Introduction

Access to public transportation, or transit, is essential in all types of communities, whether they are rural or urban. Just as in urban areas, people in rural areas and small towns rely on transportation to access jobs, schools, shopping, recreation, and a variety of services. Public transit is an increasingly essential component of the overall transportation landscape in rural areas and small towns as demographics, mobility needs, and resources change, and people rely on alternative transportation options.

According to the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), more than one-third of America’s population lives outside of urbanized areas. Nearly 40 percent of the country’s transit-dependent population – primarily senior citizens, persons with disabilities, and low-income individuals – resides in rural areas. Yet, spending per capita in these rural areas is lower than in urban areas, even though the need is present.

Public transportation is a vital component in most rural communities, with Putnam County being no different. The availability of public transportation provides mobility options to seniors, those without vehicles, the disabled, and the economically disadvantaged. Additionally, public transportation has various social and economic benefits. It can help reduce transportation costs (fuel and vehicle maintenance) for lower-income households, enabling households to spend money on other essential goods like medicine or food. Public transportation can also increase the labor pool for an area opening jobs up to individuals without a car. It can help rural areas gain population with people, such as retirees, by offering options for individuals to access services without driving. Additionally, transit can increase road safety by giving high-risk drivers, like older adults, an alternative mode of transportation. Transportation alternatives are essential for cultivating a vibrant community that offers a high quality of life for all its residents.

The Putnam County Transit Development Plan (TDP) is a strategic guide for public transportation in the county over the next five years. The TDP includes an analysis of existing services, a review of demographic and travel behavior characteristics of the service area, and the development of transit-related goals and objectives.

Existing Conditions

There are several factors to consider when identifying a community’s transit-dependent population. Income, age of the population, location, and access to employment opportunities are among the most common. The following section provides a description of Putnam County and the City of Eatonton in relation to transit-dependence factors.

Putnam County, with a total area of 361 square miles, is located in central Georgia. The county is bordered by Lake Oconee on the east, and Oconee National Forest covers much of the western part of the county. The county’s one municipality, Eatonton at 20.7 square miles, is the county seat and is in the center of the county.
Located just south of Interstate 20, Putnam County is crossed by several major roads including US highways 441 and 129 and State Routes 16, 44, 142, and 212. The county is within approximately a one-hour drive of three major employment centers, Atlanta, Athens, and Macon-Bibb.

Population
Putnam County
As of the 2013-2017 American Community Survey, the county was home to 21,730 people. The population has increased by over 500 people since the 2010 Census when 21,218 people were counted. This continues the trend of gradual population increase the county has experienced over the previous few decades albeit at a slower pace. Between 2000 and 2010, the county’s population increased by 12.8 percent, but it has only increased by 2.4 percent between 2010 and 2017.

Eatonton
An estimated 6,512 people live in Eatonton according to the 2013-2017 ACS data. The city's population accounts for almost 30 percent of all of Putnam County's population. Over the past two decades, Eatonton's population has fallen slightly even as the county's population grew. According to the 2000 Census, 6,764 people lived in Eatonton, and in 2010, 6,480 people lived in Eatonton. Between 2000 and 2017, Eatonton lost approximately 250 people or 3.7 percent of its population.

Age
Putnam County
The current and projected age distribution of the population has important implications for the demand for transit services within the county. The population has aged significantly over the past two decades as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Percent of Population by Age Group, Putnam County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 and Under</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 59</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and above</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Putnam County Population, 1980-2010
The unincorporated part of the county, the area not including the City of Eatonton, has the same aging trends as those of the overall county; however, the unincorporated part of the county has a higher percentage of people 60 years old and above as shown in Table 2.

*Table 2: Percent of Population by Age Group, Unincorporated Putnam County*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 and Under</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 59</td>
<td>50.1%</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and above</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that seniors are one of the groups that have the highest dependence on transit, the increasing numbers of those seniors in the county will impact the type, level, and extent of service needed in the county and throughout the region.

