



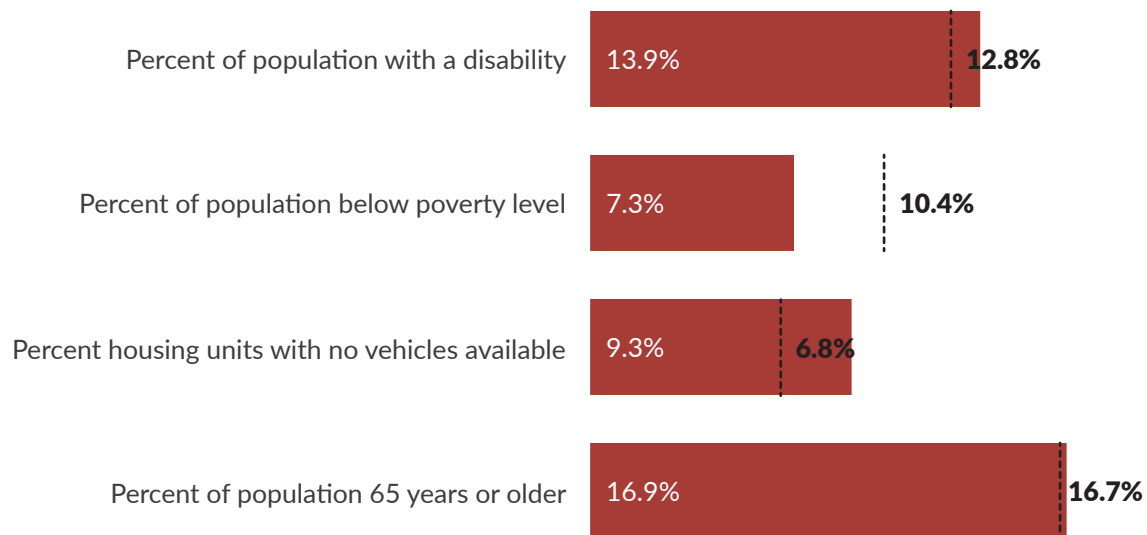
Noble County

Statistics at a glance

Table 1. Noble County and regional statistics

	Noble County	11-county region
Total Population	47,457	797,071
Median Household Income	\$70,286	
Percent of population with a disability	13.9%	12.8%
Percent of population below poverty level	7.3%	10.4%
Percent housing units with no vehicles available	9.3%	6.8%
Percent of population 65 years or older	16.9%	16.7%

Figure 1. Noble 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

Noble Transit Service directly operates public transportation and senior citizen programs and services. Transportation is provided anywhere in Noble County. There are no eligibility requirements to use the COA transportation services. For individuals age 60 or older, medical trips are by donation in Noble County only. Hours of operation are 5:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

Table 2. Noble Transit Service 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
17	14	7	0	13

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 313 people from Noble County participated. Almost forty-one percent of respondents who answered the survey from Noble County were between 25 to 34, 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:

- Rural public transportation is available through Noble County Transit throughout all of Noble County
- Maintenance support
- Receiving 5310/5311 funding
- Good partnership between the Arc of Noble County and Noble County Transit

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

313 people from Noble County participated.

11.96% were ages 65 and older.

23.55% have a disability that affects their ability to drive.

23.27% live with someone with a disability that affects their ability to drive.

19.78% were pregnant or had been pregnant within the last 18 months.

25.72% 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:

