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FIVE COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS REGIONAL MOBILITY STUDY

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Research & Innovation Division

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16. Abstract <p>The purpose of the Five County Association of Governments (AOG) Regional Mobility Study is to identify options to meet the mobility needs of transportation-disadvantaged individuals in Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Kane, and Washington Counties. The research included a literature review; inventory of transportation providers in the Five County AOG region; analysis of relevant community demographics; inventory of potential transit trip generators; a community input gathering process including a public survey and focus groups; and a SWOT analysis of potential strategies for the expansion of public transportation in the region.</p> <p>The research found that available services are meeting some of the trip needs of the target population, but there is significant demand for additional service. In rural areas of the region, service is sparse or nonexistent and is limited by eligibility requirements and severely constrained financial resources. In the populated areas, where public transit exists, its reach is limited both geographically and temporally. Expanding transportation in the Five County AOG region will involve many partners, planning efforts, and funding sources working over a multi-year timeframe.</p> <p>The recommendations of the study are for the Cedar City and St. George-area transit systems to expand their services to neighboring jurisdictions in Iron and Washington Counties, and for the Five County AOG to develop rural transit services in Beaver, Garfield, and Kane Counties. The expansion of transit services will require local stakeholders to work with UDOT and local and state officials to identify new sources of funding for planning, capital, and operational expenses.</p>					
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Five County Association of Governments (Five County AOG) Regional Mobility Study is to outline a set of recommended transit options to meet the mobility needs of transportation-disadvantaged individuals in the five-county study area: Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Kane, and Washington Counties of Utah. The study recommendations consider existing transit facilities, locations where older adults and people with disabilities reside, and their most important trip destinations. Tasks associated with the development of this plan included a literature review, provider inventory, interviews, demographic analysis, stakeholder and community input through a public survey and focus groups, needs and gaps analysis, recommendations, and a funding sources analysis. The study addresses five questions:

1. What transportation services are available to transportation-disadvantaged individuals (defined as low-income individuals, older adults (65+), and people with disabilities) living in the study area?
2. What are the residential patterns and projected growth/changes of transportation-disadvantaged populations in the study area?
3. What are the important trip destinations for transportation-disadvantaged individuals living in the study area?
4. To what extent do the existing services meet the needs of transportation-disadvantaged populations to travel to important trip destinations?
5. What changes would be necessary to the existing services, or what new services should be developed, in order to increase the extent to which these needs are met?

1.1 Methods

The study was conducted by a consultant with oversight from a project Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), which met virtually on a monthly basis throughout the study to provide feedback on work performed by the consultant. The TAC meeting participants represented the following organizations:

- Utah Department of Transportation Rural Public Transit Program
- Utah Department of Transportation Research and Innovation Division
- Utah Department of Transportation Planning Division
- Five County Association of Governments (Five County AOG)

- Zion National Park
- Kane County Active Living Centers
- SunTran

The project consultant began the study with a review of literature pertaining to the unmet transportation needs of older adults and people with disabilities in rural areas, as well as sources of information about transportation service provision in Utah. Other research tasks included an inventory of transportation providers in the Five County AOG region, the analysis of relevant community demographics, and an inventory of potential transit trip generators. The project consultant conducted a community input gathering process that consisted of an online public survey and a series of six virtual focus groups. The quantitative and qualitative data garnered from these activities informed the consultant's analysis of the region's unmet transportation needs and gaps in service. This analysis was used to generate a list of potential strategies for the expansion of public transportation services in the region. The TAC, along with members of the Five County AOG Regional Mobility Council, reviewed and discussed the strategies in a virtual SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis meeting facilitated by the consultant. This meeting generated feedback that the consultant used to formulate the recommendations for public transportation service enhancements and expansions described in this report.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan

2.1.1 Overview and Provider Inventory

The project consultant reviewed the Five County AOG’s Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan (CHSTP, or “Plan”) for 2021–2026 (2021, revised in 2023) for Beaver, Iron, Garfield, Washington, and Kane Counties. The Plan describes unmet transportation needs of older adults, people with disabilities and individuals with low incomes, and outlines strategies to meet these needs. The Plan is updated every four years or as needed. It is used by Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) and regional stakeholders to determine local needs for federal grant funding that supports transportation for older adults and people with disabilities. The Plan described input received during a 2016 community input survey completed by 345 respondents from the Five County AOG region. The key findings from the survey were that lack of affordable housing, limited transportation opportunities, and low wages were major barriers to exiting poverty and working toward self-sufficiency in Southwest Utah. However, across public, private, and low-income sectors, many believed that locally driven solutions, better communication across local agencies, and additional community involvement and resources had the potential to improve the quality of life in the region. Other input activities, conducted in 2016 and 2017, included a focus group, interviews with Council on Aging directors, and a Regional Transportation Expo.

The Plan’s strategies for meeting transportation needs and filling service gaps were generated by the Five County AOG with input and prioritization from the CHSTP Committee, which has since transitioned into the Regional Mobility Council. The Regional Mobility Council consists of representatives from health and human service agencies, transportation providers, medical centers, senior centers, organizations representing people with disabilities, and various other groups. The council meets bimonthly and focuses on ways to improve the mobility and independence of the most vulnerable populations in the community.

The Plan documented a variety of specialized transportation services that address many of the transportation needs of vulnerable populations operating within the Five County AOG region. Types of services included intercity bus service, public transportation, senior services, private agency-operated services, taxi services, and others. Twenty-five providers were listed in the Plan with basic information including days and hours of service, service areas, eligibility criteria, fees, vehicle types, and contact information. It was noted that local assisted living and long-term care facilities also offer transportation to their residents. The Plan described the services of major providers serving the St. George metropolitan area, Cedar City, and outlying rural areas.

2.1.1.1 St. George Metropolitan Area/Washington County

- St. George, Ivins, and Washington are served by SunTran, the metropolitan area's public transit operator. There are six fixed bus routes serving 135 bus stops. Demand response service is provided within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of the routes as required under the Americans with Disabilities Act complementary paratransit regulations. The plan noted that approximately 35,000 residents reside within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of a SunTran bus stop.
- The Washington County Council on Aging provides demand response transportation to older adults and people with disabilities in the St. George metropolitan area and rural Washington County, with most rides occurring outside of the SunTran paratransit service area.
- Brian Head Town provides public shuttle routes operated by St. George Shuttle during the ski seasons and summer events.
- Taxi services and transportation network companies (Uber and Lyft) are available.

2.1.1.2 Cedar City/Iron County

- Cedar City operates a public transit system consisting of one fixed route and a demand response service. The demand response service is reserved for older adults and people with disabilities.
- Iron County Council on Aging provides transportation for older adults and people with disabilities in Cedar City and other Iron County communities.
- Taxi services, including Iron County Shuttle, and transportation network companies (Uber and Lyft) are available.

2.1.1.3 Areas Outside St. George Metropolitan Area and Cedar City

- Beaver County Council on Aging operates a volunteer driver program for older adults and people with disabilities, with rides based on driver availability.
- Garfield County Council on Aging operates a volunteer driver program for older adults and people with disabilities, with rides based on driver availability.
- Kane County Council on Aging provides transportation for older adults and people with disabilities.
- Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks operate shuttle services for visitors of the park, mainly developed to manage parking, traffic congestion, and air quality.

2.1.1.4 Intercity Bus Service

Greyhound, St. George Shuttle, and Salt Lake Express provide intercity bus transportation for those needing to travel to large cities outside of the area, including Salt Lake City and Las Vegas. Stops are located only in St. George, Cedar City, Beaver (Beaver County), and Parowan (Iron County).

2.1.1.5 Human Service Agencies

TURN Community Services, Danville Services, and Red Rock Center for Independence are among the organizations that provide transportation for their clients.

2.1.2 Identified Unmet Needs

The 2016 community input survey indicated that half (49.6%) of respondents felt that transportation barriers prevented them, or someone they knew, from achieving economic security. The most frequent barriers mentioned were frequency and geographical reach of public transportation; the lack of rural public transportation for non-seniors in Garfield, Kane, and Beaver counties; the need for transit navigation training; and the high cost of transportation for families commuting long distances for employment.

At the 2017 Regional Transportation Expo, participants commented on the need to expand SunTran bus routes south to suburban communities outside of St. George including Bloomington, Bloomington Hills, and Sun River. Public transportation to access jobs is

particularly needed in the region, especially to jobs with low wages. Some locations noted included Ft. Pierce Industrial Park, Gateway Industrial Area, and nearby communities, such as Washington, for access to jobs in St. George.

The Plan's analysis of mobility gaps found the region's specialized transportation providers serve primarily the county senior centers and small client populations of the disability and behavioral health sectors. Public transportation is not available outside of the St. George/Ivins area and Cedar City. The specialized services in the outlying rural areas are limited in their capacity to adequately serve older adults and people with disabilities.

The Plan summarized the following unmet needs.

2.1.2.1 Education and Outreach About Available Transportation Resources

Input indicated many residents are unaware of the transportation services available to them, or they are unsure of eligibility for service and how to request rides.

2.1.2.2 Extended Hours of Service

Outside of St. George/Ivins and Cedar City, transportation is available only during limited hours of service. It was noted that in Washington County, the senior center's budget is only sufficient to hire part-time drivers and operate for five hours per day. In other counties, there are only sufficient funds to transport seniors to the centers for congregate meals, with some offering service one day per week for shopping and medical trips.

2.1.2.3 Consistent Availability of Transportation During Regular Hours and Days of Service

Some providers provide out-of-town trips only if they receive a minimum number of trip reservations for a given day. This means that people cannot depend upon transportation.

2.1.2.4 Geographical Expansion of Public Transit

Residents of the St. George area would benefit from the expansion of SunTran into new areas, including suburban communities. A 2012 feasibility study on connectivity between St.

George and Springdale included a recommendation to implement bus service connecting St. George to communities throughout the Interstate 15 and State Route 9 corridor, terminating in Springdale. The service would provide visitor and employee access to Zion National Park while providing some local service in Hurricane, Washington City, and La Verkin. In Cedar City, expansions have been discussed for service in Brian Head, Enoch, and Parowan to meet needs in those communities. (Note: In 2024, SunTran launched a bus route between St. George and Springdale, and UDOT has initiated a transit study of the Cedar City area.)

2.1.2.5 Comfortable Waiting Areas at Fixed Route Stops

People waiting for buses would benefit from more shelters to protect them from the sun and heat.

2.1.2.6 Rural-Urban Connectivity

Intercity bus stops are located only in St. George, Cedar City, Beaver (Beaver County), and Parowan (Iron County). Otherwise, connectivity between rural areas and urban destinations is limited to what the region's senior centers or other providers offer. The Plan noted that the communities of Kanab, Milford, Minersville, Enterprise, Panguitch, and Escalante face isolation and have significant numbers of residents with transportation needs. Residents of smaller, rural communities generally need access to urban areas for shopping, medical care, employment, and other needs. Even communities closer in proximity to St. George and Cedar City are without adequate connectivity to urban destinations.

2.1.2.7 Workforce Transportation

Employees without personal transportation struggle to get to jobs. The Plan noted that transportation is needed to a Wal-Mart distribution center, Smithfield Hog Production, the Brian Head and Eagle Point ski resorts, and Ruby's Inn.

2.1.2.8 Volunteer Transportation

The Plan noted that the Beaver, Garfield, and Kane County senior centers use volunteer drivers to provide transportation. More effective methods of recruiting and retaining volunteers

would increase the number of volunteers available to supplement the paid driving workforce and help meet more needs.

2.1.2.9 Local Elected Official Involvement

The Plan noted that local elected officials are often unaware of the extent of the region's unmet transportation needs. Their awareness and support are necessary to ensure that quality services are provided to the community.

2.1.2.10 Measures to Control Exposure to Weather Extremes

Many older adults and people with disabilities, who rely on transportation services, are unable to tolerate extreme heat and cold. Additionally, vehicle condition is impacted by weather extremes. Adequate transportation facilities, including waiting areas, are necessary to control exposure to the elements.

2.1.3 Strategies for Meeting Needs

The Plan documented twelve strategies for meeting transportation needs in the region.

1. Central Directory of Information

To ensure the availability of accurate transportation service information, the Five County AOG Regional Mobility Manager would keep Utah's 211 system updated with local transportation providers' information (e.g., service areas, eligibility, and routes).

2. Regional Vanpool Services

Vanpools can be an effective strategy for employee transportation over longer distances. Utah Transit Authority's vanpool program is available to the OAG region. The Regional Mobility Manager would connect local employers with UTA for vanpool services and encourage a study of the feasibility for more vanpool adoption in the region.

3. Flexible Travel Vouchers

Vouchers may be an effective means of filling gaps by providing funding for individuals to pay for rides with transit, taxis, or volunteer drivers. A voucher program feasibility study was noted as a necessary first step for this strategy.

4. Travel Training

Travel training was included as a strategy for the Cedar City area. SunTran already offered a travel training program at the time the Plan was developed. The Regional Mobility Manager would work with the public transit agencies to recruit, train, and compensate volunteer travel trainers.

5. Route Expansions of Existing Transportation Services

Under this strategy, SunTran and CATS would extend their route networks to cover the following communities:

CATS: Enoch, Parowan, and Brian Head

SunTran: Bloomington and Bloomington Hills areas in St. George, Washington City, Hurricane, La Verkin, and Santa Clara

It was noted in the Plan that the City of Ivins joined the SunTran system in 2014 and has experienced growing ridership.

6. Prioritize 5310 Funds for Operating Expenses

The Plan encouraged transportation providers eligible for Section 5310 funding to use this funding for operations in order to increase their hours of service and provide more dependable, routine service. It was noted that local matching funds would be necessary for Section 5310 operating grants.

7. Provide More Accessible and Safe Bus Facilities

Under this strategy, public transit operators would apply for federal funds and use volunteer and local resources to increase the number of bus shelters. A study of pedestrian access would benefit this process by identifying and prioritizing locations for shelters and pedestrian infrastructure like sidewalks.

8. Expansion and Maintenance of Paratransit/Senior/Low-Income Transportation Service

The public transit and human service transportation providers would seek additional funding from federal and local sources to expand their services. SunTran was identified as a lead organization for this effort in order to support the expansion of rural providers' services.

9. Intercity Bus Coordination

Under this strategy, local providers would develop services to connect to intercity bus stops and provide first- and last-mile connections. The local transportation providers would communicate local needs to the intercity bus providers. The intercity providers (Greyhound, St. George Shuttle, Salt Lake Express) would increase their efforts to coordinate with local providers.

10. Leverage Funding

The Plan noted that federal programs outside of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) provide funding that can be directed to transportation, including the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Social Service Block Grant (SSBG) programs. FTA allows non-DOT federal funds to be used as local match for FTA grants. The Plan assigned responsibility for coordinating and strategizing to use these types of federal funds to local transportation and human service providers and members of the CHSTP Committee (now Regional Mobility Council).

11. Coordination Through Regional Transportation Planning Process

Under this strategy, the CHSTP Committee's Dixie Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Iron County Regional Planning Organization (RPO) representatives would communicate the Plan's unmet transportation needs and recommended strategies to the MPO Transportation Executive Committee to encourage the inclusion and consideration of Plan strategies in regional transportation planning.

12. Asset Management

Local providers and mobility managers would participate in UDOT's asset management program, including a new database to provide information to support the prioritization of local projects for funding. Two funding sources mentioned under this strategy are the Utah Permanent Community Impact Fund Board (CIB) and Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs.

2.1.4 Implementation

The Plan stated the implementation of the strategies would be carried out by the CHSTP Committee (now Regional Mobility Council), including workgroups established to focus on (1) insurance barriers to ridesharing between clients of disparate programs, (2) bus shelters, and (3) travel training. Additionally, the Plan noted that the Regional Mobility Manager meets with transportation service providers during bimonthly Regional Mobility Council meetings, workgroup meetings, and through regular one-on-one communication to discuss ways to coordinate and improve efficiency. The following efforts were identified as ongoing mobility management projects:

- Better utilization of the available volunteer driver network to deliver transportation services.
- Opening a “Dialysis Bus” traveling three times per week from Panguitch to Cedar City to the general public, while coordinating stop locations with CATS in Cedar City. This bus was operated by volunteers recruited through the local LDS Church.
- Organizing Utah Urban and Rural Specialized Transportation Association (URSTA) bus training courses for volunteer drivers in the region.
- Standardizing times for a Senior Center shuttle bus from Kanab to St. George to improve predictability and reliability.
- Working with Bryce Canyon City and area businesses to establish vanpools for employees.

2.2 Utah Intercity Bus Study

The Intercity Bus Study was conducted by the UDOT Rural Public Transit (RPT) team to fulfill the planning requirements of the FTA Intercity Bus Program – Section 5311(f). As a part of this compliance effort, this study analyzed existing intercity and regional bus connections between rural areas and Utah’s key destinations, assessed gaps and needs based on population and employment centers, and identified implementation strategies to improve connectivity and access to services.

The Section 5311(f) program defines intercity bus service as “[r]egularly scheduled bus service for the general public that operates with limited stops over fixed routes connecting two or

more urban areas not in close proximity, that has the capacity for transporting baggage carried by passengers, and that makes meaningful connections with scheduled intercity bus service to more distant points, if such service is available” (p. 5). The program requires states to either certify that the intercity bus needs of their populations are being met adequately, or spend at least 15 percent of their Section 5311 funding on rural intercity bus services. The certification had not been made in Utah as of 2023. FTA’s objectives for intercity bus services are to:

- Support the connection between nonurbanized areas and larger regional or national systems of intercity bus service.
- Support services to meet the intercity travel needs of residents in nonurbanized areas.
- Support the infrastructure of the intercity bus network through planning and marketing assistance and capital investment in facilities.

The study noted that the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) Reasonable Access Study found that approximately 60 percent of all rural Utahns had intercity bus service in 2021, with the remaining 40 percent having little or no service. The study identified multiple intercity bus routes that serve the Five County AOG region. Four providers operate routes serving the Interstate 15 corridor with stops in St. George, Washington, Cedar City, Parowan, and Beaver. One provider, St. George Shuttle, also provides service from St. George to Springdale and Zion National Park, with stops in Washington, Hurricane, La Verkin, and Virgin.

The study included a demographic analysis of Utah that was used to generate recommendations for investments in expanded intercity bus service based on demand. No new service was recommended for the Five County AOG region, although the study recommended further analysis of ridership and service availability between Salt Lake City and St. George to determine whether existing services are sufficient to meet local needs. The study’s analysis of the existing services indicated that same-day round trips were available on two carriers from St. George to communities to its north. St. George Shuttle departs from St. George at 6:30 a.m. with the return arriving at 8:50 p.m. Salt Lake Express departs at 4:00 a.m. with the return arriving at 10:00 p.m.

In Utah, in the past two years, the use of 5311(f) funding has been limited to subsidizing the Blanding and Vernal routes of the Salt Lake Express, not in the Five County AOG region. To be eligible for subsidy per FTA rules, intercity providers must offer fixed routes and designated stops, provide a connection to the nation's larger intercity bus network, and offer accompanying parcel service. Only Greyhound and Salt Lake Express met these criteria at the time of the study. The Intercity Bus Study identified the St. George to Salt Lake City corridor as a potential area for improved service due to high utilization of the existing routes and projected population and employment growth in the communities served. It was recommended that UDOT monitor ridership on these routes to determine if transit demand is being met. (The companies operating in the corridor are not current FTA or state funding recipients and, therefore, are not obligated to share ridership data with UDOT.)

An additional finding was that opportunities exist to improve intercity bus connections with local and regional services to provide riders with improved access to major activity centers. It was noted that "Intercity and local/regional transit providers working together to provide timed connections and communicate with each other for future schedule and service adjustments will result in better connections" (p. 91). A recommended goal was for multiple service providers to share bus stops to make timed transfers easier. In the Implementation Strategies section of the study, Strategy 1.4 was to convene local, regional, and intercity providers to identify opportunities for improved connections. The study noted that potential funding sources for improvements include Section 5311(f) funding for eligible intercity routes, new state funding if authorized by the Utah Legislature, or Section 5339(b) Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities funding for capital bus-stop improvement projects generated by partnerships between local and regional agencies with intercity operators.

2.3 Methods for Forecasting Demand and Quantifying Need for Rural Passenger Transportation

Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 161 addresses rural transit needs assessment, defining transportation need as: "(1) the number of people in a given geographic area likely to require a passenger transportation service, and (2) the number of trips that would be made by those persons if they had minimal limitations on their personal mobility" (p. 6). The

authors found that need is determined primarily by two variables: vehicle ownership and poverty. The U.S. Census collects data on vehicle ownership and poverty through the American Community Survey, which is administered yearly to 2.5 percent of U.S. households. A calculation is provided to determine need in an area based on the two variables. The authors define a mobility gap as the number of trips that are not taken by members of zero-vehicle households as compared to residents of households with access to personal vehicles. This can be calculated by multiplying the number of households with no vehicle available by the mobility gap for the applicable U.S. region as determined from data in the National Household Travel Survey. The authors calculated a mobility gap of 0.8 person-trips per day for the Mountain U.S. Census Division, which includes Utah. This value is the difference between the number of person-trips per day taken by households with zero vehicles and the number of daily trips taken by households with one vehicle available. To estimate annual need, the authors recommend multiplying the daily gap by 300 days, reflecting reduced trip need on the weekends.

The project consultant applied this methodology to the study area. The results are provided in Table 1. The estimated mobility gap is lowest in Garfield County, at 1,152 annual one-way passenger trips. It is highest in Washington County, at 46,032 one-way passenger trips.

Table 1: Mobility Gap

County	Estimated Number of Zero-Vehicle Households	Estimated Mobility Gap (Trips)
Beaver	62	1,488
Garfield	48	1,152
Iron	631	15,144
Kane	149	3,576
Washington	1,918	46,032

2.4 Estimating Ridership of Rural-Demand-Response Transit Services for the General Public

Mattson (2016) provides two models for estimating ridership of rural-demand-response transit services. These methodologies were developed to assist transit agencies in estimating ridership based on operational characteristics (such as advance reservations requirements and

fares) and community characteristics (such as population and prevalence of older adults). The author created these models primarily because existing models lacked service characteristics that impact ridership, such as passenger fares, space of service, and advance reservation requirements.

In terms of operational data, the first model (Model 1) estimates ridership based on select datapoints collected from rural-demand-response transit systems in National Transit Database (NTD) reporting. The second model (Model 2) is based, in part, on survey data collected from rural transit agencies that incorporated factors not tracked by NTD, including the number of days of advance notice required for customers to request trip reservations. The results of running each model for Beaver, Garfield, Iron and Kane Counties are provided in Table 2. Washington County is not included because this methodology was developed for rural transit systems only.

According to the Model 2 methodology, ridership is highly responsive to the reservation window required by the transit agencies. When customers are provided with trips on a next-day reservation basis, instead of being required to reserve trips at least two days in advance, ridership increases approximately fourfold. The outputs Model 1 and Model 2 were calculated based on an assumption of a five-dollar passenger fare for a one-way trip.

Table 2: Estimates of Rural Demand-Response Ridership Using Two Models

County	Model 1	Model 2 (2+ day reservation window)	Model 2 (Next-day reservation window)
Beaver	4,023	1,534	5,302
Garfield	8,024	1,224	4,231
Iron	12,405	3,414	11,799
Kane	7,774	1,639	5,664

2.5 2023 Utah Moves Transportation Survey

The 2023 Utah Moves Transportation Survey gathered detailed demographic and travel pattern data from Utah residents through a three-part approach:

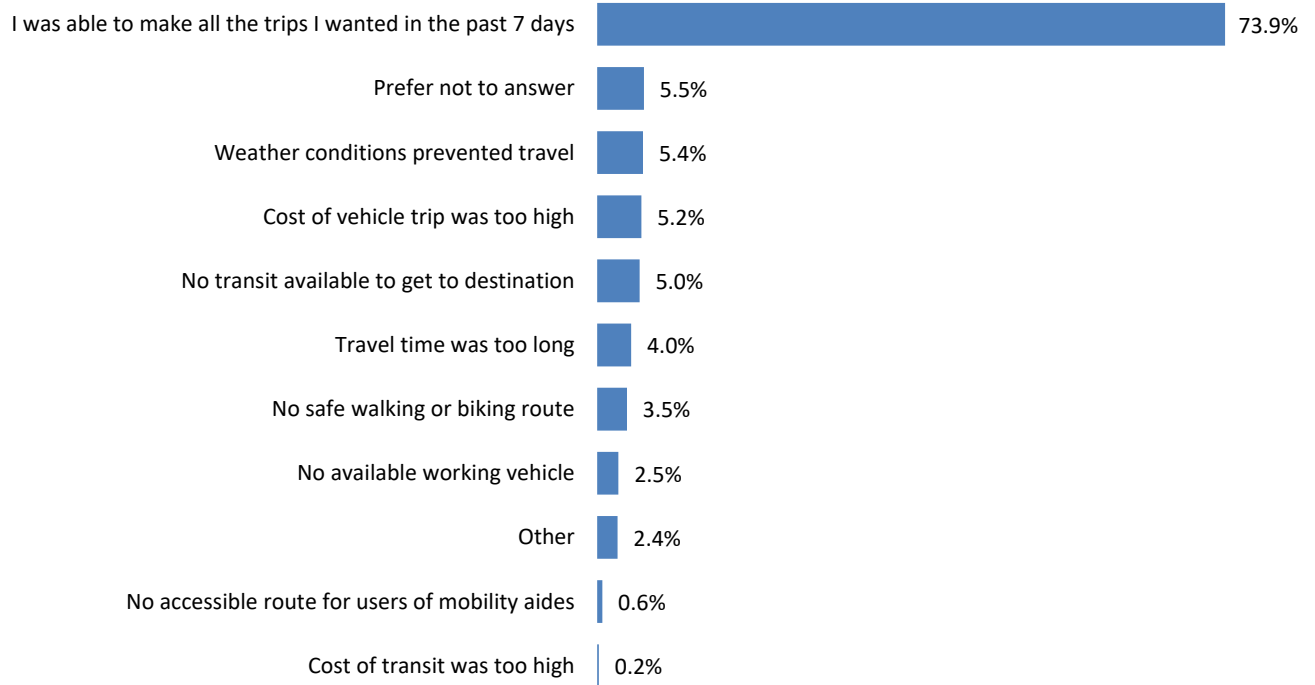
1. A core household travel survey collected daily travel data from over 25,000 individuals in 9,799 households across Utah, excluding those in group living situations, to understand typical weekday travel patterns in Spring 2023.
2. A university survey targeted college and university students from eight institutions statewide, with over 1,300 student participants, capturing weekday travel behaviors specific to the student population.
3. An additional supplemental and long-distance survey gathered more attitudinal and long-distance travel data from 3,250 respondents from the core survey.

This comprehensive survey approach aimed to capture both typical and long-distance travel patterns to support informed transportation planning in Utah. Results were available at the county level for some data, and for the Five County AOG region for other data. The data were weighted to estimate county- and region-wide values. Select findings are provided as follows.

