



## **Executive Summary**

Final

October 4, 2017



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Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, income, or family status. Persons who require special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or persons who require translation services (free of charge) should contact Marybeth Soderstrom, HRTPO Title VI Liaison, 863-534-7130, extension 134 (voice), or via Florida Relay Service 711, or by email: [msoderstrom@cfrpc.org](mailto:msoderstrom@cfrpc.org).

## INTRODUCTION

This study was initiated by the Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) to prepare a Transit Development Plan (TDP) for Highlands County, including the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area, to be eligible for State public transportation funding.

This TDP, called the **Highlands Transit Plan**, will help establish a strategic vision to guide the planning, development, and potential implementation of public transportation service in Highlands County over the next 10 years.

The Highlands Transit Plan includes the following key elements:

- > Evaluation of demographics and travel behavior/patterns
- > Assessment of existing public transportation options
- > Summary of public involvement and community outreach efforts and input received
- > Identification and prioritization of public transportation service and capital needs
- > Ten-year service, financial, and implementation plan

Specific service options to meet the needs of the community may include those developed in this TDP or other options detailed in operations planning, which would be required before services are implemented. The TDP is a guide to local decision-making, but should not be considered as a budgetary document or as a commitment to implementation.

### *State Requirement*

The Highlands Transit Plan is consistent with the requirements of the State of Florida Public Transit Block Grant Program, enacted by the Florida Legislature to provide a stable source of funding for public transportation. The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) requires recipients of Block Grant Program funds to prepare a major TDP update every five years. This requirement helps to ensure that the public transportation services being provided and planned for are consistent with the community's mobility needs. Each update must be submitted to the appropriate FDOT District Office by September 1st of the year due.

### *Plan Development*

Developing the Highlands Transit Plan involved a number of planning activities, including documenting the study area conditions, analyzing socio-economic characteristics, evaluating the existing Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) and rural public transportation services provided in Highlands County, gathering and analyzing public input, forecasting ridership, developing a situation appraisal, identifying transit needs, and preparing a cost-feasible 10-year service and financial plan.

## BASELINE CONDITIONS

One of the first steps in preparing the Highlands Transit Plan is assessing the baseline conditions of the study area, which includes all of Highlands County with a focus on the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area designated by the 2010 Census. The baseline conditions assessment provides context for the Highlands Transit Plan through the following components.

- > A description of the study area
- > Existing public transportation services
- > Population and housing profile, including age, income, and population/housing densities
- > Employment and economic profile, including employment characteristics and densities, commuting and journey-to-work patterns, tourism, and future land use policies

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement is a critical component in the TDP development process to assess a community’s vision for existing and future service needs. In developing the Highlands Transit Plan, numerous public outreach activities were conducted throughout the county to understand and obtain feedback from the community.

Public Involvement for the Highlands Transit Plan was conducted in two phases. The first phase was used to identify the community’s public transportation needs and the potential service options to present to the public for further evaluation. The second phase presented the proposed service options to the public for prioritization and input on funding mechanisms to be considered in the Plan.

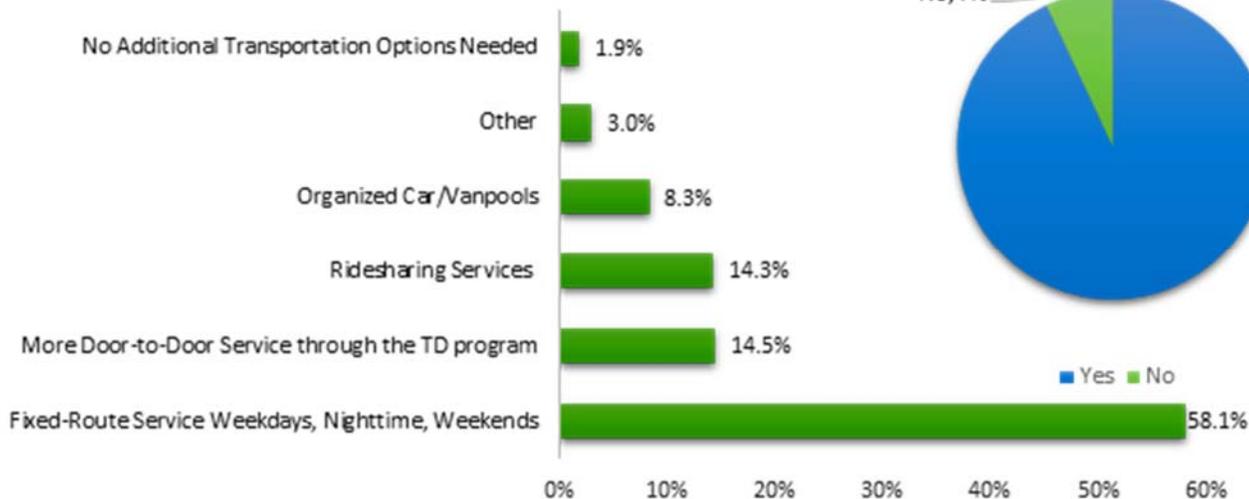
The table to the right highlights the different public involvement activities undertaken and the estimated number of people reached at each during the Highlands Transit Plan. Although many people were engaged at open events, such as the Highlands County Fair, and through communication tools such as the HRTPO website, it is difficult to quantify the exact number of contacts made from each activity.

