

Southwest RTPO Coordinated Public Transit— Human Services Transportation Plan

New Mexico Department of Transportation
Prepared by the Transit and Rail Division
September 2023

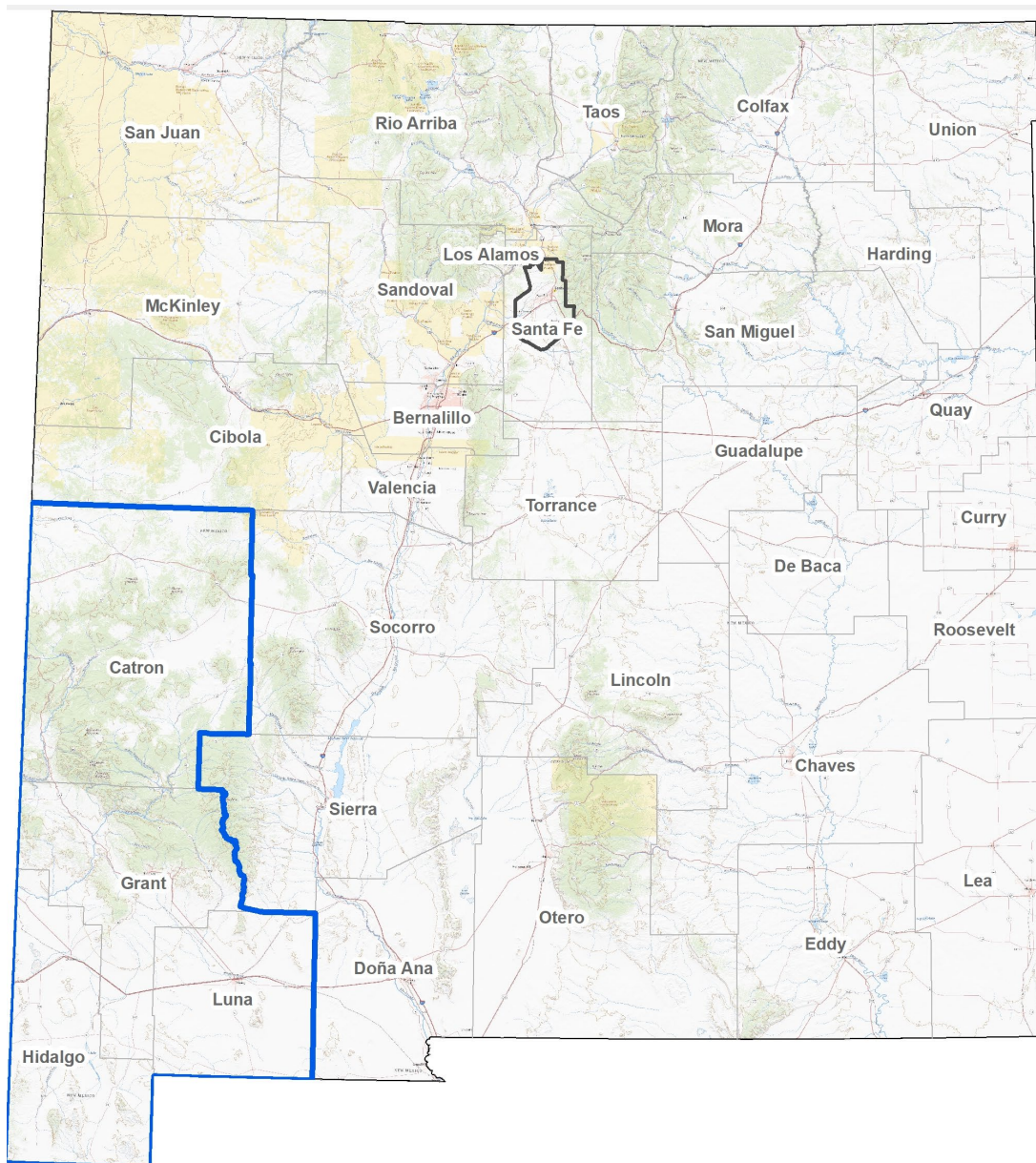


Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Background.....	2
Planning Context.....	4
Demographics.....	6
Needs Assessment	18
Strategies and Priorities	19

Tables

Table 1. Service Providers.....	4
Table 2. Population and Growth by County	7
Table 3. Potential Transit Dependence Scoring.....	16

Figures

Figure 1. Regional Geography	5
Figure 2. Population.....	8
Figure 3. Population Density	9
Figure 4. Youth Population	11
Figure 5. Senior Population.....	12
Figure 6. Individuals with Disabilities	13
Figure 7. Low Income Population.....	14
Figure 8. Households without Vehicles	15
Figure 9. Transit Dependent Populations	17

Introduction

One of the primary objectives of the New Mexico Department of Transportation's (NMDOT) Transit and Rail Division is the establishment and maintenance of public and private non-profit transit systems. The Transit and Rail Division provides this assistance through a partnership with New Mexico's transit providers and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), as well as cooperation with Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs), Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and local and tribal governments.

NMDOT is authorized under New Mexico's Public Mass Transportation Act Sections 67-3-67 to 67-3-70 NMSA 1978 (as amended by Sections 37, 37-8, and 39, Chapter 268, Laws of 1987) and has the primary authority and responsibility for administering the FTA's rural and small urban formula and discretionary grant programs.

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), signed into law by President Obama on December 4, 2015 and effective October 1, 2015, applied new program rules to the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) authorized funding for federal surface transportation programs beginning with ALL Federal Fiscal Year 2016 funding. The FAST Act legislation continued the coordinated transportation planning requirements established in previous laws. Specifically, MAP-21 noted that the projects selected for funding through the Section 5310 Program must be "included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan" and this plan must be "developed and approved through a process that included participation by seniors, individuals with disabilities, representatives of public, private, and non-profit transportation and human services providers, and other members of the public." The FAST Act maintains this requirement.

The two primary formula grant programs NMDOT administers are Sections 5310 and 5311. Section 5310, Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities, enhances mobility for seniors and persons with disabilities by providing funds for programs to serve the special needs of transit-dependent populations beyond traditional public transportation services and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit services. Section 5311, Formula Grants For Other than Urbanized Areas, provides capital, planning, administration, and operating assistance to states to support public transportation in rural areas (areas with a population of less than 50,000 people), where many residents often rely on public transit to reach their destinations.

As the statewide designated recipient of the Section 5310 and 5311 funds, NMDOT's Transit and Rail Division coordinated with transit and human services transportation providers, the Southwest RTPO and the general public to develop this plan. The main purpose of this plan is to analyze the transit services currently available in the plan area

and makes strategy recommendations for transit program and mobility coordination in the Southwest RTPO. Separate plans have been developed for each of the state's RTPO areas. These plans include MPOs, as appropriate.

Background

This section provides an explanation of the coordinated transportation planning process based on Section 5310 FTA guidance, which was released in June 2014.

Coordinated Plan Elements

FTA guidance defines a coordinated public transit human service transportation plan as one that identifies the transportation needs of older adults, individuals with disabilities, households without vehicles, and persons living under the poverty line. The plan must also provide strategies for meeting the needs of these disadvantaged population groups and prioritize transportation services for funding and implementation.

