

Lafourche Parish Transit Feasibility Study

DRAFT

April 2015

Prepared by
South Central Planning and Development Commission

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Foreword & Introduction.....	X
Chapter 2: Existing Transit Service.....	X
Chapter 3: Population & Demographics.....	X
Chapter 4: Previous Studies.....	X
Chapter 5: Needs Analysis.....	X
A. Qualitative.....	X
B. Quantitative.....	X
Chapter 6: Transit Service Options.....	X
Chapter 7: Service Sketches.....	X
A. Lafourche Demand Response.....	X
B. Thibodaux/Golden Meadow.....	X
C. Port Fourchon.....	X
Chapter 8: Governance Options.....	X
Conclusion and Recommendations.....	X
Appendix A: Existing Transit Funding Sources.....	X
Appendix B: Newspaper Articles & Notices.....	X

Chapter One

Foreword

On October 8, 2013, the Lafourche Parish Council adopted Resolution No. 13-337, authorizing South Central Planning and Development Commission to apply for grants to fund a study of potential for a public transportation system to serve Lafourche Parish. The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development and the Federal Transit Administration approved this funding request on February 12, 2014.

The goals of this feasibility study are as follows:

- ◆ To identify Lafourche Parish residents' unmet transportation needs through conversations with key stakeholders, conducting public outreach, examining demographic data, and reviewing existing transit services.
- ◆ To suggest transit solutions to address unmet transportation needs, along with approximate costs for providing such service, and identify funding sources.
- ◆ To suggest a range of possible governance structures to support the implementation of transit service within Lafourche Parish

Executive Summary

The Lafourche Parish Comprehensive Resiliency Plan identified need for a public transportation system to serve parish residents. The Parish Council approved a resolution authorizing South Central Planning and Development Commission to pursue grant funding for a study of the potential to develop a public transportation system in the parish. LADOTD and FTA funded this study, conducted by SCPDC's Transportation Division.

In the course of the study, SCPDC conducted public outreach to identify Lafourche Parish residents' unmet transportation needs. In this report on the study, SCPDC suggests transit solutions to address the unmet needs, with approximate costs and funding sources for providing the service. SCPDC also suggests a range of possible governance structures for implementing the service.

Lafourche Parish's transit initiative reflects a recent national trend of growing interest in walkability, connectivity, and alternatives to automobile use. Ridership of public transit still remains under 10% nationwide. The majority of riders are those with limited choices, due to low incomes and lack of access to personal vehicles. Housing and transportation are the two largest expenses in household budgets. The nationally used Housing +Transportation Index has set an affordability threshold of 45% of household income. On that basis, much of Lafourche Parish cannot be considered affordable.

Transit has historically been confined to densely populated areas, with riders traveling short distances. Lafourche Parish does not fit that template. The parish is largely rural, sparsely populated in many areas and 100 miles long. That does not mean that needed transit services cannot be provided. It does raise a number of challenges in providing transit services. These are somewhat higher costs and the feasible frequency of service.

A number of service models have been used in providing transit services. These include express bus, fixed-route, deviated fixed-route, local and flex service, and demand response. Features of each are described in the body of this report. A demand response service made available to the general public would be well suited to the parish's rural nature, and would help alleviate demand for transportation. With a lead time of less than 12 months, it is suggested that the parish consider this option.

There are also a number of governance models for operating and administering transit services. These include continuing with the status quo, with social service agency providers. Other options include parish coordination of existing services, parish operation of the transit service, and a regional transit service. Alternatively, a hybrid approach could separate operations and dispatch handled by the parish from paperwork and accounting functions handled by a third party. Features of each model are described in the body of this report.



Introduction

Public transportation can be considered both a public good and an economic development tool. This feasibility study should be viewed in the context of growing national demand for transit services and ways that trend might be adapted to applications in Lafourche Parish.

Rising demand follows over 60 years of general assumption among transportation planners and the public was that the total number of miles Americans traveled annually by automobile would continue to rise indefinitely. Total vehicle miles traveled (VMT) related to gasoline purchases, which supported fuel taxes that supported the Highway Trust Fund to maintain the roads on which the vehicles travel. Then, in 2003, VMT in the United States hit a plateau and has continued a steady decline since then. The resulting shortfalls in fuel taxes have created a crisis in Highway Trust Fund revenues to support road construction, improvements and

maintenance.

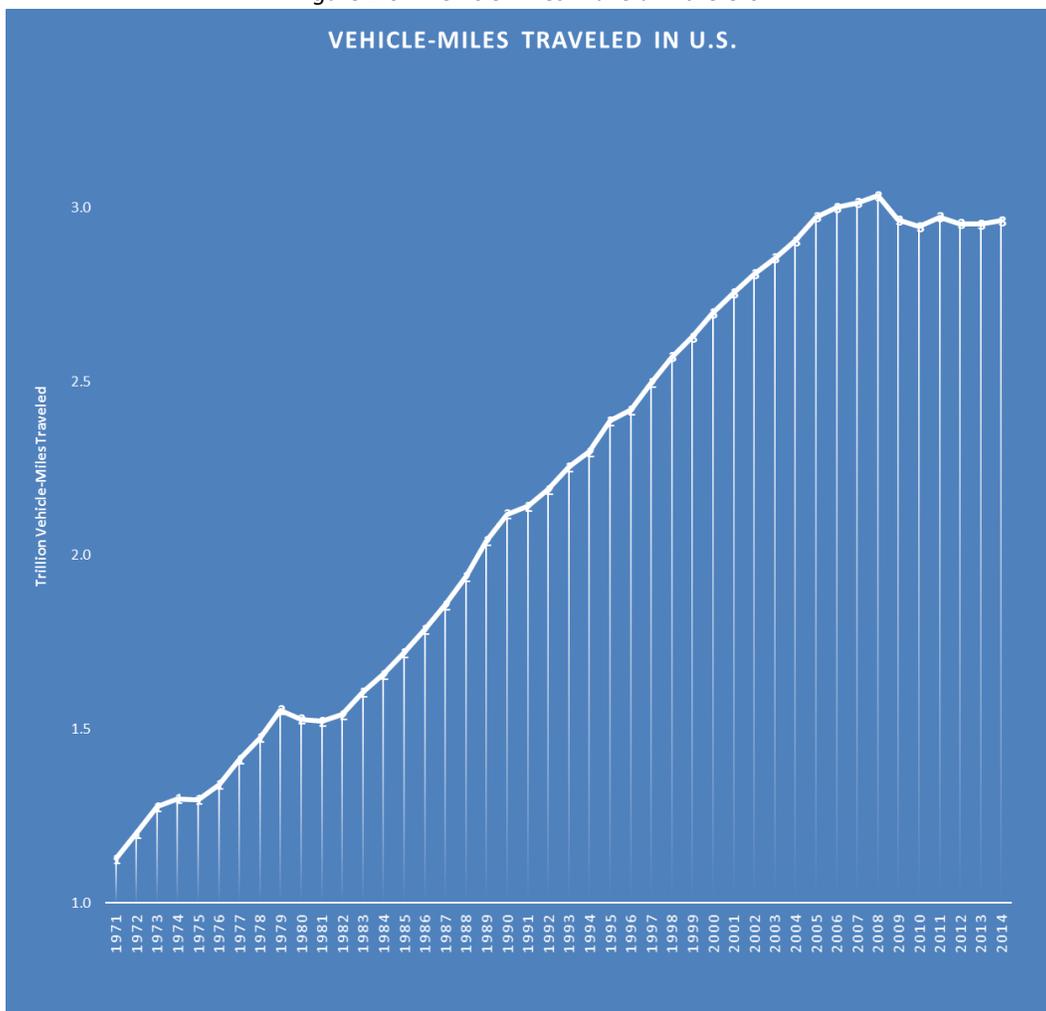
A range of demographic and economic factors have contributed to rising demand for transit. Initiatives like the Smart Growth Movement have sparked demand for housing in more walkable urban neighborhoods, with easy access to amenities like restaurants and entertainment. Related calls for more options in alternate modes of travel have advanced development of transit services, as well as of sidewalks and trails for walking and biking. In many urban areas, reliable transit service has become a prized amenity. In Lafourche Parish, the City of Thibodaux is a Louisiana Main Street community, using a national model for revitalizing the central business district that is well suited to the compact development pattern and large student population around Nicholls State University. A variation on the model will be needed if transit is to extend to less populated parts of the parish, where linear settlement patterns are oriented along either side of Bayou Lafourche.

Public transportation is especially important to lower-income residents of such areas. Lack of public transportation severely limits mobility for lower-income households that have no vehicle or a single vehicle driven to work by an employed household member. The parish’s linear settlement pattern creates limited easy access points or hubs, compounding the disadvantages. Opportunities for employment, training and even resources for daily living such as food shopping are often limited to walking distance or informal arrangements with neighbors who own personal vehicles. Enhanced mobility opens the door to improving economic prospects for both individuals and families. It also creates community benefits by increasing workforce participation, which in Louisiana tends to be 4% to

5% lower than in the rest of the country. Improving access to jobs and training resources can help to address chronic local labor shortages, especially in skilled occupations.

The growing demand for public transportation represents a profound cultural shift from the long-term national ideal of car ownership as the gateway to freedom and rite of passage into adulthood. Major changes like this do not happen overnight. They take time and often require generational adjustments. With growing populations in urban areas, public transportation can seem a reasonable alternative to increasingly clogged and congested highways, roads and even surface streets.

Figure 1.0—Vehicle Miles Traveled in the U.S.



Source: Federal Highway Administration

Gridlock on the Interstate hardly lives up to the image of boundless freedom. Arguments for public transportation may be harder to make in less populated rural areas like parts of Lafourche Parish, where people who own cars can still experience the joyous escape of the open road. Even Lafourche, however, has areas of congestion, such as roads around the Nicholls State University campus and LA 1 near the Raceland/Mathews exit from U.S. 90.

Where congestion becomes a problem, public transportation can offer at least a partial solution. Quality transit, which gets people to their destinations with less delay, provides a different kind of freedom, without the need, upon arrival, to find a parking space. Rather than being caught in gridlock, transit riders can safely send text messages to friends, read emails, or surf the web while commuting. Recent trends indicate that VMT numbers, and thus Highway Trust Fund revenues from fuel taxes will continue to drop.

It seems likely that Americans will continue to be motivated by a desire for walkable environments.

By the end of the 2000s, the Millennial Generation drove over 20% fewer miles than at the start of the decade. This could be the first generation with a significant number of individuals who choose to go carless for lifestyle rather than economic reasons. Many in this age group don't even apply for driver's licenses.

Preferences could change as the group ages, but current trends indicate a continuing rise in demand for quality transit service in urban areas. One of the purposes of this feasibility study is to consider how the trend could apply to conditions and needs specific to Lafourche Parish. A key factor will be consideration of the population to be served. For those who have a choice, transit use still remains low nationwide. This is most notable among more affluent white males. Transit use is also often less appealing to people with their own vehicles, who are likely to be in the habit and/or prefer the convenience of taking their vehicles to work and other destinations.

Study Area

The study area encompasses all of Lafourche Parish, shown in Figure 1.2.

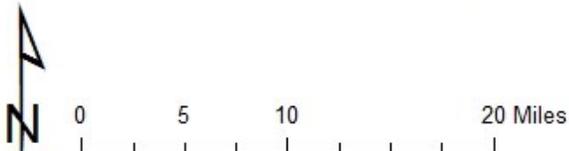
As shown on the map, the parish is located in south central Louisiana, where U.S. 90 intersects with LA -1 and LA-308. Unincorporated areas are administered by the Lafourche Parish Government. This includes the census-designated places of Gheens, Chackbay, Cut Off, Des Allemands, Galliano, Larose, Mathews, and Raceland. The parish also has three incorporated municipalities--the City of Thibodaux, the Town of Lockport and the Village Golden Meadow.

Bayou Lafourche, known as "the longest Main Street in the world," extends the length of the Parish and flows into the Gulf of Mexico. Port Fourchon, at the parish's southernmost tip, services over 90% of deep-water oil production in the Gulf. Thibodaux, the Parish seat, lies 60 miles west of New Orleans and 98 miles east of Lafayette. The 2010 United States Census reported a total population of 96,318.

The Parish has a total area of 1,474 square miles, 28% of which is water.

Figure 1.2—Study Area

Study Area



Lafourche Transit Feasibility Study

Chapter Two

Existing Service

A number of organizations currently provide transportation services in Lafourche Parish. Descriptions of the primary transportation providers appear below.

Good Earth Transit

Good Earth Transit (GET) is the only public transportation provider currently operating in Lafourche Parish. Good Earth is a division of Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government (TPCG) in neighboring Terrebonne Parish. GET provides extensive coverage, with bus routes throughout Houma and Terrebonne Parish, with the mission of providing “safe, reliable, efficient transportation for the citizens of the Houma Urbanized Area and Terrebonne Parish.”

Service in Lafourche Parish is provided under a contract with the City of Thibodaux and is limited to a “loop” route within the city, described below.

The data shows that total ridership fell for the Thibodaux route from 2013 and 2014. However, it should be noted that the transit agency faced considerable personell challenges during time. Rising wages for regional school bus and dump truck drivers made hiring and retaining transit bus drivers difficult. This effected the timely provision of transit service, which effected ridership. This figure should therefore not, in isolation, be taken to indicate a declining need for public transportation services in Lafourche Parish

Fixed Route Service

GET’s Thibodaux route, the only one in Lafourche Parish, connects to the transit service’s other lines in Terrebonne Parish. The Thibodaux “loop” serves the Nicholls campus, Walmart, and several public

housing developments. Busses run Monday thorough Friday from approximately 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. In 2014, GET’s complete fixed route service had a total of 141,133 and the Thibodaux loop had a total ridership 23,169. The Thibodaux route generally operates at 45 minute frequencies.

The figures in the second chart below provide a summary of total ridership for GET’s fixed route service. In addition to a route map, the chart shows service span, vehicles required, frequency, revenue hours and revenue miles.

Demand Response Service

GET also provides para-transit service for persons with qualifying disabilities who may not be able to use the fixed route service. GET offers “curb to curb” service for disabled persons if both the trip origin and destination is within 3/4 mile of the fixed route service. This includes the Thibodaux loop route.

Fare Structure

The base fare for all GET buses is \$1.00. A day pass costs \$2.50. Day pass coupons are available in quantities of five for \$11.00 and 10 for \$21.00. Senior citizens over age 65, Medicare recipients, and persons with qualifying disabilities may receive half-price fares. Children under 4 years of age ride for free.

In 2012, the average transit fare in the United States was \$1.33. (*U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics*)

Figure 2.1—City of Thibodaux Annual Ridership

City of Thibodaux Annual Ridership			
2011	2012	2013	2014
2,600	19,158	23,863	23,169

Source: Good Earth Transit

Lafourche Parish Council on Aging

The Lafourche Council on Aging (COA) provides a van to transport elderly and disabled residents in the Thibodaux area. This van operates out of the COA center in Thibodaux. Service is provided primarily for medical, shopping, senior center activities, etc.

The COA office in Raceland provides transportation to clients who need medical services and live in areas of Lafourche Parish outside Thibodaux. These are primarily elderly and disabled clients. If space is available after meeting primary clients’ needs, the general public may be transported.

The general fare for the public is \$4.00 round trip to and from Thibodaux, and \$8.00 for round trips to and from Terrebonne Parish. There is no fare for elderly or disabled clients, but donations are accepted.

In 2013, the LCOA served an average of 78 passengers per day.

Lafourche Association of Retarded Citizens

The Lafourche Association of Retarded Citizens (LARC) serves the mentally handicapped, disabled, and elderly. Service is offered only within Lafourche Parish. The service is a demand response system that operates from 6:00 am to 4:00 pm Monday through Friday. Vans are lift equipped. There is no fare for the service.

In 2013, the LARC served an average of 132 passengers per day.

Terrebonne Association of Retarded Citizens

The Terrebonne Association of Retarded Citizens (TARC) provides transportation service to the mentally handicapped. Some demand-response

service is provided to the outskirts of Lafourche Parish. The service operates from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm Sunday through Monday. The base fare is \$1.00 per ride, except for work trips.

In 2013, TARC served an average of 176 passengers per day.

Assumption Parish Council on Aging

The Assumption Parish Council on Aging (COA) provides public transit service to elderly parish residents. In addition to demand-response service within the Parish, service is also provided to Thibodaux, Houma, Morgan City and Donaldsonville. Weekly service to Thibodaux, primarily transports clients to medical services. The round-trip fare for to Thibodaux is \$4.00.

