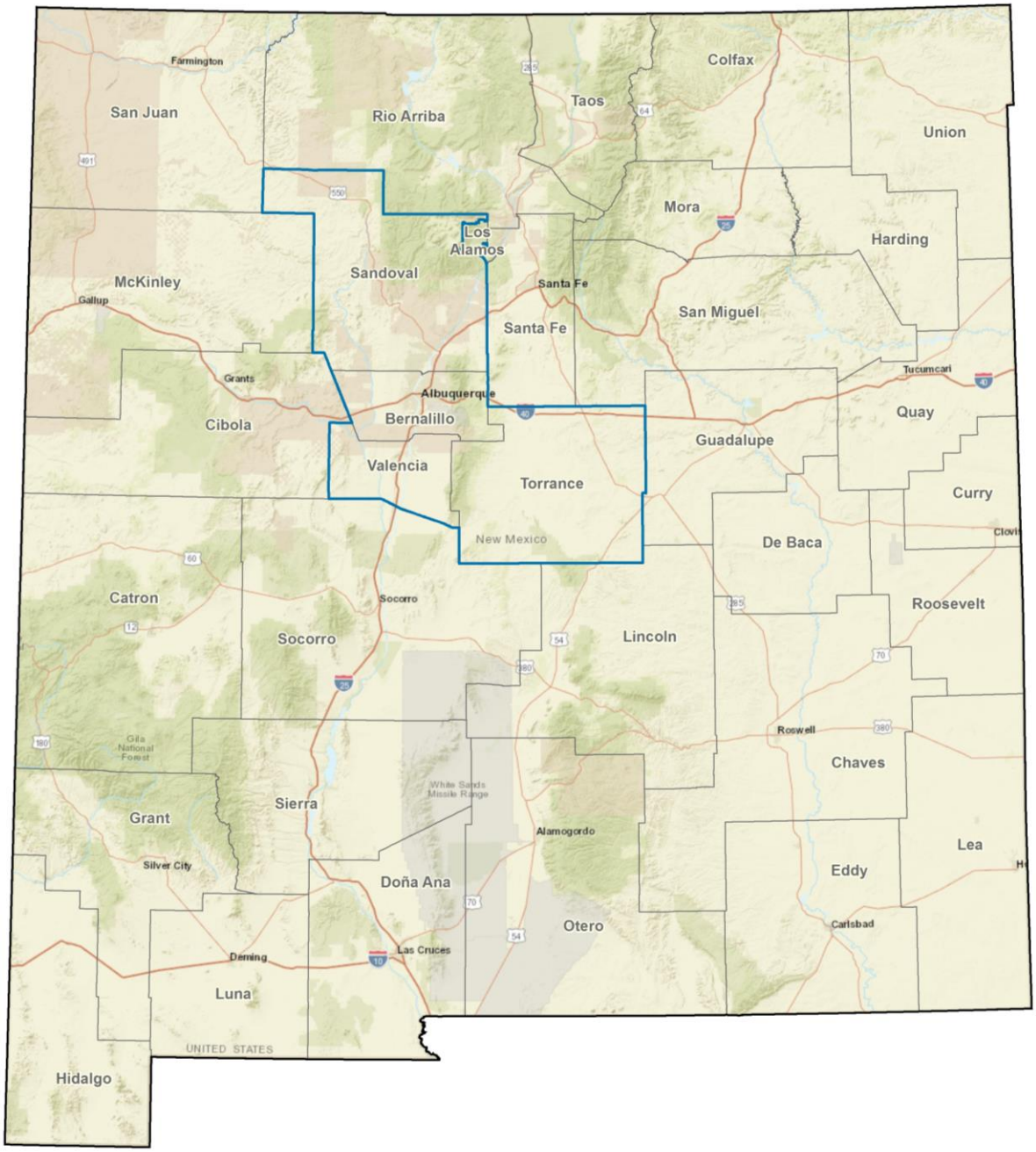
Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan

New Mexico Department of Transportation
Prepared by the Transit and Rail Division in cooperation with the Rio Metro Regional Transit District
September 2023



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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 on December 4, 2015, applied new program rules to the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) beginning in Federal Fiscal Year 2016 (October 1, 2015). The FAST Act maintains the coordinated transportation planning requirements established in previous laws. Specifically, MAP-21 required that 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 two primary formula grant programs NMDOT administers are Sections 5310 and 5311. 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 that serve the special needs of transit-dependent populations beyond traditional public transportation services and 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 (populations less than 50,000).

As the statewide designated recipient of Section 5310 and 5311 funds, NMDOT's Transit and Rail Division coordinated with transit and human services transportation providers, the Mid-Region RTPO, the Mid-Region 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 Mid-Region RTPO/MPO and develop strategies and priorities for transit program and mobility coordination in the plan area. Separate, similar plans were developed for each of the state's other RTPOs; these plans include their respective MPOs, where applicable.

Background

This section provides an explanation of the coordinated transportation planning process based on FTA Section 5310 guidance, 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 modified the FTA Section 5310 Program to consolidate 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-USDOT funding sources. Examples 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 (CCAM) 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 governments, 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 are required to be used for 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

