

Chapter 3: Demographic Information

COORDINATED PUBLIC TRANSIT-HUMAN SERVICES TRANSPORTATION PLAN

FRENCH BROAD RIVER MPO & LAND OF SKY RPO

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Understanding the region's socio-economic characteristics is essential to understanding the unique needs of the region's residents. This chapter will focus on several demographic categories:

- Seniors (ages 65 and over)
- Low-Income Households
- Low English Proficiency
- Households with Zero Vehicles
- Individuals with a Disability

These categories can be used to identify specific needs and travel patterns within the region.

The region spreads over five counties, over areas defined as urban or rural. Each community has different characteristics and different challenges in providing transportation options. For the purposes of this report, the French Broad River MPO and Land of Sky RPO planning areas have been combined into one five-county region containing Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties. While the MPO and RPO planning areas are relatively distinct in many ways, the agencies and organizations that address the transportation needs in those counties overlap those planning boundaries.

In the past decade, North Carolina has been one of the fastest growing states in the country and is expected to continue to grow at a rapid pace. While much of this growth has been concentrated of the urban areas of Raleigh, Durham, and Charlotte, the Asheville Urbanized Area has grown as well.

DATA SOURCES

The data gathered for this study was collected from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS collects information every year from a sample of the population. Unlike the decennial census, the ACS goes into detail about the respondent's housing, transportation, disability status, income, and other factors that are focused on in this chapter.

The ACS provides data in either 1-year estimates or 5-year estimates. For this report, 5-year estimates from the ACS were used. 5-year estimates take information gathered by the ACS over a 5-year period so the sample size is larger. 5-year estimates are generally considered more conservative due to their larger sample sizes over a longer period of time, but may be less reactive to major changes that can be illustrated in 1-year estimates.

SENIOR POPULATION

The Senior Population includes any individual age 65 and over. The five-county region has become an increasingly popular destination and residence for senior citizens. Numerous publications have referenced the region, or specific towns, as some of the most desirable places in the country for retirees to live.

Compared to the country and the state of North Carolina, the five-county region focused on in this plan has a significantly higher percentage of the population that is considered elderly at 20.5% of the population, compared to a little more than 14% for both the national and state averages. Within our

	Senior Population	Elderly Percentage
United States	44,628,618	14.1%
North Carolina	1,398,037	14.2%
5-County Region	96,156	20.5%
Buncombe	43,138	17.4%
Haywood	13,582	23.0%
Henderson	26,195	23.9%
Madison	4,161	19.8%
Transylvania	9,080	27.6%

region, Haywood, Henderson, and Transylvania

counties all exceed the regional average for elderly percentage of the population.

However, it should be noted that while Buncombe County has the smallest elderly percentage, it also has the largest concentration of elderly residents with an estimated 43,138 elderly residents or more than 44% of region's elderly population.

DEVELOPING THRESHOLDS

As part of this plan, staff developed a threshold for the region to determine census block groups of particular concern. By developing this threshold and examining this information at smaller geographies, planning efforts may be concentrated to the areas of highest need or areas that may deserve more focus.

ACS data estimates that 96,156 residents or 20.5% of the total five-county population is age 65 and over. However, if the regional average were to be used as a threshold it would result in 47% of the region's block groups being over the threshold. So a threshold of 30.75% of the population being age 65 or over or one-and-a-half times the regional average is recommended to be used as the elderly population threshold. This results in 14.6% of block groups in the region being triggered and shows areas with an

especially high elderly population relative to the region.

These thresholds do not mean that blocks groups that do not meet the threshold should not have any attention for efforts to improve the transportation needs of elders, but illustrates areas that may have concentrated needs.

The map on the right shows census block groups symbolized based on the percentage of the population that is estimated to be over the age of 65.

