

Southern Georgia Regional Transit Development Plan

BOOK 2

Vision and Goals Statement

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In partnership with



Blue Cypress Consulting
&
Spatial Plans

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List of Acronyms

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
DCH	Georgia Department of Community Health
DHS	Georgia Department of Human Services
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GDOT	Georgia Department of Transportation
PAC	Project Advisory Committee
SGRC	Southern Georgia Regional Commission
SWTRP	Statewide Transit Plan
TDP	Transit Development Plan
TOD	Transit-Oriented Development
VLMPO	Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization

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1.0 Introduction

Community visioning and goal setting was a core component of the Southern Georgia Regional Transit Development Plan (TDP) process. Several inputs informed the process, as illustrated in **Figure 1**. Through two rounds of stakeholder and public engagement, the planning team prompted participants to reflect on long-term needs and priorities. Because the TDP has a 25-year planning horizon, the planning team posed questions that encouraged participants to imagine a transit landscape that accounted for the multitude of possibilities and potential challenges that 25 years brings. The preliminary performance metrics ground the vision and goals in day-to-day action and help ensure steady progress toward desired outcomes.

1.1 Document Contents

Chapter 2.0 provides the region's transit vision and goals for 2050, as well as preliminary performance measures for the Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) to consider tracking as it advances the Regional TDP's implementation. The remaining chapters provide the context and plan findings that informed the vision and goals.

Chapter 3.0 highlights the region and state of Georgia's transit planning history, as well as related plans and trends that influence the transit landscape in Southern Georgia.

Chapter 4.0 summarizes the key themes from the community engagement process. The engagement process was iterative, allowing for multiple touchpoints for stakeholders and the public in the Southern Georgia Region to provide feedback and validate that the vision and goals are reflective of the community's desires for future transit.

Figure 1: Visioning and Goal Setting Inputs



2.0 Vision and Goals

The transit vision statement expresses the desired conditions of public transit in the region in the year 2050, the end of this TDP's planning horizon. The goals provide key elements needed to achieve the desired transit conditions.

2.1 Vision Statement

Transit services in the Southern Georgia Region will seamlessly connect urban and rural areas, facilitate greater accessibility to destinations across the region, and further the region's adaptability to the future.

Figure 2 further defines the intent of key terms in the vision statement.

Figure 2: Key Vision Components Further Explored

SEAMLESS CONNECTION	ACCESSIBILITY	ADAPTABILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No gaps in service area coverage across the region • Mobility hubs facilitate service transfers in locations that provide a supportive user environment • Well-promoted information for how to transition between urban and rural transit modes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fair and comfortable service for people of all abilities (e.g., visual, auditory, mobile impairments) • Reliable (e.g., on-time service) and affordable • Technology-enabled booking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure and technology solutions to help the region to prepare, respond, and recover from extreme weather events • Plan for transit's role during emergencies • Leveraging technological and other advances to adjust to a changing future

2.2 Goals

Long-term goals accompany the vision statement. Goals 1, 2, and 3 are foundational pillars (Tier I goals) for the region's transit over the 25-year planning horizon. The transit agencies in the Southern Georgia Region communicated that these have been priority goals since their establishment in 2019. Stakeholders prioritized these as their top three goals for the Regional TDP.

Goals 4, 5, and 6 require pushing the limits of what is in place today to move toward a more resilient and connected region. While stakeholders did not prioritize these goals as highly as the Tier I goals, they were all validated as important elements to guide implementation of the transit vision. As such, these goals have been categorized as Tier II goals.

The six goals are listed in the following subsections in bold. The sub-bullets expand upon each goal to provide more definition and clarity for each goal's scope.

2.2.1 Tier I Goals

1) **Deliver fiscally responsible and efficient transit services.**

- Continue delivering a quality service that is cost-effective to operate.
- Maximize ridership to the extent possible to achieve service efficiency.

2) **Provide for the unique needs of transit dependent populations.**

- Promote greater affordability for those on fixed income.
- Continue cross-agency cooperation to provide for all trip types.
- Ensure that transit service meets Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessibility standards.