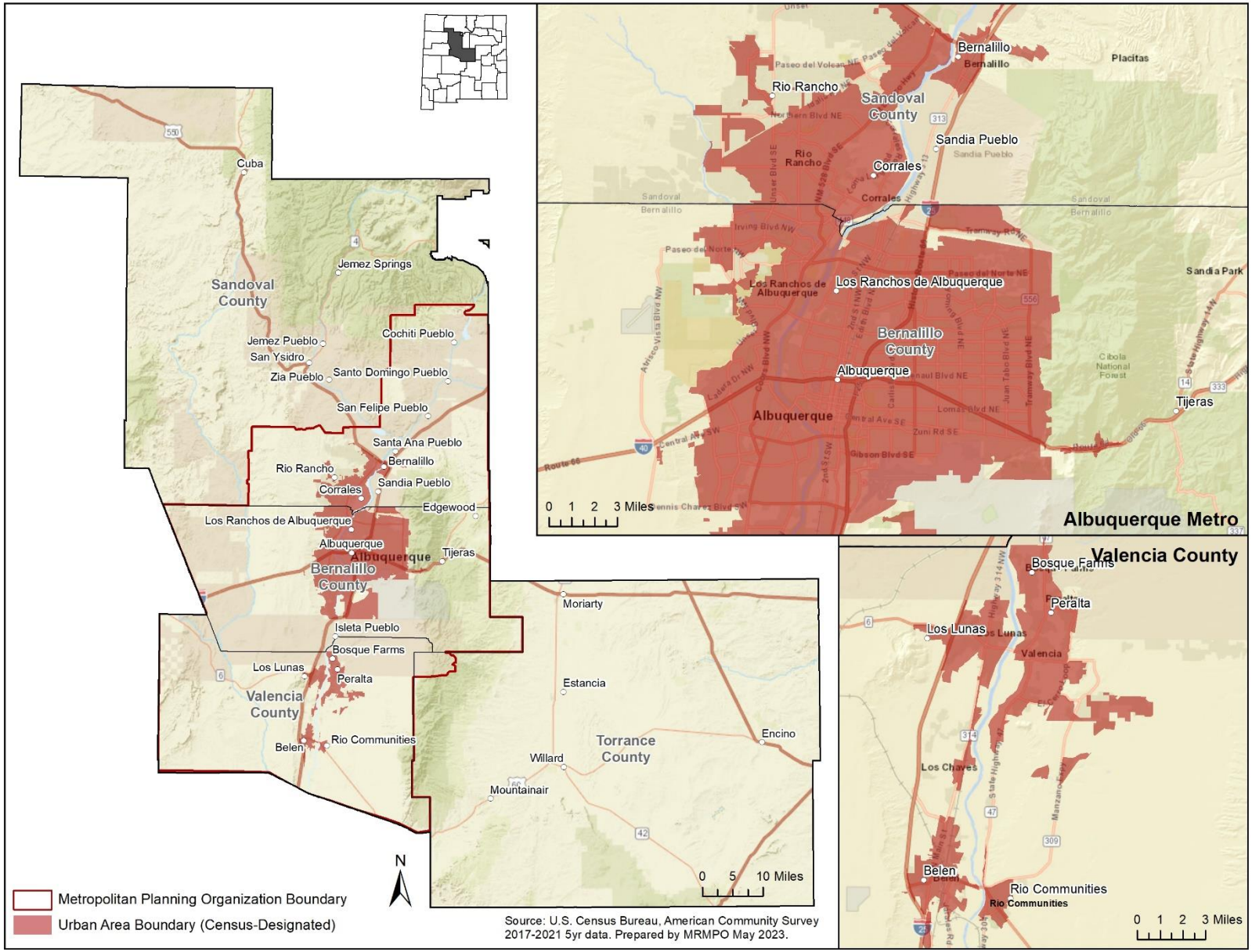
The following section provides an overview of the demographic composition of the Mid-Region RTPO/MPO. As displayed in Figure 1 (next page), this area includes Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance and Valencia counties. Table 1 provides a summary of existing transit providers serving the RTPO and MPO.

Table 1: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Service Providers

Name	Area of Service	Service Type(s)	Funding Program(s)
ABQ RIDE	City of Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, City of Rio Rancho, Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque	Bus Rapid Transit, Commuter Bus, Fixed Route Bus, Paratransit	§5307 §5339
Adelante Development Center	Bernalillo, Sandoval, Valencia counties	Program Sponsored	§5310
ARCA	Bernalillo, Sandoval, Torrance, Valencia counties	Program Sponsored	§5310
Casa Angelica	Bernalillo County	Program Sponsored	§5310
Cornucopia	Bernalillo County	Program Sponsored	§5310
Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritan Society – Manzano del Sol	City of Albuquerque	Program Sponsored	§5310
La Vida Felicidad	Bernalillo, Valencia counties	Program Sponsored	§5310
LifeROOTS	Bernalillo, Sandoval counties	Program Sponsored	§5310
Mandy's Farm	Bernalillo County	Program Sponsored	§5310
NMDOT Park & Ride	Bernalillo and Sandoval, County	Intercity Bus	§5311(f) and state funding
North Central Regional Transit District	Torrance County	Intercity, Fixed Route and Paratransit	§5307, §5310, §5311, §5311(f), §5339
PB&J Family Services	Bernalillo, Sandoval counties	Program Sponsored	§5310
Pueblo of Isleta	Pueblo of Isleta	Program Sponsored	§5310
Pueblo of Santa Ana	Pueblo of Santa Ana	Program Sponsored	§5310
Pueblo of San Felipe	Pueblo of San Felipe	Program Sponsored	§5310

Name	Area of Service	Service Type(s)	Funding Program(s)
Rio Metro Regional Transit District	Bernalillo, Sandoval, Valencia counties	Commuter Rail, Commuter Bus, Deviated Fixed Route Bus, Dial-a-Ride Bus	§5307, §5310, §5311,§5337, §5339
Share Your Care, Inc.	Bernalillo, Sandoval counties	Program Sponsored	§5310
Socorro Public Transportation	City of Belen, Valencia County	Demand Response, Commuter/Fixed Route	§5311
Therapeutic Living Services	Bernalillo County	Program Sponsored	§5310
Veterans Highly Rural Transportation Services Program	Torrance County	Program Sponsored	

Figure 1: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Regional Geography



Public Transit Providers

ABQ RIDE (www.cabq.gov/transit): ABQ RIDE operates the following services within the City of Albuquerque and portions of the City of Rio Rancho, Village of Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, and unincorporated Bernalillo County:

- 2 Albuquerque Rapid Transit (ART) lines, a premium service that features higher frequency and speed than local bus routes. ART features dedicated lanes, level-boarding stations, unique branding, 60-foot articulated buses, and transit signal priority.
- 20 local bus routes that primarily operate along arterial streets at both peak and mid-day hours, and serve stops spaced about one-quarter mile apart. In comparison to ART routes, local routes provide a finer-grained service at the neighborhood level.
- Due to staffing shortages, ABQ Ride has suspended all commuter bus routes. When fully staffed there are 16 commuter bus routes that connect outlying residential areas with major employment centers during peak hours only. Commuter routes are more likely to travel collector streets to better serve suburban residential neighborhoods.
- ABQ RIDE also provides door-to-door paratransit service as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

NMDOT Park & Ride (www.nmparkandride.com): The New Mexico Department of Transportation operates a park and ride bus service, NMDOT Park & Ride, consisting of 7 fixed routes and 5 shuttles throughout the state. In the Mid-Region RTPO/MPO, the Purple Route connects Albuquerque to Santa Fe and Los Alamos in lieu of an early morning northbound Rail Runner train.

Rio Metro Regional Transit District (www.riometro.org): Rio Metro is central New Mexico's regional transit provider. On behalf of NMDOT, Rio Metro operates the New Mexico Rail Runner Express commuter rail system that connects Belen to Santa Fe. Rio Metro's commuter and deviated-fixed route bus services in Bernalillo, Sandoval, and Valencia counties primarily connect rural and small urban residents to education, employment and healthcare opportunities, often by facilitating transfers to the Rail Runner. Rio Metro also operates dial-a-ride service in the City of Rio Rancho, Valencia County, and the Village of Corrales.

