Highlands Transit Plan

Draft Report

August 2017

Prepared for

HRTPO
Heartland Regional
Transportation Planning Organization

Prepared by

Tindale Oliver

The Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) is seeking comments from the public on the draft Highlands Transit Plan from August 8 – September 6, 2017. After the comment period closes and all input has been considered, the draft Highlands Transit Plan will be presented for adoption to the HRTPO Board on September 20, 2017, after seven (7) days public notice.

Anyone interested in submitting a comment may do so by contacting Marybeth Soderstrom, Community Engagement Manager by email msoderstrom@cfrpc.org, mail to 555 East Church Street, Bartow, FL 33830, or call (863) 534-7130 x 134. Printed copies are available upon request.

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.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Maps

Appendices

Section 1 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. This TDP, called the Highlands Transit Plan, will help establish a strategic vision to guide the planning, development, and 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 Highlands Transit Plan is a guide to local decision-making, but should not be considered as a budgetary document or as a commitment to implementation.

1.1 State Requirements

The Highlands Transit Plan is required for Highlands County to be eligible for state public transportation funding. According to Rule 14-73.001, Public Transportation, of the Florida Administrative Code (FAC), the TDP (or annual updated thereof) must be the applicant's planning, development, and operational guidance document to be used in developing the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and FDOT's Five-Year Work Program.

The current TDP requirements were adopted by FDOT on February 20, 2007, and include the following:

- Major updates must be completed at least once every 5 years, covering a 10-year planning horizon with an annual progress report or assessment conducted each year between major updates.
- A public involvement plan must be developed and approved by FDOT or be consistent with the approved Metropolitan/Transportation Planning Organization's (MPO) public involvement plan. The Heartland Regional TPO is the TPO serving the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area within Highlands County.
- FDOT, the Regional Workforce Development Board, and the TPO must be advised of all public meetings at which the TDP is presented and discussed, and these entities must be given the

opportunity to review and comment on the TDP during the development of the mission, goals, objectives, alternatives, and 10-year implementation program.

- Estimation of the community's demand for transit service (10-year annual projections) using the planning tools provided by FDOT or a demand estimation technique approved by FDOT must be included.

1.2 TDP Checklist

This 10-year plan meets the requirements for a TDP Major Update in accordance with Rule Chapter 14-72, FAC. Table 1-1 is a list of TDP requirements from Rule 14-73.001 and indicates whether or not the item was accomplished in this 10-year plan.

Table 1-1: TDP Checklist

Public Involvement Process	TDP Section
Public Involvement Plan (PIP) drafted	Section 5; Appendix C
PIP approved by FDOT	Section 5
TDP includes description of public involvement process	Section 5; Appendices C-I
Provide notification to Regional Workforce Board	Section 5
Situation Appraisal	
Land use	Section 2; Section 4
State and local transportation plans	Section 4; Appendix B
Other governmental actions and policies	Section 4; Appendix B
Socioeconomic trends	Section 2; Section 4
Organizational issues	Section 4
Technology	Section 4
10-year annual projection of transit ridership using approved model	Section 8
Assessment of whether land uses and urban design patterns support/hinder transit	Section 2; Section 4; Appendix B
Calculate farebox recovery	N/A existing; Section 12 for future assumptions
Mission and Goals	
Provider's vision	Section 10
Provider's mission	Section 10
Provider's goals	Section 10
Provider's objectives	Section 10

Table 1-1: TDP Checklist (Cont'd)

Alternative Courses of Action	TDP Section
Develop and evaluate alternative strategies and actions	Section 9
Benefits and costs of each alternative	Section 9
Financial alternatives examined	Section 9
Implementation Program	
10-year implementation program	Section 12
Maps indicating areas to be served	Section 12
Maps indicating types and levels of service	Section 12
Monitoring program to track performance measures	Section 12
10-year financial plan listing operating and capital expenses	Section 12
Capital acquisition or construction schedule	Section 12
Financial alternatives examined	Section 12
Relationship to Other Plans	
Consistent with Florida Transportation Plan	Section 4, Appendix B
Consistent with local government comprehensive plan	Section 4, Appendix B
Consistent with HRTPO long-range transportation plan	Section 4, Appendix B
Consistent with regional transportation goals and objectives	Section 4, Appendix B

1.3 Organization of the Highlands Transit Plan

The Highlands Transit Plan is organized into 12 major sections (including this introduction).

Section 2 summarizes the **Baseline Conditions** with respect to the study area and demographics for Highlands County. This includes a physical description of the study area, a population profile, and key demographics indicative of the traditional public transportation customer, including employment and journey-to-work characteristics. It also includes a review of tourism information, land use trends, major transit trip generators and attractors, commute patterns, and major employers. The information compiled and presented in this section provides the basis for more detailed analysis in subsequent tasks of the Highlands Transit Plan.

Section 3 presents the **Public Transportation Performance Evaluation,** which includes an inventory of transportation service providers, trend analyses of existing transit service, and peer review analyses of peer communities and future peers.

Section 4 includes the **Situation Appraisal**, which documents a review of relevant plans, policies, and trends and summarizes the situation appraisal prepared for the Highlands Transit Plan.

Section 5 documents the **Public Involvement** activities completed for the Highlands Transit Plan and used to identify, evaluate, and prioritize the public transportation needs for Highlands County.

Section 6 documents the process used to **Public Transportation Demand Analysis** and includes the results of several analytical processes, including assessments of the traditional and discretionary public transportation markets and of existing Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) services.

Section 7 presents the potential **Public Transportation Service Options** developed for the Highlands Transit Plan. These potential options for fixed-route service represent the public transportation needs for the next 10 years developed without consideration of funding constraints.

Section 8 documents the **Projected Ridership Demand** based on the public transportation service options introduced in Section 7.

Section 9 presents the **Service Options Evaluation** process used to prioritize the various service improvements introduced in Section 8.

Section 10 sets forth **Goals and Objectives** to serve as a policy guide for implementation of the Highlands Transit Plan based on input received from the public, stakeholders, and local policy leaders.

Section 11 presents the **Governance & Operating Structure Options** available to implement new public transportation services in Highlands County. The most feasible option from this review is also provided and considered as part of the 10-year service and financial plan.

Section 12 summarizes the **10-Year Service and Financial Plan** developed for the Highlands Transit Plan. The 10-year plan identifies the funded operating and capital improvements for different service scenarios and includes a discussion of the revenue assumptions and capital and operating cost estimates used.

Section 2 Baseline Conditions

This section establishes the baseline conditions of the study area and provides context for the Highlands Transit Plan through the components within Figure 2-1 and the following subsections:

- Study Area Description
- Population and Housing Profile
- Employment and Economic Profile

Discussion of the above is supported by maps and graphics. Primary data sources include the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) and socioeconomic data from the regional travel demand model. These data sources are supplemented by other local and regional sources, as needed.

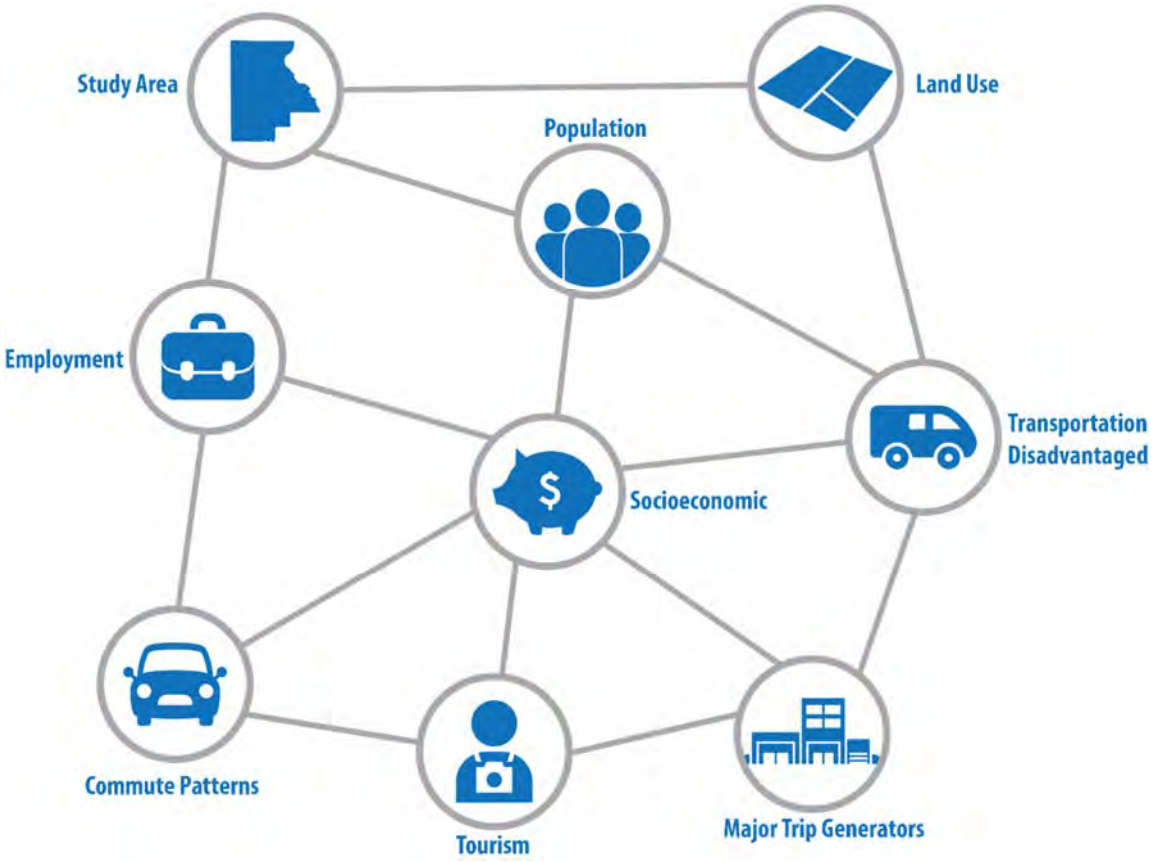


Figure 2-1: Baseline Conditions Components

2.1 Study Area Description

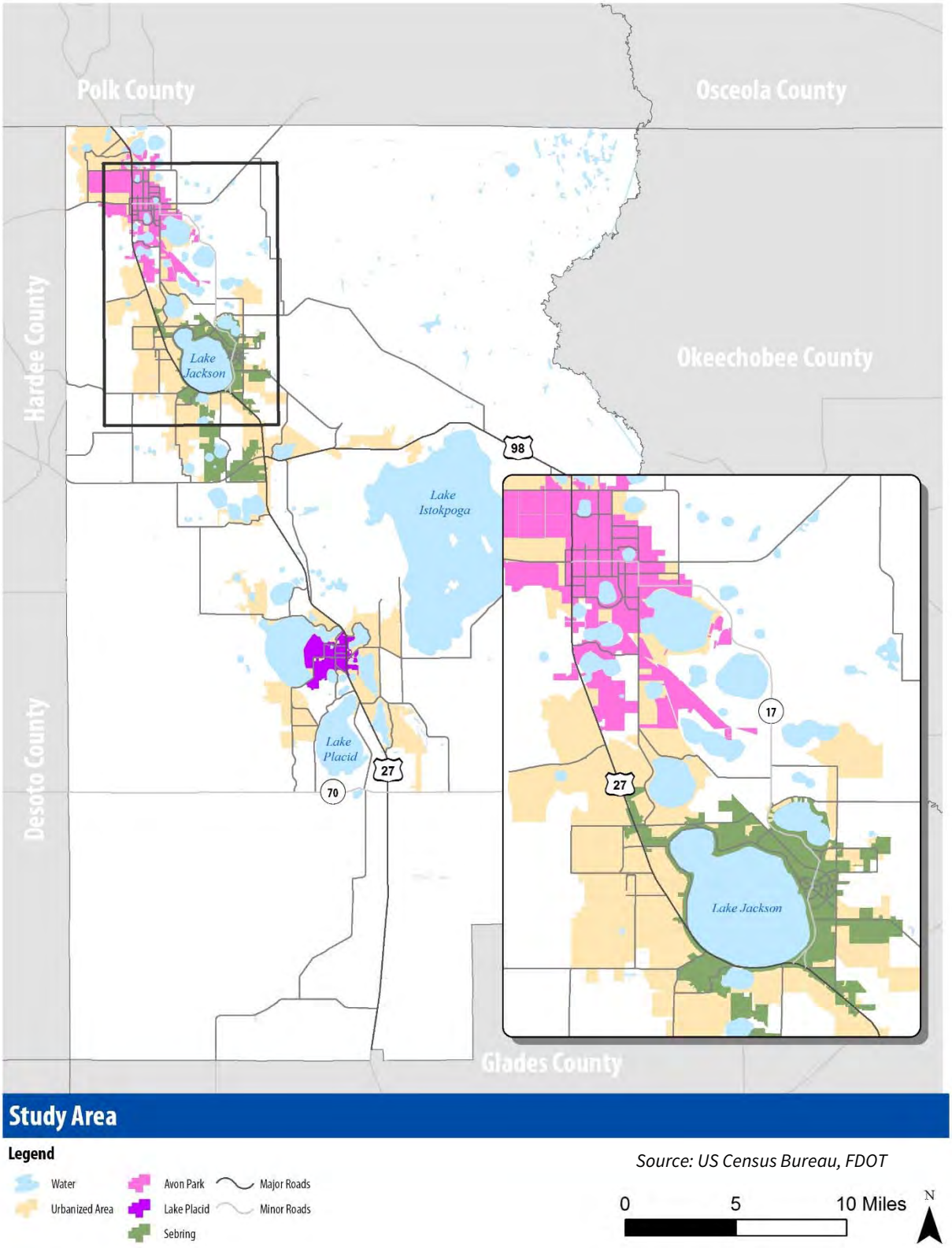
The study area for the Highlands Transit Plan includes all of Highlands County, with focus on the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area, newly-designated by the 2010 Census. Incorporated areas within Highlands County include Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid. Map 2-1 illustrates the Highlands Transit Plan study area. Highlands County is known for its many lakes, providing opportunities for water sports and leisure activities, the Sebring International Raceway, home of the "Twelve Hours of Sebring" event, arts and culture events, and much more.

Highlands County is the 14th largest county in Florida in terms of area. As shown in Table 2-1, the total area of Highlands County is just over 1,100 square miles, 92% of which is land area. While the total area of the county has stayed the same, there was a slight increase in total water area between 2000 and 2010.

Table 2-1: Study Area Physical Description

Physical Description	2010		2000
Total Area	1,106	-	1,106
Water Area	89	↖	78
Land Area	1,017	↙	1,028

Note: Area shown in square miles.
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census.



Map 2-1: Study Area

2.2 Existing Public Transportation Services

Prior to the designation of the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area, Highlands County, through the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC), used a variety of state and federal funding sources to provide reservation based door-to-door transportation services throughout the entire county. Existing public transportation services include the following:

- The **Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) Program** was established as a dedicated funding source by the State of Florida. Highlands County participates in a coordinated system with Hardee and Okeechobee counties.
- **Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities** where operating funds are awarded and used to provide enhanced public transportation to the elderly and persons with disabilities.
- **Rural Public Transportation Services** are provided through federal formula grants intended to provide public transportation in rural communities. There are no restrictions as to what type of trip can be provided except trip origins and destinations must remain within the three county TD system boundaries.

As shown in Table 2-2, due to the urban designation in the 2010 Census, rural public transportation funds can no longer be used to provide services in the urbanized area previously depicted on Map 2-1.

Table 2-2: Summary of Existing Public Transportation Services

Type of Service	Eligibility to Use Service	Urbanized Area	Rural Area	Funding Sources
Transportation Disadvantaged Trust Fund	Vital transportation to life sustaining services for those who cannot obtain their own transportation due to a disability, age, or income.	√	√	State with local cash match required
Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities	Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities	√	√	Federal with local soft match required
Formula Grants for Rural Areas	None	X	√	Federal with local soft match required

2.3 Population and Housing Profile

This subsection presents a population and housing characteristics profile for Highlands County. Table 2-3 summarizes the population change for Highlands County as a whole, its cities, and the unincorporated areas from 2000 to 2015. Overall, the total population of Highlands County has grown approximately 12.6% between 2000 and 2015, and the unincorporated areas have grown at nearly the same rate as the overall county during this period. Although Lake Placid experienced the highest growth rate during this period at 52.3%, it has the smallest population base from which to start therefore growing by 873 people during this period. While collectively, the cities experienced a higher overall percentage of growth (15.1%), the total number of residents in the unincorporated county areas grew by over twice as many people than in the cities during this 15-year period.

Table 2-3: Population Characteristics and Trends

Population	2015		2010		2000	Percent Change (2000 to 2015)	Absolute Growth (2000 to 2015)
Highlands County	98,328	↙	98,786	↖	87,366	**12.55%**	10,962
Avon Park	9,974	↖	8,836	↖	8,542	**16.76%**	1,432
Lake Placid	2,541	↖	2,223	↖	1,668	**52.34%**	873
Sebring	10,371	↙	10,491	↖	9,667	**7.28%**	704
Incorporated Only	22,886	↖	21,550	↖	19,877	**15.14%**	3,009
Unincorporated	75,442	↙	77,236	↖	67,489	**11.78%**	7,953

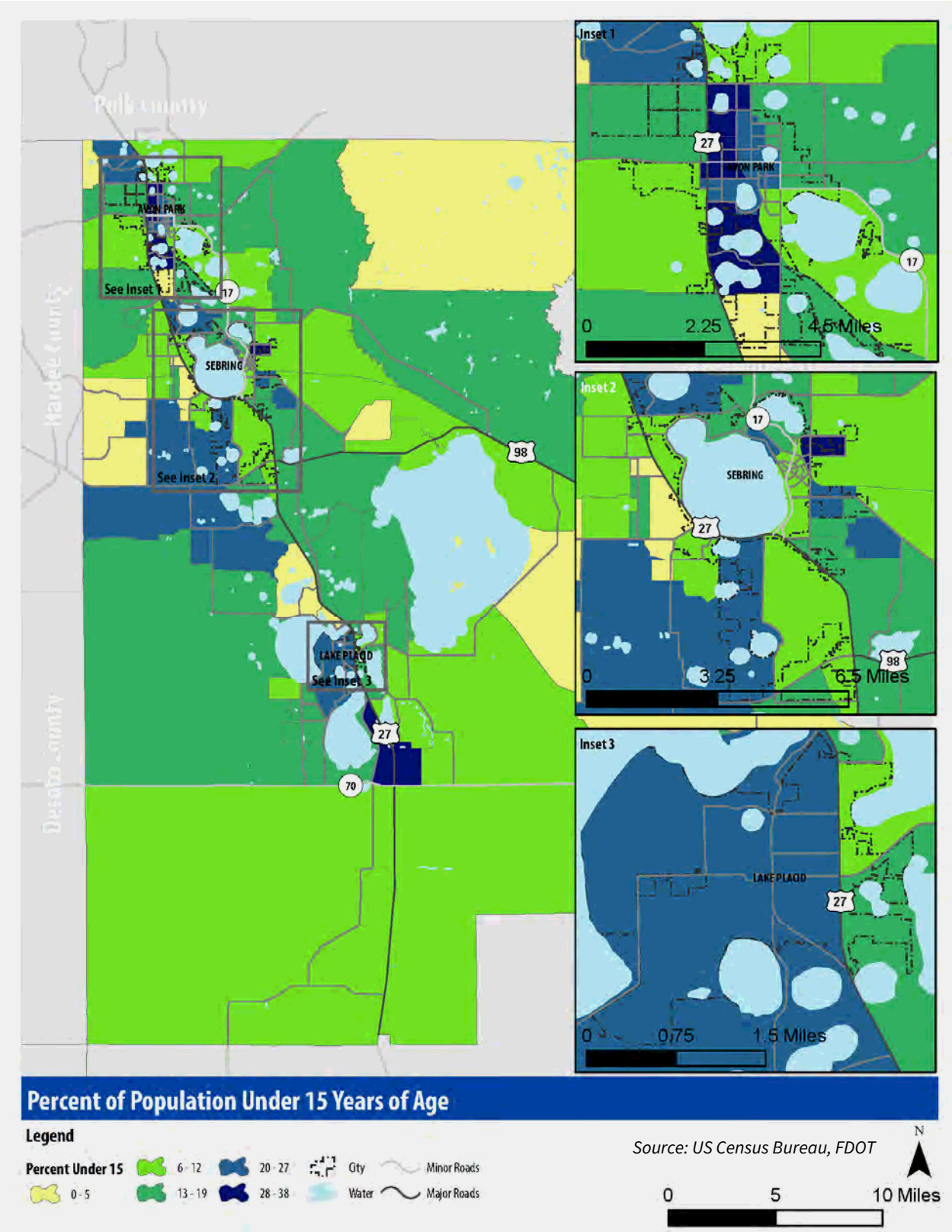
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2015 ACS

Table 2-4 summarizes the trend of different socio-demographic variables for Highlands County during the same period from 2000 to 2015. The percentage of younger residents (age 15 and younger) has decreased by-5.1% and the percentage of households with zero vehicles has decreased by 9.6%. Whereas percentages of older residents (age 65 and older) and the percentages of households below poverty have increased (1.2% and 29.1%, respectively). Black/African American, Hispanic, and other minority populations have also increased since 2000. Additionally, since the percentage of households under the poverty level and the average number of available vehicles per household are increasing, this indicates that a higher percentage of the average household income is likely being spent on transportation. Maps 2-2 through 2-6 illustrate the 2015 population characteristics identified in Table 2-4. The urbanized areas around Sebring and Avon Park, which have the highest concentrations of population in the county, have the greatest percentages of younger and older residents, minorities, lower-income households, and households with zero available vehicles.

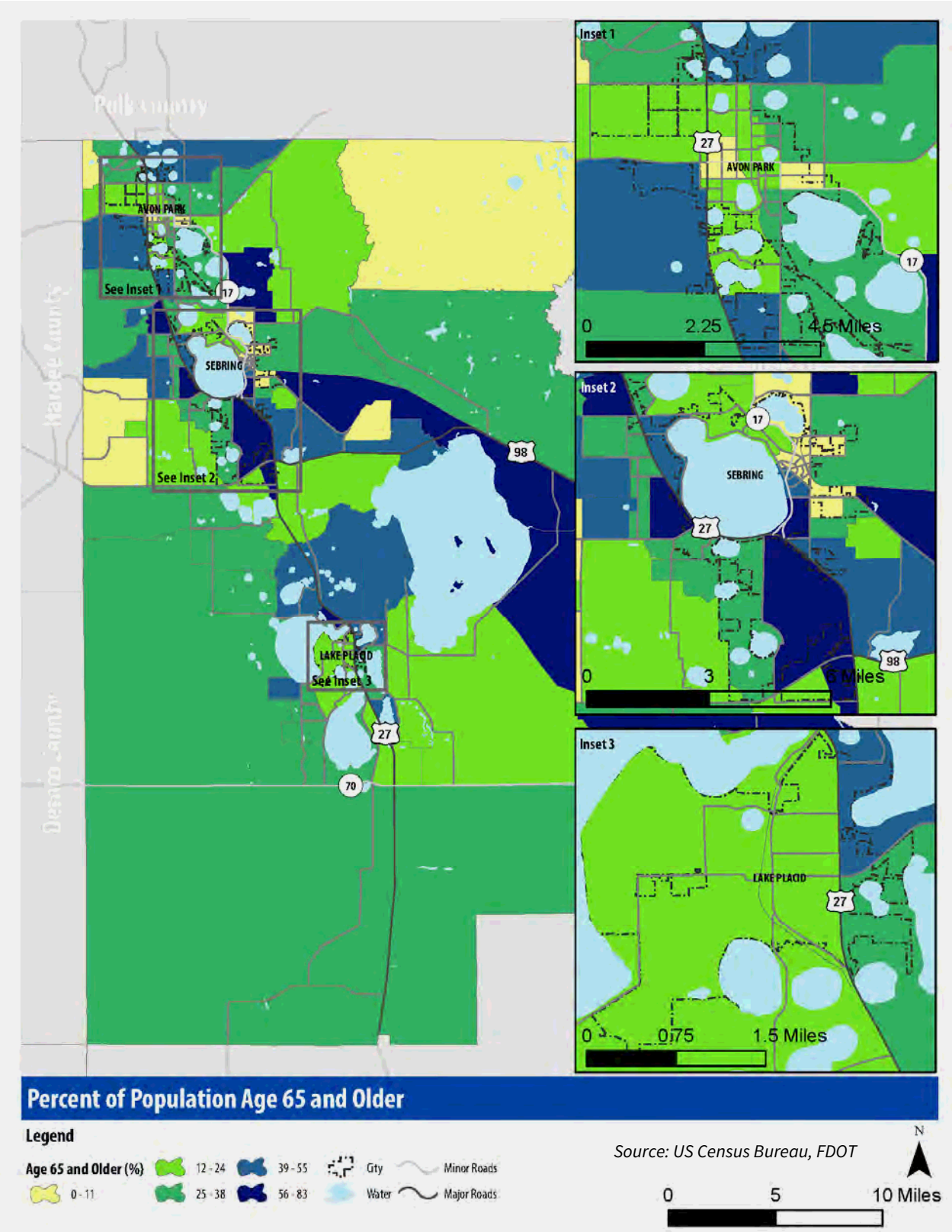
Table 2-4: Age and Household Vehicle Availability Trends

Population	2015		2010		2000		Percent Change (2000 to 2015)	Absolute Change (2000 to 2015)
Age								
Under 15 Years	14,552	14.8%	14,803	15.0%	13,634	15.6%	-5.13%	918
65 Years and Over	32,842	33.4%	31,822	32.3%	28,833	33.0%	1.21%	4,009
Ethnic Origin								
White	81,651	83.0%	79,972	81.0%	72,926	83.5%	-0.60%	8,725
Black/African American	9,400	9.6%	9,263	9.4%	8,155	9.3%	3.23%	1,245
Other	7,277	7.4%	9,551	9.6%	6,285	7.2%	2.78%	992
Hispanic/Latino Origin	17,963	18.3%	17,157	17.4%	10,542	12.1%	51.24%	7,421
Low-Income Households								
Households Below Poverty	6,973	17.3%	6,105	15.1%	5,038	13.4%	29.10%	1,935
Vehicles Available in Household								
No Vehicle Available	2,659	6.6%	2,135	5.3%	2,753	7.3%	-9.59%	(94)
1 Vehicle Available	21,440	53.1%	20,106	49.8%	18,856	50.3%	5.57%	2,584
2 Vehicles Available	12,186	30.2%	13,806	34.2%	12,019	32.1%	-5.92%	167
3+ Vehicles Available	4,112	10.2%	3,885	9.6%	3,843	10.3%	-0.97%	269

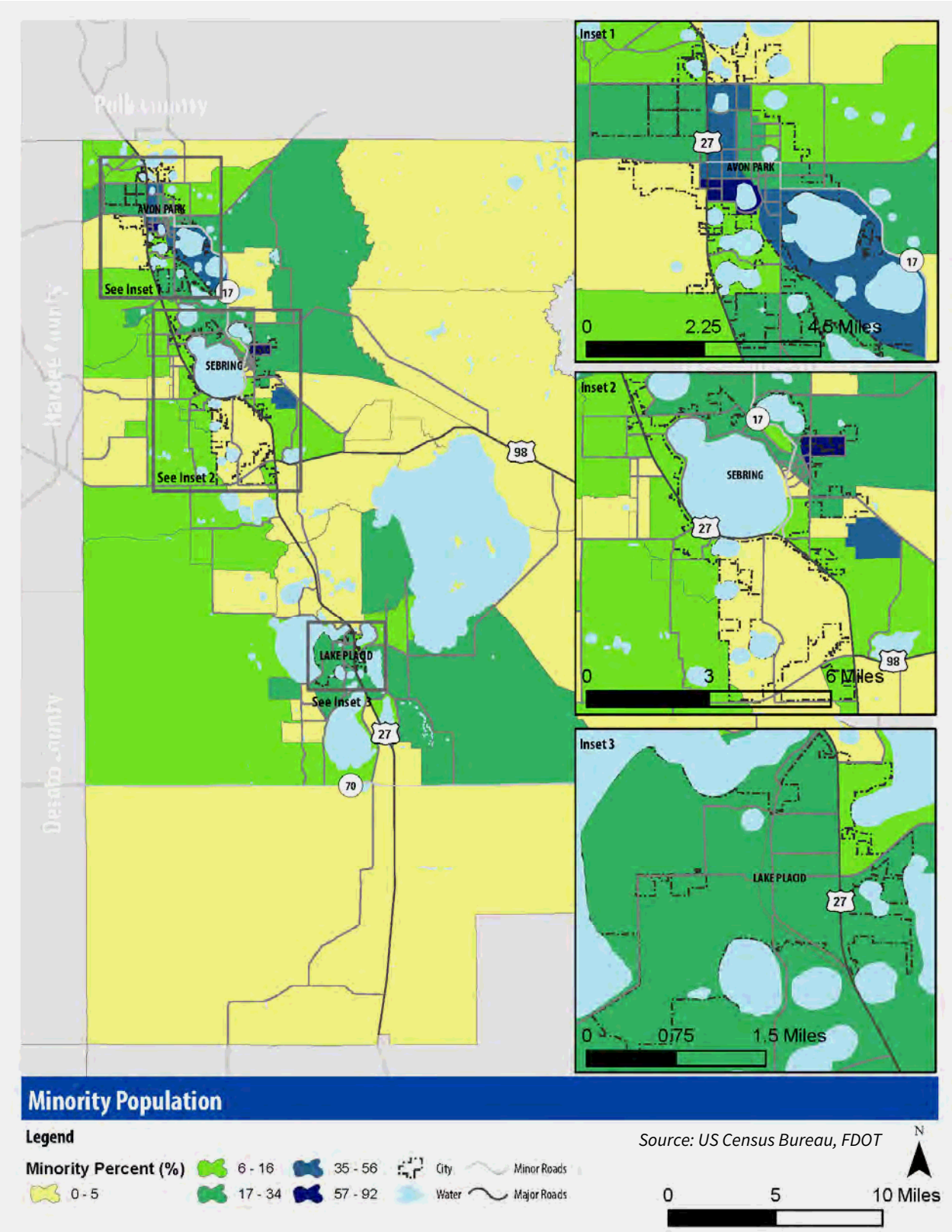
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2015 ACS



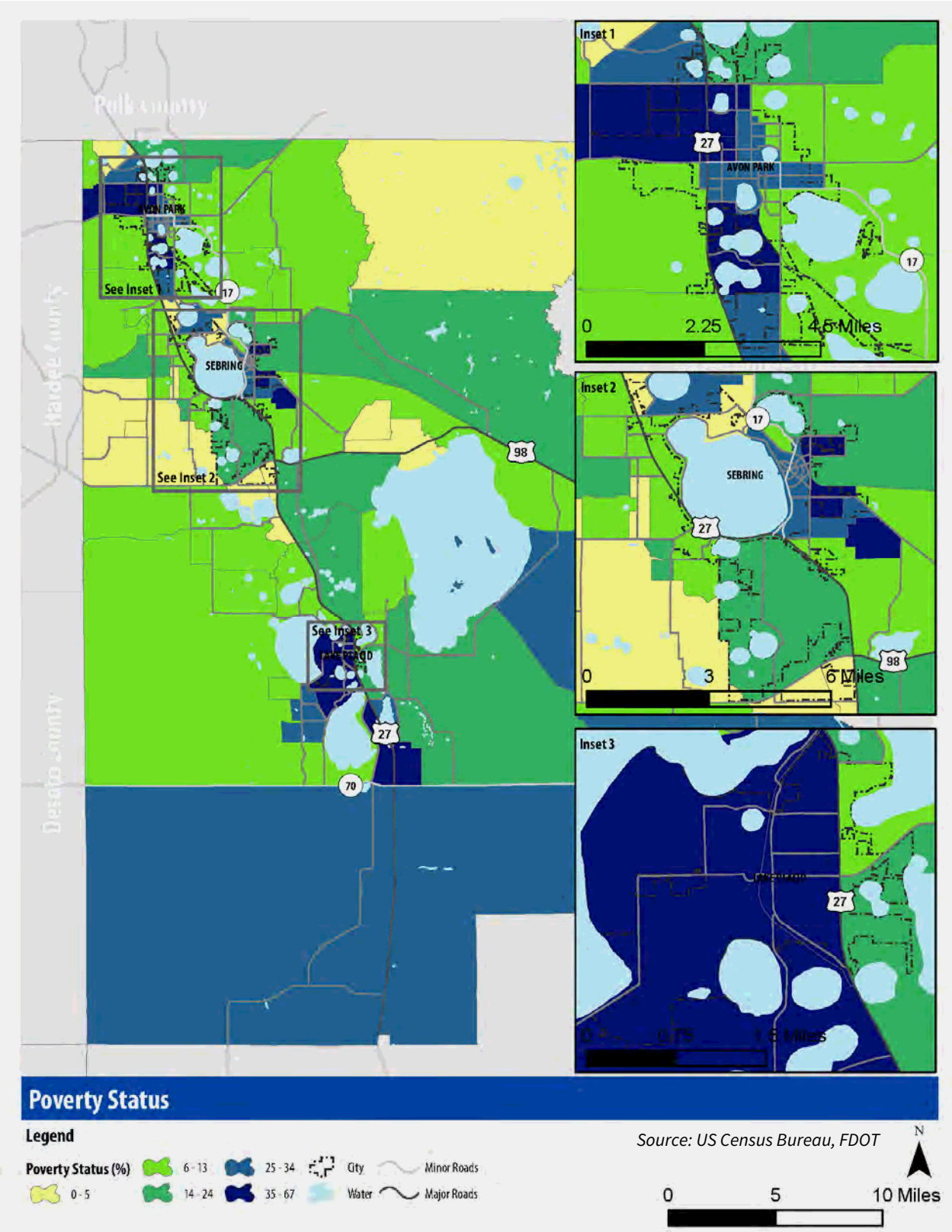
Map 2-2: Percent of Population Under Age 15



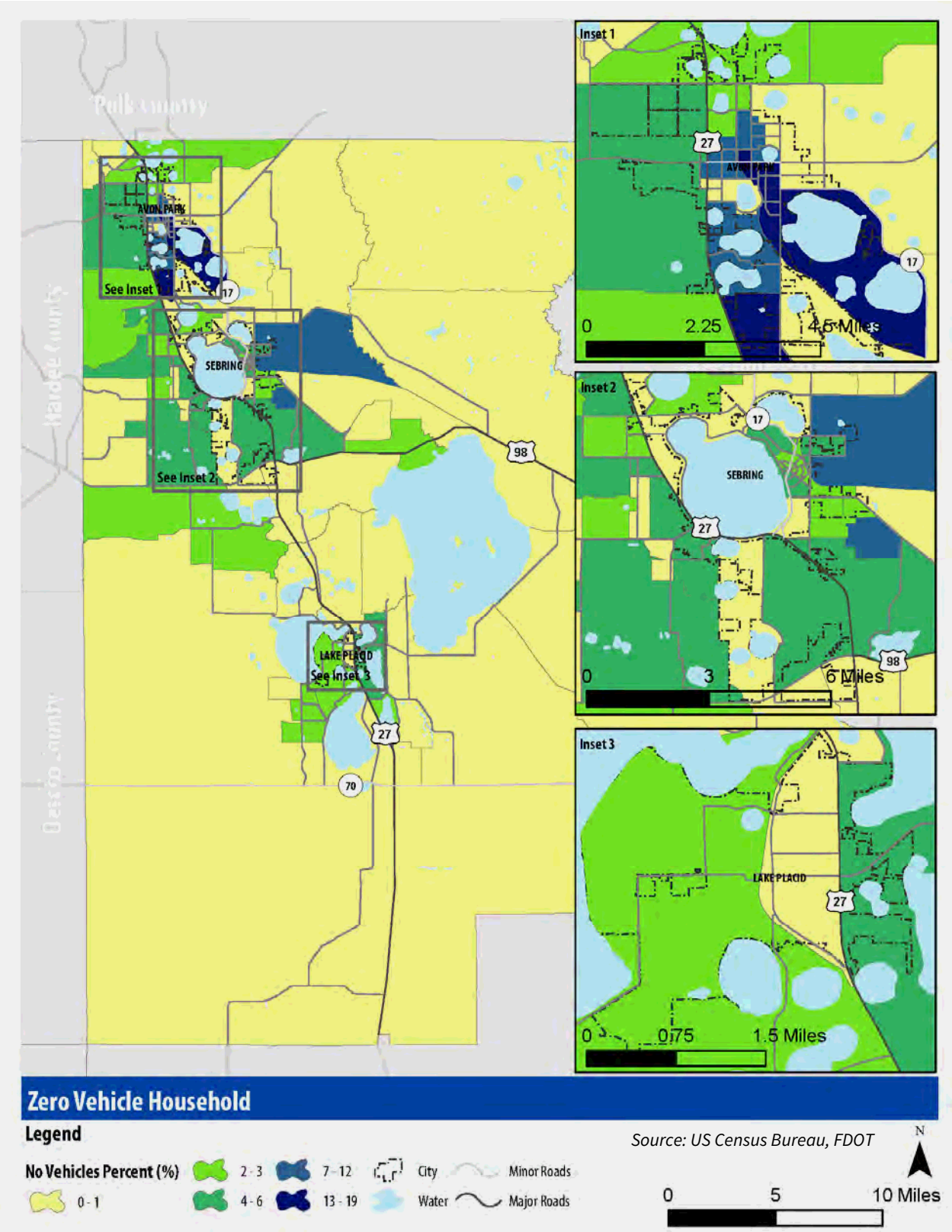
Map 2-3: Percent of Population Age 65 and Older



Map 2-4: Minority Population



Map 2-5: Percent of Population below Poverty Level



Map 2-6: Zero Vehicle Households

Age and Income Distribution

Age Distribution

Current and future age distribution of Highlands County's population are major factors when considering demand for public transportation. Persons age 15 or younger are not legally allowed to operate a motor vehicle by themselves, and persons age 65 and older are traditionally considered more likely to use public transportation, as the aging process may place limitations on their ability to drive. Teenagers who are unable to afford or have access to their own vehicle may be more likely to use public transportation or find a ride (carpool). In addition, the Millennial ("Gen Y") generation is a relatively new market of choice public transportation riders. However, this generation is greatly influential since Millennials now represent approximately one-third of the total U.S. population, according to the U.S. Executive Office Council of Economic Advisors. Shaped by technology and the Internet, the preferences of Millennials are very different than preceding generations, particularly related to housing and transportation. In its *America in 2013* survey, the Urban Land Institute reports that Millennials are twice as likely to use public transportation over other generations. However, it is recognized that various factors such as congestion levels, cost of living, and public transportation service levels affect this decision process.

