



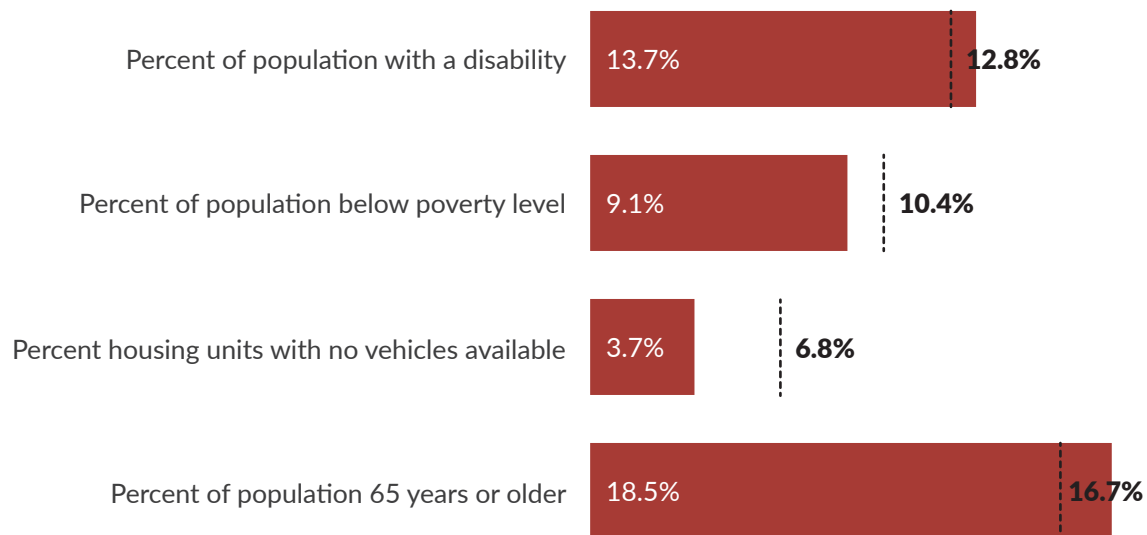
# Whitley County

## Statistics at a glance

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

	Whitley County	11-county region
Total Population	34,191	797,071
Median Household Income	\$73,636	
Percent of population with a disability	13.7%	12.8%
Percent of population below poverty level	9.1%	10.4%
Percent housing units with no vehicles available	3.7%	6.8%
Percent of population 65 years or older	18.5%	16.7%

**Figure 1. Whitley 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

Whitley County Council on Aging, Inc. (COA) directly operates public transportation through Whitley County Transit, services for individuals with disabilities, and senior citizen programs and services. Door-to-door public transport service is provided for individuals who reside in Whitley County and also to Allen, Huntington, DeKalb, Kosciusko, and Noble Counties upon request. Whitley County Transit will also transport to Indianapolis and the VA Hospital in Marion for medical appointments. There are no eligibility requirements to use the COA transportation services. Hours of operation are 7:00–5:00 PM, Monday–Friday.

*Table 2. Whitley County Council on Aging 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
12	12	7	1	11

## 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 250 people from Whitley County participated. Thirty-seven percent of respondents who answered the survey from Whitley 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 Whitley County Transit
- Uber-like system available if eligible
- Routematch software

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

*250 people from Whitley County participated.*

*23.81% were ages 65 and older.*

*22.94% have a disability that affects their ability to drive.*

*22.12% live with someone with a disability that affects their ability to drive.*

*19.21% were pregnant or had been pregnant within the last 18 months.*

*13.97% 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
- Capacity constraints
  - Difficulty in booking rides
  - No same day service
- Lack of accessible sidewalks/bridges
  - Cannot access the library or across Main Street due to bridge on the Blue River not being accessible

Survey results support the challenges mentioned. Nearly a quarter of respondents indicated obstacles included inconvenient bus routes/schedules, no service available, lack of accessibility, cost of fares and no service available across state or county lines. When asked what would help improve ability to get to places nearly twenty-four percent of respondents indicated better walking or biking paths, including curb cuts and sidewalks. Twenty-four percent of respondents also indicated that lack of transportation limits their ability to shop for food and run errands.

## Summary

The main issues in Whitley County appear to be capacity constraints (difficulty in booking rides), high fares, and lack of accessible sidewalks/bridges.



