



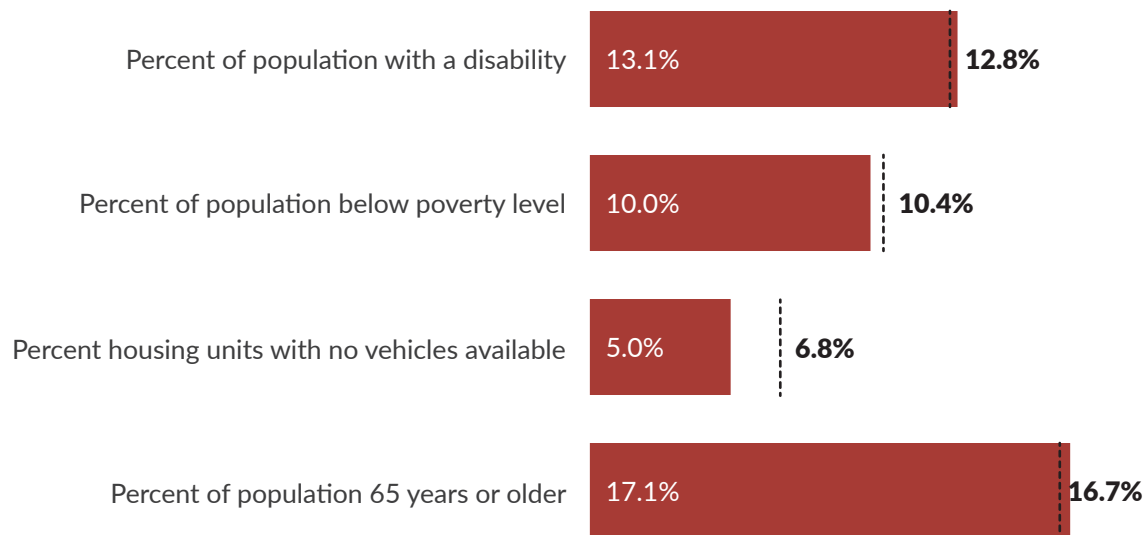
Dekalb County

Statistics at a glance

Table 1. Dekalb County and regional statistics

	Dekalb County	11-county region
Total Population	43,265	797,071
Median Household Income	\$68,110	
Percent of population with a disability	13.1%	12.8%
Percent of population below poverty level	10.0%	10.4%
Percent housing units with no vehicles available	5.0%	6.8%
Percent of population 65 years or older	17.1%	16.7%

Figure 1. Dekalb County statistics, compared with the 11-county region



Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171) and 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates

Public and Specialized Transportation Services

DeKalb County Council on Aging, Inc. (COA) directly operates public transportation through DeKalb Area Rural Transit (DART), services for individuals with disabilities, seniors, and people of all ages. DART provides trips within DeKalb County, as well as travel outside the county. Trip reservations are preferred at least 24 hours in advance. There are no eligibility requirements to use the COA transportation services. Hours of operation are 6:00 AM–6:00 PM, Monday–Friday. Other hours of service may be available. General public passenger fares are collected and donations are also accepted.

Public Input Summary

A transportation needs assessment survey was advertised to the public online and in hard copy format. It was promoted in local print media, social media, flyers, at public meetings, on websites, and through communications from steering committee members with their peers, employees, and clients. The survey was open from May 19, 2023, through July 24, 2023. Public workshops in June 2023 and virtual meetings in July 2023 provided additional opportunities to discuss transportation with riders and potential riders.

Across the region, 4,223 people participated in the public survey.

4,223 people from throughout the region participated in the public survey.

A total of 423 people from DeKalb County participated. Thirty-three percent of respondents who answered the survey from DeKalb County were between 25 to 34, making it the largest group contributing to that county's results.

423 people from DeKalb County participated.

13.27% were ages 65 and older.

22.71% have a disability that affects their ability to drive.

During the public and virtual workshops, participants were asked to answer the question: What is currently working? Some of the positive areas that participants indicated are working well include the following:

21.01% live with someone with a disability that affects their ability to drive.

19.47% were pregnant or had been pregnant within the last 18 months.