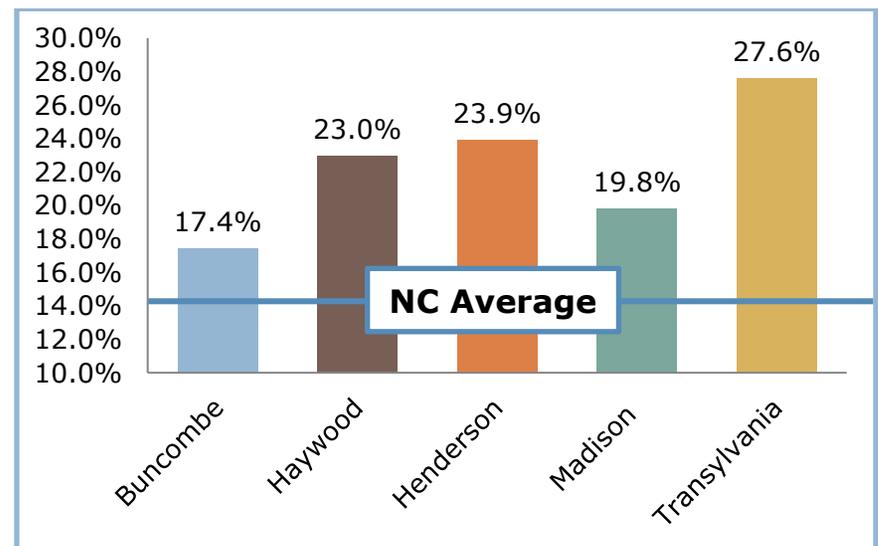
While many seniors reside in more urbanized parts of the region, large concentrations of seniors live in some more rural areas, specifically, parts of western Henderson County, southern Transylvania County, northern Haywood County, and scattered areas of Buncombe County.

In Henderson County, nearly every block group in the southwest part of the county is at least above the regional average with some areas near Flat Rock and Laurel Park even exceeding percentages that are double the regional average.

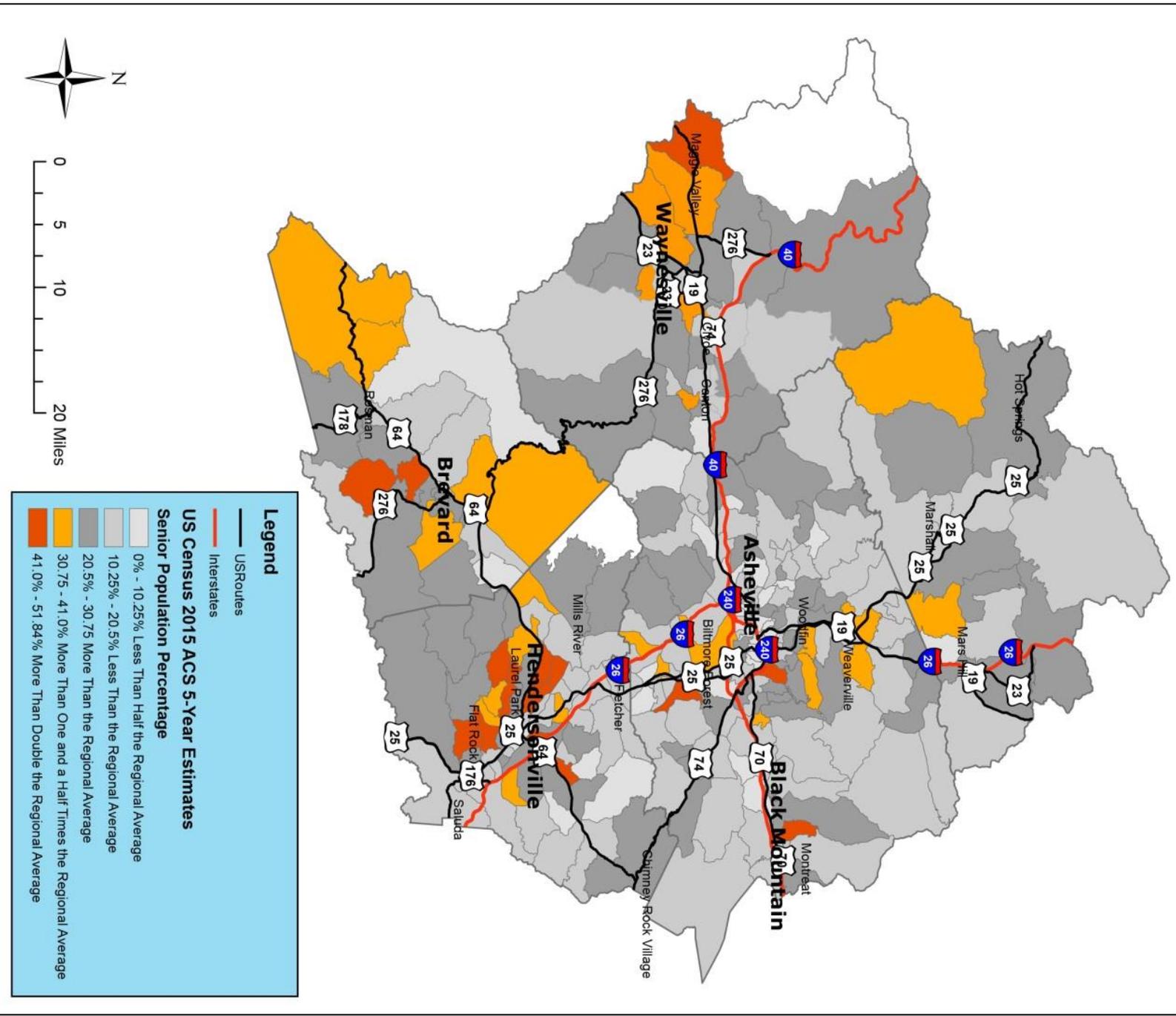
In Haywood County, much of the western part of the county is above regional averages with several block

