Southern Georgia
Regional Transit Development Plan

Existing Conditions Report

February 2025

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

In partnership with

Blue Cypress Consulting
&
Spatial Plans

Table of Contents

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

List of Figures

List of Tables

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

List of Acronyms

AADT	Annual Average Daily Traffic
ACS	American Community Survey
AFC	Alternative Fuel Corridors
AoPP	Areas of Persistent Poverty
BLS	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
CRC	Coastal Regional Coaches
CPR	Cater Parrot Railnet
DCA	Georgia Department of Community Affairs
DCH	Georgia Department of Community Health
DHS	Georgia Department of Human Services
DRI	Development of Regional Impact
EJ	Environmental Justice
ETC	Equitable Transportation Community
EV	Electric Vehicle
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GDOL	Georgia Department of Labor
GDOT	Georgia Department of Transportation
GFRR	Georgia & Florida Railroad
HIFLD	Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
IRA	Inflation Reduction Act
LCRTA	Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority
LEHD	Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics
LEP	Limited English Proficiency
LIHTC	Low-Income Housing Tax Credit
LODES	LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics
MHI	Median Household Income
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
MTP	Metropolitan Transportation Plan
NEMT	Non-Emergency Medical Transportation
NEVI	National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge
PAC	Project Advisory Committee
RITIS	Regional Integrated Transportation System
SGRC	Southern Georgia Regional Commission
SWGRC	Southwest Georgia Regional Commission
SWTRP	Statewide Transit Plan
TDP	Transit Development Plan
TIA	Transportation Investment Act
TOD	Transit-Oriented Development
TTFP	Georgia Transit Trust Fund Program
USDOT	United States Department of Transportation
UZA	Urbanized Area
VLMPO	Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization
VR	Valdosta Railway
VSU	Valdosta State University

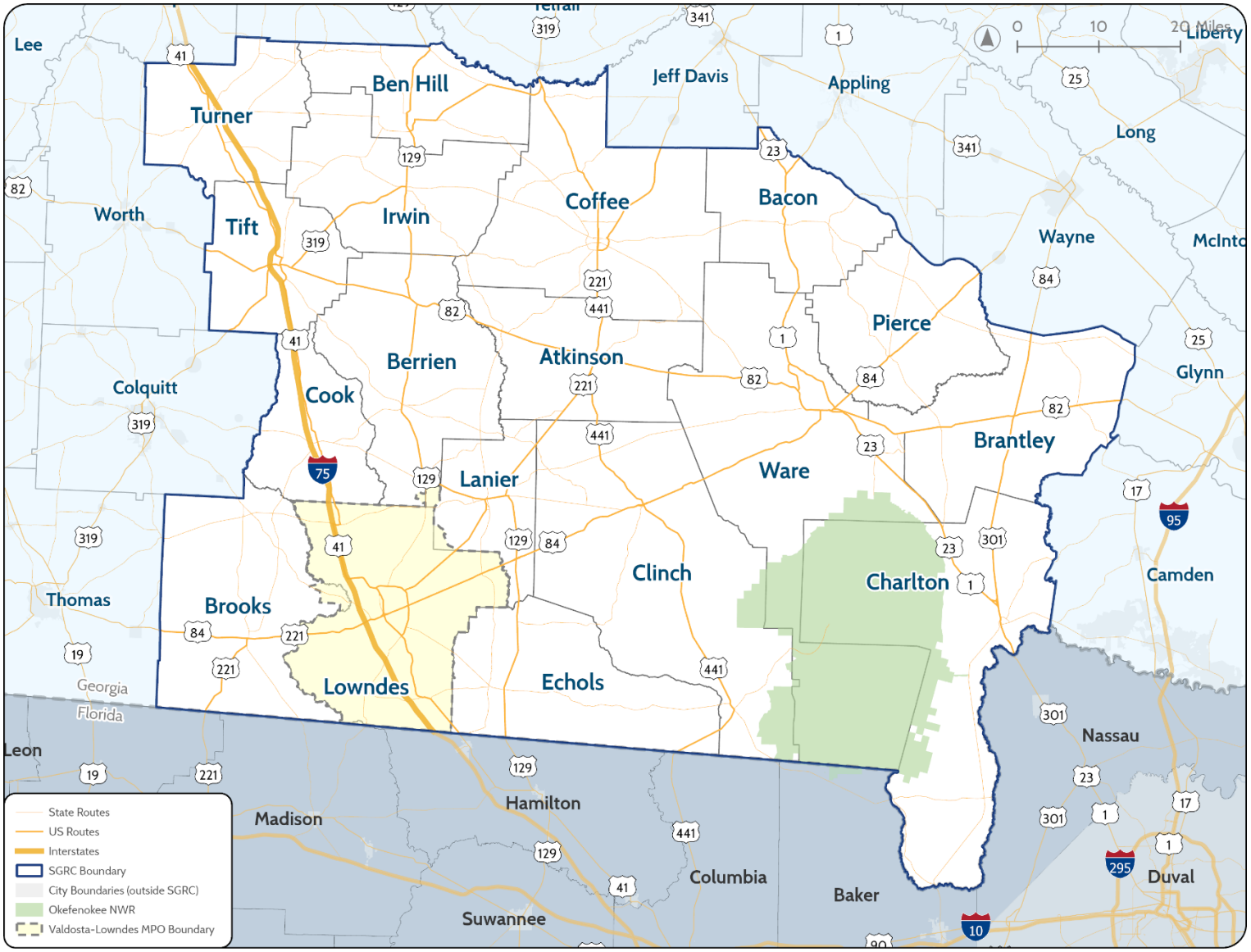
1.0 Introduction

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission (SGRC) received a grant through the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Areas of Persistent Poverty Program to study and assess the region's transit opportunities, with a focus on expanding equitable access to transit for essential services. SGRC completed a Regional Transit Development Plan in 2019 that resulted in regional consolidation of transit service across 15 of the 18 counties in the region. The new Southern Georgia Regional Transit Development Plan (Regional TDP), being developed over 2024 and 2025, will build upon the 2019 plan, while identifying new initiatives and actions to help the region's transit services achieve increased efficiencies and better serve the needs of transit-dependent populations through 2050.

The first component of the Regional TDP, the Existing Conditions Report, compiles current conditions to establish a baseline understanding of conditions and characterstics related to transit needs and opportunities along with existing transit services and operations in the region. Analysis includes data and information from a variety of sources, including existing plans, studies, and the latest data from agencies like the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL), the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), and the U.S. Census Bureau. This report documents demographic and employment trends, travel patterns, transportation options, and land use and development for the Southern Georgia Region. This report also includes a performance review of the region's current transit providers, their funding situation, and a comparison of the region's transit providers to other peer transit systems.

Figure 1 depicts the 18-county Southern Georgia Region. The region sits in the south-central area of Georgia and borders northeast Florida. The multijurisdictional Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization (VLMPO) planning area is shown in light yellow. The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), a significant natural resource in the southeast portion of the region, is shown in light green. Interstate-75 is the most prominent transportation corridor in the region, connecting southern Georgia to Florida, and providing a major travel route from the southeastern U.S. to the midwestern U.S..

Figure 1: Southern Georgia Region



Source: Southern Georgia Regional Commission

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

2.0 Demographic Trends

This chapter examines historical, current, and future population data for the Southern Georgia Region. Understanding the demographic and socioeconomic trends in the region provides insight into current and future transit demand needs for the region at large and for different population segments.

The majority of demographic data used throughout this chapter are from the U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Decenial Survey and 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates.The 5-year estimates are "period" estimates that represent data collected over a period of time. These datasets use different collection methods and methodologies to provide more demographic detail than the counts represented in the 2020 Decennial Census. There may be variation in figures such as total population across ACS datasets.

2.1 Historical Population

Population estimates over the period of 50 years were used to evaluate the region's historical population trends. The Southern Georgia Region has grown steadily over that period of time, with an overall 64 percent increase in population between 1970 and 2020. The decade with the fastest growth was 1970 to 1980, when a 17.8 percent growth rate was recorded, as shown in **Table 1**.

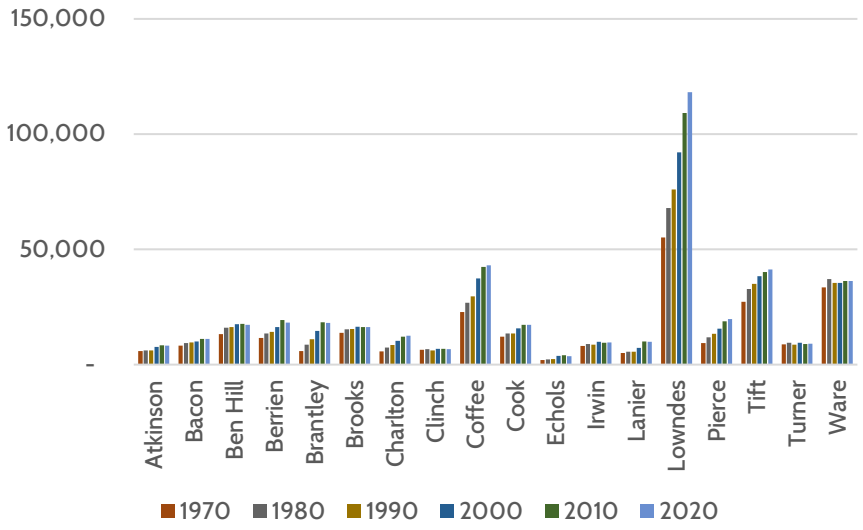
Of the counties in the region, Brantley grew the most over the past 50 years on a percentage basis, tripling its population from 5,940 to 18,021 residents, as depicted in **Figure 2**. Meanwhile, Lowndes County grew by 63,139 residents (a 114 percent increase), which was the largest population increase by number of people. Despite significant growth, the region's growth is slower than the state's growth rate, and the region experienced a significantly slower rate of growth from 2010 to 2020 compared to previous decades. This pattern is typical of other rural areas across the state.

Table 1: Historical Populations, Region and State

Geography	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	1970–1980	1980–1990	1990–2000	2000–2010	2010–2020
Southern Georgia	254,547	299,748	315,351	364,925	406,583	416,498	17.8%	5.2%	15.7%	11.4%	2.4%
Georgia	4,589,575	5,463,105	6,478,216	8,186,453	9,687,653	10,711,908	19.0%	18.6%	26.4%	18.3%	10.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Historical Population Change, 1970-2020

Figure 2: Historical Population by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Historical Population Change, 1910-2020

2.2 Demographic Trends within the Past Decade

Since 2013, the Southern Georgia Region's population experienced modest growth, with a 0.8 percent increase from 2013 to 2018, and a 2.0 percent increase from 2018 to 2023. **Table 2** shows that the state of Georgia had higher growth rates during the same period, growing by 5.4 percent from 2013 to 2018 and 4.9 percent from 2018 to 2023. Overall, most Southern Georgia counties had little to no growth or decline; however, from 2018 to 2023, several counties experienced significant population change, as shown below.

- Turner County (12.7 percent increase)
- Pierce County (5.4 percent increase)
- Brooks County (5 percent increase)
- Echols County (7.3 percent decrease)

Table 2: Population and Population Change (2013 to 2023)

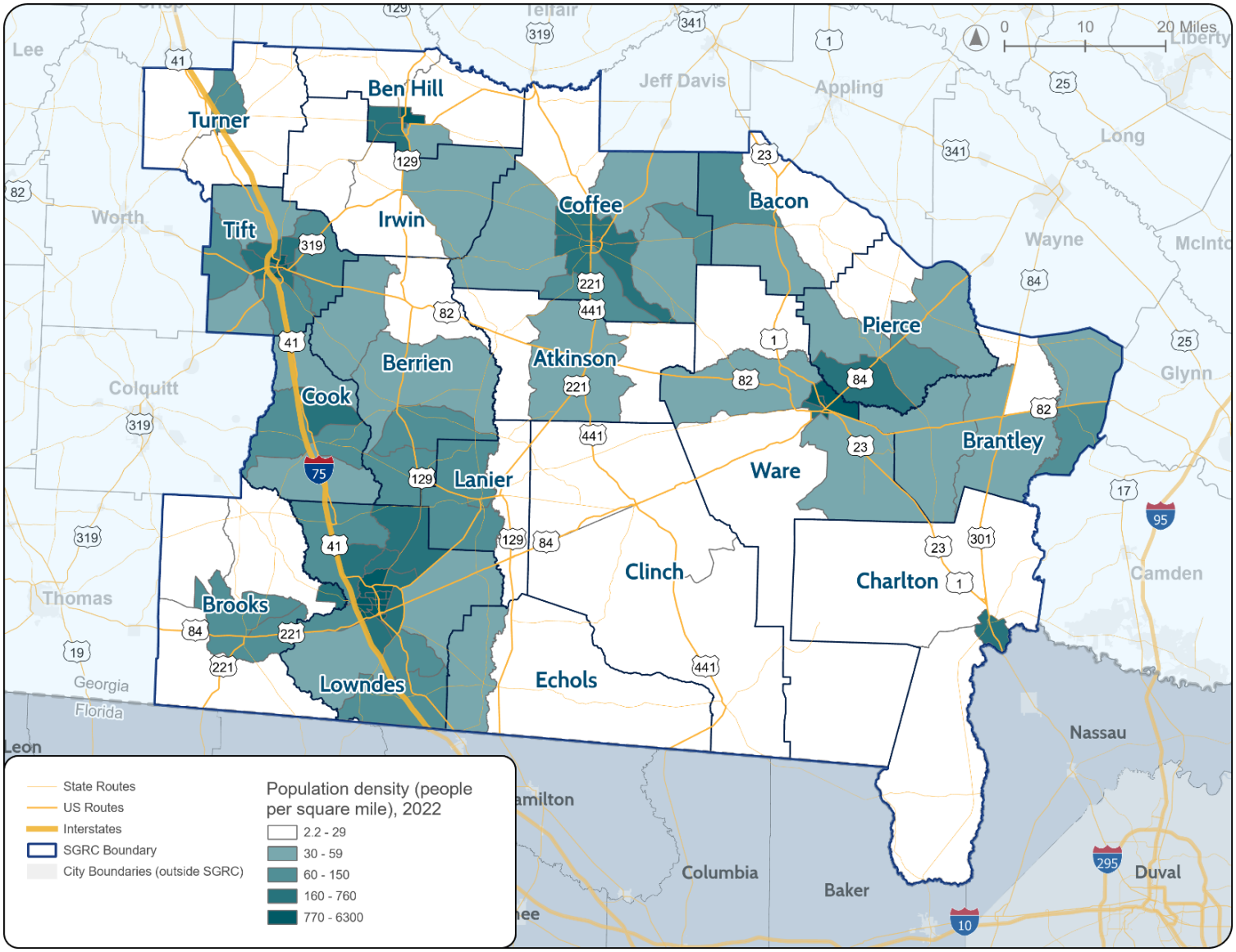
Geography	2013	2018	2023	2013–2018	2018–2023
Southern Georgia	409,625	413,179	421,596	0.8%	2.0%
Georgia	9,972,479	10,511,131	11,029,227	5.4%	4.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties in Georgia (2010 – 2019), (2020 – 2023)

2.3 Current Demographics

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates the Southern Georgia Region's 2023 population at 421,596, within an area of 8,040 square miles, for an overall estimated population density of 52 persons per square mile. Lowndes County, which contains most of the denser population areas, has 231 persons per square mile, where the densest tract has 6,264 persons per square mile, as presented in **Figure 3**. Tift and Ware counties also contain some higher-density census tracts, with greater than 2,000 persons per square mile.

Figure 3: Population Density by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B01001

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

2.4 Transit Market Demographics

The following demographics were analyzed to identify the location of populations that could benefit from public transportation:

- Areas of Persistent Poverty
- Low-Income Populations
- Senior Population: Individuals Ages 60+
- Youth Individuals: Ages 15–19
- Zero-Car Households
- Populations with a Disability

Section 2.5 discusses additional population characteristics that are often correlated with transit dependency, including minority and limited English proficiency.

2.4.1 Areas of Persistent Poverty

The Areas of Persistent Poverty (AoPP) Program awards grants to eligible applicants for planning, engineering, or development of technical or financing plans for projects eligible under Chapter 53 or Title 49 of the United States Code. This program supports the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to mobilize American ingenuity to build modern infrastructure and an equitable, clean energy future by supporting the following:

- Increased transit access for environmental justice (EJ) populations,
- Equity-focused community outreach and public engagement of underserved communities,
- Adoption of equity-focused policies,
- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and
- Addressing the effects of climate change.

Figure 4 shows the census tracts that meet the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's criteria for an AoPP, which include:

1. The **county** in which the project is located consistently had greater than or equal to 20 percent of the population living in poverty in all three of the following datasets: (a) the 1990 decennial census; (b) the 2000 decennial census; and (c) the most recent *(2022)* Small Area Income Poverty Estimates; **OR**

2. The **census tract** in which the project is located has a poverty rate of at least 20 percent as measured by the 2014-2018 5-year data series available from the American Community Survey of the Bureau of the Census.

At least one AoPP census tract is found within each of the 18 counties of the region. The census tract with the largest percentage of the population below the poverty level, 63.3 percent, is found in Valdosta (Lowndes County). Seven of the eighteen counties in Southern Georgia qualify as an AoPP based on the county criterion–these include: Atkinson, Ben Hill, Brooks, Clinch, Cook, Turner, and Ware counties.

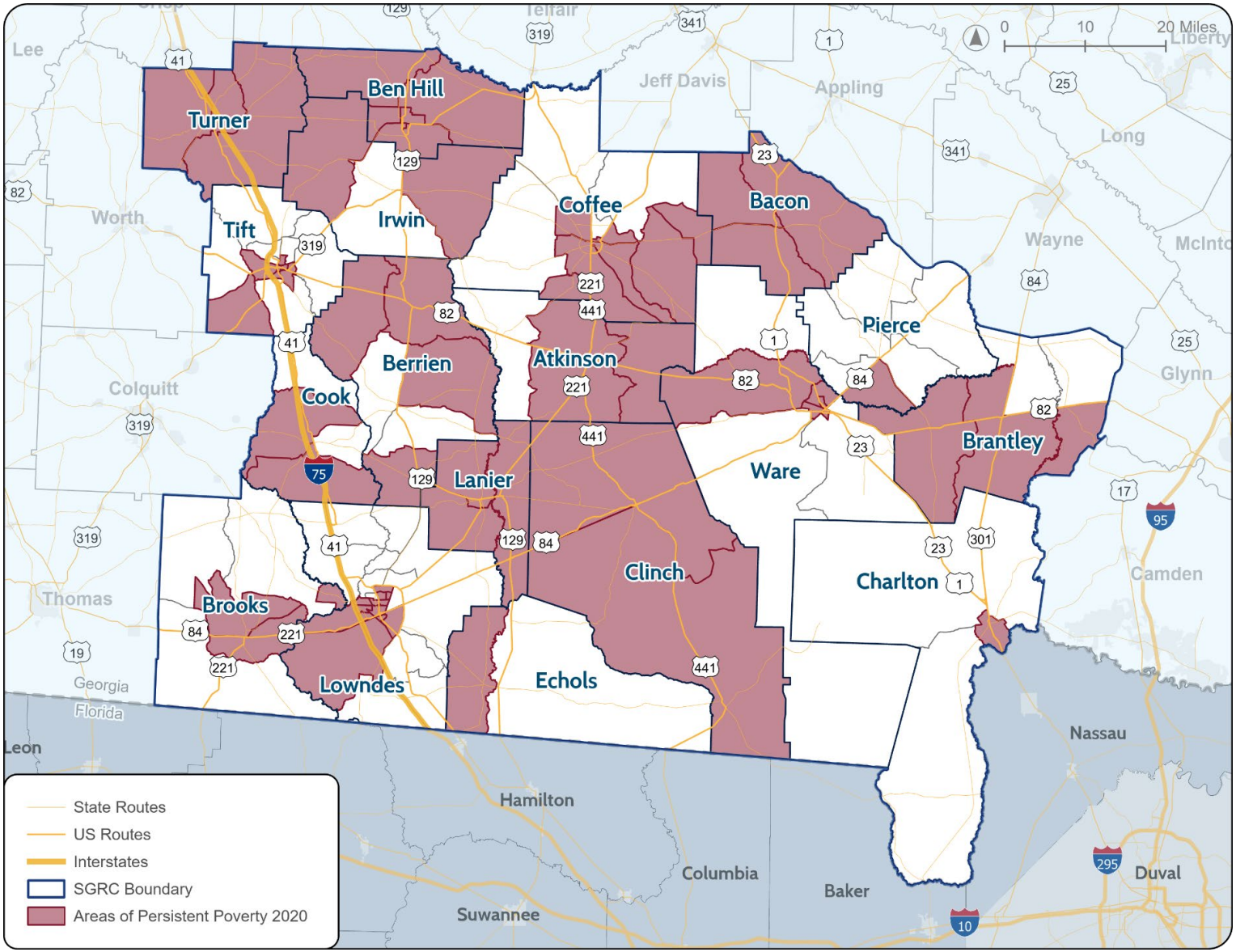
Sixty percent of the region's census tracts (71 of the 118 tracts) are considered an area of persistent poverty. These 71 tracts represent an estimated population of 241,362 people, comprising 58 percent of the total regional population, which is much higher than the statewide population share within an AoPP, as shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Populations within Areas of Persistent Poverty Census Tracts

Geography	Total Population	Total Population in AoPP	Percent Population in AoPP
Southern Georgia	415,992	241,362	58.0%
Georgia	10,516,579	2,786,819	26.5%

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Persistent Poverty Census Tracts, 2020

Figure 4: Areas of Persistent Poverty by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Department of Transportation, Persistent Poverty Census Tracts, 2020

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

2.4.2 Low-Income

Within the Southern Georgia Region, an estimated 21.7 percent of the population is classified as below the poverty line or low income, which is significantly higher than the state of Georgia's population at 13.5 percent, as shown in **Table 4**. Census tracts with high concentrations of low-income people are spread throughout the region; however, there is a large concentration of persons below the poverty line in the center of the region around Atkinson, Lanier, and Clinch counties, as shown in **Figure 5**. Median Household Income (MHI) is another indicator of low-income populations and can provide valuable information by comparing different regions to each other. The MHI of the Southern Georgia Region is $48,071. Georgia has a significantly higher MHI at $71,355. The highest MHIs in the Southern Georgia Region are found in Echols ($61,184), Pierce ($54,861), and Clinch ($53,350); the lowest MHIs are found in Atkinson ($38,007), Ben Hill ($38,255), and Turner ($39,666).

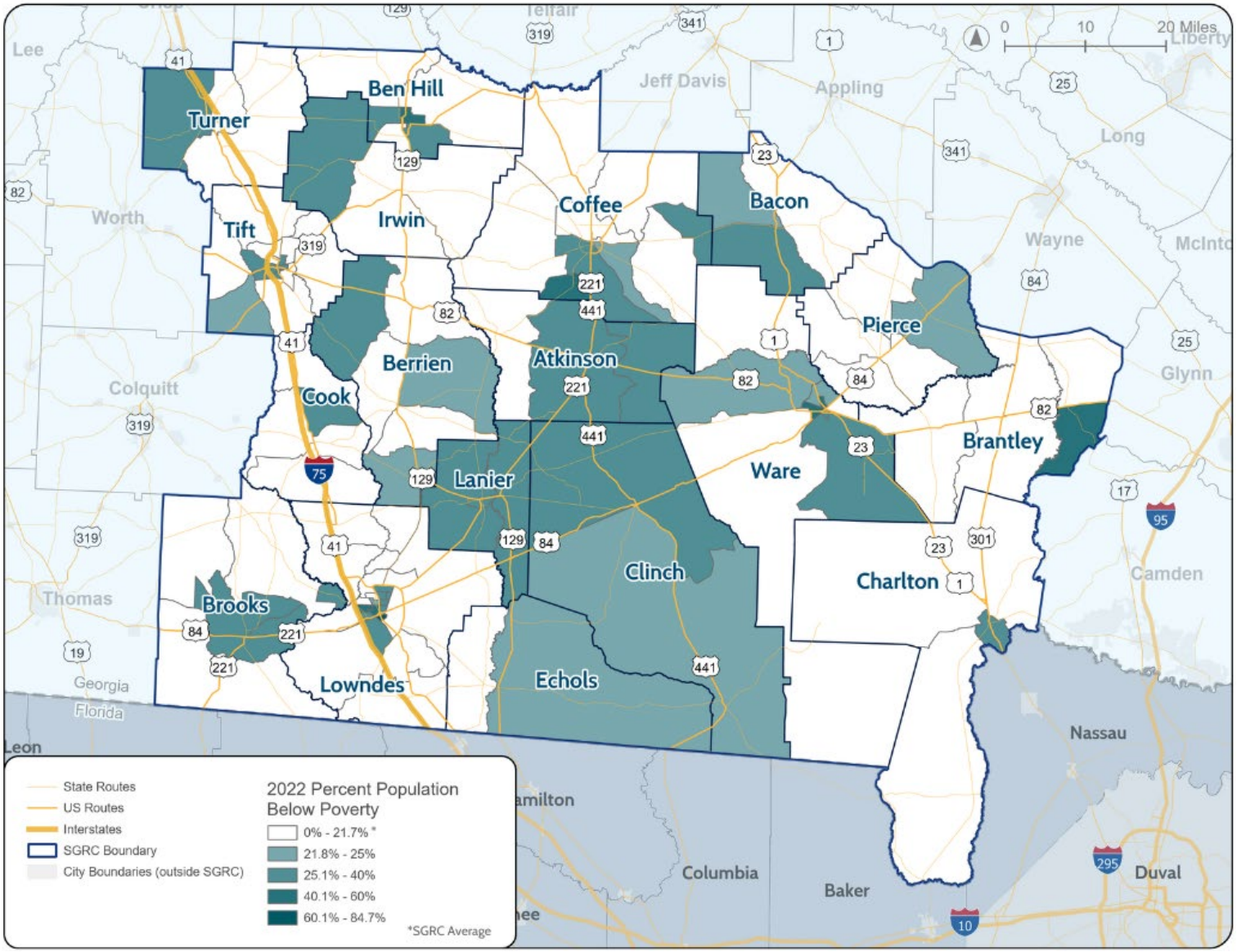
Table 4: Low-Income Population

Geography	Total Population[1]	Number Below Poverty	Percent Below Poverty	Median Household Income
Southern Georgia	400,524	86,939	21.7%	$48,071
Georgia	10,462,430	1,415,573	13.5%	$71,355

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B17001 (Economic Characteristics Data Profile)

[1] There are slight variations in the total population reported numbers between this table and subsequent tables due to the ACS data profile to which the datapoint belongs.

Figure 5: Low-Income Population by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table 17001 (Economic Characteristics Data Profile)

2.4.3 Senior (Ages 60+)

In this analysis, the senior population is defined as individuals 60 years of age and older. Transit is a key alternative to driving as people age and may not feel safe driving a vehicle. Transit services help to address a growing need for access to destinations such as medical appointments, grocery stores, and other essential services. An estimated 21.1 percent of the population in Southern Georgia Region qualifies as senior, as displayed in **Table 5**. This estimate is slightly higher than the state average where 20.2 percent of the statewide population is senior.

