



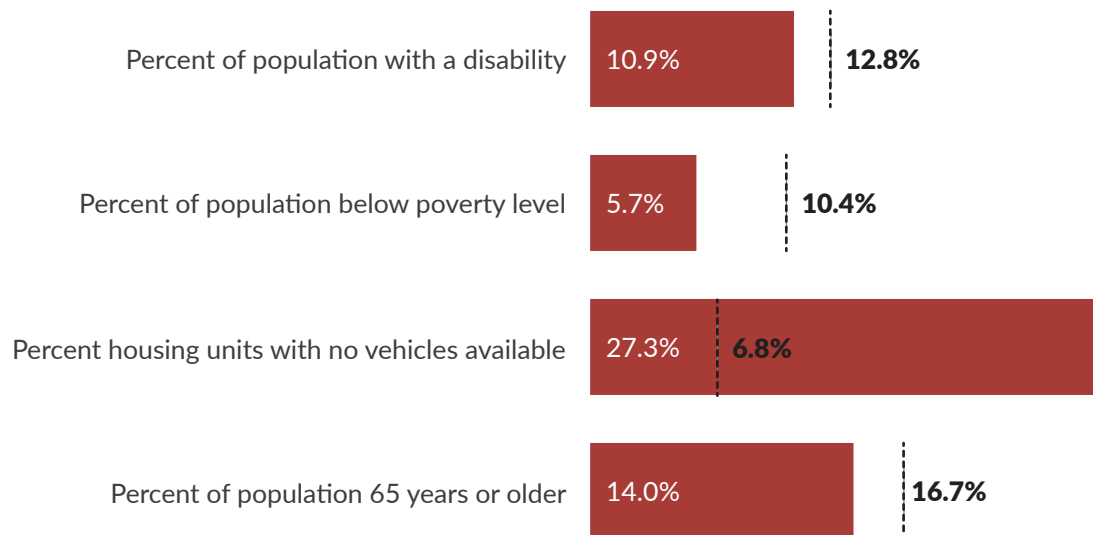
LaGrange County

Statistics at a glance

Table 1. LaGrange County and regional statistics

| | LaGrange County | 11-county region |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| Total Population | 40,446 | 797,071 |
| Median Household Income | \$81,658 | |
| Percent of population with a disability | 10.9% | 12.8% |
| Percent of population below poverty level | 5.7% | 10.4% |
| Percent housing units with no vehicles available | 27.3% | 6.8% |
| Percent of population 65 years or older | 14.0% | 16.7% |

Figure 1. LaGrange 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

LaGrange County Council on Aging, Inc. (COA) directly operates public transportation and senior citizen programs and services. Transportation is provided anywhere in LaGrange County and to Allen, St. Joe, Elkhart, and Steuben Counties. There are no eligibility requirements to use the COA transportation services. Hours of operation are 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

Table 2. LaGrange County Council on Aging, Inc. statistics

| Total Vehicles in Fleet | Number of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles | Average Number of Vehicles Used per Day | Number of Full-Time Drivers | Number of Part-Time Drivers |
|-------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 15 | 14 | 9 | 5 | 7 |

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.

A total of 578 people from LaGrange County participated. Twenty-four percent of respondents who answered the survey from LaGrange County were 65 or older, making it the largest group contributing to that county's results.

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:

- There is rural transportation
 - LaGrange COA provides public transportation
- Yoder Toter
 - LaGrange County has the Yoder Toter Amish transportation service available
- The Arc of LaGrange County is available to provide service for individuals with disabilities

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

578 people from LaGrange County participated.

24.52% were ages 65 and older.

19.19% have a disability that affects their ability to drive.

17.88% live with someone with a disability that affects their ability to drive.

17.08% were pregnant or had been pregnant within the last 18 months.

15.47% had a legal violation that was keeping them from driving.