- Rural county transportation
 - There is public transportation available in the county via DART
- Door to door service is available
- Medicaid transportation
 - Working with Verida to provide rides
- Positive and respectful drivers

20.06% had a legal violation that was keeping them from driving.

Issues or Challenges

Workshop participants also shared the most common challenges for the existing transportation network. Common challenges mentioned during the meeting were as follows:

- Limited availability
 - Same day rides are usually not available
 - Reservations at least 24 hours in advance are preferred
 - Difficulty in scheduling/coordinating trips
 - No weekend service
 - Service availability is limited to 6:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. on Monday-Friday
 - No weekend or evening hours available
 - Due to limited availability, service is not available for second or third shift workers
 - Kids and families are restricted from participating in recreational or sports activities due to lack of service available in the evenings and weekends
- Expensive Fares
 - Some indicated the cost for out-of-county rides was too expensive for them. A one-way trip outside of DeKalb County is \$35.00 and a roundtrip is \$50.00
 - Fares are too high for low income individuals who do not qualify for Medicaid assistance
- Service gaps
- Lack of transportation to mental health services
- Technology access
 - Many do not have access to smartphones or WiFi, or do not have the technological skills
- Lack of family/support system
 - Many have to rely on public transport due to the lack of a support system from family and/or friends
- Stigma
 - There is a stigma associated with public transportation; a line of thought that “it’s not for me”



Survey results were reflective of a lot of the input received from the public workshops. Approximately thirty-two percent of survey respondents indicated that there wasn't community/public transportation available. Over twenty-six percent stated that the cost of bus fare was an obstacle in utilizing public transportation service. This was further supported in the comments with one respondent stating that service was not offered in their area and another respondent indicated there was not service available before 6 a.m. for employment transportation. One respondent indicated that they were unaware of what service options were available.

Summary

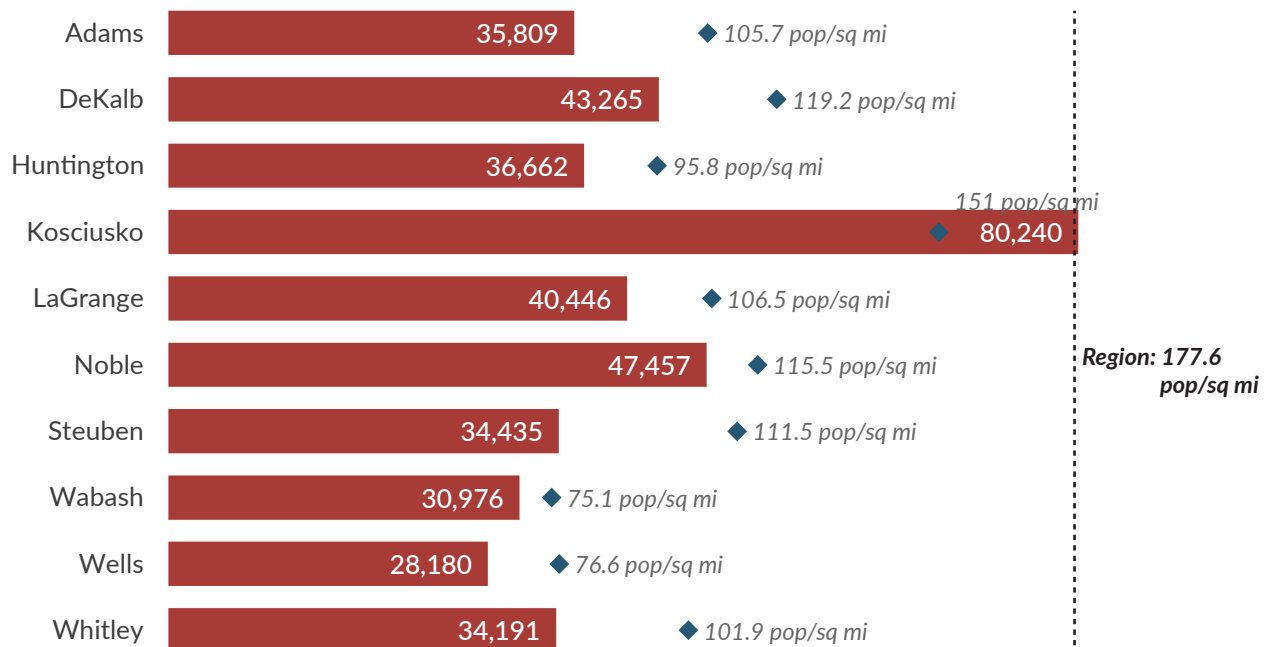
The main issues present in DeKalb County seem to be service limitations and the cost of fares, as evidenced from both the survey results and comments mentioned at the workshop. It also appears that the public is uneducated about what services exist in their community and believe there is a stigma attached with utilizing public transportation.

