

# ROCKDALE

Transit Development Plan



## Transit Service Needs Assessment and Market Analysis

April 2023

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	About this Report.....	1
2	Funding Assessment .....	2
2.1	Organizational Structure and Transportation Delivery Process .....	2
2.2	Past and Present Funding Sources for Transportation .....	4
2.3	Funding Composition for Transit Systems .....	7
2.4	Key Findings .....	10
3	Stakeholder and Public Input.....	11
4	Market Analysis.....	13
4.1	Population and Demographics.....	13
4.2	Transit Potential.....	15
4.3	Transit Propensity .....	17
4.4	Microtransit Suitability .....	21
4.5	Trip Generators and Attractors.....	23
4.6	Existing and Future Travel Demand .....	26
4.7	Summary Findings – Market Analysis .....	27
5	Transit Assessment .....	28
5.1	Opportunities by Area.....	28
5.2	Opportunities by Immediacy .....	28
6	Next Steps .....	30
6.1	Transit Analysis .....	30
6.2	Funding Analysis.....	31

## Table of Tables

Table 2.1:	Rockdale County Senior Services Grants, Sept. 2021-Sept. 2022 .....	5
Table 2.2:	Rockdale County 2023 SPLOST Funding Categories.....	6
Table 2.3:	Rockdale County DOT Grants, Sept. 2021-Sept. 2022 .....	7
Table 3.3.1:	Relevant Findings from Stakeholder Interviews .....	11
Table 4.1:	Population Trends .....	13
Table 4.2:	Employment Trends .....	14
Table 4.3:	Transit Propensity Indices.....	17
Table 4.4:	Major Corridors.....	25
Table 4.5:	Stakeholder-Identified Regional Connectors and Destinations .....	25
Table 4.6:	2020 Internal Trips in Rockdale County .....	26

Table 4.7: 2020 External Trip Pairs with Rockdale County ..... 26

## Table of Figures

Figure 2.1: Rockdale DOT Organizational chart ..... 2

Figure 2.2: GROWTH IN URBANIZED AREA (1990-2010) ..... 9

Figure 4.1: Land Use and Transit Service Viability ..... 15

Figure 4.2: Transit Potential in Rockdale County ..... 16

Figure 4.3: Transit-Oriented Population Propensity Index ..... 18

Figure 4.4: Commuter Propensity Index ..... 19

Figure 4.5: Activity Destination Propensity Index ..... 20

Figure 4.6: Areas suitable For Microtransit in Rockdale County ..... 22

Figure 4.7: Key Points of Interest ..... 24

Figure 6.1: Rockdale Transit Development Plan (TDP) Planning Process ..... 30

# 1 Introduction

Rockdale County is developing the Rockdale Transit Development Plan (TDP) to serve as a strategic guide for transit service expansion within the county. The TDP effort is in collaboration with local and regional planning partners including the City of Conyers, The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), the Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority (ATL), and the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT). This study was made possible through the financial support provided by the ATL and Rockdale County.

The purpose of the TDP is to identify a strategic transit vision for Rockdale County and provide a prioritized funding and action plan for implementation. The TDP will incorporate extensive public and stakeholder engagement into the transit planning process. This will include stakeholder interviews, public meetings, on-line surveys, outreach at community events and an interactive plan website. Engagement activities will collect input on community identified needs and priorities. The TDP will also be guided by input from a Technical Committee that will provide feedback throughout the plan development process.

The Rockdale TDP will document a 30-year vision for transit investments through the year 2050 that will address Rockdale County's transit service needs based upon current and projected conditions. The study will conclude with a prioritized list of transit improvements, a five-year action plan and policy recommendations to improve mobility, safety, connectivity, and quality-of-life for Rockdale County residents.

## 1.1 About this Report

The Transit Service Needs Assessment and Market Analysis mines the information presented in the Existing Conditions Report, input from stakeholders and the public, as well as additional information to identify markets and geographic areas where there is a demonstrated and anticipated need for transit services. It identifies short-, medium-, and long-term needs to meet current and future demand in the County. The following report:

- Presents an assessment of existing funding and delivery processes for transportation and transit in Rockdale County
- Summarizes key themes from stakeholder interviews conducted for this study
- Presents an analysis of the market for future transit services in the county by area and population
- Identifies opportunities for new transit service
- Describes the next steps that the project team will undertake in developing the upcoming recommendations and funding strategies

## 2 Funding Assessment

This section provides information on Rockdale County’s organizational structures and processes related to the delivery of transportation services presented in the Existing Conditions and Future Trends Report. It also includes information on historical and current transportation and human services funding for transportation services that are operated in Rockdale County. This information provides the basis for performing the funding analysis on the transit project recommendations identified for Rockdale County as part of this plan.

### 2.1 Organizational Structure and Transportation Delivery Process

The Rockdale County Department of Transportation (RDOT), which includes Public Works and Maintenance, constructs and maintains the transportation network in the county. RDOT is responsible for the planning, development, and maintenance of the county’s transportation infrastructure, which includes over 500 miles of roads and streets, bridges, sidewalks, grounds, and facilities and implements both short-range and long-range infrastructure improvements in the county. RDOT staff, as depicted in **Figure 2.1**, coordinate the county’s roadway infrastructure improvements with the GDOT, the ARC, the ATL, and City of Conyers staff. RDOT staff also operate and maintain the county’s street and traffic lights, pavement management program, and traffic safety program.

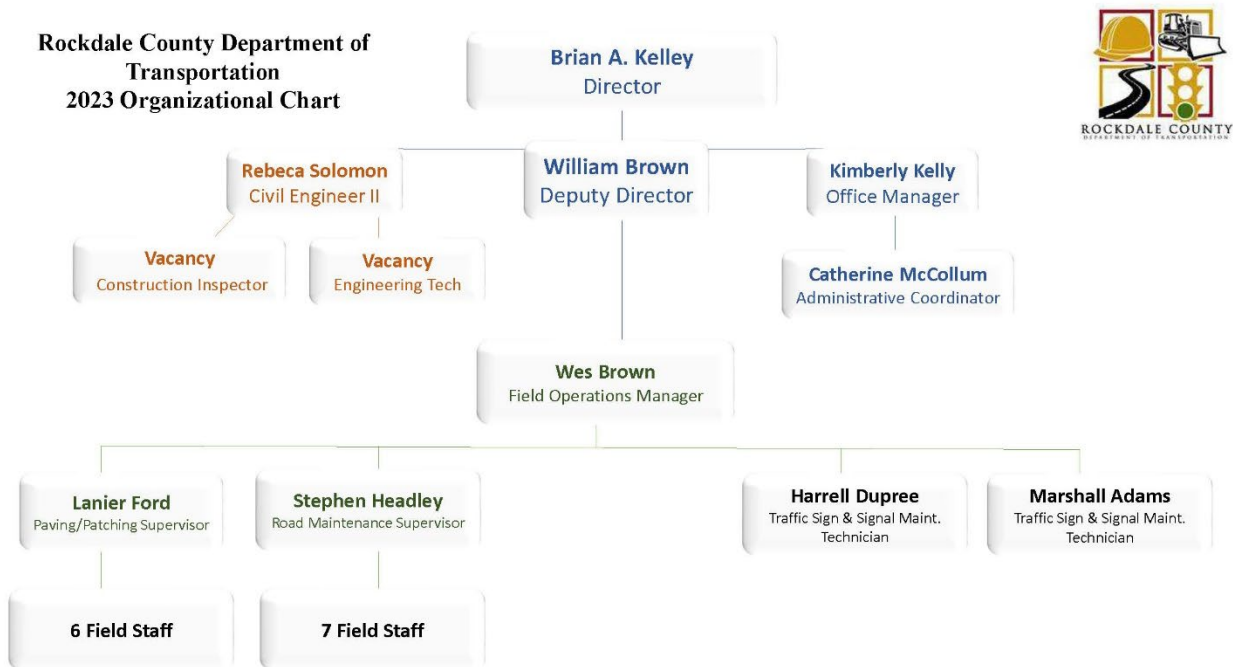


FIGURE 2.1: ROCKDALE DOT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

Source: Rockdale County DOT

As discussed in the Existing Conditions and Future Trends Report, existing transit services in Rockdale County are provided by two operators outside of RDOT - the ATL and Rockdale County Senior Services. The ATL operates three Xpress commuter bus routes within the county that provide service from Conyers to Midtown, Downtown Atlanta, and the Perimeter Center area from two park-and-ride lots in Rockdale County. The ATL establishes the conditions of service (i.e., route, schedule) for these commuter bus routes. Additionally, ATL provides regional vanpool service through its partnership with **COMMUTE with Enterprise** program. This program aids commuters who live and work within the 13 metro-counties and serves as a low cost and convenient travel option for commuters.

Currently, Rockdale County Senior Services (RSS) provides a variety of transportation services, which serve seniors, individuals with disabilities, and veterans. RSS is a division of the Parks and Recreation Department and provides basic support services to older residents of Rockdale County. These services include the following:

- **Fixed-Route** operates like county Dial-a-Ride systems and transports seniors between their home locations and prearranged destinations within the county. This service is open to Rockdale County residents who are aged 60 and older and registered for the service with the department. This service is funded through the Home and Community Based Service (HCBS) grant program provided under the Older Americans Act (OAA). The ARC serves as the ‘pass-through’ agency administering federal funds to Rockdale County.
- **Group shopping and recreational** service provides group trips to seniors with common destinations. Group trips originate at the Senior Center and destinations are predetermined and scheduled. Trips may be for essential services or leisure activities, such as shopping or attending conferences. This service is also limited to Rockdale County residents aged 60 and older.
- **Demand Response** service is similar to the department’s fixed-route transit offering with the exception that this service is limited to essential needs, which may include trips to the bank, post office, pharmacy, or doctor. Personal care trips (i.e., pedicures) are not covered under this program, and destinations are limited within Rockdale County.
- **Transportation Voucher Program** service is open to individuals with disabilities who are aged 18-65 and all residents aged 65 and above. Registration for this program is not through the OAA but is through the Federal Transit Administration’s (FTAs) 5310 funding program. There are income requirements for this program (below 200% of federal poverty level) and a need must be demonstrated. This program permits trips for personal care (i.e., pedicures), employment, or medical services and destinations are permitted outside of Rockdale County.
- **Veterans Transportation** service provides transportation to veterans aged 18 and older for medical purposes only. This service frequently brings riders to the VA Hospital in Decatur and other medical clinics in Decatur, Stockbridge, and Newton County. This is a “door-through”

service, which means that assistance boarding and exiting vehicles is provided. An assistant is also available to accompany a rider at the veteran’s appointment. Each trip requires two staff members – an assistant and driver. Specially branded vehicles are used for this service with American flag wrapping and ADA accessibility. Veterans Transportation is funded directly from Rockdale County’s General Fund.



