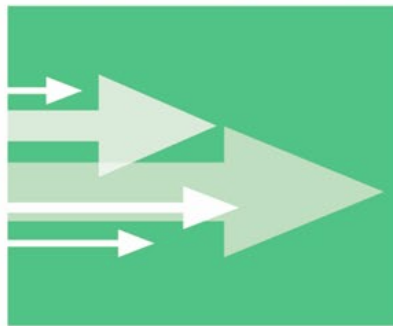




Intercity Bus Element

June 2026

Final



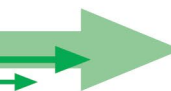


Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Study Purpose	1
1.2	Study Background.....	1
1.3	Study Framework.....	2
1.4	Relationship to the Mississippi Statewide Transit Plan	2
2	Background Data	4
2.1	ConnectMS Regional Transit Service Areas	4
2.2	Demographic Profile	6
2.2.1	People in Poverty.....	6
2.2.2	People with Disability	6
2.2.3	College Age Students	6
2.2.4	Older Adults	7
2.2.5	Zero-Vehicle Households.....	7
2.2.6	Composite Transit Propensity Index	7
2.3	Peer Review	14
3	Intercity Transportation Assessment	15
3.1	Existing Intercity Services	15
3.1.1	Greyhound & Flixbus	17
3.1.2	Delta Bus Lines.....	17
3.1.3	Amtrak	17
3.2	Intermodal Centers and Multimodal Connectivity	17
3.3	Assessment of Intercity Transportation Connectivity	19
3.3.1	User Needs.....	19
3.3.2	Provider Needs	22
3.3.3	Innovation and Integration	23
3.4	Key Findings and Causes	24
3.4.1	Readiness.....	29
3.4.2	Innovation and Integration	29
3.5	Key Findings and Causes	30
3.5.1	User Needs.....	31

3.5.2	Provider Needs	31
3.5.3	Readiness.....	32
3.5.4	Innovation and Integration	32
3.6	Summary	33
4	Funding.....	35
4.1	5311(f) Program Overview	35
4.1.1	Required Apportionment	35
4.1.2	Eligible Activities	35
4.1.3	Cost Sharing	35
4.1.4	Eligible Project Delivery Approaches	36
4.1.5	In-Kind Match	36
4.2	State Specifics	37
4.2.1	Operating Assistance Structure	37
4.2.2	Eligible Activities	37
4.2.3	Cost Reimbursement Approach	37
4.2.4	State-Level Program Conditions	38
4.2.5	Requirements for Operating Assistance.....	38
4.2.6	Comparison to Peer State Practices	38
4.2.7	Implications for Program Effectiveness	40
5	Solutions	41
5.1	Coordination Across Providers and Agencies	41
5.2	Technical Resources and Capacity	41
5.3	Funding Allocation Practices.....	42
5.4	Service Visibility and Gap Identification.....	42
6	Strengthening Multimodal Connectivity	43
6.1	Strengthening Multimodal Coordination	43
6.2	Improving First/Last Mile Connections	43
6.3	Enhancing Information, Trip Planning, and User Experience	44
6.4	Aligning Funding and Planning to Improve Multimodal Connectivity.....	44
6.5	Role of Data and Performance Monitoring	44
7	Recommendations	46
7.1	Policy and Program Governance.....	46

7.1.1	Update the State Management Plan to Expand Operating Assistance Flexibility ...	46
7.1.2	Integrate Intercity Coordination into Planning.....	47
7.1.3	Establish Formal Coordination Structures	47
7.2	Network Development and Connectivity.....	47
7.3	Coordination and Multimodal Integration.....	48
7.3.1	Develop Intermodal Transfer and Mobility Hub Strategies	48
7.3.2	Improve First- and Last-Mile Connectivity	49
7.4	Planning Tools, Data, and Performance Management	49
7.4.1	Expand GIS-Based Service Planning and Monitoring	49
7.4.2	Develop Statewide Performance Measures and Conduct Ongoing Monitoring	50
7.5	Funding Strategy and Implementation Priorities.....	50
7.5.1	Prioritize Projects that Improve Connectivity Outcomes	50
7.5.2	Expand Use of Federal Funding Flexibilities	50
7.5.3	Phased Implementation Approach	51
8	Conclusion	52
Appendix A - Complimentary Solutions Supporting Intercity Bus Connectivity		A-2

FIGURES

Figure 1. Needs and Gaps Focus Areas	2
Figure 2. ConnectMS Regions	5
Figure 3. Percentage of the Population that Live in Poverty	8
Figure 4. Percentage of the Population with a Disability.....	9
Figure 5. Percentage of the Population that is College-Aged (18-24 years)	10
Figure 6. Percentage of the Population that is Aged 65 years or Older	11
Figure 7. Percentage of Households that have Zero Vehicles Available.....	12
Figure 8. Transit Propensity Statewide.....	13
Figure 9. Existing Intercity Services	16
Figure 10. Respondents Who Use Intercity Transportation	19
Figure 11. Top Intercity Destinations.....	20
Figure 12. Intercity Bus and Rail Access by County	21



Figure 13. Reasons Why Intercity Service is Not Used22

Figure 14. Jackson Union Station28

Figure 15. Hattiesburg Depot28

Figure 16. Gulfport Station29

Figure 17. Intermodal Center Optimization.....30

Figure 18. Connectivity Optimization.....30

TABLES

Table 1. Summary of Mississippi Benchmark Group and Peer System 14

Table 2. Intermodal Centers in Mississippi 18

Table 3. Intermodal Connection Assessment25

Table 4. Section 5311(f) Funding Peer Analysis.....39

Table 5. Priority Regions for Network Development and Connectivity Improvements.....48

1 Introduction

1.1 STUDY PURPOSE

The Mississippi Department of Transportation (MDOT) initiated an Intercity Bus Study (ICB) to assess the current and future need for service across the state. The findings of this study will guide how MDOT allocates its annual funding from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5311(f) ICB Program and will inform the agency's next certification submission to FTA.

As the designated administrator of the Section 5311 program (49 U.S.C. 5311 Nonurbanized Area Formula Program), MDOT is required to dedicate 15 percent of its annual apportionment to support the development and operation of ICB services, unless the Governor certified that existing service levels sufficiently meet statewide needs. Accordingly, this study includes a structured consultation process with these providers to evaluate existing conditions and identify gaps, informing recommendations for the most effective use of Section 5311(f) funds.

1.2 STUDY BACKGROUND

FTA Circular 9040.H Formula Grants for Rural Areas¹, defines ICB services as:

“Regularly scheduled bus service for the general public that operates with limited stops over fixed routes connecting two or more urban areas not in close proximity, that has the capacity for transporting baggage carried by passengers, and that makes meaningful connections with scheduled intercity bus service to more distant points, if such service is available.”