In total, there are four required coordinated plan elements:

- Assessment of Available Services – identify current transportation providers from the public, private, and non-profit sectors.
- Assessment of Transportation Needs – identify the transportation needs of older adults, individuals with disabilities, households without vehicles, and persons living under the poverty line. This assessment can be conducted through public outreach, reviewing area transportation plans, data collection, and the assessment of gaps in current transit services.
- Develop Strategies – address the identified needs in addition to providing opportunities to increase efficiency within the transportation network.
- Develop Priorities for Implementation – address current resources, time frames, and feasibility for implementation.

Section 5310 Program

MAP-21 established a modified FTA Section 5310 Program that consolidates the previous New Freedom and Elderly and Disabled Programs. The purpose of the Section 5310 Program is to enhance mobility for seniors and individuals with disabilities by providing funds for programs to serve the special needs of transit-dependent populations beyond traditional public transportation services and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complementary paratransit services. Section 5310 Program recipients must continue to certify that projects selected are included in a locally

developed, coordinated public transit-human services transportation plan. The plan must undergo a development and approval process that includes input from seniors and individuals with disabilities, transportation providers, and other stakeholders; and is coordinated to the maximum extent possible with transportation services assisted by other federal departments and agencies.

Funding

Funds through the Section 5310 Program are apportioned for urbanized and rural areas based on the number of seniors and individuals with disabilities, with 60 percent of the funds apportioned to designated recipients in urbanized areas with populations larger than 200,000, 20 percent to states for use in urbanized areas of fewer than 200,000 persons, and 20 percent to states for use in rural areas. The federal share for capital projects is 80 percent with a 20 percent local match, and for operating grants is 50 percent with a 50 percent local match.

The local share for Section 5310 Program projects can be derived from other federal non-DOT transportation sources. Examples of these programs that are potential sources of local match include employment training, aging, community services, vocational rehabilitation services, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). More information on these programs is available on the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility Website at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/ccam>. The CCAM Federal Fund Braiding Guide can also be found on the CCAM website and provides information to potential grantees and defines Federal fund braiding for local match.

Eligible Subrecipients and Activities

Under MAP-21, eligible subrecipients for the Section 5310 Program include states or local government authorities, private non-profit organizations, or operators of public transportation services that receive a grant indirectly through a recipient. MAP-21 also modified eligible activities under the Section 5310 Program:

- At least 55% of program funds must be used on capital projects that are:
 - Public transportation projects planned, designed, and carried out to meet the special needs of seniors and individuals with disabilities when public transportation is insufficient, inappropriate, or unavailable.
- The remaining 45% may be used for purposes including:
 - Public transportation projects that exceed ADA requirements.
 - Public transportation projects that improve access to fixed-route service and decrease reliance by individuals with disabilities on complementary paratransit.
 - Alternatives to public transportation that assist seniors and individuals with disabilities.

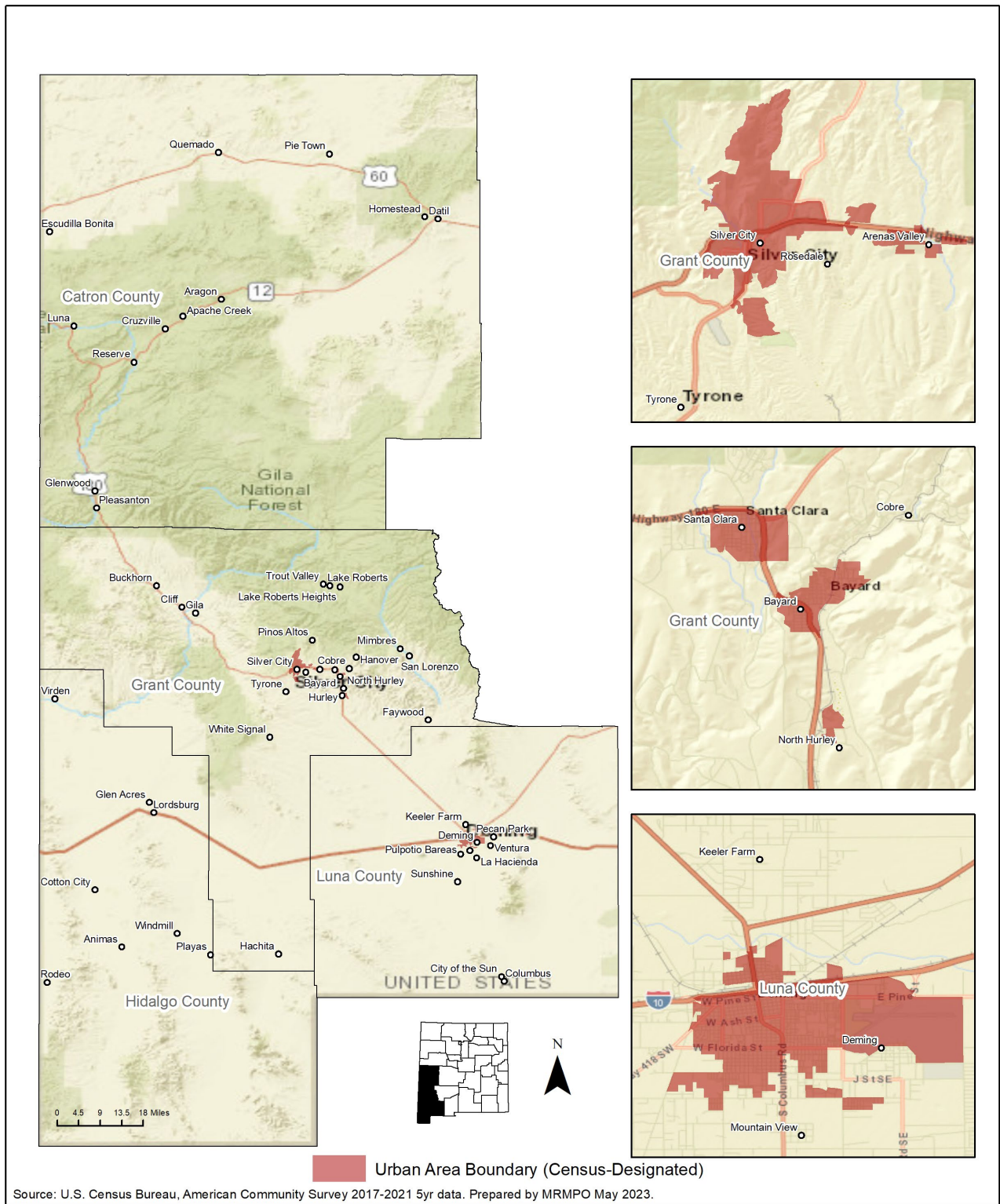
Planning Context

The following section provides an overview of the demographic composition of the Southwest RTPO. As displayed in Figure 1, the Southwest RTPO includes Catron, Grant, Hidalgo, and Luna Counties. Table 1 provides a summary of existing transit providers serving the RTPO.

Table 1: Service Providers

Transit Name	Area of Service	Service Type(s)	Funding Program(s)
Corre Caminos Transit	City of Bayard, Village of Columbus, City of Deming, Grant County, Town of Hurley, Luna County, Mimbres CDP, the Town of Silver City, and Tyrone CDP	Demand Response, Fixed Route, Modified Fixed	S. 5311
Veterans Highly Rural Transportation Services Program	Catron and Hidalgo Counties	Program Sponsored	

Figure 1: Southwest RTPO Regional Geography



Demographics

The demographic analysis in this section highlights to what extent existing services align with areas of potentially transit dependent populations. It examines population density as well as data on youth, seniors, individuals with disabilities, those living below the federal poverty level, and households without vehicles.