Assumption Association of Retarded Citizens

The Assumption Association of Retarded Citizens (ARC) provides transportation for adults with development disabilities in its vocational, group home and/or service programs. Service is provided within Assumption Parish, with some limited extensions into parts of Lafourche Parish. Transportation for the residential program is offered seven days a week, while service for the vocational program is provided five days a week.



Figure 2.1—Existing Fixed-Route Bus Lines

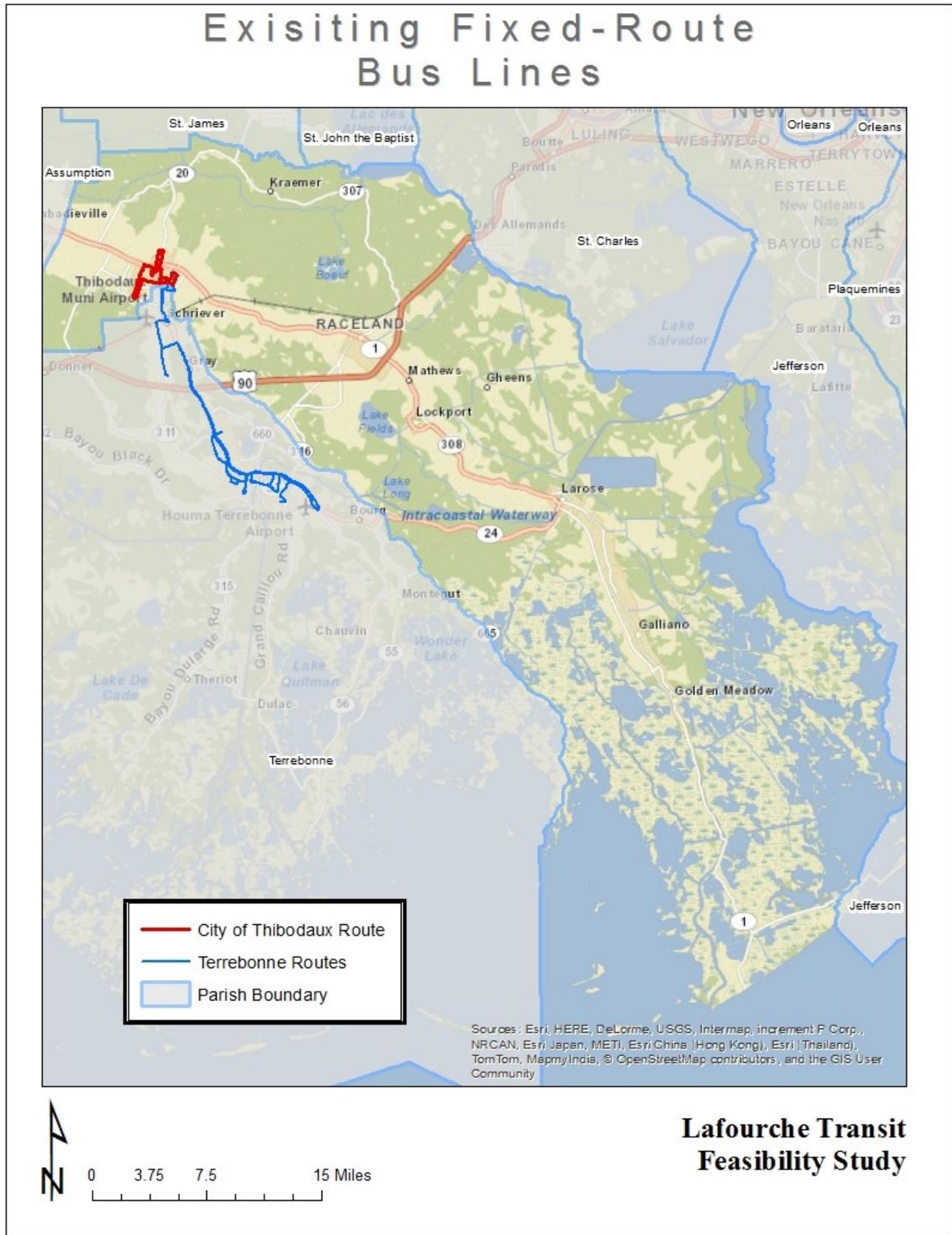
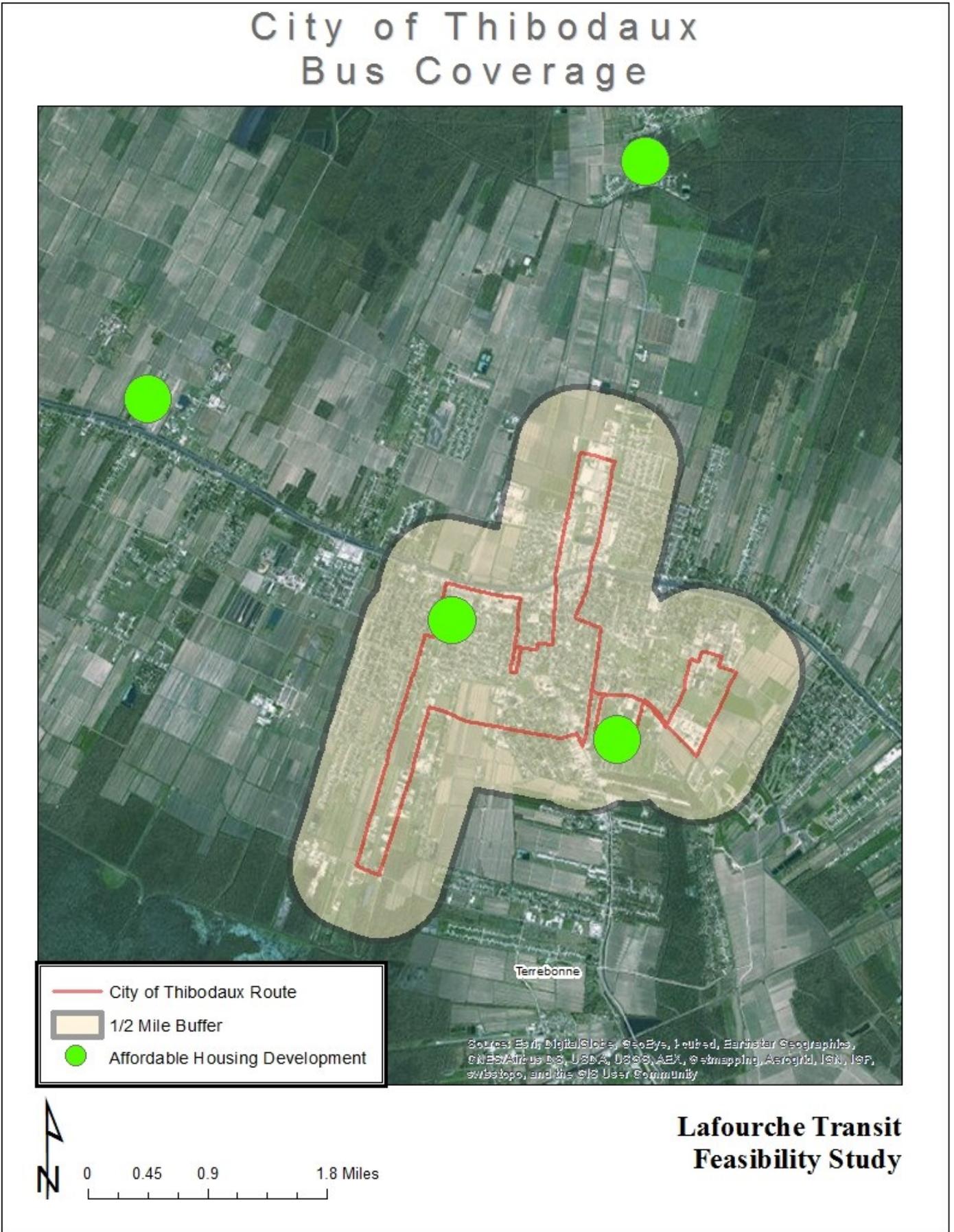


Figure 2.2—City of Thibodaux Bus Coverage



Chapter Three

Population and Demographics

The demographics of an area can be used as a strong indicator of the level of potential demand for public transportation services. Relevant demographic data collected is summarized in this section.

Overview

The 2010 United States Census total population estimate for Lafourche Parish was 96,318. The parish had a total area of 1,474 square miles, 28% of which is water.

Figure 3.1

<u>Population estimates of Lafourche Municipalities</u>	
Municipality	2000 Population
Thibodaux	14,567
Golden Meadow	2,193
Lockport	2,624
Chackbay	4,018
Cut Off	5,635
Des Allemands	2,500
Galliano	7,356
Larose	7,306
Mathews	2,209
Raceland	10,224

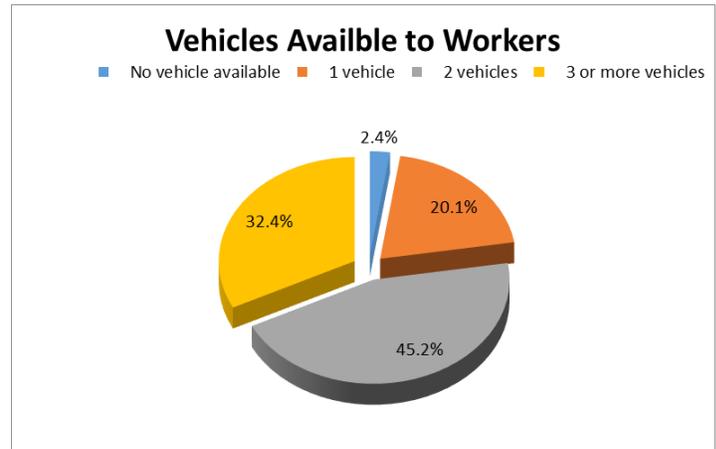
Residents of Lafourche Parish are 79.4% White and 13.2% Black. The median household income is \$50,572, and 14.1% of the population live below the poverty level.

Approximately 78.5% of Lafourche Parish residents

drive to work in a single-occupancy vehicle. This is over two percentage points higher than the 76.1% of United State citizens who commute alone.

Major employers in Lafourche Parish include the Lafourche Parish School Board, Edison Choest, Thibodaux Regional Medical Center, Nicholls State University, Bollinger Shipyards, Walmart Supercenter, Crosby Tugs LLS, John Deere, Danos & Curole Marine Contractors, and C-Port LLC.

Approximatly 2.4% of parish workers had no personal vehicle available to them. By contrast, 45.2% of workers had 3 or more vehicles available.



Source: 2011 ACS 5-year

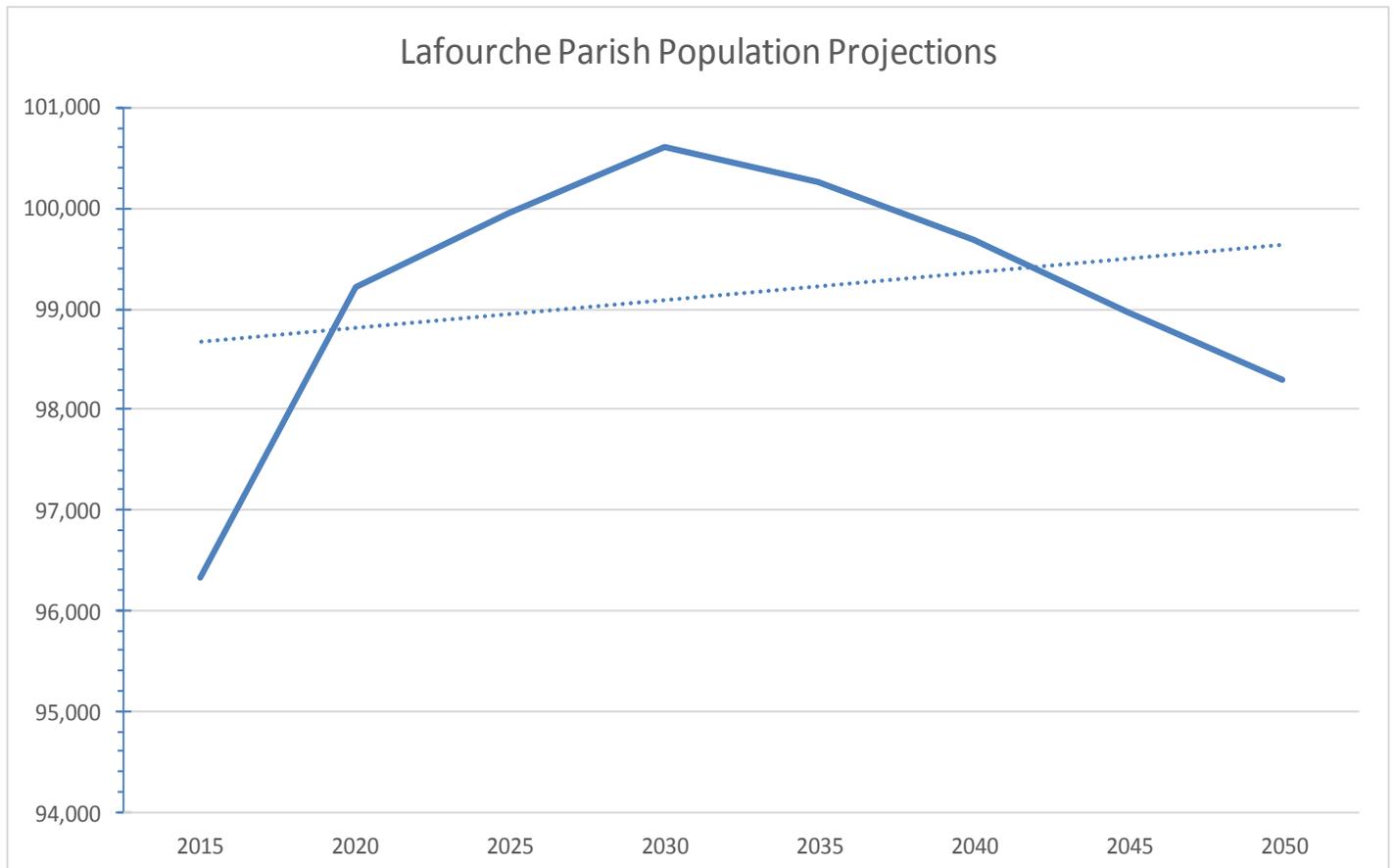
Population Projection

According to U.S. Census data, Lafourche Parish's population is projected to increase to 100,602 by 2030. This represents 4.4 percent growth from the 2010 population numbers. The figure 3.1 illustrates population projections from 2015 to 2050. The projections trend upward through 2050, with a peak and slight decline around 2030.

These population predictions assume conditions within the parish will remain constant. Economic fluctuations, catastrophic weather, and other significant events could have a significant impact on future population.

Lafourche Parish is projected to experience a growth of 2.02% between 2015 and 2050.

