

Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan for Dutchess County

July 8, 2008

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1. Background

Signed into law on August 10, 2005, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA) requires that a Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan (“Coordinated Plan”) be developed to identify the transportation needs of disabled persons, older adults, and low income populations, while also prioritizing strategies to meet any unmet needs.

The Coordinated Plan serves as the basis for funding projects under three Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) programs:

- **Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities Program (Section 5310):** Provides transportation services to elderly persons and persons with disabilities for whom other mass transportation services are unavailable, insufficient, or inappropriate. New York State limits the use of 5310 funding for the sole purpose of purchasing eligible vehicles.
- **Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) Program (Section 5316):** Provides formula funding to support projects that help transport welfare recipients and eligible low-income persons to and from work. Funds can support both capital and operating costs; though each has different local match requirements.
- **New Freedom (Section 5317):** Provides funding for new public transportation services beyond those required by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 that assist individuals with disabilities.

All three programs carry the requirement that a Coordinated Plan be in place before federal funding is provided. Funding is made available on a Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) basis (e.g. FFY 2008: September 30, 2007 – October 1, 2008) and processed through the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT).

2. Planning Guidance

The FTA issued guidance on how to develop the Coordinated Plan on September 6, 2006 (Federal Register/Vol. 71, No. 172). Under this guidance, the FTA proposed that the plan include four elements:

- An assessment of available services that identifies current providers.
- An assessment of transportation needs for individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes.
- Strategies or activities to address identified service gaps.
- Prioritizing these strategies based on resources, time, and feasibility.

NYSDOT subsequently issued guidance on how best to implement the planning requirement across the State. This included the recommendation that designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) in large Urbanized Areas take the lead in developing Coordinated Plans for their planning areas.

3. The PDCTC

As the designated MPO for the Dutchess County portion of the Poughkeepsie-Newburgh Urbanized Area, the Poughkeepsie-Dutchess County Transportation Council (PDCTC) took on the responsibility of developing the Coordinated Plan on behalf of the County's public and non-profit private transportation providers. The PDCTC was the logical choice to spearhead this coordinated planning effort for Dutchess County, given its twenty-five year history as the local MPO.

Federal transportation laws require that Urbanized Areas – places with 50,000 or more people – be represented by a MPO, which is responsible for ensuring that Federal transportation dollars (highway and transit) are committed through a locally driven, comprehensive planning process. The purpose of a MPO is to provide a forum for state and local officials to discuss transportation issues and, in turn, reach a consensus on transportation plans and specific programs of highway and transit projects. The US Department of Transportation (USDOT) relies on each MPO to make sure that federally funded projects are the products of a credible planning process, meeting the goals and priorities of the metropolitan area.

In addition to Dutchess County, the Poughkeepsie-Newburgh Urbanized Area includes parts of Orange and Ulster Counties, which are served by their own MPO: the Orange County Transportation Council (OCTC) and Ulster County Transportation Council (UCTC). With a total population of almost 352,000, the area is classified by USDOT as a Transportation Management Area (TMA). The TMA denotation carries with it additional planning responsibilities for a MPO.

4. Methodology

The PDCTC first organized the Coordinated Plan around the four key elements identified by the FTA. Staff then consulted work done by other New York State MPOs, most notably the Capital District Transportation Council (CDTC) and Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council (GBNRTC), to find ways to supplement base guidance. One common element among the plans was the use of demographic data to locate populations that are targeted by the three funding programs; the PDCTC followed suit by looking at available data to locate concentrations of elderly, disabled, and low income persons in Dutchess County.

Equally importantly, the PDCTC relied on previous planning work to identify current service gaps and possible strategies to improve service. The PDCTC recently completed a new long-range, Metropolitan Transportation Plan titled *New Connections*. The Plan establishes key policies and priority actions to improve transportation in Dutchess County over the next twenty-five years. In addition, two transit oriented studies were of particular benefit: the Coordinated Transportation Services Study (2003) and Dutchess County Transit Development Plan (2008). A fourth planning document, the Senior Transportation Services Study (2007), was also very helpful; managed by the Dutchess County Office for the Aging, the study evaluated existing services to determine if they will be able to meet future demographic changes. As a whole, these four studies completed much of the groundwork for this Coordinated Plan.

Lastly, the PDCTC consulted with local non-profit transportation providers to assess their capabilities and identify future needs. These non-profit agencies were identified through a variety of means including local knowledge, work on previous planning studies, and previous Section 5310 funding requests; NYSDOT provided information on the latter.

5. Available Transit Services

Much of the work done for previous planning studies has provided valuable insight into the types of public transit services available within the County. These services naturally revolve around the Dutchess County LOOP and City of Poughkeepsie bus systems, but also include commuter bus services that are operated by private carriers under contract with NYSDOT.

Local Bus Service

Two locally operated public bus systems operate within Dutchess County: Dutchess County LOOP and the City of Poughkeepsie bus system. While the City of Poughkeepsie focuses its service in the vicinity of the City, Dutchess County LOOP serves traditional urban centers and suburban communities, with limited service to some rural areas. Most local bus service, as measured by passengers and hours of service, is concentrated in the more densely populated parts of the County. Service outside of the urbanized area tends to be more limited. Both systems will share a new transfer point in the City's Central Business District at Academy and Cannon Streets. Both systems offer a reduced fare for seniors and disabled passengers (\$0.50). The systems do not serve locations outside Dutchess County.

- Dutchess County LOOP: operates 48 transit vehicles over 30 different fixed routes, in addition to supporting demand responsive services such as Dial-A-Ride. The system saw an eight percent increase in annual ridership from 2000 (607,200) to 2006 (663,005).
- City of Poughkeepsie Bus System: operates seven routes, with eight transit vehicles. The system saw over a nine percent decrease in ridership from 2000 (407,509) to 2006 (368,118).