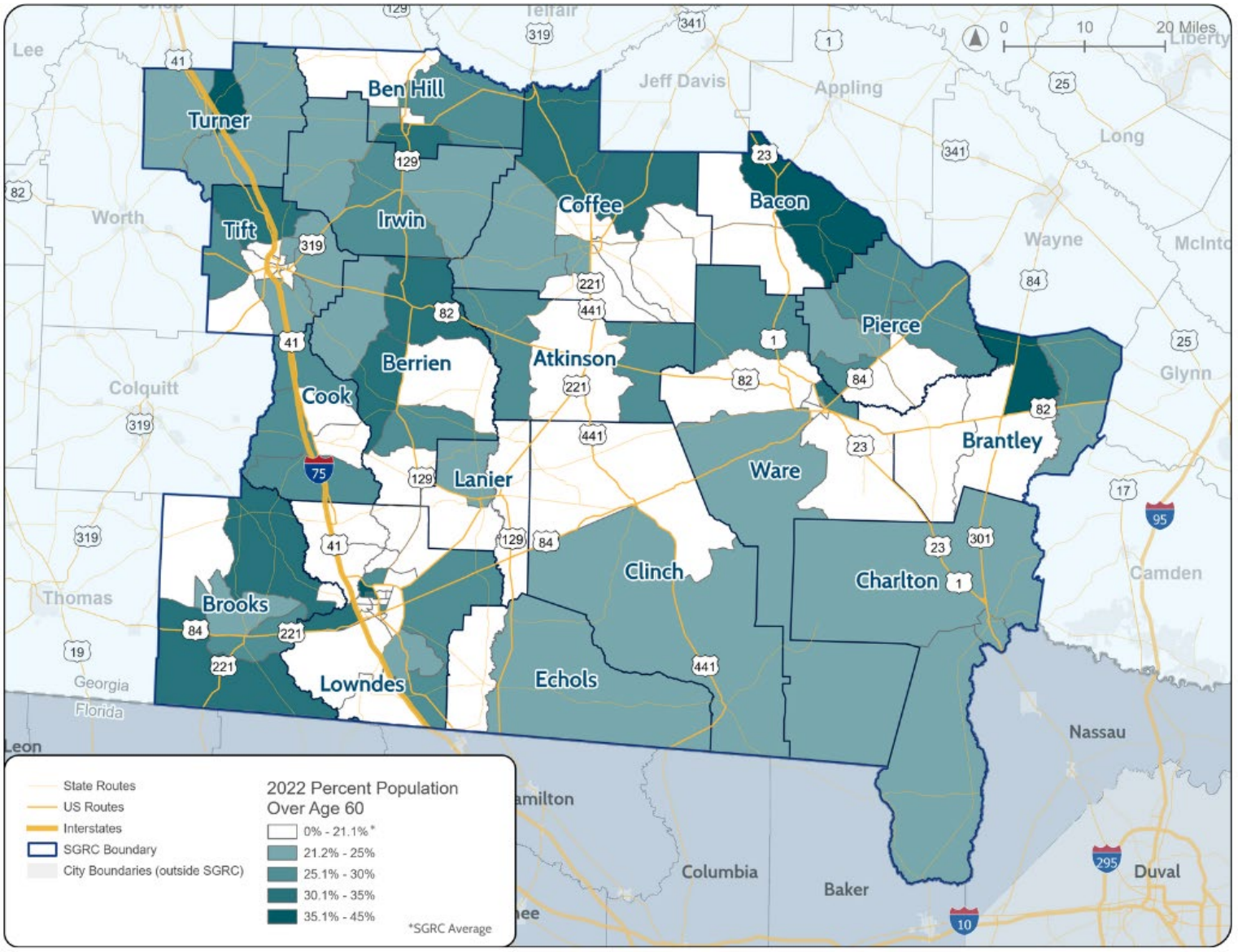
Figure 6 shows that the largest percentages of seniors in the region are located along the northern border of the region in Turner, Bacon, Coffee, Ben Hill, and Brantley counties. There are also significant pockets of senior residents in Lowndes, Brooks, and Berrien counties.

Table 5: Senior Population

Geography	Total Population	Total Ages 60+	Percent Ages 60+
Southern Georgia	415,992	87,972	21.1%
Georgia	10,722,325	2,172,093	20.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B01001 (Demographic Characteristics Data Profile

Figure 6: Senior Population by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B01001 (Demographic Characteristics Data Profile)

2.4.4 Youth (Ages 15–19)

This analysis defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 19. As this age group may be less likely to own a vehicle, transit may serve a key need for helping this population access school, workplaces, and other destinations. The Southern Georgia Region has an estimated youth population of 7.1 percent. Georgia has a slightly higher estimated youth population than the Southern Georgia Region at 7.5 percent, as indicated in **Table 6**.

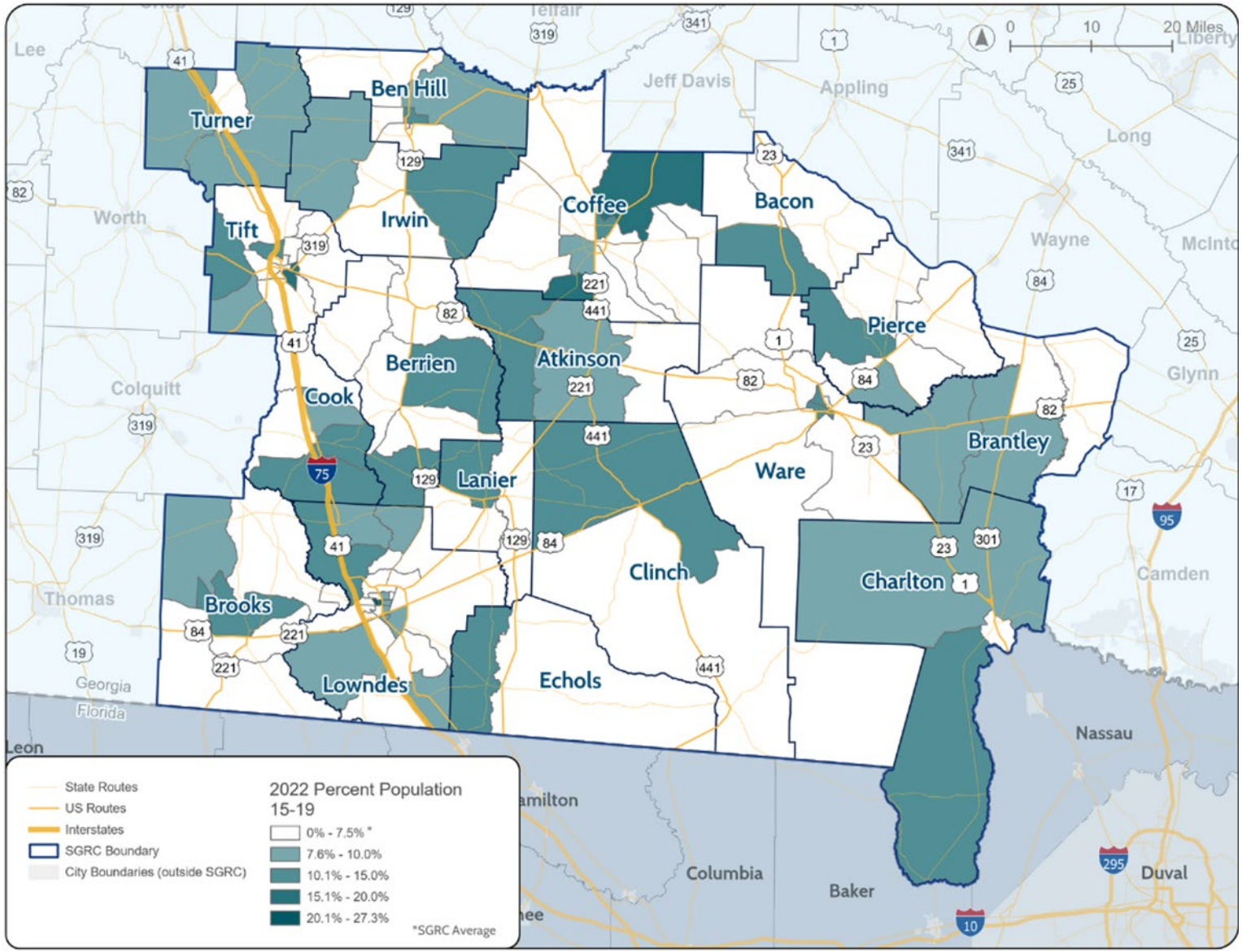
Figure 7 displays the youth population by census tract in the Southern Georgia Region. This figure shows the concentrations of youth are located mainly in the larger urban areas like the City of Valdosta in Lowndes County and the City of Tifton in Tift County. However, there are also high concentrations within Coffee and Brooks counties.

Table 6: Youth Population

Geography	Total Population	Total Ages 15–19	Percent Ages 15–19
Southern Georgia	415,992	31,320	7.5%
Georgia	10,722,325	757,557	7.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B01001 (Demographic Characteristics Data Profile)

Figure 7: Youth Population by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B01001 (Demographic Characteristics Data Profile)

2.4.5 Zero-Car Households

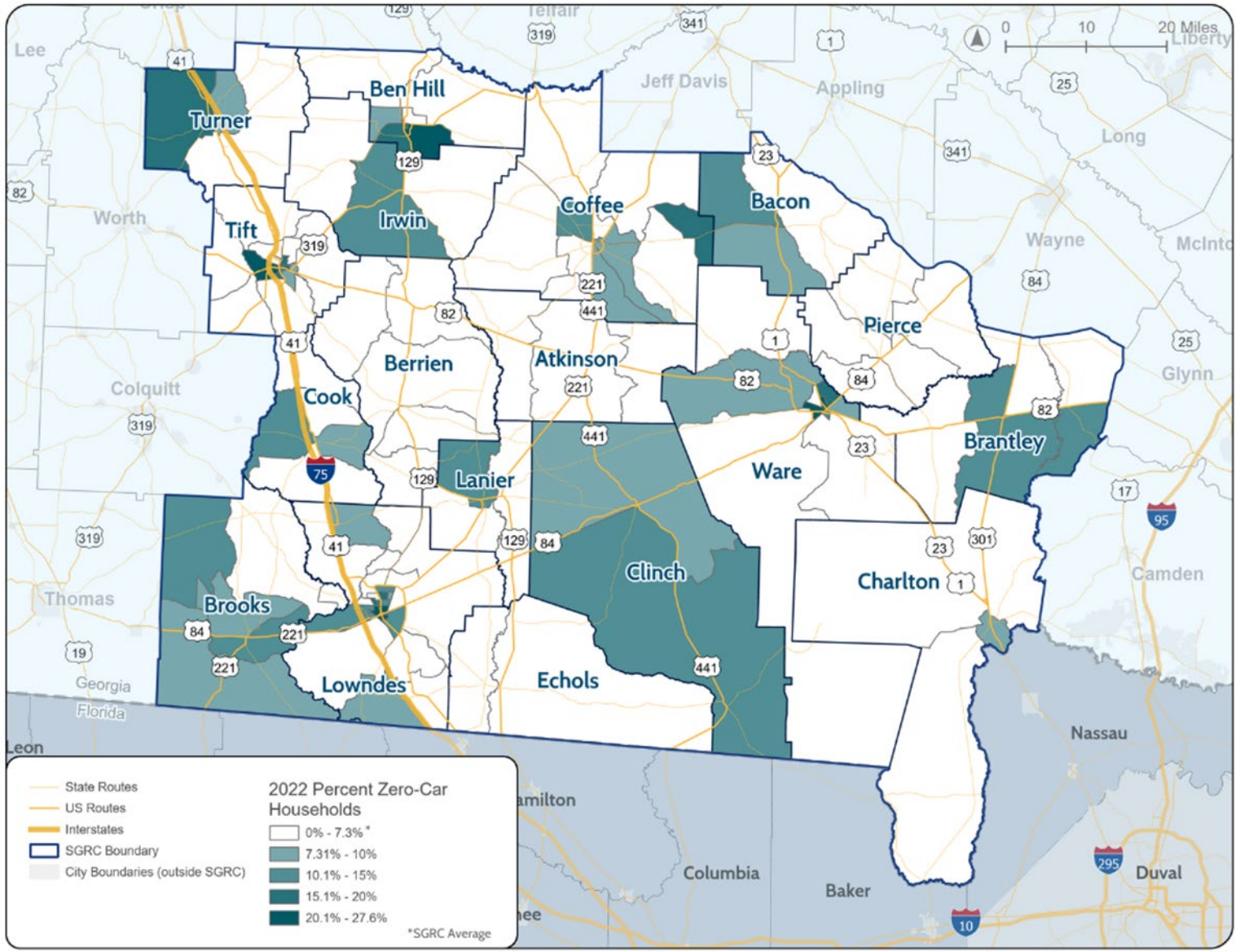
Zero-car households are households that do not have access to a vehicle for transportation. These populations may rely on transit or another form of transportation to meet their daily needs. The Southern Georgia Region has an estimated zero-car household percentage of 7.3 percent, as displayed in **Table 7**. This percentage is slightly high than the state of Georgia's estimated percentage of households without a vehicle, which is 6 percent. The highest concentrations of zero-car households are all located near cities in their respective counties of Ben Hill (Fitzgerald), Tift (Tifton), Lowndes (Valdosta), and Ware (Waycross), as shown in **Figure 8**.

Table 7: Zero-Car Households

Geography	Total Households	Total Zero Car Households	Percent Zero Car Households
Southern Georgia	151,637	11,087	7.3%
Georgia	3,946,490	236,816	6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B18101 (Social Characteristics Data Profile)

Figure 8: Zero-Car Households by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B25044 (Housing Characteristics Data Profile)

2.4.6 Populations with a Disability

Populations with disabilities may rely on transit for travel. The U.S. Census Bureau defines populations with a disability as individuals having hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, or independent living difficulties. The Southern Georgia Region has an estimated disabled population of 13.9 percent, which is slightly higher than that of the state of Georgia at 12.7 percent, as shown in **Table 7**.

Table 8 presents a county-by-county breakdown for disabled populations within the Southern Georgia Region. Bacon, Turner, and Charlton counties have the highest disabled percentages compared to their overall populations.

Figure 9 shows where concentrations of disabled populations are found across the region.

*The American Community Survey has differing methodologies for how total population is determined when a person's status cannot be determined (such as for poverty or disability). This can lead to figures that vary from the total population presented in **Section 2.2**.*

Table 8: Populations with a Disability

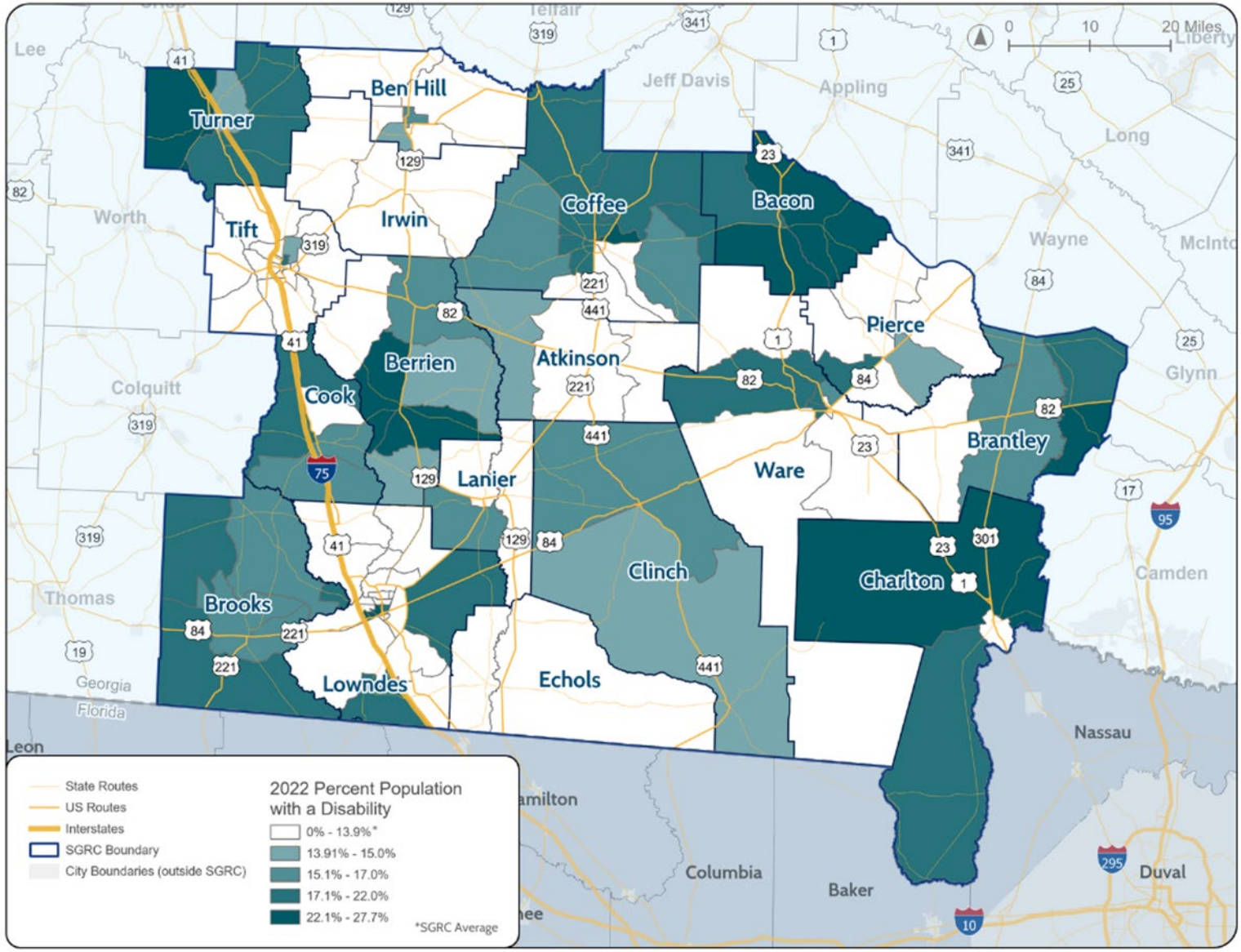
Geography	Total Population	Total Disabled	Percent Disabled
Southern Georgia	401,257	55,924	13.9%
Georgia	10,531,900	1,336,645	12.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B18101 (Social Characteristics Data Profile)

Table 9: Populations with a Disability by County

County	Total Disabled	Percent Disabled
Atkinson County	1,059	12.9%
Bacon County	2,356	22.3%
Ben Hill County	2,018	12.0%
Berrien County	3,096	17.3%
Brantley County	2,921	16.2%
Brooks County	2,733	17.0%
Charlton County	2,179	18.6%
Clinch County	1,093	16.5%
Coffee County	6,881	16.9%
Cook County	2,745	16.2%
Echols County	370	10.0%
Irwin County	844	9.1%
Lanier County	1,328	14.3%
Lowndes County	13,002	11.5%
Pierce County	2,595	13.2%
Tift County	4,383	10.8%
Turner County	1,691	19.5%
Ware County	4,630	13.7%

Figure 9: Populations with a Disability by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B18101 (Social Characteristics Data Profile)

2.5 Title VI

Title VI, as articulated in According to FTA Circular 4702.1B, prohibits recipients of federal financial assistance (e.g., states, local governments, transit providers) from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin in their programs or activities. Title VI also obligates federal funding agencies to enforce compliance. Two demographic groups covered by Title VI, minority and limited English proficiency populations, are discussed below.

2.5.1 Minority

The U.S Census Bureau defines minority as those populations with an ethnicity of Hispanic and Latino and/or those that identify as the following:

- Black or African American
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Other
- Two or More Races

Table 10 shows that an estimated 39.5 percent of the population in Southern Georgia identifies as a minority. This statistic is lower than that of Georgia's minority population share, which is estimated at 49.2 percent. **Table 11** provides the ethnic breakdown of the region's population. As shown in **Figure 10**, the highest minority concentrations are located in Ben Hill, Lowndes, and Ware counties, near their urban centers of Fitzgerald, Valdosta, and Waycross, respectively.

Table 10: Minority Population

Geography	Total Population	Total Minority	Percent Minority
Southern Georgia	415,992	164,365	39.5%
Georgia	10,722,325	5,277,170	49.2%

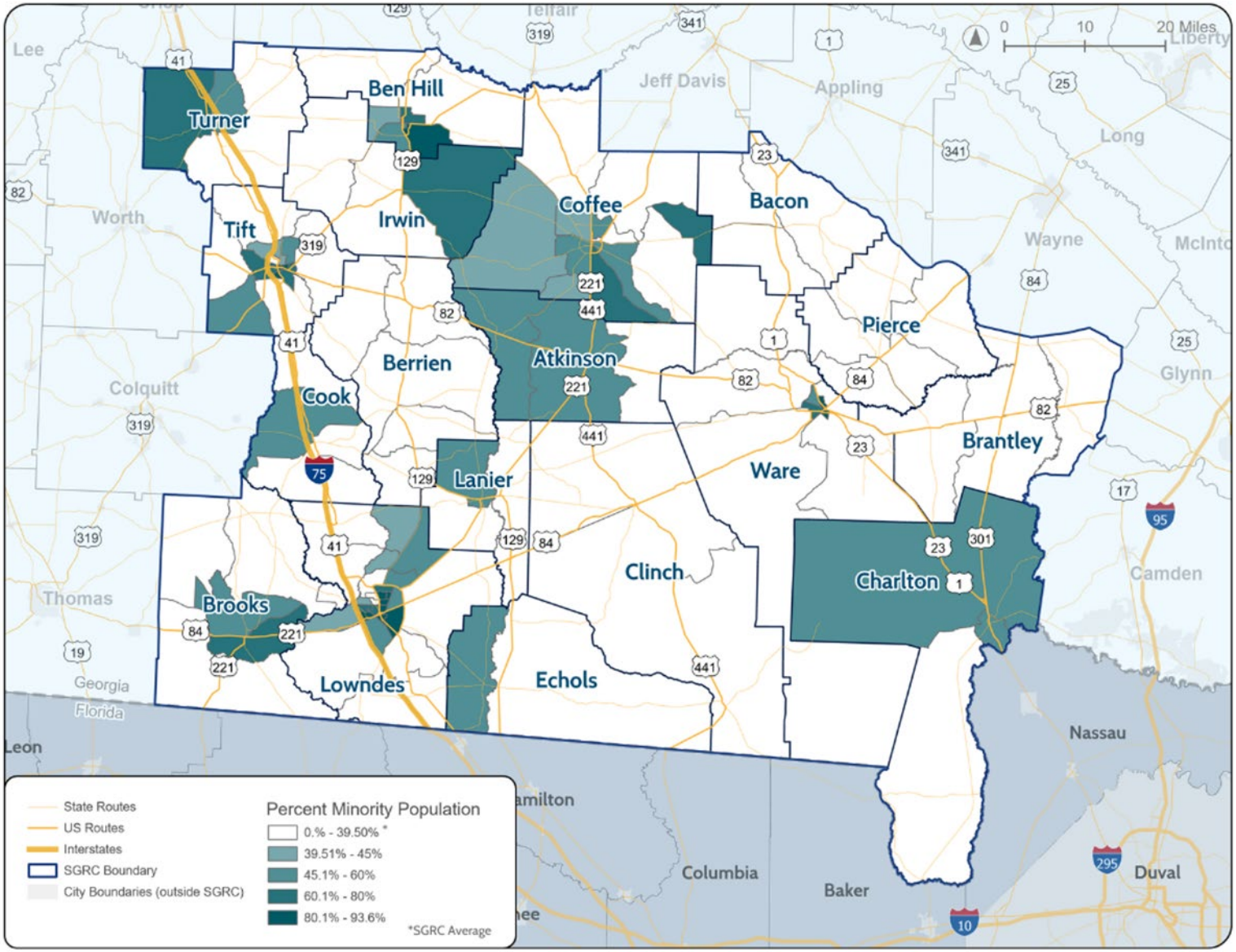
Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B03002 (Demographic Characteristics Data Profile)

Table 11: Southern Georgia Ethnicity Breakdown

Ethnicity	Total Population	Percent of Total
Hispanic or Latino	32,589	7.8%
Black or African American	116,300	28%
American Indian and Alaska Native	660	0.16%
Asian	4,235	1.02%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	123	0.0003%
Other	886	0.22%
Two or More Races	9,572	2.4%
Not Hispanic, White Alone	251,627	60.49%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B03002 (Demographic Characteristics Data Profile)

Figure 10: Minority Population by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B03002 (Demographic Characteristics Data Profile)

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

2.5.2 Limited English Proficiency

Limited English proficiency (LEP) populations are populations that speak English less than very well (i.e., well, not well, or not at all), but speak the following language types well:

- Spanish
- Indo-European
- Asian and Pacific Island
- Other

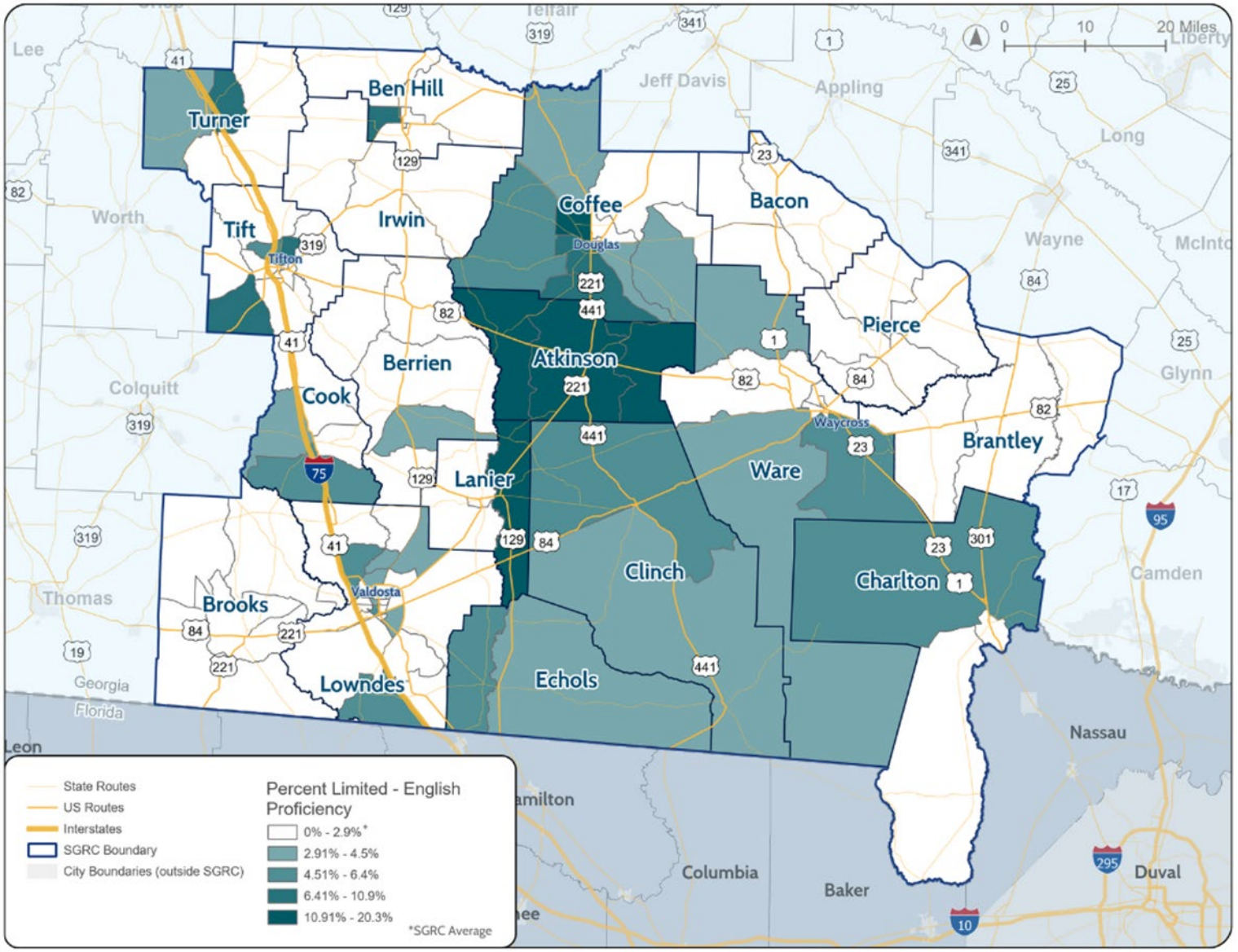
The U.S Census Bureau collects this information for people five years of age and older. **Table 12** shows that the Southern Georgia Region has an estimated LEP population share of 2.9 percent compared to the state of Georgia, which has a higher estimated LEP population share of 5.5 percent. **Figure 11** shows that the highest concentrations of LEP populations are centered around Atkinson County, with additional high concentrations in Coffee and Lanier counties. Spanish is the second most popular language spoken in these areas, after English.

