

ROCKDALE

Transit Development Plan



Conyers-Rockdale Transit Development Plan

November 2023

**STATE OF GEORGIA
COUNTY OF ROCKDALE**

**A RESOLUTION FOR THE
ROCKDALE COUNTY TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Whereas, Rockdale County, in conjunction with the Atlanta-Region Transit Link (ATL) Authority, has prepared a Transit Development Plan (TDP) recognizing the importance of preparing for growth in Rockdale County and the associated need for providing increased mobility options and access to transit; and

Whereas, the project team was led by Rockdale County Department of Transportation and a team of consultants from Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB), The Collaborative Firm (TCF), and Foursquare Integrated Transportation Planning in conjunction with a project technical committee made-up of representatives from Rockdale County, City of Conyers, ATL Authority, and the Atlanta Regional Commission; and

Whereas, the TDP project team took extensive efforts to engage the public and key stakeholders to develop a TDP that addresses Rockdale's transit needs, providing short-, mid-, and long-term transit service recommendations, policy strategies, and aspirational recommendations for Rockdale County's transit system; and

Whereas, the ATL Authority serves as the transit governing board for the 13-county Atlanta region; and

Whereas, per state legislation, the ATL Authority is required to develop and regularly update a regional transit plan (ARTP) incorporating existing and future transit services, facilities, and project in order to provide a coordinated region-wide approach and enhance connectivity for riders; and

Whereas, the Rockdale TDP has identified a list of projects for Rockdale County that need to be included in the ARTP.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Rockdale County Board of Commissioners hereby approves and adopts the Rockdale County Transit Development Plan as presented and authorizes submittal of the adopted TDP to the ATL Authority for inclusion in the ARTP; and

Rockdale County Resolution # R-2023-32

Be it further resolved that Rockdale County affirms its commitment to work toward a goal of implementing the TDP's recommended short-, mid-, and long-term recommendations to deliver increased transit service options to the citizens of Rockdale County and;

Be it further resolved that Rockdale County commits to continue to work alongside key stakeholders including the City of Conyers, surrounding counties, the Atlanta Regional Commission, the ATL Authority, and the Georgia Department of Transportation on the coordination, implementation, and monitoring of recommended transit projects to completion.

This 5th day of December, 2023.

**ROCKDALE COUNTY, GEORGIA
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

By:  _____
Osborn Nesbitt, Sr., Chairman
Board of Commissioners

Attest:

 _____
Jennifer Rutledge, Executive Director
Government Affairs/County Clerk

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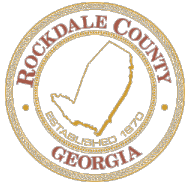
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Acknowledgements

This plan was a collaborative effort led by Rockdale County and joint Conyers-Rockdale Project Management Team, funded by the Atlanta-Region Transit-Link Authority (ATL) and the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), and with assistance from a Technical Committee and Consultant Team.



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Consultant Team



1 Introduction

Rockdale County has developed 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 incorporated extensive public and stakeholder engagement into the transit planning process which included 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 was also guided by input from a Technical Committee that provided feedback throughout the plan development process.

This final TDP report documents a 30-year vision for transit investments through the year 2050 to address Rockdale County's transit service needs based upon current and projected conditions. The study concludes with strategies to implement a set of transit projects and policy recommendations to improve mobility, safety, connectivity, and quality-of-life for Rockdale County residents.

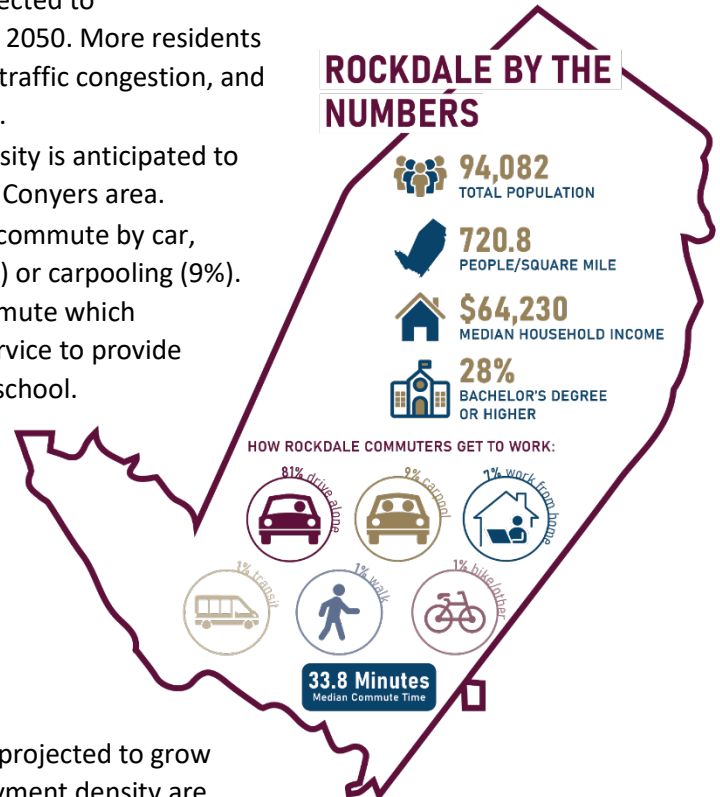
2 Summary of Existing Conditions and Future Trends

The Existing Conditions and Future Trends Memorandum contains an inventory of current conditions that informed the remaining portions of the RTDP, including the identification of transit needs and the development of service recommendation, funding strategies and final master plan. A summary of key findings from the Existing Conditions report is below.

People

- The population of Rockdale County is projected to grow by over 18,000 residents by the year 2050. More residents will result in more cars on the road, more traffic congestion, and the increased need for transit alternatives.
- Over the next thirty years, population density is anticipated to grow most significantly within the greater Conyers area.
- Almost all Rockdale commuters currently commute by car, whether in a single-occupant vehicle (81%) or carpooling (9%). Only 1% indicated they use transit to commute which provides a large market for new transit service to provide alternative options for getting to work or school.
- By 2050, Rockdale County is expected to become increasingly older with the average age increasing from 38 to 42 and a 40% increase of the 65+ age group. This could have a dramatic impact on travel patterns and the demand for transit.

FIGURE 2-1 DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT OF ROCKDALE COUNTY



Jobs

- The number of jobs in Rockdale County is projected to grow over 20% by 2050. Areas with high employment density are anticipated to expand outwards from Conyers along major transportation corridors. Employment growth will bring more commuters and new commuting patterns. To offer relief on area roadways, providing transit as a viable travel alternative will become increasingly important.

Land Use and Development

- The U.S. Census designated urbanized area (UA) has continually grown in Rockdale County and is expected to grow further when the 2020 UA is released later this year.
- This 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) with various allotments and restrictions on how these monies can be used to fund services.
- Existing land uses that support a higher-level of transit investment are clustered along the I-20 corridor and greater Conyers area and future land use plans have targeted the I-20 and Salem Road corridors as growth areas planned for transit-supportive future land uses. These corridors are particularly suitable to support the expansion of transit services.

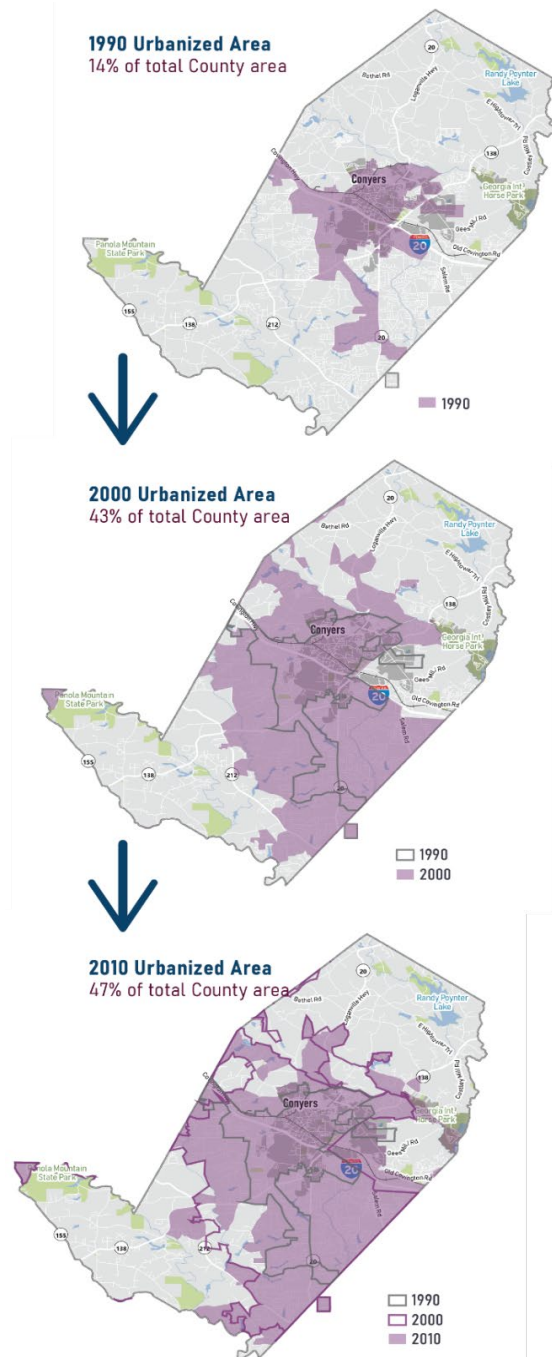
Bicycle and Pedestrian Conditions

- Rockdale County has a limited network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities. A well-connected bicycle and pedestrian network will be needed to support new, planned transit service expansion.
- Bicycle and pedestrian feasibility is also a concern primarily along Dogwood Drive, Iris Drive, SR 138, and Salem Road.

Roadway Conditions

- The following corridors should be considered for prioritization in major transit/transportation improvements:
 - Intra-county (within the county): SR 20, SR 138, Smyrna Road, Sigman Road, SR 212, Flat Shoals Road, and W Hightower Trail/White Road.
 - Inter-county (out of the county): I-20, SR 138, SR 20, SR 162 (Salem Road), Union Church Road, and SR 212.

FIGURE 2-2 GROWTH IN URBANIZED AREA (1990-2010)



Travel Demand

- Most internal trips in the county are contained within the Conyers area (24% and 26% of all trips in 2020 and 2050), suggesting that this area is most suitable area for high-frequency transit service within the county.
- Newton County is the largest generator of external trips (30%), and this trend is projected to continue in 2050, followed by Eastern DeKalb County (21%). These destinations should be evaluated as priorities for regional transit connections.
- In both 2020 and 2050 less than 5% of all Rockdale County trips were or will be completed by transit, walking, and biking, suggesting that significant investments in transit service and pedestrian/bicycle infrastructure are needed to achieve a more balanced mode split.
- A high percentage of commuters are leaving the county for work and also entering the county from other locations. Rockdale County primarily serves as a bedroom community for employment centers in Atlanta and Newton County serves as a bedroom community for Rockdale.

FIGURE 2-3 ROCKDALE COUNTY COMMUTING PATTERNS

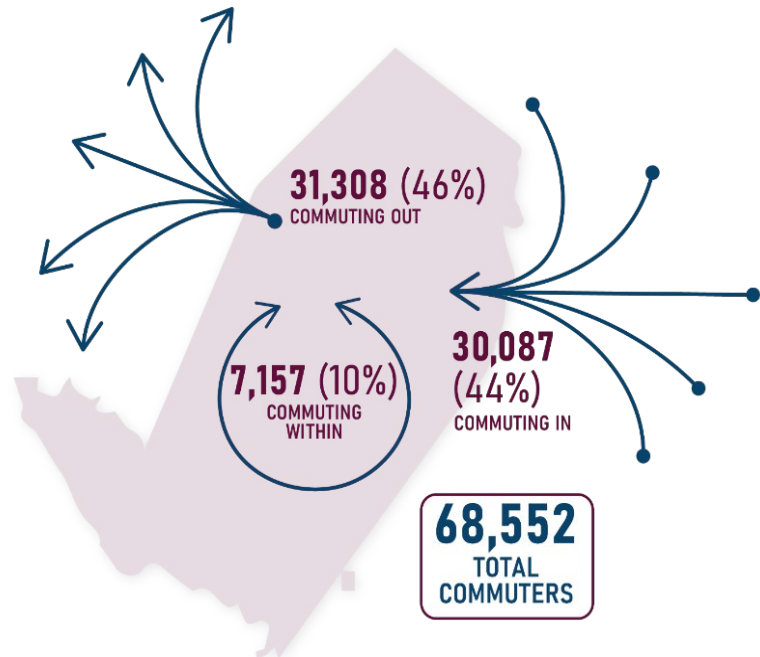
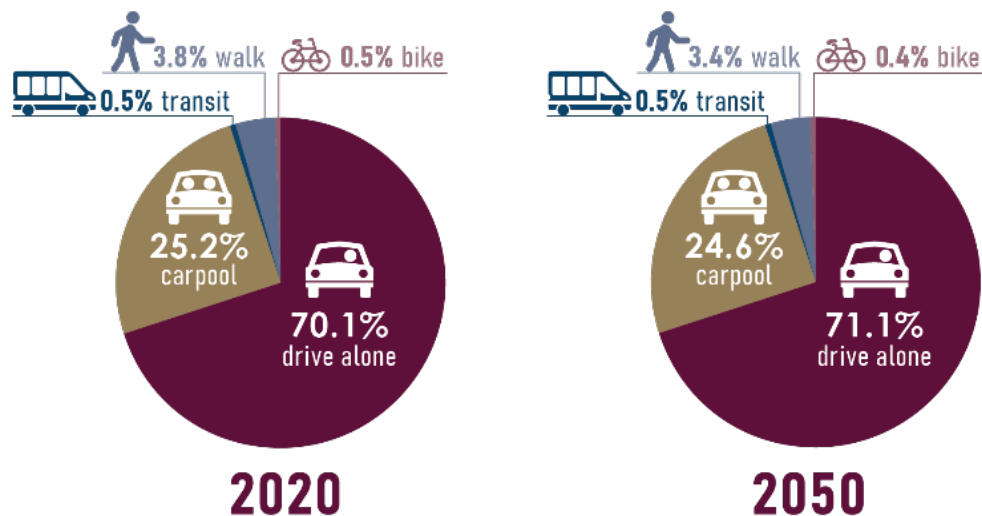


FIGURE 2-4 MODE SHARE FOR ALL ROCKDALE COUNTY TRIPS (2020 AND 2050)



Existing Transit Services

- Existing transit services are limited within Rockdale County and only cater to specific transit markets for particular trip types. The ATL provides regional transit connections for commuters who work outside of the county through Xpress bus and vanpool services. Rockdale Senior Services provides transit for seniors, adults with disabilities, and veterans through a series of programs with limitations on the trip types and destinations that can be served. Gaps in transit service are apparent for the general county population to travel to and from their homes to destinations within the county.

