

***VERNON COUNTY COORDINATED  
PUBLIC TRANSIT-HUMAN SERVICES  
TRANSPORTATION PLAN  
2019-2023***

Prepared as part of a  
Regional Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for the  
Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission Region

(COUNTIES SERVED: BUFFALO, CRAWFORD, JACKSON, LA CROSSE, MONROE, PEPIN,  
PIERCE, TREMPÉALEAU, AND VERNON)



Prepared by the Mississippi River Regional  
Planning Commission – October 2018

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## **Introduction**

Federal transit law (FAST ACT) requires that grantees under several state and federal transportation programs including the state Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program (s85.21), and the federal 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program are required to meet certain planning requirements in order to receive funding. The transit law requires that projects selected for funding under the various programs be “derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan” and that the plan be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers and participation by members of the public.

Vernon County continues to comply with the FAST ACT law as in 2006, 2008 and 2013 the county prepared plans meeting federal requirements. It is now required that the most recent 2013-2018 plan be updated. Vernon County is utilizing the services of the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC) to update the plan. This plan has been updated following guidelines from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and will serve as the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (2019-2023) for Vernon County.

## **History of Coordinated Planning Process**

A regional planning process was utilized to assist Vernon County in meeting the requirements of the Federal Transit Law (FAST ACT) for “Coordinated Public Transit-human Services Transportation Plans”. In the first years (2006-2008) of developing “Coordinated Public Transit-human Services Transportation Plans” for counties, individual public meetings were held in each county. However, meetings were poorly attended (in many cases 1 to 4 people would attend the countywide meetings) due to the region being comprised of rural sparsely populated counties even though extensive public outreach efforts (advertisements, emails, posters, etc.) were utilized. Based on the ineffective nature of the early coordinated public transit-human services transportation county meetings, a regional planning process was developed and utilized in subsequent Coordinated Public Transit-human Services Transportation Plan updates. The regional process has proven beneficial as the regional meetings have been attended by all counties in the region and numerous agencies, transportation providers and transportation advocates. Regional meetings have fostered communication between counties and agencies that in the past did not exist. At the regional meetings county specific breakout sessions are facilitated that focus on county specific needs and initiatives. A regional and individual county plans are prepared and approved as part of the public meeting and coordinated public transit-human services transportation planning process.

## **Organization of Planning Document**

As in past years, the Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan update for Vernon County has been prepared as part of a regional plan update process. Immediately following this section is the Vernon County Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plan developed by Vernon County representatives that attended the required regional public-transit human services transportation coordination meeting on July 31, 2018. Also specific to Vernon County are needs and gaps that were developed by Vernon County representatives as part of the Assessment of Transportation for Transportation – Disadvantaged Populations of Vernon County. A map illustrating the distribution of the 65

years and older population for the county is also included. The Aging and Disability Resource Center is the agency overseeing the plan for the county.

In addition to the Vernon County "specific" coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan information, the remaining sections of the plan detail the Regional Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan. The regional plan describes coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan requirements prepared/conducted at the region level such as the required public meeting, evaluation of regional/county demographic information, a regional transportation providers inventory, and regional/county plan goals and strategies. Updating the Vernon County plan through a regional process has proven beneficial to the county as such a process has improved communication between counties and aided in agencies seeing alternative ways of providing services to meet the needs of the transportation disadvantaged.