Demographic/Transit Dependence Analysis

The purpose of this analysis is to identify areas of the Mid-Region RTPO/MPO with transit dependent populations. Specifically, it incorporates six variables drawn from 2017-2021 American Community Survey five-year estimates:

- Population density
- Youth ages 10-17
- Seniors ages 65+
- Individuals with disabilities ages 18+
- Individuals living below the poverty level in the last 12 months
- Number of households with no vehicle available

On subsequent pages, each variable is mapped at the block group level using ArcGIS. Excluding population density, each variable's frequency of occurrence within each block group is compared to that of the entire planning area (i.e., Mid-Region RTPO/MPO). For example, if 20 percent of a block group's population is comprised of seniors but only 10 percent of the planning area's population is comprised of seniors, the output or score for that block group would be 2 (0.2 / 0.1 = 2), and it would be categorized as "High" using the following Transit Dependence Index (TDI):

Table 2: Transit Dependence Index

Very Low: ≤ 1x the planning area average
Low: > 1x and ≤ 1.33x planning area average
Moderate: > 1.33x and ≤ 1.67x planning area average
High: > 1.67x and ≤ 2x planning area average
Very High: > 2 times the planning area average

An average TDI score for each block group is also derived by averaging the scores for those five variables. For example, a block group with the following scores—Youth 1.5, Seniors 0.75, Disability 0.75, Poverty 1.25, and No Vehicles 0.5—would have an average TDI score of 0.95 (1.5 + 0.75 + 1.25 + 0.75 + 0.5 / 5 = 0.95) and would be categorized as "Very Low" (as the basis of reference, the planning area will always have an average TDI score of 1).

Of note, by excluding population and/or population density, the TDI score for each variable and the average TDI score of all five variables generally reflects the *degree* and not necessarily the *amount* of dependence. However, the Census Bureau attempts to constrain block group size to between 600 and 3,000 persons (the average block group size in the Mid-Region RTPO/MPO is 1,306).

Population/Population Density

For statewide context, Table 3 sorts New Mexico counties by their estimated 2020 population. The four counties in the Mid-Region RTPO/MPO are highlighted in grey. Combined, they account for 43% of the state's population.

Table 3: Population and Projected 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%

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

Additionally, since 2019, when the last coordinated plan for the Mid-Region RTPO/MPO was implemented, the four-county area's population has remained relatively stagnant, growing at a rate of less than one percent. During that period, population declines in Torrance and Valencia counties were offset by minor increases in Bernalillo and Sandoval counties.

While raw population counts at the county level give some sense of population distribution, population density at the block group level gives a more meaningful indication of which transit "tool" should be utilized. For example, fixed-route transit is more practical where population density exceeds 2,000 persons per square mile, whereas specialized transportation services (e.g., dial-a-ride) may be better suited for smaller communities and rural areas, and for individuals who are unable to use the fixed-route network in urban areas.

Figure 2 displays population density by block group for the Mid-Region RTPO/MPO. Because block groups are generally sized to contain up to 3,000 persons, block groups are smallest where population density is highest and vice versa. Unsurprisingly, population density is highest and block groups are smallest in Albuquerque, particularly in the University area, International District, and the near Northeast Heights where the grid road network is conducive for fixed-route transit. Density is also high in southwest Albuquerque and pockets of the Westside and Rio Rancho, but the cul-de-sac network in these areas is less-supportive of fixed-route transit. Population density in the Albuquerque metro generally declines along the Rio Grande (e.g., Corrales and Los Ranchos de Albuquerque) and on the suburban fringe; and, outside of a few other communities in the Mid-Region RTPO/MPO, such as Belen, Bernalillo, and Los Lunas, the remainder of the four-county area is extremely rural.

Youth (ages 10-17) and Senior (ages 65+) Populations

To a certain degree, the youth and senior populations are concentrated in different areas. As a percentage of their respective block groups' population, Figure 3 demonstrates that youth are more prevalent in Torrance County, southwest and northwest Albuquerque, the far Northeast Heights, Rio Rancho, Valencia County communities including Meadow Lake and El Cerro Mission, and several block groups in rural areas and pueblos. Figure 4 reveals that seniors are more prevalent in the North Valley, the Northeast Heights, Bosque Farms, Peralta, Rio Communities, older neighborhoods in Rio Rancho, and numerous block groups in rural areas.

Individuals with Disabilities (ages 18+)

The concentration of individuals with disabilities in Figure 5 does not cleanly mirror the concentrations of either youth or seniors. The near Northeast Heights, near North Valley, southwest Albuquerque, International District/east Central Ave. neighborhoods, and older Rio Rancho neighborhoods appear most prominent in the Albuquerque metro. Also, several block groups in Valencia County have higher concentrations of individuals with disabilities.

Individuals Living Under the Poverty Level (all ages)

Individuals living in poverty (Figure 6) has perhaps the most striking distribution of the five variables used to assess transit dependence. With the exception of the near North Valley, most of the block groups with a disproportionately higher level of poverty in the Albuquerque metro are concentrated south of I-40. The International District/east Central Ave. neighborhoods, Downtown, South Valley and southwest Albuquerque all feature prominently. In Valencia County, Meadow Lake, El Cerro Mission and west Belen also stand out, as do block groups near Moriarty and Estancia in Torrance County.

Households with No Vehicle Available

In the Albuquerque metro, households with no vehicle available (Figure 7) have a pronounced concentration in the North I-25 corridor, near North Valley, International District/east-Central neighborhoods, near Northeast Heights, Downtown, South Valley and southwest Albuquerque. While there are pockets of no vehicle availability in outlying areas, it is most pronounced in rural Sandoval County, including many of the pueblos in that area.

Average Transit Dependence Index Score

Figure 8 depicts the average TDI score of the five previous variables to give some sense of where transit dependence is most acute. In the Albuquerque metro, average TDI scores are most pronounced along the Central Ave. and I-40 corridors, including the International District, Downtown, and southwest Albuquerque. Average TDI scores are also elevated in pockets of the north I-25 corridor and South Valley. In outlying areas, average TDI scores are highest in far west Bernalillo County coinciding with Laguna Pueblo; on pueblos and reservations in Sandoval County; in Meadow Lake, El Cerro Mission and Belen in Valencia County; and in census blocks in western Torrance County.

Finally, Figure 9 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.