groups in and around Maggie Valley being above the regional threshold.

The entire region has an elder population significantly higher than the rest of the state or the country and this population is generally distributed throughout the five counties. There are some areas, such as southwest Henderson County, western Haywood County, and several parts of Transylvania County where populations are somewhat more concentrated, but few areas of the region are not impacted.



Senior Population Percentages



ZERO AUTO HOUSEHOLDS

As part of the ACS, respondents are requested to provide the number of automobiles available per household. For this study, households with limited access to vehicles are important due to their reliance on other modes for transportation. Respondents are not asked why they do not have access to a personal motor vehicle, but the reason is likely different based on each household's circumstances. Some households may be constrained by income, age, disability, or households may simply choose to rely on other modes of transportation.

While only a little more than six percent of the region's households do not have access to a vehicle- which is lower than North Carolina's percentage of zero vehicle households- it should be noted that many of the areas in our region are poorly suited for meeting the transportation needs of zero vehicle households.

DEVELOPING THRESHOLDS

In developing thresholds for zero vehicle households in census block groups, 150% of the regional average (or census block groups with 9.15% of the households with access to zero vehicles) is recommended. This threshold results in about 23%

	Zero Vehicle Households	Percentage of Vehicles w/o Access to a Vehicle
United States	10,640,294	9.1%
North Carolina	245,413	6.5%
5-County Region	11,909	6.1%
Buncombe	6,617	6.5%
Haywood	1,329	5.1%
Henderson	2,774	6.0%
Madison	461	5.5%
Transylvania	728	5.3%

of the region's census block groups exceeding the threshold.

Geographically, the block groups exceeding the threshold are distributed throughout the region, from areas in northwest Madison County, scattered parts of Buncombe County (with some concentrations in Asheville), large areas of Henderson County (especially concentrated in and to the east of Hendersonville), scattered parts of Transylvania and Haywood counties. The areas with higher percentages of zero vehicle households are spread all over the region.

LOW INCOME

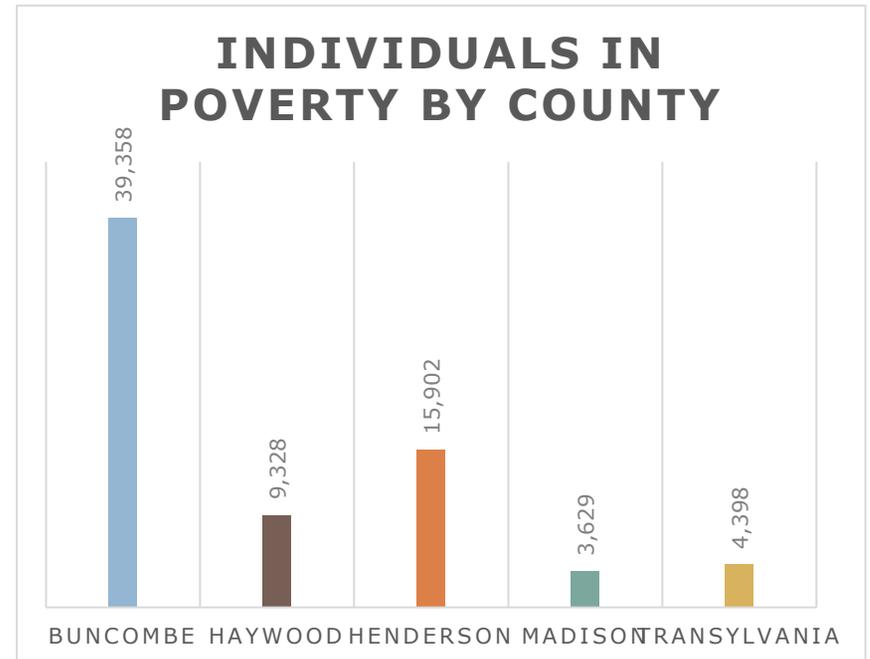
Poverty status and median household income are also estimated from information gathered by the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey. There are several different sources of data within the ACS that can indicate areas of low income. For the purposes of this report, median household incomes were examined by block group.