3) **Pursue creative and collaborative solutions to further economic opportunities.**

- Provide access to jobs across the region.
- Accommodate non-traditional working hours.

2.2.2 Tier II Goals

4) **Advance a multifaceted and connected system through regional collaboration and coordinated services.**

- Promote awareness and improve usability.
- Align with SGRC Regional Plan's vision.
- Ensure service meets reliability standards.

5) **Implement context-sensitive transit and last mile connectivity solutions in population centers.**

- Facilitate connections to destinations through mobility hubs.
- Coordinate with regional and local land use planning initiatives.

6) **Promote innovation and adaptability to meet future needs.**

- Leverage transit to facilitate responsiveness to extreme weather events.
- Adjust to and leverage new technology.

2.3 Evaluation and Monitoring

Table 1 features a preliminary set of performance metrics that SGRC and the region's transit agencies can utilize to track progress toward goals via measurable outcomes. **Table 1** includes a description of each performance metric and relevant goals for each. SGRC departments and external partners will need to further discuss these tracking metrics to set targets for each that are achievable and mutually agreed upon.

Table 1: Performance Metrics and Relevancy to Goals

Performance Metric	Description	Relevant Goals
Passenger trips per vehicle-hour*	Measures how effectively vehicles are utilized during their service hours	Goals 1, 2
Per capita expenditures on transit operations*	Indicates the relationship between cost and use of the transit system and overall transit cost effectiveness (total operating costs divided by population within service area)	Goals 1, 2, 4
Operating cost per vehicle-hour	Indicates efficiencies of trip assignment (dispatch), vehicle performance, and the density of origins and destinations in the service area	Goal 1, 5
Operating cost per mile	Indicates efficiencies of trip assignment (dispatch), vehicle performance, and the density of origins and destinations in the service area	Goal 1, 5
Safety incidents (injuries and fatalities) per 100,000 vehicle-miles*	Indicates driver training effectiveness as well as vehicle maintenance needs	Goal 1
On-time performance	Indicates service reliability (frequency of meeting scheduled pick-up and drop-off times)	Goals 1, 2, 3
Number of vehicles meeting or exceeding useful life bracket*	Indicates that an asset may need repairs or replacement soon	Goal 1
Number of coordinated transportation trips served*	Measures ridership of specific demographics who are eligible for Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS)/ Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH) subsidized transportation	Goals 1, 2
Revenue from purchase-of-service transportation trips	Indicates cost savings for transit providers	Goals 1, 2, 4
Number of handicapped-accessible seats and wheelchair lifts available across fleets	A tally of the seats available to individuals with mobile disabilities (e.g., wheelchair users)	Goal 2, 4
Number of multimodal transit centers*	A tally of multimodal facilities at which a passenger can switch between transit modes	Goals 4, 5
Percent of Transit Fleet that is No Emission or Renewable Fuel Vehicle*	Measures the share of the total fleet that are electric or fuel cell vehicles	Goal 6
Number of people reached through digital or physical outreach material distribution	Indicates effectiveness of marketing and outreach efforts to improve ridership	Goals 2, 6

*An asterisk indicates that the performance metric is based on the GDOT Statewide Transit Plan.

3.0 Planning Context

3.1 Southern Georgia Regional Context

SGRC's first Regional TDP, completed in 2019, was built around the state's goals for rural transit (FTA Section 5311). The 2019 Regional TDP goals included the following:

- Basic mobility to serve all
- Efficiency and effectiveness
- Safe, secure, quality service
- Accessible service – usable by persons with disabilities
- Coordinated provision of transportation in rural areas