Figure 2: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Population Density

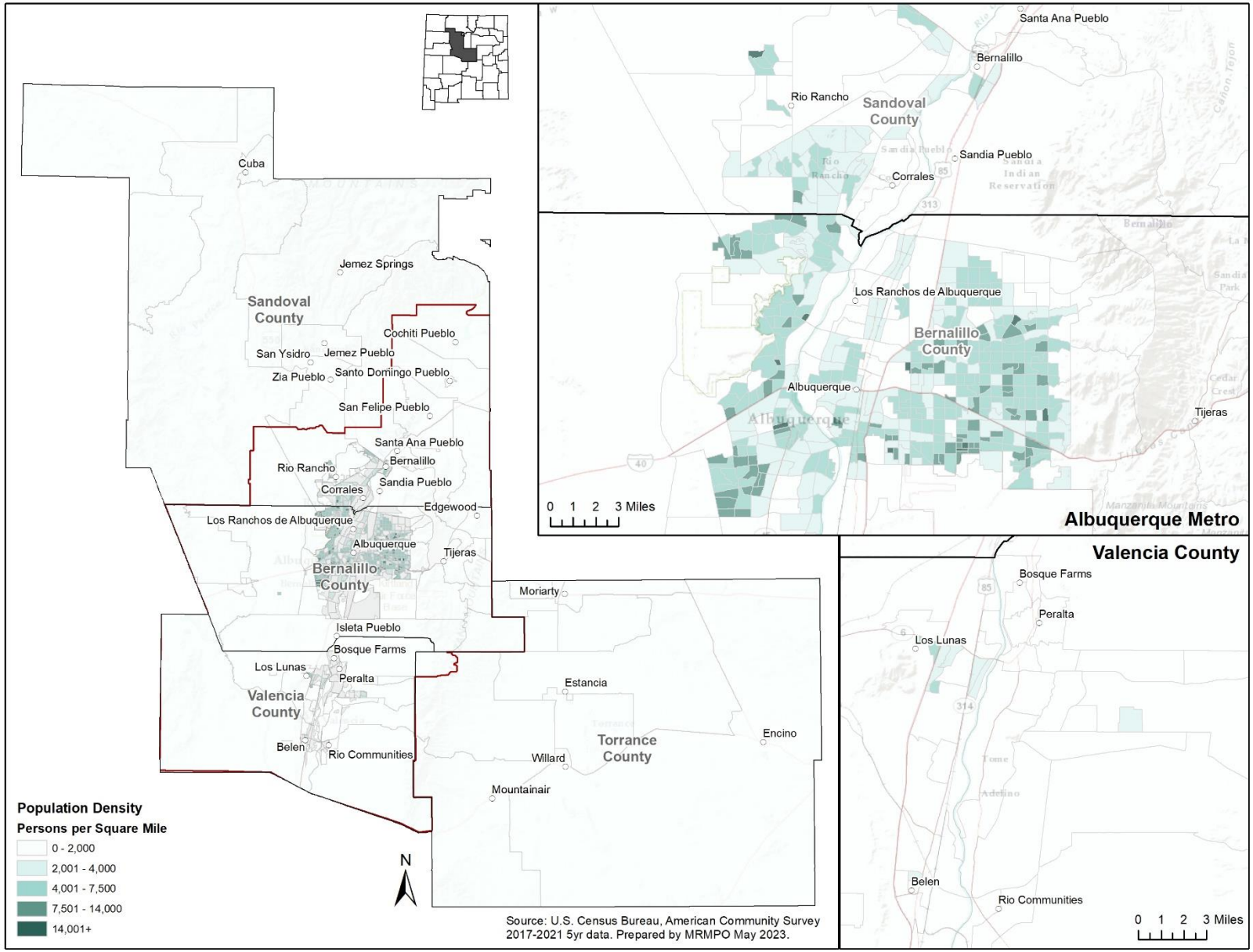


Figure 3: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Youth Population (ages 10-17)

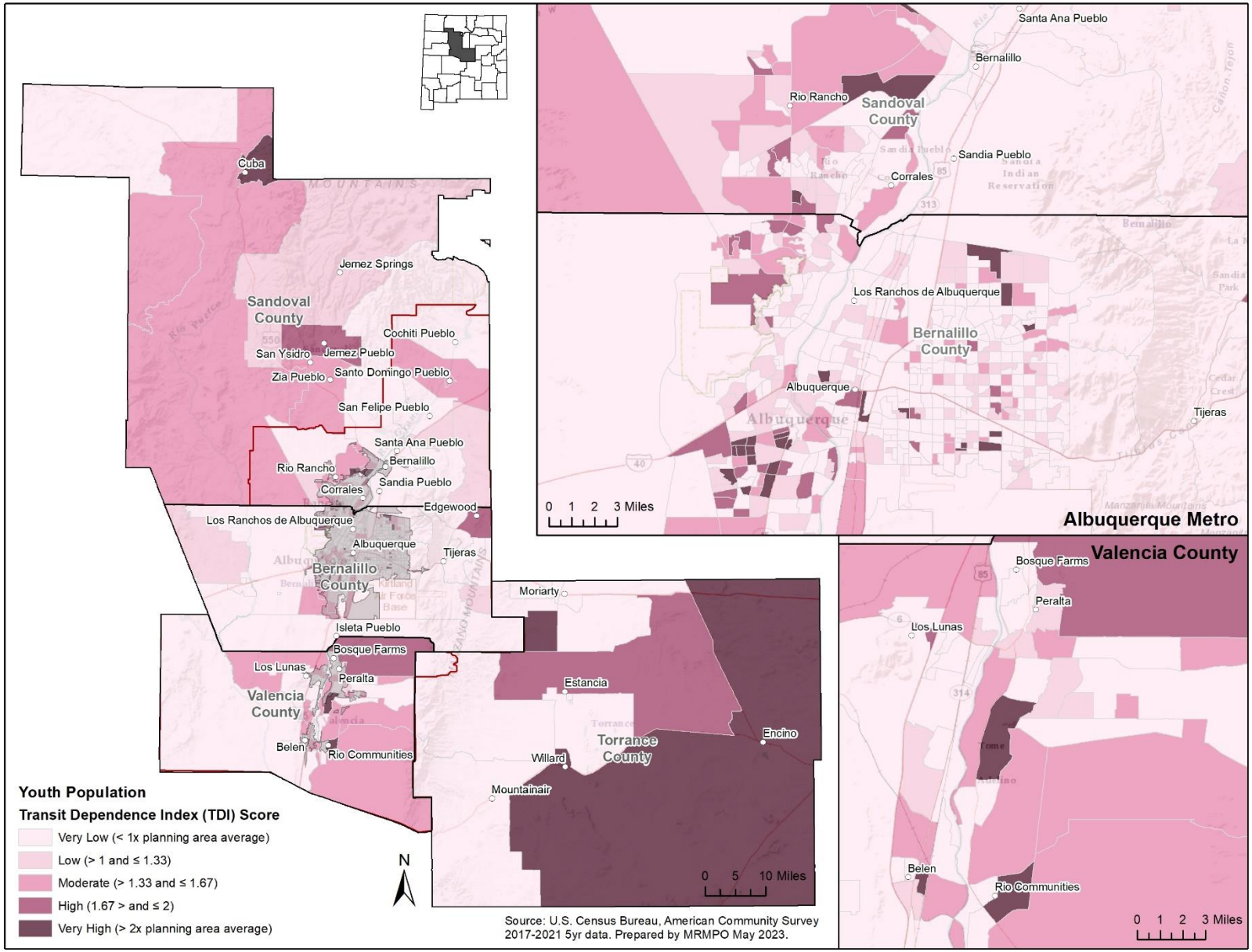


Figure 4: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Senior Population (ages 65+)