## 2.2 Past and Present Funding Sources for Transportation

The existing RDOT transportation projects and transit services provided by RSS presented in the prior section are funded by different sources. These include local funding (i.e., county general fund) and federal grant programs (e.g., FTA’s 5310 program).

### 2.2.1 Rockdale Senior Services Funding

In addition to Rockdale County government general fund, the following federal, state, and local sources provide Senior Services budget funding:

- **Title III of the Older Americans Act (OAA)** provides grants to states, tribes, and territories to advocate on behalf of older persons and their family caregivers, and to coordinate programs for them; covers supportive services, such as case management, community services, in-home services, transportation, information and referral, and legal assistance; nutrition programs, such as home-delivered meals and congregate meals; family caregiver support; and health promotion and disease prevention services.
- **Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)** is a flexible funding source that allows states and territories to tailor social service programming to their population’s needs. Through the SSBG, states provide essential social services that help achieve a myriad of goals to reduce dependency and promote self-sufficiency; protect children and adults from neglect, abuse, and exploitation; and help individuals who are unable to take care of themselves to stay in their homes or to find the best institutional arrangements.
- **Community Based Services (CBS)** offers long-term services and support provided in a person’s home or in the community, as opposed to an institutional setting.
- **Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP)** provides additional funding to states, territories, and eligible tribal organizations, which is used exclusively to purchase food, and may not be used to pay for other nutrition-related services or for state or local administrative costs.
- **Income Tax Checkoff** offers taxpayers an easy way to donate part of their tax refund to charity.

Many of the grants require a cash match, and these funds, as well as other services and programs, are made possible by the support and donations from the Rockdale County Board of Commissioners, local churches, civic organizations, businesses and individuals, and Senior Services fundraisers. The fiscal year

2023 general fund budget for Senior Services is \$1,535,505, which includes total operating expenses and total personnel services & benefits. For the time period between September 2021 and September 2022, all grant awards for Senior Services are provided in **Table 2.1**. Transportation-related grants are noted in bold text.

TABLE 2.1: ROCKDALE COUNTY SENIOR SERVICES GRANTS, SEPT. 2021-SEPT. 2022

Grantor	Title	Purpose	Date Awarded	Amount Awarded	Match
Atlanta Regional Commission	Consolidated Appropriations Act/Home & Community Services	To provide Home Community Based Services (Delivered Meals, Personal Care, Homemaker	July 2022	\$474,874	\$35,601
Atlanta Regional Commission	Consolidated Appropriations Act/Home & Community Services	To provide seniors services with home repair and support for seniors	July 2022	\$85,679	\$5,469
Hospital Authority of Rockdale County	Meals for seniors	To provide liquid meals for seniors	December 2021	\$7,000	N/A
Atlanta Regional Commission	Consolidated Appropriations Act/New Freedom Transportation	To implement the Transportation Voucher Grant program for seniors, the disabled and veterans	November 2021	\$55,074	N/A
Atlanta Regional Commission	Consolidated Appropriations Act/ARPA	To provide supportive services and basic needs for seniors effected by COVID	October 2021	\$35,342	N/A
Meals on Wheels	Pet Bytes	To provide seniors support for their pets	October 2021	\$500	N/A
Atlanta Regional Commission	Consolidated Appropriations Act/Home & Community Services	To provide Home Community Based Services (Delivered Meals, Personal Care, Homemaker	October 2021	\$407,650	\$29,452
<b>Total Amount</b>				<b>\$1,066,119</b>	<b>\$70,522</b>

Source: Rockdale County Grants Management Division



### 2.2.2 Rockdale DOT Funding

Rockdale County participates in the Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) program. The law, passed by the Georgia legislature in 1985, allows counties and cities to enact an optional one percent sales tax to fund capital projects. The county’s previous SPLOST was approved in May 2016. The current six-year SPLOST was approved in May 2022 and took effect earlier this year (2023). The tax will be collected for six years and is expected to generate \$89.1 million in revenues. The city of Conyers and Rockdale County approved intergovernmental agreements for the continuation of the 1% sales tax collection in December 2022. Revenues collected will be divided between the city and county based on the most recent census population figures. The county will receive 81.51%, or \$72.6 million of collections while the city will receive 18.49%, or \$16.5 million. Both the city and county have earmarked amounts for broad project categories shown below in **Table 2.2**.

TABLE 2.2: ROCKDALE COUNTY 2023 SPLOST FUNDING CATEGORIES

	Category	Amount
Rockdale County	Roads, bridges, sidewalks, and transportation	\$35,199,846
	Sheriff	\$5,346,000
	Fire and E911	\$8,019,000
	Parks and Recreation	\$4,455,000
	Courthouse	\$19,602,000
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$72,621,846</b>
City of Conyers	Roads, bridges, sidewalks, and transportation	\$7,909,514
	Public Safety	\$5,108,228
	Parks and Greenspace	\$1,812,597
	Equipment and vehicles	\$1,647,815
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$16,478,154</b>

Source: Rockdale County

RDOT utilizes county SPLOST funds to make improvements to bridges, sidewalks, and roadways, including resurfacing, maintenance, widening, and other enhancements.

**Table 2.3** presents all grant awards for transportation between September 2021 and September 2022. RDOT receives grant awards and local funding from the county’s general fund budget. Current grants consist of Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant (LMIG) funds distributed by the GDOT. LMIG funds are intended for use by local governments in the maintenance and repair of locally-owned roads. The fiscal year 2023 general fund budget for RDOT is \$3,630,221, which includes total operating expenses and total personnel services & benefits.

TABLE 2.3: ROCKDALE COUNTY DOT GRANTS, SEPT. 2021-SEPT. 2022

Grantor	Title	Purpose	Date Awarded	Amount Awarded	Match
Georgia Department of Transportation	Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant (LMIG)	Maintenance and repair of roads	October 2021	\$1,026,037	30%
<b>Total Amount</b>				<b>\$1,026,037</b>	<b>30%</b>

Source: Rockdale County Grants Management Division

Rockdale County also receives a suballocation of FTA Section 5307 formula funds based on population. Described in more detail in the next subsection, FTA apportions 5307 Urbanized Area Formula Program funds to urbanized areas (UZAs) and to states for public transportation capital projects and operating assistance. Formula funds allocated to the Atlanta region are received and suballocated to eligible recipients by the ATL, who is the designated recipient of FTA federal formula funding for the Atlanta region. Historically, Rockdale County has received a suballocation of 5307 formula funds. A local government must either be a direct recipient or partner with one to access FTA formula funds. The county is not a direct recipient and unable to access these funds; therefore, they were subsequently transferred to an eligible recipient within the Atlanta region. Currently, Rockdale has a balance of approximately \$1.4 million in FTA Section 5307 formula funds comprised of FY2019 through FY2022 suballocations that have not been accepted by the county or transferred back to the ATL to reallocate within the Atlanta region. Funds are available the year appropriated plus five years. Therefore, the county’s funds appropriated in FY2019 are available until September 2024, funds appropriated in FY2020 are available until September 2025, and so forth.

Local governments can apply to become FTA direct recipients, but the process can take up to a year. Local governments also have the option to enter into an agreement with an FTA direct recipient or designated recipient to establish a subrecipient relationship to receive FTA funds via a pass-through arrangement. Details on becoming an eligible recipient of funds and a specific strategy for Rockdale County will be discussed in upcoming reports.

### 2.3 Funding Composition for Transit Systems

Financing the construction, operation and maintenance of transit systems and capital costs (vehicle purchases, facilities, etc.) involve different types of funding sources, including federal and non-federal grants, revenue sources (i.e., fare revenue, advertising revenue), and other sources. Federal funding accounts for less than 20% of overall public transit funding in the country but has been an important element of launching transit projects, including microtransit services. Federal funding can be provided in two ways – formula funds, which are distributed to states and suballocated to recipients, and competitive grant programs that are available to transit agencies, cities, and states.

A few key FTA federal formula funding programs that can be used towards transit projects are noted below. These programs require a local match to fully fund a project.

- **5307 FTA Urbanized Area Formula Program** makes federal resources available to urbanized areas and to governors for transit capital and operating assistance in urbanized areas and for

transportation-related planning. An urbanized area is an incorporated area with a population of 50,000 or more that is designated as such by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. Eligible expenses include capital, planning, and operating (for areas with population less than 200,000 and operating assistance for population greater than 200,000 with exceptions). Example projects include vehicle purchases, facility construction/rehabilitation, security equipment, and preventive maintenance. Funds are available the year appropriated plus five years.