Table 12: LEP Populations

Geography	Total Population Ages 5+	Total LEP	Percent LEP
Southern Georgia	389,367	11,272	2.9%
Georgia	10,087,026	551,131	5.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B16004 (Social Characteristics Data Profile)

Figure 11: LEP Populations by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table B16004 (Social Characteristics Data Profile)

2.6 Other Equity Considerations

This section provides additional equity data for the region, beyond the traditional transit market and Title VI datapoints. A data tool from the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), the Equitable Transportation Community Explorer, provides a more holistic approach to understanding of cumulative equity factors impacting the region.

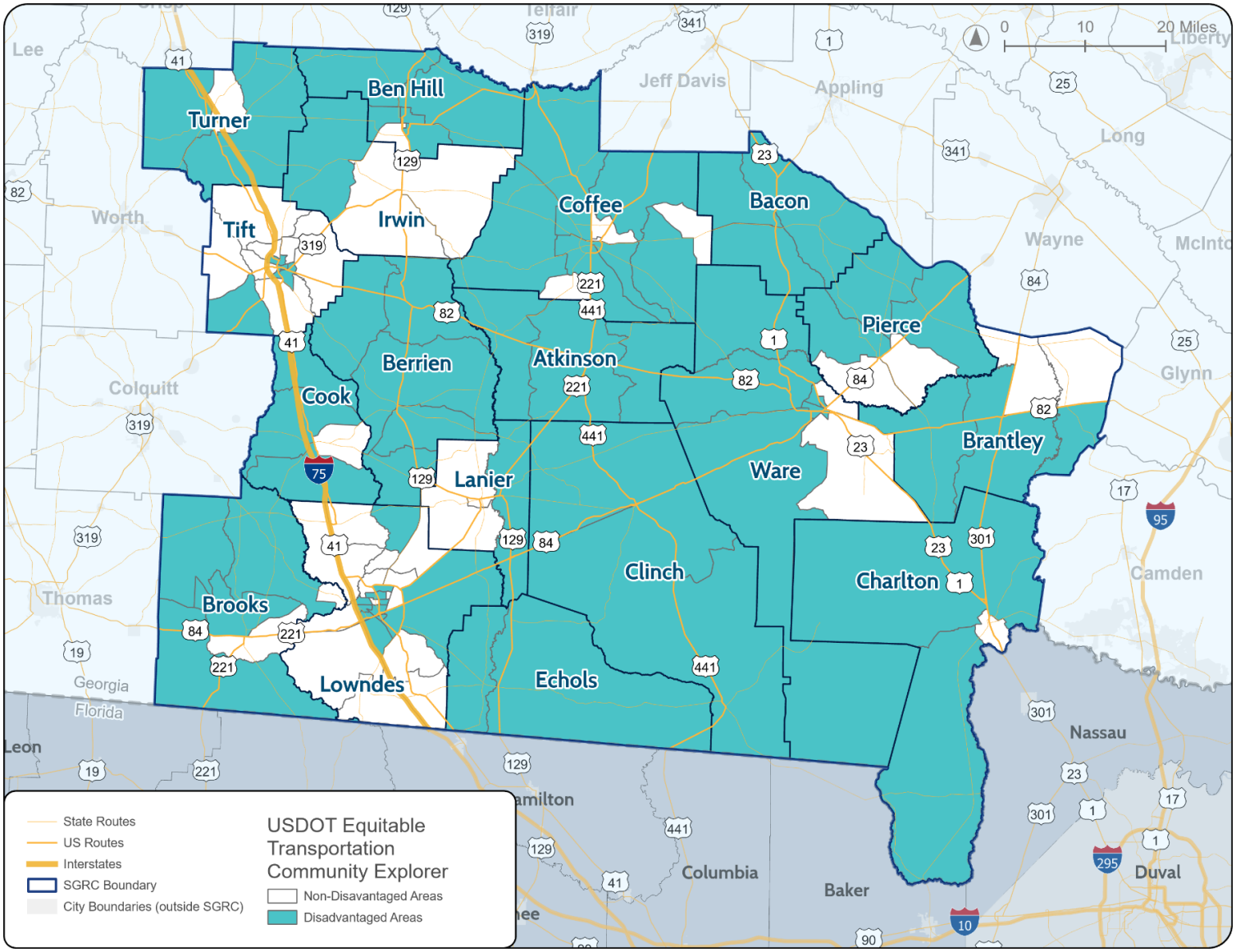
The Biden administration's Executive Order 14008 established the Justice40 Initiative, which mandates that disadvantaged communities receive 40 percent of the overall benefits of federal investments in climate and clean energy programs, including sustainable transportation. Using data from indicators collected at the census tract level, USDOT groups disadvantages into five different categories, including:

- **Transportation insecurity:** considers access, cost, and safety variables such as households with no car, jobs within a 45-minute drive, cost of gas, cost of transit, traffic fatalities, and more.
- **Environmental burden:** considers various environmental data points, such as air pollution, hazardous sites, impaired waters, and age of infrastructure.
- **Health vulnerability:** considers where populations are disproportionately at risk for various conditions such as asthma, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, and poor mental health.
- **Social vulnerability:** considers various socioeconomic factors such as income, housing tenure, insurance coverage, broadband coverage, limited English proficiency, and more.
- **Climate and disaster risk burden:** considers components of climate and hazard risks, including current risk levels and future anticipated risk levels.

Figure 12 displays which census tracts in the Southern Georgia Region are considered disadvantaged according to the USDOT's Equitable Transportation Community Explorer. According to USDOT, a census tract is considered transportation disadvantaged if the overall index score places it in the 65th percentile (or higher) of all U.S. census tracts. The census tracts identified as "disadvantaged" receive priority for funding when applying for USDOT's discretionary grants.

According to USDOT's ETC Explorer, 75 of the 119, or 63 percent, of the total census tracts within the region are considered disadvantaged. A total of 243,111 people currently reside in disadvantaged census tracts, which is 58 percent of the region's total population.

Figure 12: Transportation Disadvantages by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Department of Transportation Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer, 2022?

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

2.7 Future Demographics

Population projections provide insight into communities that are expected to experience notable growth within the region and, as such, may require modifying transit services over time. The Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget issues a population projection series by county. Based on the 2020 Census count, these data use birth rates and other growth factors to extrapolate population for each year from 2023 to 2050. Much like the differences seen between U.S. Census counts and ACS estimates data, differences in methodology can lead to variations across datasets.

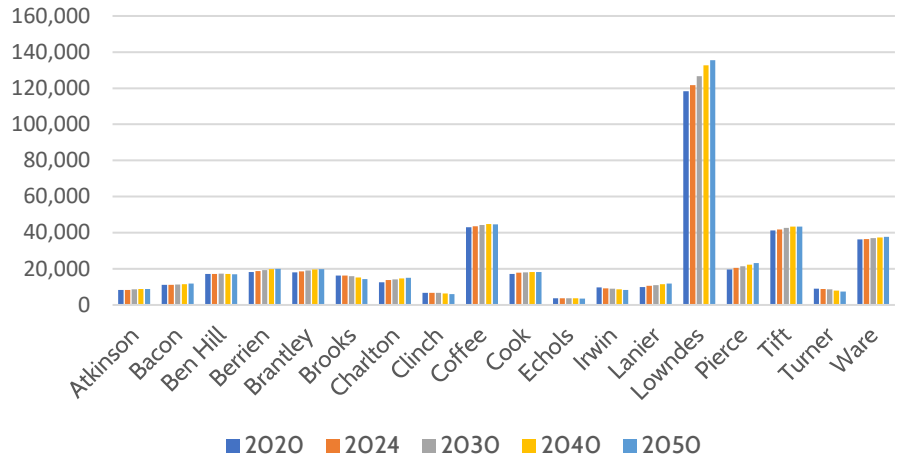
The 2023 population projections shown in **Table 13** illustrate that the Southern Georgia Region is expected to experience 7.2 percent growth in the coming decade, compared to the state of Georgia, which is expected to grow by 24.9 percent from 2020 to 2050. This growth would mean an additional 30,000 people living in the Southern Georgia Region, with the most significant growth coming between 2020 and 2030. The growth is projected to slow down between 2040 and 2050, with a growth rate of less than one percent. Individual counties that are expected to have a significant amount of growth over a thirty-year span are Lanier County at 20.4 percent and Charlton County at 20.1 percent. Other counties with notable growth include Pierce, Lowndes, and Berrien counties at 17.5, 14.6, and 10.5 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, Turner, Irwin, Brooks, and Clinch counties are each expected to decline in population by at least 10 percent, as shown in **Figure 13**.

Table 13: Population Projections

Geography	2020	2030	2040	2050
Southern Georgia	416,498	434,702	443,730	446,663
Georgia	10,710,017	11,823,402	12,711,597	13,371,813

Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, Series 2023

Figure 13: Population Projections by County



Source: Georgia Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, Series 2023

3.0 Labor Force, Jobs, & Industry Trends

This chapter provides an overview of the labor force and industry trends in the Southern Georgia Region. Workforce trips are an important component of each public transit services' operations. Evaluation of current and future jobs centers informs consideration of different service delivery options for efficiently and effectively addressing workforce needs.

3.1 Current Labor Force

Lowndes County accounts for almost one-third of the region's employed residents (29 percent). Other counties with high percentages of the region's employed residents include Coffee County (10 percent), Tift County (10 percent), and Ware County (8 percent). **Table 14** shows each county's contribution to the region's employment.

The approximate size of the Southern Georgia Region's population age 16 years of age and older in 2022 was 327,351. An estimated 182,786 people were classifed by the American Community Survey as a part of the labor force by being employed or actively seeking employment. This is equivalent to a labor force participation rate of about 56 percent. The remaining 144,565 people represent 44 percent of the region's total population age 16 years of age and older that are "not in the labor force." The region's aging population, especially prominent in Turner, Bacon, Coffee, Ben Hill, and Brantley counties, contributes to this number, as do the student populations at universities and technical colleges in the region, including but not limited to: Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, Coastal Pines Technical College, South Georgia State Collge, Valdosta State University, and Wiregrass Georgia Technical College.

Table 14: Current Labor Force and Employment by County

County	Total Labor Force Participants	Total Employed Population	County's Contribution to Region's Total Employment
Atkinson County	3,777	3,605	2%
Bacon County	4,455	4,253	2%
Ben Hill County	7,498	7,089	4%
Berrien County	7,684	7,257	4%
Brantley County	7,231	6,986	4%
Brooks County	6,974	6,627	4%
Charlton County	5,468	4,993	3%
Clinch County	2,583	2,515	1%
Coffee County	18,587	17,710	10%
Cook County	8,176	7,551	4%
Echols County	1,940	1,901	1%
Irwin County	4,175	3,917	2%
Lanier County	3,997	3,521	2%
Lowndes County	55,832	49,794	29%
Pierce County	8,718	8,474	5%
Tift County	18,407	17,809	10%
Turner County	3,592	3,341	2%
Ware County	13,692	13,100	8%
SGRC	182,786	170,443	2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, Table B23001 (Economic Characteristic Data Profile)

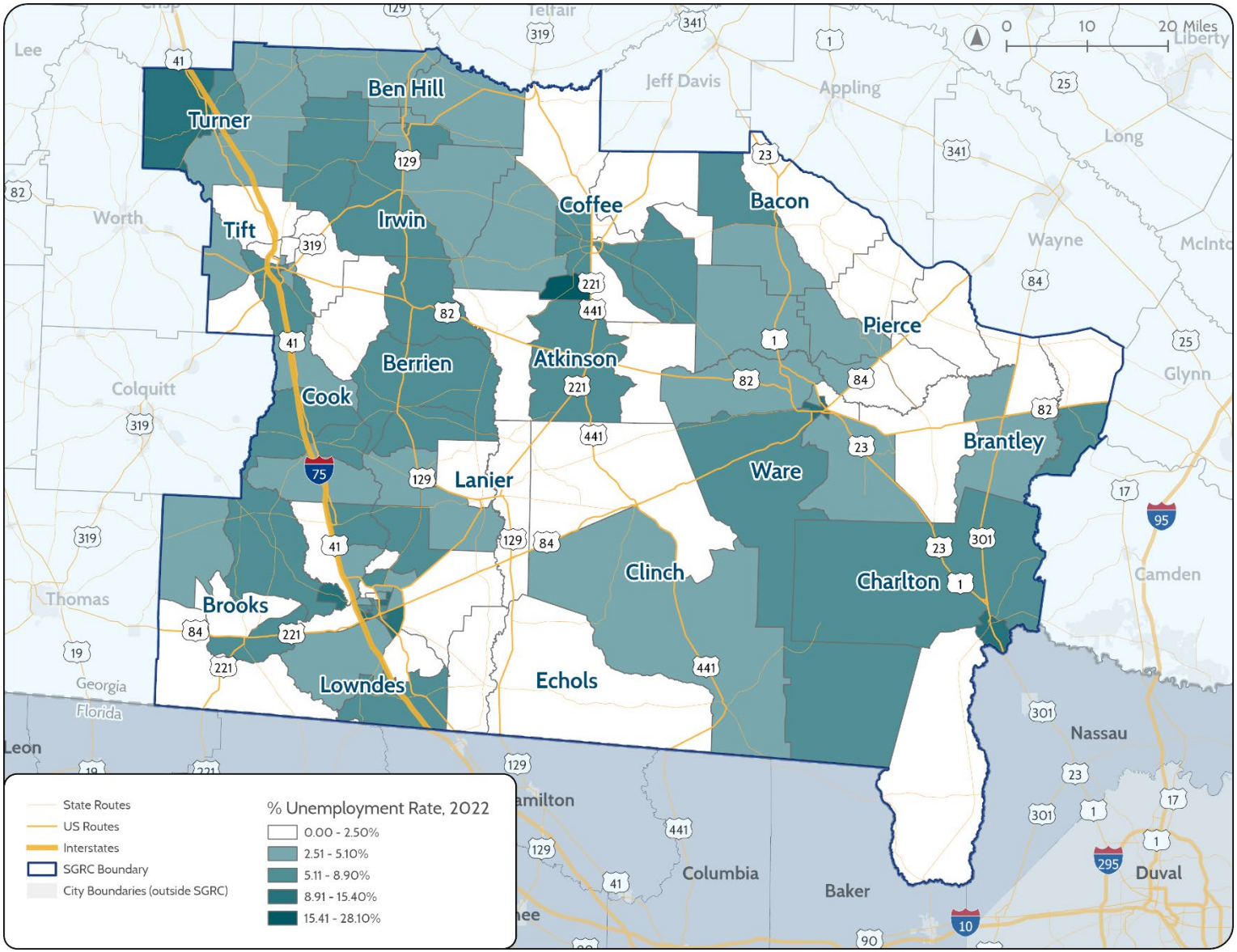
Table 15 shows that an estimated 8,032 (2.5 percent) of the population 16 years of age and older in Southern Georgia was unemployed in 2022. This percentage is lower than that of Georgia's unemployed population for 2022 (3.3 percent). **Figure 14** displays unemployed populations by census tract in Southern Georgia. South-central Coffee County contains the census tract with the highest percentage of unemployed persons, at 28.1 percent. High concentrations of unemployed persons are also found in Turner, Cook, Lowndes, Irwin, and Charlton counties. These high unemployment rates contribute to persistent poverty in these areas. Improving access to transit service may improve the quality of life of these areas by helping people to get to jobs or workforce training programs.

Table 15: Unemployed Population

Geography	Total Population 16+	Total Labor Force	Total Unemployed	Percent Unemployed
Southern Georgia	327,351	182,786	8,032	2.5%
Georgia	8,504,181	5,406,476	280,651	3.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, Table B23001 (Economic Characteristic Data Profile)

Figure 14: Unemployment by Census Tract, 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2022 American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates, Table B23001 (Economic Characteristic Data Profile)

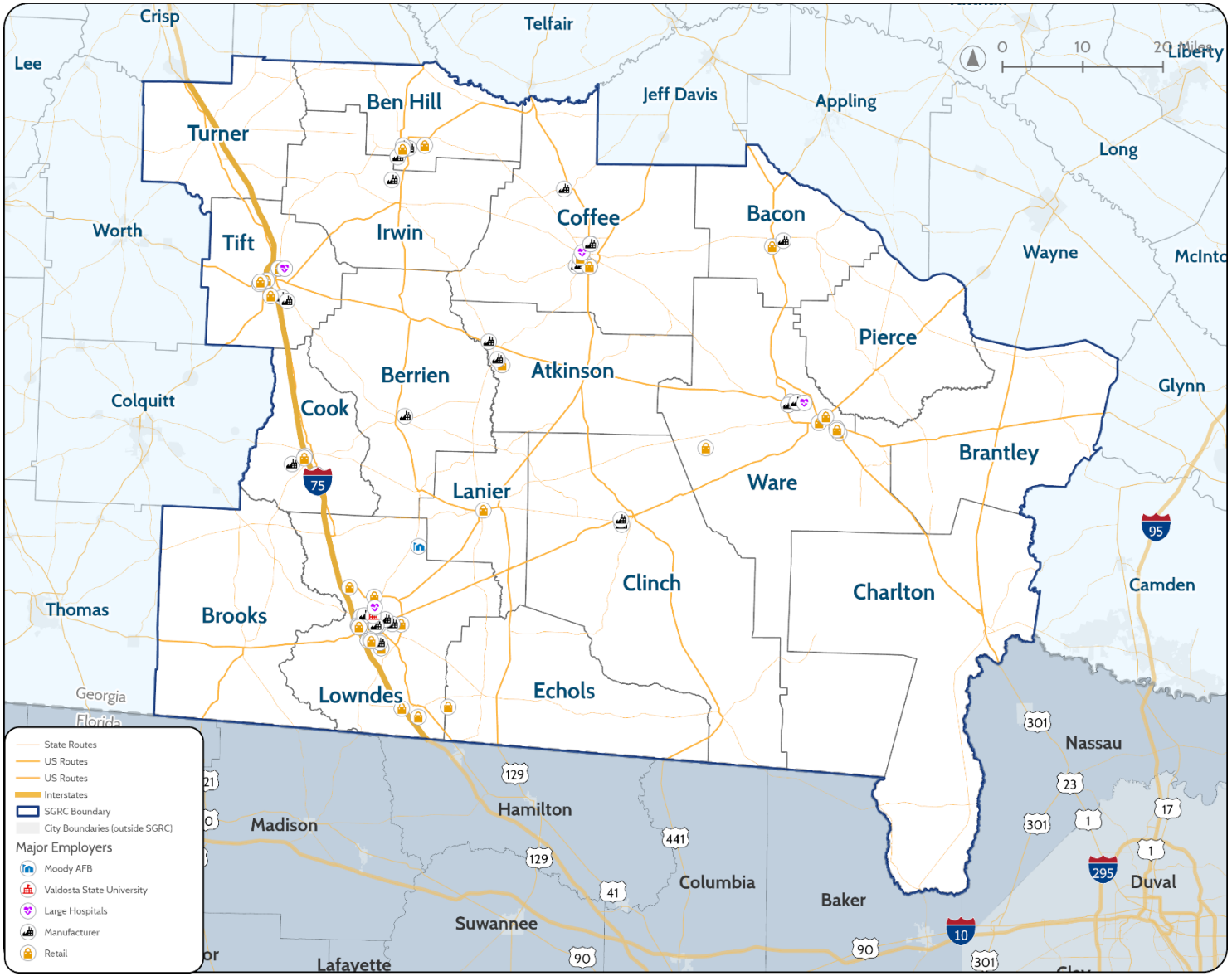
3.2 Major Industries

According to GDOL data, the government sector provides the most jobs across the region, accounting for 21.7 percent of the region's total employment. Among the private sector, manufacturing (14.1 percent), retail trade (12.8 percent), accommodation and food services (10.0 percent), and healthcare and social assistance (9.9 percent) are the top industries by employment in the Southern Georgia Region.

- The region's top employer is Valdosta State University, which employed over 1,500 people as of August 2024.
- The largest healthcare facilities in the region are South Georgia Medical Center (Lowndes facility has 330 beds), Memorial Satilla Health (231 beds), Tift Regional Medical Center (181 beds), and Coffee Regional Medical Center (98 beds)..
- The top three manufacturing employers in the region are Pilgrim's Pride Corp, Mauser Small Packaging, and PCC Airfoils LLC. Each of these manufacturers hires over 500 people. Pilgrim's Pride and PCC Airfoils are both located in the City of Douglas (Coffee County), while Mauser Small Packaging is located in the City of Homerville (Clinch County).
- The top three retail employers in the region are Nestle USA (located in Valdosta), Walmart (various supercenters and stores around the region), and Carolina Skiff (located in Waycross).
- Moody Airforce Base, located in northern Lowndes County, employs about 4,500 military personell and about 500 civilian personnel (Military OneSource).
- In 2023, two significant economic development projects within Southern Georgia were announced by the Georgia Department of Economic Development:
    - ADMARES (building and home manufacturer) created 1,400 new jobs in Waycross.
    - Walmart created 400 new jobs at a new milk processing facility in Valdosta.

Figure 15 displays the top employers in the region based on the best available regional and state data as of fall 2024. It includes private employers that have more than 100 employees, as well as significant public employers including Valdosta State University and Moody Airforce Base. No major private employers (based on the criteria of having 100 or more employees) are located in Turner, Brooks, Pierce, Brantley, and Charlton counties.

Figure 15: Major Employers



Sources: Southern Georgia Regional Commission, Georgia Department of Labor Area Labor Profile, 2024

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

3.3 Geographic Job Concentrations

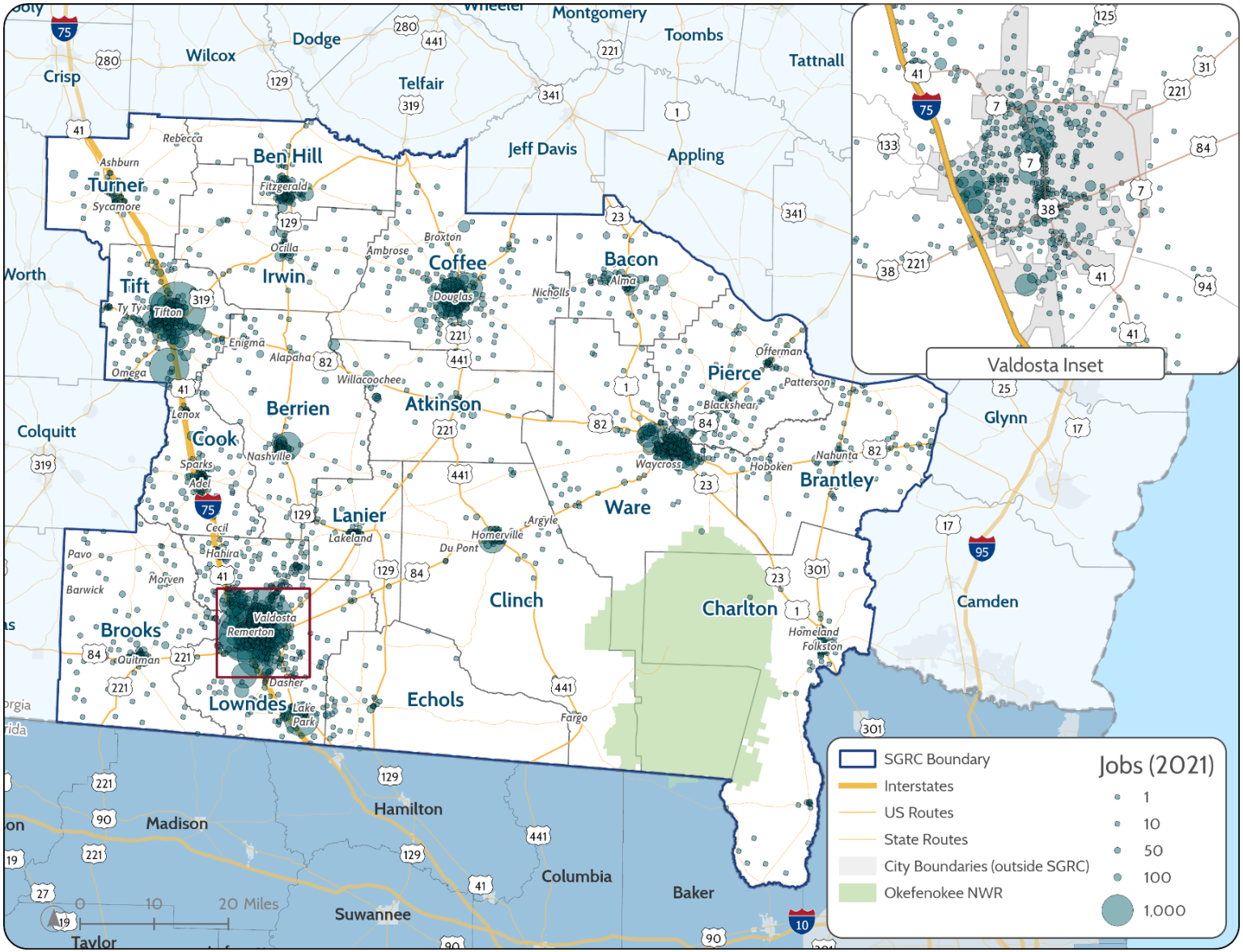
The U.S. Census Bureau's Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) Origin-Destination Employment Statistics, or LODES, program provides workforce data. **Figure 16** shows the number of jobs for each census block in 2021 available from LODES. Within Southern Georgia, the greatest job concentrations are in the cities of Valdosta, Tifton, and Waycross, with smaller but still significant concentrations in the cities of Fitzgerald and Douglas. Jobs are more sparse in the south-central and southeastern areas of the region. These areas are more rural in character and have more natural areas such as the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

United States Department of Agriculture data shows that agriculture is an important component of the region's economy, though these jobs are not included in the LODES data presented in **Figure 16**. While agriculture is a historically important industry for the region, its impact as a source of employment remains difficult to measure. Agricultural labor data is complicated by factors like seasonal fluctuation and the involvement of farmworkers that are self-employed, part-time, family members, or undocumented workers. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) focuses employment statistics on nonfarm payrolls, which exclude the self-employed, private household employees, volunteers, and farm employees. Both LODES and the Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL) utilize BLS data for their jobs, employment, and industry mix releases.

Among Southern Georgia counties, Brooks County produces the most livestock, with more than 13,000 head produced annually.[2] Other counties with significant agricultural production include Atkinson, Bacon, Berrien, Coffee, Cook, Echols, and Irwin counties.

[2] United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service, Georgia Field Office. Georgia County Estimates. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Georgia/Publications/County_Estimates/index.php

Figure 16: Job Concentration by Census Block, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau LEHD 2021 Origin-Destination Employment Statistics

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

3.4 Future Employment Trends

Table 16 provides the GDOL's industry growth projections through 2030. Based on these projections, the crop production industry is expected to experience the largest positive change in the number of employees, while the amusement, gambling, and recreation industry is expected to experience the largest percentage increase over the period. Other notable high-growth industries include warehousing and storage, social assistance, and clothing and clothing accessories stores.

