

Lowndes County Transit Development Plan



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Prepared in June 2016
by



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

The public involvement process for the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) is used to satisfy the Georgia Department of Transportation public participation process for the Program of Projects (POP).

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Introduction

This Transit Development Plan (TDP) was developed by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission, as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization for the Valdosta Urbanized Area, as a guidebook for Lowndes County elected officials and staff to answer basic questions about rural public transit in Lowndes 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. Lowndes County, GDOT and the third-party operator (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.

Demographic Analysis

Lowndes County, Georgia is a largely rural county in Southern Georgia. The 2010 Census lists the population for Lowndes County to be about 109,233 with the rural population being 27% (29,716) of the total population. However, the 2015 ACS estimated population for Lowndes County is 112,515 with a rural population of 30,473. Lowndes County is a part of the Valdosta



Lowndes County Courthouse
Source: Mike Rivera

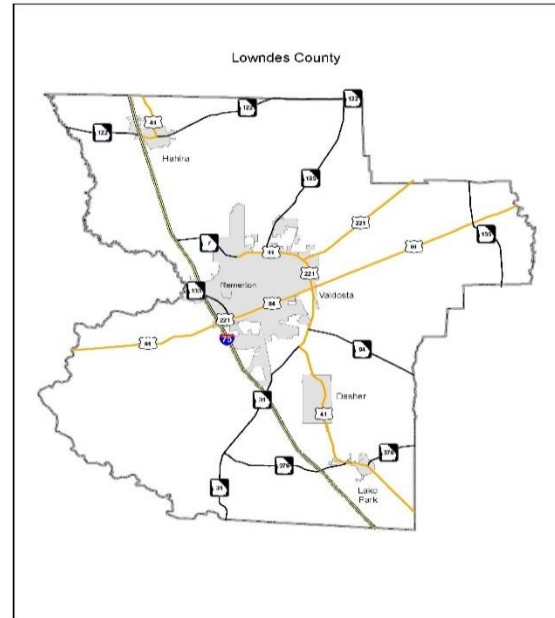


Figure 1 Lowndes County, Georgia.

Metropolitan Statistical Area, which also includes Echols County, Lanier County, and Brooks County. Lowndes County continues to have strong ties economically to the counties within the Valdosta Metropolitan Statistical Area.

Over 2,800 citizens or approximately 6.1% of Lowndes County citizens commute from Lowndes County to neighboring counties for work every day as shown in statistics from the US Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2010-2014¹. This is an indication that Lowndes County is contributing workers to jobs in surrounding counties. However, this does not compare to the number of citizens who commute into Lowndes County to for work, which is significantly higher. The increasing suburban population in Lowndes County can also have an 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.

¹ 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.

Income is often an indication of the need for public transit in a community, either urban or rural. Of the peer counties of Echols, Lanier, and Brooks Counties, Lowndes County has the highest median income at \$37,248, which is nearly \$2,500 above the median average of the other counties, at \$34,785. This means that the average pay in Lowndes County is \$350-\$5,000 more than that of its' surrounding counties.

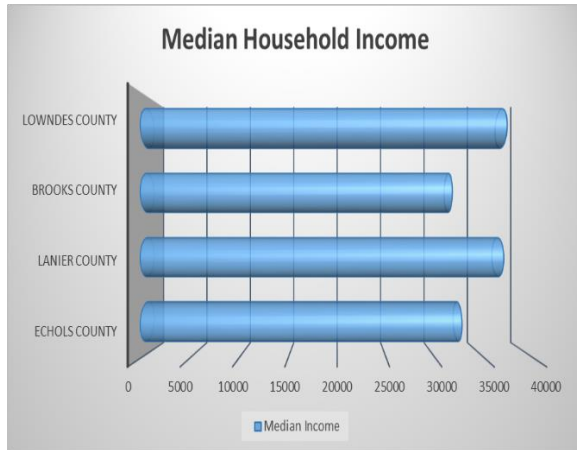


Figure 2. Median Income (2014) in Lowndes County.

