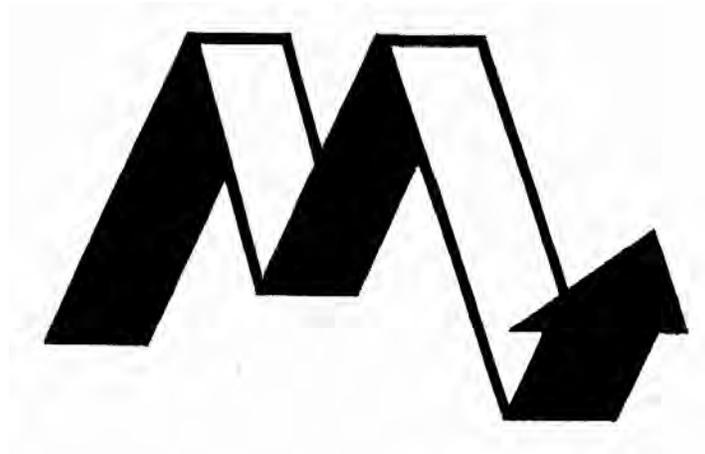


**MITCHELL COUNTY HUMAN SERVICE  
TRANSPORTATION COORDINATION PLAN**



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## **Section 1: Purpose and Background of Coordination Plan**

The purpose of this plan is to ensure that Federal requirements regarding coordination are satisfied as well as to assist Mitchell County in its continuing efforts to develop an efficient and effective transit service network.

### ***1.1 Background***

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) created a requirement that a locally-developed, coordinated public transit/human service planning process and an initial plan be developed by 2007 as a condition of receiving funding for certain programs directed at meeting the needs of older individuals, persons with disabilities and low-income persons. Plans must be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human service providers, as well as the general public. Complete plans, including coordination with the full range of existing human service transportation providers, are required by Federal Fiscal Year 2008.

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), in partnership with the High Country Rural Planning Organization (HCRPO), Mitchell County Transportation Authority and interested stakeholders, has developed a coordinated plan that meets the requirements of SAFETEA-LU and the Federal Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM). While at a minimum projects funded under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) formula programs for Sections 5310, 5316 and 5317 must be derived from a coordinated plan, the coordinated plans will incorporate activities offered under other programs sponsored by Federal, State and local agencies. These programs would include as appropriate FTA's Section 5307 and 5311 programs, as well as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Vocational Rehabilitation, Medicaid, Community Action (CAP), Independent Living Centers, and Agency on Aging (AoA) programs among others.

Development and content of coordinated plans are intended to be specific to the needs and issues of each transit provider. The coordinated plans will be developed to address intra- and inter-regional needs and issues, and in a manner that allows the providers, concurrent with regional Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) updates, to directly update the coordinated plan. Further, the coordinated plan will be developed in a manner that allows the Rural Planning Organization (RPO) to adapt and expand the plan to incorporate programs and initiatives specific to the region.

The coordinated plan's development will, at a minimum:

- Assess and document transportation needs in each county for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and persons with limited incomes;

- Inventory available services in each county and identify areas of redundancy and gaps in service;
- Identify and document restrictions on eligibility for funding;
- Identify and document short- and long-range strategies in each county to address the identified gaps in service, including mobility management strategies;
- Identify and document technological resources currently available and appropriate for coordination of transportation services;
- Identify and document coordination actions in each county to eliminate or reduce duplication in services and strategies for more efficient utilization of resources; and
- Document and prioritize implementation strategies to increase coordination of transportation services in each county.

## **1.2 Planning Process**

The coordinated plans are intended to meet the requirements of SAFETEA-LU, and the guidance detailed in the Federal Register Notice dated March 29, 2007 entitled, “Elderly Individuals and Individuals With Disabilities, Job Access and Reverse Commute, New Freedom Programs: Final Circulars’ effect May 1, 2007.”

The development of the Mitchell County plan involved three basic steps:

1. Developing an inventory of services and a sense of transportation needs.
2. Development of strategies and actions.
3. Development of the county plan document.

## **1.3 Funding Barriers to Coordination**

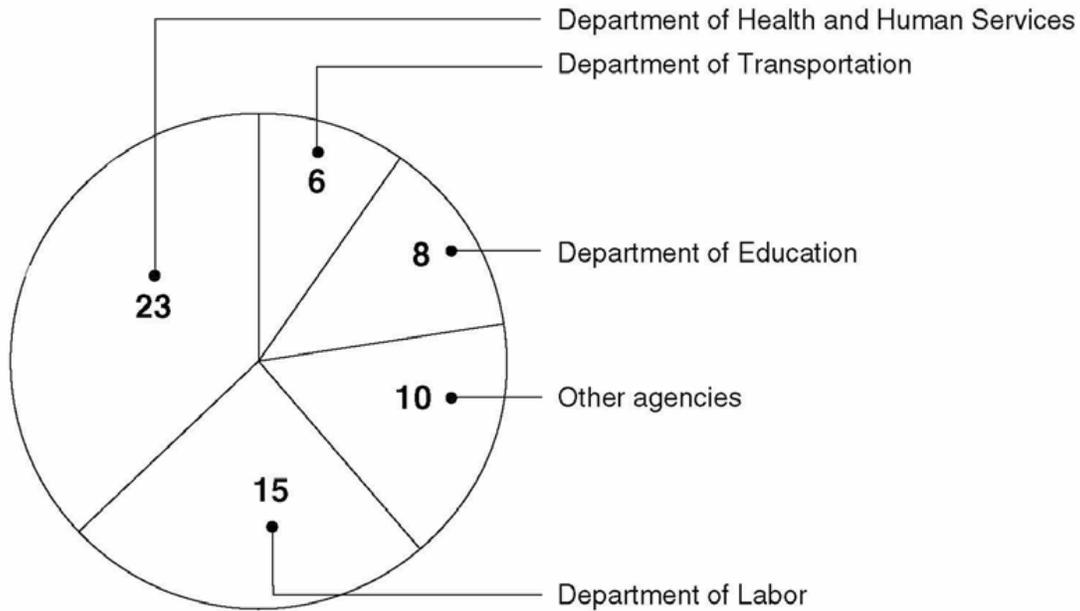
One area of common concern to all counties is the role of federal and state funding in promoting coordination. In this regard, this section analyzes to what extent federal funds inhibit coordination. Included in this discussion is a brief review of important transportation funding programs and associated regulations that could affect coordinated transit. As will be seen, these programs do not restrict coordination through regulations. However, there are practical and programmatic issues that make coordination challenging but not insurmountable.

### **1.3.1 Regulatory Review**

In June of 2003, the US General Accounting Office (GAO) issued a study on Federal transportation funding and coordination entitled *Transportation—Disadvantaged Populations*. The study reported that there were sixty-two funding programs for

transportation. Of those, sixteen are most regularly used for public transportation with six from the USDOT through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). See Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Sources of Federal Transportation Funds**



*Source: Transportation-Disadvantaged Populations, Figure 1, page 9, USGAO, June 2003.*

The ten non-DOT funding programs most commonly used for transportation are:

1. Transitional Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)—provides assistance to families with children. Such assistance can include help in funding transportation needs.
2. Vocational Rehabilitation—targets persons with disabilities and provides a variety of vocational services including transportation.
3. Medicaid—assists people with accessing medical services including transportation to such services.
4. Head Start—assists pre-school children with a variety of services including education readiness, health care, and transportation to/from such services.
5. Grants for Supportive Services and Senior Centers—assists in developing services for older people which include nutrition services, senior centers, and transportation.
6. Workforce Investment Act (WIA)—Adults—provides job skill training services as well as transportation to/from such services.
7. WIA— Youth—provides job skill training services to youth as well as transportation to/from such services.
8. WIA— Displaced Workers—provides job skill training services as well as transportation to/from such services.