2.5.1 Barriers to Making Trips

Figure 1 provides the barriers experienced by Five-County-AOG region residents to making trips cited in the survey. The respondents primarily resided in Washington (1,109) and Iron (831) Counties. While most indicated that they were able to make all the trips they wanted within the previous seven days, about five percent reported that the lack of transit to their destination was a barrier.

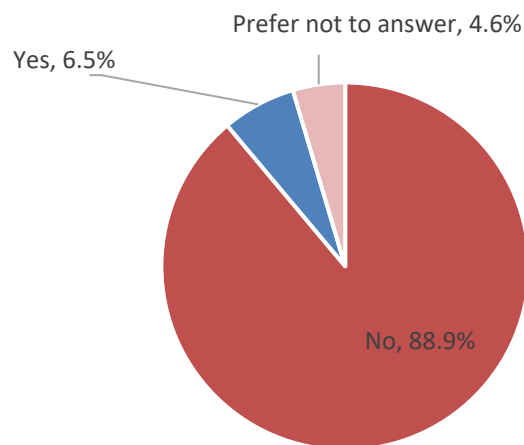
Figure 1: Barriers to Making Trips, Five County AOG Region (n = 1,985)



2.5.2 Disability Impact on Travel

As shown in Figure 2, 6.5 percent of the region's residents have a disability that affects their ability to travel.

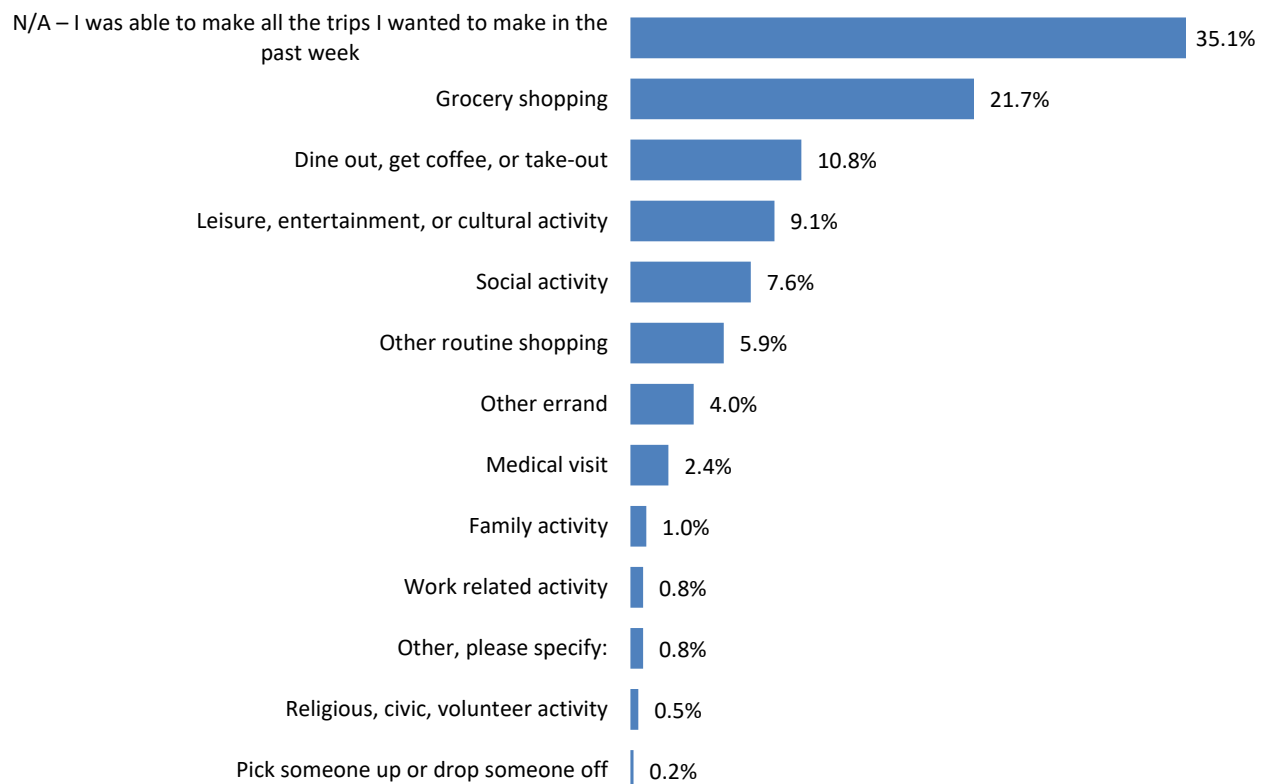
Figure 2: Has Disability Affecting Travel Ability, Five County AOG Region (n = 1,985)



2.5.3 Forsaken Trips

The follow-on supplemental survey included questions about trips that residents of Utah households have forsaken, including the purposes for these trips. The sample included 320 Five-County-AOG region households. Trip purposes for trips that these households' residents wanted to take, but did not, are shown in Figure 3. The most frequently forsaken trips were grocery shopping trips (21.7%), with 2.4% reporting that they did not make a medical visit they had wanted to.

Figure 3: Intended Purposes of Most Recent Forsaken Trips, Five County AOG region (n = 320)



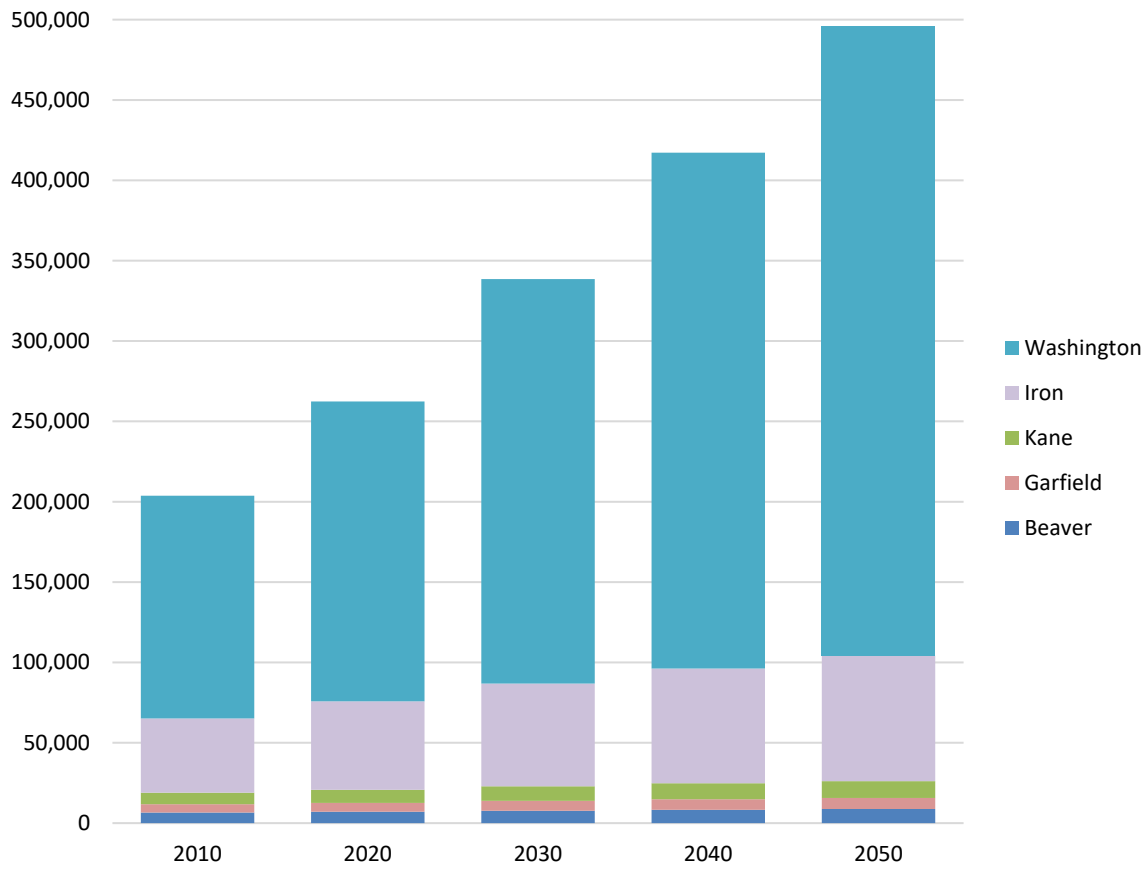
3.0 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The data for this demographic analysis of Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Kane, and Washington Counties was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2022 ACS Five-Year Estimates, 2021 Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin-Destination Employment Statistics data, and the 2020 Decennial Census. Except for decennial census data, data presented are estimates of conditions at any point within sample periods. These estimates are not exact and have a margin of error associated with them.

3.1 Population

All of the counties in the Five County AOG region are expected to see growth in their populations. Figure 4 shows the Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Kane, and Washington Counties population and projections through 2050. Washington County is expected to see the highest increase, with its population more than doubling between 2020 and 2050 (growth of 110 percent). Iron County will grow its population by 42 percent, and Beaver, Kane, and Garfield Counties' populations will each grow by 25 to 28 percent.

Figure 4: Population Projections for Five County AOG Region



Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute State and County Projections, produced July 2017

The share of growth, expressed in the number of residents, anticipated for the next 25 years in each county is depicted in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Share of Growth by County

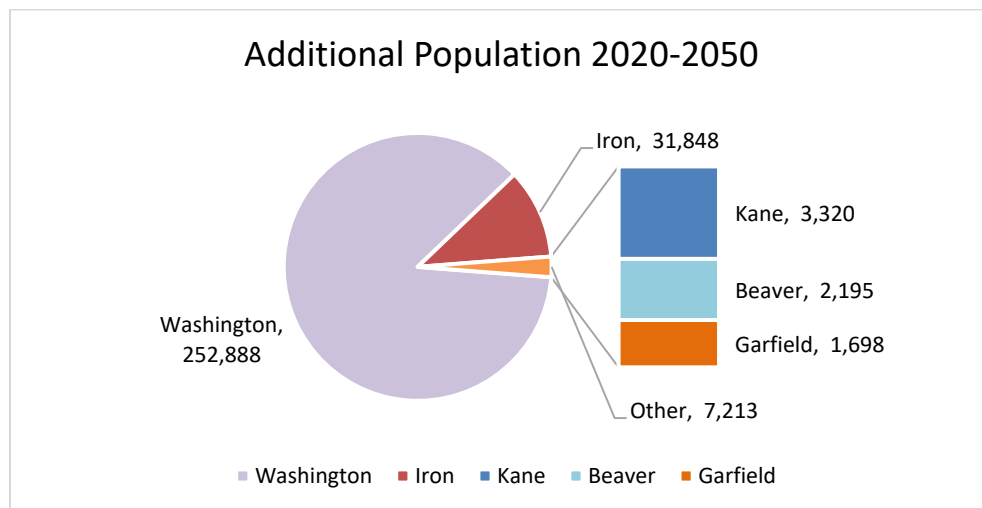
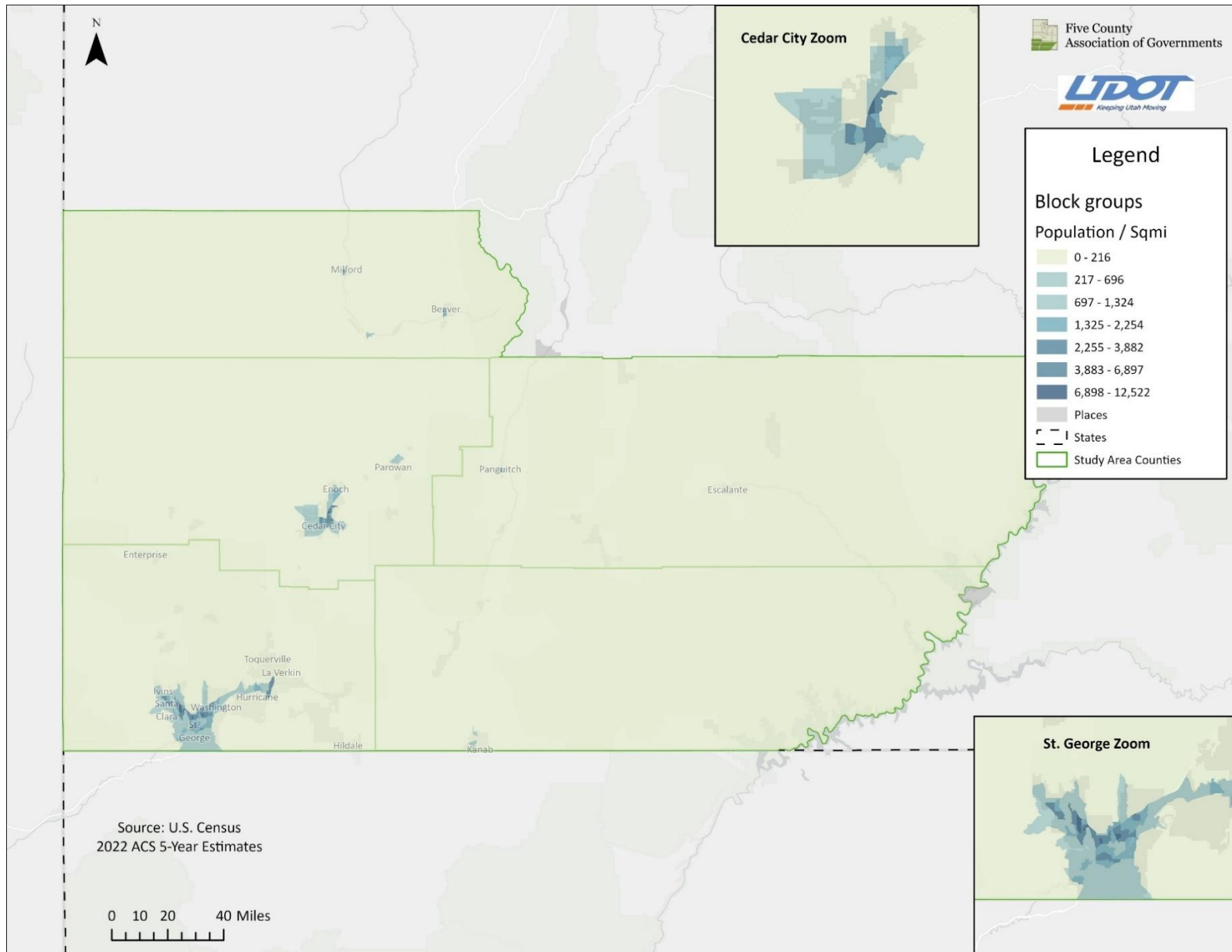


Figure 6 represents the population density for the Five County AOG area at the block group level. The areas of highest density are in Ivins, Santa Clara, St. George, and Washington in Washington County, and Cedar City in Iron County. Those areas had more than 6,898 people per square mile. The next highest areas of population density (between 3,883 and 6,897 people per square mile) are also located in the same areas. In general, fixed-route public transit is considered to be cost efficient in areas with more than 2,000 residents per square mile.

Figure 6: Population Density

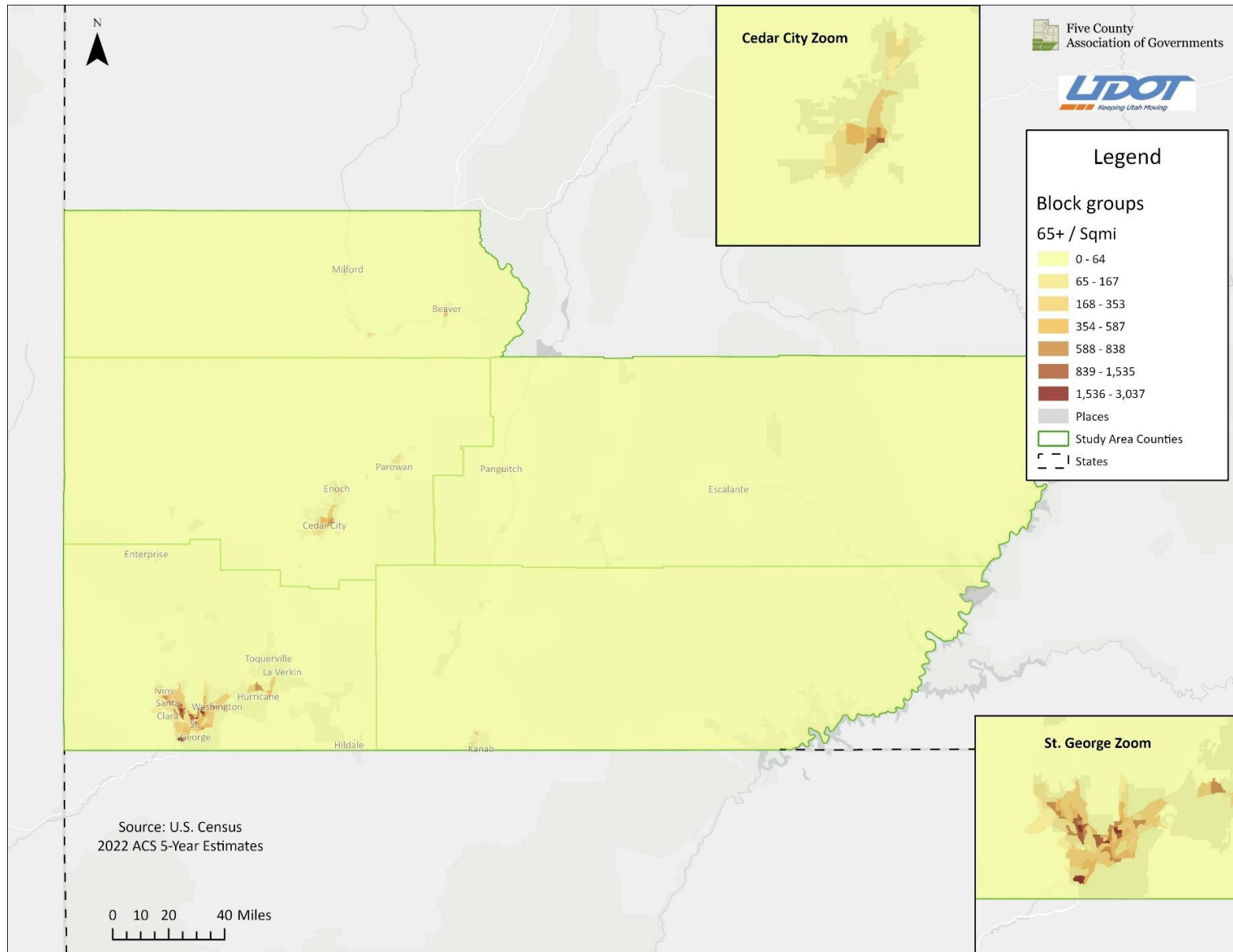


3.2 Older Adult Population

The term “older adults” includes individuals aged 65 and older. The older adult population is an important factor in transportation planning because as people age, they are more likely to need alternatives to driving. Transportation is key to maintaining independence throughout our entire lives. Numerous national studies have demonstrated that having transportation options directly correlates with health and wellness. Older adults are most likely to use transportation services when they are unable to drive themselves or choose not to drive. Self-imposed limitations on driving often include not driving at night or making trips to more distant destinations. As a result of these limitations, individuals are more likely to look for an alternative option to go where they need to go. Older adults also may be on a limited retirement income and, therefore, public or subsidized transportation services are a more economical alternative to owning a vehicle. For these reasons, the population of older adults in an area is one indicator of potential transit demand.

As the population ages, the number of people who are likely to need transportation increases even if the total number of people in the service area is not increasing. As indicated in Figure 7, the areas with the highest older adult population density are around Santa Clara, Washington, and southern St. George.

Figure 7: Older Adult Population

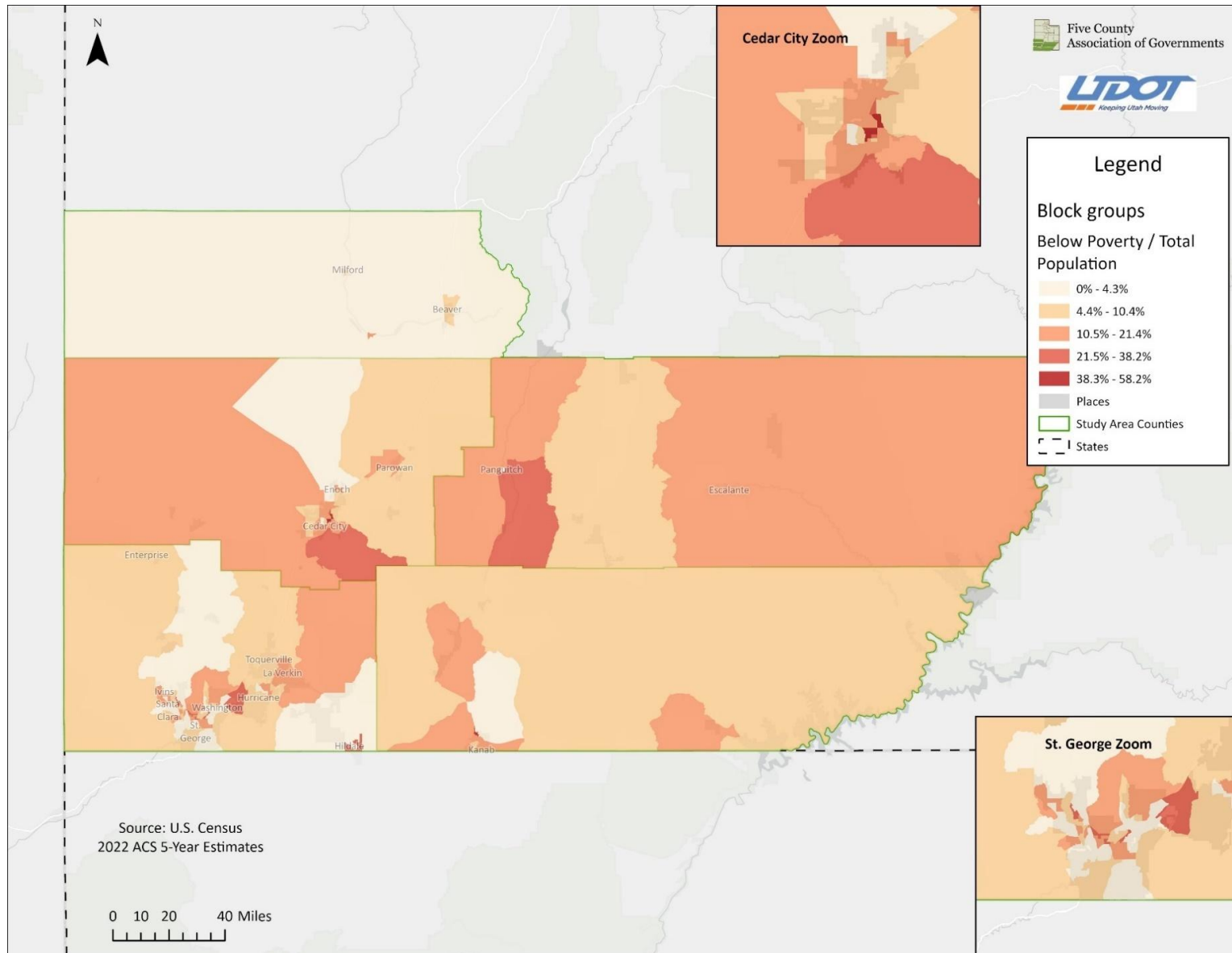


3.3 Income and Poverty

Income is also an indicator of potential demand for public transit services. Individuals and households with lower incomes are less likely to have one or more vehicles and more likely to use alternative transportation options that are budget friendly. Approximately 10.1 percent of individuals in the Five County AOG area lived in households with incomes below the poverty level in 2022.

Figure 8 illustrates the distribution of the population living below the poverty level throughout the region. The block groups that have the highest percentage of the population with incomes below the poverty level are included in dark orange/red and have a range of 38.3 to 58.2 percent of the population earning incomes below the poverty level. Block groups with the highest density of individuals living below poverty are in Iron County, specifically in Cedar City. Areas of moderately high density were Cedar City, southern Iron County, Santa Clara, St. George, Washington, Hurricane, Hildale, and Panguitch.

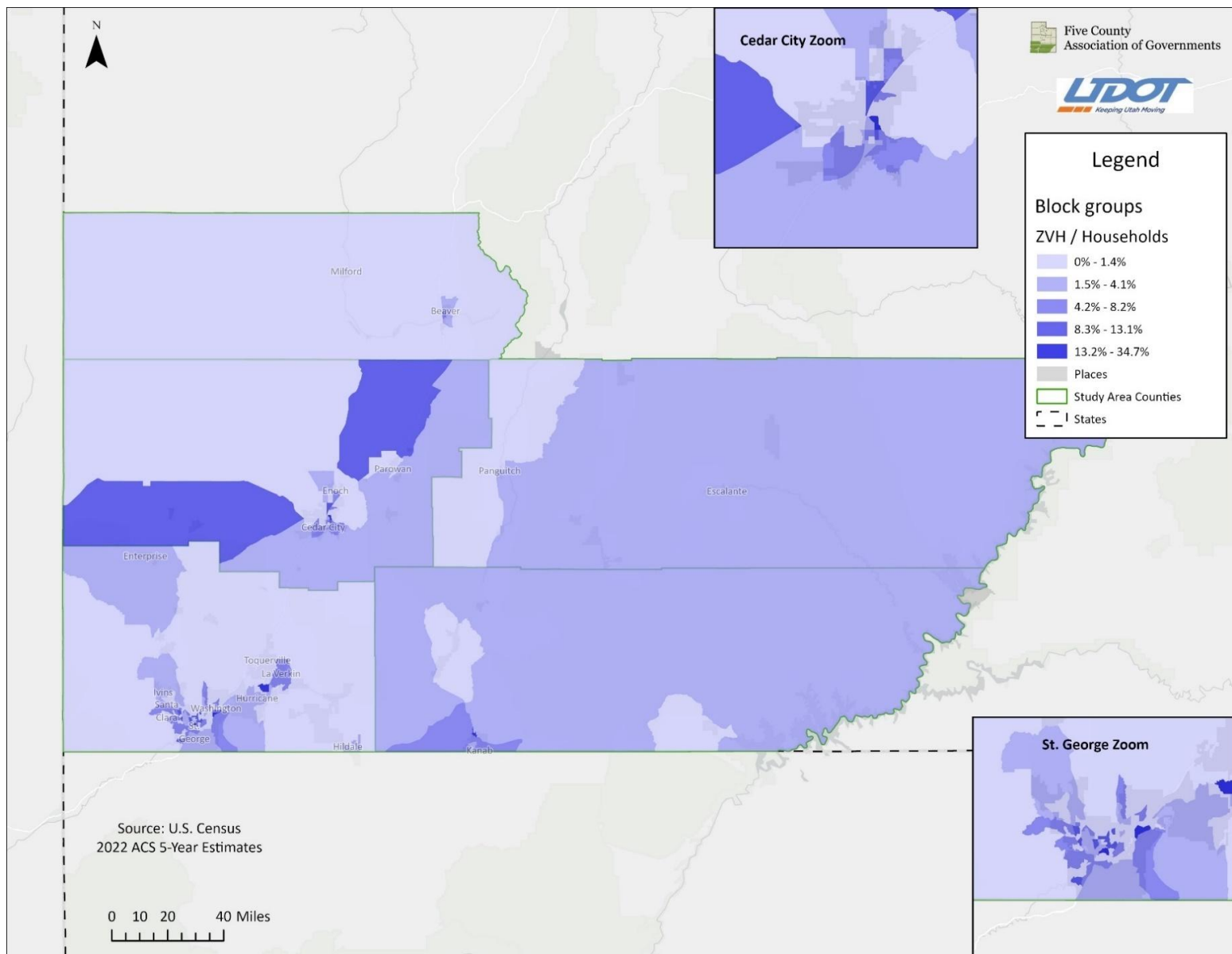
Figure 8: Percent of Population Living Below the Poverty Level



3.4 Zero-Vehicle Households

The number of vehicles available to a household is also an indicator of demand for transit because people living in households with no available vehicles are more likely to depend on public transit for all or most transportation needs. Within the Five County AOG area, the block groups with the highest percentage of households without a vehicle are in Cedar City, Hurricane, Washington, St. George, and Kanab as displayed in Figure 9.