- **5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities** provides formula funding to states for the purpose of assisting private nonprofit groups in meeting the transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities when the transportation service provided is unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate to meeting these needs. The program aims to improve mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities by removing barriers to transportation service and expanding transportation mobility options. This program supports transportation services planned, designed, and carried out to meet the special transportation needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities in all areas. Eligible expenses include capital and operating. Example projects include vehicle purchases (buses and vans), wheelchair lifts, ramps, and acquisition of transportation services under a contract, lease or other arrangement. Funds are available the fiscal year of apportionment plus two years, for a total of three years.
- **5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas** provides capital, planning, and operating assistance to states to support public transportation in rural areas with populations of less than 50,000, where many residents often rely on public transit to reach their destinations. The program also provides funding for state and national training and technical assistance through the Rural Transportation Assistance Program (RTAP). Eligible expenses include planning, capital, and operating. Example projects include vehicle purchases, operating assistance, program administration, and state and national training. Funds are available the fiscal year of apportionment plus two years, for a total of three years.
- **5337 Capital Assistance Program**, or State of Good Repair Grants Program, provides capital assistance for maintenance, replacement, and rehabilitation projects of high-intensity fixed guideway and bus systems to help transit agencies maintain assets in a state of good repair. Eligible expenses include capital. Example projects include those that maintain, rehab and replace capital assets; developing and implementing Transit Asset Management plans. Funds are available the fiscal year of apportionment plus three years, for a total of four years.
- **5339 Bus and Bus Facility Formula Program** makes federal resources available to states and direct recipients to replace, rehabilitate and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct bus-related facilities, including technological changes or innovations to modify low or no emission vehicles or facilities. Funding is provided through formula allocations and competitive grants. Eligible expenses include capital. Preventive maintenance is not eligible. Example projects include replacement, rehabilitation, and purchase of buses, vans; construction

of bus-related facilities. Funds are available for three years after the fiscal year in which the amount is apportioned.

As discussed in the Existing Conditions and Future Trends Memorandum, Rockdale County has grown significantly and is becoming increasingly urbanized. **Figure 2.2** illustrates the rapid growth in urbanized areas of the county between 1990 and 2010. With the release of the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2020 urbanized area boundary in May of 2023, it is anticipated that the majority of Rockdale County will be classified as urban, in contrast to only 14% of the county 30 years ago in 1990.

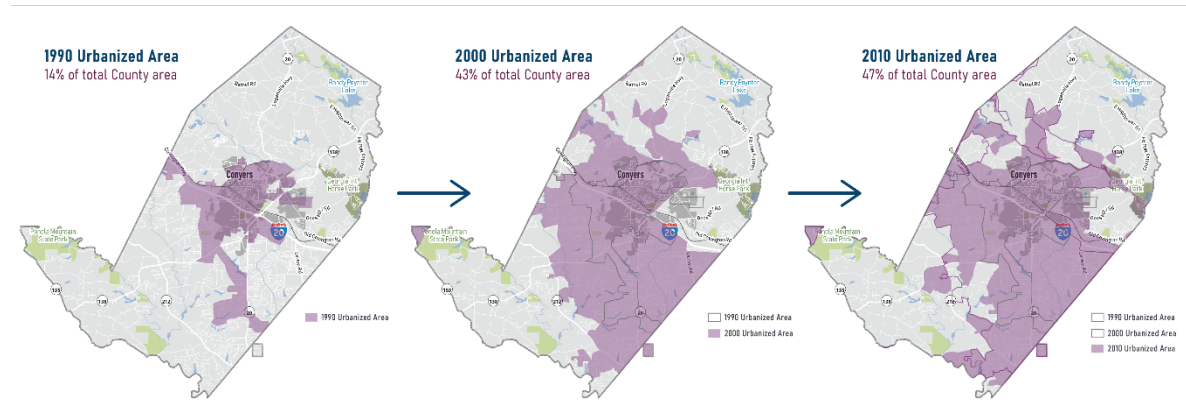


FIGURE 2.2: GROWTH IN URBANIZED AREA (1990-2010)

The continued urbanization of the county has important implications for transit funding availability from the federal government. Urbanized and rural areas are eligible for funding through different grant programs (FTA 5307 and 5311 as discussed above) with various allotments and restrictions on how these monies can be used to fund services and how long the funds are available for use.

In addition to the federal formula funds, federal competitive grant programs are also available to fund transit projects, including microtransit. FTA programs such as the Accelerating Innovative Mobility (AIM), Enhancing Mobility Innovation (EMI), Integrated Mobility Innovation (IMI), and Mobility on Demand (MOD) Sandbox programs support mobility, accessibility, equity, and innovation in the transit industry. Other federal grant programs, such as the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) can be a useful resource for microtransit and integrated services that reduce congestion. Furthermore, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides for the largest federal investment in the nation’s history and supports transit projects, including projects that advance equity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Federal funding programs typically do not provide 100% funding for construction, operation, maintenance, and capital projects. A local match, or contribution provided by the local government entity, is usually required for the purpose of assisting in the total funding package to complete a project. Capital activities are normally funded with an 80% federal contribution and 20% local match. Operating expenses are generally funded with 50% federal contribution and 50% local match. Cost sharing and local match requirements are included in FTA Circulars, Notices of Apportionments, or Notices of Funding Opportunities (NOFO) for specific federal grant programs.

State funding for local transit programs has historically been low in Georgia. However, in recent years more state funding sources have become available, including the Georgia Transit Trust Fund Program (TTFP), State General Fund Allocations, and State General Obligation Bond Proceeds. Local funding sources include transit fares, government budgets, general funds, sales tax referendums, and local partnerships. Sales tax ballot measures, which are available to fund microtransit, include general Transportation Special Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST) or designated Transit SPLOSTs. Transit agency revenues, such as fares, advertising, concessions, or parking fees can serve as another potential funding source. The Peer System Analysis Report conducted as part of the Transit Development Plan (TDP) evaluated the experiences of similar jurisdictions to Rockdale County that have implemented microtransit services. While the operating model of how these entities provide microtransit service varies, funding for these services was either fully funded by local dollars or a mix of federal and local funding sources.

## 2.4 Key Findings

- Existing transit services are limited within Rockdale County and only cater to specific transit markets for particular trip types. These services are currently provided by the ATL and Rockdale Senior Services. No transportation services are currently provided by RDOT.
- A variety of sources are utilized to fund existing Senior Services transportation programs in Rockdale County. However, there is currently no established funding source for transit that would be operated within RDOT. The county's existing SPLOST program does not provide funding for transit operations.
- Rockdale County currently has allocated FTA 5307 federal grant funds, the oldest of which is to be accessed or transferred back to the ATL for reallocation to the region by September 2024.
- Federal formula funds, competitive grant programs, and state and local resources are available to fund transit projects, including microtransit.

### 3 Stakeholder and Public Input

The Rockdale TDP relies on broad and representative stakeholder input to establish a vision and articulate the shared values of Rockdale County’s diverse population. This section presents input collected from stakeholder interviews conducted December 2022 to February 2023. Stakeholder interviews were designed to inform and excite community members about the planning process and gather preliminary insights about the how the community views Rockdale now and into the future. Nine stakeholders from Rockdale County and City of Conyers were interviewed in addition to two representatives of the ATL. **Table 3.1** presents themes from the interviews relevant to the transit vision and assessment.

TABLE 3.3.1: RELEVANT FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Common Themes	What We Heard
<b>Future Vision for Transportation in Rockdale County</b>	There is not only the opportunity for transit service to move people, but a need for a comprehensive transportation system that includes more sidewalks, dedicated space on the roadway for bikes, and other features to make corridors safe for non-motorists.
<b>Population and Development Trends</b>	All stakeholders mentioned an influx of housing developments currently under construction. These developments are primarily townhomes, single family subdivisions, and apartments. Senior living communities, such as Arbor Ridge at Conyers, are in development. These will likely result in increased traffic on existing road infrastructure.
<b>Demographic Trends</b>	The primary, likely transit market identified in multiple interviews (and was also confirmed by data trends in an analysis of Rockdale County demographics), were senior citizens. In addition to the existing population of seniors that are both eligible and currently utilize Senior Services transportation program(s), there is a projected increase in the size of this population by 2050. Stakeholders confirmed that this population is likely to increase as the data indicates. Therefore, a transit mode that is ADA accessible, simplified for an aging population, safe, and can potentially provide door-to-door services, is crucial for the county.
<b>Employment Trends</b>	<p>Rockdale County retail/commerce/employment centers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walmart</li> <li>• Target Plaza</li> <li>• Publix Groceries</li> <li>• Home Depot</li> <li>• Salem Gate (near Academy Sports)</li> <li>• Plaza with Kohls, Best Buy</li> <li>• Olde Town Conyers</li> </ul> <p>Most commercial development in the county is occurring in City of Conyers, along GA-138 corridor, Sigman Road, Salem Road, and Rockbridge Road.</p> <p>Developing industrial and economic centers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rivian Plant sited in Morgan and Newton Counties (est. complete in 2024)</li> <li>• Proposed sports complex</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Salem Gate Shopping Center</li> <li>• McCardle Landing</li> <li>• 460 Honey Creek Road</li> <li>• Warehouses near Lake Rockaway</li> </ul>
<p><b>Microtransit Suitability</b></p>	<p>While the applicability of microtransit to Rockdale County will be different than the trial program implemented in Gwinnett County, a takeaway from conducting the microtransit in Gwinnett is that a pilot period is recommended prior to full-scale implementation. Based on the variety of ideas and feedback provided by stakeholders on their vision and priority outcomes for the county, prioritizing these outcomes and conducting a pilot program may be beneficial.</p>
	<p>Proposed transit modes would not need to be the same vehicles as that of MARTA. Park and ride locations, small shuttles, vanpool vehicles, and small circulators would be best suited for the County.</p>
	<p>Stakeholders suggested a transit option that can meet people where they are, has flexibility in the routing, is integrated with technology and real-time information, and has longer hours of operation. These descriptions best reflect the offerings of microtransit, on-demand service.</p>
<p><b>Internal Destinations</b></p>	<p>Rockdale County study area community/social resources and services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aquatic Center at Johnson Park/Johnson Park</li> <li>• Georgia Horse Park</li> <li>• Custer Mill Recreation Center</li> <li>• County Municipal Building (noted as ‘in transition’)</li> <li>• JP Carr Complex (Senior Services, Veterans, Mental Health, DFACS)</li> <li>• Hospitals and other medical buildings</li> <li>• Housing Authority at Summer Circle</li> <li>• US Post Office (GA-138)</li> <li>• US Post Office (Green Street)</li> <li>• Monastery (Hwy 212)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Regional Destinations</b></p>	<p>Nearby regional transit hubs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Connection @ Springfield Baptist Church</li> <li>• Regional Connection @ Conyers GRTA Xpress Facility</li> </ul>
	<p>External regional connectors and destinations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newton County (City of Covington)</li> <li>• Indian Creek</li> <li>• Airport</li> <li>• Downtown Atlanta</li> <li>• Midtown Atlanta</li> <li>• UGA</li> <li>• GA Tech</li> <li>• Morehouse</li> <li>• Atlanta University Center (AUC)</li> <li>• MARTA transit service, in particular at Stonecrest</li> </ul>



## 4 Market Analysis

The purpose of the market analysis is to determine areas within Rockdale County where transit service is most likely to succeed based on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, as well as modeled travel demand. The following assessment identifies locations with populations that would support transit service in terms of density and land use, as well as populations that are more likely to rely on transit to fulfill their travel needs. The analysis relies on data from the U.S. Census and the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), among other sources. Additional qualitative analysis and engagement from local stakeholders will build on this market analysis to help inform transit recommendations.

