

MEOC Transit

Transit Development Plan *Fiscal Years 2021-2030*

Prepared by:



Final Report

August 2020



Prepared for:



Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc.

Under contract to:



Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation



Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Overview of Public Transportation in the Region

Introduction	1-1
Background	1-1
<i>Economy of the Service Area</i>	<i>1-2</i>
<i>Population</i>	<i>1-4</i>
History	1-4
Governance and Organizational Structure	1-4
Previous TDP Recommendations	1-6
Transit Services Provided and Areas Served	1-6
<i>Mobility Management Program</i>	<i>1-6</i>
Fare Structure and Payment Methods	1-7
Fleet	1-7
Existing Facilities	1-10
<i>Buildings</i>	<i>1-10</i>
<i>Bus Stops and Passenger Amenities.....</i>	<i>1-11</i>
Transit Security Program	1-11
Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Program.....	1-11
Data/Fare Collection Process.....	1-11
<i>Data Collection</i>	<i>1-11</i>
<i>Fare Collection</i>	<i>1-12</i>
Public Outreach.....	1-12
Other Area Transportation Providers/Services	1-13
<i>Other Public Transportation Services in the Region</i>	<i>1-13</i>
<i>Taxi and Private Transportation Providers.....</i>	<i>1-15</i>
<i>Human Service Transportation</i>	<i>1-15</i>
<i>Medicaid Transportation</i>	<i>1-15</i>
<i>Intercity Bus.....</i>	<i>1-15</i>
<i>Amtrak.....</i>	<i>1-15</i>

Chapter 2: Goals, Objectives, and Standards

Introduction	2-1
Update on MEOC Transit Operating Environment Since Prior TDP.....	2-1
Current Unmet Needs and Potential Improvements.....	2-2
Stakeholder Outreach	2-2
Transit Program Goals	2-3
Performance, Safety and Service Standards	2-7
<i>DRPT's Performance-Based Allocation Metrics.....</i>	<i>2-7</i>
<i>Service Standards</i>	<i>2-8</i>
Process for updating Goals, Objectives, and Standards	2-9

Chapter 3: Service and System Evaluation and Transit Needs Analysis

Introduction	3-1
System Evaluation	3-1
<i>Operating Data.....</i>	<i>3-1</i>
<i>Types of Services Provided.....</i>	<i>3-2</i>
<i>Demand Response Origins and Destinations</i>	<i>3-3</i>
Financial Information	3-7
<i>Operating Budget</i>	<i>3-7</i>
<i>Capital Budget.....</i>	<i>3-8</i>
Peer Analysis	3-9
Recent Compliance Results.....	3-10
MEOC Transit Rider Survey.....	3-11
<i>Customer Feedback and Travel Habits.....</i>	<i>3-11</i>
<i>Rider Profile</i>	<i>3-13</i>
MEOC Transit Community Survey.....	3-14
<i>Community Awareness and Impressions</i>	<i>3-14</i>
<i>Desired Service Improvements.....</i>	<i>3-14</i>
<i>Respondent Profile</i>	<i>3-16</i>
<i>Comments</i>	<i>3-16</i>
Input from MERTAC.....	3-16
Population Analysis	3-17
<i>Population</i>	<i>3-17</i>
<i>Population Density</i>	<i>3-18</i>
<i>Population Forecast.....</i>	<i>3-19</i>
Transit Dependent Populations	3-21
<i>Autoless Households.....</i>	<i>3-25</i>
<i>Older Adult Population</i>	<i>3-27</i>

<i>Youth Population</i>	<i>3-29</i>
<i>Individuals with Disabilities</i>	<i>3-31</i>
Title VI Demographic Analysis	3-33
<i>Minority Population.....</i>	<i>3-33</i>
<i>Below Poverty Populations</i>	<i>3-33</i>
<i>Limited-English Proficiency.....</i>	<i>3-36</i>
Land Use Profile	3-37
<i>Major Trip Generators</i>	<i>3-37</i>
<i>Employment Travel Patterns</i>	<i>3-43</i>
<i>Employment Projections.....</i>	<i>3-45</i>
<i>Park-&-Ride Lots.....</i>	<i>3-46</i>
Summary of Demographic Analyses	3-48
Review of Previous Plans and Studies.....	3-48
<i>VTrans 2040: Virginia’s Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan</i>	<i>3-48</i>
<i>Local Plans.....</i>	<i>3-49</i>
Chapter Summary	3-50

Chapter 4: Service and Capital Improvement Plan

Introduction	4-1
Service Improvements.....	4-1
<i>Expansion of the Cavalier Connection.....</i>	<i>4-1</i>
<i>County Connector Pilot – Wise County/Norton.....</i>	<i>4-4</i>
<i>Limited Saturday Service</i>	<i>4-7</i>
<i>Later Hours of Service.....</i>	<i>4-8</i>
<i>Deviated Fixed Route Service to Kingsport, Tennessee</i>	<i>4-9</i>
System Re-Branding	4-12
Capital Proposals.....	4-14
<i>Shelters and Stops</i>	<i>4-14</i>
<i>Bus Stop Signs.....</i>	<i>4-15</i>
Summary of TDP Initiatives	4-16

Chapter 5: Implementation Plan

Introduction	5-1
Transit Development Plan Initiatives by Year	5-1
<i>FY2021.....</i>	<i>5-1</i>
<i>FY2022.....</i>	<i>5-1</i>
<i>FY2023.....</i>	<i>5-1</i>

<i>FY2024</i>	5-2
<i>FY2025</i>	5-2
<i>FY2026</i>	5-2
<i>FY2027</i>	5-2
<i>FY2028 – FY2030</i>	5-2
Capital Needs	5-3
<i>Vehicle Replacement and Expansion Plan</i>	5-3
<i>Passenger Amenities</i>	5-7
<i>Technology and Equipment</i>	5-7

Chapter 6: Implementation Plan

Introduction	6-1
Operating Expenses and Funding Sources	6-1
Capital Expenses and Funding Sources	6-5
<i>State of Good Repair</i>	6-5
<i>Minor Enhancements</i>	6-6
<i>Total Capital Expenses over TDP Timeframe</i>	6-10

Appendix A: MEOC Board Members and MERTAC Members

Appendix B: MEOC Transit Rider Survey

Appendix C: MEOC Transit Rider Survey Comments

Appendix D: MEOC Transit Community Survey

Appendix E: MEOC Transit Community Survey Comments

Chapter 1

Overview of Public Transportation in the Region

INTRODUCTION

A transit development plan (TDP) is a short-range plan that outlines the services and projects that a transit provider intends to implement during a specific planning horizon. The plan also estimates the resources needed to implement the initiatives, as well as the funding opportunities that are likely to be available. The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) requires that any public transit operator receiving state funding prepare, adopt, and submit a TDP at least every six years. DRPT provides a set of TDP requirements that form the basis of the planning effort. The most recent DRPT guidelines for the preparation of a TDP were published in February 2017 and call for the plan to encompass a ten-year planning horizon. Mountain Empire Older Citizens (MEOC) Transit's previous TDP was completed in 2011 and covered a six-year planning horizon. The planning horizon for this TDP includes FY2021 through FY2030.

This current TDP for MEOC Transit will provide DRPT with an up-to-date record of related transit capital and operating budgets and provide MEOC Transit with a basis for including capital and operating programs in the Six Year Improvement Program (SYIP), the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), and the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

Chapter 1 of the plan provides an overview of the transit system and background information that was used for subsequent data collection, analysis, and recommendations for the ten-year plan.

BACKGROUND

MEOC Transit is a service provided by Mountain Empire Older Citizens, the designated Area Agency on Aging in the region. The agency also provides many other community services addressing a wide variety of needs. MEOC is one of 25 designated area agencies on aging in Virginia, each of which provides numerous services to assist older adults in their communities. The agency operates in the counties of Lee, Scott, and Wise, as well as the city of Norton, in southwest Virginia.



In the heart of the Appalachian Mountains, MEOC's service area straddles the Appalachian Plateau region to the north and the Valley and Ridge Region to the south.

Significant transportation corridors that serve the region include US Highways 58, Alternate 58, 23, and 421, and VA highways 65, 71, and 72.

There are no interstate

highways within the service area, but Interstate 81 passes southeast of the region. Rail lines in the service area include both the Norfolk Southern Railroad and CSX.

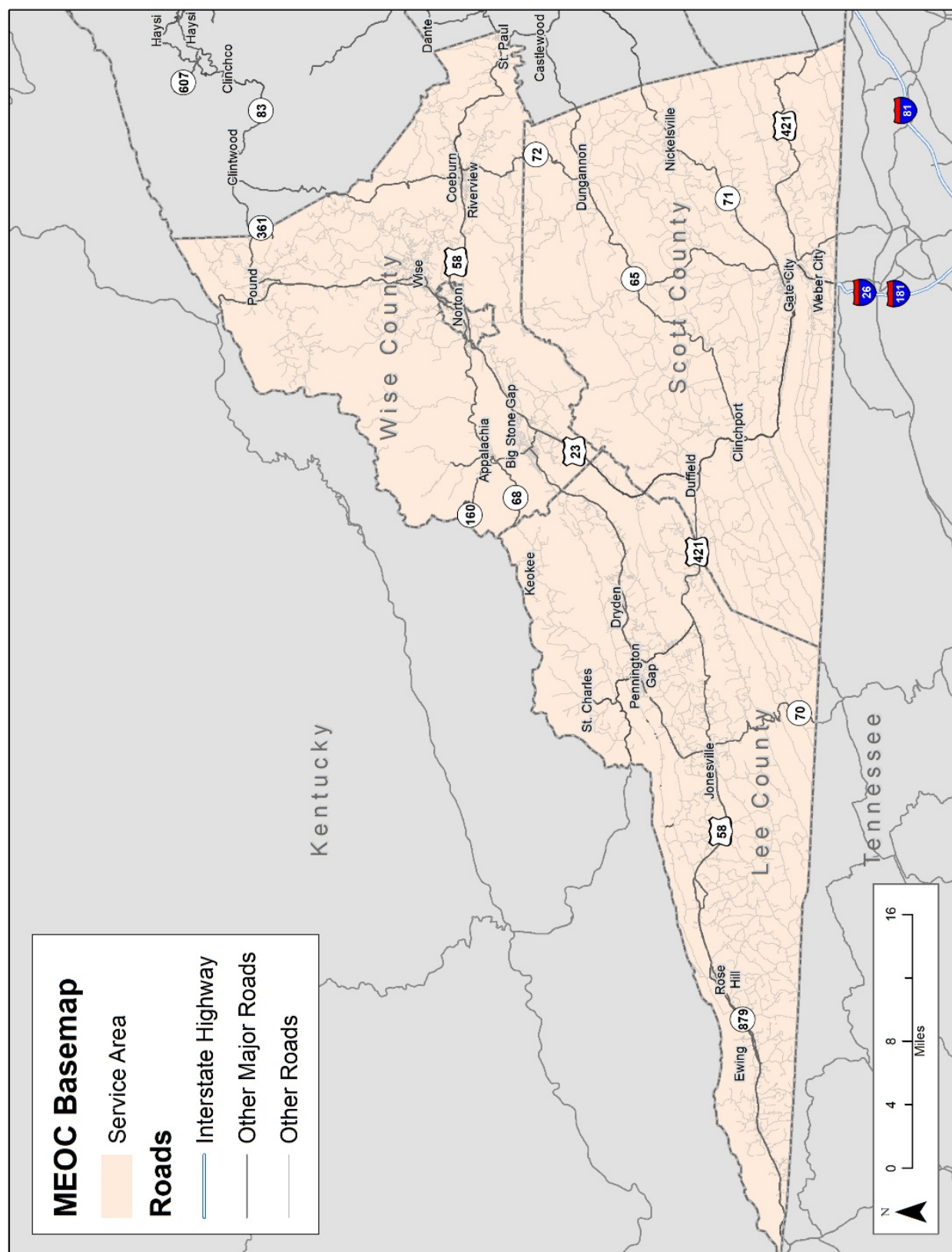
Wise County is the most populous of the jurisdictions in the service area and surrounds Norton, the traditional economic center of the study area. Additional population centers include Big Stone Gap, Wise, Coeburn, and Appalachia. Important municipalities in Scott County include Gate City, Duffield, and Weber City. Gate City and Weber City are also included in the Kingsport, TN urbanized area. Jonesville, Pennington Gap, and Rose Hill serve as the population centers in Lee County.

University of Virginia – Wise is the region's major four-year university and is located in Wise. This campus has been growing and there may be opportunities for MEOC Transit to provide additional service in the town of Wise. The region's community college, Mountain Empire Community College (MECC) is located in Big Stone Gap. A map of the service area is provided as Figure 1-1.

Economy of the Service Area

Historically, manufacturing, mining, and agriculture formed the bulk of industry and employment in the MEOC service area and southwest Virginia at large. Since 1990, employment in each industry has steadily declined. To bolster the economy in the wake of the loss of traditional employment opportunities, the region has strategized the creation of a "creative economy", emphasizing the region's arts, culture, and history to attract tourism. MEOC's service area also forms part of Virginia's e-Region, an economic development initiative sponsored by the Virginia Coalfield Economic Development Authority. This initiative touts that the region's convenient location, broadband support, and deep ties to the energy market makes it an emerging center for information technology businesses. Efforts have been made to diversify the region's economy as manufacturing, mining, and agriculture jobs become less prevalent.

Figure 1-1: MEOC Transit Service Area



Population

Data from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2014-2018 5-year estimates indicates that the total population of MEOC's service area is 89,158, which is down 5% from the 2010 Census population of 94,174. Since 2010, the counties of Lee, Scott, and Wise experienced a population decrease of at least 5%. Norton grew marginally during that time period, experiencing a 1% population increase. From 2020-2040, the population of the service area as a whole is expected to decrease by 4.1%. Detailed population trend analyses are provided in Chapter 3 of the TDP.

HISTORY

MEOC, an Area Agency on Aging, has been providing some form of transportation service since its inception in 1974. The first transportation services offered were focused on home delivered meals and congregate nutrition for older adults, funded through the Older Americans Act. Rural public transportation services were added in 1983, with federal funding assistance through DRPT. During the 1980s, MEOC's transportation program grew through a series of contractual arrangements with a number of human service programs, including a 1985 pilot program with the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services, and the town of Wise. In 1989 MEOC was recognized by Lee, Wise, and Scott counties, and the city of Norton as the designated public transportation provider. These resolutions allowed MEOC to access State Aid for Public Transit funding, which it did for the first time in 1990.

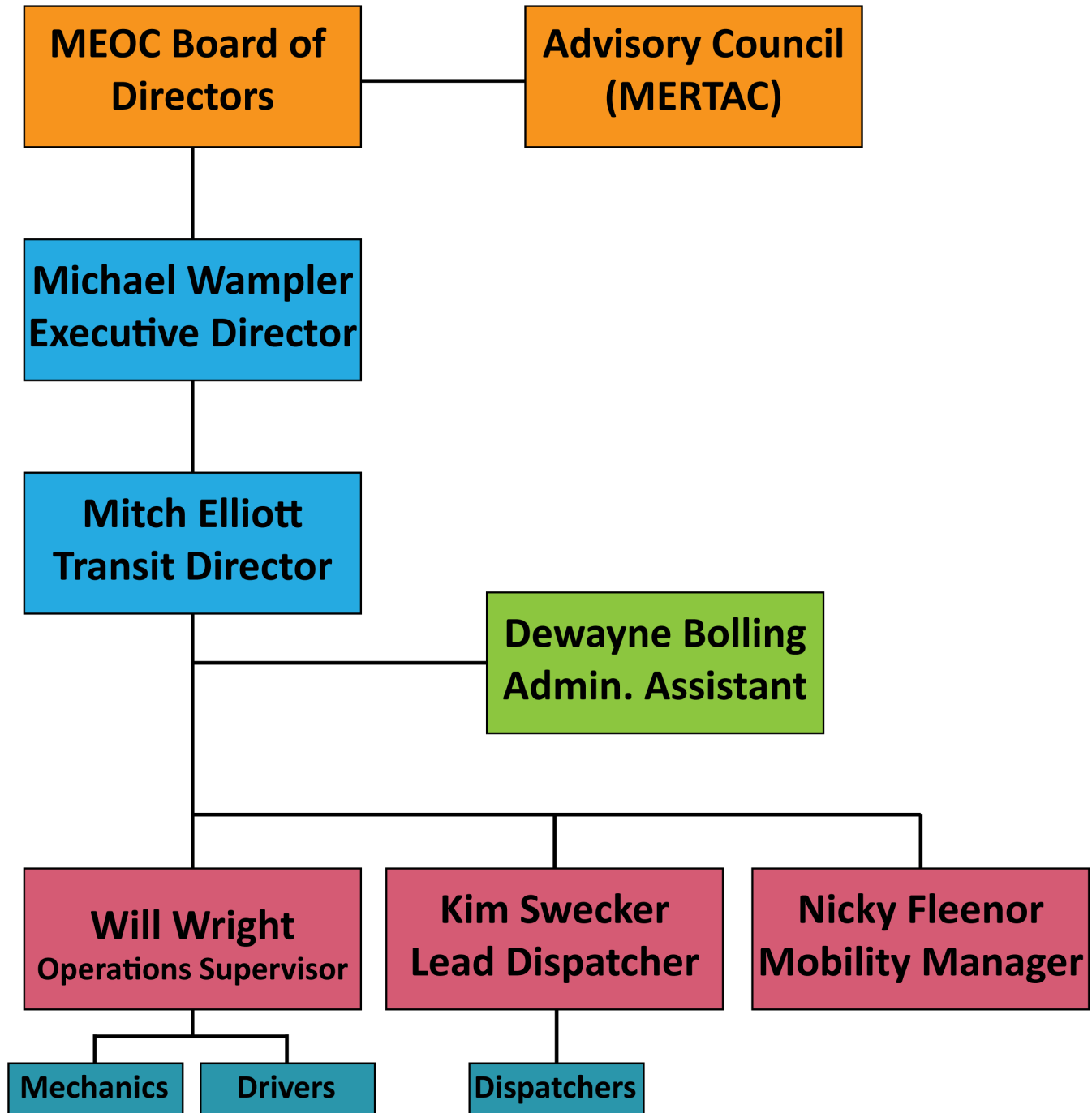
As a coordinated transportation provider throughout the course of its history, MEOC took the lead in developing the region's coordinated plan, required for funding assistance under the Federal Sections 5310, 5316, and 5317 programs. The resulting plan, "Mobility Vision," was one of the first developed in Virginia, with guidance provided by the Mountain Empire Regional Transportation Advisory Council (MERTAC). MERTAC has continued to remain active and served as the Advisory Committee for this Transit Development Plan, as it did for the 2011 TDP.

GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

MEOC operates MEOC Transit directly, and all staff members are employees of MEOC. The vehicles are maintained by employees at the MEOC Transit facility, which was completed in 2005. The MEOC Board of Directors serves as the Board for the transit program, with the MERTAC Council serving as an advisory group. MEOC's Transit Director manages the program and reports to the agency's Executive Director.

This structure is depicted in Figure 1-2.

Figure 1-2: MEOC Transit Organizational Chart



A list of the current MEOC board members and a list of the MERTAC members are provided in Appendix A.

PREVIOUS TDP RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2011 TDP recommended the following service improvements:

- Introduction of Saturday service in the form of a proposed “Saturday Shopper Shuttle”;
- Introduction of deviated fixed route services in the form of a County Connector network; and
- Introduction of a regional connector service between Big Stone Gap and Kingsport, TN.

These services were not able to be implemented over the past several years due to financial constraints. Limited Saturday service and the development of deviated fixed route services are included in this TDP, with the details outlined in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

TRANSIT SERVICES PROVIDED AND AREAS SERVED

MEOC operates curb-to-curb demand-response service within the counties of Lee, Scott, and Wise and the city of Norton. This service is operated Monday-Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. To schedule a ride, customers must call in to the transit office at least 24 hours prior to their desired ride time.

While all of the services provided are open to the public, according to the most recent cost allocation sample completed by MEOC (2019), about 73.5% are considered to be general public transportation trips with the remaining 26.5% focusing on particular programs. These programs include the following:

- Adult day care
- Congregate meals/home delivered meals
- Developmental services
- Independence house
- Medicaid
- PACE

Mobility Management Program

MEOC has had a mobility management program in place since 2009. The Mobility Manager serves as a liaison between MEOC and other service providers, coordinating transportation for people with unmet needs and providing case management for those with special transportation needs. The mobility management program was the first step in implementing

MERTAC’s vision of a “one-call” transportation center. The Mobility Manager also serves as the supervisor for the volunteer driver program.

Volunteer Driver Program

MEOC’s volunteer driver program focuses on recruiting and training volunteers to drive MEOC vehicles (vans, SUVs, or sedans) to provide transportation for people who need to access areas that MEOC Transit cannot effectively serve. A typical trip provided by a volunteer would be to get to an appointment in Kingsport (TN).

Senior Transportation Grant

From 2012 through 2019, MEOC received funding assistance through DRPT’s Senior Transportation Grant to provide additional senior transportation services throughout the region as well as to assist the Veterans’ remote clinics with transporting older veterans to the central clinics and to the VA Hospital in Johnson City. MEOC was not awarded this grant for FY2020. MEOC has submitted the 2021 grant application to DRPT and it includes a scaled-back version of the service that is planned to operate as a shuttle, connecting people from various pick-up locations and bringing them to the central clinics.

FARE STRUCTURE AND PAYMENT METHODS

MEOC Transit charges a \$1.50 fare per boarding. Adults over the age of 60 and children under the age of 18 can ride for \$0.75. Children five years of age and younger ride free.

Fares can be paid directly to the driver via either cash or a punch pass. Otherwise, a rider can choose to be billed and can pay with a check, credit card, or cash. A rider can also choose to pre-pay fares by purchasing a multi-ride punch pass, which the driver punches after each ride.

FLEET

As of May 2020, MEOC Transit had a fleet of 49 in-service vehicles. The majority of these vehicles are cutaway buses, while the remaining are smaller accessible minivans and raised-roof vans. Most vehicles have capacity for twelve passengers, and all but one are equipped to transport people who use wheelchairs. With the addition of the 2020 vehicles, the average mileage of the service fleet is 120,000 miles, down from 130,930 prior to the arrival of the 2020 vehicle replacements. The vehicles are not equipped with bicycle racks. Photos of two MEOC Transit vehicles are provided in Figures 1-3 and 1-4. Table 1-1 provides a detailed fleet inventory.

Figure 1-3: MEOC Transit Minivan



Figure 1-4: MEOC Transit Cutaway



Table 1-1: MEOC Transit Vehicle Fleet

Manufacturer	Vehicle ID	Year	Type	Status	Odometer Reading May 2020	Seating Capacity (Ambulatory)	Wheelchair
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 12	2020	Cutaway	In Service	6,466	12	4
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 14	2020	Cutaway	In Service	4,009	12	4
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 15	2020	Cutaway	In Service	5,634	12	4
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 16	2020	Cutaway	In Service	4,460	12	4
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 17	2020	Cutaway	In Service	3,318	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 92	2019	Cutaway	In Service	43,826	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 93	2019	Cutaway	In Service	47,110	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 94	2019	Cutaway	In Service	37,211	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 95	2019	Cutaway	In Service	28,806	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 96	2019	Cutaway	In Service	35,857	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 97	2019	Van	In Service	26,840	8	2
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 83	2018	Van	In Service	52,354	8	0
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 84	2018	Cutaway	In Service	84,587	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 85	2018	Cutaway	In Service	81,794	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 86	2018	Cutaway	In Service	69,240	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 87	2018	Cutaway	In Service	66,411	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 88	2018	Cutaway	In Service	73,476	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 89	2018	Cutaway	In Service	81,753	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 90	2018	Cutaway	In Service	80,859	12	4
BRA - Braun	MEOC 91	2018	Van	In Service	57,022	3	1
BRA - Braun	MEOC 82	2017	Van	In Service	87,287	5	1
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-77	2017	Cutaway	In Service	82,624	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-78	2017	Cutaway	In Service	112,025	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-79	2017	Cutaway	In Service	115,463	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-80	2017	Cutaway	In Service	130,389	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-81	2017	Cutaway	In Service	126,432	12	4
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 63	2016	Cutaway	In Service	177,737	15	4
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 64	2016	Cutaway	In Service	132,324	15	4
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 65	2016	Cutaway	In Service	136,620	15	4
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 66	2016	Cutaway	In Service	166,800	12	4
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 67	2016	Cutaway	In Service	149,817	15	4
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 68	2016	Cutaway	In Service	164,418	15	4
BRA - Braun	MEOC 76	2016	Van	In Service	114,924	5	1
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-70	2016	Cutaway	In Service	142,783	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-72	2016	Cutaway	In Service	158,095	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-73	2016	Cutaway	In Service	145,250	12	4
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-74	2016	Cutaway	In Service	141,699	12	4
Ford Explorer	MEOC -75	2016	SUV	In Service	57,017	6	0
Ford Explorer	MEOC-61	2015	SUV	In Service	130,080	6	0
Ford Explorer	MEOC-62	2015	SUV	In Service	77,873	6	0

Manufacturer	Vehicle ID	Year	Type	Status	Odometer Reading May 2020	Seating Capacity (Ambulatory)	Wheelchair
GMC - General Motors Corporation	MEOC-55	2014	Cutaway	In Service	213,592	15	4
Chevrolet Senator II	MEOC-56	2014	Cutaway	In Service	234,599	15	2
Chevrolet Senator II	MEOC-57	2014	Cutaway	In Service	197,163	15	2
Chevrolet Senator II	MEOC-58	2014	Cutaway	In Service	184,260	15	2
Chevrolet Senator II	MEOC-60	2014	Cutaway	In Service	202,647	19	2
GMC - General Motors Corporation	MEOC-9	2014	Cutaway	In Service	223,821	19	2
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC-8	2013	Cutaway	Out of Service	217,072	15	2
Chevrolet Supreme	MEOC-6	2013	Cutaway	In Service	185,536	15	2
SPC - Startrans (Supreme)	MEOC 1	2012	Cutaway	In Service	244,721	12	2
Ford Supreme	MEOC-47	2011	Cutaway	In Service	278,941	12	2
Ford Supreme	MEOC 49	2011	Cutaway	In Service	233,271	19	1
Ford Supreme	MEOC 51	2011	Cutaway	In Service	234,787	15	2
SPC - Startrans (Supreme)	MEOC 53	2011	Cutaway	In Service	270,931	19	1
GMC 2500	MEOC 7	2004	Truck	In-Service	58,638	2	0

EXISTING FACILITIES

Buildings

MEOC Transit operations are based at the agency's own facility, which was funded through DRPT/FTA grants. The transit facility is located on the same property as MEOC's main facility. Photos of the MEOC Transit facility are provided in Figures 1-5 and 1-6.

Figure 1-5: MEOC Transit Facility



Figure 1-6: MEOC Transit Facility



Bus Stops and Passenger Amenities

As a demand-response transportation program, MEOC Transit does not have passenger waiting shelters, benches, or bus stop signs.

TRANSIT SECURITY PROGRAM

MEOC Transit's security measures include the following:

- The facility is equipped with security cameras.
- The vehicles are equipped with security cameras.
- The parking lot is well lit at night, though it is not fenced.
- The local police department patrols the MEOC parking area on a regular basis.

INTELLIGENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS (ITS) PROGRAM

MEOC uses iPads on the vehicles to interact with the agency's scheduling software, ParaPlan. The iPads provide a cellular-based link between the vehicles and the dispatcher.

DATA / FARE COLLECTION PROCESS

Data Collection

MEOC Transit's data collection process begins with driver manifests and pre-trip sheets. These documents log starting time and ending time, as well as starting mileage and ending mileage. The manifests are also used to log ridership by marking a yes, cancel, or no- show on each scheduled passenger pick-up. This information is supplied electronically via tablets assigned to each driver, with paper backup copies employed in case of data failure. If there is an issue with the vehicle that needs to be looked at by maintenance, the drivers will write it down on the pre-trip sheet and complete a work order request form.

The data generated by the drivers is stored in MEOC's software program, ParaPlan. These data include ridership, miles, and hours by program. MEOC's Administrative Assistant uses a summary sheet generated from ParaPlan to report these data monthly to DRPT's online grant administration (OLGA). The monthly summary sheets are totaled each year to generate the information required for the National Transit Database.

Fare Collection

Fares are collected by drivers in envelopes and submitted to the office to store in a secured money box. The money box is emptied once a week and counted by the Transit Administrative Assistant and Transit Director. The money is then sent to the Business Office with a deposit slip.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

There are four primary ways in which MEOC Transit conducts public outreach. These are:

- **Fleet Visibility** - With a fleet of 49 vehicles, MEOC Transit has a physical presence within the communities that it serves. Each of the vehicles has the MEOC Transit logo and is readily identifiable.
- **MEOC Transit Brochures** - MEOC Transit has a printed brochure that highlights the services that are available, indicates the fare structure, provides information about accessibility and basic policies, and provides contact information. The brochures are widely distributed in the service area.
- **MEOC Website and Social Media** - The MEOC Transit website provides all of the information that a person would need in order to access a ride. The MEOC Transit website is linked with the MEOC website. MEOC also has an active presence on Facebook and Twitter, using the platforms to post announcements and news. Both social media platforms were used to post a link to the community transportation survey conducted for this TDP effort.
- **Community Presentations and Events** – MEOC Transit staff attend periodic community events and have brochures available for distribution. The Mobility Manager conducts a number of presentations to civic organizations, describing the services offered.

