



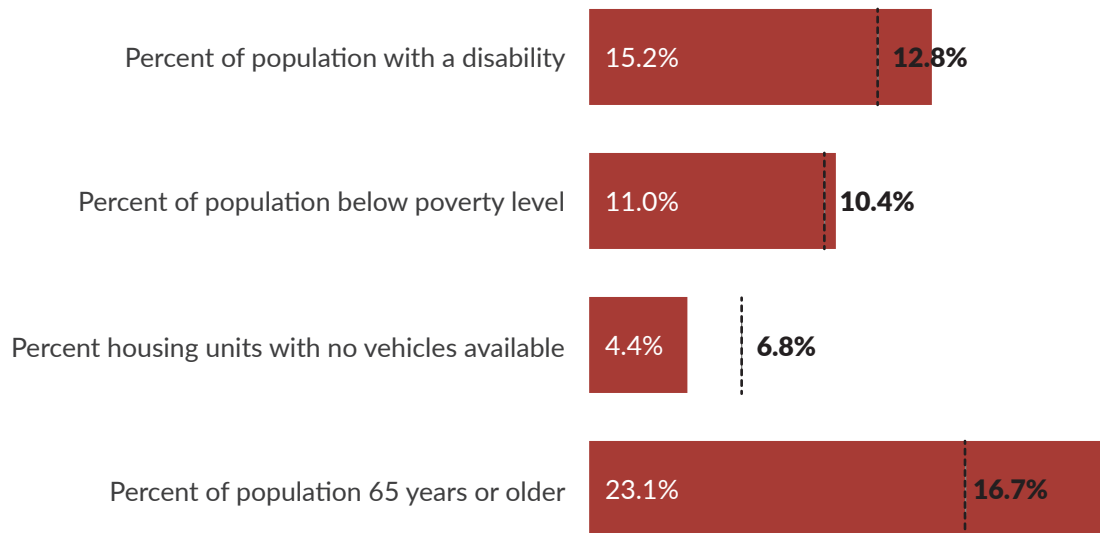
Wabash County

Statistics at a glance

Table 1. Wabash County and regional statistics

	Wabash County	11-county region
Total Population	30,976	797,071
Median Household Income	\$66,194	
Percent of population with a disability	15.2%	12.8%
Percent of population below poverty level	11.0%	10.4%
Percent housing units with no vehicles available	4.4%	6.8%
Percent of population 65 years or older	23.1%	16.7%

Figure 1. Wabash 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

Wabash County Public Transportation (Living Well in Wabash County COA, Inc.) directly operates public transportation and senior citizen programs and services. Transportation is provided anywhere in Wabash County. There are no eligibility requirements to use the COA transportation services. Hours of operation are 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

Table 2. STAR Transportation 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
8	8	4-5	2	6

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 316 people from Wabash County participated. Thirty-two percent of respondents who answered the survey from Wabash 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 Wabash County Public Transportation throughout all of Wabash County
- Door to door transportation
- Deviated fixed route service available in certain areas
- Seniors have transportation and receive socialization and meals

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

316 people from Wabash County participated.

24.04% were ages 65 and older.

29.54% have a disability that affects their ability to drive.

25.20% live with someone with a disability that affects their ability to drive.

18.88% were pregnant or had been pregnant within the last 18 months.

19.30% 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:

- Unavailability of service or inconvenient bus service
- Lack of awareness of available transportation options
- Expensive fares

Survey results support the challenges mentioned. Almost twenty-seven percent of survey respondents indicated that they do not use community or public transportation because bus service is not available or convenient to where they live and/or work, while twenty-one percent stated that the bus schedules/routes were inconvenient. Other open-ended responses were submitted stating that the respondents were unaware of what service options were available or that the service was not convenient or that there was difficulty in trying to schedule rides. Almost twenty-one percent of respondents indicated that lower cost bus fare would improve ability to go to places.

Summary

The main issues in Wabash County appear to be a lack of awareness of available service options and the unavailability of service. Fares were recently increased in Wabash County and that appears to be affecting some residents' ability to use public transportation service.

