

MARATHON COUNTY ELDERLY & DISABLED TRANSPORTATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT



Marathon County Transportation Program

DECEMBER 2023

PREPARED BY: NORTH CENTRAL WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

**Marathon County Elderly & Disabled Transportation
Needs Assessment Study**

prepared for:

Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP)

by:

North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC)

December 31, 2023

This study was prepared at the request and under the supervision of the Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP) by the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) with funding provided by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. For more information, contact:

NORTH CENTRAL WISCONSIN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
210 McCLELLAN STREET, SUITE 210
WAUSAU, WI 54403



Telephone: 715-849-5510 Fax: 715-849-5110 Email: staff@ncwrpc.org

www.ncwrpc.org

**Marathon County Elderly & Disabled Transportation Needs Assessment
Study**

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

STUDY PURPOSE

Marathon County maintains the Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP) in order to provide transportation assistance to overcome barriers that seniors and those with disabilities face in seeking full participation in society and fundamental community services. The elderly and disabled who are transportation-disadvantaged face challenges in accessing services whether they live in urban or rural areas, and the geographic dispersion of transportation-disadvantaged populations creates challenges for human service programs hoping to deliver transportation for their clients.

The program seeks to expand mobility options for its aging residents and those with disabilities. An adequate system of transportation options for all people is critical to ensuring basic human services are being delivered in order to maintain quality of life. Recognizing this, Marathon County periodically undertakes a study to comprehensively assess the transportation needs of the elderly and disabled populations within its jurisdiction and review ways in which its transportation services might be adjusted or enhanced to better serve those needs.

This Needs Assessment is intended to provide information about the current state of need for elderly and disabled transportation within Marathon County and to present a range of recommendations the County can implement to address concerns and issues identified.

STUDY PROCESS

Marathon County enlisted the assistance of the North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (NCWRPC) to conduct the Needs Assessment. The study was funded by a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation with match funds provided by the MCTP. County and NCWRPC Staff worked to develop an initial scope of work for the study based on the last full needs assessment completed back in 2014. The scope was modified by Staff to meet changing conditions during the course of the study.

Primary elements of the study include the following:

- Demographics analysis,

- Review of recent related studies and plans,
- Review of existing transportation services,
- Public listening sessions,
- Stakeholder group session,
- Stakeholder survey,
- Stakeholder interviews, and
- Development of recommendations to address needs.

Extensive public outreach efforts were conducted to generate attendance in the listening sessions. These efforts included publication of notices in local newspapers, posting of notices at ADRC, social services, and health department offices; and over 100 churches across the County were asked to print the notice in their bulletins and/or posting to their bulletin board. It was also sent to municipal clerks for printing in community newsletters.

The following agencies and organizations participated either in the listening sessions, surveys, or through one-on-one interviews with project staff:

- MetroRide
- Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP)
- Marathon County Planning Department
- North Central Health Care (NCHC)
- Center for Independent Living of Western Wisconsin New Freedom Transportation Program (CIL)
- Aging & Disability Resource Center of Central Wisconsin (ADCR-CW)
- Marathon County Veterans Service Office
- Opportunity Inc.
- ODC, Inc.
- Greater WI Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR)
- Marathon County Health Department
- Wisconsin Valley Industries
- Wausau Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)
- WATEA Wheels to Work Program
- Midstate Independent Living Consultants (MILC)
- North Central Community Action Program (NCCAP)
- Homme Heights Assisted Living and Adult Day Center

- Rennes Health & Rehab
- Marathon Residential and Counseling Services
- Benedictine Living Community
- Aspirus Wausau Hospital Kidney Care
- Waterfall Health of Wausau

IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic actually delayed progress on this study. As the pandemic unfolded, the Study Team envisioned several stand-alone sections dedicated to its impacts. However, as things transitioned to the post-pandemic era and progress on the study resumed, it became apparent that the lingering impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic would be woven into the discussion in many areas throughout the report. The focus would be on long-term system recovery from impacts rather than immediate, reactionary response.

CURRENT COORDINATION ACTIVITIES

Transportation coordination activities of Marathon County revolve around the ongoing open meeting discussions of the County Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC), service coordination between the Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP) and Metro Ride Transit/Paratransit, and the 5-year updates to the County Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan. This study makes a number of recommendations that will expand and enhance Transportation coordination in Marathon County.

WHY ELDERLY & DISABLED TRANSPORTATION SERVICES?

Transportation is a vital function we often take for granted until it becomes limited. According to the Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR), men outlive their driving ability by six years and women by ten years. A disability may also “take away” an individual’s driving ability. Lack of transportation options makes it difficult for people to continue living in their homes; leading to premature institutionalization which results in a significant loss of independence as well as a substantial fiscal impact.

Information from GWAAR also indicates that 53% of non-drivers over the age of 65 stay isolated in their homes. Without transportation options, people become trapped in their homes, leading to isolation and related health issues. The GWAAR data shows that people without transportation make 15% fewer doctor

visits, 59% fewer trips for shopping or dining out and 65% fewer trips for religious, social or family purposes.

Transportation options are important for older adults and individuals with disabilities to remain assets to our communities. They contribute through purchasing goods and services, volunteering, leadership and sharing their experience and knowledge. If no longer able to drive, people need options to continue these activities which enable them to remain healthy and engaged in the community.

Transportation options benefit everyone; not just those that use them, by reducing healthcare costs (including costs to Medicaid & Medicare), supporting family caregivers, and driving economic growth. Transportation to preventive medical care reduces the number of missed appointments and the need for more expensive emergent care. The data from GWAAR also indicates that every dollar invested in medical transportation results in a savings of \$11 in reduced ER visits. By increasing the ability of seniors and individuals with disabilities to get around, transportation options help support family caregivers, enabling them to maintain their own gainful employment and other contributions to society. Supporting transportation infrastructure and incorporating livability principles, such as transit, strengthens communities and draws new residents and investors. Data from WisDOT indicates that every dollar invested in transit yields a return of \$3.61.

SECTION 2: DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

POPULATION

Marathon County had a population of 138,013 at the 2020 Census. Marathon County and contains the Cities of Wausau, Schofield, Mosinee, and parts of Abbotsford, Colby, and Marshfield; the Villages of Athens, Birnamwood (partial), Dorchester (partial), Edgar, Elderon, Fenwood, Hatley, Kronenwetter, Maine, Marathon City, Rothschild, Spencer, Stratford, Unity (partial), and Weston; and 40 Towns. The largest places in Marathon County by population are Wausau, Weston, Kronenwetter, and Rib Mountain.

Table 1 is a snapshot of the historical population trend of Marathon County. **Table 2** gives a breakdown of Municipality populations with projections out to 2040. Population projections were conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Administration (WDOA) Demographic Services Center. The WDOA population projections are recognized as Wisconsin's official population projections in accordance with Wisconsin Statute §16.96. This projection model is based off of historical trends of individual communities; with more recent years carrying a greater weight in the projected populations.

Table 1: Historical Populations of Marathon County		
Census	Population	% +/-
1900	43,256	-
1910	55,054	27.3%
1920	65,259	18.5%
1930	70,629	8.2%
1940	75,915	7.5%
1950	80,337	5.8%
1960	88,874	10.6%
1970	97,457	9.7%
1980	111,270	14.2%
1990	115,400	3.7%
2000	125,834	9.0%
2010	134,063	6.5%
2020	138,013	2.9%

Source: U.S. Decennial Census, U.S. Census, Wisconsin DOA

Table 2: Population Projections by Municipality and Marathon County

Towns							
Municipality	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
Bergen	641	645	665	685	700	705	705
Berlin	945	950	980	1,005	1,020	1,025	1,025
Bern	591	610	640	660	680	690	700
Bevent	1,118	1,135	1,170	1,195	1,210	1,220	1,215
Brighton	612	610	620	625	630	620	610
Cassel	911	920	950	975	990	1,000	1,000
Cleveland	1,488	1,545	1,665	1,775	1,875	1,955	2,015
Day	1,085	1,110	1,155	1,185	1,215	1,230	1,230
Easton	1,111	1,140	1,190	1,225	1,255	1,270	1,275
Eau Pleine	773	770	790	805	810	810	805
Elderon	606	625	650	675	690	700	705
Emmet	931	950	1,000	1,040	1,070	1,095	1,105
Frankfort	670	670	685	695	700	700	690
Franzen	578	590	620	645	665	680	685
Green Valley	541	555	585	605	625	640	650
Guenther	341	355	375	395	415	425	435
Halsey	651	650	665	680	685	690	685
Hamburg	918	920	950	970	985	985	980
Harrison	374	370	370	365	360	350	340
Hewitt	606	620	650	675	695	710	715
Holton	873	885	900	905	910	900	885
Hull	750	745	745	745	735	715	695
Johnson	985	985	1,010	1,020	1,025	1,020	1,010
Knowlton	1,910	1,960	2,075	2,170	2,255	2,315	2,355
Maine	2,337	2,365	2,430	2,475	2,500	2,505	2,485
Marathon	1,048	1,055	1,075	1,085	1,090	1,085	1,070
McMillan	1,968	2,020	2,125	2,215	2,290	2,335	2,365
Mosinee	2,174	2,210	2,310	2,385	2,440	2,475	2,490
Norrie	976	990	1,020	1,045	1,065	1,070	1,065
Plover	689	690	710	725	735	740	735
Reid	1,215	1,245	1,295	1,335	1,370	1,385	1,390
Rib Falls	993	1,005	1,045	1,075	1,100	1,115	1,120
Rib Mountain	6,825	6,895	7,055	7,145	7,190	7,165	7,080
Rietbrock	981	985	1,015	1,035	1,050	1,055	1,050
Ringle	1,711	1,775	1,900	2,010	2,105	2,180	2,235
Spencer	1,581	1,640	1,760	1,860	1,955	2,030	2,080
Stettin	2,554	2,620	2,780	2,915	3,030	3,120	3,180

Texas	1,615	1,610	1,625	1,625	1,615	1,590	1,550
Wausau	2,229	2,260	2,340	2,400	2,445	2,465	2,455
Weston	639	680	735	790	835	875	905
Wien	825	850	900	945	980	1,005	1,025
Villages							
Municipality	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
Athens	1,105	1,110	1,145	1,170	1,185	1,185	1,180
Birnamwood	16	15	15	20	20	20	20
Brokaw	251	250	270	285	300	315	325
Dorchester	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Edgar	1,479	1,485	1,535	1,570	1,595	1,605	1,600
Elderon	179	175	175	175	175	170	165
Fenwood	152	145	145	140	140	135	130
Hatley	574	615	665	715	760	795	820
Kronenwetter	7,210	7,540	8,185	8,765	9,295	9,730	10,070
Marathon City	1,524	1,530	1,545	1,540	1,530	1,505	1,465
Rothschild	5,269	5,340	5,525	5,655	5,755	5,795	5,790
Spencer	1,925	1,945	2,000	2,035	2,060	2,065	2,050
Stratford	1,578	1,605	1,660	1,700	1,730	1,740	1,740
Unity	204	200	200	195	190	185	175
Weston	14,868	15,520	16,770	17,870	18,890	19,700	20,330
Cities							
Municipality	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
Abbotsford	694	715	765	810	845	875	900
Colby	498	505	530	545	560	565	570
Marshfield	900	940	1,015	1,080	1,135	1,185	1,220
Mosinee	3,988	4,050	4,160	4,225	4,270	4,270	4,235
Schofield	2,169	2,170	2,205	2,210	2,205	2,180	2,135
Wausau	39,106	39,440	40,460	41,100	41,490	41,450	41,070
County							
Municipality	2010	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
Total	134,063	136,510	142,200	146,595	150,130	152,120	152,790
<i>Source: Wisconsin DOA</i>							

According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Marathon County has a total population of 138,013 persons. Given the land area of 1,576 square miles, the current population density of Marathon County equals 87.57 persons per square mile. Marathon County borders Clark County, Langlade County, Lincoln County, Portage County, Shawano County, Taylor County, and Wood County. **Map 1** portrays the population density of Marathon County; the most population dense

Legend

Persons

- 0
- 1 - 10
- 11 - 100
- 101 - 300
- 301 - 500
- 501 - 1000
- 1001 - 1500
- 1501 - 2000
- 2001 - 3000
- > 3000



Source: US Census, NCWRPC, Wis DOT

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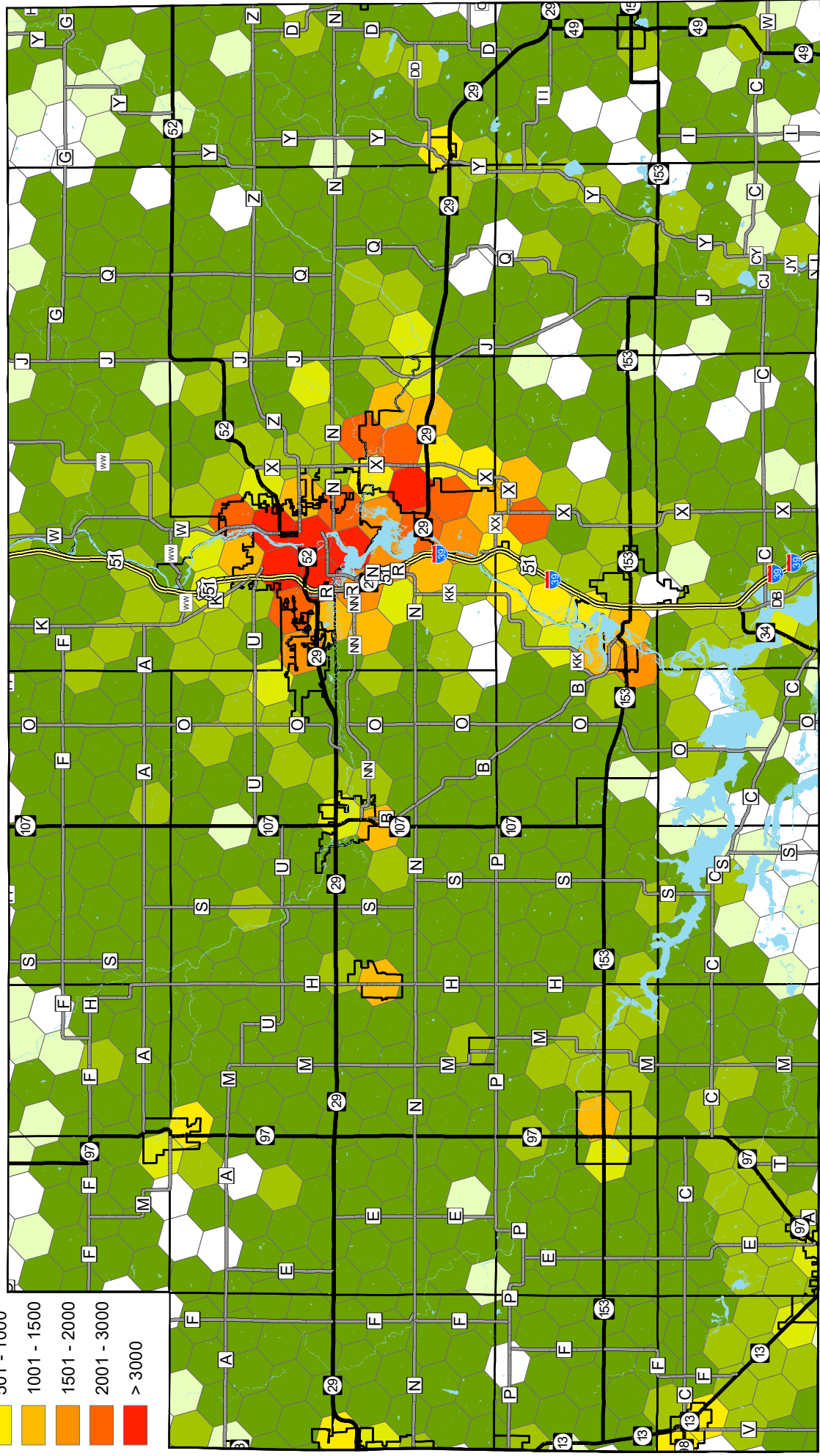
Population Density

Map 1



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areas are the City of Wausau, City of Schofield, the Village of Rothschild, the Village of Edgar, the Village of Spencer, the Village of Weston, and the Village of Marathon City. As conditions change in the county over the planning horizon, thoughtful consideration is necessary to anticipate transit needs, alternatives and future options.

Table 3 breaks down the land use of Marathon County. Agriculture is the dominant land use within the County, with agricultural uses accounting for about 41 percent of land use within Marathon County. The next largest category is Woodlands at about 39.5%. This data indicates that the majority of Marathon County is very rural with significant open, undeveloped areas between population centers and presenting a challenge for countywide transit services.

