

## 8. Study Recommendations

The Regional Transit Study has identified unmet needs in the region. **Chapter 7** summarized the significant transit needs identified. This chapter will identify key geographic areas of concern. It will also recommend next steps the region should take in addressing the geographic areas with greatest need as well as other top issues.

### 8.1 Areas of Concern

#### *i. Geographic Areas of Concern*

The study identified specific geographic areas in which the lack of transit, poor regional transit connectivity, or the level of service are of particular concern. These include:

- areas and locations that were identified by members of the public who provided input to the study;
- major regional destinations and attractions that are located outside the TARTA service area and thus are not connected to a regional transit network; and
- areas with higher densities of employment and population, or with high concentrations of older and younger residents, who are not served or underserved by transit.

#### **Major Destinations and Attractions Outside the Study Area**

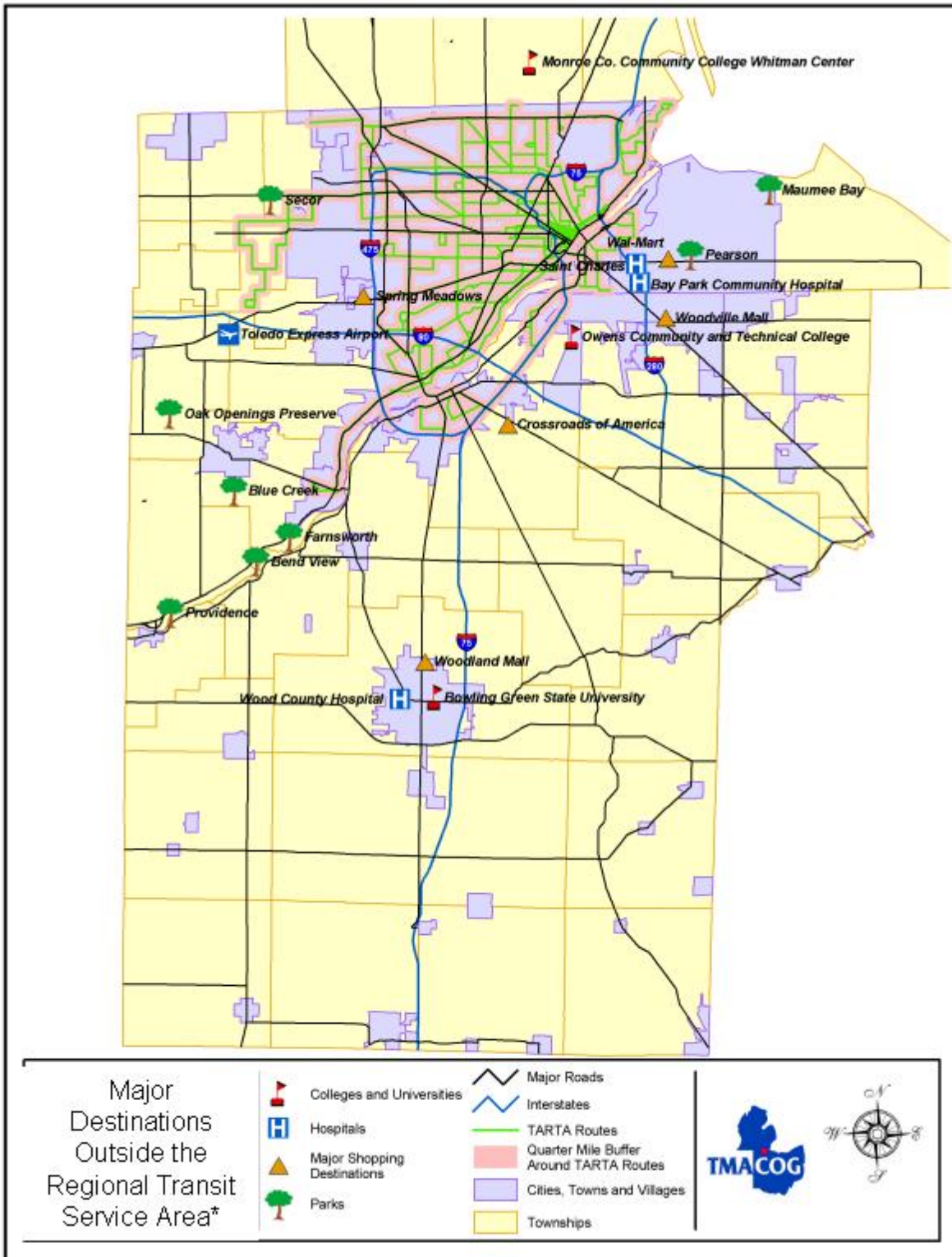
The map in **Figure 8-1** identifies a sampling of major regional attractions that are not served by the regional transit network. These attractions are inaccessible to those who depend on or prefer to use transit, including disabled, elderly and young people. As the figure shows, three of the region's major hospitals (St. Charles, Bay Park, and Wood County Hospital), several regional shopping centers and the Wal-Mart on Navarre Avenue, numerous parks, and the region's two major community colleges (Owens Community College and the Whitman Center campus of Monroe County Community College) lie outside the service area of TARTA, which is the only regional transit network. Owens Community College is currently served by TARTA through special arrangements between TARTA and the college, which include a subsidy of the TARTA service by the college. Toledo Express Airport is currently served by TARTA bus service on a trial basis.