### 4.1 Population and Demographics

Addressing transit needs begins with an assessment of anticipated transit demand. Population and demographic characteristics provide the foundation for understanding present and future demand for transit services throughout the planning area. The following sections provide a summary of key findings from the Existing Conditions Report.

#### 4.1.1 Population Trends

Rockdale County is home to a growing and diverse population base, with a variety of transit needs. The current population of Rockdale County is 94,082, with a density of 720 people per square mile. By 2050, the county’s population is expected to reach 112,000, which translates to about 18,000 new residents over the next thirty years.<sup>1</sup> More residents could result in more cars on the road, more traffic congestion, and an increased need for transit alternatives. Furthermore, population density is anticipated to grow significantly within the Greater Conyers area as well as along the Salem Road, Old Salem Road, and SR 20 corridors (**Table 4.1**).

TABLE 4.1: POPULATION TRENDS

	Current (2021) <sup>2</sup>	Future (2050)	Percent Change
Total Population	94,082	111,859	18.9% increase
Population Density (people/square mile)	720.8	857.2	18.9% increase

#### 4.1.2 Demographic Trends

Before expanding on the transit needs of the population in Rockdale County, it is important to understand the big picture of Rockdale’s demographic makeup. Almost all of Rockdale commuters commute by car, whether in a single-occupant vehicle (81 percent) or carpooling (nine percent). About seven percent of Rockdale’s workers work from home, and only one percent indicate they use transit for commuting purposes. The low share of transit commutes is partially because existing transit options are limited to ATL Xpress; workers cannot opt to commute by transit services that do not yet exist. There is

<sup>1</sup> ARC Population and Employment Forecasts, <https://atlantaregional.org/atlanta-region/population-employment-forecasts/>

<sup>2</sup> Georgia Regional Economic Analysis Project, <https://georgia.reaproject.org/>



potential for new transit services to provide alternative options for getting to work, school, or recreational activities.

Additionally, Rockdale County is expected to become increasingly older by 2050, with the average age increasing from 38 to 42 years old and the 65+ age group expected to increase by 40 percent. An aging population often creates greater demand for transit, as older adults can become less comfortable or less able operating a vehicle. The growth in older population groups in Rockdale County is expected to far outpace that of younger groups, which could have a large impact on travel patterns and demand for transit.

#### 4.1.3 Employment Trends

Rockdale County is well-served by direct interstate access to and from downtown Atlanta via I-20 and is expected to continue to attract employees and jobs over the next 30 years. According to the ARC, in 2020 there were approximately 43,300 jobs in the county. By 2050, that number of jobs is expected to grow by nearly 10,000 to 52,420 (**Table 4-2**). This reflects an increase in jobs of 21 percent between 2020 and 2050. Areas with high employment density are concentrated in Conyers and along the I-20 corridor, with anticipated growth expanding slightly outwards from the city center and major transportation corridors.

Employment growth will further solidify Rockdale County as a major destination for commuters, with new commuting patterns expected within the county and between counties. The anticipated increase in both inter- and intra-county commuters, as discussed in detail in **4.6 Existing and Future Travel Demand**, could have significant impacts on the transportation network. To offer relief on area roadways, providing public transit as a viable travel alternative will become increasingly important.

TABLE 4.2: EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

	Current (2020)	Future (2050)	Percent Change
Total Employment	43,302	52,421	21.1% increase
Employment Density (jobs/square mile)	331.8	401.7	21.1% increase

## 4.2 Transit Potential

Transit service is most likely to be sustained in areas where significant concentrations of population and employment exist. Transit’s reach is generally limited to within one-quarter mile of transit stops, or a 10-minute walk. For this reason, the size of a transit travel market is directly related to an area’s population density. The number of jobs per acre is another critical component of transit potential, as many employees must travel from their homes to their places of employment. Employment density is also a proxy for the presence of services which may attract customers as well as workers.

Land use and development patterns can further inform transit potential by helping to determine which transit service is most appropriate for an area. **Figure 4.1** depicts how additional transit services can be supported as development increases and diversifies. While fixed-route transit is most successful in urban areas, rural environments may be better suited for commuter or microtransit services.

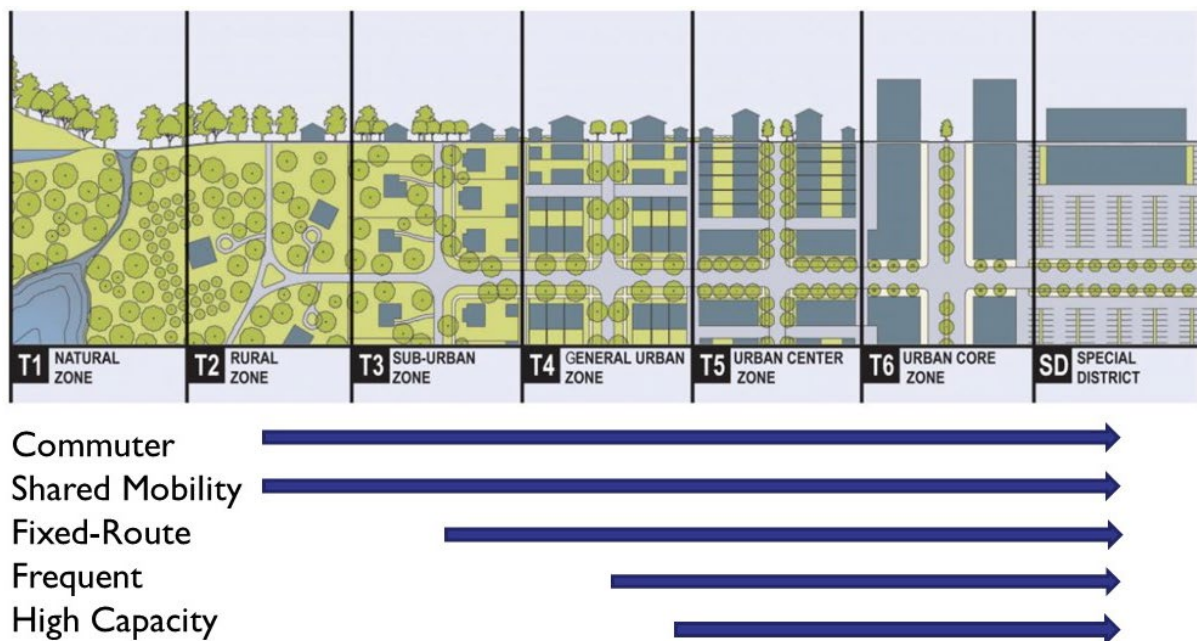


FIGURE 4.1: LAND USE AND TRANSIT SERVICE VIABILITY

To determine which transit services are most appropriate in Rockdale County, population density and employment density were combined into a single Transit Potential Index, which indicates the areas where there may be sufficient demand to support fixed-route transit. Typically, a density greater than five jobs and people per acre is needed to support base-level fixed-route transit service<sup>3</sup>. As shown in **Figure 4.2**, the areas with densities with greater than five jobs and people per acre, depicted in orange and red, are in Conyers and the surrounding areas to the southeast. Areas shown in yellow, with three to five jobs and people per acre, have densities to support microtransit. The remaining areas, shown in green and grey, have less than three jobs and people per acre, which is considered less suitable for transit service.

<sup>3</sup> TCRP Report 165 Transit Capacity and Quality of Service Manual Third Edition, <https://www.trb.org/Main/Blurbs/169437.aspx>

