

2021 Region 7W/St. Cloud APO Area Local Human Services-Transit Coordination Plan

Plan Prepared By:

Region 7W/MnDOT District 3 (Adopted October 28, 2022)

St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (Adopted October 13, 2022)

**In Partnership With: Connect Central Minnesota Regional Transportation Coordination
Council (RTCC)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2021 Local Human Services - Transit Coordination Plan was developed for the Region 7W/St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) area in Central Minnesota to evaluate and improve transit needs and services for the region. The plan was prepared by MnDOT District 3, the St. Cloud APO and Region 7W in partnership with Connect Central Minnesota Regional Transportation Coordination Council (CCMRTCC). Region 7W covers Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright counties in Minnesota. This plan serves as the strategic guide for transit services, both public and private, for Region 7W over the next five years.

Region 7W Transit Overview

Three major components were utilized to develop and create this plan, which include a demographic profile of the region that supports the analysis of the mobility needs of the area's population with a focus on elderly individuals and individuals with disabilities. In addition, a view of mobility today looks at existing transportation needs while a vision for tomorrow looks at goals and strategies to expand and improve services.

Demographic Data

- According to the 2020 Census, the region's population is 438,191, which accounts for approximately 7.6 percent of the state of Minnesota's total population.
- Over half of the population within Region 7W lives in either Stearns or Wright counties (equating to 68.38 percent of the total Region 7W population).
- Region 7W/St. Cloud APO is anticipated to grow by approximately 5 percent between 2020 and 2026 – with a population projected at just over 460,000, according to the Minnesota State Demographic Center.
- Demographic data for Region 7W and the St. Cloud APO area shows a growing diverse population of youth, adults and seniors which includes expected growth for typically underserved populations, such as persons of color and those with disabilities. Presently, approximately one in ten residents within the APO's planning area are over the age of 65 and one in ten residents identify as having a disability.

Mobility Today

- The RTCC serving Region 7W acts as a strong community advocate to investigate needs, fill gaps, and bring partners to the table to formulate and implement solutions.
- Providers say they are still recovering from the profound impacts of COVID-19. Ridership levels are continuing to rise as the pandemic enters a different phase, but employment staffing shortages for agencies and providers pose ongoing challenges for maintaining and growing services.
- Transit services are adapting to changing needs for the region and the state.

Vision for Tomorrow

- Expansion of mobility options is a key element to meeting human transportation needs for the future.
- Agencies and providers will need to resolve staffing shortages to meet growth needs.
- Expansion of services will be determined by the ability of agencies to work within their capacity, assuming financial and staffing resources are available.

Public Input Included in Plan

Throughout the LCP development process, the public was invited to participate in multiple opportunities to provide essential feedback that is highlighted in the plan. The public’s input has helped to identify short-term and long-term needs, such as service gaps, potential improvements as well as overall insight into how human transit services are presently functioning and serving the community in the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO areas.

Public Outreach	Dates	Participants
Rider Survey - Online	December 2021 to February 2022	395
Provider Survey - Online	December 2021 to February 2022	9
Focus Group Survey - Online	May 2022	166

Plan Goals and Objectives

A key goal of this plan is to use it as a tool among stakeholders and human transportation service providers in the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO areas to further improve services that meet the needs of the riders who depend on these services.

The CCMRTCC is responsible for carrying this plan forward through the next phase of work that is done by the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC.) Throughout Greater Minnesota, RTCC’s are responsible for coordination between transportation providers, service agents, and the private sector. The Council’s primary goal is to fill transportation gaps, streamline access to transportation and provide individuals more options of where and when to travel.

The RTCC that represents Region 7W/St. Cloud APO is made up of stakeholders with an interest in improving mobility for “transportation sensitive” populations such as the elderly, low-income individuals, those with disabilities and military veterans. In meetings held with the CCMRTCC regarding this plan, the consensus is the RTCC’s primary goal is expanding services in St. Cloud Metro to outlying areas. Other priorities include expansion of customer travel-training programs,

development of public awareness campaigns for transit, educating regional professionals about transportation options and providing job access for veterans.

Key themes have been developed from input received by the public and stakeholders regarding available services, how they are or are not meeting ridership needs and what the expected or hoped for vision is for future human transit services in the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area. These themes include staffing shortages for transportation agencies, need for expanding transportation services especially in rural areas and provide education and build awareness around transit needs within the region. The LCP provides a framework for the RTCC to carry out these goals and themes forward.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to evaluate existing transportation providers, identify the unmet needs and services, and establish transportation related goals for the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area. The counties included in this region are the Counties of Benton, Sherburne, Stearns and Wright, Minnesota. This documentation fulfills planning requirements for the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act) signed into law on December 4, 2015.

As a requirement of the FAST Act, grantees under the Section 5310: Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities program must have projects under a "locally developed coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan" (49 U.S.C. 5310) to receive federal funding. This plan must be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation services as well as human services providers and the public.

The local human service transportation coordination planning process encourages participation from all local stakeholders and public in the region, especially within target populations. The purpose of this process is to improve human service and public transportation for older adults, individuals with disabilities, and individuals with low incomes through coordinated transportation.

The plan contains demographic conditions, inventory of existing transportation providers, gaps in service, and unmet needs throughout the region that have been identified through analysis, committee input, and stakeholder outreach.

Major Plan Components

The plan has three major components:

- A demographic profile.

- A view of mobility today that analyzes existing transportation services, regional origins and destinations, needs/gaps, and current coordination.
- A vision of mobility tomorrow that lays out goals and strategies to improve transportation services.

Outline Design

The plan is designed to outline:

- A comprehensive review of existing public transportation and human services coordination.
- A context for continuing and broadening communication between human service agencies and transportation providers.
- A platform to enhance transportation access for older adults, people with disabilities, and those with low incomes through identification of unmet needs and strategies to address them.
- An educational tool for human service agencies, transportation providers, and Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCCs) to identify coordination opportunities.

Table 1 shows the timeline for the processes that go along with completion of the plan.

Table 1: Local Coordination Plan Timeline:

	2021				2022					
	Jul	Aug-Sep	Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Contracts Executed	X									
Appoint Steering Committee		X								
Survey & Questionnaire Collection				X	X					
Previous Effort Evaluation			X							
Steering Committee Meeting 1		X								
Focus Groups							X			
Steering Committee Meeting 2					X					
Planning Workshops (Steering Committee Meeting 3)						X	X			
MnDOT Draft Review									X	
Steering Committee/RTCC Draft Plan Review									X	
MCOTA Draft Review										X
Plan Adoption										X

COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACT

Summary of the Pandemic’s Impact on the Region 7W Human Transportation Network

Upon the completion of the 2017 iteration of the Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan, many of the transit providers within Region 7W were experiencing consistent, if not growing ridership. However, as ridership demands were increasing, maintaining the appropriate level of staffing to accommodate the growth in ridership – particularly rural transit – proved difficult. Several providers indicated labor shortages have been difficult to manage. This shortage is not only for drivers/operators, but also dispatch, office support and management.

However, those challenges were minor in comparison to those faced as a direct result of the COVID-19 global pandemic which hit the U.S. in March 2020. Ridership dropped between 40-90 percent seemingly overnight due to stay-at-home orders and employees switching to work from home. Many transportation providers within Region 7W took drastic action to provide not only employment for their staff, but also rides and access to critical services for the communities they serve.

Due to schools being canceled, social activities being shuttered, and non-emergency medical appointments being postponed, along with state mandated state at home orders, Region 7W transportation providers cut service. Urban transit provider Metro Bus reduced weekday fixed route service to mirror weekend schedules and ultimately suspended service on one of its routes. Rural transit provider Tri-CAP altered contracted or city routes (or had to forgo some entirely). In addition, Metro Bus opted to cease fare collection due to high unemployment among its primary ridership. This move was also a response to the social distancing requirements and lack of appropriate personal protective equipment on board vehicles to protect operators.

However, transportation providers within the region still saw a need to go above and beyond providing rides. Public transit providers, both rural and urban, found ways to participate in several food security initiatives – delivering food for organizations such as Catholic Charities directly to those most in need.

With minimal to no revenue coming in from fares, many transit providers turned to funding subsidies from the Federal government through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) to pay for basic operational expenses.

Throughout the remainder of 2020 and through 2021, transit ridership within Region 7W has slowly made a comeback. Some transit agencies – such as Trailblazer Transit – have seen ridership increase to approximately 80 percent of pre-pandemic levels. However, problems that plagued transportation providers pre-pandemic have only been made worse. Staffing shortages continue to plague many of Region 7W transportation providers – which will make it difficult to fully transition back to pre-pandemic service levels. In addition, new challenges such as inflation and supply chain issues have made it difficult for providers to conduct basic business operations such as maintaining their fleet.

Despite these challenges, Region 7W providers have and are continuing to adapt to this new post-pandemic world. There is a realization among many that transportation providers will need to do more with less – at least for the foreseeable future. But many remain optimistic about what the future holds and are willing to adapt to serve the needs of Region 7W residents.

BACKGROUND

Study Area Demographics

A key step in developing and evaluating transit plans is a careful analysis of the mobility needs of various segments of the population to determine potential ridership of transit services. As part of the plan development process, an effort was undertaken to identify any concentrations of the following targeted population groups: elderly individuals and individuals with disabilities.

Transit-demand analysis is the basic determination of demand for transportation in each area. There are several factors that affect demand, not all of which can be projected; however, demand estimation is an important task in developing any transportation plan and several methods of estimation are available for this purpose. The analysis makes intensive use of several demographic data and trends. In consideration of the limited resources available to prepare this plan, a decision was made to utilize the most recent American Community Survey (ACS) data to identify any concentrations of the targeted groups along with completing an analysis of the program demand. ACS data is also available and summarized at the Minnesota State Demographic Center.

This section provides information on individuals considered by the transportation and human services sectors to be dependent upon transit services. In general, the characteristics of these individuals preclude them from driving, and thereby make carpooling and transit their only viable alternative of motorized transportation.

The four types of limitations which preclude persons from driving are:

1. physical limitations
2. financial limitations
3. legal limitations
4. self-imposed limitations

Physical limitations may include permanent disabilities due to age, blindness, paralysis, or developmental disabilities and temporary disabilities such as acute illnesses and head injuries. Financial limitations include those persons unable to purchase or rent their own vehicle. Legal limitations generally refer to limitations for persons who are too young to drive (generally under age 16). Self-imposed limitations refer to those people who choose not to own or drive a vehicle (some or all the time) for reasons other than those listed in the first three categories. The Census is generally capable of providing information about the first three categories of limitation. The fourth category of limitation is currently recognized as representing a relatively small proportion of transit ridership but is still significant to this study.

Study Area

The Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area is located northwest of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area in Central Minnesota and includes the counties of Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright. The St. Cloud Area Planning Organization (APO) is the designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) within Region 7W located entirely within the Region 7W counties of Benton, Sherburne, and Stearns. St. Cloud is the largest city in the region and serves as a primary trade center within and outside the region. County seat cities in the region such as Foley (Benton County), Elk River (Sherburne County), St. Cloud (Stearns County), and Buffalo (Wright County) are larger centers and key destinations with other urban centers existing throughout the region. The region also includes lower density rural areas, which can serve as a geographic barrier to transportation.

According to the 2020 Census, the region's population is 438,191. There are 14 state-aid cities (population over 5,000) accounting for 52.8 percent of the region's population (231,182). Of the 14 state-aid cities, 5 are in the St. Cloud APO area with a combined population of 108,324. The population living in smaller cities or townships accounts for the remaining 47.6 percent of the region's population.

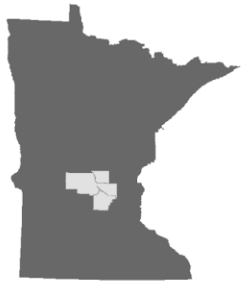
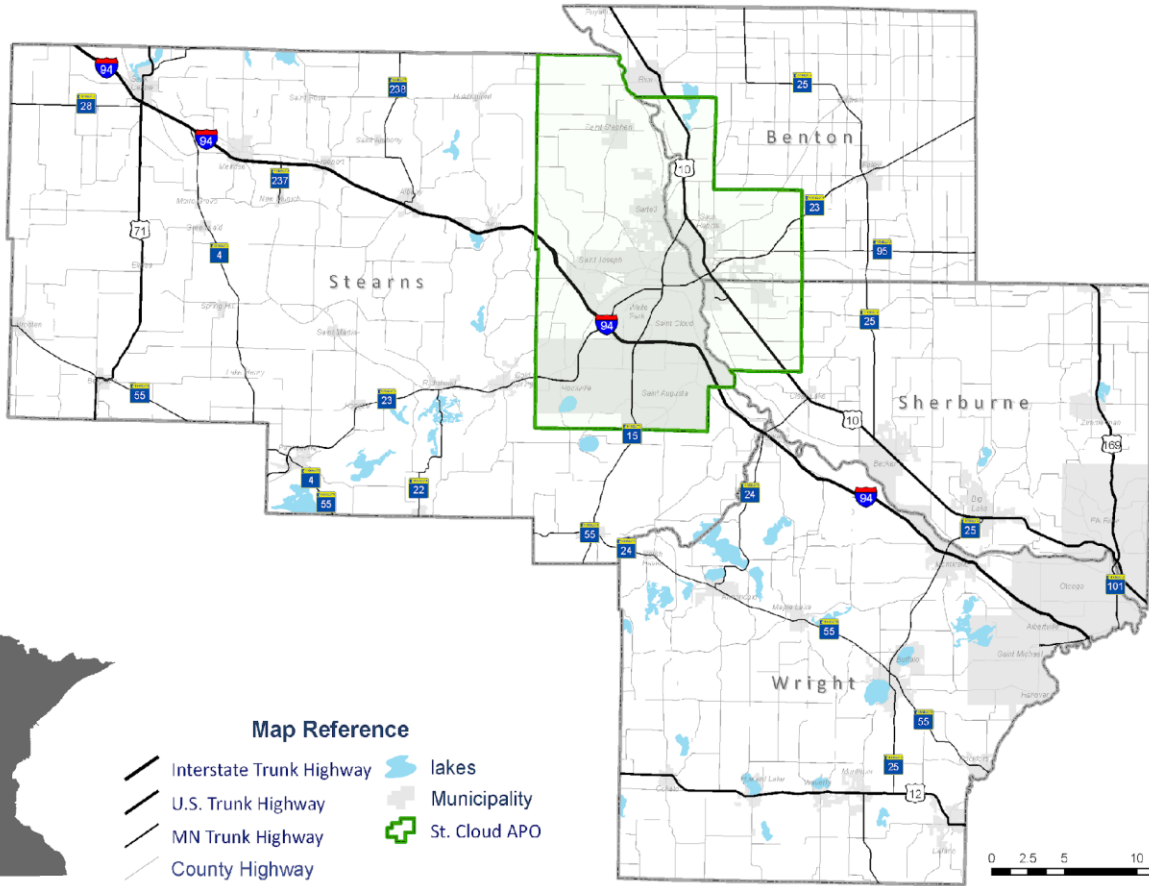
Region 7W worked together with the St. Cloud APO in developing this plan to coordinate transit services offered by public transit providers, human service agencies, non-profit and private providers. A project steering committee analyzed the status of the 2017 Region 7W/St. Cloud APO Local Human Service Public Transit Coordination plan and provided direction in the development of this plan update.

The Region 7W/St. Cloud APO staff developed an inventory meant to capture service information for all public, private, school district, human service, and non-profit transportation providers in the region. Human service and private providers assisted in surveying their riders in the evaluation of the unmet transportation needs of human service agency clients. In addition to the survey data collection efforts, a region-wide virtual focus group was conducted to discover the current perceptions of transportation services, opportunities, short and longer-term needs, trends, and challenges.

Throughout the planning process, many needs and gaps were identified. Possible solutions were considered in the strategy prioritization and project idea process. These needs and gaps were shared in collaboration with the Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (RTCC).

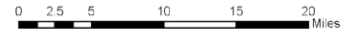
Figure 1: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO Area

Region 7W Long Range Transportation Plan
Inset Map



Map Reference

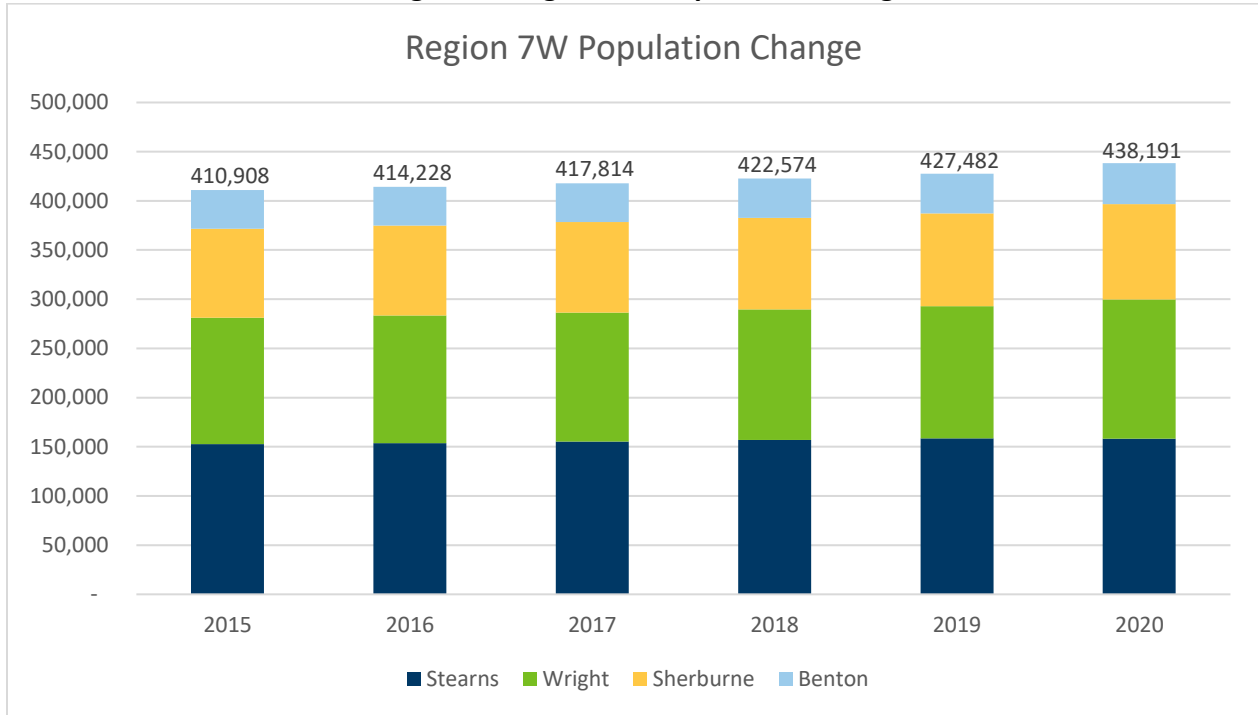
- Interstate Trunk Highway
- U.S. Trunk Highway
- MN Trunk Highway
- County Highway
- lakes
- Municipality
- St. Cloud APO



Total Population

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Census 2020, Region 7W/St. Cloud APO had a total population of 438,184 people. This accounts for approximately 7.6 percent of the state of Minnesota’s total population. The region experienced rapid growth between 1950 and 2020 by adding approximately 313,000 residents. From 2010 to 2020, the region saw an 8.9 percent population increase. Table 2 shows the historical population growth for the four-county area between 2010 and 2020.

Figure 2: Region 7W Population Change



Source: U.S. Census (2020) Decennial Redistricting Data; U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates; U.S. Census (2018) American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates; U.S. Census (2017) American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates; U.S. Census (2016) American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates; U.S. Census (2015) American Community Survey 5 Year Estimates (<https://bit.ly/3xv46pF>; <https://bit.ly/3xvis9t>; <https://bit.ly/3mSt6lG>; <https://bit.ly/3xUIXrF>; <https://bit.ly/3NXbRvp>)

Table 2: Population History by County (2010 - 2020)

County	Population (2010)	Population Subtotal (2010)	Population Change (2010 to 2020)	Population Change Percent (2010 to 2020)	Population (2020)	Population Subtotal (2020)
Benton	38,451	9.56%	2,921	7.60%	41,379	9.44%
Stearns	150,642	37.45%	7,650	5.08%	158,292	36.12%
Sherburne	88,499	22.00%	8,684	9.81%	97,183	22.18%
Wright	124,700	31.00%	16,637	13.34%	141,337	32.26%
Total	402,292	100.00%	35,892	35.83%	438,184	100.00%

Source: U.S. Census (2010 & 2020) Decennial Redistricting Data [P1] (<https://bit.ly/3tC4lsw> and <https://bit.ly/3OcN06E>)

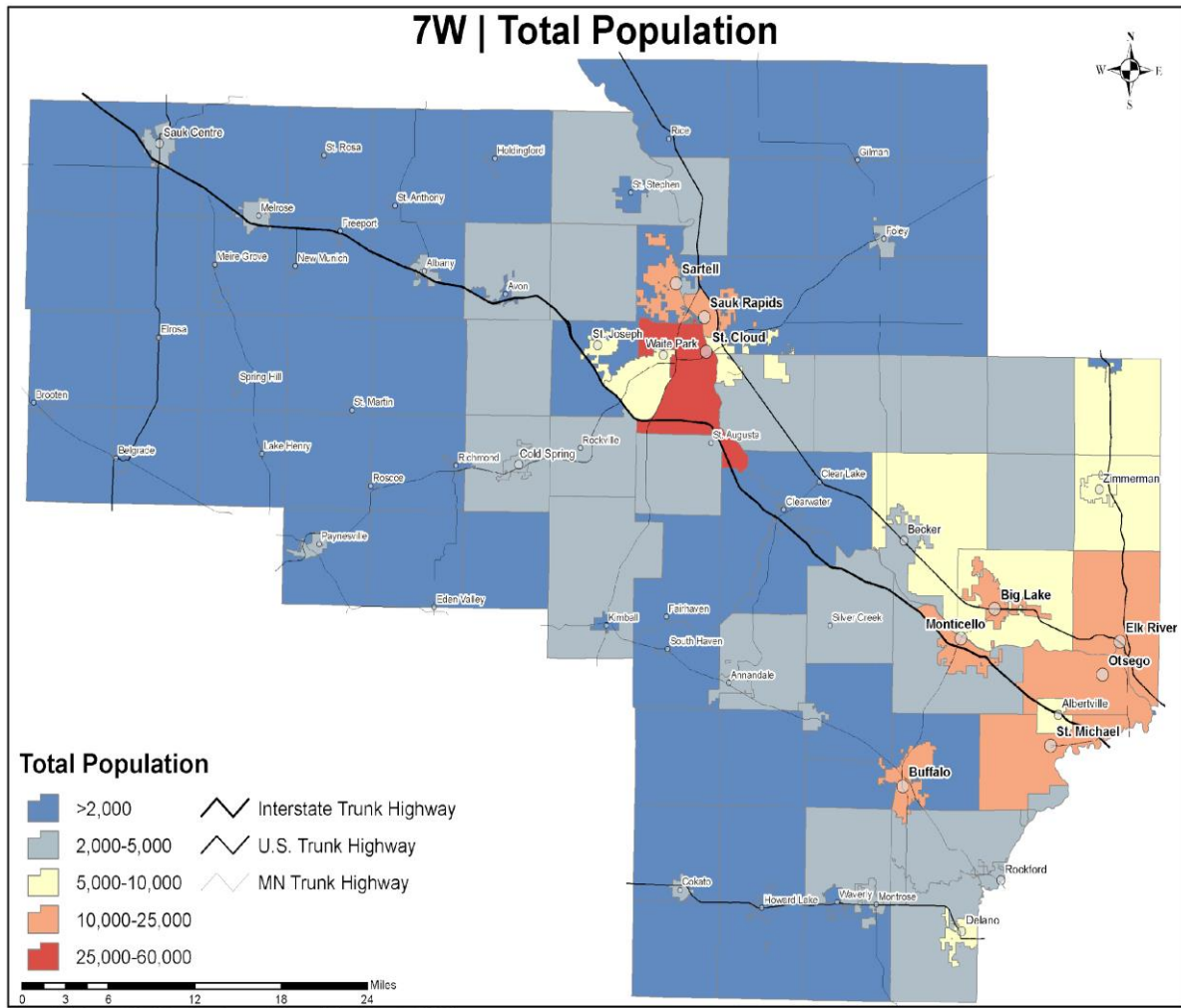
Table 3 below shows the distribution of the regional population breakdown between each county in Region 7W. Over half of the population within Region 7W lives in either Stearns or Wright counties (equating to 68.38 percent of the total Region 7W population). As shown in Figure 3, the population within Region 7W's four counties is highly concentrated within the St. Cloud area. Additional pockets of growth are found directly adjacent to the Twin Cities metro (along with U.S. Highway 169 corridor) and in and around the cities of Buffalo, Monticello, and Big Lake.

Table 3: Population by County

County	Population	Percent of Total
Benton	41,372	9.44%
Stearns	158,292	36.12%
Sherburne	97,183	22.18%
Wright	141,337	32.26%
Total	438,191	100.00%

Source: U.S. Census (2020) Decennial Redistricting Data [P1] (<https://bit.ly/3xUwovk>)

Figure 3: Region 7W Total Population



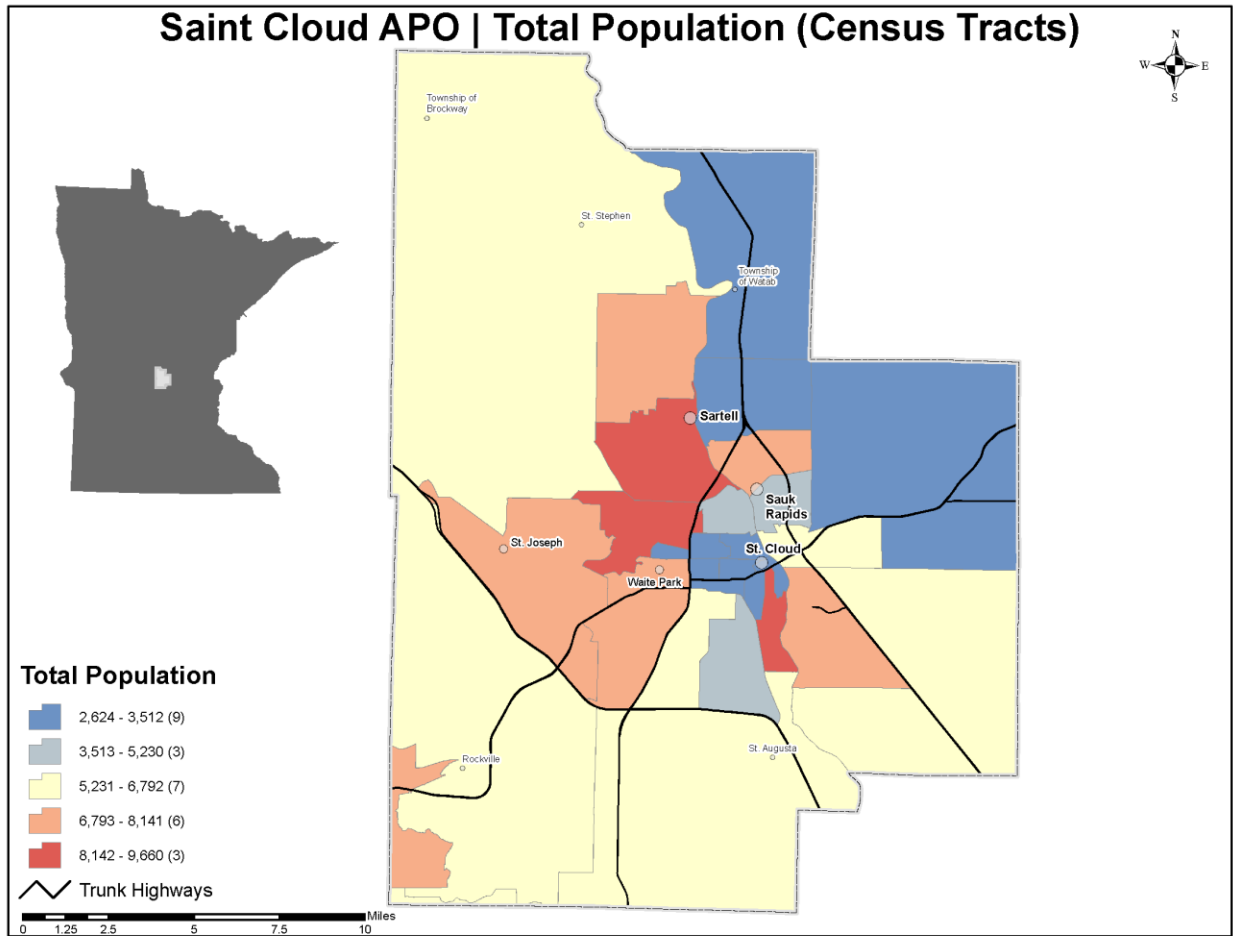
Within Region 7W’s county boundaries lies the urban metropolitan area of St. Cloud. Served by the St. Cloud APO, this area contains eight cities – Rockville, St. Augusta, St. Cloud, St. Joseph, St. Stephen, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park. In addition, the APO’s planning area also contains eight townships – Minden, Sauk Rapids, Watab, Haven, Brockway, LeSauk, St. Joseph, and St. Wendel. Of the 438,191 residents within the four-county region of 7W, approximately 31.9 percent live within the St. Cloud metropolitan area. Of those living within the St. Cloud metro, nearly half reside within the City of St. Cloud. However, it is important to note that the City of Sartell is the fastest growing municipality within the APO’s planning area – more than doubling in population since 2000. Table 4 contains a population breakdown by jurisdiction within the APO’s planning area. Figure 4 outlines the population distribution of residents within the APO.

Table 4: Population by Jurisdiction (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Population	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,895	2.07%
Haven Township	2,610	1.87%
LeSauk Township	1,502	1.08%
Minden Township	1,514	1.08%
Rockville	2,382	1.71%
Sartell	19,351	13.86%
Sauk Rapids	13,862	9.93%
Sauk Rapids Township	521	0.37%
St. Augusta	3,497	2.50%
St. Cloud	68,881	49.33%
St. Joseph	7,029	5.03%
St. Joseph Township	946	0.68%
St. Stephen	797	0.57%
St. Wendel Township	2,115	1.51%
Waite Park	8,341	5.97%
Watab Township	3,402	2.44%
Total	139,645	100.00%

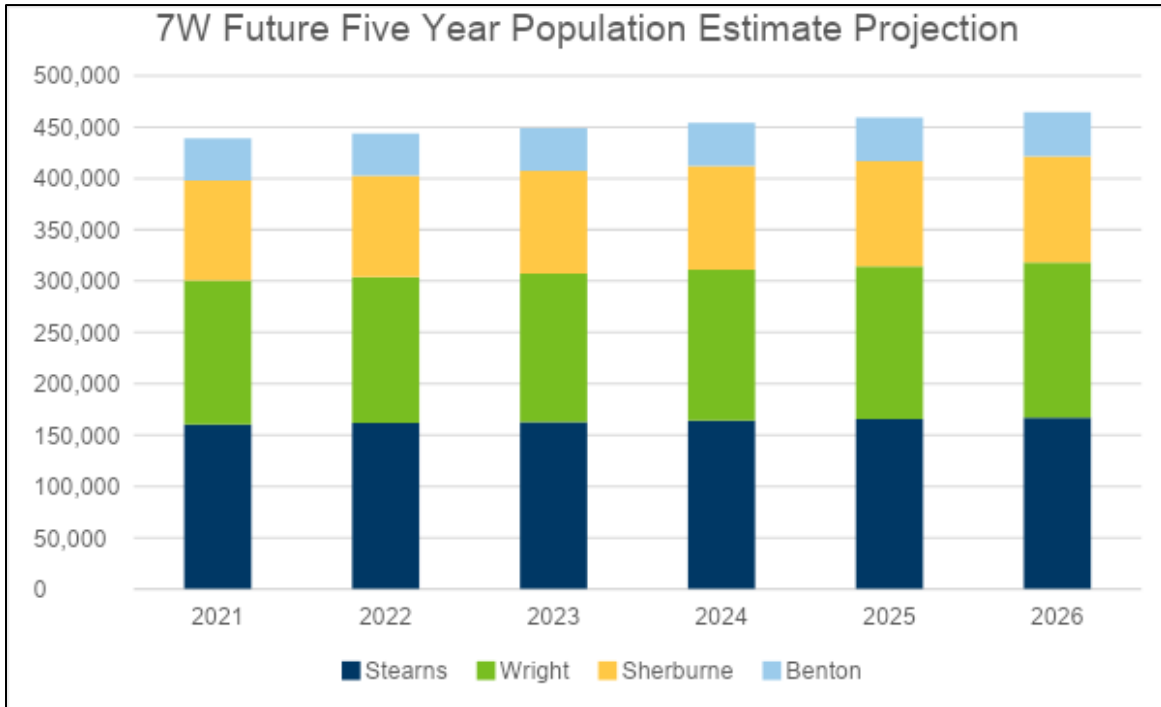
Source: U.S. Census (2020) Decennial Redistricting Data [P1] (<https://bit.ly/3mQhFLm>)

Figure 4: St. Cloud APO Total Population



It is estimated that this region will continue to experience moderate growth over the next few years. According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center, Region 7W/St. Cloud APO is anticipated to grow by approximately 5 percent between 2020 and 2026 – with a population projected at just over 460,000 as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Region 7W Population Change



Data courtesy [Minnesota State Demographic Center \(https://bit.ly/2lICzwn\)](https://bit.ly/2lICzwn)

Population by Age

Approximately one in four residents within the four-county area are under the age of 18 according to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey (ACS) Five Year Estimates. As shown in Table 5, three out of the four counties have youth populations hovering within a few percentage points of the regional average. Wright County has a slightly higher youth population – nearing three out of ten individuals being under 18. While the St. Cloud area does have a large population of youth, Figure 6 shows large clusters of youth around the Elk River/Otsego area as well as skirting the Twin Cities metro around St. Michael.

Table 5: Youth Population (17 years and younger)

County	Total Population	Youth Population	Percent of Total
Benton	40,129	10,144	25.30%
Stearns	158,452	36,658	23.10%
Sherburne	94,463	25,163	26.60%
Wright	134,438	37,821	28.10%
Total	427,482	109,786	25.68%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP05] (<https://bit.ly/3Odz5x9>)

Figure 6: Region 7W Youth Population

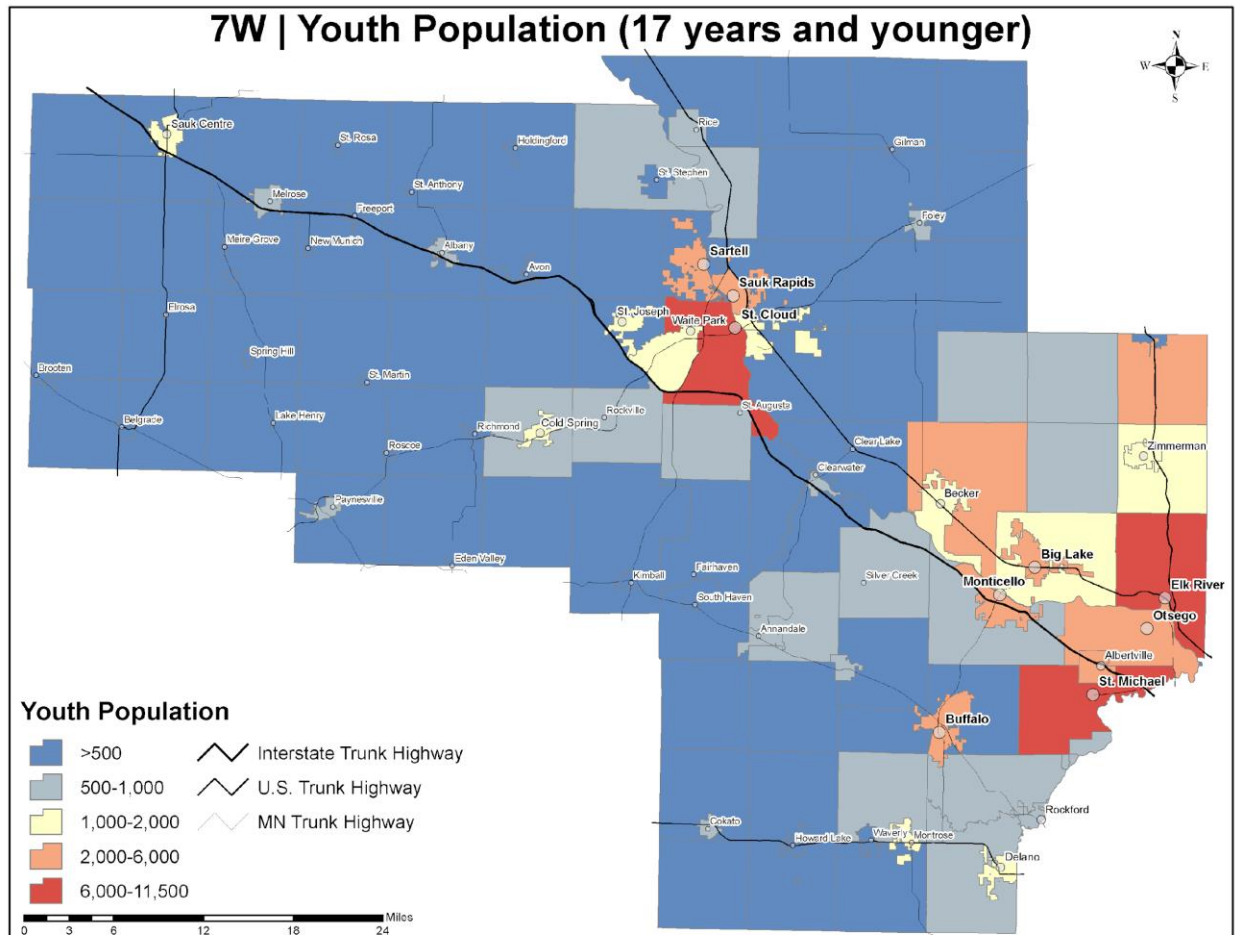


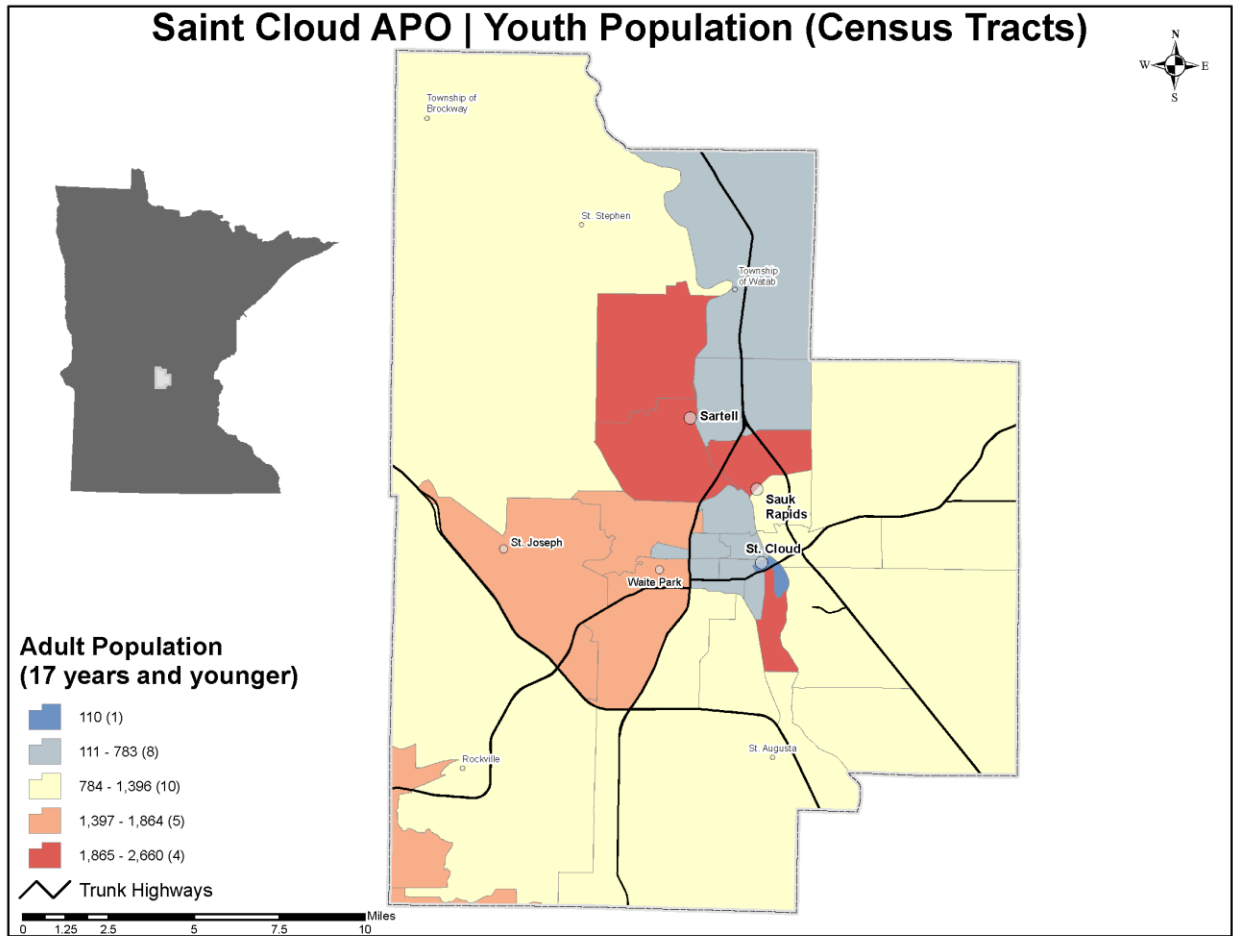
Table 6 shows the number of youths within each of the member jurisdictions of the St. Cloud APO. Approximately two in five residents within the planning area are under the age of 18 according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates. As shown in Figure 7, the population of young people by Census tract is primarily clustered around the City of Sartell – where nearly one-third of the residents are under age 18. Other notable pockets of youth populations can be found in the tracts surrounding the cities of Waite Park and St. Joseph and in south St. Cloud.

