

Northeast RTPO Coordinated Public Transit— Human Services Transportation Plan

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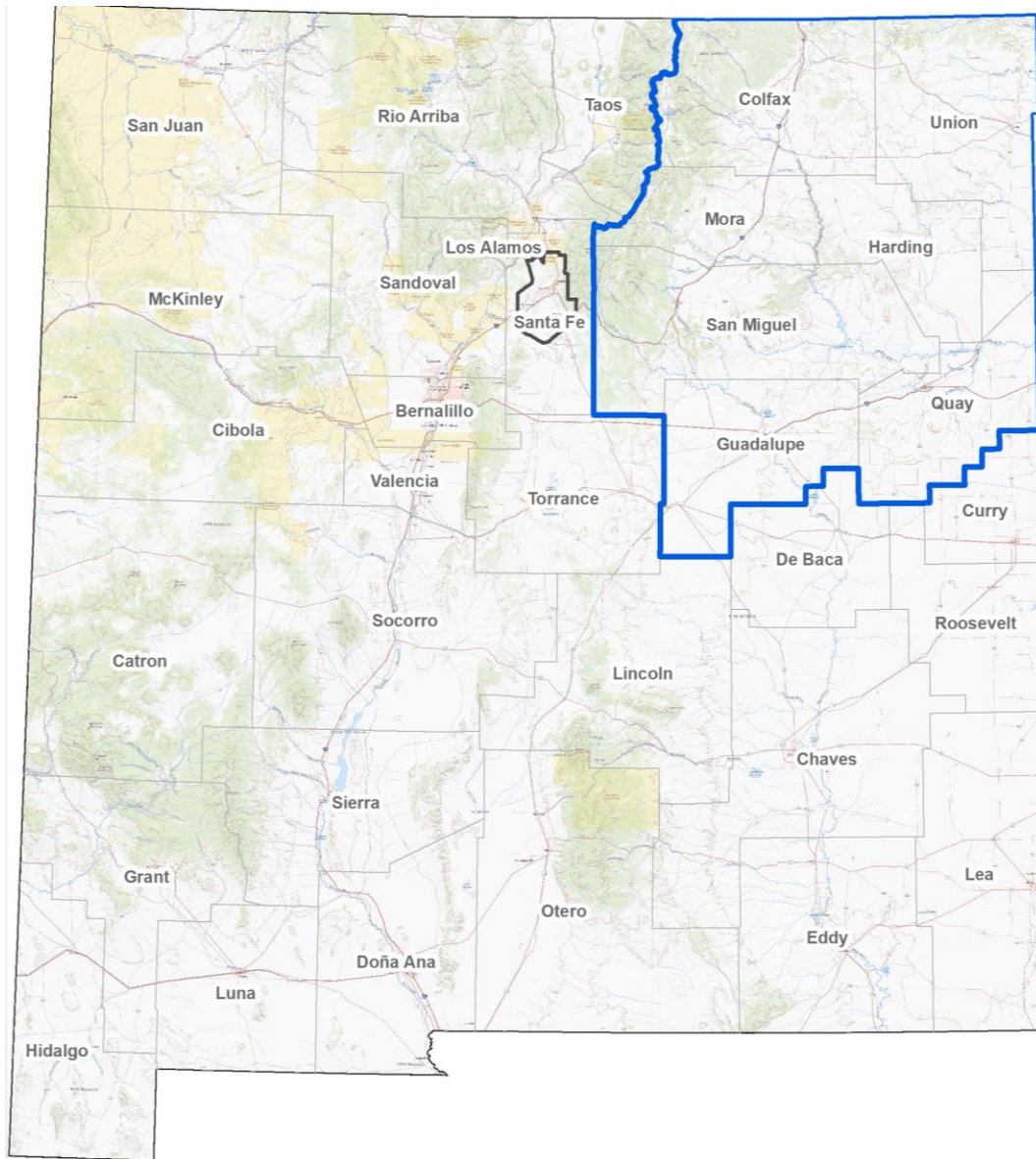


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Introduction

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 (MAP-21) Act authorized funding for federal surface transportation programs beginning with ALL FY16 funding. The FAST Act legislation continued the coordinated transportation planning requirements established in previous laws. Specifically, MAP-21 federal legislation 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 5311, Formula Grants For Other than Urbanized Areas, provides capital, planning, administration, and operating assistance to states to support public transportation in rural areas (population less than 50,000), where many residents often rely on public transit to reach their destinations. Section 5310, Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities, is intended to enhance 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.

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 Northeast RTPO, and the Eastern Plains Council of Governments, 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 Northeast RTPO and the Eastern Plains of Council of Governments. 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 FTA Section 5310 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.
- Development of Strategies - address the identified needs in addition to providing opportunities to increase efficiency within the transportation network.
- Development of 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.