#### **Top Destinations Desired by the Public**

Members of the public were asked to identify locations where they would like to go by bus but were inaccessible to them. Responses were gathered on the informational survey, which was distributed widely in the region. The survey was available on all area bus services, distributed by participating agencies and governments, and provided at public meetings and at the public outreach events. The survey also was available on the Internet and in local newspapers (the *Toledo Blade* and the *Toledo Journal*).

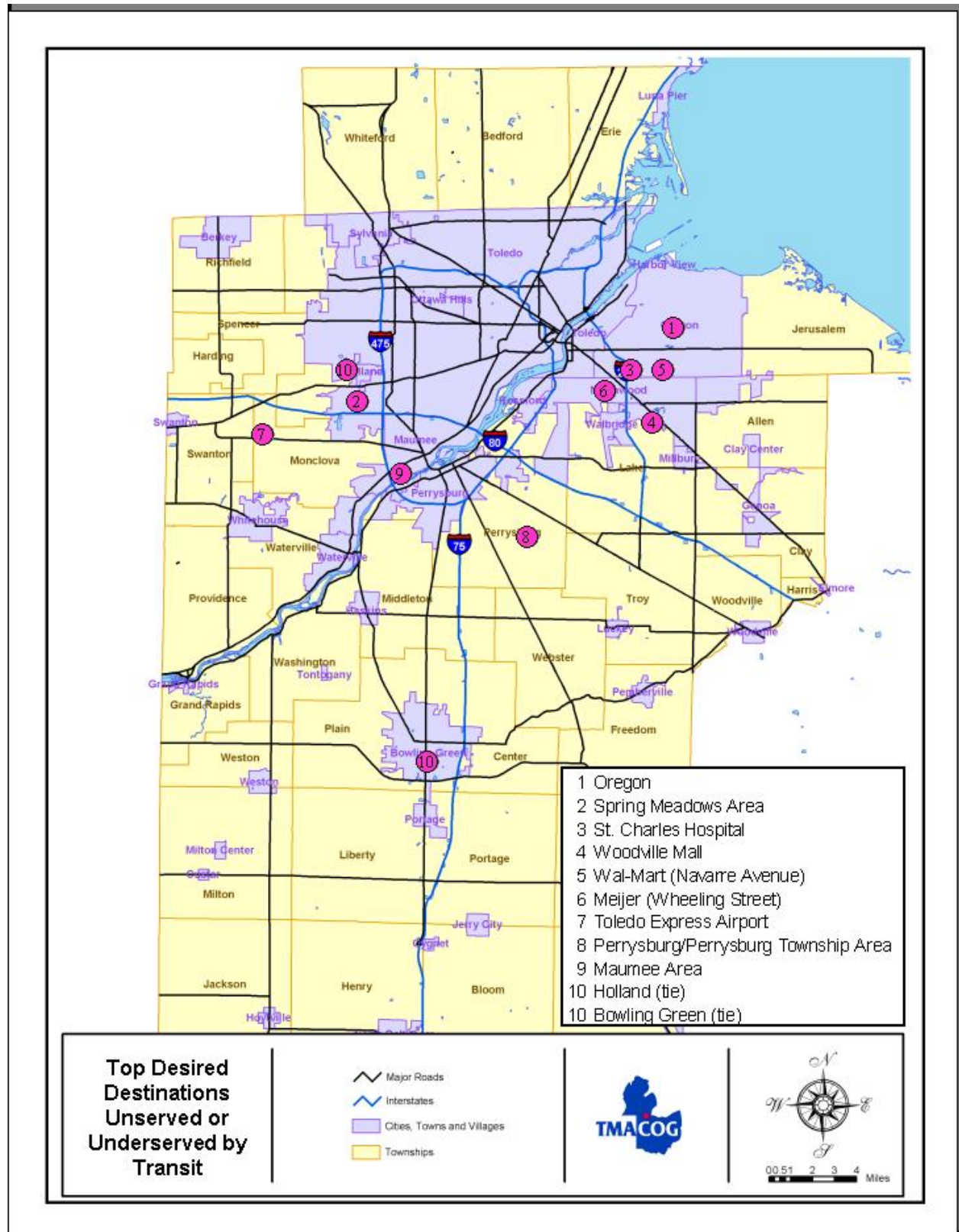
Verbal comments on desired destinations were received at the public meetings, at focus groups, and in stakeholder interviews. Additional comments were received by e-mail and voice mail. All these sources represent an unscientific survey but a strong indication of the needs and desires of current and potential transit users in the region, and thus represent potential areas of concern for development of future transit services.