Table 6: Youth Population (17 years and younger) (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Total Population	Youth Population	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,861	710	24.80%
Haven Township	2,128	496	23.30%
LeSauk Township	1,704	304	17.80%
Minden Township	1,529	305	19.90%
Rockville	2,551	566	22.20%
Sartell	18,005	5,167	28.70%
Sauk Rapids	13,703	3,543	25.90%
Sauk Rapids Township	469	90	19.20%
St. Augusta	3,720	770	20.70%
St. Cloud	68,001	13,755	20.20%
St. Joseph	7,030	1,597	22.70%
St. Joseph Township	1,464	350	23.90%
St. Stephen	963	249	25.90%
St. Wendel Township	2,074	383	18.50%
Waite Park	7,692	1,615	21.00%
Watab Township	3,199	783	24.50%
Total	137,093	30,683	22.40%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP05] (<https://bit.ly/3Odz5x9>)

Figure 7: St. Cloud APO Youth Population



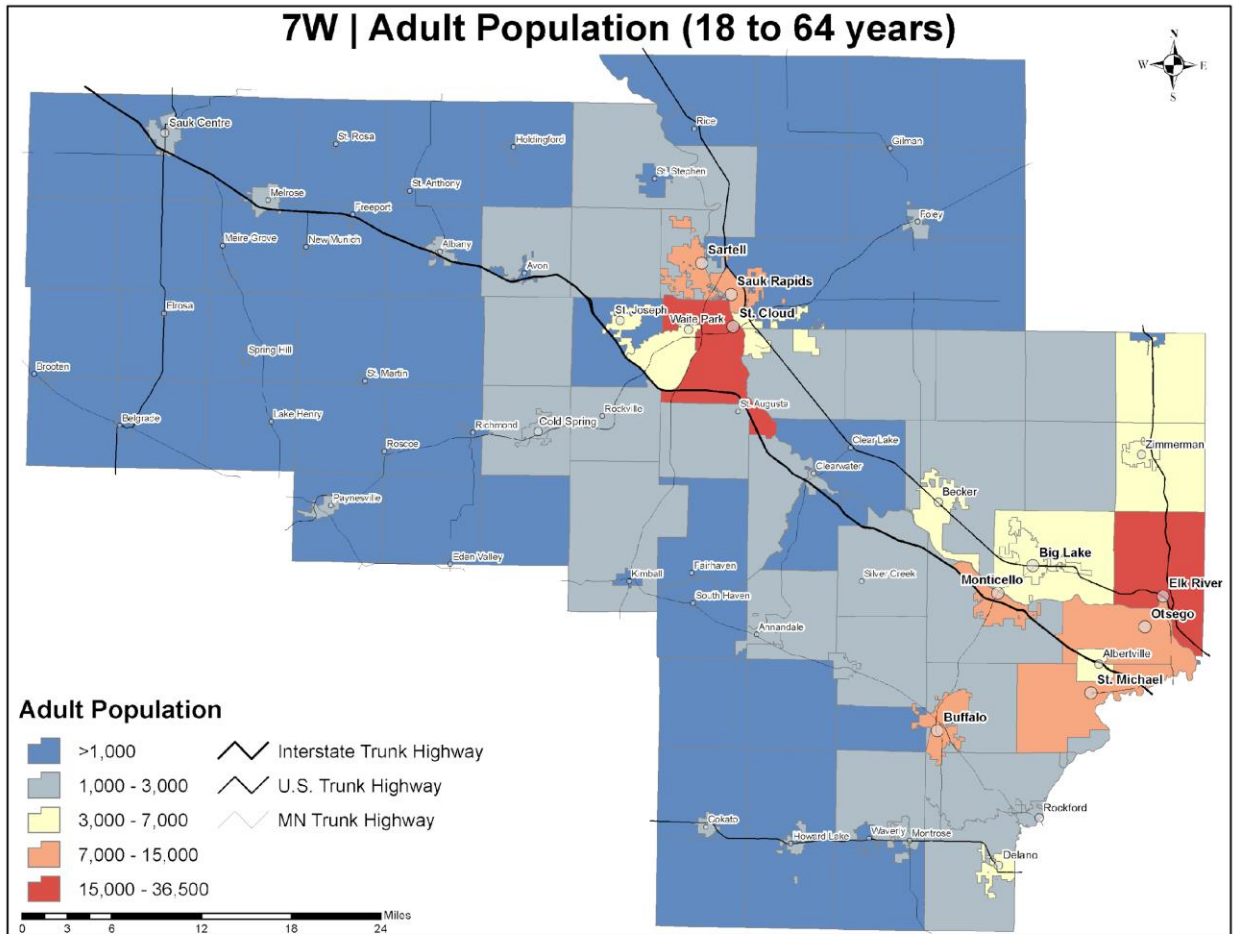
Unsurprisingly, the largest portion of the population within both Region 7W and the St. Cloud APO subset are adults ages 18 to 64. According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, 61.4 percent of the four-county area falls within this age cohort. Table 7 contains the population breakdown by county. Figure 8 shows the location of this age cohort within the four-county area. Similarly, the youth population discussed above, adults ages 18 to 64 within the Region 7W area are concentrated heavily along the U.S. Highway 169 corridor.

Table 8: Adult Population (18 to 64 years)

County	Total Population	Adult Population	Percent of Total
Benton	40,129	24,458	60.95%
Stearns	158,452	98,708	62.29%
Sherburne	94,463	59,039	62.50%
Wright	134,438	80,256	59.70%
Total	427,482	262,459	61.40%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP05] (<https://bit.ly/3Odz5x9>)

Figure 8: Region 7W Adult Population



According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, approximately three out of every five residents within the APO’s planning area are adults ages 18 to 64. While the percent of the adult

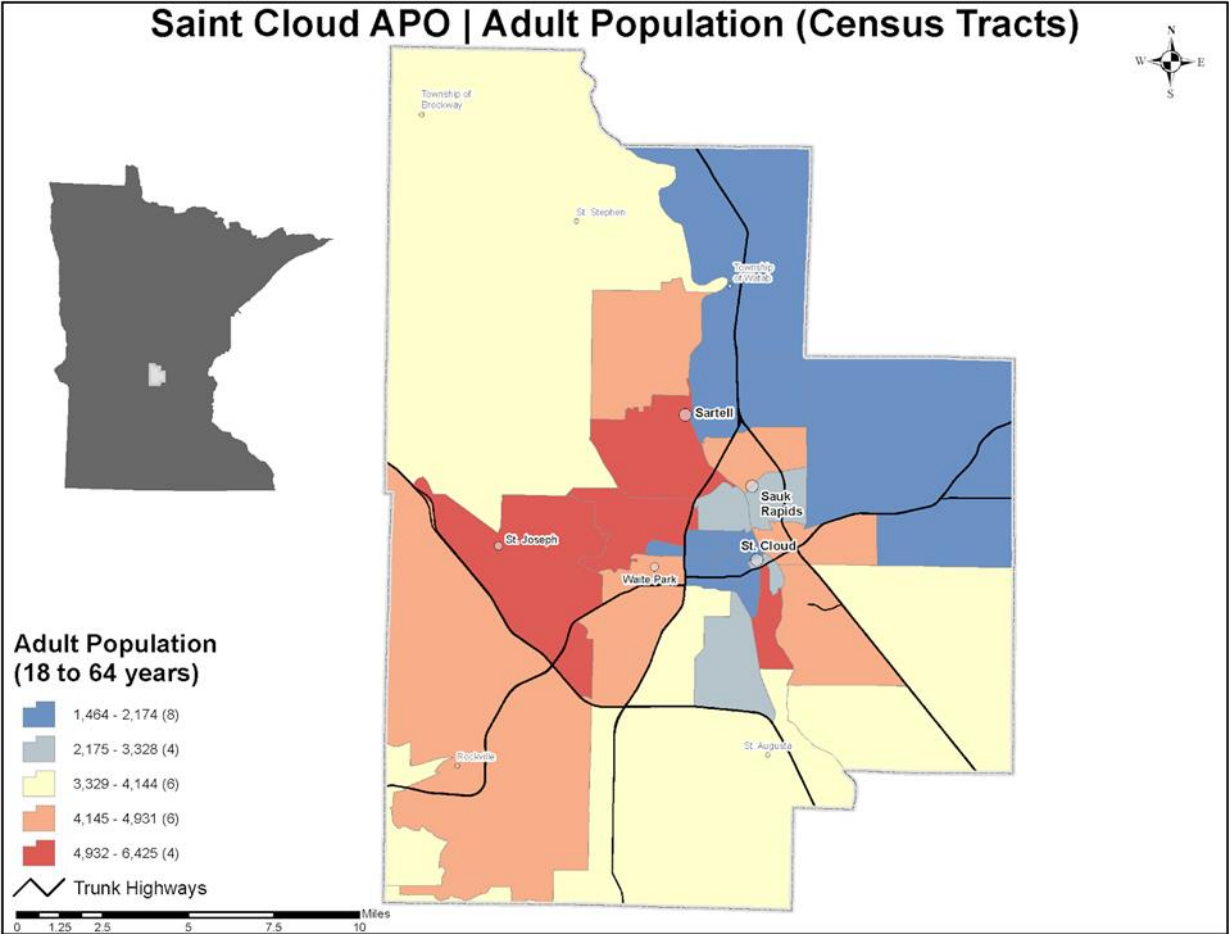
population (as shown in Table 9) is fairly consistent among APO jurisdictions, the distribution of those populations (as shown in Figure 9) indicates the APO’s adult population tend to reside in areas west of MN Highway 15 and north of I-94.

Table 9: Adult Population (18 to 64 years) (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Total Population	Adult Population	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,861	1,760	61.50%
Haven Township	2,128	1,303	61.20%
LeSauk Township	1,704	1,071	62.90%
Minden Township	1,529	950	62.10%
Rockville	2,551	1,649	64.60%
Sartell	18,005	10,789	59.90%
Sauk Rapids	13,703	8,348	60.90%
Sauk Rapids Township	469	277	59.10%
St. Augusta	3,720	2,525	67.90%
St. Cloud	68,001	45,590	67.00%
St. Joseph	7,030	4,655	66.20%
St. Joseph Township	1,464	898	61.30%
St. Stephen	963	618	64.20%
St. Wendel Township	2,074	1,310	63.20%
Waite Park	7,692	4,705	61.20%
Watab Township	3,199	2,010	62.80%
Total	137,093	88,458	64.50%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP05] (<https://bit.ly/3Odz5x9>)

Figure 9: St. Cloud APO Adult Population



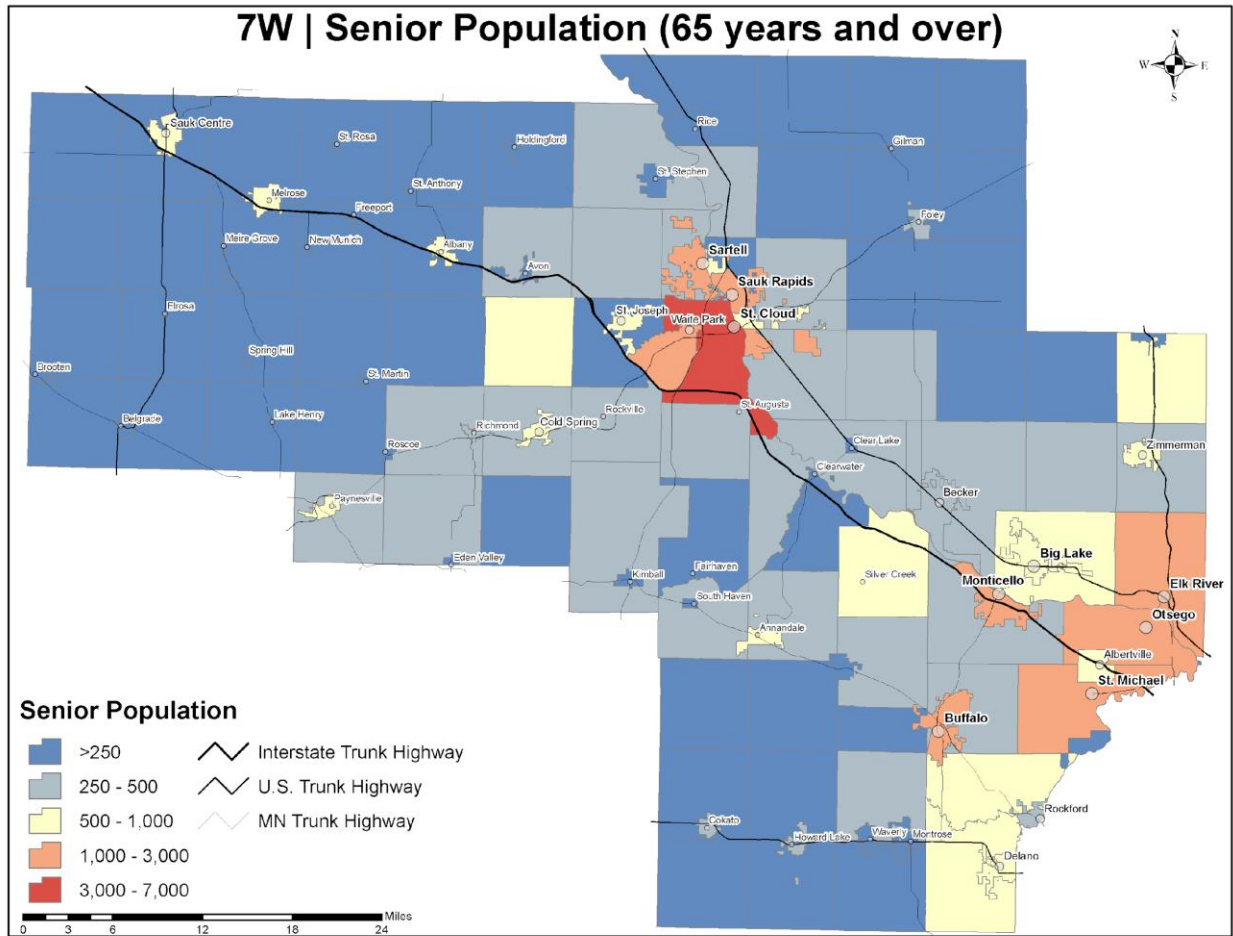
The senior population (those age 65 and older) make up approximately 13 percent of the Region 7W population. Table 10 shows the county-level breakdown in the share of the population within this age cohort. A closer look at where those populations are located (as demonstrated in Figure 10) show that while this age bracket is clustered around the St. Cloud metro and skirting the boundaries with the Twin Cities, pockets of seniors are also found in western Stearns County within the communities along the I-94 and MN Highway 23 corridor.

Table 10: Senior Population (65 years and over)

County	Total Population	Senior Population	Percent of Total
Benton	40,129	5,527	13.77%
Stearns	158,452	23,088	14.57%
Sherburne	94,463	10,261	10.86%
Wright	134,438	16,361	12.17%
Total	427,482	55,237	12.92%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP05] (<https://bit.ly/3xyKcKC>)

Figure 10: Region 7W Senior Population



As illustrated in Table 11, approximately one in ten residents within the APO’s planning area are over the age of 65. While this may be the average, it is important to note that, especially in the township jurisdictions (such as LeSauk, Sauk Rapids, and St. Wendel), the percentage of the

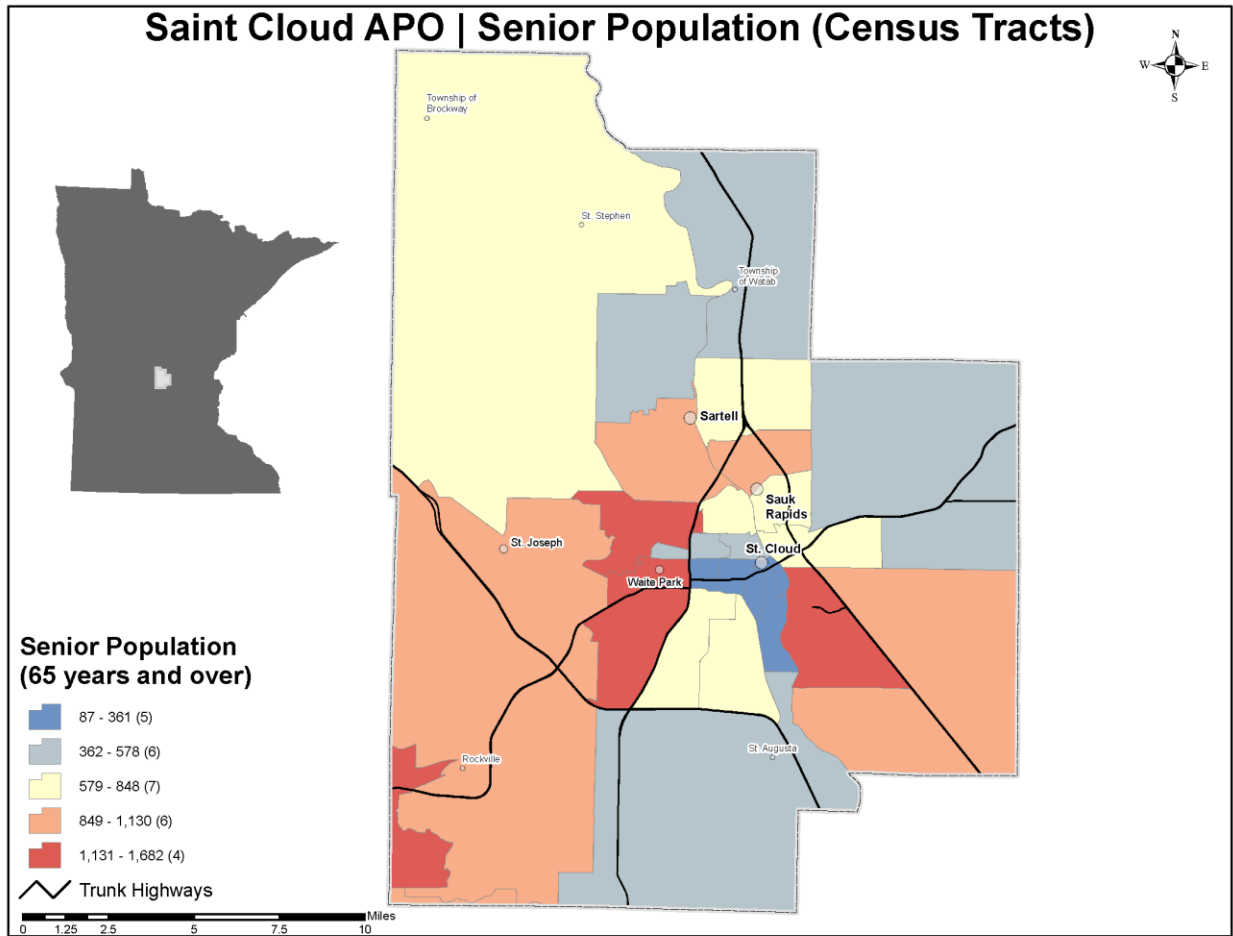
senior population is much closer to one in five residents. Figure 11 also indicates a concentration of senior populations within the City of Waite Park and in southeast St. Cloud along the U.S. Highway 10 corridor.

Table 11: Senior Population (65 years and over) (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Total Population	Senior Population	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,861	391	13.70%
Haven Township	2,128	329	15.50%
LeSauk Township	1,704	329	19.30%
Minden Township	1,529	274	17.90%
Rockville	2,551	336	13.20%
Sartell	18,005	2,049	11.40%
Sauk Rapids	13,703	1,812	13.20%
Sauk Rapids Township	469	102	21.70%
St. Augusta	3,720	425	11.40%
St. Cloud	68,001	8,656	12.70%
St. Joseph	7,030	778	11.10%
St. Joseph Township	1,464	216	14.80%
St. Stephen	963	96	10.00%
St. Wendel Township	2,074	381	18.40%
Waite Park	7,692	1,372	17.80%
Watab Township	3,199	406	12.70%
Total	137,093	17,952	13.10%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP05] (<https://bit.ly/3Odz5x9>)

Figure 11: St. Cloud APO Senior Population



Populations with a Disability

In determining the population of people with disabilities, the U.S. Census Bureau excludes what they have defined as “institutionalized” populations. The U.S. Census Bureau defines institutionalized populations as persons living in military installations, correctional and penal institutions, dormitories of schools and universities, religious institutions, and hospitals.

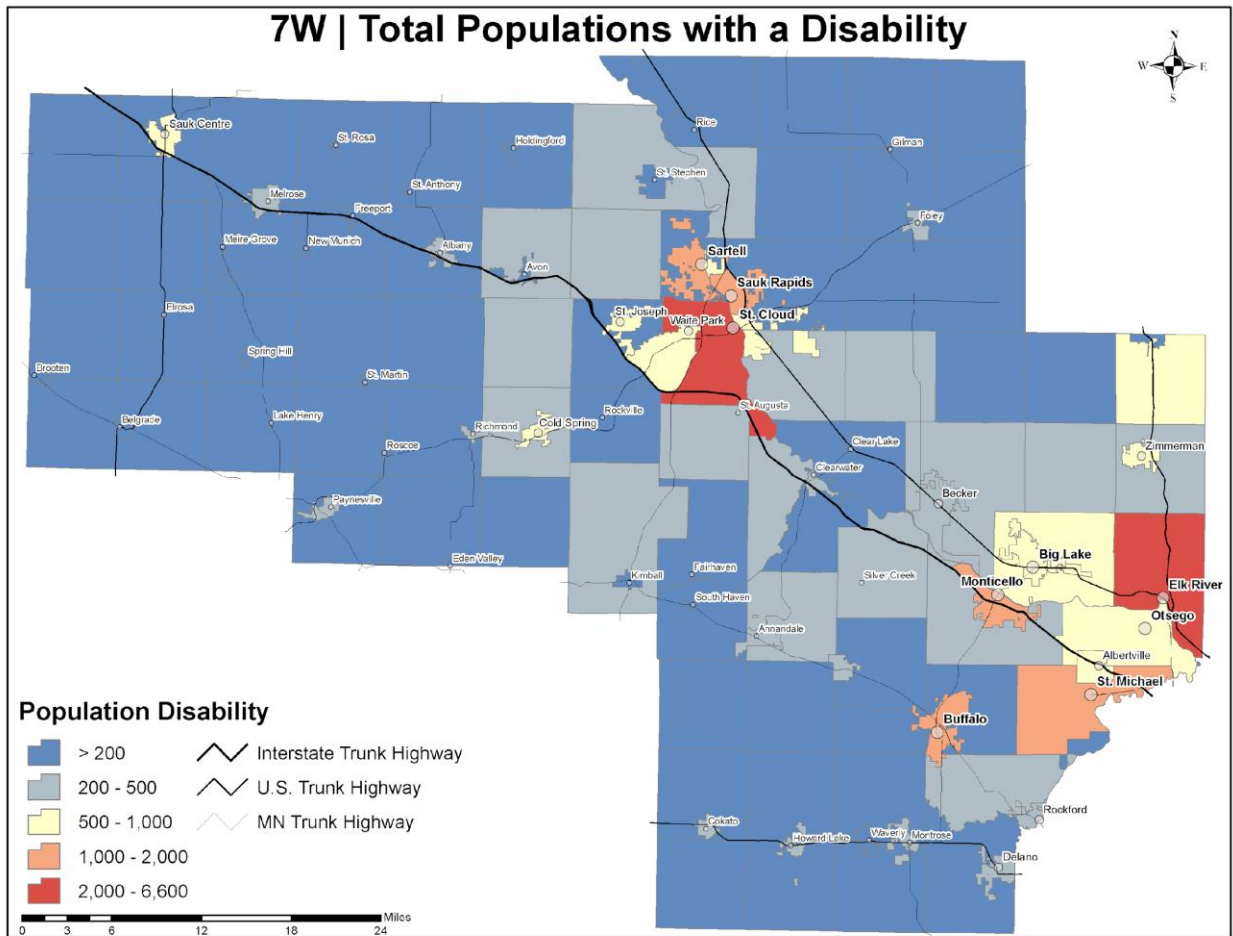
With that in mind, approximately one in ten individuals living within the four-county study area have identified themselves as having a disability. As shown in Table 12, a slightly higher percentage of Benton County’s population identifies as having a disability (11.52 percent) as compared to the rest of the counties. Populations of people with disabilities are located within the St. Cloud area along with the communities skirting the Twin Cities metro. However, additional pockets of this population subset can be found in western Stearns County around Cold Spring and Sauk Centre as shown in Figure 12.

Table 12: Populations with a Disability

County	Total Population	Disabled Population	Percent of Total
Benton	40,129	4,623	11.52%
Stearns	158,452	16,901	10.66%
Sherburne	94,463	8,418	8.91%
Wright	134,438	12,661	9.41%
Total	427,482	42,603	9.97%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1810] (<https://bit.ly/3zydZ8J>)

Figure 12: Region 7W Populations with a Disability



The St. Cloud APO’s planning area has a non-institutionalized population of 134,739 according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates. Of that population, approximately 11.3 percent of individuals identified as having a disability as shown in Table 13. Individuals with disabilities tend to be clustered closer to the urban core with larger pockets located near the U.S. Highway 10/MN

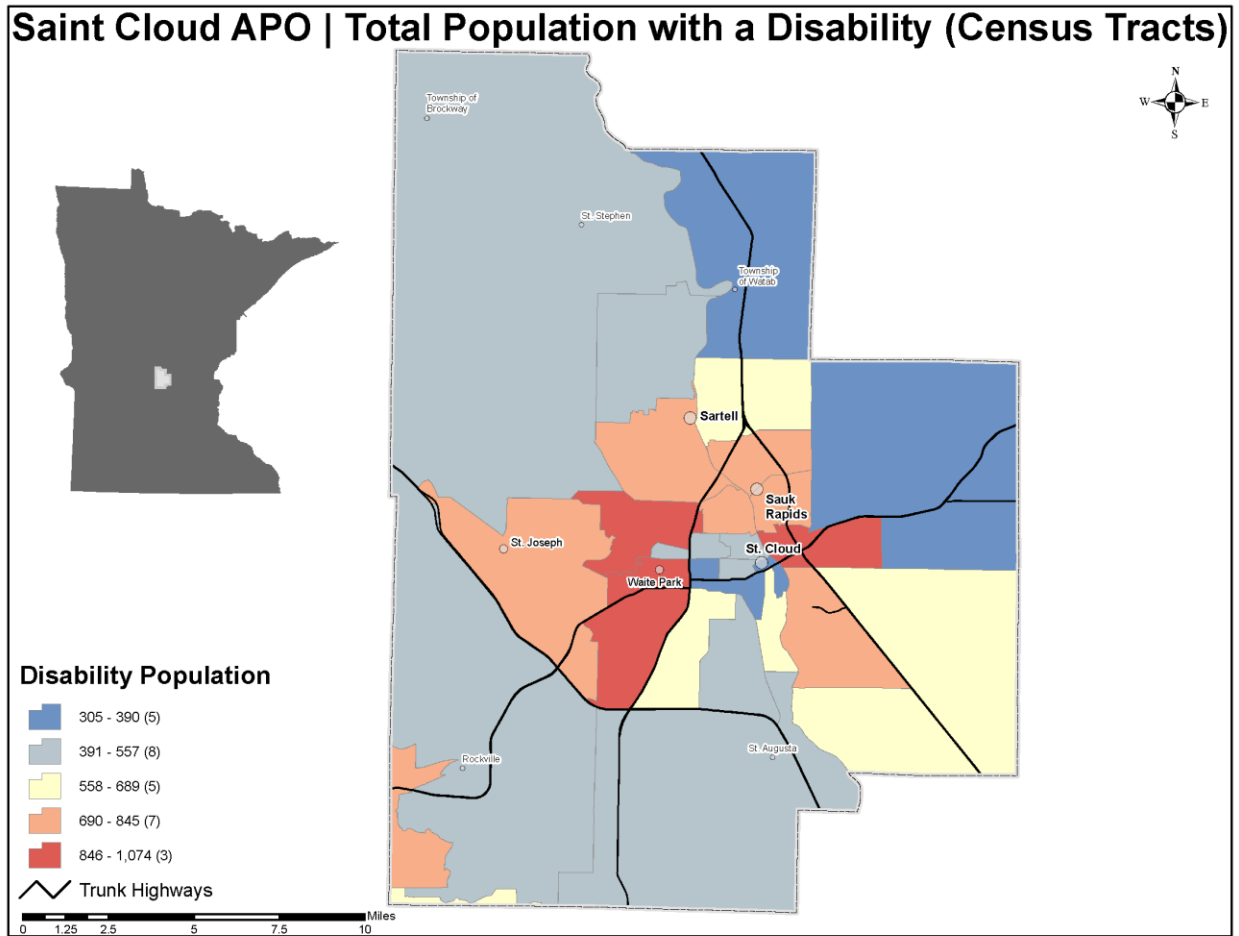
Highway 23 interchange in St. Cloud and west of MN Highway 15 in Waite Park as reflected in Figure 13.

Table 13: Populations with a Disability (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Non-Institutionalized Population	Disabled Population	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,861	217	7.60%
Haven Township	2,128	276	13.00%
LeSauk Township	1,704	114	6.70%
Minden Township	1,529	170	11.10%
Rockville	2,551	154	6.00%
Sartell	17,877	1,735	9.70%
Sauk Rapids	13,450	1,596	11.90%
Sauk Rapids Township	469	59	12.60%
St. Augusta	3,715	372	10.00%
St. Cloud	66,061	8,175	12.40%
St. Joseph	7,030	674	9.60%
St. Joseph Township	1,464	91	6.20%
St. Stephen	963	62	6.40%
St. Wendel Township	2,074	228	11.00%
Waite Park	7,664	964	12.60%
Watab Township	3,199	305	9.50%
Total	134,739	15,192	11.30%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1810] (<https://bit.ly/3zydZ8J>)

Figure 13: St. Cloud APO Populations with a Disability



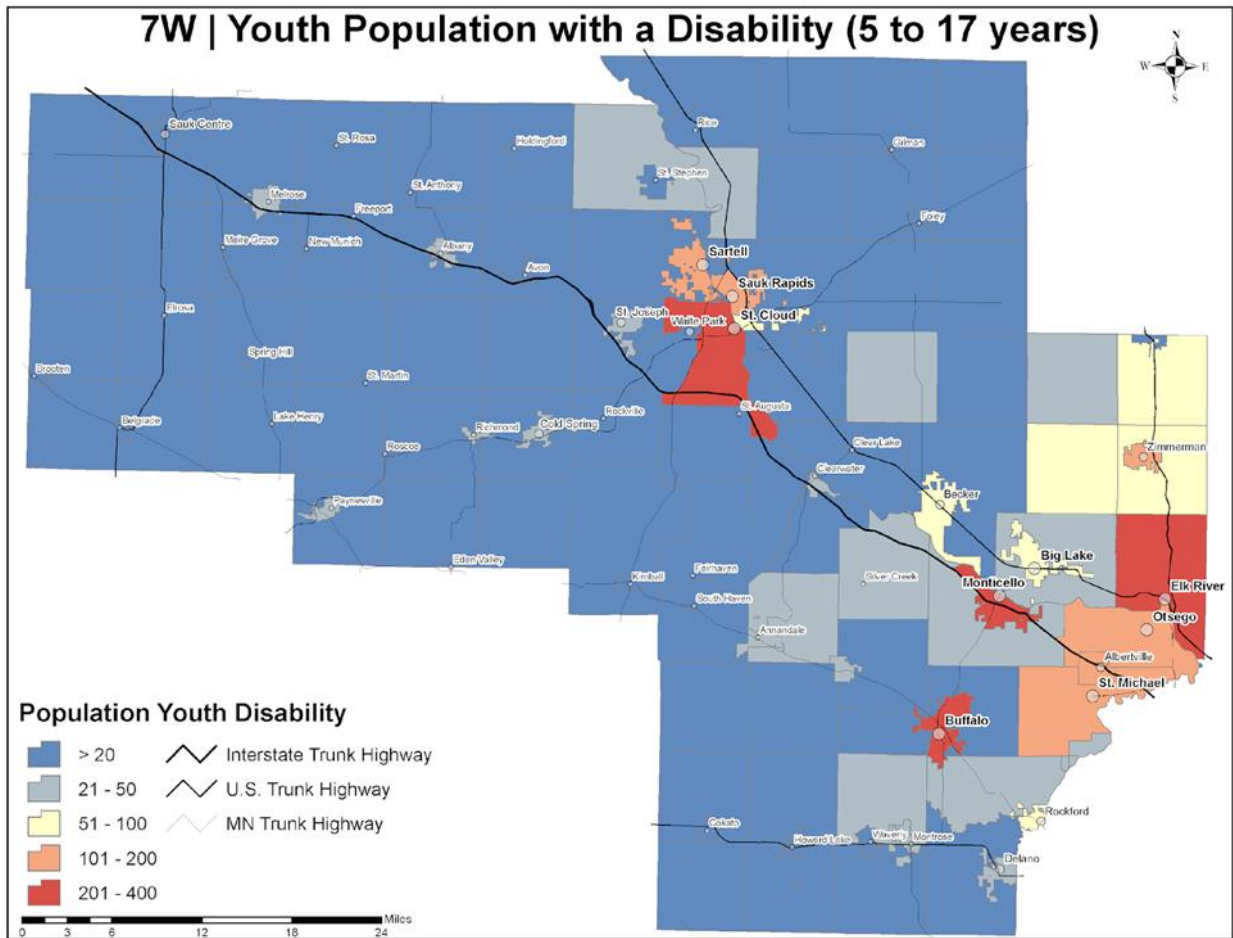
In breaking down the total population with disabilities by age, youth (ages 5 to 17) make up a rather small percentage of the population with a disability across the four-county area. Approximately 4.5 percent of the study area’s population with a disability falls into this age bracket as shown in Table 14. The map in Figure 14 shows large concentrations of youth with disabilities clustered again in the population centers of St. Cloud and along the Twin Cities metro boundaries. However, additional clusters can be found in Wright County – particularly in the communities of Monticello and Buffalo.

Table 14: Youth Population with a Disability (5 to 17 years)

County	Total Population	Disabled Population	Percent of Total
Benton	7,332	375	5.10%
Stearns	26,420	966	3.70%
Sherburne	18,928	874	4.60%
Wright	28,309	1,428	5.00%
Total	80,989	3,643	4.50%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1810] (<https://bit.ly/3zydZ8J>)

Figure 14: Region 7W Youth Population with a Disability



Youth (ages 5-17) also make up a rather small percentage of the population with a disability in the APO’s planning area. As shown in Table 15, according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, less than 1 percent of the APO’s population of people with disabilities is under age 18.

Table 15: Youth Population with a Disability (5 to 17 years) (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Non-Institutionalized Population	Disabled Population	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,861	38	1.30%
Haven Township	2,128	12	0.60%
LeSauk Township	1,704	11	0.60%
Minden Township	1,529	9	0.60%
Rockville	2,551	11	0.40%
Sartell	17,877	110	0.60%
Sauk Rapids	13,450	156	1.20%
Sauk Rapids Township	469	6	1.30%
St. Augusta	3,715	7	0.20%
St. Cloud	66,061	477	0.70%
St. Joseph	7,030	25	0.40%
St. Joseph Township	1,464	0	0.00%
St. Stephen	963	9	0.90%
St. Wendel Township	2,074	13	0.60%
Waite Park	7,664	12	0.20%
Watab Township	3,199	30	0.90%
Total	134,739	926	0.70%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1810] (<https://bit.ly/3zydZ8J>)

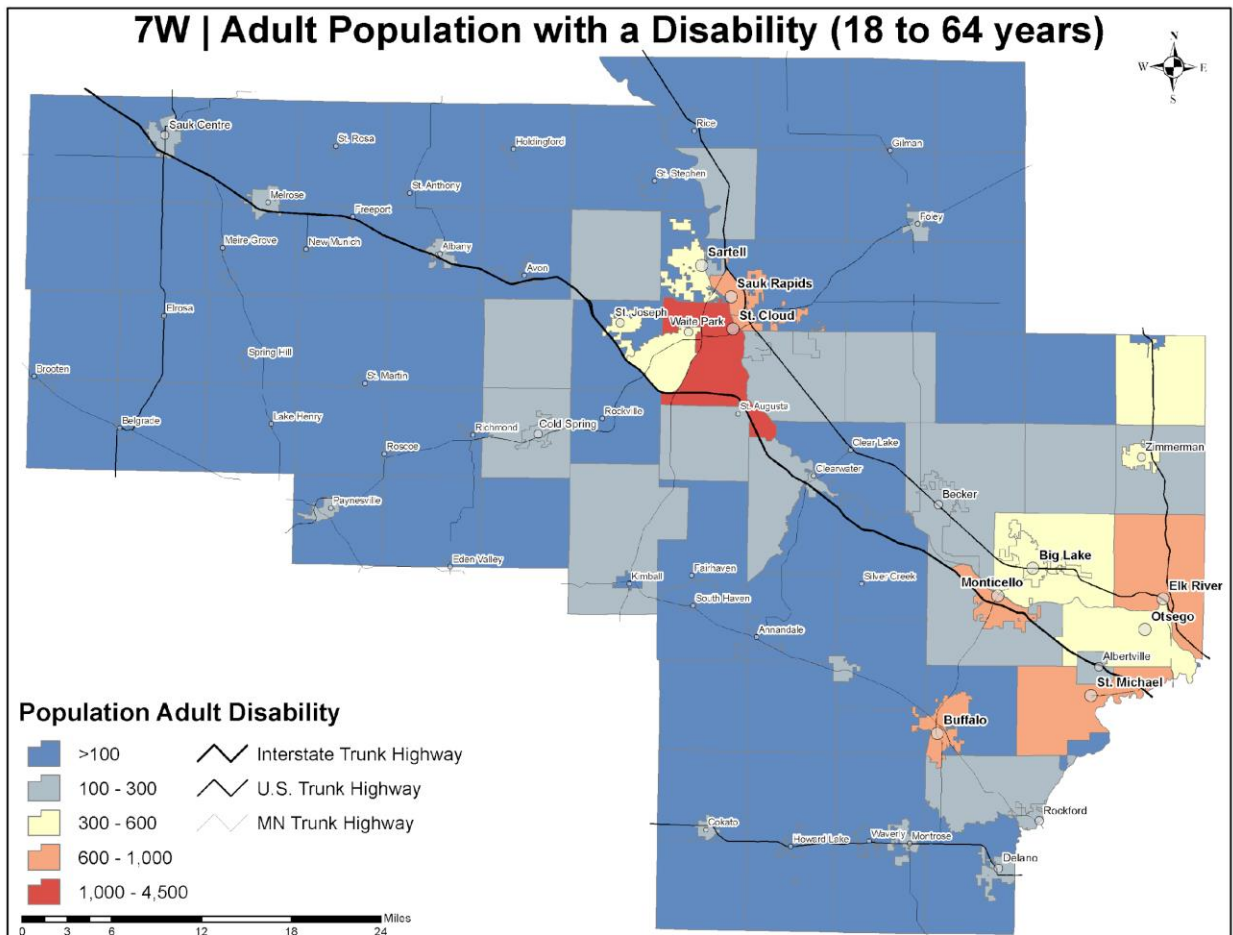
According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, approximately 8.23 percent of the four-county region’s adult population ages 18-64 have a disability. As shown in Table 16, while the study area’s average was just over 8 percent, Benton County has a much higher percentage of its adult population (18-64) with disabilities – nearly one in ten.

Table 16: Adult Population with a Disability (18 to 64 years)

County	Total Population	Disabled Population	Percent of Total
Benton	24,318	2,374	9.76%
Stearns	98,400	8,738	8.88%
Sherburne	57,393	4,332	7.55%
Wright	79,990	5,950	7.44%
Total	260,101	21,394	8.23%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1810] (<https://bit.ly/3zTo68r>)

Figure 15: Region 7W Adult Population with a Disability



Unlike the four-county area, adults 18-64 with a disability make up the largest portion of the people with disabilities population in the APO’s planning area. Within the APO, approximately 6.3 percent of people with disabilities fall within this age bracket. Concentrations of adults with

disabilities can be found within the City of St. Cloud and Haven Township where 7.8 percent and 6.8 percent of their respective people with disabilities population are adults 18-64.