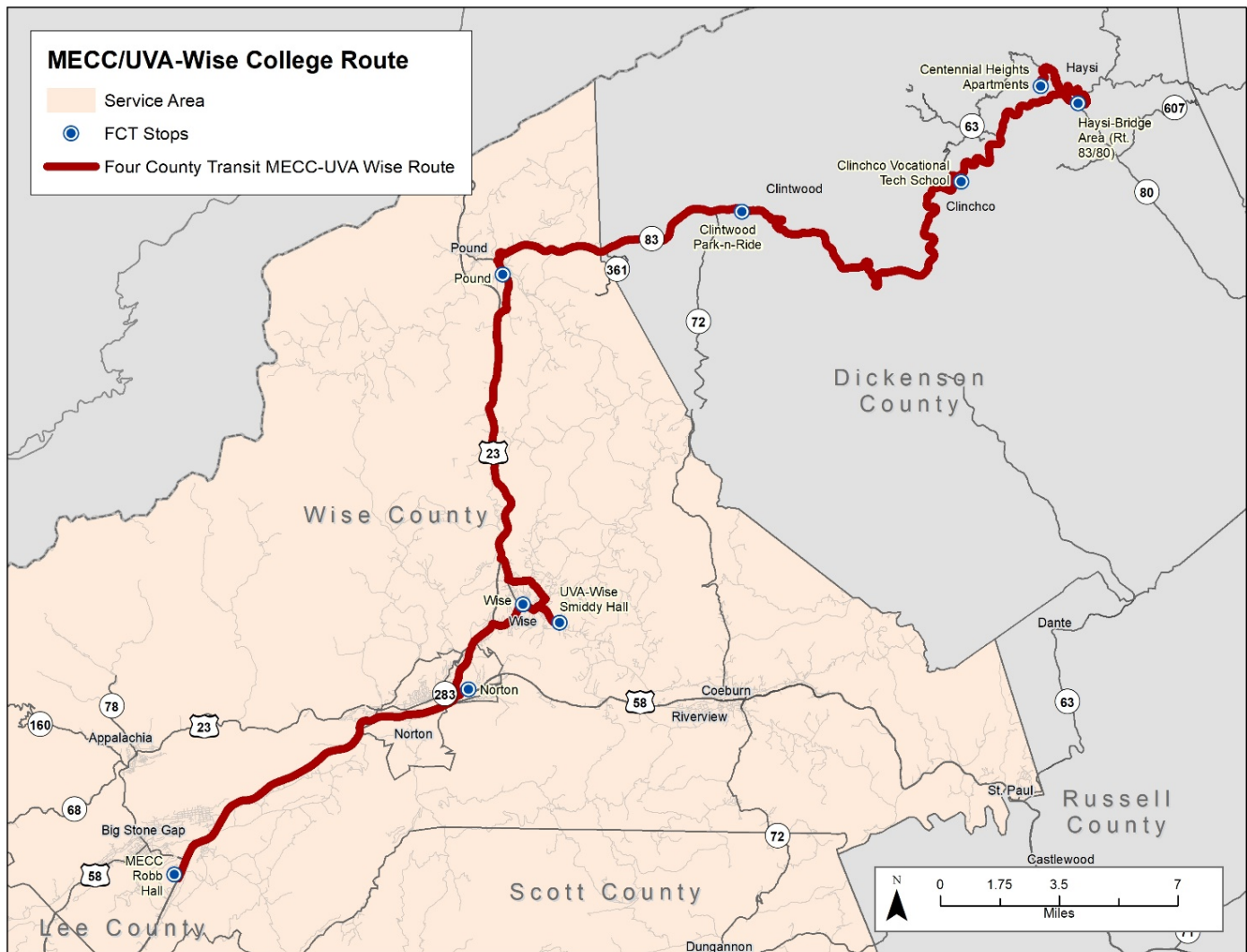
OTHER AREA TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS/SERVICES

Other Public Transportation Services in the Region

Four County Transit

Four County Transit, serving Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell, and Tazewell counties operates a fare-free college-oriented route that originates at the Centennial Heights Apartments, near Haysi, in Dickenson County and brings students and staff to both the University of Virginia – Wise and Mountain Empire Community College. This route, the MECC-Wise Express, also serves Pound which is located in Wise County. This route is shown in Figure 1-7.

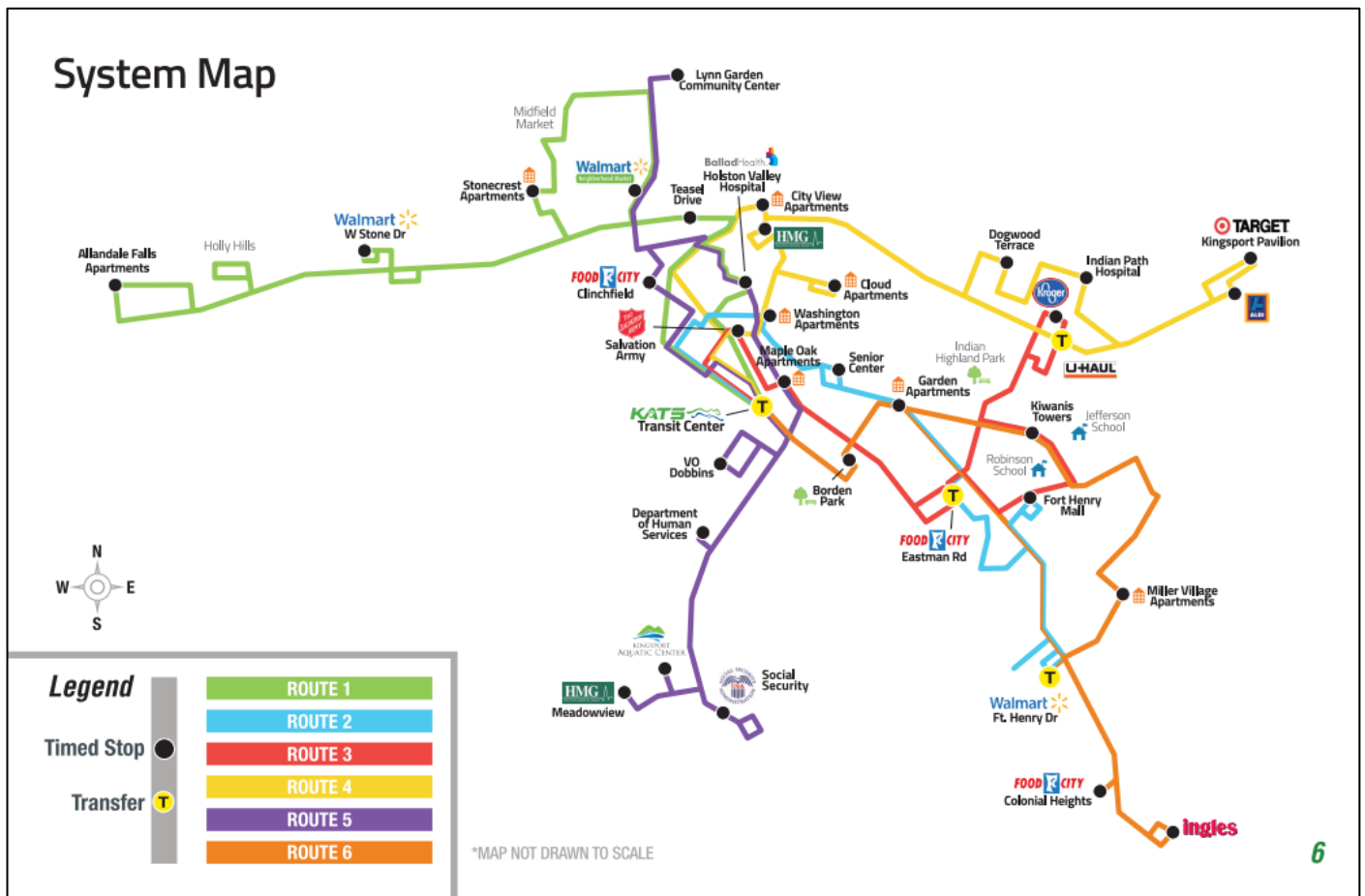
Figure 1-7: Four County Transit MECC-UVA Wise Route



Kingsport Area Transit System (TN)

While not directly in the service area, Kingsport Area Transit System (KATS) provides service in the Kingsport, Tennessee area. Both Weber City and Gate City in Scott County are located within the Kingsport, TN-VA urbanized area. The closest KATS bus stop to Scott County is located about a mile south of the VA/TN border at Lynn Garden Drive and Virgil Avenue. KATS Route 1 and Route 5 serve Lynn Garden Drive, with the Route 1 serving the west side (Virgil Avenue) and the Route 5 serving the east side (Walker Street). The KATS route map is provided as Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: KATS System Map



Taxi and Private Transportation Providers

The following taxi, medical, and private transportation providers operate in the region:

- C Trans (Wise, VA)
- Coeburn Taxi (Coeburn, VA)
- Darlene Jackson Taxi (Cedar Bluff, VA)
- J & A Transport (Pennington Gap, VA)
- Margaret Ring (Coeburn, VA)
- Med Trip Express (Marion, VA)
- Randy Hill (private provider)
- Skeens Cab (Nora, VA)
- Thompson Delivery

Human Service Transportation

Human service transportation in the region is primarily provided by MEOC Transit. The Junction Center for Independent Living also provides transportation in the region, predominantly for people with disabilities.

Medicaid Transportation

Medicaid transportation is arranged by MEOC for this region of Virginia under a brokerage agreement with Logisticare. MEOC provides some of the trips and arranges the others with area Medicaid transportation providers, several of which are local cab companies.

Intercity Bus

While there is no intercity bus service directly within the service area, Greyhound service is available from Bristol (TN) and Johnson City (TN), along Greyhound's Richmond-Roanoke-Nashville line (Greyhound Table 144). This line also serves Marion and Wytheville in Virginia.

Amtrak

There is no Amtrak service within the service area.

Chapter 2

Goals, Objectives, and Standards

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses unmet needs and gaps in transit services identified at the outset of the project, presents goals and objectives for MEOC Transit, and presents performance and service standards. Identifying unmet needs and gaps was an important first step in the development of the MEOC Transit TDP as it identified issues that were explored within the planning process. The unmet needs and gaps in service are further discussed in Chapter 3 through input from the rider and community surveys and results of the demographic analysis.

UPDATE ON MEOC TRANSIT OPERATING ENVIRONMENT SINCE PRIOR TDP

The staff-level kick-off meeting discussion focused on a number of changes that are occurring within the Mountain Empire service area. These changes include the following:

- The population of the service area has decreased by about 7,000 people since 2010.
- The coal industry is declining as a major employer, while other employment opportunities have expanded, including call centers, tourism, and prisons.
- Hospitals have merged as a new major health care provider has emerged (Ballad Health). This has resulted in a number of shifting medical destinations for MEOC riders.
- Area high schools have merged in Wise County.
- The Virginia Medicaid transportation program has changed. The program now uses seven regional brokers rather than one statewide broker. The effect locally has been that private transportation providers are now focusing on providing Medicaid transportation rather than other services as it is more lucrative for them. This has resulted in a decrease in mobility options outside of either MEOC or Medicaid.
- The University of Virginia (UVA) Wise has grown significantly. There may be an opportunity for MEOC to expand the circulator service it provides for the campus to further meet the mobility needs of students. MEOC also provides service to the campus on a demand-response basis, as well as assistance with traffic mitigation for events. MEOC was recently awarded an Integrated Mobility Initiative Grant from the

FTA through DRPT to develop a mobility on-demand program for UVA Wise (“Cavalier Connection”). This will allow riders to use a mobile application to request trips, similar to a microtransit model.

- The Walmart in Big Stone Gap closed.
- These changes have resulted in MEOC Transit trips becoming longer and more expensive.
- Ridership has increased significantly since 2010 (2010 ridership was 58,319 and FY2019 ridership was 95,892). The full ridership trends are analyzed in Chapter 3 of the TDP.

CURRENT UNMET NEEDS AND POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS

- The need for dialysis transportation has grown significantly in the past several years. MEOC has difficulty meeting all of the dialysis transportation needs, specifically for getting patients home after the second shift of dialysis.
- MEOC had been operating a Veteran’s Shuttle to bring people to a Veteran’s Administration (VA) Hospital in Johnson City, TN. This was not funded for FY2020 through the DRPT funding source that has historically been used (the Senior Transportation Program). There was a discussion of moving this program to operate under the rural Section 5311 program.
- MEOC is interested in re-branding the transit program. The agency now employs a marketing coordinator who could help with this effort. UVA Wise helped initiate a re-branding for MEOC Transit several years ago, and this work could be refreshed and re-examined for implementation.
- As discussed in the previous section, there is potential to build a deviated fixed route in the Wise area, focusing on UVA Wise and exploring a microtransit model.
- There is a need for MEOC riders to access the intercity bus network.

STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

MEOC Transit has an active advisory committee, termed MERTAC – the Mountain Empire Regional Transportation Advisory Council. The primary stakeholder outreach for the TDP occurred through the involvement of MERTAC. Members represent the following agencies:

- AmeriCorps/Mountain Empire Community College
- Ballard Health

- Frontier Health
- Junction Center for Independent Living
- LENOWISCO PDC
- Office of Emergency Services
- Rider (senior citizen, former employee)
- United Healthcare
- Veteran's Affairs
- Wise Chamber of Commerce

The study team also conducted rider and community surveys, and these results are presented in Chapter 3.

TRANSIT PROGRAM GOALS

MEOC Transit's program is guided by the seven policy goals developed by MERTAC in its 2006 Mobility Vision Plan. The seven policy goals are:

1. Mobility
2. Accessibility
3. Reliability
4. Efficiency
5. Economy
6. Equity
7. Sustainability¹

Each of these seven policy goals is supported by a number of objectives, which are excerpted below from the Mobility Plan. These goals and objectives are not in priority order.

1. Mobility

- Continue to provide coordinated human service transportation and public transit services at the highest level permitted by available funding.
- Support the adoption of Regional Mobility Plan by local governments.
- Maintain intra-regional coordinated transportation progress to date.
- Support the development of additional and alternative methods of providing local match funding to maintain existing transportation grants and programs.
- Improve mobility

¹ MERTAC, Mobility Vision Plan.

- Reach new riders, including employee commuter transportation for regional employers, especially in industrial parks and areas of job concentration.
- Increase trips for access to core services.
- Generate local match funds for targeted services.
- Encourage sharing of transportation resources among all providers.
- Support and encourage inter-regional transportation coordination.
- Encourage new start-ups and expansion of existing transportation providers in the regional market.
- Encourage and support development of a “One-Call” centralized location for all transportation needs, inquiries and requests.
- Encourage and support development of coordination and referral services.
- Encourage and support development of transportation solutions both with and without governmental subsidy, both for-profit and non-profit.
- Encourage and support development of mobility managers to assist people with finding and utilizing mobility solutions.

2. Accessibility

- Official designation of one contact point (“One-Call” Shopping) for all transportation needs within the region.
- Encourage and support development of mobility managers to assist with finding and utilizing mobility solutions.
- Educate providers and enhance awareness about Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for public and private transportation providers.
- Educate the public about public and human service transportation in the region.

3. Reliability

- Encourage the adoption by transportation providers in the region of appropriate and compatible methods (electronic and manual) for tracking performance of trip requests, scheduling and assigning trips to the appropriate or requested provider and confirmation of deliverance of trips within stated performance parameters.
- Encourage the adoption by transportation providers in the region of appropriate and compatible methods (electronic and manual) for fleet management activities, i.e. vehicle safety and performance, real-time vehicle location information and reliable and widely available two-way communication, which significantly improves fleet performance, capabilities and service to the customer.

4. Efficiency

- Provide training to all types of transportation owners, managers and employees in relevant areas, such as basic accounting and financial analysis, insurance needs and requirements, fleet maintenance and management, communications, record-keeping, safety, first aid and other knowledge applicable to the transportation industry.
- Coordinate with the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), the Community Transportation Association of Virginia (CTAV), and other recognized professional transportation organizations and peer networks for training, cooperation and technical assistance.
- Promote on-time performance through the development and use of appropriate uniform standards, use of appropriate and compatible technologies, and fleet and trip analysis methods.

5. Economy

- Support regional employers, especially in industrial parks and areas of job concentration, with employee commuter work shuttles.
- Designate and develop park and ride lots including shuttle bus shelters in appropriate locations to facilitate core transportation, especially employment related.
- Support regional planning and zoning activities and initiatives and projects that are “people transportation aware”.
- Encourage new start-ups and expansion of existing transportation providers in the regional market.
- Support coordination of services among agencies, consolidation of activities into single agencies where reasonable and effective, and eliminate redundancies.

6. Equity

- Educate and encourage the public about the use of public transportation and Mobility Managers.
- Establish a system that ensures that ALL requests having the same eligibility are treated under the same set of guidelines.

- Support establishment of a system of Freedom of Choice for Consumers among transportation providers.

7. Sustainability

- Continue to support the creation of a self-sustaining and economically efficient transportation system to serve the region.
- Continue the existing system of coordinated transportation for the region.
- Use new and existing technologies, strategies and programs to support continuing transportation activities in the region.
- Support the continuance of existing funding sources and seek new funding sources to fill existing as well as future fiscal gaps in service provision.
- Support establishment of a state or regional funding mechanism or earmark funding source to assist transportation agencies in meeting local match needs for state and federal transportation grants.

MERTAC identified a set of core transportation needs upon which planning efforts should focus. These are:

- Community activities
- Ongoing needs and services (grocery shopping, medical appointments, errands)
- Recreation
- Employment and post-secondary education

MERTAC's specific long-range goals were reviewed and slightly revised during the March 2020 meeting. The updated goals are:

1. Continue to provide mobility management services through a “one-call” Regional Transportation Center for and within Planning District 1 that can serve as a central contact point for people needing transportation assistance.
2. Fill the funding gaps in existing transportation programs.
3. Maintain and enhance mobility through increasing trips for access to core services.
4. Support the coordination of referral services and mobility managers to assist consumers.

5. Encourage monitoring of provider performance and new technologies such as real time vehicle locator services.
6. Provide travel training to providers, consumers, and the public at large.
7. Support regional employers and workers with employment related transportation.
8. Support consistent and equitable treatment of trip requests from consumers.
9. Support the creation of a sustainable and economically efficient transportation system to serve the LENOWISCO region.

PERFORMANCE, SAFETY AND SERVICE STANDARDS

The 2011 TDP developed a set of several service standards, which also included safety and performance standards. Given the growing importance of five specific performance metrics used by DRPT for funding allocation purposes, we have separated the performance standards from the service and safety standards. Both sets of standards are outlined below.

DRPT's Performance-Based Allocation Metrics

In FY2020, DRPT implemented a new performance-based methodology for allocating operating assistance funding pursuant to the Code of Virginia and Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) policy. The methodology was developed through coordination with Virginia's Transit Service Delivery Advisory Committee (TSDAC) and the CTB, which resulted from a 2018 legislative mandate to base grant amounts on agency performance.² The methodology developed considers sizing and performance metrics. The sizing metrics are intended to base allocations on the size of the agency so that grant funding is proportionate to the level of service operated.

The sizing metrics and weights for FY2020 are:

Operating cost	60%
Ridership	20%
Revenue vehicle hours	10%
Revenue vehicle miles	10%

² DRPT, Development of Performance-Based Operating Assistance Methodology, Fiscal Year 2020.

The sizing metrics and weights for FY2021 and beyond will be:

Operating cost	50%
Ridership	30%
Revenue vehicle hours	10%
Revenue vehicle miles	10%

The five performance metrics and weights are:

Passengers per revenue vehicle hour (20%)
Passengers per revenue vehicle mile (20%)
Operating cost per revenue vehicle hour (20%)
Operating cost per revenue vehicle mile (20%)
Operating cost per passenger trip (20%)

MEOC Transit Performance Metrics - FY2019

Table 2-1 provides the MEOC values for these metrics for FY2019.

Table 2-1: MEOC Transit Performance Metrics

Passenger Trips per Revenue Hour	Passenger Trips per Revenue Mile	Operating Cost per Revenue Hour	Operating Cost per Revenue Mile	Operating Cost per Passenger Trip
1.86	0.12	\$33.57	\$2.12	\$18.07

Given that these five metrics are being used by DRPT to allocate funding, it is recommended that MEOC Transit adopt these metrics internally when reviewing performance.

Service Standards

Service standards are benchmarks by which service performance is evaluated. Service standards are typically developed in several categories of service such as service coverage, passenger convenience, and passenger comfort. The most effective service standards are straightforward and relatively easy to calculate and understand. The standards outlined in Table 2-2 were updated from the 2011 TDP.

Table 2-2: MEOC Transit Service Standards

Category	Standard
Service Quality:	
On-time Performance ⁽¹⁾	90%
Safety:	
Safety Incidents per 100,000 miles	0
Qualitative Standards:	
Passenger comfort	Working air conditioning/heat. Vehicles clean and in good condition.
Availability of information	Brochures up to date and distributed throughout the community. Website up to date.

(1) On-time performance can be calculated using a sample.

PROCESS FOR UPDATING GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STANDARDS

It is recommended that MEOC Transit use these standards to gauge service performance and adjust services as warranted and feasible. It is also recommended that an annual review of service standards take place as part of the grant preparation cycle, as these measures have taken on greater importance for MEOC's annual funding allocation through DRPT. Any changes for these measurement tools can be included in the annual TDP update.

Chapter 3

Service and System Evaluation and Transit Needs Analysis

INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the TDP focuses on two primary analyses. The first focus is a description and analysis of the recent performance of MEOC Transit, including analyses of trends, peers, recent ridership, a passenger survey, and a community survey. The second area of examines transit needs, demographics, land uses and relevant studies and plans.

This chapter has 14 major components, which are presented in the following order:

1. System Evaluation
2. Financial Information
3. Peer Analysis
4. Recent Compliance Results
5. MEOC Transit Rider Survey
6. MEOC Transit Community Survey
7. Input from MERTAC
8. Population Analysis
9. Transit Dependent Populations
10. Title VI Demographic Analysis
11. Land Use Profile
12. Summary of Demographic Analysis
13. Review of Previous Plans and Studies
14. Chapter Summary

SYSTEM EVALUATION

Operating Data

Table 3-1 provides operating statistics for MEOC Transit for FY2017 through FY2019. A review of this data reveals the following:

- MEOC reduced the number of hours and miles of service provided between FY2017 and FY2018, while at the same time increased passenger trips by 19.5%. This resulted in a decrease in the per trip cost by 15.7%.

- The data for FY2019 show that MEOC reduced the miles and hours provided again, but also saw a decrease in ridership (4.2%).
- Productivity has increased from 1.44 trips per hour (FY2017) to 1.86 trips per hour (FY2018 and FY2019).

MEOC's ridership and productivity are significantly higher than they were during the previous TDP review of operating statistics. In FY2010, MEOC provided 58,319 passenger trips and experienced productivity of 1.25 passenger trips per revenue hour. MEOC staff indicated that over time the agency has become "the only game in town," which has led to ridership growth and resulting improvements in productivity.

Table 3-1: System-Wide Performance and Trend Data

Year	Passenger Trips	Revenue Miles	Revenue Hours	Operating Expenses	Trips/ Hour	Trips/ Mile	Cost per Hour	Cost per Trip	MPH
FY2017	83,707	954,134	58,110	\$1,704,609	1.44	0.09	\$ 29.33	\$ 20.36	16.4
FY2018	100,058	897,299	53,717	\$1,715,741	1.86	0.11	\$ 31.94	\$ 17.15	16.7
FY2019	95,892	815,737	51,626	\$1,733,028	1.86	0.12	\$ 33.57	\$ 18.07	15.8

Types of Services Provided

MEOC provides community transportation services for a wide variety of clientele. A cost allocation exercise performed by MEOC for five sample days in September 2019 shows that 73.5% of the trips provided are for general public transportation purposes. Additional contractual trips are provided for the following programs:

- Medicaid
- Frozen home delivered meals
- Hot home delivered meals
- Foster Grandparents Volunteer Program
- Congregate meals (includes hot meal deliveries)
- Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)
- Frontier Health Contract (local Community Services Board)
- Title V Senior Community Services Program
- Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE)
- Adult day health care

All of these program routes are also open to the general public.

Demand Response Origins and Destinations

A week's worth of demand response data from February 2020 (scheduled trips) were utilized to better identify which locations in the MEOC region generate the most trips. Throughout the study area, most trips were generated in the area's largest municipalities: Big Stone Gap, Gate City/Weber City, and Norton. Data showed that there were several trip destinations located in Tennessee, particularly Kingsport. The top ten boarding locations are listed in Table 3-2. Six of these locations appear to be human service agencies. Other major pick-up points included Mountain Empire Community College, Walmart (Norton), the Norton High Rise, and the Gate City Flea Market.

Pick up locations in each county and jurisdictions are mapped in Figures 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3.

Table 3-2: Top 10 Pick-Up Locations

Pick-Up Location Name	Address	Municipality	Zip Code	Total Pick-ups
New PACE Center	1509 3 rd Avenue E	Big Stone Gap	24219	445
Independence Unlimited	4907 Boone Trail Road	Duffield	24244	213
Developmental Services	622 Powell Avenue E	Big Stone Gap	24219	135
Independence House	2532 4 th Avenue E	Big Stone Gap	24219	105
MECC	3441 Mountain Empire Road	Big Stone Gap	24219	97
Kingston Center	428 Cecil D Quillen Drive	Duffield	24244	93
Walmart (Norton)	708 Commonwealth Avenue	Norton	24273	62
Norton High Rise	200 6 th Street NW	Norton	24273	53
Developmental Services	2637 4 th Avenue E	Big Stone Gap	24219	36
Gate City Flea Market	Water Street	Gate City	24251	36

Figure 3-1: Lee County Demand-Response Pick-Ups – Sample Data – February, 2020

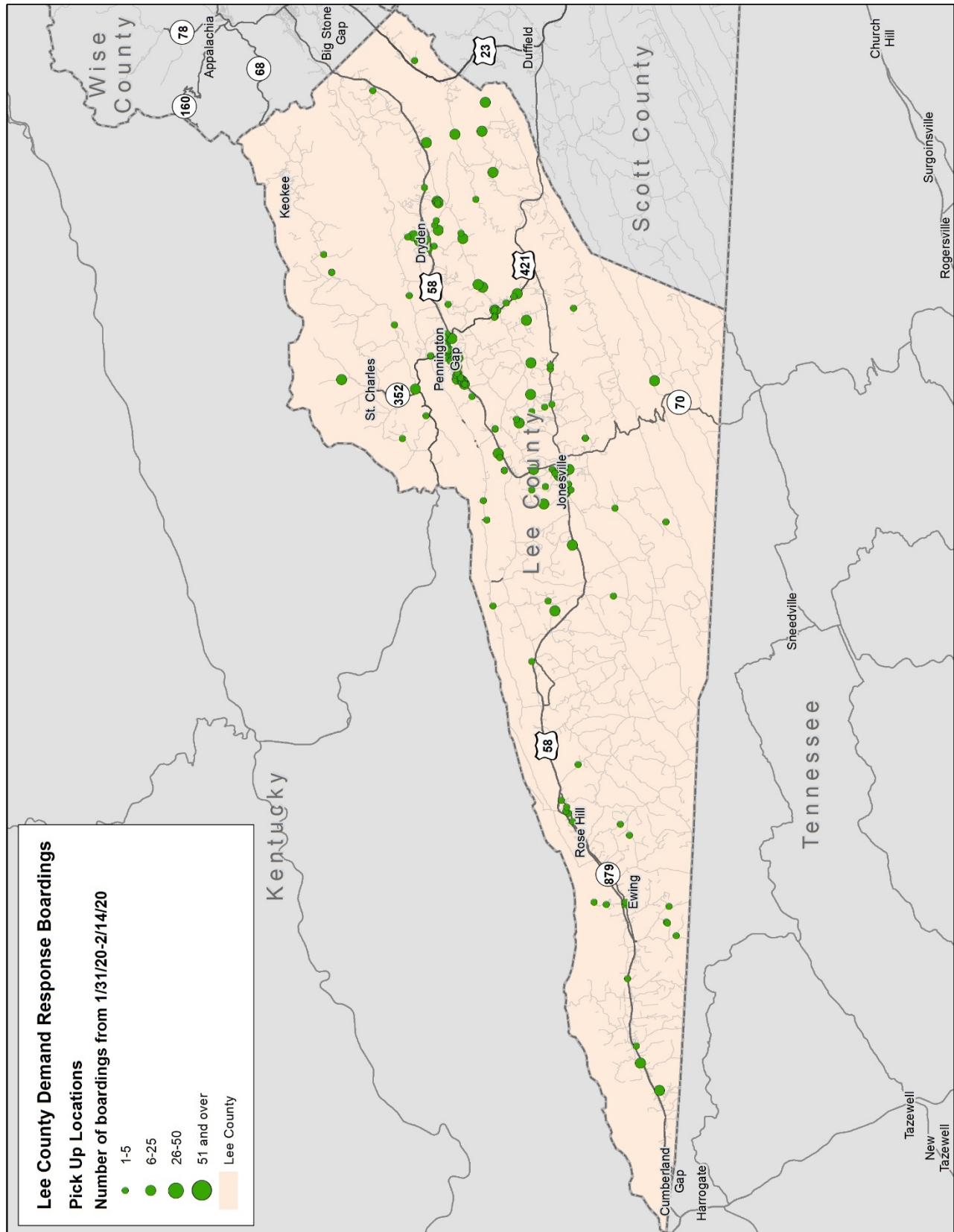


Figure 3-2: Scott County & Tennessee Demand-Response Pick-Ups – Sample Data, February 2020

