

# Pierce County Transit Development Plan

Prepared by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission



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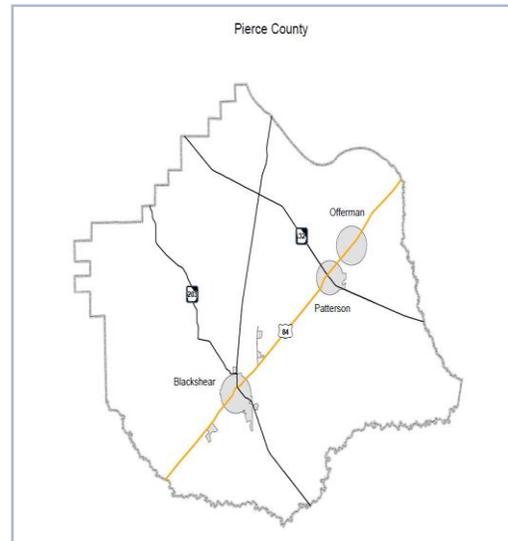
*This document is prepared in cooperation with the Georgia Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration.*

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## Introduction

This Transit Development Plan was developed by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission and the Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization. This TDP serves as a guidebook for Pierce County elected officials and staff to answer basic questions about rural public transit in Pierce County. This TDP will also be shared with the Georgia Department of Transportation to inform them of the rural public transit characteristics in the community.

Pierce County GDOT and the TPO should use this report to guide the development of rural public transit to deliver the best service possible for the residents of the community.



*Figure 1 Pierce County, Georgia*

## Demographic Analysis

Pierce County, Georgia is a largely rural county in Southern Georgia. The 2010 Census lists the population for Pierce County to be about 18,758 persons, averaging 14% decennial population growth since 1970. However, the 2014 ACS estimated population for Pierce County is 18,860. Pierce County is a part of the Waycross Micropolitan Statistical Area and continues to

have strong ties economically to Waycross and Ware County, Ga.

Over 4,000 or approximately 56% of Pierce County citizens commute from Pierce County to neighboring counties for work every day as shown in statistics from the US Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2010-2014<sup>1</sup>. This is an indication that Pierce County is becoming more of a suburban community in the region, contributing workers to jobs in neighboring Counties. The increasing suburban population in Pierce County can have a significant impact on providing public transit service to the residents of this largely rural county, especially if they are seeking to travel to destinations in other communities.

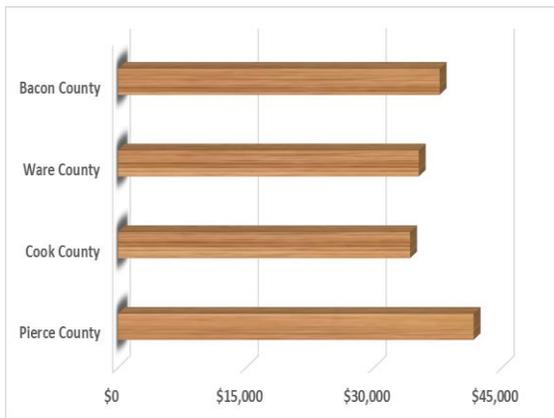
Income is often an indication of the need for public transit in a community, either urban or rural. Of the peer communities of Bacon, Ware and Cook Counties, Pierce County has the highest median income at \$41,685, which is nearly \$6,000



*City Hall, Patterson, GA  
Source: Michael Rivera*

<sup>1</sup> The ACS is a 5-year sampled survey of American households, the data may include large margins of error that may or may not be presented in this report. For detailed information a detailed review of the ACS data is encouraged.

above their average of \$35,804. Although Pierce County's median income is higher, 20% of Pierce County's population is below the poverty level. This information tends to be an indication that there might be a larger population of low income persons that might require the use of public transit. There are more than 7,300 workers in the county, and more than 4,000 commute to neighboring counties for work. This large number of commuters is indicative that this segment of the population is less likely to need public transit services as a primary means of transportation.



*Median Income (2014) in Pierce County.*

Poverty status is often an indication of the need for a greater reliance on public transit services. In Pierce County, an estimated 3,732 households are below the federal poverty level.

Transportation can be a large part of any families' budget, but it has a significant impact on those families that are living in poverty. Of the approximately 667 workers 16 years of age that fall below the poverty line and commute to work, over 500 persons have access to a vehicle (2014 ACS estimate). This indicates that while transportation is likely a higher portion of an individuals' outlays, they are still finding a way to pay for a car, gasoline, and maintenance costs, or asking friends for transportation to work, appointments, and other trips which require a vehicle. While there is no direct connection between transit ridership and access to vehicles in

Pierce County, it may be inferred that if a public transit system is affordable and accessible to all residents that it may offset some of the costs of transportation for individuals at or below the federal poverty level.

In Pierce County, about 85% of workers commute to work via a single-occupancy car or truck, and about 9.8% commute in a carpool of at least two persons. The ACS data indicates that 10 persons used a bus or public transit or other modes of transportation in Pierce County. The nature of the large number of persons leaving the county to work correlates well with the number of drivers carpooling and driving alone to work as indicated by the data.

Of the 7,300 persons living in Pierce County that do not work at home, a majority (64%) have a mean commute time of 26.1 minutes from home to work. This does correlate well with a significant number of residents commuting to neighboring communities to work and indicates that there are a large number of residents with a relatively long commute.



*Pierce County Line Sign  
Source: Google Maps*

Age can be a significant determining factor in rural public transit systems. Older residents are more likely to need transportation to and from medical appointments, shopping and other daily activities. Nearly 20% of the population of Pierce County is over the age of 60. This is higher than the state average, indicating a significant potential ridership base for a rural public transit system.



Pierce Transit Vehicle  
Source: SGRC

## Title VI and LEP Analysis

As a recipient of federal funds, Pierce County must adhere to all federal laws and regulations regarding the delivery of public transit services. As part of this, any public transit service may not discriminate against a rider on the basis of race, color, sex or limited ability to speak the English language, among other traits. According to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Executive Orders covering Environmental Justice and Limited English-proficiency, among others. The Pierce County population breakdown is as follows. This information along with other factors can be helpful when estimating the demand for a public transit system.