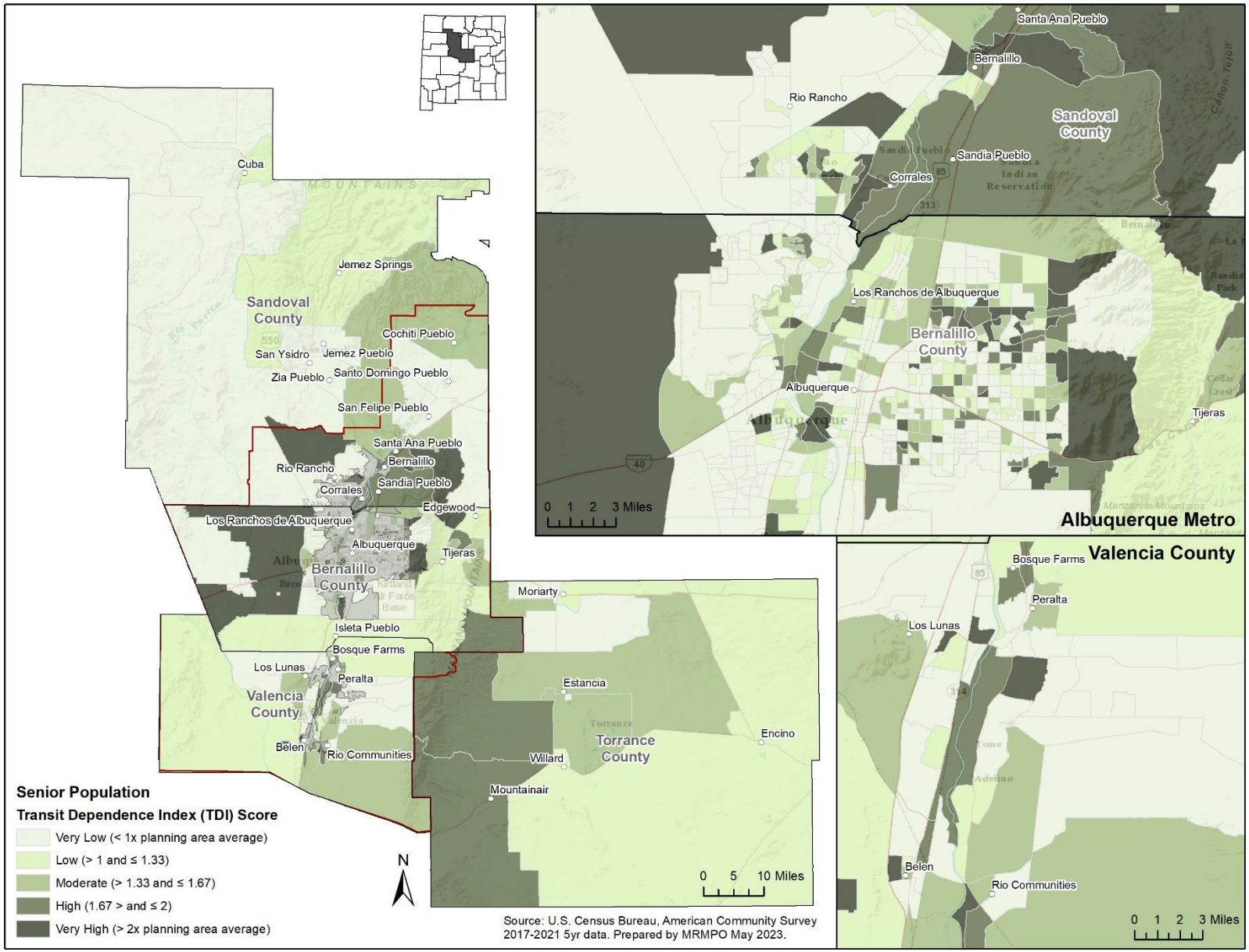


Figure 5: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Individuals with Disabilities (ages 18+)

