



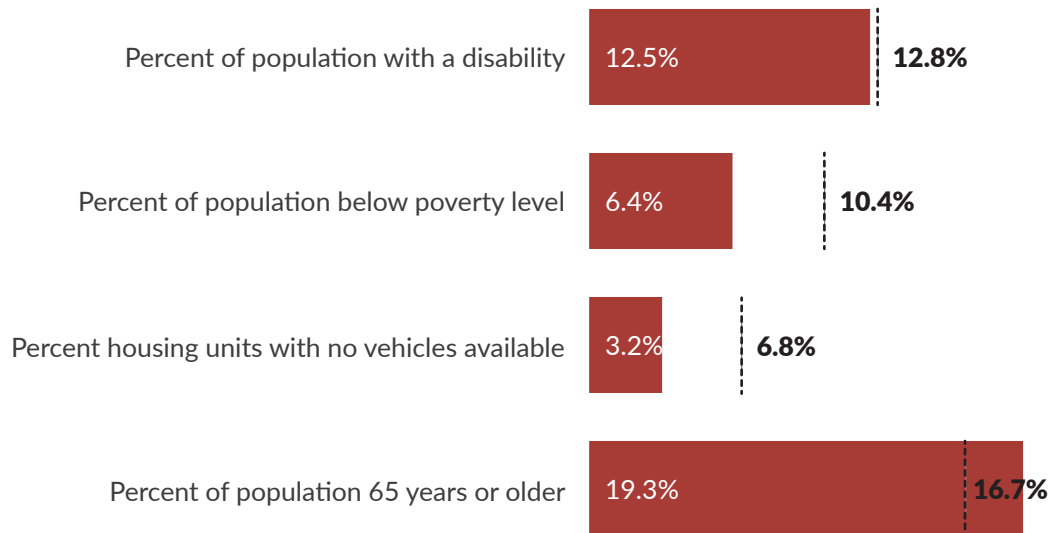
# Wells County

## Statistics at a glance

**Table 1. Wells County and regional statistics**

	Wells County	11-county region
Total Population	28,180	797,071
Median Household Income	\$68,074	
Percent of population with a disability	12.5%	12.8%
Percent of population below poverty level	6.4%	10.4%
Percent housing units with no vehicles available	3.2%	6.8%
Percent of population 65 years or older	19.3%	16.7%

**Figure 1. Wells 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

Wells County Council on Aging, Inc. (COA) directly operates public transportation through Wells on Wheels (WOW), and senior citizen programs and services. Transportation is provided throughout Wells County. Trips up to 50 miles outside of Wells County are also provided on Tuesday and Thursday. There are no eligibility requirements to use the WOW transportation services. Hours of operation are 6:00 AM to 7:00 PM, weekdays.

*Table 2. Wells on Wheels 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
14	14	10	4	8

## 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 233 people from Wells County participated. Forty-seven percent of respondents who answered the survey from Wells 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 throughout Wells County is available through Wells on Wheels
- Medicaid transportation
- While curb-to-curb service, will assist to door if requested
- Trips up to 30 miles outside of Bluffton available

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

*233 people from Wells County participated.*

*8.92% were ages 65 and older.*

*28.77% have a disability that affects their ability to drive.*

*22.07% live with someone with a disability that affects their ability to drive.*

*25.35% were pregnant or had been pregnant within the last 18 months.*

*26.76% had a legal violation that was keeping them from driving.*

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## 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:

- No service between counties or across state lines
- Lack of awareness of available transportation options
- Lack of transportation in very rural areas of the county

Survey results support the challenges mentioned. Thirty-one percent of respondents indicated that bus service is not available or is inconvenient and that accessibility was an obstacle in using transportation service. Nearly thirty percent of respondents indicate that service not crossing state lines is an obstacle to using transportation service, while nearly twenty-five percent indicate crossing county lines is an obstacle. Over thirty-two percent indicate that lack of transportation service affect their ability to run errands, while nearly twenty-nine percent indicate a lack of transportation service affects their ability to shop for household needs.

