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**ACCESS TO
OPPORTUNITY**



2.1 ACCESSIBILITY

What is Accessibility

Accessibility is the ability to access goods and services easily and without barriers. To do this one must be able to get to those goods and services; transportation is a key element of accessibility. There are a variety of ways to measure accessibility. These can include travel time, safety, and physical ability across

a variety of modes of transit. Transportation accessibility impacts all aspects of life and is a necessity for living a fulfilling life. The ability to get around and access goods and services as one wishes is a marker of quality of life and a vital determinant of employment, health, and safety.

Why Accessibility?

Accessibility is one of the four goals established by the 2050 LRTP outreach process as being a community priority for transportation overall in the MAPA region. Previous transportation plans by MAPA have highlighted accessibility as a necessary component of planning. The Coordinated Transportation Plan prioritizes accessibility and mobility for all through transit access with a focus on disability, age, and poverty. The Heartland Connections Regional Bicycle-Pedestrian Plan identifies mobility accommodations needed to make biking and walking safer and more accessible for all within the metro area for health and employment. The Transit Return on Investment Study looked at transit accessibility as it relates to employment and economic development.

The goals of the 2050 LRTP are designed to ensure a more vibrant community for the Omaha-Council

Bluffs region, which requires creating a metropolitan area full of destinations available readily by all modes of transportation. A Guiding Principle of this LRTP is to “Put People First.” This focus aims to employ transportation strategies that support health, safety, fun and economic security, providing a more holistic approach to accessibility.

In developing priorities for federal funding for transportation projects it is vital to consider how residents travel to and from services, and what projects will improve access to employment, education, healthcare, and other needs for all. By centering access to goods and services in all transportation decisions planning becomes about how people utilize the transportation system in addition to traditional engineering concerns such as maintaining the flow of traffic.

Transportation and Land Use

Transportation and land use are tied together closely in development with land use requiring supportive transportation infrastructure. Roads and streets help to determine the feel of a place and the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Streets designed to be accessible for cyclists and pedestrians promote denser neighborhoods with better access to goods and services for all - and especially for those who do not drive. The comfort people feel being in an area helps to drive different types of development. Places with narrow streets and generous sidewalks invite people to stay and linger promoting walking traffic and business.

Under a “business-as-usual” scenario, development in the Omaha region will continue to follow a pattern of outward, low-density growth. Analysis conducted with the MAPA regional travel demand model forecasts 11.1 million more vehicle-miles of car travel by 2050 under this scenario, compared to 2015. These additional vehicle miles traveled inhibit the low cost of living enjoyed by residents within the region, while creating more barriers for persons unable to access a car or drive on their own.

This increase in traffic is projected to degrade existing bottlenecks further causing average daily traffic speeds to drop from 38 to 25 miles per hour. As a result, people in the region will experience 915,000 more person-hours of driving every weekday. Moreover, backups caused by collisions today will become common and more disruptive as population growth and sprawl add traffic and make the network more vulnerable to incident-related congestion.

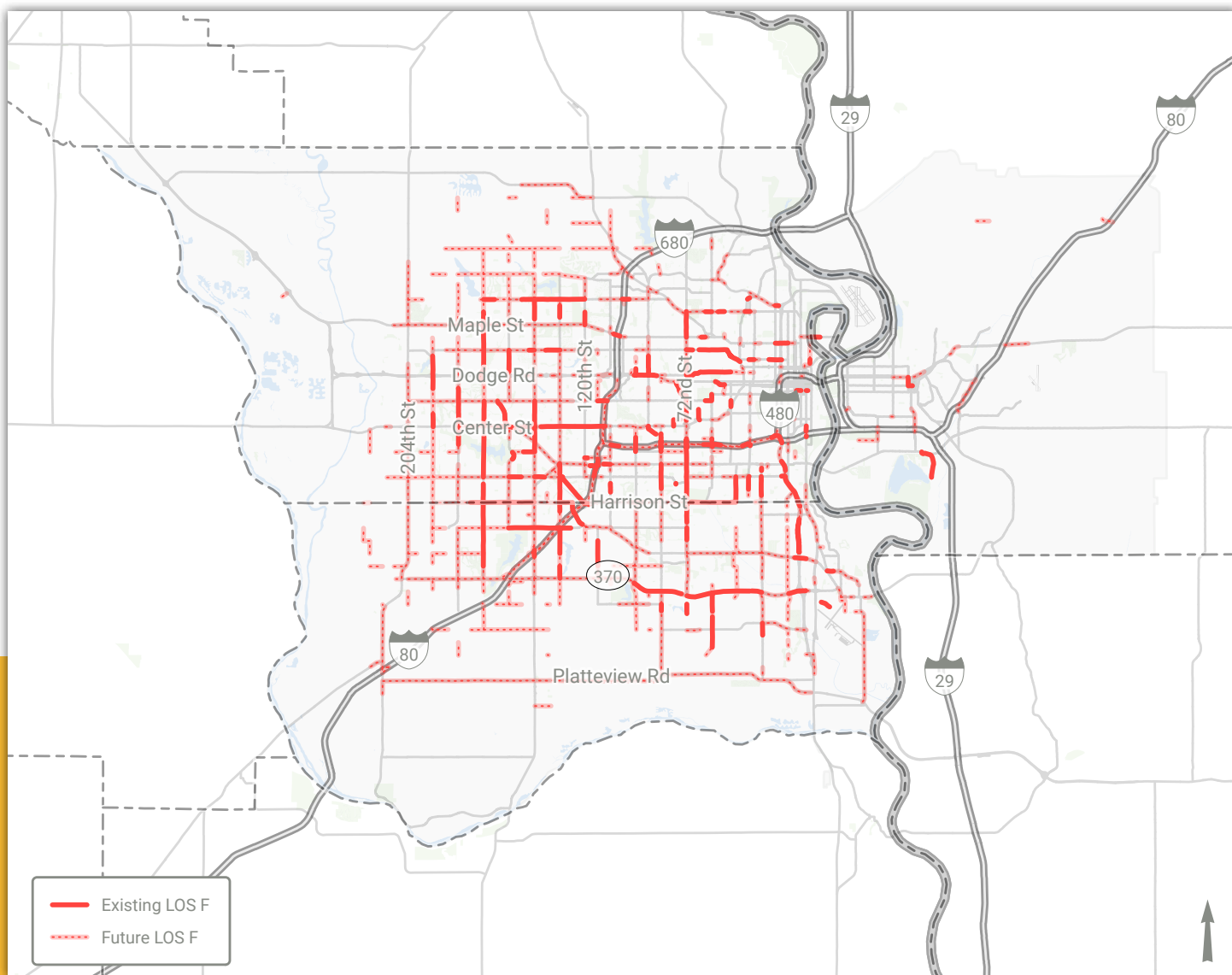
However, there is an alternative path of growth open to the region – one characterized by more comprehensive transit services and smarter growth oriented around key transit corridors, building on the goals established by Heartland 2050 and other strategic initiatives in the region. Under this vision, developed by MAPA as part of Heartland 2050’s “Close the Gap” initiative, and included in Metro’s Transit Development Plan, the region would invest in BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) along two additional corridors beyond the Omaha Rapid Bus Transit (ORBT) under development already. While the corridors require additional study, a conceptual route follows:

- Omaha/Bellevue North-South Spine:
30th-24th-Fort Crook
- 72nd & 84th Street Spine
- Council Bluffs West Broadway Corridor
- West Dodge Express / Freeway BRT
- Sarpy County Express Service

“Bus Rapid Transit” is a relatively new form of bus-based transit that delivers more comfortable, reliable, convenient, and faster service than regular bus service. This is achieved through features such as separate dedicated lanes and signal priority, along with attractive stations with premium comfort and features such as arrival information along major commercial corridors.



FIGURE 2.1
Service Level F



As a majority of corridors in the Metropolitan Area become a "Service Level F," the importance of these modal split initiatives become paramount in the future fiscal livelihood of jurisdictions in the metropolitan area. As time progresses and expanded infrastructure networks age, the cost to maintain

these systems will be too much for many of these communities to bear, as more tax revenue is used for roadway repair than other essential city services, especially services which enhance equity and vibrancy of the region.

Close the Gap

The Heartland 2050 “Close the Gap” Initiative calls for creating more walkable, livable cities, suburbs, and neighborhoods with equitable access to all residents. Its overall vision focuses on expanding different transportation options that aim to build a more robust transit system, and as a result, help the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area grow its economy and improve the quality of life for residents.

A robust transit system is faster, more convenient, and easy to use. Plus premium transportation options bring additional benefits to the community such as:

- Providing access to jobs and education
- Attracting and retaining talent
- Fostering more active lifestyles to improve public health
- Relieving traffic congestion
- Creating great, vibrant places
- Saving public funds though more cost-effective infrastructure

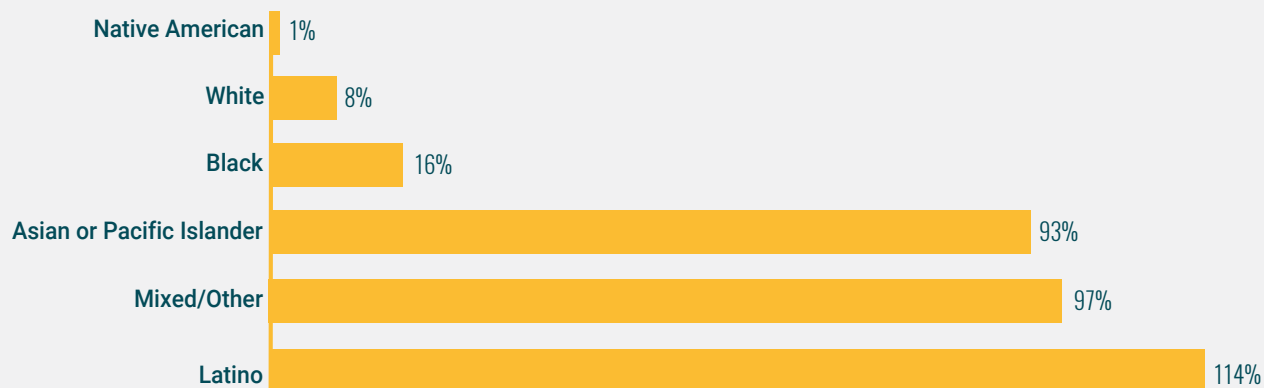
In 2016, MAPA's Heartland 2050 regional visioning project has released the Close the Gap White Paper and Executive Summary. These documents analyzed potential corridors, within the metro area, suitable

for enhanced transit services and redevelopment. The plan proposes several locations for premium upgrades that will utilize cutting-edge technology and permanent infrastructure.