Table 17: Adult Population with a Disability (18 to 64 years) (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Non-Institutionalized Population	Disabled Population	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,861	71	2.50%
Haven Township	2,128	144	6.80%
LeSauk Township	1,704	48	2.80%
Minden Township	1,529	69	4.50%
Rockville	2,551	75	2.90%
Sartell	17,877	753	4.20%
Sauk Rapids	13,450	811	6.00%
Sauk Rapids Township	469	25	5.30%
St. Augusta	3,715	196	5.30%
St. Cloud	66,061	5,168	7.80%
St. Joseph	7,030	382	5.40%
St. Joseph Township	1,464	30	2.00%
St. Stephen	963	32	3.30%
St. Wendel Township	2,074	117	5.60%
Waite Park	7,664	426	5.60%
Watab Township	3,199	184	5.80%
Total	134,739	8,531	6.30%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1810] (<https://bit.ly/3zydZ8J>)

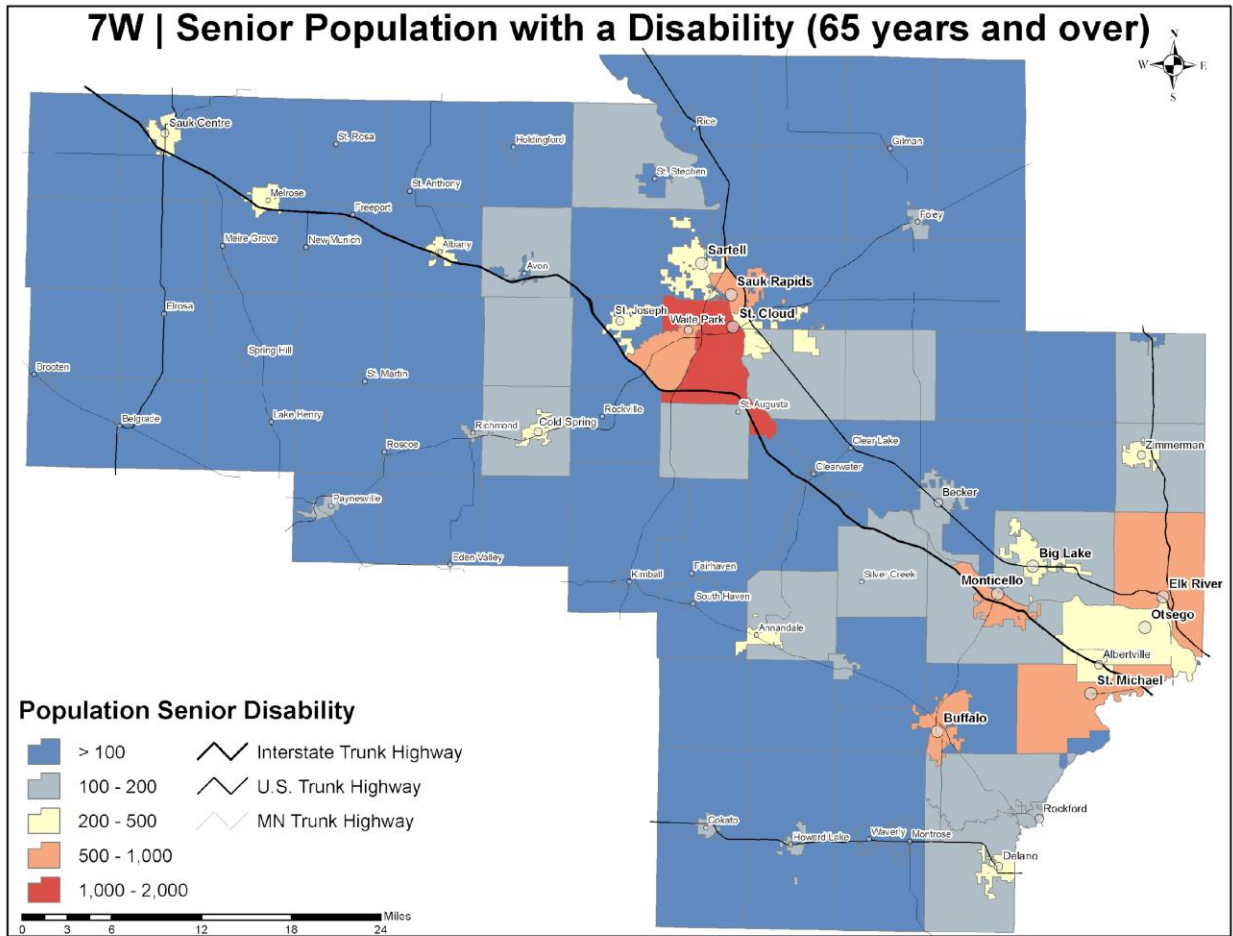
Seniors (age 65 and older) are the largest portion of the four-county population identifying as having a disability. Approximately one in three people with disabilities falls within this age cohort. Benton County has the highest percentage of its people with disabilities population age 65 and older at 33.66 percent. Concentrations of this population subset in Benton County can be found within Sauk Rapids and the eastern portion of the City of St. Cloud as shown in Figure 16.

Table 18: Senior Population with a Disability (65 years and over)

County	Total Population	Disabled Population	Percent of Total
Benton	5,527	1,858	33.66%
Stearns	23,088	7,190	31.14%
Sherburne	10,261	3,058	29.80%
Wright	16,361	5,194	31.75%
Total	55,237	17,300	31.32%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1810] (<https://bit.ly/3zydZ8J>)

Figure 16: Region 7W Senior Population with a Disability



Approximately 4.2 percent of the APO’s non-institutionalized population are adults 65 and older with a disability. According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates (as found in Table 18), the City of Waite Park has the APO’s largest share of their population identifying as being 65 and older and having a disability (6.9 percent of the City’s population).

Table 19: Senior Population with a Disability (65 years and over) (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Non-Institutionalized Population	Disabled Population	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,861	108	3.80%
Haven Township	2,128	120	5.60%
LeSauk Township	1,704	55	3.20%
Minden Township	1,529	92	6.00%
Rockville	2,551	68	2.40%
Sartell	17,877	872	4.90%
Sauk Rapids	13,450	616	4.60%
Sauk Rapids Township	469	28	6.00%
St. Augusta	3,715	169	4.50%
St. Cloud	66,061	2,530	3.80%
St. Joseph	7,030	267	3.80%
St. Joseph Township	1,464	61	4.20%
St. Stephen	963	21	2.20%
St. Wendel Township	2,074	98	4.70%
Waite Park	7,664	526	6.90%
Watab Township	3,199	91	2.80%
Total	134,739	5,722	4.20%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1810] (<https://bit.ly/3zydZ8J>)

Low-Income Population

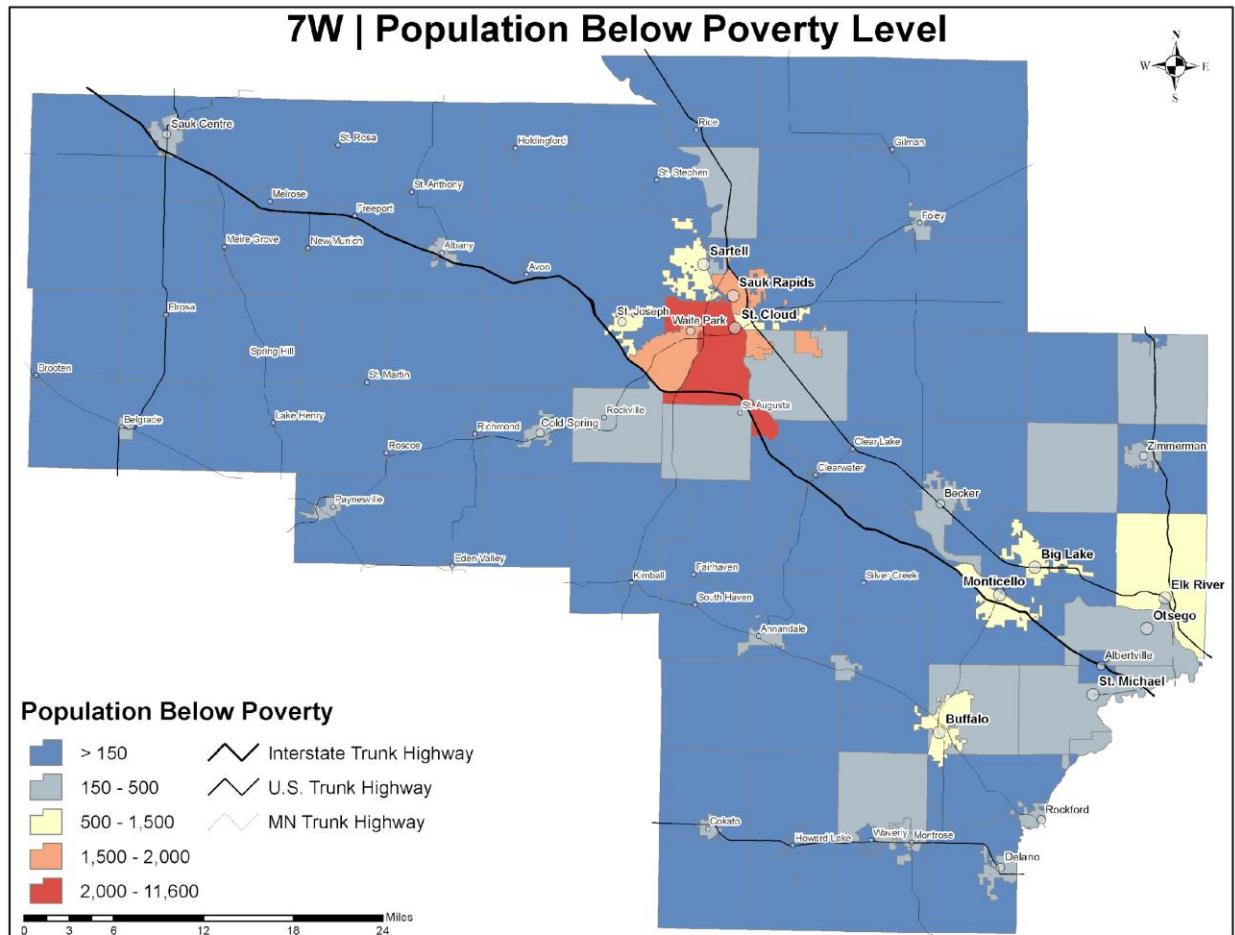
As defined by the Department of Health and Human Services, an individual having an annual income of no more than \$12,880 is considered to be living below the poverty level. Approximately 8.34 percent of individuals within the four-county area live in poverty according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates. Collectively, while that remains relatively low, a closer look at the individual counties shows that both Stearns and Benton counties have reported just over one in ten of their residents living in poverty as shown in Table 20.

Table 20: Population Below Poverty Level

County	Population Below Poverty Level	Total Population	Percent of Total
Benton	4,071	40,129	10.01%
Stearns	19,552	158,452	12.34%
Sherburne	5,912	94,463	6.26%
Wright	6,122	134,438	4.55%
Total	35,657	427,482	8.34%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701] (<https://bit.ly/3xOBeKk>)

Figure 17: Region 7W Population Below Poverty Level



Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701]

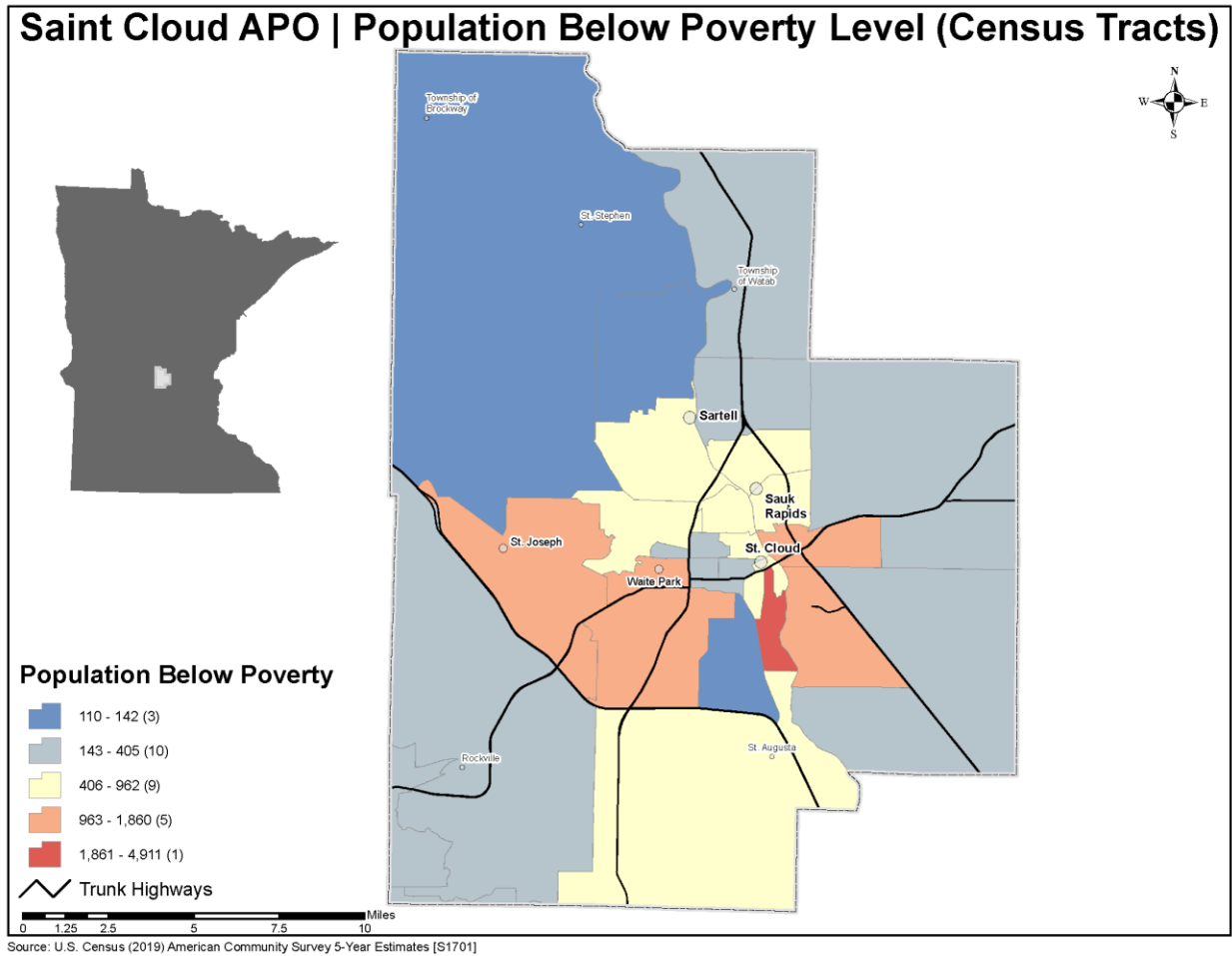
As shown in Table 21, approximately 16.3 percent of the APO planning area population is living below the poverty level according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates. Within the APO, the City of Waite Park has the largest share of its population falling below the poverty line – approximately a quarter of the City’s population. The cities of St. Joseph and St. Cloud follow closely behind with 24.5 percent and 22.5 percent of their respective populations below the poverty level. Out of the five major cities within the APO’s planning area, the City of Sartell has the smallest percentage of their population below the poverty level (approximately 5.2 percent of the city’s population is below the poverty line).

Table 20: Population Below Poverty Level (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Population Below Poverty Level	Total Population	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	58	2,861	2.00%
Haven Township	198	2,123	9.30%
LeSauk Township	90	1,704	5.30%
Minden Township	26	1,529	1.70%
Rockville	169	2,551	6.60%
Sartell	921	17,836	5.20%
Sauk Rapids	1,719	13,418	12.80%
Sauk Rapids Township	2	464	0.40%
St. Augusta	158	3,701	4.30%
St. Cloud	14,307	63,597	22.50%
St. Joseph	1,352	5,520	24.50%
St. Joseph Township	34	1,461	2.30%
St. Stephen	31	963	3.20%
St. Wendel Township	69	2,062	3.30%
Waite Park	1,891	7,571	25.00%
Watab Township	268	3,199	8.40%
Total	21,293	130,560	16.30%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701] (<https://bit.ly/3xOBeKk>)

Figure 18: St. Cloud APO Population Below Poverty Level



Tables 21 and 22 show the population of youth living below the poverty level by county and APO planning area, and the percent that population represents of the total. Figure 19 maps out the youth population in more detail by county.

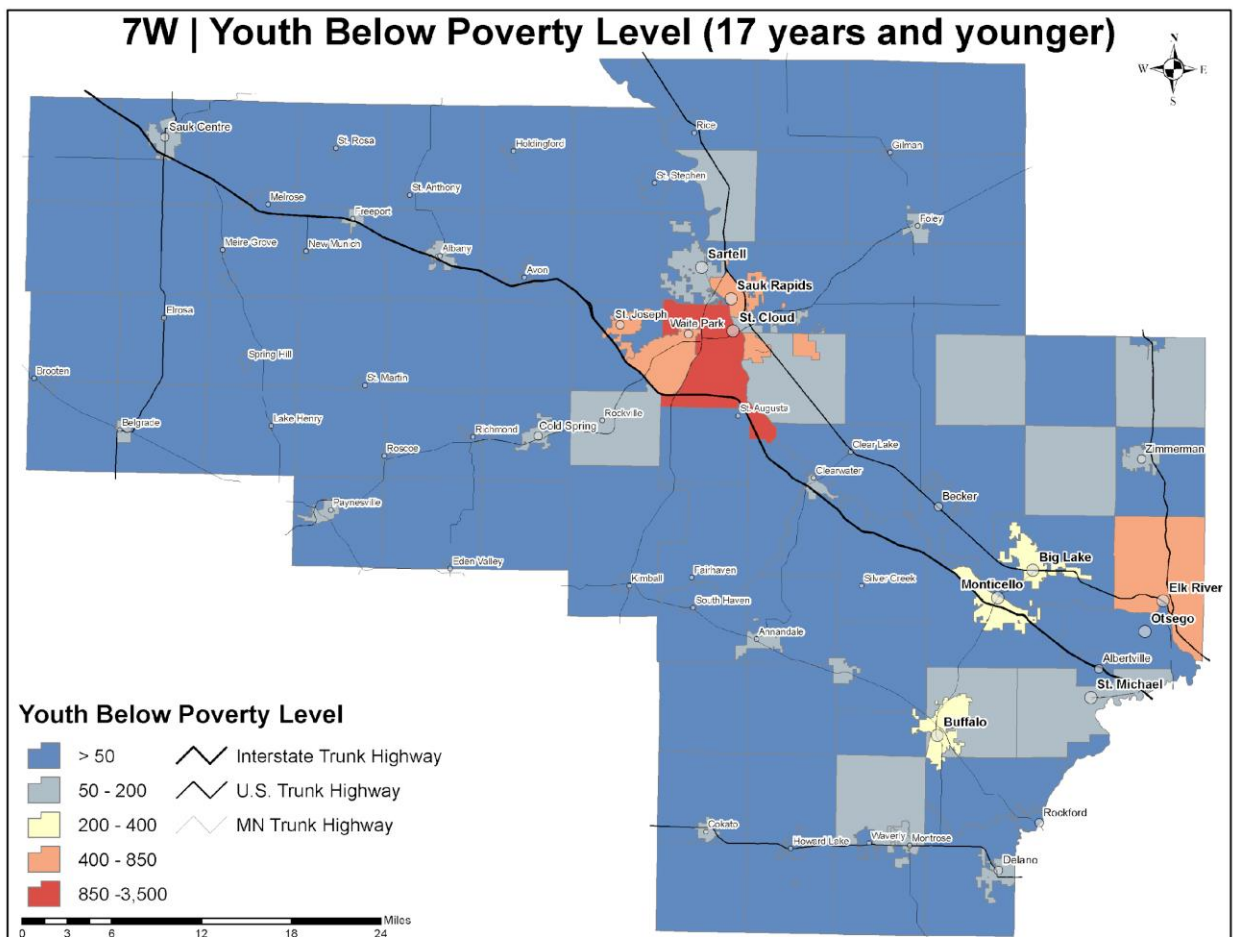
Approximately one in ten youth (under age 18) are living below the poverty level within the four-county study area according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates. Stearns County has the highest percentage of young people living in poverty – nearly one out of five youth. Large clusters of youth living in poverty can be found within St. Cloud, Waite Park, and St. Joseph as shown in Figure 19.

Table 21: Youth Below Poverty Level (17 years and younger)

County	Total Youth	Population below Poverty Level	Percent of Total
Benton	1,128	9,943	11.30%
Stearns	6,069	36,123	16.80%
Sherburne	2,087	24,788	8.40%
Wright	1,572	36,987	4.30%
Total	10,856	107,841	10.07%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701] (<https://bit.ly/3xOBeKk>)

Figure 19: Region 7W Youth Population Below Poverty Level



Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701]

Of the 16.3 percent of the APO's total population living below the poverty level, approximately 5.1 percent are children (under 18). According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, the City

of St. Joseph has the largest share of its population below the poverty level being youth (just over one in 10 or 13.4 percent). This was followed by the City of Waite Park (9 percent) and the City of St. Cloud (6.4 percent).

Table 22: Youth Below Poverty Level (17 years and younger) (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Total Youth	Population Below Poverty Level	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	0	2,861	0.00%
Haven Township	60	2,123	2.80%
LeSauk Township	3	1,704	0.20%
Minden Township	6	1,529	0.40%
Rockville	83	2,551	3.30%
Sartell	239	17,836	1.30%
Sauk Rapids	585	13,418	4.40%
Sauk Rapids Township	0	464	0.00%
St. Augusta	20	3,701	0.50%
St. Cloud	4,096	63,597	6.40%
St. Joseph	740	5,520	13.40%
St. Joseph Township	8	1,461	0.50%
St. Stephen	18	963	1.90%
St. Wendel Township	2	2,062	0.10%
Waite Park	681	7,571	9.00%
Watab Township	53	3,199	1.70%
Total	6,594	130,560	5.10%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701] (<https://bit.ly/3tBHv9F>)

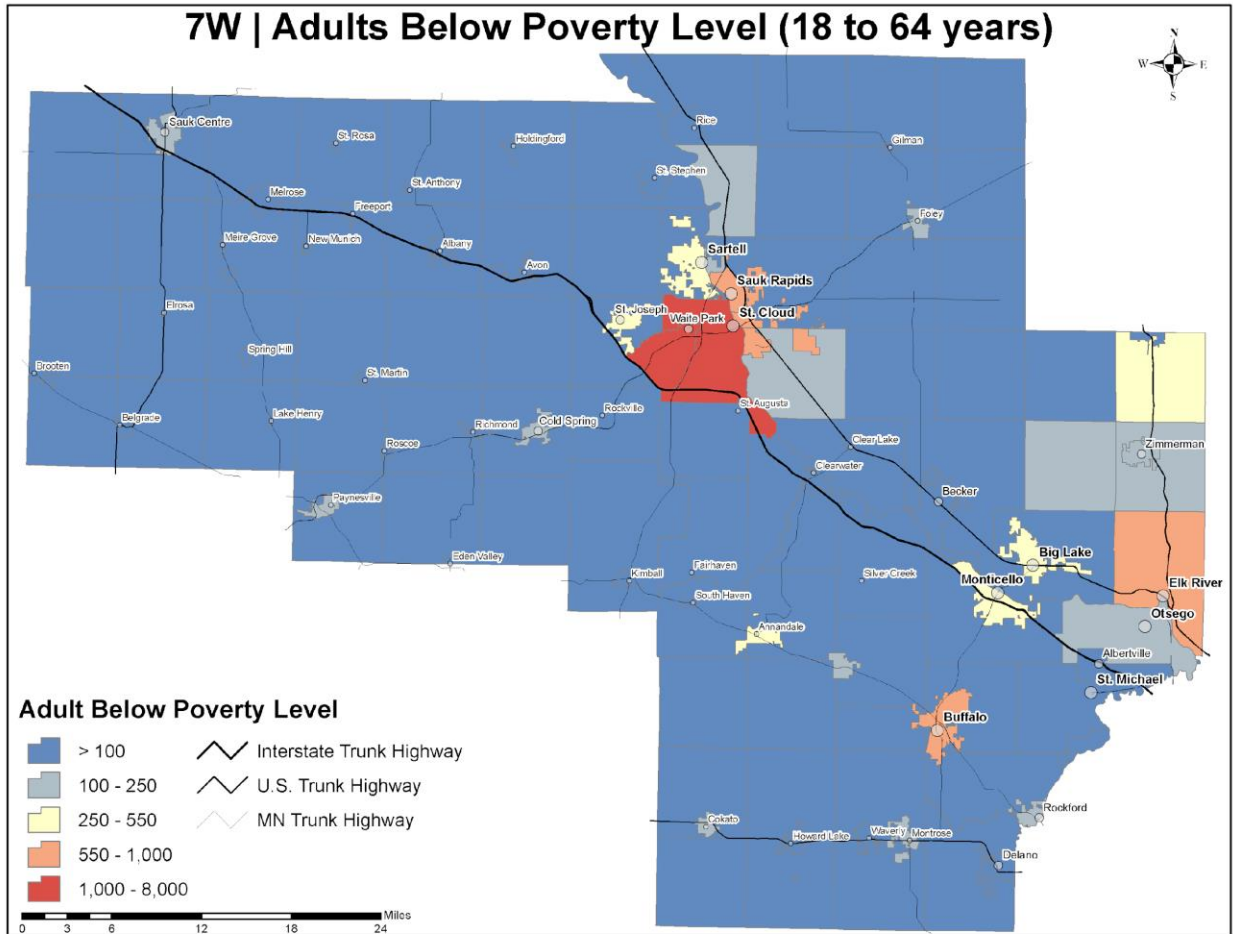
Compared to youth within the four-county area, fewer adults (ages 18 to 64) are living below the poverty level (8.22 percent). However, much like youth living in poverty, higher percentages of adults living in poverty can be found within both Benton and Stearns counties. Both counties are either at or just above one in ten adults living in poverty as shown in Table 23.

Table 23: Adults Below Poverty Level (18 to 64 years)

County	Total Adults	Population below Poverty Level	Percent of Total
Benton	2,272	24,359	9.30%
Stearns	11,975	93,138	12.90%
Sherburne	3,255	57,418	5.70%
Wright	3,440	79,999	4.30%
Total	20,942	254,914	8.22%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701] (<https://bit.ly/3xOBeKk>)

Figure 20: Region 7W Adults Below Poverty Level



A majority of the APO's population below the poverty level is between the ages of 18 and 64. According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, approximately one in ten adults within the

St. Cloud metro live below the poverty level (10.1 percent). Those adults primarily reside within the City of St. Cloud (15.1 percent of the City’s population living below the poverty level). Again, the cities of Waite Park and St. Joseph are near the top in terms of percent of their populations living below the poverty level (13.6 percent and 9 percent respectively).

Table 24: Adults Below Poverty Level (18 to 64 years) (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Total Adults	Population below Poverty Level	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,861	37	1.30%
Haven Township	2,123	116	5.50%
LeSauk Township	1,704	67	3.90%
Minden Township	1,529	10	0.70%
Rockville	2,551	71	2.80%
Sartell	17,836	577	3.20%
Sauk Rapids	13,418	860	6.40%
Sauk Rapids Township	464	0	0.00%
St. Augusta	3,701	91	2.50%
St. Cloud	63,597	9,600	15.10%
St. Joseph	5,520	495	9.00%
St. Joseph Township	1,461	20	1.40%
St. Stephen	963	11	1.10%
St. Wendel Township	2,062	45	2.20%
Waite Park	7,571	1,026	13.60%
Watab Township	3,199	154	4.80%
Total	130,560	13,180	10.10%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701] (<https://bit.ly/3tBHv9F>)

Within the four-county study area, seniors (ages 65 and over) make up the smallest percentage of the population living below the poverty line – 6.99 percent. However, it should be noted that while the areawide average is 6.99 percent, Benton County is a full 5.15 percentage points above

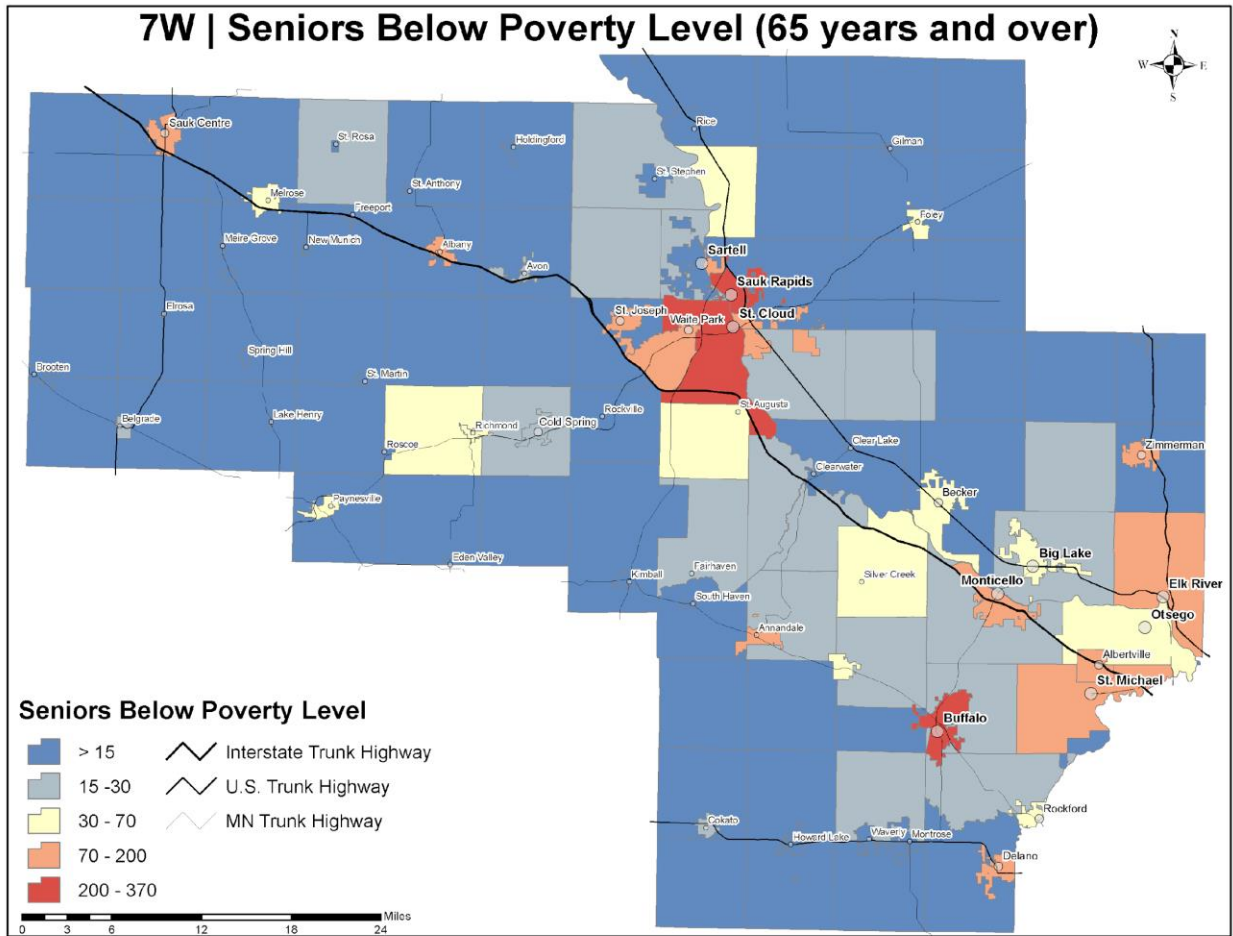
that – with 12.14 percent of their respective senior population below the poverty line. Table 25 has the county-by-county breakdown of the senior population in poverty. Figure 21 maps out the locations across the four counties with high concentrations of seniors living in poverty. Compared to youth and adults living in poverty, seniors in poverty are found not only in the urban centers like St. Cloud and along eastern Wright County, but in pockets of rural areas particularly along the major roadway corridors of I-94, MN Highway 23, MN Highway 55, and U.S. Highway 10.

Table 25: Seniors Below Poverty Level (65 years and over)

County	Population Below Poverty Level	Number of Seniors	Percent of Total
Benton	671	5,527	12.14%
Stearns	1,508	23,088	6.53%
Sherburne	570	10,261	5.56%
Wright	1,110	16,361	6.78%
Total	3,859	55,237	6.99%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701] (<https://bit.ly/3xOBeKk>)

Figure 21: Region 7W Seniors Below Poverty Level



Adults ages 65 and older make up a rather small percentage of the APO’s population living below the poverty level (1.2 percent). Within the APO’s planning area, as shown in Table 26, the cities/townships with the highest percentage of their senior population living below the poverty level include Waite Park (2.4 percent), St. Joseph (2.1 percent), and Sauk Rapids (2 percent).

Table 26: Seniors Below Poverty Level (65 years and over) (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Population Below Poverty Level	Number of Adults	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	21	2,861	0.70%
Haven Township	22	2,123	1.00%
LeSauk Township	20	1,704	1.20%
Minden Township	10	1,529	0.70%
Rockville	15	2,551	0.60%
Sartell	105	17,836	0.60%
Sauk Rapids	274	13,418	2.00%
Sauk Rapids Township	2	464	0.40%
St. Augusta	47	3,701	1.30%
St. Cloud	611	63,597	1.00%
St. Joseph	117	5,520	2.10%
St. Joseph Township	6	1,461	0.40%
St. Stephen	2	963	0.20%
St. Wendel Township	22	2,062	1.10%
Waite Park	184	7,571	2.40%
Watab Township	61	3,199	1.90%
Total	1,519	130,560	1.20%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1701] (<https://bit.ly/3xOBeKk>)

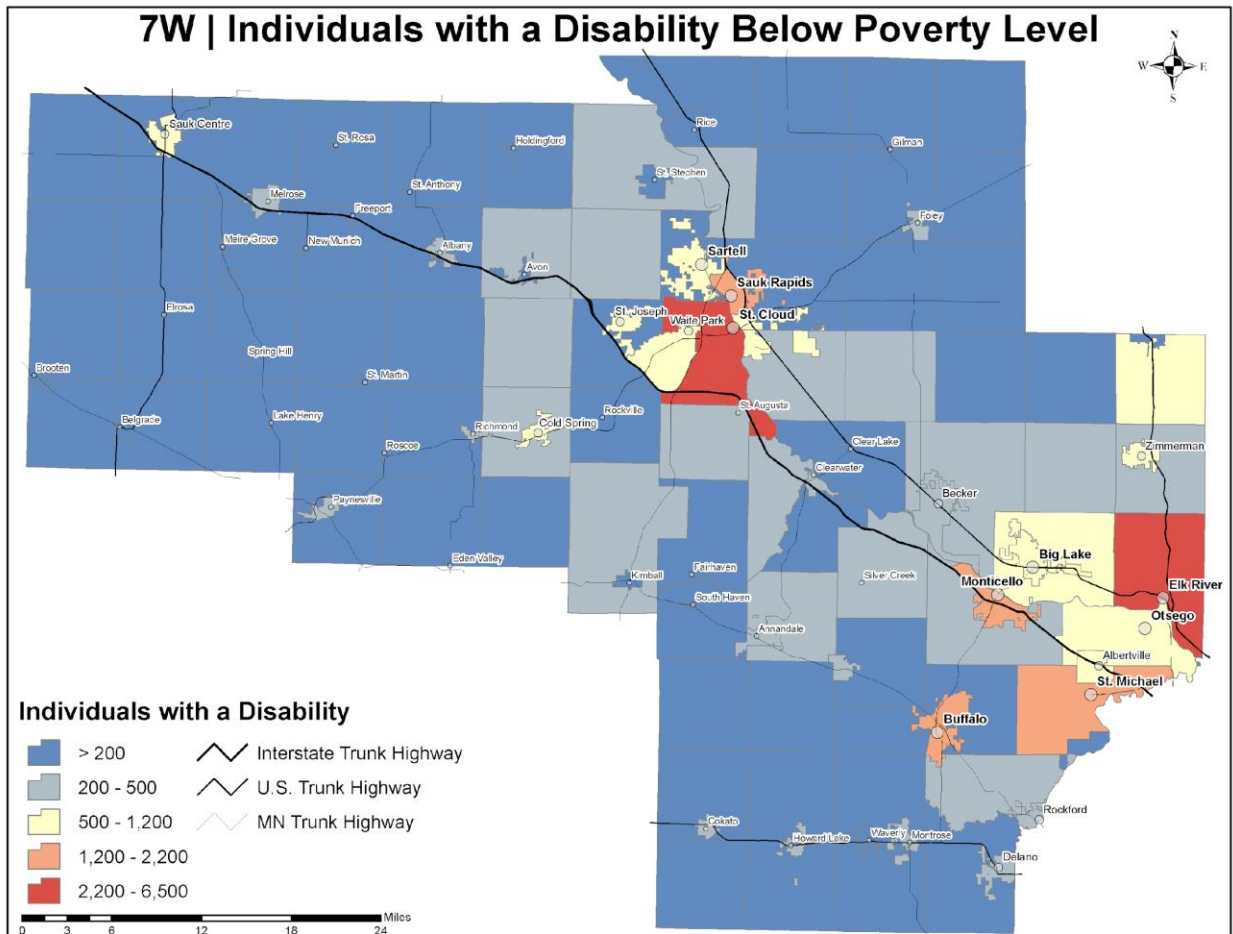
A relatively small percentage of the four-county study area identifies as a person with a disability living below the poverty level. According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, approximately 1.52 percent of the population with disabilities in the four-county area lives below the poverty line. As shown in Table 27, Benton County has the highest percentage of its respective population with disabilities living in poverty.

Table 27: Individuals with a Disability Below Poverty Level

County	Number of Persons with a Disability	Population below Poverty Level	Percent of Total
Benton	39,408	1,047	2.66%
Stearns	151,481	2,833	1.87%
Sherburne	92,051	901	0.98%
Wright	132,867	1,557	1.17%
Total	415,807	6,338	1.52%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [C18130] (<https://bit.ly/3Qkt2UE>)

Figure 22: Region 7W Individuals with a Disability Below Poverty Level



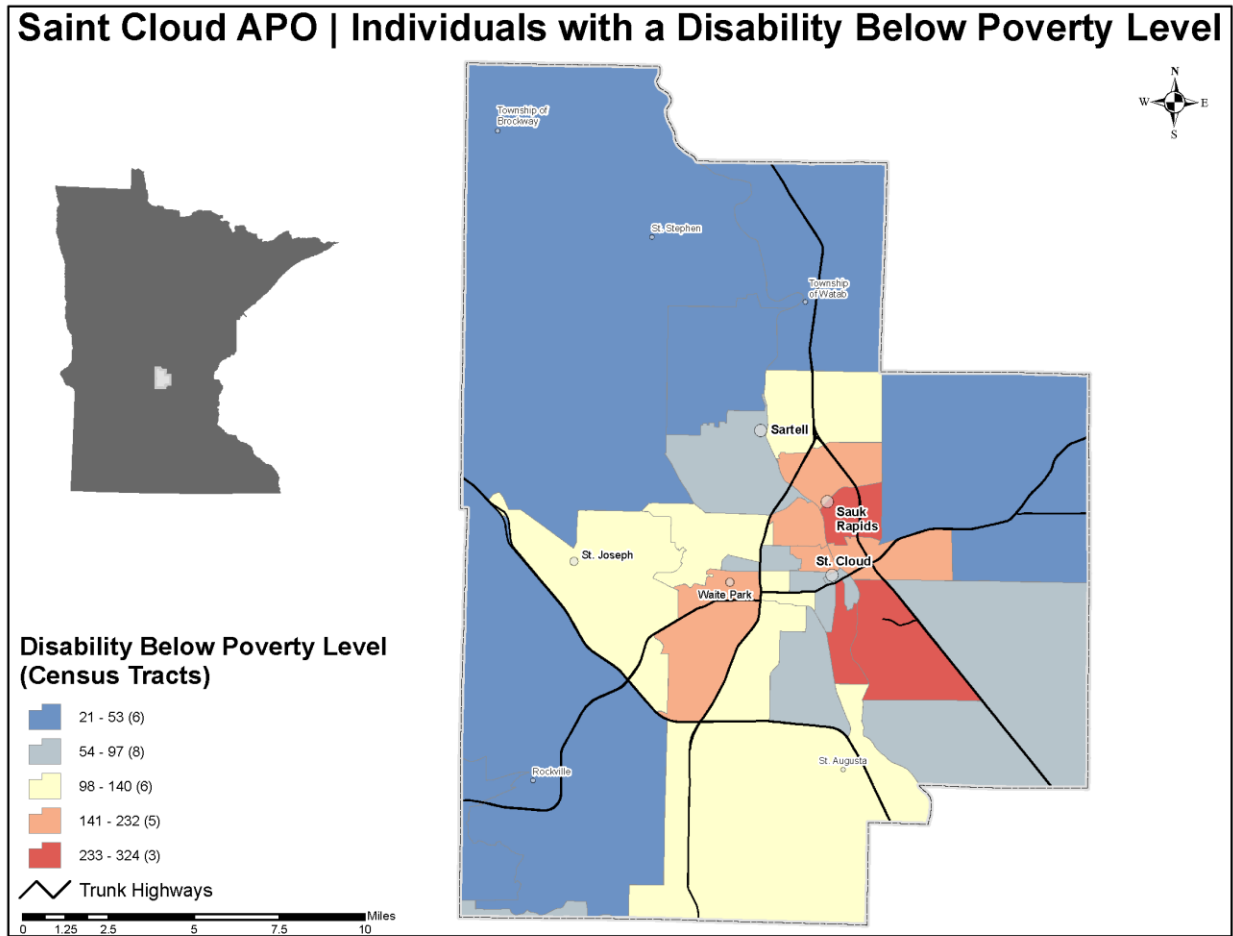
Individuals with a disability living below the poverty level make up approximately 2.6 percent of the APO’s population. The City of Sauk Rapids has the largest percentage of its population below the poverty level identifying as a person with a disability (3.9 percent) according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates. This is followed by the City of St. Cloud (3.4 percent) and the City of Waite Park (3.1 percent) as shown in Table 28.

