LAKE NORMAN RURAL PLANNING ORGANIZATION
COORDINATED COMPREHENSIVE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PLAN

PREPARED FOR THE LAKE NORMAN RPO

AND

TRANSPORTATION LINCOLN COUNTY
GASTON COUNTY ACCESS
TRANSPORTATION ADMINISTRATION OF CLEVELAND COUNTY
IREDELL COUNTY AREA TRANSIT SYSTEM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) have both made a commitment to trying eligibility for various Federal transit funds and programs to approved coordinated comprehensive transit plans created by local transit agencies. In the summer of 2008 the four transit providers in the Lake Norman Rural Planning Organization (RPO) jointly committed to participating in developing a plan. The RPO and participating transportation providers committed to conducting the planning process consistent with NCDOT and FTA guidance. The RPO exists to assist member governments in Cleveland, Iredell, and Lincoln Counties, as well as the northwest portion of Gaston County with meeting their transportation and transportation planning needs.

A second reason for conducting this planning process was the dramatic rise in fuel prices, as well as congestion and commute times for area workers. Public transportation, in addition to car and van pooling, is increasingly viewed as an alternative to driving alone. The dramatic rise in ridership for the area's express bus routes is an example of this new demand. The area public transportation providers have struggled with trying to provide commuter-oriented services while continuing to serve their traditional transit-dependant populations.

The planning process identified opportunities for efficiencies through coordination, as well as improved marketing to increase utilization of existing services. This was especially apparent in car and van pooling, as well as the development of park and ride lots throughout the Study Area. It also identified logical linkages with existing transit services to help create a truly regional system.

The recommendations for new services include both commuter and traditional demand-response services. The US 321 corridor between Gastonia and Hickory was seen as appropriate for fixed-route service, particularly to the Lincoln County Industrial Park. This service may initially be limited to van pools, however. The US 74 Corridor between Shelby and Gastonia should carry fixed-route bus service to link up with Gastonia and Charlotte Area Transit System fixed-route services. Cleveland County also needs expanded service to meet the needs of residents requiring dialysis, and other medical and human services.

This plan makes reasonable recommendations for new services to meet the identified needs of a variety of populations. When implemented, it will provide a range of options to help residents and workers in the Study Area travel for their daily needs.

I. FEDERAL REGULATORY BACKGROUND

For more than twenty years, the federal government has been working to better coordinate human service transportation activities it funds.

In 1985, during an oversight hearing on Rural Transportation, Congress heard testimony prompted by concerns of the lack of federal coordination between programs, such as the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Department of Transportation (DOT).

Aiming to better coordinate activities, the Secretaries of HHS and DOT signed an agreement establishing the Joint DOT/HHS Coordinating Council on Human Service Transportation (CCHST) in 1986. Since the CCHST's creation, the CCHST has concentrated efforts to identify barriers to coordinated transportation. At one time, the agencies identified sixty-four factors that transportation and human service representatives believed were barriers to transportation coordination. Barriers included uncertainty regarding federal responsibilities for transportation, fragmented accounting and reporting procedures, uncertainty in using resources for recipients other than program constituents, and prohibition against charging fares under the Older Americans Act.

To further support coordination, Congress included several provisions in its 1998 passage of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA –21), Public Law (PL) 105-178. Most notable was the provision to require Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC), predecessor program to today's JARC program, projects to be part of a coordinated public transit–human services transportation planning process.

In February 2004, President George W. Bush released an Executive Order on Human Service Transportation Coordination to improve assistance to those who are transportation disadvantaged. The Executive Order aims to implement coordination of transportation services to operate in the most cost effective and time efficient manner possible.

Within the February 2004 Executive Order, the President established the Interagency Transportation Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM).
The functions of the CCAM are to:

- Promote interagency cooperation
- Establish appropriate mechanisms to minimize duplication and overlap of federal programs and services so that transportation-disadvantaged persons have access to more transportation services
- Facilitate access to the most appropriate, cost-effective transportation services within existing resources
- Encourage enhanced customer access to the variety of transportation and resources available

- Formulate and implement administrative, policy, and procedural mechanisms that enhance transportation services at all levels

CCAM includes leadership from eleven federal departments:

- DOT
- HHS
- Labor
- Education
- Housing and Urban Affairs
- Agriculture
- Justice
- Interior
- Veterans Administration
- Social Security Administration
- National Council on Disabilities

In May 2005, the CCAM issued a report to the President with recommendations for breaking down federal barriers to transportation for all transportation-disadvantaged populations. The report detailed action plans for each of the eleven federal agencies who comprise the CCAM. Additionally, in 2005 the CCAM launched the United We Ride website, www.unitedweride.gov.

While it has been a long process, the federal government is working to strengthen its coordination requirements for human service transportation activities. In August 2005, Congress included coordination provisions in the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), PL 109-059. SAFETEALU specifically added a coordination requirement to the newly created Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities Program (5310), Job Access Reverse Commute Program (5316), and New Freedoms Program (5317). FTA requires projects funded through the Section 5310, 5316, and 5317 programs be derived from a locally developed Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan (CPT-HSTP).

A CPT-HSTP identifies the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes. It provides strategies for meeting local needs, and prioritizes transportation services for funding and implementation. A CPT-HSTP uses all available resources to supply transportation services efficiently and without redundancy in trips. Development of the CPT-HSTP must have the input and cooperation of transit agencies, social service agencies, community agencies, and the public.

In 2006, the CCAM issued two policy statements that take important steps to bring federal programs together to help people with disabilities, older adults, and lower income families get the transportation they need for their day-to-day mobility.

The CCAM policy statements focus on two key areas: (1) coordinated human service transportation planning and (2) vehicle sharing. These policies support communities and organizations receiving federal funding to plan transportation services together and to share resources. The policies were included as part of the recommendations in a 2005 report to the White House on Human Service Transportation Coordination. Each department on the CCAM will be taking actions to implement these policies.

II. PLAN APPROACH

The Lake Norman Rural Planning Organization (RPO) and the community transportation providers from the four member counties, Cleveland, Gaston, Lincoln, and Iredell, met in August 2008 to discuss area transit needs, and the potential for coordinating transit services,. The motivating factors for this meeting were the record fuel prices in the summer of 2008, as well as the NCDOT call for projects for prior year New Starts and Jobs Access and Reverse Commute funds. No transit provider could apply for these funds unless they had completed a comprehensive assessment of their needs. Only Iredell County had experience with such funds, and had completed a plan. The consensus of this meeting was that the four providers supported developing such a plan. The Lake Norman RPO committed to developing such a plan, with assistance from the four providers, as well as the NCDOT Department of Public Transportation. This plan was initiated in August 2008, with public input conducted in October 2008. These comments were reviewed by the transit providers and NCDOT for inclusion in the plan recommendations.

The Study Area (Figure 1) is shown below. The Lake Norman RPO covers the entirety of Cleveland, Iredell, and Lincoln Counties. It also includes the northwest portion of Gaston County. The remainder of Gaston County is found in the Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (GUAMPO) study area. For purposes of this planning process, The RPO Coordinated Transportation Plan makes recommendations for services that either pass through or connect with services within the GUAMPO Study Area.