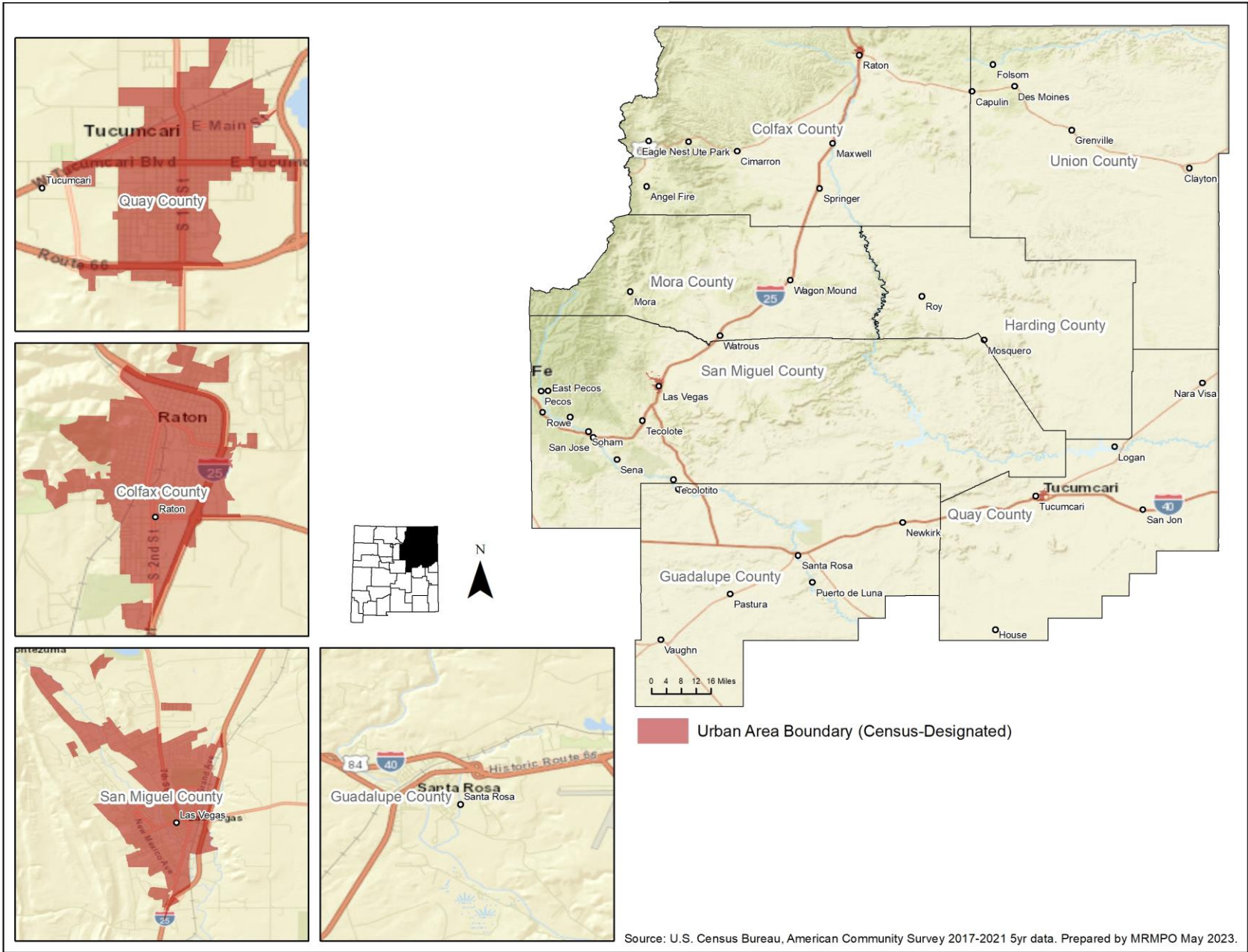
Planning Context

The following section provides an overview of the demographic composition of the Northeast Regional Transportation Planning Organization. As displayed in Figure 1, this RTPO includes Colfax, Guadalupe, Harding, Mora, Quay, San Miguel, and Union Counties. The City of Las Vegas in San Miguel County, the City of Raton in Colfax County, the City of Santa Rosa in Guadalupe County, and the City of Tucumcari in Quay County are the only urbanized areas in the RTPO planning area. Table 1 provides a summary of existing transit providers serving the RTPO.

Table 1: Service Providers

Name	Area of Service	Service Type(s)	Funding Program(s)
NMDOT Park and Ride	City of Santa Fe, City of Las Vegas, and San Miguel County	Intercity Bus	§5311(f) and state funding
North Central Regional Transit District	Mora County and the City of Las Vegas	Fixed Route	§5307, §5310, §5311, §5311(f), §5339
Meadow City Express	City of Las Vegas and the immediate outlying areas.	Demand Response	§5311
Golden Spread Frontier Coalition	Town of Clayton, and Colfax, Harding, Santa Fe, Bernalillo, Taos, Mora, San Miguel and Quay counties.	Demand Response	§5310, §5311

Figure 1: Northeast RTPO Regional Geography



Public Transit Providers

Golden Spread Frontier Coalition

The Golden Spread Rural/Frontier Coalition provides demand response service in Clayton and around Union County, and will often enter the neighboring counties of Colfax, Harding, Bernalillo, Santa Fe, Taos, Mora, San Miguel and Quay. Transportation service operates from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekdays. Reservations are required 30 minutes in advance for local trips and 72 hours in advance for intercity trips. Fares for local trips are \$4.00 one-way, with roundtrip fares of \$5.00. More information can be found at <https://www.goldenspreadcoalition.com/contact>.

Meadow City Express

Meadow City Express provides curb to curb transportation service within the city of Las Vegas and the immediate outlying areas. Passengers may call the office to schedule a ride to pick them up and take them to and from their destination. All vehicles are fully accessible. Service operates from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. MCE is closed daily from 12:00pm to 1:00pm and on weekends. Fares are \$1.00 each way, with multi-ride passes available. Rides must be scheduled at least a day in advance, more information can be found at <https://www.lasvegasnm.gov/meadowcity-express>.

NMDOT Park & Ride

The New Mexico Department of Transportation operates a general public park and ride bus service, NMDOT Park & Ride, consisting of 11 routes throughout the state. Nine of these routes serve the Northern Pueblos RTPO offering service to Española, Las Vegas, Los Alamos, Pojoaque, and Santa Fe, including three shuttles that connect New Mexico Rail Runner Express Stations to major destinations in Santa Fe. Fares for the services range from \$1.00 to \$6.00 depending on the route. Discounted monthly passes are available. Service begins at 3:55 a.m. to 9:35 p.m. More information on NMDOT Park & Ride services may be found at: www.nmparkandride.com.

North Central Regional Transit District

The North Central Regional Transit District provides fixed route and demand response service Monday through Sunday to a service area that encompasses over 10,000 square miles of north central New Mexico including the counties of Taos, Los Alamos, Rio Arriba, and Santa Fe; the Cities of Santa Fe, Española, and the Towns and Villages of Taos, Questa, Peñasco, Edgewood, Cerrillos, Madrid, El Rito, Ojo Caliente, Chama, Chimayo, La Cienega; as well as the Pueblos of Picuris, Pojoaque, Ohkay Owingeh, Nambé, San Ildefonso, Santa Clara, Tesuque, Taos, and the Jicarilla Apache Nation. Fixed route service is fare-free and demand response service is \$1.00 per one-way trip. ADA-certified riders ride free. The RTD provides contracted fixed route commuter service between the Village of Mora and the City of Las Vegas throughout the year. The company's signature "RTD Blue Buses" provide additional transit connections to New Mexico Rail Runner Express, Santa Fe Trails, NMDOT

Park & Ride, Los Alamos Atomic City Transit, City of Farmington Red Apple Transit, and Red River Miner's Transit. All of its buses are equipped with bike racks and are ADA accessible. More information on the NCRTD service may be found at: www.ncrtd.org.

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 one index based on the density of transit dependent persons, which includes all 6 demographics listed above.

The analysis draws on recent data from American Community Survey five-year estimates (2020). For each potentially transit dependent population, block groups and census tracts are classified relative to the planning area as a whole, using a five-tiered scale of very low to very high. 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. Figure 2 shows that populated areas are typically found grouped along the perimeter of the region's major cities. Because they vary in geographic area, block groups do not always effectively communicate how population is concentrated. Union County and western Colfax County fit into this description. This issue is addressed in Figure 3, which displays population density. Figure 3 shows that the population centers of the region are found in incorporated areas such as Cimarron, Las Vegas, Pecos, Raton, Santa Rosa, Springer, and Tucumcari. In addition, Table 2 allows for a comparison of county population within the RTPO to other counties in New Mexico.