It also presents two indices based on the density and percentage of transit dependent persons. The analysis draws on recent data from American Community Survey five-year estimates (2017-2021) and the 2020 Decennial Census. Mapped and summarized below, the results of the analysis highlight those geographic areas of the planning area with the greatest transportation need.

Population

Population (and population density) is an important indicator of the extent of urbanization in an area, which in turn affects the types of transportation that may be most viable. While fixed-route transit is more practical and successful in areas with 2,000 or more persons per square mile, specialized transportation services are typically a better fit for rural areas with less population density.

Figures 2 and 3 display population and population density, respectively. Both figures show that much of the planning area is very rural. The RTPO's population is primarily located near the urban clusters of Deming and Silver City, and to a lesser extent in Hidalgo County. In addition, Table 2 allows for a comparison of county population both within the RTPO and to other counties in New Mexico. Grant and Luna County have more than five times the population of Hidalgo and Catron. The overall planning area's population is projected to decrease an average of 20 percent over the next 25 to 30 years.

Table 2: Population and Growth by County

County	2020 Estimate	2040 Projection	Percent Change
Bernalillo	681,233	694,327	2%
Catron	3,491	2,897	-17%
Chaves	64,670	60,586	-6%
Cibola	26,981	25,595	-5%
Colfax	11,752	7,313	-38%
Curry	50,521	53,367	6%
De Baca	1,781	1,245	-30%
Doña Ana	218,971	231,331	6%
Eddy	59,179	68,435	16%
Grant	27,652	23,092	-16%
Guadalupe	4,330	3,472	-20%
Harding	677	627	-7%
Hidalgo	4,171	2,610	-37%
Lea	72,618	86,405	19%
Lincoln	19,397	16,514	-15%
Los Alamos	18,765	19,941	6%
Luna	24,300	21,963	-10%
McKinley	71,637	69,795	-3%
Mora	4,470	3,509	-22%
Otero	67,278	72,340	8%
Quay	8,203	6,297	-23%
Rio Arriba	38,721	34,485	-11%
Roosevelt	19,331	17,747	-8%
Sandoval	147,069	172,862	18%
San Juan	126,358	114,447	-9%
San Miguel	27,479	22,782	-17%
Santa Fe	150,488	158,420	5%
Sierra	10,898	8,400	-23%
Socorro	16,969	14,544	-14%
Taos	32,795	31,412	-4%
Torrance	15,531	13,356	-14%
Union	4,073	2,956	-27%
Valencia	75,193	69,684	-7%

Light grey depicts the counties included in the Southwest RTPO

Source: New Mexico County Population Projections July 1, 2010 to July 1, 2040, Geospatial and Population Studies Group, University of NM. Released July 2020.

Figure 2: Southwest RTPO Population by Block Group

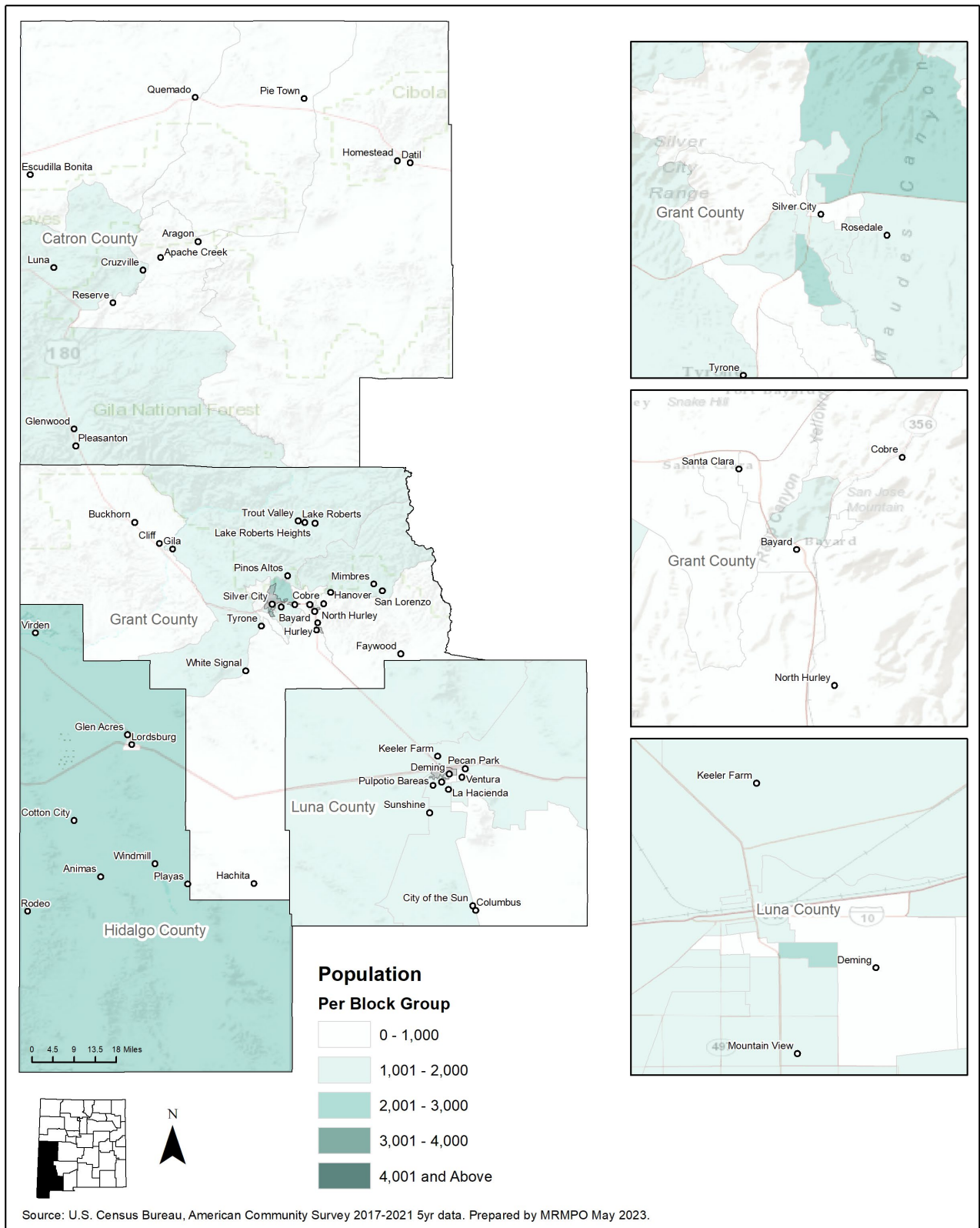
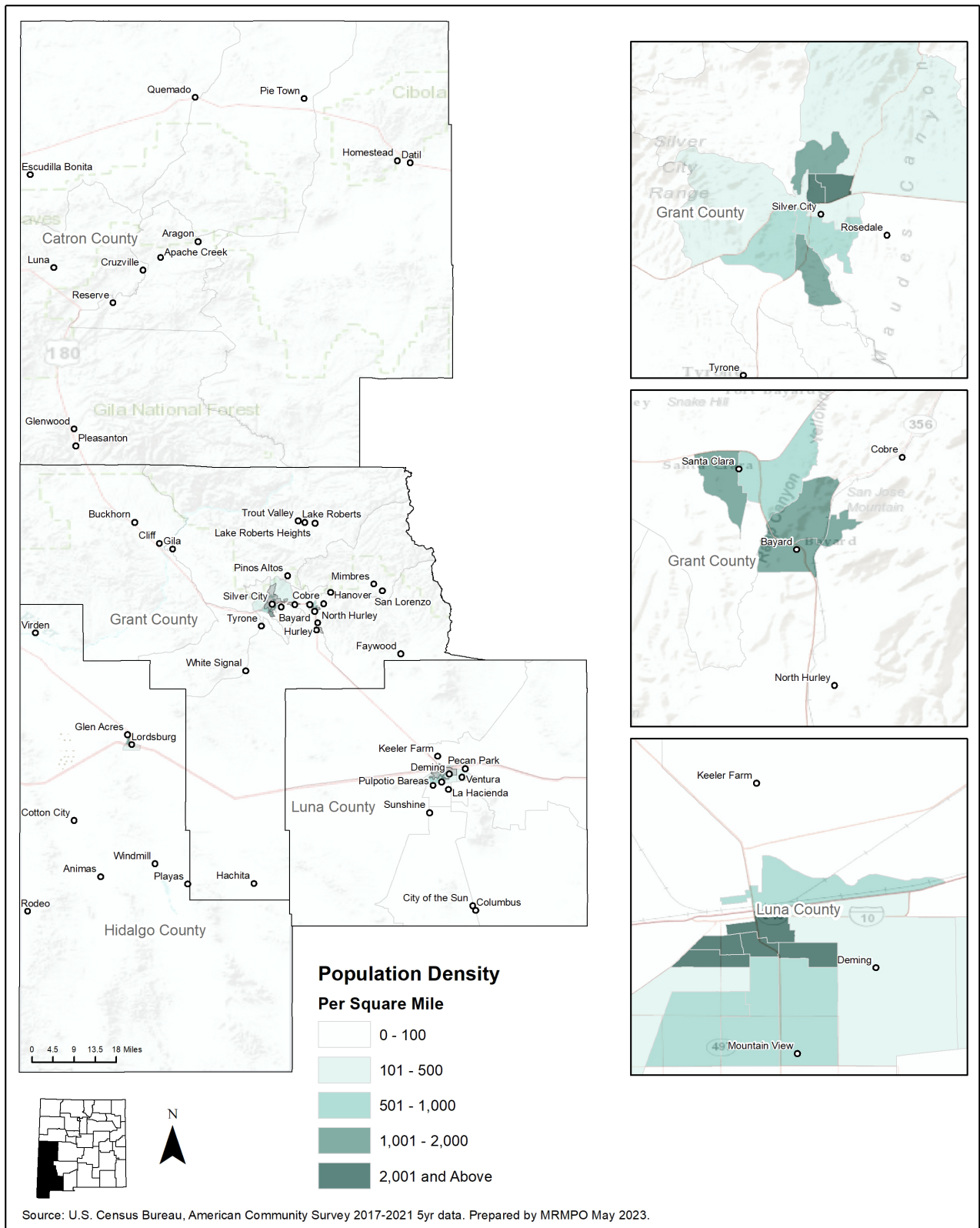