In Highlands County, the distribution of population within each age category has changed incrementally since 2000, most notably with a decreasing percentage in those age 17 or younger and an increase in persons age 65 and older, as seen in Table 2-5. Highlands County has lower percentages of residents ages 18–44 and higher percentages of residents age 65 and older compared to the state as a whole.

As seen in Table 2-6, the percentage of population in Highlands County from birth to age 19 is projected to increase by 7% overall by 2030, and the population age 65 and older is projected to increase by 32% by 2030.

Income Distribution

Income is a leading influence in travel decisions. Due to less available disposable income, low-income households are less likely to own one vehicle per licensed driver and, therefore, may be more dependent on public transportation to make essential or recreational trips. Table 2-7 depicts the income distribution of Highlands County. The largest income bracket includes households with annual incomes between $50,000 and $74,999, representing 17.6% of the population. In 2015, 33% of all households in Highlands County had an annual household income of less than $25,000, closely aligning with the 2015 Federal Poverty Level of $24,250 for a family of four.

Table 2-5: Highlands County Age Distribution Trends Compared with Florida

Age Group	2015		2010		2000	
	Highlands	Florida	Highlands	Florida	Highlands	Florida
0-17	17,571 (17.9%)	4,041,123 (20.5%)	17,972 (18.2%)	4,002,091 (21.3%)	16,744 (19.2%)	3,646,340 (22.3%)
18-44	23,958 (24.4%)	6,676,684 (33.8%)	23,961 (24.3%)	6,460,456 (34.4%)	22,373 (25.6%)	5,899,949 (39.8%)
45-64	24,006 (24.4%)	5,276,974 (26.8%)	25,031 (25.3%)	5,079,161 (27%)	19,416 (22.2%)	3,628,492 (19.7%)
65+	32,793 (33.4%)	3,650,991 (18.8%)	31,822 (32.2%)	3,259,602 (17.3%)	28,833 (33%)	2,807,597 (18.2%)

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2015 ACS

Table 2-6: Projected Age Distribution

Projected Age	2015		2020		2025		2030	Percent Change (2015 to 2030)	Absolute Change (2015 to 2030)
0-9	9,893	↖	9,959	↖	10,272	↖	10,508	6%	615
10-14	4,902	↖	5,324	↙	5,167	↖	5,285	8%	383
15-19	4,743	↖	4,862	↖	5,264	↙	5,063	7%	320
15-17*	2,880	↖	2,947	↖	3,188	↙	3,069	7%	189
18-19*	1,863	↖	1,915	↖	2,076	↙	1,994	7%	131
20-44	22,253	↖	23,029	↖	23,600	↖	24,062	8%	1,809
45-64	25,478	↖	26,365	↙	25,796	↙	25,002	-2%	(476)
65+	33,479	↖	36,294	↖	40,314	↖	44,346	32%	10,867

Source: University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research (BEBR) population projections.
*Figures shown are a subset of the 15-19 age group.

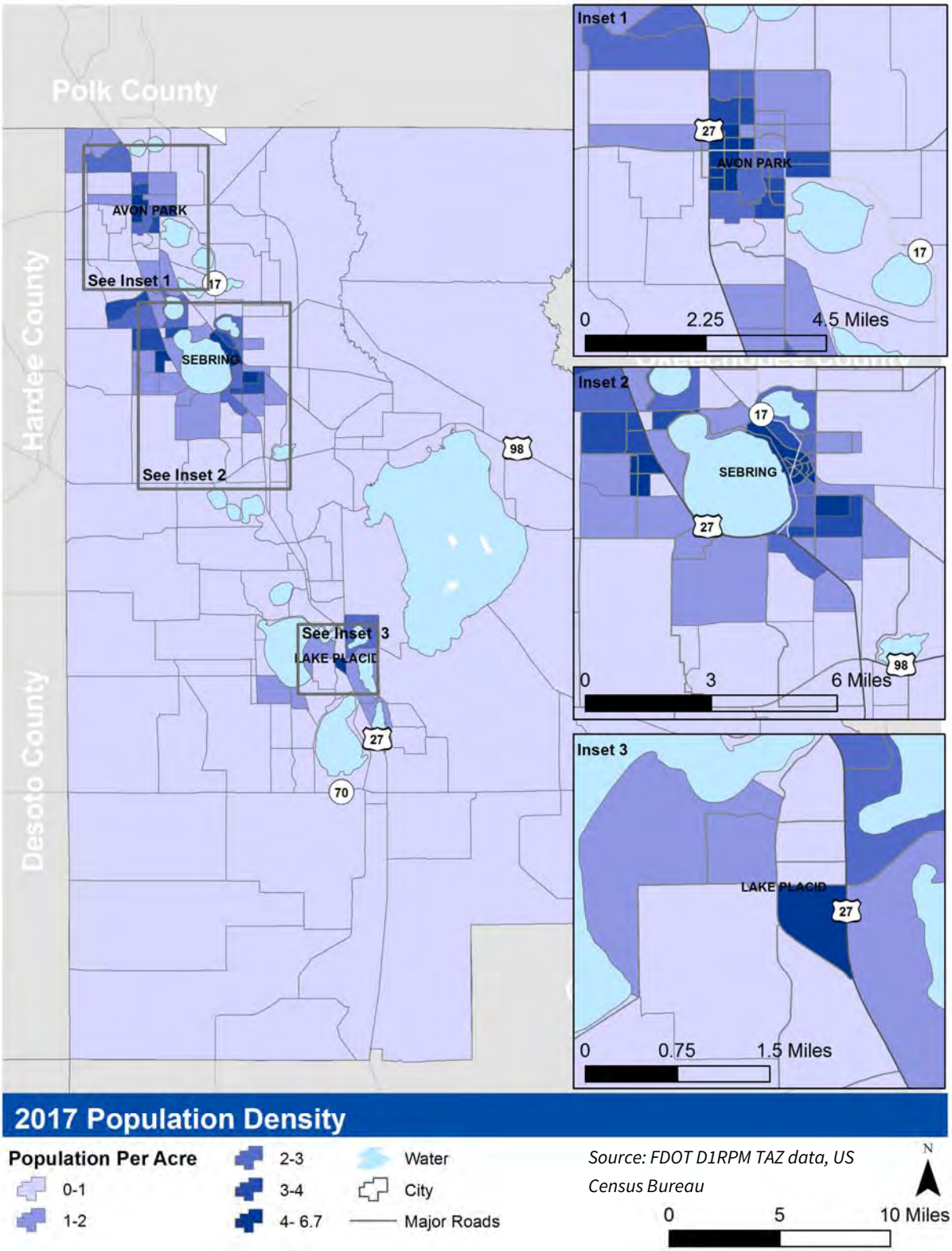
Table 2-7: Income Distribution

Annual Household Income	2015		2010		2000	
Less than $10,000	3,797	9.4%	3,351	8.3%	4,347	11.6%
$10,000 to $14,999	2,868	7.1%	3,028	7.5%	3,597	9.6%
$15,000 to $24,999	6,706	16.6%	6,662	16.5%	7,344	19.6%
$25,000 to $34,999	6,746	16.7%	7,187	17.8%	6,482	17.3%
$35,000 to $49,999	6,706	16.6%	7,752	19.2%	6,782	18.1%
$50,000 to $74,999	7,110	17.6%	6,419	15.9%	5,171	13.8%
$75,000 to $99,999	3,070	7.6%	3,109	7.7%	1,948	5.2%
$100,000 to $149,999	2,222	5.5%	2,140	5.3%	1,162	3.1%
$150,000 to $199,999	646	1.6%	444	1.1%	262	0.7%
$200,000 or more	525	1.3%	283	0.7%	375	1.0%

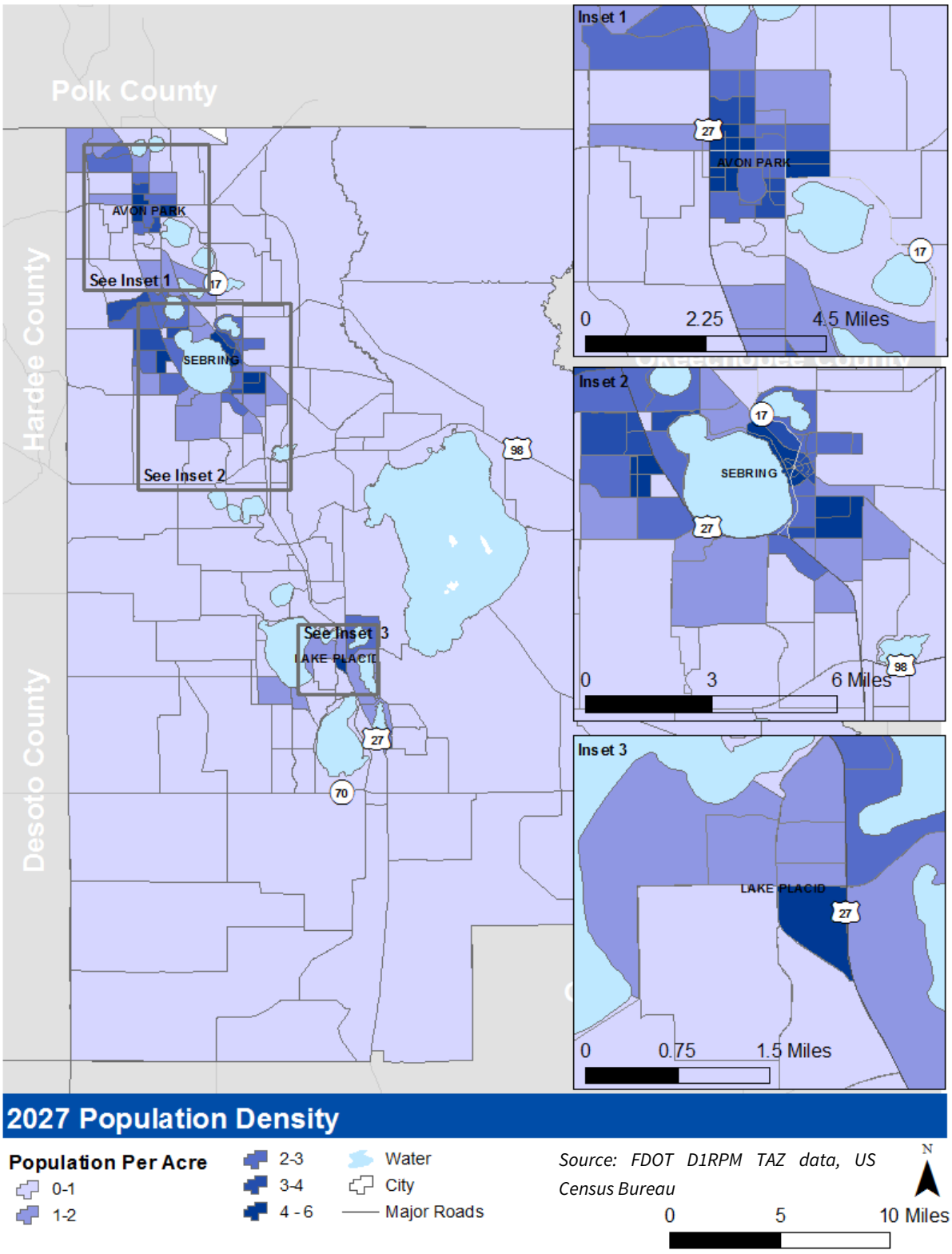
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2015 ACS

Population and Housing Densities

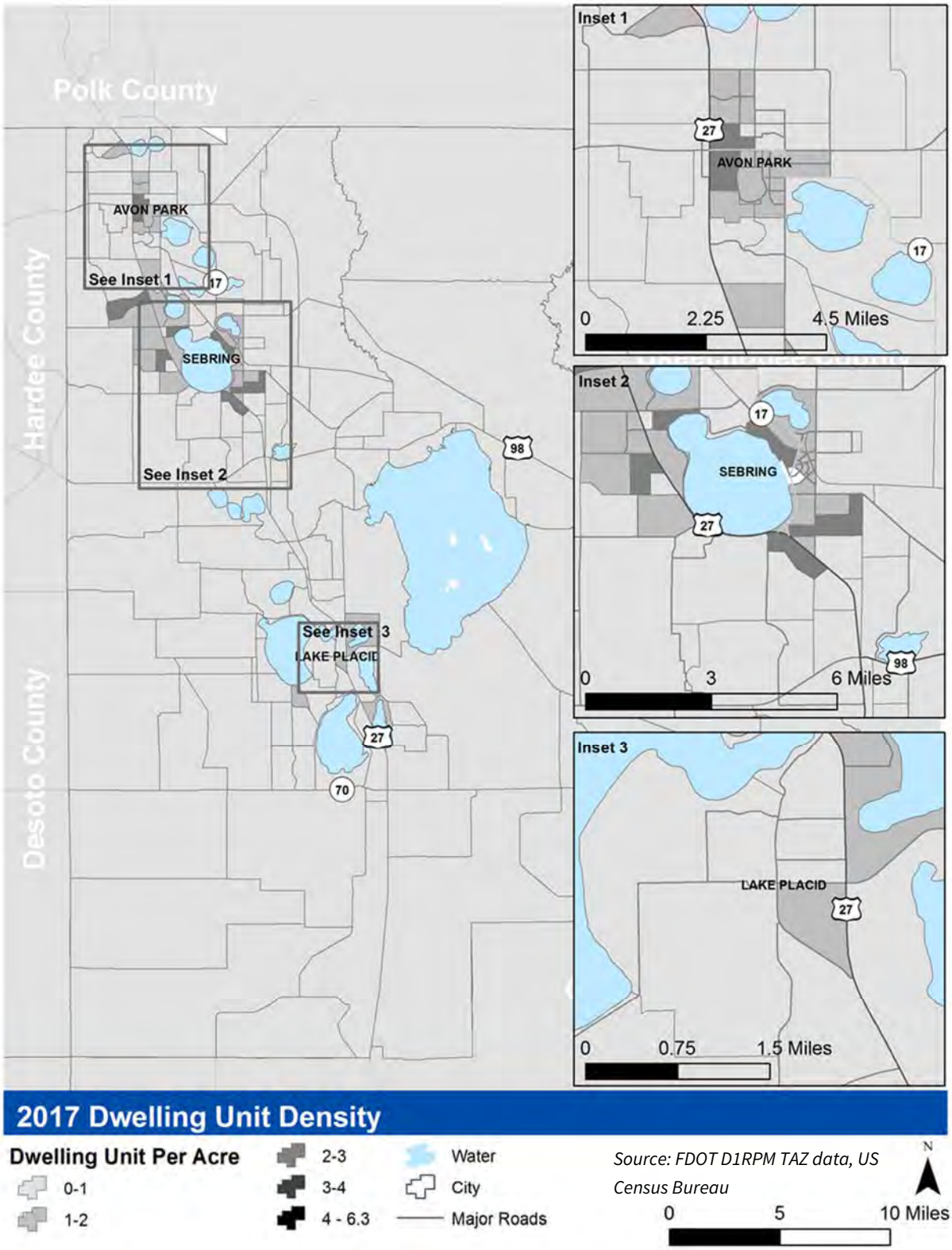
Population and housing densities were calculated for 2017 and 2027. Population density is expressed by population per acre and is illustrated in Map 2-7 for 2017 and Map 2-8 for 2027. Housing density is expressed as dwelling unit (du) per acre and is illustrated in Map 2-9 for 2017 and Map 2-10 for 2027. Low-population (0-1 persons per acre) and housing density (0-1 du/acre) areas in Highlands County occur in mostly unincorporated areas. The highest densities are found closer towards the downtown centers of Avon Park, Sebring, and Lake Placid and peak at 6.7 persons/acre and 3-4 du/acre today.



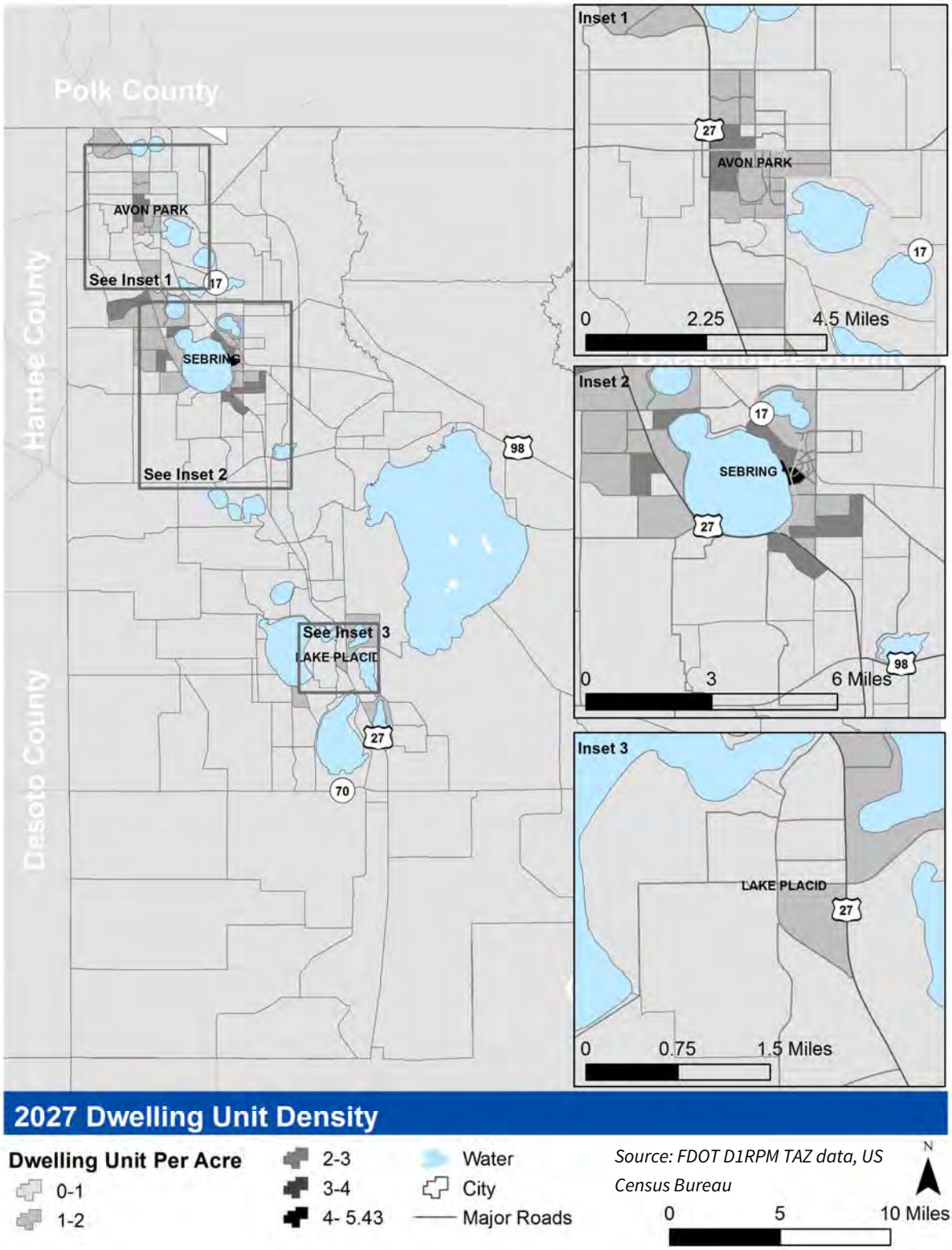
Map 2-7: 2017 Dwelling Unit Density



Map 2-8: 2027 Population Density



Map 2-9: 2017 Dwelling Unit Density



Map 2-10: 2027 Dwelling Unit Density

Transportation Disadvantaged Populations

The Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) is the designated official planning agency for the Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) Program in Hardee, Highlands, and Okeechobee counties. In this capacity, the CFRPC:

- Operates at the local level to provide staff to the Local Coordinating Board.
- Procures and recommends a Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) to the Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (Florida CTD).
- Coordinates and conducts transportation planning at the local level.
- Acquires vehicles to be used in the TD system.
- Serves as the recipient of state and federal funds for the service area.

TD services in Highlands County are contracted through MV Transportation, which serves as the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) for the three-county area. The CTC is responsible for coordinating and providing door-to-door transportation services for medical and non-medical trips to those who qualify. Priority for service is given to persons who do not own or drive their own vehicle and do not have family or friends to assist them in traveling to and from destinations. Also, TD service is provided based on needs; life-sustaining activities (e.g., grocery shopping, medical trips) are given higher priority than business or recreation trips. To qualify for the TD program, a person must:

- Live in Hardee, Highlands, or Okeechobee counties.
- Not be able to obtain their own transportation due to a disability, age, or income.
- Not be able to get a ride from household members or others for life-sustaining trips (medical, grocery, work, job-related training/education, and other vital services).
- Complete the eligibility process with MV Transportation.

Table 2-8 shows the trends in the potential TD population compared to TD passengers served between 2012 and 2016 in Highlands County. As shown, the potential TD population has been consistently increasing over the last several years; at the same time, the number of passengers served is decreasing due to the financial impacts of Medicaid reform on Florida's coordinated transportation system. In 2016, 1.7% of the potential TD passengers were served in Highlands County, while statewide 9.8% of the potential TD population were served according to the Florida CTD's 2016 Annual Report. Implementing some type of fixed-route public transportation system along with complementary paratransit service could serve a number of potential or actual TD passengers able to make the trip using these types of services. Public transportation agencies that operate certain types of fixed-route service must also provide complementary paratransit services compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for those who are unable to use accessible fixed-route services and who live within a ¾-mile area of fixed-route service.

Another role of CFRPC is to provide public transportation in those rural areas with a population of less than 50,000, where many residents must rely on rural public transit to reach their activities and destinations. As a recipient of federal operating funds under the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Section 5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas program, CFRPC coordinates with MV Transportation as the CTC to provide rural transit service in Hardee, Highlands and Okeechobee counties.

Table 2-8: Transportation Disadvantaged Potential Population and Passengers Served

Transportation Disadvantaged (TD)	2016		2015		2014		2013		2012
Potential TD Population	63,722	↖	62,448	↖	59,978	↖	58,782	_	58,782
TD Passengers Served	1,101	↙	1,190	↙	2,012	↙	2,116	↖	1,910
Percent of Potential TD Population Served	1.73%	↙	1.91%	↙	3.35%	↙	3.60%	↖	3.25%

Source: Florida Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged

2.4 Employment and Economic Profile

The Highlands County employment and economic profile includes the following subsections:

- Employment Characteristics
- Employment Densities
- Journey-to-Work Commute Patterns
- Commuter Travel Flow
- Major Trip Generators
- Tourism and Visitors Level
- Land Use and Densities

Employment Characteristics

Table 2-9 identifies the labor force trends in Highlands County. In general, labor force indicators are trending down in Highlands County in terms of total businesses, total employment, and percent of population in the work force. The percentage of population age 65 and older is projected to increase by 32% from 2015 to 2030 and the "working age population" of persons ages 18– 64 is projected to increase by only 3% during this same period (see Table 2-6). The increasing growth in retired-age persons could be a major reason employment levels are trending down in Highlands County. These trends are likely to continue in the future unless new major employers or industry attract employees to Highlands

County. In terms of the impact to public transportation, while the trend in declining employment levels may adversely impact employment-based or commute trips, there will likely be a greater need for life sustaining or essential trips, such as for medical appointments, grocery shopping, banking, etc. among the aging population as driving becomes more difficult.

Table 2-9: Labor Force Trends

Labor Force	2015		2010		2000
Total Businesses	1,833	↙	1,980		N/A
Total Employment	31,131	↙	34,083	↖	30,051
Percent of Population in Civilian Labor	37.60%	↙	46%	↖	43.50%

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2015 ACS

The top 10 private employers in Highlands County are listed in Table 2-10 and employ over 4,800 (15.5%) of Highlands County's workforce. The top private employer in Highlands County is Florida Hospital with over 1,688 employees and the second largest private employer is Walmart with 751 employees.

Table 2-10: Top Private Employers

Employer	Employees
Florida Hospital - Medical Services	1,688
Walmart	751
Agero	580
Highlands Regional Medical Center	380
Alan Jay Automotive Network	365
Palms of Sebring	326
Lake Placid Health Care	229
Delray Plants	223
Positive Medical Transport	150
Royal Care of Avon Park	140
Total - Private Employers	**4,832**

Source: Highlands County Economic Development

Table 2-11 shows the top five public employers in the county. These entities employ nearly 3,100 employees (10% of Highlands County's workforce), with Highlands County School Board employing the greatest number at 1,622 people.

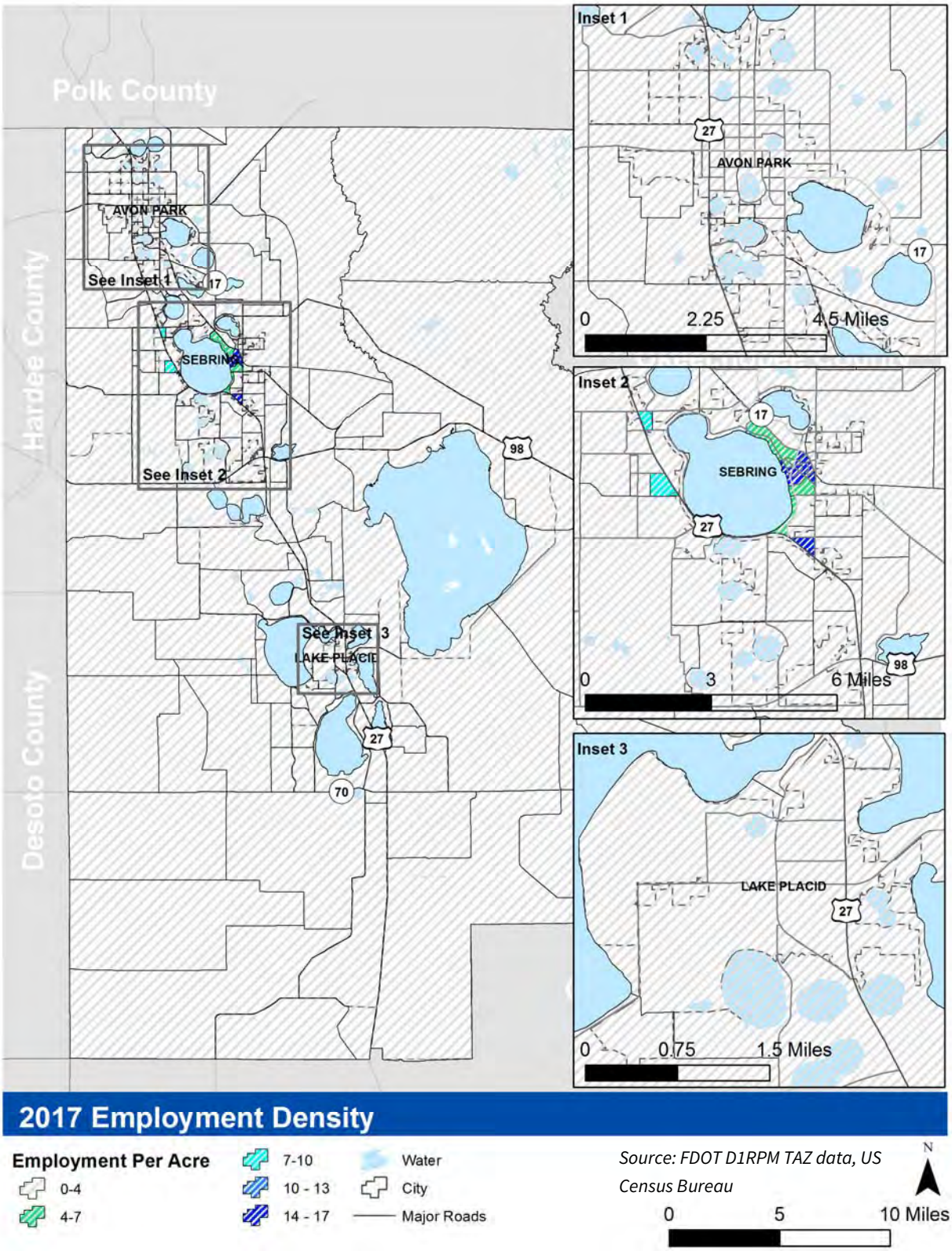
Table 2-11: Top Public Employers

Employer	Employees
Highlands County School Board	1,622
South Florida State College	455
Highlands County BoCC	376
Highlands County Sheriff's Office	350
Avon Park Correction Institution	295
Total - Public Employers	**3,098**

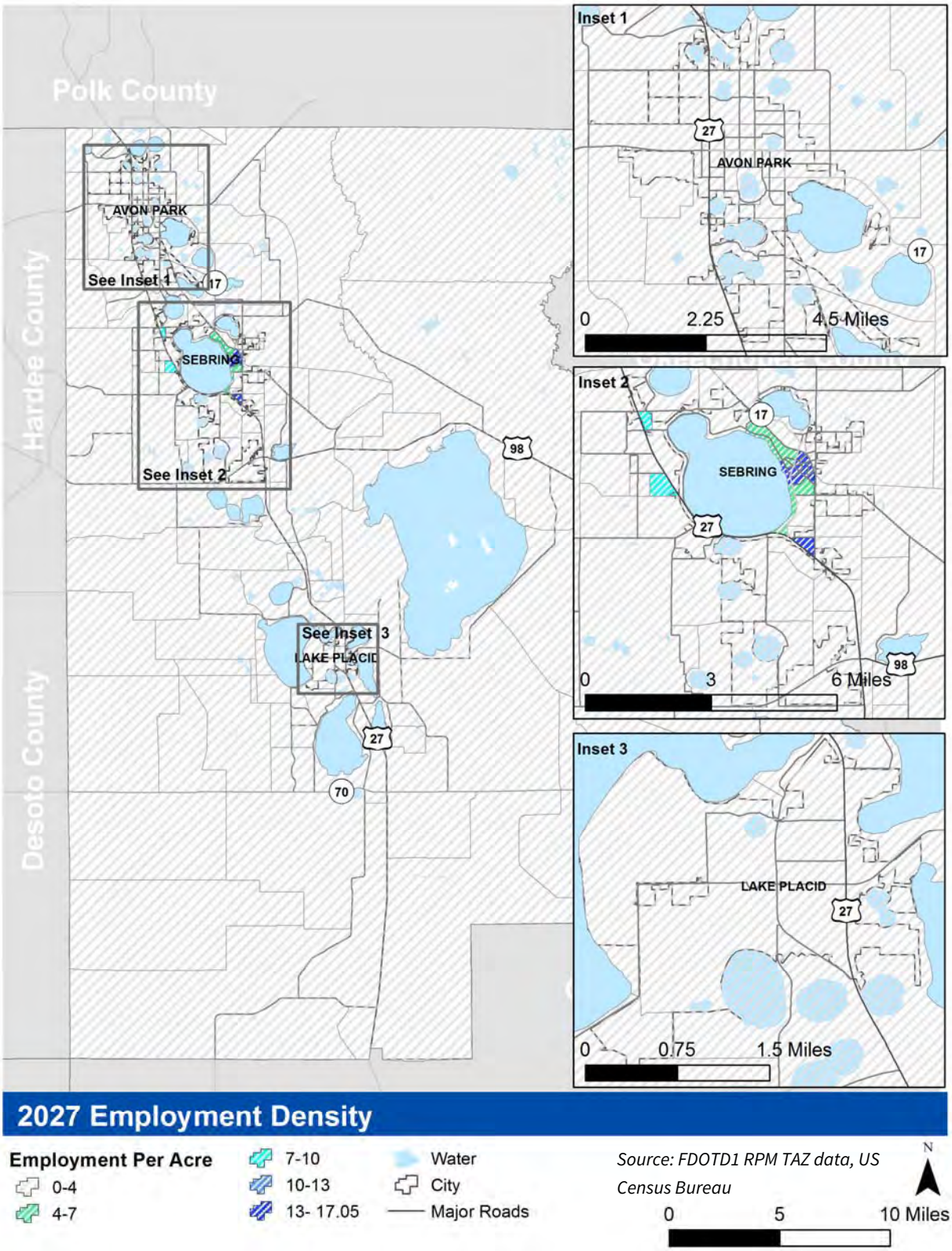
Source: Highlands County Economic Development

Employment Densities

Existing and projected employment densities in terms of employees per acre were calculated for 2017 and 2027 and are illustrated on Maps 2-11 and 2-12, respectively. This information indicates that Highlands County is generally an area of low employment density. Currently, densities are 0–4 employees per acre for nearly the entire county, including Avon Park and Lake Placid. The exception is in Sebring, where employment densities are higher in some areas (up to 4–7 and 14–17 employees per acre). It is observed that, when comparing the existing (2017) employment densities to the future (2027) employment densities, no discernable change in employment densities over the next 10 years is projected.



Map 2-11: 2017 Employment Density



Map 2-12: 2027 Employment Density

Journey-to-Work Commute Patterns

Journey-to-work characteristics for Highlands County were compiled from the American Community Survey (ACS) and are shown in Table 2-12. Single-occupant trips are trending up, and carpool trips are trending down. If public transportation were an option in Highlands County, this could help reduce single-occupant trips, provide another alternative to taking a taxi to work, and potentially lower the mean travel time to work (though many factors, including congestion, affect this).

Table 2-12: Journey-to-Work Commute Patterns

Commuting to Work	2015		2010		2000	
Car, Truck, or Van (Drove alone)	24,381	79.5%	25,316	76.1%	21,731	74.1%
Car, Truck, or Van (Carpooled)	3,465	11.3%	4,594	13.8%	5,652	19.3%
Public Transportation (excluding taxicab)	699	2.3%	653	2.0%	326	1.1%
Taxicab	12	0.0%	6	0.0%	19	0.0%
Walked	540	1.8%	665	2.0%	499	1.7%
Other	416	1.3%	813	2.5%	353	1.2%
Worked at Home	1,167	3.8%	1,207	3.6%	762	2.6%
Mean Travel Time	20.9 Min		22 Min		23 Min	

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2015 ACS.

Commuter Travel Flow

An analysis of commuting patterns for Highlands County residents and employees was completed using the U.S. Census Bureau's Center for Economic Studies "On the Map" tool. As shown in Table 2-13, the Highlands County labor force increased by 5.8%, or approximately 1,650 people, between 2010 and 2014. The majority of Highlands County residents continue to live and work in Highlands County, followed by inter-county commutes to Polk and Lee counties for employment.

Table 2-13: Where Highlands County Residents Work, 2010 and 2014

	2014		2010		Percent Change	Absolute Change
County of Employment	# of Workers	% Distribution	# of Workers	% Distribution	(2000-2014)	(2000-2014)
Highlands County	14,116	47.0%	14,426	50.8%	-2.1%	-310
Polk County	2,190	7.3%	1,960	6.9%	11.7%	230
Lee County	1,504	5.0%	1,301	4.6%	15.6%	203
Hillsborough County	1,083	3.6%	890	3.1%	21.7%	193
Miami-Dade County	1,065	3.5%	932	3.3%	14.3%	133
Palm Beach County	1,053	3.5%	840	3.0%	25.4%	213
Broward County	940	3.1%	825	2.9%	13.9%	115
Orange County	684	2.3%	594	2.1%	15.2%	90
Sarasota County	633	2.1%	-	-	-	-
Hardee County	604	2.0%	660	2.3%	-8.5%	-56
Collier County	-	-	486	1.7%	-	-
Other Locations	6,169	20.5%	5,474	19.3%	12.7%	695
Total	30,041	100%	28,388	100.0%	5.8%	1,653

Source: US Census Bureau "On the Map" online application, primary jobs.

An analysis was also completed to understand where Highlands County's labor force (workers) reside. As shown in Table 2-14, the majority of Highland County workers are Highlands County residents, consistent with Table 2-13. Outside of Highlands County, the highest distribution of Highlands County workers commute from Polk and Hillsborough counties.

Table 2-14: Where Highlands County Workers Live, 2010 and 2014

County of Residence	2014 # of Workers	2014 % Distribution	2010 # of Workers	2010 % Distribution	Percent Change (2000-2014)	Absolute Change (2000-2014)
Highlands County	14,116	58.1%	14,426	61.6%	-2.1%	-310
Polk County	1,806	7.4%	1,561	6.7%	15.7%	245
Hillsborough County	607	2.5%	535	2.3%	13.5%	72
Hardee County	569	2.3%	507	2.2%	12.2%	62
Miami-Dade County	477	2.0%	398	1.7%	19.8%	79
Orange County	443	1.8%	380	1.6%	16.6%	63
Lee County	416	1.7%	353	1.5%	17.8%	63
Palm Beach County	367	1.5%	352	1.5%	4.3%	15
Indian River County	366	1.5%	339	1.4%	5.8%	-
Broward County	363	1.5%	343	1.5%	8.0%	20
Other Locations	4,780	19.7%	4,232	18.1%	12.9%	-
Total	24,310	100.0%	23,426	100.0%	3.8%	884

Source: "On the Map" online application, primary jobs.

