



Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization

Human Services Transportation Plan DRAFT



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Prepared by:



GHMPO

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1.0 Introduction

The Gainesville-Hall Human Services Transportation Plan *Needs Assessment Report* serves as the first step in the development of a Coordinated Plan for the Gainesville and Hall County areas. The purpose of the *Needs Assessment Report* is to provide background information on the demographics of Hall County (to identify target populations) and document existing transportation providers. With this foundation, disconnections between groups will be highlighted, gaps will be exposed, and barriers to seamless implementation will be uncovered.

The Gainesville-Hall Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) is developing this plan to coordinate human services transportation, a critical need in Hall County and its jurisdictions. Transportation significantly contributes to one's quality of life and to the well-being of the community. The inability to adequately access transportation options diminishes a person's opportunity to be independent and to connect with needed services. The development of this plan is the beginning of ongoing activities that will contain ever-evolving elements.

The goal of the plan is to ensure all people, especially those with disabilities or low incomes, children and the elderly have equitable access to appropriate transportation options by offering coordination strategies. This plan was developed in conjunction with a diverse group of stakeholders including transportation providers such as Hall Area Transit (HAT), private senior transportation service providers, and state government agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services.

1.1 Background

The GHMPO is the designated planning body for transportation planning within the Gainesville urbanized area and includes all of Hall County as its planning boundary.

Hall County is located in northeast Georgia at the southern edge of the Chattahoochee Natural Forest and the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Lake Sidney Lanier, a 38,000-acre lake provides 607 miles of shoreline along the western county boundary and serves as a major traffic generator for residential, tourism and recreation trips in the region.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county has a total area of 429 square miles; 394 square miles of land, and 36 square miles (8.28%) of water. Adjacent counties include White County to the north, Habersham County to the northeast, Banks County to the east, Jackson County to the southeast, Barrow County to the south, Gwinnett County to the southwest, Forsyth County to the west, Dawson County to the northwest, and Lumpkin County to the northwest.

The city of Gainesville, the county seat, is situated 50 miles northeast of Atlanta and 40 miles northwest of Athens. A center for employment and commercial, medical, and

educational facilities and services, Gainesville is a regional transportation hub for Hall County as well as neighboring counties. Other municipalities in Hall County include Clermont, Flowery Branch, Gillsville, Lula, and Oakwood.

Key transportation routes in Hall County include Interstate 985 (I-985) and principal arterials such as E.E. Butler Parkway (SR 60), Dawsonville Highway (SR 53), Browns Bridge Road, Atlanta Highway (SR 13), and Jesse Jewell Parkway (SR 369). These routes combine with other arterials, collectors and local streets to form the County's roadway system.

2.0 Available Transit Service Characteristics

2.1 Fixed Route Bus Service

Hall Area Transit (HAT) has provided fixed route bus service in Hall County since January 2001, following the receipt of competitive Federal Job Access and Reverse Commute program funding. Following numerous recommendations from the 2004 Comprehensive Operations Analysis and Strategic Plan, HAT modified its fixed route service to improve system efficiency and ridership.

Within the City of Gainesville, HAT presently operates three (3) fixed bus routes, under the “Red Rabbit” moniker. The three routes are designated by color (Blue, Gold and Red) and connect at the HAT Transfer Station at the corner of Pine and High Streets, adjacent to the Gainesville Public Utilities complex. The routes share many stops in downtown Gainesville along an alignment stretching from Poultry Park (Jesse Jewell Parkway at West Academy Street) south to Queen City Parkway and the HAT Transfer Station, continuing east along High Street, and north along Main Street to Jesse Jewell Parkway.

From downtown, the Blue Route extends west along Dawsonville Way and Shallowford Road to the Lakeshore Estates area, with stops at regional retail sites including Lakeshore Mall, The Village Shopping Center, Home Depot, Goody’s and Kohl’s department stores, and Wal-Mart. East of downtown along Jesse Jewell Parkway, the Blue Route reaches the New Holland area of unincorporated Hall County and major medical facilities, including Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC), The Imaging Center, the NGMC Lanier Park medical campus, and the Guilford Immediate Care Clinic.

The Gold Route continues southwest from downtown along Jesse Jewell Parkway and Browns Bridge Road near Hall County Memorial Park. Destinations include a variety of local retail centers and dining establishments, the Georgia Department of Labor, and the Westside community. To the south and east from downtown, the Gold Route travels past I-985 along Athens Street and Athens Highway to the Morning Side Hills/Lenox Park area. In addition to the Hall County Health Department, the Newtown community, and the Greyhound Bus Station, there are major manufacturing and processing firms within walking distance of the Gold Route, including Fieldale Farms, Pilgrim’s Pride, Land O’Lakes Purina Feed, Cargill, and Kings Delight.

The Red Route extends from Jesse Jewell Parkway and Downey Boulevard downtown to reach destinations in northern Gainesville. The route travels northbound along South Enota Drive past Sherwood Plaza and the NGMC Quick Care and rehabilitation facilities, then continues east along Park Hill Drive, Cleveland Highway and Clarks Bridge Road to the J&J Foods supermarket at Limestone Parkway. The route then returns west, traveling past South Enota Drive to Oak Tree Drive, Thompson Bridge Road, and Linwood Drive in the Spring View Acres community, before returning southbound to downtown. Many supermarket chains (Food Lion, Ingles, J&J, Kroger, Publix), and various apartment

complexes are along this route. In the downtown area, the Red Route also serves Brenau University and stops at the Downtown Gainesville branch and headquarters of the Hall County Library system.

The Red Rabbit fixed routes operate between 6:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. on Mondays through Fridays. There is no service on weekends or county holidays. Fares on the Red Rabbit are \$1.00 per one-way trip. A half-fare of \$0.50 is the cost charged to seniors above age 60, children aged 18 and below, persons carrying a Medicaid card, and students. Transfers between routes are free, and remain valid within 50 minutes from the time of issuance.

Service frequencies are every 30 minutes throughout the day on the Blue Route, and every 60 minutes on the Red and Gold Routes. The Blue and Gold Routes' schedules are synchronized for timed transfers at the High Street-Pine Street Red Rabbit Transfer Station. Westbound services arrive and leave at :55 and :00 on the hour, respectively, while the eastbound services arrive and leave at :25 and :30 on the hour.

The Red Rabbit routes provide service with five (5) 30-foot shuttle buses, including two 2000 Goshen shuttles, and three 2002 Goshen shuttles. Each vehicle supports up to 18 adult ambulatory passengers, with securements in the rear available for two wheelchairs. All five vehicles are to be replaced during Fiscal Year (FY) 2008 with six (6) new 27-foot vehicles. Fleet expansion is expected to continue in FY 2009 (2 vehicles) and FY 2010 (one vehicle). All HAT fixed route vehicles are accessible under the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and all vehicles are equipped with wheelchair lifts.