## Summary

The main issues in Wells County appear to be lack of service between counties and crossing state lines, as well as transportation in the very rural areas of the county. A lack of awareness of available service also appears to be an issue since over thirty percent of respondents indicated that there wasn't service available to them or that inconvenient routes was an obstacle.

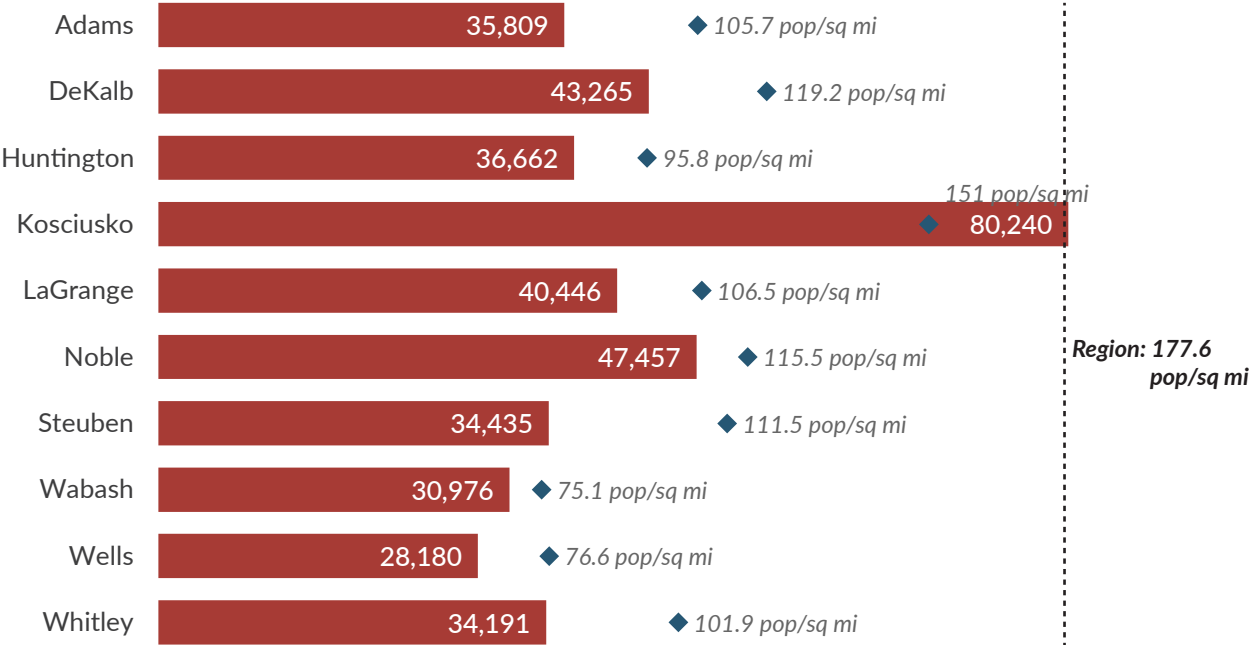


# Demographics

## Population

Wells County is the smallest county in the region with 28,180 people in the 2020 decennial census. Allen County has the largest population in the region. Figure 2 below shows the population for each county included in this assessment. Bluffton and Ossian have the highest population density at 501–7,471 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)