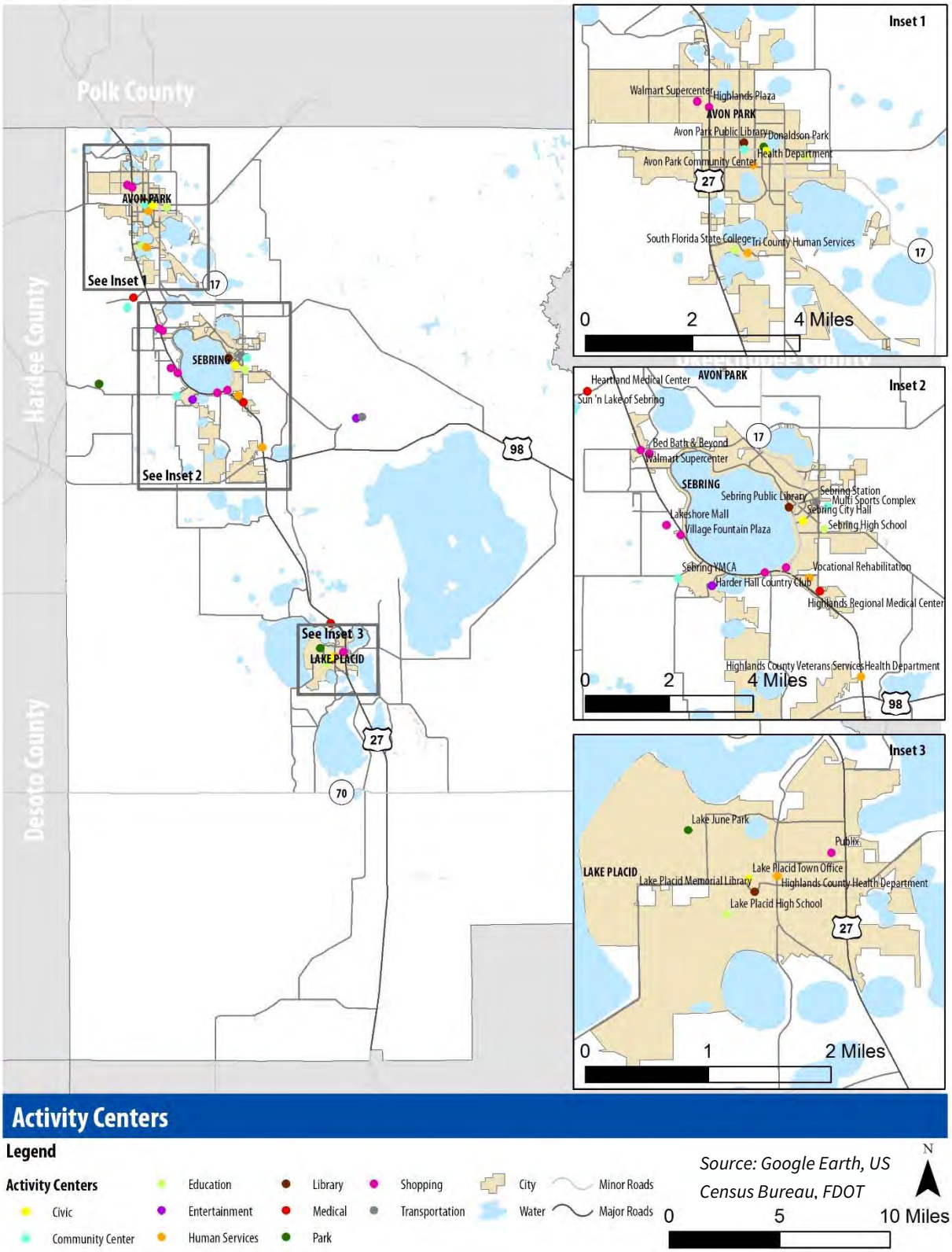
Major Activity Centers

Major activity centers are places that attract a high number of visitors and provide necessary services for residents, such as medical services, educational facilities, retail, and government services. Major activity centers in Highlands County are listed in Table 2-15 and illustrated on Map 2-13. With few exceptions, most of the major trip attractors are located within the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area.

Table 2-15: Major Trip Generators and Attractors

Activity Center	Type
City of Avon Park	
Avon Park City Hall	Civic
Avon Park Community Center	Community Center
Avon Park High School	Education
Avon Park Public Library	Library
Donaldson Park	Park
Highlands County Health Department	Human Services
Highlands Plaza	Shopping
South Florida State College	Education
Tri County Human Services	Human Services
Walmart Supercenter	Shopping
Town of Lake Placid	
Florida Hospital Lake Placid	Medical
Highlands County Health Department	Human Services
Lake Placid High School	Education
Lake Placid Memorial Library	Library
Lake Placid Town Office	Civic
Lake Placid Publix	Shopping

Activity Center	Type
City of Sebring	
Bed Bath & Beyond	Shopping
Florida Hospital Heartland Medical	Medical
Harder Hall Country Club	Entertainment
Highlands County Health Department	Human Services
Highlands County Veterans Services	Human Services
Highlands Hammock State Park	Park
Highlands Regional Medical Center	Medical
Lakeshore Mall	Shopping
North Gate Peddler's Mall	Shopping
Sebring City Hall	Civic
Sebring High School	Education
Sebring International Raceway	Entertainment
Sebring Public Library	Library
Sebring Regional Airport	Transportation
Sebring Station	Transportation
Sebring YMCA	Community Center
Southgate Shopping Center	Shopping
Multi-sports Complex	Community Center
Sun 'n Lake of Sebring	Community Center
Village Fountain Plaza	Shopping
Vocational Rehabilitation	Human Services
Walmart Supercenter	Shopping



Map 2-13: Major Activity Centers

Tourism and Visitor Levels

Tourism is a major economic driver in Florida. Highlands County, especially, is known for its natural amenities such as lakes for fishing, boating, skiing and sailing; golf courses; and festivals with a statewide draw. Table 2-16 demonstrates the economic impacts of Florida's tourism industry over the last several years. This information indicates that Florida as a whole is still a major tourist destination for out of state visitors generating increased local tax revenue and employment opportunities throughout the state, including in Highlands County.

Table 2-16: Economic Impact of Tourism

Tourism	2015		2013	Percent Change (2013 to 2015)
Out-of-State Visitor Spending	$147,800,000	↖	$113,500,000	**30.22%**
Total Business Sales from Tourism	$236,300,000		N/A	N/A
Travel Generated Employment	2,160	↖	1,320	**63.64%**
Travel Generated Tax Receipts (All)	$30,200,000		N/A	N/A
Travel Generated Local Tax	$6,200,000	↖	$3,640,000	**70.33%**

Visit Florida, visitflorida.org

Land Use and Densities

The Highlands County and municipal comprehensive plans identify residential densities and commercial and industrial land use densities and/or intensities within their respective jurisdictions. Table 2-17 summarizes the allowable residential land use designations for Highlands County, Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid, and Table 2-18 summarizes this information for commercial and industrial land use designations. Sebring has the highest allowable residential densities and also provides for a high-density downtown mixed-use development designation. Land use designations and densities are important, as higher-density areas with a mix of land uses can generally better support public transportation service than lower-density, single-use land use patterns.

Table 2-17: Residential Land Uses

Area	Density and/or Intensity
Highlands County	
Low Density Residential	1-3 units per acre
Medium Density Residential	4-8 units per acre
High Density Residential	9-12 units per acre
Assisted Living Facilities	Exception, maximum 30 units per acre
City of Sebring	
Low Density Residential	1-5 units per acre
Medium Density Residential	5-12 units per acre
High Density Residential	10-40 units per acre
Mixed Use	12-20 units per acre
Downtown Mixed Use Redevelopment (DMUR)	Maximum 40 units per acre
City of Avon Park	
Low Density Residential	1-6 units per acre
Medium Density Residential	Maximum 16 units per acre
Mixed Use	16 units per acre
Mobile home parks	Maximum 8 units per acre
Town of Lake Placid	
Rural Landscape	1 unit per 5 acres - 1 unit per acre
Low Estate Residential	1 unit per acre
Low Suburban Residential	1-2 units per acre
Low Density Residential	1-3 units per acre
Medium Density Residential	Maximum 6 units per acre
County Medium Density Residential	Maximum 8 units per acre
High Density Residential	Maximum 12 units per acre, 0.35 FAR
County High Density Residential	Maximum 12 units per acre
Residential Mixed Use	Maximum 3 units per acre, 0.35 FAR
Downtown Mixed Use	Maximum 12 units per acre, 1.00 FAR
Residential/Office	Maximum 2 units per acre, 0.50 FAR
Public/Semi Public	1 unit per acre

Note: FAR = Floor Area Ratio

Table 2-18: Commercial and Industrial Land Uses

Area	Density and/or Intensity
Highlands County	
Public/Quasi-Public Facility And Institutional Lands	Up to 1.00 FAR
Commercial	Up to 0.70 FAR for office Up to 0.80 for other commercial uses
Commercial/Industrial Mixed Use	Up to 0.80 FAR
Business Park Center	Up to .50 FAR for non-commercial uses
Industrial	Up to 1.00 FAR
Mixed Use	Consistent with approved Development Order or Development Agreement
Multi Use Center	Floor Area Ratio: 1.0 FAR Retail/Office/Light Industrial: Up to 80% of acreage
City of Sebring	
Mixed Use	
Commercial Mixed Use	Up to 100% office, retail, industrial, or other commercial
Single Family Mixed Use	Up to 30% commercial
Industrial-mixed use	Up to 90%, minimum of 80% industrial, up to 20% commerical
Commercial	Maximum impervious surface ratio of 0.70, exception Downtown Sebring CRA max impervious surface ratio 1.0 Max 50 feet building height, exception maximum 100 feet upon City Council approval for PUD Multi-Family up to 12 du/ac and 20% of area
Neighborhood Commercial	Offices and small scale commercial uses maximum impervious surface ratio of 70% maximum 50 feet building height.
Industrial	Industrial and warehousing activities, More intensive commercial uses, wholesale, and retail with a maximum impervious surface ratio of 70%, max building height 50 feet, exception up to 100 feet upon City Council approval for PUD
Downtown Mixed Use Redevelopment	Up to 40 units per acre; maximum impervious surface ratio is 0.70; Downtown Sebring CRA impervious ratio up to 1.0; building height max 50 feet; exception up to 100 feet upon City Council approval for PUD

Area	Density and/or Intensity
City of Avon Park	
Downtown Commercial	Offices up to 0.70 FAR, Commercial FAR 0.80.
Highway Commercial	Offices up to 0.70 FAR, Commercial FAR 0.80.
Mixed Use	Retail/Office/Light Industrial FAR 1.00.
Neighborhood Commercial	Offices up to 0.70 FAR, Commercial FAR 0.80.
Industrial	Up to 1.00 FAR.
Public Buildings and Grounds	Up to 1.00 FAR.
Town of Lake Placid	
Residential Mixed	Maximum 0.35 FAR.
County Mixed Use	Established through site specific policies in the FLUE (Future Land Use Element) .
Downtown Mixed Use	Maximum 1.00 FAR.
Residential/Office	Maximum 0.50 FAR.
Commercial-General	Maximum 1.00 FAR.
Commercial-Intensive / Light Industrial	Maximum 1.00 FAR.
Industrial	Maximum 1.00 FAR.
Public/Semi-Public	Maximum 1.00 FAR.

Sources: Highlands County, Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid Comprehensive Plans, Future Land Use Elements

Section 3 Public Transportation Performance Evaluation

The public transportation performance evaluation is divided into four subsections:

- Inventory of transportation service providers
- Trend analysis of existing public transportation services
- Peer communities review
- Future Public Transportation Performance Analysis

3.1 Transportation Service Providers

MV Transportation

As noted previously, MV Transportation serves as the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) for Hardee, Highlands, and Okeechobee counties. Performance data for its operations in Highlands County for FYs 2015 and 2016 are provided in Tables 3-1 and 3-2.

Table 3-1: CTC Performance Data (FYs 2015 & 2016)—Trip Summary

CTC Performance Data	FY 15-16		FY 14-15	Percent Change
Ambulatory Trips	80,017	↙	88,380	**-9.46%**
Within Service Area	*78,894*	↙	*85,603*	**-7.84%**
Outside Service Area	*1,123*	↙	*2,777*	**-59.56%**
Non-Ambulatory Trips	11,788	↖	11,743	**0.38%**
Within Service Area	*11,611*	↖	*11,483*	**1.11%**
Outside Service Area	*177*	↙	*260*	**-31.92%**
Total Stretcher Trips	234	↙	530	**-55.85%**
Within Service Area	*232*	↙	*483*	**-51.97%**
Outside Service Area	*2*	↙	*47*	**-95.74%**
Total Trips	92,039	↙	100,653	**-8.56%**
Within Service Area	*90,737*	↙	*97,569*	**-7.00%**
Outside Service Area	*1,302*	↙	*3,084*	**-57.78%**

Source: CTC Annual Operating Reports

Although the total vehicle miles and revenue miles increased, the annual operating budget decreased by 20%. This indicates that the service being provided is being provided more efficiently in terms of more service for a lower cost. TD services in Highlands County are provided through a fleet of 19 active vehicles, 9 of which are owned by CFRPC. The detailed vehicle inventory is provided in Appendix A.

Table 3-2: CTC Performance Data (FYs 2015 & 2016)—Operating Summary

CTC Performance Data	FY 15-16		FY 14-15	Percent Change
Service Span*	8 am-5 pm		8 am-5 pm	n/a
Total Driver Hours	183,040	↖	208,228	-12.10%
Total Vehicle Miles	1,237,562	↖	750,700	64.85%
Total Revenue Miles	858,458	↖	534,815	60.51%
Annual Operating Cost	1,660,168	↙	2,070,280	-19.81%
Cost per Trip	$18.04	↙	$20.58	-12.34%
Average Trips per Passenger	83.60	↙	84.54	-1.11%

*Some trips may originate earlier or go beyond these hours depending on the distance clients are transported for their medical services. Source: CTC Annual Operating Reports.

Other Transportation Providers

In addition to MV Transportation, other private and public transportation providers offer transportation services in Highlands County. To understand the full range of transportation services available, transportation providers were identified and contacted for a survey. The information provided by responsive providers is documented in Table 3-3. As shown, the types of available services offered through these providers range from emergency/ambulance-related, non-medical/social, commuter services, and recreational.

Table 3-3: Other Transportation Service Providers Inventory

Company Name	Services Provided	Service Restrictions	Service Area	Days/Hours of Operation	Average Annual Ridership	Fare Per Trip	Primary Trip Types	Vehicle Fleet/ ADA Accessible Vehicles	Funding Partners
Comfort Keepers of Sebring	Non-Emergency Medical	NA	Polk, Highlands, Hardee counties	24/7	Declined to provide	$0.95 per mile plus a 3 hour minimum	Grocery, recreation, education, medical	300 Caregiver's Vehicles; None ADA Accessible	None
A1 Royal Airport Transportation & Limo Service	Taxi	NA	Southwest Florida, including Highlands County	24/7	Declined to provide	Declined	Airport Transportation	2-cars, 1-van; None ADA Accessible	None
Affordable Transport, Inc.	Non-Emergency Medical	Insurance Coverage Required	Polk, Hardee, Highlands counties	24/7	NA	Varies	Medical/ Ambulatory	13-15 Vehicles; All ADA Accesible	None
American Home Companions	Non-Emergency In-Home Care	NA	Counties in Central Florida and South Florida, including Highlands County	24/7	NA	Declined to provide	Medical/Ambulatory, Grocery, Recreation	Caregiver's vehicles	None
American Medical Response Tampa - West Florida	Ambulance	Insurance Coverage Required	Pasco, Hillsborough, Sumter, Orange, Polk, Highlands, Hardee, Broward, Palm Beach, Dade, Monroe	24/7	65,000	Depends on level of service, wheelchair, critical care	Medical/Ambulatory	100 vehicles; 100 ADA accesible	N/A
Commuter Services of Southwest Florida	Bus, Carpool	Employer based	Polk, Manatee, Hardee, Sarasota, Desoto, Charlotte, Glades, Highlands, Okeechobee, Lee, Hendry, Collier	8-5 pm	22,981	None	Home-Employment Services	NA	FDOT

Company Name	Services Provided	Service Restrictions	Service Area	Days/Hours of Operation	Average Annual Ridership	Fare Per Trip	Primary Trip Types	Vehicle Fleet/ ADA Accessible Vehicles	Funding Partners
Options for Senior America	Non-Emergency In-Home Care	Client- ongoing schedule	Hillsborough, Polk, and Highlands counties	M-F 8:30-5	NA	$0.45 per mile	Nutricion, grocery, recreation	NA	None
The Bus Bank	Charter	NA	Throughou the U.S.	24/7	NA	Declined to provide	Recreation	NA, Partner Vehicles; non-specified number are ADA accesible	None
Trinity Non Emergency Transport, Inc./Angel On Board Medical Tranport	Non-Emergency	NA	Polk County, Sebring	M-S 6am-7pm	NA	Quote-based Fare	Non emegency, nutrition, grocery, recreation	7 Vehicles; 7 ADA accesible	None
National Patient Travel Helpline	Non-Emergency	Income Requirements	U.S.	24/7	NA	No fare	Medical	NA, volunteer organizations utilized	Donors
Sunnyvale Medical Trasport, Inc.	Non-Emergency	Push IV	National- Long Distance Travel Only	24/7	130	Distance-based Fare	Medical Transport	3 motor homes; 3 ADA accesible	None

Source: Information provided by each agency.

3.2 Peer Community Review

Since Highlands County currently does not have fixed-route public transportation service, research was undertaken to understand the primary type of public transportation options available, including fixed-route or demand-response service, based on other similar "peer" communities. The selected peers include communities within and outside of Florida that are comparable to Highlands County based on selected key transit-supportive variables.

The peer community review conducted for Highlands County, including the methodology used and the results, are summarized below.

Peer Community Review Methodology

For this analysis, 2010 Census data were collected and analyzed for all counties within Florida and the three southeastern states closest to Florida, including Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. To be considered as a peer county, it had to meet one or more of the following five criteria**:**

- **Urbanized Area Designation:** Be within a designated Urbanized Area.
- **Population Total:** Be within 5% of Highlands County's 2010 population.
- **Population Density:** Have population densities (in terms of persons per square mile of land) within 3% of Highlands County.
- **Percent of Population Age 65+:** Be within 10% of Highlands County's percent of population age 65 and older.

Peer Community Review Summary

Table 3-4 presents the peer review results for the communities selected using the criteria summarized in the methodology. As shown, these peers have similar demographic characteristics to Highlands County. The findings in the table indicate that all of these communities have designated urbanized areas with demand-response service. Three of the seven peer communities have additional public transportation options, with one providing fixed-route service and two providing deviated fixed-route service.

Table 3-4: Summary of Peer Community Review

Counties	Population			Percent Age 65 and Over		Population Density	Public Transportation		UZA
Peer Review	2015 (Est.)	2010	2000	2015 (Est.)	2010	2010	Demand Response	Fixed-Route	Designated Urban Areas (UZA)
Sumter County, Florida	118,891	93,420	53,345	54.8	43.4	170.8	Ride Right, LLC	Deviated Fixed-Route Shuttle	Leesburg--Eustis--Tavares
Flagler County, Florida	105,392	95,696	49,832	29.1	24.5	197.1	Flagler County Public Transportation	NA	Palm Coast--Daytona Beach--Port Orange
Charlotte County, Florida	173,115	159,978	141,627	38.4	34.1	235.2	Charlotte County Transit	Public Dial-a-Ride	North Port--Port Charlotte
Citrus County, Florida	141,058	141,236	118,085	35.6	31.9	242.8	Citrus County Transit	Deviated Fixed-Route Bus	Homosassa Springs--Beverly Hills--Citrus Springs
Floyd County, Georgia	96,504	96,317	90,565	16.1	14.2	188.9	Rome Transit Department	Yes	Rome
Whitfield County, Georgia	104,216	102,599	83,525	13	11.2	353.2	Whitfield County Transit Services	NA	Dalton
Bartow County, Georgia	102,747	100,157	76,019	13.2	10.6	217.9	Bartow County Transit	NA	Cartersville
Highlands County, Florida	**99,491**	**98,786**	**87,366**	**34.1**	**32.2**	**97.2**	**Community Transit**	**NA**	**Sebring-Avon Park**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 and 2010 Census, 2015 ACS

Figure 3-1 demonstrates that Highlands County has the largest land area in the group of peers overall. Due to the expansive land area, the population density is the lowest among the peers, presenting a challenge to operating a fixed-route public transportation system. Although this peer review does not indicate that Highlands County needs to implement fixed-route public transportation immediately or the extent to which such a service might be provided geographically, it indicates that communities with similar demographics have elected to implement public transportation services beyond the door-to-door TD service currently available in Highlands County. Consideration for a future public transportation system should focus on serving the areas in Highlands County in which population density is the greatest, such as the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area.

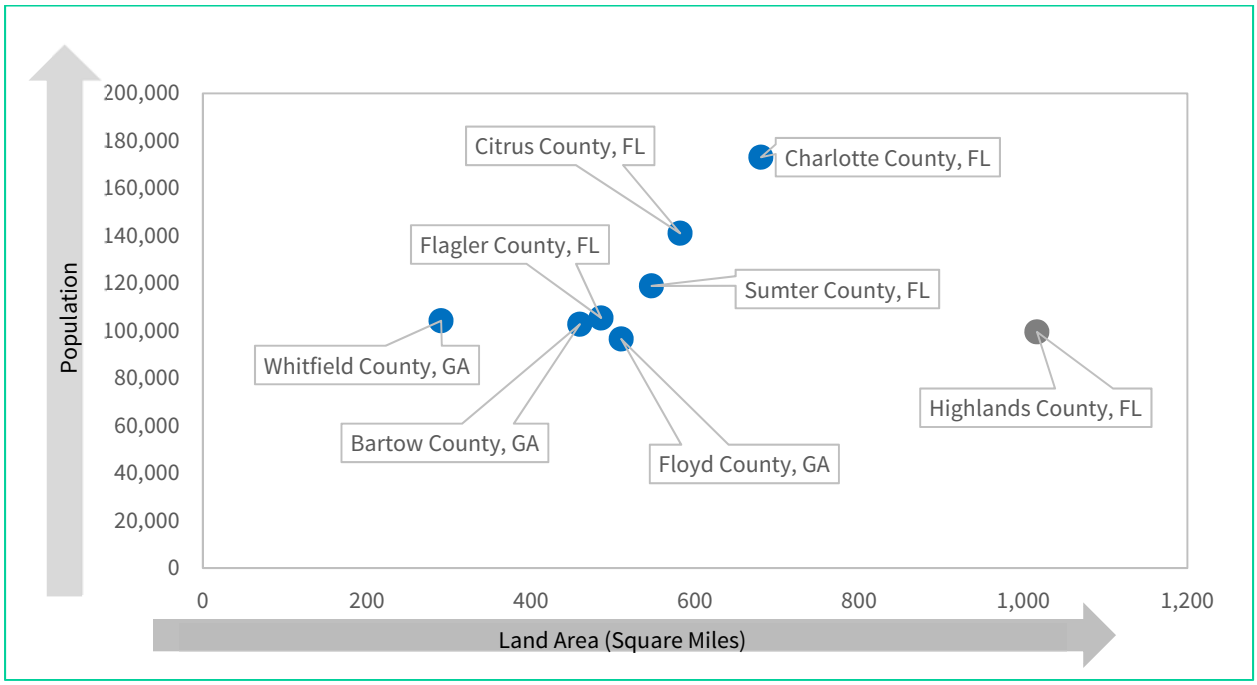


Figure 3-1: Peer Communities Comparison

3.3 Future Public Transportation Performance Analysis

While the peer community review looks at what types of public transportation services currently operate in communities similar to Highlands County, another analysis was conducted to understand the potential future performance of public transportation in Highlands County by the year 2040 based on how selected public transportation agencies operate today.

Transit Agency Selection

The methodology to select the group of public transportation agencies used in this analysis involved a two-step process. The first step was to project the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area population

for the year 2040 and the urbanized area size and then to use National Transit Database (NTD) data from the Florida Transit Information System (FTIS) to identify other systems operating today in areas with a similar urban area population and size. As future 2040 urban area population data are not available, the current Urbanized Area-to-countywide population ratio for Highlands County was calculated and applied to the 2040 countywide population figure. The 2040 countywide population figure was determined using the socioeconomic data forecasts developed for the Heartland Regional TPO's 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

Once the 2040 Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area population was estimated, a set of public transportation systems on which to base the future performance analysis were selected based on two parameters: service area population within +/- 10% of the projected 2040 Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area population and service area size (square miles) within +/- 20% of the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area. Queries were run with both parameters using "and" statements to return public transportation systems that fit both parameters. Table 3-5 identifies the public transportation systems selected for this analysis.

Table 3-5: identified Systems for the Future Performance Analysis

System	Location
ART (Asheville Redefines Transit)	Asheville, NC
Beaumont Municipal Transit System	Beaumont, TX
Charlottesville Area Transit	Charlottesville, VA
Decatur Public Transit System	Decatur, IL
Kootenai County	Coeur d'Alene, ID
Longview Transit	Longview, TX
St. Joseph Transit	St Joseph, MO

Future Performance Analysis Summary

Table 3-6 identifies the key performance indicators and measures from the 2015 NTD data (the most current available), which were used to illustrate the potential performance of public transportation in Highlands County by 2040.

Table 3-6: Future Performance Analysis Measures

Performance Measures
Service Area Population
Service Area Size (square miles)
Passenger Trips
Revenue Miles
Total Operating Expense
Vehicles Operated in Maximum Service
Effectiveness Measures
Passenger Trips Per Capita
Passenger Trips Per Revenue Mile
Passenger Trips Per Revenue Hour
Efficiency Measures
Operating Expense Per Passenger Trip
Operating Expense Per Revenue Mile
Operating Expense Per Revenue Hour

Table 3-7 presents the minimum, maximum, and mean of the selected transit agencies for each performance indicator, effectiveness measure, and efficiency measure analyzed. The results of this analysis indicates the potential of Highlands County to achieve the average performance of the selected systems by 2040 if public transportation service is implemented, although a number of factors would affect the actual performance and growth of a new public transportation system established in Highlands County. It is also recognized that the performance of the selected public transportation systems included in this analysis, as well as the potential performance of a system in Highlands County, is influenced by a number of factors. This analysis did not take into consideration unique characteristics of these other communities, such as seasonal population, tourism and higher education institutions, all which affect ridership levels and system performance throughout the year.

Based on the resulting public transportation system group mean, Highlands County could expect by 2040:

- Nearly 960,000 annual passenger trips and an annual operating expense of approximately $4 million.
- An average of 11.5 passenger trips per capita.
- An average operating expense of approximately $5.80 per trip.

Table 3-7: Summary of Future Performance Analysis

Performance Indicators	Peer Group Minimum	Peer Group Maximum	Peer Group Mean	Highlands County	% From Peer Group Mean
Service Area Population	78,004	85,755	81,480	85,994	**-5.25%**
Service Area Size (square miles)	38	53	43	46.17	**7.79%**
Service Area Population Density	1,535	2,257	1,937	1,863	**-3.86%**
Passenger Trips	186,910	2,423,740	958,722	--	
Revenue Miles	188,496	1,043,767	700,775	--	
Revenue Hours	11,721	104,572	54,513	--	
Total Operating Expense	$649,063	$7,188,657	$4,158,376	--	
Vehicles Operated in Maximum Service	2	24	14	--	
Effectiveness Measures	**Peer Group Minimum**	**Peer Group Maximum**	**Peer Group Mean**	**Highlands County**	**Potential Growth**
Passenger Trips Per Capita	2.38	28.26	11.54	--	
Passenger Trips Per Revenue Mile	0.56	2.32	1.21	--	
Passenger Trips Per Revenue Hour	6.47	23.18	16.3	--	
Efficiency Measures	**Peer Group Minimum**	**Peer Group Maximum**	**Peer Group Mean**	**Highlands County**	**Potential Growth**
Operating Expense Per Passenger Trip	$2.97	$12.07	$5.81	--	
Operating Expense Per Revenue Mile	$3.44	$6.89	$5.66	--	
Operating Expense Per Revenue Hour	$55.38	$101.79	$77.28	--	

Note: The Highlands County service area population figure represents the projected 2040 population for the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area. This figure was calculated by applying the current percentage of population within the Urbanized Area to the 2040 countywide population projection. The land area of the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area was used as a proxy for the potential service area size for Highlands County.

Section 4 Situation Appraisal

This section documents a review of various transportation planning and programming documents to identify policies or issues that could impact the implementation of public transportation services in Highlands County. The results of this plans review is a component of the situation appraisal, which assesses the public transportation operating environment with respect to land use, state and local transportation plans, socioeconomic trends, organizational issues, technology, and 10-year public transportation ridership projections. The situation appraisal serves as the basis for the formulation of Highlands County's public transportation needs and future goals and objectives. Some aspects of the situation appraisal will be documented in future technical memoranda, with the completed situation appraisal included in the final report prepared for the Highlands Transit Plan.

4.1 Review of Plans, Programs, Policies, and Studies

A review of selected federal, regional, and local plans, programs, land development codes, and studies that influence public transportation operations, infrastructure, and policy was conducted to understand the potential implications for implementing a public transportation system in Highlands County. Findings from this review will help to ensure that the Highlands Transit Plan is developed consistent with other local planning efforts and help Highlands County to better understand its public transportation operating environment. Table 4-1 provides a list of plans, programs, and studies that were reviewed for this effort. Appendix B provides an overview of the relevant goals, policies, and key considerations for the Highlands Transit Plan situation appraisal.

Table 4-1: Summary of Reviewed Plans, Programs, Policies, and Studies

Federal Plans/Programs
Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act
State Plans/Programs
2060 Florida Transportation Plan
State of Florida Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) Plan
FDOT Florida Intercity Bus Service Needs Assessment and Action Plan
Regional Plans/Programs
Heartland Regional TPO (HRTPO) 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)
Heartland Rural Mobility Plan (HRMP)
Transportation Disadvantaged Service Plan (TDSP) for Hardee, Highlands and Okeechobee Counties
Heartland 2060: Building a Resilient Region
Heartland Regional TPO (HRTPO) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
Local Plans/Programs
Highlands County Comprehensive Plan
Sebring Comprehensive Plan
Avon Park Comprehensive Plan
Lake Placid Comprehensive Plan
Hardee Comprehensive Plan
Okeechobee Comprehensive Plan

4.2 Situation Appraisal

The Highlands Transit Plan is required to include a situation appraisal of the public transportation operating environment. The purpose of this appraisal is to help develop an understanding of the potential operating environment for public transportation in Highlands County in the context of the following elements:

- Socioeconomic trends
- Travel patterns and behavior
- Land use
- Public involvement
- Organizational attributes
- Technology
- Regional public transportation challenges/barriers

The assessment and resulting implications are drawn from the following sources:

- Results of technical evaluation performed as part of the Highlands Transit Plan planning process
- Review of relevant plans, studies, and programs

- Outcomes of public outreach activities

The identified challenge/barriers, trends, and implications are summarized for each of the major elements in the remainder of this section.

Socioeconomic Trends

To better assess the impact of the growth in population on public transportation needs, it is important to understand the trends and markets that could be impacted and/or may benefit from public transportation service in Highlands County. Key findings from an assessment of socioeconomic trends included in the baseline conditions are summarized as follows:

- The percentage of population age 65 and older experienced has been increasing consistently since 2000 and is projected to grow by 32% by 2030. This could have significant impact on the need for public transportation in the future as limitations from aging may reduce the ability to operate a personal vehicle.
- Although children under age 15 show declining trends since 2000, this group is projected to increase by approximately 7% by 2030.
- The percentage of minority population shows moderate declines since 2000 (3%).
- The number households below the poverty level increased by approximately 29% since 2000, which may indicate less disposable income available to own/operate a personal vehicle and resulting higher need for public transportation.
- Potential transportation disadvantaged populations increased by 8% since 2012, indicating growth in a core population group relying on public transportation.
- Zero-vehicle households decreased 10% between 2000 and 2015.
- Tourism is trending to have positive economic impacts in Florida, which will likely have a positive impact on the local economy in Highlands County. A safe, efficient, and convenient public transportation system serving key activity centers and tourist destinations, attractions and major events will likely increase tourist and visitor levels.

Implications

The combination of increasing trends and projected growth among the following populations indicate a potential public transportation market and demonstrates an increasing need for public transportation services:

- Population age 65 and older.
- Children under age 15.
- Populations below the household poverty level.
- Potential increase in the percentage of household income being spent on transportation.
- Transportation disadvantaged populations.

- Increasing tourist/visitor levels.

Travel Patterns and Behaviors

To assess the impact travel patterns and behavior have on potential public transportation needs, journey-to-work data from the American Community Survey (ACS) for 2000, 2010, and 2015 and origin-destination data for 2016 from the Highlands County Community Transit Coordinator (CTC) were analyzed. The analyses identified the following key trends:

- Single occupancy travel increased since 2000.
- Carpooling declined since 2000.
- Utilization of public transportation services increased since 2000.
- Number of people working from home increased.
- Mean travel time to work decreased since 2000.
- Walking and other forms of transportation declined since 2000.
- The majority (97%) of TD trips either originating from or ending in Highlands County are intra-county trips, primarily within the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area.

Implications

The findings demonstrate a split among two growing modes within Highlands County: 1) single-occupancy vehicle travel and 2) public transportation. Although single-occupancy vehicle travel increased by 74%, findings indicate that public transportation has experienced a growing trend since 2000. The origin-destination analysis for current TD trips indicates public transportation service within the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area could help offset non-emergency and non-ADA trips for medical, shopping, and recreational needs.

Regional Public Transportation Challenges/Barriers

The density threshold assessment and the total land area of Highlands County pose regional transportation challenges and barriers. Transit supportive densities primarily exist within Sebring and Avon Park. The total land area of Highlands County is nearly double the average size and the lowest population density of the selected peer communities.

Implications

Public transportation may be feasible within the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area; however providing regional public transportation service throughout Highlands County may not be supported by existing or projected densities in other areas.

Land Use

A review of the land use designations within the Lake Placid Comprehensive Plan, the Sebring Comprehensive Plan, and the Avon Park Comprehensive Plan identify policies that are transit-supportive.

The Lake Placid Comprehensive Plan identifies the following:

- Land use policies identify transit-supportive development within the urbanized area.
- Policies support sustainable growth principles and transit-oriented design.

The Sebring Comprehensive Plan identifies the following:

- Future Land Use elements promote orderly compact growth and alternative forms of transportation that support transit oriented development.
- Transportation element identifies public transportation coordination including transit supportive land uses.

The Avon Park Comprehensive Plan identifies the following:

- Land Use element enforces land development regulations that discourage urban sprawl and supports growth management policies that regulate land use activities and encourage compact urban growth.
- Future Land Use maps and existing Future Land Use categories encourage pedestrian-oriented urban neighborhoods with convenient access to future transit stations consistent with transit friendly policies.

Implications

Highlands County has significantly lower population and employment densities than the selected peer communities. Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid have identified transit-supportive land use policies in their respective comprehensive plans. However, given that population and employment densities are not anticipated to change between now and 2040, public transportation service should focus primarily on serving or connecting the areas with the highest densities.

Public Involvement

The results of the public involvement efforts are summarized in Section 5. General conclusions drawn from public involvement efforts conducted for the Highlands Transit Plan include the following:

- **Need for fixed-route transportation service in Highlands** County – Community input received during the early public involvement activities indicated a clear need for fixed-route transportation service in Highlands County. Key areas that the public feel should be served include:
    - Lake Placid to Sebring (downtown & mall)
    - Avon Park to Sebring (downtown & mall)
    - Sebring – downtown to mall
    - Shopping: mall, Walmarts, grocery stores
- **Solid weekday service is a priority –** Full-day service on weekdays to cover commuting hours is the top priority, followed by weekend service (with Saturday a higher priority than Sunday service), then nighttime service.
- **Use existing revenue for local match**– Implementing new fixed-route public transportation service will require identifying a dedicated local funding source to serve, at a minimum, as a local match for federal and state revenue. Feedback emphasized a need to explore reallocating existing local option gas tax and general fund revenue to public transportation, rather than implementing new sales or property taxes.

Implications – *As new public transportation service is considered in Highlands County, it will be important to balance the allocation of limited resources to maximize the effectiveness of the service being provided in terms of service coverage, frequency, and major destinations served.*

Organizational Attributes

As part of developing the Highlands Transit Plan, various governance structures were considered and evaluated. Further, within each governance structure, the contracting of operating and/or administrative functions was assessed. The process for and results of the governance structure assessment are documented in Section 11. Ultimately, the 10-year service and implementation plan for implementation of public service in Highlands County, as documented in this TDP, is based on the decision that the HRTPO Board will serve as the governing body of the transit system and will likely contract out operations/maintenance functions to a third-party operating while retaining administrative functions in-house.

Implications *–Once service has been established and is operational, periodic efforts to assess the efficiency of the service being provided, such as through a comprehensive operational analysis (COA), or other internal assessments, as appropriate, should be completed to identify whether any governance/operating changes could enhance the systems efficiency.*

Technology

Implementing new fixed-route public transportation service will require acquiring transit vehicles, installing infrastructure, such as bus stops, and evaluating the benefits of technology to support service efficiency and enhance the overall transit experience for riders. During initial implementation, farebox and fare media technology, automatic vehicle location, automated voice announcements, and automatic passenger counts could be evaluated to better support service efficiency and customer experience. Exploring various in-vehicle technologies such as Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs) and GPS may be more appropriate once public transportation service is established.

Implications *– Implementing technologies should be appropriate to the scale of service being provided and appropriate for a start-up system. Further evaluation of technologies can be completed along with initial service efficiency evaluations.*

Section 5 Public Involvement

A comprehensive public involvement program is critical for developing the Highlands Transit Plan. Not only will it ensure that the HRTPO meets applicable TDP requirements, but also that the resulting 10-year plan reflects a community-driven vision for public transportation in Highlands County. This section documents the public involvement activities conducted for the Highlands Transit Plan.

5.1 Public Involvement Timeline and Phases

Developing the Highlands Transit Plan included two phases of public involvement. The first phase occurred from February to March 2017 and was intended to:

- Inform the community that the Highlands Transit Plan was being developed.
- Determine community interest for a new public transportation system to serve Highlands County.
- Understand where people would like to travel using public transportation.
- Identify the types of services that should be considered.

