical to pursue was provided through the list associated with each need. Strategies associated with the highest importance need – Securing Additional Transit Funding – represent those to be considered as priorities for further development and implementation.

Addressing high importance needs is one path to developing strategy implementation priorities. A second path to implementation was to prioritize strategies that support multiple targeted populations needs across the state. By tabulating the number of times a particular strategy was identified as a concept to address the list of needs, those with the potential to be more universal in their benefit were identified. Like the final screening for strategies supporting the higher importance needs, strategies addressing multiple needs were also reviewed relative to the selection criteria listed above.

Incorporated in the process of final selection of priority strategies are:

- **Support for the strategy** received through discussion with Regional Committee and Statewide Committee representatives.
- **Readiness for implementation**. The list of strategies includes ideas that require multiple agencies that may not be currently coordinating their efforts to support targeted

populations to work together. Creating this coordinated environment may take time and concerted effort by each of the associated agencies, which may result in placing the priority for full implementation lower than other more readily implementable alternatives.

- **Funding support needed**. Strategies requiring added funding, and especially more local funding, may take additional time to implement as agencies must work with their decision-makers to secure funding. Many entities responsible for funding set their budgets and priorities annually and have little latitude to accommodate even modest unplanned funding requests. Additionally, some strategies, such as extending the availability of mobility managers, require substantial investment by multiple participants and bringing all of them together with financial support will take time. Thus, higher cost strategies without a currently identified funding champion, even for high priority needs, may be lowered on the implementation priority list.

Table 4 lists the strategies arrived at by this methodology. They are organized into a first-tier priority list and a second-tier list.

Table 4. Prioritized Strategies for Implementation

Prioritization	Path to Inclusion	
	Supports High Importance Need	Supports Multiple Needs
First Priority		
Strategy 2: Marketing/Branding Outreach	X	X
Strategy 3: Regional Education/Workshops	X	
Strategy 7: Promote the Community Benefits of Transit Service	X	X
Strategy 9: Centralizing Resources	X	X
Strategy 12: Secure Non-Traditional Operations Funding	X	X
Strategy 15: Services Clearinghouse and Shared Data	X	X
Second Priority		
Strategy 1: Expand Mobility Manager Coverage	X	X
Strategy 8: Technologies to Improve Coordination		X
Strategy 10: Shared Operations and/or Administration	X	
Strategy 11: Centralized Reservations and Dispatch	X	
Strategy 16: Transit Service Expansion and Improvements		X

To some degree across the state, each of the strategies in the master list is being employed by an agency or groups of agencies. Those that require little concept development or new funding to implement include Strategy 3 (Regional Education/Workshops). The heart of this strategy is the work already being done across the state in the mobility management sphere. To implement the strategy, the key is to highlight a select number of focus area ideas (e.g. "Our Most Successful

Marketing Efforts") and prepare a workshop to relate the information to interested partner transit agencies.

Strategy 2 (Marketing/Branding Outreach) is another example of a strategy already underway. A number of providers have seen explosive growth in ridership resulting from their marketing activities and could be tapped to provide advice and support. The statewide mobility management team is a source of marketing ideas and is available to assist in documenting successful activities in a package for use by other agencies. This strategy dovetails with Strategy 7 (Promote the Community Benefits of Transit Service). The benefits associated with increasing ridership due to adjusting marketing efforts can be used as inputs for measuring the benefit transit provides to the community.

Some strategy pairs share similar data, with the primary difference being the audience intended to use the information. An example of this case is Strategy 9 (Centralizing Resources) and Strategy 15 (Create a Centralized Clearinghouse and Shared Data). Through wide implementation of these strategies, information including agency contact information, service area, service times, fares, etc. would be made current, organized, and made conveniently available for different audiences. Potential riders or current riders would be the target audience in Strategy 9 and potential partnering agencies would be the target audience in Strategy 15. While it may seem logical to simply combine these, there would be critical information made available in one strategy (example: how fares are shared/distributed for a coordinated trip) that would not be appropriate to share with riders.

The convenience of addressing multiple audiences with similar individual agency effort suggests Strategies 9 and 15 should be top priorities for implementation. The challenge is that they do require immediate updates to a shared database every time there are changes to an organization or service, sustained through the life of the organization. While no less important, Strategy 12 (Securing Non-Traditional Operations Funding) is likely to be a longer-term implementation, given that it involves support from outside partners.

Support for all these strategies will be available at the state level, through the mobility management team. However, ultimately they will be implemented by interested and motivated providers, whether those providers are working together two at a time, as a region, or across regional boundaries.

Appendix

Input Summary Round 1

In Round 1 meetings, participants were asked how they are currently coordinating, what their main challenges are, and whether/how they would change the prioritized list of needs generated in the 2018 update.