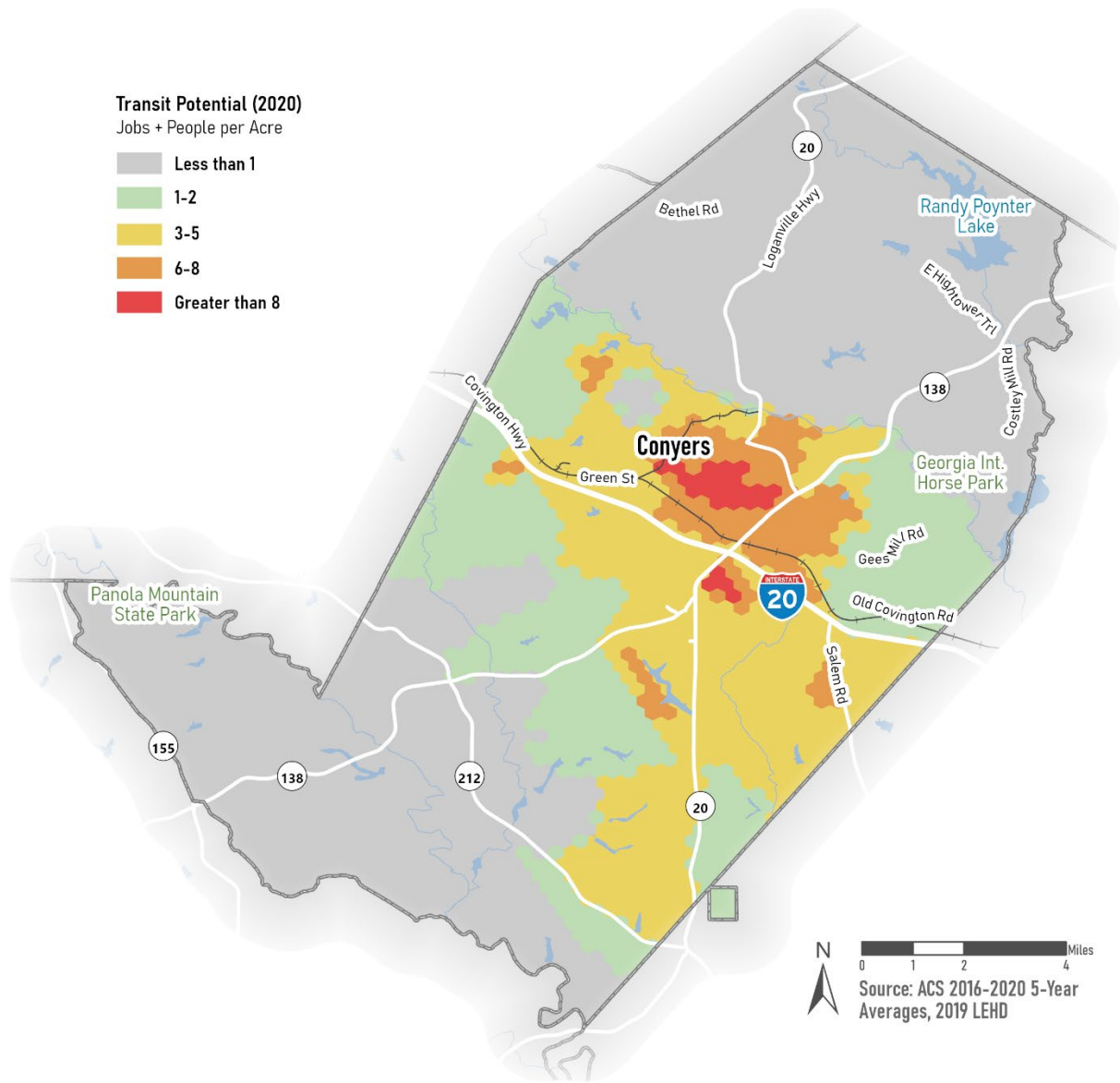


FIGURE 4.2: TRANSIT POTENTIAL IN ROCKDALE COUNTY

### 4.3 Transit Propensity

Above all, public transit is a mobility tool. While some individuals use transit only to commute between home and work, others rely on transit as a lifeline to services, such as grocery shopping, medical appointments, and government services. The following transit propensity indices identify three key transit markets: transit-oriented populations, commuter populations, and activity destinations. These indices use a series of demographic and employment factors to determine geographic areas with expected demand and/or need for transit service.

#### 4.3.1 Methodology

Each propensity index is created using population data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates and/or data for 2019 from the U.S. Census’ Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) program (**Figure 4.3**). Each metric is weighted based on its relevance to transit ridership to generate each index’s score. Together with other information on transit potential and travel flows, these indices form a basis for planning transit service in and around Rockdale County.

TABLE 4.3: TRANSIT PROPENSITY INDICES

Index	Description	Metrics	Data Sources
Transit-Oriented Population Propensity Index	Highlights areas with residents who are most likely to use transit	Population, age, income, vehicle ownership, and disability status	ACS 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates
Commuter Propensity Index	Highlights areas with high concentrations of likely transit commuters	Labor force and non-single occupancy vehicle commute mode	ACS 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates
Activity Destination Propensity Index	Highlights areas with strong commercial and public-sector activity	Retail and restaurant jobs, entertainment and recreation jobs, healthcare jobs, education jobs, and government and public services	LEHD 2019

### 4.3.2 Transit-Oriented Population Propensity Index

The Transit-Oriented Population Propensity Index (**Figure 4.3**) maps the residents who are likely to use transit. Certain population subgroups have a higher propensity to use transit as their primary means of local and regional transportation. These groups include youth and senior citizens, low-income residents, households with one or fewer cars, and persons with disabilities. Areas with high concentrations of these five population groups are most in need of all-day transit service providing access to downtown and crosstown destinations. As illustrated in the map, the area with the highest transit-oriented population propensity is in Conyers, with moderate to high need extending out in all directions. While current transit need is mostly limited to Conyers, demographic trends such as the county’s aging population suggest that transit need may continue to grow and expand throughout Rockdale County.

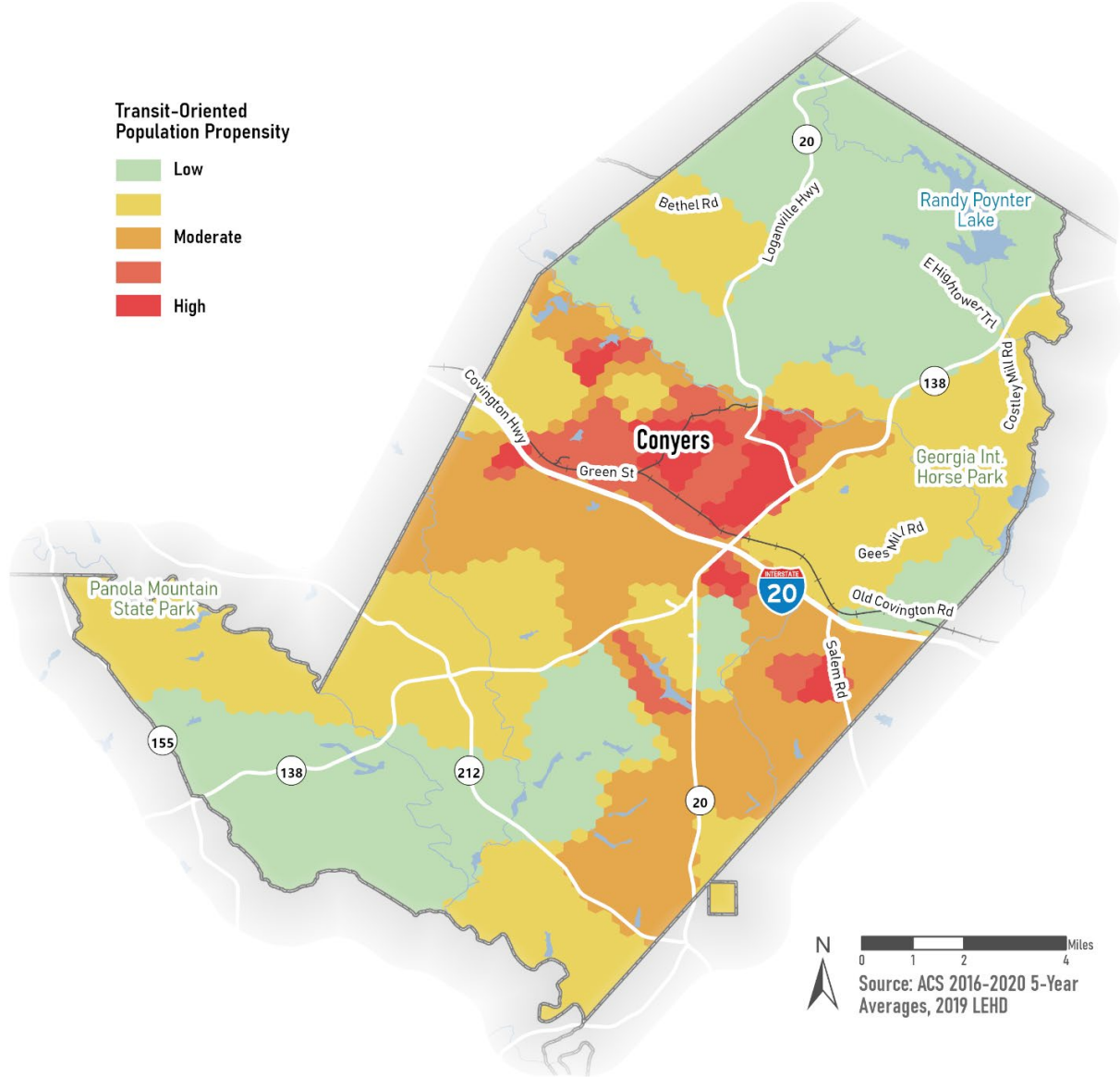


FIGURE 4.3: TRANSIT-ORIENTED POPULATION PROPENSITY INDEX



### 4.3.3 Commuter Propensity Index

The Commuter Propensity Index (**Figure 4.4**) details where commuters live. The data sources for this index include residents who are in the labor force or are employed, with a special emphasis on individuals who commute by transit or by means other than driving alone. Areas with high concentrations of commuter propensity are most suitable for peak period, commuter, or limited stop service connecting employment centers to high density residential areas. In Rockdale County, commuter propensity is highest in Conyers, with moderate to high need extending to the northwest and south.