Poverty status is often an indication of the need for a greater reliance on public transit services, meaning that there might be a larger population of low income persons that might require the use of public transit. In Lowndes County, an estimated 28,400 households are below the federal poverty level. This means that about 25.3% of the County's residents are in poverty under the federal definition. Although this is a high percentage, it is still significantly lower than the poverty status percentage of peer counties.

There are more than 47,000 workers age 16 years and over in the county, and more than 2,800 or 6.1% commute out of the county for work. Of the remaining workers, over 39,000 workers commute alone. This high 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. However, there is still a population of workers

that get to work by other modes.

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 7,521 workers in poverty in Lowndes County, 6,754 persons have at least 1 vehicle available to use. 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 Lowndes 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.

Of the 47,000 workers 16 years of age and over 29,000 persons have 1 or 2 vehicles available to use (2014 ACS estimate). In Lowndes County, about 84% of workers commute to work via a single-occupancy car or truck, and about 9% commute in a carpool of at least two persons. The ACS data indicates that 1520 persons used a bus, public transit or other modes of transportation in Lowndes County. Of the 47,000 workers living in Lowndes County that do not work at home, a majority (81%) have a one to twenty-four minute commute, while the mean travel time is 18.4 minutes from home to work. The large number of persons carpooling to work or using other modes of transportation (such as walking) is indicative that this segment of the population is more likely to use or need public transit services.

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. A little over 15% of the

population of Lowndes County is over the age of 60. This is lower than the state average but still indicates a significant potential ridership base for a rural public transit system.

Title VI and LEP Analysis

As a recipient of federal funds, Lowndes 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 Lowndes 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
TOTAL POPULATION	112,515
RACE	
WHITE	65,134
AFRICAN AMERICAN	40,703
OTHER	815
HISPANIC	5,863
# IN POVERTY	27,375

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 Lowndes 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 Lowndes County is Spanish. It is estimated that there are a total of 3,772 persons, or 3.6% 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 Lowndes County, 1,508 persons are linguistically isolated (LEP), meaning they do not speak English “very well.”

Estimate	3.6%
Margin of	+/- 0.4
Lowndes	3,772
United States	13.0%

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

Lowndes County Transit does not have a history of LEP individuals who could not use the system. It is recommended that if needed Lowndes 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 Lowndes County to the LEP community.

Lowndes 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 Lowndes County and overall costs.

To help ensure that potential riders with limited English are able to use Lowndes County Transit Services, MIDS Transportation has created a pamphlet in Spanish, which is the second most common language in Lowndes County. 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, where a Google Translator can provide for basic information on the service to LEP individuals.

ADA Analysis

When looking at the impact of transit on a community, the number of citizens with disabilities should be considered. While ambulatory disabilities keep a person from moving about smoothly, there are persons with other disabilities that the public transit service in Lowndes County can serve.

Rural public transit services provides a means for transportation for those with disabilities that otherwise may find it difficult to get around.

14,000 or 13% of persons in Lowndes County have some sort of disability. Persons with disabilities require more assistance and options when it comes to transportation of all modes. Persons with ambulatory difficulties have trouble moving about under their own power and often require assistance to complete tasks. In Lowndes County, 7,413 persons have an ambulatory difficulty and the population of 65 years and older accounts for 42% of those with an ambulatory difficulty. The Lowndes County transit service is fully ADA accessible, providing

vans with lifts and trained drivers that help assist riders on and off the bus.

Roles and Responsibilities

Transit delivery can be complicated in any area; however, when the roles and responsibilities of several transit delivery partners in one area are explained it makes it easier for a community to understand transit options. Lowndes County has various transit partners that serve different purposes. Some of the transit services also overlap with one another, this allows for more people to be serviced within particular categories.

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission coordinates human service transit in an 18-county region (including Lowndes County) through the Georgia Department of Human Services. Currently MIDS Transportation serves as the Third Party Operator and offers transportation for the SGRC using a private fleet as well as the Lowndes County Transit Service 5311 fleet to provide these trips.

