

# LACKAWANNA LUZERNE MPO

## COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT - HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN

APRIL 2024

PREPARED FOR:

LACKAWANNA-LUZERNE  
TRANSPORTATION STUDY MPO

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FINAL  
PLAN

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## Purpose

Public transportation represents a lifeline service for many, providing connections to medical appointments, food access, government services, and employment. In recognition of the vital need for reliable transportation for a region's most vulnerable populations, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires planning and coordination to improve mobility for seniors, persons with disabilities, veterans, and other human services clients.

Toward that end, the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act of 2015 built upon previous federal transportation bills to require that all projects selected for FTA funding should be included within a Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan (Local Coordinated Plan). The FTA further established that Local Coordinated Plans must include an assessment of available transportation services, whether public, private, or nonprofit; an assessment of transportation options for seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income individuals; policies, and/or projects to address gaps between existing services and future needs; and implementation priorities based on available resources, time, and feasibility.

The Lackawanna-Luzerne Transportation Study Metropolitan Planning Organization (also known as LLTS MPO or LLTS) serves as the lead agency in these transportation planning initiatives. This plan is an administrative update to the LLTS MPO's previous Local Coordinated Plan, which was adopted in 2008.

The purpose of this plan is to help improve transportation services for persons with disabilities, older adults, and individuals with lower incomes in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties through a more coordinated transportation system. The Local Coordinated Plan was developed in coordination with key human service stakeholders, including:

- Local transit agencies
- Regional health care providers
- Regional hospitals
- County offices of human services
- Behavioral health services
- Drug and alcohol services
- Veterans' affairs offices

Interviews conducted with these stakeholders provided the foundation for updating the transportation inventory; identifying key destinations in the region; defining transportation challenges that human services clients in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties may face; and developing strategies to improve human services transportation within the region.

The LLTS MPO considers all of the transit agencies, stakeholders, and project ideas listed in this Plan to be compliant with and eligible for subrecipient application for grant funds under 49 U.S.C. Section 5310 awarded at the discretion of the Federal Transit Agency and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities grants).

## Vision and Goals

Human service providers in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties work tirelessly to deliver vital services across the region. To support these services, LLTS MPO and the organization's Transportation Advisory Council created a vision and set of goals that have guided the development of this plan and will inform the coordination of human services transportation in the region.

### Vision

This plan will create a path forward to enhance equitable transportation services for persons with disabilities, older adults, veterans, and individuals with economic disadvantages in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.

**Goals**

1. Identify gaps in public transportation services and awareness in the region that may disproportionately affect recipients of human services.
2. Work to address human service transportation challenges and increase connectivity for residents within and beyond Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.
3. Lay the groundwork for collaboration and foster relationships among the MPO, transit providers, and local stakeholders in regards to transit-dependent individuals and the organizations that work with them.

**Regional Description**

Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties both contain a mix of urban and rural land use—urban in the Wyoming and Lackawanna Valleys, and rural in the northern portion of Lackawanna County and the southern portion Luzerne County (**Figure 1**). Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties are situated in a unique geography at the center of the Boston/Washington Corridor—just a few hours away from New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, and Washington, D.C. The counties sit at an intersection of many key transportation corridors—Interstates 80, 81, 84, 380, and 476 (the Pennsylvania Turnpike); U.S. Routes 6 and 11; and Pennsylvania Routes 115, 307, 309, 315, and 435.

Because of this important transportation network, major retailers have realized the transportation logistic potential of the region. This has allowed e-commerce to expand in the region, with major companies like Adidas, Amazon, American Eagle Outfitters, Chewy, Costco, CVS Caremark, J.P. Boden, Rakuten, and Spreetail operating distribution centers and warehouses in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the growing number of distribution centers coming to the two counties, the Appalachian Regional Commission has classified these two counties as ‘transitional’. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), established in 1965, is an economic development partnership entity of the federal government and 13 state governments, focusing on 423 counties across the Appalachian Region, including Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. The ARC’s ‘transitional’ classification of the two counties has remained constant since 2002 and means that they are “transitioning between strong and weak economies.”

Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties also possess some of the most distressed areas in Appalachian Pennsylvania (**Table 1**). Between FY 2020 and FY 2024, the total number of economically distressed areas between the two counties has held steady above 25, with more than half of those places located in Luzerne County. Individually, Luzerne County has ranked as one of the top three counties in the state for distressed areas<sup>2</sup>.

*Table 1: Number of Distressed Areas in Appalachian Pennsylvania by Fiscal Year*

	<b>FY 2020</b>	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>	<b>FY 2024</b>
<i>Lackawanna</i>	12	8	12	10	10
<i>Luzerne</i>	14	19	21	18	16
<i>Total</i>	26	27	33	28	26

*Source: Appalachian Regional Commission*

<sup>1</sup> “Distribution White Paper Northeastern Pennsylvania (NEPA).” *Mericle*, November 2020. <https://www.mericle.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/distribution-white-paper-mweb-1.pdf?hsCtaTracking=d1fb351b-aa0f-4a42-9933-866e203506a4%7C4165189c-00f5-4293-8608-716eafbafabe>.

<sup>2</sup> “County Economic Status and Distressed Areas by State, FY 2020.” Appalachian Regional Commission, August 13, 2020. <https://www.arc.gov/county-economic-status-and-distressed-areas-by-state-fy-2020/>.

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Like much of the Rust Belt, Northeastern Pennsylvania experienced industrial and economic decline, steady population loss, and urban decay during the 20th century. The region was once a center for anthracite coal mining, but cheaper fuel sources and accidents like the Knox Mine Disaster in 1959 escalated the decline in deep mining. Similarly, the garment and manufacturing industries also faced significant decline with outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to other regions of the United States and abroad. Altogether, with globalization, the expansion of free trade agreements, and more economical alternatives, mining and manufacturing industries are now rare in Northern Pennsylvania.

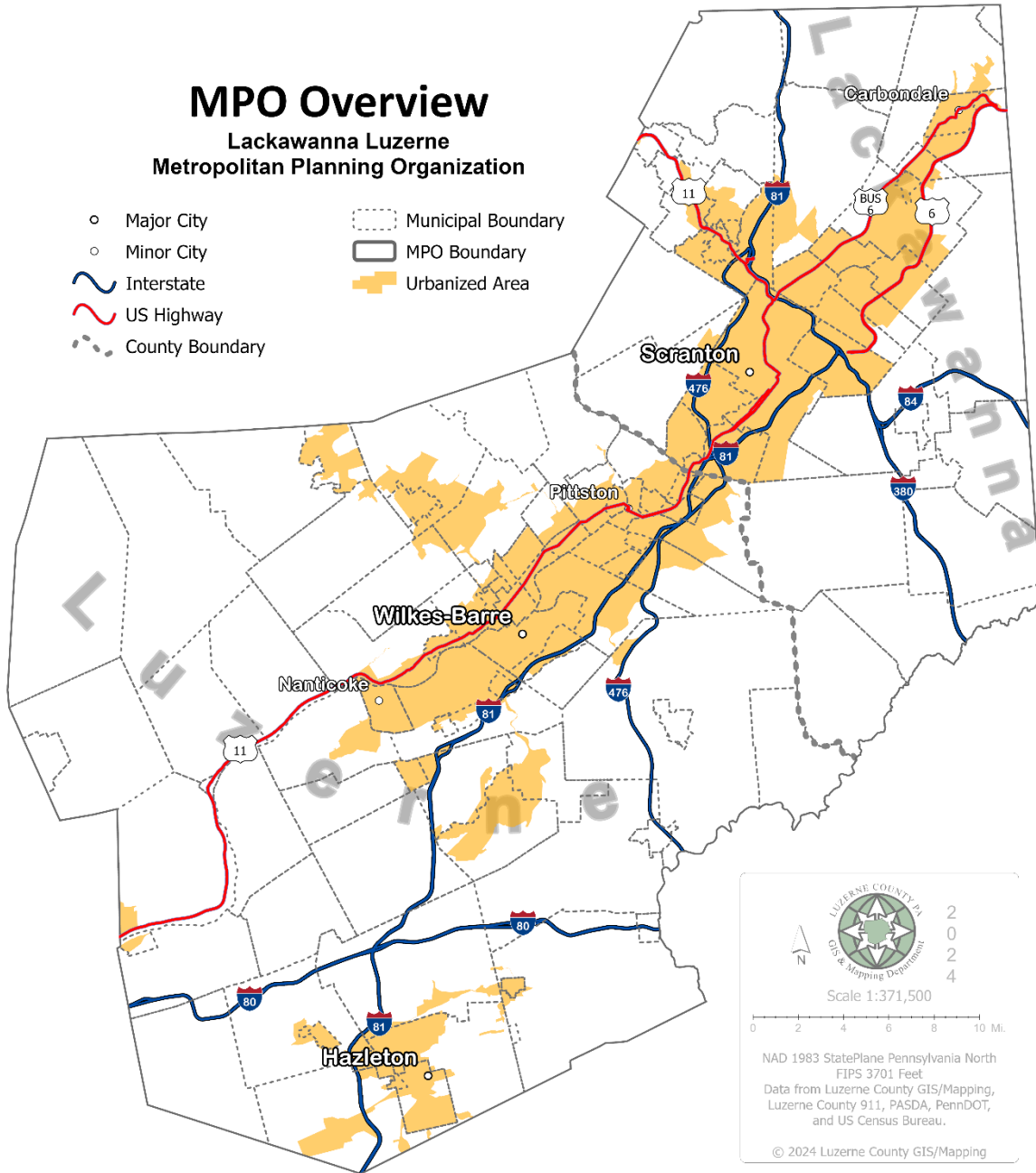
With its urban corridor stretching along the Susquehanna River, Northeastern Pennsylvania is vulnerable to disruptive flood events. In 1972, Hurricane Agnes caused enormous destruction along the New York-Pennsylvania border. In Luzerne County, 25,000 homes were destroyed when the river rose to 40.9 feet, four feet above the top of the existing levees at the time. As a result, many people left the Wyoming Valley in the aftermath of the storm.

Despite a reinforced levee system that was completed in January 2013,<sup>3</sup> flooding continues to be a major seasonal concern in the region, prompting important conversations about how future flood events may impact the resources and services available to transit users as well as how to help residents evacuate prone areas.

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<sup>3</sup> Skrapits, Elizabeth. "Four Years Later, Levee System Standing Tall | News | Citizens..." *The Citizens' Voice*, April 17, 2020. [https://www.citizensvoice.com/news/four-years-later-levee-system-standing-tall/article\\_836e7476-c513-5a5d-be8e-cb3ae9413f5d.html](https://www.citizensvoice.com/news/four-years-later-levee-system-standing-tall/article_836e7476-c513-5a5d-be8e-cb3ae9413f5d.html).