Downtown Waycross

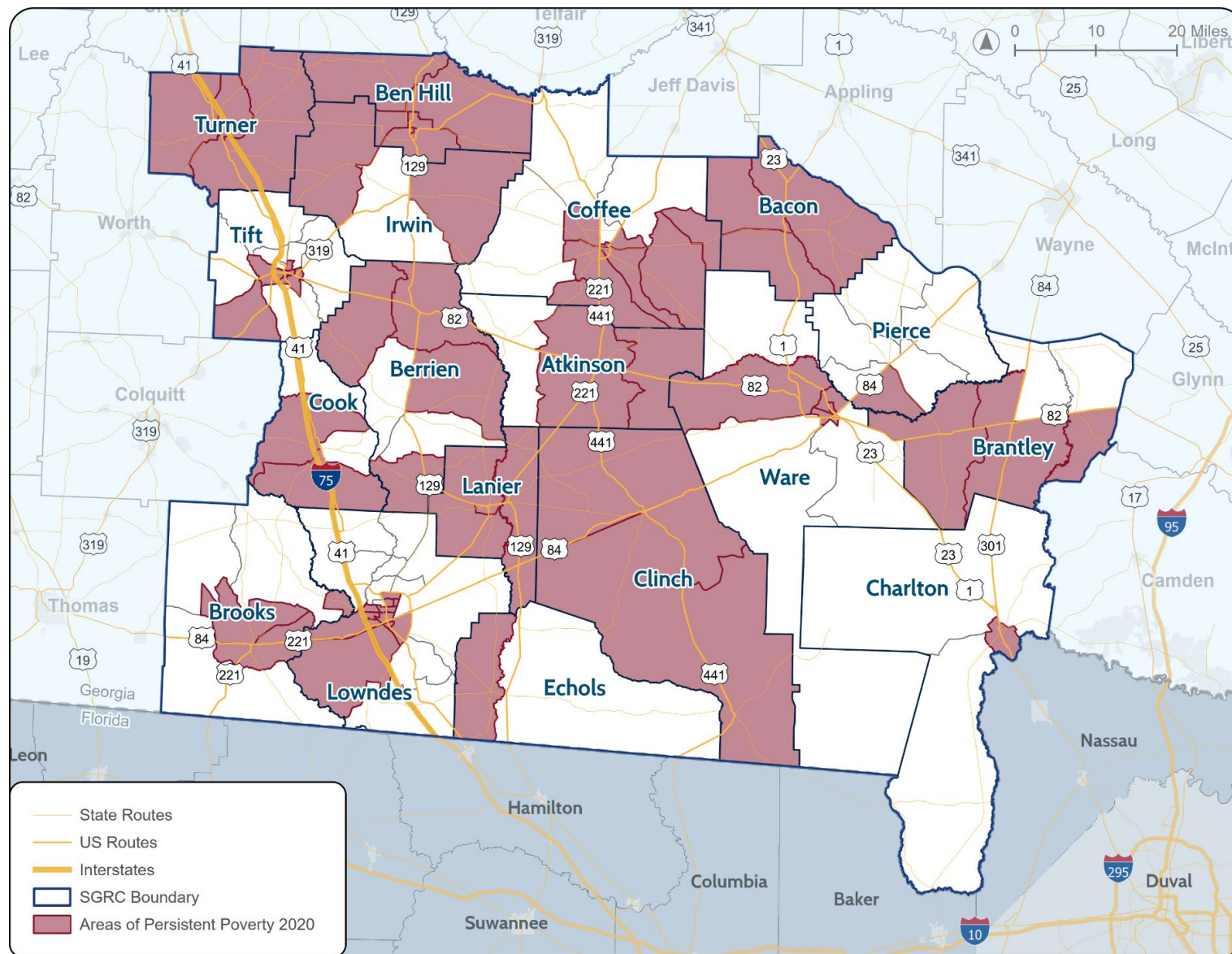
3.1.1 Areas of Persistent Poverty

SGRC funded the current Regional TDP with a grant from the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Areas of Persistent Poverty program. This program supports local and state governments, non-profit organizations, and transit agencies with addressing the needs of transit-dependent populations. In its grant application, SGRC emphasized the new Regional TDP's primary purpose of making implementable recommendations for providing affordable transportation access and mobility to areas of persistent poverty. Public transit is a key means of improving the quality of life and opportunities available to underserved populations. As documented in the **Existing Conditions Report** and shown in **Figure 3**, about 58 percent of the region's population – about 241,000 people – live in census tracts that meet the federal government's criteria for areas of persistent poverty.