The idea is to build on previous plans to further connect the region's jobs, entertainment centers and educational institutions. Currently, Metro manages all operating costs and services successfully compared to peer agencies. However, without new funding sources, maintenance or improvements become difficult. By securing regional funding, it will help maintain and expand Metro's infrastructure, as well as provide more opportunities to reduce future congestion through new roads, transit, and walking and biking trails.

The Close the Gap Plan proposes several key corridors for premium transit service that include more frequent service with premium technology and permanent infrastructure. Many of these corridors build on previous plans, and connect the region's job and entertainment centers and, most importantly, community colleges and universities. Feeder routes would connect the priority corridors to neighborhoods.

The Region is Still Majority White, but People of Color Have Grown Fastest in the Region Overall



Growth Rates of Major Racial/Ethnic Groups, 2000 to 2015

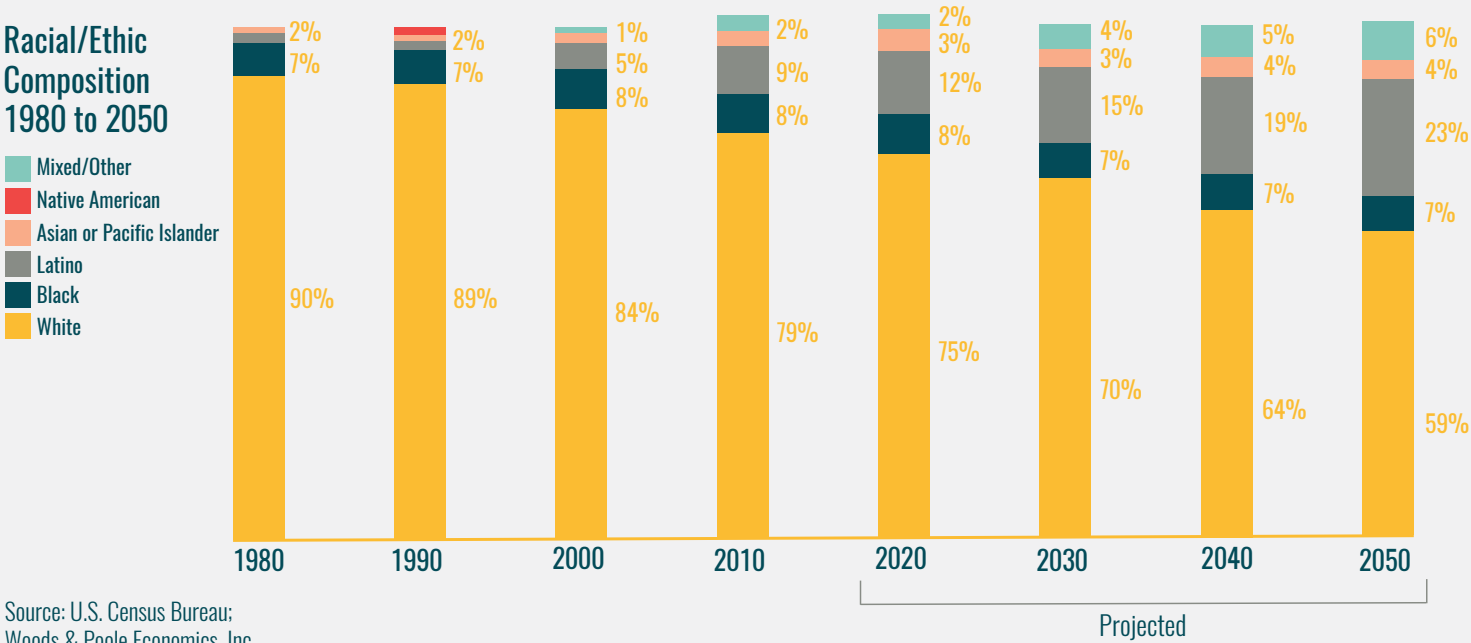
Source: U.S. Census Bureau Note: Data represents a 2011 through 2015 average

As the demographics of Omaha continue to change, the importance of equity becomes paramount to ensuring that the metro does not continue historic trends that have limited society and divided development of the city. Data suggests that by 2050 40% of the population of the region will be people of color, meaning the region will be much more diverse in the future. Ensuring that existing socioeconomic trends do not continue to hamper the progress of people of color is a major priority of continued growth of the region.

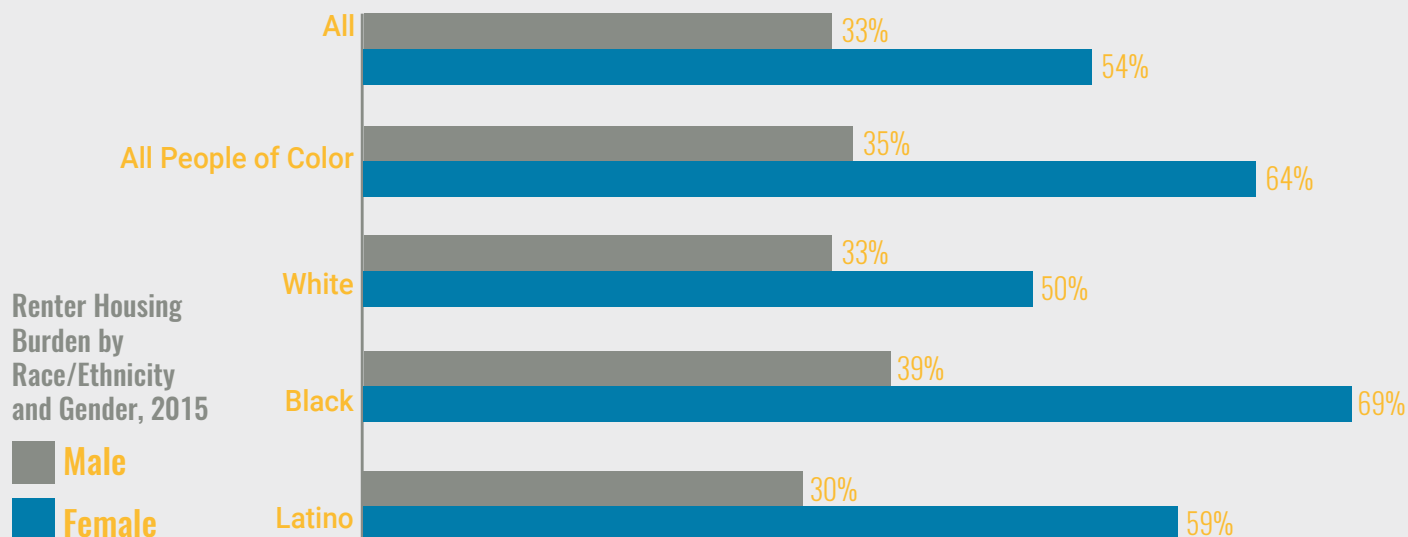
Transportation access and equity is a large driver of economic opportunity and development patterns. Ensuring that the transportation structures that are

funded and built create equity in access to goods and services throughout the region for all is a guiding principle of Heartland 2050. Transportation planning must consider the interplay of built structures of roadways and sidewalks, the funding for upkeep and transportation services like transit, and the effects of these two factors on development and land use patterns. These factors determine who has access and to what and how good or poor that access is. It is not enough to just provide services for people. They must also be able to access these resources in the ways that are most beneficial to them; meaning that transportation options must work for a variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Region is Quickly Becoming More Diverse, and, by 2050, Four in 10 Residents Will be People of Color



Households headed by women of any race are far more likely to be rent burdened than those headed by men



Source: IPUMS, Universe includes all renter-occupied households with housing costs. Note: Data represents a 2011 to 2015 average.

2.2 EMPLOYMENT ACCESSIBILITY

Omaha is often called a '20 minute city' with most of the employment, education, healthcare, and shopping centers located within 20 minutes of each other and connected by robust interstate networks. Omaha was built primarily after the 1950s when vehicle access to goods and services was the main planning consideration. This led to much of the development from the 1950s through the early 2000s being done using the suburban model of small neighborhood areas connected to a larger system of high volume roadways which feed into the interstate system. The dense networks of interstates and high speed high capacity roads provide for vehicle access to most of

the city and good connectivity from Sarpy, Douglas, and Pottawattamie Counties into the employment and education centers of the region.