Table 16: Industry Projections

Industry Title	2020-2030 Employment Change		
	2020 Base Year Employment	Total Change in Employment	Percent Change
Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries	950	390	42.5%
Warehousing and Storage	3,790	1,390	36.7%
Social Assistance	1,800	550	30.8%
Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores	810	250	30.7%
Ambulatory Health Care Services	6,450	1,640	25.5%
Food Services and Drinking Places	12,260	3,100	25.3%
Crop Production	15,380	3,810	24.7%
General Merchandise Stores	5,030	1,000	19.9%
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	2,710	520	19.4%
Transportation Equipment Manufacturing	2,560	510	19.4%
Hospitals	7,320	1,000	13.7%
Total Self Employed and Unpaid Family Workers, All Jobs	11,530	1,530	13.3%
Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods	2,780	290	11.1%
Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods	2,840	280	10.2%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	2,730	270	10.2%
Food and Beverage Stores	2,510	250	10.1%
Wood Product Manufacturing	3,770	370	9.6%
Educational Services	14,440	760	5.2%
Construction	6,390	320	5.0%
Local Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals	6,260	270	4.3%

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

4.0 Existing Transportation Network

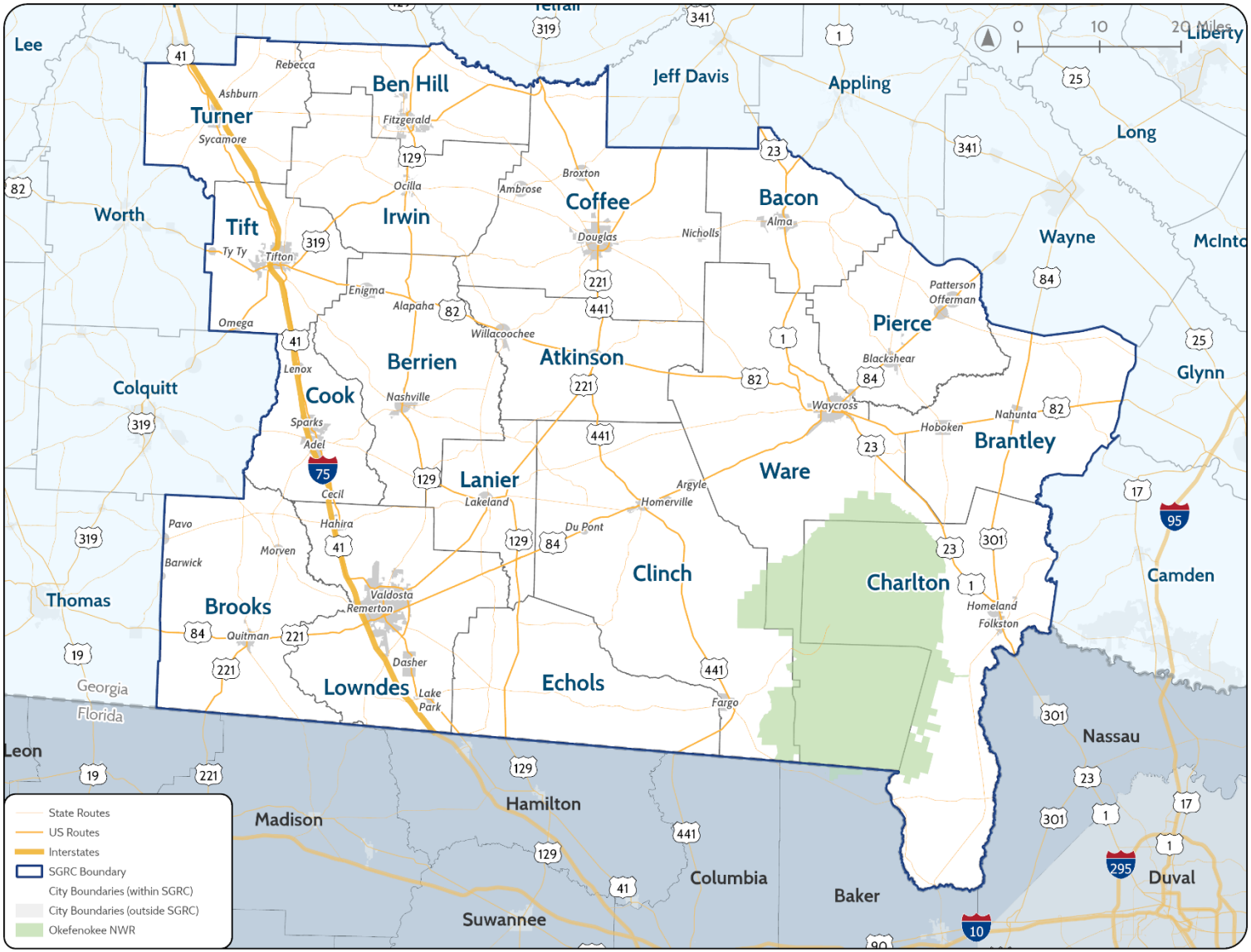
The following chapter provides an overview of the roadway system, park and ride facilities, rail infrastructure, and non-motorized facilities. It also includes an analysis of traffic volumes over time. This chapter provides context about the region and the space that the transit services operate within. The various facilities in place today , along with their activity levels, helps to inform how people and goods travel within and through the region now and in the future.

4.1 Transportation System Overview

As shown in **Figure 17**, several major corridors that serve the region, including but not limited to:

- Interstate 75, which runs north-south, traverses through Turner, Tift, Cook, and Lowndes counties.
- US Route 84, which runs from the southwest to northeast corner of the region, is a state-designated freight corridor.
- US Route 82, which runs east-west, connects Waycross, Tifton, and Albany.
- US Route 41, which runs north-south, is a parallel route to Interstate 75.
- US Route 221, which runs north-south, goes through Lanier, Atkinson, and Coffee counties within the region.
- US Route 441, which runs north-south, goes through Clinch, Atkinson, and Coffee counties within the region.
- US Route 23, which runs north-south, goes through Charlton, Ware, and Bacon counties within the region.
- US Route 129, which runs north-south, goes through Lanier, Berrien, Irwin, and Ben Hill counties within the region.

Figure 17: Roadway Network



Source: Georgia Department of Transportation

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

4.1.1 Annual Average Daily Traffic

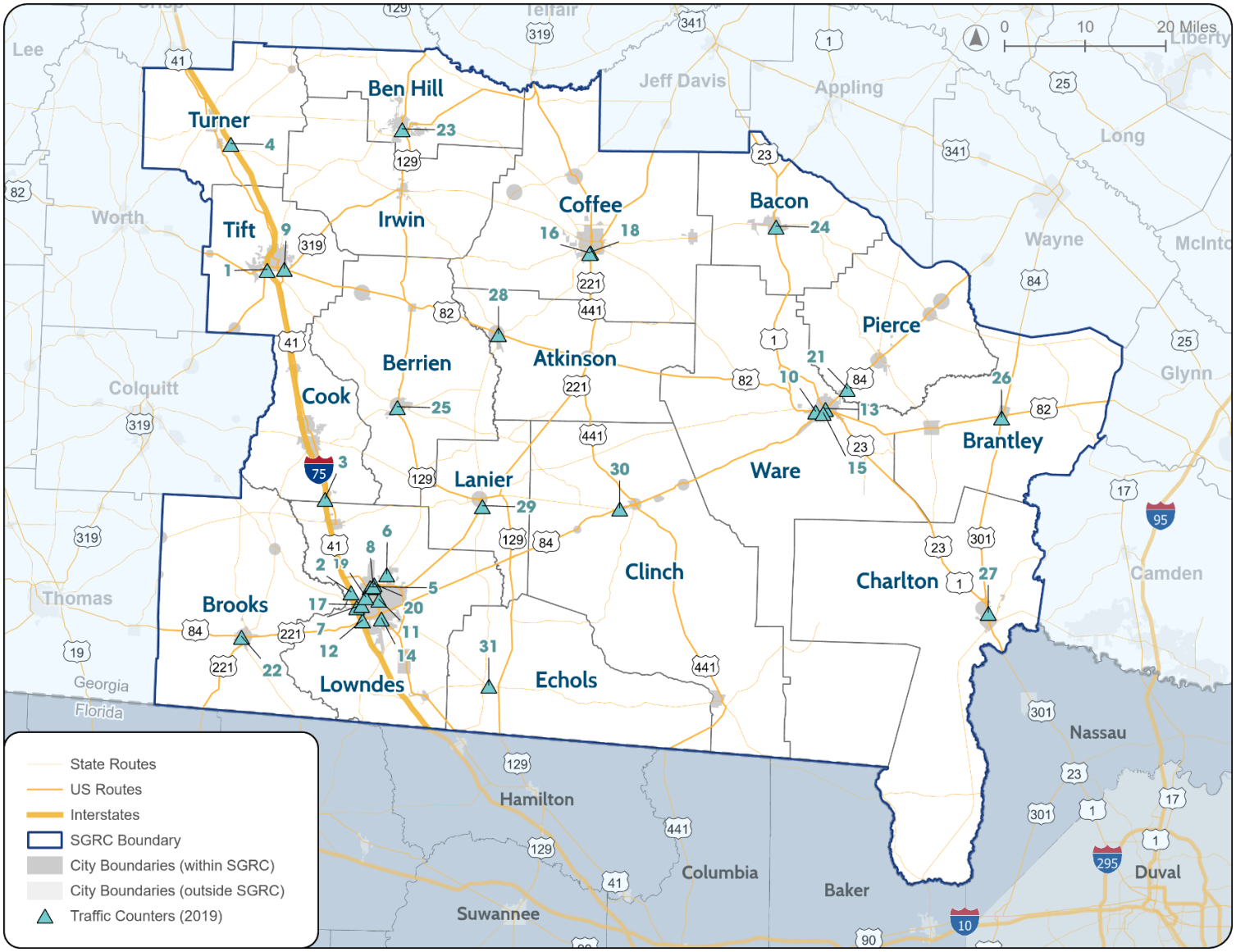
GDOT collects and reports traffic volume for all vehicle classes (car, single-unit truck, multi-unit truck) throughout the state of Georgia from traffic count stations, measured as Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT). This traffic volume provides valuable data and critical information for federal reporting and for analyzing traffic patterns and other statistics. Routes that are classified as rural and experience traffic volumes less than 10,000 AADT are considered less traveled, while routes with counts over 10,000 AADT are considered more heavily traveled. The same concept applies to urban routes, with the threshold being 20,000 AADT for more heavily traveled routes.

For the purpose of understanding travel trends and potential congestion points, traffic counters from the 20 busiest roadways in the region were chosen; only one counter per roadway was chosen for each county. For any county without a roadway among the region's busiest, the counter with the highest traffic from such counties was added to the end of the table to provide a more robust snapshot of traffic volumes throughout the region.

Figure 18 and **Figure 19** depict the results of this analysis for 2019 and 2023, respectively. The tables that follow, **Table 17** and **Table 18**, list the corresponding AADT counts at these traffic count stations in descending order.

Unsurprisingly, Interstate 75 carries the highest traffic volumes in the region. Lowndes County has the greatest concentration of heavily trafficked corridors, with 11 of the top 20 busiest roadways. In 2019, the only other counties in the region with more than one traffic counter station in the top 20 AADT list were Coffee, Lowndes, Ware, and Tift counties. In 2023, Coffee County only had one traffic counter station make the top 20 AADT list. Otherwise, traffic volumes were at relatively consistent levels in 2023 compared to 2019.

Figure 18: Annual Average Daily Traffic (2019)



Source: Georgia Department of Transportation, Traffic Analysis and Data Application (TADA), 2019

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

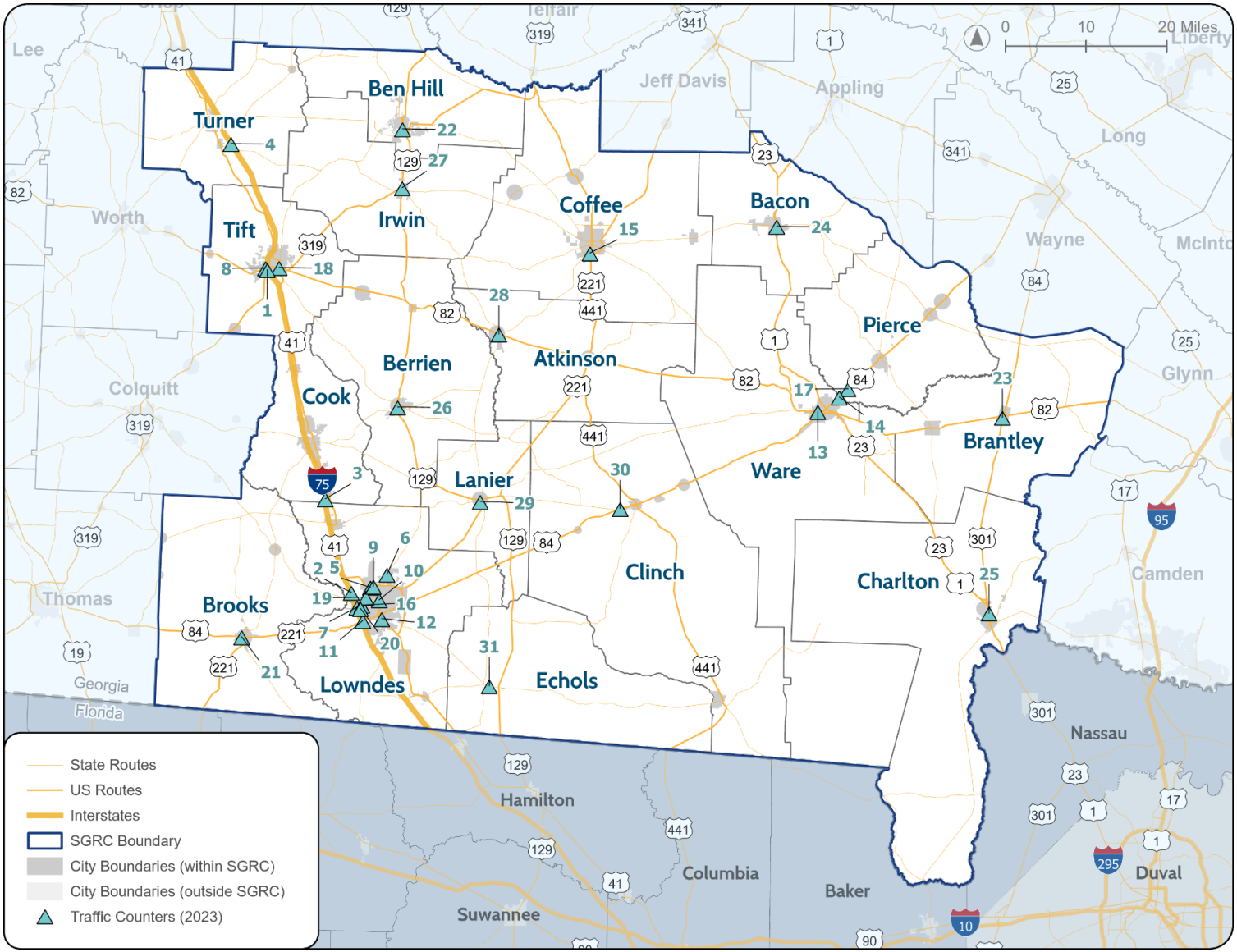
Table 17: Traffic Counter Station Sample and 2019 AADT

Map ID	Traffic Counter ID	Roadway Name	Roadway Functional Class	County	2019 AADT
1	277-0241	Interstate-75	Urban Principal Arterial - Interstate	Tift	58,000
2	185-0237	Interstate-75	Urban Principal Arterial - Interstate	Lowndes	55,600
3	075-0165	Interstate-75	Rural Principal Arterial - Interstate	Cook	49,300
4	287-0194	Interstate-75	Rural Principal Arterial - Interstate	Turner	45,000
5	185-0073	N Valdosta Rd, SR 7, US 41	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	34,700
6	185-0205	Bemiss Rd, SR 125	Urban Minor Arterial	Lowndes	29,600
7	185-0165	SR 94, SR 133, St Augustine Rd	Urban Minor Arterial	Lowndes	27,500
8	185-0530	Inner Perimeter Rd	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	26,800
9	277-0174	5th St E, SR 520, SR 35, US 82, US 315	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Tift	26,200
10	299-0140	S Georgia Pkwy W, Francis St, SR 714, SR 520	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Ware	25,600
11	185-0065	N Ashley St, US 41, SR 7	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	24,400
12	185-0131	W Hill Ave, US 84, US 221, SR 38,	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	23,500
13	299-0016	Plant Ave, US 1, SR 4, SR 250	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Ware	21,900
14	185-0046	S Patterson St, SR 7, SR 94, SR 31	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	20,300
15	299-0143	SR 714, Reynolds St, S Georgia Pkwy	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Ware	19,800
16	069-0232	SR 353, SR 135, Bowens Mill Rd SW	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Coffee	19,000
17	185-0411	Baytree Rd	Urban Minor Arterial	Lowndes	18,900
18	069-0109	S Peterson Ave, SR 31, SR 135, US 441, US 221	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Coffee	18,700
19	185-0419	Jerry Jones Dr	Urban Minor Arterial	Lowndes	18,000
20	185-0195	N Oak St Exd	Urban Minor Arterial	Lowndes	16,300
21	229-0110	US HWY 84, SR 38	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Pierce	16,100
22	027-0149	W Screven St Thomasville Rd	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Brooks	14,400
23	017-0107	US 129, US 319, SR 90, SR 11, Ocilla Hwy	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Ben Hill	12,900
24	005-0114	US Hwy 1	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Bacon	12,500
25	019-0114	S Davis St, US 129, SR 11	Rural Minor Arterial	Berrien	11,400
26	025-0152	W Cleveland St, US 82, SR 520	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Brantley	10,800
27	049-0107	US 23, US 1, US 301, SR 121	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Charlton	10,700
28	003-0123	SR 520, US 82, Main St	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Atkinson	9,360
29	173-0230	Annie Mae Dr/S Mill St	Rural Major Collector	Lanier	9,020
30	065-0112	US HWY 84, SR 38, Valdosta Hwy	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Clinch	5,770

Map ID	Traffic Counter ID	Roadway Name	Roadway Functional Class	County	2019 AADT
31	101-0123	Chitty Rd, SR 94	Rural Major Collector	Echols	2,850

Source: Georgia Department of Transportation, Traffic Analysis and Data Application (TADA), 2019

Figure 19: Annual Average Daily Traffic (2023)



Source: Georgia Department of Transportation, Traffic Analysis and Data Application (TADA), 2023

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

Table 18: Traffic Counter Station Sample and 2023 AADT

Map ID	Traffic Counter ID	Roadway Name	Roadway Functional Class	County	2023 AADT
1	277-0241	I- 75 / SR 586	Urban Principal Arterial - Interstate	Tift	62,000
2	185-0237	I- 75 / SR 586	Urban Principal Arterial - Interstate	Lowndes	61,900
3	075-0165	I- 75	Rural Principal Arterial - Interstate	Cook	55,700
4	287-0194	I- 75	Rural Principal Arterial - Interstate	Turner	49,300
5	185-0073	N Valdosta Rd / SR 7 / US HWY 41 S	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	34,500
6	185-0205	State Rte 125	Urban Minor Arterial	Lowndes	32,800
7	185-0165	St Augustine Rd / SR 94 / SR 133	Urban Minor Arterial	Lowndes	28,500
8	277-0201	US Hwy 82	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Tift	27,400
9	185-0530	Greystone Way	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	24,600
10	185-0065	N Ashley / SR 7 / US HWY 41	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	24,400
11	185-0131	W Hill Ave / SR 38 / US 84 / US 221	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	24,400
12	185-0046	S Patterson St / SR 7 / US 41 S / SR 94 / SR 31	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Lowndes	22,900
13	299-0141	Francis St / SR 520 / S Georgia Pkwy W / SR 714	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Ware	21,900
14	299-0072	State Rte 38 / SR 84 / Plant Ave	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Ware	21,500
15	069-0232	State Rte 135 / SR 353 / Bowens Mill Rd SW / SR 206	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Coffee	18,800
16	185-0411	Baytree Rd	Urban Minor Arterial	Lowndes	18,400
17	229-0110	US Hwy 84	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Pierce	18,400
18	277-0169	Ermine Ave	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Tift	17,800
19	185-0419	Co Rd 40	Urban Minor Arterial	Lowndes	17,500
20	185-0519	Norman Dr	Urban Major Collector	Lowndes	16,100
21	027-0149	S Laurel St	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Brooks	15,900
22	017-0107	Sadie St	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Ben Hill	12,900
23	025-0152	Brantley St	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Brantley	11,600
24	025-0152	Brantley St	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Brantley	11,600
25	005-0114	W 12th St	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Bacon	10,500
26	049-0107	State Rte 4/15/23	Urban Principal Arterial - Other	Charlton	10,500
27	019-0114	Johnson Aly	Rural Minor Arterial	Berrien	9,770
28	155-0107	W Hudson St	Rural Minor Arterial	Irwin	9,610
29	003-0123	Paulk Ave	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Atkinson	8,610
30	173-0129	State Rte 31	Rural Minor Arterial	Lanier	8,230

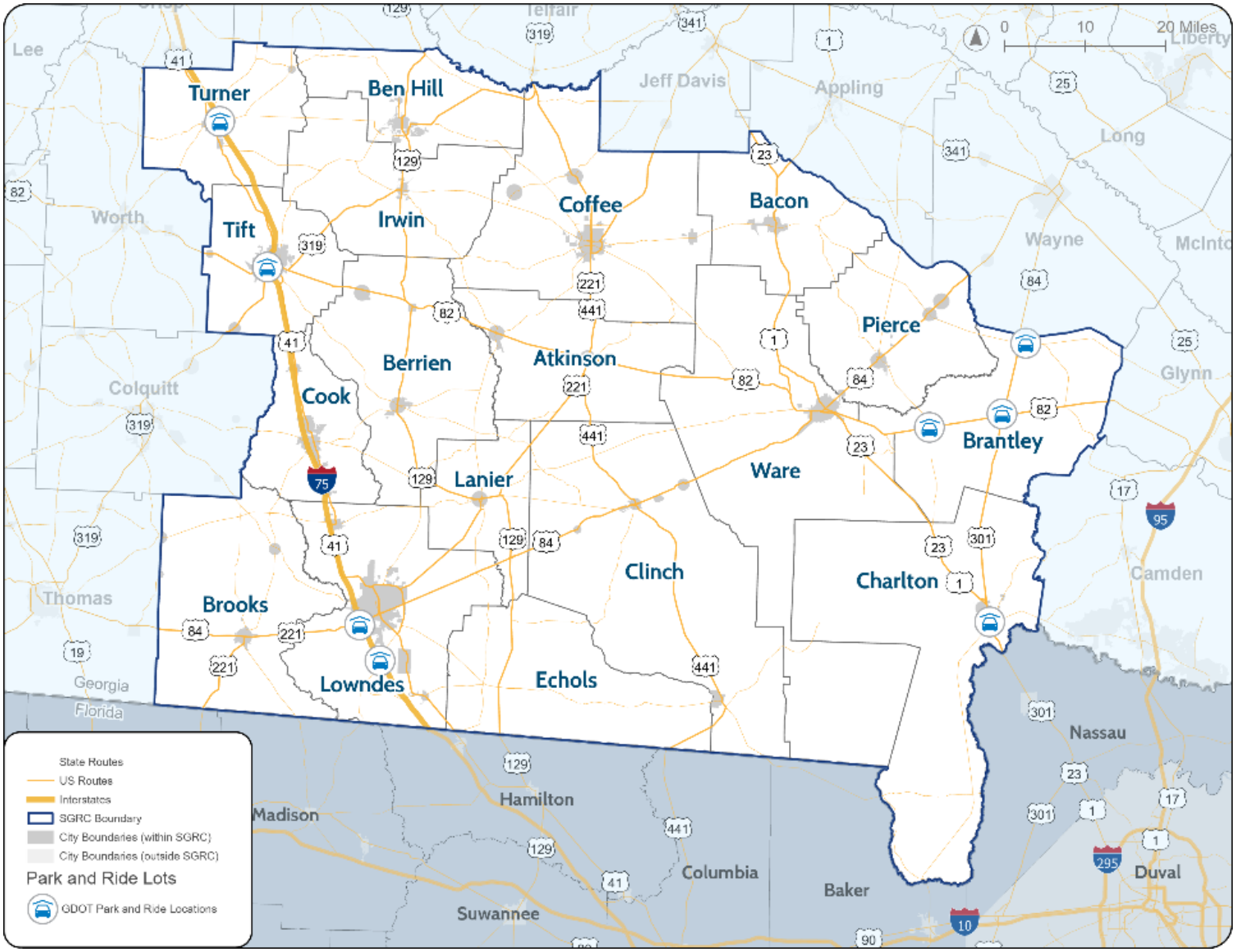
Map ID	Traffic Counter ID	Roadway Name	Roadway Functional Class	County	2023 AADT
31	065-0112	US Hwy 84	Rural Principal Arterial - Other	Clinch	6,420

Source: Georgia Department of Transportation, Traffic Analysis and Data Application (TADA), 2023

4.2 Park and Ride Lots

GDOT-owned park and ride lots are scarce throughout the 18-county region, with a total of only 8 lots. Four lots are located along Interstate 75 (one in Turner County, one in Tift County, and two in Lowndes County). Each of these lots is relatively small, with 15 spaces in Turner County, 24 spaces in Tift County, and 41 total spaces across the two lots in Lowndes County. Three lots are located in Brantley County, with a total capacity of 74 spaces. One is located in Charlton County, with 34 spaces. As shown in **Figure 20**, the central portion of the region lacks access to GDOT-owned park and ride lots.

Figure 20: GDOT-Managed Park and Ride Lots



Source: Georgia Department of Transportation

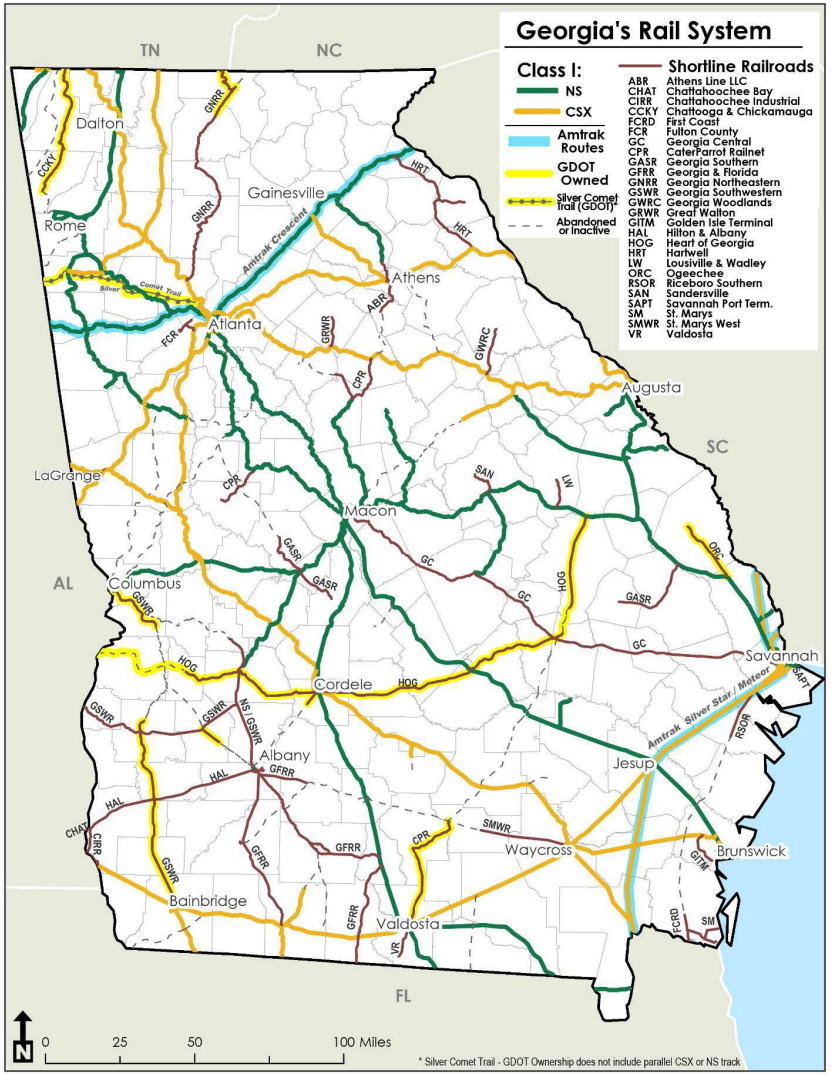
SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

4.3 Rail

Two Class 1 railroads, are found within the Southern Georgia Region, one operated by Norfolk Southern and the other operated by CSX. The Norfolk Southern line connects major population and job centers throughout the state including Valdosta, Macon, Atlanta, Rome, and Dalton. The CSX line runs east-west, connecting Bainbridge, Valdosta, Waycross, and Brunswick.Three shortline railroads also traverse through the region: Cater Parrot Railnet (CPR), Valdosta Railway (VR), and the Georgia & Florida Railroad (GFRR). These railroads are depicted in **Figure 21**.