Planned and Programmed Projects

- A comprehensive inventory of planned projects within Rockdale County and in adjacent districts has been assembled and this will be consulted for coordination with planned transit services. The recommendations of the Newton County Transit Master Plan will be of particular importance given the strong travel demand patterns between the two counties.

FIGURE 2-5 EAST CONYERS PARK AND RIDE



FIGURE 2-6 WEST CONYERS PARK AND RIDE



3 Summary of Public Involvement

The Rockdale TDP relied on broad and representative stakeholder and community input to establish short-, mid-, and long-term recommendations that implement the vision and articulate the shared values of Rockdale County’s diverse population. The public involvement process included engaging an active technical committee, stakeholder interviews, a robust online project presence, public surveys, open houses, pop-up events, and presentations to the County Board of Commissioners. A table detailing these outreach activities, when they occurred, and a high-level summary of feedback is included below.

Outreach Activity	Date(s)	Details + Feedback
Stakeholder Interviews	Various	<p>Key County leaders, staff, and stakeholders were engaged in one-on-one or small group virtual interviews to learn from key stakeholders in the Rockdale community about their transit needs. A full list of stakeholder interview participants can be found in the Rockdale TDP Outreach Summary Report. Key feedback from the stakeholder interviews included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Transportation service should prioritize the elderly and should be ADA accessible ■ Proposed transit modes should be different from MARTA (especially vehicles – smaller vehicles were desired). ■ Negative connotation with transit with many residents especially from a safety perspective ■ Safe connections should be prioritized including sidewalks and other first/last mile connections.
Project Online Presence	Project Duration	<p>The project’s online presence included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Project Website ■ Social Media ■ Email Marketing
Project Surveys	<p>Survey #1: March-May 2023</p> <p>Survey #2: July – August 2023</p>	<p>The Project Team developed two surveys that were available online and in hard-copy format in both English and Spanish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Survey #1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Over 150 paper surveys and 170 electronic responses — Most respondents indicated transit expansion should be focused on expanding mobility choices for all Rockdale residents ■ Survey #2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Over 1,000 responses — Most respondents indicated they were not interested in introducing a transit system to Rockdale County

<p>Pop-Up Events</p>	<p>April-July 2023</p>	<p>The Pop-Up events targeted small-to-large scale events already planned within the County. The Project Team worked diligently to solicit community participation at these events to ensure that residents and community members were effectively engaged. Visual boards, fact sheets, comments cards, survey postcards, and email sign-up sheets are examples of materials used to help increase participation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Trucks on the Tracks – April 20 ■ Friday Winedown – July 14 ■ Rockin’ Rockdale – July 30
<p>Literature Drops</p>	<p>Various</p>	<p>Early in the project, the team dropped marketing collateral with information on the project’s different outreach events/activities at various locations throughout the county including locations such as community centers, libraries, parks, the Georgia International Horse Park, and other frequently used services and activity centers. A full list of the literature drop locations can be found in the Outreach Summary Report.</p>
<p>Public Open Houses</p>	<p>Open House #1: March 21, 2023</p> <p>Open House #2: May 23rd</p> <p>Open House #3: August 29th</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Open House #: JP Carr community Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Approximately 10 attendees — Residents identified major residential and employment areas in/around Rockdale County and shared feedback on their transit-riding experiences and general feelings towards transit investments ■ Open House #2: CE Steele Community Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Approximately 20 attendees — Feedback included a general openness to the convenience of proposed microtransit and the desire to have increased access to the Atlanta Airport as a regional connection. ■ Open House #3: CE Steele Community Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Approximately 8 attendees — Key feedback included a desire for transit to not add to congestion, no loitering at bus stops, and affordable transit services that don’t lead to tax increases.
<p>Technical Committee Meetings</p>	<p>TC Meeting #1: March 14th</p> <p>TC Meeting #2: May 16th</p> <p>TC Meeting #3: August 22nd</p>	<p>A Technical Committee was created to help guide the vision and direction of the planning process and technical recommendations. The TC was comprised of local County and City and regional staff/leaders and met in-person three times at key project milestones. A full list of TC members can be found in the Outreach Summary Report.</p>

4 Transit Service Needs Assessment and Market Analysis Summary

The Transit Service Needs Assessment and Market Analysis mined the information presented in the Existing Conditions Report, input from stakeholders and the public, and 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. Specifically, the Transit Service Needs Assessment and Market Analysis:

- Presented an assessment of existing funding and delivery processes for transportation and transit in Rockdale County
- Summarized key themes from stakeholder interviews conducted for this study
- Presented an analysis of the market for future transit services in the county by area and population
- Identified opportunities for new transit service
- Described the next steps in developing recommendations and funding strategies

4.1 Transit Market Analysis Key Findings

- 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.

4.2 Identified Transit Opportunities by Area

4.2.1 Opportunities within Rockdale County

4.2.1.1 Fixed Route Transit Opportunities

The market analysis highlighted several areas of opportunity throughout Rockdale County with 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.**

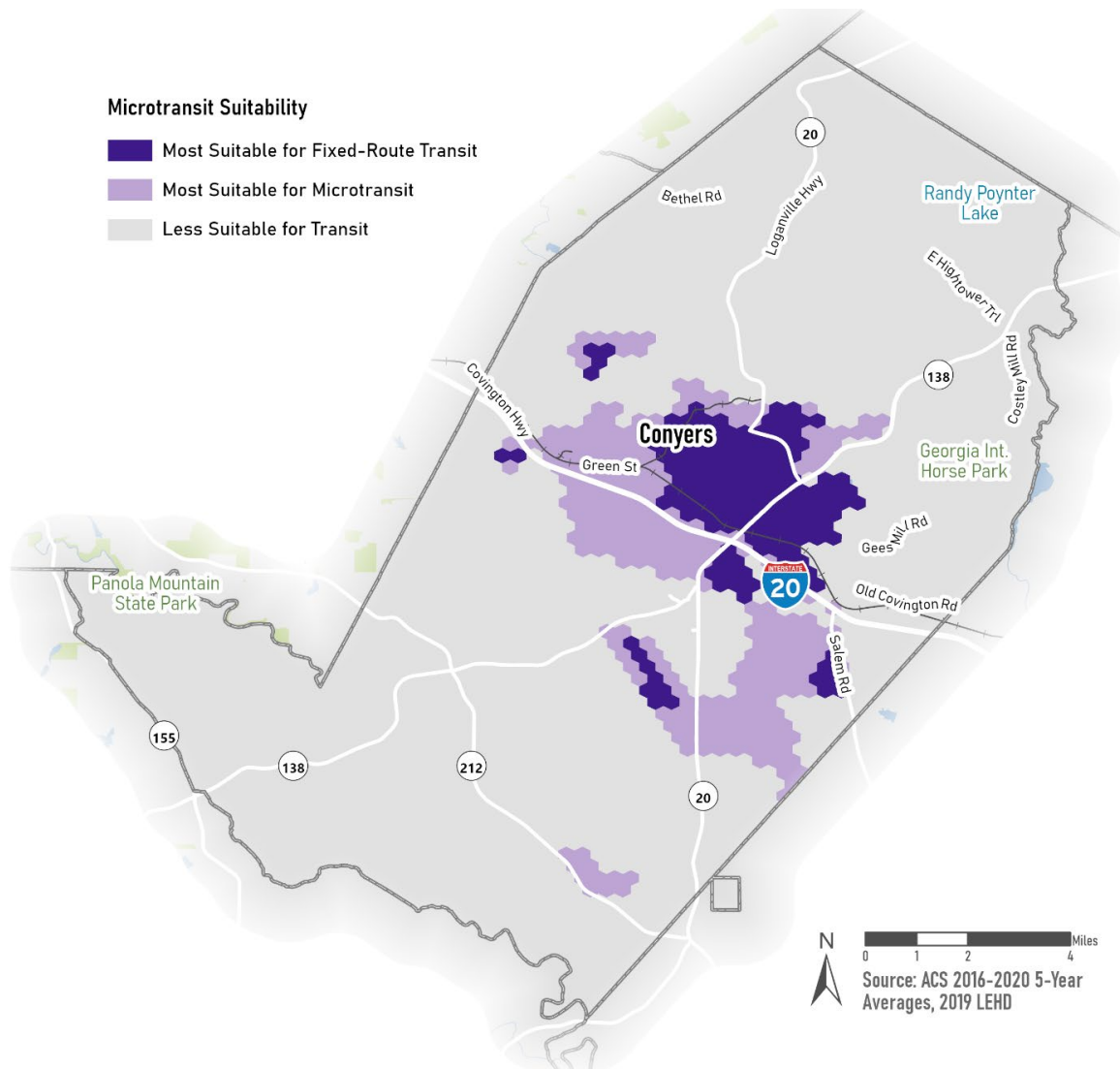
4.2.1.2 *Microtransit Opportunities*

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.

FIGURE 4-1 AREAS SUITABLE FOR MICROTRANSIT IN ROCKDALE COUNTY



4.2.2 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.

4.3 Opportunities by Immediacy

4.3.1 Short-Term Opportunities: Microtransit

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.

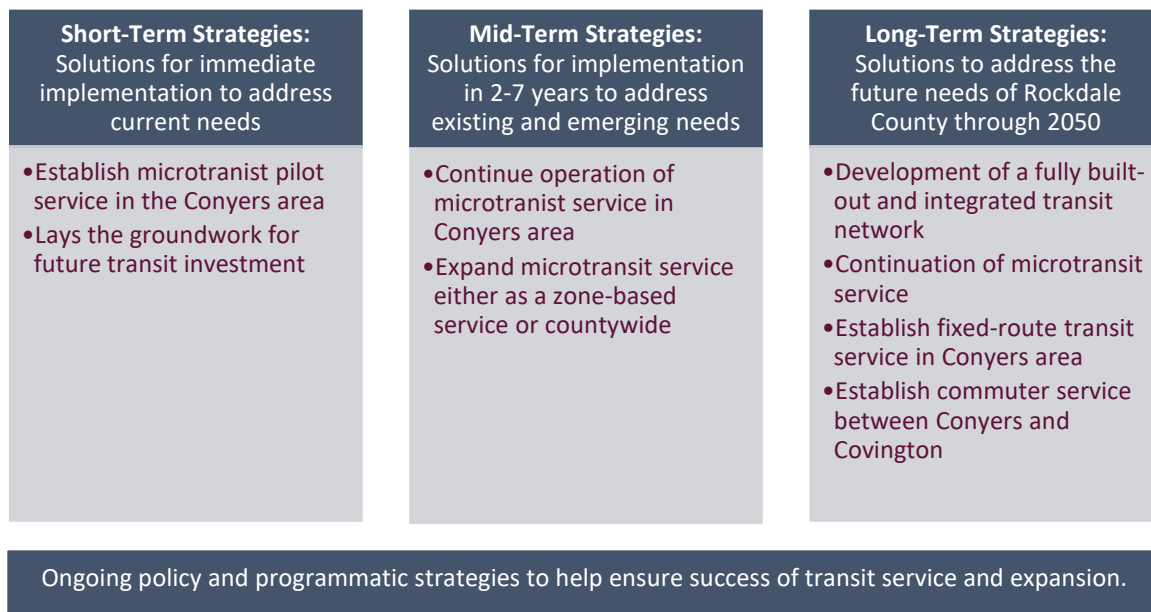
4.3.2 Long-Term Opportunities: Fixed-Route Service

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.

5 Phased Transit Service Recommendations

The culmination of technical planning and community engagement resulted in a set of transit recommendations divided into four categories: short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations and policy and programmatic strategies (**Figure 5-1**).