Demand Responsive Services

Dutchess County LOOP operates three demand response services:

- ADA Paratransit – mandatory ADA complementary paratransit service for the City of Poughkeepsie and Dutchess County. This service is for individuals who live within 3/4 mile of a City Bus or LOOP fixed route, but who have a disability that precludes them from riding the fixed route service.
- Dial-A-Ride – service for individuals aged 60 years and over who cannot use the regular LOOP service. To be eligible, passengers must be a resident of the Towns of Beekman, Dover, East Fishkill, Hyde Park, LaGrange, Pleasant Valley, Poughkeepsie, Red Hook, Union Vale, Wappinger, or City of Poughkeepsie. Trips must also have an origin point in one of those municipalities. In 2007 Dial-A-Ride served over 23,500 passengers.

- Rural Paratransit – this service primarily serves Medicaid supported group homes in rural areas.

Regional Bus Service

Inter-county bus service is provided to locations outside the County by several private operators, under contract with NYSDOT.

- *Mulligan* provides service between the Village of New Paltz in Ulster County and the City of Poughkeepsie.
- The Newburgh-Beacon Bus shuttle and *Hendrik Hudson* provide regular service between the City of Newburgh, Stewart Airport, and the Beacon train station.
- *Hendrik Hudson* operates a weekday commuter service between Poughkeepsie and White Plains in Westchester County.
- *Coach USA/ShortLine* provides regular service between Rhinebeck and Fishkill in Dutchess County, with connections to New York City (via Newburgh and northern New Jersey).
- *Trailways* provides regular service between Poughkeepsie and Kingston and Newburgh, with connections to Albany and Long Island (via Kingston and Newburgh).

Other Transit Services

Dutchess County is also served by passenger rail service provided by Metro-North Railroad and Amtrak. Metro-North Railroad carries travelers from eight stations (and the Appalachian Trail) on the Hudson and Harlem Lines to Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan. At the Dutchess County end, there is peak period bus service (LOOP Commuter Train Connection) at the three Hudson Line stations, and more limited service at some of the other stations. Amtrak provides service from Poughkeepsie and Rhinecliff south to New York's Penn Station and north to the Albany area (Rensselaer) for connections to its national system.

Dutchess County also has access to a passenger ferry service between the Cities of Newburgh (Orange County) and Beacon. The service currently operates during weekday peak periods and is timed to serve trains arriving and departing the Metro-North station at Beacon. A private, weekend water taxi service was also started in 2007, operating during the summer.

6. Previous Planning Work

The PDCTC recognizes the important role that transit plays in promoting a healthy transportation system, and more importantly, providing mobility to people without access to a personal vehicle, whether by choice or necessity. In recent years, improving existing transit services has been the focus of a variety of planning studies; one more strategic in nature than the other three.

New Connections (2007)

New Connections is the current Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the PDCTC. As required by SAFETEA, a MPO must develop a long range plan (MTP) to guide future transportation investment. The plan must have at least a twenty year horizon and include strategies that support an integrated, multi-modal transportation system, which naturally includes a strong public transit system.

The PDCTC initiated *New Connections* through a review of existing Federal, State, and County land use and transportation planning laws and guidance, to include *Dutchess County's Greenway Connections (2000)* and *New York State Transportation Plan (2006)*. The literature review sought to identify planning policies and recommendations that support the mission of meeting the current and future transportation needs of Dutchess County. Much of this literature reiterated the importance of transit in promoting sustainable development and providing people with a variety of transportation choices.

New Connections also uses available demographic forecasts to identify future trends. One of the more important issues facing the County is population growth and its associated impact on the transportation system. The County's population is expected to grow from an estimated population of 295,000 in 2006 to 342,000 by 2035, with the over-65 population doubling from 33,690 to 70,912. This growth will place additional pressure on existing infrastructure, public services, and resources. Estimates further indicate that the number of jobs in Dutchess will increase by 43 percent from 114,500 in 2000 to over 172,000 by 2035, with the mix of jobs changing to more service-oriented jobs and fewer manufacturing jobs.

Population and job growth will translate into more demand for travel both within the County and to the surrounding region. This will place additional pressures on our highways and transit systems; in particular, increases in inter-county travel will likely translate into greater demand for access to commuter rail service. The MTP lists some of the implications these demographic changes will create; the following are most relevant to this Coordinated Plan:

- A larger share of the population may work in service and retail jobs and travel outside the traditional weekday morning and afternoon peak periods. Weekend travel will increase.
- Public transit schedules may have to be adjusted to meet service and retail job hours.
- There may be a mismatch between the number and location of workers and jobs, which could increase regional travel.
- There may be greater opportunities for transit or carpooling for long distance (e.g. out of county) commuting trips.
- A larger segment of the County's population will be over 65 and may rely more on public transit and non-motorized transportation options, including assistance from human service agencies for their transportation needs.
- The growth in the number of older residents may prompt the need to evaluate and retrofit

roads to provide more visible lane markings and street signage, better lighting, increased sight distances, and longer merge lanes. These design improvements would aid all drivers.

With a consideration of what demographic and development changes may occur, *New Connections* recommends transportation policies and priority actions under five strategic goals: System Management and Preservation; Mobility and Accessibility; Land Use and Economic Development; Environment and Energy; and Safety and Security. In relation to the Coordinated Plan, *New Connections* establishes a number of policies and actions directly related to improving transit service in Dutchess County:

Policy Statements (Transit Only)

- Continue to place a priority on improving the safety, efficiency and reliability of existing transportation facilities (e.g. transit infrastructure).
- Public transit provides benefits to both users and non-users. For some it is an alternative to automobile travel, for others it provides essential mobility, and it can also assist the region in efforts to meet important air quality, energy savings, and congestion management objectives.
- Improve and expand links between and among complementary transportation services (e.g. local bus and commuter rail).
- Support the ability of older people to remain independent and age in their communities.
- Pay special attention to locations for new housing and service facilities developed or marketed to the over 55 population. Walking should be an option, and access to and accommodation for bus transit will be important.
- Continue to support and promote non-automobile transportation options.