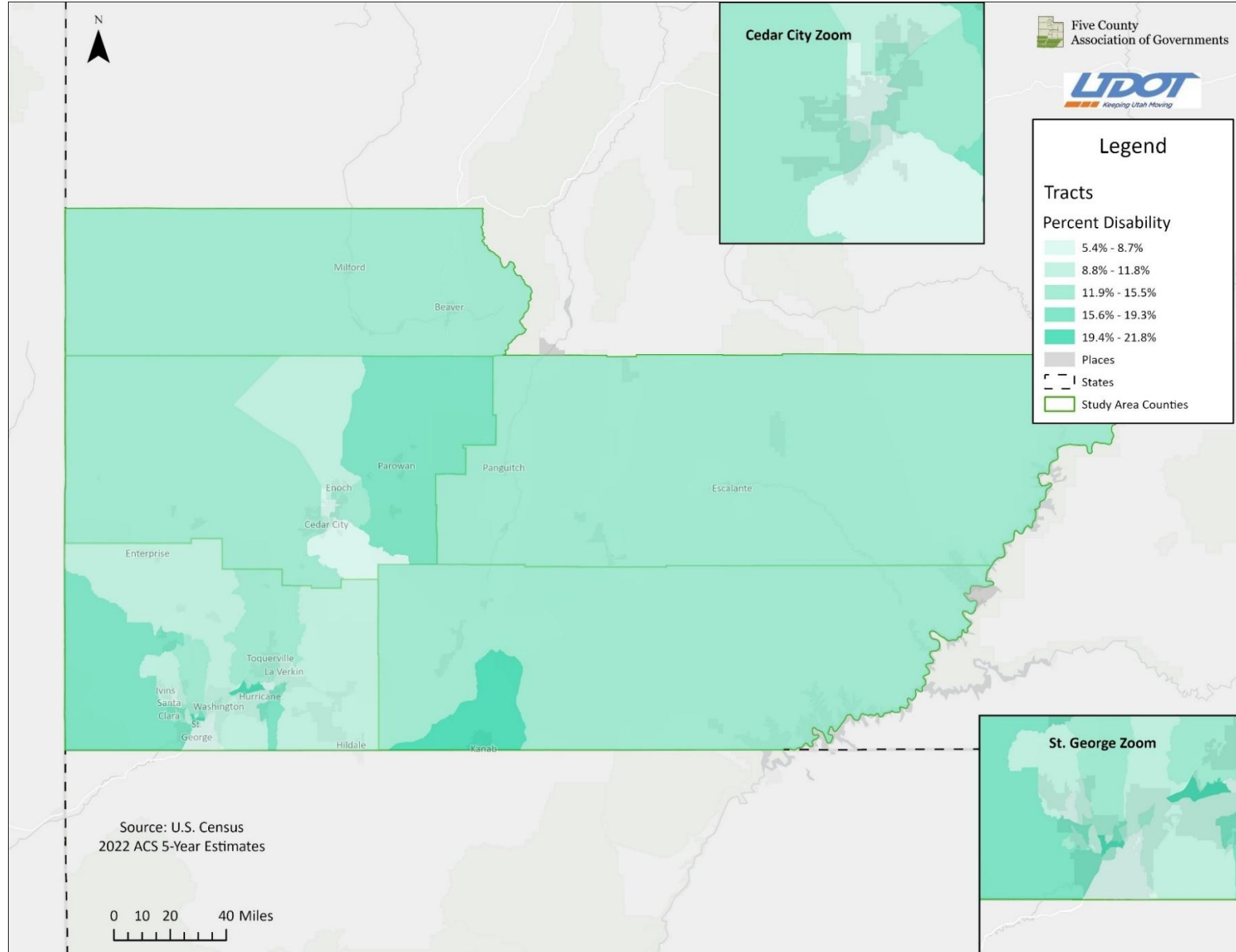
Figure 9: Percent of Households with Zero Vehicles Available



3.5 Disability

Figure 10 illustrates the number of individuals in the Five County AOG area that are living with a disability. Those individuals with a disability are more likely to use public transit due to the inability to drive a personal vehicle. The Census tracts with highest percentages of individuals with a disability are located in Kanab, Hurricane, and St. George. These Census tracts had between 19.4 and 21.8 percent of individuals with a disability.

Figure 10: Percent of Population with a Disability



3.6 Transit Propensity

In order to project which locations have the greatest demand for transit, a calculation to determine transit propensity can be used. Transit propensity is a model to provide a comparative estimate of areas where transit is likely to experience the highest level of demand. Transit propensity considers demographic characteristics to measure the likelihood that a local population will use transit service. The model was derived through research completed on transit trip generation. The result is an estimate of the relative propensity for transit demand per Census block group. To calculate transit propensity, American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates (2022) were gathered at the block group level for Beaver, Garfield, Iron, Kane, and Washington Counties. The data included the total population, total households, population below the poverty level, number of persons aged 65 and older, and the number of households with zero vehicles available. The results from the analysis are depicted in Table 3.

The project consultant conducted a comparative analysis of high, moderate, and low propensity. It must be noted that “very low” and “low” values do not indicate a lack of need, but the level of demand generated from those areas is less than the mean (average) value for the study area. The analysis results indicate the following salient points:

- Areas of highest projected transit demand (high) had a combination of the greatest population densities, largest elderly populations, had the highest numbers of housing units without an available vehicle, and had the most population below the poverty level.
- The block groups in this category (orange color) are located throughout Kane County, eastern Garfield County, north central Iron County, southwest Iron County, Cedar City, La Verkin, Hurricane, Washington, St. George, and Santa Clara.
- It should be noted that no areas in the Five County AOG area were categorized as very high.

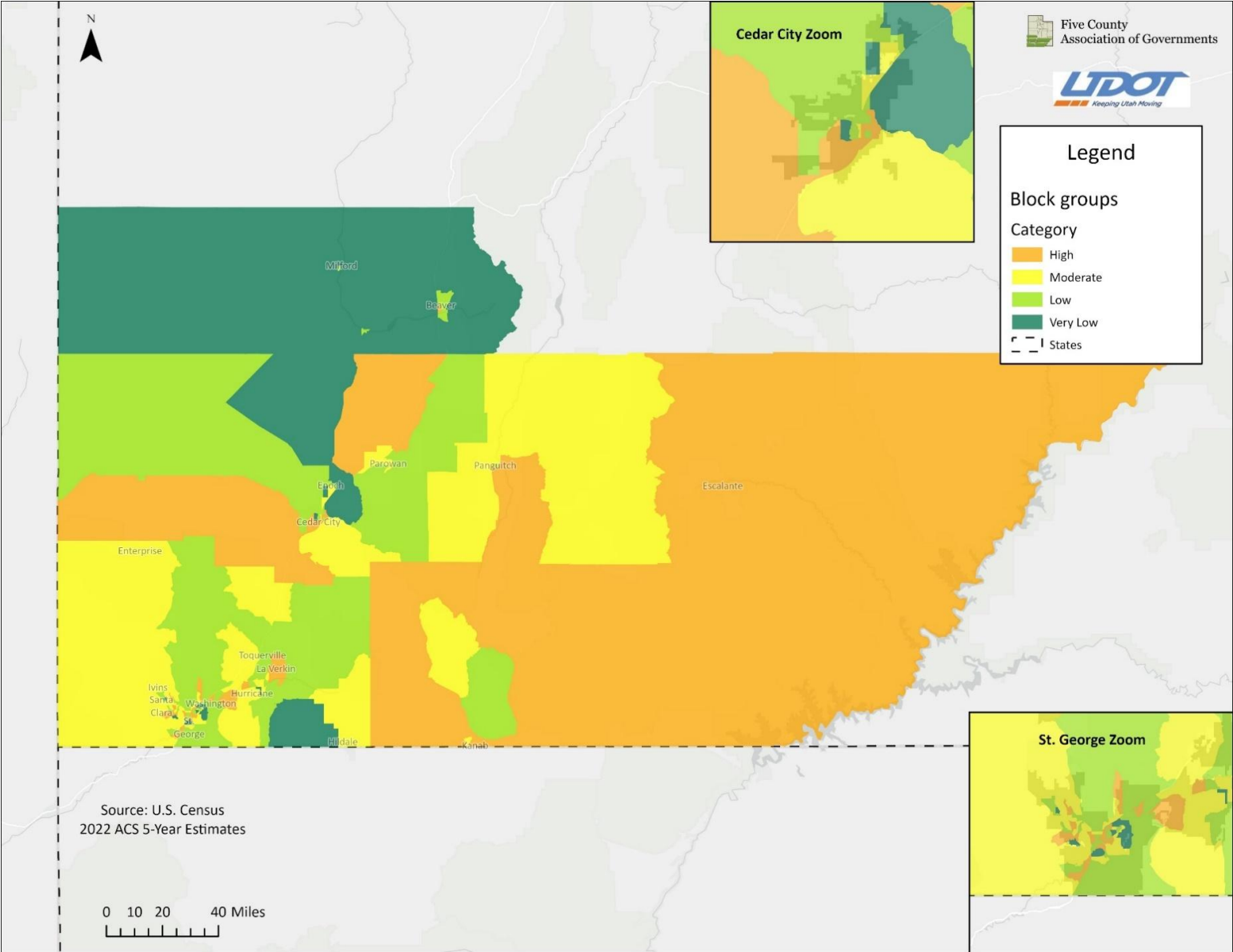
Table 3 illustrates the process and the Transit Propensity map in Figure 11 geographically depicts the data.

Table 3: Transit Propensity

Variable	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Zero Vehicles	All of the variables fell below the lower limit	2 of 3 of the variables fell below the lower limit	0.81% - 5.97%	2 of 3 of the variables exceeded the upper limit	All of the variables exceeded the upper limit
Below Poverty			5.69% - 16.63%		
65+ Population			13.88% - 28.33%		

Source: U.S. Census ACS, Five-Year Estimates, 2022

Figure 11: Transit Propensity



3.7 Trip Destinations/Generators

Numerous factors determine where a passenger wants or needs to travel. Trip generators are locations or activities that generate the need for trips, whether by foot, bicycle, car, or public transportation. These generators can vary widely. Figure 12 considers the locations of specific trip generators, including grocery stores, medical facilities, human service agencies, nutrition sites, and senior centers. Essentially, any destination or activity that prompts people to travel from one place to another can be considered a trip generator.

For many individuals, medical facilities and shopping areas are the most critical destinations. Oftentimes, in very rural areas, medical and shopping trips represent the majority of the public transit trips. This reflects the results of the 2023 Utah Moves Transportation Survey, which showed that shopping and medical trips were likely to be foregone due to various barriers, including cost and lack of public transit. Therefore, a map is provided that displays only medical and shopping destinations. This map is shown in Figure 13.

Figure 12: Major Trip Generators

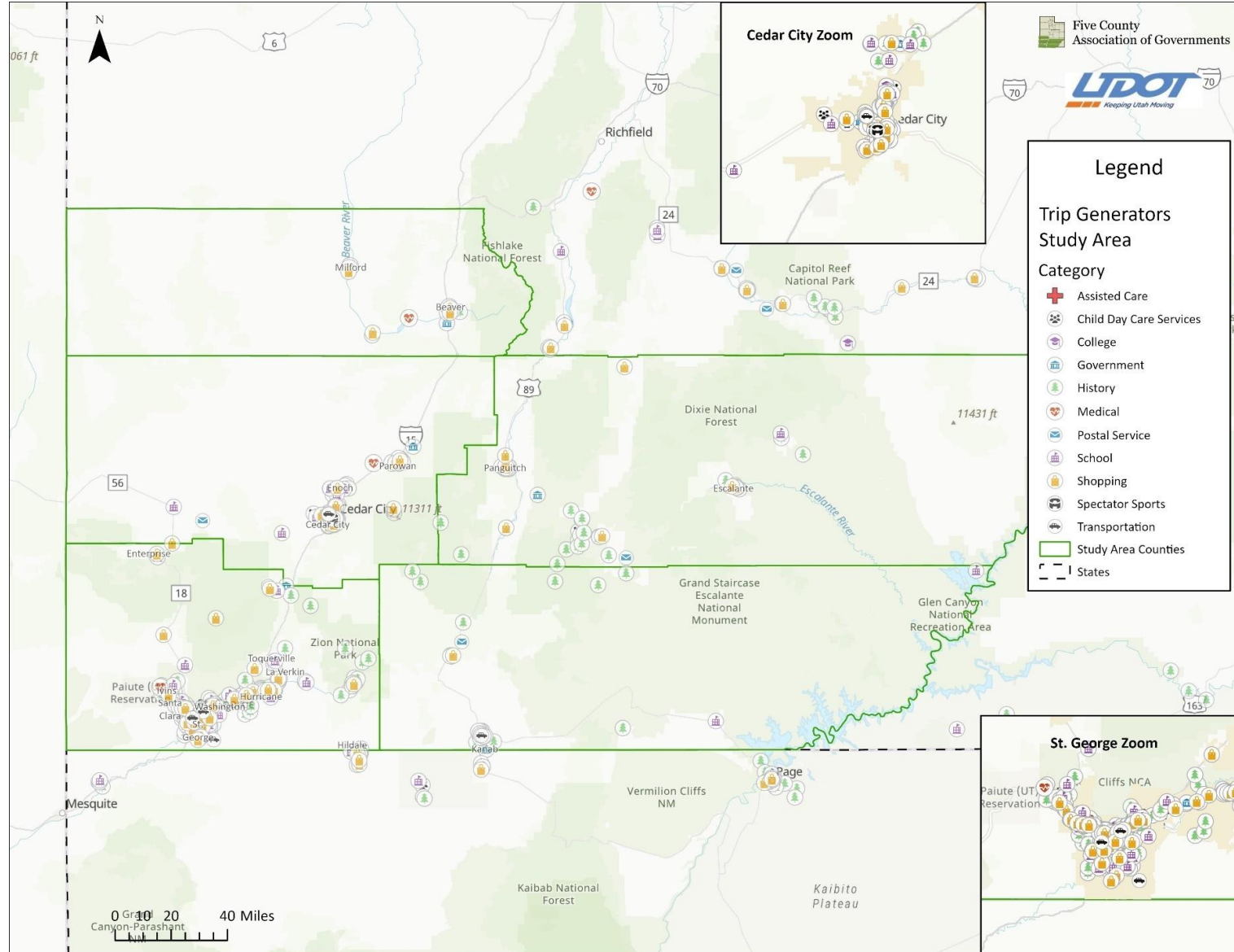
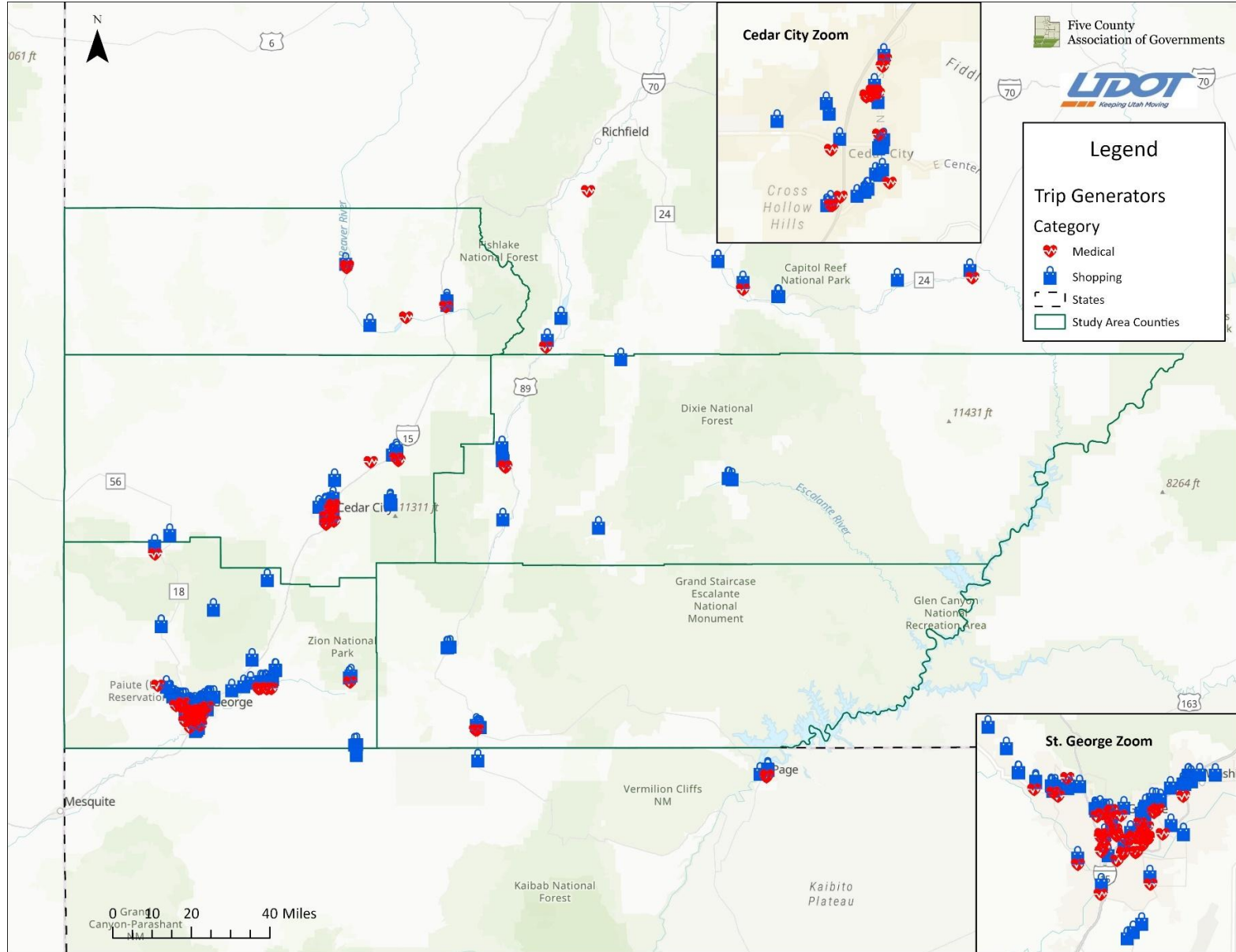


Figure 13: Medical and Shopping Trip Generators



3.8 Commuting

The Five County AOG region's major employment center is the St. George metropolitan area. As of 2021, 63,531 residents of the region worked in Washington County. The volumes of residents of each county who work in the five counties and in other counties are depicted in Figure 14. This figure demonstrates that most employees commute between Iron and Washington Counties, and many residents leave the region for work. However, most commuting in the region is intra-county.

Figure 14: Commuting Patterns of Five-County-AOG Region Residents

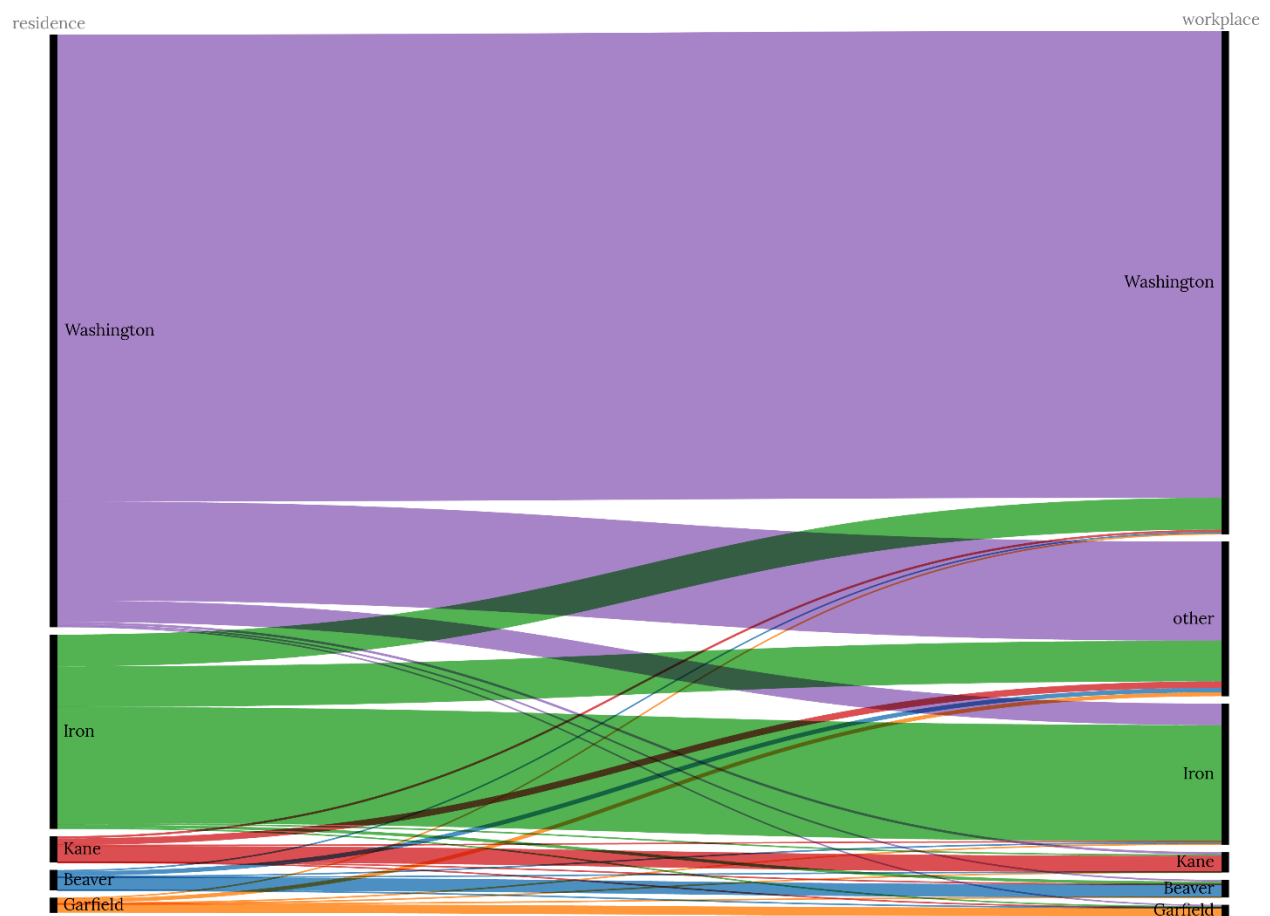
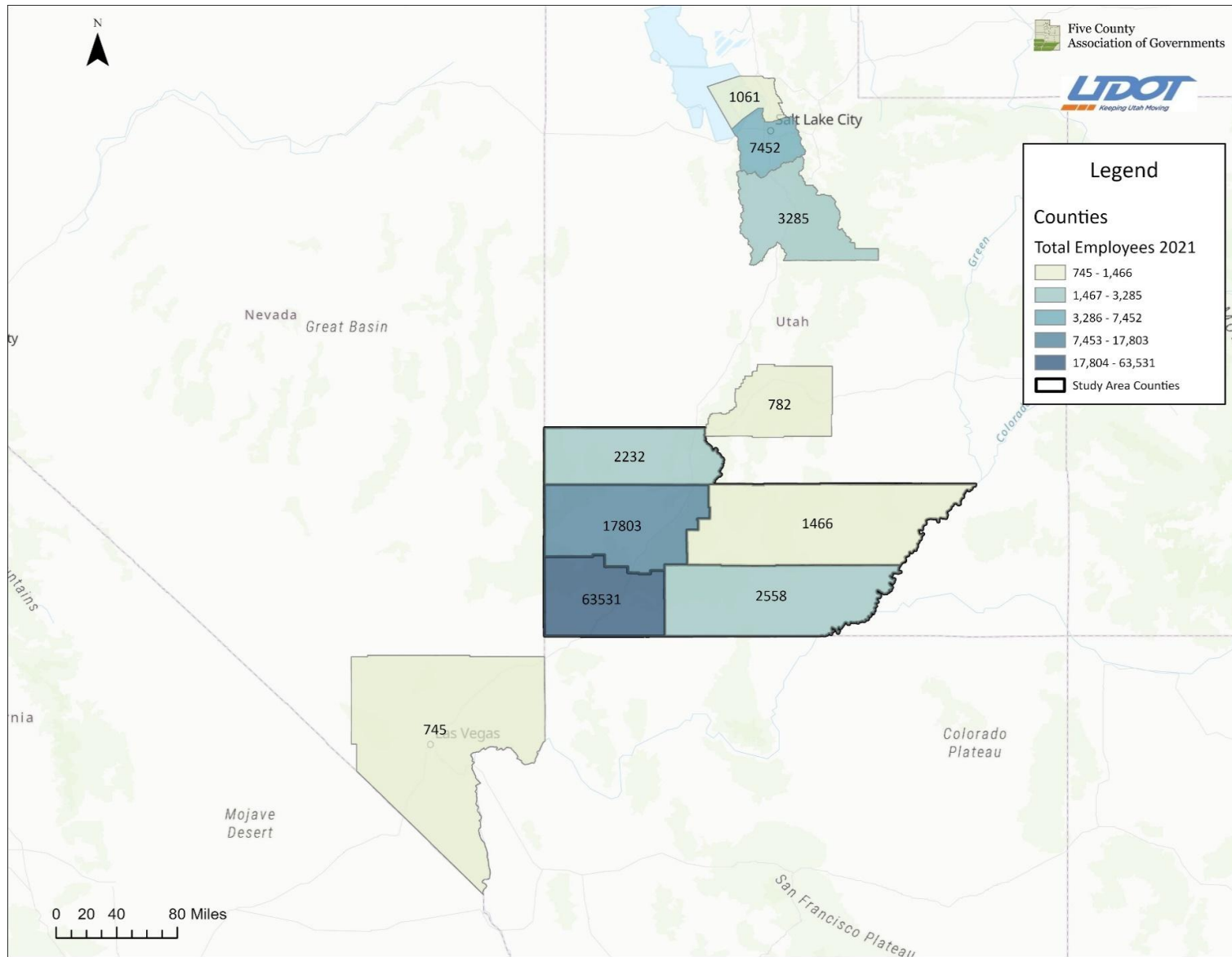


Figure 15 provides the number of Five County AOG region residents who work in each county. According to the 2021 source data (U.S. Census Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program), nearly 12,000 residents commuted northbound to the Salt Lake City

metropolitan area. Additionally, 745 traveled to the Las Vegas area for work. Maps showing the commute patterns for residents of each of the five counties are provided in the Appendix.