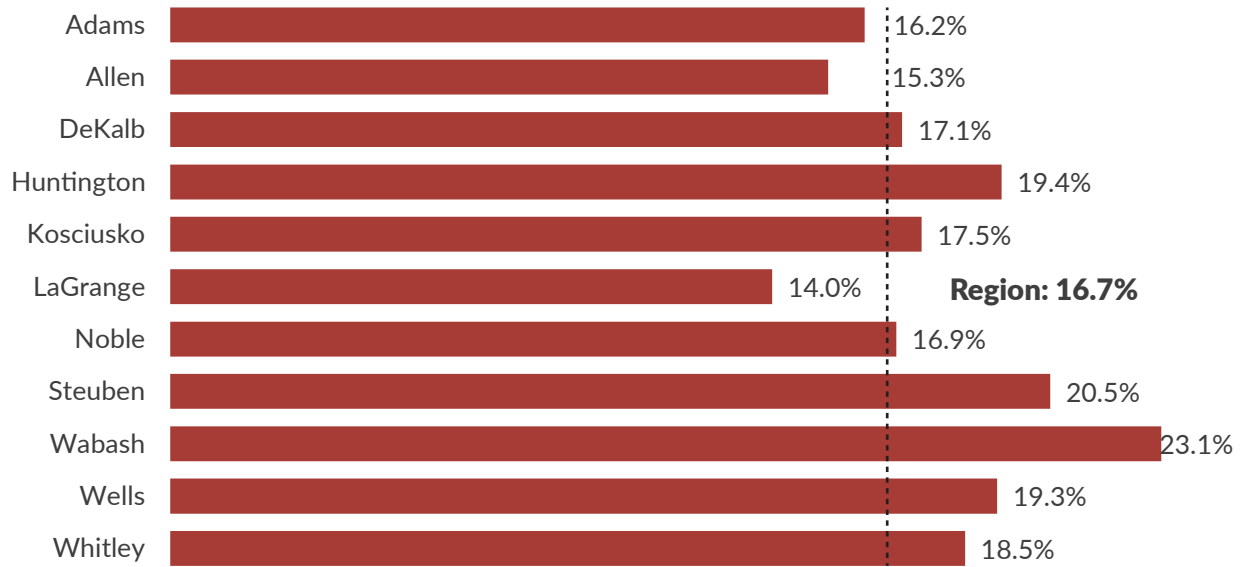
## Age

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.

Wells County has the fourth-highest percentage of its population age 65 or older, at 19.3 percent. 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 18.5 percent older adults. Figure 3 illustrates the county-by-county percentages.



Figure 3. Percentage of population Age 65 and Older

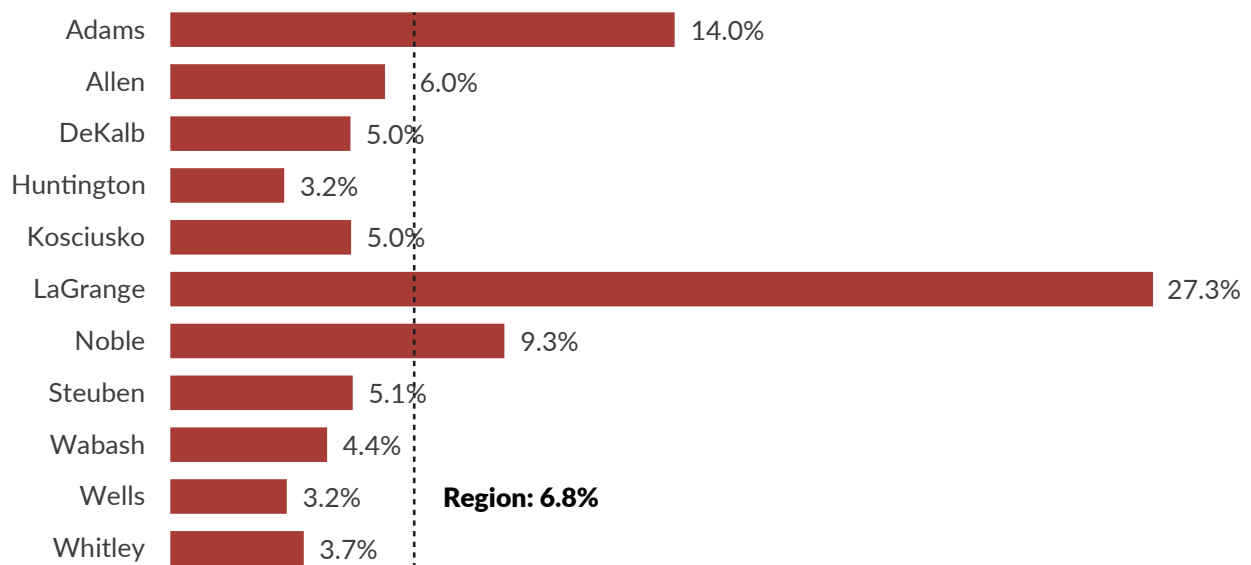


Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

## 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. Wells and Huntington counties share the lowest percentage of households without a vehicle, at 3.2 percent. 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.

