



CENTRAL MIDLANDS COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS
**Regional Transit Needs Assessment
and Feasibility Study**



**Central Midlands Council of Governments
Regional Transit Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study**

Final Report

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Central Midlands Council of Governments

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Section 1: Introduction

The Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG), in coordination with Lexington County and Richland County, conducted a regional transit needs assessment to assess the public's perception of transit needs throughout the two counties. Using public input combined with an assessment of transit dependent populations and major destinations outside of the existing fixed-route transit service area (as provided by the Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority, operating as The COMET), the transportation needs were identified, ranked as good, better, and best, and prioritized based on several factors relating to the ease of implementation. Projects that rank as "good" are considered to meet the needs of the transit dependent population with the ability to travel independently. Projects that are considered "better" meet and exceed the needs of the transit dependent to provide service for the general population. Finally, projects that are considered the "best" would be directed towards commuters and a mode shift from automobiles, providing comprehensive, countywide service.

Project Background

This study focused mainly on the areas within Lexington and Richland Counties that are located outside of The COMET's existing fixed-route transit service area, which is primarily concentrated in the regional urban center of the City of Columbia. However, the assessment also reviewed those areas with limited transportation services available on the periphery of the fixed-route service area. Previous studies have been conducted to review the transportation needs inside The COMET service area; therefore, special consideration was given to areas with mobility needs and how best to achieve an increased level of transportation service for those more rural communities. Some of the geographic locations studied may have transportation options available other than The COMET that are provided through non-profit organizations. These services were also reviewed to determine the accessibility of information describing the services and associated eligibility requirements to determine whether the requirements were too stringent or inapplicable to the general public.

Report Organization

This plan is comprised of eight major sections, including this introduction. Each of the sections is briefly described below.

Section 2 provides an overview of the study area demographics and existing conditions. This section provides information on the environment in which any proposed transportation services would operate. The purpose of this section is to present an understanding of the operating environment in the context of socioeconomics, land uses, and available transportation services.

Section 3 summarizes the extensive public involvement activities that were undertaken as part of the regional transit assessment for the outlying areas of Lexington and Richland counties. Public involvement activities discussed and/or summarized in this section include the community surveying effort and other stakeholder meetings that were conducted to obtain feedback relating to the mobility needs.

Section 4 presents the unmet needs that were identified collectively through information reviewed as part of the assessments described in Sections 2 and 3. Unmet needs are summarized for the region as a whole and by each of the study area counties.

Section 5 presents all feasible alternatives that have been identified as a result of the technical review of existing conditions, demographic data, and major destination and public outreach comments. Using the

background data for each sub-area within the larger region comprising the study area, all feasible alternatives are presented in this section and later prioritized for inclusion in the proposed implementation plan.

Section 6 provides the prioritization process that was used to rank the potential transportation options by good, better, and best. The prioritization process was also used to rank the projects for implementation independent of the best transportation option(s) for the sub-area, but based on ease of implementation, cost, and timeframe for project initiation.

Section 7 includes the implementation plan for the recommended transportation options for Lexington and Richland counties. The recommendations are organized by the suggested timeframe for implementation using five-year increments from 2015 through 2040.

Section 8 summarizes the conclusions of this regional transit needs assessment.

Section 2: Background Assessment

The Central Midlands region of South Carolina includes four counties: Richland, Lexington, Newberry, and Fairfield, together comprising 15 percent of the state's total population. The study area for this effort is illustrated in Map 1 and includes the two most populous counties within the region, Richland and Lexington, centered on the most populous city in South Carolina and the state capital, Columbia.

As previously noted in Section 1, this study focused on the areas outside of Columbia not currently served by The COMET, the regional public transit system serving portions of Richland and Lexington Counties with service centralized in the Columbia urbanized area. While this study focused mainly on the areas located outside of The COMET's existing fixed-route transit service area, the assessment also reviewed those areas with limited transportation services available on the periphery of the fixed-route service area.

This section provides an overview of the study area, including the physical characteristics, demographics, existing transportation services, and transportation funding policies that may affect the provision of transportation services within these more rural communities.

Richland County

Richland County is the largest county in the Central Midlands region in terms of both area (757 square miles¹) and population (401,566 as of 2014²), and is the second most populous county in South Carolina. Richland County is the geographic center of the state and its largest city, Columbia, is the most populous city in South Carolina, serving as both the state capital and county seat.

As shown in Map 1, there are seven incorporated areas in Richland County, although four (including Columbia) are partially located in adjacent counties, and five Census Designated Places (CDPs) within unincorporated Richland County, including:

- > City of Cayce (located mostly in Lexington County)
- > City of Columbia (county seat, located partially in Lexington County)
- > City of Forest Acres
- > Town of Arcadia Lakes
- > Town of Blythewood (located partially in Fairfield County)
- > Town of Eastover
- > Town of Irmo (located mostly in Lexington County)
- > Dentsville CDP
- > Gadsen CDP
- > Hopkins CDP
- > Lake Murray CDP
- > St. Andrews CDP

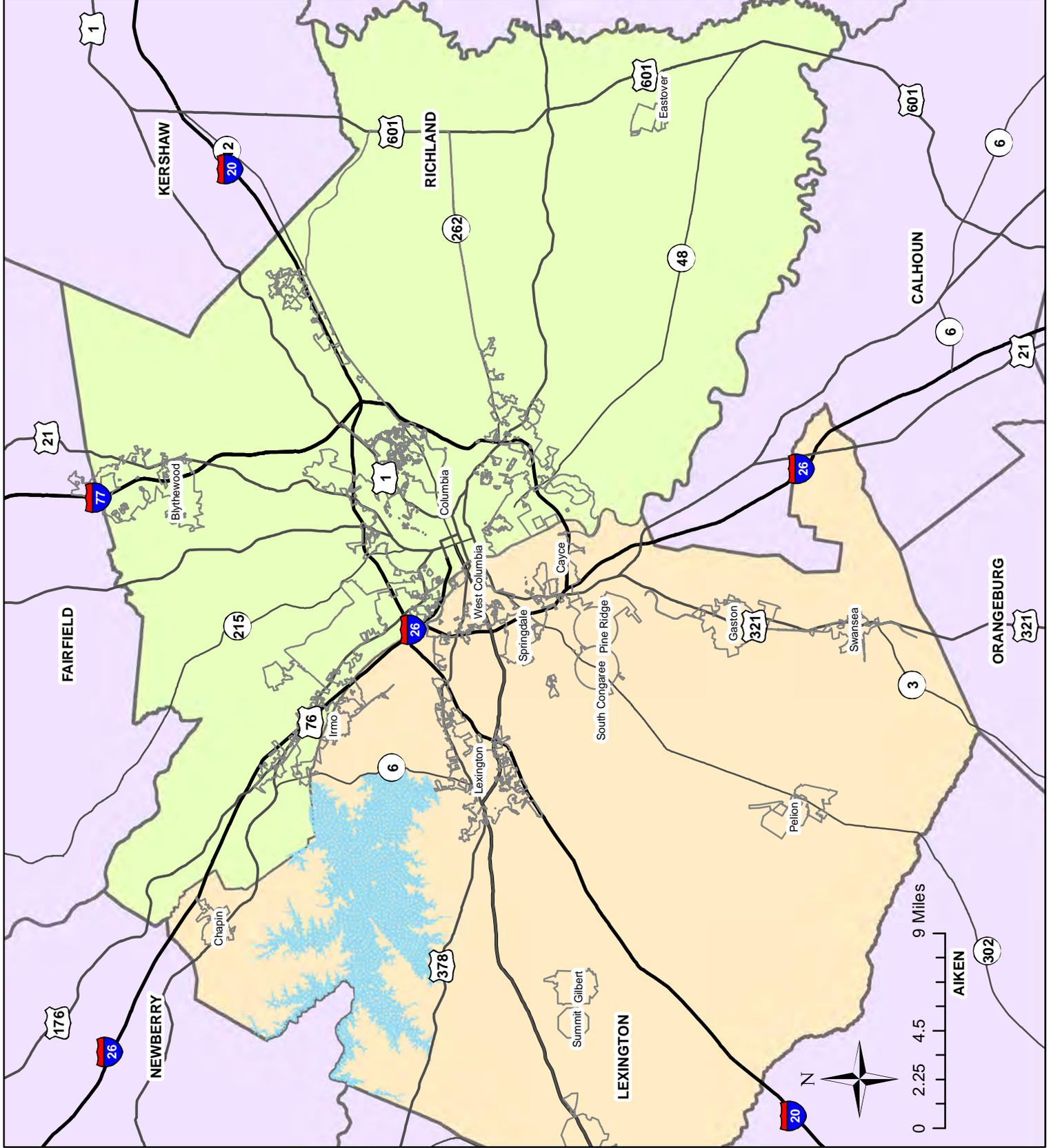
¹ 2010 Quick Facts, U.S. Census Bureau

² Population estimate as of July 1, 2014, U.S. Census Bureau

Central Midlands

Study Area

- US Highways
- SC Highways
- Interstates



Richland County Demographic Profile

According to five-year estimates (2009-2013) from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), approximately 10 percent of Richland County's population is age 65 and older, 7 percent are unemployed, and 17 percent are living below the poverty level as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. The percent of civilian population that are persons with disabilities is 11.3 percent and more than one-third are 65 years and older (37.7%). Richland County's population is very diverse as a majority-minority community, with approximately 45 percent Caucasian, 45 percent Black/African American, 5 percent Hispanic, and the remaining 5 percent predominantly Asian or persons of two or more races.

Due to its function as the state capital, government positions encompass a large portion of the employment in Columbia. Industry is also important to the local economy. Jobs related to educational services, health care, and social assistance make up approximately one-fourth (24.7%) of jobs in Richland County, with retail trade and employment related to the arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services comprising 11.5 and 11.1 percent, respectively. Fort Jackson, located on the eastern edge of Columbia, is the largest and most active Initial Entry Training Center in the U.S. Army, training more than 45,000 individuals annually. Table 1 presents the major employers in Richland County. Major employers with multiple locations are not included in the top employer list. While over-the-road truck drivers may not use transit services, companies specializing in freight and distribution services are included on the list as transit may benefit drivers without personal vehicles and administrative, sales, and customer support staff. These employers are also shown on Map 11 in Section 4 and discussed as part of the unmet needs assessment. While the majority of persons in Richland County have graduated from high school (90.7%), the number of residents holding a bachelor's degree or higher is 37.2 percent.

Table 1: Richland County Major Employers

Employer	Municipality
University of South Carolina	Columbia
Richland County	Columbia
Corrections Department	Columbia
Dorn VA Medical Center	Columbia
Westinghouse Electric Co LLC	Hopkins
Colonial Life & Accident Insurance	Columbia
South Carolina Department of Social Services	Columbia
Bonitz Inc	Columbia
Computer Sciences Corp	Blythewood

Table 2 summarizes key demographic statistics for Richland County compared to South Carolina compiled from the 2013 ACS. This comparison indicates that Richland County:

- > Has a higher number of persons per housing unit compared to the state average.
- > Has a younger population in terms of percent of population 65 years or younger and median age compared to the state average. As shown in Map 2, the median age for most of Richland County residents is 20-50 years old. Exceptions to this include the north Richland County/Blythewood and south Richland County areas where the median age is slightly higher (50-65 years). These areas also have limited transportation service options.
- > Has greater ethnic diversity in terms of a higher percent of non-Caucasian residents (primarily Black or African American persons) compared to the state average. As shown in Map 3, areas with the highest percentage of minorities include north Columbia and areas north of Interstate 20, as well as Gadsden, Eastover, and throughout southeastern Richland County.
- > Has a higher percentage of residents who are age 5+ years who speak a language other than English at home compared to the state average.
- > Has a higher percentage of persons who have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the state average.
- > Has a higher per-capita income and median household income compared to the state average. As shown in Map 4, the median household income is generally higher in areas north of Interstate 20 than in areas south of Interstate 20. Acadia Lakes/Dentsville, southeast Columbia, and northwest Richland County are among the areas with the highest median household income.
- > Has a percent of population below poverty level slightly lower than the state average, but the unemployment rates of Richland County and South Carolina are essentially the same.
- > The percent of civilian population with a disability in Richland County is higher than the state average, although the civilian population age 65+ years with a disability is consistent with the state average.

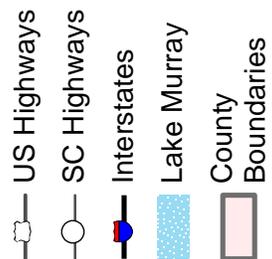
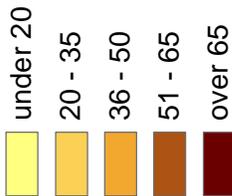
Table 2: Demographic Profile – Richland County

Description	Richland County	South Carolina
Land Area	757.07	32,020
Population	389,708	4,679,602
Male	48.6%	48.6%
Female	51.4%	51.4%
Persons per Housing Unit	2.39	2.18
Age		
Percent Under 18 Years	22.5%	23.1%
Percent 65+ Years	10.2%	14.2%
Median Age	32.6	38.1
Race/Ethnicity		
White alone	44.9%	64.0%
Black or African American alone	45.6%	27.6%
Hispanic alone	4.9%	5.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.1%	0.3%
Asian alone	2.4%	1.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.1%	0.0%
Some other race alone	0.1%	0.1%
Two or more races	1.9%	1.5%
Language other than English spoken at home, Age 5+	3.9%	3.0%
Education/Income		
Population Age 16+ Years in Labor Force	67.6%	61.7%
High School Graduate or Higher, Age 25+ Years	90.7%	85.0%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher, Age 25+ Years	37.2%	25.4%
Per Capita Income, Past 12 months	\$25,763	\$23,943
Median Household Income	\$48,359	\$44,779
Percent of Population Below Poverty Level	17.2%	18.1%
Unemployment Rate	7.0%	6.9%
Health		
Percent of Civilian Population with a Disability	11.3%	13.9%
Percent of Civilian Population with a Disability, Age 65+ Years	37.7%	37.8%

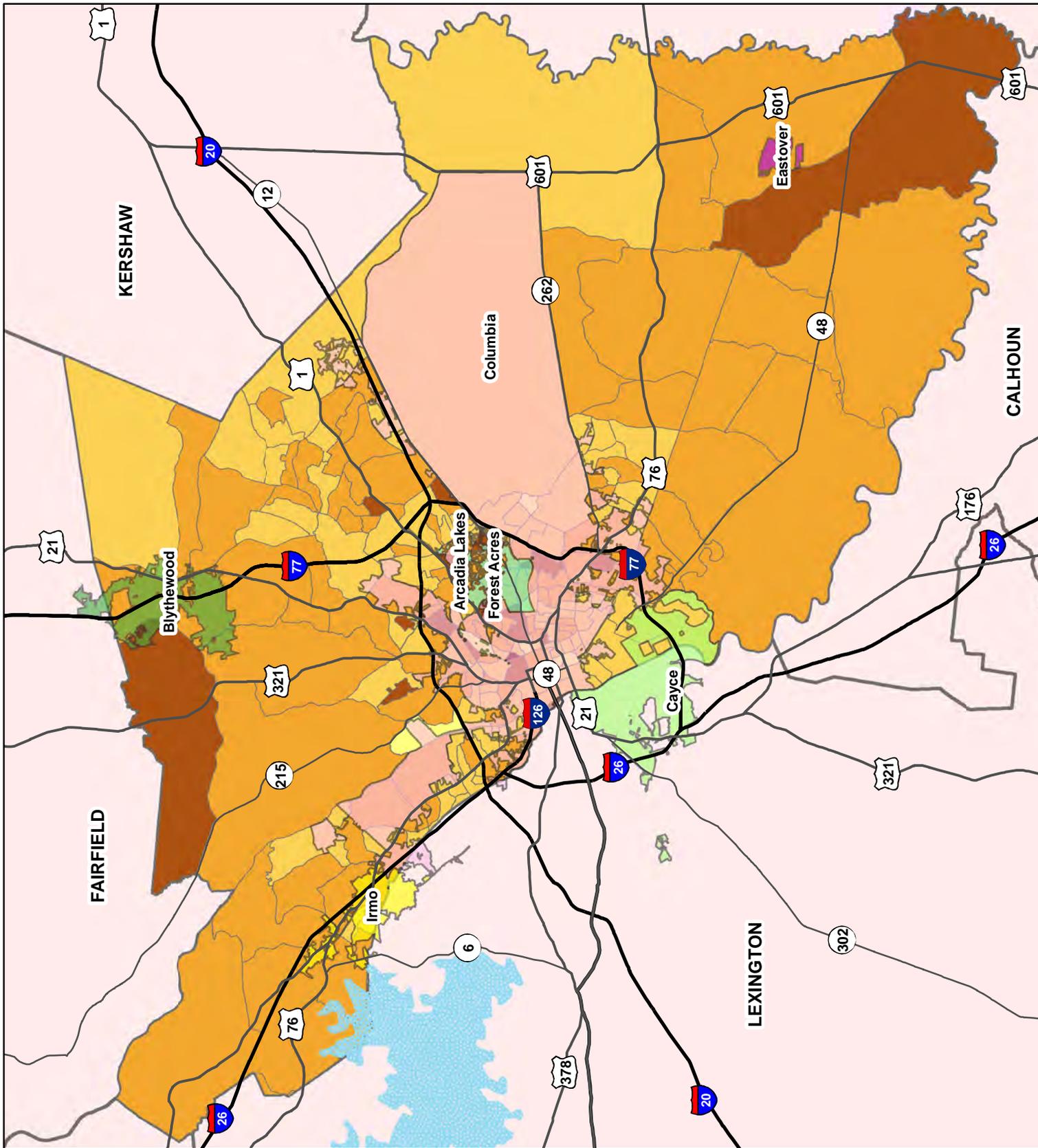
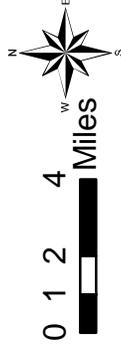
Source: 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimates, American Community Survey

Richland County Median Age

Median Age

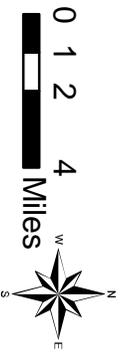
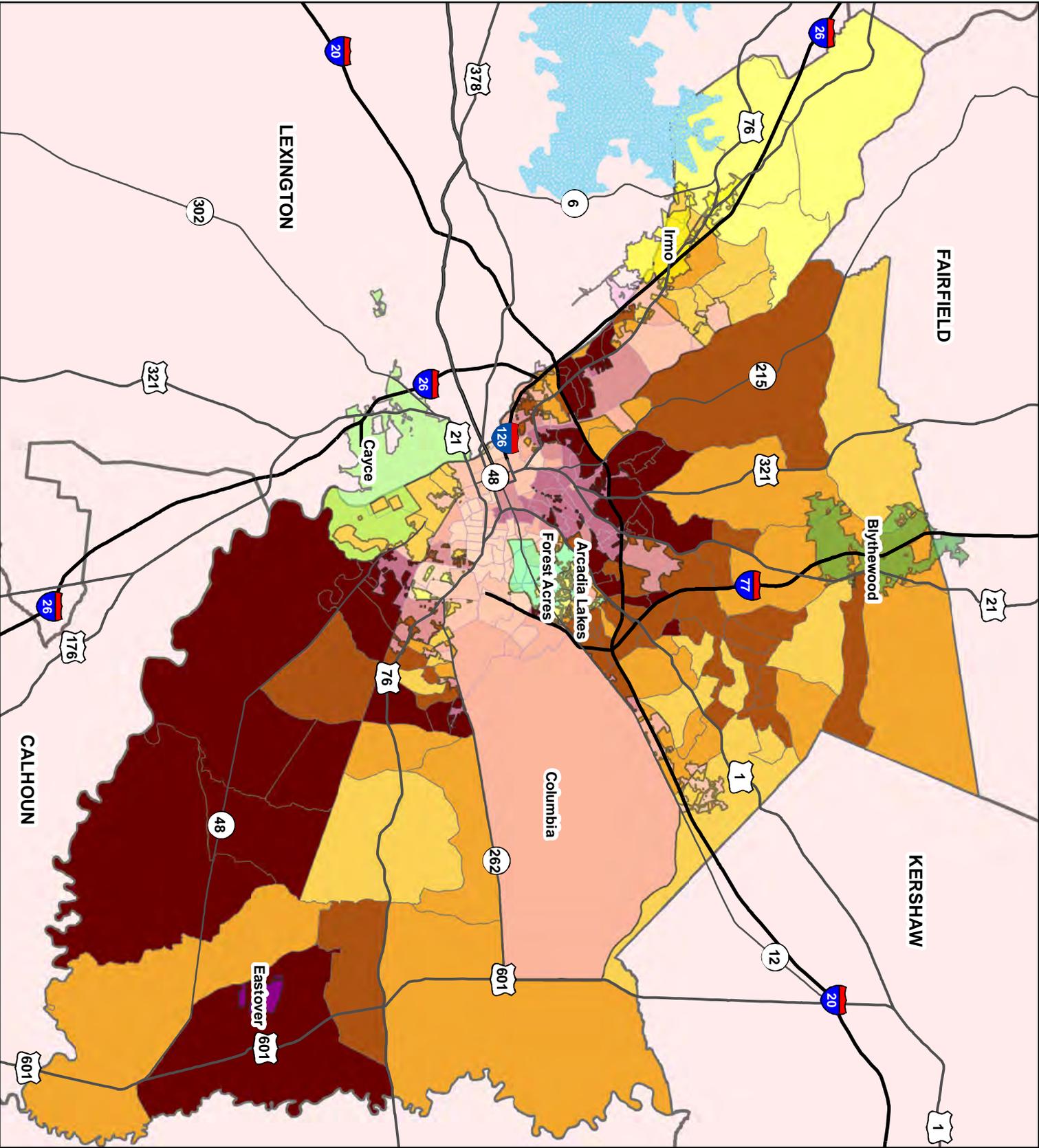
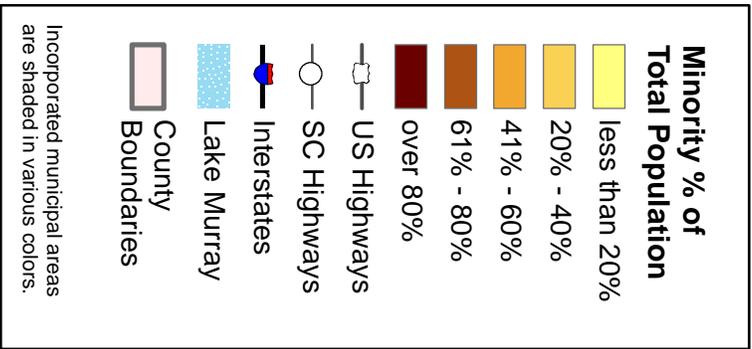


Incorporated municipal areas are shaded in various colors.