FACTOR	POPULATION
<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	18,860
<b>RACE</b>	
<b>WHITE</b>	16,209
<b>AFRICAN AMERICAN</b>	1,641
<b>OTHER</b>	579
<b>HISPANIC</b>	947
<b># IN POVERTY</b>	3,732

Four factors are used to determine if a public transit system must provide services to persons who have limited English-proficiency. The four factors are outlined here for Pierce County.

1. The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the public transit service.

The second most common language spoken at home in Pierce County is Spanish. It is estimated that there are a total of 967 persons, or 5.2% of the total population that speaks Spanish. This is significantly lower than the national percentage of people that speak Spanish at home. The US Census Bureau estimates that of the persons 5 years and older in Pierce County, 511 persons are linguistically isolated.

<b>Estimate</b>	511
<b>Margin of Error</b>	+/- 23.1
<b>Pierce County %</b>	5.2%
<b>United States %</b>	20.9%

2. The frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the transit service.

Pierce County Transit does not have a history of LEP individuals who could not use the system. It is recommended that if needed Pierce County utilize the website of the Southern Georgia Regional Commission where a Google Translator is available for potential riders to learn more about the system.

3. The nature and importance of the transit service provided by Pierce County to the LEP community.

Pierce County Transit is provided as a service to riders in the county to access basic, non-emergency public transit services.

4. The resources available to Pierce County and overall costs.

Pierce County can provide materials in other languages for the potential riders of Pierce County Transit; however, based on the information provided here, there does not appear to be a great need at this time that would justify the overall costs of providing these services to residents. As noted previously, it is recommended that potential riders utilize the SGRC website at [www.sgrc.us](http://www.sgrc.us), where a Google Translator can provide for basic information on the service to LEP individuals.

## ADA Analysis

Oftentimes rural public transit services like the one in Pierce County provides meaningful transportation for those with ambulatory disabilities. In Pierce County, 2,291 persons have an ambulatory difficulty, meaning they have difficulty moving about under their own power. The population above age 65 accounts for 45% of those individuals with an ambulatory difficulty. The Pierce County transit service is fully ADA accessible, providing vans with lifts and courteous drivers trained and willing to help riders get on and off the buses.



*Pierce County Transit driver assisting seniors onto the shuttle.  
Source: SGRC*

## Evaluation of Existing Services

Pierce County Transit is similar to that of other counties in the region. This section will examine how Pierce County Transit compares to surrounding communities and other communities of similar size. This section will look at the last five years (2009-2013) of available data on the operations of the Pierce County Transit Service. This data will allow us to look at trends and the future growth of Pierce County transit service.

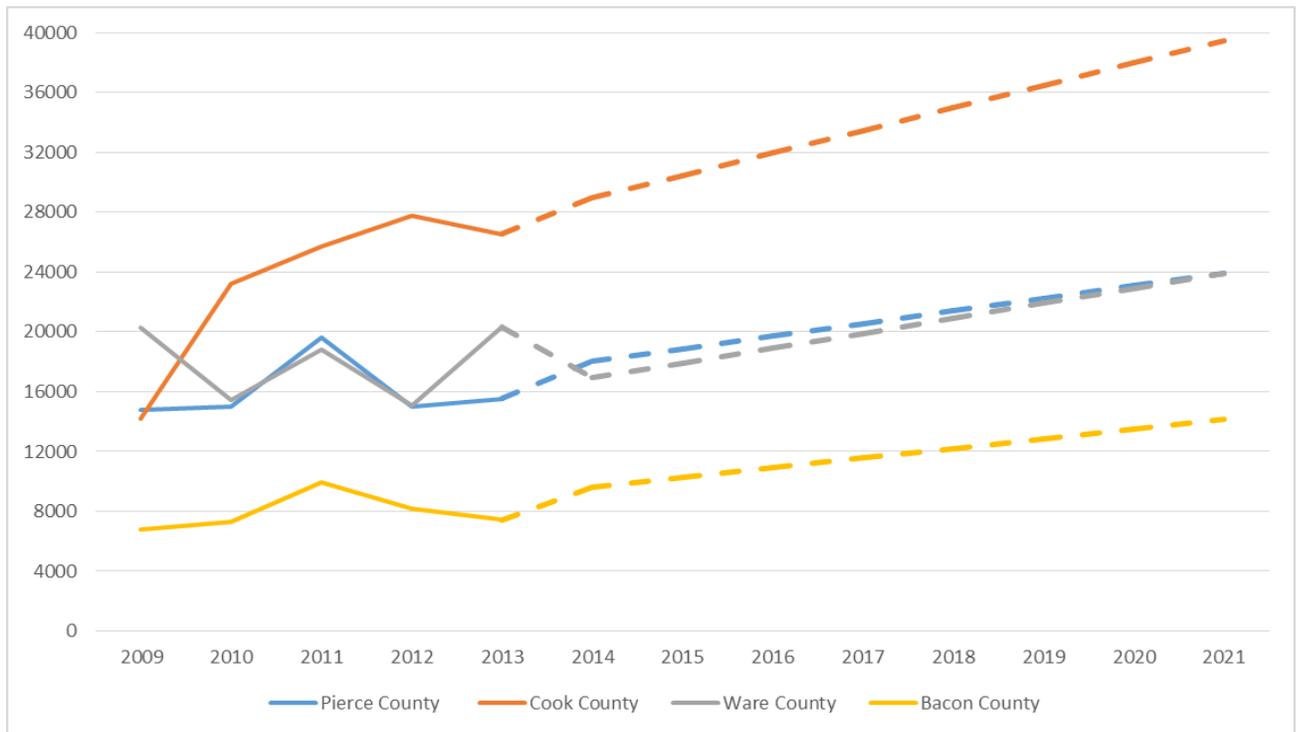


Figure 3 Past and Future Trend of Public Ridership in Peer Transit Systems, Pierce County is likely to see a moderate increase in public ridership based on these trends.

Many of the transit systems in the region use purchase of service contracts (POS) to supplement the ridership and utilization of the public transit systems. This is no different in Pierce County, where over the past five years, coordinated transportation (POS) has accounted for, on average, 92% of all trips annually.

