

MALHEUR COUNTY COORDINATED TRANSPORTATION PLAN



Adopted October 19th, 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Malheur County appreciates the input, energy, and commitment of local and regional stakeholders who participated in this plan update. The following organization and individuals made significant contributions toward this effort:

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- » Ed Susman – WorkSource Oregon

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In addition to these individuals, STF/STIF Advisory Committee members participated in the TAC.

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ACRONYMS

- ACS – American Community Survey
- CTP – Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation Plan/Coordinated Transportation Plan
- DLCD – Department of Land Conservation and Development
- EOCCO – Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization
- FTA – Federal Transit Administration
- GOBHI – Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc
- HRTG – Highly Rural Transportation Grant
- LEP – Low English Proficiency
- MCOACS – Malheur Council on Aging & Community Services
- NEMT – Non-Emergency Medical Transportation
- PMT – Project Management Team
- ODOT – Oregon Department of Transportation
- RVHT – Rural Veteran Healthcare Transportation Grant
- SRT – Snake River Transit
- STF – Special Transportation Fund
- STIF – Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund
- STIP – Statewide Transportation Improvement Program
- TAC – Technical Advisory Committee
- TSP – Transportation System Plan

INTRODUCTION

Malheur County updates its Coordinated Transportation Plan (CTP) every five years to work toward community goals while fulfilling state and federal funding requirements. This planning process encourages open dialogue and coordination between public transit and human service transportation providers to ensure that key populations, such as older adults, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes, are served as efficiently as possible with a high quality of service. Public transportation services within Malheur County are primarily provided by Malheur Council on Aging & Community Services (MCOACS). MCOACS led the development of this CTP update.

The Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) Section 5310 program and Oregon's Special Transportation Fund (STF) fund projects and services that enhance the mobility of seniors and persons with disabilities. To be eligible for funding, projects and services are required to be "included in a locally developed, coordinated public transit human services transportation plan." While §5310 funds are directed solely toward services open to the general public, STF funds can also be used for client-only services and programs enhancing the mobility of low-income individuals. As the subrecipient of Malheur County's STF funds, MCOACS implements projects and services funded by §5310.

The STF is being merged into Oregon's Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF), effective July 2023. Administrative rulemaking related to this merger will not be finalized until late 2022. However, if ODOT's initial recommendations are implemented, client-based projects and services will need to be included in the CTP to be eligible to receive STIF funding. As the designated STIF Qualified Entity, Malheur County can distribute federal and state funds to itself and to eligible subrecipients to support the mobility of seniors and persons with disabilities. This update to Malheur County's CTP captures existing STIF plan projects and will inform future STIF planning.

The intent of the CTP is to be a "living" document that identifies needs and investment priorities. Transit providers and partners in Malheur County will use the plan to allocate funding and develop and enhance transit services. Since the plan must be updated every five years, it has been written in a way that can incorporate ongoing updates and revisions.

Coordinated Transportation Plan Requirements

ODOT provides the following requirements for Coordinated Transportation Plans:

1. (1) An assessment of available services that identifies current transportation providers (public, private, and non-profit);
2. (2) An assessment of transportation needs for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes. This assessment can be based on the experiences and perceptions of the planning partners or on more sophisticated data collection efforts, and gaps in service (Note: If a community does not intend to seek funding for a particular program (Section 5310, 5311), then the community is not required to include an assessment of the targeted population in its coordinated plan);

3. (3) Strategies, activities, and/or projects to address the identified gaps between current services and needs, as well as opportunities to achieve efficiencies in service delivery; and
 - » (4) Priorities for implementation based on resources (from multiple program sources), time, and feasibility for implementing specific strategies and/or activities identified.

Assessing Need and Identifying Proposed Service and Capital Improvements

Reflecting legislative priorities identified in the Keep Oregon Moving Act, the CTP addresses the transportation needs of people residing and traveling within the region, especially those residents in low-income communities. Key project and program provisions of the CTP include the following STIF Criteria:

- » Increased frequency of bus service to areas with a high percentage of Low-Income Households.
- » Expansion of bus routes and bus services to serve areas with a high percentage of Low-Income Households.
- » Fund the implementation of programs to reduce fares for public transportation in communities with a high percentage of Low-Income Households.
- » Procurement of low or no emission buses.
- » Improvement in the frequency and reliability of service between communities inside and outside of the Qualified Entity's service area.
- » Coordination between Public Transportation Service Providers to reduce fragmentation in the provision of transportation services.
- » Implementation of programs to provide student transit service for students in grades 9-12.

SERVICE AREA

Malheur County covers 9,888 square miles across southeastern Oregon and is the second-largest county by area in the state. Major transportation routes connect Malheur County with its neighbors: Interstate 84 with Baker County to the north; US Highway 26 with Grant County to the northwest; US Highway 20 with Harney County to the southwest; OR 78 and US Highway 95 with Nevada to the south; and both US Highway 95 and Interstate 84 with Idaho to the east.

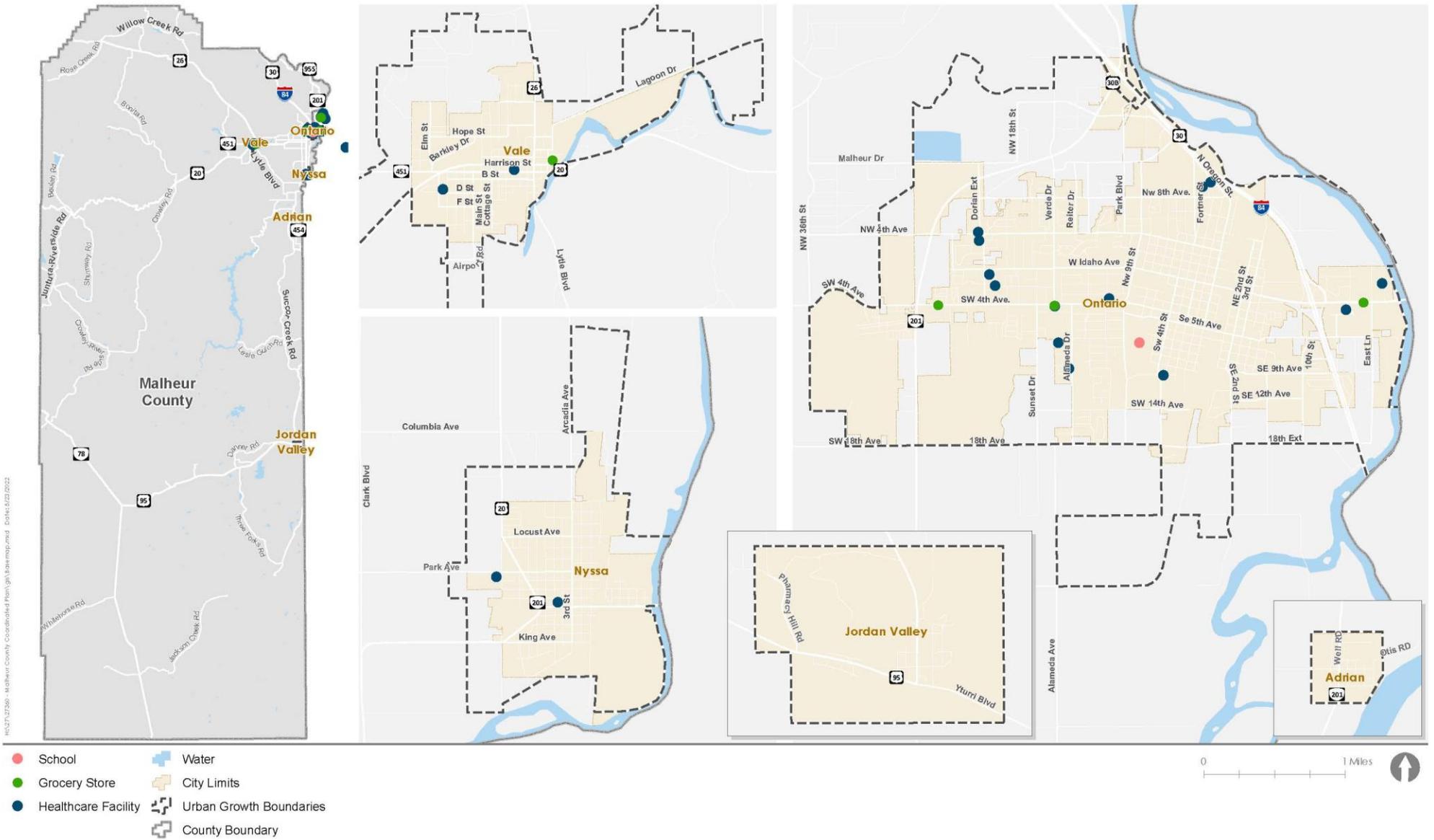
As of the 2020 Decennial Census, Malheur County has a population of 31,571. Although Vale is the county seat, a third of the overall population is concentrated in the city of Ontario, which has a population of 11,645. Other population centers include Nyssa, Adrian, and Jordan Valley. Malheur County's population density is low, with 3.1 people per square mile.