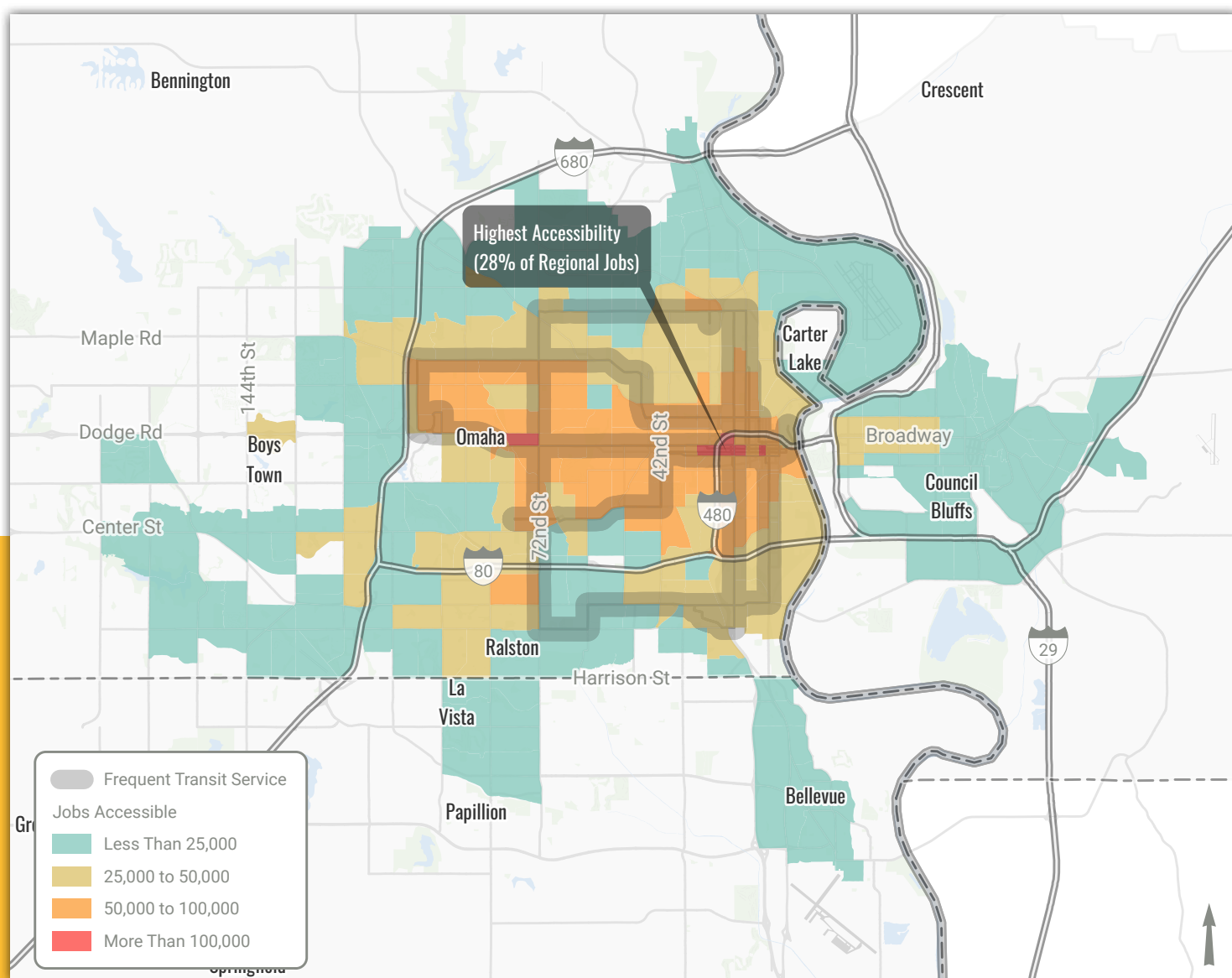
A person can drive throughout the metropolitan area within 30 minutes of automobile driving. More than 160,000 jobs within the metro area are within 30 minutes of an automobile trip, regardless of where one lives or works. This type of development is not as conducive to transit accessibility and the large footprint of Omaha means that providing transit to the region is difficult logistically and expensive. Concerns over the pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure in

the counties and the far western portions of Omaha make providing accessible transit service difficult also.

The map below shows the employment density within a 45-minute trip on existing public transit. Only one neighborhood has access to 80,000-120,000 jobs in central Omaha near UNMC using a longer trip time

that includes walking to a bus stop and waiting for the next bus to arrive. Thus, the lens of accessibility illustrates that our opportunity to improve access to employment opportunities includes investing in a regional transit system that provides options to residents who may not have access to an automobile.

FIGURE 2.2: Employment Accessibility, 45 Minute Transit Trip



Equitable Access to Employment

WHAT IS AN EQUITABLE REGION?

Regions are equitable when all residents - regardless of their race/ethnicity, income, neighborhood of residence, or other characteristics - are fully able to participate in the region's economic vitality, contribute to the region's readiness for the future, and connect to the region's assets and resources.

2.3 ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Strong and equitable regions possess high-quality jobs which produce new ideas, products, businesses and economic activity. These high-quality jobs require adequate education and training resources for local talent to acquire skills necessary to be successful in these jobs and career paths. The Omaha-Council Bluffs region features numerous colleges, schools and job training programs for people to become skilled. However, the accessibility and availability of these resources can be limited based upon geographic location or socioeconomic status.

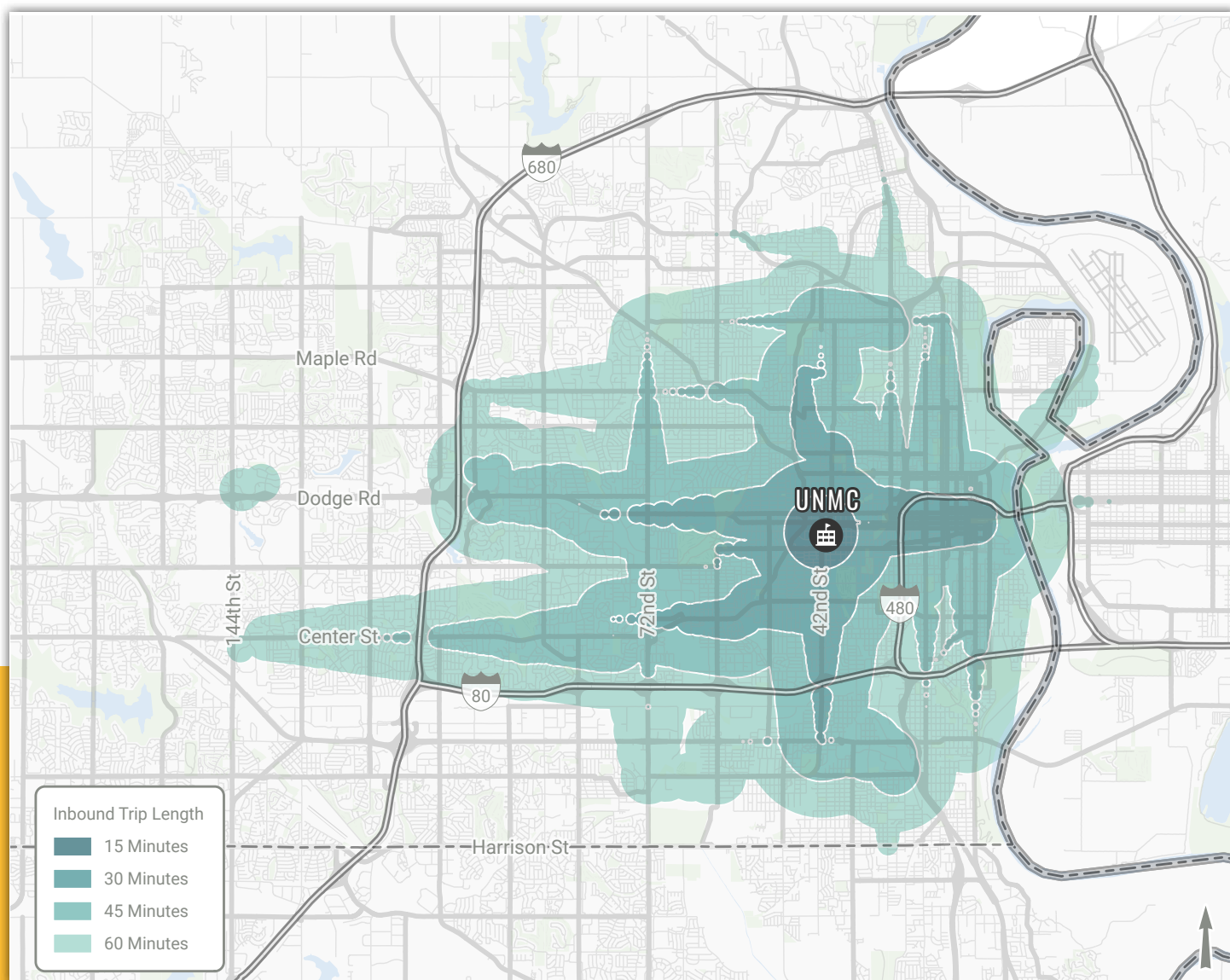
Residents of the region face looming skills and education gaps, especially African Americans and

Latinos. Black and Latino rates of post-secondary education (having at least an associate's degree) are far lower than the share of future jobs that will require that level of education. Looking at the youth who will fill these jobs ultimately, youth of color are more likely to be disconnected from school or work than White youth (13 percent and 7 percent, respectively). Despite some progress since 2000, young Latino immigrants are 11 times as likely as White youth to be without a high school diploma and not in pursuit of one. Health disparities for youth and residents in general also exist. Residents of color are more likely to have limited supermarket access (11 percent) compared with White residents (4 percent).