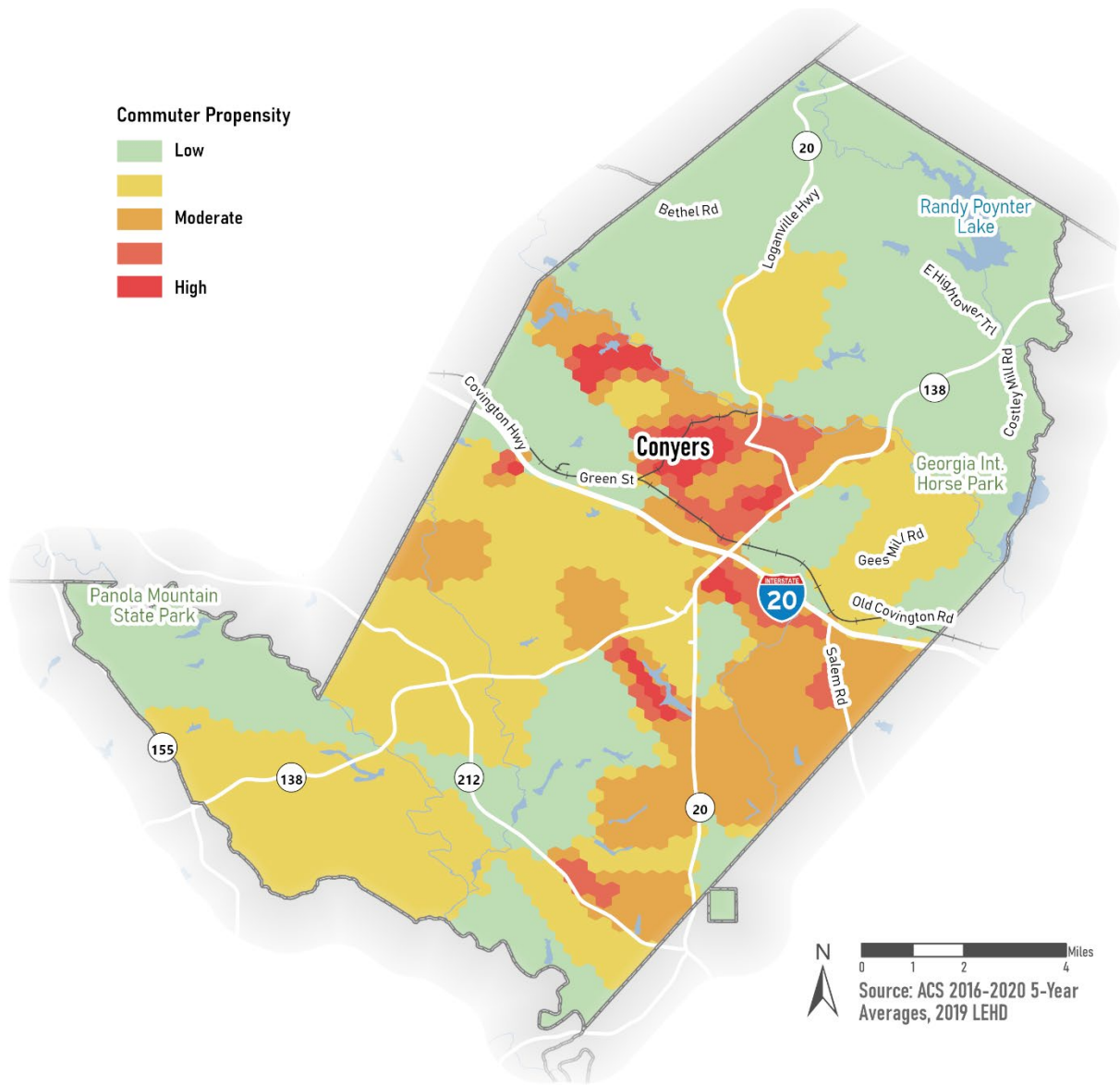


FIGURE 4.4: COMMUTER PROPENSITY INDEX

#### 4.3.4 Activity Destination Propensity Index

The Activity Destination Propensity Index (**Figure 4.5**) illustrates where residents might use transit to travel either for non-work trips or for lower-income service jobs. These destinations include retail, health care, social assistance, education, government facilities, recreation facilities, and restaurants. Areas with high activity destination propensity benefit from both all day local service and peak hour high frequency service. In Rockdale County, activity destination propensity is concentrated in Conyers and surrounding areas to the south.

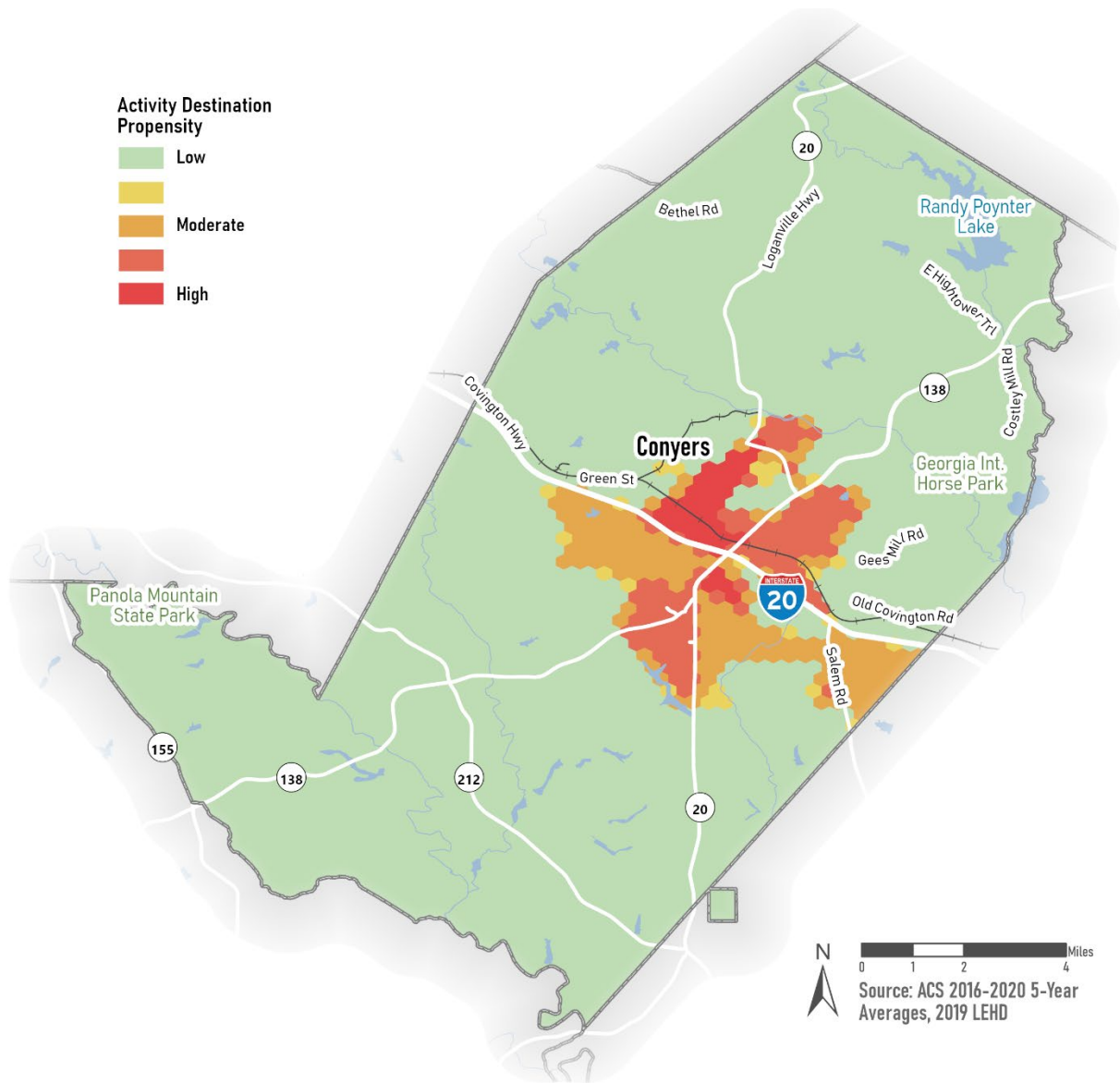


FIGURE 4.5: ACTIVITY DESTINATION PROPENSITY INDEX

#### 4.4 Microtransit Suitability

To enhance the transit demand analysis, a microtransit suitability analysis was conducted to assess locations which may have a high suitability for microtransit and areas which may be better served by fixed-route transit. The microtransit suitability analysis compares population and jobs per acre to transit need, represented by the Transit-Oriented Populations Propensity Index. An ideal microtransit zone has a transit need value of at least “Moderate” and a density of population and fewer than five jobs per acre. Together, these two values indicate that there is some amount of transit need, but density or the road network may not be supportive of fixed-route transit. Areas with densities more than five people or jobs per acre are more suitable for fixed-route service. All areas with low densities of population and jobs per acre and low transit need may not be suitable for microtransit or fixed-route service.

As shown in **Figure 4.6**, the microtransit suitability analysis found that suitability for fixed-route transit and microtransit was limited to Conyers and the surrounding areas. Potential areas for microtransit extend outwards from Conyers in all directions, most notably to the south and west. The areas that are most suitable for microtransit reflect a need for transit but not sufficient density to support fixed-route service. Further exploration into land use, development patterns, and internal travel patterns may help determine additional areas that may be suitable for microtransit service. For example, microtransit service could provide connections between lower-density residential areas and commercial corridors across the county. Beyond what is shown in the suitability analysis, an evaluation of transit propensity and points of interest suggests that areas surrounding Georgia International Horse Park and areas South of I-20 including along the SR 20/McDonough Highway, SR 212, and SR 138/Stockbridge Highway may also be suitable for microtransit.