Table 28: Individuals with a Disability Below Poverty Level (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Number of Persons with a Disability	Population below Poverty Level	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	6	2,861	0.20%
Haven Township	36	2,123	1.70%
LeSauk Township	12	1,704	0.70%
Minden Township	7	1,529	0.50%
Rockville	33	2,551	1.30%
Sartell	202	17,820	1.10%
Sauk Rapids	522	13,377	3.90%
Sauk Rapids Township	2	464	0.40%
St. Augusta	23	3,701	0.60%
St. Cloud	2,129	63,538	3.40%
St. Joseph	88	5,520	1.60%
St. Joseph Township	6	1,461	0.40%
St. Stephen	6	963	0.60%
St. Wendel Township	22	2,062	1.10%
Waite Park	232	7,571	3.10%
Watab Township	28	3,199	0.90%
Total	3,354	130,444	2.60%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [C18130] (<https://bit.ly/3QkT2UE>)

Figure 23: St. Cloud APO Individuals with a Disability Below Poverty Level



Households with Incomes Below the Poverty Level

Households below the federal poverty level are defined by the Department of Health and Human services as a household of four having an annual income of no more than \$26,500.

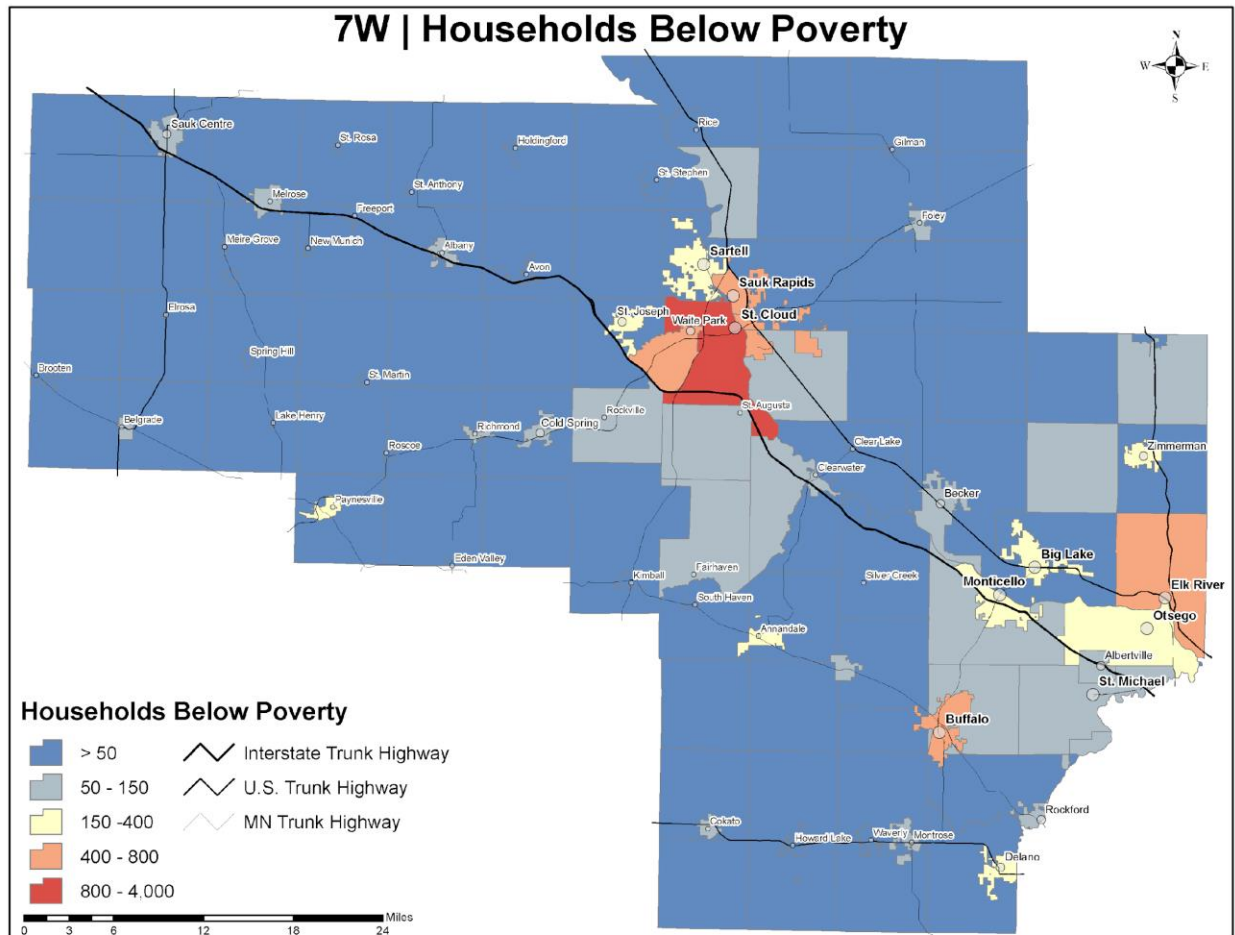
Similar to individuals in poverty, the percentage of households within the four-county area below poverty is relatively small – sitting at approximately 8.6 percent of households. However, much like individuals in poverty in the previous section, both Benton and Stearns counties have a greater percentage of their respective household population living below the poverty line.

Table 29: Households Below Poverty

County	Total Households	Households Below Poverty	Households Above Poverty	Percent Below Poverty of Total
Benton	16,452	1,900	14,552	11.55%
Stearns	59,479	6,756	52,723	11.36%
Sherburne	32,206	1,990	30,216	6.18%
Wright	48,242	2,855	45,387	5.92%
Total	156,379	13,501	142,878	8.63%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [B17017] (<https://bit.ly/3O8G815>)

Figure 24: Region 7W Households Below Poverty



Just over 50,000 households are found within the APO’s planning area according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates. Of that, approximately 8,000 (14.5 percent) are considered below the poverty level. A majority of these households living below the poverty level in the APO’s

planning area are found within the cities of St. Cloud and Waite Park – with approximately 19.7 percent and 18.4 percent of their respective household populations living below the poverty level.

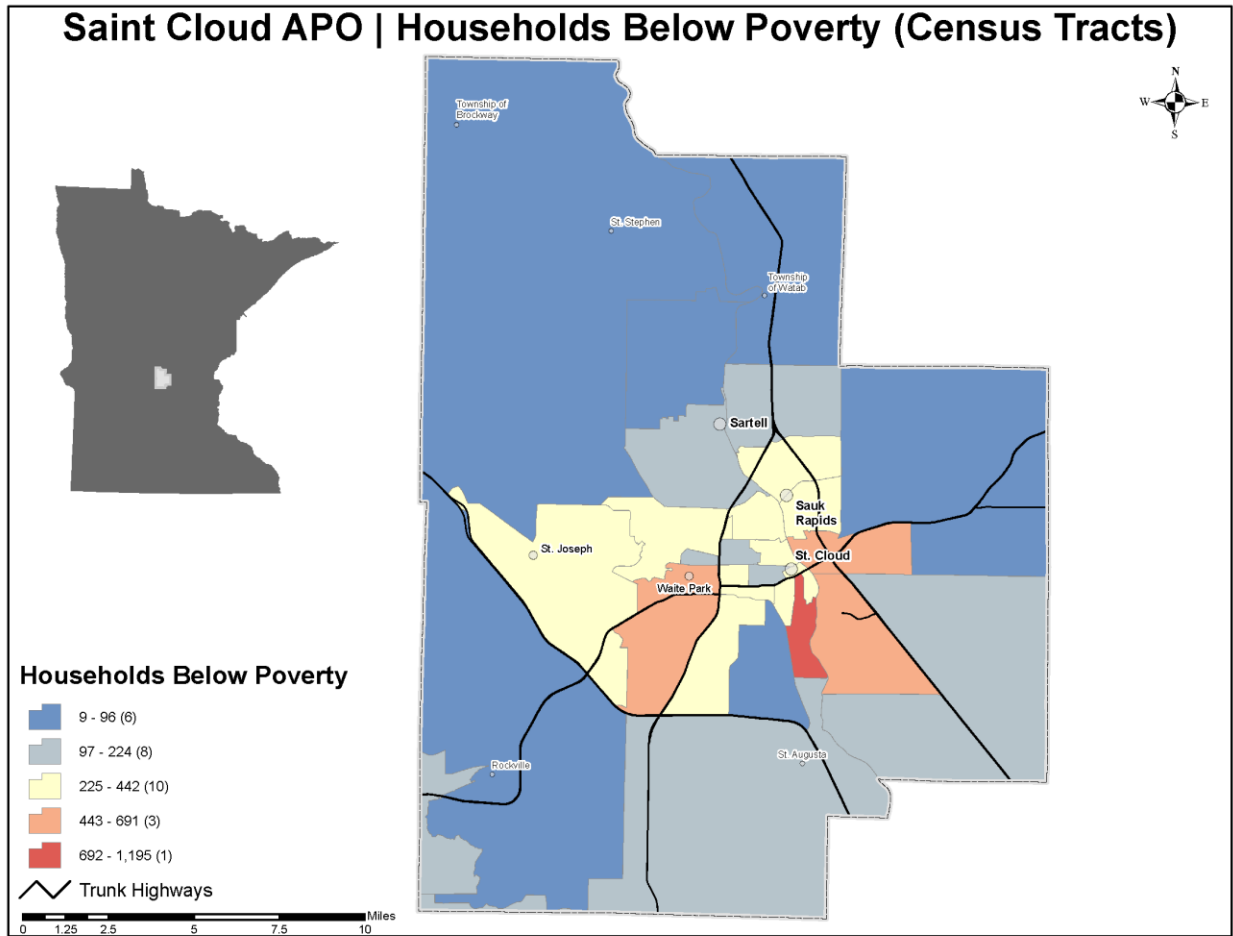
As shown in Figure 25, a sizable cluster of households below the poverty level can be found in the Census tract area which includes the areas surrounding St. Cloud State University in south St. Cloud.

Table 30: Households Below Poverty (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Total Households	Households Below Poverty	Households Above Poverty	Percent Below Poverty of Total
Brockway Township	1,059	35	1,024	3.30%
Haven Township	775	55	720	7.10%
LeSauk Township	715	42	673	5.90%
Minden Township	646	17	629	2.60%
Rockville	993	60	933	6.00%
Sartell	6,975	364	6,611	5.20%
Sauk Rapids	5,703	764	4,939	13.40%
Sauk Rapids Township	204	1	203	0.50%
St. Augusta	1,316	56	1,260	4.30%
St. Cloud	26,374	5,207	21,167	19.70%
St. Joseph	1,916	270	1,646	14.10%
St. Joseph Township	556	13	543	2.30%
St. Stephen	343	8	335	2.30%
St. Wendel Township	821	44	777	5.40%
Waite Park	3,499	643	2,856	18.40%
Watab Township	1,145	96	1,049	8.40%
Total	53,040	7,675	45,365	14.50%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [B17017] (<https://bit.ly/3O8G8I5>)

Figure 25: St. Cloud APO Households Below Poverty



Zero-Vehicle Households

Households without a motor vehicle are important to identify in human services transportation and transit plans. Households without access to vehicles rely more heavily on transit and alternative transportation options such as walking, biking, or programs/services such as Uber or Lyft.

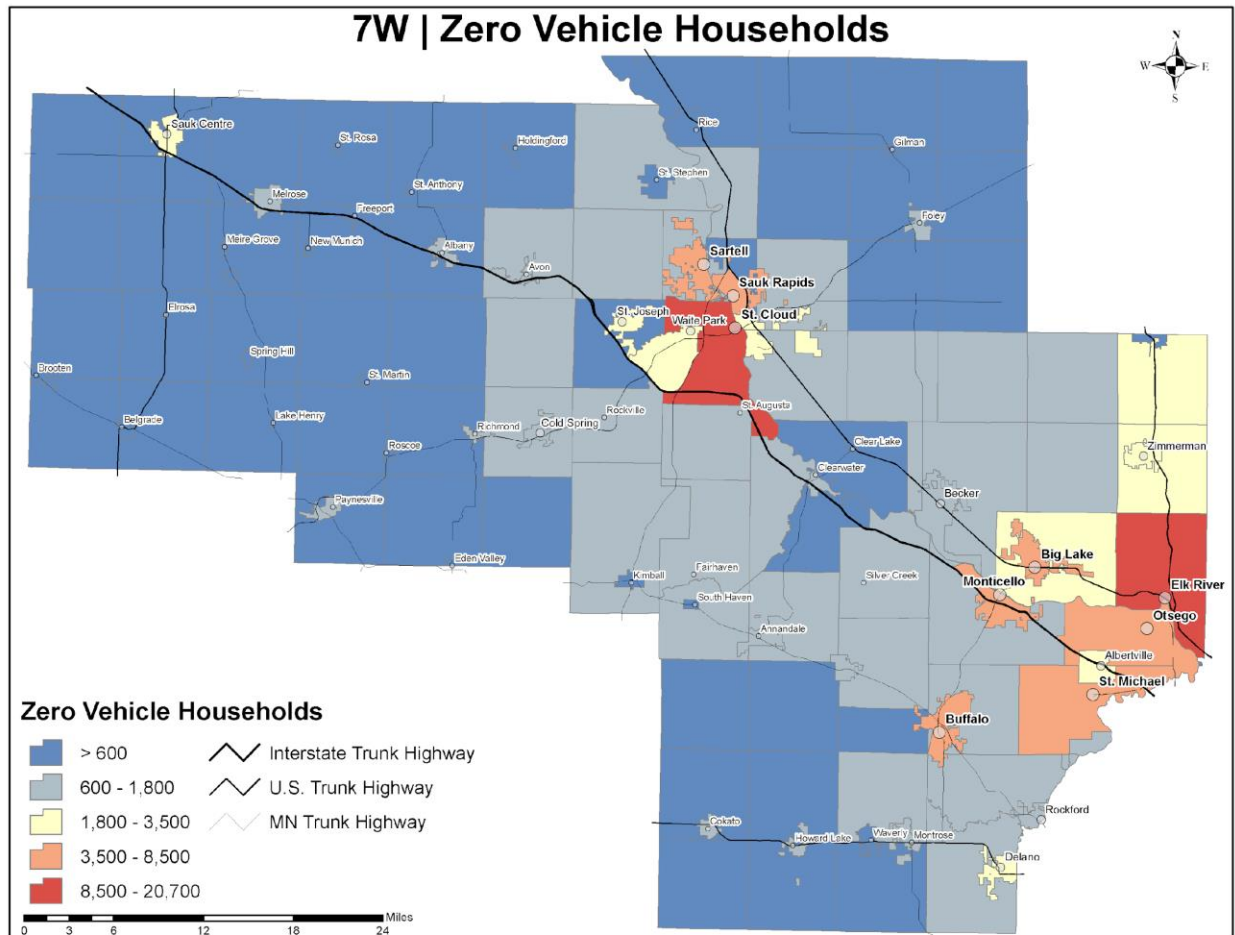
According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, less than 5 percent of all households within the four-county area do not have a vehicle. As shown in Table 31, Benton County has the largest percentage of its household population without access to a motor vehicle – 7 percent of households.

Table 31: Zero Vehicle Households

County	Total Households	Zero Vehicle Households	1 Vehicle	2 Vehicles	3 or More Vehicles	Percent Zero-Vehicle of Total
Benton	16,452	1,144	4,883	6,488	3,937	7.00%
Stearns	59,479	3,079	17,449	23,954	14,997	5.20%
Sherburne	32,206	973	5,575	13,638	12,020	3.00%
Wright	48,242	1,707	10,273	20,855	15,407	3.50%
Total	156,379	6,903	38,180	64,935	46,361	4.41%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S2504] (<https://bit.ly/3mPATAI>)

Figure 26: Region 7W Zero Vehicle Households



According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, approximately 6.8 percent of households within the APO’s planning area did not have access to a vehicle. This equates to approximately 3,600 households within the St. Cloud metro. The cities of St. Cloud, Waite Park, and Sauk Rapids have the highest percentage of their respective household populations not having access to a motor vehicle (9.3 percent, 8.8 percent, and 7.3 percent respectively).

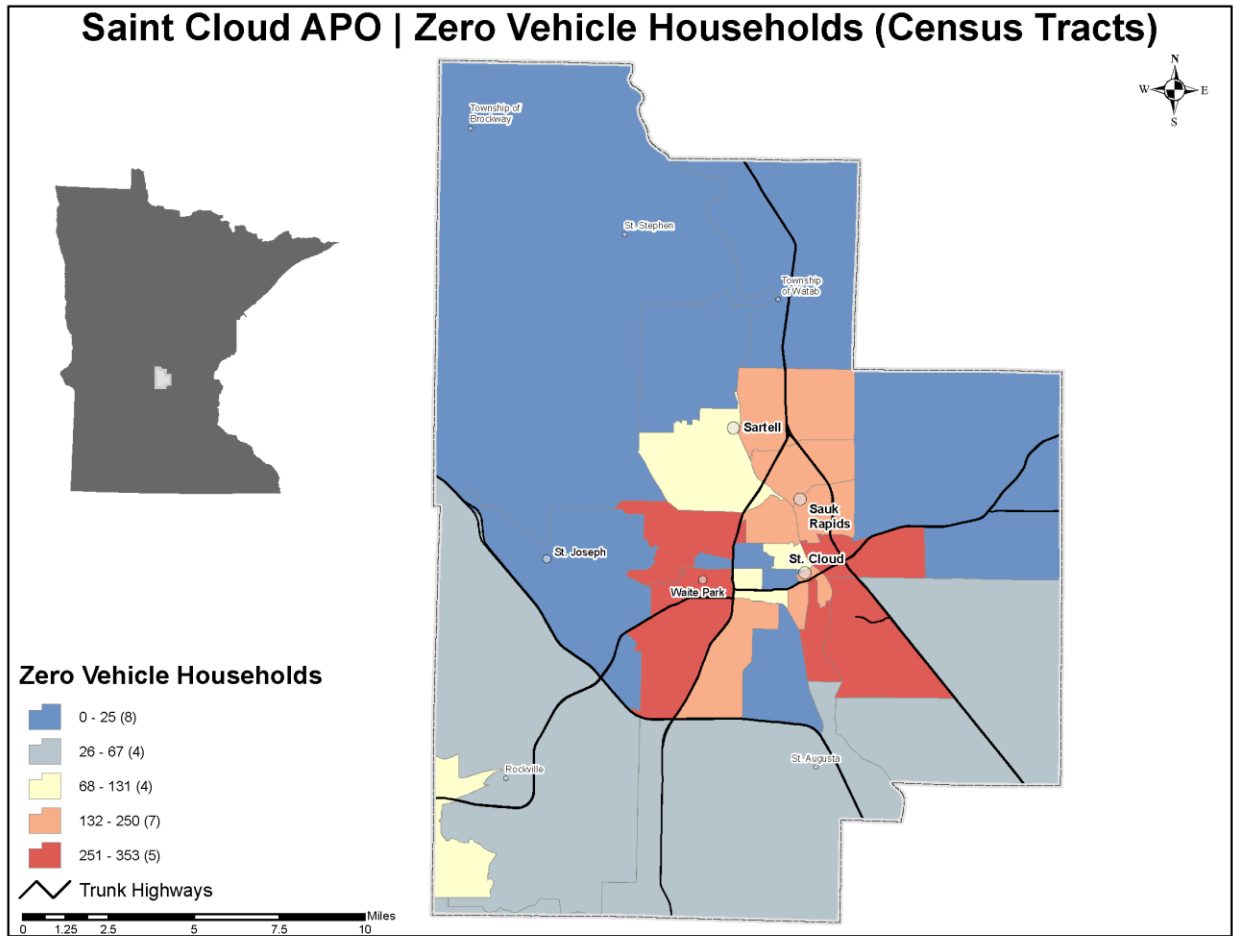
Figure 27 illustrates the location of these households within the planning area by Census tract. South St. Cloud and the area surrounding the U.S. Highway 10/MN Highway 23 interchange and areas immediately to the west of MN Highway 15 in Waite Park have larger concentrations of this demographic subset.

Table 32: Zero Vehicle Households (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Total Households	Zero Vehicle Households	1 Vehicle	2 Vehicles	3 or More Vehicles	Percent Zero-Vehicle of Total
Brockway Township	1,059	11	155	444	449	1.00%
Haven Township	775	22	110	334	309	2.80%
LeSauk Township	715	9	160	339	207	1.30%
Minden Township	646	5	208	180	253	0.80%
Rockville	993	53	128	462	350	5.30%
Sartell	6,975	309	2,233	3,058	1,375	4.40%
Sauk Rapids	5,703	419	1,992	2,372	920	7.30%
Sauk Rapids Township	204	0	37	107	87	0.00%
St. Augusta	1,316	10	205	517	584	0.80%
St. Cloud	26,374	2,454	9,705	10,330	3,885	9.30%
St. Joseph	1,916	0	716	891	309	0.00%
St. Joseph Township	556	3	90	231	232	0.50%
St. Stephen	343	2	43	134	164	0.60%
St. Wendel Township	821	6	110	365	340	0.70%
Waite Park	3,499	308	1,668	997	526	8.80%
Watab Township	1,145	4	182	456	503	0.30%
Total	53,040	3,615	17,742	21,217	10,493	6.80%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S2504] (<https://bit.ly/39uonDR>)

Figure 27: St. Cloud APO Zero Vehicle Households



Commuting to Work

Connecting residents living within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO to their places of employment is a key component of the Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan. And understanding their primary mode of transportation is vital to ensuring not only access to that mode but considering alternative options as well.

Within both Region 7W and the St. Cloud APO, residents rely heavily on single-occupancy vehicle trips when commuting to and from work. Looking specifically at the four-county area, the next most popular form of commuter transportation is carpooling. Other forms of transportation including walking, biking, and public transit make up a very small portion of commute trips as shown in Table 33.

However, it is important to note that ACS frames this question to look at one specific week of travel: “How did you usually get to work LAST WEEK?” so it may be very likely that commute trips by multiple modes may be underreported.

Table 33: Commuting to Work

County	Drove Alone	Carpooled	Public Transportation	Walked	Bicycle	Worked at Home	Total
Benton	84.80%	7.70%	1.20%	1.40%	0.00%	3.80%	20,896
Stearns	80.00%	7.50%	1.50%	4.30%	0.60%	5.30%	84,328
Sherburne	83.70%	7.40%	1.80%	0.60%	0.20%	5.80%	50,737
Wright	85.20%	6.70%	0.80%	1.20%	0.10%	5.10%	71,737
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	227,698

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S0801] (<https://bit.ly/3tCdGPU>)

Residents within the St. Cloud APO’s planning area rely heavily on single-occupancy trips when commuting to and from work. According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, approximately four out of five work trips were made by individuals driving alone in a car as shown in Table 34. The remaining 20 percent of work trips taken across the metro were made up of either carpooling, public transit, active transportation (walking/biking), taxis, motorcycles, other means, or by just working from home.

Looking specifically at public transportation commute trips, approximately 2 percent of work trips within the APO’s planning area were taken using this form of transportation – with a significant amount of transit trips being completed within the City of St. Cloud.

Table 34: Commuting to Work (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Drove Alone	Carpooled	Public Transportation	Taxi	Motorcycle	Bicycle	Walked	Other Means	Worked at Home	Total
Brockway Township	1,285	132	10	-	-	-	13	-	134	1,574
Haven Township	902	53	21	4	4	4	10	-	61	1,059
LeSauk Township	768	65	17	-	-	8	-	24	70	952
Minden Township	792	32	6	-	-	-	12	11	40	893
Rockville	1,092	175	-	-	-	9	16	10	73	1,375
Sartell	8,518	513	57	14	-	18	27	25	385	9,557
Sauk Rapids	6,283	526	83	27	11	-	34	32	163	7,159
Sauk Rapids Township	205	36	-	-	-	-	3	2	14	260
St. Augusta	1,985	122	3	-	-	-	16	9	110	2,245
St. Cloud	27,723	2,718	1,047	98	21	378	1,601	196	1,206	34,988
St. Joseph	2,460	291	169	-	-	9	539	131	312	3,911

Jurisdiction	Drove Alone	Carpooled	Public Transportation	Taxi	Motorcycle	Bicycle	Walked	Other Means	Worked at Home	Total
St. Joseph Township	708	45	5	-	-	-	8	9	66	841
St. Stephen	482	31	-	-	-	-	6	-	42	561
St. Wendel Township	1,018	79	5	-	3	-	25	-	67	1,197
Waite Park	3,027	755	14	33	-	57	55	17	221	4,179
Watab Township	1,507	132	4	-	-	-	-	-	70	1,713
Total	58,755	5,705	1,441	176	39	483	2,365	466	3,034	72,464
Total Percent	81.10%	7.90%	2.00%	0.20%	0.10%	0.70%	3.30%	0.60%	4.20%	100.00%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S0801] (<https://bit.ly/3tCdGPU>)

Place of Work

Knowing where current residents are working is useful in assessing the need of expanding transportation services. For instance, if a majority of a county’s residents are employed outside of that county, transportation providers (public and private) may need to adjust their services to accommodate travel patterns. Or residents may need to coordinate trips with multiple transportation providers to reach their desired destination.

As shown in Table 35, about 50 percent of the residents within the four-county region work within their county of residence. However, as the table indicates, Benton County residents overwhelmingly commute outside of the county to work. Seven out of ten Benton County residents are employed outside the County.

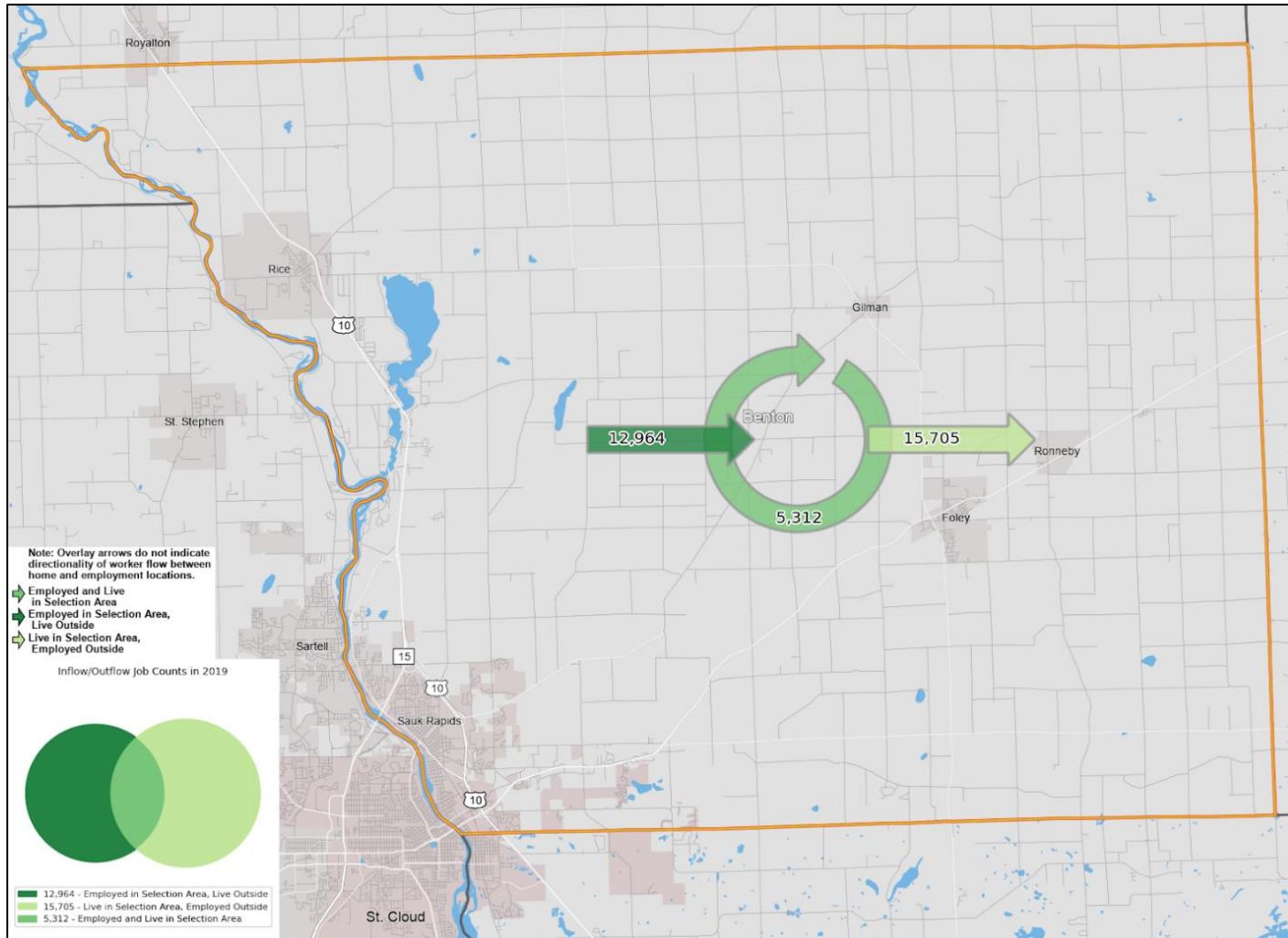
Table 35: Place of Work

County	Works in County of Resident	Percent of Total Work Within County	Works Outside County of Residence	Percent of Total Works Outside
Benton	5,312	29.10%	12,964	70.90%
Stearns	48,630	55.50%	38,952	44.50%
Sherburne	10,982	42.50%	14,836	57.50%
Wright	23,503	52.10%	21,605	47.90%
Total	88,427	50.01%	88,357	49.98%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program [Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership] (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

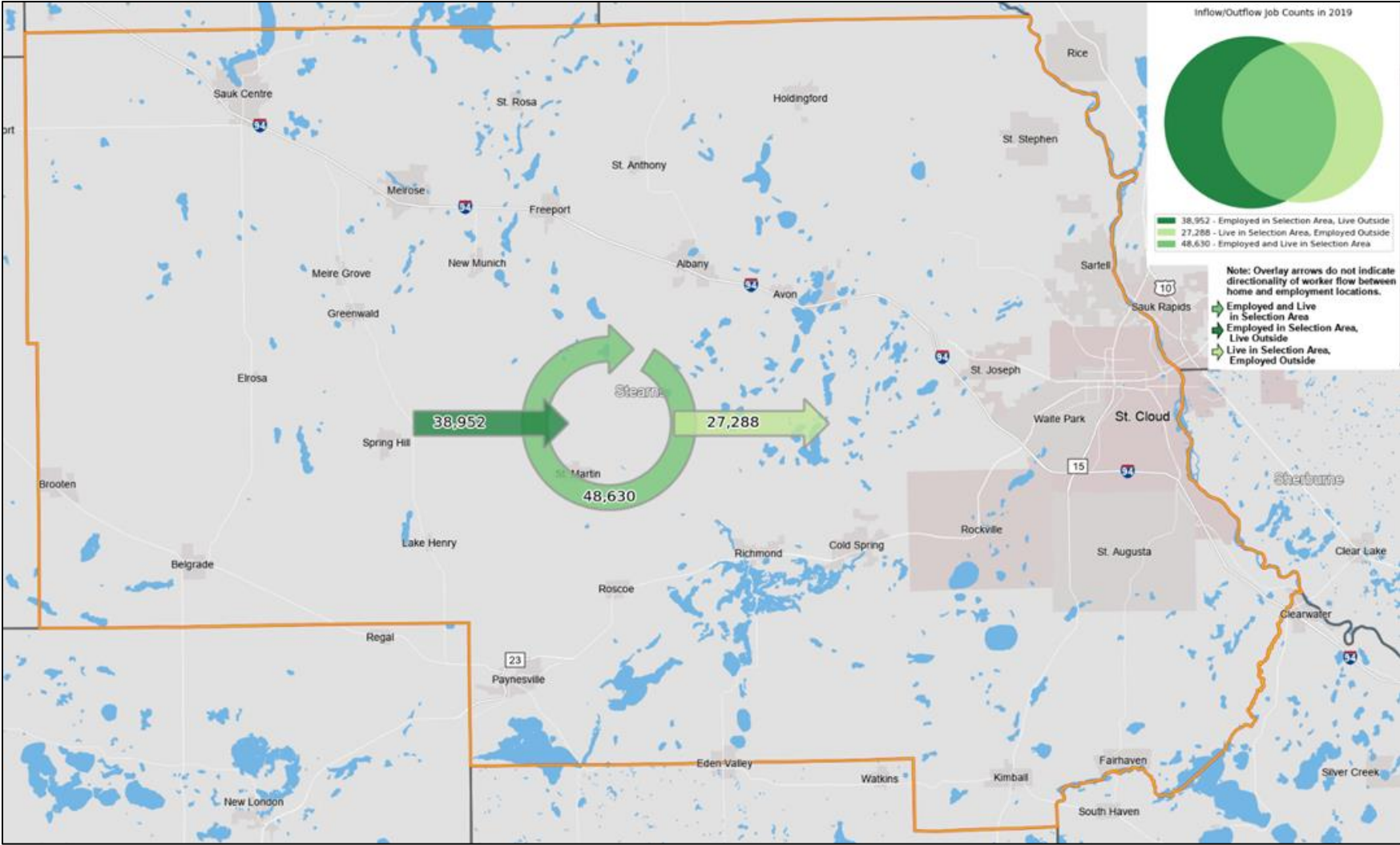
Figures 28-31 on the next pages provide county specific information.

Figure 28: Benton County Employment Commute



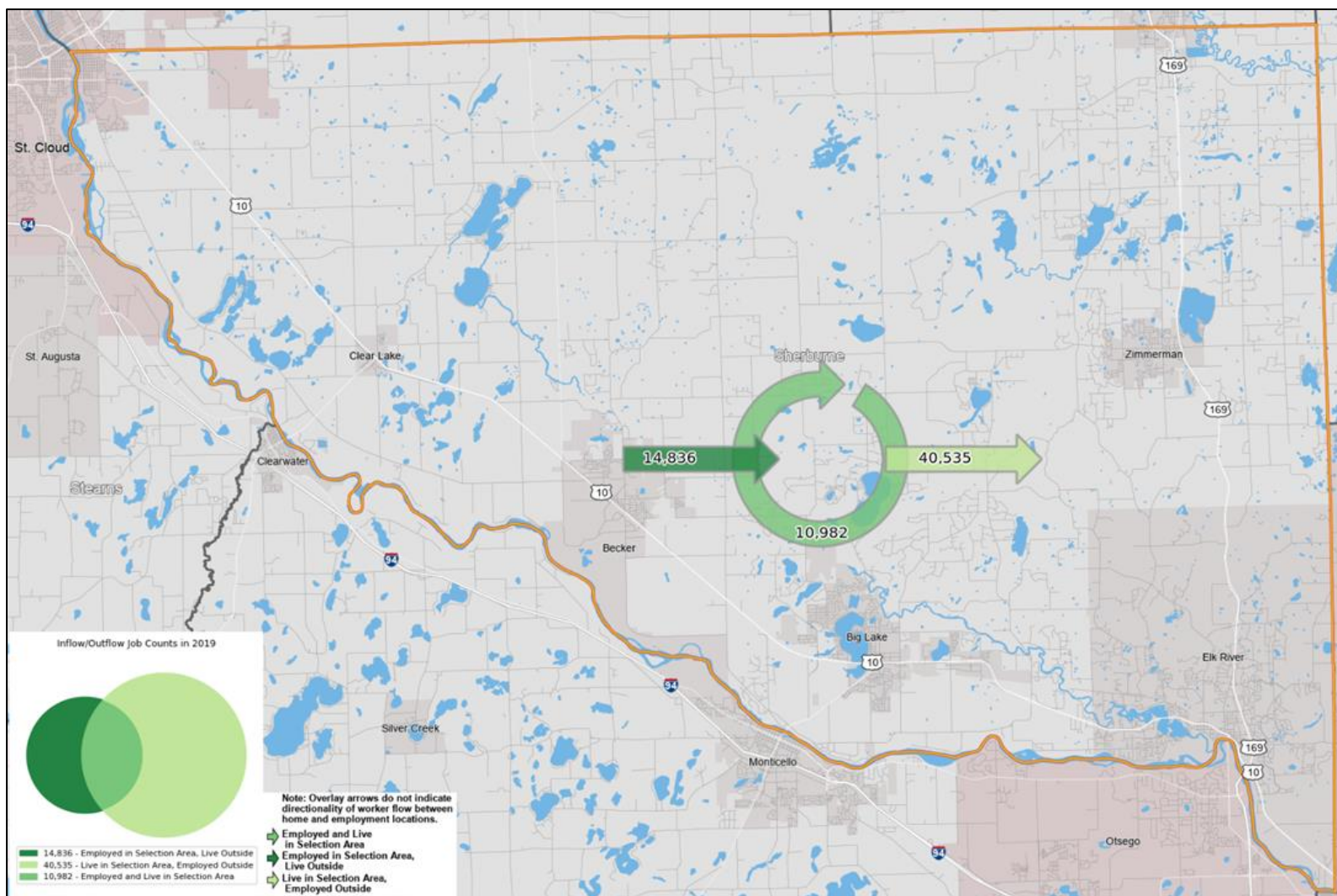
Source: U.S. Census (2019) Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program [Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership] (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

Figure 29: Stearns County Employment Commute



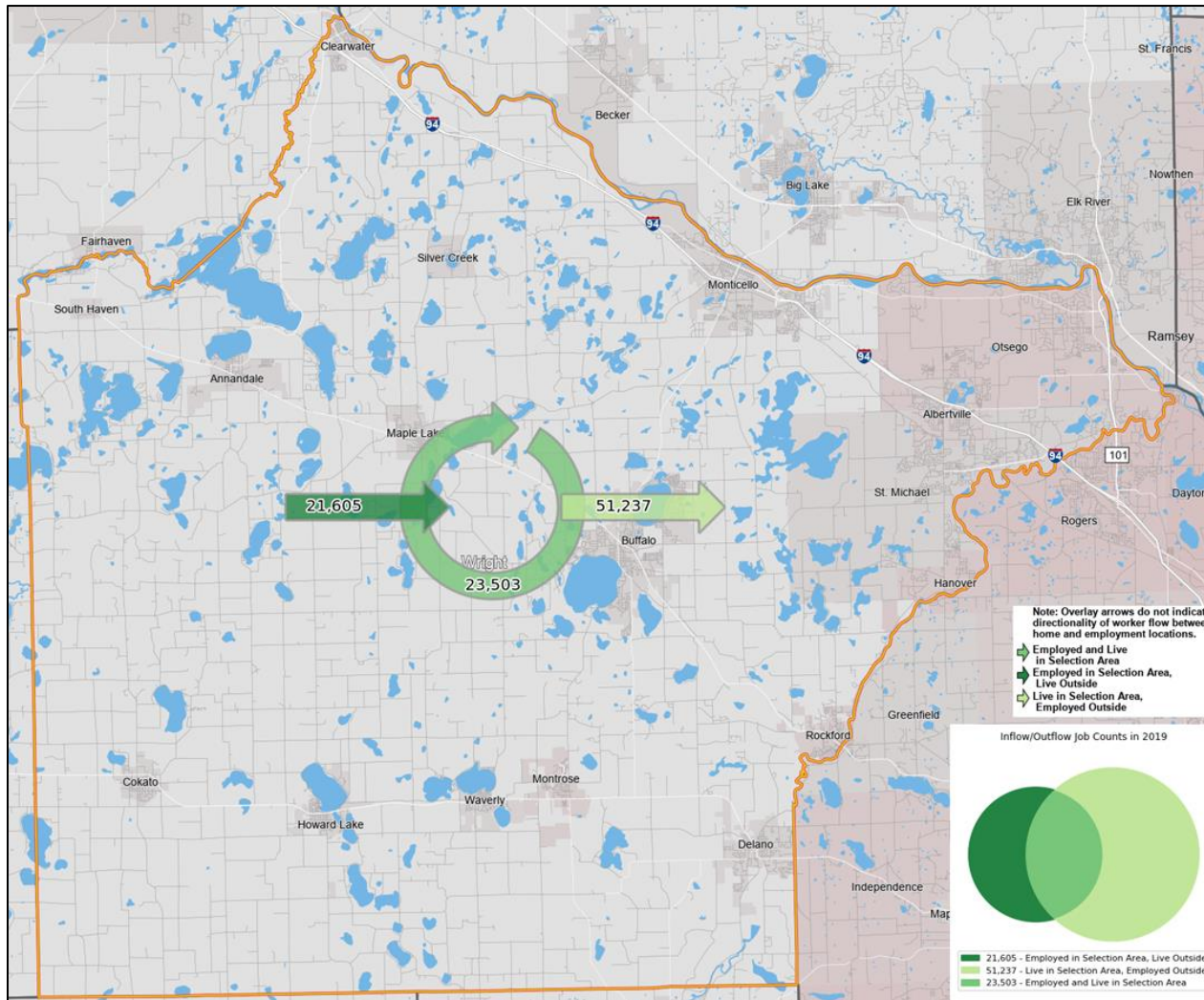
Source: U.S. Census (2019) Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program [Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership] (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

Figure 30: Sherburne County Employment Commute



Source: U.S. Census (2019) Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program [Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership] (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

Figure 31: Wright County Employment Commute



Source: U.S. Census (2019) Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program [Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership] (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

As shown in Table 36, there are approximately 83,000 people employed within the eight municipalities found within the St. Cloud APO’s planning area according to the 2019 U.S. Census Bureau’s Center for Economic Studies. Of those, approximately 46 percent of employees live outside of their city of employment – meaning these individuals must commute to their place of employment.

For example, in the City of St. Cloud, 53,084 people are employed within the city limits. Of those, 38,414 do not live in St. Cloud (72.4 percent). The remaining 14,670 people (27.6 percent) both live and work within the city of St. Cloud.

A closer look at this data reveals the cities of St. Cloud, Sartell, and Sauk Rapids have the highest percentages of their populations living and working within their municipalities (27.6 percent, 19.9 percent, and 15.1 percent respectively).