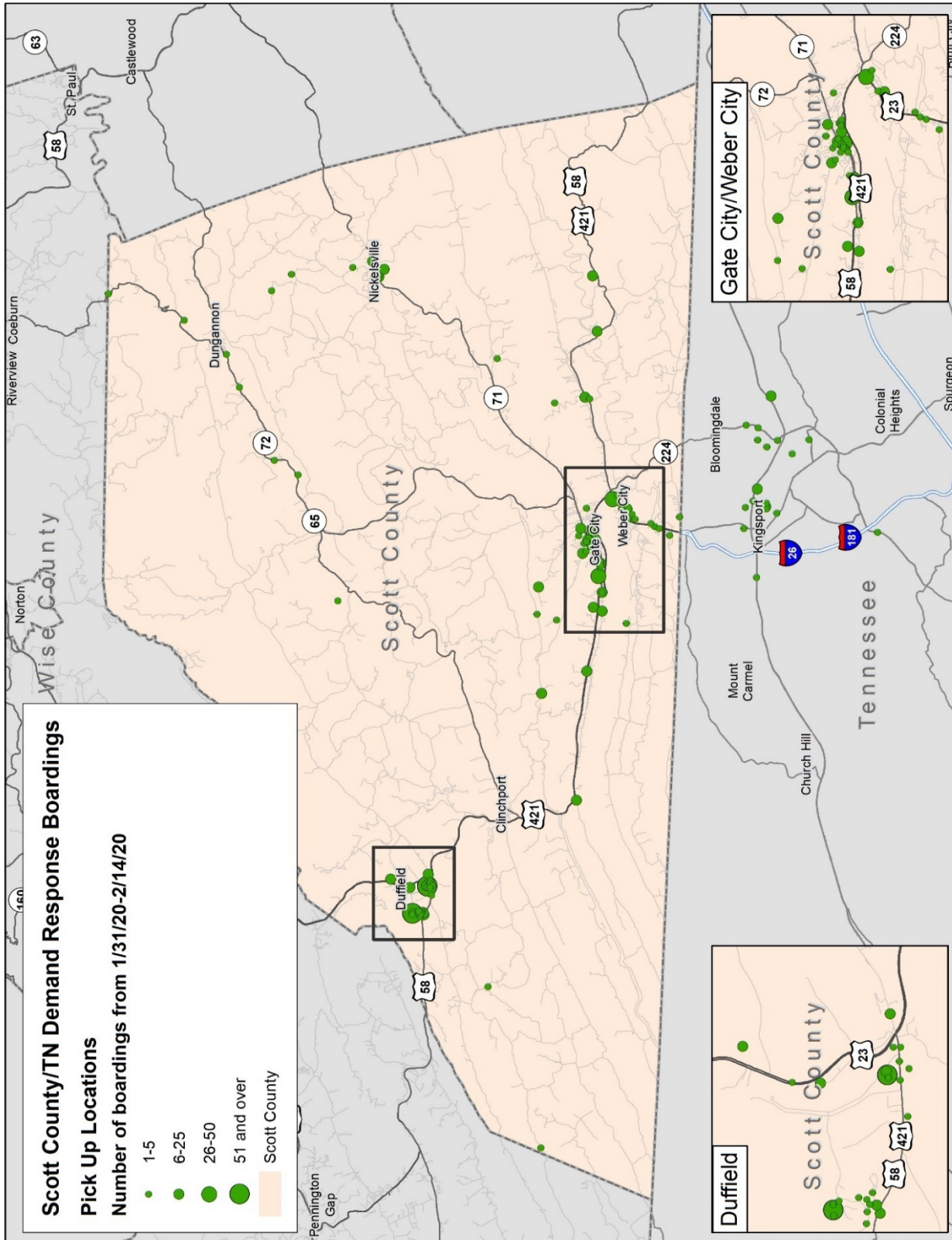
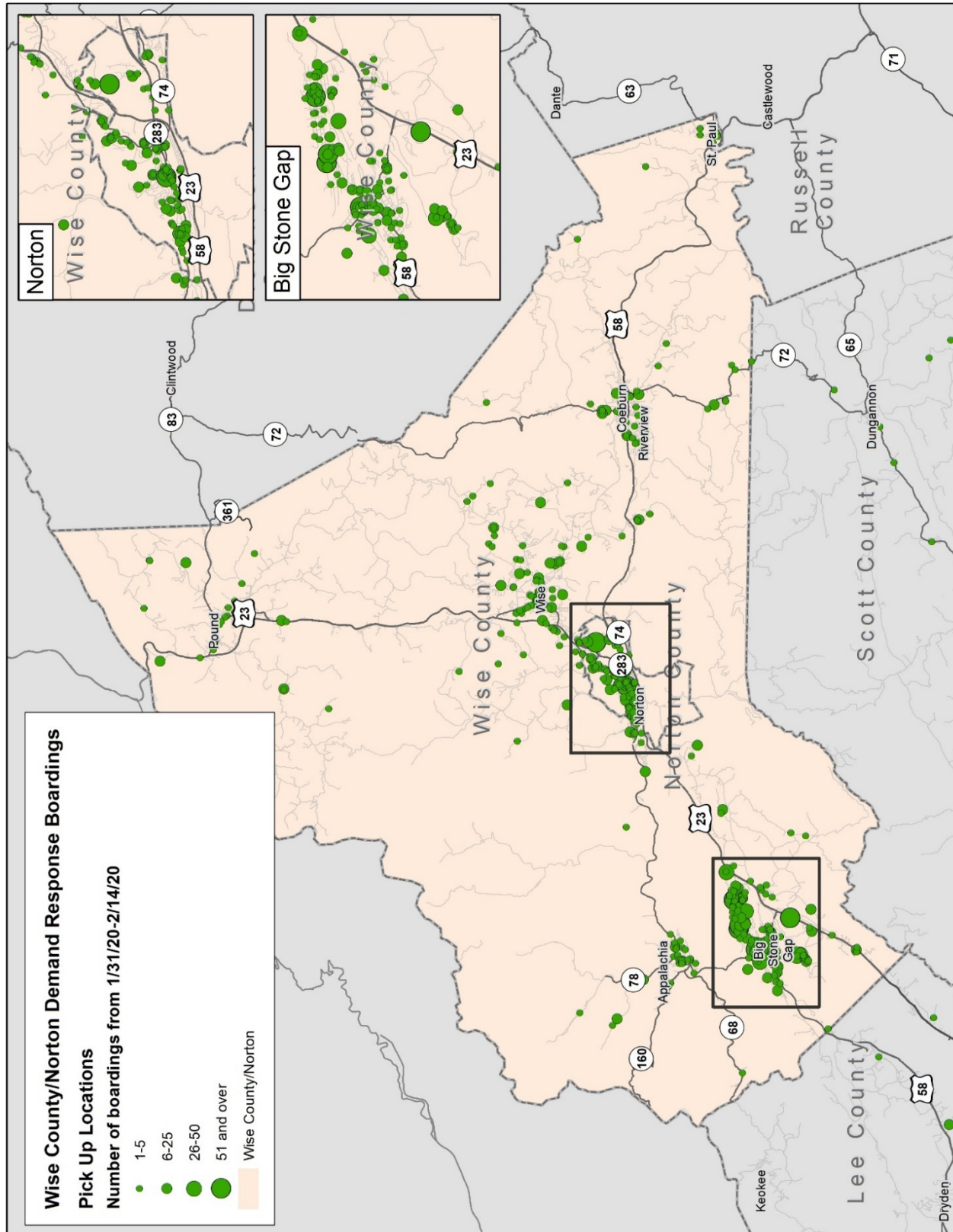


Figure 3-3: Wise County & City of Norton Demand-Response Pick-Ups – Sample Data, February 2020



FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Operating Budget

The operating budget for MEOC Transit for FY2020 is just over \$2.3 million. Labor expenses account for the largest share of the budget, with salaries and fringe benefits totaling \$1,487,773. Other major line-item expenses include fuel, indirect costs, and insurance. Table 3-3 provides the individual line item expenses. This budget includes all transportation services, including those funded through other human service transportation programs. The DRPT operating budget for MEOC Transit, as listed in the FY2020 SYIP is \$1,798,711. The DRPT operating budget does not include MEOC Transit's expenses for the non-DRPT transportation services that the agency provides.

Table 3-3: MEOC Transit - FY2020 Operating Budget

Cost Category	Amount
Salaries	\$1,221,337
Fringe Benefits	\$266,336
Advertising/Promotion	\$200
Business Insurance	\$135,000
Computer Software	\$6,000
Contracted Services	\$7,000
Contract Services-Mechanics	\$5,000
Equipment Purchases	\$2,000
License Fees and Taxes	\$300
Maintenance Agreement	\$1,000
Medical Exams/Testing	\$4,500
Indirect Costs	\$231,089
Membership Dues	\$200
Printing and Reproduction	\$250
Registration Fees	\$3,500
Rent/Leases	\$1,500
Subscription Fees	\$500
Supplies	\$5,000
Supplies-Cleaning	\$300
Supplies-Data Processing	\$500
Supplies-First Aid	\$500
Supplies-Office	\$750
Telephone	\$19,000
Training	\$1,200
Uniforms and Clothing	\$3,000
Utilities	\$14,000
Vehicle-Fuel	\$400,000
Vehicle-Parts	\$35,000
Vehicle-Tires	\$24,000
Total Operating Budget	\$2,388,963
Fare Revenue	\$52,000
Net Deficit	\$2,336,963

MEOC Transit is funded through a mixture of sources, including Federal Section 5311 funding, DRPT state aid, contractual revenue for service provided, and local government funds. The funding sources for FY2020 are listed in Table 3-4.

Table 3-4: MEOC Transit – FY2020 Funding Sources

Funding Sources	Amount
DRPT Operating - Federal Section 5311	\$802,654
DRPT State Aid	\$485,454
DRPT Special Grants	\$75,530
Donations Individuals	\$5,500
Fee for Service Business	\$110,000
Program Transfer-Internal Programs	\$510,000
Insurance Rebates/Payments	\$25,000
Local Government	\$70,000
Logisticare Contract	\$250,200
VDA-Special Transit	\$38,604
Total	\$2,372,942

Capital Budget

MEOC Transit's total capital budget for FY2020 is \$435,500. The agency is replacing seven vehicles using a combination of federal, state, and local funds. MEOC Transit's capital budget is shown in Table 3-5.

Table 3-5: MEOC Transit - FY2020 Capital Budget

Capital Items	Number	Total Cost	Federal	State	Local
Body-on-Chassis Vehicle with Lift (replacement)	5	\$340,000	\$272,000	\$54,400	\$13,600
Raised Roof Van with Lift (replacement)	1	\$65,000	\$52,000	\$10,400	\$2,600
Service Vehicle (replacement)	1	\$30,500	\$24,400	\$4,880	\$1,220
Total	7	\$435,500	\$348,400	\$69,680	\$17,420

In FY2019, MEOC Transit also replaced seven vehicles. The federal source for capital funding for both FY2019 and FY2020 is the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Appalachian Development Public Transportation Assistance Program.

PEER ANALYSIS

While it is most relevant for a transit agency to examine its own performance over time, it is valuable to know the operating statistics for transit programs that could be considered “peers,” either by virtue of location, service area characteristics, or size. Analyzing peer operating data helps determine if local transit data is “in the ballpark” of typical operating data for an agency of its size.

The following Virginia programs were used as peers based on their similarity in operating data:

- **Bay Transit** - A large multi-county program that operates out of a senior service agency. Bay Transit provides service on Virginia’s Middle Peninsula and Northern Neck. Bay Transit operates primarily demand-response service.
- **District 3/Mountain Lynx** – A multi-county program that operates in southwest Virginia and is affiliated with a large multi-service agency. Mountain Lynx operates demand-response service, as well as deviated fixed route service (which is considered demand-response according to the National Transit Database).
- **Four County Transit** – A multi-county program that operates in southwest Virginia and is affiliated with a senior service agency. Four County Transit operates scheduled route service and provides a route to Mountain Empire Community College.

Some other multi-county programs were examined, but were not included because they operate in areas with higher population density.

The peer comparison data are presented in Table 3-6. These data are from the 2018 National Transit Database. As indicated in this table, MEOC Transit operates with the lowest operating cost per revenue hour and per revenue mile. The productivity in terms of passenger trips per revenue hour is the lowest among the peers, though it should be noted that MEOC Transit is the only one of the demand-response peers that does not operate any circulator services in towns. The mean productivity of the four agencies is 2.8 passenger trips per revenue hour, likely driven by the scheduled routes offered by Four County and the in-town circulators offered by District 3.

MEOC Transit operates the largest fleet among the peers, with 47 vehicles. The mean number of vehicles among the peer group was 37.5.

Table 3-6: Selected Peer Comparison

Feature	MEOC Transit	Bay Transit	District 3	Four County	Mean
Vehicles	47	38	25	40	37.5
Revenue Hours	53,717	60,971	48,453	35,428	49,642
Revenue Miles	897,659	1,408,398	494,447	751,233	887,934
Passenger Trips	100,058	138,504	166,883	150,004	138,862
Operating Costs	\$ 1,715,741	\$ 3,146,427	\$ 1,994,520	\$1,626,746	\$2,120,858
Passenger Trips per Hour	1.86	2.27	3.44	4.23	2.80
Passenger Trips per Mile	0.11	0.10	0.34	0.20	0.16
Operating Cost per Mile	\$1.91	\$2.23	\$4.03	\$2.17	\$2.39
Operating Cost per Trip	\$17.15	\$22.72	\$11.95	\$10.84	\$15.27
Operating Cost per Hour	\$31.94	\$51.61	\$41.16	\$45.92	\$42.72

Source: National Transit Database, 2018

RECENT COMPLIANCE RESULTS

A rural public transit compliance review of MEOC Transit was conducted by DRPT in 2014. There were findings in the following areas:

- Organizational Management
 - Legal Authority – MEOC was instructed to submit revised bylaws that include reference to the organization’s public transportation function.
- Satisfactory Continuing Control
 - Disposition of Vehicles and Equipment – MEOC was instructed to submit an updated disposition policy to indicate that funds from the sale of vehicles are placed in a dedicated transportation capital replacement fund.
- Operations and Service Requirements
 - Maintenance – MEOC was instructed to submit an updated vehicle maintenance plan with a corrected variance (10%) and detail how preventative maintenance reviews will be conducted on time.
- Planning and Coordination
 - Title VI – MEOC was instructed to update their brochures to include a Title VI statement and display the statement on the vehicles.

DRPT indicated that each of these findings has been closed.

MEOC TRANSIT RIDER SURVEY

An important task for the TDP was to gather opinions from current customers concerning MEOC Transit's services, as well as to develop a passenger profile. With input from MEOC Transit staff, a rider survey was prepared. The survey was administered on board vehicles by MEOC Transit staff between December 2019 and February 2020. This section includes infographics of customer feedback and travel habits (Figure 3-4) and the rider profile (Figure 3-5). At the end of the survey period, 144 surveys had been collected. A copy of the rider survey is provided in Appendix B.

Customer Feedback and Travel Habits

Customer Satisfaction

Customers were asked about their satisfaction on a multitude of MEOC Transit's service components, including hours of service, on-time performance, the trip scheduling process, fares, and marketing materials. A majority were either "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with MEOC Transit's overall service and each of its component parts. Eighty-seven percent of riders were satisfied with MEOC Transit's overall service. The service components with the highest satisfaction levels were riders' sense of security (93%), bus drivers (91%), and the cleanliness of vehicles (90%). The service components with the lowest satisfaction levels were the days and hours of service (76%), the trip scheduling process (77%), and the MEOC Transit website (77%).

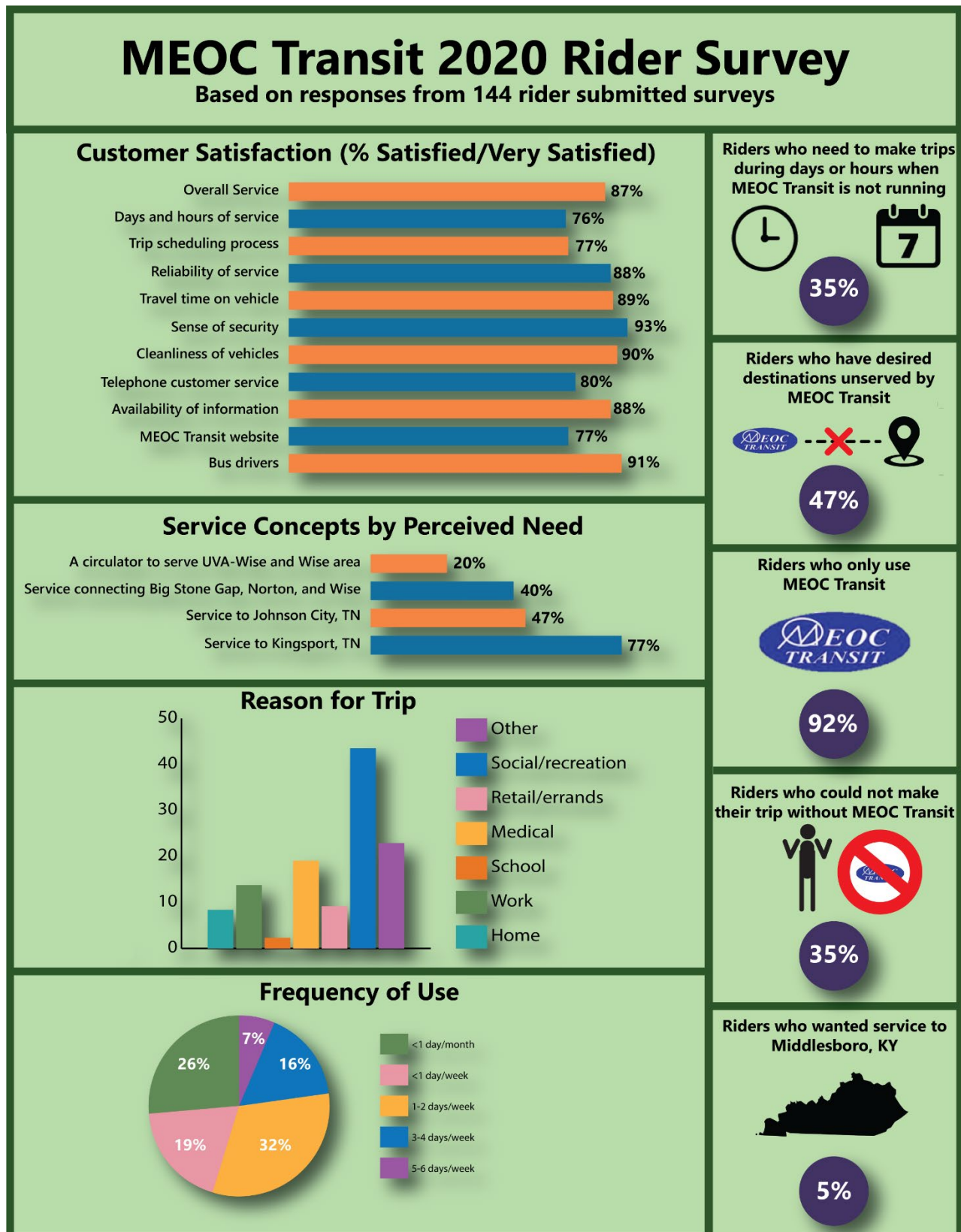
Desired Service Improvements

Expanded service days and hours were frequently mentioned as a desired service improvement. Thirty-five percent of riders indicated that they need to make trips during days or hours when MEOC Transit is not operating. MEOC Transit riders were asked if there was a need for various scheduled service concepts. The most popular concept among riders was service to Kingsport (77%). The least desired service improvement was a circulator serving UVA-Wise and its surrounding area (20%). Riders were also asked if there was a need for service to Johnson City (47%) and a connector bus between Big Stone Gap, Norton, and Wise (40%). In the comments, riders expressed an interest in service expansion to Abingdon (VA), Bristol (TN-VA), Middlesboro (KY), and Pikeville (KY).

Travel Habits

The most prevalent trip reason for MEOC Transit riders was social/recreation (44%). Medical (19%) was the purpose for several more trips. Twenty percent of respondents chose "Other". Using MEOC Transit to access education was the least selected trip purpose; only 2% of riders indicated that was the reason for their trip. When asked to specify, several riders indicated that they were going to a community senior center.

Figure 3-4: Rider Survey Feedback Infographic



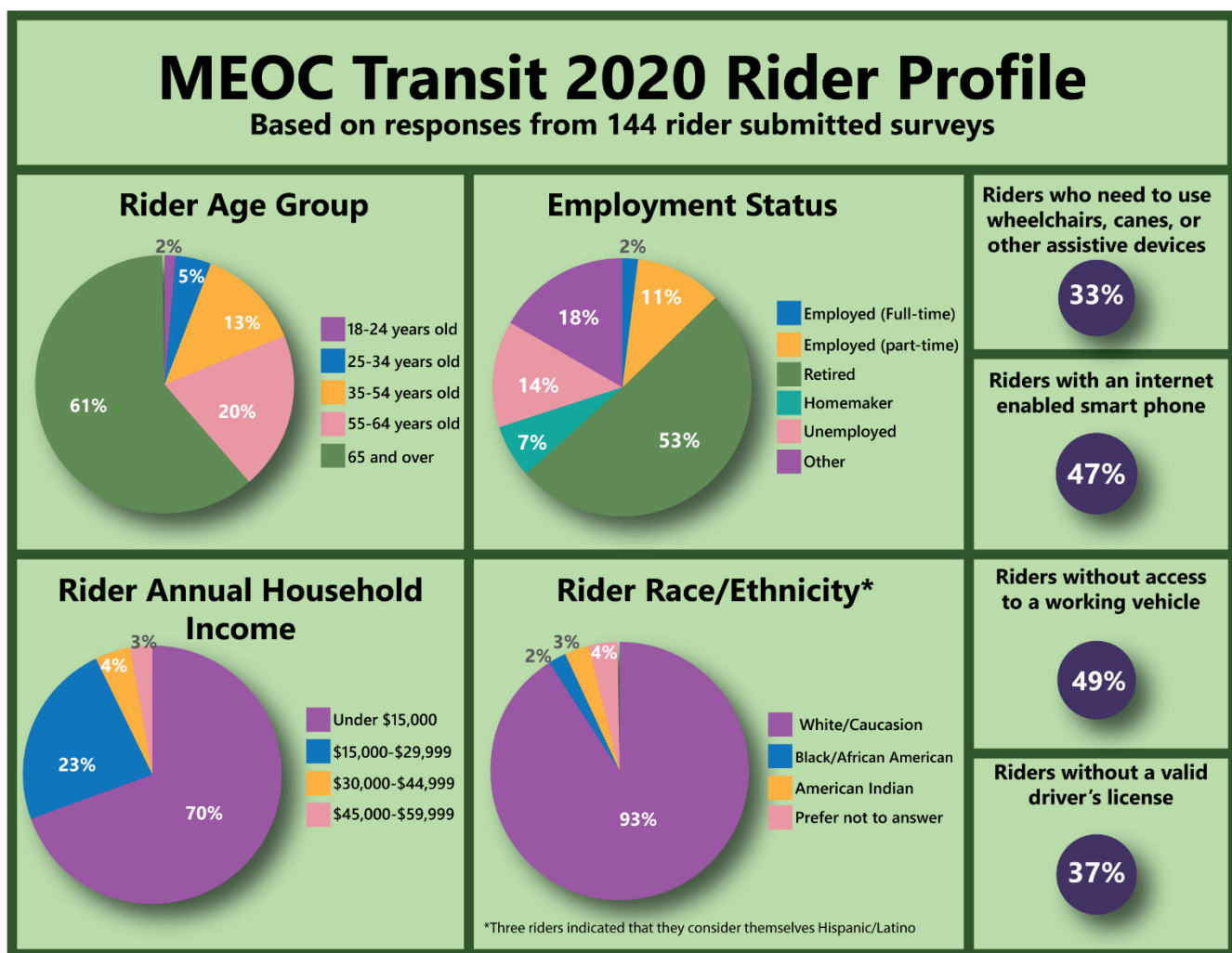
Comments

MEOC Transit riders were afforded an opportunity to provide open-ended comments on the survey form. The rider comments do not provide additional insight beyond what was received via the questions are provided in Appendix C.

Rider Profile

After providing feedback on MEOC Transit, riders were asked a series of demographic questions to understand who MEOC Transit is serving. Most riders were Caucasian (93%), older than 65 years (61%), retired (53%), and had an annual household income of less than \$15,000 (70%). Thirty-three percent of riders require the use of wheelchairs, canes, or other assistive devices. A minority of riders had an internet enabled smart phone (47%), no access to a working vehicle (49%), and no valid driver's license (37%).

Figure 3-5: Rider Profile Overview



MEOC TRANSIT COMMUNITY SURVEY

Along with the transit rider survey, a broader community survey was administered during the outreach process. The survey was administered electronically, as well as via paper copies distributed to area health departments, the local Community Services Board, the local Veterans' Affairs offices, MERTAC members, and several other community outlets.

The community survey better assesses public awareness of the transit system while engaging with a respondent pool that includes non-transit riders. The community survey asked the general public about their awareness of MEOC Transit services, their inclination towards using transit, and which regional services are most needed. A demographic profile of respondents was created to further contextualize the input received. A copy of the community survey is provided in Appendix D. Figure 3-6 displays a summary infographic of the community survey.

Community Awareness and Impressions

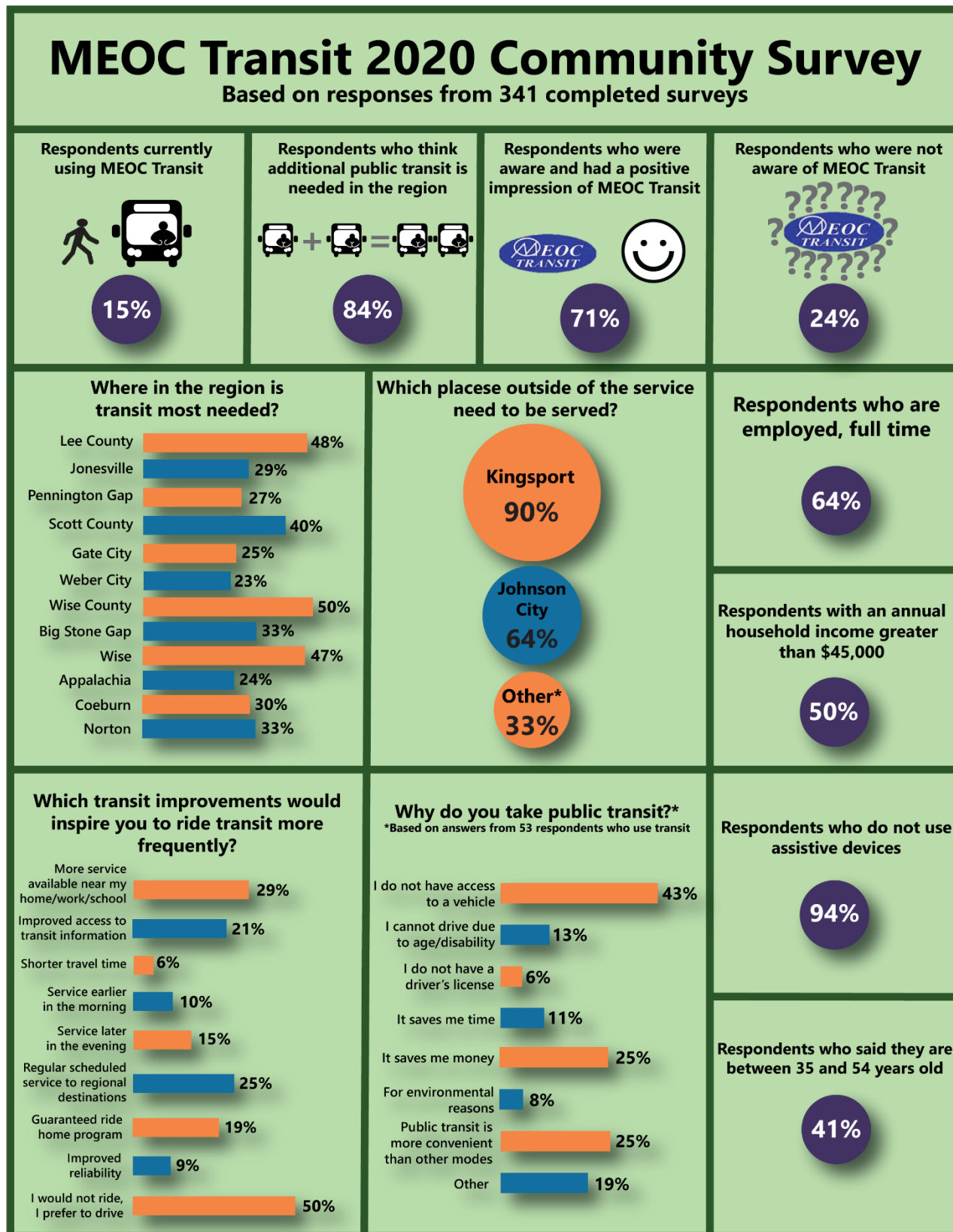
Fifteen percent of respondents indicated that they currently use MEOC Transit. When asked whether they were aware of MEOC Transit services, 71% of respondents indicated that they were aware of the services provided by MEOC Transit services, while 24% of respondents were unaware of MEOC Transit. Only 5% of respondents had a negative impression of MEOC Transit services.

Desired Service Improvements

Eighty-four percent of all respondents believed that there is a need for additional public transit services in the region. When asked where transit is most needed within the service area, Wise County (50%), was the most selected jurisdiction. Of the service area's various municipalities, Wise (47%), Norton (33%), Big Stone Gap (33%), and Coeburn (30%) were thought to have the highest transit need.

Respondents were asked whether there were any areas outside of the service area that needed service. The vast majority (90%) of respondents wanted service to Kingsport, while a smaller majority (64%) wanted service to Johnson City. Thirty-three percent of respondents wanted more service to "other" locations. These "other" locations included Abingdon (VA), Bristol (TN-VA), Middlesboro (KY), and Pikeville (KY).

Figure 3-6: Community Survey Infographic



Respondent Profile

The community survey was able to engage with a greater plurality of Mountain Empire community members. Sixty-four percent of respondents had full-time employment, 50% had an annual household income greater than \$45,000, and 41% were between the ages of 35 and 54. Compared to the demographics of the rider survey, this survey was filled out by a younger and higher earning group of community members than a typical MEOC Transit rider. Being able to receive feedback from these other groups is important.

Comments

Survey participants provided a number of open-ended comments and these are provided in Appendix E. The general theme to the comments is that MEOC is a great resource and should be expanded to provide more services. Another theme is that people perceive the program as being only for the elderly, as “Older Citizens” is part of the name of the service. There were requests for fixed route services, and services to Tennessee. Weekend service was also requested. There were a few negative comments with regard to scheduling and the need to provide car seats.

INPUT FROM MERTAC

The focus of the March 10, 2020 MERTAC meeting was to discuss the MEOC TDP, including reviewing the work completed to date and soliciting information concerning unmet transportation needs from the group. The following unmet needs were discussed:

- **Re-branding.** This project should be included in the TDP so that MEOC Transit can be awarded funding to help pay for the effort. The broader MEOC agency has been working on a new logo and has hired a marketing specialist.
 - There was concern that re-branding would result in higher demand that MEOC Transit may not be able to meet.
- **Examine the Provision of Deviated Fixed Routes.** Providing deviated fixed route service in high demand areas could serve to better coordinate trips and improve efficiency.
- There is a need for service after 5:00 p.m.
- UVA Wise students are interested in pursuing a deviated fixed route option for Friday and Saturday evenings. UVA Wise students are interested in other transit options as well, including a deviated fixed route to Walmart from campus. MEOC Transit currently provides the Cavalier Connection, which operates a deviated fixed route and a demand-response service.

