2

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY

2.1 ACCESSIBILITY BACKGROUND

What is Accessibility

In a transportation context, accessibility refers to the ease with which people can get to the goods and services they need. There are a variety of ways to measure accessibility: travel time, safety, and physical ability all factor into how easily someone can access everyday activities for work, play, or recreation. Transportation accessibility is a necessity for a fulfilling life; access to goods and services is a vital determinant of employment, health, and safety. In other words, accessibility improves the quality of human life.

Why Accessibility?

Accessibility is one of the four goals that the region established during the development of the 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) from 2015 through 2020. The goals were selected in order to create a more vibrant community in the Omaha-Council Bluffs region, with key destinations easily accessible by all modes of transportation. A guiding principle of this plan is to "Put People First," so it employs transportation strategies that support health, safety, fun, and economic security in a more holistic approach to accessibility.

In developing federal funding priorities for transportation projects, it is vital that we consider how residents travel to and from services, and which projects will improve everyone's access to employment, education, healthcare, and other needs. By prioritizing access to goods and services in all transportation decisions, planning becomes about how people utilize and interact with the public space.

MAPA highlighted accessibility as a necessary component in previous transportation plans. The Coordinated Transit Plan (CTP) 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 in order to make biking and walking safer and more accessible for all within the metro area. The Transit Return on Investment Study examined transit accessibility as it relates to employment and economic development.

How is Accessibility Measured?

Historically, transportation planning has focused on the need to move large volumes of automobiles as quickly as possible. This approach undervalued transit, cycling, and walking. Alternatively, accessibility focuses on the availability of services in a community, whether all segments of the population can access them, and what the quality of access looks like. By employing an accessibility lens, planners and engineers examine all modes of transportation, as well as the experiences of users, centering designs on human needs, as opposed to vehicles.

To enable this shift in focus, MAPA will use accessibility as a fundamental measure of transportation performance, and employ the following metrics over the life of this plan:

- Federally Required Metrics
    - Percent of Non-Single Occupancy Vehicle Travel
    - Safety Measures
- Stakeholder Vetted Regional Metrics
    - Number of Jobs Within 30 Minutes of Home via Automobile
    - Number of Miles of Sidewalk Gaps Within ¼ Mile of Elementary Schools
    - Percent of Homes/Population Within 60 Minutes of Colleges and Universities via Public Transportation
    - Population Within 30 Minutes of Hospitals/Clinics via Public Transportation
    - Population Within 30 Minutes of a Grocery Store via Public Transportation
    - The number of jobs reachable within a 30-minute transit commute of key low-income and minority neighborhoods
    - Low-income / minority population within 1/4 mile of frequent service
    - Low-income / minority population served by all routes
    - Regional population within 1/4 mile of frequent service
    - Regional population served by all routes

Performance Targets

Evaluating performance at a regional level involves taking account of how things are today, setting targets for the future, and then looking at how well we did when the future becomes the present. Measuring performance toward access will be an ongoing process that is shared with the public online. For a more detailed description of performance measures, please see Appendix E. The following metrics will be used to measure accessibility within the region:

- Number of fatalities,
- Rate of fatalities,
- Number of serious injuries,
- Rate of serious injuries,
- Number of non-motorized fatalities and non-motorized serious injuries,
- Total number of fatalities reported to the National Transit Database (NTD), excluding trespassing and suicide-related fatalities,
- Rate of fatalities per total Vehicle Revenue Miles (VRM) by mode,
- Total number of injuries reported to the NTD, excluding injuries resulting from assaults and other crimes,
- Rate of injuries per total VRM by mode,
- Total number of transit safety events meeting a major event reporting threshold reported to the NTD by a Full Reporter on the S&S-40 form,
- Rate of transit safety events per total VRM by mode,
- Mean distance between major mechanical failures by mode,
- Percent of Non-SOV travel,
- Jobs within 30 min of home via Automobile,
- Jobs within 45 min of home via Transit,
- % Homes/population within 60 min of colleges and universities via transit,
- Miles of sidewalk gaps within 1/4 or 1/2 mile of schools,
- % Homes/population within 30 min of hospitals/clinics via transit,
- % Homes/population within 30 min of a grocery store via transit,
- The number of jobs reachable within a 30-minute transit commute of key low-income and minority neighborhoods,
- Low-income/minority population within 1/4 mile of frequent transit service,
- Low-income/minority population served by all transit routes,
- Regional population within 1/4 mile of frequent transit service,
- Regional population served by all transit routes, and
- Access to essential services such as schools, healthcare, grocery stores, and other destinations via transit.

Transportation and Land Use

Transportation and land use are tied together in development, with land use requiring supportive transportation infrastructure. Roads and streets contribute to placemaking and the safety of pedestrians and cyclists. Streets designed to be accessible for cyclists and pedestrians promote more densely populated neighborhoods with better access to goods and services for all - especially for those who do not drive. Spaces designed to be welcoming encourage people to be there, increasing foot traffic and vibrancy. When put together, accessible streets and welcoming spaces become safe, desirable places people frequently visit.

Accessibility and Safety

Safety directly affects who can use transportation systems and how freely they can move. Without safe conditions, many people—especially children, the elderly, and people with disabilities—are excluded from accessible transit, reinforcing social and economic inequalities. Improving safety is key to making transportation truly accessible for all.

Safety is a critical factor that significantly impacts transportation accessibility in several ways:

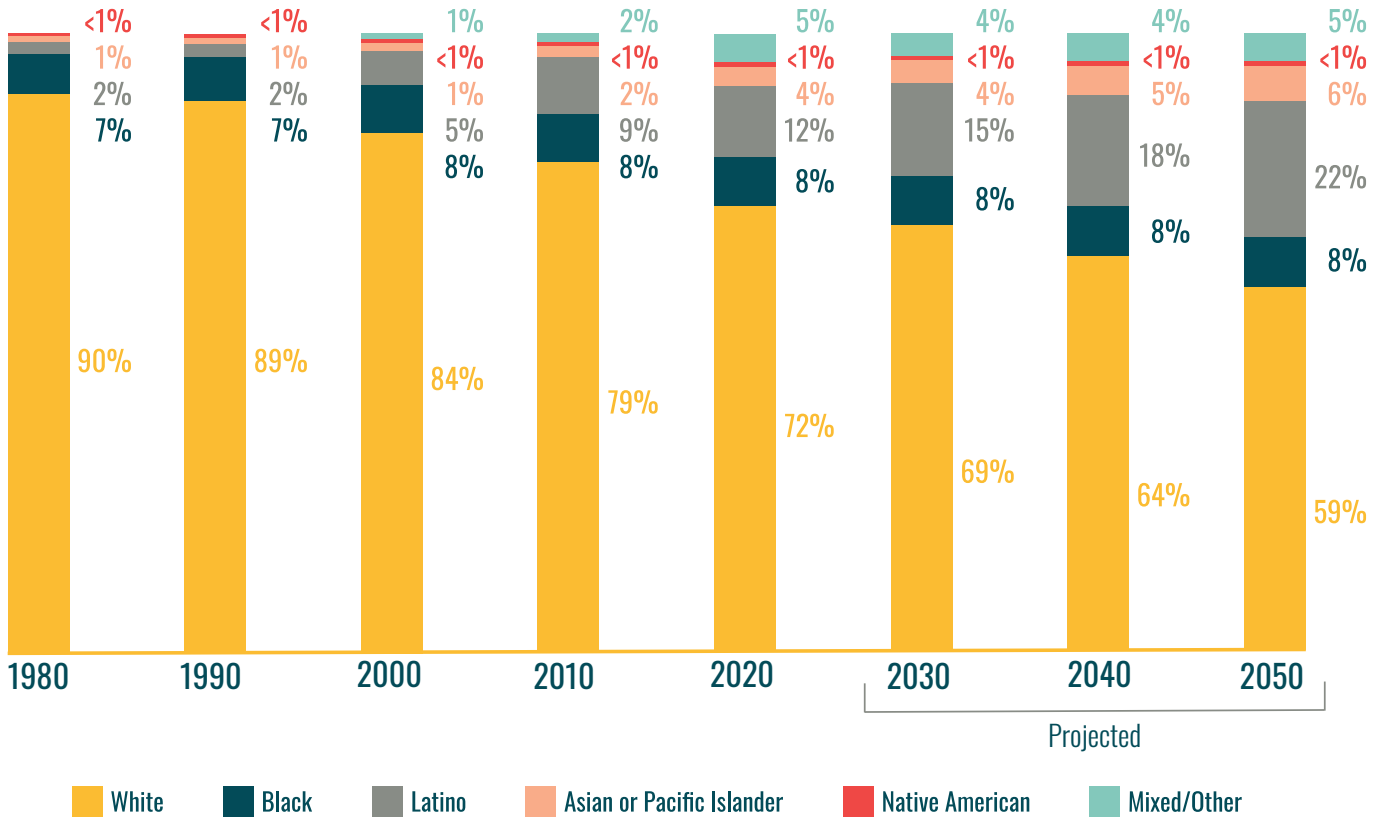
1. Physical Safety & Infrastructure Design: Safe infrastructure (e.g., well-lit sidewalks, crosswalks, protected bike lanes) ensures that pedestrians, cyclists, and people with disabilities can access transit systems without fear of being involved in crashes. Poorly maintained roads, a lack or gap in the sidewalks, or unsafe transit stops can deter people from using public transport, especially vulnerable groups (elderly, children, people with disabilities).
2. Public Transportation: Fear of crime (e.g., harassment, assault, theft) discourages people, particularly women and marginalized communities, from using public transport or walking/biking. High-crime transit areas may reduce accessibility for those who rely on those routes but feel unsafe using them. Unsafe transit disproportionately affects low-income communities, where transit may be the only option. Safe, affordable transit ensures equitable access to jobs, education, and healthcare.
3. Traffic Safety & Reliability: High crash rates (e.g., reckless driving, poor road conditions) can make certain routes dangerous, limiting access for pedestrians and cyclists. Safe, well-enforced traffic laws (e.g., speed limits, pedestrian priority) improve accessibility for non-motorized users.
4. Disaster & Emergency Preparedness: Transportation systems must be resilient to natural disasters (floods, earthquakes) to ensure continuous access during emergencies. Evacuation routes and accessible emergency transit are crucial for people with disabilities or limited mobility.