**Eatonton**

The age trends in Eatonton do not follow those of the overall county. While the percentage of the population over age 60 increased by almost 10 percent between 2000 and 2017 in the county, the 60-and-over population in Eatonton only increased by 2 percent as shown in Table 3. The proportion of the 19-and-under age group decreased slightly, and the 25 to 59 age group increased slightly.

*Table 3: Percent of Population by Age Group, City of Eatonton*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19 and Under</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 59</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 and above</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Income**

Income level is another indicator of transit dependence, as low-income households are less able to purchase and maintain automobiles. A more specific measure of transit need is the population with incomes below the poverty level. A high poverty rate often translates into a greater need for various services, including public transportation.

**Putnam County**

In 2017, 17.2 percent of Putnam County’s population was in poverty, slightly higher than the statewide estimate of 15.1 percent according to the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) program. The median household income is estimated to be $47,710, lower than the statewide median household income of $56,117.
Eatonton
The median household income in Eatonton is $34,298 according to the 2013-2017 ACS Estimates. This is significantly lower than the median income for Putnam County. The poverty rate is also higher for the city than for the overall county at 27.0 percent.

Income is relevant to consider for Putnam County and other rural counties because rural areas generally have lower incomes and higher poverty rates than urban areas. Additionally, rural residents drive more miles than urban residents, meaning their fuel and vehicle maintenance costs are higher than that of their urban peers. Income particularly becomes a transit need indicator when transportation costs, like gasoline, rise. While low-income populations are the most vulnerable to increases in fuel, other income groups could also find fuel prices cost-prohibitive and cause an increase in transit demand. While that additional demand is difficult to project, accounting for low-income households in transit planning has been a reliable measure for transit demand.

Disability
Individuals with disabilities typically rely on public transit because their disabilities limit or completely deny them of their ability to drive. In addition, some disabled individuals require vehicles with specialized equipment and may require “door-to-door” service with special assistance. Because the goal of any transportation system is to provide mobility options to individuals, regardless of ability, consideration of the disabled population is critical to public transportation planning.

Putnam County
According to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey (ACS) data, approximately 3,000 people or 14.3 percent of Putnam County's population had a disability. The majority (44.5 percent) of the disabled population in the county are 65 years old. The most common disability among all disabled persons is an ambulatory difficulty, followed by independent living difficulty.

Eatonton
Similar to the overall county, 14.5 percent of Eatonton’s population has a disability. Unlike the county, seniors (age 65 and over) only account for 27.9 percent of the disabled population, while 50.3 percent of the disabled population in the city are in the 35 to 64 age group. The most common disability among disabled persons in the city is ambulatory difficulty followed by independent living difficulty.

Commuting Patterns
Putnam
Based on the 2013-2017 ACS data, there are 8,911 workers age 16 and over in Putnam County. Over 55 percent of those workers work in Putnam County while the remainder travels to other counties. Most of those who commute outside the county for work travel to Baldwin and Greene Counties, with Baldwin drawing the highest percentage (10.4%) of workers.
Workers also travel into Putnam County for work with most of those workers coming from Baldwin, Greene, and Morgan Counties.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau Center for Economic Studies, there was a greater outflow of workers from Putnam County than the inflow of workers. According to the most recent data from 2015, 4,945 workers left Putnam County for jobs, 2,760 traveled into the county, and 1,968 both lived and worked in the county.

**Eatonton**
There are 3,207 workers age 16 and over in Eatonton. Of those living in Eatonton, 55.4 percent also work in Eatonton while the remainder works in Putnam County or one of the neighboring counties.

Workers also travel into Eatonton for work with most of those workers coming from Greene, Baldwin, and Morgan Counties.