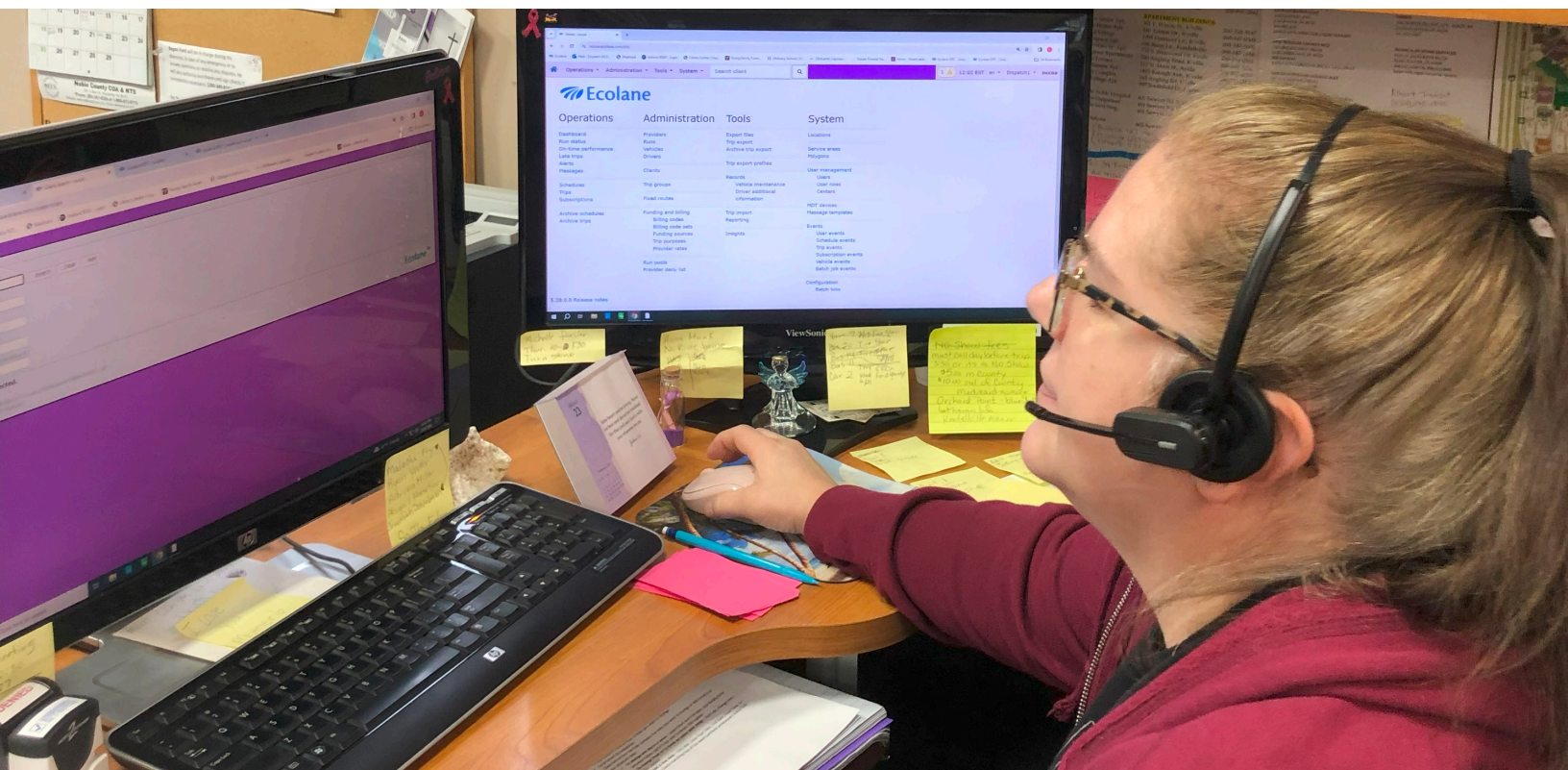
- Under served
 - Capacity and funding constraints
- Employment transportation
- Service availability and accessibility
 - No evenings or weekends
- Staffing shortage
- Vehicle selection
- High out of pocket fares
- Awareness of available transportation options

Survey results support the challenges mentioned. Twenty-nine percent of survey respondents indicated that there was no public transportation service available. Lack of accessibility and inconvenient bus schedules/routes were reported by a quarter of respondents. Twenty-six percent of respondents also indicated that the cost of bus fare was a deterrent to using public transportation. When asked what would help improve ability to get to places nearly twenty-nine percent of respondents indicated lower bus fare. A quarter of respondents also indicated that transportation service does not cross state or county lines.

A few open-ended responses indicated that there is an issue with scheduling and unavailable drivers which is resulting in last minute cancellations. Nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that unreliable transportation limits ability to shop for food and other household needs, run errands, go to school or take children to school or activities

Summary

The main issues in Noble County appear to be capacity/funding constraints, high fares, lack of drivers and unawareness of available transportation options.