To ensure the participation of as many residents as possible, outreach efforts were varied and included both direct involvement techniques and information distribution techniques. Two key highlights from the transportation needs survey, as completed by 771 participants, are shown below.

Outreach Event	Participants
<b>Phase 1 Activities</b>	
Stakeholder Interviews	27
Transportation Needs Survey	771
Public Workshops (3)	23
Highlands County Fair	Various
Community Presentations	75+
<b>Phase 2 Activities</b>	
Community Transit Forum	20
Service Options Survey	156
Public Workshop	15
Blueberry Festival	Various
<b>Information Distribution Techniques</b>	
HRTPO Website	Various
Email Campaigns	247+
HRTPO Facebook Page	2,900+
PSAs and Radio Spots	Various
Newspaper Advertisements	Various

### Public Transportation Needs Survey

**Q: What transportation options would people like to see?**



**Q: Is there a need for fixed-route public transportation service in Highlands County?**





## VISION, MISSION, AND GOALS

Setting goals and objectives is a critical foundation for any successful planning effort and should stem from values inherent in the community’s vision for the future. Florida’s TDP Rule requires inclusion of the public transportation provider’s vision, mission, goals, and objectives. A goal is a statement of what needs to be accomplished to implement the vision, and objectives and policies outline more specific actions needed to achieve the goal.

Goals, objectives, and policies to support the planning, implementation, and operation of Highlands County’s public transportation system over the next 10 years were formed from the Highlands Transit Plan development process.

### Vision



Highlands County will have mobility choices allowing residents and visitors to travel easily and efficiently using accessible public transportation.

### Mission



To provide Highlands County with safe, dependable, and cost efficient public transportation options.

### Goals



- > Goal 1: Expand mobility choices for residents and visitors.
- > Goal 2: Create and maintain a reliable and efficient public transportation system.
- > Goal 3: Support tourism and economic development.
- > Goal 4: Maximize safety and security for all transportation services and facilities.

## GOVERNANCE & OPERATING STRUCTURE OPTIONS

As part of the implementation plan for public transportation service within the Sebring–Avon Park Urbanized Area, a decision about the appropriate governance and operating structures must be made. During development of the Highlands Transit Plan, several options for governance structures were evaluated. Ultimately, it is recommended that the HRTPO serve as the governing agency for a number of reasons described in detail in Section 11 of the Plan. It is likely that the HRTPO will need to contract out operating services, at a minimum, but potentially may need to do so for all services and provide management/oversight of the contract as the responsible agency.

A proposal to move forward with the HRTPO as the governing agency in preparing the 10-year service and financial plan for the Highlands Transit Plan was presented to the HRTPO Board on June 21, 2017. At this meeting, the HRTPO approved a motion to designate the HRTPO as the preferred governing agency for the basis of decisions and direction provided in the Highlands Transit Plan.

# 10-YEAR SERVICE & FINANCIAL PLAN

## Public Transportation Service Options

At its June 21, 2017 meeting, the HRTPO Board provided direction to explore service options that would add door-to-door dial-a-ride service in the Sebring–Avon Park Urban Transit Area than was presented in the initial proposed fixed-route system (discussed in Section 7 of the Highlands Transit Plan). From this direction, four service options were developed that use a combination of dial-a-ride service, flex routes, and express service between Avon Park and Sebring within the designated Urban Transit Area. Each of the four service options assume weekday service will be provided from 7:00 am to 6:00 pm.

### Option 1: Urban Dial-a-Ride Service

Dial-a-ride service is a door-to-door, reservation-based service that operates similar to the County’s existing TD service; however, unlike TD services, anyone is eligible to use the service to any destination within the Urban Transit Area.

### Option 2: Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex Service

Under this option, the urban dial-a-ride service within the Urban Transit Area is complemented by the Sebring/Lake Jackson flex route. The flex route provides scheduled stops to a limited number of key activity centers and major destination along the route at a 30-minute frequency and door-to-door service on a reservation basis for other destinations up to 1.5 miles from the route.