2.2 Demand-Responsive Service

There are two components to the demand-responsive service offered by HAT. These include the ADA-complementary paratransit service required for the service area within a three-fourth mile distance from Red Rabbit transit stops, and the demand-responsive van service offered by HAT to all persons residing and working in Hall County outside of the Red Rabbit service area. The county wide service provided by HAT is called "Dial-A-Ride" and the ADA-complementary service is called "Mobility Plus".

For Dial-A-Ride service, HAT maintains a distance-based fare structure: \$2.00 for travel up to two miles, \$3.00 for distances greater than two but less than four miles, and \$4.00 for trips up to seven miles. Dial-A-Ride and Mobility Plus services are curb-to-curb operations.

HAT presently utilizes two (2) vehicles to accommodate the ADA-complementary paratransit service. These include two Ford high-top vans scheduled for replacement in FY 2009. Each vehicle supports up to 10 ambulatory passengers with accommodations for two wheelchairs.

Nine (9) additional vehicles support the remaining demand-responsive service area in Hall County. FTA Nonurbanized Area Formula Program funding assisted in the purchase of the remaining seven (7) lift-equipped vehicles, consisting of one Ford cutaway mini-bus, two Ford Pacer II shuttle vans, and four (4) Ford Goshen vans. Each accommodates eight adult passengers with two wheelchair positions. The Ford Goshen vans are scheduled for replacement in FY 2010, while the remaining vehicles are scheduled for replacement in FY 2008.

2.3 Commuter Facilities

HAT maintains the Red Rabbit Transfer Station at High and Pine Streets, a predominantly industrial area, at the southern end of downtown Gainesville. A small number of parking spaces are available at this location, although park-and-ride utilization is low.

The Blue and Gold Routes also have a transfer point at a shelter on Prior Street at the Community Service Center. The Service Center parking lot provides a storage site for HAT vehicles.

In the Transit Development Plan (TDP) adopted in May 2008, one of the major recommendations included the relocation of the HAT system transfer center from its current location on High Street/Pine Street to the new HAT Headquarters building located at 687 Main Street. Additional recommendations from the TDP appear later in this section.

There are currently 22 shelters in place at stops along HAT Red Rabbit bus routes. Shelters include a posted schedule to help riders identify the next scheduled time of arrival.

The rising costs of inter-county and long-distance commuting, particularly to the Athens and Atlanta metropolitan areas, are making park-and-ride lots an attractive option for alternative transportation in Hall County. Park-and-ride lots support ridesharing activities while providing a potential future location for express bus services. GDOT operates one park-and-ride lot in Oakwood, at the intersection of SR 53/Winder Highway and Wallis Road, just south of the I-985 northbound off-ramp at Exit 16. The lot has 126 parking spaces. Just north of this location, an additional park-and-ride lot accommodating 300-400 vehicles is under construction at SR 13/Atlanta Highway and I-985, as part of the I-985 Split Diamond Interchange/Collector-Distributor Project. Many Atlanta-bound Hall County commuters use the park-and-ride facility in Gwinnett County, at SR 20/Buford Drive just west of the I-985 southbound on-ramp. Served by Gwinnett County Transit (GCT) Route 50 and GRTA Xpress Route 101, the Buford park-and-ride has 335 spaces and is located approximately three miles south of Hall County.

After extensive public outreach activities, the Transit Development Plan (TDP) included several recommendations that augmented, expanded, or created new HAT service throughout the greater Gainesville area. Each of these recommendations could benefit

the overall transportation options available to Hall County citizens. Table 1 lists each of the recommendations.

Table 1: Recommendations to HAT Service based on the May 2008 TDP

Potential Service Modifications	
Route	Proposed Modification Description
Blue	Extend north of Limestone Parkway to the Ridgecrest Apartments and connect with the Green Route. Eliminate service on Limestone Parkway between Beverly Road and Jesse Jewell Parkway. Terminate at the HAT Transfer Center.
Orange	Originate at the Lake Forest Apartments and terminate at the HAT Transfer Center via Dawsonville Highway and Rainey Street. Service on Shallowford Road and Pearl Nix Parkway moved to Purple Route. Eliminate service on John Morrow Boulevard.
Gold	Originate at Lenox Park and terminate at the HAT Transfer Center. Operates on the eastern half of current Gold Route.
Pink	Originate at Memorial Park Drive and terminate at HAT Transfer Center.
Red	Originate at Linwood Apartments and terminate at HAT Transfer Center. Eliminate service on Queen City Parkway.
Green	Originate at Ridgecrest Apartments and connect with Blue Route. Terminate at the HAT Transfer Center.
Potential New Service	
Route	Proposed New Service Description
Purple	New service on Atlanta Highway from Lakeshore Mall to Flowery Branch area. Implement in three phases: (1) Lakeshore Mall to Memorial Park Drive; (2) Memorial Park Drive to Gainesville State College; (3) Gainesville State College to Flowery Branch.
Flexible Route Service	New weekday demand response zone service for US 129 corridor area.
Commuter Service	Commuter bus service to Gwinnett County; Commuter bus service from park-and-ride lot to downtown Atlanta.

2.4 Private and Other Transportation Service Providers

There are approximately 15 companies currently providing taxicab services in Hall County. Virtually all are based in Gainesville, with a sizeable majority oriented to serve the growing Spanish-speaking population. Taxicabs offer variable distance-based rates for services to destinations throughout Hall County. Several offer flat-fee rates to major shopping sites in Gwinnett and Banks/Jackson Counties, as well as shuttle service to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (HJIA) and other destinations in Atlanta and Athens. A similar number of taxi services based just outside of Hall County (in Buford, Winder, etc.) serve a number of Hall County's incorporated areas.

In addition to HAT and the taxi services, several private agencies provide transportation services to individual segments of the population. Table 2 below shows each providers name as well as the specific segment of population they transport.

Table 2: Private Transportation Providers and Segments of the Population Served

Provider	Primary Service/Segment Served
Medtran Medical Transport	Transportation for wheelchair users, people with disabilities, seniors
Family Medical Transport	Family ambulance; primarily seniors
Southeast Tran	Medicaid and doctor appointments; primarily seniors
Veterans Community Outreach Foundation	Transportation for veterans
Village Nursing Care	Care, errands, and medical transportation; seniors
Community Service Center	Various human service programs; numerous
Disability Resource Center	Non-profit center serving northeast Georgia; those with a disability
Legacy Link	Designated Area Agency on Aging in northeast Georgia; seniors

When surveyed, some of the private transportation providers shared information related to the specific services they provide to the Gainesville-Hall community.

Some of the providers offer service to the northeast Georgia area as well as the Gainesville-Hall area. Generally speaking, the majority of private transportation services are available between 8AM and 5PM while some extend their service hours a couple of hours before and after with a couple providing 24-hour service.