The information gathered from the first phase of public involvement, along with the baseline conditions assessment, was used to identify the community's public transportation needs and identify potential service options to present to the public for further evaluation.

The second phase of public involvement was from mid-April through late-May 2017 and presented the proposed service options to the public. As part of this outreach, the public was asked to evaluate and help prioritize the proposed service options and funding mechanisms to be considered in the Highlands Transit Plan.

5.2 Public Involvement Plan (PIP)

One of the first activities in this process was to prepare the PIP to identify the public involvement techniques to be undertaken in developing the Highlands Transit Plan. The PIP provides numerous opportunities for involvement by the general public and representatives of local agencies and organizations. A copy of the PIP developed for the Highlands Transit Plan is included in Appendix C. In accordance with Rule 14-73.001, FAC, the PIP developed for the Highlands Transit Plan is consistent with the HRTPO's Public Participation Plan and was approved by FDOT.

5.3 Summary of Public Involvement Activities

This section introduces the types of public involvement techniques used in developing the Highlands Transit Plan and summarizes the various public involvement activities undertaken.

Public Involvement Techniques

A variety of public involvement techniques are documented in the Highlands Transit Plan PIP. This approach helps provide opportunity for a range of community stakeholders and residents to actively participate in the plan development process. The public involvement techniques used in developing the Highlands Transit Plan are identified by two major categories:

- **Direct involvement techniques** include activities that directly engage the community using "hands-on" activities, such as public workshops and surveys.
- **Information distribution techniques** include the use of materials or methods such as emails and informational flyers used to inform and educate the community about the project.

The direct involvement and information distribution techniques used to develop the Highlands Transit Plan are summarized in Table 5-1 along with the estimated number of people reached. For some activities, such as the surveys and public workshops, it is easier to quantify the number of persons reached than other activities. For those activities for which the number of persons reach is quantifiable, this information is provided.

Table 5-1: Summary of Direct Involvement and Information Distribution Techniques

Direct Involvement Techniques	No. of Persons Reached	Information Distribution Techniques	No. of Persons Reached
Phase 1 Activities		**HRTPO Website**	**Various**
Stakeholder Interviews	**27**	**Email Campaigns**	**247+**
Transportation Needs Survey	**771**	**HRTPO Facebook Page**	**2.9k+**
Public Workshops (3)	**23**	**PSAs and Radio Spots**	**Various**
Highlands County Fair	**Various**	**Newspaper Advertisements**	**Various**
Community Presentations	**75+**		
Phase 2 Activities			
Community Transit Forum	**20**		
Service Options Survey	**156**		
Public Workshops (1)	**15**		
Blueberry Festival	**Various**		

Many people were reached at open events such as the Highlands County Fair and Blueberry Festival and through communication tools such as the HRTPO website, various PSAs and radio announcements, and newspaper advertisements; however, it is difficult to quantify the exact number of people reached.

Phase 1 Public Involvement Activities

The first phase of public involvement activities was intended to identify the community's public transportation needs and identify service options to present to the public for further evaluation. The Phase 1 direct public involvement activities include the following:

- Conducting stakeholder interviews
- Administering transportation needs survey
- Attending Highlands County Fair
- Facilitating public workshops
- Presenting at community group meetings

Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews provide a one-on-one forum to gather input from policy and agency or community leaders concerning the vision for public transportation in their community. Interviews were conducted in March 2017 with the following stakeholders:

- Taylor Benson, Coordinator, Office of Economic Development, Highlands County
- Chris Benson, Director of Community Programs, Highlands County
- Bruce Bergham, CEO, Florida Hospital Heartland Medical Center
- Sheriff Paul Blackman, Highlands County Sheriff
- Commissioner Jim Brooks, Highlands County Board of County Commissioners (HCBCC)/HRTPO Board Chair
- Mary Kay Burns, Administrator, Florida Department of Health, Highlands County
- Don Clarke, President, Lake Placid Chamber
- Donna Doubleday, Executive Director, CareerSource Heartland
- Tenille Drury-Smith, Director of Marketing, Sun n' Lake of Sebring Improvement District
- Commissioner Don Elwell, HCBCC/HRTPO Board and Tourist Development Council Chair
- June Fisher, County Adminstrator, Highlands County
- Commissioner Greg Harris, HCBCC/HRTPO Board
- Robin Hinote, Community Redevelopment Agency, City of Sebring
- Mayor John Holbrook, Town of Lake Placid
- Dusty Johnson, Chairman, Board President, Sebring Chamber
- Dr. Tom Lietzel, President, South Florida State College
- Dr. Brenda Longshore, Superintendent, Highlands County School Board
- Councilman Charlie Lowrance, HRTPO Board, Sebring City Council
- Amanda Massey, Board President, Avon Park Chamber
- Lindsey Pierson, Director of Marketing/Public Information Officer, Highlands Regional Medical Center
- Commissioner Jack Richie, HCBCC/HRTPO Board
- Mayor John Shoop, City of Sebring
- Romona Washington, Executive Editor, Highlands News Sun
- Phil Williams, Town Administrator, Town of Lake Placid
- Mike Willingham, Executive Director, Sebring Airport Authority
- Casey Wohl-Hartt, Tourist Development Director, Highlands County
- Ansley Woods, Highlands County Area Director, United Way of Central Florida

A list of 11 questions was developed for the interviews, which were asked of each stakeholder. A copy of the interview script is provided in Appendix D. The input received during these interviews was reviewed and major themes were identified as summarized below.

Importance of Public Transportation: Nearly all stakeholders believe it is important for Highlands County to have some form of public transportation service.

Personal Use of Public Transportation, If Available: The majority of the stakeholders stated that they would not use public transportation, primarily because of the availability and convenience of their own

personal vehicle and that their schedules were not conducive to using public transportation. There were a few stakeholders who stated they would use public transportation if they could make a similar trip when using their own personal vehicle or if their trip was were not bound by time constraints.

Population Groups Benefiting Most From Public Transportation: The majority of stakeholders indicated that older adults and unemployed persons would benefit most from public transportation service. The two next most mentioned groups were workers and students. Tourists and visitors were the least mentioned group.

Population Groups that Experience the Greatest Challenges/Barriers with Existing Transportation Options: The majority of stakeholders indicated that persons with disabilities, low-income persons, and older adults experience the greatest mobility challenges with regard to the transportation options in Highlands County. The least mentioned group was commuters. The most common reasons mentioned were a lack of access to reliable transportation, inability to afford a means of transportation, and medical issues or age restricting their ability to operate a personal vehicle.

Types of Public Transportation Services Desired: The majority of stakeholders would like to see some form of bus system in the area or a combined effort including the increased use of Uber/Lyft. The least mentioned options were vanpools and carpools, which most did not regard as an authentic form of public transportation. A few stakeholders mentioned a demand-response service, but most were not familiar with that service. It was noted that the county's rural nature and geography interrupted by many lakes would make it difficult to operate public transportation in a cost-effective manner.

General Need for Public Transportation in Highlands County: The overwhelming majority of stakeholders responded that there was a need for public transportation in Highlands County.

- **Major Intra-County Destinations:** Stakeholders mentioned the major intra-county destinations that should be served by public transportation include hospitals, grocery stores, banks, doctor offices, South Florida State College, the mall, Walmart stores in Sebring and Avon Park, shopping plazas, restaurants, the three downtowns (Lake Placid, Sebring, Avon Park), lifestyle/leisure opportunities such as art and cultural offerings, Highlands Hammock State Park, and other local events.
- **Major Inter-County Destinations:** Stakeholders mentioned the major inter-county destinations that should be served by public transportation include airports for commuters and tourists, cruise terminals, hospitals, medical facilities such as Moffitt in Tampa, the VA Hospital and doctor offices/specialists for referrals, regional shopping centers, and links to other public transportation services in neighboring counties.

Reasonable One-Way Fare: Answering this question proved more difficult to the majority of stakeholders, as they desired additional information regarding the length of the trip, overhead costs for the public transportation service, fuel prices, etc. No stakeholder answered that a one-way fare of $0.50 or less was reasonable. The answers varied among the range of options, including $0.51–$1.00,

$1.01–$1.50, $1.51–$2.00, and $2.00 or more. Most stakeholders responded that a fare of $1.01–$1.50 was reasonable; however, several saw the appeal of a round figure such a $1.00 or $2.00 (easiest to provide change) and within the range that most would be comfortable paying. Some felt that a one-way fare of $2.00 was a bargain considering the average cost per mile to drive a personal vehicle.

Willingness to Pay Additional Local Taxes for Public Transportation Service: The majority of stakeholders were in favor of paying additional local taxes for public transportation service. There were a few respondents who were strongly against the institution of another tax to their constituent base; however, most saw the benefit of the service and felt that the community would embrace the county's economic development efforts as long as the tax was a reasonable amount for taxpayers.

Types of Funding Sources That Should Be Considered: This question elicited a variety of answers from respondents. Passenger fares were cited often as a source of future funding. Public-private partnerships were mentioned a few times, and others felt that the area did not have the economy to support such a system. The three tax options—sales, ad valorem, and gas—were noted by many respondents, but several said they did not know enough about those sources to know if they were viable options for a funding a public transportation system. Sales and gas taxes were the two most frequently mentioned of the three local tax sources. Some stakeholders also felt that a combination of the local tax options would be worth exploring to spread the cost out over different groups. The County's general fund was also mentioned as an additional funding source that could be explored.

10-Year Vision for Public Transportation in Highlands County and the Heartland Region: The majority of stakeholders indicated that they would like to see some form of public transportation in the county and that anything is better than the lack of service now. A public transportation system coupled with the availability of Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) such as Uber within the next 10 years was the most popular response. A few did not see 10 years as being enough time to put a system in place. This generally lead to two topics regarding the creation of future public transportation—whether the county's population could financially support a public transportation system and the feasibility to operate it efficiently given the large size and low density of the county. Better economic opportunities, workforce development, safety, quality of life, and a renaissance for the downtown areas were noted as community goals that are best served by public transportation.

Survey 1—Establishing Public Transportation Needs

An initial survey was developed as part of the first phase of public involvement activities to gather feedback regarding the need for public transportation service in Highlands County. Two versions of this survey were distributed to the community via the HRTPO website, paper copies at various community events, or by various community partners and returned to the HRTPO by mail. One survey was prepared for the general public, and another was geared towards users of the County's Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) service. The TD survey included the same questions as the general survey and four additional questions asking about their experience using the existing TD service. Both surveys were

available in English and Spanish. Copies of the English and Spanish survey instruments are provided in Appendix E.

In total, 771 surveys were completed and returned, either through the HRTPO's website, in person at the different outreach activities, or distributed to various social service agencies and returned by mail. The results of all surveys received are summarized below. The first four questions are from the TD survey only, for which there were 26 responses (of the 771 total), and the remaining questions include results from all survey respondents.

Transportation Disadvantaged User Survey Questions

On the TD survey, the first question asked respondents if they had ever used the Highlands County TD program. All respondents who indicated "yes" were considered to be a TD user. For the second question, respondents were asked to rate their overall experience using the TD program. Figure 5-1 shows that 67% of respondents rated their experience using the TD service as "good" or "very good."

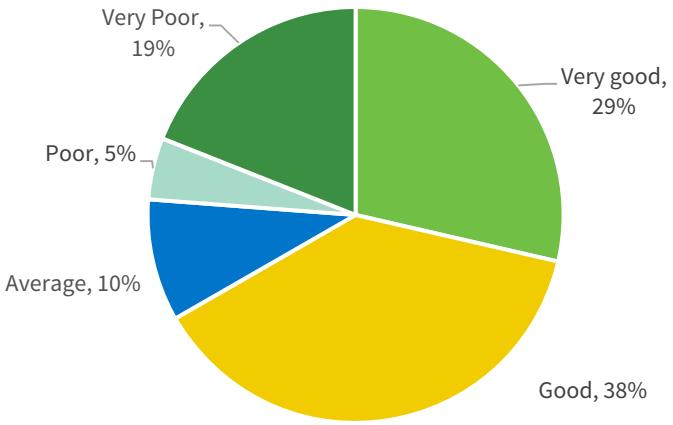


Figure 5-1: How would you rate the overall experience of the TD service provided?

When asked how often they use the TD service, 57% said they use it at least 3 times per week and 33% said they use it 1–2 times per week (Figure 5-2). Only 10% of respondents use the service 1–3 times per month.

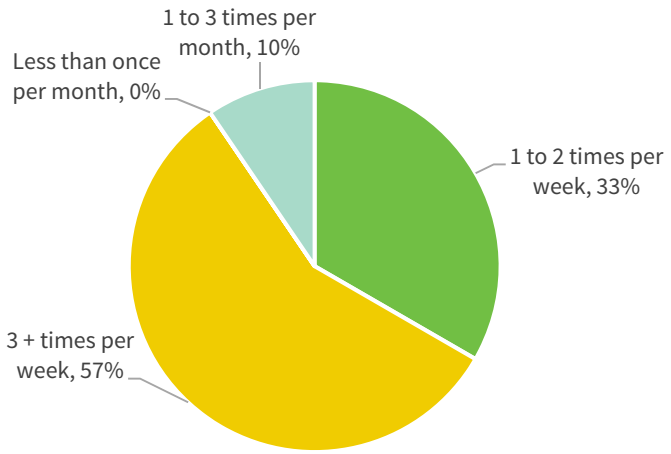


Figure 5-2: How often do you use the TD service?

Figure 5-3 shows the type of trips for which respondents use the TD service. Respondents were allowed to choose multiple answers for this question. Almost all respondents said they use the service for medical trips, 62% said they use the service for work and for shopping/entertainment trips, and 50% said they use the service for trips to the bank/post office, grocery shopping, or for governmental services. Of those who said selected "other," "school" was the most popular answer.

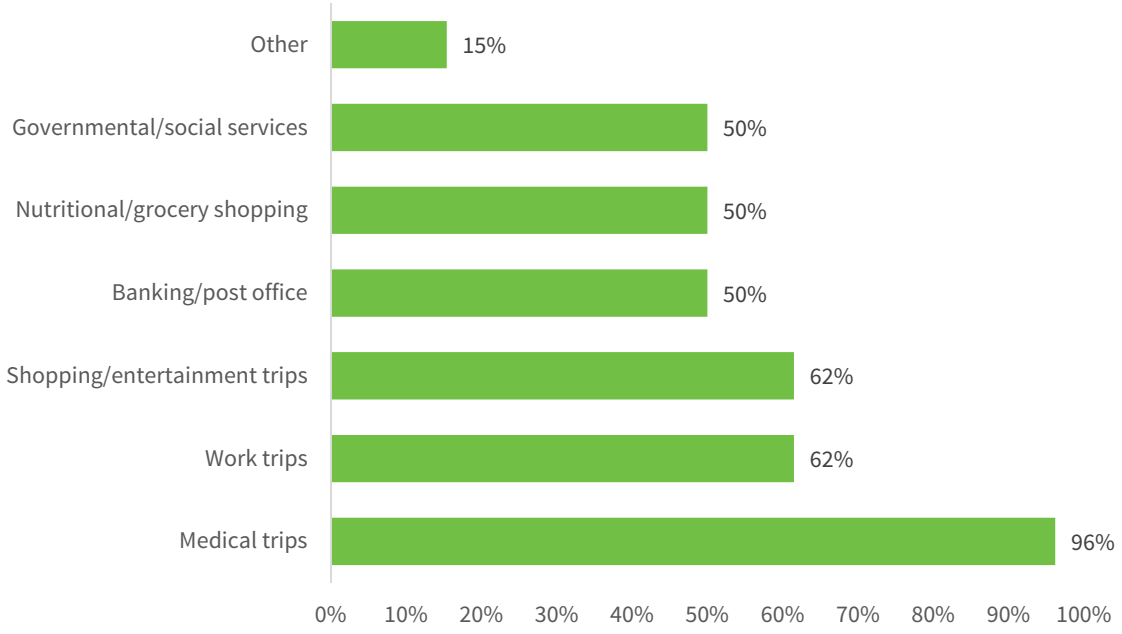


Figure 5-3: What type of trips do you mostly use for the service for?

General Survey Questions Regarding Transportation Needs

The remaining survey questions were asked of both TD users and the general public; the results include combined results from all surveys received. These questions focused on the need for public transportation in Highlands County.

Figure 5-4 shows that 68% of respondents have experience using public transportation across Florida and throughout the US.

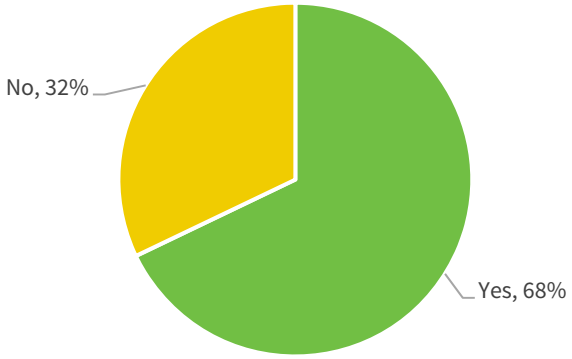


Figure 5-4: Have you used public transportation in other areas?

Figures 5-5 and 5-6 indicated that respondents are largely in support of having public transportation service in Highlands County, with nearly 80% of respondents saying they would use a fixed-route transportation service it were available and 93% saying there is a need for public transportation in the county.

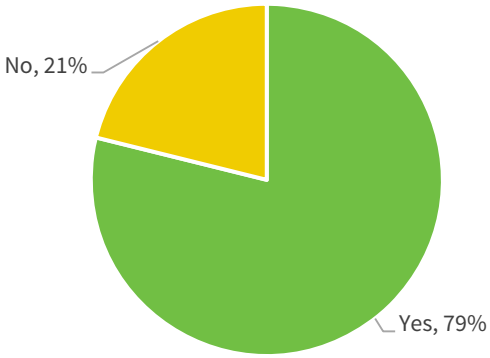


Figure 5-5: Would you use a public transportation service that runs on a regular route with a printed schedule?

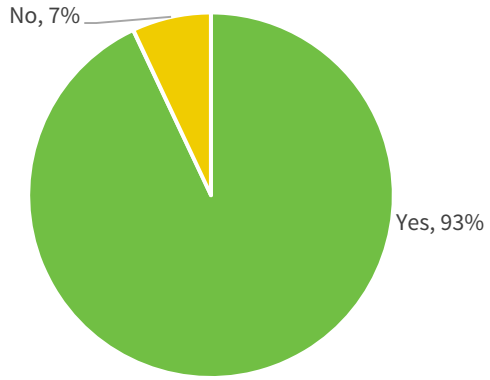


Figure 5-6: Do you think there is a need for a fixed-route public transportation service in Highlands County?

When asked what transportation service options they would like to see in Highlands County, 58% of respondents said they would like a fixed-route bus service during weekdays, nighttime, and weekends (Figure 5-7). Of these time periods, weekdays was the most popular choice, followed by weekends, then nighttime. More door-to-door service through the TD program and ridesharing services such as Uber and Lyft followed, with 14% of respondents selecting each option. Respondents were able to select multiple transportation service options when answering this question.

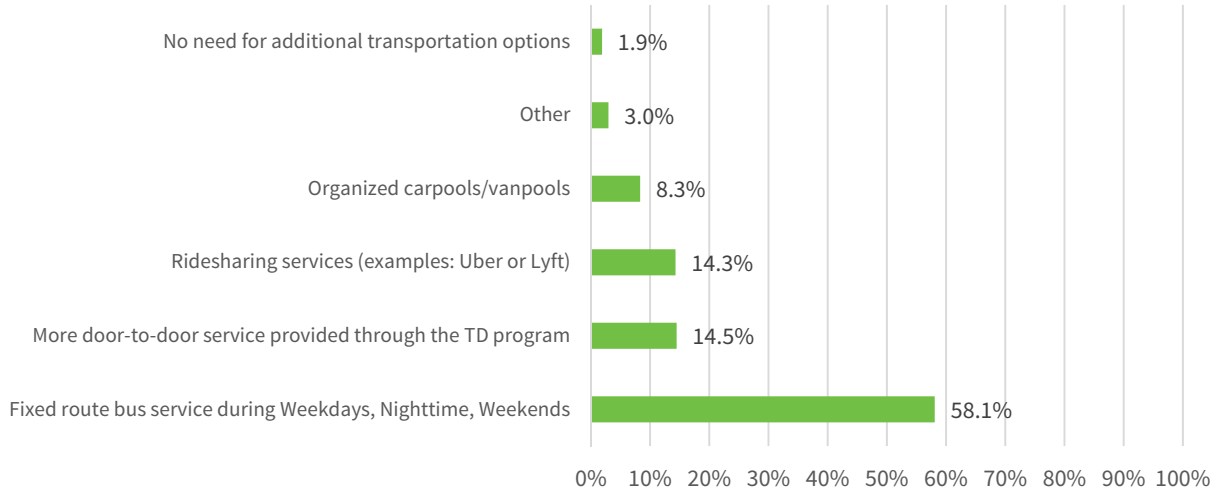


Figure 5-7: What transportation options would you like to have in Highlands County?

Respondent opinions varied regarding the reasonable amount for a one-way fare for public transportation. As shown in Figure 5-8, the majority (37%) indicated that a one-way fare of $0.51–$1.00 was reasonable, 23% said $1.51–$2.00, and 17% said $1.01–$1.50. About 10% of respondents indicated that a fare of more than $2.00 was reasonable.

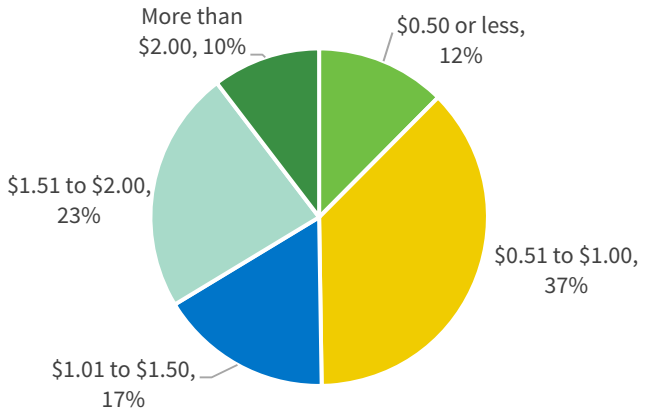


Figure 5-8: What do you think is a reasonable one way fare to pay for fixed-route public transportation service?

Respondents were asked to list the top five locations they would like public transportation service to or from. The most common locations provided were:

- Lake Placid to Sebring (downtown and the mall)
- Avon Park to Sebring (downtown and the mall)
- Sebring (downtown to the mall)
- Shopping at various retailers, such as Walmart, the mall, and grocery stores

Demographic Information

This section identifies characteristics of respondents who took the survey, including their mode of travel, age, and the ZIP code in which they live.

When asked about their primary mode of travel, 82% said they use a personal car, 10% ride with a family member or friend, 3% walk or bike, and 1% use the TD program (Figure 5-9).

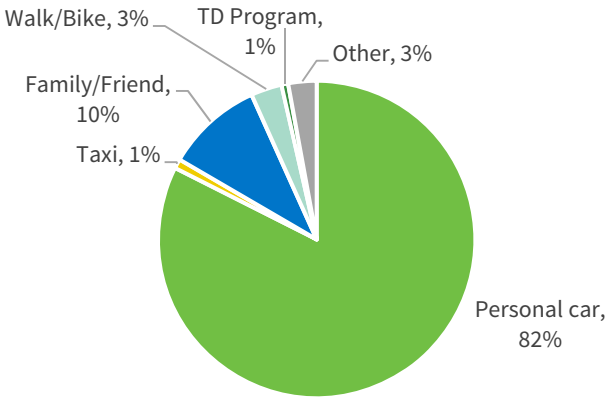


Figure 5-9: What is your current primary mode of travel?

Figure 5-10 shows survey participation by all age groups, from middle school-age to adults age 65 or older. The age group most represented include those 25–34 (19%), followed by 45–54 (17%) and 65 or older (17%).

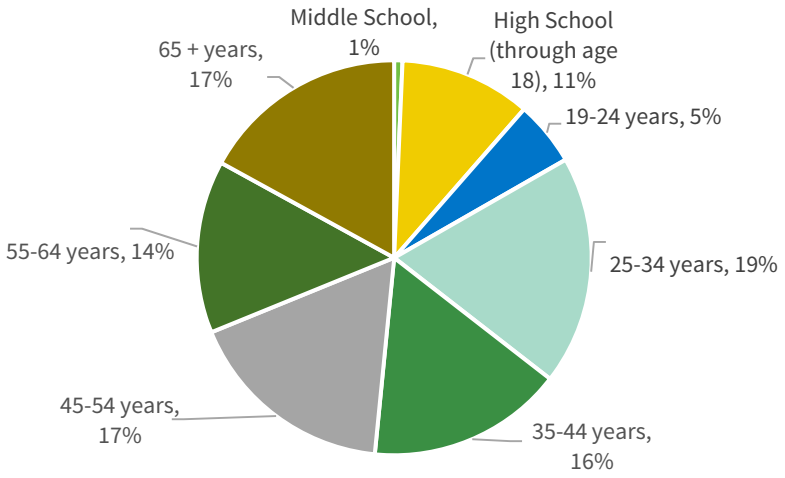


Figure 5-10: What is your age?

As shown in Figure 5-11, although the majority of respondents have a personal vehicle available, this percentage decreases for both younger and older persons, indicating that these age groups must rely on other transportation options, such as family/friends or other services.

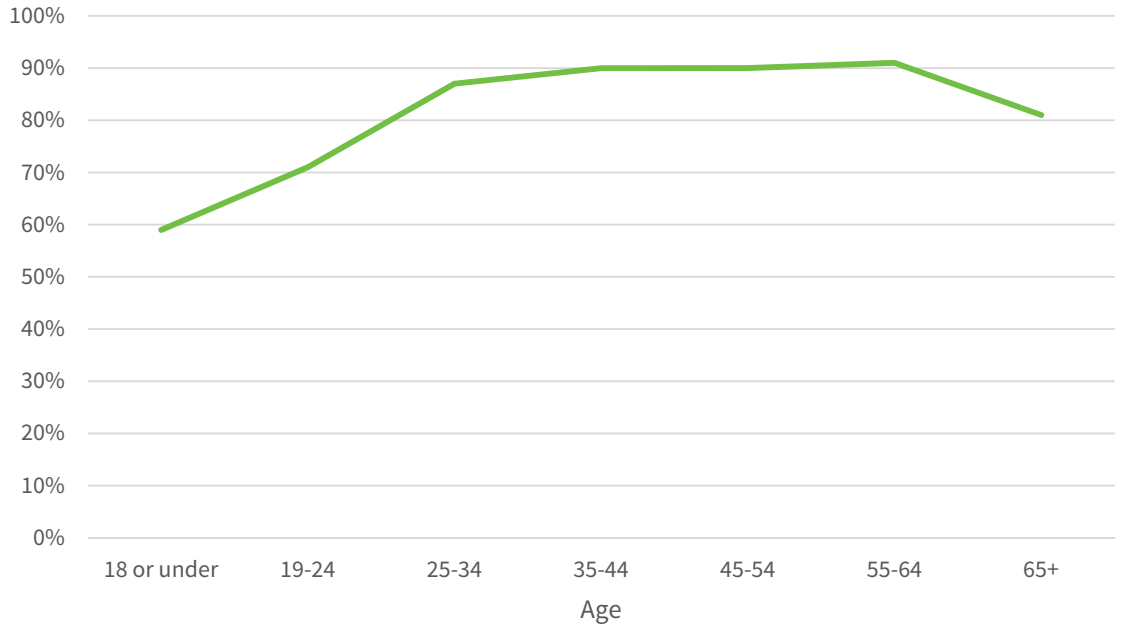


Figure 5-11: Relationship between Age and Personal Vehicle Availability

Survey respondents were asked to provide their home ZIP code to gauge the geographic distribution of participation. As shown in Figure 5-12, the top five most frequently cited home ZIP codes include Sebring (33870, 33875, 33872), Avon Park (33825), and Lake Placid (33852). Map 5-1 illustrates the number of survey responses received for each ZIP code in Highlands County.

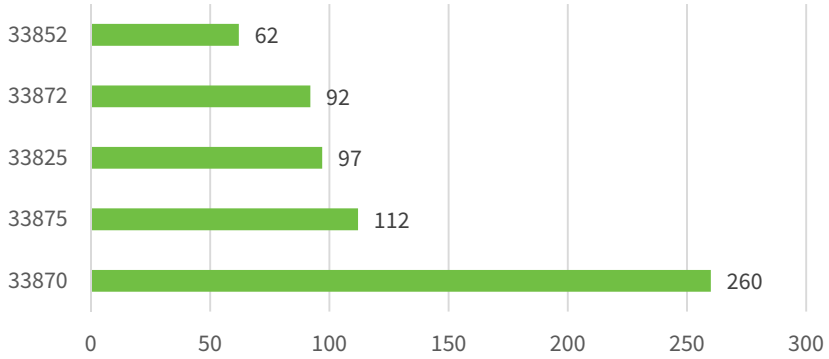
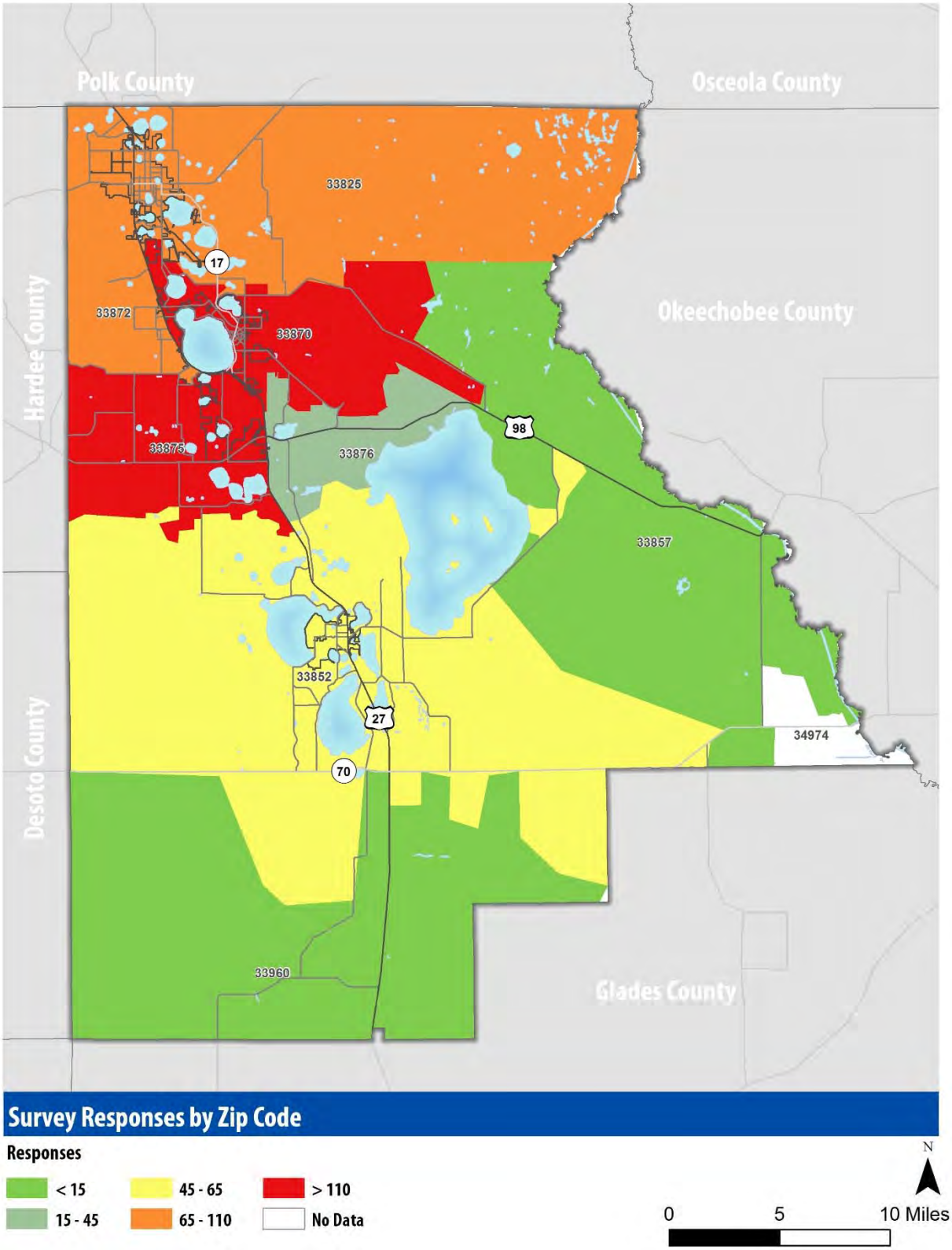


Figure 5-12: What is your home ZIP code?

General Conclusions

Results from the survey provided insight into the need for public transportation in Highlands County. Conclusions drawn from the survey analysis include the following:

- Respondents overwhelmingly indicated a need for fixed-route service in Highlands County.
- Service on weekdays is the top preference, followed by weekends, then nighttime.
- Respondents would like public transportation service to travel between Avon Park, Sebring (downtown and the mall), and Lake Placid, primarily for shopping purposes.
- Most members of the TD population rely on family/friends for travel as opposed to a personal vehicle.



Map 5-1: Transportation Needs Survey Number of Responses by ZIP Code

Phase 1 Public Workshops and Grassroots Events

Highlands County Fair and Public Workshops

One major grassroots event and three public workshops were held during the first phase of the public involvement activities for the Highlands Transit Plan. The grassroots event included a display booth at the Highlands County Fair on February 10–18, 2017. The first workshop was held on February 27 in Lake Placid, and the remaining two on March 2 in Sebring and Sun n' Lakes.

The first phase of public involvement included a booth at the Highlands County Fair (left) and three public workshops at which participants could provide input in several ways, including drawing where public transportation is needed on a series of poster maps (right).

At each event, display boards were provided summarizing the TDP process, demonstrating the plan service area and major activity centers, and introducing the different types of public transportation services being considered for the Highlands Transit Plan. The first public survey on public transportation needs was distributed at each event. The input received from these surveys was combined with the online survey input and is summarized in the Transportation Needs Survey subsection that follows.

At the three public workshops, a board summarizing the results of the Transit Orientation Index (TOI) for Highlands County was presented. Given the smaller group setting of the workshops, participants were asked to note on maps locations where they would like to see public service provided and what major activity centers they felt should be connected. From this exercise, the following trends in desired origins and destinations were indicated:

- Connectivity between Lake Placid, Avon Park, and Sebring
- Avon Park to Lakeshore Mall (in Sebring)
- Lake Placid to Lakeshore Mall
- Avon Park to downtown Sebring
- Lake Placid to downtown Sebring
- Sun n' Lakes to downtown Sebring

- Residential areas southwest and southeast of downtown Lake Placid to downtown Lake Placid
- Connectivity to shopping centers, grocery stores, medical facilities, and hospitals
- Service to South Florida State College

Images of the flyer used to advertise the workshops and boards displayed at the workshops are provided in Appendix F.

Other Community Presentations

In addition to the events outlined above, HRTPO staff made several presentations to local community groups about the Highlands Transit Plan:

- Children's Services Council – March 15, 2017, Sebring, 20 attendees
- Sebring Sunrise Rotary – March 23, 2017, Sebring, 25 attendees
- Sebring Lions Club – April 6, 2017, Sebring, 25 attendees

Phase 2 Public Involvement Activities

The second phase of public involvement was focused on obtaining input regarding the proposed public transportation service options and funding mechanisms for consideration in the Highlands Transit Plan. The direct involvement activities conducted during the second phase of public involvement included the following:

- Facilitating the Community Transit Forum
- Administering the service options and funding survey
- Attending the Avon Park Blueberry Festival
- Facilitating a public workshop at the Avon Park Community Center

Community Transit Forum

The Community Transit Forum was held on April 15, 2017, from 3:30–5:00 PM at the Sebring Civic Center. The purpose of the event was to invite policy leaders and other community stakeholders to hear a presentation about the Highlands Transit Plan that focused on highlights of the technical analysis completed to date and results of the first phase of public involvement activities.

Forum participants listened to a presentation on the Highlands Transit Plan (left), then participated in a series of three break-out discussion groups (right).

Following the presentation, participants were separated into groups to complete three exercises:

- # 1 focused on brainstorming a 10-year vision for the Highlands Transit Plan and goal strategies to support the vision.
- # 2 reviewed the preliminary service options to be presented to the public for comment.
- # 3 introduced the four governance structures and funding options for potential public transportation service in Highlands County and asked participants to evaluate each: 1) Transit District, 2) department within Highlands County, 3) department within one of the cities (Sebring, Avon Park, or Lake Placid), and 4) department within the HRTPO.

A summary of the feedback received during each exercise is presented below. A copy of the forum agenda, presentation, and break-out group exercises is included in Appendix G.

Exercise 1: 10-Year Public Transportation Vision

For the first exercise, participants were asked to brainstorm ideas for what the vision for public transportation in Highlands County should be over the next 10 years as well as strategies and goals necessary to achieve the vision that should be considered for inclusion in the Highlands Transit Plan. The results of the sessions with all three break-out groups are provided below.

10-Year Vision for Public Transportation

Group 1

- Provide citizens, tourists, and other users within the county with access to support medical, quality of life, employment, education, etc.
- Provide older residents who lack the ability to drive or access to transportation due to health, age, etc., with expanded transportation options so they can remain more independent.
- Help with short-term transportation needs.
- Implement public transportation in the most financially-minded/conservative approach.

Group 2

- Connect people to the community.
- Provide public transportation in a convenient, affordable, and accessible way.
- Provide a reliable and timely system.
- Help members of the community obtain and maintain employment, obtain an education, and advance their careers; assistance with self-sufficiency.
- Include a sustainability component.
- Enhance the overall quality of life for Highlands County residents.
- Assist with business growth and economic development.
- Provide better accessibility to medical services by connecting to outside centers/transit.