**Vehicle Access**
**Putnam**
County-wide, only 5.1 percent of households do not have a vehicle available, which is lower than the statewide estimate of 6.7 percent of households without access to a vehicle. However, that figure is somewhat misleading as there are discrepancies within Putnam County. The majority of those households with no vehicle are located near Eatonton and in the western part of the county as shown on Map 1.
Middle Georgia

Population

The middle Georgia region is comprised of 11 counties. These include Baldwin, Crawford, Houston, Jones, Macon-Bibb, Monroe, Peach, Pulaski, Putnam, Twiggs, and Wilkinson Counties. According to 2017 population estimates, 496,288 people lived in the region, an increase of almost 8,000 people since the 2010 U.S. Census. According to the Georgia Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget, the region’s population is projected to grow over the next 20 years in the region, increasing by over 70,000 people. However, the population growth will be uneven across the region as shown in Table 4. Houston County is expected to experience the most growth with some counties even losing population.

Table 4: Middle Georgia Region Population Projections, 2015-2040

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2025</th>
<th>2030</th>
<th>2035</th>
<th>2040</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin</td>
<td>46,457</td>
<td>44,906</td>
<td>47,487</td>
<td>48,359</td>
<td>48,902</td>
<td>49,154</td>
<td>49,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macon-Bibb</td>
<td>155,778</td>
<td>152,862</td>
<td>158,072</td>
<td>159,592</td>
<td>160,506</td>
<td>160,817</td>
<td>160,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford</td>
<td>12,453</td>
<td>12,295</td>
<td>12,285</td>
<td>12,013</td>
<td>11,629</td>
<td>11,145</td>
<td>10,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>152,213</td>
<td>153,479</td>
<td>163,444</td>
<td>174,362</td>
<td>185,016</td>
<td>195,316</td>
<td>205,265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones</td>
<td>29,024</td>
<td>28,470</td>
<td>30,141</td>
<td>31,187</td>
<td>32,084</td>
<td>32,757</td>
<td>33,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td>27,516</td>
<td>27,113</td>
<td>28,888</td>
<td>30,322</td>
<td>31,725</td>
<td>33,074</td>
<td>34,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peach</td>
<td>27,214</td>
<td>27,099</td>
<td>27,611</td>
<td>27,850</td>
<td>29,090</td>
<td>28,320</td>
<td>28,484</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As the population distribution of the region shifts and needs change, there may need to be consideration of regional collaboration or cooperation for transit services.

**Existing Services**

Putnam County has two primary programs that provide transit services to residents.

**Department of Human Services (DHS) Coordinated Transportation System**

Recognizing the importance of transportation in linking people with services and opportunities, the Department of Human Services (DHS) developed a statewide transportation system to meet the specialized needs of its clients who are elderly, mentally and physically disabled and/or low-income. The goal is to provide safe, efficient, and cost-effective transportation for these clients, allowing them to access essential services provided by the department.

The DHS-coordinated transportation system provides contracted services and oversight statewide. Transportation services are provided to clients served by the Division of Aging Services (DAS), Division of Behavioral Health and Development Disabilities (DBHDD), Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), and the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), but the criteria for eligibility may differ among agencies.

DHS contracts with the Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC) to administer the DHS Coordinated Transportation Program in the 11-county region including Putnam County. MGRC subcontracts with Macon-Bibb Economic Opportunity Council (EOC) to provide transportation services for Putnam County residents that are clients of the following human service agencies or programs: Eatonton-Putnam Senior Center, Oconee Center – Behavioral Health Services, Putnam County Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS), Putnam-Jasper Support Services, and the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency – Milledgeville. Service to the Eatonton-Putnam Senior Center began in early 2019.

Coordinated Transportation is an essential service in Putnam County in that it allows for greater access to human services for the elderly, disabled, and those with limited transportation options. DHS seeks to provide the maximum amount of essential transportation services that can be accomplished with available funding. Therefore, they have established a list of priority trips, and transportation funding is committed to the highest priority services first. The following are the essential trips in order of priority for each DHS Division and for other programs served by Coordinated Transportation in Putnam County:
Division of Aging Services

- Trips to and from Senior Centers,
- Trips to and from medical appointments (including dialysis, chemotherapy, etc.),
- Trips to and from preventative health screenings and appointments (including dental, vision, hearing, etc.),
- Trips for shopping (groceries, medications, etc.),
- Trips to and from work/employment,
- Field trips,
- Trips that support application and management of public benefits,
- Trips to pay bills, conduct banking, etc.,
- Trips that support civic engagement and continued involvement in the community (including cultural activities),
- Trips that support evidence-based programs offered through DAS and health/wellness activities offered in the community,
- Trips that facilitate attendance at support group meetings for both caregiver services and kinship care services.