Pierce County currently provides an annual average of 15,985 trips in the last five years using seven, ADA accessible vans, or mini-buses. Below are several charts that highlight the usage of vehicle fleets in transit systems through the region. Bacon County has a fleet of 2 vehicles, Ware County has a fleet of 6 vehicles, and Cook County has a fleet of 6 vehicles.

When looking at all of the vehicle-based data as a whole, Pierce County is comparable with other counties in the region providing public and coordination transportation trips to residents. One way to look at how well the vehicles are being utilized is by the time remaining at the end of the year based on the operating hours of service. In Pierce County, there is a difference of 7,461 hours that could be utilized throughout the year. The remaining hours are higher because Pierce County has seven vehicles, which means that a lot more trips could be handled by these vehicles. This is an indication that marketing should be increased for this system around the Pierce County community.

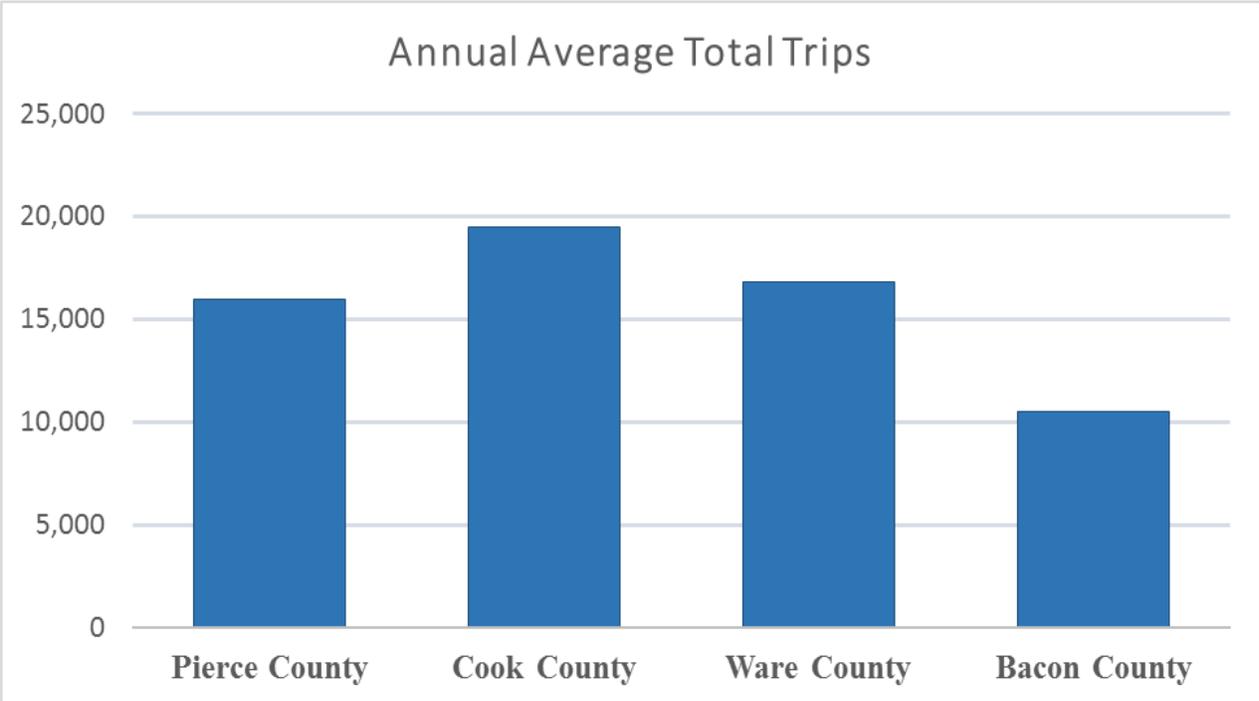


Figure 4 Annual Average Total Trips (5 years). Pierce County is in line with the other counties in the region when it comes to annual average trips with the exception of Bacon County which is significantly lower than the others.

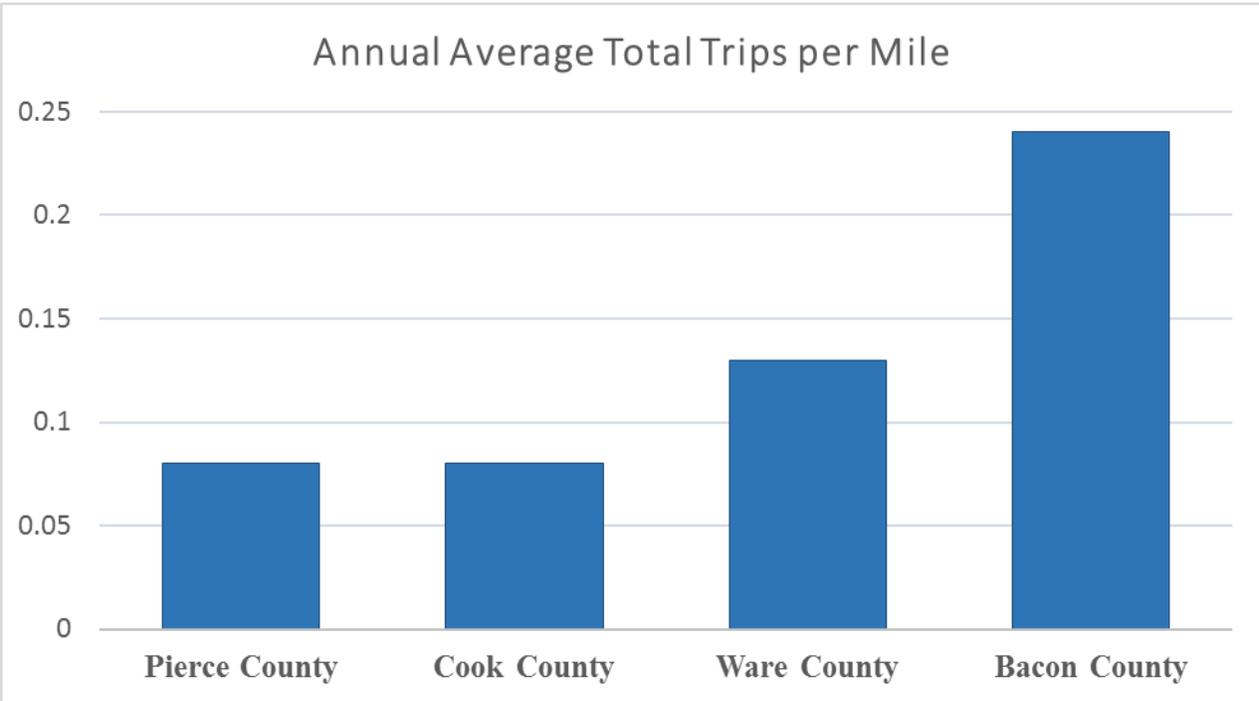


Figure 5 Annual Average Total Trips per Mile (5 years). Mileage in rural transit trips tends to be quite high, due to the low density characteristics of the rural landscape. In Southern Georgia, Pierce County provides the least amount of trips per mile, averaging about 0.08 trips/miles over the last 5 years.