2.2 THE BASELINE - WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Under a "business-as-usual" scenario, development in the Omaha region will continue to follow a pattern of outward, low-density growth. MAPA used the regional travel demand model to conduct an analysis which forecast 11.1 million more vehicle-miles of car travel by 2050 under this scenario, compared to 2015. These additional vehicle miles traveled will 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 exacerbate existing bottlenecks and cause 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 disruptively common as population growth and sprawl both add traffic and make the network more vulnerable to incident related congestion.

FIGURE 2.1: Population Projection by Race/Ethnicity in the Omaha-Council Bluffs Region



As the demographics of Omaha continue to change, universal access becomes paramount in ensuring that we do not continue historic trends that have limited society and divided development of the city. Population projections, as shown in Figure 1, suggest that by 2050 41% 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.

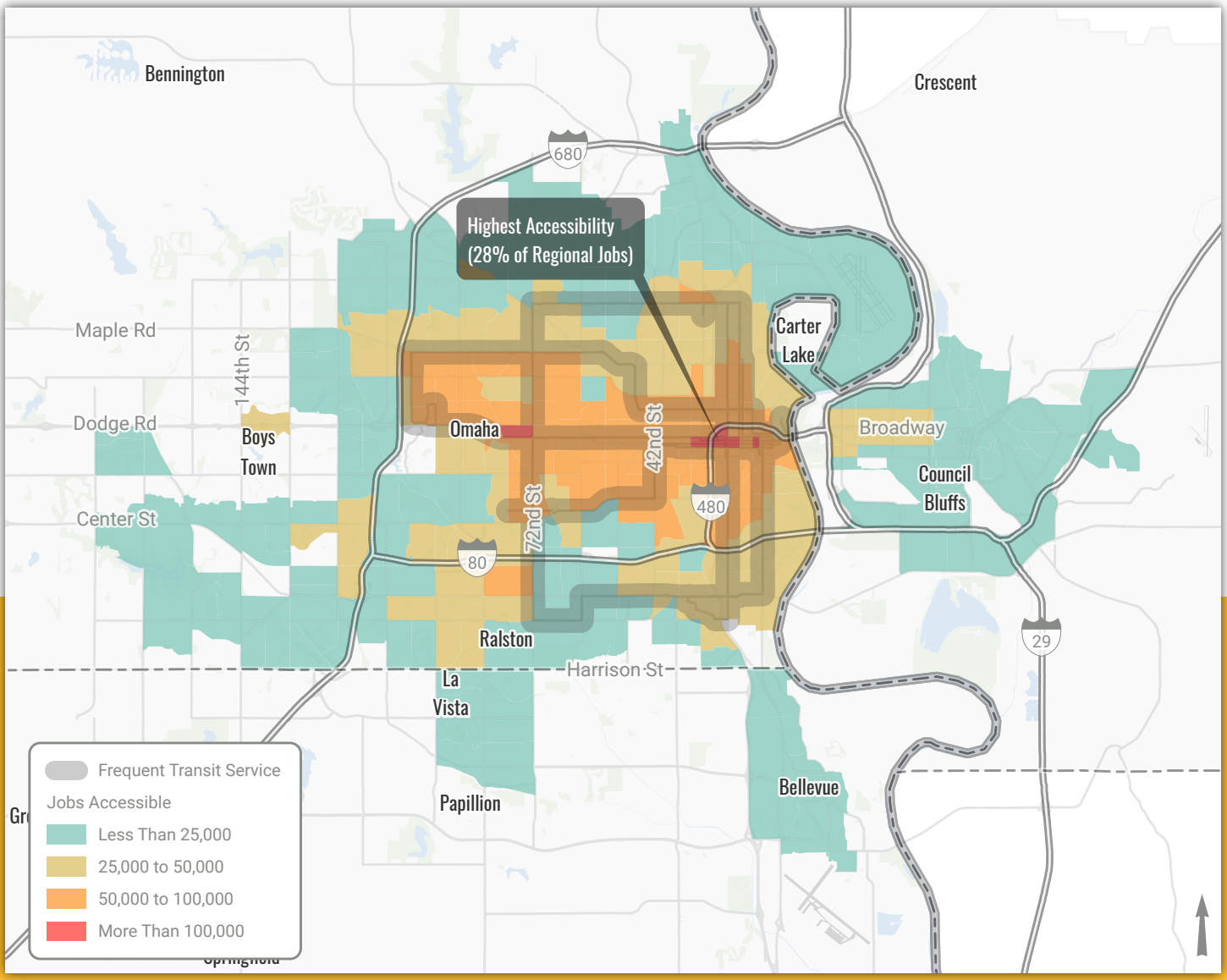
Transportation access is a major driver of economic opportunity and has a direct impact on the land use development patterns that exist. Ensuring that the transportation structures that are funded and built create widespread access to goods and services throughout the region for all is a guiding principle 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 three 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.

Access to Employment

Omaha is often called a '20-minute city' with most employment, education, healthcare, and shopping centers located within 20 minutes of each other and connected by robust interstate networks. Omaha was primarily built after the 1950s, when automobile access to goods and services was the main planning consideration. Much of the development from the 1950's through the early 2000s was based on the suburban model of small neighborhood areas connected to a larger system of high volume roadways, feeding into the interstate system. The dense networks of interstates and high speed, high capacity roads provide automobile access to most of the city and good connectivity from Sarpy, Douglas, and Pottawattamie counties into the employment and education centers of the region.

Figure 2 shows employment density within a 45-minute trip on existing public transit. The pattern of development in the region, with its large footprint, is not easily accessible by transit since providing transit to such development is logistically difficult and expensive. Inadequate pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure in much of the region also hinders transit accessibility. Most neighborhoods have access to fewer than 80,000 jobs within this trip window. Compare this to the 160,000 jobs within a 30 minute automobile trip. Through the lens of accessibility it becomes evident that improving access to employment opportunities includes investment in a regional transit system that provides options to residents who may not have access to an automobile.