Figure 2: Northeast RTPO Population by Block Group

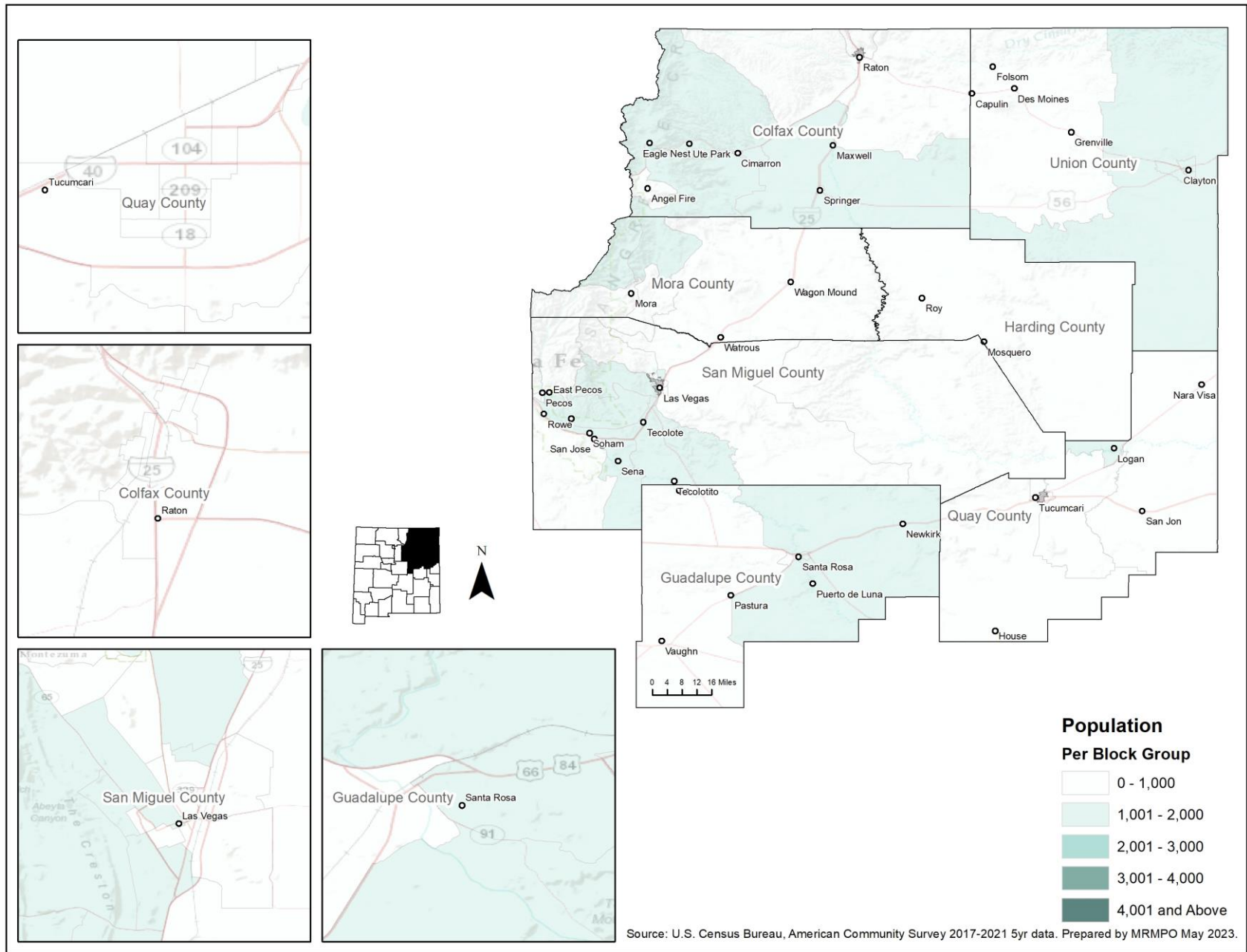


Figure 3: Northeast RTPO Population Density

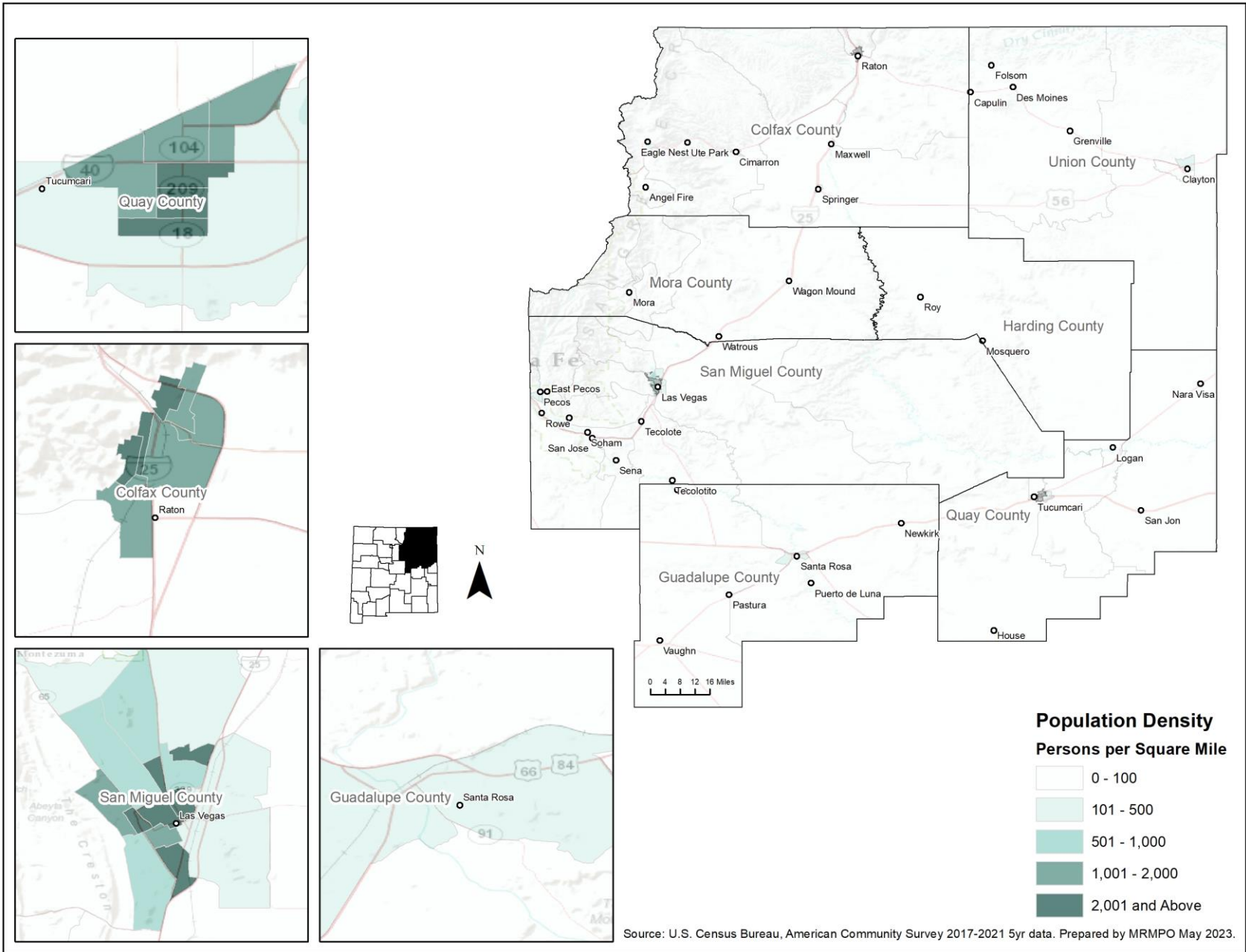


Table 2: Population and Growth by County

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 Northeast RTP

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

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 the youth, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income populations. The greatest numbers of youth are located around the incorporated areas of the region, such as Cimarron, Las Vegas, Pecos, Raton, Santa Rosa, Springer, and Tucumcari; additional areas with high proportions of youths are north of Raton and southern Colfax County, western Quay County, near Logan, western San Miguel County and in Mora County west of Mora. The senior population is dispersed throughout the region; however, large concentrations exist along the I-25 corridor north of Las Vegas into Mora County, western