

# TMACOG REGIONAL TRANSIT STUDY

*Needs and Next Steps*

Executive Summary  
September 2004



## Introduction

The Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments (TMACOG) Regional Transit Study is the region's response to perceived shortcomings in the public transportation systems. These include a perceived lack of transportation options for growth areas and a lack of mobility for seniors, persons with disabilities, and other people who need or desire public transportation.



The purpose of the study was to determine whether there are unmet needs for public transportation in the region and the extent and nature of these needs. The study area includes Lucas and Wood Counties in Ohio and Erie, Bedford and Whiteford Townships in Monroe County, Michigan. Project sponsors include a wide range of local governmental agencies, transit providers, and non-profit entities from throughout the study area.

## Project Organization

The Executive Committee, made up of representatives of the funding agencies, was the primary governing body of the study. A Study Committee, made up of representatives of the funding agencies, plus representatives from other agencies and concerned citizens, assisted in guiding the study and provided technical input. The study was managed day-to-day by TMACOG staff.

## Study Findings: Is Public Transit Working in Our Region?

The Regional Transit Study revealed and documented a number of needs that are not being met by the existing transit services in the region. These needs were documented through analysis of the market for transit in the region, the transit services now operating in the region, and the public's perceptions of their public transportation services. **This study verifies that current public transportation does not provide a comprehensive system that serves all the needs of the region.**

### *Geographic Coverage*

**About 90 percent of the region's land area is not served** by the fixed-route bus network provided by the Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA). Other transit providers, including dial-a-ride services and university transit systems, serve some of these areas. (See map on page E-11.) However, most of these providers cover only small local areas, are not linked to TARTA or to one another, and provide little or no evening or weekend service. As a result, transit users cannot travel between many of the region's important trip generators, such as between Bowling Green State University and The University of Toledo.

Furthermore, **30 percent of the region's transit-supportive area lacks transit service.** These areas are major concentrations of employment and population to which transit service could be provided efficiently and effectively. Were transit to serve these areas, it would increase transit ridership and allow transit to support existing development in the region.

The lack of geographic coverage also limits the choices of transit dependent consumers of retail, medical and professional services, and distorts normal patterns of travel and consumer choice. More than one-fourth of survey respondents chose their job, their doctor, and where they shop based on transit availability. Citizens desire access to specific areas in the region not currently served by regional transit (such as Oregon and Perrysburg Township), specific shopping centers and stores (such as Wal-Mart in Oregon, Spring Meadows and Woodville Malls) and specific medical facilities (St. Charles, Bay Park and Wood County hospitals). A number of the region's major recreation destinations (metroparks; Maumee Bay State Park) also lie outside the regional fixed-route transit network, and thus are inaccessible to those who use transit.