Group 3

- Provide the most feasible options for transportation disadvantaged persons.
- Improve quality of life.
- Provide transportation to work/employment centers to improve economic development while being fiscally responsible.
- Provide a system that is easy to use for tourists, visitors, and residents.
- Provide a system that is accessible and adjustable based on needs and demands.
- Provide access to health needs, employment, shopping, education, recreation, government centers.

Strategies and Goals to Achieve the 10-Year Vision

Group 1

- Sustainable, affordable, accessible, feasible
- Responsive → available
- Flexible

Group 2

- Increase employment/decrease poverty
- Increase quality of life
- Support tourism
- Bring business to community
- Relieve downtown parking
- Help traffic on US 27
- Ensure safety for all
- Bring Highlands County in line with other rural cities/similar areas with public transportation

Group 3

- Improve access to affordable transportation
- Ensure availability to all citizens
- Improve access to employment options
- Build in a revenue source
- Connect to the three towns/county for community events and employment (weekends/ evenings)

Exercise 2: Preliminary Public Transportation Service Options

After reviewing maps illustrating the preliminary service options, each group was asked to discuss and provide comments. Comments received are summarized below.

Group 1

- Very much favored fixed-route service.
- Little support for a blend of service options.
- Moderate support for extremely limited flex-route service.
    - No delays for business or work trips.
    - Not everyone has access to a phone for "call-and-ride" flex service.
- Buses should include bike racks for youth.
- Very little support for downtown circulators.
- Favored limited express (fixed-route) service.
- Did not address vehicle options due to time constraints.

Group 2

- Significant discussion about previous efforts to implement public transportation service in Highlands County.
- Very supportive of fixed-route service complemented by flex-service options.

- Downtown circulator service would not be used; flex service covering same areas more efficient.
- More neutral position on limited express service.
- Regarding traditional flex bus or trolley, preferred flex bus.

Group 3

- Any service options should be phased approach.
- Implementation must include establishing route management system.
- Flex-service options needed to better serve quality-of-life trips.
- Access to services are key consideration.
- Very minimal support for fixed-route service; cities are too far apart, much of county is rural/low density.
- Through-county transportation high priority.
- Regarding traditional flex bus or trolley, preferred flex bus.

Exercise 3: Governance Structure and Funding Options

Governance Structure

After reviewing all four governance options and answering questions, the following indicators of support was reached through consensus.

Transit District:

- Group 1: **Medium** level of support, with reservations about how Board would be structured and greater concern for funding independent Board.
- Group 2: **Medium** level of support; group somewhat intrigued by Transit District, but most expressed concern regarding funding mechanism.
- Group 3: **Medium** level of support; might be good option if County option not preferred mechanism, but generally not preferred option.

County Department:

- Group 1: **Medium to high** level of support; most agreed that County level most appropriate for proper management and coordination of new transit system.
- Group 2: **Medium to high** level of support; most agreed that County department makes most sense, but some concerns with leadership making real commitment to initiate and manage new transit system successfully.
- Group 3: **Medium to high** level of support; most agreed that County department is logical choice.

City Department:

- Group 1: **Medium to high** level of support, but consensus not clear, no firm level of support indicated. Discussed that if County not willing, City may take lead, requiring greater coordination and funding consideration.
- Group 2: **Low to medium** level of support; if County not willing, City could take lead, but coordination could be problematic; if City (likely Sebring) committed, would have better chance than if County not fully committed.
- Group 3: **Low** level of support; no matter how willing a City is to lead, coordination would require too much to be successful.

Department within HRTPO:

- Groups 1 and 2: **Low** level of support; all agreed TPO is good planning agency, but not designed for operating bus service; since it covers six counties, could create numerous issues.
- Group 3: **Low to medium** level of support; all agreed HRTPO would have difficulty, as it covers six counties; could be option if County not willing to take lead.

Funding Options

The discussion regarding funding options for public transportation was more in-depth and varied than the discussion concerning governance structures. Although consensus was not fully reached, four sources or options were noted as needing to be studied further and considered. The following highlights each of these four sources and highlights the key thoughts from the collective group.

Sales Tax

The needs survey indicated a high need for transit, and a high number of respondents also indicated they would use the service. This may indicate higher support for a new revenue source for public transportation through a voter referendum. Even though a sales tax increase was recently approved, there may be enough support to consider additional sales tax for public transportation, especially among older adult voters.

Property Tax

Because the sales tax was recently increased to 7.5%, it may be more plausible to consider an increase in property tax increases for public transportation; however, due to the high number of older adult voters in Highlands County, this may create an opportunity for voter support of additional sales tax, as noted previously.

Gas Tax

If gas tax revenue is available to dedicate to public transportation, it makes some sense to consider this funding source; however, the County will need to determine if this is a viable option.

General Funds

General fund revenue was the only source for which a consensus for support was reached, and it was a **medium** level of consensus because if a referendum required for another source is not an option, the only other option may be general fund revenue.

Service Options and Funding Survey

A survey was developed for the second round of public involvement to gather feedback on the transportation options and possible funding sources. The surveys was available in both English and Spanish. Copies of the English and Spanish survey instruments are provided in Appendix H.

In total, 156 surveys were completed and returned, either through the HRTPO's website, in person at the outreach activities, distributed to various community partners, printed in the local newspaper and returned to the HRTPO by mail. Although fewer second surveys were completed compared to the initial transportation needs survey, the service options survey was available for a considerably shorter period of time (April 29–May 22, 2017) to maintain the overall TDP schedule. The results of the second survey are summarized below.

In the first question, respondents were asked to rate their priority of implementing seven proposed transportation options shown on a map, including two express routes, three flex routes, and two downtown circulators. Figure 5-13 shows that nearly half of respondents rated the Avon Park–Sebring Express, the Sebring-Lake Placed Express, the Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex, and the Downtown Sebring Circulator as high priorities. Only 28% and 24% of respondents rated the South Lake Placid Flex and the Downtown Lake Placid Circulator as high priorities, respectively. Some respondents chose not to rate all the service options provided.

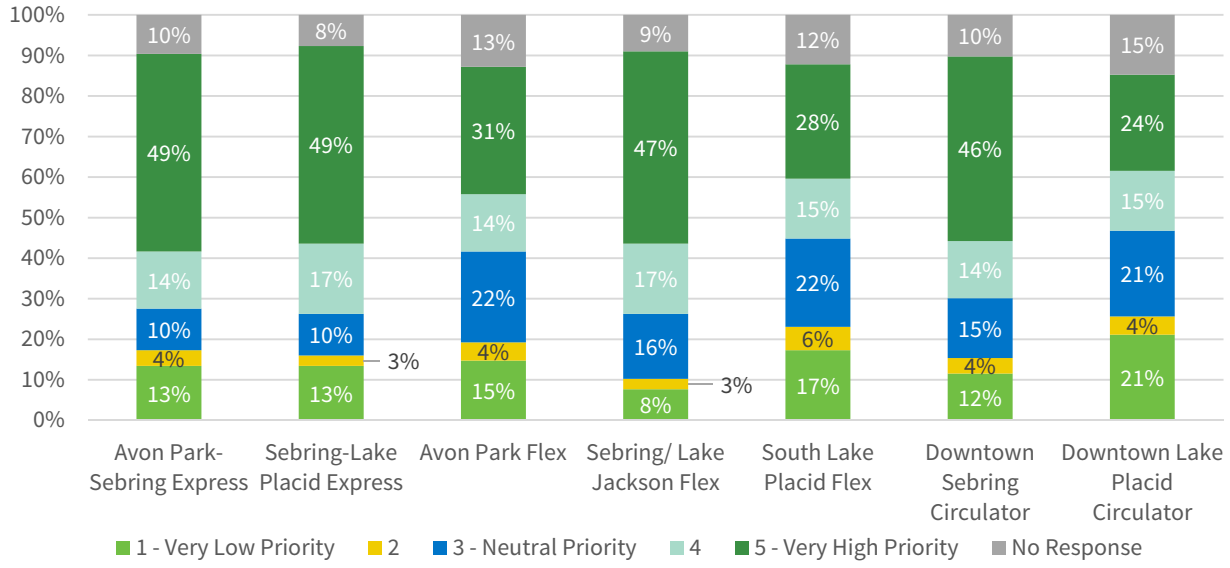


Figure 5-13: Level of Priority for Each Transportation Option

Respondents were asked to rate their level of support for different revenue sources that could be used to fund public transportation. Figure 5-14 shows that a majority of respondents support the options to redistribute existing general fund revenue or existing local gas tax revenue, and most respondents were not supportive of increasing local sales or property taxes.

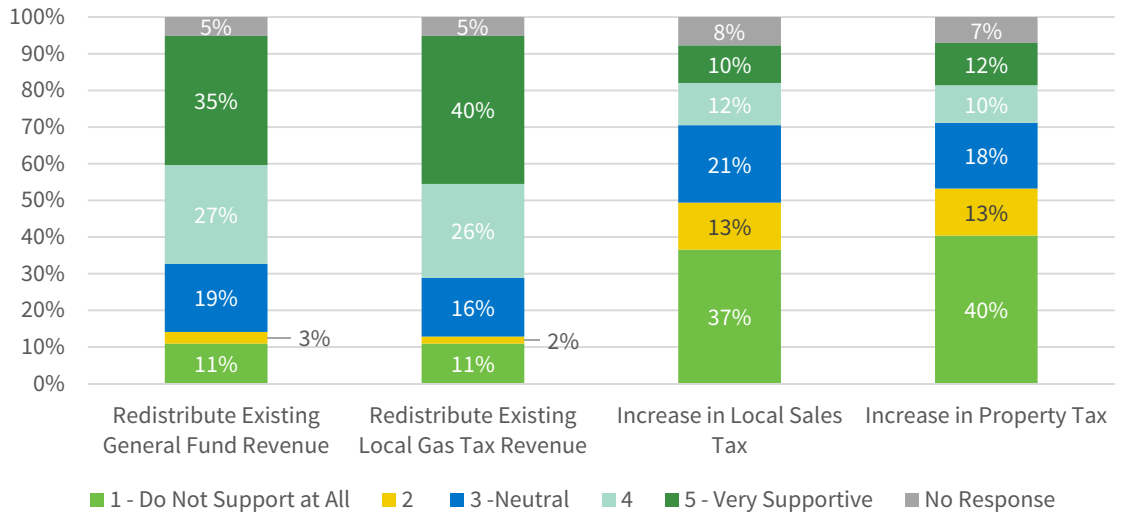


Figure 5-14: Level of Support for Local Funding Sources

Figure 5-15 shows the age distribution of respondents for the second survey. Nearly 40% were age 65 or older, 21% were 55–64, 16% were 45–54, 13% were 35–44, and 12% were 34 or younger. Respondents for the second survey were generally older compared to the first survey.

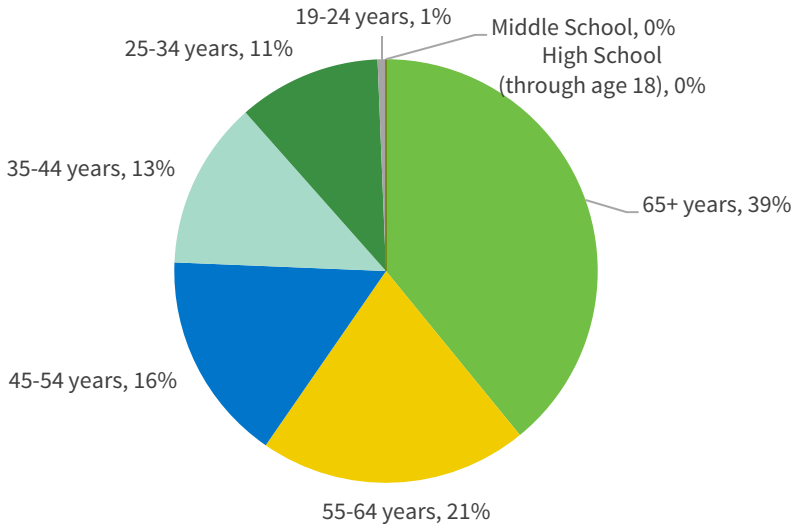


Figure 5-15: What is your age?

Survey respondents were asked to provide their home ZIP code to determine the geographic distribution of participation. As shown in Figure 5-16, the top five most frequently cited home ZIP codes

reflect the same top five ZIP codes from the transportation needs survey. They include Sebring (33870, 33875, 33872), Avon Park (33825), and Lake Placid (33852). Map 5-2 illustrates the number of transportation option survey responses received from each ZIP code in Highlands County.

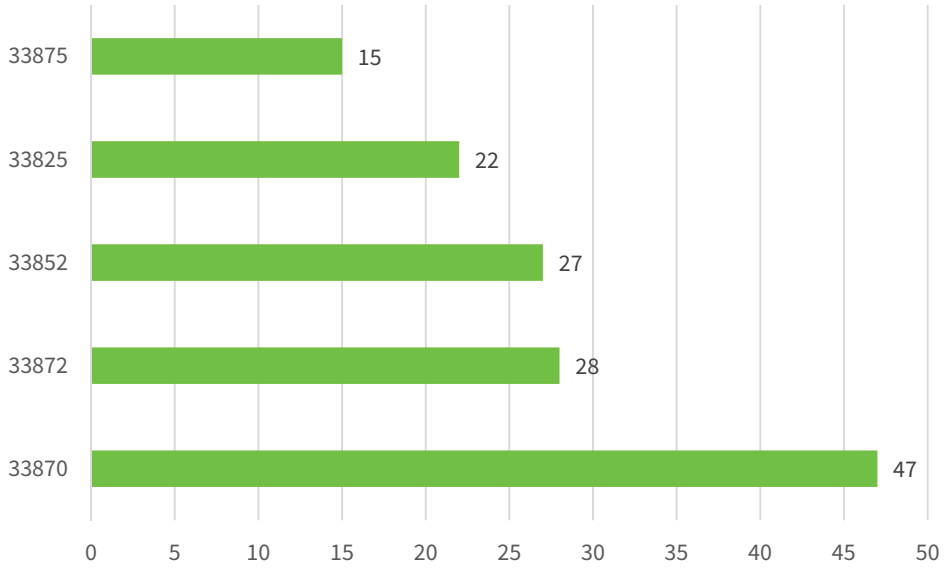
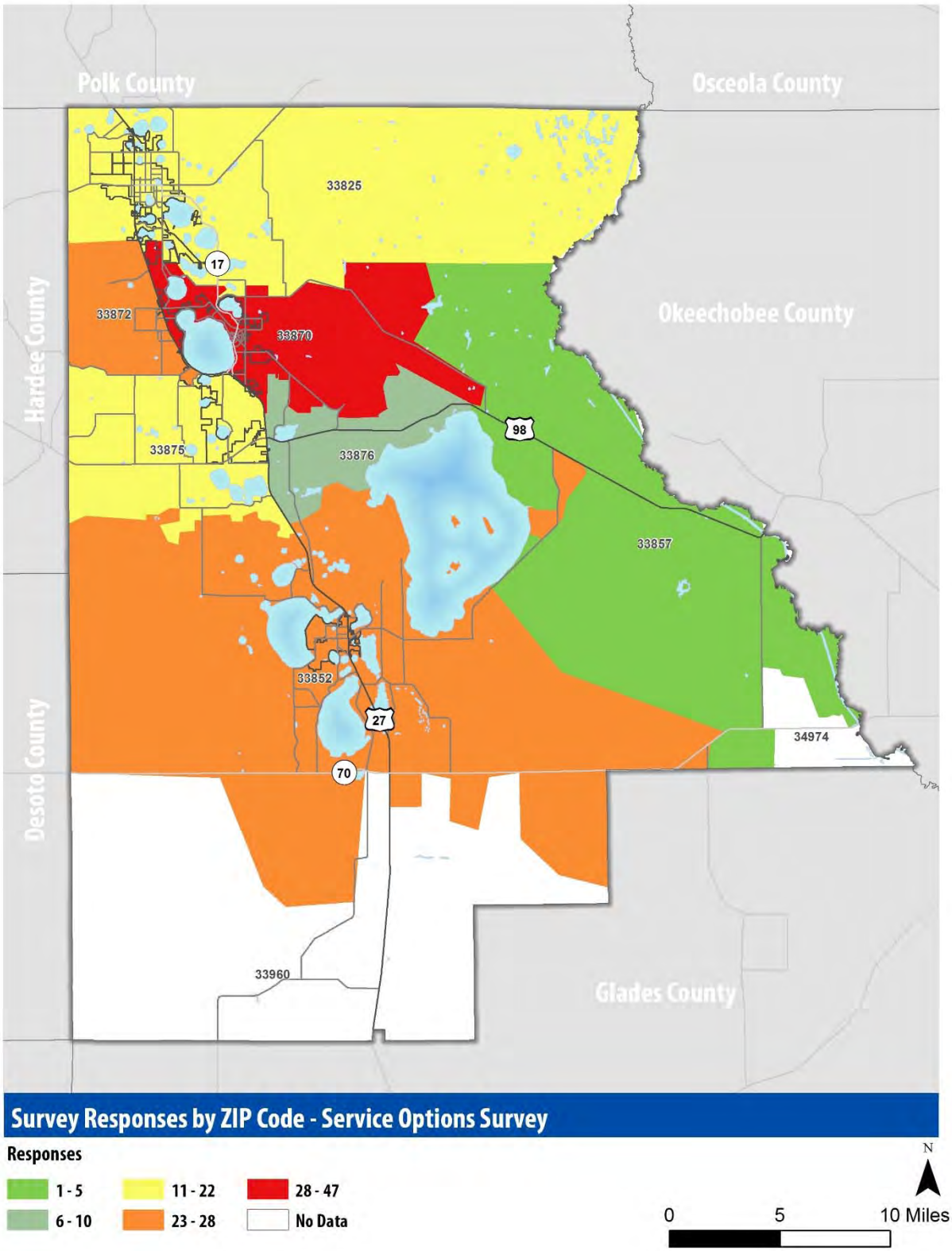


Figure 5-16: What is your ZIP Code?

Respondents were given the option to provide comments at the end of the survey. Although there was a mix of comments supporting and opposing new public transportations service in Highlands County, several themes emerged:

- Public transportation service is needed for older adults to make life-sustaining trips to grocery stores, doctor appointments, etc.
- Public transportation will help a variety of people.
- If available, funding from general revenues might be acceptable. Gas taxes should be used for roads, not for public transportation service.
- New taxes should not be implemented for public transportation service.
- Highlands County is too small/rural to support a viable public transportation service.
- Circulators should cover areas with supermarkets and pharmacies.
- Many residents are seeking employment and need transportation to CareerSource Heartland.



Map 5-2: Service Options and Funding Survey Number of Responses by ZIP Code

Phase 2 Public Workshops and Grassroots Events

One major grassroots event and a public workshop were held during the second phase of the public involvement activities for the Highlands Transit Plan. The grassroots event included a display booth at the Avon Park Blueberry Festival held at Donaldson Park (Avon Park) on April 29, 2017. The public workshop was held on May 4, 2017, at the Avon Park Community Center.

Avon Park Blueberry Festival

At the Avon Park Blueberry Festival, a table for the Highlands Transit Plan was set up to provide information about the plan to people visiting the festival. The table included display boards to summarize the TDP process, illustrate the plan service area and major activity centers, and introduce the different types of public transportation service options being considered for the Highlands Transit Plan. A flyer about the upcoming public workshop and the survey on public transportation options and funding sources were distributed.

Outreach for the Highlands Transit Plan at the Avon Park Blueberry Festival on April 29, 2017.

Phase 2 Public Workshop

The May 4 workshop was designed to be interactive, asking participants for input on a number of different subjects related to developing and funding public transportation service. First, a presentation on the Highlands Transit Plan was made to provide background information for workshop attendees. Following the presentation, attendees were provided with an activity card asking them to participate in the activities at three stations.

- Station 1 reviewed the baseline conditions data and the transportation needs survey results and asked participants to prioritize certain aspects of public transportation service to help develop a vision for the future of public transportation in Highlands County.
- Station 2 asked participants to take the public transportation options survey and prioritize different service types.

- Station 3 introduced potential funding options for public transportation service in Highlands County and asked participants to select the options they preferred.

The flyer used to advertise the workshops, the presentation, the activity card, and the boards displayed at the workshops are provided in Appendix I.

Presentation to workshop attendees (left) and participants completing interactive exercises (right).

A summary of the feedback received from each exercise station is presented below.

Station 1: Baseline Data and Transportation Needs Survey Results

After reviewing the baseline conditions data and transportation needs survey results, participants were asked to prioritize certain aspects of public transportation service by placing a dot next to their preferred option. The results are summarized below and illustrated in Figure 5-17.

- "Efficiency of service" was priority over "ease of accessing service."
- "Flexibility in service area" was priority over "more defined route."
- "Larger coverage area" was priority over "more frequent service."
- "More days of service" was priority over "longer hours of service (weekdays only)."
- "Lower one-way fare" was priority over "free transfers between routes."

Station 2: Service Options

In addition to taking the public transportation options survey, participants were asked to prioritize types of public transportation services by placing a dot next to the preferred option. As illustrated in Figure 5-18, flex service followed by express service were the overwhelming favorites.

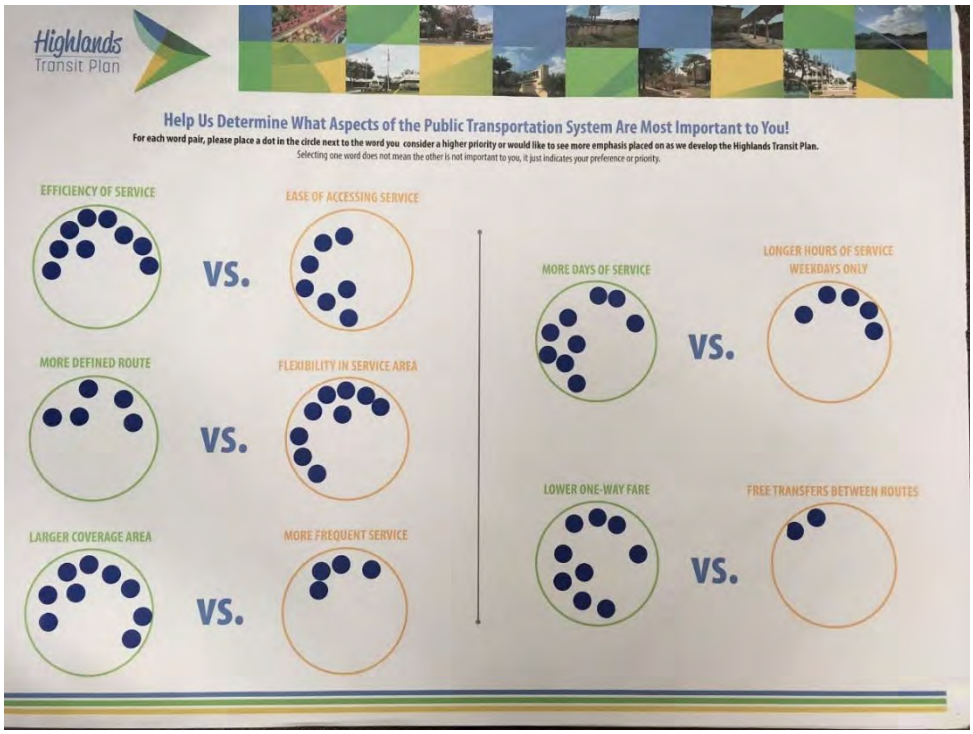


Figure 5-17: Station 1 Activity Results (Prioritization of Public Transportation Characteristics)

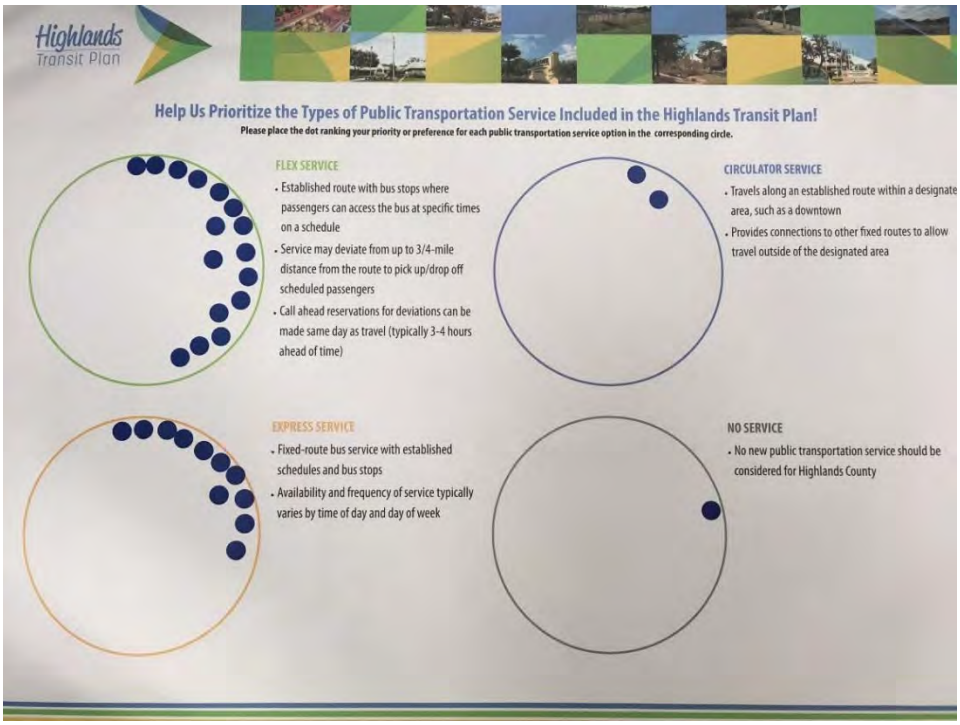


Figure 5-18: Station 2 Activity Results (Prioritization of Public Transportation Service Types)

Station 3: Funding and Governance Options

At the third station, participants were shown potential funding sources and provided with a description of each. They were given a sticker with a "1" and "2" and asked to place the sticker next to the funding sources that were their first and second preferences. They also could choose the option "I do not support any local funding sources for public transportation." As illustrated in Figure 5-19, the "Redistribute existing general fund revenue" option was the most supported, followed by "Redistribute existing local gas tax revenue" and "Increase in local sales tax." No one chose "Increase in property tax" or "I do not support any local funding sources for public transportation."

Figure 5-19: Station 3 Activity Results (Prioritization of Local Funding Sources)

Other Direct Involvement Activities

Mobility Advisory Committee

The HRTPO Board receives recommendations from several advisory committees as it is responsible for developing and approving plans. One of the three advisory committees included in the HRTPO structure is the Mobility Advisory Committee (MAC), which was formed initially to serve as a project steering committee to guide the development of the Highlands Transit Plan. If the Highlands Transit Plan is adopted and implementation of public transportation service is pursued, it is envisioned that the MAC will play a key role in this process. Membership of the MAC convened for the Highlands Transit Plan is presented in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2: Mobility Advisory Committee Members

Member	Organization
Rhonda Beckman	Ridge Area Arc
Bruce Behrens	Senior Representative/ HRTPO CAC Member
Ermelinda Centeno	Central Florida Health Care
Melony Culpepper	Highlands County Planning Department
Robin Hinote	Sebrign Community Redevelopment Agency
Kelly Kirk-Brooks	MV Transportation
Robert Long	Senior/LCB Member
Ann Martin	CareerSource Heartland
Emily Swenson	Student, SFSC

CAC = Citizens Advisory Board; LCB = TD Local Coordinating Board

Communication Tools

This section summarizes the communication tools used throughout the Highlands Transit Plan.

HRTPO Website

Information about the plan, including public involvement opportunities and links to the surveys and key documents, was routinely posted to the HRTPO's website (see Figure 5-20).

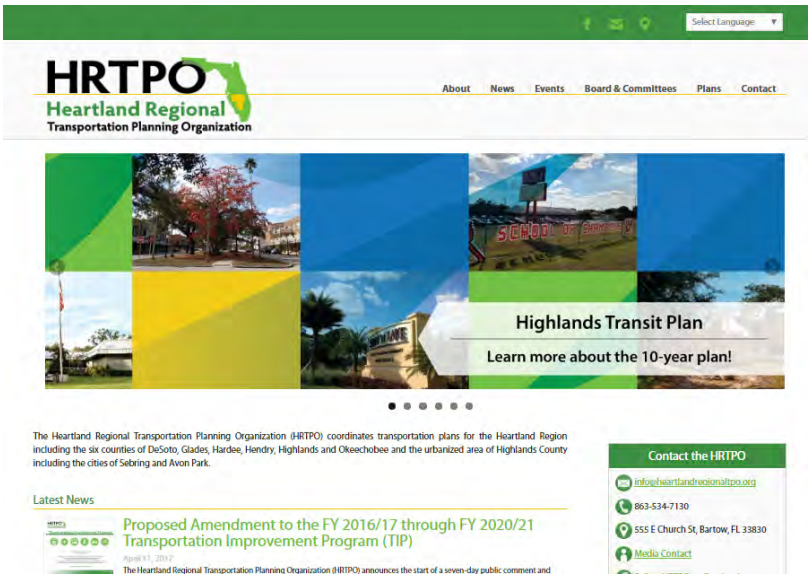


Figure 5-20: Highlands Transit Plan Information on HRTPO Website

Social Media

Information about the Highlands Transit Plan was periodically posted on the HRTPO's Facebook page. As of the end of May 2017, 11 Facebook posts were made. Table 5-3 summarizes the social media posts made and the reach and engagement of each post.

Email Communications

A contact database was formed that included 247 people at the end of May 2017. The database was used to send out six notices of surveys and other public involvement opportunities and announcements about the Highlands Transit Plan during this period.

Newspaper Advertisements and Meeting Notices

Newspaper advertisements or other meeting notices made through May 31, 2017, include the following:

- February 24, 2017– *Highlands News Sun* article, "TPO holding transit workshops"
- February 26, 2017 – *Highlands News Sun* editorial, "Attend a workshop"
- March 6, 2017 – *Highlands News Sun* article, "Highlands gearing up plan for transit"
- March 6, 2017 – *Highlands News Sun* article, "Some residents want mass transit"
- Spanish language PSA on La Zeta (March and April)
- May 4, 2017 – *Highlands News Sun* article, "Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization workshop tonight"
- May 10, 2017 – *Highlands News Sun,* Options Survey published
- May 11, 2017 –*Highlands Sun* (free publication), Options Survey published
- *Coffee News*, meeting notice for May 4th public workshop
- One-hour segment on the Barry Foster Show, radio station WWTK 7030AM- March 23, 2017

Table 5-3: Highlands Transit Plan Social Media Communications

Date/Time	Post	Type	Reach	Engagement
05/10/2017	#Highlands, give your input on the possible public transportation service options with this new survey before May 22!	Link	605 total Organic 605 Paid 0	26 post clicks 14 reactions
05/05/2017	Learn more and share your thoughts on the service options here: http://heartlandregionaltpo.org/programs-and-plans/highlands-transit-plan/	Video	81 total Organic 81 Paid 0	4 post clicks 4 reactions
05/04/2017	Highlands Transit Plan Community Workshop - Part 1	Video	68 total Organic 68 Paid 0	5 post clicks 8 reactions
05/04/2017	Make plans to join us tonight!	Link	30 total Organic 30 Paid 0	2 post clicks 2 reactions
04/20/2017	Join us to talk about the public transportation service options for the Highlands Transit Plan on May 4 at the Avon Park Community Center.	Link	2.9K total Organic 1,243 Paid 1,661	205 post clicks 97 reactions
04/14/2017	At their meeting on April 19, the HRTPO will present an amendment for the current Transportation Improvement Program that will provide the construction funding for a safety project for Intersection Lighting Retrofit at S. Ridgewood Drive (SR 17) in Avon Park and Sebring, FL. The public comment period is currently open for this amendment.	Link	60 total Organic 60 Paid 0	1 post clicks 3 reactions
03/16/2017	Thank you to City of Sebring, Florida, for sharing the Highlands Transit Plan survey on www.mysebring.com! The plan is being developed right now and will be based on community input, so if you live in Highlands County, we need to hear from you.	Link	122 total Organic 122 Paid 0	6 post clicks 6 reactions
03/03/2017	#HighlandsCounty, your opinion on the need for public transportation matters. Take this brief survey now!	Link	70 total Organic 70 Paid 0	1 post clicks 5 reactions
02/27/2017	Have thoughts about public transportation needs in Highlands County? Join us at one of the three open house style workshops this week.	Link	2.5K total Organic 931 Paid 1,556	91 post clicks 83 reactions
02/21/2017	Join us next week to discuss public transportation needs in Highlands County!	Photo	139 total Organic 139 Paid 0	6 post clicks 6 reactions
02/14/2017	Public workshops are scheduled in Lake Placid, Sebring, and Sun N' Lake as part of an effort to gather input from citizens for the Highlands Transit Plan that is currently under development. Learn more: http://heartlandregionaltpo.org/workshops-scheduled-for-development-of-highlands-transit-plan/	Photo	225 total Organic 225 Paid 0	14 post clicks 9 reactions

Section 6 Public Transportation Demand Analysis

This section summarizes the public transportation demand analysis conducted as part of the Highlands Transit Plan. Three assessment techniques were used to assess demand for public transportation services in Highlands County:

- Discretionary Market Assessment
- Traditional Market Assessment
- TD Origin-Destination Assessment

The results of these assessment techniques, when combined with the situation appraisal, performance reviews, and public involvement feedback, provide the building blocks for identifying public transportation needs in Highlands County for the next 10 years.

6.1 Public Transportation Market Assessment

The public transportation market assessment prepared for the Highlands Transit Plan includes an evaluation from two different perspectives—the discretionary market and the traditional market, the two predominant rider markets for public transportation service. Analytical tools for conducting each market analysis include a Density Threshold Assessment (DTA) for the discretionary market and a Transit Orientation Index (TOI) for the traditional market. These tools can be used to determine whether areas of the county considered to be transit-supportive for the corresponding public transportation market. These market assessment tools and corresponding public transportation markets measured from each are described below.

Discretionary Market Assessment

The discretionary market refers to potential riders living in higher-density areas of the county that may choose to use public transportation as an alternative to commuting or driving. The DTA uses industry-standard relationships to identify the areas within Highlands County that experience transit-supportive residential and employee density levels today as well as in the future. Highlands County existing (2017) and future (2027) socioeconomic dwelling unit and employment data developed at the Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ) level for the adopted 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) were used to conduct the DTA.

Three density thresholds were developed to indicate whether an area contains sufficient density to sustain some level of fixed-route public transportation operations:

- *Minimum* – reflects minimum dwelling unit or employment densities to consider basic fixed-route public transportation services (i.e., local fixed-route bus service).

- *High* – reflects increased dwelling unit or employment densities that may be able to support higher levels of public transportation investment (i.e., increased frequencies, express bus) than areas meeting only the minimum density threshold.
- *Very High* – reflects very high dwelling unit or employment densities that may be able to support higher levels of public transportation investment (i.e., premium public transportation services, such as bus rapid transit—BRT) than areas meeting the minimum or high density thresholds.

Table 6-1 presents the dwelling unit and employment density thresholds (in terms of TAZ) associated with each threshold of public transportation investment.

Table 6-1: Public Transportation Service Density Thresholds

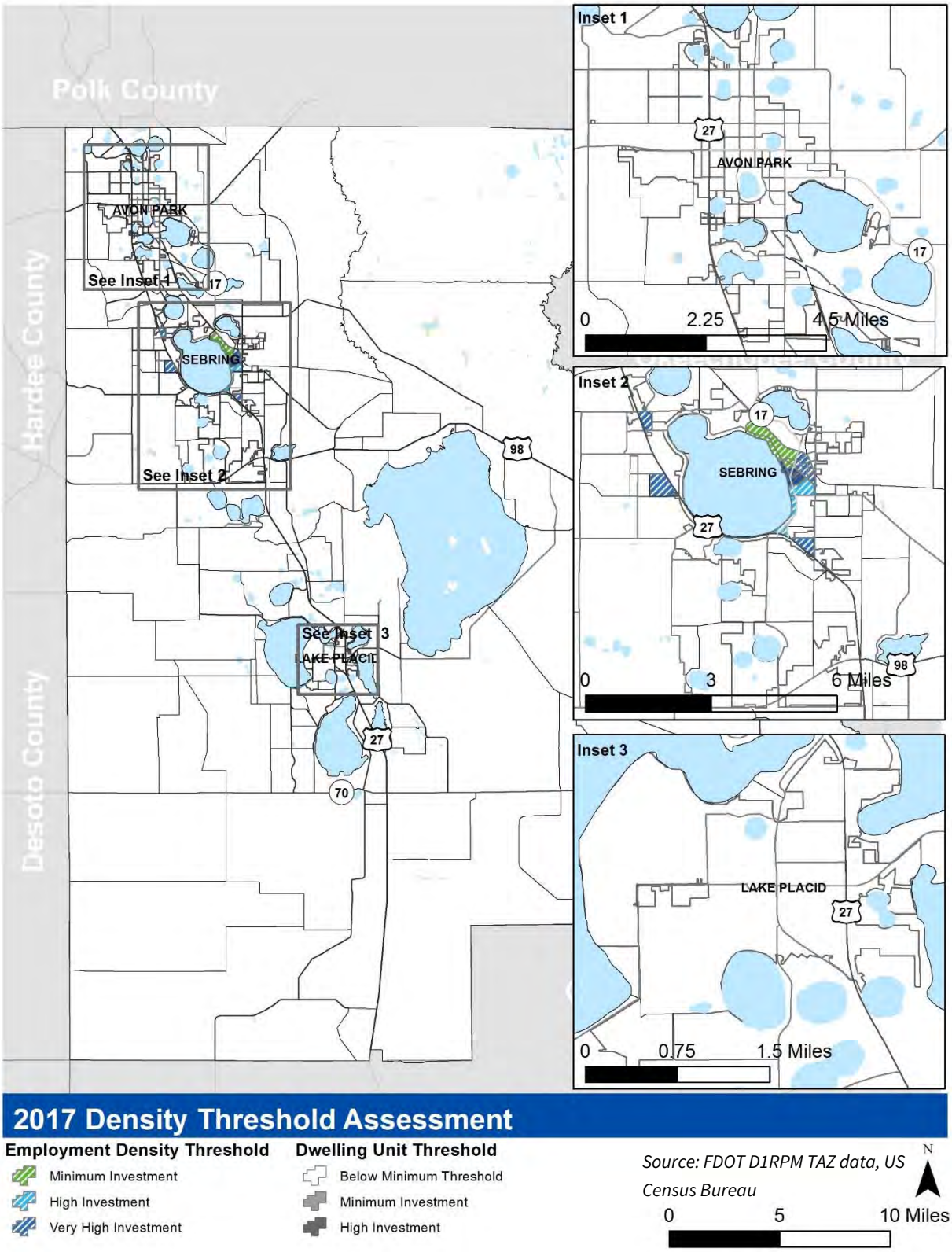
Level of Transit Investment	Dwelling Unit (du) Density Threshold	Employment Density Threshold
Minimum Investment	4.5-5 du/acre	4 employees/acre
High Investment	6-7 du/acre	5-6 employees/acre
Very High Investment	≥8 du/acre	≥7 employees/acre

Maps 6-1 and 6-2 illustrate the 2017 and 2027 DTAs, respectively, which identify areas of Highlands County that support different levels of public transportation investment based on existing and projected dwelling unit and employment densities.