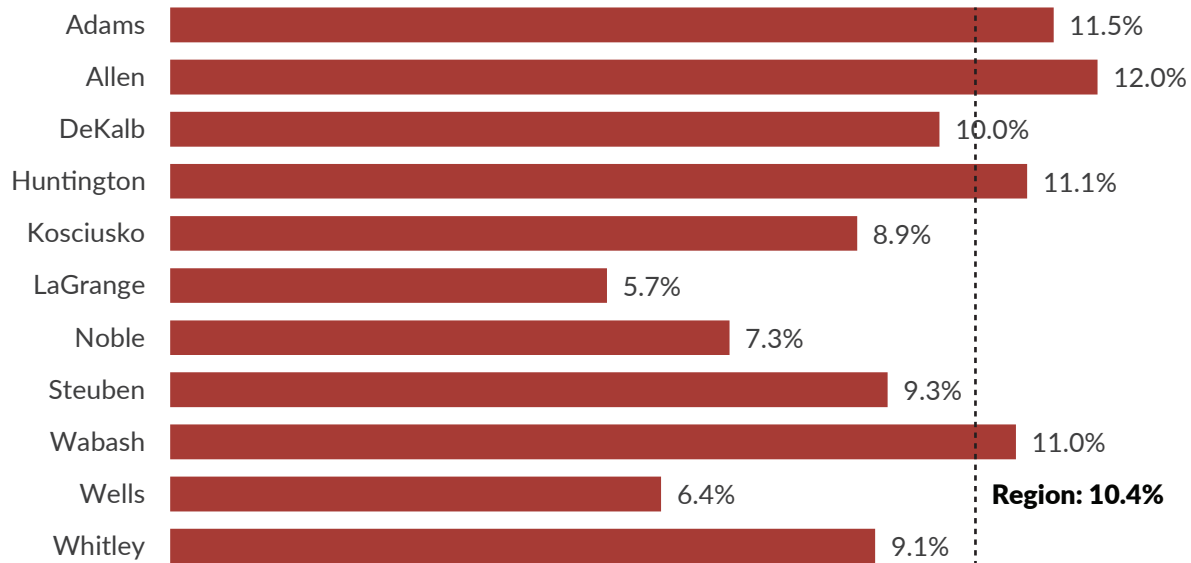
Figure 4. Zero-Vehicle Households



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

Wells County has an estimated 6.4 percent of its population with income below the poverty level, the second lowest after Lagrange, at 5.7 percent, both well below the regional rate of 10.4 percent. Adams County has the highest poverty rate in the region, with 12 percent; the region's rate is 10.4 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**