Figure 1 displays the project area, which includes all of Malheur County, as well as select population centers within the County. Further demographic information is included in the following section.

Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data provided by the US Census Bureau indicates that, as of 2019, employment clusters in Malheur County include the cities of Ontario, Vale, and Nyssa. Malheur County imports about 6,800 workers daily, which is roughly equivalent to the number of workers who also reside in Malheur County. About 3,900 residents of Malheur County travel outside of the county for work, mostly to cities in Idaho such as Payette, Fruitland, Weiser, Nampa, Caldwell, Boise, and New Plymouth. Taken together, this data indicates a high demand for workers in the Malheur County portion of the Treasure Valley.

Malheur County Coordinated Transportation Plan

Figure 1. Project Area



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

This section provides an overview of the demographic profile of Malheur County. Table 1 delineates select demographic characteristics of Malheur County residents, including those with a disability, individuals experiencing poverty, elderly people (aged 65+), and zero vehicle households. These demographic characteristics are particularly important in transit planning, as these populations tend to have a higher transit reliance. Additionally, it is important to understand where racial/ethnic minorities are located, to better provide service in communities that have been historically marginalized from the planning process.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Malheur County and Select Population Areas (2020)

	Total Population	Total Households	Below 100% Poverty*	Below 200% Poverty**	Youth (Under 18)	Older Adults (65 and older)	Racial/Ethnic Minority	Zero Vehicle Households	Persons with LEP***	Persons with Disability
Oregon	4,096,744	1,642,579	12.4%	29.3%	15.0%	8.0%	10.7%	7.2%	2.4%	14.3%
Malheur County	26,829	10,059	21.1%	47.2%	30.3%	13.0%	17.9%	8.5%	2.0%	16.3%
Adrian	224	71	17.0%	27.2%	43.6%	0.0%	18.4%	0.0%	0.0%	5.8%
Jordan Valley	160	60	11.3%	30.0%	47.8%	5.4%	11.8%	0.0%	0.0%	11.3%
Nyssa	3,149	1,116	22.1%	52.4%	30.0%	10.4%	19.4%	12.8%	5.5%	13.3%
Ontario	10,733	4,315	23.8%	52.8%	35.8%	14.9%	20.4%	14.3%	1.5%	19.2%
Vale	2,104	662	20.5%	50.9%	20.1%	27.7%	12.5%	10.4%	2.3%	15.2%

*100% Poverty indicates the percentage of individuals who earn below the Federal Poverty Level, and thus qualify for government aid. **200% Poverty indicates an increased degree of poverty beyond the Federal Poverty Level. ***Limited English Proficiency

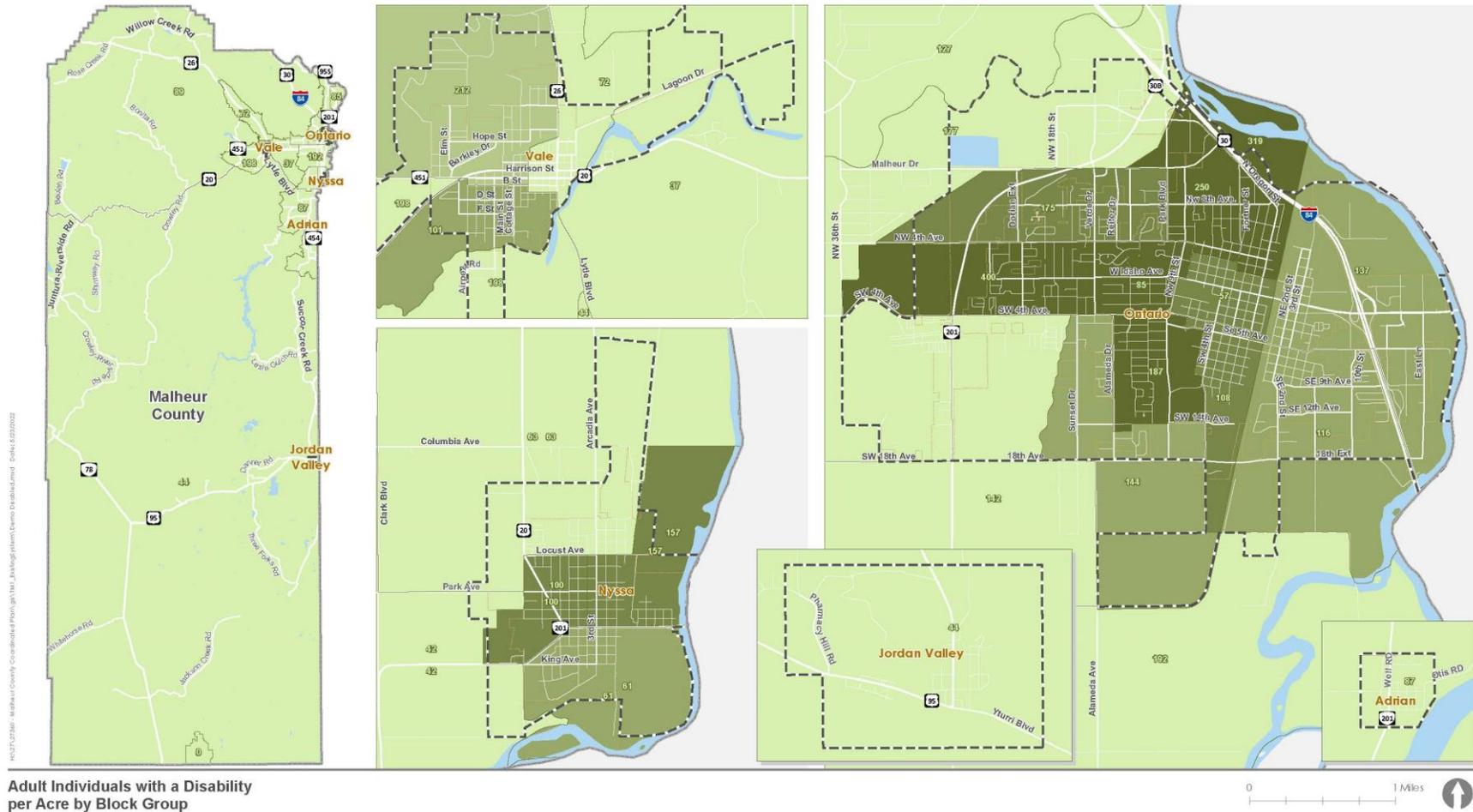
Source: US Decennial Census 2020 and American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Estimates; Tables S1602, S1701, S1810, B25044.

Figure 2 through 6 map these demographic characteristics. Key demographic profile findings include:

- » Ontario has a higher percentage of people with a disability and a higher percentage of people experiencing poverty than Malheur County as a whole.
- » Adrian has the highest percentage of elderly people for any incorporated city in the County. However, it still has a lower amount than Malheur County as a whole, which indicates that elderly people may be more likely reside in unincorporated Malheur County than in a city.
- » Nyssa and Ontario are the most racially diverse communities, with a higher percentage of minority populations in the community than Malheur County as a whole.
- » Ontario and Nyssa also have the highest percentage of zero-vehicle households, with a higher percentage than Malheur County as a whole.