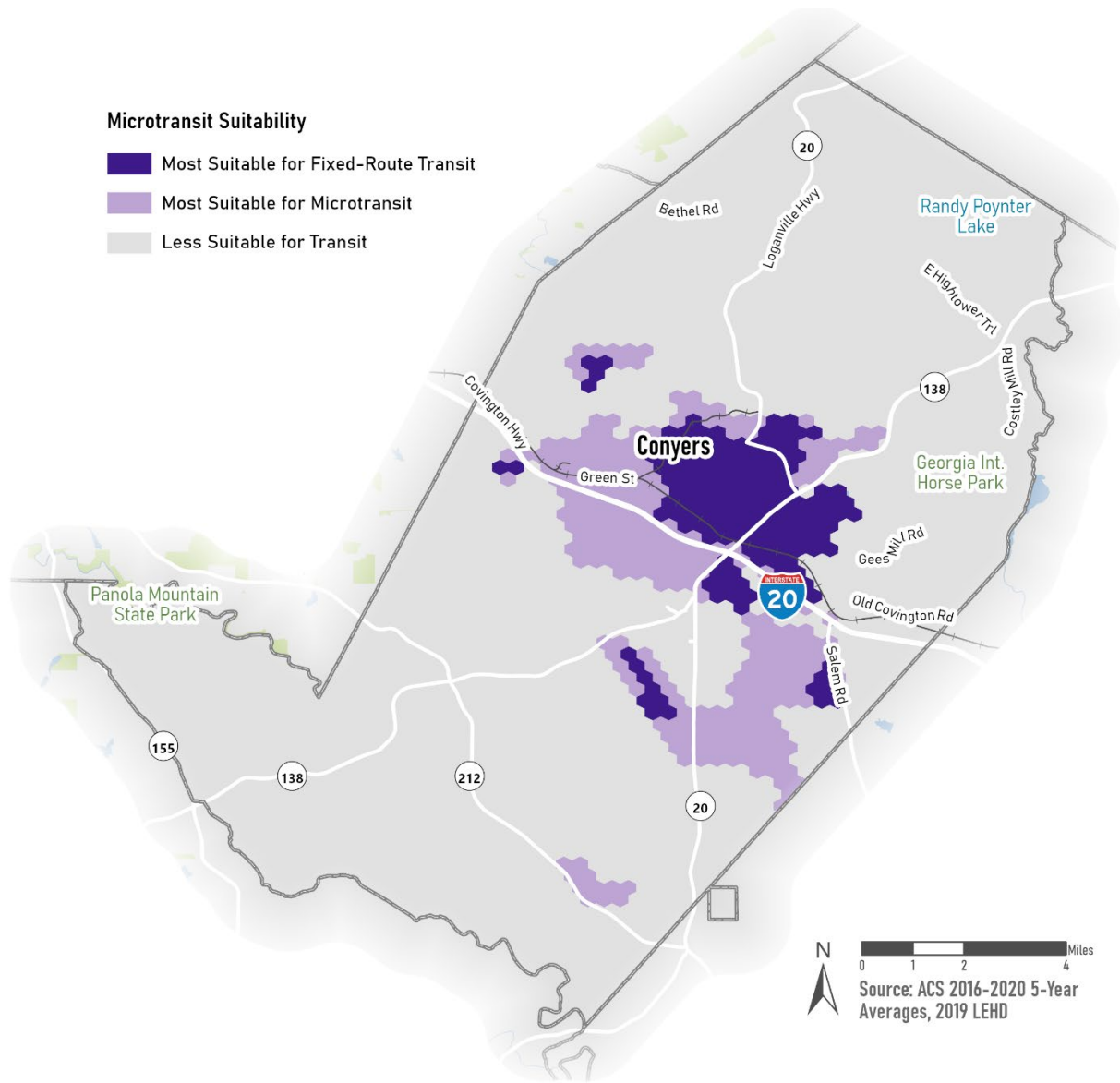


FIGURE 4.6: AREAS SUITABLE FOR MICROTRANSIT IN ROCKDALE COUNTY

## 4.5 Trip Generators and Attractors

Trip generators or attractors are important indicators of where there may be demand for transit service and are typically found within transit-supportive land uses such as mixed-use residential, commercial, office, or high-density residential. This section provides a summary of key points of interest and development patterns throughout Rockdale County that may generate or attract transit trips.

### 4.5.1 Major Points of Interest

The major points of interest that are likely trip generators and attractors were identified based on five categories of activity: community, education, housing, medical, and shopping.<sup>4</sup> As shown in **Figure 4.7**, the points of interest are most densely concentrated within the Conyers area and become continually more scattered further away from Conyers. Major employers are also highly concentrated in Conyers and along the I-20 corridor. This suggests that areas with the greatest travel demand and highest concentration of trips are likely in and around the Conyers.

Furthermore, the Existing Conditions Report found that transit-supportive land-uses and future development projects are located largely within the I-20 corridor. These findings indicate that areas best-suited to support and attract a higher-level of transit service are clustered along I-20 and in greater Conyers. This aligns with areas of population and employment growth as well as the Activity Destination Propensity Index, which found that areas with the highest concentration of activity destinations and greatest propensity for non-work trips are located throughout Conyers and the I-20 corridor.

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<sup>4</sup> POIs are generated using the Google API and key word searches for each category. The key words for each category are as follows. Community: senior center, rec center, community center, YMCA, social security, library and city hall; Shopping: grocery, supermarket, Walmart, and Target; Medical: hospital and clinic; Education: high school, college, and university. Housing: apartments, condominiums, trailer parks, and RV parks.

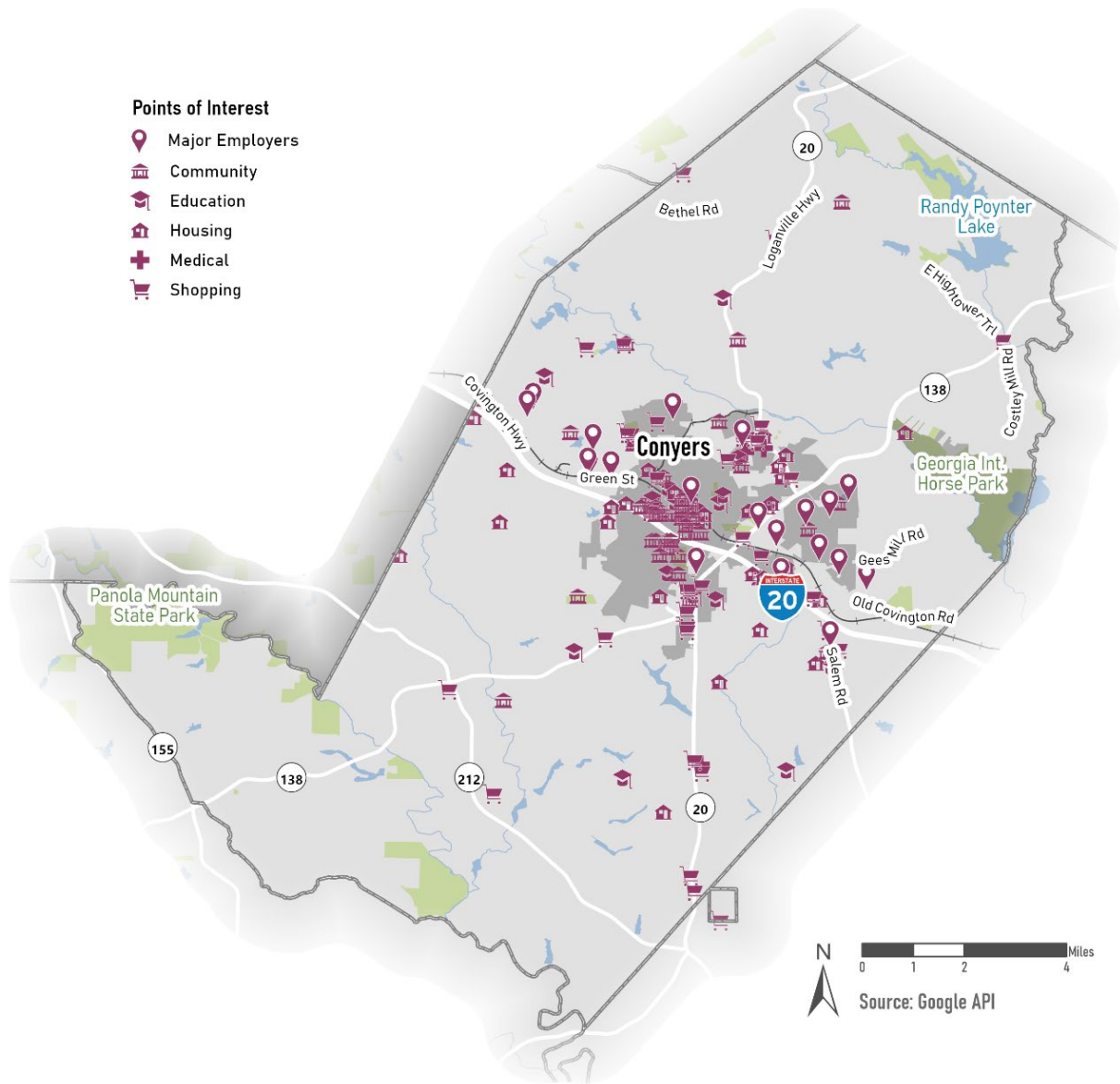


FIGURE 4.7: KEY POINTS OF INTEREST

In addition to I-20, several corridors function as major connectors throughout Rockdale County, listed in **Table 4-4**. Many of the corridors provide direct and important connections between Conyers and surrounding parts of Rockdale County, while also providing access to several points of interest located along their path.

TABLE 4.4: MAJOR CORRIDORS

Major Corridors	
■ Irwin Bridge Road	■ Highway 138
■ Rockbridge Road	■ Salem Road
■ West Avenue	■ Courtesy Parkway
■ Old Milstead	■ Sigman Road
■ Honey Creek	■ Dogwood/Iris Drive

Per the stakeholder interviews conducted for this study and summarized in Section 3 of this report, several regional destinations also result in frequent trips to and from Rockdale County. These regional points of interest are listed in **Table 4-5**, with most destinations located in the Atlanta area. This analysis provides important insight into external trip patterns between Atlanta and Rockdale County and suggests areas where there may be the greatest demand for regional transit connections.

TABLE 4.5: STAKEHOLDER-IDENTIFIED REGIONAL CONNECTORS AND DESTINATIONS

Regional Connectors and Destinations
■ Indian Creek
■ Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport
■ Downtown Atlanta
■ Midtown Atlanta
■ University of Georgia
■ Georgia Institute of Technology
■ Morehouse College
■ Atlanta University Center (AUC)

## 4.6 Existing and Future Travel Demand

Another key element of assessing where transit should be located is an examination of current and future mobility trends. That is, examining common origin-destination pairs. The Existing Conditions Report used the ARC’s travel demand model to determine travel flows to and from Rockdale County in 2020 and 2050 to examine internal trips (those that start and end within the county) and external trips (those that start or end within the county).

### 4.6.1 Internal Trips

As detailed in the Existing Conditions Report and in **Table 6**, most internal trips in Rockdale County are contained within the Conyers area. This suggests that the Conyers area is the most suitable area internal transit service in Rockdale County. With additional development coming to the south and east of Conyers, there is also a wider service area emerging surrounding Conyers that is projected to grow through 2050. It also appears that neighboring counties are an increasingly important destination for Rockdale County residents.

TABLE 4.6: 2020 INTERNAL TRIPS IN ROCKDALE COUNTY

Origin	Destination	Total Trips	% of Internal Trips
Conyers	Conyers	31,699	24%
N Rockdale	N Rockdale	21,536	17%
S Rockdale	S Rockdale	19,643	15%
Conyers	N Rockdale	13,860	11%
N Rockdale	Conyers	13,592	10%
Conyers	S Rockdale	8,755	7%
S Rockdale	Conyers	8,567	7%
N Rockdale	S Rockdale	5,931	5%
S Rockdale	N Rockdale	5,922	5%

Source: ARC

### 4.6.2 External Trips

In 2020, approximately 38 percent of trips with an origin or destination in Rockdale started or ended external to the county. In 2050, 40 percent of trips are projected to start or end external to the county. This represents a small shift toward external trips over time and a small shift away from internal trips. The analysis from the Existing Conditions Report indicates that Newton County is by far the largest generator of external trips, followed by Eastern DeKalb County (**Table 7**). External trips to and from Newtown County and Dekalb County are relatively evenly split between Conyers, North Rockdale, and South Rockdale. The prevalence of these external trips throughout Rockdale County suggests that Newton County and Eastern DeKalb County should be evaluated as priorities for regional transit connections.