Division of Family and Children Services

- Trips in support of TANF and SNAP Works Program recipients (employment, job training, job search, etc.),
- Trips to and from technical schools and adult education,
- Trips to and from work experience sites for food stamp recipients,
- Trips to and from medical appointments,
- Trips to and from mental health centers,
- Transitional support service trips,
- Other non-TANF trips,
- Trips to and from substance abuse treatment,
- Trips for Social Service consumers,
- Trips for children in foster care and under child protective services.

Department of Behavioral Health and Disabilities

- Trips to and from employment locations,
- Trips to and from mental health appointments,
- Trips to and from community training and integration activities,
- Trips to and from medical appointments,
- Trips for social services

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

- Trips to and from school,
- Trips to and from employment,
• Trips for job search and job placement,
• Trips to and from job training,
• Trips to and from workshops and assessment sites.

Transportation providers under these programs can provide different types of service:

• Subscription trips – These are scheduled trips with a pre-determined notice to meet the repetitive needs of passengers. They are performed on a continuing basis.
• Scheduled response – trips are scheduled with a pre-determined notice and are not performed on a continuing basis
• Demand Response Service – trips are requested and performed on a short notice
• Group Trips – trips that involved transporting multiple passengers with the same point of origin and the same destination.

According to a 2017 presentation to the Georgia House of Representatives Rural Development Council, there are three primary barriers to service:

1. Funding – grant modifications at the federal level have resulted in reduced federal funds
2. Lack of available transportation providers in some areas of the state
3. Consumers live significant distances from services in rural areas, and in order to ensure consumers are not traveling too long, providers may not fill vehicles to capacity

The presentation also included the following solutions to these barriers:

1. Implement volunteer driver programs in areas where the need is greater than funding
2. Implement voucher programs that reimburse non-family members to transport a consumer to services
3. Use a variety of vehicle types to meet the needs of an area

5311 Program
Section 5311 is a federal funding program administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to provide capital, planning, and operating assistance to states. Federal funds are allocated to states on a formula basis. The Georgia Department of Transportation is responsible for administering the program in the state. In Putnam County, the 5311 grant is administered and operated by the county. The county provides fare-based, demand response, rural public transportation to all eligible residents. The nature of trips provided by the program includes medical, social services, personal shopping, business recreation, and employment.
**Private Transit**

Currently, there are no private transportation services such as taxis, vanpools, or ride-sharing in Putnam County. There are taxi and ride-sharing services available in neighboring counties that could provide services to a location in Putnam County, but rates are cost-prohibitive to use on a regular basis.

**Current Services**

The following is an overview of the transit services available in Putnam County.

**Putnam County Rural Public Transportation (5311 Program)**

**Overview**

Putnam County's rural public transportation system is available Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. Reservations are required at least 24 hours in advance. The fare is $2.00 per trip in the county and $8.00 per trip to Baldwin County or Greene County. A total of three vehicles, including two with a wheelchair lift, are available.

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**General Service Indicators**

The usage of the system has fluctuated over the past five calendar years as shown in Table 5 with 2016 having the highest number of trips.

**Table 5: Putnam County Transit Use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Trips</td>
<td>14,305</td>
<td>16,654</td>
<td>18,309</td>
<td>15,126</td>
<td>14,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating Expenses</td>
<td>$221,170</td>
<td>$210,988</td>
<td>$218,677</td>
<td>$236,808</td>
<td>$232,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Per Trip</td>
<td>$15.46</td>
<td>$12.67</td>
<td>$11.94</td>
<td>$15.66</td>
<td>$16.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All figures for this year are as of December 21, 2018

Most of these trips were for shopping, doctor's appointments, to community services, or to meet other personal needs.
Budget expenses have also fluctuated over the past five fiscal years, as shown in Table 5. Changes to these budgets can be accounted for by increases or decreases in vehicle supplies, fuel, and staffing. Cost per trip has also fluctuated over the past five years with 2016 having the lowest cost per trip. That year also had the greatest number of trips.