### *Suburban and Rural Residents*

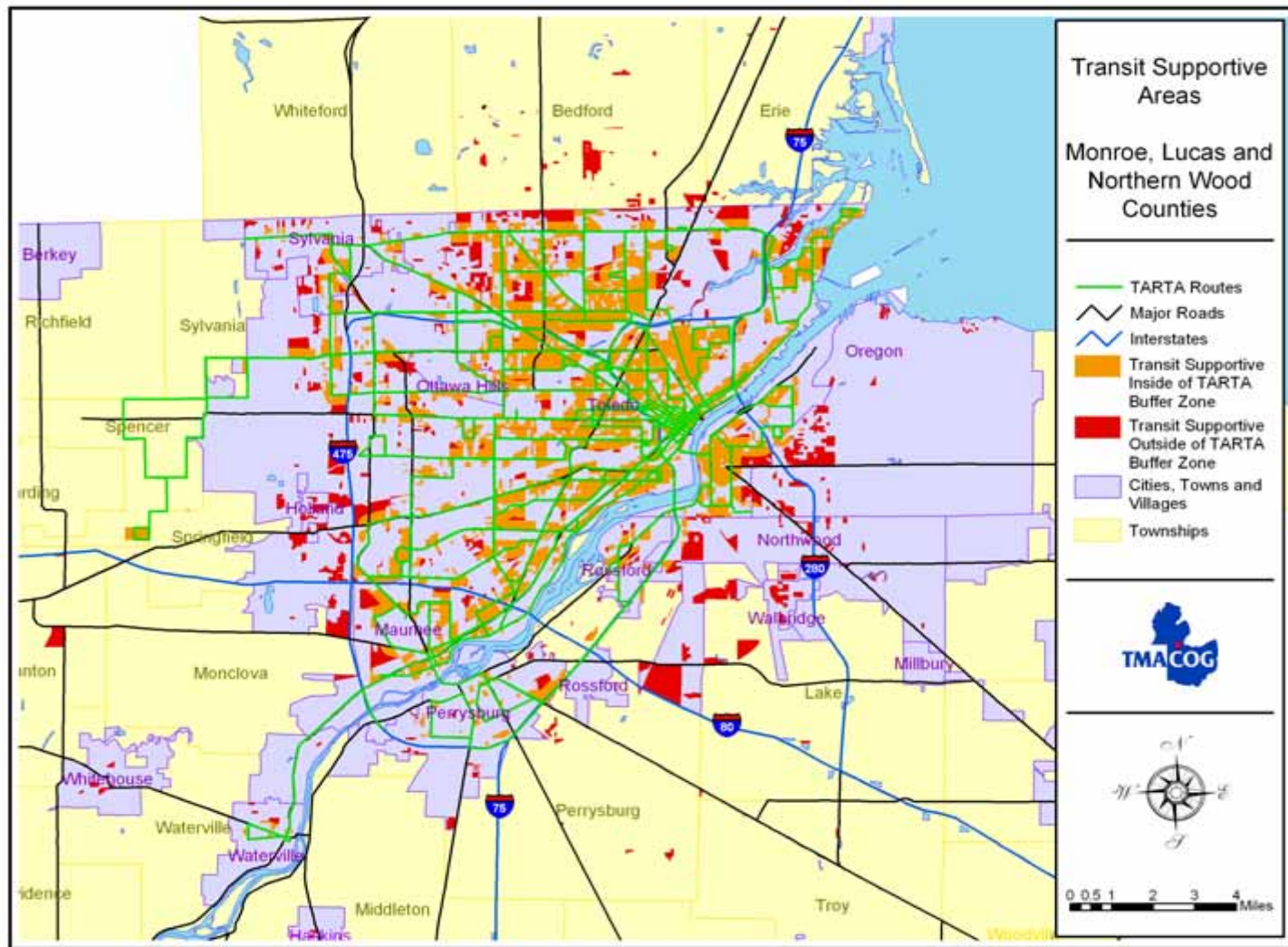
**More than 47 percent of the region's population is not served** by fixed-route transit service. Many suburban areas with growing populations and commercial concentrations, such as Perrysburg Township, City of Oregon and Springfield Township, have no transit service. Population and employment growth, and growth in the number of elderly and disabled in these areas, will increase the need for transit service in the future.

### *Access to Jobs, Business, and Industry*

Lack of geographic coverage and connections and limited evening, night, and weekend service curtails access to jobs for residents—particularly those who are without private transportation. Downtown Toledo, the focus of TARTA's fixed-route bus network, is no longer the main employment location. In fact, less than 5 percent of the TMACOG region's employment is located in the downtown. Employment is increasingly dispersed throughout the region. Analysis of employment location indicates that **57 percent of jobs in the region are not served** by the existing fixed-route transit system. The current lack of service, or limited service, in employment areas like northern Wood County and Arrowhead Park limits the flexibility of the transit system to serve business and industry in the region. It separates employees from jobs, and employers from workers.

The job market is changing (including growth in the service sector), and fewer people work a standard Monday-through-Friday daytime schedule. Nationally, the percentage of employees with flexible work schedules increased to nearly 29 percent by 2001. Between 25 to 40 percent of workers in retail sales, cleaning service, health care, food service, and production are working non-traditional shifts. These national figures are supported by local data: a Toledo area employer association survey found that among responding companies, approximately 28 percent of the reported staffing schedules were for a non-standard work week.