To implement these policies, *New Connections* establishes a number of transit oriented action items:

Priority Actions (Transit Only)

- Continue routine replacement of transit vehicles to ensure safe and reliable operations.
- Support maintenance, rehabilitation, and improvement of transit facilities to ensure efficient operation and to improve customer safety and convenience.
- Improve quality and availability of customer information for all public transit systems.
- Develop a process to identify locations for new bus shelters and other passenger amenities (e.g. ticket kiosks, bicycle parking).

- Expand number of transit vehicles that can accommodate bicycles.
- Continue to support transit demand management activities (e.g. Metro-North commuter rail, inter-county commuter bus, and MetroPool).
- Complete the Transit Development Plan and support implementation of priority recommendations.
- Develop a Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan to identify transportation improvements for the County’s seniors, disabled, and low-income residents.
- Establish, improve, and/or expand parking facilities to serve regional bus, rail, and carpool programs.
- Consider transit and pedestrian access in new housing and service facilities developed for or marketed to elderly or handicapped populations.
- Continue to support projects that promote ridesharing, walking, and bicycling.
- Support projects identified by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in its *20-Year Needs Assessment* and *Five-year Capital Program*.
- Increase use of electronic security and surveillance applications on public transit vehicles.

The above policies and actions provide the foundation for this Coordinated Plan, reinforcing the goal of providing safe and reliable transportation options to the disabled, elderly, and poor: the target groups for transit funding under the Section 5310, 5316, and 5317 programs. However, since long range plans like *New Connections* are strategic in nature; the PDCTC realizes that a specialized subject such as transit service requires more detailed, operational level analysis. Accordingly, a number of such studies have been pursued in recent years.

Dutchess County Transit Development Plan (2008)

In early 2008, the PDCTC completed a Transit Development Plan for Dutchess County. The plan made a number of recommendations to improve the efficiency of the two local bus systems (Dutchess County LOOP and City of Poughkeepsie). The plan relied on quantitative and qualitative measures to evaluate the two systems, including a diagnostics analysis of all routes to measure performance and productivity. The project was managed by an Advisory Committee, made up of members from organizations with an interest in public transit; this included human service agencies such as the Dutchess County Office for the Aging, Department of Mental Hygiene, and Taconic Resources for Independence, Inc. – a private, non-profit advocacy group for disabled persons.

The Transit Development Plan relied on extensive public outreach to gather input on how to improve service. This outreach consisted of three components: holding a series of interviews with various stakeholder groups (e.g. community organizations), conducting a series of intercept

surveys at major trip destinations (e.g. Galleria Mall), and two public meetings. Of this outreach work, three of the stakeholder group discussions – Community Organizations, Dutchess County Agencies, and Medical/Health Care Providers – relate most to this Coordinated Plan. In these discussions, stakeholders raised important concerns about current transit service and the state of transportation for disabled and senior populations:

- Schedules are difficult to understand and use, especially for persons with cognitive disabilities, the elderly, and the sight impaired.
- Because the schedules are so complex, people with disabilities and the elderly are intimidated by the bus systems (i.e. Dutchess LOOP). Some clients are also afraid of being stranded.
- Dutchess LOOP and City of Poughkeepsie bus systems are too limited in geographic coverage, hours of operations, and frequency of service for people to rely on them for all their transportation needs.
- Rural areas such as the Harlem Valley, which has a growing senior population, are underserved by the Dutchess LOOP system.
- Service does not respond to non-traditional work schedules. Agencies report that their clients must turn down jobs due to limited service on Sundays or evenings; being retail oriented, these jobs are predominately located along Route 9 from Poughkeepsie south to Fishkill.
- Drivers do not announce stops. This is not only a concern for sight impaired passengers, but for all passengers, since many locations do not have street signs.
- The Dial-A-Ride program should be expanded.
- The bus systems should better serve recreational areas to improve people's quality of life.
- Medical providers noted that the availability of public transportation reduces the transportation costs of social service programs. Some must rely on private taxis, which are expensive and sometimes unreliable.
- Occasionally, clients cannot make an ADA paratransit reservation three days in advance, because of last minute or unexpected medical appointments.
- Many stops are not marked nor lighted at night, which lowers people's sense of safety and security; flag stops are also unreliable.

The project also included a survey of passengers on all City of Poughkeepsie and Dutchess County LOOP bus routes, which allowed existing passengers to comment on transit service; the survey also solicited information about age, income, employment status, and trip purpose. Relevant findings for this Coordinated Plan include:

- Senior citizens (65 years old and above) accounted for only 3.4% of LOOP and 5.8% of City of Poughkeepsie passengers, well below their proportion of the County’s total population.
- Passengers tend to have lower income, with almost 30% of LOOP and over 50% of City of Poughkeepsie passengers having annual incomes below \$15,000.
- Many passengers use the systems to commute to work, over 55% and 37% of LOOP and City of Poughkeepsie passengers respectively.
- Many passengers are dependent on transit: over 44% of LOOP and 68% of City of Poughkeepsie passengers have no vehicle; additionally, only 44% of LOOP and 36% of City of Poughkeepsie passengers have a driver’s license.
- Relatively few passengers paid the discounted disabled fare, only 3% and 9% for LOOP and the City of Poughkeepsie respectively.
- In terms of improvement priorities, riders generally wanted more frequent service, more weekend service, and longer service hours.

Though still underway at the time of writing, the Transit Development Plan makes some preliminary recommendations as to where and when buses should operate in Dutchess County and the City of Poughkeepsie. The proposed changes call for more service on major corridors such as Route 9 from Hyde Park to Fishkill and more frequent service in populated urban and suburban communities. Inversely, the plan recommends replacing underperforming fixed routes, most notably in less populated rural areas, with a flexible service that is similar to existing demand response services such as Dial-A-Ride.

The plan also recommends that the City of Poughkeepsie use a full pulse system for all six of its routes at the Main & Market bus stop (and eventually the transit hub at Academy and Cannon Streets). The full pulse would have all buses arriving and departing Main & Market at the same time, which would facilitate passenger transfers.