FIGURE 5-1: CRITICAL COMPONENTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION



The short-, mid-, and long-term recommendations are primarily made-up of recommendations for future microtransit and fixed-route transit services.

Microtransit is an emerging approach for a general public, on-demand transit service. Rides are booked using a mobile application (app) interface, and the service is intended to be flexible. This type of service is more responsive than scheduled dial-a-ride services, and it can provide more coverage than fixed-route service.

Fixed-route bus service transports riders along a predetermined route with regular stops and a predictable schedule. This type of service can be offered as a commuter service, a local service, or as a peak-only service. Fixed-route transit benefits from economies of scale; the service is most cost effective and efficient when it is operating in high density areas with concentrations of both people and jobs. In lower density areas without a well-connected street grid, fixed-route transit service can become inefficient and as expensive on a per hour, per mile, and per trip basis as other more flexible services.

5.1 Short-Term Recommendations

The short-term recommendations are transit solutions for immediate implementation. These recommendations address current needs identified in the *Transit Service Needs and Market Analysis* report. The timeframe for implementation of the short-term recommendations is the two-year period after plan adoption. The recommended short-term transit investments are detailed in **Table 5.1**.

These recommendations represent two potential paths forward for implementing new microtransit service in Rockdale County. Operating a microtransit pilot provides proof of concept and allows for an initial evaluation of performance before the County makes long-term financial commitments.

TABLE 5.1: SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Project ID	Project Name	Project Description	Average Wait Time (min)	Vehicle Need	Annual Vehicle Hours	Total Estimated Annual Cost
ST-1	Conyers-Rockdale Northern Microtransit Service (Pilot)	On-demand microtransit service with one zone covering the City of Conyers north of I-20	20, 30, or 60	1	4,382	\$394K
ST-2	Conyers-Rockdale Extended Microtransit Service (Pilot)	On-demand microtransit service with one zone covering the City of Conyers north and south of I-20	20, 30, or 60	2	8,764	\$788K

To limit the county’s capital investments in the short-term, Rockdale County can contract with a third-party vendor who will manage and operate the microtransit service day today. This vendor would provide all elements of service, including vehicles, drivers, and technology. Rockdale County, in turn, would provide contract oversight. By utilizing a third-party vendor, the county can focus internal resources on marketing and education to ensure residents understand the benefits of microtransit and how to use the service. Rockdale County Senior Services currently provides demand response transportation services for senior citizens in the county, which can serve as an initial model for marketing and managing more widespread microtransit service.

5.1.1 Conyers-Rockdale Northern Microtransit Service (Pilot)

The first recommended pilot scenario is to implement microtransit with a single zone covering the City of Conyers north of I-20 (Figure 5-2). The zone covers a population of over 20,000 people and provides service to over 19,000 jobs, making it a strong candidate for microtransit in the short-term. Destinations served by the Conyers microtransit zone include Walmart on Dogwood Drive, Publix at Milstead Crossing, Piedmont Rockdale Hospital, 20th Television, Rockdale County High School, and several

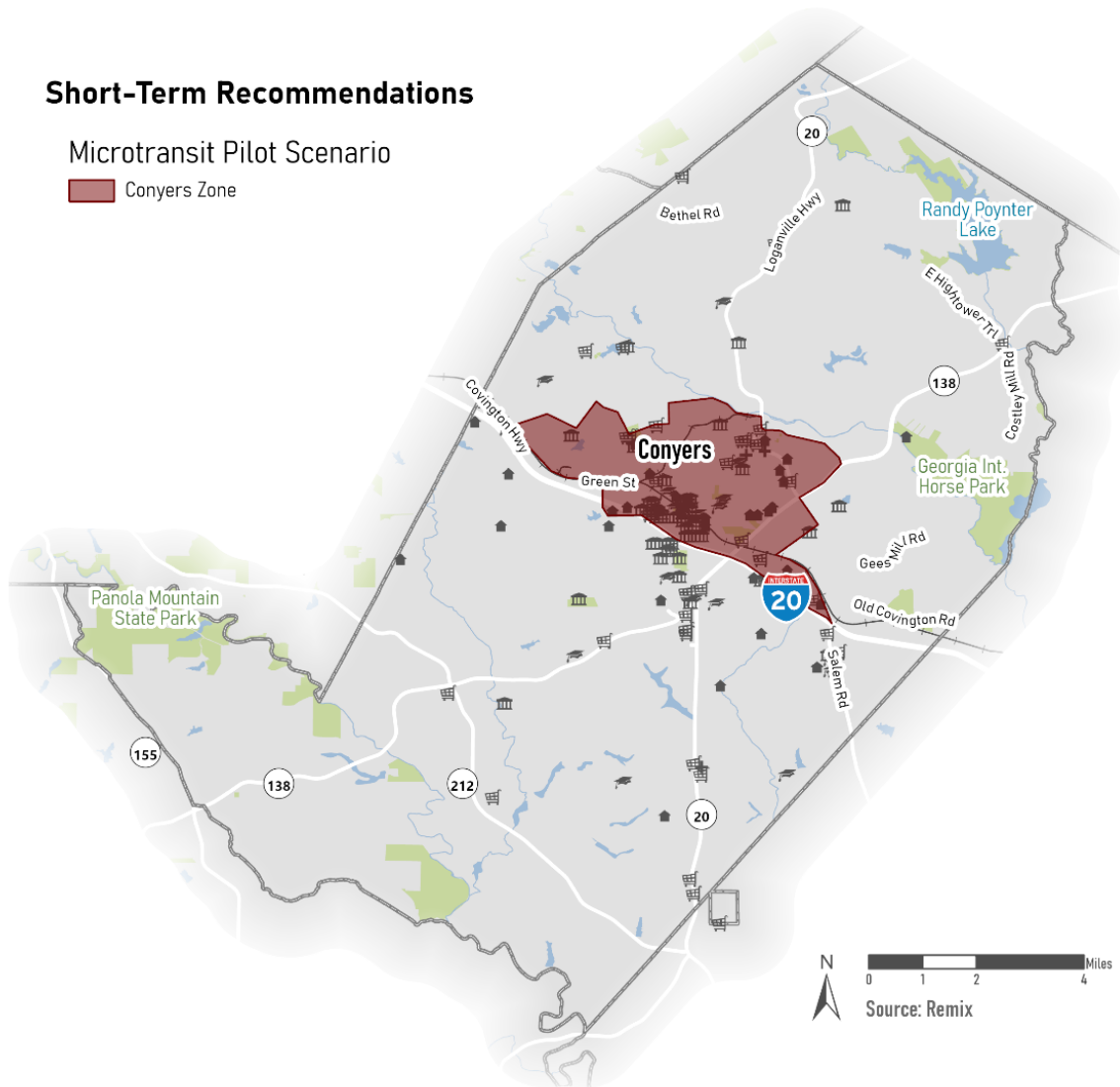
Rockdale County government buildings. The zone also offers connections to the West Conyers Park and Ride and the East Conyers Park and Ride for transfers to ATL Xpress commuter routes. The zone can be covered with one vehicle, and the average wait time does not impact the vehicle needs for this zone.

FIGURE 5-2: SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS: CONYERS-ROCKDALE NORTHERN MICROTRANSIT SCENARIO

Short-Term Recommendations

Microtransit Pilot Scenario

 Conyers Zone



5.1.2 Conyers-Rockdale Extended Microtransit Service (Pilot)

An alternative pilot scenario is to implement microtransit with a single zone covering the City of Conyers both north and south of I-20 (Figure 5-3). This scenario allows for more coverage and service to key destinations south of I-20, serving a total population of over 53,000 and providing connections to nearly 34,000 jobs. Destinations served by this zone (in addition to the destinations served by the Conyers zone) include Kroger at Conyers Square, Aldi on Stockbridge Highway, Publix at The Village at Millers Chapel, Target at Conyers Commons, and major employers such as Golden State Foods and Southeast Connections LLC. The zone also offers connections to the West Conyers Park and Ride and the East

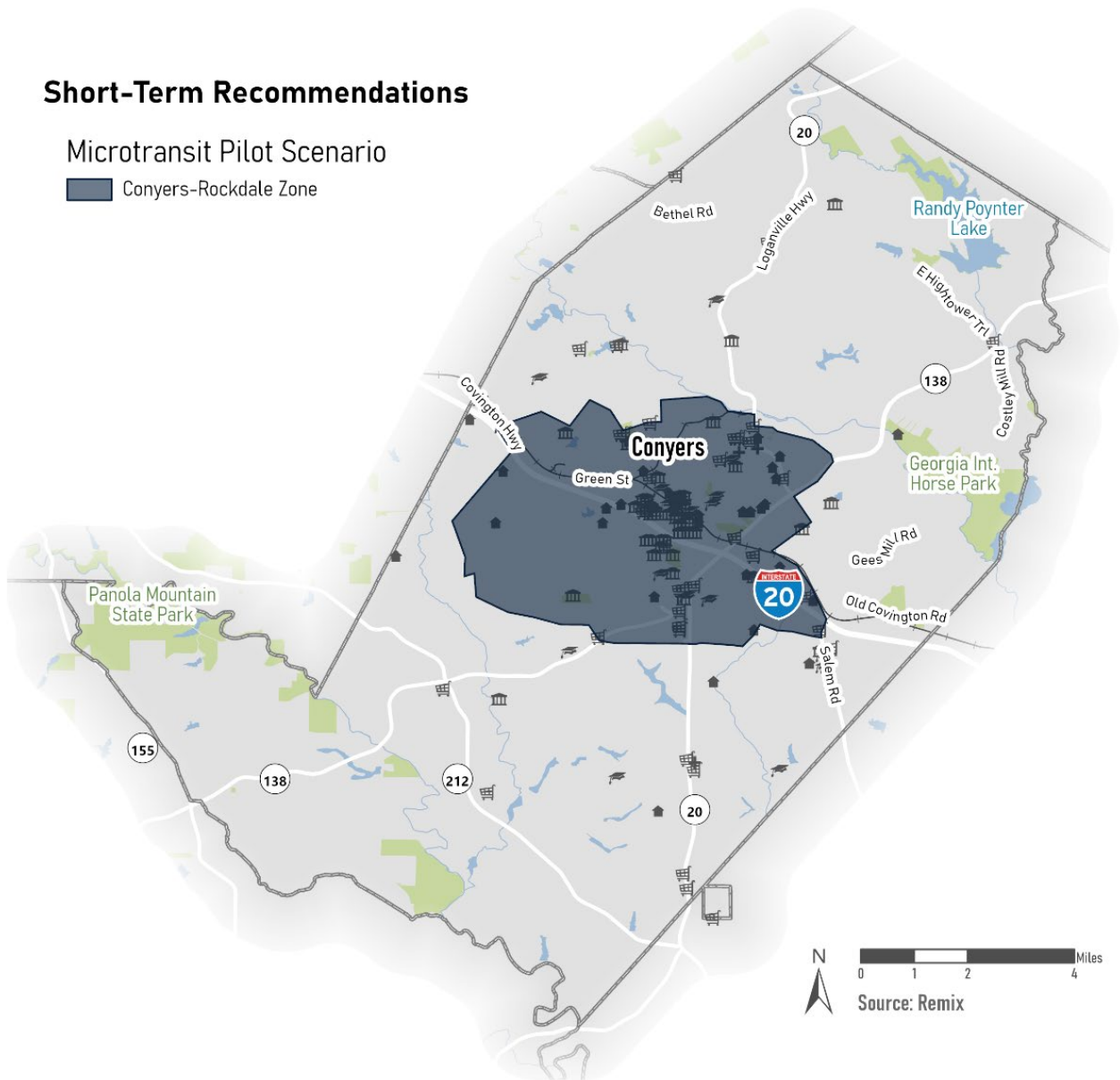
Conyers Park and Ride for transfers to ATL Xpress commuter routes. The zone can be covered with two vehicles, and the average wait time does not impact the vehicle needs for this zone.

FIGURE 5-3: SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS - CONYERS-ROCKDALE PILOT SCENARIO

Short-Term Recommendations

Microtransit Pilot Scenario

 Conyers-Rockdale Zone



Short-Term Key Takeaways

Both microtransit pilot scenarios cover large populations and job markets and provide connections to several key destinations throughout Conyers. The larger Conyers-Rockdale Extended zone provides the benefit of serving nearly twice as many people and jobs as the Conyers-Rockdale Northern zone.

However, while the Conyers-Rockdale Northern zone may provide fewer connections, the smaller size allows the zone to be operated at a lower cost and with fewer resources.

5.2 Mid-Term Recommendations

The mid-term recommendations offer transit solutions for implementation within two to seven years after plan adoption. These recommendations build on the short-term recommendations and continue to address needs identified in the *Transit Service Needs and Market Analysis* report. The recommended mid-term transit investments are detailed in **Table 5.2**.