The Circular also outlines the objectives for the 5311(f) program:

1. Funding for ICB service, under Section 5311, is to support the connection between rural areas and the larger regional or national system of ICB service.
2. Support services to meet the intercity travel needs of residents in rural areas.
3. Support the infrastructure of the ICB network through planning and marketing assistance and capital investment in facilities.

FTA encourages states to use the funding under Section 5311(f) to support these national objectives, as well as priorities determined by the state.

This ICB Study provides a timely and necessary reassessment of ICB services across the State of Mississippi. A comprehensive evaluation of system efficiency and effectiveness is essential to maximize the value of the state's existing annual investment in intercity transit, while also identifying unmet needs and opportunities to enhance connectivity across the network.

¹ <https://www.transit.dot.gov/regulations-and-programs/fta-circulars/formula-grants-rural-areas-program-guidance>

1.3 STUDY FRAMEWORK

The evaluation of ICB services is grounded in a structured framework that assesses performance across four key focus areas (**Figure 1**): User Needs, Provider Needs, Readiness, and Innovation. These focus areas provide a comprehensive lens through which the system can be evaluated, considering both the experience of riders and the operational capacity of service providers. Supporting this framework are key performance indicators—ridership, reliability, and accessibility—which serve as measurable benchmarks for assessing system performance and guiding future investment decisions. This approach ensures that the analysis is both data-driven and aligned with statewide goals of improving mobility, enhancing system resilience, and expanding access to transportation services.

Figure 1. Needs and Gaps Focus Areas



1.4 RELATIONSHIP TO THE MISSISSIPPI STATEWIDE TRANSIT PLAN

This ICB Element serves as a supporting component of the Mississippi Statewide Transit Plan and builds upon previous planning efforts completed as part of the statewide planning process. The study incorporates findings from the statewide Gap Analysis, demographic assessments, provider outreach, stakeholder engagement, and mobility evaluations to identify opportunities for improving Mississippi's intercity bus network. These efforts provide the foundation for evaluating existing intercity bus services, identifying unmet travel needs, and recommending strategies that strengthen statewide connectivity through improved coordination with regional transit providers, local transit agencies, and other transportation services. While passenger rail and other transportation modes are considered where they support multimodal travel, the

Intercity Bus Element

primary focus of this study is improving the effectiveness, accessibility, and coordination of Mississippi's intercity bus network.



2 Background Data

Section 2 provides an overview of the conditions that shape intercity transportation demand and access across Mississippi. It includes description of regional transit service areas, demographic characteristics, and peer system performance to establish a foundation for identifying mobility needs and gaps.

2.1 CONNECTMS REGIONAL TRANSIT SERVICE AREAS

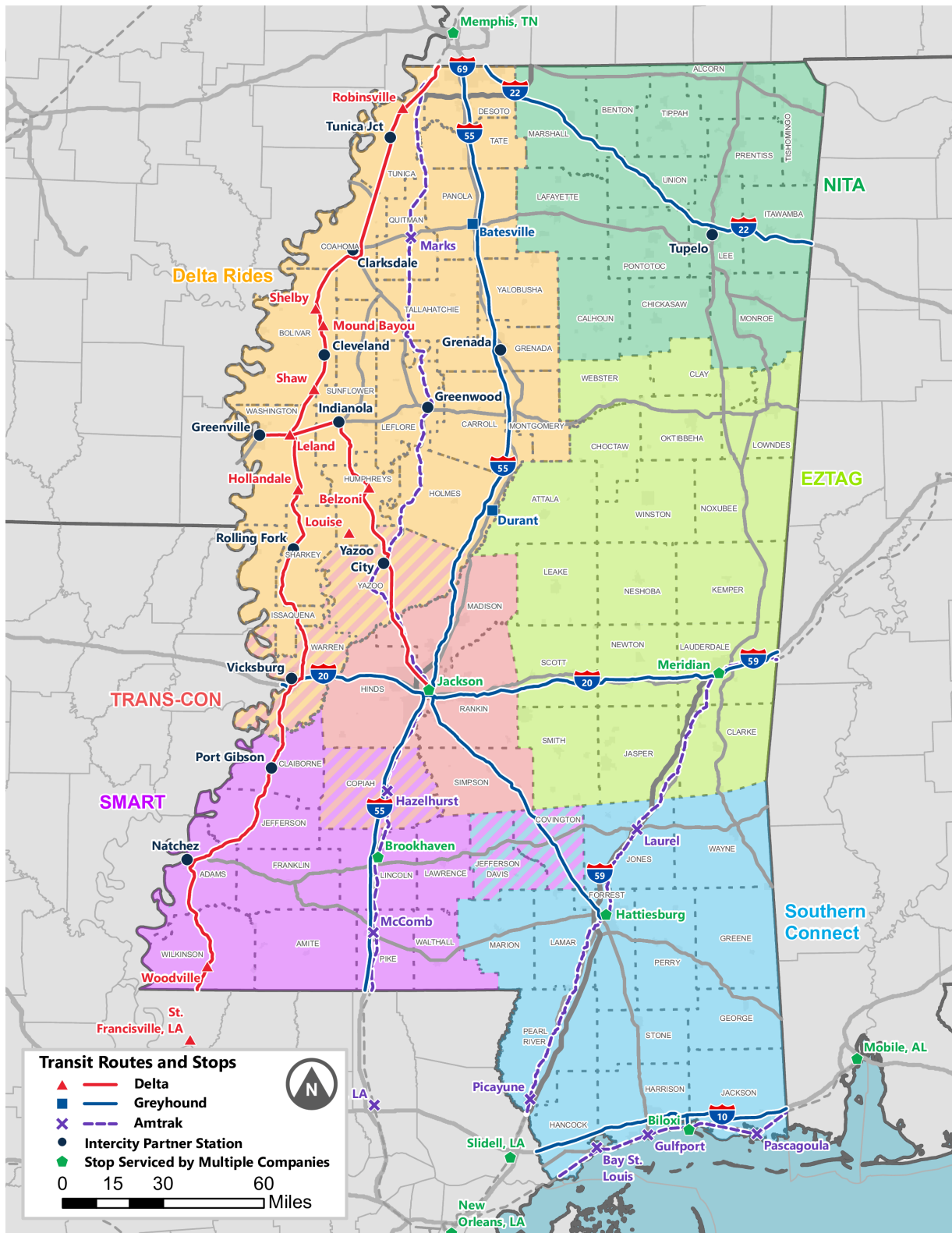
Mississippi's public transportation network is organized through a series of regional transit providers operating under the ConnectMS-program. These regional systems provide local and regional mobility services throughout the state and serve as an important foundation for intercity connectivity. While this study focuses specifically on ICB and passenger rail services, understanding the geographic service areas of the ConnectMS providers is important because these systems often provide the first-mile and last-mile connections that enable residents to access intercity transportation options.