**Figure 8-1: Major Destinations Outside the Regional Transit Service Area\***



\*The TARTA network, which represents the region's only large-scale, regional transit network

**Figure 8-2: Top Desired Destinations Unserved or Underserved by Transit**



From all these sources, more than 400 responses citing nearly 100 desired destinations were received. The top locations identified are shown in the map in **Figure 8-2**. The top locations are:

1. Oregon
2. Spring Meadows and surrounding area
3. St. Charles Mercy Hospital
4. Woodville Mall
5. Wal-Mart on Navarre Avenue
6. Meijer on Wheeling Street (at Woodville Road)
7. Toledo Express Airport
8. Perrysburg/Perrysburg Township area
9. Maumee area
10. Holland (tie)
10. Bowling Green (tie)

The City of Oregon located east of Toledo and outside the TARTA service area, was by far the most frequently cited location. More than 60 responses identified Oregon generally as a desired destination, and three specific locations within Oregon (St. Charles Mercy Hospital, Wal-Mart on Navarre Avenue, and the Meijer discount retail store on Wheeling Street) also were among the locations most frequently cited. Of the more than 400 responses received, about 100 identified Oregon or specific businesses or locations in Oregon as desired destinations that cannot be reached using public transit. Woodville Mall, located in Northwood, just south of Oregon, was also among the most frequently cited locations.

Spring Meadows Mall, Toledo Express Airport and locations along Airport Highway west of Toledo were also frequently cited. (Most of the comments were received before TARTA's trial service to Toledo Express Airport was implemented.) Several locations that are within TARTA's service area, including Perrysburg, Maumee and Sylvania, were cited as locations to which they would like to travel using transit. This may indicate that some respondents lived outside the transit service area. It may also mean that the public is not aware that bus service is available to these locations, or that the existing service does not operate at the required times or is otherwise insufficient for the respondent's trip purposes.

### **Demographic Areas of Concern**

As noted in **Chapter 7**, many areas of the TMACOG region with a high density of population or employment, and large concentrations of elderly and young people, are not served by transit. Such areas are potentially strong transit markets, where citizens would utilize public transit if available. These areas also represent a regional concern both in terms of the opportunity lost for shifting automobile trips to public transportation, and because they represent potentially isolated populations.

**Figure 8-3** shows areas where these types of concerns exist. There are significant concentrations of elderly and youth populations outside the transit service area who are more likely than other age groups to rely on public transportation for their mobility needs. Likewise, there are large areas with transit-supportive densities of population and employment, and large concentrations of employment, that lie outside the transit service area.

The many overlaps indicate that a number of these areas have concentrations of employment and population and higher than average concentrations of younger and older residents. These areas of overlap represent areas of significant transit need and potential transit demand, and in many cases coincide with the locations identified in **Figures 8-1** and **8-2**. The maps shown in **Chapter 4** of this report provide further background on the demographic areas of concern in the region.

### **Time of Day Areas of Concern**

As noted in **Chapter 7**, lack of evening and weekend service on some routes, and lack of night service throughout the area, prevents many people from using transit for work trips. The map shown in **Figure 8-4** shows the portion of the TMACOG region that is served by transit service that runs past 8 p.m. Areas outside the green shaded area—in spatial terms, most of the TMACOG region—have no transit service after the 8 p.m. hour. These areas not served after 8 p.m. include many employment locations, including shopping centers and retail stores, restaurants, hotels, hospitals, warehouses, factories, and other establishments where employees work shifts or routinely work past 9 p.m. Many of these establishments are nominally within the TARTA service area. However, due to lack of evening, night and weekend services, such areas, and the jobs in them, are practically inaccessible to those who rely on transit for their transportation needs.