Colfax County, and most of San Miguel County. Quay County also has larger numbers of seniors in the rural areas of the county and in Logan. Individuals with disabilities are largely concentrated throughout northwestern portion of the RTPO, near Clayton in Union County and in the west portion of Quay County. Block groups with the highest classification for low-income individuals are located in incorporated areas of the RTPO planning area, such as Cimarron, Las Vegas, Pecos, Raton, Santa Rosa, Springer, and Tucumcari.

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 distribution of households without vehicles in the Northeast RTPO. Areas with large concentrations of households without vehicles are found near Raton, in Clayton, Santa Rosa, in Mora and western Mora County, and in the east and southwest portion of San Miguel County.

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

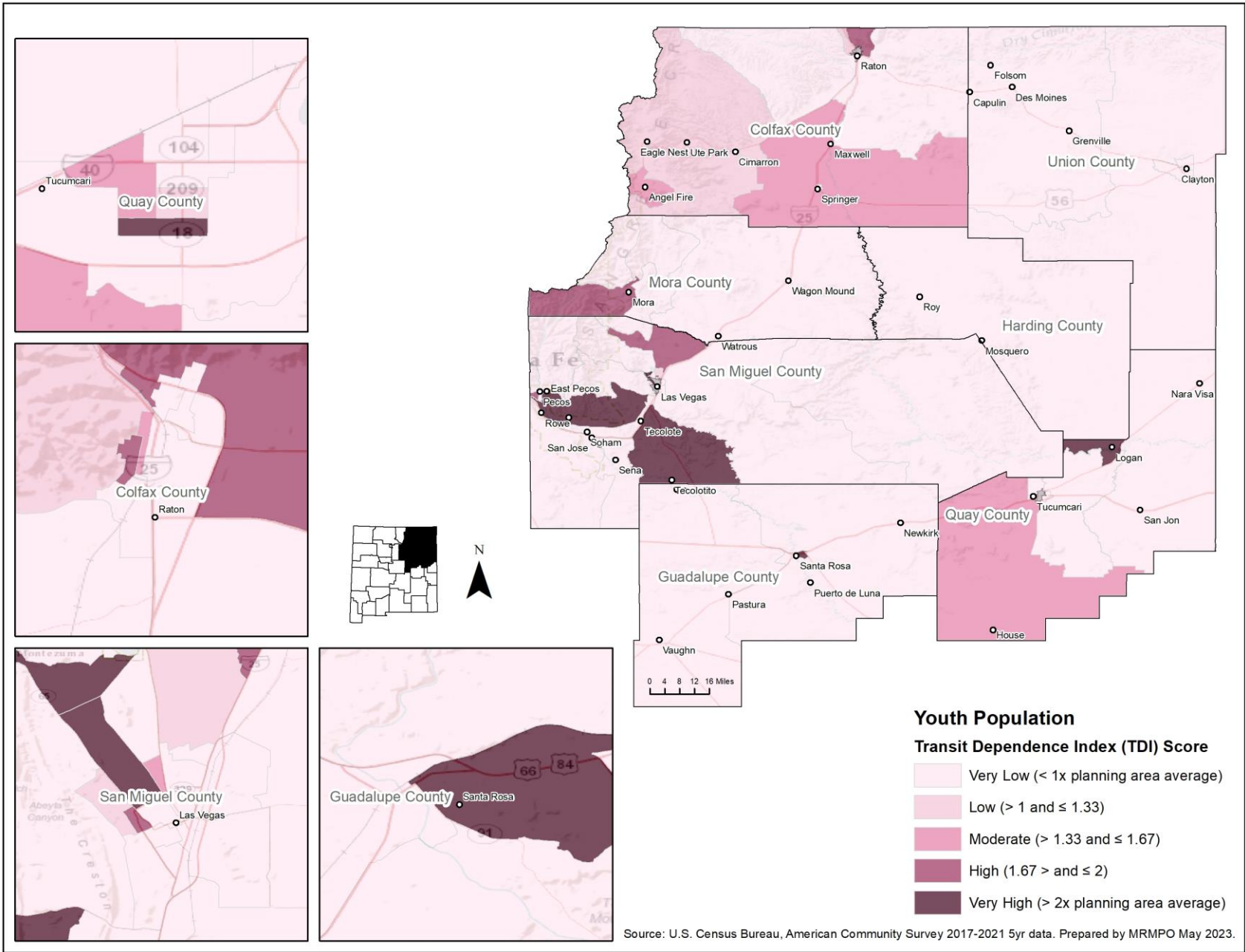


Figure 5: Northeast RTPO Senior Population (ages 65+)