Figure 15: Employment Locations of Employed Residents of the Five County AOG Region



4.0 TRANSPORTATION PROVIDERS

4.1 Overview

The Five County AOG region is served by a variety of transportation providers, including public transit systems, senior centers, taxis, human service agencies, intercity bus operators, Medicaid non-emergency transportation provided through a statewide brokerage, and vouchers provided by the Five County AOG mobility-management program. The public and human service transportation providers are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Public and Human Service Transportation Providers

Provider	Eligibility	Service Area
Cedar Area Transportation Service (CATS)	General Public	Cedar City
SunTran	General Public	St. George, Ivins, Santa Clara, and Washington
Beaver County Council on Aging	Age 60+	Beaver, Iron and Washington Counties
Garfield County Council on Aging	Age 60+, people with disabilities	Escalante, Henrieville, Tropic, Cannonville, Hatch, Panguitch
Iron County Council on Aging	Age 60+	Cedar City, Parowan, Paragonah and Summit
Kane County Council on Aging	Age 60+ and dependents of age 60+	Kanab, Orderville, Glendale, Alton (shopping trips provided to St. George and Cedar City)
Washington County Council on Aging	Age 60+, people with disabilities	St. George, Ivins, Santa Clara, Washington, Hurricane, LaVerkin, Toquerville, and Enterprise
Southwest Behavioral Health Center	Center clients attending SBH programs	Five County AOG region
Red Rock Center for Independence	Clients (people with disabilities)	Five County AOG region
TURN Community Services	Clients (people with disabilities)	Five County AOG region
Five County AOG Voucher Program	Age 60+ and low income	Five County AOG region
Zion National Park	General Public	Springdale/Zion National Park

Provider	Eligibility	Service Area
Bryce Canyon National Park	General Public	Bryce Canyon National Park

This section contains descriptions of each provider and their services. The project consultant conducted an online questionnaire and follow-up telephone interview with each provider to obtain this information. In some cases, providers did not participate in data collection. Information was also acquired from agency websites.

4.2 Beaver County

Older adults (60 years of age and older) are served by the Beaver County Council on Aging's senior transportation program. Rides are primarily provided to destinations in Beaver, Iron, and Washington Counties. There is a suggested donation of \$2 for in-county rides, \$7 to other counties in the Five County AOG region, and \$12 for rides to locations outside of the region.

4.3 Garfield County

Garfield County Council on Aging did not participate in data collection for this study. The agency's website states that it provides monthly shuttles to Cedar City for shopping and doctor visits.

4.4 Iron County

Three providers are based in Iron County: The Cedar Area Transportation Service (CATS) public transit system, the Iron County Council on Aging, and the Bryce Canyon Shuttle.

4.4.1 Cedar Area Transportation Service (CATS)

CATS provides public transportation in Cedar City. The agency's services consist of one fixed route and paratransit service for older adults (65 years of age and older) and people with

disabilities. Eligibility for paratransit requires an application. The passenger fare to ride the fixed route is \$1.50. The paratransit fare is \$2.

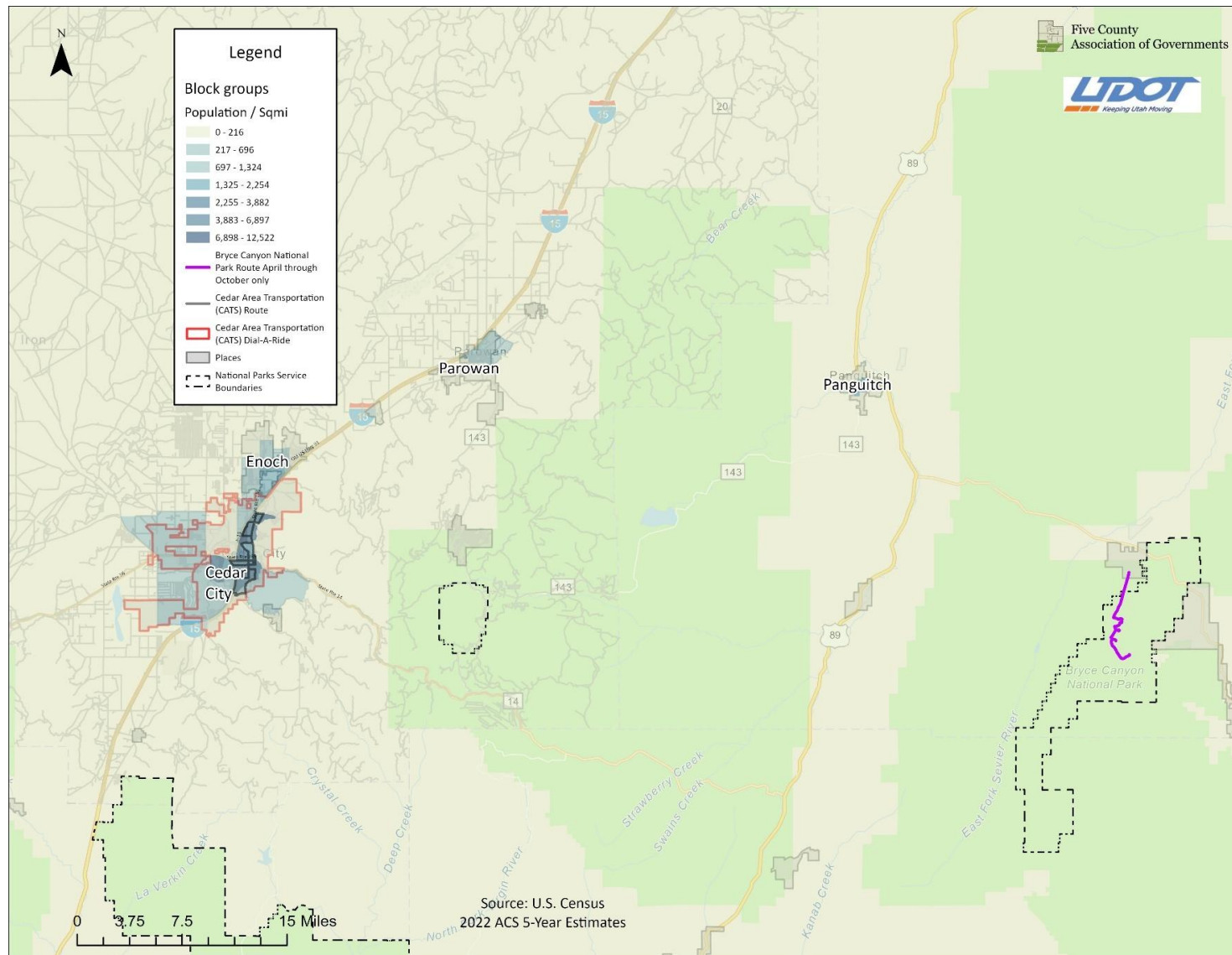
4.4.2 Iron County Council on Aging

The Iron County Council on Aging provides senior transportation in Cedar City, Parowan, Paragonah, and Summit. There is a suggested donation to ride. The program is staffed by volunteer drivers. Rides are provided to activities at the Parowan and Cedar City senior centers. The program also provides a shopping trip from Parowan to the Cedar City Walmart every other Tuesday. Rides are also provided occasionally to medical appointments and the post office.

4.4.3 Bryce Canyon Shuttle

Bryce Canyon National Park provides a seasonal shuttle route to serve visitors to the park. The service does not require a fare. The service areas of CATS and the Bryce Canyon Shuttle, and the surrounding area's population density, are shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16: CATS and Bryce Canyon Shuttle Service Areas



4.5 Kane County

Kane County Active Living Centers transport seniors to the senior center in Kanab on days when congregate meals are offered (Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays). Twice a month, rides are provided to St. George or Cedar City for shopping purposes, or to a state park for recreation. Medical appointments can be accommodated on these runs as schedules permit. On Thursdays, the agency provides local trips for shopping and banking. Rides are provided on a donation basis.

4.6 Washington County

4.6.1 SunTran

SunTran provides public transportation primarily in St. George, Washington, and Ivins. The agency's services consist of a fixed route network and complementary paratransit for passengers with disabilities. Recently, SunTran established a route that connects St. George to Springdale, with stops in communities along the way. Eligibility for paratransit requires an application. The fixed route fare is \$1. The paratransit fare is \$2.

4.6.2 Washington County Council on Aging

The Washington County Council on Aging operates transportation out of its St. George, Hurricane, and Enterprise Active Living Centers. Rides are requested in advance, and are first come, first served.

The Dial-a-Ride service provided by the St. George Active Life Center is available in the St. George area, including Ivins, Santa Clara, Sun River, Bloomington, Bloomington Hills, and Washington City. For those who are 60 years of age or older, the suggested donation is \$3 one way or \$5 round trip. Individuals with disabilities under the age of 60 can ride but must pay a fare of \$6 one way or \$10 round trip. Rides are provided to medical appointments, pharmacies for prescription pick-up, lunch or activities at the senior center, grocery shopping and spousal visits.

Hurricane's Dial-a-Ride service is available in Hurricane and, on Wednesdays, to destinations in St. George. The suggested donation is \$5.00 for those aged 60 or older. The fee is \$10 for individuals with disabilities who are under 60. Medical appointments are prioritized for rides.

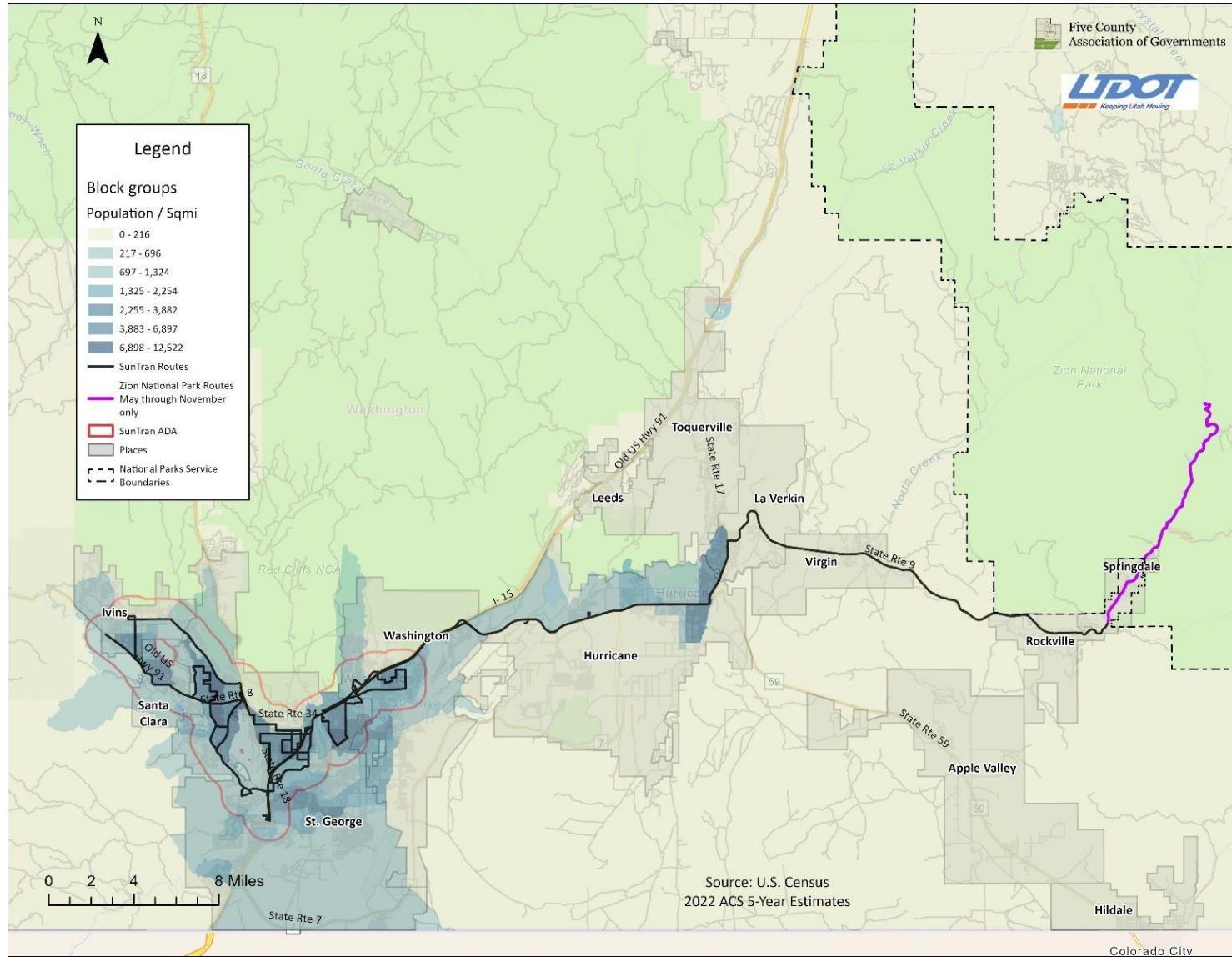
The Enterprise Senior Center's transportation program provides rides to seniors to attend lunch at the Senior Center, and various locations around town, such as the post office, Carter's and Bracken's. The suggested donation is \$3. Two trips are scheduled to St. George each month for medical appointments, picking up prescriptions, and shopping. The suggested donation is \$3 one way or \$5 round trip for those 60 years of age and older; individuals under 60 who have disabilities may ride for a fee of \$3 one way or \$5 round trip.

4.6.3 Zion National Park

Zion National Park contracts with a third-party operator to run the Zion Shuttle, consisting of two bus routes that operate seasonally. The Springdale Shuttle operates between Springdale and the Zion Canyon Visitor Center. The Canyon Line operates in the park between the Visitor Center and the Temple of Sinawava. The service does not require a fare.

A map of the service area for SunTran and the Zion National Park bus routes, and the surrounding area's population density, is provided in Figure 17.

Figure 17: SunTran and Zion National Park Routes Service Areas



4.7 Regionwide Providers

4.7.1 Five County AOG Medical Voucher Program

The Five County AOG Mobility Management program offers a limited number of medical transportation vouchers to offset the cost of long-distance trips to medical appointments. The vouchers are available to low-income older adults (60+) and people with disabilities who reside in any of the five counties and do not have access to affordable transportation services. Individuals must work with their county Council on Aging, TURN Community Services or Red Rock Independence Center to complete an eligibility determination process for the program. The vouchers are used by recipients to offset the cost of travel for purposes such as medical appointments, pharmacy visits, obtaining food from pantries, and other critical health or nutrition purposes. Individuals with access to other programs that provide transportation, such as Medicaid non-emergency transportation, may not be eligible for vouchers because they have other means of transportation through these programs.

In the current program year, 40 individuals residing in rural communities throughout the region have been provided with 71 vouchers. The budget for the program has the capacity to provide approximately 150 vouchers per year.

4.7.2 Human Service Agencies

Red Rock Center for Independence, Southwest Behavioral Health, and TURN Community Services are regional human service agencies that operate transportation to meet the needs of their clients.

- Red Rock Center for Independence transports their clients (people with disabilities) to agency programs and activities as well as appointments with supportive programs like Medicaid, Vocational Rehabilitation, and mental health/casework.
- Southwest Behavioral Health provides transportation to their clubhouses in Washington and Iron Counties, as well as to mental health appointments at their facilities. They also

provide rides to children attending school/intensive outpatient programs, and they provide taxi vouchers to their clients.

- TURN Community Services is statewide provider of services for people with developmental disabilities, including day programs, residential living services, art center programs, summer camps, and supported employment. Transportation supports client participation in these programs.

4.8 Provider Resources

Table 5 shows the vehicles, drivers, and financial investment of all providers. The data sources for this information include a provider survey, interviews conducted by the project consultant, the Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan, and the National Transit Database. Some organizations do not track passenger transportation costs separately from other programs.

Table 5: Fleet, Staffing, and Financial Resources

Provider	Vehicles	Drivers	Transportation Operating Budget	Transportation Funding Source(s)
Cedar Area Transportation Service (CATS)	6	9 PT (part time)	\$150,000	FTA Section 5311, Cedar City, Fares
SunTran	16	21 FT (full time) 8 PT	\$2,452,675 (2022)	FTA Section 5307, City of St. George, Washington County, UDOT (for Springdale route), Fares
Beaver County Council on Aging	3	1 PT (Volunteer)	Not provided	Beaver County, Five County AOG
Garfield County Council on Aging	6	Not provided (Volunteer)	Not provided	Not provided
Iron County Council on Aging	13	4 FT 18 PT (Volunteer)	\$18,500	Iron County, Five County AOG
Kane County Council on Aging	6	3 PT	Not available	Kane County, Older Americans Act
Washington County Council on Aging	7	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided

Provider	Vehicles	Drivers	Transportation Operating Budget	Transportation Funding Source(s)
Southwest Behavioral Health Center	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
Red Rock Center for Independence	11	3 PT	\$17,500	FTA Section 5310, Utah State Office of Rehabilitation, Donations
TURN Community Services	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
Five County AOG Voucher Program	N/A	N/A	\$15,000	State of Utah Aging Agency
Zion National Park	N/A	N/A	\$68.31 per service hour for third party operation; fixed costs during off season of \$63,000 per month	National Park Service
Bryce Canyon National Park	N/A	N/A	Not provided	National Park Service

4.9 Days/Times of Service and Ridership

Table 6 shows the days and times that public and human service transportation is available in the region. The data sources for this information include a provider survey, interviews conducted by the project consultant, agency websites, and the Coordinated Human Service Transportation Plan.

Table 6: Operating Days/Hours and Annual Ridership

Provider	Days of Service	Operating Hours	Annual Ridership
Cedar Area Transportation Service (CATS)	Mon – Sat	Monday-Friday: 7:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Saturday: 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	16,191
SunTran	Mon – Sat	5:30 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.	303,631
Beaver County Council on Aging	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
Garfield County Council on Aging	Mon and Fri	7:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m.	Not provided

Provider	Days of Service	Operating Hours	Annual Ridership
Iron County Council on Aging	Mon (Parowan, Summit, Paragonah) Tue (Cedar City) Wed (Cedar City, Parowan, Summit, Paragonah) Thu (Parowan, Summit, Paragonah) Fri (Cedar City)	9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.	Not provided
Kane County Council on Aging	Mon, Wed, Thu, Fri	9:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.	3,852
Washington County Council on Aging	Mon - Fri (specific days vary by location)	9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. (hours vary by location)	Not provided
Southwest Behavioral Health Center	Mon - Fri	8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.	Not provided
Red Rock Center for Independence	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
TURN Community Services	Not provided	Not provided	Not provided
Five County AOG Voucher Program	Not applicable	Not applicable	149 (round trips)
Zion National Park	Mon - Sun, March through December	Hours vary seasonally	5,730,436
Bryce Canyon National Park	Mon - Sun, April through October	8:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.	666,911

4.10 Provider Input on Unmet Needs

Some providers participated in interviews with the project consultant in August and September of 2024. Their feedback is summarized in this section.

4.10.1 People with Disabilities

- People with disabilities experience difficulty getting to jobs, especially to workplaces outside of St. George. Transportation services are very limited outside of the city. Even within St. George, there are few employers that hire people with developmental disabilities that can be accessed conveniently on SunTran routes. There is some service in suburban communities, such as Ivins, but it is limited. In the rest of the region, even in

Cedar City, where there is public transit, the available services are not meeting the employment transportation needs of people with disabilities.

- People with disabilities would benefit from public-transit travel training and other measures to ease anxieties about using the services. They generally need more personalized service than a larger bus system provides.

4.10.2 Washington County

- SunTran's service area is limited relative to the area's population density and distribution. Most fixed route riders are going to work or school. There are many areas north and south of St. George that need service. Specific areas that need transit service include:
 - In St. George at the end of River Road there is an industrial area with many manufacturers not served by transit.
 - Deseret Drive – the Washington Fields area – north side of town.
 - People want to come in to St. George from areas such as Hurricane and LaVerkin.
 - Employment in Washington is growing, including along George Washington Blvd.
 - Desert Color is large new residential community about ten miles from downtown.
 - Bloomington Hills
 - Little Valley
- SunTran routes run every 40 minutes; more frequent service is desired. Bus rides are perceived as taking too long.
- The new Springdale route will be helpful for people needing to travel between communities along the route, but more service is needed in the metropolitan area so people can travel within it more effectively. For example, Hurricane will have access to the route, but the places they can go conveniently will still be limited.
- St. George is the major hub for the Five County AOG region. People need to get there from rural areas throughout the five counties.

4.10.3 Iron County

- Cedar City is growing rapidly with 8,000 new homes projected by 2030.
- CATS' fixed route runs once every hour. Increasing frequency would help them meet more needs.
- Cedar City has many areas where sidewalk improvements would help people get to and from bus stops.

- CATS is not serving all of the areas where there are needs. Unserved areas currently include some industrial park areas and plants, including a development on the west side of town.
- People need to get to Cedar City from Enoch, Parowan, Panguitch, Beaver County, Baker (Nevada), and Enterprise. Residents of these communities come to Cedar City for medical appointments and other needs.
- Smaller outlying communities also have people who need transportation including Beryl, New Castle, and Kanarraville.
- In Parowan, there is going to be a very big new community of new homes.

4.10.4 Kane County

- People in northern Kane County need to get to Intermountain Health Care's (IHC) location in Panguitch (Garfield County) for health care. There are more services in Panguitch than IHC-Kanab. Otherwise, Kane County residents generally travel to St. George or Cedar City for healthcare.
- A dialysis center is coming to Kanab.
- In Kane County, shopping options are limited. There are stores in Kanab, Orderville, and Fredonia, Arizona. There is a Walmart in Big Water near Page, Arizona. But rides are needed to St. George and Hurricane (and Cedar City for northern Kane residents) for shopping at affordable places like Walmart or Costco.
- There are food pantry services in Kanab, Big Water, and Orderville; everyone in Kane County is within 15-20 miles of food pantry other than Duck Creek, where people are even more isolated.
- Higher education is more available in St. George and Cedar City but Kanab has a Utah State University branch for trades. Colorado City, Arizona has a community college.
- Like the rest of the region, there's a lot of growth with new housing going up, with many retirees moving in who will eventually have transportation needs.

4.10.5 Beaver and Garfield Counties

- Transportation within Beaver County (particularly, Milford to Beaver) is a challenge.
- In Garfield County, many people work at Bryce Canyon, but the only way to get there is to drive.
- There are jobs in Escalante (Garfield County), but no way to get there.
- In general, community with populations of 100-300 people need to get to the nearby towns of about 1,000 people for work, medical, shopping, and government/human services purposes.

4.10.6 Coordination of Service

- The Five County AOG region has several public and human service transportation providers, but they do not coordinate their services sufficiently to meet the region's needs.
- It might be helpful to offer regular routes from small communities to Cedar City and St. George, with the senior or human service agency providers transporting people to local pick-up points for these routes.

5.0 Public Survey

5.1 Survey Methodology

The project consultant conducted an online survey of the public in Surveymonkey.com. The survey was promoted on social media through paid advertisements on Facebook, and local stakeholders circulated it through internet and social media. The survey was available from July through September 2024 and was completed by 118 respondents.

5.2 Respondent Demographics

5.2.1 Residence

The survey was completed primarily by residents of Washington (n = 81) and Iron Counties (n = 33). The counties and cities of residents of the respondents are provided in Table 7. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents were residents of St. George, Cedar City, or Hurricane. Several responses were also received from smaller, suburban, and rural communities of Washington County, particularly Washington City, Springdale, and Rockville. There were no responses from Beaver County.

Table 7: Respondents Primarily Resided in Washington and Iron Counties

	Washington	Iron	Garfield	Kane
Bryce Canyon City			1	
Cedar City		27		
Duck Creek				1
Enoch		4		
Enterprise	1			
Hildale	1			
Hurricane	24			
Ivins	1			
Kanab				1

	Washington	Iron	Garfield	Kane
LaVerkin	1			
Panguitch			1	
Parowan		2		
Rockville	4			
Santa Clara	2			
Springdale	6			
St. George	31			
Virgin	1			
Washington	9			

5.2.2 Age and Disability

The majority of respondents were adults under the age of 65 (Figure 18) who did not have a disability requiring the use of an assistance device (Figure 19).

Figure 18: Age Distribution (n = 117)

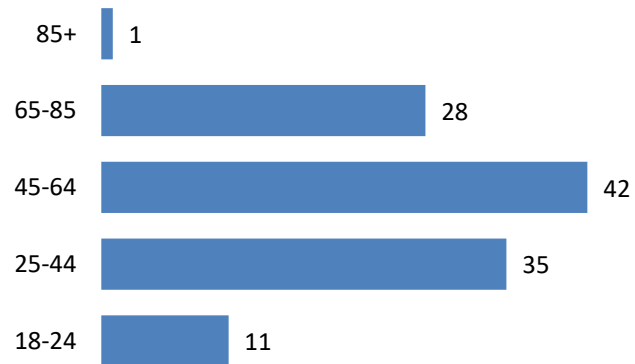
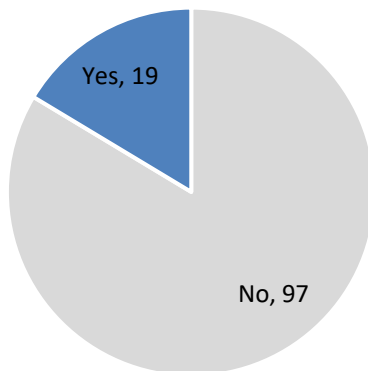


Figure 19: Do you or a member of your household have a disability that requires you to use a cane, walker, wheelchair, and/or another device to help you get around? (n = 116)



5.2.3 Income and Vehicle Access

A small minority of survey respondents reported living in households with no vehicle available (Figure 20). Income levels ranged from below \$15,000 to \$100,000 or more (Figure 21).