Senior Transportation Services Study (2007)

The Dutchess County Office for the Aging contracted with a private research firm to study senior transportation services in the County. The study focused on assessing current demand for transportation services and identifying options to address future demand (which is expected to grow in step with an ever growing elderly population).

Completed in 2007, the study provides a review of current senior transportation services. The study identified three primary means that agencies use to transport elderly clients: public transit (fixed route and demand response), non profit organizations, and two County Departments (Office for the Aging and Social Services). Of particular note for this Coordinated Plan, the project team interviewed five non-profit agencies that specifically provide transportation to seniors:

- Friends of Seniors
- Martin Luther King Cultural Center
- North East Community Center (NECC)
- Northern Dutchess Caregivers Coalition
- Pawling Community Resource and Services Center

Through interviews with the above agencies and also County Departments (including the PDCTC and Planning Department), the stakeholders identified the following gaps in existing senior transportation services:

- Limited hours and days of service, especially during evenings and weekends.
- Limited availability of to-the-door, through the door assistance; many seniors need this extra assistance.
- Limited availability of transportation for medical and other purposes; with limited resources available, service providers have to prioritize the most urgent needs.
- Providers indicated that they were overburdened by the high demand for basic trip purposes, even though seniors require transportation for purposes other than medical treatment to maintain a good quality of life.
- Seniors are confused or unaware of available services.
- Service providers are discontinuing services due to high operational costs.
- It is difficult to recruit and manage volunteer drivers.

Building on the issues presented by the various stakeholders, the study made the following general conclusions:

- Stakeholders, including providers, consumers, and county staff, recognize that current transportation services are inadequate to meet their needs. Seniors desire flexible, accessible transportation options.
- Volunteer organizations serve a critical role in providing senior transportation.
- Although there are unmet needs, current service providers are unlikely to be able to expand their capacity without additional funding.
- Rural communities in Dutchess are underserved by public transportation. Even with enhancements, many seniors will still be unable or unwilling to use public transit.

The study then makes short and long term recommendations to mitigate these issues, with the following being the most relevant to this Coordinated Plan.

Short Term Recommendations

- Promote coordination among senior transportation providers to leverage resources, increase system capacity, and increase access to information.
- Enhance fixed route and demand-response systems to better serve seniors. This includes exploring feeder services and route deviation options, improving Dial-A-Ride call center operations, and recruiting volunteers.
- Identify one or more organizations within the County who might participate as an affiliate for national senior transportation programs.

Long Term Recommendations

- Promote existing services through education and awareness.
- Explore partnerships to increase funding including sponsorships for transportation to and from major commercial destinations.
- Explore partnerships with neighboring counties.
- Expand volunteer recruitment to increase non-profit service capacity.

Coordinated Transportation Services Study (2003)

The PDCTC initiated this study at the request of several human service agencies that were interested in better coordinating transportation services to their clients. The study focused on identifying cost effective strategies to improve and expand client transportation services. An important premise of the study was that the agencies could deliver more efficient and effective service by using economies of scale, most notably in preventive maintenance (e.g. consolidated maintenance facility or joint contract), but also in operations (e.g. joint contract with a third party provider).

As part of the study, a number of human service agencies were interviewed about their transportation capabilities and needs. These agencies included the Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC), Dutchess County Office for the Aging, Gateway Industries, and Rehab Programs, Inc. Dutchess County LOOP, the countywide public bus system, participated in the study, as did First Student Inc., a private transportation company. In all the study identified at least thirty agencies in Dutchess County that required or provided transportation services for their clients; many of these agencies relied on the Dutchess LOOP and City of Poughkeepsie bus systems, private taxis, or their own vehicles to transport clients.

The Study identified the following issues related to human service transportation in Dutchess County:

- Agencies use a combination of three strategies to provide transportation to their clients – using the public bus systems, contracting with a private transportation provider, or using

non-contracted agency transportation. (A similar observation was made in the Senior Transportation Services Study).

- Transportation options are limited in the north and east of the County, despite the presence of transportation needs there.
- Despite having fixed routes in most municipalities throughout the County, the Dutchess LOOP service is spread thin, with only a few trips per day in many areas, covering only a small portion of each municipality.
- Despite contracting out much of their service, ARC and Rehab Programs maintain their own transportation services with lower cost effectiveness and productivity than the contracted service.
- Dial-A-Ride service is currently limited to the senior and disabled populations and serves only 12 of 30 municipalities in the County. In addition, many communities receive service less than five times per week and the service span is from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Opportunities for increasing the availability of service in the County are worth exploring.
- The Office for Aging is not involved in the contracted service provided by First Student. This may present an opportunity for increasing the cost effectiveness of senior transportation.

The Study identified a number of strategies to improve human service transportation services in the County, focusing on three areas: administration, operations, and maintenance:

Administration

- Include additional agency routes, including the Office for the Aging subscription routes, in the next request for proposals to provide contracted subscription services.
- Include additional subscription routes now operated in-house by ARC and Rehab Programs in the next request for proposals to provide contracted subscription services.
- Make LOOP responsible for operating most agency-based transportation.
- Centralize scheduling, dispatching, and data collection within ARC and Rehab Programs to increase efficiency and oversight.
- Designate or create a transportation coordinator position at ARC Rehab Programs, and the Office for the Aging.
- Create a County transit broker position.

Operations

- Allow general public riders and riders from other agencies to utilize agency-based transportation programs only when it is possible to accommodate them on existing trips.

- Transform select LOOP routes that are currently fixed into route deviation to increase their coverage.
- Actively attempt to expand Dial-A-Ride service to additional communities by gaining financial support from those communities.
- Work with existing Dial-A-Ride communities to increase days of services and hours of operation.
- Initiate a pilot program that provides subscription trips to a major employer or employment center.