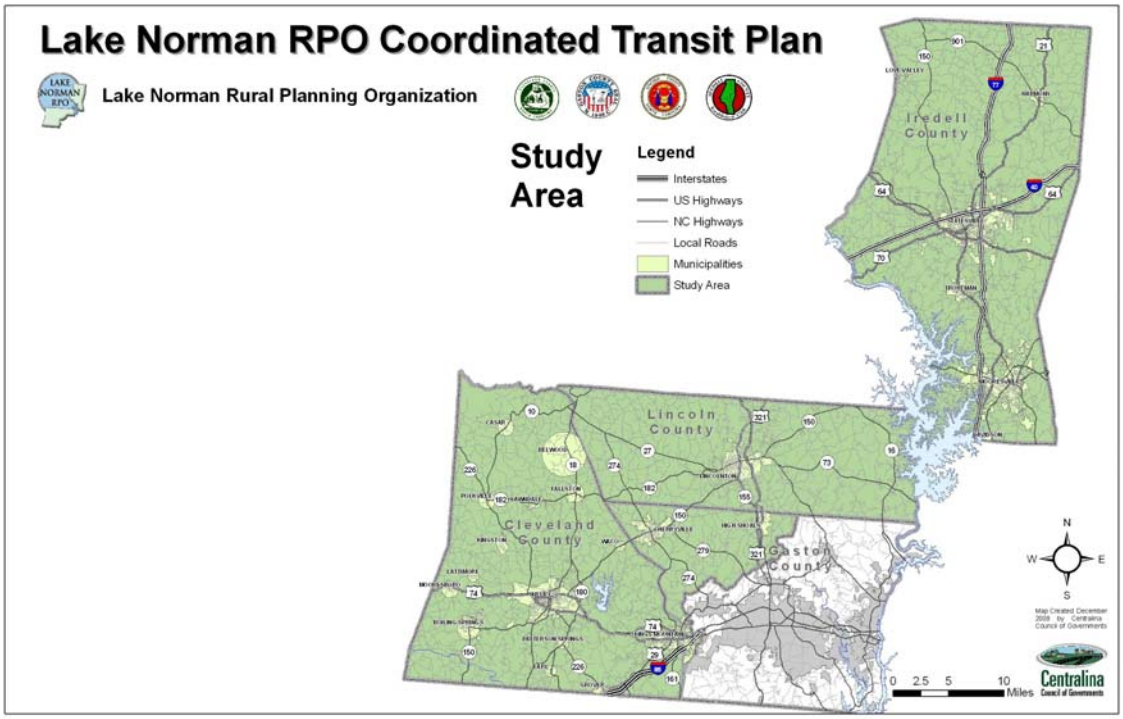

Figure 1: Study Area

III. DEMOGRAPHICS

The study area for the Lake Norman RPO includes Cleveland, Lincoln, Iredell Counties, and the northwest portion of Gaston County. Together, this area includes approximately one third of a million residents. This population total has been increasing, and is expected to total over one-half million residents by 2030. The RPO population lives in a variety of environments: low-density rural areas, burgeoning suburban "bedroom communities", and established small and medium sized- cities.

The transportation needs of these residents likewise vary. There is a significant amount of inter-county travel by the residents and employees within the RPO. Approximately 20,000 RPO residents commute to Mecklenburg County for employment. Over 4,000 Mecklenburg County residents commute to Lake Norman RPO businesses for employment.

Figure 2: Base Demographics

	Lincoln County	Iredell County	Gaston County	Cleveland County
Total Population	73,106	151,445	202,535	98,453
Persons over 65	9,267	18,663	25,920	14,489
Persons in Poverty	6,487	15,919	30,062	21,200
Persons with Disability	6,496	11,238	21,742	10,299
Workers Unemployed	1,244	2,889	6,477	3,645
Number of Workers	32,438	66,477	84,601	38,705
Households without Vehicles	704	2,529	4,583	3,028

Source: 2007 American Community Survey

Growth is expected to continue in the region, despite the current downturn in new housing starts. The growth in the RPO is primarily in southern Iredell County and eastern Lincoln County, which is also the location of current CATS fixed-route transit service, as well as several van pools. This area is likely to continue growing, and increase demand on the existing services.

Those residents requesting transit services, left residing in the rural portions of the study area are the most difficult to serve because of the dispersed housing and distant destinations. This is demonstrated in the tables below, which show the commuting patterns for the four-county area.

Figure 3: Commuter Flows

	County Where Residents Work					
County Residents	Cleveland	Gaston	Iredell	Lincoln	Mecklenburg	Catawba
Cleveland	29,530	5,963	186	706	2,734	500
Gaston	2,442	56,321	377	1,868	23,101	452
Iredell	131	274	41,787	287	9,604	1,956
Lincoln	317	3,166	521	15,249	6,545	4,435

Source: 2000 Census

Figure 4: Intra-County Employment

County	Total Jobs in County	Jobs Filled by County Residents	Percent of County Jobs Filled by County Residents
Cleveland	37,097	29,530	80%
Gaston	75,116	56,321	75%
Iredell	54,969	41,787	76%
Lincoln	21,209	15,249	72%

Source: 2000 Census

It can be clearly shown by the above table that there is a significant amount of cross county commuting in the RPO Study Area. Approximately one-quarter of all jobs in the Study Area are performed by workers traveling from another county. This total is likely higher due to significant changes in employment centers over the past eight years, as well as high growth in eastern Lincoln County and southern Iredell County.