**Non-weekday schedules are not well served with our current public transportation.** TARTA has fewer bus routes in the evening, no service after the 11:00 p.m. hour, and less service on weekends. Other area transit provides little, if any, night, weekend or holiday service. Survey respondents stated inadequate time-of-day coverage is a significant problem. Workers reported lost wages and lost job opportunities. College students find it difficult to use transit to meet their school and work schedules.



**Transit Supportive Areas:** Numerous areas of the TMACOG region have employment and population densities that can support public transit service. However, many of these areas (highlighted in red) lie outside the region’s fixed-route public transit network.

To be effective, transit must, at minimum, serve the needs of people entering the work force. A study of participants in the CommuterLINK program, which provides transportation to new workers, found that a large majority could not use TARTA for work trips. Transit was not available at the right hours and/or did not serve the workplaces of these workers. Suburban employers report problems with attracting and keeping entry-level staff due to lack of public transportation.

The number of people in the region aged 55+ will increase by nearly 50 percent over the next 20 years, while the number of younger adults will fall. However, area employment is expected to grow significantly. This suggests more people will work past “retirement age.” Seniors are more likely to use transit, and are also more likely to be disabled (about 40 percent of area residents aged 65 or older are disabled) and thus more dependent on public transportation.

All of these employment trends, taken together, point to more need for public transit. However, they also produce travel patterns that are extremely difficult to serve with traditional fixed-route public transit.

### *Elderly, Youth and Disabled Access to Transit*

Demographic trends suggest more transit will be needed in the future. Elderly, disabled, and young people are among those most likely to rely on transit. The number of persons in the region aged 65 and over is projected to increase by more than 30 percent in the next 20 years. This also increases the number of disabled in the population.

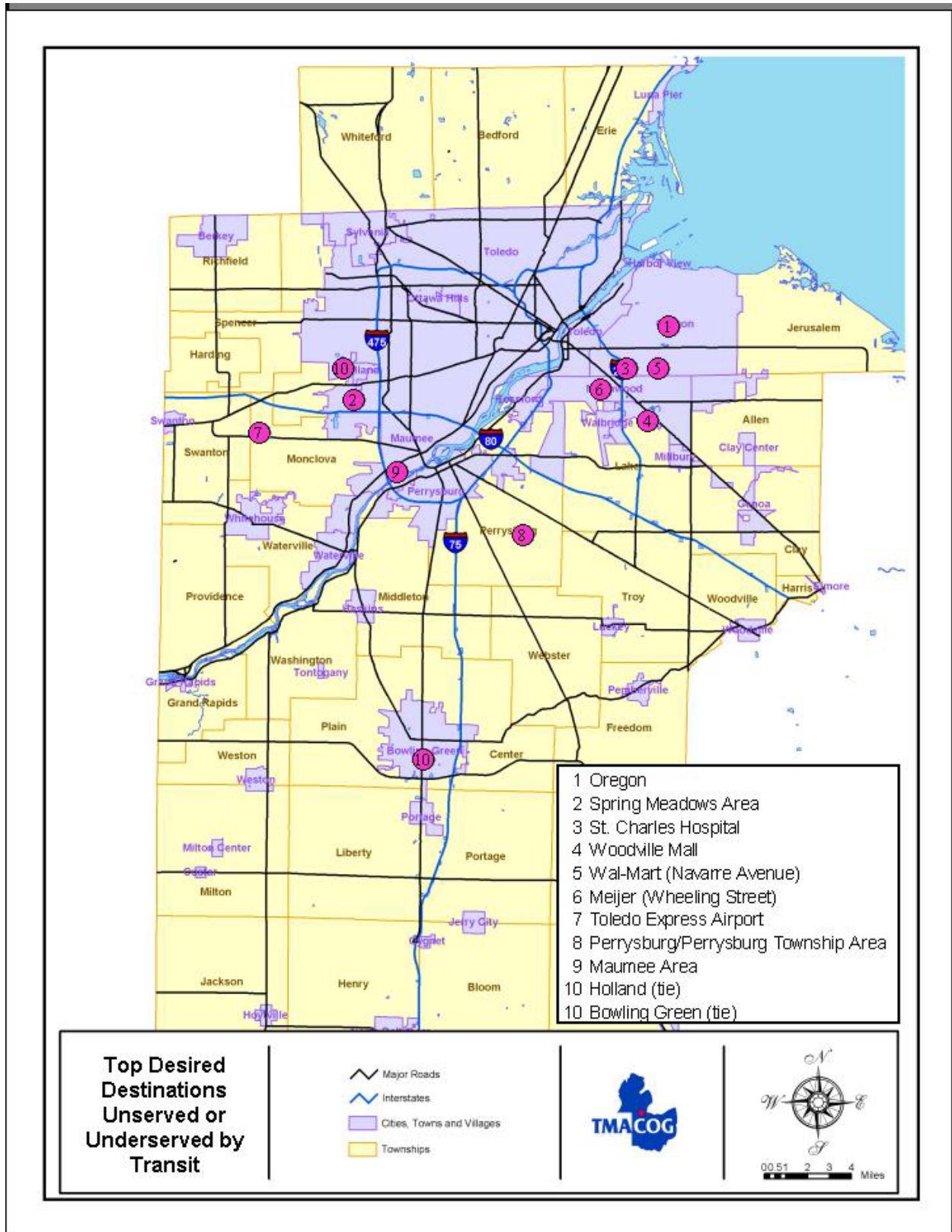
Many unserved areas in the region, including suburban areas, have higher densities of elderly, youth and disabled persons. About 15 percent of the older population (aged 65+)—and an equivalent percentage of disabled citizens—live in areas without transit, potentially isolating them from activities, jobs and services. In terms of numbers, more than 28,000 area residents over age 50, and more than 12,000 over age 65, live in unserved areas. Nearly 24,000 of the area’s youth live in non-transit areas. Workforce participation among the disabled and youth has increased in recent years, and this trend is expected to continue, creating further demand for transit services.