There is currently no passenger rail service available within the Southern Georgia Region.

Figure 21: State Rail Network



Source: Georgia Department of Transportation, State Rail Plan

4.4 Active Transportation

Active transportation refers to human-powered transportation, such as walking or biking, as a means of traveling from an origin to a destination. Walking and biking infrastructure can fill critical gaps in transit infrastructure, enabling people to reach their destination safely via a dedicated space once they exit transit.

Figure 22 depicts national and state bicycle routes, as well as hiking sites designated by the region. Updated from the Georgia Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and the Georgia Official Bicycle Map, GDOT's current Georgia Bicycle Route Map establishes a statewide bike route system. The map designates three routes within Southern Georgia:

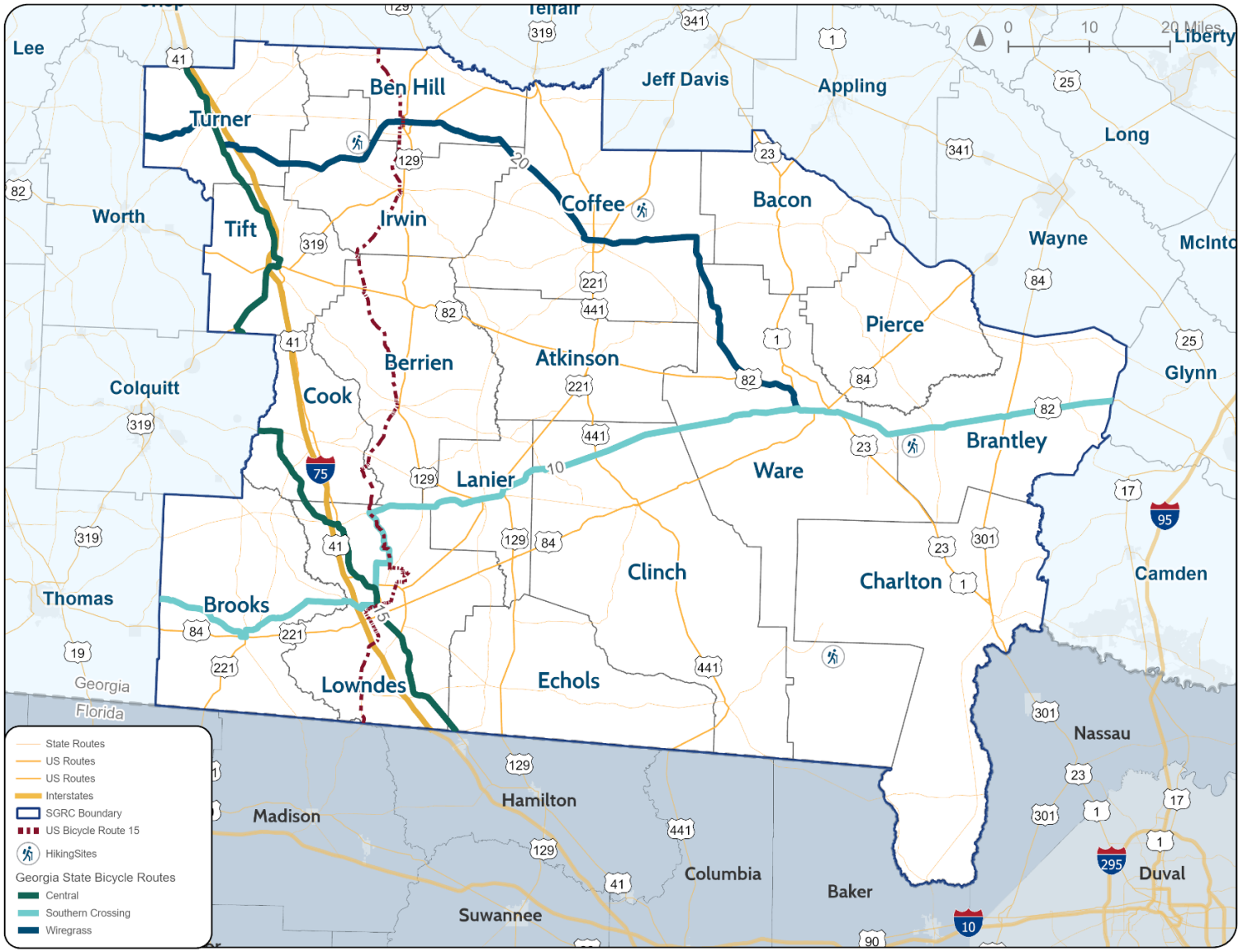
- Central, which traverses north-south throughout the state, has one terminus in Echols County and goes through Lowndes, Cook, Tift, and Turner counties within the region.
- Southern Crossing, which runs east-west across the state, goes through Brooks, Lowndes, Lanier, Clinch, Ware, and Brantley counties within the region.
- Wiregrass, which runs east-west from Early County (in the Southwest Georgia Region) to Ware County, goes through Turner, Ben Hill, Coffee, and Ware counties.

U.S. Bicycle Route 15 is part of the national cycling network. Much of the Georgia and Florida portions of this route are complete.

The Southern Georgia Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan (2015) and the Valdosta-Lowndes Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (2007) are the most recent bike and pedestrian plans completed with the region. The SGRC plan has a vision of "developing safe and healthy transportation alternatives and a connected transportation network that promotes community pride and enhances local marketability." The Southern Georgia Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan provides guidance for local governments to adopt policies and design principles that support active transportation, such as complete streets. The Valdosta-Lowndes Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan focuses on creating safe interconnectivity among key destinations, such as schools, parks, businesses, and other community destinations.

Additionally, Berrien, Cook, and Lanier counties are collaborating to develop a bicycle route network along the Highway 37 Georgia Grown Trail. This initiative is an agritourism project.

Figure 22: U.S. and State Bicycle Routes and Designated Hiking Sites



Source: Georgia Department of Transportation

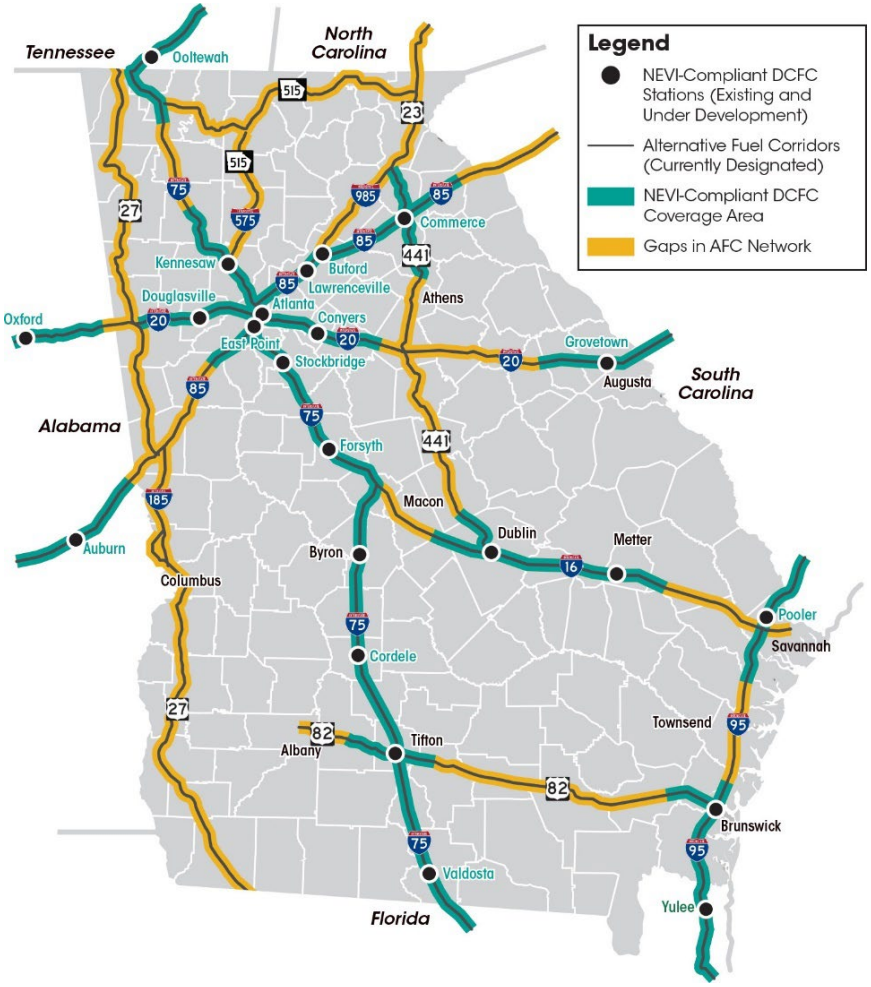
SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

4.5 Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure

GDOT and the Federal Highway Administration are working to build out a network of alternative fueling and charging infrastructure along the national highway system. The Georgia National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Deployment Program map, displayed in **Figure 23**, show Interstate 75 and U.S. Route 82 as designated alternative fuel corridors. The full stretch of Interstate 75 within the region as well as a portion of U.S. Route 82 are within the NEVI-Compliant DC Fast Charging Coverage Area. The GDOT fact sheet for this program states that the gaps in the altnerative fuel corridors network are required to be addressed. Public-private partnerships will help the full network come to fruition.

Chapter 6 provides more details about local implementation of EV infrastructure.

Figure 23: Georgia National Electric Vehicle Deployment Program Map



Source: Georgia Department of Transportation

5.0 Travel Trends

This chapter includes information on travel patterns within the Southern Georgia Region and the surrounding counties, including portions of northeast Florida. Understanding travel patterns helps indentify intra- and cross-county traffic flows as well as transit demand in the region.

5.1 Background

The Regional Integrated Transportation System (RITIS) platform and the INRIX Analytics suite provide information on travel patterns based on millions of data points collected daily. For this report, the data trends reported in the following sections are based on RITIS INRIX origin-destination trip data between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2023.

5.2 Geographic Areas for Travel Trends Analysis

The analysis of travel trends in the Southern Georgia Region includes all counties within the SGRC boundaries and all counties that share a border with the region, including the following:

- Two counties in Central Savannah River Region: Camden and Glynn
- Five counties in Heart of Georgia Altamaha Region: Appling, Jeff Davis, Telfair, Wayne, and Wilcox
- One county in River Valley Region: Crisp
- Three counties in Southwest Georgia Region: Colquitt, Thomas, and Worth
- Six counties in Florida: Baker, Columbia, Hamilton, Jefferson, Madison, and Nassau

5.3 Travel Patterns within the Region

The major travel pattern in the Southern Georgia Region is intra-county travel, with 78 percent of the trips reporting origins and destinations within the same county in 2023. As shown in **Table 19**, Lowndes and Coffee counties have the greatest number of trips (for all trip types). Counties with the highest percentage of intra-county trips are Coffee, Lowndes, Charlton, and Bacon, while Atkinson, Cook, Echols, Irwin, and Lanier counties have the highest percentage of inter-county trips. Higher rates of inter-county travel may mean that the populations cannot access all the services that they need within their residential counties.

Table 19: Total Trips and Intra-County vs. Inter-County Percentages

County	Total Trips	Intra-County Trip Percentage	Inter-County Trip Percentage
Atkinson County	207,548	57.5%	42.5%
Bacon County	342,976	83.5%	16.6%
Ben Hill County	441,439	81.1%	18.9%
Berrien County	450,311	68.9%	31.1%
Brantley County	274,557	75.1%	24.9%
Brooks County	334,025	69.9%	30.1%
Charlton County	215,358	87.5%	12.5%
Clinch County	269,800	77.9%	22.1%
Coffee County	1,559,311	90.3%	9.7%
Cook County	546,625	64.6%	35.4%
Echols County	84,019	56.2%	43.8%
Irwin County	265,860	60.7%	39.3%
Lanier County	198,051	59.5%	40.6%
Lowndes County	4,075,649	89.9%	10.1%
Pierce County	527,113	74.4%	25.6%
Tift County	1,939,722	85.9%	14.1%
Turner County	348,257	71.4%	28.6%
Ware County	1,181,745	80.7%	19.3%

Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System, Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected January 1 to December 31, 2023.

Inter-county travel, travel that starts in one county and ends in different county, also contributes to a significant number of trips in the Southern Georgia Region. Of these trips, travel to and from Lowndes County constituted the highest number of inter-county trips. The following county pairs reported the highest number of trips:

- Pierce and Ware County
- Cook and Lowndes County
- Brooks and Lowndes County

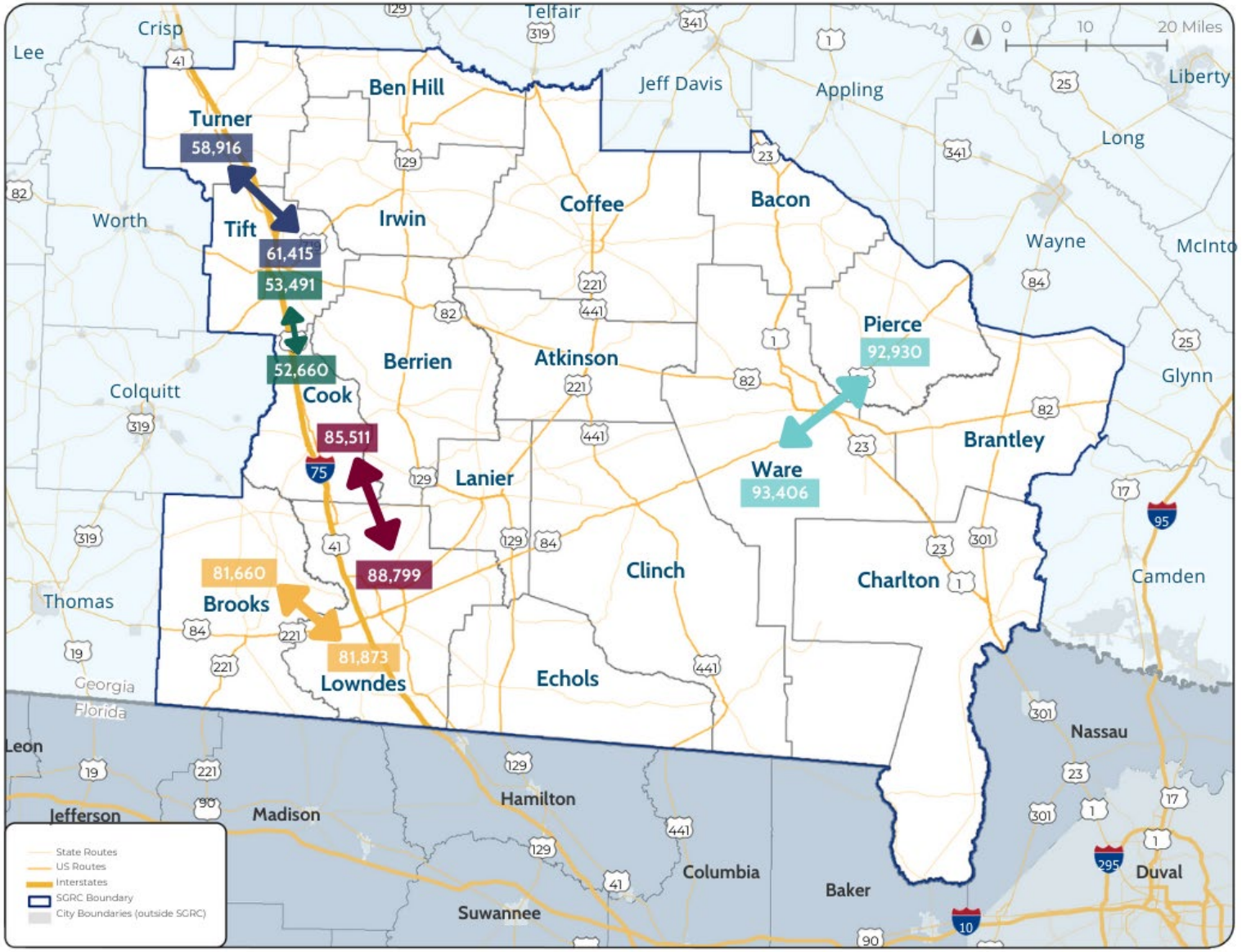
Table 20 provides the top origin-destination pairs and total number of trips between January 1 to December 31, 2023. **Figure 24** illustrates the major inter-county travel patterns, and

Table 20: Inter-County Trips in the Region, 2024

Origin	Destination	Total Trips
Pierce County	Ware County	93,406
Ware County	Pierce County	92,930
Cook County	Lowndes County	88,799
Lowndes County	Cook County	85,511
Brooks County	Lowndes County	81,873
Lowndes County	Brooks County	81,660
Turner County	Tift County	61,415
Tift County	Turner County	58,916
Cook County	Tift County	53,491
Tift County	Cook County	52,660

Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System, Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected January 1 to December 31, 2023.

Figure 24: Inter-County Travel Patterns



Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System, Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected January 1 to December 31, 2023.

5.4 Travel Patterns: Region and Surrounding Areas

Inter-region and inter-state travel are important to analyze as key components of the Southern Georgia Region's overall travel trends. **Table 21** and **Table 22** detail the total trips between locations within and outside of the region during the study period. The majority of daily trips are recorded in both directions between Lowndes County and Hamilton County, a Florida County along the state line. A large number of daily trips are also generated between Tift County and counties outside to the west of the region, including Colquitt and Worth counties. **Figure 25** depicts these inter-regional travel patterns.

Table 21: Origin-Destination Pairs where Destination is Outside of Region, 2024

Origin	Destination	Total Trips
Lowndes County	Hamilton County	61,104
Tift County	Colquitt County	42,159
Tift County	Worth County	41,392
Brantley County	Glynn County	40,032
Turner County	Crisp County	39,456
Charlton County	Nassau County	33,500
Cook County	Colquitt County	29,593
Brooks County	Thomas County	28,595
Lowndes County	Madison County	26,442
Pierce County	Wayne County	26,132

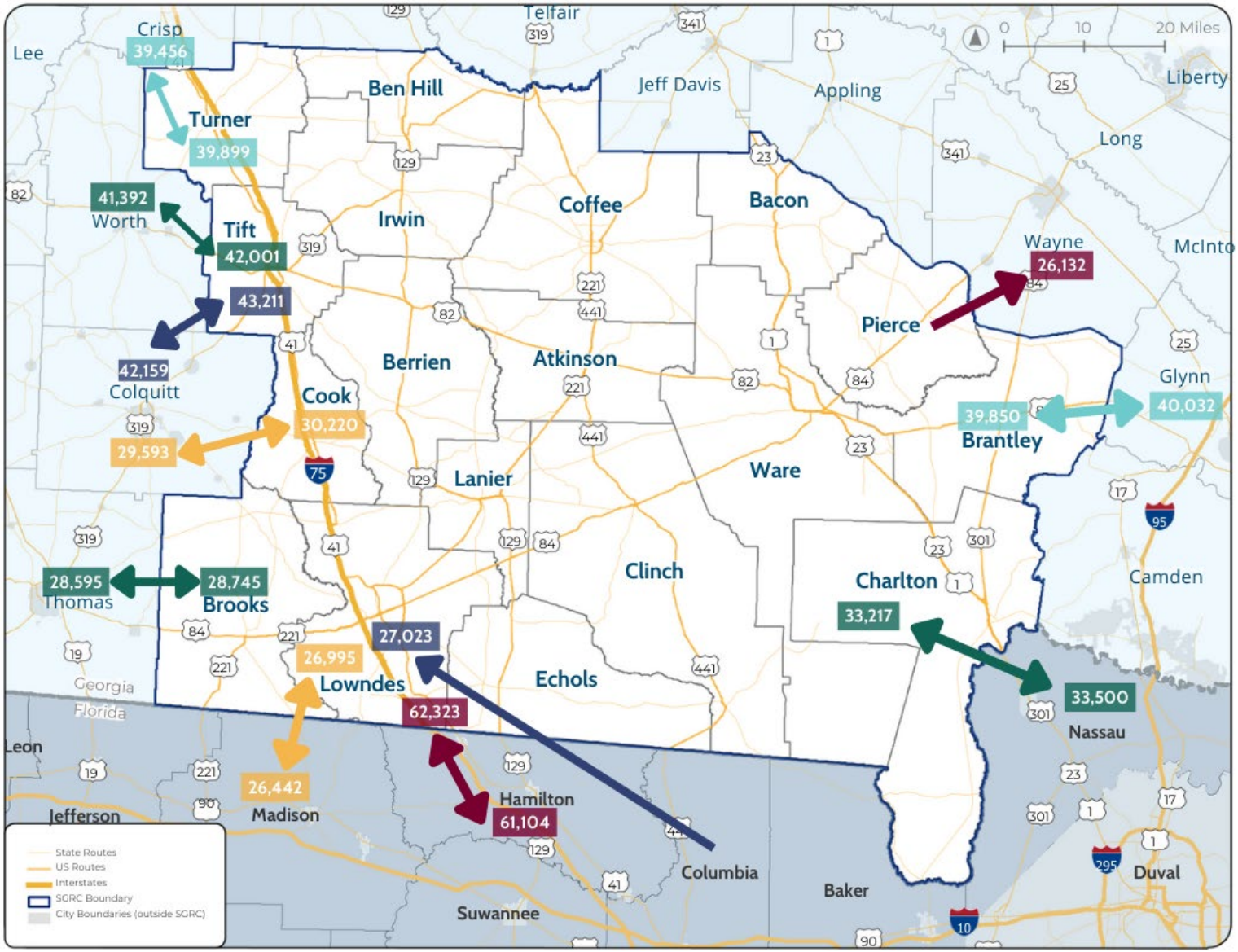
Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System, Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected January 1 to December 31, 2023.

Table 22: Origin-Destination Pairs where Origin is Outside of Region, 2024

Origin	Destination	Total Trips
Hamilton County	Lowndes County	62,323
Colquitt County	Tift County	43,211
Worth County	Tift County	42,001
Crisp County	Turner County	39,899
Glynn County	Brantley County	39,850
Nassau County	Charlton County	33,217
Colquitt County	Cook County	30,220
Thomas County	Brooks County	28,745
Columbia County	Lowndes County	27,023
Madison County	Lowndes County	26,995

Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System, Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected January 1 to December 31, 2023.

Figure 25: Inter-Regional Travel Patterns



Source: Regional Integrated Transportation Information System, Trip Analytics. INRIX sample trip totals collected January 1 to December 31, 2023.

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

6.0 Plan Review

This chapter provides a review of transit and transportation plans that are pertinent to the Southern Georgia Region. This review helps establish a baseline understanding of the issues, opportunities, and recommendations that have previously been recommended for the region and its individual municipalities.

6.1 Statewide Plans

6.1.1 GDOT Georgia Statewide Transit Plan

The Georgia SWTRP was last updated in 2020. The SWTRP identifies transit needs and opportunities; reviews local, county, and regional plans; and recommends policy and priority projects for implementation across the state. The plan describes the different types of transit service provided in the state, including:

- Demand response
- Fixed route
- Vanpool
- Flex route
- Microtransit
- Express bus
- Intercity transit
- Heavy rail
- Streetcar
- Ferry

Demand response transit refers to small bus operations that require advance reservation and provide curb-to-curb service. Demand-response service does not operate on a fixed route or schedule, instead picking up and dropping off passengers at desired locations. In rural areas of Georgia, transit service is focused on the demand-response model. The SWTRP notes that there are 80 transit systems across the state which provide demand-response service. Five of these 80 cover multiple counties (26 counties total). The demand-response systems provided 1.8 million trips to Georgians in 2017.

Fixed route transit typically refers to bus operations that follow a determined route with known stops and a set schedule. Fixed-route service is a good option for an urbanized area with multiple destinations, such as a downtown shopping area or route with businesses.

The SWTRP reported that there were 125,799 rural transit trips in the Southern Georgia Region in 2017. This constitutes about 7 percent of all rural transit trips in the state. Other trends reported in the SWTRP are highlighted below.

- **The rising populations of low-income, senior, disabled, and zero-car households.**
  - All counties within Southern Georgia exceed the state average for low-income populations.
  - 14 of the 18 counties in Southern Georgia exceed the state average for senior(60+) populations.
  - 16 of the 18 counties in Southern Georgia exceed the state average for disabled populations.
  - 13 of the 18 counties in Southern Georgia exceed the state average for zero-car households.

- **Advances in transportation-related technology.** Ridesharing programs are becoming more accepted as a viable means of travel, both supplementing and competing with transit. Digital platforms that aid trip scheduling have the potential to meaningfully impact ride scheduling and reliability. Connected and autonomous vehicles need to be part of the transit conversation.
- **Rural areas that are growing in population may be absorbed into urban areas.** This changes the federal funding calculation.

6.1.2 GDOT Rural and Human Services Transportation Plan

The Georgia 2050 Regional and Human Services Transportation Plan was completed in 2023 as a joint effort of GDOT, the Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Georgia Department of Community Health (DCH). This plan provides a framework for coordination among Georgia's agencies interested in delivering rural mobility services. The focus areas of the plan are the state's three systems for rural mobility services:

- Rural public transit, administered by GDOT,
- Human services transportation, administered by DHS, and
- Non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT), administered by DCH.

6.2 Local Transit Plans

6.2.1 Southern Georgia Regional Commission Transit Development Plan, 2019

The 2019 Southern Georgia Regional TDP included various analyses to support the implementation of a regional rural transit service across the Southern Georgia Region. By pooling resources and maximizing the use of purchase of service revenue, the planning analysis concluded that a regional transit service would be able to provide a more cost-effective service than individual county-led rural transit programs. Historically, some smaller counties in Southern Georgia had been unable to support a rural public transit program based on local cash match requirements.

This plan provided implementation guidance for the local governments to participate in a regional cost-sharing strategy that would meet FTA requirements. Most of the Southern Georgia Region is defined as a rural area by FTA definitions, except for the Valdosta Urbanized Area. Because the FTA's Section 5311 program does not allow for urban-to-urban trips (trips that originate and end within the Urbanized Area), the cost scenarios for the regional system would include a cash match from Lowndes County to cover those urban-to-urban trips with local dollars.

An excerpt from the 2019 TDP is included on the next page to illustrate the proposed regional system's cost breakdown compared to other regional systems. The cost share assumptions of this model are included. Following the 2019 TDP, SGRC established its regional transit system and set up its cost share model based on the TDP's assumptions. As anticipated in the TDP, a surplus of purchase-of-service revenue has benefited the participating counties, as the excess purchase of service amount has sufficiently covered the SGRC's bottom line. See Section 9.2 for more information.