Panhandle

Coordination and Challenges

- The Panhandle is ahead of the curve compared to other regions, but the challenges they face are the same. Coordination is still a challenge and can be improved.
- Sidney and Kimball are coordinating on vehicle parking to avoid deadheads.
- A volunteer driver program started with 5310 funding was cut short by the pandemic; Open Plains Transit has since sought 5311 funding for home pickups to provide connections to intercity service.
- Open Plains Transit is hoping to start a ride-hailing pilot program that would function with an app but also offer accessible vehicles and meet drug and alcohol policies.
- A new intercity bus to Valentine was launched with funding from hospitals/other non-transport stakeholders. More difficult, but important, is getting in-kind support (staff time and other resources).
- Panhandle services have found transferring buses can pose significant challenges to their users, so much so that some riders simply cancel the trip. As they coordinate they are seeking to limit transfers.

Priorities

- There was interest in assigning higher priority to weekend service and service to certain out-of-state locations such as the VA in Cheyenne, the health clinic in Rapid City, and the Denver airport. Weekend service would include special events such as Oktoberfest.

Northeast

Coordination and Challenges

- Some of the challenges mentioned include finding enough drivers for long-distance trips; funding driver wages; building ridership; meeting high demand for services; late-night transportation; and finding vehicle insurance.
- Service availability is limited by the hours of companies that provide drug testing. Range is a limit for many agencies, due to vehicle/driver capacity constraints.
- Finding local-share funding from municipal and county governments has been a challenge.

- Existing coordination strategies include working with a nonprofit coalition to synchronize fixed route bus service and using NDOT-provided software.

Priorities

- There was interest in assigning higher priority to school-related trips.

Other Regions

Coordination and Challenges

- An agency that generally does in-town rides is challenged to keep drivers busy, while other agencies offering longer trips discussed the problems created by long-distance trips, which can take a full day of a driver's time for one customer. There is interest in tag-teaming longer trips. Coordinating appointment times so that multiple customers can share a vehicle would help but is challenging to do in practice.
- Other challenges mentioned include the perception that transit is only for seniors; location in a dead zone for public transit; coordination with other agencies; billing for mileage/gas/driver time; unmet need for Medicaid transportation;
- Other coordination practices currently done include sharing the number of other agencies for trips the first agency cannot accommodate and sending drivers to be trained at the Safety Center in Kearney.

Priorities

- Finding and keeping drivers was mentioned as a higher priority.

Statewide Committee

- It was suggested accessibility is a throughline in all the needs/priorities identified.
- It was suggested that tribal input be sought.

Input Summary Round 2

In Round 2 meetings, participants were asked for input on the updated list of needs, as well as the proposed strategies for meeting each need.

Panhandle

Needs List

- There was some interest in moving accessible transportation higher on the list of needs, in acknowledgement that NDOT has made accessible transportation a top priority.

Strategies

- **Need 1, Funding:** Strategies 12, 7, and 10 would be good to pursue. Strategy 7 is already something that Panhandle providers work together on, but they could use more support; it is almost a full-time position in itself. The virtual meetings that emerged from the pandemic have enhanced regional communication and helped forge partnerships. Nurturing partnership is time-consuming and having someone to take on more of that work would help.

- **Need 2, Inter-Agency Communication/Coordination:** Strategy 1 would help if the right person could be found and funded. However, that would be difficult, especially as passengers have established relationships of trust with their local providers. Mississippi and Ohio are examples of states that have regional mobility managers. Their first six months on the job consist of getting up to speed with all the providers. Strategy 3 would be a great resource. Strategies for centralized dispatch and other data sharing would be hard because everyone has different software. Some states are trying to implement singular dispatch, but NDOT is not pursuing this at the moment. It would be a difficult process to choose one product. That said, Strategy 10 should stay.

- **Need 3, Finding/Keeping Drivers:** Strategy 17, volunteer drivers, has worked in other states. It was also suggested that driver background check requirements be amended to allow more individuals to find work as public transit operators. Long-ago convictions should not necessarily preclude people from employment now. It was also suggested that NDOT provide a list of legal requirements for drivers. This was discussed 5-6 years ago, but has fallen by the wayside since then. Many requirements are driven by DHHS. The Mobility Management consultants will research this.

- **Need 7, Accessible Transportation Options:** It was recommended that "urban" be removed from the name of Strategy 19, because rural systems do have bus stops. This strategy should stay on the list. Improving bus stops is a topic for facilities looking to find money to support their clients with shelters while they wait for the bus. Regarding Strategy 13, every vehicle procured is a wheelchair-accessible vehicle. Overall, all these strategies are useful. There was some concern about Strategy 14's short-term feasibility. Insurance for taxi services in rural areas is prohibitively expensive; drug and alcohol policies set limits. It was suggested that TNCs are more feasible models than taxis.