### *Service Frequency, Direct Routing and Trip Time Length*

When trip time lengths are excessive, transit is eliminated as a realistic option for mobility. Excessive trip times in this region are related to:

- Lack of direct routing between destinations;
- Lack of connections (or very limited connections) between transit systems; and
- Insufficient service frequency.

Excessive trip time length affects access to jobs, education, medical care, and other essential services in the region.



**Top Destinations:** Members of the public indicated nearly 100 locations they would like to reach by bus that were not accessible to them. These are the “top 10.”

**Airport Service**

Connections to Toledo Express and Detroit Metro airports were recommended by economic development officials, business people, and survey respondents. TARTA began operating a trial service to Toledo Express Airport beginning in December 2003. No transit service is available from the Toledo area to Detroit Metro Airport. Airport service benefits current and potential airport employees and nearby businesses, as well as local travelers and visitors. Connections to airports are also a boost to civic pride, as most large cities have frequent, high-quality connections to their regional airports for travelers who choose transit.



Public outreach events, like this display at the Andersons' in West Toledo, helped to spread the word about the study and yielded important comments and ideas.

**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. The study documented deficiencies in the transit system in our region and identified very real concerns with how transit works to meet transportation needs. The Study Committee has developed a set of objectives to address these concerns, and recommends that stakeholders **select and initiate strategies to accomplish these objectives**. Funding sources for this work should be pursued as needed.

The objectives include the following:

|                                  | <b>Short Term (1-3 years)</b>   | <b>Longer Term (4-10 years)</b>  |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>A. Existing Transit Areas</b> | 1) Investigate options and fund service improvements to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Add direct service between non-downtown destinations 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> 2) Work with stakeholders to coordinate transportation resources of senior citizen, workforce development, Medicare, and social service agencies | 1) Add connection between Bedford and Monroe City area<br>2) Add connection between Bowling Green and the metro area |

|                             | <b>Short Term (1-3 years)</b>   | <b>Longer Term (4-10 years)</b>   |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
|                             | 3) Continue to provide ADA-compliant paratransit service to the growing disabled population in transit service areas<br>4) Improve transit marketing / public information<br>5) Work with local governments to improve sidewalks and pedestrian access to bus stops |   |
| <b>B. New Transit Areas</b> | 1) Work with local stakeholders to investigate alternatives for providing service, and pursue new service in the Oregon area, Northwood, Holland/ Springfield Township, and Perrysburg Township   | 1) Operate and fund transit as a county-wide or multi-county system, allowing areas of need to be served<br>2) Pursue coordination and connectivity with adjoining rural county transit systems (Ottawa County, etc.) |

Specific projects and policy changes resulting from these efforts will be implemented through the coordinated efforts of regional stakeholders and incorporated, along with other transit initiatives, into the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). Pursuing these objectives will require political will, regional collaboration, thoughtful strategizing, and concerted effort. The benefits to the region will be significant.