### Option 3: Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex Services + Express Service

This option builds upon Option 2 by adding the Avon Park Flex route with deviations up to 1 mile from the route, in addition to the urban dial-a-ride service and Sebring/Lake Jackson flex route. This option also includes the Avon Park–Sebring express route to provide connecting fixed-route service between the Avon Park and Sebring/Lake Jackson flex routes with limited stops in between for faster service than the flex route. The two flex routes are proposed at 30-minute frequencies, and the express route is proposed at a 60-minute frequency.

### Option 4: Flex + Express Service

This option includes the two flex routes (Avon Park and Sebring/Lake Jackson) and the Avon Park–Sebring express route included in Option 3 at the same frequencies as previously noted, but removes the dial-a-ride service.

### Complementary ADA Paratransit Service

ADA paratransit service is not required for dial-a-ride service or express or flex routes. Since the four service options presented above include a combination of these three service types, no complementary ADA paratransit service is required or considered in the 10-year plan.

## Other Capital/Infrastructure, Maintenance, and Administrative Needs

### Capital and Infrastructure Needs

Capital/infrastructure needs to be considered in the 10-year plan include:

- > **Vehicles** (buses) to provide the public transportation service. The Plan assumes the purchase of light-duty vehicles for dial-a-ride service and medium-duty vehicles for flex and express service.
- > **Bus stop infrastructure**, which includes, at a minimum, basic infrastructure such as a pole/bus stop sign and bench; other amenities typically provided at bus stops with higher ridership, such as transfer locations, include bus stop shelters, bicycle racks, trash cans, and lighting (if needed).
- > **Radio communication equipment** between the bus operators and dispatch.



Left: Charlotte County Transit vehicle providing dial-a-ride service. Center: Emerald Coast Rider (EC Rider in Okaloosa County) community and express route bus. Right: Hillsborough Area Regional Transit (HART) vehicle providing flex service.

### 10-Year Vehicle Needs

Service Scenario	# of Light-Duty Vehicles	# of Medium-Duty Vehicles
Option 1 (Dial-a-Ride)	5 initial, 3 replacement	N/A
Option 2 (Dial-a-Ride + Flex)	3 initial, 2 replacement	3 initial, 2 replacement
Option 3 (Dial-a-Ride + Flex + Express)	3 initial, 2 replacement	5 initial, 4 replacement
Option 4 (Flex + Express)	N/A	5 initial, 4 replacement

### Maintenance Needs

- > **Maintenance (routine or otherwise)** will need to be performed on buses and other major equipment. For a potential system of this size, this would be typically performed through a third-party maintenance contract.