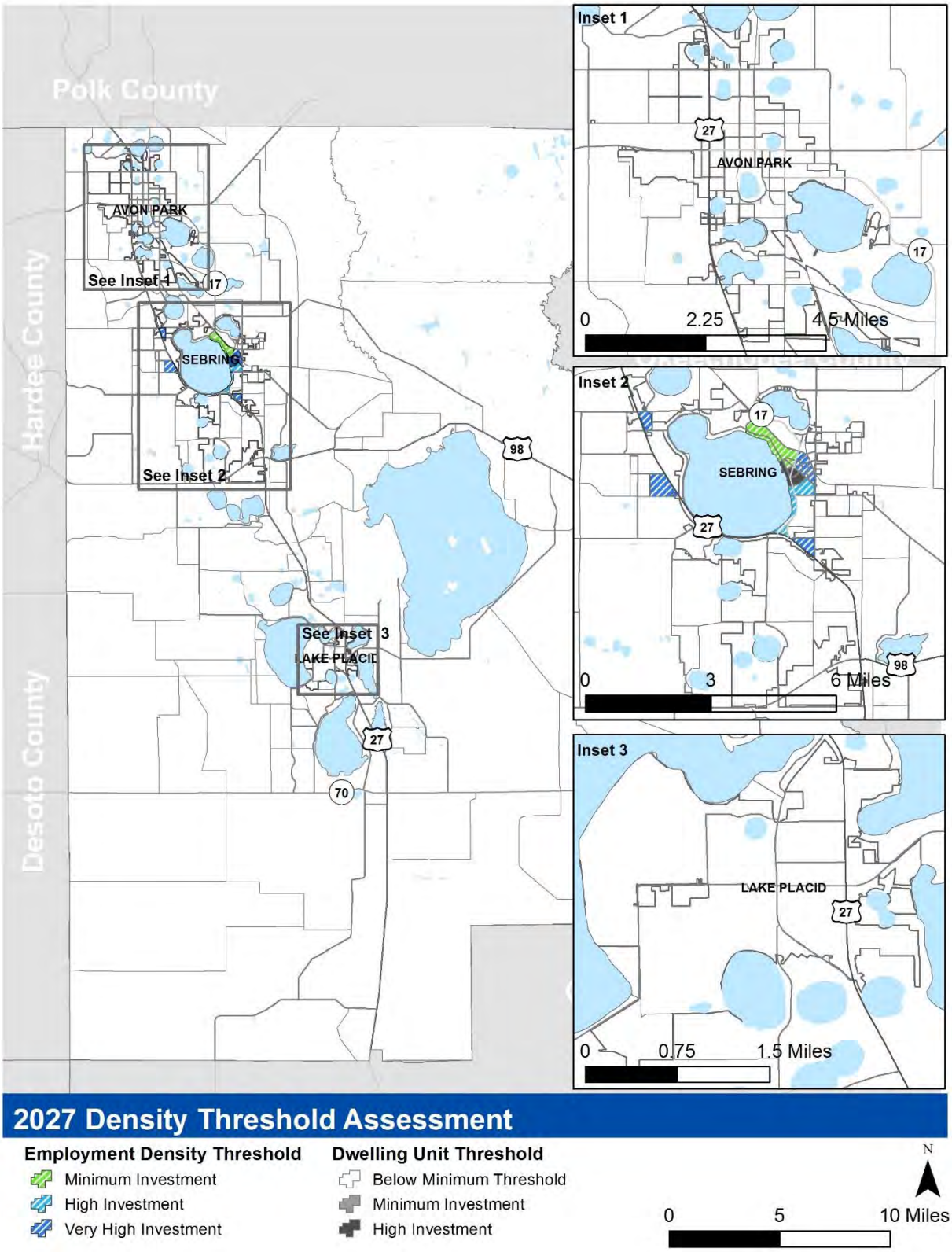
The general low-density nature of Highlands County, due to its large geographic size relative to the population, is a challenge for implementing fixed-route public transportation. There are no areas that currently or are projected to have dwelling unit densities that support minimum levels of local, fixed-route public transportation investment based on this assessment process. However, there are limited areas of the county that currently have, or are projected to have, employment densities that would support various degrees of public transportation service. All are found in Sebring and include:

- Commercial area around Walmart
- Commercial area around Lakeshore Mall
- Downtown Sebring
- Commercial area around Highlands Regional Medical Center (vicinity of US 27 and Sebring Parkway intersection)

Map 6-1: 2017 Density Threshold Assessment



Map 6-2: 2027 Density Threshold Assessment



Traditional Market Assessment

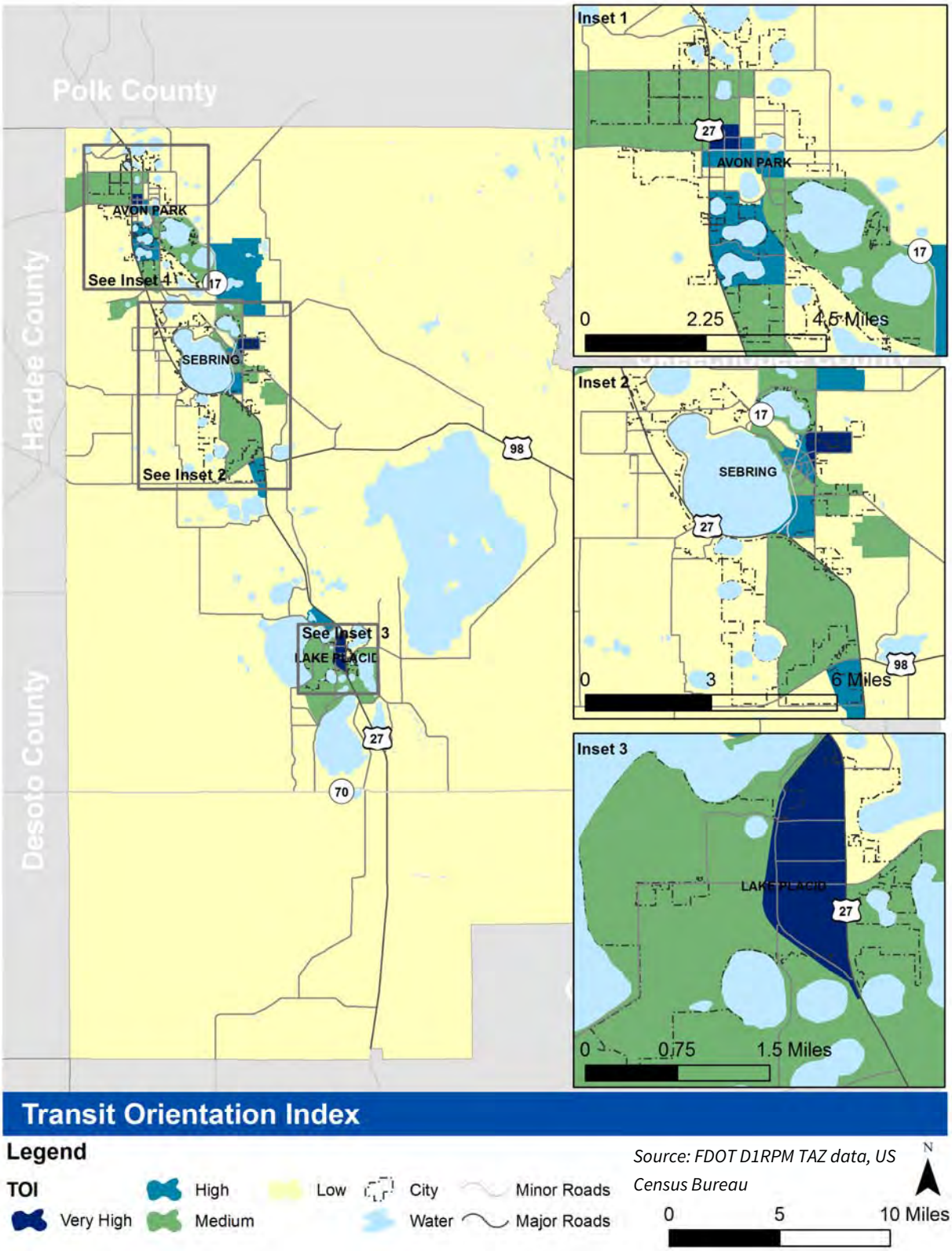
The traditional market refers to population segments that historically have a higher potential to use public transportation or depend on it for their transportation needs. For some individuals, their ability to drive is greatly diminished with age, so they must rely on others for their transportation needs. Likewise, younger persons not yet of driving age but who need to travel to school, employment, or for leisure may rely more on public transportation until they reach driving age. For lower-income households, transportation costs are particularly burdensome, as a greater proportion of income is used for transportation-related expenses than for higher-income households. Households with restricted income, particularly those with no private vehicle, are more likely to rely on public transportation for travel. Therefore, traditional public transportation users include older adults, youth, and households that are low-income and/or have zero vehicles.

A TOI assists in identifying areas of the county where a traditional public transportation market exists. To create the TOI, five-year demographic data from the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates were analyzed at the census block group level (the most detailed level of data available from ACS) for the following demographic and economic variables:

- Population age 65 and over (older adults)
- Population under age 15 (youth)
- Population living below poverty level ($25,000 or less annual income for 4-person household)
- Households with no vehicles available (zero-vehicle households)

The ACS data layers were overlaid to develop a composite ranking for each census block group of “Very High,” “High,” “Medium,” and “Low” with respect to the level of transit orientation. The areas that ranked “Very High” reflect a very high transit orientation, i.e., a high proportion of public transportation-dependent populations, and those ranked “Low” indicate much lower proportions of public transportation -dependent populations. To avoid skewed results, very low density block groups (e.g., those with fewer than 100 persons per square mile) were removed from the analysis.

Map 6-3 illustrates the 2014 TOI prepared for Highlands County, reflecting areas with varying traditional market potential. Areas with “Very High” and “High” transit orientation are primarily within or surrounding Avon Park, Sebring, and Lake Placid.



Map 6-3: Transit Orientation Index

6.2 Transportation Disadvantaged Origin-Destination Assessment

Since there is currently no fixed-route public transportation service in Highlands County, it is important to understand where people are traveling to and where they need to go. This will help to more effectively plan public transportation service options that best meet the needs of Highlands County residents, employees, and visitors. The transportation needs survey results documented in Section 5 identify locations for which residents would like to see public transportation services. To supplement public input and other technical data, a review of the Community Transportation Coordinator's (CTC) calendar year 2016 trip data was conducted to identify where current passengers are coming from (origin) and where they are going to (destination) for trips either originating or ending in Highlands County.

As expected, the majority of trips (97%) are intra-county, starting and ending in Highlands County. As shown in Table 6-2, of the remaining 3% of trips, the majority start or end in Hardee, Hillsborough, Polk, or Desoto counties and are medical-related trips to various hospitals and treatment centers.

Table 6-2: TD Origin-Destination Analysis Summary—Counties

Top 5 County Origins	Total Trips
Highlands	97.2%
Hardee	1.2%
Hillsborough	0.6%
Polk	0.5%
DeSoto	0.2%
Others	0.3%
Grand Total	100%

Top 5 County	Total Trips
Highlands	97.2%
Hardee	1.2%
Hillsborough	0.6%
Polk	0.4%
DeSoto	0.2%
Others	0.3%
Grand Total	100.0%

Source: 2016 CTC trip data

As shown in Table 6-3, 97% of trips start or end in cities or unincorporated areas of Highlands County, including Avon Park, Sebring, Lake Placid, Lorida, and Venus. Other popular origins and destinations outside of Highlands County include Wauchula, Tampa, and Arcadia.

Table 6-3: TD Origin-Destination Analysis Summary—Cities/Unincorporated Areas

City/Unincorporated	Total Trips	County
Sebring	58.7%	Highlands
Avon Park	25.9%	Highlands
Lake Placid	11.3%	Highlands
Wauchula	0.9%	Hardee
Lorida	0.8%	Highlands
Tampa	0.4%	Hillsborough
Venus	0.4%	Highlands
Arcadia	0.2%	DeSoto
Others	1.2%	Various
Grand Total	100%	

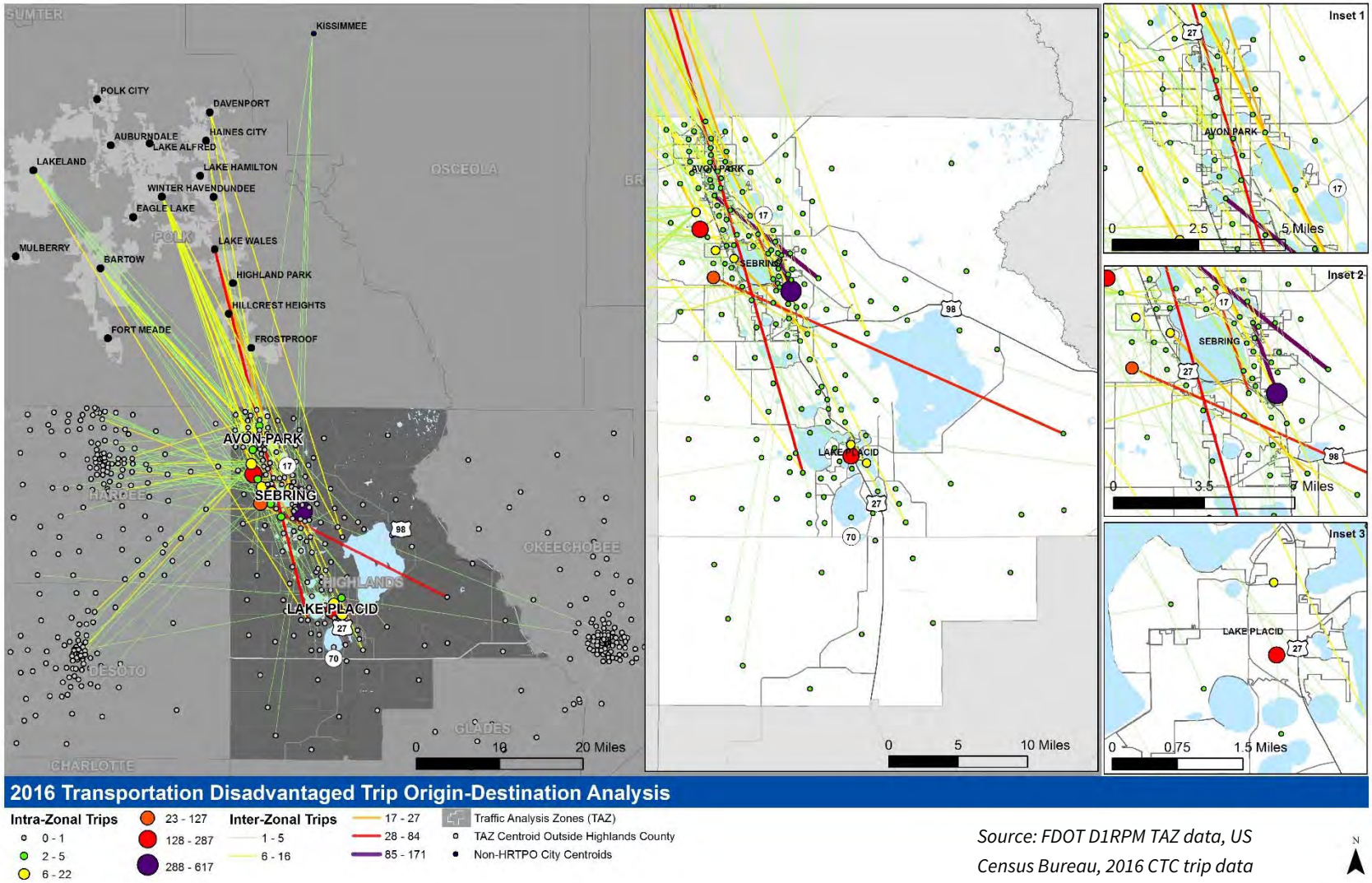
City/Unincorporated	Total Trips	County
Sebring	58.6%	Highlands
Avon Park	26.4%	Highlands
Lake Placid	10.9%	Highlands
Wauchula	0.9%	Hardee
Lorida	0.8%	Highlands
Tampa	0.4%	Hillsborough
Venus	0.4%	Highlands
Arcadia	0.2%	DeSoto
Others	1.2%	Various
Grand Total	100%	

Source: 2016 CTC trip data

Finally, the top five origin-destination pairs are presented in Table 6-4, and Map 6-4 illustrates the origin and destination analysis.

Table 6-4: TD Top Five Origin-Designation Pairs

Top 5 Origin-Destination Pairs
Lorida-West Sebring (various medical centers)
Within Lake Placid
Within Sun n' Lakes (Florida Hospital)
South Sebring (Highlands Regional Medical Center - Downtown Sebring)
South Sebring (Highlands Regional Medical Center - North Sebring)



Map 6-4: TD Origin/Destination Analysis

6.3 Regional Public Transportation Needs

The TD origin-destination assessment, combined with input received from the community during the public involvement process, indicates that regional connectivity for public transportation should be further evaluated. The analysis indicates that for medical trips, people are traveling to/from Highlands County and the following locations:

- Polk County (Lake Wales, Winter Haven, Lakeland, Davenport)
- Desoto County (Arcadia , surrounding areas)
- Hardee County (Wauchula, Zolfo Springs)
- Okeechobee County (City of Okeechobee)

Of these locations, travel between the aforementioned locations in Polk County are the most frequently occurring TD trips and therefore the highest priority need for regional connectivity. Within Highlands County, but outside the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area or Lake Placid, Lorida is also an area with a high frequency of medical-related trips, primarily to Sebring made through the TD program. Periodic service between Sebring and Lorida (2–3 times per week) as part of a regional consideration for fixed-route public transportation could reduce the demand for TD service.

A primary opportunity for examining regional connectivity of public transportation is the update process of the Heartland Rural Mobility Plan (HRMP), which is currently ongoing. The current HRMP was originally completed in 2009 to identify and address the mobility challenges within a six-county rural area in south central Florida which, at that time, was designated as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern (RACEC). The area formerly designated as a RACEC is now known as the South Central Rural Area of Opportunity (RAO). Rural Areas of Opportunity (RAO) are defined as rural communities, or a region composed of rural communities, that have been adversely affected by extraordinary economic events or natural disasters and are designated by the Governor through an executive order. The HRMP study area includes the six counties of DeSoto, Glades, Hardee, Hendry, Highlands, and Okeechobee and the four communities of Belle Glade, South Bay, Pahokee, and Immokalee all within the RAO area.

The HRMP update is currently being undertaken to document the changes and progress that has occurred since the initial plan This process will conduct a review and assessment of the HRMP, engage the CFRPC and HRTPO to involve local governments, interested agency partners, and the public in the HRMP update process, and result in an updated HRMP document in the form of a TDP. Implementation of a public transportation system in Highlands County as a result of this planning effort will provide a starting point for discussion of regional connectivity to other systems and providers.

Section 7 Public Transportation Service Options

The service options presented in this section reflect the public transportation needs of the community identified through both technical analyses and public input from the following methods:

- **Public Workshops and Stakeholder Discussions** – public workshops and stakeholder discussions have been very effective in obtaining input on public transportation needs during the early stages of preparing the Highlands Transit Plan. Collectively, public workshops, the Community Transit Forum, grassroots events, and stakeholder interviews provided input from a wide range of perspectives regarding what public transportation service options should be considered when implementing a new system over the next 10 years.
- **Public Transportation Needs Survey** – a comprehensive survey was conducted early during the Highlands Transit plan development process to help identify public transportation needs from residents throughout the county.
- **Transit Demand Assessment** – an assessment of public transportation demand and needs was conducted for Highlands County using various GIS-based analysis tools. These technical analyses, together with the baseline conditions assessment and performance reviews, were used to identify areas of the county with characteristics shown to be supportive of transit.
- **Situation Appraisal** – requirements for a 10-year TDP in Florida include the need for a situation appraisal of the environment in which the transit agency operates, or in the case for Highlands County, may potentially operate in the context of the following elements:
    - Socioeconomic trends
    - Travel behavior
    - Land use
    - Public involvement
    - Organizational attributes
    - Technology
    - Regional public transportation issues
    - Assessment of the plans reviewed

From the methods described above, potential public transportation service options were identified for consideration in the Highlands Transit Plan and are summarized below.

7.1 Proposed Public Transportation Service Options

From the public transportation needs assessment, it was determined that fixed-route service is primarily needed within, and to provide connectivity between, the cities of Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid. To accommodate a wider geographic area and meet the needs of different population groups, potential routes were identified and fall under three types of public transportation service:

- **Flex Service** is a call-and-ride service that consists of several fixed time points/bus stops (where a customer can reach the service) and provide pick up and drop off services within the designated ¾-mile flex service area. Reservations for pick up/drop off can be made on the same day of travel.
- **Express Service** operates as a fixed route and on a fixed schedule with limited stops along the route to serve major activity centers.
- **Circulator Service** is a fixed-route that serves a designated area, such as a downtown, and connects to another route(s) in the system.

A total of seven routes under these three service types were identified as potential public transportation service options. Each route is described in more detail in the following subsections.

Flex Routes

Three flex routes were identified:

- **Avon Park Flex,** designed to provide service from the Avon Park Walmart (a transfer point to the Avon Park-Sebring Express) to downtown Avon Park via N Lake Avenue, Main Street, and then loop back north on US 27 to Walmart. Locations served by this route include the Avon Park Walmart, Avon Square, Avon Park City Hall, commercial areas along Main Street and US 27, and the residential area south of downtown Avon Park.
- **Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex,** designed to provide service from the Sebring Walmart (a transfer point to the Avon Park-Sebring Express and Sebring-Lake Placid Express), around Lake Jackson via the Sebring Parkway and connecting to the Downtown Sebring Circulator at the transfer point along the Sebring Parkway. This route also serves the Highlands Regional Medical Center, Harder Hall area, Lakeshore Mall, and other commercial areas along the Sebring Parkway and US 27.
- **South Lake Placid Flex,** designed to serve the Lake Placid Publix Shopping Center (a transfer point to the Sebring-Lake Placid Express), Placid Lakes (residential area), Lake Mirror Drive, and commercial areas along US 27.

Express Routes

Two express routes were identified:

- **Avon Park-Sebring Express,** designed to provide service from Florida Hospital Family Medicine in Avon Park (north of the Avon Park Walmart) south along US 27 to the Walmart in Sebring (a transfer point to the Sebring-Lake Placid Express and the Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex routes). Other major destinations served by this route include South Florida State College (SFSC) main campus, Florida Hospital Sun ‘N Lake, and the greater Sun ‘N Lake Community.

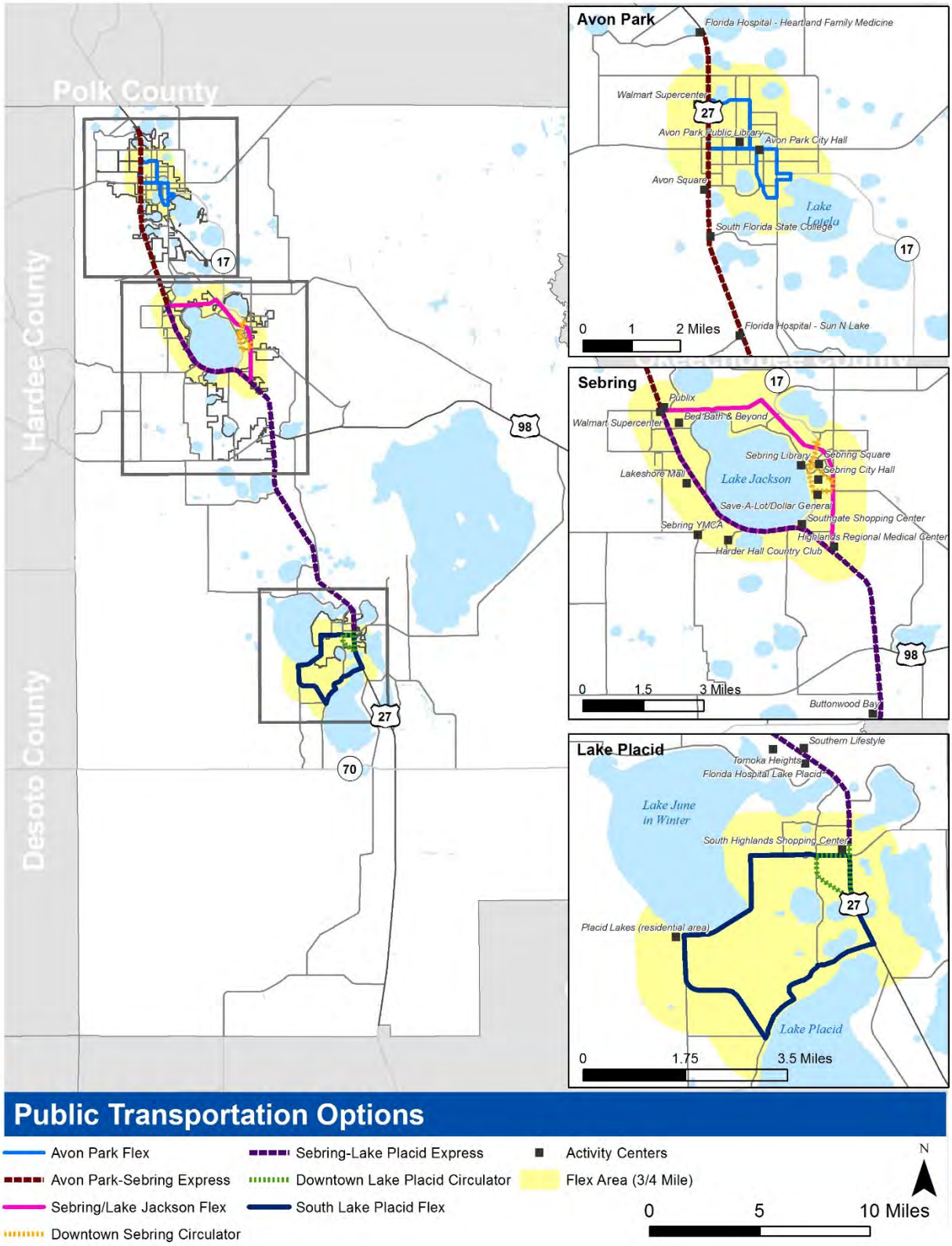
- **Sebring-Lake Placid Express,** designed to provide service from the Sebring Walmart (a transfer point to the Avon Park-Sebring Express and the Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex routes) south along US 27 to the Lake Placid Publix Shopping Center. Other major destinations served by this route include Lakeshore Mall, other commercial areas along US 27 in Sebring (such as the Bed, Bath, & Beyond shopping center), Southgate Shopping Center, Highlands Regional Medical Center, residential areas along US 27 south of Sebring (e.g., Buttonwood Bay, Silver Oaks, and Tomoka Heights), and Florida Hospital Lake Placid.

Circulator Routes

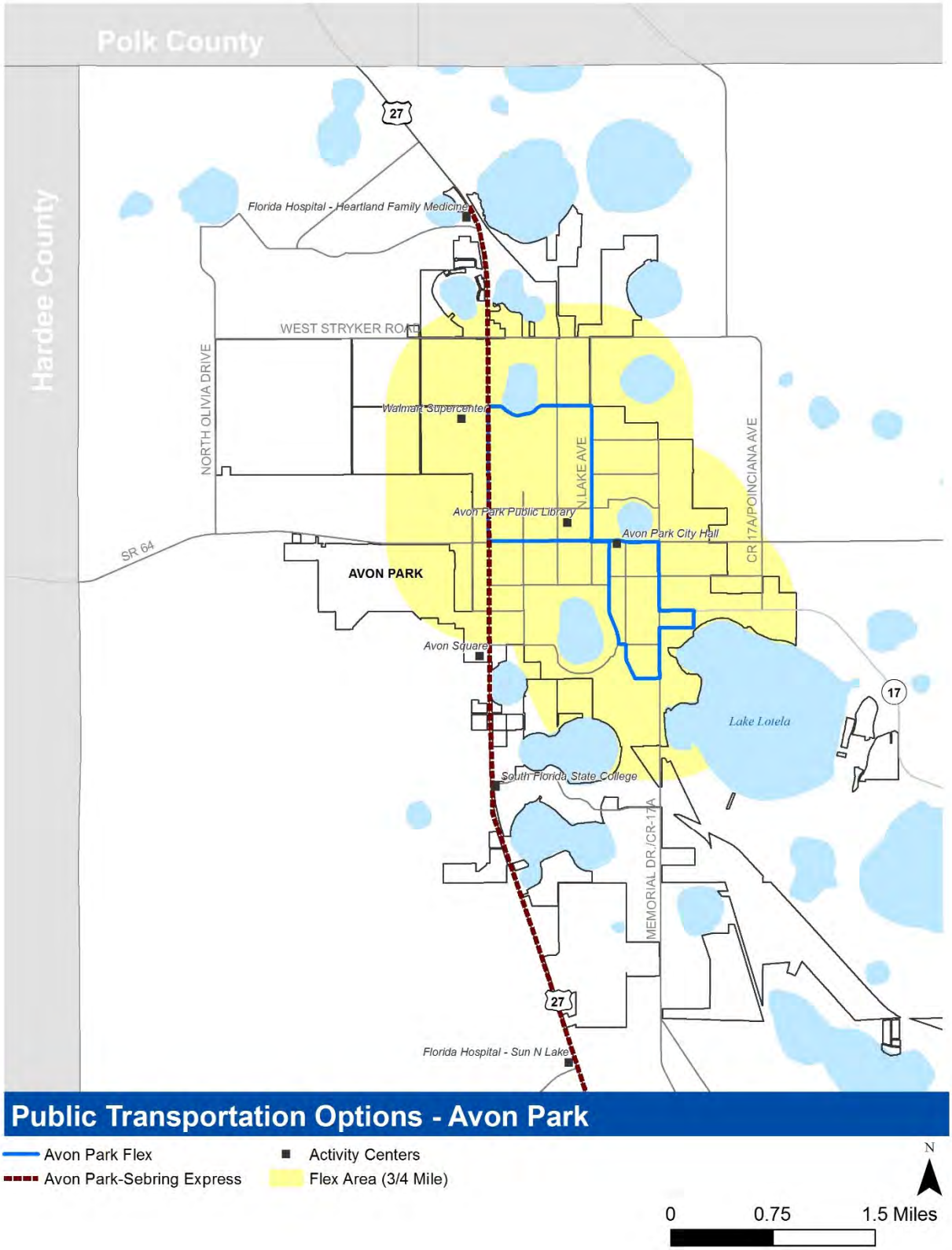
Two circulator routes were identified:

- **Downtown Sebring Circulator,** designed to circulate through downtown Sebring, serving prominent locations such as Sebring Square, Sebring City Hall, and Sebring Library Center, and Sebring Parkway (a transfer point to the Sebring/Lake Jackson Circulator).
- **Downtown Lake Placid Circulator,** designed to circulate through downtown Lake Placid, serving prominent locations such as the Lake Placid Publix Shopping Center (a transfer point to the Sebring-Lake Placid Express and South Lake Placid Circulator routes), the S. Main St commercial area, and SFSC Lake Placid campus.

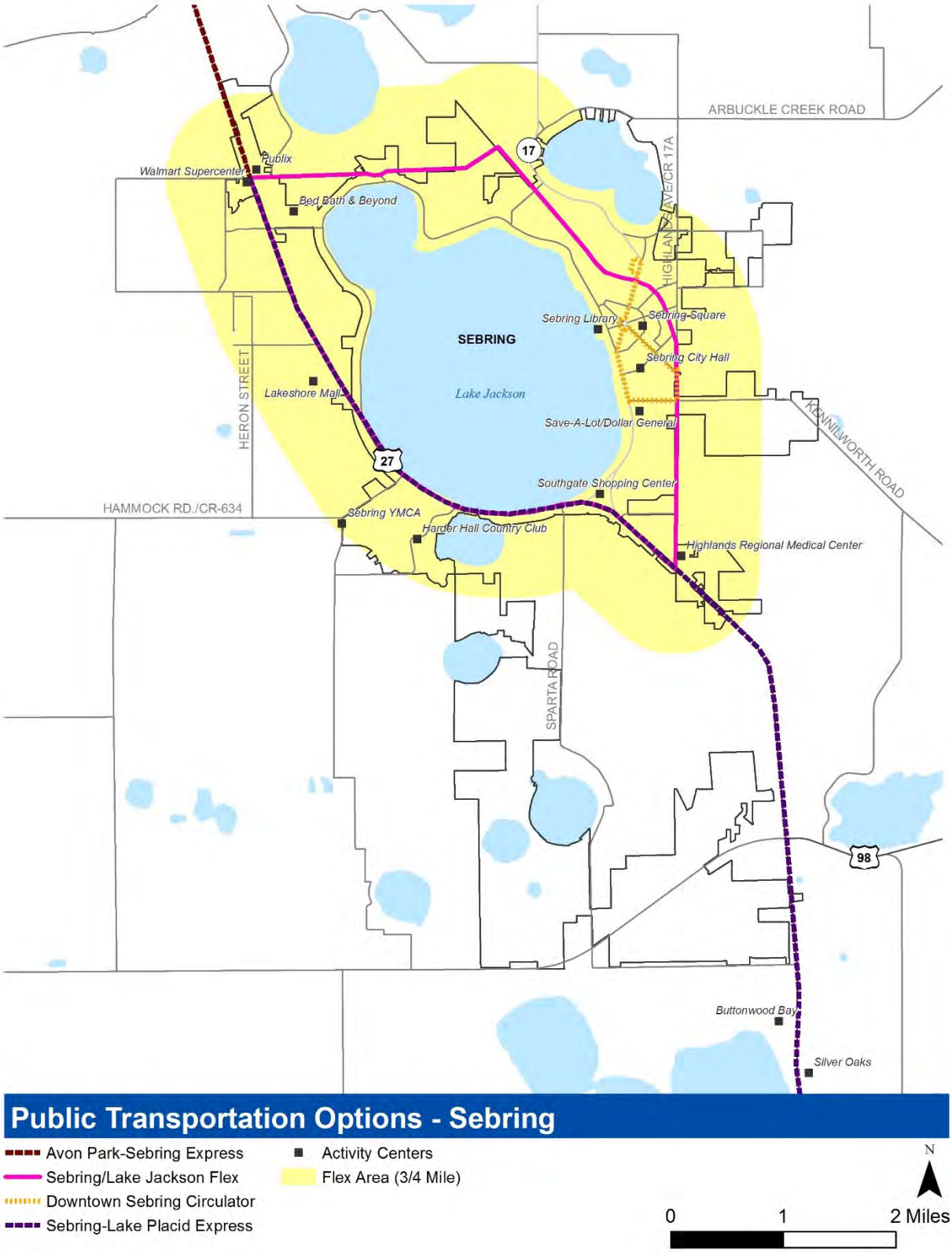
The proposed public transportation service options are illustrated on Map 7-1 for the entire county and Maps 7-2 through 7-4 for Avon Park, Sebring, and Lake Placid, respectively.