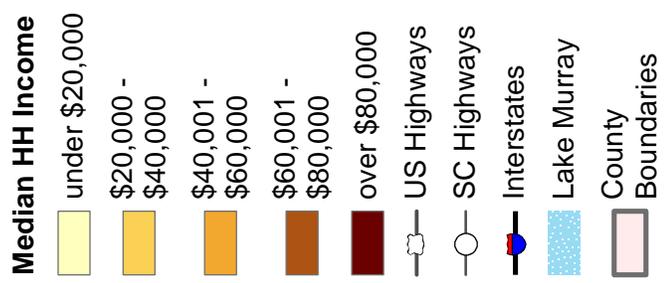
Data Sources: US Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, South Carolina DOT

Richland County Minority Population

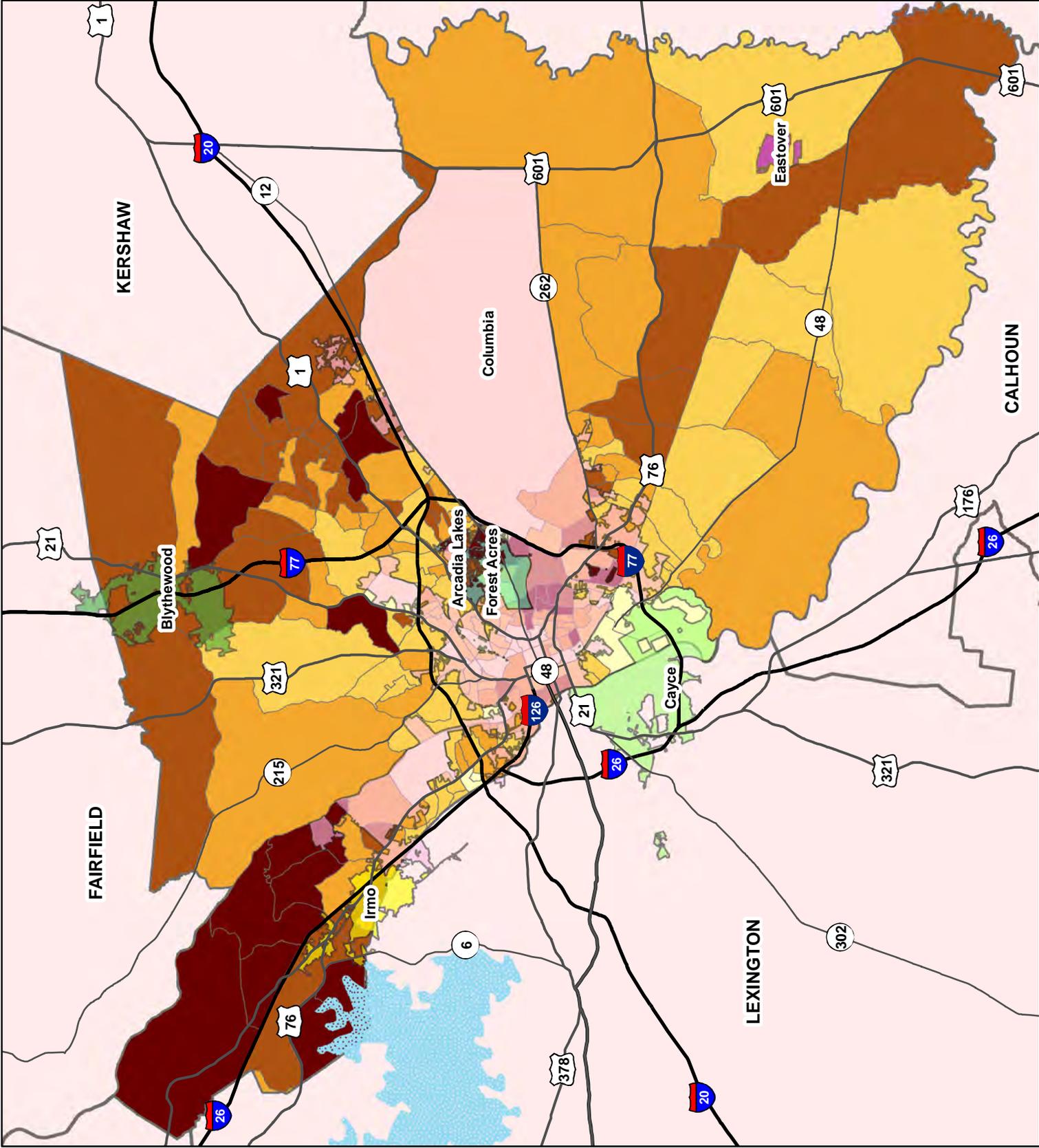


Data Sources: US Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, South Carolina DOT

Richland County Median Household Income



Incorporated municipal areas are shaded in various colors.



Data Sources: US Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, South Carolina DOT

Lexington County

Lexington County is the second largest county within the Central Midlands region in terms of total land area at 699 square miles³ and the sixth most populous county in the state, with a 2014 population estimate of 277,888.⁴ The county seat of Lexington is the Town of Lexington, a fast growing area that boasts low unemployment rates in comparison with other counties in South Carolina. The Columbia Metropolitan Airport is also located in Lexington County.

As shown in Map 1, there are 14 incorporated areas in Lexington County, although 4 are partially located in adjacent counties. There are also four CDPs within unincorporated Lexington County, including:

- > Town of Batesburg-Leesville (located partly in Saluda County)
- > City of Cayce (located partly in Richland County)
- > Town of Chapin
- > City of Columbia (located most in Richland County and the Richland county seat)
- > Town of Gaston
- > Town of Gilbert
- > Town of Irmo (located partially in Richland County)
- > Town of Lexington (county seat)
- > Town of Pelion
- > Town of Pine Ridge
- > Town of South Congaree
- > Town of Summit
- > Town of Swansea
- > City of West Columbia
- > Oak Grove CDP
- > Red Bank CDP
- > Seven Oaks CDP
- > Springdale CDP

Lexington County Demographic Profile

Approximately 12.8 percent of Lexington County's population is age 65 and older, 6.2 percent are unemployed, and 13.2 percent are living below the poverty level as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Both the unemployment rate and percent of population living in poverty in Lexington County is lower than that in Richland County.

The percent of the civilian population that are persons with disabilities is 11.3 percent and more than one-third of them are 65 years and older (37.7%), consistent with Richland County. The population of Lexington County is less diverse than Richland County, with 76.7 percent Caucasian, 14.3 percent Black/African American, 5.6 percent Hispanic, and the remaining predominantly people of two or more races or Asian.

The employment profile of Lexington County closely mirrors that of Richland County with jobs related to educational services, health care, and social assistance at 22.4 percent, retail trade comprising 11.7

³ 2010 Quick Facts, U.S. Census Bureau

⁴ Population estimate as of July 1, 2014, U.S. Census Bureau

percent of jobs, and employment related to the arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services representing 8.4 percent of jobs. While located in Richland County, Fort Jackson draws employees throughout the Central Midlands region, including Lexington County. Table 3 presents the major employers in Lexington County. Major employers with multiple locations are not included in the top employer list. As previously mentioned, over-the-road truck drivers may not use transit services; however, top employers that specialize in freight and distribution services are included on the list as transit may benefit drivers without personal vehicles and administrative, sales, and customer support staff. These employers are also shown on Map 11 in Section 4 and discussed as part of the unmet needs assessment.

Table 3: Lexington County Major Employers

Employer	Municipality
Michelin North America, Inc.	Lexington
SCANA Corporation (Corporate Campus)	Cayce
Amazon.com	West Columbia
House of Raeford Farms, Inc.	West Columbia
Teleperformance	Columbia
USA Inc.	Cayce
Southeastern Freight Lines	West Columbia
General Information Services	Chapin
Republic	West Columbia
National Distributing	West Columbia
Harsco	West Columbia

While the majority of persons in Lexington County having graduated from high school (88.6%) is comparable to that in Richland County (90.7%), the number of residents holding a bachelor’s degree or higher is lower at 29.9 percent compared to 37.2 percent in Richland County.

Table 4 summarizes key demographic statistics for Lexington County compared to South Carolina based on the 2013 ACS. This comparison indicates that Lexington County:

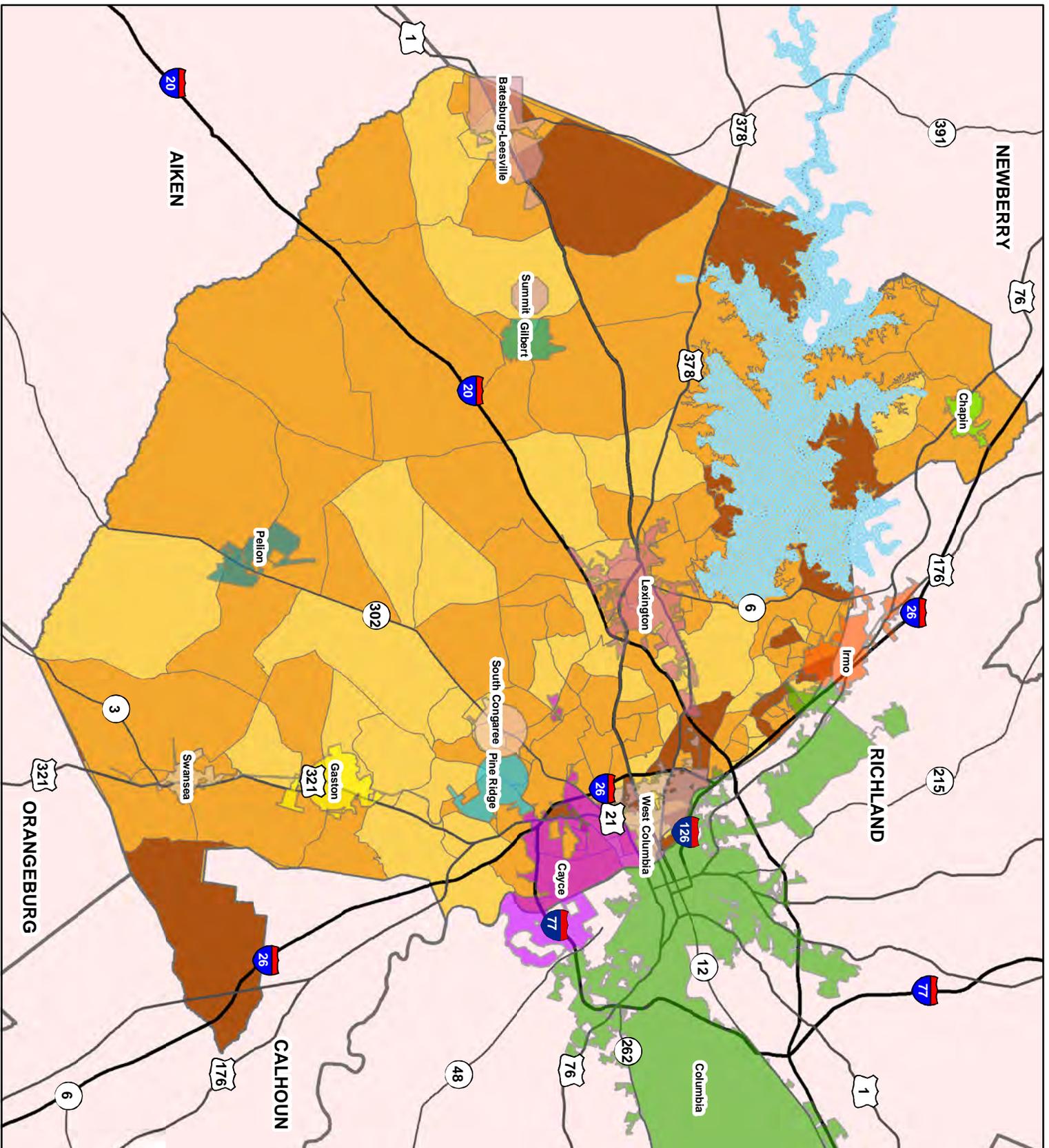
- > Has a higher number of persons per housing compared to the state average.
- > Has a slightly younger population in terms of percent of population 65 years or younger and median age compared to the state average. As shown in Map 5, the median age for most of Lexington County is 20-50 years old. Exceptions to this include areas around the northern periphery of the county, northwest Lexington County/Batesburg-Leesville, and the southeast Lexington County areas where the median age is slightly higher (50-65 years). These areas also have limited transportation service options.
- > Has less ethnic diversity in terms of a higher percent of Caucasian residents compared to the state average. As shown in Map 6, Lexington County is primarily Caucasian, with some smaller sub-areas having a higher percentage of minority population (40-80%), including west of Lexington, south of Irmo, south of Cayce, south of Gaston, and around Batesburg-Leesville.
- > Has a percentage of residents aged 5+ years who speak a language other than English at home consistent to that of the state average.
- > Has a slightly higher percentage of persons who have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher compared to the state average.
- > Has a higher per-capita income and median household income compared to the state average. Similar to Richland County, the median household income in Lexington County is generally higher in areas north of Interstate 20, including Chapin, Irmo, and Lexington, than in areas south of Interstate 20 (see Map 7).
- > Has a lower percentage of the population living below poverty and lower unemployment rate compared to the state average.
- > The percent of civilian population with a disability (all ages) in Richland County is slightly less than the state average.

Table 4: Demographic Profile – Lexington County

Description	Lexington County	South Carolina
Population		
Male	48.8%	48.6%
Female	51.2%	51.4%
Persons per Housing Unit	2.32	2.18
Age		
Percent Under 18 Years	24.2%	23.1%
Percent 65+ Years	12.8%	14.2%
Median Age	37.9	38.1
Race/Ethnicity		
White alone	76.7%	64.0%
Black or African American alone	14.3%	27.6%
Hispanic alone	5.6%	5.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.2%	0.3%
Asian alone	1.4%	1.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.0%	0.0%
Some other race alone	0.1%	0.1%
Two or more races	1.7%	1.5%
Language other than English spoken at home, Age 5+	2.9%	3.0%
Education/Income		
Population Age 16+ Years in Labor Force	67.7%	61.7%
High School Graduate or Higher, Age 25+ Years	88.6%	85.0%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher, Age 25+ Years	28.9%	25.4%
Per Capita Income, Past 12 months	\$26,886	\$23,943
Median Household Income	\$54,061	\$44,779
Percent of Population Below Poverty Level	13.2%	18.1%
Unemployment Rate	6.2%	6.9%
Health		
Percent of Civilian Population with a Disability	11.3%	13.9%
Percent of Civilian Population with a Disability, Age 65+ Years	36.4%	37.8%

Source: 2009-2013 Five-Year Estimates, American Community Survey

Lexington County Median Age



Median Age

- Under 20
- 20 - 35
- 36 - 50
- 51 - 65
- over 65

US Highways
 SC Highways
 Interstates
 Lake Murray
 County Boundaries

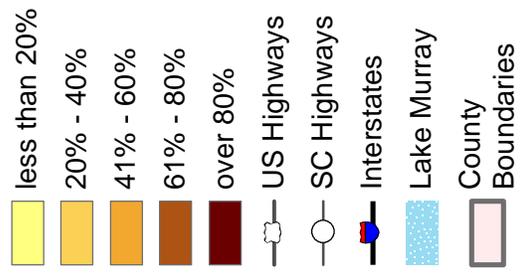
Incorporated municipal areas are shaded in various colors.



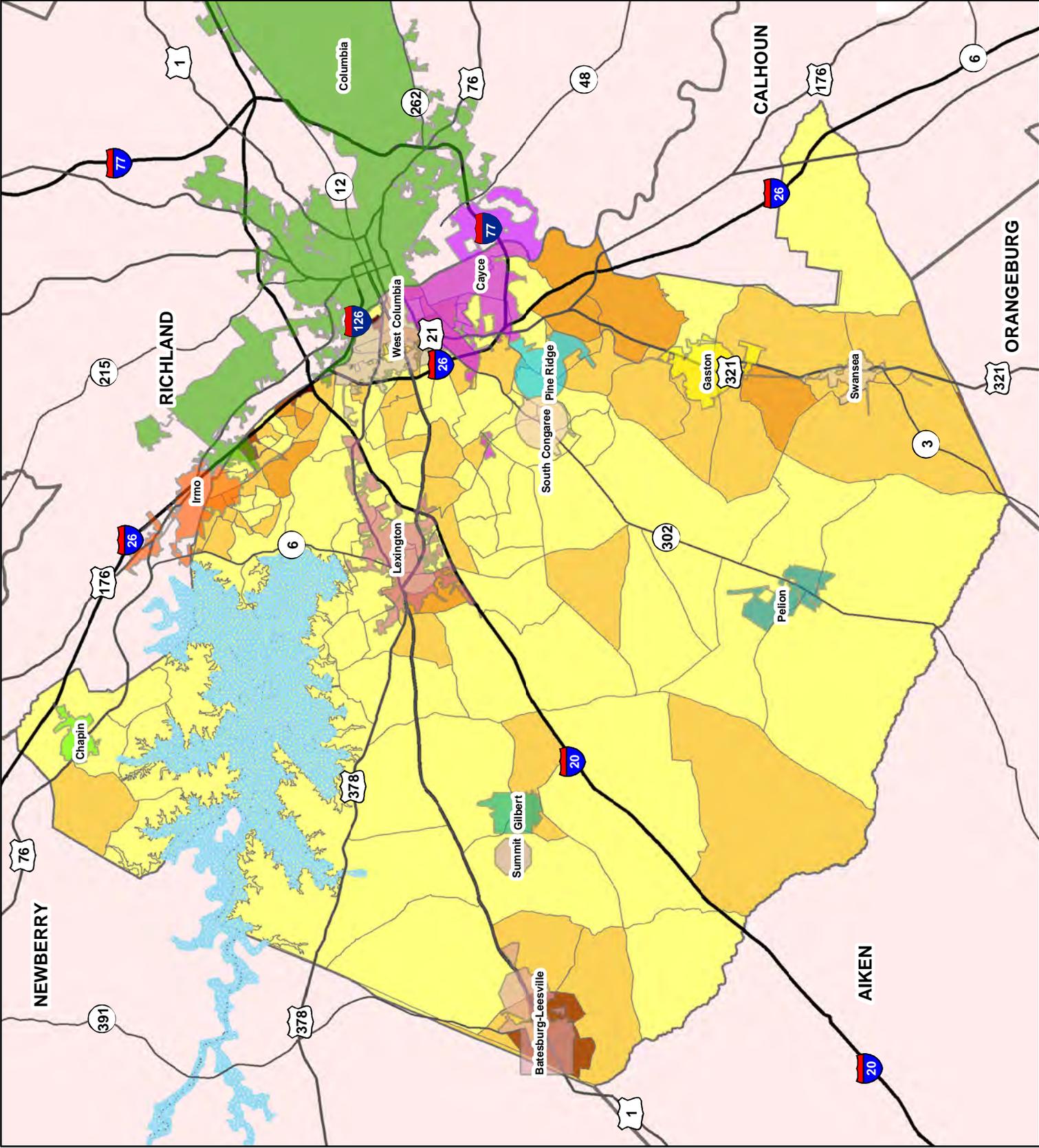
Data Sources: US Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, South Carolina DOT

Lexington County Minority Population

Minority Percent of Total Population

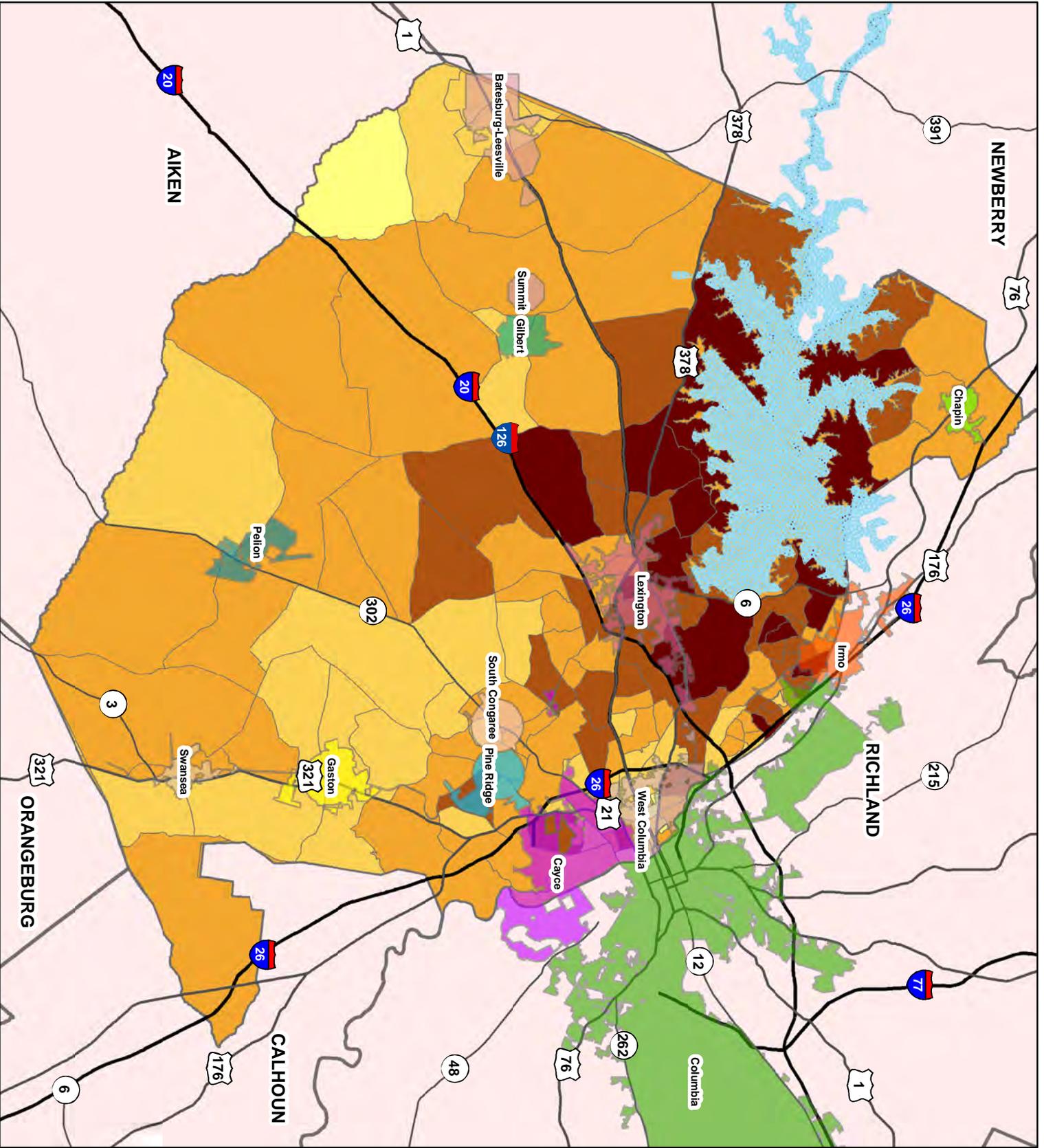


Incorporated municipal areas are shaded in various colors.



Data Sources: US Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, South Carolina DOT

Lexington County Median Household Income



Median HH Income

- less than \$20,000
- \$20,000 - \$40,000
- \$40,000 - \$60,000
- \$60,000 - \$80,000
- \$80,000 - over \$80,000

- US Highways
- Lake Murray
- SC Highways
- Interstates
- County Boundaries

Incorporated municipal areas are shaded in various colors.



Data Sources: US Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, South Carolina DOT

Transit-Orientation Analysis

Often, a propensity towards transit for the population of a given area can be predicted based on certain density and demographic characteristics. Demographic characteristics such as automobile access, income, and age can have a direct impact on a person's mobility. These characteristics can be mapped, and the resulting maps can help to identify possible areas where transit dependent populations exist. Generally, populations without access to cars, with lower incomes, or who are too young to drive or who are more likely to be infirmed due to advanced age have a much higher propensity to use transit than the population at large. Providing transit service to neighborhoods with a higher proportion of the population meeting these characteristics can often assist in meeting social and ridership goals.