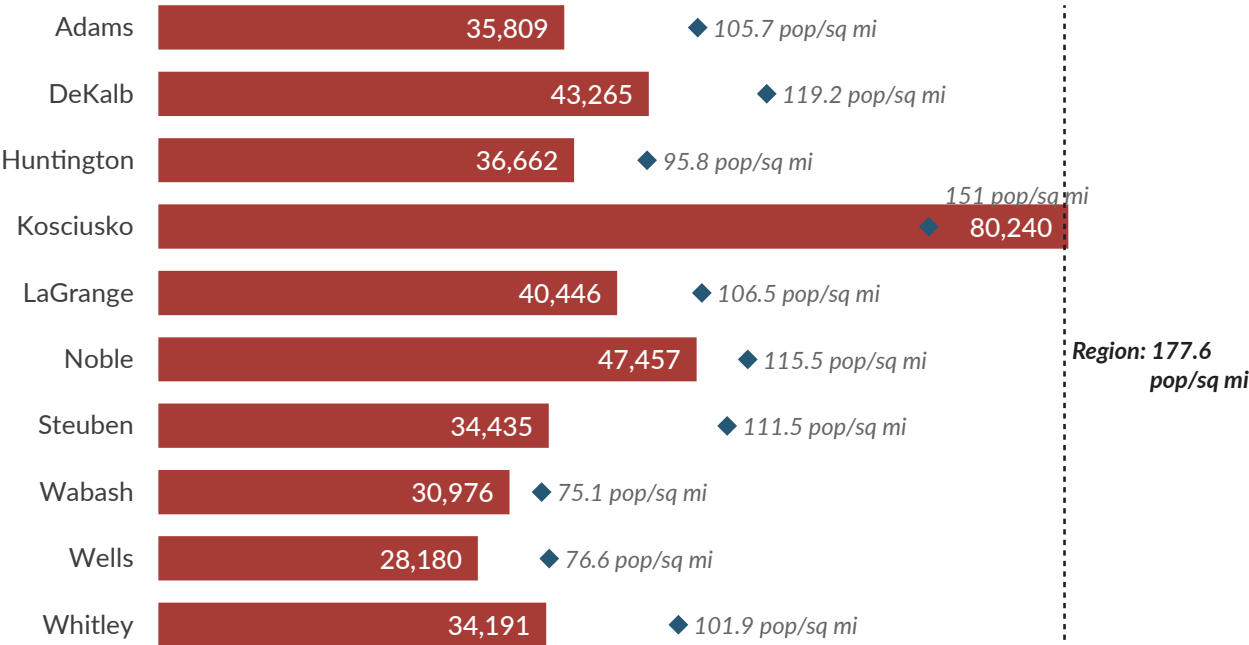


Demographics

Population

Noble County has the third largest population in the region with 47,457 people in 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 Noble County varied with Kendallville having the highest population density at 1,501–7,480 people per square mile. Ligonier has medium to high population density, while the areas of Rome City, Round Lake, Albion and Avilla have lower population densities. The rest of the county has low population density. Individual county population density maps are included in Appendix C for reference.

Figure 2. Population and density by county



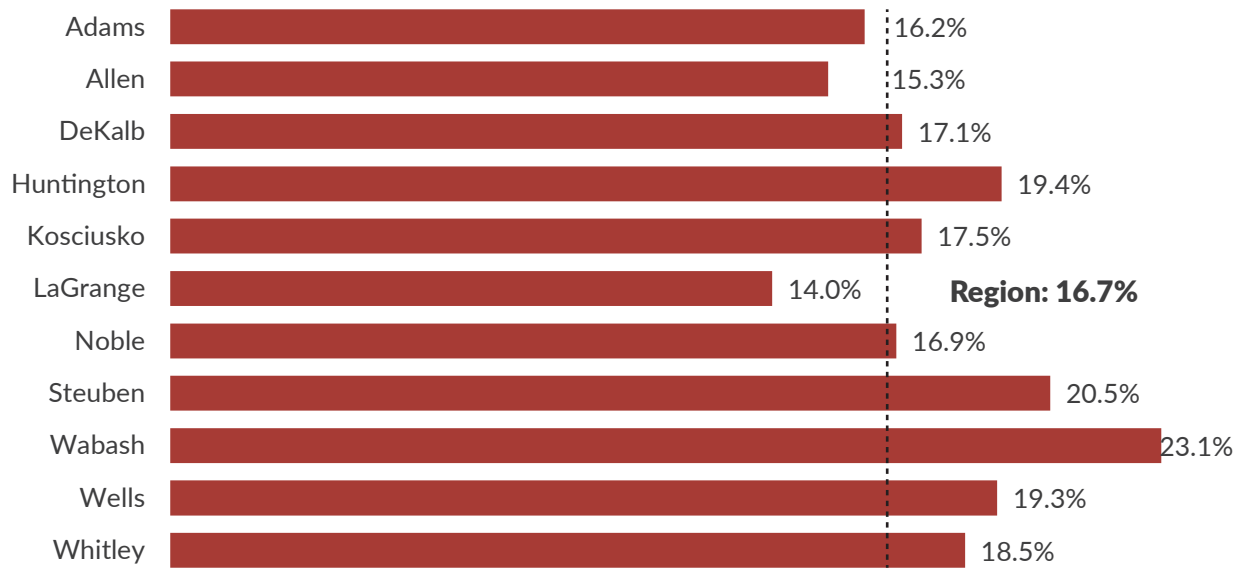
Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

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 Noble County, 16.9 percent of the population is age 65 or older, just above the region's rate of 16.7 percent. LaGrange has the youngest population, at 14 percent older adults, while Wabash and Steuben have the oldest, with over 20 percent older adults. Figure 3 illustrates the county-by-county percentages.