3.1.2 Relevant Planning or Policy Documents

SGRC has several recent or underway planning initiatives that impact the future of transit in the region. **Table 2** includes a list of major regional plans with the closest nexus to transit, along with some key excerpts that are particularly relevant to the region's transit vision and goals. Key words and phrases are indicated in bold and underlined format.

Figure 3: Areas of Persistent Poverty



Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Persistent Poverty Census Tracts, 2020

Table 2: Key Regional Plans and Policy Documents

Plan Name	Plan or Document Description	Excerpts Pertinent to Transit Development Plan Vision and Goals
Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) 2050 Update*	The MTP addresses operating conditions and improvement recommendations for all modes of transportation including roadway, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians.	<p><i>Findings from MTP Historical Equity Action Lens:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transit needs are persistent and connected to lack of <u>access to public services and basic necessities</u>. • In 2021, the town debuted Valdosta On Demand after returning federal funding for transit for several years. Though a compromise between fixed transit and no transit, respondents have identified its shortcomings, especially difficulty of access. <u>Those most likely to use Valdosta On-Demand are also those most likely to have the hardest time using it.</u> • Residents also indicated that current transit options and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure make it harder for people to <u>get to jobs</u> or to <u>places where they would spend money</u>.
Regional Plan 2023 Update	SGRC's Regional Plan identifies long-term projected development patterns for the region and communicates the land use preferences for future growth and preservation of critical environmental and historic resources.	<p><i>Relevant Goals and Policy Statements:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New development should be limited to existing urban areas. • The regional public transportation plan should evaluate <u>incentives for private investment</u> to increase access to public transportation. • The location and proximity of significant ports (Savannah, Brunswick, and Jacksonville), interstates (I-75 and I-10), and federal highways (US-82, US-84, and US-1) are vital <u>opportunities to integrate land use planning, transportation, and economic growth</u>.
Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization (VLMPO) Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Guidelines	The MPO TOD Guidelines provide TOD strategies and recommendations that may be tailored based on the context of different targeted planning areas making up the MPO jurisdiction.	<p><i>Relevant Goals and Policy Statements:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing the potential for future <u>transit-oriented development</u>. • Assisting local engineers and planners on developing TOD in the VLMPO area. • Identifying the potential need/ opportunity for micro-mobility. • Promoting policies that increase <u>access</u> to public transit. • Promoting rural and small urban TOD policies to facilitate securing federal funding to address <u>mobility</u> and access needs, and to <u>administer those resources effectively</u>. • Supporting more efficient microtransit service through increased <u>shared trips to hubs with multiple destinations</u>. • Promoting the evolution of the current microtransit service into a more <u>cost-effective service</u> through flex-routes or point deviation, with fixed time points at <u>mobility hubs surrounded by thriving, walkable, areas</u>.

*The MTP update process is underway at the same time as this Regional TDP process. The Regional TDP team reviewed an interim document from the MTP process called the [Historical Equity Action Lens](#).

3.2 Georgia Statewide Transit Plan

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) completed its first state-level transit plan in 2020. Like this Regional TDP, the Statewide Transit Plan (SWTRP) has a planning horizon that extends through the year 2050.

Figure 4 shows the statewide transit vision and goals. GDOT uses a set of 20 performance measures to assess its progress toward meeting the SWTRP goals. GDOT publishes an annual implementation report that keeps the public informed about the state's progress within the different performance metric categories. These GDOT performance metrics were considered as part of preliminary performance metrics recommended for SGRC's consideration, as identified in **Table 1**.

More details about the Southern Georgia Regional TDP's implementation strategy are provided in the **Recommendations Report**.

Figure 4: Statewide Transit Plan Vision and Goals



Source: GDOT Statewide Transit Plan

3.3 Future Trends

The future landscape of transit is heavily influenced by the following demographic and technological trends.

The population growth of urban and urbanizing areas will continue to outpace the growth rate of rural areas.