TABLE 5.2: MID-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Project ID	Project Name	Project Description	Zone	Avg Wait Time (min)	Vehicle Need	Annual Vehicle Hours	Total Estimated Annual Cost
MT-1	Zone-Based Micro transit Service	On-demand microtransit service with five additional zones surrounding the Conyers zone.	North west	20, 30, or 60	1	4,382	\$394K
			North east	60	1	4,382	\$394K
			South west	20 or 30	2	8,764	\$788K
			South east	20, 30, or 60	1	4,382	\$394K
			South east	60	1	4,382	\$394K
			South east	20 or 30	2	8,764	\$788K
MT-2	County wide Micro transit Service	On-demand microtransit service with an additional countywide zone providing connections to the Conyers zone.	County wide	20, 30, or 60	1	4,382	\$394K
				20	18	78,876	\$7.1M
				30	15	65,730	\$5.9M
				60	11	48,202	\$4.3M

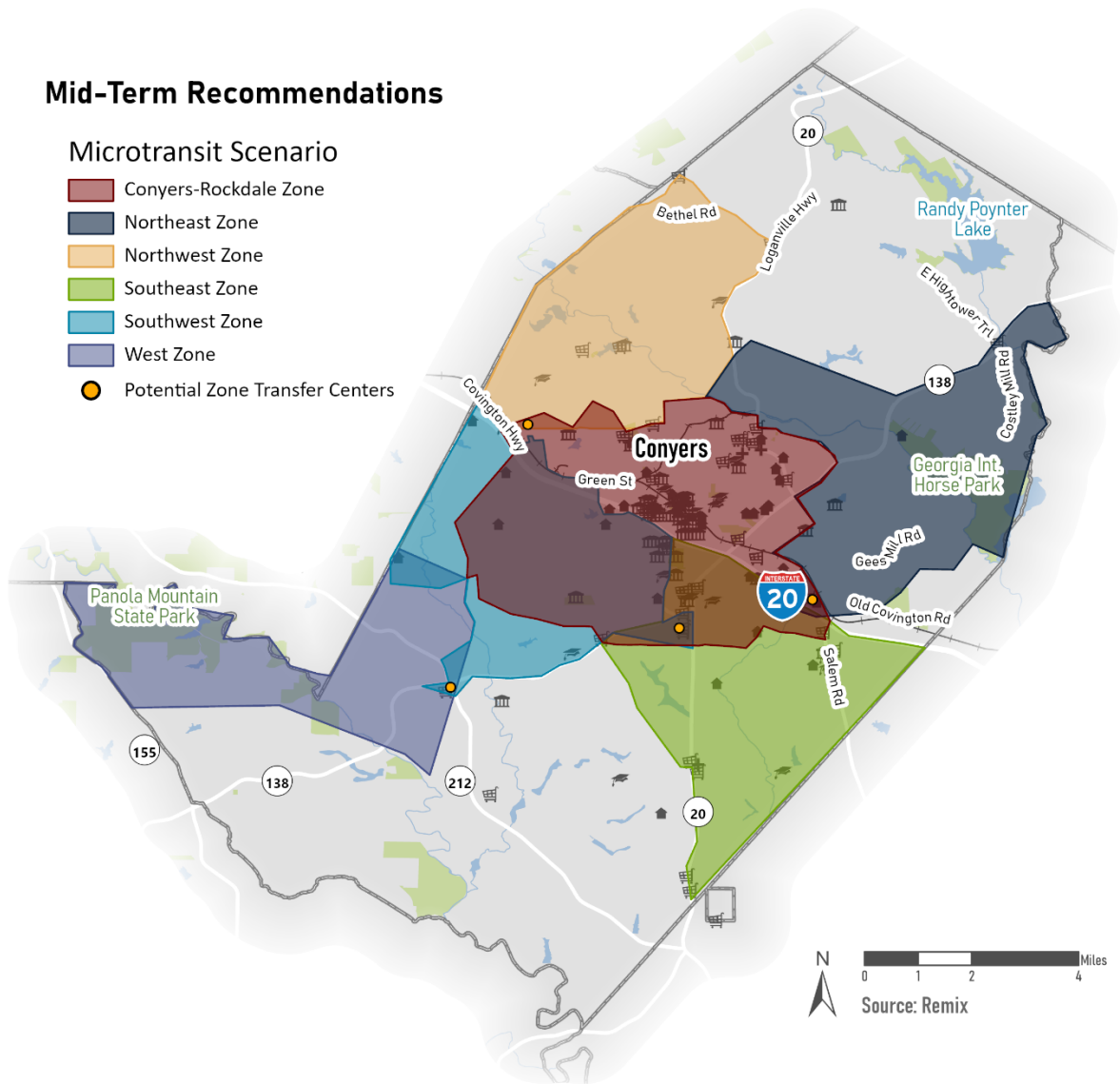
5.2.1 Zone-Based Microtransit Service

In the mid-term, the County should focus on maintaining and expanding microtransit service to areas beyond Conyers. The implementation of zone-based service is one approach to microtransit expansion. Using this approach, the consultant team recommends implementing up to five additional zones surrounding the Conyers zone to provide connections throughout Rockdale County (**Figure 5-4**).

The zone-based scenario includes the following new zones: Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and West. Each zone provides potential transfer locations to other zones and can be gradually phased into service based on level of priority. Implementation priority can be driven by several factors and should be guided by the County's microtransit goals and pre-set performance metrics. Some potential metrics for evaluating priority include number and percent of people and jobs served within a zone, number of points of interest within a zone, and the number of connections to other transit services.

Following a zone-based approach to microtransit, some areas of the county will remain unserved, but the zone-based approach focuses expansion on areas with the greatest transit potential and allows for quicker response times with dedicated vehicles for each zone. However, while the smaller zones minimize the costs and vehicle requirements, it can potentially require two- or three-seat rides for cross county trips.

FIGURE 5-4: MID-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS - ZONE-BASED MICROTRANSIT



Northeast Zone

The Northeast zone borders the northeastern corner of the Conyers zone, providing service north of Milstead and from Walnut Grove Road to the county’s eastern edge. The zone covers an area with over 7,000 people and over 6,000 jobs. Destinations served include Warner Brothers/Bonanza Productions, BJ’s Wholesale Club, Georgia International Horse Park, and several residential neighborhoods. Transfer to the Conyers zone or ATL Xpress commuter service is available at the East Conyers Park and Ride at Springfield Baptist Church.

Northwest Zone

The Northwest Zone provides service north of the Conyers zone from Loganville Highway to the county's western edge. The zone serves a population of over 19,000 people and provides access to over 6,000 jobs. Destinations served include the Lakeview Estates neighborhood, Lake Capri, Conyers Food Mart, and major employers such as Batchelor & Kimball, Inc. and Volume Transportation. Transfer to the Conyers Zone, Southwest Zone, or ATL Xpress commuter service is available at the West Conyers Park and Ride on Sigman Road.

Southeast Zone

The Southeast Zone provides service south of I-20, bounded by Parker Road, Stanton Road, and the county's eastern edge. The area includes nearly 26,000 people and over 10,000 jobs, with major employers such as Golden State Foods and AT&T. Other destinations of interest include Kroger at Conyers Square, Target at Conyers Commons, Publix at The Village at Millers Chapel, Rockdale Emergency Relief/Food Bank, and Salem High School. Transfer to the Conyers zone, Northeast zone, or ATL Xpress commuter service is available at the East Conyers Park and Ride at Springfield Church and transfer to the Southwest zone is available at Conyers Commons.

Southwest Zone

The Southwest Zone provides service southwest of the Conyers zone from Stockbridge Highway to the western edge of the county. It covers a population of nearly 11,000 people and over 5,000 jobs. Major destinations include Aldi, Target at Conyers Commons, Publix at The Village at Millers Chapel, Publix at Smyrna Crossing, Heritage High School, and several Rockdale County administrative buildings. Transfer to the Conyers zone, Northwest zone, or ATL Xpress commuter routes is available at the West Conyers Park and Ride on Sigman Road. Transfer to the Southeast Zone is available at Conyers Commons. Transfer to the West zone is available at Publix at Smyrna Crossing.

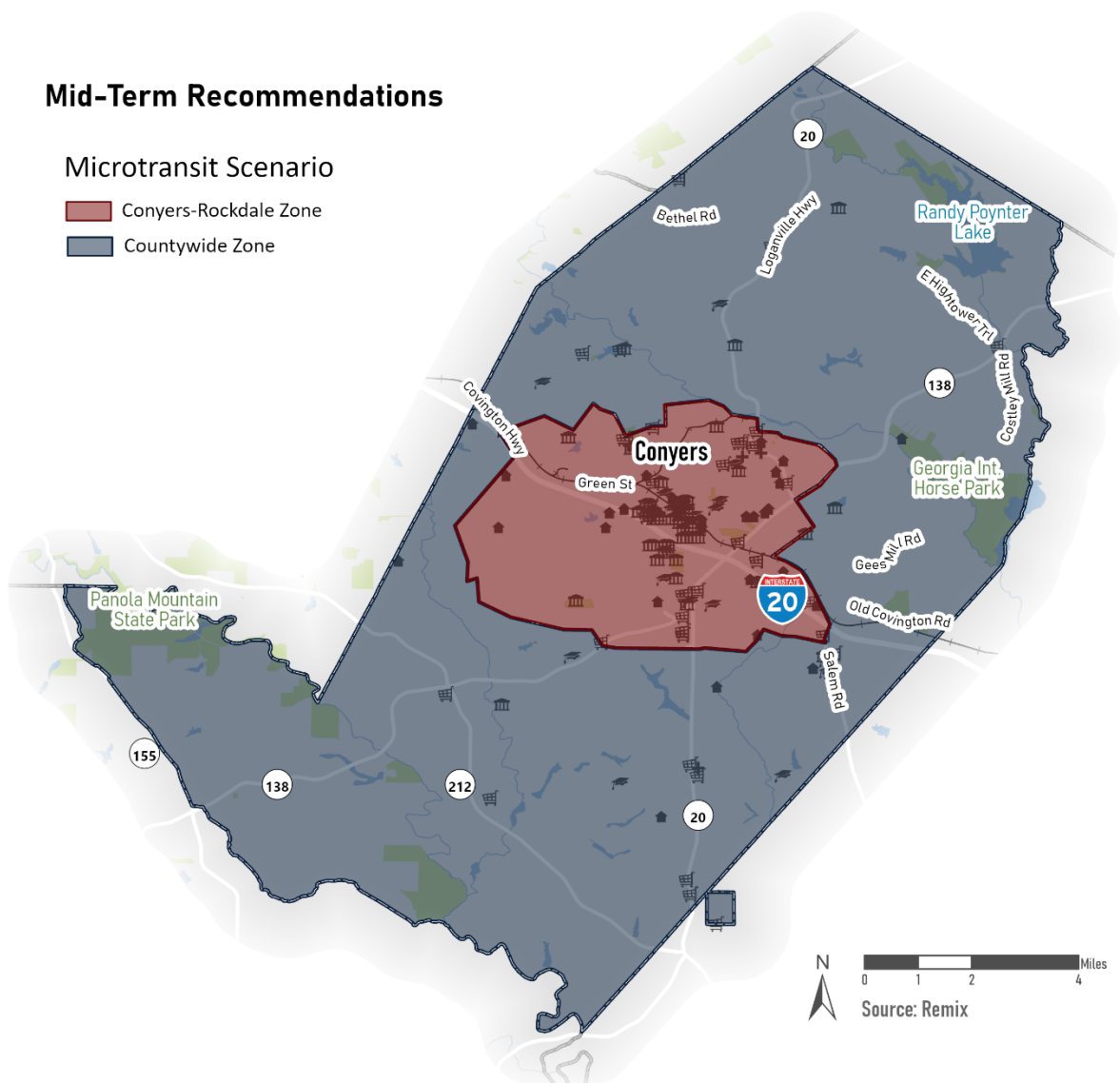
West Zone

The West zone covers the westernmost corner of the county, serving mostly residential areas with a total population of 3,600 and a total of 281 jobs. Destinations of interest include Publix at Smyrna Crossing, Panola Mountain State Park, and several residential communities along Stockbridge Highway. Transfer to the Southwest zone is available at Publix at Smyrna Crossing.

5.2.2 Countywide Microtransit Service

The implementation of countywide service is another approach to microtransit expansion. Under this approach, it is recommended that one additional zone is implemented to cover the entire county and provide connections to the Conyers-Rockdale zone (**Figure 5-5**). Like the zone-based approach, countywide service can be phased in over time, starting with areas directly bordering Conyers and expanding outwards as the service becomes more popular and funds become available. Eventual expansion to countywide service ensures that no Rockdale residents or visitors are left out and allows for one-seat trips across the county. However, it requires a higher vehicle count and potentially longer wait times given the large service area.

FIGURE 5-5: MID-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS - COUNTYWIDE MICROTRANSIT



Mid-Term Key Takeaways

Before expanding microtransit services, the county should evaluate the benefits and potential drawbacks of both the zone-based and countywide approach. Zone-based service would minimize costs and vehicle requirements by utilizing smaller overlapping zones, but this approach would provide fewer and less direct connections across the county. On the other hand, countywide service provides direct connections to the entire county, but would require more resources and longer wait times. Upon evaluation, the county may also choose to continue operating the pilot zone as a permanent service and forego expansion.

5.3 Long-Term Recommendations

The long-term recommendations are transit solutions for implementation from seven years after plan adoption through 2050. These recommendations build on the short- and mid-term recommendations and continue to address needs identified in the *Transit Service Needs and Market Analysis* report. The recommended long-term transit investments are detailed in **Table 5.3**.