Lowndes County provides transit services funded through the Federal Transit

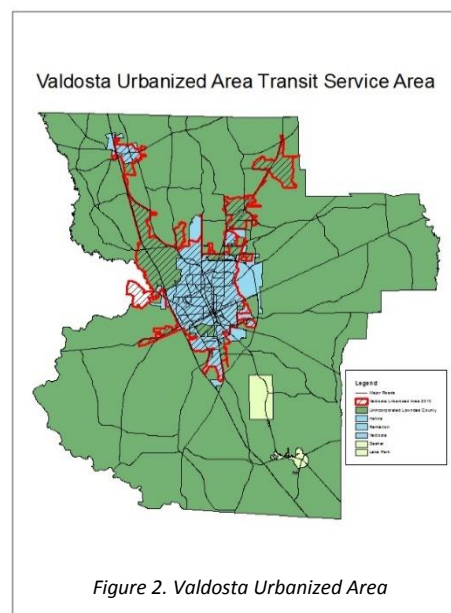


Figure 2. Valdosta Urbanized Area

Administration 5311 rural transit program for the rural areas of Lowndes County. MIDS Transportation also serves as the TPO for the Lowndes County Transit Service. MIDS and Lowndes County are able to use the purchase of service funding provided by the trips the SGRC coordinated transit service provides to cover the cash match Lowndes County must pay to provide rural public transit services. However, if Lowndes County Transit is to continue to perform public urban to urban trips, the County or other local jurisdiction will be responsible for those costs since they are not eligible under the FTA 5311 regulations.

The SGRC in its roles as a regional and Metropolitan Planning Organization provide transit planning services to Lowndes County and other partners.

Another transit service provider in Lowndes County is Valdosta State University. VSU offers a shuttle bus service to its students. Although the transit service is limited to VSU students, it goes beyond campus stops and allows for a range of stops within the community such as Wal-Mart and the Valdosta Mall.

The Georgia Department of Transportation also plays an important role in the transit service delivery in Lowndes County. GDOT administers the FTA 5311 funding to Lowndes County for the operation of its Rural Transit Service.

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 Lowndes County. The Valdosta-Lowndes MPO 2040 Transportation Vision Plan does include goals for public transit that include promoting and preserving the current transit system. In this section the goals and objectives

will be discussed as well as how Lowndes County Transit is currently meeting them.

1. Increase the Safety of the Transportation System for All Users.

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

2. Increase the Security of the Transportation System for All Users.

Lowndes County Transit is committed to meet the needs of all users of the system. 7 of the 8 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.

3. Increase the Accessibility and Mobility of People and Freight;

In Lowndes County the transit service is open to all residents. Many of the current riders are seniors who have some personal mobility issues. The Lowndes County transit service works 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.

4. Protect and Enhance the Environment, Promote Energy Conservation, Improve the Quality of Life, and Promote Consistency between Transportation Improvements Planned Growth and Economic Development Patterns;

Lowndes County is continuously working with the SGRC to accomplish these goals. The SGRC gives technical assistance and analysis of transit service delivery strategies and options to better

inform local and state officials in achieving these goals.

5. Promote Efficient System Management and Operation; and

The Lowndes County Transit System is operated in an efficient and effective manner by the county and 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 Lowndes County effectively work with GDOT to provide an efficient transit system for the residents of the county.

6. Emphasize the Preservation of the Existing Transportation System

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, Lowndes County is meeting the goals and objectives set out by GDOT and other entities. Lowndes County has also updated its comprehensive plan to include the idea of developing a more robust transit system, as well as provide more information on transit services that are already available in the community. Lowndes County also continues to actively participate in regional transportation

and land use planning efforts with the SGRC and VLMPO.

Transit Need and Demand

The 2010 Census increased the urbanized area within Lowndes County, resulting in changes to the number of trips eligible under the 5311 Rural Transit program. These changes are not unique to Lowndes County; however they could have a significant impact on the trips currently being provided. Citizens were looking at an 80% reduction in service based on the increased urbanized area, however, the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners has agreed to pay the additional local match of up to \$36,757 to continue providing urban to urban trips and avoid any disruption in service.