The ConnectMS network consists of multiple regional transit providers, where each service has a defined geographic area and provides a combination of demand-response, deviated fixed-route, and other mobility services tailored to local needs. These service areas establish the framework through which residents access employment, healthcare, education, and intercity transportation connections.

Figure 2 illustrates the six ConnectMS regional transit service areas throughout Mississippi. The regional boundaries provide context for the demographic analysis presented in the following sections and help identify where concentrations of transit-dependent populations align with existing transportation services and where potential mobility gaps may exist.

Intercity Bus Element

Figure 2. ConnectMS Regions



2.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

A range of demographic characteristics plays a key role in determining where ICB services are most needed and likely to be successful. Higher utilization of ICB service is often associated with areas that have concentrations of individuals experiencing poverty, older adults, people with disabilities, college students, and households without access to a vehicle. To better understand these patterns, data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey in 2020 were compiled and analyzed to identify locations across the state where these populations are most prominent.

The analysis was conducted at the census tract level, with a focus on the density of these populations per square mile to highlight areas of concentrated need. Mapping this data provides a clear visual representation of where transit-dependent populations are located, helping to inform where ICB services may be most beneficial and where service gaps may exist.

2.2.1 PEOPLE IN POVERTY

Poverty is present across the state (**Figure 3**), with most areas falling within low to moderate ranges; however, distinct concentrations of higher poverty are evident within the Delta Bus Lines region located in northwestern Mississippi. This region is currently served by ICB service through Delta, Greyhound, and Amtrak. Communities without nearby ICB stations, where a significant majority of the population lives in poverty, are primarily located in the counties of Neshoba, Leake, and Winston.

2.2.2 PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

As shown in **Figure 4**, the areas with the highest concentration of people with a disability are in Holmes County, Carroll County, and Noxubee County. The tract with the highest concentration of persons with a disability in the state is in Noxubee. More than half of the tract contains a significant majority of the population living with a disability. Other communities with concentrations of persons with disabilities include Jackson, Gulfport, Hattiesburg, Vicksburg, and Yazoo City. Apart from Noxubee County, all of these communities have ICB stations nearby.

2.2.3 COLLEGE AGE STUDENTS

In central Mississippi, Hinds County (Jackson) exhibits moderate concentrations of college age students, though not as pronounced as other areas, indicating a more distributed young adult population (**Figure 5**). Stronger concentrations appear in Forrest County (Hattiesburg) and Oktibbeha County (Starkville, not shown but implied by regional patterns), where universities drive higher shares of residents in this age group. Along the Gulf Coast, including Harrison County (Biloxi and Gulfport), the population remains moderate with fewer high-concentration pockets compared to inland college towns. In contrast, many rural counties across the Delta and eastern Mississippi show lower percentages of 18–24-year-olds, reflecting outmigration or limited local higher education opportunities.

2.2.4 OLDER ADULTS

The distribution of residents aged 65 and older across Mississippi shows that the aging population is broadly dispersed, with most areas falling within the 11 to 25 percent range, but with notable pockets of higher concentrations in rural and coastal regions (**Figure 6**). In central Mississippi, including Hinds County (Jackson) and surrounding areas, older adults are more prevalent in suburban and rural fringes rather than the urban core. Similar patterns are observed near Forrest County (Hattiesburg), where higher concentrations occur outside the city. Along the Gulf Coast, particularly in Harrison County (Biloxi and Gulfport), there is greater variability, with some areas showing elevated shares of older residents, influenced by retirement trends. In the Delta region, including Washington, Sunflower, and Bolivar Counties, pockets of higher concentrations exist within rural and low-density areas.

2.2.5 ZERO-VEHICLE HOUSEHOLDS

The distribution of zero-vehicle households across Mississippi (**Figure 7**) indicates that while most areas have low to moderate percentages, higher concentrations are clustered in specific urban centers and pockets of rural communities. In central Mississippi, Hinds County (Jackson) shows elevated concentrations of households without access to a vehicle, particularly within the urban core, reflecting higher transit dependency in these areas. Similar localized clusters appear in Forrest County (Hattiesburg) and along the Gulf Coast in Harrison County (Biloxi and Gulfport), where denser development and socioeconomic factors contribute to increased shares of zero-vehicle households. In contrast, many rural areas across the Delta and eastern Mississippi show scattered pockets rather than continuous concentrations, indicating dispersed but still significant need.

2.2.6 COMPOSITE TRANSIT PROPENSITY INDEX

To better understand where transportation needs may be greatest across Mississippi, a composite Transit Propensity Index (TPI) was developed using demographic and socioeconomic characteristics commonly associated with higher transit dependence. The index combines multiple indicators, including population density, households without access to a vehicle, older adults, individuals with disabilities, low-income populations, and minority populations. Census Block Groups were scored and classified to identify areas with relatively higher and lower concentrations of potential transit need.

(**Figure 8**) presents the statewide Composite Transit Propensity Index. Areas shown in darker shades indicate block groups with higher concentrations of populations that may be more likely to rely on public transportation, while lighter shades represent areas with lower relative transit propensity. The map highlights concentrations of higher transit propensity in and around Mississippi's major urban centers, including Jackson, Hattiesburg, and the Biloxi–Gulfport coastal region, as well as select rural communities throughout the state.