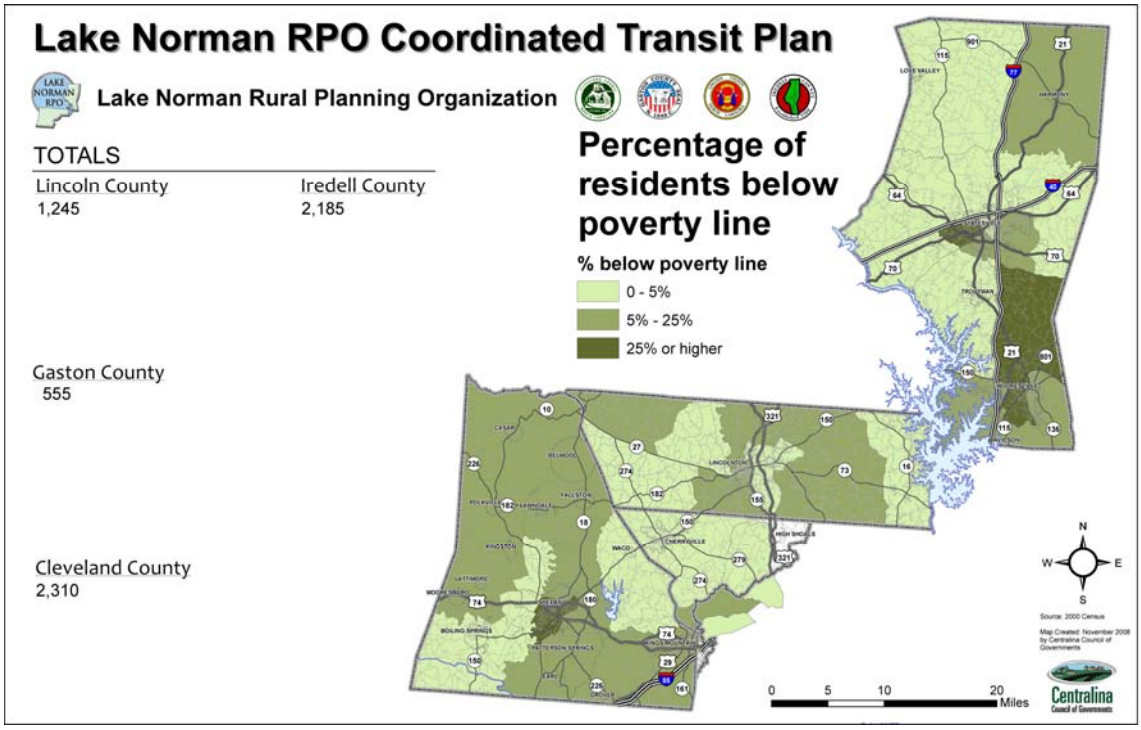

Figure 5: Poverty Levels in Study Area

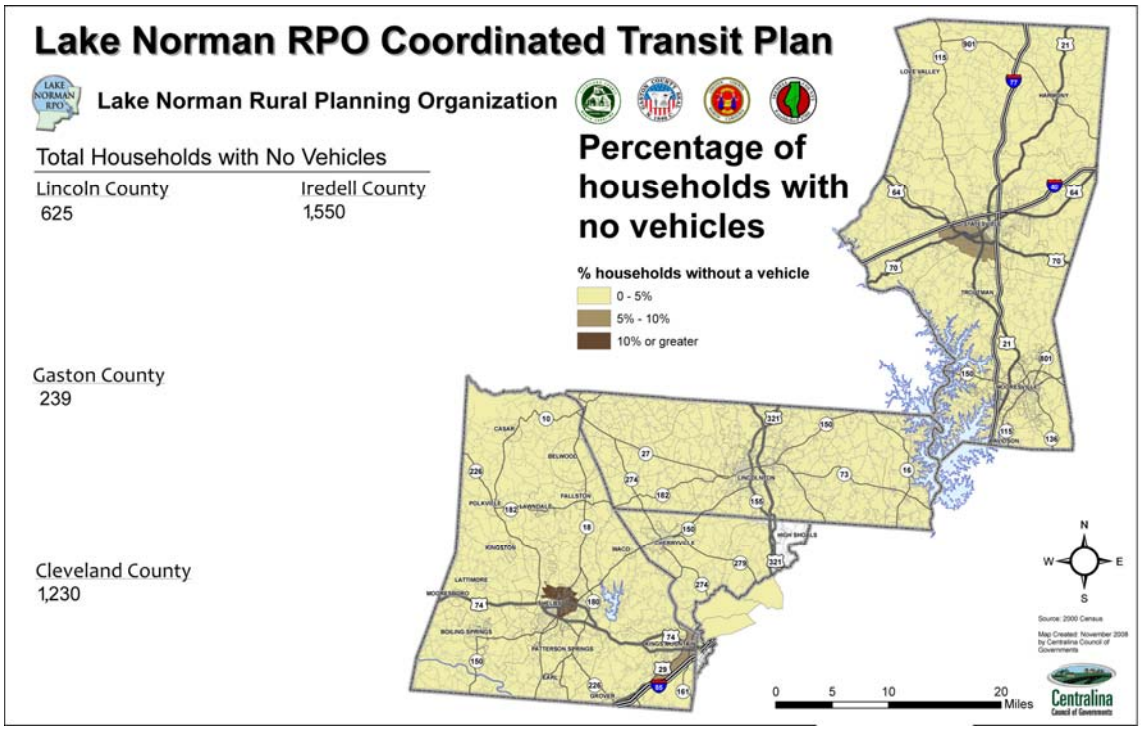

Figure 6: Households without Vehicles in Study Area

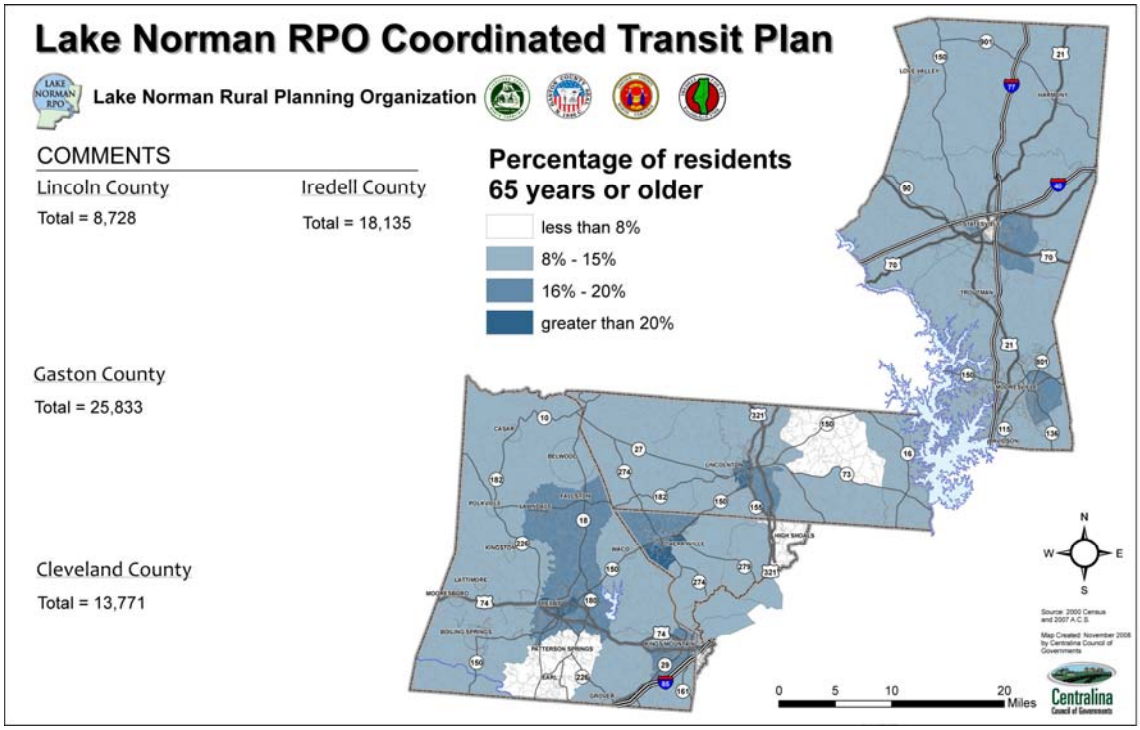

Figure 7: Residents 65 or Older

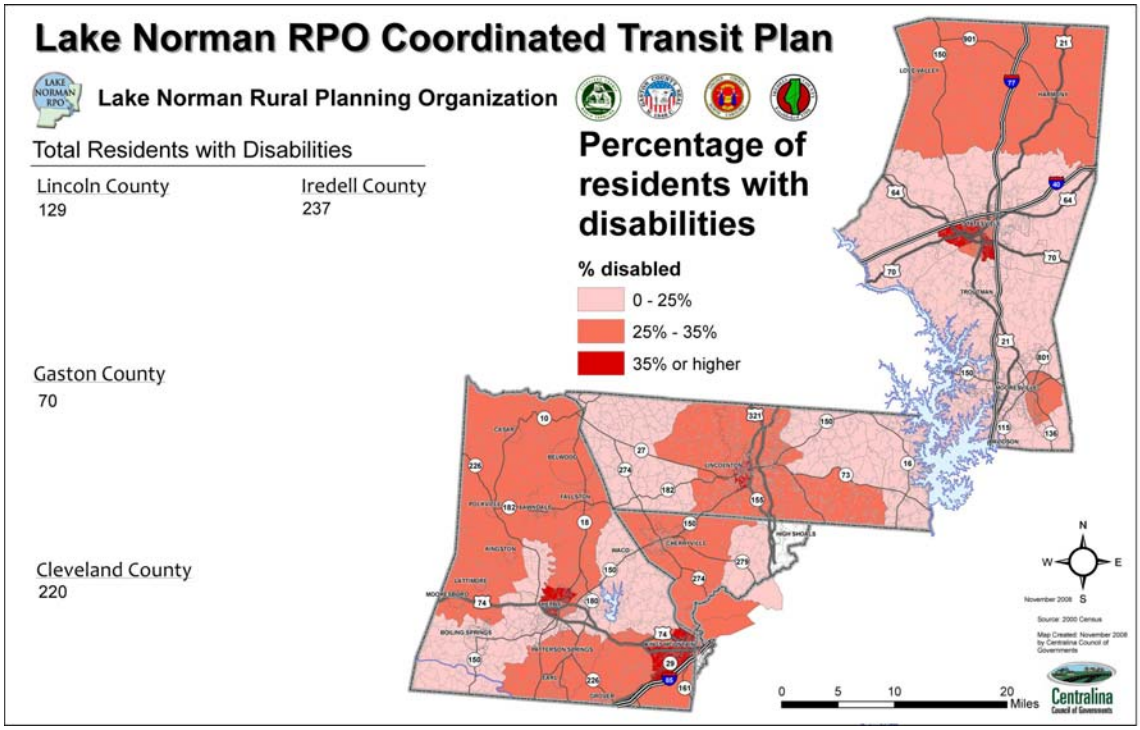

Figure 8: Residents with Disabilities

IV. INVENTORY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

The Lake Norman RPO Study Area is served by a variety of public transit systems. These services range from demand response "dial-a-ride" service to van pools and scheduled express bus service. There is even a proposal to implement commuter rail from southern Iredell County into Uptown Charlotte.

A. Community Transportation Systems

The four Lake Norman RPO counties each have their own community transportation system. These systems typically serve a transit-dependant population and their medical needs. These services are open to the public, and do carry "general population" riders, but these are in the minority. With the exception of Iredell County, They also do not carry a significant commuter population.

Figure 9: Existing Community Transportation Service Characteristics Table

System	Number of Vehicles	Average Trips Served per Day (2008)	Days of Service	Hours of Service	Cost per Trip
Transportation Lincoln County	12	175	Monday-Friday	6 AM- 5 PM	$1.00
Gaston County ACCESS	23	525	Monday-Friday	4 AM- 7PM	$1.00
Transportation Administration of Cleveland County	28	345	Monday-Friday	6 AM- 6 PM	$1.25
Iredell County Area Transit System	28	500	Monday-Friday	5 AM- 9 PM	$1.00

B. Commuter-Oriented Transit Services

The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) operates two express bus routes into the Lake Norman RPO Study Area: one to east Lincoln County, and one to Mooresville. These routes have been successful in attracting commuters out of their vehicles and into buses. Recent ridership spikes can likely be attributed to high fuel prices, although the increasing cost of parking, as well as congestion, may also play a role.

Lincoln County and Mooresville help pay for the operating costs of the two routes, although CATS does pay for all capital and administrative costs associated with the routes. These are peak-hour services, operated Monday- Friday.

Figure 10: Express Bus Statistics Table

Route	2008 Average Daily Ridership	Year Service Initiated	Location of Stops	Scheduled Service
Lincoln County Express	157-283	2004	NC 16 and NC 73	AM and PM peak-hour service
Mooresville Express	162-221	2001	Intersection of Brawley School Road and Williamson Road	AM and PM peak-hour service

C. Van Pools

CATS operates a van pool program for those persons commuting to Mecklenburg County. There are currently 22 van pools operated by CATS originating in the RPO Study Area. These services are funded by CATS and the actual riders. There is no financial support from the RPO governments. The Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART) operates two van pools that operate between Iredell County and Forsyth County, and one between Iredell County and Davie County. There are currently no other formal van pool programs operating in the study area.