- As depicted in **Figure 5**, the Statewide Transit Plan reported on the trend of urbanization occurring throughout the state, with a greater proportion of growth in urban areas than in rural areas by 2050.
- The federal funding calculation for major transit programs administered by the FTA may be impacted as rural areas are absorbed into urban areas.

An aging population will require more services, particularly transportation to medical facilities and other daily needs.

- The Governor's Office of Planning and Budget projects that Southern Georgia's senior population (60 and up) will grow by about 20 percent by 2050.

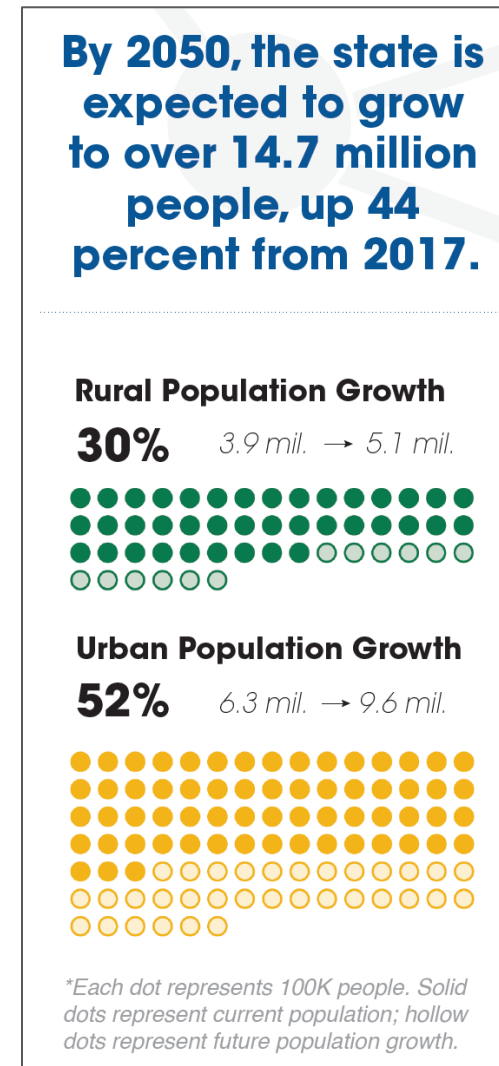
Ridesharing programs are becoming more accepted as a viable means of travel, both supplementing and competing with transit.

- Digital platforms that aid trip scheduling have the potential to meaningfully impact ride scheduling and reliability.

Connected and autonomous vehicles will be part of the transit landscape.

Additional details about emerging vehicle and transportation technologies are found in the **Recommendations Report**.

Figure 5: Rural and Urban 2050 Statewide Population Projections



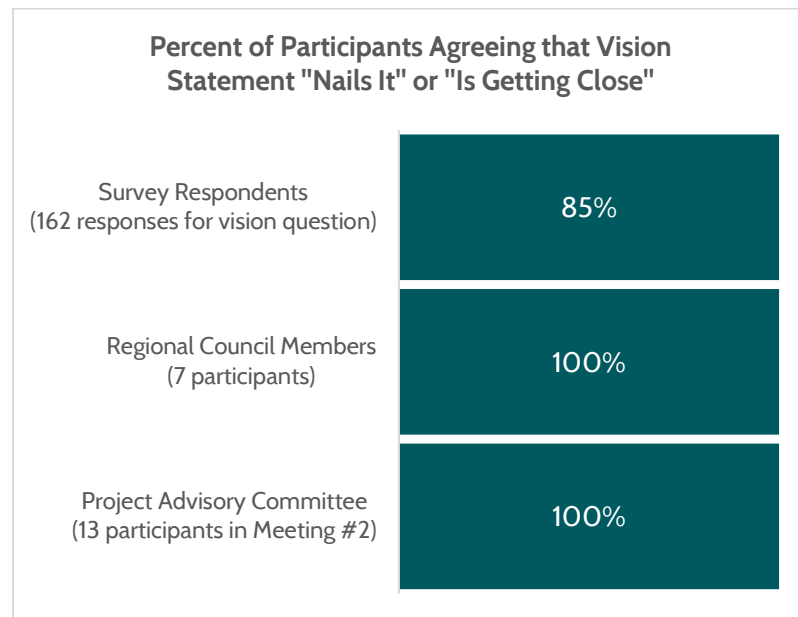
Source: GDOT Statewide Transit Plan, "Highlights of Existing Conditions and Future Trends Analysis," Summer 2019