Figure 3. Percentage of population Age 65 and Older

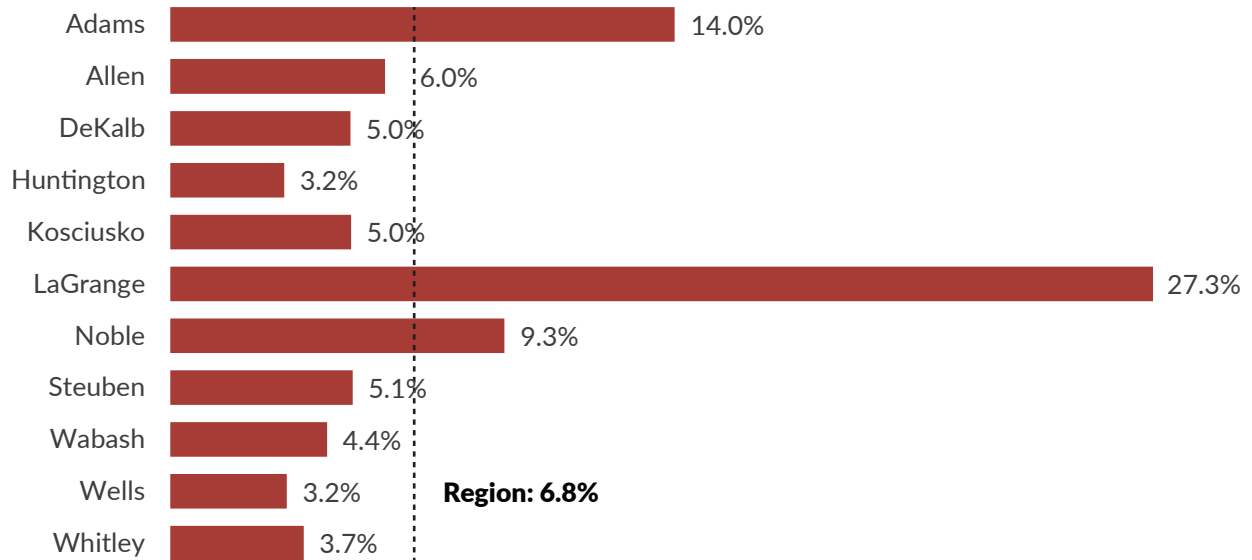


Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

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. Nine percent of households in Noble County have no vehicle, the third highest rate in the region behind LaGrange County at 27.3 percent, and Adams County, at 14 percent. All other counties have six percent or less zero-vehicle households. A breakdown by county is provided in Figure 4.