Individual and household income can play a crucial role in determining the transportation needs of an area. Providing more affordable transportation options can provide much-needed relief to households with limited income for purchasing and maintaining personal automobiles.

DEVELOPING THRESHOLDS

For developing a threshold to determine areas with increased low-income households, this report recommends a threshold of census block groups with a median household income of 80% or less (\$35,811) than the average regional household income. Other mapped categories show block groups with 60% or less (\$26,858) than the average regional household income and 30% or less (\$13,429) than the average regional household income. This threshold results in 80 census block

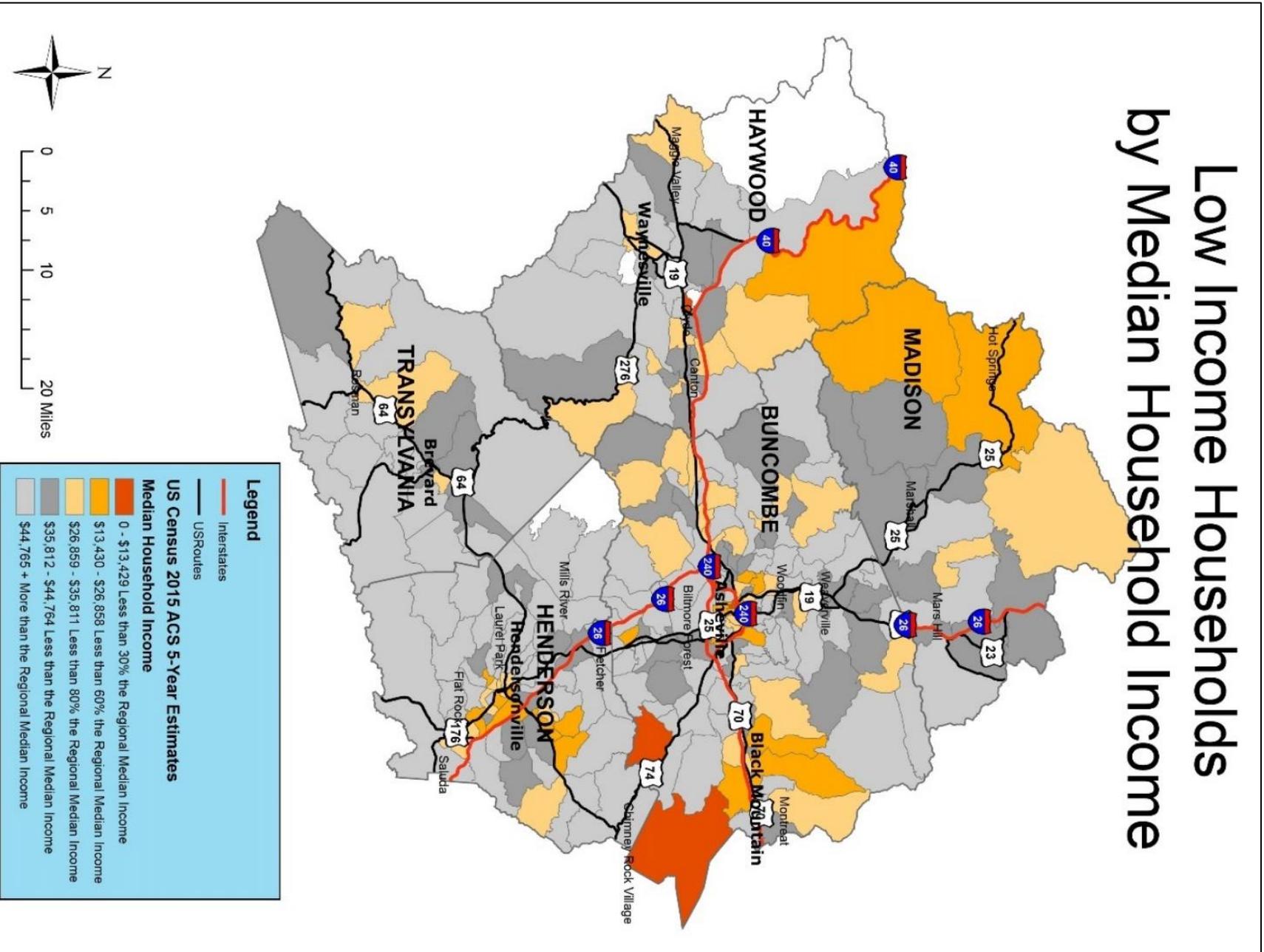
groups meeting or exceeding the threshold or about