Cost Share Assumptions from SGRC Transit Development Plan, 2019

	SGRC	Coastal	SWGRC
Total Expenses	**$ 4,637,811.53**	**$ 4,079,484.00**	**$ 5,426,848.00**
Less Farebox (4%)	$ 185,544.46	$ 275,638.00	$ 203,859.00
Lowndes Urban Trips (cash)	$ 35,000.00		
Less Non-Eligible Fed Funds (ex: 5310)	$ 550,000.00	$ 250,000.00	$ 260,796.00
Net Operating Deficit	**$ 3,867,267.07**	**$ 3,828,484.00**	**$ 4,962,193.00**
Federal 50%	$ 1,933,633.54	$ 1,914,242.00	$ 2,481,096.50
Local Match Required 50%	$ 1,933,633.54	$ 1,914,242.00	$ 2,481,096.50
Local Match Available	$ 2,150,454.00	$ 2,608,365.00	$ 2,957,139.46
Excess POS	$ 216,820.46	$ 694,123.00	$ 476,042.96

- **Farebox Revenue** for the SGRC is estimated at 4% of the total expenses based on actual recovery rates within the SGRC area. CRC collects close to 7% of its revenue from fareboxes, while SWGRC collects just under 4%.
- The **Lowndes Urban Trips** are those trips which begin and end within the Valdosta Urbanized Area. GDOT and FTA will not allow the costs of these trips to be reimbursed as part of the 5311 program, therefore Lowndes County is required to pay a cash match to cover these trip costs. It is proposed that Lowndes County would continue to pay this actual cash match annually as long as these trips are provided.
- The $550,000 listed under the **SGRC Non-Eligible Federal Funds** are the FTA 5310 funds that the SGRC receives as a part of the DHS Coordinated Transportation program contract, and are not eligible to be reimbursed as part of the 5311 program. FTA funds from different sources cannot be used to match other FTA funds.
- Federal funding may be provided for up to 50 percent of the **Net Operating Deficit**; the remaining 50 percent (or more) must be provided from locally-derived funds.
- Based on the estimated available **Purchase of Service** amounts across the region from DHS, Medicaid, and Private contracts, the Local Match Available exceeds the 50% Local Match Required, meaning it is not anticipated that any county will need to pay a local match (with the exception of Lowndes for the Valdosta Urbanized Area trips). The Excess purchase of service amount of $216,820 may be used for Future Year Capital Match or to reduce the federal drawdown amount for operating expenses.
- If there is a shortfall in the amount of **Local Match Available**, or purchase of service revenue, the shortfall is proposed to be made up by each County based on the percentage of trips originating in each County. For example, if only 4% of the trips under the regional transit system begin in Brooks County, then Brooks County would only be required to contribute 4% of the shortfall amount. Therefore, if there is a $100,000 shortfall in Local Match Available, based on the 4% of the Total Trips provided originating in Brooks County, Brooks County would contribute $4,000 to the SGRC to cover the Local Match Required.

6.2.2 Individual County TDPs for Clinch County, Echols County, and Lanier County

In 2022, SGRC developed TDPs on behalf of the three counties in the region without public transit: Clinch, Echols, and Lanier. Each plan covers socioeconomic statistics, transit demand calculations, and other relevant data. Non-program demand was estimated at 7,900 annual trips for Clinch County, 1,900 annual trips for Echols County, and 8,200 annual trips for Lanier County. These plans conclude with information about transit funding and the benefits of joining the SGRC regional transit system. Each of these TDPs recommend that the subject county joins the regional transit system rather than starting a single-county rural transit service, as the regional option is more financially feasible.

6.2.3 Valdosta Urbanized Area Transit Implementation Report, 2017

In 2016, the City of Valdosta, in partnership with the Georgia DHS, piloted a shuttle program to serve workforce needs. The program was jointly funded with funds allocated through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Jobs Access and Reverse Commute program (which no longer exists) and federal funding administered by DHS. The cost-benefit analysis of the pilot revealed that the service yielded net positive results (greater benefits than cost). However, due to the lack of sustainable funding sources, the shuttle program did not continue.

This implementation report helped to lay the groundwork for the City of Valdosta's future transit service by evaluating how the City could tap into FTA Section 5307 Urban Area funds and bring in additional revenue through Purchase of Service contracts. The report also provided guidance about how transit systems can work with third-party transit operators to run the service efficiently.

6.2.4 Valdosta-Lowndes MPO Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission completed a document called the *Valdosta-Lowndes MPO Transit-Oriented Development Guidelines* in June 2024. The goals of this initiative included:

1. Assessing the potential for future transit-oriented development (TOD).
2. Assisting local engineers and planners on developing TOD in the Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization (VLMPO) area.
3. Identifying the potential need/opportunity for micro-mobility.
4. Promoting policies that increase access to public transit.
5. Promoting rural and small urban TOD policies to facilitate securing federal funding to address mobility and access needs, and to administer those resources effectively.
6. Supporting more efficient microtransit service through increased shared trips to hubs with multiple destinations.
7. Promoting the evolution of the current microtransit service into a more cost-effective service through flex-routes or point deviation, with fixed time points at mobility hubs surrounded by thriving, walkable, areas.

The existing conditions portion of this document provides geographic heat map depictions of the origins and destinations of both SGRC Transit and Valdosta On-Demand in 2023. These maps are shown in **Figure 26** and **Figure 27**.

The following key takeaways can be drawn from these heat maps:

- SGRC Transit's trips into Valdosta are primarily to the northern area of the city (where South Georgia Medical Center and

Valdosta State University are located), the central downtown area, and the commercial area on the western border.

- Moody Airforce Base (located in northeast Lowndes County), Hahira (a city in northwest Lowndes County), and Lake Park (a city in southwest Lowndes County) are significant destinations for SGRC Transit.
- Valdosta On-Demand mainly serves trips within the city limits, though some destinations appear to follow major corridors just outside of the city to the northwest, northeast, and southeast.
- Valdosta On-Demand's service has more destination hotspots north of US Route 84 than in the southern portion of the city.

Figure 26: 2023 SGRC Transit Origin and Destination Locations

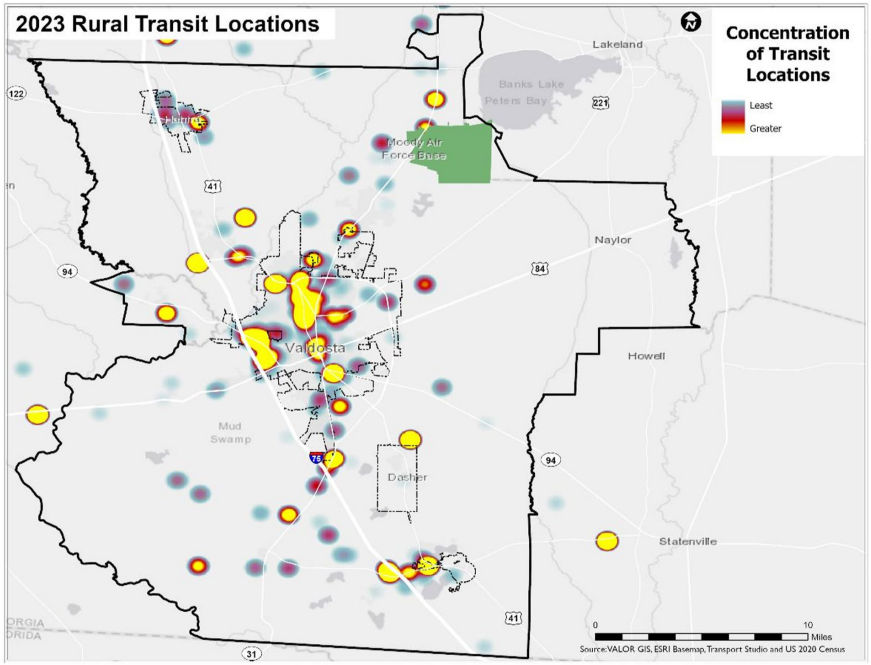
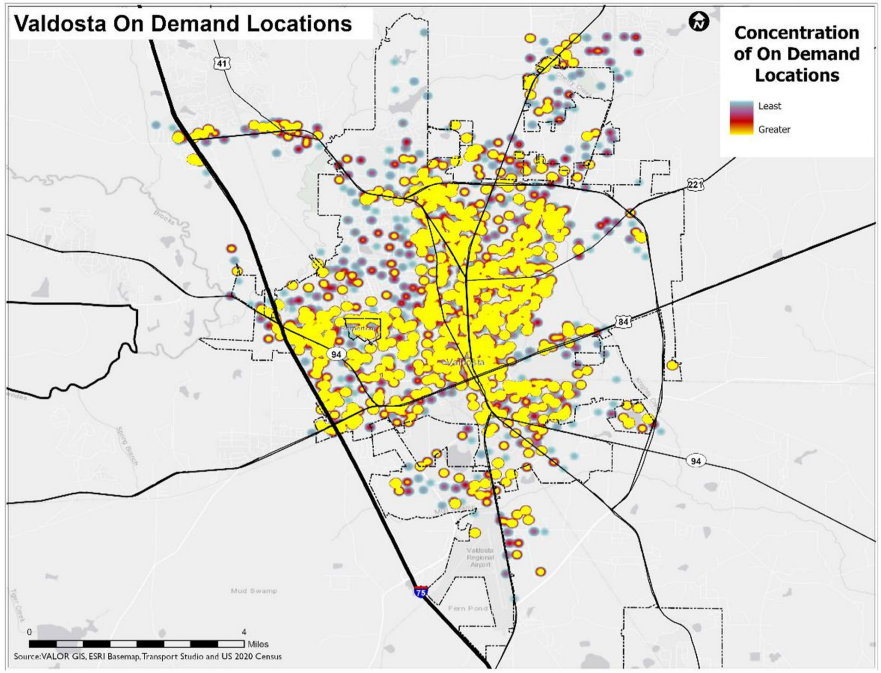


Figure 27: 2023 Valdosta On-Demand Origin and Destination Locations



SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

6.3 Related Transportation Plans

6.3.1 Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), Vision 2045

VLMPO updates its MTP every five years; the last update, Vision 2045, was adopted in 2020. This comprehensive regional transportation plan evaluates transportation needs and opportunities related to:

- Roadway and bridge conditions
- Freight
- Public transportation
- Bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Aviation

Vision 2045 includes a brief evaluation of the rural transit service that was in place in the region in 2020. It includes a set of performance measures for the SGRC transit assets to remain in a state of good repair.

Vision 2045 also laid the foundation for the implementation of the urban transit service in Valdosta. The financial plan portion of the document provides details about how VLMPO plans to fund projects included in the MTP list, including the preliminary capital and operating expenses anticipated for a new urban transit program. Both federal and local funding sources, such as local tax dollars generated through the Transportation Investment Act, are essential for the MTP's implementation.

As of fall 2024, VLMPO was in the process of developing its 2050 MTP. As this process is occurring concurrently with the Regional TDP, it will be important to align the efforts.

6.3.2 Valdosta-Lowndes MPO Electrical Vehicle Infrastructure Readiness Strategy for Small Cities and Rural Areas in Southern Georgia

VLMPO and SGRC jointly developed its Electrical Vehicle Infrastructure Readiness Strategy in 2022, during the same period that the state of Georgia was developing its EV Charging Infrastructure Plan. The outcome of this study was a suitability map showing locations throughout the region where Level 2 and Level 3 EV charging deployment are appropriate. The plan also summarizes best practices for local governments working to establish EV charging infrastructure in their communities, such as model ordinances and design guidelines. In addition, this plan provides a reference to *Vision 2045*, which discussed how EVs can provide efficiencies for public transit systems.

7.0 Existing Transit Services

Transit services in the Southern Georgia Region include two public transit services: SGRC Transit and Valdosta On-Demand. This chapter shares more information about each of these services and also summarizes state-administered transit programs that are not offered to the general public but are available for specific populations for eligible trip types. The chapter concludes with a comparative analysis of transit performance measures for the region's transit agencies and identified peer systems. This comparative analysis will help inform performance improvement areas that will be further explored in the Alternatives Analysis and Recommendations Report.

7.1 Local Services

7.1.1 SGRC Transit

SGRC Transit is the regional transit system administered by SGRC with transit service currently provided through a third-party operator, RMS Inc. The regional transit service began in 2021. Participating counties include Atkinson, Bacon, Ben Hill, Berrien, Brantley, Brooks, Charlton, Coffee, Cook, Irwin, Lowndes, Pierce, Tift, Turner, and Ware. Clinch, Echols, and Lanier counties do not take part in the regional system.

Demand-response service is provided on weekdays from 7:30 AM to 5:30 PM and must be booked 24 hours in advance. Riders may book by telephone or on mobile devices using GDOT's Let's Ride app. Fares are $3.00 for trips up to 10 miles; for trips longer than 10 miles, $0.50 per additional mile is added to the base fare.

Figure 28 provides a summary of the rural transit program operating and funding characteristics.

7.1.2 Valdosta On-Demand

Since 2021, the City of Valdosta has administered an urban microtransit system called Valdosta On-Demand. Microtransit is a technology-enabled service that allows for close to immediate dispatching of transit vehicles once rides are booked. Transit service is currently provided through a third-party operator, Via. Riders may book by using the Via mobile application or by telephone. Service is offered throughout the Valdosta's city limits at a price of $2 per trip and an additional $1 for each extra passenger. The United Way of Greater Valdosta has partnered with the City to offer vouchers to social service agency clients who utilize Valdosta On-Demand. The Valdosta On-Demand service operates between 5:30 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

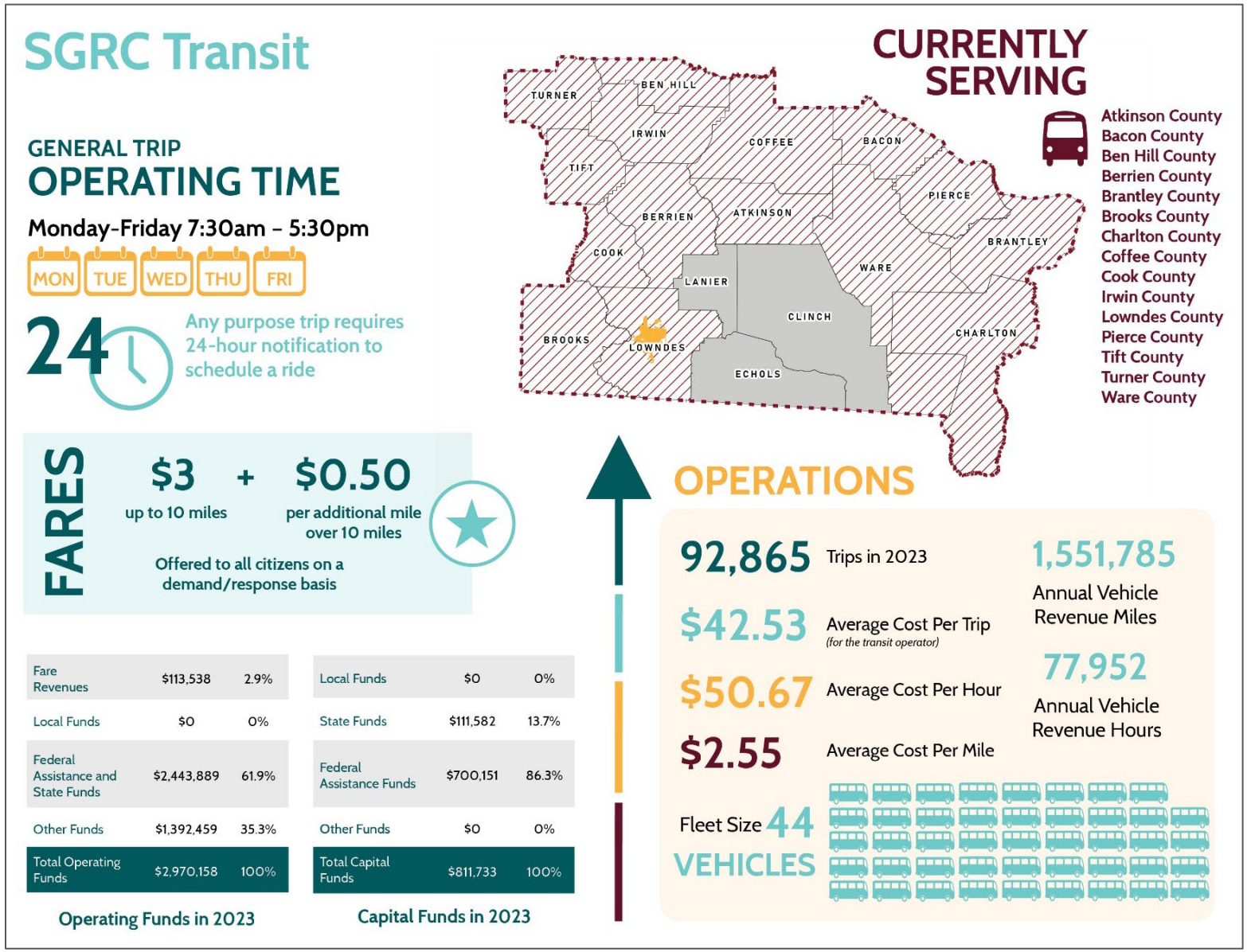
Figure 29 provides a summary of the urban transit program operating and funding characteristics.

7.1.3 Non-Public Transit Services

As of late 2024, the following non-public transit services were operating or in the process of being established in Southern Georgia:

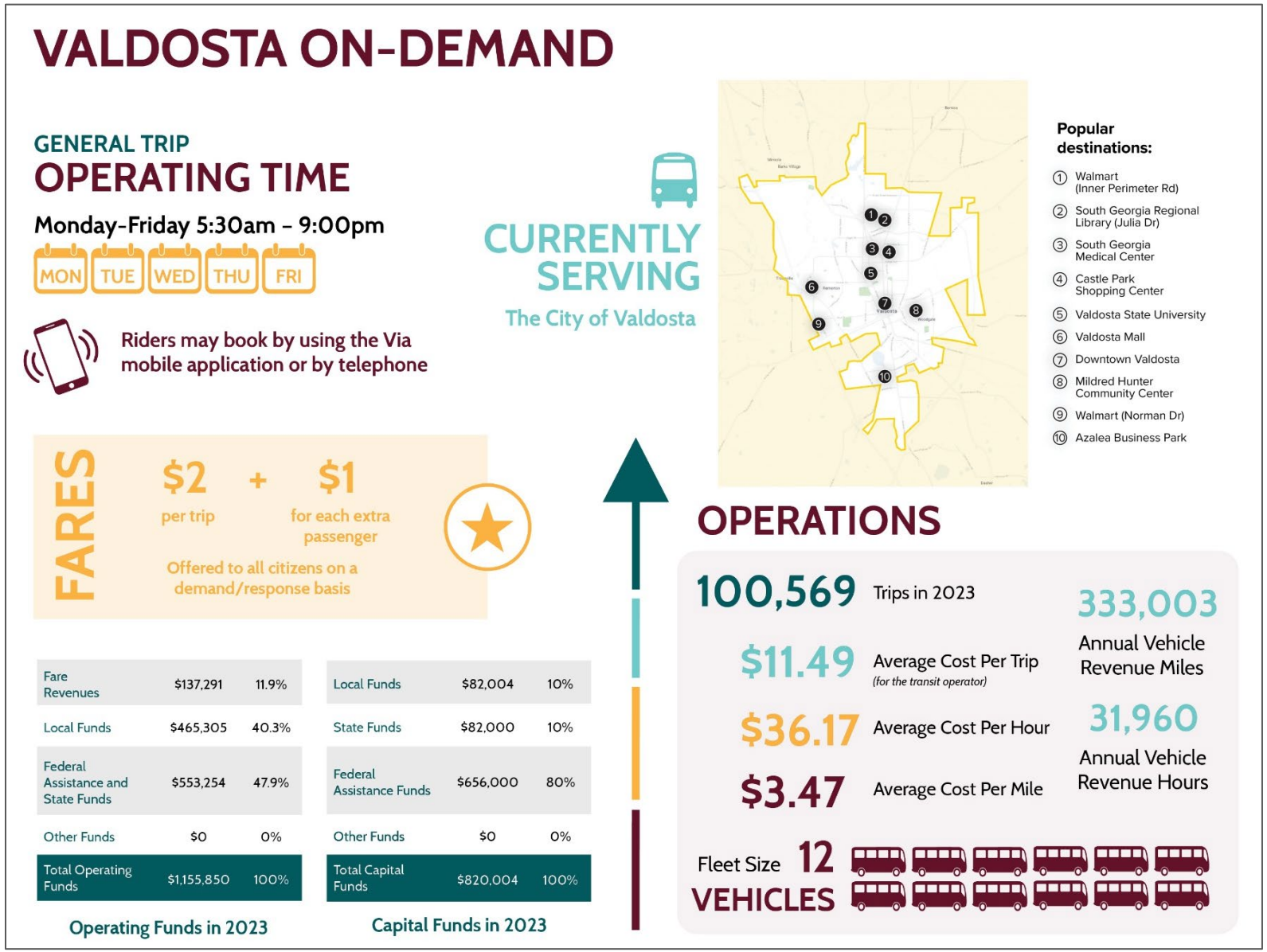
- Valdosta State University (VSU) campus shuttle service;
- Azalea Sprinter passenger excursions along the historic Georgia-Florida railroad (between Moody Air Force Base and Willacoochee);
- Greyhound, an intercity bus service with one bus stop in Valdosta; and
- A transportation service operated by Action Pact, a community action agency, with other partners in Ware County.

Figure 28: SGRC Transit Operations Profile



Sources: National Transit Database 2023 Transit Agency Profile, Southern Georgia Regional Commission

Figure 29: Valdosta On-Demand Transit Operations Profile



Sources: National Transit Database 2023 Transit Agency Profile, City of Valdosta

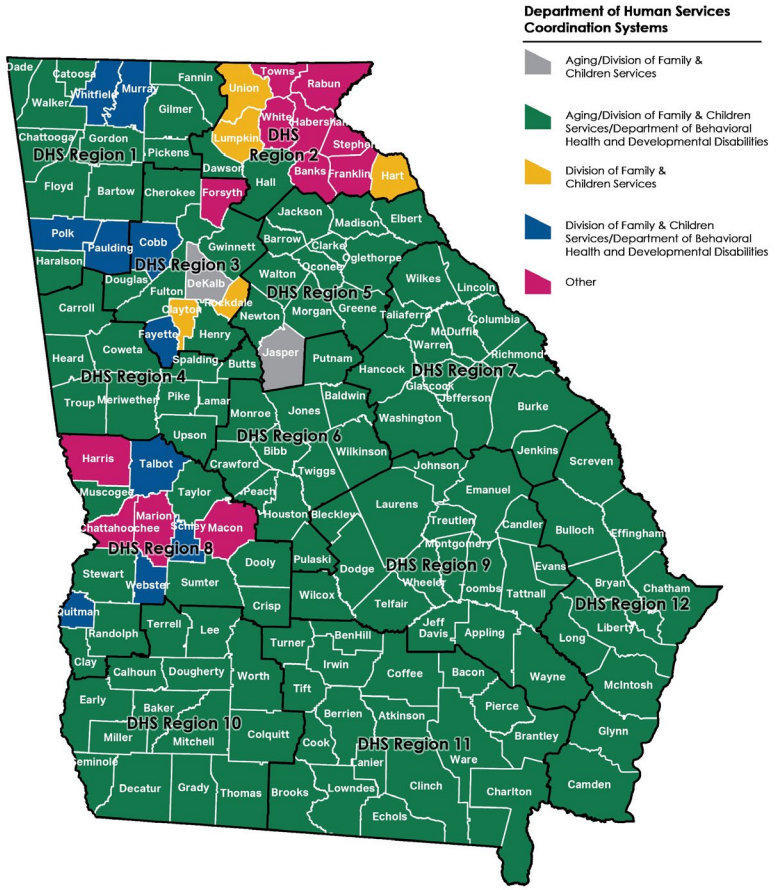
7.2 State-Administered Services

7.2.1 Georgia Department of Human Services Transportation Services

Georgia DHS administers transit service to disadvantaged populations across the state. These populations include seniors, low-income families, individuals with disabilities, and individuals who need vocational training. Coordination takes place within DHS Regions, which match the boundaries of the Regional Commissions throughout the state. As shown in **Figure 30**, the Southern Georgia Region is in DHS Region 11.

In addition to its public transit service, SGRC Transit (operated by RMS Inc.) provides transit service to clients of DHS-affiliated human service provider agencies, such as senior centers, developmental disability day centers, medical appointments, vocational rehabilitation centers, etc., free of charge. SGRC Transit's trip planner tool on its website helps customers to identify the appropriate program. Human Service Providers assist qualified DHS clients with booking trips through SGRC Transit's Coordinated Transportation service.

Figure 30: Georgia DHS Regional Service Map



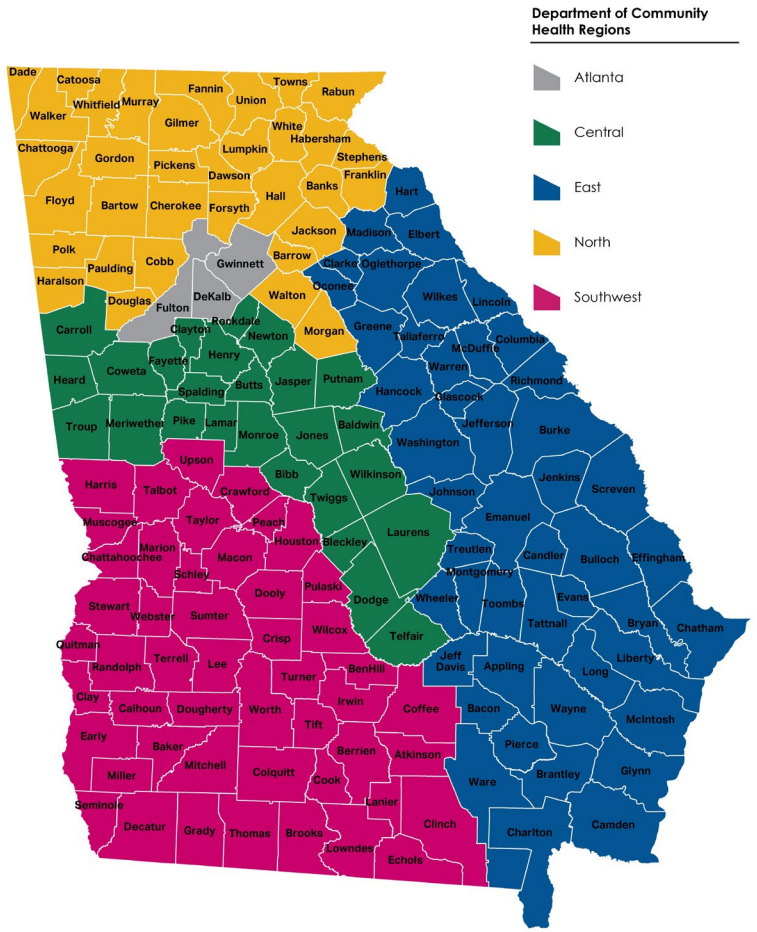
Source: GDOT Statewide Transit Plan

7.2.2 Georgia Department of Community Health Transportation Services

Georgia DCH contracts with brokers to administer and provide NEMT service; this rideshare transit service is reserved for medically necessary trips by individuals eligible for Medicaid. These trips are typically healthcare-related appointments such as doctor visits or prescription pick-ups. SGRC Transit's trip planner tool on its website helps customers to identify the appropriate program.

DCH divides the state into five NEMT regions. **Figure 31** shows that the Southern Georgia Region is split between the DCH southwest region (portrayed in pink) and the east region (portrayed in blue). As of winter 2024, Modivcare is the active NEMT broker for both of these regions.

Figure 31: Georgia DCH Regional Service Map



Source: GDOT Statewide Transit Plan

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

7.3 Peer Transit Services

Several transit agencies were identified for peer comparison purposes. These agencies have similarities to the various systems located within the Southern Georgia Region and can provide useful performance measure comparisons and potential best practices.