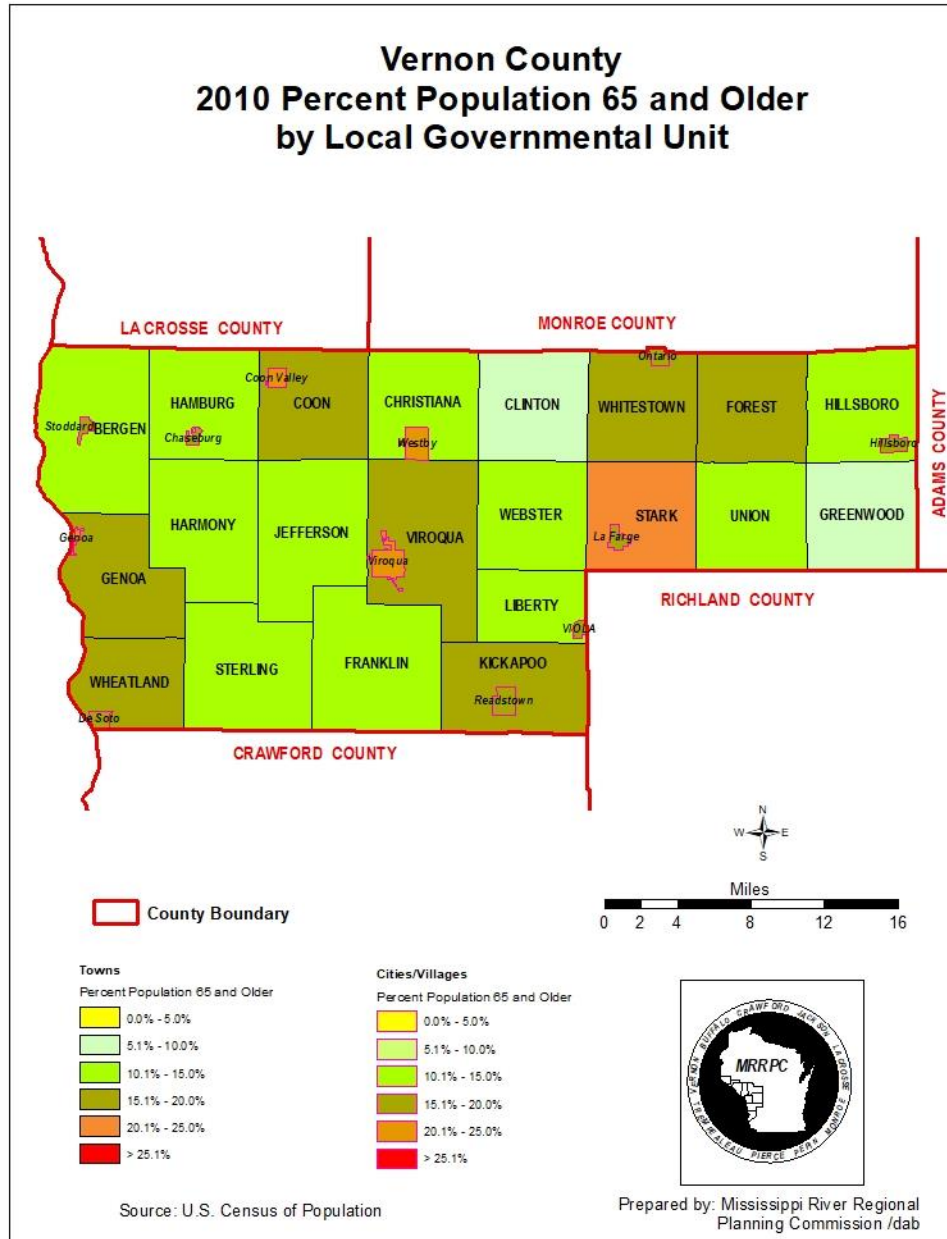
## Vernon County Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plan

Priority of Goal	Strategy/Goal to support 5 year coordinated plan	Activities	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline/ Deadline	Roadblocks to Implementation
4	Increase transportation options for the transportation disadvantaged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪Utilize other funding sources to provide alternative transportation options/services</li> </ul>	-All county agencies providing transportation	-Ongoing throughout the planning period	-Grant restrictions
2	Develop/expand/continue transportation services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪Coordination with other local agencies about transportation options</li> <li>▪Make referrals to other agencies</li> </ul>	-All county agencies providing transportation	-Ongoing throughout the planning period	-Territorial
1	Develop and improve access to information and increase awareness of transportation services marketing/educational outreach).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪Continue to prioritize funding for marketing</li> <li>▪Meetings/outreach with local agencies/groups/clinics about transportation options</li> </ul>	-All county agencies providing transportation	-Ongoing throughout the planning period	-How to reach people
3	Maximize the efficiency of transportation services through technology, innovation, local and regional coordination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪Maximize the VCTCC role in the community/county</li> </ul>	-Vernon County Transportation Coordinating Committee	-Address at VCTCC meetings	-Date of meeting
5	Strive to increase transportation funding to create sustainable transportation service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪Provide fee for service transportation to the Managed Care Organizations</li> <li>▪Ensure ride reimbursement is consistent with other funding sources</li> </ul>	-All county agencies providing transportation	-Ongoing throughout the planning period	-Limited funding resources

## Vernon County Assessment of Transportation for Transportation – Disadvantaged Populations

### Needs and Gaps

- Saturday or early morning dialysis appointments
- Assistance in getting to the appointment room/floor
- Low income/homeless
- Newly employed
- Rural residents



## **Regional Plan Introduction**

In August of 2005, Congress passed the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation, Equity Act: A legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), reauthorizing the surface transportation act. As part of this reauthorization, grantees under several state and federal transportation programs including the state Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program (s85.21), and the federal 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program were required to meet certain planning requirements in order to receive funding. Subsequent Federal transit law including the FAST ACT (2015) continues to require that projects selected for funding under the various programs be “derived from a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan” and that the plan be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers and participation by members of the public. The 2018 Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan update for MRRPC counties has been conducted on a regional basis through Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) *Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Planning* guidance. In the development of this plan all parties involved (regardless of county or agency affiliation) have worked together and have created the local/regional goals/strategies and the action steps included in the regional plan. It is intended that transportation activities conducted on a regional, county or agency level will be consistent and derived from the strategies/goals of this plan.