### Administrative/Service Planning Needs

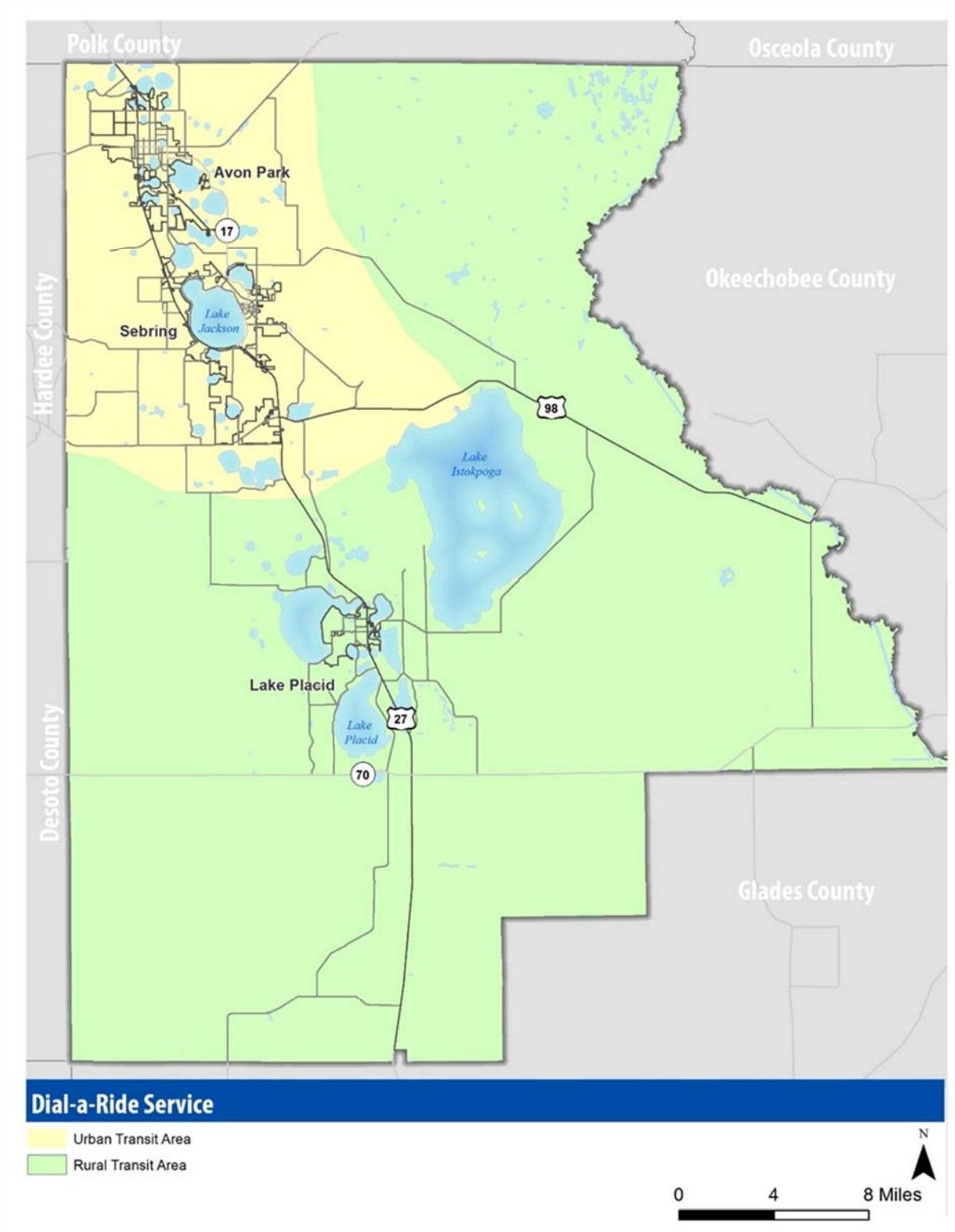
- > **Staff resources to oversee public transportation operator contract** – the HRTPO, as the assumed governing agency, will need the staff capacity to oversee a private contractor for additional public transportation service in the Urban Transit Area. Therefore, additional staff resources will need to be considered as part of the 10-year plan.
- > **Advertising and marketing materials** – includes developing a brand/theme for the new system, printing schedules and other materials, and conducting a major marketing campaign typically done leading up to system implementation, followed by annual costs for marketing and printing as needed.
- > **Transit Development Plan Major Update** – required five years following adoption of this initial Highlands Transit Plan. It is recommended that an on-board survey also be completed at the time of the major TDP update to evaluate if the service is effectively meeting the needs of the system’s customers. In between adoption of this plan and the next major update, annual progress reports will be due to the FDOT by September 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

### Cost & Revenue Assumptions

The 10-year plan includes a number of cost and revenue assumptions for both the operating and capital components of implementing public transportation service. Detail regarding these assumptions is provided in Section 12 of the Highlands Transit Plan.

## Option 1: Urban Dial-a-Ride Service

The map below illustrates providing dial-a-ride service within the designated Urban Transit Area. The tables on the following page summarize the 10-year operating and capital costs and revenues and select service efficiency measures for this service option.





### 10-Year Plan – Option 1

Cost/Revenue Category	10-Year Total	Annual Average
<b>CAPITAL</b>		
<b>Costs</b>		
Operator Contract to Capital	\$3,036,776	\$303,678
Vehicles	\$673,723	\$67,372
Other Capital	\$371,905	\$37,191
<b>Capital Costs - Subtotal</b>	<b>\$4,082,404</b>	<b>\$408,240</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
<b>Federal Revenue</b>		
Section 5307	\$3,265,923	\$326,592
<b>State Revenue</b>		
Soft Match Toll Revenue Credit	\$816,481	\$81,648
<b>Capital Revenue – Subtotal</b>	<b>\$4,082,404</b>	<b>\$408,240</b>
<b>Capital Costs &amp; Revenues Balance</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>OPERATING</b>		
<b>Costs</b>		
Service Operations	\$4,555,164	\$455,516
Planning Support	\$895,193	\$89,519
<b>Operating Costs - Subtotal*</b>	<b>\$5,450,357</b>	<b>\$545,036</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
Section 5307	\$2,694,648	\$269,465
<b>State Revenue</b>		
Block Grant	\$1,252,425	\$125,242
<b>Local Revenue</b>		
Estimated Farebox	\$379,597	\$37,960
Other Required Local Revenue	\$1,123,688	\$112,369
<b>Operating Revenue – Subtotal</b>	<b>\$5,450,357</b>	<b>\$545,036</b>
<b>Operating Costs &amp; Revenues Balance</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>PERCENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE</b>		
<b>% Local Government Share of Total Revenue</b>	<b>12%</b>	