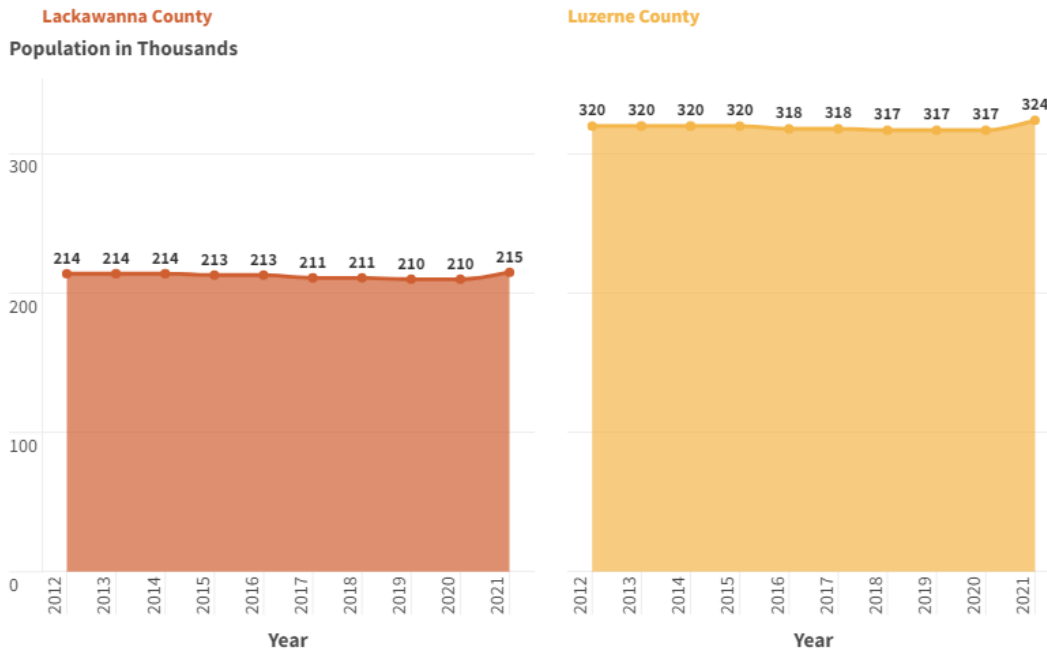
Figure 1: LLTS MPO Study Area



## Demographics

Both Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties have been steadily declining in population since the 1930s, but 2021 saw the beginnings of a potential upward trend (**Figure 2**). Both counties saw over a 2% increase in population that year, which may be partly due to national trends of urbanites moving out of nearby densely populated areas, like New York City and Philadelphia, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Figure 2: Population in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties from 2012 to 2021*



*Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2012 - 2021*

While veterans from other areas travel into the region for healthcare at the Wilkes-Barre Veterans Affairs Medical Center, there are also many veterans who reside within the two counties. In 2021, there were 11,830 veterans living in Lackawanna County, comprising of 6.9% of the population<sup>4</sup>, and 20,210 veterans living in Luzerne County, accounting for 7.8% of the population. Approximately a third of veterans in either Lackawanna or Luzerne Counties were living with a disability, a significantly higher percentage than the non-veteran population. Veterans in both counties were less likely to live in poverty than non-veterans, however, with 7.5% of veterans in Lackawanna County and 7.2% in Luzerne County.

*Table 2: Veterans and Non-Veterans with a disability or under the poverty level*

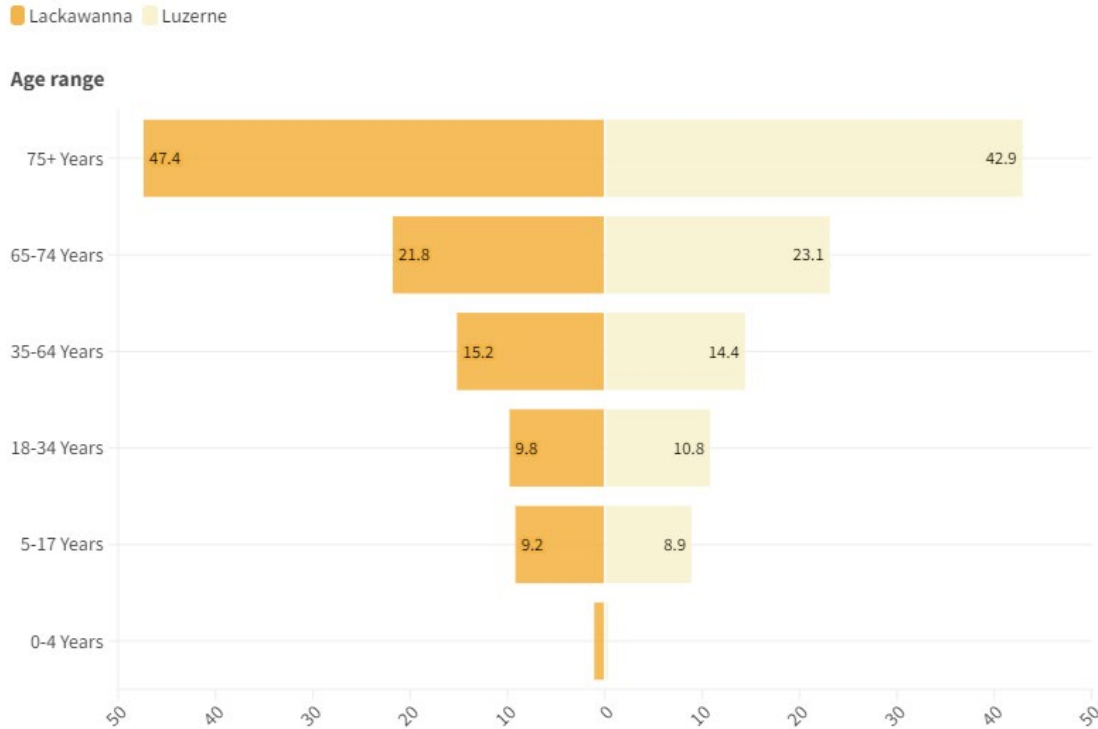
	<b>Disability Status</b>	<b>Poverty Status</b>
<i>Lackawanna County Veterans</i>	36.8%	7.5%
<i>Lackawanna County Non-Veterans</i>	17%	12.1%
<i>Luzerne County Veterans</i>	31.3%	7.2%
<i>Luzerne County Non-Veterans</i>	16.9%	11.9%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates*

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates in 2021, Table S2101

Overall, there are 33,328 residents (15.7%) living with a disability in Lackawanna County and 49,124 residents (15.3%) living with a disability in Luzerne County. The percentage of the population living with a disability of any kind increases in both counties as the age range increases (**Figure 3**).

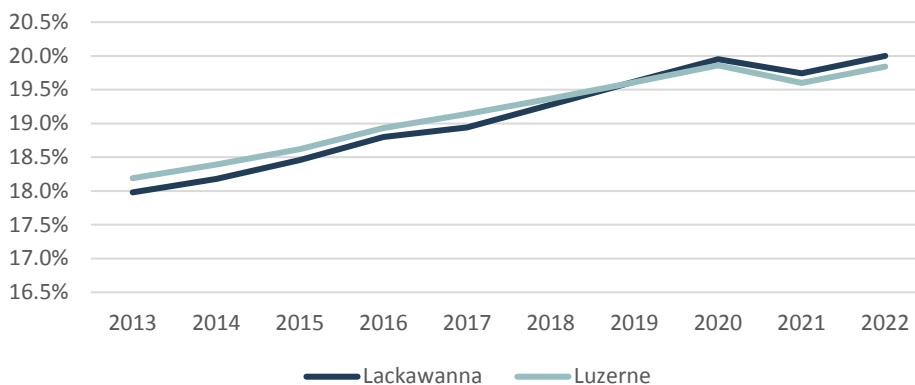
*Figure 3: Percent of the Population Living with any Disability by Age Group for Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.*



Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2021

The senior populations (aged 65 years or more) in both Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties account for nearly a quarter of the population and are steadily increasing (**Figure 4**). This indicates that demand for senior services and accessible transportation in both counties will increase as well.

*Figure 4: Population 65 Year and Over in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties over a 10-Year Period*

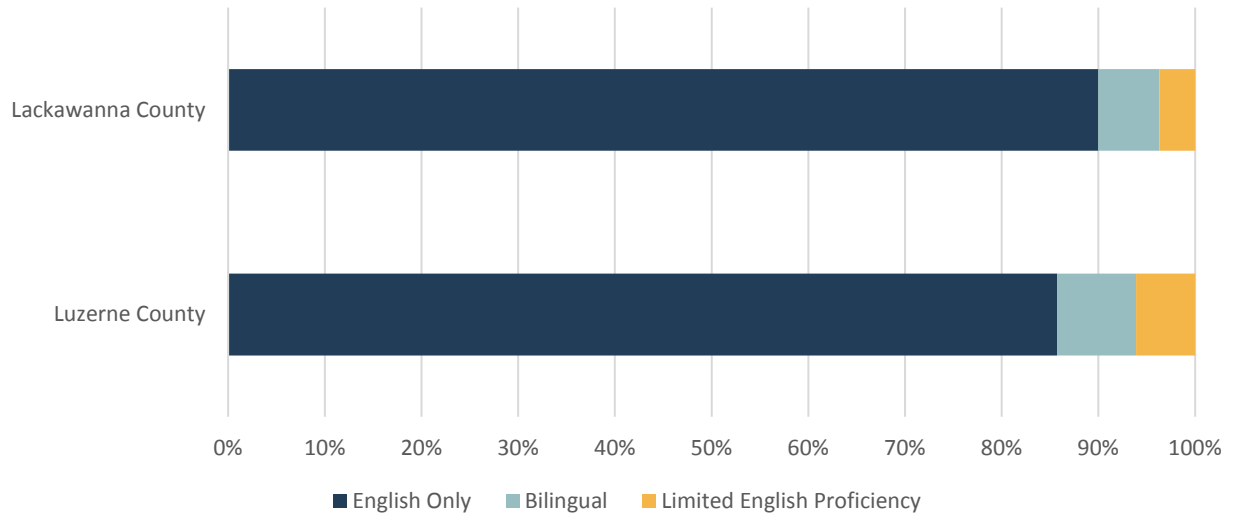


Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2013-2022



In 2022, 20,467 Lackawanna County residents spoke a language other than English at home; 37.0% of these residents responded that they did not speak English “very well.” In Luzerne County, 44,091 residents speak a language other than English at home, and 42.7% of these residents do not speak English “very well.” Accommodating transportation signage, ticket purchasing options, and wayfinding to fulfill the needs of English as a Second Language (ESL) populations remains critical to providing accessible public transportation.