Peer Comparisons
The following are comparisons between systems in some of Putnam County’s neighboring counties.

Baldwin County
Baldwin County offers reservation-based services similar to Putnam County. The system operates Monday to Friday, 7:45 am to 4:00 pm and charges $2.00 per trip. There are no services available outside Baldwin County. Reservations must be made at least 24 hours in advance.

Jones County
Jones County also offers reservation-based services. The system operated Monday to Friday, 7:00 am to 4:00 pm. It costs $2.00 round trip and $0.50 for each additional stop up to $4.00 in the county. For out-of-county trips, it costs $4.00 plus $0.50 per stop up to $6.00. Medical trips cost $2.00.

Hancock County
Hancock County also offers trips that are different rates depending on destination. For areas around Sparta, the round-trip rate is $5.00. For cities in nearby counties including Eatonton and Milledgeville, the rate is $15.00 round-trip. Hancock also provides transportation to Augusta or Macon-Bibb for $50 round trip when the schedule permits.

Morgan County
Morgan County offers reservation-based public transportation. The first available pickup time is 6:00 am and the last pickup is 5:15 pm. Transportation to or from areas outside Madison may be limited in the early morning or late afternoon. Inside Madison’s city limits, the fare is $1.25 per stop. It is $1.50 per stop outside the city limits. Morgan County also offers trips to Covington twice a week for $16.00 round-trip. Additionally, trips to Athens for medical appointments are available once a month for $25 round trip.

Department of Human Services (DHS) Coordinated Transportation
Under DHS’s Coordinated Transportation System, transportation services are made available twenty-four (24) hours per day, seven (7) days per week. Core hours are between the hours of 6:00 am and 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday; however, scheduled trips beyond these core hours and days are available when demand warrants.

Figure 2 displays historical trip data from the human service providers available in Putnam County. According to this data, the total number of trips have declined by almost 1,000 between 2014 and 2018.
Four of the five human service providers experienced trip declines during this period. Putnam-Jasper Support Services is the only agency that did not experience an overall decline in the number of trips.

Accompanying the decline in the number of trips is the decline in total operating expenses. Table 6 shows the operating costs and cost per trip over the last five fiscal years for each human service provider. The operating expenses for some of the providers have fluctuated over time as demand shifted. Putnam-Jasper Support Services is the only agency that has consistently offered trips and increased operating expenses for the service, while agencies like the Oconee Center did not have any trips or operating expenses from FY 2015 – FY 2018. Putnam DFCS had a declining number of total trips during this period, which was accompanied by a decrease in operating expenses.

Table 6: DHS Coordinated Transportation Providers Operating Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Service Provider</th>
<th>FY 2014</th>
<th>FY 2015</th>
<th>FY2016</th>
<th>FY 2017</th>
<th>FY 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Public Transit Needs Assessment

Stakeholder Input
Despite the availability of transit services provided under 5311 services and by human service providers, concerns have been raised about the current public transit services. The main concerns raised include a lack of transportation for residents needing to get to work or school, limited hours of operation, lack of inter-county connectivity, and sometimes unpredictable pick-up or drop-off times. A fixed-route system with designated stops could resolve some of these concerns, but fixed-route systems, particularly in rural areas, can be cost-prohibitive.

In addition to concerns about operations, other challenges related to public transit in Putnam County include awareness of the system and stigma of public transportation. The county’s public transit system advertises in grocery stores, doctor’s offices, places of business, and via Facebook; however, this information may not be reaching all potential parties. Additionally, there is often a stigma associated with public transit that it is only used by individuals who can’t afford other modes of transportation. This stigma particularly applies to buses. If Putnam County wanted to pursue an expansion of transit services, addressing this stigma would be essential in order to increase ridership and make the service more cost effective.