An analysis was conducted of the demographic profile for the study area, and the results are shown in Map 8. The propensity for transit use in these areas is reflected in a Very High, High, Medium, or Low ranking index for individual census tracts in Richland and Lexington counties. As shown, areas with the highest transit orientation indices are within or close to Columbia, with lower transit orientation generally in the more rural areas of the region.

The transit orientation analysis of demographic data refers to a more dependent category of ridership, or people who might not have another desirable choice but to ride transit, regardless of the convenience or service level of the transit system. It should also be noted that these data are based on available data from the 2013 ACS, which is provided for illustrative purposes only; this does not imply that these areas can be or should be served with transit, as there are many other factors that affect transit operations, such as density and available roadway networks. The information is assumed to correlate to a certain combination of characteristics that can often correspond to higher than average dependency on transit for the population in that area. This set of characteristics is not meant to imply that areas without these characteristics may not also be productive if served by transit.

Regional Growth and Development

Richland County is projected to add over 78,000 residents between 2010 and 2040, an increase of 21 percent, while Lexington County is projected to add over 115,000 residents, an increase of 49 percent.⁵ Geographically, the pattern and distribution of development expected is anticipated to follow the historic trends with the heaviest growth providing infill within downtown Columbia and extending outwards into the suburban portions of Richland and Lexington counties, including NE Richland/Blythwood, SE Columbia/Eastover, Lexington, and Chapin/Irmo. New residential construction in the higher growth rate suburban portions of the planning area is expected to be characterized by lower density, single family homes with a population density of less than 2.5 persons per acre.

The area around the Town of Lexington has been the second major growth area in the greater Columbia area over the past few decades. The Lexington sub-area in central Lexington County will also continue to see rapid growth, and is projected to be the region's largest population center by 2040.

⁵ Columbia Area Transportation Study (COATS): Moving the Midlands 2040 Transportation Plan (Draft)

Regional Transportation Profile

Existing Transportation Services

Existing public transportation service in Richland and Lexington counties is provided by The COMET, which serves Columbia and the outer-lying urban areas of West Columbia, Cayce, Forest Acres, Irmo/St. Andrews, as well as Fort Jackson. The COMET's service area is illustrated in Map 9. The COMET operates 24 fixed routes, 17 of which operate all day (generally between 5 AM to 12 AM on weekdays, 6 AM to 10 PM on weekends) with the remaining routes operating only during weekday peak hours. There are also two hybrid flex routes that make some scheduled stops and demand response service that allows for scheduled pickups.

For riders living within The COMET's service area who have a disability that prevents them from accessing and/or using the fixed-route system, Dial-a-Ride (DART) service is also provided. DART is an origin-to-destination, advance reservation, shared-ride transportation service. Riders must be certified as eligible prior to using the DART service.

Other transportation providers include private drivers (e.g., taxi cabs and luxury cars) and providers for non-emergency medical and senior transport. Many of these other transportation providers are for-profit transportation services, which are typically not affordable services for daily transportation needs by the target populations due to fixed- or low-incomes and vehicle accessibility issues for those with disabilities. An inventory of these other transportation providers is included in Appendix A.⁶

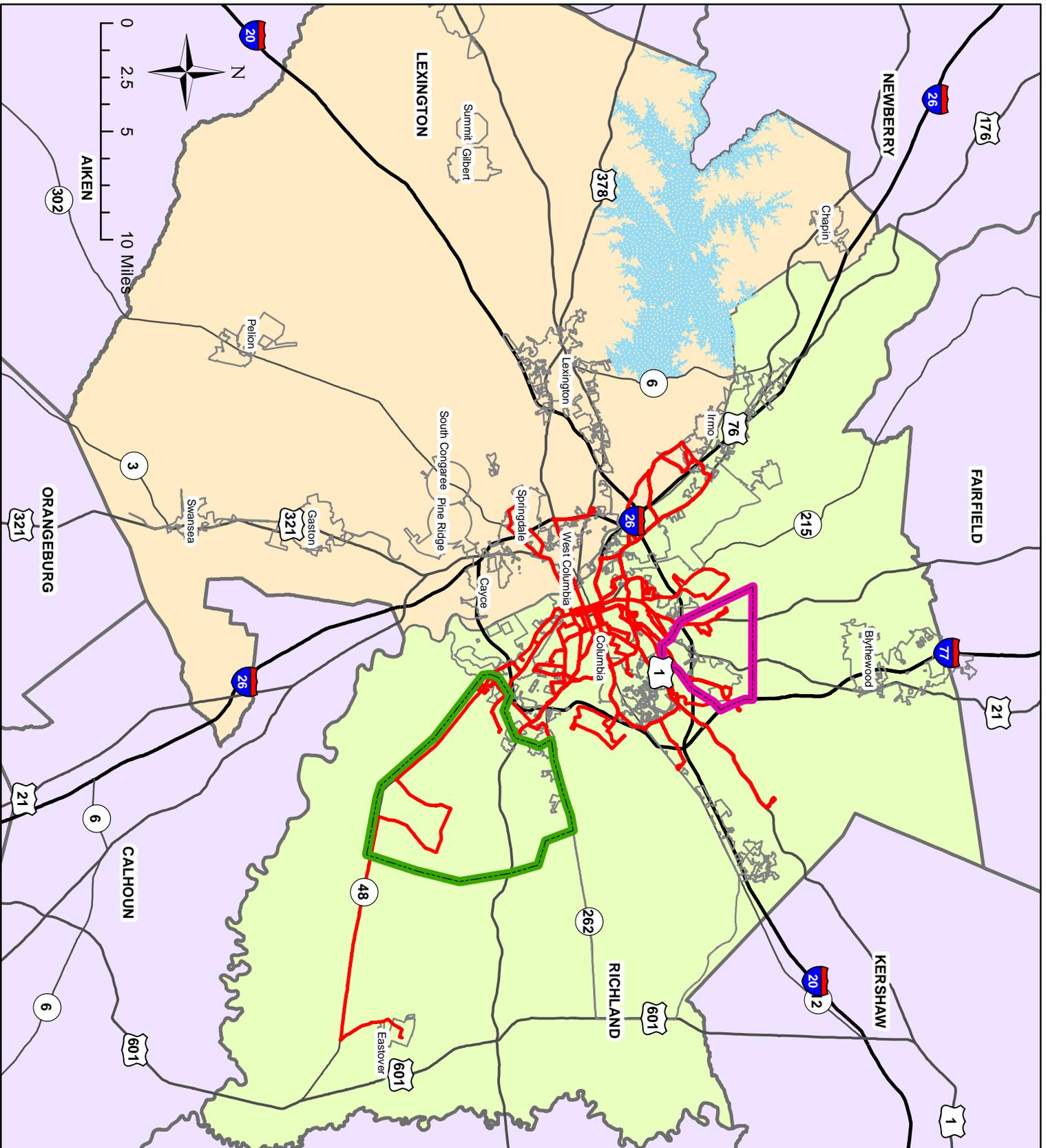
Richland County Transportation Penny

In November 2012, voters within Richland County approved the Transportation Penny, formally known as a "Special Sales and Use Tax." According to the SC State Code of Laws §4-37-30, counties are empowered to impose this sales and use tax, pursuant to a referendum and not to exceed 1 percent, as a source of revenue for highways, roads, streets, bridges, mass transit systems, greenbelts, and other transportation-related projects and/or facilities (e.g., drainage facilities).

Collections of the Richland County Transportation Penny began May 1, 2013, with a potential 22-year program to fund high priority roadway projects (63% of proceeds), transit (29% of proceeds), and high priority bike/pedestrian/greenway projects (8% of proceeds).⁷ Prior to the Transportation Penny, transit in the Central Midlands region was underfunded, resulting in a 45-percent reduction in service hours in May 2012. Upon receiving collected sales taxes, The COMET was able to start planning around the regional transit authority's first-ever dedicated funding and in May 2013, one year after the cut, The COMET restored 24,000 hours of service, increased frequency, and developed new routes and programs to meet the transit needs of Richland County.

⁶ This inventory was compiled based on internet research using the best available information.

⁷ *Richland County Transportation Penny Fact Sheet*; based on distribution of funds anticipated for projects (less funds for administration of program).



Central Midlands

Study Area

-  Flex Route 62
-  Flex Route 13
-  The COMET
-  US Highways
-  SC Highways
-  Interstates



Data Sources: US Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, South Carolina DOT

Technology improvements, such as The COMET App, has made transit more convenient for current riders and prospective riders. New rider fare programs, such as the Freshman Freedom Pass (for college students) and the Half-Fare program, have contributed to increases in ridership and overall interest in taking transit. The Transportation Penny has also provided critical local matching funds required to leverage federal grants for vehicles, signs, shelters and other capital improvements.

Since revenue generated by the Transportation Penny is generated through sales in Richland County, funding of transit improvements is limited to Richland County. Therefore, in looking at Map 9, it is apparent that the majority of the region's transit service is in Richland County.

Section 3: Public Outreach

This section summarizes the extensive public outreach process that was completed to assess the transit feasibility needs of communities within Lexington and Richland counties located outside of The COMET's existing service area. A grassroots public outreach approach was the key component of this study due to the need to reach persons living in more rural areas who may not have access to transportation or internet-based tools for providing input. Because of the wide geographic reach and understanding of potential economic and mobility barriers to participation, a "one-size fits all" approach was not feasible for this assessment; therefore, a combination of many tailored outreach tools were used during this study.

It is also important to mention that transportation services were assessed for both the two-county project study area as a whole and individually for each of the counties based on the level of coordination and funding that would be required for implementation. However, the public outreach process was conducted comprehensively for the entire study area, with events attended in both counties to ensure that input was solicited from residents, employees, and visitors within the entire study area. The results of the public outreach process are collectively presented in this section, with the more detailed recommendations and implementation plans presented by county in subsequent sections of this plan. All public outreach activities conducted as part of this study conformed to the current CMCOG Public Participation Policy.

Outreach Techniques

The various direct involvement and information distribution techniques that were deployed during the public outreach process are described in this section. Direct involvement techniques refer to those that engage the stakeholders and the public in "hands on" workshops and/or discussions about the project. Information distribution techniques refer to those that utilize the dissemination of public information materials to inform the general public of the project. Table 5 presents an overview of the techniques deployed and the number of persons reached using each method. As shown in the table, over 3,000 individuals received information relating to the transit assessment. Not all chose to participate in the process and provide comments, but they were made aware of the effort through the recipient of project materials including surveys and newsletters.

Table 5: Public Outreach Techniques

Public Outreach Technique	Number of Participants
Stakeholder Meetings	
<i>Stakeholder Group Interviews at the CMCOG (6.5 hour interview window with more than 190 persons invited)</i>	10
<i>Individual Stakeholder Interviews (2 meetings attended)</i>	4
Transit Needs Surveys	
<i>Venues/Events (20+ venues surveyed)</i>	1,104
<i>Online Survey Monkey Survey (available from Feb 2015 to July 2015)</i>	60
<i>Mail Out Survey (distributed to more than 1,700 churches)</i>	3

Public Outreach Technique	Number of Participants
<i>Telephone Survey (with local area code available from Feb 2015 to July 2015)</i>	7
Meetings Attended by Project Representative (3 Meetings Total)	
<i>Lexington County Public Transit Workgroup (January 2015)</i>	12
<i>Central Midlands RTA Service & Standards Meeting (February 2015)</i>	20
<i>Lower Richland Ministerial Alliance Meeting (April 2015)</i>	22
Information Disseminated	
<i>Newsletter Email Blast (sent to CMCOG email distribution list)</i>	85
<i>CMCOG Website (newsletter and survey link available from April 2015 to July 2015)</i>	N/A

Direct Involvement

Public involvement activities involving direct interaction with agencies, organizations, and/or citizens were used throughout the study process. The direct involvement activities selected for this study include the following:

- Committee/Community Briefings and Meetings
- Stakeholder Meetings
- Staff Briefings and Meetings
- Community Surveying
- Committee and Board Presentations

A number of methods were used in the development of this plan to present a tailored outreach approach, recognizing that “traditional methods” may not be the most effective approach to gather input from participants in the more rural areas. The techniques described in the remaining sections assist with understanding the communities’ needs and help develop innovative transportation alternatives. For this reason, the series of maps illustrating demographic data for each county were previously presented to help understand the community profile.

Committee/Community Briefings and Meetings

Early in the outreach process, stakeholder groups and local leaders were contacted to participate in one-on-one discussions and share input relating to transportation and mobility issues and needs within the study area. Several local leaders responded and arranged for the project team to meet with them directly; the project team also attended scheduled meetings to share an overview of the study and ask for input. The meetings that were attended are described below.

Lexington County Public Transit Workgroup – January 21, 2015

The Lexington County Public Transit Workgroup meets on a quarterly basis to discuss transportation issues. An introduction to this regional transit needs assessment was presented at the meeting held on January 21, 2015.

Central Midlands Regional Transit Authority Service and Standards Meeting – February 11, 2015

An introduction to this regional transit needs assessment was provided at this meeting. Persons in attendance were asked to provide assistance with identifying the best points of distribution for the project survey effort.

Penny Sales Tax (Dirt Road) Meeting – March 2, 2015

This meeting focused mainly on the dirt road paving project in Richland County. Project surveys were distributed to persons attending the meeting.

Lower Richland Ministerial Alliance – April 20, 2015

The Lower Richland Ministerial Alliance met at the Pleasant Grove Baptist Church in Gadsden, with approximately 25 persons in attendance. The meeting focused on plans for the Lower Richland Sanitary Sewer project that would run sanitary sewer lines from Columbia to Eastover. Following those discussions, this regional transit needs assessment was introduced to the Ministerial Alliance with a brief overview of the previous requests for assistance with completion of project surveys. The attendees confirmed that surveys were distributed approximately one week prior to the meeting and many of the surveys were returned without comments. One person in attendance commented that to receive an accurate picture of the community needs and wants, surveys would need to be sent to every household in Richland and Lexington counties. Further discussion focused on the survey efforts being completed within the parameters of this study.

Staff Briefings and Meetings

Several project update meetings were held throughout the data collection phase to coordinate efforts and obtain input from team members and the CMCOG project manager. In addition to weekly coordination amongst the project team members, a more formal project update meeting was held in April 2015, with staff members present from Lexington County, The COMET, and CMCOG. Some of the key discussion items that resulted from that meeting include:

- The COMET has reviewed the need for transportation service to the Amazon distribution center. Nephron Pharmaceuticals is also located next to Amazon and may provide an opportunity to piggyback transportation services to both facilities. The COMET would like to review the actual operations, including the security procedures to enter and exit the facilities since those have been noted to take up to 15 minutes. Schneider Electric is located on the way to Sumter County and could possibly be accessed by Route 47.
- The ReFlex Route 62 is doing well with approximately 800 trips per month and is considered the first step towards fixed-route transit service. Trips must be scheduled by 5 PM the previous day or 5 PM on Saturday for Monday pickup. On July 1, 2015, The COMET will begin providing the service previously provided by the Santee-Wateree Regional Transit Authority. The Lower Richland County service operated by The COMET will now stop at the Wal-Mart on Garner's Ferry Road and public housing locations, but will not continue trips to downtown Columbia.
- Contracting transportation services that operate in Batesburg-Leesville would be ideal compared to having to deadhead back to The COMET transit facility.

- The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) may be able to develop carpool lanes in combination with the planned widening of I-20, if there was a plan in place. Research should also be conducted to determine the necessary steps and requirements that would allow for buses to operate on the roadway shoulders.
- Pelion, South Congaree, and Pine Ridge have all expressed the need for transportation services; however, identifying funding for those services is an issue.
- It would be beneficial to have companies survey their employees regarding where they are coming from so that the bus routes could be planned accordingly to capture the most riders in both directions.
- The standard process for beginning new services would require approximately eight months to including discussions, committee and Board presentations for approval, and advertisement of those services.
- There will be a new technology park built in Chapin along with a 200-acre residential and commercial complex being developed by the Mungo Company.
- Newberry County Council on Aging in coordination with SCDOT operates an express route from Newberry County to Columbia.
- Lexington County would like to conduct its own survey effort after the results of this study are publicized to gauge the citizen's interests in the transportation recommendations. This should be conducted at the same time non-profit organizations begin requesting Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

Stakeholder Meetings

Meetings with local leaders and stakeholders were conducted both as one-on-one and group discussions. Stakeholders that participated in one-on-one discussions included the Town of Eastover Mayor, Richland County Council Members, South Carolina Department of Social Services, Richland County Transportation Department, Zion Hopewell Full Gospel Baptist Church, and representatives from local businesses, libraries, The COMET, Harvest Hope Food Bank, Lexington Agency on Aging, and community centers. Key discussion topics from the meetings are listed below.

- Guidance on where the surveys should be conducted to reach the greatest number of community residents.
- Groups or agencies that could assist with outreach efforts.
- Information sharing on transportation services.

The group discussion stakeholder meetings were scheduled at the CMCOG office on April 7, 2015. A total of 193 stakeholders were invited to attend one of the five different stakeholder group meetings by choosing the group that best fits their focus area and would best accommodate their schedule. Invitations were sent to representatives from the community centers, assisted living facilities, schools, senior centers, food banks, and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) contacts. The focus areas of the five stakeholder meetings include:

- Schools/Education

- Healthcare/Human Services
- Religious Organizations/Churches
- Local Representatives
- Local Businesses/Chambers/Workforce/Economic Development

While a large number of local stakeholders and community leaders were invited to share their experiences with transportation and mobility, 10 participants attended the sessions. The participants represented Lexington County, Town of Chapin, Town of Batesburg-Leesville, Town of Blythewood, Richland County School District One, Senior Resources, Providence Presbyterian Church, and New Hope Christian. The stakeholders that participated were well versed on the many transportation issues in Lexington and Richland County and were able to share a significant amount of information.

Key discussion topics from the stakeholder meetings are summarized in this section.

- Participants would like to see high-speed rail implemented throughout South Carolina. In the opinion of the stakeholders, the configuration of the State of South Carolina would make high-speed rail the best transit option for connecting municipalities. In addition, participants commented that a commuter rail connection between Charlotte, North Carolina, and Columbia, South Carolina, should be part of the commuter rail plan.
- Park-and-rides may be good options for Pelion, Batesburg-Leesville, Swansea, Gaston, and potentially Chapin. However, attendees commented that the Town of Chapin may not support transit services and park-and-ride options to the same degree due to higher average median household incomes.
- The Town of Lexington has seen many transportation study efforts that have not come to fruition; therefore, the town has become somewhat discouraged and feels that transportation services would need to be implemented independently. Transit is also not the priority in Lexington, with the Town recently spending more money on synchronizing traffic signals to balance congestion. While a reliable, consistent park-and-ride is an option in Lexington, there is also a need for the State to construct interchanges to solve the traffic flow issues.
- There is a distinct difference between buses and mobile office options. Clemson has a bus that travels between Greenville and Clemson connecting with a park-and-ride lot in Clemson. The buses are equipped with free Wi-Fi service.
- There are night classes in held in Richland County and students that use public transportation are unable to get home.
- Workers are unable to get from Richland County to Lexington to work at Amazon. The COMET is working with Amazon to determine the best way to get employees to a central location that may be accessed by transit. One approach to provide better access from outside of the existing fixed-route service area to the jobs at Amazon may be vanpools.
- Some further outreach activities that were recommended during the meetings included attending the Sweet Potato Festival, the Herb Festival, and the Lexington Museum to encourage participants to complete surveys, and speaking with employees at Palmetto Health Parkridge and Lexington Medical Center. It was also mentioned during this meeting that unsuccessful attempts have been

made to contact the Lexington Medical Center and many churches throughout Lexington and Richland counties.

- Door-to-door services are needed in the rural areas to provide trips for low-income seniors needing to access doctor's appointments and pharmacies in Columbia. Effective July 1, 2015, Senior Resources will provide service to persons in need on a limited basis. Without other options available, seniors must pay \$50 each way for taxicabs. The existing need for these services is focused in Blythewood, Lower Richland County/Eastover, and Columbia.
- Transportation is needed to provide the Hispanic community and lower-income workers with access to the three free Good Samaritan medical clinics in Columbia. Most people using these clinics are reliant on others for rides. The clinics are only open one day per week and patients are selected through a lottery system based on the demand for medical services. People needing to access the clinics may be able to pay a nominal fee. The clinics are located in West Columbia (along Leaphart Street), Columbia (along old Percival Road), and near Chapin (along Hwy 76).
- One pastor commented that his church has child development centers with approximately 200 children and two buses. The congregation of this church has the resources needed to get people where they need to go. Another pastor in attendance commented that his church is located in Blythewood and the congregation is hesitant to use public transportation.
- There are four University of South Carolina College of Social Work student interns working among the congregations. It would be beneficial to have the interns trained by The COMET to learn the transportation services that are available. The interns could then provide travel training to members of the congregation.
- There is no way to access Blythewood other than by automobile. Therefore, public transportation is needed along with roadway improvements, including an extra lane through Blythewood and a review of the I-77 exits relating to semi-trailer traffic. Representatives from the Town of Blythewood will assist with identifying space for a park-and-ride lot. Another option would be for commuters to park their cars in Blythewood Park. Two transit trips per day to the new park-and-ride lot/parking location would help the town with its transportation issues.
- Highway 1 is being reviewed for possible expansion from Batesburg-Leesville to Lexington. With the expansion, an industrial park would be coming in with the hopes of attracting employers that would add 50 to 150 jobs to the area. Therefore, an express route from the VA hospital and the administrative buildings in downtown Columbia to Batesburg-Leesville would make sense. The service could terminate at a hub near the Lexington Medical Center. For Town support of transportation projects in Batesburg-Leesville, the benefits would have to outweigh the costs of providing the service.
- There was a survey completed approximately six months prior to the stakeholder group meeting. The survey focused on potential transportation options, including light rail, express routes, etc.
- There may be a need for transportation service from Blythewood to Leesburg.
- The transportation options in Blythewood may need to focus on tourist areas to potentially use hospitality funds for the local funding portion based on the Town's limitations and requirements to proceed with court hearings prior to imposing any millage.

Community Surveying

An extensive surveying process was conducted throughout the two-county study area using the survey instrument presented as Appendix C. Table 6 presents the locations that were surveyed as part of this effort.

Table 6: Survey Locations

Batesburg-Leesville	Mercado Acapulco (West Columbia, SC)
CMCOG Collected (Lexington and Columbia)	Midlands Technical College Airport Campus
Eastover Dollar General	Midlands Technical College Beltline Campus
Eastover Festival	Midlands Technical College Northeast Campus
Eastover Town Hall	Poultry Festival (Batesburg-Leesville)
Gadsden Community Center	Richland County Neighborhood
Harvest Hope Food Bank (Columbia, SC)	Richland One Stop
IGA (Columbia, SC)	Richland County Libraries (Cooper and Eastover)
Lexington County Library	Senior Resources (Richland County, SC)
Lexington One Stop	Senior Centers
Lower Richland Community Center (Eastover, SC)	SurveyMonkey (Online & Telephone Survey Tool) ⁸



Survey respondents were asked to indicate where they visit most frequently each month by first selecting the type of place (i.e., shopping, work, medical, school, senior center, library, church, child care, volunteer services, recreational activities, beauty shop, food bank, or other). Next, respondents were asked to provide information relating to the specific trips, including the name of the trip location, the address or nearest intersection for that location, the days of the week that the trip is needed, and the time of day that the trip would be required. Respondents were also asked how much they would be willing to pay for transit services, if they have

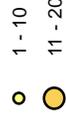
any special transit needs, and to provide the nearest intersection to their home address for origin and destination mapping purposes.