Figure 3.3



Source: 2010 Census

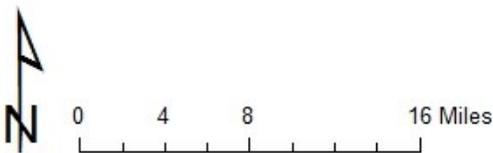
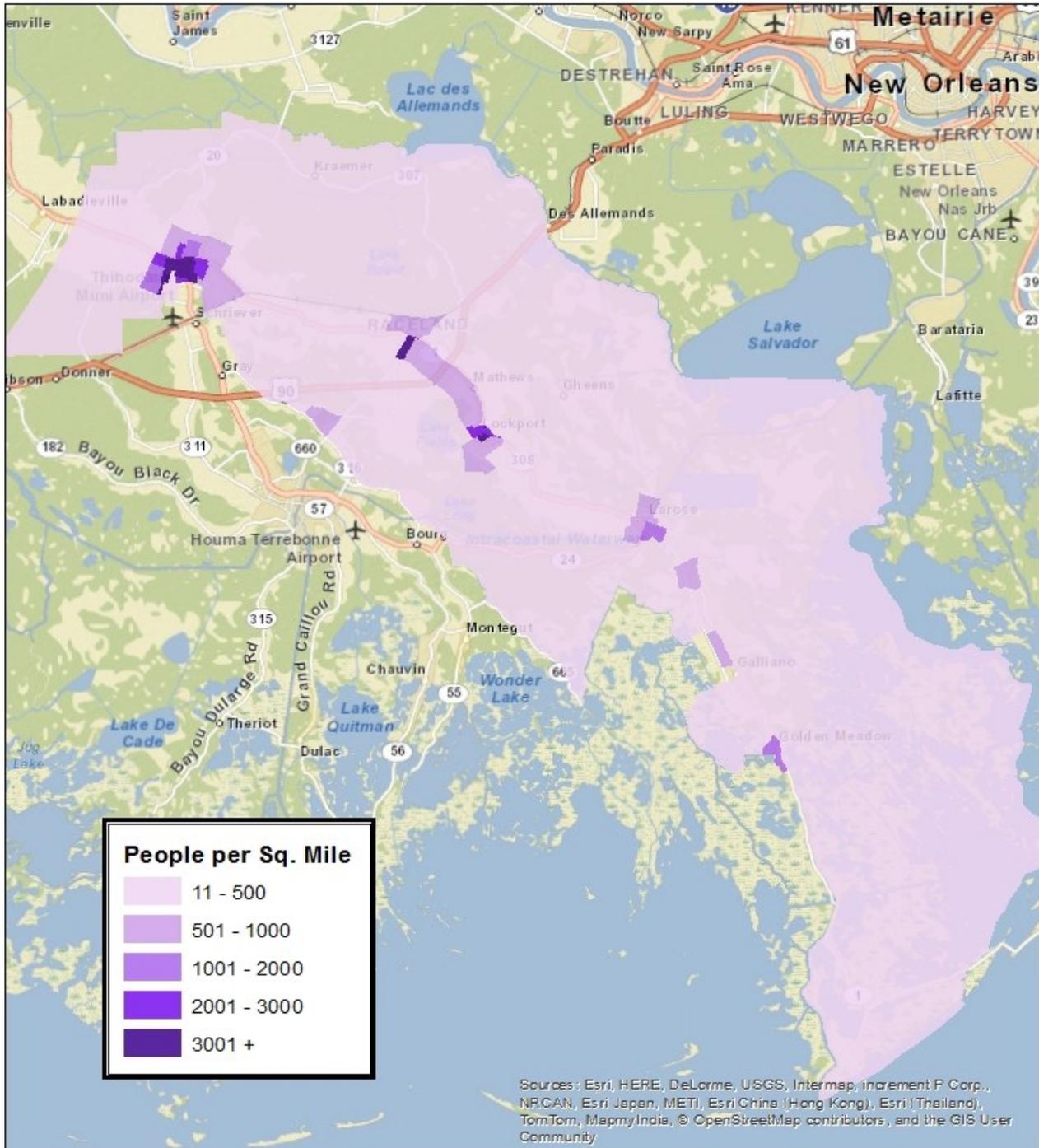
Due to physical or financial limitations, the elderly are often among the most transit dependant segments of a given population. The elderly often rely on transit for doctors appointment, family visits, and other daily needs. As the 'Baby Boom' generation retires and ages, transit dependency is expected to increase nationwide. Population projections show significant growth in Lafourche Parish for the 65+ cohort.

Figure 3.4

	2010	2015	% Change	2020	% Change	2025	% Change
Age 65+	16,957	19,726	+16.3	21,503	+9.0	23,244	+8.1

Figure 3.4

Population Density by Census Block Group



Lafourche Transit Feasibility Study

Source— 2011 ACS 5-year

Population Density

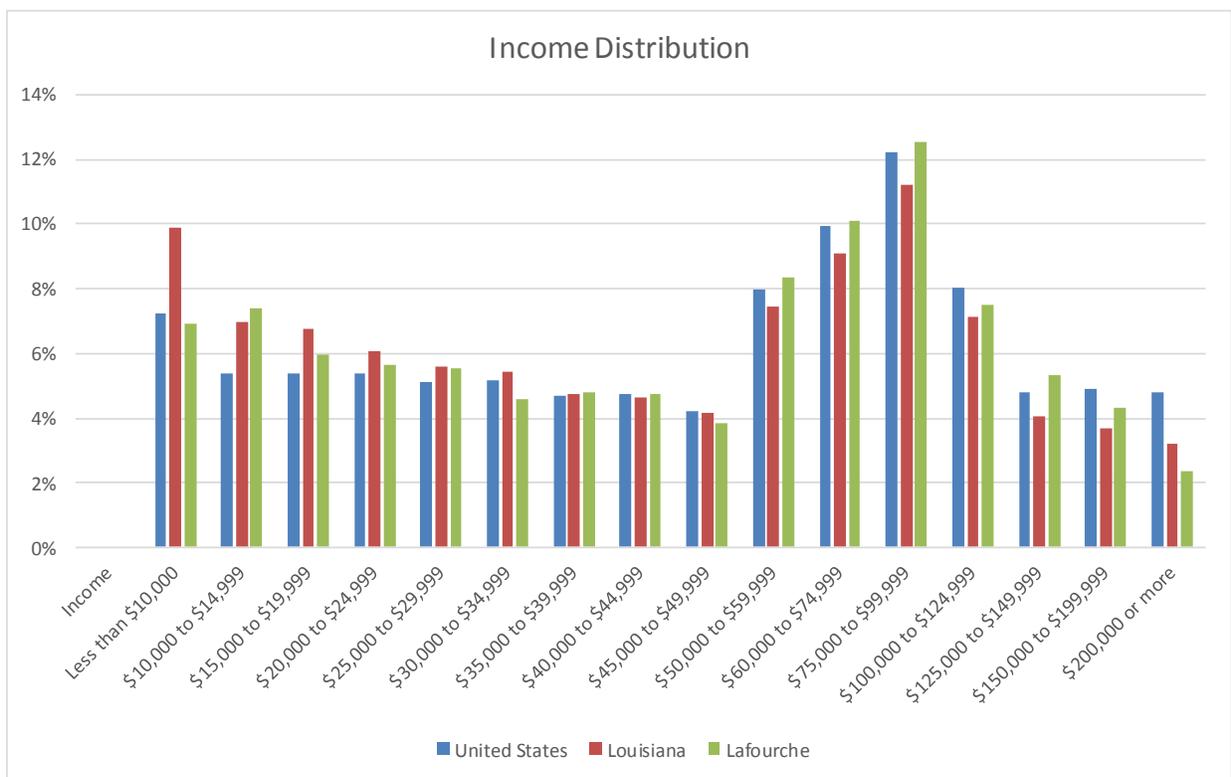
Population density in the Lafourche Parish is depicted in Figure x.x. After the City of Thibodaux, the highest densities occur along LA-1 in the Raceland and Lockport areas. Some Census block groups in the parish have population densities in excess of 3,000 persons per square mile. The next highest concentrations are found in Larose and the Village of Golden Meadow, with population densities between 1,000—1,600 persons per square mile. Block groups in Cut Off and Galliano had densities of 500—1000 persons per square mile.

Income

According to the U.S. Census, per capita income for Lafourche Parish residents in 2010 was \$15,809, while median household income was \$34,910.

Among households in the parish, 31.5% earned less than \$29,999 annually. Of that group, 6% earned between \$15,000—\$19,999, while 7.4% earned between \$10,000—\$14,999, and 7% earned less than \$10,000.

Figure 3.5



Source: 2013 ACS 5-year

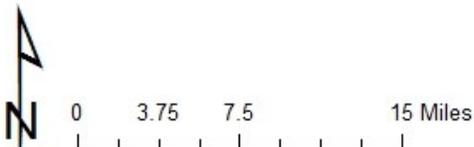
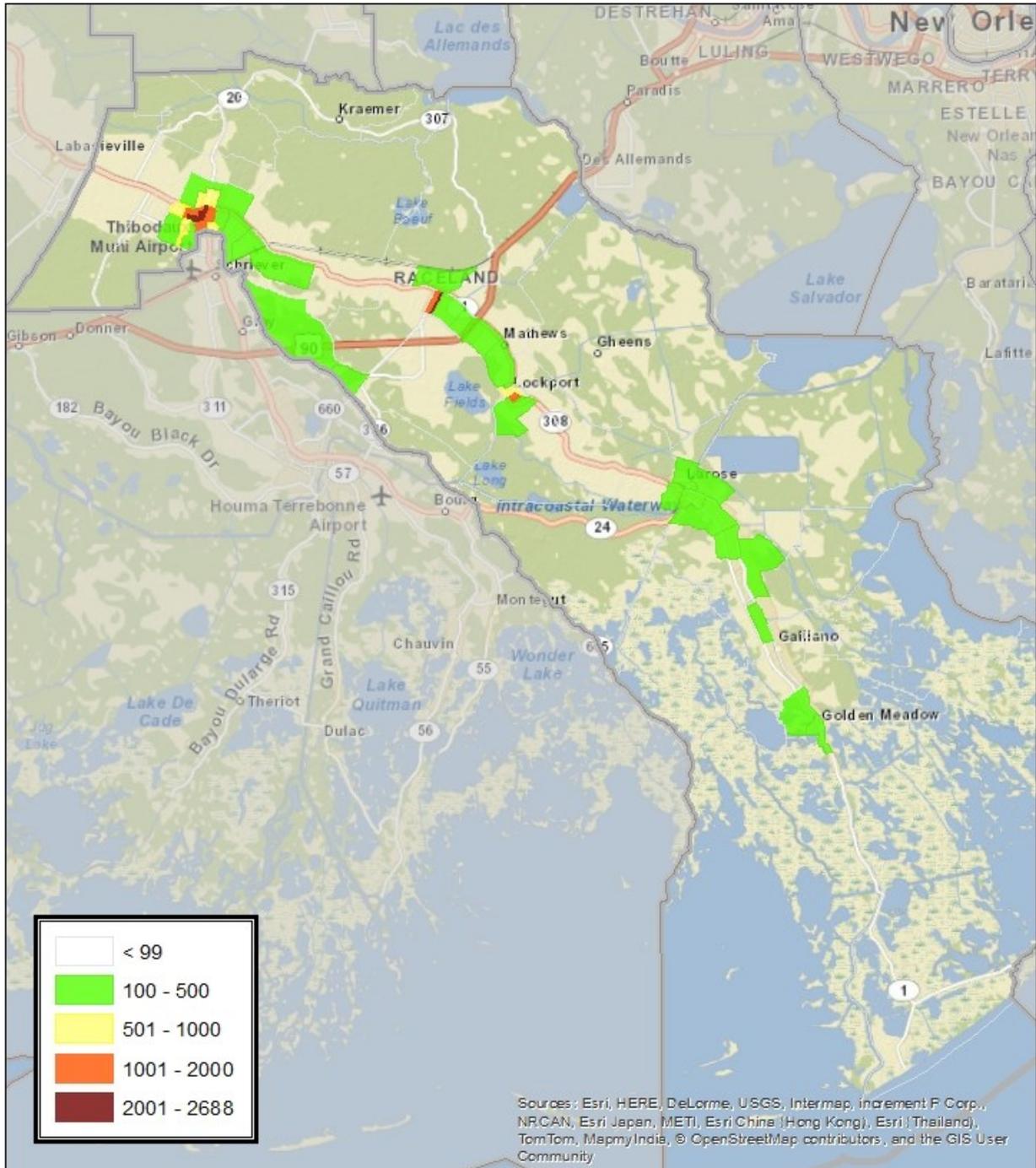
Poverty

Approximately 16.5% of Lafourche Parish residents live below the poverty line. This includes 21.9% of children and youths under age 18 and 18.3% of individuals over age 65.

Figure x.x illustrates concentrations or pockets of poverty in Lafourche Parish by Census Block Groups. The majority of poverty in the parish is concentrated along LA-1, with the highest incidence found in Thibodaux, Raceland, and Lockport.

Figure 3.6

Persons Living in Poverty per Square Mile



Lafourche Transit Feasibility Study

Zero-Vehicle Households

The number of Zero- Vehicle households is often used as a significant indicator of potential demand for transportation services. In Lafourche Parish, 2.4% of workers aged 16 and above have no vehicle available to them. This is lower than the approximately 3.3% of Louisiana residents who have no access to a vehicle and the 4.3% of U.S. residents without cars.

Persons Over 65 Years of Age

The United States faces an long-term aging of population. Individuals born post- World War II from 1946 to 1964 make up the “baby boom.” Two age cohorts in that group—45 to 49 year olds and 50 to 54 years olds-- have experienced the greatest growth over the past decade. Individuals in this group are beginning to retire and take their skills with them. This is an issue for both the regional energy and manufacturing sectors, which face what is called “the big crew change” or the “big shift change.” The Administration on Aging (U.S Dept. of Health and Human Services) reports that, based on a comprehensive survey of older adults, longevity is increasing and younger seniors are healthier than ever before. Individual plans may include semi-retirement and opportunities to pass on skills to the next generation. This, along with quality of life issues and the wish to continue living independently will put increasing pressure on local jurisdictions to provide transportation services to meet this population’s mobility needs.

Housing + Transportation Index

The traditional measure of affordability recommends that housing should cost no more than 30% of income. On that basis, three out of four U.S. neighborhoods can be considered “affordable” for the typical household. However, this historic benchmark leaves out transportation costs, typically the second largest household expenditure. In the early 2000s, as prices for housing and transportation continued to rise, the concept of affordability started to shift, as burdens increased on many

already stressed household budgets. Policy makers began to recognize the need for a more comprehensive approach that considers the full costs associated with a housing unit, including its location, in comparison to other units in other locations.

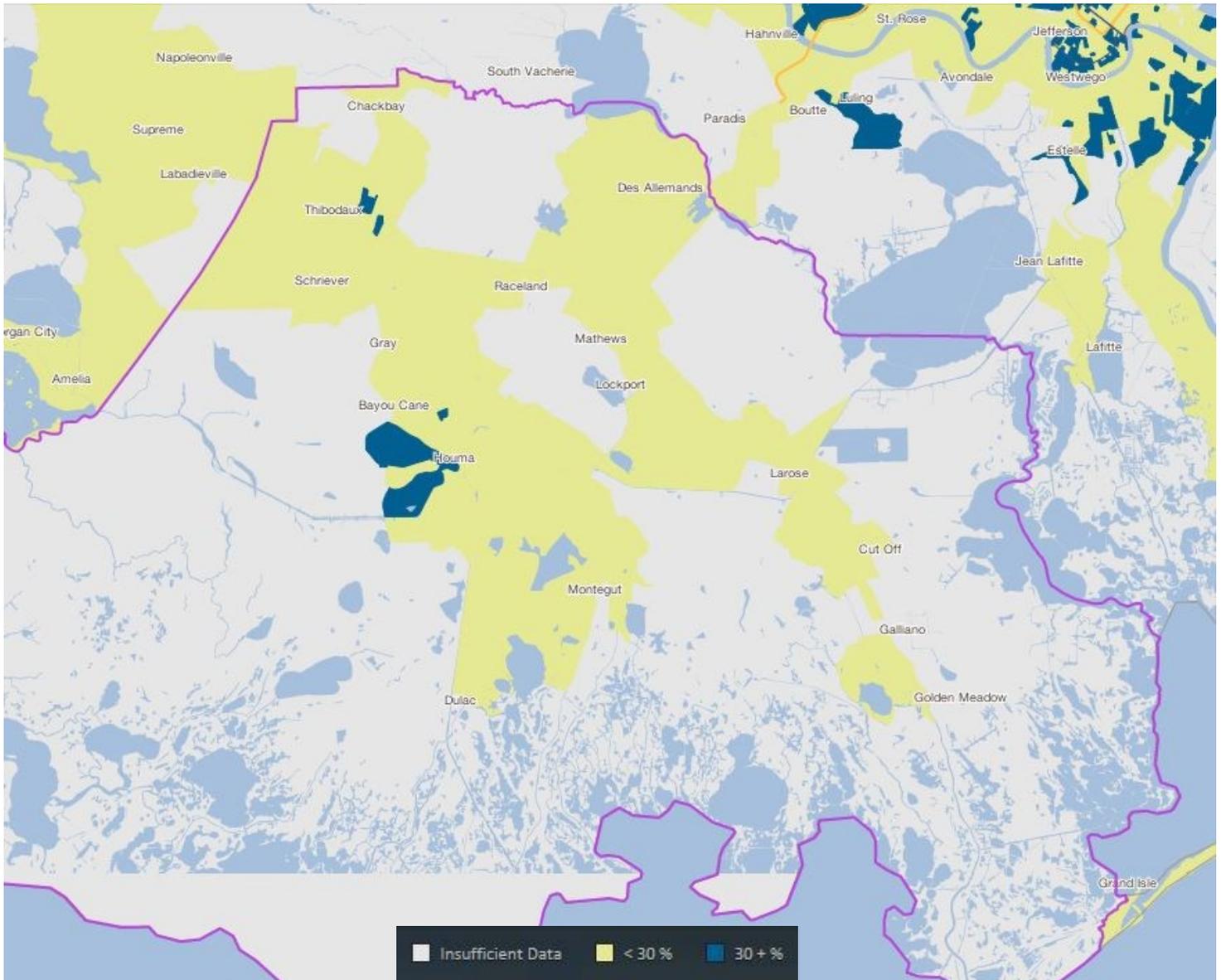
In 2006, the private, non-profit Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) issued the first version of the Housing + Transportation Index (H+T). The index uses two primary independent variables--residential density and household income--that drive three primary dependent variables: auto ownership, auto use and transit ridership. Combined costs of not more than 45% were considered affordable. Federal agencies like the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development quickly adopted the new tool, which “proves” the anecdotal understanding that people who live in compact neighborhoods, with convenient access to jobs, services and transit, tend to have lower transportation costs than those in neighborhoods where most trips require an automobile. The index now includes locally specific data on 337 metropolitan areas in the United States. This includes Lafourche Parish.