Table 3: Land Use Type in Marathon County, 2020		
Land Use Type	Acres	Percent of Acreage
Agriculture	412,525.06	40.92%
Commercial	6,083.11	0.60%
Governmental / Institutional	2,457.27	0.24%
Industrial	6,811.10	0.68%
Open Lands	65,026.81	6.45%
Outdoor Recreation	7,576.17	0.75%
Residential	48,179.75	4.78%
Transportation	32,800.86	3.25%
Utility	17.44	0.00%
Water	28,609.20	2.84%
Woodlands	398,071.30	39.49%
Total Acreage	1,008,158.07	100%
<i>Source: NCWRPC Land Use Inventory</i>		

AGE AND GENDER

Marathon County has a gender ratio of 50.39% male to 49.61% female. **Figure 1** gives the 2021 breakdown of gender and age distribution of the population of Marathon County. This figure also has the projected population and age categories to the year 2040. **Figure 2** indicates that the median age of Marathon County in 2000 was 36.3 years of age compared to 36.0 years of age statewide. The 2021 median age of Marathon County was 40.8 years of age compared to 39.6 years of age statewide. **Map 2** displays the mean age of all citizens in each census block in Marathon County. The rapid increase in the median age of

Median Age



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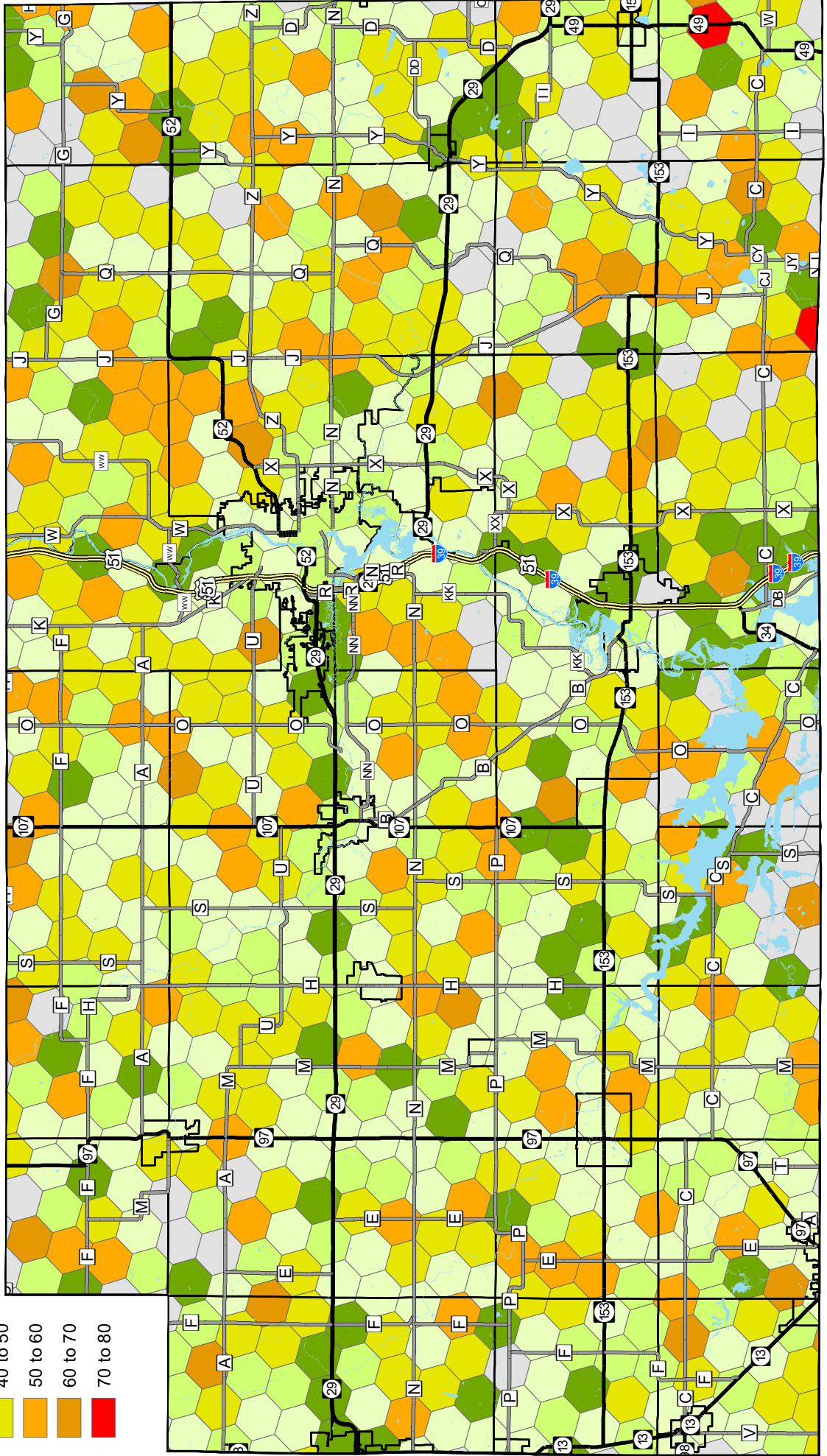
Source: US Census, NCWRPC, Wis DOT
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Legend

Median Age

- No Persons
- < 20
- 20 to 30
- 30 to 40
- 40 to 50
- 50 to 60
- 60 to 70
- 70 to 80



Marathon County could be the product of an aging local population, influx of retirees, and out migration of the younger people for employment and post-secondary education.

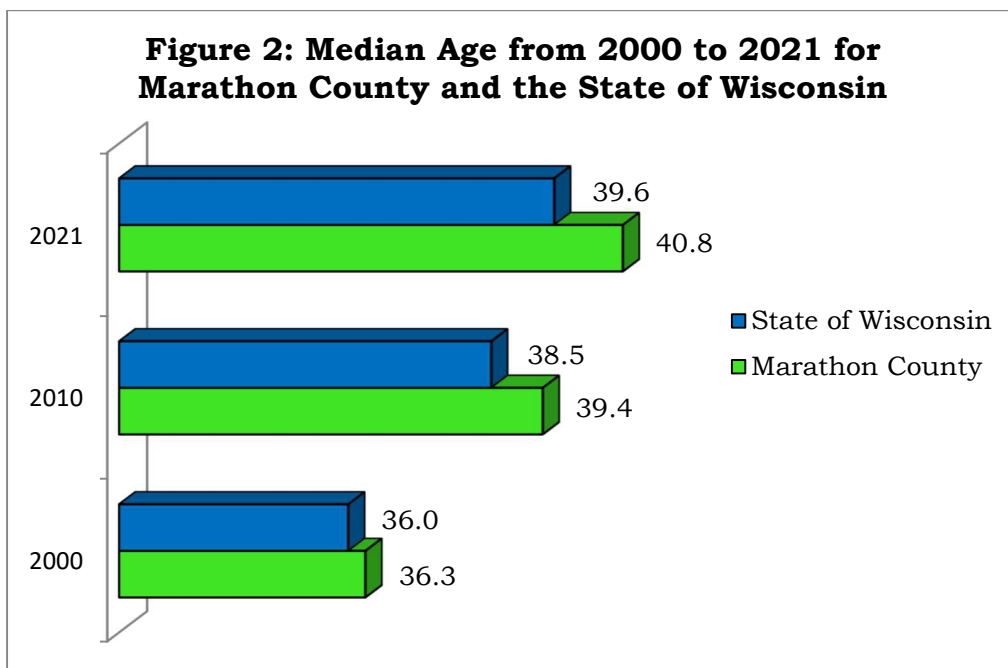
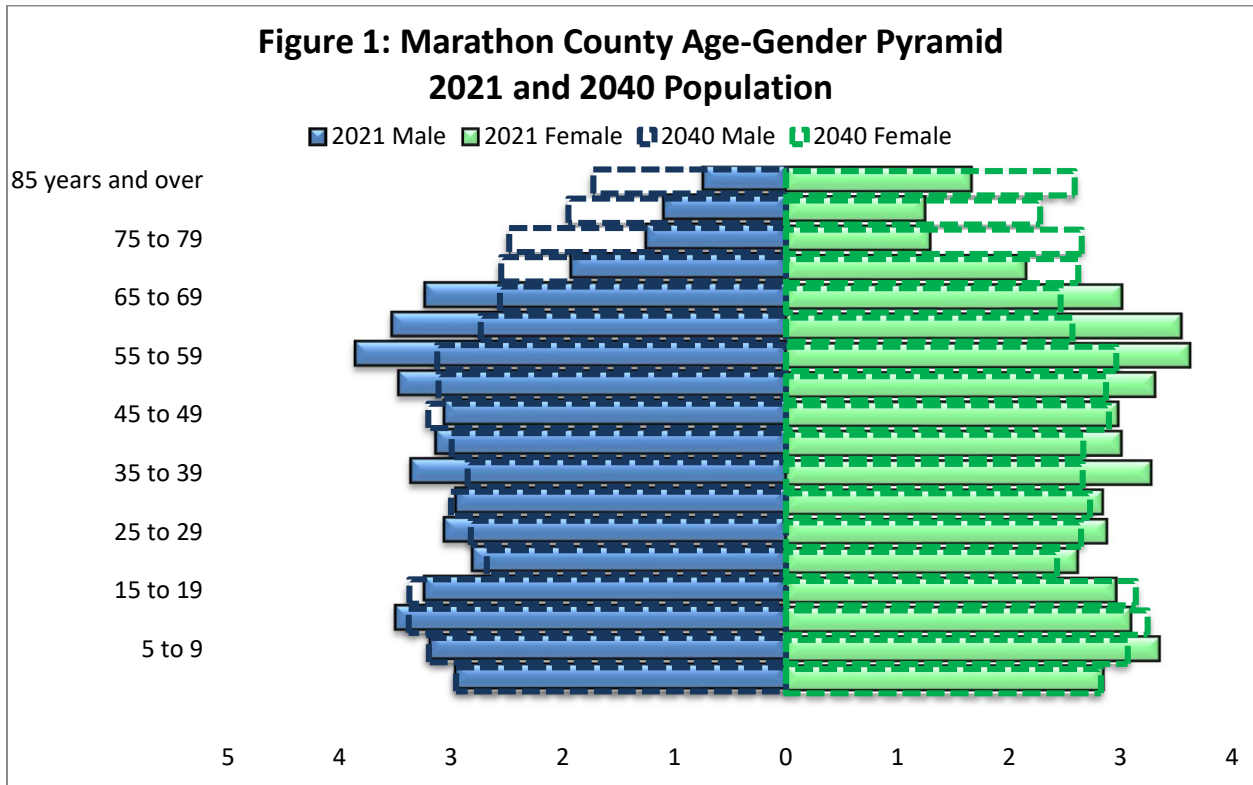
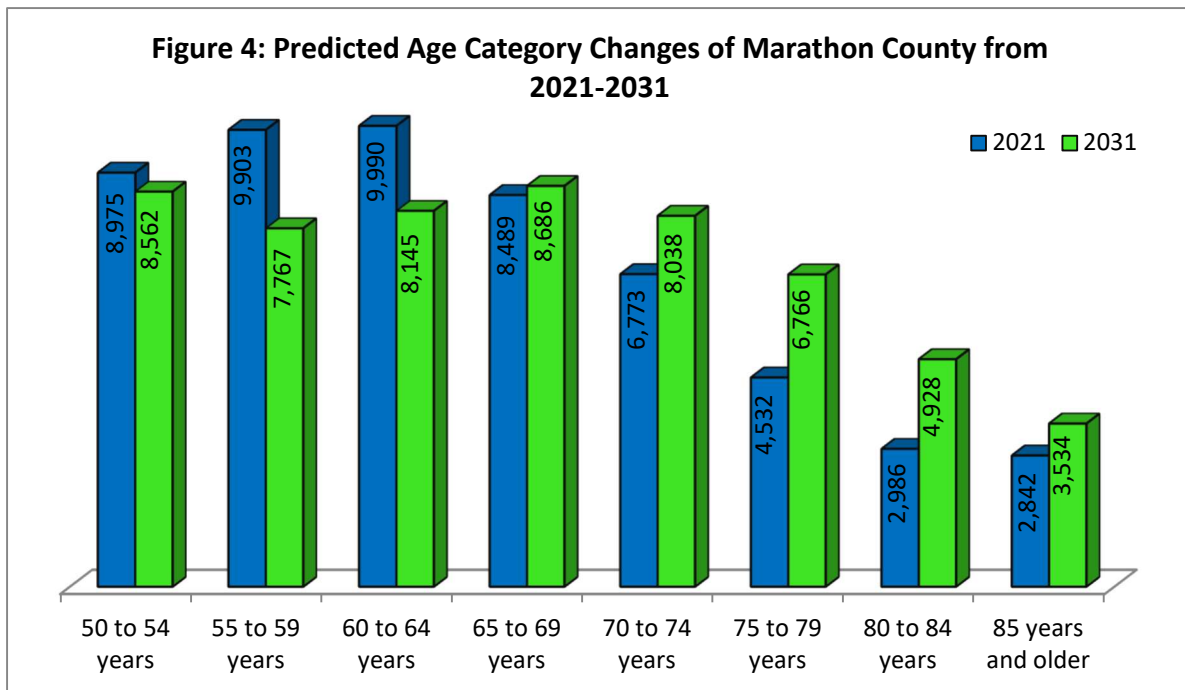
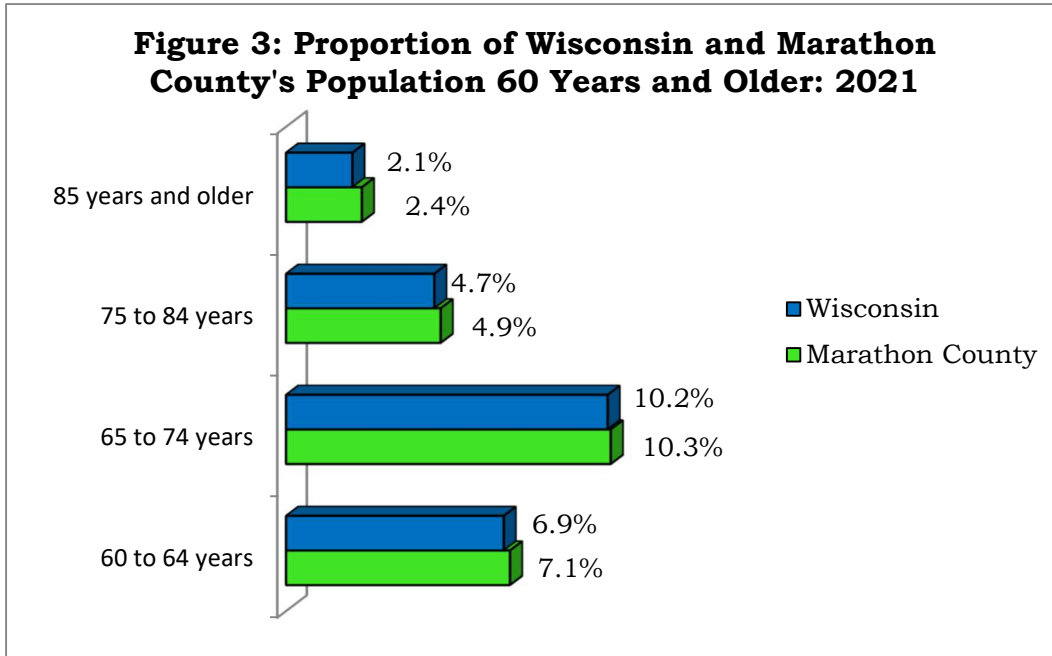
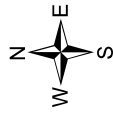
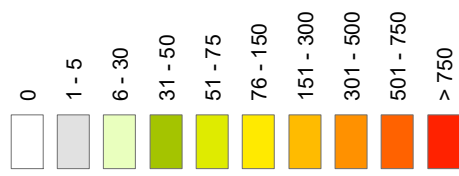


Figure 3 compares the proportion of residents over the age of 60 in Marathon County and Wisconsin. Marathon County has a slightly higher percentage in each age category over 60 years of age than the State. Marathon County and the State as a whole have similar proportions amongst each of the age groups above age 60. **Map 3** portrays the density of citizens per census block that are over the age of 60 years.



Legend

Persons over 60



Source: US Census, NCRWPC, Wis DOT

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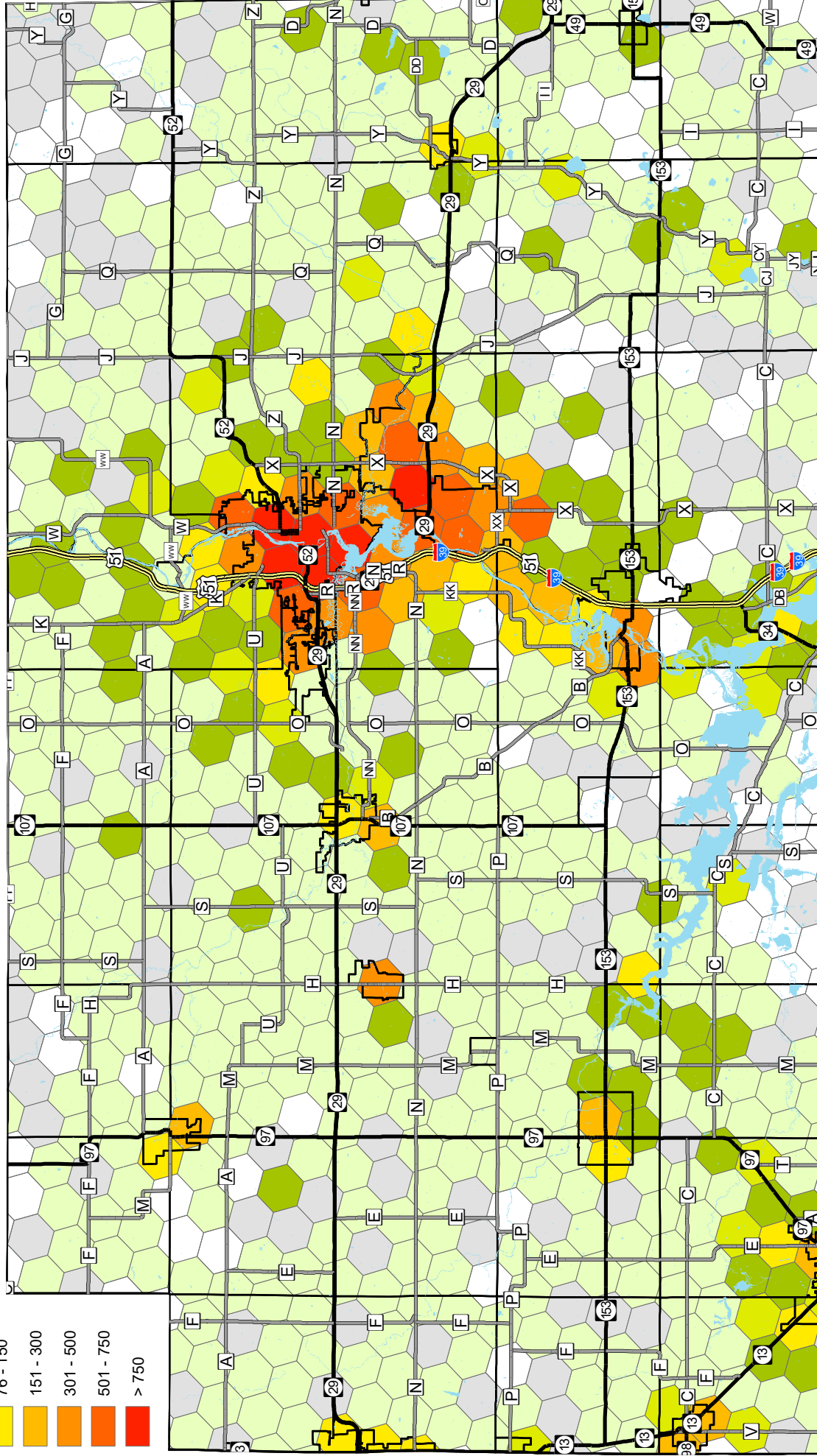
Population Over 60 Years

Map 3



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Population forecasts conducted by EMSI project a large increase in the population of residents 65 years and older from 2021 to 2031 in Marathon County, and a large decrease in persons between the ages of 50 and 64. **Figure 4** displays population forecasts in Marathon County for age cohorts over the age of 50.

HOUSEHOLDS

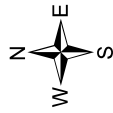
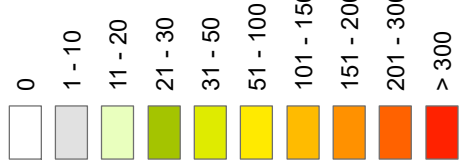
Nearly a third (30.4%) of all households within Marathon County had a householder over the age of 65 in 2021. This is a significant increase from the percentage of households with a householder over the age of 65 in 2000 (23.3%). This helps further indicate that, like most other counties, Marathon County has an aging population. **Table 4** displays seasonal housing totals in the County for the years 2000, 2010, and 2021. **Map 4** displays the distribution of households with a householder age 65 or older by census block in Marathon County.

Table 4: Proportion of Marathon County Housing Units with a Householder Age 65 or Older			
	2000	2010	2021
Total Households	47,702	52,708	56,218
Households 65+	11,094	12,512	17,072
Households 65+ %	23.3%	23.7%	30.4%
<i>Source: U.S. Census 2000 and 2010, American Community Survey 2017-2021</i>			

Table 5 compares household sizes in Marathon County and Wisconsin for the year 2021. According to the 2021 American Community Survey, Marathon County has a larger portion of occupied housing units that are 1-person or non-family than the averages for the State as a whole. This is elaborated further in **Table 6**, which compares citizens per household. These tables suggest that Marathon County on average has more people per household compared to the State of Wisconsin. This suggests that family sizes are larger in Marathon County as well.