Demographics

Population

Figure 2 below shows the population for each county included in this transportation assessment. DeKalb County is the fourth largest county amongst the 11 counties. The block groups with the highest population density are within Waterloo, Butler, Garrett and Auburn. The rest of the county has mid to low population densities. Individual county population density maps are included in Appendix C for reference.

Figure 2. Population and density by county



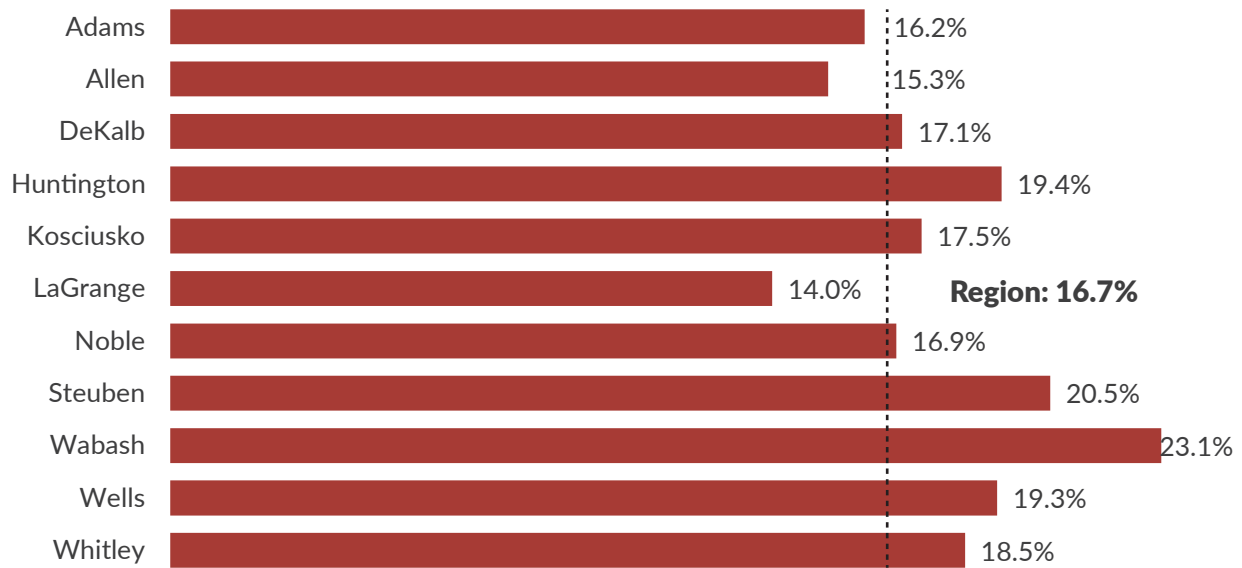
Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

Age

In rural communities, it is common for age to be used as an indicator of current and future transportation demand. That is because as a person ages, they are more likely to need and want alternatives to driving themselves. Older adults are also sometimes living on a retirement or social security income which makes public transportation a more affordable option than owning and operating a personal vehicle.

In DeKalb County, 17.1 percent of the population is 65 or older. In four of the region's counties, 19 to 23 percent of the population is age 65 or older. LaGrange and Allen Counties have the youngest populations. Wabash, Steuben, Huntington, and Wells Counties have the oldest. Figure 3 illustrates the county-by-county percentages.