Figure 3: Southwest RTPO Population Density



Youth, Seniors, Individuals with Disabilities, and Low-Income Individuals

Youth (10-17), Seniors (65 and above), Individuals with Disabilities (18 and above), and Low-Income Individuals (living below the federal poverty level) must be identified and accounted for when considering transit need. Figures 4 through 7 display these populations. The greatest numbers of youth are located near Silver City, the town of Bayard, in the northwest portion and a south portion of Luna County. The senior population is primarily in Silver City and Deming, the northern section of Grant County, as well as throughout Catron County. Individuals with disabilities are also concentrated near Silver City and Deming, throughout Catron County. Block groups with the most low-income individuals are located north of Silver City, northern Luna County, a portion in central Catron County and in Lordsburg.

Households without Vehicles

Households without at least one personal vehicle are more likely to depend on the mobility offered by public transit and human service organizations than those households with access to a car. Figure 8 shows the households without vehicles in the Southwest RTPO. As with the other population groups, block groups with the highest numbers are located in the population centers of Silver City and north and west of Deming, Lordsburg, Luna County, and a northern portion of Catron County.

Figure 4: Southwest RTPO Youth Population (ages 10-17)

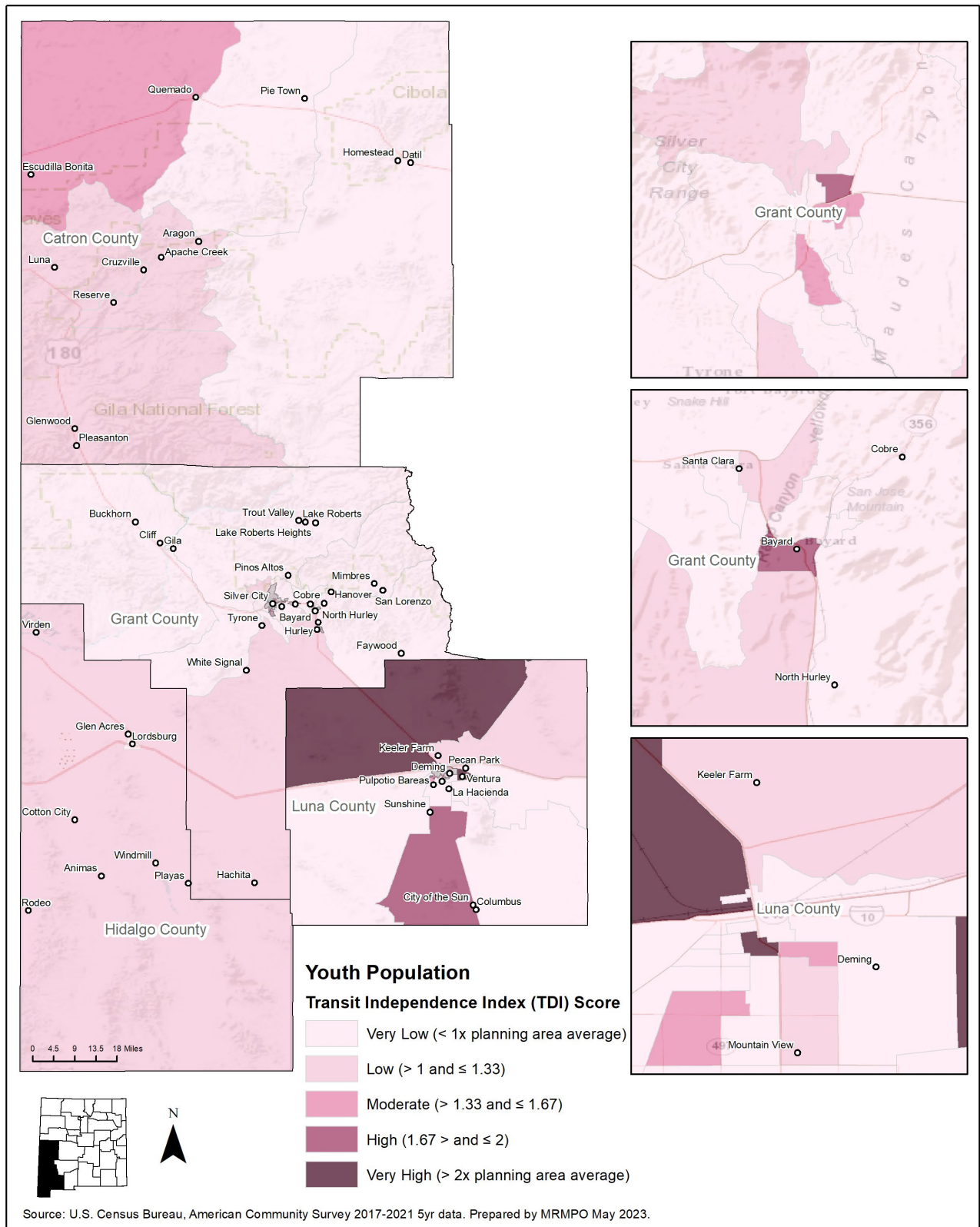


Figure 5: Southwest RTPO Senior Population (ages 65+)