The largest concern among those providers who responded to the Team’s question was not having enough vehicles to cover the demand for the trips. In most cases, the majority of calls are in a small window of time and the supply of vehicles is quickly exhausted. A related concern was the inability to carry more than one wheelchair or scooter passenger for each trip. This causes the vehicle supply to dwindle quickly. Additionally, the lack of vehicle availability forces riders to use taxi services which can be expensive and lack dependency in terms of arrival/departure times.

In terms of funding, most providers rely on Medicare/Medicaid for payment that may be supplemented by a small fee or fare. In some cases, the fares are discounted or forgiven after certain points in the day.

Some of the general suggestions heard included providing more reliable service (arrival time), expanded transportation to businesses away from central Gainesville, and providing transportation from areas outside of Hall County to the central Gainesville area.

3.0 Demographic Information

3.1 Population

Hall County has been characterized by explosive growth over the last decade. The population of Hall County increased from 95,434 to 139,277 between 1990 and 2000, a growth rate of 45 percent. U.S. Census Bureau estimates show Hall County gained approximately 7,000 people between 2005 and 2006, increasing to 173,256 residents growing about 24% since 2000. The net increase since the Year 2000 Census has been close to 34,000 (see Tables 3 and 4). As of 2006, the County was ranked 17th among all Georgia counties in population percentage gains since 2000. The population is most highly concentrated within the city limits of Gainesville.

Table 3: Population, Hall County and Gainesville

Population Totals				
City/County	1990	2000	2005	2006
Gainesville	17,885	25,578	32,444	33,340
Hall County	95,434	139,277	166,302	173,256

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 4: Population Density, Gainesville and Hall County

Population Density ¹				
City/County	1990	2000	2005	2006
Gainesville	660	944	1,197	1,230
Hall County	242	353	422	440

¹Population density computed based on U.S. Census Data based on total land area of Gainesville and Hall County, 27.1 and 394 square miles of Gainesville and Hall County, respectively.

According to the *2025 Hall County Comprehensive Plan*, Hall County's growth reflects its status as northeast Georgia's regional center for business, shopping, medical services, and educational opportunities. The historic growth is also due in great part to its proximity to and spread of growth from the metropolitan Atlanta area. According to the 2030 GHMPO Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Update, this dramatic growth has created new and more complex challenges to adequately address citizen mobility needs.

The LRTP Update projects that by 2030 Hall County's population is anticipated to more than double to 365,241. This represents an approximate 120 percent increase over the most current 2005 population estimate.

3.2 Employment

According to the GHMPO 2030 LRTP, total employment is projected to increase from 65,133 in 2005 to 278,978 in 2030. Table 5 shows the significant growth in employment projected in the County for the retail, service, manufacturing, and wholesale trade industrial sectors.

According to the GHMPO Travel Demand Model, projected areas of highest employment concentration in 2030 are in the City of Gainesville, particularly the town square area, the Northeast Georgia Medical Center area and the predominately industrial Gainesville Mills area. Outside of Gainesville, the area with the highest projected employment density is in Oakwood, in the vicinity of the I-985/SR 53 (Winder Highway) interchange near Gainesville State and Lanier Technical Colleges.

Table 5: 2005 and 2030 Employment by Category, Hall County

	Retail	Service	Mfg.	Wholesale	Total Employment
2005	7,000	37,336	16,928	3,869	65,133
2030	29,980	159,305	73,056	16,637	278,978

3.3 Income

The median household income in Hall County in 2000 was \$44,908 (see Table 6). The median family income was \$50,100. The per capita income for the county was \$19,690. Approximately 8.50 percent of families and 12.40 percent of the population were below the poverty line, including 15.20 percent of those under age 18 and 14.70 percent of those ages 65 or over.

Table 6: Income/Economic Characteristics, Hall County and Gainesville

Location	Median HH Income¹	Median Family Income¹	Per Capita Income¹	Families Below Poverty Level	Individuals Below Poverty Level
Gainesville	\$36,605	\$43,734	\$19,128	869 (16.1 %)	5,188 (21.8 %)
Hall County	\$44,908	\$50,100	\$19,690	3,070 (8.5%)	16,980 (12.4%)
Georgia	\$42,433	\$49,280	\$21,154	210,138 (9.9 %)	1,033,793 (13.0%)
U.S.	\$41,994	\$50,046	\$21,587	6,620,945 (9.2%)	33,899,812 (12.4%)

Source: U.S. Census 2000 Data
¹(1999 Dollars)

The percentages of families and individuals residing in Hall County, living below the poverty line, are similar to percentages for the State in 2000. The proportion of families and individuals residing in Gainesville living below the poverty line are observed here to be significantly higher than both the County or State percentages.

3.4 Transit Target Markets

Populations typically needing transit, or more likely to use transit, are described using a variety of demographic and socioeconomic data; they are often identified by considering where low-income, minority, youth, disabled, and elderly populations, and households without access to a car, truck or van for private use are concentrated. They also consider education, income, and population density.

Target market concentrations in the Transit Development plan adopted by GHMPO in May 2008 were identified by developing a transit market index (transit propensity index). The index included the following variables: households without vehicles, population below poverty, population ages 65 and older, persons with disabilities, persons without a high school diploma, and non-White population. Note that persons of Latino/Hispanic ethnicity are included in both White and non-White populations. Each census block group was assigned a numerical ranking from one through five for each variable, based on its percentile, as compared to the study area as a whole: 20th percentile, 40th percentile, 60th percentile, 80th percentile or 100th percentile. An aggregate score for each block group was computed. The resulting transit target market scores were mapped and are illustrated in Figure 1 to aid in identifying transit needs and potential transit markets.

The geographic distributions of households without vehicles, population below poverty, population ages 65 and older, persons with disabilities, persons without a high school diploma, and non-White population are mapped separately and are illustrated in Figures 2 through 6, respectively.

The transit market index values are observed to be highest within limits of the City of the Gainesville, to the east of the city (bordering US 129 (Athens Highway) and SR 323 (Gillsville Highway)), and to the southwest (between SR 13 (Atlanta Highway) and SR 369 (Browns Bridge Road)). The highest potential (the area with a transit target market index equal to 5, as shown in Figure 1) is observed in a zone generally bounded by US 129 (E.E. Butler Parkway) to the west, I-985 to the south and SR 365 (Jesse Jewell Parkway) to the north and east.