As illustrated below, under the traditional “30% of household income” affordability benchmark, the majority of housing available in Lafourche Parish would be considered “affordable.” When housing and transportation costs are combined, however, much of the parish does not meet the “45% of household income” model and would thus not be considered “affordable”.

Transit service represents one important solution to alleviating the heavy burden combined housing and transportation costs represent for many households in Lafourche Parish. Extending and/or improving transit service and walkability in areas with housing prices in a relatively affordable range, could allow residents in those areas to reduce their reliance on automobiles.

Housing Costs as % of Income

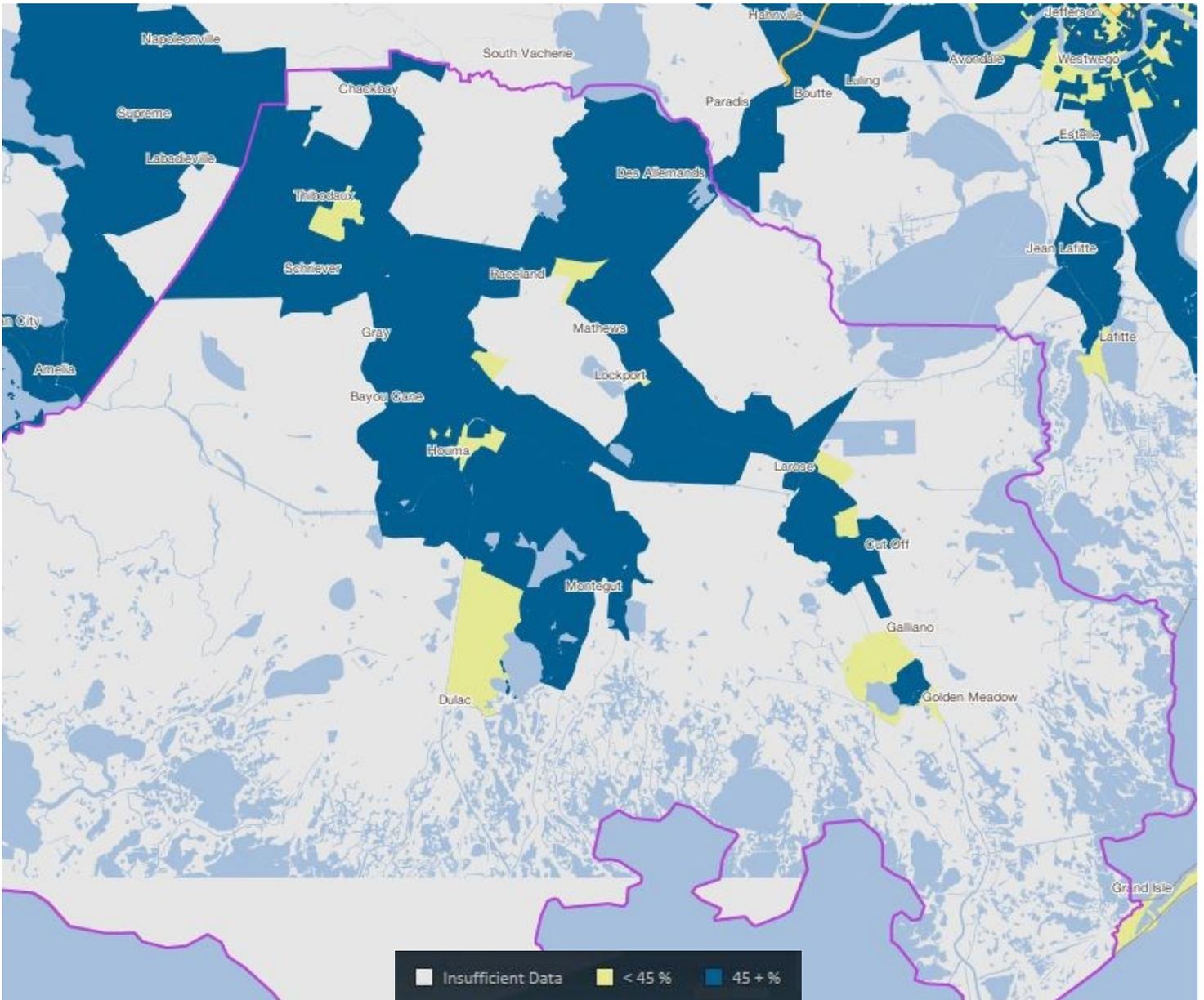
Fig 3.7



This map illustrates that, according to the conventional measure of housing affordability, the vast majority of housing in Lafourche Parish can be considered “affordable.” Average housing prices in the yellow areas cost less than 30% of average income. In the blue areas, housing costs are greater than 30% of average household income and are therefore deemed “unaffordable.”

Housing Costs and Transportation Costs as % of Income

Fig 3.8



Income: \$46,738 Household Size: 2.74 people

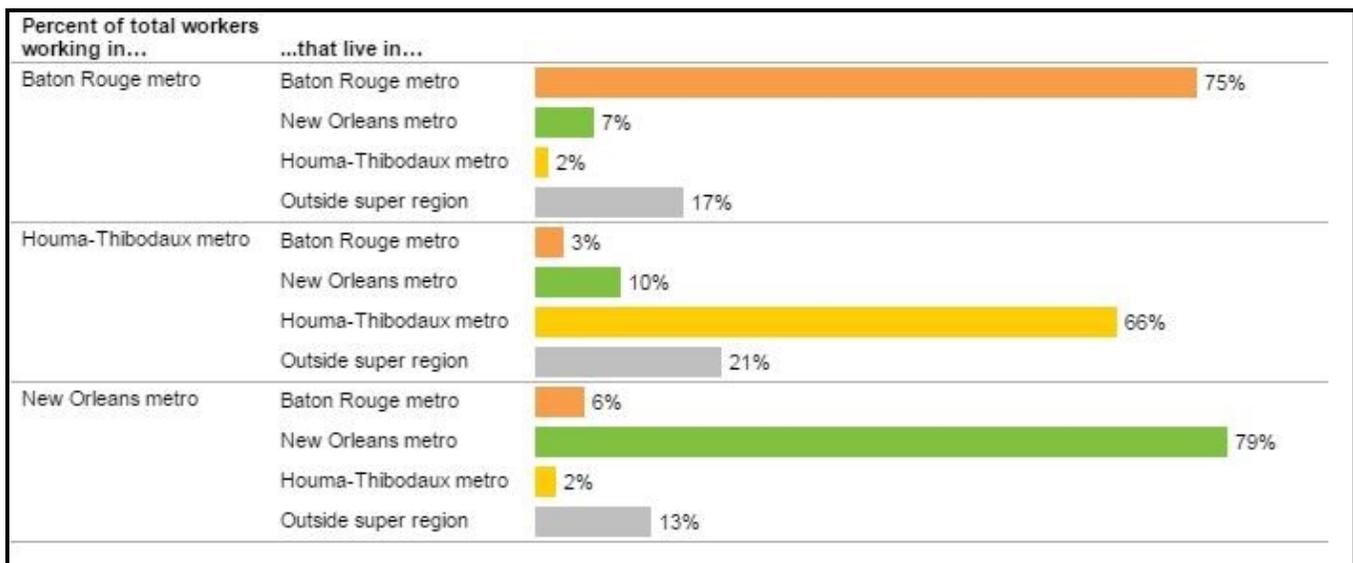
This map illustrates that, when transportation costs are figured into housing affordability, much of Lafourche actually appears to be *unaffordable* for most families. Here, areas shaded blue have combined housing and transportation costs above 45% of average income.

The costs of owning a personal automobile represent a significant financial burden for many families. Providing residents with alternative modes of transportation can significantly enhance affordability. Enabling residents to safely walk, cycle or take transit to work can greatly reduce their transportation costs.

Commute Patterns

The Houma-Thibodaux area has been identified as the third point of a triangular “super region,” with the other points being New Orleans and Baton Rouge. According to the Data Center report *Economic Synergies across Southeast Louisiana* (April 2013), the three metropolitan areas represent 55% of the state’s jobs and 53% of the state’s population. The three economies are closely linked; Lafourche, Port Fourchon, and neighboring Terrebonne Parish provide the feedstocks for petrochemical manufacturing in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. There is also significant cross commuting. Figures for 2004 show that 9,140 workers commuted from Houma-Thibodaux to New Orleans for work, while 7,145 commuted in the opposite direction. By 2010, the numbers of commuters had grown in both directions, with 11,133 heading into New Orleans and 8,298 going in the opposite direction. Increased investment in transit and transit corridors could expand the ability of new and growing companies to draw from a larger labor pool. Again, this is especially important in skilled occupations.

Number of people working in Lafourche Parish	...who live in...	
	Assumption Parish	862
	Jefferson Parish	511
	Orleans Parish	94
	St. Charles Parish	124
	St. James Parish	99
	St. John the Baptist Parish	44
	Terrebonne Parish	448
Number of residents living in Lafourche Parish	...who work in...	
	Assumption Parish	285
	Jefferson Parish	1411
	Orleans Parish	555
	St. Charles Parish	760
	St. James Parish	301
	St. John the Baptist Parish	248
	Terrebonne Parish	8471



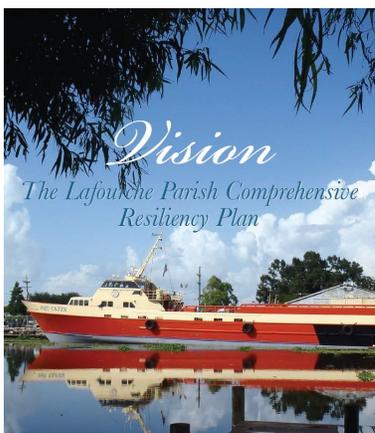
Source: 2006-2010 ACS & GNOCDC analysis of Local Employment Dynamics, U.S. Census Bureau

Chapter Four

Previous Studies

The Lafourche Parish Comprehensive Resiliency Plan

The Lafourche Parish Comprehensive Resiliency Plan, adopted by the Lafourche Parish government in 2014, is the guiding document for future land use and development in the parish. The plan envisions Lafourche as a “safe and resilient community that celebrates its cultural heritage.” Along with increased pedestrian and cycling options, the vision includes a “public transportation system which provides transportation between Thibodaux, Houma and Golden Meadow.”



Stakeholders who participated in workshops and focus groups conducted to develop the plan cited problems in getting around the Parish without a car. They also described “struggles” in traveling from Thibodaux to Houma. While fixed route service between the two cities currently exists, the buses don’t run frequently enough or late enough into the evening, and don’t provide sufficient weekend service to meet residents’ needs. It is not surprising then that stakeholders ranked affordable transportation within the parish as a top priority. Recommendations included expanding transit service and connections to other transit facilities, as well as to the existing fixed-route Thibodaux “loop,” which links to the Good Earth fixed-route system to Houma.

The comprehensive plan suggests a number of action

steps to meet the goals of expanding and improving the quality of the transportation options available to parish residents.

- Plan and fund basic public transit service to major hubs: Raceland, Thibodaux and Houma
- Phase transit development to provide—in the long term—once a day service to Golden Meadow.
- Explore methods for coordinating with Port Fourchon to provide shuttle transportation service for the 2,000 dockside and offshore workers who utilize the facility daily. Coordinate this effort with the daily service to Golden Meadow.
- Participate in future regional passenger train service through coordination with Amtrak.

Houma-Thibodaux Metropolitan Transportation Plan 2035

The Houma-Thibodaux Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is responsible for making required five-year updates to the region’s long range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).

The 2035 MTP contains a transit sketch model used to identify areas that may have potential for future transit needs. Existing ridership data, the location of job generating facilities, and the locations of households without cars were used to predict potential transit boardings by Traffic Analysis Zone (TAZ). The model identified all TAZ’s with potential for more than five transit boardings as transit dependent.

The model indicates that demand for transit service exists along LA-1 in the Raceland-Matthew’s area, as well as in the vicinities of Larose, Galliano, and Golden Meadow. It should be noted that this model

extrapolates from the existing level of service provided in Terrebonne Parish. Adjusting the quality and/or frequency of the bus service would likely effect potential ridership.

Beyond Traffic 2045 (draft)

In February 2015, the U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx outlined the nation’s long-range transportation objectives in a document titled *Beyond Traffic 2045*. That report, though still in draft form, is indicative of growing Federal willingness to consider funding, over the next several decades, alternative modes of transportation, particularly mass transit. The report cited a number of reasons for the shift in emphasis:

- ◆ America’s population will grow to 70 million by 2045:
- ◆ Emerging mega-regions will absorb about 75% of U.S. population, while rural population will continue to decline (Lafourche Parish is part of the Gulf Coast mega-region);
- ◆ Population growth will be greatest in the South and West, straining existing infrastructure;
- ◆ More Americans, particularly Millennials, may continue to reduce automobile trips in favor of transit or inter-city passenger rail trips;
- ◆ By 2045, the number of older Americans will have nearly doubled, significantly increasing the number of people who need quality transit connections to medical and other services.

The *Beyond Traffic* report discusses the current resurgence of transit use in the United States. Use of transit has risen to its highest level in over 50 years. While transit accounts for less than 5% of all trips to and from work nationwide, transit performs a number of other critical functions. In addition to helping to alleviate congestion and pollution, transit also provides a transportation option for those who cannot or choose not to drive. A number of trends are fueling the growth in transit use. These include the concentration of population in urban areas and technologies, like GPS and smart phone software that make riding transit easier and more enjoyable.

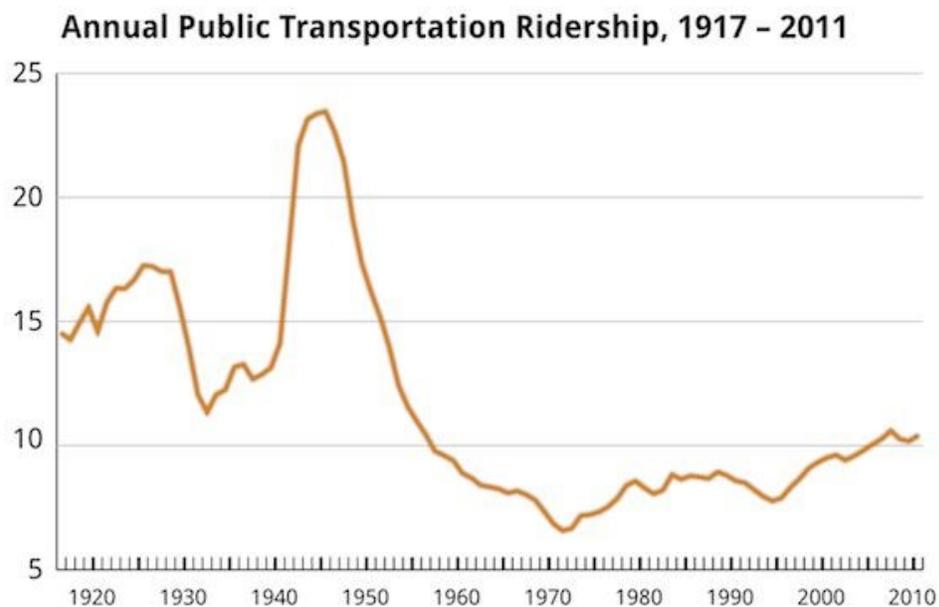


Figure 4.x

Source: American
Public
Transportation
Association

Chapter Five

Needs Assessment

A. Qualitative Analysis

One of the first steps in this study was conducting outreach to community stakeholders in order to better understand transit needs, challenges, and perceptions within the community. Information gathered from the outreach effort was used to identify issues to be addressed in the later phases of the study. A survey instrument with 10 questions was developed and used to solicit community feedback.

The opportunity to participate in the survey was advertised and copies were distributed through a number of channels, including email lists, social media, and several local newspaper articles. This included a front page story in *The Bayou Times*. Members of the study team also set up a booth at the Nicholls State University Student Union and spoke at a Bayou Interfaith Shared Community Organizations (BISCO) dinner to discuss transit and solicit public opinion. See [appendix x.x] for newspaper articles and a copy of the survey used.