25.4% of the census block groups in the region.

Geographically, pockets of low-income households are especially notable in Asheville, eastern Buncombe County, areas of central Henderson County (Hendersonville, East Flat Rock, Fruitland), but there is also considerable poverty in more rural areas of Madison, Haywood, Buncombe, Transylvania counties. However, it should be noted that small pockets of low-income households are known to exist in block groups not meeting these thresholds.

Low Income Households by Median Household Income



LOW ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Low English Proficiency Information was gathered from the US Census Bureau's American Community Survey five-year estimates.

The region, overall, has a relatively low rate of individuals with Low English Proficiency. The region has a lower rate (3.4%) than North Carolina (4.8%) and considerably lower than the national rate (8.6%).

However, there are some concentrated pockets of individuals with Low English Proficiency around the region, including several tracts in eastern Henderson County at more than twice the regional average and, increasingly, scattered areas of Buncombe County.

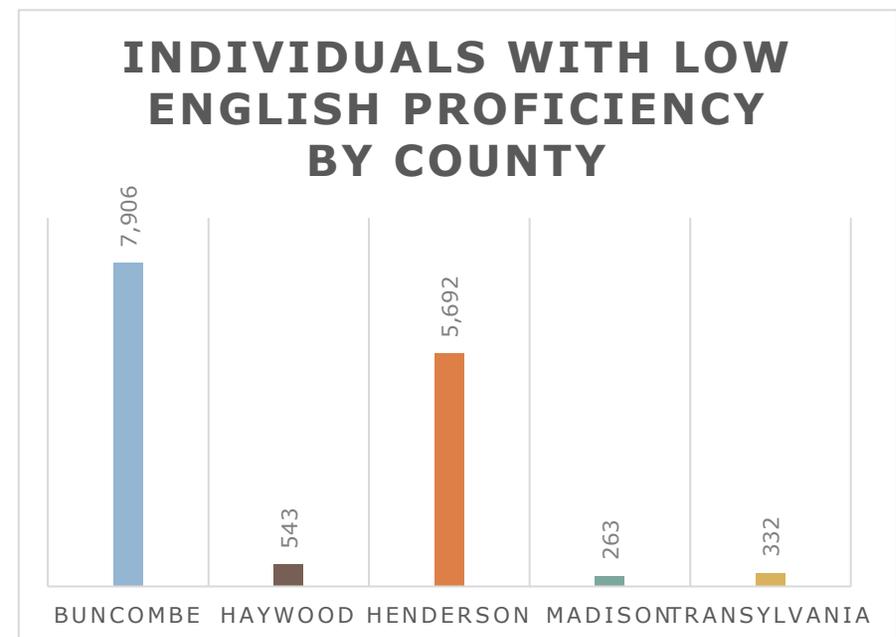
DEVELOPING THRESHOLDS

For the purposes of this report, ACS data on individuals with low English proficiency was used. As noted, approximately 3.4% of the region's population, or an estimated 15,147 residents of the region are considered less than proficient in English.