Figure 3. Percentage of the Population that Live in Poverty

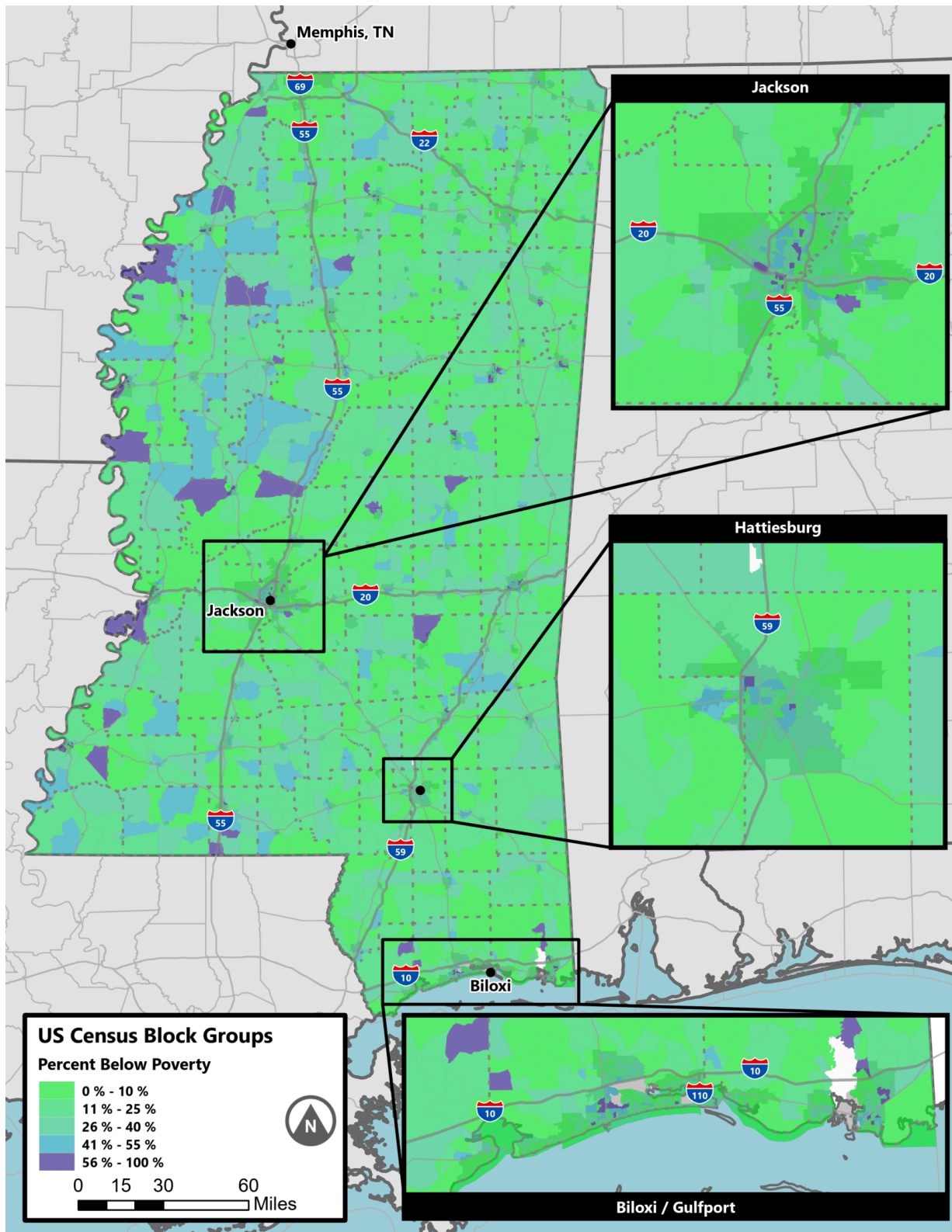


Figure 4. Percentage of the Population with a Disability

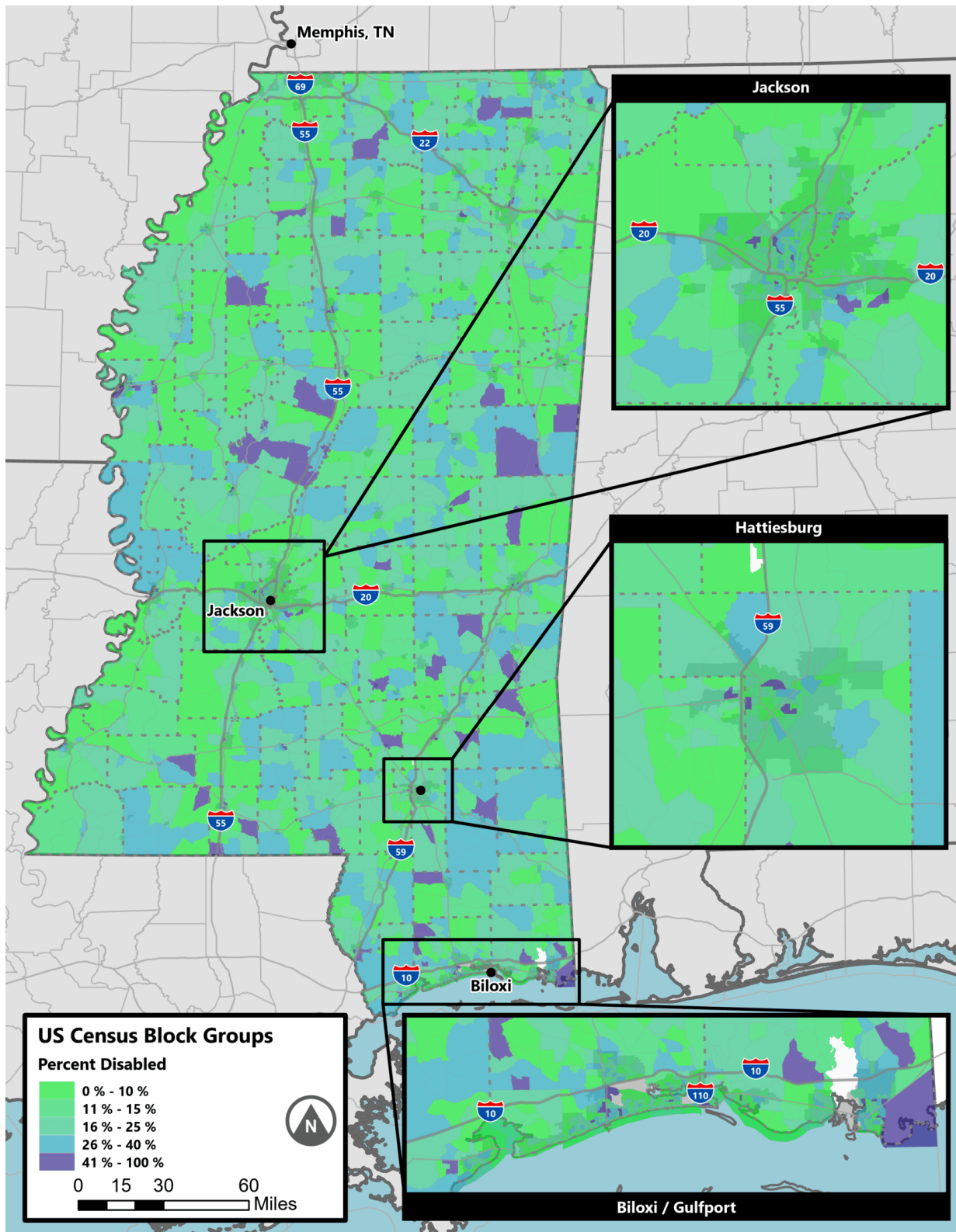


Figure 5. Percentage of the Population that is College-Aged (18-24 years)