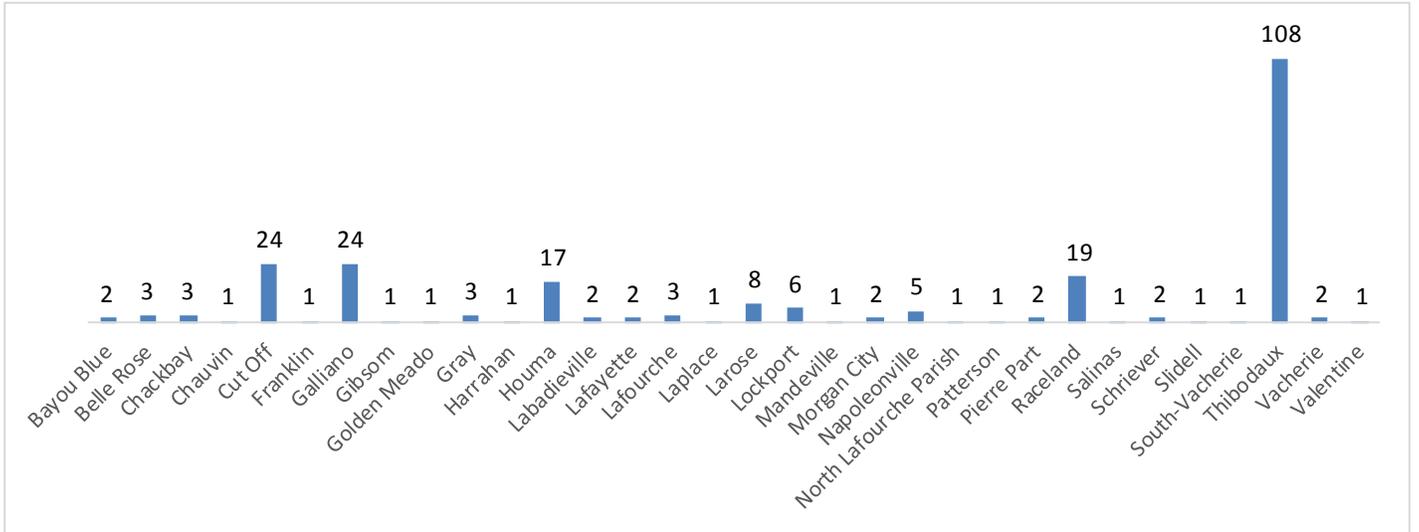
A total of 264 surveys were collected.

The survey questions were as follows:

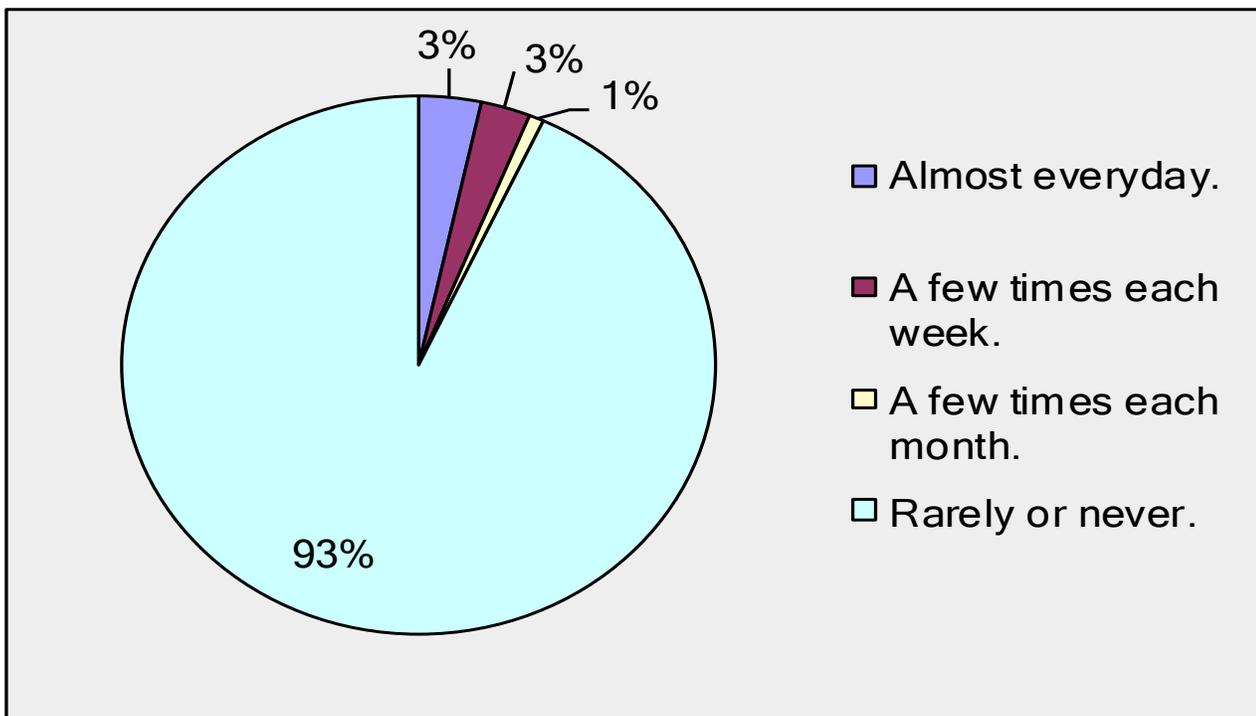
- ◆ In what year were you born?
- ◆ In what city or town do you live?
- ◆ How often do you ride transit?
- ◆ On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how would you rate the importance of transit in Lafourche Parish today?
- ◆ On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how would you rate the importance of transit in Lafourche as the parish grows?
- ◆ On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how effective do you think transit is in Lafourche today?

The following is a summary of the answers collected. Complete answers to open-ended questions can be found in Appendix C.

In what city or town do you live? (250 responses)

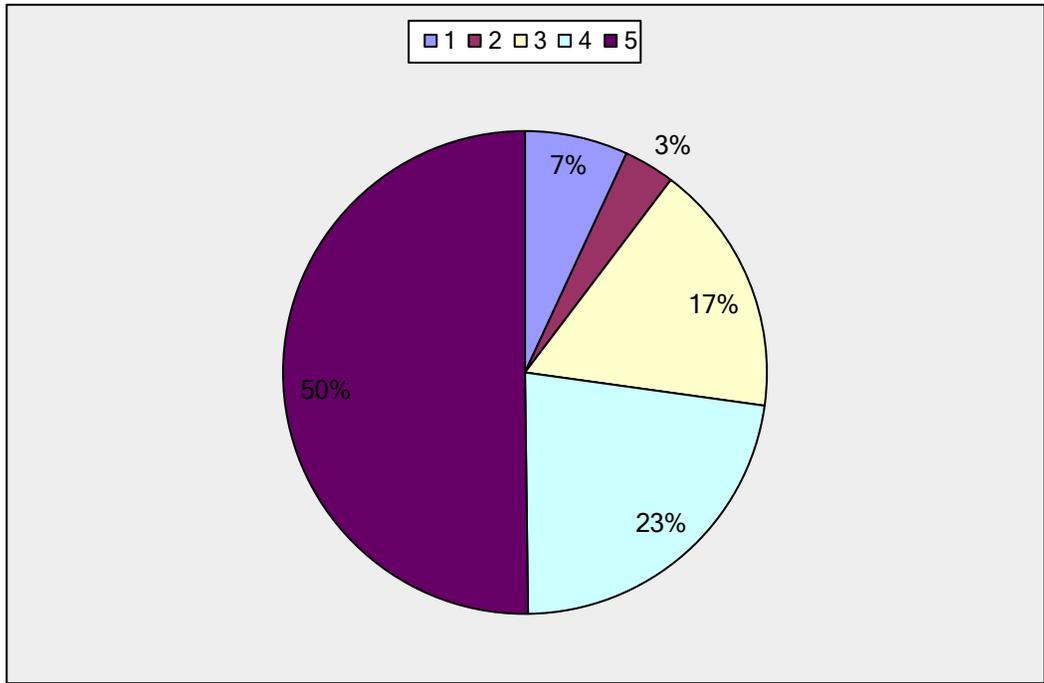


How often do you ride public transit? (261 responses)



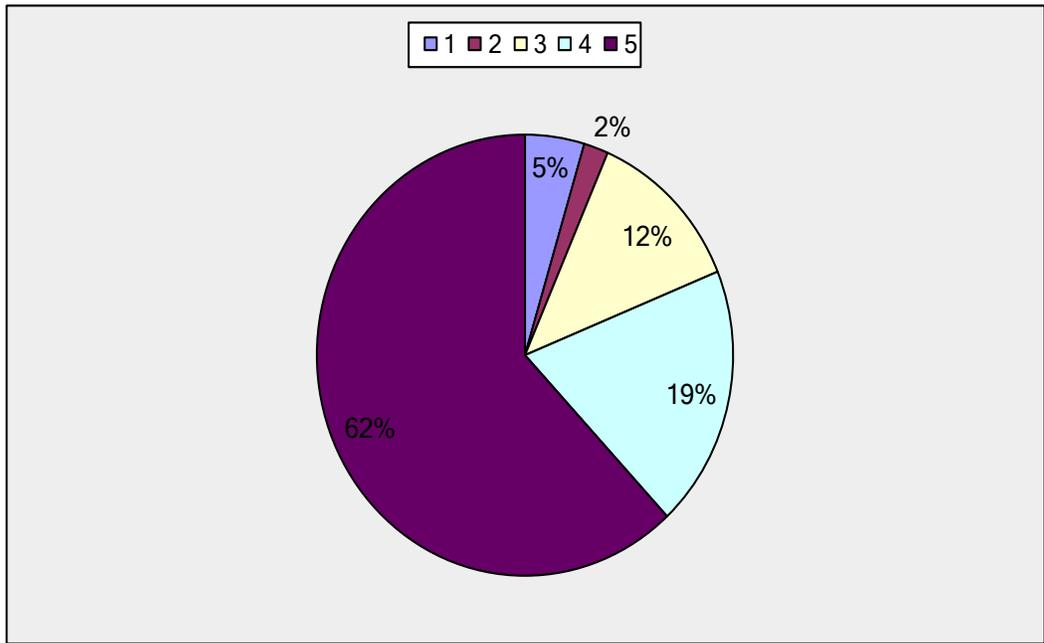
On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how would you rate the importance of transit in Lafourche Parish today?

(261 responses)



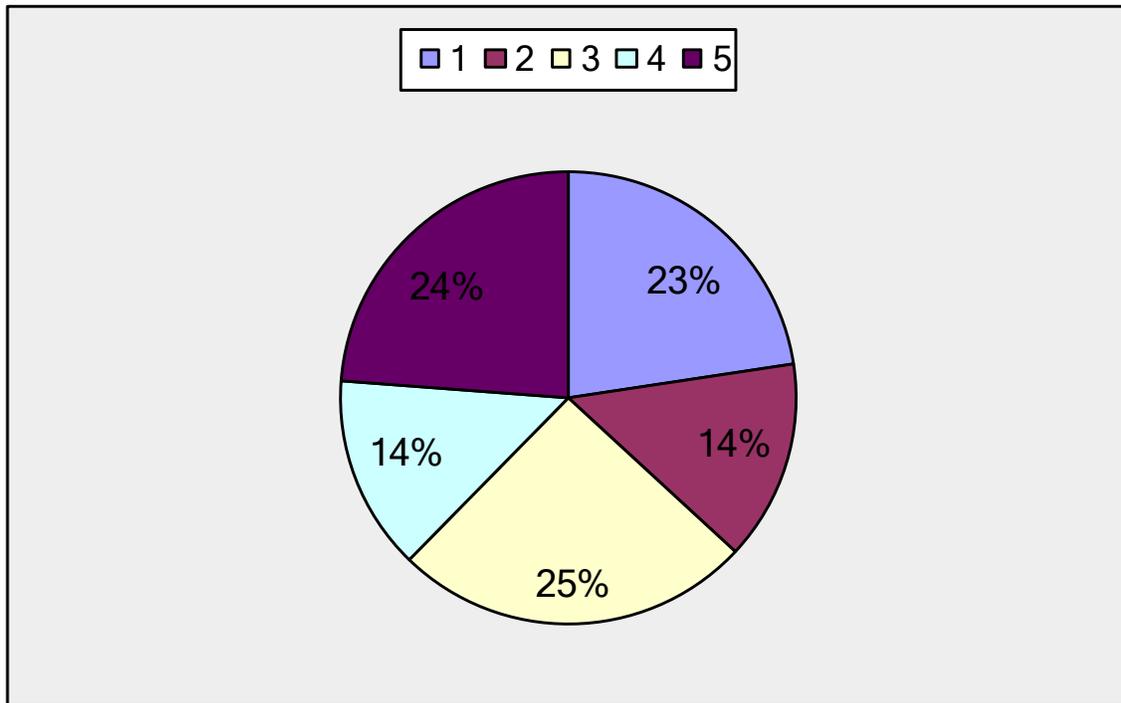
On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how would you rate the importance of transit in Lafourche as the Parish grows?

(260 responses)



On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how effective do you think transit is in Lafourche Parish today?

(252 responses)



What do you like most about the current transit service in your community?

(207 responses)

This was an open-ended question which received a wide variety of responses. The most common response was simply that there was no transit service in the respondent's area or, "N/A." Other responses include:

- ◆ We only have elderly transit now;
- ◆ Not a native of this area, just moved here and don't always have reliable transportation;
- ◆ A lot of people ride the bus so it helps them get around;
- ◆ It helps people out to the doctor and places if they can't drive;
- ◆ I don't use it often so I don't know;
- ◆ The low cost of bus fare;
- ◆ It runs daily;
- ◆ The route that goes from Houma to NSU;
- ◆ It's effective but I wish it would expand to just other areas and longer times.

What do you think are the most important transit issues that need to be addressed right now?

(196 responses)

The majority of respondents answered this open ended question asking for a more robust transit service, however many respondents also indicated that no issues needed to be addressed at the current time. A selection of the responses are listed below.

- ◆ Simple public transport connection between lower Lafourche and Houma/Thibodaux and north of I-90;
- ◆ A bus route is needed for all of Lafourche;
- ◆ Please get us one;
- ◆ Retirement for my generation;
- ◆ Advertisement if there IS something;
- ◆ The transits get to each stop on time;
- ◆ More availability and buses;
- ◆ There are not enough areas being covered under the transit schedules. More people, especially students, could benefit from transit buses in lower cities;
- ◆ 1. Greatly increased routes 2. Provide weekend days 3. provide at least some routes nightly 7 days;
- ◆ Getting available transit to and from work sites;
- ◆ Developing a schedule route that extends to the working and retail center(s) of Lafourche Parish (Thibodaux, Raceland, Larose, Larose, Galliano, Fourchon).

What do you think are the most important transit issues that need to be addressed as the parish grows?