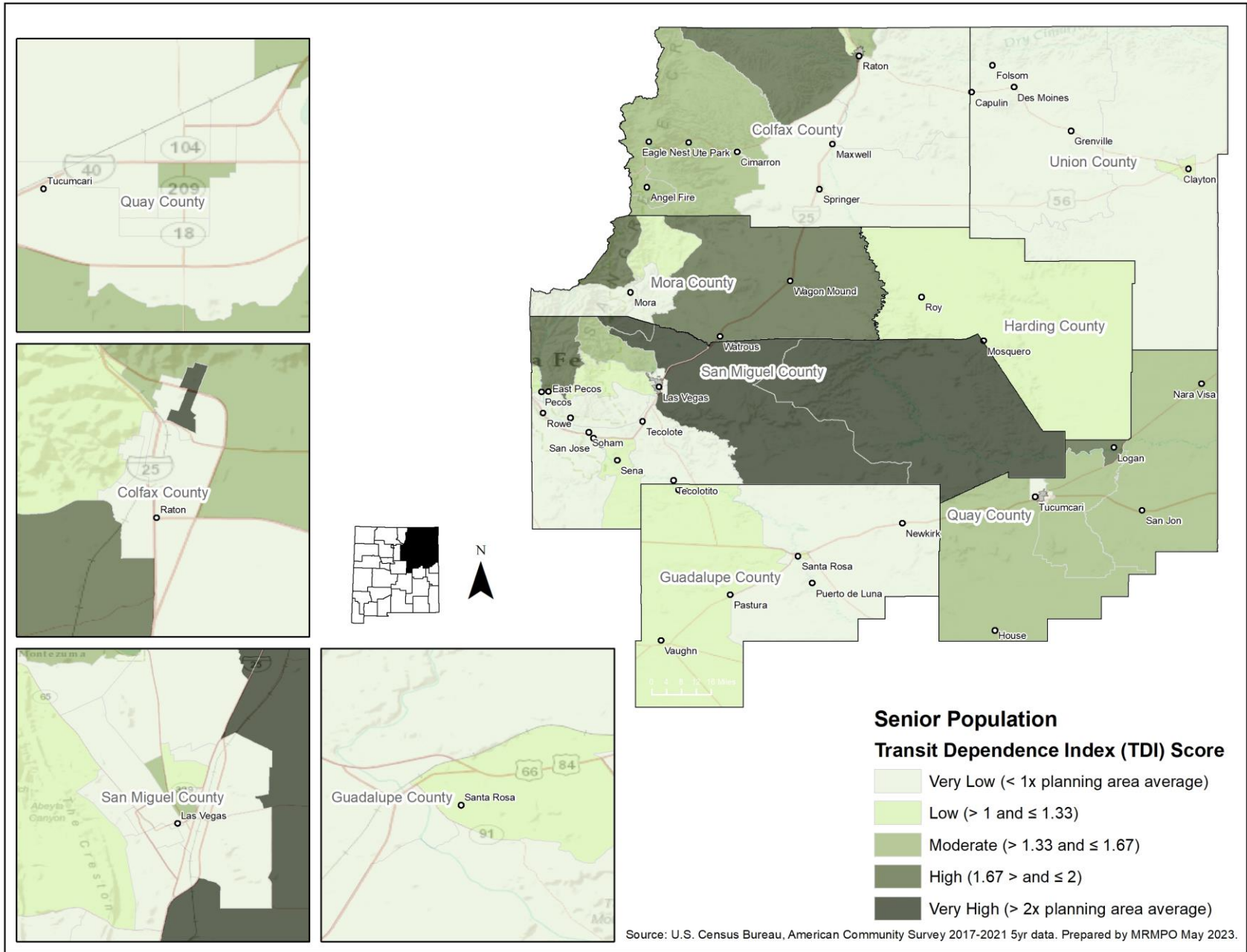


Figure 6: Northeast RTPO Individuals with Disabilities (ages 18+)

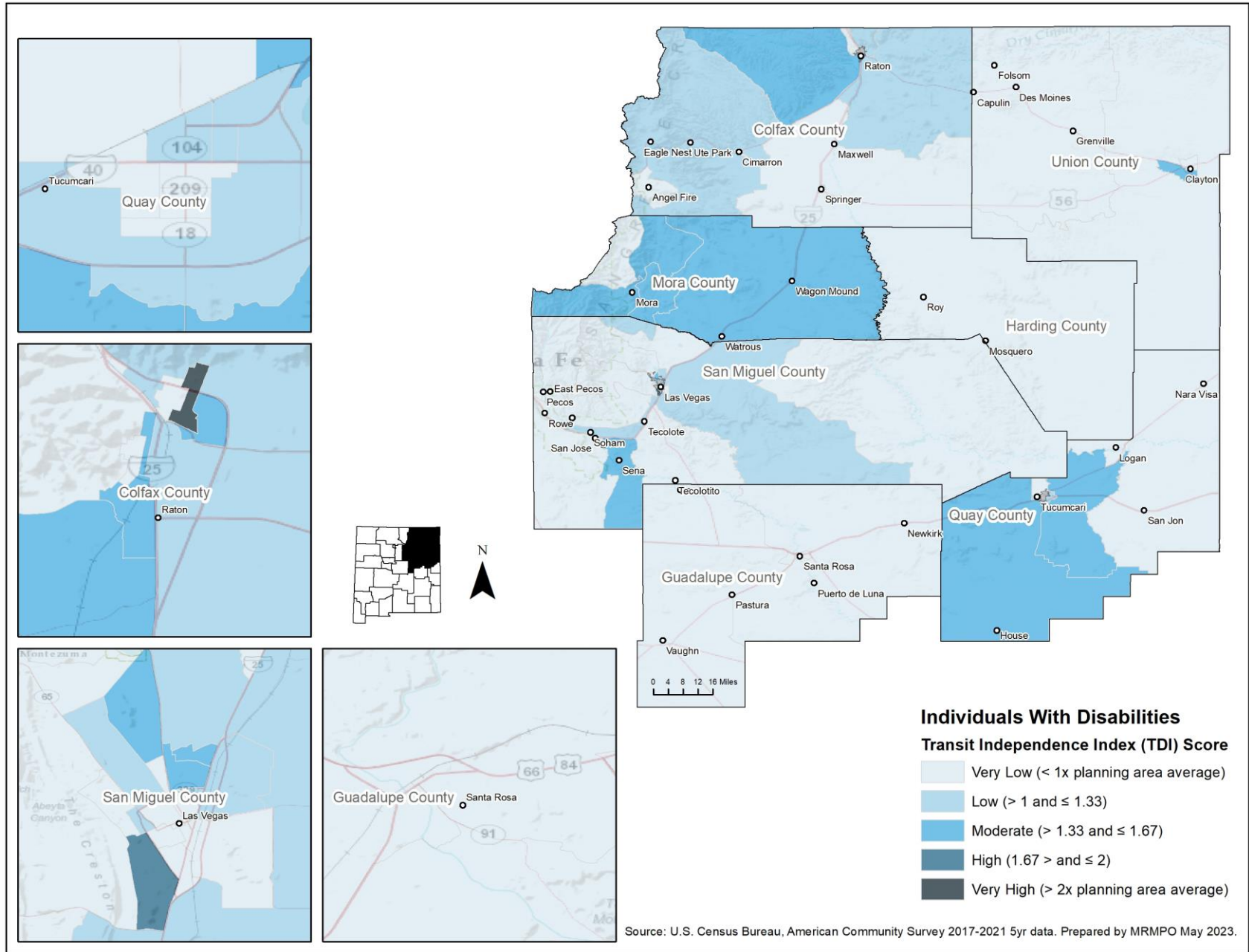


Figure 7: Northeast RTPO Individuals Living Below the Poverty Level (all ages)