9. Program for Native Americans (under Older Americans Act)—provides a variety of social service funding (e.g., nutrition and caregiver services) for Native Americans.
10. Senior Community Service Employment program—provides work opportunities for older Americans.

In addition, these six US DOT programs were listed among the top human service transportation funding programs:

1. Capital Grants (Section 5309)
2. Urbanized Area Formula Program (Section 5307)
3. Non-urbanized Area Formula Program (Section 5311)
4. Job Access and Reverse Commute (Section 5316)
5. Over-the-Road Bus Program (Section 3038)
6. Transportation for Elderly and Persons with Disabilities (Section 5310)

Since the 2003 GAO study, the “New Freedom” program was enacted. The New Freedom program (Section 5317) is intended to provide operating and capital assistance to services that go beyond ADA complementary paratransit requirements.

## **1.4 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.

### **1.4.1 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:

1. 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
2. a governmental authority that:
  - a. is approved by the State to coordinate services for elderly individuals and individuals with disabilities; or
  - b. 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.

## **1.4.2 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 non-urbanized 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

### **1.4.3 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 curb cuts, 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

- o 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.

### 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.

## ***1.5 Non-regulatory Challenges***

While regulatory factors do not prevent different social programs from sharing resources, there are practical and programmatic considerations that can make coordination challenging. Some of these are service delivery issues and others relate to administrative issues.

Service delivery related issues include special requirements imposed by certain funding streams that are unique and not common to other funding streams. For example, Head Start requires on-vehicle monitors and use of safety restraints for passengers. These requirements are not typical with general public services funded by FTA. Thus, for an operator of FTA-only funded services, transporting a Head Start client would require these additional features, creating additional expense.

Administrative-related issues refer to the documentation of the use of a funding stream's dollars. For example, Medicaid only pays for medical-related transportation. A service provider who transports the general public as well as a Medicaid traveler would need to document to Medicaid the incremental cost of the trip. This would demonstrate to Medicaid that it is paying for only its share of the service. While a cost allocation formula can overcome this, this still presents an administrative hurdle in providing shared services.

## ***1.6 Conclusion***

This review found that solely on a regulatory basis, federal transportation funding does not, per se, prohibit or restrict coordination. However, some programs present service

delivery and administrative issues that require creative thinking and tenacity to overcome practical and programmatic challenges to sharing resources.

## **1.7 Organization of the Document**

This plan has these three main parts:

*Section 2: Introducing Mitchell County* profiles the county's population and service providers. It also contains information regarding transit needs in the county.

*Section 3: State of Coordination* examines current efforts at human service transportation coordination and explores some of the barriers and opportunities to further coordination.

*Section 4: Coordination Strategies and Actions* provide initial ideas for the county to continue its development of coordinated transit.

## **Section 2: Introducing Mitchell County**

Mitchell County is located in the mountains of northwestern North Carolina (refer to Figure 2). This section provides a demographic and service profile of the county as well as an identification of needs.

### **2.1 Profile of County**

Mitchell County is located in the mountains of northwestern North Carolina. A large portion of Mitchell County is located in the Pisgah National Forest thus bringing tourists seeking outdoor activities. Feldspar mining and some manufacturing are the primary industries in the county

#### **Overall Population**

According to U.S. Census Bureau estimates, in 2000, the population of Mitchell County was 15,687 persons. The State of North Carolina Demographer estimated the 2008 population of Mitchell County grew by 2.2 percent to 16,034. The two largest municipalities in Mitchell County are Spruce Pine and Bakersville. The Town of Spruce Pine had a population of 2,030 persons in 2000, and grew 0.34 percent to 2,037 in population in 2007. The Town of Bakersville had a population of 357 persons in 2000 and shrank 0.28 percent to 356 in 2008. In comparison, the population in North Carolina grew by 14.67 percent

#### **Elderly Population**

In 2009, 17.75 percent of North Carolina's population was 60 years and over. Mitchell County had a population of 4,247 that was 60 and over or 26.5 percent of the population. According to census population estimates, the July, 2029 population of 60 years old and over will be 4,818 persons. (Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the Mitchell County elderly population.)

#### **Disabled Population**

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 1.3 million persons age five and over were identified with a disability in North Carolina, representing approximately 16.9 percent of the total population. Mitchell County had a higher proportion of persons with disabilities than found statewide, 26.5 percent (3,918 persons). (Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the Mitchell County disabled Population.)

### **Persons below the Poverty Level**

In 2000, 12.3 percent of North Carolina's population was living in poverty. Mitchell County had 13.8 percent (2,142) persons living below the poverty. (Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of the Mitchell County population below poverty level.)

### **Median Household Income**

In 2000, the median household income in North Carolina was \$39,184, which is higher than Mitchell County. The median household income for Mitchell County in 2000 was \$30,508.

### **Change in Daytime Population**

Mitchell County has diverse commuting patterns. According to the 2000 Census there were 6,925 employed residents in Mitchell County. Almost 30.5 percent (2,112 persons) of Mitchell County's population leaves the county for work. The primary out of county work destination is Yancey County (689 persons), followed by McDowell County (639 persons) and Avery County (291 persons) along with 90 persons commuting to various locations in Tennessee to work. While there were 2,112 persons leaving the county for work, there were also 2,074 commuters coming to Mitchell County to work. (Figure 6 illustrates the commuting patterns for Mitchell County.)

### **Zero Vehicle Households**

In 2000, 7.5 percent of households in North Carolina were zero vehicle households. The percent of households in Mitchell County with zero vehicles was also 7.5 percent. (Figure 7 illustrates the distribution of zero vehicle households in Mitchell County.)

## **2.2 Services**

Mitchell County Transportation Authority is the primary transportation provider in Mitchell County. Mitchell County Transportation Authority, located in Bakersville, is a nonprofit organization rendering transportation services to the citizens of Mitchell County. MCTA began in 1976 as part of WAMY (Watauga, Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey) Community in Action group and then severed ties to become the Mitchell County Transportation Authority in 1986. The MCTA operates under a Advisory Board which meets quarterly.

Along with serving the General Public, the MCTA provides transportation to several Human Service Agencies throughout the county by utilizing 12 vans and a staff of 13 people of which 10 are drivers. The following includes a list of agencies currently being served by the MCTA:



### **Mitchell County Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan**

- Mitchell Senior Services- the Mitchell Senior Center is dedicated to assisting the older adults in Mitchell County to maintain their own home as long as possible. We offer a variety of Programs and services designed especially for the older adult.
- Mitchell-Yancey Partnership for Children- providing services for children and their parents ages birth to five (NC Smart Start)
- Mountain Opportunity Center- provides a day program for the developmentally disabled.
- Mitchell County Department of Social Services-through Title XX for eligible clients who need non emergency medical transportation.
- Services for the Blind
- Brian Center for Health and Rehabilitation- skilled nursing facility
- Bear Creek II- care home for disabled adults

MCTA provides transportation to the following destinations for human service agencies' clients:

- Intermountain Children's Place- Head Start program
- Mayland Community College
- Laurel Creek Child Development Center
- Divita Dialysis Center
- Blue Ridge Physical Therapy
- Latino ESL classes
- Various retail locations
- Mitchell County Health Department
- Mitchell County Courthouse

MCTA receives Section 5311 (Federal) funds 80% and state funds 5% for administrative and capital needs. The MCTA is responsible for a 15% local match on all funds received. Operating expenses are obtained from contractual services with the agencies and fares generated.