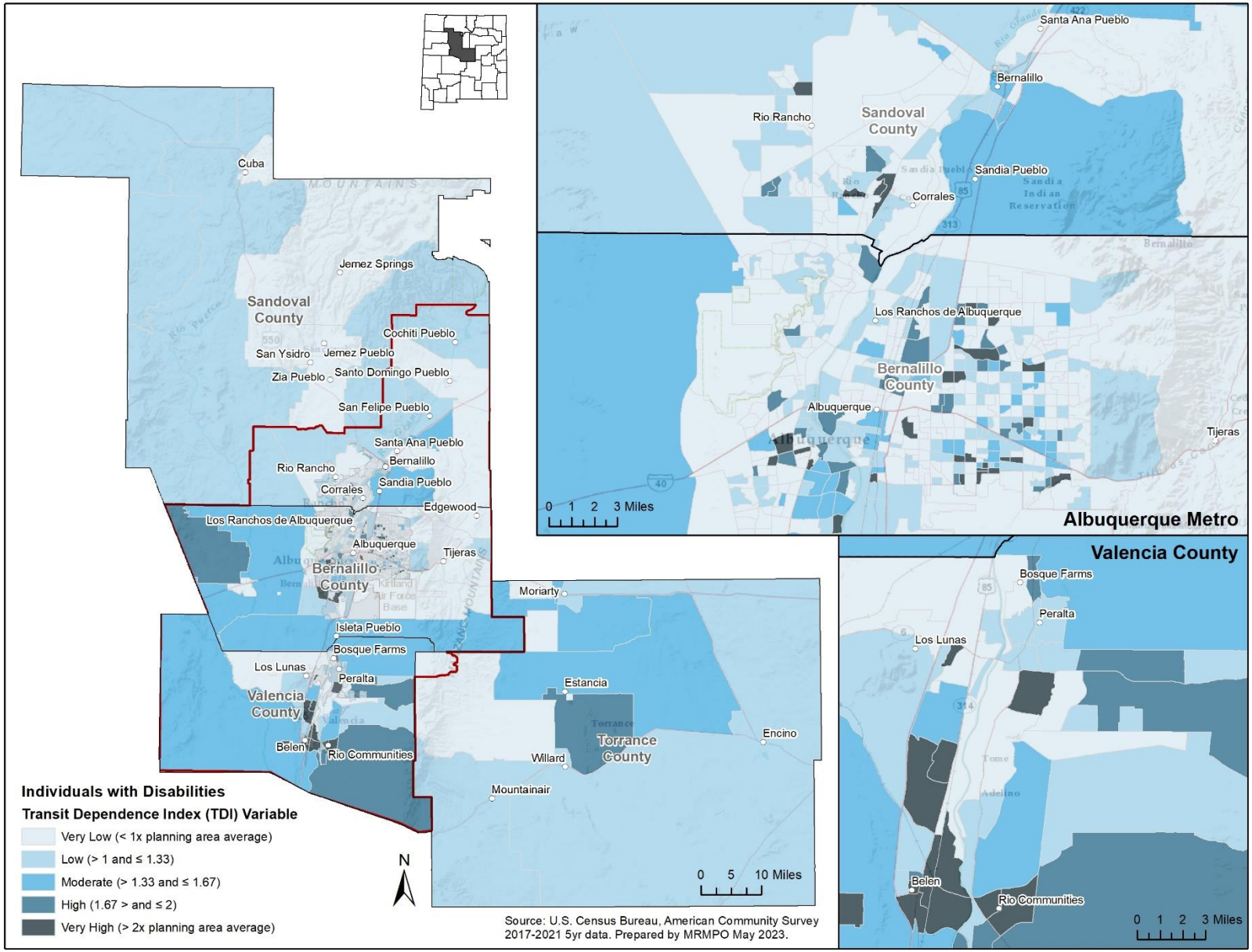


Figure 6: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Individuals Living Below the Poverty Level (all ages)

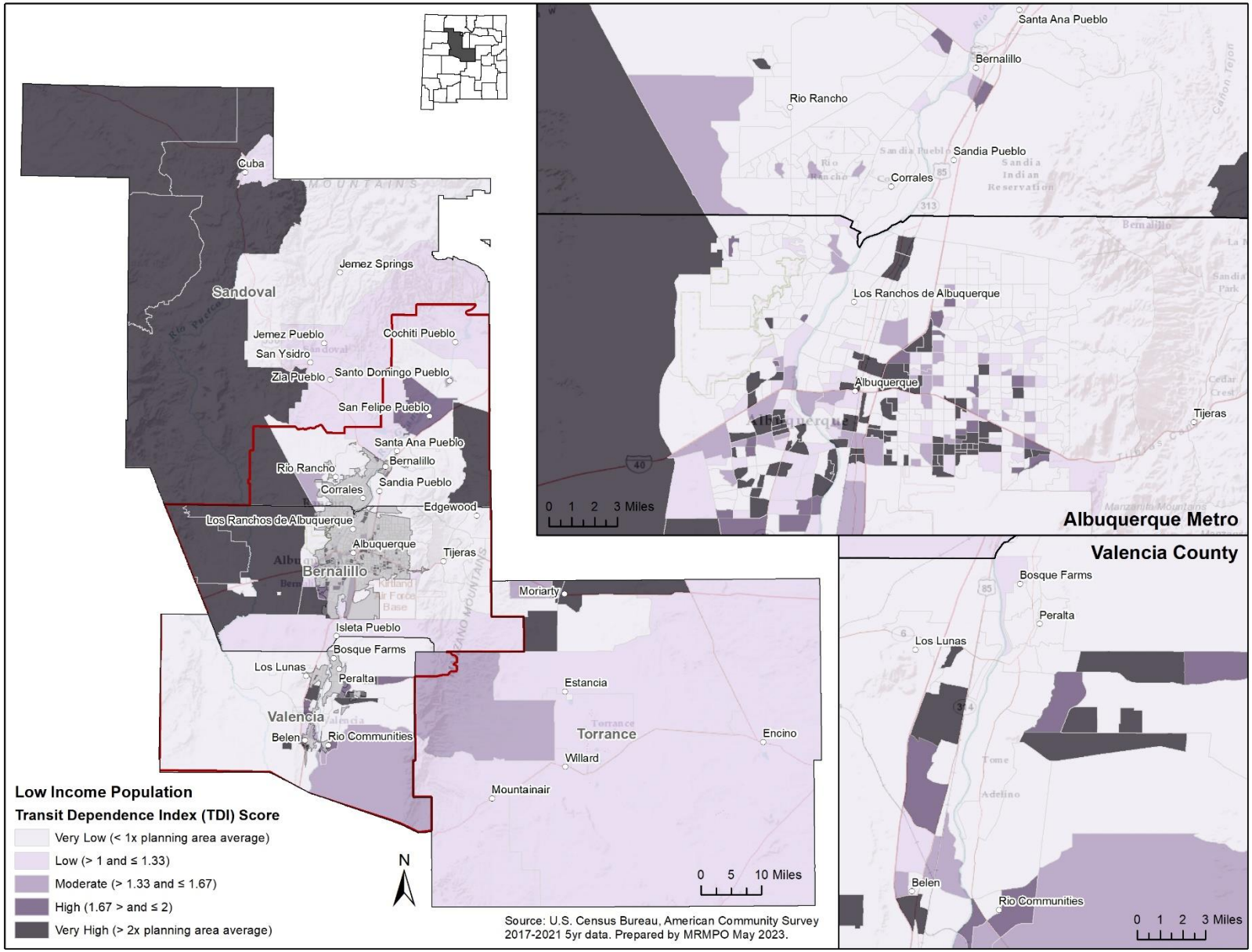


Figure 7: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Households with No Vehicle Available