Legend

Households



Source: US Census, NCWRPC, Wis DOT

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Households With a Resident 65 Years or Older



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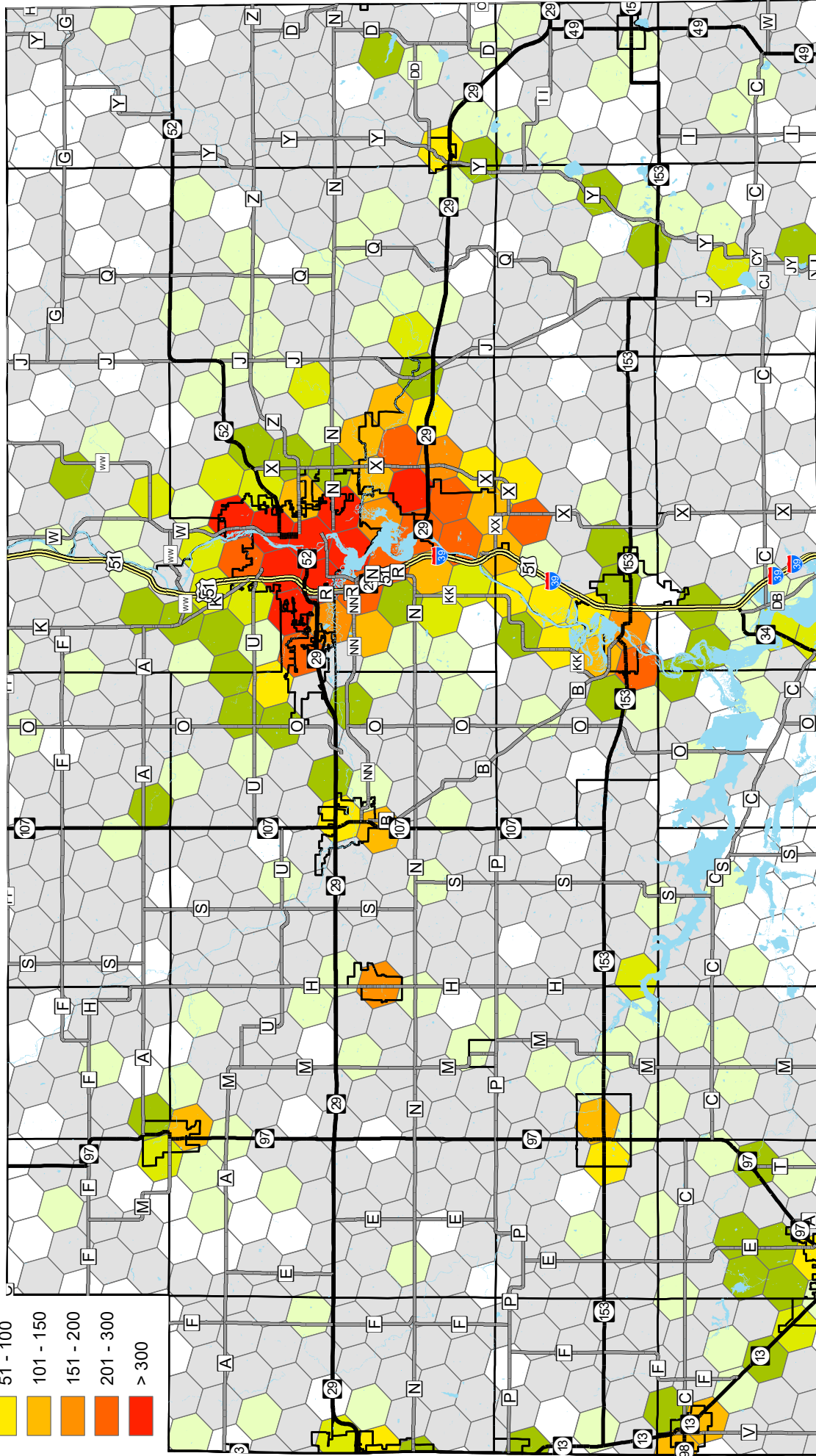


Table 5: Occupied Housing Units of Marathon County and Wisconsin; 2021

Household Type	Marathon	Wisconsin
1 person household	26.7%	30.3%
2 person household	39.7%	37.2%
3 person household	13.6%	13.4%
4 person household	20.0%	19.1%
Family Households	66.0%	62.0%
Non-Family Households	34.0%	38.0%
Householder 65 years and older	27.7%	26.8%
<i>Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021</i>		

Table 6 Household Size 2000 to 2021

Year	Marathon County	Wisconsin
2000	2.64	2.50
2010	2.54	2.43
2021	2.45	2.45
<i>Source: Census 2000 & 2010, ACS 2017-2021</i>		

ECONOMIC PROFILE

Economic data is a helpful tool used to gauge the economic stability of a planning area and will further help the County understand possible economic vulnerabilities. Median earnings for Marathon County’s workers are nearly equal to those of Wisconsin’s. Median household income in Marathon County is slightly higher than in Wisconsin, and per capita income is slightly lower than in Wisconsin. **Table 7** compares the median earnings, median household income, and per capita incomes for Marathon County and Wisconsin in 2021. Marathon County’s economic data suggests that the county compares similarly to the State of Wisconsin with regard to the above metrics. Citizens of Marathon County have a similar portion of disposable income to spend on essentials while they spend a greater portion of their income on transportation. **Table 8** displays the median household income for Marathon County, Wisconsin, and the United States and then uses the national household averages spent on transportation. This displays how the standard transportation cost affects different median household incomes.

Table 7: Median Earnings, Household, Income, and Per Capita Income; 2021

Economic Categories	Marathon County	Wisconsin
Median Earnings for Workers	\$39,227	\$39,089
Median Household Income for Workers	\$67,940	\$67,080
Per Capita Income of Workers	\$36,172	\$36,754
<i>Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021</i>		

Table 8: Percent of Household Income Spent on Transportation; 2021

	Marathon County	Wisconsin	United States
Median Household Income	\$67,940	\$67,080	\$69,021
US Household Average Transportation Cost	\$10,961	\$10,961	\$10,961
Percent of Household Income Spent on Transportation	16.24%	16.34%	15.88%
<i>Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021</i>			

EDUCATION

Marathon County contains eight school districts that are based in the county, while the Abbotsford, Antigo, Auburndale, Colby, Marshfield, Medford, Rosholt, and the Wittenberg-Birnamwood School Districts also serve Marathon County in addition to the counties they are based in. **Table 9** compares enrollment for the 2021-2022 school-year in the five school districts based in Marathon County. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s 2021-2022 Enrollment Data, Marathon County had a total of 19,236 students attending pre-K through 12th grade in the five school districts based in the County, while the other districts serving Marathon County had a total of 13,248 students.

Table 9: Marathon County Public School District Enrollment; 2021	
School District	Total Students
Abbotsford	722
Antigo	2,083
Athens	431
Auburndale	813
Colby	964
D.C. Everest	6,018
Edgar	600
Marathon	744
Marshfield	3,897
Medford	3,130
Mosinee	1,993
Rosholt	505
Spencer	650
Stratford	811
Wausau	7,989
Wittenberg-Birnamwood	1,134
Total	32,484

Source: WI Department of Instruction [2021-2022 Enrollment Data]

Table 10 compares educational attainment within Marathon County to the State of Wisconsin. Educational attainment is lower in Marathon County than it is in the State as a whole, as Marathon County has a similar percentage of residents ages 25 and older with a high school diploma or higher but a lower percentage of residents with a post-secondary degree than the State. Major differences in educational attainment between Marathon County and Wisconsin are in the percentage of residents with a Bachelor’s Degree and the percentage of residents with a Graduate or Professional Degree. In Marathon County, 18.1% of residents age 25 or older have obtained a Bachelor’s Degree and 8.6% of residents have obtained a Graduate or Professional Degree. This compares to Wisconsin’s totals of 20.7% of residents obtaining a Bachelor’s Degree and 10.8% of residents obtaining a Graduate or Professional Degree.

Table 10: Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Older; 2021

	Percent of Population for Marathon County	Percent of Population for Wisconsin
Less than 9th grade	3.0%	2.4%
9th to 12th grade, no high school diploma	4.1%	4.7%
High school degree	33.0%	30.0%
Some college, no degree	19.3%	20.2%
Associate's degree	13.8%	11.2%
Bachelor's degree	18.1%	20.7%
Graduate or professional degree	8.6%	10.8%

Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021

Marathon County also has a smaller portion of the population currently attending college or graduate school. According to the 2021 American Community Survey, 18.4% of Marathon County residents are attending college or graduate school, compared to 26.1% in the State as a whole. Nearby post-secondary education facilities include North Central Technical College with locations in Wausau, Antigo, Medford, Spencer, and Wittenberg; and Mid-State Technical College with locations in Stevens Point, Marshfield, and Wisconsin Rapids.

VETERANS

According to the 2021 American Community Survey, the veteran to civilian proportion is higher in Marathon County than it is in the State as a whole, as shown in **Table 11**. There are approximately 8,018 veterans residing in Marathon County, while 2,492 of these veterans are classified as having a disability.

Table 11: Veterans of Marathon County; 2021

	Marathon County	Wisconsin
Percent of Veterans in the Civilian Population of 18 Years and Older	7.6%	6.9%

Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021

COMMUTING

Less than 1% of Marathon County workers use public transportation to get to their place of work. **Table 12** displays the modes of transportation for Marathon County workers. **Table 13** displays the patterns of people coming into and traveling out of Marathon County for employment. Marathon County has a net commute/worker **gain** of 3,644 people. About two-thirds of Marathon County working residents (37,817) are employed within Marathon County.

Table 12: Commuting for Workers 16 Years and Older in Marathon County; 2021	
Means of Transportation	Workers
Workers 16 Years and Older	71,107
Car, Truck, or Van - drove alone	56,112
Car, Truck, or Van - carpooled	6,116
Public Transportation (excluding taxicab)	166
Walked	1,379
Other means	873
Worked at home	6,461
Mean travel time to work (minutes)	19.2
<i>Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021</i>	

Table 13: Marathon County Commuting Patterns			
Location	Marathon Co. Workers Commute To:	Commute From:	Net Commute
Marathon County	37,817	37,817	0
Wood County	4,169	2,645	-1,524
Portage County	1,944	2,390	446
Brown County	1,114	719	-395
Lincoln County	1,104	2,814	1,710
Clark County	722	1,256	534
Elsewhere	11,498	14,371	2,873
Total	20,551	24,195	3,644
<i>Source: U.S. Department of Commerce</i>			

There are a total of 56,218 households in Marathon County, 2,306 of which do not own a vehicle. Households with a resident age 65 or older account for 1,082 of the households without a vehicle, as shown in **Table 14**. In terms of vehicle ownership, over 93 percent of Marathon County’s households with a resident age 65 and older own a vehicle.

Table 14: Household Vehicle Ownership by Age and Ownership Status in Marathon County; 2021			
Owner Occupied		Renter Occupied	
Age 15-64 with no vehicle	Age 15-64 with a vehicle	Age 15-64 with no vehicle	Age 15-64 with a vehicle
308	29,200	916	11,091
Owner Occupied		Renter Occupied	
Age 65+ with no vehicle	Age 65+ with a vehicle	Age 65+ with no vehicle	Age 65+ with a vehicle
299	13,119	783	1,850

Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021

LQ data is helpful when determining the prevalence of the job industry in a specific geographic area compared to the Nation. As you can see in **Table 15**, a number is next to the industry type and the number represents the proportion between Marathon County and the United States in the percent of the population working in an industry type. If the number is 2, that means the percent of the population working in that industry is two times as high compared to the national average. If the number is 1, it is the same and if the number is 0.5, that means there is half of the population proportion employed in that industry in Marathon County as compared to the nation. **Table 16** is a list of the top 5 employers for Marathon County, Clark County, Langlade County, Lincoln County, Portage County, Shawano County, and Wood County.

Table 15 LQ of Marathon County Employment Industry to US	
Industry	LQ
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	2.27
Mining	0.14
Utilities	0.82
Construction	0.72
Manufacturing	3.24
Wholesale Trade	1.21
Retail Trade	0.98
Transportation and Warehousing	0.82
Information	0.27
Finance and Insurance	1.61
Real Estate	0.38
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	0.33
Management of Companies and Enterprises	1.94
Administrative Support and Waste Management	0.40
Educational Services	0.23
Health Care and Social Assistance	1.01
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1.03
Accommodation and Food Services	0.78
Other Services, Except Public Administration	0.64
Public Administration	0.70
<i>Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021</i>	

Figure 5 displays the times the working population leaves for their work commute. 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. is the time segment that the majority of individuals leave to go to work (29.4%). The majority of citizens (77.5%) have a commute time of 25 minutes or less, and 20% of all commuting citizens have a commute time of less than 10 minutes, as shown in **Figure 6**. A visual representation of Marathon County’s commuting patterns is provided in **Figure 7**. Driving distances to urban centers in close proximity to Marathon County are provided in **Table 17**. Note that the fastest route highlighted by Google Maps was used for each distance.

Table 16: Top 5 Employers in Nearby Geographic Locations

Marathon Co.	Aspirus Wausau Hospital
Marathon Co.	Greenheck Fan Corp.
Marathon Co.	Kolbe & Kolbe Millwork Co
Marathon Co.	Liberty Mutual Insurance Co
Marathon Co.	United Healthcare Services
Clark Co.	Grassland Dairy Products
Clark Co.	Abbyland Pork Pack
Clark Co.	Cummins Filtration
Clark Co.	Memorial Hospital
Clark Co.	Meyer Manufacturing
Langlade Co.	Antigo Unified School District
Langlade Co.	Amron
Langlade Co.	Aspirus Langlade Hospital
Langlade Co.	CoVantage Credit Union
Langlade Co.	Karl's Transport
Lincoln Co.	Church Mutual Insurance Company
Lincoln Co.	Packaging Corporation of America
Lincoln Co.	Harley-Davidson Motor Company
Lincoln Co.	Semco Windows and Doors
Lincoln Co.	Pioneer Transportation Ltd.
Portage Co.	AIG
Portage Co.	Sentry Insurance Group
Portage Co.	Aspirus Hospital Stevens Point
Portage Co.	McCain Foods USA
Portage Co.	Worzalla Publishing Co
Shawano Co.	Thedacare Group
Shawano Co.	Aarrowcast
Shawano Co.	Mohican North Star Casino
Shawano Co.	County of Shawano
Shawano Co.	Shawano County School District
Wood Co.	Marshfield Clinic
Wood Co.	De Boer Transportation
Wood Co.	Roehl Transport
Wood Co.	Ho-Chunk Gaming
Wood Co.	Wal-Mart