Vehicle Maintenance and Fleet Conditions

- Consolidate vehicle maintenance for all vehicles at the LOOP garage or other facility.
- Coordinate vehicle purchases among agencies.
- Purchase only wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Although the study was completed five years ago, the issues and recommendations it presents are similar to those in more recent studies. As the PDCTC coordinated with human service agencies for this Coordinated Plan, staff verified that these strategies remained valid, and if so, incorporated them into the plan's final recommendations.

7. Agency Consultation

Consultation represents an important concept in SAFETEA; and though it is directed towards metropolitan transportation planning requirements like the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), it is equally applicable to developing this Coordinated Plan. In general terms, consultation refers to the requirement that a MPO provide citizens, affected public agencies, and private providers with a reasonable opportunity to be involved in the transportation planning process.

For the Coordinated Plan, the PDCTC consulted with local human service agencies to accomplish three goals:

- 1) Verify that the issues and recommendations from earlier studies are valid.
- 2) Identify any new transit issues and service gaps not already identified.
- 3) Gather information on the transportation capabilities of each human service agency (e.g. vehicle inventory, major destinations).
- 4) Identify future capital needs.

The PDCTC carried out this consultation by gathering information through two means: a written survey and a roundtable discussion. Local human service agencies were contacted in writing and

provided a survey, which asked agencies about the services they provided, including the number of clients served, the nature of trips provided, and their transportation capabilities. The survey included a vehicle inventory for agencies. (Please see Attachment 1).

The written survey was followed by a roundtable discussion focused on understanding the transportation challenges facing their organizations. Attendees were encouraged to describe current service gaps and offer possible solutions – especially ones that could be carried out with FTA Section 5310, 5316, and 5317 funding. Issues and recommendations from previous studies were also reviewed and validated.

The PDCTC directly consulted with the following human service providers for this Coordinated Plan:

- Anderson School
- Association for Senior Citizens
- Deveraux New York
- Dutchess County Office for the Aging
- Europa Associates, Inc.
- Friends of Seniors
- Lutheran Care Center-Concord Village
- Lutheran Care Center-Kings Apartments
- Maranatha Human Services
- Martin Luther King Cultural Center
- New Horizons Resources
- Northern Dutchess Caregivers Coalition
- North East Community Center
- Pawling Community Resource & Services Center
- Saint Francis Healthcare Foundation
- Taconic Resources Inc.

Through the survey and in-person comments, the PDCTC noted the following observations from local human service agencies:

- The current bus system (e.g. LOOP) does not meet all of the mobility needs of elderly residents, especially those in rural areas. Many people in the Harlem Valley travel to Connecticut or Putnam County for medical services; however, since county vehicles cannot leave the county, residents must find other ways to travel.
- Investigate the possibility of storing transit vehicles in the Harlem Valley to reduce deadhead mileage, which would allow for more service.
- Not all communities subscribe to Dial-A-Ride, which leaves some residents without access to public transportation, and therefore are more reliant on non-profit organizations and family/friends.

- Many seniors, notably those who grew up in the area, do not have experience with public bus systems. However, new comers from the New York City metropolitan area do have such experience, and have a higher expectation for bus service.
- Headways (i.e. time between trips) on LOOP routes should be reduced to make it more convenient for residents.
- In rural areas there is a small pool of volunteers available to operate vehicles.
- Many non-profits struggle with supporting operational costs for vehicles. Purchasing a vehicle is not necessarily the greatest challenge, when compared to operating the vehicle: finding a driver, paying for fuel, maintenance, and insurance.
- Because public systems are not convenient, some agencies are forced to operate their own transportation service.
- Elderly residents should be offered travel training classes.
- Staff should research the ability of Dial-A-Ride to go beyond the County border, which will require a waiver from the NYS Operating Authority and County Legislature.
- Future studies should identify elderly travel locations.
- In addition to medical services, there is a strong need for access to recreational services, especially for the elderly.
- Wheelchair lifts add additional service requirements to non-profit agencies.

Many of the above issues are consistent with observations and ideas raised in previous studies, especially the Transit Development Plan and Senior Transportation Services Study. In general, all of the studies and the work done for this Coordinated Plan point to the reality that local bus operations do not fulfill all of the mobility requirements for residents; this is especially true for the elderly and disabled. This is apparent by the fact that many human service agencies find it more practical to provide their own transportation rather than rely on the two local bus systems. In doing so, their clients have grown accustomed to the convenience of such dedicated services.

With the exception of the Dial-A-Ride program and ADA complementary paratransit service, public bus operators, most notably Dutchess County LOOP, cannot compete with the level of transportation services provide by local human service agencies. In the case of LOOP, the existing fixed route system is incapable of meeting specialized travel needs. This problem is most evident in rural areas such as the Harlem Valley, where residents rely more on out-of-county services that cannot be accessed by LOOP fixed route or Dial-A-Ride vehicles.

The reliance on separate transportation services poses a challenge in that many organizations operate in isolation from one another. There are no known local examples of agencies combining transportation services to better manage resources.

8. Assessment of Transportation Needs

In addition to the needs identified in previous planning studies and those provided through the above consultation, the PDCTC analyzed U.S. Census data to locate areas with high concentrations of elderly, disabled, and low income populations. Much of this work had been done as part of the environmental justice analysis completed for *New Connections*, though some changes have been made in how the data is presented.

Elderly Population

According to the 2000 Census, over 33,600 persons aged 65 years and over lived in Dutchess County – almost 12 percent of the County’s total population (280,150). At the municipal level, the Town and City of Poughkeepsie reported the highest number of elderly persons (65 years and older): 5,363 and 4,056 respectively, which represented 28 percent of all seniors in Dutchess. Other towns with substantial numbers of seniors included Hyde Park, East Fishkill, Fishkill and Wappinger: a logical distribution given that the southwest quadrant is the most populous.