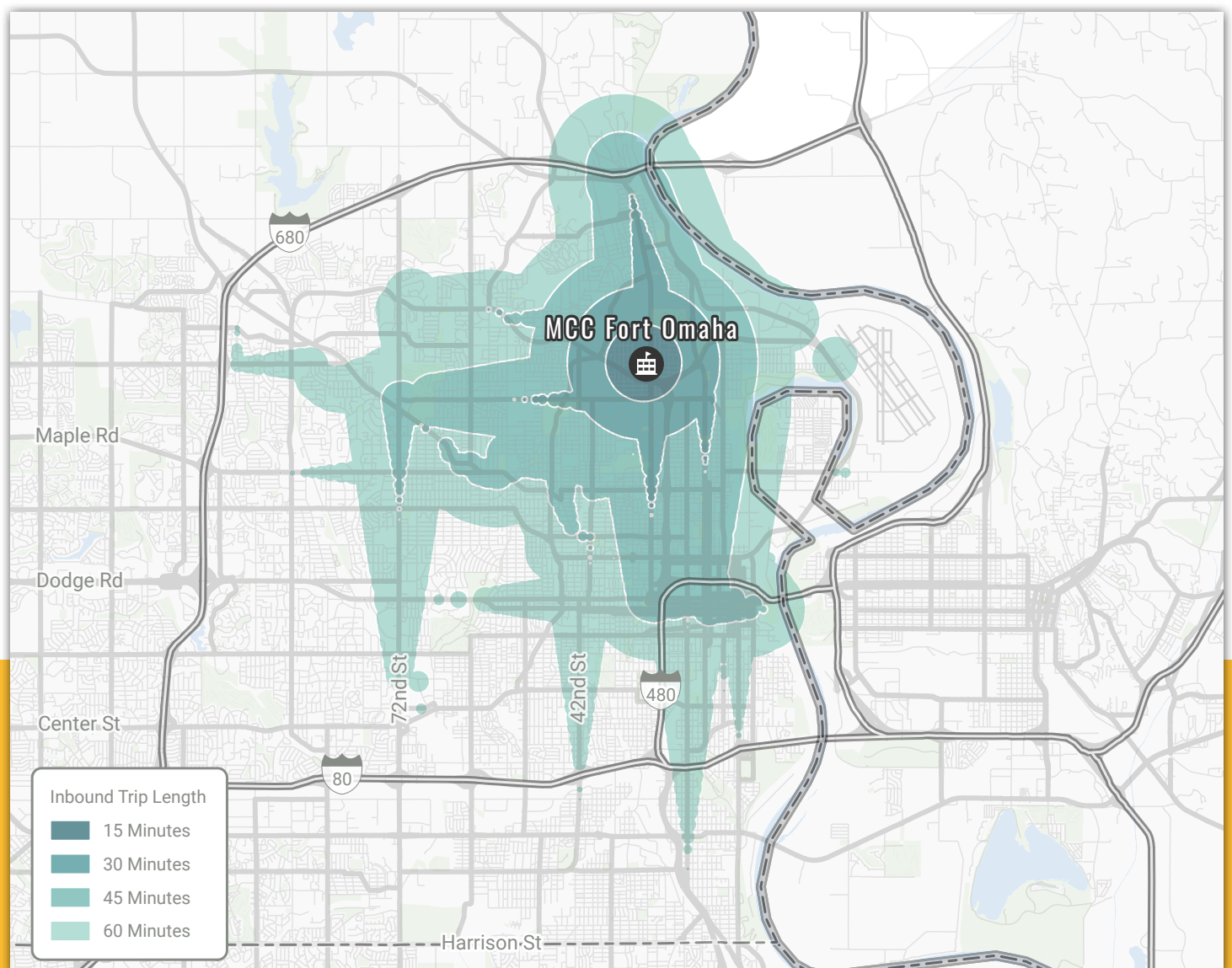
The following maps show the inbound trip lengths to various places of large educational resources within the Metropolitan Area:

FIGURE 2.3: Campus Transit Accessibility, UNMC



UNMC is located along numerous transit routes and is centralized relatively within the urban core of the Omaha Metro Area. Students, employees, and patients of UNMC can access large portions of the urban core within 60 minutes, and areas in Downtown and Midtown have frequent 15 minute (or less) trips to the campus and hospital. Given the central location of UNMC, the campus and facility will have a prominent role as a center point of future transit improvements.

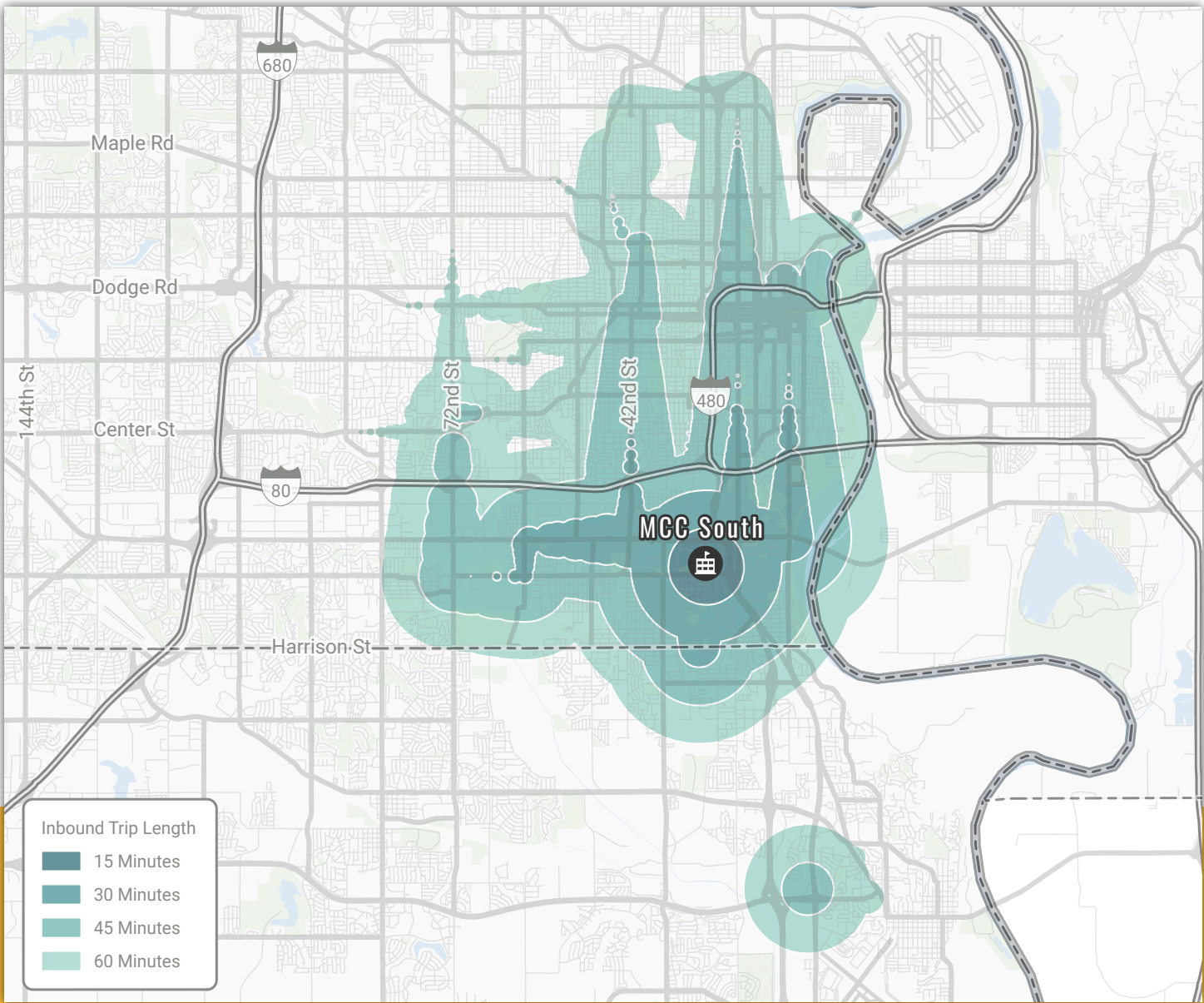
FIGURE 2.4: Campus Transit Accessibility,
MCC - Fort Omaha Campus



The Fort Omaha campus of MCC is very accessible to North Omaha and Downtown, but accessibility tapers off quickly when needing to go further south or west.