Many survey respondents completed the survey with physical locations that could be mapped to determine the origin and destination of their transportation needs. The information that was accurate enough for mapping purposes is presented in Map 10 to provide a spatial relationship of the survey input. As shown in Map 10, the top locations for trip pairs are between Eastover and Columbia and Irmo and Columbia. The three highest intra-zonal trip locations are the City of Columbia (St. Andrews area), the City of Columbia (southeast near Hopkins), and the Town of Eastover.

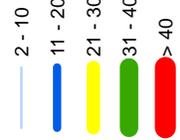
⁸ The project telephone line that was established to accept both verbal and numerical survey responses was active for approximately five months, from February 2015 to July 2015.

Study Area Trip Intensity Lines

Intra-zonal Trips



Inter-zonal Trips



Origins



Destinations



Eastover Route



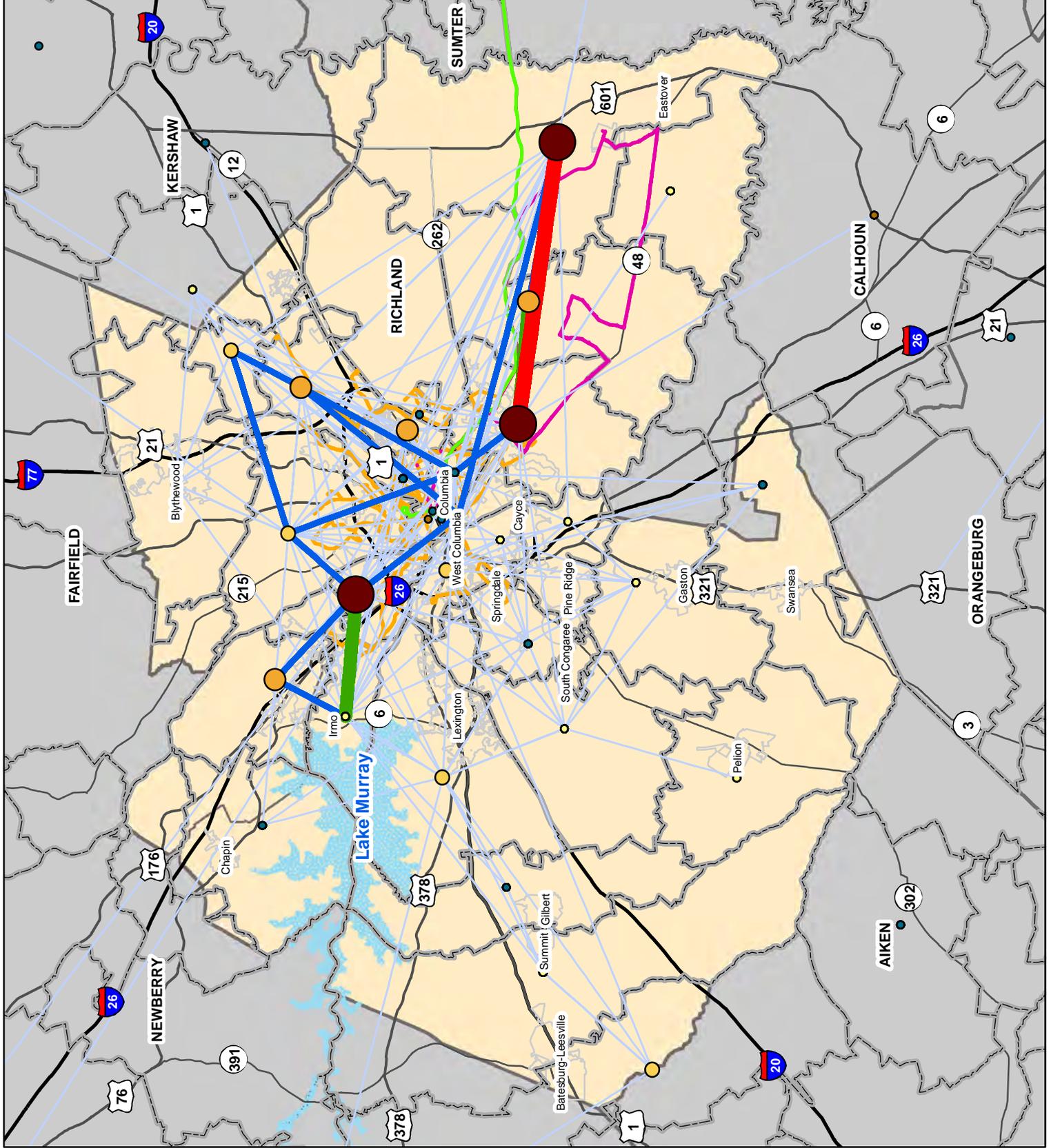
The COMET Routes



Sumter to Columbia VanPool



TAZ Boundary



Some survey respondents provided general information relating to their transit needs, but did not feel comfortable providing geographic locations for those trips or their home addresses. Some of the general comments that were heard during the survey effort are listed below.

- The seats on the fixed-route buses are tight. Passengers would like to for the buses to have more room for storing personal items and bags.
- Most survey respondents provided positive responses to the possible addition of transit services in the outlying areas.



In total over one thousand surveys were collected. Each survey provided the respondent an opportunity to list the top three destinations that they need to access and their home origin. Not all respondents provided three choices, but using the survey tool approximately 3,500 origin and destination pairs are identifiable for the purpose of determining potential transportation links. In addition to identifying types of trips, responses provided areas where services are needed throughout Lexington and Richland counties. The transportation needs that have been identified are discussed further in Section 4, Identification of Unmet Needs.

Survey responses were grouped into several categories for analysis purposes explained below.

- Educational – includes schools, colleges, technical schools, childcare, and libraries.
- Work – includes any location identified as work by the respondent.
- Shopping – includes grocery stores, pharmacies when not specifically noted as medical, and all other stores that provide clothing, games, housewares, and the commissary.
- Religious – includes all churches, temples, mosques, and faith-based organizations and/or facilities.
- Medical – includes hospitals, clinics, doctors' offices, pharmacies when noted for medical purposes, walk-in clinics, pediatric facilities, veteran's medical locations, and medical specialization facilities such as for cancer and mental health.
- Recreational – recreational facilities include gyms, parks, lakes, Riverbanks Zoo, beauty parlors, barbershops, community centers, activity centers, movies/theaters, and bowling alleys. Libraries and senior centers may also be classified as recreational if the respondent specifically indicated that was the trip purpose.
- Senior Centers – senior centers were given a separate category since these facilities provide a range of services including recreational, social, educational, and residential housing and were not always identified by specific purpose to be grouped under other categories.
- Social Services – includes food banks; drug treatment programs; Goodwill; Salvation Army; unemployment offices (SC Workforce); Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) assistance offices; SC UPLIFT Community Outreach; and wellness centers.

- Other – this is a catch-all category for miscellaneous locations that could not be grouped under other areas, but did not have a significant number of responses to warrant a separately identified category. Locations that were identified in this category include banking facilities, florists, general area locations such as downtowns and main streets, volunteer service at various locations, airport, law offices, county buildings, visiting family, and coffee shops.
- Non-responsive – some respondents left blanks in areas of the survey or responses were not legible; therefore, these specific responses were not able to be included under one of the above categories.

Table 7 displays the overall survey results by trip purpose:

Table 7: Overall Trip Destinations

Trip Purpose	Percentage of Responses
Shopping	35%
Educational	13%
Religious	12%
Work	11%
Medical	8%
N/A	7%
Recreational	6%
Senior Center	4%
Social Services	2%
Other	2%

Shopping was the primary trip purpose overwhelmingly chosen by respondents as their destination of choice. Due to shopping’s ability to provide a wide range of choices covering the realm of grocery, hygiene, clothing, pharmaceutical, home improvement, etc., it is understandable why respondents provided this as the primary destination. While shopping locations ranged throughout Richland and Lexington counties, there were some store types that were frequently cited as the destination including Walmart, BI-LO, and Food Lion. The mall was another frequent location with varying malls being mentioned, including The Mall in Columbia, Columbiana Centre, and The Village at Sandhill. The top noted locations for accessing these stores included Garners Ferry, Bush River, and Two Notch Roads. Other locations of interest for shopping included Harbison Boulevard, Highway 6, Dutch-Fork Road, St. Andrews Road, Augusta Road, and Fort Jackson. Many of the shopping locations were in communities near the respondent’s origin or in downtown Columbia, identifying the need for circulator services within communities and connections to public transportation services connecting to downtown Columbia.

Educational trips were the second most listed destination when all choices were combined, with libraries, public schools (from elementary to high school), and childcare destinations being the highest listed locations. University of South Carolina and Midlands Tech locations were also identified as destinations that need to be accessed. It is important to note that surveying was conducted through the Richland and Lexington County Public Library main and branch locations, as well as at Midlands Tech locations, which may have influenced some of the responses regarding destinations. Religious and work locations were

the third and fourth types of destinations that were named and were spread throughout Lexington and Richland counties.

Similarly to Table 7, Overall Destinations, Table 8 displays that shopping is the primary trip purpose. With regard to the second most desired destination category, there is a shift from the overall responses table with work being the secondary choice versus educational trips. Responses for work locations and types of work ran the gamut with Broad River Road, Beltline, Two Notch Road and Garners Ferry listed as locations for employment. Since transportation may be an issue for respondents, it is reasonable to expect that shopping, work, and other trip types are completed in the same area. Table 8 provides a summary of the survey respondents' first choice destination location.

Table 8: First Choice Survey Destinations

Trip Purpose	Percentage of Responses
Shopping	45%
Work	19%
Educational	11%
Religious	7%
Medical	5%
Senior Center	5%
Recreational	3%
N/A	3%
Social Services	1%
Other	1%

Table 9 provides an overview of the second choice survey destinations, which also mirrors the overall and first choice trip destinations with shopping as the primary response. Educational destinations are the next highest destination selected for the survey respondents' second choice, followed by religious locations. With the second choice selection, medical-related destinations surpass work-related trips. The survey responses indicate that shopping and work are primary trip purposes, but once these locations are accessed, the next highest priority for respondents is access to educational, religious, and medical sites.

Table 9: Second Choice Survey Destinations

Trip Purpose	Percentage of Responses
Shopping	31%
Educational	15%
Religious	13%
Medical	11%
Work	9%
N/A	6%
Recreational	5%
Senior Center	5%
Social Services	2%
Other	1%

The final survey selection as in all other responses had shopping maintaining its lead as the primary travel destination. With work and educational destinations accounting for a large percentage of first and secondary choices, the third choice indicates an increase in religious destinations after shopping. In addition there was a significant increase in recreational destinations as the third choice. Beauty/barber shop and salon destinations represented 56 percent of the recreational trip destinations. As noted in Table 10, below, 13 percent of the respondents did not select a third destination.

Table 10: Third Choice Survey Destinations

Trip Purpose	Percentage of Responses
Shopping	27%
Religious	15%
Educational	13%
N/A	13%
Recreational	10%
Medical	8%
Work	5%
Social Services	3%
Senior Center	3%
Other	2%

The survey responses provide local area information on destinations that individuals in the rural areas of Lexington and Richland counties would like to access. Based on the responses, also identified were some locations that respondents listed as currently having service through The COMET’s public transit services. For these locations, community outreach and education may assist in helping increase community mobility, as discussed further in Section 4.

Information Dissemination

The information distribution activities selected for the study included the production and distribution of a project newsletter, posting information to the CMCOG website, and mailing out nearly 2,000 surveys to churches located in Lexington County and Lower Richland County, particularly the Hopkins community. The survey described in the previous section was also available online using Survey Monkey and by telephone to accommodate respondents without internet access. The website link and telephone number (with local area code) to access the project survey were included in the project newsletter and on the CMCOG website. The results of the online and telephone surveys were combined with the results from the other various surveying efforts and were presented comprehensively in this section of the report.

Section 4: Identification of Unmet Needs

This section reviews the unmet needs in the study area based on public input, technical analyses of demographic data and major destinations, and a review of transportation providers in the study area. Map 11 presents the places of interest, including major employers in the area for the purpose of identifying transportation needs outside of The COMET service area, and the ¾-mile door-to-door paratransit service area. Also presented in Appendix E are two additional maps that were used to complete the analysis of unmet needs. The maps present a geographic illustration of previous DART paratransit trip denials and the distribution of churches outside of the fixed-route network, respectively.

Relevant planning efforts for each of the areas within the study area were also reviewed to identify any transportation barriers based on the analyses and assessments of previous studies. Many of the cities, towns, and other unincorporated communities in the study area are planning for future growth that is both pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly while still trying to deal with built environments that are oriented towards automobile use rather than transit. As these communities strive to create transit-oriented development and adequately meet the needs of residents and visitors, the following transportation gaps and barriers should be addressed.

Lexington County Transportation Needs

The needs described in this section are specific to the Lexington County portion of the study area. Based on the review of transportation providers in the area, there are many private companies available to provide taxi or chauffer service. There is also The COMET fixed-route network and corresponding complementary paratransit service within ¾-mile of those routes in Columbia, Cayce, West Columbia, and Irmo. Human services agencies, including Day Break Adult Daycare, Senior Express of Midlands, and Care by Generation, offer limited transportation service to seniors and individuals with disabilities who do not have transportation available and need access to medical appointments in and around Columbia. The remainder of this section describes the needs by geographic area within Lexington County.

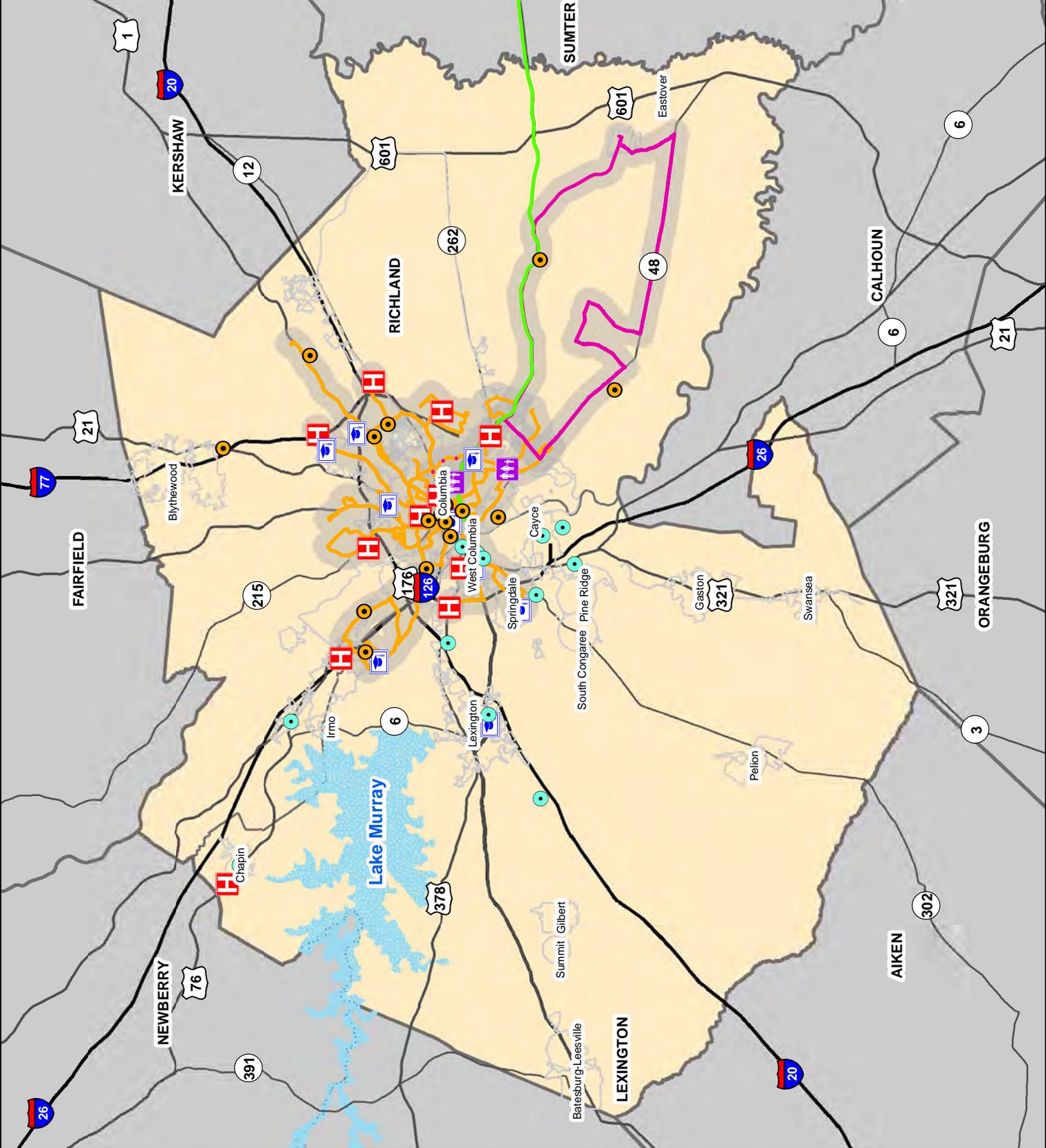
Batesburg-Leesville/Summit/Gilbert/Lexington

Needs in the Batesburg-Leesville and Lexington areas include commuter transit service between Batesburg-Leesville, the Town of Lexington, and Columbia. There are currently no public transportation options available in this area and the nearby towns of Summit and Gilbert. The assessment of transit orientation in this area revealed high and medium TOI block groups in Batesburg-Leesville and medium TOI block groups in Lexington, indicating the presence of a traditional market for transit service in these areas. The demographic maps also show that the population in the Town of Batesburg-Leesville has a higher minority population and lower household incomes in comparison to the other areas in Lexington County.



Study Area Places of Interest

- Lexington Major Employers 
- Richland Major Employers 
- Community Services 
- Educational Facility 
- Medical Facility 
- The COMET Routes 
- Sumter to Columbia VanPool 
- The COMET 3/4-Mile Buffer 



Several major employers are located near I-20 in the western portion of Lexington County and outside of the existing service area for The COMET, including US Food Service, Michelin, Southeastern Freight Lines, and the Lexington County School District One. There are also places of interest in Lexington County outside of the fixed-route network, including Lexington Medical Center and the Lexington County Library. Survey respondents from this area indicated that they would like transportation services for intra-city trips and trips between Batesburg-Leesville and Lexington, as well as service to Gilbert and to West Columbia. Some survey respondents from Columbia also indicated needing reverse commute transportation to the Town of Lexington.

Cayce/West Columbia/Springdale

There are two existing bus routes provided by The COMET in this area: Route 26 in West Columbia and Route 28 in Cayce. These routes provide connections to the Lexington Medical Center and Midlands Technical College Airport campus. These routes also serve a large portion of the residential areas in proximity to the routes. Within West Columbia and the area east of Cayce, there are several medium TOI block groups, thus indicating that there are potential transit users residing in this area.



This geographic area contains several major employers, with some of them located outside of the fixed-route system, including SCANA Corporation, Harsco, Amazon, and Nephron. There is a need for

transportation service connecting the surrounding communities with job opportunities at these and other major employers.

Chapin/Irmo/St. Andrews

The Newberry County Council on Aging in coordination with SCDOT operates an express route with a stop at the Exxon gas station in Chapin before continuing to Columbia. While the express route service is available to provide connectivity with Columbia, there is no transportation providing local circulation within Chapin and there are no interim stops between Chapin, Irmo, and St. Andrews. Therefore, there is a need for a service that will connect Chapin with Columbia, but also provide access to the nearby communities with the same transportation needs. The existing express route service is also limited with only one AM trip to Columbia and one PM return trip to Chapin.



The Town of Irmo is located in both Richland and Lexington counties, but is included in this section and grouped with the needs of Chapin and St. Andrews (also located in Richland County). The Irmo and St. Andrews areas ranked among the highest requested destinations based on the results of the community surveying effort. The general area encompassing St. Andrews and Irmo is currently covered by two of The COMET's bus routes, but also includes many shopping opportunities and a high propensity for transit use. In addition to The COMET service, there is also limited transportation service available to seniors and individuals with disabilities provided by Harbison Wheels, a non-profit

organization. The Harbison Wheels service includes wheelchair-equipped vehicles and is operated by trained volunteers.

Lexington County School District Five is listed as one of Lexington County's major employers and is located just north of Irmo and outside of the transit network. Transportation service with additional stops along the Newberry express bus route and additional run times during both peak periods would provide access to employers for both persons residing in the outlying areas and persons from the Columbia area in need of reverse commute transportation service.

Pelion/Gaston/Swansea



There are no existing public transportation services in the Pelion, Gaston, or Swansea areas. Both Gaston and Swansea are located along Highway 321 in the southern portion of Lexington County with Census blocks showing medium propensity for traditional transit use. Survey respondents from Gaston and Swansea indicated needs for transportation services to West Columbia, Cayce, and Lexington, as well as connections between the towns of Gaston and Swansea. There were a limited number of survey responses received from the residents of Pelion, but those respondents noted that their family members assist with meeting their transportation needs. Most of the trips from Pelion were to church, the grocery located in Red Bank, and the Walmart located along Highway 6.

Pine Ridge/South Congaree

There is one major employer (National Distributing) in this area located just outside of Pine Ridge. The Town of Pine Ridge has a slightly higher median household income in comparison to other areas in Lexington County. Survey respondents from this area indicated a need for bike racks and storage areas on the buses. Most respondents also need to access destinations in Columbia.

Census block groups in South Congaree and just west of South Congaree have a medium level of transit orientation. Based on public outreach, the transportation needs in South Congaree include trips for medical and religious purposes along Fish Hatchery Road and Highway 6. Some residents from this area also need special transportation services with the ability to accommodate walkers.

Richland County Transportation Needs



Richland County transportation providers include private providers for taxi and chauffeur type trips, The COMET, Senior Express of Midlands, Care by Generation, Transport Care Service, Northeast Wheels, and Harbison Wheels. Senior Express of Midlands and Care by Generation offer limited transportation service to seniors and individuals with disabilities who do not have transportation available and need access to medical appointments in and around Columbia. Transport Care Service provides non-emergency medical trips in Richland County. Northeast Wheels operates lift-equipped vehicles for seniors with no other safe and affordable transportation available and living near northeast Columbia.

The territories for this service include Baptist Medical, Palmetto Heath of Richland, Providence Northeast, and Providence Downtown. While specific to the Irmo and St. Andrews area, Harbison Wheels also provides trips for seniors and individuals with disabilities in need of transportation to medical appointments and other local businesses. The remainder of this section describes Richland County's transportation needs by geographic area.