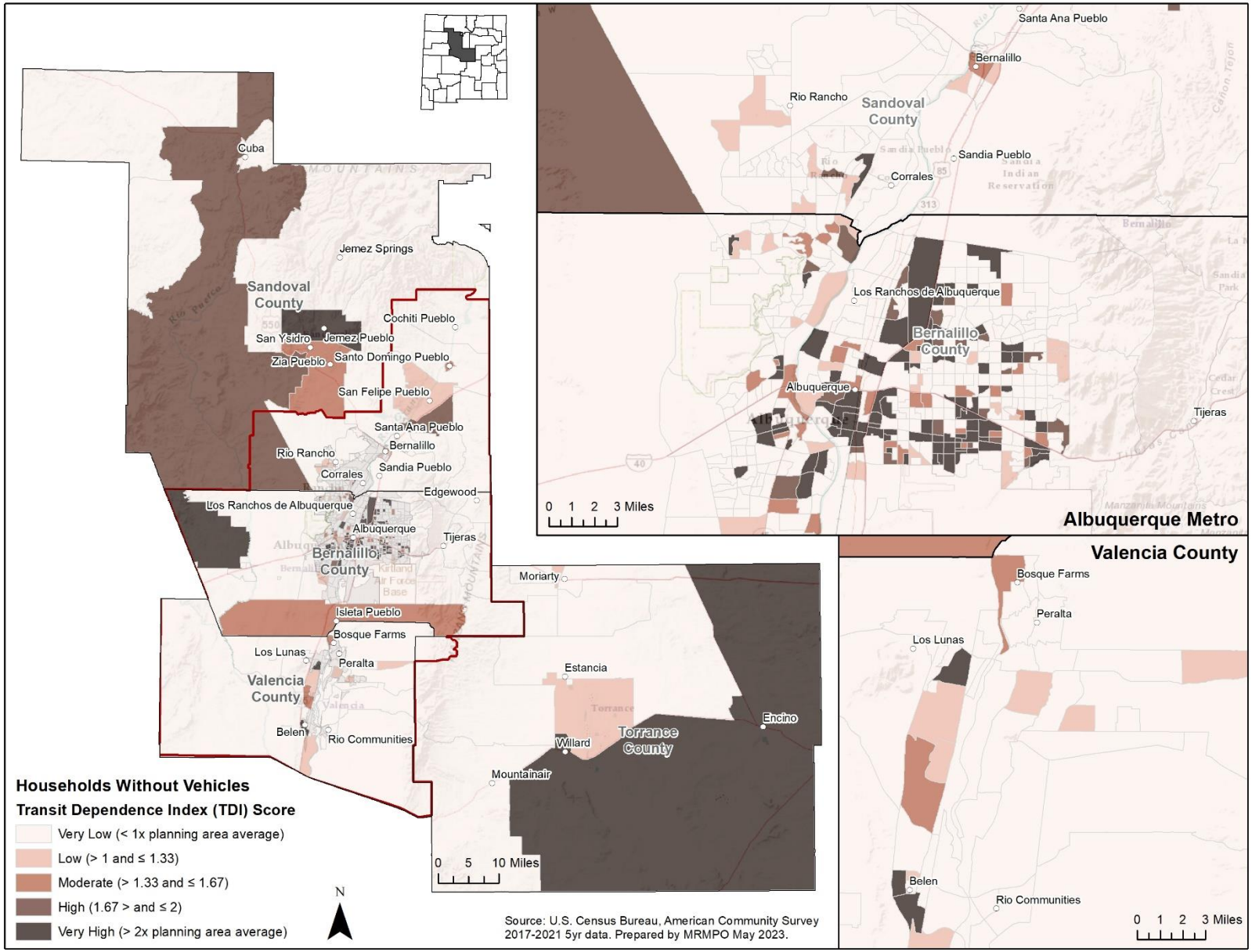


Figure 8: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Average Transit Dependent Population

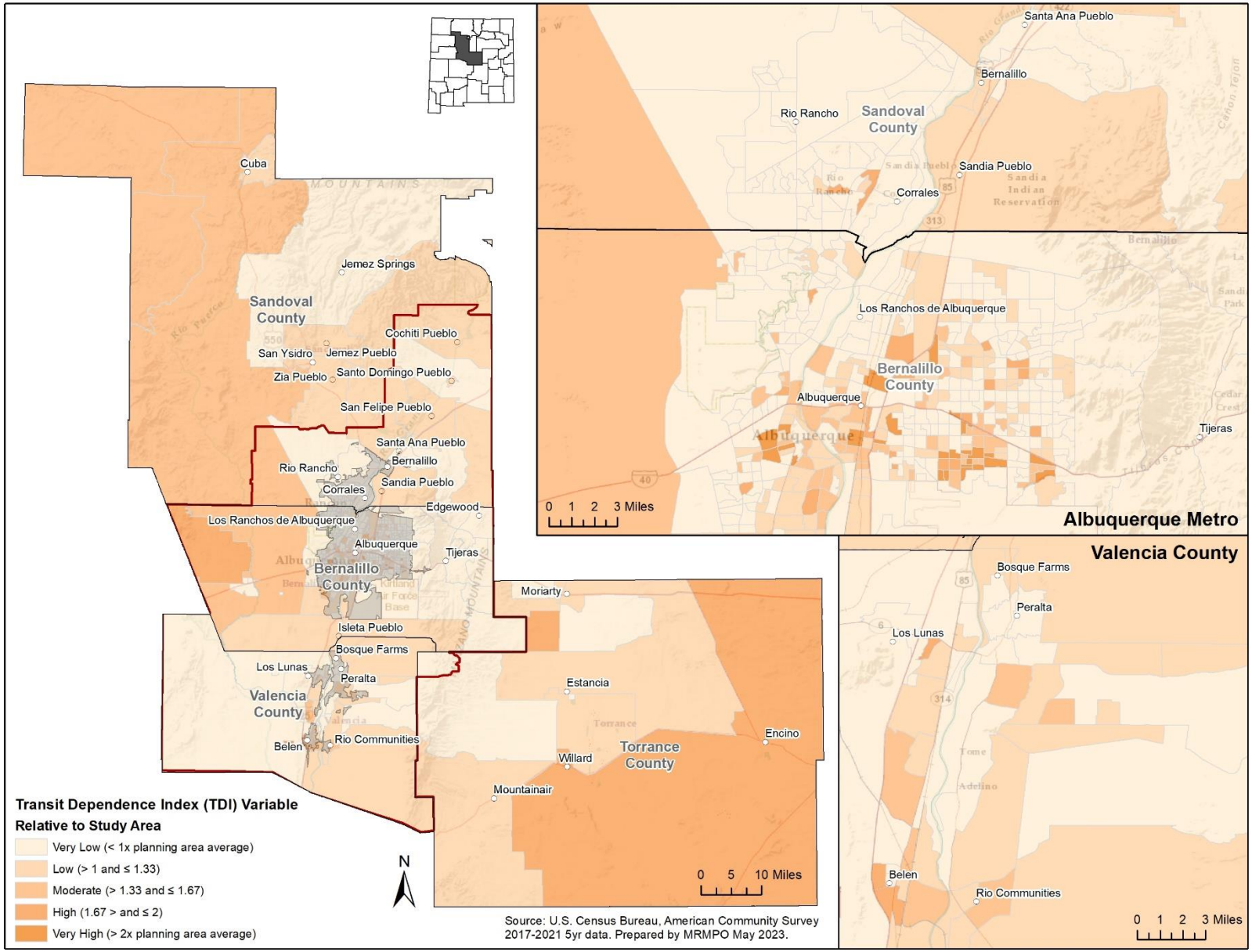
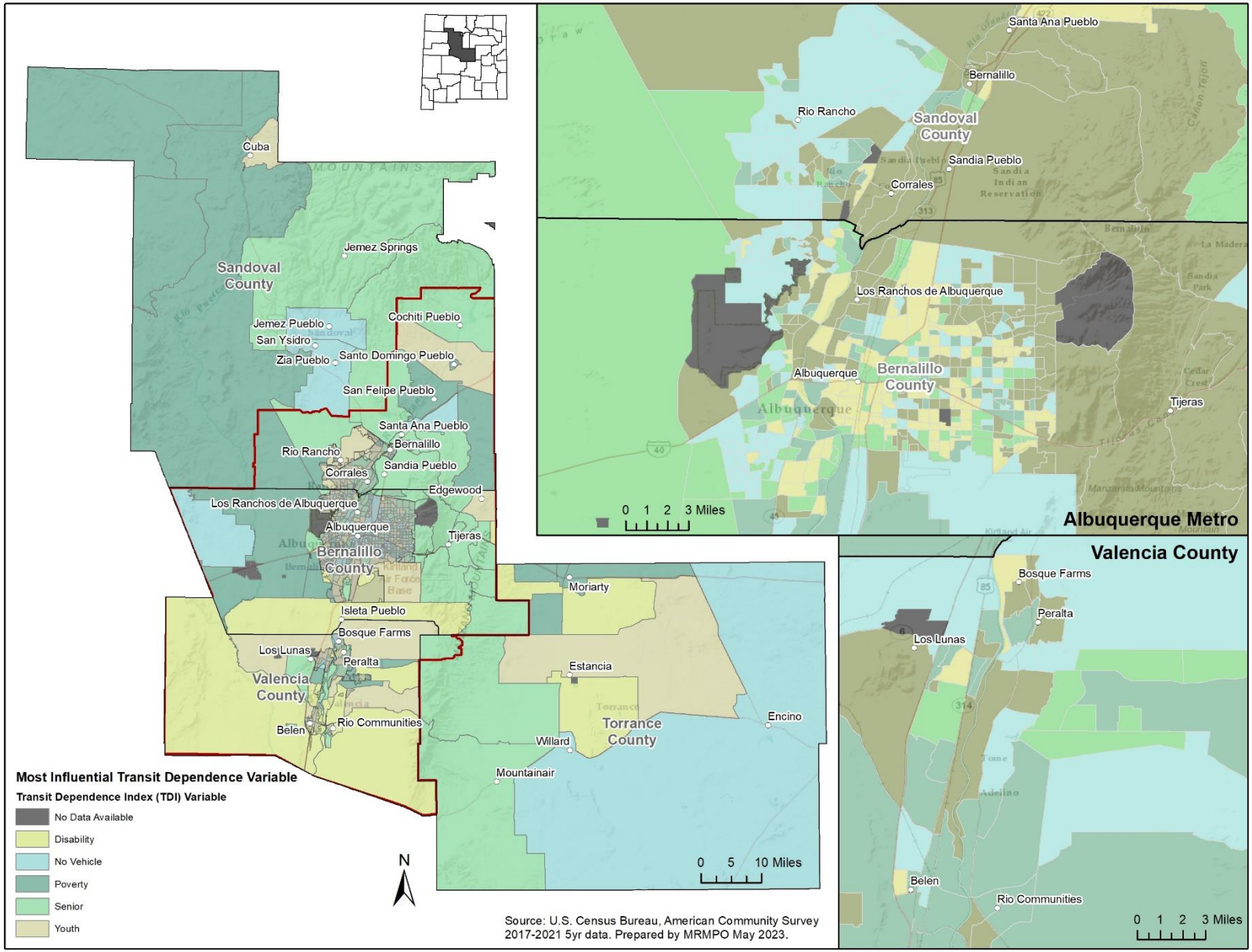