Figure 5: Time Workers Leave for Work in Marathon County; 2021

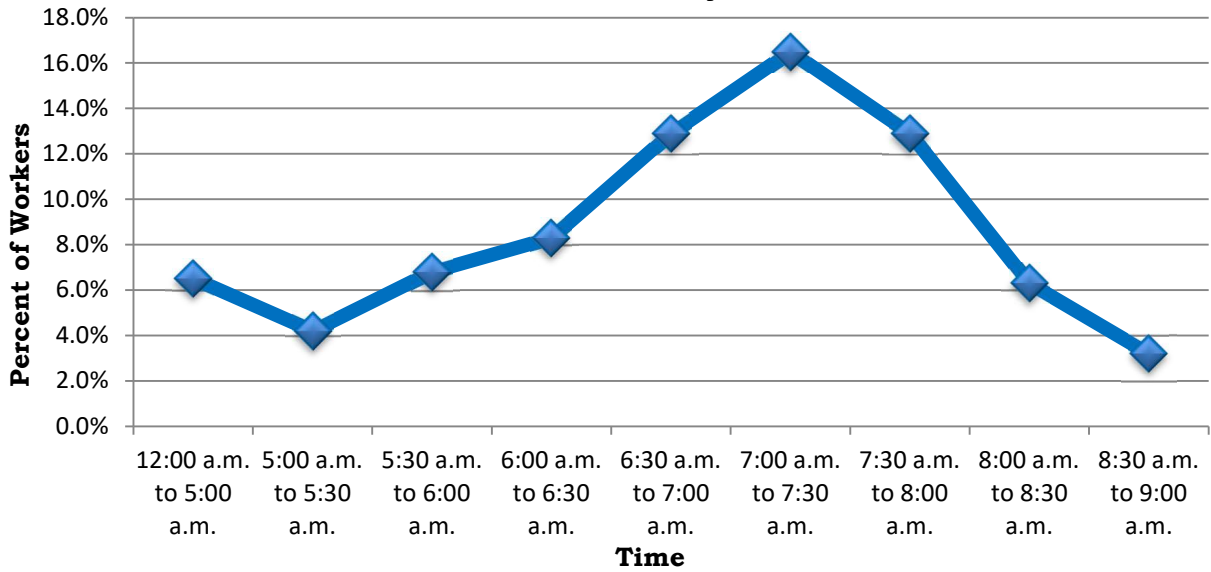


Figure 6: Travel Time to Work for Workers in Marathon County; 2021

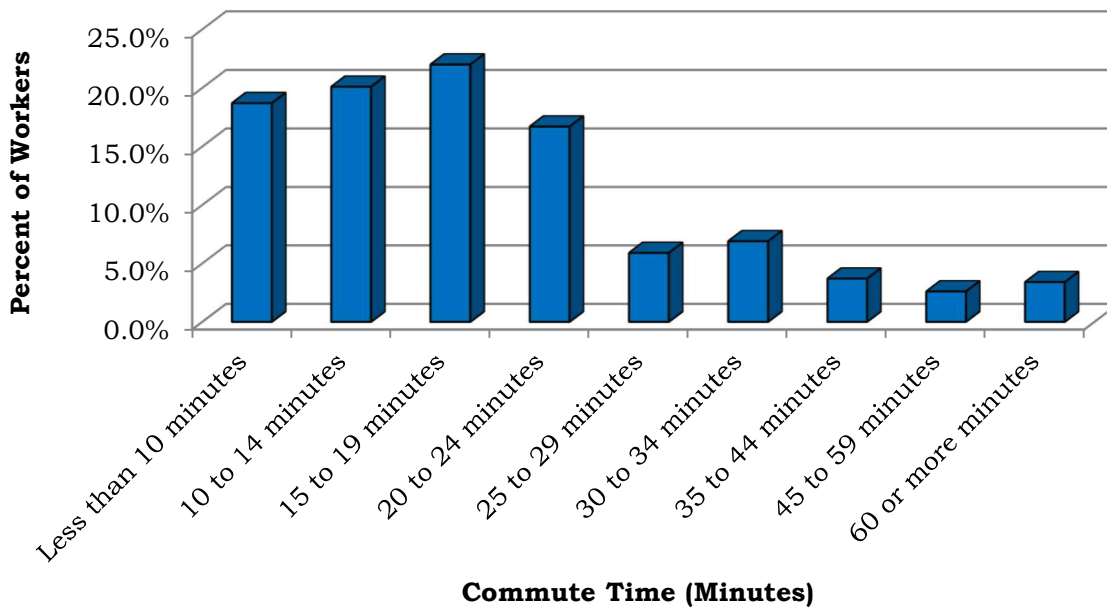


Figure 7: Marathon County Commute Patterns

■ Workers that travel into Marathon Co. ■ Marathon Co. Residents that travel to

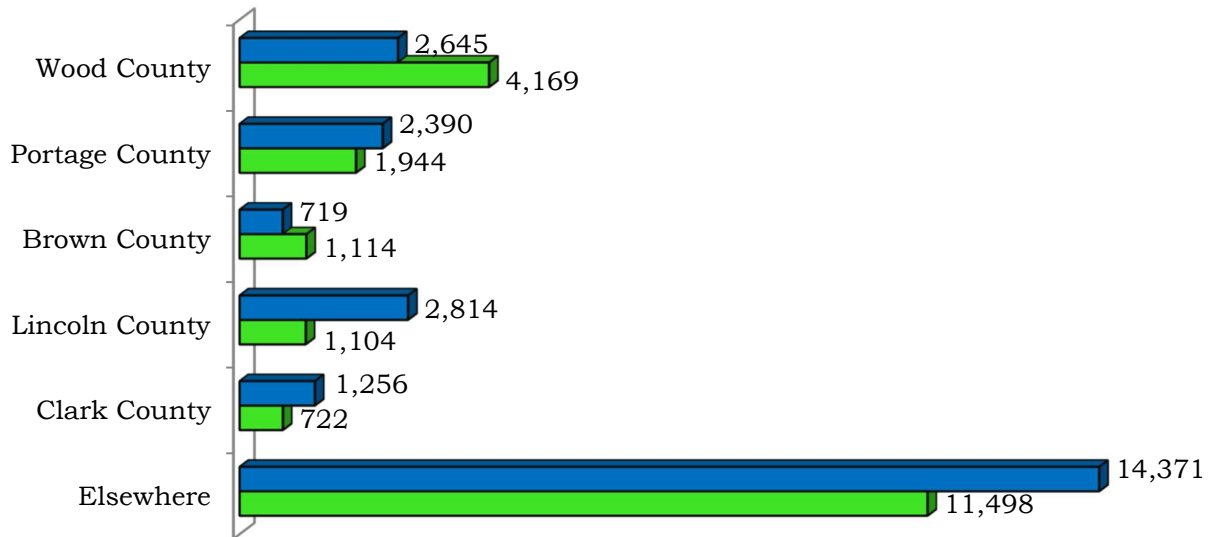


Table 17 Driving Distances between Urban Centers

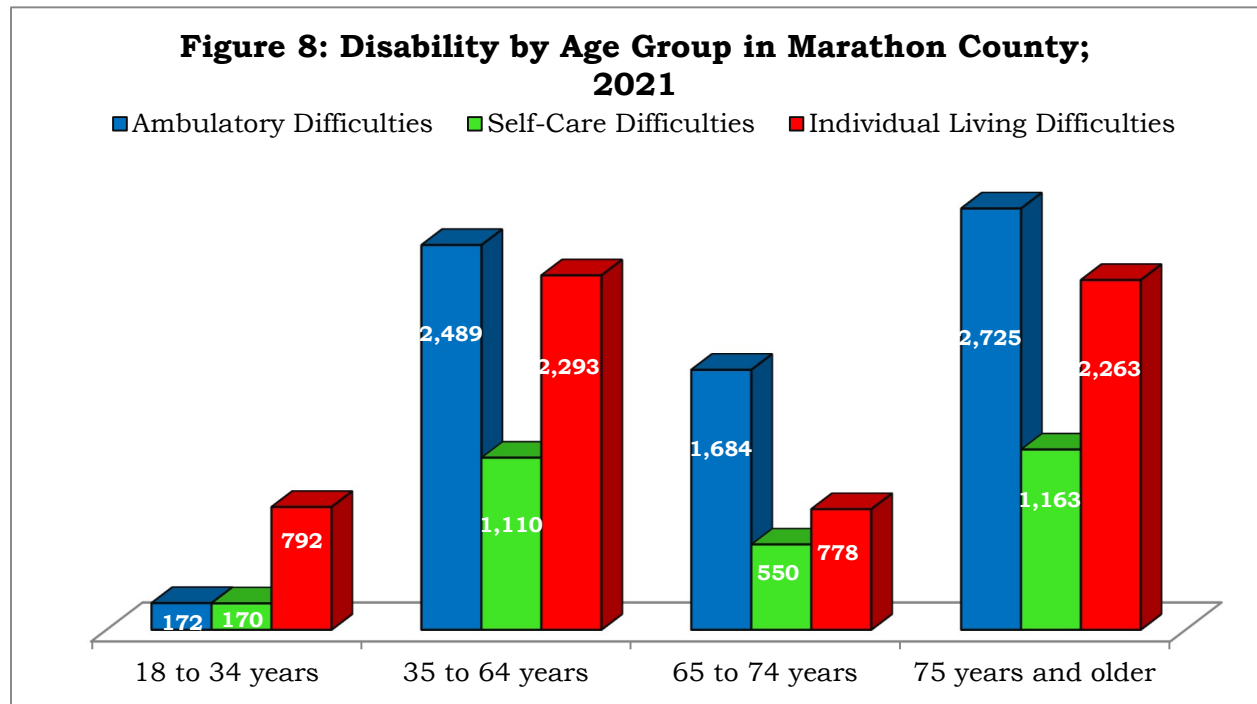
Wausau to Weston	11.6 miles
Wausau to Mosinee	15.6 miles
Wausau to Marathon City	12.2 miles
Wausau to Hatley	22 miles
Wausau to Athens	29 miles
Wausau to Edgar	18.2 miles
Wausau to Abbotsford	34 miles
Wausau to Colby	36.5 miles
Wausau to Stratford	32.5 miles
Wausau to Fenwood	26 miles
Wausau to Marshfield	44 miles
Wausau to Wittenberg	30 miles
Wausau to Elderon	29 miles
Wausau to Merrill	16.8 miles
Wausau to Stevens Point	35 miles
Wausau to Antigo	34 miles
Wausau to Rhinelander	56 miles
Wausau to Appleton	103 miles
Wausau to Green Bay	97 miles
Wausau to Madison	143 miles

Source: Mileage Generated with Google Maps (Fastest Route was used)

DISABILITIES

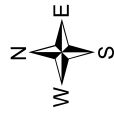
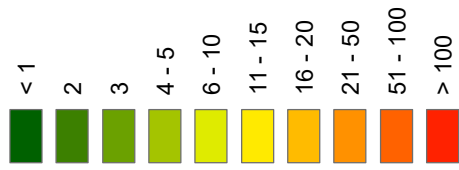
Marathon County has a disabled population of 16,440 individuals or 12.04% of the total population, as shown in **Table 18**. **Figure 8** displays age categories and disabled rates within each age category. There are three disabilities that may have an effect on a citizen’s ability to operate an automobile. These are Ambulatory difficulties, self-care difficulties, and individual living difficulties. The age category 75 years and older has the highest percentage of the age group with a disability at 45.38%, as shown in **Table 19**.

Table 18 Marathon County Population with a Disability; 2021		
Total Civilian Non-Institutionalized Population	Citizens with a Disability	Percent of Marathon County Residents with a Disability
136,568	16,440	12.04%
<i>Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021</i>		



Legend

Disabled Persons /SQ MI



Source: US Census, NCWRPC, Wis DOT

This map is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey of the actual boundary of any property depicted. This drawing is a compilation of records, information and data used for reference purposes only. NCWRPC is not responsible for any inaccuracies herein contained.

Population Density of Persons with Disabilities

Map 5



**North Central
Wisconsin Regional
Planning Commission**

210 McClellan St., Suite 210, Wausau, WI 54403
715-849-5510 - staff@ncwrpc.org - www.ncwrpc.org

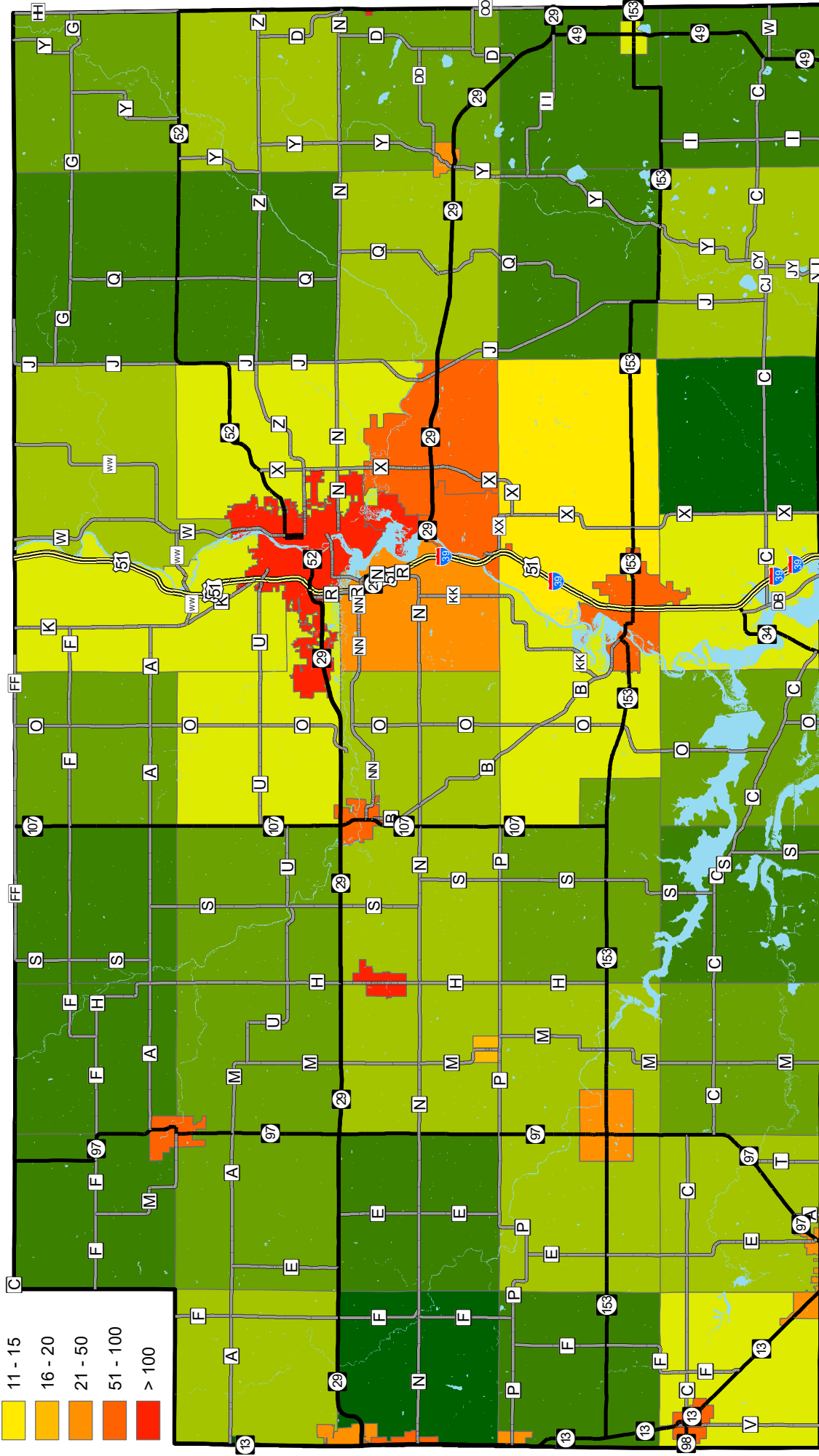


Table 19 Age Categories with Disabilities in Marathon County; 2021

	Civilian Non - Institutionalized Population	Population with a Disability	Percent of Age Group with a Disability	Percent of Marathon County Disabled Population
Total	Total Population: 136,568	Total Population: 16,440	~	~
Under 5 years:	7,985	34	0.43%	0.21%
5 to 17 years:	23,648	1,191	5.04%	7.24%
18 to 34 years:	26,317	1,831	6.96%	11.14%
35 to 64 years:	54,940	6,078	11.06%	36.97%
65 to 74 years:	14,124	2,970	21.03%	18.07%
75 years and over:	9,554	4,336	45.38%	26.37%

Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021

SECTION 3: REVIEW OF PREVIOUS PLANS AND STUDIES

This section presents a detailed review of current plans and studies relevant to elderly and disabled transportation within Marathon County. An analysis of reports prepared by various outside sources provides a good opportunity to identify concerns and issues that are indicators of need for elderly and disabled transportation services.

The following reports were reviewed for this study:

- 2023 Marathon County LIFE Report
- Locally Developed, Coordinated Public Transit-Human Service Transportation Plan, 2024-2028
- Metroride Transit Development Plan, 2022
- ADRC-CW 2022-2024 Aging Plan

2023 MARATHON COUNTY LOCAL INDICATORS FOR EXCELLENCE (LIFE)

The Marathon County Local Indicators For Excellence (LIFE) Report provides information on a wide range of quality of life indicators in the County. The LIFE Report project is guided by the LIFE Project Steering Committee and is supported by community sponsors. The report is published every two years and serves as a tracking tool to show how the community has changed over time. The stated purpose of the report is to:

- Acknowledge community success and progress.
- Identify community “Calls-to-Action”.
- Serve as a catalyst for change by advancing community conversation and partnerships.

The 2023 report is broken down into seven sections that account for many aspects of life in Marathon County from basic needs to health and wellness. Each section was developed by a subcommittee comprised of local experts which examined local data, developed narratives based on community context, and identified calls to action and successes to be included. The seven subcommittees identified a total of 18 Calls-to-Action. The LIFE Steering Committee selected the top Calls-to-Action through a facilitated prioritization process to be highlighted in the 2023 LIFE Report. There was one “call-to-action” related to transportation established in the 2023 LIFE Report, as follows:

“Given the public support for expansion of public transportation services, municipalities need to consider support for and funding a public bus system with routes throughout the Wausau Metro Area. This would allow individuals to utilize public transportation for employment as well as increase access to other basic needs such as health care.”

The United Way of Marathon County hosts the report online in an interactive environment and utilizes it to identify community needs and priorities for funding and issue work. The LIFE Report also serves as a valuable source of information to inform decision-making for other community partners as well.

One of the key data elements utilized in the development of the LIFE Report is the statistical analysis of the United Way’s 211 information and referral service. Community members can access assistance via the 211 phone line or via the website. The purpose of the 211 service is to help eliminate barriers by connecting people with services. In 2021, United Way’s 211 answered 5,193 requests for help from Marathon County residents, providing 11,881 referrals to community resources.

A review of these statistics, see **Table 20**, reveals that overall 211 need requests have declined in the last ten years. However, transportation needs have increased slightly, but is still less than three percent of total needs in 2021. Transportation needs rank 12th on the list versus housing leading with 3,111 needs in 2021.

Table 20: 211 Information & Referral Service - Transportation Needs			
Marathon County	2012	2018	2021
Total Needs	18,155	n/a	11,881
Transportation Needs	n/a	321	346
Unmet Transportation Needs	215	136	82
<i>Source: LIFE Reports 2013 & 2019 and 211 Impact Report for 2021.</i>			

Unmet needs, those where 211 could not provide an effective referral, has dropped by 62% since 2012, but remains the third highest category of unmet need following income support and housing. In 2012, transportation ranked second in unmet needs.

Another major data source for the LIFE Report is the LIFE Survey. The survey was last conducted in 2022 in preparation for the 2023 LIFE Report. The LIFE Report indicates that in order to assess the issues regarding the quality of life in Marathon County, the LIFE Steering Committee distributed a survey to Marathon County residents in June of 2022. The results were collected and tabulated by the Survey Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

The six-page survey was sent to 1,434 households in Marathon County with 75% being mailed to a random sample of County residents. The remaining 25% were directed to three target groups: populations under age 35, households with incomes under \$25,000, and people of color. This was done to ensure representation in the sample from populations that are sometimes challenging to reach with surveys. Two rounds of reminder postcards were sent to those that had not returned the survey.

A second survey was distributed to 100 selected Marathon County non-profit partners by United Way of Marathon County. A total of 463 surveys were returned. An adequate number of responses were received to make a statistically valid survey with a margin of error of +/- 5% at 95% confidence.

Regarding the availability of public transportation in their community, the survey results indicate that only 20% are satisfied while 32% are dissatisfied, with 48% neutral or did not answer. Further, only 22% are not concerned while 61% are concerned about the availability of public transportation in their community with 17 neutral or did not answer. This would seem to indicate a significant issue regarding the availability of public transportation within Marathon County, however, when asked to select their top three issues that concern them the most, availability of public transportation only reached 2% ranking it 19th on the list.

The survey also asked some more specific questions regarding experiences with transportation. One question asked if the respondent or someone in their family did not see a doctor in the last year when they should have and why. Only 1.4% of respondents indicated that “no transportation” was the reason that they or someone in their family did not go to a doctor when they should have. The survey also asked about not going to the dentist or a mental health provider. In both cases, dentist and mental health, only 0.6% indicated that “no transportation” was the reason that they or someone in their family did not go to a dentist or mental health provider when they should have.

Similarly, the survey asked if anyone in the respondent's household had "missed work, a medical appointment or other important event in the last year because they had no transportation." In this case, only 6.1% of respondents indicated that lack of transportation had resulted in missing work, and appointment or other event.

The final transportation related question asked those that had missed work, medical appointments or other important events because they had no transportation to more specifically identify the problem. Results for this question were as follows: 90% not applicable, 2.3% other, 2.1% couldn't afford gas or cab fare, 1.5% no one available to drive me, 1.2% unable to drive, 1.2% unreliable car, 0.9% no public transport, and 0.9% no car.

Another potentially related plan reviewed for this study was the 2022-2026 Marathon County Health Improvement Plan or CHIP. This plan is mentioned here because it is tied to the LIFE Report and utilizes the community health assessment data compiled and analyzed in the LIFE Report. The current CHIP does not identify transportation as a top health priority for the 2022 to 2026 period.

LOCALLY DEVELOPED, COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT-HUMAN SERVICE TRANSPORTATION PLAN, 2019-2023

Federal transit law requires that any projects selected for funding under the Section 5310 Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities (formerly titled Elderly and Disabled Capital Assistance Program) must be derived from a "locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan". This requirement was implemented as part of the SAFETEA-LU legislation in 2005 and the requirement continues under the current transportation legislation, the IIJA (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law or BIL passed in 2021. The purpose of the coordinated planning process is to have stakeholder involvement in the assessment of elderly and disabled transportation, and to provide strategies and goals to improve those transportation alternatives.

Under previous Federal legislation, the Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC/WETAP) and New Freedom programs were repealed, and eligible projects may be funded under either the expanded 5310 program (for New Freedom type projects) or the 5311 program (for JARC/WETAP type projects). Only those projects eligible to be funded under the 5310 program need to be included as part of the coordinated planning process. This would include the "traditional"

5310 vehicle purchase requests, and also the New Freedom-type projects for mobility management or other capital projects, or for operating assistance projects such as volunteer driver programs or voucher programs.