Other agencies that provide transportation services include:

- Mitchell County DSS will provide funding to clients to reimburse them for travel expenses associated with doctor appointments, dental appointments, and other trips of this nature.
- The Brian Center has one lift equipped van.

### ***2.3 Identified Transportation Gaps and Needs***

Two key sources of information were utilized to describe Mitchell County's human transportation service providers as well as their needs. The first was through a workshop with the human services agencies and other stakeholders conducted on December 2, 2009. The second was a survey distributed to agencies to allow them the opportunity to contribute to the development of the coordinated human services transportation plan whether they were able to attend the workshop or not.

### **2.3.1 Survey**

In addition to the statistical information provided in Section 2.2, a number of human transportation services and other service providers were surveyed to determine the nature of their services as well as factors that could help or hinder coordination. This section summarizes that survey.

Surveys were distributed to various human service agencies in Mitchell County that provide transportation or use MCTA to allow for additional input. The survey was distributed by email to human service agencies, given to and made available at the workshop. The survey consisted of 12 questions that covered the following:

- Descriptive information about provider types of transportation services provided
- Types of clients and destinations served
- Times of day and days of week of service
- Vehicle restrictions
- Areas of interest with respect to coordination
- Areas of public transportation that need improvement
- Need for new services

Key observations from the survey are:

- Varied destinations are served, but the primary issue is a need for extended service hours.
- Offer taxi type services to clients and charge on a per mile basis.

### **2.3.2 Sponsored Meetings**

During the course of the project, the High Country Rural Planning Organization along with the NCDOT Public Transportation Division sponsored one workshop. This workshop was attended by representatives of human service agencies and MCTA. The workshop was held to facilitate discussion about transportation issues and potential strategies to address these issues. The workshop advanced the development of the coordination plan through the identification of transportation gaps, discussion regarding the barriers to and opportunities for coordination. A short summary from the workshop is included in Appendix A, and the discussions at this workshop served as the basis for Sections 3 and 4 of this plan.

## **Section 3: State of Coordination in the County**

This section reviews issues associated with coordination in Mitchell County and describes the efforts already under taken to coordinate as well as stated barriers to and opportunities for coordination.

### ***3.1 Transportation Gaps/Barriers to Coordination***

As a result of facilitated meetings, some gaps in human service transportation within Mitchell County have been identified. The list of gaps is not intended to be inclusive of all gaps, but the gaps identified are considered by workshop participants as the most

significant and should be the focus of projects and strategies funded under the three FTA programs.

Many of the gaps in transportation for Mitchell County involve providing affordable transportation services that aren't covered by Medicaid or some other subsidy to the poor, elderly, and disabled. Human service agencies cited long travel times to remote areas and limited resources (vehicles and revenue) as contributing to these issues.

Elderly and disabled populations were identified as the groups with the most needs. Many of these individuals live in the remote areas of the county and have no means to get to medical appointments or for basic needs other than by services that MCTA can provide.

The group identified many issues that either represent gaps or barriers to coordination. They include:

- Long waits to return home for individuals at medical appointments due to waiting for other transportation clients to finish with their appointments.
- Transportation for children of low income parents to and from after school activities.
- Increased marketing for increased public awareness.
- Extended hours during the day.
- Weekend service.
- Money for car repairs and fuel for low income.
- Private contracts with human service agencies.
- Transportation to Asheville, Johnson City, and Boone for education at community college/university.
- Reduced rates for volunteers working with MCTA clients.
- Coordination of trips with agencies within county and with neighboring counties.
- Drivers for clients who have a vehicle but are unable to drive.
- Transportation for non-emergency medical calls to 911 or from general public.

## **Section 4: Coordination Strategies and Actions**

Based on the coordination and other issues identified in Section 3, several strategies and actions were developed to advance the county's efforts to promote coordination to a higher level. "Strategy" is defined here as a general direction for a course of action, while "actions" are more specific steps in fulfillment of the given strategy. Actions will lead to "projects" which implement the actions and strategies. This coordination planning effort will only go to the "action" level, with projects to be developed later.

### ***4.1 Coordination Strategies***

The coordination strategies and actions were developed to address the transportation needs and issues confronting the county identified in Section 3. The primary issues and needs include:

1. IT software
2. Extra vehicles for specific service
3. Extra drivers

4. Funding for operational costs associated with expanded service
5. Extended hours and weekend service
6. Voucher Program
7. Transport of non emergency medical
8. Coordination of trips between transit systems
9. Marketing to special groups (disabled, low income, and elderly)
10. Vanpools to education and employment
11. Volunteers to assist with clients who have a car but are unable to drive

## **4.2 Actions**

Need: IT software

Action Strategy: Apply for funding to purchase IT software to assist in coordinating trips.

Need: Additional transit vehicles and drivers

Action Strategy: Apply for FTA Section 5310, 5316, and 5317 funds to help pay for additional vehicles and operating assistance

Need: Extended Hours of operation for weekends and late nights

Action Strategy: Apply for FTA Section 5310, 5316, and 5317 funds to help pay for additional vehicles and operating assistance

Need: Vouchers to subsidize trips for poor, disabled and seniors.

Action Strategy: Apply for FTA Section 5316 funds to help pay to fund transit voucher programs by appropriate agencies for welfare recipients and other low income individuals.

Need: Coordination of trips with other transit systems.

Action Strategy: Develop website or other means to share out of town trip schedules with neighboring transit systems.

Need: Non-emergency medical service.

Action Strategy: Coordination with 911 call center for trip scheduling.

Action Strategy: Additional training for drivers or assistants to care for individuals utilizing the service.

Action Strategy: Apply for FTA Section 5310, 5316, and 5317 funds to help pay for additional vehicles and operating assistance

Need: Marketing to special groups.

Action Strategy: Distribution of flyers to human service agencies for clients, to faith based organizations, the Employment Security Commission and Job Link

Need: Vanpools to employment centers and schools, colleges, and universities.

Action Strategy: work with area churches and community centers to use facilities for possible park and ride lots.

Action Strategy: Identify other potential sites for park and ride lots.

Action Strategy: Apply for FTA Section 5310, 5316, and 5317 funds to help pay for additional vehicles and operating assistance.

Action Strategy: Seek vouchers from employers to subsidize a vanpool.

Need: Volunteers to assist with non-traditional transit needs (client has a car, but cannot drive)

Action Strategy: Compile a list of volunteers and make it available to those interested in the service.