- There is a good network/partnerships of local social services in the county

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:

- Difficulty with public transportation reaching the very rural areas of the county
- Service availability
 - There is no service in the evenings or on the weekends
- Ridesharing services such as Uber, Lyft or taxi are not available
- Too much demand for providing service to individuals with disabilities
- Minimal cell phone or technology access
- Staffing/driver shortages
 - Experiencing qualification issues such as applicants not passing drug tests
 - Competing with schools/RV transport for drivers
- Difficulty with providing transportation for those discharged from the hospital, particularly from the Fort Wayne area
- High vehicle expenses/aging fleet/availability of replacement parts

Survey results support the challenges mentioned, in particular the lack of ridesharing options, availability of service and shortage of drivers. Several respondents indicated that lack of manpower/drivers is an issue affecting availability of transportation service. In addition, several respondents indicated a lack of ridesharing services such as Uber or Lyft as an obstacle to being able to go places. Several open-ended responses indicated that transportation service has to be scheduled in advance and that rides are often booked. Also, due to the large Amish population in LaGrange County, it is important to note that many respondents indicated that they use horse and buggy as their transportation option or do not use public transportation for religious reasons.

Summary

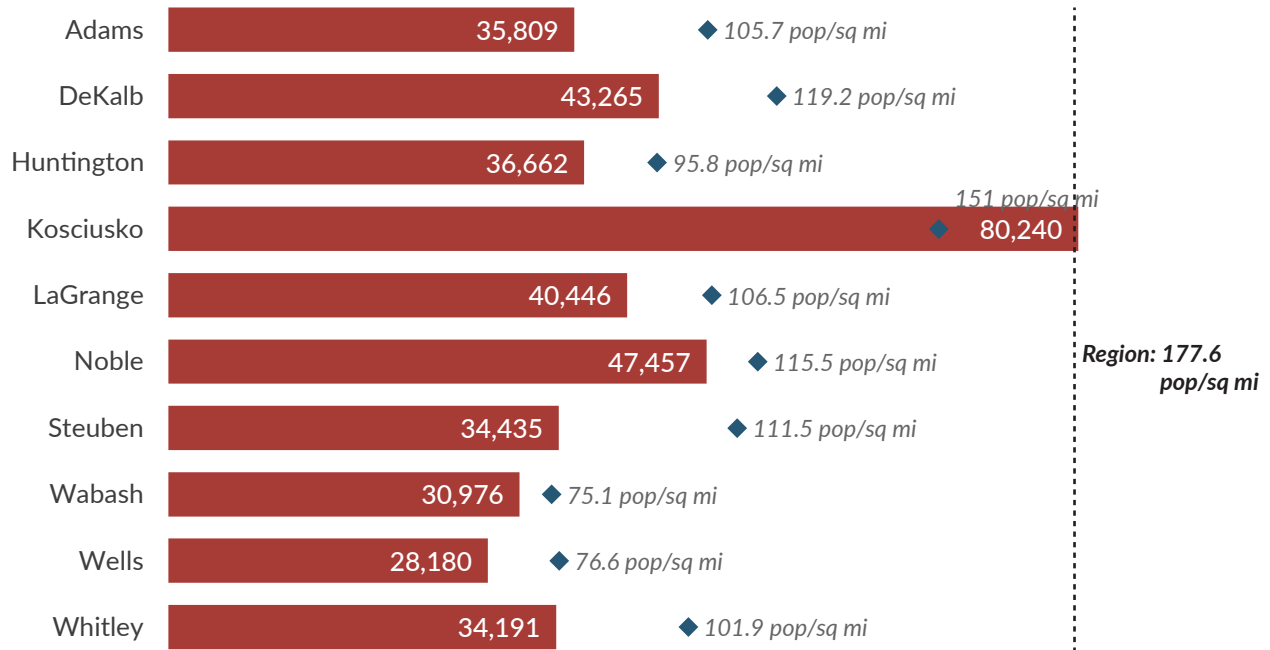
LaGrange County is unique to the other counties in the region due to its large Amish population. Many residents of the county use horse and buggy as their transportation means. However, LaGrange County is experiencing service availability issues and lack of ridesharing options.