Development of the plan includes gathering demographic information, documenting the existing transportation services for the plan area, holding a public meeting to discuss elderly and disabled transportation services, and development of strategies for improving those services over the next five years.

FTA guidelines require a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan to consist of:

- an assessment that identifies public, private, and non-profit entities that currently provide transportation services to persons with disabilities and, older adults, and the availability of those services;
- an assessment of transportation issues for persons with disabilities and older adults, and gaps in service; this assessment may be based on the experiences and perceptions of the planning partners or on more sophisticated data collection efforts;
- strategies activities and/or projects to address the identified gaps in current services, as well as opportunities to improve efficiencies in service delivery; and
- priorities for implementation based on resources, time, and feasibility for implementing specific strategies/activities identified.

Recipients of 5310 funding must certify that projects selected for funding were derived from a coordinated plan, and the plan was developed through a process that included representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers, and members of the public, including persons with disabilities, the elderly, and advocates of these groups.

Through this planning process, a number of concerns and issues for elderly and disabled transportation were identified, as follows:

- Cost of service: average trip cost to county is approximately \$106.
- Hours of service, lack of evening and weekend services - impacts ability to participate in some life activities.
- 48 hour advance reservation for service can be a burden for users.

- Shortage of volunteer drivers is becoming a challenge.
- Reaction by insurance industry to new transportation models like Uber are negatively impacting volunteer drivers.
- Can't get to jobs due to service limitations.
- IRIS cut backs further reduce available funding for service.
- Jurisdictional barriers and a lack of authority to establish/provide regional service (re: RTA).
- Cannot provide service to meet the needs due to reduced and inconsistent funding.
- Levy limits make it difficult/impossible to fill the cuts.
- Failure to plan for alternative transportation.
- Lack acknowledgment by elected officials (local and higher) that alternate transportation is necessary and important.

The process concluded with the development of a list of strategies and actions to address the identified issues, as follows:

- Encourage urban area communities to support transit services.
- Coordinate local information and education messaging with providers, advocates, case workers, etc.
- Update county-wide human services transit needs assessment to gain better understanding of the current unmet need for transportation services and how to better focus efforts to meet those needs.
- Coordinate legislative messaging.
- Improve communication between providers and agencies & interest groups, including: advocates, case workers, health care workers, residential administrators, etc. (hold Transit Summit).
- Encourage DOT to change its administrative rules.
- Encourage statewide RTA legislation.
- Maintain and expand existing services...

- Explore creating county level mobility manager position.
- Acquire cot accessible vehicles.
- Support Regional Volunteer Driver Program to reinforce local program and fill in gaps in service.
- Consider developing travel training / travel buddy program.
- Create comprehensive list of available services (keep up to date / web based).
- Encourage federal / state officials to address program restrictions.

METRO RIDE TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2022)

Urban transit systems periodically prepare comprehensive program plans to review operations, address issues and explore ways to improve or modernize services. These plans are known as transit development plans or TDPs. Metro Ride serves the City of Wausau and is the only regular transit system within Marathon County. The most recent TDP for Metro Ride was just completed in 2022.

Regular transit systems are designed to serve as many people in the community as possible, including accommodation of elderly and disabled residents. The buses are equipped with hydraulic entry lower systems, lifts and wheelchair securements. In addition, the system is required to provide supplemental service, known as paratransit, to provide to people with disabilities or impairment that impede their ability to use regular buses. More on Metro Rider service can be found in Section 4 of this report. Paratransit parallels the regular bus system, so it is mentioned in the TDP but addressed only indirectly.

Overarching findings of the TDP include the following:

- Ridership has declined substantially in the past decade due to two factors: service cuts in response to funding reductions and more recently, the pandemic.
- In 2012, the system experienced a significant reduction in revenue, so service reductions and fare increases were implemented to help offset the loss of local revenue. Consequently, ridership declined drastically from 788,748 trips to 631,360 trips per year as a result of the service changes.

- The system partially recovered in 2013 when it temporarily restored some of the lost service until 2015.
- In 2015, the restored service could not be financially sustained and had to be eliminated again, leading to another decline in ridership.
- In 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic travel patterns significantly reduced public transit demand in Wausau. The pandemic had similar impacts on transit systems across America.
- During the post pandemic recovery period, Metro Ride has gradually regained riders but continues to fall short of its potential.
- As measured by boardings for each vehicle hour of service, Metro Ride pre-pandemic productivity justifies the type of service offered. The pandemic drop in ridership has proven temporary in many cities.
- Metro Ride formerly served the surrounding jurisdictions of Rothschild, Schofield, and Weston. However, they discontinued subsidizing services which were consequently discontinued. The adjacent jurisdiction of Rib Mountain, which notably encompasses several discount big-box stores has never been served by Metro Ride.
- Demand for Metro Ride paratransit service is low, as most medical and human service rides are covered by other transportation providers.

The TDP planning process a range of survey and meeting tools to gather input for the plan. Key input and findings are summarized below.

Survey respondents had a generally positive view of Metro Ride services with one exception being dissatisfaction with the destinations served, as they cannot reach destinations and employment outside the city of Wausau. Service hours and days available were another issue. Many work shifts that start before 6:30 AM or end after 6:30 PM. Residents cannot use Metro Ride to reach work, community events or other activities at night or on weekends.

The survey results indicate the top priorities for transit service improvements:

- 76 percent of respondents support expanding service to Rib Mountain.
- 69 percent supported service expansion to Weston, Schofield and Rothschild.
- 59 percent of respondents voted for adding Saturday service.
- 48 percent of responses would like service after 6:30 PM.
- 40 percent of respondents also want Metro Ride to serve more areas of Wausau.

With the closure of the Wausau Center Mall in 2021, Wausau residents are left with limited in-person shopping areas within the city limits. Rib Mountain, Schofield and Weston host the area's major shopping and discount retailers. Riders currently cannot access these locations on Metro Ride, which only operates inside Wausau. If funding from other communities were available, Metro Ride would be able to expand its service area.

Metro Ride is funded through a combination of Federal, State, local funds, and passenger fares. Over 80 percent of survey respondents support local government annual budget allocations for public transit. Residents of Wausau were the strongest supporters of additional local government transit funding. However, over 80 percent of Weston respondents and 57 percent of the respondents from Rib Mountain also supported their local communities funding public transit.

Survey respondents also indicated they want longer weekday operating hours, Saturday service, service to more areas of the city, and the ability to use apps to plan their rides and know when the bus is coming. Support for shared ride demand response service was marginal.

The TDP points out that additional financial support for public transit must come from new revenue or a reallocation of existing funds to public transit. Overall, more than half of the survey respondents would support a tax increase of as much as \$50 per year to support public transit. Twenty-two percent of respondents would support a tax increase of \$51 to \$100 per year to support public transit in their community.

A number of meetings were also organized for the TDP. These meetings included leaders from Wausau and surrounding communities, healthcare and other employers, and community-based organizations among others. Many of the same suggestions from the survey results were expressed, including: the need to serve destinations outside Wausau city limits, desire for expanded service hours, and need to deploy new technologies to facilitate riding the buses. Some expressed frustration about transit funding limitations and divisive attitudes towards transit and transit users.

Based on this extensive data collection and analysis, the TDP explores a wide range of options for improving and expanding Metro Ride transit service. The options are packaged into three scenarios as follows:

- Improve and expand existing Metro Ride services.

This scenario involves several components, as follows:

- Technology improvements, expanded operating hours and deploying microtransit to more completely serve the City of Wausau.

Microtransit offers a shared-ride transit service reserved in advance with short notice. The vehicle picks up the passenger at a virtual bus stop or the requested point of origin and drops them at or near the curb of the requested destination. The service area, or zone(s), can be defined as the entire city or portions of the city.

- Fare structure and fare media changes to improve the customer experience.
- Service expansions within Wausau including expanded hours for fixed route service, Saturday service, and microtransit zones during evening hours.

The TDP illustrates the fiscal barrier to service expansion. It calculates that expansion of the seven existing routes by one hour each day of regular operation would cost approximately \$227,855 per year. Expanding by 3.5 hours per day would cost approximately \$797,492 per year. It also shows that expanding the existing seven route service to include a six-hour period on Saturdays would require approximately \$222,600 plus the cost of ADA paratransit service annually. Microtransit costs are also significant.

- Expand public transit services into Rib Mountain, Rothschild, Schofield and Weston.

This scenario involves evaluation of a variety of options for expanding transit services into the Wausau metro surrounding communities.

- Improve efficiencies within the existing system to support service improvements.

The TDP determined that opportunities for cost savings within the fixed route structure are achievable. Such savings could be reapplied to service improvements/expansions that are desired by the community. Potential service expansions may include adding hours to the current schedule for early morning or later evening trips, adding demand-response modes of service, or potentially expanding the service area coverage.

Ultimately, the recommended plan advanced by the TDP included three elements, as follows:

- Technology Improvements.
 - GPS Source – Real-time access for Metro Ride and the riders
 - Metro Ride app offering mobile payment options and real-time tracking of vehicles
 - Annunciators on vehicles
 - Mobile Data Terminals on vehicles that auto-upload into the Metro Ride server
- Operations Improvements
 - Extended service hours
 - Limited Saturday service
 - Extend service to Wausau West Industrial Park
 - Extend service to Rib Mountain, Rothschild, Schofield and Weston
- Focus on Community Education and Engagement

Implementation of these recommendations would provide significant benefits to senior and disabled riders through the improved and extended service for both the regular and paratransit components.

ADRC-CW 2022-2024 AGING PLAN

Every three years, the designated county aging unit develops a “aging plan.” Mandated by federal law, the plan is required for the aging unit to receive federal funds under the Older Americans Act. Additionally, the aging plan structures the agency’s priorities, sets an agenda for aging services and programs, and explains the financial plan and formulas that allocate program funding.

Marathon County has joined with three adjacent counties: Lincoln, Langlade and Wood to form a joint aging unit organized as the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Central Wisconsin or ADRC-CW. The mission of the ADRC-CW is to promote choice and independence through personalized education, advocacy, and access to services that prevent, delay, and lessen the impacts of aging and disabilities in the lives of adults. Transportation is not one of the ADRC’s core services but falls under the catch all of Community Services.

Community input for the for the aging plan included a survey and focus groups. Results for the survey show that 51% of respondents prioritize “transportation resources” which was second overall under the supportive services category after in-home services at 80%. Participants in the “Health Promotion” focus group felt

that transportation is a barrier either via lack of knowledge of what is available or true gaps and needs. However, the final aging plan did not establish any transportation related goals, strategies or action steps.

SECTION 4: REVIEW OF EXISTING TRANSPORTATION SERVICE

Marathon County provides county-wide transportation for the elderly and disabled through the Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP) which partners with the City of Wausau's Metro Ride Transit System to serve the Wausau urban core. These services are described in detail in this section. In addition, a wide range of other public, non-profit and private transportation providers also operate within Marathon County. This section also provides an overview of these programs to understand all of the transportation options available to county residents.

MARATHON COUNTY TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

The Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP) Paratransit Service is public transportation for persons over 60 or persons with disabilities. Access to this service is limited to persons whose physical or mental disability prevents them from riding Metro Ride buses or the Metro Ride Paratransit Service.

MCTP service was designed to meet the needs of clients within Marathon County that live outside of the Metro Ride Paratransit service area or those that are in need of door-through-door services who do not have other resources for transportation. MCTP provides trips to medical, nutritional and employment destinations. Service is provided through a combination of paid and volunteer drivers in a shared-ride, on demand car, van or bus. MCTP does not provide transportation for Medical Assistance or Family Care clients at this time.

Currently, MCTP services are provided by North Central Health Care (NCHC) through an agreement with Marathon County. NCHC is responsible for all program components, and their operations are overseen by the Marathon County Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC). The service is funded through the County's annual allocation of County Elderly and Disabled Transportation Assistance Program (State Statute 85.21) funding, 20% local match provided by the County, and program revenue (passenger fares).

MCTP is a door-through-door service, meaning that the van will pull up at the origin of the rider and assist them out of their residence and get them into the doors at their destination. The driver will come to the door and will provide assistance to get the rider in and out of the vehicle. MCTP is a shared-ride

service, meaning that rides may be shared with other passengers. Passenger trips are combined as much as possible to increase efficiency and appropriately utilize available funding.

MCTP hours of operation are Monday through Friday 8:00 am-4:30 pm, with the last return pick-up at 4:00 pm (except holidays). MCTP service is provided outside of the Metro Ride Paratransit area and inside the Marathon County line for clients in need of door-through-door service. Deviation from these parameters may be provided, if requested in advance, depending on driver availability. Service is provided on a first-come, first-served basis, but every effort will be made to accommodate all requests subject to driver and vehicle availability. The rider is charged a fee based on trip distance as shown in **Table 21**.

Table 21: MCTP Cost Share Schedule		
Trip Range	One-way Fare	Round Trip Fare
0 to 15 Miles	\$6.00	\$12.00
16 to 30 Miles	\$12.00	\$24.00
31 to 45 Miles	\$15.00	\$30.00
46 to 60 Miles	\$20.00	\$40.00
Over 60 Miles	Actual Cost	Actual Cost
<i>Source: MCTP.</i>		

MCTP determines eligibility for all riders through an application process. Once a rider has been certified to use the MCTP, they will be able to use the services for as long as needed. One exception to this would be someone who has been certified with a temporary disability. Determination for temporary certification is decided on a case-by-case basis. **Map 6** reflects the relative density of users registered with the program across the county.

Ride requests should be made at least two working days in advance to schedule including return rides. Requests made with less than a 48-hour notice are not guaranteed, but service requests are accommodated if arrangements can be made within driver availability. If a reservation must be changed, MCTP requests notification at least one hour prior to scheduled pick-up time. Changes made on the day of scheduled ride will only be accommodated if space is available.

Subscription Service is available for recurring rides. Reservations can be made in advance for periods of two to twelve months. Drivers do not collect fares. Billing for all rides is batched for all rides each month.

MCTP Registered User Concentration

Map 6



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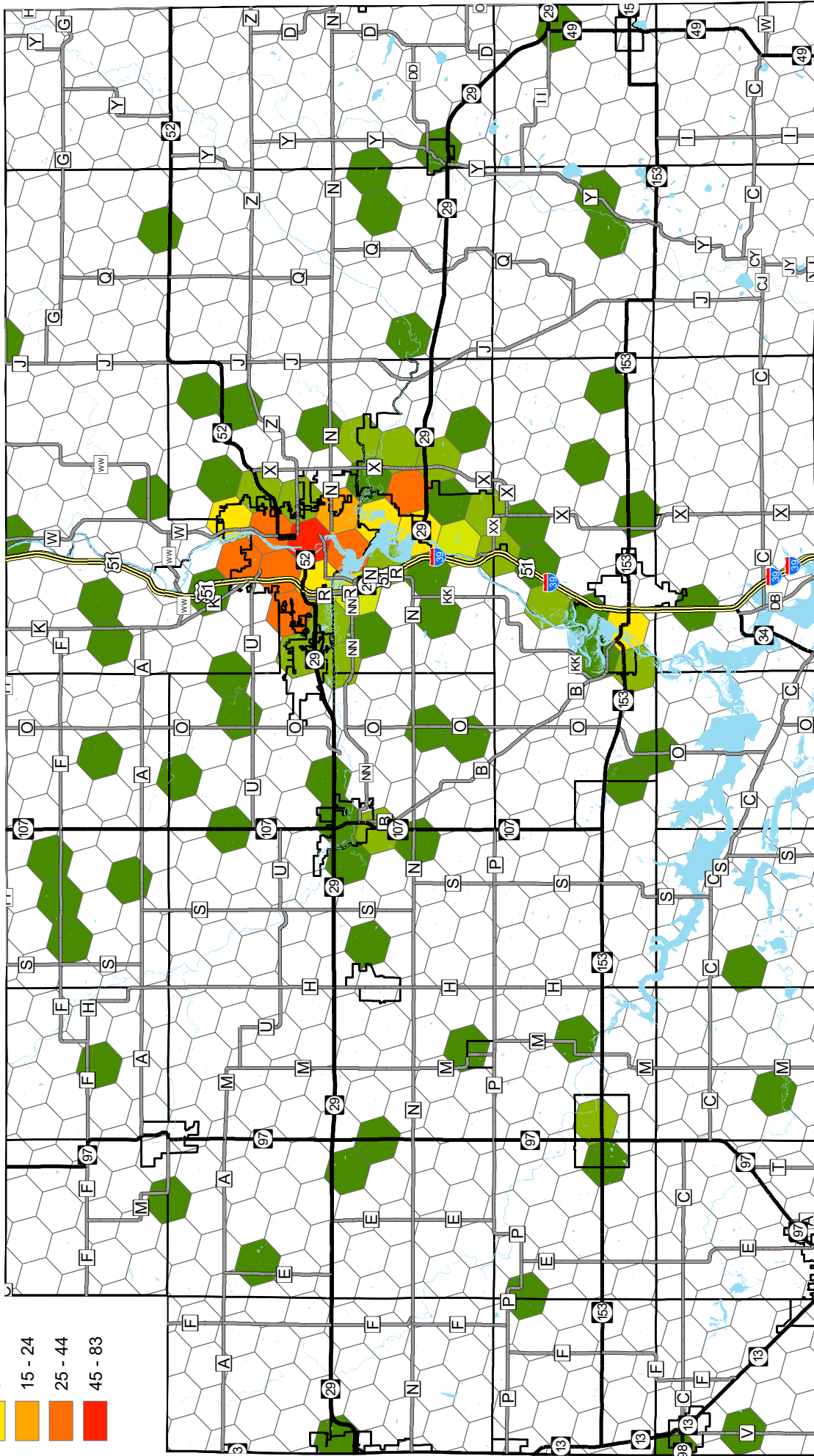
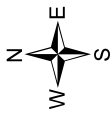
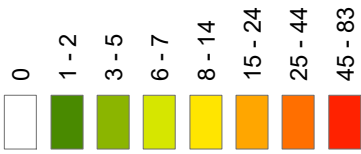
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Source: US Census, NCWRPC, Wis DOT

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Legend

Registered Persons



All mobility devices will be secured to the vehicle. MCTP can accommodate standard wheelchairs, scooters and other mobility devices. Mobility devices cannot exceed 48” in length, 30” in width and 600 lbs. in total weight. If a mobility device does not meet those standards, riders can contact MCTP to see how their needs can be accommodated. MCTP does not provide wheelchairs or other mobility devices.

Personal Care Attendants (PCA) or service animals may accompany a rider at no additional charge. However, space for the PCA or service animal must be reserved when scheduling the ride. MCTP drivers will assist the rider out of the vehicle and into the door at their destination. If the rider needs assistance after they are at the facility, a PCA must be available. MCTP does not provide personal care attendant services. If a personal care attendant is not available, the driver will wait five minutes and then return the rider to the origin of their trip.

Utilization of the MCTP was fairly consistent over the last decade excepting the last three years and the obvious effect of the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in a 33% decline in ridership, see **Table 22**. Prior to COVID, ridership numbers ranged from 8,000 to 10,000 rides per year. This is down from program highs of around 17,600 back in 2008. With the pandemic, ridership plunged to 6,206 in 2020 but is rebounding fairly well. The 2022 ride total reached 7,021.