Following successful microtransit service operations, the consultant team recommends implementing fixed-route service in the long term. Once the fixed-route network is implemented, microtransit should be adapted accordingly. Microtransit service can continue to operate countywide to provide critical connections to the fixed-route network, or the county can eliminate microtransit assuming the fixed-route network provides adequate service. The fixed-route service recommendations consist of three routes: Stonecrest Mall to Terraces at Fieldstone, Flat Shoals Road to East View Road, and Conyers to Covington. Each recommendation is detailed below and shown in **Figure 5-6**, including two alignments for Conyers to Covington service.

TABLE 5.3: LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Project ID	Project Name	Project Description	Avg Wait Time (min)	Vehicle Need; Annual Vehicle Hours	Capital Cost	Total Estimated Annual Cost
LB-1 (Scenario 1)	Stonecrest Mall to Terraces at Fieldstone	Local bus service from Stonecrest to Conyers along Old Covington Hwy, Dogwood Dr, and Salem Rd	60	2; 8,764	\$400K	\$2.5M
LB-2 (Scenario 1)	Flat Shoals Road to East View Road	Local bus service from the medical center to shopping along Main St, Parker Rd, and McDonough Rd	60	2; 8,764	\$400K	\$2.5M

Project ID	Project Name	Project Description	Avg Wait Time (min)	Vehicle Need; Annual Vehicle Hours	Capital Cost	Total Estimated Annual Cost
LB-1 (Scenario 2)	Stonecrest Mall to Terraces at Fieldstone	Local bus service from Stonecrest to Conyers along Old Covington Hwy, Dogwood Dr, and Salem Rd	30/60	4; 11,896	\$800K	\$3.3M
LB-2 (Scenario 2)	Flat Shoals Road to East View Road	Local bus service from the medical center to shopping along Main St, Parker Rd, and McDonough Rd	30/60	2; 8,764	\$400K	\$3.3M
LB-3A ¹	Conyers to Covington Scenario A	Peak period inter-county bus service (limited stop) from Conyers to Covington along Sigman Rd, I-20, and Iris Dr	60	2; 3,132	\$400K	\$713K
LB-3B	Conyers to Covington Scenario B	Peak period inter-county bus service (local stops in cities) from Conyers to Covington along Old Covington Hwy, Walnut Grove Rd, and Hwy 278	60	2; 3,132	\$400K	\$713K

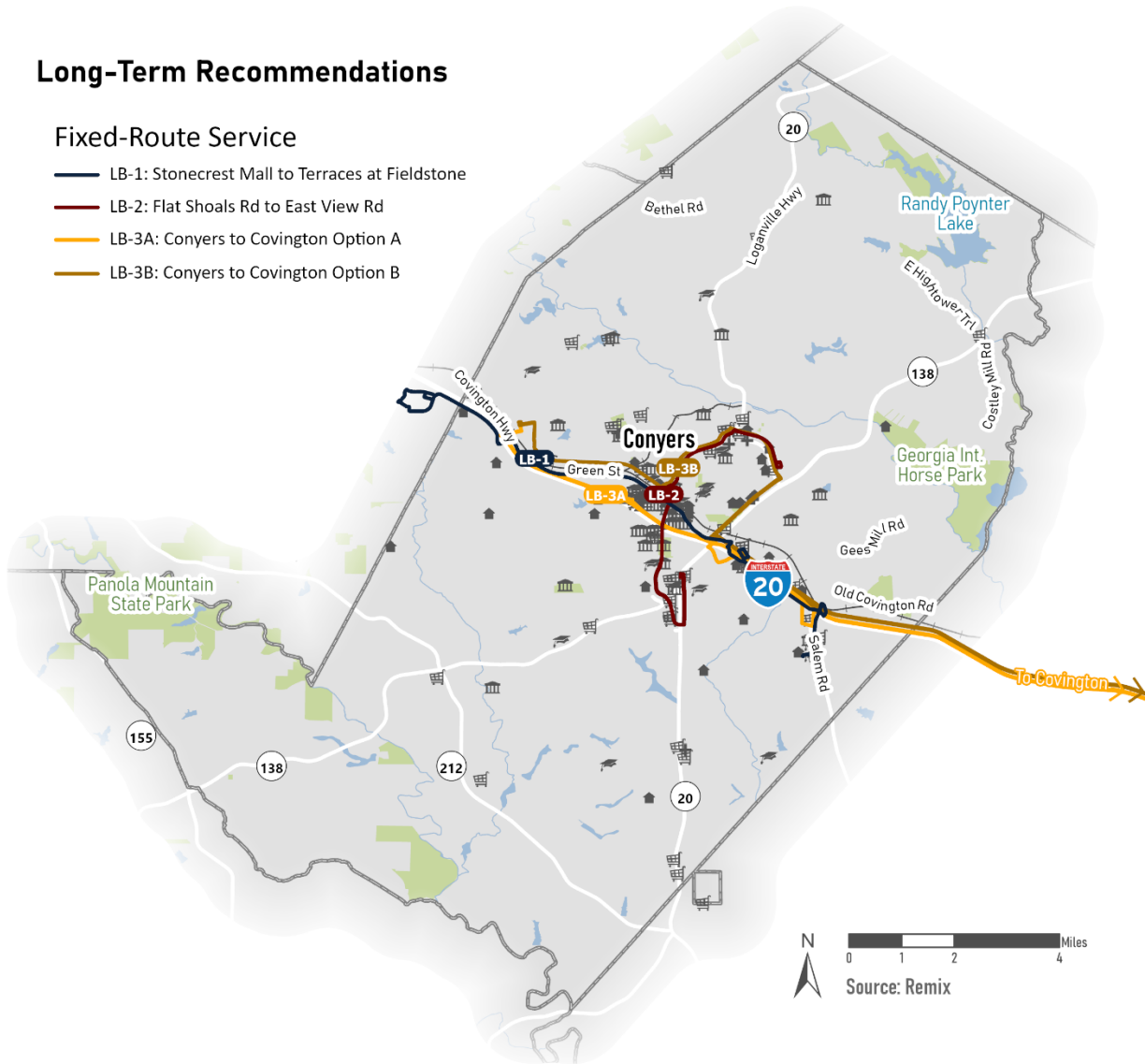
¹ LB-3 Conyers to Covington includes two scenarios/options. Scenario A provides more direct service between downtown Conyers and Downtown Covington; Scenario B provides more local service within downtown Conyers and Covington. In the long-term, when Rockdale County is ready to implement this service, additional analysis will be required to determine if Scenario A or Scenario B is warranted.

FIGURE 5-6: LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

Long-Term Recommendations

Fixed-Route Service

- LB-1: Stonecrest Mall to Terraces at Fieldstone
- LB-2: Flat Shoals Rd to East View Rd
- LB-3A: Conyers to Covington Option A
- LB-3B: Conyers to Covington Option B



5.3.1 LB-1: Stonecrest Mall to Terraces at Fieldstone

The first route recommendation provides east-west service from Stonecrest Mall on Turner Hill Road to Terraces at Fieldstone apartment complex on Ellington Road. The route travels along several key corridors, including Old Covington Highway, Green Street, Dogwood Drive, and Salem Road, serving nearly 6,400 people and approximately 11,600 jobs.² Key destinations include Stonecrest Marketplace shopping center, Walmart on Mall Parkway, Olde Town Conyers, Walmart on Dogwood Drive, Conyers Crossroads shopping center, and Food Depot on Salem Road. There are two scenarios for this route

² People and jobs served by fixed route transit are estimated as the number of people and jobs within ¼-mile of proposed stops using American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Averages for 2016-2020 and the Longitudinal Employer Household Dynamics (LEHD) Survey for 2019.

recommendation. Scenario 1 would provide 60-minute service for 14 hours a day on weekdays and Saturdays. Scenario 2 would provide 30-minute peak service and 60-minute off-peak service for a 14-hour span of service on weekdays and Saturdays. For an average wait time of 60 minutes, two vehicles are needed to operate this service in both directions (inbound and outbound). For an average wait time of 30-minute peak service, four vehicles are needed to operate this service in both directions (inbound and outbound).

5.3.2 LB-2: Flat Shoals Road to East View Road

The second route recommendation provides north-south service from Kroger on Flat Shoals Road to Chevron on East View Road. The route travels along Parker Road, Milstead Avenue, and Sigman Road, serving destinations such as Aldi, Publix, Target, Rockdale Career Academy, Olde Town Conyers, and Rockdale Medical Center. The route serves over 10,000 people and nearly 8,400 jobs. The route travels along Parker Road, Milstead Avenue, and Sigman Road, serving destinations such as Aldi, Publix, Target, Rockdale Career Academy, Olde Town Conyers, and Rockdale Medical Center. There are two scenarios for this route recommendation. Scenario 1 would provide 60-minute service for 14 hours a day on weekdays and Saturdays. Scenario 2 would provide 30-minute peak service and 60-minute off-peak service for a 14-hour span of service on weekdays and Saturdays. For an average wait time of 60 minutes, two vehicles are needed to operate this service in both directions (inbound and outbound). For an average wait time of 30-minute peak service, two vehicles are needed to operate this service in both directions (inbound and outbound).

5.3.3 LB-3: Conyers to Covington

The following two fixed-route scenarios provide limited-stop service from the West Conyers Park and Ride to destinations in Covington. The two alignments are similar, but one focuses on faster and more direct service, while the other increases coverage as described below. Prior to implementation, the county should conduct additional analysis to determine if Scenario A or Scenario B is more appropriate.

LB-3A: Direct Service

The first scenario provides service from the West Conyers Park and Ride to the Covington Park and Ride along I-20, with one stop at the East Conyers Park and Ride. This scenario would provide quick and direct hourly service between the two cities but does not provide service or circulation within the cities. The service would operate similarly to how ATL Xpress operates today. The route serves approximately 500 people and 2,000 jobs. Stops at park and ride lots in both Covington and Conyers provide connections to ATL Xpress and other proposed transit services, connecting transit customers to additional jobs. For an average wait time of 60 minutes during peak periods on weekdays, two vehicles are needed to operate this service in both directions (inbound and outbound).

LB-3B: Coverage Service

The second scenario provides service from the West Conyers Park and Ride to the Walmart on Industrial Boulevard in Covington, with stops along Old Covington Highway, Milstead Avenue, Sigman Road, and Walnut Road in Conyers and Highway 278, Newton Drive, and John R. Williams Highway in Covington. Destinations of interest include Olde Town Conyers, Rockdale Medical Center, Walmart at Conyers Plaza, Food Depot at Covington Crossings, Downtown Covington, Ficquett Elementary School, and Covington Branch Library. In sum, the route serves approximately 12,000 people and 13,000 jobs. For an

average wait time of 60 minutes during peak periods on weekdays, two vehicles are needed to operate this service in both directions (inbound and outbound).

The additional stops in Conyers and Covington in Scenario B provide greater access and connections for residents in the two cities but result in less direct and longer service. Unlike Scenario A, which operates as more of an all-day express bus service, Scenario B operates locally in Conyers and Covington and operates express service on I-20 between the two cities.

Long-Term Key Takeaways

Each fixed-route service recommendation serves a unique purpose and set of destinations. While Stonecrest Mall to Terraces at Fieldstone provides critical east-west connections for residents in Rockdale County, Flat Shoals Road to East View Road serves as a local north-south connector. Both routes connect residents to shopping, jobs, and ATL Xpress commuter service, and would work together to provide connections in all directions. While implementing either of these routes, the County would need to evaluate the total estimated costs, including the additional capital expenses associated with additional county staff to provide oversight of the operations and acquiring county-owned assets. These assets may include vehicles, bus stops and bus stop amenities, and maintenance facility and associated equipment that support operations of a fixed route service.

Meanwhile, the Conyers to Covington route provides inter-county service for residents who may live, work, or frequently visit Newton County. When implementing this route, the County would need to evaluate potential tradeoffs between faster service versus increased connections. Scenario A would deliver faster and more direct service between Conyers and Covington by only serving three park and rides, but Scenario B would provide more connections to several local destinations throughout Conyers and Covington.