FIGURE 2.2: 45 Minute Public Transportation Access

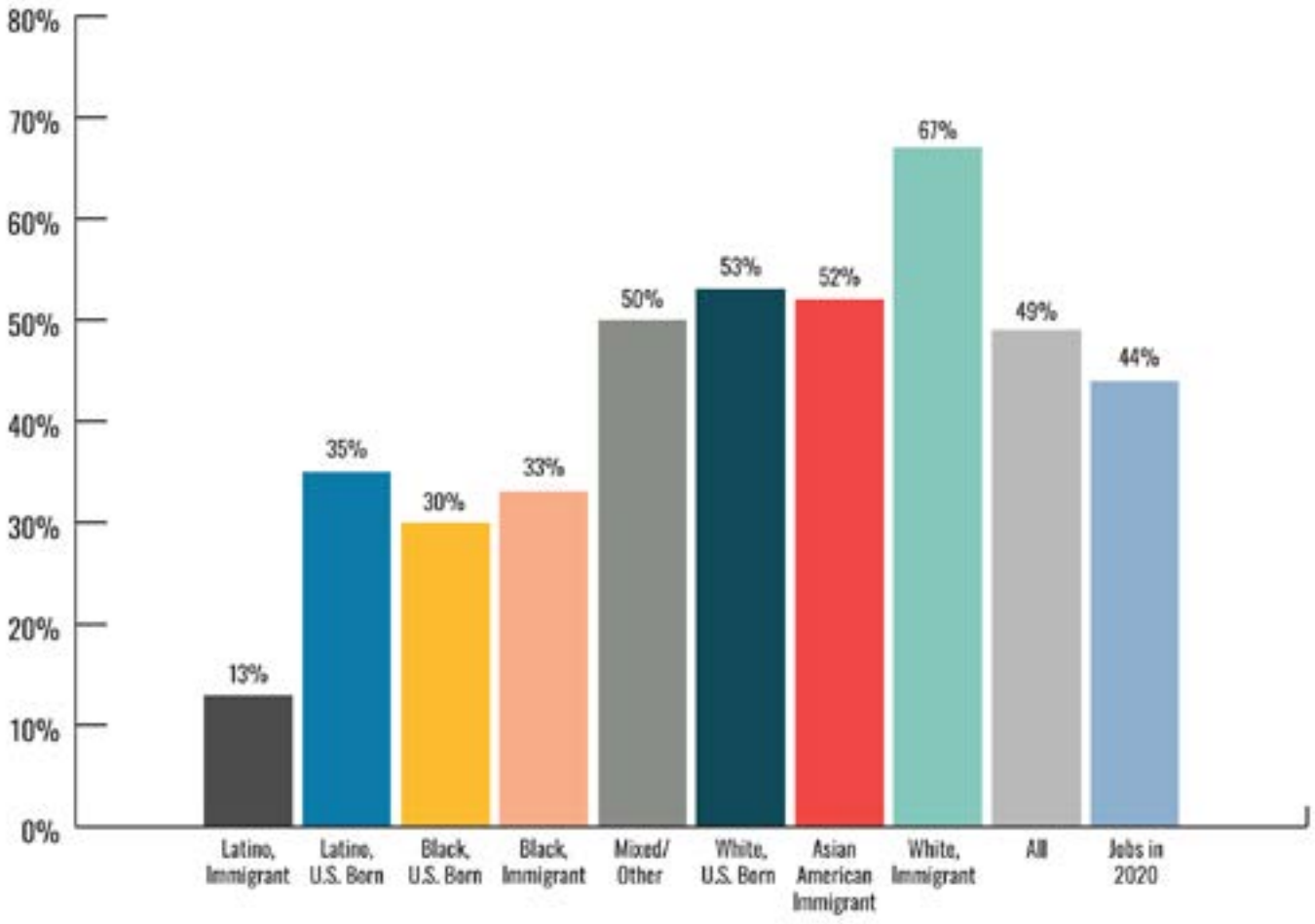


Access to Education

Vibrant and equitable regions feature high-quality jobs which spur new ideas, products, businesses, and economic activity. High-quality jobs require adequate education and training opportunities for local talent to acquire the skills necessary to successfully perform them. Though the Omaha-Council Bluffs region features numerous colleges, schools, and job training programs 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 postsecondary education (having at least an associate's degree) are far lower than the share of future jobs that will require that level of education. Figure 3 below compares the rates of postsecondary education among different backgrounds.

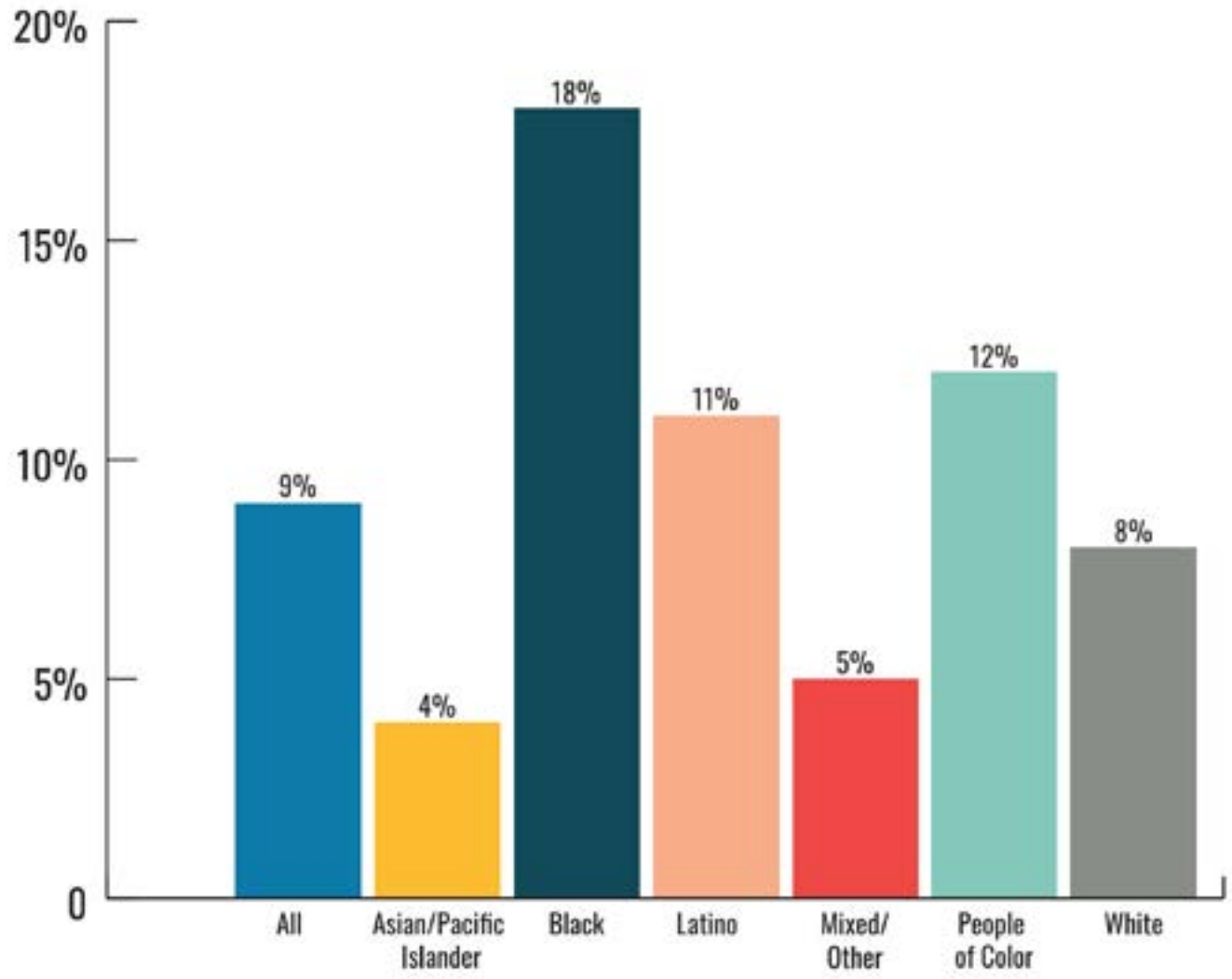
FIGURE 2.3: Share of Working-Age Population with an Associate's Degree or Higher by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, 2020 and Projected Share of Jobs That Require an Associate's Degree or Higher, 2020.



Source: IPUMS and National

Among the youth who will ultimately fill these jobs, youth of color are more likely to be disconnected from school or work than White youth (12 percent and 8 percent, respectively). Figure 4 below shows how .

FIGURE 2.4: Disengaged Youth: 16- to 24-Year-Olds Not Working or in School by Race/ Ethnicity, 2019. Equity Atlas.



Source: IPUMS and National

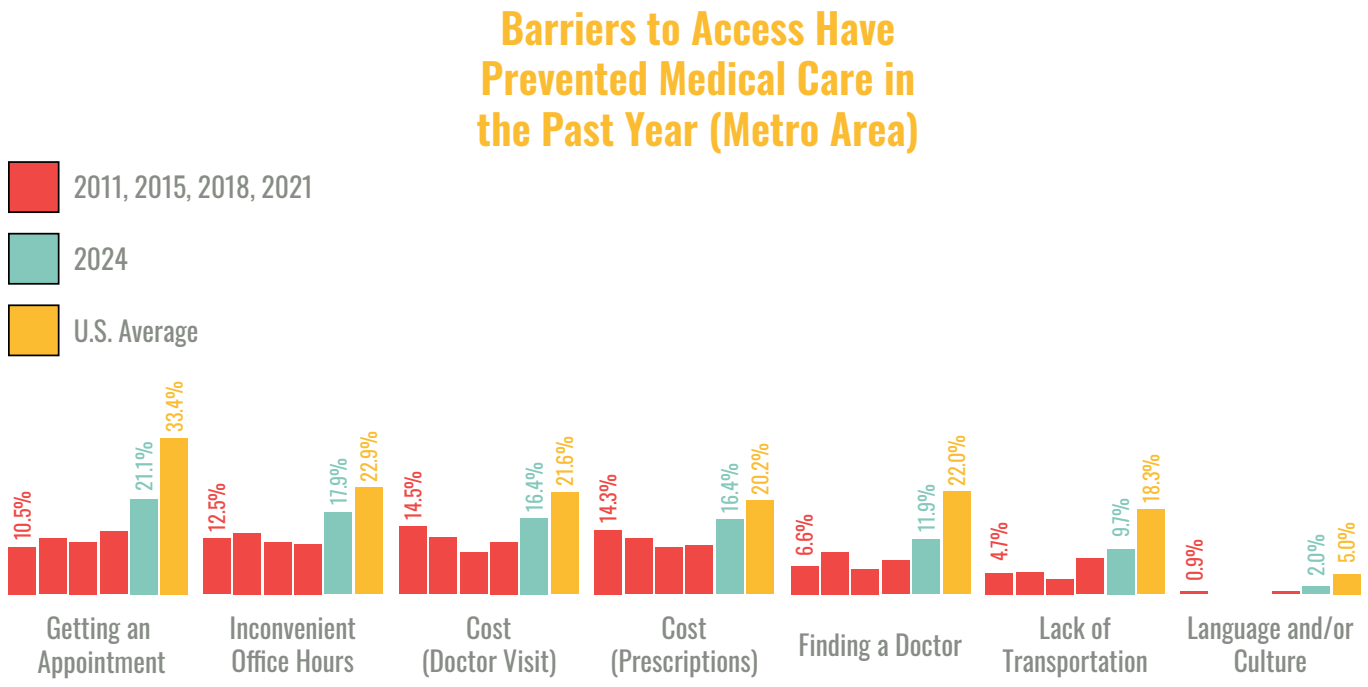
The following maps show the inbound trip lengths to significant educational resources within the Omaha metropolitan area.

Public Transit to Educational Resources

Figure 5 below shows the accessibility of four campuses via transit.