- UVA-Wise students would like to see real-time transit information and the university may be able to help develop an application for MEOC Transit.
- There is a need to provide a connection between Wise and Kingsport, both for Wise residents getting to services and jobs in Kingsport, and also for students who live in the Kingsport area and attend UVA-Wise. There is an agreement in the Appalachian region that allows residents to receive in-state tuition for schools in the region.
- MEOC area residents also need access to Tennessee hospitals. For example, it is not uncommon for a patient to be transferred from a local hospital to a larger hospital in Tennessee for specialty services. Spouses and family members may not be able to visit the patient and the patient may not have a way home when discharged. Kingsport and Johnson City were mentioned as destinations.
- MEOC currently serves some of this demand, providing shuttle services for cancer patients to attend radiation appointments in Kingsport while the local radiation center in Norton is upgrading its facility.

POPULATION ANALYSIS

This section provides a general population profile for the study area, identifies and evaluates underserved population subgroups, and reviews the demographic characteristics pertinent to a Title VI analysis. The study area consists of Lee, Scott, and Wise counties and the city of Norton. This analysis includes data sources from the 2010 U.S. Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates.

Population

Table 3-7 shows U.S. Census population counts for the study area from 1990 to 2018. While Virginia's population has grown by 5% since 1990, the MEOC service area population has decreased by 5%.

Table 3-7: Historical Populations

	1990 Population	Growth Rate	2000 Population	Growth Rate	2010 Population	Growth Rate	2018 Estimate	Growth Rate
Virginia	6,187,358	--	7,078,515	14%	8,001,024	13%	8,413,774	5%
Lee County	24,496	--	23,589	-4%	25,587	8%	24,134	-6%
Scott County	23,204	--	23,403	1%	23,177	-1%	22,009	-5%
Wise County	39,573	--	40,123	1%	41,452	3%	39,025	-6%
City of Norton	4,247	--	3,904	-8%	3,958	1%	3,990	1%
Total Service Area	91,520	--	91,019	-1%	94,174	3%	89,158	-5%

Source: U.S. Census, American Factfinder

Table 3-8 shows the recent population trends in the study area. Since 2010, Virginia has grown in population by 5.2% while MEOC's service area has decreased in population by 5.3%. Since 2010, Norton had the highest growth rate of any of MEOC's jurisdictions, seeing a 0.8% population increase since 2010. Wise County had the highest rate of population loss since 2010 with a 5.9% population decrease.

Table 3-8: Recent Population Trends

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2010-2018 % Change
Virginia	8,001,024	7,926,192	8,014,955	8,100,653	8,185,131	8,256,630	8,310,301	8,365,952	8,413,774	5.2%
Lee County	25,587	25,405	25,528	25,497	25,380	25,206	24,911	24,428	24,134	-5.7%
Scott County	23,177	23,210	23,061	22,940	22,781	22,570	22,378	22,290	22,009	-5.0%
Wise County	41,452	41,505	41,361	41,154	40,872	40,530	40,074	39,539	39,025	-5.9%
City of Norton	3,958	3,934	3,971	3,998	4,015	4,007	3,978	4,043	3,990	0.8%
Total Service Area	94,174	94,054	93,921	93,589	93,048	92,313	91,341	90,300	89,158	-5.3%

Source: U.S. Census Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: ACS 5-year Estimates

Population Density

Population density is one of the most important factors in determining the appropriate transportation service in a community. It is often used as an indicator for the type of public transit services that are feasible within a study area. Typically, an area with a density of 2,000 persons per square mile will be able to sustain daily fixed route transit service. An area with a population density below 2,000 but above 1,000 persons per square mile may be a better candidate for deviated fixed route or demand-response services.

This analysis looked at the population density of the study area at the block group level. No block group in the service area had a population density of over 2,000 people per square mile.

The highest density block groups are in Big Stone Gap, Coeburn, Norton, and Wise. Figure 3-7 shows the study area's population density

Population Forecast

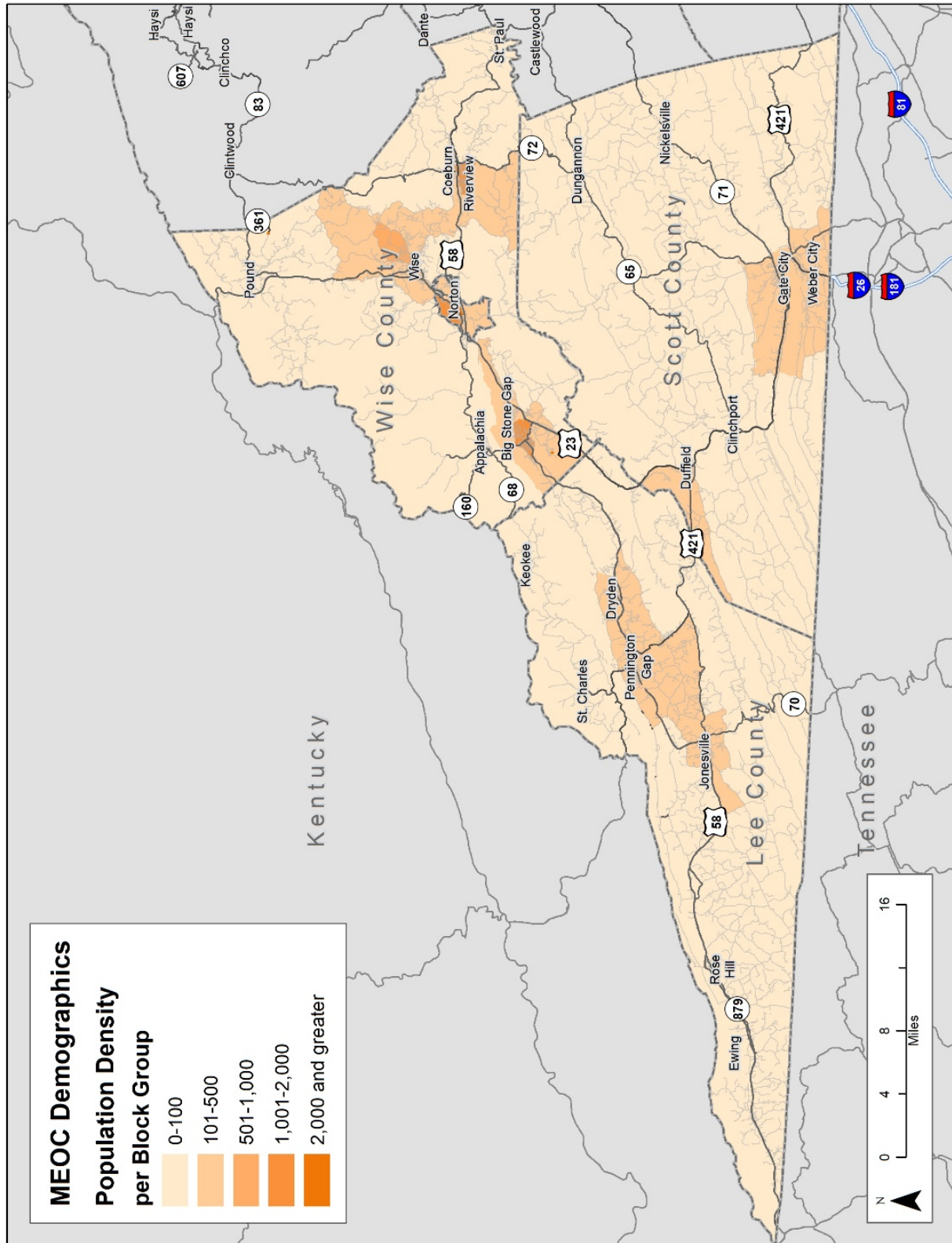
Table 3-9 provides general population projections for the study area. In keeping with observed population trends since 1990, the total population of MEOC's service area is expected to decrease at a similar rate to Virginia's population growth rate. From 2020-2030, the population of persons ages 0-19 and 20-64 in the MEOC service area will decrease while the population over the age of 65 will increase by 3.1%. Regarding MEOC's component jurisdictions, no city or county is projected to have population growth.

Table 3-9: General Population Forecast for the Study Area

Age Group (Years)	Population	Percent	Population	10-year Change	Population	10-year Change
	2020 Population		2030 Projection		2040 Projection	
Virginia	8,655,021	100.0%	9,331,666	7.8%	9,876,728	5.8%
0-19	2,152,495	24.9%	2,298,450	6.8%	2,452,625	6.7%
20-64	5,150,078	59.5%	5,309,834	3.1%	5,614,317	5.7%
65+	1,352,448	15.6%	1,723,382	27.4%	1,809,787	5.0%
Lee County	23,718	100.0%	23,632	-0.4%	23,258	-1.6%
0-19	4,846	20.4%	4,764	-1.7%	4,585	-3.8%
20-64	13,761	58.0%	13,618	-1.0%	13,496	-0.9%
65+	5,111	21.5%	5,250	2.7%	5,177	-1.4%
Scott County	21,949	100.0%	20,961	-4.5%	19,740	-5.8%
0-19	4,383	18.5%	4,062	-7.3%	3,848	-5.3%
20-64	12,369	52.1%	11,407	-7.8%	10,560	-7.4%
65+	5,197	21.9%	5,491	5.7%	5,332	-2.9%
Wise County	37,844	100.0%	36,400	-3.8%	34,545	-5.1%
0-19	8,532	36.0%	8,171	-4.2%	7,733	-5.4%
20-64	22,054	93.0%	20,877	-5.3%	20,073	-3.9%
65+	7,258	30.6%	7,351	1.3%	6,739	-8.3%
City of Norton	3,906	100.0%	3,857	-1.2%	3,762	-2.5%
0-19	981	4.1%	965	-1.7%	960	-0.5%
20-64	2,254	9.5%	2,177	-3.4%	2,132	-2.0%
65+	671	2.8%	716	6.7%	670	-6.4%
MEOC Study Area	87,417	100.0%	84,849	-2.9%	81,304	-4.2%
0-19	18,743	79.0%	17,962	-4.2%	17,126	-4.7%
20-64	50,438	212.7%	48,079	-4.7%	46,261	-3.8%
65+	18,236	76.9%	18,808	3.1%	17,917	-4.7%

Source: University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, 2019

Figure 3-7: Population Density of the Study Area



Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

TRANSIT DEPENDENT POPULATIONS

Public transportation needs are defined in part by identifying the relative size and location of segments within the general population that are most likely to be dependent on transit services. This includes individuals who may not have access to a personal vehicle due to income status or are unable to drive due to age or disability. The results of this demographic analysis highlight areas within the study area with the greatest transportation needs.

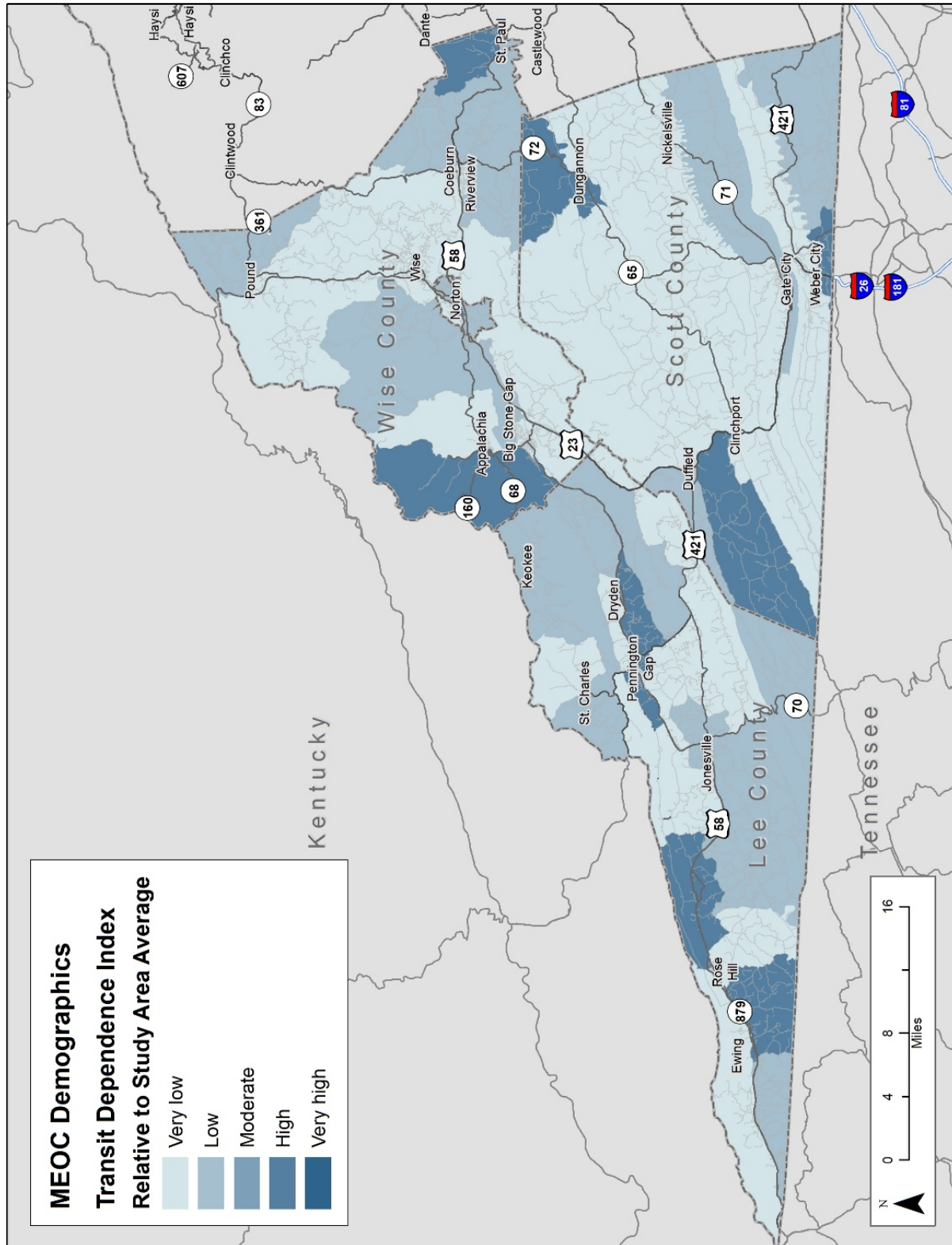
For the purpose of developing a relative process of ranking socioeconomic need, block groups are classified relative to the entire study area by using a five-tiered scale of “very low” to “very high.” A block group classified as “very low” can still have a significant number of potential transit dependent persons; as “very low” only means below the study area’s average. At the other end of the spectrum, “very high” means greater than twice the study area’s average. The exact specifications for each score are summarized in Table 3-10.

Table 3-10: Relative Ranking Definitions for Transit Dependent Populations

Number of Vulnerable Persons or Households	Score
Less than and equal to the study area’s average	Very Low
Above the average and up to 1.33 times the average	Low
Above 1.33 times the average and up to 1.67 times the average	Moderate
Above 1.67 times the average and up to two times the average	High
Above two times the average	Very High

Figure 3-8 displays Transit Dependence Index (TDI) rankings for the study area. According to the TDI, areas with higher transit need are found in block groups throughout the service area, including: Appalachia, Big Stone Gap, Clinchport, Dungannon, Dryden, Pennington Gap, and Weber City.

Figure 3-8: Transit Dependence Index



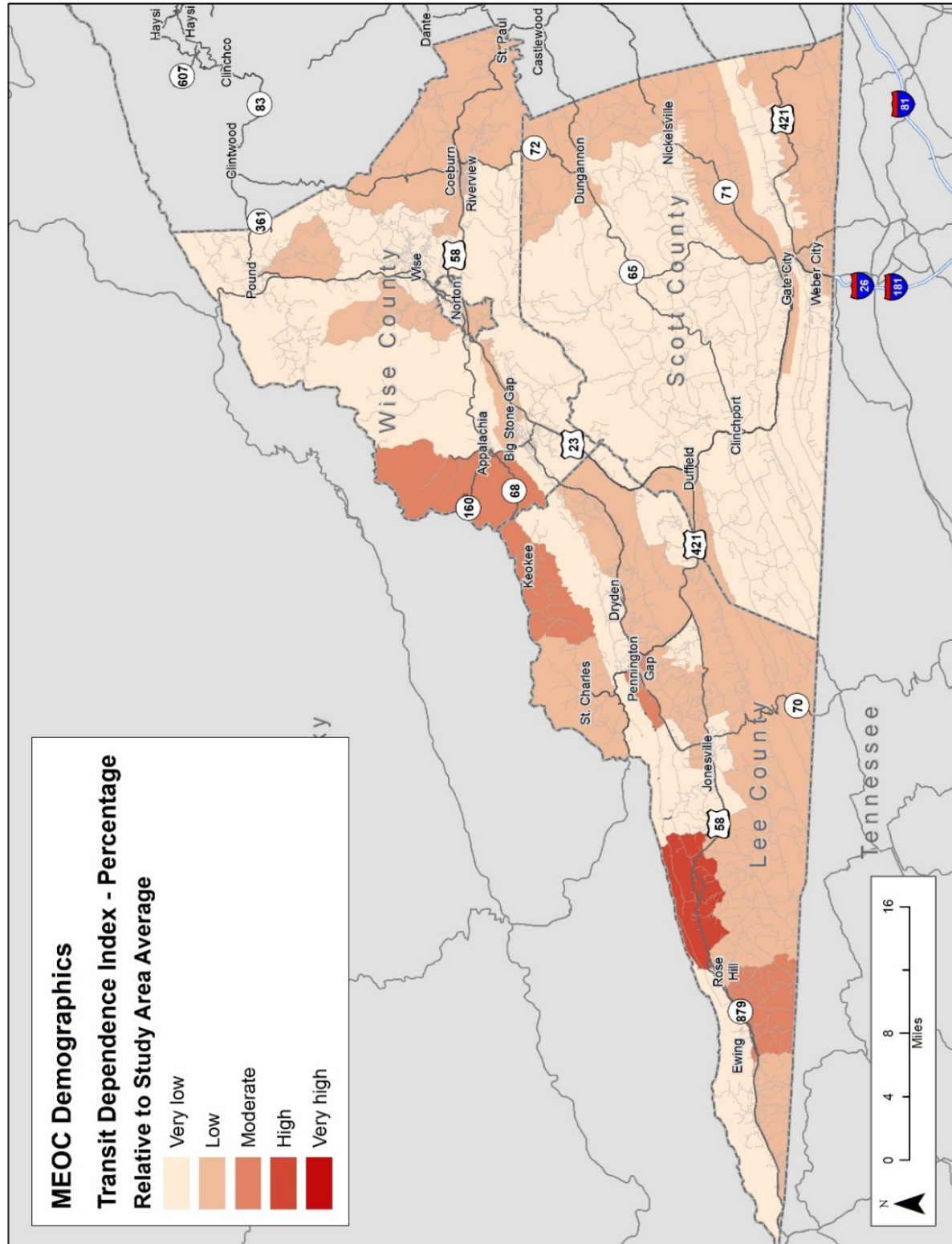
Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

The Transit Dependence Index Percent (TDIP) is like the TDI measure except that it is not weighted by a block group's population density. The TDIP uses only the average percentage of all transit dependent groups within the study area, aggregating autoless households, older adults (ages 65+), youth (ages 10-17), individuals with disabilities, and below poverty individuals, to create this metric.

Removing the population density allows for further analysis of a block group's degree of transit dependence. It represents the percentage of the block group's population with the above socioeconomic characteristics, and it follows the TDI's five-tiered categorization of "very low" to "very high". It does not highlight block groups that are likely to have higher concentrations of vulnerable populations only because of their population density.

Figure 3-9 shows transit need based on percentage. According to the TDIP, higher percentages of transit dependent persons are found in Lee County, specifically the block groups surrounding Rose Hill.

Figure 3-9: Transit Dependence Index Percentage

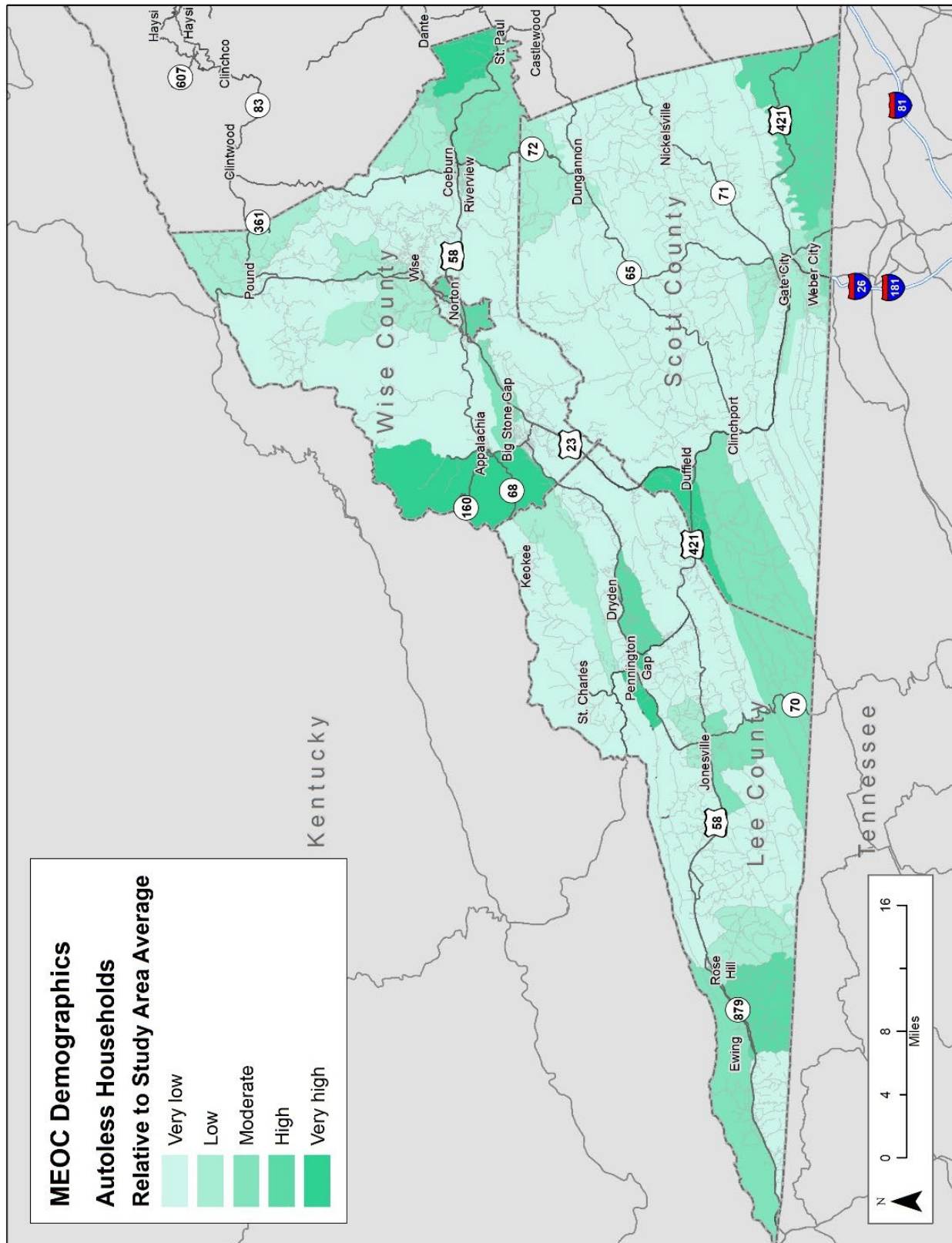


Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

Autoless Households

Households without access to at least one personal vehicle are more likely to depend on the mobility offered by public transit. Although autoless households are reflected in both the TDI and TDIP measures, displaying this segment of the population separately is still important. Higher percentages of autoless households are found in the block groups west of Appalachia and Big Stone Gap. Figure 3-10 displays the relative number of autoless households.

Figure 3-10: Autoless Households

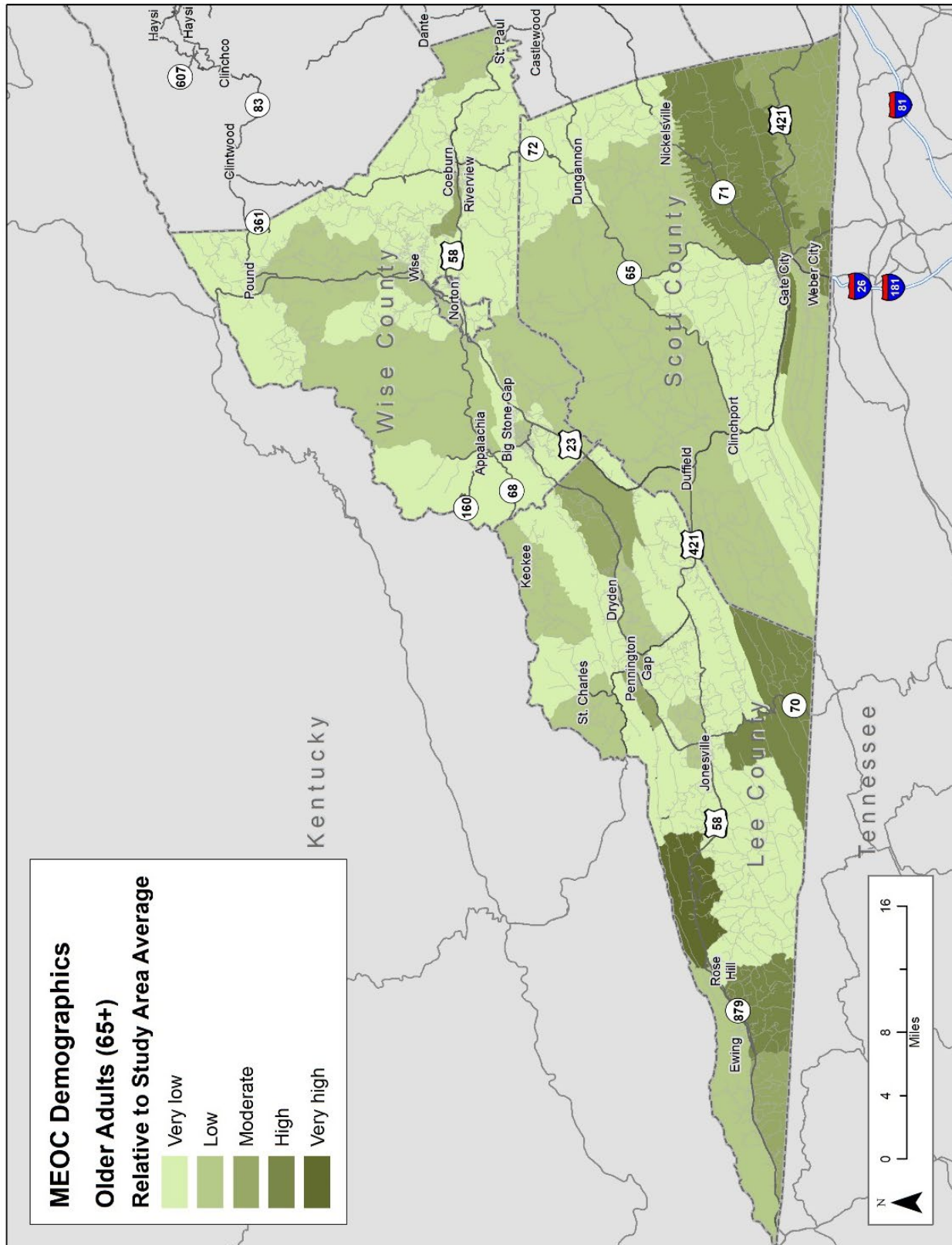


Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

Older Adult Population

One of the socioeconomic groups analyzed by the TDI and TDIP indices is the older adult population, which is individuals ages 65 and older. Persons in this age group may begin to decrease their use of a personal vehicle and rely more heavily on public transit. Block groups that contain very high percentages of older adults are located around Rose Hill. High percentages of older adults are found south of Jonesville and block groups near Gate City and Weber City. Figure 3-11 illustrates the older adult population in the study area.

Figure 3-II: Distribution of the Older Adult Population (Ages 65 and Above)

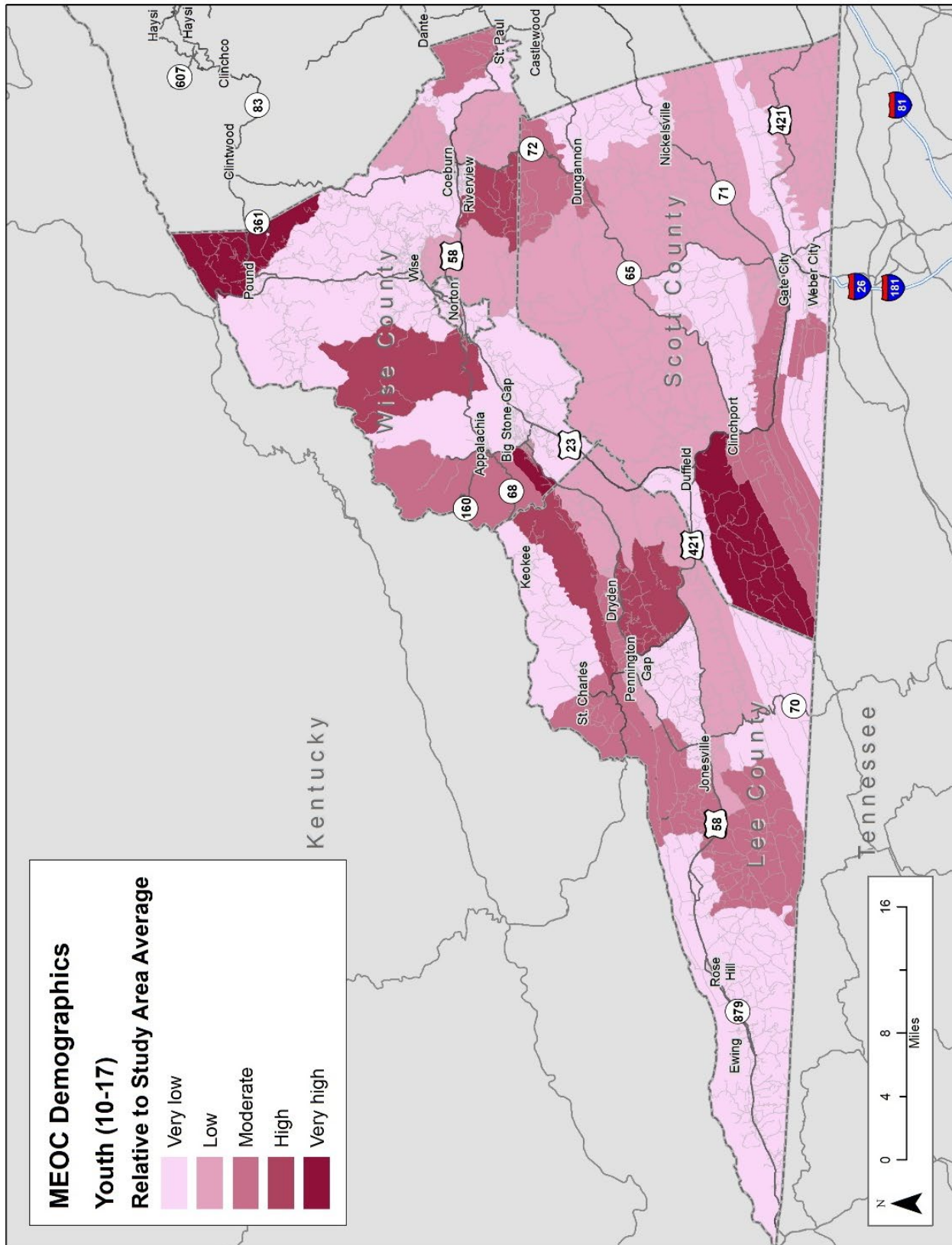


Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

Youth Population

The youth population is often used as an identifier of transit dependent populations. Persons ages 10 to 17 either cannot drive or are just beginning to drive and often do not have a personal automobile consistently available to them. For this population, public transit is a crucial mobility option. Very high youth populations are in Big Stone Gap, Duffield, and Pound. Figure 3-12 illustrates the concentrations of youth populations relative to the study area.