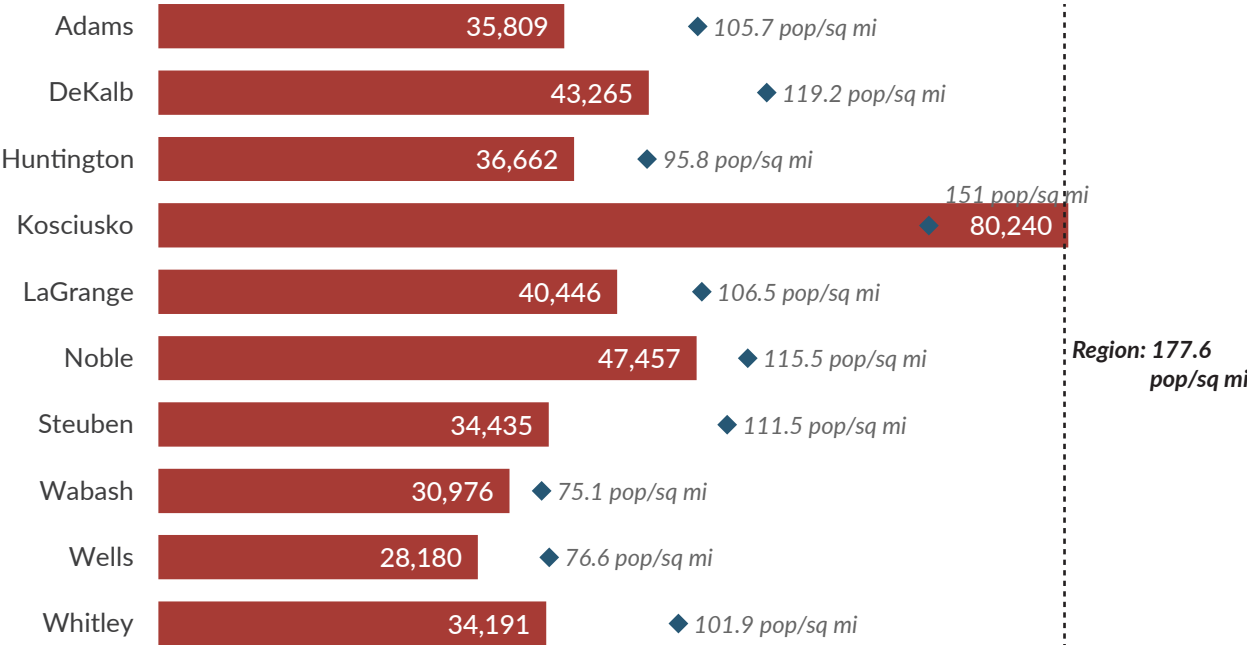


Demographics

Population

Wabash County is the second smallest county in the region with 30,976 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. Wabash, Valley Brook, and North Manchester have high to medium population density in Wabash County at 1,001–3,264 people per square mile. The area of La Fontaine has medium population density at 501–1,000 people per square mile. 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



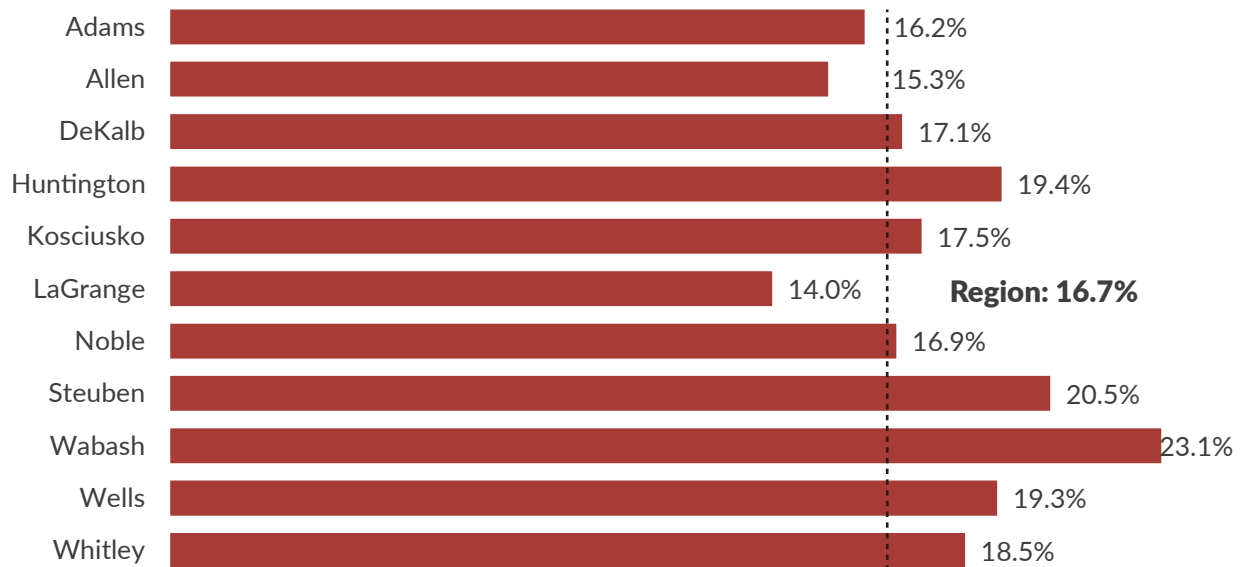
Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

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.