An evaluation of the last 3 years of data indicated that of the 92,709 trips made on public transit, only 18,044 trips met the definition of a rural trip according to the FTA 5311 guidelines. This averaged out to be 6,015 eligible rural trips per year.

The majority of these rural trips were made through POS contracts with DHS and Logisticare, 9,956 and 6,194 respectively, while Public ridership accounted for 10% of the total trips, or 1,894 trips.

Based on projections of Lowndes County's population growth remaining constant at 3.3%, and the estimated percent of rural ridership of 5.3%, the 2020 Population and rural ridership are estimated at 116,590 persons and 6,179 rural riders.

5-year Capital and Operating Plan

The decision for the Lowndes County Board of Commissioners to pay the additional match up to \$36,757 means that the status quo is able to be maintained, at least for FY17. The SGRC was able to run a forecasted model of potential 5311 trips and operating costs based on

continuation of this agreement. These figures are for the 5311 service only, and do not reflect any costs associated with a possible 5307 urban transit system. For more information, please

see the Valdosta Urbanized Area Transit Implementation Studies on the web at www.sgrc.

Appendix

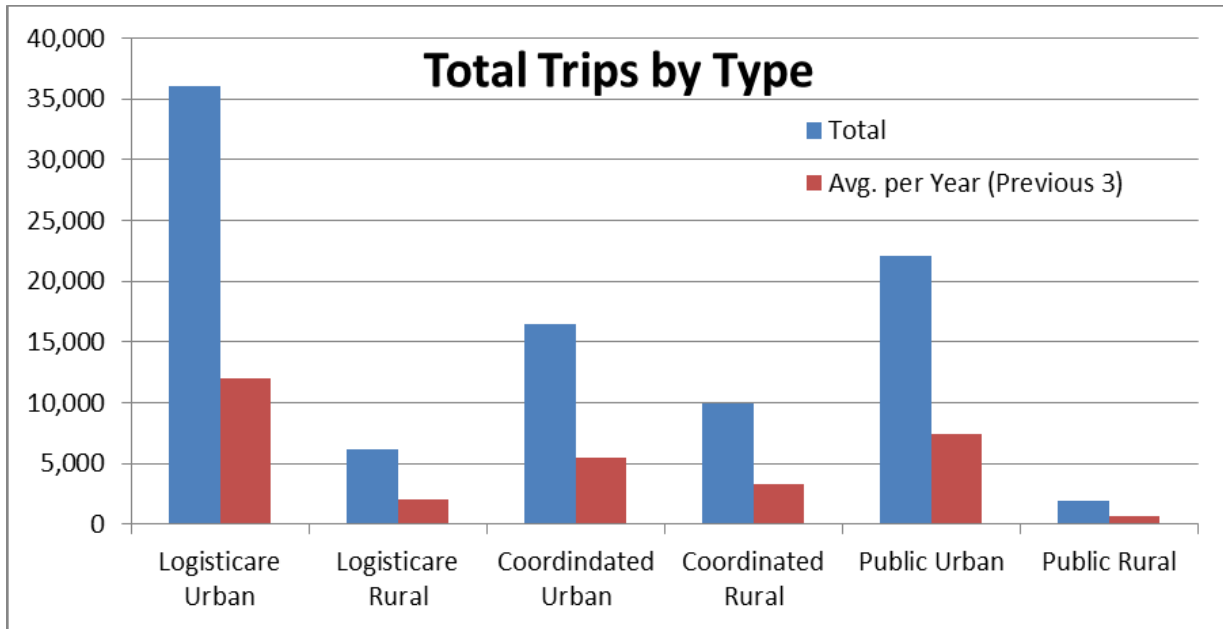


Figure 3. Total Trips by Type (3 year average)

