December 2020

# Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan

RPC Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham

## RESOLUTION 2020-2

### Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan of the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB)

**WHEREAS,** the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) has contracted with the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) to draft the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan (HSCTP), for the counties of Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair, and Walker; and

**WHEREAS,** the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) requires that projects funded through the Federal Transit Administration's Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program (Section 5310) be derived from a locally developed plan; and

**WHEREAS,** the HSCTP is the instrument by which the RPCGB staff describes the current state and future plans for human services transportation planning; and

**WHEREAS,** RPCGB is responsible for providing staff and matching funds to administer the HSCTP.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham, representing Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, Shelby, St. Clair, and Walker counties, hereby adopts the FY 2020 Update of the Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan as presented this 16th day of December, 2020.

Valerie Abbott, RPCGB Board Chair

Charles Ball, RPCGB Executive Director

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# HUMAN SERVICES COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN

## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

To be eligible for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) program funds, including but not limited to Section 5310 (Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities), proposed projects must be derived from a locally-developed human services coordinated transportation plan (HSCTP). The plan will guide the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham (RPCGB) in decision-making regarding the allocation of funds.

The RPCGB serves six counties—Blount, Chilton, Jefferson, St. Clair, Shelby, and Walker (see Figure 1)—and developed its first plan in 2006. The plan's purpose is to address mobility issues for transportation disadvantaged individuals. Many people mistakenly assume that transportation disadvantaged individuals comprise only those people with disabilities or people using wheelchairs. In fact, transportation disadvantaged includes those who are unable to transport themselves or to purchase transportation due to their age, income, health, or physical limitations.

While the HSCTP aims to improve quality, efficiency, and mobility of transportation services for all citizens in the Greater Birmingham area, it is specifically designed to improve services for transportation disadvantaged individuals by ensuring that communities coordinate transportation resources. Coordination enhances transportation access and facilitates the most appropriate and cost-effective transportation possible with available resources. In accordance with FTA guidelines, key elements of this plan include:

- Goals and Standards
- Inventory of Services
- Demographics
- Needs and Barriers
- Strategies to Address Needs

**FIGURE 1**
**Map of Greater Birmingham Region**

## GOALS

HSCTPs are intended to improve coordination of transportation services. Additional goals specified herein are intended to be supportive of coordination and lay the foundation for that goal.

### GOAL 1: Coordinate transportation within and across boundary lines

Coordination of regional transportation eliminates jurisdictional boundaries and seeks to provide quality service for its patrons. Multiple transportation providers or programs with different purposes, qualifications, and boundaries cause trips to be confusing, lengthy, inefficient, and sometimes impossible.

### GOAL 2: Improve efficiencies by sharing resources and using collective purchasing power

Pooling resources allows for greater accessibility to more people and improves efficiencies. Sharing resources, such as fuel, garages, and maintenance facilities, will lower the cost of providing human service transportation.

### GOAL 3: Increase availability of service, including expansion of capacity, service area, days/hours of service, and accessibility (sidewalks, ramps, etc.)

Increased availability and accessibility of transportation allows more people to travel for more trip purposes. Accessibility includes capital improvements, such as sidewalks, ramps, and bridges, as well as travel training, which enable people to walk or use mobility devices to access public transportation.

### GOAL 4: Increase public awareness of mobility options and funding

More usage means more efficiency, and choice/competition encourages quality of transportation services. Public education of transportation options and funding is an ongoing process.

## STANDARDS FOR FUNDING

The RPCGB ensures all applications for FTA Section 5310 funds comply with the standards set forth herein.

1. Proposed projects must seek to address service barriers and support one or more of the plan goals stated above.

2. Proposed projects must:
   - provide service to a broad range of people
   - expand service area, days, or hours of operations and/or
   - coordinate with another agency for provision of service. Coordination may include contracts for fuel, insurance, drivers, etc.

3. Applicants must identify a secure source for matching funds.

4. Applicants requesting vehicles must have at least one wheelchair-accessible vehicle in their fleet.

5. All agencies that receive funding to purchase vehicles must participate in efforts to coordinate the use of the vehicle(s) during down times and in emergency situations.