### **Study Content: Basis for the Recommendations**

The Recommendations are based on in-depth technical analysis (market assessment, assessment of existing transit services, and potential transit demand estimate) and extensive public input. These were completed over a 20-month period with the assistance of a nationally recognized consultant team and are described briefly below.

### **Public Outreach**

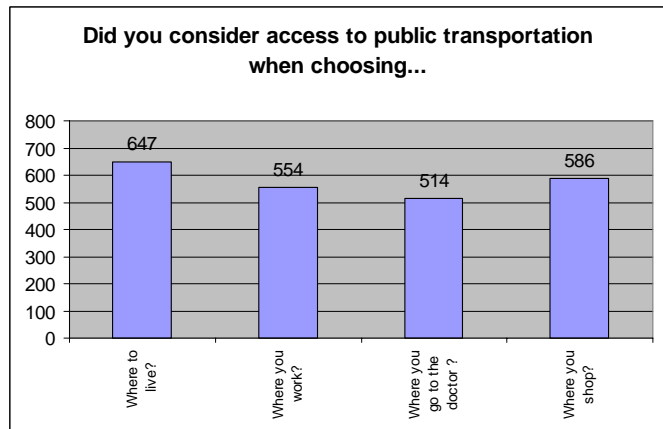
The study pursued a “mosaic” approach in which public input is gathered from a variety of sources and is placed together in its context to form the full picture of public opinion on the subject. The various strategies included:

- A statistically-valid telephone survey of residents in the region
- An informational survey, distributed on buses, at community events, and by public service and non-profit agencies throughout the region
- Two series of traditional public meetings
- A series of public outreach events at several public locations
- Focus groups, targeting groups likely to be under-represented in the other efforts
- Interviews with local stakeholders (business and community leaders)
- Media outreach and paid advertising, including publication of the informational survey in newspapers

- Outreach via the Internet and receipt of comments by phone, fax, and e-mail
- Selected outreach materials created in both English and Spanish.

The public outreach efforts confirmed that many of the perceived problems that prompted the study are genuine, and the feedback illuminated how these problems shape the lives of area residents. The most significant issues for the public are lack of geographic and time coverage, making it difficult or impossible to provide access to jobs and other essential destinations, especially during evenings and weekends. The public input process also identified wide support for providing public transit, especially to serve the elderly, disabled, and those without access to automobiles.

Transit users expressed concern about long waits between buses, unreliable service, and lack of direct service between non-downtown locations. Also noted were inaccessibility to bus stops (due to lack of sidewalks, paved waiting areas and snow removal), the need for more advertising and instructions on how to use the transit system, and some quality of service issues. Support for more Mud Hens game service and bus service to the airport also were among the findings of the public outreach effort.

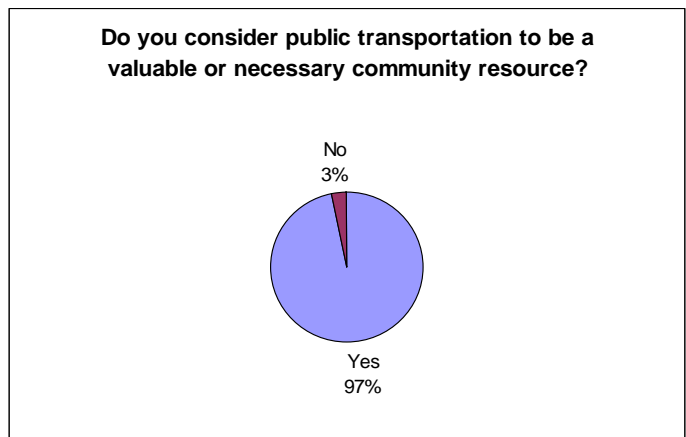


Hundreds of informational survey respondents said they made major life decisions, including where to live and work, based on the availability of transit service.