Demographics

Population

Kosciusko County has the fifth largest population in the region with 40,446 people at the 2020 decennial census. Allen County has the largest population in the region while Wells County has the lowest. Figure 2 below shows the population for each county included in this assessment. Population density in LaGrange County varied from the city of LaGrange with the highest population density per square mile at 1,001–1,500 people per square mile, with the northwest corner having a higher density of 1,501–3,279 people per square mile. . The areas of Shipshewana, Topeka and Eddy have lower populations density of 201–500 people per square mile. The rest of LaGrange County is sparsely populated. Individual county population density maps are included in Appendix C for reference.

Figure 2. Population and density by county



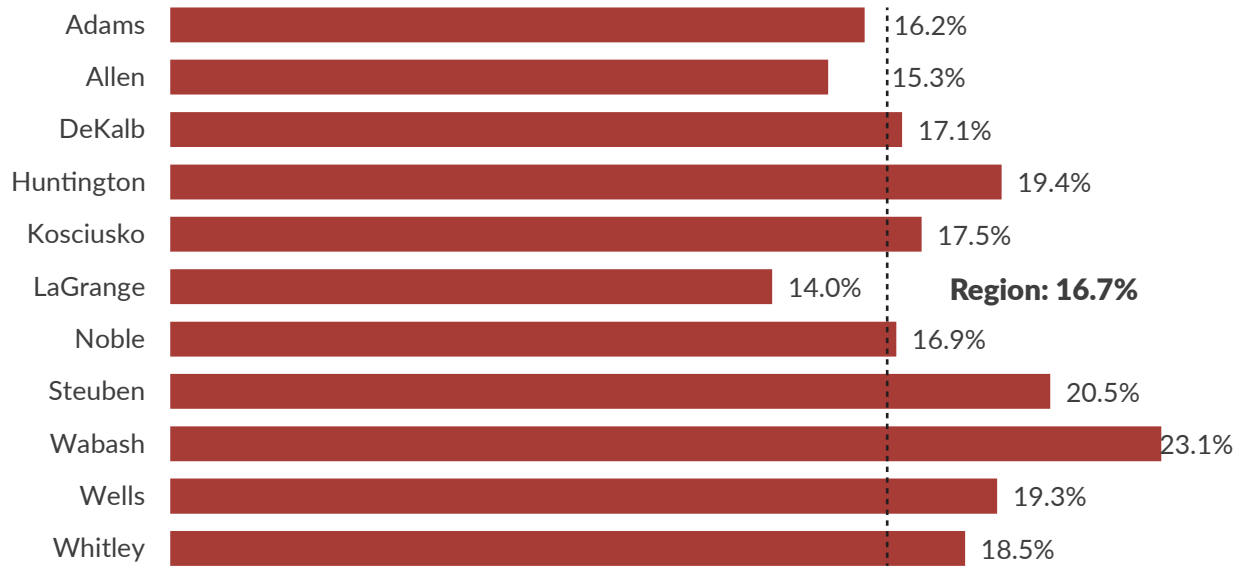
Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

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 Kosciusko County, 14 percent of the population is age 65 or older, the smallest percentage in the region; the other counties in the region vary from 15.3 percent to 23.1 percent. Figure 3 illustrates the county-by-county percentages.