Wabash County has the highest percentage of the population age 65 or older in the region, at 23.1 percent. LaGrange has the youngest population, at 14 percent older adults, with the remaining counties having percentages between 15.3 to 20.5 percent older adults. Figure 3 illustrates the county-by-county percentages.

Figure 3. Percentage of population Age 65 and Older

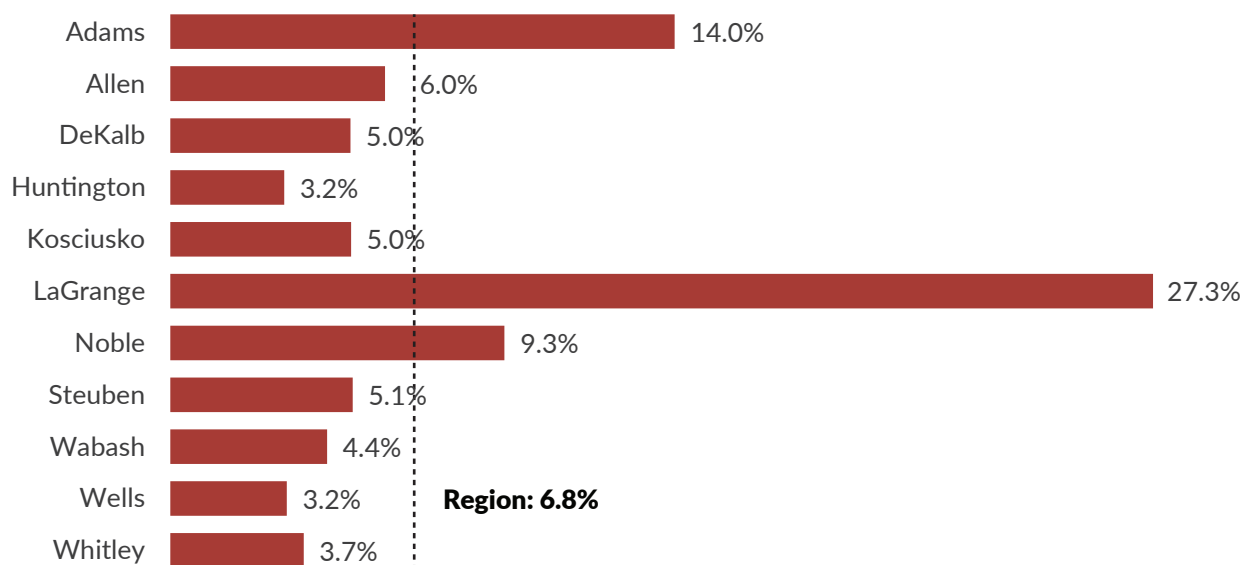


Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

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. In Wabash County, 4.4 percent of households have no vehicle, similar to Dekalb and Kosciusko counties. LaGrange County has the highest proportion of households without a vehicle, at 27.3 percent, followed by Adams County, at 14 percent. Regionally, 6.8 percent of households have no vehicles. A breakdown by county is provided in Figure 4.