Figure 1: Transit Target Market

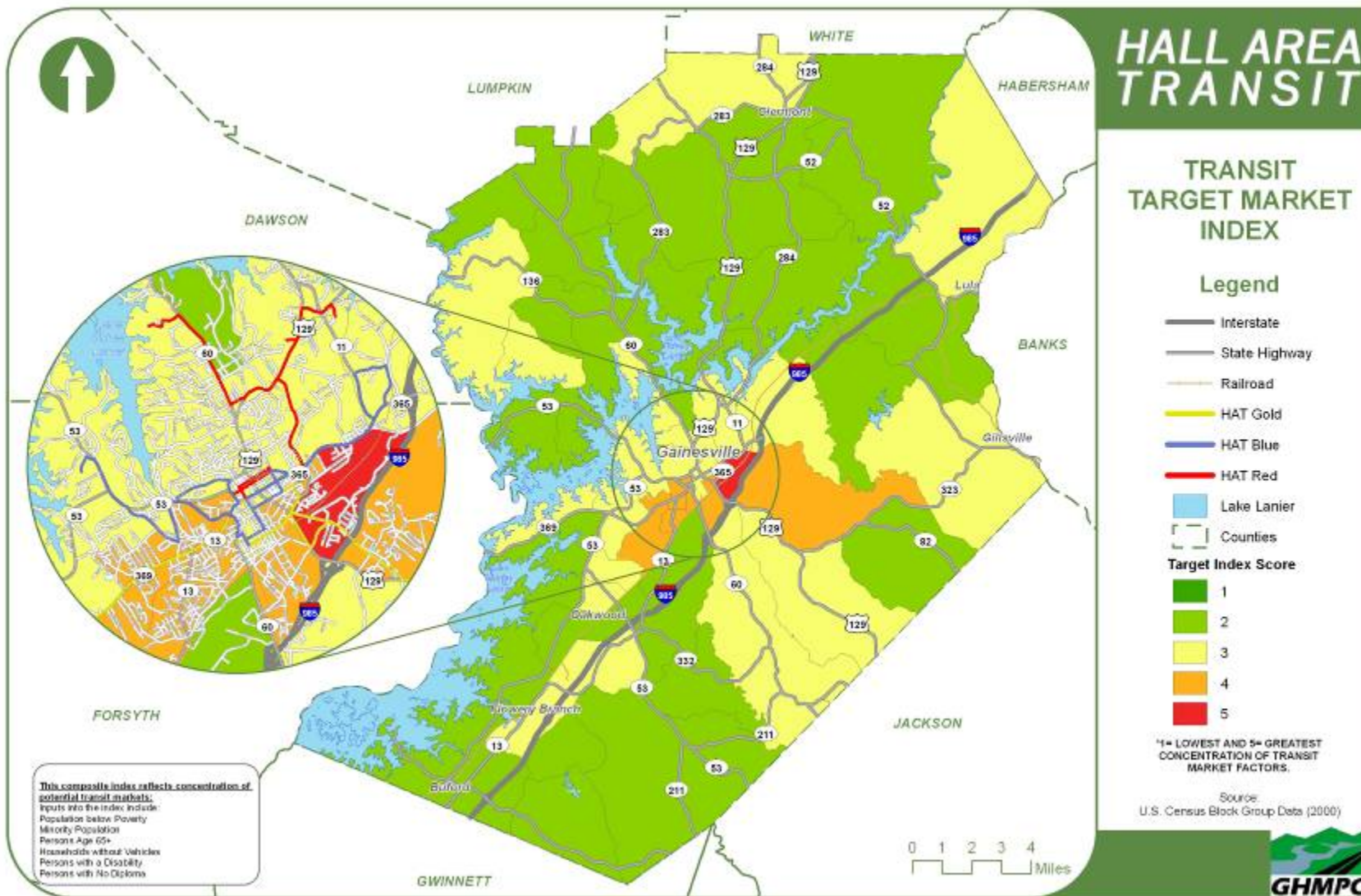


Figure 2: Percent of Households without Vehicles

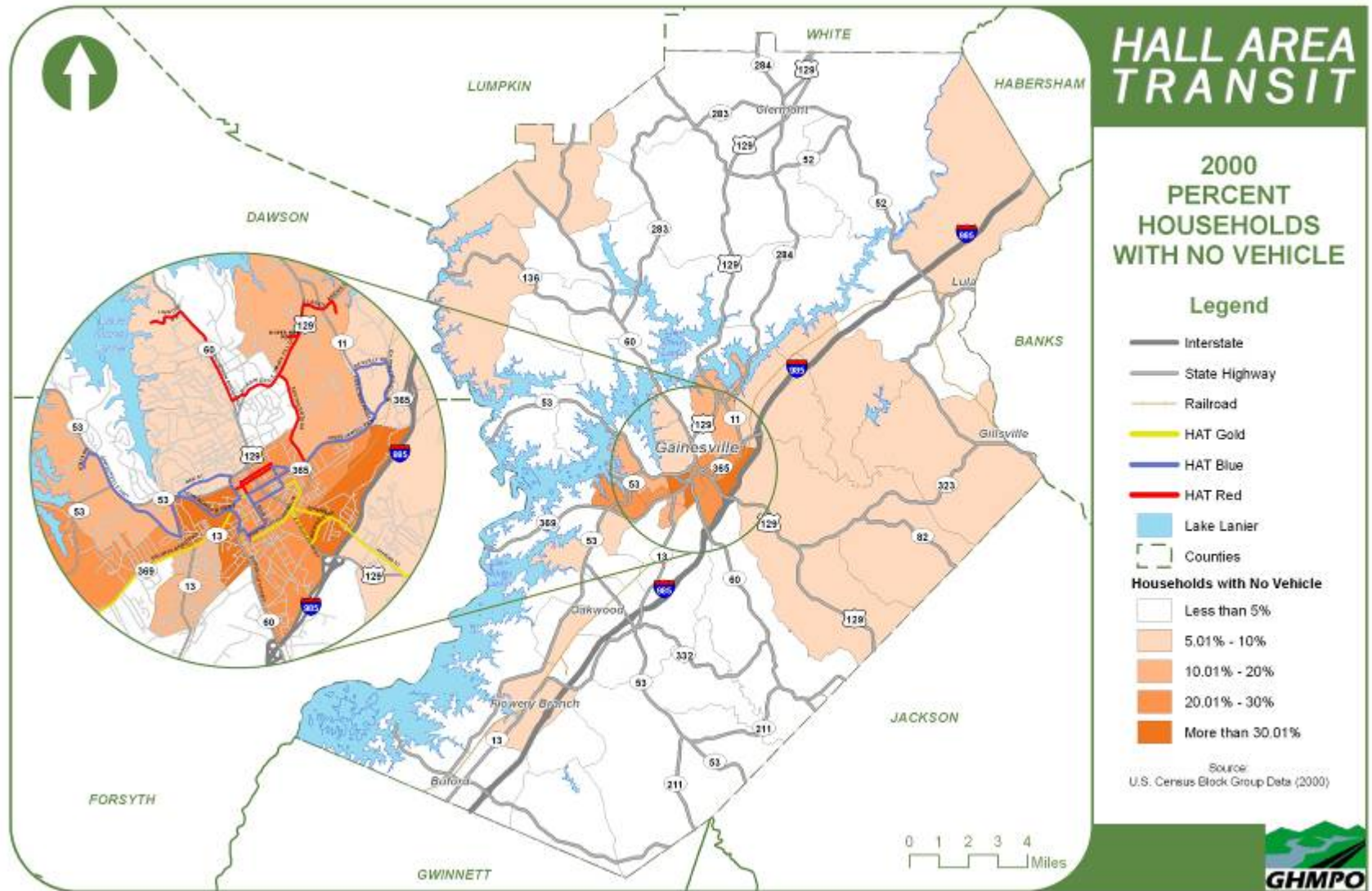


Figure 3: Percent of Population Living Below Poverty Level

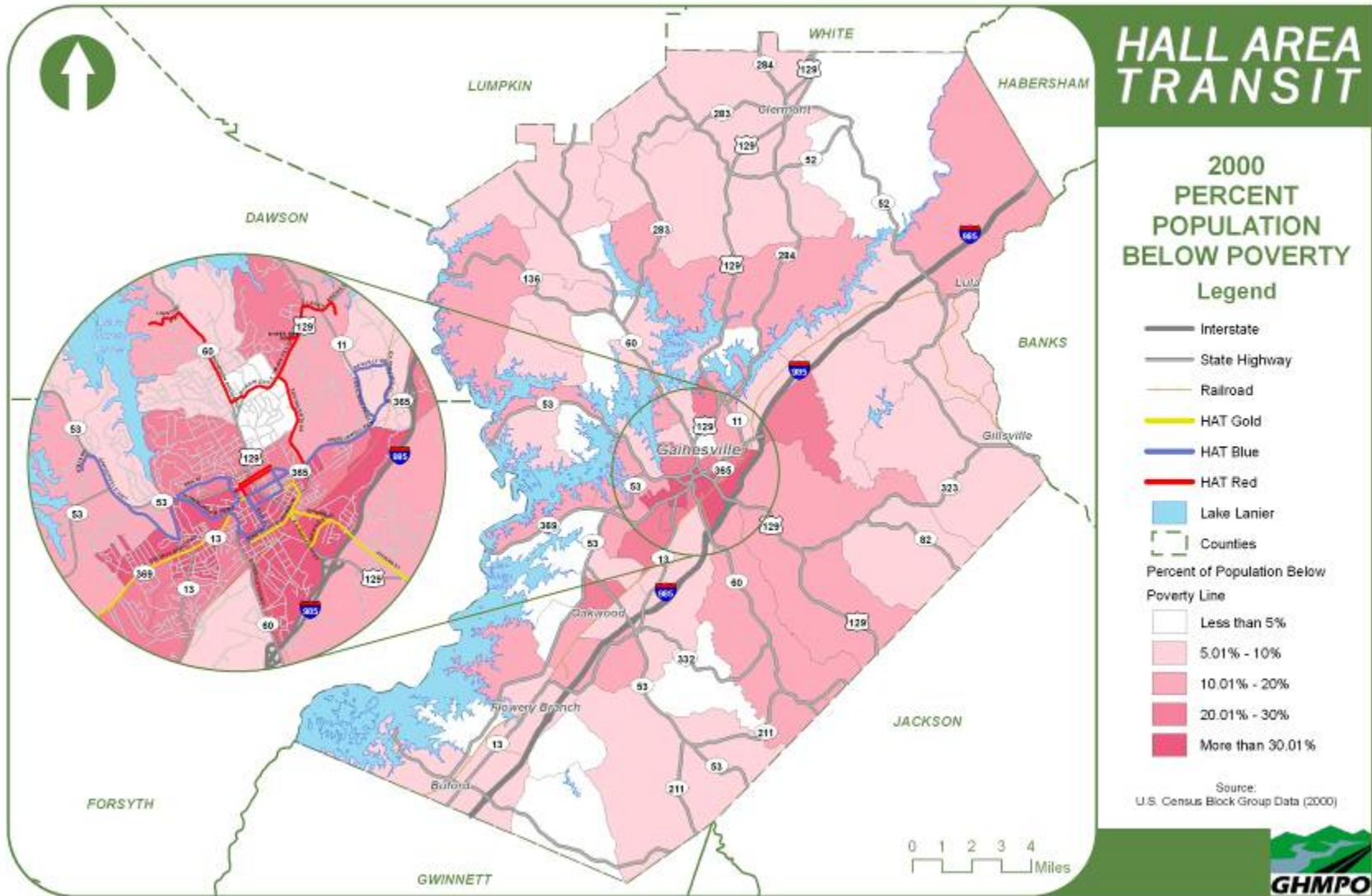


Figure 4: Percent of Population 65 Years of Age and Older

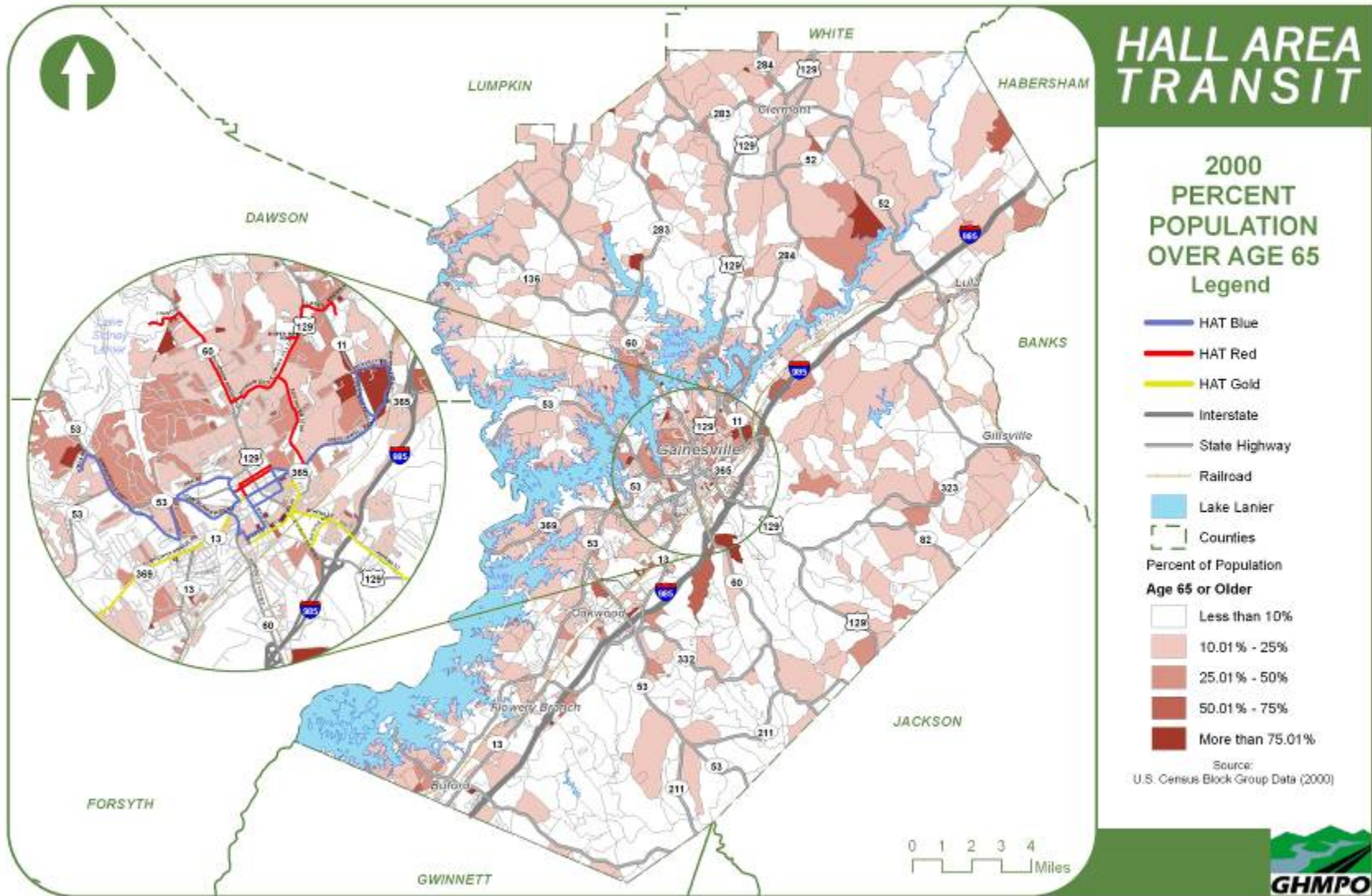


Figure 5: Persons with Disabilities

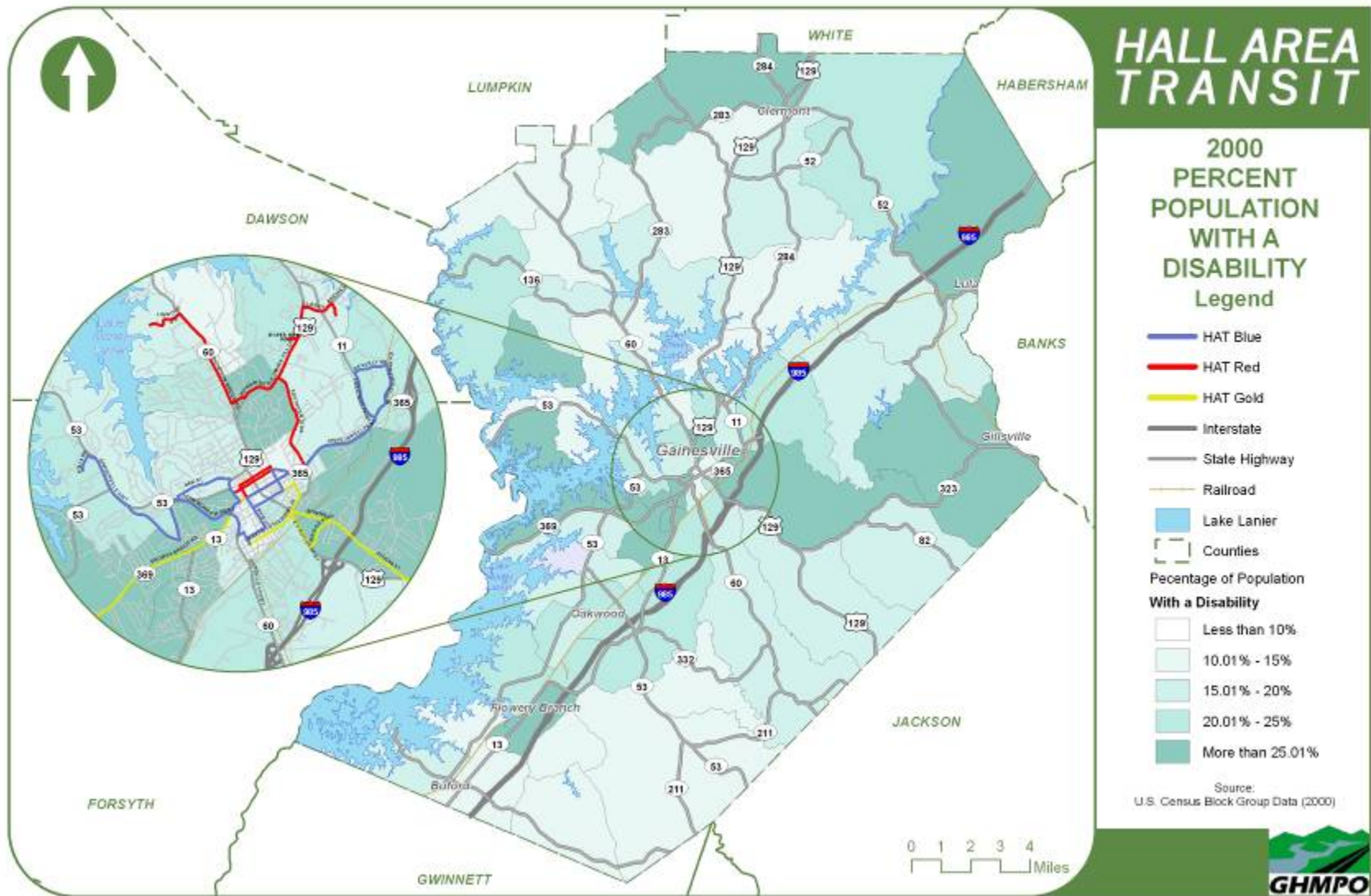


Figure 6: Percentage of Minority (Non-White) Populations

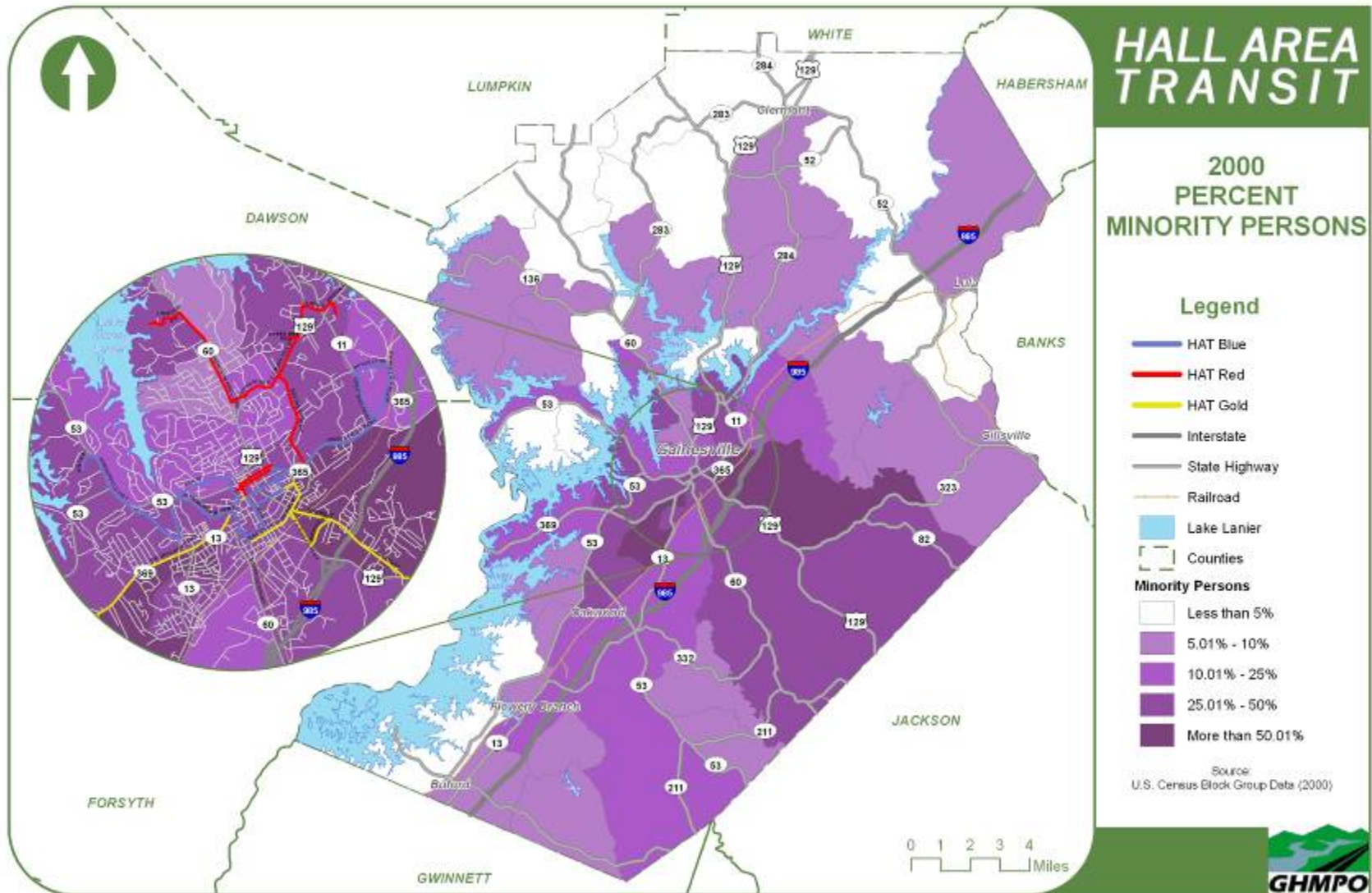


Table 7 provides a summary of demographic characteristics for the county and state, for persons age 10 to 19, persons age 65 and older, persons living below poverty, and households without access to car, truck, or van. Overall, the percentage of persons 65 years of age and greater and of persons under 18, are somewhat equivalent to the statewide percentages. The percentages of persons living below the poverty line and zero-vehicle households are lower than statewide percentages.

Table 7: Population and Household Characteristics - 2005

Geography	Total		Percent of Population or Households			
	Population	Households	Persons Under 18	Persons Age 65+	Individuals Living Below Poverty	Households w/No Access to Vehicles
Hall County	166,302	53,036	27.5%	9.3%	8.5%	5.7%
Georgia	8,821,142	3,771,466	26.0%	9.6%	14.4%	7.0%