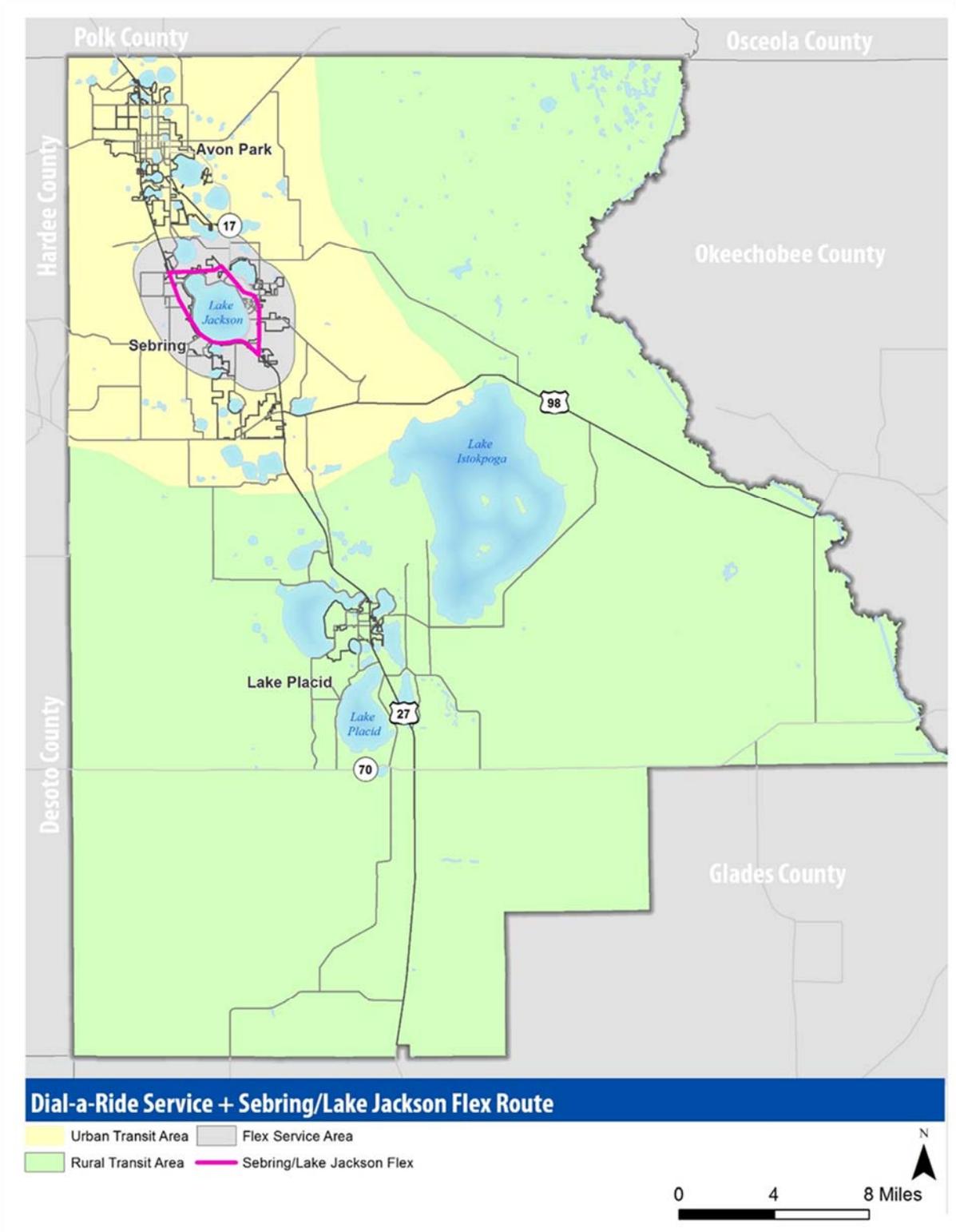
\*Does not include the contractor operating costs included under the capital cost category (Operator Contract to Capital). The total operating costs for this service option equals the sum of the Operator Contract to Capital cost and the Operating Costs – Subtotal.

### Service Efficiency Measures – Option 1

Measure	Option 1
Estimated Annual Trips	21,600
Anticipated Revenue Hours	8,316
Average Trips per Revenue Hour	2.6
<b>Annual Operating Cost per Trip</b>	<b>\$39.29</b>

## Option 2: Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex Service

The map below illustrates providing dial-a-ride service within the designated Urban Transit Area and the Sebring/Lake Jackson flex route. The tables on the following page summarize the 10-year operating and capital costs and revenues and select service efficiency measures for this service option.