5.3.4 Aspirational Long-Term Service

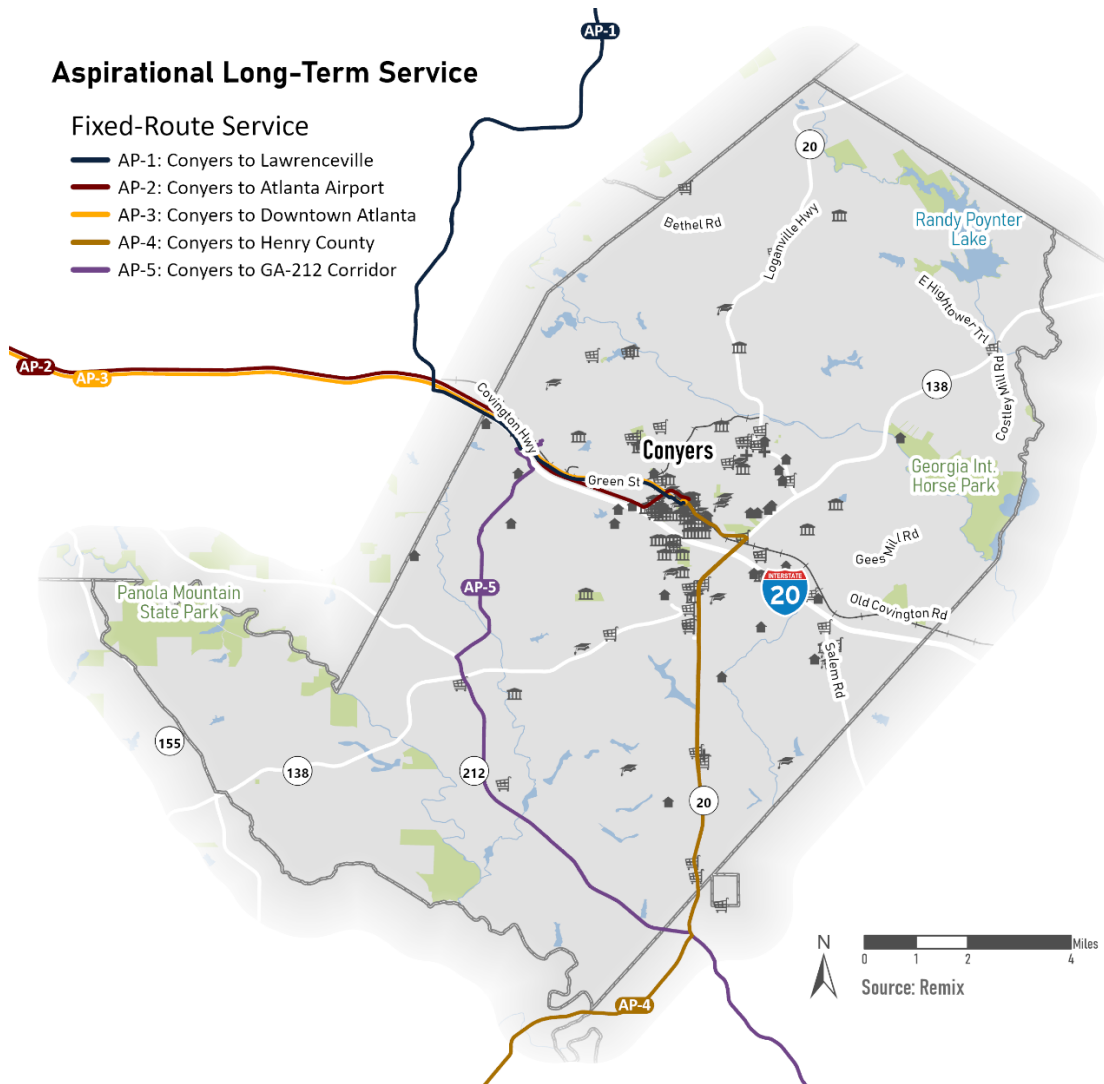
In addition to the long-term fixed-route service recommendations, the consultant team designed five aspirational long-term fixed-route services, which are detailed in **Table 5.4** and shown in **Figure 5-7**.

These routes are larger in scale and meant to provide a vision for longer-term regional service. Unlike the other recommendations, these aspirational long-term service recommendations are not part of the financial plan and will require additional study prior to implementation.

TABLE 5.4: ASPIRATIONAL LONG-TERM SERVICE

Project ID	Project Name	Project Description
AP-1	Conyers to Lawrenceville	Limited stop service from Conyers to Lawrenceville along Old Covington Highway, I-20, and GA-124
AP-2	Conyers to Atlanta Airport	Limited stop service from Conyers to the Atlanta Airport along I-20 and I-285
AP-3	Conyers to Downtown Atlanta	Limited stop service from Conyers to Downtown Atlanta along Old Covington Highway, I-20, and Ted Turner Drive
AP-4	Conyers to Henry County	Limited stop service from Conyers to Henry County along GA-138 and McDonough Highway
AP-5	Conyers to GA-212 Corridor	Limited stop service from Conyers to the GA-212 Corridor along McDaniel Mill Road and Smyrna Road

FIGURE 5-7: ASPIRATIONAL LONG-TERM SERVICE



5.3.4.1 AP-1 Conyers to Lawrenceville

This aspirational service scenario would provide bus service from Main Street in Downtown Conyers to Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville. The route travels along Old Covington Highway, I-20, and GA-124, serving destinations such as Walmart on GA-124 in Snellville, Snellville Pavilion, Publix at Presidential Markets, Sam’s Club on Scenic Highway in Snellville, and Lawrenceville Square Shopping Center. This route serves approximately 1,300 people and nearly 3,000 jobs.

5.3.4.2 AP-2 Conyers to Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport

Bus service from Conyers to the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport would provide a direct connection from Main Street in Downtown Conyers to Domestic Terminal South at the Airport. This limited-stop route travels along I-20 and I-285 and would provide Rockdale County residents with access to over 63,000 airport jobs.

5.3.4.3 AP-3 Conyers to Downtown Atlanta

Fixed-route service from Conyers to Downtown Atlanta would provide connections from Old Covington Highway in Downtown Conyers to the Vine City MARTA Station in Downtown Atlanta. This route would provide service to key destinations such as Mercedes-Benz Stadium, State Farm Arena, and Georgia World Congress Center as well as serve over 450 people in Rockdale County and over 5,000 jobs in Rockdale County and Downtown Atlanta.³

5.3.4.4 AP-4 Conyers to Henry County

Long-term service from Conyers to Henry County would provide a connection from Downtown Conyers to McDonough along GA-138 and McDonough Highway. Key destinations served include Conyers Crossing, Publix at The Village at Millers Chapel, Conyers Commons, Kroger at Newton Crossroads, Henry County Courthouse, and Kroger at McDonough Crossing. This route would provide service to nearly 5,500 people and 4,400 jobs.

5.3.4.5 AP-5 Conyers to GA-212 Corridor

This route would connect the Sigman Road Park and Ride in Conyers to key destinations along the GA-212 corridor. Destinations served include residential communities along McDaniel Mill Road, Publix at Smyrna Crossing, Kroger at Newton Crossroads, Denny Dobbs Park, Porter Memorial Branch Library, and Dollar General on GA- 81. The route would also provide service to over 3,200 people and 555 jobs.

Key Takeaways

Each fixed-route service recommendation serves a unique purpose and set of destinations. While Stonecrest Mall to Terraces at Fieldstone provides critical east-west connections for residents in Rockdale County, Flat Shoals Road to East View Road serves as a local north-south connector. Both routes connect residents to shopping, jobs, and ATL Xpress commuter service, and would work together to provide connections in all directions.

Meanwhile, Conyers to Covington provides inter-county service for residents who may live, work, or frequently visit Newton County. When implementing this route, the county would need to evaluate potential tradeoffs between faster service versus increased connections. Scenario A would deliver faster and more direct service between Conyers and Covington by only serving three park and rides, but Scenario B would provide more connections to several local destinations throughout Conyers and Covington.

As fixed-route service progresses, Rockdale County can look towards aspirational long-term service plans to continue growing their regional connections. For example, service to the Atlanta airport and Downtown Atlanta would provide critical connections between Conyers and the region's anchor city. Furthermore, routes to Lawrenceville, McDonough, and along the GA-212 corridor would increase connections to nearby counties and along the outer ring of the Atlanta region, improving access to opportunities for residents in Rockdale County. Before implementing aspirational service plans, Rockdale County should assess how their needs may have evolved and consider how the routes fit into their long-term goals.

³ This figure is an estimate of jobs in the downtown area at Georgia World Congress, Mercedes-Benz Stadium, and State Farm Arena.

5.4 Policy and Programmatic Strategies

Strategies supporting transit operations are important to maximize returns on transit investments. The TDP has identified a variety of policy programmatic strategies to support the short-, mid-, and long-term projects. These policy and programmatic strategies include safety, education and marketing, walkable places, first-mile/last-mile connections, roadway operational improvements, and transit signal priority.

5.4.1 Safety and Security

Keeping travelers and the community safe and secure is critical to operating a successful transit system. Safety is accomplished through physical infrastructure, technology, training, and enforcement.

Rockdale County has a suburban auto-oriented roadway network with several wide, multi-lane arterials that can be difficult for pedestrians to cross. To increase safety, the county can improve pedestrian crossings in areas with a high number of transit pick-ups and drop-offs or high ridership stops. Example improvements include crosswalks and pedestrian hybrid beacons, commonly known as high intensity activated crosswalk (HAWK) signals. These safety improvements can be implemented as standalone projects or as part of larger first-mile/last-mile connectivity improvements discussed in the Walkable Places section.

Technologies to increase safety on transit vehicles include in-vehicle surveillance, operator communications, and mobile apps that allow riders to covertly report safety concerns and incidents. Combined, these technologies will allow Rockdale County to monitor safety on the system in real-time and improve safety by providing information needed to rapidly respond to incidents and safety issues.

Collaboration between the transit provider and local law enforcement agencies is important for improving incident response and enforcement to keep both riders and the community safe. An on-going training program can prepare the transit provider, law enforcement, and first responders to effectively respond to incidents when they occur. Additionally, close collaboration with law enforcement agencies can improve the response to any potential crimes committed on the transit system.

5.4.2 Marketing and Education

Introducing new transit service in Rockdale County will require significant marketing and education to make potential riders aware of the service and prepare them to use it.

5.4.2.1 Marketing Plan

Building awareness of the brand, transit services, and transportation options among Rockdale County residents is important to drive interest of potential riders. At a minimum, the county should develop a promotional plan for the pilot service.

5.4.2.2 Education and Outreach

Educating potential riders on basic transit skills can increase their comfort level and encourage them to use transit services. The county should develop a traveler training program that teaches key transit skills with a focus on new riders, seniors, and persons with disabilities. The traveler training program can be formatted as a presentation given to groups at senior centers, schools, and other organizations that request it.

The county should develop customer education materials such as videos and brochures summarizing the basic skills needed to ride transit. Videos could be distributed through public access television and the county website. Brochures can be posted on the county website in electronic format. Additionally, brochures can be printed and distributed at key locations throughout the county, including libraries, senior centers, and government offices.

5.4.3 Walkable Places

Creating walkable places is important to build demand for and increase the cost-effectiveness of proposed transit services. An additional benefit is the increased intensity of uses in walkable places increases economic development and tax revenues.

Below are five keys to creating walkable places:

1. People-Friendly Design – does the area feel safe, comfortable, and attractive?
2. Walkability – can people easily make short trips without getting in a car?
3. Density and Intensity – are there enough residents, workers, students, and visitors to support ridership?
4. Mix of Uses – is there a mix of uses that creates activity throughout the day (e.g., residences, offices, retail, restaurants, entertainment)?
5. Managed Parking – is parking right-sized through less visibility and fewer spaces?

5.4.4 First-mile/Last-mile Connections

Every transit journey begins and ends with a trip from the origin to the transit stop and from the stop to the destination. These trips are usually completed on foot or by bicycle. Sidewalks and bicycle infrastructure connecting origins and destinations to transit stops is key to providing safe access to transit and encouraging ridership. To maximize transit potential, the County should provide a connected network of pedestrian and bicycle facilities between transit stops and key origins and destinations.

Recent advances in technology have brought affordable electric scooters and bicycles to market. Both types of vehicles can improve first-mile/last-mile connections by reducing physical exertion compared to unassisted scooters and bicycles, increasing the accessibility and practicality of this mode of transportation. Currently, electric scooter sharing is provided by private companies that usually focus their fleets in dense urban areas. In contrast, several cities across the country including Nashville, Tennessee, have successfully implemented bicycle sharing systems with fleets entirely made up of electric bicycles. The County should explore options for providing an electric bicycle sharing service to complement transit as it is implemented.

5.4.5 Roadway Operational Improvements

Transit vehicles operating in mixed traffic can benefit significantly from roadway operational improvements implemented in congested areas. Both treatments designed to improve general purpose traffic flow or specific to transit can improve schedule adherence and reduce travel times. Improvements for general purpose traffic flow could include signal timing and coordination, access management (e.g., raised center medians, increased spacing between driveways), and operating improvements such as additional turn lanes. Transit specific improvements could include queue jump lanes at intersections or transit-only lanes along congested roadways.

Queue jump lanes are separate transit-only lanes at intersection approaches that allow transit vehicles to bypass general purpose traffic. The downstream side of the intersection can include a transit-only receiving lane, or a short transit-only signal phase with an early green can be implemented for the transit vehicle to bypass the queue. Queue jump lanes are deployed at congested intersections to reduce transit vehicle travel time.

Exclusive lanes for transit vehicles are like queue jumps because they allow transit vehicles to bypass congestion in the general-purpose lanes. Transit-only lanes are usually a more significant investment than queue jumps, as they run along an entire roadway segment and are not just implemented at intersections. Transit-only lanes are most suited to fixed-route service.

5.4.6 Transit Signal Priority & Intelligent Transportation Systems

At intersections, transit signal priority (TSP) technologies can reduce travel times and improve schedule reliability by adjusting signal timing to accommodate transit vehicles. As a transit vehicle approaches a signal, on-board equipment will request priority. This could include holding a green light or reducing green time on opposing phases to get a green light earlier for the transit vehicle. This type of technology could provide the most benefit on fixed routes, or at intersections near major destinations that are frequently used by microtransit vehicles.

Intelligent transportation systems (ITS) encompass several technologies that aim to increase safety and mobility on roadway systems. Existing GDOT and Rockdale County ITS efforts within the proposed microtransit service zones should be leveraged to improve the travel time for microtransit vehicles, leading to reduced wait times, lower travel times, and better performance. For the proposed fixed route services, existing and planned ITS infrastructure can be combined with TSP to further reduce travel times, improve schedule reliability, and provide a better transit experience.