### Market Assessment

The market assessment analyzed the population, employment and unemployment trends in the TMACOG region to identify how those trends might affect the need for public transportation. The region’s population is not predicted to grow significantly over the next thirty years. However, the population is expected to age significantly and to continue to move outward from the cities to suburban areas.

Regional employment is expected to grow, with workforce participation by women and older people expected to increase. Employment is also expected to diversify, with less reliance on manufacturing and more employment in various types of services. Service jobs



The informational survey reached thousands of area residents, both transit users and non-users. Nearly all respondents acknowledged public transit's importance to community life.



tend to be less geographically concentrated than manufacturing jobs, and service workers have more irregular work hours. The aging of the population and of the workforce will make public transportation more critical in the future. However, the trend is toward increased dispersal of people and jobs. GIS\* mapping of employment and demographic data shows that areas with high population densities (including high densities of elderly and disabled persons) and many employment sites are outside the area now served by fixed-route public transit.

More than 46 percent of the population and 57 percent of the employment in the region is not served by fixed-route transit service. Areas in the region with a density of three jobs per acre and four persons per acre were identified as “transit-supportive areas.” More than 30 percent of the transit-supportive area lies outside the full service fixed-route transit network, leaving high-density growing areas in Lucas County and northern Wood County unserved. Other high-density areas including Bowling Green and Bedford Township provide limited public transit, but have no connections or very limited connections to the remainder of the region.

**Coverage of TARTA Fixed-Route Bus Service in Study Area and Transit-Supportive Areas**

|   | Area (mile <sup>2</sup> ) | Population | Employment |
|---|---------------------------|------------|------------|
| Study Area*   | 1,076.4                   | 613,713    | 245,059    |
| Transit Coverage Area (1/4 mile buffer around TARTA fixed routes) | 103.1                     | 327,058    | 105,060    |
| Percent of Area Not Served by Transit Network                     | 90.4%                     | 46.7%      | 57.1%      |
| Transit-Supportive Area   | 48.5                      | 319,939    | 128,428    |
| Transit-Supportive Area Covered                                   | 33.6                      | 244,378    | 91,930     |
| Percent of Transit-Supportive Area Not Served by Transit Network  | 30.7%                     | 23.6%      | 28.4%      |