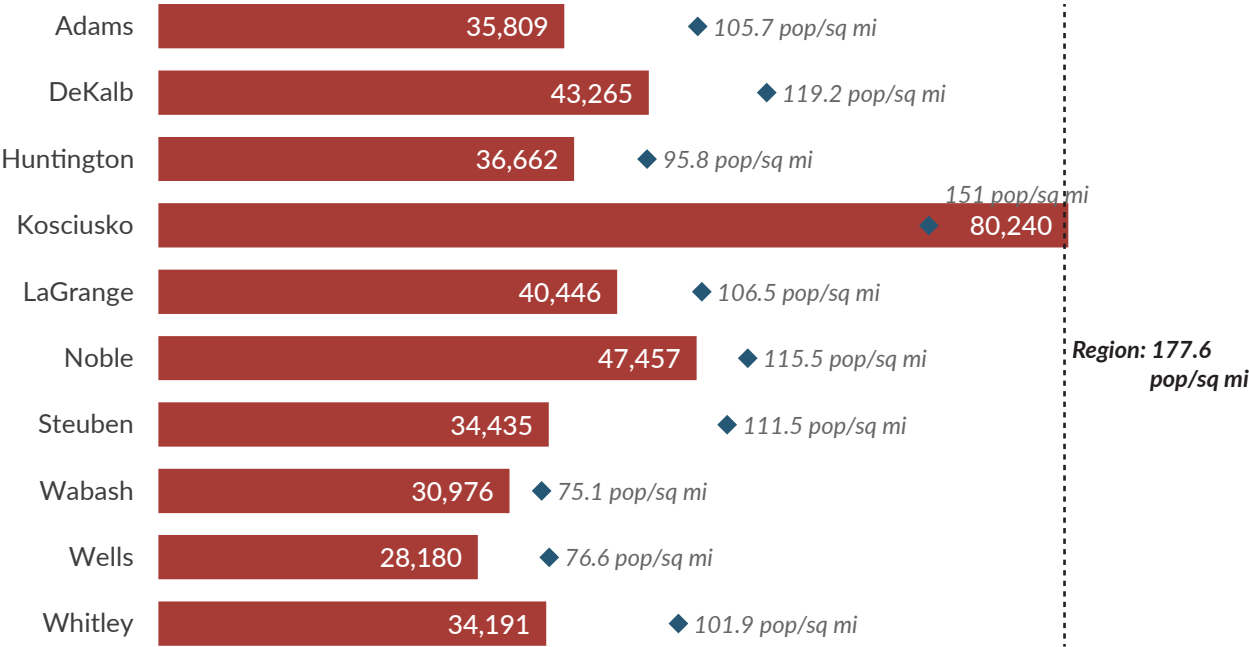


# Demographics

## Population

Whitley County has the third smallest population in the region, with 34,191 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. Columbia City has the highest population density in the county at 1,001–3,507 people per square mile. Tri-Lakes, South Whitley, Churubusco and the area surrounding Columbia City have medium to low population density, while 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**



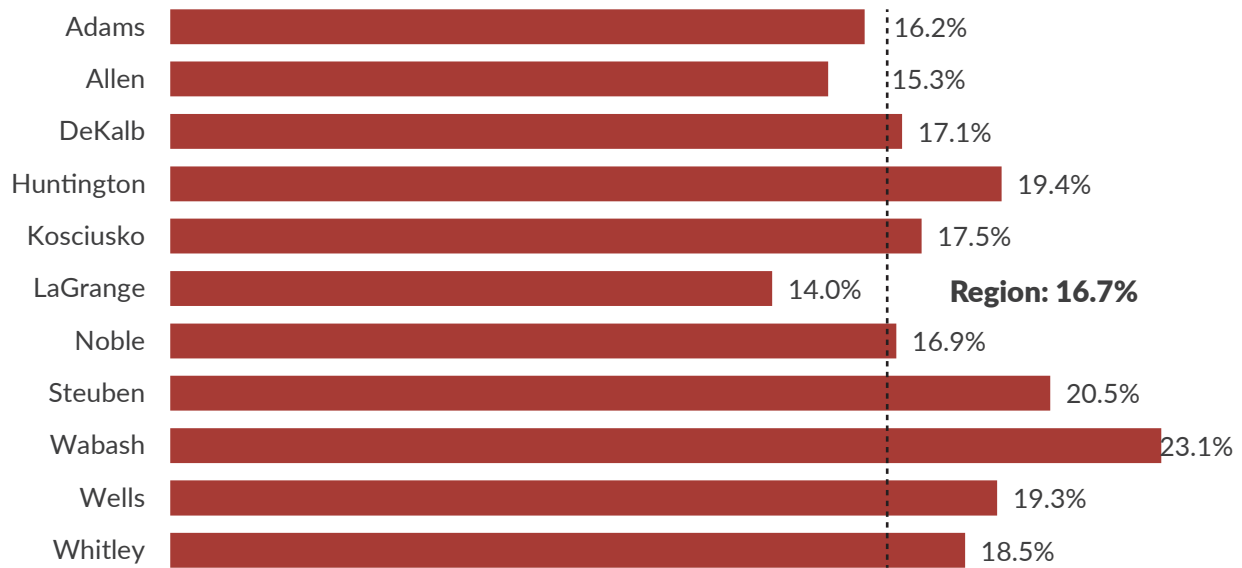
Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