Table 36: Place of Work (Employed in City) (St. Cloud APO)

City	Total Employed in City	Employed in City, Lives Outside City	Employed in City, Lives Outside City Percent	Lives and Works in City	Lives and Works in City Percent
Rockville	537	508	94.60%	29	5.40%
St. Augusta	1,111	1,053	94.80%	58	5.20%
St. Cloud	53,084	38,414	72.40%	14,670	27.60%
St. Joseph	1,969	1,819	92.40%	150	7.60%
St. Stephen	476	474	99.60%	2	0.40%
Sartell	6,340	5,081	80.10%	1,259	19.90%
Sauk Rapids	4,458	3,789	84.90%	672	15.10%
Waite Park	9,087	8,724	96.00%	363	4.00%
MPA Total*	82,862	38,092	46.00%	44,770	54.00%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program [Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership] (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

*The MPA Total includes the entirety of the APO’s planning area, not just the eight cities listed here.

Data found in Table 37 (also from the 2019 U.S. Census Bureau’s Center for Economic Studies) provides a slightly different perspective on this data. Approximately 67,000 individuals within the workforce population reside within the St. Cloud APO’s planning area. Of those, approximately 33 percent live in one of those municipalities but work in a different city.

Looking again at the City of St. Cloud, 31,821 people who are employed live within the city limits. Of those, approximately 17,151 individuals who live within St. Cloud are employed outside of the city (53.9 percent). The remaining 46.1 percent of employees both live and work within St. Cloud.

As shown in Table 37, aside from the City of St. Cloud a majority of working age residents within the eight APO municipalities live in one city but are employed outside their city of residence.

Table 37: Place of Work (Living in City) (St. Cloud APO)

City	Total Living in City	Living in City, Employed Outside City	Living in City, Employed Outside City Percent	Lives and Works in City	Lives and Works in City Percent
Rockville	1,053	1,024	97.20%	29	2.80%
St. Augusta	1,803	1,745	96.80%	58	3.20%
St. Cloud	31,821	17,151	53.90%	14,670	46.10%
St. Joseph	2,485	2,335	94.00%	150	6.00%
St. Stephen	497	495	99.60%	2	0.40%
Sartell	9,048	7,789	86.10%	1,259	13.90%
Sauk Rapids	6,714	6,042	90.00%	672	10.00%
Waite Park	3,786	3,423	90.40%	363	9.60%
MPA Total*	67,127	22,357	33.30%	44,770	66.70%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program [Local Employment Dynamics (LED) Partnership] (<https://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>)

*The MPA Total includes the entirety of the APO's planning area, not just the eight cities listed here.

Minority Communities

A majority of residents within the four-county area are white. However, the area does have a growing Black, Indigenous, or People-of-Color (BIPOC) population. BIPOC includes individuals who identify as: Black/African American alone; American Indian and Alaska Native alone; Asian alone; Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone; some other race; two or more races; and Hispanic or Latino regardless of race.

According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, 11.65 percent of the overall population of Benton, Stearns, Sherburne, and Wright counties are considered BIPOC. Black/African American

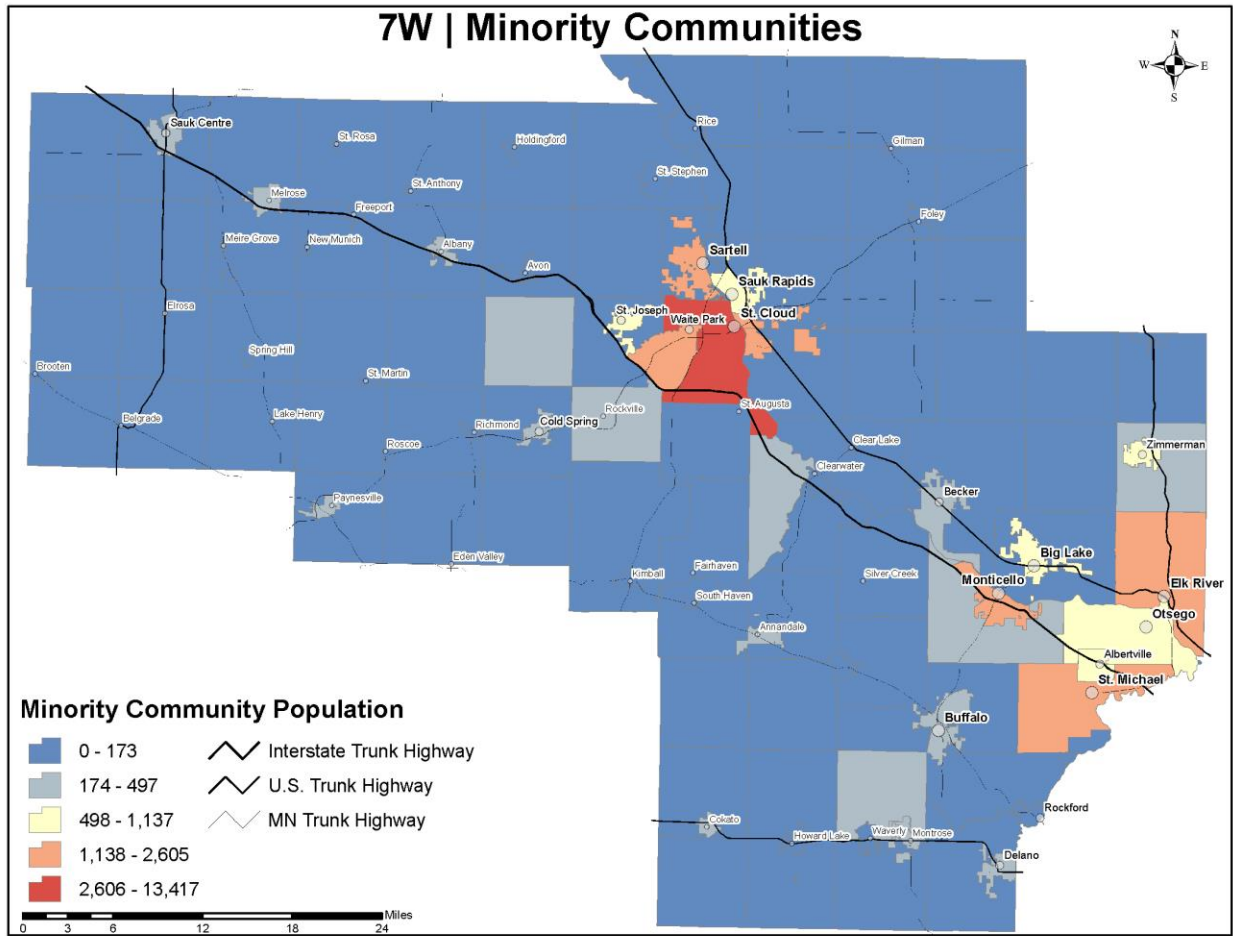
alone and Hispanic/Latino make up the largest portion of the BIPOC populations within the four counties.

Table 38: Population by Race

County	White	Black or African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino	American Indian or Native	Two or More Races
Benton	36,637	1,601	408	981	78	1,079
Stearns	139,188	10,217	3,304	5,342	330	3,283
Sherburne	87,265	2,335	1,213	2,451	556	1,888
Wright	126,547	1,905	1,495	3,953	399	2,569
Total	389,637	16,058	6,420	12,727	1,363	8,819

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP05] (<https://bit.ly/3aZ8OVd>)

Figure 32: Region 7W Minority Communities



According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, nearly one in five residents within the St. Cloud APO’s planning area are BIPOC.

As shown in Table 39, BIPOC populations within the St. Cloud APO’s planning area are primarily found within the cities of Waite Park and St. Cloud where approximately 35.8 percent of Waite Park residents and 25.1 percent of St. Cloud residents are BIPOC. A large portion of these two cities' BIPOC population identifies as being Black or African American. The City of Rockville has the APO’s next largest percentage of its population identifying as BIPOC – 11.5 percent. A closer look at this data finds that Rockville’s BIPOC population is primarily composed of individuals of Hispanic or Latino descent.

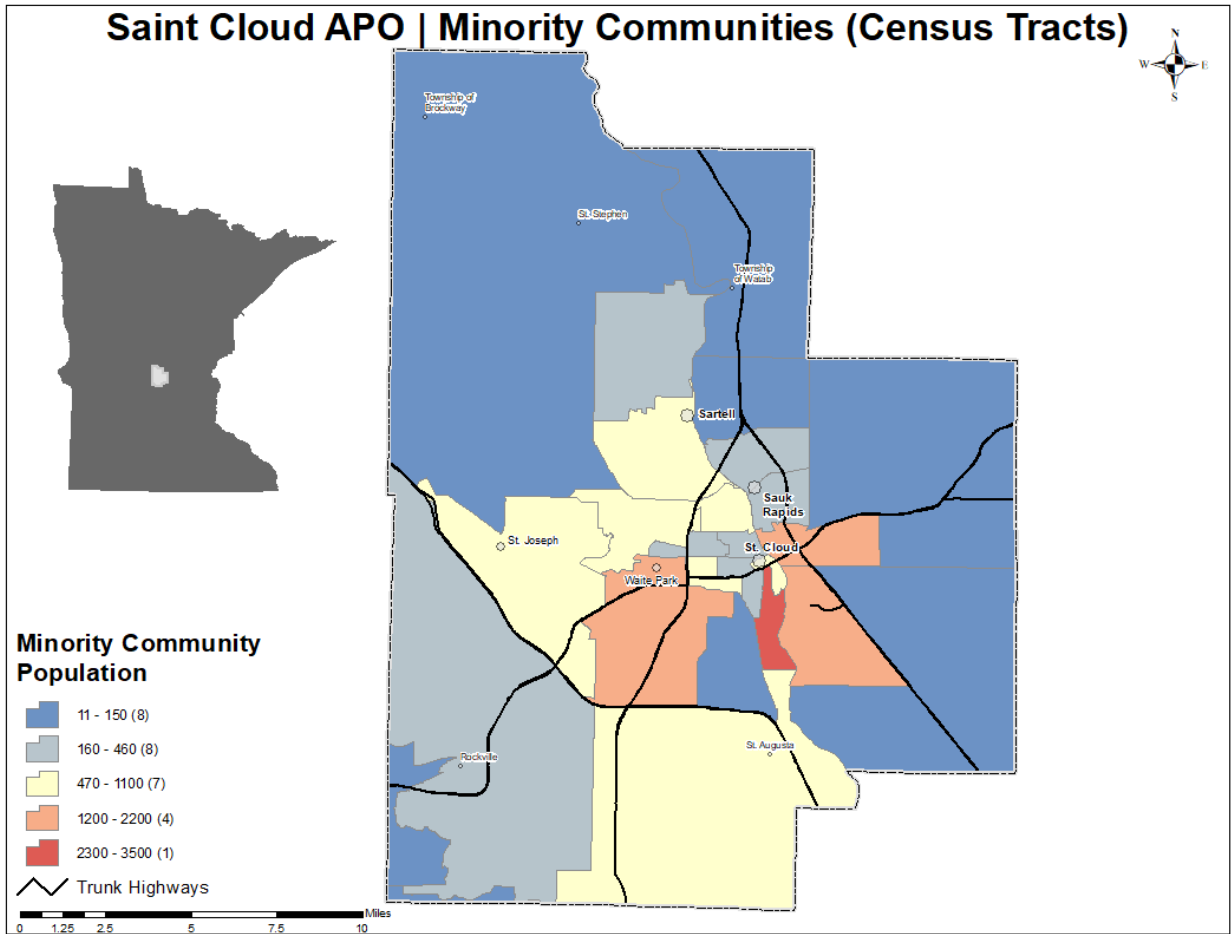
Table 39: Population by Race (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	White Alone	Black or African American Alone	American Indian/Alaska Native Alone	Asian Alone	Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander Alone	Some Other Race Alone	Two or More Races	Hispanic or Latino	Total	Black & Indigenous people of color (BIPOC) Percent
Brockway Township	2,785	0	0	38	0	0	23	15	2,861	2.70%
Haven Township	2,019	17	3	6	0	0	60	23	2,128	5.10%
LeSauk Township	1,572	59	0	56	0	0	17	0	1,704	7.70%
Minden Township	1,516	0	6	0	0	0	0	7	1,529	0.90%
Rockville	2,258	13	3	0	0	0	0	277	2,551	11.50%
Sartell	16,320	402	0	592	0	0	293	398	18,005	9.40%
Sauk Rapids	12,577	66	11	264	0	0	381	404	13,703	8.20%
Sauk Rapids Township	437	3	0	8	0	0	0	21	469	6.80%
St. Augusta	3,581	2	7	45	0	0	56	29	3,720	3.70%
St. Cloud	50,964	9,902	427	2,281	0	167	2,094	2,166	68,001	25.10%
St. Joseph	6,366	320	17	82	0	0	173	72	7,030	9.40%
St. Joseph Township	1,438	0	0	0	0	0	9	17	1,464	1.80%
St. Stephen	907	3	0	18	0	0	4	31	963	5.80%

Jurisdiction	White Alone	Black or African American Alone	American Indian/Alaska Native Alone	Asian Alone	Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander Alone	Some Other Race Alone	Two or More Races	Hispanic or Latino	Total	Black & Indigenous people of color (BIPOC) Percent
St. Wendel Township	2,024	0	0	16	0	0	18	16	2,074	2.40%
Waite Park	4,938	1,550	0	322	0	0	237	645	7,692	35.80%
Watab Township	3,108	0	10	13	0	0	38	30	3,199	2.80%
Total	112,810	12,337	484	3,741	0	167	3,403	4,151	137,093	17.70%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP05] (<https://bit.ly/3aZ8OVd>)

Figure 33: Minority Communities (St. Cloud APO)



Limited English Communities

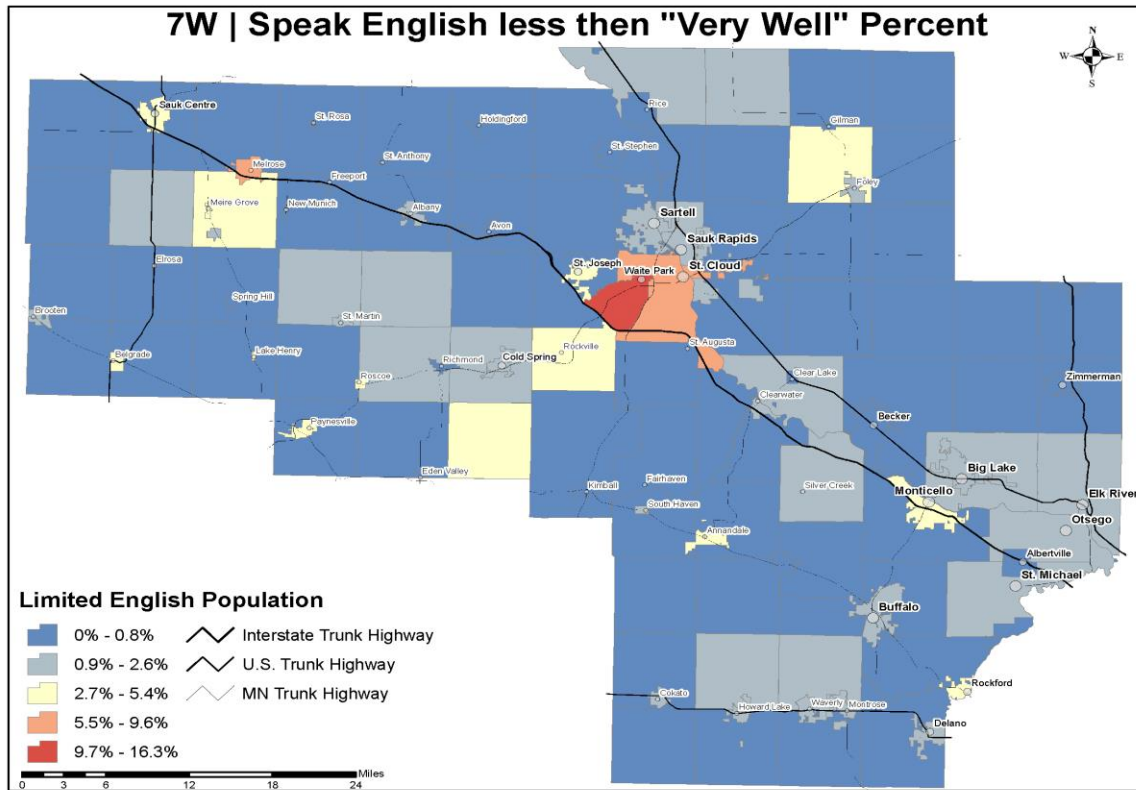
English is the predominant language spoken within Benton, Stearns, Sherburne, and Wright counties. Of the population over the age of five, 97.5 percent speak English “very well” according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates. The remaining 2.5 percent of residents with English speaking skills “less than very well” are primarily concentrated within Stearns County (about 4.2 percent of the county’s population speaks English “less than very well.” Figure 34 illustrates where concentrations of LEP populations speak English “less than very well” primarily in the St. Cloud area with pockets in Benton and Stearns Counties.

Table 40: Limited English Population

County	Speak English only or speak English “very well”	Percent of Total	Speak English less than “very well”	Percent of Total
Benton	36,518	97.80%	804	2.20%
Stearns	142,027	95.80%	6,230	4.20%
Sherburne	87,067	98.70%	1,166	1.30%
Wright	123,258	98.60%	1,751	1.40%
Total	388,870	97.50%	9,951	2.50%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1601] (<https://bit.ly/3O5pKrq>)

Figure 34: Region 7W Limited English Population



According to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates, approximately 4.8 percent of the population living within the St. Cloud APO’s planning area speaks English less than “very well.” As shown in Table 41, Limited English Proficient (LEP) populations are prevalent within the City of Waite Park where approximately 16.3 percent of the City’s population speaks English less than “very well.” Other notable areas with LEP populations include the cities of St. Cloud (6.5 percent), Rockville (4.9 percent) and St. Joseph (4.8 percent). Figure 35 illustrates where concentrations of LEP populations speak English less than “very well” primarily in the St. Cloud area.

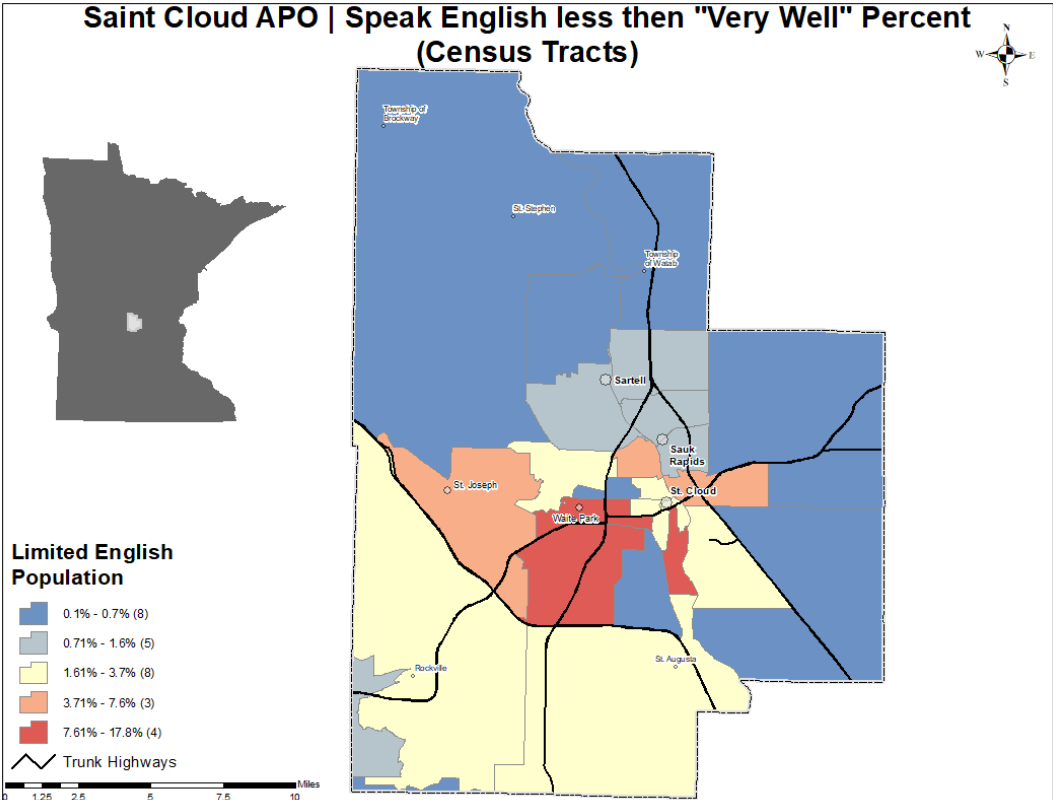
According to the [Minnesota Department of Education’s 2018-2019 Primary Home Language](https://bit.ly/38YoAyh) data (<https://bit.ly/38YoAyh>), primary languages spoken at home within the major public school districts found within the planning area include Somali and Spanish.

Table 41: Limited English Population (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Total Individuals	Speak English only or speak English “very well”	Percent of Total	Speak English less than “very well” or “not at all”	Percent of Total
Brockway Township	2,719	2,645	97.30%	0	0.00%
Haven Township	2,039	1,993	97.70%	2	0.10%
LeSauk Township	1,621	1,557	96.10%	11	0.70%
Minden Township	1,430	1,423	99.50%	0	0.00%
Rockville	2,350	2,163	92.00%	116	4.90%
Sartell	16,813	15,581	92.70%	166	1.00%
Sauk Rapids	12,587	12,029	95.60%	179	1.40%
Sauk Rapids Township	444	406	91.40%	5	1.10%
St. Augusta	3,532	3,467	98.20%	23	0.70%
St. Cloud	63,919	54,409	85.10%	4,144	6.50%
St. Joseph	6,658	6,009	90.30%	318	4.80%
St. Joseph Township	1,346	1,333	99.00%	0	0.00%
St. Stephen	882	846	95.90%	5	0.60%
St. Wendel Township	1,995	1,952	97.80%	15	0.80%
Waite Park	6,987	5,172	74.00%	1,136	16.30%
Watab Township	3,054	3,005	98.40%	4	0.10%
Total	128,376	113,990	88.80%	6,124	4.80%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [S1601] (<https://bit.ly/3O5pKrq>)

Figure 35: Limited English Population (St. Cloud APO)



Economic Conditions

According to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Region 7W has the third largest economy of the 13 economic development regions within the State of Minnesota. Region 7W remains the fastest growing economy since 2015 with approximately 11,000 businesses located within the four-county region employing about 167,000 people.

Healthcare and Social Assistance is the top employment sector within Region 7W accounting for approximately one-fifth of all jobs within the region. This industry covers employment in places such as hospitals and nursing/residential care facilities. Healthcare and Social Assistance is followed by manufacturing (both products and food processing), retail trade, educational services (K-12 and colleges/universities), and construction (buildings and roadways) as shown in Table 42.

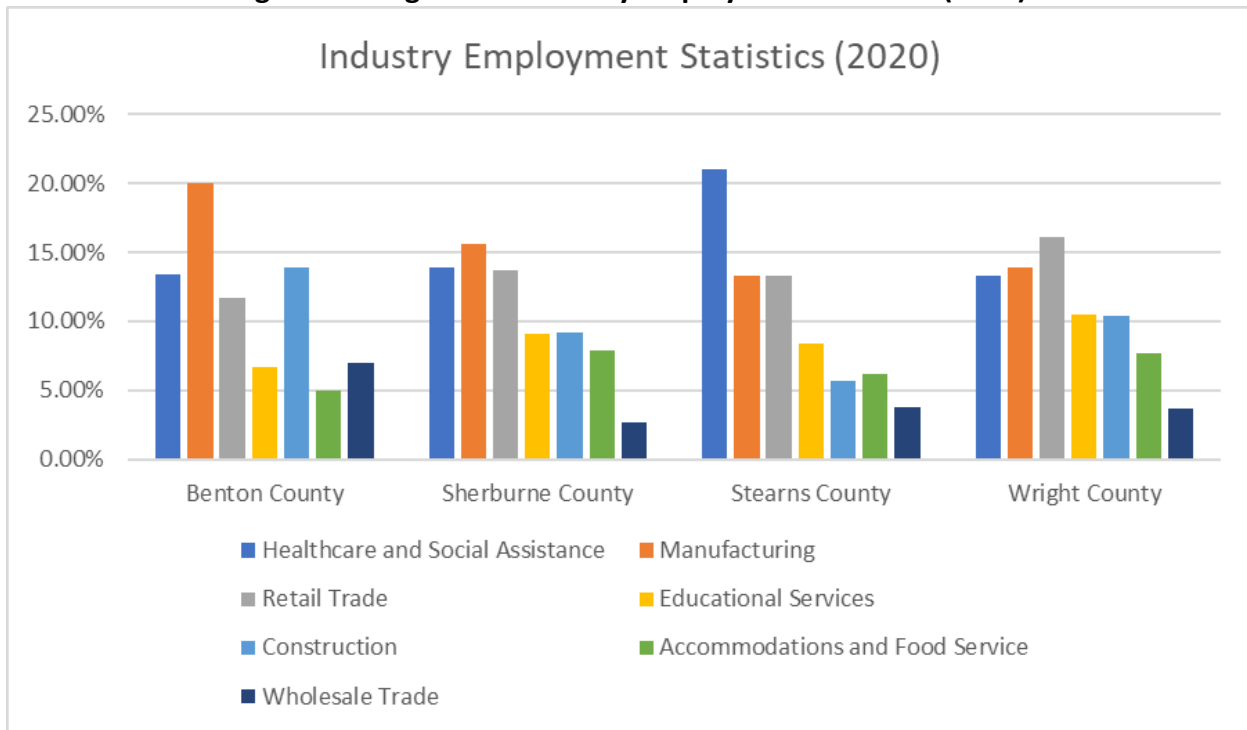
Table 42: Top Five Employment Sectors for Region 7W (2020)

Industry	Number of Jobs	Percent of Total Jobs	Average Annual Wage	Change in Jobs 2019-2020
Healthcare and Social Assistance	28,666	17.2%	\$53,168	+1.0%
Manufacturing	24,182	14.5%	\$57,864	-7.2%
Retail Trade	23,237	13.9%	\$32,033	-3.7%
Educational Services	14,822	8.9%	\$51,980	-6.6%
Construction	13,775	8.3%	\$70,692	+2.6%

Source: MnDEED Regional Profile Region 7W (<https://bit.ly/39wrj5S>)

A closer look at each of the four counties reveals that for the most part, these five industries play a major role in the county’s specific economy. However, in Stearns County accommodations and food services (i.e., restaurants) make up a sizable portion of the county’s economy. In Benton County, wholesale trade (distribution businesses) rounds out their top five employment industries. Figure 36 briefly compares the top industry employment stats between the four counties.

Figure 36: Region 7W Industry Employment Statistics (2020)



Source: [MnDEED County Profile: Benton County \(https://bit.ly/3NrDxbn\)](https://bit.ly/3NrDxbn)

Source: [MnDEED County Profile: Sherburne County \(https://bit.ly/3wUVj07\)](https://bit.ly/3wUVj07)

Source: [MnDEED County Profile: Stearns County \(https://bit.ly/3lowjle\)](https://bit.ly/3lowjle)

Source: [MnDEED County Profile: Wright County \(https://bit.ly/3lmYulp\)](https://bit.ly/3lmYulp)

It is important to note that when COVID hit in March 2020, a majority of these top employing industries within Region 7W took a dramatic hit. According to DEED Regional Analysts Mark Schultz’s and Tim O’Neill’s analysis, the bulk of jobs lost statewide between second quarter 2019 and second quarter 2020 were concentrated in five industries: Accommodation and Food Services; Retail Trade; Healthcare and Social Assistance; Other Services; and Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation¹. In the 13-county Central Minnesota Planning region (which includes Region 7W), approximately 11 percent of jobs were lost during the early stages of the pandemic.

Schultz and O’Neill further state the impact of COVID-19 on these industries impacted several demographic population subsets. Statewide, more women than men experienced job loss across all sectors.

“Where women accounted for 55.0 percent of Minnesota’s total employment losses between third quarter 2019 and 2020, they accounted for 87.8 percent of employment loss in Health Care & Social Assistance during that period. Similarly, women accounted for significant shares of employment loss in Finance & Insurance (83.3 percent), Retail Trade (67.7 percent), Other Services (62.0 percent), Educational Services (61.7 percent),

¹ Schultz, Mark and Tim O’Neill. “[Hardest-Hit Industries During the Early Part of the COVID-19 Recession.](https://bit.ly/3wD2euE)” Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. (https://bit.ly/3wD2euE).

Accommodation & Food Services (56.9 percent) and Real Estate and Rental & Leasing (56.1 percent).”²

In addition, sectors with larger shares of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) workers – including Healthcare and Social Assistance, Accommodation and Food Services, and Manufacturing – experienced significant losses in the number of jobs and/or respective total employment. Similar losses among workers aged 65 and older in industries such as Educational Services and Retail Trade were also recorded statewide. ³

While it is still too early to tell what sort of impact telework will have on Region 7W’s economy as a result of COVID, according to St. Cloud State University Economists King Banaian and Rich MacDonald, the pandemic has led to changes in both the desire of employees wanting to work from home and the willingness of employers to allow for it.⁴

“Research from WFH Research indicates the average number of days employers are planning to have workers telecommute has risen from 1.06 days in January 2021 to 1.33 days in October. Workers, on the other hand, express a desire for about 2.3 days of telework.”⁵

However, telework will not be the answer for all industries including food preparation, construction/maintenance/repair, transportation, manufacturing, and farming. Alessia Leibert, Research Project Manager with DEED, states telework options will most likely be reserved for those positions which require post-secondary education. “At a time when telecommuting and flexible work schedules are becoming the norm, employers who cannot offer these perks to jobseekers find themselves at a disadvantage. In fact, it is no accident that the jobs employers are currently struggling the most to fill are more concentrated (in) ... Healthcare Support, Food Preparation and Serving, Installation, Construction, Manufacturing, Transportation and Material Moving.”⁶

Employment Status

The overall unemployment rate within the four-county area is hovering just under 5 percent according to the 2015-2019 ACS Five Year Estimates. Out of the four counties, Benton County has reported the highest percentage of its population being unemployed – 6.07 percent. Wright County has reported the lowest percentage of its population being unemployed at 4.29 percent.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Banaian, King and Rich MacDonald. “[The state of telework in Minnesota signals long-term change in workplaces.](https://bit.ly/3wqfzYl)” St. Cloud Area Quarterly Business Report. St. Cloud Times. Dec. 12, 2021. (<https://bit.ly/3wqfzYl>).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Leibert, Alessia. “[Pandemic-era Job Postings Reveal Top Occupations Offering Remote Work.](https://bit.ly/3wnt76T)” Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. (<https://bit.ly/3wnt76T>)

It is important to note that this data does not account for the unemployment/job losses that occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Table 43: Regional Employment Status

County	Employed	Unemployed	Not in Labor Force	Percent of Total Population Unemployed
Benton	20,287	1,800	7,502	6.07%
Stearns	79,035	5,414	33,192	4.59%
Sherburne	44,263	3,271	16,221	5.12%
Wright	63,962	3,789	20,336	4.29%
Total	207,547	14,274	77,251	4.76%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP03] (<https://bit.ly/39uKYjK>)

Table 44 shows the residents living within the St. Cloud APO’s planning area are sitting slightly better in terms of the unemployment rate compared to Region 7W as a whole. Approximately 3.7 percent of St. Cloud metro residents are currently without work. A closer look at the data reveals a higher unemployment rate within the City of St. Cloud (5 percent) as compared to the rest of the metro. Watab and Sauk Rapids townships (both located in Benton County) also have higher than the average unemployment rate for the APO’s planning area (4.1 percent and 3.8 percent respectively).

Again, it should be noted that this information is from the 2015-2019 ACS Five-Year Estimates and does not account for any job losses incurred as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Table 44: Regional Employment Status (St. Cloud APO)

Jurisdiction	Employed	Unemployed	Not in Labor Force	Armed Forces	Population Estimates 16+	Percent of Total Population Unemployed
Brockway Township	1,585	52	609	0	2,246	2.30%
Haven Township	1,090	18	609	0	1,717	1.00%
LeSauk Township	965	38	408	0	1,411	2.70%
Minden Township	906	31	317	0	1,254	2.50%
Rockville	1,414	24	617	0	2,055	1.20%
Sartell	9,805	323	3,399	16	13,543	2.40%
Sauk Rapids	7,224	241	2,919	41	10,425	2.30%
Sauk Rapids Township	260	15	120	0	395	3.80%
St. Augusta	2,289	61	715	0	3,065	2.00%
St. Cloud	35,971	2,795	16,752	59	55,577	5.00%
St. Joseph	4,114	119	1,304	0	5,537	2.10%
St. Joseph Township	863	30	267	0	1,160	2.60%
St. Stephen	561	21	160	0	742	2.80%
St. Wendel Township	1,212	26	495	0	1,733	1.50%
Waite Park	4,228	152	1,921	0	6,301	2.40%
Watab Township	1,730	103	706	0	2,539	4.10%
Total	74,217	4,049	31,318	116	109,700	3.70%

Source: U.S. Census (2019) American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates [DP03] (<https://bit.ly/39qINOC>)

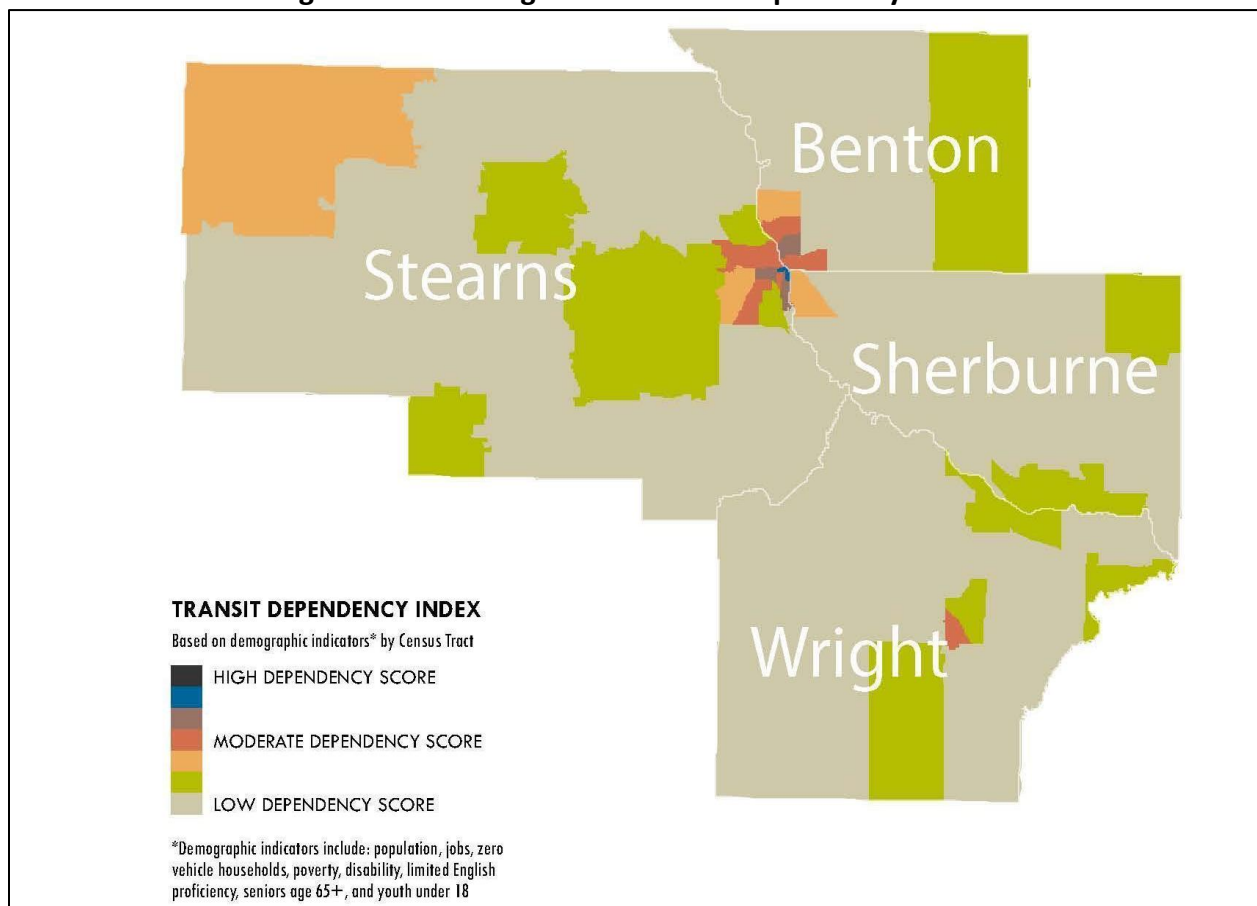
Transit Dependency Index

Understanding key demographic population subsets independently (as done thus far as part of the Study Demographics section) is important in determining the specific geographic distribution of those groups across the four-county area. For example, it is helpful to know where locations of zero vehicle households are across the area, especially when discussing access to alternate forms of transportation such as transit. But do other demographic areas – such as individuals in poverty or people with disabilities – overlap?

The transit dependency index is a summation of the study area demographics and their collective geographic distribution. Taken together, the transit dependency index provides a closer look at areas across the region that theoretically are in most need of accessible transportation.

Figure 37 shows the transit dependency index from the last iteration of the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan. During the drafting of that plan, transit dependent populations were highly clustered within the St. Cloud metro (APO planning area).

Figure 37: 2017 Region 7W Transit Dependency Index

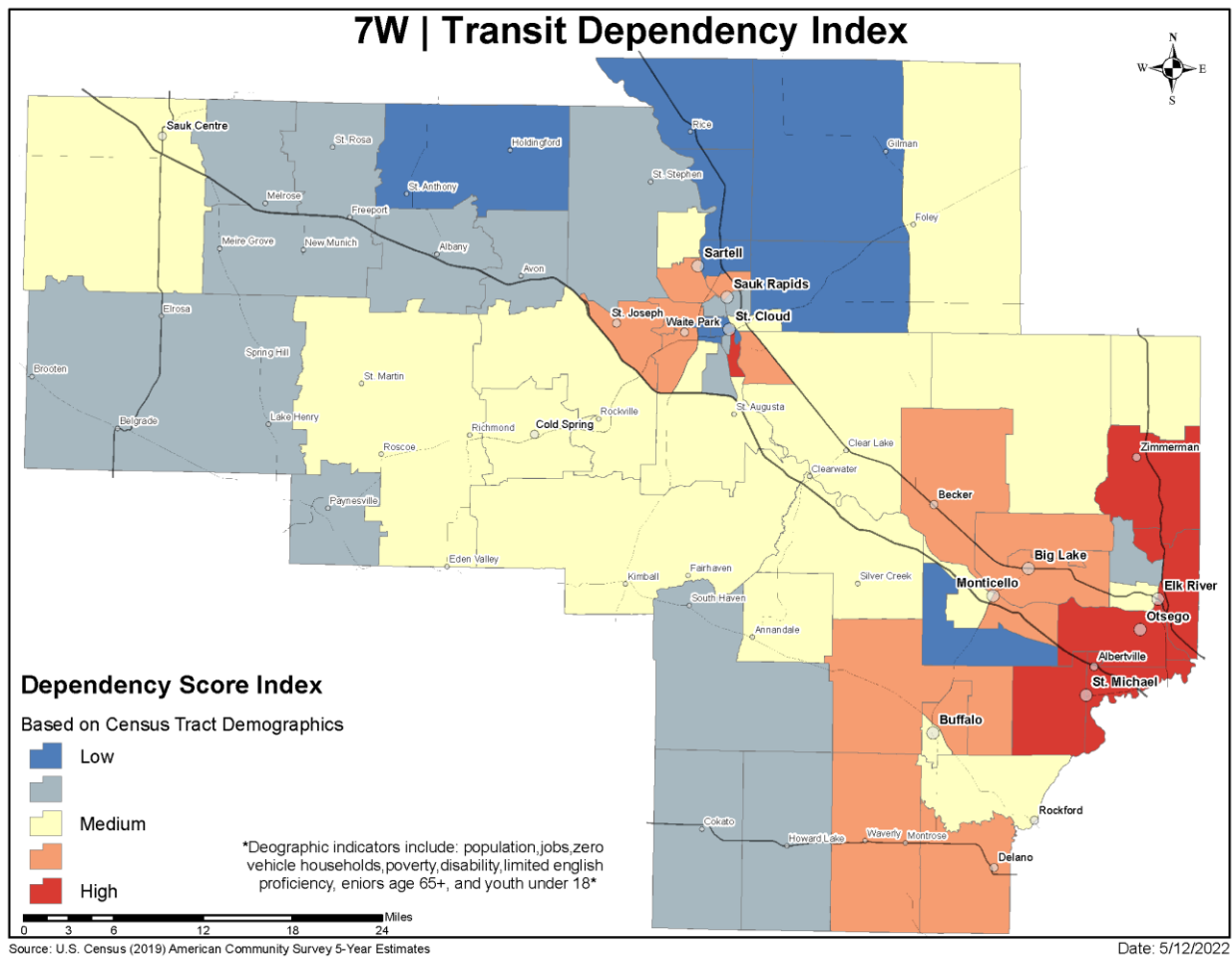


However, within the past five years, it is apparent the St. Cloud metro is not the only area within the four counties with high concentrations of transit dependent populations. As shown in Figure

38, the growth of transit dependent populations has exploded in eastern Sherburne County and throughout Wright County. Communities such as St. Michael/Albertville, Zimmerman, Elk River, and Otsego are now being flagged as having large concentrations of populations who would/could rely on transit. In addition, communities along the U.S. Highway 10, U.S. Highway 12, and MN Highway 55 corridors are also seeing an increasing need for transit access.