#### *ii. Populations of Concern*

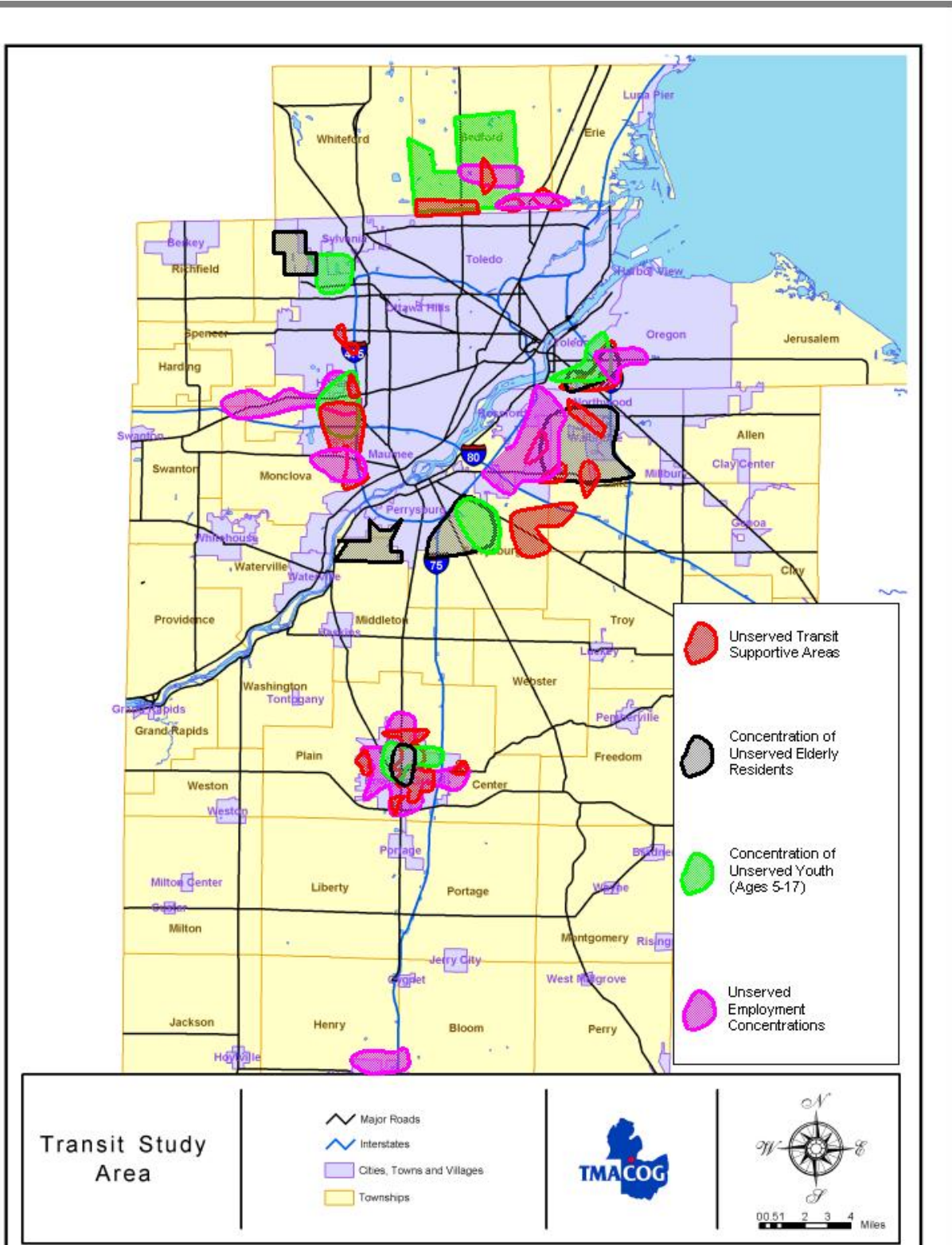
In addition to geographic areas, the lack of universal availability of high quality transit service throughout the region has an undue impact on a number of vulnerable populations. As noted in the section above, many areas of the region with high concentrations of elderly and young people are not served by transit at all, or not connected to the TARTA regional transit network. Disabled persons, who are the most likely of all groups to depend on public transportation, have few mobility options if they live in the 90% of the region that is not served by TARTA. New workers are discouraged from participating in the workforce by lack of transit service to major employment centers and by lack of evening, night, and weekend service. They are also hampered by infrequent service to parts of the service area, by lack of connection between transit systems, and by long travel times for trips between distant portions of the transit service area.

#### *iii. Other Concerns*

The regional transit study identified a number of additional issues regarding the transit system that, based on the number of comments received, might need to be addressed:

- A need for more direct service between non-downtown destinations (the need to explore route patterns that do not require transfers in downtown Toledo).
- The need for training of transit drivers to be more friendly and helpful to passengers, particularly disabled passengers.

**Figure 8-3: Demographic Areas of Concern**



- The need for improved bus stops, shelters, sidewalks, crosswalks, and other pedestrian infrastructure to support transit use and particularly to help disabled and elderly transit users.
- Funding to maintain and expand transit service in the TMACOG area.

## 8.2 Strategies for Addressing Unmet Needs

Addressing the highest priority transit needs in the community will require a variety of strategies at the regional, sub-regional, and local levels. Among the strategies that potentially could be considered in a regional transit strategic initiative are reorganization of the existing transit system or systems, additional services or changes to existing services, and changing to funding and governance structures.

### *i. System Reorganization*

TARTA, the region's main transit system, is organized as a collection of local communities that opted in to the system beginning in the 1970s. Other services are operated by individual local communities or by the universities. Most other transit providers in Ohio, and throughout the country, are organized on a single or multiple countywide basis. Countywide organization removes constraints such as those that prevent service to growing suburban employment and residential areas. Strategies could include using an existing transit provider or developing a new countywide or multi-county entity to provide public transit service throughout the region.

