

South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO Coordinated Public Transit— Human Services Transportation Plan

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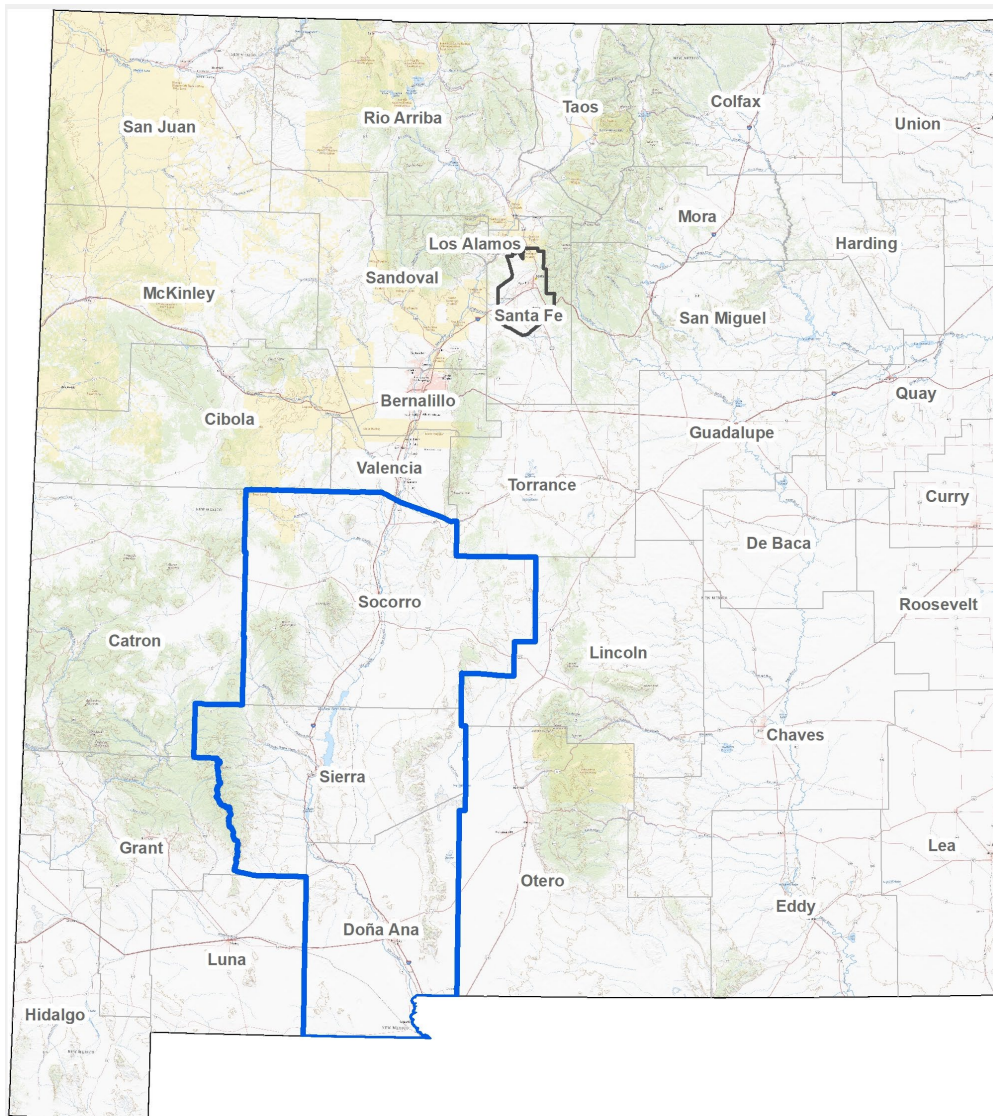
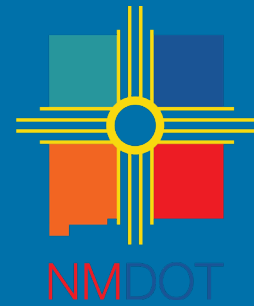


Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Planning Context.....	4
Demographics.....	8
Needs Assessment	20
Strategies and Priorities	21

Tables

Table 1. Service Providers	4
Table 2. Population and Growth by County.....	11
Table 3. Potential Transit Dependence Scoring.....	18

Figures

Figure 1. Regional Geography	6
Figure 2. Population.....	9
Figure 3. Population Density	10
Figure 4. Youth Population.....	13
Figure 5. Senior Population.....	14
Figure 6. Individuals with Disabilities	15
Figure 7. Low Income Population.....	16
Figure 8. Households without Vehicles	17
Figure 9. Transit Dependent Populations	19

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 South Central RTPO, the Mesilla Valley MPO, the El Paso MPO, 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 South Central

RTPO and the Mesilla Valley MPO and the El Paso MPO. 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
- 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