The next section will discuss the current state of mobility options within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO. While it is also important to understand the locations of where current service is being provided, it will be critical to ensure that these growing areas of transit dependency are being addressed now and in the future.

Figure 38: 2021 Region 7W Transit Dependency Index



MOBILITY TODAY

Major Trip Generators

The location of major trip generators within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO is an important component in understanding transportation needs – particularly when it comes to where people want/need to go. This section contains a look at some of the more common trip generators: employment, shopping, education, public service, and medical/specialty services.

Employment

As stated earlier, healthcare and manufacturing are the most common industries within the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area. It comes as no surprise that the top five employers within the study area are either healthcare or manufacturing entities. Table 45 lists the top 15 employers in Region 7W/APO by total number of employees. Of those, a majority are located within Stearns County (11 out of 15). Appendix A contains a full list of major employers within the study area.

Table 45: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO Top 15 Employers

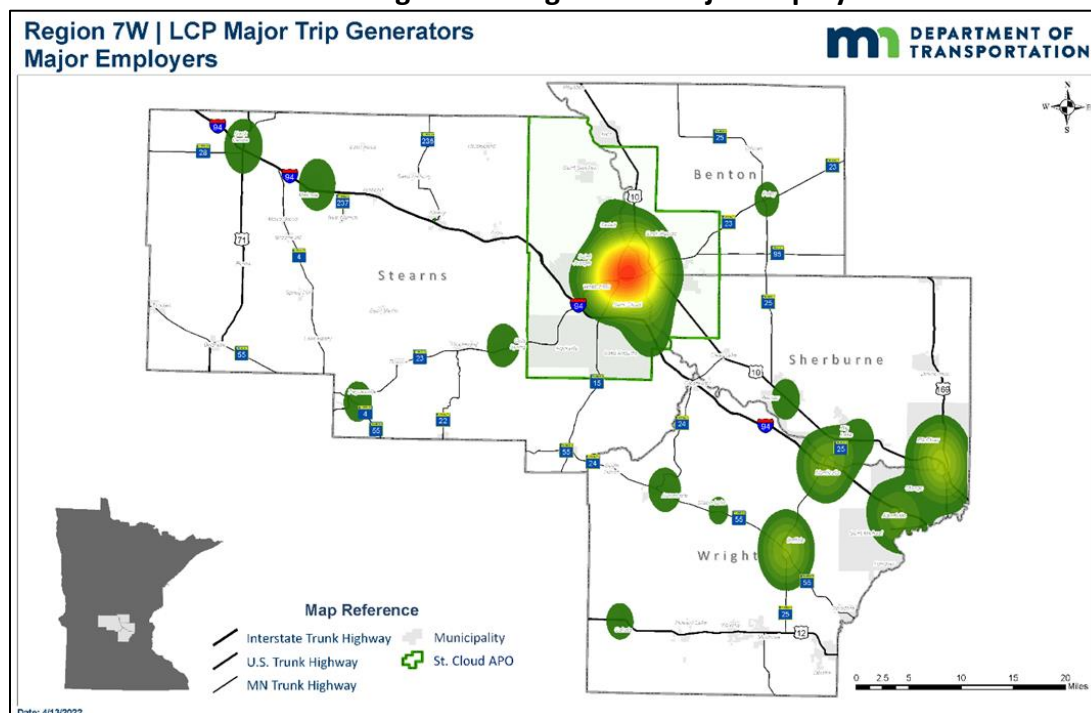
Company Name	City	County	Number of Employees
St Cloud Hospital	St. Cloud	Stearns	4,629
St Cloud VA Health Care System	St. Cloud	Stearns	1,573
Woodcraft Industries Inc.	St. Cloud	Benton	1,038
FDC Services Inc (Fulfillment Distribution Center)	St. Cloud	Stearns	1,001
Foundation For Healthcare – Country Manor	Sartell	Benton	1,000
Stearns County	St. Cloud	Stearns	850
Jennie O Food Inc.	Melrose	Stearns	800
New Flyer USA	St. Cloud	Stearns	750
Wolters Kluwer Health	St. Cloud	Stearns	700
Bernick's	Waite Park	Stearns	600
Coldspring	Cold Spring	Stearns	600
Merrill Corp	St. Cloud	Stearns	600
St. Benedict’s Senior Community	St. Cloud	Sherburne	500
Aria Communications Corp	St. Cloud	Stearns	500

Company Name	City	County	Number of Employees
CentraCare – Monticello	Monticello	Wright	500

Source: DataAxel (US Businesses 2022) (<https://www.data-axle.com/>)

As shown in Figure 39, employment clusters throughout the four-county area are concentrated heavily along major roadway corridors – I-94, U.S. Highway 10, U.S. Highway 71, U.S. Highway 169, MN Highway 23, MN Highway 25, and MN Highway 55.

Figure 39: Region 7W Major Employers



Source: DataAxel (US Businesses 2022) (<https://www.data-axle.com/>)

Shopping

Table 46 lists the top 15 shopping destinations sales volumes found within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO. Shopping destinations are defined as supermarkets/other grocery stores, department stores, and home improvement centers. As the list shows, most of the major shopping destinations for the region are found within Stearns County – particularly within the St. Cloud metro. Appendix B contains comprehensive list of shopping locations within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO.

It should be noted that malls such as Crossroads Center in St. Cloud/Waite Park are not specifically listed because they contain multiple stores (such as Target, JCPenney, and Macy’s).

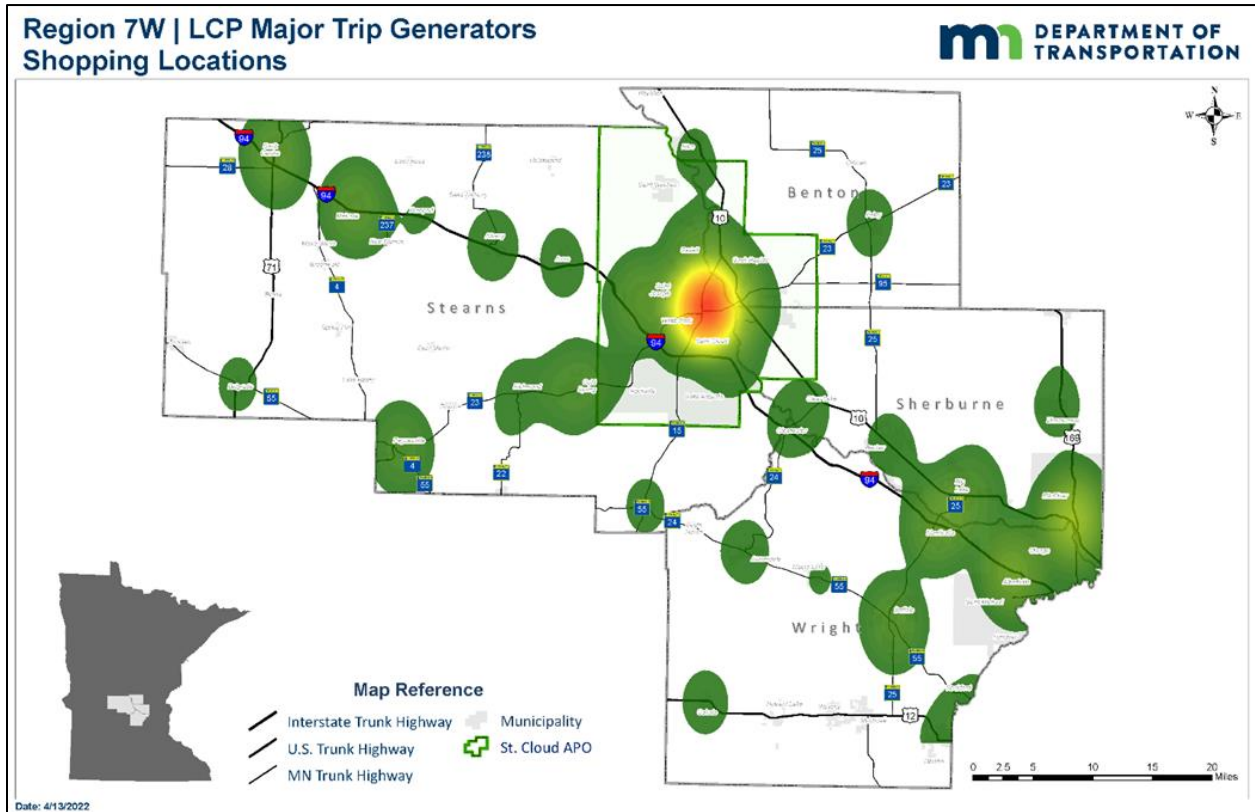
Table 46: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO Top 15 Shopping Destinations

Company Name	City	County	Sales Volume \$
Walmart Supercenter	St. Cloud	Stearns	\$100-500 Million
Walmart Supercenter	Sartell	Stearns	\$100-500 Million
Walmart Supercenter	Sauk Centre	Stearns	\$100-500 Million
Cash Wise Foods	Waite Park	Stearns	\$100-500 Million
Costco Wholesale	St. Cloud	Stearns	\$100-500 Million
Macy's	St. Cloud	Stearns	\$50-100 Million
Target	St. Cloud	Stearns	\$50-100 Million
Runnings	Monticello	Wright	\$50-100 Million
JCPenney	St. Cloud	Stearns	\$50-100 Million
Sam's Club	Sartell	Stearns	\$50-100 Million
Home Depot	Waite Park	Stearns	\$50-100 Million
Kohls	Waite Park	Stearns	\$50-100 Million
Home Depot	Monticello	Wright	\$50-100 Million
Walmart Supercenter	Monticello	Wright	\$50-100 Million
Home Depot	Elk River	Sherburne	\$50-100 Million

Source: DataAxel (US Businesses 2022) (<https://www.data-axle.com/>)

Figure 40 illustrates by heat map the location of shopping locations in the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO areas. The St. Cloud area serves as the primary hub for shopping in the region, while the secondary locations follow the state highway systems.

Figure 40: Region 7W Shopping Locations



Source: DataAxel (US Businesses 2022) (<https://www.data-axle.com/>)

Education

Region 7W/St. Cloud APO is home to 25 public school districts along with several private/charter/alternative/religious schools. In addition, the region is also home to several higher education institutions such as St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud Technical & Community College, and the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University.

Tables 47 through 49 provides a list of educational institutions within the region while Figure 41 maps out their location. See Appendix C for a complete list of all educational destinations – particularly individual schools as part of the public school districts.

Table 47: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO Public School Districts

School District	County
Sauk Rapids-Rice	Benton
Foley	Benton
Becker	Sherburne
Big Lake	Sherburne
Elk River	Sherburne
Albany	Stearns
Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa	Stearns
Eden Valley-Watkins	Stearns
Holdingsford	Stearns
Kimball	Stearns
Melrose	Stearns
Paynesville	Stearns
ROCORI	Stearns
St. Cloud	Stearns
Sartell-St. Stephen	Stearns
Sauk Centre	Stearns
Annandale	Wright
Buffalo-Hanover	Wright
Dassel-Cokato	Wright
Delano	Wright
Howard Lake-Waverly-Winsted	Wright
Maple Lake	Wright
Monticello	Wright
Rockford	Wright
St. Michael-Albertville	Wright

Source: [Minnesota Department of Education](#)

Table 48: Region 7W/APO Other Schools

School Name	County
Petra Lutheran School	Benton
Whole Child Montessori School – Sauk Rapids	Benton
Heritage Montessori School (Pre-K)	Sherburne
Three Rivers Montessori School (Pre-K)	Sherburne
My Own Montessori (Pre-K)	Sherburne
Prairie Hill Montessori (Pre-K)	Sherburne
Free Grace Bible College	Sherburne
Agape Christian Pre-School	Sherburne
First Step Preschool & Childcare	Sherburne
Spectrum Schools	Sherburne
Saint Andrew Catholic School	Sherburne
Solid Rock Christian Academy	Sherburne
Ascent Academy	Sherburne
Catholic Community Schools	Stearns
Athlos Academy of St. Cloud (Grades K-8)	Stearns
STRIDE Academy	Stearns
Prince of Peace Lutheran School (Grades Pre-K - 8)	Stearns
Whole Child Montessori School – St. Cloud (Pre-K)	Stearns
Montessori on Main (Pre-K)	Stearns
Washington Elementary	Stearns
Holy Innocents School (Grades K-12)	Stearns
St. Cloud Math & Science Academy (Grades K-5)	Stearns
Holy Cross Catholic School	Stearns
Children’s Day Montessori (Pre-K)	Stearns

School Name	County
Saint John's Preparatory School	Stearns
Igra Education Center	Stearns
St. Boniface Grade School	Stearns
Sacred Heart School	Stearns
Holy Family School	Stearns
Montessori School of Melrose	Stearns
Jane Goodall Environmental Science Kaleidoscope Charter School	Wright
Swan River Montessori Charter School	Wright
Wright Technical Center (High School for Technical & Alternative Education)	Wright

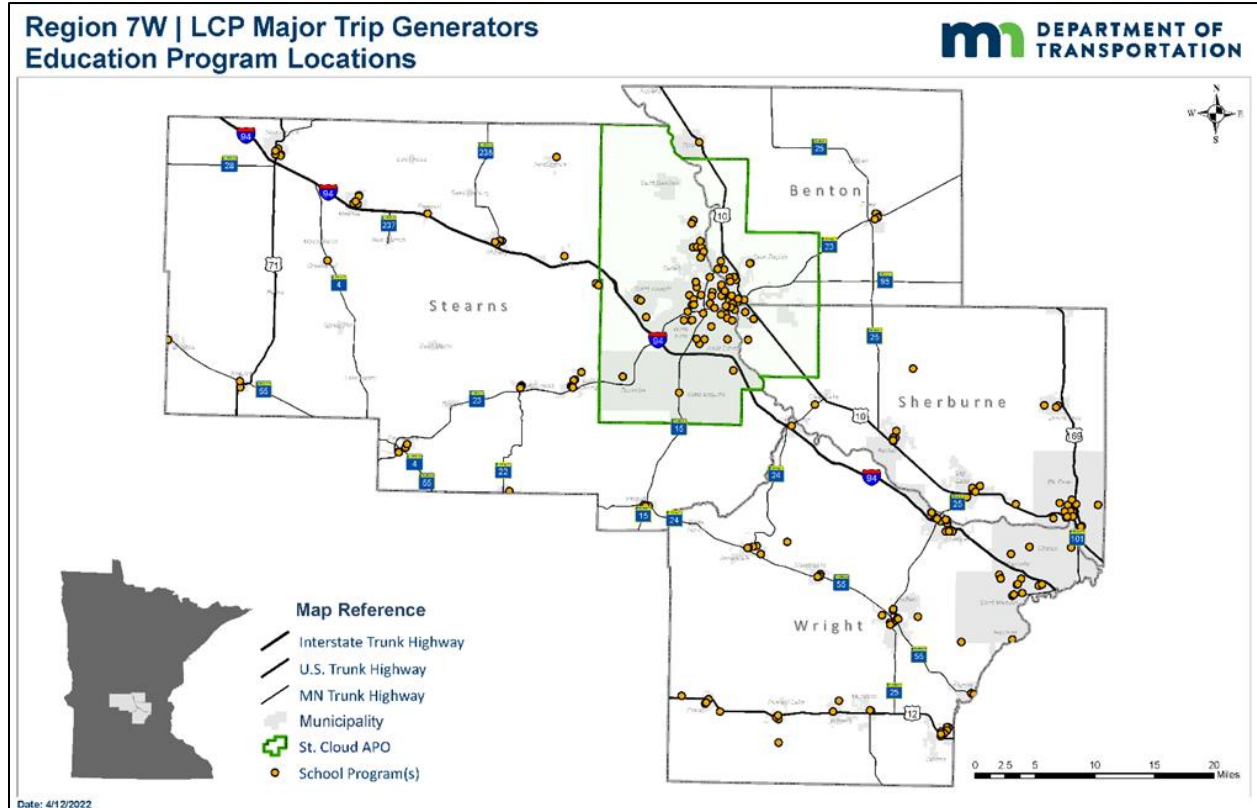
Source: [Minnesota Department of Education](#)

Table 49: Region 7W/APO Colleges and Universities

Post-Secondary Schools	County
Model College of Hair Design	Stearns
Rasmussen University – St. Cloud	Stearns
St. Cloud State University	Stearns
St. Cloud Technical and Community College	Stearns
College of St. Benedict	Stearns
St. John's University	Stearns
Bethel College	Wright

Source: [Minnesota Department of Education](#)

Figure 41: Region 7W Education Program Locations



Source: [Minnesota Department of Education](#)

Public Service

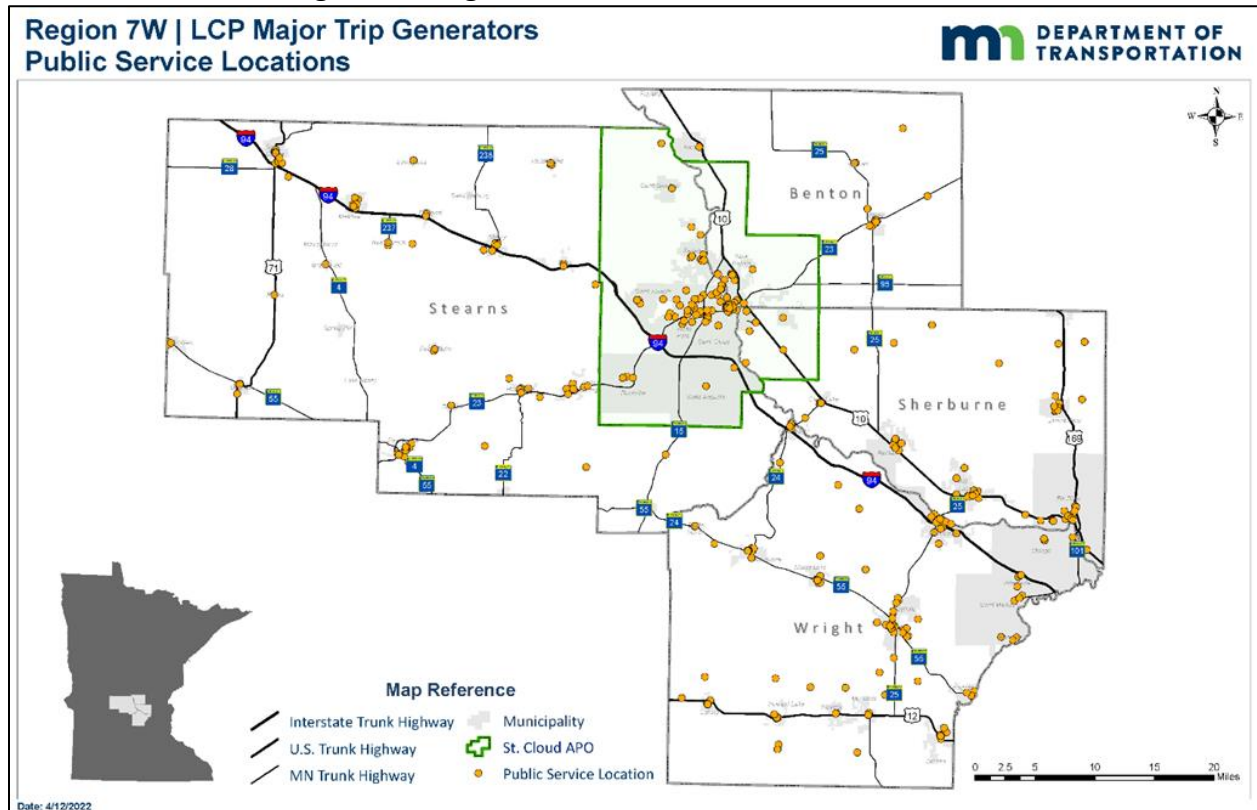
Public Services in the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area include services provided by each city, township, and county. Such services include administration, public works/maintenance/utilities, police and sheriff, and parks. Also included under the public services category are:

- Fire departments
- Postal services/post offices
- Army National Guard armories/DEERS offices
- Libraries
- Soil and water conservation district offices
- Watershed district offices
- Housing and Redevelopment offices
- State of Minnesota offices
- Retired and Senior Volunteer Program offices

Appendix D contains a comprehensive listing of public services in the Region 7W/APO areas.

The map in Figure 42, below, shows the location of public services across the four-county study area.

Figure 42: Region 7W/APO Public Service Locations



Source: DataAxel (US Businesses 2022) (<https://www.data-axle.com/>)

Medical and Specialty Services

Medical and specialty services are comprised of the following:

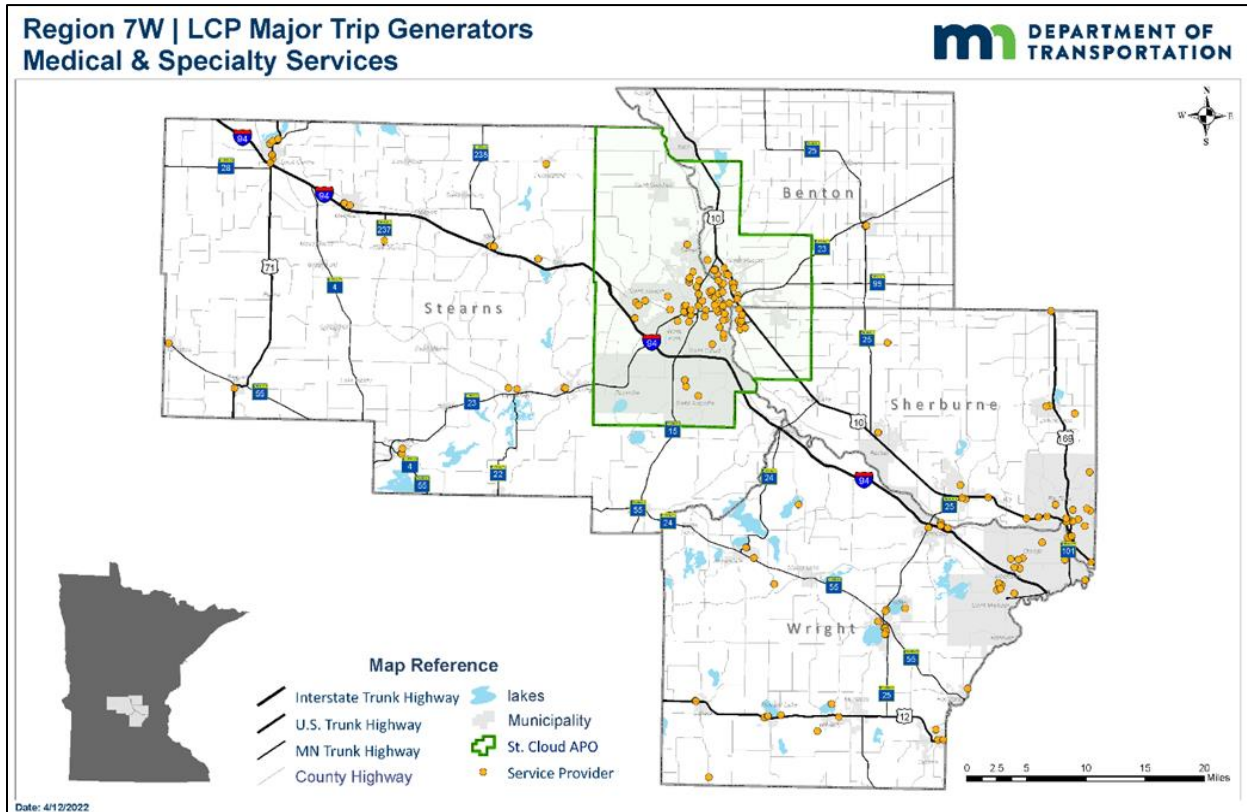
- Outpatient care centers
- Hospitals
- Nursing care facilities
- Residential facilities
- Mental health facilities
- Substance abuse facilities

Also included within this category are museums, historical sites, and other similar institutions along with services designed specifically for the elderly and people with disabilities.

As shown in Figure 43, a majority of these types of services are found within the St. Cloud APO's planning area. However, a growing number of these types of services are also located in both Sherburne and Wright counties near the borders of the Twin Cities metro.

Refer to Appendix E for a full listing of these services within the four-county area.

Figure 43: Region 7W Medical & Specialty Services



Source: DataAxel (US Businesses 2022) (<https://www.data-axle.com/>)

List of Human Service Program Providers Impacted by Transportation

Human service programs primarily focus on connecting individuals with basic needs such as access to food/meal programs along with transportation to medical appointments and employment. Often times there are eligibility requirements which need to be met before being able to participate due to the fact that many of these programs focus on reaching traditionally underserved populations – mainly seniors, people with disabilities, and veterans.

Of late, there has been more of a push with human service program providers to go above the basics. In addition to the services mentioned above, many are beginning to branch off into providing access to various community-based programming such as access to places of worship, shopping, and other recreational/quality of life activities.

A comprehensive directory of human service transportation program providers in Region 7W/St. Cloud APO is shown in Appendix F.

Program Demand Analysis

Demand Estimation as Part of Needs Assessment

Program trips are defined as those trips that would not be made without the existence of a

specific social-service program or activity. The distinguishing factor is that the trip time and destination are set not by the traveler, but by the agency sponsoring the trip. Equations were presented in Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 3 for use in estimating Program Trip demand based on specific Census data. These formulas can be accessed from TCRP Report 3 online.

Given the high variance in program trip demand that was observed in data obtained since the publication of TCRP Report 3, it is recommended that better estimates can be derived by using specific information collected directly from individual programs.

Table 50 below identifies transportation programs that human service providers in Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area participate in along with the total number of trips provided for each program.

The following methodology was used to calculate the demand estimation of human service trips:

$$(\# \text{ participants}) \times (\# \text{ weekly events}) \times (\text{percent of participant attendance}) \times (\text{proportion of transit dependent}) \times (\# \text{ of weeks/year program is offered}) = \text{Results}$$

The Results of the above formula will then be multiplied by two to account for transportation to and from the programmed event.

These trips could be served by the agency providing the program directly or coordinated with another program agency or a public transportation provider based on available capacity.

Region 7W/St. Cloud APO staff requested program data from transportation providers within the four-county area. Only two providers – Metro Bus and Options, Inc., – completed this request as shown in Table 50. As a result, it is unknown the full extent human service program providers utilize the numerous transportation service providers within the study area.

Table 50: Program Transportation Data

Program Name	Metro Bus Transportation to VA Medical Center	Metro Bus Transportation to WACOSA	Options Inc. Transportation to Workshop Site
Number of Participants	20	25	136
Number of Events per Week	5	5	60
Percent of Participants who Attended on an Average Day	15%	20%	87%
Percent of Participants who are Transit Dependent or Likely to use Transit	100%	100%	100%
Number of Weeks the Program is Offered per Year	52	52	52
Results x 2	1,560	1,300	738,316

Existing Transportation Services

The transportation providers in the Region 7W/APO area include:

- Public transit
- Volunteer driver programs
- Non-profit and private specialized and taxi service providers

Transportation services are also provided by various human service agencies for their clients. This type of human services transportation includes the following:

- County social services
- County public health
- County Veteran’s services
- Agencies serving the elderly and/or people with disabilities

Given the broad range of existing transportation services within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO, MnDOT District 3 staff along with Connect Central Minnesota Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (CCMRTCC) developed an inventory as a way to capture service information for all transportation providers.

The inventory provides a source of comparison across agencies and a means to identify service gaps. To complete the inventory, an online survey questionnaire was distributed to the region's transportation providers, possible transportation providers, and human service providers. A summary of the transportation and human service resources is available in Appendix F.

Additional information – hours of service, service areas covered, and eligibility requirements (if any) – was requested to help inform this plan. However, there was very limited participation from human service organizations and transportation providers across Region 7W/St. Cloud APO.

List of Transportation Service Providers

Public Transit Providers

Region 7W/St. Cloud APO has one urban transit provider (St. Cloud Metro Bus) and two rural transit providers (Trailblazer Transit, and Tri-CAP).

St. Cloud Metro Bus

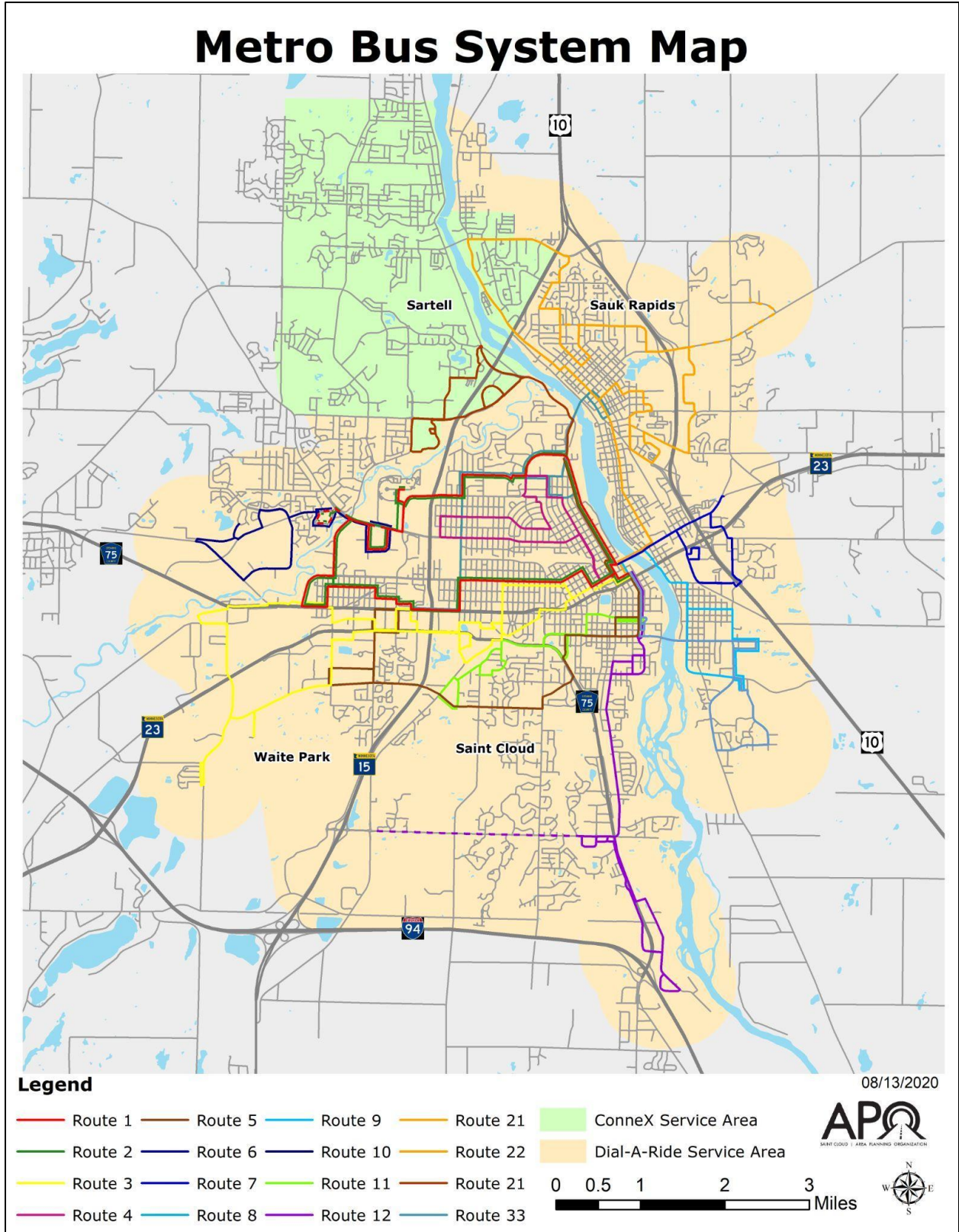
St. Cloud Metro Bus is the primary public transit service in the St. Cloud metro area – operating seven days a week. The urban transit provider services the communities of St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park with regular fixed-route service. In addition, Metro Bus provides a paratransit option (Dial-a-Ride) for residents living within a three-quarter mile buffer of the fixed route system. The Metro Bus service map can be found in Figure 44.

Metro Bus is also responsible for providing Northstar Link commuter bus service component to the Northstar Commuter Rail station in Big Lake.

Table 51: St. Cloud Metro Bus Information

Agency Name	St. Cloud Metro Bus
Transportation Service Type	Public Transportation Provider (paratransit, fixed route, commuter bus, and demand response)
Other Services Provided	None
Contact	David Green, Chief Operations Officer dgreen@stcloudmtc.com ; 320-258-6885
Hours	Varies by service
Service Area	Commuter Bus: Cities of Anoka, Becker, Coon Rapids, Elk River, Minneapolis, Ramsey Fixed Route/DAR/Demand Response: Cities of St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids, and Waite Park
Eligibility Requirements	Must meet eligibility requirements for paratransit services
Website/Social Media	www.ridemetrobus.com

Figure 44: Metro Bus Service Area



Trailblazer Transit

Trailblazer Transit is the public transit operator that provides county-wide bus transportation for Wright County. Trailblazer provides Dial-a-Ride style transportation for the general public weekdays (Monday-Friday) from 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. In addition to providing service within Wright County, Trailblazer also provides county-wide transportation for both McLeod and Sibley counties. The Trailblazer Transit service area map can be found in Figure 45.

Table 52: Trailblazer Transit Information

Agency Name	Trailblazer Transit
Transportation Service Type	Public transit provider
Other Services Provided	Common carrier transportation on program (SMART-RIDE) to complement the 5311 program
Contact	Gary Ludwig, Executive Director
Hours	Office Hours: Monday - Friday 6 a.m. - 6 p.m. Bus Operation Hours: Monday - Friday 6:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Service Area	McLeod, Sibley, and Wright counties
Eligibility Requirements	None
Website/Social Media	www.trailblazertransit.com

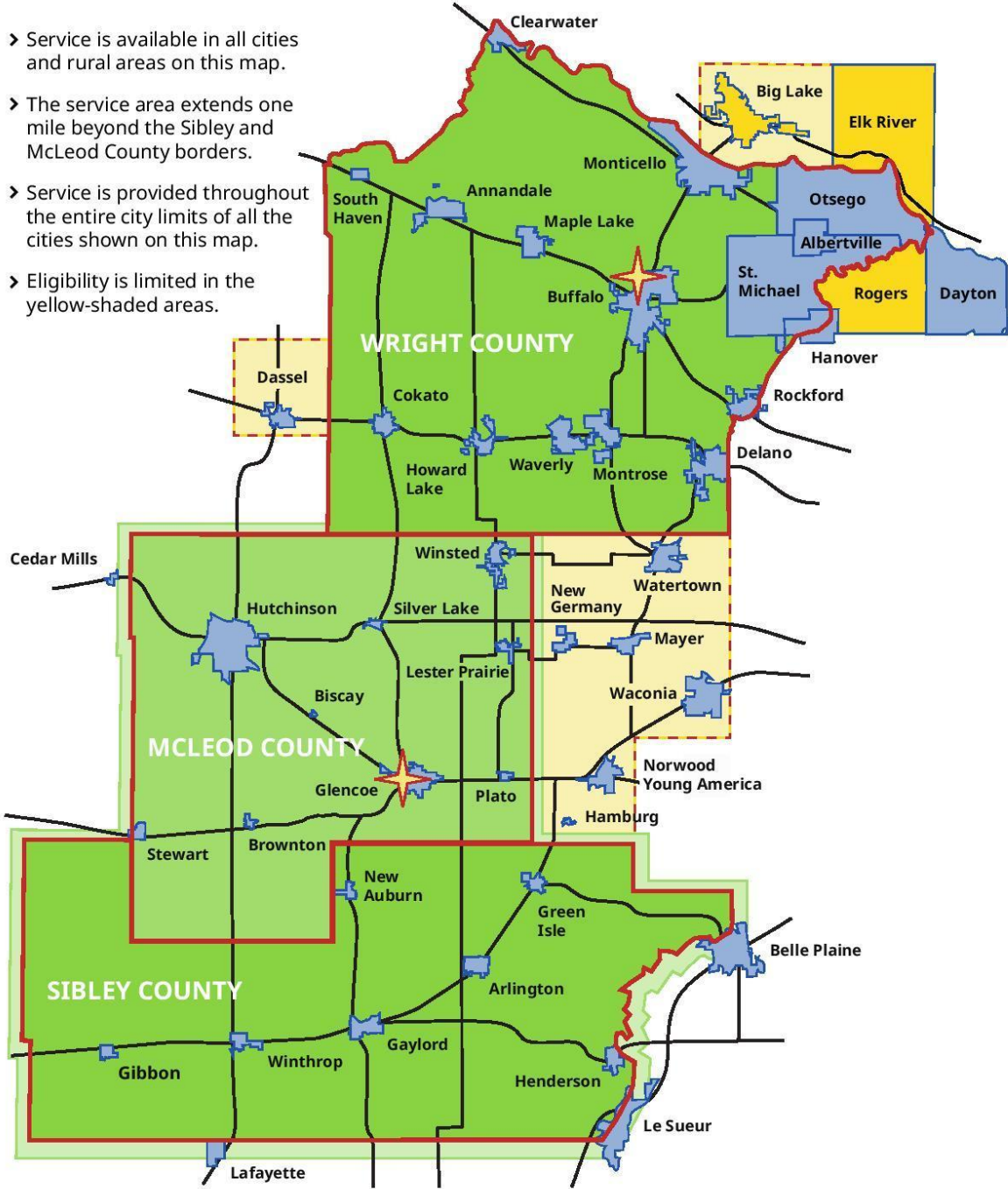
Figure 45: Trailblazer Transit Service Area

Trailblazer Transit

5311 Service Area — 2022

 = Trailblazer Facility

- › Service is available in all cities and rural areas on this map.
- › The service area extends one mile beyond the Sibley and McLeod County borders.
- › Service is provided throughout the entire city limits of all the cities shown on this map.
- › Eligibility is limited in the yellow-shaded areas.



Tri-CAP

Tri-CAP transportation is a public transit operator that provides bus and volunteer driver transportation in Benton, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Sherburne, and Stearns counties. Tri-CAP services the following cities within the four-county study area:

- Benton County:
 - Foley: Route connecting St. Cloud to Foley on Thursdays.
 - Areas within a 15-mile radius of the Waite Park hub outside of the Metro Bus service area.
- Sherburne County:
 - Big Lake: City service 9:30 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. Monday through Friday.
 - Elk River: City service 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday; Direct route from St. Cloud (with a stop in Big Lake) Monday through Friday leaving at 7:30 a.m. and arriving at 9:45 a.m. Departing route leaves Elk River at 2:15/2:30 p.m. and returns between 3:45 and 4:15 p.m.
 - Becker/Big Lake: Route connecting Becker/Big Lake to Monticello Monday through Friday with the exception of the second and fourth Tuesdays. Route departs from Becker at 9:25 a.m. and arrives in Monticello at 10 a.m. Route leaves Monticello at either 11:15 a.m. or 1 p.m. and returns to Becker by 11:50 a.m. or 1:35 p.m.
 - Zimmerman/Princeton to Elk River: Monday through Friday route departing Princeton at 7:45 a.m. and arriving in Elk River by 9:45 a.m. (stops in Zimmerman and Big Lake). Return route leaves Elk River by 2 p.m. and arrives in Princeton by 4 p.m.
 - Becker/Big Lake to Elk River: Second and fourth Tuesday of the month route. Departs from Becker at 9:25 a.m. and arrives in Elk River by 10 a.m. Departure from Elk River either at 11:15 a.m. or 1 p.m. and arrival in Becker either at 11:50 a.m. or 1:35 p.m.
 - Elk River to St. Cloud: First and third Thursday of the month. Departs from Elk River at 9:15 a.m. with stops in Big Lake, Becker, and Clear Lake before arriving at Crossroads Center at 10:15 a.m. Departs Crossroads Center at 1 p.m. and arrives in Elk River by 2 p.m.
- Stearns County:
 - Service within a 15-mile radius of Waite Park hub OUTSIDE of the Metro Bus service area. This includes Cold Spring and St. Joseph.
 - Albany: City service 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday.
 - Melrose: City service 7:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Monday through Friday.
 - Sauk Centre: City and township service 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday. Saturday service (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.) was temporarily suspended due to COVID.
 - Sauk Centre to Alexandria: First Monday of the month (second Monday if the first is a holiday). Service departs Sauk Centre at 8 a.m. and arrives in Alexandria around 8:45-9 a.m. Service leaves Alexandria at 3 p.m. and arrives in Sauk Centre between 3:45 and 4 p.m.
 - Sauk Centre to St. Cloud: Every Thursday. Route departs Sauk Centre at 7:55 a.m. with stops in Melrose, Freeport, Albany, Avon, St. Joseph, the VA Medical Center,

and Crossroads Center, before arriving in downtown St. Cloud between 9:50 a.m. and 10:15 a.m. Route departs downtown St. Cloud at 2 p.m. and arrives back in Sauk Centre by 3:40 p.m.

- Paynesville: City service 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Figure 46 shows the Tri-CAP Transportation service area.

Table 53: Tri-CAP Transportation Information

Agency Name	Tri-CAP Transportation
Transportation Service Type	Public transit provider
Other Services Provided	Volunteer driver program
Contact	Lori Schultz, Executive Director Nick Terhune, Transportation Director
Hours	Varies based on services provided
Service Area	Cities within and counties of Benton, Morrison, Mille Lacs, Sherburne, and Stearns
Eligibility Requirements	None
Website/Social Media	www.tricap.org

Figure 46: Tri-CAP Transportation Service Area



Volunteer Driver Programs

Volunteer driver programs provide a valuable resource for local communities – particularly in rural areas. Volunteer drivers provide rides using their own private vehicles for programs that assign passengers to the driver. With the exception of Tri-CAP’s volunteer driver program (which serves Stearns, Benton, Sherburne, Mille Lacs, and Morrison counties), many volunteer driver programs within the four-county study area are local and mainly community based. Examples include but are not limited to: Helping Hands in Holdingford, The Rose Center in Paynesville, Foley Area CARE, Assumption Community Faith in Action in Cold Spring; and Wright County Community Action.