### *Planning Process*

As previously mentioned, the 2018 coordinated public transit-human services transportation planning process was conducted regionally for the nine counties in the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission area. Peter Fletcher, the Transportation Planner, for the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, facilitated the planning process update and public meeting activities. The coordination planning process initially required by SAFETEA-LU and subsequently the FAST ACT in reality has been on going in the MRRPC Region over the past several years as local transportation coordinating meetings (county TCC’s) regularly conduct meetings to discuss needs, gaps, as well as strategies and activities to reduce gaps and meet the transportation needs of the region. To formally meet the requirements of the Locally Developed Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Planning Process a regional meeting was conducted on July 31, 2018.

### **Public Meeting**

On July 31, 2018 a regional public-transit human services transportation coordination meeting was held in West Salem, Wisconsin. The meeting notice was published in regional newspapers and over 150 invitations were sent out to transportation providers, agencies and advocates. Additionally, the MRRPC website provided meeting and plan information throughout the planning process as well as the opportunity for people to provide comments via email or other means (list of meeting invitees, participants, meeting notice, flyer, website, etc. is attached as Appendix A). Approximately 40 people attended the meeting and participated in the plan update process.

At the meeting, a review of the coordination process was provided to participants as well as information on the region’s demographics. The meeting facilitator then led a discussion focusing on identifying service gaps and needs in the region (and counties); identifying what has been done well in the last five years; and discussed what could be done better. Meeting participants then developed and approved transportation plan goals based on the discussions.



The second part of the meeting involved a break out session in which individuals were grouped by county. Each group discussed gaps and needs, prioritized plan goals and identified actions to meet the goals of the plan at the county level. At the conclusion of the meeting the regional and county public-transit human services transportation coordination plans were adopted/approved. The meeting record which summarizes the meeting activities is attached as Appendix B. Each of the meeting participants were also given meeting evaluation forms in an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting and planning process. In general, the evaluations were positive, and participants felt the meeting was productive. Appendix C attached contains a summary of meeting evaluation forms.



*Break out session by Counties.*

## Demographic Information (Region and County Information)

**Table 1: Population Trends and Projections 1980-2040**

	1980 <sup>(1)</sup>	1990 <sup>(1)</sup>	2000 <sup>(1)</sup>	2010 <sup>(1)</sup>	2020 <sup>(2)</sup>	2030 <sup>(2)</sup>	2035 <sup>(2)</sup>	2040 <sup>(2)</sup>	% Chg 80-10	% Chg 10-40
Buffalo	14,309	13,584	13,804	13,587	13,485	13,470	13,380	13,000	-5.0	-3.5
Crawford	16,556	15,940	17,243	16,644	16,835	17,430	17,265	16,555	0.5	-0.5
Jackson	16,831	16,588	19,100	20,449	21,760	23,200	23,370	23,290	21.5	13.9
La Crosse	91,056	97,892	107,120	114,638	122,100	128,120	129,830	131,500	25.9	14.7
Monroe	35,074	36,633	40,896	44,673	48,600	52,950	53,970	54,410	27.4	21.8
Pepin	7,477	7,107	7,213	7,469	7,420	7,315	7,190	6,885	-0.1	-7.8
Pierce	31,149	32,765	36,804	41,019	43,575	46,125	46,475	46,825	31.7	14.2
Trempealeau	26,158	25,263	27,010	28,816	30,725	32,810	33,240	33,450	10.2	16.1
Vernon	25,642	25,617	28,056	29,773	32,085	35,300	36,150	36,520	16.1	22.7
<b>MRRPC Reg.</b>	<b>264,252</b>	<b>271,389</b>	<b>297,246</b>	<b>317,068</b>	<b>338,605</b>	<b>358,750</b>	<b>362,905</b>	<b>364,475</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>15.0</b>
<b>State of Wis.</b>	<b>4,705,642</b>	<b>4,891,769</b>	<b>5,363,715</b>	<b>5,686,986</b>	<b>6,005,080</b>	<b>6,375,910</b>	<b>6,476,270</b>	<b>6,491,635</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>14.1</b>
<b>U.S.</b>	<b>226,542,199</b>	<b>248,709,873</b>	<b>281,421,906</b>	<b>308,745,538</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>26.6</b>	<b>NA</b>

Source: (1) U.S. Census Bureau; (2) Population Projections – WI Dept. of Administration – Demographics Services Center

An important component of the planning process is the analysis of the region's demographics and associated trends. The demographic information helps in assessing the individuals, groups and transportation-disadvantaged populations in the counties and region. Table 1 shows the region's population trends and projections. From 1980 to 2010 the region's population increased by 20.0% compared to 27.6% increase in the State and a 26.6% increase in the United States. The region's population is projected to increase by 15.0% by 2040.