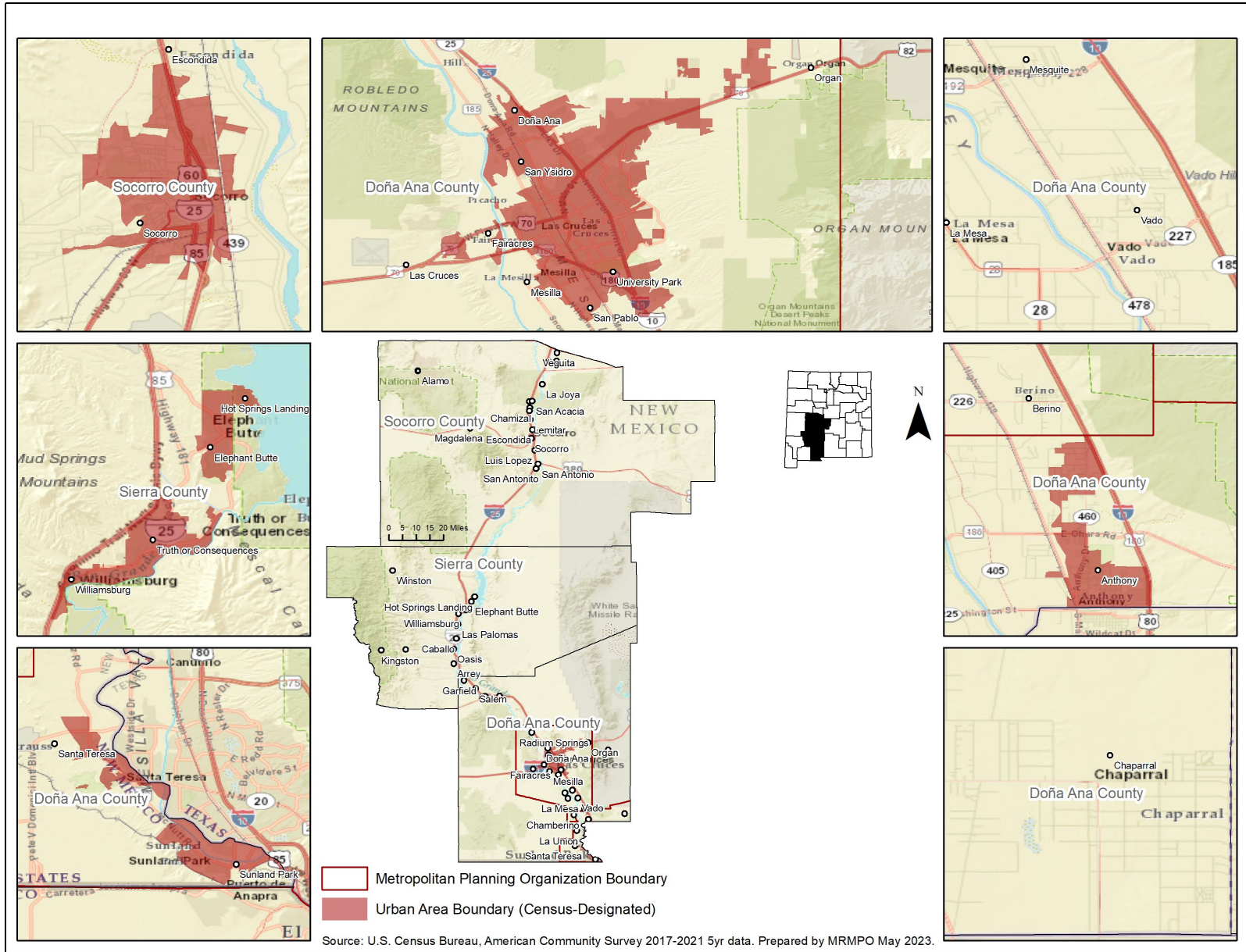
The following section provides an overview of the demographic composition and existing transit services including a description of fixed route providers of the South Central RTPO. As displayed in Figure 1, this RTPO includes Doña Ana, Sierra, and Socorro Counties. The plan also includes the Mesilla Valley MPO and the New Mexico portion of the El Paso MPO. Table 1 provides a summary of existing transit providers serving the RTPO and MPO areas.

Table 1: Service Providers

Transit Name	Area of Service	Service Type(s)	Funding Program(s)
Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society-Las Cruces Village	City of Las Cruces	Program Sponsored	§ 5310
Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society-Socorro	City of Socorro	Program Sponsored	§ 5310
Hatch Area Medical Center (Ben Archer Health Center)	Arrey, Doña Ana, Doña Ana County, Garfield, Hatch, Las Cruces, Rincon, Salem, Sierra County, Truth or Consequences, and Williamsburg	Program Sponsored	§ 5310
La Clinica de la Familia	Las Cruces, Anthony, Doña Ana County	Program Sponsored	§ 5310
NMDOT Park & Ride	Anthony, El Paso, and Las Cruces, White Sands	Intercity Bus	§ 5311(f)
Presbyterian Medical Services	Doña Ana County	Program Sponsored	§ 5310
Progressive Residential Services	Doña Ana County	Program Sponsored	§ 5310

Transit Name	Area of Service	Service Type(s)	Funding Program(s)
RoadRUNNER Transit	DACC, Las Cruces, Town of Mesilla, and NMSU	Fixed Route, Paratransit Demand Response	§ 5307
South Central Regional Transit District	Las Cruces, Alamogordo, White Sands, Anthony, El Paso, Chaparral, Santa Teresa, Sunland Park, Mesilla, Williamsburg, Truth or Consequences, Elephant Butte, Hatch, Doña Ana County, Sierra County, Otero County, El Paso County	Fixed Route, Demand Response	§ 5310, § 5311
Socorro Transportation	Alamo Reservation, Rail Runner Station in Belen, Dialysis Clinic in Los Lunas, Village of Magdalena, and Socorro	Demand Response, Commuter/Fixed Route	§ 5311
Tresco, Inc.	Alamogordo, Carrizozo, Deming, Las Cruces, Lordsburg, Reserve, Silver City, Socorro, Truth or Consequences	Program Sponsored	§ 5310
Veterans Highly Rural Transportation Services Program	Sierra and Socorro Counties	Program Sponsored	

Figure 1: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO Regional Geography



Public Transit Providers

RoadRUNNER Transit

RoadRunner Transit operates eight local bus routes in Las Cruces, and two Aggie Shuttle routes within New Mexico State University (NMSU). Trip planning for RoadRunner Transit is available on Google Maps. Schedule Service operates from 6:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. on weekdays, and from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Saturdays. Two routes have 30minute headways and six routes have 60-minute headways. The NMSU Aggie Shuttle provides frequent service on weekdays only during the regular fall and spring semesters. RoadRUNNER Transit is currently zero fare. Paratransit Service RoadRunner Transit also operates a Dial-A-Ride service, providing origin-to-destination service to senior citizens and persons with disabilities. Rides must be scheduled in advance by calling (575) 541-2777. Before using the Dial-A-Ride, passengers must apply to determine eligibility. Fares are \$2.00 per one-way trip except trips to or from a City Senior Center are free. More information on RoadRUNNER Transit may be found at: <http://www.las-cruces.org/1314/RoadRUNNER-Transit>

Socorro Transportation

The City of Socorro operates a Dial-a-Ride service for the residents of Socorro from 8:45 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. There is also a three-times-a-week dialysis trip to Los Lunas. The fare for Dial-A-Ride service in the City of Socorro is \$0.50, discounted \$.25 for seniors, students, and individuals with disabilities. Socorro Transportation also operates one commuter route to Belen and the New Mexico Rail Runner Express. Fare for the Rail Runner shuttle is \$2.25. Passes available 2 rides for \$3.50 and for 10 Rides for \$17.50. More information on Socorro Transportation may be found at: www.socorronm.gov/city-services/transportation/