Non-Profit and Private Specialized and Taxi Providers

Non-profit, private specialized and taxi transportation providers make up a large and important part of transportation network within Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright Counties.

Non-profit transportation providers include organizations such as Functional Industries; Guardian Angels of Elk River; Rise; Options, Inc.; and WACOSA. A majority of the non-profit transportation service providers within the four-county study area are client based – meaning in order to be eligible for the service you must be enrolled in their programming.

Options Inc.

Options Inc. is a private, nonprofit organization offering services that develop and maintain life skills for people with developmental disabilities.

Table 55: Options Inc. Information

Agency Name	Options Inc.
Transportation Service Type	Private non-profit transit provider
Other Services Provided	Day and employment services
Contact	Matt Carlson, Director
Hours	8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Service Area	Sherburne County
Eligibility Requirements	Must have a disability
Website/Social Media	www.optionsincmn.org

In addition to the various non-profit transportation providers, several for-profit providers service the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO planning area. These include, but are not limited to, Care Transportation; Patron Transportation; Voigt’s Bus Service; Elite Taxi; and Executive Express. Transportation services among for-profit and private providers are generally open to the public and are based either on referral, direct contact, or contracted services with an outside agency.

Finally, it should be noted that Jefferson Lines – an intercity bus line – operates throughout some of the four-county area. Stops include Elk River, Dassel, St. Cloud (which serves as a transfer point), and Collegeville.

Transportation Resources and Technology

Table 56 provides information about local travel training program options in the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area. Program Transportation Resources data was requested from Region 7W transportation providers and only two providers – Metro Bus and Options Inc. submitted complete information in return.

Table 56: Transportation Resources (Travel Training)

Transportation Resource	Availability	Cost	Usage	Service Area
Metro Bus	Monday - Friday (Travel training hours vary depending on the needs of the training)	No Charge	Since 2019, Metro Bus has conducted 1400 Community Outreach Activities connecting with more than 10,000 individuals	St Cloud, Sartell, Waite Park and Sauk Rapids. Groups have also come into the service area for training
Options Inc.	Monday – Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.	No charge	Private Non-Profit	Sherburne County

Table 57 contains the technology used by each transportation provider for scheduling, dispatching and/or GPS tracking. Program Transportation Technology data was requested from Region 7W transportation providers and only three providers – Metro Bus, Trailblazer Transit, and Options Inc. submitted information in return.

Table 57: Transportation Technology

Agency Name	Name of Scheduling Software	Do you have an App for Transportation (Y/N)?	Name of Dispatching Software	AVL System/GPS (Y/N)?
Metro Bus	Trapeze PASS (Paratransit and ConneX)	No	Trapeze Pass	Y
Metro Bus	Trapeze Streets (Fixed Route and Commuter Bus)	No	Trapeze Pass	Y
Trailblazer Transit	NOVUS from TripSpark	No	NOVUS from TripSpark	Y
Options Inc.	Google Docs	No	None	No

Vehicles

Table 58 summarizes the vehicle fleets for St. Cloud Metro Bus and Options Inc. transportation providers in Region 7W/St. Cloud APO. Metro Bus has the largest public transit fleet in Region 7W/St. Cloud APO with 78 paratransit, fixed route, and commuter buses. One hundred percent of the public transit bus fleet vehicles are wheelchair accessible.

Options Inc. operates a mixed fleet of eight small accessible buses and 20 non-accessible vans. A vehicle utilization table is provided below. Vehicle fleet data was requested from Region 7W transportation providers and only two providers – Metro Bus and Options Inc. – submitted complete fleet information in return. A detailed list of their vehicle fleet is included in Appendix G and Appendix H.

Table 58: Vehicle Utilization Table

Number of Vehicles	Make/ Model	Years	Capacity/ Wheelchair Capacity	Days of the Week Vehicle is in Service	Service Hours	Program to which Vehicle is Assigned (if applicable)	Service Area
St. Cloud Metro Bus							
21	ARBOC	2011 to 2021	9/4, 14/6, 20/2	Sunday - Saturday	Wkdy: 5 A-10:15 P, Sat: 7:45 A-6:30 P, Sun: 8:45 A-5:45 P	Paratransit (Dial-a-Ride)	Cities of St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids and Waite Park
14	Champion LF	2016 to 2018	13/4	Sunday - Saturday	Wkdy: 5 A-10:15 P, Sat: 7:45 A-6:30 P, Sun: 8:45 A-5:45 P	Paratransit (Dial-a-Ride) and Connex	Cities of St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids and Waite Park
7	New Flyer D35LF	2006 to 2010	30/2	Sunday - Saturday	Wkdy: 5A-10:43P, Sat: 7:45A-7:12P, Sun: 8:45 A-6:12 P	Fixed Route	Cities of St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids and Waite Park
31	New Flyer XN35	2014 to 2018	32/2	Sunday - Saturday	Wkdy: 5 A-10:15 P, Sat: 7:45 A-6:30 P, Sun: 8:45 A-5:45 P	Paratransit (Dial-a-Ride)	Cities of St. Cloud, Sartell, Sauk Rapids and Waite Park
5	MCI D4500	2017 to 2018	57/2	Sunday - Saturday	Wkdy: 3:50A-8:05P, Sat 9A-8:55P, Sun: 8:20A-6:50P	Northstar Link Commuter Bus	Cities of Anoka, Becker, Coon Rapids, Elk River, Minneapolis, Ramsey, and St. Cloud
Options Inc.							
8	Star Trans Bus	2009 – 2019	12/4	Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30 pm	Options Inc.	Sherburne County
20	Dodge and Ford Vans	2012 – 2020	7/0 to 12/0	Monday – Friday	8:00 am – 4:30pm	Options Inc.	Sherburne County

OUTREACH EFFORTS

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee for the Local Coordination Plan is responsible for guiding the plan’s development. Steering Committee duties included:

- Evaluating strategies and assessing outcomes of projects identified in the 2017 Local Human Service Transit Coordination Plan.
- Developing project ideas and identifying priority strategies as part of the public workshop of the draft plan.
- Prioritizing project ideas identified at the public workshop for inclusion in the final plan.

The Steering Committee for the Local Coordination Plan was made up of members from the CCMRTCC and transportation stakeholder participants invited to participate from the Phase 1 RTCC planning project with representatives from county agencies, area agency on aging representatives, centers for independent living representatives, transportation providers, community organizations, and others. Table 59 lists the members of the Steering Committee.

Table 59: Steering Committee Membership

Members	Organization
Laura Sakry	Assumption Community Faith in Action -- Cold Spring
Robert Cornelius	Benton County Human Services
Brenton Marshik	Benton County Human Services
George Fiedler	Benton County Veterans Services
Terry Markfort	Care Transportation
Tammy Biery	Career Solutions
Michelle Weibe	Central Minnesota Council on Aging
Kristin Yeager	Central Minnesota Jobs and Training Services
Tammy Buttweiler	ConnectAbility
Trent Dilks	Disabled American Veterans
Bryan Baker	Elite Taxi
Larry Logeman	Executive Express

Members	Organization
Lisa Zwart	Functional Industries
Ashley Nordlie	Functional Industries
Darin Bohlken	Great River Faith in Action
Leslie Dingmann	Greater St. Cloud Development Corp.
Buddy King	Higher Works Collaborative
Luke Greiner	MN Department of Employment and Economic Development
Davin Miller	MTM
Melissa Marengo	MTM
Steven Hollingsworth	Opportunity Services
Matt Carlson	Options Inc.
Brenda Geldert	Options Inc.
Tom Conyers	Patron Transportation
Linda Earl	Reach Up Inc.
Meleah Gore	Rise Inc.
Mike Harper	Rise Inc.
Kimberly Washington	Rise Inc.
Debbie Anderson	St. Cloud Metro Bus
Dave Green	St. Cloud Metro Bus
Michael Kedrowski	St. Cloud Metro Bus
Amanda Larson	Sherburne County Health and Human Services
Tony Masters	Sherburne County Health and Human Services
Bruce Price	Sherburne County Veterans Services
Janet Goligowski	Stearns County Human Services
Melissa Huberty	Stearns County Human Services

Members	Organization
Cory Vaske	Stearns County Veterans Services
Gary Ludwig	Trailblazer Transit
Lori Schultz	Tri-CAP
Nick Terhune	Tri-CAP
Alexis Lutgen	United Way of Central Minnesota
Roger Long	Voigt Bus Companies
Sam Rodriguez	Voigt Bus Companies
Nancy Betts	WACOSA
Jami Goodrum Schwartz	Wright County Health and Human Services
Nesa Black	Wright County Health and Human Services
Jennifer Wucherer	RSVP St. Cloud
Tauna Quimby	AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP Stearns/Benton Counties
Vicki Johnson	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
Brian Gibson	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
Stephanie Castellanos	MN Department of Transportation
Tom Cruikshank	MN Department of Transportation

Client Experience

Rider Survey:

As part of the extensive outreach conducted to get public input on transit needs and gaps, the public was given several opportunities to provide feedback throughout the plan development process. A survey focused on consumers and riders of human service transportation in Region 7W launched in December 2021 and ran to February 2022. The web-based survey tool was promoted through Facebook social media, on the Region 7W website, and by direct email distribution.

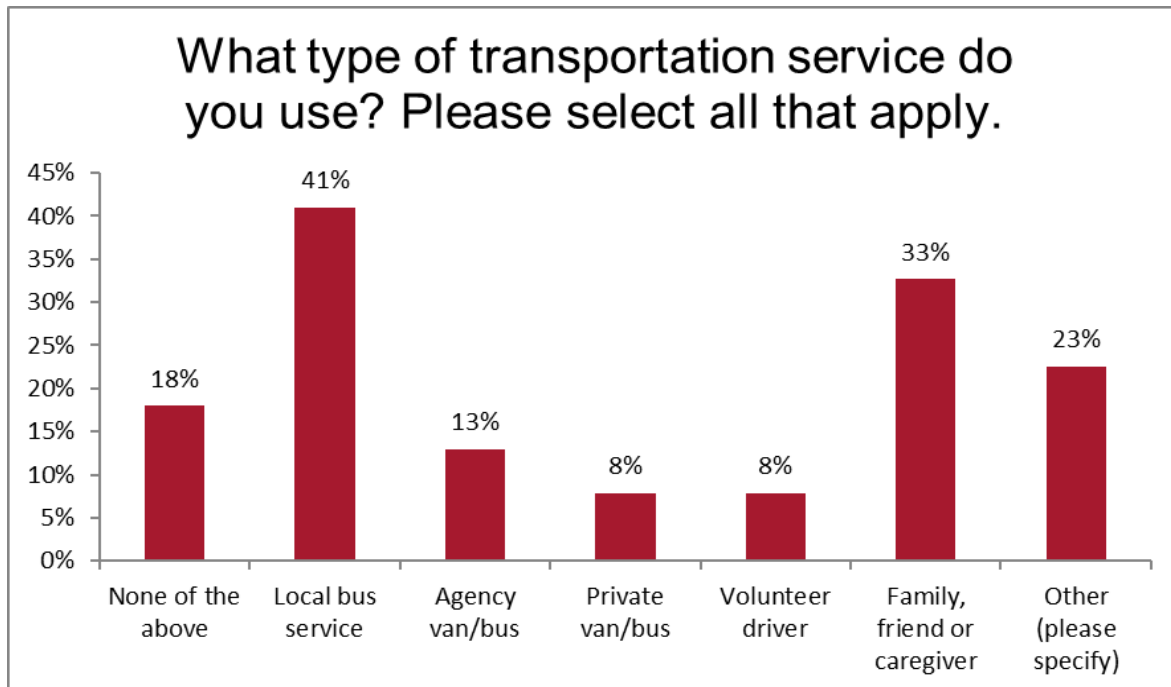
The online survey was used in lieu of paper surveys due to COVID-19 in-person contact restrictions to get feedback and opinions on human transit services in Region 7W. The survey captured responses from 395 participants. A summary of key findings is outlined below.

A complete version of the survey questions and responses are located in Appendix J.

What Type of Transportation Service Do You Use?

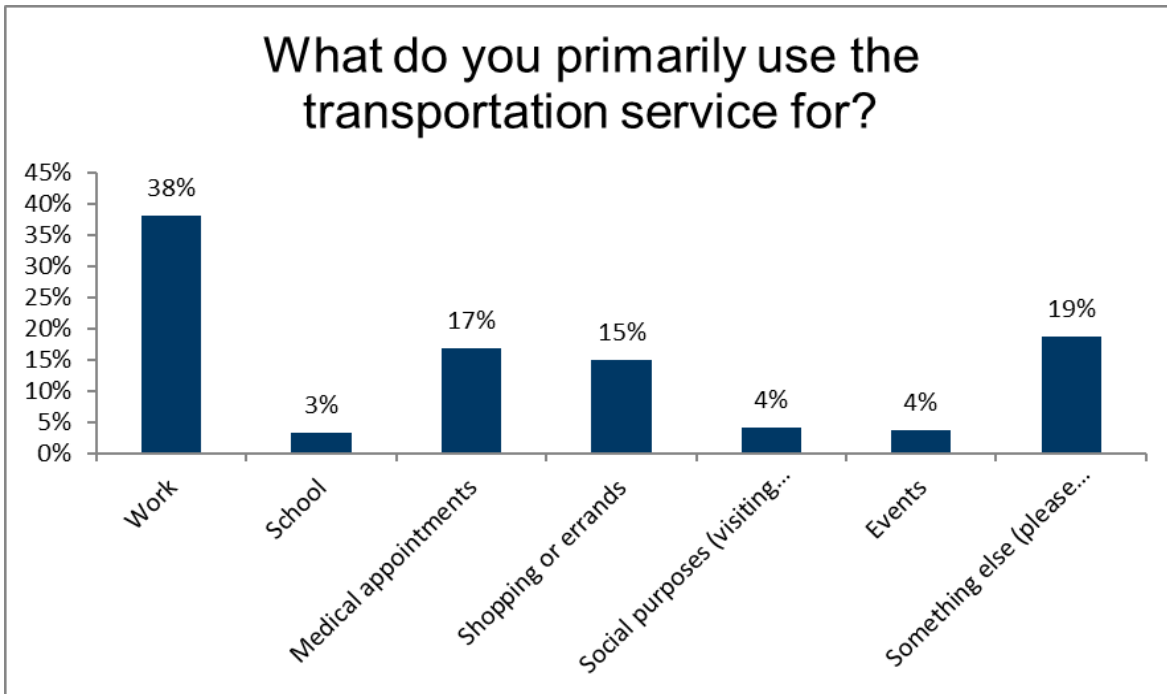
Survey responses indicated that most participants rely on local bus service for transportation (41 percent) followed by needing rides from family, friends, or caregivers (33 percent) and then other types of transportation (23 percent) which included Northstar train, Uber/Lyft, friends, taxis, biking, walking and their own car.

Per which transportation services are mainly used, Metro Bus/Metro Transit and Northstar were top answers. (Other answers included cars, cabs/taxis such as Lyft and Uber, Assumption drivers, Dial-a-Ride, Groome, family/volunteers.)



What do you primarily use the transportation service for? (268 Responses)

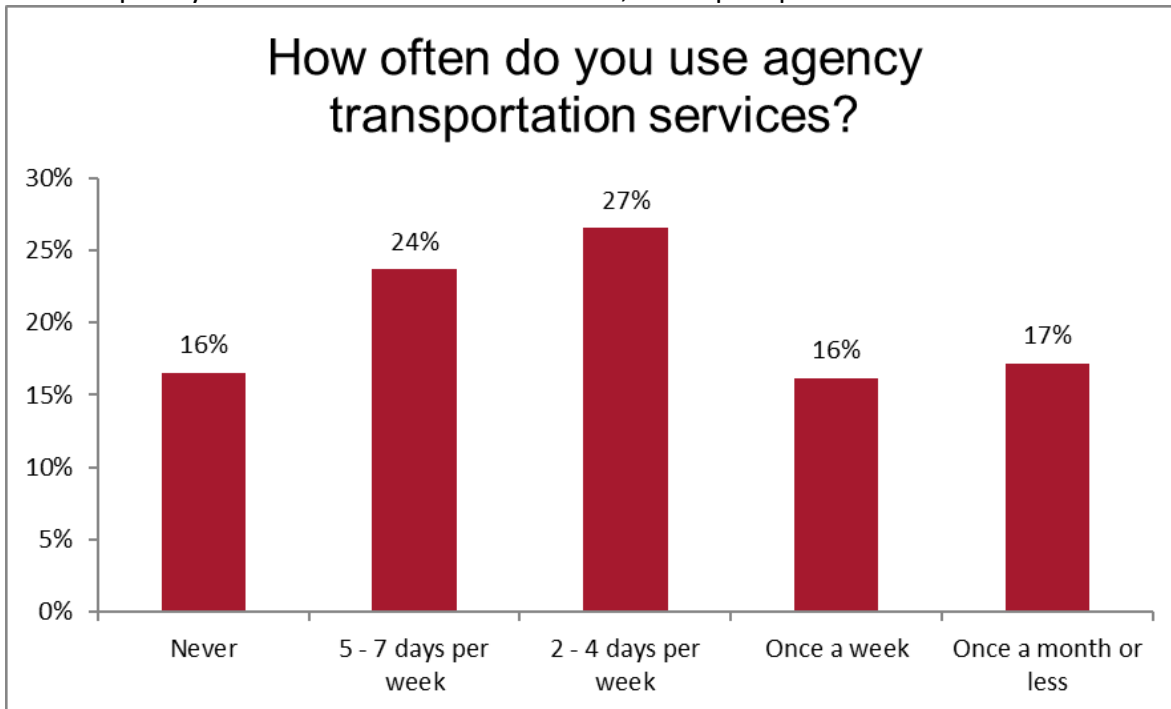
Survey participants noted that the main use for transit services was to get to work (38 percent), followed by "something else" (19 percent), medical appointments (17 percent) and shopping or errands (15 percent).



Nineteen percent of survey participants said they used transit services for “something else” for activities such as: events, pharmacy, adult day care, church, volunteer work, hair appointments, going out to eat and getting to/from the airport.

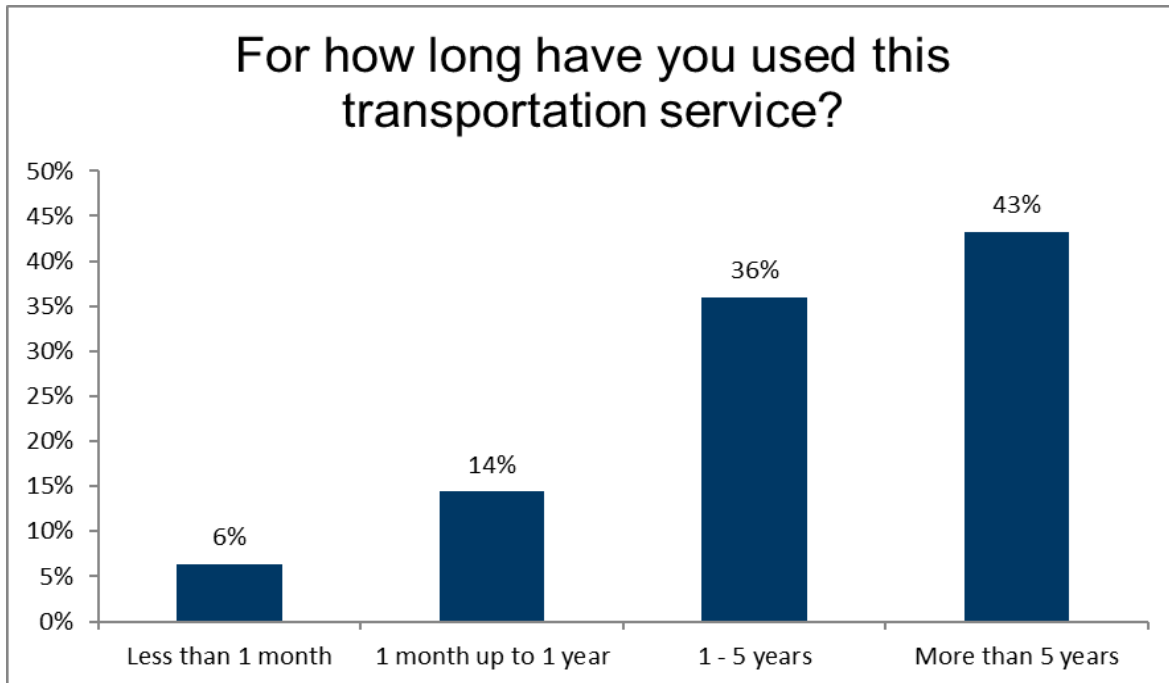
How often do you use agency transportation services? (272 Responses)

Per the frequency that transit services are needed, the top response was 2 to 4 times a week.



For how long have you used this transportation service? (245 Responses)

The majority of participants said they've used transit service for more than 5 years (43 percent), followed by 1-5 years (36 percent), one month up to a year (14 percent) and less than one month (6 percent).



Key demographics captured from the survey:

What is your age? (232 Responses)

- Under 18 5 responses – 2 percent
- 18 – 24 19 responses – 8 percent
- 25 – 34 30 responses – 13 percent
- 35 – 44 51 responses – 22 percent
- 45 – 54 39 responses – 17 percent
- 55 – 64 36 responses – 16 percent
- 65 – 74 28 responses – 12 percent
- 75 or older 22 responses – 9 percent
- Prefer not to answer 2 responses – Less than 1 percent

Which of the following best describes how you think of yourself? (240 Responses)

- Female 129 responses – 54 percent
- Male 101 responses – 42 percent
- Transgender 1 response (Remaining 4 percent said either Transgender, Non-binary or Prefer not to answer)

- Non-binary 5 responses
- Prefer not to answer 4 responses

Provider Survey:

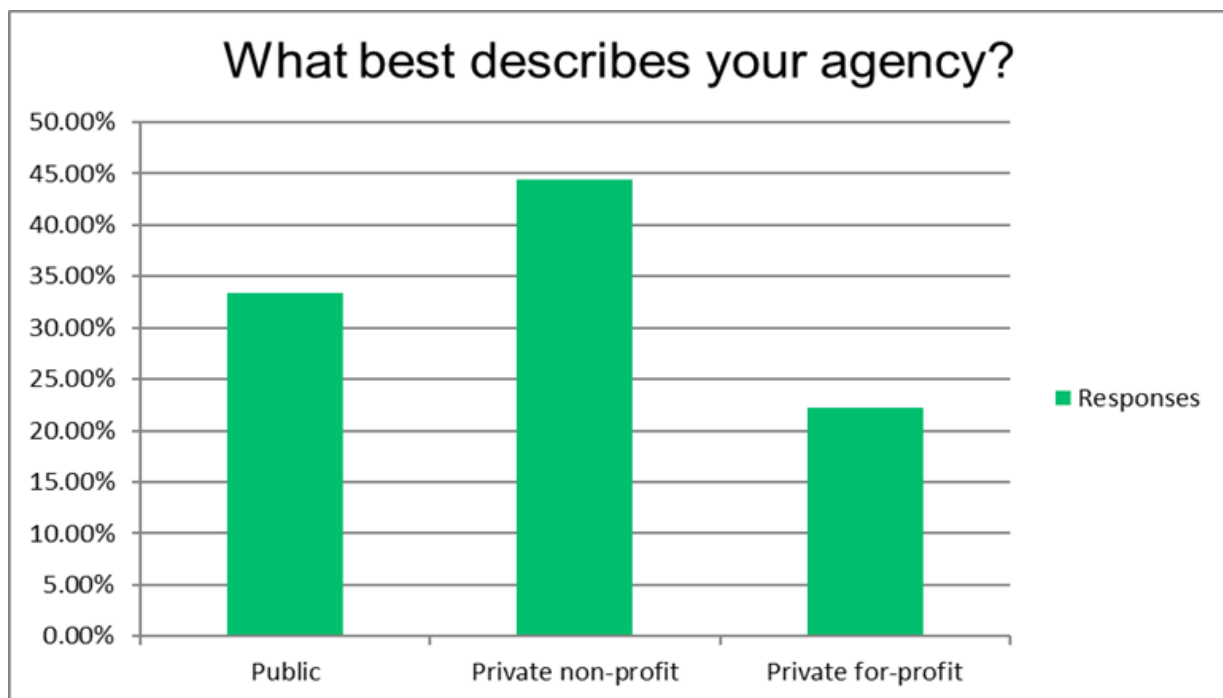
A web-based online survey was promoted through Facebook social media, the Region 7W website and by email contact focused on providers operating in the Region 7W area. The survey was also conducted from December 2021 through February 2022. A complete copy of the Provider Survey questions, and responses area located in Appendix K.

For this survey, responses were received from nine providers that operate within the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area: Patron Transportation, St. Cloud VA HCS, Trailblazer Transit, Executive Express, St. Cloud Metro Bus, Functional Industries, Inc., Tri-CAP Transit, Great River Faith in Action, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)/State of Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development. A summary of survey responses follows.

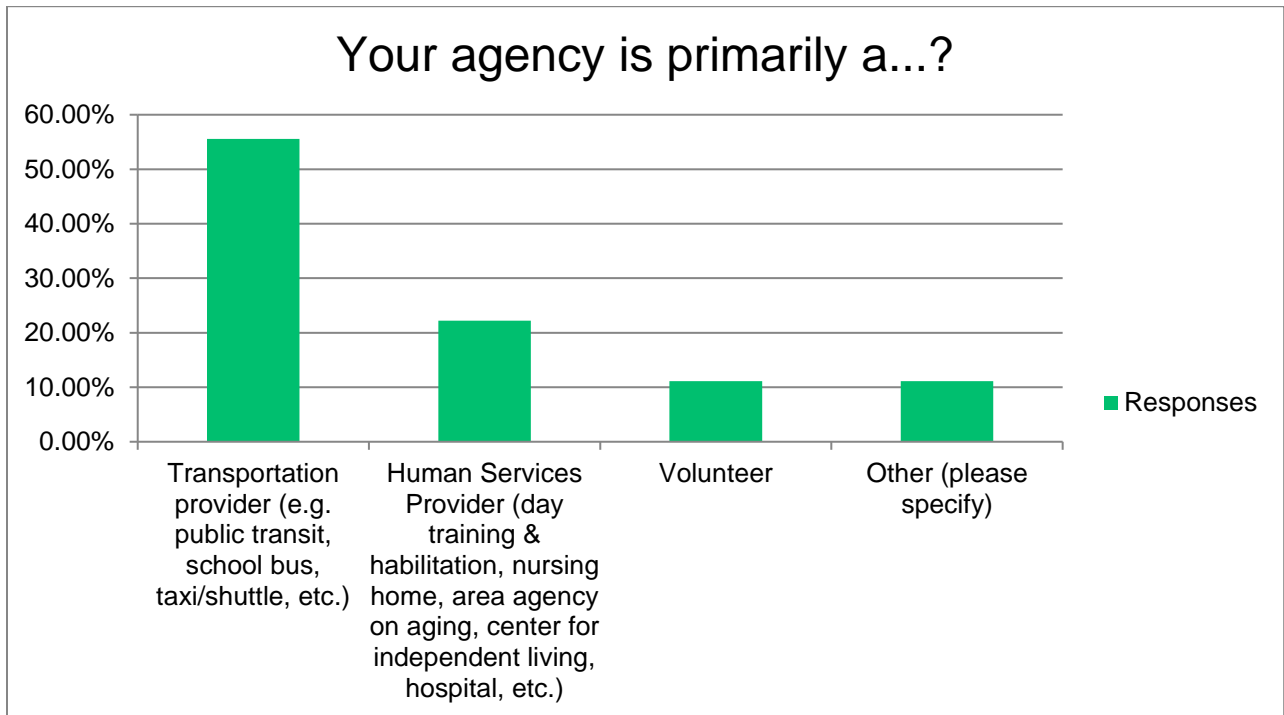
Transit providers had a large range in how many clients are served on an annual basis, from 80,000 being the top provider to 250 clients being the smallest.

Responding Agencies

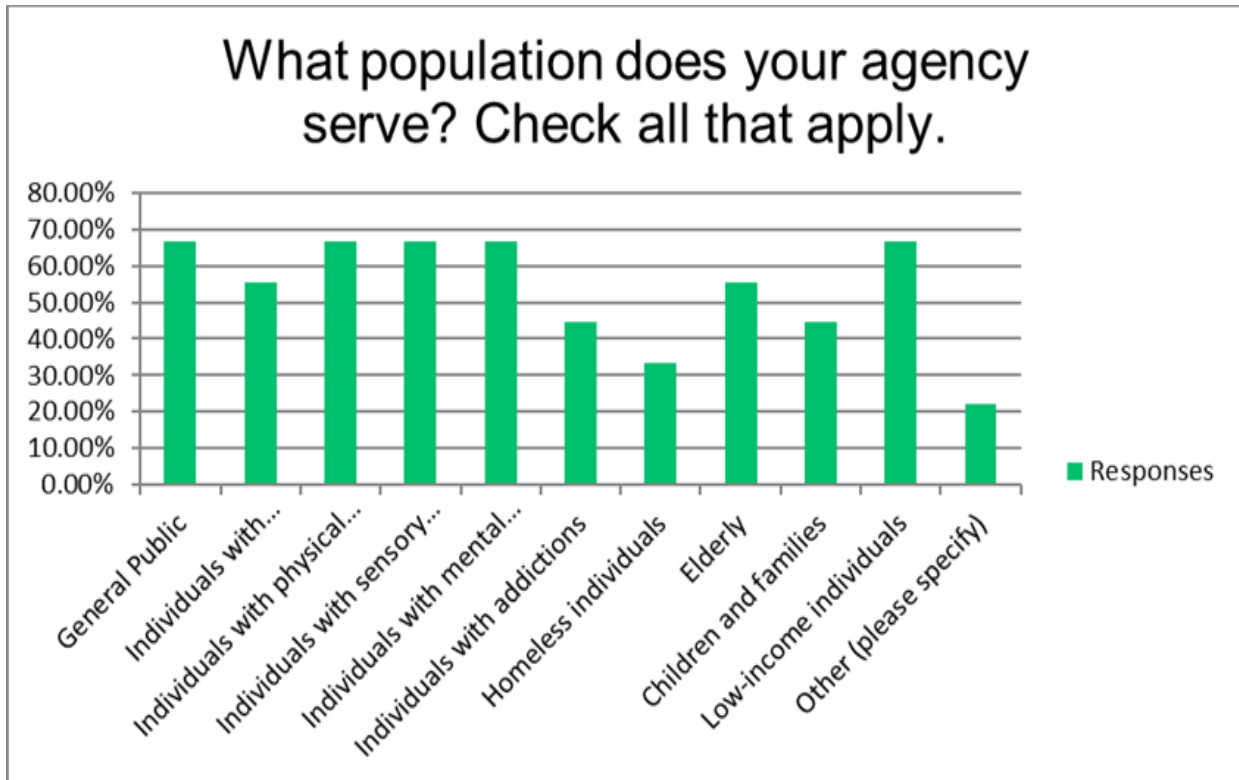
Responses were received from the following sectors: public, private non-profit and private for-profit.



The majority of survey respondents represent transportation providers, such as public transit. There were also respondents from human service providers, volunteers, and others.



The survey asked providers what populations they serve with a variety of responses available, such as the elderly, low-income, people with disabilities and the general public. Responses showed that all of these populations are presently represented in their ridership:



Service Areas:

Transportation providers mainly provide services within the Region 7W/APO areas, but some also listed additional locations:

- Stearns, Wright, Sherburne, Benton, Morrison, Meeker
- In general, within a 50-mile radius of St. Cloud
- Sibley County, McLeod County, Wright County, plus neighboring communities in Sherburne, Hennepin, and Scott Counties
- All of central MN; St. Cloud area, Alexandria area, Brainerd area etc. This the norm, but we can pick up anywhere in the state
- Stearns, Sherburne, Benton, Sauk Rapids, Waite Park, St. Cloud, Sartell, Becker, Big Lake, Elk River, Anoka, Hennepin, Ramsey, Coon Rapids, Minneapolis
- Wright County
- Waite Park, Sauk Rapids, Paynesville, Albany, Melrose, Sauk Centre, Big Lake, Elk River, Foley, Zimmerman, Princeton
- Counties: Sherburne, part of Wright, and part of Mille Lacs. Cities: Albertville, Becker, Big Lake, Clearwater, Clear Lake, Elk River, Monticello, Now & then: Orrock, Otsego, Palmer, Princeton, Rogers, Santiago, Saint Michael, Zimmerman

Rider Fees:

On average, how much do passengers pay for one ride on your transportation service? (The survey didn't ask from where-to-where for these costs.)

- \$2.00
- \$199.00 St Cloud to Minneapolis
- \$1.25 - Fixed Route, \$2.50 - ConneX and Paratransit, \$1-\$5.50 Commuter Bus
- \$17.50
- \$1.25
- \$0.00

Focus Group:

In May of 2022, an additional outreach effort was made through an online “focus group” survey, in lieu of in-person meetings due to COVID concerns and restrictions, that was provided to seek a more substantial snapshot of needs and services among transit riders and providers. The survey garnered 166 participants and was promoted through Facebook social media, a news release sent to local media, the Region 7W website and by email contact focused on providers operating in the Region 7W area.

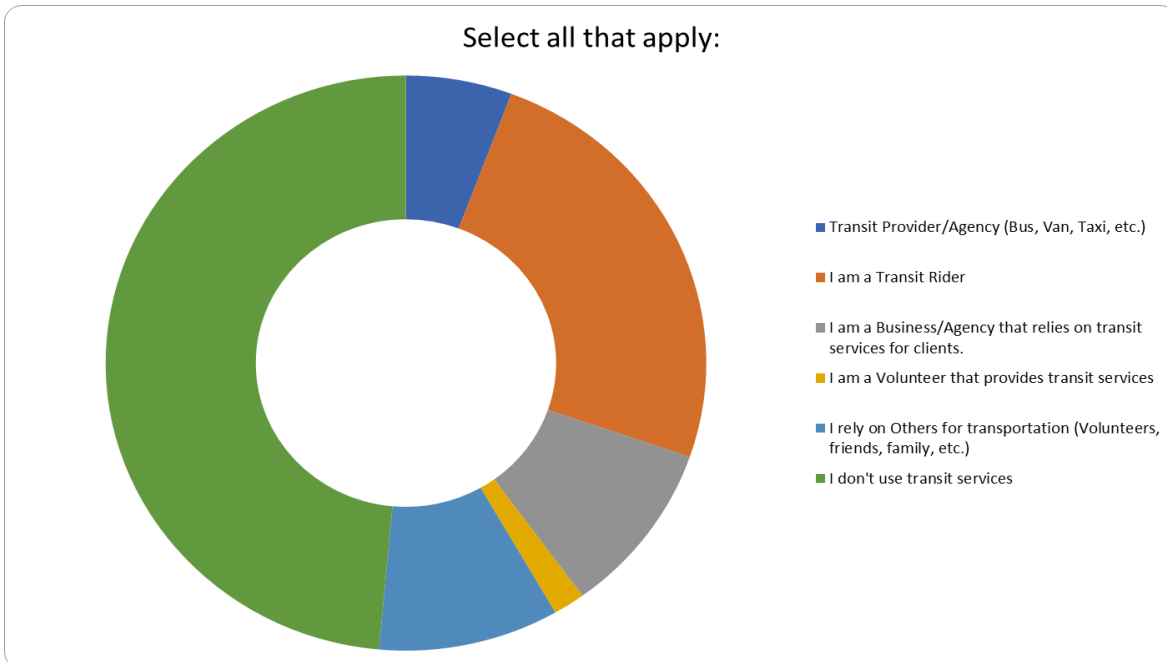
The survey was supported by MetroQuest, a public engagement survey software that the MN Department of Transportation subscribes to. The survey is user friendly and enabled us to get feedback and pinpoint participant’s needs and issues on a map of the region.

Survey Launch Page:

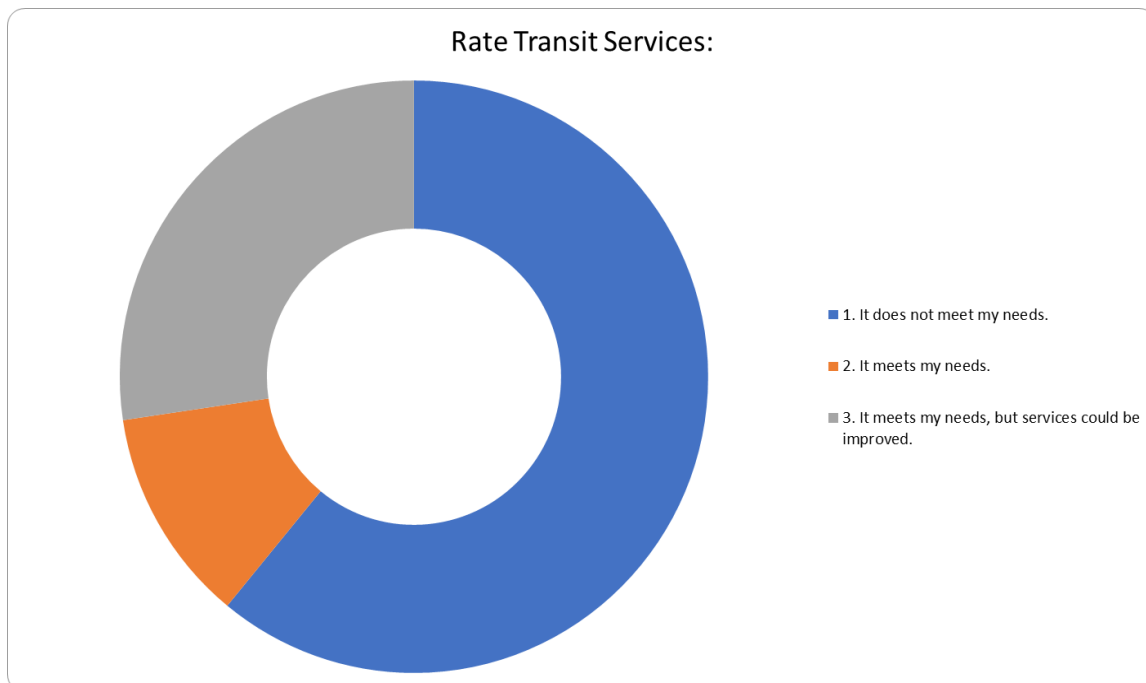


Key survey questions were the following:

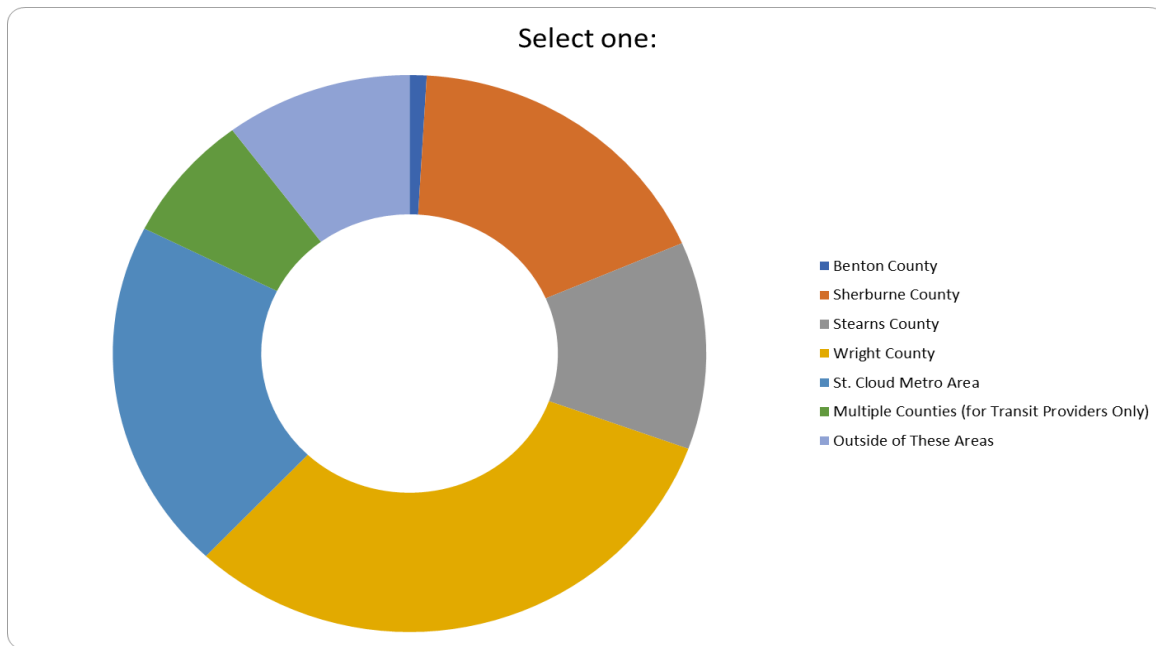
How do you use transit services in Region 7W/APO area?



How would you rate existing transit service in your community?



Where do you use or provide transit services?



Service Needs and Issues:

Do you see a need to expand transportation service beyond what exists today? To which cities or communities? To other neighboring counties?