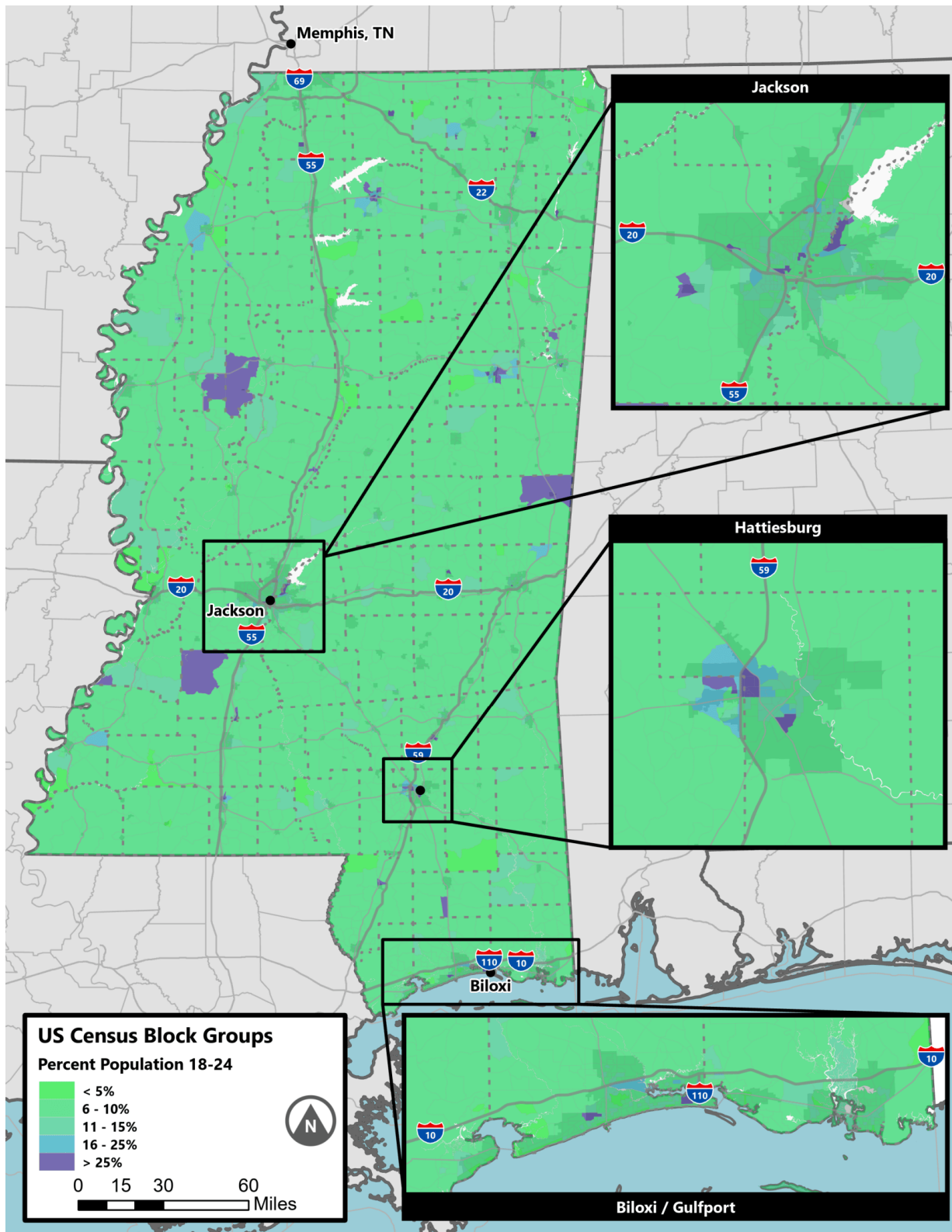


Figure 6. Percentage of the Population that is Aged 65 years or Older

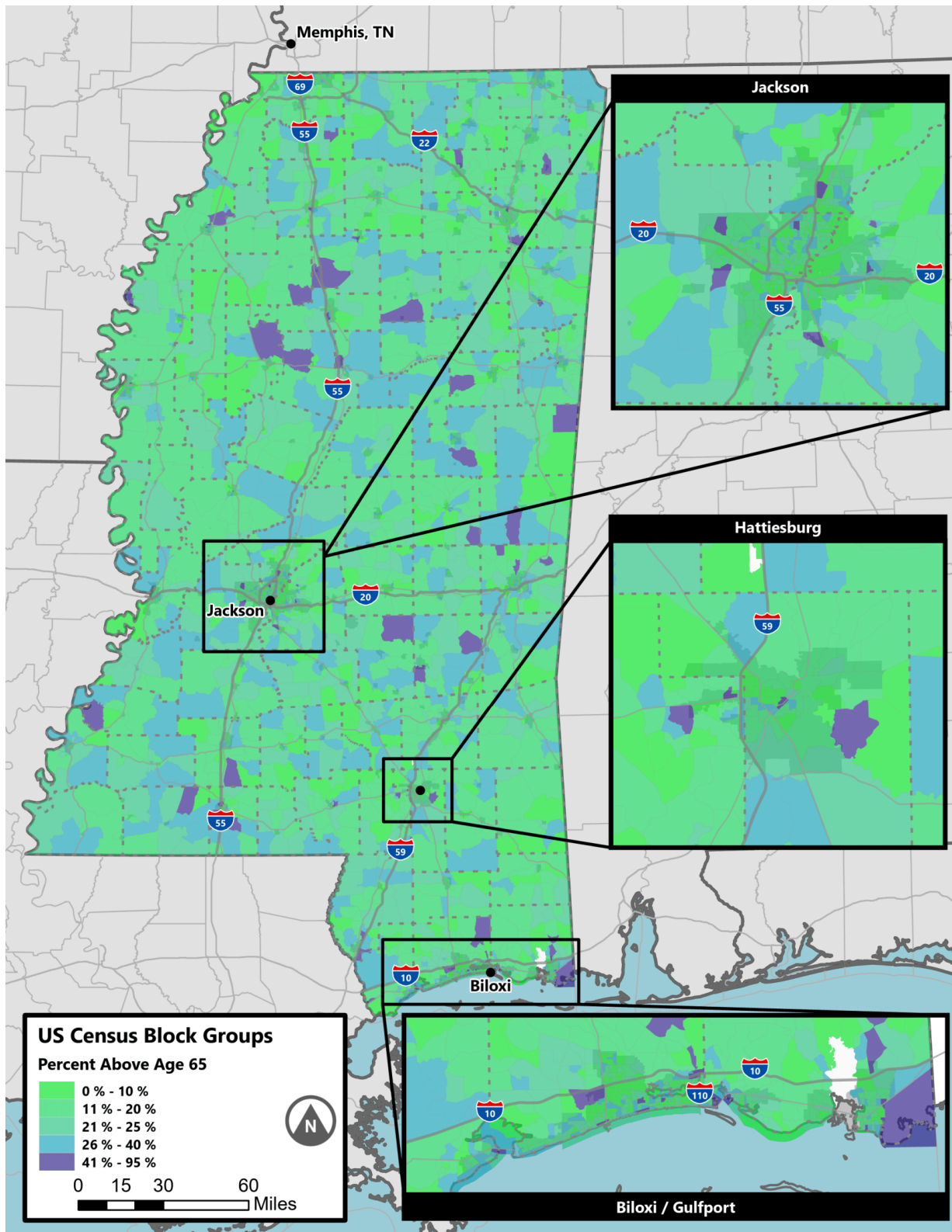