## INVENTORY OF SERVICES

The Greater Birmingham area offers various resources to meet the transportation needs of its citizens, including fixed route public transit (and ADA complementary paratransit), on-demand and demand response public transportation, nonprofit agencies that transport clients, private transportation providers such as local taxi services, and interregional service via Greyhound and Amtrak. In addition, Uber and Lyft operate throughout Alabama.

### Fixed Route

The Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority provides a fixed route transit service in the Birmingham area, with complementary ADA paratransit service within ¾ miles of the fixed route.

Walker County contracts with ClasTran to provide a deviated fixed route service within the City of Jasper.

### On Demand

The City of Birmingham has contracted with Via to operate an on-demand shared-ride service in a limited service area. The program hires local drivers and provides accessible vehicles for riders with disabilities.

Uber and Lyft operate throughout the State of Alabama.

### Demand Response

In the counties of Jefferson and Shelby, ClasTran operates curb-to-curb demand response service. ClasTran receives grant funding for capital equipment, administration, and operations under FTA Sections 5310 (urban) and 5311 (rural), along with local contributions for match.

Collat Jewish Family Services operates a door-to-door service for individuals who are over 60 or have a disability. Service is limited to a 5-mile radius of their location.

Blount, Chilton, and St. Clair counties have transportation primarily funded by the representative county government.

### Interregional

Amtrak has train service between Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, and Anniston. There is only one trip in and out every day, making it nearly impossible to complete a round trip in a single day.

Greyhound bus serves 38 cities in Alabama with several routes, making it possible to complete a one-day round trip between Birmingham and many cities.

### Vanpool/Carpool

CommuteSmart organizes the local vanpool and carpool program. CommuteSmart maintains a database to match riders, will provide a van, financial subsidy to riders, and other supporting services including a guaranteed ride home in case of emergency. Currently, there are 36 vanpools serving the Birmingham metropolitan area.

### School Bus

School districts provide transportation to school for students of their own district who are in grades K-12. They may also transport children for education assistance programs, including children living outside district boundaries who need to access programs not available in their home district.

### Indirect Providers

Indirect providers bring services to a person's home, so a trip is not needed. They may also transport certain people under certain circumstances. These organizations generally focus on a specific client group, for example:

- Grocery stores and pharmacies that make home deliveries
- Hot meal delivery services
- Personal services, companion, and in-home care
- Hospitals and medical clinics
- Residential long-term care facilities and group homes
- Senior and community centers
- Churches and faith-based organizations
- Child and adult care facilities
- Job training/employment development services
- Social service agencies

### Direct Providers

Direct transportation providers are private organizations whose primary purpose is to transport people. They contribute to overall community mobility and include:

- Taxicabs and private drivers
  - Jason's Van Service (Walker County)
  - King Cab
  - Moovmo
  - Need-A-Ride
  - Silver Cab
  - Uber and Lyft (throughout Alabama)
  - Yellow Cab

- Nonprofit
  - ClasTran
  - Collat Jewish Family Services
  - Kid One

- Nonemergency medical
  - Medical Transport of Alabama
  - Careavan Transport

- Airport shuttles
  - Groome Transportation

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic indicators help determine the likelihood of residents to be dependent on others for transportation. Typical indicators are age 65 and over, no vehicle in the household, no high school education, and poverty. At the time of this update, the most recent population data available was from the 2018 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. The combined population of the six-county region makes up 23% of the state's population. Jefferson is the most populous county, having 14% of the state's population.

Graphics and tables of demographic cohorts follow, each showing a comparison of all six counties (Tables 1 and 2 and Figures 2 through 7). The figures visually demonstrate the array of differences among the counties. Each county's demographic data are individually reviewed and presented later in this section.