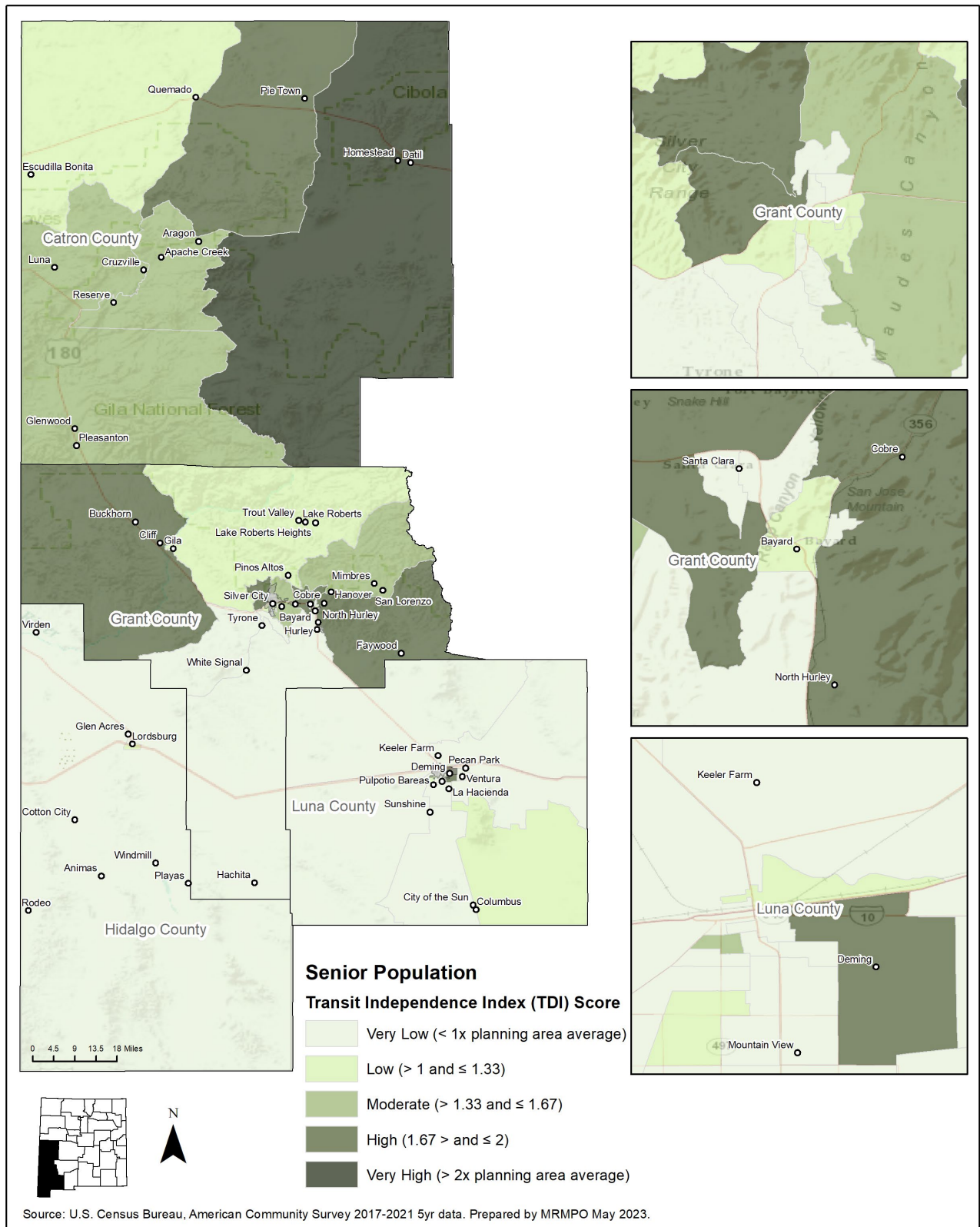


Figure 6: Southwest RTPPO Individuals with Disabilities (ages 18+)