### 10-Year Plan – Option 2

Cost/Revenue Category	10-Year Total	Annual Average
<b>CAPITAL</b>		
<b>Costs</b>		
Operator Contract to Capital	\$3,036,776	\$303,678
Vehicles	\$957,458	\$95,746
Other Capital	\$387,441	\$38,744
<b>Capital Costs – Subtotal</b>	<b>\$4,381,675</b>	<b>\$438,167</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
<b>Federal Revenue</b>		
Section 5307	\$3,505,340	\$350,534
<b>State Revenue</b>		
Soft Match Toll Revenue Credit	\$876,335	\$87,633
<b>Capital Revenue – Subtotal</b>	<b>\$4,381,675</b>	<b>\$438,167</b>
<b>Capital Costs &amp; Revenues Balance</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>OPERATING</b>		
<b>Costs</b>		
Service Operations	\$5,299,791	\$529,979
Planning Support	\$1,071,545	\$107,154
<b>Operating Costs – Subtotal*</b>	<b>\$6,371,336</b>	<b>\$637,134</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
Section 5307	\$3,155,137	\$315,514
<b>State Revenue</b>		
Block Grant	\$1,434,818	\$143,482
<b>Local Revenue</b>		
Estimated Farebox	\$416,828	\$41,683
Other Required Local Revenue	\$1,364,553	\$136,455
<b>Operating Revenue – Subtotal</b>	<b>\$6,371,336</b>	<b>\$637,134</b>
<b>Operating Costs &amp; Revenues Balance</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>PERCENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE</b>		
<b>% Local Government Share of Total Revenue</b>	<b>13%</b>	

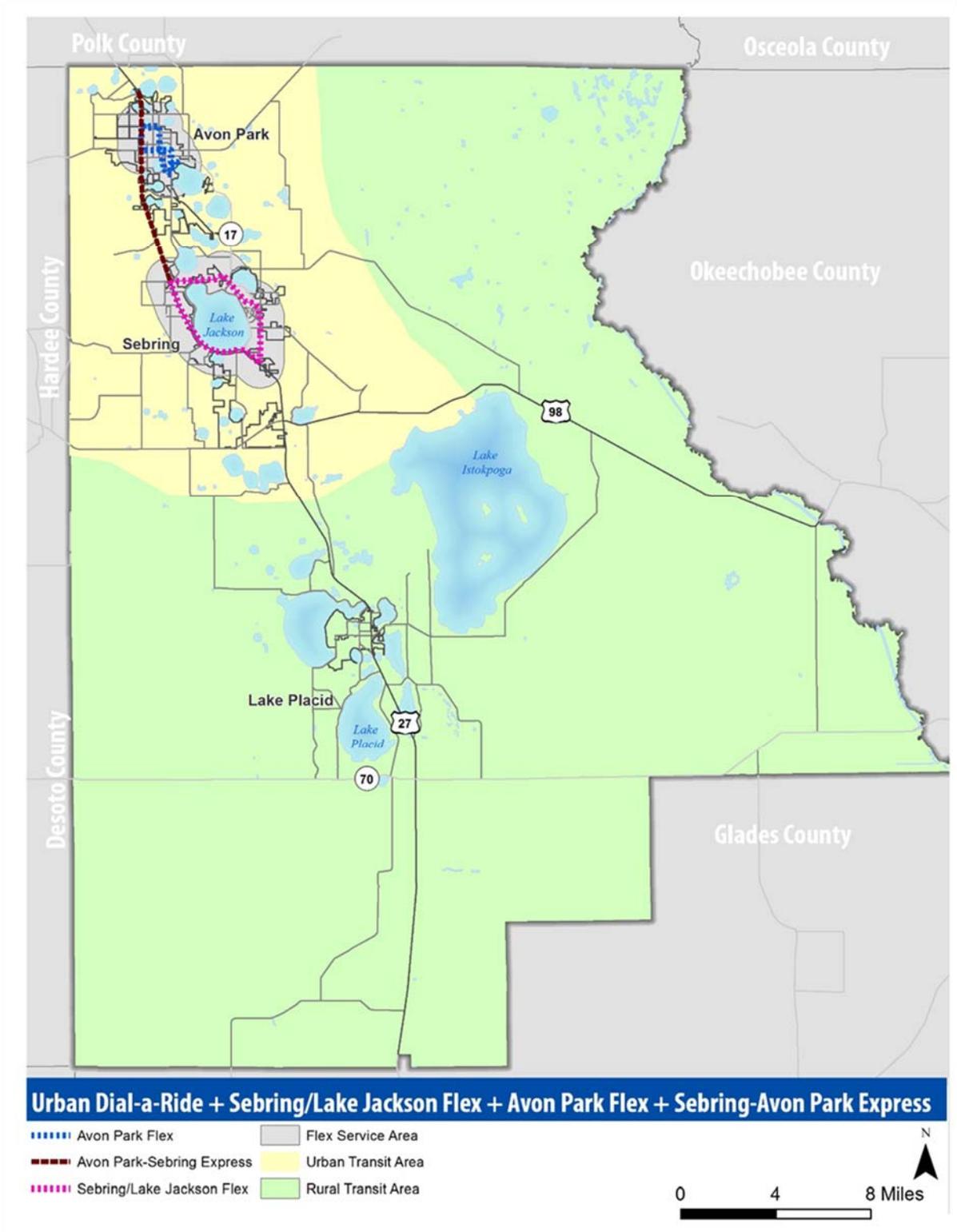
\*Does not include the contractor operating costs included under the capital cost category (Operator Contract to Capital). The total operating costs for this service option equals the sum of the Operator Contract to Capital cost and the Operating Costs – Subtotal.