Table 2 illustrates the region's Age 65+ population and projects the future Age 65+ population out to the year 2040. As the information demonstrates, the region's Age 65+ population will increase by more than 159% by the year 2040. It is obvious that such an increase will significantly increase the need for public transportation and further illustrates the need for a coordinated transportation system. Included in Appendix E is a map of each county showing the Age 65+ population distribution by census tract.

**Table 2: Population Projections Age 65+ - 2010-2040**

	65+ 2010 <sup>(1)</sup>	65+ 2015 <sup>(2)</sup>	65+ 2020 <sup>(2)</sup>	65+ 2025 <sup>(2)</sup>	65+ 2030 <sup>(2)</sup>	65+ 2035 <sup>(2)</sup>	65+ 2040 <sup>(2)</sup>	% Increase 65+ 2010- 2020	% Increase 65+ 2020- 2030	% Increase 65+ 2030- 2040	% Increase 65+ 2010- 2040
Buffalo	2,459	2,760	3,190	3,690	4,045	4,210	4,150	29.7	26.9	2.6	68.8
Crawford	3,062	3,570	4,285	4,985	5,540	5,695	5,525	39.9	29.3	-0.3	80.4
Jackson	3,303	3,930	4,670	5,625	6,350	6,790	6,970	41.4	36.0	9.8	111.0
La Crosse	15,201	18,645	22,170	25,950	28,840	30,370	30,990	45.8	30.1	7.5	104.0
Monroe	6,223	7,350	8,850	10,585	12,060	12,680	12,840	42.2	36.3	6.5	106.0
Pepin	1,337	1,545	1,805	2,135	2,360	2,520	2,505	35.0	30.7	6.1	87.4
Pierce	4,283	5,190	6,505	8,025	9,335	10,005	10,455	51.9	43.5	12.0	144.0
Trempealeau	4,567	4,970	5,825	6,720	7,500	7,910	8,020	27.5	28.8	6.9	75.6
Vernon	4,962	5,475	6,145	7,645	8,510	8,700	8,720	23.8	38.5	2.5	75.7
<b>Region</b>	<b>45,397</b>	<b>73,577</b>	<b>85,356</b>	<b>97,488</b>	<b>108,115</b>	<b>115,480</b>	<b>117,605</b>	<b>88.0</b>	<b>26.7</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>159.0</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>777,314</b>	<b>894,920</b>	<b>1,063,930</b>	<b>1,257,515</b>	<b>1,424,320</b>	<b>1,508,635</b>	<b>1,535,365</b>	<b>36.9</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>97.5</b>

Source: (1) U.S. Census Bureau; (2) Population Projections – WI Dept. of Administration – Demographics Services Center

**Table 3: Median Income and Poverty Rates of All Ages**

County	Median Household Income 2012-2016	Persons Below Poverty 2012-2016 (%)
Buffalo	\$52,447	10.8%
Crawford	\$45,780	13.6%
Jackson	\$49,608	13.1%
La Crosse	\$51,477	14.8%
Monroe	\$53,394	13.9%
Pepin	\$51,346	13.4%
Pierce	\$64,364	12.0%
Trempealeau	\$52,438	9.7%
Vernon	\$49,476	16.3%
<b>Region</b>	<b>\$52,259</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>\$54,610</b>	<b>12.7%</b>
<b>Nation</b>	<b>\$55,322</b>	<b>15.1%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016, ACS 5-year estimates

Table 3 illustrates the counties and regions median household income and poverty rates. In general, the counties in the region have median household incomes less than the state and nation. Poverty rates in three counties (Buffalo, Pierce, and Trempealeau) are lower than the state rate, but the remaining six counties have a poverty rate equal to or higher than the State of Wisconsin.

Table 4 shows a breakdown of percent of disabled persons in the region by two age categories and the number of disabled persons ages 18-64. In the region there are over 19,000 disabled persons between the ages of 18-64. This is 9.7 percent of the persons between the ages of 18-64. In the region there are over 49,000 persons over the age of 65. The percent of disabled persons age 65+ in the region is 31.9. If we utilize the projection of the Age 65+ population for the region from Table 2 and multiply that by the region's current rate of disabled persons ages 65+ it can be projected that by the year 2040 the region will have over 32,000 residents that are Age 65+ and disabled.