The National Transit Database (NTD) provides standardized performance data for all federally funded transit agencies in the United States. This section compares 2023 NTD data, the most recent NTD data set available at the time of this report.

7.3.1 Peers for SGRC Transit

7.3.1.1 Southwest Georgia Regional Commission

Southwest Georgia Regional Transit is the regional transit system offered by the Southwest Georgia Regional Commission. All but one of the counties in the region participates in the regional system; Thomas County Transit opted out of the regional system and operates its own rural transit service.

Demand-response service is provided on weekdays from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Customers must book no later than 2:00 p.m. the day before service is needed. Riders may book by telephone or on mobile devices using GDOT's Let's Ride app. Fares are $3.00 for in-county trips of less than 10 miles. Trips over 10 miles are $5.00 and cross-county trips are $5.00 plus $0.50 per mile over 10 miles. Seniors (individuals 65 or older) and frequent riders can receive a 50 percent discount.

7.3.1.2 Coastal Regional Coaches

Coastal Regional Coaches (CRC) is the branded regional transit system operated directly by Georgia's Coastal Regional Commission. All ten of the region's counties participate, including Bryan, Bulloch, Camden, Chatham, Effingham, Glynn, Liberty, Long, McIntosh, and Screven. Three urban transit services also operate in the Coastal region (administered by Chatham Area Transit, Liberty Transit, and Statesboro Area Transit).

Demand-response service is provided from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM and must be booked 24 hours in advance. Riders may book by telephone, online using QRyde, or on mobile devices using GDOT's Let's Ride app. Fares are $3.00 one way, plus $3.00 for each county line crossed during multi-county trips.

7.3.1.3 Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority

The Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority (LCRTA) provides demand-response transit service across five of the sixteen counties in the River Valley Region, including Cusseta-Chattahoochee, Harris, Georgetown-Quitman, Randolph, and Stewart counties. LCRTA contracts with RMS to provide transit service on weekdays between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. The standard fare is $3.00 for trips of less than 10 miles within the five-county region; longer trips within the five-county region are $5.00, while trips outside the region are $5.00 for the first 10 miles and $0.50 for each additional mile. Seniors (individuals 60 and up) and those enrolled in the frequent rider program can receive a 50 percent discount.

7.3.1.4 Northeast Mississippi Community Services Agency (Northeast MS)

Also known as the "Ride the Smile" transit service, the Northeast Mississippi Community Services Agency provides demand-response transit service across 14 counties in Northeast Mississippi. Transit services are provided on weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Riders must call to make a reservation. The fare varies based on mileage of the trip and other nuances that are specific to where the trip originates and ends.

7.3.2 Peers for Valdosta On-Demand Transit

7.3.2.1 Hall Area Transit

In 2021, Hall County launched WeGo, a microtransit system developed in partnership with Via, a mobility and software technology company. Hall Area Transit provides demand-response transit across the county. Trips are provided using branded vans; passengers needing a wheelchair-accessible vehicle can request one.

Transit services are provided on weekdays from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Riders may book by phone or using the WeGo app. During the day, a one-way trip of five miles or less costs $2.00, while longer trips cost $0.50 per additional mile. After 6:30 p.m., the base fare for trips under five miles increases to $4.00, while the additional per-mile surcharge remains the same.

7.3.2.2 RIDE (Wilson, NC)

RIDE, a microtransit service operating in Wilson, North Carolina, launched in partnership with Via in 2020. It replaced the fixed-route transit service in Wilson. RIDE operates Monday through Friday from 5:30 a.m. until 7:00 p.m., and on Saturdays from 7:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. Service is offered throughout the city limits at a price of $2.50 per trip and an additional $1 for each extra passenger.

7.4 Performance Measures

Along with U.S. Census data, NTD datasets can be used to analyze performance measures that track how efficiently or effectively transit systems operate. Though performance measures are effective in quantifying operational characteristics of transit operators, every community and every transit operator face a different series of operating conditions and challenges. Recognizing that these performance measures cannot convey every aspect of a system's operation is an important factor in analyzing systems' past operation.

Table 23 provides several performance measures for SGRC Transit and its regional peers. An examination of these performance measures yields the following takeaways:

- Northeast Mississippi Community Services has the lowest cost per hour among the regional sample; however, SGRC Transit has the lowest cost per hour of the Georgia systems.
- Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority has the lowest cost per mile.
- Southwest Georgia Regional Commission provides the highest number of trips per capita.
- SGRC Transit has the highest fare recovery ratio.
- Coastal Regional Coaches serves the lowest trips per capita (0.13), but SGRC Transit's ratio of trips per capita is only slightly higher (0.17).

Table 23: Performance Metrics for SGRC Transit and Regional Transit Peers

	Southern Georgia Regional Commission Transit	Coastal Regional Coaches	Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority	Southwest Georgia Regional Commission	Northeast Mississippi Community Services (MS)
Service Area Population	395,608	733,638	57,982	304,566	427,867
Population Density (per sq mi)	59.99	125.12	32.57	56.27	58.62
Annual Operating Budget	$3,949,888	$4,458,614	$1,316,493	$5,942,200	$2,461,210
Unlinked Passenger Trips	92,865	94,307	25,217	179,324	93,349
Total Operating Vehicles	44	59	14	72	43
Vehicle Revenue Miles	1,551,785	1,025,028	562,308	2,049,816	1,080,364

	Southern Georgia Regional Commission Transit	Coastal Regional Coaches	Lower Chattahoochee Regional Transportation Authority	Southwest Georgia Regional Commission	Northeast Mississippi Community Services (MS)
Vehicle Revenue Hours	77,952	62,962	23,561	105,988	67,611
Trips per Capita	0.17	0.13	0.43	0.59	0.22
Revenue Hours per Capita	0.13	0.09	0.41	0.35	0.16
Cost per Trip	$42.53	$47.28	$52.21	$33.14	$26.37
Cost per Mile	$2.55	$4.35	$2.34	$2.90	$2.28
Cost per Hour	$50.67	$70.81	$55.88	$56.06	$36.40
Fare Revenue per Trip	$1.22	$0.88	$1.17	$0.41	$0.00
Recovery Ratio	3.0%	1.8%	2.2%	1.2%	0.0%

Sources: FTA National Transit Database 2023 Annual Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau 2022 QuickFacts

Table 24 provides several performance measures for Valdosta On-Demand and its microtransit peers. Key takeaways include:

- Valdosta On-Demand has the lowest cost per hour and cost per mile;
- Valdosta On-Demand and RIDE Wilson have similar costs per trip with Hall Area Transit's cost per trip being almost double.
- RIDE Wilson provides the highest number of trips per capita; and
- The fare recovery ratio is similar among all three microtransit programs.

Table 24: Performance Metrics for Valdosta On-Demand and Peers

	Valdosta On-Demand	Hall Area Transit	RIDE Wilson (NC)
Service Area Population	55,765	203,136	47,833
Population Density (per sq mi)	1,593.3	477.9	1,541.5
Annual Operating Budget	$1,155,850	$1,763,630	$2,384,021
Unlinked Passenger Trips	100,569	88,073	217,569
Total Operating Vehicles	10	13	18
Vehicle Revenue Miles	333,003	487,675	576,374
Vehicle Revenue Hours	31,960	24,825	37,624
Trips per Capita	1.80	0.43	4.55
Revenue Hours per Capita	0.57	0.12	0.79
Cost per Trip	$11.49	$20.02	$10.96
Cost per Mile	$3.47	$3.62	$4.14
Cost per Hour	$36.17	$71.04	$63.36
Fare Revenue per Trip	$1.37	$2.47	$1.42
Recovery Ratio	11.9%	12.3%	13.0%

Source: FTA National Transit Database 2023 Annual Data Tables, U.S. Census Bureau 2022 QuickFacts

8.0 Transit Supportive Land Use and Development

This chapter analyzes existing and future land use to determine where transit-supportive land uses are located within the region and where future development is likely to occur. In addition to land uses and zoning, key destinations and essential services, developments of regional impact, affordable housing, and senior centers are also identified and discussed in this section due to each of these having a direct correlation with inducing or contributing to transit needs.

8.1 Existing Land Use

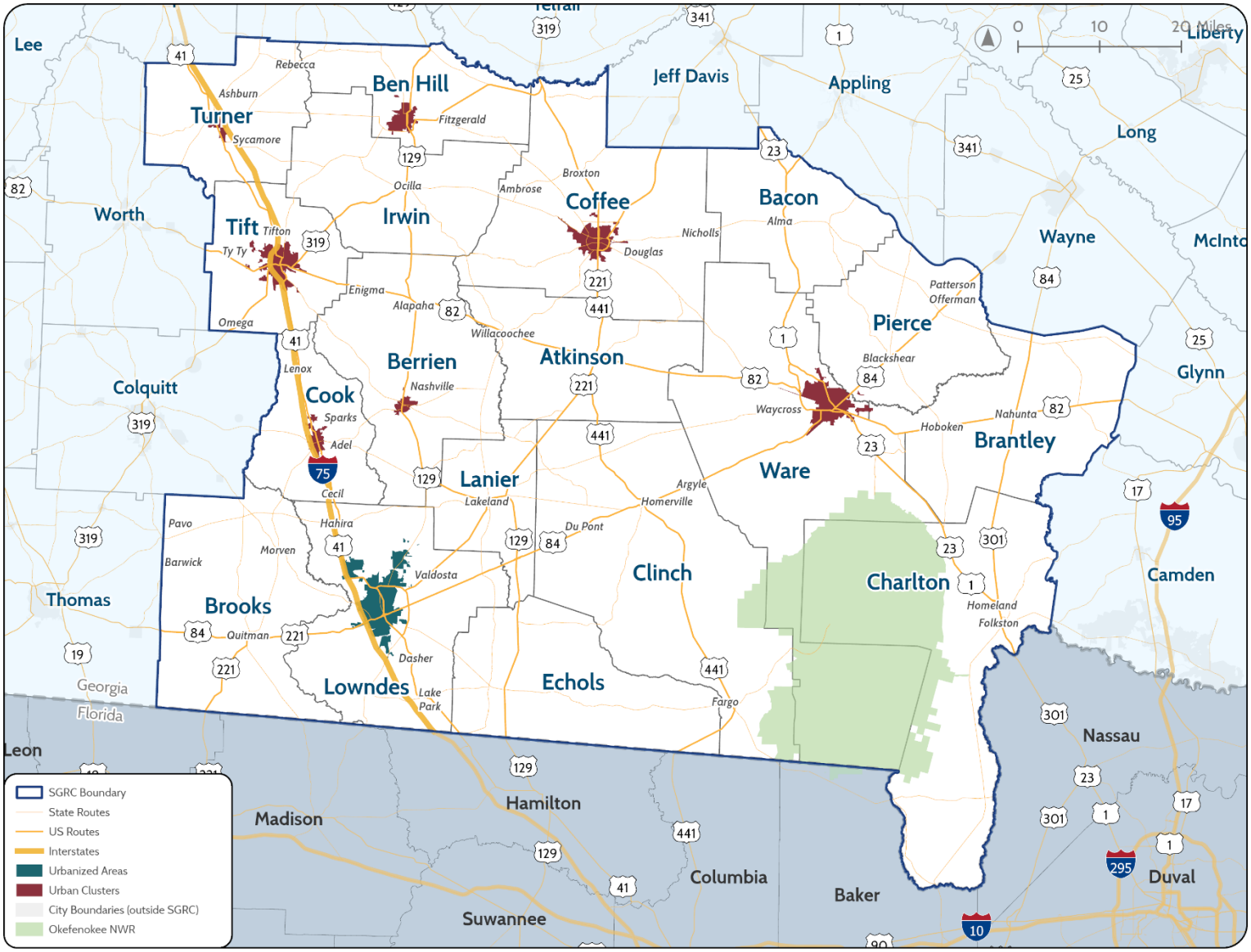
A large portion of the Southern Georgia Region is rural, including agricultural lands and wetland areas; however, several urban clusters and one urbanized area (UZA), designated in the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 Decennial Census, are located across the region as shown in **Figure 32.** The FTA bases its annual apportionments for transit formula funding based on urbanized area delineations. **Table 25** provides details about the urban clusters and UZA in the Southern Georgia Region.

Table 25: Urban Clusters and Urbanized Area

Name	Urbanized Area or Urban Cluster	Area (Square Miles)	Population	Eligibility for FTA Section 5307 Urban Area Funds
Adel	Cluster	6.18	7,034	No
Ashburn, GA	Cluster	4.29	4,738	No
Douglas, GA	Cluster	16.8	14,258	No
Fitzgerald, GA	Cluster	8.71	11,281	No
Nashville, GA	Cluster	3.67	4,844	No
Tifton, GA	Cluster	18.67	24,580	No
Valdosta	Urbanized Area	41.88	76,769	Yes
Waycross, GA	Cluster	25.12	24,985	No

Figure 33 depicts high level land uses across the region. More concentrated development corresponds with major transportation corridors, including Interstate 75 and U.S. Routes 84, 129, and 221. These corridors carry local, commercial, and pass-through traffic to major development nodes within the region, including the developing and developed areas within Tift, Lowndes, Ben Hill, Coffee, Berrien, and Ware counties.

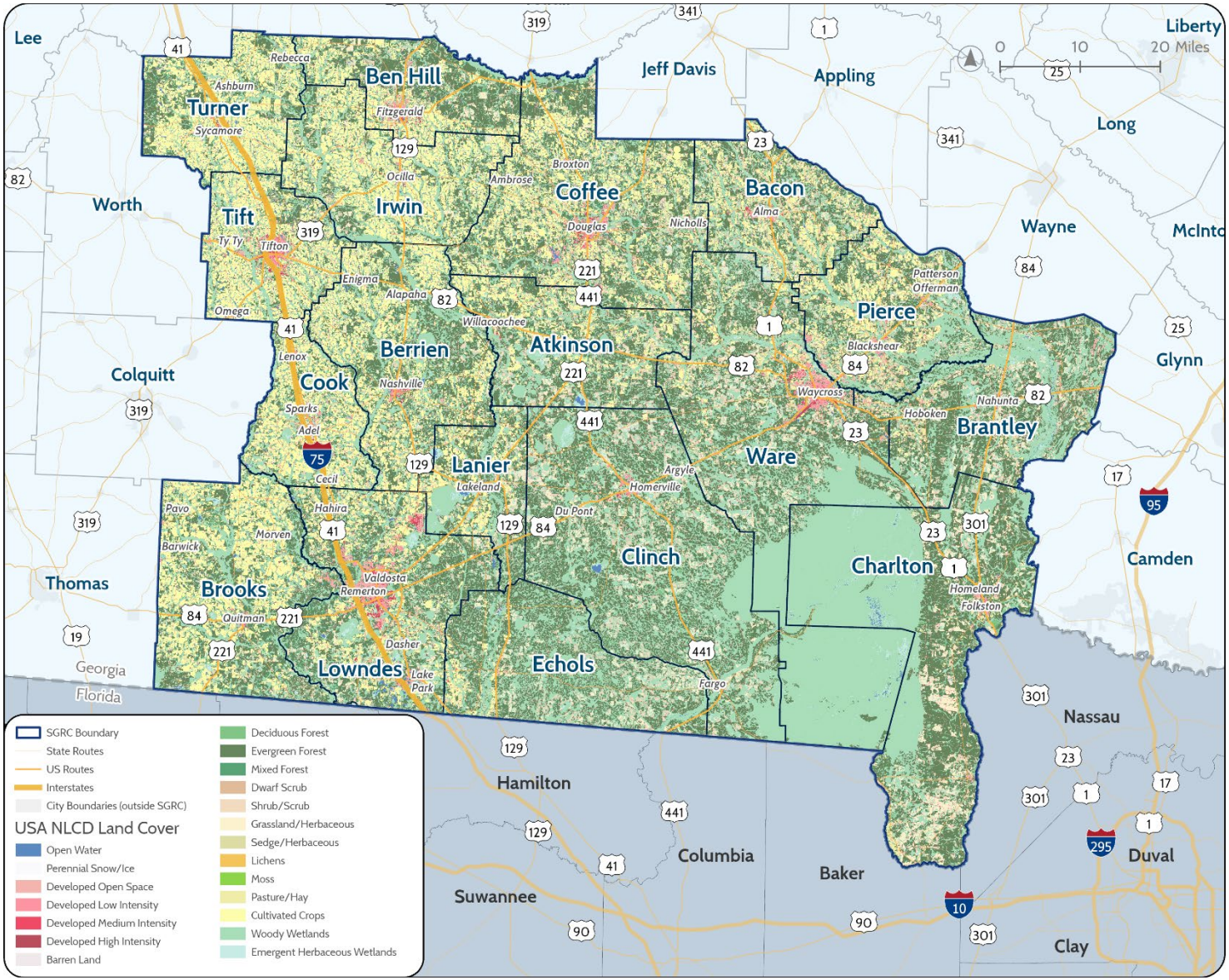
Figure 32: Urbanized Areas



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2020 Decennial Census, Federal Transit Administration Urbanized Areas

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

Figure 33: Land Cover



Source: U.S. Geological Survey National Land Cover Database, 2021

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

8.2 Future Land Use

Developed and developing areas with more concentrated centers of activity and dense land uses could better support transit due to higher concentrations of people and activity, creating the potential for additional or larger quantities of riders and the opportunity to support the needs of a greater number of transit dependent community members. Land use policies that support multi-family housing, commercial uses, public/institutional uses, and light industrial in high density or in proximity to one another can contribute to more cost-effective and efficient transit services.

SGRC's Regional Plan identifies long-term projected development patterns for the region, consisting of developed, developing, and rural areas, as shown in **Figure 34**. This map reflects the future land policy communicated in each local government's Comprehensive Plan. The Regional Plan emphasizes maintenance of rural development patterns throughout large portions of the region. While the majority of the region is envisioned as remaining rural, developed areas, concentrated along key corridors throughout the region, are expected to remain or, in some cases, continue to experience growth. In the future, the largest developed areas are expected to still be within Lowndes, Tift, Cook, Ware, Coffee, and Ben Hill counties. The Regional Plan identifies rapid development around Valdosta, Waycross, Douglas, Tifton, Fitzgerald, Adele, Alma and southern Charlton County, where the Jacksonville metro area has continued to expand.

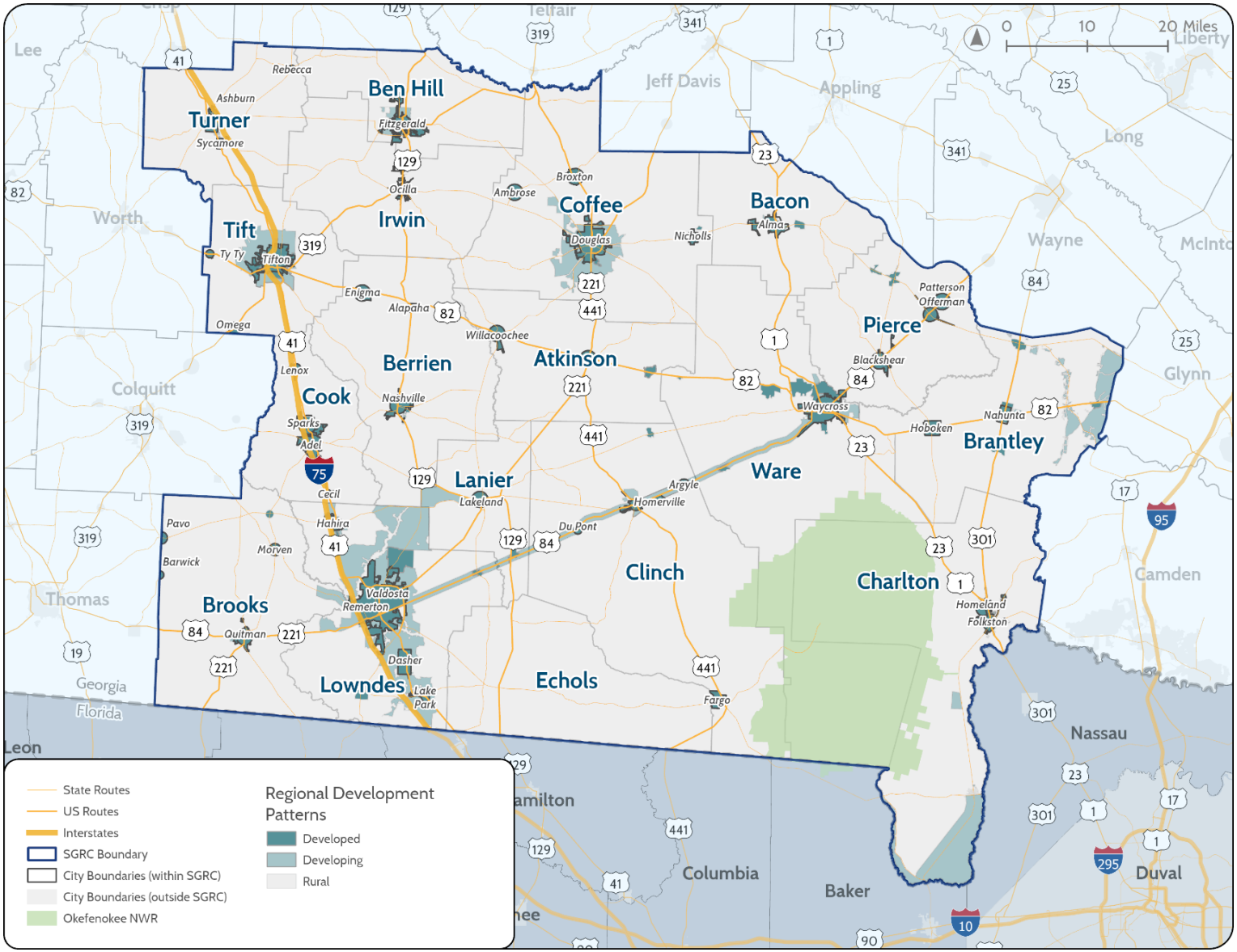
Southern Georgia Regional Plan

The Southern Georgia Regional Plan communicates several goals and policy statements that are relevant to this Regional TDP, including:

- Recent regional planning efforts reveal increasing development pressures threaten environmentally sensitive areas and historically agricultural areas. New development should be limited to existing urban areas.
- The regional public transportation plan should evaluate incentives for private investment to increase access to public transportation.
- The location and proximity of significant ports (Savannah, Brunswick, and Jacksonville), interstates (I-75 and I-10), and federal highways (US-82, US-84, and US-1) are vital opportunities to integrate land use planning, transportation, and economic growth.
- The region needs to improve safety along rail corridors.

Designated developed areas tend to follow major highway corridors including Interstate 75 and US Highway 84. Aside from these major transportation corridors, there are three other major nodes across the region that indicate urbanization and higher density (Fitzgerald, Folkston, and Douglas). In addition, some smaller nodes have also been included in this category due to their function as minor regional economic hubs: Blackshear, Pearson, Lakeland, Nashville, Homerville and Alma.

Figure 34: Projected Development Patterns



Source: Southern Georgia Regional Commission, Regional Plan 2023

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

8.3 Key Destinations and Essential Services

Key destinations and essential services are those places or service centers that residents or visitors rely on for commercial, social, religious, public safety, recreation, or governmental needs. **Figure 35** maps these destinations in the region. Specific points of interest are overlaid on a heat map, indicating the concentration of key destinations, with pink, red, and yellow representing more dense concentrations of destinations and blue representing sparser distributions.

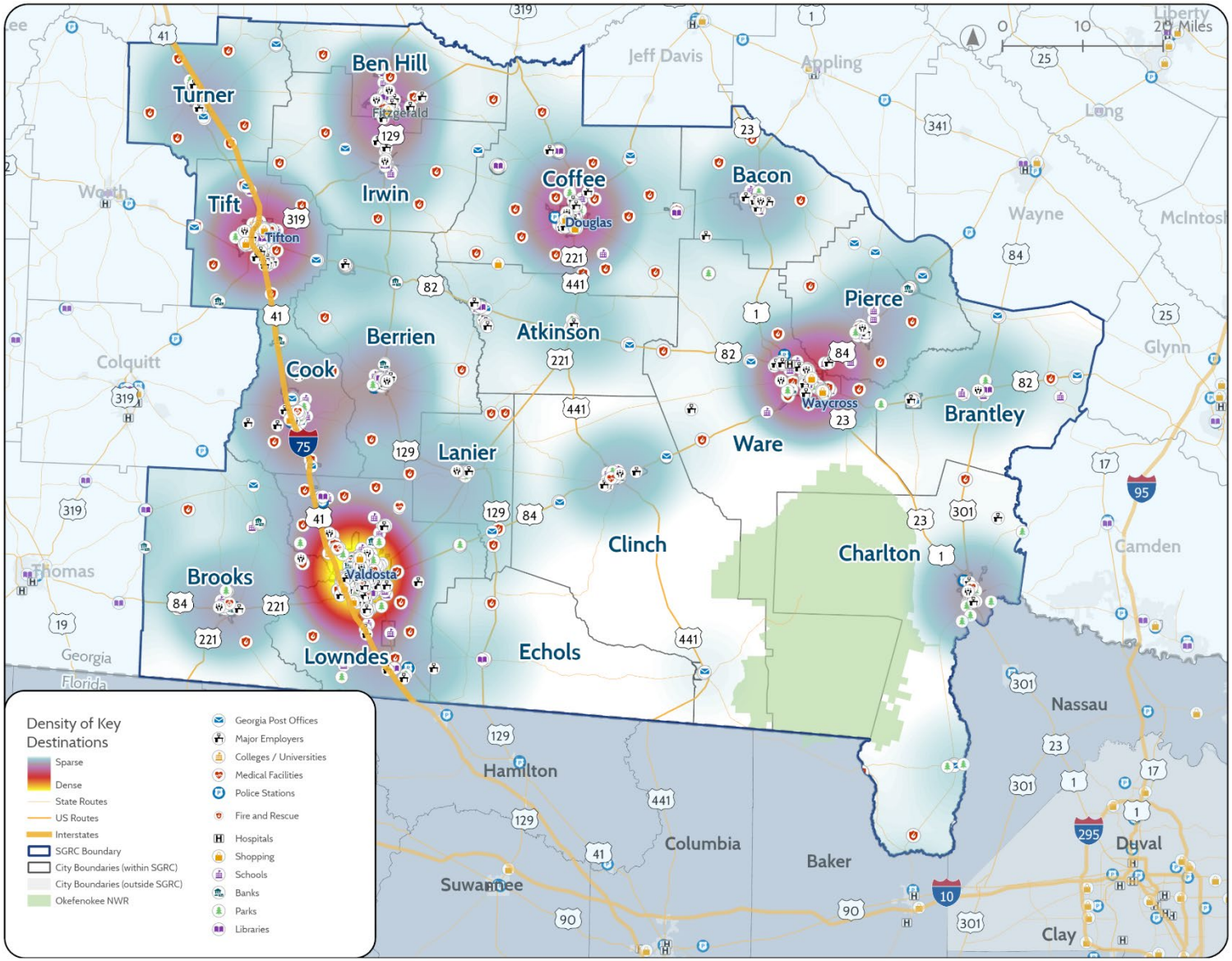
Mapping the locations of these destinations helps identify activity centers or high-travel destinations, which, in turn, provide a solid foundation for transit development planning. Within the Southern Georgia Region, these activity centers are concentrated in the region's major population centers, including Valdosta, Tifton, Douglas, Fitzgerald, and Waycross.

Major job centers and locations of major employers have one of the largest impacts on travel patterns. See Chapter 3 for additional details related to job centers and locations of major employers.