### *ii. Additions or Changes to Existing Services*

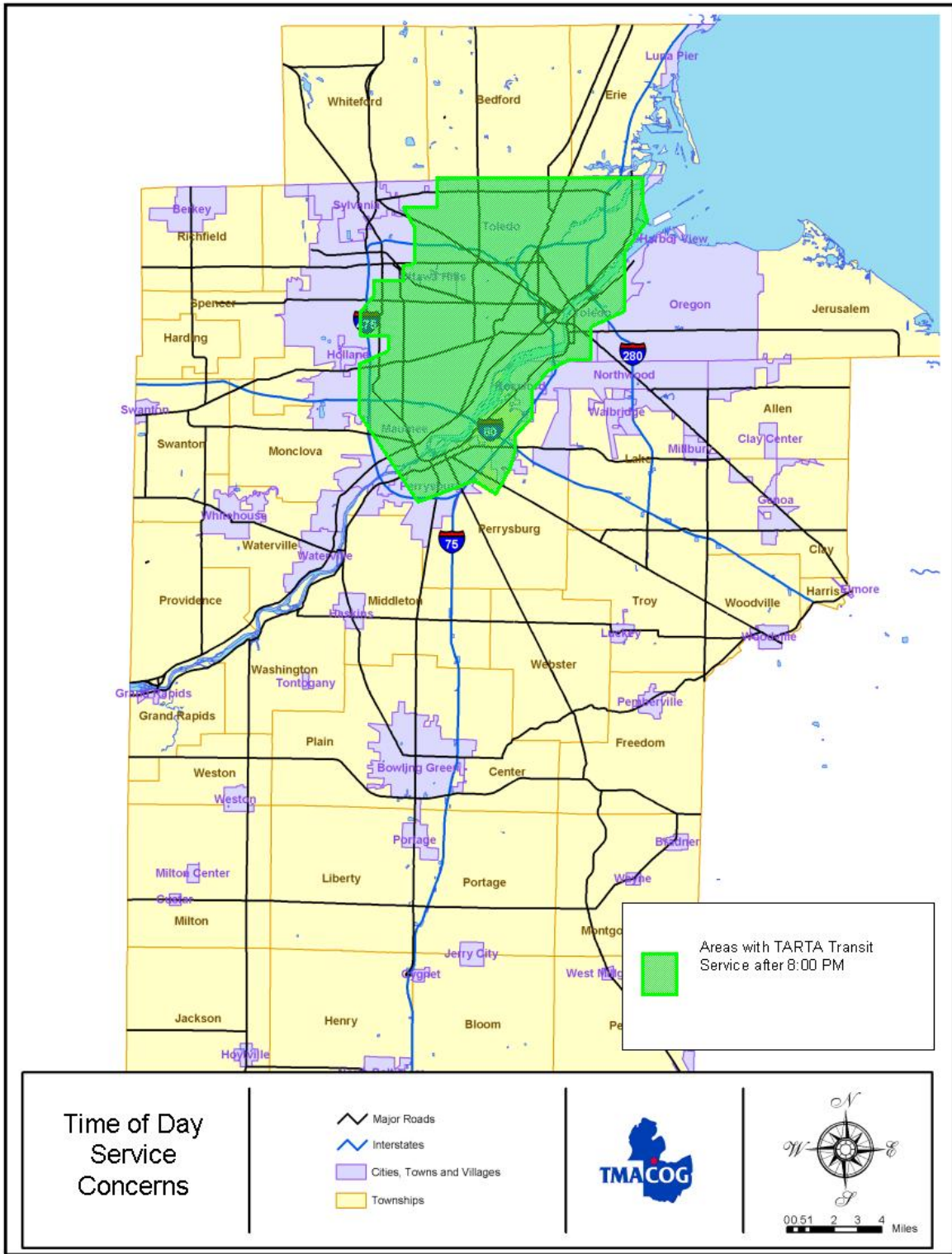
Changes that are less extensive than system reorganization that might occur include extension of existing services, development of new services, or development of new service approaches.

### **Service Area Additions**

Transit services may be needed to some extent in every part of the TMACOG region. However, the areas of concern maps in this chapter (**Figures 8-1, 8-2, and 8-3**) provide a basis to prioritize areas for new service. These include areas of high employment and population, and areas with concentrations of highly transit-dependent populations. Regional priorities and local political support will also drive additions to the service area. Perhaps the most obvious strategy for providing transit service to most of these areas is for voters to approve their communities joining TARTA under the existing arrangement. However, other potential strategies exist. These include:

- the purchase of service from TARTA by individual communities or groups of communities;
- direct provision of transit service by one or more communities, either by contracting service to a private bus operator or by developing a public bus system to provide service within their communities and connections to other parts of the region; or
- the development of private, not-for-profit entities (transportation management associations) to provide transit and other transportation services in one or more communities, perhaps on a travel corridor basis or to serve a specific employment area.