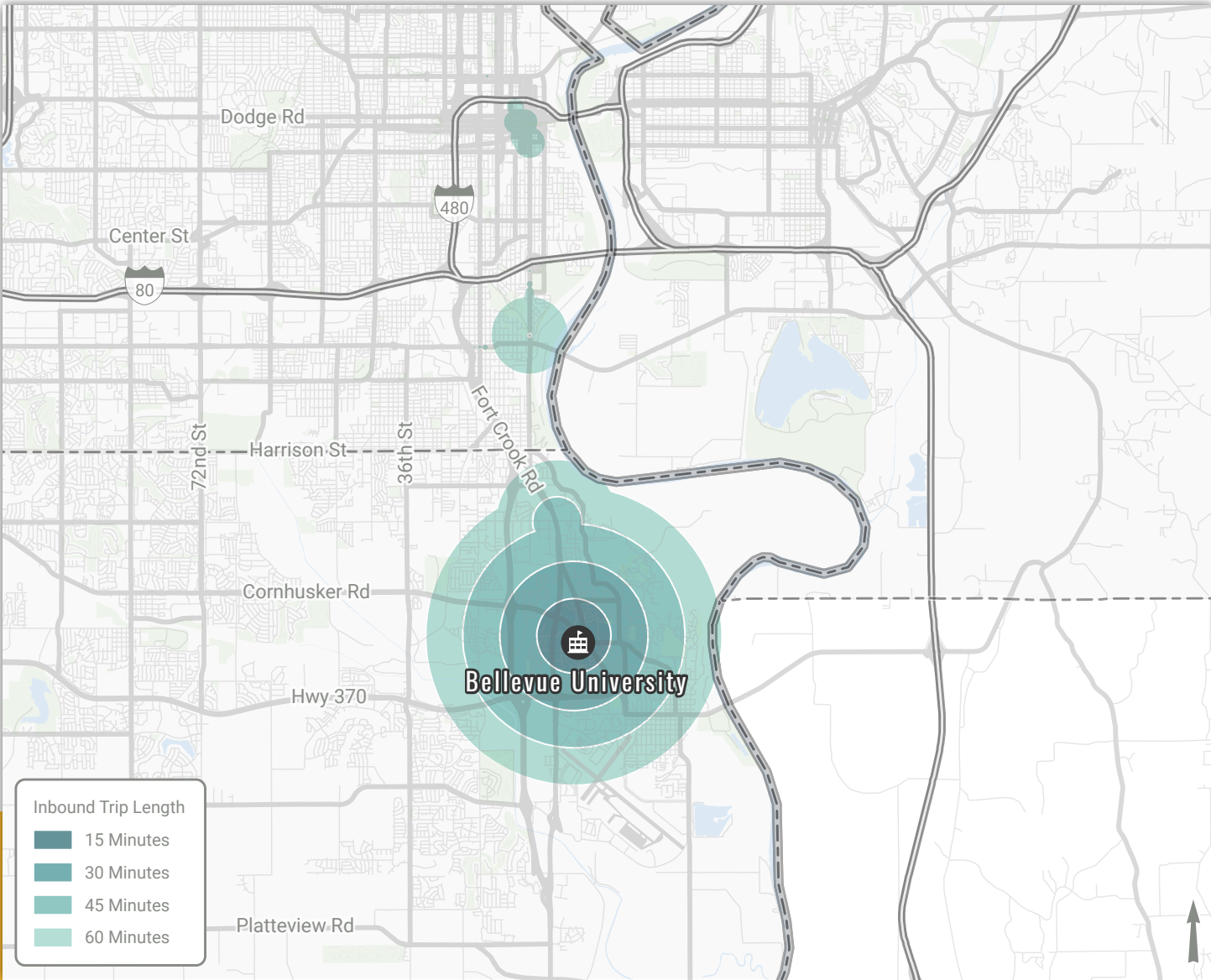


FIGURE 2.5: Campus Transit Accessibility, MCC - South Campus



Currently MCC-South Omaha has 15 minute trip length throughout South Omaha, but its accessibility north and west becomes limited past Dodge Street and west of 84th Street.

FIGURE 2.6: Campus Transit Accessibility, Bellevue University



Transit access to Bellevue University is very limited and transit is generally not a tangible solution for students living beyond the direct vicinity of the university campus.



2.4 ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE & WELLNESS

There are a mix of public and nonprofit paratransit providers in the region who serve clients unable to drive and those unable to use traditional mass transit. Private for-profit companies like Uber, Lyft, and ZTrip also provide service, particularly for trips not served by public and nonprofit providers.

Health and human service transportation clients are often left to determine the service level which they are eligible to receive. Some of the criteria for these determinations include geography, trip type, and time of day. Challenges have been presented and found

through numerous planning initiatives which cite limitations to the services which can be utilized for various services. Funding resources are limited for nonprofit transit organizations, which requires them to prioritize which clients receive service.

A number of transit providers operate in the Omaha-Council Bluffs region. Below is a list of the public and nonprofit organizations operating currently in the region and participating in the Coordinated Transit Committee.



PUBLIC PROVIDERS

Metro Transit
Moby
SWITA
Bellevue
La Vista / Ralston
Papillon
Council Bluffs
Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging

NONPROFIT PROVIDERS

Crossroads of Western Iowa
Black Hills Works
Friendship Program
Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership
Pottawattamie County Veterans Affairs Refugee
Empowerment Center
New Cassel Retirement Home
Intercultural Senior Center

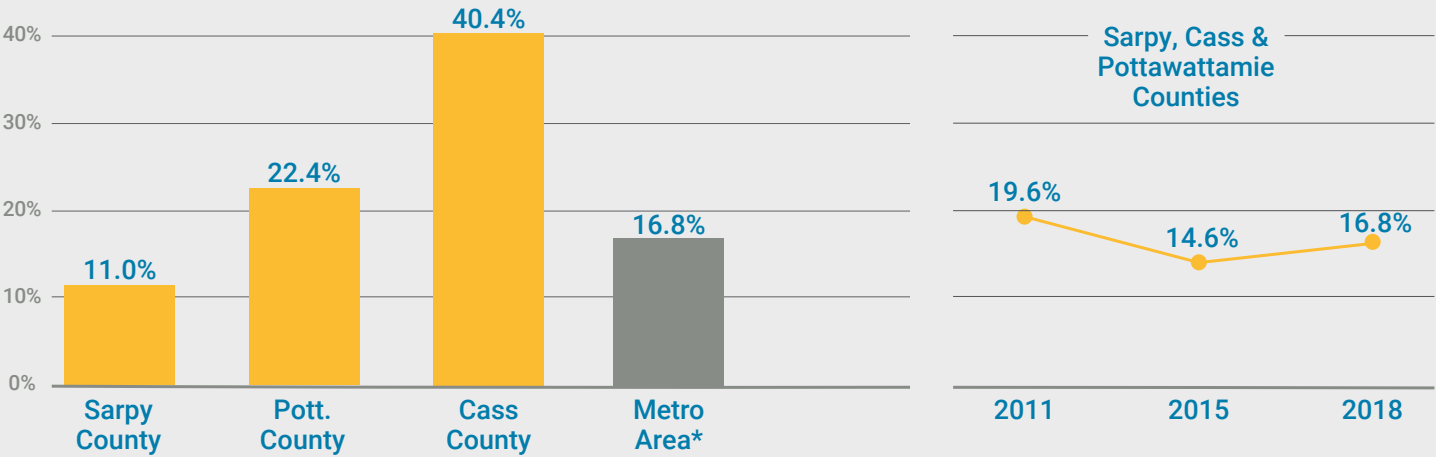
Medical Access

As Omaha’s population continues to age, access to medical care becomes more important than ever, especially for those who are unable to drive or who do not have access to a car.

The National Institute on Health and National Institute on Aging have identified that where one lives is the largest single determinant of health and lifespan, much of this is due to access to care. One of the major limits identified to accessing healthcare in the Omaha area is inadequate transportation services

often linked to limited or inadequate public transit. The Douglas, Sarpy/Cass, and Pottawattamie County Health Departments cite transportation access and time as barriers to receiving care in the 2018 Community Health Needs Report. This issue is called out again in the Community Health Conversations Report in regards to mental health support. Cass County and other rural areas have some of the longest transportation times to access care, though race and gender were the main social burdens affecting those in urban areas.

Have Had to Travel 30 Minutes or More for a Medical Appointment in the Past Year
(Sarpy, Cass & Pottawattamie Counties Only)



Sources: PRC Community Health Surveys, Professional Research Consultants, Inc.
Note: Asked of all respondents (*excluding those in Douglas County)



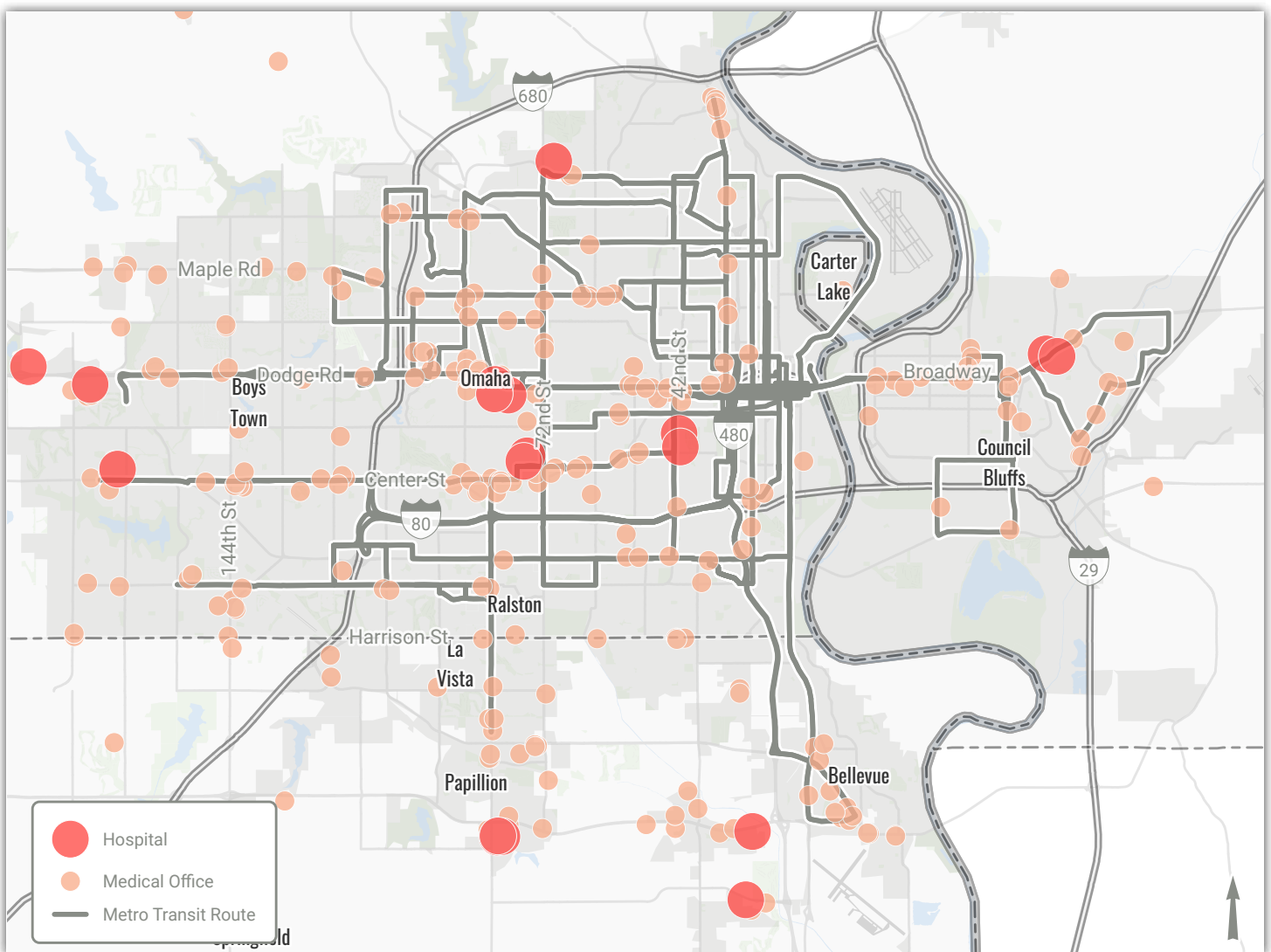
Transit Access to Medical Facilities

The map below shows the hospitals and doctors offices as well as the transit lines. UNMC is the only hospital located east of 72nd street and the majority of hospitals and specialists offices are located in suburban areas a significant distance from transit lines. Most of the hospitals shown on the map are located on or near transit lines but these routes are low frequency or commuter routes that run every hour or only twice a day at peak times. The current distri-