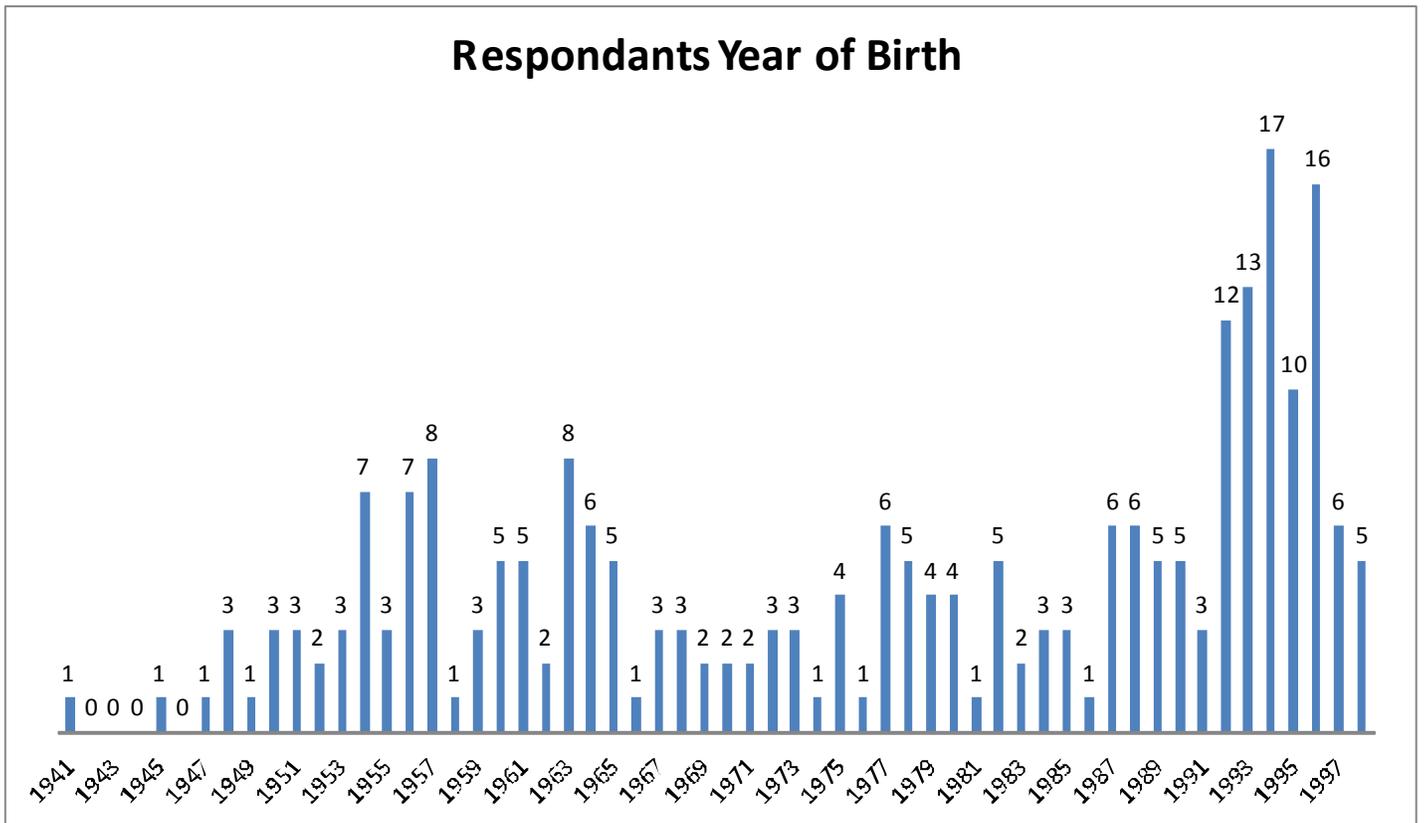
(190 responses)

- ◆ Nothing, it good as it is;
- ◆ Complete lack. Simple transport such as buses to take people to work to the store doctors;
- ◆ Stay clean and don't run late;
- ◆ To not spend money on them;
- ◆ Cooler air conditioners;
- ◆ More public transit options;
- ◆ Safety issue;
- ◆ Schedule more buses;
- ◆ Greater spread of service throughout the parish;
- ◆ Lower part of Lafourche parish;

Are there any specific transit services you would like to see?

(189 responses)

- ◆ Buses or vans to vital services;
- ◆ Link to Houma, to Thibodaux, along LA1/308 to Walmart, to Raceland, St Anne hospitals/clinics;
- ◆ Bus service to Teche Action Clinic;
- ◆ Parish-wide transit system. Weekend services, especially to the mall in Houma;
- ◆ Buses to Fletcher from at least Lockport;
- ◆ Rapid rail service between Thibodaux, Houma, BR and NO;
- ◆ Bus service from Larose to the Houma Indian Center south of Golden Meadow;
- ◆ A route from Thibodaux to Golden Meadow;
- ◆ Transit for the outskirts of the parish, like Marydale, Waverly;
- ◆ Rail into larger urban areas of Jefferson and Orleans.



Quantitative Analysis

In addition to soliciting public input, data-driven quantitative measures were used to estimate transit needs. For this part of the study, a simple model was developed to illustrate an area's transit appropriateness.

Methodology

The model was created as a tool to assess or measure the "transit friendliness" of an area. This is only a means to give transit professionals and elected officials a sense of the *relative viability* of possible transit investments.

A review of transit literature indicates that density of employment and housing has a strong, positive correlation with transit usage. This relationship was used as the basis for the model. The region was divided into Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZs). This level of geographic detail was selected because the Census Block Groups in the study area were too large to create a meaningful model. A TAZ area was calculated excluding bodies of water in order to accurately determine density. Each TAZ was then assigned a score which was calculated from its density of employment and housing.

The score for each TAZ was classified based on a range of five categories ranging from "High" to "Low":

- ⇒ High > 7.5
- ⇒ Medium-High 2.5—7.5
- ⇒ Medium 1.0—2.4
- ⇒ Marginal 0.6—0.9
- ⇒ Low < 0.6

A higher score indicates that the relative population and employment density in the area **may** support some form of transit system or an increase in the level of transit services.

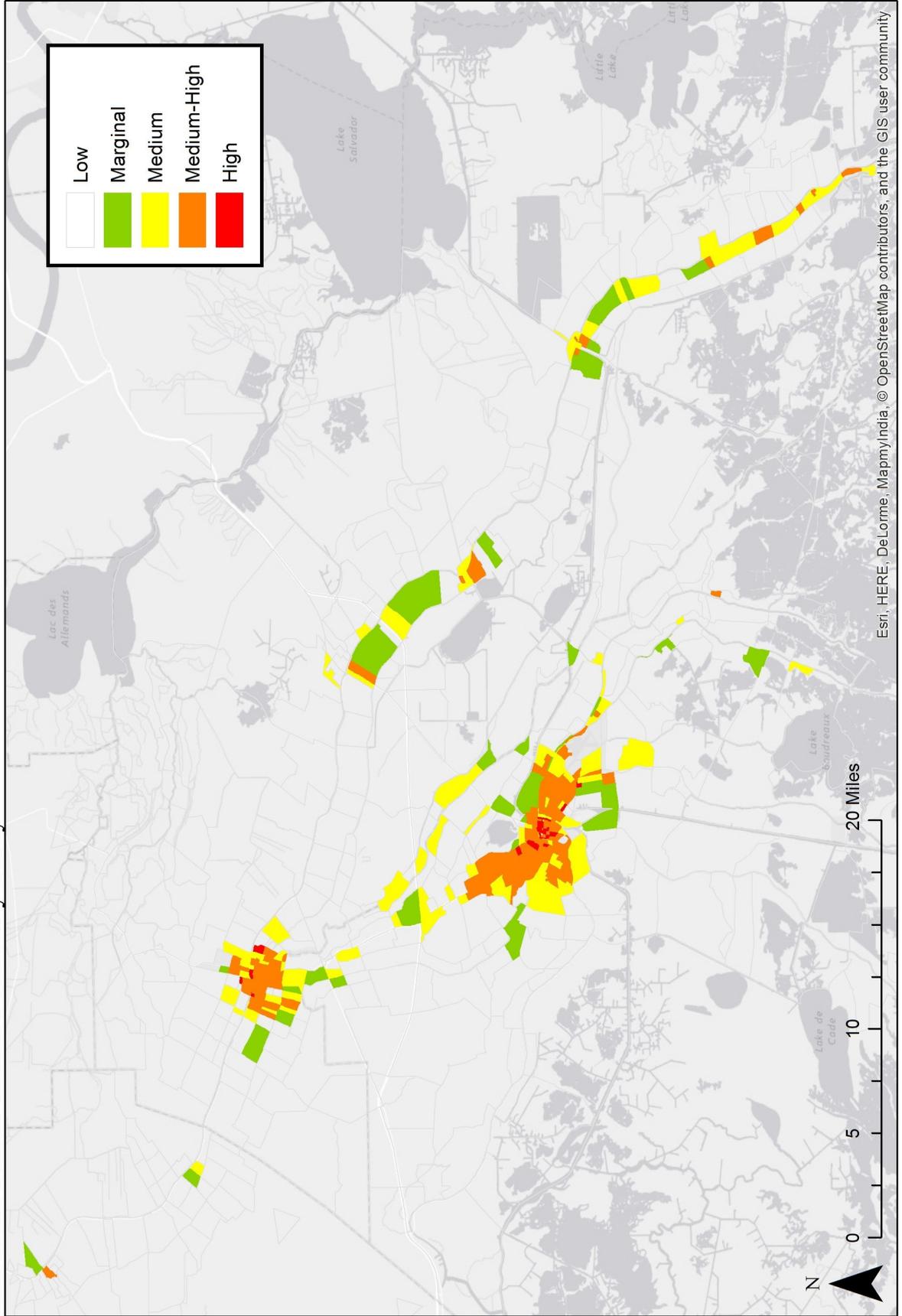
Discussion

As one might anticipate, the model indicates the highest concentrations of transit need in Houma and Thibodaux, particularly within the downtown areas. The model also shows that stretches of LA-1 / 308 may be supportive of transit investment, particularly the Raceland and Matthews area, Galliano and Lockport. The model indicates, as well, Labadieville and Napoleonville in Assumption Parish may also be supportive of increased transit service.

Note: While the positive relationship between density and transit usage is well-established in the professional planning literature, the formula used to derive this score is based on national regression analyses. A more precise, regional model could not be created due to the lack of highly specific data, such as the number of boardings per bus stop, or the addresses of demand response pick ups and drop offs. As more accurate data becomes available, tools better suited to the study area can be created to examine the precise relationships between transit ridership and various independent variables. Future transit planning efforts could consider the creation of a region-specific transit model.

Transit Needs Analysis

Lafourche Parish Transit Feasibility Study



Chapter Six

Transit Service Options

As previously discussed, Lafourche Parish is a challenging area in which to provide effective transit service. In general, transit is most cost-effective when large volumes of passengers can be transported for short to moderate distances. Lafourche Parish, by comparison, has a relatively small population spread out over a large area. This means that overall travel volumes are lower than in urban areas and many trip distances are very long.

This does not mean that transit is not needed, or that it cannot be provided effectively. However, it does mean that transit must be designed with consideration of well-defined markets, and that certain cost metrics will be higher than in more urbanized areas.

This chapter describes the different types of transit services that could be feasible in Lafourche Parish, and presents service scenarios for short-term transit (over the next five years) and long term (to 2025) transit improvements. It also presents associated ridership, costs, and other factors.

TYPES OF TRANSIT SERVICES

Transit service can be provided in a variety of ways, ranging from rail to bus-rapid-transit (BRT) to bus to paratransit to volunteer driver services. For transit to be most effective, individual services must be designed to match market demand and the operating environment. The following sections describe different transit types that may be appropriate for Lafourche Parish.

Commuter Rail / Intercity Rail

Commuter and intercity rail services provide fast rail

service in long, high volume corridors. Service operates on exclusive rights-of-way, often on rail lines that are owned by freight railroads. As the names imply, commuter rail service is oriented to serving commute trips, while intercity service primarily serves intercity trips.

Lafourche Parish and Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government are currently examining Amtrak intercity rail service between Schriever (within the study area), New Orleans, and Houston.

Light Rail

Light rail provides urban rail service that operates in a combination of exclusive rights-of way and mixed traffic. It is typically operated with one to three car trains and is designed to serve high volume corridors at moderate speeds.

INew Orleans streetcars are some of the most familiar examples of light rail in the country. Several streetcar expansions have been completed in the last 15 years, or are currently underway.

Projected population and employment densities and travel volumes for Lafourche Parish through 2045 do not indicate sufficient demand to support light rail.

Express Bus

Express bus service provides fast, limited stop bus service that is typically designed to serve moderate to long distance commute trips to and from major employment areas. Express bus service often operates only during peak commuting periods, but in some high volume areas, it can provide all day service. Express bus service is provided in nearly all major urban areas, and typically operates from outlying areas.

Regional Bus Service

Regional bus services provide connections between regional destinations, which for Lafourche would include destinations within the parish as well as in Terrebonne and perhaps Assumption Parishes. Regional routes often operate to and from transit centers, where connections can be made to local services. However, regional bus service can also provide local circulation at one or both ends, especially in areas where local circulator routes are not available.

Regional services can also operate as fixed-route service or route-deviation services.

Fixed Route – Fixed route bus services operate along a set route with regularly scheduled times and headways. Services typically operate with designated stops or as a “flag for stop” service where riders can hail the bus at any safe location along the route.

Deviated Fixed-Route - Deviated fixed-route service is a variation of fixed-route service that diverges from the fixed route to provide curbside service in certain locations. When there are no requests for the deviation, service operates in the same manner as the standard fixed-route. To be dropped off away from the normal route, riders simply request the service from the driver when they board the bus. For pick-ups, riders must call the transit system in advance with the location and time they want to be picked-up. Specific reservation procedures vary and are determined by the transit system based on factors such as policy, level and type of demand, and other factors. Deviated fixed-route service is typically used in more rural areas to expand service coverage. Such service is considered to be “demand-responsive” under ADA regulations. As a result, if deviated fixed-route service is provided, it is not necessary to provide complimentary paratransit service.

Finally, regional routes can provide full-time or part-time service. In higher demand areas, they can operate as much as five to seven days a week. In lower volume areas, they can provide one or two day per week service for critical needs such as medical appointments or shopping trips.

Local Bus Service

Local routes serve a variety of local activity centers and provide connections to regional services. As with regional services, local services can provide both fixed-route and route deviation service.

In low density areas and in areas where development is concentrated, routes also often operate as loops. One way loop routes allow transit systems to provide greater service coverage with fewer vehicles. The Thibodaux route of Good Earth Transit currently operates as a loop.

Flex Service

Flex-Service is a hybrid of fixed-route and demand responsive service. At one end, this model operates on a fixed schedule to and from specific locations. At the other end, it operates within a designated flex area along a variable route and provides demand-responsive service. Flex routes provide a way to expand service to areas where current population and employment densities or the road network make traditional fixed route service infeasible. Flex routes serve a number of different types of trips, only some of which require reservations.

Chapter Seven

Transit Service Sketches

Considering the demographic analysis and public outreach discussed thus far, it is appropriate to consider potential transit service options. This section will briefly discuss **three** transit service options that may fit in Lafourche Parish, along with operating cost estimates and potential funding sources for each:

1. Demand Response
2. Daily Service Down the Bayou
3. Port Fourchon

1. Demand Response

Unlike fixed-route service, where vehicles arrive at a set time and place according to a schedule, demand-response service offers greater flexibility, picking up individual passengers on their doorsteps and transporting them to specific destinations. The nature of demand response precludes the ability to transport large numbers of riders. This model is best suited to rural and sparsely populated areas.

Although research conducted for this study indicated many parish residents need public transit service, the rural nature of the parish is unlikely to generate the ridership necessary for regular, fixed route service. Demand response may be an excellent solution, because it is flexible enough to service a few residents at a time. Residents can call to schedule, often with 24-hour notice, and would be picked up at their door step.

Demand response service would also allow

for the possibility of growth and expansion. If sufficient demand exists, the vehicles could begin following a regular schedule and route, evolving into a demand response, or fixed route service.

With its large parking lot, the Government Center in Matthews may be an ideal location to stage demand response vehicles.

In order to provide such service, the Parish would need to either contract out a third party provider, or operate the service itself with parish-employed drivers, dispatchers, maintenance workers, etc. In similar situations elsewhere in Louisiana, the local jurisdiction often receives the grant funding, and then contracts the Council on Aging to provide the service. Governance options are discussed in greater detail later in this study.

Ridership Demand

Estimating the ridership of a new transit system is one of the most challenging aspects of transportation planning, and most subject to margins of error. That said, however, reasonable

—Connecting Raceland—

One of the goals outlined in the Lafourche Parish Comprehensive Resiliency Plan was to connect the Raceland/Matthews hub with the centers of activity in Thibodaux and Houma. A demand response service could provide Raceland residents with increased mobility to these cities in the near term. If demand response service is successful and it is determined that the need for more frequent service exists, fixed-routes along LA-182, US-90, or LA-1 could be explored further.

ridership estimates based on data from similar services in the region. St. James Parish, for example, operates 18 vehicles in a combination of demand response and deviated fixed-route service, and provides approximately 400 passenger trips per day.

For demand response service in Lafourche Parish, a **minimum suggested starting** point is three vehicles—two of them operating regularly and one used as a backup. This can be scaled up as necessary. Based on all available data, it is estimated that three demand response vehicles would provide Lafourche Parish with **40-50 passenger trips per day**. A larger fleet of 10-20 vehicles could easily provide several hundred trips per day.

Capital Expenses	
3 vans	\$120,000—150,000
85% State and Federal contribution	-\$102,000—127,000
15% Local match	\$18,000—19,000
Approximate Annual Operating	
Salary / Wages-Drivers	\$60,000
Salary / Wages-Dispatch	\$26,000
Salary / Wages-Mechanic	\$37,000
Fringe Benefits	\$30,000
Vehicle Insurance	\$18,000
Fuel and Oil	\$10,000
Maintenance & Repairs	\$500
Annual expenses	\$181,500
50% State and Federal contribution	-\$78,000
~ 14,400 trips annually	-\$14,400
42% Local Match	\$76,230
Total First Year Estimated Costs	
\$95,230	

Minimum Lead Time
3-6 mos.