**Figure 8-4: Time of Day Areas of Concern**



**System Restructuring**

Addressing comments raised by the public relating to directness of service and the need for direct, no-transfer service between areas outside of downtown, would require an examination of the existing TARTA transit system and possible restructuring of the system. Restructuring options could include overlays of new cross-town bus routes on the existing radial system, or development of regional hubs to provide more service to suburban areas. Restructuring will be essential if the TARTA system is significantly expanded or if countywide or multi-county service is the selected strategy for addressing the region's transit needs.

### **Improved Inter-connectivity Among Existing Services**

Two areas in the region, Bedford Township and Bowling Green, provide transit service in their communities independent of TARTA. Bedford Township's system is relatively modest, providing infrequent dial-a-ride service during daytime hours and a twice-daily connection to the TARTA system. Bowling Green's system provides on-demand dial-a-ride service but provides no connection to the regional transit network. Upgrading those systems to provide, where warranted, fixed-route bus service and full ADA paratransit service, while maintaining their independence from TARTA, is one strategy for improving transit service to those areas. These services could be further enhanced by new or more frequent direct connections to the TARTA bus network. These would allow travelers from those areas to travel to most of the major destinations in the region while avoiding the political and funding issues related to these communities joining TARTA.

### **Time of Day Related Improvements**

More frequent service, and extended service hours later in the evening and on weekends, would improve transit's ability to provide for personal mobility, especially travel to employment. These increases in service – whether in the TARTA, Bedford Township, or Bowling Green systems – would require increased funding. Options for increasing funding are discussed below.

#### *iii. Funding Changes*

TARTA, the region's main transit system, is organized as a collection of local communities that opted to pay a local real estate tax to provide subsidies to the system. The other transit systems in the region are supported by local funds limited to a single community (in the case of the Bedford Dial-a-Ride); by a combination of local and state support (in the case of Bowling Green Transit) or in the case of the campus bus service, supported by student fees, tuition, and state educational funding.

Both the organization and funding of TARTA and the other systems are unusual in the context of Ohio and most other U.S. urban areas. In most areas of Ohio (and in many areas in the U.S.), transit agencies are organized to serve entire counties and are supported by a county sales tax.

Any changes in our region's transit may require changes in funding levels and approaches. Various options to consider include major funding restructuring and minor changes to the existing system of funding. Some of these approaches are discussed below. This list is not exhaustive. Additional innovative strategies can be developed to address the specific needs of our region.

- Were transit to be restructured in order to provide service coverage throughout the areas where it is most needed, different funding organization would be required. This might resemble the funding approach used in most of communities, that is, a countywide or multi-county funding base.
- Incrementally expanding transit to additional suburban communities, especially those identified as areas of concern, could be accomplished under the existing opt-in system (voters in those areas approving a property tax).
- Specific organizations, communities or businesses that would benefit from new transit service could, in the manner used by Owens Community College, directly subsidize new transit services to their locations.
- Direct operation of transit service or contract purchase of transit service from a private vendor is another option for local communities or businesses interested in providing transit.
- Increasing service frequency, time-of-day coverage, or cross-town route service, would make providing transit service more costly both in areas now served by transit and in new areas. Funding these service improvements most likely would require an increase in the funding base. Voters could approve an increase in the transit levy, or switch to a regional sales tax-based funding system, or add a sales tax over and above the existing or increased property tax.
- Improved service could be prioritized on a corridor-by-corridor and route-by-route basis, and innovative funding strategies could be explored. For example, local businesses in the past have subsidized additional TARTA bus trips to serve workers whose shifts end later than buses operate. A business or consortium of businesses in a given corridor could create a transportation management association (TMA) to subsidize transit service to an area, such as in the Spring Meadows or Arrowhead Park areas, for geographic coverage or to provide services for their workers during non-transit hours.
- Similarly, governmental agencies and not-for-profit groups serving the newly employed, disabled, or other groups, could provide funding to increase the service frequency or service hours of bus routes in certain key corridors, to provide connections to jobs or other important attractions in those corridors.
- Combining services, such as public transit agencies assuming responsibility for transporting university students or social service agency clients, could also expand the funding base and increase economies of scale, resulting in cost savings.