**TABLE 1: Cohort Comparison of Counties**

| Cohort | Blount | Chilton | Jefferson | Shelby | St Clair | Walker |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Zero Vehicle Households | 4.1% | 4.9% | 7.7% | 2.9% | 3% | 5.7% |
| Population 65+ | 17.8% | 13.3% | 15% | 14.3% | 15.9% | 18.6% |
| Poverty | 14.4% | 18.6% | 17% | 8.4% | 13.2% | 19.7% |
| 25+ No High School Diploma | 19.8% | 17.8% | 12.4% | 7.9% | 15.2% | 19.1% |
| Median Household Income | $48,695 | $45,182 | $51,979 | $75,761 | $54,887 | $60,293 |
| Population Growth 2000-2018 | 13% | 11% | -3.3% | 47.4% | 34.9% | -8.8% |

**TABLE 2: Population and Growth (2000-2018)**

| County | Population 2000 | Population 2010 | Population 2018 (est.) | Growth 2000-2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blount | 51,024 | 57,322 | 57,645 | 13% |
| Chilton | 39,593 | 43,643 | 43,930 | 11% |
| Jefferson | 662,047 | 658,466 | 659,892 | -3.3% |
| Shelby | 143,293 | 195,085 | 211,261 | 47.4% |
| St. Clair | 64,742 | 83,593 | 87,306 | 34.9% |
| Walker | 70,713 | 67,023 | 64,493 | -8.8% |
| Region | 1,031,412 | 1,105,132 | 1,124,527 | 9.0% |
| State | 4,447,100 | 4,633,360 | 4,864,680 | 9.4% |