Figure 3. Percentage of population Age 65 and Older



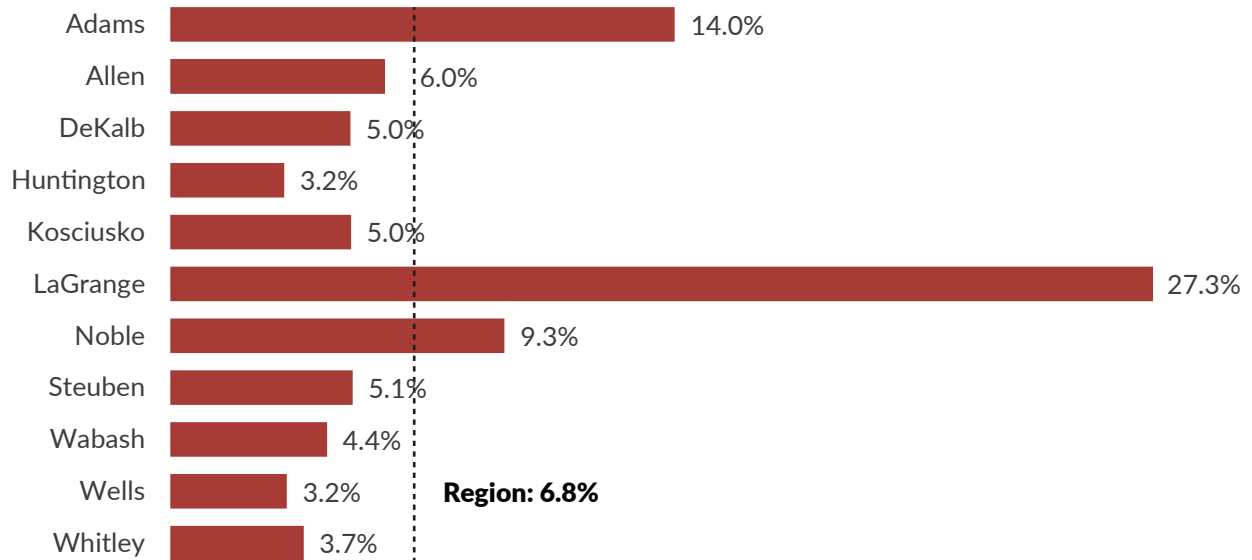
Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)



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. Twenty-seven percent of households in Kosciusko County have no vehicle. This is by far the highest amongst the other counties due to the large Amish population in LaGrange County who utilize horse and buggy as means of transportation. All other counties have fourteen percent or fewer zero-vehicle households. A breakdown by county is provided in Figure 4.

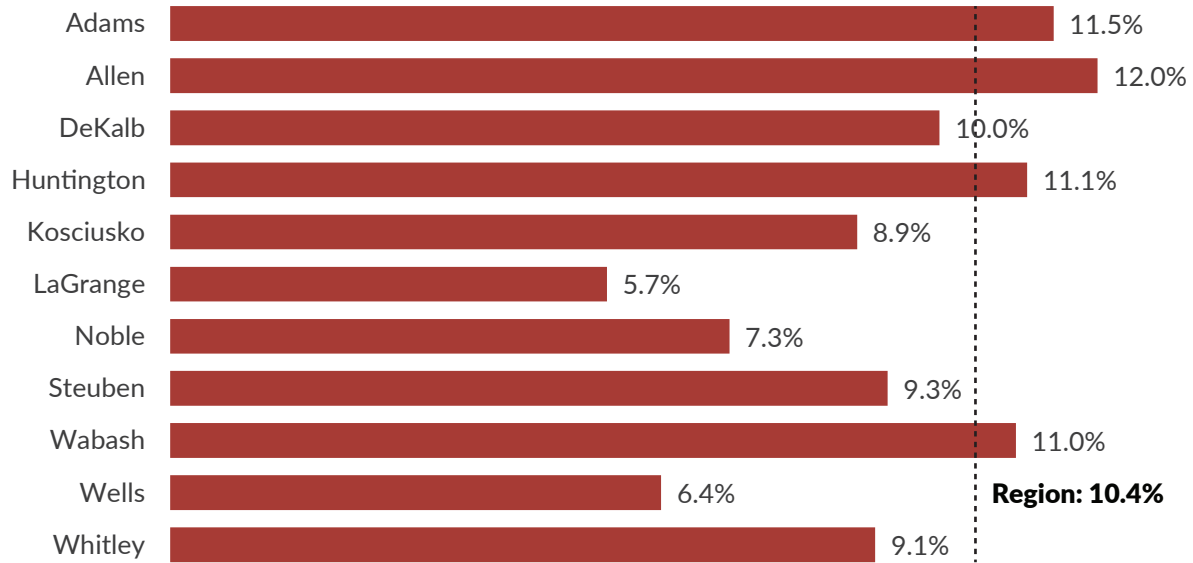
Figure 4. Zero-Vehicle Households



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

LaGrange County has 5.7 percent of its population with income below the poverty level, the lowest county rate in the region. Figure 5 shows the percentages of household incomes below the poverty level for the 11-county region.