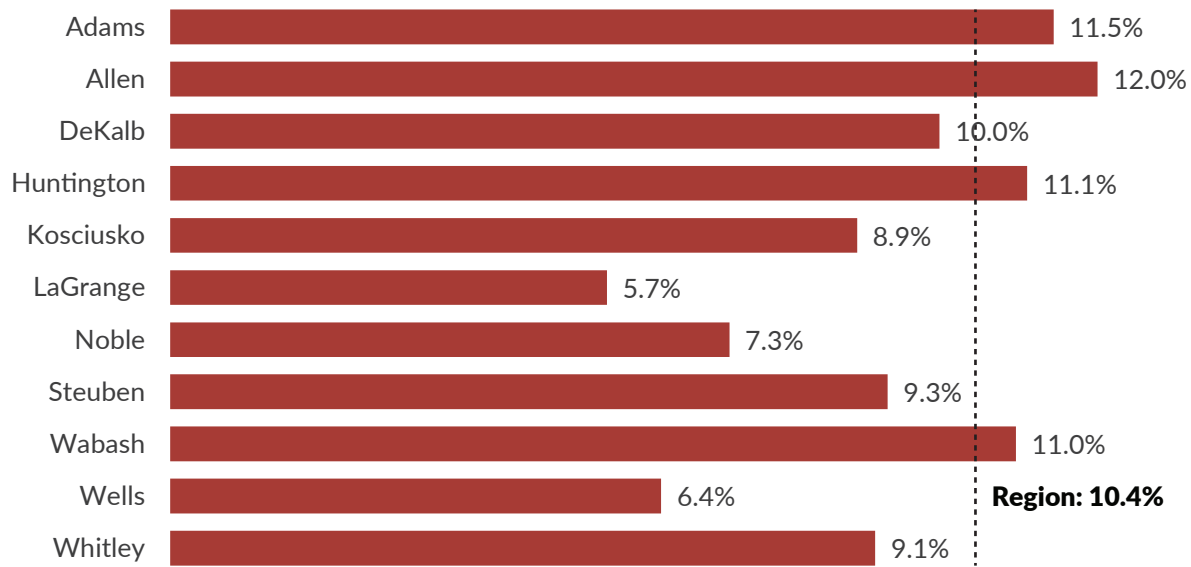
Figure 4. Zero-Vehicle Households



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

Noble County has 7.3 percent of its population with income below the poverty level, the region’s third lowest, behind Lagrange at 5.7 percent, and Wells County, at 6.4 percent. Every other county in the region has a poverty rate of over 8.9 percent. Figure 5 shows the percentages of household incomes below the poverty level for the 11-county region.

Figure 5. Percent people below poverty level

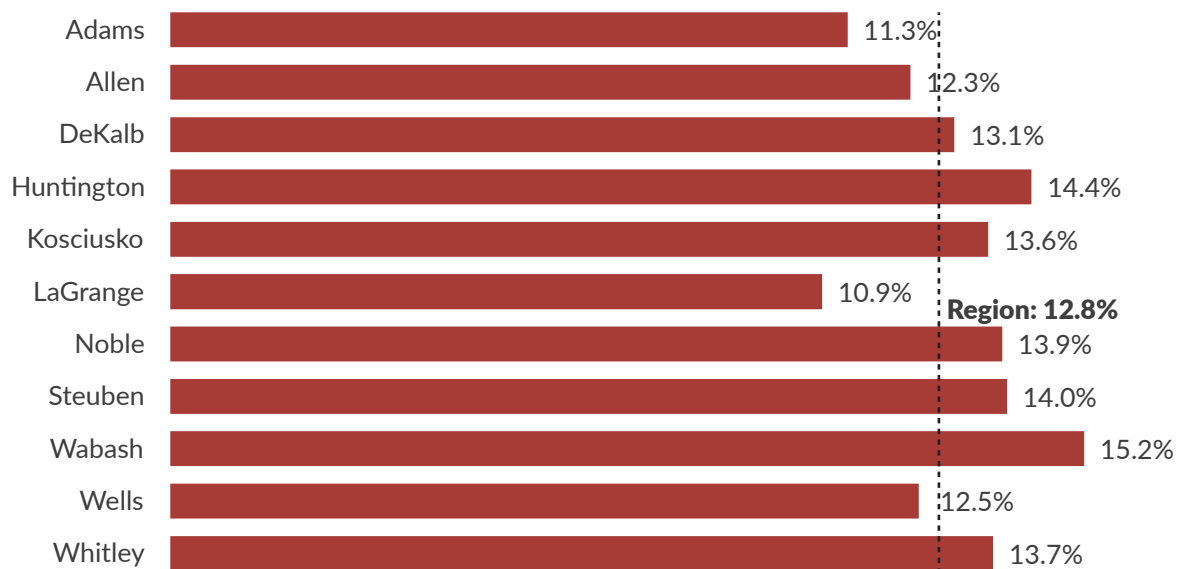


Source: 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table B17001

Individuals with Disabilities

In Noble County, an estimated 13.9 percent of the population has a disability, the third highest rate in the region behind Wabash at 15.2 percent, and Huntington, at 14.4 percent. In all other counties, eleven to 13.7 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 Noble 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 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

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

Table 3. Recommendations tables

Recommendation #3	Action Steps
<p>Noble County could participate in a regional scheduling/dispatching software. Since unavailability of service and driver shortages (resulting in cancellations) identified as challenges, this initiative would help eliminate service gaps 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 #4	Action Steps
<p>Noble County could participate in a program that assists working individuals with purchasing necessary parts to repair vehicles since almost twenty-one percent of survey respondents stated having a more reliable vehicle would help improve ability to get to places. The program would involve mechanics who volunteer time and/or offer reduce-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.</p>	<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.

Recommendation #5	Action Steps
<p>Noble 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>Noble 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>Noble 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>Noble 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>Noble 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.
Recommendation #10	Action Steps
<p>Noble 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 main issues voiced was that there was an unawareness of available service options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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