Northeast Richland County/Blythewood/Killian

The Town of Blythewood is automobile dependent and does not have existing transit service. According to the Town's Master Plan, the vision for the future is a more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environment with a focus on transit-oriented development. The Town would like to incorporate alternative modes of transportation that would support its plans to reduce traffic congestion, improve east-west connectivity, and provide transit options between Blythewood and Columbia for residents and visitors. There are also several churches in northeast Richland County that may benefit from the addition of transit services in this area, including Shady Grove AME, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Mt. Seir Baptist Church, and New Free Hope Independent Church.

Killian is located in northeast Richland just south of Blythewood and has a high transit orientation for traditional transit users. Within Killian, there is a senior center, a Walmart Supercenter, and a distribution center. Many survey respondents chose shopping at the Walmart in Killian as one of the destinations that they need to visit.

Lower Richland County



Lower Richland is comprised of Hopkins, Gadsden, and the Town of Eastover. Based on the survey effort completed as part of this study, respondents indicated Eastover and Hopkins as places with the greatest transportation needs, including both intra-city trips and inter-city trips, mostly traveling along Garners Ferry Road. This area contains block groups with very high propensity for transit use. There are high minority block groups throughout lower Richland and areas with median household income between \$20,000 and \$40,000. In addition, one block group within Eastover reflects a median age between 51 and 65.

The COMET currently operates the Route 47 in Eastover and the ReFlex Route 62 in the Hopkins area. However, there remains a need for additional public transportation service to shopping venues along Garners Ferry Road, churches in the Eastover area, and medical appointments in Columbia. One participant during the public outreach process noted that circulation within the Town of Eastover is not as great of a transportation need in comparison to gaining access to transportation services from Eastover to goods and services outside of the town, specifically in Columbia. However, despite this contention, the overall survey results indicate that circulation within the city still remains a need for many people living in the community. Gadsden residents are primarily in need of transportation access to Garners Ferry Road for shopping at Walmart and Bi-Lo, and to access Gadsden Park Community Center for senior activities. A respondent from Gadsden also indicated desiring access to the commissary at Fort Jackson.

The mapping analysis of church locations presented in Appendix E illustrates that there are a number of churches in the lower Richland area and many of them are outside of the existing fixed-route and flex route services. The COMET transit services in this area currently operate only on weekdays, presenting a need for weekend transportation to access church services. A review of a sample of paratransit trip provided by The COMET for its Dial-A-Ride Transit (DART) service showed many trip request denials in the lower Richland area. Previously, the transit route in this area was operated by the Santee-Wateree Regional Transportation Authority (SWRTA). More recently, The COMET began operating the lower Richland route instead of the SWRTA. The need for door-to-door service in this area may have been reduced with transitioning the route to The COMET along with the provision of complementary paratransit service. The number of trip denials should be reviewed again in the future after more recent data becomes available from The COMET's operation of services in this area.

Arcadia Lakes/Forest Acres/Dentsville

While outside of Columbia, Arcadia Lakes, Forest Acres, and Dentsville are located within the existing service area of the COMET fixed-route network. This area was reviewed to determine any transportation needs that are not being met through the existing transportation services. The mapping analysis illustrates that there are medium and high TOI block groups located in this area along Highway 12 (Percival Road) near I-77 and I-20. Major destinations in this area include Columbia Place; shopping along Forest Drive (Walmart), Decker Boulevard, and Two Notch Road; and Fort Jackson. With the existing services provided by The COMET in this area, the need is not for intra-circulation but rather to provide residents of the outlying areas with access to the places of interest along Forest Drive, Two Notch Road, and Trenholm Road.

Conclusion



As shown in Section 3, the most frequently selected trip purpose for survey respondents was access to shopping. The needs review for the study area shows that many of the major shopping destinations are located near the City of Columbia, with most in close proximity to fixed-route services. Residents of the outlying areas without access to transportation are reliant on friends and family members, private transportation companies, and non-profit organizations to meet their daily mobility needs. The private transportation companies are often costly if not under an agreement for voucher acceptance, family members often cannot afford the time and/or expense of gas to provide trips on more than just an occasional basis, and the non-profit organizations reviewed in this section have strict eligibility requirements for the use of their transportation services and mostly provide medical-related trips anyway. Therefore, the identified needs indicate that a variety of transportation services will be needed for the residents in the outlying areas to be able to regularly access other outlying areas, employers outside of the transportation network, and shopping. The review of transportation needs by geographic location presented in this section is the basis to support the feasible alternatives that should be considered for the study area, as presented subsequently in Section 5.

Section 5: Feasible Alternatives

Many of the locations and services that were identified as needs are located within the existing COMET service area. However, many of the survey respondents reside outside of The COMET route network coverage, making the greatest need to plan future transportation services that will provide residents of the outlying areas connections with the existing transit network. Some of the needs may be met through new fixed-route services, while others in less dense areas with smaller populations are not supportive of traditional transit services and will need to be met through innovative approaches to coordination and mobility. Prior to implementation of any proposed transit routes, the alignment and schedule should be further studied by The COMET or the selected contract provider. The feasible alternatives that may be applicable to the two-county study area as a whole and the alternatives that have been identified for each of the communities in the study area are presented on Map 12 and described in detail in this section.

Study Area Alternatives

- Rail service from the outlying areas connecting with Columbia and potentially extending farther from Blythewood to Charlotte, North Carolina, and through Irmo, Lake Murray, Chapin, and Newberry to Greenville, South Carolina. The rail services would create regional connections creating economic development opportunities and job access throughout the state. Rail service from Columbia to Blythewood would operate parallel to or along I-77 based on right-of-way availability to Farrow Road, while rail service from Columbia to Chapin would operate along or parallel to I-26 also based on right-of-way availability and further study.
- With many of the interstates in the study area experiencing congestion and planned expansions, another lower cost alternative would be the provision of buses on the roadway shoulders. This lower cost option for express or bus rapid transit can be accommodated by modifying the shoulders during roadway work without having to add additional lanes. Allowing the buses to operate on the shoulders during periods of congestion would allow for the buses to by-pass slower traffic, thereby helping to increase the attractiveness of the transit service for commuters over the private automobile. Permitting buses on the shoulders would require coordination with SCDOT and possible revisions to the South Carolina State Law. Proposed options for buses along the shoulders are from Columbia to Blythewood along I-77 to Farrow Road and from Columbia to Chapin along I-26. These services would provide an alternative to the more costly rail option. Bus on shoulder programs are being utilized throughout the U.S. in various regions of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois, Kansas, California, and Washington.

- To provide additional transit options in the outlying areas to assist in meeting the needs of the transportation disadvantaged riders, voucher programs may be further explored to coordinate with private transportation providers and/or human services agencies. These transportation providers would become part of a network that accepts vouchers provided by the human services agencies (i.e., Senior Resources). An agreement would need to be executed with each transportation providers to ensure acceptance of the voucher, and consideration should be given to finding providers with accessible vehicles.
- A program using volunteer drivers to offer trips to older adults living outside of the paratransit service area would provide transportation service where there is currently a need and gap in services. Using personal vehicles or vehicles procured with grant funds, volunteer operators may be trained and provide trips on designated days to registered users of the system. Trips may include life sustaining activities, medical appointments, and other supportive services that would assist the individual with living independently. Based on the needs identified in the survey effort summarized in Section 3, implementation of a volunteer driver vanpool service providing trips to/from senior centers on Tuesday and Thursday would provide a benefit to the communities included in the study area. Some of the senior centers in the study area are located in the Town of Lexington, Swansea, Gadsden, and Gaston.

This service would provide a low cost option to persons with paratransit transportation needs who have requests that are either beyond the existing service area or outside of the service hours. Some of the areas that have been identified based on requests include Irmo, Sumter, Columbia, Elgin, Hopkins, Cayce, Lexington, and West Columbia. Similarly this type of volunteer driver service could benefit residents in the rural areas by providing service on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings for access to religious activities. While a volunteer driver program would have many benefits, this program would also require administrative oversight and reservation and scheduling support. There are many options for establishing and monitoring a volunteer driver program, some of which are identified below.

- Space Coast Area Transit administers a volunteer driver program that recruits retired bus and paratransit drivers to volunteer their time and utilizes agency-owned vehicles and an agency reservationist to provide trips outside of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) corridor based on vehicle and volunteer availability.
- Independent Transportation Network has a successful volunteer driver program where drivers utilize their personal vehicle to provide trips. Vehicles are inspected by an automobile shop partnering in the effort to ensure that vehicles are safe to transport patrons. Background checks are also completed on volunteers for safety and liability purposes. Users of the service make reservations and are scheduled for their trip. Patrons pay a registration fee to be a member of the service and then a nominal fee per mile for service. Volunteers are able to earn miles for later in life when their own ability or desire to transport themselves is gone.

- Employee/employer vanpools are an option for some of the major employers that are located outside of the existing service area (shown on Map 11 in Section 4). These vanpools may be coordinated through a rideshare program to identify persons living and working in close proximity. Various providers will lease vanpools to organizations for monthly payments that include maintenance of the vehicles. This is a low cost option that could fill a transportation gap for residents in outlying areas needing access to employment opportunities in other outlying areas or residents of Columbia that need reverse commute transportation to those same employers located outside of the existing COMET service area (e.g., Nephron and Amazon located south of Cayce). Vanpools could originate from designated park-and-ride lots that are established in coordination with the identified cities and towns.

The IRS Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefits law includes a Commuter Choice provision to encourage employers to offer transportation benefits in exchange for tax benefits. Under the federal commuter choice program, the employer may cover the full cost of the tax-free benefit on transit, vanpool, and parking up to \$255 per month starting January 1st, 2016.

- The outlying areas in Lexington and Richland County could benefit from the establishment of park-and-ride lots in combination with express routes to Columbia and/or connecting with the existing fixed-route system. Many of the points of interest that were indicated as priority trips for the survey respondents are within the existing COMET service area; therefore, the needs focus on providing mobility options and access for residents of the outlying areas to the existing network. Filling the existing gaps in transportation will help to achieve the communities' planning goals to improve the environment for pedestrians. Potential park-and-ride lot locations will need to be coordinated with the jurisdictions and may include:
 - Columbiana Centre (Irmo)
 - I-26 (Chapin)
 - Lexington Medical Center (Batesburg-Leesville)
 - Town of Lexington
 - US 1 and Sunset Boulevard (West Columbia)
 - I-77 and Farrow Road near Providence Hospital (Columbia)
 - Blythewood Park (Blythewood)
- As the cities and towns within the study area move towards complete streets and pedestrian and bicycle-friendly development, bike share programs should be considered for implementation. Bike sharing would help improve circulation within the communities and provide an additional resource to access some of the existing transit services when those communities are outside of the existing network but in close proximity. Allowing passengers to use the bicycle as part of a membership program and leave them off at their final destination would also reduce issues with bike rack capacity on the buses, when bicycles are needed for the first and last mile of the trip.
- Education programs would ensure that the existing services are fully utilized prior to adding additional services. An education program could also reduce duplication by informing the general

public and agencies of current mobility options. These programs should be easy to implement and may include the following:

- Bi-annual Joint Transportation Forums – Forums held at transit accessible facilities and encompass both public and private transit providers in Richland and Lexington counties.
- Senior Center Programs – Transit knowledgeable staff should conduct informal discussion group programs periodically at major senior centers identified in each county. Discussion group topics may include the availability of existing paratransit and fixed-route services and available travel training programs.
- Employer Training – Efforts should focus on providing employers with information regarding matching shift work with existing transit schedules and vanpools. Information should also be provided to employers on the IRS Qualified Transportation Fringe Benefits law, specifically the Commuter Choice provision.
- Through coordination with CMCOG and The COMET, human services agencies, churches, and non-profit medical centers may acquire grant-funded vehicles that would allow those organizations to provide trips to their own clients and reduce reliance on the public transportation system. Based on the densities and distances between communities in the outlying areas of Lexington and Richland counties, many areas are not supportive of traditional transit services and will require agency vanpools or volunteer driver services to improve mobility to residents in these areas. Acquiring vehicles to provide these services may meet the needs of the smaller communities with reduced capital and operating expense.

Lexington County

The feasible transportation alternatives that have been identified for Lexington County based on the needs described in Section 4 are presented in this section.

Batesburg-Leesville

- An express route providing connectivity from Batesburg-Leesville and Lexington to Columbia along US 1 would provide a transportation service for commuters accessing employment opportunities. Potential routing for the service may begin at the Lexington Medical Center to provide a central hub where commuters may access the route or another park-and-ride location identified by the town. The express service would also include an additional stop along US 1 near the intersection of Peach Festival Road to provide additional access to the residents of the towns of Gilbert and Summit. The express route service would operate during peak hours only, providing a morning trip to Columbia and evening return trips to the Batesburg-Leesville area. While this service may be operated by The COMET, opportunities for contracting service with an operator in the Batesburg-Leesville area would be optimal to avoid the additional cost associated with deadhead from the Columbia area.

- Circulator service between Town Center Square, the future Batesburg-Leesville Industrial Park, Batesburg Business District, and Leesville Business District would enhance mobility within the town and provide connectivity for nearby residential areas. The circulator would also connect at the Lexington Medical Center to the express route.

Cayce

- The establishment of an employee vanpool program operated in the City of Cayce and nearby areas would provide transportation access to employment opportunities and possible reverse commutes depending on the origination point of the vanpools. Potential major employers in the area that may participate in the program include Amazon, Nephron, SCANA, Carolina Gas Transmission, and others. The program could allow a group of employees residing in the same geographic area to lease a van, with a designated employee operator. The major employers may opt to participate in the cost of the vanpool lease as part of an employee benefits program.
- New fixed-route transit service from Amazon and Nephron to The COMET transfer plaza in Columbia would provide reverse commute transportation for employees residing in Columbia. The route alignment would extend north on 12th Street to US 1 and over to the Downtown Transfer Plaza. This new route provides transfer options with other routes connecting at the Transfer Plaza, allowing job access for residents throughout the study area. The fixed-route should operate on weekdays with an AM, mid-day, and PM trip operating as a commuter bus service.

Chapin & Irmo

- Rail service providing connectivity from Columbia to Chapin along I-26, with potential to provide regional connections with the surrounding counties and Greenville, South Carolina. The rail service would begin as a commuter train operating weekdays from 6 AM to 9 PM. With the implementation of rail service, feeder bus networks would be reviewed to determine the needs for connecting nearby residents and uses.
- As an alternative to the more costly rail service, an express route along I-26 from The COMET Transfer Center in Columbia to Chapin with potential future extensions beyond the study area creating regional connectivity with adjacent Newberry County and Greenville, South Carolina. This route would operate during the AM and PM peak periods and also provide stops at park-and-ride locations in Irmo near the Columbiana Centre and near the Walmart on Harbison Boulevard.
- The existing COMET Routes 34 and 34B provide circulation within the Irmo/St. Andrews area during the week and on the weekend with 60-minute frequencies. These existing routes will connect with the proposed express route and provide opportunities for circulation within Irmo/St. Andrews.

Swansea & Gaston

- New fixed-route service along Highway 321 (Southbound Road) from Swansea stopping in the center of Gaston near the Dollar General and continuing on to provide transportation service to

the area where Amazon and Nephron are located. The fixed-route should operate on weekdays with an AM, mid-day, and PM trip operating as a commuter bus service.

Gilbert & Summit

- A voucher program established with a designated private transportation provider or non-profit human services agency would provide mobility options to the residents of the Town of Gilbert. The town is located between the towns of Lexington and Batesburg-Leesville and within close proximity to the Town of Summit. Both Summit and Gilbert are small towns. There are elementary, middle, and high schools located within the Town of Gilbert as well as churches, government offices, a post office, and other services located within both towns. However, residents could benefit from additional transportation services to shopping and other activities. The voucher program would allow residents to use transportation services and pay with vouchers at a pre-negotiated rate to avoid higher costs associated with taxi cab trips or varying fares for other service. Voucher prices and acceptance agreements would need to be negotiated in advance as well as a system set up for distribution of the vouchers.
- Through a reservation system, vanpool volunteer drivers may provide trips to the residents of Gilbert and Summit based on the availability of services and requests. Volunteer operated transportation services may be alternated by members of the community and may use vehicles purchased with assistance from The COMET or CMCOG. If operators use their own vehicles, the establishment of a mileage reimbursement program would be another option to provide compensation for the trip. Based on the densities in this area, the vanpool program would be a feasible option for improving mobility and providing connections with goods and services in the nearby towns of Batesburg-Leesville and Lexington.
- The proposed route operating from the Town of Batesburg-Leesville would include an additional stop half way between the Town of Batesburg-Leesville and the Town of Lexington. The stop could be located along US 1 near the intersection at Peach Festival Road. This stop would provide access to the City of Columbia and the Town of Lexington. The vehicle used to provide this service should be equipped with bicycle racks as bikes would be another option used to access the bus stop along US 1. Volunteer drivers using mileage reimbursement programs may also provide trips from Gilbert and Summit to the express route service.

Town of Lexington

- An express route providing connectivity from the Town of Lexington to Columbia along US 1 would provide a transportation service for commuters accessing employment opportunities. A park-and-ride lot will be established as part of this route within the Town of Lexington at a location to be determined by the town. The route could also extend west to the Lexington Medical Center in Batesburg-Leesville. This service would operate during peak hours only providing a morning trip to Columbia and evening return trips. While this service may be operated by The COMET, opportunities for contracting the service with an operator in the Batesburg-Leesville area would

be optimal to avoid the additional cost associated with deadhead from the Columbia area. Another option to assist with reducing the operating cost associated with this alternative would be to establish a hub at the Lexington County Administration Building to avoid deadhead miles.

- Flex route service within the Town of Lexington would provide connectivity linking residential areas with shopping, schools, the Lexington County Administrative building, the courthouse, Lexington Medical Center, churches, and other recreational activities. The flex route service area would cover a five-mile radius from the Lexington Walmart and the service will pick up passengers at this point hourly while circulating to pick up passengers with reservations all other times. This proposed service would also connect with the proposed express route from Batesburg-Leesville heading to Columbia. The proposed hours of operation on the flex route are weekdays and weekends from 7 AM to 6 PM.

Pelion

- A voucher program established with a designated private transportation provider or non-profit human services agency would provide mobility options to the residents of Pelion. The voucher program would allow residents to use transportation services and pay with vouchers at a pre-negotiated rate. Voucher prices and acceptance agreements would need to be negotiated in advance as well as a system set up for distribution of the vouchers.

Pine Ridge & South Congaree

- New fixed-route service beginning in Pine Ridge providing transportation service to the elementary and middle schools located along Fish Hatchery Road with the alignment continuing along Pine Ridge Road to South Congaree. The route alignment would extend north on Edmund Highway and west on Boston Avenue serving the nearby schools, Midlands Technical College Airport campus, churches, and the airport. The route will also run along Platt Springs Road and south on Emanuel Church Road to South Congaree and Pine Ridge. This route would also provide connections with the existing COMET Route 28.

Springdale

- Springdale transportation options include The COMET existing Route 28. Mobility in this area will increase with the implementation of the proposed Pine Ridge/South Congaree route for residents wanting to commute from Springdale to churches and other services in the more remote areas. This area would also benefit from the voucher programs and volunteer vanpool services described previously in this section as a recommendation for the entire study area.

West Columbia

- The proposed Batesburg-Leesville/Lexington express route to Columbia will also traverse West Columbia, providing additional service along US 1 where there is no service since the existing Route 26 diverts from US 1 to Holland Street. The proposed stop may be located near Sunset

Boulevard near Habitat for Humanity Restore and Columbia Farms. With the designation of a park-and-ride location in this area, the express route could also provide trips to passengers in need of reverse commute transportation for job opportunities in Lexington or Batesburg-Leesville.

Richland County Alternatives

The feasible transportation alternatives identified for Richland County based on the needs described in Section 4 are presented in this section.

Blythewood

- Rail service providing connectivity from Columbia to Blythewood along Farrow Road and I-77, with potential to provide regional connections with the surrounding counties and Charlotte, North Carolina. The rail service would begin as a commuter train operating weekdays from 6 AM to 9 PM. With the implementation of rail service, feeder bus networks would be reviewed to determine the needs for connecting nearby residents and uses.
- As an alternative to rail service, an express route providing connectivity from Columbia to Blythewood along Farrow Road and I-77 would provide a transportation service for commuters accessing employment opportunities and visitors to the town. With the implementation of this service, the town should coordinate to establish a park-and-ride location with the potential location at Blythewood Park. The express service would also include an additional stop along I-77 in Killian at the Walmart, where it could connect with the proposed Killian flex route. The express route service would operate during peak hours only providing a morning trip to Columbia and evening return trips. While this service may be operated by The COMET, opportunities for contracting service with an operator in the Blythewood area would be optimal to avoid the additional cost associated with deadhead from the Columbia area. A satellite operations facility could also be explored, which could reduce the amount of deadhead if The COMET were to provide the service.

Killian

- Flex route service within Killian, creating a transportation option from the residential areas to the Walmart. The service area will extend five miles from the Walmart on Killian Road and will include Killian Park, high TOI residential areas, churches, schools, medical facilities, and other shopping opportunities. The service will pick up passengers at the Walmart hourly while circulating to pick up passengers with reservations all other times. This proposed service would also connect with the proposed express route from Columbia to Blythewood. The proposed hours of operation on the flex route are weekdays and weekends from 7 AM to 6 PM.

Lower Richland (Hopkins, Gadsden, and Eastover)

Some of the greatest needs identified through the public outreach process were in the Hopkins, Gadsden, and Eastover areas. The Lower Richland area has three existing COMET services including the Route 401 along Garners Ferry Road, Route 47 to Eastover, and the ReFlex Route 62 in Hopkins.

- Improvements to the existing COMET transportation network that would improve the services provided to the Lower Richland area are listed below.
 - Extend the service area for the ReFlex Route 62 to include Patterson and to include the Walmart on Garners Ferry.
 - Add weekend service to Route 47 and ReFlex Route 62.
 - Increase the frequency on Route 401 (along Garners Ferry) to 30 minutes.
 - Increase the frequency on Route 47 to 60 minutes all day and remove the mid-day break.
- A voucher program established with a designated transportation provider would provide mobility options to the residents of Lower Richland (Hopkins, Gadsden, and Eastover). The voucher program would allow residents to use transportation services and pay with vouchers at a pre-negotiated rate. Voucher prices and acceptance agreements would need to be negotiated in advance as well as a system set up for distribution of the vouchers. The voucher program would help residents to reach destinations outside of The COMET network in an area where densities are not supportive of fixed-route transit service, while also filling the gaps in the existing transportation services.
- With the implementation of a mileage reimbursement program, friends, relatives, or neighbors with access to vehicles would be able to provide trips to residents in Lower Richland without the expense of gas. Seniors, persons with disabilities, and other residents without access to transportation may coordinate with volunteer drivers in the communities for trips to shopping, medical, etc. This program would require management from The COMET or CMOG and tracking of trip logs from the drivers. Other requirements should be established as part of this program and may include eligibility requirements based on age, access to vehicles, residing outside of the transit service area, or the need to access facilities outside of the transit service area.
- Through a vehicle acquisition program, churches located in Richland County would be able to provide lower cost trips to their congregations with only the expense of an operator or the commitment from a volunteer driver. This program would be beneficial in the Gadsden and Eastover areas where there is currently no transit service on the weekends. Potential central locations for church pickups might include the post office on Bluff Road in Gadsden and the library in Eastover.