## **Appendix A:**

Poster Board Discussion results



### **Mitchell County Workshop: December 2, 2009 Bakersville Volunteer Fire Department**

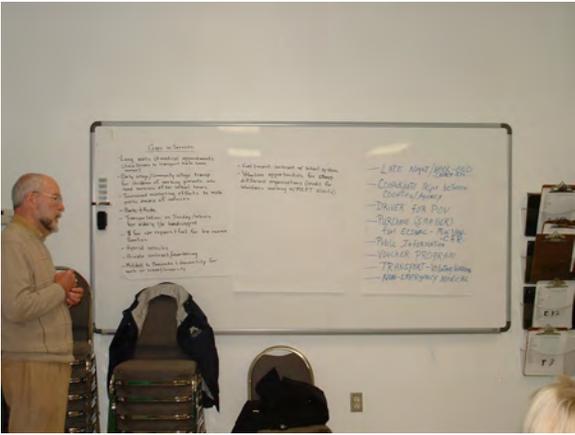
Senior, disabled, and impoverished mobility is a key issue to the agencies serving them.

Transportation options

Flexibility in short notice demand response service.

Transportation to employment

Coordination of Services

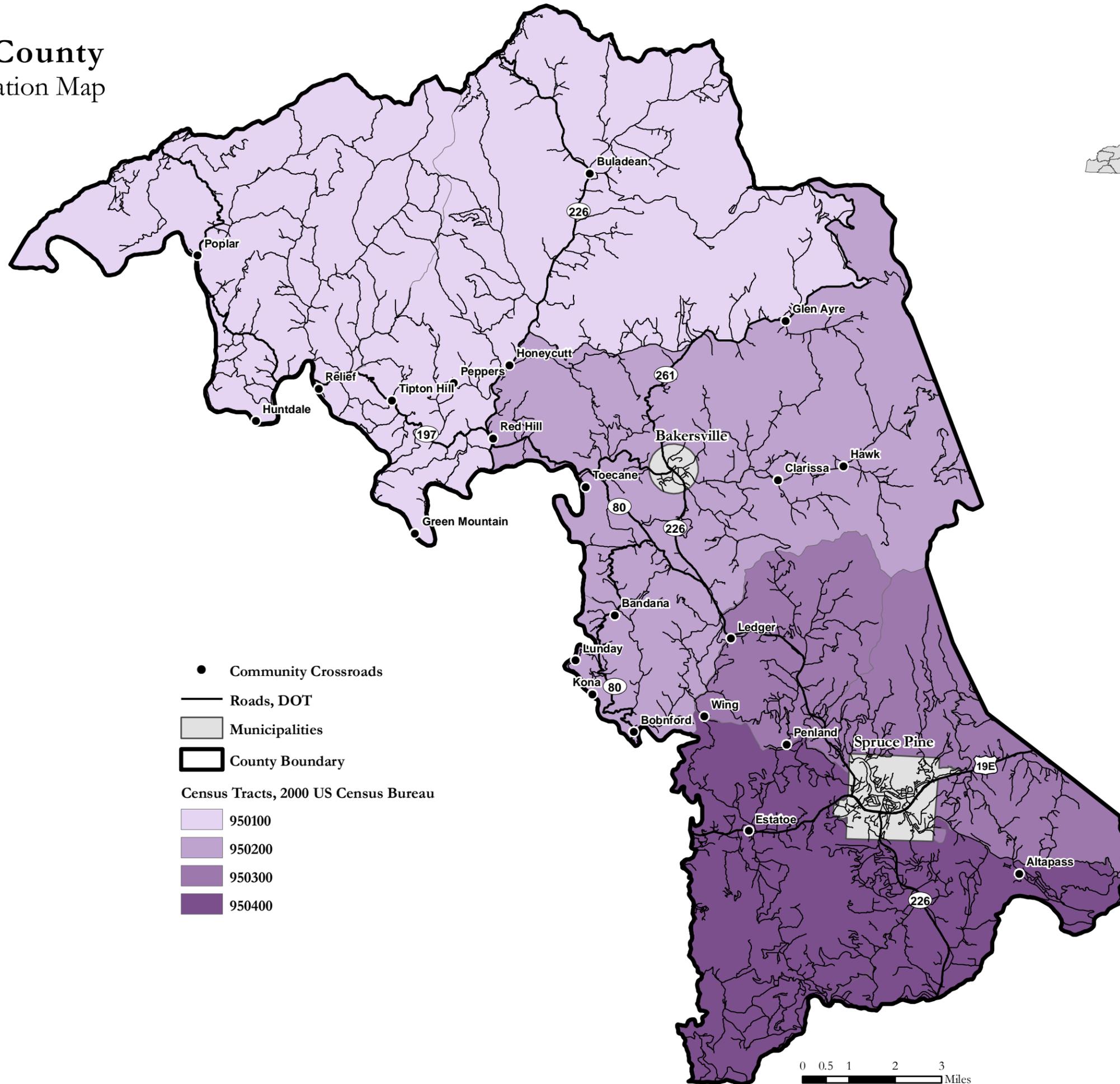
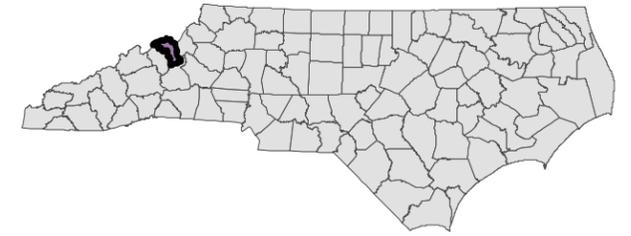