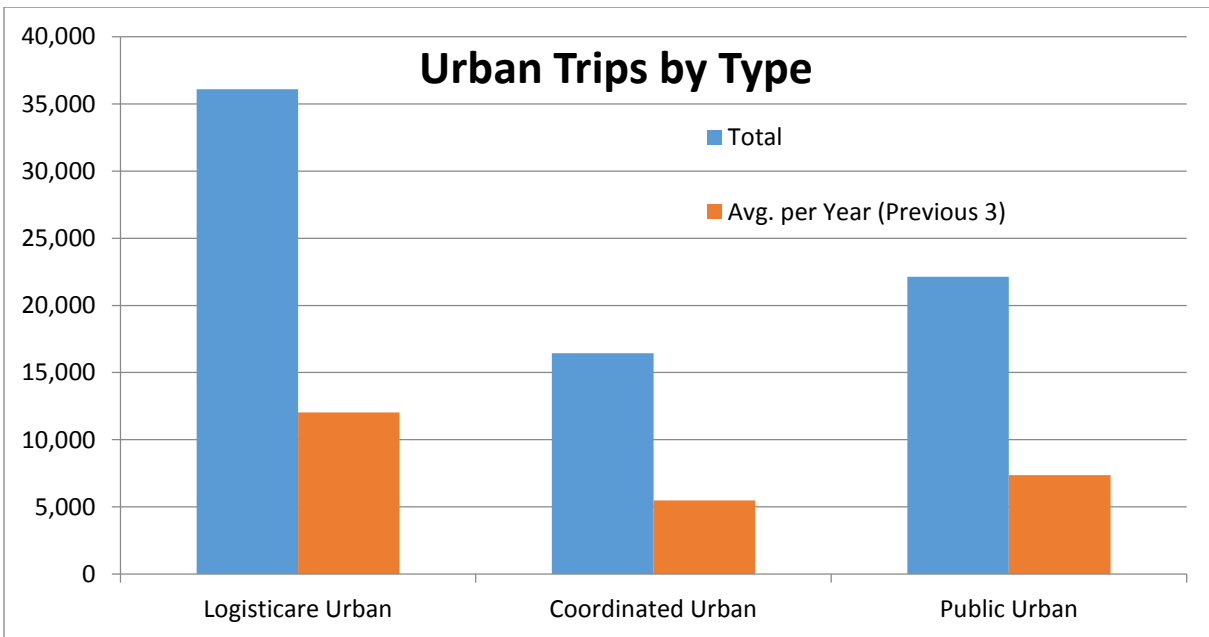


Figure 4. Urban Trips by Type (3 year average).