UNMC is located along multiple transit routes and is relatively centralized 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 the Downtown and Midtown areas of Omaha have frequent bus service (15 minutes or less) to the campus and hospital. Given the central location of UNMC, the campus and facility will have a prominent role in future transit improvements.

FIGURE 2.5: Inbound Trip Lengths to UNMC within the Region



Access to Healthcare & Wellness

There is a mix of public and private paratransit providers in the region who serve clients unable to drive or use traditional mass transit. Private, for-profit companies like Uber, Lyft, and ZTrip also provide service, particularly for trips not possible using public and private providers.

Health and human service transportation clients are often on their own when figuring out options available to them. Availability can depend on geography, trip type, and time of day. Funding resources are limited for non-profit transit organizations, requiring 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 currently operating in the region and participating in MAPA's Coordinated Transit Committee (CTC), a group focused on improving public transportation through better communication.

PUBLIC PROVIDERS

Metro Transit

Moby

SWITA

Bellevue

La Vista / Ralston

Papillon

Council Bluffs

NONPROFIT PROVIDERS

Crossroads of Western Iowa

Black Hills Works

Eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership

Pottawattamie County Veterans Affairs Refugee

Refugee Empowerment Center

New Cassel Retirement Home

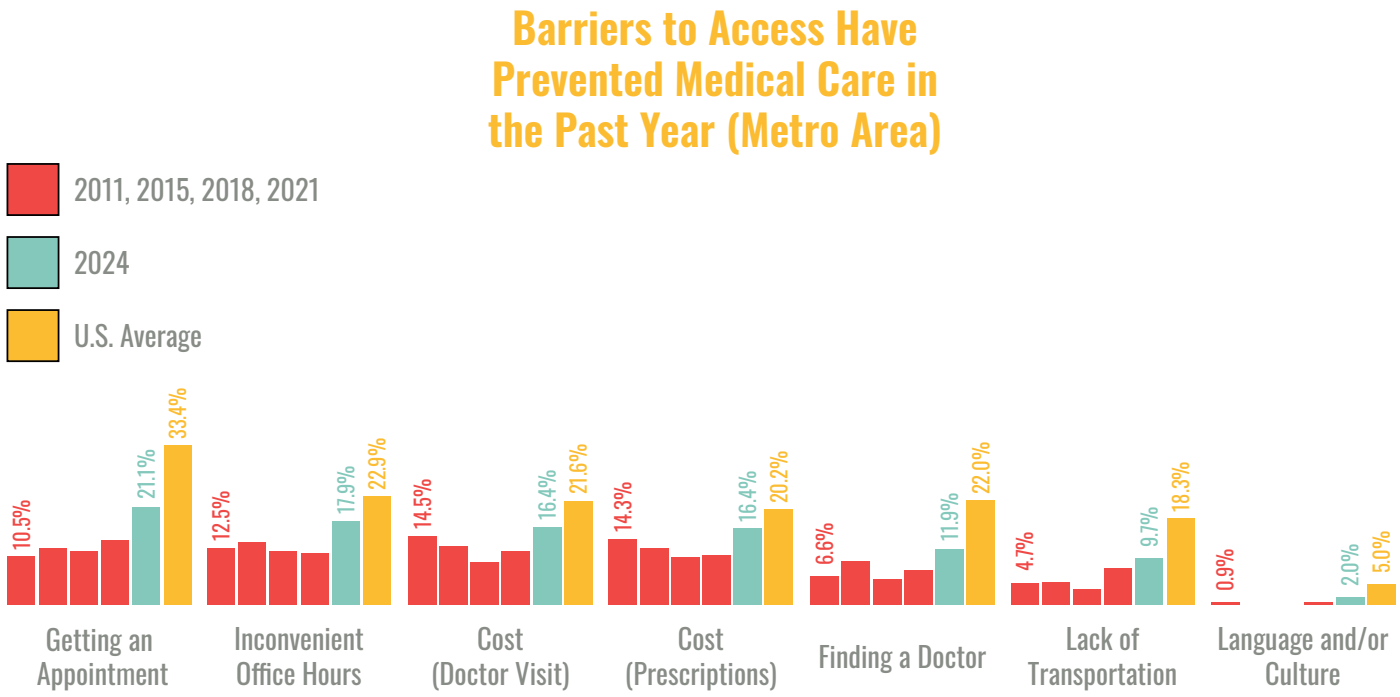
Intercultural Senior Center

Medical Access

As Omaha's population continues to age, access to medical care becomes more vital, especially for those who are unable to drive or do not have access to a personal vehicle.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Institute on Aging (NIA) have identified that place of residence is the largest single determinant of health and lifespan, since it affects access to care. One of the major limitations identified to accessing healthcare in the Omaha area is inadequate transportation, often linked to limited public transit. The Douglas, Sarpy/Cass, and Pottawattamie County Health Departments cite transportation access and time as barriers to receiving care in the 204 Community Health Needs Report. The report calls out lack of transportation as a barrier affecting more people each year from 2011 to 2024 as shown in Figure 6.

FIGURE 2.6: Barriers to Medical Access, 2024 Douglas County Community Needs Health Assessment

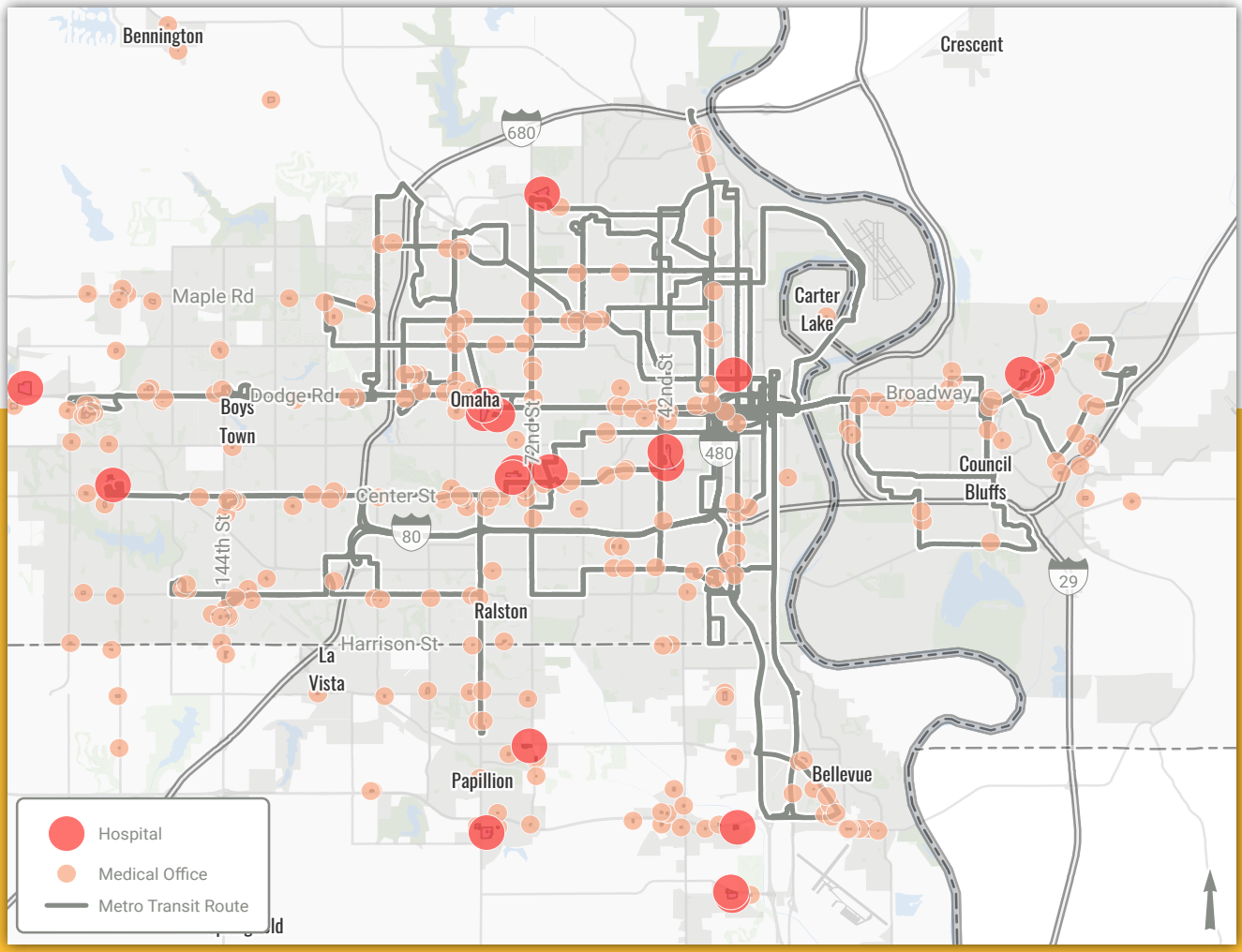


Transit Access to Medical Facilities

The map below shows hospitals and doctors' offices in the region, along with public transit lines. There are no full-service hospitals in Omaha's downtown core. UNMC is the only civilian hospital located east of 72nd street; the majority of hospitals and specialists offices are located in more affluent suburban areas. 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 distribution of healthcare services leaves urban and rural populations underserved, without access to major hospitals or providers beyond primary care. Council Bluffs and Sarpy County see similar disparities with only one hospital in Council Bluffs and Sarpy County completely dependent on Omaha for major medical care. Anyone living in these areas without access to an automobile lacks reliable and easy access to healthcare, especially intensive or specialized care.

Figure 7 below shows existing transit routes in relation to medical facilities.