# 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.

Whitley County has the fifth-highest percentage of the population age 65 or older in the region, at 18.5 percent. LaGrange has the youngest population, at 14 percent older adults, but all other counties have percentages of older adults between 15.3 to 23.1 percent. Figure 3 illustrates the county-by-county percentages.

*Figure 3. Percentage of population Age 65 and Older*

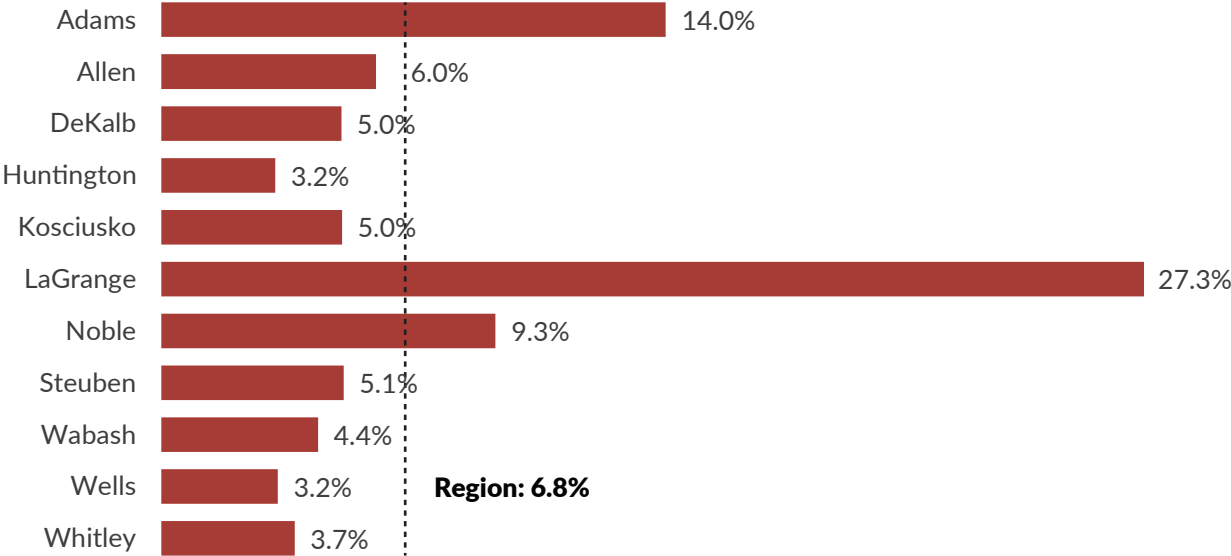


Source: 2020 DEC Redistricting Data (PL 94-171)

# 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. In Whitley County, an estimated 3.7 percent of households have no vehicle, well below the regional average of 6.8 percent. LaGrange County has the highest proportion of households without a vehicle, at 27.3 percent, followed by Adams County, at 14 percent. The remaining counties have between 3.2 to 9.3 percent of households with no vehicles. A breakdown by county is provided in Figure 4.