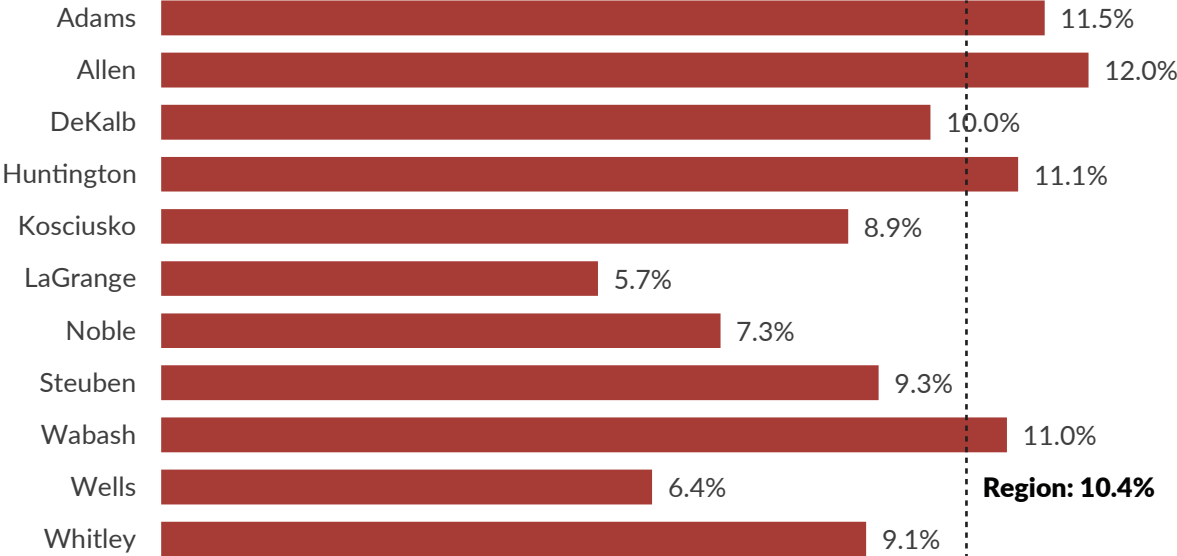
Figure 4. Zero-Vehicle Households



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

Wabash County has an estimated eleven percent of its population with income below the poverty level, which is above the regional rate of 10.4 percent. It, along with Allen, Adams, and Huntington counties, have between 11 and 12 percent of residents with income below the poverty level; all the remaining counties have rates under 10 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

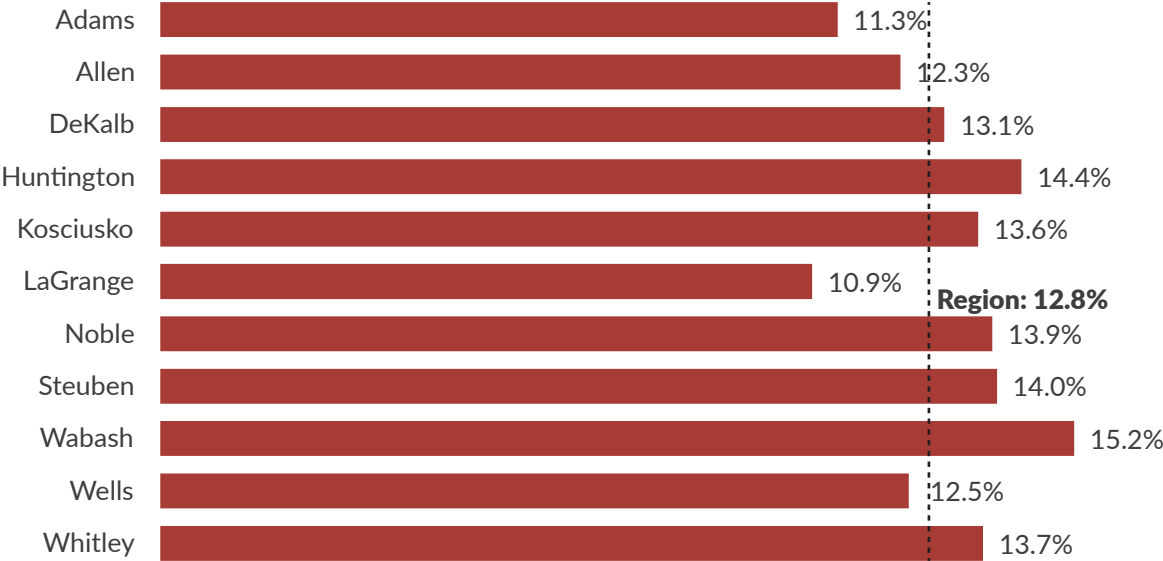


Source: 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table B17001

Individuals with Disabilities

In Wabash County, an estimated 15.2 percent of the population has a disability, the highest rate in the region. All other counties have rates between 10.9 and 14.4 percent of the population with 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 Wabash 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>Wabash County could participate in a regional scheduling/dispatching software. Since service limitations and capacity constraints were 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>Wabash County could participate in a program that assists working individuals with purchasing necessary parts to repair vehicles since close to a quarter 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>Wabash 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>Wabash 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>Wabash 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>Wabash 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>Wabash 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

Wabash 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 since one of the issues raised in the survey results was lack of awareness of available transportation options.

- 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