South Central Regional Transit District

SCR TD operates 4 routes within the Doña Ana County to include Mesilla, Las Cruces, Anthony, and Hatch. All routes operate Monday through Friday with trips starting early morning, midday and afternoon. The Red Route begins at the Mesilla Valley Intermodal Transit Terminal at 7:00 a.m. making several stops along the way, via Stern Drive, with the final destination at the Anthony Transit Center. The Purple route initiates at the Anthony Transit Center with a destination to the Sunland Park Casino with local service in the Anthony and Sunland Park. The Copper Route begins at the Greyhound bus terminal to the Mesilla Valley Intermodal transit terminal. Making several stops along the trip. The Green Route starts at the Hatch Community Center and ends at the New Mexico State University. The route continues throughout the day making its last trip from New Mexico State University at 5:15 p.m. making final destination at Mesilla Valley Hospital. SCR TD also operates three routes that connect bus service to El Paso, TX. The Turquoise route operates from Anthony to El Paso Northgate Transfer Center via Highway 404 to Chaparral. This route operates from Monday through Friday with trips in the morning, midday, and afternoon. The Silver route operates from Sunland Park City Hall to West El Paso via Sunland Park Drive making the final stop at West El Paso Transfer Station. This

route operates from Monday through Saturday with trips in the morning, midday, and afternoon. The Yellow route operates from Downtown El Paso to Sunland Park City Hall via Paisano Drive. This route operates from Monday through Saturday starting from downtown El Paso at 5:45 a.m. and making trips morning, midday, and afternoon, ending the last run at 10:20 p.m. The fares include adult fares for \$1.00 one-way, free transfers between SCRTD routes, and discount fares of \$.50 for seniors, students, and people with disabilities. More information on the SCRTD's service may be found at: <https://scrtcd.org/>.

New Mexico Department of Transportation Park & Ride

The New Mexico DOT operates a general public park and ride bus service, which operates ten routes throughout the state. The NMDOT Park & Ride Gold and Silver Routes serves the South Central RTPO offering service to El Paso, Anthony, Las Cruces, and White Sands weekdays. Fares are \$3.00 one-way and discounted monthly passes are available. Service in the NMDOT Park & Ride's Southern Region spans from approximately 5:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. More information on the NMDOT Park & Ride service may be found at: http://dot.state.nm.us/content/nmdot/en/Park_and_Ride.html

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. 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. Both maps show that much of the planning area is very rural. The RTPO's population is primarily within the urbanized areas of Las Cruces and El Paso. In addition, Table 2 allows for a comparison of county population within the RTPO to other counties in New Mexico.

Figure 2: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO Population by Block Group

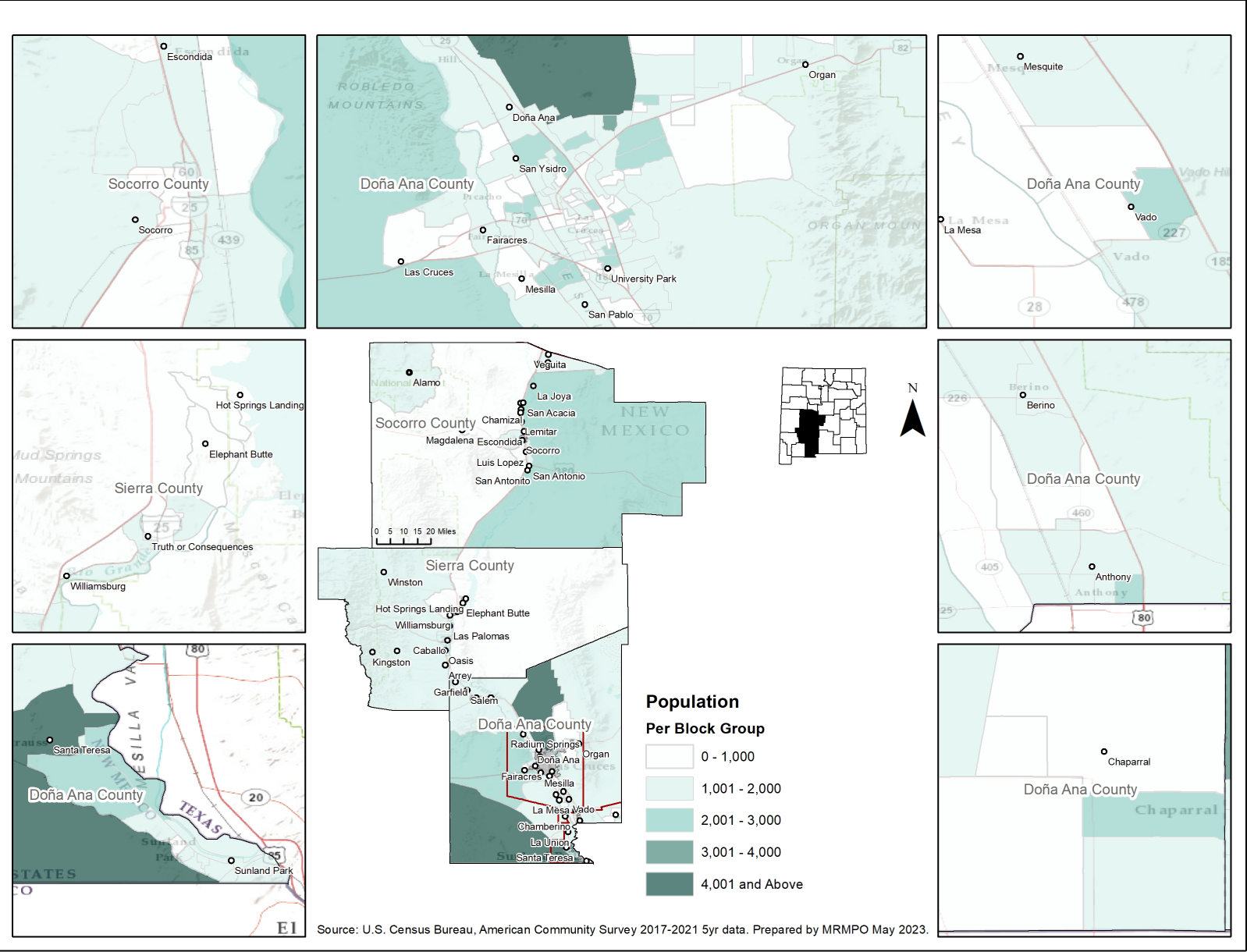


Figure 3: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO Population Density