Arcadia Lakes, Forest Acres, and Dentsville

- The Arcadia Lakes, Forest Acres, and Dentsville areas have access to the existing COMET service; however, the survey effort indicated a need for transportation service along Trenholm Road. A new fixed-route service from Farrow Road near the South University-Columbia campus, south on

Parklane Road to Trenholm Road and Beltline would provide additional connectivity in this area. This route would also connect with the Northeast Richland Flex Route 13 extending to Denny Terrace and Spring Valley, Routes 5 and 15 along Forest Drive, Route 16 along Two Notch Road, and Route 55X from SandHills to downtown Columbia along 277.

Lake Murray & St. Andrews

- Residents of Lake Murray would benefit from the rail or express route service proposed along I-26 from Columbia to Chapin and described in more detail in the Lexington County section describing potential alternatives for Chapin and Irmo. This route would traverse both Richland and Lexington counties with proposed park-and-ride lots off of I-26 near Chapin and at the Columbiana Centre. Lake Murray is located approximately half way between the towns of Chapin and Irmo and residents may choose to access either of the park-and-ride lots suggested to use the proposed service.
- St. Andrews is located south of Irmo and has existing transit service available using The COMET Routes 34 and 34B. These routes provides circulation within the Irmo/St. Andrews area during the week and on the weekend with 60-minute frequencies. These existing routes will connect with the proposed express route and provide opportunities for circulation within Irmo/St. Andrews.

Conclusion

Based on the review of transportation services available and the needs identified throughout the study development process, the recommendations in this section are proposed and prioritized as Good, Better, and Best in Section 6 of this report. While implementation of all transportation alternatives recommended in this section would provide enhanced mobility in the more rural and outlying areas, based on funding and ease of implementation, services will need to be selected for phased-implementation as a progression to fill the transportation gaps in the study area. Recommendations for implementation follow the prioritization process and are included in Section 7.

Section 6: Prioritization Process

The feasible alternatives described in Section 5 were each evaluated against a series of criteria developed to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does the alternative provide service to the highest priority service area (based on the survey)?
- To what extent does the alternative serve transit dependent riders?
- To what extent does the alternative serve choice transit riders?
- To what extent does the alternative support community transit-oriented development goals?
- To what extent does the alternative provide access to major destinations?
- To what extent does the alternative serve areas with a higher TOI?
- To what extent does the alternative help reduce identified gaps in transportation services?
- What is the relative ease of implementation?
- To what extent does the alternative extend The COMET's existing service area?

As part of this process, points were awarded for each criterion based on the following scale: 1 point = "good," 2 points = "better," and 3 points = "best." So, for each given alternative, professional judgment was used to assign one of these three point levels to each of the ten criteria. Once summed, the total points awarded to each transportation alternative were then used to prioritize the alternatives within each geographic area (i.e., for the study area as a whole, for Lexington County, and for Richland County) using the same "good," "better," and "best" priority designations. Table 11 presents the results of this evaluation process used to prioritize the feasible alternatives.

Study Area Prioritized Alternatives

As shown in Table 11, the alternatives that ranked as "best" for the study area as a whole are the employee vanpool program, the volunteer driver vanpool program, and the regional rail service. These alternatives ranked the highest because they provide regional connectivity, would fill existing gaps in transportation service, and would provide service in high transit orientation areas to transit dependent individuals. The rail service ranked high because of its potential to connect the region and serve both the traditional and choice transit markets; however, the rail alternative ranked below the other two because it would be cost prohibitive and not as easy to implement in comparison to the two vanpool programs. Additional details relating to the costs and strategies for consideration during a potential implementation phase are presented in Section 7.

The alternatives that are considered "better" include voucher programs, grant-funded vehicles, and park-and-ride lots. Voucher programs will help meet the latent mobility needs, provide transportation options to the transit dependent populations, and are easier to implement in comparison to the other projects. Park-and-ride lots may not be as easy to implement, but will offer more regional connectivity for both transit markets. The grant-funded vehicle program will allow for agencies to provide much needed trips without the financial burden of obtaining capital funding for the purchase of a vehicle. Both the voucher programs and the grant-funded vehicles will provide transportation options for transit dependent riders, but are not likely to attract choice riders or have an impact on regional connectivity.

Table 11: Feasible Transportation Alternatives Prioritization Matrix

Alternative	Highest Priority Service Area (Survey Based)	Serves Transit Dependent Riders	Serves Choice Transit Riders	Supports Community TOD Goals	Provides Access to Major Destinations	High TOI Service Area	Helps Reduce Identified Gaps	Ease of Implementation	Provides Regional Connectivity	Extends Existing COMET Service Area	Rank (within Geographic Area)
Study Area Transportation Alternatives											
Buses on Interstate Shoulders	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	7
Voucher Program	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	4
Volunteer Driver Vanpool Program	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	2
Employee Vanpool Program	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1
Park-and-Ride Lots	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
Bike Share Program	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	8
Education Programs	○	●	○	○	○	○	●	●	○	○	9
Regional Rail Service	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	2
Grant-Funded Vehicles	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	5
Lexington County Transportation Alternatives											
Batesburg-Leesville Express Route	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1
Batesburg-Leesville Circulator Service	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4
Cayce Employee Vanpool Program	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	5
Cayce Fixed-Route Service	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
Chapin & Irmo Express Route	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1
Swansea & Gaston Fixed-Route	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	10
Gilbert & Summit Voucher Program	○	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	10
Gilbert & Summit Volunteer Driver Vanpool Program	○	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
Town of Lexington Express Route	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3
Town of Lexington Flex Route	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
Pelion Voucher Program	○	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	10

Table 11: Transportation Alternatives Prioritization Matrix (Continued)

Alternative	Highest Priority Service Area (Survey Based)	Serves Transit Dependent Riders	Serves Choice Transit Riders	Supports Community TOD Goals	Provides Access to Major Destinations	High TOI Service Area	Helps Reduce Identified Gaps	Ease of Implementation	Provides Regional Connectivity	Extends Existing COMET Service Area	Rank (within Geographic Area)
Lexington County Transportation Alternatives											
Pine Ridge & South Congaree Fixed-Route	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
Lexington Medical Center Batesburg-Leesville Park-and-Ride Lot	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4
Chapin and Columbiana Centre Park-and-Ride Lots	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4
Park-and-ride at US 1 & Sunset Blvd in West Columbia	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
Park-and-ride in the Town of Lexington	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
Richland County Transportation Alternatives											
Blythewood Express Route	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1
Killian Flex Route	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4
Lower Richland Improvements to Existing COMET Services	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1
Lower Richland Voucher Program	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	5
Lower Richland Friends and Family Reimbursement Program	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	5
Lower Richland Volunteer Driver Vanpool Program	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	○	5
Trenholm Road Fixed-Route Service	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1
Blythewood Park Park-and-Ride	○	●	●	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	9
I-77 & Farrow Road near Providence Hospital Park-and-ride	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	8

Description	Good	Better	Best
Icon	○	●	●

These programs also are likely to be operated by private transportation providers and non-profit organizations; therefore, relieving some of the financial burden associated with additional deadhead miles for public transit providers located inside the more urbanized areas (such as The COMET). Alternatives that are considered “good” but not better or best are buses operating on the interstate shoulders, bike share programs, and education programs. Each of these options would improve mobility in the study area and are feasible for consideration as implementable concepts, but may not be the most optimal choices for providing access and filling the current gaps in transportation throughout the study area. Buses operating on the interstate shoulders ranked higher than the other two alternatives considered “good” because the service would provide connectivity for transit users and help meet transportation needs; however, the ease of implementation may not be as straightforward as the other options and the alternative will not contribute to establishing transit-oriented development, but rather will operate along the existing limited access roadway system. Also, the bus on shoulders program does not specifically address additional transportation for the rural area, but improves the efficiency of existing service operated along the interstate. However, it is important to recognize that the potential efficiency improvements and ability to attract more riders with implementation of the bus on shoulders program could provide some financial benefits that could then allow for extension of service to rural areas or savings that could be diverted to rural area transit services.

Lexington County Prioritized Alternatives

The good, better, and best alternatives for Lexington County are presented below in ordinal ranking.

- Batesburg-Leesville Express Route (Best)
- Chapin & Irmo Express Route (Best)
- Town of Lexington Express Route (Best)
- Batesburg-Leesville Circulator Service (Better)
- Cayce Employee Vanpool Program (Better)
- Cayce Fixed-Route Service (Better)
- Gilbert & Summit Volunteer Driver Vanpool Program (Better)
- Town of Lexington Flex Route (Better)
- Pine Ridge & South Congaree Fixed-Route Service (Better)
- Chapin & Columbiana Centre Park-and-Ride Lots (Better)
- Lexington Medical Center Batesburg-Leesville Park-and-Ride Lot (Better)
- Town of Lexington Park-and-Ride Lot (Better)
- West Columbia (US 1 & Sunset Boulevard) Park-and-Ride Lot (Better)
- Swansea & Gaston Fixed-Route Service (Good)
- Gilbert & Summit Voucher Program (Good)
- Pelion Voucher Program (Good)

The highest priority (“best”) projects ranked in that order based on the ability to meet transportation needs and provide regional connectivity. These projects are also less difficult to implement and the cost considerations that factor into the scoring are summarized in more detail in the next section of this

document. The Chapin & Irmo express route would provide service in one the highest priority areas based on the survey results, contributing to its rank as one of the best projects for consideration.

Some reasons contributing to the lower scores for those projects that are considered “good,” but scored lower than the others based on the criteria include the following: the services are planned for an area that was not one of the most requested areas during the survey effort, the services are not designed for choice transit riders, and/or the services will not help to achieve the transit-oriented development goals that have been established in many of the towns’ planning documents.

Richland County Prioritized Alternatives

The good, better, and best alternatives for Richland County are presented below in ordinal ranking.

- Blythewood Express Route (Best)
- Lower Richland Improvements to Existing COMET Services (Best)
- Trenholm Road Fixed-Route Service (Best)
- Killian Flex Route (Better)
- Lower Richland Voucher Program (Good)
- Lower Richland Friends & Family Mileage Reimbursement Program (Good)
- Lower Richland Volunteer Driver Vanpool Program (Good)
- Blythewood Park Park-and-Ride Lot (Good)
- I-77 & Farrow Road near Providence Hospital Park-and-Ride Lot (Good)

The three projects in Richland County that scored the best all received the same total maximum points. Some of the reasons contributing to the alternatives ranking as best include improving regional connectivity, addressing existing gaps in transportation service, operating in high transit orientation areas, providing access to major destinations, and operating in some of the areas ranked among the highest priorities according to survey respondents. Additional considerations for moving forward with implementation of these projects are explained in the Implementation Plan presented in Section 7.

The lower scoring alternatives would still meet the identified needs in lower Richland County, serve transit dependent users, operate within high transit orientation areas, provide access to major destinations, and would be considered easier to implement. However, some of the contributing factors to the lower ranking for these projects are their inability to help the lower Richland area meet the goals to encourage transit-oriented development, where appropriate and not being located in a high priority service area according to survey results.

Conclusion

This prioritization process has been completed to assist CMCOG and the counties with identifying the top transportation improvement alternative priorities that should move forward, once further analysis is completed on the specific alternatives and funding is available. The prioritization ranking results in highlighting those projects that meet the greatest needs based on the established criteria; however, any subsequent implementation process also must factor in other criteria related to costs and ease of

implementation when developing timeframes for accomplishing each alternative. Some projects may rank as the “best” choice to achieve the communities’ goals, but phased-implementation will be needed due to the complexity of the alternative or its prohibitive up-front and/or ongoing cost. Section 7 includes more detail on the items that need to be considered before moving forward with the feasible alternatives regardless of the ranking identified.

Section 7: Implementation Plan

After determining the priority alternatives to meet the needs of the rural areas in the Central Midlands region, reviewing the estimated costs of the potential alternatives is an important next step for establishing whether the alternatives are financially feasible and, therefore, truly practical for consideration as implementable options. Financial feasibility can be reviewed from several aspects including overall initial cost to implement an alternative, timeframe to acquire funding, ability of invested monies to generate future revenue, capacity of a project to attract project partners to help offset cost, and ongoing cost of a proposed alternative. Herein, generally, initial capital and ongoing operating and maintenance (O&M) costs are considered to assess potential financial feasibility. It is important to note, however, that the costs provided below as part of the assessment of the feasible alternatives are planning-level cost estimates that simply provide a general “ballpark” amount for decision-making purposes. Further review of any specific alternative will be required to refine potential costs whenever it is determined that moving forward with implementation is warranted.

- **Rail service** – Rail service will be the most expensive of the alternatives to implement based on the capital cost of providing rail infrastructure (right of way, guideway and track, stations, and maintenance/storage facilities) and other capital needs (vehicles, technology, and signalization), as well as the significantly higher O&M cost of rail. Based on the Reconnecting America Transit Technologies Worksheet, commuter rail costs can range from approximately \$3-\$25 million per mile, generally, when existing track is utilized. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), sometimes utilized as a lower cost alternative to commuter rail, can range between \$4-\$40 million per mile in terms of start-up capital cost based on the same worksheets. Estimated capital costs will vary based on geographic area, length of rail line, amount of capital infrastructure needed, number of vehicles, and technology necessary to provide service. The draft *Moving The Midlands 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan* (LRTP) identifies peer city corridor costs averaging between \$80 million for the Camden Corridor to \$290 million for the Charlotte corridor. Annual operating costs for commuter rail and BRT services also run the gamut based on frequency and span of service. A key difference between commuter rail and BRT relates to operating speed, with commuter rail, on average, operating between 30-60 miles per hour and BRT traveling at much lower speeds, similar to fixed-route bus service. When BRT is operated in dedicated lanes, however, travel speeds can increase.

Prior to any major capital mass transit project moving forward, additional study will be required to develop a locally preferred alternative that meets Federal Transit Administration criteria to be eligible for federal funding. State funding will also be contingent on state level guidance.

- **Bus service** – It is estimated that bus service has an operational cost of approximately \$109 per revenue hour based on Fiscal Year 2013 National Transit Database (NTD) reporting. Most of the bus service recommended herein would operate during peak travel periods to provide access to

employment, but would, at a minimum, operate for approximately six hours per weekday. Based on such a minimum amount of service, a fixed-route is estimated to have an approximate annual O&M cost of \$165,000. In addition, with new service or extensions to existing service, the purchase of one or more additional spare vehicles may be necessary, which can add capital cost between \$350,000-\$600,000 depending on the bus vehicle size, configuration, and technology components desired. The COMET vehicles operate at approximately 12 miles per hour; therefore, extensions to existing routes can have both operating and capital cost impacts. Also, with regular fixed-route service, complementary paratransit service must also be provided at least within ¾-mile of the route in accordance with the ADA of 1990, as amended, which is an additional cost to consider when implementing any non-flex or deviated fixed-route service. According to the NTD, demand response trips in Fiscal Year 2013 cost approximately \$30 per trip.

- **Fixed-route service** – As described above, fixed-route service improvements that are greater than an extension of service hours or days of service can have both operating and capital costs. Annual O&M costs are estimated at \$165,000 for new routes with a 12-mile distance or less that operate on weekdays only for a minimum of six hours. Vehicle costs are estimated between \$350,000-\$600,000 per vehicle.
- **Express commuter bus service** – Express bus service costs are similar to fixed-route bus costs. The key difference is that express bus typically operates with limited stops to improve travel speeds and over longer distances than regular fixed-route service. Express service may feature more amenities on the bus and at stations due to the longer distance trip. Express service is typically operated during peak commuter travel times as opposed to fixed-route service that typically operates throughout the day. Express bus service can have higher passenger fares based on the distance traveled and on-board amenities provided. ADA paratransit service is not a requirement for express commuter bus service.
- **Flex service** – A hybrid service of fixed-route and demand response, flex service tends to have lower operating and capital costs. Typically smaller vehicles are utilized, which traverse a set area for providing transportation access. Service is usually planned to connect with fixed-route service, while also providing for scheduled pick-ups throughout the defined “flex” area. Operating costs for these services vary, but are more in line with paratransit cost per hour figures. It is estimated that based on demand response per-revenue-hour costs for Fiscal Year 2013 NTD reporting, flex service would average approximately \$67 per hour of service.
- **Voucher program** – Voucher program costs are unique in that they can be controlled by the amount of funding available, the per-mile reimbursement rate or negotiated trip rate, and the defined administrative and management cost. An example of a voucher program with 50 participants allotted 100 miles of travel per month for a year at the General Services Administration’s (GSA) current private automobile rate of \$0.575 per mile would cost \$34,500. Costs associated with a staff person to administer the program, management oversight, and other

miscellaneous operating expenses might be estimated at an additional \$75,000 per year. Based on this example, the overall annual program cost would be \$109,500. Since there is no capital cost associated with this program, implementation would be based on the identification of operating funding to start. Program participants would be provided the payment voucher once trips are completed/verified or vehicle owners providing trips can be paid once verification of the trip is completed. Another option for the voucher program is to negotiate a set rate per trip (mileage-based rates) and utilize registered transportation providers. A program participant is given a set number of trips that they can take per month with approved transportation providers. The trip can be scheduled directly with the transportation provider or through an agency that will provide a manifest to the transportation provider. The participant will provide the voucher to the transportation provider once the trip is completed or the agency administering the program will be responsible for paying the provider directly. An area can choose to start the program based on a set number of participants/transportation providers, allotting a set number of miles, and/or based on the total amount of funding to be utilized.

- **Vanpool program**– Vanpool programs are common programs where individuals with the same origins and destinations, or within close proximity for both trip ends, utilize a shared vehicle. Costs for vanpool programs vary based on the type/size of vehicle, maintenance, and insurance requirements, with an average cost ranging from as low as \$3,000 per year per vehicle up to \$25,000. The cost can be sponsored by an employer if an employer vanpool option is chosen or paid by the persons using the vanpool. Vanpool programs can be managed by public or private entities. Many vanpool programs rely on vehicles that are purchased by a public transportation provider to avoid having to add capital cost into the overall program cost for the employer or vanpool participants. Gas is not a covered expense and will need to be borne by the vanpool users or employer.

Carpooling is a similar option where shared rides are coordinated to increase overall mobility. There are many programs and websites that allow persons with vehicles and persons in need of a ride to coordinate transportation service. Since carpooling is at the sole discretion of the private automobile owner, the arrangements are not subject to prescribed program criteria and are encouraged as a mobility option, but not suggested as a potential alternative. As part of the education alternative, carpooling options should be discussed.

- **Volunteer driver program** – The volunteer driver program is recommended to increase mobility in the rural area by utilizing vehicles that are currently available to reduce overall program costs. Volunteers are recruited to drive vehicles and provide trips to specific areas or between predetermined locations as described in the Feasible Alternatives section of this report. This program has nominal cost if implemented with agencies and organizations that currently have vehicles. Costs primarily relate to operating the vehicle (gas, insurance, maintenance) and program administration. Some programs provide a stipend to volunteers as a way to

recruit/retain drivers. If the programs are successful, vehicle replacement costs will need to be factored.

- **Bus on shoulders** – The bus on shoulders program is estimated to cost approximately \$2,000 per shoulder mile to add necessary markings and signage. The travel speed for buses improves by approximately 10 to 15 miles per hour during peak congestion periods, thereby helping to increase the attractiveness of bus service. This program should be further reviewed along the various interstates in Lexington and Richland counties as a congestion mitigation strategy and to increase bus usage for routes utilizing major highways in the area.
- **Bike share programs** – Bike share programs are becoming increasingly popular as communities recognize the health benefits and the alternative transportation options they provide. For many individuals, bicycles provide access to transit and increase the need for vehicle storage at transit stops and/or on vehicles. With bikeshare programs, various locations can be designated throughout the community to access bicycles for connecting with transit or completing the entire trip and, based on bikeshare agency partners, could reduce the need for separate storage facilities. Bikeshare programs are an option, but will require effort to implement. Bicycles have to be purchased, facilities constructed, potential project sponsors secured, and technology infrastructure may also be required. Overall bikeshare programs recently implemented throughout the U.S. have ranged from \$2 million in capital costs up to \$20 million and can have an annual operating expense of \$50,000 or more based on the size of the program. For the smaller rural communities in this study area, the initial capital investment and the annual operating cost could be scaled back by starting with a pilot program.
- **Education** – Education is a lower cost alternative that can be immediately implemented in an effort to increase mobility. There are existing services in some of the rural areas that, based on survey responses, it is clear residents are not aware of them or how to access the services, e.g., the fixed-route and flex service in Eastover. Also, with education a dialogue with transportation professionals can be created on community needs so that existing services can be improved or enhanced. Staff, as availability allows, can schedule time to complete community outreach and educational activities. In addition, staff may choose representatives from the community to be ambassadors and responsible for spreading the word about available transportation options. There are operating costs related to providing materials, staff time, and facility usage for a productive education program, but, overall, increasing education is a lower cost alternative. Various media strategies may also be considered to increase community knowledge regarding transportation options, but these strategies may increase the costs of an educational program.
- **Park-and-ride lots** – Park-and-ride facilities offer locations for shared vehicle rides to occur and convenient stops for mass transit services (bus and rail). The primary costs for a park-and-ride lot is related to securing land and is typically a one-time capital cost. The cost of the park-and-ride facility will vary based on geographic area, the number of spaces required, and any added amenities (restrooms, lighting, waiting areas, signage, etc.). There are minor on-going O&M costs

for park-and-rides to keep the facility safe and maintained. Park-and-ride lots can be co-mingled with other uses like malls, shops, churches, government buildings, movie theaters, restaurants, and other uses that have substantial parking areas that are rarely at capacity and/or have trip generation patterns that do not coincide with the typical work weekday. Co-locating park-and-ride lots with existing uses will also save on the cost of having these facilities. These facilities are useful when coordinated with other services such as carpooling, vanpooling, and mass transit options.

Federal and state sources may be available to help offset some of the capital and operating costs for all of the feasible alternatives. Based on the needs identified, the public outreach efforts, the prioritization, and the planning level cost estimates, an implementation schedule was developed based on the immediate-, short-, and long-term parameters described below.

- **Immediate-term** – The immediate-term range has been developed to encompass projects and/or programs that could be implemented within two years, have an estimated annual operating cost of \$50,000 or less, and have an estimated capital cost under \$200,000. These alternatives would not require legislative changes to implement.
- **Short-term** – The short-term range is defined as the ability to implement within three to five years, with annual operating costs above \$50,000 and up to \$500,000, and capital costs above \$200,000, but less than \$3 million. These alternatives may require local or state legislative changes, but not federal action.
- **Long-term** – Alternatives included in the long-term implementation timeframe are those that would require more than five years to implement, have estimated annual operating costs above \$500,000 annually, and require a more significant capital investment exceeding \$3 million dollars.

Tables 12 through 14 identify the feasible alternatives within the specified timeframes for implementation within the region as a whole, and for Lexington and Richland counties individually. It should be noted that the implementation schedule below may fluctuate based on funding availability and the complexity of initiating programs. Below are some examples of items that could shift the timeframe for implementation.