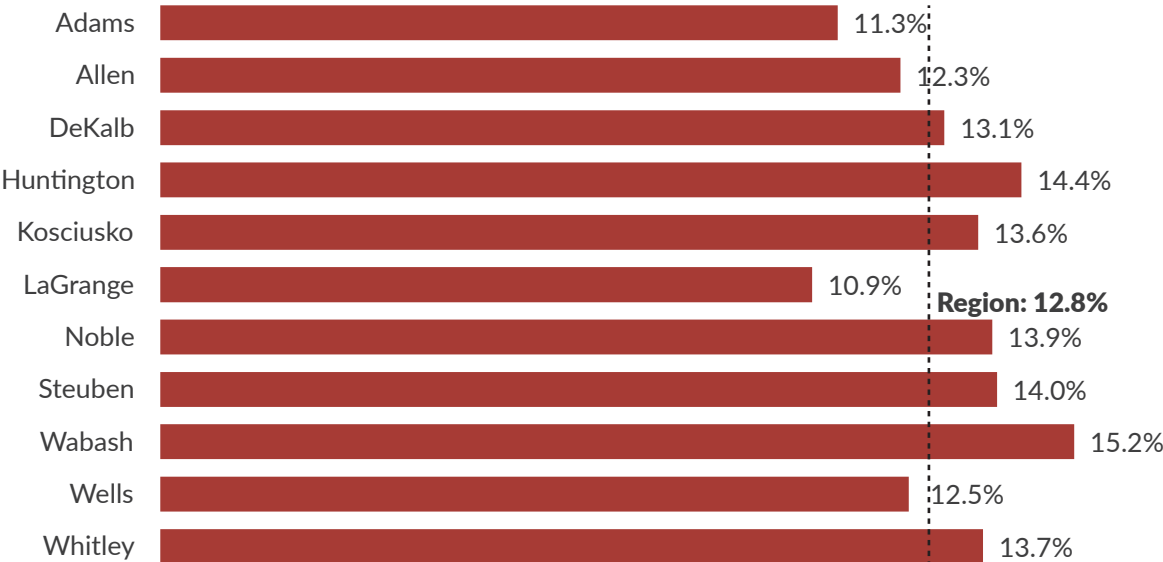


Source: 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table B17001

# Individuals with Disabilities

In Wells County, an estimated 12.5 percent of the population has a disability, just under the regional rate of 12.8 percent. LaGrange County has the lowest percentage with 10.9 percent of the population with a disability; Wabash County has the highest rate of 15.2 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 Wells 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>Wells 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"> <li>• Rural transit providers implement broad use of block scheduling to enable more trip-sharing opportunities.</li> <li>• Rural transit providers would establish local permission as well as agreements between agencies to pick up trips that would otherwise go unserved.</li> <li>• Rural transit providers would establish the necessary policies, consistent driver training standards, and customer service procedures.</li> </ul>
Recommendation #4	Action Steps
<p>Wells 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"> <li>• Identify a lead agency to administer the program and develop a board or committee for program establishment and fundraising.</li> <li>• Identify program parameters and policies.</li> <li>• Promote the program to potential funders.</li> <li>• Implement the program through partner non-profit agencies that will identify good candidates for the program.</li> <li>• Establish and measure program performance.</li> </ul>
Recommendation #5	Action Steps
<p>Wells 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"> <li>• Identify a lead agency and structure for the carpool/vanpool program (i.e., in-house or contracted).</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Implement vanpool/carpool services.</li> </ul>



Recommendation #6	Action Steps
<p>Wells 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"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Determine the most appropriate regional structure for the eleven counties that will provide the most opportunity for increased mobility throughout the region.</li> <li>• Identify a lead agency for the region and/or subregions.</li> <li>• Present regional structure to INDOT.</li> <li>• Submit regional Section 5311 grant application(s).</li> </ul>
Recommendation #7	Action Steps
<p>Wells 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"> <li>• Identify vehicles throughout the region that are idle on days or periods during the day.</li> <li>• Identify and establish an organization to manage the vehicle-sharing lease/rental program.</li> <li>• Develop lease/rental agreement.</li> <li>• Establish a vehicle lease/rental management agency.</li> <li>• Establish vehicle lease/rental rates at a level sufficient to support administration and management of the program.</li> </ul>
Recommendation #8	Action Steps
<p>Wells 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"> <li>• Develop a list of contractual issues that are deterring providers from contracting with NEMT brokers.</li> <li>• Develop recommendations for contract revisions.</li> <li>• Meet with Indiana's NEMT brokers to present and negotiate contract revisions.</li> </ul>
Recommendation #9	Action Steps
<p>Wells 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"> <li>• Develop information packet with instructions on how to enroll in the Indiana Medicaid Family or Associate Transportation Program.</li> <li>• Promote and provide education about the Indiana Medicaid family and associate transportation program.</li> <li>• Establish a program to assist, as needed, with the completion of the Medicaid Family Member or Associate Transportation Services Form.</li> </ul>



## Recommendation #10

Wells 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.

## 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