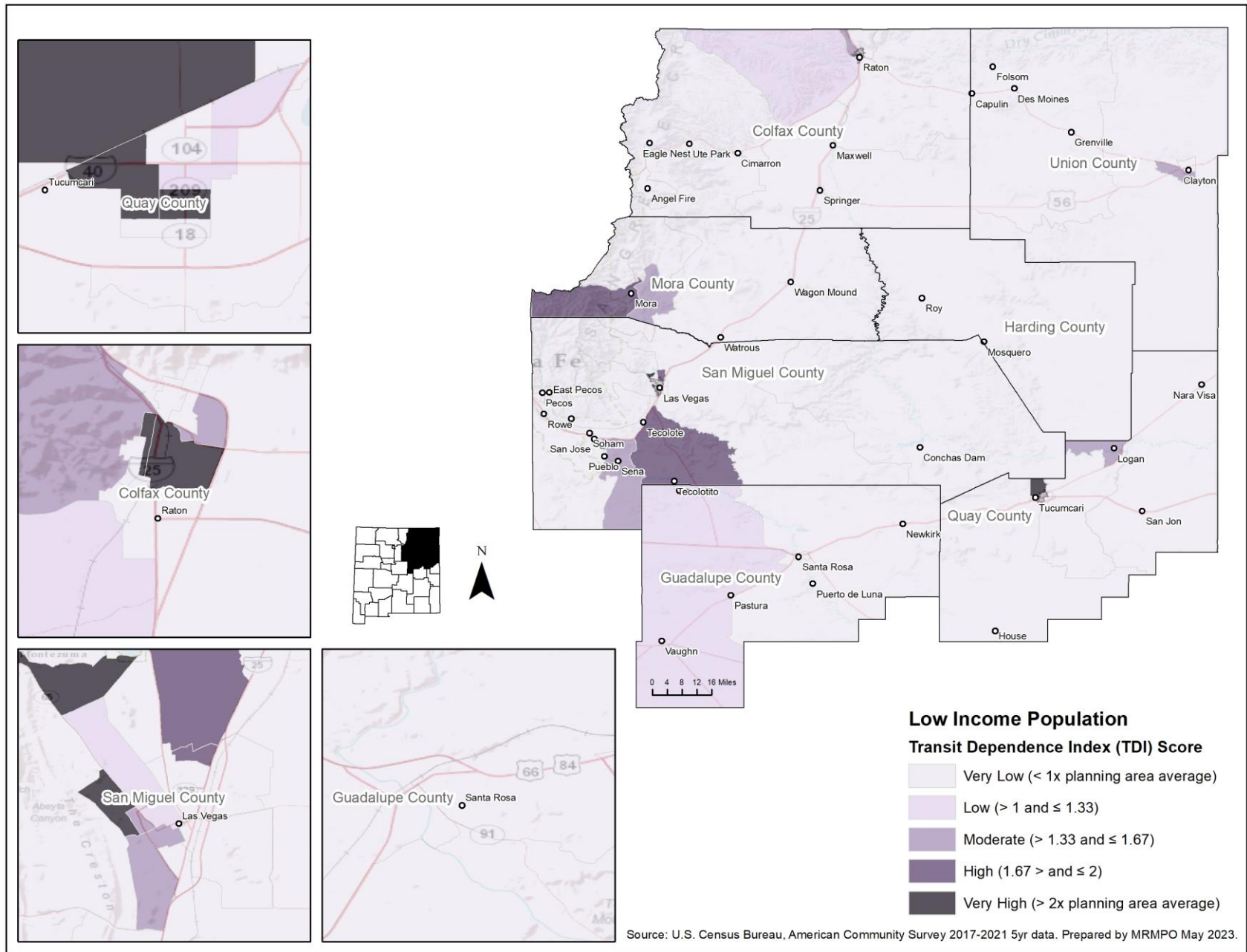
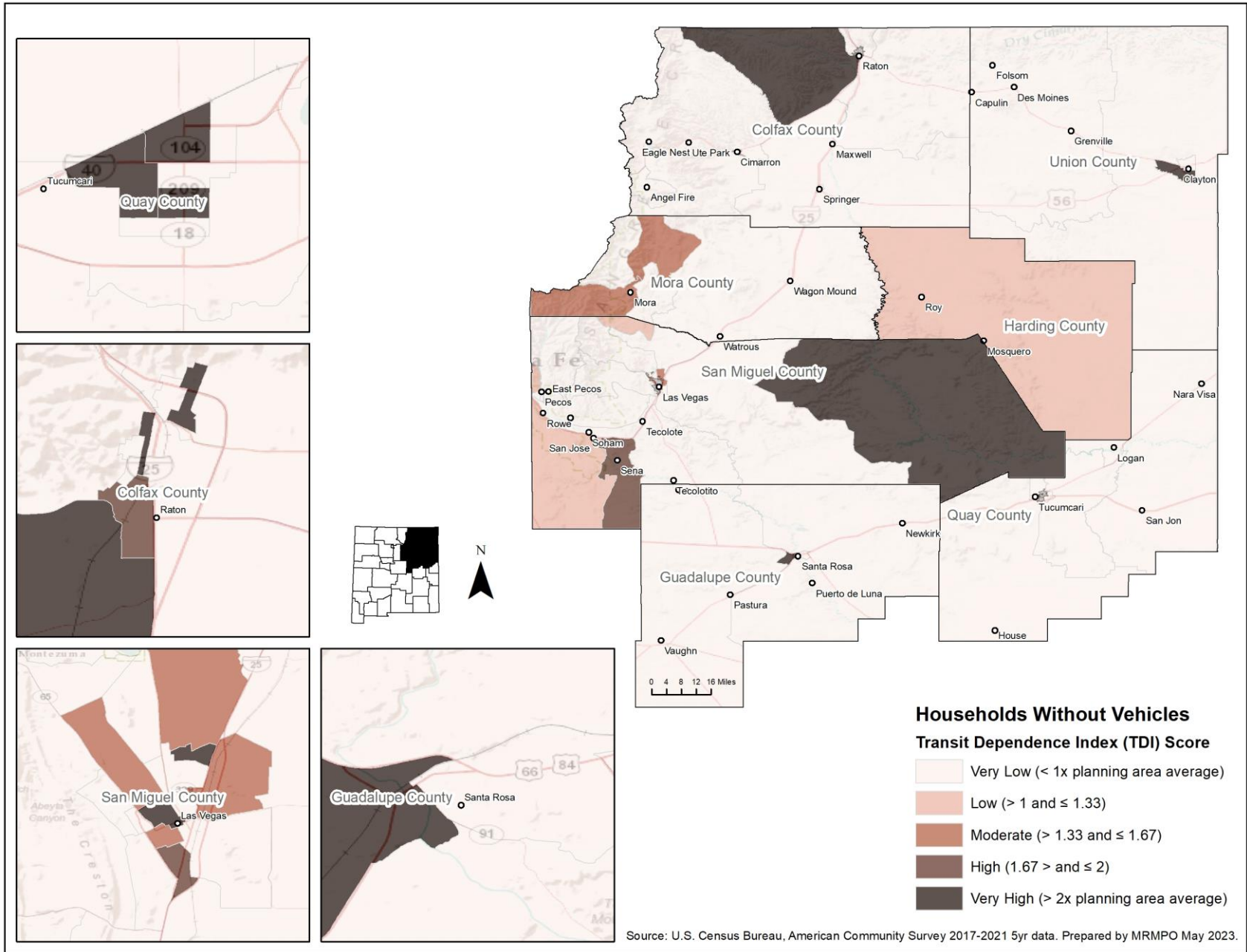


Figure 8: Northeast RTPO Households with No Vehicle Available



Transit Dependence Indices

For each block group in the planning area, the socioeconomic characteristics described above were combined into aggregate measures of transportation need: the Transit Dependence Index (TDI) and the Transit Dependence Index Percentage (TDIP). Both measures are based on the prevalence of the vulnerable populations in the planning area. However, the TDI accounts for population density and the TDIP does not. By removing the persons per square mile factor, the TDIP measures degree rather than amount of vulnerability.