**Table 4: Disabled Persons in MRRPC Region**

County	Total Number of Persons Ages 18-64	Number of Disabled Persons Ages 18-64	% of Disabled Persons Ages 18-64	Number of Employed Disabled Persons Ages 18-64	% of Employed Disabled Persons Ages 18-64	Total Number of Persons Ages 65+	Number of Disabled Persons Ages 65+	% of Disabled Persons Ages 65+
Buffalo	7,781	628	8.1	257	40.9	2,590	721	27.8
Crawford	9,124	1,274	14.0	707	42.5	3,250	1,083	33.3
Jackson	11,378	1,354	11.9	735	54.3	3,497	1,094	31.3
La Crosse	75,774	7,196	9.5	3,792	52.7	16,570	5,415	32.7
Monroe	26,255	3,126	11.9	1,524	48.8	6,667	2,204	33.1
Pepin	4,193	374	8.9	219	58.6	1,439	431	30.0
Pierce	27,017	2,028	7.5	1,145	56.5	4,942	1,476	29.9
Trempealeau	17,196	1,464	8.5	713	48.7	4,740	1,516	32.0
Vernon	16,830	1,596	9.5	683	42.8	5,408	1,724	31.9
<b>Regional Total</b>	<b>195,548</b>	<b>19,040</b>	<b>9.7</b>	<b>9,775</b>	<b>51.3</b>	<b>49,103</b>	<b>15,664</b>	<b>31.9</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates

Table 5 shows the means of transportation people utilize to get to work. It is not surprising that within the region 89.0% of people drove to work and 80.7% drove alone as there are limited public transportation options available for workers. In five counties within the region the percentage of carpoolers equaled or exceeded the state average.

**Table 5: Means of Transportation to Work**

	Workers 16 years and over	Car, truck, or van	Drove alone	Carpooled	Public transportation (excluding taxicab)	Walked	Bicycle	Taxicab, motorcycle, or other means	Worked at home
Buffalo	6,725	87.6%	76.6%	11.0%	0.2%	3.3%	0.0%	1.3%	7.6%
Crawford	7,375	90.0%	81.8%	8.2%	0.3%	3.6%	0.2%	1.3%	4.5%
Jackson	9,102	90.1%	79.8%	10.3%	0.1%	2.2%	0.1%	1.2%	6.3%
La Crosse	61,584	87.9%	80.2%	7.7%	1.1%	5.2%	1.8%	0.8%	3.2%
Monroe	21,041	90.9%	82.6%	8.3%	0.1%	2.9%	0.2%	2.1%	3.9%
Pepin	3,633	85.0%	76.5%	8.5%	0.1%	4.6%	0.6%	1.0%	8.7%
Pierce	22,469	88.2%	80.5%	7.7%	0.2%	5.2%	0.8%	0.6%	5.0%
Trempealeau	15,027	90.3%	81.2%	9.1%	0.2%	3.3%	0.2%	1.2%	4.8%
Vernon	13,210	86.0%	78.2%	7.8%	0.6%	3.7%	0.4%	2.0%	7.2%
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>2,862,898</b>	<b>89.0%</b>	<b>80.7%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>	<b>1.9%</b>	<b>3.3%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>4.2%</b>
<b>United States</b>	<b>145,861,221</b>	<b>85.7%</b>	<b>76.4%</b>	<b>9.3%</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>4.6%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 5-year estimate

Table 6 illustrates where people in the region work. La Crosse County had the highest percentage of residents working in their county of residence at 89.9% followed by Monroe County at 77.9%. Pierce County had the lowest percentage of residents working in their county of residence at 37.1% followed by Buffalo County at 44.7%. The data further substantiates the need and importance of regional transportation coordination.

**Table 6: Place of Work**

	Worked in state of residence	Worked in county of residence	Worked outside county of residence	Worked in place of residence	Worked outside place of residence
Buffalo	75.4%	44.7%	30.7%	10.7%	31.3%
Crawford	92.6%	68.2%	24.5%	24.3%	25.6%
Jackson	98.6%	67.5%	31.1%	14.3%	19.6%
La Crosse	96.9%	89.9%	7.0%	41.3%	38.7%
Monroe	99.0%	77.9%	21.1%	22.6%	27.3%
Pepin	88.8%	51.5%	37.3%	15.3%	21.7%
Pierce	61.9%	37.1%	24.7%	18.8%	37.2%
Trempealeau	93.1%	67.7%	25.4%	16.8%	34.8%
Vernon	98.3%	60.0%	38.4%	16.6%	25.9%
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>96.1%</b>	<b>71.8%</b>	<b>24.3%</b>	<b>29.3%</b>	<b>43.8%</b>
<b>U.S.</b>	<b>96.3%</b>	<b>72.4%</b>	<b>23.9%</b>	<b>31.5%</b>	<b>43.5%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates

**Assessment of Available Transportation Providers/Services**

A transportation services provider survey was mailed to transportation providers in the region. The survey was also made available to transportation coordination meeting participants. A total of 28 provider response forms detailing the transportation services provided were returned. Provider response forms are attached in Appendix D. The following table lists the transportation providers in the region. The chart illustrates the transportation programs available at the regional and county level.