To better identify service needs, the PDCTC used Census Block Group data to locate high concentrations of seniors below the municipal level. The data was measured by the number of seniors per square mile, which not only measures the density of senior population, but helps mitigate variations in geographic size. In doing so, the data shows the highest densities of seniors in communities located along the Hudson River – notably the Cities of Beacon and Poughkeepsie and Village of Wappingers Falls, followed by the Towns of Fishkill, Hyde Park, Poughkeepsie, and Wappinger, and Village of Fishkill. In addition, the numbers show pockets of moderate to high densities scattered throughout some the county’s suburban and rural communities: Amenia, Dover, East Fishkill, Pawling, Pine Plains, Pleasant Valley, Red Hook, and Rhinebeck.

Disabled Population

According to the 2000 Census, almost 18,000 physically disabled persons aged five and over lived in Dutchess County; of these, 43 percent were aged 65 years and over. Looking at the number of disabled persons per square mile, we again see the highest concentrations in the Cities of Beacon and Poughkeepsie and the Village of Wappingers Falls. The data also shows pockets of moderate to high concentrations of disabled persons in the Towns of Fishkill, Hyde Park, Poughkeepsie, and Wappinger, and Village of Fishkill. Smaller concentrations also exist in the Harlem Valley (e.g. Towns of Amenia and Dover) and Northern Dutchess (e.g. Rhinebeck and Red Hook).

To a large extent, the geographical distribution of disabled persons in Dutchess mirrors the patterns found for senior population density, which suggests that transportation services in these areas may be able to satisfy the needs of both population groups. This would allow local human service agencies to maximize limited vehicles resources.

Low Income Population

The 2000 Census identified over 19,500 people living in poverty in Dutchess County, representing 7 percent of the total population. The Census Bureau defined poverty using 1999

Figure 1. Number of Elderly (Per Square Mile)

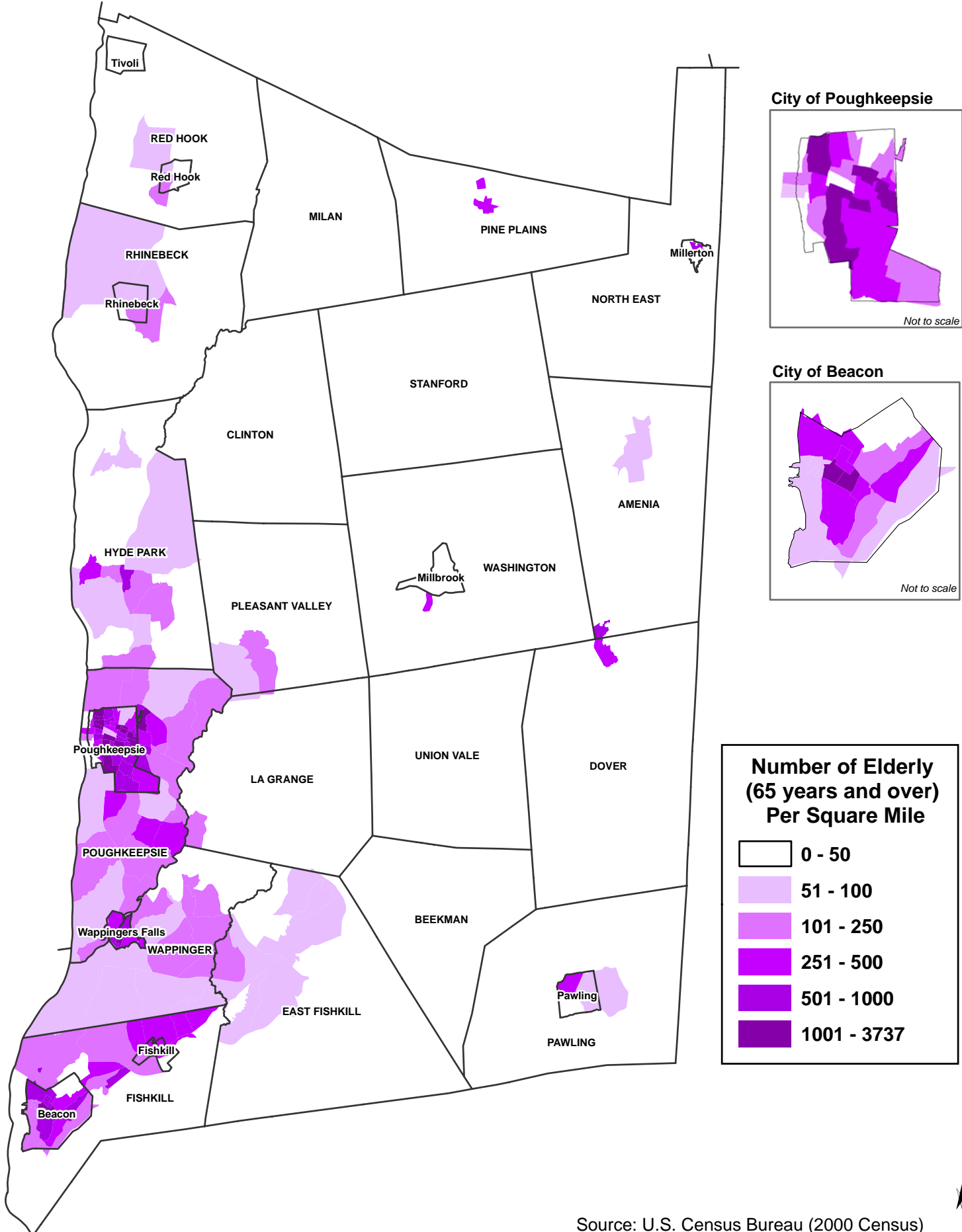
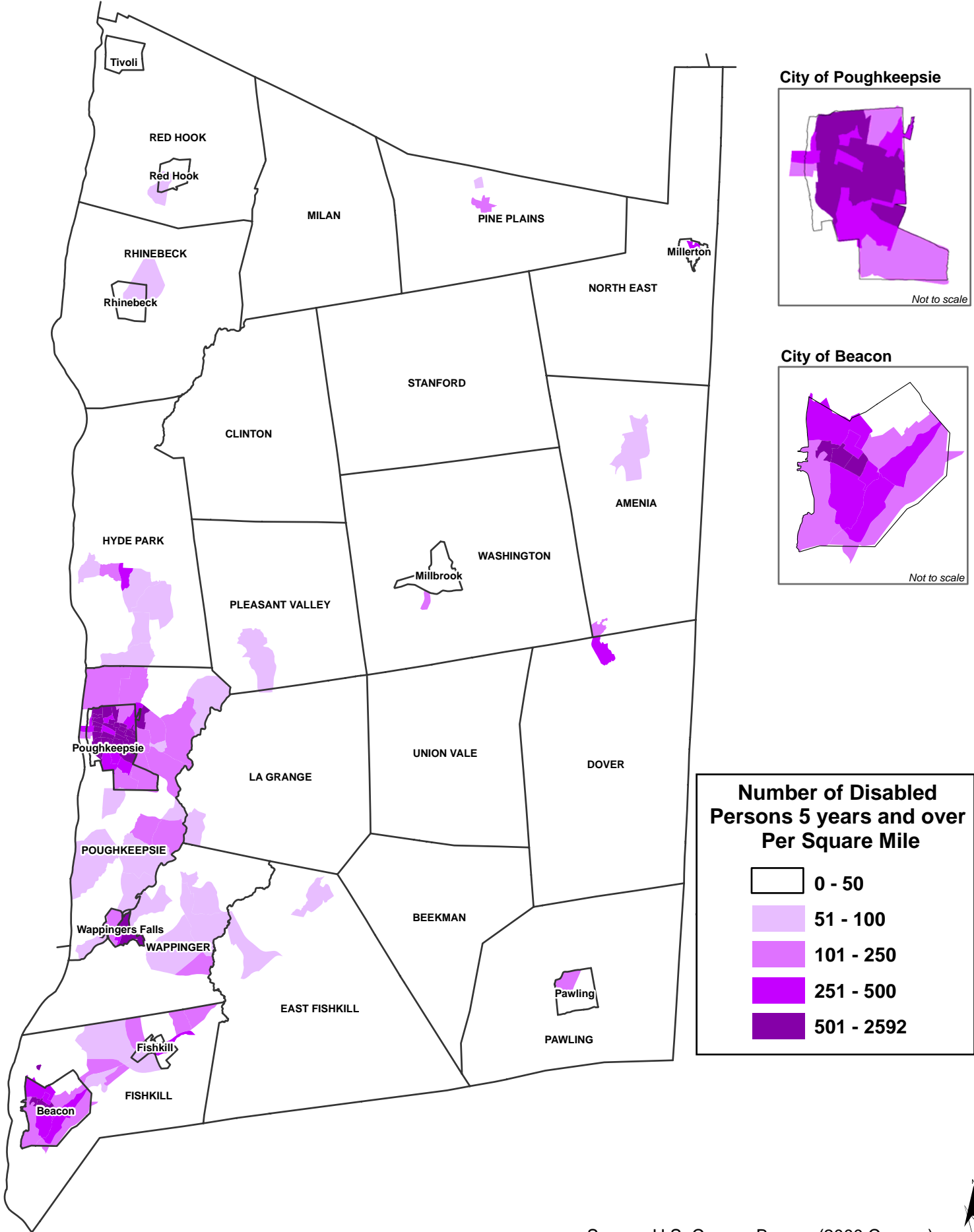