Malheur County Coordinated Transportation Plan

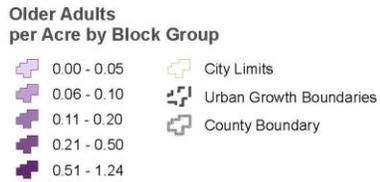
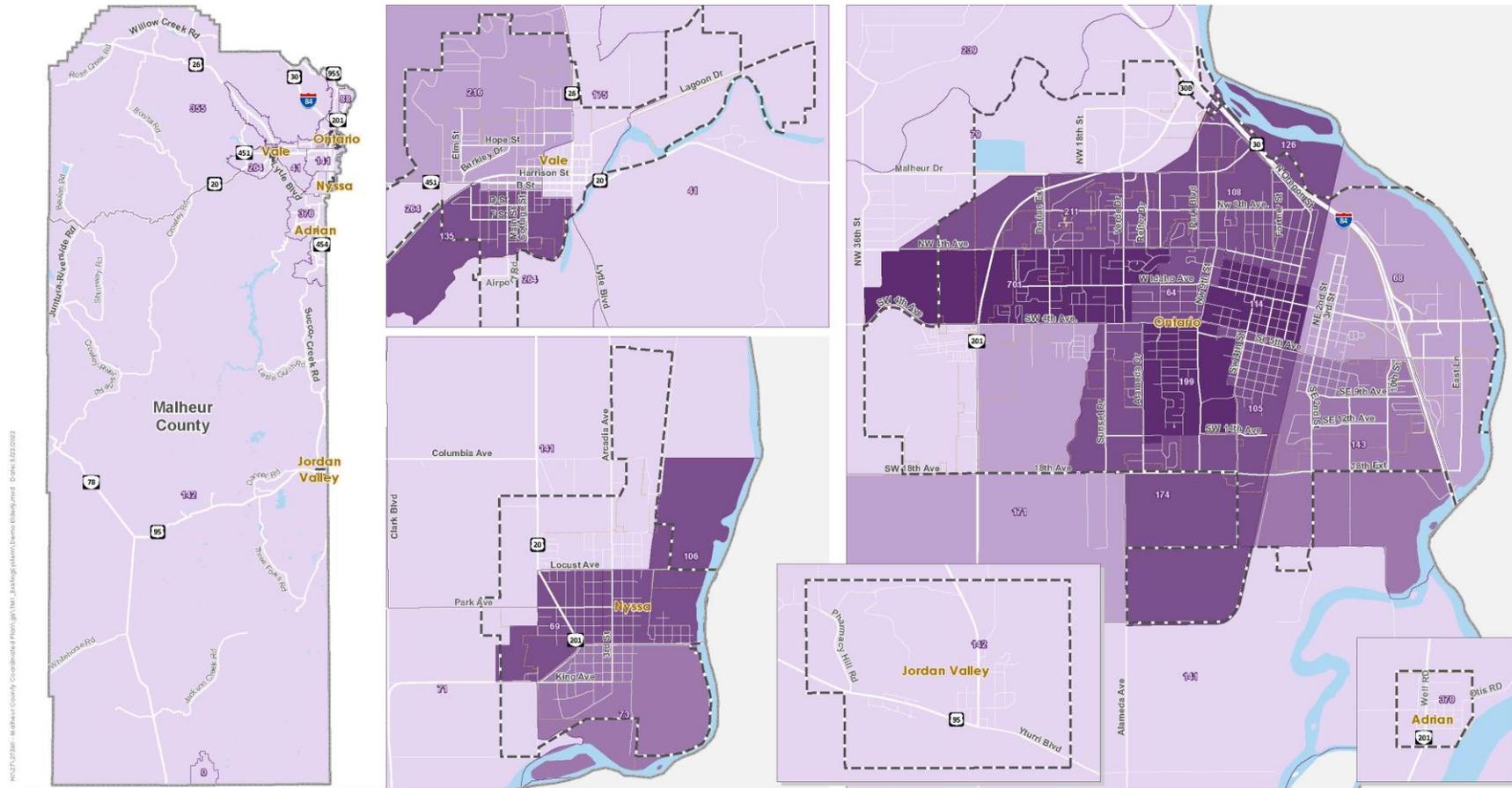
Figure 2. Individuals with a Disability (2020)



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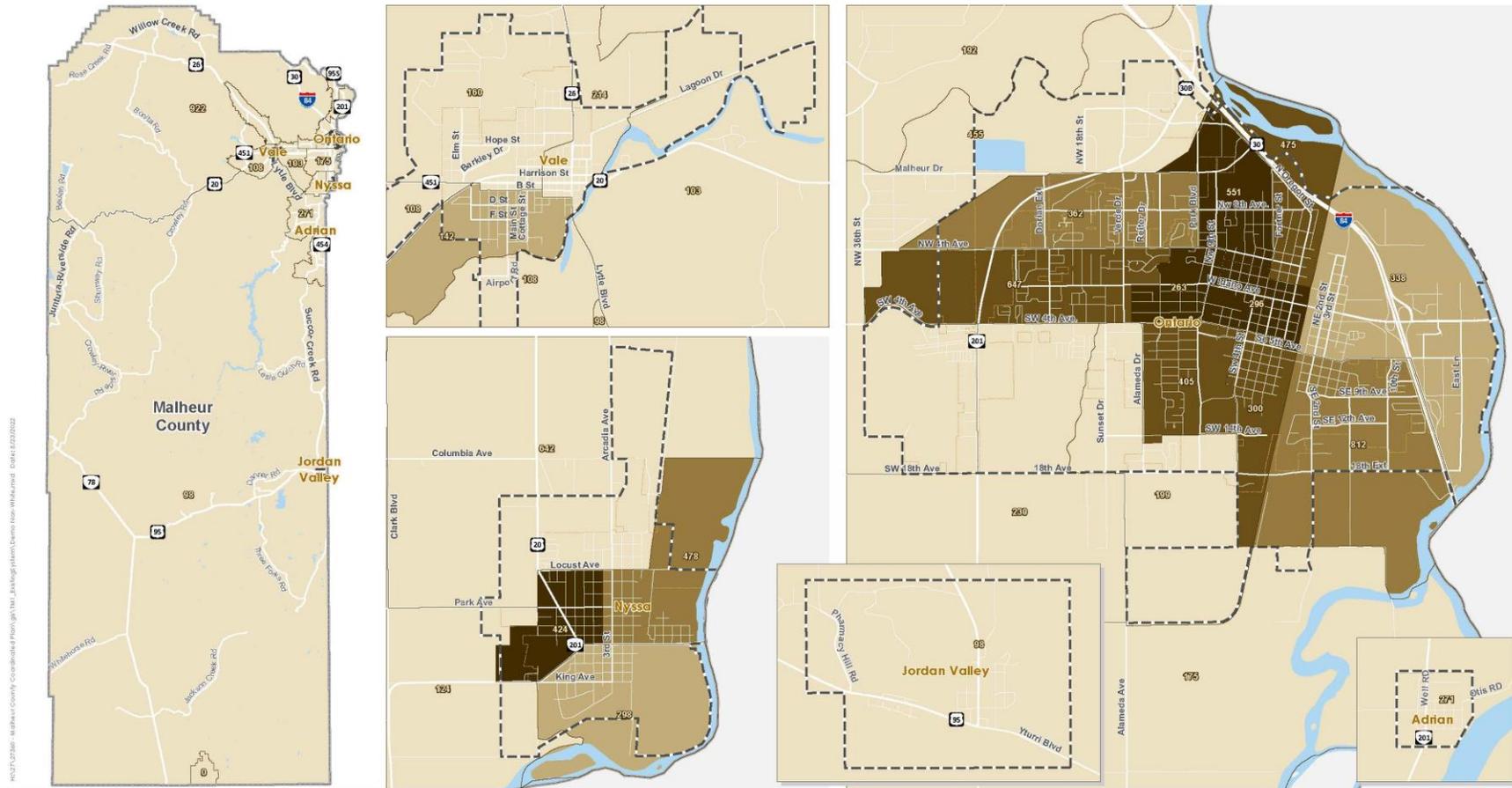
Malheur County Coordinated Transportation Plan

Figure 4. Older Adults (2020)



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Figure 5. Racial/Ethnic Minority (2020)



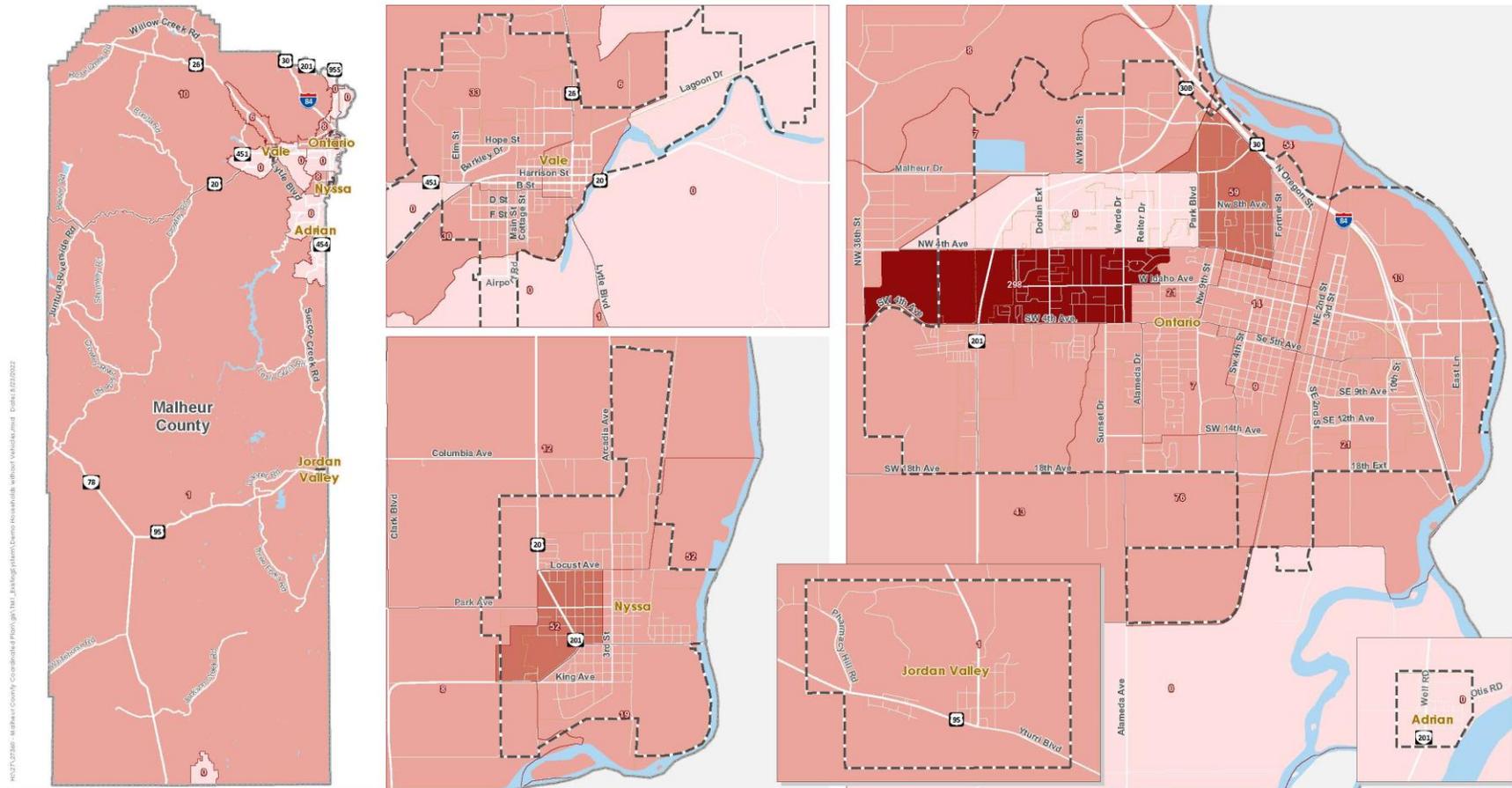
Racial/Ethnic Minority Population per Acre by Block Group