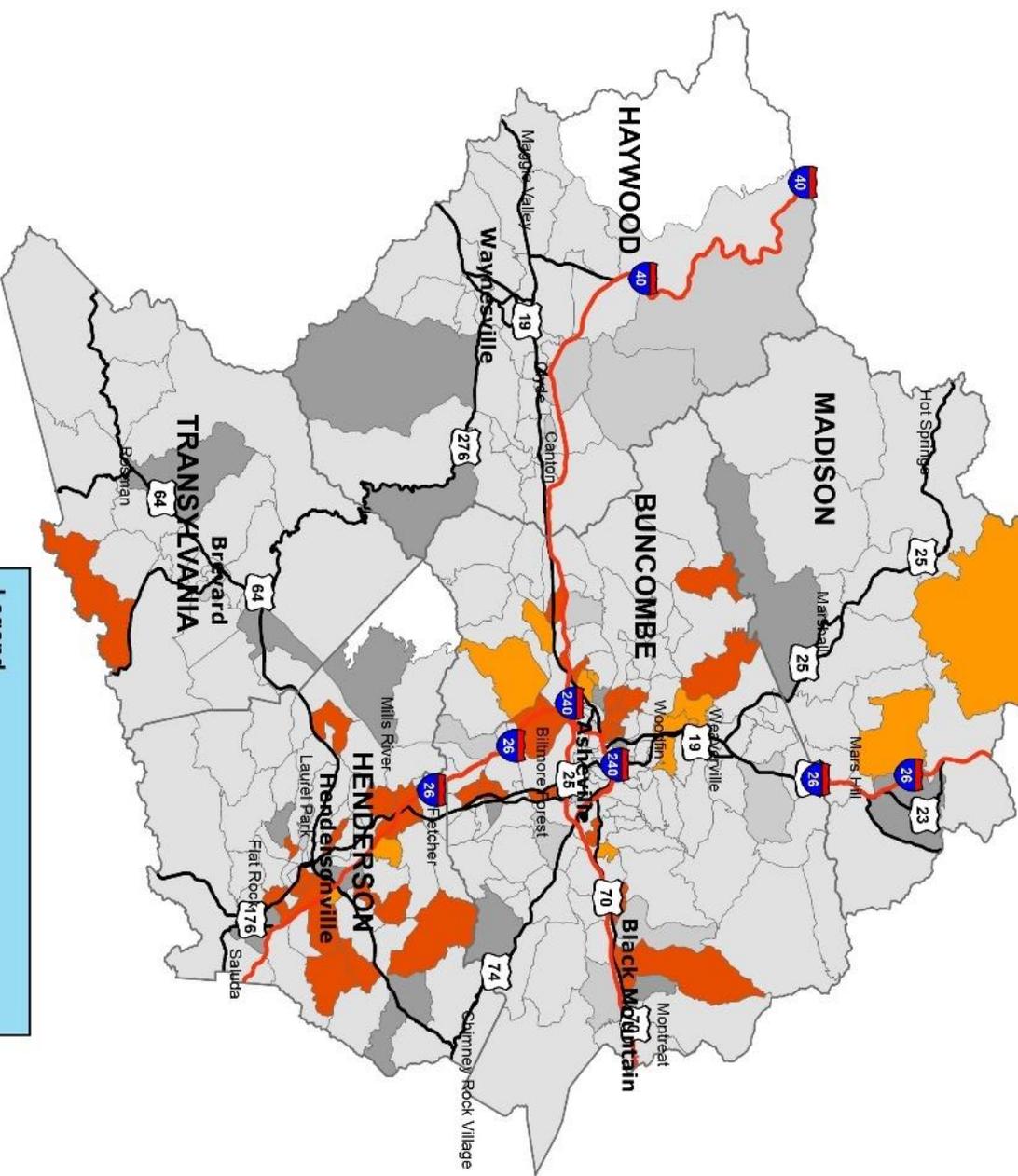
To focus on areas of higher concentrations, a threshold of census block groups having more than 150% the regional average or block groups exceeding 5.1% of its population with low English

proficiency has been used. Also mapped are areas simply above the regional average of 3.4% as well as block groups that are double the regional average at 6.8%.

In our region, block groups exceeding the threshold are distributed widely. The largest concentrations appear in eastern Henderson County, near Hendersonville, East Flat Rock, and Fruitland, as well as portions of eastern Buncombe County, areas around Asheville, and parts of Madison County near Mars Hill. While Haywood County does not have any block groups that exceed the threshold, a couple of large block groups in southern Haywood exceed regional averages.