*Figure 5: Ability to Speak English for Population 5+ Years in Lackawanna & Luzerne Counties*

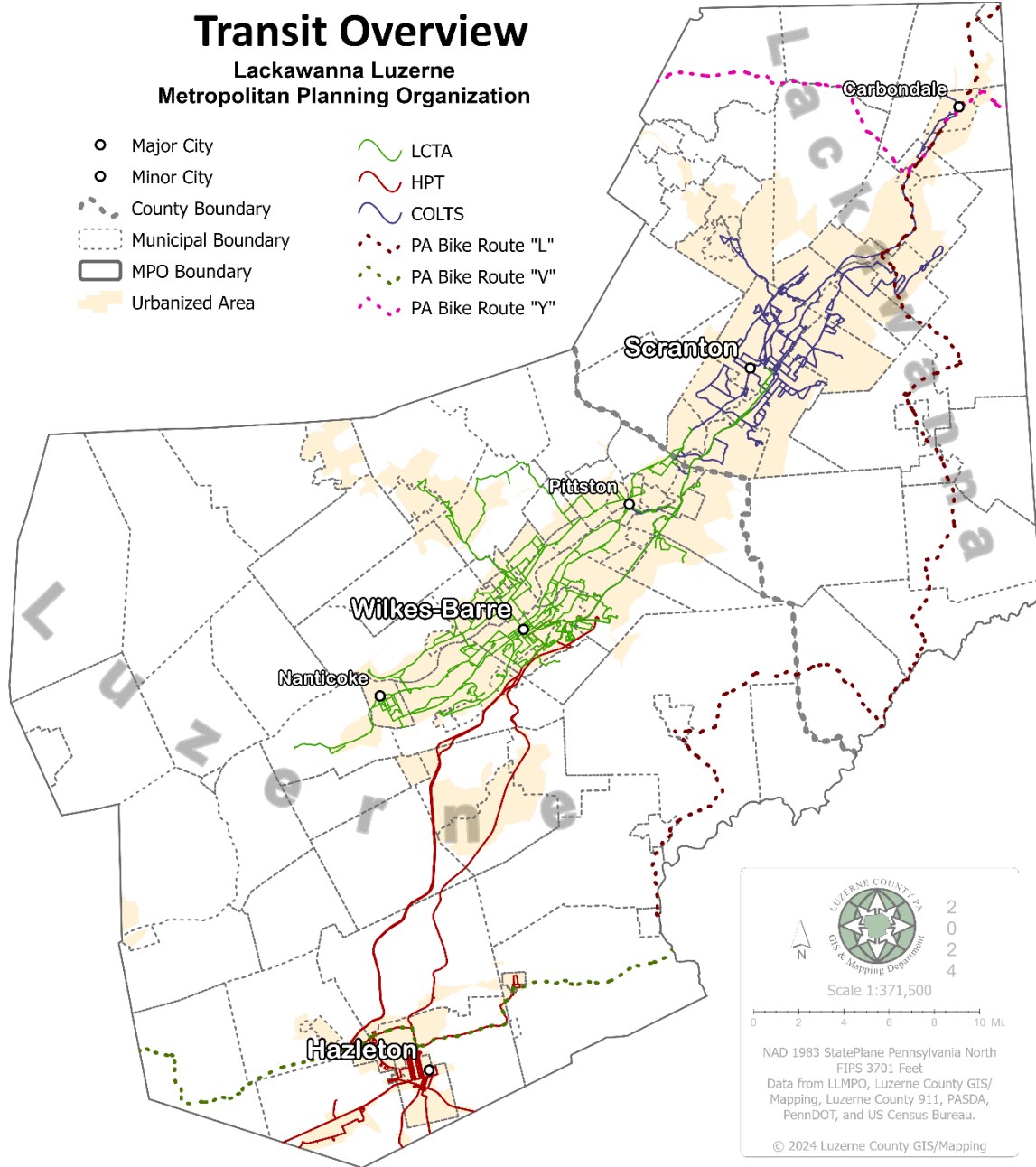


*Source: U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2022*

## Transportation Inventory

Residents of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties have a variety of transportation options available to them. Top transportation options include walking, cycling, privately owned automobiles, carpooling, public transportation, and taxi services/transportation network companies (TNCs).

*Figure 6: Public Transportation Fixed-Routes and Bicycle Routes in the Study Area*



### Walking

According to the ACS 2022 5-Year Estimates, 3.1% of Lackawanna County's working population indicated walking as their main means of traveling to work, while 2.5% of Luzerne County's working population indicated that walking was their primary mode of travel to work. Walking is often the least expensive form of transportation, and with the presence of evenly paved sidewalks, ADA curb ramps, and audibly signalized crosswalks, walking can also be an accessible mode of travel for persons with disabilities. Areas that lack a fully connected sidewalk network, however, can cause safety concern for residents who walk to their destinations.

### Cycling

Only 0.1% of the Lackawanna County's working population indicated that they primarily commute by bicycling, while 0.2% of Luzerne County residents commute by bicycle. Bicycles can be an inexpensive, more accessible alternative to owning a vehicle; however, there is not currently a robust network of bicycle infrastructure across both counties to support safe commuting by cycling.

### Carpooling

In 2022, 10.0% of commuters in Lackawanna County indicated carpooling as a means of traveling to work, compared to 76.4% driving alone. Similarly, in Luzerne County, 10.3% of commuters carpooled while 76.6% drove alone. Carpooling occurs when multiple people share a vehicle to travel together, preventing the use of multiple vehicles being driven to the same location. By multiple people using a single vehicle, the overall cost of the trip (which may include fuel costs, tolls, parking fees, and vehicle maintenance) decreases per person.

### Public Transportation

An estimated 0.7% of Lackawanna County commuters utilize public transportation. The majority of riders utilize the local transit agency, County of Lackawanna Transit System (COLTS). The agency provides both traditional fixed-route bus service and demand-response paratransit. Paratransit is a door-to-door service that groups riders together based on their travel times and destinations. This fare-based service is available to the public and is subsidized to be more affordable for seniors, persons with disabilities, and Medical Assistance (MATP) users. Additionally, other transit users may make use of nearby rail connections to commute, such as NJ Transit's Port Jervis Line.

Approximately 1.0% of Luzerne County commuters use public transportation. The majority of transit riders utilize Luzerne County Transportation Authority (LCTA), which provides both traditional fixed-route bus service and demand-response paratransit. A portion of public transportation commuters drive to New Jersey to use NJ Transit rail service.

### TNCs / Taxi Services

Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) and taxi services are private organizations that provide on-demand service to transport individuals to and from destinations determined by the passenger. Taxis operate ride-hailing services using a fleet of company-owned vehicles, while TNCs use mobile apps to connect passengers to drivers who provide rides in their personal vehicles. The most popular TNCs are Uber and Lyft. Both TNC companies serve the Wilkes-Barre and Scranton areas, but vehicles available for trips are not wheelchair accessible and do not include car seats for small children.

## Current Service Providers

### County of Lackawanna Transit (COLTS)

COLTS, established in 1972, operates 23 fixed routes serving various communities and industrial parks in Lackawanna County as well as a few destinations in Luzerne County (Mohegan Sun Casino and Racetrack, Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center, Golden Technologies Distribution Center in Laflin). The agency offers 20 daytime routes and 2 evening routes, in addition to its complementary paratransit service under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and shared-

ride service for seniors and persons with disabilities. Shared-ride trips are available to Lackawanna County residents travelling to locations in Lackawanna or Luzerne Counties.

COLTS’s ridership fell significantly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, COLTS provided 502,178 trips, down from 923,727 in 2020 and 1,158,396 in 2019.

In July 2018, COLTS began accepting all LCTA passes to promote better connectivity between the two counties. Students, faculty, and staff from Johnson College, Lackawanna College, Marywood University, and the University of Scranton can ride all COLTS buses for free with a current, valid college ID. COLTS recently partnered with the Scranton School District to make it easier for Scranton High School and West Scranton High School students to get to their classes. All COLTS passes can be purchased at the COLTS administrative office at 800 North South Road and at the Lackawanna Transit Center at 30 Lackawanna Avenue. In addition to single fares, COLTS offers 31-day, 10-ride, and day passes. Some of the locations where these passes can be purchased include the courtesy desk at Boscov’s, in The Marketplace at Steamtown, Gerrity’s Supermarkets at the Keyser Oak Shopping Center, 702 South Main Ave in Scranton, 320 Meadow Ave in Scranton, and 4015 Birney Ave in Moosic. All the passes can be purchased at the Albright Memorial Library, the Nancy Kay Holmes Library, the Library Express, the Valley Community Library, and the Carbondale Public Library. Passes can also be purchased on the COLTS website, <https://coltsbus.com/>.

*Table 3: COLTS Fixed-Route Fares, Updated 2013*

<b>Ticket</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Base Fare	\$1.75
Day Pass	\$4.00
10-Ride Pass	\$15.75
31-Day Pass	\$60.00

COLTS myStop mobile application allows bus riders to plan their trip, track their bus in real time, and get route and bus information. Bus riders can also text or call their bus stop ID to get more information about their bus stop and arrival. All COLTS buses also offer free Wi-Fi.

**Luzerne County Transportation Authority (LCTA)**

Luzerne County Transportation Authority (LCTA), established in 1972, offers fixed-route and shared ride public transit services for Luzerne County. The fixed-route service operates 19 routes that serve various communities in Luzerne County on weekdays and Saturdays. Route 24 to Frances Slocum State Park is seasonal, operating from May to September annually when the waterfall trails are accessible to the greater public. Route 17 connects the LCTA Transit Center in Wilkes-Barre to the COLTS Transit Center in Scranton.

In addition to fixed-route service, LCTA also operates paratransit services for Luzerne County residents, which are subsidized for seniors and persons with disabilities. Paratransit rides must be scheduled at least one day prior to the trip and LCTA does not generally provide service to destinations outside of Luzerne County.

As with many transit agencies nationally, LCTA has experienced a decrease in ridership over the past few years. In 2021, LCTA provided 826,474 passenger trips, down from 1,099,300 in 2020 and 1,287,082 in 2019.

LCTA currently oversees a fleet of 91 vehicles, which include six diesel/gasoline buses, 15 hybrid diesel/electric buses, 19 compressed natural gas (CNG) buses, and 51 diesel/gasoline paratransit vehicles. The agency offers 20 daytime routes, five night-time routes, and two inclement weather routes as well as a Senior Transit Program, Medical Assistance Transportation Program (MATP), Special Transportation Efforts Program, and a Persons with Disabilities Program.

*Table 4: LCTA Fixed-Route Fares, Updated 2018*

<b>Ticket</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Base Fare	\$1.75
Day Pass	\$4.00
10-Ride Pass	\$15.75
20-Ride Pass	\$30.00
31-Day Pass	\$60.00

LCTA utilizes the myStop app, which allows riders to plan their trip, track their bus, find the closest bus stop, and see all routes in detail. Passengers can also text or call a number with their bus stop ID to get this information.

Passengers can purchase their tickets or passes using the LCTA Smart Pay Application or on the website, <https://smartpay.lctabus.com>. Physical passes can also be purchased at the Intermodal Center in Wilkes-Barre or LCTA Administrative Offices at 315 Northampton Street in Kingston.

All LCTA fares are universally accepted on COLTS, the neighboring transit system in Lackawanna County, however COLTS buses do not accept the Smart Pay Application. Senior citizens who are 65 years and older can ride LCTA buses for free, but they must first submit an application with their proof of age to obtain a State Transit ID Card, at the LCTA Administrative Offices.

**Hazleton Public Transit (HPT)**

Hazleton Public Transit (HPT), operated by Easton Coach Company, is a fixed-route bus service for the City of Hazleton and surrounding communities. HPT oversees a fleet of 15 vehicles which comprises five diesel/gasoline motorbuses, three diesel/gasoline paratransit vehicles, and seven CNG buses. HPT operates nine regular routes in addition to a Summer, Saturday, and Sunday Loop.

In 2021, HPT provided 128,928 passenger trips, down from 168,481 in 2020 and 199,297 in 2019.