**FIGURE 2: Zero-Vehicle Households**

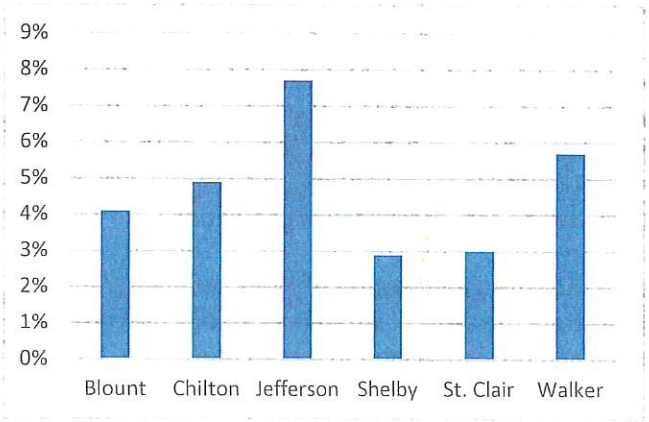



**FIGURE 3: Age 65 and Over**

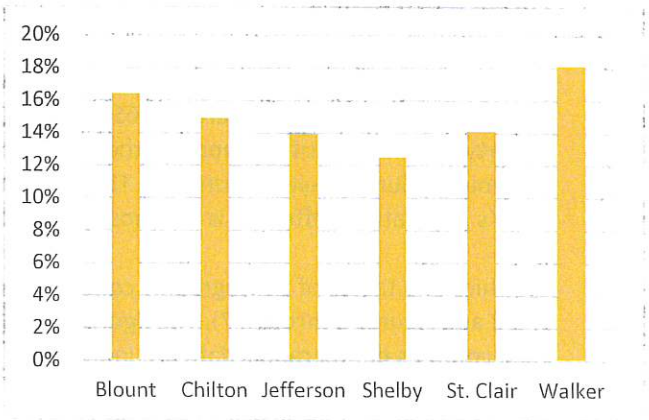



**FIGURE 4: Poverty**

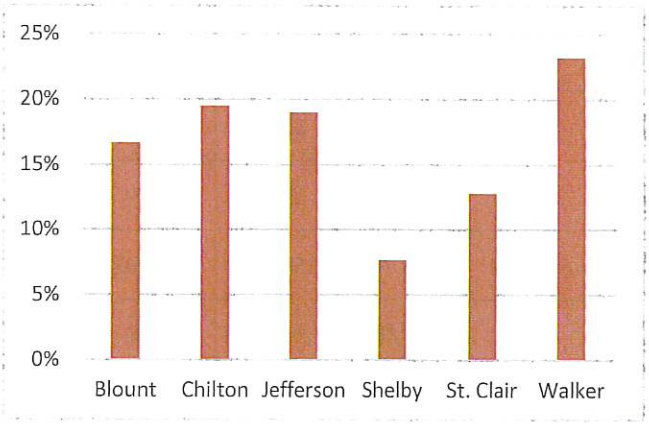



**FIGURE 5: Age 25+ No High School Diploma**

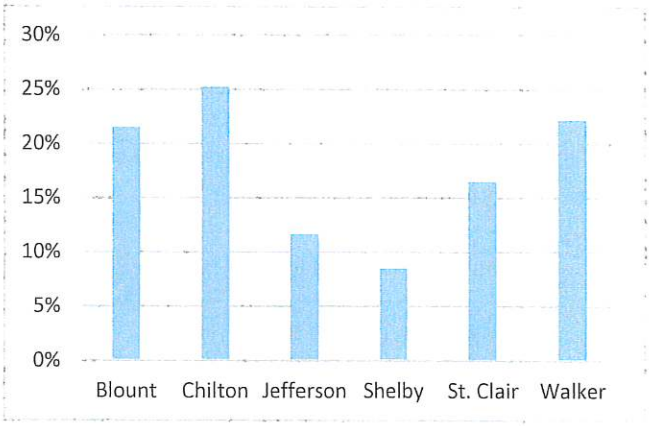



**FIGURE 6: Median Household Income**

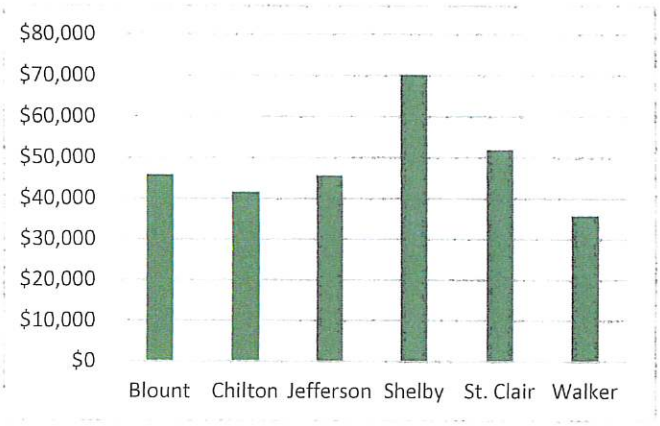
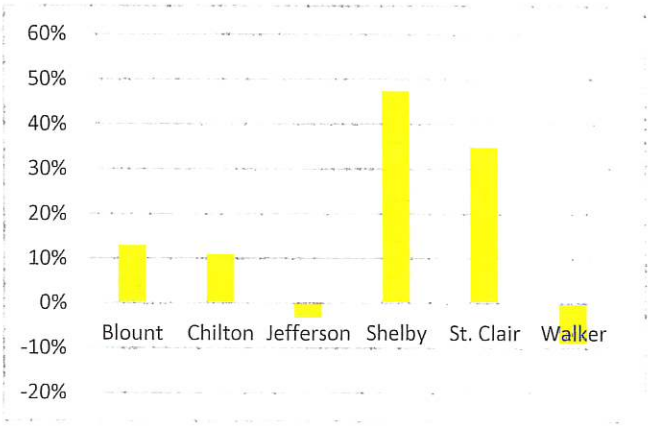



**FIGURE 7: Population Growth 2000-2015**



## Blount County

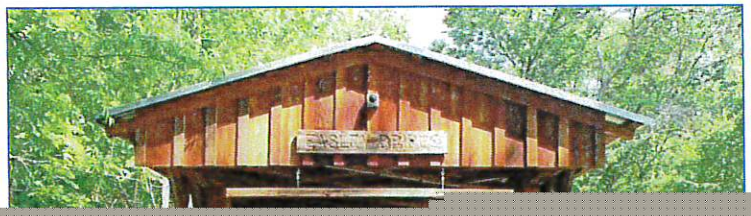
Blount County covers 651 square miles, mostly rural, having an average density of 89 people per square mile. Cities include Oneonta (county seat), Hayden, Allgood, Nectar, Blountsville, Locust Fork, Cleveland, Susan Moore, Snead, Rosa, and Highland Lake. The county is known for its picturesque covered bridges and Rickwood Caverns, which has limestone formations and an underground pool.