Figure 20: Number of Vehicles in Household (n = 116)

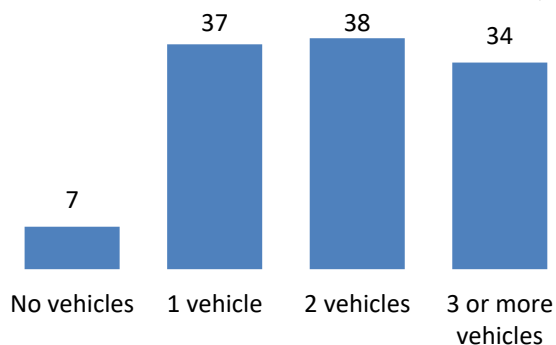
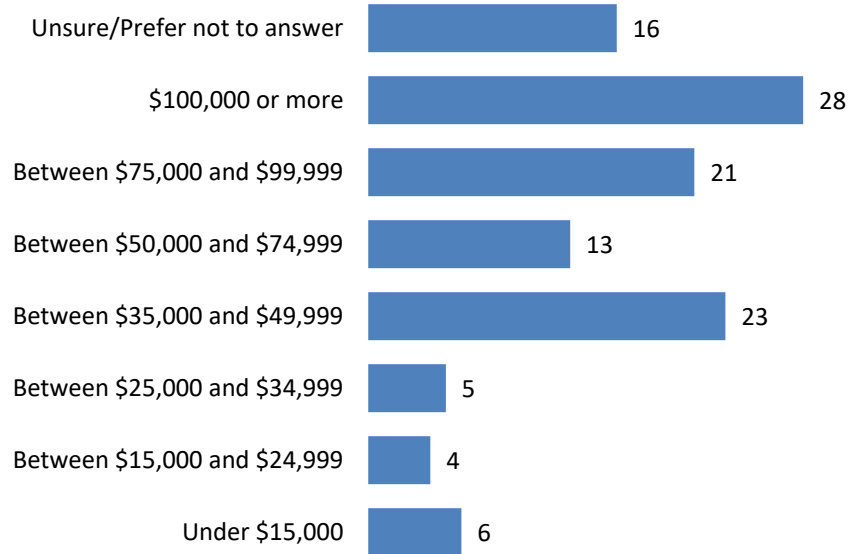


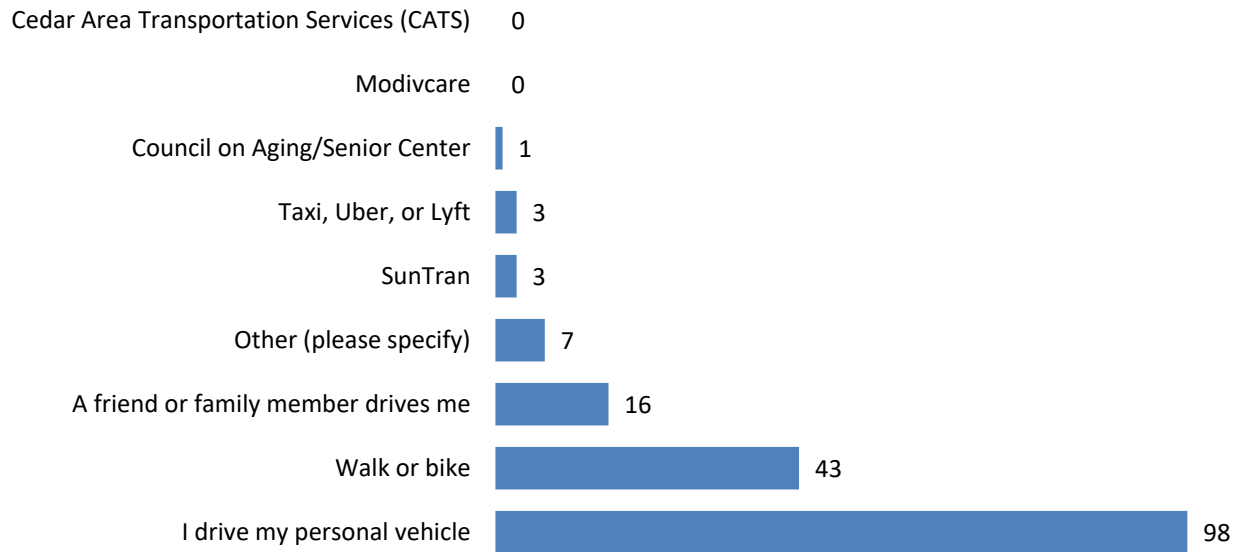
Figure 21: Household Income Ranges (n = 116)



5.3 Transportation Difficulty

The majority of survey respondents reported that they drove their own personal vehicle, with smaller numbers reporting walking, biking, being driven by a friend or family members, or using other forms of transportation. The modes of transportation used by respondents are shown in Figure 22. The results add up to greater than the sample size because respondents could select more than one answer.

Figure 22: Forms of Transportation Used (n = 118)



“Other” responses included the following:

- Assisted living transportation, but this is limited
- I drive, am unable to drive adult daughter
- NPS bus service in Springdale
- NPS Shuttles
- Salt Lake Express
- St. George Shuttle (2 responses)

Respondents also reported whether they had difficulty with transportation for various destination types. Figure 23 provides the responses for the 20 respondents who reported that they do not drive a personal vehicle. Many reported difficulties with all trip purposes, with fewer reporting difficulty with education trips because that purpose was not applicable to them.

Figure 24 displays the responses for respondents who reported that they drive a personal vehicle, with most reporting no difficulty with transportation for the specified destination types.

Figure 23: Difficulty Level for Specified Trip Purposes – Respondents without Personal Vehicle (n = 20)

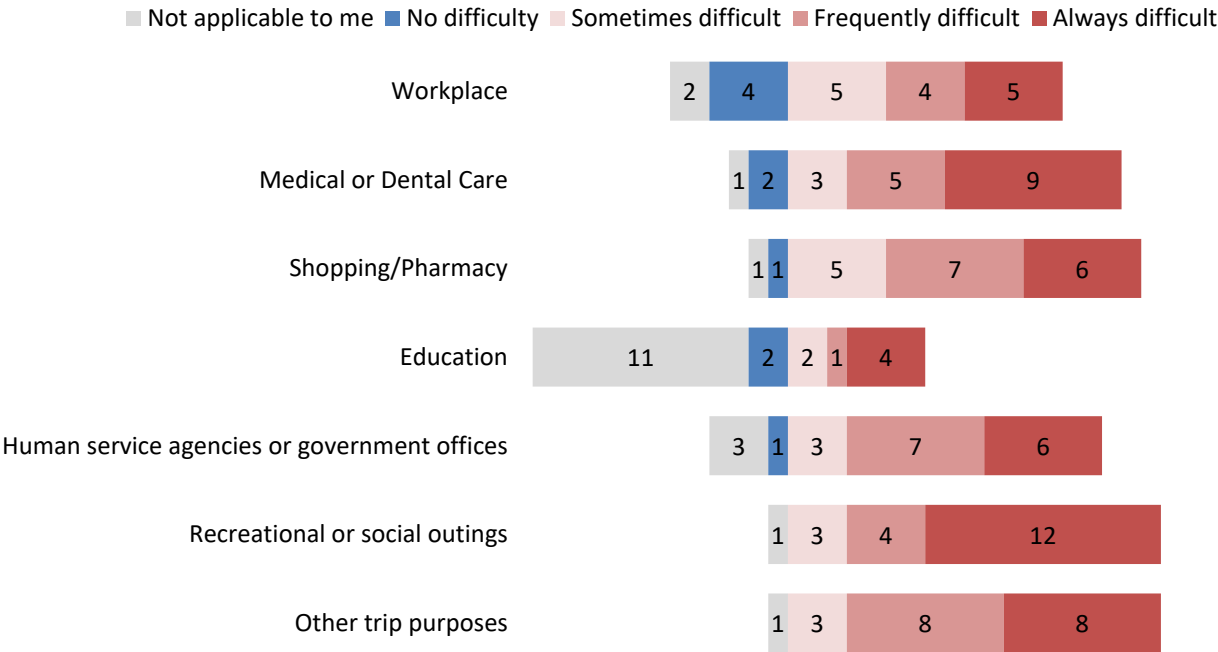
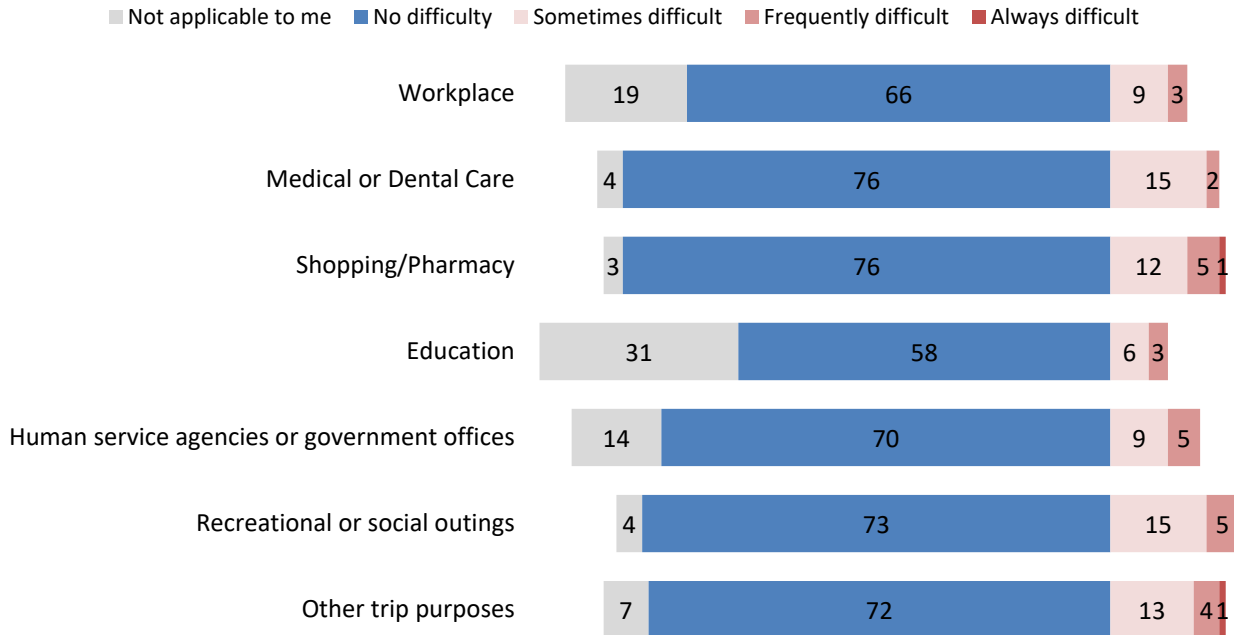


Figure 24: Difficulty Level for Specified Trip Purposes – Respondents with Personal Vehicle (n = 98)



Survey respondents indicated the days of week and time of the day that they have difficulty finding rides. The responses for those without a personal vehicle are provided in Figure 25 (days) and Figure 26 (times). These respondents had difficulty over each day of the week consistently, with unmet needs peaking in the afternoons and evenings.

Figure 25: Days of Week You Have Difficulty Finding a Ride (n = 16)

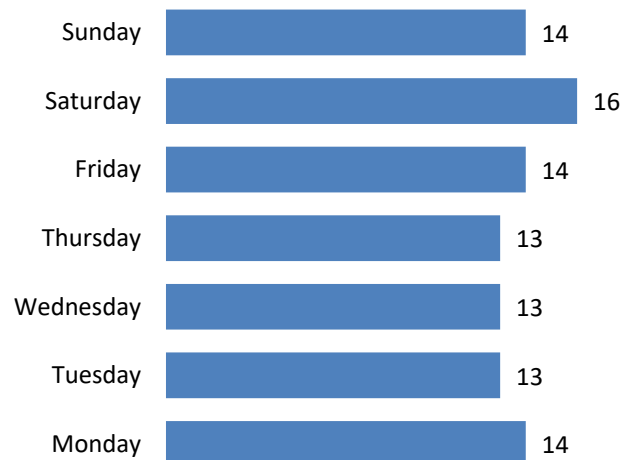
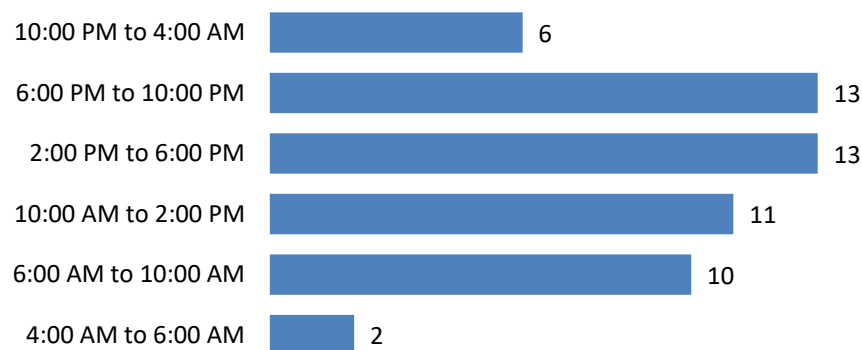


Figure 26: Time of Day You Have Difficulty Finding a Ride (n = 13)



5.4 Trip Patterns

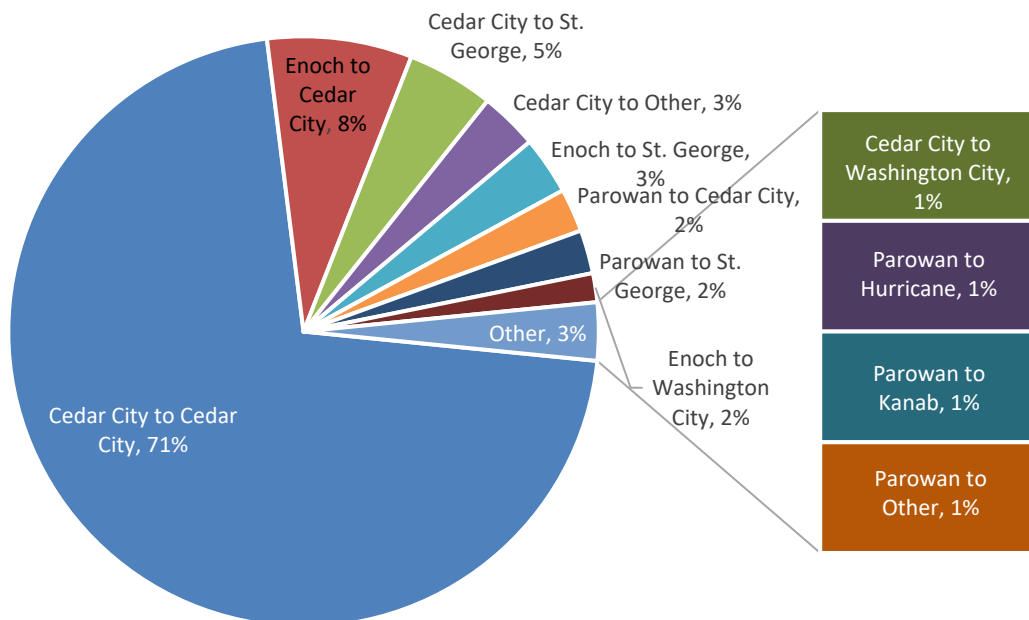
Respondents indicated which cities or towns they most frequently traveled to for six trip purposes: work, medical, shopping, education, recreational/social, and other. The responses are shown for Iron and Washington Counties in the following figures.

5.4.1 Iron County

Iron County respondents' trip patterns are shown in Figure 27. Each respondent indicated the community where they traveled to most frequently for each trip purpose. This provided an origin-destination pair for up to six trip types for each respondent. A total of 129 origin-destination pairs were provided by Iron County respondents.

The majority of the respondents reported living in Cedar City and traveling to destinations within Cedar City. Cedar City residents also travel to St. George and other locations. Enoch residents most commonly travel to Cedar City, followed by St. George. Parowan residents most commonly travel to St. George and Cedar City.

Figure 27: Iron County Trip Patterns (n = 126)



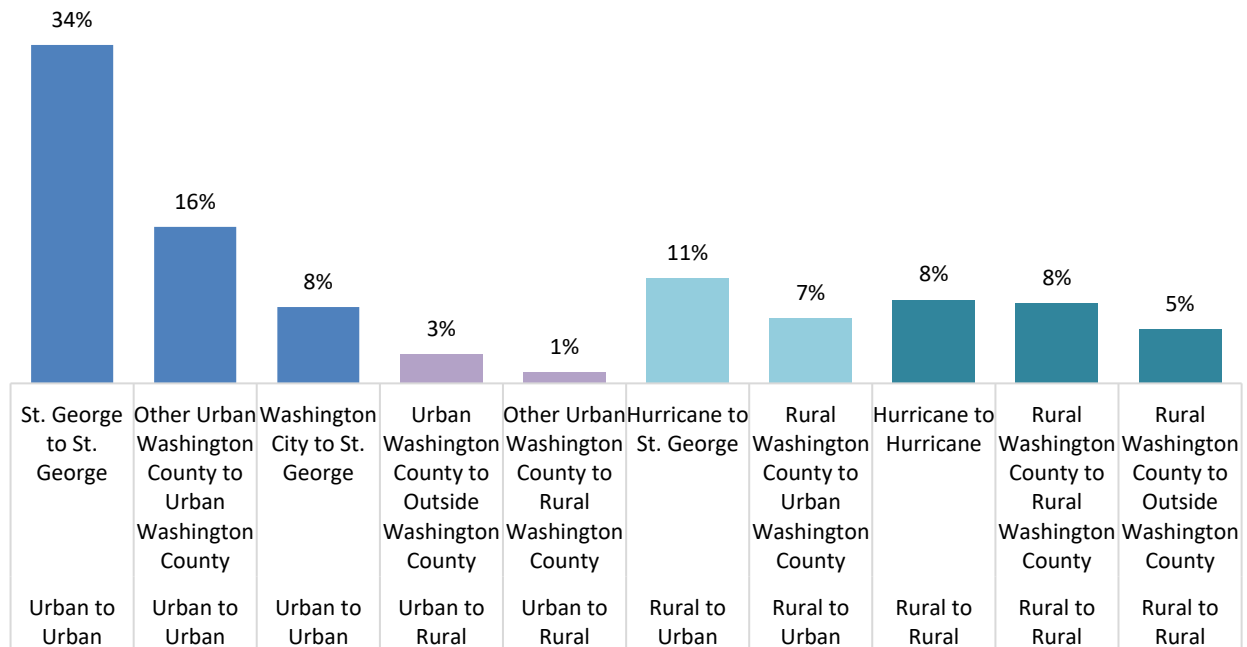
5.4.2 Washington County

The Washington County trip pattern data included many communities; therefore, the data were consolidated into the categories provided in Figure 28.

A total of 58 percent of the trip pattern data represented trips occurring within the U.S. Census-designated St. George Urban Area, which includes St. George, Ivins, Santa Clara, and Washington City. This area's population generates FTA Section 5307 funding for urban transit. The designated recipient of this funding is the City of St. George, operator of SunTran. Only four percent of the trip patterns involved traveling from urban Washington County to rural or out-of-county destinations. Rural to urban travel represented 18 percent of the trip patterns, with 11 percent representing Hurricane to St. George trips.

A total of 21 percent of the trip patterns represented travel needs within the rural areas of Washington County (Hurricane, LaVerkin, Virgin, Hildale, Rockville, and Springdale).

Figure 28: Washington County Trip Patterns (n = 252)



5.4.3 Other Counties

Only four residents of other counties participated in the survey. These individuals — residents of Bryce Canyon City, Duck Creek, Kanab, and Panguitch — primarily traveled to St. George and Cedar City.

5.5 Open-Ended Feedback

Seventy-one individuals responded to an open-ended survey question that asked for input regarding transportation needs. Key points and common themes are provided in this section. The full responses are included in the Appendix to this report.

5.5.1 Iron County

Twenty-one Iron County respondents provided input, including 18 Cedar City residents and 3 Enoch residents. The majority expressed support for more extensive public transportation in the area. Several respondents stated that the CATS system has a limited reach. Some respondents called for connectivity between Enoch and Cedar City, and between Cedar City and St. George. A few respondents also expressed interest in improvements to local bicycling and walking infrastructure. A couple of respondents called for improvements to local roadways to reduce congestion, including at Exit 57.

5.5.2 Washington County

A total of 47 respondents from Washington County provided input, including residents of Hurricane (14), Ivins (1), LaVerkin (1), Rockville (4), Springdale (4), St. George (17), Virgin (1), and Washington (5). Most called for more extensive transit in the region, with several stating that services should be convenient, affordable, and available in more places than SunTran covers today. There were many comments in favor of transit that would serve the Hurricane and Springdale areas. Two respondents mentioned that options for travel to Las Vegas, beyond what exists today, would be helpful.

Some respondents expressed interest in options including senior transportation, wheelchair-accessible taxis, and reimbursable volunteer-provided transportation. Several said that a bus route should connect St. George to Springdale, providing access to the communities along Route 9. Several respondents discussed needs for improvements to infrastructure for biking and walking. Some respondents said that it was important to improve roadways to accommodate increasing congestion and build more parking.

5.5.3 Other Comments

Three respondents from Garfield and Kane Counties discussed needs for connectivity between Cedar City, St. George, and smaller communities. Three respondents from Iron and Washington Counties said that transit options should be targeted to the needs of local residents rather than designed for tourism purposes.

6.0 Virtual Focus Group Input

6.1 Overview

The project consultant conducted a series of six virtual focus groups on unmet transportation needs in the Five County AOG region in July and August 2024. Each focus group was centered on a specific sector, as outlined in Table 8.

Table 8: Virtual Focus Groups

Sector	Date
Tourism and Recreation	July 30, 2024
Business and Workforce	July 31, 2024
Social and Human Services	July 31, 2024
People with Disabilities	August 1, 2024
Older Adults	August 1, 2024
Health Care	August 14, 2024

Twenty-one individuals attended the virtual focus groups, representing 16 organizations. The organizations represented included municipalities, counties, health care providers, workforce development, a school district, and nonprofit organizations. The attendees are listed in Table 9.

Table 9: Focus Group Attendees

Organization	Name
Association for Utah Community Health	McKenzie Dangerfield
Beaver County	Jen Wakeland
City of Santa Clara	Christa Hinton
Community Health Centers	Elizabeth Fiorello
Conserve Southwest Utah/Desert Livability	Judith Rognli
Conserve Southwest Utah/Desert Livability	April Subashe
Department of Workforce Development (Kane and Washington Counties)	Dora Ward

Enoch City	Rob Dotson
Enterprise Medical Clinic	Melinda Rupp
Four Points Health	Sonya Mitchell, RN
Intermountain Health	Jordan Merrill
Iron County Care and Share	James Jetton
Red Rock Center for Independence	Frank Robbins
Southwest Utah Health Department	Emilia Brown
Southwest Utah Health Department	Kathryn Moster
Town of Springdale	Mayor Barbara Bruno
Town of Springdale	Tom Dansie
Town of Springdale	Rick Wixom
Town of Springdale	Niall Connolly
University of Utah Health	Kristen C. Quinn, CMHC
Washington County Schools	Brian Gunnell

6.2 Focus Group Discussion Themes

6.2.1 Service Safety, Quality and Appropriateness

A recurring concern among focus group participants was the need for transportation services that accommodate individuals with mobility challenges, such as those using larger power wheelchairs. Participants highlighted that such individuals require vehicles equipped with hydraulic wheelchair lifts and adequate interior space for securement. The frailty of older adults and individuals with medical conditions further complicates their ability to use city bus services, as they often find it difficult to walk to and from bus stops or endure bumpy rides. Many participants emphasized the importance of ensuring that drivers are properly trained and subject to criminal background checks. For vulnerable populations, particularly those with behavioral health issues or severe disabilities, having an additional person ride along for safety reasons was suggested as a necessary measure.

Participants discussed the importance of customizing transportation options based on the specific needs of individuals with disabilities or other mobility challenges. In some areas, smaller buses or modified vehicles with updated assistive devices, such as improved handrails or updated seating arrangements, were recommended as solutions. Additionally, it was noted that many existing bus stops are inconveniently placed, creating challenges for individuals trying to access them safely. In certain cities, such as Springdale, stops are located far from essential services, including grocery stores and medical centers, making the overall system less effective for those who rely on public transportation.

Another recommendation was to leverage resources from local institutions like Southern Utah University to create transportation networks that could better serve both the university community and the general public. This could involve utilizing underutilized vehicles or even private transportation services to fill the gaps in public transportation coverage.

6.2.2 Medical Transportation

Transportation to medical appointments emerged as a significant challenge, especially for residents in rural areas. The primary healthcare hubs are in St. George and Cedar City, which are distant for many patients. Healthcare workers expressed that patients often rely on friends or family for rides, which can be costly in terms of fuel and time off work. In some cases, healthcare workers themselves use their personal vehicles to pick up patients due to a lack of transportation alternatives. This issue is exacerbated for patients who need transportation for surgeries scheduled early in the morning or for those discharged late at night.

Transportation to medical appointments emerged as a significant challenge, especially for residents in rural areas. The primary healthcare hubs are in St. George and Cedar City, which are distant for many patients.

Communities like Hildale and Colorado City face additional hurdles, as the nearest hospitals are 45 minutes away. The absence of healthcare facilities and reliable transportation in these areas has contributed to health issues, particularly among newborns whose mothers use midwives and do not seek hospital care. In other rural areas, such as Enterprise, there is no

transportation to nearby health clinics, leaving many residents without access to essential healthcare services.

Medicaid transportation services are available to some, but many low-income individuals do not qualify for Medicaid or lose their coverage due to minor changes in income. Modivcare, the transportation provider for Medicaid patients, does not always have sufficient subcontractors to meet demand. Additionally, specialty care services can be as far away as Las Vegas, making transportation to appointments both time consuming and expensive. This lack of reliable transportation also causes delays in preventive care, leading to more severe health issues that could have been avoided. Participants noted that healthcare providers might be willing to schedule transportation for patients if a user-friendly online system were in place, but establishing such a system would require significant resources.

Focus group participants highlighted that adult daycare centers and community health facilities, like the Memory Matters Club, face significant challenges in providing consistent and affordable transportation for patients attending medical appointments. In some cases, these facilities have staff members providing transportation, but resources are stretched thin due to high demand. While transportation is free in the interest of increased accessibility, the availability of vehicles remains limited. Respondents called for better coordination between healthcare providers and transportation services, particularly to reduce the strain on already limited resources.

Participants also noted that vulnerable populations are often left without options for weekend or early-morning medical appointments because transportation services usually do not operate on Fridays or during certain hours. Participants further mentioned that efforts to introduce coordinated scheduling, perhaps through an online portal, could help mitigate this gap.

6.2.3 Affordability

Affordability is another major barrier to transportation for residents, particularly those in rural areas. Participants reported that a taxi ride from a rural area to St. George or Cedar City can cost up to \$400, making this option unaffordable for many. Taxi fares within Cedar City have

Participants reported that a taxi ride from a rural area to St. George or Cedar City can cost up to \$400.

also risen sharply over the last five years, from \$6 to \$10 for a short ride. Although public transit services like SunTran are available, their costs remain prohibitive for many residents, especially for longer routes or those that require transfers. The Springdale route, for instance, will cost \$8 each way, and participants expressed concern that this will deter potential users, especially low-wage workers commuting from neighboring towns.

Though affordability was a recurring issue across focus groups, additional insights pointed to the difficulty low-income individuals face when transportation costs compete with other essential expenses, such as healthcare and groceries. Some suggested that transportation services introduce a monthly pass system to help offset the high cost of individual rides, especially for seniors and low-income workers. For example, the new SunTran route's \$8 per trip fare could become more accessible if a discounted monthly pass was introduced.