Figure 5. Percent people below poverty level

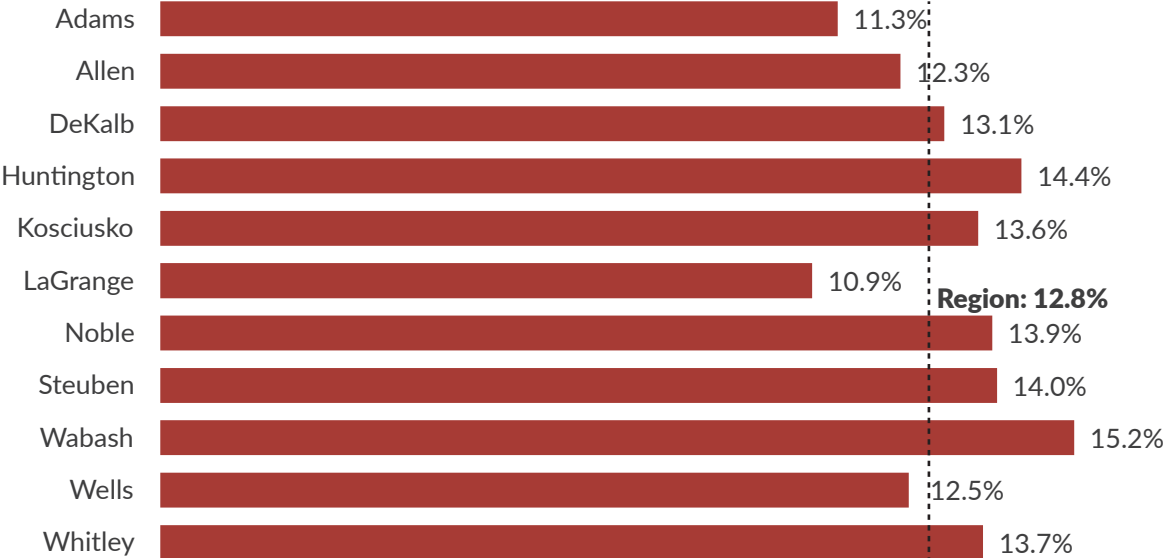


Source: 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table B17001

Individuals with Disabilities

Not quite eleven percent of the population in LaGrange County has a disability, which is the lowest percentage in the eleven counties in the region. In all other counties, twelve to fifteen percent of the population has a disability, with a regional rate of 12.8 percent, 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

The following recommendations listing and Table 3 summarizes the recommendations and action steps pertinent to LaGrange 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 5: Regional Carpool/Vanpool Program

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

Table 3. Recommendations tables

| Recommendation #3 | Action Steps |
|---|--|
| <p>LaGrange County could participate in a regional scheduling/dispatching software. Since service limitations, capacity constraints and driver shortage were identified as challenges, this initiative would help eliminate availability issues within the region by expanding access to services between the counties.</p> | <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 #5 | Action Steps |
| <p>LaGrange County could participate in the expansion of the carpool/vanpool program by working with transportation partners to help meet the demand for employment trips during second and third shifts. This program would be developed in coordination with local employers and advertised to employees. This program could be operated either in-house or under contract with a private provider.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a lead agency and structure for the carpool/vanpool program (i.e., in-house or contracted). • Meet with local employers to identify the potential level of demand from employees throughout the region. Use this information to help determine the size of the program. • Implement vanpool/carpool services. |
| Recommendation #6 | Action Steps |
| <p>LaGrange 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> | <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). |
| Recommendation #7 | Action Steps |
| <p>LaGrange 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> | <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. |

| Recommendation #8 | Action Steps |
|--|---|
| <p>LaGrange County could participate in collaborative and coordinated regional efforts to review and evaluate current Indiana Medicaid brokerage requirements.</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. |

| Recommendation #9 | Action Steps |
|--|--|
| <p>LaGrange 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> | <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. |