HPT riders have the option to keep their passes on their smartphone, streamlining the ticket validation process with HPT SmartPay, which is available for Apple and Android devices. Riders can also purchase reusable Smart Cards and paper tickets from the Hazleton Public Transit Administrative Offices at 126 West Mine Street, Hazleton, PA 18201. Riders may also pay for their fare onboard. One-way standard bus fares are \$1.50 and transfers can be purchased for \$0.50.

Seniors, Penn State Hazleton students, and children under six years of age with an adult can ride HPT for free. Penn State students can present their student ID to ride and children under six must travel with an adult. Seniors aged 65 and up can obtain an HPT Transit ID card available at 126 West Mine Street, Suite A; in order to receive their HPT Transit ID card they will need to bring proof of age and fill out an application.

Persons with disabilities and Medicare cardholders qualify for a reduced fare card which riders can obtain from the HPT Office after filling out an application and providing proof of disability or Medicare coverage.

*Table 5: HPT Fixed-Route Fares,  
Updated 2015*

<b>Ticket</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<i>Adult Fare</i>	\$1.50
<i>Disabled persons</i>	\$0.75
<i>Medicare card holders</i>	\$0.75
<i>Transfer fee</i>	\$0.50
<i>Paratransit</i>	\$3 - \$4
<i>10-Ride Pass</i>	\$13.50
<i>20-Ride Pass</i>	\$27.00

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## Stakeholder Engagement and Public Outreach

Stakeholder input for the LLTS MPO Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan was gathered through 10 interviews from December 5, 2023, to December 13, 2023. The MPO invited a variety of stakeholders from human service providers throughout Northeastern Pennsylvania to participate in virtual interviews. These stakeholder focus groups were divided into the following subgroups:

- Housing Authorities
- Mental Health and Developmental Services
- Senior Services
- Children and Youth Services
- Drug and Alcohol Treatment Providers
- Health Departments
- Transit Agencies
- Mental Health, Intellectual & Developmental Disability Services
- Veterans and Vocational Rehabilitation Providers
- Cycling and Pedestrian Advocacy Groups

These interviews, conducted via Microsoft Teams, had one to six stakeholders per focus group. Some interviewees represented organizations that provide services across the Northeastern Pennsylvania region, including not only Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, but also Susquehanna and Wyoming Counties.

The interview questions pertained to client demographics, transportation challenges, regional trends, post-pandemic recovery, and overall transportation improvement. The meetings were recorded and transcribed to ensure feedback was accurately captured. Information gained from these interviews informed the following *Transportation Needs and Service Gaps* section.

For organizations that were unable to send representatives to an interview, two Microsoft Forms surveys were available—a general survey for human services providers (which included the same questions as the live interviews), and a cycling survey to gather more information about bicycle use in the region. Overall, 40 human service providers answered the human services survey and two cycling advocates completed the cycling survey. These providers work with clients included in all the focus groups but were most represented by groups that assist families in poverty, seniors, and people with disabilities.

Survey responses indicated that the transportation-related challenges facing their clients include:

- lack of service outside of evening hours and on weekends
- no rural fixed-route service available
- not owning vehicles or having other sources of transportation
- long wait times for shared-ride services
- difficulty traveling with children

All these challenges impact getting to appointments on time and accessing necessary amenities.

Survey respondents also noted that current trends in the region such as:

- high unemployment
- understaffed transit companies
- an aging population unable to drive
- increase in the cost of living

All of these factors are all impactful on their client's decision or ability to use transit. Survey responses largely aligned with the feedback obtained in the focus group interviews.

Multiple stakeholders spoke about topics and concerns that were common across the region and across human services specifically, including:

- Cross-county trips
- Travel times and hours
- Staffing shortages across all industries
- Aging population and overall decrease in family-based support
- Limits to the effectiveness of virtual appointments

These key takeaways and other details from the stakeholder interviews helped illustrate the state of human services transportation and informed the MPO's analysis of existing transportation barriers.

## Transportation Needs and Service Gaps

Through the collaboration and cooperation of human service agencies, transportation organizations, advisory councils, and the general public, various transportation needs and service gaps have been identified in Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties. Six key barriers or gaps that limited the provision of human services include:

### Cross-County Trips

Most human service providers work with clients who travel to major destinations across county borders—not just from Lackawanna County to Luzerne County and vice versa, but also from Wyoming and Susquehanna Counties to Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties as well as Northeast Pennsylvania to Montour County. Many public and private transportation services will not cross county lines, even between Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties.

### Travel Times

Trip lengths were a concern for many human services providers, especially for clients travelling from rural areas of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties to major urban destinations. Long trip lengths (2+ hours each way) without bathroom breaks or other stops are particularly difficult for seniors and persons with disabilities.

### Decentralized County Offices

Human services offices are scattered throughout the region (**Figure 7**), which can be an impediment for clients who need access to multiple types of services (ex. veterans services, senior services, and drug and alcohol services).

### Transit Service Evening Hours

Existing transit services have limited spans of service, despite evening appointments and court hearings becoming more commonplace. Human services clients who have 5:00 PM appointments or court hearings after work may not be able to rely on public transportation services that end daily service at 6:00 PM or earlier.

### Bicycle/Pedestrian Infrastructure

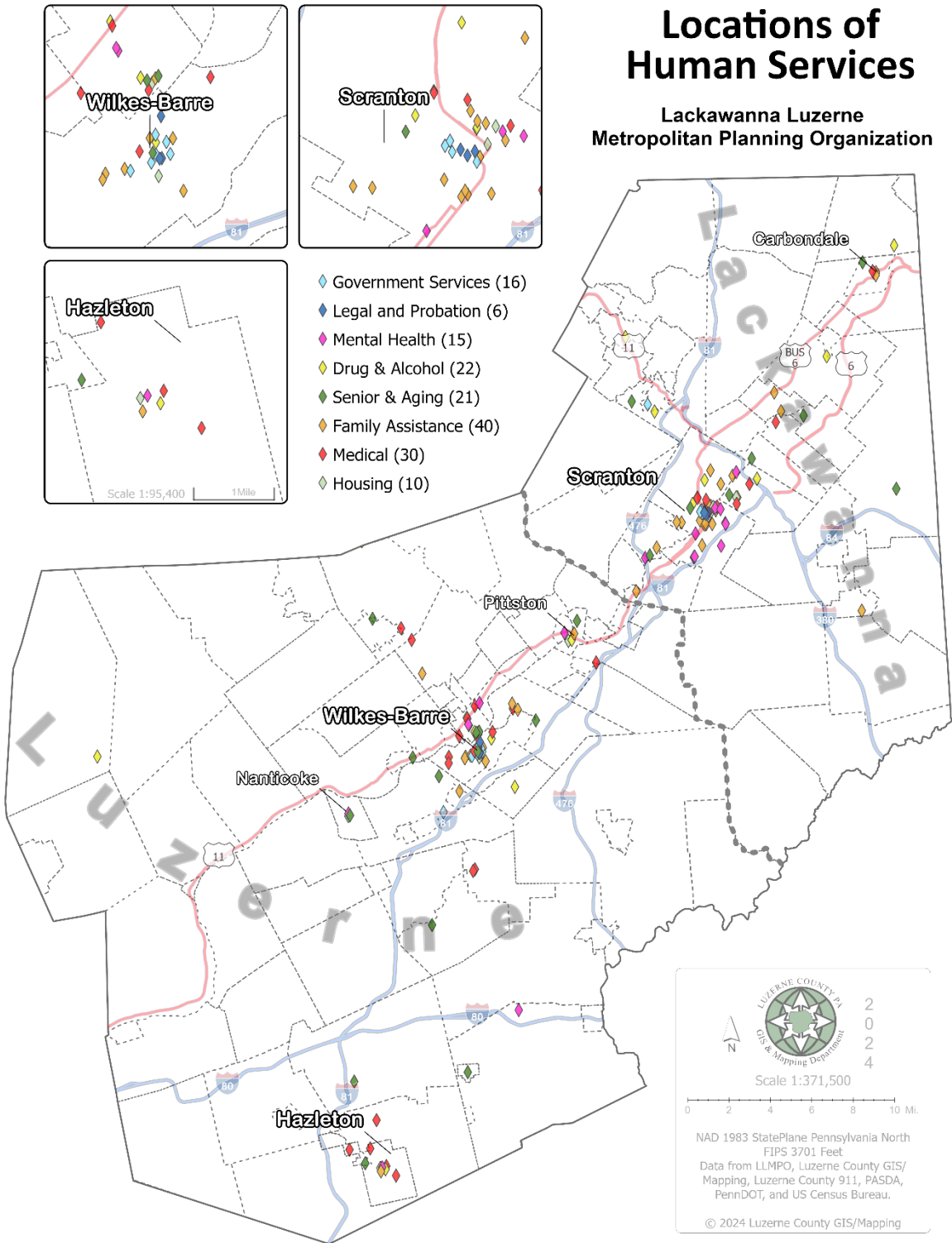
Many human services clients who do not have regular access to a private vehicle would be able to travel more independently if there were more amenities for pedestrians and cyclists. And for those who already walk or bike out of necessity, enhanced safety features on key routes could make their travel safer.

### Affordable Housing

A shortage of affordable housing in urban areas is pushing low-income residents, persons with disabilities, and seniors further out and away from existing transit infrastructure and human services destinations. When the nearest available affordable housing unit, assisted living community, or hotel is over an hour away from human services destinations,

this puts additional pressure on transit and human services providers to operate longer trips to serve communities in need.

Figure 7: Human Services Destinations





## Implementation Strategies

Through the identification of transportation barriers and challenges in accessing human services, LLTS can focus on strategies to improve transportation coordination in the region and enhance the delivery of human services. These strategies can be broadly grouped by which organizations or stakeholders are in the best position to champion strategies for improvement: the LLTS Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), county governments, and public transportation agencies.

<b>LLTS MPO</b>	<b>Coordinate with transit agencies on land-use or development plans</b>
	Although developers often work closely with local officials and the MPO on issues of land use and zoning, failing to coordinate with local transit providers can lead to gaps in service and infrastructure that cannot accommodate buses or pedestrians. The MPO can help by including transit agencies in conversations about land-use and economic development projects to ensure that new housing and job opportunities are seamlessly integrated into the public transportation network.
	<b>Support affordable housing initiatives</b>
	Affordable housing is a major hurdle for many human services clients. Alleviating the shortage of affordable housing, especially in areas near key human services destinations, will allow more clients to live within an accessible distance of important resources. As the region’s metropolitan planning organization, LLTS should advocate for affordable housing and support initiatives as they arise.
	<b>Invest in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure on key routes</b>
	Robust, connected, and safe bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure provides human services clients with more ways to get around and expands the reach of fixed-route transportation. LLTS can make a profound impact on accessibility for bicyclists and pedestrians by focusing on improvements along key routes, such as U.S. Route 11 and BicyclePA Routes L, V, and Y.

<b>County Governments Agencies</b>	<b>Collocate human services offices</b>
	As human services clients are increasingly accessing more than one type of services (veterans who also need housing assistance, seniors who also need drug and alcohol treatment, etc.), scattered and decentralized County services will become a barrier to clients who need to visit multiple offices. Branches of a County’s human services department should ideally be collocated in the same building or the same complex to streamline mobility and access. As each County makes decisions about office space and facility locations in the long term, proximity among disparate human services offices should be a high priority.