Source: State data from the 2005 American Community Survey and <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/13/13139.html>
 And http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/census/2005tp/tab3totab8/percents/hall_county_georgia.xls and <http://www.gainesvilletimes.com/news/stories/20060903/localnews/121826.shtml>

Data on race and ethnicity from the 2000 Census are presented in Table 8. Overall, the County and its principal city, Gainesville, are characterized by a larger proportion of persons identifying themselves as Hispanic or Latino than is found statewide. The percentage of Asian residents is also slightly higher in Gainesville than the percentage residing within in the County and the State.

Table 8: Year 2000 Data on Race and Ethnicity

Geography	Total Year 2000 Population	White	African American	Asian	American Indian and Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian; Other Pacific Islander	Some Other Race	Two or More Races	Hispanic/Latino
Gainesville	25,578	65.2%	15.7%	2.7%	0.3%	0.1%	14.3%	1.7%	33.2%
Hall County	139,277	80.8%	7.3%	1.3%	0.3%	0.2%	8.8%	1.4%	19.6%
Georgia	8,186,453	65.1%	28.7%	2.1%	0.3%	0.1%	2.4%	1.4%	5.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau: 2000 U.S. Census

4.0 Gaps in Existing Service

Based on feedback from stakeholders and some review of local transit services, significant gaps in service were exposed. The gaps cover a variety of issues and should be addressed collectively to ensure the user receives the maximum availability of transportation options for their given situation. The gaps are not corridor- or modally-specific rather they address “bigger picture” issues that can be addressed through policy discussions and implementation strategies. The Coordinated Plan Final Report is expected to offer recommendations that address some of these gaps.

Beginning with origins and destinations, it was made clear by some of the stakeholders that fixed route transit services simply do not cover all of the areas riders need to access. While it is not expected that HAT or other transit services cover every location where employers (or jobs) exist, it should be the goal to access the largest amount of employers as possible including indirect connections to the transit service via sidewalk or other mode of transportation. While adhering to the ADA rules governing transportation, seemingly minor issues such as lack of adherence to published schedules, destination signing that is too small or vague to understand and general lack of information on public transportation can potentially confuse riders. Therefore, opportunities to provide expanded community outreach could be explored.

In terms of the private transportation services, these providers covered the core hours required for transportation-dependant populations to access doctor and medical appointments, allowing for shopping (such as grocery store) and worship. In some cases, these providers extended their service hours to begin earlier in the morning as well as into the evening.

It is recognized that a more thorough gaps analysis should be performed in the future as the aging population continues to increase the demand for specific transportation services becomes more important.

5.0 Needs and Challenges

Through stakeholder input and research, the Study Team identified several key needs and challenges which layout the issues facing the provision and coordination of human service transportation. While these are not necessarily recommendations, many could be easily applied. Specific recommendations appear in the next section.

The needs and challenges are listed below.

Higher levels of transit service in areas outside of central Gainesville and during off-peak times

There are areas of the Gainesville-Hall County region that have low or no service by public transit. This is primarily because these areas have low densities of housing and employment and, more recently, due to budget constraints. In addition, transit is traditionally focused toward peak hours when most people are travelling to and from work, making travel to jobs with non-traditional schedules difficult. Because of these two factors, mobility can be difficult for persons without automobiles.