- If park-and-ride locations can be secured within existing infrastructure versus being constructed, these lots may be able to move into an immediate timeframe. If land must be purchased, agreements negotiated, and/or large amounts of funding secured, the long-term timeframe is appropriate.
- The voucher programs are anticipated to have a quicker timeframe for implementation based on their ability to be scaled to funding availability; however, difficulty finding an agency to administer the program or in recruiting transportation providers may increase the timeframe for implementation to the short-term. Likewise with the volunteer programs, an inability to recruit volunteer drivers or access compliant vehicles may be an obstacle to implementing these programs.
- Vanpools are programs that can be outsourced or administered in-house. Delays to implementing a vanpool program can relate to funding to procure vehicles, vehicle production schedules from

manufacturers, employers or persons wanting to participate in the program, and setting up the regulatory guidelines of how the program will operate if completed in-house or procurement schedules for a private vendor.

- While the bus on shoulders program should be relatively inexpensive to implement, modifying current regulations to allow for this program may be time consuming. In addition, this program will require coordination between the transit operator, the South Carolina Department of Transportation, and law enforcement. If coordination goes well and appropriate regulations are accommodated at the state and local levels in short order, it may be timelier to implement. Driver education will be another key component of this program that could have an impact on the implementation timeframe.
- Bike share programs can be implemented on different scales to control the amount of time to implement as well as cost; however, some aspects of a bike share can be timely. Establishing locations for bikes to be picked up and dropped off, constructing facilities, procuring or developing the technology to be utilized for the program and determining rental rates are some elements that could delay a bike share program. Other considerations would involve having designated bike paths and signage to ensure that individuals choosing to utilize bike share options can do so safely.
- With bus-related services (fixed-route, flex, and circulator), ensuring that modifications to existing service and/or new services are consistent and coordinated with the overall system and schedule, vehicle acquisition, addressing additional staffing/operator needs, and funding the operation are all items that have placed this alternative in the short-term timeframe versus the immediate term. Some of these same items could lead to bus service alternatives extending into the long-term.
- In the case of rail service, the planning, construction and operating cost, and funding securement are all elements that place rail into the longer-term timeframe.

Table 12: Regional Transportation Alternatives Implementation

Study Area Transportation Alternatives			
Alternative	Immediate-term	Short-term	Long-term
Buses on Interstate Shoulders			
Voucher Program			
Volunteer Driver Vanpool Program			
Employee Vanpool Program			
Park-and-Ride Lots			
Bike Share Program			
Grant-Funded Vehicles			
Education Programs			
Regional Rail Service			

Table 13: Lexington County Transportation Alternatives Implementation

Lexington County Alternatives			
Alternative	Immediate-term	Short-term	Long-term
Batesburg-Leesville Express Route			
Batesburg-Leesville Circulator Service			
Cayce Employee Vanpool Program			
Cayce Fixed-Route Service			
Chapin & Irmo Express Route			
Swansea & Gaston Fixed-Route Service			
Gilbert & Summit Voucher Program			
Gilbert & Summit Volunteer Driver Vanpool Program			
Town of Lexington Express Route			
Town of Lexington Flex Route			
Pelion Voucher Program			
Pine Ridge & South Congaree Fixed-Route Service			
Lexington Medical Center Park-and-Ride Lot (Batesburg-Leesville)			
Park-and-ride at US 1 & Sunset Blvd in West Columbia			
Town of Lexington Park-and-Ride Lot			
Chapin and Columbiana Centre Park-and-Ride Lots			

Table 14: Richland County Transportation Alternatives Implementation

Richland County Transportation Alternatives			
Alternative	Immediate-term	Short-term	Long-term
Blythewood Express Route			
Killian Flex Route			
Lower Richland Improvements to Existing COMET Services			
Lower Richland Voucher Program			
Lower Richland Friends and Family Reimbursement Program			
Lower Richland Volunteer Driver Vanpool Program			
Trenholm Road Fixed-Route Service			
Blythewood Park Park-and-Ride			
I-77 & Farrow Road near Providence Hospital Park-and-ride			

Section 8: Conclusion

The CMCOG determined a need for an assessment of rural transportation options and committed funds to commence the study of the rural areas of Richland and Lexington counties. Through an extensive grassroots public outreach effort, over 3,000 discrete responses were received from interested persons within the study area regarding destinations that should have accessible transportation options. Using the information gathered during the public outreach process combined with specific technical analyses that were completed to better understand the context of the local conditions related to mobility, transportation needs were identified, various alternatives to potentially meet those needs were developed and assessed for practical feasibility, and planning level costs were estimated. Additionally, a prioritization process was completed to group the proposed alternatives into categories of good, better, and best. Finally, the ability to implement each proposed alternative was assessed, leading to a proposed implementation schedule.

The steps taken in this rural area transit assessment resulted in rail, one of the highest-cost alternatives, being ranked as a “best” option, while the implementation assessment for this option determined that it more appropriately requires a longer-term consideration. To reconcile the best option designation with a longer-term implementation, it is important to acknowledge that rail has been included in the draft LRTP, which is a positive step to ensure further study of rail transportation. Advancing any planning efforts on a possible rail alternative will identify a commitment to this project as a feasible alternative to provide future transportation connections to the rural areas.

Vanpool and volunteer driver programs were also selected as “best” options and included as potential alternatives that could have more immediate implementation. To advance a vanpool or volunteer driver program, CMCOG will need to develop strategies for reaching out to human services agencies, employers, and the rural areas to further develop specific guidelines for implementing and possibly administering these programs.

The key findings of this rural transit needs assessment are that there is a clear need for additional transportation options in the rural areas of Lexington and Richland counties, along with the recognition that alternatives that may work best on a regional level are not always best for a specific jurisdiction. In addition, it was learned that further attention and efforts are necessary to reduce the existing transportation gaps in the region. Education, while not ranked as a “best” option from the alternatives review, will be a crucial part of engaging the community and progressing efforts to improve mobility for all.

This transit needs assessment provides a basis for the CMCOG to move forward with future efforts to advance the recommended alternatives in Lexington and Richland counties. During this assessment, a database was created that the CMCOG can use for future outreach efforts and to support additional planning activities for the various alternatives. It was clear from the public outreach process conducted for this effort that access to shopping locations is a vital need. Having this knowledge, the CMCOG can

assist rural areas with planning for future commercial areas to be in close proximity to public transit and/or closer to the residential areas that they are intended to serve. Outreach to private businesses frequented by residents of the rural areas may also provide opportunities for future development of partners for the transit alternatives.

Overall, a clear need was established through this assessment for additional transit options. It was also determined that a number of these transit alternatives, while needed, may take time to implement and some alternatives are better to provide community circulation while others address regional connectivity. It is recommended that the activities below be considered in an effort to advance the alternatives included in this assessment.

- Coordinate with The COMET to allow review of existing routes with recommendations for service extensions and/or new service implementation once funding can be secured.
- Coordinate with the Penny for Richland project manager to determine the ability of these funds to support proceeding with any of the short-term Richland County improvements.
- Coordinate with Richland and Lexington counties' elected officials and staff to make key decision-makers aware of the identified needs and potential alternatives to help meet them.
- Submit for grant funding during annual federal and state grant cycles to secure future planning funds to allow for refinement of the proposed alternatives and additional rural area outreach.
- Conduct outreach with human services and religious organizations to create a comprehensive inventory of available vehicles that could be utilized for a volunteer driver program.
- Review budgets to determine funding levels that may be available over the next couple of years to complete a demonstration voucher program in specific rural communities. Based on the success of such an initial demonstration voucher program, expansion of the program can be initiated.
- Continue with rail planning activities, but ensure that members of the rural communities are engaged in the planning efforts to make sure that rail station and/or feeder bus connectivity planning will successfully accommodate an increase in rural area access to the overall public transit service network.
- Seek partnerships with major employers to establish and grow shared commuter transportation programs, i.e., carpool/vanpool. In concert with this effort, discuss the ability to utilize existing parking areas with excess capacity as potential park-and-ride locations.

The strategies above provide actions that can be initiated to further development of priority transit alternatives in the rural areas through to implementation. The CMCOG should continue to plan a future that provides greater access, increased mobility options, and enhanced inclusion for the rural communities of Lexington and Richland counties. Transit assessments and other studies inclusive of significant public outreach efforts will not only advance alternatives, but assist in promoting public education, improving comprehensive planning, and can lead to the identification of potential economic development opportunities. The continued sustainability of Lexington and Richland counties' rural areas

is directly associated with the ability of residents in these areas to access resources. The review of the rural areas and the alternatives presented in this assessment can support the desired connectivity as they are implemented. As alternatives are implemented, the needs of the communities may change due to the improved transit access; therefore, it is important that continued interaction with and assessments of the rural areas occur in order to ensure that the most viable alternatives are implemented over time.

Appendix A: Transportation Provider Matrix

Provider Name	Location	Operating Hours	Fares	Eligibility	Service Area	Additional Information	Transportation Type
Checker Yellow Cab	Columbia, SC	24/7	Initial Drop Charge = \$2.00 Per Mile = \$2.50 Extra passenger (over 2) = \$0.50 Senior Citizen (age 60 and over) = 10% off total rate	N/A	Columbia and Midlands Area, Fort Jackson and airport	Specializes in medical appointments and handicap (wheelchair van) service	Taxi
Capitol City Cab	1659 Airport Blvd., Suite B West Columbia, SC 29169	24/7	Varies Senior Citizen (age 60 and over) = 10% off total rate	N/A	Greater Columbia metropolitan area and surrounding counties, Columbia Metro Airport, and Fort Jackson	Wheelchair accessible taxis at no extra cost Rideshare option	Taxi
Party Cab	Northwest Columbia, Columbia SC	24/7	Varies	N/A			Taxi
Wicky Wicky Taxi	West Metro, Cayce, SC		Varies	N/A			Taxi
First Class	Midtown-Downtown Columbia SC	9:00 AM - 5:00 PM	Varies	N/A	Columbia, SC	Pick ups and drop offs at the airport as well as door to door service for residents in Columbia	Luxury Transportation
Deluxe Cab LLC	1519 Sunset Blvd., West Columbia, SC 29169	24/7	Start of trip = \$2.00, \$2.50 for every mile after that \$18 an hour for wait time Senior citizens are given 10% off of the metered rate	N/A	Columbia, SC primarily airport trips	Offers minivans and sedans for transport	Taxi
Five Points Taxi Van	2002 Greene St #302, Columbia, SC 29205	24/7	Varies	N/A			Taxi
CPC Exclusive Shuttle Transportations Services	301 Veterans Rd Columbia, SC 29209	Reservation	\$54 an hour	N/A	SC: Myrtle Beach, Hilton Head, Charleston, Columbia NC: Charlotte, Raleigh GA: Augusta, Savannah, Atlanta	Luxury Sedans for airport transportation, corporate executives, weddings, prom nights, graduation, dining out, and special occasions	Luxury Transportation
Platinum Limousine and Sedan Service	2601 Read St Columbia, SC 29204	Reservation	Varies	N/A	Sumter SC, Columbia SC, Florence SC		Luxury Transportation
Southern Valet	710 Lady St, Columbia SC 29201	Reservation	Varies	N/A			Luxury Transportation
ACC MedLink Long Distance Medical Transportation	Serving Columbia Area	24/7	Varies	Long distance medical transport		Long distance medical transportation service	Medical Transportation
Transport Care Services	652 Bush River Rd. Columbia SC 29210	Reservation	Varies	N/A	Richland County and surrounding areas	Non-emergency medical transportation	Medical Transportation
Executive Chauffeur Service	2026 Assembly St Columbia SC 29201	Reservation	Varies	N/A	greater Columbia area including Irmo, Lexington, Chapin, Cayce, West Columbia, Blythewood, and Forest Acres	Airport transportation, chauffeur service, shuttle service, transportation services, taxis	Luxury Transportation
Signature Transportation	701 Gervais St, Columbia SC 29201	24/7 on call	Varies	N/A	Columbia based	Limousine, Executive Sedans, Corporate VIP Transportation, VIP Buses Airport Shuttles	Luxury Transportation
Senior Express of the Midlands	701 Gervais St. Ste. 150, Columbia, SC 29201	Reservation	30 minute trip = \$15.00 plus \$1.00 per mile	N/A	Fairfield, Kershaw, Lexington, Newberry, Richland, Saluda Generally a 50 mile radius around Columbia	Door to door transportation for any age client who needs transportation	Senior Vanpool
Dart Special Needs Transportation	3613 Lucius Rd, Columbia SC 29201	Same days and hours as The COMET's fixed-route service	\$3.00 per one-way trip	Disability preventing use of the fixed-route system	The COMET's fixed-route service area	Special needs transportation	Vanpool
Care by Generations	Lexington	24/7	\$100.00 for 2 hours of caregiver and 50 round trip miles additional hour at \$16.50 an hour and each additional mile at \$0.48 a mile	Transportation only provided for wheelchairs or otherwise disabled individuals	Midlands Region	Agency staff transports client to doctor's office, health clinics, and other medical facilities for non-emergency medical services by appointment	Vanpool
Fairfield County Council on Aging	Fairfield	Reservation	Donations	Transportation to and from the Winnsboro Senior Center is provided. Non-emergency, non-Medicaid transportation to doctor's appointments may be arranged.		Provides non-emergency, non-Medicaid transportation to scheduled doctor's appointments for seniors	
Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission	Lexington	N/A		Only residents of Lexington / Richland District Five ages 55 and over	Lexington and Richland transportation to nutrition sites, medical appointments, and other necessary appointments	Transportation provided to seniors for scheduled medical transportation when a need has been identified	Medical Transportation
Newberry County Council on Aging	Newberry	6:00 AM - 6:00 PM	Local Trips (within Newberry County) = \$2.00 round trip Newberry County to Columbia = \$15.00 round trip Newberry County to Charleston = \$50.00 round trip Senior Center Transportation = \$0.25 round trip Suitable donation	Only medicaid eligible clients	Newberry, Columbia, Charleston	Offers transportation to local, non-emergency medical appointments with at least three days prior notice	Medical Transportation
Northeast Wheels Transportation Program	Richland	9:30 AM - 1:00 PM Monday and Thursday		Only for seniors and adults with disabilities in the near NE Columbia area who do not have safe/affordable transportation.	NE Columbia within boundaries of Highway 277 to I-77 to Percival Road to Forest Drive to Beltline Blvd and back to Highway 277. (Includes: Baptist Medical, Palmetto Health Richland, Providence NE, and Providence Downtown Hospitals)	Provides transportation on a lift-equipped van for seniors and adults with disabilities who live in the near northeast Columbia, SC to any location within the same area	Vanpool
5 Points Wheels Transportation Program	Richland	9:30 AM - 1:00 PM Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday	Suitable donation	Only for seniors and adults with disabilities living in downtown Columbia, SC	Downtown Columbia within the boundaries of Rosewood Drive to Sunset Drive to Huger Street to Blossom Street to Assembly Street to Rosewood Drive	Provides transportation on a 14 passenger, lift equipped bus for seniors and adults with disabilities who live in downtown Columbia, SC to any location within same area	Vanpool
AllCare Living Services Inc.	Richland	24/7	Donations. Services available up to 4 hours and include mileage fees up to 40 miles round trip	Service only available to those with short and long term health, mental, and/or physical disabilities	Berkeley, Calhoun, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Lexington, Orangeburg, Richland	Transportation to medical appointments as well as caregiver assistance	Medical Transportation
DayBreak Adult Care Services	123A Library Hill Lane Lexington, SC 29072		hourly rates minimum of 4 hours per day	N/A	Lexington	Primarily a senior care service but provides transportation to medical appointments and facilities as well	Medical Transportation
The COMET	3613 Lucius Rd, Columbia SC 29201		Fare Information: Regular fare = \$1.50 All Day = \$3.00	N/A	Midlands (Lexington and Richland County)	Provides regular scheduled bus routes in the Midlands County area. Park and Ride, Downtown Circulation system, free Wi-Fi, real time bus locators	Fixed Route
Santee Waterree RTA	129 S Harvin St, Sumter SC 29150	5:00 AM - 8:30 PM	\$1.00 for passengers, \$0.50 for senior citizens and disabled passengers . Morris College, CCTC, and USC students are free during an active school semester	N/A	Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, Sumter	Public transportation provider for Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, and Sumter counties. Also provides demand response paratransit service	Fixed Route
Fairfield County Transit	1794 US Hwy 321 By-Pass S Winnsboro, SC 29180	8:30 AM - 10:30 AM 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM	Fares range from \$0.75 to \$1.50 and route deviation service is available for an extra \$0.25 or \$0.50 to the normal fare. No deviations over 2 miles accepted	N/A	Drops at the main hospitals in downtown Columbia and the bus depot at Sumter and Laurel Street		Commuter Bus
Human Services Providers		Monday to Friday 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM		Available for medical related trips only	Regions operated throughout South Carolina. Serves all of the Midlands County region	Transportation is available for doctor appointments, dialysis, x-rays, lab work, drug store or other medical appointments	Medical Transportation
Ambulance Services				Medical emergency			Medical Transportation
Blue Ribbon Cab Company	6400 Main Street Columbia, SC	24/7	Meter Rate - Initial Charge = \$2.00 Each additional mile = \$2.50	N/A	Columbia and surrounding Midlands region	Provides 24/7 service in Columbia as well as the surrounding Midlands. Fleet includes cars and vans. Provide wheelchair accessible service as well.	Taxi
Harbison Wheels	137 Sheath Drive Columbia SC 29212	Monday: 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM Tuesday: Special Events Wednesday: 9:00 AM - 3:30 PM Thursday: Medical appointments outside rider area Friday: 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM Sunday: Church trips	Non-profit supported by donations	N/A	Broad River Rd, Partridge Dr, I-26, Columbiana Mall, Kroger Complex, St. Andrews Rd, Lake Murray Blvd, Harbison Blvd, Piney Grove Rd, Irmo Area.	Supplies transportation to Seniors and physically and mentally disabled area residents for doctors appointments and places of business. Also serves HUD housing. Bus is wheelchair equipped	Vanpool
K-12 School Transportation System				Students enrolled in public schools	Within school districts		Commuter Bus
Greyhounds	710 Buckner Rd Columbia SC 29203	Monday-Sunday 12:00 AM - 2:00 AM, 6:45 AM - 11:59 PM	Prices vary based on trip length	N/A	United States		Commuter Bus
Amtrak	850 Pulaski St, Columbia, SC 29201	Midnight to 5:30 AM 10:15 PM to 11:59 PM		N/A	United States		Rail

Appendix B: Stakeholder Outreach Plan



Central Midlands Council of Governments

**Regional Transit Needs
Assessment & Feasibility Study
Stakeholder Outreach Plan**

May 2015

Tindale Oliver

Central Midlands Council of Governments

Regional Transit Needs Assessment & Feasibility Study

Stakeholder Outreach Plan

January 2015

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Introduction

The Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG), in coordination with Tindale Oliver, Pond & Company, Inc., and Anne Morris and Associates, LLC, is initiating the process to complete a Regional Transit Needs Assessment and Feasibility Study. The intent of the study is to determine the potential for expanded transit services in the rural areas of Richland and Lexington County, gauge the short- and long-term benefits of and demand for such enhanced transit service, and identify the good, better, and best alternatives that may meet the transportation needs in the outlying areas that are not currently served by The COMET. To assess the needs, the process will be heavily dependent on a grassroots outreach approach combined with some technical analysis and an assessment of available funding for implementation of the identified transit alternatives. Public involvement will be the key component due to the characteristics of the study and the need to reach persons living in the rural areas who may not have access to transportation and other internet-based tools. A “one-size fits all” approach is not feasible for this assessment; therefore, a combination of many tailored outreach tools will be deployed. The remainder of this document describes the public/stakeholder outreach techniques that have been identified for consideration and further discussion with CMCOG and representatives from Richland and Lexington counties. All activities conducted as part of this study will conform to the current CMCOG Public Participation Policy.

Title VI of the Civil Rights

The CMCOG is committed to ensuring that no person shall on the basis of race, color or national origin, sex, age, disability, family or religious status, as provided by Civil Rights legislation currently in effect be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination or retaliation under any program or activity conducted as part of this Stakeholder Outreach Plan. All activities will be conducted in accordance with the CMCOG/Columbia Area Transportation Study (COATS) Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Title VI Policy.

Environmental Justice

On February 11, 1994, Executive Order 12898 was signed and the 1994 U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) procedures on Environmental Justice require that the transportation planning process seek to identify the needs of low-income and minority populations. The CMCOG’s policy is to adhere to the principles of Environmental Justice in the metropolitan planning process. The activities included in this plan will be enhanced to identify and address the needs of minority and low-income populations in making transportation decisions.

Limited English Proficiency

Public transportation providers receiving federal funding from the U.S. DOT have a responsibility in accordance with Executive Order 13166, to take reasonable steps to ensure persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) have meaningful access to benefits, services, information, and other important programs

and activities. LEP persons include individuals who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. The CMCOG is committed to creating a positive environment for persons with LEP and ensuring that they have an opportunity for full participation in public involvement activities.

Reasonable Accommodations

Persons who require reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended, or persons who require interpretation and translation service to participate in public meeting activities are requested to notify CMCOG at least five days prior to workshops or meetings. Requests for alternative-format materials or translation should be made in advance to accommodate the development and provision of these materials. All public meeting notices will include the appropriate CMCOG staff contact phone number and deadline date for requesting special accommodations at the meetings.

Stakeholder Outreach Techniques

Many outreach techniques were selected for inclusion in the Stakeholder Outreach Plan to maximize the potential for active participation by citizens in the rural areas of Richland and Lexington County. Each technique is briefly summarized in this section. Direct involvement techniques refer to those that engage the stakeholders and the public in “hands on” workshops and/or discussions about the project. Information distribution techniques refer to those that utilize the dissemination of public information materials to inform the general public of the project.

Direct Involvement Activities

Public involvement activities involving direct interaction with agencies, organizations, and/or citizens will be used throughout the study process. The direct involvement activities selected for this study include the following:

- Staff Briefings
- Stakeholder Interviews/Discussion Group Meetings
- Public Workshops (Piggyback-Style and One-on-One Discussions)
- Committee and Board Presentations
- Festival Booths
- Surveys (Online, phone, hard copy)
- Newsletter mail-outs

A number of methods have been included in this plan to present a tailored outreach approach recognizing that “traditional methods” may not be the most effective approach in the rural areas. The techniques described in the remaining sections will assist with understanding the communities’ needs and help develop innovative transportation alternatives. For this reason, a series of maps for both counties have been developed to help understand the community demographics.

Staff Briefings

To keep the CMCOG completely briefed and up to date on the project, weekly conference calls will be held with the Consultant project manager and various team members. This will also allow the Project Team to collaborate on upcoming outreach activities, project deliverables, and other action items. These conference calls are estimated to take approximately thirty minutes and will generally only encompass the Project Team. However, during key stages of the project when there is a need for input from the community leaders, additional representatives may be asked to participate in the weekly conference call. It is anticipated that additional participation will be requested during discussions pertaining to the review of the public outreach results, alternatives, and recommendations.

Project Stakeholders & Stakeholder Interviews

The Regional Transit Needs Assessment & Feasibility Study stakeholders include a diverse group, including those who can provide input on the transit needs, persons who will participate in the planning process, and those who will be part of the implementation stage. The activities outlined in this plan provide opportunities to obtain input from the various groups throughout the development of the assessment. Stakeholders that will be engaged throughout the planning process include, but are not limited to, the agencies and groups listed below. Stakeholders will be provided information throughout the study and asked to be a resource in distributing project information to clients and contacts.