**Mitchell County Human Service Transportation Coordination Plan**

## **Appendix B: Maps**

# Mitchell County

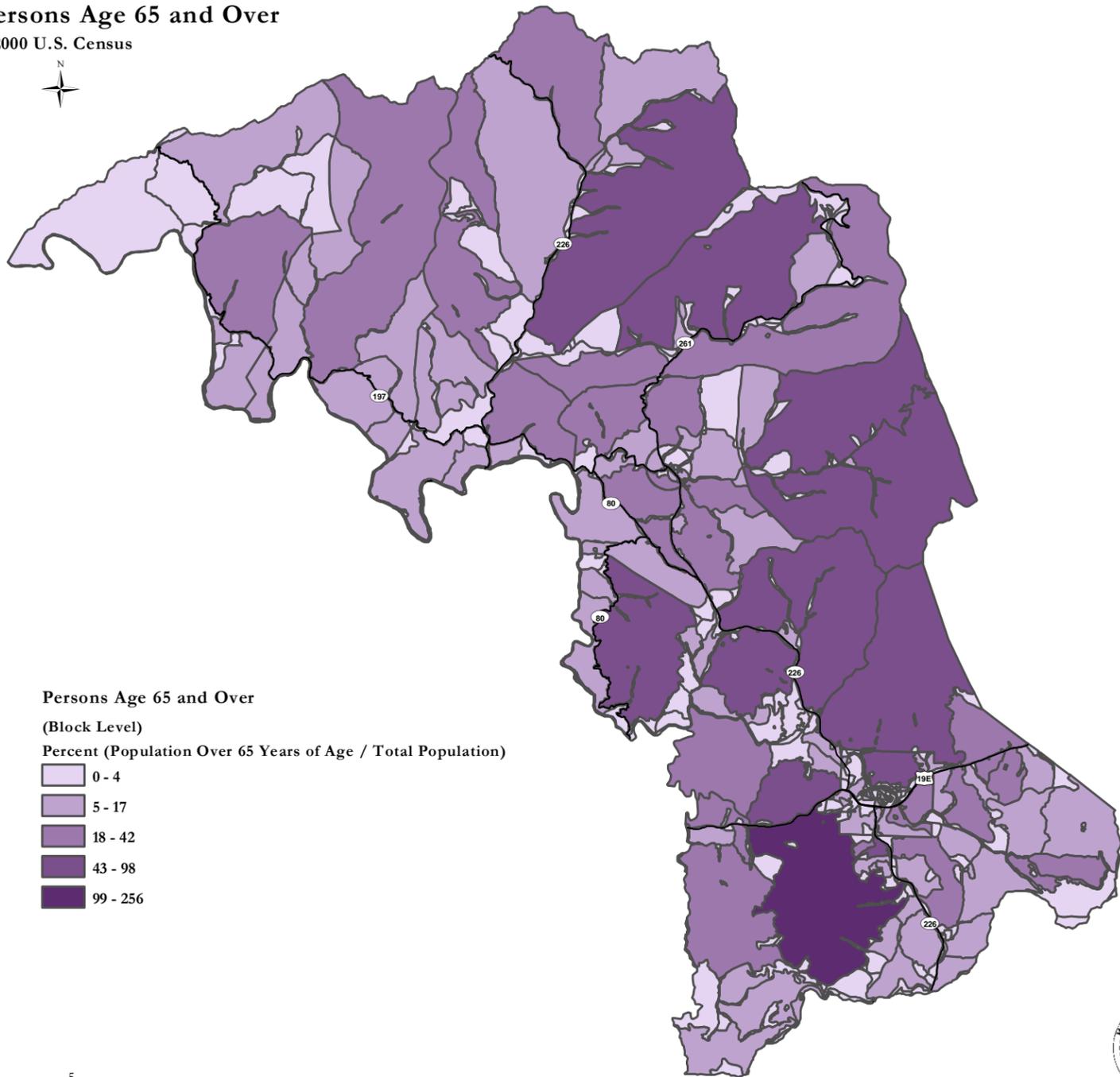
Figure 2: Location Map



Mitchell County Elder Population  
Figure 3: Elder Population

Number of Persons Age 65 and Over

2000 U.S. Census



Persons Age 65 and Over  
(Block Level)  
Percent (Population Over 65 Years of Age / Total Population)