Figure 3. Percentage of population Age 65 and Older

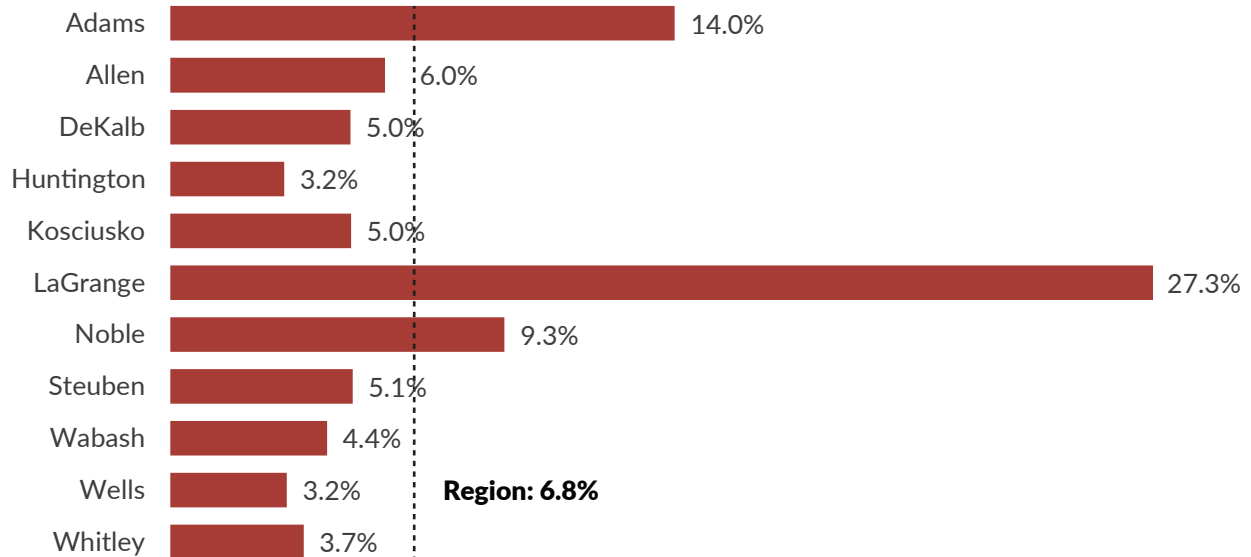


Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

Zero-Vehicle Households and Households Below Poverty

Households without access to a vehicle are highly likely to need transportation from a public or nonprofit agency. In DeKalb County, an estimated five percent of households have no vehicle available, which falls in about the middle range between the other counties. LaGrange had the highest percentage of zero vehicle households. A breakdown by county is provided in Figure 4.