Figure 3-12: Distribution of the Youth Population (Ages 10 to 17)

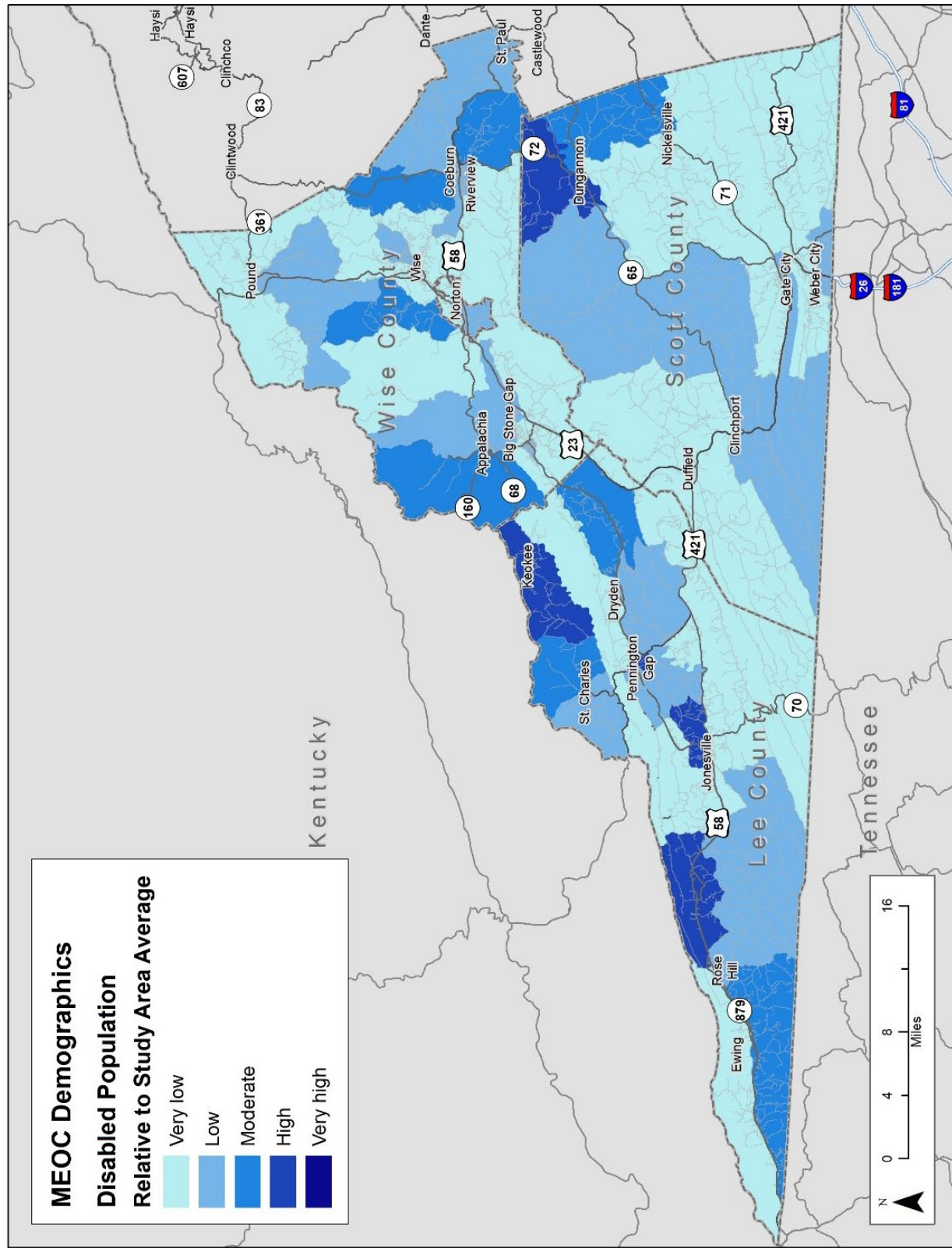


Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

Individuals with Disabilities

Figure 3-13 illustrates the distribution of individuals with disabilities in the study area. The American Community Survey was used to obtain data for populations of individuals with disabilities. This data is only provided at the census tract level. Persons who have disabilities that prevent them from or make it more difficult to own and operate a personal vehicle often rely on public transit for their transportation needs. High percentages of individuals with disabilities can be found in Dungannon, Jonesville, Keokee, and Rose Hill.

Figure 3-13: Distribution of Individuals with Disabilities



Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

TITLE VI DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in programs and activities receiving federal subsidies. This includes agencies providing federally funded public transportation. The following section examines the minority and below poverty level populations in the study area.

Minority Population

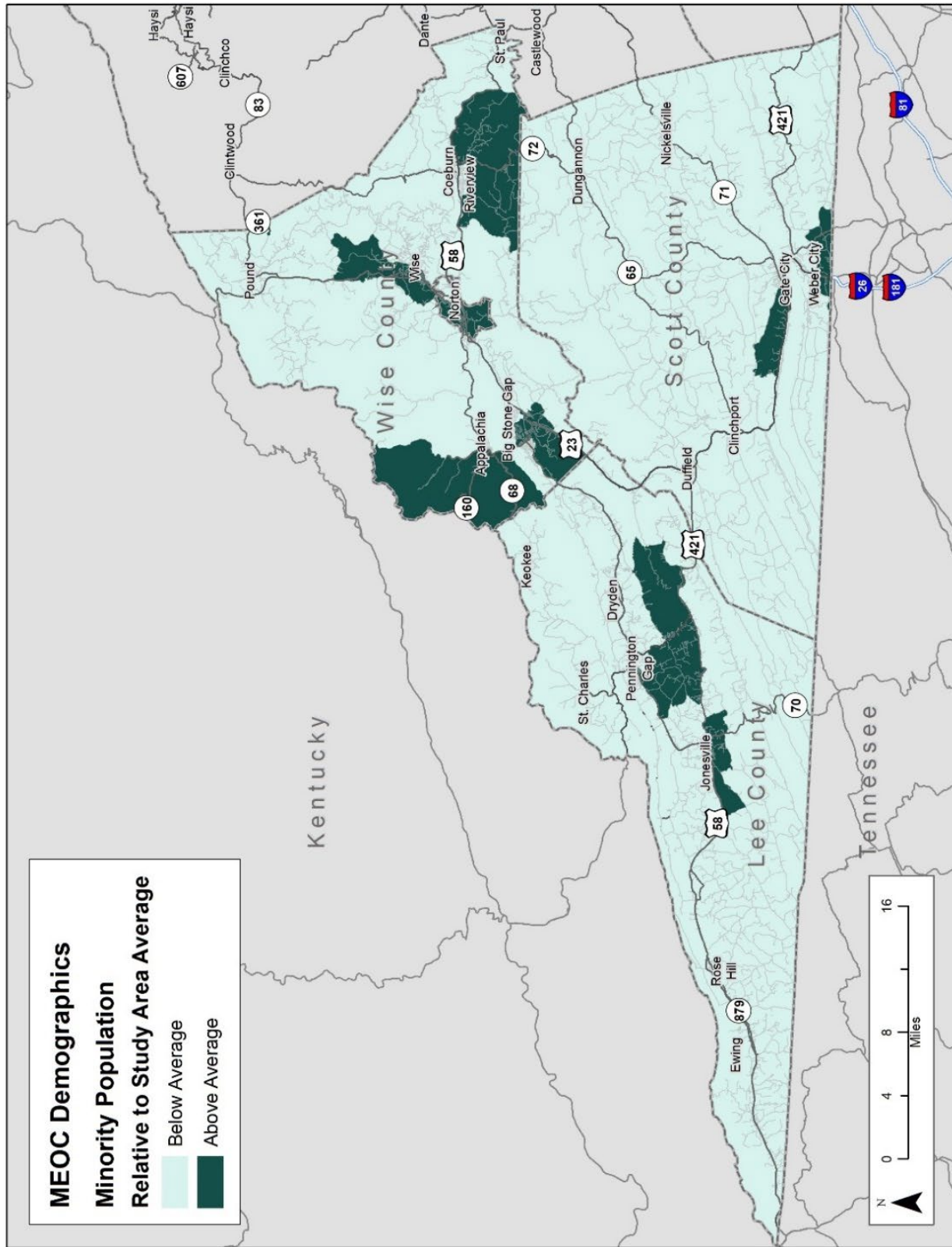
It is important to ensure that areas with an above average percentage of racial and/or ethnic minorities are not negatively impacted by any proposed alterations to existing public transportation services. In the study area, the average concentration of minority populations is 6.7%. Figure 3-14 illustrates the concentration of minority populations above and below the area's average. Block groups in Appalachia, Big Stone Gap, Coeburn, Gate City, Jonesville, Norton, Pennington Gap, Weber City, and Wise have an above average minority population.

Below Poverty Populations

The second group included in the Title VI analysis represents individuals who earn less than the federal poverty level. This segment of the population may find it a financial burden to own and maintain a personal vehicle, thus relying on public transit as their primary means of transportation. The average percentage of individuals living below the federal poverty level is 20.7%. The poverty level in the region is almost twice the poverty rate of the Commonwealth as a whole (10.7%).¹ As is shown in Figure 3-15, most of Lee County has an above average percentage of individuals are living below the federal poverty level.

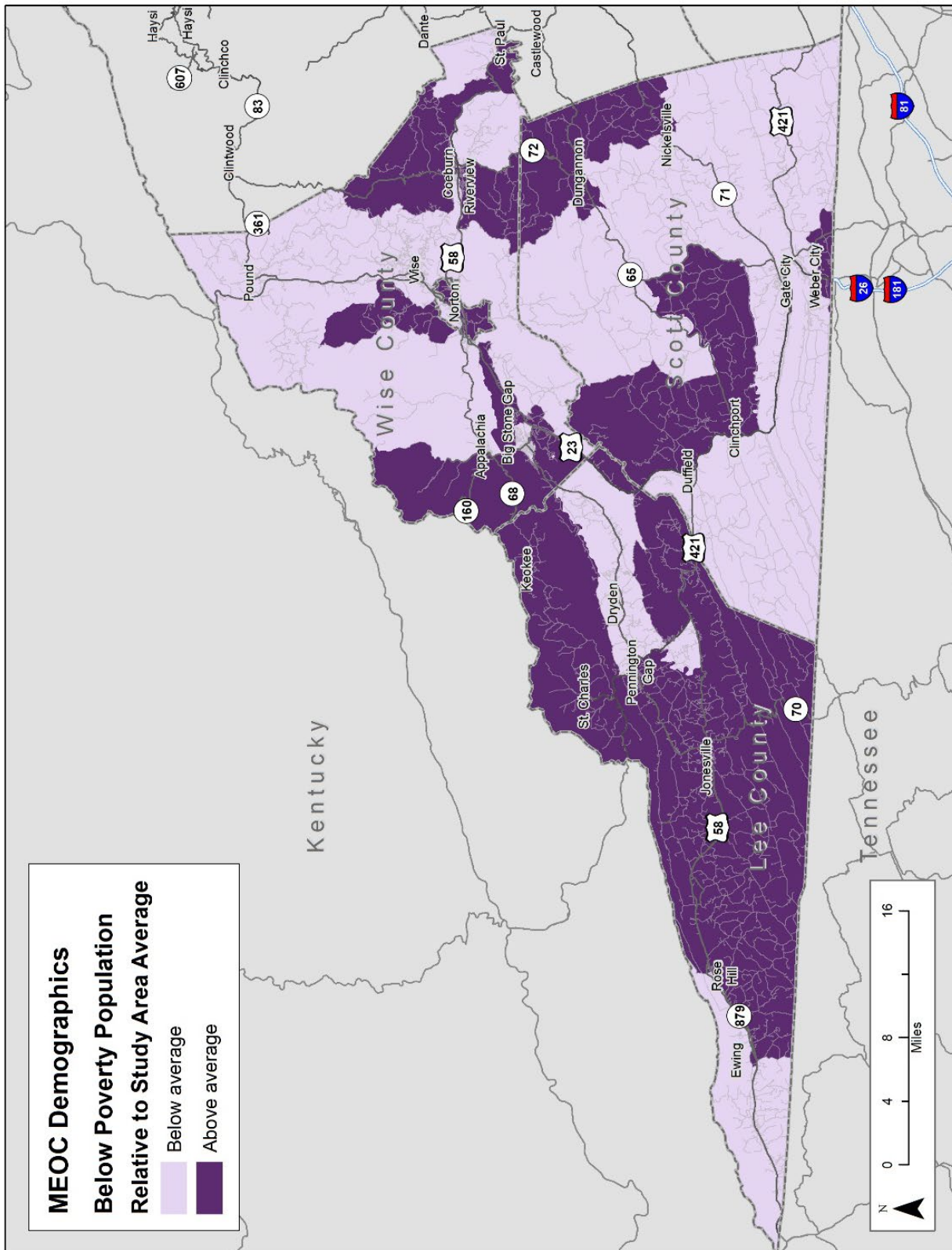
¹ U.S. Census Quick Facts, July 1, 2019.

Figure 3-14: Distribution of the Minority Population



Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

Figure 3-15 Distribution of the Below Poverty Population



Source: U.S. Census and American Community Survey

Limited-English Proficiency

In addition to providing public transportation for a plurality of socioeconomic groups, it is also important to adequately serve and disseminate information to those of different linguistic backgrounds. According to the U.S Census Bureau, a person with limited-English proficiency (LEP) is any non-native English speaker who categorizes how they speak English as anything less than “very well”. The MEOC service area’s population is predominantly English speaking, though there is a small population of LEP Spanish speakers, accounting for less than one percent of the study area population. Table 3-II displays the LEP persons in the service area by language spoken at home.

Table 3-II: Limited English Proficiency Populations in the Service Area

MEOC Service Area			
Language	Number of LEP Population	Percent of County Population Speaking Language	Percent of LEP Population Speaking Language
Spanish or Spanish Creole	435	0.50%	68.18%
French	58	0.07%	9.09%
German	28	0.03%	4.39%
Persian	19	0.02%	2.98%
Laotian	14	0.02%	2.19%
Arabic	13	0.01%	2.04%
Chinese	12	0.01%	1.88%
Other and unspecified languages	12	0.01%	1.88%
African languages	10	0.01%	1.57%
Russian	8	0.01%	1.25%
Urdu	7	0.01%	1.10%
Serbo-Croatian	6	0.01%	0.94%
Other Pacific Island languages	5	0.01%	0.78%
Japanese	4	0.00%	0.63%
Thai	4	0.00%	0.63%
Vietnamese	3	0.00%	0.47%
Total LEP Population	638	0.73%	
Total Service Area Population	87,020		

Source: American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates (2011-2015), Table B16001.

LAND USE PROFILE

Major Trip Generators

Identifying land uses and major trip generators in the study area complements the demographic analysis by indicating where transit services may be most needed. Trip generators attract transit demand and include common origins and destinations, like multi-unit housing, major employers, medical facilities, educational facilities, non-profit and governmental agencies, and shopping centers. Large concentrations of trip generators are found in Big Stone Gap, Gate City, Norton, and Wise. Figure 3-16 identifies major trip generators in the study area.

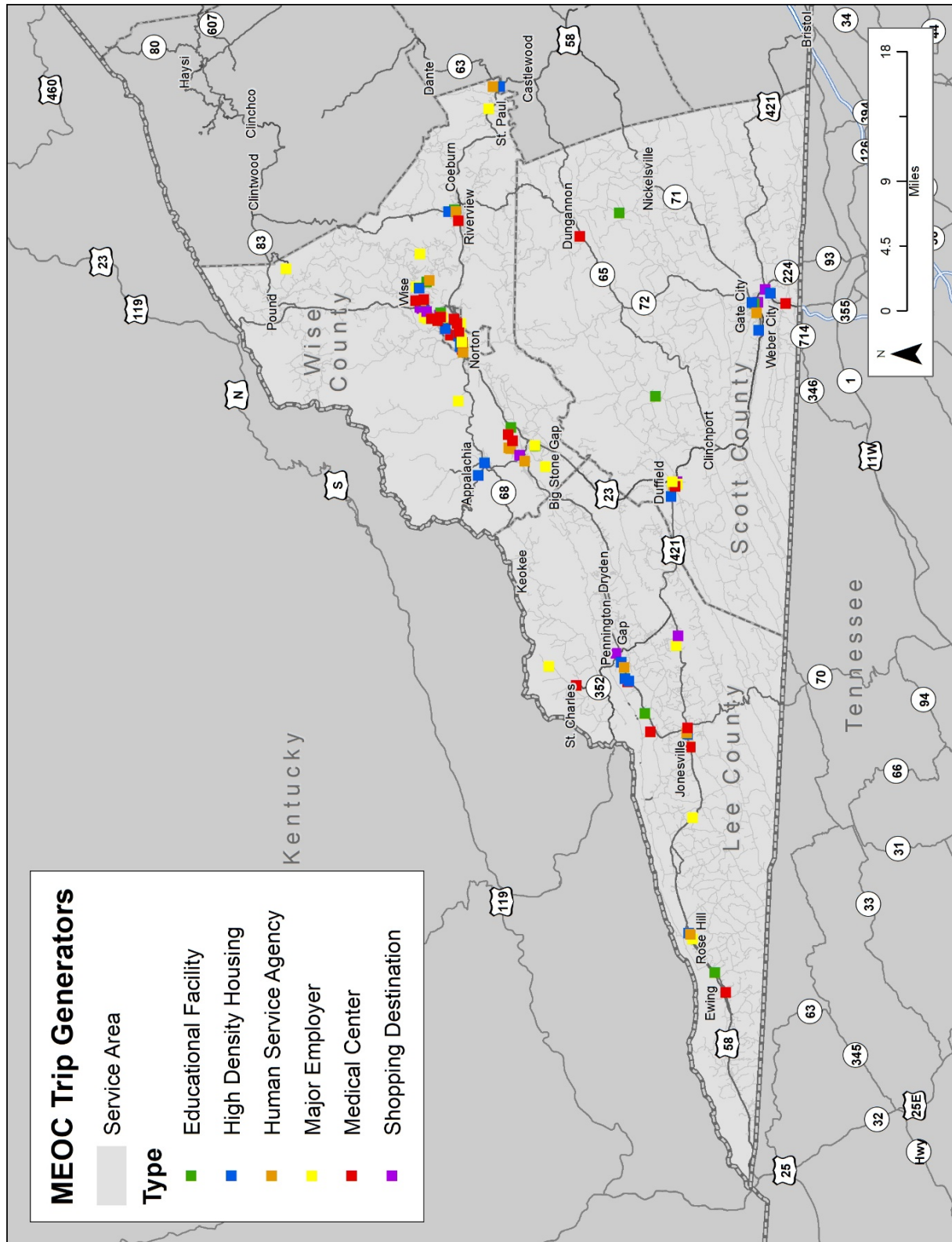
Educational Facilities

Many of the individuals that comprise the school age population are unable to afford or operate their own personal vehicle; therefore, it may be assumed that this segment of the population is often reliant upon public transportation. Additionally, many faculty and staff members associate with these institutions as a place of employment. Educational facilities that are in the study area include Mountain Empire Community College and UVA-Wise. Additional educational facilities include the study area's public high schools. These are listed in Table 3-12.

Table 3-12: Educational Facilities

Name	Address	City	Zip Code
John I. Burton High School	109 11 th Street NW	Norton	24273
Mountain Empire Community College	3441 Mountain Empire Road	Big Stone Gap	24219
University of Virginia - Wise	1 College Avenue	Wise	24293
Central High School	5000 Warrior Drive	Norton	24273
Eastside High School	314 Schoolhouse Hill Drive NE	Coeburn	24230
Union High School	2 Champions Avenue	Big Stone Gap	24219
Lee High School	200 Generals Lane	Jonesville	24263
Thomas Walker High School	126 Blue Gray Road	Ewing	24248
Gate City High School	178 Harry Fry Drive	Gate City	24251
Rye Cove High School	164 Eagles Nest Lane	Duffield	24244
Twin Springs High School	273 Titan Lane	Nickelsville	24271

Figure 3-16: Major Trip Generators



Multi-Unit/ High-Density Housing

Residents living in multi-unit housing complexes tend to drive fewer miles and use public transportation more frequently than residents of single-unit housing. Multiunit housing complexes are located throughout the study area and are listed in Table 3-13.

Table 3-13: Multi-Unit/High-Density Housing

Name	Address	City	Zip Code
Jonesville Manor Apartments	117 Jonesville Manor Road	Jonesville	24263
Stonegate Apartments	430 Stonegate Drive	Pennington Gap	24277
Lee Terrace Apartments	1750 Combs Road	Pennington Gap	24277
Rose Hill	50 Pinnacle Place	Rose Hill	24281
Old Mill Apartments	112 L & N Avenue	Pennington Gap	24277
Gatewood Apartments	219 Gatewood Court	Gate City	24251
Clinch View Manor Apartments	134 Jay Street	Gate City	24251
Weber City Apartments	319 Greenwood Drive	Weber City	24290
Thomas Village Apartments	163 Cecil D Quillen Drive	Duffield	24244
Gilliam Court Senior Citizens Apartments	736 Gilliam Street NE	Wise	24293
Norton Heights Apartments	520 Alexandria Circle NW	Norton	24273
Inman Village Apartments	100 Don Whitehead Drive	Appalachia	24216
Cavalier Housing	144 College Row	Wise	24293
Litchfield Manor	107 Litchfield Street NW	Coeburn	24230
Norton Green Apartments	380 14th Street NW	Norton	24273
Stonebriar Apartments	16600 Broad Street	St. Paul	24283
Shawnee Ridge Apartments	250 Virginia Avenue NE	Norton	24273
Appalachian Towers	505 W Main Street	Appalachia	24216

Human Service Agencies

Human service agencies help support community members by providing family support, recreation, and other services to help enrich the quality of life for area residents. Mountain Empire Older Citizens Transit also operates many of the human service agencies in the region. Virginia Career Works centers and public libraries were also considered trip generators. Table 3-14 lists the human service agencies in the region.

Table 3-14: Human Service Agencies

Name	Address	City	Zip Code
Mountain Empire Older Citizens	1501 Third Avenue East	Big Stone Gap	24219
The PACE Center	1508 Third Avenue East	Big Stone Gap	24219
Virginia Career Works - Norton	1725 Park Avenue SW	Norton	24273
Virginia Career Works - Duffield	225 Boone Trail Road	Duffield	24224
Appalachian Community Action & Development Agency	119 Hill Street	Jonesville	24263
Lee County Public Library	539 Joslyn Avenue	Pennington Gap	24277
Heritage Hall – Wise	9434 Coeburn Mountain Road	Wise	24293
Scott County Public Library	297 W Jackson Street	Gate City	24251
C. Bascom Slemple Memorial Library	11 Proctor Street N	Big Stone Gap	24219
Coeburn Community Library	111 Third Street	Coeburn	24230
Mailbox Library	124 Library Road SW	Wise	24293
Rose Hill Community Library	6463 Thomas Road	Rose Hill	24281
J. Fred Matthews Memorial Library	16552 Wise Street	St. Paul	24283
Wise County Public Library	124 Library Road	Wise	24293
Clinchview Public Housing	3311 3 rd Avenue	St. Paul	24283

Major Employers

The major employers displayed in Figure 3-II were obtained from the City of Norton, Wise County, and the Virginia Employment Commissions Economic Profile of the Lenowisco PDC. Some major employers, like public school systems and community colleges, are not on this list but are instead listed as educational facilities, medical centers, or shopping destinations. Table 3-15 lists the major employers within the study area.

Table 3-15: Major Employers

Name	Address	City	Zip
Norfolk Southern Railway	405 Depot Street SW	Norton	24273
Pepsi Seven Up Bottling	1226 Park Avenue NW	Norton	24273
Union Drilling	200 Industrial Drive	Norton	24273
Wolfe, Williams, & Reynolds	470 Park Avenue NW	Norton	24273
Mullican Lumber & Manufacturing	4864 Blackwood Industrial Park	Norton	24273
Virginia Department of Transportation - Wise	703 Hurricane Road NE	Wise	24293
VA Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy	3450 Mountain Empire Road	Big Stone Gap	24219
Wallens Ridge State Prison	1052 Dogwood Drive	Big Stone Gap	24219
Red Onion State Prison	10800 H Jack Rose Highway	Pound	24279
Crutchfield Call Center	5655 Industrial Park Road	Wise	24293
Paramont Coal Company	5703 Crutchfield Drive	Norton	24273
Sykes Enterprises	10431 Pinnacle Drive	Wise	24293
United States Penitentiary, Lee	Hickory Flats Road	Pennington Gap	24277
Glass Machinery & Excavation	27262 Wilderness Road	Jonesville	24263
Lone Mountain Processing	2778 State Road 636	St Charles	24282
Elk Knob Head Start Center	41876 Wilderness Road	Pennington Gap	24277
Tempur Production	203 Tempur Pedic Drive	Duffield	24244
Riggs Oil Company Black Diamond	1505 E 1 st Avenue	Big Stone Gap	24219
Virginia City Hybrid Energy	3117 Russell Creek Road	St Paul	24283
VFP Inc.	402 Industrial Park Road	Duffield	24244
Deroyal Industries	100 Industrial Park	Rose Hill	24281

Medical Facilities

Medical facilities represent a significant destination for users of public transportation. Older adults and persons with disabilities often rely more heavily upon services offered by medical facilities than other population segments. Major medical centers within the service area are clustered in Norton. There is also a hospital in Big Stone Gap (Lonesome Pine). Ballad Health is scheduled to reopen the Lee County Community Hospital in Pennington Gap.

Community health facilities are scattered throughout the region. Table 3-16 lists the medical facilities in the study area.

Table 3-16: Medical Facilities

Name	Address	City	Zip Code
Norton Community Hospital	100 15th Street NW	Norton	24273
Clinch River Health Services	17825 Veterans Memorial Hwy	Dungannon	24245
Frontier Health – Big Stone Gap	2532 4 th Avenue E	Big Stone Gap	24219
Mountain View Regional Hospital	310 3rd Street NE	Norton	24273
Lee Health & Rehab Center	208 Health Care Drive	Pennington Gap	24277
Lee County Behavioral Health Services	34804 Wilderness Trail	Jonesville	24263
Lonesome Pine Hospital	1990 Holton Avenue	Big Stone Gap	24219
James H Quillen VA Medical Center	654 US-58 ALT	Norton	24273
Thomas E. Renfro Community Clinic	515 Front Street W	Coeburn	24230
Healios Health Center	5516 Industrial Park Road	Norton	24273
Wellmont Health System	5341 Esserville Road	Norton	24273
Wellmont Occupational Health	295 Wharton Ln	Norton	24273
WMA Women’s Health	338 Coeburn Avenue SW	Norton	24273
WMA Jonesville	32576 Wilderness Road	Jonesville	24263
Western Lee County Clinic	1446 Dr Thomas Walker Drive	Ewing	24248
Appalachian Healthcare Associates	338 Coeburn Avenue SW	Norton	24273
Wise Cavalier Clinic	413 W Main Street	Wise	24293
Community Physicians Wise	716 Spring Avenue SE	Wise	24293
Holston Medical Group	121 Advanced Technology Drive	Duffield	24244
Ballad Health Medical Associates Urgent Care	601 Commonwealth Drive	Norton	24273
Ballad Health Medical Associates Urgent Care	1014 Park Avenue NW	Norton	24273
Scott County Behavioral Health Services	1006 US-23	Weber City	24290
Stone Mountain Health Services	276 Fieldstone Drive	Jonesville	24263
St. Charles Community Health Clinic	241 State Road 636	St Charles	24282

Shopping Destinations

For transit users, grocery stores, hardware stores, and other shops that sell necessities are just as vital a shopping destination as large shopping malls. Additionally, these shopping locales can often double as major employers, adding another dimension to the travel patterns of a destination. Table 3-17 lists the study area's shopping destinations.

Table 3-17: Shopping Destinations

Name	Address	City	Zip Code
Walmart - Norton	780 Commonwealth Drive	Norton	24273
Lowe's Home Improvement	201 Woodland Dr SW	Wise	24293
Food City - Pennington Gap	205 River Bend Drive	Pennington Gap	24277
Food City - Wise	207 Woodland Drive SW	Wise	24293
Food City - Big Stone Gap	603 Wood Avenue W	Big Stone Gap	24219
Food City - Weber City	3004 US-23	Weber City	24290
Food Country USA	42158 US-58	Duffield	24244
Save A Lot	102 US-58	Pennington Gap	24277
Food Lion	241 Gateway Plaza	Gate City	24251
Ridgeview Shopping Center	75 Ridgeview Road SW	Wise	24293

Employment Travel Patterns

In addition to considering locations of major employers, it is also important to account for the commuting patterns of residents working inside and outside the study area. According to ACS five-year estimates, the majority (78%) of residents in the study area work in Virginia and typically work in their county of residence (58%). Most residents travel to work by driving alone (85%). Less than one percent of the service area's residents use public transportation as their primary mode of travel to work. Table 3-18 illustrates commuting patterns of residents in the study area.