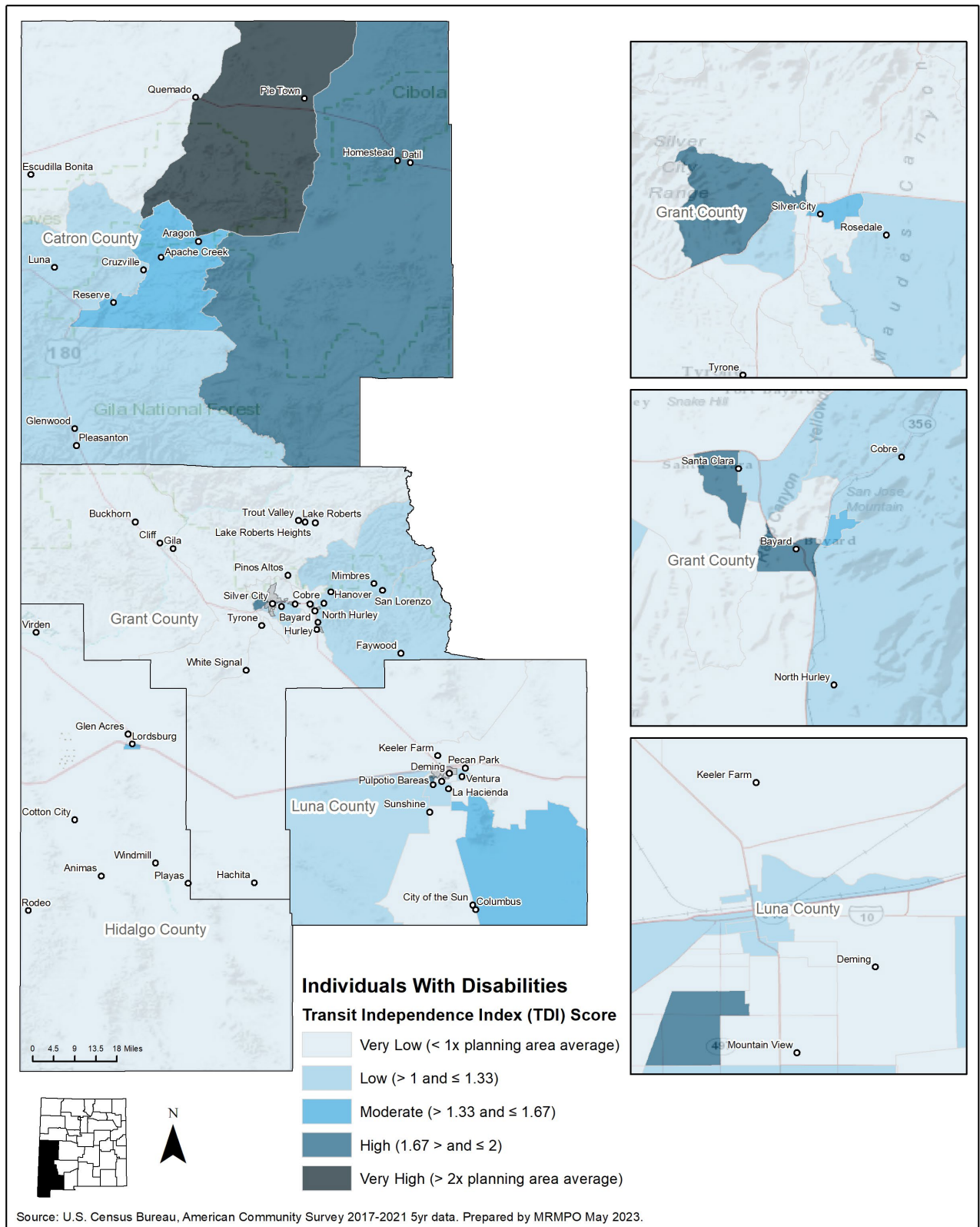


Figure 7: Southwest RTPO Individuals Living Below the Poverty Level (all ages)

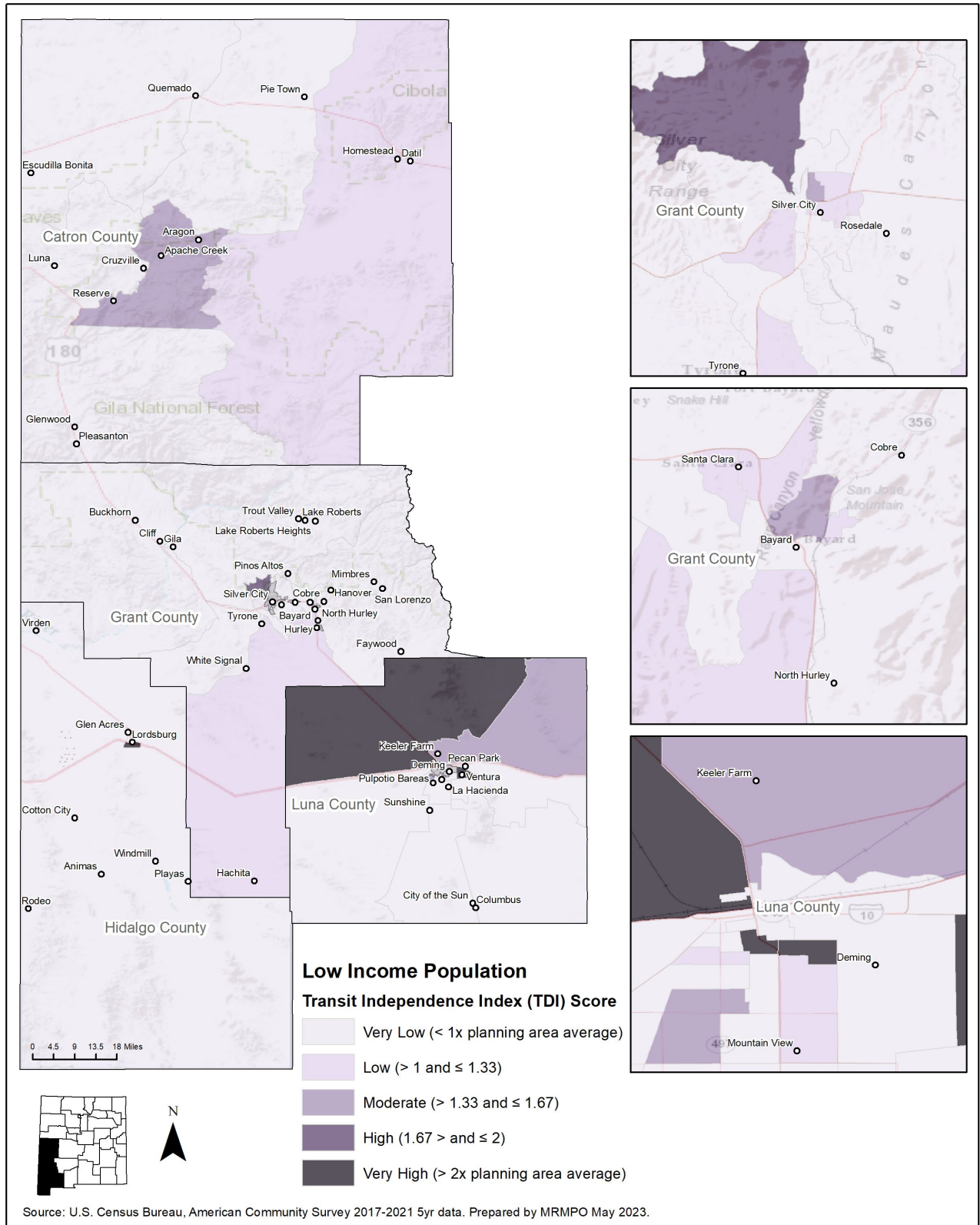
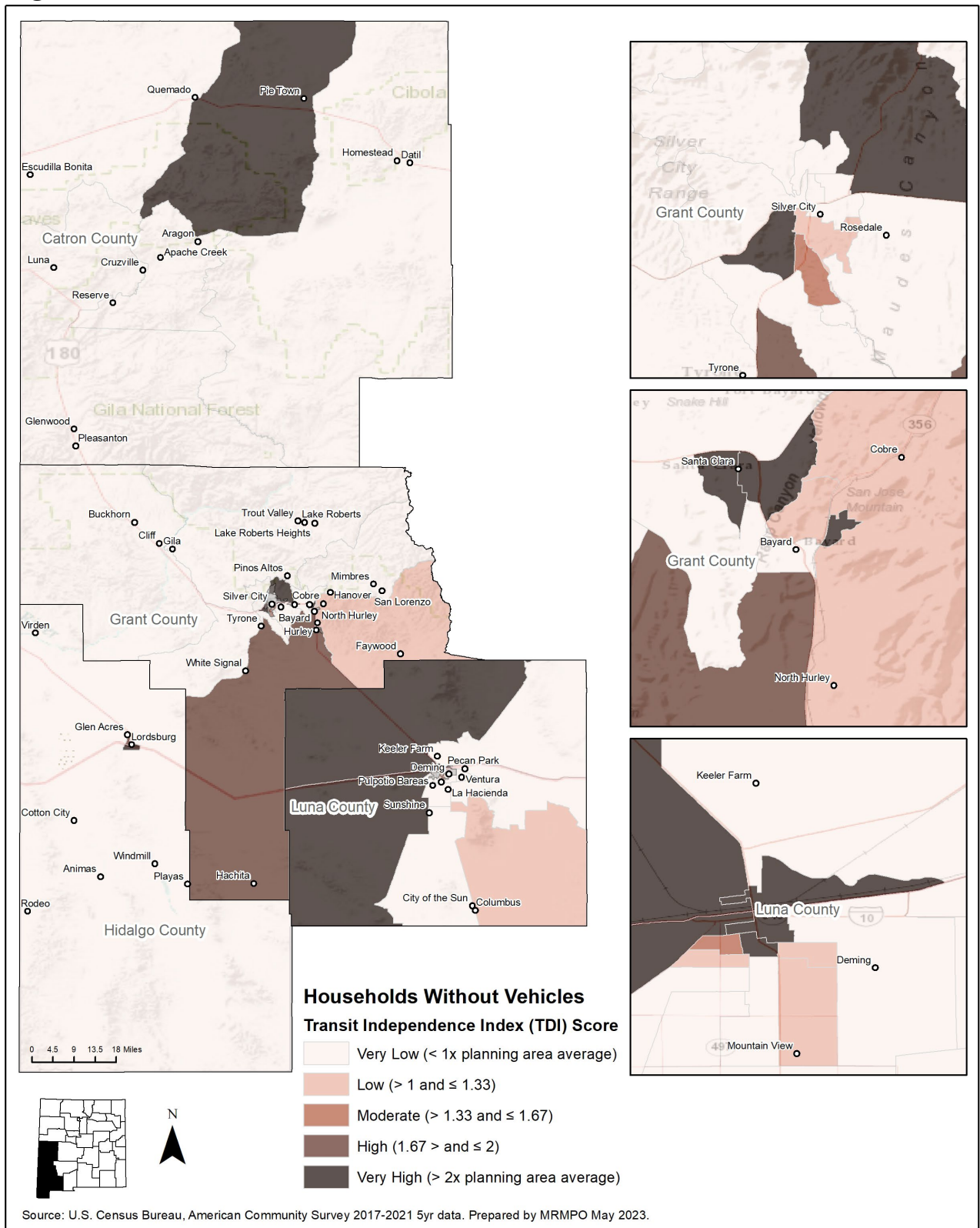