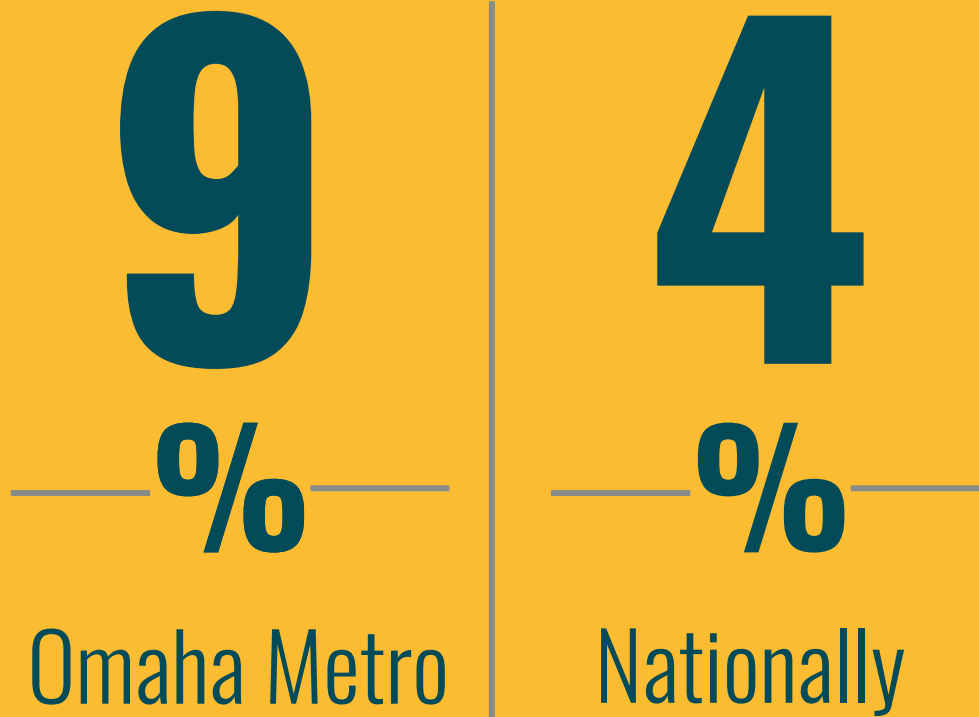
bution of healthcare services leaves urban and rural populations underserved without major hospitals or access to providers beyond primary care.

Council Bluffs and Sarpy County have hospitals located on major corridors, but with limited transit access. This leaves those without cars without reliable and easy access to healthcare, especially major or specialized care in rural areas and downtown Omaha.

FIGURE 2.7: Healthcare Facilities and Metro Transit Routes



LIVING IN A FOOD DESERT



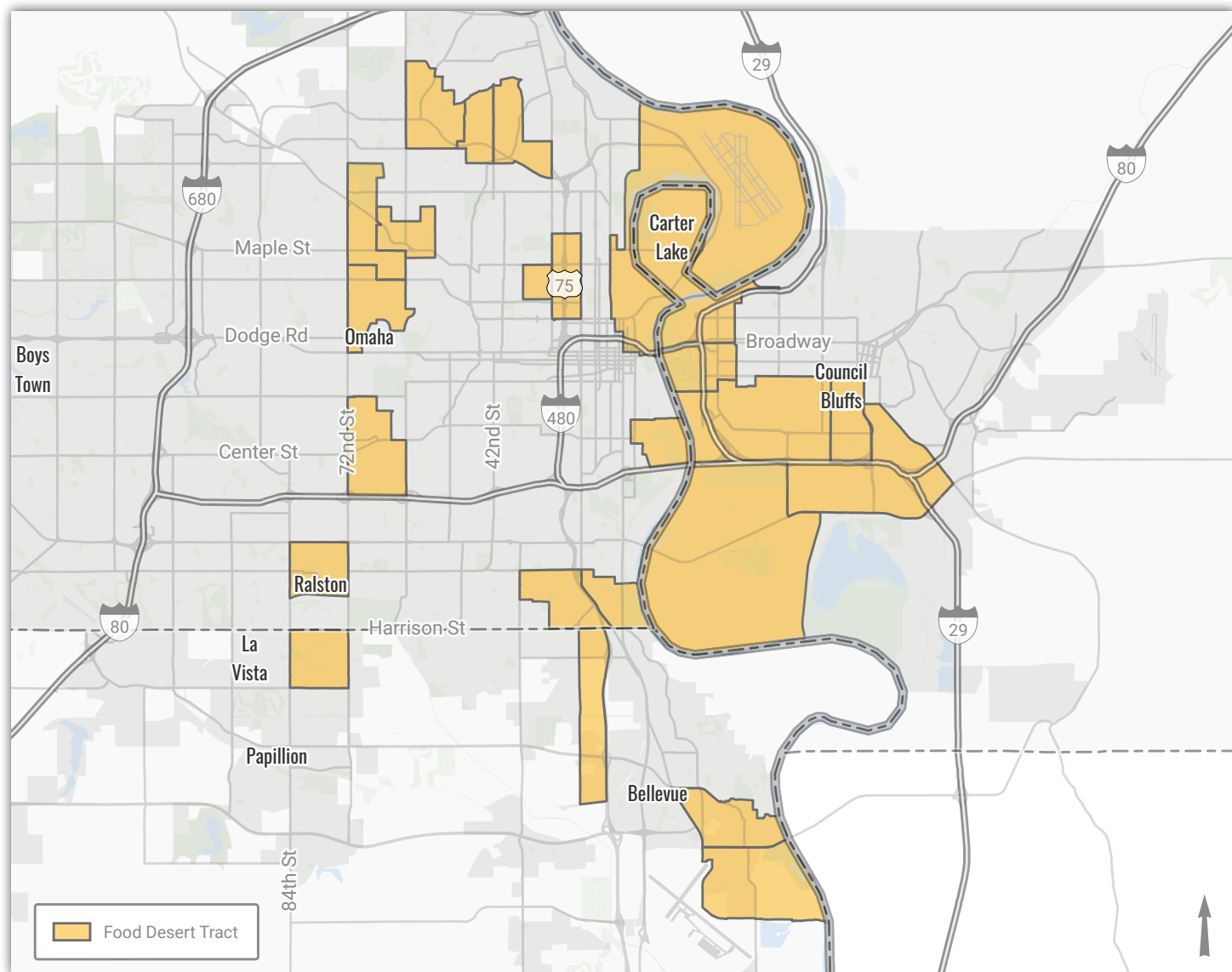
Food Access

According to Landscape Omaha, 9% of people in the MAPA area live in food deserts, more than twice the national average, which has a profound impact on the health of residents unable to access nutritious foods. All of the food deserts are east of 72nd street and the majority of them coincide with areas of poverty and single or no car households further compounding the problem of food access. In the 2018 Community Health Needs Report both obesity and food insecurity,

the fear that food may run out before they have money to replace it, as major health impacts for the area. These issues affect those without cars and those without access to safe places to exercise at disproportionate rates. Insufficient transit and pedestrian and cyclist accommodations make navigating much of Omaha dangerous for pedestrians, especially children, compounding food access inequalities.