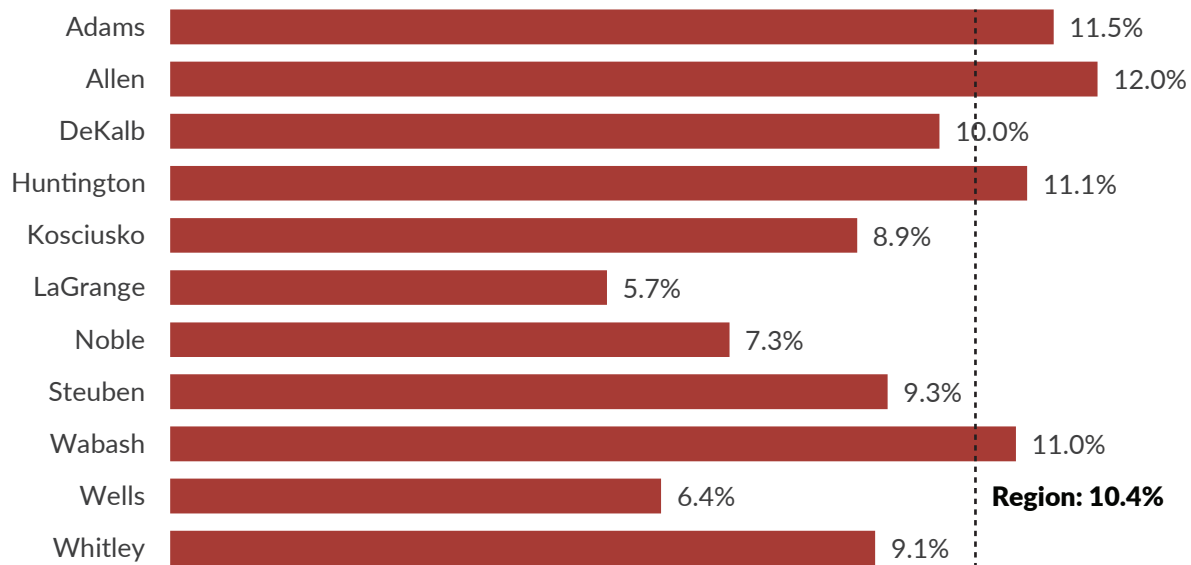
**Figure 4. Zero-Vehicle Households**



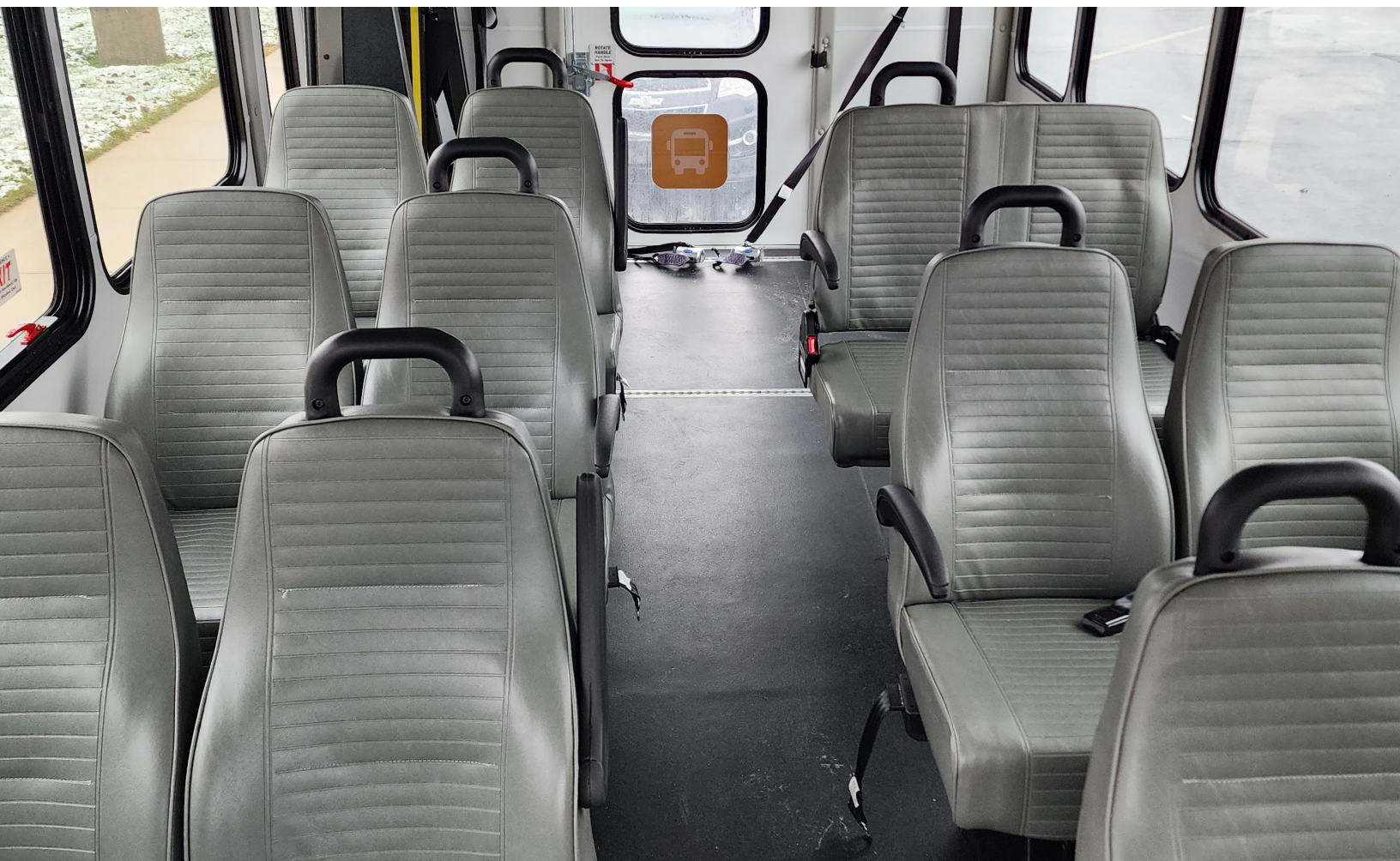
Source: 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table DP04