4.0 Community Input

Throughout the Regional TDP's development, stakeholders and the public were invited to participate and help shape the future of public transit. The planning team carried out an accessible public participation process to hear from a diverse audience across the region, particularly people who are more likely to use public transit. Full documentation of stakeholder and public outreach activities are available in the Public Involvement Appendix.

Results from the second round of engagement indicate strong support for the vision statement, as depicted in **Figure 6**.

Figure 6: Vision Statement Feedback from Stakeholders and the Public



**SGRC distributed feedback forms to Regional Council members at its April 2025 meeting, and seven members completed the forms.*

4.1 Stakeholder Input

Stakeholder involvement included the following activities:

- **Project Advisory Committee** - met twice throughout the planning process (existing conditions phase and alternatives analysis phase)
- **Stakeholder Interviews** - 10 individual or group interviews conducted with key stakeholder organizations
- **Southern Georgia Regional Council** - discussion of the Regional TDP at two regular Council meetings, with input requested related to needs/priorities and draft vision and goal statements

The following subsections coalesce the key themes across all the stakeholder input activities.

4.1.1 General Themes

- Coordination of different transit services (both public and other types) is essential, so that there are **no gaps in service coverage** across the region.
- Connecting people to their **places of employment** is a major issue facing industries in the region, particularly the manufacturing industries.
- **Infrastructure needs**, such as electric vehicle charging stations and road capacity, may pose future challenges for transit in the region.
- SGRC Transit may be **unaffordable** to customers in remote/rural locations due to its fare structure, which increases fares with distance traveled.

4.1.2 Needs

- There is a need to increase **public awareness** of existing transit services.
- **Right-sizing transit fleets** with demand and driver availability is critically important to the success of transit in the Southern Georgia Region.

4.1.3 Priorities

- Transit should be **reliable for customers** – including timely pick up/drop off, easy-to-navigate technology, and a relevant service area.
- Transit should work in **partnership** with existing (non-transit) programs to support seniors with their **daily needs** (medical, grocery, etc.).
- **Vanpools** or other transit programs geared toward **commuters** would serve an essential need, specifically where **workforce housing and major employment areas** are located.



Project Advisory Committee Meeting #1, January 9, 2025

4.2 Public Input

Two rounds of public engagement invited members of the public to learn about the plan's development and weigh in on transit needs and opportunities. The following themes summarize topics that were brought forth either at the two public meetings or through the two surveys.

4.2.1 General Themes

- **All areas of the region** should have access to transit.
- Transit service at its core is about providing more **mobility options**, particularly for those who do not have the option to drive.
- **Reliability of transit service** is important to those who rely on it to access medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other **daily needs**.
- Transit service's role in providing **access to jobs** is critical to furthering the region's economic health and opportunities.
- **First-mile/last mile transportation solutions** (transit hubs, multimodal infrastructure, etc.) should be planned in tandem with transit expansion.

4.2.2 Needs

- Existing transit service areas are confusing to the public. **Coordination among transit providers** is needed to provide a clear and seamless guide for transit users on how to reach **common destinations**.
- The region needs a **more comprehensive transportation system** that supports the use of transportation modes other than driving.

- There is strong support for continued investment in transit service delivery enhancements to make transit an **easy and accessible mobility option**. As shown in **Figure 7**, *accessibility (particularly for handicap needs), availability, and timely* were frequently mentioned words on an open-ended feedback question on the second community survey.
- It is critical that transit service is **affordable**, particularly for residents of rural areas who often need to travel farther distances to access grocery stores, medical facilities, and jobs.