As shown in Table 3 below, the score of “very low” to “very high” is based on the relative concentration of these populations in relationship to the average of the planning area. 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 average TDI rankings for the RTPPO. Figure 10 shows the highest scoring or most influential variable for each block, regardless of a block group’s average TDI score. This give some indication of what may be driving transit dependence in particular areas. The block groups that have the highest classification of transit need are in the urbanized areas in the RTPPO planning area. The block groups with high and very high transit needs are in Las Vegas, Santa Rosa and Raton, and also near Tucumcari and Logan, Clayton and Mora.

Figure 9: Northeast RTPO Average Transit Dependent Population

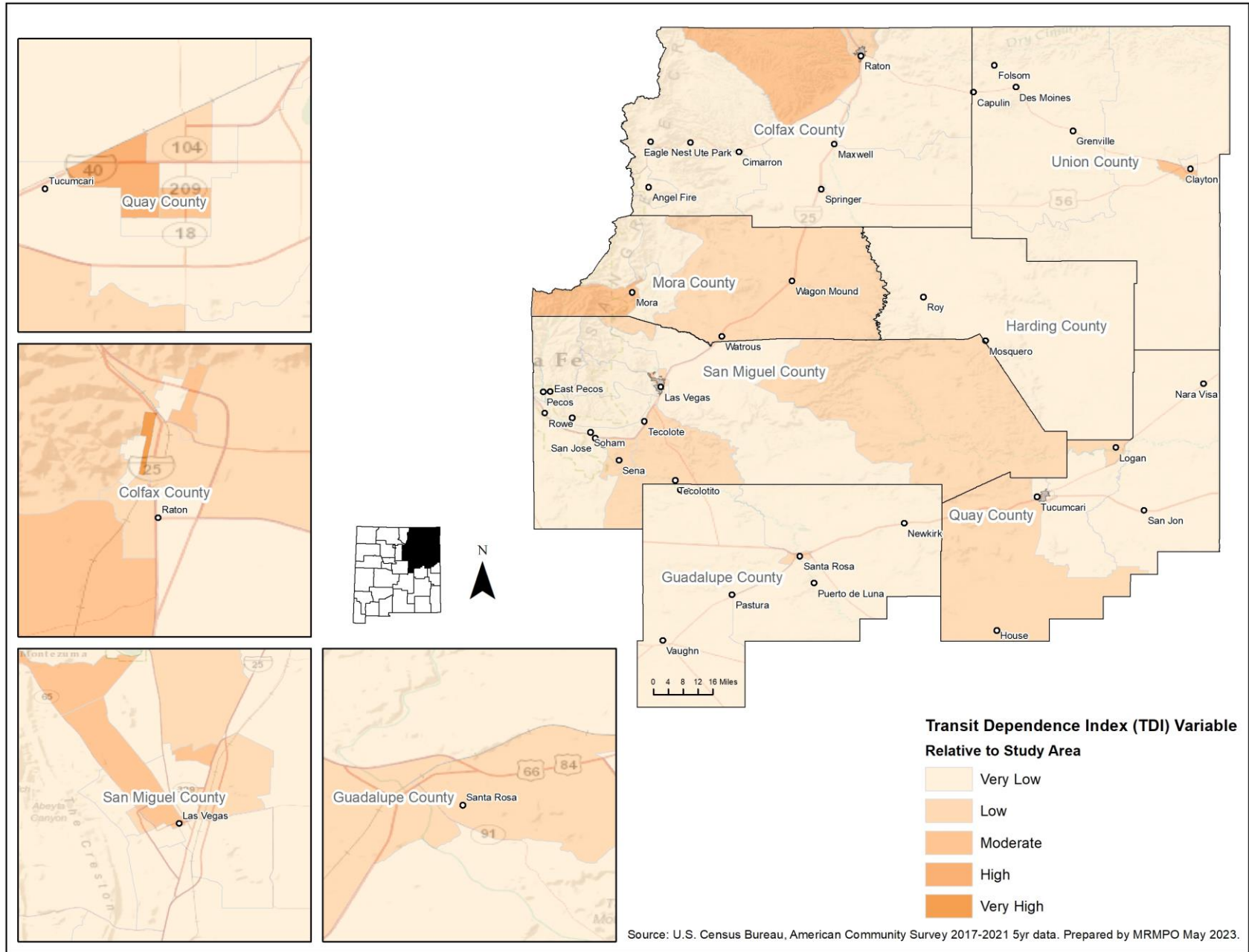
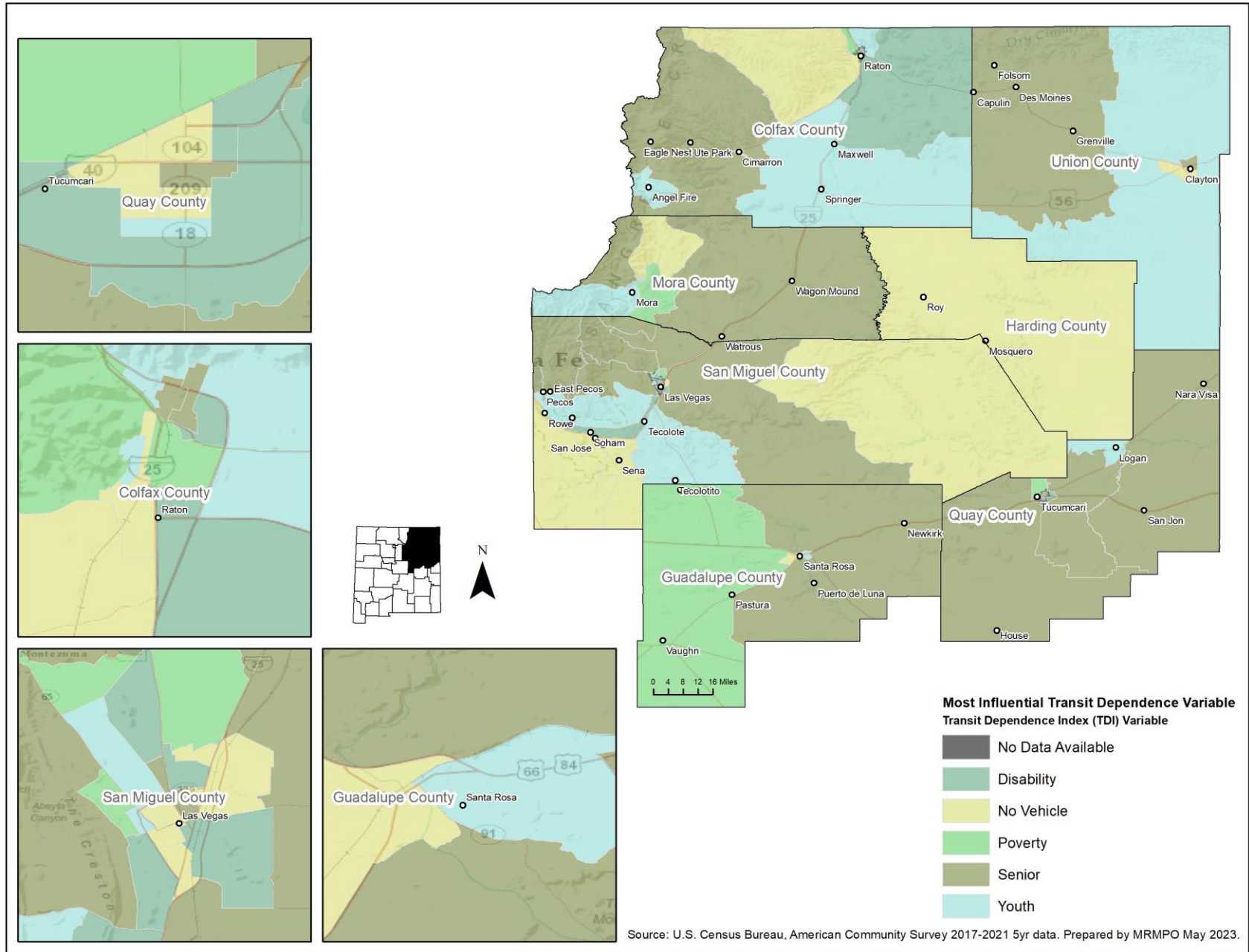