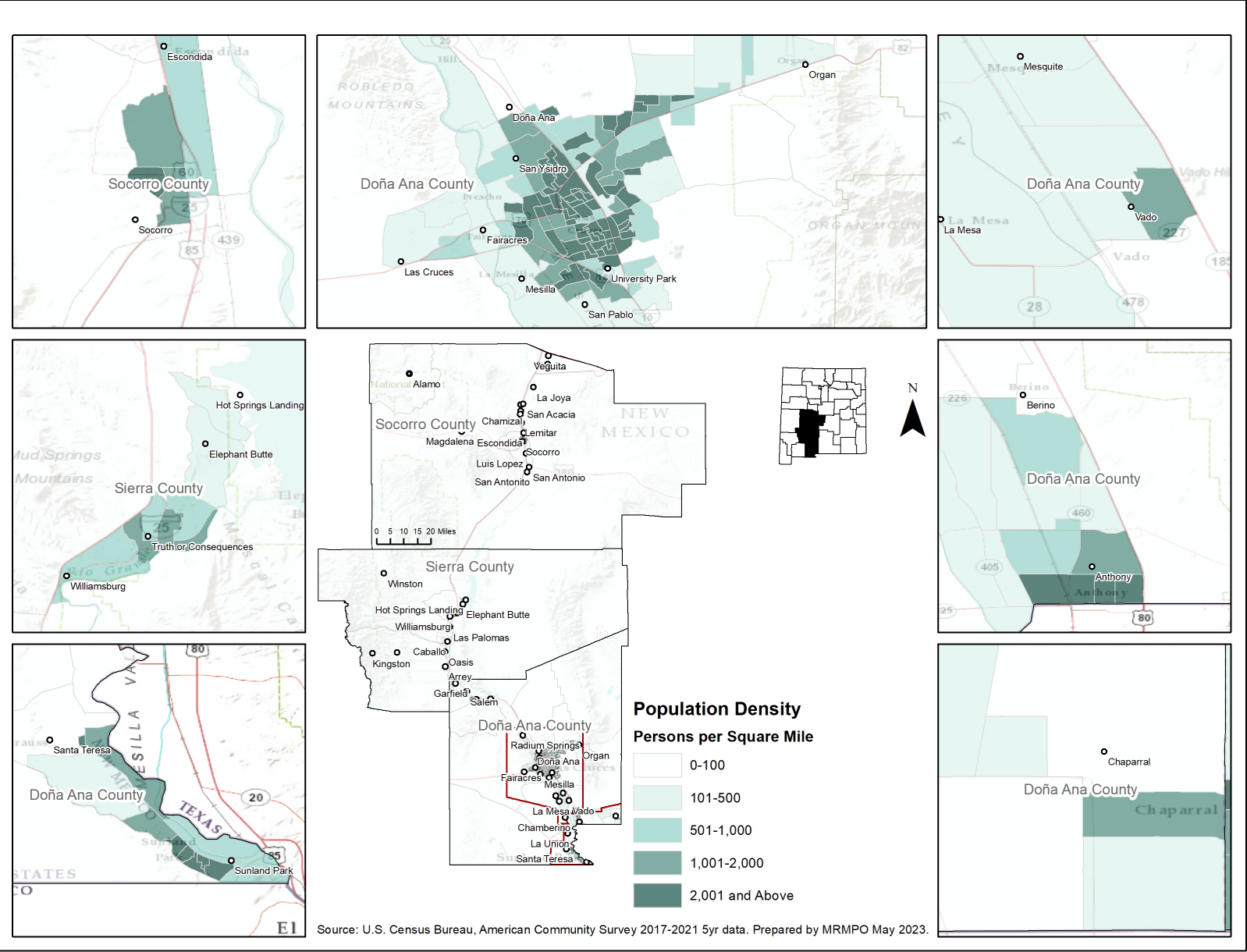


Table 2: Population and Growth by County

County	2017 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 South Central 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.

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 in southern Doña Ana County, Las Cruces, and Truth or Consequences. Sierra County and eastern Socorro County have the largest senior population block areas, while the City of Las Cruces has a few very dense areas east of the city. Individuals with disabilities are concentrated in eastern Socorro and Sierra Counties and in areas east of the City of Las Cruces. Block groups with the highest classification for low-income individuals are located in northwest and eastern Socorro County, east of Truth or Consequences, Sunland Park and surrounding areas. As well as, northwestern Doña Ana County, areas east of the City of Las Cruces, and the Town of Alamo.

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 South Central RTPO. Block groups with large populations of households without vehicles are in Las Cruces, west and east of Truth or Consequences, Elephant Butte and in southern Doña Ana County.

Figure 4: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO Youth Population (ages 10-17)

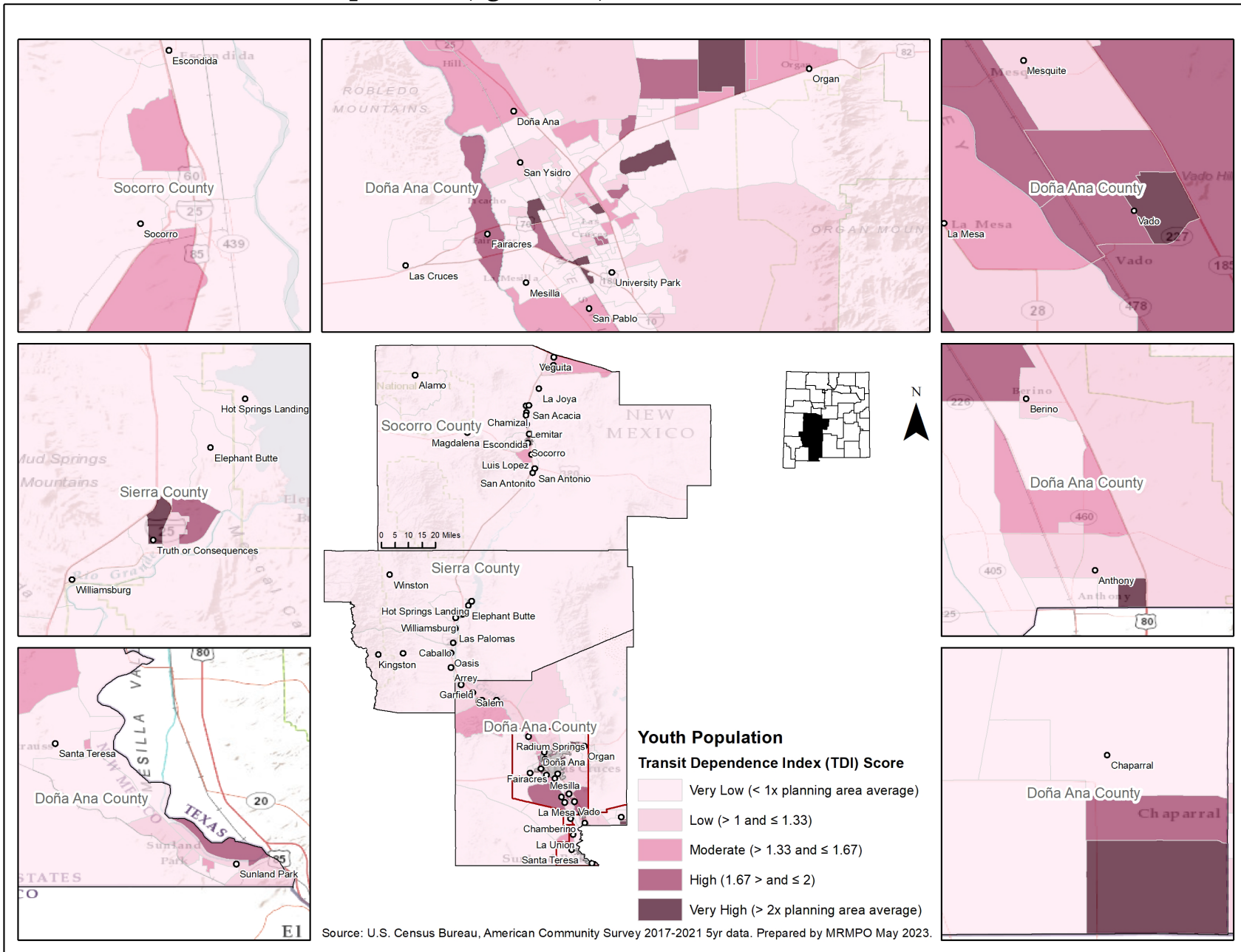


Figure 5: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO Senior Population (ages 65+)