Summary of responses:

- Public transit systems need to regionalize
- Employers outside of Metro Bus service area lose potential employees that don't have transportation
- Cross county service expansion
- Rural area service expansion
- Lower costs

Survey participants noted the need for expanded transit services in the following areas:

- Options that take Wright County residents to St. Cloud or into the Twin Cities area
- To St. Joseph and the St. Augusta area
- Between Becker/Monticello
- Service to Coon Rapids and Maple Grove
- To all of the St. Cloud area, including Waite Park, Sauk Rapids and Sartell
- Rail transportation between St. Cloud and Minneapolis
- Bus from Princeton/Zimmerman to Northstar train
- Big Lake
- Zimmerman
- Communities close to St. Cloud, such as St. Joseph, Kimball, etc.

- Public transport to all county seats in the region, so able to serve for jury duty and other administrative tasks
- Buffalo, especially in the evenings
- Extend Northstar service to St. Cloud
- Rural Wright County
- St. Michael
- Overall transportation options from Region 7W to the Twin Cities

When asked “Are there any groups of people or people in certain areas that you think could be better served?” survey participants highlighted the following:

- Elderly
- School-aged children
- Those with disabilities (including driver assistance if needed, i.e., a child with limited sight needs to be walked into medical appointments, not just dropped off at the door)
- Veterans
- Single parents
- Rural areas throughout the region
- Low-income populations, particularly in rural areas
- Commuters
- College students
- Factory workers
- Everyone

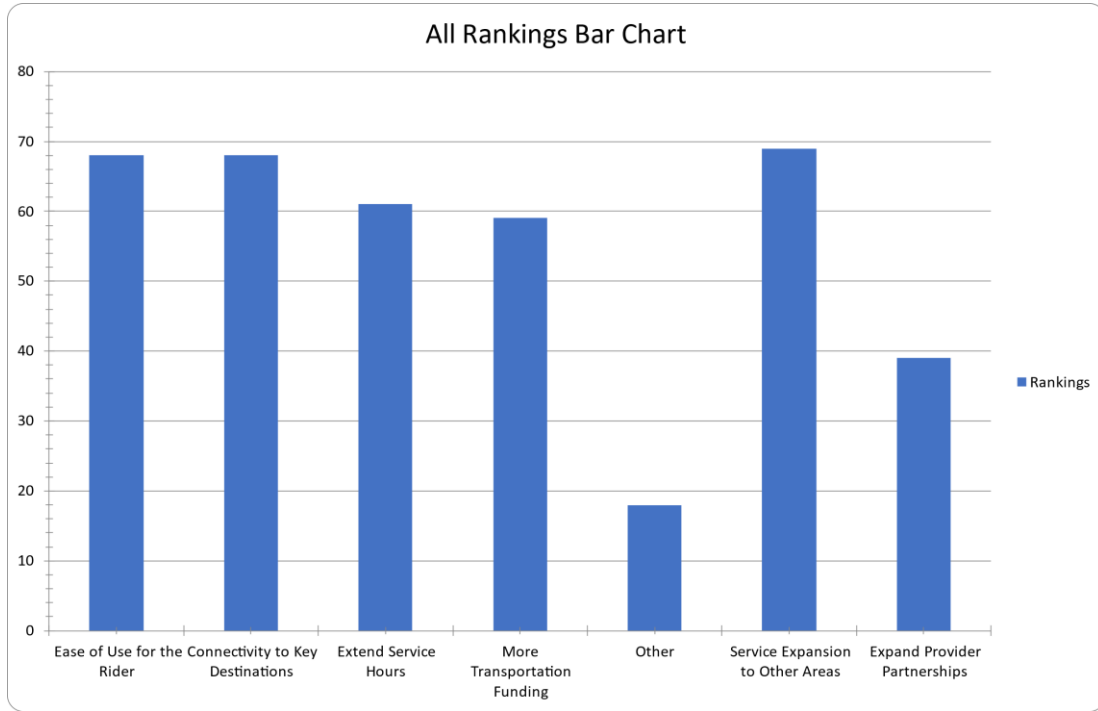
Priority Rankings

From these topics, survey participants were asked to rank their top five priorities in order of importance to them:

- Extend Service Hours
- Expand Provider Partnerships
- Service Expansion to Other Areas
- More Transportation Funding
- Connectivity to Key Destinations
- Ease of Use for the Rider
- Other

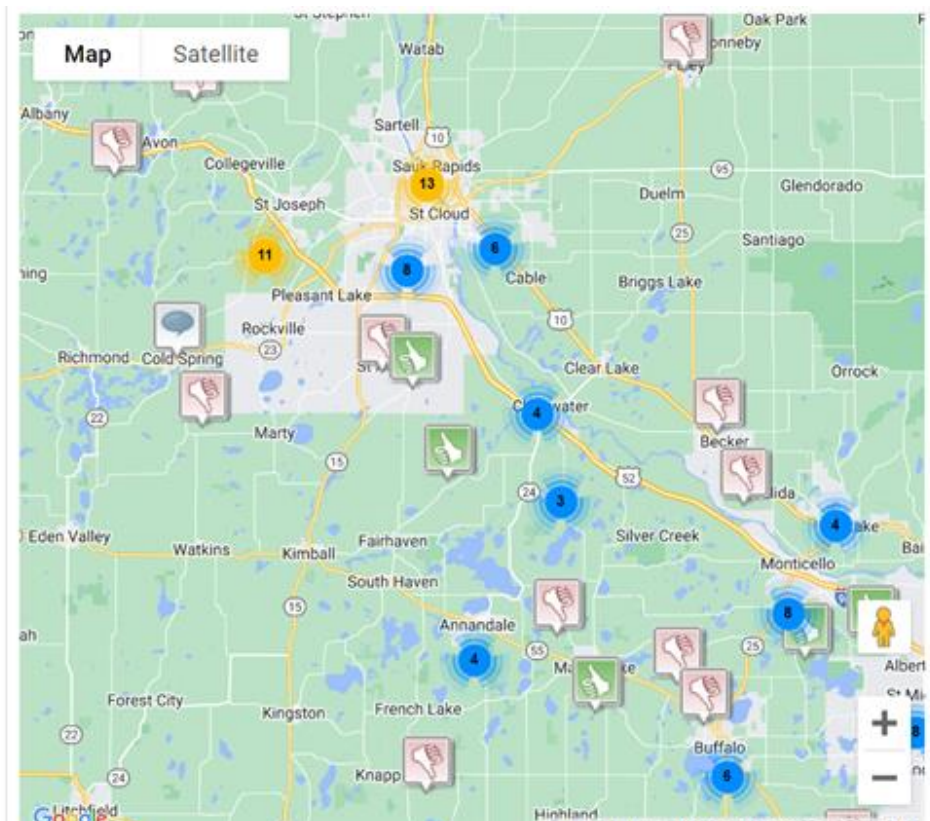
Here are the results of the priority rankings:

The top priority noted by survey participants was “Service Expansion to Other Areas” which was followed closely by “Connectivity to Key Locations” and “Ease of Use for the Rider.”



Sampling of Map Comments Received:

Survey participants were asked to drop an icon with comments on a map of the area. The map allowed for open placement of comments, but participants were asked to focus on Region 7W. The options to choose from were the following: Transit service is good here, transit service is needed here, question or idea for a location and other type of comment.



Transit service was considered “good” on the survey comment map in these locations:

- Within Buffalo, Delano and Monticello transit is good
- More frequent Northstar link runs to Big Lake rail station would be great
- St. Cloud Metro
- Light rail system is awesome! Great public transport. The metro has somewhat decent public transport
- Public Transit in St. Cloud Metro is very good, any addition to it would be welcome, though

Transit service was noted “as needed” on the survey comment map in these locations:

- Our rural communities, Highway 12 corridor is in need of more transit options
- Currently there are no regular routes in Sartell
- St. Joseph
- Transit in St. Cloud is horrible. Expand the Northstar Link
- Sauk has no metro service
- A part of Stearns County, but all the attention goes to St. Cloud

- Bus service would be very helpful going to St. Joseph
- Public transit from St. Cloud to Foley is needed
- Big Lake, MN
- Need more options connecting Monticello to other smaller cities like Big Lake, Elk River
- More times available for the Northstar
- Transportation to Northstar
- Need more available taxis, options for after hours
- Need bus service to St. Cloud for students without cars
- Need transportation from Wright County to St. Cloud and vice versa
- In Albertville and St. Michael
- Commuter transit

Additional comments or ideas that were placed on the comment map include the following:

- Expanded pickups/drop offs in Sauk Rapids
- Better connectivity to Wright and Sherburne counties. Also, expanded hours needed
- Expand service time to areas that have 24/7 employees
- Additional pickup options for riders that work, better for personal schedules of both rider and caregivers
- Expanded service for Westwood area
- More shelters and benches at bus stops. I'm disabled and use a walker and am now using a wheelchair. I try to use the fixed route when I can and I have last minute appts, etc. Benches would be very helpful. Also, for Metro St. Cloud, a lack of timely snow removal on sidewalks and at bus stops is a definite barrier
- It would be helpful to be able to get to St. Cloud and surrounding areas for shopping/weekend/dining/work
- Here's an idea: focus on specific events to take riders at specific times, dates & locations. Get riders used to the idea that public transit is reliable. The State Fair, Twins games are easy. In Benton and Stearns Counties, how about researching large church times? Again, these are specific times, locations
- We need to have the Northstar train run more often and used for events. Also, extend to St. Cloud

At the end of the survey, participants were asked some demographic information for Title VI purposes, such as age, gender, race, and zip code. The answers for this portion of the survey were voluntary and not required to complete the survey.

A demo of the Focus Group survey can be found here:

<https://demo.metroquestsurvey.com/?u=uq8v8e#!/?p=web&pm=dynamic&s=1&popup=none>

Planning Workshop

Two planning workshops were held for the Region 7W Local Coordination Plan. The first was held virtually in conjunction with the CCMRTCC meeting on April 12, 2022. Fifteen people participated in the meeting and workshop. A PowerPoint presentation of information about the LCP planning process was presented to the participants. A follow up survey was sent to all the participants asking several questions about goals, strategies, and projects. Results from the survey are summarized below. Participants brought forward some issues they are facing.

- Driver shortages
- Staffing shortages
- Struggles in recruiting and retaining volunteer drivers

A second virtual planning workshop was held on May 3, 2022, with attendees from the larger LCP steering committee invited to participate. Nineteen people participated in the workshop. A PowerPoint presentation of information about the LCP planning process was presented to the participants. A copy of the presentation is included in Appendix I. Participants brought forward some issues they are facing.

- Driver shortages
- Staffing shortages
- Need to recruit volunteer drivers
- Multi-family housing developments growing, creating need for more transportation services
- Many ages 55+ RSVP volunteers that do not drive
- RSVP seniors that cannot get far from the bus stop on their own
- Many seniors are part of an isolated population
- To get out of their house
- To walk or volunteer
- Electric vehicle grants for transportation providers in Region 7W

A follow up survey was sent to all the participants asking several questions about goals, strategies, and projects.

The following results are from two Region 7W Planning Workshop follow-up questionnaires on April 12, 2022, and May 3, 2022. Both surveys were circulated for two weeks. Unfortunately, survey participation was not as robust as hoped but the responses received were helpful to capture input.

Workshop Date	Fielding Dates	Responses
April 12, 2022	Tuesday, April 26 – Tuesday, May 10	5
May 3, 2022	Wednesday, May 3 – Wednesday, May 18	4
Total		9

1. Which counties in the region does your organization serve? Select all that apply

County	Responses	Percent
Wright	7	78%
Sherburne	6	67%
Stearns	6	67%
Benton	5	56%
Other: (State of MN)	1	11%

2. What is your organization's role in transportation? Select all that apply

Role	Responses	Percent
Public Transportation Provider	3	33%
Private Transportation Provider	1	11%
County Human Service Provider	4	44%
Agency with Direct Transportation Services	0	0%
Something Else: (Nonprofit with transportation coordination services)	1	11%

3. Please rank in order of importance RTCC Phase 3 initiatives, where 1 is your top priority and 5 is your last priority.

Initiative	Priority
Expanding services in St. Cloud Metro to outer lying area	#1
Education regional professional of transportation options	#2
Continue to expand travel training programs	#3
Create public awareness campaign for transit in region	#4
Job access for veterans	#5

4. Please indicate any other transit related projects you would like to see addressed in Region 7W.

- Expanded hours for current transportation systems, expand transportation options
- County-managed brokerage service to distribute transportation requests that have tax dollars associated with them
 - 1) More transportation options for kids outside of school district transportation.
 - 2) Using rideshare to fill in the gaps for public transportation
 - 3) Find way to subsidize rides with rideshare (other than waiver services)
- I just know the current needs of the population we serve, which is individuals with disabilities. I know I have spoken with the County on the high costs for individuals' waivers to fund for transportation. They have often denied potential opportunities, such as private transportation options for people that work outside of public transportation hours. The cost has posed as a barrier. We do understand the high costs in transit, as to that is why we contract out our transportation, especially for us as a non-profit

5. What is being done well regarding transportation coordination in Region 7W?

- Momentum with CCMRTC/LCP efforts. Entities recognized the need for coordinated efforts outside of siloed work of individual providers
- Awareness and recognition of limited resources
- Contracting with Trailblazer Transit has been a great success for our facility

6. What aspects of transportation can be improved in Region 7W?

- When doing surveys, make sure the surveys are geared toward both people who have access to transportation services and those who don't use transportation services because it's not available or is extremely limited. The surveys need to ask about hopes and wishes for transportation as well as what isn't working well with the limitations on resources when there are any even available. People need to be able to report what they would like to use and how they would use it if it were available. The transition age group (18-21 years old) does not fit well into waiver transportation services due to the responsibility of the school district needing to fund employment services, so that is a tricky area when multiple sources (school, VRS, waiver, and parents/guardians) are trying to coordinate those transition years of employment development, exploration, and support. The questions of who pays and whose vehicle is used to access employment is not always clear-cut and has limitations based on transportation agreements with the school programs. This needs attention and clarification through information and educational initiatives
- Require all taxpayer-funded transportation to be offered to public transit systems first
- We need to do better with how we move people in our region
- Increased resources (drivers, fleet) expanded hours, more affordable options
- For us as a provider of community employment options and also our center-based programs, it would be nice for advocacy in transportation options across county lines

7. What are the main projects needed to fill the transportation service gaps in your community/county?

1	2	3	4
Add more hours of bus service.	Improve existing dispatching/routing software.	Show our public transit to be easy to use, safe and friendly.	Work to help people with barriers to find and maintain work.
All transportation providers enrolling as an MHCP provider.	Find funding to subsidize rides outside of waived services (elderly and other barriered populations.)	Transportation options outside of regular business hours.	Crossing county lines.
Funding Options.	Transportation Costs (private and waiver paid)		

8. Would more vehicles help to meet the needs in your service area?

Answer	N	Percent
Yes	5	56%
<p><i>Please explain your answer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transit systems can't provide more service without more drivers and vehicles. • We need to incorporate more resources to provide transportation outside public transit hours. • Yes and no. I think that people do have the means for providing transit options but the driver in this workforce lacks. It may be beneficial to providing support for the costs of the vehicles but also wage incentives (probably not the area to advocate). 		
No	1	11%
<p><i>Please explain your answer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I believe there are enough vehicles - we need more drivers/staff. 		
No answer	3	33%
<p><i>Please explain your answer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		

9. Do we need more hours of transportation services in your area?

Answer	N	Percent
Yes	6	67%
<p><i>Please explain your answer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More service hours during the day (i.e., more buses on the road) • Limited hours mean limited amounts of people that can utilize the services • 2nd and 3rd shift workers need transportation • YES! This is a gap for serving individuals to utilize transportation to get to and from their jobs in the community. This gap is also in relation to the lack of employees at businesses. 		
No	0	0%
<p><i>Please explain your answer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		
No answer	2	22%
<p><i>Please explain your answer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		

10. Is there a need for more volunteer drivers in Region 7W?

Answer	N	Percent
Yes	5	56%
<p><i>Please explain your answer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every volunteer driver ride provided is a huge help to those in need, not to mention and economic driver for where they are taking their client to (medical, grocery, other.) • Wright has a very small volunteer driver program and would also need more admin staff to grow the program. • I have not utilized volunteer driver options in our area. Working with a vulnerable population may pose as a challenge for getting volunteer drivers and working with teams. 		
No	1	11%
<p><i>Please explain your answer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer driver programs should be discontinued in favor of professional driving services. 		
No answer	2	22%
<p><i>Please explain your answer:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		

11. How would your organization use additional transportation service funding?

- Higher driver wages, add more bus service
- Local match for RTCC
- Possibly assist with hiring a driver to fulfill the gaps outside of county lines to get people to and from work. Also, to have staff to do a ride along for those individuals that need one on public transportation or to do our own route for those individuals

The list of attendees for the two planning workshops is included in Table 60.

Table 60: Planning Workshops Attendee List

April 12, 2022, Planning Workshop	
Name	Organization
Michelle Weibe	Central Minnesota Council on Aging
Tammy Buttweiler	ConnectAbility
Gary Ludwig	Trailblazer Transit
Nesa Black	Wright County Health and Human Services
Stephanie Castellanos	MN Department of Transportation
Tom Cruikshank	MN Department of Transportation
John Stang	MN Department of Employment and Economic Development
Tom Gottfried	MN Department of Transportation
Sheri Wegner	ConnectAbility of MN
Jill Robeck	Sherburne County
Kristin Otto	Wright County
Brian Gibson	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
Michelle Kiefer	CentraCare Health

May 3, 2022, Planning Workshop	
Name	Organization
Belle Drown	ConnectAbility of MN
Tammy Buttweiler	ConnectAbility of MN
Debbie Anderson	Metro Bus
Michael Kedrowski	Metro Bus
Vicki Johnson	St. Cloud Area Planning Organization
Kristin Otto	Wright County
Ashley Nordlie	Functional Industries
Sam Rodriguez	Voigt's Bus Companies
Nesa Black	Wright County
Tony Masters	Sherburne County
Stephanie Castellanos	MN Department of Transportation
Matt Carlson	Options Inc.
Tauna Quimby	AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP
Tammy Buttweiler	ConnectAbility
Roger Long	Voigt's Bus Companies
Jennifer Wucherer	RSVP St. Cloud
Tom Gottfried	MN Department of Transportation
Kimberly Washington	Rise Inc.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Through the rider and provider surveys, workshop attendee surveys and focus group survey, respondent comments were categorized into themes of strengths and weaknesses of existing coordination efforts in Region 7W. Survey respondents were asked to name strengths and weaknesses that are summarized in Table 61. Combined with the plan's technical findings, the strengths and weaknesses helped form the basis for identifying strategies to address transportation coordination in the region.

Table 61: Planning Workshop Outcomes

Strengths	Weaknesses
Good public transit coverage in each county and St. Cloud metro area	Driver and staffing shortages caused reduction in many transportation services
Ample non-profit and for-profit transportation providers in the region	Transportation options limited outside the St. Cloud metro area
Transportation programs were able to retain most services throughout the pandemic	A lot of the attention in St. Cloud metro area instead of rural areas
Human service agencies willingness to collaborate with transportation providers	Lower wages for transportation drivers
Several volunteer-driver programs in the region	Limited transportation service hours
	Lack of advanced automated transportation scheduling technologies

NEEDS, GAPS, COORDINATION, and BARRIERS

Regional Needs & Gaps

Service needs and gaps persist despite on-going efforts to improve the quality of community transportation services by transportation and human service providers. This section identifies needs revealed by stakeholder input.

Throughout this planning process, many needs and gaps were discussed, and possible solutions identified in the strategy prioritization and project idea process. Many of these needs and gaps could be further refined through participation in a Regional Transportation Coordinating Council. Convening a regional coordination body through this planning process assisted in identifying issues and possible solutions, but a coordinating group working to implement projects would help ensure projects are completed. The projects include centralizing information, staffing a mobility manager position, and marketing transit assets along with continuing to explore options for implementing a Transportation Management Coordination Center in the region. The purpose of the TMCC would be to create an entity that would function as a regional coordination center for all modes of transportation in the region. These projects would help improve the conditions of the gaps and needs identified in this planning process.

The Steering Committee and Workshop attendees discussed needs and gaps in the region throughout the planning process. Table 62 groups these into four categories: service limitations, gaps and unmet needs, centralized information, program eligibility and trip purpose limitations, and service quality and miscellaneous issues.

Table 62: Regional Needs and Gaps

Service Limitations, Gaps and Unmet Needs	
Geographical gaps – county-wide service – gaps in reliable rural transportation	Expanded service hours and service areas for transit programs
Need for retaining and hiring volunteer drivers	Backfill service gap needs with private operators – Uber and Lyft
Centralized Information	
Centralized database - one call/one click Transportation Management Coordination Center (TMCC)	Improving transportation trip scheduling and fare collection technologies – dispatching, scheduling, and routing systems
Mobility manager (RTCC)	
Program Eligibility and Trip Purpose Limitations	
More transportation options for kids, veterans, seniors	
Service Quality and Miscellaneous Issues	
Education/marketing the public about transit programs and services	

MOBILITY TOMORROW

2017 Local Coordination Plan Projects

During the last iteration of the Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan, the project steering committee outlined a series of goals/priorities that, if completed, would have the potential to improve coordinated transportation efforts across Region 7W and the St. Cloud APO.

These strategies were grouped into three main categories: Coordinate and Consolidate Transportation Services and Resources; Mobility; and Communication, Training, and Organizational Support. Table 63 identifies each of the projects under these categories and outlines progress made toward achieving their outcomes.

For projects still ongoing (or those that have not yet been started) the 2022 Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan steering committee has evaluated their merit and, if deemed necessary to continue, has identified them as part of the goals and strategies for this iteration of the document.

Table 63: 2017 Local Coordination Plan Project Outcomes

2017 Projects	Accomplished Yes/No	Current Status	Relevant for 2022 Plan Yes/No	Why? or Why Not?
Communication, Training and Organizational Support				
Create a centralized database of available transportation resources.	Yes	The CCMRTCC in Phase 2 has created a database of providers and a plan to launch an online portal.	Yes	Database is important tool for RTCC and public to utilize.
Hire a mobility manager.	Yes	The CCMRTCC has hired a mobility manager in Phase 2.	Yes	The mobility manager is an important staff position in representing the RTCC.
Create a public awareness campaign to educate the public.	No	The CCMRTCC is working on an awareness campaign in Phase 2, carrying forward in Phase 3 planning work.	Yes	Public awareness of transportation programs is paramount for the public to understand what's available.
Convene regional coordination body.	Yes	The CCMTRCC was created to serve the role of the Region 7W area regional coordination body.	Yes	The CCMRTCC is the designated regional coordination body necessary to move goals of the RTCC forward.
Improve community engagement activities.	No	The CCMRTCC has engaged many agencies and organizations that work together to improve community engagement.	Yes	Continued coordination of community engagement is important to meet the goals of the RTCC.
Educate regional professionals of transportation options.	No	The CCMRTCC is engaging regional professionals about	Yes	It is important for the region's professionals to understand what

2017 Projects	Accomplished Yes/No	Current Status	Relevant for 2022 Plan Yes/No	Why? or Why Not?
		transportation programs in the region.		transportation programs are available.
Provide technical training for coordination staff.	No	Staff from regional agencies and organizations would benefit from coordination training.	Yes	The CCMRTCC will be an appropriate entity to provide and coordinate training for agency staffs.
Continue/expand customer travel training programs.	No	The CCMRTCC has identified in Phase 3 a need to expand travel training.	Yes	Travel training is an important tool to help the public understand how to use transportation programs.
Increase availability of smart phone applications for trip planning.	No	Trip planning applications are necessary tools to provide trip planning. Funding and staffing may be hindering development.	Yes	The CCMRTCC should work with regional providers to create or have access to trip planning apps.

2017 Projects	Accomplished Yes/No	Current Status	Relevant for 2021 Plan Yes/No	Why? or Why Not?
Mobility Strategies				
Work with area schools/colleges to help coordinate mobility strategies and transportation services.	No	Mobility for schools and colleges in the region helps students access services and more efficiently utilize transportation services. Metro Bus provides services for St. Cloud State University and St. Cloud Technical and Community College. Difficulty to implement with current COVID-related staffing shortages.	Yes	The CCMRTCC and transit providers would be good organizations to coordinate with schools and colleges in the region.
Improve job access for veterans.	No	The CCMRTCC has identified in Phase 3 a need to improved access for veterans.	Yes	Work with Veteran's service offices and programs should be expanded to help Veterans reach jobs and other services.
Improve school access for children, such as the Salvation Army in St. Cloud.	No	Coordination of transportation services with Salvation Army and other organizations would help improve school access.	Yes	Important for all children to have transportation access to schools and school activities.

2017 Projects	Accomplished Yes/No	Current Status	Relevant for 2021 Plan Yes/No	Why? or Why Not?
Mobility Strategies				
Improve transportation services at senior housing centers, such as the Keller Lake Commons.	No	More work needs to be done in the region to improve transportation services for senior housing centers. Hold programming during existing hours of service.	Yes	Continue working with senior housing centers to identify ways to improve access to transportation services.
Expand services in the St. Cloud Metro outer lying area.	No	St. Cloud area has robust transportation services – services become less available further away from St. Cloud in the region	Yes	Work with regional providers to expand services outside of St. Cloud area.
Expand weekend and holiday hours.	No	Transportation needs do not stop on weekends and holidays. Metro Bus is the only public transportation provider operating on weekends. Trailblazer has doubled service in Wright County since 2017.	Yes	Creation and expansion of weekend and holiday transportation will provide greater access for more people in the region.
Increase travel options to county seats.	No	Transportation services to county seats varies by county, by time of day and day of the week.	Yes	Countywide travel options to service and employment hubs in county seats and other communities is important.

2017 Projects	Accomplished Yes/No	Current Status	Relevant for 2021 Plan Yes/No	Why? or Why Not?
Mobility Strategies				
Increase service hours throughout the day.	No	Transportation program service hours throughout the day are limited throughout the region.	Yes	To meet Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan service goals, increasing service hours will provide improved access to services and employment in the region.
Increase service hours during non-typical travel times.	No	Transportation program service hours throughout the day are limited throughout the region.	Yes	To meet Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan service goals increasing service hours will provide increased access to services and employment in the region.

2017 Projects	Accomplished Yes/No	Current Status	Relevant for 2021 Plan Yes/No	Why? or Why Not?
Coordinate and Consolidate Transportation Services and Resources				
Contract with common carrier to permit co-mingling of capital resources.	No	Trailblazer transit has created the Wright County Smart Rider service.	Yes	Additional co-mingling programs would be beneficial to maximizing resources regionally.
Contract between agencies with set base prices.	No	Not widely done in the region. Possible shift in how subsidies are distributed. Less control how agencies are charging.	Yes	Agencies are able to contract with each other's programs to benefit from maximizing resources on the regional level.
Improve private sector involvement through full participation of private enterprise participation.	No	Private sector providers are not typically widely engaged. Always will be an ongoing thing. Shifting from less county focus to more provider focus.	Yes	Wider coordination with private sector providers would allow greater coverage in the region.
Collect ride denial data from private partners.	No	Ride denial data is not collected from private providers.	Yes	Ride denial and ridership information would be helpful to know where unmet needs exist.
Work with Uber, Lyft, and others to help improve fee/fare structures.	No	Uber and Lyft are not currently engaged in the region. Hard to change their fee/fare structure.	Yes	Uber and Lyft can be important partners in filling gaps in service, especially in rural areas.

2017 Projects	Accomplished Yes/No	Current Status	Relevant for 2021 Plan Yes/No	Why? or Why Not?
Coordinate and Consolidate Transportation Services and Resources				
Coordinate volunteer driver programs /organize volunteers to provide rides.	No	Volunteer driver programs are experiencing difficulty retaining and recruiting drivers.	Yes	The CCMRTCC will work with volunteer driver programs to assist in recruiting and training drivers.

One of the largest accomplishments to come out of the 2017 Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plans, not only within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO, but statewide, was the creation of Regional Transportation Coordinating Councils (RTCCs).

The Minnesota Departments of Transportation and Human Services, in collaboration with other state agencies through the Minnesota Council on Transportation Access (MCOTA) began collaboration efforts with local governments and organizations to foster coordination between transportation providers, service agents, and the private sector. It is the intent that RTCCs will work to fill transportation gaps, streamline access to transportation, and provide individuals – primarily those who are disadvantaged (older adults, individuals with disabilities, individuals with low incomes, and/or military veterans) – more options of where and when to travel.

Within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area, work began to establish an RTCC in 2018. This effort ultimately led to the development of an Operational Implementation Plan in August 2019.

In July 2021, ConnectAbility of Minnesota, Inc., began Phase 2 of the statewide RTCC program within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO. Under the name Connect Central MN Regional Transportation Coordinating Council (CCMRTCC), the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO RTCC has continued its work with community partners and agencies such as:

- County human services
- County public health
- Public transportation providers
- Private transportation providers
- Healthcare agencies
- DEED
- Non-profit agencies

It is the understanding of Region 7W/St. Cloud APO planning area that the primary function/outcome of this iteration of the Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan will serve to guide the activities of CCMRTCC.

Goals and Strategies

The goals, objectives, and strategies established through this iteration of the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO Local Human Services Transit Coordination Plan were developed based on the analysis of the existing conditions and input from both transportation providers and users detailed in early portions of this plan. For each goal, specific measurable tasks and deliverables were identified to help the region reach its desired goal.

The Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area has identified the following goals to further the coordination of local human services and transportation providers:

1. Expand services within the St. Cloud metro to outer lying areas.

2. Expand customer travel training programs.
3. Develop public awareness campaigns for transit.
4. Educate regional professionals of transportation options.
5. Coordinate with area organizations to provide job access for veterans.

In the section that follows, each of these goals will be further addressed through identification of objectives and strategies to be implemented to achieve those goals. It should be noted that these goals, tasks, and deliverables were crafted with the intention of leaving the door open to innovation. While approved and adopted by the CCMRTCC, this list should not be seen as exhaustive. It is intended that this plan will be a living document to act as a guide for the Region 7W RTCC to use in working with the regional transportation stakeholders and communities.

Goal 1: Expand Service

Goal Statement: Expand services within the St. Cloud metro to outer lying areas.

Description: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO through the CCMRTCC will continue to work with local public and private transportation providers to look for ways to expand upon existing services with current resources. CCMRTCC will work locally to promote and recruit drivers for services that fill gaps in public transportation with options like Uber and Lyft.

Justification: During public outreach efforts, both transit providers and members of the public expressed a concern about the limited transportation options outside the St. Cloud metro area. Even within the St. Cloud metro area, current public transportation schedules and service frequency do not keep up with the needs of those who regularly rely on this form of transportation. Public transit cannot provide all of the transportation needs in the urban and rural areas of Region 7W. For many rural areas, transportation options are either non-existent or limited in scope so that it becomes prohibitive to utilize on a regular basis. Alternative services such as Lyft or Uber can open up rural service areas to fill gaps that public transit systems cannot meet.

Tasks:

1. Continue ongoing support of local transit systems including, but not limited to, Trailblazer, Metro Bus, and Tri-CAP. CCMRTCC will also continue to provide support to organizations such as the VA Medical Center, CentraCare, Central Minnesota Council on Aging, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, and the Minnesota Department of Health Waiver Programs.
2. Assist with driver recruitment through public engagement strategies such as shared marketing opportunities, job fairs, and through local Chambers of Commerce.
3. Provide vehicle sharing education to agencies such as WACOSA, Metro Bus, and assisted living facilities.

Deliverables: Table 64 documents the outlined deliverables which will assist Region 7W/St. Cloud APO in achieving this goal. This table includes the specified deliverable and the primary entity

responsible for completing the aforementioned task. The Progress column will allow Region 7W/St. Cloud APO to keep track of the status of these deliverables to ensure that these tasks are completed and provide accountability to members of the public.

Table 64: Goal 1 Deliverables

Deliverable	Responsible Entity	Progress
Establish quarterly meetings with area transit leaders outside of meetings of the CCMRTCC.	CCMRTCC	
Host booths at job fairs hosted by agencies such as Veterans Affairs and Career Force.	CCMRTCC	
Post information to the CCMRTCC website on processes and policies pertaining to vehicle sharing	CCMRTCC	
Research and obtain a list of 5310 vehicles within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO. Using this inventory, determine which vehicles would be eligible for partnership in vehicle sharing.	CCMRTCC	
Begin development of a Transportation Management Coordination Center (TMCC) in the region.	CCMRTCC	

End Product: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO hope to accomplish the following with the completion of these tasks/deliverables:

- The creation of additional vehicle sharing partnership(s) throughout the region.
- The recruitment of additional drivers to fill in critical service gaps throughout the region.

Goal 2: Expand Travel Training

Goal Statement: Expand customer travel training programs.

Description: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO through the CCMRTCC will work with local transportation providers and programs to create and promote travel training resources throughout the region. CCMRTCC will work to help educate new and existing riders on the ease and safety of various transportation options throughout Region 7W/St. Cloud APO.

Justification: During public input, with both providers/stakeholders and the general public, it became apparent that people were hesitant to use public transit services because they were unsure of how to do so. While some providers within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO have extensive travel training programs, however, many do not, especially in rural portions of the study area. Metro Bus operates the most extensive travel training program in Region 7W. To advance travel training in the region, additional community engagement will be required to get people more comfortable with public transit and alternative transportation services. Providers want the public to know that their services are friendly, easy-to-use, safe, and convenient.

Tasks:

1. Work with local transit systems including, but not limited to, Trailblazer, Metro Bus, and Tri-CAP to develop, provide, and/or promote travel training resources.
2. Work with regional driver volunteer programs including, but not limited to, Tri-CAP, Assumption Communities, Helping Hands Holdingford, CARE in Foley, and Rose Center in Paynesville to develop, provide, and/or promote travel training resources.
3. Work with local agencies including, but not limited to, those mentioned above to promote best practices regarding ridership safety.

Deliverables: Table 65 documents the outlined deliverables which will assist Region 7W/St. Cloud APO in achieving this goal. This table includes the specified deliverables and the primary entity responsible for completing the aforementioned task. The Progress column will allow Region 7W/St. Cloud APO to keep track of the status of these deliverables to ensure that these tasks are completed and provide accountability to members of the public.

Table 65: Goal 2 Deliverables

Deliverable	Responsible Entity	Progress
Post on CCMRTCC website travel training resources for regional providers.	CCMRTCC	
Meet with existing travel training programs monthly to expand on a regional level similar to Dakota County efforts. Establish a working team of volunteer driver programs in Region 7W/St. Cloud APO.	CCMRTCC	

End Product: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO hope to accomplish the following with the completion of these tasks/deliverables:

- Coordinated creation and access to travel training resources regionwide.

Goal 3: Awareness Campaigns

Goal Statement: Develop public awareness campaigns for transit.

Description: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO through the CCMRTCC will work with transit providers and community partners to promote the value of having a variety of available transportation options in the region. CCMRTCC will promote stories of life saving trips showcasing examples of the importance of transportation options within the region.

Justification: During conversations with local transportation providers, it was discovered many did not have the time nor the resources to do basic outreach efforts to promote their services. Many mention that due to being short staffed, and working to fill open positions, they are unable to perform these tasks. While in the immediate future, this might not be the number one focus for many providers (staffing issues still remain the top priority). As providers look to expand their service to new areas/clientele, it will be vital to educate the public on the important role transit plays in taking people where they want and/or need to go.

Tasks:

1. Engage with a group of entities such as WACOSA, Central Minnesota Council on Aging, and regional assisted living facilities (i.e., organizations such as Keller Commons in Big Lake) to develop a communication plan for transit public awareness.
2. Hire a marketing agency for coordination and execution of communication plan.

3. Identify additional marketing needs of local transportation programs/agencies including, but not limited to, Trailblazer Transit, Smart Ride, Metro Bus, Tri-CAP, Patron Companies, and Care Transportation.
4. Work closely with local agencies, including, but not limited to those mentioned above, to promote their transportation stories.

Deliverables: Table 66 documents the outlined deliverables which will assist Region 7W/St. Cloud APO in achieving this goal. This table includes the specified deliverables and the primary entity responsible for completing the aforementioned task. The Progress column will allow Region 7W/St. Cloud APO to keep track of the status of these deliverables to ensure that these tasks are completed and provide accountability to members of the public.

Table 66: Goal 3 Deliverables

Deliverable	Responsible Entity	Progress
Conduct meetings with community partners that share an interest in transportation marketing.	CCMRTCC	
Create online video clips and posts regarding the role of the RTCC and other transportation agencies/providers.	CCMRTCC	
Post existing links and new promotional material to the CCMRTCC website.	CCMRTCC	
Participate as a vendor at a minimum of two senior events within Region 7W/St. Cloud APO.	CCMRTCC	

End Product: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO hope to accomplish the following with the completion of these tasks/deliverables:

- Build and/or utilize existing materials to promote public engagement with regional transportation options and resources.

Goal 4: Education

Goal Statement: Educate regional professionals of transportation options.

Description: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO, through the CCMRTCC, will work to educate regional professionals about the transportation options in the area to increase knowledge and awareness. The CCMRTCC will prioritize organizations that will work with and/or are willing to work with individuals with transportation barriers.

Justification: During interviews with human service professionals (as well as employers), it was discovered that many were unaware of the limitations transit-dependent populations face when it comes to accessing transportation service options. Several of these agencies had limited knowledge about public transit including service schedules and frequency, often times creating barriers to participation for those needing their services the most. The tight labor market during the pandemic taught many employers to think outside the box and engage people about transportation options and consider asking how the candidate employee is getting to work.

Tasks:

1. Continue ongoing management of resource directory.
2. Participate in regional Chambers of Commerce, government affairs, and economic organizations to provide information and education on transportation as an economic driving force.

Deliverables: Table 67 documents the outlined deliverables which will assist Region 7W/St. Cloud APO in achieving this goal. This table includes the specified deliverable and the primary entity responsible for completing the aforementioned task. The Progress column will allow Region 7W/St. Cloud APO to keep track of the status of these deliverables to ensure that these tasks are completed and provide accountability to members of the public.

Table 67: Goal 4 Deliverables

Deliverable	Responsible Entity	Progress
Post and maintain updates to resource directory on CCMRTCC website.	CCMRTCC	
Distribute resource directory via email to existing transportation partners including, but not limited to, WACOSA, regional county human services offices, county public health officials,	CCMRTCC	

Deliverable	Responsible Entity	Progress
CentraCare, and other regional medical providers.		
Attend meetings hosted by Chambers of Commerce, government affairs, and Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) on a quarterly basis.	CCMRTCC	

End Product: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO hope to accomplish the following with the completion of these tasks/deliverables:

- Become an ongoing educational resource for professionals to promote local and regional transportation.

Goal 5: Job Access for Veterans

Goal Statement: Coordinate with area organizations to provide job access for veterans.

Description: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO through the CCMRTCC will work with veteran organizations to learn about transportation gaps for veterans seeking and maintaining employment. The CCMRTCC will work to offer education and resources for assistance whenever possible. In addition, the CCMRTCC will maintain a veterans committee to provide ongoing support, resources, and information.

Justification: This goal was a carryover from the 2017 iteration of the plan. With a large existing network of groups focused on Veterans issues, transportation and transportation access needs to be an ongoing part of these efforts. Many comments were received during outreach efforts that veterans are often unemployed or underemployed, have transportation difficulties, and are located throughout the entire Region 7W in both rural and urban areas.

Tasks:

1. Engage local veterans’ vocational specialists including, but not limited to, St. Cloud StandDown, Inc., to learn about gaps and work to assist with transportation education and solutions.
2. Continue committee work with Department of Veterans Affairs to investigate and implement strategies to support veteran employment.

Deliverables: Table 68 documents the outlined deliverables which will assist Region 7W/St. Cloud APO in achieving this goal. This table includes the specified deliverable and the primary entity responsible for completing the aforementioned task. The Progress column will allow Region

7W/St. Cloud APO to keep track of the status of these deliverables to ensure that these tasks are completed and provide accountability to members of the public.

Table 68: Goal 5 Deliverables

Deliverable	Responsible Entity	Progress
Meet with and facilitate a meeting with area VA supporting agencies.	CCMRTCC	
Conduct a SWOT analysis of current veteran services.	CCMRTCC	
Facilitate the addition of three additional members to the veterans committee.	Dept. of VA – lead agency. CCMRTCC assist/partner	

End Product: Region 7W/St. Cloud APO hope to accomplish the following with the completion of these tasks/deliverables:

- Provide ongoing information and resources for veterans seeking and maintaining employment.

CONCLUSION

In Summary, the 2021 Local Human Services - Transit Coordination Plan highlights the existing transportation conditions of Region 7W through the use of demographics, feedback from transit providers, an analysis of travel behaviors and a synopsis of public opinion through various outreach efforts. It also highlights needs for the future and how the RTCC and the CCMRTCC will use this plan as a strategic guide for growing and expanding transit services for Region 7W during the next five years. By closely examining the existing services compared to future needs, this plan serves as a point of reference to improve transportation services.

This plan has also reviewed the results of public outreach efforts of both regional transportation consumers and transportation providers. Detailed needs and gaps in the region are outlined in the plan, and a brief overview of how the Connect Central MN Regional Transportation Coordinating Council can continue to implement the outlined goals, strategies, and tasks.

The goals and strategies will guide improvements to the region’s public transit, and provide collaboration with private transportation providers, and local non-profits with transportation services. The plan will also continue to guide and promote our regional transportation options for better accessibility, affordability, and options of where and when all people can travel.

Overall, it is intended that this plan will be a living document to act as a guide for the Region 7W RTCC to use in working with the regional transportation stakeholders and communities. The plan will also serve as a useful reference to determine that established goals and deliverables are achieved as progress is made to improve and expand transit services throughout the Region 7W/St. Cloud APO area.