5.5 Equity Analysis

A geospatial analysis of the proposed short-, medium-, and long-term transit was performed to determine the accessibility for the following demographic groups within each microtransit zone and within one-quarter mile of each fixed-route stop:

- Population
- Low-income population
- Minority population
- Zero-vehicle households
- Persons with disabilities
- Senior population
- Youth population
- Limited-English proficiency (LEP) persons
- Jobs

This analysis provided an overview of how the proposed recommendations expand access to various population groups who may be transit reliant, as well as access to jobs. The analysis highlighted who within Rockdale County will be served by the proposed transit recommendations which is important in helping Rockdale County prioritize transit service where it is most likely to generate ridership and expand access to transit-reliant populations.

This analysis also lays the groundwork for any future Title VI analysis Rockdale County may undergo. More detailed information on Title VI requirements can be found in the Transit Service Recommendations Report.

Given Rockdale County's size and relatively dispersed development patterns it is difficult to serve all jobs and population with transit. Focused on Rockdale County's most populous and dense areas, microtransit provides transit coverage to the largest percentage of people and jobs of all the short-, medium-, and long-term recommendations. Of the short-term recommendations, the larger, Conyers-Rockdale microtransit pilot zone, serves more people and jobs than the smaller Conyers microtransit pilot zone. Both zones serve over one-third of Rockdale's low-income households and zero-car households.

The additional microtransit zones proposed in the mid-term continue to expand transit access in Rockdale County. Of the proposed zones, the Southeast Zone serves the greatest number of people and jobs compared to the other proposed zones. Over one-quarter of Rockdale County's jobs, over one-quarter of Rockdale's low-income and zero-car households, and over one-quarter of Rockdale County's youth, senior, minority, and disabled populations are located within the zone.

The long-term, fixed-route service recommendations, overall, serve a smaller percentage of people and jobs compared to the microtransit recommendations. The proposed routes serve between one and 13 percent of Rockdale County's population and between three and 35 percent of Rockdale's jobs.

The aspirational long-term fixed route service recommendations extend outside of Rockdale County to reach employment and recreation destinations across the Atlanta region. This significantly expands Rockdale County residents' access to jobs and opportunities in the long-term. Service to the airport, for example, provides Rockdale County residents with access to the over 60,000 jobs located at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, and service to Downtown Atlanta and Henry County open up access to 5,000 or more jobs via transit. While these routes offer a limited stop service in Rockdale County, thereby limiting the number of jobs within the county that are accessible, they do significantly expand connections outside the county.

6 Funding Considerations

The funding considerations build on the Transit Service Recommendations that were identified to implement transit in Rockdale County in short-, mid-, and long-term categories to meet the anticipated revenue needs. The funding considerations:

- Determined funding methodology and requirements based on estimates of capital and operations & maintenance (O&M) costs for each proposed transit project identified in the phased short-, mid-, and long-term service recommendations
- Identified potential funding opportunities at the national, state, regional, local and project levels
- Developed strategies to fund transit investments based on the opportunities identified

The funding requirements, opportunities, and strategies for the transit service recommendations are summarized below. The full funding assumptions and other details can be accessed in the Funding Considerations Report.

6.1 Funding Methodology + Requirements

This section describes the methodology, assumptions, and requirements used to generate estimate the total funding needed to implement the short-, mid-, and long-term transit investments identified in the *Phased Transit Service Recommendations* report. For each category of transit investment, capital and O&M costs are estimated. The total estimated cost of each recommended transit service is detailed in the Recommendations section above as well as the Funding Considerations Report.

6.1.1 Capital Cost Estimate Methodology

The following general assumptions were used to estimate the capital costs for the Microtransit pilot service recommendations:

- The Microtransit pilot would begin operations in late Spring/early Summer of 2024 and would operate for one full year.
- The Microtransit service is anticipated to be operated through a turnkey contract. The flat rate cost would cover the turnkey service.
- Additional capital expenses for software and licensing fees would be required for in-house operations. These costs are not assumed to be incurred by Rockdale for the Microtransit pilot.

The following general assumptions were used to estimate the capital costs for the long-term fixed route service recommendations:

- Cutaway vehicles, costing approximately \$200,000 each, would be used for the fixed route bus service. Larger vehicles and/or electric vehicles could be more costly and are not included in the capital cost estimate.
- Additional capital expenses would be required for a maintenance facility/garage, bus stops, transit hubs, etc. Costs for the transit hubs and bus maintenance facility vary based on the site selected and are not included in this capital cost estimate.

6.1.2 Operating & Maintenance Cost Estimate Methodology

The following general assumptions were used to estimate the O&M costs for the Microtransit pilot service recommendations:

- Operating cost per vehicle hour (\$90) is based on peer estimates.
- The flat rate covers turnkey service.
- Cost could vary based on selected vendor for the Rockdale Microtransit service.
- Span of service is 14 hours. Hours of operations are weekdays and Saturdays, from 6:00 am to 8:00 pm.
- Minimum vehicle needs for each scenario vary based on average wait time (20-, 30-, or 60-minutes)
- Vehicle need is based on the number of vehicles to operate in the zone. Spare vehicles are not included.

The following general assumptions were used to estimate the O&M costs for the long-term fixed route service recommendations:

- Operating cost per vehicle hour (\$100) is based on peer estimates.
- Cost could vary based on selected vendor for the Rockdale fixed route service.
- The span of service for fixed route is 14 hours. Hours of operations are weekdays and Saturdays, from 6:00 am to 8:00 pm.
- Span of service for commuter service is 6 hours on weekdays only. Hours of operations are 6:00 am to 9:00 am and 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm.
- Minimum vehicle needs for each scenario vary based on average wait time (20-, 30-, or 60-minutes)
- Vehicle need is based on the number of vehicles to operate in the zone. Spare vehicles are not included.

6.2 Funding Opportunities

This section identifies key federal, state/regional, and local funding sources to implement short-, mid-, and long-term transit investments in Rockdale County.

6.2.1 Federal Funding

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. Formula funds and grant programs require a local match to fully fund a project.

Federal transportation funding is primarily derived from federal fuel tax revenue from the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). Federal fuel tax revenue is collected by the Department of Treasury and transferred to the FHWA and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for obligation. The flat rate federal fuel tax of 18.4 cents per gallon (on gasoline) has not been increased since 1993, and fuel tax revenue has been steadily declining due to inflation and increased fuel efficiency. On the transit side, the Mass Transit Account (MTA) receives 2.86 cents of the 18.4 cents per gallon (on gasoline). The HTF and the MTA continue to

face a funding crisis, relying on the transfer of General Fund revenue since 2008 to keep each account solvent.

Currently, the FHWA and FTA distribute federal formula funds to states according to various programs outlined in the most recent surface transportation authorization bill, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). The BIL is the largest long-term investment in infrastructure and economy in our country's history. It provides \$550 billion over fiscal years 2022 through 2026 in new Federal investment in infrastructure, including in roads, bridges, and mass transit, water infrastructure, resilience, and broadband.

Rockdale County receives a suballocation of FTA Section 5307 formula funds based on population. 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. Local governments can apply to become FTA direct recipients. By doing so, they could assume more control in receiving FTA funds directly and all responsibilities associated with that control.

However, the process to become an FTA direct recipient can take up to a year and requires coordination with the FTA Regional Office. 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. The County could execute an agreement with the ATL to access its FTA 5307 formula funds, which would be a faster process.

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.

In addition to the federal formula funds, Rockdale County may be able to increase its share of federal funding for transportation by pursuing competitive federal grant and loan programs that are available to fund transit projects, including microtransit. Key federal discretionary grant opportunities are shown in **Table 6.1**.

TABLE 6.1: KEY DISCRETIONARY FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Accelerating Innovative Mobility (AIM)	Mobility on Demand (MOD) Sandbox programs support mobility, accessibility, equity, and innovation in the transit industry.
Enhancing Mobility Innovation (EMI)	FHWA “flex” formula funds - Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) and Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG)
Integrated Mobility Innovation (IMI)	Carbon Reduction Funds
Other potential programs created, retooled, or expanded as part of IIJA or a future infrastructure bill	

Many of these discretionary programs are highly competitive, and project sponsors are incentivized to leverage a higher local match to increase project competitiveness for a limited pool of federal dollars. Furthermore, federal funding programs typically do not provide 100% funding for construction and operation and maintenance of 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 typically 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. A considerable amount of labor can be expended in the pre-award phase (researching funding opportunities and applying for grants), award phase (administrative, financial, and programmatic reporting requirements of the award), and post-award phase (financial and programming reporting for closeout) in the grant process.

6.2.2 State Funding

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. Similar to federal funding, the primary source of state transportation funding is a 26 cents per gallon tax on gasoline and a 29 cents per gallon tax on diesel. Fuel tax revenue is legislatively restricted for use on roads and bridges and is programmed by GDOT.

The Georgia General Assembly previously allocated a little over \$20 million per year to statewide transit needs from revenue generated by various fees imposed on hotel lodging, electric vehicles, and heavy

vehicles. Over the past few years, the Georgia General Assembly has made several advancements in statewide transit funding as shown in **Table 6.2**.

TABLE 6.2: SELECT STATE SOURCES OF FUNDING

Funding Source	Description
The Georgia Transit Trust Fund was established in 2021 (see Ga. Code §48-13-141)	Revenue generated by a new state ride-hailing fee is now appropriated annually to the trust fund and dedicated for use by one or more transit providers for capital transit projects throughout the state of Georgia. The first allocations were made in 2021 for MARTA’s Bankhead rail station (\$6 million) and a new bus maintenance facility in Athens-Clarke County (\$1 million).
The Georgia Transportation Trust Fund was established in 2021 (See Ga. Code §40-2-151.2).	Revenue generated by the various fees imposed on hotel lodging, electric vehicles, and heavy vehicles is now appropriated annually to the trust fund and dedicated for use and expended by the GDOT Commissioner for transportation purposes and transit projects. No more than 10% of the funds may be expended on transit projects.
The Atlanta-Region Transit Link Authority (ATL) was created in 2018 as a new regional transit planning organization and designated recipient of federal transit funds.	The ATL manages federal and state transit funding for the Atlanta region, including Rockdale County. The ATL recommends an annual list of projects of regional and state significance for possible state bond proceeds (see Ga. Code §50-39-4). With the creation of the ATL, the Georgia General Assembly dedicated \$100 million in state bond proceeds for the Georgia 400 BRT Project in 2018. The Georgia General Assembly also made a one-time award of \$75 million in general obligation bond proceeds to 11 transit projects in nine communities across the state in 2015.

6.2.3 Local Funding

Similar to the majority of counties within the state, sales tax is Rockdale County’s primary source of funding for existing and future transportation services. Georgia has several different sales tax mechanisms that are currently used to fund county transportation and transit projects. Each mechanism has a unique history and specific requirements, including minimum and maximum sales tax rates, allowable sales, eligible expenditures, and sunsets.

The existing RDOT transportation projects and transit services provided by Rockdale Senior Services are funded by different sources. These include local funding (i.e., county general fund) and federal grant programs (e.g., FTA’s 5310 program). 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. RDOT utilizes County SPLOST funds to make improvements to bridges, sidewalks, and roadways, including resurfacing, maintenance, widening, and other enhancements. In addition to SPLOST funds, RDOT receives local funding from the County’s general fund budget and grant awards. There is currently no established funding source for transit that would be operated by RDOT. The County’s SPLOST program does not provide funding for transit operations.

Potential options for local funding sources include transit fares, government budgets, general funds, sales tax referendums, advertising, concessions, parking fees, or 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. Select local funding opportunities available for transit projects in Rockdale County are shown in **Table 6.3**.

TABLE 6.3: SELECT LOCAL SOURCES OF FUNDING

Funding Source	Description
General Funds	The Rockdale County General Fund is the largest component of the County’s annual budget and is primarily comprised of property tax revenue. Rockdale County General Funds support all other county activities, including administrative and personnel costs for police, courts, water, parks, library, transportation, senior services transportation, and more.
Fare Revenue	Passenger fare collected at the farebox is a common source of revenue for transit providers.
Advertising Revenue	A common source of revenue for transit providers is income from advertisements placed on vehicles, facilities, and transit-related materials such as schedules and maps.

6.2.4 Peer Systems

Financing the construction, operation and maintenance of transit systems, including related capital expenses (vehicle purchases, facilities, etc.) involve different types of funding sources. These include federal and non-federal grants, revenue sources (i.e., fare revenue, advertising revenue), and other sources. As microtransit and on-demand transit software solutions become more commonplace in transit systems across the country, agencies and cities that operate this service have developed a number of ways to fund their microtransit projects. The examples below demonstrate how transit partners have launched, sustained, and grown microtransit service and software solutions for their respective service areas.

In 2021, Community Transit in Lynnwood, Washington was evaluating microtransit solutions to complement the City’s fixed route bus service. The service was anticipated to start in spring 2022 as a one-year pilot to allow the agency to assess the riders’ needs before implementing the next steps. The overall pilot program was funded as part of a \$1 million CMAQ grant.