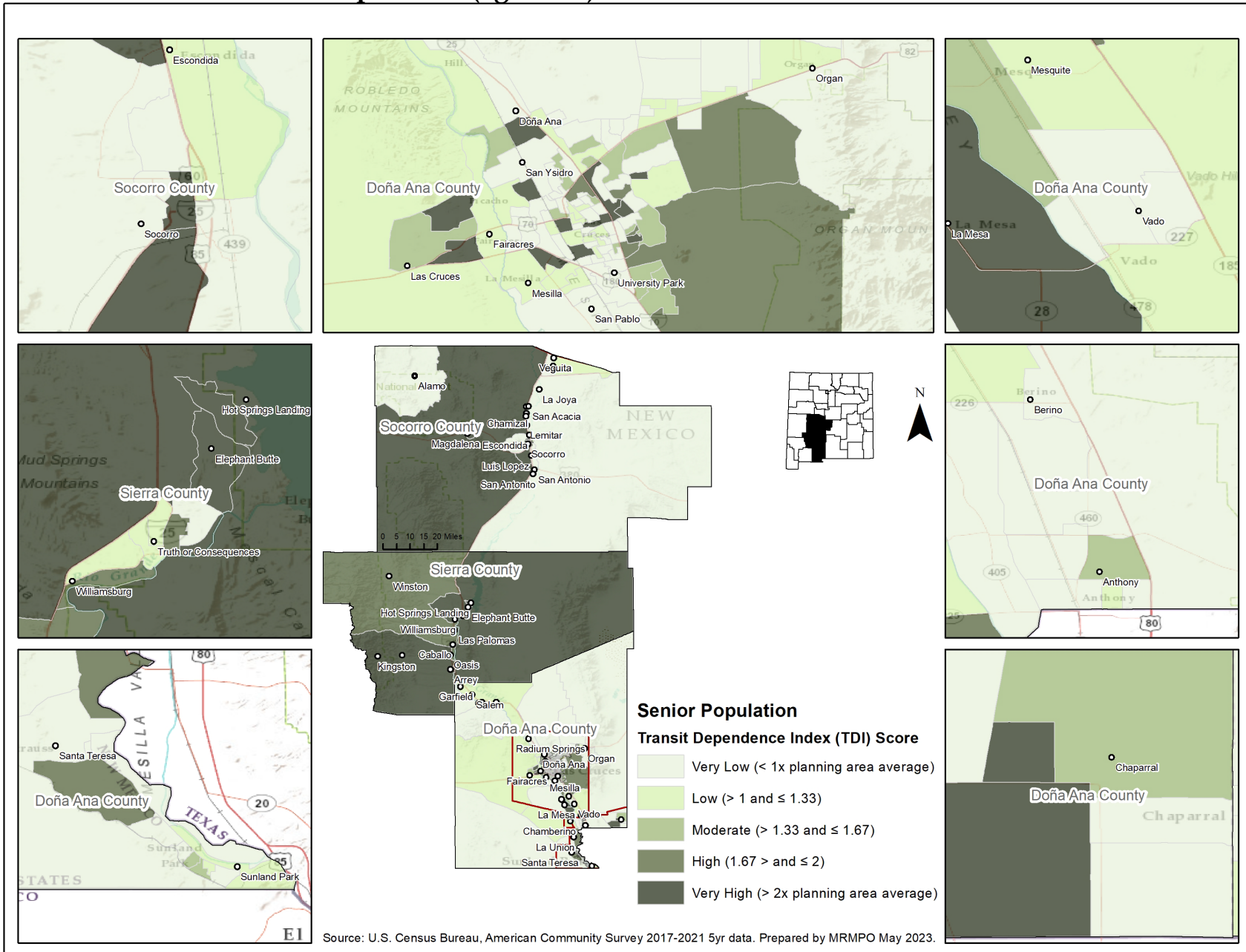
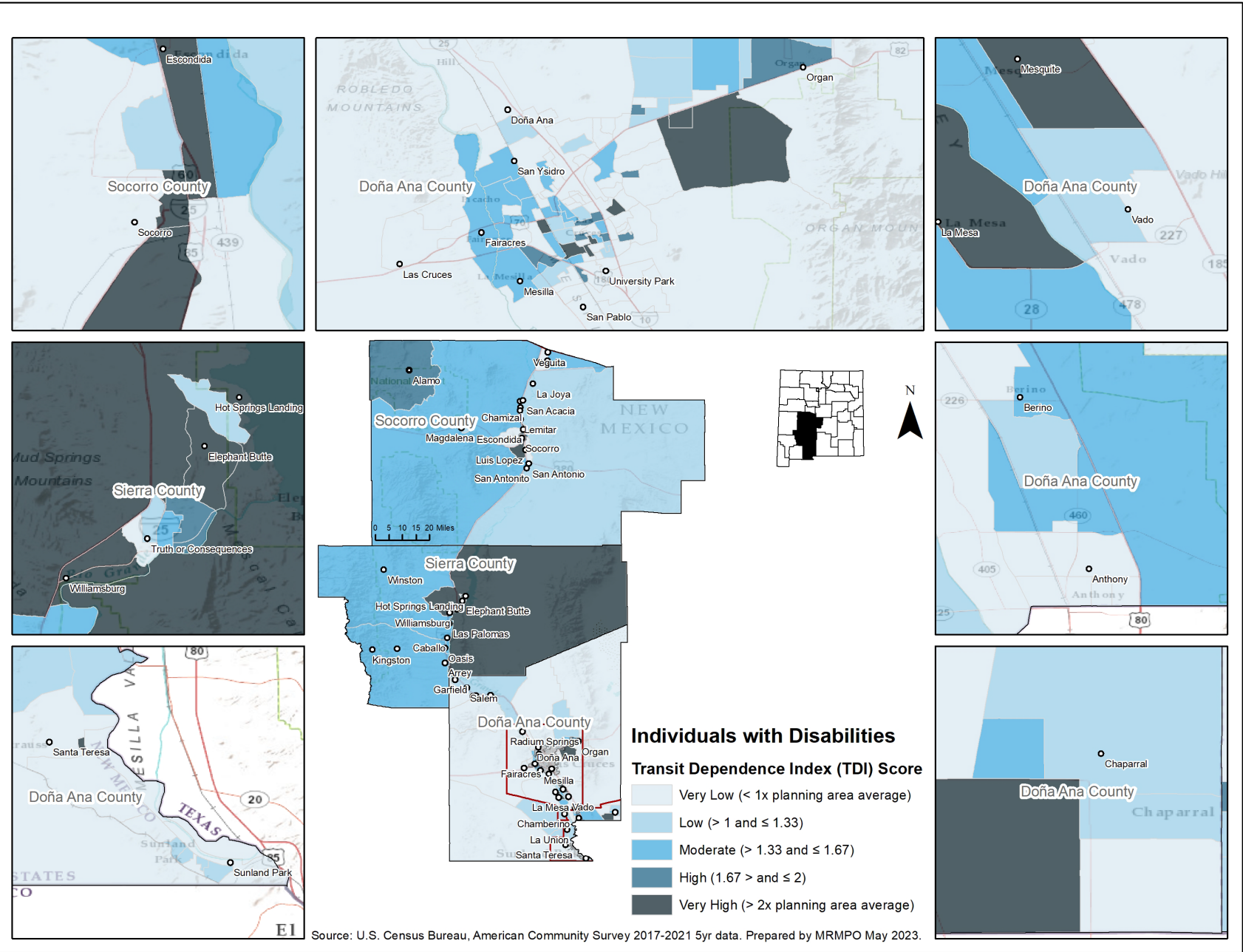