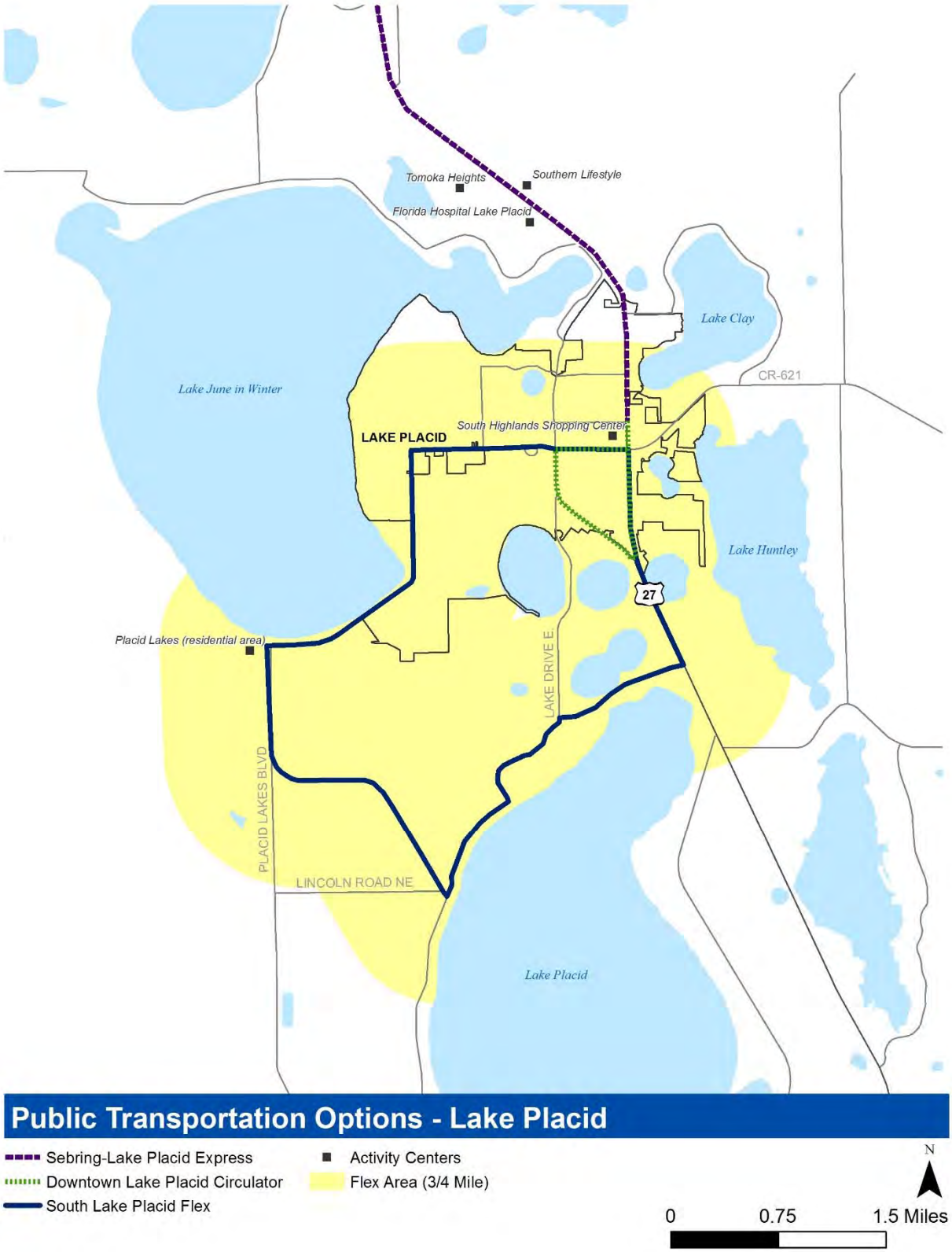
Map 7-1: Public Transportation Service Options—Highlands County



Map 7-2: Public Transportation Service Options—Avon Park



Map 7-3: Public Transportation Service Options—Sebring



Map 7-4: Public Transportation Service Options—Lake Placid

Section 8 Projected Ridership Demand

Ridership forecasts for the identified public transportation service options were prepared using T-BEST (Transit Boardings Estimation and Simulation Tool) Version 4.2.1, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT)-approved public transportation demand forecasting tool. T-BEST is a comprehensive public transportation analysis and ridership-forecasting model that can simulate travel demand at the individual route level. The software was designed to provide near- and mid-term ridership forecasts consistent with the needs of public transportation operational planning and TDP development. In producing model outputs, T-BEST also considers the following:

- *Network connectivity* – the level of connectivity between routes within a public transportation network; the greater the connectivity between routes, the more efficient the service becomes.
- *Spatial and temporal accessibility* – service frequency and distance between stops; the larger the physical distance between potential bus riders and bus stops, the lower the level of service utilization; similarly, less frequent service is perceived as less reliable and, in turn, utilization decreases.
- *Time-of-day variations* – peak-period travel patterns are accommodated by rewarding peak service periods with greater service utilization forecasts.
- *Competitive and complementary routes* – competition between routes is considered; routes connecting to the same destinations or anchor points or that travel on common corridors experience decreases in service utilization; conversely, routes that are synchronized and support each other in terms of service to major destinations or transfer locations and schedule benefit from that complementary relationship.

The following section outlines the T-BEST input and assumptions, includes a description of the scenarios performed using the model, and summarizes the ridership forecasts produced by T-BEST.

Model Inputs/Assumptions and Limitations

T-BEST uses various demographic and public transportation network data as model inputs. The inputs and the assumptions made in modeling the potential Highlands County system in T-BEST are presented below. The model is based on 2019 conditions, as that is the earliest public transportation service could feasibly be implemented following adoption of this TDP in 2017. As there is currently no public transportation system, prior ridership data were not available for input into the model. Therefore, the default equations using the TBEST Land Use Model 2016 structure for ridership estimates in Florida were used to predict ridership. The model is supported by 2013 parcel-level data developed from the Florida Department of Revenue's (DOR)'s statewide tax database. The DOR parcel data contains land

use designations and supporting attributes that allow the application of Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE)-based trip generation rates at the parcel level as an indicator of travel activity.

It should be noted that T-BEST is not interactive with roadway network conditions or pedestrian connectivity. Therefore, ridership forecasts will not show direct sensitivity to changes in roadway traffic conditions or speeds.

Public Transportation Network

The potential route network for Highlands County is based on the three flex routes, two express routes, and two downtown circulator routes introduced in the previous section and illustrated in Map 8-1.

Demographic Data

The demographics used as the base input for the T-BEST model were derived using 2010–2040 socio-economic zonal data obtained from the FDOT District 1 Regional Planning Model (D1RPM). Using these data, the model captures market demand (population, demographics, employment, and land use characteristics) within ¼ mile of each bus stop.

Population and Employment Growth Rates

A socio-economic data growth factor to project population and employment data was used to supplement the socio-economic zonal forecasts mentioned above. The population growth rate was calculated using historical data obtained from 2011-2015 ACS estimates and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The employment growth rate was calculated using zonal growth derived from the D1RPM. As indicated previously, population and employment data are hard-coded into the model and cannot be modified by end-users. As applied, the growth rates do not reflect fluctuating economic conditions as experienced in real time.

Special Generators

Special generators were determined to evaluate locations with opportunities for high ridership or prominent transfer points. For Highlands County, these include the following:

- Avon Park Walmart (assumed major transfer point)
- Highlands Regional Medical Center (assumed major transfer point)
- Lakeshore Mall
- Sebring Walmart (assumed major transfer point)
- South Florida State College—SFSC (main campus)
- SFSC (Lake Placid campus)
- Florida Hospital Heartland Medical Center
- Lake Placid Publix Shopping Center (assumed major transfer point)

T-BEST Model Limitations

It has long been a desire of FDOT to have a standard modeling tool for public transportation demand that could be standardized across the state similar to the Florida Standard Urban Transportation Model Structure (FSUTMS) model used by metropolitan/transportation planning organizations (M/TPOs) in developing long range transportation plans. Although T-BEST is an important tool for evaluating improvements to existing and future public transportation services, model outputs do not account for latent demand for public transportation that could yield significantly higher ridership, and, correspondingly, they may overestimate demand in isolated cases. In addition, T-BEST cannot display sensitivities to external factors such as an improved marketing and advertising program, changes in the price of service for customers, and other local conditions.

Although T-BEST provides ridership projections at the route and bus stop levels, its strength lies more in its ability to demonstrate relative comparisons of ridership productivity. As a result, model outputs are not absolute ridership projections but, rather, are comparative for evaluation in actual service implementation decisions. T-BEST has generated interest from departments of transportation in other states and continues to be a work in progress that will become more useful as its capabilities are enhanced in future updates to the model. Consequently, it is important to integrate sound planning judgment and experience when interpreting T-BEST results.

8.2 Ridership Forecast

Individual Routes & Span of Service Scenarios

Using T-BEST, annual ridership estimates were developed for Highlands County's potential public transportation system for the seven proposed routes for three span of service (hours of operation) scenarios:

- **Weekday service** for all routes with a service span of 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM
- **Saturday service** for all routes with a service span of 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM
- **Sunday service** for the three flex routes to accommodate local trip needs with a service span of 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM; no Sunday service is assumed for the express or downtown circulator routes

T-BEST also incorporates information on fares, transfers, and stop spacing to forecast ridership. Typically, this information is based on the system's current fare structure, transfer payment policy, and existing bus stop locations and route structures. As there is no existing public transportation system in Highlands County, the assumptions listed below were made for this information and incorporated into T-BEST:

- Base fare of $1.50 per one-way trip

- Free transfers between routes
- In addition to key stops, bus stops were generally spaced 0.25 miles for downtown circulator and 0.5 miles for flex routes. Bus stops for the express routes correlate with the major activity centers.

Table 8-1 presents 10-year ridership forecasts for weekday service, Saturday service, Sunday service, and total for all service days by route. According to the projections, overall average annual ridership could increase by 11.2% by 2029. Weekday annual ridership is expected to increase by 12.5%, Saturday ridership by 5.8%, and Sunday ridership by 3%.

Fare vs. Fare-Free Scenario

Since a fare policy has not yet been established for the potential public transportation system, a second forecast scenario was completed assuming a fare-free system. Since the cost of riding the bus affects ridership, this scenario helps to measure the potential impact of implementing a fare-free system (in which all public transportation service is free to all riders) on the ridership forecast. Understanding the effects of a fare-free policy is important, as ridership is part of the formula to allocate Florida Public Transit Block Grant Program funds; higher ridership increasing Block Grant funds could offset the fare revenue that otherwise would be generated. The weekday forecast, assuming the $1.50 base one-way fare from Table 8-1, was compared to a weekday forecast assuming a fare-free system and the results are presented in Table 8-2. As shown, the impact of a fare-free system varies by route, but the overall weekday ridership is forecasted to increase by a 21.9% compared to the fare scenario in 2019 and 12.1% increase over the fare scenario in 2029. Although the fare-free base (2019) weekday ridership is projected to be higher than the fare scenario, the fare-free scenario is anticipated to have a lower overall growth rate and is forecasted to increase by 7.4% between 2019 and 2029 compared to the fare policy growth of 12.5%.

Table 8-1: 10-Year Public Transportation Ridership Forecast by Route (2019 & 2029)

Route	Annual Weekday Boardings	Annual Saturday Boardings	Annual Sunday Boardings	Total Annual Boardings
2019 Ridership Forecast				
Avon Park Flex	15,798	2,856	2,158	20,812
Downtown Lake Placid Circulator	11,584	1,912	N/a	13,496
Downtown Sebring Circulator	20,217	2,411	N/A	22,628
Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex	25,612	4,310	2,874	32,796
Sebring-Avon Park Express	14,362	2,095	N/A	16,457
Sebring-Lake Placid Express	32,156	4,962	N/A	37,118
South Lake Placid Flex	7,393	1,820	1,316	10,529
Total All Routes—2019	**127,122**	**20,366**	**6,348**	**153,836**
2029 Ridership Forecast				
Avon Park Flex	17,870	2,940	2,196	23,006
Downtown Lake Placid Circulator	12,837	1,972	N/A	14,809
Downtown Sebring Circulator	21,451	2,418	N/A	23,869
Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex	29,561	4,602	3,000	37,163
Sebring-Avon Park Express	17,893	2,468	N/A	20,361
Sebring-Lake Placid Express	35,060	5,289	N/A	40,349
South Lake Placid Flex	8,281	1,866	1,341	11,488
Total All Routes—2019	**142,953**	**21,555**	**6,537**	**171,045**
% Growth (2019–2029)	**12.45%**	**5.84%**	**2.98%**	**11.19%**

Table 8-2: 10-Year Public Transportation Ridership Forecasts—Fare vs. Free-Fare System

Route	Annual Weekday Boardings: With Fare	Annual Weekday Boardings: No Fare	Percent Difference
2019 Ridership Forecast			
Avon Park Flex	15,798	19,162	21.29%
Downtown Lake Placid Circulator	11,584	15,493	33.74%
Downtown Sebring Circulator	20,217	26,462	30.89%
Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex	25,612	31,139	21.58%
Sebring-Avon Park Express	14,362	15,745	9.63%
Sebring-Lake Placid Express	32,156	36,769	14.35%
South Lake Placid Flex	7,393	10,115	36.82%
Total All Routes—2019	**127,122**	**154,885**	**21.84%**
2029 Ridership Forecast			
Avon Park Flex	17,870	20,689	15.78%
Downtown Lake Placid Circulator	12,837	16,168	25.95%
Downtown Sebring Circulator	21,451	26,502	23.55%
Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex	29,561	34,059	15.22%
Sebring-Avon Park Express	17,893	19,117	6.84%
Sebring-Lake Placid Express	35,060	39,314	12.13%
South Lake Placid Flex	8,281	10,517	27.00%
Total All Routes—2029	**142,953**	**166,366**	**16.38%**
% Growth (2019–2029)	**12.45%**	**7.41%**	

Note: Weekday ridership forecasts shown.

Geographic Scenarios

Due to financial constraints, policy decisions, or other factors, it is not expected that all seven proposed public transportation routes will be implemented in the first year of service. Therefore, other scenarios grouping several of the proposed routes were identified as potential implementation options to provide service in specific areas of the county. These scenarios were developed not only to cover different geographic areas, but also to meet the community's priorities expressed during the public involvement process. The geographic scenarios identified include the following:

- **Sebring-central Service** – includes the two express routes (Avon Park-Sebring Express and Sebring-Lake Placid Express) providing service from these communities connecting to service in Sebring via the Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex.
- **Avon Park-Sebring Service** – includes the Avon Park Flex and Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex with the Avon Park-Sebring Express providing connecting service between these two routes.

- **Sebring-Lake Placid Service** – includes the Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex and the South Lake Placid Flex with the Sebring-Lake Placid Express providing connecting service between these two routes.

Ridership forecasts were also developed for each geographic scenario to evaluate how they would perform if implemented as the public transportation system. Table 8-3 presents the 10-year weekday ridership forecasts for the three geographic scenarios. As shown, the Sebring-central service produces the highest overall ridership estimates and the second highest 10-year growth at 14%, and the Avon Park-Sebring service has the lowest overall ridership estimates but the highest overall 10-year growth at 18%. Ridership forecasts for the Sebring-Lake Placid service fall in the middle; this scenario produces the overall lowest 10-year growth at 10%.

Table 8-3: 10-Year Public Transportation Ridership Forecasts—Geographic Scenarios

Geographic Scenario	Annual Weekday Boardings 2019	Annual Weekday Boardings 2029	Percent Difference
Sebring-central Service	71,171	81,322	14%
Avon Park-Sebring Service	50,760	60,076	18%
Sebring-Lake Placid Service	60,271	66,226	10%

Note: Weekday ridership forecasts shown.

Section 9 Public Transportation Service Options Evaluation

This section summarizes the process and results of evaluating the various service options developed for the Highlands Transit Plan. Because there are limited financial resources available to implement new public transportation service in Highlands County, it is important to evaluate and subsequently prioritize the service recommendations to prepare a cost affordable 10-year implementation and service plan.

9.1 Service Options Evaluation Methodology

This section identifies and defines the evaluation criteria to be used in prioritizing the service improvements developed for the Highlands Transit Plan and the methodology by which those criteria should be applied.

Three evaluation categories were identified for determining criteria for the evaluation:

- Public Involvement
- Transit Markets
- Productivity and Efficiency

Table 9-1 lists these evaluation categories, each category's corresponding criteria, the associated measure of effectiveness, and the assigned weighting for each criterion.

Table 9-1: Service Option Evaluation Measures

Category	Criteria	Measure of Effectiveness	Relative Weighting	Overall Category Weight
Public Involvement	Public Input	Level of interest in specific service options (Very High, High, Moderate, Low)	40%	40%
Transit Markets	Traditional Market	Percent of corridor in High or Very High TOI	10%	30%
	Discretionary Market	Percent of corridor area that meet Minimum DTA tier for employment or dwelling unit density	10%	
	Employment Market	Percent of countywide employment market served	10%	
Productivity & Efficiency	Productivity	Trips per hour (T-BEST-generated trips and revenue hours of service)	15%	30%
	Cost Efficiency	Cost per trip	15%	
Total			100%	100%

Public Involvement

An extensive public outreach process was conducted for the Highlands Transit Plan 10-year planning effort that resulted in numerous opinions and suggestions on public transportation services from many viewpoints. This input largely influenced the proposed public transportation options developed and presented in Section 7. Using the responses from the public transportation options survey, the relative priority for each service operation was used to measure the level of public interest in each as "None," "Moderate," "High," or "Very High" as part of the evaluation process.

Transit Markets

In evaluating the proposed service options, three public transportation markets were identified:

- **Traditional Market** – existing population segments that historically have a higher potential to use transit and/or are dependent on public transit for their transportation needs; for the service options evaluation, the proportion of each service option operating within ¾ mile of a "High" or "Very High" TOI area was calculated.
- **Discretionary Market** – potential riders living in higher-density areas of the county that may choose to use public transportation as an alternative to commuting or driving; the proportion of each service option operating within a ¾-mile area of TAZs meeting at least the "Minimum" dwelling unit or employment density threshold in the 2017 DTA was calculated and used for the service options evaluation.
- **Employment Market** – the percentage of the countywide employment market served by each potential service option, based on information produced through the TBEST analysis.

Productivity and Efficiency

Productivity is generally measured in terms of ridership. Service efficiency is used by transit agencies to measure how well they are using their existing resources. Each measure is critical to the success of the agency, and services performing well in terms of their productivity and efficiency should receive a higher priority. Forecast ridership, revenue hours, and operating cost figures for each individual service option were used in this measure:

- **Ridership productivity** – measured in terms of annual passenger trips per revenue hour of service using outputs from T-BEST 2019 ridership data.
- **Cost efficiency** – evaluated for each service option using a standard transit industry efficiency measure of the operating cost per passenger trip. Since there are no current operating cost per passenger trip data for fixed-route public transportation service in Highlands County, a 2019 operating cost per passenger trip figure was calculated using the average cost from identified peer agencies gathered from the National Transit Database (NTD) and inflated to 2019. The resulting unit cost figure was multiplied by the annual revenue hours per service option from T-

BEST and then the resulting total annual operating cost was divided by the annual ridership from T-BEST to calculate the operating cost per hour estimate for each public transportation option.

Figure 9-1 shows the Highlands Transit Plan 10-year public transportation options evaluation process, including criteria, measures, and weights used for each category. A summary of various criteria and measures used in each tier and the evaluation results are presented in the remainder of this section.

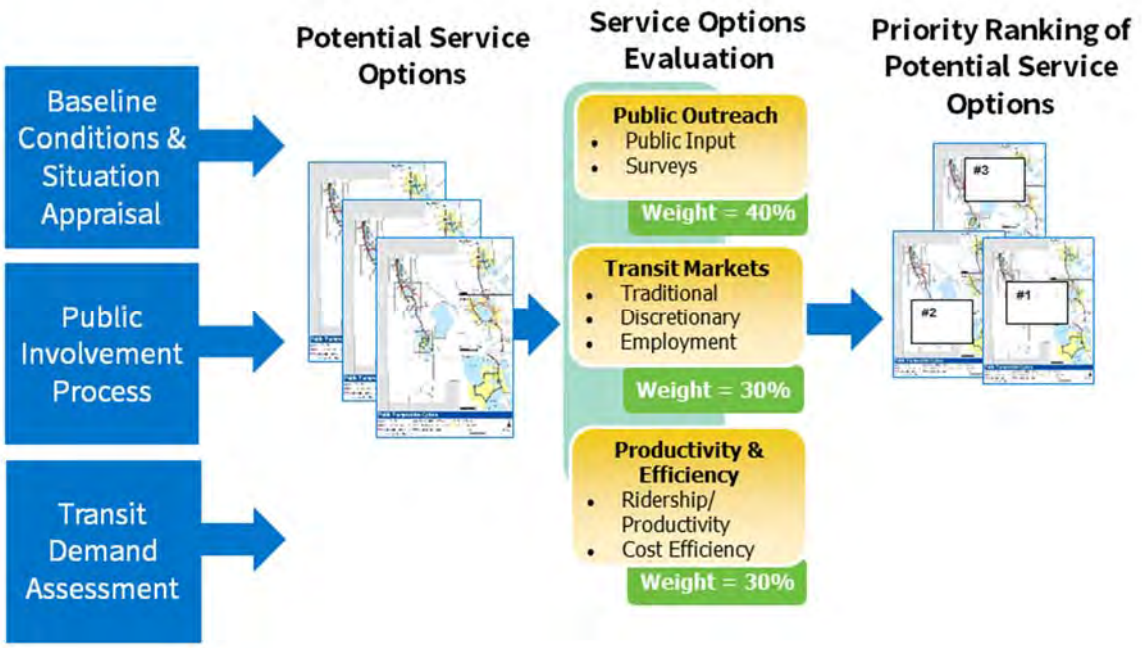


Figure 9-1: Public Transportation Service Options Evaluation Process

Service Options Scoring Thresholds

As noted, each evaluation criterion is assigned a weight. Weighting the criteria affords the opportunity to measure the relative importance of each criterion among the group of criteria to be applied. For each public transportation option, a score was determined either through the computation of the selected measure of effectiveness or through the educated judgment of the analyst. Potential scores were assigned depending on the relative comparison of a given public transportation service option with other public transportation service options as it relates to a given criterion. A higher score is consistent with a higher ranking for a given service option for the criterion being evaluated.

The thresholds for computation-based criteria (public outreach, traditional market, choice market, employment market trips per hour, operating cost per trip) were determined using the average of the entire data set and one standard deviation above or below the average. Table 9-2 shows the thresholds and scoring for each criterion used in the service options evaluation.

Table 9-2: Service Options Evaluation – Scoring Thresholds

Criteria	Range	Score
Public Input – Interest in Improvement (Average Priority Rating from Service Options Survey)	Less than (Average – 1)	1
	Between (Average – 1) to Average	3
	More than Average to (Average + 1)	5
	More than (Average + 1)	7
Traditional Market Potential (% Serving Traditional Market)	Less than (Average – 1)	1
	Between (Average – 1) to Average	3
	More than Average to (Average + 1)	5
	More than (Average + 1)	7
Choice Market Potential (% Serving Choice Market)	Less than (Average – 1)	1
	Between (Average – 1) to Average	3
	More than Average to (Average + 1)	5
	More than (Average + 1)	7
Employment Market	Less than (Average – 1)	1
	Between (Average – 1) to Average	3
	More than Average to (Average + 1)	5
	More than (Average + 1)	7
Trips per Hour	Less than (Average – 1)	1
	Between (Average – 1) to Average	3
	More than Average to (Average + 1)	5
	More than (Average + 1)	7
Operating Cost per Trip	More than (Average + 1)	1
	More than Average to (Average + 1)	3
	Between (Average – 1) to Average	5
	Less than (Average – 1)	7

Note: Number in range represents statistical standard deviation.

9.2 Results of Service Options Evaluation

Each public transportation service option was evaluated using the process summarized above, and the detailed results of the evaluation are presented in Table 9-3. From this process, each public transportation service option received a score. The public transportation service options were then ranked based on their respective score into one of three categories: individual routes (for which all seven routes were evaluated separately in this process), span of service (weekday service for all routes, Saturday service for all routes, and Sunday service for the three flex routes), and the three geographic scenarios. Table 9-4 presents the prioritized list of improvements based on this process for each of these three categories.

Table 9-3: Service Options Evaluation Results

Evaluation Criteria		Avon Park Flex (Weekday Only)	Downtown Lake Placid Circulator (Weekday Only)	Downtown Sebring Circulator (Weekday Only)	Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex (Weekday Only)	Avon Park-Sebring Express (Weekday Only)	Sebring-Lake Placid Express (Weekday Only)	South Lake Placid Flex (Weekday Only)	Weekday Service (All Routes)	Add Saturday Service (All Routes)	Add Sunday Service (3 Flex Routes Only)	Sebring-central Service	Avon Park-Sebring Service	Sebring-Lake Pl Service
Public Involvement	Level of Support	Moderate	Low	High	Very High	High	High	Moderate	Very High	High	High	Very High	Moderate	Moderate
	Score	3	1	5	7	5	5	3	7	5	5	7	3	3
	Weight	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%	40%
Traditional Market	% in Traditional Market	17.095%	20.079%	33.083%	12.594%	13.274%	12.739%	5.247%	13.315%	13.315%	10.845%	13.531%	13.702%	10.985%
	Score	5	5	7	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	3
	Weight	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Choice Market	% in Choice Market	0.000%	0.000%	16.654%	7.275%	0.784%	2.024%	0.000%	2.999%	2.999%	3.284%	3.258%	3.558%	3.082%
	Score	3	3	7	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	5	3
	Weight	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Employment Market	% in Employment Market	12.18%	8.91%	15.36%	44.89%	26.19%	43.00%	9.65%	83.67%	83.67%	66.67%	76.26%	67.32%	56.68%
	Score	1	1	1	3	3	3	1	7	7	5	7	5	5
	Weight	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%	10%
Boardings per Hour	Trip/Hour	5.70	4.18	7.29	4.62	5.18	5.80	1.33	4.59	5.60	5.81	5.20	5.03	3.92
	Score	5	3	7	3	5	5	1	3	5	5	5	5	3
	Weight	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%
Operating Cost per Trip	Cost /Trip	$11.93	$16.27	$9.32	$14.72	$13.12	$11.72	$14.83	$14.83	$12.15	$11.70	$13.07	$13.52	$17.36
	Score	5	1	7	3	5	5	3	3	5	5	5	3	1
	Weight	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%	15%
Total Score		**3.60**	**1.90**	**5.60**	**4.80**	**4.40**	**4.40**	**2.30**	**5.00**	**4.80**	**4.60**	**5.60**	**3.70**	**2.90**

Table 9-4: Service Options Evaluation Results (Prioritized)

Proposed Improvement	Score	Rank
Individual Routes		
Downtown Sebring Circulator (Weekday Only)	5.60	1
Sebring/Lake Jackson Flex (Weekday Only)	4.80	2
Avon Park-Sebring Express (Weekday Only)	4.40	3
Sebring-Lake Placid Express (Weekday Only)	4.40	3
Avon Park Flex (Weekday Only)	3.60	5
Downtown Lake Placid Circulator (Weekday Only)	1.90	6
South Lake Placid Flex (Weekday Only)	2.30	7
Span of Service		
Weekday Service (All Routes)	5.00	1
Add Saturday Service (All Routes)	4.80	2
Add Sunday Service (3 Flex Routes Only)	4.60	3
Service Scenarios		
Sebring-Central Service	5.60	1
Avon Park-Sebring Service	3.70	2
Sebring-Lake Placid Service	2.90	3

Section 10 Goals and Objectives

10.1 Vision, Mission, Goals, & Objectives

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, while 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 findings of the situation appraisal. This process considers input gathered from public outreach activities such as the public workshops, transit forum, stakeholder interviews, and the transportation needs survey. Based on these sources, five themes from which to formulate the preliminary goals and objectives for the Highlands Transit Plan were identified and include:

1. Connect people to major destinations throughout the community
2. Provide public transportation service for all, including both transit-dependent and discretionary riders
3. Enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors
4. Support tourism and economic development
5. Deliver reliable and efficient service in a fiscally responsible manner

Progress towards achieving the goals, objectives, and policies will be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the annual TDP progress report. Following adoption of the Highlands Transit Plan, planning and service development will likely encompass a minimum two-year period. Therefore, objectives and policies to specifically support this start-up period are included. Once the public transportation service has started, the annual progress report process will determine if these objectives and policies should be removed or amended to further support ongoing operations.

Public Transportation Vision and Mission

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 and Objectives

Goal 1: Expand mobility choices for residents and visitors.

Objective 1.1: Serve all key activity centers, or major destinations, and major transportation corridors.

Policy 1.1.1: Work with the community to identify key activity centers and design new services to reach as many potential riders as feasible.

Policy 1.1.2: Focus all new services on connecting key activity centers within the Sebring—Avon Park Urbanized Area.

Policy 1.1.3: Design fixed routes along major transportation corridors to minimize customer travel time.

Objective 1.2: Promote awareness of the public transportation system.

Policy 1.2.1: Develop a clear brand for the public transportation system early in the service planning process to promote and increase awareness of the service to residents, employees, and visitors prior to service implementation.

Policy 1.2.2: Develop and implement a phased marketing plan that educates potential riders, increases citizen awareness, and enhances ridership as fixed-route services are planned and initiated.

Policy 1.2.3: Distribute bus schedules and system information in public places throughout the county for residents and visitors.

Policy 1.2.4: Develop and maintain a public transportation system website early in the service planning process to provide information on service development milestones. Regularly update the website with current service and schedule information once service is implemented.

Policy 1.2.5: Identify and engage key partners, including workforce development agencies, chambers of commerce, health and community services, and others as appropriate, who can enhance the ability to reach potential riders and increase passengers through specific joint efforts.

Objective 1.3: Prioritize funding for public transportation service that has a higher potential to serve transportation disadvantaged populations.

Policy 1.3.1: As funding becomes available, build upon the base public transportation system using a combination of fixed routes/circulators, flex routes, and express routes to maximize mobility choices, ridership, accessibility, and areas served.

Policy 1.3.2: Support public transportation and human services agency coordination efforts during the service planning process and through service implementation to reduce service duplication and convert applicable transportation disadvantaged trips to fixed-route trips.

Objective 1.4: Develop, implement, and maintain a public transportation system to meet current and future demands and needs, including regional connectivity.

Policy 1.4.1: Develop an outreach plan to maintain an ongoing community dialogue process during the service planning process through service implementation by employing a variety of direct and informational outreach methods.

Policy 1.4.2: Conduct an on-board survey at least every five years as part of major TDP updates to monitor changes in user demographics, travel behavior characteristics, and user satisfaction.

Policy 1.4.3: Work cooperatively with neighboring communities through the Heartland Regional Transportation Planning Organization (HRTPO) to implement services that enhance mobility choices and improve the connectivity between regional public transportation services.

Policy 1.4.4: Ensure coordination and consistency with local and regional plans for the future provision of public transportation service in Highlands County and the greater Heartland Region.

Goal 2: Create and maintain a reliable and efficient public transportation system.

Objective 2.1: Provide strong leadership in the planning, development, and implementation of new public transportation service in Highlands County.

Policy 2.1.1: Evaluate all potential governance structures to determine the most appropriate to oversee the planning, development, and implementation of new public transportation service in Highlands County.

Policy 2.1.2: Establish membership of the HRTPO's Mobility Advisory Committee (MAC) to include representation by Highlands County, Sebring, Avon Park, Lake Placid, and other community stakeholders to guide the planning, development and implementation processes.

Objective 2.2: Support public transportation in the long term by maintaining low capital and operating costs, maximizing federal and state funds, and adopting new technologies that improve service efficiency and lower costs.

Policy 2.2.1: *Maximize all potential federal and state funding sources to reduce the local contribution required to fund the implementation of a public transportation system in Highlands County.*

Policy 2.2.2: *Explore a funding partnership agreement with Highlands County, Sebring, Avon Park, and Lake Placid for local contributions to implement public transportations service focused in the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area. .*

Policy 2.2.3: *Explore private funds and alternative revenue sources, such as advertising on vehicles and at stops.*

Policy 2.2.4: *Explore a funding partnership with employers and businesses who desire enhanced public transportation service.*

Policy 2.2.5: *Develop an equitable fare policy and establish a farebox recovery standard to be reviewed during the next major TDP update.*

Policy 2.2.6: *Maintain a state of good repair for public transportation vehicles and other assets to minimize long-term maintenance costs.*

Objective 2.3: Invest in public transportation systems and practices that increase transportation system efficiency.

Policy 2.3.1: *Implement the use of appropriate technologies to improve service quality, efficiency, accessibility, and reliability.*

Policy 2.3.2: *Evaluate capital expenditures based on operational efficiencies, such as the use of appropriately-sized and technically- and ecologically-efficient vehicles.*

Objective 2.4: Evaluate performance of each route to identify necessary service changes.

Policy 2.4.1: *Develop a service performance monitoring and evaluation program for all existing and expanded services.*

Policy 2.4.2: *Collect data on service performance measures and service quality in a regular and consistent manner.*

Policy 2.4.3: *Develop a service performance monitoring and evaluation program at the route level, including standards to determine strong, average, or poor performing routes.*

Goal 3: Support tourism and economic development.

Objective 3.1: In the service planning process, include consideration for providing a public transportation system that is easy to identify, access, use, and serves major employers and popular locations visited by tourists.

Policy 3.1.1: *Work cooperatively with major employers to promote public transportation usage by employees.*

Policy 3.1.2: *Work cooperatively with tourism agencies, such as the Highlands County Visitors and Convention Bureau and chambers of commerce to promote public transportation usage by visitors and seasonal tourists.*

Policy 3.1.3: *Identify opportunities to provide special public transportation service for events, such as the 12 Hours of Sebring Race at the Sebring International Raceway.*

Objective 3.2: Coordinate future public transportation system investments with supportive land use patterns.

Policy 3.2.1: *Coordinate with County and municipal planners to consider comprehensive planning and land development regulations that encourage transit-oriented development.*

Policy 3.2.2: *Coordinate with County and municipal planners to incorporate public transportation improvements and associated amenities into new development or redevelopment along a current or planned public transportation route.*

Policy 3.2.3: *Coordinate with the HRTPO in multimodal planning activities to ensure that public transportation receives equal consideration in the process for prioritizing improvements.*

Goal 4: Maximize safety and security for all transportation services and facilities.

Objective 4.1: Maintain and implement safety and security systems throughout public transportation facilities, fleet, and stops.

Policy 4.1.1: *Develop safe, comfortable, and useful public transportation facilities at major destinations incorporating seating, shelters, signage, trees/landscaping, sidewalks, and bicycle storage as deemed appropriate by location and ridership demand.*

Policy 4.1.2: *Develop and maintain a comprehensive System Safety Program Plan (SSPP) and Safety Security Plan (SSP).*

Policy 4.1.3: *Plan to prioritize new and future accessible bus stops in areas with a high level of sidewalk connectivity between the bus stop and major destinations within walking distance.*

Policy 4.1.4: *Communicate safety concerns related to lighting and traffic conflicts at or near bus stops with the appropriate maintaining jurisdiction.*

Policy 4.1.5: *Explore public and private partnerships for park and rides and shared-use parking facilities in safe and convenient locations.*

Section 11 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. This section documents the governance and operating structure options considered and ultimately selected for inclusion in the Highlands Transit Plan.

11.1 Governance Structure Options

The governance structure refers to the agency or body responsible for overseeing the provision of public transportation services. The governing agency is also responsible for serving as the recipient of federal and state grant funding to provide such services. As part of this initial assessment, there are four potential governance structure options to be considered for the Highlands Transit Plan, which include:

- A Transit District, which is an independent agency established through voter approval or local ordinance with its own governing board comprised of multiple jurisdictions as members. A Transit District is implemented by local ordinance through jurisdictions participating within the District. The most common local funding sources are ad valorem tax assessed on properties within the District boundaries or general fund contributions from participating agencies within the District.

- A Department within Highlands County where public transportation services are governed by the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). An advisory board comprised of representatives from the other local governments where service is provided would be recommended.

- A Department within the City of Sebring, City of Avon Park, or Town of Lake Placid where public transportation services are governed by the responsible City/Town Council. If services are provided to areas outside of the governing city, using the MAC or establishing an advisory board comprised of representatives from the other local agencies where service is provided would be recommended. An interlocal agreement would likely be needed to outline operational and management parameters of participating jurisdictions.

- A program within the HRTPO where public transportation services are governed by the TPO Board comprised of local elected officials. The HRTPO Board could appoint a Highlands Transit Policy Board to provide governance and recommendations to the HRTPO. This Transit Policy Board could be comprised of elected officials from the local governments within the Sebring–Avon Park Urbanized Area including Highlands County BOCC. The staffing for the public transportation service could be provided by the same interlocal agreement the HRTPO has with Central Florida Regional Planning Council (CFRPC) for staff services

11.2 Operating/Administrative Structure Options

The operating structure refers to how the day-to-day administrative functions and provision of public transportation services are provided. Operating functions refer to providing the services, including but not limited to hiring and training vehicle operators and performing reservation/dispatch functions. Administrative functions refer to, but are not limited to activities such as overseeing marketing and advertising, customer service, and collecting data for reporting requirements. These functions can either be provided in-house by the governing agency or outsourced to a private contractor who is then monitored by the governing agency. The three combinations of operating/administrative structures considered for future public transportation services in Highlands County include:

- The governing agency provides both operating and administrative functions in-house. This allows the governing agency to retain the greatest level of control over the quality and aspects of the services being provided. However, this would require significant increases in staff resources to operate and oversee all facets of the public transportation services being provided.
- The governing agency contracts out operating functions and provides administrative functions in-house. This option allows the governing agency to retain managerial control of the services, but ensures the largest portion of system cost (vehicle operations) has competitive prices through an established contract. The contractor also assumes liability for claims, though the governing agency would still be accountable to its funding partners. Transit management firms also have access to experienced personnel and have expertise in providing public transportation services in areas initially establishing a system.
- The governing agency contracts out both operating and administrative functions. This essentially provides a turn-key operation with a reduced start up time and at reduced costs for salaries and benefits through contracted rates. While this option requires the least amount of responsibility by the governing agency for the day-to-day operations and administrative functions, some oversight is still needed for items such as budgeting, grant management, route planning, and program compliance. With this option, the contractor assumes liability for claims, but the governing agency would still be accountable to its funding partners.

In Florida, it is very common for public transportation agencies, particularly smaller agencies, to contract out operating and administrative functions and have an in-house staff person manage and oversee the contractor's services. In Highlands County, operations and administration related to providing TD and rural transportation services are currently contracted out to MV Transportation as the Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC) with grants managed by the CFRPC.

11.3 Governance & Operating Structure Options Evaluation

Evaluating the governance and operating structures was an evolving process. Establishment of a Transit District would require voter approval and the most intensive set up process as it is essentially establishing a new agency with a new governing body. Since the public transportation service is anticipated to cross several jurisdictions, selecting a single local agency, such as Highlands County or one of the municipalities, would require interlocal and participatory agreements as well as decisions for providing local funding between agencies for operating and administrative functions. The HRTPO currently manages transportation and transit programs for Highlands County and administers grant funds for Highlands County, including serving as the Designated Official Planning Agency (DOPA) for the Transportation Disadvantaged system in Highlands County In addition, the HRTPO Board members include all Highlands County Commissioners and a member from both the cities of Sebring and Avon Park, indicating that local priorities will be represented.

Benefits of selecting the HRTPO as the governing agency are summarized in Table 11-1.