Figure 7. Percentage of Households that have Zero Vehicles Available

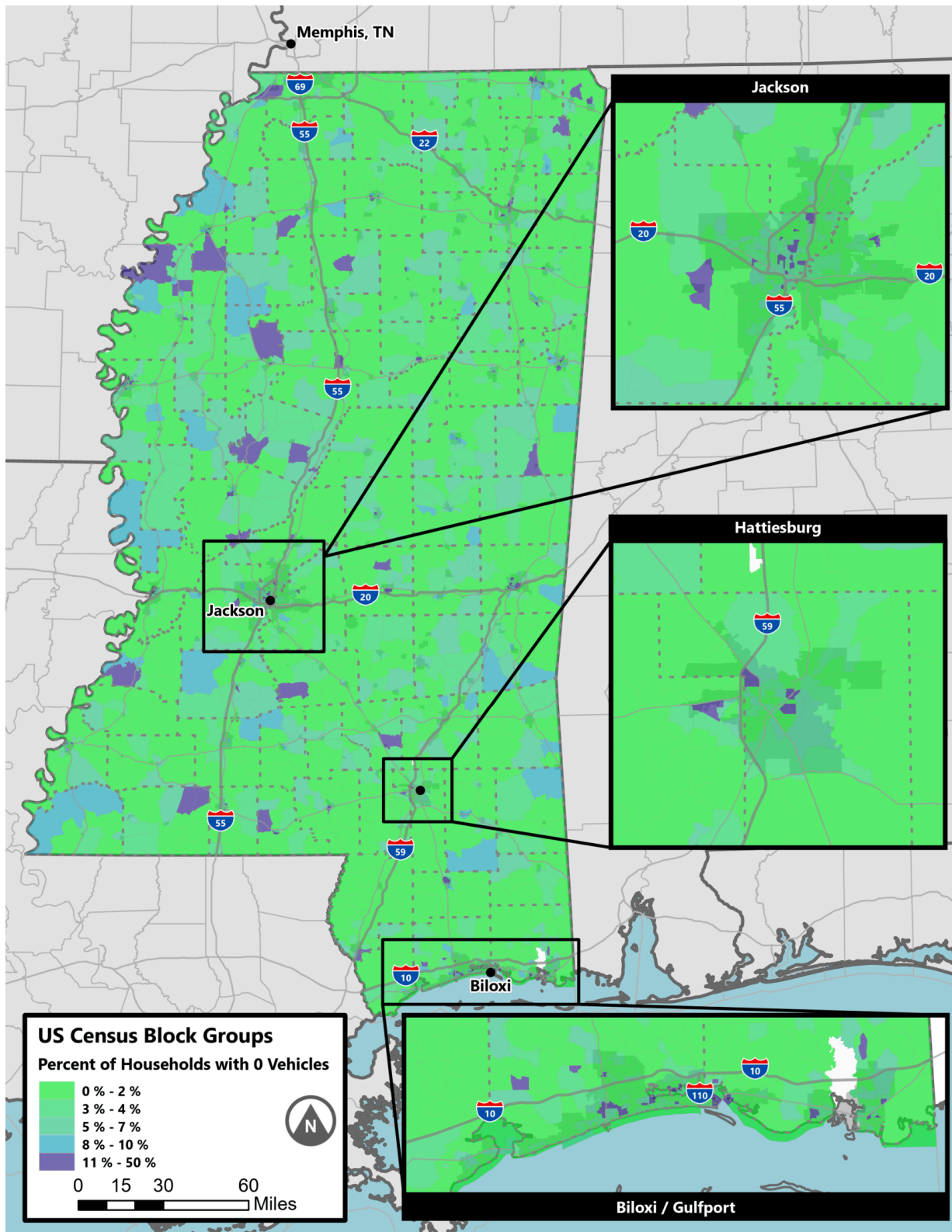
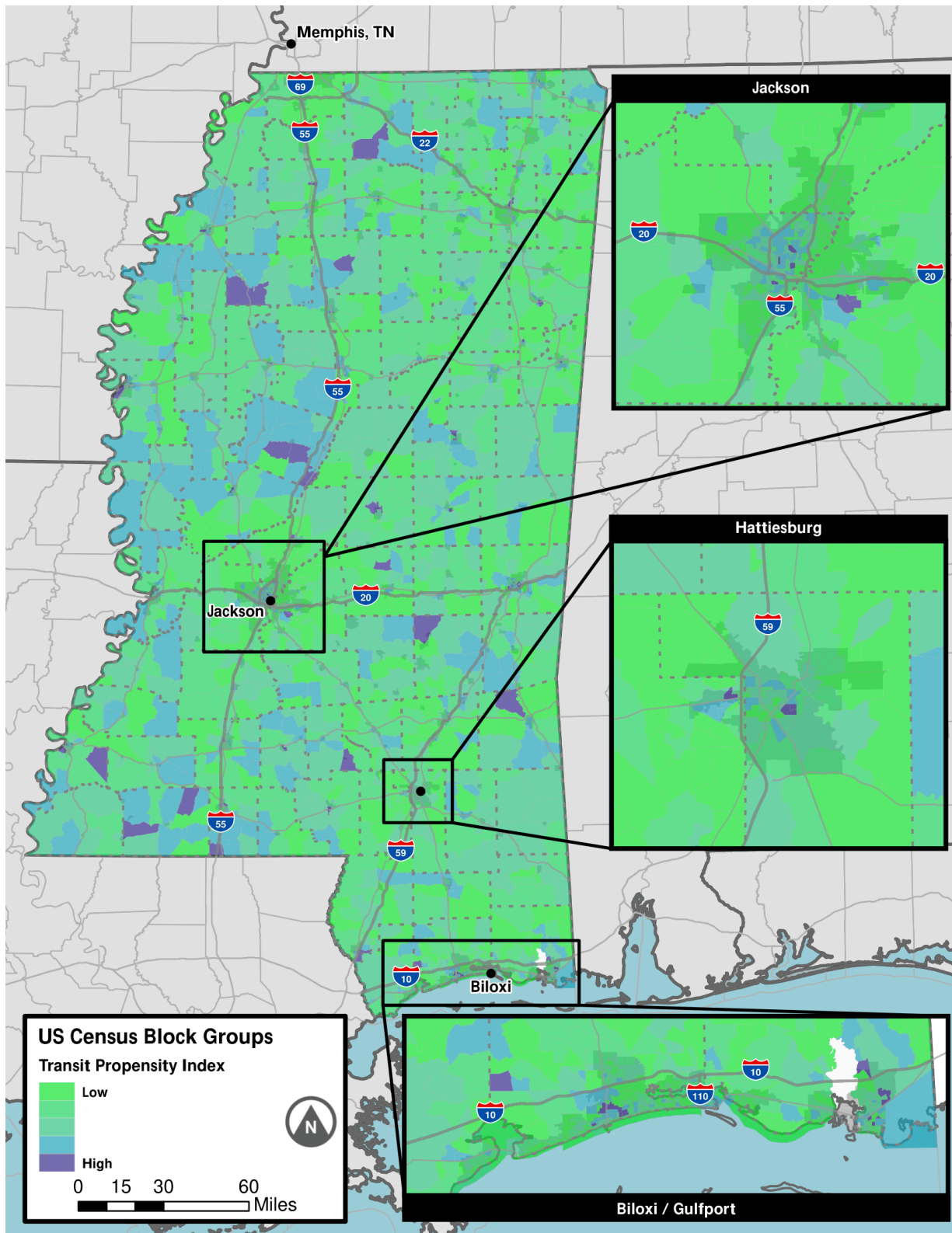