Figure 6: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO Individuals with Disabilities (ages 18+)



**Figure 7: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO
Individuals Living Below the Poverty Level (all ages)**

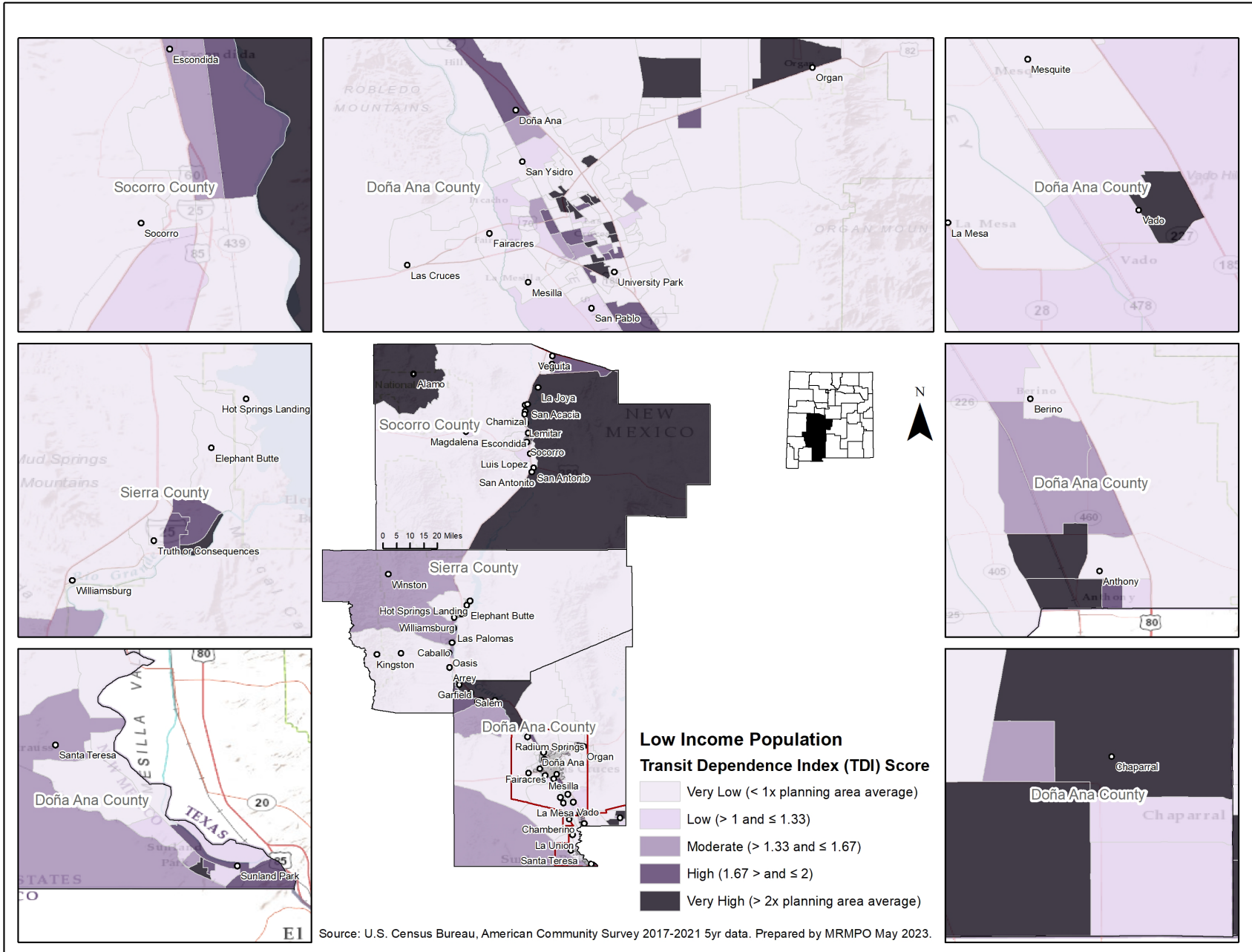
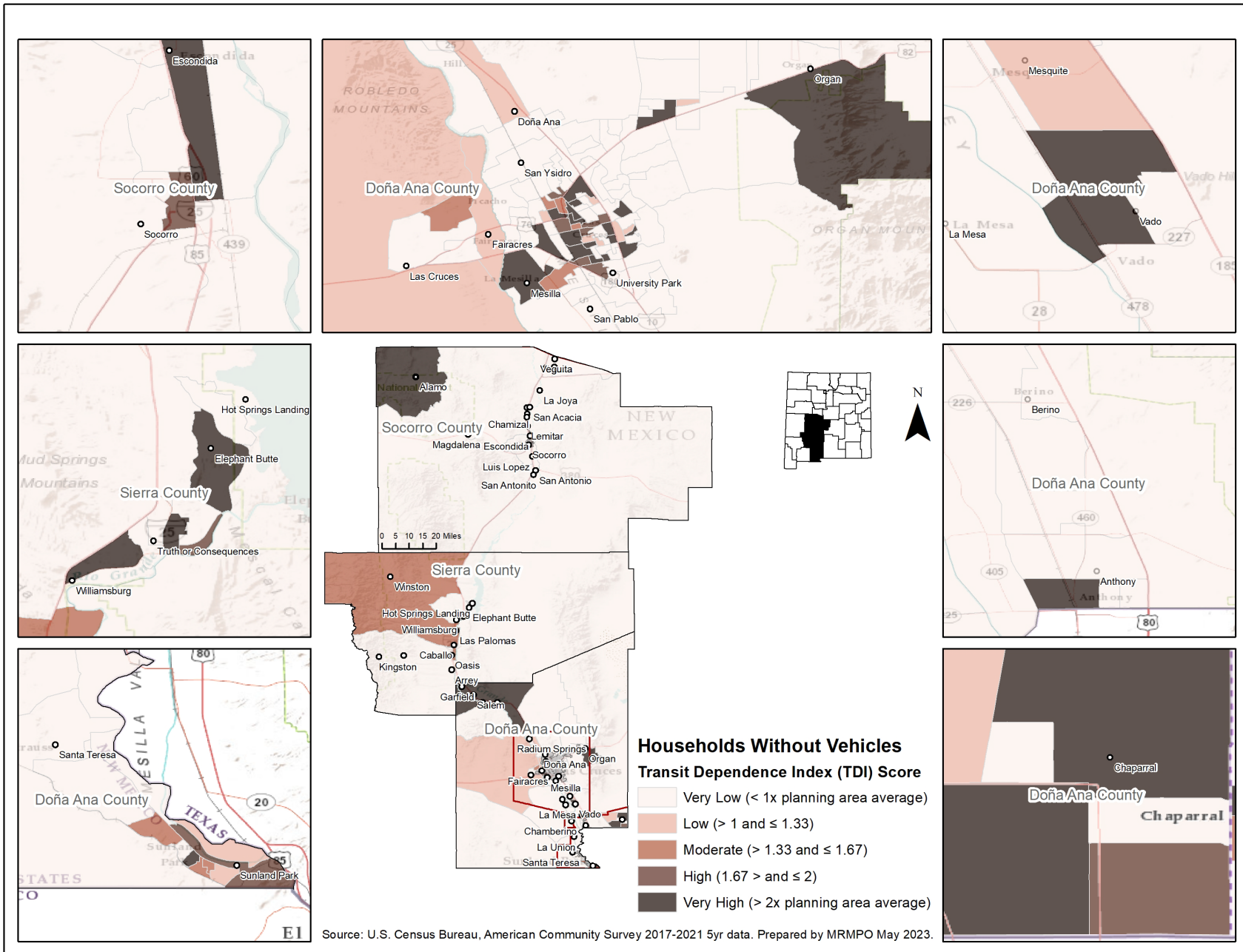