### Service Efficiency Measures – Option 2

Measure	Option 2
Estimated Annual Trips	31,300
Anticipated Revenue Hours	11,088
Average Trips per Revenue Hour	2.8
<b>Annual Operating Cost per Trip</b>	<b>\$30.06</b>

### Option 3: Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex Services + Express Service

The map below illustrates providing dial-a-ride service within the designated Urban Transit Area and the Avon Park flex route, Sebring/Lake Jackson flex route, and Avon Park-Sebring express route connecting the two flex routes. The tables on the following page summarize the 10-year operating and capital costs and revenues and select service efficiency measures for this service option.





### 10-Year Plan – Option 3

Cost/Revenue Category	10-Year Total	Annual Average
<b>CAPITAL</b>		
<b>Costs</b>		
Operator Contract to Capital	\$4,644,737	\$464,474
Vehicles	\$2,097,546	\$209,755
Other Capital	\$418,512	\$41,851
<b>Capital Costs – Subtotal</b>	<b>\$7,160,795</b>	<b>\$716,079</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
<b>Federal Revenue</b>		
Section 5307	\$5,728,636	\$572,864
<b>State Revenue</b>		
Soft Match Toll Revenue Credit	\$1,432,159	\$143,216
<b>Capital Revenue – Subtotal</b>	<b>\$7,160,795</b>	<b>\$716,079</b>
<b>Capital Costs &amp; Revenues Balance</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>OPERATING</b>		
<b>Costs</b>		
Service Operations	\$6,967,105	\$696,710
Planning Support	\$1,247,896	\$124,790
<b>Operating Costs – Subtotal*</b>	<b>\$8,215,001</b>	<b>\$821,500</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
Section 5307	\$4,076,970	\$407,697
<b>State Revenue</b>		
Block Grant	\$1,741,660	\$174,166
<b>Local Revenue</b>		
Estimated Farebox	\$580,592	\$58,059
Other Required Local Revenue	\$1,815,780	\$181,578
<b>Operating Revenue – Subtotal</b>	<b>\$8,215,001</b>	<b>\$821,500</b>
<b>Operating Costs &amp; Revenues Balance</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>PERCENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE</b>		
<b>% Local Government Share of Total Revenue</b>	<b>12%</b>	