Other issues, attributed in part to the impact of COVID as well, are impacting service provision including difficulties in recruiting and maintaining both paid and volunteer drivers.

Table 22: MCTP Annual Ridership	
	85.21 Rides
2013	8,869
2014	8,405
2015	9,920
2016	10,096
2017	8,474
2018	8,071
2019	9,321
2020	6,206
2021	6,490
2022	7,021
<i>Source: NCHC.</i>	

METRO RIDE TRANSIT AND PARATRANSIT SERVICES

Metro Ride is the fixed bus route system for the City of Wausau. Metro Ride has previously served the surrounding communities of Rothschild, Schofield, and Weston. However, they discontinued subsidizing services which were consequently discontinued. The regular transit buses are equipped with hydraulic entry lowering systems, lifts and wheelchair securements to accommodate elderly and disabled passengers.

Metro Ride also provides ADA paratransit services to riders within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of their fixed route services when they are in operation. **Map 7** shows the Metro Ride Paratransit service area versus the relative density of elderly and disabled in the Wausau metro and surrounding area. The earliest passengers can be picked up is 6:45 AM and must begin their final trip at or before 6:00 PM to allow for travel to be completed within the service day.

Metro Ride paratransit is an origin-to-destination (curb-to-curb) service available to persons who are unable, because of a physical or mental disability, to access a fixed bus route or ride a regular transit bus. Many Metro Ride paratransit passengers are unable to walk or must have assistance in order to walk. The bus driver will provide passenger assistance in the boarding and alighting process but not to or through the doorway.

Paratransit riders must be certified by Metro Ride to access this service. Once an application is submitted, the rider is notified of their eligibility determination within 21 days. The fare for a one-way trip using Metro Ride's paratransit service is \$2.50 and must be paid in cash with exact change. Passes, tokens and tickets are not available for purchase.

Trip requests are scheduled by hand and keyed into the Trapeze Simpli software which produces a driver manifest or schedule. For recurring rides with the same origin and destination on a set schedule, passengers may request a subscription trip. Metro Ride offers subscription trips for periods of two to 12 months. To deter no-shows on these trips, agency policy dictates that a rider who cancels a subscription trip three times in a single month has their subscription removed. Non-subscription trips must be called in at least one working day before the ride is needed.

In addition to the regular and paratransit service, Metro Ride also provides free weekly grocery shopping routes. These routes serve several senior living complexes on Wednesday mornings. The routes each make stops at two or more residential campuses before arriving at the grocery store. Grocery shopping

routes are open to any complex resident and the general public that board at the complex.

Use of Metro Ride regular buses by elderly and disabled riders has fluctuated but maintained about 30% of total annual ridership over the last decade, except for the recent precipitous drop due to the Covid-19 pandemic, see **Table 23**. In 2020, ridership dropped 80% from 2019. Numbers are trending back up, but the recovery rate appears to be very sluggish.

Utilization of the paratransit service was fairly consistent over the last decade excepting the effect of Covid, which resulted in a 57% decline in ridership, see **Table 23**. Prior to Covid, ridership numbers generally ranged from about 3,000 to 3,800 rides per year. This is down from program highs of around 23,902 back in 2000. With the pandemic, ridership plunged to 1,641 in 2020 but is rebounding well. The 2021 ride total reached 2,925, nearly in line with recent program norms.

Table 23: Metro Ride Annual Ridership		
	Regular Route Elderly & Disabled	Paratransit
2013	144,805	3,388
2014	156,006	3,303
2015	146,889	2,504
2016	138,817	3,021
2017	130,501	3,648
2018	136,699	3,446
2019	120,071	3,779
2020	24,656	1,641
2021	29,300	2,925

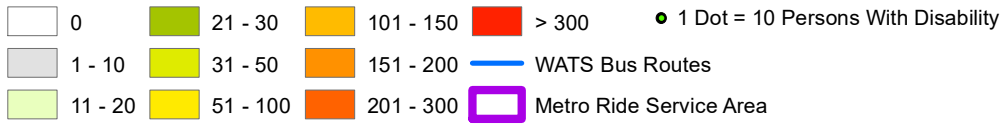
Source: Metro Ride.

OTHER TRANSPORTATION SERVICES WITHIN MARATHON COUNTY

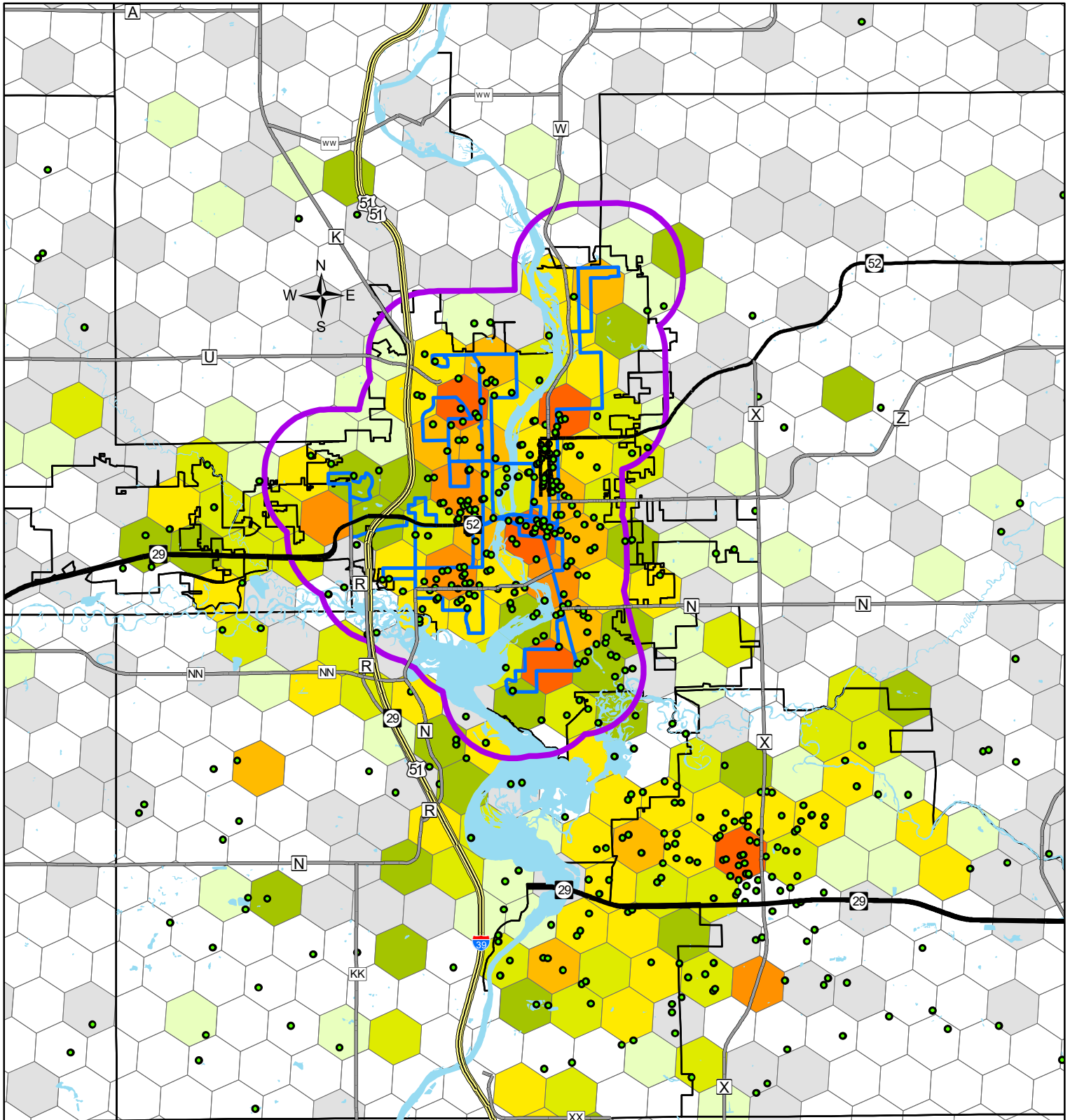
In addition to the services provided by the Marathon County Transportation Program and Metro Ride Transit, there are a wide variety of other services in the mix within Marathon County. Services range from private specialized, taxi, or ride-hailing services to non-profit organizations to federal and state coordinated/subsidized programs. The number and diversity of options can make it difficult for those with transportation needs to navigate the choices.

Legend

Households Resident 65 Years or Over

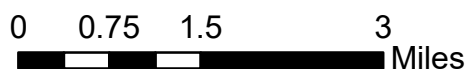


Metro Ride Service Area



Source: US Census, NCWRPC, Wis DOT

This map is neither a legally recorded map nor a survey of the actual boundary of any property depicted. This drawing is a compilation of records, information and data used for reference purposes only. NCWRPC is not responsible for any inaccuracies herein contained.



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Private Specialized Transportation Providers

The number of private companies offering specialized transportation service has increased notably since the onset of Family Care and the state's Medical Assistance (MA) transportation broker systems. Some of the main ones operating in Marathon County include: Abby Vans, AK Transport, KH Medical Transport, North Central Caravans, Reliaride Transport Services, and Touch of Hope. These services seem to have a stable presence in Marathon County while many others have come and gone over time.

Private services typically operate on a 24/7 basis including evenings, weekends and holidays throughout a larger region and are not restricted by community boundaries. They also usually operate multiple types of vehicles to accommodate a variety of individual ambulatory and non-ambulatory (unable to walk) needs such as walker, wheelchair (including bariatric) or medical stretcher (cot/gurney). These services provide door-to-door non-emergency medical and non-medical trips such as shopping, church, or just getting "out-and-about".

While the flexibility and range of services these companies are able to provide can meet a lot of identified needs, the cost for these rides can be prohibitive for many even when subsidized by MA, IRIS, or other long-term care programs especially when frequent regular trips are required.

Taxicab Services

Local taxi firms also often provide non-emergency medical and non-medical transportation services and typically have wheelchair accessible vans. Some accommodate stretcher transports. Service area may be limited and level-of-service varies. Cost can be an issue. Some of the main taxi companies operating in Marathon County include: All American Taxi and Northwoods Cab.

Ride Hailing Services

Use of ride-hailing apps, such as Uber and Lyft, have become increasingly popular across the country, with some research showing as much as 30% of Americans using these services. People are able to use their smartphone to call a car to any address where Uber or Lyft operates and track the arrival of their driver in real-time. Customers may call a ride for any purpose, whether it be to go to work, school, a medical appointment, or a grocery store. Traditionally, ride-hailing services have not operated in rural areas as the low population

density may mean fewer rides. However, companies have increasingly been expanding into rural areas.

Uber has been partnering with small, rural communities to provide government-subsidized rides. One recent example in this area is in Juneau County where they have allocated funding to provide Uber or Lyft drivers an additional \$5 per ride began or completed in Juneau County. The impetus for the program was in response to a county-wide health survey in which residents identified accessible transportation as one of the top priorities for community health. Uber and Lyft also have special programs for medical appointments and senior mobility.

DAV Van Service

Coordinates volunteer drivers for the Disabled American Veterans van to transport veterans to a VA Clinic. Riders must be ambulatory (able to walk). The rides are free. VA Travel reimbursement is also available.

Non-Profit Organizations

Certain non-profit service organizations, often with religious affiliation but not always, provide a variety of transportation services. For example, many area churches coordinate volunteers to provide rides for those in need.

Faith in Action of Marathon County provides transportation for medical appointments, grocery shopping, personal appointments, and community activities. Service is provided at no charge to residents over 60 years of age. Trained volunteers provide services to help seniors whose needs are unmet, do not qualify for existing services or do not have friends or family nearby.

Disabled/Senior Living Complexes

Some nursing homes and other residential facilities maintain their own vehicle to provide transportation for their residents. Facilities with vehicles include Bedrock HCS at Abbotsford, Pride TLC, Rennes Health & Rehab Center, Homme Home Forest Park Village/Homme Heights, Primrose Retirement Community, Benedictine Living Community and Marathon Residential and Counseling Services, among others.

Independent Supportive Services

A number of agencies provide employment and other supportive services to elderly and disabled individuals in the community. Examples in Marathon County include Opportunity Inc., ODC, Inc. and Northern Valley Industries.

These entities provide a range of supportive living assistance, adult day services, respite care, inclusive childcare, and/or employment services depending on their mission and goals. Services are available to enrolled clients. Transportation is often provided as a support service to connect clients with program services and locations and to help them be more independent in their community. For example, Opportunity Inc. provides accessible transportation for individuals with disabilities to and from their homes, to places of employment, to medical/dental appointments, to the pharmacy, to the store so they can purchase necessities and for socialization and recreational opportunities to prevent isolation and loneliness.

CIL New Freedom Transportation Program

The Center for Independent Living – Western Wisconsin (CIL) operates their New Freedom Transportation Program. Transportation is provided for the elderly (55 and older) and those with disabilities. The program serves 42 counties across Wisconsin, including Marathon. As such it is one of the largest (geographically) volunteer driver programs in the nation. They also provide transportation vouchers.

The program staff currently includes 1 full-time transportation director/regional mobility manager, 1 full time transportation program coordinator, 1 transportation program assistant, 5 full-time transportation specialists who do dispatching and information and referral in the service area of central, northern and western Wisconsin. The goal of the program is to provide gap service to supplement other existing programs.

The transportation program operates 7 days a week, 24 hours a day including evenings, weekends and holidays. Advance notice is preferred, but they work to accommodate need at any time subject to driver availability. This is in order to try and address rider unmet needs when other programs are unavailable. Trip purpose is unrestricted, so the CIL service can be used for medical, educational, employment-related, social and other needs. The program also provides rides that cross community boundaries that other programs cannot. Over 248,692 trips have been provided since 2008 for over 22,862 riders across the region. Program rates are \$5 for 0 to 50 miles, \$10 for 51 to 100 miles and over 100 miles is \$10 plus 33-cents per mile past 100.

Within Marathon County the program has struggled to maintain volunteer drivers which program staff attributes in part to low utilization within the county. Staff is constantly working to build up the program, concentrating where the opportunities and needs present themselves. There is potential for the Marathon

County Transportation Program to work with CIL to build up their service in the county and increase program utilization.

Wisconsin MA Transportation Broker Program

The State of Wisconsin contracts for non-emergency medical transportation (NEMT) management. Service is provided for Badger Care Plus, Wisconsin Medicaid and IRIS enrollees.

Wisconsin's NEMT manager is required by federal law to use the least expensive type of ride to get the client to the appointment based on their needs. If they can't ride a bus and aren't able to use their own car, the NEMT manager will schedule a ride based on their medical and transportation needs. The program manager contracts with various transportation providers to service the rides under the program. Typically, these are private transport firms but may be a public sector service.

Total rides provided under the state NEMT program have increased steadily since the program was instituted in 2011. Average monthly rides provided in Marathon County were about 2,000 in 2013, just over 5,000 in 2018 and about 7,000 in 2022. In 2022, a total of 83,376 rides were provided in Marathon County under the program.

VEHICLE AVAILABILITY

Substantial barriers stand in the way of the sharing of vehicles amongst many of the providers of transportation services in the County. Vehicle types may not be compatible between the services provided (e.g., using a large transit bus to provide one-on-one transportation of individuals across the County is not cost effective) and/or regulatory barriers may prohibit sharing (e.g., the use of school buses to provide transportation to non-student populations). For this reason, the determination was made that there is a low potential for sharing and/or reassignment of a significant number of vehicles amongst providers.

SECTION 5: ASSESSMENT OF TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

Transportation needs were assessed for Marathon County through an extensive outreach effort comprised of public listening sessions, stakeholder working group meeting, surveys, and stakeholder interviews. This effort resulted in broad input into the specialized transportation needs facing Marathon County. This section summarizes the key findings and observations from the various outreach activities.

STAKEHOLDER WORKING GROUP MEETING

Project Staff worked with MCTP and Marathon County team members to identify relevant transportation stakeholders from across the county. In total, 66 individuals and organizations were identified and invited to participate. The working group meeting was held on October 19, 2023 at Marathon County's River Drive facility in Wausau. Of the 66 invited only 10 choose to attend, including:

- MCTP
- Metro Ride
- Wausau MPO
- Marathon County Health Department
- CIL New Freedom Transportation
- Opportunity Inc.
- ODC, Inc.
- WATEA – Wheels to Work
- Northern Valley Industries
- Midstate Independent Living Consultants (MILC)

The session revolved around a round-robin, nominal group process format to identify and discuss transportation needs and gaps in Marathon County, as follows:

- Cost of service can be a barrier.
- Hours of service, lack of evening and weekend services - impacts ability to participate in some life activities.

- Some providers have reliability issues.
- Medical discharge.
- Issues with bariatric van availability.
- Issues with changing technology – electric vehicles.
- Lack of volunteer drivers.
- Can't get to jobs due to service limitations. (Limited access to employment opportunities outside of fixed route service area.)
- Limited access to daily needs outside fixed route service area.
- Jurisdictional barriers and a lack of statutory authority to establish/provide regional service (re: RTA).
- Lack of regional cooperation.
- Funding not keeping up with increasing costs for providing service.
- Cannot provide service to meet the needs due to reductions in funding.
- Levy limits make it difficult/impossible to fill the cuts.
- Lack of funding alternatives.
- Instability of 5310 funding.
- Transit funding moved out of transportation to the general fund – increases competition for funding and instability of transit funding.
- Lack acknowledgment by elected officials (local and higher) that alternate transportation is necessary and important.

Some key takeaways from the discussion of transportation needs within Marathon County include:

- A lack of awareness of transportation issues among elected officials at all levels, agencies, organizations and the general public is a key point that must be addressed.
- Follow through on plan implementation of action items / solutions is lacking.

- Regulatory and funding issues are major barriers mostly beyond our local control and as such represent a call to action.
- Large parts of the Wausau urban area (including Wausau’s West Side/Industrial Park, and adjacent communities of Weston, Schofield, Rib Mountain & Rothschild) with high concentrations of elderly and disabled, do not have transit system coverage.
- The lack of volunteer drivers needs to be approached from multiple angles to address barriers (insurance, etc.), recognition, etc.
- Marathon County currently has a “no new positions” policy that may persist under current budget conditions which may make it difficult to implement some recommendations.
- There are other programs and services that may be leveraged to complement the MCTP, such as CIL New Freedom.