- 0.00 - 0.25
- 0.26 - 0.50
- 0.51 - 1.00
- 1.01 - 1.50
- 1.51 - 1.95

City Limits
Urban Growth Boundaries
County Boundary

Malheur County Coordinated Transportation Plan

Figure 6. Zero-Vehicle Households (2020)



Zero Vehicle Households per Acre by Block Group

- 0.00
- 0.01 - 0.15
- 0.16 - 0.25
- 0.26 - 0.40
- 0.41 - 0.53
- City Limits
- Urban Growth Boundaries
- County Boundary

AVAILABLE SERVICE INVENTORY

Figure 7 shows the available transit services in Malheur County and surrounding areas. Providers in Malheur County include MCOACS, Treasure Valley Transit, People Mover of Grant County, POINT, and Greyhound. The primary transit provider in Malheur County is MCOACS, which operates the Snake River Transit (SRT)-Malheur Express. Table 2 delineates additional information about the available transit service providers.

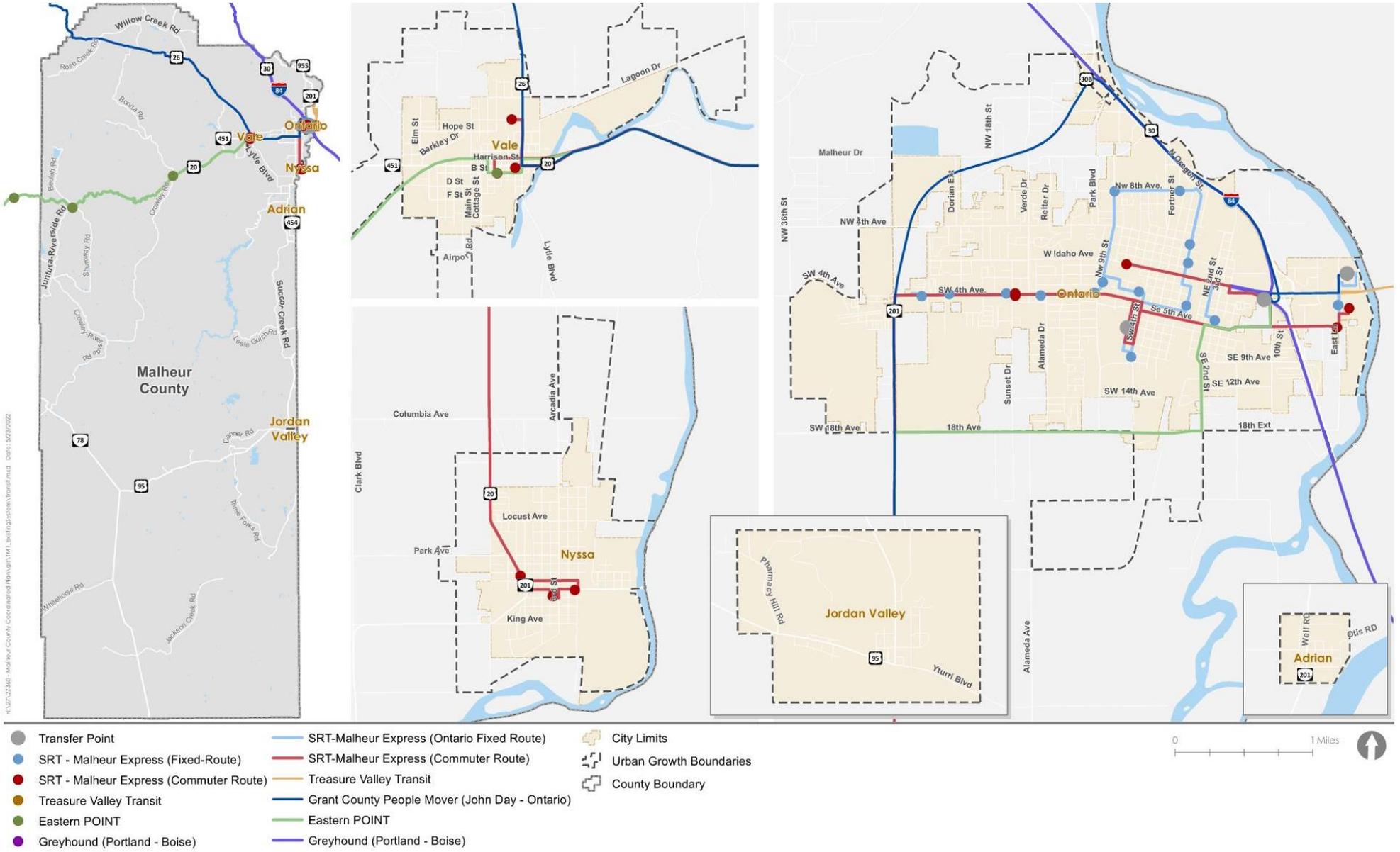
SRT-Malheur Express transit services provide fixed-route, complementary paratransit, commuter route, and demand-response services to all of Malheur County and its surrounding areas. The Ontario fixed-route service is a one-hour loop with 16 stops throughout the city of Ontario.

Complimentary paratransit provides demand-response services for eligible riders to destinations in Ontario that are within three-quarters of a mile of the fixed route. The commuter route public transit service connects to the Ontario fixed-route service and allows riders to connect from Ontario into the outlying cities of Vale and Nyssa. SRT-Malheur Express also provides demand-response, shared-ride transportation services in Malheur County communities. SRT-Malheur Express services also make connections to surrounding areas in Idaho such as Fruitland, Payette, Weiser, New Plymouth, Caldwell, Nampa, and Boise. To provide these transit services, MCOACS employs 11 full-time employees, including one transit manager, seven drivers, two dispatchers, and one maintenance specialist.

MCOACS is a private, nonprofit organization providing services for the general public in Malheur County and surrounding areas, including for seniors, low-income, and persons with disabilities, so that all may live healthy, meaningful, self-sufficient, and independent lives.

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Figure 7. Available Transit Service in Malheur County



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Table 2. Available Service Inventory (2022)

Transit Provider	Service Name	Service Type	Operating Hours	Service Area	Connections
<u>Snake River Transit (SRT) – Malheur Express</u> Operated by MCOACS, a public provider	City of Ontario	Fixed-route service	Monday – Friday (M – F), 6:00AM – 5:00PM First Saturday of Every Month 9:00AM – 3:00PM	Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treasure Valley Transit ● POINT ● Greyhound
	Ontario / Vale / Nyssa	Commuter route	M – F, Morning: 7:15AM – 9:05AM Evening: 3:00PM – 5:10PM	Ontario – Vale – Nyssa	
	Snake River Access	Demand-response paratransit (advanced registration)	M – F, 6:00AM – 5:00PM First Saturday of Every Month 9:00AM – 3:00PM	Origins and destinations within ¾ mile of Ontario fixed-route stops	
	Snake River Access PLUS	Demand-response shared-ride (advanced registration)	M – F, 8:00AM – 5:00PM	Origins and destinations in Malheur County and surrounding areas (Ada, Canyon, & Owyhee Counties, ID)	
	Non-Emergent Medical Transportation	Demand-response for eligible Medicaid recipients	-	Malheur County and surrounding Oregon Counties	
	Veteran Rides	Demand-response for eligible veterans	-	Malheur County – Boise VA Medical Center – Caldwell VA clinic	
	Senior Meal Site Transportation	Door-to-site for eligible seniors	Tuesdays & Thursdays 11:00AM – 2:00PM	Ontario Area	
<u>Treasure Valley Transit</u> Private, nonprofit provider	Snake River Transit	Deviated fixed-route	M – F, 6:00AM – 6:00PM First Saturday of Every Month 9:00AM – 3:00PM	Ontario – Fruitland – Payette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SRT-Malheur Express
	Ontario – McCall	Deviated fixed-route	First Saturday of Every Month	Ontario - McCall	
<u>People Mover of Grant County</u> Public provider	Ontario Route	Curb-to-curb service	Fridays Morning: 6:15AM – 11:20AM Evening: 4:00PM – 6:15PM	Mt Vernon – Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SRT-Malheur Express
<u>POINT</u> Public provider	Eastern (Bend – Ontario) OR Amtrak Route 8409	Intercity	M – F, 9:45AM – 1:40PM (WB) 2:30PM – 8:25PM (EB)	US 20 Highway (Bend – Ontario)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SRT-Malheur Express ● Greyhound
<u>Greyhound</u> Private provider	Greyhound	Intercity	M – F, Morning: 8:30AM – 10:00AM Evening: 8:30PM – 10:00PM	Interstate 84 (Baker City – Ontario – Nampa)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SRT-Malheur Express ● POINT