Figure 10: Northeast RTPO Most Transit Influential Transit Dependence Variable



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. This information was gained by focusing on the targeted population groups for the Section 5310 (seniors, individuals with disabilities, people with lower incomes) and specific need characteristics (trip purpose, time, destination, etc.). The vast majority of needs identified could be described as cross-cutting the needs of all three population groups.

In addition to the demographic data presented in the previous section, the Northeast RTPO Long Range Plan, Northeast Regional Transportation Plan, the New Mexico 2040 Plan, and the New Mexico Statewide Public Transportation Plan were reviewed to provide a complete picture of the region's needs, goals, and objectives.

Comments from local stakeholders during the initial planning process included the following:

- Additional service is needed around Eagle's Nest, Angel Fire, Mora County, Harding County, Mosquero, and the Village of Roy. Section 5311 service is beneficial, but there are additional service needs relating to low-income populations

The most recent Northeast RTPO Long Range Plan included the following needs:

- Provide a balanced multi-modal transportation system (air, rail, automobile, transit, bicycle/pedestrian/equestrian) for the state and efficient movement of people, freight and goods between rural and urban regions
- Promote efficient and thorough public involvement in the transportation planning process
- Promote a continuing, cooperative and comprehensive transportation process and reduce institutional barriers between all governmental entities involved in providing transportation to Northeastern New Mexico
- Take advantage of new opportunities in funding and flexibility afforded by the future federal funding and encourage enhanced funding through state legislation
- Promote and communicate a rational methodology for prioritizing transportation projects
- Promote planned integration of the interrelationships of existing and future transportation land use planning systems while incorporating environmental, conservation, and quality of life issues
- Identify and utilize all potential source funds for transportation projects
- Ensure that transportation services meet the needs of diverse segments of the population such as the youth, seniors, and individuals with disabilities

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).

The New Mexico Statewide Public Transportation Plan offers some objectives for NMDOT that will “strengthen the Department’s position for a more effective, integrated public transportation network” (an update to the 2010 plan is currently in process):

- Create and sustain statewide integrated network of public transportation services and intermodal facilities
- Encourage regional and local planning partners to adequately address state public transportation policy in all transportation planning activities and programs throughout the state
- Preserve existing public transportation service levels, facilities, and equipment
- Build partnerships between federal, state, regional, local, tribal, and private sector public transportation entities to improve public transportation planning and coordinated service delivery
- Promote the availability of some form of public transportation service in all areas of New Mexico for use by the general public, including all “human services” groups, with particular attention to small urban and rural areas
- Market and promote the use of public transportation for all residents of the state
- Promote the implementation of state-of-the-art public transportation management and operations to ensure effective use of resources and to improve service delivery

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 with higher concentrations of special needs populations
- Coordinate with municipal, county and other funding agencies to assess and

- respond to needs for intercommunity and intercounty service
- Cooperate with community centers and other entities and agencies to provide service to unserved or underserved populations
 - Focus on serving special needs populations at a rate at least proportional to the growth in their numbers in this planning area
 - Emphasize education on available special needs transit services to eligible population groups
 - Establish transit connections between major centers inside and outside of the RTPO area, i.e. between Tucumcari, Vaughn, and Albuquerque; Raton and Trinidad, Colorado; between Red River, Angel Fire, Eagle Nest and Raton; between Clayton and Amarillo, Texas; and between Tucumcari and Amarillo, Texas
 - Provide route service to unserved or underserved populations in both urban and rural areas, i.e., Mora County, Mora, Harding County, Mosquero, Roy, Clayton, Cimarron, Wagon Mound, and Des Moines
 - Create transportation options for seniors, veterans, and individuals with disabilities in Harding County to have access to grocery stores as well as human services
 - Work on regional transit solutions, such as car and van pools
 - Seek and utilize opportunities to expand, combine or leverage funding sources to establish or improve services, i.e. provide customers with one number to call for requests for various transportation services, information on services, and trip planning
 - Provide opportunities to add or enhance public transportation services beyond the minimum requirements of the ADA
 - Investigate the possibility of creating a transportation management system (TMS) similar to those implemented in other rural regions across the county
 - Make on-call public transportation services more efficient and accessible across the region
 - Develop a Regional Transit District (RTD)
 - Coordinate with appropriate agencies to fill transportation service gaps in evening and weekend service
 - Improve coordination between government agencies and non-profit transit providers. This could take the form of an annual summit and/or networking meetings; a directory of providers NMDOT publishes [the New Mexico Transit Guide](#)); one-click, one-call systems; voucher programs; etc.