Table 3-18: Journey to Work Patterns for Study Area

MEOC Service Area		
Workers (Ages 16 +)	29,434	
Employment Location	Number	Percent
In State of Residence	23,085	78%
In County	17,132	58%
Outside of County	5,953	20%
Outside State of Residence	6,349	22%
Means of Transportation to Work	Number	Percent
Car, Truck, or Van - drove alone	25,139	85%
Car, Truck, or Van - carpooled	2,921	10%
Public Transportation	97	0%
Walked	376	1%
Taxicab, Motorcycle, Bicycle, Other	175	1%
Worked at Home	726	2%

Source: ACS, Five-Year Estimates (2014-2018), Table B08130

Another source of data that provides an understanding of employee travel patterns is the Census Bureau's Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) dataset. The top work destinations for residents of the study area included Wise, Kingsport, Norton, Big Stone Gap, and Jonesville. Two of the top ten work destinations were located outside of Virginia, in Tennessee. Table 3-19 lists the top ten work destinations for residents of the service area.

Table 3-19: Top Ten Employment Destinations for Residents in the MEOC Service Area

Place	Number of Workers who Live in the MEOC Service Area	Percent
Wise, VA	2,585	8.6%
Kingsport, TN	2,378	7.9%
Norton, VA	2,290	7.6%
Big Stone Gap, VA	1,869	6.2%
Jonesville, VA	1,156	3.8%
Gate City, VA	1,138	3.8%
Pennington Gap, VA	718	2.4%
Johnson City, TN	556	1.8%
Bristol, VA	479	1.6%
Weber City	446	1.5%

Source: Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, 2017.

LEHD data also provided the top places of residence for people working within the MEOC service area. Top places of residence included Norton, Big Stone Gap, and Wise. Kingsport was the only top ten place of residence not located in Virginia. Table 3-20 lists the top places of residence for workers within the MEOC service area.

Table 3-20: Top Ten Places of Residence for Workers in the MEOC Service Area

Place	Number of People who Work in MEOC Service Area	Percent
Norton VA	1,120	4.3%
Big Stone Gap, VA	1,084	4.2%
Wise, VA	629	2.4%
Kingsport, TN	499	1.9%
Appalachia, VA	332	1.3%
Coeburn, VA	312	1.2%
Gate City, VA	287	1.1%
Pennington Gap, VA	284	1.1%
Bristol, VA	234	0.9%
Dryden, VA	224	0.9%

Employment Projections

The Virginia Employment Commission prepares employment projections for counties, cities, and regions of the Commonwealth. For the Mountain Empire region, the projections are not available by jurisdiction, but are available for Local Development Area 1, which includes Lee, Scott, Wise, Buchanan, Dickenson, Russell and Tazewell counties and the city of Norton. Exhibit 3-1 shows these projections for years 2014-2024.

Exhibit 1: Local Development Area 1 Employment Projections 2014-2024

	Employment			Percent	
	Estimated 2014	Projected 2024	Change	Total	Annual
Total, All Industries	61,301	64,924	3,623	5.91%	.58%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	192	201	9	4.69%	.46%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	4,858	4,604	-254	-5.23%	-.54%
Utilities	341	304	-37	-10.85%	-1.14%
Construction	2,589	2,947	358	13.83%	1.3%
Manufacturing	2,950	2,773	-177	-6%	-.62%
Wholesale Trade	1,351	1,384	33	2.44%	.24%
Retail Trade	8,954	9,346	392	4.38%	.43%
Transportation and Warehousing	1,436	1,502	66	4.6%	.45%
Information	716	645	-71	-9.92%	-1.04%
Finance and Insurance	1,374	1,446	72	5.24%	.51%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	369	379	10	2.71%	.27%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	2,172	2,497	325	14.96%	1.4%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	792	818	26	3.28%	.32%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management	1,557	1,723	166	10.66%	1.02%
Educational Services	7,107	7,251	144	2.03%	.2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	8,393	9,996	1,603	19.1%	1.76%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	216	237	21	9.72%	.93%
Accommodation and Food Services	4,119	4,295	176	4.27%	.42%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1,340	1,466	126	9.4%	.9%

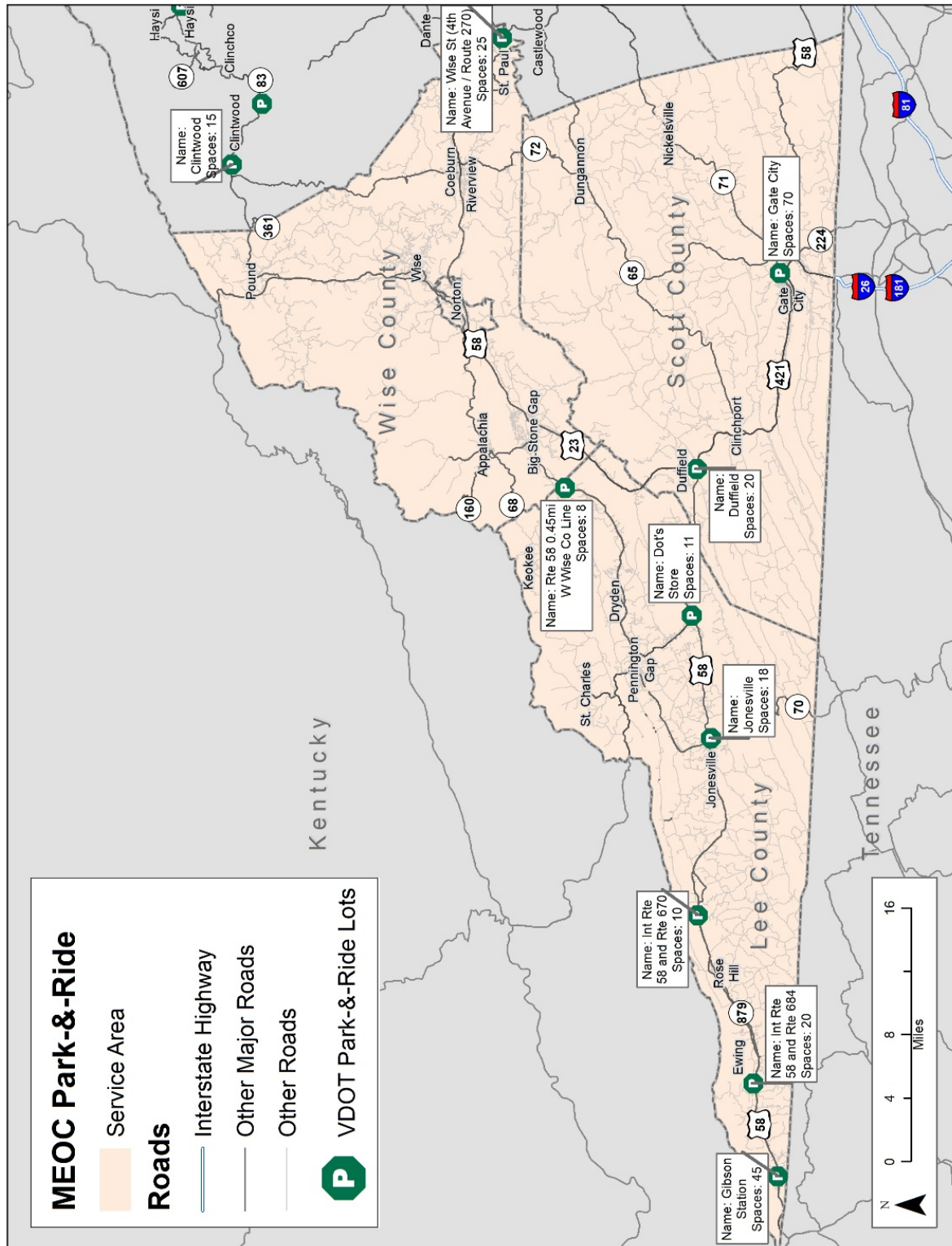
Source: Virginia Employment Commission, Economic Information and Analysis, Long Term Industry and Occupational Projections, 2014-2024

These data project modest job growth in the region (5.9% over the ten-year period). The largest employment growth sectors are expected to be: Health Care and Social Assistance (19.1%); Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (14.96%); and Construction (13.83%). Declining sectors are expected to include: Utilities (-10.85%); Information (-9.92%); and Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction (-5.23%).

Park-and-Ride Lots

Virginia DOT operates nine park-&-ride lots in the MEOC service area. The lots are spread throughout the service area, with most located along US 58 and US 23. Lee County has the most park-&-ride lots of any jurisdiction with five. The largest lot is in Gate City and has 70 parking spaces. Figure 3-17 shows all park-&-ride lots in the study area along with information about the number of spaces available at each lot.

Figure 3-17: Park and Ride Lots in the MEOC Service Area



SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSES

When combining demographic, land use, and commuter trends analyzed in the previous sections, the following themes emerge:

- The majority of the service area is low density with fewer than 100 people per square mile.
- The region is losing population and this trend is expected to continue.
- The poverty rate in the region is significantly higher than the Commonwealth as a whole, particularly in Lee County.
- There are a significant number of workers who travel to Tennessee for work (7.9% to Kingsport; and 1.8% to Johnson City).
- The majority of workers drive alone to work.
- Though the population is trending lower, modest job growth is projected.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLANS AND STUDIES

VTrans 2040: Virginia's Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan

VTrans 2040 is Virginia's long-range multimodal policy plan that sets the vision, goals, and investment priorities for Virginia's transportation systems. It was completed in 2018. The VTrans 2040 plan was drafted with the intention of outlining the goals and objectives needed to guide transportation planning within the commonwealth of Virginia. VTrans 2040 is a comprehensive plan that incorporates all modes of transportation into its analysis. VTrans 2040 builds on preceding VTrans plans by updating the vision, goals, and objectives outlined in VTrans 2035.

As part of its analysis, VTrans performed a needs assessment for each Virginia DOT region. MEOC's service area is in the Bristol Region. The major transportation issues within the service area included:

- Safety
- Mode choice
- Local access
- Circulation

These transportation issues were specifically identified in the town of Wise and city of Norton, as well as Gate City and Weber City in Scott County. Increasing mode choice was identified as a major need in these two areas of the service area.

The issues outlined in the needs assessment were then used to create a list of goals and objectives for Virginia to work towards over the next twenty years. Transit related objectives included:

- Increase the accessibility to jobs via transit, walking and driving in metropolitan areas
- Increase percent of transit vehicles and facilities in good or fair condition
- Reduce per-capita vehicle miles traveled
- Reduce transportation related NOX, VOC, PM and CO emissions

Local Plans

2017 Scott County Comprehensive Plan

Scott County's 2017 Comprehensive Plan guides planning within the county. Gate City and Weber City are also part of the Kingsport, TN urbanized area, making inter-state coordination an important goal that is guiding the plan. Scott County's transportation goal is to "promote feasible solutions to relieve current traffic problems and support specific land use objectives". None of the policies outlined to achieve this goal specifically mention public transportation, but are vague enough to incorporate transit improvements into future planning processes.

2018 Wise County Draft Comprehensive Plan

The 2018 Wise County Comprehensive Plan guides county planning projects and initiatives through the year 2035. The plan identifies current and projected socioeconomic characteristics and aims to incorporate the needs that may arise from these demographic realities. There is limited discussion of public transportation beyond a description of MEOC Transit's current services, though some language indicates the potential role public transportation will take on in the coming years. Wise County's vision for public transportation is outlined below:

- A projected increase in people ages 65 and older will increase demand for transit
- Transportation is broadly mentioned as a worthwhile "community investment"
- Goal 24, Policy 24.3 states that Wise County will "Participate in a coordinated, regional approach to transportation planning and seek adequate funding to support all transportation modes"

- The loss of nearby medical centers was highlighted as a “concerning change” and exacerbates the pre-existing transportation need for medical appointments.

UVA-Wise 2025 Plan (2016)

As the largest four-year institution in the region, UVA-Wise is one of the major educational and cultural centers in the Mountain Empire region. The UVA-Wise 2025 Plan was drafted to outline goals and strategies to improve the campus and its surrounding community, including the transportation network. UVA-Wise hopes to improve its campus by making transportation improvements that benefit multiple modes, including public transportation. The plan also identifies creating better connections between the campus and the Town of Wise through improvements to the transportation network as a key goal. These network improvements could ease the implementation of new transit services at UVA-Wise and its surrounding area.

Lee County Comprehensive Plan

The Lee County Comprehensive Plan is currently being revised.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The system evaluation and needs analysis involved collecting and reviewing data and input from many different sources:

- System Performance Data;
- Passenger and Community Surveys;
- Demographics; and
- Land Use and Transportation Plans.

The results of the system evaluation and the priorities identified through the survey and demographic data, combined with input from regional stakeholders included in Chapter 2, were used in the development of service and capital plan (Chapter 4).

Chapter 4

Service and Capital Improvement Plan

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present a series of service and capital improvements that MEOC plans to implement during the ten-year planning horizon covered by the TDP. These potential improvements were developed based on the data compiled and analyzed in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, together with input from MEOC Transit staff, MERTAC, and DRPT. The projects were initially presented in a draft chapter 4, and then prioritized by MEOC Transit staff and MERTAC. The service improvements are presented first, in priority order, followed by a discussion of the planned re-branding project, and capital projects.

SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

The following service improvements were developed through a review of the gaps in current services identified through input from riders and area stakeholders. Each service concept is detailed in this section and includes:

- A summary of the service concept
- Potential advantages and disadvantages
- An estimate of the operating and capital costs
- Ridership estimates (if applicable)

The cost information for these proposals is expressed as the fully allocated costs, which means all program costs on a per unit basis are considered when contemplating expansions. This overstates the incremental cost of minor service expansions as there are likely to be some administrative expenses that would not be increased with the addition of a few service hours. These cost estimates were based on FY2019 operating expenses.

These initiatives are presented in priority order and include the expansion and implementation of deviated fixed routes to meet a number of trip needs, as well as limited Saturday service and later service Monday through Friday.

Expansion of the Cavalier Connection

A representative from UVA Wise attended the March 2020 MERTAC meeting. She provided the following insights regarding the need for additional circulator service for UVA Wise students and the town of Wise:

- The Student Council has initiated a petition for increased transportation services. They would like to see service available on a deviated fixed route basis from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. MEOC currently provides the Cavalier Connection, which is an informal arrangement that stations a vehicle on campus and provides demand-response service. There is also a second vehicle that runs a deviated route between campus, the town and Walmart. The vehicle has a “Cavalier Connection” magnet on it, which students recognize.
- There are 600 students who live on campus and most do not have vehicles. The campus has the capacity to house 800 students.
- Students primarily need access to shopping and employment opportunities. It was reported that some walk to Walmart, which is about 3.7 miles each way.

This initiative focuses on adding hours and formalizing the deviated fixed route that operates between the campus and Walmart. It currently operates between 11:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. While the students indicated a desire for 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. service, it may make more sense to add service incrementally. If this service operated Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., the total annual increase in revenue service hours (assuming one vehicle) would be approximately 1,700. This assumes a year-round schedule. It may be that the hours of service would be shorter, or service curtailed during school breaks; however, this route also serves the town of Wise and the surrounding major shopping points.

It would be helpful for riders if a map of the route was published. The time points are available through a link on the UVA Wise website, but there is not a map. In addition, this service is not posted on MEOC Transit’s website.

The route is presented in Figure 4-1. At about ten miles, this route operates hourly.

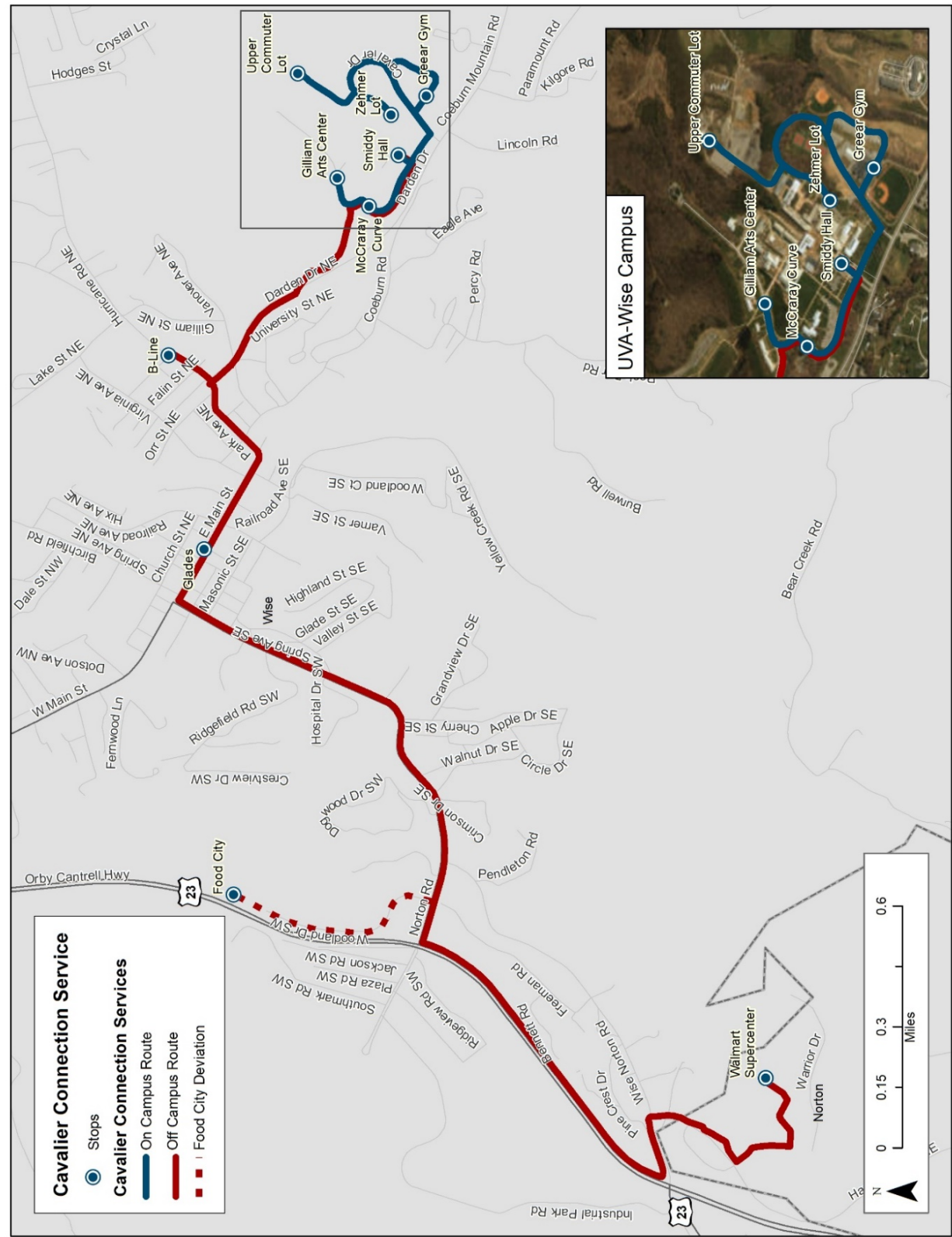
Advantages

- Responds to a need voiced by local stakeholders.
- Expands upon an existing service with a funding partner.
- Improves the level of service for UVA Wise and the town of Wise.
- Allows for the implementation of the microtransit project.

Disadvantages

- There are expenses associated with expanding the route.

Figure 4-1: Cavalier Connection Deviated Fixed Route



Expenses

- The total annual increase in operating expenses (assuming a year-round schedule, as described above) would be about \$57,000.

Ridership

- The additional hours of service are estimated to generate about 8,500 annual additional passenger trips.

Mobility on Demand

It is envisioned that this route will work together with an enhanced Cavalier Connection demand-response service, which is scheduled to be upgraded through the implementation of mobility-on-demand technology. DRPT was recently awarded a Mobility on Demand Sandbox Program grant from the FTA for rural microtransit, with MEOC and Bay Transit as the participating rural transit agencies. The grant will pay for the implementation of real-time microtransit for the Cavalier Connection. Riders will be able to request trips in real-time via smart phones and will be able to track their trips as they wait for the vehicle. Riders who do not have smart phones will continue to be able to request trips via a dispatcher. DRPT will be leading the project and procuring the services of a third-party private technology partner who will develop the program. The costs will be covered through the FTA grant and matched by DRPT.

County Connector Pilot – Wise County/Norton

The 2011 TDP included a series of deviated fixed route county connectors. These routes were developed using the service design that is in place in neighboring transit programs (Four County Transit and District III – Mountain Lynx). These routes were not implemented; however, transit demand in the region has grown significantly since 2011. Given the increasing demand for transit in the LENOWISCO region, coupled with DRPT's emphasis on productivity, it may be an opportune time to test the concept of deviated fixed route service in the LENOWISCO region.

This service initiative calls for a county connector pilot to connect Wise, Norton, and Big Stone Gap. These communities were chosen for the pilot, as the sample trip data provided for Chapter 3 indicated a high level of rider activity among these communities. There are also significant trip generators within these communities, including UVA Wise and Mountain Empire Community College (MECC).

The concept is for there to be fixed stops at key locations in each of the towns, with a little extra time in the schedule added for deviations. This initiative includes weekday service with three round-trips proposed each service day, to coincide with convenient campus arrival and departure times, to the extent possible. Three round-trips per weekday equates to 7.5 vehicle

revenue hours per weekday, for an annual total of about 1,912 hours (assuming 255 weekdays). The route is about 24 miles each way.

In addition to providing access to educational opportunities, this route will also serve to connect three of the major population centers within Wise County, allowing greater access to the government services provided in Wise (Health Department, Courthouse) and the medical and shopping opportunities in Norton and Big Stone Gap. A proposed route alignment is presented in Figure 4-2.

MEOC Transit may be able to manipulate some of its existing demand-response riders onto this route, as well as feeding it from the outlying areas to reduce mileage on the demand-response trips.

Advantages

- Responds to a need indicated by the rider surveys.
- Connects three major population centers within Wise County.
- Provides access to educational, medical, shopping, and governmental destinations.
- Provides the opportunity for greater service productivity through the use of deviated fixed routes, which is increasingly important under DRPT's performance-based funding model.

Disadvantages

- The demand for this type of service is untested in the region, though it has worked in neighboring regions.
- There are significant expenses associated with implementing the route.

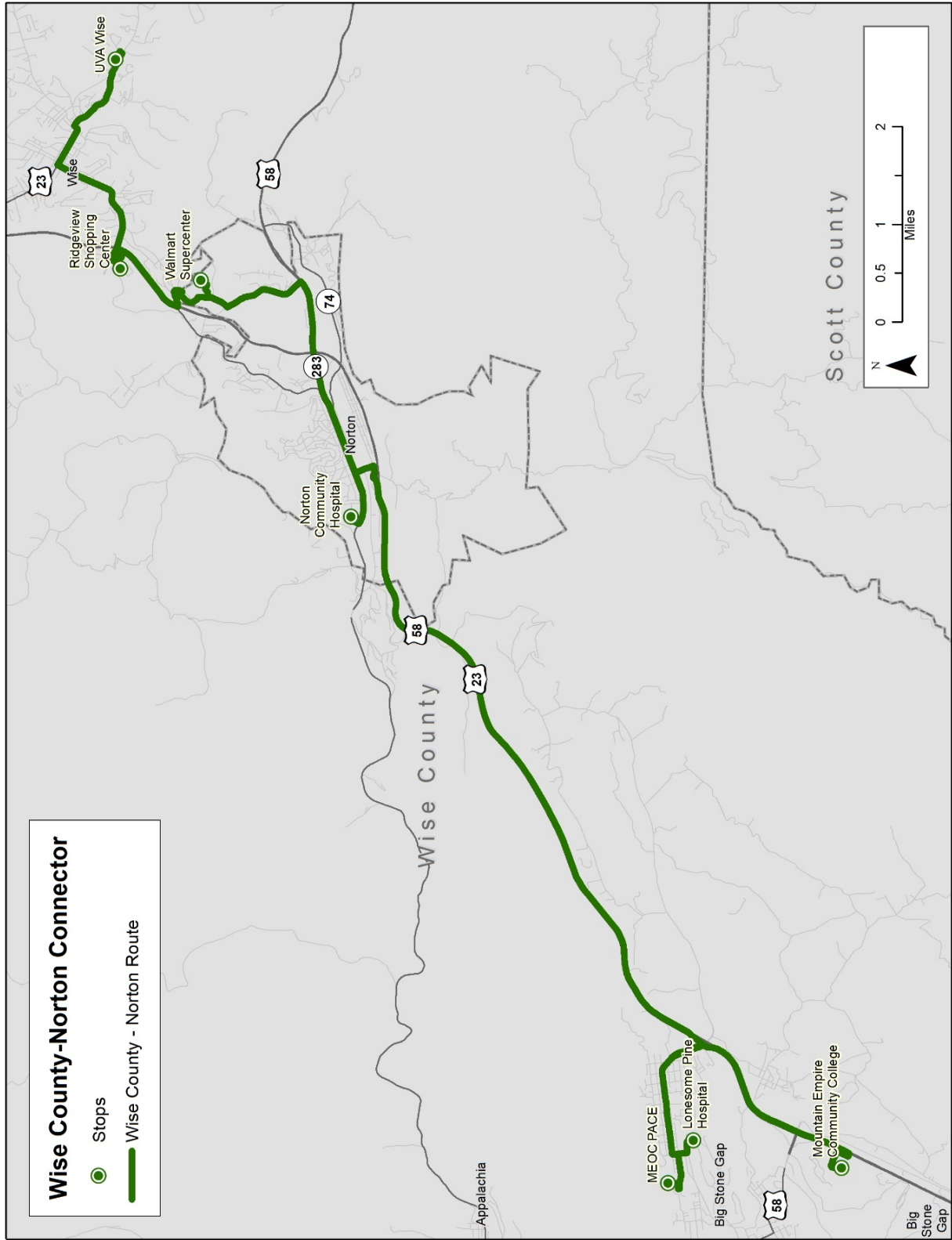
Expenses

- The total annual operating expenses based on 1,912 annual vehicle revenue hours are estimated to be \$64,200. One vehicle would be needed at a cost of \$68,000. Some of these expenses could be offset by a reduction in the current demand-response trips in this corridor.

Ridership

- If three trips per vehicle revenue hour can be achieved, the total annual ridership would be 5,736. Some of these trips are likely not to be new trips, but ones currently provided via demand-response.

Figure 4-2: Wise County - Norton Connector



Limited Saturday Service

There was a question on the passenger survey that asked if there are times of the day or days of the week when riders need to travel but MEOC Transit is not available. Thirty-five percent responded that there were. The majority of the write-in comments for this question indicated some variation of Saturday/weekend/evening service. This result is similar to the 2011 TDP survey, which also included a significant number of requests for weekend service. To address this desire for additional weekend mobility, it is proposed that MEOC operate on Saturdays on a limited basis to gauge demand. The prior TDP suggested a “shopper shuttle” approach providing deviated fixed routes in the more populated jurisdictions of the service area on the first Saturday of the month. This approach is carried forward for this TDP period and described below.

This concept would involve three to four shuttle routes, one per county (with perhaps two in Wise County), providing service from a few targeted housing areas to community shopping areas. Targeted areas would likely be as follows:

Lee County: Jonesville-Pennington Gap
 Scott County: Gate City-Weber City
 Wise County: Appalachia--Big Stone Gap-Norton-Wise-Coeburn

The hours of service are recommended to be those conducive to Saturday shopping and errands, most likely 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., which would result in eight revenue hours per vehicle, and 32 revenue hours per operating day (4 vehicles). The annual revenue service hours for this limited Saturday service would be 384 hours.

Advantages

- Responds to a need expressed via the passenger surveys.
- Provides limited Saturday mobility.
- Tests the concept of Saturday service.
- Tests the concept of shuttle service in the region.

Disadvantages

- Offers an inconsistent schedule with only one Saturday a month covered.

Expenses

- Using MEOC Transit’s fully allocated (FY2019) cost per hour of \$33.57, 384 additional service hours would cost just under \$13,000 annually in operating expenses. No additional capital would be required.

Ridership

- Targeting specific areas and offering deviated fixed route service, rather than demand-response, will likely result in service that is more productive than the current demand-response service. If the Saturday shuttle services can average three passenger trips per hour, the total ridership for the Saturday services would be 1,152 passenger trips.

Later Hours of Service

As discussed within the previous service improvement concept, riders indicated a desire for later service during the week. The focus of this proposal is to add one hour of service for eight vehicles (two for each county) so that service is extended to 6:00 p.m. This would allow riders to use MEOC for later appointments and for work shifts that end at 5:00 p.m. The total annual vehicle revenue hours for this initiative is 2,040 (eight hours multiplied by 255 service days).

Advantages

- Responds to comments received via the rider survey.
- Provides an extra hour of service for riders, allowing for greater mobility in the afternoon.
- Tests the concept of later service.

Disadvantages

- There may not be high enough demand to justify the extra hour of service.
- It may be difficult to manage with the large service area.
- The extra hour will likely have lower productivity than the average.

Expenses

- The total annual operating expenses associated with the added hours will be about \$68,500. No additional capital will be required.

Ridership

- Assuming a lower than average productivity for this hour of service, the total annual ridership estimate is 3,060.

Deviated Fixed Route Service to Kingsport, Tennessee

Service connecting the region to Kingsport, Tennessee was supported by 77% of the rider survey participants. In addition, this linkage was discussed as an important need at the March 2020 MERTAC meeting, and was included in the 2011 TDP as a feeder project to the Greyhound stop in Kingsport. It appears that Greyhound service is no longer available in Kingsport, but there are a number of other important destinations in Kingsport.