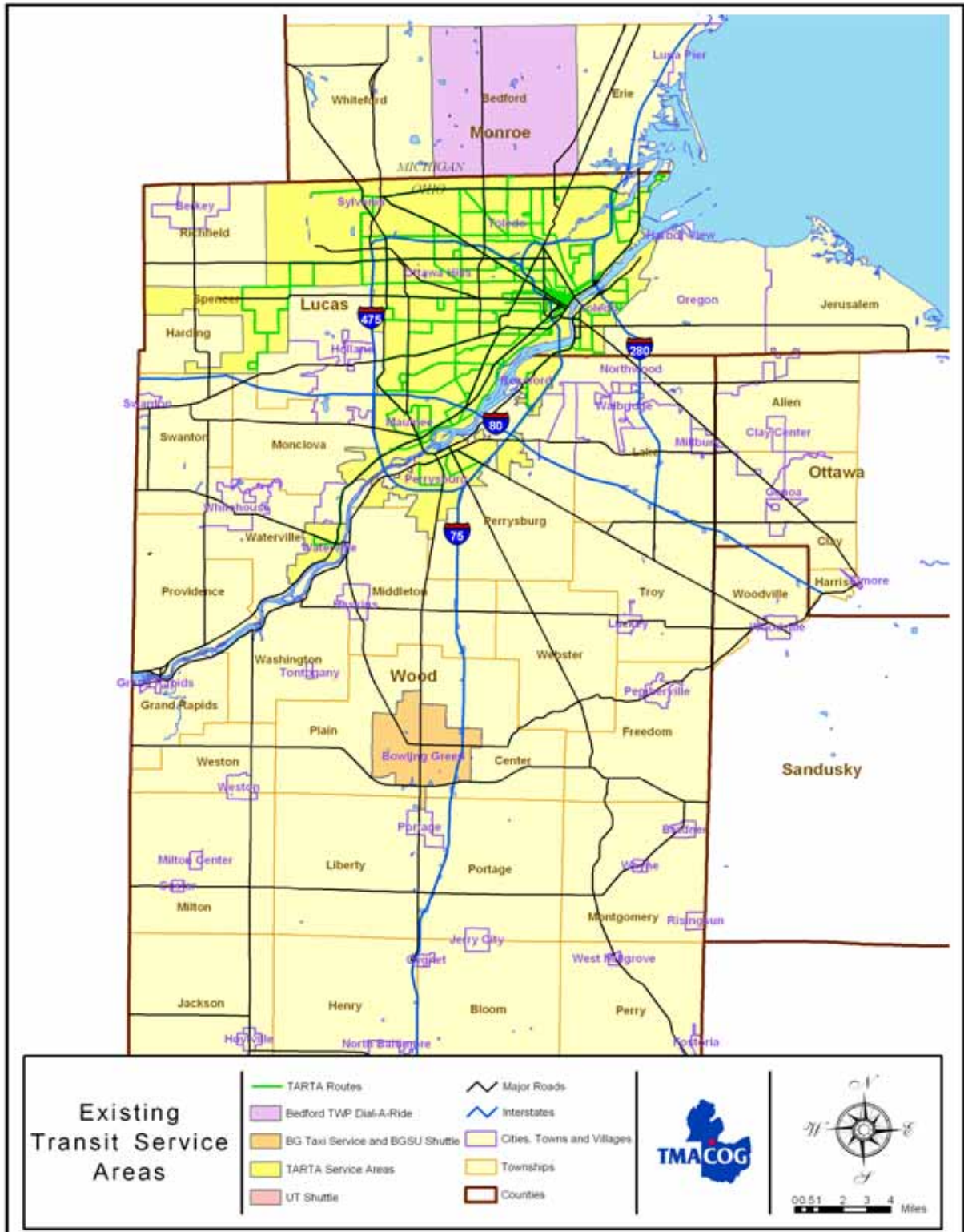
\*Lucas and Wood Counties; Erie, Bedford and Whiteford Townships in Monroe County

**Assessment of Existing Transit Service**

Public transportation in the TMACOG region is fragmented, and large areas of the region are not served by public transit. Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA) provides bus service in Toledo and eight adjacent communities. TARTA provides fixed-route bus service throughout its service area; provides Call-a-Ride circulators in Perrysburg and Maumee, and (beginning in 2004) in Sylvania; and operates Toledo Area Regional Paratransit Service (TARPS) for the disabled throughout its service area. TARTA’s service area does not include a number of growing suburban jurisdictions, including the City of Oregon and Bedford, Perrysburg, Springfield, and Monclova Townships.

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\* Geographic Information Systems, computerized systems that allow data tied to a spatial location to be analyzed using computer-generated maps. All of the maps shown in the Transit Study Report have been created using GIS.



**Existing Transit Service Areas:** Most of the region (90 percent of the land area) is not served by a regional-scale, fixed-route public transit network. The services that do exist are not well interconnected and vary considerably in terms of the type and frequency of service offered.

Bowling Green Transit is a subsidized taxi service that provides mobility options in the City of Bowling Green. Lake Erie Transit operates a dial-a-ride service in Bedford Township that provides circulation in the township and connections to TARTA in north Toledo. The University of Toledo (UT) and Bowling Green State University (BGSU) offer fixed-route bus service for the benefit of their students. During the academic year, BGSU's service seems to function as a de-facto local bus service in Bowling Green.

As a result of the deficiencies in the region's public transportation, a variety of services from TMACOG's CommuterLINK program to the Office on Aging and numerous social service agency transit systems, have sprung up to meet the unmet transportation needs of specific populations. These independent and unlinked systems are difficult to assess, but may be untapped resources for providing better transit for the region in the future. TMACOG has a history and ongoing commitment to work with agency providers on coordinating transportation services.



TARPS, TARTA's paratransit service for the disabled, came in for both praise and criticism by members of the public and the disabled community. Efficiency and effectiveness are improving, but ridership and costs are skyrocketing.