Schools and higher learning services, such as colleges and universities, are also a major contributor to the flow of travel patterns. There are 18 colleges and universities in the study area, with the major educational facilities in the region being:

- Valdosta State University
- South Georgia State College
- Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
- Wiregrass Georgia Technical College
- Coastal Pines Technical College

Figure 35: Key Destinations and Services



Source: Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data (HIFLD), 2020

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

8.3.1 Medical Facilities

Medical facilities, like hospitals and urgent care centers, are essential services that families, aging populations, and individuals with disabilities need to be able to access easily. As shown in **Table 26**, there are 17 major medical facilities in the region. Largest among these facilities are South Georgia Medical Center, Tift Regional Medical Center, Memorial Satilla Center, and Coffee Regional Medical Center. Given that the majority of medical facilities are located within only a few urbanized areas within the larger region, the populations outside these cities may have difficulties accessing them without a vehicle.

8.3.2 Parks and Recreational Facilities

Throughout the region, there are four state parks and numerous public recreational areas including the Okefenokee NWR, the Banks Lake NWR, the Grand Bay Wildlife Management Area, the Broxton Rocks Preserve and Gaskins Forest Education Center. The Okefenokee NWR is a federally protected wilderness area, and a globally significant wetland located in the southeastern portion of the region. Alongside these public recreation areas and local recreation parks, both the Satilla and Suwanee River also are an economic draw, enticing visitors to travel the Water Trails within the region. Ecotourism, such as Water Trails, is a contributor to economic impact within this area, especially surrounding the Okefenokee NWR.

Table 26: Medical Facilities in the Region

Medical Facility	County
Bacon County Hospital	Bacon
Dorminy Medical Center	Ben Hill
SGMC Berrien Campus	Berrien
Brooks County Hospital	Brooks
Charlton Memorial Hospital	Charlton
Clinch Memorial Hospital	Clinch
Coffee Regional Medical Center	Coffee
Southwell Medical	Cook
Cook Medical Center	Cook
Irwin County Hospital	Irwin
SGMC Lanier Campus	Lanier
23D Medical Group – Tricare	Lowndes
Greenleaf Medical Center	Lowndes
South Georgia Medical Center	Lowndes
SGMC Smith Medical Center	Lowndes
Tift Regional Medical Center	Tift
Memorial Santilla Health	Ware

Source: Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data (HIFLD)

8.4 Developments of Regional Impact

Developments of Regional Impact (DRIs), regulated by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, are large-scale developments that are likely to have regional effects beyond the local government jurisdiction in which they are located. Over the past ten years, eight projects have been submitted and completed across the region, consisting of mines, truck stops, water treatment facilities, pollution control plants, and multi-family housing. The DRIs are located in Charlon, Tift, and Lowndes counties, with the majority clustered along the Interstate 75 corridor between Tifton and Valdosta.

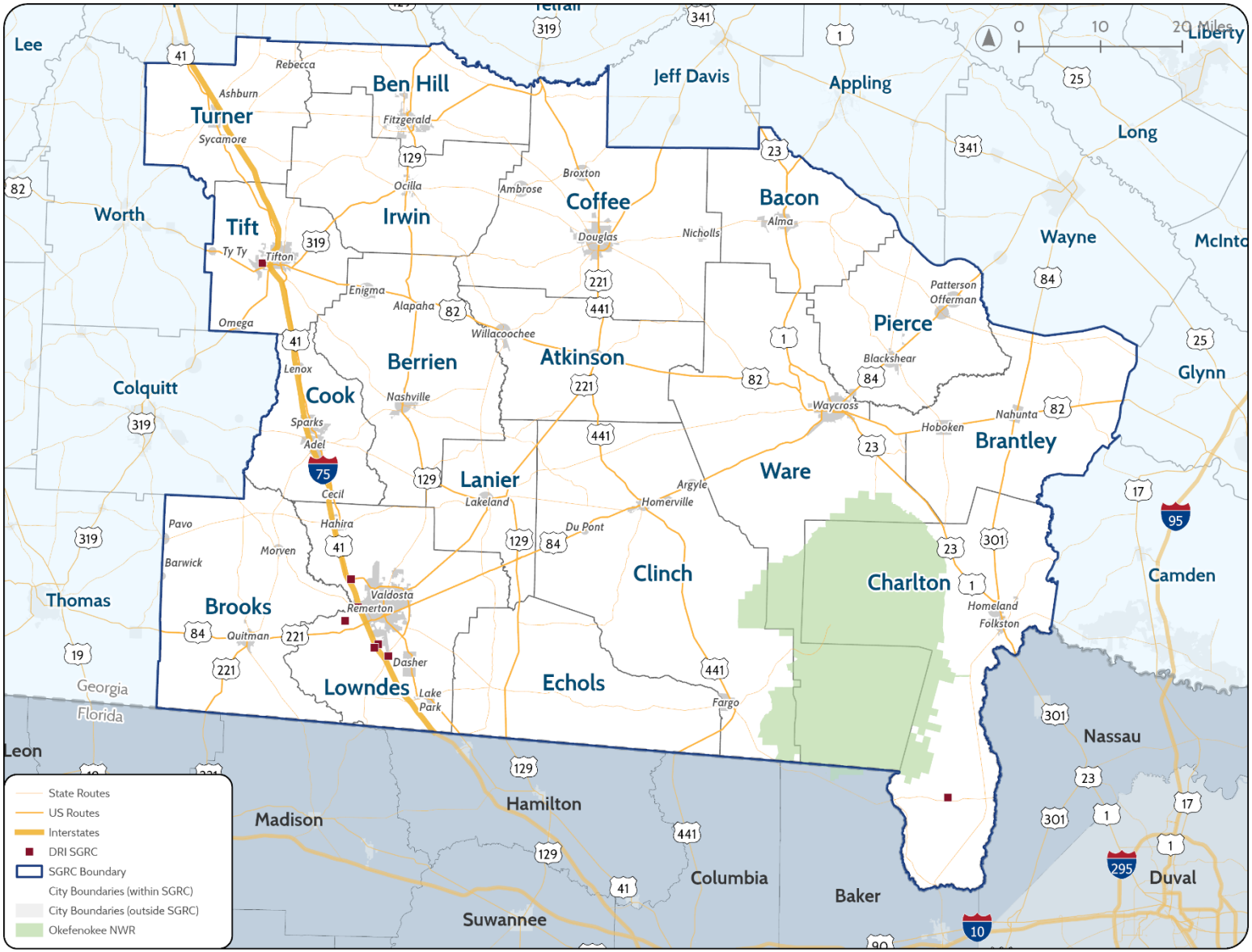
Table 27 lists the DRIs that were completed in the last decade, and **Figure 36** shows the locations of these projects.

Table 27: Developments of Regional Impact (2014 – 2024)

Project	Development Type	County	City	Current Status
Twin Pines Minerals, LLC Heavy Mineral Sands Mine	Other	Charlton	Unincorporated	Complete
Race Trac Valdosta EDO	Truck Stops	Lowndes	Unincorporated	Complete
City Water Plant #2	Water Supply Intakes/ Reservoirs	Lowndes	Valdosta	Complete
7-Eleven (Store #1055378)	Truck Stops	Lowndes	Unincorporated	Complete
Love's Travel Stop & Country Store	Truck Stops	Lowndes	Unincorporated	Complete
Quick Trip Travel Center	Truck Stops	Lowndes	Valdosta	Complete
Withlacoochee Water Pollution Control Plant	Wastewater Treatment Facilities	Lowndes	Unincorporated	Complete
The Apex	Housing	Tift	Tifton	Complete

Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs

Figure 36: Developments of Regional Impact (2014 – 2024)



Source: Georgia Department of Community Affairs

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

8.5 Subsidized Housing Initiatives

People living in subsidized housing have constrained household budgets that qualify them for housing subsidies. These same financial constraints often correlated with also needing transportation support. As such, consideration of where subsidized housing properties are located can help support transit planning decisions. This section explores such housing initiatives in the Southern Georgia Region that are overseen by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), including Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) properties, multi-family assisted properties, and public housing properties.

- *LIHTC properties* are properties that have been acquired, rehabilitated, or newly constructed from tax credits to provide rental housing for lower-income households.
- *Multi-family assisted properties* consist of HUD-subsidized multifamily rental housing properties with five or more dwelling units. These typically include apartments or town houses, but can also include nursing homes, hospitals, senior housing, mobile home parks, retirement service centers, and occasionally, vacant land.
- Public housing properties are administered by HUD and provide housing options for low-income residents at rents they can afford.

For this section, housing and properties for seniors have been excluded, and, instead, are covered in **Section 8.6**, which focuses on aging initiatives.

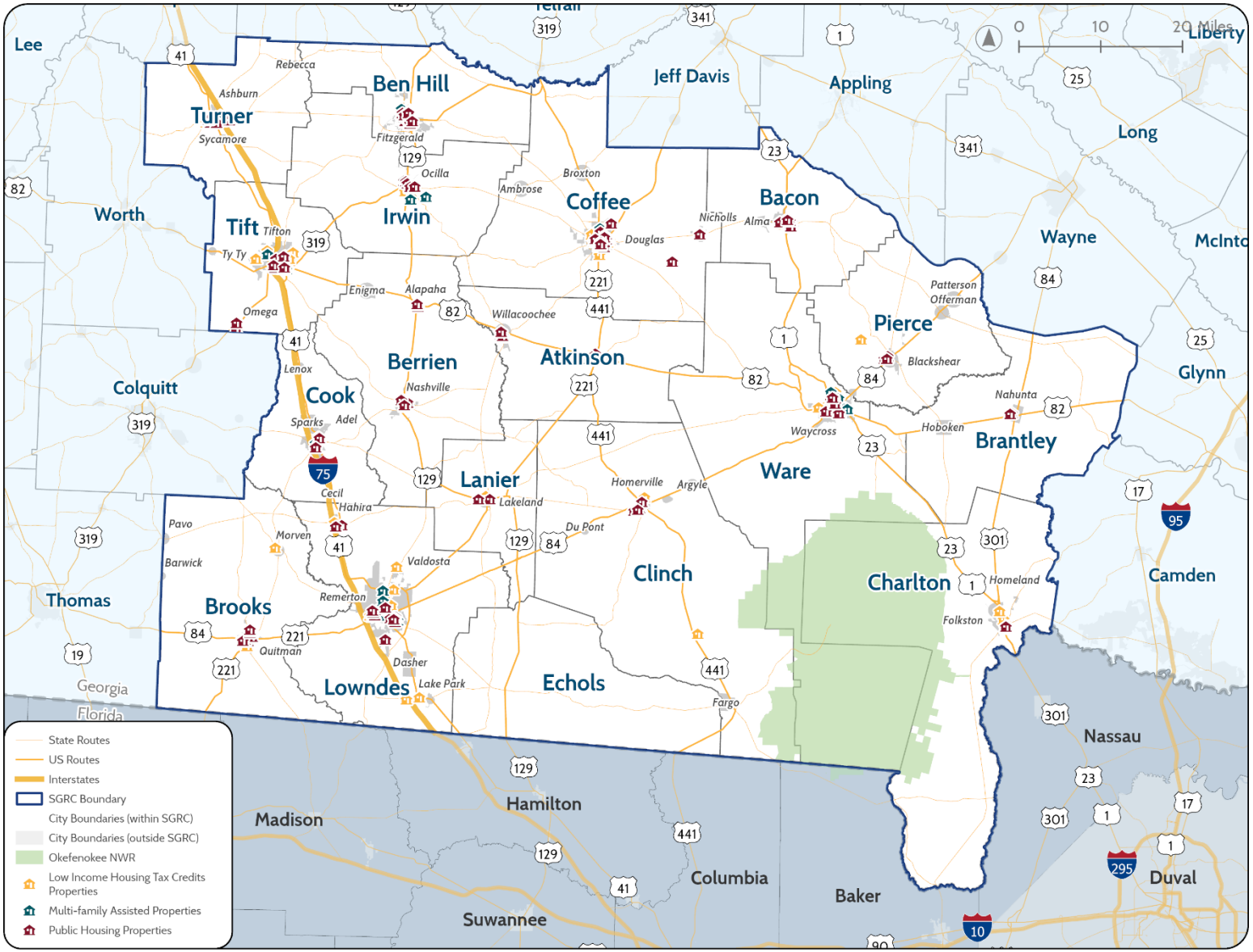
Table 28 provides a breakdown of the subsidized housing initiatives in the region, and **Figure 31** displays these properties geographically. Public housing accounts for the majority of regional subsidized housing properties at approximately 92 percent, while LIHTC properties make up 6 percent, and multi-family assisted properties encompass the remaining 2 percent.

Table 28: Subsidized Housing Initiatives

Property Type	Number of Properties	Percent of Total Properties
Low-Income Housing Tax Credits	85	6%
Multi-family Assisted	35	2%
Public Housing	1,366	92%
Total	1,486	100%

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2022

Figure 37: Subsidized Housing Initiatives



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2022

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

8.6 Aging Initiatives and Senior Centers

Each county in the Southern Georgia Region has an aging initiative or senior center, for a total of 53 facilities throughout the region. As shown in **Figure 38**, higher concentrations of elderly facilities are found in more highly populated communities, such as Valdosta, Tifton, Waycross, Douglas, Fitzgerald, and Ocilla.

These properties can be categorized as elderly assisted properties (66 percent) and senior centers (34 percent), as displayed in **Table 29**. Elderly assisted properties are HUD-subsidized multifamily housing properties specifically for the elderly, excluding insured hospitals with active loans. Nursing homes and assisted living residences are publicly owned buildings, in most cases by a county, or privately-owned buildings with multiple dwelling units. In addition to the elderly assisted properties and nursing homes/assisted living residences, there are personal care homes that are privately owned residences, usually containing fewer than six beds for elderly persons. All of these centers require a license from Georgia DCH.

As described in **Section 7.2**, Georgia DHS and DCH programs are services that cater to the needs of seniors. The SGRC Division of Aging administers a DHS contract that generally provides trips to and from each respective County Senior Center that it serves.

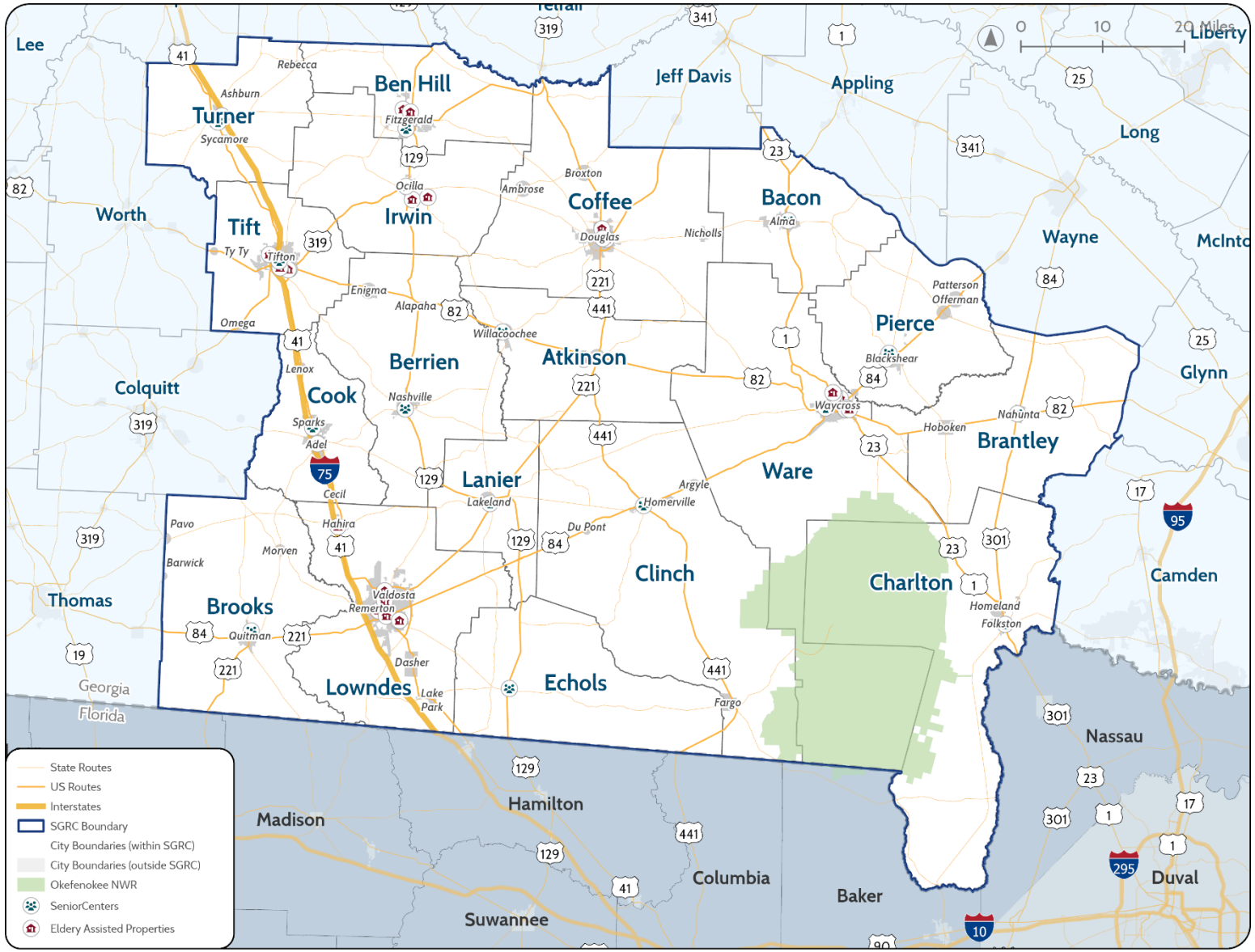
While DHS and DCH transportation options are accessible to certain populations for eligible trip types, public transit is available to all populations regardless of trip type. Public transit can help address gaps for riders who require access to a certain destination or need to book the ride without the assistance of a Human Services Professional.

Table 29: Aging Initiatives and Senior Centers

Property Type	Number of Properties	Percent of Total Properties
Elderly Assisted	35	66%
Senior Centers	18	34%
Total	53	100%

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Georgia Department of Community Health, 2022

Figure 38: Aging Initiatives and Senior Centers



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and Georgia Department of Community Health, 2022

SOUTHERN GEORGIA REGIONAL COMMISSION

9.0 Transit Funding

This chapter covers the key funding sources for public transit capital, operations, and maintenance, including the amounts of funding that each transit agency has received or is anticipated to receive in 2025. Federal funding has a substantial impact on the levels of service that transit agencies are able to provide, so it is important to plan for and anticipate any potential changes in funding levels as federal policy changes. In addition, the Georgia Transit Trust Fund Progam (TTFP) has become a key supplementary source of funding for Georgia transit agencies.

9.1 Existing Funding for Transit

Public transit in the State of Georgia is funded through several sources, including federal, state, and local funds. Direct revenue, such as fares and coordinated purchased transportation, provide another source of income.

Federal grants fall into two categories:

- *Formula grants*, which allocate funds based on certain characteristics of the areas receiving funding, and
- *Competitive grants*, which require agencies or governments seeking funding to apply for it.

In most cases, regardless of grant type, recipients must demonstrate the ability to provide local matching funds covering some portion of project costs.

9.1.1 Section 5311 Rural Formula Funding

The FTA provides Section 5311 Rural Public Transportation Funding to GDOT to administer to non-urbanized areas with a population of less than 50,000. As shown in **Table 30**, 2023 was the last year that individual county subrecipients in the region received Section 5311 funding. Since 2024, the only rural transit provider in the region has been SGRC Transit.

Section 5311 funding requires a local match and can be used to provide transit services for all residents and trip types. Funds are allocated based on an area's size, population, low-income population, and revenue vehicle miles. Section 5311 funds can be used for capital, operating, planning, and job access related activities. The federal share is up to 80 percent for capital projects and 50 percent for operating costs; local or state funds must be used to make up the remaining costs. Historically, the State of Georgia has provided 10 percent capital funds match for the purchase of rural transit buses.

Table 30: Section 5311 Distributions in Southern Georgia, 2023-2025

Funding Recipient	2023	2024	2025
SGRC Transit	$3,884,486	$4,632,085	$3,753,317
Individual County Subrecipients in Southern Georgia Region	$276,578	$0	$0
Total	**$4,161,064**	**$4,632,085**	**$3,753,317**

Source: GDOT Program of Projects, Fiscal Years 2023, 2024, 2025

9.1.2 Section 5307 Urban Formula Funding

Formula funding for urban areas is provided through the Section 5307 Urban program. Within Georgia, GDOT serves as the designated recipient for Section 5307 funds allocated to urban areas with populations greater than 50,000 and less than 200,000. Section 5307 provides up to 80 percent of capital funding. Though large urban systems may not use Section 5307 funds for operating expenses, urban areas with populations below 200,000 may use Section 5307 to fund up to 50 percent of operating budgets. Valdosta On-Demand has been the only recipient of Section 5307 funding in Southern Georgia in recent years, as shown in **Table 31**.

Table 31: Section 5307 Distributions in Southern Georgia, 2023-2025

Funding Recipient	2023	2024	2025
Valdosta On-Demand	$1,121,291	$1,455,529	$1,470,757
Total	**$1,121,291**	**$1,455,529**	**$1,470,757**

Source: GDOT Program of Projects, Fiscal Years 2023, 2024, 2025

9.1.3 Georgia Transit Trust Fund Program

The Georgia TTFP is a funding program administered by GDOT. It uses a population-based formula to distribute state funds to Georgia's counties and municipalities that have existing transit services. The TTFP is funded through a tax levied on rideshare services and other for-hire ground transportation, as passed by the Georgia General Assembly in 2020. The TTFP Guidelines on GDOT's website provide specifics about how this funding source is closely aligned with the requirements of the federal transit funding programs (Section 5307 and Section 5311).

Table 32 shows the TTFP amounts allocated to SGRC Transit and Valdosta On-Demand in 2024 and 2025. TTFP dollars can be used for a variety of purposes. In 2024, SGRC Transit used TTFP funding to implement a pilot Saturday service expansion. SGRC Transit's 2025 TTFP application includes line items to support administrative items, such as salaries for mechanics, employee training courses, an extended hours dispatch call center, and a driver hiring commercial, and new technology and equipment, such as informational screens on vehicles, a service truck, and cell signal broadcasters.

Table 32: Georgia Transit Trust Fund Awards, 2024 and 2025

Funding Recipient	2024	2025
SGRC Transit	$1,368,678	$1,287,382
Valdosta On-Demand	$158,846	$153,433
Total	**$1,527,524**	**$1,440,815**

Source: GDOT TTFP Webpage, Fiscal Years 2024 and 2025

9.2 Local Funding

As discussed in previous sections, federal transit service funding is contingent on a local funding match. This local funding can come from a number of sources, including local general funds, special transportation taxes, fares, advertising revenue, or purchase-of-service income from other transportation programs.

Section 5311 programs, in particular, benefit from purchase-of-service contracts when used in coordination with HST programs, such as Medicaid's Non-Emergency Medical Transportation Program of the Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility for Seniors program administered by the Georgia DHS. Funds derived from these programs are considered program income and thus count as a local match.

As shown in Table 33, SGRC Transit is successfully leveraging purchase-of-service revenue. Since SGRC Transit began its service, it has had excess purchase-of-service revenue, negating the need for the participating local governments to contribute to the cost share.

Table 33: SGRC Transit's Operating Budgets, 2023 and 2024

	2023	2024
Total O&M Costs	$3,949,888	$3,613,012
Purchase-of-service Revenue	$1,392,459	$2,293,875
Purchase-of-service Ratio	35%	73%

10.0 Key Findings

This section summarizes key findings from the Existing Conditions Report. These findings, along with feedback from stakeholders and public involvement activities, are critical to identifying regional transit needs. This section also provides further guidance on the next stage of the Regional TDP.

Below is a list of key findings and takeaways from the Existing Conditions Report. These findings, along with feedback from stakeholders and public involvement activities, are critical to identifying regional transit needs and assessing potential transit initiatives and priorities for the future.

- Three counties in SGRC do not currently offer rural, public demand-response transit service. These counties neighbor each other and are located in the mid-southern portion of the region.
- Brantley County, located on the eastern border of the region and near the growing Brunswick Urbanized Area, has experienced the most growth over the past fifty years by percentage growth, while Lowndes County has experienced the most growth by total number of people. Increasing urbanization may affect transit service models, as well as funding options.
- Lowndes, Tift, and Ware counties have the densest populations, as well as the greatest concentrations of key destinations for transit. Ben Hill, Coffee, and Cook counties also have a high concentration of key destinations for transit.
- The 2050 population projections anticipate Lanier, Charlton, Pierce, Lowndes, and Berrien counties experiencing the most growth among the region's counties. Turner, Irwin, Brooks, and Clinch counties are each projected to experience a negative population growth rate of at least 10 percent. Declining population will have an impact on future funding levels in these communities.
- A large portion of the region, 75 of the 119 census tracts, or 63 percent of the region's total census tracts, is considered disadvantaged, based on the USDOT's Equitable Transportation Community Explorer. In addition, 58 percent of the region's population lives in a census tract defined as an Area of Persistent Poverty. This Regional TDP is grounded in expanding equitable outcomes for these populations who are most in need of transit.
- Valdosta State University is the region's largest employer, with over 1,500 employees. Both students and the workforce at VSU have transportation needs that may be served by transit.
- The government sector provides the most jobs across the region, accounting for 21.7 percent of the region's total employment. Among the private sector, manufacturing (14.1 percent), retail trade (12.8 percent), accommodation and food services (10.0 percent), and healthcare and social assistance (9.9 percent) are the top industries by employment in the Southern Georgia Region. The U.S. Military also employs about 4,500 personnel at Moody Airforce Base, located in northwest Lowndes County.
- Park and ride lots are sparse and only found in a few counties; the central area of the region lacks any park and ride lots. Better connecting the region with park and rides could expand the use of transit.
- The major travel pattern in the Southern Georgia Region is intra-county travel, with 78 percent of the trips reporting origins and destinations within the same county, which implies that short trips will often meet transit riders' needs; however, in

counties with a higher rate of inter-county travel (Atkinson, Cook, Echols, Irwin, and Lanier counties), the populations likely require access to neighboring counties for services that may not be available in their residential county.

- The most popular inter-regional trip pattern is between Lowndes County and Hamilton County, a Florida County along the state line. A large number of daily trips occur between Tift County and counties just west of the region, including Colquitt and Worth counties. On the eastern side of the region, there is a high rate of trips between Brantley County and Glynn County, a county in Georgia's Coastal Region. To a lesser degree, but nevertheless significant, Charlton County and Nassau County, Florida have a high number of inter-state trips.
- SGRC's planning initiatives encourage community design that is supportive of more efficient transit, including transit-oriented development and active transportation, such as bike and pedestrian facilities.
- The City of Valdosta, VLMPO, and SGRC have worked closely together to plan for and implement transit services that are not duplicative but rather work in tandem to serve populations in the greatest need of transit service.
- Electric vehicle infrastructure has been a priority for the region since the IIJA was enacted in 2021. Expansion of charging infrastructure improves the feasibility of transitioning public transit fleets to electric vehicles.
- SGRC Transit serves a relatively low number of trips per capita compared to other regional transit services.
- Valdosta On-Demand has similar performance metrics as peer microtransit agencies.
- Medical facilities are mainly limited to the larger cities in the region, so intercounty transit access is critical.
- Since 2024, SGRC Transit has been the region's sole subrecipient of FTA Section 5311 funds, and Valdosta On-Demand has been the region's sole recipient of FTA Section 5307 funds. Supplemental funding from the Georgia TTFP has been an important additional source of funding, helping the transit agencies expand and enhance their operations.
- SGRC Transit has successfully leveraged purchase-of-service contracts since the service was established. This revenue is counted toward its annual FTA Section 5311 local match. To date, the local match has been fully covered by purchase-of-service and fare revenue, so the local governments participating in the regional transit partnership have not needed to pay into the cost share.