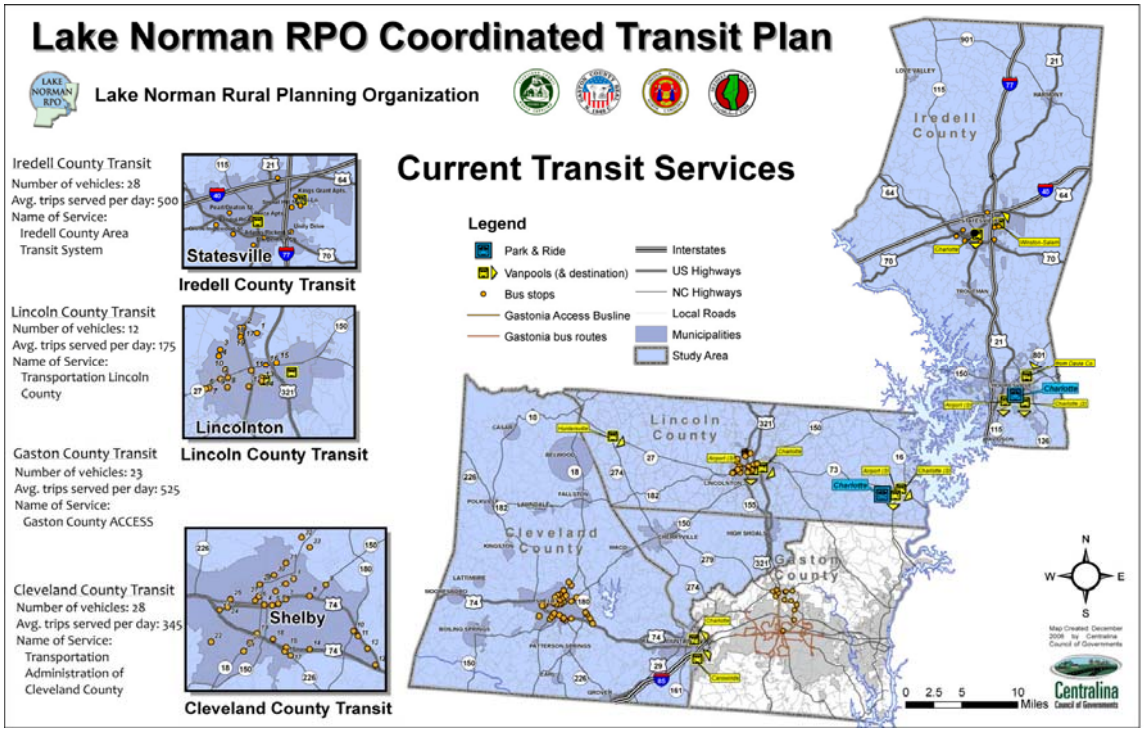

Figure 11: Current Transit Services

V. GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION

FTA Sections 5310, 5316, and 5317 Programs require that projects be derived from a locally developed CPT-HSTP. This chapter discusses the specific goals, who can apply, examples of eligible projects, potential funding, and the Designated Recipient (DR) for the three programs.

For each program, FTA will publish the annual apportionment in the Federal Register following the enactment of the annual DOT appropriations act. Funds are available during the FY of apportionment plus two additional years. For example, funds apportioned in FY 2006 are available until the end of FY 2008 (September 30, 2008).

FTA will add any unobligated funds remaining at the end of the period of availability to the next year's program apportionment and will reapportion the funds among all the states.

A. Elderly Individuals & Individuals with Disabilities (Section 5310)

Goal

The Section 5310 program was established in 1975 as a discretionary capital assistance program. In cases where public transit was inadequate or inappropriate, the program awarded grants to private non-profit organizations to serve the transportation needs of elderly persons and persons with disabilities. FTA (then the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) apportioned the funds among the States by formula for distribution to local agencies, a practice made a statutory requirement by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). In the early years of the program, many of the subrecipient non-profit agencies used the vehicles primarily for transportation of their own clients. Funding for the Section 16(b)(2) program, as it was then known, ranged between $20–35 million annually until the passage of ISTEA, when it increased to the $50–60 million range. ISTEA also introduced the eligibility of public agencies under limited circumstances to facilitate and encourage the coordination of human service transportation. Increasingly, FTA guidance encouraged and required coordination of the program with other Federal human service transportation programs. In lieu of purchasing vehicles, acquisition of service in order to promote use of private sector providers and coordination with other human service agencies and public transit providers was made an eligible expense under ISTEA. Other provisions of ISTEA introduced the ability to transfer flexible funds to the program from certain highway programs and the flexibility to transfer funds from the Section 5310 program to the rural and urban formula programs.

The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA–21) enacted in 1998, reauthorized the Section 5310 program. TEA–21 increased the funding levels for the Section 5310 program but made no significant program changes. In 2005,

Congress enacted SAFETEA–LU. SAFETEA–LU introduced the requirement that projects funded with 5310 funds be derived from a locally developed, coordinate public transit-human services transportation plan; removed the flexibility that funds can be transferred to Section 5311 for Section 5311 program purposes during the fiscal year apportioned, if funds were not needed for Section 5310 program purposes; introduced a seven State pilot program that allows selected States to use up to one-third of the funds apportioned to them for operating assistance; and allowed transfers to Section 5307 or 5311, but only to fund projects selected for Section 5310 program purposes.

Title 49 U.S.C. 5310 authorizes the formula assistance program for the special needs of elderly individuals and individuals with disabilities. FTA refers to this formula program as "the Section 5310 program." FTA, on behalf of the Secretary of Transportation, apportions the funds appropriated annually to the States based on an administrative formula that considers the number of elderly individuals and individuals with disabilities in each State. These funds are subject to annual appropriations.

Title 49 U.S.C. 5310(a)(1) authorizes funding for public transportation capital projects planned, designed and carried out to meet the special needs of elderly individuals and individuals with disabilities.

Title 49 U.S.C. 5310(a)(2) provides that a State may allocate the funds apportioned to it to:

a. a private non-profit organization, if public transportation service provided by State and local governmental authorities under Section 5310(a)(1) is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate; or

b. a governmental authority that:
(1) is approved by the State to coordinate services for elderly individuals and individuals with disabilities; or
(2) certifies that there are not any non-profit organizations readily available in the area to provide the special services.

The code assigned to the Section 5310 program in the Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance is 20.513.

B. Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program (Section 5316)

Goal

The goal of the 5316 Program is to improve access to transportation services to employment and employment-related activities for welfare recipients and eligible low income individuals and to transport residents of urbanized areas and non-urbanized areas to suburban employment opportunities. Toward this goal, the FTA provides financial assistance for transportation services planned, designed, and

carried out to meet the transportation needs of eligible low-income individuals, and of reverse commuters regardless of income. The program requires coordination of federally assisted programs and services in order to make the most efficient use of federal resources.

Examples of Projects

Funds from the 5316 program are available for capital, planning, and operating expenses that support the development and maintenance of transportation services designed to transport low-income individuals to and from jobs and activities related to their employment and to support reverse commute projects.

Eligible projects may include, but are not limited to capital, planning, and operating assistance to support activities such as:

- Late-night and weekend service
- Guaranteed ride home service
- Shuttle service
- Expanding fixed-route public transit routes
- Demand-responsive van service
- Ridesharing and carpooling activities
- Transit-related aspects of bicycling (such as adding bicycle racks to vehicles to support individuals who bicycle a portion of their commute or providing bicycle storage at transit stations)
- Local car loan programs that assist individuals in purchasing and maintaining vehicles for shared rides
- Promotion, through marketing efforts, of the:
    - Use of transit by workers with non-traditional work schedules
    - Use of transit voucher programs by appropriate agencies for welfare
    - recipients and other low-income individuals
    - Development of employer-provided transportation such as shuttles,
    - ridesharing, carpooling
    - Use of transit pass programs and benefits under Section 132 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986
    - Supporting the administration and expenses related to voucher programs
    - Acquiring GIS tools
    - Implementing ITS, including customer trip information technology
- Integrating automated regional public transit and human service transportation
- information, scheduling, and dispatch functions
- Deploying vehicle position-monitoring systems
- Subsidizing the costs associated with adding reverse commute bus, train, carpool van routes or service from urbanized areas and nonurbanized areas to suburban work places

- Subsidizing the purchase or lease by a non-profit organization or public agency of a van or bus dedicated to shuttling employees from their residences to a suburban workplace
- Facilitating the provision of public transportation services to suburban employment opportunities
- Supporting new mobility management and coordination programs among public transportation providers and other human service agencies providing transportation.
- Mobility management activities may include:
    - Promotion, enhancement, and facilitation of access to transportation services, including the integration and coordination of services for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and low-income individuals
    - Support for short-term management activities to plan and implement coordinated services
    - Support of state and local coordination policy bodies and councils
    - Operation of transportation brokerages to coordinate providers, funding agencies and customers
    - Provision of coordination services, including employer-oriented Transportation Management Organizations and Human Service
    - Organizations customer-oriented travel navigator systems and neighborhood travel coordination activities such as coordinating individualized travel training and trip planning activities for customers
    - Development and operation of one-stop transportation traveler call centers to coordinate transportation information on all travel modes and to manage eligibility requirements and arrangements for customers among supporting programs; and
    - Operational planning for the acquisition of intelligent transportation technologies to help plan and operate coordinated systems inclusive of GIS mapping, GPS, coordinated vehicle scheduling, dispatching and monitoring technologies as well as technologies to track costs and billing in a coordinated system and single smart customer payment systems (acquisition of technology is also eligible as a standalone capital expense).