Figure 9: Mid-Region RTPO/MPO Most Influential Transit Dependence Variable



Needs Assessment

In addition to the demographic data presented in the previous section, the Mid-Region Regional Transportation Plan, Mid-Region Metropolitan Transportation Plan, New Mexico Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan, and the New Mexico Statewide Public Transportation Plan were reviewed to provide a complete picture of the Mid-Region RTPO/MPO's transit needs. The participants in these planning processes provided input on the specific, unmet needs of seniors, individuals with disabilities and individuals living in poverty. Consequently, many of the recommendations would benefit all three of these groups.

The Mid-Region Metropolitan Transportation Plan (*Connections 2040*; adopted 2020) recommends the following:

- Develop a long-range regional transit plan in coordination with public service agencies.
- Support premium regional transit and a core transit network.
- Enhance the safety, frequency, availability, and reliability of transit.
- Adopt mixed-use and higher density zoning along transit corridors to support ridership.
- Incentivize and invest in transit-oriented development.

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).

Strategies and Priorities

Stakeholders generated a variety of strategies through the previous Mid-Region RTPO/MPO and statewide coordinated transportation planning processes. These strategies were reassessed and updated accordingly; and, although they are broad in scope, the intent is to allow NMDOT and other agencies flexibility in programming Section 5310 and other funds, and to give providers the creativity to implement strategies that would best meet the needs of their respective services areas. Furthermore, the feasibility and timing of many of these strategies are obviously dependent upon increases in transit providers' resources and funding.

- Increase service in rural areas and from rural areas to the City of Albuquerque.
- Introduce deviated fixed routes (DFR)—operated by the public or private sector—that connect to existing transit services.
- Support and provide technical assistance for a feasibility study to provide transit service to the East Mountains and Torrance County
- Provide technical assistance and support to partner existing transit agencies in the state with Torrance County to develop a plan and implementation of transit service to the East Mountains and Torrance County
- Coordinate efforts between funding agencies (e.g., FTA, NMDOT, MRMPO), local governments, tribal governments and human services agencies to improve transit service to Albuquerque's Westside, Corrales and Rio Rancho. Because of their relatively low density and cul-de-sac road networks, these areas are particularly challenging to serve, although new technological advancements may help improve access for transit-dependent populations residing and working in these areas.
- Expand weekday/weekend and evening/late-night hours for existing transit services, potentially through improved coordination.
- Ensure that transit services to seniors, individuals with disabilities, and individuals living in poverty keep pace with the growth of those populations.
- Increase ridesharing, carpooling, non-emergency medical care transportation, early childhood transportation, employer-based services, etc.
- Pursue bike or scooter programs and improve non-motorized access to transit stops.
- Improve park-and-ride and other transit infrastructure.
- Enhance ADA services beyond the minimum requirements.
- 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.
- Leverage partnerships with existing agencies to realize economies of scale (joint procurements for vehicles, gas, maintenance; coordinated pool of volunteer drivers; etc.).

- Establish a state transit fund. Although proposals were introduced during the 2023 legislative session, no transit fund was created by the legislature.
- Work for more flexibility in federal funding, as well as seek to grow or leverage other funding sources to increase/improve transit service.
- Improve education/marketing of transit services to in-need populations and the social programs that serve them.
- Support transit providers' transition to zero-emission vehicles.