Program Name	Counties Served									Other Counties and Municipalities Served
	Buffalo	Crawford	Jackson	La Crosse	Monroe	Pepin	Pierce	Trempealeau	Vernon	
Buffalo County Dept. Health & Human Services	X									
Crawford County Opportunity Center - *Only clients served		X								Grant
Crawford County Aging & Disability Resource Center		X								
Jackson County Aging Programs			X							
Jackson County Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers			X							
Jackson County Veterans Services			X							
Prairie Maison Community Health Services Corporation - *Residents only		X		X						Grant
Brookdale Senior Living - * Residents only				X						
La Crosse County Veterans Services				X	X					
Monroe County Aging Disability Resource Center					X					
Handishop Industries										Tomah, WI
Morrow Home Community - * Residents only					X					

**Table 7: County/Multi-County Transportation Services Inventory**

Program Name	Counties Served									Other Counties and Municipalities Served
	Buffalo	Crawford	Jackson	La Crosse	Monroe	Pepin	Pierce	Trempealeau	Vernon	
Tomah VA Medical Center	X		X	X	X			X	X	Price, Taylor, Lincoln, Clark, Marathon, Portage, Wood Waushara, Adams, Juneau, Winona, MN, Houston, MN
Pine Creek Transportation	X		X	X	X			X		Clark, Eau Claire, Wood
Pepin County Aging Program	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Assisted Living of Durand - * Residents only						X				Eau Claire, Dunn, St. Croix, Black River Falls, WI, Minneapolis, MN
Pierce County Aging & Disability Resource Center							X			
Pierce County Veterans Services					X		X			Minneapolis, MN
Trempealeau County Aging & Disability Resource Center								X		
Trempealeau County Health Care Center - * Clients only										
Vernon County Aging Disability Resource Center									X	
Bethel Home and Services - * Residents only		X		X	X				X	Other counties as requested.
New Freedom Transportation Program						X	X			Adams, Ashland, Barron, Bayfield, Burnett, Chippewa, Clark, Douglas, Dunn, Eau Claire, Forest, Florence, Iron, Lincoln, Langlade, Marathon, Oneida, Polk, Portage, Price, Rusk, Sawyer, St. Croix, Taylor, Vilas, Washburn, and Wood
SMRT Bus – Fixed Route bus service		X		X	X				X	
La Crosse MTU				X						
Shared Ride Taxi - Tomah					X					
Shared Ride Taxi - Onalaska/Holman				X						
Shared Ride Taxi - Westby									X	
Shared Ride Taxi - Viroqua									X	
Shared Ride Taxi - Prairie du Chien		X								
Shared Ride Taxi - Black River Falls			X							
Shared Ride Taxi - River Falls							X			

Within the region there are two fixed route public transportation systems; La Crosse Municipal Transit Utility (MTU) and Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit (SMRT). The La Crosse MTU provides service to the City of La Crosse as well as bus routes to the adjacent communities of Onalaska, Town of Campbell (French Island), and La Crescent, MN. La Crosse MTU operates seven days a week. The SMRT Bus began service in December of 2012 and provides service to La Crosse County, Vernon County, Crawford County, and Monroe County serving sixteen cities and villages. SMRT buses run week day routes between 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The region is also served by seven shared-ride taxi services. Share-ride taxi services operate in Tomah, Onalaska-Holmen, Westby, Viroqua, Black River Falls, Prairie du Chien, and River Falls.

All counties in the region either sponsor and/or operate programs (volunteer drivers, mini-buses, etc.) that provide transportation services to elderly and disabled residents. A portion of funding for the operation of the county transportation services comes through State of Wisconsin 85.21 funding. The transportation services are primarily operated by Aging and Disability Resource Centers or Human Services Departments. The transportation services provide door to door service for medical appointments, shopping, and social activities.

The region is also served by numerous specialized transportation providers. Specialized transportation providers primarily provide transportation to consumers that are disabled or need personal assistance to get to medical appointments or employment opportunities.

In assessing the available services, the challenge that continually faces the counties and transportation providers is “space”. The region for the most part is very rural and providing transportation services to a rural area is challenging and expensive. Based on initial analysis, it appears that the number of vehicles and seats on the vehicles is not a significant issue. The challenge remains serving a rural area. It is apparent that in the future to better address the “spatial challenge” coordination of transportation services is vital in order to meet the increasing transportation needs of the region’s population.

### **Assessment of Transportation Needs for Transportation-Disadvantaged Populations**

At the public-transit human services transportation coordination meeting, a general discussion among meeting participant’s focused on identifying service gaps and needs for disadvantaged populations in the counties and the region. The gaps and needs identified were derived from the experiences of the meeting participants and from a review of demographic data for the region. The “Needs and Gaps” are listed below:

#### **Needs and Gaps**

- Need more public transportation information region wide
- Outside city limits transportation challenges
- Wasted transportation trips
- Dedicated local funding sources – support for RTA’s
- Need to communicate to recruit volunteers
- Non walkable infrastructure
- Transportation for low income workers
- Public transportation for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> shift workers
- Regional connectivity coordination of transit services
- Communicating details about riders’ needs (e.g., wheelchair) to volunteer drivers
- Short or no weekend service
- Want access to S.M.R.T. bus
- Availability of cot and stretcher transportation
- Availability of dialysis and bariatric transportation
- Availability of vehicles capable of transporting wheelchairs
- Educating the public and medical community to schedule appointments to coincide with transit timetables
- Lack of transit between Wisconsin and Minnesota communities
- Unexpressed or hidden demand for transit in rural areas (i.e., people need transit, but aren’t speaking up about it)