Figure 2.8: Food Deserts in the Omaha-Council Bluffs Region



Park and Recreation Access

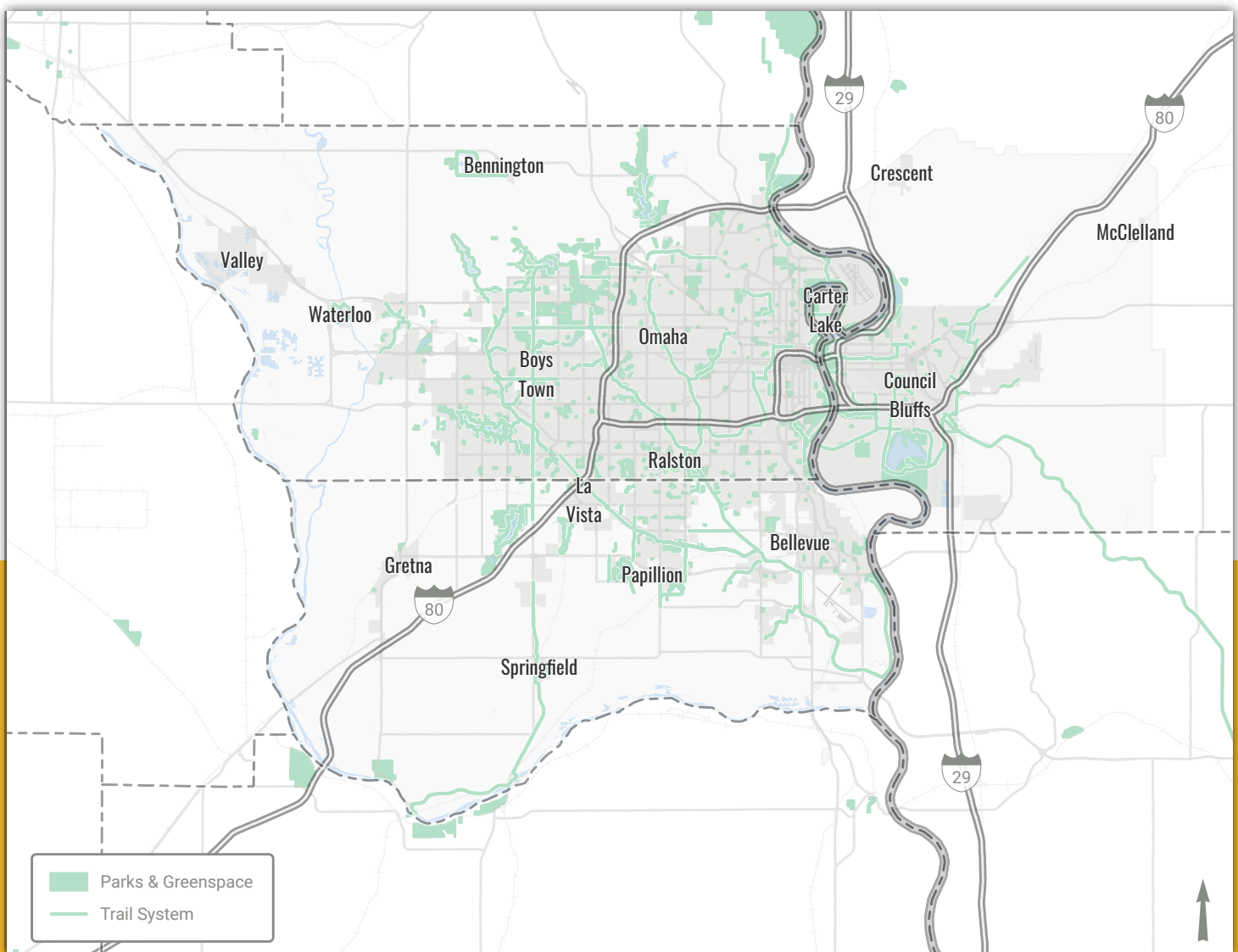
Access to green space, safe trails, and parks has been linked to improved physical and mental health in population studies and decreases in neighborhood rates of crime. Due to these findings the Centers for

Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) have initiatives to improve access to outdoor space and trails in communities. Trails and parks provide not only mental and physical benefits for

those living near them but also safer transportation options for those without cars. The map from the city of Omaha Parks and Recreation Department shows where Omaha parks are located and the second map shows the recreational and on-street bike facilities in the region. Access to trails and safe streets is vital

for both maintaining physical well being as well as providing safe ways for those without cars to access medical services. Parks and green space are also vital to building a sense of community and creating social ties that provide for better education outcomes for children and health outcomes for older adults.

Figure 2.9: Omaha-Council Bluffs Trail System



2.5 KEY STRATEGIES

Utilize Accessibility as Fundamental Measure of Transportation Performance:

Shifting away from traditional measures of moving vehicles to connecting people.

Historically transportation planning has focused on the need to move large volumes of people as quickly as possible being the main metric for good transportation access. This approach downplayed transit, cycling, and walking. Instead of looking at the volume of

people moved through the transportation system, accessibility looks at what services are available within a community and who can access them and what the quality of that access looks like. This allows planners and engineers to examine all modes of transportation and the experiences of users, centering the designs on humans and not vehicles.

Focusing Transit Investments on Improving Accessibility:

Increasing the frequency of transit services on existing routes and prioritizing new connections.

The goal of Heartland 2050 has been to create a more equitable region for all residents. Planning efforts and studies, most notably the Metro Transit Development Plan (TDP), have developed a series of changes to the Metro system to enhance transit frequency along routes with higher ridership and in areas of higher zero-car households. This allows for

Metro to focus services on those who are most dependent on them and where they are able to connect the most people to services.

The map below showcases transit routes along with racially concentrated areas of poverty (RCAP). Providing transit resources in these areas is crucial to future equity and engagement efforts in Omaha to foster new job and educational attainment.

Figure 2.10: Racially and Ethnic Concentrations of Poverty (RCAP/ECAP), MAPA Region

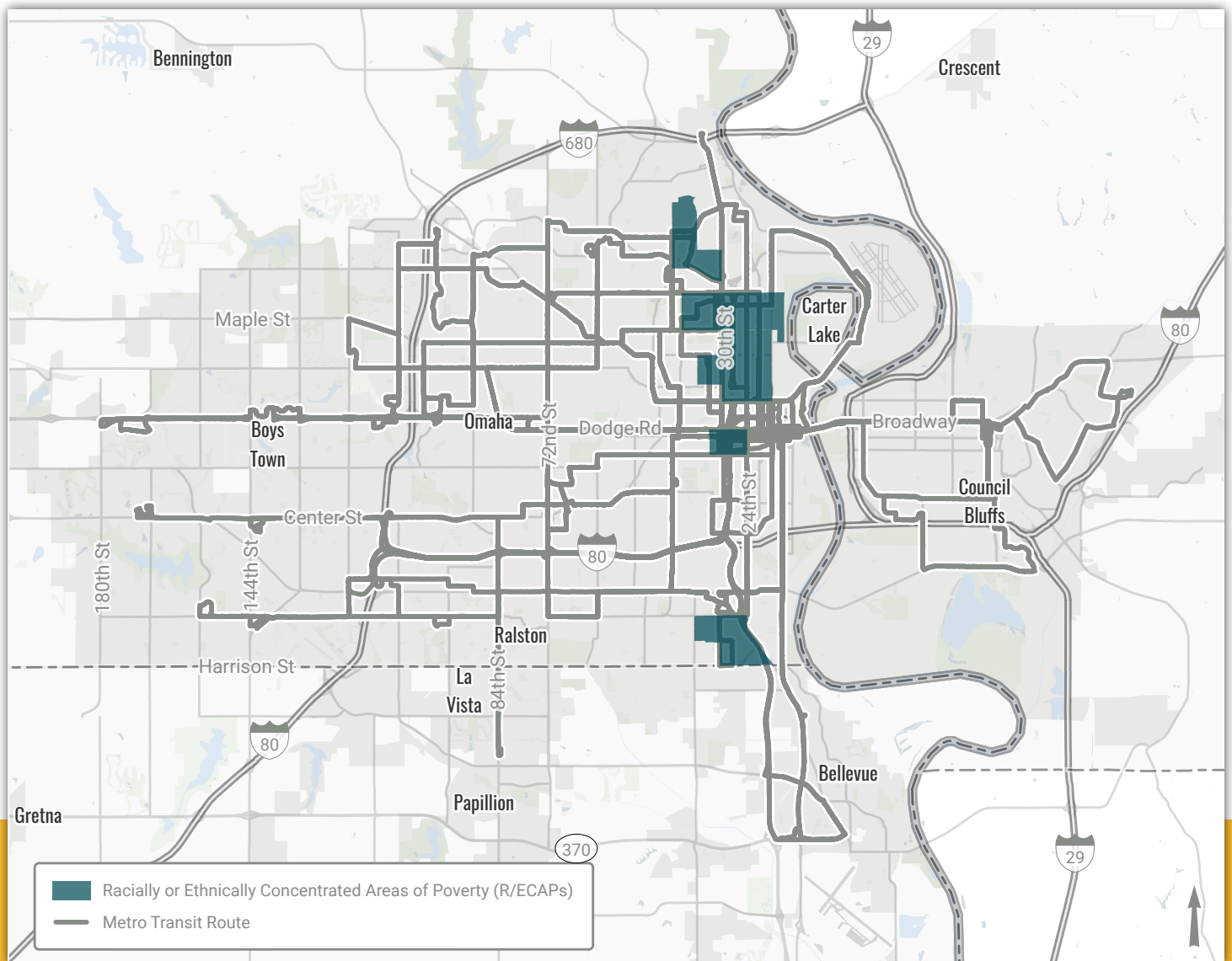
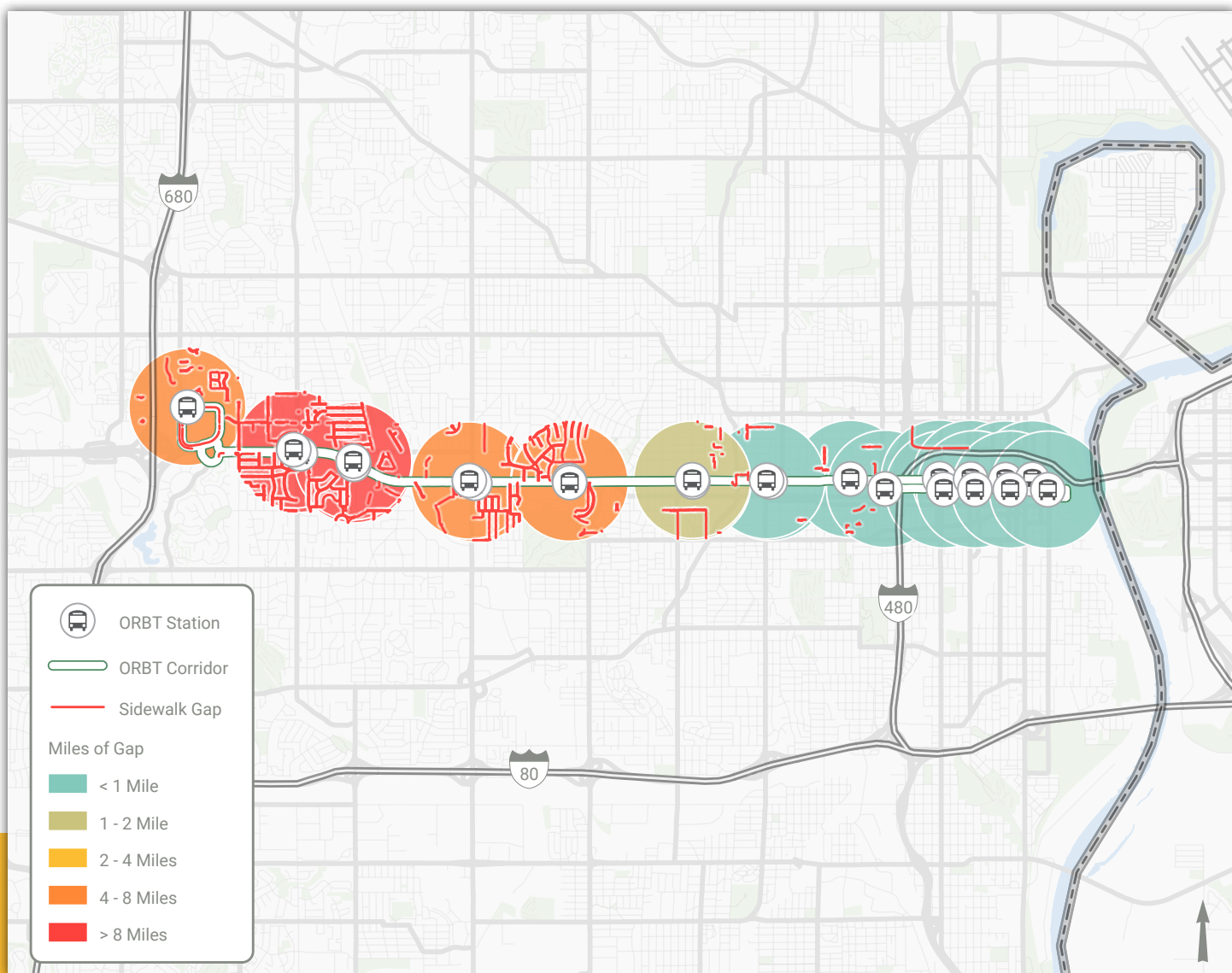