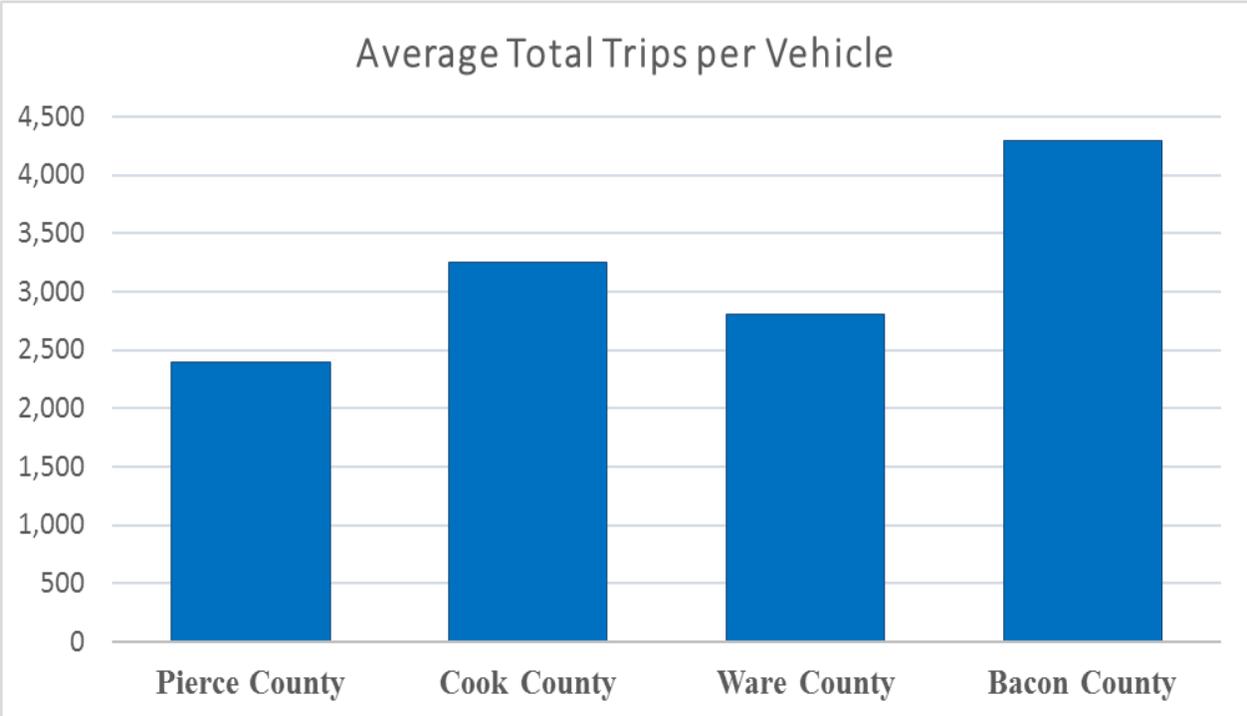


Figure 6 Annual Average Total Trips per Vehicle (5 years). Pierce County has the least trips per vehicle on average, this is probably due to Pierce County having the most vehicles for use. This data should not be taken alone, rather looking at all of the data in this section together for an overall picture of what transit service delivery is like for Pierce County residents.