Pandemic Modifications

The COVID-19 pandemic, beginning in March 2020, significantly impacted daily life and thereby transit service. To adapt and respond to the challenges of the pandemic, transportation providers developed creative solutions and services, such as the SRT-Malheur Express Grocery Delivery Program, which coordinated grocery pickups from Red Apple Market Place, Walmart, and Albertson's stores for high-risk or isolating Malheur County residents. SRT-Malheur Express also offered free fares on fixed-route and demand-response services to help Malheur County residents access emergency food distribution events during the spring and summer of 2020. MCOACS also restricted the number of passengers onboard during the height of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic also necessitated service changes, such as the suspension of weekend service on the Oregon POINT Eastern Route and the reduction of Greyhound services from two roundtrips to one roundtrip per day. However, as the pandemic evolved, new schedule modifications created better connectivity between POINT buses and Greyhound services. During this time, the POINT stop in Vale was also relocated to the Malheur County Courthouse to improve transfer opportunities between SRT-Malheur Express, POINT, and the Grant County People Mover.

Supporting Programs

Several agencies provide support for transportation access in the region, though they do not directly provide transportation services. These include:

- » **Oregon Employment Department's** WorkSource program, which includes bus passes and gas vouchers for employment, job training, and education trips.
- » **Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc. (GOBHI)** contracts non-emergency medical transportation for Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization (EOCCO) trips to MCOACS.

Fleet (MCOACS)

- » There are 17 active vehicles in the fleet, 53 percent of which are in Excellent Condition.
- » The average age of the active fleet is 4.5 years.
- » The fleet spare ratio is 13 percent, which is lower than the recommended 20 percent.
- » Between 2018 and 2021, the miles per vehicle and hours per vehicle declined steadily, which is likely due to the purchase of nine vehicles between 2018 and 2020, as well as the slight decline in service miles and services hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funding (MCOACS)

- » While federal and state funding vary by year, MCOACS receives steady funding from local partner agencies annually, including Malheur County, City of Ontario, City of Nyssa, and City of Vale.
- » MCOACS is awarded funding from ODOT's STF and STIF on a biannual basis. In the past three application cycles, which span 2017–2023, MCOACS has received an average of \$154,333 in STF funding and an average of \$1,107,727 in STIF funding.
- » Contract, local, and state funds are used as a local match for federal funds.

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- » MCOACS is awarded funding from the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA's) Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities Program (§5310) and the Formula Grants for Rural Areas Program (§5311) on a biannual basis. In the past three application cycles, which span 2017–2023, MCOACS has requested and received an average of \$232,605 in §5310 funding and an average of \$723,997 in §5311 funding.
- » MCOACS receives an annual Veteran Highly Rural Transportation Grant of \$45,000 from the Veterans Administration to support the transportation of veterans to medical appointments.
- » MCOACS receives an average of \$152,228 per year in contracted funding for Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) from GOBHI.

Operations

- » Across SRT-Malheur Express services, mileage has trended downward since 2018, due to service reductions related to funding in 2019, and especially since 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - While both the fixed-route and commuter route services have remained relatively steady over the past four years, the service hours for Snake River Access PLUS have decreased by 39 percent.
 - The fixed-route service and the Snake River Access PLUS services experienced a substantial decline in ridership between 2018 and 2021, while the commuter service ridership has remained steady.
 - For the fixed-route service, rides per hour slowly increased between 2018 and 2020, before declining by 39 percent in 2021. The rides per hour on the commuter route has slowly declined over the past four years, as has the rides per hour for the Snake River Access PLUS.
 - Generally, the rides per hour and rides per mile for each service reflect similar trends.
- » Between 2017 and 2021, door-to-door services provided transit access to over 30 unique locations in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington.
 - In this period, the most popular origins and destinations were Ontario, Fruitland, and Nyssa.
 - 71 percent of door-to-door trips between 2017 and 2021 were completed in 30 minutes or less, and 91 percent of trips were completed in one hour or less.
 - Combined door-to-door services average 2,600 cancellations and 405 no-shows per year.

Financial Performance

- » Between 2018 and 2021, the operating costs increased or remained steady across services:
 - The cost per service hour increased steadily (~34 percent) across services.
 - The cost per service mile followed a similar trend across services, with a ~34 percent increase during this period.
 - The cost per ride increased the most substantially of all metrics, with an average increase of 63 percent across services.

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- The cost per ride on the commuter service increased the most, with a 195 percent increase between 2020 and 2021. This could reflect the changing nature of work due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- » Vehicle costs remained steady between 2018 and 2020, with a slight increase between 2020 and 2021, which likely reflects the purchase of new vehicles.
- » The farebox recovery ratio has decreased across services between 2018 and 2021.

RELEVANT PLANS & PROGRAMS

This section describes relevant plans, programs, and policies adopted by Malheur County and partner agencies. Key findings include:

- » Public transit funding in Oregon has shifted since the previous Malheur County CTP was adopted; the State of Oregon created additional transportation funding through the STIF, which will soon be combined with the STF.
- » ODOT's most recent Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) includes several roadway projects in Malheur County, but none that directly address improving transit amenities, services, or access.
- » Many Malheur County transit improvements included in the FY 19-21 STIF cycle were rolled over into the FY 21-23 cycle.
- » Transit service was identified as an important community health strategy in the EOCCO Health Plan. This coincides with the vision and goals outlined in the Oregon Public Transportation Plan and related plans.
- » The City of Ontario completed a walking and bicycling transportation plan in 2021 that identified many improvements that would benefit transit riders.
- » The City of Ontario has programmed numerous projects to improve transit access in the next few years.

These findings stemmed from a review of the following documents:

- » Oregon Department of Transportation
 - ODOT Public Transportation Funding in Oregon (2017)
 - ODOT Statewide Transportation Improvement Program FY21-24 (2021)
 - ODOT Oregon Public Transportation Plan (2018)
 - ODOT Oregon Transportation Options Plan (2015)
 - ODOT Mobility as a Service White Paper (2020)
- » Malheur County
 - Malheur County Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation Plan (2016)
 - Malheur County STIF Plan (2021)
 - Malheur County STIF Plan (2019)
 - Malheur County Comprehensive Plan (2010)
 - EOCCO Health Plan for Malheur County (2019)
- » City of Ontario
 - City of Ontario Active Transportation Plan (2021)
 - City of Ontario Capital Improvement Plan (2021)
 - City of Ontario Transportation System Plan (2006)

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

This section describes the various stakeholder involvement opportunities that informed this plan.

Public Survey

This section summarizes the findings of a public survey developed to understand the travel patterns, needs, and other information concerning transit service in Malheur County. The project team developed two surveys with the goal of better understanding public opinion on transit services in Malheur County. A survey designed to understand riders' experience was administered to transit passengers, while a slightly modified survey was presented to non-riders to understand their perceptions of transit service. In total, 77 surveys were completed: 31 from riders, and 46 from non-riders. Surveys were administered online between May 27, 2022, and June 27, 2022, and in person on June 2, 2022, at the Project Initiation Workshops. Major takeaways include:

- » Top trip purposes were shopping/errands (55 percent), medical appointments (39 percent), and commutes to work or school (33 percent).
- » While riders reported understanding Malheur County transit services "well" or "fair," non-riders reported their understanding as "fair" or "poor."
- » When people do transfer, they are mostly connecting between SRT-Malheur Express and Treasure Valley Transit.
- » The most commonly accessed stop is the Ontario Walmart (11 respondents), followed by the Ontario Train Depot/Downtown, Ontario Grocery Outlet, and Vale Courthouse (three respondents each).
- » Most people walk to and from bus stops.
- » 70 percent of respondents in Malheur County report driving themselves as their primary mode of transportation.
- » 60 percent of the respondents have never used transit services.
- » Most survey respondents do not use SRT-Malheur Express services because they prefer to drive their own vehicle.
- » In general, riders of SRT-Malheur Express rate quality of service as higher than non-riders.
- » For both riders and non-riders, the most desired improvements were increased frequency, extended hours, and service to more destinations.
- » Both riders and non-riders reported that common barriers and challenges to using transit for trips include: lengthy ride times, confusing schedules, lack of service on Saturdays, and stop locations far from their origin or destination.
- » Things that would encourage non-riders to use transit services include: an increase in fuel costs or decrease in fare costs, more route availability in terms of bus stops and service frequency, and more information about how to ride services.
- » Riders and non-riders asked for a range of new locations, including to employment destinations and grocery stores, more frequent stops on existing routes, and additional service to Vale and Nyssa.
- » Other challenges to using services included their general inaccessibility for those with mobility challenges and a lack of bus stop amenities to make waiting more comfortable.