The City of Valdosta, Georgia, launched Valdosta On-Demand in April 2021. The service is a dynamically routed on-demand transit service for all riders within the city limits. Initially, the FTA funded 80% of expected costs for the City of Valdosta public transportation system; FTA Cares Act funding was anticipated to cover the City's match, which is 20% of expected costs. In future years, the FTA will continue to fund 80% of costs while the portion of the City's responsibility can be mitigated via advertising, additional grants, and in-kind service agreements.

In Cherokee County, Georgia, the Cherokee Area Transportation Service (CATS) is implementing a microtransit software solution to reduce wait times for bus service in the county. CATS is initiating the new pilot software program to enhance service in the Canton fixed route service area that is currently underperforming. Passengers will use a phone or tablet to schedule trips and make payment via the app as an option to paying cash for the trip. The CATS pilot program will use local funds that are included in the CATS fiscal year 2024 budget. The cost of the program is \$487,058 over five years. The first-year cost of the program is \$235,822, including implementation, training and first year services. The FTA is responsible for 80% of these costs; Cherokee County will pay 20%. Ongoing services after the first year are projected to cost \$62,809 a year in years two through five and will be funded through a 50/50 match with the FTA.

6.3 Funding Strategies

This section distills funding opportunities identified previously and matches them with strategies to implement, operate, and maintain the short-, mid-, and long-term transit investments.

6.3.1 Short-Term

The recommended funding strategy to implement, operate, and maintain the short-term transit investment in the microtransit pilot is to claim the approximately \$1.4 million in FTA 5307 funds that have been suballocated to Rockdale County over the last five fiscal years (FY2019 through FY2022). These 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. If these funds are not accessed by the county, then they can be transferred back to the ATL to reallocate to an eligible recipient in the Atlanta region.

The Rockdale microtransit pilot will be funded through a 80/20 match with the FTA 5307 funds. The County's general fund budget and estimated fare revenue from ridership could comprise the local funds needed to provide the remaining funds to fully fund the microtransit pilot. Additionally, the County could apply for funding through the Atlanta Regional Commission TIP solicitation call for projects in the spring of 2024. Also, the County could submit projects for inclusion in the ATL's Regional Transit Plan (ARTP) for consideration for state funding in 2024.

6.3.2 Mid-Term

As the County evaluates the benefits and potential drawbacks of expanding microtransit service to either the zone-based or countywide approach, a mid-term funding strategy that leverages federal, state, and local sources of funding would be optimal. In the mid-term, the county should focus on utilizing its annual suballocation of FTA 5307 funds, applying for additional competitive federal and state funding, and expanding its local funding sources beyond the general fund and farebox revenue (i.e., advertising) to fully fund and support the expansion of the transit system.

6.3.3 Long-Term

As the County evaluates the benefits and potential drawbacks of expanding to local fixed-route and inter-county service, a long-term funding strategy that leverages federal, state, and local sources of funding would continue to be optimal. Additional capital costs, such as vehicle purchases, bus stop signage and amenities, and bus maintenance facility and equipment would need to be considered. As the County transitions from the turnkey microtransit service, the contract options of the third-party service provider for the fixed-route service would need to be evaluated. Such options include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Service contract: the contractor provides maintenance and transit service, and the County provides the vehicles
- Service contract: the contractor provides transit service only, and the County provides the vehicles and maintenance
- Vehicle maintenance contract: the contractor provides maintenance, and the County provides vehicles and transit service
- Vehicle lease contract: the contractor provides vehicles, and the County provides maintenance and transit service

- Maintenance/lease contract: the contractor provides vehicles and maintenance, and the County provides transit service
- Turnkey contract: the contractor provides vehicles, maintenance, and transit service
- Vehicle/service contract: the contractor provides the vehicles and transit service, and the County provides maintenance

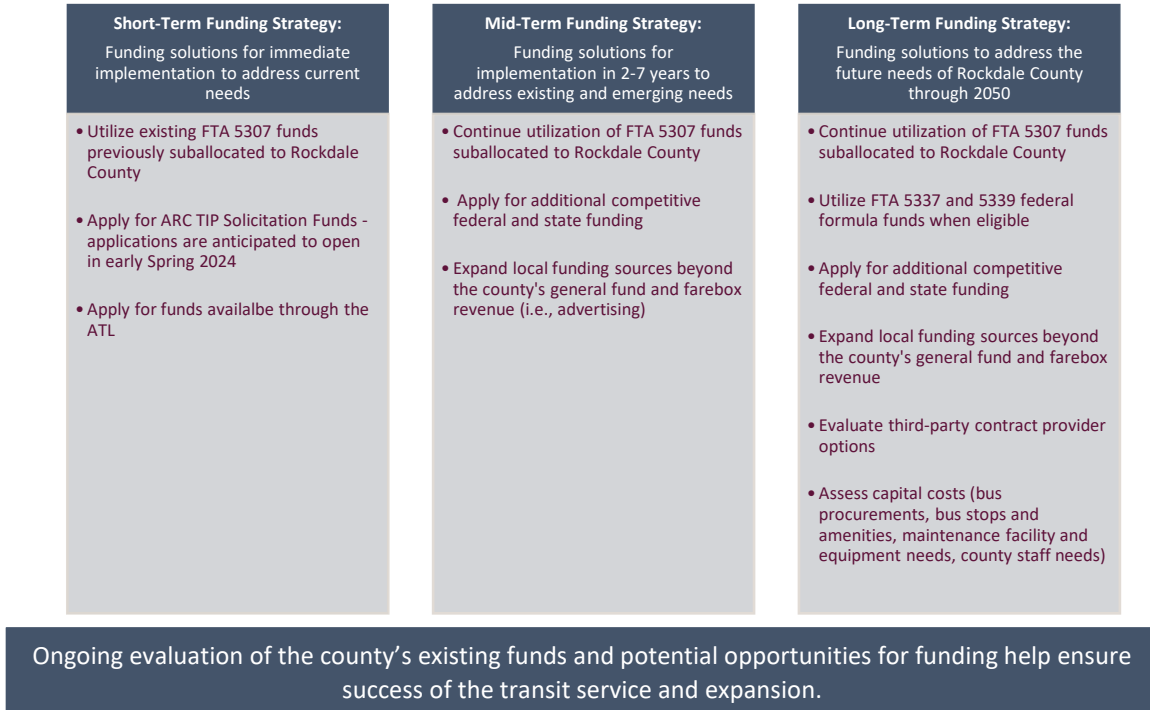
As the county explores these options, additional considerations should be given to the growth of the system and contract type, as additional county staff would be needed for in-house services performed by the County and/or oversight needed of the growing transit system. Long-term, the County should focus on utilizing its annual suballocation of FTA 5307 funds, applying for additional competitive federal and state funding, and expanding its local funding sources beyond the general fund and farebox revenue (i.e., advertising) to fully fund and support the expansion of the transit system.

In addition to 5307 formula funds, FTA provides other key federal funding programs that can be used towards transit projects. These include the following:

- **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. The federal share for eligible capital expenses is not to exceed 80 percent of the net project cost. The County could become an eligible recipient of these formula funds after they operate a “fixed guideway and/or high-intensity motorbus system” in revenue service for at least seven full federal fiscal 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. If the County decides to implement fixed -route bus service in the long-term, then they could become an eligible recipient of these formula funds.

Figure 5-1 summarizes the short-, mid-, and long-term funding strategy for the Rockdale transit system recommendations.

FIGURE 6-1: SHORT-, MID-, AND LONG-TERM FUNDING STRATEGY



7 Implementation Strategy and Next Steps

The figure below outlines the Rockdale TDP’s study process and illustrates that the study is almost complete. The final major deliverable is the Transit Development Plan (this report) which summarizes the planning process, stakeholder and public outreach, the preferred investment scenario, funding plan, and implementation strategies.

TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

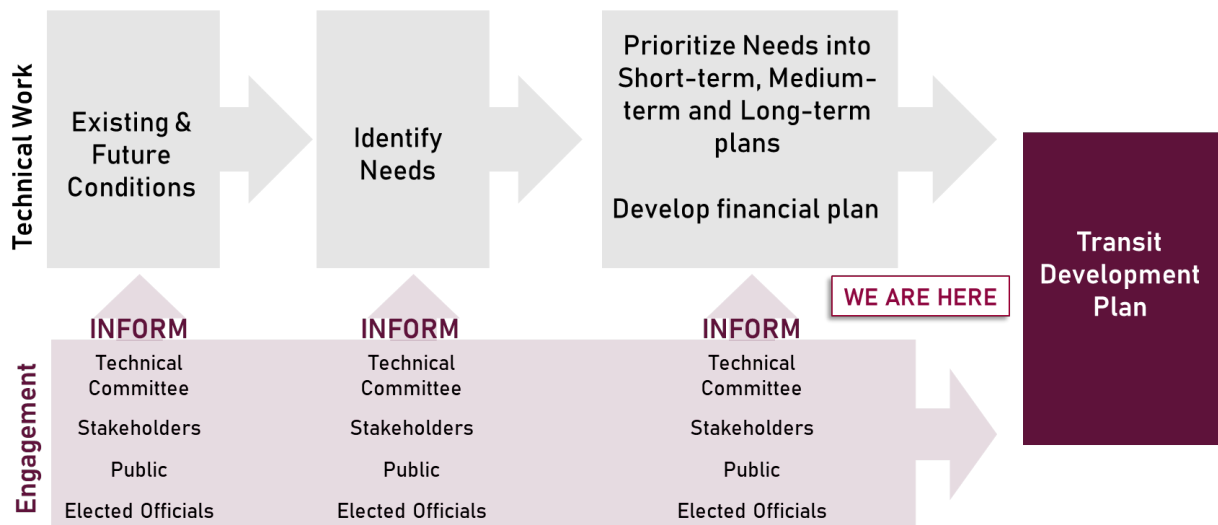


FIGURE 7-1: ROCKDALE TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN (TDP) PLANNING PROCESS

7.1 Implementation Strategy

The implementation strategy guides the delivery of the transit services recommended in this TDP. Funding, service delivery and education are the key components of the implementation strategy and are described as follows.

No projects can be delivered without funding. Rockdale County should pursue funding opportunities including FTA formula funds as well as additional grants. As FTA formula funds require a local match and grants are often discretionary, a steady source of local funding should be identified and obligated.

The three keys to service delivery are start small, evaluate, and iterate. By implementing pilot projects first, Rockdale County can gather valuable information about how riders use the service and their preferences with a lower initial commitment of resources. The pilot projects should be evaluated regularly to identify opportunities to improve the projects or redirect resources. After each evaluation, the county can iterate by introducing service enhancements to the project or identifying the next TDP projects to implement.

Transit will be a new service in Rockdale County, making education and marketing important for success. As the County prepares to begin service, educational materials on benefits of transit service as well as

instructions on how to use transit should be developed. As services continue to be delivered, the public should be educated about the new transportation options and the additional benefits they bring.

7.2 Next Steps

The path to TDP implementation requires a series of early actions, which are described as follows.

7.2.1 Pursue Funding for Microtransit Pilot Service

Approximately \$1.4 million in FTA 5307 funds have been suballocated to Rockdale County over the last five fiscal years (FY2019 through FY2022). These funds are available to the county from the appropriated year plus five years, meaning funds appropriated in FY2019 are available only until September 2024. The first step in pursuing funding for the microtransit pilot service is to execute an agreement with the ATL to access the FTA 5307 funds. A 20 percent local match is required to access FTA 5307 funds, so the second step is for the county to budget local funding, which could comprise estimated fare revenues and an obligation from the county's general fund budget. The third step is to submit a TIP Solicitation application to ARC during their call for projects, anticipated Spring 2024, for additional funding. Throughout the pursuit, coordinate with other county staff such as Finance-Grants and Senior Services to identify potential additional sources of funding.

7.2.2 Identify and Contract with a Microtransit Pilot Operator

To make the best use of limited capital and staff resources, Rockdale County should contract a third-party vendor to manage and operate the microtransit service day to day. The county provides contract oversight, while the vendor provides vehicles, drivers, and technology. Rockdale County staff should issue an RFP for microtransit services and select a vendor.

7.2.3 Marketing and Education

Rockdale County should develop a promotional plan for the pilot service. The promotional plan should aim to increase awareness of the brand, describe the transit service and benefits, and outline the transportation options available. Promotional materials should include clear and concise instructions on how to use the pilot service.

Additionally, because transit will be a new service in Rockdale County, a traveler training program should be developed. The program should focus on teaching key transit skills to new riders, seniors, and persons with disabilities. As a first step, the traveler training program can be formatted as a presentation that can be given to groups at senior centers, schools, and other locations as requested.

7.2.4 Coordination with County Departments & Agency Partners

Rockdale County Transportation staff should coordinate with Planning and Development staff to encourage development patterns that lead to walkable places in the microtransit zone and around future fixed-route stops.

Rockdale County should collaborate with agency partners, including the ATL, ARC and GDOT on the advancement of projects and recommendations consistent with the TDP. This includes coordination with the ATL on federal funding opportunities and ARC on TIP solicitation. Coordination with GDOT should take place regarding implementing TSP and/or queue jump lanes at Rockdale County intersections with GDOT owned traffic signal infrastructure and/or roadways.

7.2.5 Continue Implementing Projects

As additional funding is obligated and/or grants are won, continue implementing TDP mid- and long-term projects.