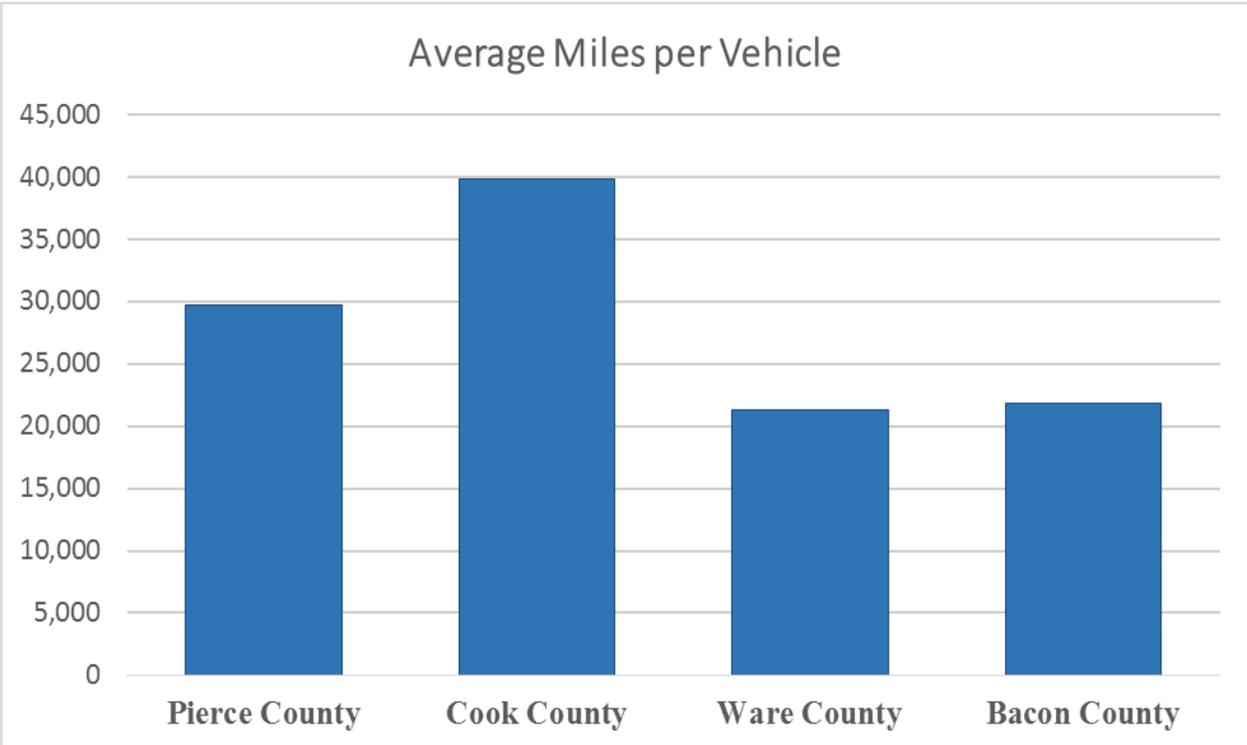


Figure 7 Annual Average Miles per Vehicle (5 years). Pierce County is comparable to others for the number of miles each vehicle drives annually. This is typical of rural trips where greater distances are required for travel.

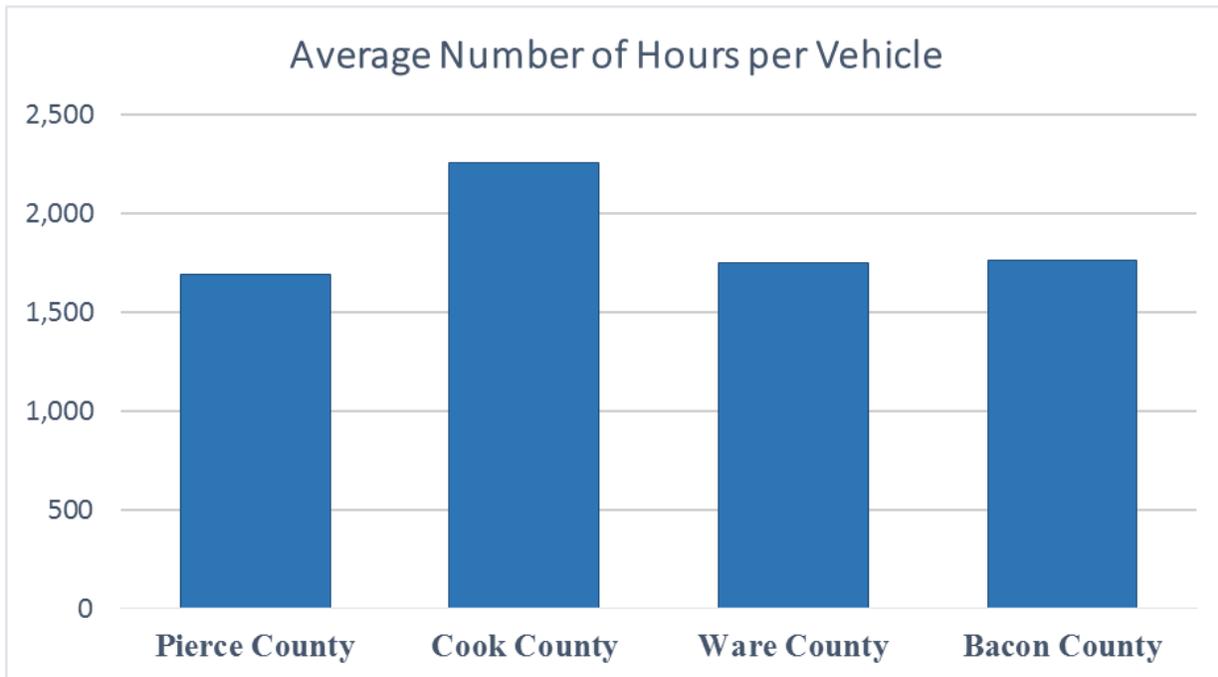


Figure 8 Annual Average Hours per Vehicle (5 years). The rural, low density development in Pierce County means that transit trips are typically longer and more time is spent per vehicle and per trip travelling to each destination; however Pierce County has 7 service vehicles which allows for less hours per vehicle in comparison to the other counties.