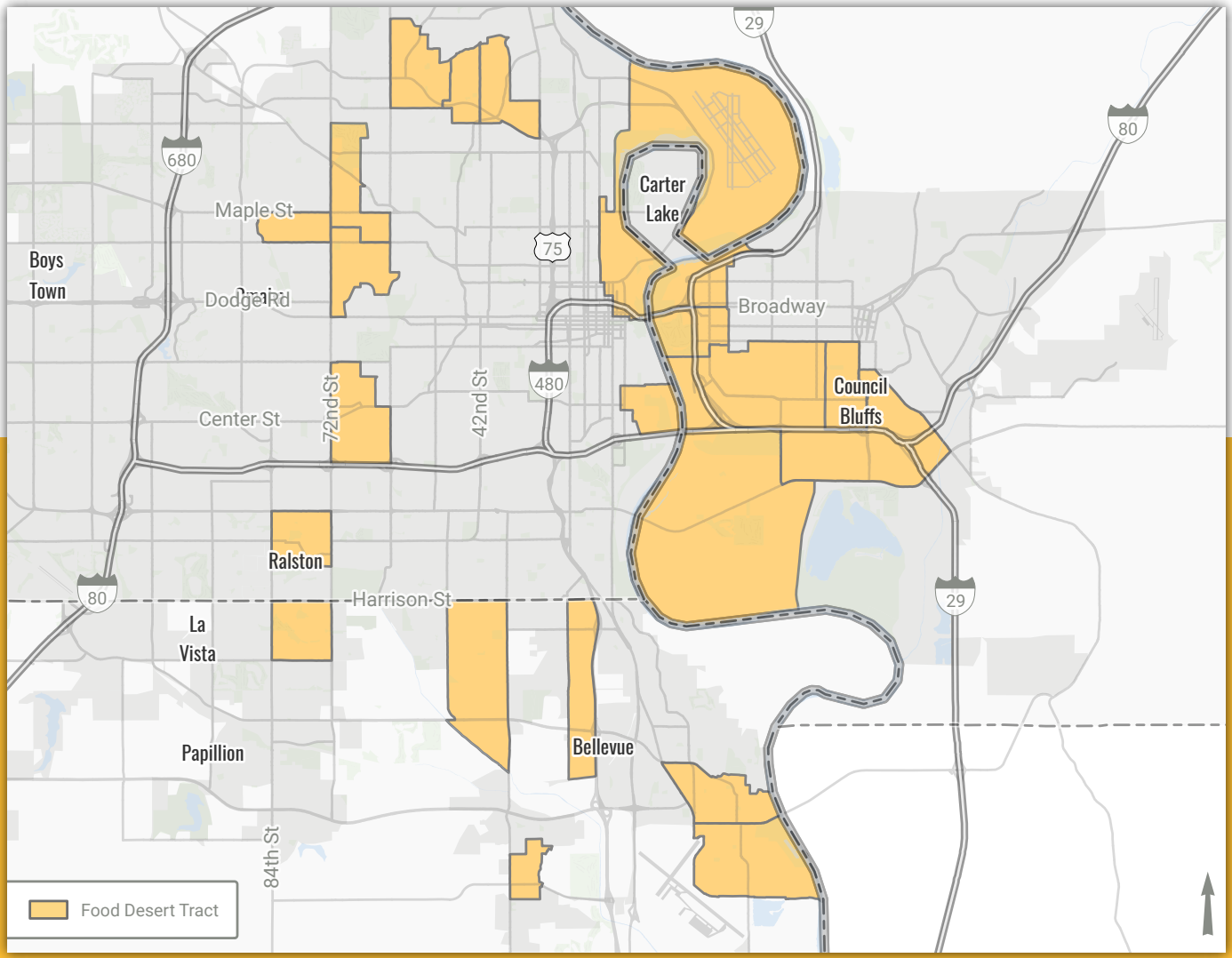
FIGURE 2.7: Transit Access to Medical Facilities



Food Access

Based on 2019 demographic data, 9% of people in the MAPA area live in food deserts - Census tracts marked for being low-income, or having low-access to food. As shown in Figure 8, most of the food deserts in the region are east of 72nd Street and the majority of them coincide with areas of poverty and single, or zero, car households, further compounding the problem of food access. The 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment for the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro area, prepared by the local county health departments, identifies both obesity and food insecurity, the fear that food may run out before having 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, pedestrian, and cyclist accommodations make navigating much of Omaha dangerous for people outside of cars, especially children.

FIGURE 2.8: Food Deserts in the Omaha Metro Area

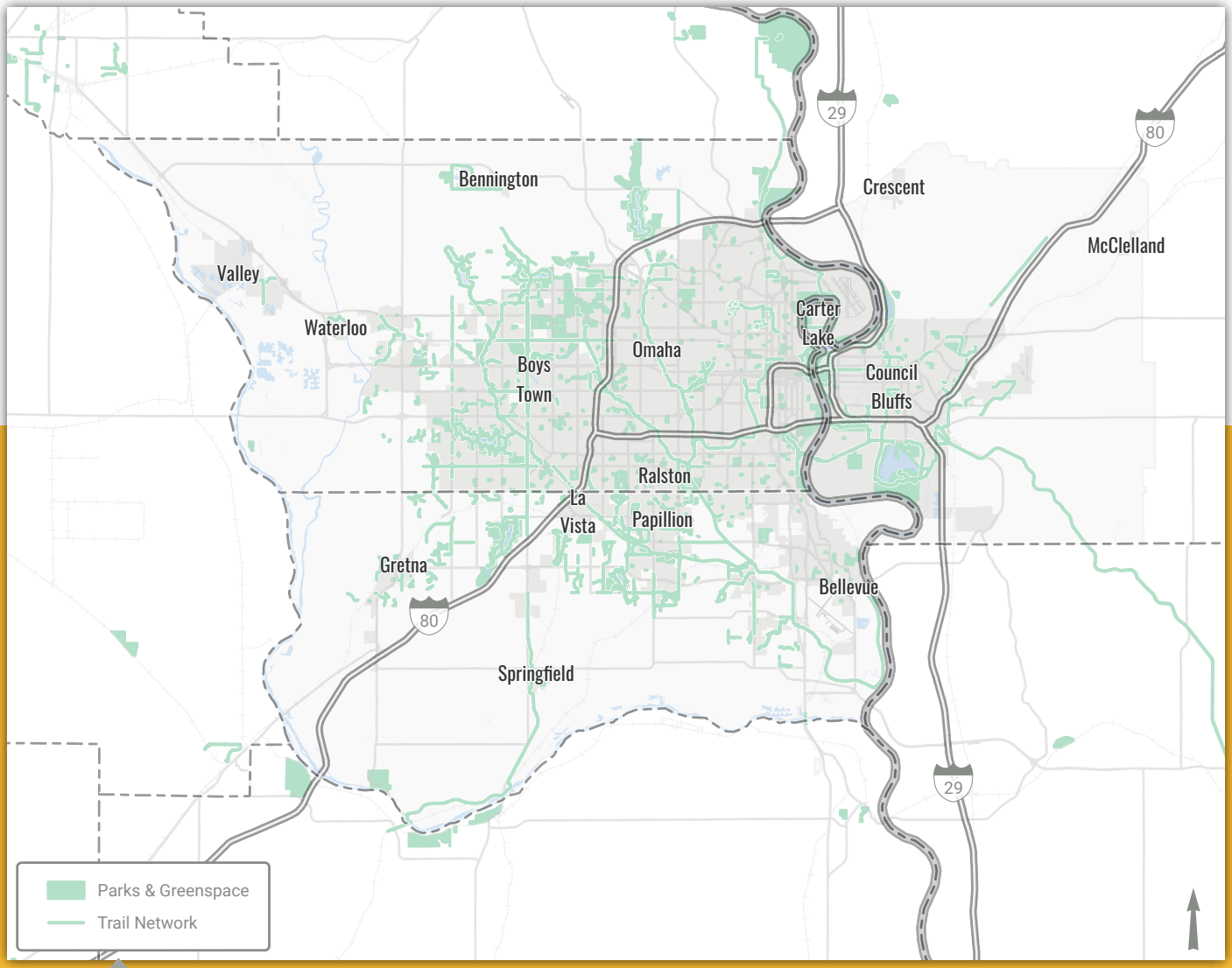


Park and Recreation Access

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there is a relationship between access to green space for recreation and the amount of physical activity a person gets. In an effort to encourage this kind of activity, the CDC and the World Health Organization (WHO) have created initiatives that help 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.

Access to trails and safe street routes is vital for both maintaining physical wellbeing, as well as providing safe ways for those without cars to access medical and other essential services. Parks and green spaces are also important for 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: Trails and Greenspace in the Region



71%

of People in the MAPA Region Live Within Walking Distance of a Park or Trail

66%

of People in Areas of Persistent Poverty Live Within Walking Distance of a Park or Trail

Access to the greenspace and trails shown in Figure 9 can be measured by how easily residents can get to them. MAPA analyzed the number of people living within ¼ of a mile of these places and found that 71% of residents should be able to walk or roll to recreational space in five minutes or less. In areas of persistent poverty, places where 20% or more of residents have consistently lived below the poverty line for an extended period, 66% of residents are within ¼ of a mile of recreation space. This analysis did not take into account a lack of adequate sidewalks; addressing sidewalk gaps throughout the region is a necessary step on the path to increased accessibility.