Provider Survey

Transportation providers, including both public and private providers, responded to a survey about their operations and fleet, how their clients use their services, and what they perceived as Malheur County's transit needs. The findings from this survey are incorporated into the "Available Service Inventory" section and informed this plan's needs and strategies.

Technical Advisory Committee

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) provided representation from public and private transportation providers; cities, county, and state agency members; organizations involved in the care of elderly and disabled populations; and other stakeholders invested in transportation options for Malheur County. TAC meetings included the following:

- » TAC Meeting 1, June 2, 2022: This meeting introduced the project and reported on the existing system findings. TAC members provided further information about their services and client needs, and asked questions about the purpose and development process of the CTP.
- » TAC Meeting 2, August 10, 2022: This meeting reported back on the needs and strategies developed based on existing system findings, TAC Meeting 1 feedback, and public outreach. TAC members agreed on the draft priorities and offered additional considerations for the strategies.
- » TAC Meeting 3, September 21, 2022: This meeting presented the full draft of the CTP and sought feedback.

Workshops

Several public workshops and events were held to gather community input on transportation services. These workshops included:

- » Project Initiation Workshops offered drop-by tables on June 2, 2022, at the following locations:
 - Ontario Walmart
 - MCOACS Office
 - Vale M&W Market
 - Nyssa M&W Market
- » The Route Evaluation Workshop, held on August 10, 2022, at the MCOACS office, provided a presentation and review of route alternatives for the City of Ontario Local fixed-route and commuter route services. The presentation was open to the public but primarily included TAC members.
- » Draft Plan Review Workshops offered drop-by tables on September 21, 2022, at the following locations:
 - Ontario Red Apple
 - MCOACS Office
 - Vale Senior Center
 - Nyssa M&W Market

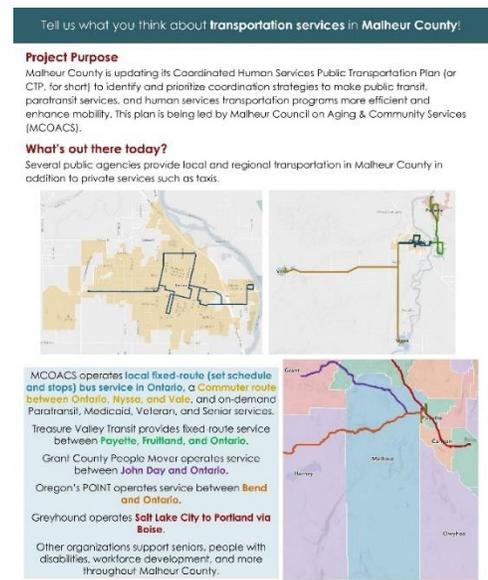


Figure 8. Workshop #1 poster showing existing services

NEEDS AND STRATEGIES

This section details the needs identified from the existing conditions analysis, the discussions with the TAC, and the responses from the public survey, as well as strategies to address each need. These needs include those of users as well as operators. Many strategies meet multiple needs. Malheur County coordinated transportation needs include the following:

1. Services for populations in unincorporated areas and communities not connected to the existing system, particularly for elderly populations
2. Reliable transportation for employment-based trips, especially for low-income populations
3. Local and regional connectivity for transit-dependent groups (people with disabilities, people experiencing poverty, racially diverse populations, and zero-vehicle households) in Ontario, Nyssa, and Vale
4. Continued and expanded connections between transportation providers in Malheur County
5. Increased ridership on existing services
6. Expanded and maintained vehicle fleet capable of meeting service needs
7. Stabilized costs and increased funding streams
8. Methods to attract and retain staff, including drivers, maintenance, supervisors, and administration

Table 3 associates the needs listed above with corresponding strategies for addressing each need.

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Table 3. Needs and Corresponding Strategies

Strategy	Needs							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Routes and Services								
Enhance the Commuter and Local Fixed-Route services via route modification, increased frequency, or increased service hours.		X	X		X			
Promote and/or subsidize vanpools for employment.		X	X					
Promote rideshares.	X							
Enhance dial-a-ride service hours, including the Snake River Access and Veteran Highly Rural Transportation Grant programs.	X		X					
Implement "lifeline" services to communities such as Adrian, Harper, Jordan Valley, and Weiser.	X		X	X				
Study feasibility of continuous route across Oregon/Idaho borders to reduce transfers and enhance ridership.		X	X	X	X			
Transit Stops and Rider Tools								
Provide safe and accessible bus stops, including better amenities and comfortable walking and bicycling connections, especially at stops that connect with other providers.				X	X			
Improve fare payment options, including affordable options for low-income people and students.					X			
Provide real-time vehicle arrival information.					X			
Pursue technological advancements, such as app-based booking or dynamic routing software, that promote system use and increase efficiency.			X		X			
Coordination								
Establish regular coordination meetings with connecting providers and partners to improve access to services.	X			X				
Establish feedback and marketing program to engage with employers, education centers, disadvantaged populations, and more.		X	X		X			
Fleet and Facilities								
Obtain new vehicles.						X		
Establish capital replacement plan.						X		
Ensure adequate storage and maintenance capabilities to meet future service needs.						X		
Pursue low-/zero-emission vehicles to stabilize fuel prices.						X	X	
Funding								
Continue to leverage local funds and seek new partnerships to obtain state and federal funds.							X	
Seek ways to share trips across funding pools (§5310, §5311, VHRTH, etc.) while maintaining separate ride records.							X	
Staffing								
Partner with college and training centers to communicate availability of positions.								X
Seek peer review and pursue funding to ensure competitive wages and benefits.								X
Conduct regular feedback sessions with staff.								X

PRIORITIZATION

This section establishes evaluation criteria to prioritize the strategies described in the previous section. The prioritized strategies are presented as well.

Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria for these strategies focuses on the costs and benefits, ease of implementation, and group(s) served or needs met. These criteria are established at the following scales:

- » Costs – High-level estimated costs considering the scale of implementation
 - \$: Less than \$25,000 annually
 - \$\$: \$25,000 to \$75,000 annually
 - \$\$\$: Greater than \$75,000 annually
- » Benefits – Qualitative measure identifying expected outcome of the recommendation
 - +: Strategy enhances services slightly
 - ++: Strategy enhances services moderately
 - +++: Strategy enhances services substantially or is necessary to continue operations
- » Difficulty of Implementation – Considers whether the strategy can be implemented quickly and with little complication, beyond costs to implement
 - Low: Infrastructure, staff, and other resources are already in place
 - Medium: Some infrastructure, staff, and other resources are in place, but more will need to be obtained
 - High: No infrastructure, staff, or other resources are in place
- » Group(s) Served/Needs Met – Considers how many of the following groups benefit from this strategy: Low-income populations, people with disabilities, youths, older adults, racial/ethnic minority, zero-vehicle households, households with Limited English proficiency, veterans, and employees
 - ①: Fewer groups served/needs met
 - ●: Many groups served/needs met

Results and Prioritization

Using the above evaluation criteria, the strategies were evaluated and prioritized in Table 4. High-priority strategies are generally lower cost, provide greater benefits, are less difficult to implement, and serve the needs of more groups than lower-priority strategies.

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Table 4. Strategies and Priorities

Strategy	Costs	Benefits	Difficulty of Implementation	Group(s) Served / Needs Met	Priority
Routes and Services					
Enhance the Commuter and Local Fixed-Route services via route modification, increased frequency, or increased service hours.	\$\$ - \$\$\$	+++	Medium	●	High
Promote and/or subsidize vanpools for employment.	\$	++	Medium	🕒	Medium
Promote rideshares.	\$\$	+	Low	🕒	Medium
Enhance dial-a-ride service hours, including Snake River Access and Veteran Highly Rural Transportation Grant programs.	\$\$	+++	Medium	●	High
Implement "lifeline" services to communities such as Adrian, Harper, Jordan Valley, and Weiser.	\$\$\$	+++	High	🕒	Low
Consider possibility of continuous route across Oregon/Idaho border to reduce transfers and enhance ridership.	\$\$	++	High	🕒	Low
Transit Stops and Rider Tools					
Provide safe and accessible bus stops, including better amenities and comfortable walking and biking connections, especially at stops that connect with other providers.	\$\$ - \$\$\$	+++	High	●	Medium
Improve fare payment options, including affordable options for low-income populations and students.	\$	+++	Medium	●	High
Provide real-time vehicle arrival information.	\$\$	++	Medium	🕒	Low
Pursue technological advancements, such as app-based booking or dynamic routing software, that promote system use and increase efficiency.	\$	++	Medium	🕒	Medium
Coordination					
Establish regular coordination meetings with connecting providers and partners to improve access to services.	\$	++	Low	🕒	High

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Strategy	Costs	Benefits	Difficulty of Implementation	Group(s) Served / Needs Met	Priority
Establish feedback and marketing program to engage with employers, education centers, disadvantaged populations, and more.	\$	++	Low	●	High
Fleet and Facilities					
Obtain new vehicles.	\$\$	+++	Medium	●	Medium
Establish capital replacement plan.	\$	++	Low	●	High
Ensure adequate storage and maintenance capabilities to meet future service needs.	\$\$\$	+++	High	●	Low
Pursue low-/zero-emission vehicles to stabilize fuel prices.	\$\$\$	++	High	●	Low
Funding					
Continue to leverage local funds and seek new partnerships to obtain state and federal funds.	\$	+++	Low	●	High
Seek ways to share trips across funding pools (§5310, §5311, VHRTH, etc.) while maintaining separate ride records.	\$\$	+++	Medium	◐	Medium
Staffing					
Partner with college and training centers to communicate availability of positions.	\$	++	Low	●	Medium
Seek peer review and pursue funding to ensure competitive wages and benefits.	\$	++	Low	●	Medium
Conduct regular feedback sessions with staff.	\$	++	Low	●	High

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This section will identify timeline and funding opportunities for the high-priority strategies. Table 5 shows the funding sources aligned to each strategy.