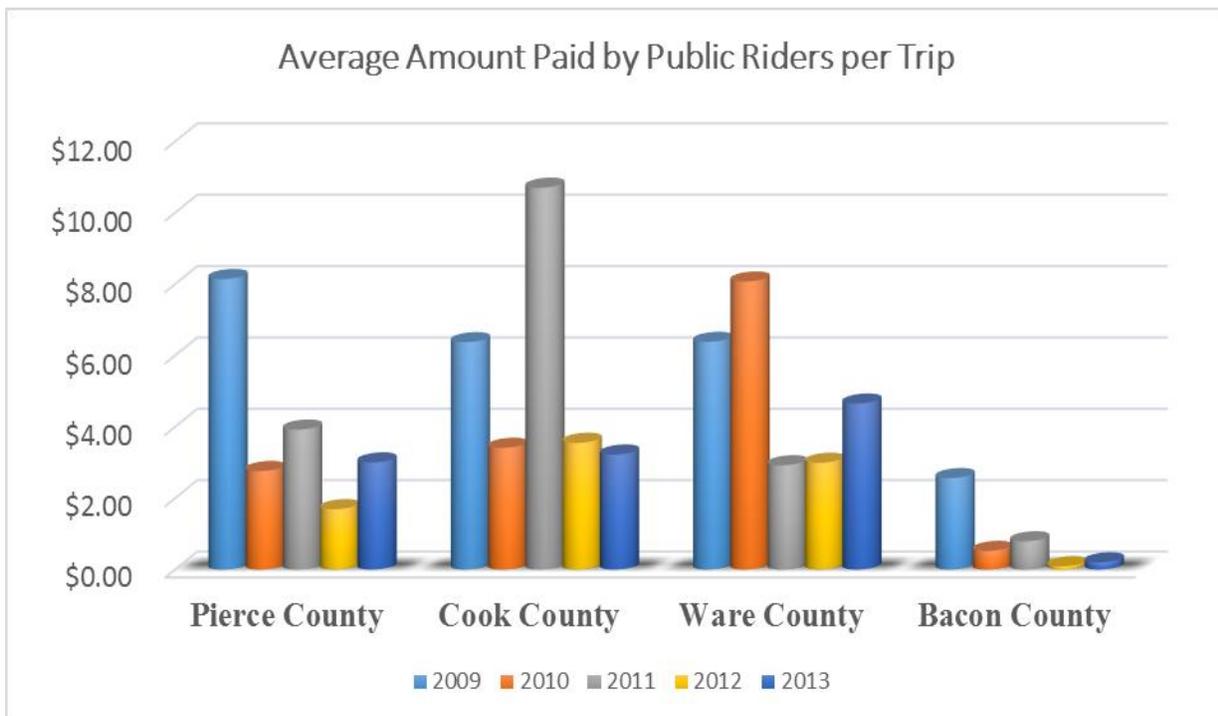


Figure 9 Average Paid by Public Riders per Trip. In Pierce County, data from the National Transit Database indicates, a higher rate difference between years compared to other counties.

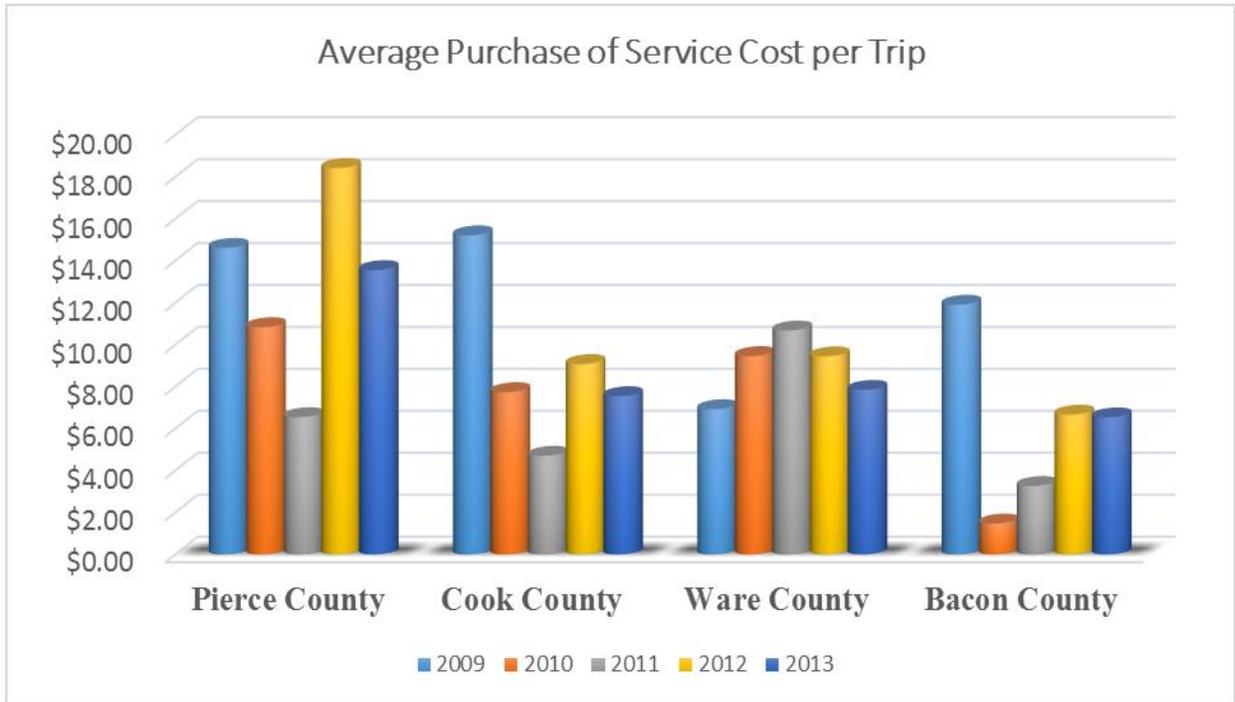


Figure 10 Average POS Cost per Trip. Pierce County supplements its local match of federal funds with POS or Purchase of Service Contracts from local human service agencies and other partners. This results in the county typically having no local expenditures.