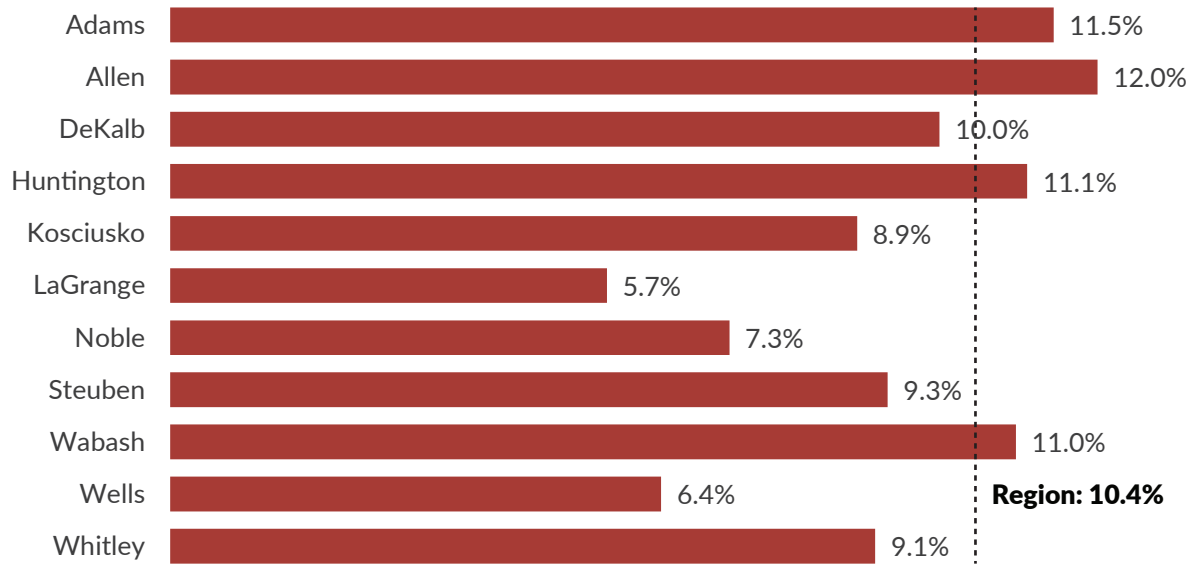
Figure 4. Zero-Vehicle Households



Source: 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP04

DeKalb County has 10 percent of its population with income below the poverty level, which is just below the region's. Allen, Adams, Huntington, and Wabash have a percentage of population below the poverty level over the region's rate of 10.4 percent. In contrast, LaGrange, Wells, and Noble counties have much smaller shares of their population below the poverty level. Figure 5 shows the percentages of people living below the poverty level for the 11-county region.

Figure 5. Percent people below poverty level

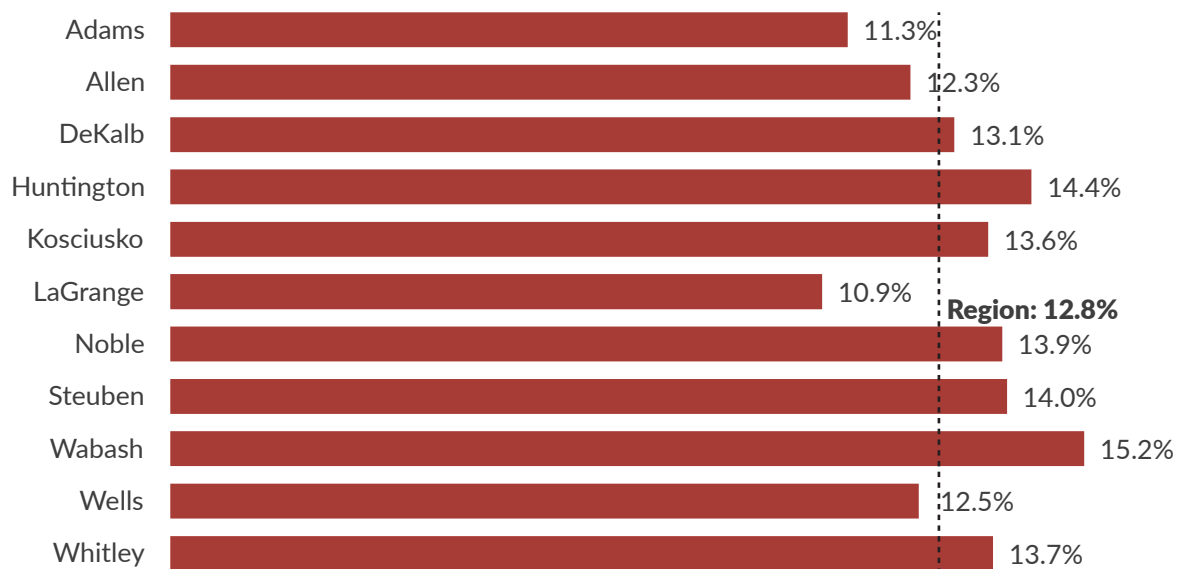


Source: 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table B17001

Individuals with Disabilities

In DeKalb County, about 13.1 percent of the population has a disability, which is similar to the regional rate of 12.8 percent. Wabash County has the highest percentage, at 15.2 percent, and LaGrange has the lowest, at 10.9 percent. In all other counties, eleven to fifteen percent of the population has a disability, as depicted in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Individuals with a Disability



Source: 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP02

Recommendations

Table 2 summarizes the recommendations and action steps pertinent to DeKalb County. Complete information and a full breakdown of each recommendation and associated action steps/implementation responsibility can be found in the full Needs Assessment report.