Transit Dependence
The analysis in this section highlights the area of potentially transit-dependent populations. It examines population density, youth, seniors, those with incomes below the federal poverty level, households without vehicles at the block group level and individuals with disabilities at the census tract level.

The analysis used data from the American Community Survey five-year estimates (2013-2017). The block groups and census tracts are classified relative to the county, using a five-tiered ranking system of very low to very high. An aggregate analysis combining youth, seniors, those with incomes below the federal poverty level, and households without a vehicle which provides an overview of the potential need in the county. The results of this analysis, mapped and summarized below, highlights potential areas with the greatest
Population Density

Population density is an important indicator of what type of transportation system is most viable. Areas with a high population density are often able to sustain fixed-route transit systems, while more rural areas rely on on-demand services or another transportation alternative. The overwhelming majority of Putnam County is rural with population densities of less than 100 persons per square mile. There is one block group with a population density of nearly 3,000 persons per square mile located in the City of Eatonton.

Map 2: Population Density
Seniors

Seniors, age 65 and above, are one of the groups that must be identified when identifying transit need. The senior population in Putnam County is located south of Eatonton and along Lake Oconee.

Map 3: Concentration of Senior Population
Youth
Youth, ages 10 to 17, are another group commonly considered when identifying transit-dependent populations. There is a higher concentration of youth populations in the northern part of the county.
Poverty

People living below the federal poverty line are also considered as a potentially transit-dependent population. While 17.1 percent of Putnam County’s population is identified as living below the poverty line, the distribution of that population is not even across the county with concentrations existing in the southern part of Eatonton.

Map 5: Concentration of Population Below Federal Poverty Line

![Map of Poverty Concentration](image-url)

Poverty Classification
- Very High
- Moderate
- Low
- Very Low

Sources: ERI, U.S. Census Bureau, NGA, CGA, INTEG, NCEAS, NLS, CS, NMG, SocialPathways, CIty-Countydata, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermapp and the GIS user community.
Households Without Vehicles

Households without access to a vehicle are more likely to depend on public transit. Block groups with large populations of households without vehicles are located in the southern part of Eatonton and in the western part of Putnam County.

Map 6: Concentration of Households without a Vehicle

Autoless Households
- Very High
- Moderate
- Very Low

Disabled Population

As previously noted, individuals with disabilities comprise part of the transit-dependent population. While data is not available at the block group level like the other groups, it is available at the census tract level. According to this analysis, there are no areas with high or very high concentrations of the disabled population relative to the entire county.
Aggregate Analysis

The aggregate analysis combining youth, seniors, those with incomes below the federal poverty level, and households without a vehicle, provides an overview of the potential need in the county. There was only one block group identified as having the highest aggregate score, and it is in central Eatonton. This block group also has the highest population density with almost 3,000 people per square mile.
Demand

The following maps are a representation of the locations where passengers were picked up or dropped off by Putnam County transit services. These maps are not intended to capture every pick-up and drop-off point that the county serves, but rather provide an overview of where the services are used the most.

Pick-Up Locations

The pick-up addresses represent the locations where people were picked up by the service. This could include their homes or a destination in a series of stops they were picked up from. For example, the senior center would be counted as a pick-up location when the user was leaving the senior center to return home. The three most frequent pickup locations were the Eatonton Senior Center, Walmart, and the Sumter Street Station Apartments. This map represents trips in November 2017. This is not intended to be a precise analysis of trips, but some trips may not be represented because of missing or inaccurate address data.

Map 9: Transit Pick Up Points
Drop-Off Locations
The following map represents the drop-off locations for the same time period as the Pick-Up Locations map. This could include the first destination after departing their homes or the homes they returned to after the trip. The three most frequent drop-off destinations are the Eatonton Senior Center, Walmart, and the Lawson Homes Apartments.