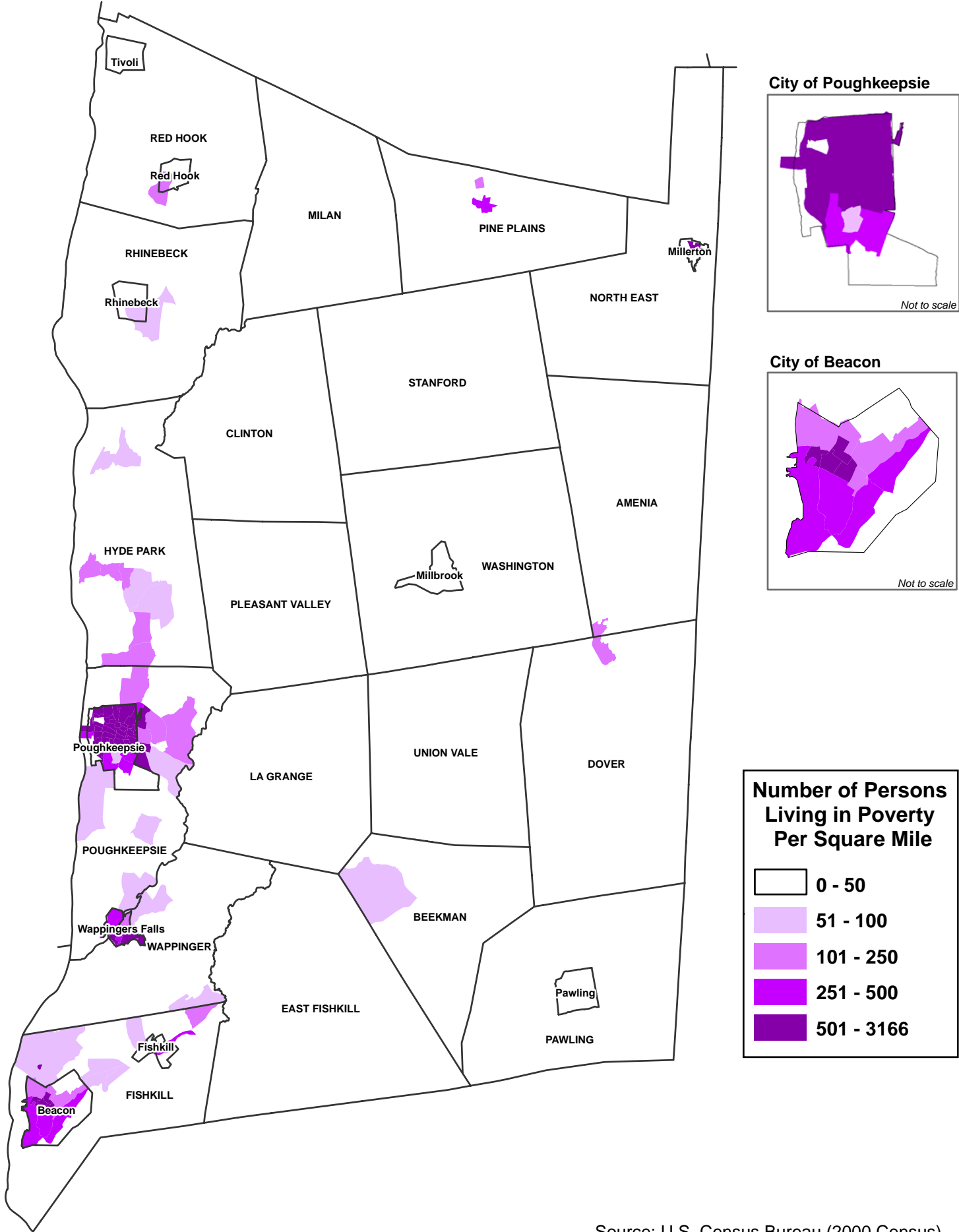
Figure 2. Number of Disabled Persons (Per Square Mile)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000 Census)