Figure 8: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO Households with No Vehicle Available



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.

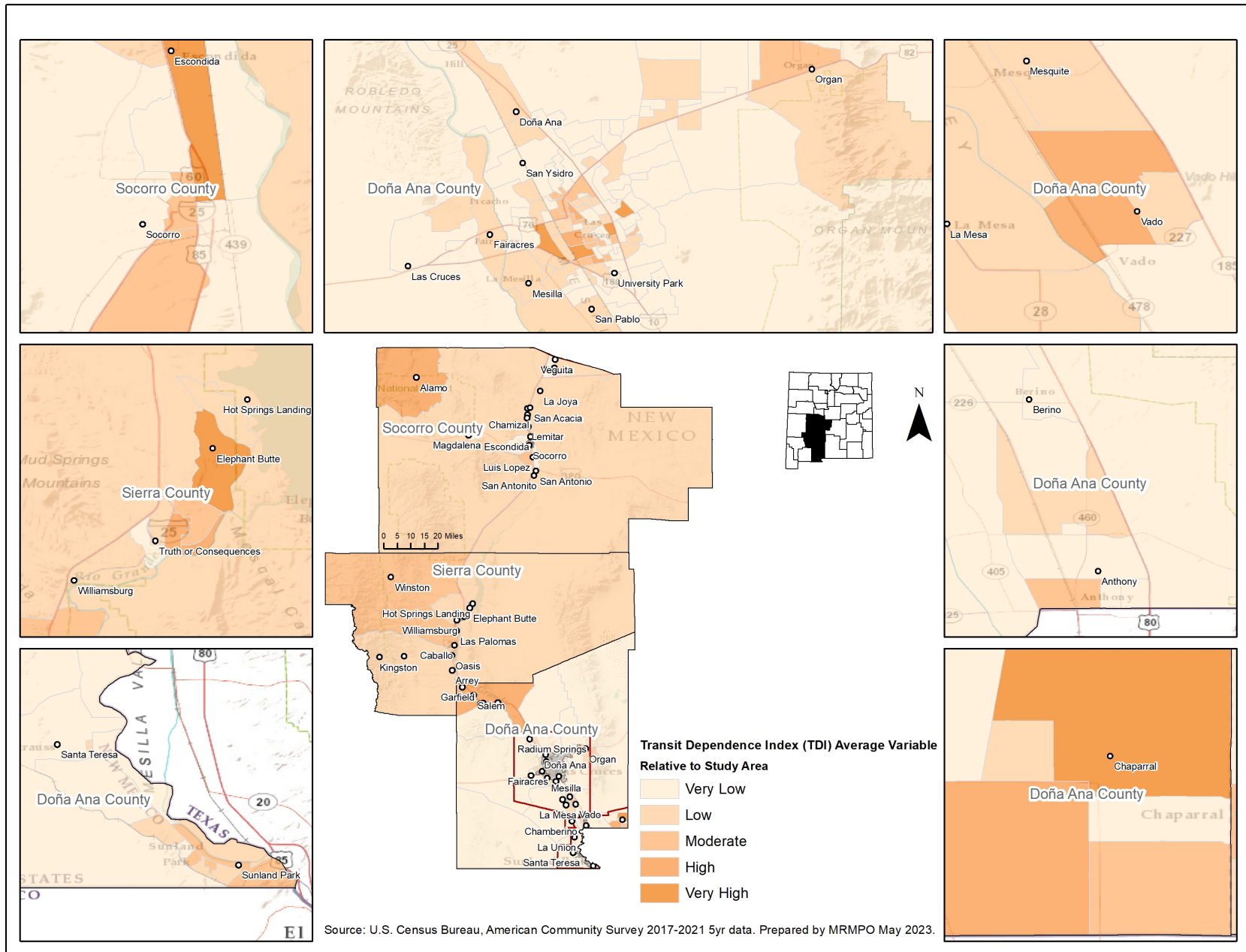
As shown in Table 3 below, the score of “very low” to “very high” is based on the relative concentration of these populations in relationship to the average of the planning area. A block group classified as “very low” can still have a significant number of potentially transit dependent persons; “very 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