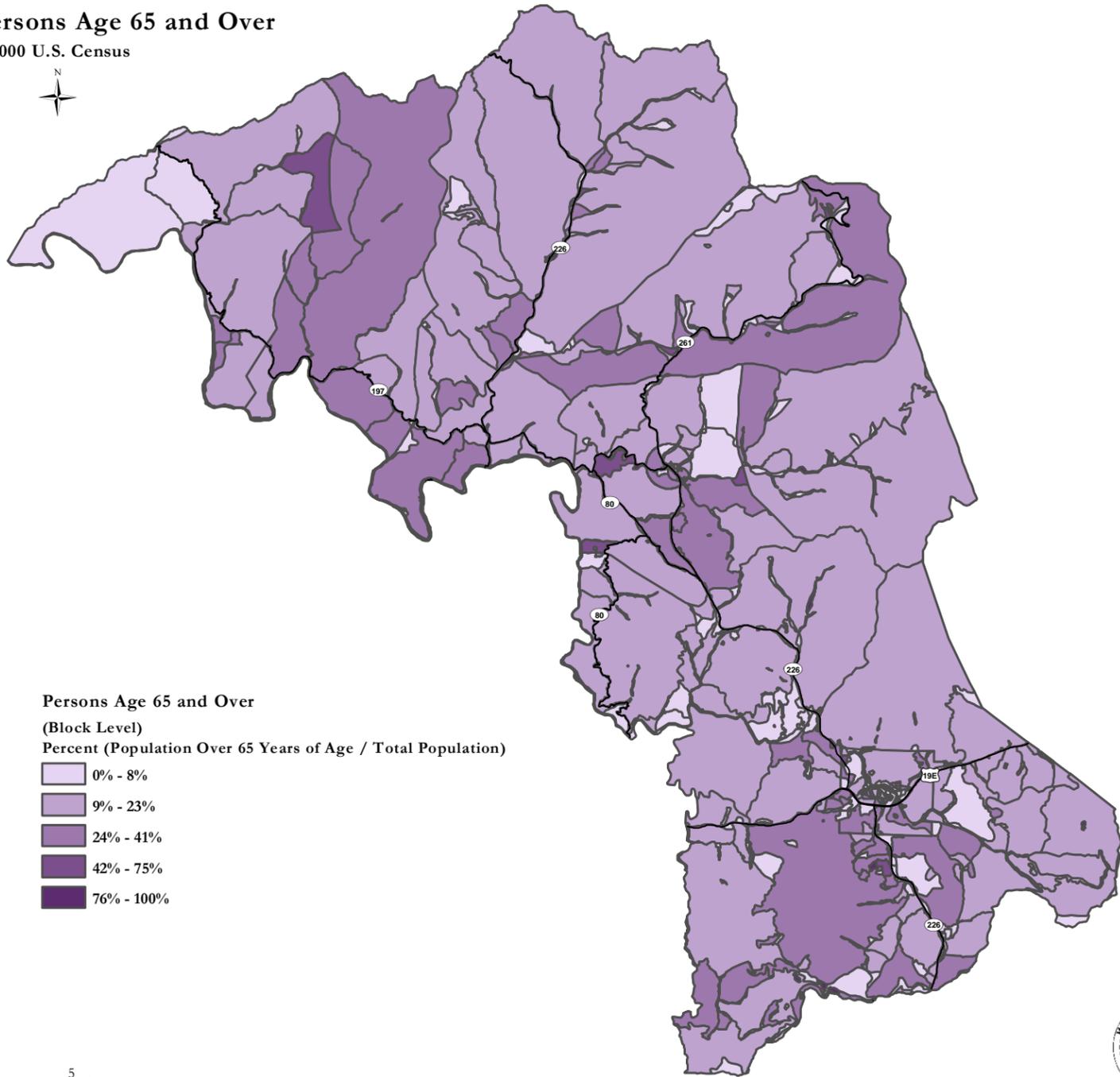
0 - 4
5 - 17
18 - 42
43 - 98
99 - 256

0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles



Percent of Persons Age 65 and Over

2000 U.S. Census



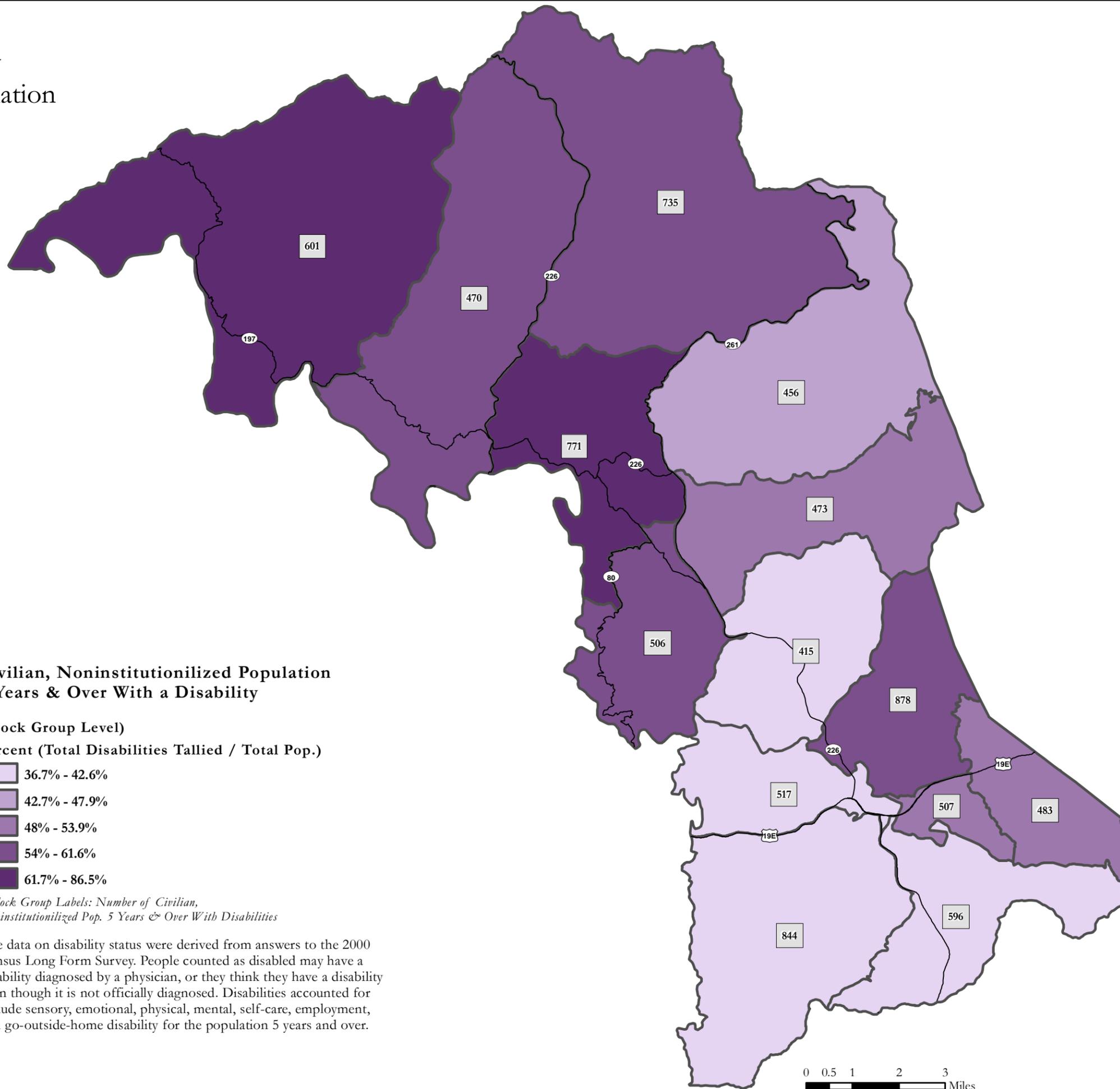
Persons Age 65 and Over  
(Block Level)  
Percent (Population Over 65 Years of Age / Total Population)

0% - 8%
9% - 23%
24% - 41%
42% - 75%
76% - 100%

0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles



**Mitchell County**  
**Figure 4: Disabled Population**  
**2000 U.S. Census**



**Civilian, Noninstitutionalized Population  
 5 Years & Over With a Disability**

(Block Group Level)

Percent (Total Disabilities Tallied / Total Pop.)

- 36.7% - 42.6%
- 42.7% - 47.9%
- 48% - 53.9%
- 54% - 61.6%
- 61.7% - 86.5%

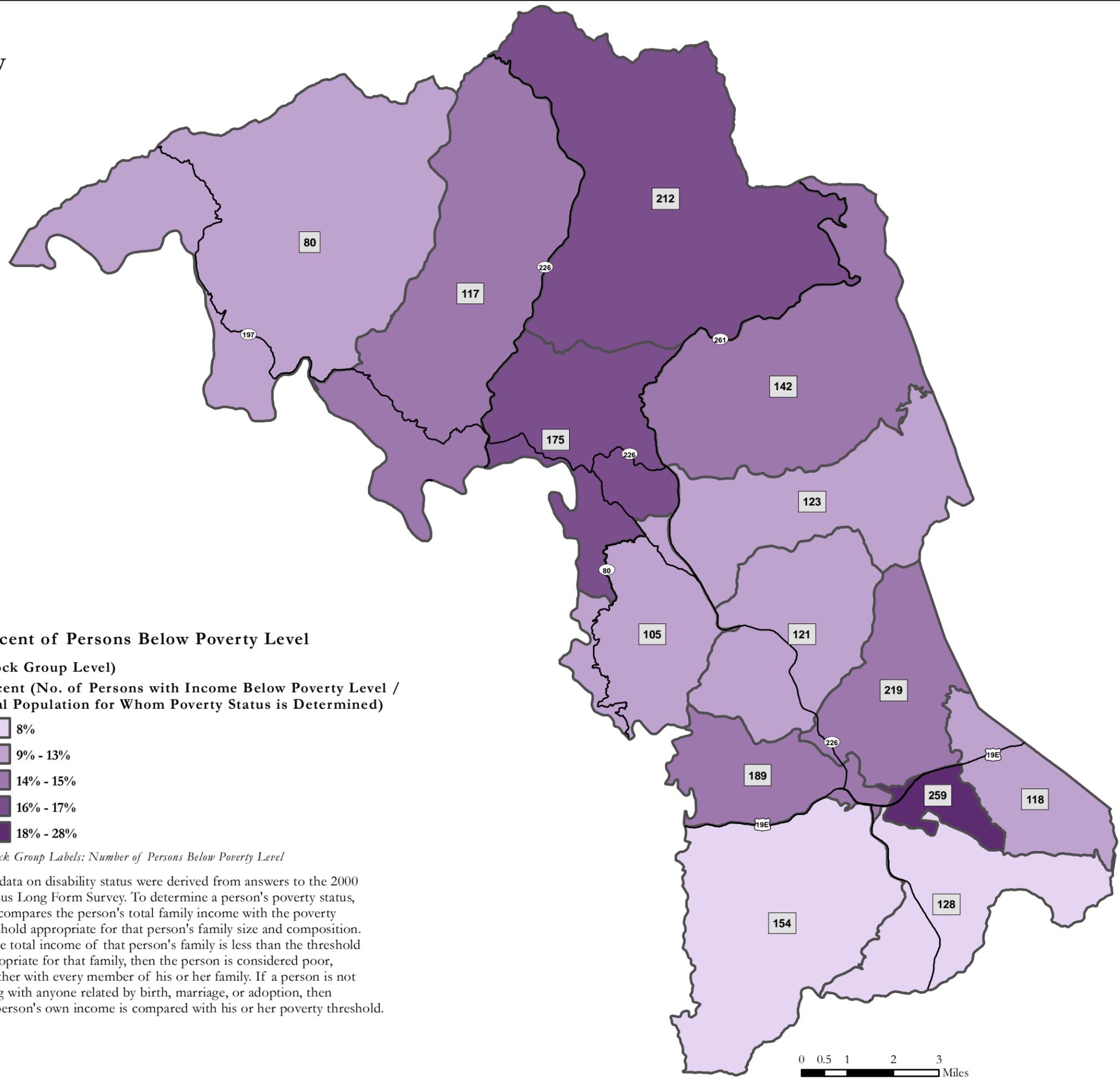
*\* Block Group Labels: Number of Civilian, Noninstitutionalized Pop. 5 Years & Over With Disabilities*

The data on disability status were derived from answers to the 2000 Census Long Form Survey. People counted as disabled may have a disability diagnosed by a physician, or they think they have a disability even though it is not officially diagnosed. Disabilities accounted for include sensory, emotional, physical, mental, self-care, employment, and go-outside-home disability for the population 5 years and over.