#### *iv. Other Strategies*

In today's transit climate, there is increasing willingness to look at nontraditional approaches to providing transportation. Integrated paratransit services, system-wide dial-a-ride service, and new technologies are a few of the current innovations the region can consider:

- Providing high quality (door-to-door) paratransit service for the disabled was one of the higher priority items for the public and members of the Regional Transit Study committee. Establishment of a countywide or multi-county transit entity is a potentially cost-effective strategy for achieving this goal. Paratransit is expensive to operate and its costs, and use, are expanding rapidly. Innovative strategies to provide paratransit services are in operation in other areas and are helping to provide more service at lower cost. Computerized scheduling and vehicle location systems allow transit operators to integrate public transit and various other transportation services (such as services provided by boards of mental health and mental retardation, and other not-for-profit agencies) to provide more capacity to the paratransit system at a lower cost. Funding and cooperation arrangements for the development of such a system, which would include the development of a regional dispatching center, could be explored in a regional strategic transit initiative.
- System-wide dial-a-ride or guaranteed ride home services in which a transit agency contracts with taxi companies could be strategies to provide evening and night services in corridors where bus services could not be provided efficiently.
- Interest has been expressed in trying out new transit service on an experimental basis. A funding mechanism would need to be sought that would allow a trial service, for example to an unserved suburban area. Based on the results of the trial period, the service could then be discontinued, changed, or made permanent.
- The public expressed interest in innovative transit technologies such as the proposed regional core circulator in downtown Toledo and possible connections between downtown Toledo, the University of Toledo, Medical College of Ohio, and Owens Community College. Strategies for providing a regional rail or people-mover network could be explored in a regional initiative or as part of more detailed corridor studies.

### **8.3 Funding and Staffing of Strategic Initiatives**

Developing any of the above strategies will require time, expertise, and effort. Some of that effort can be provided by existing staff and budgets of public and private stakeholders. Depending on the strategies selected, additional resources may also be needed (consultant services, extra staff time, public involvement expenses, computer software, etc.). The study committee has worked with the current consultant team to identify possible funding sources.

The Regional Transit Study was funded through a combination of funding by TMACOG, TARTA and Lake Erie Transit, county and local governments, economic development agencies, and social service agencies. A similar funding consortium is one potential source of funding for the development of strategic transit initiatives. Additional identified sources are included below.

Potential funding sources for initiatives to address transit needs include:

- TMACOG, the Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA) and other providers of public transportation services in the region, primarily drawn from agency planning funds.

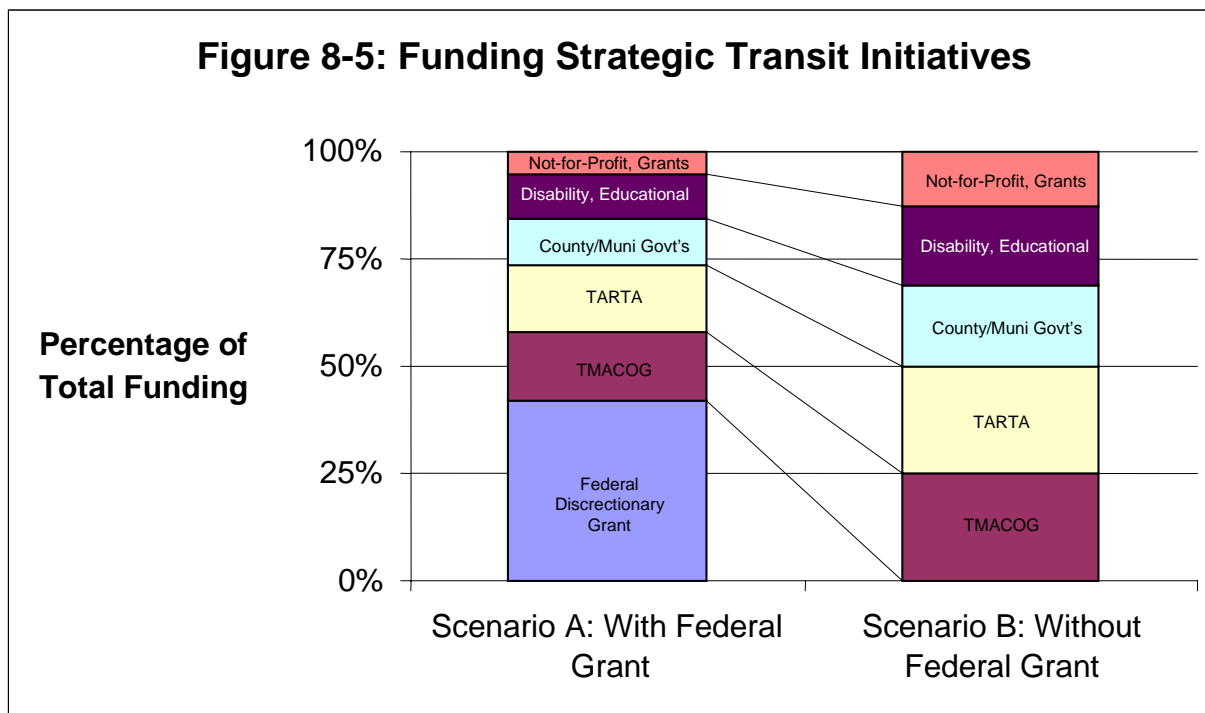
- Federal grant programs administered through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) or other programs or agencies of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT).
- State grant programs administered through the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) or Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).
- Local, regional and national foundations with goals related to transportation or service to disadvantaged populations.
- Businesses based or operating in the region with an interest in developing the regional transportation system.
- County and local governments.
- Regional colleges, universities and training schools.
- Local governmental or non-profit entities serving disabled, mental health, developmental disability, elderly, youth, unemployed, low-income or other disadvantaged populations.