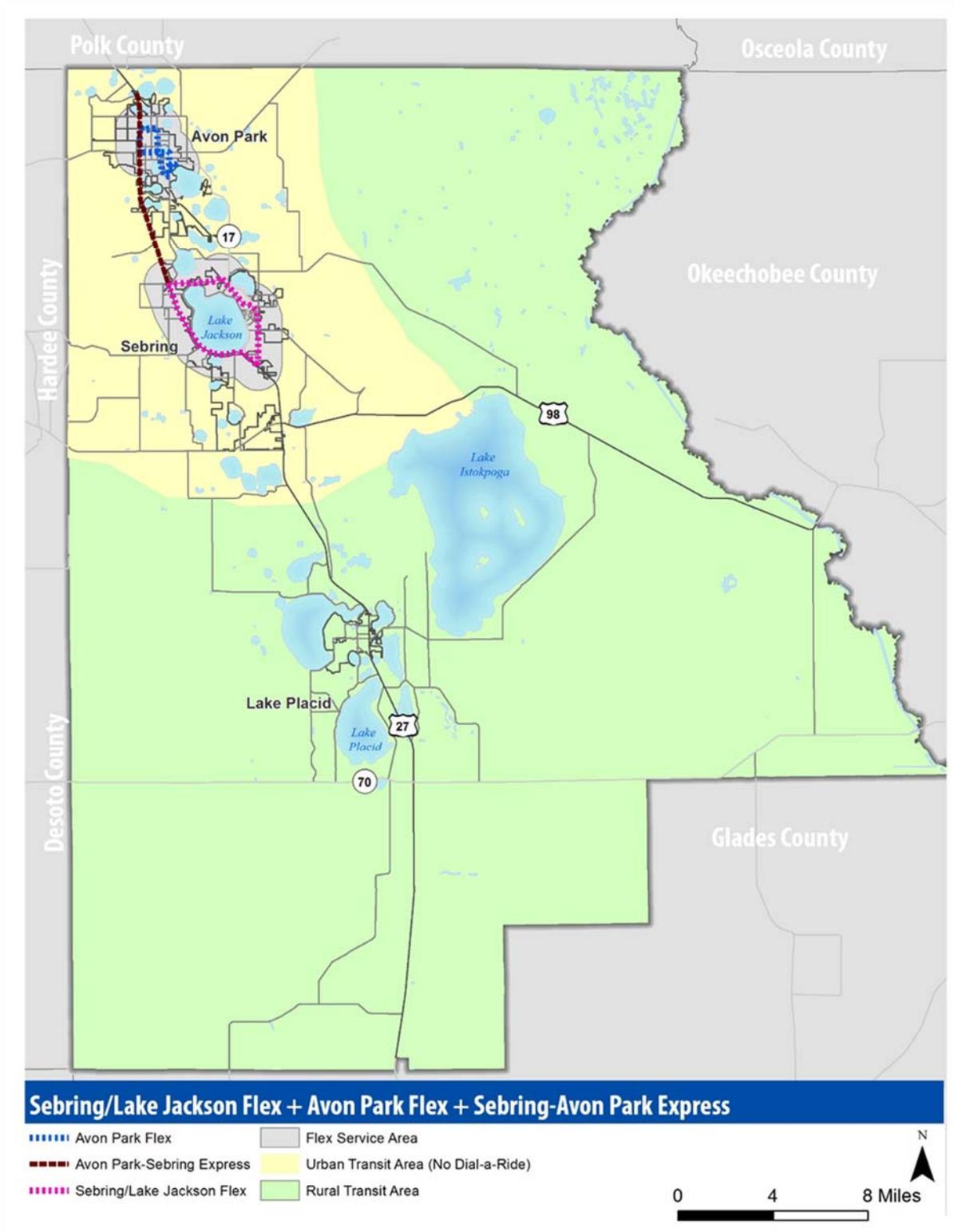
\*Does not include the contractor operating costs included under the capital cost category (Operator Contract to Capital). The total operating costs for this service option equals the sum of the Operator Contract to Capital cost and the Operating Costs – Subtotal.

### Service Efficiency Measures—Option 3

Measure	Option 3
Estimated Annual Trips	54,100
Anticipated Revenue Hours	16,632
Average Trips per Revenue Hour	3.3
<b>Annual Operating Cost per Trip</b>	<b>\$23.77</b>

## Option 4: Flex + Express Service

The map below illustrates the Avon Park flex route, Sebring/Lake Jackson flex route, and Avon Park-Sebring express route connecting the two flex routes. The tables on the following page summarize the 10-year operating and capital costs and revenues and select service efficiency measures for this service option.





### 10-Year Plan – Option 4

Cost/Revenue Category	10-Year Total	Annual Average
<b>CAPITAL</b>		
<b>Costs</b>		
Operator Contract to Capital	\$2,620,219	\$262,022
Vehicles	\$1,675,536	\$167,554
Other Capital	\$418,512	\$41,851
<b>Capital Costs - Subtotal</b>	<b>\$4,714,267</b>	<b>\$471,427</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
<b>Federal Revenue</b>		
Section 5307	\$3,771,414	\$377,141
<b>State Revenue</b>		
Soft Match Toll Revenue Credit	\$942,853	\$94,285
<b>Capital Revenue - Subtotal</b>	<b>\$4,714,267</b>	<b>\$471,427</b>
<b>Capital Costs &amp; Revenues Balance</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>OPERATING</b>		
<b>Costs</b>		
Service Operations	\$3,930,329	\$393,033
Planning Support	\$1,247,896	\$124,790
<b>Operating Costs - Subtotal*</b>	<b>\$5,178,225</b>	<b>\$517,823</b>
<b>Revenue</b>		
Section 5307	\$2,558,582	\$255,858
<b>State Revenue</b>		
Block Grant	\$1,197,409	\$119,741
<b>Local Revenue</b>		
Estimated Farebox	\$327,527	\$32,753
Other Required Local Revenue	\$1,094,707	\$109,471
<b>Operating Revenue - Subtotal</b>	<b>\$5,178,225</b>	<b>\$517,823</b>
<b>Operating Costs &amp; Revenues Balance</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>PERCENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE</b>		
<b>% Local Government Share of Total Revenue</b>	<b>11%</b>	

*\*Does not include the contractor operating costs included under the capital cost category (Operator Contract to Capital). The total operating costs for this service option equals the sum of the Operator Contract to Capital cost and the Operating Costs – Subtotal.*

### Service Efficiency Measures – Option 4

Measure	Option 4
Estimated Annual Trips	60,100
Anticipated Revenue Hours	11,088
Average Trips per Revenue Hour	5.4
<b>Annual Operating Cost per Trip</b>	<b>\$12.98</b>



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