- Schools, including special education transition programs
- Health care providers – hospitals and medical facilities
- Local units of governments (cities, villages, townships)
- Richland County
- Lexington County
- Religious and community organizations
- Youth organizations
- Senior organizations
- Organizations representing minority interest
- Area Agency on Aging
- Social workers for individuals with disabilities
- Disability advocates of Richland and Lexington counties
- Transit advocacy groups
- South Carolina Department of Transportation
- Economic development organizations
- Workforce Development Board
- Local business community and major employers
- Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce
- Greater Lexington Chamber of Commerce

To obtain the perspectives of a variety of groups, open public meetings at the CMCOG office will be conducted and potential stakeholder groups will receive direct e-mail invites to increase the level of local participation and project input. In addition to the on-site meetings at CMCOG, the CMCOG project

manager and the Consultant Public Outreach Specialist will conduct one-on-one interviews with local leaders to inform them of the project and solicit their feedback.

Geographic Public Workshops

Based on the demographics and land uses of the study area, the traditional public workshop may not be the best approach to attracting participants during the first round of public outreach. For this reason, existing events, including flea markets, farmer's markets, local chambers of commerce, or church services, may be attended as an approach to collecting data on the transportation needs of the community. Attendance at town meetings may also be completed in lieu of a workshop to poll the opinions of attendees.

Public outreach will be held at various locations and times of day to ensure that people are able to attend regardless of work shifts, childcare, and/or location. In addition, where technology is available and feasible, conference call meeting capabilities may be made available for individuals who would like to participate by telephone and are unable to attend in person.

The first round of public outreach will be used as an information gathering process and will be conducted in March 2015 to assist with identifying the transit needs in the rural areas. The first round of information gathering will be conducted at locations where people are already going in order to increase participation and maximize input. The outreach will be conducted by two teams over the course of several days and also serve as a project field review. This approach will allow for equal coverage in Richland and Lexington counties by having one team focus their efforts on local events and grassroots outreach within each of the counties. During this time, the study area will be observed and the team will speak with people at local businesses, community centers, religious institutions, and/or government agencies.

In lieu of formal presentations, the teams will set up tables at various destinations to solicit input and complete surveys and comment cards. The public outreach materials will also be delivered to rural area libraries, churches, and community centers. All comments received from the first round of outreach will be summarized and provided to CMCOG for review. A preliminary listing of potential events/drop-in meetings and schedule for the first round of public outreach is provided below by county for review and comment by the CMCOG.

Lexington County Outreach – Week of March 7, 2015

- Rural churches
- Lexington County Recreation and Aging Commission
- IGA Grocery Stores
- Libraries
- Technology Centers

Richland County Outreach – Week of March 7, 2015

- Transportation Penny Advisory Committee
- Richland County Library (Eastover)

- Dollar General (Eastover)
- Post Office (Eastover)
- Post Office (Gadsden)
- Rural churches
- IGA Grocery Stores
- Richland Library Southeast

Additional outreach was conducted in April and May 2015 by the project team to include public meetings at CMCOG, and participation at local festivals (Eastover Festival and BBQ and Poultry Festival).

The third round of public outreach will be conducted following the development of transit alternatives for each county. The alternatives will be developed using the results of the first round of outreach activities, some technical mapping analysis completed to identify larger proportions of transit oriented individuals, key activity centers, and key origins and destinations derived during project outreach. The second round of public outreach will be conducted using a more traditional form of public workshops since the material being covered is more technical. Therefore, a brief presentation will be conducted explaining the overall process and how the alternatives were developed. Map boards and other displays showing the preferred alternatives will be available during the meeting. Meetings will be conducted in both counties and may be piggyback-style using other outreach events, Town Council meetings, and/or church events to attract participants. Easy to read handouts identifying the recommendations will be disseminated along with an updated edition of the project newsletter. Attendees/participants will be asked to provide feedback using several different methods, including comment cards, one-on-one discussions with the Project Team, and completion of interactive activities designed to prioritize the recommendations by good, better, and best for incorporation into the technical prioritization process. A preliminary listing of potential events/drop-in meetings and schedule for the third round of public outreach is provided below for review and comment by the CMCOG.

Lexington County Outreach – June 2015

- Drive-thru project display (tent with project information in a location with high automobile traffic)
- Rural churches
- Lexington County Recreation and Aging Commission
- Town Council Meetings

Richland County Outreach – June 2015

- Drive-thru project display (tent with project information in a location with high automobile traffic)
- Richland County Library (Eastover)
- Rural churches
- Richland Library Southeast
- Town Council Meetings

Stakeholder Committee and Board Presentations

A total of three presentations will be given to present the final draft recommendations and alternatives to committees/boards identified by the CMCOG. If scheduling permits and the presentation can be conducted over the course of a day, more than three presentations may be accommodated.

The tentative Boards and/or committee for presenting the assessment draft recommendations is provided below and has been determined through discussions with the CMCOG and Lexington County staff present for the initial project kick-off meeting discussions.

- CMCOG Board of Directors
- Lexington County Board of County Commissioners
- Richland County Board of County Commissioners
- The COMET Board

Information Distribution Activities – Other Community Engagement Tools and Techniques

The information distribution activities selected for the study are listed and discussed in detail in the remainder of this section.

Website Materials

Materials announcing the project and project updates will be developed and provided to the CMCOG and Lexington and Richland counties in Word format for inclusion on their respective websites. In addition, project announcements and direction on how to give input will be disseminated to local media outlets, including broadcasting on the cable channels, print media, and other available resources secured by the funding partners. Examples of media resources that may be contacted with assistance from the CMCOG and Lexington and Richland counties include, but are not limited to, the Columbia Star, The State, Lexington Chronicle, WISTV, WACHFOX, ABC Columbia, South Carolina Educational Television, and/or WLTX 19.

Project Newsletter

Prior to the first round of public outreach, a project newsletter will also be developed announcing the project and documenting the stakeholder outreach activities that will be conducted. The newsletter will also include information on how the public can share their thoughts through one of the electronic methods, written comments, or contacting the Project Team via telephone, if they are unable to attend one of the scheduled events. During the grassroots outreach process, the newsletters will be distributed in the rural areas to activity centers, libraries, shopping malls and other retail centers, schools, homeowners associations, residential addresses, and human services agencies. The newsletter will also be distributed at transportation hubs on the fringe of the rural area to reach individuals that are currently using the system, but may have transportation needs beyond the current transit service area.

Internet-based survey

An internet survey will be developed using Survey Monkey software to create a tool that can be distributed via email, posted on agency websites, and administered in person using tablets. The same

survey will be available in paper format and disseminated at community events, major activity centers, and human services agencies for completion by persons without access to personal computers. Survey participants will be asked to either mail or fax their surveys back so that their comments will be recorded and considered during the development of the recommendations.

If the survey is administered during a Project Team attended and facilitated outreach event, the Project Team members will be available at the event to assist individuals with completing the survey, with special consideration given to the needs of individuals with disabilities. A Spanish version of the survey will also be available both electronically and in paper format. Based on the requests received for materials in other languages and feedback from stakeholders and the CMCOG staff, all efforts will be made to accommodate LEP persons in providing comments.

If agreed upon by county school superintendents, the internet-based survey link may be provided within the public school system computer labs, with school students being asked to survey their parents regarding the current transit needs, bring back their responses, and enter them in the school computers. Students may also provide the link to their parents to take the survey, if they have home computers available. This technique will allow students to assist the parents and meet special needs as they relate to illiteracy, lack of access to computers, individuals with disabilities, and/or LEP persons. This technique will require approval from the school superintendents and participation from both the parents and students.

Automated Phone Survey

An automated telephone survey will be available and designed with features that allow persons to call in and participate in the survey effort as well as the system will have the capability to automatically dial out to a phone number list. The automated phone survey will ask participants a series of recorded questions that can be answered using the telephone key pad. Based on the phone list uploaded to the system, this method is able to reach large numbers of people in a short timeframe.

Public Meeting Notices

Written public notices will also be provided to Lexington and Richland County for the county representatives to provide to their respective website coordinators and contacts at broadcast television and radio.

Mailing List

A mailing list will be compiled using the contact information provided by the public and stakeholders at outreach events and all other contact information provided by the CMCOG, Lexington County, and Richland County. Persons included on the mailing list will be kept aware of the project's progress through the informational dissemination techniques described in this section.

Conclusion

The stakeholder outreach plan described includes both traditional and tailored techniques in an effort to reach underserved and underrepresented populations within the two-county study area. While the outreach must be conducted within the parameters of the project scope, all efforts will be made to reach the greatest number of individuals using a grassroots approach. The possible workshop locations and

approaches described within this plan have been presented as options for the CMCOG, Lexington County, and Richland County to review and choose locations and approaches that best fit the rural communities. Using both direct involvement and information distribution activities will help to understand the overall needs of persons without access to transportation options and help to identify innovative alternatives to meet those needs.

Appendix C: Survey Instrument



The Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG) has initiated a study to determine the transit needs of those living and/or working in the rural areas of Richland and Lexington Counties outside existing service areas. Part of this study involves conducting surveys throughout these two counties. These surveys will be conducted using the internet; and providing paper copies at locations such as libraries, through faith-based organizations, at community meetings, and other locations. Please take a moment to complete this survey.

What are the 3 places you visit most frequently every month? (Place a 1 by the most often, a 2 by the second most often, a 3 by the least most often.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grocery store, pharmacy, Wal-Mart | <input type="checkbox"/> Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walk-in medical clinic, doctor's office, dentist, therapist, hospital | <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary, middle, high school, college, training center | <input type="checkbox"/> Library |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church, temple, mosque, faith-based organization | <input type="checkbox"/> After school program, child care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer services | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beauty shop, barber shop | <input type="checkbox"/> Mall, shopping center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Salvation Army, Goodwill | <input type="checkbox"/> Food bank |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

What is the name of the first place? _____ (Example – Walmart, BI-LO, Senior Center, Harvest Hope, Doctor's Care)

Where is it located? _____ (road name, address, nearest intersection, town, city)

What days do you go to this place? (Circle all that apply) Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

What time do you need to be at this place? _____

What time do you need to return home from this place? _____

What is the name of the second place? _____ (Example – Walmart, BI-LO, Senior Center, Harvest Hope, Doctor's Care)

Where is it located? _____ (road name, address, nearest intersection, town, city)

What days do you go to this place? (Circle all that apply) Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

What time do you need to be at this place? _____

What time do you need to return home from this place? _____

What is the name of the third place? _____ (Example – Walmart, BI-LO, Senior Center, Harvest Hope, Doctor's Care)

Where is it located? _____ (road name, address, nearest intersection, town, city)

What days do you go to this place? (Circle all that apply) Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

What time do you need to be at this place? _____

What time do you need to return home from this place? _____

What would you be willing to pay for transit service? (Circle One)

- | | | | | | | |
|---------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Nothing | Under \$1.00 | \$1.00 - \$1.50 | \$1.50 - \$2.00 | \$2.00 - \$2.50 | \$2.50 - \$3.00 | More than \$3.00 |
|---------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|

If you have special transit needs, what are they? _____

Where do you live? (Please provide a nearest intersection, town, city, or zip code or address.)

Thank you for your help!

Appendix D: Project Newsletter



REGIONAL TRANSIT NEEDS ASSESSMENT & FEASIBILITY STUDY NEWSLETTER



PROJECT Announcement

The Central Midlands Council of Governments (an agency providing planning, technical assistance, and services to local governments, business, and residents in the Central Midlands region) is excited to announce a feasibility assessment project on the transit needs in the unserved areas of Lexington and Richland Counties.

To reach the most people, the Project Team will be traveling around the region talking to local business owners, agencies, residents, employees, and anyone else who will share their input. Our goal is to make sure that anyone wanting to participate in the planning process is provided an opportunity.

After we reach out to as many people as possible over the next couple of months, we will look at all of the data to develop potential transportation options for the study area to meet the transit needs and fill identified gaps in service. The potential services will be presented to the public in a more formal setting towards the end of the project. The transit projects that come out of this study may be considered for implementation, as funding is available. **Please make sure that you provide us with your contact information so that we can send you a personal invitation to attend the final workshops and review the project outcomes.**



The Project Team will have one-on-one discussions with the community to find out their transportation needs.



Stakeholder meetings will be held to collect to obtain input from local leaders and representatives of the community.

WHAT WE HAVE *Heard*

We have already started spreading the word about this important project. Some of the places that have welcomed us to speak with their customers and clients include Dollar General stores, Harvest Hope Food Bank, and some IGA locations. We have received a lot of feedback from people regarding where they need to go and some of the top locations mentioned were the grocery store and Wal-Mart, followed by work and church services. We have also collected the exact locations of these places so that we can determine how best to connect the most needed services in the community.

HOW CAN YOU *Participate*

If you have already participated in the transit survey, we would like to **thank you** for taking the time to express your needs. If you have not taken this important survey, please do so by either going online to the English version of the survey at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CMCOGTransitNeedsSurvey> or the Spanish version at:

<https://es.surveymonkey.com/s/CMCOGTransitNeedsSurveyEspanol>.

You may also participate by phone in either the English or Spanish survey by calling (803) 610-4000. You may also request a paper copy of the survey from one of the Project Team members or at any Lexington or Richland County Library. You will see us around your community passing out surveys. No matter how you tell us, please make sure that you share your thoughts so that we can develop a plan to better serve your needs!

PROJECT *Schedule*

We have a lot to do in a short amount of time. This major effort is scheduled to wrap up in June 2015, with a plan that identifies the good, better, and best transit options for our study area. The Project Team will continue collecting public input over the next couple of months and we urge you to let us know what you think before **April 30, 2015** so we can be sure to review your comments.

Also consider joining us on April 7, 2015, at the CMCOG Conference Room, 236 Stoneridge Drive, Columbia, SC 29210 **between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM** to offer your input and find out more about this project.

HOW CAN YOU *Participate*



Online Survey

English:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/CMCOGTransitNeedsSurvey>

Spanish:

<https://es.surveymonkey.com/s/CMCOGTransitNeedsSurveyEspanol>



Telephone Survey

(803) 610-4000



Send Us Your Comments

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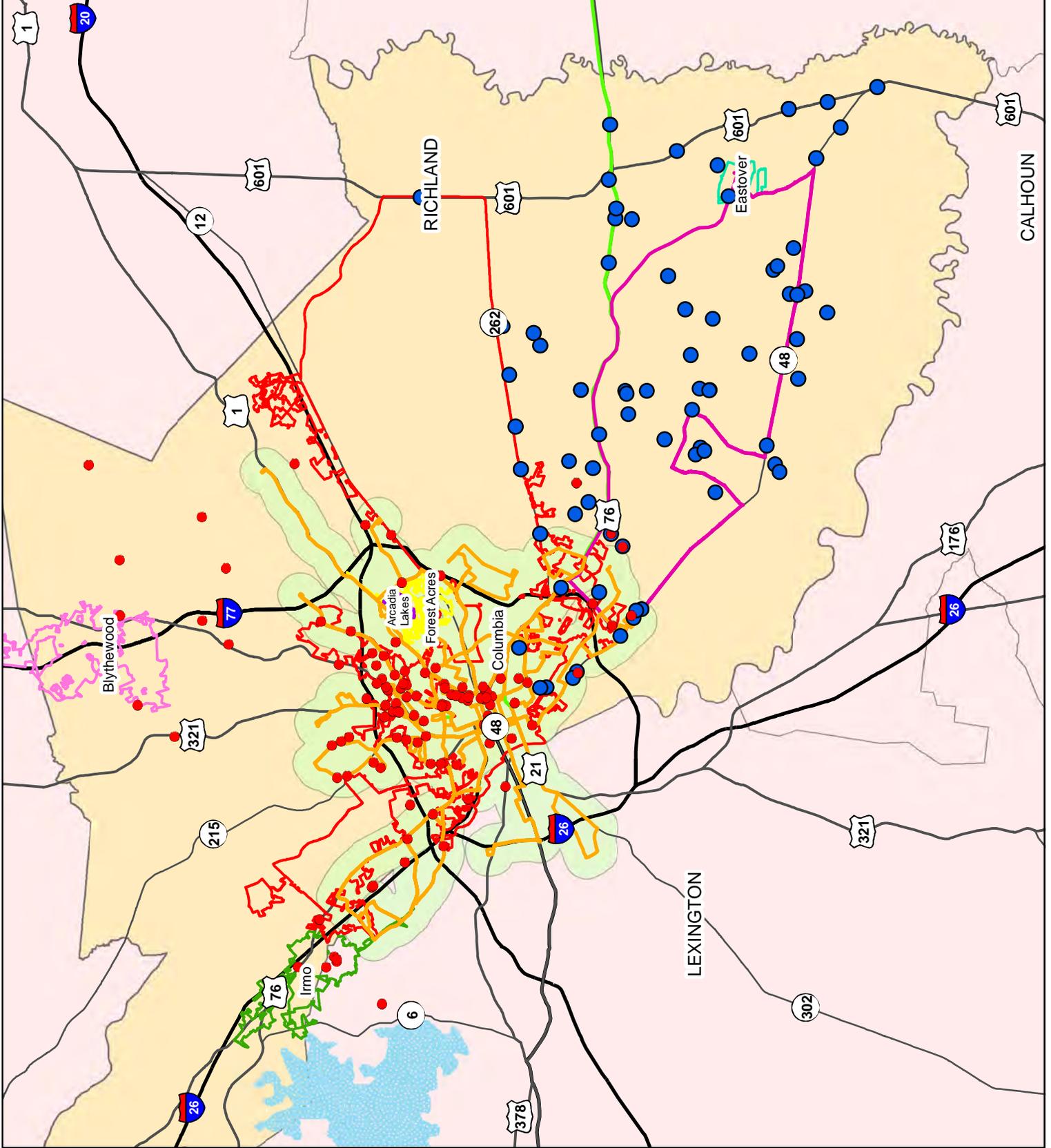
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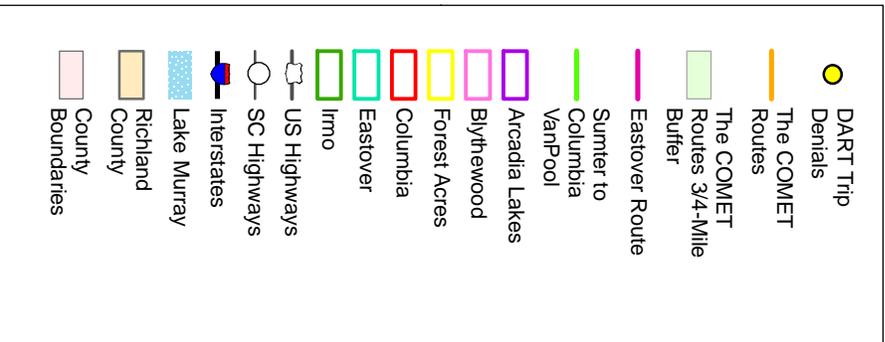
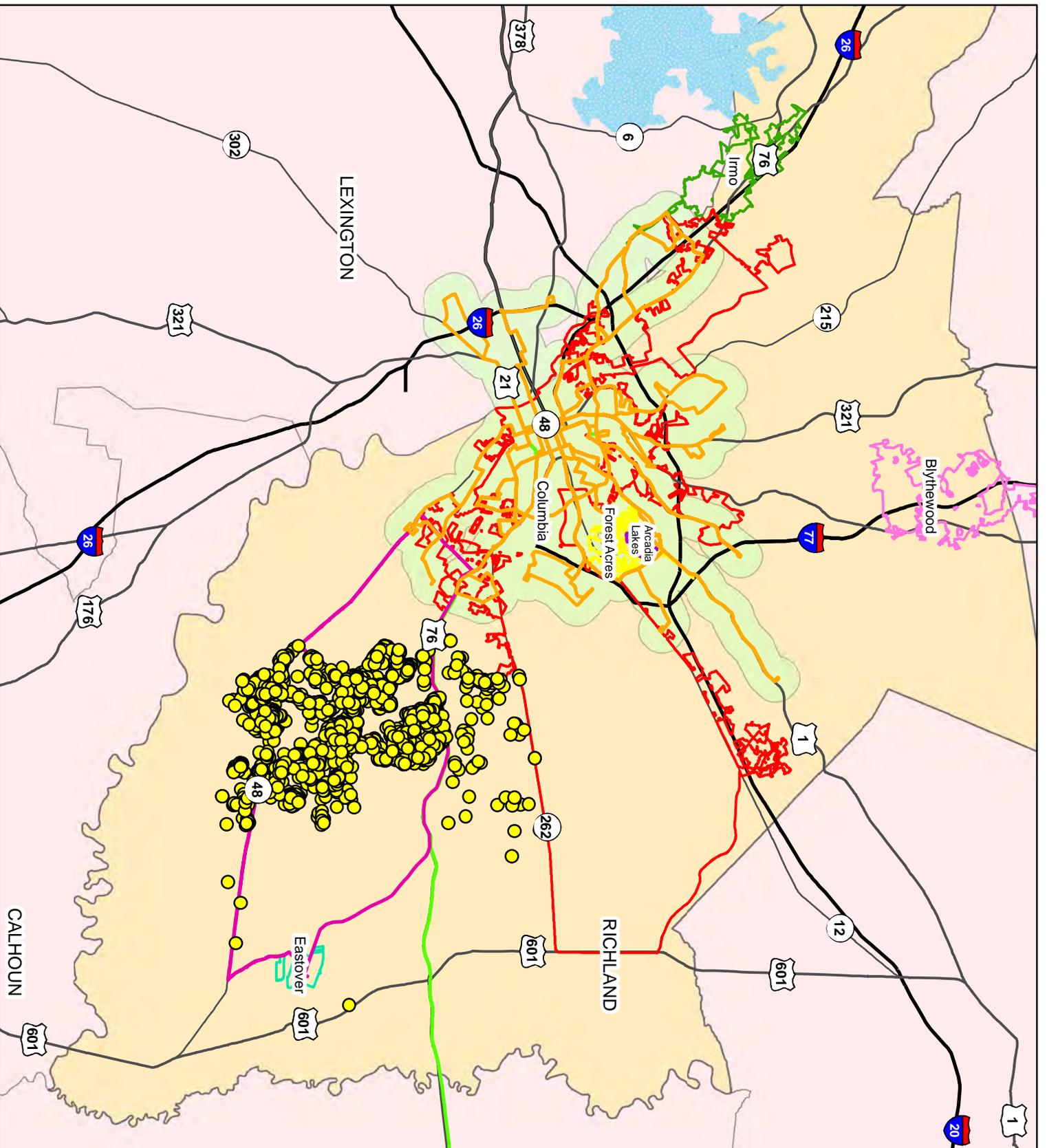
Appendix E: Additional Mapping Analysis

CMCOG Rural Area Assessment Out of the DART Service Area Request

- Columbia, Blythehood, Irmo Church Locations
- Lower Richland Church Locations
- The COMET Routes
- Eastover Route
- Sumter to Columbia VanPool
- The COMET Routes 3/4 Mile Buffer
- Arcadia Lakes
- Blythehood
- Forest Acres
- Columbia
- Eastover
- Irmo
- US Highways
- SC Highways
- Interstates
- Lake Murray
- Richland County
- County
- Boundaries



CMCOG Rural Area Assessment Out of the DART Service Area Request



Data Sources: US Census Bureau, 2008-2012 American Community Survey, South Carolina DOT