Figure 8: Southwest RTPO Households with No Vehicle Available



Transit Dependence Indices

For each block group in the planning area, the socioeconomic characteristics described above were combined into an aggregate measure of transportation need for the Transit Dependence Index (TDI). The TDI measure is based on the prevalence of the vulnerable populations in the planning area and accounts for population density.

The TDI follows a “very low” to “very high” classification scale. Shown in Table 3, the score of “very low” to “very high” is based on the relative concentration of these populations in relationship to the average of the RTPO. A block group classified as “very low” can still have a significant number of potentially transit dependent persons; “very low” only means below the planning area average. At the other end of the spectrum, “very high” means greater than twice the planning area average.

Table 3: Potential Transit Dependence Scoring

Vulnerable Persons/Households (# or %)	Score
≤ the planning area average	1 (Very Low)
> Average and ≤ 1.33 times average	2 (Low)
> 1.33 times average and ≤ 1.67 times average	3 (Moderate)
> 1.67 times average and ≤ 2 times average	4 (High)
> 2 times the planning area average	5 (Very High)

Figure 9 displays the overall TDI ranking for the RTPO. Figure 10 shows the highest scoring or most influential variable for each block, regardless of a block group’s average TDI score. This gives some indication of what may be driving transit dependence in particular areas. The block groups that have a TDI classification of very high or high include a northern portion of Catron County, much of the northern portion of Luna County, and portions of Grant County near Silver City, Bayard, and west of Deming. Using this analysis, the block groups with the most transit need are found near Quemado, Deming and Lordsburg.

Figure 9: Southwest RTPO Average Transit Dependent Population

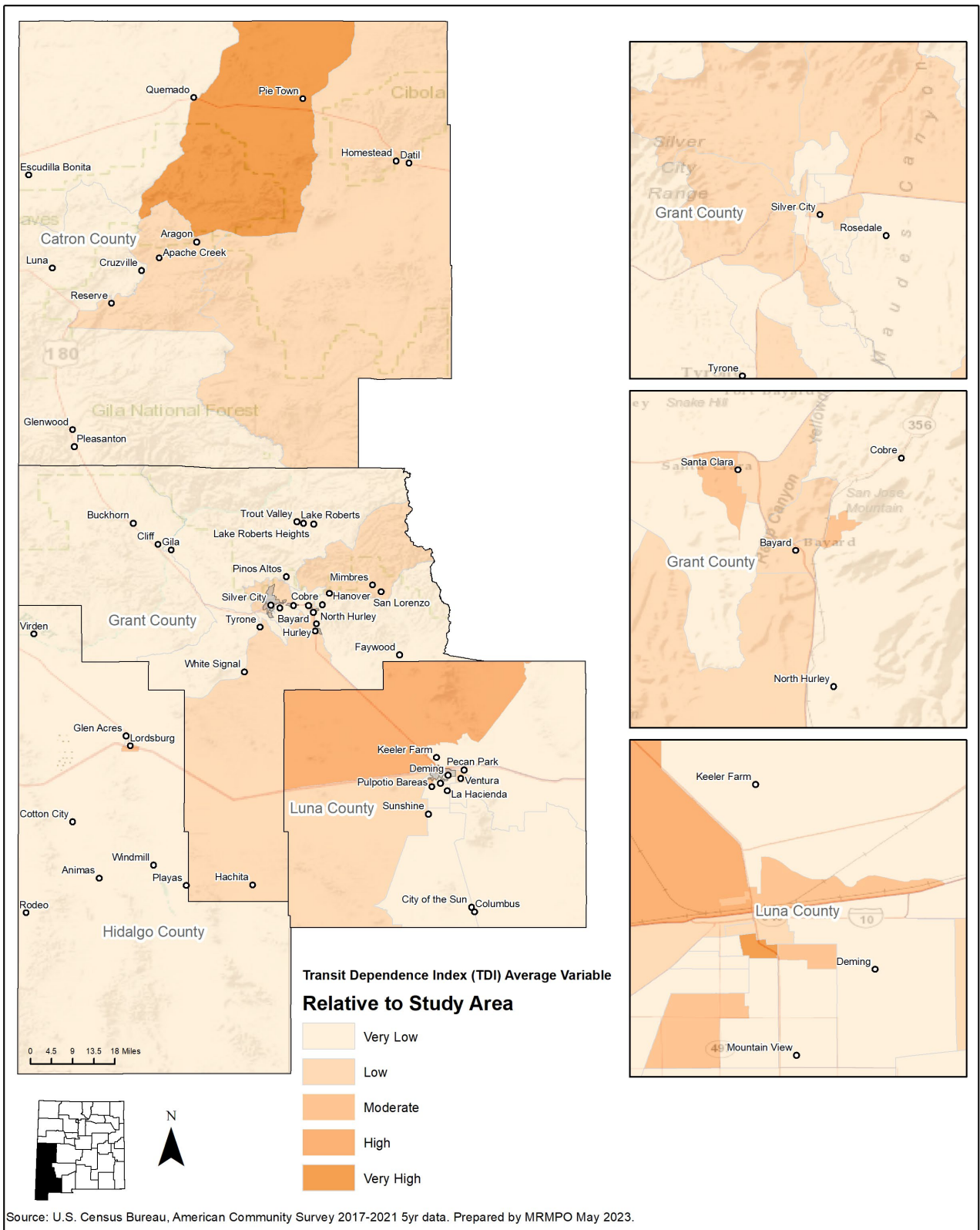
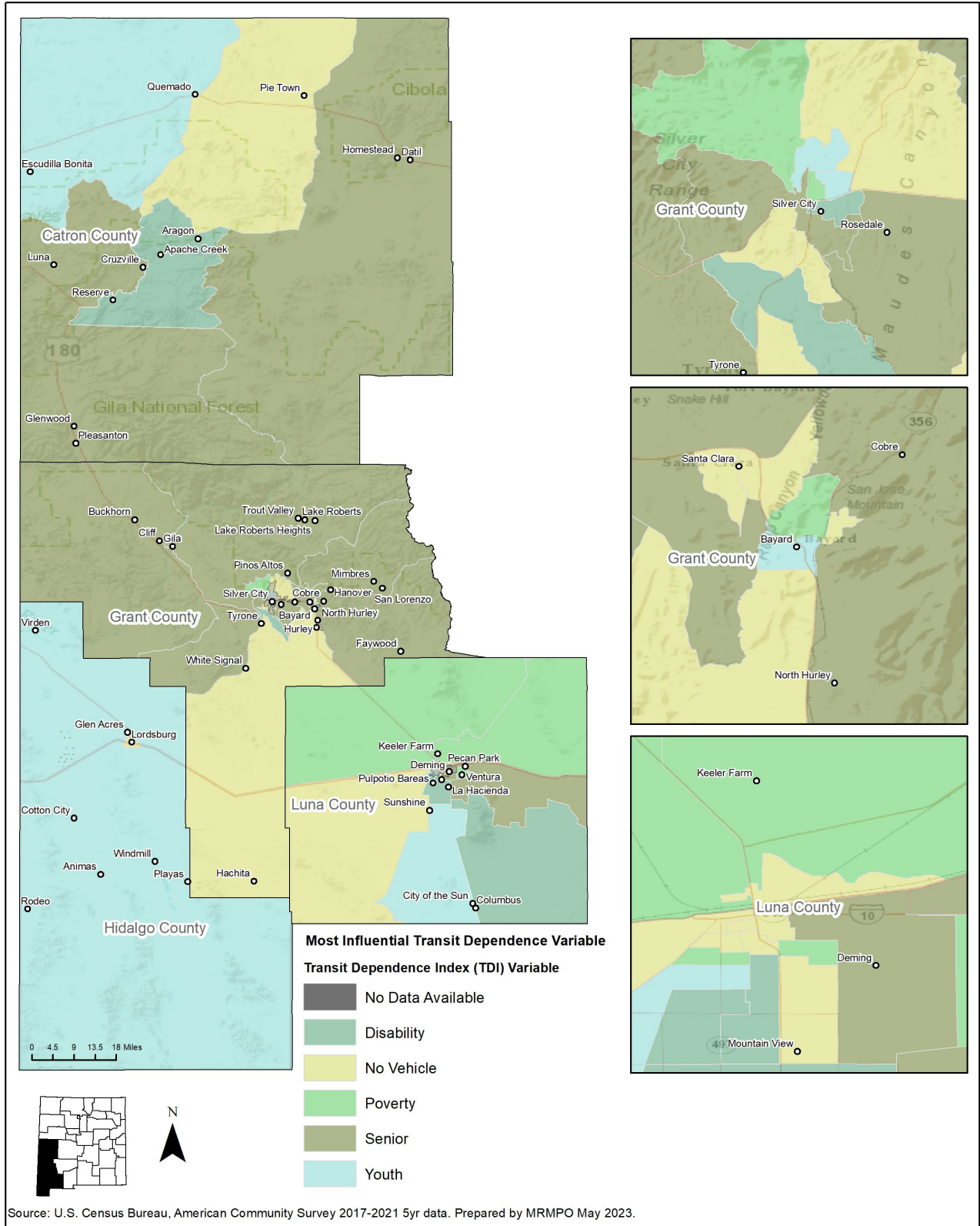