Funding

SAFETEA-LU authorized $602 Million (FY 05 to FY 09) for the 5316 Program. FTA will apportion funds as follows:

- Sixty percent of the funds shall be distributed among designated recipients in urbanized areas with a population of 200,000 or more, in the ratio that the number of eligible low-income individuals and welfare recipients in each such urbanized area bears to the number of eligible low-income individuals and welfare recipients in all such urbanized areas
- Twenty percent of the funds shall be distributed among the states, in the ratio that the number of eligible low-income individuals and welfare

recipients in urbanized areas with a population of less than 200,000 in each state bear to the number of eligible low-income individuals and welfare recipients in urbanized areas with a population of less than 200,000 in all states

- Twenty percent of the funds shall be distributed among the states, in the ratio that the number of eligible low-income individuals and welfare recipients in other than urbanized areas in each state bears to the number of eligible low-income individuals and welfare recipients in other than urbanized areas in all states.

Designated Recipient

- There is no designated recipient in the Lake Norman RPO area, as all providers are found in rural areas. The NCDOT distributes all 5316 funds to rural transit providers.

Who Can Apply

- There are three categories of eligible sub recipients:
  - Private non-profit organizations
  - State or local governmental authority
  - Operators of public transportation services, including private operators of public transportation services

How to Apply

- Eligible applicants will be able to apply for funds from the NCDOT in response to an announced call for applications for such funds. The projects selected must be derived from a CPT-HSTP.

C. New Freedom Program (Section 5317)

Goal

The goal of the New Freedom Formula Grant Program is to provide additional tools to overcome existing barriers facing Americans with disabilities seeking integration into the workforce and full participation in society. Lack of adequate transportation is a primary barrier to work for individuals with disabilities. Only 60% of persons with disabilities (between the ages of 16 and 64) are employed, according to the 2000 Census. Section 5317 seeks to reduce barriers to transportation services and expand the transportation mobility options available to people with disabilities beyond the requirements of the ADA. The ADA includes access to certain transportation services as a right. The New Freedom program is not intended to fund such services.

Examples of Projects

Section 5317 Program funds are available for capital and operating expenses that support new public transportation services beyond those required by the ADA and new public transportation alternatives beyond those required by the ADA designed

to assist individuals with disabilities with accessing transportation services, including transportation to and from jobs and employment support services.

For the purpose of the New Freedom Program, "new" service is any service or activity that was not operational on August 10, 2005, and did not have an identified funding source as of August 10, 2005, as evidenced by inclusion in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) or the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). In other words, if not for the New Freedom Program, these projects would not have consideration for funding and proposed service enhancements would not be available for individuals with disabilities.

New Public Transportation Services beyond the ADA

The following activities are examples of eligible projects meeting the definition of new public transportation.

- Enhancing paratransit beyond minimum requirements of the ADA. ADA complementary paratransit services can be eligible under New Freedom in several ways as long as the services provided meet the definition of "new:"
    - Expansion of paratransit service parameters beyond the three-fourths mile required by the ADA
    - Expansion of current hours of operation for ADA paratransit services that are beyond those provided on the fixed-route services
    - Incremental cost of providing same-day service
    - Incremental cost of making door-to-door service available to all eligible ADA paratransit riders, but not as a reasonable modification for individual riders in an otherwise curb-to-curb system
    - Enhancement of the level of service by providing escorts or assisting riders through the door of their destination
    - Acquisition of vehicles and equipment designed to accommodate mobility aids that exceed the dimensions and weight ratings established for common wheelchairs under the ADA and labor costs of aides to help drivers assist passengers with over-sized wheelchairs
    - Installation of additional securement locations in public buses beyond what is required by the ADA
- New "feeder" service (transit service that provides access) to commuter rail, commuter bus, intercity rail, and intercity bus stations, for which complementary paratransit service is not required under the ADA
- Making accessibility improvements to transit and intermodal stations not designated as key stations. This may include:
    - Building an accessible path to a bus stop that is currently inaccessible, including curbcuts, sidewalks, accessible pedestrian signals or other accessible features
    - Adding an elevator or ramps, detectable warnings, or other accessibility improvements to a non-key station that are not otherwise required under the ADA
    - Improving signage, or wayfinding technology

- Implementation of other technology improvements that enhance accessibility for people with disabilities including ITS
- Travel training

New Public Transportation Alternatives beyond the ADA

The following activities are examples of projects that are eligible as new public transportation alternatives beyond the ADA under the New Freedom Program:

- Purchasing vehicles to support new accessible taxi, ridesharing, and/or vanpooling programs
- Supporting the administration and expenses related to new voucher programs for transportation services offered by human service providers
- Supporting new volunteer driver and aide programs. Supporting new mobility management and coordination programs among public transportation providers and other human service agencies providing transportation. Mobility management activities may include:
    - Promotion, enhancement, and facilitation of access to transportation services, including the integration and coordination of services for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and low-income individuals
    - Support for short-term management activities to plan and implement coordinated services
    - Support of state and local coordination policy bodies and councils
    - Operation of transportation brokerages to coordinate providers, funding agencies and customers
    - Provision of coordination services, including employer-oriented Transportation Management Organizations and Human Service Organizations, customer-oriented travel navigator systems and neighborhood travel coordination activities such as coordinating individualized travel training and trip planning activities for customers
    - Development and operation of one-stop transportation traveler call centers to coordinate transportation information on all travel modes and to manage eligibility requirements and arrangements for customers among supporting programs
    - Operational planning for the acquisition of intelligent transportation
    - technologies to help plan and operate coordinated systems inclusive of GIS mapping, GPS Technology, coordinated vehicle scheduling, dispatching and monitoring technologies as well as technologies to track costs and billing in a coordinated system and single smart customer payment systems

Funding

SAFETEA-LU authorized $339 Million (FY 05 to FY 09) for the 5317 Program. FTA will apportion funds among the recipients by formula, based on the ratio that the number of individuals with disabilities in each such area bears to the number of individuals with disabilities in all such areas.

FTA will apportion funds as follows:

- Sixty percent among designated recipients in large urbanized areas
- Twenty percent to the states for small urbanized areas
- Twenty percent to the states for rural and small urban areas under 50,000 in population

Designated Recipient

- There is no designated recipient in the Lake Norman RPO area, as all providers are found in rural areas. The NCDOT distributes all 5316 funds to rural transit providers.