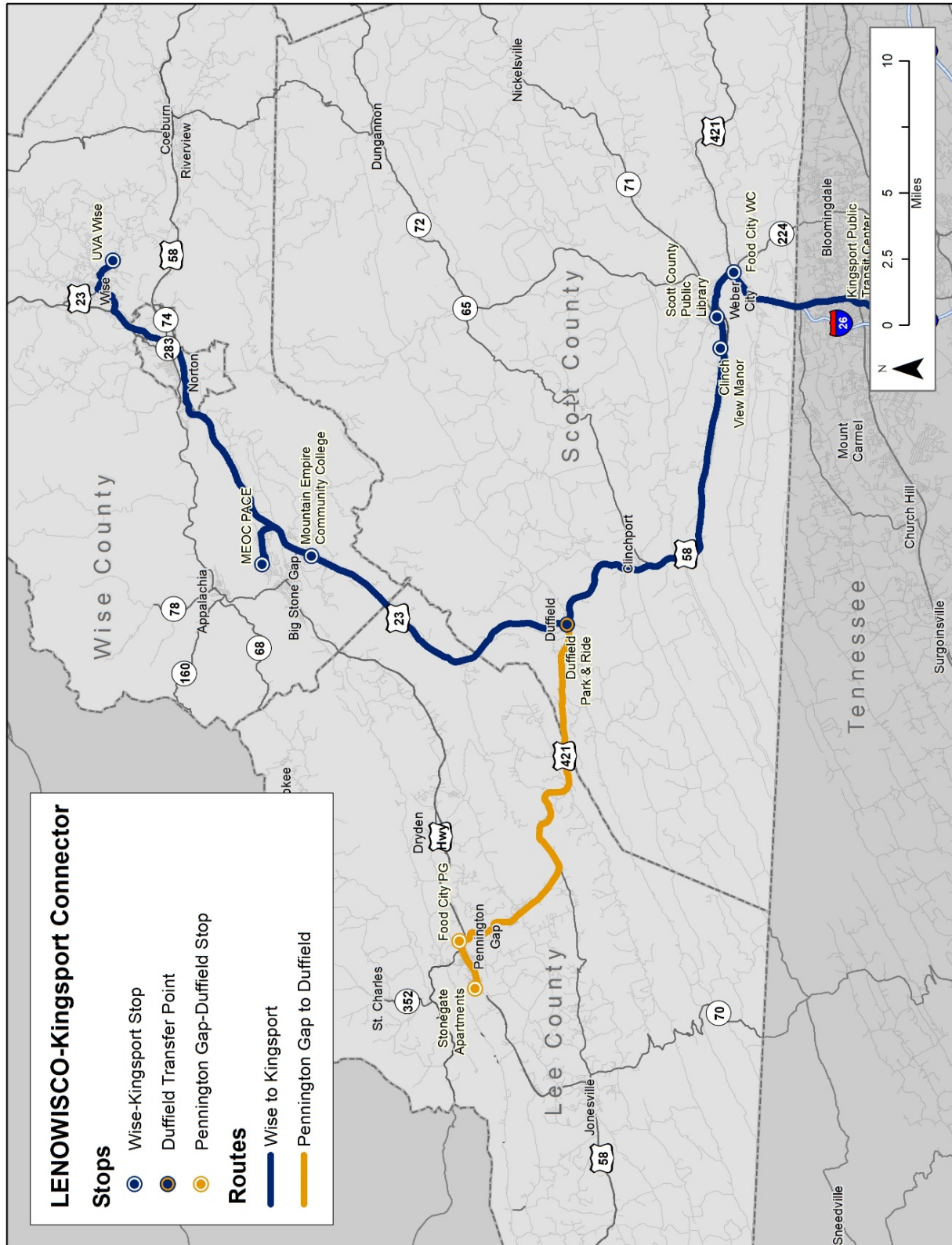
MERTAC members indicated that this service would be important for the following trip needs:

- **Medical appointments.** While primary care is available in the LENOWISCO (Lee, Norton, Wise, Scott) region, people typically have to travel to Kingsport or Johnson City to see medical specialists.
- **Families visiting patients in the hospital and hospital discharges.** MERTAC members reported that it is fairly common for patients to be transferred from a local hospital to Ballad Health's Holston Valley Medical Center in Kingsport. Family members who don't drive or do not want to drive that far have difficulty visiting. A comment provided via the community survey also articulated this issue.
- **Work opportunities.** Data from the Census Bureau indicated that 7.9% of workers who live in the MEOC service area work in Kingsport.
- **Reverse commute educational opportunities.** In-state tuition is available for Appalachian region Tennessee residents to attend UVA Wise. A transit link would facilitate this opportunity for potential students.

A main route, with a feeder route from Pennington Gap, is mapped in Figure 4-3. It is proposed that the feeder route meet the main route at the park and ride lot in Duffield for transfer opportunities. The main route between UVA Wise and Kingsport is about 52 miles each way. The feeder route between Pennington Gap and Duffield is about 19 miles each way.

Two round trips per day on the main route would likely require about 7 vehicle revenue hours per day. Two round trips on the feeder route would likely require about 3 vehicle revenue hours per day. If both route(s) operated Monday through Friday (2 round trips per day), the total annual vehicle revenue hours would be 2,550. Two vehicles would be required.

Figure 4-3: Proposed LENOWISCO - Kingsport Connector



Advantages

- Responds to a need articulated by survey respondents and stakeholders.
- Provides regional mobility, both within the LENOWISCO region and to Kingsport.
- Connects Lee County origins and destinations to Wise and Scott counties.
- Potentially meets a number of trip purposes including medical, employment, and educational.
- Implements a type of service that is potentially more productive than the current demand-response model, which is increasingly important under DRPT's performance-based funding model.
- May reduce demand on MEOC Transit's current demand-response program, which could offset some of the new expenses associated with the route.

Disadvantages

- The demand for this type of service is untested in this region, though it is in place in neighboring regions (Four County Transit and Mountain Lynx).
- There are significant expenses associated with implementing the routes.

Expenses

- The total annual operating expenses are estimated to be \$85,604. Vehicles are estimated to cost \$68,000 each, for a total of \$136,000. Some of these expenses may be offset by a reduction in the demand for demand-response trips in the corridor.

Ridership

- If this service could produce three passenger trips per revenue hour, the total annual ridership would be 7,650. Some of these trips are already being provided via MEOC's current demand-response program.

SYSTEM RE-BRANDING

MEOC Transit staff has been interested in re-branding the transit program for a number of years. The desire to re-brand stems from the public's misconception of the service, a result of having the words "older citizens" in the acronym. MEOC Transit staff would like to project the image that the service is for everyone, not just older citizens. The need for re-branding was validated via the community surveys, with ten of the comments indicating that community members have the perception that the service is only for older adults.

The re-branding will coincide with the development of deviated fixed routes for the agency, which will further emphasize the concept that the service is for everyone.

There have been some efforts made toward choosing a new logo, but the agency could use some targeted financial assistance to fully develop a new logo and implement the brand. The agency recently hired a marketing coordinator who may be able to assist with this effort.

A number of transit programs in Virginia have re-branded recently, including the following:

- **Blackstone Area Bus.** Operated by the town of Blackstone, with service to several surrounding areas.



- **BRITE.** Staunton, Augusta, and Waynesboro. Administered by the Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission.



- **JAUNT.** A multi-jurisdictional system operating in the Charlottesville area.



- **Mountain Lynx Transit.** A multi-jurisdictional system in southwest Virginia operated by the District Three Governmental Cooperative.



Each of these programs re-brands has needed varying levels of assistance, depending upon the extent of the project. For MEOC we have outlined a full branding project, including finalizing the design, new letterhead, website, and vehicle wraps or signs.

Advantages

- A new brand for the transit program can emphasize that the system is for everyone and is not only seniors.
- A fresh, modern look may attract new riders.
- A new design on the vehicles will better promote the agency within the communities that it serves.

Disadvantages

- It may cause some confusion among elderly riders, but this can likely be overcome through education.
- There are costs associated with re-branding that are not correlated to an increase in the level of service.

Expenses

- The cost to redo the brand and update the website and marketing materials is likely to be about \$15,000. There is a relatively large range in prices for these tasks. Blackstone Area Bus recently paid \$14,000 for a similar effort.
- Simple decals for the vehicles are about \$300 each (based on District Three experience) and full bus wrapping is about \$5,000 per vehicle (based on JAUNT experience).
- Discussions with MEOC staff and DRPT indicated that MEOC will likely implement a new brand incrementally using simple decals, rather than investing in full bus wrapping. As vehicles are replaced each year, the new logo will be included on the vehicles.

Ridership

- There is likely to be an incremental increase in ridership through increased awareness of the system.

CAPITAL PROPOSALS

As MEOC Transit begins to introduce deviated fixed routes, there will be a need to offer shelters at key stop locations, and signs at other stops. These are described within this section.

Shelters and Stops

Some of the stop locations for the proposed deviated fixed routes have a covered place where passengers can wait for the transit vehicle, and others likely do not. Key stops are likely to include the following:

- Lonesome Pine Hospital
- Mountain Empire Community College (MECC)
- Norton Community Hospital
- Ridgeview Shopping Center
- UVA Wise
- Walmart Norton

The Four County Transit bus stop at UVA Wise is at Smiddy Hall and its bus stop at MECC is at Robb Hall. It would make sense for MEOC Transit to use these same stops for the proposed new services. Riders can presumably wait inside at both of these locations.

A shelter program could be developed over time as the routes are implemented and ridership patterns are established. Installing shelters at certain sites may require negotiations with property owners to determine whether a shelter would be permitted and where to install it.

Advantages

- Provides safe and sheltered locations to wait for the transit vehicle.
- Increases visibility of the transit system.
- Allows passengers to readily identify the location of the transit stop.

Disadvantages

- Implementation issues – It can be difficult to work out agreements with property owners to site shelters.
- There are costs associated with purchasing, installing, and maintaining shelters.

Expenses

- A concrete pad with a shelter and a bench is likely to cost between \$10,000 and \$15,000, depending upon the site.

Ridership

- There may be nominal increases in ridership as the shelters increase the visibility of the transit program.

Bus Stop Signs

As MEOC Transit implements deviated fixed routes, there will be a need to identify specific bus stop locations. These locations are usually identified with signage, though some systems operate without using them. For deviated fixed route systems that use signs, they typically will install a sign at each time point identified within the public schedule.

Advantages

- Eliminates any confusion with regard to stop locations.
- Increases the visibility of the transit system.

Disadvantages

- There are costs associated with purchasing, installing, and maintaining signs.

Expenses

- The total cost for a sign, post (if needed, depending upon location) and installation is about \$150. The cost estimate for 30 signs (ten for each route, with several shared stops) is \$4,500.

Ridership

- The higher visibility provided through the installation of bus stop signs may increase ridership incrementally.

SUMMARY OF TDP INITIATIVES

The service and capital initiatives presented in this chapter are summarized in Table 4-1

Table 4-1: Summary of Potential TDP Initiatives

TDP Proposals	Estimated Annual Revenue Service Hours	Estimated Ridership	Annual Operating Expenses	Capital Expenses
Operating Proposals:				
Cavalier Connection Expansion	1,700	8,500	\$57,069	\$0
Wise County - Norton Connector	1,912	5,736	\$64,200	\$68,000
Limited Saturday Service	384	1,152	\$13,000	\$0
Later Hours of Service	2,040	3,060	\$68,000	\$0
LENOWISCO - Kingsport Connector	2,550	7,650	\$85,600	\$136,000
Re-Branding (1)	-	small increase	\$15,000	\$14,100
Capital Proposals:				
Additional Shelters	-	small increase	\$0	\$45,000
Bus Stop Signs		small increase	\$0	\$4,500
Total	8,586	26,098	\$302,869	\$267,600

(1) Assumes the vehicle decals

Chapter 5

Implementation Plan

INTRODUCTION

The Implementation Plan provides a general outline of the steps required to implement the Service and Capital Improvement Plan described in Chapter 4. This first section includes a discussion of the major activities for each year of the plan, followed by a capital replacement plan for vehicles, passenger amenities, and technology systems.

TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN INITIATIVES BY YEAR

Each planning year covered by the MEOC Transit 2020 TDP is listed below, followed by the list of improvements scheduled for the year, along with some general implementation steps. Greater detail is provided for the short-term projects than for the longer-term projects. It should be noted that this schedule has been constructed using currently available information with regard to service priorities and funding constraints. Additional resources or shifting priorities may change this schedule and MEOC Transit can address these changes through the annual TDP update process.

FY2021

- Implement the Mobility on Demand project for the Cavalier Connection.
- Begin the re-branding effort using designs developed for the agency as a whole.
- Plan for continued re-branding efforts to occur as vehicles are replaced.

FY2022

- Continue re-branding effort with an updated website, brochure, and updated logo on new vehicles.
- Expand the hours of service provided for the Cavalier Connection.
- Monitor the results of the implementation of the Mobility on Demand project.

FY2023

- Implement the Wise County Connection to provide deviated fixed route service between Big Stone Gap, Norton, and Wise. Actively manage the demand-response trips in these areas to shift as many as is feasible from the demand-response mode to the deviated fixed route mode.

- Monitor ridership on the Cavalier Connection during the additional hours to validate need. Continue to monitor Mobility on Demand project.
- Start to implement bus shelter and signage program for the Cavalier Connection.
- Continue re-branding effort as vehicles are replaced.

FY2024

- Implement limited Saturday services using a deviated fixed route model and vehicles with the new brand. Advertise the availability of the service through press releases and social media.
- Implement later hours of service, Monday through Friday.
- Monitor ridership and productivity on the Wise County Connection. Determine the extent to which demand-response ridership was shifted to the new service.
- Continue to monitor the Cavalier Connection and the Mobility on Demand project.
- Continue with the re-branding effort as vehicles are replaced.

FY2025

- If Wise County Connection is considered successful, begin to implement bus shelter and signage program to improve the experience for riders.
- Monitor ridership for Saturday service and later hours of service.
- Continue to monitor ridership on the Cavalier Connection and Wise County Connection.
- Continue with re-branding effort as vehicles are replaced.

FY2026

- Monitor the changes implemented in FY2025.
- If the Wise County Connection is considered successful, implement the Kingsport Connection to provide deviated fixed route service from the LENOWISCO region to Kingsport, Tennessee.
- Continue with re-branding effort as vehicles are replaced.
- Prepare for a full TDP update.

FY2027

- Monitor the changes implemented in FY2026.
- Conduct a full TDP update.

FY2028 – FY2030

- Monitor the changes implemented in FY2027.
- Begin implementing projects recommended within the FY2027 TDP.

CAPITAL NEEDS

Vehicle Replacement and Expansion Plan

This section presents the details of the vehicle replacement and expansion plan, including vehicle useful life standards and estimated costs. A vehicle replacement and expansion plan are necessary to maintain a high-quality fleet and to dispose of vehicles that have reached their useful life. The capital program for vehicles was developed by applying FTA/DRPT vehicle replacement standards to the current vehicle fleet which was presented in Chapter 1.

Useful Life Standards

The useful life standards used by the FTA were developed based on the manufacturer's designated vehicle lifecycle and the results of independent FTA testing. The standards indicate the expected lifespans for different vehicle types. If vehicles are allowed to exceed their useful life, they become much more susceptible to break-downs, which may increase operating costs and decrease the reliability of scheduled service. With some exceptions for defective vehicles, DRPT/FTA funds are not typically available to replace vehicles that have not yet met the useful life criteria. The FTA vehicle useful life policy for a number of different vehicle types is shown in Table 5-1. DRPT's useful life policy mirrors the FTA useful life policy.

Table 5-1: FTA's Rolling Stock Useful Life Policy

Vehicle Type	Useful Life
Light Duty Vans, Sedans, Light Duty Buses and All Bus Models Exempt from Testing Under 49 CFR, part 665	Minimum of 4 Years or 100,000 Miles
Medium, Light Duty Transit Bus	Minimum of 5 Years or 150,000 Miles
Medium, Medium Duty Bus	Minimum of 7 Years or 200,000 Miles
Small, Heavy Duty Transit Bus	Minimum of 10 Years or 350,000 Miles
Large, Heavy Duty Transit Bus, including over the road coaches	Minimum of 12 Years or 500,000 Miles

Source: FTA Circular 5100.1: Bus and Bus Facilities Formula Program Guidance

Vehicle Replacement Plan – Baseline Estimate

The majority of MEOC Transit’s revenue service vehicles are cutaway vehicles, with a minimum useful life of five to seven years. These vehicles have gasoline engines. MEOC has purchased four raised roof vans in the past three years that offer a different look. The Cavalier Connection is operated with these types of vehicles. A photo of one of these types of vehicles from the Highland Cavalier student newspaper is shown below as Exhibit 5-1.

Exhibit 5-1: Cavalier Connection Raised Roof Van



Source: Highland Cavalier Student Newspaper Article, September 2018, Google Images

MEOC’s vehicle history suggests that the agency keeps vehicles between eight and nine years, depending upon the particular vehicle. Table 5-2 provides the existing fleet inventory with the estimated calendar year that each vehicle is eligible for replacement. The operating condition of the vehicles and the availability of funding will dictate the actual replacement year.

In addition to helping MEOC Transit and DRPT plan future fleet needs, this vehicle replacement plan will also feed DRPT’s transit asset management plan (TAM), which is an FTA-required plan that must include an asset inventory; condition assessments of inventoried assets; and a prioritized list of investments to improve the state of good repair of its capital assets.¹ The TAM requirements establish state of good repair standards and four state of good repair performance measures.

¹ Federal Register, Volume 81, No. 143, Tuesday July 26, 2016, Rules and Regulations, DOT, FTA, 49 CFR Parts 625 and 630, Transit Asset Management; National Transit Database.

Table 5-2: MEOC Transit Vehicle Inventory and Estimated Replacement Schedule

Manufacturer	Vehicle ID	Year	Type	Status	Odometer Reading May 2020	Seating Capacity (Ambulatory)	Wheelchair	Estimated Replacement Year
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 12	2020	Cutaway	In Service	6,466	12	4	2028
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 14	2020	Cutaway	In Service	4,009	12	4	2028
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 15	2020	Cutaway	In Service	5,634	12	4	2028
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 16	2020	Cutaway	In Service	4,460	12	4	2028
Ford - Starcraft	MEOC 17	2020	Cutaway	In Service	3,318	12	4	2028
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 92	2019	Cutaway	In Service	43,826	12	4	2027
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 93	2019	Cutaway	In Service	47,110	12	4	2027
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 94	2019	Cutaway	In Service	37,211	12	4	2027
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 95	2019	Cutaway	In Service	28,806	12	4	2027
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 96	2019	Cutaway	In Service	35,857	12	4	2027
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 97	2019	Van	In Service	26,840	8	2	2027
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 83	2018	Van	In Service	52,354	8	0	2026
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 84	2018	Cutaway	In Service	84,587	12	4	2026
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 85	2018	Cutaway	In Service	81,794	12	4	2026
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 86	2018	Cutaway	In Service	69,240	12	4	2026
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 87	2018	Cutaway	In Service	66,411	12	4	2026
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 88	2018	Cutaway	In Service	73,476	12	4	2026
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 89	2018	Cutaway	In Service	81,753	12	4	2026
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC 90	2018	Cutaway	In Service	80,859	12	4	2026
BRA - Braun	MEOC 91	2018	Van	In Service	57,022	3	1	2026
BRA - Braun	MEOC 82	2017	Van	In Service	87,287	5	1	2025
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-77	2017	Cutaway	In Service	82,624	12	4	2025
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-78	2017	Cutaway	In Service	112,025	12	4	2025
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-79	2017	Cutaway	In Service	115,463	12	4	2025
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-80	2017	Cutaway	In Service	130,389	12	4	2024
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-81	2017	Cutaway	In Service	126,432	12	4	2024
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 63	2016	Cutaway	In Service	177,737	15	4	2023
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 64	2016	Cutaway	In Service	132,324	15	4	2024
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 65	2016	Cutaway	In Service	136,620	15	4	2024
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 66	2016	Cutaway	In Service	166,800	12	4	2023
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 67	2016	Cutaway	In Service	149,817	15	4	2024
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC 68	2016	Cutaway	In Service	164,418	15	4	2023
BRA - Braun	MEOC 76	2016	Van	In Service	114,924	5	1	2024
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-70	2016	Cutaway	In Service	142,783	12	4	2024
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-72	2016	Cutaway	In Service	158,095	12	4	2023
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-73	2016	Cutaway	In Service	145,250	12	4	2024
FRD - Ford Motor Corporation	MEOC-74	2016	Cutaway	In Service	141,699	12	4	2024
Ford Explorer	MEOC -75	2016	SUV	In Service	57,017	6	0	2024
Ford Explorer	MEOC-61	2015	SUV	In Service	130,080	6	0	2020
Ford Explorer	MEOC-62	2015	SUV	In Service	77,873	6	0	2023
GMC - General Motors Corporation	MEOC-55	2014	Cutaway	In Service	213,592	15	4	2022

Manufacturer	Vehicle ID	Year	Type	Status	Odometer Reading May 2020	Seating Capacity (Ambulatory)	Wheelchair	Estimated Replacement Year
Chevrolet Senator II	MEOC-56	2014	Cutaway	In Service	234,599	15	2	2022
Chevrolet Senator II	MEOC-57	2014	Cutaway	In Service	197,163	15	2	2022
Chevrolet Senator II	MEOC-58	2014	Cutaway	In Service	184,260	15	2	2022
Chevrolet Senator II	MEOC-60	2014	Cutaway	In Service	202,647	19	2	2022
GMC - General Motors Corporation	MEOC-9	2014	Cutaway	In Service	223,821	19	2	2022
Chevrolet Motor Division - GMC	MEOC-8	2013	Cutaway	Out of Service	217,072	15	2	2022
Chevrolet Supreme	MEOC-6	2013	Cutaway	In Service	185,536	15	2	2022
SPC - Startrans (Supreme)	MEOC 1	2012	Cutaway	In Service	244,721	12	2	2021
Ford Supreme	MEOC-47	2011	Cutaway	In Service	278,941	12	2	2021
Ford Supreme	MEOC 49	2011	Cutaway	In Service	233,271	19	1	2021
Ford Supreme	MEOC 51	2011	Cutaway	In Service	234,787	15	2	2021
SPC - Startrans (Supreme)	MEOC 53	2011	Cutaway	In Service	270,931	19	1	2021
GMC 2500	MEOC 7	2004	Truck	In-Service	58,638	2	0	2020

Vehicle Replacement and Expansion Plan

The annual schedule for vehicle replacement and expansion, based on the implementation schedule provided in this chapter and the FTA vehicle useful life standards, is shown in Table 5-3.

This vehicle replacement and expansion schedule is based on estimates; actual vehicle purchases may vary depending upon service changes, funding availability, and unexpected economic shifts. Changes to this vehicle replacement and expansion schedule can be made by MEOC Transit within its annual TDP update letter to DRPT, if needed. As shown in the table, the greatest number of vehicle purchases are scheduled for FY2024. If it is not feasible to purchase this many vehicles in one year, some replacements may shift to FY2025, if the vehicles are still in acceptable condition.

Table 5-3: Vehicle Replacement and Expansion Schedule

Number of Vehicles	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY2029	FY2030
Replacement	5	8	4	9	4	9	6	5	TBD	TBD
Expansion			1			2				
Non-Revenue			1	1						
Total Vehicles	5	8	6	10	4	11	6	5	TBD	TBD

Estimated Vehicle Costs

The estimated vehicle replacement costs are presented in Table 5-4. These costs are based on vehicle costs experienced by MEOC Transit in FY2020. For FY2021 to FY2030, a 3% inflationary factor was applied each year. These cost estimates were used to develop the capital budget, which is included with the Financial Plan in Chapter 6. The plan includes the replacement of 50 revenue vehicles and two non-revenue vehicles, as well as three expansion vehicles. Potential funding programs for the replacement and expansion vehicles include: Federal Appalachian Development Assistance Program; DRPT's Capital Assistance Program; and local funds. All service vehicles purchased will be lift- or ramp-equipped.

Table 5-4: Estimated Costs of New Vehicles

Fiscal Year	Body-On-Chassis	Raised Roof Van	Support Vehicle
2021	\$70,555	\$66,950	\$31,415
2022	\$72,672	\$68,959	\$32,357
2023	\$74,852	\$71,027	\$33,328
2024	\$77,097	\$73,158	\$34,328
2025	\$79,410	\$75,353	\$35,358
2026	\$81,793	\$77,613	\$36,419
2027	\$84,246	\$79,942	\$37,511
2028	\$86,774	\$82,340	\$38,636
2029	\$89,377	\$84,810	\$39,796
2030	\$92,058	\$87,355	\$40,989

Passenger Amenities

As MEOC Transit begins to offer deviated fixed route service, there will be a need for passenger amenities such as passenger waiting shelters and bus stop signs. These are included for the mid-range years of the plan, once the deviated fixed routes have become established.

Technology and Equipment

The routine replacement of computer hardware and software is included in the plan, as are shop equipment and spare parts. MEOC Transit will be participating in a Mobility on Demand project associated with the Cavalier Connection. The technology required for this project is being funded through the Federal Transit Administration and DRPT. If the program is successful, there may be a need for MEOC to purchase additional equipment during the TDP period. MEOC can include these currently unknown expenses within the annual TDP update letter to DRPT.

Chapter 6

Financial Plan

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a financial plan for funding existing and proposed MEOC Transit services for the TDP's ten-year planning period. The projects indicated in years 1-3 should be considered short-term, those in years 4-7 are considered mid-term, and those planned for years 8 through 10 should be considered long-term projects. The financial plan addresses both operations and capital budgets, focusing on the project and capital recommendations that were highlighted in Chapter 4 and the implementation schedule and capital needs highlighted in Chapter 5.

It should be noted that over the course of the ten-year period there are a number of unknown factors that could affect transit finance, including: the future economic condition of MEOC's partners; the availability of funding from the Federal Transit Administration; and the availability of funding from the Commonwealth Transportation Fund.

OPERATING EXPENSES AND FUNDING SOURCES

Tables 6-1 and 6-2 provide a financial plan for the operation of MEOC Transit's services under the ten-year plan. Table 6-1 summarizes the annual revenue hours of service for the existing transit program as well as for the service projects that are recommended. Table 6-2 provides operating cost estimates, and Table 6-3 identifies the funding sources associated with these service projects. A number of assumptions used in developing the operating cost estimates are described below.

For FY2021, the first year of the plan, the expenses and revenues are based on MEOC Transit's 2020 DRPT budget, with an inflation rate of 3% applied.

The projected cost per revenue hour and the operating costs to maintain the current level of service between FY2022 and FY2030 assume a 3% annual inflation rate. It is understood that none of the funding partners listed in the tables are committing to these funding levels, but that they are planning estimates. Specific funding amounts for each year will be determined during the annual SYIP adoption and budget cycle for the Commonwealth and the local funding partners.

Table 6-1: MEOC TDP Financial Plan for Operations – Planned Revenue Hours

Projects	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030
Projected Incremental Annual Revenue Hours											
Current Level of Service	51,636	51,636	51,636	51,120	50,608	50,608	50,355	50,103	50,103	50,103	50,103
TDP Improvements -Hours											
Re-Branding - No Additional Hours											
Cavaller Connection - Added Hours			1,700	1,700	1,700	1,700	1,700	1,700	1,700	1,700	1,700
Wise County - Norton Connection				1,912	1,912	1,912	1,912	1,912	1,912	1,912	1,912
Limited Saturday Hours					384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Later Hours, M-F					2,040	2,040	2,040	2,040	2,040	2,040	2,040
Kingsport Connection							2,550	2,550	2,550	2,550	2,550
Total Transit Revenue Hours		51,636	53,336	54,732	56,644	56,644	58,941	58,689	58,689	58,689	58,689

Table 6-2: MEOC Transit TDP Financial Plan for Operations – Estimated Annual Operating Expenses

Projects		FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030
Projected Operating Expenses											
Cost Per Revenue Hour	\$34.83	\$35.88	\$36.96	\$38.45	\$40.00	\$41.20	\$42.65	\$44.15	\$45.48	\$46.84	\$48.25
Current Level of Service	\$1,798,711	\$1,852,672	\$1,908,252	\$1,965,500	\$2,024,465	\$2,085,199	\$2,147,755	\$2,212,188	\$2,278,553	\$2,346,910	\$2,417,317
TDP Improvements - Expenses											
Re-Branding (1)			\$22,000	\$7,100							
Cavalier Connection - Added Hours			\$62,825	\$65,363	\$68,004	\$70,045	\$72,509	\$75,059	\$77,312	\$79,631	\$82,020
Wise County Connection				\$73,515	\$76,485	\$78,780	\$81,551	\$84,420	\$86,953	\$89,561	\$92,248
Limited Saturday Hours					\$15,361	\$15,822	\$16,378	\$16,955	\$17,463	\$17,987	\$18,527
Later Hours, M-F					\$81,605	\$84,054	\$87,011	\$90,071	\$92,774	\$95,557	\$98,424
Kingsport Connection							\$108,763	\$112,589	\$115,967	\$119,446	\$123,030
Total Projected Operating Expenses	\$1,798,711	\$1,852,672	\$1,993,077	\$2,111,478	\$2,265,920	\$2,333,900	\$2,513,968	\$2,591,282	\$2,669,022	\$2,749,093	\$2,831,566
% Change Year by Year		3%	8%	6%	7%	3%	8%	3%	3%	3%	3%

Table 6-3: MEOC Transit Financial Plan for Operations – Estimated Annual Operating Funding and Revenue

Anticipated Revenue and Subsidies	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030
Passenger Revenue	\$53,961	\$54,040	\$55,661	\$63,344	\$67,978	\$70,017	\$75,419	\$77,738	\$80,071	\$82,473	\$84,947
Subtotal, Revenue	\$53,961	\$54,040	\$55,661	\$63,344	\$67,978	\$70,017	\$75,419	\$77,738	\$80,071	\$82,473	\$84,947
Net Deficit	\$1,744,750	\$1,798,632	\$1,937,416	\$2,048,134	\$2,197,943	\$2,263,883	\$2,438,549	\$2,513,544	\$2,588,951	\$2,666,620	\$2,746,619
Contract Revenue	\$106,734	\$109,936	\$144,647	\$148,986	\$153,456	\$158,059	\$162,801	\$167,685	\$172,716	\$177,897	\$183,234
Federal Funds	\$872,375	\$898,546	\$968,708	\$1,024,067	\$1,098,971	\$1,131,942	\$1,219,274	\$1,256,772	\$1,294,476	\$1,333,310	\$1,373,309
State Funds	\$485,454	\$500,018	\$538,602	\$569,381	\$611,028	\$629,359	\$677,917	\$698,765	\$719,728	\$741,320	\$763,560
Local Funds	\$280,187	\$290,133	\$285,460	\$305,700	\$334,488	\$344,523	\$378,557	\$390,322	\$402,032	\$414,093	\$426,515
Subtotal, Subsidies	\$1,744,750	\$1,798,633	\$1,937,416	\$2,048,134	\$2,197,943	\$2,263,883	\$2,438,549	\$2,513,544	\$2,588,952	\$2,666,620	\$2,746,618
Total Projected Operating Revenue and Subsidies	\$1,798,711	\$1,852,673	\$1,993,078	\$2,111,478	\$2,265,921	\$2,333,900	\$2,513,968	\$2,591,282	\$2,669,022	\$2,749,093	\$2,831,565

CAPITAL EXPENSES AND FUNDING SOURCES

DRPT has implemented a capital assistance prioritization process that allows DRPT to allocate and assign limited resources for projects that are deemed the most critical.¹ DRPT's capital program now classifies, scores, and prioritizes projects into the following categories:

- **State of Good Repair (SGR).** This category includes projects and programs that replace or rehabilitate existing assets.
- **Minor Enhancement (MIN).** This category includes projects and programs to add capacity, new technology or a customer facility, and meet the following criteria:
 - Total project cost of less than \$2 million; or
 - Vehicle expansion of not more than 5 vehicles or 5% of the existing fleet size, whichever is greater.
- **Major Expansion (MAJ).** This category includes projects or programs that add, expand or improve service with a cost exceeding \$2 million or for expansion vehicles, and increase of greater than 5 vehicles or 5% of fleet size, whichever is greater.