<b>Public Transportation Agencies</b>	<p><b>Market existing travel training to a wider audience</b></p> <p>Transit agencies in the region already provide travel training at no cost for new riders to learn how to navigate the fixed-route system. This training can open new doors for human services clients who live in areas with fixed-route service but who have been hesitant to ride buses or who are not aware of the fixed-route options available in their area. Transit agencies could market their travel training programs to the general public, as well as partnering with human services offices and education centers that work directly with clients who could benefit.</p>
	<p><b>Prioritize evening service</b></p> <p>As transit agencies update their Transit Development Plans, it will be important to remember and prioritize evening service whenever service expansion is considered. For both fixed-route and shared-ride services, expanding evening hours to 7:00 PM or 8:00 PM would allow more human services clients to return home from their after-work appointments or court hearings on transit.</p>
	<p><b>Enhance regional cooperation between transportation providers</b></p> <p>Because so many human services clients need to travel across county lines, transit agencies can facilitate more regional trips by communicating with each other regularly. This includes not just transportation providers within Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, but also neighboring providers in Northeast Pennsylvania that frequently make trips into and out of the region.</p>
	<p><b>Increase scheduling efficiencies for shared-ride operations</b></p> <p>Shared-ride providers are often limited in how much service they can provide because of long trips to distant pick-up and drop-off points; in turn, long trip lengths and wait times can discourage potential riders from using the service. Identifying common inefficiencies when scheduling trips can alleviate the burdens on both riders and providers. Many agencies have worked with PennDOT directly to streamline their shared-ride processes through software operational assessments, and COLTS is already working with PennDOT to receive technical assistance with increasing scheduling and operational efficiency.</p>

## Conclusion

Human service agencies provide support for the most vulnerable residents of Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties and access to their services is critical to the health and quality of life for many residents of the region. A reliable transportation network is essential to allow seniors to age in place, individuals with disabilities to fully participate as members of their community, and disadvantaged individuals to maintain their health and safety.

This Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan provides insight and first steps towards enhancing transportation for human services clients. The MPO will continue to evaluate solutions and coordinate with public transportation agencies and county government entities to ensure that human services can better meet the needs of the region. By streamlining human service procedures, enhancing regional collaboration, and investing in diverse mobility options, LLTS will be able to plan for both the present and future of the region.

## Appendix A: Stakeholder Engagement Summary

## **Stakeholder Engagement Summary**

Stakeholder input for the LLTS MPO Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan was primarily gathered through 10 interviews from December 5, 2023, to December 13, 2023. The MPO invited a variety of stakeholders from human service providers throughout Northeastern Pennsylvania to participate in virtual interviews. These stakeholder focus groups were divided into the following subgroups:

- Housing Authorities
- Mental Health and Developmental Services
- Senior Services
- Children and Youth Services
- Drug and Alcohol Treatment Providers
- Health Departments
- Transit Agencies
- Mental Health, Intellectual & Developmental Disability Services
- Veterans and Vocational Rehabilitation Providers
- Cycling and Pedestrian Advocacy Groups

These interviews, conducted via Microsoft Teams, had one to six stakeholders per focus group. Some interviewees represented organizations that provide services across the Northeastern Pennsylvania region, including not only Lackawanna and Luzerne Counties, but also Susquehanna and Wyoming Counties. Names and contact information for each interview attendee can be found in Appendix A of this summary.

The meetings were recorded and transcribed to ensure feedback was accurately captured. Agendas and meeting notes can be found in Appendix B of this summary.

For organizations that were unable to send representatives to an interview, two Microsoft Forms surveys were available which included the same questions as the live interviews—a survey for human services providers and a cycling survey to gather more information about bicycle use in the region.

### **Key Themes**

The interview questions pertained to client demographics, transportation challenges, regional trends, post-pandemic recovery, and overall transportation improvement. Multiple stakeholders spoke about topics and concerns that were common across the region and across human services specifically.

#### **Cross-County Trips**

Most human service providers work with clients who travel to major destinations across county borders—not just from Luzerne County to Lackawanna County and vice versa, but also from Wyoming and Susquehanna Counties to Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties; NEPA to Montour County. Many public and private transportation services will not cross county lines even between Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties.

#### **Travel Times**

Trip lengths were a concern for many human services providers, especially for clients travelling from rural areas of Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties to major urban destinations. Long trip lengths (2+ hours each way) without bathroom breaks or other stops are particularly difficult for seniors and persons with disabilities.

### Staffing Shortages

Since the pandemic, many industries are experiencing severe staffing shortages. Transit agencies are short on drivers and maintenance workers, which means that fewer vehicles can be on the road picking up passengers. Medical providers have closed or are short-staffed, which means that patients must travel even farther to get the same services. And human services offices are short of caseworkers who might otherwise be able to drive clients who have no other transportation.

### Demographic Changes

The regional population is aging, meaning there are more seniors who need services, and an increasing number of those seniors need additional services (mental health care, drug/alcohol rehabilitation, housing, etc.). This demand is exacerbated by an overall decrease in traditional sources of support, such as family who live locally or close relationships with neighbors.

### Transit Service Hours

Existing transit services have limited spans of service, even while evening appointments and court hearings are becoming more common. Human services clients who have 5pm appointments or court hearings after work may not be able to rely on public transportation services that stop at 6pm or earlier.

### Limits to Virtual Appointments

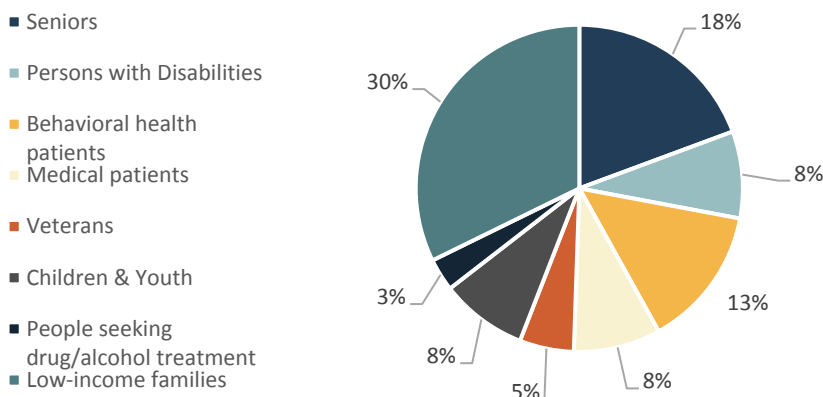
Human services providers have expanded their virtual offerings since 2020; in some cases this has increased accessibility, but in other cases virtual appointments are inferior to in-person appointments. Intake interviews for mental health and substance use disorder tend to be more effective in person, while other clients may not have a smartphone or internet access to take advantage of virtual meetings. As a result, many human services still rely heavily on in-person appointments and regular transportation to deliver the highest level of care to their clients.

## Survey Results

Overall, 40 human service providers answered the human services survey and two cycling advocates completed the cycling survey. These providers work with clients included in all the focus groups but were most represented by groups that assist families in poverty, seniors, and people with disabilities.

### Human Services Provider Feedback

#### Question 1: Who are the typical customers/clients of your agency?



**Question 2:** Are there any transportation-related challenges you and your colleagues face in providing services? (i.e. getting clients to your office, travelling with kids, etc.)

- Weekend service
- No service outside of traditional working hours
- Rural service
- Accessing necessary amenities
- Clients do not own vehicles
- Clients have no other source of transportation
- Clients miss appointments
- Long wait times for shared-ride services
- Difficult to travel with children

**Question 3:** Are there any trends in the region that are impacting your clients or their access to your services? (i.e. current employment trends, demographic trends, etc.)

- Aging population unable to drive
- High unemployment
- Rural patients lack transportation options
- Transportation companies/coordinators are understaffed
- Growing cost of living and wages no not reflect cost increase
- High rates of homelessness

**Question 4:** Has your client/customer base recovered to pre-pandemic levels?

- Food pantries are still frequently utilized

**Question 5:** Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to human services transportation in the region?

- Many families with limited personal vehicle access are moving to the area
- On-demand drivers sometimes do not show up
- Accommodating for aging populations
- Accommodating for those without internet access
- Helping patients get to and from medical appointments
- Seniors facing isolation due to lack of transportation services
- Income-based free or reduced cost transportation for underserved populations
- Improved service hours and availability
- Cooperating with insurance carriers to ease access to medical appointments
- Difficult for families to navigate LCTA bus system
- Programs to help impoverished families receive bus passes
- Making services more public and approachable/accessible
- Streamlining the COLTS PwD application process

## Cycling Advocate Feedback

**Question 1:** To the best of your knowledge, do your customers/clients bike or walk to access amenities?

- Yes, some do

**Question 2:** What areas of your community are not easily accessible by bicycle? How could accessibility be improved?

- Scranton to Pittston

- Mountain Top and the Back Mountain

**Question 3:** What are some difficulties encountered by pedestrians or cyclists in your area?

- Distracted drivers
- Truck traffic
- Narrow roads

**Question 4:** Does your organization partake in volunteer efforts or provide mobility options or opportunities for disadvantaged groups?

- Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority participates in an adaptive bikeshare program for wheelchair users or people that have other mobility issues.

## **Appendix B: List of Stakeholders**



## Stakeholder Interview Contacts

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Focus Group</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
Janet Sweeney	Director of Northeast Office	PA Environmental Council	Lackawanna/Luzerne	Cycling	Tuesday, December 12, 2023
Vincent Bulzoni	Board Member	Anthracite Bike Coalition	Lackawanna	Cycling	Tuesday, December 12, 2023
Owen Worozbyt	Operations Director	Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority	Lackawanna	Cycling	Tuesday, December 12, 2023
Bernie McGurl	Executive Director	Lackawanna River Conservation Association	Lackawanna	Cycling	Tuesday, December 12, 2023
Leslie Ward	Deputy Director	Children & Youth Services	Luzerne	CYS	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Kerry Browning	Deputy Director	Office of Youth & Family Services	Lackawanna	CYS	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Joelle Balut	Drug and Alcohol Therapist	Wyoming Valley Alcohol & Drug Services	Lackawanna/Luzerne	Drug & Alcohol	Monday, December 11, 2023
Lou Guzzi	Clinical Director	Drug and Alcohol Treatment Service	Lackawanna	Drug & Alcohol	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Rene Esgro	Case Management Supervisor	Drug and Alcohol Department	Lackawanna	Drug & Alcohol	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Ryan Hogan	Drug and Alcohol Administrator	Drug & Alcohol	Luzerne	Drug & Alcohol	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Shannon Bonacci	Deputy Director	City of Pittston Redevelopment Authority	Luzerne	Housing	Tuesday, December 5, 2023
Alicia Zazzera	Executive Director	Carbondale Housing Authority	Lackawanna	Housing	Tuesday, December 5, 2023
Tara Fox	Administrator	Behavioral Health & Development Services	Luzerne	MHIDD	Wednesday, December 6, 2023
Miki Drutchal	Acting Administrator	Lackawanna County Behavioral Health	Lackawanna	MHIDD	Monday, December 11, 2023
Meghan Osborne	Deputy Chief Probation Officer	Adult Probation Department	Lackawanna	Prison Release	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Julie Mann	Coordinator	LINK	Lackawanna/Luzerne	Senior Services	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Mary Schell	Director of Social Services	Area Agency on Aging	Luzerne	Senior Services	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Sara McDonald	Director	Area Agency on Aging	Lackawanna	Senior Services	Thursday, December 7, 2023
Gretchen Wintermantel	Communications Director	LCTA	Luzerne	Transit Agency	Monday, December 11, 2023
Joe Roselle	Director of Administrative Services	LCTA	Luzerne	Transit Agency	Monday, December 11, 2023
Debbie Dennis	Director of Shared-Ride	LCTA	Luzerne	Transit Agency	Monday, December 11, 2023
Rob Fiume	Executive Director	LCTA	Luzerne	Transit Agency	Monday, December 11, 2023
Courtney Schaeffer	Administrative Assistant	HPT	Luzerne	Transit Agency	Monday, December 11, 2023
Nicole Ference	Human Resources Manager	COLTS	Lackawanna	Transit Agency	Monday, December 11, 2023
Timothy Booth	Director	Lackawanna County Veterans Affairs	Lackawanna	Veterans	Tuesday, December 12, 2023
Crystal Arcarese	Chief of Social Work	Wilkes-Barre Veterans Administration	Luzerne	Veterans	Tuesday, December 12, 2023
Heather Nelson	District Administrator	Office of Vocational Rehab Services	Lackawanna/Luzerne	Vocational Rehab	Tuesday, December 12, 2023