Figure 8. Transit Propensity Statewide



2.3 PEER REVIEW

A peer review of comparable states was conducted to benchmark Mississippi's performance and identify potential opportunities for improvement. Peer states, including Alabama, Arkansas, and Louisiana, were selected based on similarities in geography, rural composition, and transit system structure. The analysis compared key performance indicators such as trips per capita across different service types, including large urban, small urban, rural fixed-route, and rural demand-response systems.

The findings (**Table 1**) indicate that Mississippi underperforms relative to its peers across all service categories, with particularly significant gaps in small urban and rural demand-response services. For example, small urban systems in Mississippi demonstrate a lower level of service utilization compared to peer states, while rural demand-response services also show a notable deficit in trips per capital. These disparities suggest that existing services may not fully meet demand or provide adequate coverage and accessibility.

Table 1. Summary of Mississippi Benchmark Group and Peer System

Transit Service Type	Trips per Capita		
	Mississippi	Peer Systems	Gap
Large Urban	4.4	4.94	-11%
Small Urban	1	2.82	-65%
Rural Fixed Route	12.55	14	-7%
Rural Demand Response	0.75	1.32	-43%
State Average	4.67	5.64	-17%

The peer review findings served as part of the foundation for the recommendations developed through this study. By examining practices associated with stronger performance in neighboring states, the study identified opportunities that will enhance coordination, improve funding effectiveness, strengthen intercity connections, and better align Mississippi's transportation network with demonstrated best practices.

3 Intercity Transportation Assessment

Section 3 assesses Mississippi's intercity transportation network, including existing services, intermodal facilities, and overall system connectivity. It examines how well current infrastructure and providers meet user and provider needs, evaluates readiness for improvement, and identifies opportunities to enhance coordination and expand mobility statewide.

3.1 EXISTING INTERCITY SERVICES

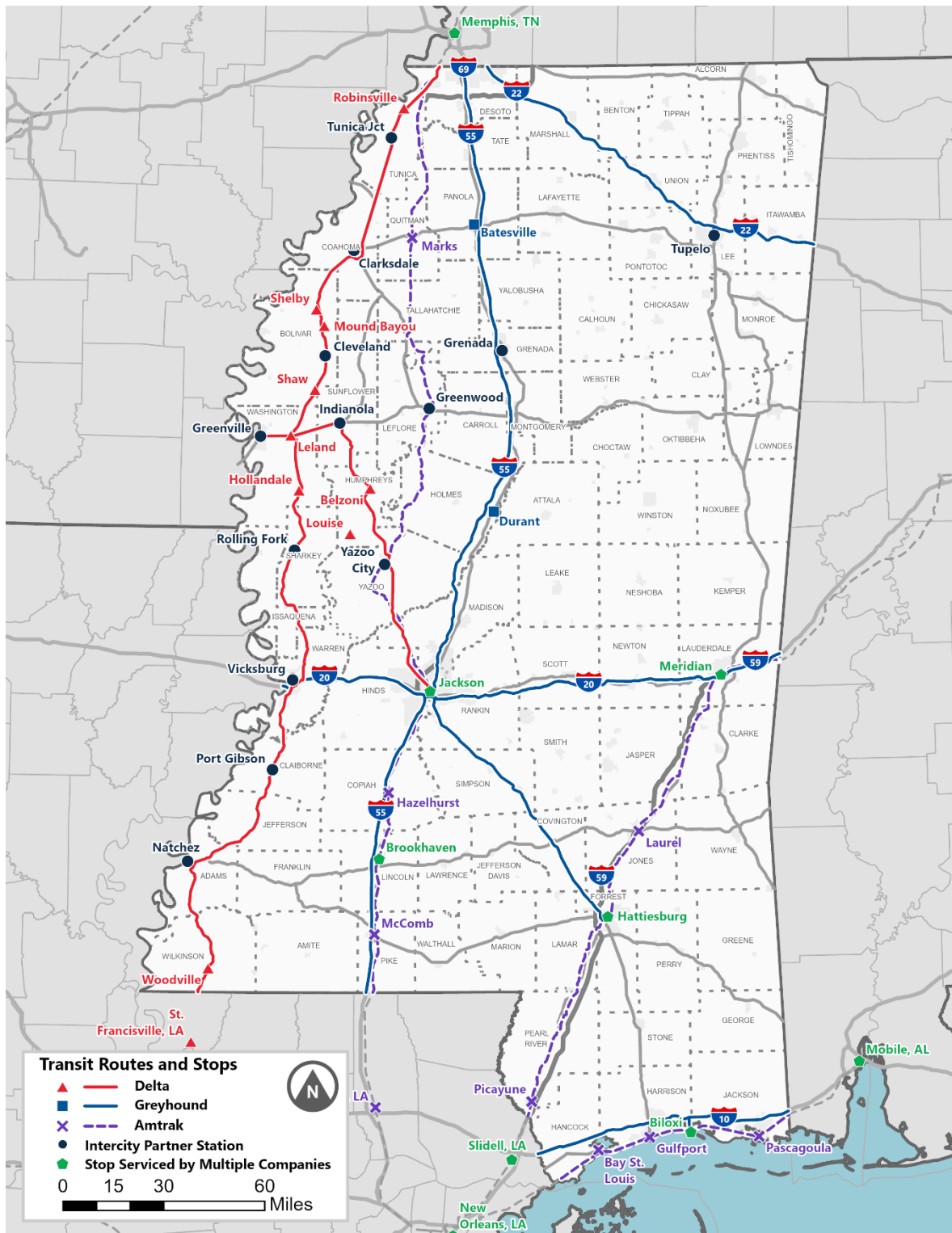
Mississippi's intercity transportation network is anchored by private intercity bus providers that connect communities throughout the state with regional and national destinations. Greyhound, FlixBus, and Delta Bus Lines provide scheduled intercity bus service that links Mississippi residents to employment centers, healthcare, education, and other essential destinations both within and beyond the state. These services are complemented by regional and local public transit providers that offer first- and last-mile connections for many rural communities.