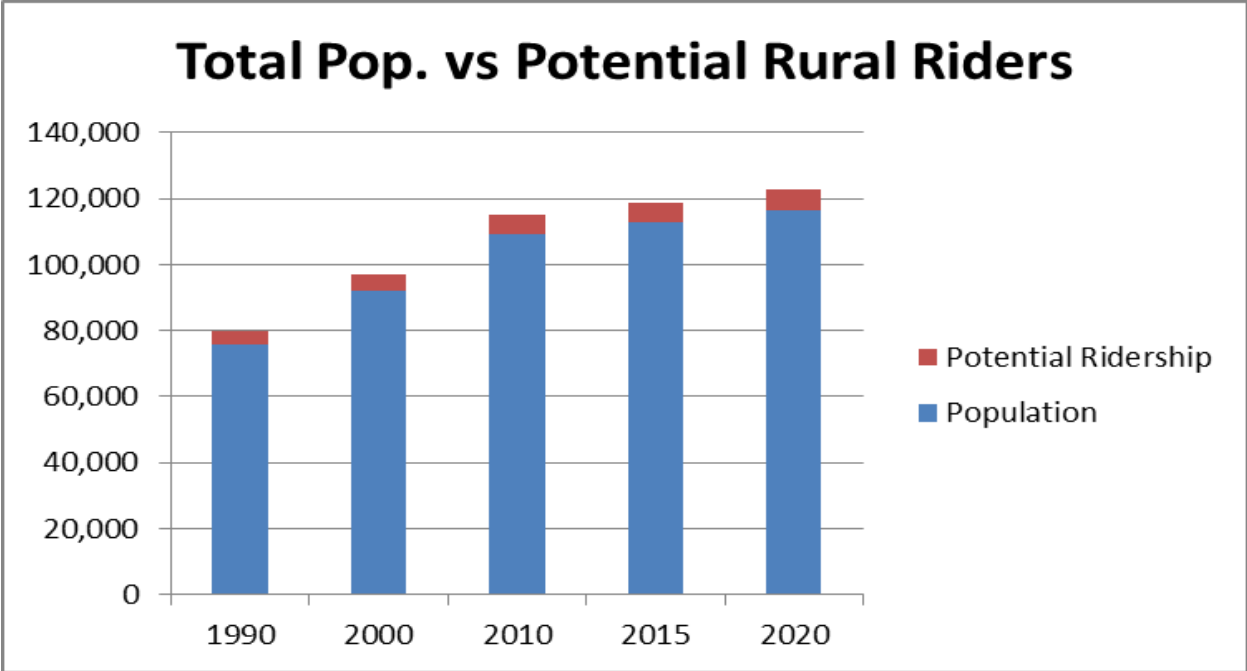


Figure 5. Total Population and Number of Potential Riders (3 year average)