- **Need 4, Broadening Awareness (Marketing):** All the strategies listed are good ideas; Strategy 11 would take some time to implement. An online trip planner would be more doable, but would not be usable by many rural households that only have a landline.

- **Need 5, Regional Center Service:** The Panhandle does not have one regional center, although there is a tendency to think of Scottsbluff as the center. There are many transfers along the Hwy 20 corridor, there is likely high demand emerging for Rapid City, and so on. Regarding Strategy 20, that coordination is taking place and the group could not think of more they could do.

Northeast

Strategies

- **Need 1, Funding:** Regarding new funding sources, Nucor is funding free rides for veterans as part of the local match. Mobility Manager could also be a strategy serving the funding need.

- **Need 2, Inter-Agency Communication/Coordination:** Strategy 1 is important. Strategies 8 and 15 overlap somewhat in NDOT's future plans for the trip planning software. The software subsidized by NDOT since 2020 is not used to its full potential. The number of agencies using software has gone from eight to 26. Introducing software has allowed agencies to expand their service. Collecting data for reporting has been the most beneficial function; the auto-scheduler is less used. The software makes it easier for drivers to look up routes and leave notes.

- **Need 3, Finding/Keeping Drivers:** Raising wages to match the local starting wage for CDL drivers in public works departments can help. Alternatively to simply matching wages, making it a "destination career" for drivers can help – should be a subject for advocacy. Difficulty paying drivers is sometimes attributed to the minimum-wage increase to $15, but starting wages for drivers are already higher than that. Transit could do better at marketing their positions to younger adults looking for a longer-term career rather than retirees. In-house CDL training helps with recruitment. It may be worth looking into agreements with taxi services giving them after-hours access to accessible vehicles.

- **Need 4, Broadening Awareness (Marketing):** Adding Strategy 1 may be applicable. The Mobility Management team has been asked repeatedly for information on the return on investment of transit. If there is a Mobility Manager hired for the region, they need to be involved in marketing. Advertising the fact that there are transit sponsors may attract more transit sponsors. Even sponsoring organizations may also need to be made more aware of what the transit service accomplishes and needs; e.g. members of a hospital board who do not know that the hospital provides service to the general public and not just patients.

- **Need 5, Regional Center Service:** Success in coordinating service means both providers and passengers getting out of their comfort zone. It also means sustained hard work.

- **Need 8, Commuter Trip Support:** Madison/Pierce County commuter trips have been an essential need/topic in the last two years. There is a potential benefit to vanpooling, but the state vanpool program has been harmed by Covid, going from 30 participants to fewer than 10. Iowa's recently launched vanpool program has yet to create a vanpool. The next quarterly meeting may include a comparative update from both states on vanpooling.

Other Regions

Strategies

- **Need 1, Funding:** The list seems comprehensive. There was interest in Strategy 10 from a hospital that had purchased vehicles to transport its long-term care patients but foresaw a need to share with the community. A representative from Bellevue said it had been difficult to get clients outside Bellevue's service area, which ends at 84th and Dodge Street in Omaha. Medical professionals are moving further west; trying to work out arrangements whereby another agency can make the trip, or Bellevue can take patients to Dodge and another agency can take them the rest of the way, has not been successful.

- **Need 2, Inter-Agency Communication/Coordination:** Doubts were expressed about the usefulness of Strategy 10 and Strategy 11 to a small agency with only four vehicles and no dispatch staff (drivers take calls). Help with the back-office documentation is needed more. On the other hand, another small agency without dispatch staff was interested in Strategy 11. One agency commented that Strategies 10 and 11 would have to be implemented together. A different provider cautioned that centralized dispatch must not cover so large an area that dispatchers would not understand everything.

- **Need 3, Finding/Keeping Drivers:** Coordinating with other agencies for intercity trips can be challenging when customers cannot afford to pay both agencies. Not all agencies participate in Medicaid coverage. This is a good idea, as it helps serve customers and increases the local match available.

Statewide Committee

Needs

- The Omaha, Ponca, Santee, and Winnebago tribes all need more accessible services. Seeking tribal input was encouraged.

Strategies

- **Need 1, Funding:** Vehicle supply chain problems are a challenge for rural as well as urban agencies. Deliveries are several years behind. Strategies that address this would be helpful.

- **Need 3, Finding/Keeping Drivers:** The issue of disruptive passenger behavior was raised. Although incidents may be fewer on rural transit, they do exist. Federal regulations are clear that agencies do not have to carry disruptive passengers. Driver training includes de-escalation. Strategy 14 should include open-class services. There are 10 taxi services in Nebraska and 53 open-class carriers. They are typically non-emergency medical transportation but can do much more than that.