2. Daily Service Down the Bayou

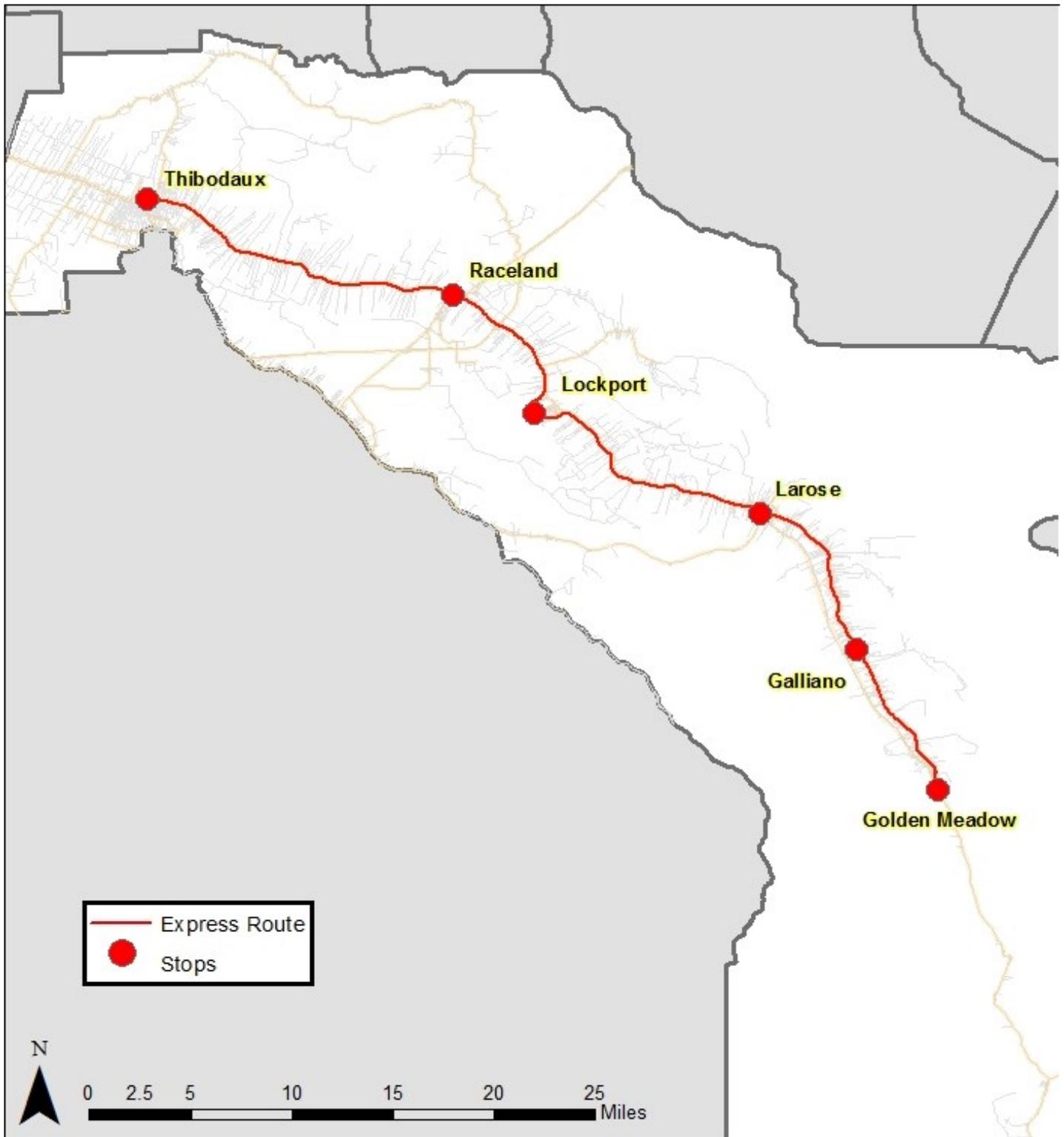
An ambitious goal established in the Lafourche Parish Resiliency Comprehensive Plan was the provision of daily service down Bayou Lafourche, connecting Thibodaux with Golden Meadow. The 100-mile length of the parish makes the provision of all-day service between Thibodaux and Golden Meadow cost prohibitive. However, a “commuter” or “express” shuttle offering limited service the length of parish may be workable and useful to residents.

To sketch out such service, it was assumed that a Thibodaux to Golden Meadow shuttle would run twice daily—one round trip in the morning, and one round trip in the evening. The bus would make stops only at key locations, allowing it to travel the length of the route relatively quickly.

A combination of daily express service, demand response vehicles, and the existing Good Earth transit network would allow Lafourche residents to experience significantly increased mobility within the parish and across the region.

Capital Outlay	
3 vans	\$120,000—150,000
85% State and Federal contribution	-\$102,000—127,000
15% Local match	\$18,000—19,000
Approx. Annual Operating	
Salary / Wages-Drivers	\$30,000
Salary / Wages-Mechanic	\$37,000
Fringe Benefits	\$30,000
Vehicle Insurance	\$18,000
Fuel and Oil	\$10,000
Maintenance & Repairs	\$500
Annual expenses	\$125,000
50% State and Federal contribution	-\$62,500
~ \$15,000 farebox revenue	-\$15,000
42% Local Match	\$47,500
Total First Year Estimated Costs	
\$66,500	

Figure 7.x



Thibodaux / Golden Meadow Daily Express

Approx. 53 miles one way

3. Service to Port Fourchon

With over 2,000 workers on site every day, Port Fourchon is a major trip attractor in Lafourche Parish. The port also drives much of the region’s economy. Providing public transit service to the facility, however, presents several unique challenges. Among these are the port’s distance from other parish activity hubs (71 miles from Thibodaux), offshore workers’ nonstandard schedules, and existing transportation to and from the port offered by multiple private providers.

Public transport to and from the port could be provided, however, especially with buy-in from area industry. Cooperation among the Port Commission, employers located at the port, and transit professionals could create a forum for planning and implementing the most effective service with optimal schedules, routes, stops, fares, etc.

Since the port is located within a rural area, any transit service originating there would qualify for 5311 Rural Transit funding. Section 5311 grants are Federal funds administered by the LADOTD and provide 85% of capital costs and 50% operating assistance. Employers located at the port may be willing to contribute to the local match, providing the service at little or no cost to the parish.

If transit service were to originate in an urbanized area such as Thibodaux or Houma, it may be funded through a 5307 Urban Area Formula transit grant. Because much of Lafourche parish is on the cusp between rural or “small urban,” the most appropriate funding source for a particular type of service may need to be clarified through a grant program manager with LADOTD.



Summary of Service Suggestions

1) Demand Response

- ◆ Near-term solution to transportation needs in Lafourche
- ◆ Can be turned into a regular, fixed-route service if demand exists
- ◆ Minimum 3 vehicles to start, providing roughly 40 trips per day
- ◆ Eligible for 5311 Rural funding
- ◆ \$18,000 local match for capital
- ◆ \$66,000 local match for operating

2) Daily service between Thibodaux and Golden Meadow

- ◆ Twice daily AM/PM shuttle service
- ◆ Stops only at key hubs along LA-1/308
- ◆ Fixed-route service which may only be eligible for 5307 urban area funding.
- ◆ \$18,000 local match for capital
- ◆ \$47,500 local match for operating

3) Port Fourchon

- ◆ First step should be discussions with port employers and the Port Commission to determine level of interest and specific needs
- ◆ Employers could contribute to the local match
- ◆ Eligible for 5311 rural funding

Chapter Eight

Options for Governance Structure

A major challenge in possible development of a parishwide transit system is the question of a potential institutional structure for implementing and administering such a system. This is often unfamiliar territory for largely rural communities, where transportation planning has historically focused on developing and expanding the local road network. However, growth, development, and resulting higher traffic volumes create a need to expand the range of transportation modes available within the community and to consider regional approaches.

A number of structural governance models have been used in establishing and administering transit policy and services. Possible organizational frameworks range from making the transit service a department of city or parish government to creating a full-fledged regional transit authority (RTA) with multi-jurisdictional powers. Other possible governance structures fall between these two. The “right” solution represents a combination of what is legally permissible, and balancing the priorities and financial capabilities of the entities that will provide the transit service. This section considers possible structures available to Lafourche Parish, its municipalities, and other potential partners.

Each structural approach is described in terms of:

- Representation/ composition of the policy board
- Powers and responsibilities--whether the entity would have the powers necessary to provide transit services, which generally consists of the ability to:
 - Construct, acquire, and operate transportation services and/or facilities;
 - Enter into contracts and agreements;
 - Apply for and receive grants of money, property, and loans;
 - Issue bonds;
 - Regulate fares and determine schedule and routes;
- Provide operating and capital funding for services operated by others;
- Acquire land through purchase, lease, gift, condemnation, or otherwise, either for its own use or on behalf of other agencies;
- Legal standing--whether the organization would be a legal entity in its own right or a subset of another entity;
- Eligibility for existing grants and funding--whether the organization would be eligible for available transit funding;
- New funding opportunities--whether the organization would be able to leverage additional funding;
- The steps required for implementation, if any.
- Examples of where and how the option is or has been used elsewhere in Louisiana.

Governance Options

Many different types of organizations, using a wide variety of governance structures, provide transit services throughout Louisiana and within Lafourche Parish. The most common of these include:

- Parish or city-operated systems that provide transit service as a departmental function governed by the parish or city council;
- Regional transportation or transit authorities that operate independently of the governments of the areas that they serve (although typically with board-level representation from those governments);
- Provision of service through intergovernmental agreements, where the agreements are approved by the governing boards of the participating parties.

In all areas, the available options are determined by state law and local policies. Louisiana law provides for five different options that could potentially be used within Lafourche Parish:

- Operation by social service organizations;
- Parish coordination;
- Parish-operated transit service;
- Regional Transit Authority (RTA);
- Provision of transit through intergovernmental agreement (IGA).

Status Quo

Lafourche Parish currently has an array of transit service providers, including the City of Thibodaux (under an agreement with Good Earth Transit), various social service organizations, and private businesses. Each of these entities develops and implements its own transportation service to meet identified needs of its target populations and its own capabilities. The tables below summarize the responsibilities and powers that accrue to different types of governance structures, the interests each represents, their levels of legal standing, and the advantages and disadvantages of each structure.

Lafourche Examples

Good Earth Transit (GET), in neighboring Terrebonne Parish, is operated as a function of the Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government. As noted above, GET has extended service into Thibodaux, under an agreement with city government.

Responsibilities and Powers to Develop and Operate Transit Service	Representation	Legal Standing-- Administrative Location	Implementation	Advantages	Disadvantages
Local governments have all powers needed to develop and operate transit.	Each entity represents its own interests.	Typically in Department of Public Works or established as a separate governmental department.	No specific actions required to maintain current conditions.	Each provider chooses its own service and management model based on their priorities and funding capacity..	No effective mechanism for addressing regional needs as population grows and communities become more intertwined.
Local governments can also provide transit service on behalf of other public and private entities. Services may be reimbursed or non-reimbursed.	Each entity is governed by its own policy boards--Parish or City Council.	Public entities are eligible for federal transit funding.			No platform for a transit “champion” to promote and drive transit needs in the context of a regional transportation system.
					Lack of coordination can result in fragmented service.
					Small systems with small operators can produce significant differences in service quality.
					As transit grows, different financial capabilities can lead to growing mismatch of services and regional demand.

Social Service Agency Providers

Responsibilities and Powers to Develop and Operate Transit Service	Representation	Legal Standing-- Administrative Location	Implementation	Advantages	Disadvantages
Agencies have most, but not all necessary powers.	Agencies represents their own interests.	Much existing transportation for elderly and disabled parish residents currently provided by private non-profit agencies.	No additional actions required to maintain current conditions.	Each agency chooses its own service and management model	Disadvantages are the same as those that apply to local government operators.
Cannot obtain land through eminent domain.	Agencies are governed by their boards of directors.	Major providers: Lafourche Council on Aging (COA) and Lafourche Association for Retarded Citizens.			
Not eligible for some types of transit funding, but eligible public entities may apply on agency's behalf.					

Hybrid/Cooperative Endeavor

In developing a public transit system, the Lafourche Parish Government could choose to take on certain responsibilities, while contracting, through a cooperative endeavor, with a third party to handle other responsibilities. In a possible division of labor, the parish would handle the operational, dispatch and maintenance side of transit management, while contracting the financial record keeping, and the reporting and grant management. It is important to have staff with expertise in these knowledge intensive areas in order to stay in good standing with the Federal Transit Administration, which provides the bulk of grant funding for both capital and operating expenses.

Parish Government would have the same responsibilities and powers, representation, and legal standing, as with the previously described parish-operated transit system. The table below adds information regarding the role of the third party, under a cooperative agreement.

Responsibilities and Powers to Develop and Operate Transit Service	Representation	Legal Standing-Administrative Location	Implementation	Advantages	Disadvantages
The third party has the responsibilities assigned by the parish under the Cooperative Agreement.	The third party acts on behalf of the parish, in line with policy established by the parish council and as established under the Cooperative Agreement.	The third party would handle administrative responsibilities at a separate location.	The third party would handle responsibilities as established in the Cooperative Agreement	The fledgling transit system would benefit from expertise in transit record keeping, reporting and grant management.	Distance of administration from operations could cause delays in flow of information on any problems and/or need for improvement.
		The third party would handle administrative and reporting duties to ensure compliance with grant and funding requirements.		Reduce cost and learning curve for the parish in meeting grant requirements .	

Parish-Operated Transit Service

Lafourche Parish, as a Louisiana local government, possesses all of the powers necessary to operate its own transit service, should it choose to do so. The initial decision on whether to provide transit service leads to another set of decisions on the extent of service to be provided. Possible options include making transit service available throughout the parish. Alternatively, local service could be offered in some designated areas or routes could be developed to fill in service gaps left by other providers.

Local Examples

The most prominent local example of a parish-run transit service is Good Earth Transit in neighboring Terrebonne Parish. Good Earth functions as a department within the Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government. The mission is to provide public transportation service to improve mobility and access to parish residents access in a variety of locations within the parish. As noted previously, Good Earth provides some service in Lafourche Parish, with a single, circular loop route serving locations in the City of Thibodaux and Nicholls State University campus. This service is provided under a contract between Good Earth and the City of Thibodaux. St. James Parish also operates a parishwide transit system, providing scheduled bus service to its residents on weekdays.

Responsibilities and Powers to Develop and Operate Transit Service	Representation	Legal Standing-- Administrative Location	Implementation	Advantages	Disadvantages
The parish has all the necessary powers to perform all transit-related functions.	The parish council would act as policy board for a parish transit service.	Parish transit service would be part of parish government, with the parish exercising all its existing powers to provide transit service.	The parish council would have to make a policy decision to implement transit service, then develop the capacity.	Maintaining a high level of local control.	This option provides for no regional body to set regional transit policy.
The parish could also choose to provide transit service on behalf of other public and private entities.	Other transit providers would represent their own interests and have their own policies set by their boards of directors.	The parish is an eligible recipient for all transit grants.	The parish council would also need to decide the extent and limits of service --only to residents of unincorporated areas the parish administers, regional routes, on behalf of other agencies.	A parish-operated system would provide a mechanism for developing new and additional transit services and routes.	Providing local or targeted services raises issues regarding who should provide and who should pay for the service.
Possible local or targeted services could include transit for the parish's population centers, Indian communities, and/ or social service agencies.	No regional body to address regional issues.			Opportunities for expansion could increase if the parish provides transit service on behalf of other public and private entities.	Shared responsibility could lead mismatch of service and demand.
Services to other public and private entities could be reimbursed or non-reimbursed.					

Regional Transportation Authority

Regional Transportation Authorities (RTAs) provide a structure for regional collaboration. RTA functions include identifying regional needs, weighing and balancing the relative merits of different transportation modes, setting priorities, and budgeting and programming to fund and implement programs and projects. [cite Louisiana statute regarding formation of RTAs requires an RTA to develop a 20-year Regional Transportation Plan that describes proposed transportation elements and projects, funding, and implementation schedules.

RTAs are established for the purpose of leading and coordinating all regional transportation planning and development efforts. Powers and responsibilities extend far beyond providing transit services. Specific roles and responsibilities of RTAs include:

- Driving local and regional transportation policy making;
- Developing and implementing a comprehensive regional transportation program that includes the full range of transportation modes from roads, transit, and human services transportation, to ride sharing, walking, and biking;
- Establishing a program of projects to be implemented;
- Ensuring appropriate financial contributions from all involved parties;
- Developing financial plans to fund and implement projects;
- Fostering collaboration among local governments (the parish, the municipalities);
- Providing appropriate representation to important stakeholders.