The working group meeting discussion also led to a series of draft action items and strategies to address identified transportation needs and gaps. This outline formed the framework for the final recommendations of this study.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Throughout the study process key stakeholders were interviewed by Project Staff to provide a more in-depth exploration of current transportation program operations and discussion on needs. Interviews took place in person and over the phone. The following organizations were included in the one-on-one interview process:

- Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP)
- North Central Health Care (NCHC)
- Wausau MPO
- Metro Ride
- CIL New Freedom Transportation
- Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources (GWAAR)
- ADRC-CW

Some key takeaways from the stakeholder interview process regarding transportation needs within Marathon County include:

- MCTP current volunteer driver shortage and difficulties recruiting new drivers has forced a state of reduced service – trip purpose for rides limited to medical, 3-day notice (up from 2) and no same day.
- The number of MCTP registered users outside the Wausau urban area is limited.
- Applications for MCTP program registration continue to be approved, but many never use the services.
- County rural transportation routes were discontinued due to lack of use.
- CIL New Freedom operates 24/7 including evenings, weekends, holidays, hospital discharges and serves the elderly 55 and up, disabled and veterans.
- Number of requests to CIL from Marathon County has been low, and it's difficult to retain volunteer drivers if there are no riders for them to deliver.
- CIL draws drivers from a radius of 45 up to 60 miles from the ride origin which widens its available driver pool to fulfill ride requests.
- CIL has had success in recruiting volunteer drivers having recently added 8 new drivers.
- Gas prices are softening, and federal mileage reimbursement rate is anticipated to go up next year which will help in driver recruitment.
- State starting to acknowledge the issue regarding volunteer drivers, and has created a state volunteering coordinator position to develop/provide resources and help address the problems.
- GWAAR is working to advance legislation to prevent insurance companies in Wisconsin from categorizing volunteer drivers as Uber/Lyft, taxis or other rides for hire.
- No real concerns with the current system as far as fulfilling medical transportation needs. The biggest need for elderly and disabled in Marathon County are those basic needs trips, shopping, recreation, social, etc.
- The ADRC can serve as a messaging (information and resources) and liaison conduit between elderly and disabled residents and transportation programs / providers.
- Reductions in funding for Metro Ride have resulted in decrease in service levels. Metro Ride is obligated to provide for all qualifying paratransit requests, so limits on service are maintained to control demand from exceeding capacity afforded by budget.
- Metro Ride budget constraints preclude expanding service levels without additional funding sources.

- Current specialized transportation system (in Wisconsin) is disjointed many providers / programs with differing criteria. Riders have a difficult time who to call to get the ride they need.
- Should be a more concerted effort to work together to create a more integrated transportation system.
- Metro Ride indicated that in the past when a private firm has been contracted to provide the paratransit service, ridership increased because the firm “pushed” rides – exceeding the financial bounds of the program.

STAKEHOLDER SURVEY

As part of the study process a group of 34 from the original stakeholders were targeted to receive a stakeholder survey in order to capture input from a broader range of agencies or organizations than attended the working group meeting or were interviewed by Project Staff. The survey could be completed in paper or digital form via Survey Monkey. The following organizations responded to the survey:

- North Central Community Action Program (NCCAP)
- Homme Heights
- Aspirus Wausau Hospital Kidney Care
- Marathon County Veterans Service Office
- Rennes Health & Rehab
- Marathon Residential & Counseling Services
- Benedictine Living Community
- Waterfall Health of Wausau

Some key takeaways from the targeted stakeholder survey regarding transportation needs within Marathon County include:

- All survey respondents indicated that they assist elderly and/or disabled individuals with their transportation needs.
- Most provide transportation referrals & information and/or actively arrange rides with various services, while 5 own vehicles and directly provide rides.
- Those that do provide rides also utilize other outside services.
- All use a variety of transportation options, but 3 of the 8 indicated that they were not familiar with the Marathon County Transportation Program.

- Clients only rarely or occasionally miss an appointment due to lack of transportation.
- Perceived gaps in in transportation for the elderly & disabled in Marathon County:
 - Early morning and weekends.
 - During non-business hours and weekends.
 - Education of services.
 - For those patients that don't qualify for Veyo but still have limited funds, we refer to MCTP, however, dialysis treatment capacity requires some patients to be on a Tues-Thurs-Sat schedule, but MCTP is not available on Saturdays. If a patient gets a later appointment time it can impact having a ride home as MCTP does not run in the evening.
 - For patients going to treatment 3x/week, transportation can pose a large financial barrier. Most patients accept MCTP pricing. But taxi or medical transport can be very expensive.
 - Clinic is open on many holidays, but transport companies are typically closed on those days.
 - Last minute rides are hard to accommodate but sometimes required because of health concerns.
 - Nursing homes and assisted living facilities need more access to transportation.
 - Medical stretcher (cot/gurney) transfers are difficult to get.
 - Bariatric rides are difficult to get.
- Barriers that prevent clients from utilizing specialized transportation within Marthon County:
 - Cost.
 - The response time for acceptance or denial – waits up to 2-weeks for answer.
 - Wheelchair accessible vehicle.
 - Not a resident of Marathon County.
 - On Medicaid.
 - Unaware of services.
 - No family to help.
 - Routine and scheduled dialysis appointments 3x/week. Consistency for these patients is key.
 - Not educated in how to use.
 - Family Care says facilities have to provide transport. Facilities sometimes need help with transport due to staffing/vehicle

availability. A vehicles cannot be in Wausau & Marshfield for appointments at the same time.

- Most common complaints/concerns heard about specialized transportation in Marathon County:
 - Taxi – costs, not reliable or on-time, issues with vulnerable clients.
 - Cost.
 - Don't run on Saturdays. Limited hours of operation (evenings).
- How might specialized transportation in Marathon County be improved:
 - More availability.
 - Create a program for CBRF, ALF and SNF only.
 - Medical stretcher (cot/gurney) and bariatric rides.
 - After hours transportation.
 - Increase rides available per week/month for Medicaid recipients.
- How might specialized transportation services be better promoted:
 - Flyers and brochures to hand out to residents.
 - Maybe a segment on the news.
 - Send out brochures to community partners or email blast.
 - Easy to read and understand flyers (large print).
 - Provide information/training to local social workers and case managers.
 - Train MCOs.
 - Train facilities on resources available, how to use, how to bill, etc.
- One commented that they have been hearing about the lack of drivers, and they wonder if more work could be done to better promote and advertise the need for drivers.
- One respondent not familiar with the MCTP indicated they would be interested in learning more about transportation in the county.

PUBLIC LISTENING SESSIONS

A total of four public listening sessions were organized for this project to provide an opportunity to hear from the general public about their use of specialized transportation services in Marathon County and their desires and priorities for potential changes to those services.

The meetings were held in July and August of 2023 in Athens, Hatley, Stratford and Wausau. Notices were published in area newspapers and distributed to all clerks in Marathon County for public posting and placement in community newsletters. There was also outreach to many of the churches throughout the

county requesting them to post on their community message boards and publish in Sunday bulletin and church newsletters. Unfortunately, attendance was low with only six individuals attending despite the outreach effort.

There was some good discussion with those that did attend. Some key takeaways from the public discussion of transportation within Marathon County include:

- Gets by through walking for most needs (independent living w/ disability).
- Transportation could be a problem (needed 2x/day – 5 days /week) if cannot find new job within walking distance.
- Another issue is matching job shift schedules to transportation availability schedules.
- Support programs (MCO, DVR) schedule Abby Vans for needs such as medical and employment interviews.
- Relies on nearby family for other occasional / longer trips.
- Used MCTP for shopping trips before Covid.
- Small towns, like Spencer, are losing residents because people don't want to live in area without services. More services used to be available in the past, but now improved transportation (to provide access to services) may be an option to counter this.
- Suggest periodic (i.e. once-a-month) “senior shopping day” – route between smaller communities, like Spencer, and Wausau.
- Suggest bringing in church groups, social groups, civic/service organizations (“Lions”, Chamber, etc.) to “help” with the transportation issue.
- The transportation system is confusing with all the different programs and their restrictions and requirements.
- Navigating curb-to-curb service in Wausau can be difficult and dangerous (crossing busy streets to get to stops) especially in the winter (sidewalks not cleared, ice).
- Can't get to VA Clinic.
- Can't get to volunteer opportunity or retail in Rib Mountain.
- Need transportation to Neighbor's Place Food Pantry 1-2 times per week.
- Wait times for rides is an issue.
- Getting groceries or getting to the doctor's is a challenge from Hatley.
- New elderly housing complexes being built in Hatley.
- Transportation important for seniors: prevent social isolation / access work to supplement income / access volunteer opportunities.

There was also the opportunity to submit written comments digitally or via US Mail. Three comments were received by email. Two comments were submitted by residents that did not attend one of the public sessions, and one was from an individual that also attended a public session. The comments received are as follows:

- “My main concern about the elderly and disabled is the following: The amount of money that is spent on the transit plan every five years and nothing ever changes. It just sits on a shelf and collects dust. When is this community going to act on this plan. It’s the same issues study after study and no results. Years to get ADA bus shelters.

My other concern is microtransit to our community. In my communities across this country microtransit is not a door to door service you need to get to a certain location to get a ride. How does this service comply with ADA laws.

I was wondering when the county will let the elderly and disabled have rides for social events? The needs for rides are increasing because of the aging population.”

- “Yes we do need public transportation. And linking in with existing transportation. Wheelchair friendly. Most elderly and disabled have walkers or wheelchairs. Ramps can be dangerous for visually impaired people. You need to consider lift access. Just like NCHC provides.

Even if service is limited to one day with two in and out transport times. For now. With more added later. Yes we do need transportation. Not everyone has a car. And it would help get people where they need to be. Jobs would open up. And dependence on government programs would go down. Shopping would increase. So tax base would shift and help pay for better transportation. One bus holds many people. That means less road work. These people that complain about property taxes. What about the taxes already in existence? Paying for what?

We want big events to come in. Bringing their money with them. Without public transportation they go elsewhere. I know because I see it. I asked them. They said transportation in northern Wisconsin is a joke.

We have the opportunity to fix this. If we can put away fears of certain people that fear cost. We can move forward and make northern Wisconsin

the place to be. And attract more money to our area. Benefits all. We people deserve better.”

- A final submitted comment referenced a 1971 article about a “new minibus for those 55 years of age or over made its first trip from Stratford to Wausau Thursday morning, returning with a full load.” The submitter stated, “Maybe we can get this started up again.”

ASSESSMENT OF TRANSPORTATION NEEDS – SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Based on a review of available data and the input collected from the public and various stakeholders, this study finds that, excepting the effects of the Covid pandemic, the need for rides for the most critical needs (medical) for those most in need (elderly & disabled who cannot ride a regular bus) is being fairly well met. This is in part due to the significant expansion of transportation service options and care programs, that provide for transportation, available within Marathon County since 2009. Survey results indicate that there is a very low percentage of appointments missed due to lack of transportation.

However, that is not to say that there are no issues related to transportation services in Marathon County. Stakeholders also report that eligibility requirements for programs that provide for transportation (Family Care, Badger Care, MA, etc.) do not include all elderly and disabled in need of transportation or cover all needed trip purposes. Affordability is another issue particularly for those that are not covered by a program, with some rides costing 100’s of dollars. MCTP fills some of this gap by being a relatively affordable service.

In addition, all these services increase the demand for available drivers, resulting in an indirect competition for drivers in the area. Not to mention the confusion for users trying to navigate the extensive options available.

The available driver pool has been further impacted by the pandemic. This is particularly an issue with the volunteer driver ranks with many drivers exiting service due to the pandemic and slow to return in the post-pandemic era. This is the issue for MCTP which currently has a severe shortage of volunteer drivers. This lack of volunteer drivers has resulted in a gap (unmet need) in the transportation service due to reductions in service level. This reduction in service entails trip purpose for rides limited to medical, 3-day notice (up from 2) and no same day service. This creates “new” needs including transportation for

nutritional and employment purposes and reduced ability to get a ride with less than 72 hour notice including “same-day” for sudden need.

While Covid certainly impacted transportation providers, many riders either attended fewer appointments to minimize exposure or utilized alternate means of transportation that were more comfortable, most likely leaning more heavily on family and friends. Ridership figures show that MCTP, Metro Ride Paratransit and state brokered MA rides are relatively quickly rebounding. In fact, MA program rides have surged above pre-Covid levels. The one exception is Metro Ride regular transit which previously carried a significant number of elderly and disabled rides. These riders have been slow to return to the bus, and may be continuing to rely on their Covid period alternatives due to lingering exposure concerns. Metro ride has some work to do to continue its recovery in this area.

The current immediate barrier to serving the elderly and disabled transportation needs within the County for the MCTP is the volunteer driver situation. The lack of volunteer drivers problem must be solved to re-establish nutritional and employment trip purposes and have fewer unmet ride requests.

Study findings indicate that many of the same transportation needs remain persistent, including a range of basic needs trip purposes (such as shopping, business appointments, education, volunteering, social, recreation and others), expanded hours of service (evening, weekend and holiday), hospital discharge, and crossing county lines. These needs have proven difficult to meet with the resources available. While many of the other service providers out there do offer some of these services, cost typically restricts use to the most necessary medical trips except for those with more resources at their disposal.

Finally, one suggestion for improvement stemming from the outreach relates to the need for continued and expanded information and education about the availability and use of the MCTP and other transportation programs available within the County. A number of respondents/attendees were unaware of the existence of the programs or how to access them. On-going communication about the programs is necessary to ensure that individuals in need have the best chance of discovering and accessing needed transportation. Expanding educational efforts into new and different areas may help reach individuals not currently getting the message.

SECTION 6: RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS NEEDS

With the reality of limited resources, it is not possible to meet all needs all of the time, a number of strategies were identified to restore and bolster the capacity of the MCTP to maintain a reliable, affordable transportation option for essential trips by elderly and disabled residents with limited transportation resources while attempting to fill in some of the gaps in the system where unmet needs remain.

Through the input and discussions brought together for this study, the following recommendations were identified to help address the elderly and disabled transportation needs in Marathon County:

- Maintain Existing MCTP Transportation System and Restore Service Capacity:
 - Engage in and Sustain More Active Recruitment of Volunteer Drivers and Address Volunteer Issues
 - Focus on Communications and Messaging
- Utilize the CILWW New Freedom Regional Volunteer Driver Program
- Increase Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advocacy at All Levels: Local, State and Federal
- Encourage Wausau Urban Area Communities to Support Transit Services
- Encourage Statewide Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Legislation
- Explore Creating County Level Mobility Manager Position
- Consider Study for Reestablishing County Route Service

The remainder of this section discusses each of the identified recommendations.

1. Maintain Existing MCTP Transportation System and Restore Service Capacity

It is a general finding of this study that the current model of service for the Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP) through North Central Health Care (NCHC) and Metro Ride Paratransit is generally well received by those who use it. The biggest area of concern is the recent reduction in service through NCHC due primarily to a severe lack of availability of volunteer drivers.

Another issue identified, that may be undermining the program, is lack of awareness and program confusion due to the current complexity of the elderly and disabled transportation delivery system statewide as a whole.

As a result of these findings, this recommendation has two components:

- Active recruitment of volunteer drivers.
- Focus on Communications.

A. Engage in and Sustain More Active Recruitment of Volunteer Drivers and Address Volunteer Issues

Most counties are struggling with maintaining volunteer drivers post Covid. The MCTP had 35 active volunteer drivers pre-covid, but currently they are down to just 5. To handle this situation, trip workload has been shifted to paid drivers and service reductions have been implemented. These reductions include trip purpose for rides limited to medical, 3-day notice (up from 2) and no same day.

This has worked in the short term. MCTP rides dropped significantly in 2020 and 2020 due to Covid but recovered well in 2022. This situation is not cost efficient or sustainable. To return to 2019 trip levels, the goal is to restore MCTP service standards of providing for medical, nutrition and employment trip purposes, 2-day notice and providing same day rides when able.

To accomplish this, efforts to recruit and retain volunteer drivers must be ramped-up and sustained. This should be a significant effort beyond the capacity of one or two staff people with other responsibilities. It is proposed that the County and TCC endorse a team effort involving personnel from the MCTP, County Planning, Wausau MPO, and ADRC-CW. The team should also include NCHC, United Way of Marathon County, GWAAR and CIL New Freedom. CIL has had some recent success in recruiting new volunteer drivers. Recognizing the importance of volunteers to aging and disability programs and the difficulties faced with attracting new volunteers, Wisconsin DHS has created a volunteer program coordinator to provide resources and assistance:



Samantha Margelofsky
Volunteer Program Coordinator
Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources
Wisconsin Department of Health Services
Samantha.margelofsky@dhs.wisconsin.gov
608-267-3228

The United Way has several programs and staff dedicated to volunteering efforts, including the Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Marathon County.

This includes a searchable posting board for community volunteer opportunities. This is good, however, one finds the NCHC call for drivers buried on page 17 of 27. The competition for volunteers is significant. Looking at just calls for drivers, in addition to NCHC/MCTP, there are a minimum of 8 other organizations seeking volunteer drivers for various purposes, including:

- Faith in Action
- Habitat for Humanity
- Wausau Area Mobile Meals
- ADRC Meals on Wheels
- The Neighbors Place
- The Salvation Army
- Marathon County Hunger Coalition
- The Open Door of Marathon County

In addition to participating in other volunteering events, such as the United Way's recently reinstated annual Volunteer Fest, the team should work to develop special efforts dedicated to volunteer driving. These efforts should include coordinating with the other entities seeking drivers (noted above) on ways to work together to maximize the available volunteer driver pool.

A ramped-up recognition program and incentives package should be designed and implemented. Some ideas for this identified during this study include:

- Recognition Luncheon(s)
- Provide Meals
- Arrange Discounts (One idea was work with area vendors to assemble a special volunteer drivers discount card. Could feature gas and auto service discounts among others.)
- Think outside the box

Beyond Covid, there are a number of factors affecting volunteer driver participation. The team should work to identify and address these barriers. Discussions for this study have identified the following issues: mileage reimbursement rates, gas prices and insurance issues. Gas prices have stabilized and decreased somewhat, and the federal mileage reimbursement rate is expected to increase next year. These factors could be highlighted in recruitment efforts. The insurance issue is a larger concern.

Personal auto insurance companies are causing volunteer driver programs to lose volunteers due to non-renewal of coverage or increasing premiums on auto

policies for volunteer drivers. Some insurance agencies classify commercial activity as receiving any compensation, even mileage reimbursement and are non-renewing coverage or increasing rates as a result. Basically, volunteer driving is being lumped into livery services (for-hire vehicles that are used by businesses to generate revenue by transporting people) and transportation network companies (TNCs), such as Uber and Lyft because they are getting “compensated” for their services.

GWAAR has been working with a coalition to advance legislation to protect volunteer drivers from insurance companies classifying volunteer driving as a commercial activity. The team should contact GWAAR and encourage them to press this effort and find out how Marathon County can support what they are doing. Outreach to stakeholders should explain the issue, the effort to change the law, and how they can talk to legislators about the importance of this problem and the need to pass this legislation.

The team must also broaden the promotion and advertising for the volunteer driver positions. Getting the word out to a wider range of agencies and stakeholders will increase awareness of the problem and help circulate the message on the need for volunteer drivers. Outreach should include area churches and other community service organizations. Some agencies contacted during this study expressed interest and willingness to help. The need for volunteer drivers should also be posted on the Volunteer Opportunities page of the County website.

B. Focus on Communications and Messaging

While many are aware of the MCTP, the many programs and providers can cause confusion among potential users. Going to the Internet to find out more about MCTP and transportation provided by the County, illustrates this problem. Looking on the County’s webpage doesn’t reveal it despite having a transportation section on its Services page, and a sampling of various key word searches in Google for the program yield NCHC’s website (norcen.org), the ADRC and various private services. While NCHC’s page is useful, someone looking for the Marathon County public transportation program might easily dismiss it as a private company program and not what they are looking for. The ADRC page is a listing of related and unrelated “transportation” services across multiple counties that need to be sorted through. Then, the limited info on the “Marathon County Transportation Program” again appears to attribute it to NCHC.