6.2.4 Access to Transportation Information

Participants observed that, in addition to affordability, accessing accurate and timely information about available transportation services poses a challenge, particularly for individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP). Many non-English speakers — especially Spanish speakers in St. George — struggle to navigate the system despite the fact that 211 serves as a centralized resource for transportation information. Participants pointed out that LEP individuals may hesitate to ask for information from drivers or other transit personnel due to both language and cultural barriers, resulting in underutilization of available services.

Some participants suggested that transportation agencies should improve their communication and marketing efforts to better inform the public about available services. In particular, expanding the use of simple and clear informational materials in multiple languages,

such as Spanish, was seen as essential to helping non-English-speaking residents navigate the complex transportation system. Additionally, participants noted that incorporating large, easy-to-read signage, or offering alternate accessible formats, at bus stops and within vehicles would significantly help seniors and individuals with visual impairments.

Over 1,000 employees commute to Springdale and Zion National Park from as far as St. George and Cedar City (40 – 50 miles), but the public transit options are insufficient to meet their needs.

6.2.5 Consistency of Funding and Volunteer Transportation

Participants observed that the region has experienced numerous transportation programs that were implemented successfully but ultimately cut due to inconsistent funding. For example,

Participants noted that programs relying on volunteer drivers can be unsustainable, as volunteers often face burnout from the demands placed on them.

short-term voucher programs were introduced in some areas of SW Utah, but once funding dried up, residents lost access to these services. Participants noted that programs relying on volunteer drivers can be unsustainable, as volunteers often face burnout from the

demands placed on them. Faith-based groups in Cedar City have occasionally provided transportation and food box delivery services, but these programs have also been inconsistent and difficult to maintain due to limited resources.

Participants mentioned that while volunteer-based transportation programs have been helpful, many are overburdened by high demand. Participants recommended the development of a more formal partnership between local businesses and community organizations to provide consistent funding for volunteer transportation programs. For example, using grants or creating long-term sponsorship programs could ensure that these services remain available to those in need.

6.2.6 Employee Transportation

Participants noted that transportation for employees in the tourism and service industries, particularly in Springdale and Zion National Park, is a mounting concern. Participants observed a misalignment between transit schedules and employee shifts, particularly in the tourism and

service industries. Over 1,000 employees commute to Springdale and Zion National Park from as far as St. George and Cedar City (40 - 50 miles), but the public transit options are insufficient to meet their needs. The new SunTran route from St. George to Springdale, for example, is designed primarily for tourists and does not align with the schedules of service industry workers. Some businesses have taken steps to address this gap by offering their own employee transportation services, such as hotel-operated vans, but these efforts are not widespread.

While the flexibility of vanpool services was highlighted as a potential solution for industries with predictable schedules, some participants suggested that smaller, more frequent shuttle services could better serve industries where employee shifts are less consistent. This could involve using smaller vehicles during off-peak hours to reduce costs while maintaining service.

6.2.7 Tourist Transportation

Participants noted that the rapid growth of tourism in Springdale and Zion National Park has strained the town's infrastructure. Although the Zion National Park shuttle system benefits local residents, it operates for only ten months of the year, leaving a gap in transportation services during the off-season. Additionally, the tourist season has expanded beyond summer, now stretching from mid-March through Thanksgiving, which has increased the demand for year-round transportation solutions.

Many visitors to Springdale bypass the town's shops and restaurants because they cannot find convenient parking.

For areas like Springdale, where tourism puts a strain on the local infrastructure, participants recommended additional parking structures at key shuttle stops to reduce congestion. Many visitors bypass the town's shops and restaurants because they cannot find convenient parking. Creating more centralized parking hubs with shuttle access was seen as an immediate solution that would benefit both residents and visitors.

6.2.8 Public Transit: Level of Service and Coverage

Participants noted that public transit services in the region, particularly in Cedar City and St. George, were widely viewed as insufficient for the area's fast-growing population. SunTran and Cedar Area Transit have limited routes, with many areas, including Enoch, Hurricane, Hildale, Enterprise, and Diamond Hill, receiving no service. Participants noted that trips often take much longer than they should, citing a ride from Santa Clara to Walmart that takes 1.5 hours when a more direct route would take 40 minutes. There is also a lack of service coverage for specific groups, such as seniors and youth involved in evening activities. Participants emphasized the need for expanded transit routes and longer service hours, particularly to serve employment shifts and youth programs.

Some participants highlighted the specific need for more transit stops near healthcare facilities. In Cedar City, for instance, bus stops are located too far from key health clinics, making it difficult for individuals with limited mobility to access services. Other areas with high senior populations, such as Santa Clara and Dixie Downs, are similarly underserved. In Cedar City, the bus route does not extend to major employers along Highway 56, which leaves many workers without reliable transportation options.

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Participants noted that while CATS' paratransit service does a good job, people in crisis need rides sooner than they can qualify for the service, because the eligibility process takes some time and requires medical documentation. Additionally, many participants noted that the fragmented nature of bus routes in places like St. George and Cedar City creates significant delays, making the system less efficient than it could be. A suggestion was to create more direct routes between major hubs and popular destinations, rather than relying on transfers. Additionally, participants suggested that buses run more frequently in areas with higher demand, such as near schools or medical centers.

In rural areas, such as Beaver and Garfield Counties, participants highlighted that new developments and growing populations are creating additional demand for public transportation.

Expanding service in these areas would require proactive planning to ensure that future growth does not exacerbate existing transportation gaps.

6.2.9 Safety and Comfort for Public Transit Riders

Concerns about the safety and comfort of public transit riders were also raised during the discussions. The region's hot climate, especially in areas served by SunTran, can make waiting for buses uncomfortable and even dangerous. Participants suggested that most bus stops should have covered shelters to protect riders from extreme heat. Additionally, many bus stops, particularly in Cedar City, are inaccessible for people using wheelchairs or walkers due to inadequately maintained sidewalks (or lack of sidewalks) or poor infrastructure. “First-and-last mile” challenges were also highlighted, as riders often have to walk long distances from bus stops to their final destinations, including shopping centers and medical facilities.

Participants suggested that most bus stops should have covered shelters to protect riders from extreme heat.

In addition to the lack of infrastructure, particularly benches and shelters at bus stops, participants suggested the need for countdown clocks at major bus stops, allowing riders to see when the next bus will arrive. This could help alleviate frustration during long waits and make the system more user friendly. The addition of clearer signage and more accessible entry points at bus stops was recommended for seniors and disabled riders.

6.2.10 Charter/Alternative School Access

Participants observed that transportation barriers are also affecting access to charter and alternative schools. Some parents are unable to send their children to these schools due to a lack of reliable transportation options.

It was noted that the lack of transportation to charter and alternative schools disproportionately affects low-income families and those living in rural areas where public transit does not extend. Parents often have to choose between work obligations and transporting their children to school, which leads to inconsistent attendance. Offering shuttle services that

specifically target these underserved schools could help ensure that students receive consistent access to education.

6.2.11 Rural Needs

Rural communities face particularly stark transportation challenges. In Cedar City, for instance, the food pantry serves individuals from outlying areas like Garfield County, Enoch City, and Parowan, some of whom hitchhike to access the service. The rural Latino population,

In Cedar City, for instance, the food pantry serves individuals from outlying areas like Garfield County, Enoch City, and Parowan, some of whom hitchhike to access the service.

particularly in Beryl, faces additional barriers due to language and access issues. In Beaver County, residents need to access healthcare and services in Cedar City or St. George but lack consistent transportation options. Milford, Beaver, and Zionsville have been particularly affected by traffic congestion, as commuters travel into

these areas on two-lane highways. Rural residents often need to travel to Las Vegas or Salt Lake City for advanced healthcare, which is a significant challenge without adequate transportation infrastructure.

Rural residents emphasized the significant transportation challenges they face in accessing even basic services, such as grocery stores and healthcare. New insights pointed to the need for inter-county transportation services that connect isolated communities to nearby cities.

For example, some residents of Beaver County need to commute to Cedar City for work, but the lack of reliable transit options forces them to rely on personal vehicles, which is not sustainable for all. Establishing a regional transportation authority that could coordinate services across county lines was suggested as a solution.

Establishing a regional transportation authority that could coordinate services across county lines was suggested as a solution.

6.2.12 Funding

The SunTran Springdale route is set to receive \$15 million in funding over a ten-year period from UDOT, supplemented by a 0.25% transportation tax in Washington County. This

significant investment underscores the value the region places on public transit. Additionally, there is potential for private businesses to contribute to last-mile transportation services, particularly in areas like Beaver County, where employers such as mines and power plants could benefit from connecting their workers to broader transit systems.

In addition to existing funding challenges, participants discussed the potential for local businesses to sponsor transportation initiatives, especially in rural areas where public funding is limited. Businesses that rely on large workforces, such as mining companies or power plants, could benefit from contributing to local transportation infrastructure, such as shuttle services or vanpools. This would help ensure that workers have reliable transportation while reducing congestion in these areas.

6.2.13 Planning Efforts Underway or Planned

In terms of planning efforts, several initiatives are underway or in development. These include the Highway 9 Regional Mobility project, aimed at improving transportation to key destinations along Highway 9 between Kanab and St. George. UDOT is also conducting a transit improvement study for Cedar City. There was also a mention of the Beaver County Master Transportation Plan and how it could address the transportation needs of people with disabilities in Beaver County. These efforts reflect a growing focus on expanding and improving transportation infrastructure in the region.

New planning initiatives were mentioned, such as the development of smaller, more flexible transportation networks that could better serve rural and suburban areas. There was also discussion about the potential for public-private partnerships to build out transportation infrastructure, especially for new developments. One key idea was creating transportation hubs that connect multiple modes of transportation, such as buses, shuttles, and bikes, allowing for easier transfers between systems.

6.2.14 Solutions and Recommendations

To address these challenges, participants recommended fostering stronger partnerships between transportation providers, senior centers, and human services agencies to share resources and develop coordinated solutions. Engaging local educational institutions, such as Southern Utah University (SUU) and Southwest Technical College, could also help address student and faculty transportation needs. Participants expressed interest in using technology to improve trip planning and public information about transit options. However, some participants noted that existing apps, such as SunTran's, are not functioning well, and technical issues (e.g., QR codes exceeding monthly limits) have hindered access to real-time transit information.

Moreover, participants emphasized the need for better coordination between transportation providers and other stakeholders, such as healthcare systems and local businesses. One new suggestion was the development of a centralized online portal where users could schedule rides, view real-time transit updates, and access discounted fare options. This portal could serve as a hub for various transportation services, ensuring that riders have access to all available options in one place.

Additionally, participants recommended more aggressive marketing of existing transportation services, particularly to rural and underserved communities. By increasing public awareness and improving access to information, transit agencies could help boost ridership and ensure that more people are aware of their transportation options.

7.0 Needs and Gaps Analysis

In this section, the study's research questions are addressed, providing a comprehensive overview of the unmet transportation needs and service gaps in the Five County AOG region.

7.1 Availability of Services

Research Question 1:

What transportation services are available to transportation-disadvantaged individuals *[low-income individuals, older adults (65+), and people with disabilities]* living in the study area?

Transportation-disadvantaged individuals living in the Five County AOG region have access to a limited network of basic public and human service transportation services. Public transportation is available in parts of Cedar City, St. George, Ivins, Springdale, and Washington. A new SunTran route now connects St. George to Springdale, with stops in Washington, Hurricane, LaVerkin, and Virgin along the way. Public transit is not available in many outlying areas of Cedar City and St. George. Rural areas of Iron and Washington Counties have no public transit. Beaver, Garfield, and Kane Counties have no public transit. Visitors to Bryce Canyon and Zion National Parks are served by the parks' shuttle systems. Intercity bus lines have stops in Beaver, Cedar City, St. George, and Parowan.

In the region's outlying suburban and rural areas, there is no public transit, but older adults (ages 60 and over) are served by the county Councils on Aging. As documented in the Provider section of this study, the Councils on Aging generally offer services that are limited to their counties' more populated areas. Many of these services operate during limited days and hours. These services provide a basic level of access to senior centers and shopping centers, with some services also providing rides to medical appointments or recreational opportunities. Some of these services also provide rides to people with disabilities under 60. People with disabilities also have access to paratransit within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of SunTran fixed routes. Older adults and people with disabilities in Cedar City have access to a citywide Dial-a-Ride offered by the Cedar Area Transit system.

Three nonprofit agencies providing supportive services to individuals with disabilities and mental health conditions offer limited transportation to their clients. These clients benefit from having this access to critical services related to their disabilities. Additionally, individuals with Medicaid health coverage are provided with non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) to their Medicaid-covered appointments. Five County AOG provides a limited number of transportation vouchers to low-income older adults who need financial assistance to be able to attend medical appointments, and whose needs cannot be met by NEMT, Council on Aging services, or public transportation.

7.2 Demand Patterns

Research Question 2:

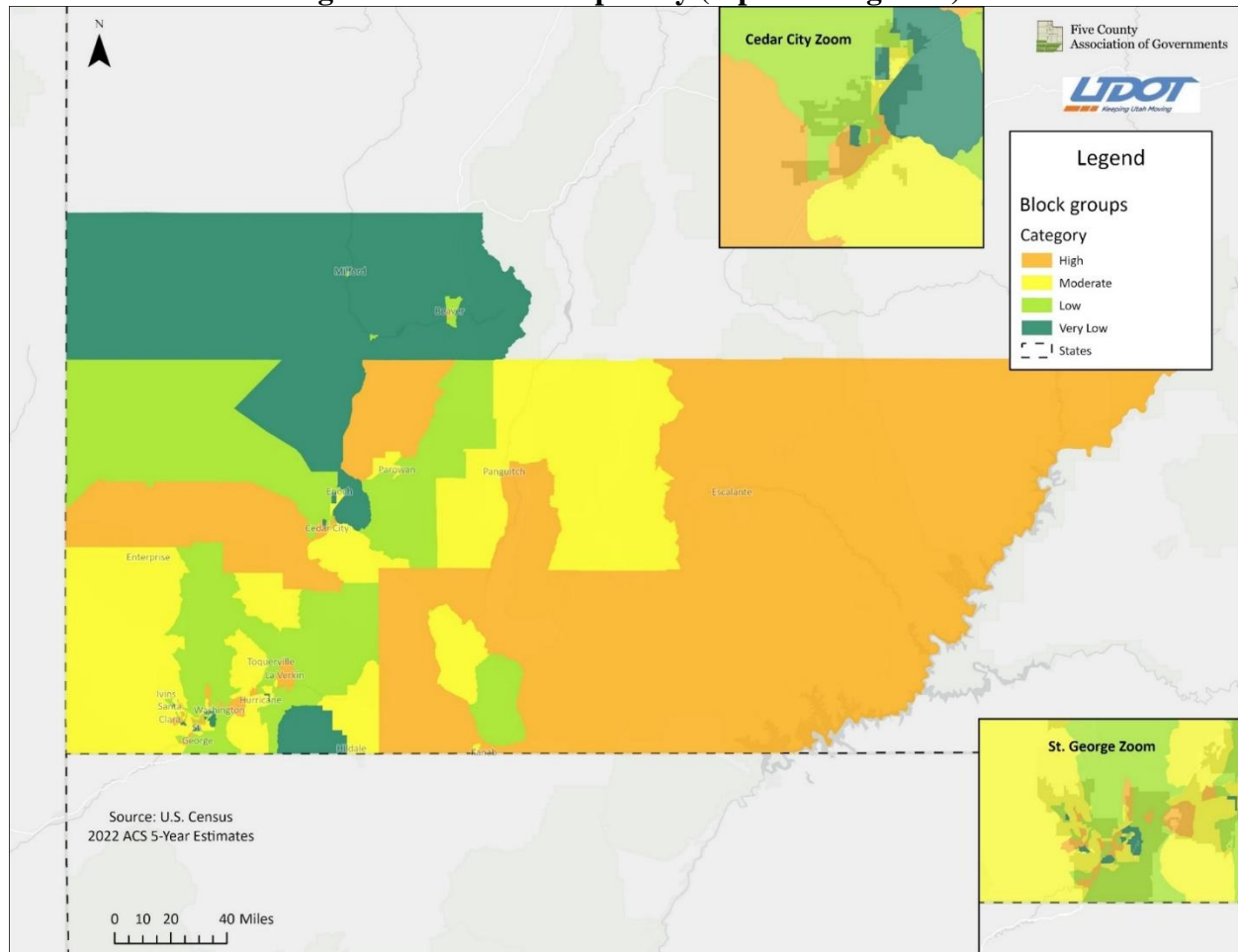
What are the residential patterns and projected growth/changes of transportation-disadvantaged populations in the study area?

The Five County AOG region is characterized by rapid population growth. The St. George metropolitan area is one of the fastest-growing areas in the nation. All five counties in the region are projected to grow significantly in the coming decades. Growth has already outpaced the reach of the public transit systems serving the St. George area and Cedar City. These systems serve core areas of the cities, but population has increased in nearby, unserved areas like Enoch in Iron County and Hurricane in Washington County.

Areas with the highest older adult population density are around Santa Clara, Washington, and southern St. George in Washington County. Block groups with the highest density of individuals living below the poverty level are in Iron County, specifically in Cedar City. Areas of moderately high poverty density are Cedar City, southern Iron County, Santa Clara, St. George, Washington, Hurricane, Hildale, and Panguitch. Block groups with the highest percentage of households without a vehicle are in Cedar City, Hurricane, Washington, St. George, and Kanab. Areas with the highest percentages of individuals with a disability are located in Kanab, Hurricane, and St. George. The transit propensity map in the following figure

shows that transportation needs may be highest in large portions of Garfield, Kane, and Iron Counties, although there are pockets of high need in Washington and Beaver Counties as well.

Figure 29: Transit Propensity (repeat of Figure 8)



Research Question 3:

What are the important trip destinations for transportation-disadvantaged individuals living in the study area?

Key trip purposes identified in this study included medical, shopping/food pantry, and employment (particularly for people with disabilities). Tourism/recreation facilities and schools (charter/private school and secondary education) were also identified as important destinations.

Improved medical transportation emerged as one of the most critical needs in the region. St. George is the foremost destination for medical care, followed by Cedar City. There are smaller medical facilities in many of the smaller communities in the region, such as Enterprise, Panguitch, and Hildale. Some residents travel to facilities in Salt Lake City and Las Vegas for advanced and specialty care. Rides are needed to and from hospitals all hours of the day. Some appointments, such as surgeries, require patients to arrive early in the mornings; hospital discharges occur in the evenings and on weekends. These temporal gaps in mobility service are a strong need.

While many smaller communities have grocery stores, lower-income residents are attracted to larger stores (e.g., Walmart and Costco) in St. George and Cedar City for affordability reasons. It is also important for individuals in poverty to be able to travel to food pantries. Food pantries are located in the larger cities and smaller communities.

Employment is available throughout the region, with the largest numbers of jobs available in St. George. It is important for transportation options to be accessible to individuals with disabilities. The unemployment rate is much higher for people with disabilities, and transportation is one of the biggest barriers for this population to consistent employment. Feedback indicated that public transit in Cedar City and the St. George area does not reach all of the high-employment areas of the cities. There are many employment opportunities in the tourism and recreation field in Brian Head, Bryce Canyon, and Springdale/Zion National Park, however, transportation to these areas is a continuing challenge.

7.3 Unmet Needs and Gaps and Service

Research Question 4:

To what extent do the existing services meet the needs of transportation-disadvantaged populations to travel to important trip destinations?

The available services are meeting some of the trip needs of transportation-disadvantaged populations, but there is significant demand for additional service. In rural areas of the region,

service is sparse or nonexistent, and is limited by eligibility requirements and severely constrained financial resources. In the populated areas of the region, where public transit exists, its reach is limited both geographically and temporally (unavailable during nights and weekends), and funding is also limited.

Research Question 5:

What changes would be necessary to the existing services, or what new services should be developed, in order to increase the extent to which these needs are met?

Improvements to local transportation services are necessary for the region's rural and urban communities. This section lists potential improvements, including administrative structure changes, by county.

7.3.1 Washington County

An expansion of SunTran to more St. George suburban and outlying Washington County communities would meet needs for the greatest number of area residents. Preliminary discussions with SunTran and other stakeholders during the study centered on SunTran, a department of the City of St. George, adding additional communities to its service area through interlocal agreements, similar to the agreement that currently exists between SunTran and Ivins.

7.3.1.1 Route Adjustments and Extensions

The addition of the Springdale route in late 2024 was an important first step in SunTran's expansion. A comprehensive study of transit demand and feasibility in Washington County would allow SunTran to identify ways to redesign its route network for more efficiency and effectiveness, and where it should expand service. Some areas have characteristics, such as population density, that would support the addition of new fixed route service. Other, less populated areas would be more appropriate for a demand-responsive transportation service.

7.3.1.2 Increased Days/Hours of Service and Route Frequency

Increased route frequency (for example, routes that arrive at stops every 15 to 30 minutes) would make the service more convenient, especially for passengers who transfer between routes to get to their destinations. Ideally, routes would operate seven days per week, with hours of operation adequate to meet second- and third-shift employment needs in multiple sectors (manufacturing, tourism/recreation, health care, food service, etc.). Potentially, SunTran's service in Springdale could be extended to complement the Zion National Park service so that Springdale has year-round transit service.

7.3.1.3 Rural Service and Intercity Connections

Rural demand response service could be added to complement efforts of the Washington County Council on Aging in outlying areas of the county. SunTran and the Council on Aging should coordinate to maximize efficiency and prevent duplication of service. Ideally, demand response service would be available for out-of-county trips, given the need for travel to medical destinations in adjacent communities (e.g., Cedar City or Las Vegas). Services should connect to local intercity bus stops (currently, in St. George), so that convenient transfers would be available to intercity routes.

7.3.1.4 Bus Stop and Pedestrian Infrastructure, Customer-Facing Technology and Travel Training

Many SunTran passengers struggle with excessive heat during the summer months, and would benefit from more shelters and covered seating areas at bus stops. Sidewalk and pedestrian safety enhancements would make fixed routes more accessible to passengers with physical limitations.

Improvements to public information through enhanced deployment of technology would be critical for educating the community about expanded and new services. Additionally, personalized travel training is necessary to familiarize community members with how they can use public transit. This is especially important for vulnerable populations including older adults, people with disabilities, and people with limited English proficiency. Partnerships with local

senior centers, disability-serving organizations and agencies serving the Spanish-speaking population would be helpful in developing programs to improve outreach to these groups.

7.3.2 Iron County

The structure of Iron County expansion recommendations is similar to the Washington County strategies. An expansion of CATS services to communities throughout Iron County would fill gaps in service experienced by transportation-disadvantaged residents. CATS, a department of Cedar City, would expand by forming agreements with other Iron County communities, and potentially, Iron County for rural service.

7.3.2.1 Expansion of CATS

UDOT is currently conducting a transit enhancement study on behalf of CATS to develop a plan for revised and expanded services. The Cedar City/Enoch area would benefit from the development of the current CATS route into a more extensive, frequent route network that served well-populated areas and places with concentrations of trip generators, including employers. Other, less populated areas, such as Parowan, would be more appropriate for a demand-responsive transportation service. With enough funding, CATS could expand its dial-a-ride service for older adults and people with disabilities to become a countywide service.

7.3.2.2 Rural Service and Intercity Connections

Rural demand response service should be coordinated with the Iron County Council on Aging in outlying areas of the county. There is demand for out-of-county trips, particularly to St. George. Rides could be provided to one or more locations where transfers could be made to SunTran. Expanded CATS services should also connect to local intercity bus stops in Cedar City and Parowan.

7.3.2.3 Bus Stop and Pedestrian Infrastructure, Customer-Facing Technology and Travel Training

CATS passengers would benefit from more shelters and covered seating areas at bus stops, particularly during winter weather. Sidewalk and pedestrian safety enhancements would

make fixed routes more accessible to passengers with physical limitations. Similar to SunTran, improvements to public information through enhanced deployment of technology would be helpful for orienting the community to the system, as well as travel training.

7.3.3 Beaver, Kane, and Garfield Counties

The population densities in Beaver, Kane, and Garfield Counties do not support cost-effective fixed-route bus service. Unmet needs in these rural counties would be most appropriately met by demand-responsive public transportation. A potential alternative discussed by stakeholders was to offer deviated routes in these areas. Strengths and weaknesses of these approaches were discussed in the October 17, 2024 SWOT analysis documented in the following section.

A regional operator with multiple local bases of vehicle operations may be the most efficient way to serve a very large, sparsely populated geographical service area. The demographic analysis for this study identified greater propensity for transit in Kane and Garfield Counties than Beaver County. Potentially, service could be initiated in the former, then expanded to the latter in a later phase of implementation.

The service would be reservation based, providing in-county rides as well as trips to St. George and Cedar City, primarily for shopping and medical trip purposes. Potentially, regularly scheduled runs to these cities could be offered to encourage shared rides. These services would be provided with paid drivers operating agency vehicles. However, volunteer driver programs and transportation vouchers could be continued in order to supplement the paid driver services. “Gap trips” in difficult-to-serve areas can sometimes be provided more efficiently through voucher or volunteer programs.

These rural services should be coordinated with the Council on Aging transportation programs to avoid duplication. Travel training could be offered in conjunction with the Councils on Aging. The Councils on Aging may be interested in limiting their own services to local trips, with the public transit operator covering cross-county and out-of-county trips.

A tentative recommendation of this study is for the Five County AOG to assume the role of transit operator in the three rural counties, although other options, including county operation of rural transit, were discussed in the SWOT analysis.

7.4 SWOT Analysis of Potential Strategies

On October 17, 2024, the TAC and Regional Mobility Council were convened to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) involved in potential transit expansion strategies in the Five County AOG region. This SWOT analysis evaluated the transit expansion strategies proposed by the project consultant following the needs and gaps analysis.

7.4.1 Potential Service Strategies

7.4.1.1 Strategy 1: SunTran and CATS Fixed-Route Expansion

Description: Expansion of existing fixed-route services, including new locations, extended hours, increased frequency, and upgraded services in key corridors, such as dedicated bus lanes or express routes.

Strengths

Broad Stakeholder Support: SunTran has significant support from the St. George City Council, Zion National Park, and Washington County stakeholders. This includes support for the Zion route opening on November 1, 2024 which can create more awareness and opportunities for rebranding.

Rising Urban Demand: There is significant growth in the St. George area, creating demand for expanded routes, including potential expansion into the industrial park between Utah Tech and Dixie Tech.

Weaknesses

Lengthy Expansion Process: Expansion is a long process, requiring years of planning and vehicle acquisition. A comprehensive planning study would be necessary for both St. George and Cedar City. It may take two to three years before new buses are delivered and operational.

Funding and Public Perception: Funding remains a critical issue for expansion. There is an auto-dominated mentality in the region, and local resistance exists due to perceptions that funding transit is subsidizing transportation services for people without cars.