Created By:

**Mitchell County**  
**Figure 5: Poverty**  
**2000 U.S. Census**



**Percent of Persons Below Poverty Level**  
**(Block Group Level)**  
**Percent (No. of Persons with Income Below Poverty Level / Total Population for Whom Poverty Status is Determined)**

- 8%
- 9% - 13%
- 14% - 15%
- 16% - 17%
- 18% - 28%

*\* Block Group Labels: Number of Persons Below Poverty Level*

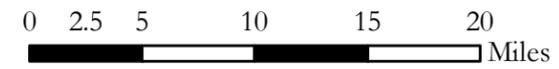
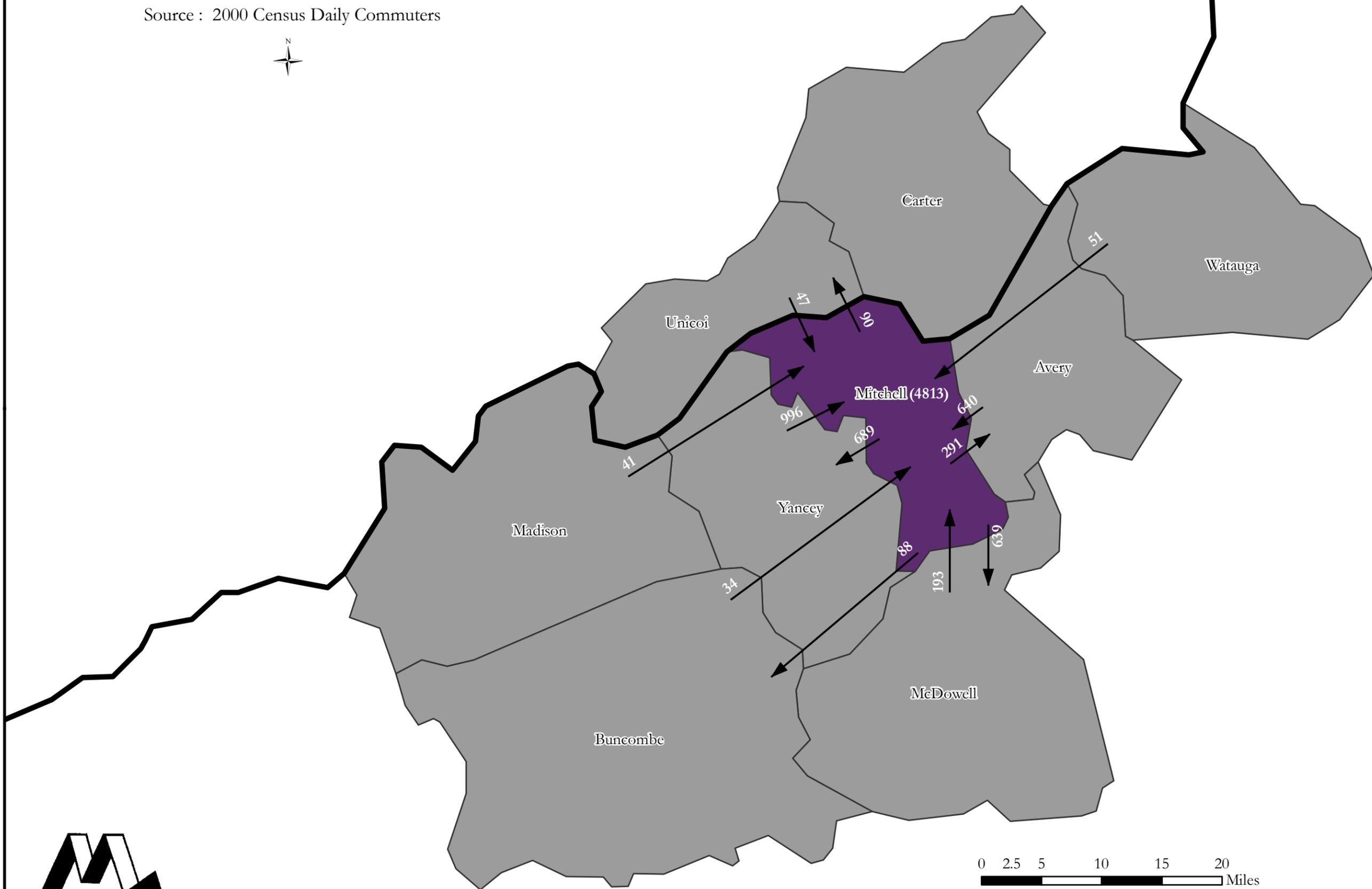
The data on disability status were derived from answers to the 2000 Census Long Form Survey. To determine a person's poverty status, one compares the person's total family income with the poverty threshold appropriate for that person's family size and composition. If the total income of that person's family is less than the threshold appropriate for that family, then the person is considered poor, together with every member of his or her family. If a person is not living with anyone related by birth, marriage, or adoption, then the person's own income is compared with his or her poverty threshold.