Who Can Apply

- There are three eligible subrecipients:
    - Private non-profit organizations
    - State or local governmental authority
    - Operators of public transportation services including private operators of public transportation services

How to Apply

- Eligible applicants will have the opportunity to apply for funding through a competitive selection process held by the NCDOT. The projects selected must be derived from a CPT-HSTP.

VI. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A series of facilitated workshops were held to identify perceived needs, gaps, and barriers in the existing systems. Two workshops were held in the RPO: October 15 in Lincolnton and November 4 in Shelby. This process also relied on input gathered at an Iredell County transit needs workshop held by the United Way earlier in 2008.

The two meetings for this process were attended by over two dozen elected officials, local planning staff, NCDOT staff, transit providers, and human service agencies. The workshops involved participants working in teams to identify the needs, gaps, and barriers and writing them on Study Area maps. The input is shown below, organized by topic. The comments included consideration for both commuter and the transit-dependent populations, and explored the coordination and administrative issues common to operating transit services. The RPO, NCDOT and the participating transit agencies then met on November 24, 2008 to analyze the comments and prioritize the improvements that should be made. These prioritizations are shown in Section VII: Prioritization of Needs.

It is important to note that some of the perceived needs, gaps, or barriers that were identified may not be consistent across the entire RPO area.

The following is a summary of needs, gaps, and barriers identified through workshops and public comment.

A. Infrastructure Issues

a) Need for park and ride locations to serve car pools, van pools, and scheduled bus service
b) Need for additional transit vehicles for Cleveland, Iredell, Lincoln and Gaston public transportation systems

B. Coordination and Communication Issues

a) Information and coordination services, including communication of available services and service eligibility
b) Coordination among agencies and providers
c) Awareness of available services, notably www.sharetheridenc.org and van pool programs, by employers and commuters

C. Other than Transit-based Services

a) Need for additional van pools throughout Study Area

D. Fixed Route & Demand Response Service Issues

a) Coordinating community transit service stops with express bus and van pool routes
b) Expand service capacity (expanded hours and weekend service) for all four current transit service providers to meet commuter, general public and human service needs

E. Services primarily for workers

a) Need for outreach to employers and workers regarding available services
b) Provide outreach for www.sharetheridenc.org
c) Ensure local funding is secured for existing express bus routes
d) Make rural van pool programs available to workers and employers

F. Other Issues

a) Need for stable, dedicated local funding streams to allow for better planning by service providers.

VII. PRIORITIZATION OF NEEDS

The participants in the Lake Norman Organization Coordinated Comprehensive Public Transportation Plan understand that there is a very limited set of funding programs available to support implementation of the recommendations of this plan. The area transit providers have evaluated the strategies listed by the public and themselves and identified those which offer the most benefit to the public. The recommendations have been broken down according to those found in Section VI. Needs Assessment. A map of the recommendations is provided on the following page. The RPO held two public comment meetings on February 26 and 27, 2009 in Statesville and Lincolnton, respectively. A total of 13 citizens attended these meetings. They provided comments that helped clarify the recommendations in this plan, but did not substantively change the final recommendations.

It is important to note that many of these issues can be addressed concurrently. Coordination and Communication Issues will likely not require significant funds to resolve- just the commitment to address. The establishment of new services will require prioritization on the part of the applying and implementing agency. Many of the identified needs do not complete with other services in the county, and so they were not prioritized.

A. Infrastructure Issues

Need: Additional transit vehicles, particularly in Cleveland, Lincoln and Gaston Counties, to provide additional service and reduce demand of existing fleet

- **Strategy:** Apply for FTA Section 5310, 5316, and 5317 funds to help pay for additional vehicles.
- **Strategy:** Dedicate local revenue stream for transit services in order to allow for more reliable planning and service provision.

Need: Dedicated public lots for car pools, van pools, and scheduled bus service to pick up and drop off passengers.

- **Strategy:** Incorporate recommendations from Plan into local subdivision and development regulations to require or recommend provision as a part of site plan.
- **Strategy:** Apply for CMAQ (where available) grants to fund purchase and development of public parking lots.
- **Strategy:** Work with NCDOT where excess public land is made available to develop public parking lots.

B. Coordination and Communication Issues

Need: Authority and predetermined agreements to coordinate client transfers at county lines and client delivery across county lines.

- **Strategy:** Develop Memoranda of Understanding between county transit providers to allow for transfers and for appropriate billing for transporting clients across county lines.

Need: Single source for identifying services and eligibility for the entire Study Area

Strategy: Develop mobility coordinator position that can readily identify routes and services to provide transportation for client, regardless of client location or provider used.

C. Other than Transit-based Services

Need: Awareness of existing van pool operations

Strategy: Place links to CATS and PART van pool programs on municipal web sites.

Strategy: Educate chambers of commerce, workforce development organizations, and employers about eligibility and process for existing area van pool programs.

Need: Increase van pools opportunities for workers and residents in the Study Area

Strategy: Apply for CMAQ (where eligible), 5316, and 5317 funds to help pay for operating new van pool routes as identified in Figure 12; through public, private, and non-profit providers.

Strategy: Educate employers, workforce development agencies, and chambers of commerce of availability of van pool programs.

Need: Awareness of existing ride-matching web sites

Strategy: Place links to www.sharetheridenc.org on municipal, economic development, chamber of commerce, workforce development, and other relevant web sites.

D. Fixed Route & Demand Response Service Issues

Need: Better integrate demand-response, local and express bus routes

Strategy: Establish drop off and pick up times for local and demand-response services that allow for seamless transfer between bus routes

Need: More frequent and extended service to human service providers, commuters, and the general public.

Strategy: Apply for Section 5316 and 5317 funds to provide for additional local service, particularly in Cleveland and Iredell Counties

Strategy: Dedicate local revenue stream for transit services in order to allow for more reliable planning and service provision.

Need: Develop new scheduled routes in Lincoln, Gaston, and Cleveland Counties.

Strategy: Apply for 5316 and 5317 funds to help pay for new scheduled service between Boiling Springs and Shelby.

Strategy: Apply for 5316 and 5317 funds to help pay for a new scheduled service between Gastonia, Lincolnton, and Hickory.

Strategy: Apply for 5316 and 5317 funds to help pay for a new scheduled route between Shelby and the northern communities in Cleveland County.

Strategy: Apply for 5316 and 5317 funds to help pay for a new scheduled route between Lincolnton and Eastern Lincoln County.

Strategy: Apply for 5316 and 5317 funds to help pay for a new scheduled route between Shelby, Kings Mountain and Gastonia.