Table 5. Funding Sources

Funding Source	Description	Eligibility			
		Operating	Capital	City/County Facilities	Marketing/Outreach
FTA Grants	§5304: Non-Metropolitan Transportation Planning Grant. Funds are allocated to states, which then distribute them to regional and local agencies for transit planning.				X
	§5310: Enhanced Mobility of Seniors & Individuals with Disabilities Program. Formula funding for the purpose of meeting the transportation needs of seniors and people with disabilities. ODOT allocates state 5310 funds to rural areas via local STF agency and may reserve for discretionary programs.	X	X		X
	§5311: Federal Transit Administration's Rural Area Formula Program. Formula funding to small cities and rural areas with populations of less than 50,000 for transit capital, planning, and operations, including job access and reverse commute projects. Funds are distributed to providers through ODOT. Additionally, no less than 15 percent of funds must be spent on the development and support of intercity bus transportation, unless the intercity bus needs of the state are being adequately met.	X	X		X
	§5339: Funding for small urban and rural areas, as well as transit agencies in large urban areas, to replace, rehabilitate, and purchase buses and related equipment and to construct bus-related facilities.	X			
	Other: The FTA periodically releases additional funding opportunities. In 2019, the FTA released the Integrated Mobility Innovation opportunity, providing \$15 million for demonstration projects focused on Mobility on Demand, Strategic Transit Automation Research, and Mobility Payment Integration. For FY20, the FTA also announced the Mobility for All Pilot Program to invest in mobility options that connect older adults, individuals with disabilities, and people with low incomes to jobs, education, and health services.				
State Special Transportation Funds (STF)	Allocated by the Oregon Legislature every two years. Funds may be used for any purpose directly related to public transportation services for seniors and people with disabilities.	X			X
Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund (STIF)	Formula funds for expanding access to jobs, improving mobility, relieving congestion, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, while providing a special focus on low-income populations. STIF funds may be used for public transportation purposes that support the operations, planning, and administration of public transportation programs and may also be used as the local match for state and federal grants. 90 percent of STIF funds are distributed to Qualified Entities (Malheur County). 5 percent of STIF funds are available via discretionary grants for flexible funding. 4 percent of funds are available via discretionary grants for projects enhancing intercommunity services and the statewide transit network. 1 percent of the funds are allocated for program administration and a technical resource center.	X	X		X

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Funding Source	Description	Eligibility			
		Operating	Capital	City/County Facilities	Marketing/Outreach
Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG)	This grant-based federal program, under Veteran Affairs, provides demand-response services. It transports veterans in highly rural areas to VA-authorized health care facilities. There is no user fee if the program is available in the area the veteran lives in.	X			
Rural Veteran Healthcare Transportation Grant (RVHT)	This program, under ODOT, provides demand-response services, providing veterans access to physical, mental, and/or behavioral healthcare. Access is not limited to VA-authorized health care facilities; access to services that contribute to a veteran's well-being may be accommodated as well. This program aims to focus its services to veterans but is open to shared rides with civilians.	X			
Private/Public Sponsorships	Private/public sponsorships involve a private entity, such as a local business owner, working with the public agency to fund a project (e.g., bus stop shelter and sidewalk connection maintenance). In return for their investment in the community, these business owners often have recognition for their role, providing a marketing venue for the business.	X	X	X	X
STIP Enhance	Funds allocated to projects through a competitive grant application process. Eligible projects include public transit capital improvements.		X	X	
Multimodal Impact Fees	Similar to transportation system development charges but more focused on improvements to multimodal transportation options. If a TIF is established, the fixed-route service could work to allocate a portion of funds toward transit-enhancing improvements.			X	
ODOT Safe Routes to School Grant Program	Eligible projects include safety improvements that positively affect the ability of children to walk and bicycle to school. Projects must be within a public road right-of-way, consistent with jurisdictional plans, supported by the school or school district, within a one-mile radius of a school, and able to be constructed within five years of the application. Project examples include sidewalks, median refuge islands, rapid flashing beacons, etc.		X	X	
Transportation Options Program	Discretionary grant program including initiatives such as Innovative Mobility Grants, which ODOT is currently determining a framework for, and Immediate Opportunity Grants of \$5,000 or less for qualified activities. Examples of eligible activities include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Transportation-focused community events such as Open Streets, Bike Rodeos, etc. ● Activities to engage historically underserved communities in active or multimodal transportation outreach or education ● Purchase of items associated with bike and pedestrian safety outreach, such as bicycle racks, helmets, locks, etc. 				X
Rural Transportation Equity Program	This one-off ODOT funding opportunity seeks to support rural communities in the following ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identifying and engaging underserved communities in rural areas to provide transportation options, like bicycling, walking, and public transportation, in order to access to critical services and destinations ● Building capacity within local governments to maintain relationships and connections to underserved communities, with a focus on including underserved groups in future planning efforts ● Matching communities' needs with outside funding opportunities (i.e., federal and state programs and resources) through strategic investment planning <p>Morrow County received this grant and will conduct outreach in the coming year. Should this grant become a regularly provided fund, Morrow County could continue to pursue this in the future.</p>				X

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In addition to these, roadway facility owners (cities, Malheur County, ODOT) can pursue walking and bicycling facility improvements through the following funds:

- » Surface Transportation Block Grants
- » State Highway Fund
- » Road Fund Serial Levy
- » Road Utility Fee
- » Vehicle Registration Fee
- » Local-Option Fuel Tax
- » Immediate Opportunity Funds
- » All Roads Transportation Safety
- » General Fund
- » Transportation Development Tax
- » System Development Charges
- » Local Improvement District
- » Tax Increment Financing
- » Urban Renewal Districts

Table 6 aligns the high-priority strategies to the relevant funding sources and identifies a timeline for implementation and/or completion. The timeline is based on considerations such as securing staff, vehicles, or other resources needed to implement the recommendation; whether an activity is ongoing or a discrete task; and what other strategies need to be in place before the strategy itself should be implemented. These timeframes represent the ideal implementation timeline and are subject to the availability of resources such as funding, staff availability, vehicles and facilities, and other factors.

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Table 6. High-Priority Strategies and Available Funding Pools

Strategy	Section 5304	Section 5310	Section 5311	Section 5339	STF	STIF	HRTG	RVHT	Private/Public Sponsorships	STIP Enhance	ODOT Safe Routes to School Grant	Transportation Options Program	Rural Transportation Equity Program	Timeline
Routes and Services														
Enhance the Commuter and Local Fixed-Route services via route modification, increased frequency, or increased service hours		X	X		X	X	X	X	X					0-5 yrs
Enhance dial-a-ride service hours, including Snake River Access and Veteran Highly Rural Transportation Grant programs		X	X		X	X	X	X	X					0-5 yrs
Transit Stops and Rider Facilities														
Improve fare payment options, including affordable options for low-income populations and students		X	X		X	X			X					3-5 yrs
Coordination														
Establish regular coordination meetings with connecting providers and partners to improve access to services		X	X		X	X			X					<2 yrs
Establish feedback and marketing program to engage with employers, education centers, disadvantaged populations, and more		X	X		X	X			X			X	X	0-5 yrs
Fleet and Facilities														
Establish capital replacement plan	X	X	X	X	X	X								<2 yrs
Funding														
Continue to leverage local funds and seek new partnerships to obtain state and federal funds	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0-5 yrs
Staffing														
Conduct regular feedback sessions with staff		X	X		X	X								<2 yrs

MONITORING PROGRAM

The following section provides a program to track transit service performance and the success of the plan's recommendations. The program is driven by data and founded on performance measures that can be tracked on a regular basis against set benchmarks. In most cases, these performance measures are already tracked as part of FTA reporting requirements. This program enables a dynamic system where service adjustments can be implemented and justified following performance evaluations.