Table 11-1: Benefits of Selecting the HRTPO as the Governing Agency

Description	Benefits
Governed by the Highlands Transit Policy Board, comprised of elected officials established under the authority of the HRTPO, with representatives from jurisdictions within Highlands County • Membership, operational procedures, and responsibilities would be defined by the HRTPO Board. • Bylaws would be established by the Highlands Transit Policy Board. • CFRPC/HRTPO staff would provide staff services under the current staffing agreement with the HRTPO.	• Provides a structure for the County and Cities to govern jointly • CFRPC/HRTPO staff currently manage various transportation and transit programs and administers grant funds for Highlands County including serving as the Designated Official Planning Agency for the Transportation Disadvantaged system in Highlands County • Allows for greater flexibility in the coordination of services in the region and integration with the Transportation Disadvantaged system • Staff is knowledgeable of FTA and FDOT regulations regarding transit • Equipped to look at long-term growth of the region and regional service needs • Currently has staff with transit experience

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. 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.

In terms of performing operational and/or administrative functions in-house or through a private contractor, it is recognized that the HRTPO will need additional staff resources for managing public transportation. It is likely that the HRTPO will have to contract out operating services at a minimum, but potentially all services and provide management/oversight of the contract as the responsible agency. The decision to perform operational/administrative functions in-house or contract them out can be made as part of the service planning stages between adoption of the Highlands Transit Plan and service start up.

Section 12 10-Year Service and Financial Plan

This section presents the 10-year service and financial plan for the Highlands Transit Plan, the purpose of which is to explore the feasibility of and provide recommendations for potential public transportation services in the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area. Since this TDP is establishing a new system, there is much more flexibility in how the plan evolves during its development compared to a TDP update prepared for an established transit system. In developing this 10-year plan, the potential service options ultimately recommended must best fit the community from a policy, financial, and feasibility perspective.

This section describes the preferred public transportation options ultimately included in the 10-year plan for consideration by the HRTPO Board as the assumed governing agency. The 10-year plan also documents capital and operating cost and revenue assumptions used in developing the cost feasible plan options presented. Finally, the financial and implementation plans for each proposed service option for the 10-year period are presented.

12.1 Selection of Preferred Public Transportation Alternatives

The seven fixed route options previously presented and evaluated in Section 7 and 9, respectively, along with preliminary, planning level cost estimates and potential required local match were presented to the HRTPO Board on June 21, 2017. From this meeting, direction was given to explore additional service options that would increase door-to-door service made available to a larger portion of the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area than the proposed fixed-route system presented. 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. These four options were then presented to the Highlands County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) at the July 18, 2017 workshop.

The Urban Transit Area is an expansion of the designated Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area to include all corridors connecting large employers and activity centers. The remaining area of the county outside the Urban Transit Area is considered the Rural Transit Area where rural public transportation services are provided. Existing TD services remain countywide. Under each of these four service options, the existing door-to-door services provided by the Community Transportation program (including the TD program and rural public transportation) will remain available to those that qualify and/or live in the rural service area. Each of the four service options assume weekday service will be provided from 7 AM to 6 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. Map 12-1 illustrates the Urban Transit Area where dial-a-ride service is proposed to be provided.

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. While the initial proposed flex route option discussed in Section 7 provided flex service up to ¾-mile of the route, the flex service area for this option was expanded to 1.5 miles. This change was made to reach a higher percentage of potential rides for the flex service rather than the dial-a-ride service, which is provided at a higher cost per passenger. Map 12-2 illustrates both the Urban Transit Area where dial-a-ride service would be provided and the 1.5 mile Sebring/Lake Jackson flex route area.

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 60 minute frequency. Map 12-3 illustrates the Urban Transit Area where dial-a-ride service would be provided, the 1 mile Avon Park and 1.5 mile Sebring/Lake Jackson flex route areas, and the Avon Park-Sebring express route.

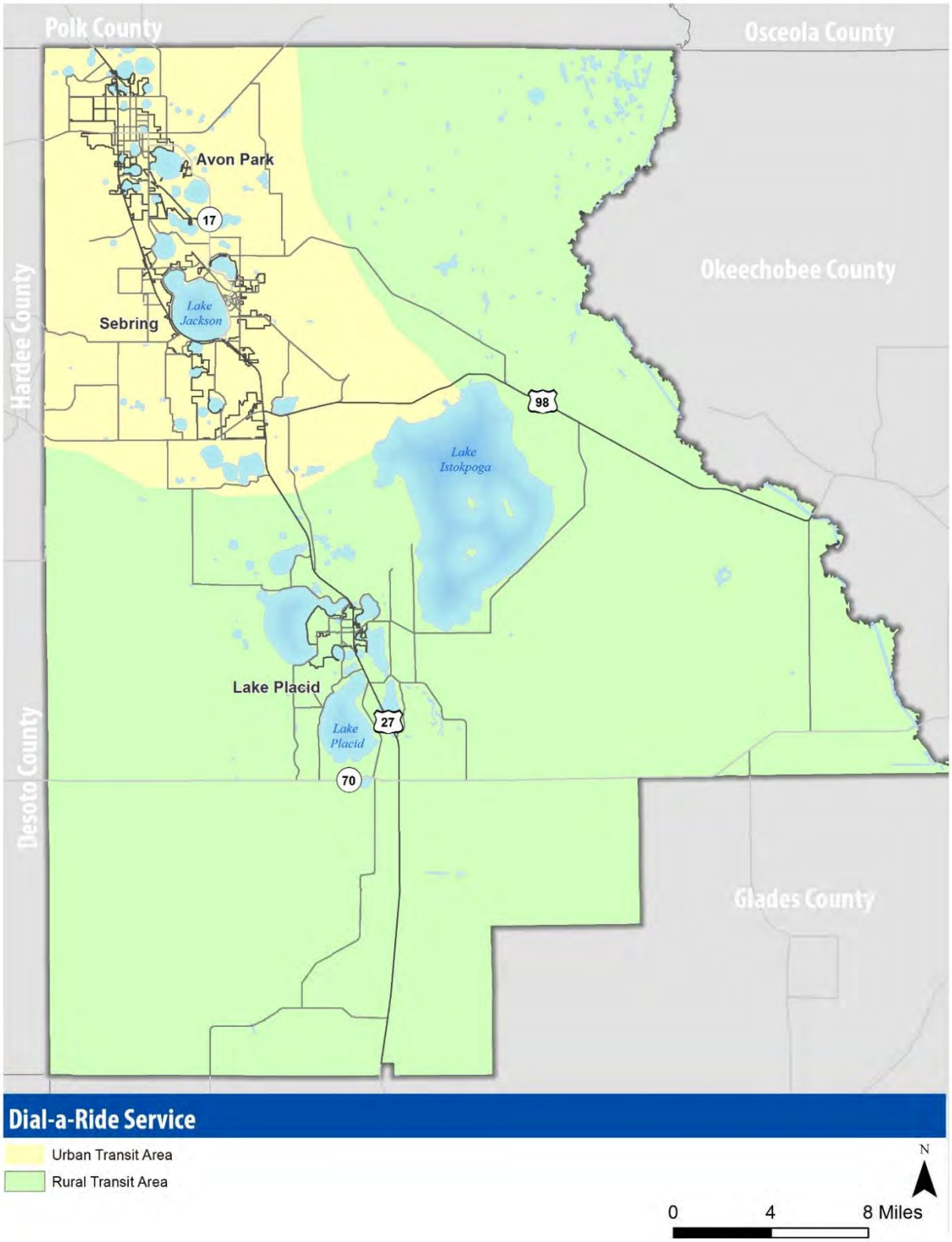
Option 4: Flex + Express Service

This fourth option includes the two flex routes (Avon Park and Sebring/Lake Jackson) and Avon Park-Sebring express route included in Option 3 at the same frequencies as previously noted, but removes the dial-a-ride service. Map 12-4 illustrates the 1 mile Avon Park and 1.5 mile Sebring/Lake Jackson flex route areas and the Avon Park-Sebring express route provided under this service option.

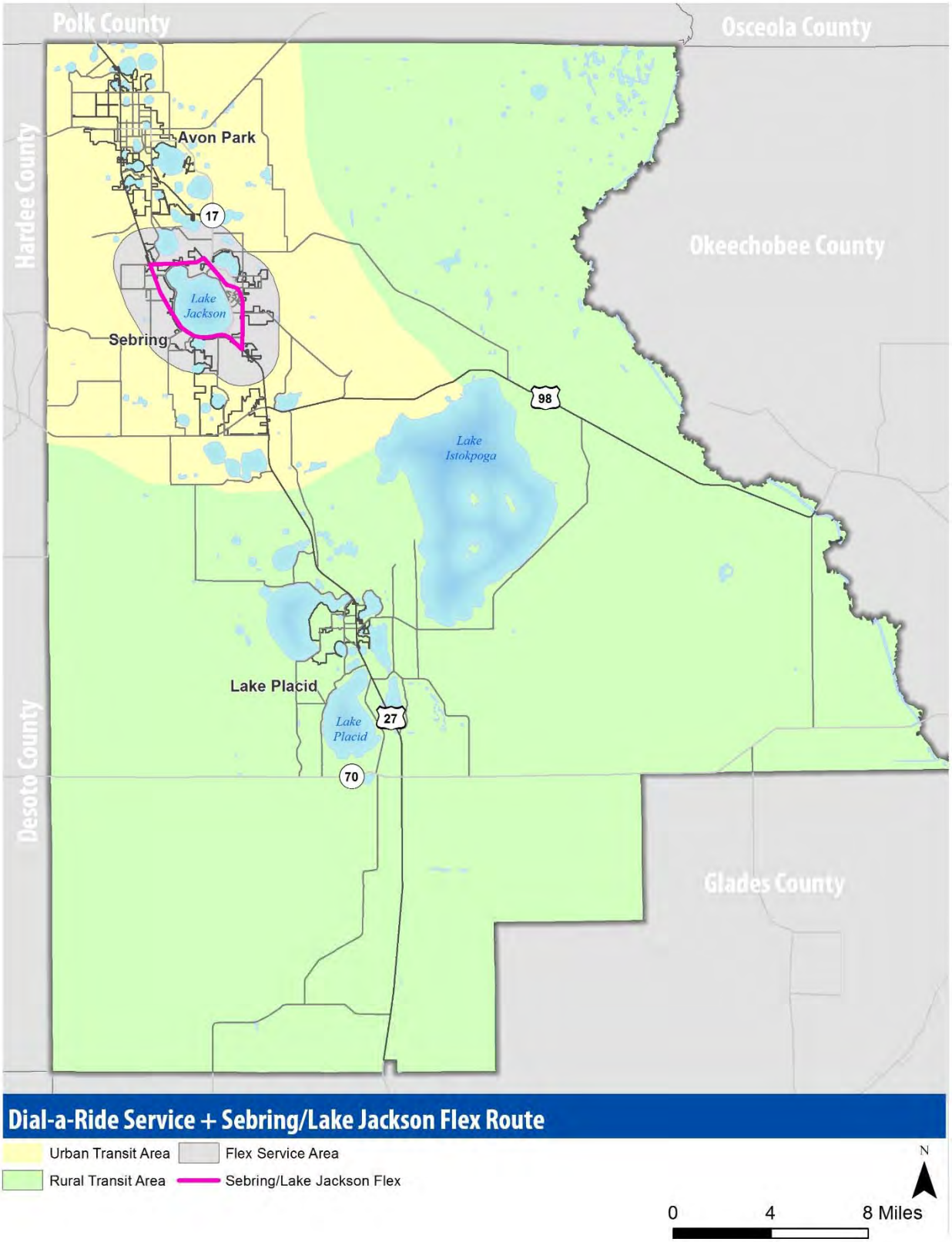
Complementary ADA Paratransit Service

ADA paratransit service is not required for dial-a-ride service, 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.

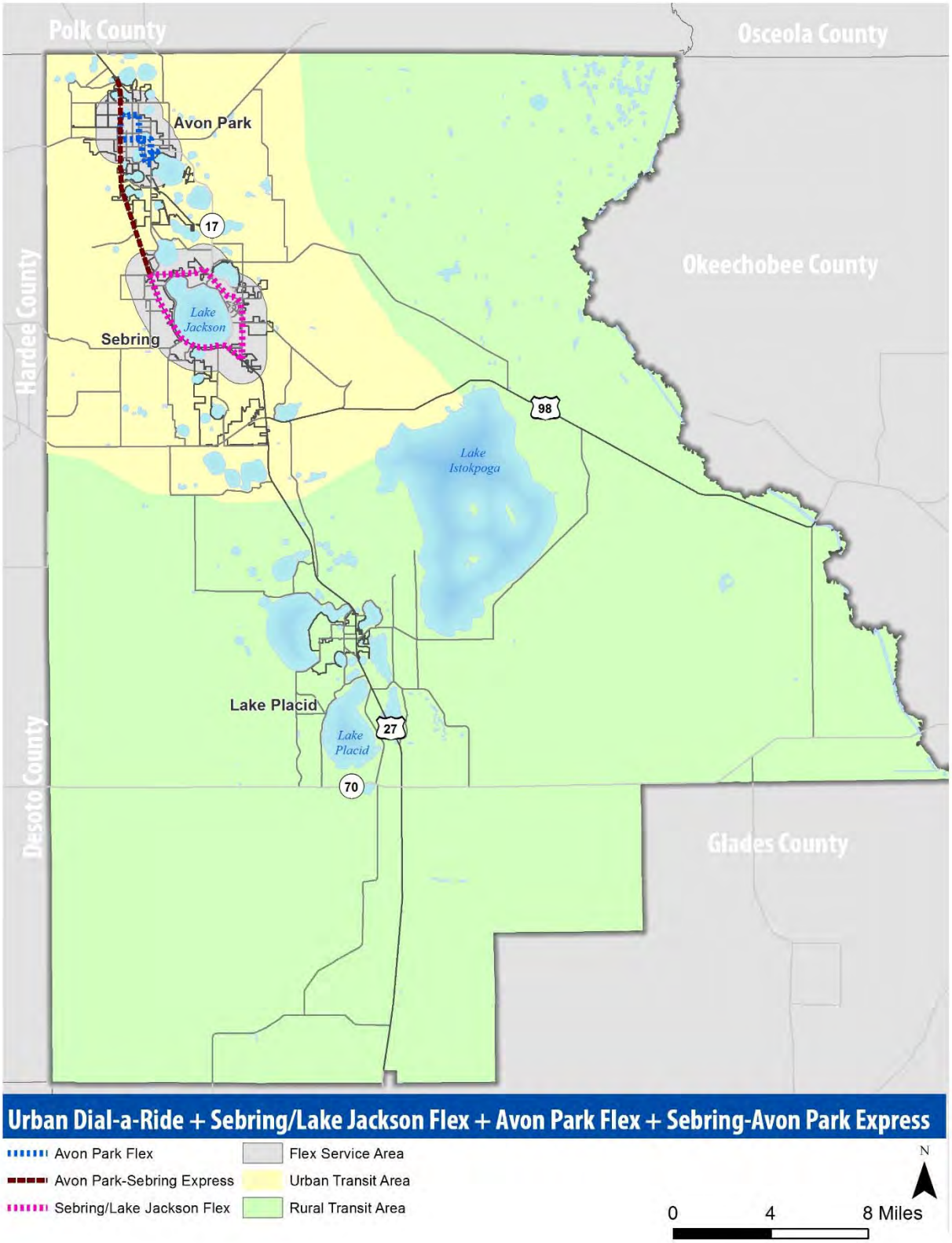
Map 12-1: Option 1—Urban Dial-a-Ride Service



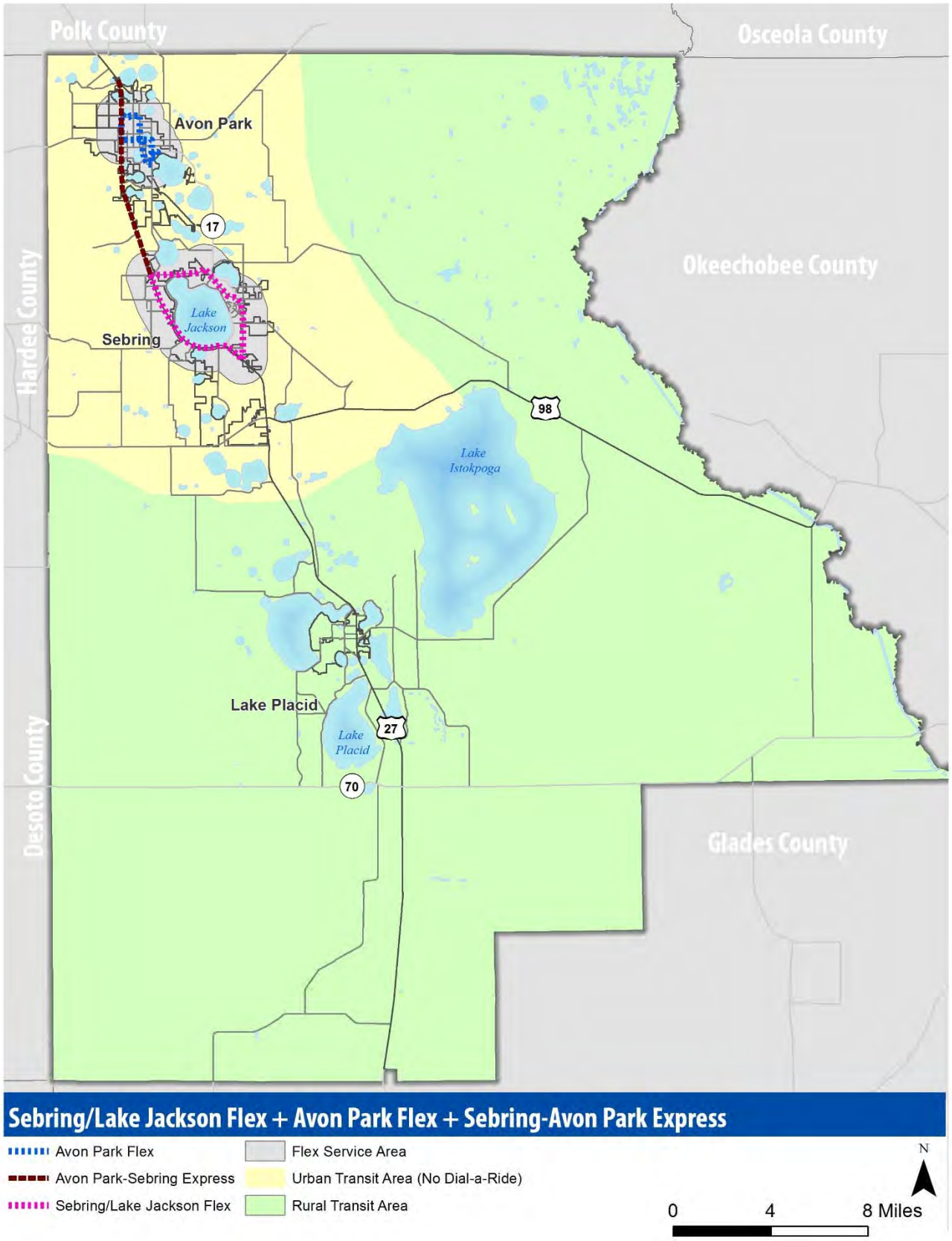
Map 12-2: Option 2—Urban Dial-a-Ride +Flex Service



Map 12-3: Option 3—Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex + Express Service



Map 12-4: Option 4—Flex + Express Service



Other Capital/Infrastructure, Maintenance and Administrative Needs

Implementing a new public transportation service will also require investment in start-up capital vehicles and equipment, maintenance contracts, and administrative considerations such as staffing to oversee the contractor in providing the public transportation services.

Capital and Infrastructure Needs

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

- **Vehicles** (buses) to provide the public transportation 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, lighting (if needed).
- **Radio communication equipment** between the bus operators and dispatch.

Maintenance Needs

- **Maintenance (routine or otherwise)** will need to be performed on the 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**, which 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, then annual costs for marketing and printing as needed.
- **Transit Development Plan Major Update**, which is 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 1st of each year.

Coordinated Transportation Services

Implementation of new services presented in this plan must be coordinated with other public transportation services currently provided in Highlands County. If new service in the Urban Transit Area is implemented, a new contract will need to be implemented separate from MV Transportation's

current contract to serve as the Highlands County Community Transportation Coordinator (CTC). Coordination between these two service contracts, particularly if different providers, will be important. Implementing a one-stop call center could greatly support coordination of new service with existing TD and rural public transportation services from a countywide perspective. However, since such a facility is still conceptual in nature and the location, size, and functionality will greatly depend on the services ultimately provided in the Urban Transit Area, it is not included in the 10-year financial plan.

Further, depending on the service option ultimately selected, marketing and advertising campaigns play an important role in educating current TD users about the new services provided in the Urban Transit Area and to transition those TD customers able to use the new service to a lower cost-per-trip service option, if available.

12.2 Cost and Revenue Assumptions

This section presents the capital and operating cost assumptions and the costs and revenues associated with the 10-year Highlands Transit Plan.

Operating Cost Assumptions

Several assumptions were used to develop operating costs associated with implementing public transportation service in the Urban Transit Area for the 10-year planning period of 2018-2027. These assumptions are based on a variety of factors, including service performance data from MV Transportation, the private contractor for current TD and rural transportation services provided in Highlands County, information from other recent Florida TDPs, and data from the National Transit Database (NTD). The operating cost assumptions are summarized as follows:

- Annual operating costs for dial-a-ride service calculated at $287,000 per vehicle in operation, based on an operating cost per hour of $39.92 per trip in 2018 dollars and average annual ridership per vehicle of 7,200 passengers from similar dial-a-ride services provided in other Florida counties. The operating cost per hour is based on information provided by MV Transportation for rural public transportation services in FY 2016, inflated to 2018 dollars.
- Annual operating costs for the flex and express route services are based on average operating cost per hour of $67.00 (in 2018 dollars) from selected peer systems collected through validated NTD data. Annual service hours for the flex and express routes were previously developed through the T-BEST ridership forecast.
- The operating plan assumes the earliest service could be implemented is in year 2 of the plan, or FY 2020.
- A conservative annual inflation rate of 1.8% was used for all operating cost projections, based on the average Consumer Price Index (CPI) historical data from 2007–2016.

Capital Cost Assumptions

Several assumptions were used to develop costs associated with the capital and infrastructure needs associated with implementing public transportation service in the Urban Transit Area as part of the 10-year plan. These cost assumptions are summarized as follows:

- Services provided under this system will require the purchase of new vehicles for all service scenarios. Vehicle costs were developed based on approved contracts within the FDOT's Transit Research Inspection Procurement Services (TRIPS) system. The TRIPS system provides agencies in Florida with the means to procure quality vehicles at the lowest possible price through pre-approved contracts. Vehicles are assumed to cost $100,000 for medium duty vehicles for the flex and express route services and $80,000 for light duty vehicles for the dial-a-ride service.
- The 10-year Plan assumes vehicles for each service option will be purchased in the second year of the plan (FY 2019) in advance of service implementation in FY 2020. The typical replacement schedule for medium duty vehicles is 7 years and 5 years for light duty vehicles. Therefore, the 10-year plan assumes that the light duty vehicles purchased for dial-a-ride service (excluding spares) will be replaced in year 7 and the medium duty vehicles purchased for flex and express service (excluding spares) will be replaced in year 9.
- Figure 12-1 illustrates vehicles for other Florida agencies that are similar to those assumed to be included in the 10-year plan for the four public transportation service options under consideration. The assumed number of vehicles required for each service option include:
    - Option 1 (Urban Dial-a-Ride Service): 3 light duty vehicles and 2 light duty spares purchased initially; 3 light duty vehicles to be replaced during 10-year plan per schedule.
    - Option 2 (Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex Service): 2 light duty vehicles/1 light duty spare and 2 medium duty vehicles and 1 medium duty spare purchased initially; 2 light and 2 medium duty vehicles to be replaced during 10-year plan per schedule.
    - Option 3 (Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex + Express Service): 2 light duty vehicles/1 light duty spare and 4 medium duty vehicles and 1 medium duty spare purchased initially; 2 light and 4 medium duty vehicles to be replaced during 10-year plan per schedule.
    - Option 2 (Flex + Express Service): 4 medium duty vehicles and 1 light duty spare purchased initially; 4 light duty vehicles to be replaced during 10-year plan per schedule.

Figure 12-1: Public Transportation Vehicle Examples

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

- A 20 percent spare ratio was factored into the vehicle replacement and expansion schedule.
- An annual growth rate of 1.8% was used for capital cost projections, based on average CPI historical data from 2007 to 2016.
- The purchase of radio communication equipment is included at a cost of $95,000 based on recent comparable costs from other Florida systems.
- Annual costs for implementing bus stop infrastructure is included. The exact costs for this are unknown at this time as they depend on how many bus stops are established and the type of infrastructure provided at each. For planning purposes, the 10-year plan assumes $15,000 for bus stop infrastructure for route implemented. There is no cost assumed for dial-a-ride service as there are no established bus stops.

Typical shelter at a shopping center.

Planning and Administrative Costs

Several assumptions were used to develop cost estimates for planning and administrative needs associated with implementing public transportation service in the Urban Transit Area as part of the 10-year plan. These cost assumptions are summarized as follows:

- Following adoption of the Highlands Transit Plan and, if steps are taken moving forward to implement public transportation service, the HRTPO as the assumed governing agency will be responsible for preparing a major update of this TDP in five years and annual TDP progress reports in the interim years. The 10-year plan assumes a base cost of $20,000 to complete the annual progress reports (starting the year service is implemented) during those years when a major update of the TDP is not due. A base cost of $140,000 is estimated to prepare the major update of this TDP, including an on-board survey to assess the service being provided from the customer's perspective.
- A robust advertising and marketing campaign will be critical to educating potential riders about the system and also converting current TD riders in the Urban Transit Area, who are otherwise

able to use the new system, as the cost per trip is considerably less. The 10-year plan assumes a base cost of $45,000 for the initial advertising/marketing plan in years 2 and 3 of the plan to develop the brand/theme, advertise the service, and printing of materials and schedules. An annual base maintenance cost of $20,000 is assumed thereafter for printing of schedules/materials and other marketing needs.

- While the 10-year plan assumes that the major service and administrative functions will be contracted out, additional HRTPO staff resources will be needed to oversee the contractor's performance and administer the federal and state grant funds, at a minimum. The extent of staff resources required will depend on the type and extent of services ultimately provided and the responsibilities taken on by the HRTPO versus being contracted to a private operator. For purposes of this 10-year plan, a base cost of $100,000 per year for a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff person is assumed. For each service option, it is assumed 0.6 FTE will be needed after the first year to help with service planning and development. To be conservative, this staff person is assumed to be funded with local revenue in the event that federal grant funds are not yet available. Once service is implemented, it is assumed that the dial-a-ride service option (Option 1) will continue to require 0.6 FTE per year, the dial-a-ride + flex service (Option 2) will require 0.8 FTE per year, and the dial-a-ride + flex + express (Option 3) and flex + express (Option 4) will each require 1.0 FTE per year.

Revenue Assumptions

Revenues for the public transportation service options included in the 10-year plan include several federal, state and local sources, including the following.

Federal Section 5307 Revenue:

- Upon designation of the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area, Highlands County is eligible for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 Urbanized Area Formula funds. For urbanized areas with populations less than 200,000, which applies to the Sebring-Avon Park Urbanized Area, operating assistance is an eligible expense under the 5307 program. Capital, planning, and administrative expenses are also covered under Section 5307. Operating assistance provided under Section 5307 requires a 50% match, while capital assistance requires a 20% match.

- Federal 5307 revenues have been set aside for Highlands County following establishment of the Urbanized Area. These funds have not been applied for thus far and can roll over for up to four years. Highland County has been apportioned just under $800,000 in Section 5307 funds over the last three fiscal years. It is assumed this revenue is available for use in implementing public transportation services starting in the first year of the 10-year plan so as to not lose the revenue as a result of exceeding the four year rollover period.

- For public transportation providers contracting out service and maintenance, FTA provides for assistance with the capital consumed over the course of the contract. When a contractor provides maintenance and transit service and the recipient (in this case the HRTPO) provides the vehicles, FTA will provide assistance for 80% of the contract costs (rather than the 50% assistance for operating costs). Therefore, the 10-year plan assumes that the HRTPO can allocate up to 40% of its potential contracted operating costs to be paid for with 80% federal assistance. The HRTPO must purchase all vehicles being used to provide service to be eligible for the increased operating assistance. The remaining 60% of contracted operating costs will be provided by federal assistance at the 50% rate.
- Federal funds are assumed to increase annually by the same percentage as costs (1.8%).

State Funds

- Section 341.052, Florida Statutes, established the Florida Public Transit Block Grant Program administered by FDOT. Block Grant Funds are provided to public transit agencies to carry out operating and capital improvements identified in their TDPs. Block grant funds provide up to 50% assistance to federal funds net of any local operating (e.g., fare, advertising revenue, etc.) funds available. State Block grant funds require a 50% local match. For example, if a capital project funded with Section 5307 funds can provide 80% assistance, the remaining 20% required match can be met with 10% of Block Grant funds and 10% of local funds.
- The formula to allocate Block Grant funds is based on three components: population of the service area, ridership, and revenue miles. Block grant venues are estimated based on information provided by FDOT's Public Transit Office.
- State toll revenue credits are assumed to provide the required 20% soft match to federal funds for all capital expenditures, and no local cash match is required.
- State funds are assumed to increase annually by the same percentage as costs (1.8%).

Local Funds

- Projected fare revenue for new services are based on a conservative farebox recovery ratio of 5%, which is established by reviewing farebox recovery ratios of established peer systems and applying a reduction since this is a new system.
- The remaining local funds required for federal and state grant revenue is not assumed to come from a particular source, but could be general fund revenue, sales tax, property tax, or a combination thereof.

- There is no assumption regarding advertising revenue being available as local funds in the 10-year plan. However, if an advertising program is developed, this revenue could be realized in the future.
- Local funds are assumed to increase annually by the same percentage as costs (1.8%).

12.3 10-Year Service and Financial Plan

A detailed 10-year service and financial plan was developed for each of the four service options to provide weekday public transportation service in Highlands County. The detailed plans for each service option are provided in Appendix J. Tables 12-1 thru 12-4 summarize the 10-year total and annual average capital and operating costs and revenues by source for each service option.

Table 12-1: 10-Year Implementation Plan Summary—Option 1 (Urban Dial-a-Ride Service)

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

(1) Reflects the portion of the contracted operating cost eligible for federal funding as a capital cost at 80% with a 20% match.

(2) Remaining portion of the contracted operating cost eligible for federal funding at 50% with a 50% match.

(3) Includes other operating costs such as HRTPO staff support and service planning costs.

(4) Does not include the contractor operating costs included under the capital cost category (Operator Contract to Capital under Item 1). The total operating costs for this service option equals the sum of the Operator Contract to Capital cost (Item 1) and the Operating Costs – Subtotal (Item 4).

Table 12-2: 10-Year Implementation Plan Summary—Option 2 (Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex Service)

Cost/Revenue Category	10-Year Total	Annual Average
CAPITAL		
Costs		
Operator Contract to Capital[1]	$3,036,776	$303,678
Vehicles	$957,458	$95,746
Other Capital	$387,441	$38,744
Capital Costs - Subtotal	***$4,381,675***	***$438,167***
Revenue		
Federal Revenue		
Section 5307	$3,505,340	$350,534
State Revenue		
Soft Match Toll	$876,335	$87,633
Capital Revenue - Subtotal	***$4,381,675***	***$438,167***
Capital Costs & Revenues Balance	***$0***	***$0***
OPERATING		
Costs		
Service Operations[2]	$5,299,791	$529,979
Planning Support[3]	$1,071,545	$107,154
Operating Costs - Subtotal [4]	***$6,371,336***	***$637,134***
Revenue		
Section 5307	$3,155,137	*$315,514*
State Revenue		
Block Grant	$1,434,818	*$143,482*
Local Revenue		
Estimated Farebox	$416,828	*$41,683*
Other Required Local Revenue	$1,364,553	*$136,455*
Operating Revenue - Subtotal	***$6,371,336***	***$637,134***
Operating Costs & Revenues Balance	***$0***	***$0***
PERCENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE OF TOTAL REVENUE		
% Local Government Share	13%	

(1) Reflects the portion of the contracted operating cost eligible for federal funding as a capital cost at 80% with a 20% match.

(2) Remaining portion of the contracted operating cost eligible for federal funding at 50% with a 50% match.

(3) Includes other operating costs such as HRTPO staff support and service planning costs.

(4) Does not include the contractor operating costs included under the capital cost category (Operator Contract to Capital under Item 1). The total operating costs for this service option equals the sum of the Operator Contract to Capital cost (Item 1) and the Operating Costs – Subtotal (Item 4).

Table 12-3: 10-Year Implementation Plan Summary—Option 3 (Urban Dial-a-Ride + Flex + Express Service)

Cost/Revenue Category	10-Year Total	Annual Average
CAPITAL		
Costs		
Operator Contract to Capital[1]	$4,644,737	$464,474
Vehicles	$2,097,546	$209,755
Other Capital	$418,512	$41,851
Capital Costs - Subtotal	***$7,160,795***	***$716,079***
Revenue		
Federal Revenue		
Section 5307	$5,728,636	$572,864
State Revenue		
Soft Match Toll	$1,432,159	$143,216
Capital Revenue - Subtotal	***$7,160,795***	***$716,079***
Capital Costs & Revenues Balance	***$0***	***$0***
OPERATING		
Costs		
Service Operations[2]	$6,967,105	$696,710
Planning Support[3]	$1,247,896	$124,790
Operating Costs - Subtotal [4]	***$8,215,001***	***$821,500***
Revenue		
Section 5307	$4,076,970	*$407,697*
State Revenue		
Block Grant	$1,741,660	*$174,166*
Local Revenue		
Estimated Farebox	$580,592	*$58,059*
Other Required Local Revenue	$1,815,780	*$181,578*
Operating Revenue - Subtotal	***$8,215,001***	***$821,500***
Operating Costs & Revenues Balance	***$0***	***$0***
PERCENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHARE OF TOTAL REVENUE		
% Local Government Share	12%	

(1) Reflects the portion of the contracted operating cost eligible for federal funding as a capital cost at 80% with a 20% match.

(2) Remaining portion of the contracted operating cost eligible for federal funding at 50% with a 50% match.

(3) Includes other operating costs such as HRTPO staff support and service planning costs.

(4) *Does not include the contractor operating costs included under the capital cost category (Operator Contract to Capital under Item 1). The total operating costs for this service option equals the sum of the Operator Contract to Capital cost (Item 1) and the Operating Costs – Subtotal (Item 4).*

Table 12-4: 10-Year Implementation Plan Summary—Option 4 (Flex + Express Service)

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

(1) Reflects the portion of the contracted operating cost eligible for federal funding as a capital cost at 80% with a 20% match.

(2) Remaining portion of the contracted operating cost eligible for federal funding at 50% with a 50% match.

(3) Includes other operating costs such as HRTPO staff support and service planning costs.

(4) Does not include the contractor operating costs included under the capital cost category (Operator Contract to Capital under Item 1). The total operating costs for this service option equals the sum of the Operator Contract to Capital cost (Item 1) and the Operating Costs – Subtotal (Item 4).

Table 12-5: Summary Comparison of Service Options

Element	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
OPERATING AND CAPITAL COSTS (10-YEAR TOTAL)				
Operating Costs				
New Service	$7,591,940	$8,336,568	$11,611,842	$6,550,548
Other Operating and Planning Expenses	$895,193	$1,071,545	$1,247,896	$1,247,896
Total Operating Costs	***$8,487,133***	***$9,408,112***	***$12,859,738***	***$7,798,445***
Capital Costs				
Vehicles	$673,723	$957,458	$2,097,546	$1,675,536
Other Capital	$371,905	$387,441	$418,512	$418,512
Total Capital Costs	***$1,045,628***	***$1,344,899***	***$2,516,058***	***$2,094,048***
Total Costs - Capital & Operating	**$9,532,761**	**$10,753,011**	**$15,375,796**	**$9,892,493**
OPERATING REVENUES (10-YEAR TOTAL)				
Federal				
Section 5307 for Capital to Contract & Operating	$5,731,424	$6,191,913	$8,721,706	$5,178,801
State				
FDOT State Block Grants	$1,252,425	$1,434,818	$1,741,660	$1,197,409
County				
Other Local Funds Required	$1,123,688	$1,364,553	$1,815,780	$1,094,707
Other				
Farebox Revenues	$379,597	$416,828	$580,592	$327,527
Total Operating Revenue	**$8,487,133**	**$9,408,112**	**$12,859,738**	**$7,798,445**
Total Operating Cost	**$8,487,133**	**$9,408,112**	**$12,859,738**	**$7,798,445**
Net Operating (Contingency/Need)	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**
CAPITAL REVENUES (10-YEAR TOTAL)				
Federal 5307	$229,147	$468,564	$1,083,899	$1,151,195
State (Soft Match Toll Revenue Credits)	$816,481	$876,335	$1,432,159	$942,853
Local	$0	$0	$0	$0
Total Capital Revenue	**$1,045,628**	**$1,344,899**	**$2,516,058**	**$2,094,048**
Total Capital Cost	**$1,045,628**	**$1,344,899**	**$2,516,058**	**$2,094,048**
Net Capital (Contingency/Need)	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**
TOTAL COSTS VS. REVENUES (10-YEAR TOTAL)				
Total Revenue	**$9,532,761**	**$10,753,011**	**$15,375,796**	**$9,892,493**
Total Cost	**$9,532,761**	**$10,753,011**	**$15,375,796**	**$9,892,493**
Net Total (Contingency/Need)	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**	**$0**
Percent Local Share of Total Revenue	**12%**	**13%**	**12%**	**11%**
SERVICE EFFICIENCY MEASURES				
Estimated Annual Trips	21,600	31,300	54,100	60,100
Anticipated Revenue Hours	8,316	11,088	11,088	11,088
Average Trips per Revenue Hour	2.6	2.8	4.9	5.4
Annual Operating Cost per Trip	**$39.29**	**$30.06**	**$23.77**	**$12.98**