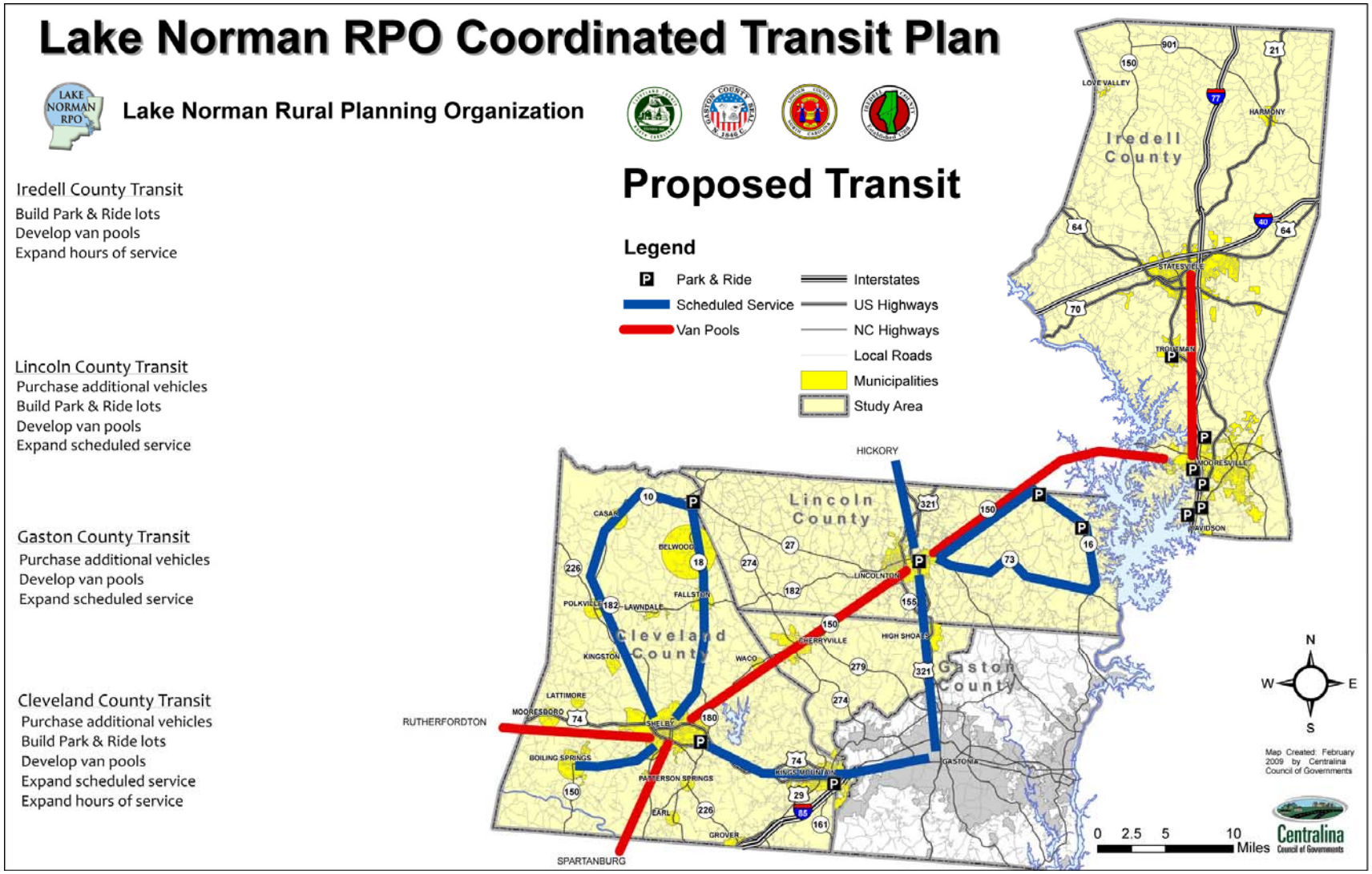

Figure 12: Proposed Transit Recomendations

VIII. COORDINATION WITH OTHER PLANS

Recommendations for transit services are contained in a variety of transportation, land use, and economic development plans for the Lake Norman RPO area. The following is a list of recommendations, by geography, for the transit needs of the area.

A. Cleveland County

a) Cleveland County, in coordination with the municipalities within the county, is currently in the beginning stages of developing a Comprehensive Transportation Plan for the entire county. Transit services will be considered as a part of the process.
b) The 1995 Shelby Thoroughfare Plan does not include any transit recommendations.
c) The 1996 Kings Mountain Thoroughfare Plan does not include any transit recommendations.

B. Iredell County

a) The 2008 Iredell County Comprehensive Transportation Plan references the Iredell County Area Transportation System, but no specific recommendations are provided, save for those already identified by ICATS. These improvements include increasing the size of the fleet, utilizing technology to increase performance and efficiency, and participation in regional communication activities.
b) The 2007 Troutman Comprehensive Transportation Plan included recommendations for three park and ride lots:
    a. Perth Road and Autumn Leaf Road
    b. US 21 and Ostwalt Amity Road and,
    c. Eastway Drive and Winecroff Street
c) The 2007 Mooresville Comprehensive Transportation Plan included recommendations for significant express and local bus service and park; park and ride lots; as well as for commuter rail service to Mecklenburg County. These recommendations are shown in the map on the following page.
d) The 1997 Statesville Thoroughfare Plan did not include any recommendations for transit provisions. The NCDOT- Transportation Planning Branch is in the beginning phases of updating this Plan.

C. Lincoln County

a) The 2006 Lincoln County Comprehensive Transportation Plan makes recommendations for express bus service from Lincolnton to Charlotte, as well as a park and ride location at NC 16 and NC 73. This park and ride has since been implemented as a part of a Wal-Mart shopping center.

IX. MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The needs identification step of this planning process made clear that there are many people and organizations willing, able and eager to be involved in creating a better coordinated public transportation-human service transportation system in the counties of the RPO. The RPO area is fortunate to have such strong commuting patterns, as well as employment and population growth, which allow the area transit providers to plan and provide effective services to meet the needs of a variety of populations in the Study Area.

The prioritized listing of identified needs, gaps and barriers in section VII includes the top ten items, but by far, the top issue at the workshops was expanding the days, hours and reach of the existing systems as development and employment move beyond the traditional borders of the systems of the RPO. The desire for Sunday service, both for work and for socialization was frequently expressed as a part of the desire for expanded service.

The next most important need to the participants in the workshops as well as to people who commented outside of the workshops was for information about public transportation services. Other needs, gaps or barriers identified by people who were unaware of existing services that filled those needs further reinforced the need for information. Several who took the time to participate in this process made clear that there are gaps in the current systems of communication with people who have low vision.

The path to a truly coordinated system that fits the needs of most residents will be long, and possibly difficult, but it is an important goal. The diversity of the development patterns and the character of the communities included in the RPO area are great, but the development of this plan is an important first step. Implementation will show the coordination, effectiveness, and need for comprehensive and coordinated public transportation services in the area.

X. PROJECT SELECTION PROCESS

The North Carolina Department of Transportation will issue a call for projects and will award grants based on applications received. RPO staff will apprise area transit providers of any upcoming application deadlines, as well as assist with grant applications. The North Carolina Department of Transportation will develop and utilize a project selection process to award grants.