Louisiana Examples

Baton Rouge has developed the Capital Area Transit System (CATS) and New Orleans has developed the New Orleans Transit Authority (NORTA). Both are RTAs which lead their respective area's transit activities. While Baton Rouge handles direct administration of CATS, New Orleans has contracted day-to-day operations of its RTA to TransDev, a private entity. RPTA in the River Parishes (St. Charles, St. James, St. John the Baptist) is a regional rural transit authority, which has contracted day to day operations to Viola, a private entity.

Responsibilities and Powers to Develop and Operate Transit Service	Representation	Legal Standing-- Administrative Location	Implementation	Advantages	Disadvantages
RTAs have bonding authority to help finance projects.	Membership includes representatives of all of jurisdictions where the RTA provides service.	An RTA is an independent authority, with powers provided by Louisiana statute.	State enabling legislation required to establish a specific RTA.	Strong focus on developing a balanced regional transit system.	Required 20-year RTA transportation plan may limit autonomy and flexibility of individual providers.
While RTAs do not have eminent domain powers, local governments can exercise such powers on an RTA's behalf.	Governing board comprised of a representative from each jurisdiction where the RTA provides service.	RTAs are eligible for all federal transit-related grants.	Major issue: whether local governments are willing to transfer control of most transportation decision making and funding to an RTA.	Mechanism for regional public-private collaboration on transportation issues.	Regional focus has potential to reduce local control of transportation planning.
An RTA can construct and acquire facilities and equipment.				Opportunities to develop a "seamless" regional transportation system.	Potential to reduce level of transportation funding directly available to local governments.
An RTA can provide local governments with funding for roadways, bike paths, and pedestrian facilities, then construct and subsequently maintain the facilities.				Expanded funding potential for transit and other alternative transportation modes.	
An RTA can directly operate or contract for the operation of transit service.					
An RTA can also acquire existing transit systems.					

Appendix A

Transit Funding Options:

This section provides a short summary of transit funding options. All funding programs include limiting factors in terms of what they will fund and More detailed discussion can be found in Appendix 1: Existing Transit Funding Source.

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5307 Urban Area Funds

Section 5307 provides funding for transit capital investments and operating expenses, as well as some funding for transportation planning.

Funds	Federal Match	Eligibility	Population	Eligible Areas in Lafourche Parish
Bus replacement, overhaul, rebuilding; passenger facility construction and maintenance.	Up to 80% for capital expenses. Up to 50% of operating Expenses.	Urbanized Areas designated by U.S. Census Bureau.	200,000 or more –funds flow directly to the designated recipient.	City of Thibodaux
			Under 200,000—funds allotted to Governor, distributed by LA DOTD Multimodal Planning Division.	Some areas along LA 1/308, including Raceland, Mathews, and Lockport.
				No other areas of the parish are eligible.

FTA 5309 Transit Capital Investment Program

This part of Section 5309 provides capital assistance for buses and bus facilities, as well rail and fixed guide way systems.

Funds	Federal Match	Eligibility	Population	Eligible Areas in Lafourche Parish
Buses and bus facilities; Modernizing Rail and fixed guide way systems; new fixed guide way systems.	Up to 80% of total project costs.	Funds previously allocated by Congressional earmarks.	N/A	N/A
		Funding affected by reduced use of Congressional earmarks.		

FTA Section 5309 Buses and Bus-Related Equipment and Facilities

If Lafourche Parish decides to provide expanded transit services, Section 5309 could be used to develop the system.

Funds	Eligibility	Population	Eligible Areas in Lafourche Parish
Purchase of buses for fleet and service expansion.	Funds have previously been allocated by Congressional earmarks.	N/A	N/A
Bus replacement rebuilding, preventive maintenance.	Securing earmark would require strong political support.		
Bus maintenance and administrative facilities.			
Transfer facilities, bus malls, intermodal terminals, park-and-ride stations.	Requires successful completion in major capital investment planning and project development process.		
Passenger amenities like shelters and bus stop signs.			
Also communication equipment.			

FTA Section 5309 New Starts

Section 5309 funds new or extended rail projects. rapid rail, commuter rail, monorail, or fixed guideway systems like people movers or busway/high occupancy vehicle (HOV) facilities. The Very Small Starts sub-section funds bus, rail or ferry projects.

Funds	Eligibility/Federal Match	Eligible Areas in Lafourche Parish
New light rail, rapid rail, commuter rail, monorail or automated fixed guideway systems like people movers or busway/high occupancy vehicle (HOV) facilities.	Small Starts: Total project cost of \$250 million or more, with funding request no greater than \$75 million.	None of the bus transit projects proposed for Lafourche Parish would qualify for New Starts funding.
	Very Small Starts: Total project cost less than \$50 million and less than \$3 million per mile (excluding vehicles)	None of the bus transit projects proposed for Lafourche Parish would qualify for Very Small Starts funding.

FTA Section 5310 Elderly and Persons with Disabilities Transportation Program

Section 5310 provides funding to public and non-profit agencies that provide transportation services to the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Funds	Federal Match	Eligibility	In Lafourche Parish
Capital expenses, primarily for vehicles.	Up to 90% of capital expenses.	Eligible recipients are private non-profit agencies and governmental agencies where there are no non-profit organizations currently providing transportation services to the target populations.	Section 5310 currently funds several transportation programs in Lafourche Parish.
Mobility Management awards to qualified agencies serving predominantly older adults and person with disabilities.		Funds are apportioned based on each state’s share of the nation’s qualify populations.	Section 5310 will continue to be an important source of funding of transportation services for older residents and those with disabilities.
		LA DOTD’s Multimodal Division administers Section 5310 and makes funding decisions with MPOs and social service transportation professionals.	

FTA Section 5311 Rural and Small Urban Areas

Section 5311 provides formula funding to states for the purpose of supporting public transportation in areas with fewer than 50,000 residents. In south Louisiana, St.James Parish, with a population slightly over 20,000, received Section 4311 grants annually for capital and operating expenses of its parish wide transit system.

Funds	Federal Match	Eligibility	Population	In Lafourche Parish
Capital, operating, and administrative assistance to state agencies, local public bodies, Indian tribes, and non-profit organizations.	Maximum of 50% of net operating costs.	Funded through apportionment to State Governor, based on non-urban population and land area.	Under 50,000.	Parish population is above the eligibility threshold.
Also provides capital, operating and administrative funding to public and private transportation service operators.	State must use 15% of its annual allocation to support intercity bus service.			City of Thibodaux is within the population threshold.
	Projects to meet ADA, Clean Air Act or bicycle access may receive 90% funding.			

FHWA Surface Transportation Program (STP) Funds

The Surface Transportation Program is a “flexible funding” source that allows states to shift highway funds to transit uses. Once flexed, the funds are administered in the same manner as other FTA funds. LA DOTD generally allocated transit funds for capital uses such as purchase of vehicles and development of transit facilities.

Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Funds (CMAQ)

Funds	Federal Match	Eligibility	
Wide variety of transit uses, including improvements to public transit, high occupancy vehicle (HOV) facilities, employee trip reduction (ETR) programs, traffic flow improvements.	Up to 88.5% of cost for capital purchases.	Areas in non-attainment with federal ozone and carbon dioxide standards. oxide levels in	
Also bicycle and pedestrian facilities, park-and-ride facilities, and programs to restrict vehicle use.		Funds distributed based on area population and severity of ozone and carbon mon	
Can also help start new services like transit, providing operating assistance for up to three years.			

Appendix B



Transit study launches in Lafourche

Posted: Nov 10, 2014 5:28 AM CST
Updated: Nov 10, 2014 5:28 AM CST

The South Central Planning and Development Commission is seeking input on the future of public transit in Lafourche Parish.

The Daily Comet reports the group has launched a transit feasibility study on needs in communities throughout the coastal parish.

Officials say the findings will be presented to parish officials in 2015.

Lafourche residents can share their thoughts online at <http://scpdc.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=365c12ac787d0e01ffbe2b736&id=73f0e5bc03&e=e0ab8c9f67The>.



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#), or use the "Reprints" tool that appears above any article. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

Survey examines Lafourche transportation needs

By [Aaren Gordon](#)

Staff Writer

Published: Saturday, November 29, 2014 at 6:01 a.m.

Continued economic growth in Lafourche Parish is the impetus behind a transportation study that's expected to be completed in early 2015.

"Lafourche Parish is growing, the economy is strong, and unemployment is very low. In order to keep the parish humming, it's imperative that folks can get where they need to go, including those who do not have regular access to an automobile — that's where public transit comes in," said planner Adam Tatar of the South Central Planning and Development Commission, which is conducting the study.

Tatar said parish transit service consists of a bus loop in Thibodaux and bus service into Terrebonne Parish and Houma.

"Many folks believe this is an insufficient level of public transportation service for the parish," he said.

Tatar said the study will identify how public transportation can meet unmet needs.

"We do this by looking at census data and demographics, conducting surveys, talking with citizens, meeting with community leaders and consulting with other professionals and government agencies," he said.

Jeff Leuenberger, Lafourche Parish senior planner, said transit needs to improve to accommodate the jobs being created in southern Lafourche.

The parish's 4 percent unemployment rate is lower than the state and national rates, and that needs to continue, he said.

"With our low unemployment rate and high employment opportunities in the southern portion of the parish, we see transportation as a crucial part in maintaining our parish's economic growth," he said.

Employers have said transportation access is one of their main workforce needs, Leuenberger said.

"We have a large separation between employment centers in the south with housing in the north," he said. "Thus, the parish wants to ensure we are providing all infrastructure needed to access jobs."

More than 35 percent of Lafourche residents have one vehicle per household and 20 percent of the parish's workforce comes from outside of the region, such as Baton Rouge and New Orleans, Leuenberger noted.

A typical transit study determines where trips originate and depart in the parish, and which of these trips would be improved by transit access.

This transit study will be different because various employers provide options such as van pools, rental cars or ride-sharing, Leuenberger said,

“The transit study will look at where these types of trips overlap and duplicate. If we can consolidate those trips into a comprehensive transit system it would reduce that replication, allowing for cheaper and more broad access by both employers and employees. Once those statistics are framed, the study will look at various options the parish could consider at the lowest cost,” he said.

Younger workers are also looking for multiple transportation options when they move to a new place.

“More college universities and cities are providing a comprehensive transit system. So when young graduates are looking to relocate they are used to using a transit system and want to continue doing so,” he said.

Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure with paths connecting to communities can be important, he said.

Multiple forms of transit can also benefit visitors who want to explore the Cajun culture, swamps or the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, he added.

Exploring how to better use the Amtrak service and looking into regional bus service are other possibilities, he said.

Tatar said the commission’s recommendations will be presented early next year for the parish’s consideration.

To participate in the survey, visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/D2YCSL7>.

Staff Writer Aaren Gordon can be reached at 857-2209 or aaren.gordon@houmatoday.com.

Copyright © 2014 DailyComet.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.



Home ▸ News

Laf. studying public transit

Story **Comments**

Share Print Font Size: - +



RICHARD FISCHER | THE TIMES

Public transit

A Terrebonne Parish public bus makes its way through Downtown Houma on the North Bayou Route. A study is currently being conducted to see if a similar public transit system would be feasible in Lafourche Parish.

[Buy this photo](#)

Posted: Tuesday, November 18, 2014 12:13 pm | Updated: 12:31 pm, Wed Nov 26, 2014.

By RICHARD FISCHER Staff Writer

With the help of the South Central Planning and Development Commission, Lafourche has taken the next step toward the possibility of a parish-wide public transportation system.

Last October, the parish commissioned SCDPC to apply for grant money on behalf of the parish in order to perform a transit feasibility study. The study is now underway.

"The parish is growing. Our neighboring parishes Terrebonne and St. Charles are bringing [public transportation] forth. It's something that the people of this parish need and deserve," said the councilman who brought the resolution to the table, L. Phillip Gouaux.

SCDPC received \$120,000 from the federal government, requiring a 20 percent local match, so Lafourche contributed \$30,000 to the \$150,000 study.

The objective of the study is to gather data and determine if parish-wide public transportation is feasible, and if so, which types of transportation would meet the needs of the residents best.

"The goal of the study that we're doing right now is just to look at that possibility and just make some suggestions back to the parish," SCDPC Transportation Planner Adam Tatar said. "The study is basically going to look at demographics of Lafourche Parish. Where do folks live? Where do they work? Who owns a car and who doesn't? Who bikes to work? Who rides the bus to work? We're going to look at all of this stuff and kind of see where there might be an unmet transportation need and then we're going to try and brainstorm on some different transit-based solutions that may help address that need."

Tatar said there is no solution already in mind to the totally open-ended question of how would public transportation work in the parish, if at all.

"We're going to look at what the need is and we're going to ask how do we meet this need? Really every option is on the table. We're just looking to see where is the need, what is it and what kind of additional transit service will meet that need," Tatar explained.

Because of the elongated and often sparsely populated nature of Lafourche Parish, lots of ideas are on the table.

0
 Tweet
 0
 Like

Submit Your News!



We're always interested in hearing about news in our community. Let us know what's going on!

[Submit news](#)



Calendar

February 2015						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
today's events		browse			submit	

Popular **Commented** Facebook Activity

Stories

- ▶ [A walk to remember](#)
- ▶ [Local school among 6 in state nominated for national award](#)
- ▶ [St. Matthew's names NOLA principal new headmaster](#)
- ▶ [Friends, family remember Montegut man killed by drunk driver](#)

[More](#)

Photos

Videos

"The rural nature of Lafourche Parish definitely makes transit a challenge. There are people there. There's a need for transportation, but the landscape there definitely poses challenges," Tatar said. "It will require a little bit of creative problem solving on our end. There's not going to be stops every two blocks like you see in New Orleans. That doesn't make any sense in a place like Lafourche Parish, but there still is a transportation need. There are folks without cars who have jobs to get to, so it's going to be working within the constraints of the landscape."

Possible options include but aren't limited to carpool services like van pooling and paratransit and the extension of the Good Earth bus route in Thibodaux – an expansion of Terrebonne Parish Consolidated Government's transportation system into Thibodaux by way of a cooperative endeavor.

There are four other bus routes as part of the Good Earth Transit, three of which stay completely within Terrebonne Parish. The other connects Houma to Nicholls State University.

"I think it's a great service. I wouldn't hesitate to implement it as a public service. I think it does a great good for the community," said TPCG Public Transit Administrator Philip Liner in regard to the possibility of a similar system in Lafourche. "It gives people who would otherwise have to find a ride or call a taxi, it gives people an alternative to get where they need to go through the day and get their tasks accomplished."

Good Earth has been transporting residents since 1997, and Liner said it averages 3,000 to 3,500 riders per week.

Good Earth is funded mostly by the federal government through Federal Transportation Administration funds – something Lafourche would have the ability to take advantage of also. Liner said some capitol projects are 100 percent funded by FTA funds, while others require a 20 percent local match. Operational costs are split 50-50, he said.

Soon-to-come improvements to the Good Earth Transit system include a ridership information system, which would provide real time statistics on how many people are riding and where they are getting on and off as well as a smart phone app, which would pinpoint the location of busses for residents. Visit http://www.tpcg.org/index.php?f=public_transit for more information on the public transportation system TPCG provides.

As for Lafourche, the possibility for a transit system is still in its infancy, but SCDPC invites residents to help it grow by participating in an online survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/D2YCSL7.

Additionally, SCDPC is reaching out to business leaders, the chamber of commerce and the local institutions of higher learning to gather as much information as possible.

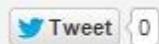
"The more input we get the merrier. It just makes the study that much more robust," Tatar said.

Tatar hopes to have a report with recommendations presented to the parish in early 2015. From there, the parish will decide if or how to move forward with public transportation.

"I think it would be great to have a parish-wide transit system for the simple reason the central part of the parish has never been afforded that option, and it's just something that I think would benefit the parish having something like that," said Lafourche Parish councilman Joseph Fertitta.

Lafourche Parish Transit Survey

You are here: [Home](#) » [Home Page](#) » Lafourche Parish Transit Survey



November 10, 2014

[Home Page](#), [Lafourche Parish](#), [Metropolitan Planning Organization](#) [Comments Off](#)

The remarkable growth in Lafourche Parish may be creating an opportunity for new or expanded public transit service. Transit allows citizens who do not have access to a car to travel to work, school, and other daily needs, while relieving traffic congestion and easing air pollution.

South Central Planning and Development Commission is currently performing a "Transit Feasibility Study" to better understand what transit improvements might benefit the communities of Lafourche Parish.

Your voice matters!

Please follow the link below to share your thoughts about public transit service – every opinion is important, and will help to inform this study. The final report will be presented to the Parish in early 2015.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/D2YCSL7>