The County should work to clarify the identity and ownership of the Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP) on the Internet and in other future resource publications, like those of the ADRC and others. The webpage should be hosted on the County website and redesigned to represent the MCTP as a County / public service and clarify NCHC's role as a contracted provider.

Similarly, the NCHC's program brochure is a quality piece, but it should also be redesigned to clarify program identity and roles.

It is apparent that the Marathon County Transportation Program needs an education component to help potential users understand their options. One of the primary reasons that a need for a ride goes unsatisfied is not that service is unavailable, but that the individual in need of the ride is either unaware of the services that are available or is misinformed about the availability of service or program requirements.

Most county transportation programs have detailed websites, service guides and brochures. The County should consider the development and maintenance of a website, Facebook page, guide and brochure for the transportation program. Although there will be individuals within the elderly and disabled communities that do not use the internet for various reasons, many are tech savvy. In addition, these tools would be useful to families and caregivers that are supporting someone who is elderly or disabled as well as professionals such as case managers and social workers assisting these persons. An annual mailing about program availability, costs, etc to keep entities informed about MCTP is another option. An email blast format was suggested.

The County should work as a conduit for improving communication between all providers and agencies & interest groups including advocates, social workers, case managers, other health care workers, residential administrators, etc. Sharing of information about each other's operations and programming and how they affect one another can improve awareness and service delivery. At the Stakeholder Group Meeting the concept of a "Transit Summit" was suggested.

A county-wide transit summit provides an opportunity for transportation providers, benefit providers (MCOs, etc.), advocates, agencies and care providers for the elderly and disabled, as well as, local officials and other interested parties and stakeholders to come together to enhance program awareness, share system/program information, promote advocacy, address common issues and develop cooperative solutions. State (DOT, DHS, etc) officials and staff and elected representatives should be invited to attend/participate – possibly acting as presenters where appropriate. The transit summit could be annual or

periodic, as needed. Transit summit planning and implementation may be eligible for 5304 program funding with match being potentially “in-kind”.

There is also a need to get awareness out in the rural areas of the county of the programs that are available and how they work. One suggestion was to get more educational resources out where the elderly and disabled frequent like churches and community/senior centers.

Other options for information and education include: present at senior group meetings; get families information on the programs, possibly through the ADRC as part of a packet of things they need to know; develop a newsletter to be sent periodically to residents of the county to explain the services that are available; and putting program information in the Senior Review, area newspapers and town newsletters.

United Way 211 was identified as a source of information. The United Way holds quarterly interagency meetings which may be a good opportunity to provide a session with information on what's available. The County should work with both the United Way and the ADRC to improve resource material and messaging not only about the MCTP (including Metro Ride Paratransit component) but how the overall transportation system works in relation to all the various programs and providers.

2. Utilize the CILWW New Freedom Regional Volunteer Driver Program

The MCTP should work with the CIL New Freedom to explore options to integrate the two programs. This would involve coordinating with Midstate Independent Living Consultants (MILC) which has a Memorandum of Agreement with CIL for providing service in Marathon County. The CIL program can reinforce MCTP service and fill in gaps in service need.

The primary function of the CIL New Freedom program is to provide gap service to supplement other existing programs. To fulfil that mission, CIL New Freedom operates 7 days a week, 24 hours a day including evenings, weekends and holidays. Advance notice is preferred, but they work to accommodate need at any time subject to driver availability. This includes hospital discharge, another significant area of unmet transportation need. Trip purpose is unrestricted, so the CIL service can be used not only for medical, nutritional, and employment related needs, but also educational, volunteering-related, recreational, social and other needs. The program also provides rides that cross community

boundaries that other programs cannot. All of this is in order to try and address rider unmet needs when other programs are unavailable.

All of these operation parameters address the major on-going unmet needs in Marathon County that the MCTP does not have the resources to provide. Working with the CIL program provides the County with a mechanism to fill in those gaps in service to meet more of the community's transportation needs. CIL could also be utilized as a back-up option to help fulfill rides the MCTP can't due to scheduling conflicts or driver availability. By working together, this would assist CIL in meeting its service obligations under its agreement with MILC.

The CIL New Freedom program would have to be incorporated with the communications and messaging recommendations noted above along with the other components of the system (NCHC and Metro Ride) so that potential county program users become more aware of this option to promote awareness and build ridership.

If successful, the County should consider integrating CIL New Freedom as a third leg of the Marathon County Transportation Program together with MCTP-NCHC and Metro Ride Paratransit.

3. Increase Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advocacy at All Levels: Local, State and Federal

Marathon County / MCTP should work to coordinate advocacy outreach to local, state and federal officials and elected representatives to address concerns and issues facing elderly and disabled transportation. Government entities must be mindful of lobbying restrictions associated with program grant funding and other regulations. However, information and education efforts can be made to increase awareness of concerns and issues, and other stakeholders can be encouraged to boost outreach. This includes families and caregivers that are supporting someone who is elderly or disabled as well as professionals: advocates, social workers, case managers, other health care workers, residential administrators, etc. that are assisting these individuals and families. Other related professional associations and support organizations, such as the Wisconsin Public Transit Association and GWAAR, are also a valuable resources in these efforts.

Local elected leaders need to be made aware of the importance of elderly and disabled transportation, informed about the issues facing the transportation

system, and encouraged to support and adequate budget for elderly and disabled transportation.

Some of the concerns and issues that need to be addressed through advocacy efforts include:

- Working to address transportation concerns specific to MA eligibility, adequate funding reimbursement, 5310 requirements and streamlining eligibility requirements.
- Eliminating barriers to intercounty cooperation.
- Enhancing coordination with disabled population, low income, elderly, Family Care and all other programs that provide for transportation services.
- Reducing or eliminating other federal/state program restrictions and regulatory barriers: encourage DOT to change problematic administrative code.
- Encouraging Wausau Urban Area communities to support/provide public transit.
- Promoting enabling legislation for Regional Transit Authorities (RTA) in Wisconsin.
- Addressing levy limits that result in cuts in funding / reductions in service levels for critical public services like elderly and disabled transportation.
- Addressing volunteer driver issues, including but not limited to the insurance classification problem – GWAAR legislative effort (see Recommendation 1A).

There is some overlap between this recommendation and the “Communications” recommendations in this Section. For example, the transportation summit concept (see Recommendation 1B) could be leveraged to assist with the advocacy efforts and goals. Expansion of the summit to a regional (multi-county) or statewide scope can amplify the outreach to DOT and other local, state and federal entities.

4. Encourage Wausau Urban Area Communities to Support Transit Services

Despite the range of public benefits provided by transit services, the City of Wausau is the only community out of the 7 total cities and villages in the urban area to support a public system. Cities as small as Mauston at 4,000 population recognize the importance of public transportation by supporting a shared-ride taxi service. At various points, transit was extended from Wausau to some of

the surrounding communities, but support within those communities could not be sustained and service was discontinued.

The density of elderly and disabled in Marathon County is highest in Wausau and the surrounding urban area. In addition, medical, residential and other services utilized by the elderly and disabled are scattered throughout the urban area. Historically, Metro Ride serves a significant number of elderly and disabled with its regular bus routes in addition to the paratransit service for those unable to ride a bus. When you consider that the local government share of Metro Ride cost is only about 25% with around 60% coming from state and federal sources, it is probably the most locally cost-efficient way to provide these services. It represents a missed opportunity to support the elderly and disabled residents in these communities.

The cities and villages of the Wausau Urban Area should be encouraged to implement expansion of Metro Ride transit service into their communities. The recent Metro Ride TDP (refer to Section 3 of this study) lays several scenarios with budget projections for extending transit service into the adjacent communities. This recommendation overlaps with the “Communications” and “Advocacy” recommendations in this Section.

5. Encourage Statewide Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Legislation

Transit systems across Wisconsin have explored the creation of Regional Transit Authorities (RTA) as an alternative organizational structure. An RTA would have an independent governing commission and could serve an entire region. The RTA structure would relieve the local municipalities from responsibility to provide the necessary local match to fund transit. However, RTA legislation has been stalled in the Wisconsin Legislature. An RTA remains an option if State legislative support shifts or new legislation supports such an initiative.

State elected officials should be encouraged to pass RTA enabling legislation. Again, lobbying restrictions limit direct action, but MCTP can work in conjunction with Metro Ride to disseminate information and education on this issue to elected leaders and the public. In addition, MCTP should support and coordinate with efforts of entities such as the Wisconsin Public Transit Association to promote RTA and explore ways organizations such as GWAAR might be able to help. This recommendation overlaps with the “Communications” and “Advocacy” recommendations in this Section.

6. Explore Creating County Level Mobility Manager Position

Mobility management is an approach for managing and delivering coordinated transportation services to the elderly and disabled. Mobility management focuses on meeting individual rider needs through a wide range of transportation options and service providers. It also focuses on coordinating in-house services, in this case MCTP and Metro Ride Paratransit, with outside service providers and support programs in an effort to achieve a more efficient transportation service delivery system.

Mobility management involves these key steps:

- Developing an inventory of available services
- Identifying customer needs
- Developing strategies to meet customer needs
- Coordinating financial and other resources
- Improving coordination between in-house/public services and programs – public, private and non-profit
- Training staff and volunteers
- Promoting the use of innovative technologies, services, and other methods to improve customer service and coordination
- Developing customer information and trip planning systems

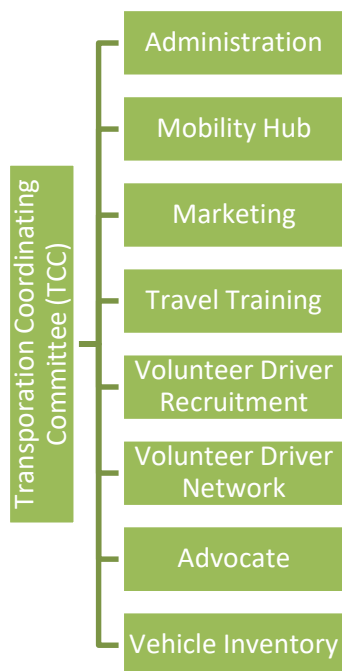
Mobility managers serve as service coordinators, operations managers, and customer travel navigators. They help communities develop transportation coordination plans, programs, and policies, and build local partnerships. Mobility managers may also work to promote policies that favor public transportation. They coordinate transportation services among all customer groups, service providers, and funding agencies and work with human service agencies and workforce centers that coordinate the travel and trip planning needs of individuals who receive human service program assistance.

Two programs administered by WisDOT 5310 and WETAP have awarded projects that include mobility managers throughout the state. The direction that mobility management takes is a local decision and is not limited or mandated by WisDOT other than to ensure project eligibility according to the applicable funding source.

Marathon County, through its TCC and MCTP, should implement a Mobility Manager in cooperation with Metro Ride. In addition to basic mobility management functions, this position could be tasked with shepherding

implementation of the recommendations of this study and providing oversight of the County’s elderly and disabled transportation services provided through MCTP and Metro Ride Paratransit. See **Figure 9** for a conceptual framework for a proposed MCTP mobility management system.

Figure 9: Proposed MCTP Mobility Management Framework



7. Consider Study for Reestablishing County Route Service

It was brought up during this study that it may be helpful for the elderly and disabled across the county to have regular transit routes between Wausau and the smaller outlying communities. However, the MCTP has run out-county routes in the past. These have all been discontinued due to low ridership. In addition there are the obvious budgetary and staffing issues.

While this same situation is found in a number of adjacent counties, there are several examples of counties successfully running county-wide transportation routes around the state. Marathon County may want to take a fresh look at the potential for re-establishing county-wide route(s) by developing a feasibility study on the creation of new county-wide route(s). A feasibility study could

evaluate options for organizing and operating routes, including routing, frequencies, fare structures, reservation and scheduling details, etc. This type of feasibility study would be eligible for 5304 program funding.

Looking at county route structures leads to consideration of alternative service models. There are a range of service models used by counties across the state. Many of those that provide county-wide routes have formed full single or multi-county transit systems. This transit system approach opens up additional funding opportunities. The 5304 program could also be used to more generally look at alternative service models for Marathon County. This approach provides an opportunity to prepare in advance for possible service delivery changes in the future while determining if a more detail route feasibility study is warranted.

PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

While all of the recommendations presented here represent important steps toward maintaining and expanding the Marathon County Transportation Program (MCTP), the pressing need is to address the volunteer driver problem. Therefore, the recommended top priority of this study is to focus on Recommendation 1.A. The CIL New Freedom program represents a ready-made solution to many of the elements of unmet transportation need within the County, and should, therefore, be the secondary priority for implementation moving forward.

MCTP ELDERLY & DISABLED TRANSPORTATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

STATEWIDE TRANSIT PLANNING PROGRAM (SECTION 5304)

Formula based grant program apportioned annually to states for use in public or specialized transit planning and research. Federal share is 80% with a required 20% non-federal match.

ENHANCED MOBILITY OF SENIORS AND INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES PROGRAM (SECTION 5310)

The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) – Federal Transit Administration (FTA) administers its Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities Program which is commonly referred to as Section 5310. This program supports transportation services planned, designed, and carried out to meet the special transportation needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities in all areas – large urbanized (over 200,000), small urbanized (50,000-200,000), and rural (under 50,000). Eligible projects include both traditional capital investment and nontraditional investment beyond the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit services. A local match is required of 20 percent for capital projects and 50 percent for operating expenses.

Examples of traditional capital projects include:

- buses and vans; wheelchair lifts, ramps, and securement devices; transit-related information technology systems including scheduling/routing/one-call systems; and mobility management programs.

Examples of “non-traditional” projects include:

- travel training; volunteer driver programs; building an accessible path to a bus stop including curb-cuts, sidewalks, accessible pedestrian signals or other accessible features; improving signage, or way-finding technology; incremental cost of providing same day service or door-to-door service; purchasing vehicles to support new accessible taxi, rides sharing and/or vanpooling programs; and mobility management programs.

FEDERAL FORMULA GRANT PROGRAM FOR RURAL AREAS (SECTION 5311)

The FTA also administers its Formula Grants for Rural Areas, commonly referred to as Section 5311. This program is designated for areas with less than 50,000 and its purpose is to provide funding to states to support public transportation in rural areas. Like Section 5310, this program also has a 20 percent local match for capital projects and 50 percent local match for operating projects. Section 5311 may be used to help rural areas:

- Enhance the access of people in non-urbanized areas to health care, shopping, education, employment, public services, and recreation.
- Assist in the maintenance, development, improvement, and use of public transportation systems in non-urbanized areas.
- Encourage and facilitate the most efficient use of all transportation funds used to provide passenger transportation in non-urbanized areas through the coordination of programs and services.
- Assist in the development and support of intercity bus transportation.
- Provide for the participation of private transportation providers in non-urbanized transportation.

RURAL TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (RTAP)

Formula funding for states to provide research, technical assistance, and training to improve the delivery of transit services in rural and small urban areas (under 50,000 in population).

WI EMPLOYMENT TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (WETAP)

The Wisconsin Employment Transportation Assistance Program (WETAP) is an annual competitive grant program combining state and federal funding sources into one coordinated program to help local areas address transportation needs for low-income workers. Lack of transportation is a significant barrier to getting and keeping jobs for low-income workers. Improving transportation options can improve the economic outcomes for these workers.

The WETAP program focuses on funding activities that support the following:

- New or expanded transportation services that address the employment-related transportation needs of eligible low-income workers;
- Shared solutions such as ridesharing, public transportation expansion, vanpools, or carpools;

- Individual solutions, such as car repair or used car loan programs;
- Coordinated transportation solutions based on a local planning process involving local stakeholder in order to address service gaps and avoid duplication.

This program is funded in part by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), state funds from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development and state funds from WisDOT.

BUS AND BUS FACILITIES FORMULA GRANTS (SECTION 5339)

Provides capital funding to replace, rehabilitate, and purchase new buses and related equipment and to construct bus-related facilities. Replaces 5309. Cost share is 80/20. Eligible Recipients include designated recipients that operate fixed route bus service or that allocate funding to fixed route bus operators; and State or local governmental entities that operate fixed route bus service that are eligible to receive direct grants under 5307 and 5311.

COUNTY ELDERLY AND DISABLED TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE (WIS. STAT. 85.21)

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) administers its County Elderly and Disabled Transportation Assistance Program through State Statute 85.21. This program provides counties with financial assistance to provide transportation services to seniors and individuals with disabilities.

The purpose of this program is to promote the general public health and welfare by providing financial assistance to counties providing transportation services for seniors and individuals with disabilities, and to thereby improve and promote the maintenance of human dignity and self-sufficiency by affording the benefits of transportation services to those people who would not otherwise have an available or accessible method of transportation. Allocation of funds to each county is based on annual population estimates. A local match of 20 percent is required from each county to receive Section 85.21 funds.

STATE URBAN MASS TRANSIT OPERATING ASSISTANCE (WIS. STAT. 85.20)

The State Urban Mass Transit Operating Assistance program (codified in Wisconsin State Statute 85.20) provides operating cost assistance to transit systems in order to alleviate local tax burdens. Eligible applicants include municipalities or counties with populations greater than 2,500, as well as transit or transportation commissions or authorities. Public transportation services eligible for this program includes bus, shared-ride taxicab, rail or other conveyance either publicly or privately owned. Capital projects are not eligible for this program.

OLDER AMERICANS ACT

The Older Americans Act (OAA) is considered to be the major vehicle for the organization and delivery of social and nutrition services to older Americans and their caregivers. It authorizes a wide array of service programs through a national network of 56 State agencies on aging, 629 area agencies on aging, nearly 20,000 service providers, 244 Tribal organizations, and 2 Native Hawaiian organizations representing 400 Tribes. The OAA also includes community service employment for low-income older Americans; training, research, and demonstration activities in the field of aging; and vulnerable elder rights protection activities.

NON-PROFIT/PRIVATE FUNDING/DONATION/FUNDRAISING

Beyond the typical federal and state funding sources for specialized transportation, it is equally important to consider other non-traditional means to coordinate transportation options. Coordinating with private companies and non-profit organizations that already provide specialized transportation should be a priority. Additionally, other non-traditional options should be pursued, such as working with community based residential facilities (CBRFs) who already provide transportation for their residents, partnering with local service based organizations and working with faith based organizations/churches who may also provide transportation to their members. For example, a mobility manager may be able to get a coalition of these groups together and pool resources to provide a more comprehensive transportation system at the local level, utilize new ways to fundraise and seek new grants and donations to help with paratransit.

VETERANS FUNDING

Similar to the private/non-profit section above, it is important that the County Veterans Service Office (CVSO) seek non-traditional ways to help coordinate transportation options for the local veteran population. Where possible, the CVSO could reach out to local veterans groups (such as the local VFW and others) to see if there are opportunities to provide volunteer rides or to contribute funds towards transportation for veterans. Continued coordination with regional Disabled American Veterans (DAV) chapters with vanpools should remain and possibly find means to increase services.