Performance measures are divided into annual and less frequent (e.g., biennial) monitoring bases. Most of the recommended performance measures should be reviewed each year. The performance measures identified for less-frequent review are less likely to fluctuate meaningfully on an annual basis. As these performance measures are applied in the future, Malheur County may adjust how often specific performance measures are examined. Benchmarks also consider existing and future data availability.

Performance Measures Requiring Annual Review

The following performance measures are recommended to be evaluated at least annually to understand how the new services are being used and their overall cost. All these measures are typically already monitored for National Transit Database reporting purposes.

- » **Capital costs** track the annual capital costs directly to the service operator (MCOACS) and improvements by facility owners (e.g., Malheur County, local cities, employers, other property owners). This information is useful for budgeting for vehicle replacements and additional transit-supportive infrastructure, such as shelters, based on actual agency cost experience.
- » **Operating costs** tracks annual operating costs for the services. This information is useful for evaluating cost trends for future budgeting purposes, and for calculating other performance measures, such as cost per hour, that can be compared with peer agencies.
- » **Annual rides** tracks total number of rides per year. This information is useful for evaluating ridership trends, and for calculating other performance measures, such as rides per hour or cost per ride, that can be compared with peer agencies. Transit providers typically also track ridership more frequently (e.g., by month, by day of week) to help identify ridership patterns and trends, which can help optimize services.
- » **Revenue service hours** tracks total number of hours of revenue service provided. This measure is used to calculate rides and cost per hour.
- » **Rides per hour** tracks average annual rides per hour (productivity). Staff resources permitting, tracking annual productivity by scheduled trip is useful for identifying and supporting the need for schedule changes (e.g., addressing consistently over- or under-utilized trips), for identifying the need to purchase higher-capacity vehicles, and for targeting marketing efforts to increase ridership, among other uses.
- » **Cost per hour** tracks average annual operating cost per revenue hour. Comparing respective costs per hour is a useful measure for peer agencies to check whether their costs and cost trends are in line with, greater than, or less than the peer average.

Performance Measures Requiring Less Frequent Review

The following performance measures are either: (1) less likely to change in a significant way on an annual basis and do not need to be tracked each year; or (2) are time intensive to evaluate on an annual basis.

- » **System ease of use** tracks improvements made to travel between communities or transit providers, such as technology improvements (trip-planning, real-time tracking apps) and timed transfers between different transit providers.
- » **Walking and bicycling access** tracks the percentage of stops with a sidewalk/path, bicycle lane/path, and/or crossings connecting to the stop.

Peer Comparison

While every transit provider has a unique service area and operating characteristics, comparing a provider's performance to that of similar providers can help managers and other decision-makers gauge whether changes in performance match the experiences of similar agencies or if these changes may be due to actions on the provider's part (indicating either something to correct or something to continue, depending on how performance changed). Transit agencies that receive federal funding are required to report information about service miles, service hours, and ridership, among others, to the National Transit Database. Peer comparisons were conducted for Malheur County to understand existing and potential performance using the most recent year of available data, 2018. Peers were primarily identified using the process described in *TCRP Report 141: A Guidebook on Performance Measurement and Peer Comparison in the Transit Industry*, which uses factors such as type of service provided, amount of service provided, geographic characteristics, and more.

Table 7 provides the peer comparison evaluation. Figure 9 shows rides per hour for the peer providers. Figure 10 shows the cost per hour for the peer providers. As shown, MCOACS provides near the average of its peers in terms of rides per hour and does so on the lower end of the cost spectrum.

Table 7. Transit Provider Comparison (2018)

	MCOACS	Grant County	Community Connection of NE Oregon	Senior Citizens of Sweet Home, Inc.	MCEDD (Wasco County)	Mt. Si Senior Center (WA)	Flathead Area IX Agency on Aging (MT)
Annual Revenue Miles	260,239	224,936	553,315	311,384	100,718	197,317	322,847
Annual Revenue Hours	15,264	11,612	28,031	16,754	6,526	13,853	25,416
Annual Ridership	49,123	37,507	80,820	102,274	26,145	22,518	105,662
Rides per Mile	0.19	0.17	0.15	0.33	0.26	0.11	0.33
Rides per Hour	3.22	3.23	2.88	6.1	4.01	1.63	4.16
Cost per Hour	47.55	33.96	56.23	42.99	85.7	89.88	48.29

Figure 9. Rides per Hour for Comparable Systems

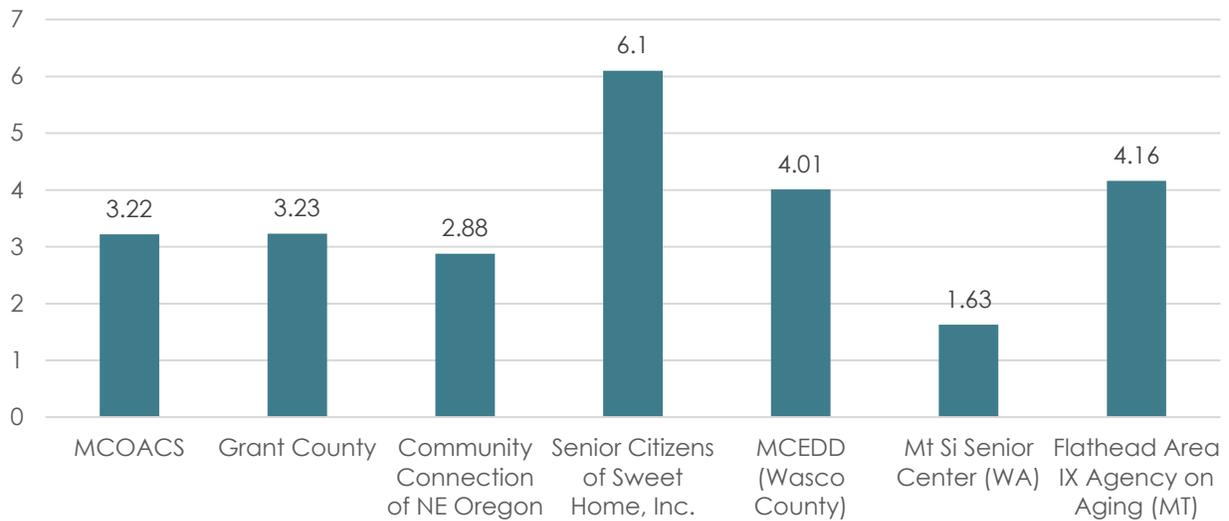
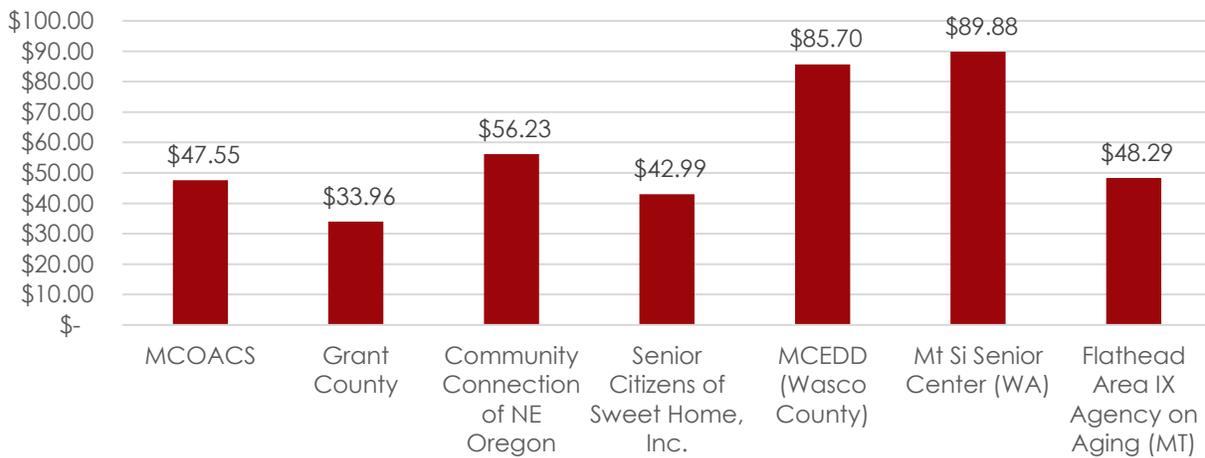


Figure 10. Cost per Hour for Comparable Systems



CONCLUSION

Transportation services play a key role in Malheur County, connecting residents and visitors to the places they need to go locally and regionally. Most imminently, this document can serve as preparation for funding cycles, including STF and STIF cycles, that can help Malheur County to implement recommendations and enhancing transportation services. Beyond that, the recommendations are intended to provide conceptual guidance to be refined by Malheur County, MCOACS, and their partners as funding and partnership opportunities become available.

While this document provides prioritized strategies and examples of how these would specifically be implemented, the recommendations are a snapshot in time and may adjust to meet the changing needs of the region.

REFERENCES

1. Technical Memorandum 1: Existing System
2. Technical Memorandum 2: Implementation Plan
3. Technical Memorandum 3: Route Evaluation