Figure 2.11: Sidewalk Gaps Near ORBT Transit Stations



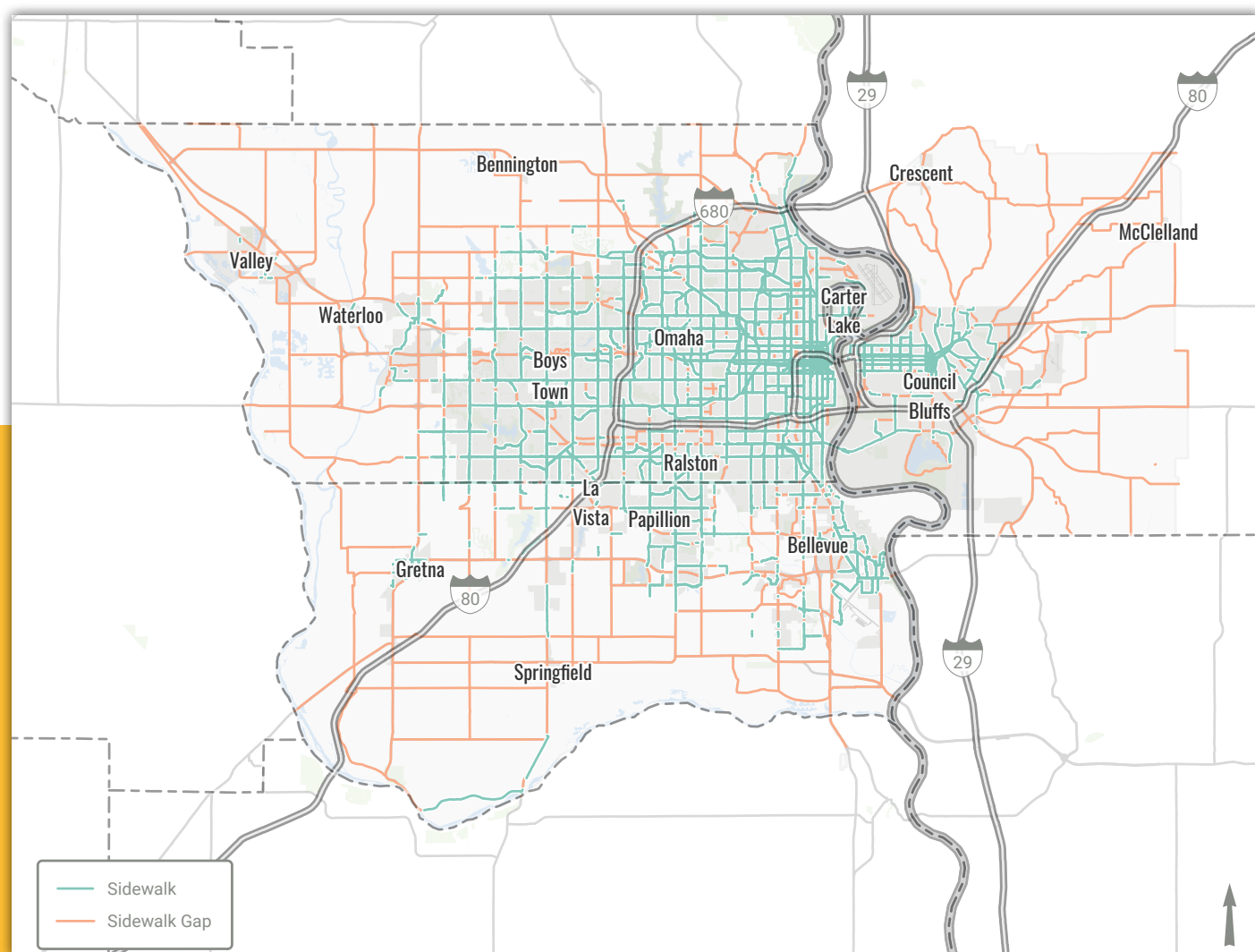
The map above showcases the new ORBT line along Dodge Street from Westroads Mall to Downtown Omaha. By introducing bus rapid transit (BRT) to the metropolitan area, along with transit-oriented development near fixed stop locations, the transit system will be able to provide a higher level of service along this highly traveled corridor.

Prioritize Sidewalk Connections Near Activity Centers and Schools

The ability of students to safely get to and from school by foot or bike is a major concern for education access. Several federal and local programs have identified Safe Routes to Schools programs for the region and many local activist groups and neighborhood associations have taken on school access as a priority. Having consistent and maintained sidewalks that allow for students of all ages to get to and from school and extracurricular activities is vital for them to be able to continue their education and develop

hobbies and healthy social networks. Obesity and childhood diabetes are a major concern for school aged children in Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie counties and daily exercise through walking or biking to school and activities is one of the ways the Douglas County Health Department has identified as combating these issues. In 2019 the need for safe access to rural schools became a talking point when three school children in different parts of the metro area were struck and killed by vehicles near their schools.

Figure 2.12: Regional Sidewalk Gaps



Develop a Regional Model of Collaboration for Demand-Response Services

Current transit programs are fragmented, with inconsistent service areas. Regional collaboration provides opportunity.

Current transit options are often difficult for people to navigate due to restrictions on qualifications and jurisdictional boundaries which limit access to metro wide services. This consistent problem has lead to MAPA's involvement in a variety of coordinated transportation initiatives.

One of the ongoing proposed solutions to this is better coordination of service. The goal of this is to simplify what rides users qualify for or to allow for nonprofits to 'share' clients so they can transport people based not on a narrow demographic, but instead on the most efficient and effective provider for that ride with simplified payment.

In 2017 MAPA and Sarpy County completed the Sarpy County Transit Study which looked at service gaps and proposed transit options for the cities, county, and nonprofits to improve and expand service. The plan laid out short, medium, and long term recommendations to improve transit access for Sarpy County residents. Short term recommendations included increasing frequency along commuter routes in higher density areas, promoting the state-wide vanpooling network in the county, and coordinating local providers with Metro Transit to provide linkages between the cities in Sarpy County and the Omaha transit network. Medium term goals centered

around turning express or commuter routes into fixed route services that would provide regular transit to Bellevue, Papillion, and La Vista. Long term the goals included providing transit along high capacity roads like Highway 370 to link Sarpy County with Omaha and Council Bluffs.

In 2019 the state of Nebraska passed legislation allowing for the creation of regional transit authorities across jurisdictions. This would allow for transit to be provided to the Omaha metro region and not just within city limits, expanding access to fixed route transit and paratransit options for Douglas and Sarpy Counties as well as improving transit connections between downtown Omaha and suburban job centers.

The unified payment system Metro Transit is developing allows for seamless payment integration with Park Omaha, Metro Transit, and Heartland B-Cycle to provide more complete and easier to access transportation options for those who do not drive.

Omaha's Smart Cities initiative, Metro Transit, Heartland B-Cycle, and MAPA have been developing a program to help coordinate transit services for OPS students who do not live far enough from their school to qualify for school buses but are too far to walk comfortably. This would not only provide better and safer transportation options for children but also instill a mentality of busing and biking early to raise a new generation of cyclists and transit users.