# Mitchell County

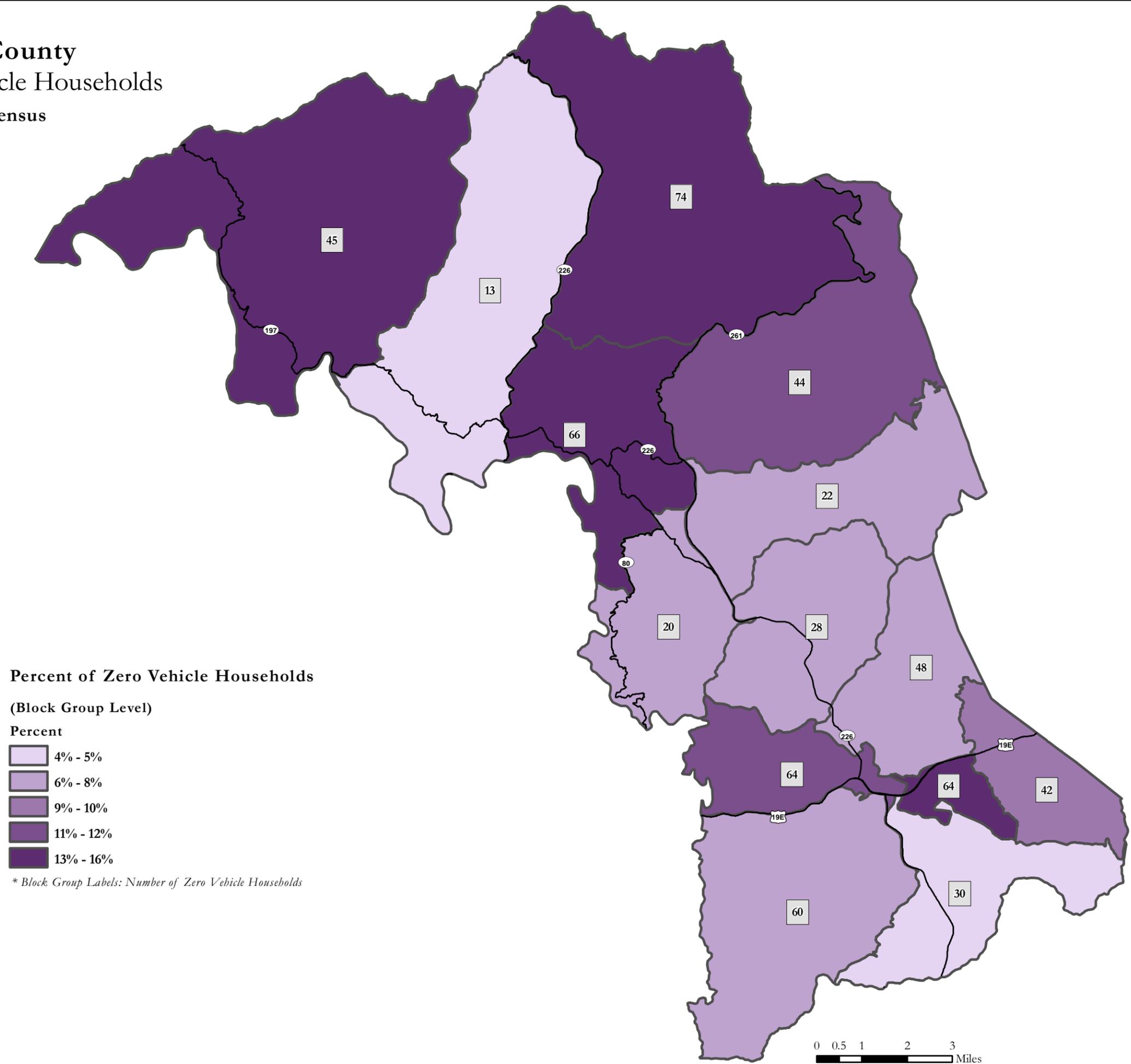
## Figure 6: Commuting Patterns

Source : 2000 Census Daily Commuters





**Mitchell County**  
Figure 7: Zero Vehicle Households  
2000 U.S. Census



**Percent of Zero Vehicle Households**

(Block Group Level)

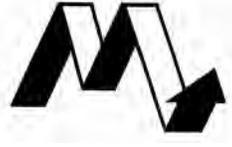
Percent

-  4% - 5%
-  6% - 8%
-  9% - 10%
-  11% - 12%
-  13% - 16%

\* Block Group Labels: Number of Zero Vehicle Households



## **Appendix C: SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTS**



**Agenda – Coordinated Transportation Workshop  
December 2, 2009**

9:00 – 9:30 Welcome/Overview

9:30 – 10:00 Overview of Current Services

10:00 – 11:00 Table Discussion - Transportation Needs

11:00 – 11:30 Eligible Activities - Circular Review

11: 30 – 12:00 Calculation of Service Strategies

12:00 – 12:30 Break

12:30 – 1:00 Prioritization Exercise

1:00 – 1:30 What's Next? Adjournment

Dear Community Leader/Stakeholders:

Mitchell County Transportation Authority (MCTA), in association with High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO) and North Carolina Department of Transportation, is hosting a community input session at the Bakersville Fire Department to solicit input for a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan for Mitchell County. This process is being led by the High Country RPO, in cooperation with MCTA and other community transportation providers in the region.

The Federal Transit Administration is requiring a coordinated plan of local transit services in order to apply for transportation program funds from the Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities Program (FTA Section 5310), Job Access and Reverse Commute Program (FTA Section 5316) and New Freedom Program (FTA Section 5317). This local coordinated plan will include:

- An assessment of available transportation services;
- An assessment of transportation needs;
- Strategies to address the identified gaps between current services and needs; and
- Priorities for implementation.

A coordinated plan must be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private and nonprofit transportation and human service transportation providers as well as members of the public. We are inviting members of various groups and organizations that include transportation partners, passengers and advocates, human service partners, community-based organizations, businesses, and public elected officials.

The declining economy, rising unemployment, and the high cost of fuel mean that we must explore all funding opportunities and develop the most efficient and effective use of transportation resources for getting people to important destinations, such as jobs and medical appointments. We would greatly appreciate your attendance and input to help identify transit needs for all residents and workers in our county.

If you are unable to attend please send a representative from your agency.

Should you have any questions, feel free to contact:

Craig Hughes, Transportation Planner  
High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO)  
Phone: 828-265-5434 FAX: 828-265-5439  
chughes@regiond.org

Barbara Buchanan, MCTA Director  
828-688-4715 FAX: 828-688-3510  
bbuchananmitchell@verizon.net

\*Directions to Bakersville Fire Department: When you come into Bakersville go straight through red light. You will come to caution light turn left continue to first street on left (Baker Lane). Station is first building on left.

**MITCHELL COUNTY  
TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY  
(MCTA)**

**YOU ARE INVITED**

by the North Carolina Department of Transportation to participate  
in the development of a  
Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services  
Transportation Plan

The planning workshop will be held **Wednesday, December 2, 2009**  
**from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.** at the Bakersville Fire Department  
located at 305 Baker Lane  
Facilitated by Pat Perry of the NC-DOT

The meeting will be to update and gather information from participating  
agencies and/or stakeholders about needed transportation services in  
Mitchell County. Your representation, expertise and involvement in this  
process would be greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions about this planning workshop please contact  
Craig Hughes, Transportation Planner  
High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO)  
Phone: 828-265-5434 FAX: 828-265-5439  
chughes@regiond.org

You may also contact:  
Barbara Buchanan, MCTA Director  
828-688-4715  
bbuchananmitchell@verizon.net  
Surveys and additional information  
are enclosed. Lunch will be provided

*HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!*



# Mitchell County Coordinated Transportation Plan Service Survey

We encourage you to provide feedback about current and needed public transportation Services in Mitchell County. The information you provide will be used to help identify future transportation services as well as improve existing services.

**Section I - EXISTING SERVICES of Human Service Agencies** (If you are not employed by a human service agency, skip to Section II)

- What type of transportation services does your agency provide directly or indirectly to clients?

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- If you don't provide the service directly, who provides these services for your agency?

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- If your agency provides transportation in agency-owned vehicles, how many vehicles does the agency own and what type of vehicles are they?

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- Where are your clients going? What times of day does your agency provide transportation services to your clients?

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- Could any of your transportation funding or other funds be used as matching funds? Describe.

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- Do you have any specific areas of interest in regard to trip coordination?\_\_\_\_\_

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- What improvements would you like to see made to existing public transportation services in your county? (Example: frequency of service, hours of service, new destinations)

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**Section II - NEW SERVICES**

- What kind of transportation service, not currently provided, is needed in your county?

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- What group(s) of people would use this service? (Example: commuters, elderly, disabled, shoppers, etc.)

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- What origins and destinations would be connected by this service? (Example: hospitals, schools, office parks, etc.)

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- Do you have any additional comments?

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Thank you for your time. Please bring this survey to the meeting on December 2, 2009 or return it, by November 30, 2009 to:

Craig Hughes, Transportation Planner  
High Country Rural Planning Organization (RPO)  
468 New Market Blvd.  
Boone, NC 28607  
Phone: 828-265-5434 Fax: 828-265-5439  
chughes@regiond.org