Whitley County has an estimated 9.1 percent of its population with income below the poverty level, which is below the regional rate of 10.4 percent. Allen, Adams, Huntington, and Wabash 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**



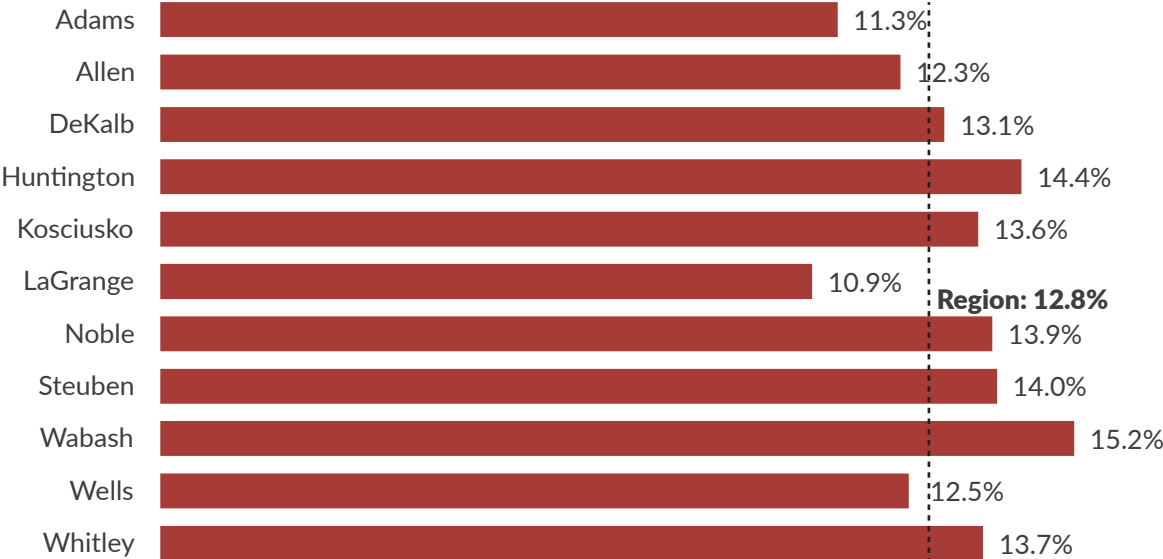
Source: 2022 American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, Table B17001



# Individuals with Disabilities

In Whitley County, an estimated 13.7 percent of the population has a disability, the fifth-highest rate in the region. County rates vary between a low of 10.9 percent in Lagrange to a high of 15.2 percent in Wabash, 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 Whitley 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



**Table 3. Recommendations tables**

Recommendation #3	Action Steps
<p>Whitley 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>Whitley 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>Whitley 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>Whitley 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>Whitley 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>Whitley 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>Whitley 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>