Neighborhood Expanded Access to Trails (NEAT) Study

In 2022, MAPA partnered with the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District (PMRNRD) to find ways to improve the ease and comfort of access from neighborhoods to the Omaha metropolitan area's existing multiuse recreational trail network. It was an opportunity to coordinate MAPA's planning work with the NRD's trail development and identify easy to close gaps in the system.

The project team evaluated 18 different locations throughout the region, scoring them based on ease of construction, continuity, safety, and land availability. Eight projects were ultimately prioritized as quick to build and the PMRNRD has begun working to complete these connections. Both agencies intend to take another look at potential connections in a future NEAT study that will inform the next Metropolitan Transportation Plan.

2.3 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACCESS

Alternatives to the status quo that prioritize more comprehensive transit service, as well as smarter growth oriented around key transit corridors, are possible.

MetroNEXT

Heartland 2050 calls for creating more walkable, livable cities, suburbs and neighborhoods with equitable access. Its vision, which was expanded upon in Metro Transit's MetroNEXT plan, 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. The plan's goals are:

1. Address Equity in Our Region
2. Improve & Expand Connections
3. Provide an Excellent Travel Experience
4. Promote Environmental Stewardship
5. Lead Responsibly & Collaboratively

A robust transit system is faster, more convenient, and easier to use than what exists in our region today. Premium transportation options bring additional benefits to the community such as:

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

MetroNEXT was completed in 2022. The plan proposes several locations for premium upgrades that will utilize cutting edge technology and permanent infrastructure. Currently, Metro Transit manages operating costs and services successfully, compared to peer agencies. However, without new funding sources, maintenance and improvements become difficult.

Securing regional funding will help maintain and expand Metro's infrastructure, as well as provide more opportunities to reduce future congestion through new roads, transit and walking options, as well as bicycle trails.

"When asked how much our region should be spending on transit, seven out of ten respondents indicated we should be spending 'more' or 'much more' on our transit system."

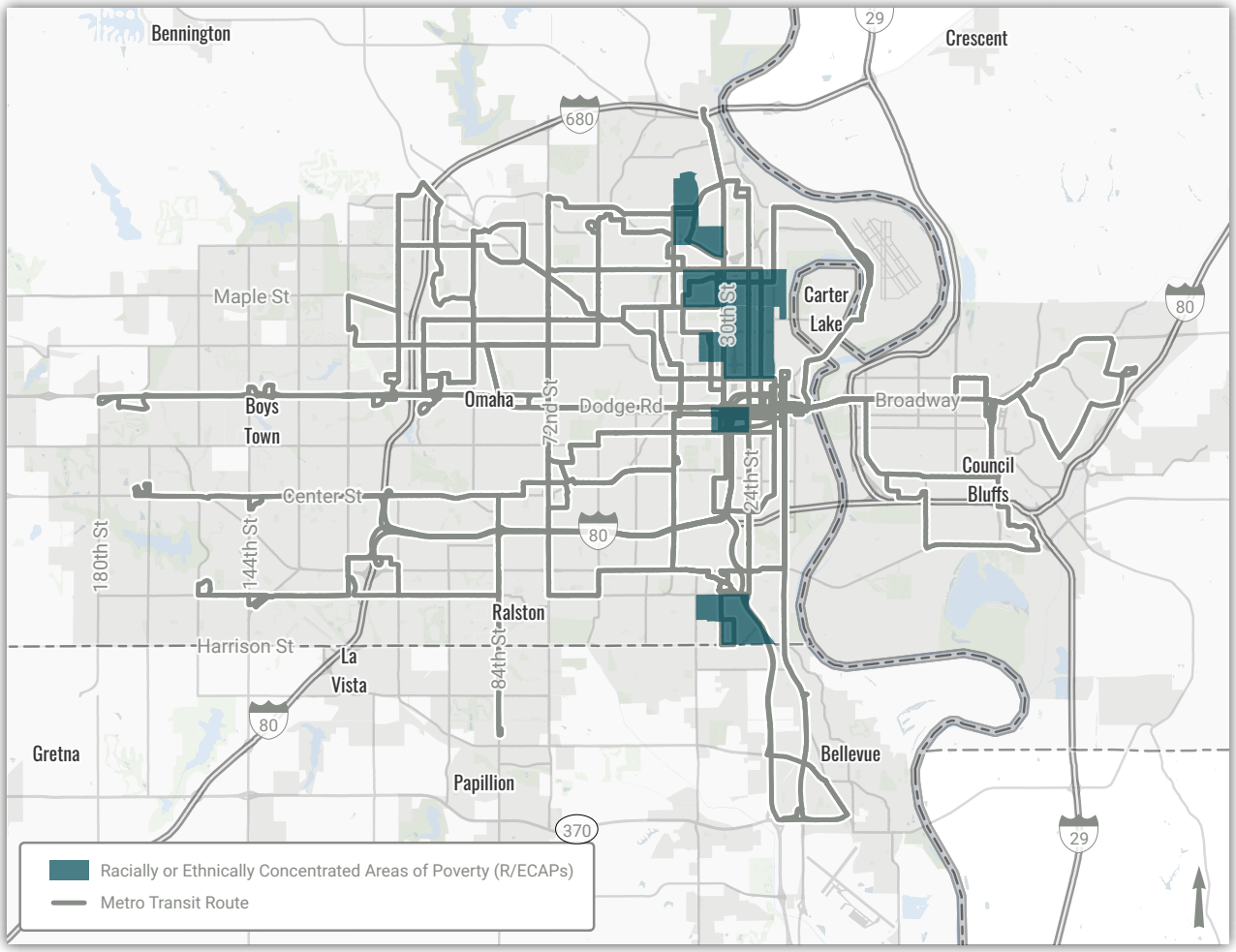
- Quote from MetroNEXT executive summary

Focusing Transit Investments on Improving Accessibility

The goal of Heartland 2050 has been to create a more accessible region for all residents. Planning efforts and studies, most notably MetroNEXT, 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.

Figure 10 below showcases transit routes along with racially concentrated areas of poverty (RCAP). Fostering job access and educational attainment in these areas is crucial to future access and engagement efforts in Omaha and cannot be done without providing transit resources.

Figure 2.10: Omaha-Council Bluffs Transit Service Frequency for RCAP



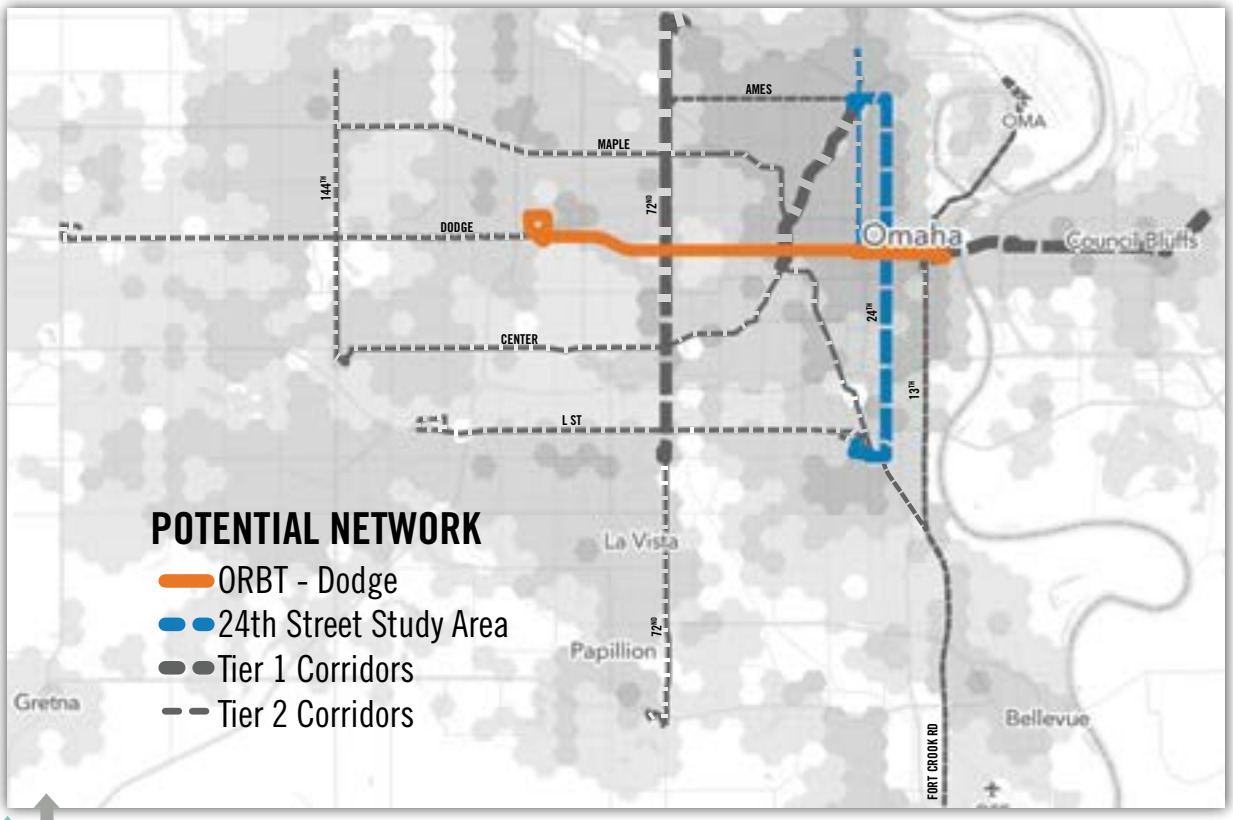
Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

BRT is an enhanced form of on-street public transportation that aims to operate more like rail than traditional bus service. Stops are further apart and set up more like stations, with larger shelters, departure and arrival information, and ticket machines. The buses are often larger and come more frequently, usually every ten to fifteen minutes. In 2020, Metro Transit began service on the region's first BRT line, known as Omaha Rapid Bus Transit (ORBT), along Dodge Street. By introducing BRT to the metropolitan area, along with transit-oriented development near fixed stop locations, the transit system will be able to provide an improved level of service along this highly traveled corridor.