- Keeping fares affordable
- Programs for purchase and/or repair of private automobiles
- Disabled population is largely willing to work, but is often unable to drive and cannot find adequate transportation to a job

The group also reviewed the service gaps and needs identified during the 2013 planning process and identified “What has been done well in the last five years?” (listed below):

#### **What has been done well in the last five years?**

- More coordination among agencies, to eliminate needless duplication
- Willingness of agencies to cooperate across county lines
- Development of volunteer-driver programs
- More mobility managers
- Changing attitude toward transit: more positive than before; people more likely to see themselves as potential riders than before
- Agencies welcome all kinds of riders (i.e., programs are not limited only to the disabled, elderly, etc.)
- SMRT Bus expansion
- More flexibility for funding
- Counties thinking outside the box
- Networking between counties/private agencies
- Improved perception of public transportation - more diversity in ridership

In general, transportation providers do an adequate job of meeting the needs of the region’s population. However, as illustrated there are service gaps and needed services in the region. Several of the gaps and needs focused on expansion of transportation services in the region. Expansion of the region’s SMRT Bus services was highlighted. In 2017 the SMRT Bus expanded service to Monroe County and further expansion of the SMRT Bus or similar transit services was recognized as a need in the region. Needs also included more specialized equipment/services to meet the needs of dialysis and bariatric consumers. Additionally, providing public transportation to rural areas and operation in non-traditional hours were identified.

As part of the plan update process, participants also discussed “What could be done better?” in an effort to identify activities and or transportation coordination improvements over the next five years.

#### **What could be done better?**

- Combine all types of transit – break down silos among general ridership, disabled, elderly, etc. – “it’s all transportation”
- Need more accessible transportation, especially as the population ages
- More volunteer drivers needed
- Encourage sharing of vehicles and other resources among local governments
- Secure enough funding for transportation programs
- Improve marketing, outreach, and education about transportation options
- Connected transportation infrastructure sidewalks, trails, transit routes – all modes

Meeting participants expressed the need for more accessible transportation as well as improved coordination of regional transportation services, information, education, and marketing. Connected transportation infrastructure as well as the need for funding were also identified as important to continue to improve transportation services.

### **Plan Goals**

Based on the information gathered and public input received, human services transportation plan goals were developed. The plan goals are broad in scope in an effort to address and be consistent with existing and future strategies, actions and programs. The goals are the foundation for future transportation activities at the regional and county level. The goals approved as part of the planning process are:

#### Plan Goals

- 1) Increase transportation options for the transportation disadvantaged.
- 2) Develop/expand/continue transportation services.
- 3) Strive to increase transportation funding to create sustainable transportation services.
- 4) Develop and improve access to information and increase awareness of transportation services (marketing/educational outreach).
- 5) Maximize the efficiency of transportation services through technology, innovation, local and regional coordination.

### **Strategies, Activities and/or Projects to Address Gaps and Needed Services**

The following five year “Regional Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plan” was developed based on the Regional Transportation Coordinating Committees past efforts, public/participant input from the planning meeting conducted as part of the 2018 plan update, and information gathered from individual county “Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plans” developed at the meeting. Both a Regional “Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plan” and County “Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plans” were prepared as part of the planning update process. The regional “Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plan” focuses on activities and programs that when implemented will improve transportation coordination on a regional level looking across county lines and agency boundaries.

It is important to point out that roadblocks to implementation of the strategies have been identified. For the strategies to be successful the roadblocks will have to be overcome. In numerous cases the roadblocks are not locally controlled, meaning that in order for local regional coordination to be truly successful rules, policies, and requirements of numerous non-regional entities will have to be modified or changed.