## Appendix C: Stakeholder Interview Agendas & Notes

## Housing Stakeholder Interview

<b>Date</b>	Tuesday, December 5, 2023
<b>Time</b>	10:00am – 11:00am
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	<p><b>Stakeholders:</b> Shannon Bonacci (City of Pittston Redevelopment Authority) Alicia Zazzera (Carbondale Housing Authority)</p> <p><b>LLTS MPO:</b> Mary Liz Donato Eric Middleton Jonathan Shaw Matt Jones</p> <p><b>Michael Baker Intl.:</b> Annie Butkiewicz DeRon Jordan</p>

### Discussion

Who are the typical customers/clients of your agency?

Both: Seniors, disabled, and those below poverty line

Are there any transportation-related challenges you and your colleagues face in providing services? (Getting to your office, travelling with kids, etc.)

AZ: Lack of vehicle ownership

SB: Very little walkable area. Uncomfortable to access public transportation

AZ: Carbondale – Two elderly high rises in Main Street and 2 on other side of town

SB: Pittston – Main Street and downtown main office. Bus stops along Main Street help

Most housing developments are off Main. Rather distant from Main Street. Sidewalks are underdeveloped. Tough to access Main Street bus routes.

Are there any trends in the region that are impacting your clients or their access to your services? (i.e. current employment trends, demographic trends, etc.)

SB: Housing crisis and huge demand for housing. Difficult for those on modest income to find housing.

No vacancies, considering closing waiting list

AZ: Also closed list due to backlog. Section 8 program difficult to track. Section 8 scattered site tough to keep track of

Has your client / customer base recovered to pre-pandemic levels? Have any modifications been made to your services to adapt to pandemic-related challenges?

AZ: Pandemic did not change much relating to housing supply or demand

SB: Return to healthcare services. Elderly need public transit to reach medical appointments. Food desert; elderly do not take bus to grocery store. Grocery store closed due to not being cost effective

SB: Health service shuttle service assists elderly residents with appointment access. Arranged by healthcare provider

Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to human services transportation in the region?

AZ: COLTS provides service to medical partners but only in 2-hour window. Patients often miss return rides.

SB: Lack of digitized documentation makes polling residents difficult. Everything usually arranged via paperwork

## MHIDD Stakeholder Interview #1

<b>Date</b>	Wednesday, December 6, 2023
<b>Time</b>	10:00am – 11:00am
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	<p><b>Stakeholders:</b> Tara Fox (Luzerne County Behavioral Health &amp; Development Services)</p> <p><b>LLTS MPO:</b> Eric Middleton Jonathan Shaw</p> <p><b>Michael Baker Intl.:</b> Emily Webb Nico Corbo</p>

### Discussion

Who are the typical customers/clients of your agency?

TF: Human Services oversee drug and alcohol, mental health, aging, children and youth. I oversee behavioral health rather than healthcare, along with homelessness. Housing, food insecurities, access to medical care. I also handle mental health and intellectually disabled for Wyoming and Luzerne County. Children and youth are exclusively for Luzerne County.

Are there any transportation-related challenges you and your colleagues face in providing services? (Getting to your office, travelling with kids, etc.)

TF: Trouble with transportation not crossing county lines. Rural Wyoming County has accessibility difficulties because providers cannot cross county lines. Children and Youth services struggle with transportation for families. Uber and ride hailing services may be a possibility to ameliorate mobility issues. Long wait time is oftentimes a deterrent.

Wilkes-Barre and Hazleton are urban areas. Rural areas are less accessible. Origins dispersed throughout the county and destinations, usually either in Hazleton or in Wilkes-Barre. Children and Youth provide a great deal of transportation assistance. Mental Health assists in lesser capacity. Drug and Alcohol transportation assistance inconclusive. Funding for mental health transportation assistance cut by state. Luzerne Human Services will be transitioning to non-traditional hours. Shift in hours could necessitate shared ride and fixed route to cooperate with human service agency. Agency's services should accommodate for the consumer's schedule. Health care providers thankfully able to accommodate. A concerted effort to collaborate and roll out transportation service with public transit providers would ease the issue related to service hour change.

Are there any trends in the region that are impacting your clients or their access to your services? (i.e. current employment trends, demographic trends, etc.)

TF: Staffing issues throughout the agency at provider level. Patients may seek services in another county because of lack of availability in resident county. Lack of staffing is a post-pandemic product. Not rebounding as

quickly as the agency would like. Mental health services are not popular for older populations and for minority populations. Language, cultural, and stigma barriers must be broken down and transportation needs must adjust accordingly.

Spanish language accommodations must improve on the *provider's* end. Bilingual workers are a hot commodity. Staffing is a huge issue and reimbursement rates have not been increased. Potential employees prefer factory-related alternatives, like the Chewy plant.

Has your client / customer base recovered to pre-pandemic levels? Have any modifications been made to your services to adapt to pandemic-related challenges?

TF: We made an investment in virtual technology and availability of virtual services. Could reach unserved populations. Many subgroups were more eager to participate in virtual appointments and telehealth. Internet connectivity issue in rural Wyoming and Luzerne County. Virtual education is difficult as well. Wyoming County lags significantly in both internet capacity and transportation to amenities.

Medical assistance qualifications decreased during the pandemic. MA eligibility became more lenient. Income thresholds decreased during the pandemic. Now the MA eligibility has returned to pre-pandemic strict norms. Now, serving the same number of people but fewer are MA eligible for services.

Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to human services transportation in the region?

TF: A one-hour outpatient appointment becomes 4 or 5 hours when accommodating for shared-ride time. Conversely, transit is useful because the agency offers bus passes if patients attend appointments. Incentive for those who live within bus routes. Hazleton and Luzerne County Transit serve the area. Human Services fund bus passes through their budget. Nothing similar in Wyoming County regarding shared-ride or PWD. Human Services provides training to help patients use public transportation. Human Services or transit agencies can teach riders how to utilize transit not just for employment, but medical, leisure, etc.

HPT and Luzerne County can also introduce rider training services or check if they provide rider training services.

EW: They may already provide that service, we can follow up with you about whether those services are available and contact information if so.

## CYS Stakeholder Interview

<b>Date</b>	Thursday, December 7, 2023
<b>Time</b>	10:30am – 11:30am
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	<p><b>Stakeholders:</b> Leslie Ward (Luzerne County Children &amp; Youth Services) Kerry Browning (Lackawanna County Office of Youth &amp; Family Services)</p> <p><b>LLTS MPO:</b> Mary Liz Donato Jonathan Shaw</p> <p><b>Michael Baker Intl.:</b> Annie Butkiewicz Nico Corbo</p>

## Discussion

Who are the typical customers/clients of your agency?

LW: Low-income clients. Intellectually disabled, mental health diagnoses, substance abuse issues. Service for families with children under 18. Also assist independent living 18+ families

KB: Difficult to navigate because the entire family is involved.

Are there any transportation-related challenges you and your colleagues face in providing services? (Getting to your office, travelling with kids, etc.)

LW: Families with several children receive taxi or Uber financial assistance from an agency. It is difficult to cross county lines from Luzerne and Lackawanna County. It is difficult to assist accessibility for providers across county lines. Biggest hurdle is getting patients to Danville hospital. Support staff and case workers assist with rides. Agency oftentimes does not receive enough prior notice for preparing ride. Hotel families struggle with getting children to and from school. Schools often struggle with resources. Case workers must provide rides on a daily basis. Hotels sometimes not school district.

KB: We provide bus passes and ride assistance for patients. It is difficult for rural areas to receive access. Cannot order Ubers because the County doesn't use credit cards. Patients have material reliance on free bus passes or case worker assistants. Clients underutilize taxi service because we try to use case aids to provide rides. This isn't necessarily helping families in the long run because they become dependent on our agency.

Are there any trends in the region that are impacting your clients or their access to your services? (i.e. current employment trends, demographic trends, etc.)

LW: Many residents are in hotels and living in poverty. Are able to access residents in Wilkes-Barre but harder to assist those living more rurally. Our agency is down 40 case workers.

KB: Housing shortage and lack of affordable housing. The housing market for the entire county is becoming unaffordable. Luzerne county residents struggle for employment. Cyclical, lack of living wage leads to lack of

proper housing. Tough to continue assisting families who are caught in cycle. Sometimes we must remove children from families. Underlying issues of addiction, mental health, etc. Compounds with housing crisis. Community must help with affordable housing. Our agency is down 60 case workers.

Has your client / customer base recovered to pre-pandemic levels? Have any modifications been made to your services to adapt to pandemic-related challenges?

LW: Staffing shortages since pandemic. People were unable to reach services during the pandemic. It is particularly difficult for people with addictions and mental health issues. When agency is remote from their patients, they cannot grasp the magnitude of addiction and mental health issues proliferating. Patients became accustomed to remote meetings, reticent to return to in-person.

KB: The transportation itself was not the biggest issue during the pandemic, instead isolation.

Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to human services transportation in the region?

LW: Schools also don't have the resources despite being legally bound to transport children to school. Children get fed in school. Breakfast and Lunch. Crucial to actually get these children into school. School and service providers offer safe space. There's a Catholic youth center with afterschool programs. Drop-in but transportation to programs required. Transportation must be easy, accessible, and navigable for clients.

KB: Increase awareness for human service issues falls onto children and youth services. The logistics of living in a hotel and lack of space makes the situation even more tense.



## Drug & Alcohol/Prison Release Stakeholder Interview

<b>Date</b>	Thursday, December 7, 2023
<b>Time</b>	1:00pm – 2:00pm
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Stakeholders:</b> Lou Guzzi (Drug & Alcohol Treatment Service - Scranton) Meghan Osborne (Lackawanna County Adult Probation) Rene Esgro (Lackawanna-Susquehanna Drug & Alcohol Programs) Ryan Hogan (Luzerne-Wyoming Drug & Alcohol)
	<b>LLTS MPO:</b> Mary Liz Donato Eric Middleton Jonathan Shaw
	<b>Michael Baker Intl.:</b> Emily Webb DeRon Jordan

### Discussion

Who are the typical customers/clients of your agency?