Figure 10: Southwest RTPO Most Influential Transit Dependence Variable



Needs Assessment

While an analysis of demographic data is important for understanding overall mobility needs, it is vital to gain the insight of local stakeholders who are acutely aware of the transportation challenges faced by residents. Participants from the initial planning process provided input on specific unmet needs in the region. Information on needs was also gleaned from the Southwest RTPO Long Range Plan and the New Mexico 2040 Statewide Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan.

The Southwest RTPO Long Range Plan included the following comments on transit related needs:

- Lack of reliably scheduled and accessible public transportation
- Lack of access to metro areas
- Mass transit between communities
- Connectivity (within communities and between towns)
- Route expansion of existing transit system
- Public transportation for senior citizens and other age groups
- Readily accessible public transportation between Silver City and Las Cruces and El Paso, Albuquerque, and Tucson
- No public transportation in the evening
- Lack of public transportation in rural areas
- No public transportation providers for medical services
- Affordable public transportation
- Availability of transportation services
- Transportation to larger cities by train or bus
- More education and awareness of the benefits of public transportation
- Affordable, safe, and reliable transportation to larger cities
- Increased need for shuttle services
- Affordable public transit service to Tucson, El Paso, Las Cruces, and Deming
- Current services are difficult for transporting the elderly and young due to the set route schedule
- Public Transit in the Southwest RTPO does not extend to Catron County

The New Mexico 2045 Statewide Long-Range Multimodal Transportation Plan (adopted 2021) included the following transit related goals and needs:

- Expand transportation choice through multimodal investments and complete streets design.
- Improve mobility and accessibility in strategic corridors.
- Provide technical assistance for transit agencies planning and funding-pursuits that will lead to the electrification of assets.
- Promote and support the expansion of vanpooling services to close transit service gaps, improve mobility and reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT).

In sum, the needs assessment found that Silver City and Deming have the highest concentration of special needs transit populations; they also receive the majority of the transit service. However, there is need for expanded service hours and times to include additional service at night and on weekends. There is also need to provide more service to rural areas of the RTPO, and for expanded service between communities and between smaller towns and larger cities. The overall transit need across the RTPO is increasing because special needs transit population groups are growing faster than the population.

Strategies and Recommendations

Equally important to identifying the needs and gaps in existing transportation services is developing corresponding strategies for improvement. Local stakeholders generated a variety of strategies through the previous coordinated transportation planning process. These strategies were reassessed and updated accordingly.

The following strategies and recommendations are broad in scope. This is intended to allow agency flexibility for funding and provider creativity in suggesting programs and services:

- Prioritize transit service to areas of concentrated special needs transit populations
- Provide circulator service in urban cities
- Fill transportation service gaps such as:
 - Evening and weekend service
 - Intercommunity and intercity service; i.e. service linking communities such as Columbus and Lordsburg to larger communities
 - Service for rural areas i.e. service linking communities such as Animas, Playas and Rodeo to larger communities
- Introduce intra- and interstate services to between the planning area and larger cities: i.e. Las Cruces, Albuquerque, Tucson, Arizona and El Paso, Texas
- Provide connections to existing commercial transportation service providers' intra- and interstate routes
- Assess and respond to unserved and underserved special transit needs
- Explore regional transit solutions for dispatch and maintenance facilities, and operations and administration processes; i.e. provide customers with one number to call for requests for various transportation services, information on services, and trip planning
- Work on regional transit solutions such as car and van pools
- Seek and utilize opportunities to expand, combine or leverage funding sources to increase or improve service
- Expand or enhance transportation services to meet the growth rate of special needs populations in the planning area
- Provide opportunities to add or enhance public transportation services beyond the minimum requirements of the ADA