Figure 3. Number of Persons Living in Poverty (Per Square Mile)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (2000 Census)



dollars categorized by family size; for example, a single person making less than \$8,667 was classified as living in poverty, while a four person family with two children and making less than \$16,895 was classified as living in poverty.

Areas with the highest concentrations of low income populations lived in the Cities of Beacon and Poughkeepsie, along with the Villages of Millerton and Wappingers Falls. Moderate concentrations of poverty were present in the Towns of Beekman, Fishkill, Hyde Park, and Poughkeepsie, with smaller pockets in Pine Plains, Red Hook, Rhinebeck, and Wappinger.

Conclusions

The geographic spread of each population group hints to the need for two basic types of elderly, disabled, or low income oriented transportation services: one service that targets those living in the urban and suburban communities along the Hudson River, and a second service that targets those living in the rural areas in the northern and eastern sections of Dutchess (i.e. the Harlem Valley). The differences in travel distances and number of potential users between two such services may also necessitate the need for different types of vehicles: larger capacity vehicles for the urban areas and smaller vehicles for rural areas. The smaller vehicles would likely get better fuel mileage than their larger counterparts, which would help reduce operating costs.

At a minimum, the data indicates that three municipalities in particular require special attention:

- City of Beacon
- City of Poughkeepsie
- Village of Wappingers Falls

These three localities support some of the highest densities of elderly, disabled, and low income populations in Dutchess County. Although this is partly influenced by their overall population density, density alone does not fully explain the prevalence of these groups in those communities. Regardless of the reasons, human service agencies providing transportation to residents in these three areas should receive special consideration when evaluating which programs to fund under FTA Sections 5310, 5316, and 5317.

9. Priority Actions

Given the findings from previous transit planning studies, the analysis of available demographic data, and recent input from local human service agencies for this Coordinated Plan, the PDCTC has identified the following short term priority actions:

- Replacement vehicles are needed to maintain current levels of service. Due to high operational tempos, vehicles used by human service agencies tend to wear out faster, requiring frequent replacement.
- Human service agencies will require additional vehicles to meet growing demand. Many agencies expect the number of clients they serve to increase as the County's total population increases.

- Dutchess County should explore the feasibility of allowing LOOP vehicles to operate outside the County. Until then, human service agencies that support travel outside the County should receive special consideration for funding; this is particularly true for agencies serving residents in Harlem Valley communities such as the Towns of North East and Pawling.
- Travel training is required for persons not familiar with the Dutchess County LOOP and City of Poughkeepsie bus systems.
- Marketing of current fixed route and demand response services should be expanded to better inform residents of available transportation services. This marketing should be targeted towards disabled, elderly, and low income residents; increasing the use of existing services could help alleviate demands placed on human service agencies.
- Given the concentration of disabled, elderly, and low income populations in the Cities of Beacon and Poughkeepsie, and the Village of Wappingers Falls, human service agencies serving those municipalities should receive priority consideration for support.
- Upon completion of the Transit Development Plan, service proposals that improve connections between high-density residential areas (e.g. City of Poughkeepsie) and employment centers (Route 9 corridor) should receive priority for implementation. Such service improvements may be eligible for Section 5316 (JARC) funding; 5316 funding may also help existing routes in the interim. This could include services that enhance access to higher paying jobs in the New York metropolitan area via better commuter rail connections.

The above priority actions are meant to complement the recommendations made in supporting plans such as the Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Transit Development Plan.

10. Lessons Learned

This coordinated planning process has reinforced our view that local human service agencies fulfill a critical transportation role in Dutchess County. In many cases, the transportation services they provide cannot be replicated by public bus operators. Since these agencies are right sized to their client base and more cognizant of their needs, they can more effectively deploy available vehicle assets.

The PDCTC will periodically update this Coordinated Plan to ensure compliance with new federal guidelines and, more importantly, adapt to population changes and new service requirements. Furthermore, the PDCTC will continue to partner with local human service agencies to help meet the transportation needs of disabled, elderly, and low income population groups. This Coordinated Plan represents a first step in coordinating client based transportation services; the PDCTC understands that it must maintain an open dialogue with agency representatives to meet the unique mobility challenges of particular population groups.

Funding from the FTA will continue to play a critical role in supporting client based transportation services. As such, the PDCTC will partner with local human service agencies and

local bus operators to apply for available FTA funding that will improve transportation services to the elderly, disabled, and poor in Dutchess County; this includes assisting non-profit agencies in securing FTA Section 5310 funds on an annual basis.