Aside from the federal formula grants that are now used to fund TMACOG's transportation planning activities as the Metropolitan Planning Organization, there is no specific federal program that funds transit development initiatives. Use of these formula funds would require re-allocation of existing TMACOG planning resources.

A federal earmark sponsored by the local congressional delegation is the most likely source of funding for initiatives of this type. Obtaining an earmark depends on a number of factors, including support of Congress and federal budgetary negotiations; and timing of such grants depends on the federal budgetary cycle. It is likely that a federal grant would cover no more than half the cost of a transit initiative. Nonetheless, the potential for a federal grant is probably the key variable in the funding and timing of any major efforts to address the region's transit priorities.

The study's financial analysis identified a number of potential local and national non-profit grant providers that may be interested in providing funding. Their areas of interest include serving the region's transportation needs, educational initiatives, helping the disabled, and expanding job opportunities.

Through these various sources, funding in the \$300,000-\$500,000 range could be developed for use in developing transit initiatives in the region. The likely proportions of this funding by source, with or without a federal grant, are illustrated in **Figure 8-5**.



## 8.4 Recommendations

The study committee **affirms public transportation as part of the region's basic infrastructure**, essential to support economic development and personal mobility for all citizens. Public transit is an important part of the region's multi-modal transportation system.

This study has documented deficiencies in the transit system in our region and has identified very real concerns with how transit works to meet transportation needs. Transportation stakeholders in our region will need to work together to address these shortcomings. The study committee has developed a set of actions (objectives) to be pursued to develop specific projects and policy changes toward this end. The committee **recommends that stakeholders select and initiate strategies to accomplish these objectives**. As needed, funding sources for this work should be pursued.

The following matrix outlines recommended objectives related to key concerns. They are organized by whether they are recommended for short- or longer-term action, and whether they primarily are issues of existing or new service areas. Within these categories, the objectives are listed in general priority order for implementation, reflecting both the importance of the objective and the time, funding, and political factors that will impact how soon it can be implemented.

**Table 8-1: Recommended Objectives for Transit Improvement in the TMACOG Region—**  
in priority order for implementation

|  | <b>Short Term (1-3 years)</b>   | <b>Longer Term (4-10 years)</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>A.<br/>Existing<br/>Transit<br/>Areas</b> | <p>1) Investigate options and fund service improvements to address the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Add direct service between non-downtown destinations (crosstown routes) in the TARTA service area</li> <li>▪ Add/expand evening, night, weekend, and holiday service in all transit service areas</li> <li>▪ Increase service frequency in all service areas</li> <li>▪ Expand the Bedford Dial-a-Ride service area, and add more connections to TARTA</li> </ul> <p>2) Work with stakeholders to coordinate transportation resources of senior citizen, workforce development, Medicare, and social service agencies to address transportation needs</p> <p>3) Continue to provide ADA-compliant paratransit service to the growing disabled population in transit service areas</p> <p>4) Improve transit marketing / public information</p> <p>5) Work with local governments to improve pedestrian access to bus stops (sidewalks, paved pads, snow removal, etc.)</p> | <p>1) Add connection between Bedford and Monroe City area</p> <p>2) Add connection between Bowling Green and the metro area</p>   |
| <b>B.<br/>New<br/>Transit<br/>Areas</b>      | <p>1) Work with local stakeholders to investigate alternatives for providing service, and pursue new service in the following areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oregon area</li> <li>2. Northwood</li> <li>3. Holland/Springfield</li> <li>4. Perrysburg Township</li> </ol>   | <p>1) Reorganize transit to operate and fund it as a county-wide or multi-county system, allowing areas of need to be served</p> <p>2) Pursue coordination and connectivity with adjoining rural county transit systems (Ottawa County, etc.)</p> |

Specific projects and policy changes resulting from these efforts will be implemented through the coordinated efforts of regional stakeholders. These projects and policies will join other transit-related initiatives currently underway in the region and incorporated into regional and local plans and programs. The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) includes major project and policy initiatives. The current RTP is the “2025 Regional Transportation Plan—Update 2004.” Federal funding is coordinated through the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Each transit agency maintains a multi-year program of projects.

Pursuing objectives developed by the Transit Study Committee—and the resulting transit improvements—will require political will, regional collaboration, thoughtful strategizing, and concerted effort. The benefits to the region will be significant.



This report has documented the findings of this first-ever comprehensive study of transit in the northwest Ohio/southeast Michigan region. This study has been a truly regional effort, aimed at improving the economic conditions and quality of life in this region through wise planning for and investment in public transportation services and facilities. TMACOG thanks all the partners, citizens, and community leaders who helped make this study possible.