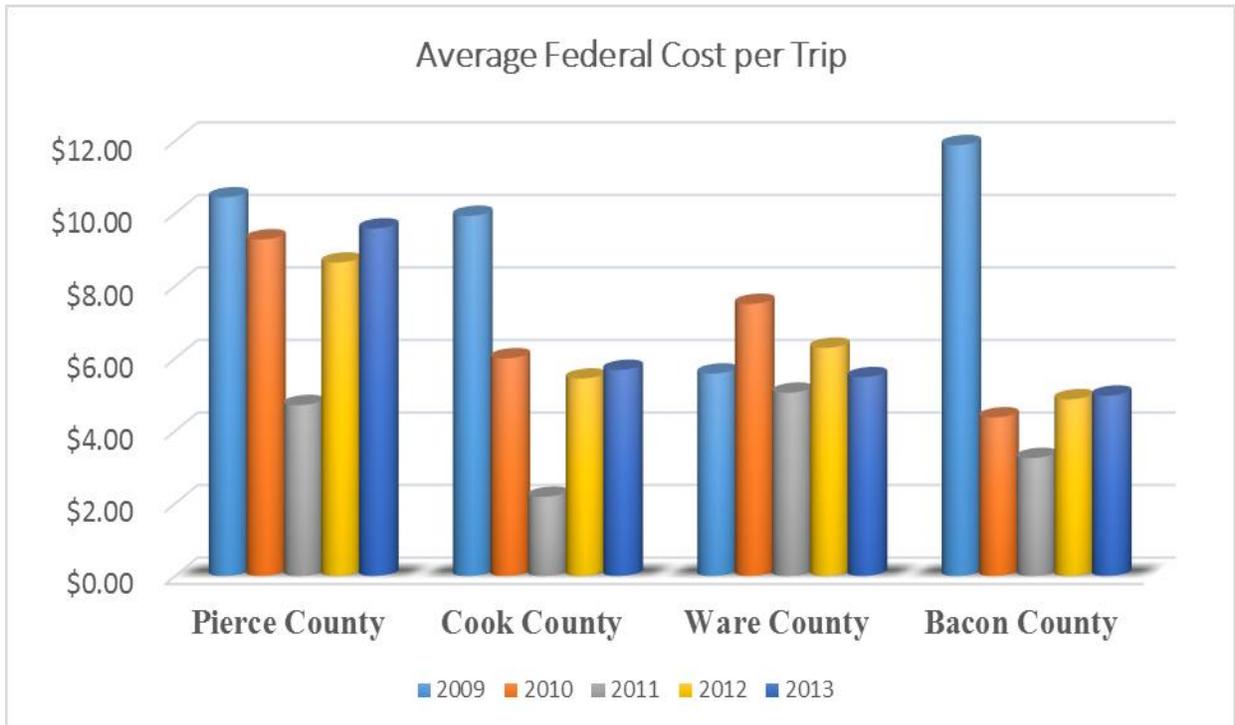


Figure 11 Average Federal Cost per Trip. Under the 5311 Rural Transit Program the Federal Transit Administration Pays up to 50% of the net operating deficit after face box revenue. Pierce County had a significantly higher cost than the other counties in 2013.

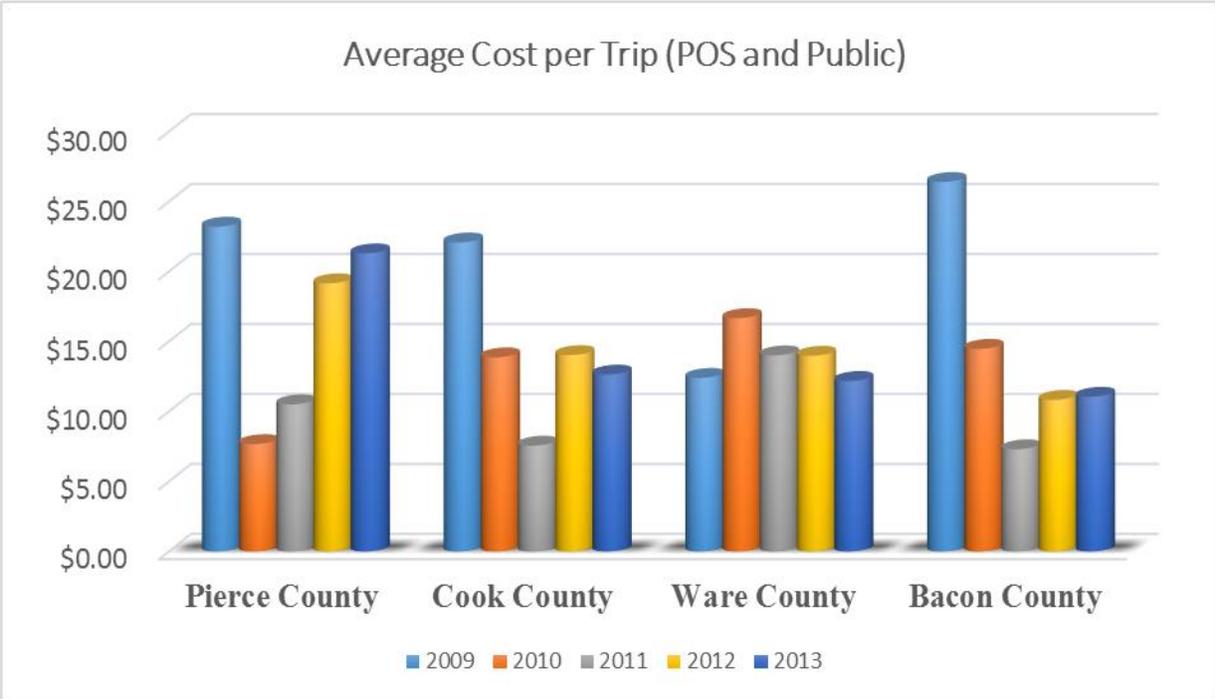


Figure 12 Average Cost per Trip (Public & POS). The five-year average cost of a trip for all riders and all funding sources for the Pierce County Transit Service is \$16.37 per trip.

## Goals and Objectives for Transit

GDOT lays out several goals and objectives for rural public transit in Georgia. Many of them are straight forward and are discussed here. The SGRC and the Valdosta-Lowndes MPO have additional goals that impact rural public transit in Pierce County. The Pierce County Comprehensive Plan does include goals for public transit that include promoting and extending the hours of the current transit system. In this section the goals and objectives will be discussed as well as how Pierce County Transit is currently meeting them.

### 1. Basic Mobility to Serve All Georgians

In Pierce County the transit service is open to all residents. Many of the current riders are seniors who have some personal mobility issues. The Pierce County transit service contracts with the Southern Georgia Regional Commission to provide coordinated human service transportation for seniors and other clients on a daily basis for trip destinations such as jobs, medical appointments and shopping trips.

### 2. Program Implementation

Pierce County administers the 5311 rural public transit program through coordination with GDOT and its TPO, MIDS Transportation, Inc, meeting or exceeding the FTA program requirements. As is demonstrated through the performance criteria noted before, the Pierce County Transit Service meets or exceeds most of these criteria on a daily basis.

The SGRC works with Pierce County and GDOT to provide technical assistance and analysis of the transit service delivery to better inform local and state officials.

### 3. Efficiency and Effectiveness

The Pierce County Transit System is operated in an efficient and effective manner by the county at its TPO. Utilizing POS contracts the TPO is able to utilize these funds to match the federal funds used to supplement the public riders. The TPO and Pierce County effectively work with GDOT to provide an efficient transit system for the residents of the county.



*Pierce Co. Transit  
Source: SGRC*

### 4. Safe, Secure Quality Service

The Pierce County Transit System is safe and secure, utilizing a proven training program for drivers and dispatchers. Pierce County and its TPO maintain safety and driver records that provide for a safe and secure environment for the riders.

### 5. Accessible Service—Usable by Persons with Disabilities

Pierce County Transit is committed to meet the needs of all users of the system. All vehicles are lift equipped to assist riders in wheelchairs. All drivers have been trained how to operate the lifts, assist riders and make sure each rider is safely secured aboard the vehicles.

Working with MIDS, Inc. and the SGRC Pierce County Transit provides coordinated transit services for human service agency clients throughout the community, recovering the fully allocated costs of these trips and assisting in meeting the federal match requirements for the rural public transit program.