Opportunities

Expanding Frequency and Coverage: The new Zion route is poised to serve new locations, including key corridors around the city and areas such as the east side of Zion National Park.

Educational Campaigns and Rebranding: A rebranding campaign could address local resistance by emphasizing the environmental benefits of transit, reducing highway traffic, and highlighting the community-wide advantages of reliable public transit.

Threats

Political and Public Funding Hurdles: Local governments are hesitant to fund transit expansions since the majority of residents rely on personal vehicles. In addition, there is reluctance to support transit funding due to its perception as unnecessary for most of the population.

Inter-Jurisdictional Coordination: Expanding routes across different jurisdictions presents logistical challenges, such as accommodating different community standards for bus stop designs and branding.

7.4.1.2 Strategy 2: Demand Response Service for the Public

Description: On-demand transportation services operating within counties or across the region, providing door-to-door or curb-to-curb service, particularly in rural and low-density areas. This alternative could involve countywide service in Beaver, Garfield, and Kane or rural service outside of fixed-route areas in Iron and Washington. This service strategy could potentially operate within communities, within counties, and/or within the region, and would provide connectivity to the St. George area and Cedar City.

Strengths

Utilization of Unused Resources: Existing, unused senior center buses, such as those in Beaver County, present an opportunity to deploy resources more effectively. These

vehicles could be repurposed to support demand-response services if drivers are available.

Flexibility for Rural Populations: Demand-response services offer significant flexibility to operate in areas like Garfield, Beaver, and Kane counties, where fixed-route services are unlikely to be cost effective.

Weaknesses

High Operational Costs: Demand-response services incur high per-trip costs, especially when operated over long distances in sparsely populated areas. This makes maintaining these services expensive without sufficient funding.

Unpredictable Demand: Demand for these services is inconsistent, making resource allocation, staffing, and scheduling a complex challenge.

Opportunities

Hybrid Employment Models: Utilizing hybrid employment models where employees can perform different tasks during periods of low transit demand could make this service more cost efficient and cost effective.

Inter-County Collaboration: Counties could work together to offer demand-response services, pooling resources for a coordinated service delivery. Beaver County's buses and Cedar City's staffing capacity, for example, could complement each other to create a feasible model for providing on-demand transit services.

Threats

Political Resistance and Operational Complexity: Providers are reluctant to expand services outside their jurisdictions due to political and logistical challenges. It is also difficult to assign responsibility for operating these services across multiple counties, further complicating coordination.

Limited Volunteer Driver Availability: In some areas, the reliance on volunteer drivers poses a challenge, as many volunteer drivers are senior citizens and find driving larger buses intimidating.

7.4.1.3 Strategy 3: Flexible Service/Point Deviation Service Connecting Communities

Description: A hybrid model where vehicles operate on a fixed schedule along a route but can deviate within a defined area to pick up or drop off passengers upon request. Point deviation is essentially a hybrid of fixed-route and demand response service. It involves advertised,

scheduled stops in communities with flexibility to add pick-ups and drop-offs within a defined zone (e.g., two-mile radius).

Strengths

Flexibility for Rural Areas: This service provides flexible advertised stops and the ability to deviate within a specified radius (such as one mile), making it ideal for rural areas where fixed routes may not be practical.

Support for Planning Appointments: Scheduled stops allow passengers to plan trips around a known timeframe, which is helpful for those attending medical appointments and running errands.

Weaknesses

Difficult Scheduling and Delays: Maintaining a consistent schedule is difficult with deviations, particularly when dealing with unpredictable appointment times (e.g., doctor visits). This reduces service reliability and may cause delays in the broader route.

Opportunities

Suitability for Rural Regions: The flexibility of point deviation services makes it well suited to rural areas where population density is low, providing an alternative to traditional fixed-route systems.

Use of Dynamic Routing Software: Implementing dynamic routing technology could improve efficiency by optimizing routes and minimizing delays caused by deviations.

Threats

Winter Weather Impact: Beaver and Garfield Counties experience severe winter weather, which complicates scheduling and service delivery. Poor road conditions can lead to delays and cancellations, particularly in areas with less developed infrastructure.

Service Coordination and Reliability: Balancing point deviations while maintaining an on-time schedule for fixed stops is difficult, especially in larger areas with multiple users requiring deviations.

7.4.1.4 Strategy 4: Expansion of Voucher and Volunteer Programs

Description: Programs that provide transportation vouchers to eligible individuals or use volunteer drivers to offer transportation services, particularly for medical appointments and essential trips. This would involve smaller-scale programs providing one-on-one solutions, a Five County AOG voucher program, and/or expansion of senior center programs, or new organizations using fleet vehicles or personal vehicles, or both.

Strengths

Cost-Effective Alternatives: Voucher and volunteer programs are less costly compared to running full-scale transit services. These programs provide direct and flexible support to those with specific transit needs, including seniors and people with disabilities.

Successful Medical Voucher Programs: The voucher program has already proven successful, as evidenced by 300 medical vouchers distributed recently, which directly helped residents' access to healthcare. This indicates the potential effectiveness of expanding such services.

Weaknesses

Limited and Quickly Depleted Funding: Funding for voucher programs tends to be limited and is quickly exhausted, making it challenging to keep these services available consistently throughout the year. This issue also impacts the sustainability of current voucher offerings.

Volunteer Availability and Burden: Volunteer drivers are not always available, leading to gaps in service. Many drivers also provide caregiving support, meaning their responsibilities go beyond driving alone, making it hard to maintain a reliable pool of volunteers.

Opportunities

Partnerships with Healthcare Providers: Engaging healthcare providers in supporting the voucher program could ensure that more patients receive the transportation they need for medical appointments. This could create a sustainable, year-round medical voucher service.

Electronic Voucher System: Testing electronic vouchers, as proposed by the Utah Transit Authority, could help streamline reimbursement processes and reduce administrative burdens, improving the program's scalability and efficiency.

Threats

Economic Vulnerability and Funding Sustainability: The sustainability of these programs is vulnerable to fluctuations in funding availability. During economic downturns, there may be fewer donations and grants, limiting the availability of vouchers.

High Cost of Private Providers: Private services like Uber are often too expensive for voucher partnerships. They are generally unwilling to work at discounted rates, further complicating the affordability and reliability of volunteer-driven or voucher-based transit solutions.

7.4.1.5 Summary of Service Strategies

SunTran and CATS Fixed-Route Expansion: Expansion of fixed routes in Washington and Iron Counties will provide dependable, efficient transportation options to residents of the more populated areas. As with all service expansions, identifying sustainable funding for operations and capital needs will be a hurdle. It is also challenging to coordinate with multiple, adjacent jurisdictions to operate fixed routes.

Demand Response Service for the Public: Demand response is a more cost-effective option than fixed-route for serving rural areas, including Beaver, Garfield, and Kane Counties, and outlying rural areas of Washington and Iron Counties. However, this type of service carries a high per-trip cost. A demand response operator in the Five County AOG region may be able to use senior center transit vehicles that are infrequently used. It may be difficult to recruit drivers in rural areas, although there may be an opportunity to partner with CATS and/or SunTran to share drivers.

Flexible Service/Point Deviation Service Connecting Communities: There was less support from the SWOT Analysis participants for this type of service. However, many rural communities have found success with flexible and deviated route services. Additional transit studies could be used to determine whether this mode would be appropriate in the region.

Expansion of Voucher and Volunteer Programs: Voucher and volunteer programs are sometimes the only way to meet some needs and fill difficult-to-serve gaps. These programs

depend on the availability of a transportation provider to accept a voucher, including volunteers or friends/family members. Voucher programs are also vulnerable to changes in funding availability.

7.4.2 Administrative Strategies

7.4.2.1 Alternative 1: Cities Continue to Operate Public Transit Systems

Description: SunTran currently operates in Ivins, Santa Clara, and Washington under agreement. This service could extend to more communities or throughout the county. CATS could also extend beyond its city limits under this alternative.

Strengths

Cost Efficiency: Cities already provide administrative services such as HR and legal support, reducing overhead. The availability of St. George's administrative services to SunTran is an example of this.

Established Infrastructure: St. George and Cedar City have established transit systems that can be expanded with incremental investment, making it easier to grow without starting from scratch.

Weaknesses

Low Motivation for Expansion: Cities have little motivation to expand transit into new areas without dedicated funding. This results in underrepresentation in underserved communities like Hurricane and Enterprise.

Inconsistent Standards Across Jurisdictions: Managing multiple jurisdictions leads to inconsistencies in standards, such as differing expectations for bus stop designs and service frequency, complicating operations.

Opportunities

Partnerships with Other Communities: Communities like Brian Head have expressed interest in collaborating with St. George or Cedar City, offering opportunities to extend services and create larger transit networks.

Threats

Inconsistent Political Support: Different cities have different expectations, making it challenging to align objectives and maintain consistent transit services. Expansion requires political and funding support from all participating municipalities.

7.4.2.2 Alternative 2: Form Transit Districts in Each County

Description: This would involve communities in each county forming a transit district. This alternative is likely more viable in Washington and Iron Counties. Potentially, rural communities nearby (e.g., Kanab) could participate.

Strengths

Potential for Unified Services: Forming transit districts could allow for consistent transit programs throughout the region, with dedicated governance and funding to support growth.

Weaknesses

High Administrative Costs: Operating a freestanding transit district comes with significant costs for administrative functions like HR and legal services. The administrative burden of these services may be higher compared to continuing operations within individual cities.

Opportunities

Increased Funding Opportunities: Establishing a transit district could create eligibility for larger federal and state grants, as these tend to prioritize regional solutions. Dedicated funding from transit district taxes can also ensure sustainable financial resources.

Structured Growth and Development: Transit districts provide the organizational structure to support expansion in rural and neighboring areas that otherwise may not have been included in city-operated plans. They allow for coordinated and strategic growth across multiple communities, extending transit coverage to areas such as Kanab or Hurricane.

Threats

Political Hesitancy: Forming transit districts requires a significant amount of local political buy-in, which can be challenging in communities like Kane County, where voters previously rejected proposals to form transit districts.

Equity Concerns: Different areas may contribute varying amounts to the district but may not necessarily receive services that are proportional to their contributions. This potential imbalance can lead to community resistance and dissatisfaction with the implementation of the transit district.

7.4.2.3 Alternative 3: Rural County Transit Programs

Description: This alternative is the most common option for rural transit nationwide. With this alternative, coordination with senior centers would be important.

Strengths

Use of Existing Resources: Rural counties like Garfield have infrastructure in place, such as senior centers, that can be leveraged to provide transit services. This reduces the cost of launching new programs while building existing facilities and services.

Local Focus and Community Support: Rural transit programs tend to be more community-centric, targeting specific local needs and providing tailored services, such as transporting seniors to medical appointments and grocery stores. This community focus can build stronger local support and engagement.

Weaknesses

Overburdened Senior Centers: Senior center directors and staff are already managing a wide range of responsibilities and may not have the capacity to add transportation coordination to their workloads. This lack of bandwidth is a significant barrier to scaling rural transit services.

Absence of Internal Champions: Rural transit programs need leadership and dedicated champions to advocate for and coordinate services. Without these internal leaders, it can be difficult to sustain the momentum needed for program expansion.

Opportunities

Dedicated Rural Transportation Coordinators: Hiring dedicated staff to manage transit programs can help reduce the burden on senior centers while ensuring that

transit services are professionally managed. Counties like Garfield and Beaver could pool resources to fund a shared coordinator, facilitating collaboration and improving service delivery.

Resource Coordination Among Counties: Improved coordination among counties can lead to pooled resources, shared services, and a more efficient delivery of transit. This could involve counties coordinating with each other to extend service areas or share vehicle fleets, which would help overcome some of the capacity limitations currently facing these programs.

Threats

Political and Financial Support Gaps: Political and financial support for rural transit is inconsistent. Without dedicated champions and sufficient funding from local governments, it is unlikely that rural transit programs will gain the traction needed to succeed.

Communication and Coordination Barriers: There may be ongoing discussions among local leadership regarding transit needs, but weak communication and coordination across counties are hindering progress. Without a coordinated effort, rural transit programs may remain fragmented and limited in reach.

7.4.2.4 Alternative 4: Five County AOG as Operator or Coordinator of Rural Transit

Description: One example of this alternative is the Uintah Basin Association of Governments. This alternative would offer unique advantages over more localized options. Five County AOG already offers a voucher program.

Strengths

Centralized Coordination and Consistency: Five County AOG already has experience coordinating programs like the regional voucher system and is well positioned to extend its role to other transit services. By centralizing operations under one entity, the AOG can streamline services and provide consistent transit programs throughout the five counties.

Established Relationships: The AOG has existing relationships with stakeholders and communities across the region. These connections can facilitate coordination, expand transit services efficiently, and reduce redundancy by eliminating fragmented, overlapping efforts.

Weaknesses

Limited Staff Capacity: The AOG currently operates with minimal staffing for its existing programs, and expanding to coordinate transit services would require additional staff and resources. Without expanding its workforce, the AOG may be unable to meet the increased demands of operating a regional transit system.

Complex Regional Operations: Operating transit services across five counties involves significant logistical complexity, including managing intercounty political dynamics, funding mechanisms, and the differing transit needs of both urban and rural areas.

Opportunities

Grant Funding and Financial Support: As a centralized organization, Five County AOG would be in a strong position to apply for state and federal grants to support regional transit expansion. Regional coordination also opens doors for more significant funding opportunities that may not be available to individual counties.

Integrated Services and Resource Sharing: Centralizing transit services under the Five County AOG allows for an integrated approach that improves efficiency. By combining resources, counties can eliminate redundancy, improve coverage, and streamline operations, benefiting all participating regions.

Threats

Financial Commitment from Counties: Counties must commit to financially support a centralized transit system. Historically, funding contributions from individual counties have been inconsistent, which undermines long-term sustainability. Without strong buy-in from all participating counties, the success of the AOG in operating a regional system will be limited.

Complex Political Environment: Gaining alignment from all counties on transit priorities and securing the necessary funding presents a significant challenge. Some counties may prioritize other services or may be unwilling to contribute financially to a regional transit program. Overcoming this reluctance will require strong advocacy and clear communication of the benefits of regional coordination.

7.4.2.5 Summary of Administrative Alternatives

Cities Continue to Operate Public Transit Systems: This alternative offers lower costs by using existing city administrative structures but suffers from a lack of regional motivation to expand services and inconsistent standards across multiple jurisdictions.

Form Transit Districts in Washington and Iron County: Consolidating services under transit districts would create consistent, structured services with dedicated funding. However, funding, administrative costs, and political interest remain significant obstacles to implementation.

Rural County Transit Programs: Rural transit programs coordinated through senior centers provide a localized, community-focused solution but lack the leadership, resources, and capacity to operate effectively without additional staffing and coordination.

Five County AOG as Operator or Coordinator: Centralizing operations under the AOG offers the opportunity for regional coordination and increased efficiency. However, it requires significant staffing, financial support, and political alignment to succeed.

7.5 Conclusion

The SWOT analysis further emphasizes the importance of targeted, flexible, and accessible transportation solutions that address the specific needs of both urban and rural populations in southwestern Utah. Key takeaways include:

Funding Stability: Consistent and recurring funding sources are crucial to maintaining and expanding services effectively. The creation of transit districts or regional coordination through the AOG could provide the structure needed to secure sustainable funding.

Targeted Service Expansion: Urban areas should focus on expanding coverage, increasing accessibility, and improving service frequency. For rural areas, tailored solutions like demand response, vouchers, and volunteer programs can more effectively meet community needs.

Technological Integration: Using technology for scheduling, real-time updates, and service information can significantly enhance user experience and operational efficiency. Dynamic routing software can improve efficiency for flexible and demand-response services.

Public-Private Partnerships and Community Engagement: Leveraging local institutions, businesses, and volunteer networks can create sustainable transportation programs and help gain broader community buy-in. Partnerships with healthcare providers can support expanded voucher programs, especially for medical trips.

Centralized Regional Coordination: Five County AOG is well positioned to coordinate and operate transit services across the region, provided that counties contribute sufficient funding and support. Regional coordination would increase efficiency and eliminate redundant services.

8.0 Recommendations

Expanding transportation for disadvantaged populations in the Five County AOG region will involve many partners, planning efforts, and funding sources working over a two- to three-year timeframe for initial implementation.

8.1 Conduct Transit Development Studies

The recommendation of this study is for SunTran and CATS to expand their services to neighboring jurisdictions in their counties, and for Five County AOG to develop rural transit services in Beaver, Garfield and Kane Counties. CATS is currently undergoing a transit study. SunTran has indicated interest in a similar study. Studies of this nature can be used to engage local governments, businesses, and community members in discussions to build support for transit expansion, and to develop implementation strategies for feasible service expansions, detailing required resources, funding sources, timelines, and expected outcomes.

An additional, third study would be necessary to develop rural transit in the three counties under the Five County AOG. This study would provide the AOG with guidance on directly operating (or contracting with a third-party operator to run) transit services and coordinating with CATS, SunTran, and the Council on Aging programs to maximize efficiencies, aiming toward a seamless regional travel experience for the customer.

8.2 Establish a Coordinating Committee

The existing Five County Regional Mobility Council can serve as a regional coordinating committee to oversee the planning and implementation of transit services, ensuring alignment across all participating counties and collaborating providers. CATS, SunTran, and the county Councils on Aging can use this committee as a hub for the implementation of strategies developed in this study to address unmet needs and gaps in service.

8.3 Collaborate with UDOT and Local and State Elected Officials to Pursue Expansion Funding

The expansion of transit services will require local stakeholders to identify new sources of funding for planning, capital, and operational expenses. The cost of these expansions and new services is scalable according to local needs and funding availability.

Identified funding sources should be ongoing and sustainable. UDOT's Rural Public Transit group can work with SunTran, CATS, and the Five County AOG to identify FTA funding that may be available to fund expenses associated with expansion. The U.S. Congress appropriates FTA funding to states (for rural and small urban areas) and large urban areas; funding is allocated based on population, transit system performance, and other factors.

The State of Utah legislature has periodically provided funding for transit expansions; they have provided targeted funding to the region to fund SunTran's addition of the St. George-Springdale route. The Utah Transportation Commission prioritizes projects for funding by the Transit Transportation Investment Fund (TTIF), which provides monies for transportation capacity projects.

Local funding can be provided through county and/or city general funds. Some cities and counties, including Washington County, have established a local option sales tax to support transit expenditures.

Rural transit systems in the U.S. often provide contracted human service transportation and use the revenue as local match for FTA grants. A frequent source of contract funding is Medicaid non-emergency transportation (NEMT). The statewide NEMT brokerage (currently, Modivcare) partners with local providers to operate this type of service. Federal and state aging dollars would also be eligible sources of local match if made available.

8.4 Community Engagement

It will be critical for the lead partners in transit expansion to educate residents on the benefits of public transit, focusing on environmental, social, and economic advantages to build community support and encourage ridership. At the beginning of the process, public buy-in will be necessary for securing sustainable local funding for transit. Later, and over time, public engagement will ensure that the services generate ridership, meet needs, and are appropriately designed and updated in response to community input.

8.5 Conclusion

The success of transit expansion in southwestern Utah's Five County AOG region depends on a collaborative and well-coordinated approach that meets the unique needs of both rural and urban areas. By focusing on hybrid solutions, engaging stakeholders, and securing stable funding, the Five County AOG can make significant progress in expanding access to essential services and enhancing the quality of life for all residents.

APPENDIX

This appendix includes county maps depicting the work commute patterns of each county's residents, followed by the open-ended feedback provided by survey respondents.