Recommendation 3: Regional Scheduling/Dispatching Software Initiative

Recommendation 4: Assistance for Personal Vehicle Maintenance and Parts

Recommendation 6: Design a Regional Transportation Network

Recommendation 7: Vehicle Sharing Program

Recommendation 8: Increased NEMT Providers

Recommendation 9: Increase Participation in Medicaid Family Member and Associate Transportation Provider Program

Recommendation 10: Increase community outreach and education efforts to expand awareness and understanding of available transportation options

Table 2. Recommendations tables

Recommendation #3	Action Steps
DeKalb County could participate in a regional scheduling/dispatching software. Since service gaps and limited availability were identified challenges, this initiative would help eliminate gaps within the region by expanding access to services between the counties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural transit providers implement broad use of block scheduling to enable more trip-sharing opportunities. • Rural transit providers would establish local permission as well as agreements between agencies to pick up trips that would otherwise go unserved. • Rural transit providers would establish the necessary policies, consistent driver training standards, and customer service procedures.

Recommendation #4	Action Steps
DeKalb County could participate in a program that assists working individuals with purchasing necessary parts to repair vehicles. The program would involve mechanics who volunteer time and/or offer reduced-priced maintenance. Individuals would submit an application and the lead agency would first explore that individuals' options for using public transit. Should the applicant have transportation needs beyond the service provided by any of the local public transit services, the application would then be taken into consideration and evaluated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a lead agency to administer the program and develop a board or committee for program establishment and fundraising. • Identify program parameters and policies. • Promote the program to potential funders. • Implement the program through partner non-profit agencies that will identify good candidates for the program. • Establish and measure program performance.

<p>Recommendation #6</p> <p>DeKalb County could participate in the 11-county regional transportation network initiative in response to INDOT's announcement to establish a regional rural transportation model through Indiana. This could help bridge service gaps and expand availability.</p>	<p>Action Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene meetings of the Section 5310 and Section 5311 transportation providers in the region for the purpose of establishing the regional transportation network. Establish a regionalization committee. • Determine the most appropriate regional structure for the eleven counties that will provide the most opportunity for increased mobility throughout the region. • Identify a lead agency for the region and/or subregions. • Present regional structure to INDOT. • Submit regional Section 5311 grant application(s).
<p>Recommendation #7</p> <p>DeKalb County could participate in a vehicle sharing program which would establish vehicle lease and rental programs so that providers and human service agencies could rent or lease vehicles from another provider when not in use by the owner.</p>	<p>Action Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify vehicles throughout the region that are idle on days or periods during the day. • Identify and establish an organization to manage the vehicle-sharing lease/rental program. • Develop lease/rental agreement. • Establish a vehicle lease/rental management agency. • Establish vehicle lease/rental rates at a level sufficient to support administration and management of the program.
<p>Recommendation #8</p> <p>DeKalb County could participate in collaborative and coordinated regional efforts to review and evaluate current Indiana Medicaid brokerage requirements.</p>	<p>Action Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a list of contractual issues that are deterring providers from contracting with NEMT brokers. • Develop recommendations for contract revisions. • Meet with Indiana's NEMT brokers to present and negotiate contract revisions.
<p>Recommendation #9</p> <p>DeKalb County could help promote increased participation in the Medicaid program wherein a family member or other person can drive Medicaid-eligible clients to medical appointments and in turn receive gas mileage reimbursement.</p>	<p>Action Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop information packet with instructions on how to enroll in the Indiana Medicaid Family or Associate Transportation Program. • Promote and provide education about the Indiana Medicaid family and associate transportation program. • Establish a program to assist, as needed, with the completion of the Medicaid Family Member or Associate Transportation Services Form.

Recommendation #10

DeKalb County could help initiate promotion and marketing in order to increase community outreach and education efforts to expand awareness and understanding of available transportation options. This would be beneficial since one of the issues heard was that there was an unawareness of available service options.

Action Steps

- Develop a public awareness of transit campaign with one-page information sheets about public transit service options, prices, hours, and how to schedule a ride in the local county; include a resource for information about multi-county rides or services in neighboring counties
- Meet with community partners and tell them about the available transit options and encourage them to share information with clients and staff
- Take the vehicle or set up a table at community fairs, festivals and events to promote transit
- Coordinate with other regional transportation providers to develop a consistent message about using transit for multi-county trip needs