LG: We deal with substance-use disorder population, we have about 80% MA folks. Even if you live in East Mountain, getting into Scranton can be a challenge

RH: We represent 2 counties, with Luzerne being the more populous county. We do primarily substance-use disorder and we do case management unit. We see 90-95% publicly funded folks (our office or Medicaid) who have diagnoses for substance-use disorder. We do a screening to see if a person potentially has an SUD, and then we help them through the process of getting a diagnosis

MO: We have 3,100 individuals overseen in our department, ranging from bail supervision to general supervision. Our specialty supervision has access to bus passes, but we don't always have that for the general supervision folks.

RE: In Susquehanna County we could really use transportation assistance, so individuals truly are at a loss for transportation. And if people leave treatment, they're often not able to get transportation back home

Are there any transportation-related challenges you and your colleagues face in providing services? (Getting to your office, travelling with kids, etc.)

LG: Employment is a concern here. A lot of stuff that gives a living wage to our clients is factory work, like an industrial park up in Jessup. There's a bus to the industrial park but it's a mile away and uphill.

DJ: Right, many buses just go to the "front door" of industrial parks

MO: Bus transportation stops at 6pm, so we have quite a few folks who have trouble getting home after a 5pm hearing or check-in. Work release is now run out of the County prison, so I don't know how that runs.

RH: In Luzerne County we have a work release program through our Department of Corrections, but last I knew there wasn't transportation for that .

DJ: Ok, if you have a point of contact in that Department we can follow up with them

MO: We currently do not have a work release program in Lackawanna County, just a house arrest program. The work release program ended during the pandemic.

Are there any trends in the region that are impacting your clients or their access to your services? (i.e. current employment trends, demographic trends, etc.)

RE: We're seeing a large trend in the elderly population needing treatment. We do a lot of virtual assessments and screenings since covid, but it is sometimes necessary to do one-on-one meetings with individuals. A lot of folks have physical disabilities in addition to the SUD, and a lot of folks don't even have a phone. So, trying to do everything virtually doesn't work for everyone.

RH: We've also seen an increase in our aging population, partly because we're keeping people alive longer. And people with acute medical conditions of all ages can be difficult to transport. We have a lot of people doing daily dosing for some SUD medication at the doctor's office; unlike dialysis treatments, they can get "holiday dosing" so they don't have to come in at those times, but otherwise they need to travel every day. They're generally open every day 7am-3pm

Has your client / customer base recovered to pre-pandemic levels? Have any modifications been made to your services to adapt to pandemic-related challenges?

LG: Our centers went up during COVID because people were looking for someone to talk to. And telehealth didn't exist for SUD pre-covid, so that's been a huge change and has increased accessibility. We're probably 90% in-person, but it's nice to have the availability of that alternative

RH: Same for Luzerne-Wyoming.

RE: In our office we used to be required to do face-to-face assessments, so now we have the opportunity to do virtual assessments. So, we've remained doing the majority of assessments via telephone or zoom, we assess people at the county prisons weekly virtually. That may come to an end at some point, but it's working better for us at this point.

MO: You can't really supervise anyone on probation via phone. Court proceedings were done via Zoom or Teams for a year, but we're back to doing everything in person. We did lose a lot of offenders during that time, who relapsed or who did.

EW: Have you seen any post-pandemic staffing issues, either in your organizations or at organizations?

MO: Not necessarily due to the pandemic, but our colleagues across the state have had staffing issues. We anticipate 2 probation officers going into the private sector in January, and that's difficult to deal with.

Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to human services transportation in the region?

LG: We used to have a barrier of confidentiality with MATP and COLTS bus and they were allowed to take free bus rides. But at one point they went from a sign-in sheet to requesting a letter of info, and that went against state confidentiality laws. The laws on confidentiality recently changed, and the PA 2-55-5 regulation that was so stringent has been placed on the backburner. But moving forward, I hope you'll keep us in the loop so that you don't build something we can't use.

## Aging/Senior Services Stakeholder Interview

<b>Date</b>	Thursday, December 7, 2023
<b>Time</b>	9:00am – 10:00am
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	<p><b>Stakeholders:</b>            Julie Mann (PA LINK to Aging/Disability Resources)            Mary Schell (Luzerne-Wyoming Counties AAA)            Sara McDonald (Lackawanna County AAA)</p> <p><b>LLTS MPO:</b>            Mary Liz Donato            Eric Middleton</p> <p><b>Michael Baker Intl.:</b>            Emily Webb            DeRon Jordan</p>

### Discussion

Who are the typical customers/clients of your agency?

SM: We serve older adults 60 years

JM: Our clients are largely the aging and disabled (usually 50+)

Are there any transportation-related challenges you and your colleagues face in providing services? (Getting to your office, travelling with kids, etc.)

SM: We just had some listening sessions for the state Master Plan on Aging, and we had some feedback that there's a gap in services for people aged 60-65 to qualify for SR. It's a wonderful program and we're happy to have it, but because it accommodates so many people the length of waits can be tough on them to get to medical appointments. And I think more people need more assistance getting from the house to the van. And we increasingly have people going outside the county. Over an hour on. The SR program is great for the day-to-day routines that you do regularly, but if something pops up it can be difficult to get that scheduled—sometimes there's a 2-week wait to go from a new rider application to a trip, or even for existing riders the 24-hour lead time for booking trips can be difficult.

MS: I agree, we heard almost the same feedback in the Luzerne-Wyoming listening sessions. Particularly in Wyoming County, it takes longer because it's rural, but even in rural Luzerne one gentleman said it was almost a 3-hour ride one-way trip for him.

JM: I don't directly deal with consumers myself, but I've been at the listening sessions and that's what I've been hearing. And I also do Carbon County, and I hear the same things. We have the CCTI buses in Carbon County

Are there any trends in the region that are impacting your clients or their access to your services? (i.e. current employment trends, demographic trends, etc.)

SM: I think both Lackawanna and Luzerne have a high increase in seniors as the population increases. The volume of people we serve every year continues to increase. And we serve a more diverse group of people

every year, and it's not just medical appointments that they need now. There are increasingly more mental health appointments or drug/alcohol trips.

MS: I agree. One of the things we're finding is that a growing number of our consumers don't have formal supports like local family, or relationships with their neighbors, so they're turning towards transportation services more and more.

JM: I do want to mention that the Luzerne and potentially Lackawanna, Northeastern Counseling Association has their own ride program. So when you have some of those individual programs, they're already set up with their own ride. They will occasionally do something very local for a medical trip, but mostly it's just for their own programming.

SM: Yeah, Scranton Counseling Center has van services for their partial programs and day programs, but it doesn't include outpatient therapy.

Has your client / customer base recovered to pre-pandemic levels? Have any modifications been made to your services to adapt to pandemic-related challenges?

SM: Pre-pandemic we had more of a focus on consumer choice and picking providers, but that's become more difficult to do post-pandemic because of workforce issues. I can see in our office that that's had an impact on the way we deliver in-home services to adults. We have less flexibility with accommodating schedules or certain providers.

MS: That's been our experience as well. During the pandemic a lot of services were done virtually, but now we're back in person. The service centers are now offering the same programming as before, so the trip demand is back to pre-pandemic levels. But the workforce is much lower than it was in the realm of healthcare providers.

JM: Our Person-Centered Counseling Program doesn't necessarily hear about transportation.

SM: We also only have 1 adult daycare center in Lackawanna County, and they used to have their own transportation before the pandemic, but now they don't have that and they're relying on the SR program to get clients there. That's a respite for caregivers, so that's important.

Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to human services transportation in the region?

SM: We're just always open to being part of the conversation to better serve our older adults!

MS: Yeah, transportation has been a vital component to our consumers, so I appreciate the opportunity to share what we're seeing.

JM: I'd definitely like to be included in any of these conversations. I'm in direct contact with our AAAs and CILs, and through our network partners we often have questions. And transportation has been on the forefront for a while. I'd definitely like to be included in any way that I can.

## MHIDD Stakeholder Interview #2

<b>Date</b>	Monday, December 11, 2023
<b>Time</b>	3:00pm – 4:00pm
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	<p><b>Stakeholders:</b> Joelle Balut (Wyoming Valley Alcohol &amp; Drug Services) Miki Drutchall (Lackawanna County Behavioral Health/Intellectual Disability/Early Intervention)</p> <p><b>LLTS MPO:</b> Mary Liz Donato Jonathan Shaw</p> <p><b>Michael Baker Intl.:</b> DeRon Jordan Nico Corbo</p>

### Discussion

Who are the typical customers/clients of your agency?

JB: Luzerne County probation, children and youth. People with gambling issues. Family members refer those seeking treatment for gambling addiction. Self-referred not medical doctor

MD: People with medical assistance/ Medicare. Total life span from birth to early intervention. People with intellectual disabilities as well

Are there any transportation-related challenges you and your colleagues face in providing services? (Getting to your office, travelling with kids, etc.)

JB: Shared ride program. Long waiting times before and after appointment cause complaints. Bus schedules conflict with doctor's appointments, night appointments, etc. When buses stop running and people miss an appointment the attendance policy is tarnished. Three missed appointments in six months causes issues with compliance.

MD: In certain rural areas buses are on low frequency. Later in the day, service becomes more challenging. Stops are blocks or miles away from their origins or destinations. Both frequency and location cause issues.

Are there any trends in the region that are impacting your clients or their access to your services? (i.e. current employment trends, demographic trends, etc.)

JB: Difficulty with employed patients managing time and receiving treatment. If someone becomes employed, then they must seek treatment after hours, but transportation service is not viable at that time.

MD: If someone has a court order or mental health appointment it is difficult to manage reaching human service appointments afterwards.

Has your client / customer base recovered to pre-pandemic levels? Have any modifications been made to your services to adapt to pandemic-related challenges?

JB: Difficult to sense if a patient is telling the truth during virtual treatment. Especially for addiction patients. Not too much of a patient drop during COVID because in-person appointment is much more effective. Some patients would state COVID as a deterrent for seeking treatment.

MD: Since COVID, folks have reengaged with transportation at a similar rate to pre-pandemic. Some lenience and COVID allowances allowed transportation access and those may be removed post- pandemic.

Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to human services transportation in the region?

JB: After hours prove difficult to access via public transportation. Long wait times for shared ride. The shared ride takes too long and the fixed route does not operate late enough.

MD: Distance to fixed-route origins and destinations is an issue. Service hours do not run late enough. We need more curb cutouts for Lackawanna County and specifically Scranton, and there are many unwalkable sidewalks.

## Transit Agency Stakeholder Interview

<b>Date</b>	Monday, December 11, 2023
<b>Time</b>	11:00am – 12:00pm
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Stakeholders:</b> Gretchen Wintermantel (Luzerne County Transportation Authority) Joe Roselle (Luzerne County Transportation Authority) Debbie Dennis (Luzerne County Transportation Authority) Rob Fiume (Luzerne County Transportation Authority) Courtney Schaeffer (Hazleton Public Transit) Nicole Ference (County of Lackawanna Transit System)
	<b>LLTS MPO:</b> Eric Middleton Jonathan Shaw
	<b>Michael Baker Intl.:</b> Emily Webb Nico Corbo

## Discussion

Who are the typical customers/clients of your agency?