Figure 30: Beaver County Residents' Employment by County

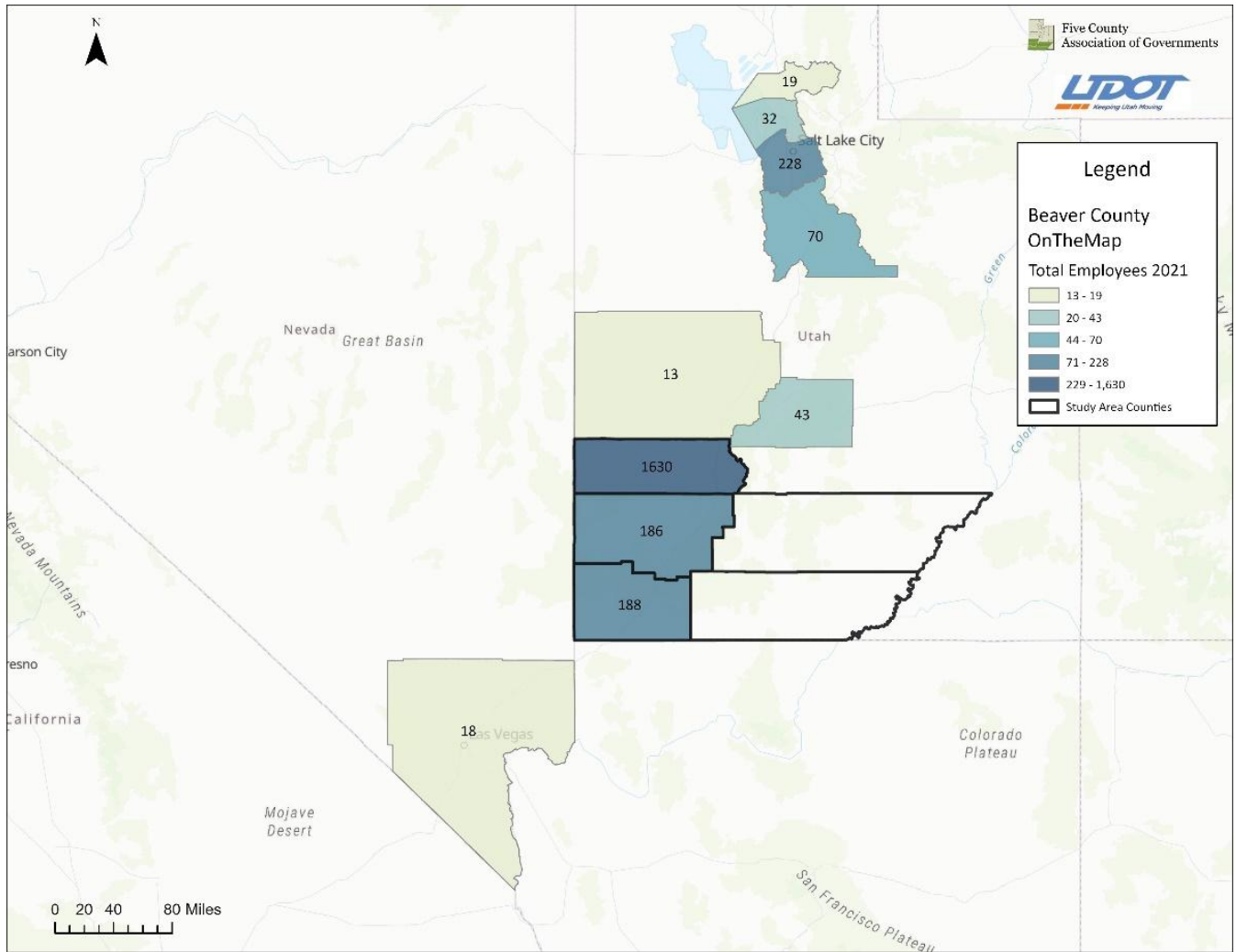


Figure 31: Garfield County Residents' Employment by County

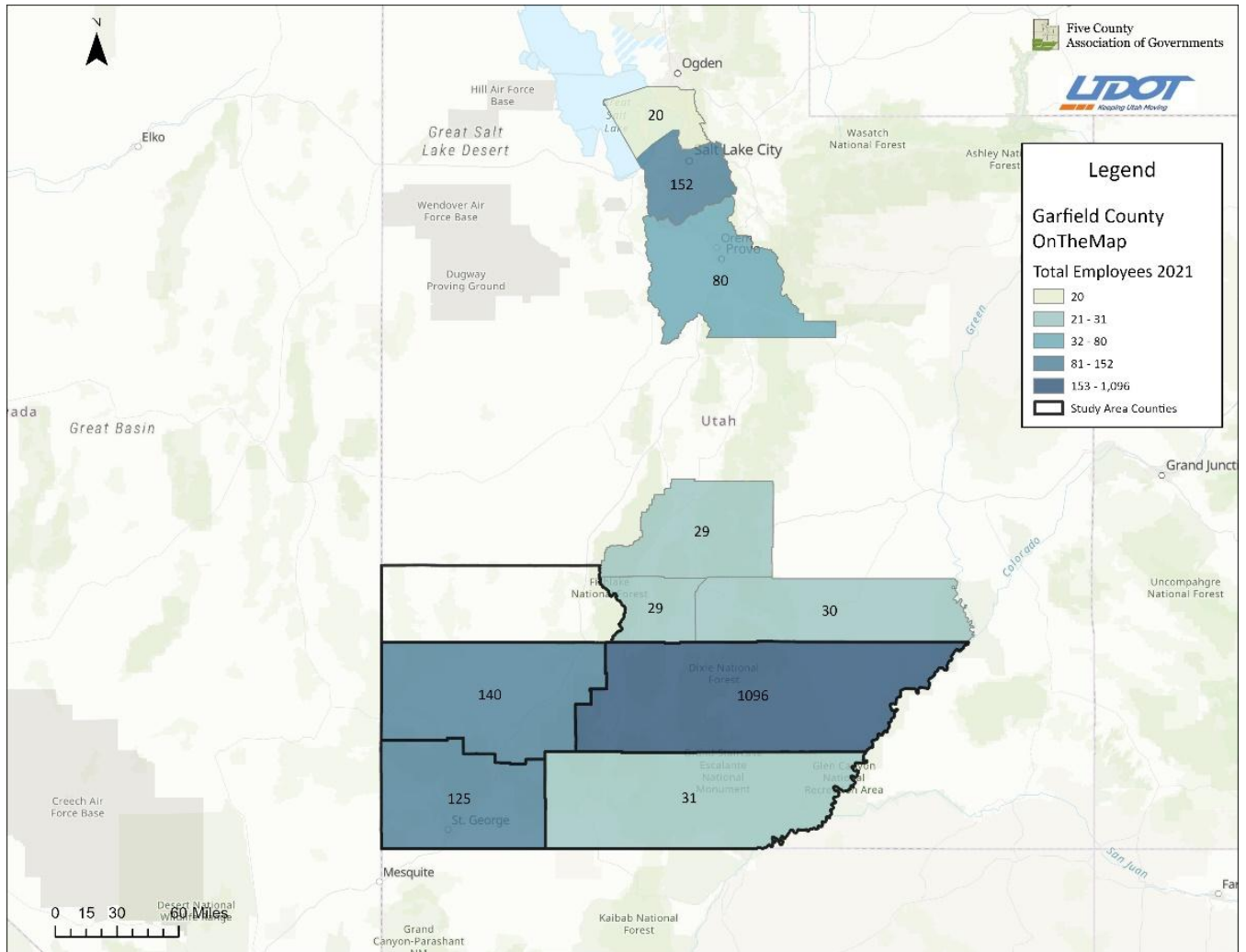


Figure 32: Iron County Residents' Employment by County

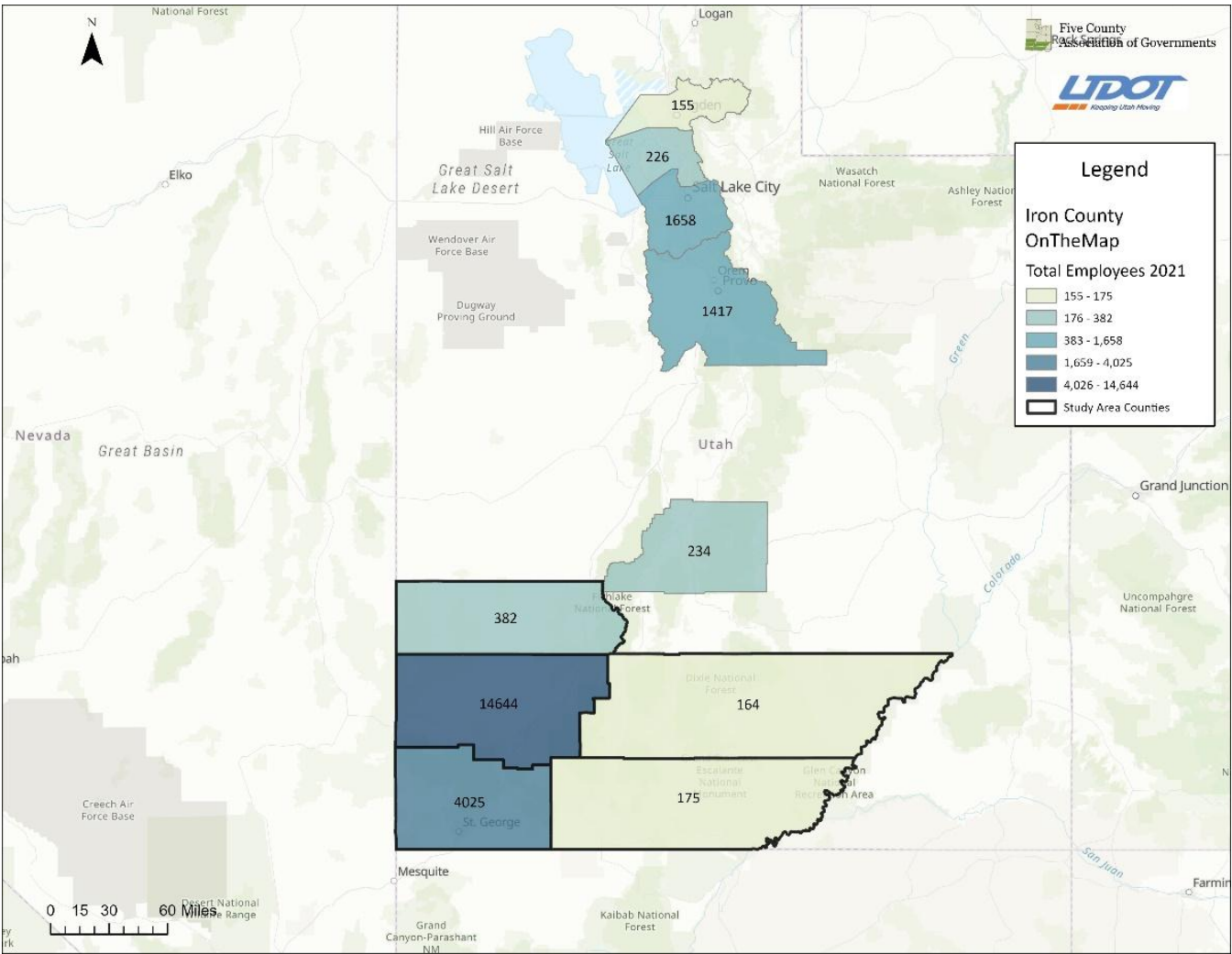


Figure 33: Kane County Residents' Employment by County

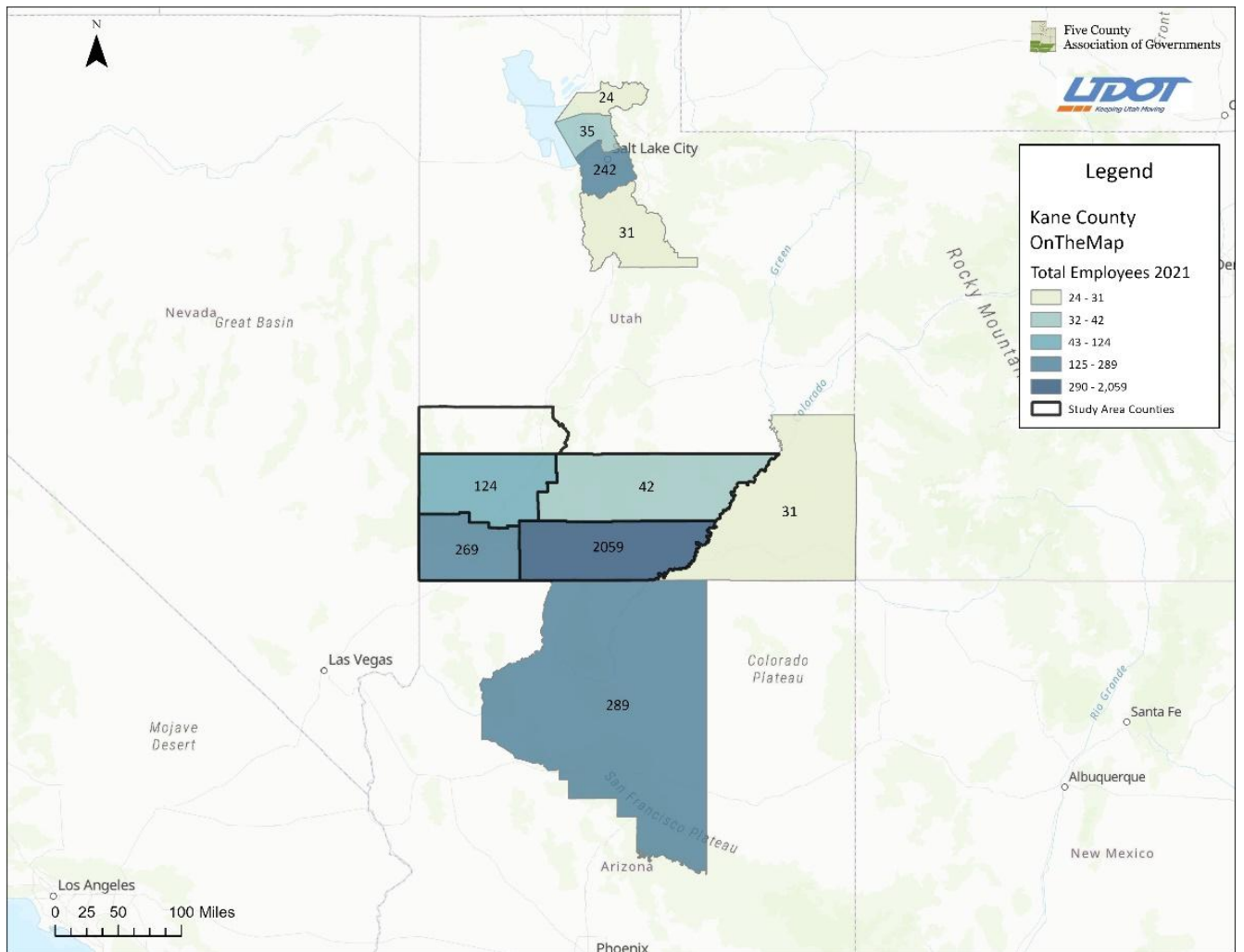


Figure 34: Washington County Residents' Employment by County

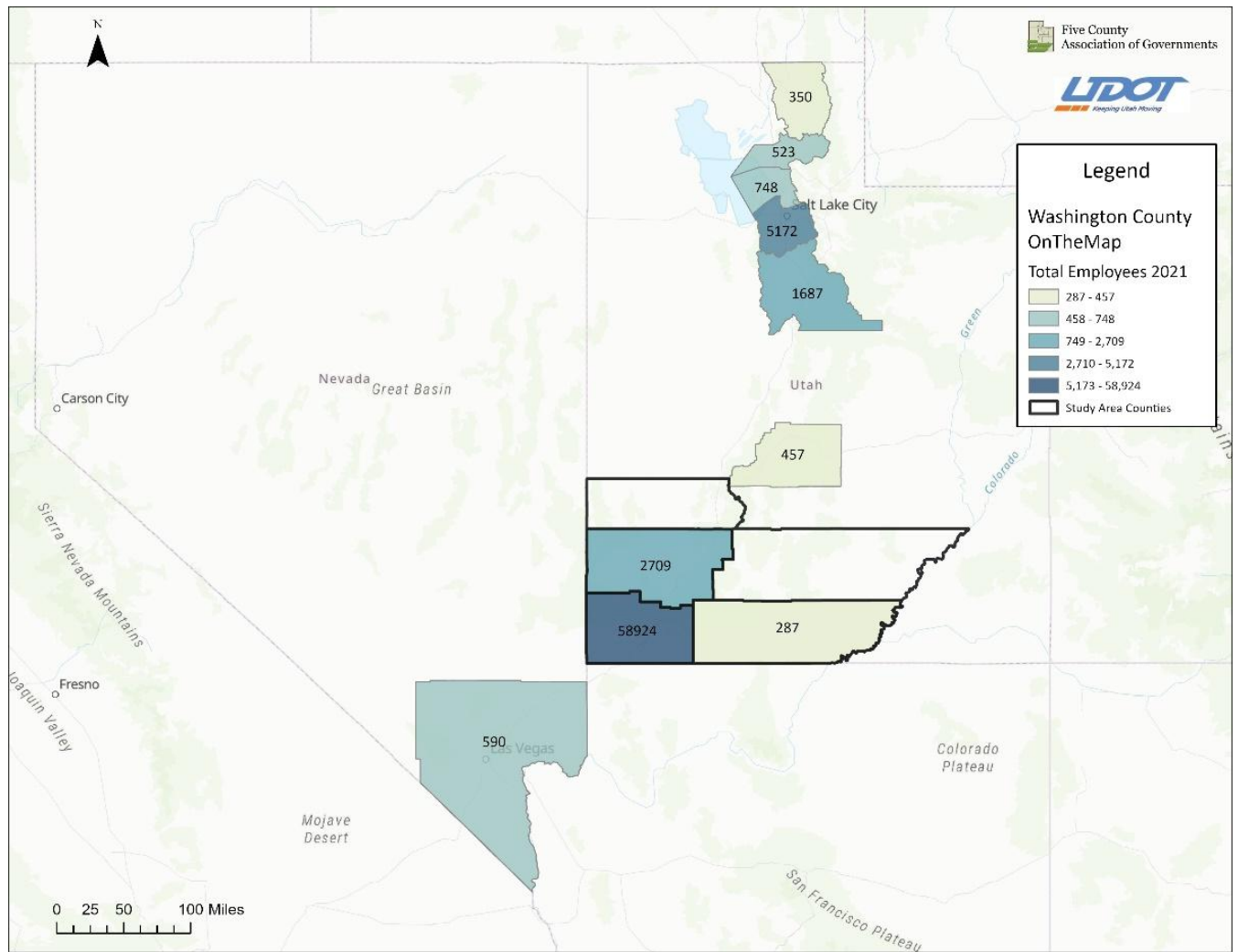


Table 10: Public Survey Open-Ended Feedback

What county do you live in?	What city or town do you live in?	Please share any input you may have about transportation needs in your community.
Garfield County	Bryce Canyon City	We are often asked for transportation options to Cedar and St. George to get to the airport and to car rentals. We also hear a lot of folks who fly in and would like a bus to bring them to our area instead of having to rent cars.
Iron County	Cedar City	A bus/train/trolley that runs frequently from north to south and to the airport would be awesome. The hills north and south are tiring to bike, though the bike trail is great. I would love to take a bus to ski at Brian Head resort in the winter, especially on weekends. I don't own a car, so having public transportation is key. The bus to/from Salt Lake City and St. George takes too long and is too expensive.
Iron County	Cedar City	Access to public transport is extremely important, especially for those who are unable to drive themselves.
Iron County	Cedar City	Bike lanes and trails in Cedar City could be improved, especially on the west side of the city.
Iron County	Cedar City	Cedar City has no readily available public transport and I can't drive and am disabled to the point where I can't walk places. This means I'm trapped in my house unless I can get a ride, which makes me miserable. Please give us a bus system so I can go places
Iron County	Cedar City	I am lucky to have access and physical capability for both vehicle and bicycle transport that makes my movement easier than most people. Alternate bike routes make it possible for me to get most places I need efficiently when traffic is bad but it is not always safe at certain times or for certain stretches. Biking north of 800 N is limited. Main Street and 200 N traffic are major concerns for all transport modalities. Left turns and crossing at intersections without lights is nearly impossible/highly dangerous at some times of today. Visibility is often a problem because of parked vehicles and permanent (signs, landscaping, utility boxes) or temporary obstructions (commercial and political signs) along the sidewalk that block views. Pedestrian safety is awful all around due to a mix of street design and human behaviors (speeding, running lights, inattentive driving). pedestrian crossing is very dangerous even at crosswalks with lights because drivers frequently ignore pedestrians during left turns.
Iron County	Cedar City	I don't use public transportation, but work for a company that helps individuals with barriers to employment find and maintain jobs. Frequently they have no idea what to do for transportation when it comes to getting a job, because they live in Enoch or in Beaver. The CATS system doesn't go out to those places, and the times are inconvenient for the rest of my clients. I work with 20 clients and about 15 of them could use some better form of public transportation.
Iron County	Cedar City	I was hoping we were talking about a rail system, connecting southern Utah with northern Utah. But anyway, my mother and my disabled sister were in need of better transportation. They have passed away now. It was hard for them to come to my house out on Hwy 56. Especially

What county do you live in?	What city or town do you live in?	Please share any input you may have about transportation needs in your community.
		after they moved to St. George. My children would go pick them up and take them home.
Iron County	Cedar City	I would 100% take public transit if it were more usable.
Iron County	Cedar City	I would love to see a more robust public transport system.
Iron County	Cedar City	Live about 10 miles outside city limits in a large older subdivision. There are no transportation services out here, and as I am aging and losing mobility, I worry how I will get to town if I can't drive. No delivery services out here either not even meals on wheels or anything.
Iron County	Cedar City	Needs to be close enough to get to.
Iron County	Cedar City	Our community needs a more robust public transit system to serve those without adequate transportation, including seniors, unhoused community members, and those in outlying areas who do not have access to the CATS system. Many in our community are forced to use expensive taxi services to supplement the inadequate transit system.
Iron County	Cedar City	Public transit should benefit members of the local over tourism
Iron County	Cedar City	Safer & better roads w proper turns, exit & entrance onto busy streets. Multiple daily accidents in local areas. Exit 57 is dangerous & too congested.
Iron County	Cedar City	There are a lot of neighborhoods with no sidewalks or lighting that make people feel comfortable. You have vehicles parked in unsafe spaces (too close to stop signs), vehicles parked on bike lanes (around campus and cedar high school fields), a lot of drivers rolling coal, a lot of drivers not stopping before the stop signs or crosswalks not making it safe for anyone biking on either the far-right margin or sidewalk. Maybe implement more enforcing and hard barriers between bike lanes and vehicles.
Iron County	Cedar City	Transportation in Cedar City is generally pretty good. I have noticed an increase in traffic congestion in the last couple of years, particularly on main street. Cedar City has a very serious problem with traffic under and around Exit 57. At certain times during the day there is major backup and frustration with traffic not moving.
Iron County	Cedar City	Would like to see more bicycle paved paths separate from cars, and better maintenance of sidewalks in Cedar City.
Iron County	Cedar City	Would prefer to commute to work on a bicycle, but the lack of dedicated bike lanes/trails makes it challenging to safely do so.
Iron County	Enoch	Can we please get more public transportation that isn't the St. George shuttle (gotten overpriced). Like have a bus that just goes to each of the exits and it could honestly just stop at the mavericks at least with Enoch/Cedar city since we have so many of them (like one on every exit).
Iron County	Enoch	I use my personal car because there isn't really a choice for people living in Enoch. I would also never take my groceries on public transportation- too many bags and no way to keep the cold stuff cold.
Iron County	Enoch	We don't have problems with transportation, but I have had friends and neighbors who have had extreme issues with even being able to get a

What county do you live in?	What city or town do you live in?	Please share any input you may have about transportation needs in your community.
		job because they don't have vehicles or drivers and there wasn't any form of public transportation when they needed it except Uber or taxis.
Kane County	Kanab	An affordable bus or shuttle to St. George at intervals throughout the week would benefit so many people in the area. Medical and dental care, shopping, travel education-are just some of the needs I hear from people.
Kane County	Duck Creek	It would be beneficial to have a shuttle service between Kanab, Orderville, Glendale, Duck Creek, Cedar City, and St. George
Washington County	Hurricane	Buses in St. George need more stops!
Washington County	Hurricane	Currently I am able to drive myself to everything I need to. But last year an injury made that impossible and I discovered how difficult it was to get around here without my own car. Public transit is nonexistent, the community van schedule was highly limited, taxi service is unpredictable—in other words, if you don't have friends who are available when you need them to be, you can't get anywhere. It's a real problem that should be addressed in a community with a significant retired and aging population.
Washington County	Hurricane	From Hurricane to St. George
Washington County	Hurricane	I have no idea how we will shop or go to the doctor in a couple years when we no longer drive. We sure can't afford to pay much.
Washington County	Hurricane	I help transport a couple seniors with handicaps for shopping because there is no community transit for them to Washington Co or St. George, which is difficult for me. There is a need for weekly community transportation from Hurricane to Washington Co. and St. George. This is long past due.
Washington County	Hurricane	I would happily take my bicycle more places than I already do but West Hurricane is very unsafe for cyclists. No bike trails. Very few bike lanes.
Washington County	Hurricane	I would love for there to be buses running from Hurricane to St. George to the university, to decrease traffic due to students, and I would take a bus if they were offered
Washington County	Hurricane	I would love to see more active transportation options, such as bike and walking trails, especially those connecting Hurricane to St. George. Expanding mass transit options in our community would also be a significant improvement.
Washington County	Hurricane	It would really help if there was public transportation between hurricane and St. George, particularly to Utah Tech and around the hospital.
Washington County	Hurricane	Low income individuals and those experiencing homelessness have no resources
Washington County	Hurricane	Need accessible public transportation
Washington County	Hurricane	Old Highway 91 should be drivable from SR 9 to Cedar City as a frontage road.

What county do you live in?	What city or town do you live in?	Please share any input you may have about transportation needs in your community.
Washington County	Hurricane	STOP THE GROWTH!!!!!! The push for trails around the cities is a push from the government to control 15-minute cities. No cars allowed.
Washington County	Hurricane	We need "bus" transportation between Hurricane and St. George.
Washington County	Ivins	More buses in Ivins and a quicker bus route to get around St. George
Washington County	LaVerkin	While my family and I have few if any transportation issues, many others in my community do. Public transit from LaVerkin to Hurricane, St. George is supposedly starting soon, but initial route planning doesn't appear to make that planned transit route convenient or useful for employment, medical services, or shopping purposes. Would hate to see the money provided by the State and UDOT not be used in a way that really benefits those that need access to transportation.
Washington County	Rockville	Bus to Springdale would be nice
Washington County	Rockville	I do not have a transportation problem but the elderly and young do. There is virtually no transport from Rockville to St. George is I am forced to drive. Along with millions of other people visiting Zion National Park.
Washington County	Rockville	It would be nice to have a bus route between St. George and Springdale.
Washington County	Rockville	Living in Rockville, I ride my bike to work in Zion and like that there is some infrastructure for it, but I wish I didn't have to depend on a car so much for my other transportation needs. When I visit friends in St. George at night, I don't really want to drive home late at night. I know there was supposed to be a bus, but haven't heard any updates on that. I also wish Washington county had more cycling infrastructure. We don't need that many lanes in St. George. We can sacrifice a small amount of space for bikes.
Washington County	Springdale	I'm an avid cyclist living in Springdale, who doesn't have a license. There is a great need for an interconnected bicycle network in Southern Utah; akin to some of the networks that exist around national parks such as Grand Tetons. I believe there is space and a desire for a safer cycling route between Zion and St. George, specifically a dedicated pedestrian route in Rockville where I have to enter traffic to get around parked vehicles, and along route 9 where I'm barely separated from cars doing 85. The shoulder along Virgin to Hurricane is at two different levels forcing me onto the highway. I believe St. George to Zion could be one of the premiere cycling routes in the country if there was a separated route, and it would allow me to bike between Springdale and Hurricane where I have to do most of my errands/doctors/etc. As of now I bike this route in traffic and feel horrendously unsafe doing so.
Washington County	Springdale	More public transportation connecting the county and region.
Washington County	Springdale	Our community is aging. Our town is very walkable, but we are very far from most conveniences. Medical care and affordable groceries are

What county do you live in?	What city or town do you live in?	Please share any input you may have about transportation needs in your community.
		at least 30 minutes away. Scheduling rides around appointments can be difficult. We have strong community relationships with lots of willing people to help. I think a reimbursement program would go a long way in our community to incentivize those who are already willing to provide assistance for transportation to those of us who can't drive.
Washington County	Springdale	Would like to see van services to pick up seniors to go to community center. Many seniors spend too much time along. Bring back community lunches and van pool
Washington County	St. George	Frequent bus transit connecting cities as well as better land use planning are very important to mitigate car dependency in Washington County.
Washington County	St. George	I am fortunate to have car. Concerned for people who do not if they depend on public transportation.
Washington County	St. George	I feel satisfied with car transportation - roads and highways are rarely in traffic and get me where I need fast. It's when on the rare occasion I do not have a car and need to travel outside to neighboring cities including where i work that it becomes an extreme cost or sometimes impossible when trying to use taxi or the bus. I love to walk to nearby shopping and social places as well as run errands, but the city is not designed for pedestrians and I often feel unsafe or stressed by the cars.
Washington County	St. George	If we had a good public transportation system, I would use it because then I would not have to fight traffic or worry about parking or worry about getting back into a hot car in the St. George heat. It seems like this survey thinks that only people without private cars would use public transportation, but if it was a good system, I think everyone would use it.
Washington County	St. George	I'm fortunate enough to be able to have and afford my own vehicle that allows me to get where I need to be, however, the public transportation availability for the area is severely lacking. If given the opportunity with the convenience necessary, I would wholeheartedly switch to public transport. When I visit other cities and countries I rely almost solely on public transportation because it's affordable and convenient enough. I would greatly appreciate the ability to use mass transit for getting to Zion, Vegas, or even just around town as our population grows to the point of becoming challenging to drive to work or the grocery store. Thank you for your time investigating and creating accessible, affordable, and convenient mass transit for our area.
Washington County	St. George	In general, I am looking for ways to spend less time in my car -- not necessarily shorter drive times, but alternative transportation options. For example, I would take public transit more often if it was easier and more comprehensive. I appreciate the number of bike lanes in Washington County (although there could always be more). I have found that very few businesses have a designated place to lock up my bike which can be frustrating.
Washington County	St. George	It would be helpful if there were more wheelchair accessible taxi services.

What county do you live in?	What city or town do you live in?	Please share any input you may have about transportation needs in your community.
Washington County	St. George	Keep the senior transportation services in St. George
Washington County	St. George	My 25-yr-old son is in a wheelchair full time (manual). He needs transportation help every day. I finally quit my job so I could be more free to get him where he needs to be. St. George is SO limited in the transportation help. It's impossible. We've tried uber (SO expensive), and taxis (unreliable and sometimes won't put the w/chair in the back). We used to use SunTran when we used to live in the 4 mile radius that it covered. But then when we built a new house that we needed for more w/chair accessibility, we moved 5 miles from the city center and therefore do not qualify for SunTran. Who lives within a 4 mile radius of the city center? About 10% of the people who live in St. G city or Washington city and need help getting somewhere.! Oh, my goodness. Things have to change. Once I wrote a long letter stating my concerns to the mayor of St. G. She delegated a city person to call me which they did. And then he proceeded to tell me that St. G was really focused on completing the transportation needs of tourists, and getting them to Zion and back. So. St. G focuses more on tourists than local people's needs!?! We have lived in St. G for 24 years. We the local people need more transportation options for those with disabilities!!!! Ugh. I'm going to speak to the city council. It is difficult. Things need to change. --Frances Smith, mom to Conrad Smith, St. George Utah.
Washington County	St. George	My daughter, 33, does not drive. Our bus system is outdated and takes way too long to get from place to place. So, I drive her. I'm 62 and will not always be able to drive or I could pass on. Uber is very pricy even for a ride to Red Cliffs Mall.
Washington County	St. George	No transportation to the higher paying warehouse jobs
Washington County	St. George	Parking is sometimes inadequate in various areas, including housing developments when visiting others. When I talked with my friend who served on the Planning Commission for Provo City several years ago, she said that Provo tried building apartments with limited parking to promote biking and public transit. Unfortunately, many residents still had cars, which led to parking challenges. It might be worth considering this as our city (St. George) reviews new development plans, to ensure we avoid similar issues. New developments definitely need to provide adequate parking for both residents and visitors.
Washington County	St. George	Should have more bus routes to locations in the south of Washington county. Having worked with the homeless, the need for expansion of the bus routes is sorely needed.
Washington County	St. George	SunTran has been a great benefit to the community. Expanding transportation for senior community members should be a priority for future transportation expansion.
Washington County	St. George	The new bike tunnels have improved my commute at the bottom of bluff thank you.

What county do you live in?	What city or town do you live in?	Please share any input you may have about transportation needs in your community.
Washington County	St. George	We desperately need public transit that addresses the south end of town, Brigham Road, and goes directly back to downtown St. George. Also longer transit options (train) to go to Vegas and Cedar
Washington County	St. George	We need to move Costco to a bigger location out by Sun river or something. The traffic at Green springs and Telegraph is horrible, as well as the traffic at River Road and the Boulevard.
Washington County	Virgin	A bus from SG-Springdale to alleviate traffic and offer a ride option please!
Washington County	Washington	I believe upgrading the public transportation would benefit the community. I would use it more
Washington County	Washington	I would like to see the cities and county finish roads rather than waiting for the developers to do it. Then they can recover the costs from the developers when the adjacent land is developed. You'll lose a lane for a mile on a wider road because there is an undeveloped section. It creates bottlenecks and safety issues. I would also be interested to know what percentage of our county population uses public transportation.
Washington County	Washington	Please continue to make pathed trails leisure use.
Washington County	Washington	Please don't build the Northern Corridor in Red Cliffs NCA!!!
Washington County	Washington	Stop trying to be like Europe! I've lived there and how the lifestyle and cities are built it makes sense for public transportation. It doesn't here!