Adequate transit connections

There are human services sites in the Gainesville-Hall County region that are not served or served by low levels of regular route public transit service. This makes it difficult for low-income persons, persons with disabilities, and other transportation-disadvantaged persons to access these facilities.

Sufficient connections between under- and unemployed persons and entry-level jobs

Inadequate mobility options often hamper entry-level workers the most. Often times, transit service is provided where residents live but does not connect to the appropriate job opportunities.

Increase mobility options for persons transitioning into the workforce with unique schedules

Under- and unemployed persons often need transportation assistance when they first transition into the workforce; the goal being for them to leave public programs and secure their own private transportation. Some persons need assistance with making this transition.

Serve areas of the region currently underserved by paratransit

The hours of service that paratransit transportation operates are affected by the hours of local regular route service. As regular-route services are reduced, complementary paratransit service hours may also be reduced. There are opportunities for longer hours

of operation because the number of persons who are elderly and/or disabled has been increasing.

Eliminate service duplication in the metropolitan region

There are areas where public dial-a-ride service is duplicated. Providers could coordinate services to eliminate service duplication and improve efficiency.

Adequate transfer facilities for dial-a-ride service to coordinate with regular route service

Regular fixed route service is often less expensive to operate than dial-a-ride programs. Transportation costs can be reduced by using a dial-a-ride program to take people to fixed-route service wherever possible. Then the majority of the trip can be made on regular route service at a lower cost. One key is having adequate facilities that allow for convenient transfers. In some places, there are no or only minimal shelters, which makes transferring difficult.

Information coordination on travel options between fixed route service and dial-a-ride programs

When transferring from dial-a-ride to fixed route, riders do not know when a bus will actually arrive. This can be especially problematic for vulnerable populations and during the winter or on days of inclement weather. In addition, not all dial-a-ride scheduling software allows for the integration of fixed route service. This may cause schedulers to inadvertently exclude dial-a-ride options when scheduling trips.

Eliminate service fragmentation among private providers

Service fragmentation exists within human service transportation providers because most limit passengers they are willing to carry to their own client base. Opportunities for coordination may exist. Individuals may be involved with multiple programs. Programs with similar needs but different client bases may be close enough to share programs. Programs with similar client bases may also be able to share resources.

Increase awareness of public transit options among human service agencies and human service populations

Human service agencies sometimes overlook available public transit. The services can have erroneous perceptions among agencies and consumers stemming from a lack of local information, problems with schedules, and perceived convenience issues. These can lead to an underutilization of public transit and increased inefficiencies.

It is important to note that the Georgia Department of Human Resources (GA DHR), Region 2 completed a *Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan* in 2006. In this plan, GA DHR performed detailed ridership analysis and made recommendations as

to how to improve overall service, determine gaps in service, and recommend revisions to make the human transportation services perform more efficiently. The purpose of this Plan is to not take the place of the DHR plan. Instead, the *Gainesville-Hall County HST Coordinated Plan* should augment and strengthen the case for more coordination of transportation services for the elderly, disabled, and other transportation-dependent populations.

Note: It is important to note that the Study Team made numerous attempts to reach out to the local private taxi services to no avail.

6.0 Recommendations for Improvements

Based on the findings in the Needs and Challenges section the following recommendations and strategies for addressing the service gaps recommendations were developed.

Create a Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council (HSTCC)

Coordination is a process. One of the most important things necessary to move this process forward will be to continue the dialogue initiated during this study. Therefore, the primary recommendation is the development of a forum through which this can occur. The Human Services Transportation Coordinating Council would be created to maintain lines of communication and continue the pursuit of a long term strategy for coordination. The Council could be hosted by Hall Area Transit, and could include representatives from the Georgia Department of Human Resources, Legacy Link, Village Nursing Care, Disability Resource Center, Gainesville Senior Center, Southeastrans, and others. The HSTCC could provide the participating agencies a forum through which projects, ideas, issues and opportunities could be discussed on a more permanent basis. Additionally, the HSTCC could select other activities to further improve transportation options such as

- Regularly update the coordinated plan and integrate it with regional and statewide plans
- Better integrate public transit-human services transportation needs into local government decision-making and development patterns
- Execute strategic public information campaigns (town hall style meetings, workshops, seminars, brochures, website upgrades, etc.) throughout the service area to increase awareness, meet customer expectations, boost ridership, and garner more support for effective approaches to meet identified needs

Mobility Management

Mobility management has been likened to a community travel agent with access to a family of transportation services. United We Ride has defined mobility management as making innovative use of transit resources to respond to the demands of customers, which may include:

- Providing non-traditional services such as vanpool, ride-share, or demand-responsive services
- Implementing technologies that increase travel options or convenience
- Providing information on all modes and ridesharing at a single call center
- Influencing land use in favor of transit
- Enhanced coordination of services (private and/or public). Example solution:
 - Coordination of private and non-profit transportation services with the public transportation system

Improving public transportation will become more important as the population ages in Hall County and surrounding areas. By developing a comprehensive mobility

management policy and coordinating various types of transportation services, solutions may be found to better serve customers and to better use scarce public funds. Two potential funding sources for improving mobility services are described as follow:

FTA Section 5316 - Jobs Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Funding

Example Eligible Projects:

1. Increase transit service beyond current limited hours of operation

Example solutions:

- Provide more frequent service / reduced headways

2. Increase geographic service area so that more areas are served or served more fully

Example solutions:

- New fixed routes or expanded routes to employment and shopping areas inside/outside region and state

3. Broader/improved communication about transit services

Example solutions:

- Improved promotion / Community outreach identifying available services and providing information and guidance on how to use the system; and
- Initiate promotion / Business outreach identifying available transportation services

FTA Section 5317 - New Freedom Funding

Example Eligible Projects:

1. Broaden Geographic Service Area

Example solutions:

- Expansion of transit service to employment opportunities inside/outside of the region

2. Enhanced assisted services

Example solutions:

- Door-to-door service;
- Information technology that allows service providers to know what the needs are of those requesting service, and
- Training for service providers to accommodate new service

Coordinate with Georgia Department of Human Services to Identify Eligible Projects for FTA Section 5310 - Specialized Transportation (Elderly and Disabled)

Example Eligible Projects:

1. Broaden Geographic Service Area

Example solutions:

- Expansion of transit service to medical facilities inside/outside of the region and state, and
- Transportation to/from nursing homes, senior centers, community centers

2. Enhanced assisted services

Example solutions:

- Replacement of aging paratransit vehicles;
- Door-to-door service;
- Information technology that allows service providers to know what the physical and mobility needs are of those requesting service, and
- Training for service providers to accommodate new service