TABLE 4.7: 2020 EXTERNAL TRIP PAIRS WITH ROCKDALE COUNTY

External Destination	Total Trips	% of External Trips
Newton County	48,331	30.0%
South Dekalb County – Outside of I-285	33,416	20.8%
Henry County	18,503	11.5%
South Gwinnett County	15,147	9.4%

Walton County	8,513	5.3%
North Gwinnett County	5,542	3.4%
City of Atlanta	5,188	3.2%
North Dekalb County – Inside of I-285	3,937	2.4%
Dekalb County – Outside of I-285	3,675	2.3%
North Clayton County	3,059	1.9%
South Dekalb County – Inside of I-285	2,692	1.7%
City of Atlanta – Central Business District	2,540	1.6%
Cobb County	1,666	1.0%
North Fulton County	1,641	1.0%

Source: ARC

#### 4.6.3 Commuting Patterns

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s LEHD study reveals that only 10 percent of Rockdale County commuters live and work in the county. The highest concentrations of internal commuters are found throughout central Rockdale County, most notably in Conyers. However, the low percentage of commuters within the county suggests that work commutes represent a small portion of internal trips.

On the other hand, a high percentage of Rockdale County commuters are leaving the county for work. Similarly, the data suggests a large percentage of commuters are entering the county from other locations for work. Roughly 46 percent of Rockdale County commuters are commuting out of Rockdale County, and 44 percent of commuters are commuting into Rockdale County from other home locations. This reveals that work commutes make up a large portion of the county’s external trips. An assessment of commuter home and work locations indicates that Rockdale County serves as a bedroom community for employment centers in Atlanta and Newton County serves as a bedroom community for Rockdale County. Similar to the conclusions above, this analysis indicates that Newton County and Atlanta should be further evaluated for regional transit service.

### 4.7 Summary Findings – Market Analysis

- Areas across the county, especially Conyers and the I-20 corridor, have the potential for transit service, including fixed-route bus, commuter bus, and on-demand microtransit.
- Future growth in both employment and population indicates the county will become increasingly dense, thereby increasing its transit potential.
- The projected increase in the county’s senior population further supports the need for a variety of mobility options beyond driving a single-occupancy vehicle.
- Existing internal trip patterns and projected growth suggest that Conyers and the surrounding area are the most suitable areas for fixed-route transit service in the county.
- Trips that start or end outside Rockdale County are becoming increasingly common; Newton County and Eastern DeKalb County are important connections for Rockdale County residents and employees.
- Data driven analysis is the first step in identifying areas with transit potential, but additional qualitative analysis and engagement is required to build robust transit recommendations.

## 5 Transit Assessment

### 5.1 Opportunities by Area

#### 5.1.1 Opportunities within Rockdale County

##### 5.1.1.1 Fixed Route Transit Opportunities

The market analysis highlights several areas of opportunity throughout Rockdale County that have the potential for transit service. An evaluation of demographic patterns and trip patterns reveals that Conyers and the I-20 corridor are most suited for fixed route transit service. With a density of more than five jobs plus people and several major trip generators, there is an opportunity to implement fixed-route or peak-period commuter bus service throughout Conyers and the surrounding areas.

##### 5.1.1.2 Microtransit Opportunities

While density to support fixed-route transit was limited to the Conyers area, there are opportunities to establish microtransit zones throughout the county. The market analysis identifies several potential areas for microtransit service based on transit propensity and points of interest, including:

- Conyers
- Areas surrounding Georgia International Horse Park
- Along several major corridors, including SR 20/McDonough Highway, SR 212, and SR 138/Stockbridge Highway.

Determining precise boundaries of potential microtransit zones will require further exploration into land use, development patterns, and internal travel patterns.

#### 5.1.2 Opportunities for Regional Connections

As Rockdale County continues to grow and diversify, trips that start or end outside of Rockdale County will become more common. This presents an opportunity to establish regional transit connections for Rockdale County residents and employees. Trip patterns detailed in the market analysis identify Newton County and Eastern DeKalb County as the largest generators of external trips. With over 50 percent of external trips split between these two areas, implementing commuter bus service between Conyers and Newton County and Conyers and Eastern DeKalb County could help serve regional mobility needs. Furthermore, commuting patterns reveal that many Rockdale County residents commute to employment centers in Atlanta. While ATL Xpress service already connects Rockdale County Residents to Midtown, Downtown, and Perimeter, the findings from the market analysis indicate that establishing additional commuter bus service between Conyers and Atlanta could be beneficial for employees throughout the region.

### 5.2 Opportunities by Immediacy

#### 5.2.1 Short-Term Opportunities

While further analysis will be needed to determine the appropriate prioritization and phasing strategy, short-term opportunities should address more immediate transit needs and have quicker implementation times. Based on identified transit opportunities, establishing microtransit service is a more viable short-term opportunity given its applicability across the county and ability to match the county's internal mobility needs. Additionally, given the large number of commutes and lack of current

service from Rockdale County to Newton County and Eastern DeKalb County, implementing commuter bus service to those two areas would be beneficial in the short-term.

#### 5.2.2 Long-Term Opportunities

Long-term opportunities can address less immediate needs and allow for longer implementation times. Establishing fixed-route transit service throughout Conyers is more viable as a long-term opportunity for Rockdale County. This would allow for an assessment of microtransit ridership and performance before developing fixed-route service. Additionally, commuter service to Atlanta could be a long-term opportunity. Since ATL Xpress already provides service between Conyers and Atlanta, providing commuter bus service to other counties should remain a higher priority in the short term.



## 6 Next Steps

Figure 6.1 outlines the Rockdale TDP’s study process and illustrates that the study is currently in its second phase. The next major deliverable will be the *Phased Transit Service Recommendations Technical Memo and Maps*.

### TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

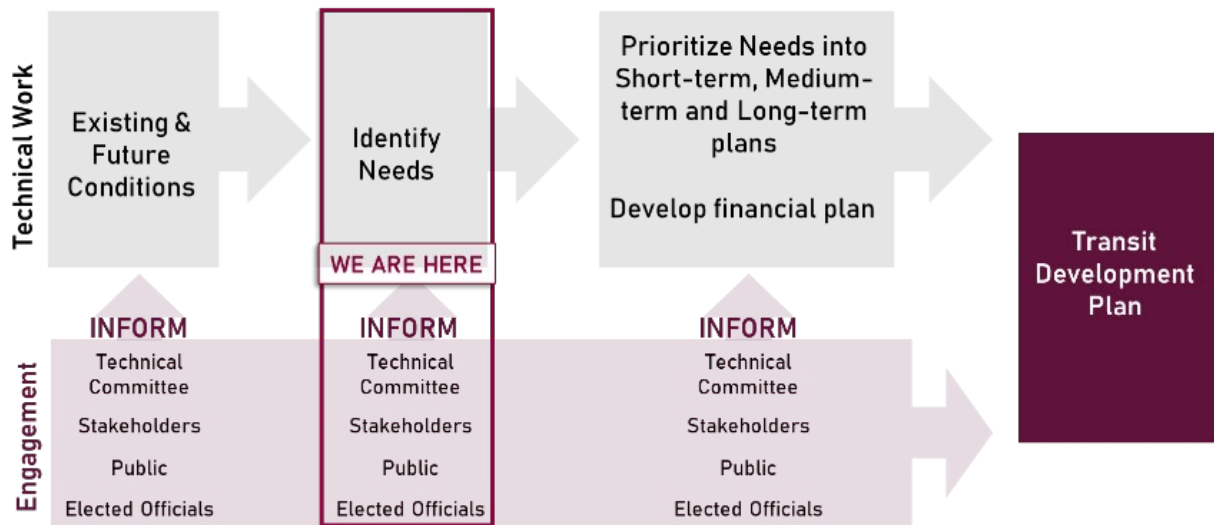


FIGURE 6.1: ROCKDALE TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN (TDP) PLANNING PROCESS

### 6.1 Transit Analysis

Public engagement will be held to ground truth the findings of this analysis with community members’ perspectives. Public input from these meetings will be consolidated, reviewed with the Technical Committee, and utilized as an input in developing transit service recommendations. Next steps for the transit analysis will be to develop recommendations based on identified needs and markets, and then refine and prioritize those recommendations based on stakeholder and public input. Transit service recommendations efforts will include:

- Developing a network of short-, mid-, and long-term phased transit service recommendations
- Developing policy and programmatic strategies designed to address current and future transit propensity.
- Identifying the time range for implementation:
  - Short-Term Recommendations: Solutions for immediate implementation to address current needs.
  - Mid-Term Recommendations: Projects for implementation in 2 – 7 years to address existing and emerging needs that may include new lines of service, or transition of existing routes to higher-capacity service.

- Long-Term Recommendations: Investments to address future needs of Rockdale County and the City of Conyers through 2050, creating a fully built-out and integrated system that meets or exceeds maintenance requirements.

## 6.2 Funding Analysis

The next phase of the funding analysis will entail performing a financial analysis of the recommended transit projects identified and presented in the Transit Development Plan. Specifically, the financial analysis will include:

- Developing a rough order magnitude of the annual capital, operating, and maintenance costs.
- Identifying potential federal, state, and local funding sources that could be used to leverage existing sources, fund additional project costs, and/or fund long-term operations and maintenance costs.
- Developing a financial model to estimate future cash flows that incorporates the recommended transit service levels, O&M and capital cost estimates, high-level revenue projections from existing funding sources, and assumptions on project timing.
- Developing up to three financial scenarios that test varying sensitivities on the levels of federal funding, potential funding from other sources, and potential new local funding sources.