The following three types of projects are exempt from the prioritization scoring process:

- Capital projects that do not receive any state transit capital funding contribution.
- Debt service agreements approved in previous fiscal years.
- Track lease payments and capital cost of contracting requests.

The TDP for MEOC includes projects in the SGR and MIN categories, as described below.

State of Good Repair

Eligible activities for funding under State of Good Repair Include²:

Replacement/Rehabilitation of:

- Vehicles/rolling stock (buses, vans, rail cars, support vehicles)
- Administrative/maintenance facilities

¹ DRPT, Making Efficient Responsible Investments in Transit (MERIT), Capital Assistance – Program Prioritization, FY 21 Technical Documentation.

² DRPT, Making Efficient Responsible Investments in Transit (MERIT), Capital Assistance – Program Prioritization, FY 21 Technical Documentation.

- Customer amenities (parking facilities, bus shelters, benches, signage)
- Any other specific existing pieces of equipment and/or technology that **do not** fall into the Special Asset Categories**

**** Special Asset Categories:**

- Tools: all tools needed to provide maintenance services (i.e., new/replacement tools, tool cabinets)
- Maintenance Equipment: All equipment needed to maintain vehicles, infrastructure, and/ or other assets (i.e., bus lift, tire mounting device, forklifts)
- Spare Vehicle/Rail Parts: All spare vehicle and rail parts that will be used to maintain assets in working order that are not part of a larger rehabilitation project (i.e. alternators, transmissions, engines, seats, windows, gas tanks)
- Building/Facility Items and Fixtures: All individual, small facility parts and fixtures that are being replaced outside of a larger rehabilitation project (i.e., concrete floors, stairs, escalators, hand dryers, fans, lighting systems)
- Grouped Assets/Programs of Projects (less than \$2 million): Includes large groups of assets that cannot be broken down into subcomponents (i.e., general SGR purchase of parks or track). Does not include grouped assets or program of projects for vehicle rehab or replacement.
- Other Financial Tools: Includes funds for needed capital investments that cannot be scored as a replacement/rehabilitation (i.e., capital cost of contracting, track lease payments, debt service on previously approved projects)

Federal and state matching ratios for SGR projects are currently as follows: federal – 80%; state – 16%. The estimated expenses and funding sources for the SGR projects for the TDP period are provided in Table 6-4.

Minor Enhancements

Eligible investments under the Minor Enhancement (MIN) category include:

- Fleet expansion (fewer than 5 vehicles or 5% of fleet)
- New customer amenities (parking facilities, bus shelters, benches, accessibility improvements, signage)

- New equipment and technology
- New small real estate acquisition
- Capital project development less than \$2 million (engineering and design, construction management)
- All assets that fall in the Special Assets Categories (listed above)

Table 6-4: State of Good Repair Projected Capital Expenses and Funding

	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030
Vehicle Replacements										
Body-on-Chassis	5	8	4	8	3	7	5	5	TBD	TBD
Vans				1	1	2	1			
Support Vehicles			1	1						
Sub-Total Replacement Vehicles	5	8	5	10	4	9	6	5	0	0
Vehicle Costs										
Replacement Vehicles	\$352,775	\$581,376	\$332,736	\$724,262	\$313,583	\$727,777	\$501,172	\$421,230	\$0	\$0
Computer/Technology Replacements	\$2,000	\$2,060	\$2,122	\$2,185	\$2,251	\$2,319	\$2,388	\$2,460	\$2,534	\$2,610
Total SGR Expenses	\$354,775	\$583,436	\$334,858	\$726,447	\$315,834	\$730,096	\$503,560	\$423,690	\$2,534	\$2,610
Anticipated Funding Sources - Current Federal/State/Local Matching Ratios										
Federal	\$283,820	\$466,749	\$267,886	\$581,158	\$252,667	\$584,076	\$402,848	\$338,952	\$2,027	\$2,088
State	\$56,764	\$93,350	\$53,577	\$116,232	\$50,533	\$116,815	\$80,570	\$67,790	\$405	\$418
Local	\$14,191	\$23,337	\$13,394	\$29,058	\$12,633	\$29,204	\$20,142	\$16,948	\$101	\$104
Total Funding	\$354,775	\$583,436	\$334,858	\$726,447	\$315,834	\$730,096	\$503,560	\$423,690	\$2,534	\$2,610

Notes: Future vehicle replacement purchases are assumed to be funded as follows: 80% federal; 16% state; and 4% local.
Vehicle prices include inflation, and are based on the vehicles described in Chapter 5.

Table 6-5: Minor Enhancements Projected Capital Expenses and Funding

Capital Need	FY 2021	FY2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY2029	FY2030
Expansion Vehicles			\$74,852			\$163,586				
Bus Stop Signs			\$4,000			\$4,000				
Bus Shelters and Benches				\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000			
Maintenance Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	\$5,150	\$5,305	\$5,464	\$5,628	\$5,796	\$5,970	\$6,149	\$6,334	\$6,524
New Technology - TBD pending demonstration grant										
Total MIN Expenses	\$5,000	\$5,150	\$84,157	\$20,464	\$20,628	\$188,382	\$20,970	\$6,149	\$6,334	\$6,524
Anticipated Funding Sources- Current Federal/State/Local Matching Ratios (1)										
Federal	\$4,000	\$4,120	\$67,325	\$16,371	\$16,502	\$150,706	\$16,776	\$4,919	\$5,067	\$5,219
State	\$800	\$824	\$13,465	\$3,274	\$3,300	\$30,141	\$3,355	\$984	\$1,013	\$1,044
Local	\$200	\$206	\$3,366	\$819	\$825	\$7,535	\$839	\$246	\$253	\$261
Total Funding	\$5,000	\$5,150	\$84,157	\$20,464	\$20,628	\$188,382	\$20,970	\$6,149	\$6,334	\$6,524

(1): Funding split assumed to remain 80% federal; 16% state; and 4% local

Total Capital Expenses over TDP Timeframe

The combined SGR and MIN budgets for the TDP period are provided in Table 6-6.

Table 6-6: MEOC Transit Capital Budget- FY2021-FY2030

SGR	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2027	FY2028	FY2029	FY2030
Replacement Vehicles	\$352,775	\$581,376	\$332,736	\$724,262	\$313,583	\$727,777	\$501,172	\$421,230	\$0	\$0
Computer/Technology Replacements	\$2,000	\$2,060	\$2,122	\$2,185	\$2,251	\$2,319	\$2,388	\$2,460	\$2,534	\$2,610
Total SGR Expenses	\$354,775	\$583,436	\$334,858	\$726,447	\$315,834	\$730,096	\$503,560	\$423,690	\$2,534	\$2,610
MIN										
Expansion Vehicles			\$74,852			\$163,586				
Bus Stop Signs			\$4,000			\$4,000				
Bus Shelters and Benches				\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000			
Maintenance Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	\$5,150	\$5,305	\$5,464	\$5,628	\$5,796	\$5,970	\$6,149	\$6,334	\$6,524
New Technology - TBD pending demonstration grant										
Total MIN Expenses	\$5,000	\$5,150	\$84,157	\$20,464	\$20,628	\$188,382	\$20,970	\$6,149	\$6,334	\$6,524
TOTAL CAPITAL EXPENSES	\$359,775	\$588,586	\$419,014	\$746,911	\$336,462	\$918,478	\$524,530	\$429,839	\$8,867	\$9,133
Anticipated Funding Sources- Current Federal/State/Local Matching Ratios (1)										
Federal	\$287,820	\$470,869	\$335,211	\$597,529	\$269,169	\$734,782	\$419,624	\$343,871	\$7,094	\$7,307
State	\$57,564	\$94,174	\$67,042	\$119,506	\$53,834	\$146,956	\$83,925	\$68,774	\$1,419	\$1,461
Local	\$14,391	\$23,543	\$16,761	\$29,876	\$13,458	\$36,739	\$20,981	\$17,194	\$355	\$365
Total Funding	\$359,775	\$588,586	\$419,014	\$746,911	\$336,462	\$918,478	\$524,530	\$429,839	\$8,867	\$9,133

(1): Funding split assumed to remain 80% federal; 16% state; and 4% local

Appendix A

Mountain Empire Older Citizens – Board of Directors

Mountain Empire Regional Transportation Advisory Council - Members

MOUNTAIN EMPIRE OLDER CITIZENS, INC.

Board of Directors

A. J. Hatmaker, Chair

twohats@verizon.net

279 Constitution Road

Pennington Gap, VA 24277

Retired Lee County Public School Principal

Term Expires: October 2021

Ethel Daniels, Vice-Chair

Ethel.daniels21@yahoo.com

111 10th Street, N.W.

P. O. Box 476

Norton, VA 24273

Community Volunteer

Term Expires: August 2020

Pamela J. Collie - Price

Pamela.collie@sykes.com

P.O. Box 3822

310 Woodland Court

Wise, VA 24293

Recruiting and Marketing Manager, Frontier
Secure

Term Expires: March 2020

Steve Garrett

Lsgarrett10@hotmail.com

P.O. Box 453

Jonesville, VA 24263

Retired, Wise County Redevelopment
and Housing Authority

Term Expires: June 2020

Eleanor Sue Cantrell, M.D.

Sue.cantrell@vdh.virginia.gov

Wise County Health Department

134 Roberts Street, S.W.

Wise, VA 24293

Director, LENOWISCO Health District

Term Expires: October 2020

Nancy Bailey, Treasurer

nbbailey202@gmail.com

107 West Second Street, S.

Big Stone Gap, VA 24219

Mayor, Big Stone Gap, VA

Term Expires: October 2021

Gretchen Cope

Gretchen.Cope@dcr.virginia.gov

1420 Natural Tunnel Parkway

Duffield, VA 24244

Cove Ridge Center Director/Education
Administrator

Term Expires: December 2022

Kim Dorton

KDorton@mecc.edu

3441 Mountain Empire Road

Big Stone Gap, VA 24219

Mountain Empire Community College

Dean of Health Sciences

Term Expires: March 2022

MERTAC Membership, January 2020

Member Name	Organization
Mary Absher	Americorps/MECC
Jimmy Adkins	LENOWISCO PDC
Marcus Adkins	United Healthcare
Robert Ember	Frontier Health
Judy Free	Veteran's Affairs
Olivia Harvey	Junction Center for Independent Living
Dennis Horton	Junction Center for Independent Living
Sydney Manis	Office of Emergency Services
Wendy Wampler	Frontier Health
Rick Colley	Wise Chamber of Commerce
Carol Huffman	Former MEOC employee; senior bus rider
Misty Myers	Ballad Health

Appendix B

Rider Survey



**Tell us about your ride.
Complete the survey.**

1. Please rate MEOC Transit in the following areas by placing an X:

	 Strongly Satisfied	 Satisfied	 Neutral	 Dissatisfied	 Strongly Dissatisfied
Overall service					
Days and hours of service					
Trip scheduling process					
Reliability of service					
Travel time on the vehicle to get to my destination					
Sense of security					
Cleanliness of vehicles					
Telephone customer service					
Availability of information					
MEOC Transit website					
Bus drivers					

2. What is the purpose of your trip today?

- ☐ Home ☐ School ☐ Retail/Errands ☐ Social/Recreation
☐ Work ☐ Medical ☐ Other: _____

3. On average, how often do you use MEOC Transit?

- ☐ 5-6 days a week ☐ 3-4 days a week ☐ 1-2 days a week
☐ Less than once a week ☐ Less than once a month

4. If you were not using MEOC Transit today, how would you make this trip?

- ☐ Drive ☐ Walk/Bicycle ☐ Family/Friends ☐ Wouldn't make trip
☐ Taxi or Uber/Lyft ☐ Other: _____

5. Are there places in the region that you need to go that MEOC Transit does not serve?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, where: _____

6. Are there times of the day or days of the week when you need to travel but MEOC Transit is not available?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, when: _____



7. Is there a need for any of the following regularly scheduled public transportation routes: (check all that you think are needed)

- ☐ A circulator to serve UVA- Wise and Wise- area destinations
☐ A service connecting Big Stone Gap, Norton, and Wise
☐ Service to Kingsport, TN
☐ Service to Johnson City, TN

8. Do you use any other public transportation services in the region?

- ☐ Mountain Lynx (District Three) ☐ Four County Transit
☐ Other: _____ ☐ No

9. If MEOC Transit were to make one service improvement, what would you request?

Please answer a few questions about yourself.

What is your zip code? _____

How old are you?

- ☐ Under 18 ☐ 18-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-54 ☐ 55-64 ☐ 65+

Do you need any of the following to help you on a daily basis? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Wheelchair ☐ Walker ☐ Cane ☐ Service Animal ☐ Personal Care Attendant ☐ No

Do you have an internet enabled "smart" phone? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have a valid driver's license? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you have access to a working vehicle? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Do you consider yourself Hispanic/Latino? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Which one of the following best describes your race? (check all that apply)

- ☐ White/Caucasian ☐ African American/Black ☐ Asian ☐ Prefer not to answer
☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

What is your employment status? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Employed (Full-time) ☐ Student (Full-time) ☐ Retired ☐ Unemployed
☐ Employed (Part-time) ☐ Student (part-time) ☐ Homemaker ☐ Other

What is your annual household income?

- ☐ \$14,999 or less ☐ \$15,000 - \$29,999 ☐ \$30,000 - \$44,999
☐ \$45,000 - \$59,999 ☐ \$60,000 - \$74,999 ☐ \$75,000 or higher

MEOC Transit (276) 523-7433

Comments:

Appendix C

Rider Survey Comments

Appendix C

Rider Survey Comments

Rider Survey Comments
Yes, Abingdon because that's where I have to get my special shoes I wear through the VA
It would be nice to get out of the house on Saturdays please
Drivers could be more patient. Things happen. They should take people to run errands, have regularly scheduled stops.
Why can't we get rides to other counties Wise and Scott
Most Lee Countians are desperate for this transit service. It takes the worry away just knowing you can get to your appointment.
We have only MEOC public transportation in this county. We need more service!
I have ridden transit for 20 years and am very pleased with them. I rate them highly.
Most drivers are fantastic but a couple are not so great!

Appendix D

Community Survey



Public Transportation Survey

MEOC Transit is conducting a Public Transportation Survey. Please help us learn more about community transportation needs in Lee, Scott, and Wise Counties and the City of Norton by completing this survey. Alternatively, you can complete this survey on-line at:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MEOCCommunitySurvey>

1. How do you **usually** get to where you need to go within the community for work, school, shopping, errands, or medical appointments? Please indicate which mode you use the most.

____ I drive ____ I use public transportation ____ I walk
____ Friends/family drive me ____ I ride a bicycle ____ I take a taxi/Uber/Lyft

2. Do you currently use any of the following transportation services? *Please check all that apply and indicate how often you typically ride*

Service

- ☐ MEOC Transit
☐ Four County Transit
☐ Taxis/Uber/Lyft
☐ Vanpools or carpools
☐ Other: _____

Frequency of Use

- ☐ 5 days/week or more ☐ 1-4 days/week ☐ Less than 1 day/week
☐ 5 days/week or more ☐ 1-4 days/week ☐ Less than 1 day/week
☐ 5 days/week or more ☐ 1-4 days/week ☐ Less than 1 day/week
☐ 5 days/week or more ☐ 1-4 days/week ☐ Less than 1 day/week
☐ 5 days/week or more ☐ 1-4 days/week ☐ Less than 1 day/week

3. Do you currently use MEOC transit or other forms of public transportation?

☐ Yes ☐ No

4. If you **DO** use public transportation, what are the primary reasons why you choose public transportation? *Please check all that apply*

- ☐ I do not have access to a vehicle ☐ It saves me money
☐ I am unable to drive due to age or disability ☐ For environmental reasons
☐ I do not have a driver's license ☐ Public transit is more convenient than other modes
☐ It saves me time ☐ Other: _____

5. If you **DO NOT** use public transportation currently, **OR ARE ONLY ABLE TO USE IT FOR SOME TRIPS**, what transit service improvements would be needed for you to choose to ride public transportation more frequently? *Please check all that apply*

- ☐ Better service availability near my home/work/school- where: _____
☐ Improved access to transit information ☐ Shorter travel time
☐ Service earlier in the morning ☐ Service later in the evening
☐ Regularly scheduled service to regional destinations – where: _____
☐ Guaranteed ride home for emergencies/overtime ☐ Improved reliability
☐ I would not ride, I prefer to drive ☐ Other: _____

6. Are you aware of the services provided by MEOC Transit?

☐ Aware; overall positive impression ☐ Aware; overall negative impression ☐ Not aware

7. Do you think there is a need for additional or improved public transportation in the region?

☐ Yes ☐ No ***If you checked "No," please skip to Question # 8.***

⇒ ***Over, please***

7. If you checked "Yes" for Question #6 above, please indicate **where within the region (Lee, Scott, and Wise Counties and the City of Norton)** there is a need for additional or improved public transit services? Please check all that apply.

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| ☐ Lee County | ☐ Scott County | ☐ Wise County | ☐ City of Norton |
| ☐ Jonesville | ☐ Gate City | ☐ Big Stone Gap | |
| ☐ Pennington Gap | ☐ Weber City | ☐ Wise | |
| | | ☐ Appalachia | |
| | | ☐ Coeburn | |

Please also indicate if you think the following public transportation linkages are needed. Check all that apply.

- ☐ Service connecting the region to Kingsport, TN
☐ Service connecting the region to Johnson City, TN
☐ Additional options for commuter transportation to access jobs or classes- please indicate what linkages are needed:

8. Please provide any comments you may have concerning public transportation in the region.

Please answer a few questions about yourself

9. What is your zip code? _____
10. How old are you?
☐ Under 18 ☐ 18-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-54 ☐ 55-64 ☐ 65+
11. Do you need any of the following assistance to help you on a daily basis? (check all that apply)
☐ Wheelchair ☐ Walker ☐ Cane ☐ Service Animal ☐ Personal Care Attendant ☐ No
☐ Other: _____
12. Do you have an internet enabled "smart" phone? ☐ Yes ☐ No
13. Do you have a valid driver's license? ☐ Yes ☐ No
14. Do you have access to a functioning vehicle? ☐ Yes ☐ No
15. Do you consider yourself Hispanic/Latino? ☐ Yes ☐ No
16. Which one of the following best describes your race? (check all that apply)
☐ White/Caucasian ☐ African American/Black ☐ Asian ☐ Prefer not to answer
☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
17. What is your employment status? (check all that apply)
☐ Employed (Full-time) ☐ Student (Full-time) ☐ Retired ☐ Unemployed
☐ Employed (Part-time) ☐ Student (part-time) ☐ Homemaker ☐ Other
18. What is your annual household income?
☐ \$14,999 or less ☐ \$15,000 - \$29,999 ☐ \$30,000 - \$44,999
☐ \$45,000 - \$59,999 ☐ \$60,000 - \$74,999 ☐ \$75,000 or higher

Thank you!

Appendix E

Community Survey Comments

Appendix E

Community Survey Comments

Community Survey Comments
I think the services offered by MEOC are great for those that need them
I rode it in the past everyone was so nice I wish the wait to get picked back up was sooner
Very limited - you have to give too much time in advance (2 weeks) and a hassle to call back each time to get time and approval.
MEOC is a wonderful program and I would love to see it expanded
Positive response when calling for a ride. Being able to have a ride in less than 1-2 weeks notice. Should be able to catch the bus when you need a ride.
Need more availability, easier to book a ride with less than a week's notice. It seems such a hassle to get an appointment for transportation if we don't give them a week-2 weeks advance notice. Sometimes we have emergencies where we need transportation the next day or so.
MEOC is a huge asset to provide transportation to Veterans who have no other way of getting to Johnson City for appt's. If MEOC loses funding, I don't know how some Veterans will be able to get to appts. MEOC is awesome!
MEOC Transit has an excellent transportation system.
Better hours
Need to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
There is a common misconception that MEOC transit is for senior citizens only. This has discouraged people from thinking this transit is even an option for them to utilize.

There is a misperception of how MEOC transportation works or people think they don't qualify by "income". They have also been told there is not enough vehicles to provide transportation. Some have to wait a long time to be picked back up from a clinic appointment or they do not show up which causes an issue with the doctor's office. Many people in this area must go to Johnson City, Kingsport or Pikeville, KY to receive treatment and have been told transportation is not provided to these areas.

MEOC is a great resource for the region and students at UVA Wise. Increased services with UBER like service would enhance the existing system.

I believe the Mountain Empire Older Citizens acronym (MEOC) is well known to serve older citizens. A name change might be best to improve the usage of available transportation. A surrounding county uses the name "Lynx" which does not suggest the transportation is just for a certain age group. In the work I do, many continue to believe that the MEOC buses cannot be used by them due to the limited knowledge.

I work as a public health outreach worker in Lee county. Transportation is the biggest need for these clients. More info needs to be put out about MEOC.

MEOC Transit is an exceptional service that provides access to our elderly that have nobody to help them get to appointments or to do much needed grocery shopping. We are blessed to have MEOC transit.

It is a wonderful service provided for not just the elderly, but the public as a whole. There needs to be more advertising of the services due to most people's misconception that it's just for the elderly. I personally used this service to travel back and forth to college and was able to obtain my nursing degree partly due to the help I had with transportation. They were a God-send to me and now as a nurse I am able to see and assist others receive the same benefits. Thanks for offering such a valuable and needed service. God Bless!

Thank you for your service.

Good service, drivers need better pay.

Most people in our community are unaware MEOC transit is for any age because they know the 'OC' stands for older citizens. I feel many more people would use the transit if there were more public information advertising and informing of the services. Also many night shift workers in our community carpool and have expressed interest in other options but none exists in the county during their hours.

It is a much needed service to our community

I think the public transportation is lacking in some areas, such as trips to grocery, library, Walmart, doctor and dental appointments. Not enough available buses or vans.

As a professional, I know my clients who were financially, emotionally, and/or intellectually limited had difficulty navigating the Logisticare system that they could access through their Medicaid

With the decrease in services provided at local healthcare facilities, it would seem vital for more connections to facilities in the Tri-Cities region.

Standardized public transportation routes would help so many in this area. Transportation is a serious barrier to access to medical care, jobs, etc.

Don't know enough about it.

I do not use public transportation, but I have worked with people that do use it and need it. It would be helpful to have transportation on holidays, some businesses are closed but people still need to get to and from work and also to appointments. I also think earlier and later hours would be nice. To have an "on call" person for things like hospital discharges would be helpful too, just to give one example. I think it would benefit MEOC to advertise that this transportation is available to everyone not just the elderly, lots of people I know think it is just for elderly because of the MEOC name and that's most of the people you see using it. Maybe even advertise to college and high school students so they are aware.

Times MEOC is available is an issue and distances it can go plus need to call so far in advance.

Due to our rural area the need for public transportation is tremendous. There needs to be extended hours to allow access to use public transportation for work and college.

Long riding times between pickup and destination due to multiple rider stops

I usually have a ride with friends/relatives but I have friends and relatives that have a hard time getting a ride with someone. They could really use the services of MEOW. I've, have however, also heard some folks complain about having to wait a long time for the van to pick them back up after seeing the doctor and that there should be more vans running so folks can get back home sooner. Especially if they're incontinent and don't always have a depends or are hungry...

I feel like there needs to be a broader range of public transportation for our entire district

I think better access to transportation could greatly improve the health and well-being of our residents.

Scott County is such a rural area that MEOC has difficulties serving the entire county. I would like to see more availability.

Fixed routes would be great, especially to the Tri-cities

It is very needed for everyone, seniors, veterans, students....

It helps for grocery, drug store, Walmart and Mall for everyday needs.

There are so many people in our area that could improve their situation and general well-being if there was an actual public transit system in place. The unemployed could actually get to work and people could actually get to the store. I am all for public transportation, especially for those that are not able to drive. Let's do this!

I'm not aware of MEOC's transit and how it works in my area but would be interested in learning more. I depend on family or friends to take appointments and would like to know more about MEOC transit.

Difficult to schedule on short notice

There are many people in the region that need specific transportation needs that are routine and need scheduled transportation to such as a job, job interview, or college classes

Car seats would be a nice addition to the buses. It takes me 20 minutes a day just carrying, buckling, unbuckling, and carrying the car seat. That doesn't include the 3 trips I have to make for each pick up and drop off. It is hard to carry everything plus a child. Also, stop dropping off a mother and her child at the edge of the four lane to walk quite a distance to daycare with loads of stuff. It is dangerous. The dispatch team needs a serious attitude adjustment. Kim Sweaker is the only person who is friendly and helpful. Jeremy and Bryan in particular are painful to deal with. They are rude and argumentative and let you know how irritating they find you to be. Maybe if the system wouldn't pick up one person at a time to go to basically the same places, they could better accommodate their riders. Also, if it is such a hassle to transport those of us who aren't senior citizens, like dispatch tells you, then don't offer the services.

Poor people need all the access to health care and education they can get.

Many elderly neighbors would benefit from the transportation; however, I think they are unaware of how to be added to the transportation routes.

Because the school in which I work is "off the beaten path", many of our parents are unable to attend meetings and/or school functions because of a lack of transportation.

Increasingly interested due to advancing age, limited vision for nighttime driving, increasing need for handicap accessibility. I am very impressed with services offered through the years by MEOC transit. Additional access to medical services outside the immediate area would give consumers of healthcare additional options for care and specialty services that are not always available in the (3) county + City of Norton region.

It is my opinion that public transportation is a benefit to individuals and families in our area.

Elderly people need access to public transportation because of health problems and can't drive or eye problems preventing them from being independent. loss of driver's license because of age or health

I believe there needs to be more regular routes in ALL areas of the region...not just for medical appointments...but for everyday errands, transportation to work and other services.

The MEOC Transit isn't known to the community. Most people think the transit is only for the elderly. More marketing material and information needs to be given to the public. Large groups need to be spoke to such as colleges, large business such as Sykes, Logisticare, Hospitals to let them know that the services are available for anyone of any age.

I might be interested in my elderly mother using this. She lives in Weber City.

overall good, Thanks

The consolidation of health care services by the monopoly that is Ballad Health, has placed a demand on residents in our area to travel for needed health services. Some residents have no way of returning from out-of-state facilities once they have completed treatment or received the care they need. Our region has no alternative or option to stay within our region for life saving services. The only Level 1 trauma center that serves our area is in Johnson City, TN. We need transit services that extend into Tennessee or that provide a connection service to public transit that can get residents to those medical facilities.

Doing a great job.

Thank you for the great service you provide for our region. I know someone that relies on your service in Wise Co. each week. Again, thank you!

none

Many people do not have transportation to bring their child to school if they miss the bus. Expanding your public transportation could help get those students to school during a situation as this.

MEOC TRANSIT IS THE BEST I HAVE COME TO KNOW, HARD AND DEDICATED EMPLOYEES, EVERYONE SHOULD WALK IN THEIR SHOES FOR ONE DAY

I am a teacher and I have many parents that do not have transportation to come to school for meetings or to go to doctor appointments.

Many people think MEOC transportation only services the elderly of our region.

I think many elderly citizens are unaware of the services offered

We need uber and uber eats!!

I think there should be more frequent options, especially too and from the college.

I think that public transportation is a HUGE need for our area. From the elderly to college students, having a form of public transportation will greatly increase quality of life.

People in Scott County have asked about weekend rides to Tricities Tn, and to Saturday night trips to Carter Fold. Also people going to Kingsport by Ambulance and not admitted to hospital in the late afternoon or evening have no way home till MEOC opens next day.

Public transportation has been sparse for years in the region, so people could not rely on it to meet their needs like they did in the past when there were regularly scheduled routes.

My daughter rides MEOC bus 5 days a week. This is a great help for her.

We need more options after hours, when MEOC is closed. We also need affordable transportation for people who cannot pay to ride.

Thank God it's there, but it needs more resources to deliver the unmet need for service.

I would like to see you all open on Saturdays

I think we need an actual public transit that does a bus route They stop at bus stops to pick people up at certain times and take you to certain places. Like Big Stone to Norton Walmart. Like a TRUE mass public transit like Richmond has. Affordable fares and maybe a bus pass.

Wish you could have stops in neighborhoods to pick up and run a route to Bank, Post Office, Pharmacy, and Grocery store.

Need fixed routes

There are areas in Lee County that you can only get rides once a day and it very early. Or you schedule rides and are just not picked up due to the location. People need to be made aware of this so they can arrange other means for transportation.

A lot of the people don't realize anyone can ride the bus they think you have to be old. MEOC says we have transportation for all ages written on the bus. People don't read what is on the bus when they see one. They just think wow there goes another one of those buses.

There is a great need for the public to understand that MEOC is not only for the elderly persons transportation to/from Drs appointments but anywhere for every age.

Public transportation is sorely lacking in the area. The services provided by MEOC are nice, but more options should be available to better serve the area's residents. Not all trips can be scheduled during regular business hours.

Overall, great service. Need more flexibility and a great need for bus stops in busier towns and Norton, but I know that is difficult.