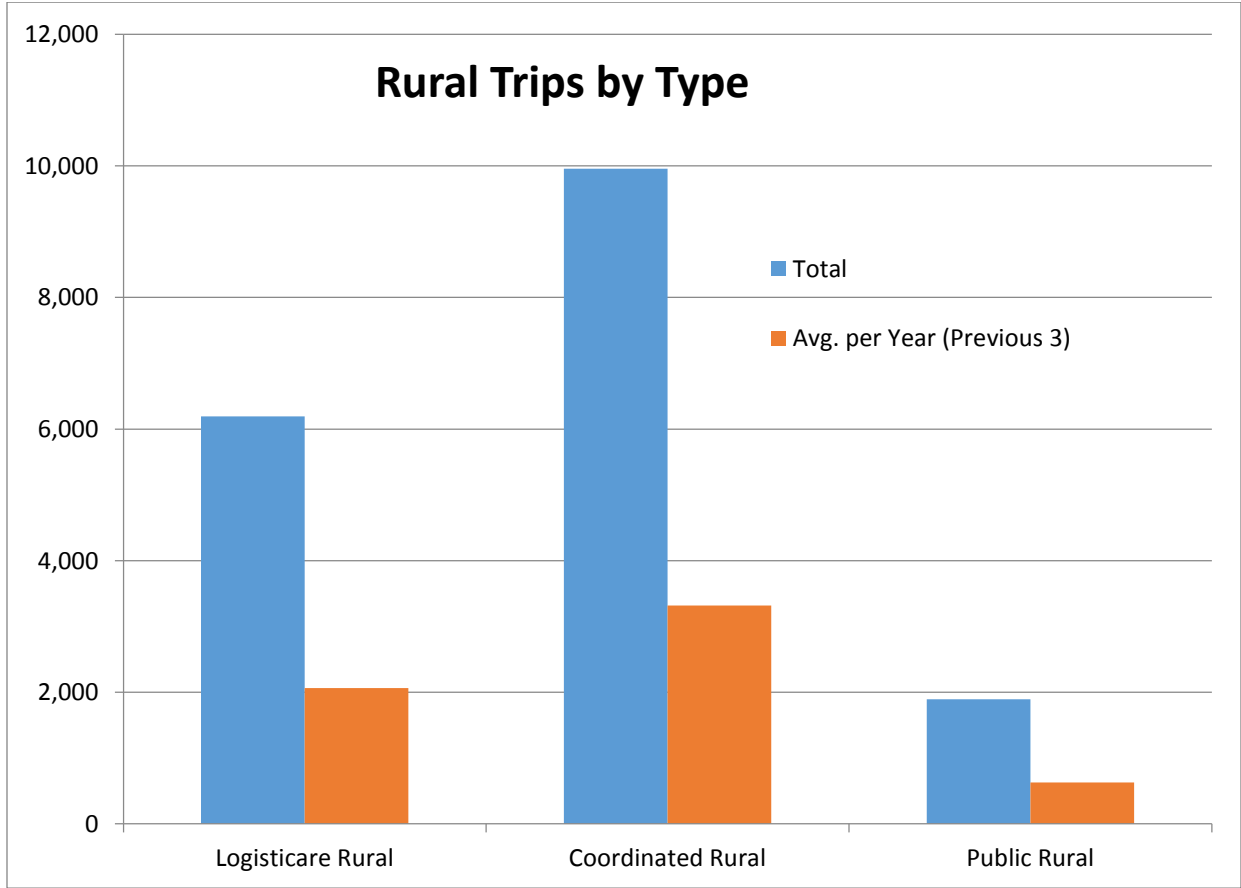


Figure 6. Rural Trips by Type (3 year average)

Operator: Lowndes County/TPO
 Date: 7/8/2016

With POS
 2.32% Inflation Rate

FY2017-2018				
Net Operating Summary				
Administrative Total / Ratio	\$ 89,355.00		15%	
Operating Total / Ratio	\$ 496,917.00		85%	
Total Operating Budget	\$ 586,272.00			
LESS: POS Revenue	\$ 184,357.00			
LESS: Non-5311 Expenses	\$ -			
Public Transportation Budget	\$ 401,915.00			
LESS: 10% Fare Revenue	\$ 40,191.50			
Net Operating Total	\$ 361,723.50			
Budget Summary	Totals	Federal	State	Local
		Capped		
Operating Budget Total	\$ 361,723.50	\$ 184,357.00	\$ -	\$ 177,366.50
POS Local Funds	\$ 184,357.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 184,357.00
Excess POS Local Funds	\$ 62,889.74	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 62,889.74
LCBOC 5311 Urban adjustment	\$ 36,757.00			\$ 36,757.00
Capital Budget Total	\$ 48,165.00	\$ 38,532.00	\$ 4,816.50	\$ 4,816.50
Budget Grand Total	\$ 162,641.76	\$ 222,889.00	\$ 4,816.50	\$ (28,306.74)

Vehicles	8
Average Trips Per Vehicle	370
Total Trips Projected	38,013
Percentage of Public Trips	33.27%
POS Trips	25,366
POS Amount	\$ 247,246.74
Rate Per Trip	\$ 9.75
POS Fully Allocated Costs	\$ 14.26
Total Public Trips	12,647
Subsidized Revenue Per Public Trip	\$ 17.62
Expected Farebox Per Trip	\$ 3.18

FY2021-2022

Net Operating Summary		
Administrative Total / Ratio	\$ 97,940.20	16%
Operating Total / Ratio	\$ 504,372.02	84%
Total Operating Budget	\$ 602,312.22	
LESS: POS Revenue	\$ 184,357.00	
LESS: Non-5311 Expenses	\$ -	
Public Transportation Budget	\$ 417,955.22	
LESS: 10% Fare Revenue	\$ 41,795.52	
Net Operating Total	\$ 376,159.70	

Vehicles	8
Average Trips Per Vehicle	444
Total Trips Projected	42,590
Percentage of Public Trips	33.27%
POS Trips	28,420
POS Amount	\$ 277,289.37
Rate Per Trip	\$ 9.76
POS Fully Allocated Costs	\$ 13.24
Total Public Trips	14,170
Subsidized Revenue Per Public Trip	\$ 13.01
Expected Farebox Per Trip	\$ 2.95

Budget Summary	Totals	Federal	State	Local
		Capped		
Operating Budget Total	\$ 376,159.70	\$ 184,357.00	\$ -	\$ 191,802.70
POS Local Funds	\$ 184,357.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 184,357.00
Excess POS Local Funds	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
LCBOC 5311 Urban adjustment	\$ 36,757.00			\$ 36,757.00
Capital Budget Total	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Budget Grand Total	\$ 228,559.70	\$ 184,357.00	\$ -	\$ 44,202.70