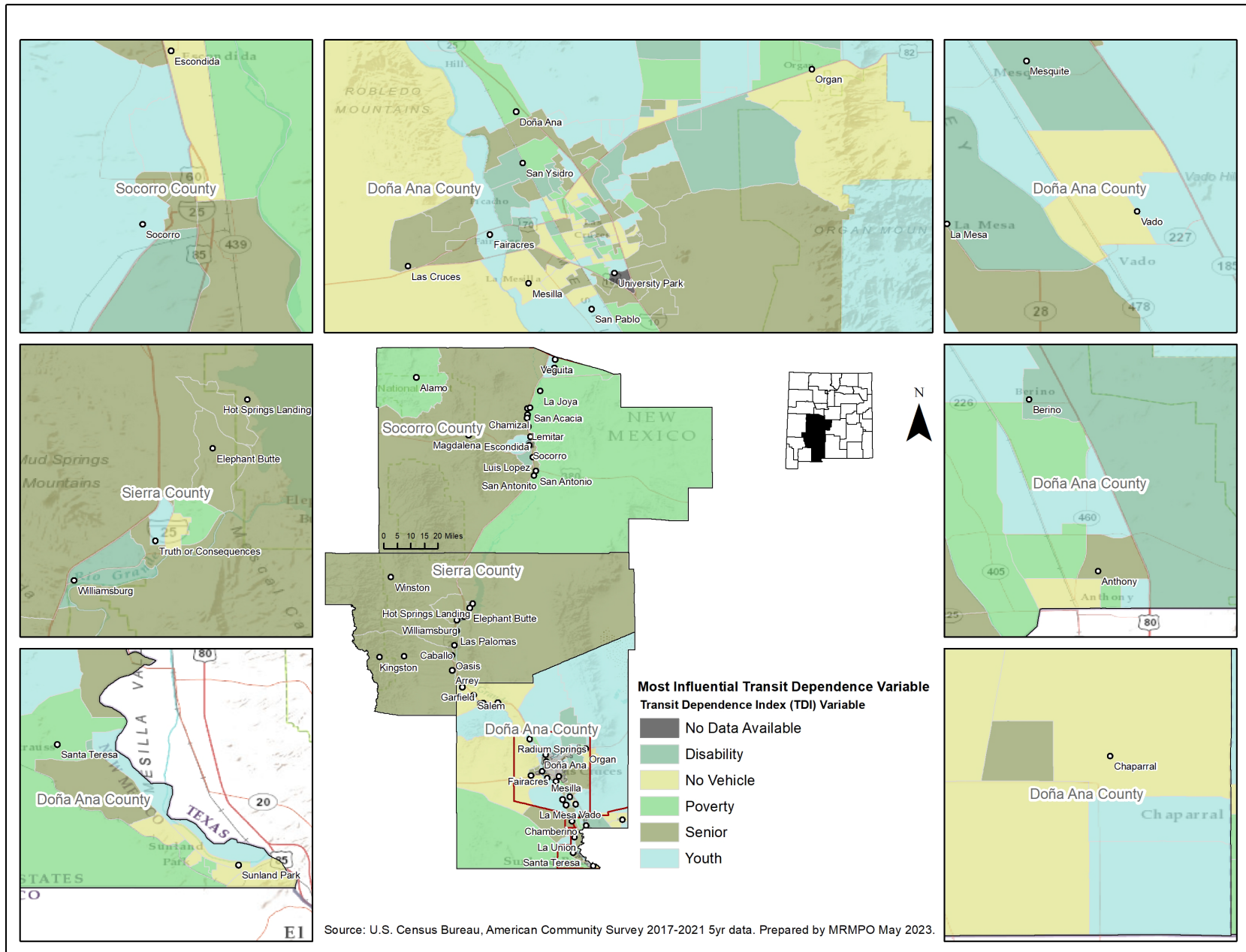
Vulnerable Persons/Households (# or %)	Score
≤ the planning area average	1 (Very Low)
> Average and ≤ 1.33 times average	2 (Low)
> 1.33 times average and ≤ 1.67 times average	3 (Moderate)
> 1.67 times average and ≤ 2 times average	4 (High)
> 2 times the planning area average	5 (Very High)

Figure 9 displays the average TDI rankings for the RTPO. 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 a TDI classification of high are scattered and include the area around Alamo and Central Las Cruces. Using this analysis, the block groups with high and very high transit needs can all be found within Las Cruces and El Paso.

**Figure 9: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO
Average Transit Dependent Population**



**Figure 10: South Central RTPO, Mesilla Valley MPO, and El Paso MPO
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. 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. The planning area includes two MPOs with fixed route transit systems and several small rural areas that are served by Section 5310 and 5311 programs. Although the MPOs have the highest concentration of service needs, more services are currently available to them. By contrast, rural populations are spread across a wider geographic area and have more dependence on the special needs transit service. In addition, where service is offered, community members have observed that:

- Access points are not convenient to them or to their destinations
- Transit service is used and anticipated for use more by those with higher incomes and fewer physical disabilities
- Those with lower incomes are most concerned about transit availability, but less likely to use transit than those in other income ranges

Information on needs was collected from the New Mexico 2045 Long-Range Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan and the New Mexico Statewide Public Transportation Plan was collected to provide a complete picture of the region's needs, goals, and objectives.

The New Mexico 2045 Long-Range Statewide 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 Priorities

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
- Determine the need for additional funding or additional access to different kinds of funding in Sierra and Doña Ana Counties
- Coordinate efforts with the West Texas/El Paso Regional Coordinated Transportation Planning Coalition to identify transit needs and implement services that would involve the El Paso MPO
- Explore the need for interregional, interstate, and international transit services, and integrate services where appropriate
- Work with the SCRTD and Las Cruces to coordinate stops and reduce duplication of service
- Coordinate with urban providers to increase the level of service provided to special needs transit populations
- Work with community centers and other transit providers to route new or additional service to unserved or underserved populations

- Increase service delivery in smaller rural areas such as Santa Teresa, Sunland Park, Chaparral, and Socorro
- Increase service delivery to growing special needs populations in Sierra County;
- Work with county health and human services departments to monitor patient needs served and unserved by current transportation providers
- Emphasize education on available special transit services to eligible population groups
- Establish a seamless automatic financial tracking and payment system for transit providers
- 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
- Introduce additional intra- and interstate services between the larger communities in the planning area, i.e. between Las Cruces and El Paso
- 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.