Low English Proficiency Household Percentages



Legend

- Interstates
- US Routes

US Census 2015 ACS 5-Year Estimates

LEP Households Percentage

- 0 - 1.7% Less than Half the Regional Average
- 1.7 - 3.4% Less than the Regional Average
- 3.4 - 5.1% More than the Regional Average
- 5.1 - 6.8% More than 150% the Regional Average
- 6.8% + More than Double the Regional Average

DISABILITY STATUS

Disability status is also estimated based on information collected from US Census Bureau's American Community Survey. These disabilities may include sensory, physical, mental, self-care, or disabilities affecting an individual's ability to go outside. Any of these disabilities may make the availability of public transportation necessary or more attractive as opposed to relying on personal automobiles.

The region has a higher rate of individual with disabilities than North Carolina (13.5%) or the country (12.4%). While Buncombe County has the largest population of individuals with a disability, the other four counties all have higher rates of individuals with a disability that exceed the regional rate.

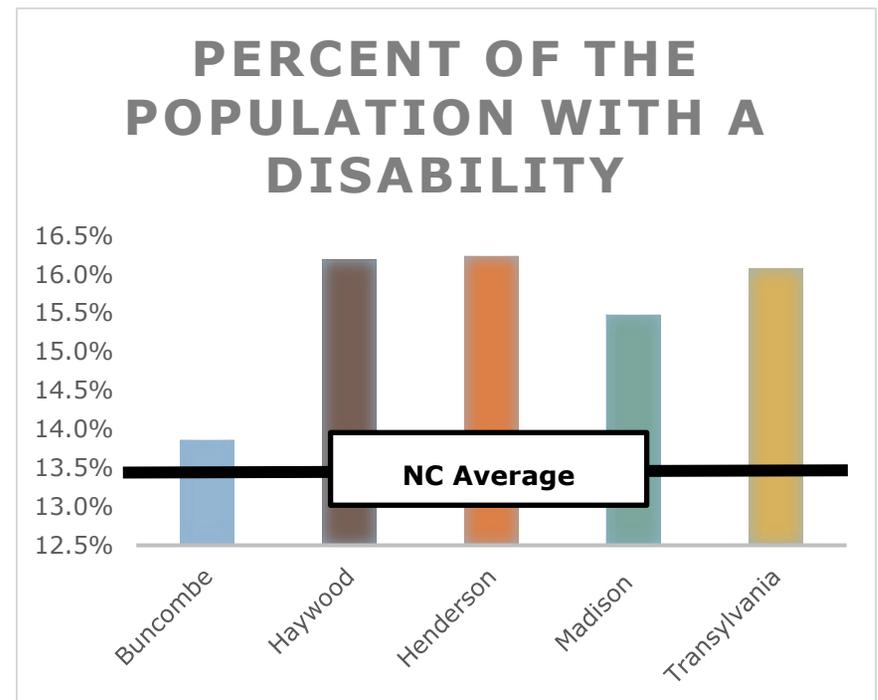
It should be noted that disability information through the ACS is only available at the Census Tract level and not Census Block Groups.

DEVELOPING THRESHOLDS

The threshold for individuals with a disability was set at the regional average (14.9%). With a threshold at the regional average, 48% of the region's census tracts exceed the threshold. This includes a majority

of census tracts in Haywood, Henderson, Madison, and Transylvania counties.

While Buncombe County has the lowest rate of individuals with disabilities, three of the six census tracts that exceed 150% of the regional average are in Buncombe County, including tracts in East Asheville, Downtown Asheville, and the Sandy Mush area.



VETERANS

Zero Vehicle Households, Low Income Households, Low English Proficiency, the Elderly Population, and Individuals with a Disability all play a crucial role in determining the opportunities and need for human transportation services around the region, but there are many other groups and sub-groups that often have increased need as well.

In the five-county region, all five counties have a higher percentage of its 18 years and older population with veteran status than the national average (8.3%). All five counties also- at least- meet the state average (9.3%) with Haywood, Henderson, and Transylvania counties exceeding the state average.

In recent history, veterans have been more likely to be homeless, living in poverty, or living with a disability than the average American citizen. And beyond the increased need in veteran populations, some assistance may be possible through various grants and programs aimed specifically at helping veterans.