Under the vision established by Heartland 2050 and other strategic initiatives, the region would invest in BRT along two additional corridors beyond the ORBT line already in service. "Bus Rapid Transit" is a relatively new form of bus-based transit that delivers more comfortable, reliable, and faster service than regular bus routes, achieved through features such as separate, dedicated lanes and signal priority, along with attractive stations with premium features such as arrival information, along major commercial corridors. While the corridors require additional study, Metro Transit is looking closely at an Omaha/Bellevue North-South Spine along 24th Street and Fort Crook Road and enhanced service along 72nd and 84th Streets.

Figure 11 below shows the ORBT line along Dodge Street from Westroads Mall to Downtown Omaha along with the potential future BRT corridors.

Figure 2.11: Potential BRT Network (MetroNEXT)



Microtransit

Microtransit, as described in MetroNEXT, "is a shared-ride, on-demand service operated by smaller vehicles serving various stops within a designated zone with no fixed routing between stops." It can be used in areas where more typical bus service is difficult to provide due to greater distances between destinations. Microtransit can unlock access to areas of the region previously closed to people by providing service where none currently exists. Metro Transit will be launching a microtransit pilot in 2025/2026 to test its viability in the Omaha area.

Complete Streets

Complete Streets represent a holistic approach to street design that fosters safer, more accessible, and more livable communities. The concept includes transportation policies and design approaches that prioritize the safety, accessibility, and convenience of all users of the road, regardless of their mode of transportation. Benefits of this approach include:

- Improved Safety: Reduces crashes and fatalities, especially for vulnerable road users,
- Healthier Communities: Encourages walking and cycling, promoting physical activity and reducing pollution,
- Economic Benefits: Boosts local economies by increasing foot traffic to businesses and enhancing property values,
- Environmental Benefits: Reduces pollution by promoting alternative modes of transportation, and
- Accessibility: Ensures that all community members, regardless of age, ability, or income, have access to safe transportation options.

Some of the Complete Streets related efforts that impact this plan are included below.

Safe Streets and Roads for All

The Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) initiative is a federal program aimed at reducing roadway fatalities and serious injuries through comprehensive safety strategies. It supports planning and implementation projects that enhance transportation safety for all users, emphasizing access and data-driven solutions.

In 2022, MAPA received an SS4A grant to develop a Comprehensive Safety Action Plan (CSAP) for Douglas and Sarpy Counties in Nebraska and the cities of Council Bluffs, Carter Lake, Crescent, and McClelland in Pottawattamie County, Iowa. This effort includes significant public engagement to identify points of concern in the transportation network, a comprehensive policy review to ensure alignment with safety goals, the pursuit of local leadership commitment to prioritize and implement safety improvements, and a thorough analysis of crash-relevant datasets to build a High Priority Network tool designed to aid communities, stakeholders, and public officials in identifying high-risk areas (intersections and roadway segments) with the aim to implement regional low-cost/high impact solutions and strategies.

Walk Access to Elementary Schools

The ability of students to safely get to and from school on foot or by 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. Well connected and maintained sidewalks that allow for students of all ages to get to and from school and extracurricular activities are vital for them to continue their education, as well as develop hobbies and healthy social networks. Obesity and childhood diabetes are major concerns for school aged children in Douglas, Sarpy, and Pottawattamie Counties. Daily exercise, through walking or biking to school and activities, is one of the ways the Douglas County Health Department has identified to combat these issues. In 2019, the need for safe access to schools became a talking point in rural communities when three school children in different parts of the metro area were struck and killed by vehicles near their schools.

Gaps in the sidewalk system limit access to schools and recreational facilities. Existing gaps throughout the region are shown in Figure 12 below. These gaps also impact students using public transportation. Figure 13 below highlights sidewalk gaps along the most frequently used route, ORBT, which primarily follows Dodge Street from Downtown to Westroads Mall.

Figure 2.12: Sidewalk Gaps Throughout the Region

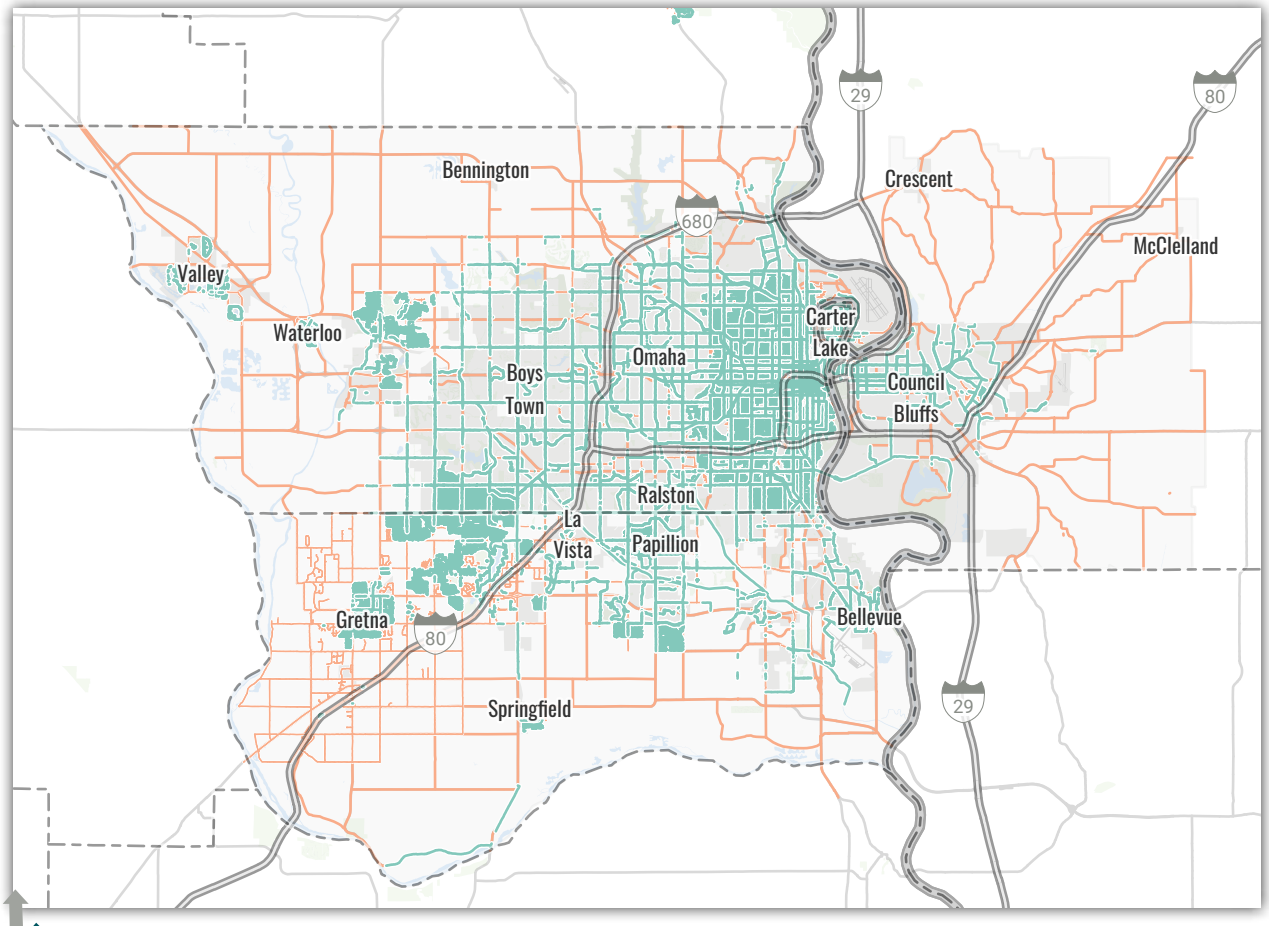
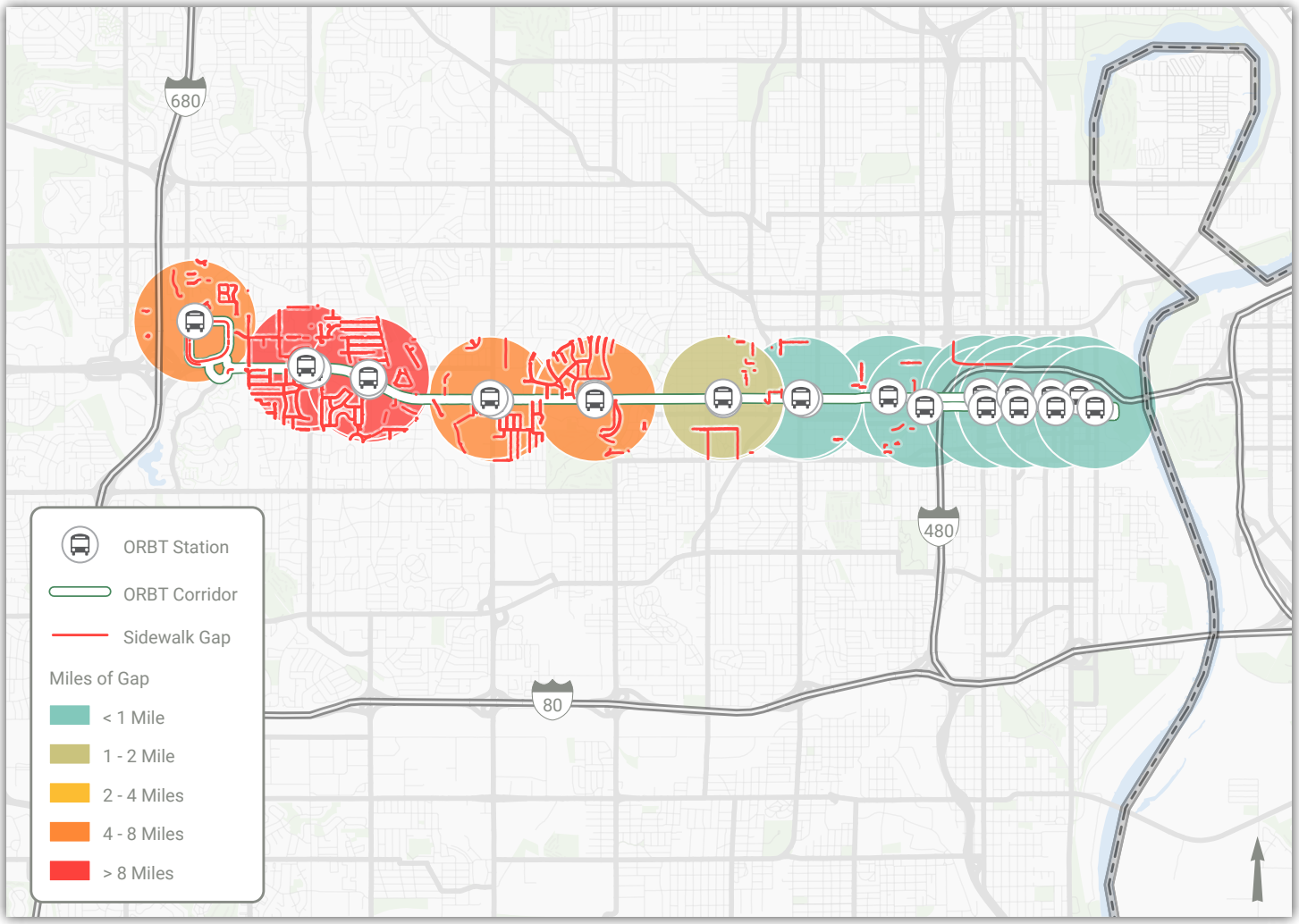