For the most part, Blount County falls within the median range of the demographic data in the six-county region. Notable exceptions are seen in education and population age 65 and over. Nearly 20% of Blount County's population age 25 and over has no high school diploma, and nearly 18% of the population is 65 or over. However, the median household income is in line with the state.

Blount County's 2018 estimated population was 57,645, growing 13% since 2000. This is very healthy when compared to the region and state at 9% and 9.4%, respectively. The Birmingham urbanized area (UZA) has expanded into a portion of Blount, which is partially responsible for the county's healthy growth rate.

**TABLE 3: Demographic Comparisons for Blount County**

| Cohort | Blount | Region | Alabama |
|---|---|---|---|
| Zero Vehicle Households | 4.1% | 4.7% | 6.2% |
| Population 65+ | 17.8% | 15.8% | 16.1% |
| Poverty | 14.4% | 15.2% | 17.5% |
| 25+ No High School Diploma | 19.8% | 15.4% | 14.2% |
| Median Household Income | $48,695 | $56,133 | $48,486 |
| Population Growth 2000-2018 | 13% | 9.0% | 9.4% |



## TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS

People were asked to identify barriers to transportation. Funding was only mentioned a few times and was not at the top of the list.

### Availability

The barrier that participants cited most often was availability of transportation, which includes service area, hours of operation, and dependability. Public transportation service is limited, even in Jefferson and Shelby counties, where some public transit exists. Many people are unable to use Section 5310 demand response service, due to capacity constraints and eligibility criteria.

Of concern in Blount, St. Clair, and Walker counties is the ability to get to and from other counties, especially since the bulk of medical and social services are in Jefferson County. People are denied services for which they are eligible because they cannot access facilities.

### Infrastructure

Sidewalks and bike lanes are often nonexistent, making it necessary to walk and ride in streets or in other areas not designed for pedestrians or cyclists. For individuals living within a few miles of a town or grocery store, walking or biking is an obvious and convenient choice. But on a two-lane road where vehicles are traveling over 55 miles per hour, it is not feasible.

### Public Awareness

Many people are unaware that public transportation is available in their county whether they are eligible. Hence, there is a need for public education and marketing. Public awareness leads to increased efficiencies and overall effectiveness. Other benefits of increased access to jobs and shopping is an increased tax base and overall public health.

Additionally, the public needs to be educated about overall funding of transit. Most people are unaware of how much public transportation costs and how it is funded.

### Coordination

Another barrier is the lack of interest in sharing resources. There is a prevailing "what-comes-here-stays-here" mentality. Jurisdictions as well as agencies may be hesitant to share resources because they are worried about not getting their fair share. However, sharing resources increases funding efficiencies and allows more people to access more services.

## STRATEGIES

The following strategies will be used to address the transportation needs and barriers indicated above.

1. Enforce Standards for Funding for FTA Sections 5310. Only applications requesting capital equipment for projects that serve a broad range of people, expand service area, hours, and/or days of operation, and/or engage in coordinated contracts will be funded.

2. Develop a task force to assist applicants with collaboration and sharing of resources to increase efficiencies.

3. Coordinate service across county lines.

4. Assist the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority in service development and route adjustment.

5. Develop ways to expand services. In the urbanized area, this may include specialized service, express buses, and bus rapid transit.

6. Begin a public awareness campaign regarding available services and advocate for designation of funding.

7. Identify and reduce duplication of services.

8. Work with employers to participate in CommuteSmart, the local ridesharing program.

9. Encourage a central call center for Jefferson and Shelby counties.

10. Assist with the formation of volunteer programs to provide transportation services.

11. Look for partners to promote the benefits of public transportation services.

12. At a minimum under FTA Section 5310, sustain current levels of service, including vehicle replacement, where appropriate.

13. Other strategies or proposed projects not listed herein will be considered for funding if they demonstrate concurrence with stated Goals and movement toward resolution of Needs and/or Barriers.