*Public participation during the meeting.*



## Regional Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plan

Priority of Goal	Strategy/Goal to support 5 year coordinated plan	Activities	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline/ Deadline	Roadblocks to Implementation
5	Increase transportation options for the transportation disadvantaged.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Evaluate existing regional ride scheduling service</li> <li>● Funding for one call regional ride scheduling and coordination</li> <li>● Evaluate the expansion to the SMRT bus (fixed route bus service) to more counties in the region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ongoing through 5 year plan period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cost of a centralized ride scheduling system</li> <li>● Requires cooperation of counties and transportation agencies</li> <li>● Requires coordination of transportation services</li> <li>● Funding</li> <li>● No RTA Authority</li> </ul>
2	Develop/expand/continue transportation services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue SMRT Bus Service in the Region</li> <li>● Continue to facilitate the coordination of elderly disabled transportation services (shared volunteer drivers, etc.)</li> <li>● Identify opportunities to maintain and expand the number of vehicles in the region providing transportation services</li> <li>● Continue to expand the diversity of users</li> <li>● Evaluate Coordination with for profit taxis</li> <li>● Explore "VIA" Program (Austin, TX), a Uber/Lyft type local transportation system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ongoing through 5 year plan period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complexity of funding rules</li> <li>● Cooperation among all agencies</li> <li>● Difficulty in prioritizing services, needs for vehicles</li> <li>● Funding</li> </ul>
3	Develop and improve access to information and increase awareness of transportation services (marketing/educational outreach).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work with counties and explore shared marketing approaches to reach consumers</li> <li>● Assist counties in getting more information on the internet and the coordination of information services</li> <li>● Increase awareness of state sponsored "Rideshare" website for carpooling purposes</li> <li>● Identify better methods to reach consumers in rural areas</li> <li>● Utilize public PSAs and radio ads</li> <li>● Utilize targeted marketing with professional assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Initiate Year 1 and 2 then ongoing through 5 year plan period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cost</li> <li>● Web access (providers and consumers)</li> <li>● Consumer literacy</li> </ul>
3	Maximize the efficiency of transportation services through technology, innovation, local and regional coordination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitate the sharing locally developed transportation technology (tracking, accounting programs)</li> <li>● Work with counties in identifying and evaluating local/regional routing software</li> <li>● Explore new media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to communicate with users</li> <li>● Continue to work cooperatively with neighboring counties (Juneau, Richland, Eau Claire, etc.) and neighboring regions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ongoing through 5 year plan period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Computer literacy</li> <li>● Software interface</li> <li>● Personnel to develop</li> <li>● Data maintenance</li> <li>● Cost of technology</li> </ul>

Priority of Goal	Strategy/Goal to support 5 year coordinated plan	Activities	Person(s) Responsible	Timeline/ Deadline	Roadblocks to Implementation
1	Strive to increase transportation funding to create sustainable transportation services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Coordinate Local, State, and Federal elected officials' outreach</li> <li>●Assist counties in pursuing state and federal transportation funding</li> <li>●Maintain/increase existing funding levels</li> <li>●Work with counties in pursuing grant funding through collaborative efforts</li> <li>●Expand employee and business support for rides</li> <li>●Gain medical centers support (local hospitals)</li> <li>●Support state statute revisions authorizing local units of government the ability to form Regional Transit Authorities (RTA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●The Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee will be responsible for the coordination and completion of the activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Ongoing through 5 year plan period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●Political support for funding</li> <li>●Competitiveness among local providers</li> <li>●Complicated processes (grants)</li> <li>●Need grant writers</li> <li>●Political support for RTA authority</li> </ul>

The regional activities developed as part of the plan update process focus on continuing to explore a one call regional ride scheduling service. It was determined to it would be valuable to identify areas where such a service has been implemented and evaluate if such a service could be duplicated in the region. Additional regional activities identified include, continue and expand the existing SMRT Bus regional transportation service, identify shared marketing opportunities, explore different approaches to transportation, and support legislative efforts to allow for Regional Transit Authorities to be created through cooperation of local units of governments. The regional activities identified will help in addressing the “needs and gaps” identified by meeting participants. The Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee is identified as the responsible entity to facilitate the activities. Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee meetings over the planning period will address the activities listed in the work plan.

A Vernon County “Needs and Gaps” and “Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plans” was developed (illustrated on page 2). The county “Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plans” will serve as a guide for Vernon County to follow when implementing transportation coordination efforts at the county level to address service gaps and needs. The county work plans identify more county specific programs/activities that will improve transportation coordination and service delivery at the local level.

**Identification of Priorities**

Participants at the July 31, 2018 human services transportation coordination public meeting upon developing plan goals and activities, prioritized the goals by county based on resources, time, and feasibility. The prioritization of goals and actions are included on the county “Strategies, Activities and/or Projects Work Plans”. Regional “Strategies/Goals” (page 13) were prioritized by meeting participants. Valuable in the prioritization assessment was reviewing the “roadblocks to implementation” that were identified in the plan update process. The “roadblocks to implementation” oftentimes identified a lack of resources or time to implement the activity.

**Conclusion**

Regional transportation coordination is taking place in Western Wisconsin. County and agency boundaries are becoming less significant in the provision of transportation services, while consumer destinations and needs are becoming more important. It was determined that meeting attendees (in the form of a Regional Transportation Coordinating Committee) will meet annually with the intent of coordinating transportation on a regional basis understanding that counties and agencies will continue to provide transportation services that are responsive to their consumers' needs. It is the hope of the meeting attendees and transportation advocates that lessons learned locally will also be learned at the state and federal level (particularly by the funding and program rule makers) as true transportation coordination and service provision will not be achieved until that day comes.