Figure 2.13: Sidewalk Gaps along Dodge Street ORBT Line



Develop a Regional Model of Collaboration for Demand-Response Services

Although regional collaboration contributes to increasing opportunity, current programs are fragmented, with inconsistent service areas.

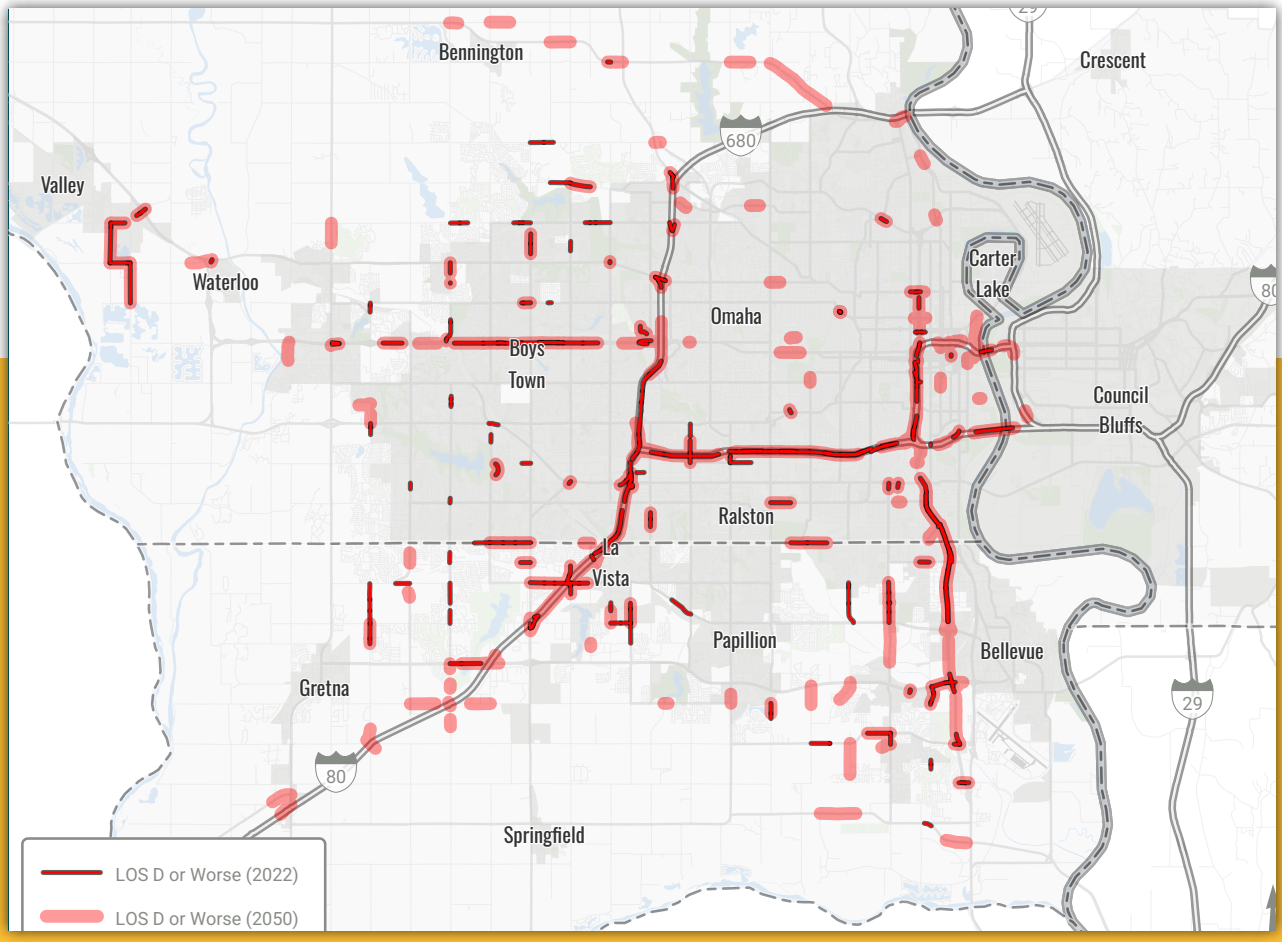
Finding transit options is often difficult for people due to restrictions on qualifications and jurisdictional boundaries which limit access to metro wide services. This consistent problem has led to MAPA's involvement in a variety of coordinated transportation initiatives.

A proposed solution is better coordination of service, the goal of which is to simplify which rides users qualify for, or to allow for nonprofits to 'share' clients so they can transport people based on the most efficient and effective provider for that ride, with simplified payment, rather than demographic information.

In 2017, MAPA and Sarpy County completed the Sarpy County Transit Study which examined service gaps and proposed transit options for cities, the 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 statewide 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 were 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 370 to link Sarpy County with Omaha and Council Bluffs.

Shift Focus in Transportation System Design

Figure 2.14: Level of Service D or worse



Level of Service (LOS) is a measure of how traffic flows along a roadway based on factors such as speed, travel time, freedom to maneuver, traffic interruptions, comfort, and convenience. It is graded on a scale of A (best) to F (worst) and focuses primarily on the experience of automobile drivers. Focusing on LOS leads to wider roads, which consume more land, and higher speeds, which are unsafe. As expanded infrastructure networks age, the cost to maintain these systems will increase and more tax revenue will need to be allotted for roadway repair rather than other essential city services.

As a majority of corridors in the metropolitan area become designated "Service Level D or Worse" as shown in Figure 14, the region must decide how to address continued growth and meet transportation needs. Relying too heavily on LOS as a metric for transportation planning, rather than balancing it with other measures like Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), can lead to significant negative consequences for safety, urban design, and public budgets. Shifting the region's focus from LOS to VMT can significantly improve accessibility by encouraging multimodal transportation and efficient land use through:

- Expanding and improving public transit systems (buses, trains, light rail) reduces the need for car travel, making it easier for people to access jobs, schools, and services without owning a vehicle,
- Prioritizing sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, and pedestrian-friendly streets ensures that walking and cycling are safe and convenient options for short trips,
- Designing dense, mixed-use neighborhoods around transit hubs reduces the need for long trips and makes transit more accessible to residents,
- Narrower streets, speed bumps, and roundabouts can slow vehicle traffic, making streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists while discouraging excessive car use,
- Focusing on VMT reduction allows cities to invest in transit and active transportation infrastructure in low-income and marginalized neighborhoods, improving access to jobs, education, and healthcare,
- Creating infrastructure that accommodates people with disabilities, seniors, and children ensures that everyone can move around the city safely and comfortably, and
- Encouraging walking and cycling through better infrastructure provides easy access to physical activity, reducing the prevalence of chronic diseases like obesity and heart disease.