Trip Denial
Putnam County Transit has very few trip denials. If there is a trip denial, it is because there is a time conflict as transit services are already committed at the requested time. Putnam County Transit does its best to work with clients and figure out a different time slot so the client can still receive transit services. As a result of the efforts to negotiate times with clients, the transit service denies very few trips.
Analysis of Transit Dependence and Demand

The aggregate spatial analysis shown in Map 8 demonstrates that the highest transit need is within the City of Eatonton. Putnam County Transit can efficiently serve the highest need populations as they are centrally located. This enables the transit service to avoid trip denials and conduct thousands of trips as the transit-dependent population and their destinations are near one another. This is reflected in that most of the drop-off and pick-up locations are within the City of Eatonton as shown in Maps 9 and 10. Using these limited data sets, it would appear that Putnam Transit is serving the areas with the highest transit dependence while providing efficient service given that destinations and transit-dependent areas are near one another.

The transit-dependent maps are an initial, broad analysis of transit need in the county. When analyzing small block groups, the analysis can provide more insight because it is easier to locate where the transit need is. However, in the large block groups in the more rural part of the county, pinpointing exactly where there is transit need is a challenge. For example, the block group in western Putnam County has very high transit dependence; however, the population with that high transit dependence may be concentrated in the portion of the block group located in Eatonton or may live in the more undeveloped part of the county. To more effectively understand transit needs within the county would require a large-scale survey of county residents using locational data.

However, without more detailed data, this transit-dependence data can provide insight when locating public service. If aggregate need becomes higher or lower in certain areas, it can direct the county to explore locating services in that area. If the need in the areas near Lake Oconee increases, that can inform the county there may need to be permanent services located in that area, rather than traveling from Eatonton to serve that area. The continued analysis of trips can also inform if there is a growing need for a permanent location of services in certain areas of the county.
Operations Plan
Capital Plan

Putnam County’s current fleet consists of three total vehicles. Characteristics of the fleet are detailed in Table 7. There are no plans to make any purchases in the next five years.

Table 7: Fleet Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make/Model</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Seating Capacity</th>
<th>Wheelchair Capacity</th>
<th>Mileage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ford Goshen Coach Van</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>215,967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford/Startrans Shuttle Vans</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>74,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford/Startrans Shuttle Vans</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75,749</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Putnam County allocated $10,000 in its FY 2019 budget for a capital equipment purchase. This money will come from SPLOST funds, not the general fund and is to pay for a vehicle that was replaced in 2017.

It is recommended that Putnam County replace vehicles at an interval in order to avoid the financial burden of replacing an entire fleet at one time.

It is anticipated that ridership will increase over time, particularly as the population ages and development near Lake Oconee continues.

Financial Plan

Putnam County does not currently have a five-year financial plan. The county has budgeted $241,830 for the 2019 fiscal year and intends to keep the program operational in coming years; however, the budget for this service has the potential to vary significantly in the coming years. In previous years, the county’s transit system provided services to seniors going to and from the Eatonton-Putnam Senior Center because the DHS Coordinated Transportation Program services in the county did not include the senior center. However, in early 2019, the DHS Coordinated Transportation Service began providing transportation for participants to and from the senior center on a daily basis. This will likely reduce the ridership for Putnam County Transit and potentially reduce the need for transit service. Fuel costs may also influence budgetary changes, particularly if prices dramatically increase.

Recommendations

Short Term (1-2 Years)

- Continue operation of 5311 services within and surrounding Putnam County to provide transit services to users
- Develop and implement diverse marketing tools to inform county residents about public transit services
- Develop and implement a program to quantify transit needs in Putnam County by using a variety of survey techniques and public input forums.
Medium Term (3-4 Years)

- Explore expanding services to neighboring counties that can fulfill resident needs (e.g., Macon-Bibb and Jasper Counties for shopping; Morgan County for healthcare)
- Expand weekday service hours in order to expand transit opportunity for more individuals (e.g., workers, students, etc.)
- Explore operating a seasonal shuttle between City of Eatonton and recreation destinations in the county (e.g., Oconee Springs Park)

Long Term (5+ Years)

- Monitor resident demand for transit service near Lake Oconee development, particularly as elderly population increases in area