JR: Downturn in ridership since COVID; 75% of pre-pandemic levels, shared ride at 80%. Challenges getting buses into industrial parks. Transit development plan with outside consultants. Introduction of microtransit.

BF: Coordinate with businesses and industrial parks to make them transit friendly. Starting and ending shift times vary.

DD: Crossing county lines and long-distance transportation provides difficulty. STEP and medical assistance programs cross county lines.

CS: We service industrial parks; issues with service hours aligning with industrial park working hours.

Are there any transportation-related challenges you and your colleagues face in providing services? (Getting to your office, travelling with kids, etc.)

CS: Paratransit must run to Wilkes-Barre; short window of time running paratransit to Wilkes-Barre

JR: Recently added more trips to Veterans Affairs hospitals. Difficulties receiving public input regarding destination demands of public. Passengers requested a stop closer to Luzerne Housing Authority. Easy to divert route and accommodate. TDP should help provide more input for passengers.

BF: Stakeholder meetings with TDP will help align with desired destinations. Shifting service to be cost neutral as possible. Fine line between providing service and fiduciary duty to spend responsibly.

What are the goals or objectives of your short- to long-term planning efforts?

JR: Collaborate with schools and provide transportation at correct times. Schools and campus services can't run continuously. College students need transportation. A night service loop provided but not very efficient. Extending current service into the late night. Eventual Sunday service.

NF: Night service and fixed route collaborating with schools and more efficient collaboration.

CS: Improved routes for nighttime service.

Do you provide any monthly rider passes to human services providers, or rider training?

GW: Improving contracts with colleges and universities to offer transit passes for students and staff. Ongoing meetings but not a lot of progress. LCCC already has a decent service base. Semester card for students and keeping those up to date. I would like to see a program implemented with Kings, Misericordia, LCCC, etc. ModeShift smart pay card for refill. Works similar to credit card. Meet with universities every couple of months. Rider training/ travel training for fixed route and shared ride. Provide travel training to anyone who asks. ESL Spanish speaking travel training assisted by customer service rep.

DD: Shared ride meets with mental health, rehabilitation, other human services. Passes are given out to clients every month. LCTA issues passes to human services every month. The human services hands out passes and retrospectively billed by LCTA for number of passes handed out. Human service organizations forward LCTA the needs for passes. New rider applications and passes. Agency assists with helping clients fill out pass requests.

CS: Travel training offered but requests less frequent than before. I work with Penn State and various rehabilitation centers. Lack of momentum in travel training. Seniors used to frequently request training. Passengers ask drivers for assistance, not the agency. ESL Spanish speakers seek out Spanish speaking employees for assistance. More informal.

NF: Passengers come to drivers with travel training questions, not necessarily to transit agency office employees. Many fixed route drivers speak Spanish and accommodate riders.

Are there any trends in the region that are impacting your clients or their access to your services? (i.e. current employment trends, demographic trends, etc.)

SB: Housing crisis and huge demand for housing. Difficult for those on modest income to find housing.

No vacancies, considering closing waiting list

AZ: Also closed list due to backlog. Section 8 program difficult to track. Section 8 scattered site tough to keep track of

Has your client / customer base recovered to pre-pandemic levels? Have any modifications been made to your services to adapt to pandemic-related challenges?

JR: Enhanced cleaning measures since COVID have continued. Mobile fare collection assisted riders. Consistent use of mobile fare collection. Schedules must become more legible, and headways should become more consistent. Workforce difficulties; must service in-person employees such as at schools and factories.

BF: Driver and mechanic hiring issues. Recent improvements. Mechanics are still needed but they have improved staffing over the past year or so.

JR: Drivers are well-staffed. Paring back of services during COVID. Compensation contracts needed to be negotiated and rates had to be improved.

DD: Interest in positions such as drivers have improved in recent years. Back up since COVID

NF: Fixed-Route is well-staffed. Mechanics are struggling, in need of more mechanics. Some more shared ride drivers would also help.

CS: Steady employment of drivers and not many difficulties.



DD: Lots of last-minute appointment cancellations because doctors would call off in-person appointments.

JR: Shared ride contracts have pared back as other agencies increased service post COVID. Shared ride found other services to replace previous trips since pandemic.

## Cycling Stakeholder Interview

<b>Date</b>	Tuesday, December 12, 2023
<b>Time</b>	9:00am – 10:00am
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Stakeholders:</b> Vincent Bulzoni (Anthracite Bike Coalition) Owen Worozbyt (Lackawanna Heritage Valley Authority) Bernie McGurl (Lackawanna River Conservation Association) Janet Sweeney (Pennsylvania Environmental Council)
	<b>LLTS MPO:</b> Robert Kenney Jonathan Shaw
	<b>Michael Baker Intl.:</b> Annie Butkiewicz Nico Corbo

## Discussion

Who are the typical customers/clients of your organization?

VB: Accept donations of bikes, repurpose, repair bicycles. Children from low-income backgrounds benefit from bicycles. Also do trailhead bike repair, safety checks. Two hours of volunteer service for a bike is going well. Bicycles donated from various sources. Mostly work with children; most bikes are donated to children. Trailhead repair focuses on older cyclists because children do not ride alone.

OW: Trail users study just concluded. The demographic of trail riders remains the same. Main trail users are women between age 45 and 54. Trails used for recreation and transportation. Numbers continually increasing. Even through COVID, the walking, biking, and even roller blading on trails increased.

BM: Primary demographic of trail users is the same as Owen Worozbyt's. The organization is hoping to acquire property along the river and tributary for conservation to provide river access. Reclaimed abandoned rail corridors. Unique niche in conservation property acquisition.

What areas of your community are most easily accessible by bicycle?

OW: Lackawanna Heritage Trail, Elmers Boulevard, Snake Road. Biking on the 307 and 347 is unsafe due to high traffic, sharp turns, and faster speed limits. Marshwood Road out of Dunmore is very popular. 247 is a designated cycling route. Trails are main highways of bikers, DNH trail up and down the valley.

VB: Road riding has become more concerning. Moon Lake, Levee system in Wilkes Barre. There are lots of offroad trails where you don't have to mingle with traffic. Safety is at one's discretion regarding route and timing. Route design and crossing traffic are crucial. Vince categorized intersections in respect to traffic and existing traffic fixtures. Cycling education must be enforced and supported. Safety is dependent on the education of cyclists.

OW: Unfortunately, bikeshare has not continued due to stealing. The hotel got rid of bikeshare despite the represented need for cycling. Last leg of trip/journey but hotel removed the opportunity.

VB: ABC on the hill and proximity of low-income housing made bike distribution a natural fit. Many bikes go to children due to proximity. Serendipitous niche in the community.

OW: Carbondale and Blakely bike share. Use the bikes recreationally. Hotel and YMCA users utilize the bikes as well. Most people drive to trail in order to ride bike recreationally.

What are some difficulties encountered by the cycling community in your area?

OW: Not enough bike racks. Refuses to pay for parking in Downtown Scranton. You must lock your bike to trees or mailboxes. Heritage valley is making trail friendly business plan. Making small businesses more trail friendly.

BM: How do people get in and out of the valley and up and over mountains? Damage from thunderstorms and natural disasters causes blockage of narrow corridors to get people out of Valley. Elmhurst Boulevard is difficult to access from Downtown Scranton. Expand and upgrade the trail network to access Elmhurst Boulevard. Interstate construction obliterated access. Large bike/ped bridge near falls recommended. Restoring human connection that was severed by interstate. Back Mountain and Kingston.

VB: Lack of bike lanes makes getting out of the valley difficult. Road riding has become a bit too hazardous.

JS: Toby's Creek and Edwardsville gap is attempting to be connected via a trail system. Both on the road and trail. Large road segment to connect the two.

## Veterans & Vocational Training Stakeholder Interview

<b>Date</b>	Tuesday, December 12, 2023
<b>Time</b>	10:00am – 11:00am
<b>Location</b>	MS Teams
<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Stakeholders:</b> Timothy Booth (Lackawanna County Veterans Affairs) Heather Nelson (Wilkes-Barre Office of Vocation) Crystal Arcarese (Wilkes-Barre Veterans Administration)
	<b>LLTS MPO:</b> Mary Liz Donato Jonathan Shaw Robert Kenney
	<b>Michael Baker Intl.:</b> Emily Webb DeRon Jordan

### Discussion

Who are the typical customers/clients of your agency?

TB: Help veterans get into apartments or to medical appointments. Some difficulty with veterans living in Susquehanna County getting down to Lackawanna. The shared-ride program won't go to Lackawanna County (part of Forest City is in Susquehanna,

CA: We have an 18-county catchment area here, and while we have assistance of county programs, and our DAV can't always handle that capacity. The biggest barrier is transportation across county lines with the shared-ride programs. If they're using FR or SR, they need to register with multiple counties' services or get multiple bus passes .

HN: The OVR serves primarily individuals seeking employment, so we work with students as young as 14. For our young students, they're nervous about it; we try to provide travel training, but we don't always have the capacity for that. We purchase transportation in our community, so we do travel training through that.

Are there any transportation-related challenges you and your colleagues face in providing services? (Getting to your office, travelling with kids, etc.)

HN: Our staff usually meets people in the communities, like libraries or sometimes their homes. Our office is in downtown Wilkes-Barre

CA: We do have transportation barriers getting veterans into the Veterans Center if they don't qualify for SR or PwD, and the evenings and weekends have the least amount of coverage for FR.

DJ: Based on those barriers, do you see people no-showing for appointments?

CA: Sometimes they'll arrive late for an appointment, or they're rushing out of an appointment in order not to be stranded. We've had to go to our board of trustees to get approval for taxis, but there's limits on that. So, interruption of medical care is a big issue. For homelessness and recovery, we usually send people out into the field, so for medical trips our clients are more impacted by transportation gaps.

Are there any trends in the region that are impacting your clients or their access to your services? (i.e. current employment trends, demographic trends, etc.)

TB: Primarily we're serving seniors

CA: I think there's been an overall reduction in candidates applying for jobs, which decreases the need for public transit. For any other demographic shift, the growing senior population is the biggest demographic factor.

HN: We're also seeing fewer young adults with driver's licenses and relying on friends/family or public transportation, so if they need to leave their immediate community, they're kind of stuck.

Has your client / customer base recovered to pre-pandemic levels? Have any modifications been made to your services to adapt to pandemic-related challenges?

HN: I think our office is back to serving the same number of people, but we are seeing certain types of appointments that can be virtual more often (for signing paperwork we prefer that people be in-person though).

Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to human services transportation in the region?

CA: The thing I've observed is that some of the employment opportunities that are 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> shift lack transportation. So, people can't get there for these higher-salary positions.

HN: It might have been more productive to send someone from my field staff, but it's hard to know all the different transportation options—it's kind of intimidating for people to navigate.

PREPARED BY:

**Michael Baker**

**I N T E R N A T I O N A L**