The SGRC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy or (CEDS) includes a goal that seeks to 'Ensure that the region's transportation systems are intact to facilitate growth.' The CEDS covers a broad region of 18-counties and encourages each local government to address transportation concerns at a local level, including the establishment of public transit systems.

The SGRC also produces a Regional Comprehensive Plan, similar to local, county-level Comprehensive Planning efforts. A goal in this plan includes the need to determine the transportation needs of seniors and an aging population. This impacts the mobility of the regional population and how communities develop and implement their land use policies.

Overall, Pierce County is meeting the goals and objectives set out by GDOT and other entities. Pierce County should work to include public transportation in its next comprehensive plan update and continue to actively participate in regional transportation and land use planning efforts with the SGRC and VLMPO.





Figure 15 Peer Community Comparison from Rural Transit Demand

Peer Data Worksheet									
Input Data from Peer Transit Systems or Existing Transit Service									
Name of Peer System		Cook County	Ware County	Bacon County					
Population of Area		17,061	35,915	11,196					
Size of Area Served (Square Miles)		227	982	259					
Annual Vehicle-Miles of Service Provided		263,133	162,977	40,048					
Annual Vehicle-Hours of Service Provided		15,053	11,717	3,626					
Service Type (Fixed Route, Route-Deviation, Demand-Response)		Demand-Response	Demand-Response	Demand-Response					
Number of One-Way Trips Served per Year		26,548	15,775	7,447					
Degree of Coordination with Other Carriers (Low, Medium, High)		Low	Low	Low					

Results of Peer Data Comparison		Annual Vehicle-		Annual
		Population	miles	vehicles-hours
Input Data for My System:		18,860	219,496	12,614
Observed Trip Rates		Demand Estimate Based On:		
Peer Values		Population	Annual Vehicle-	Annual vehicles-
			miles	hours
Trips per Capita				
Maximum	1.6	30,178		
Average	0.9	16,974		
Median	0.7	13,202		
Minimum	0.4	7,544		
Trips per Vehicle-Mile				
Maximum	0.2		43,899	
Average	0.1		21,950	
Median	0.1		21,950	
Minimum	0.1		21,950	
Trips per Vehicle-Hour				
Maximum	2.1			26,489
Average	1.7			21,444
Median	1.8			22,705
Minimum	1.3			16,398
Values expected for my system				
Maximum		30,178	43,899	26,489.0
Average		16,974	21,950	21,444.0
Median		13,202	21,950	22,705.0
Minimum		7,544	21,950	16,398.0

## Transit Recommendations

Based on the research in this report it is the recommendation of the Southern Georgia Regional Commission that Pierce County continue to operate, and in the future expand, transit services to accommodate more riders and trips as needed. The demographic and transit demand analysis show there is a gap in unmet demand and need in Pierce County. With expanded marketing and outreach, Pierce County Transit could help meet the needs of residents more effectively and efficiently. This report also indicates there may be an unmet demand in the number of potential customers for transit services. The county and its TPO should consider expanding marketing efforts to ensure residents know this service is available to the general public.

In cooperation with other local governments which provide transit and the SGRC, Pierce County should work to develop regional flyers and brochures to inform the public, social service agencies, and other agencies of the availability and affordability of Pierce County Transit.

## 5-year Capital and Operating Plan

Included in this section are the capital and operation budget plans for a five-year period, FY2017-2022. These should only be used as guidance.

Operator: Pierce County/ TPO  
Date: 4/25/2016

With POS  
2.32% Inflation Rate

FY2017-2018				
<b>Net Operating Summary</b>				
Administrative Total / Ratio	\$ 88,748.00		24%	
Operating Total / Ratio	\$ 274,418.00		76%	
Total Operating Budget	\$ 363,166.00			
LESS: POS Revenue	\$ -			
LESS: Non-5311 Expenses	\$ -			
Public Transportation Budget	\$ 363,166.00			
LESS: 10% Fare Revenue	\$ 36,316.60			
Net Operating Total	\$ 326,849.40			
<b>Budget Summary</b>				
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Local</b>
Operating Budget Total	\$ 326,849.40	\$ 163,424.70	\$ -	\$ 163,424.70
POS Local Funds	\$ 148,136.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 148,136.00
Excess POS Local Funds	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Capital Budget Total	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Budget Grand Total</b>	<b>\$ 178,713.40</b>	<b>\$ 163,424.70</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 15,288.70</b>

Vehicles	7
Average Trips Per Vehicle	185
Total Trips Projected	20580
Percentage of Public Trips	17.00%
POS Trips	12821
POS Amount	\$ 148,136.00
Rate Per Trip	\$ 11.55
POS Fully Allocated Costs	\$ 25.49
Total Public Trips	9606
Subsidized Revenue Per Public Trip	\$ 17.01
Expected Farebox Per Trip	\$ 3.78

FY2021-2022				
<b>Net Operating Summary</b>				
Administrative Total / Ratio	\$ 97,274.88		24%	
Operating Total / Ratio	\$ 300,783.99		76%	
Total Operating Budget	\$ 398,058.87			
LESS: POS Revenue	\$ -			
LESS: Non-5311 Expenses	\$ -			
Public Transportation Budget	\$ 398,058.87			
LESS: 10% Fare Revenue	\$ 39,805.89			
Net Operating Total	\$ 358,252.99			
<b>Budget Summary</b>				
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Local</b>
Operating Budget Total	\$ 358,252.99	\$ 179,126.49	\$ -	\$ 179,126.49
POS Local Funds	\$ 178,604.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 178,604.00
Excess POS Local Funds	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Capital Budget Total	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Budget Grand Total</b>	<b>\$ 179,648.99</b>	<b>\$ 179,126.49</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 522.49</b>

Vehicles	7
Average Trips Per Vehicle	200
Total Trips Projected	23110
Percentage of Public Trips	17.00%
POS Trips	19181
POS Amount	\$ 178,604.00
Rate Per Trip	\$ 9.31
POS Fully Allocated Costs	\$ 18.68
Total Public Trips	11825
Subsidized Revenue Per Public Trip	\$ 15.15
Expected Farebox Per Trip	\$ 3.37