TARTA provides hourly service on suburban routes and half-hourly service in urban areas during the day, but service diminishes over the course of the evening, and the agency runs significantly fewer routes on weekends. None of the services operate between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. TARTA and Bowling Green services do not interconnect, while TARTA and the Bedford dial-a-ride services connect only during the mid-day, leaving the region, in effect, without a regional transit network. TARTA's services operate with reasonable efficiency and effectiveness compared to other agencies in similar-sized areas, and the region has added transit innovations over the years. However, demand for and therefore the cost of TARTA's paratransit service, TARPS, has risen dramatically in recent years.



Flexible routing allows transit services to divert from a fixed route to pick up and drop off passengers closer to their origin and destination points. TARTA's Call-a-Ride services in Perrysburg, Maumee and Sylvania, and the Bedford Dial-a-Ride are examples of flexible route service.

Transit agencies in other parts of the country have updated transit to make a better "fit" to today's lifestyles. Smaller, more comfortable and efficient buses, improved transit stops and transfer centers, flexible service options, and the application of computer technologies have made transit more responsive to the public's needs. The TMACOG region has some of these

innovations (such as dial-a-rides) and may wish to consider additional updates to provide higher quality transit service to residents and businesses.

### Potential Transit Demand

The project consultant team prepared a quantitative estimate of unmet demand for public transportation in the region using data from TMACOG’s travel demand model, demographic data, and information from project surveys. The estimates were made by comparing the percentage of travelers using transit (“transit share”) in transportation corridors in the TMACOG region to corridors in other cities with similar demographic characteristics but with more complete and frequent transit service.

The estimate found that 4,000 to 10,000 more daily transit trips (in addition to the 20,000 daily transit trips taken today) could be generated in the TMACOG region if high-quality transit service were in place in all areas where potential demand for it exists. These additional trips could generate millions of dollars in additional transit fare revenues. The increased mobility provided by the improved transit service could also result in increased economic activity in the region.

**Table: Estimate of Unmet Demand by Corridor**

| Corridor:  | Existing Riders | Existing Share | Additional Future Riders | Future Share | Total Future Riders | % Increase Over Existing |
|------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| Downtown   | 2,630           | 3.2%           | 1,850                    | 5.4%         | 4,480               | 70%                      |
| East       | 1,860           | 0.7%           | 400                      | 0.8%         | 2,260               | 22%                      |
| South/West | 5,280           | 0.7%           | 630                      | 0.8%         | 5,910               | 12%                      |
| South      | 1,880           | 0.7%           | 150                      | 0.8%         | 2,030               | 8%                       |
| North/West | 6,420           | 0.6%           | 1,660                    | 0.8%         | 8,080               | 26%                      |
| TOTAL      | 18,070          |                | 4,690                    |              | 22,760              | 26%                      |

Even a slight increase in transit’s share of the travel market in each corridor can result in large increases in transit ridership. However, in order to achieve these ridership gains, significant improvements to the transit system would be required. These might include:

- Expand service to portions of the TMACOG region and corridors where potential demand exists.
- Expand cross-town service to provide direct transit connections to growing employment and retail areas without requiring a downtown transfer. An example would be the development of a mini-hub in the Arrowhead Park area, with service extending directly into surrounding Toledo and suburban neighborhoods.
- Provide service to target areas and populations, including major transportation hubs, universities, and areas with large concentrations of seniors, students, low-income persons, and disabled persons.
- Increase service frequency, including peak period service to the downtown area and to other employment areas, and off-peak service to major retail and commercial centers.

## A Regional Effort

The Regional Transit Study has documented the findings of this first-ever comprehensive look at 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. Special thanks goes to the following agencies that joined the TMACOG Transportation Department and the TMACOG Commuter Services Department in funding the Regional Transit Study:

Ability Center of Greater Toledo  
Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio, Inc.  
Bedford Township  
The Board of Lucas County Commissioners  
The Board of Monroe County Commissioners  
City of Oregon  
City of Perrysburg  
City of Toledo  
Lake Erie Transportation Commission  
Owens Community College  
Regional Growth Partnership, Inc.  
Springfield Township  
Sylvania Township  
Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA)  
Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority  
United Way of Greater Toledo

For more information, including the full Study Report, contact:

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