Passenger rail service provided by Amtrak offers an additional travel option along select corridors and can complement the intercity bus network where stations are co-located or well connected. However, rail service is geographically limited and serves only a portion of the state. Accordingly, this assessment focuses primarily on Mississippi's intercity bus network and the coordination opportunities that improve access between intercity bus services and other transportation providers.

Figure 9 shows ICB, passenger rail routes, and corresponding stop locations in Mississippi.

Intercity Bus Element

Figure 9. Existing Intercity Services



3.1.1 GREYHOUND & FLIXBUS

Greyhound and FlixBus serve as the primary providers of long-distance ICB service in Mississippi, offering fixed-route connections between major urban centers and regional hubs. Their services are critical for linking the state to the broader national transportation network, particularly along key corridors such as Jackson to Memphis and New Orleans. While these services provide essential connectivity and modern amenities, they are corridor-based and do not extend comprehensively into rural areas, resulting in limited accessibility for many transit-dependent populations.

3.1.2 DELTA BUS LINES

Delta Bus Lines has provided motorcoach transportation throughout the Mississippi Delta since 1985, operating scheduled intercity bus service connecting Memphis, Tennessee; Jackson, Mississippi; and Baton Rouge, Louisiana via the U.S. 61, U.S. 82, and U.S. 49W corridors. In addition to scheduled passenger service, the company transports baggage and package express shipments and provides charter and tour services. To extend connectivity beyond its scheduled routes, Delta Bus Lines partners with Public Transit Associates to connect travelers with destinations throughout its broader service area. With a fleet of modern motorcoaches and more than 40 employees, Delta Bus Lines serves as an important regional intercity transportation provider, supporting mobility across the region while facilitating connections to destinations both within and beyond the region.

3.1.3 AMTRAK

Amtrak provides intercity passenger rail service in Mississippi through the City of New Orleans line and the Gulf Coast service, offering important north-south and coastal connectivity. These services connect key cities such as Jackson and Gulfport to major national destinations, supporting long-distance travel and regional mobility. However, rail service in Mississippi is geographically limited to specific corridors, leaving large portions of the state-particularly rural areas-without direct access to passenger rail, thereby constraining its overall reach and impact within the statewide transportation network.

3.2 INTERMODAL CENTERS AND MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY

Intermodal centers serve as critical transfer points within Mississippi's transportation network, providing opportunities for passengers to connect between local transit, regional transit, ICB, passenger rail, and other transportation services. These facilities support mobility by reducing transfer barriers, improving access to destinations, and expanding travel options for residents who may not have access to a personal vehicle.

A total of twenty-six intermodal centers operate throughout Mississippi (**Table 2**). While the level of service and available connections varies by location, these facilities provide the foundation for statewide multimodal connectivity and play an important role in linking rural communities to regional and national transportation networks.

The distribution of intermodal centers also provides a useful framework for evaluating the effectiveness of Mississippi's intercity transportation network. Their ability to support passenger transfers, coordinate services, and provide access to intercity transportation is assessed in the following sections through the lenses of User Needs, Provider Needs, Readiness, and Innovation.

Table 2. Intermodal Centers in Mississippi

Location	Modes Present
Batesville	Greyhound
Bay St. Louis	Amtrak
Biloxi	Amtrak, Greyhound, Flixbus
Brookhaven	Amtrak, Five County
Clarksdale	Delta Bus Lines
Cleveland	Delta Bus Lines
Greenwood	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines
Greenville	Delta Bus Lines
Grenada	Delta Bus Lines
Gulfport	Amtrak, CTA, National Park Ferry
Hattiesburg	Amtrak, Greyhound, Hub City Transit
Indianola	Delta Bus Lines
Jackson	Amtrak, Greyhound, JTRAN, Natchez Transit
Laurel	Amtrak
Marks	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines
McComb	Amtrak
Meridian	Amtrak, Greyhound
Natchez	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines
Pascagoula	Amtrak
Picayune	Amtrak
Port Gibson	Delta Bus Lines
Rolling Fork	Delta Bus Lines
Tunica	Delta Bus Lines
Vicksburg	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines
Yazoo City	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines

3.3 ASSESSMENT OF INTERCITY TRANSPORTATION CONNECTIVITY

The assessment of Mississippi's intercity transportation network was conducted using the four focus areas established in the study framework: User Needs, Provider Needs, Readiness, and Innovation. Together, these focus areas provide a comprehensive understanding of how well the existing network serves residents, supports transportation providers, and positions the state for future mobility improvements.

3.3.1 USER NEEDS

User Needs focus on how effectively the transportation network provides access to essential destinations and transportation opportunities for Mississippi residents.

Public outreach results indicate that many residents rely on intercity transportation to access employment, healthcare, education, and other services beyond their local communities. **Figure 10** summarizes survey responses regarding current use of intercity transportation, while **Figure 11** identifies the most frequently cited destinations for intercity travel.

Figure 10. Respondents Who Use Intercity Transportation

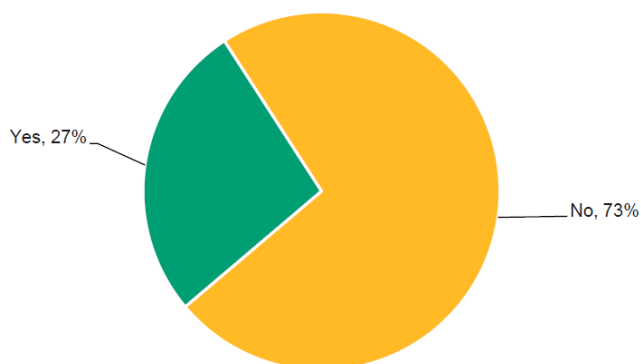
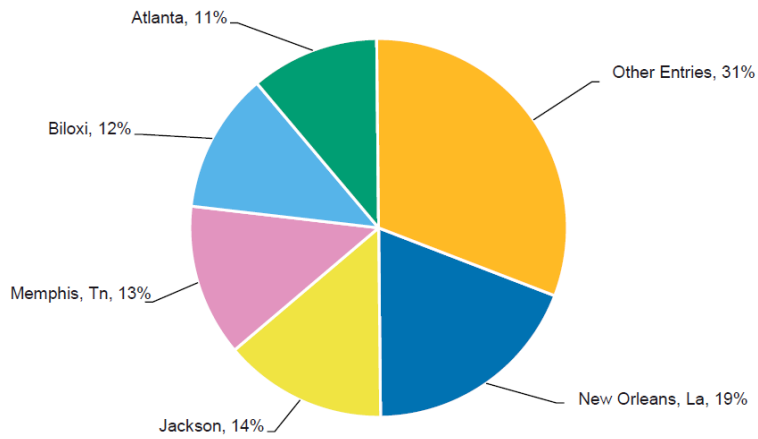
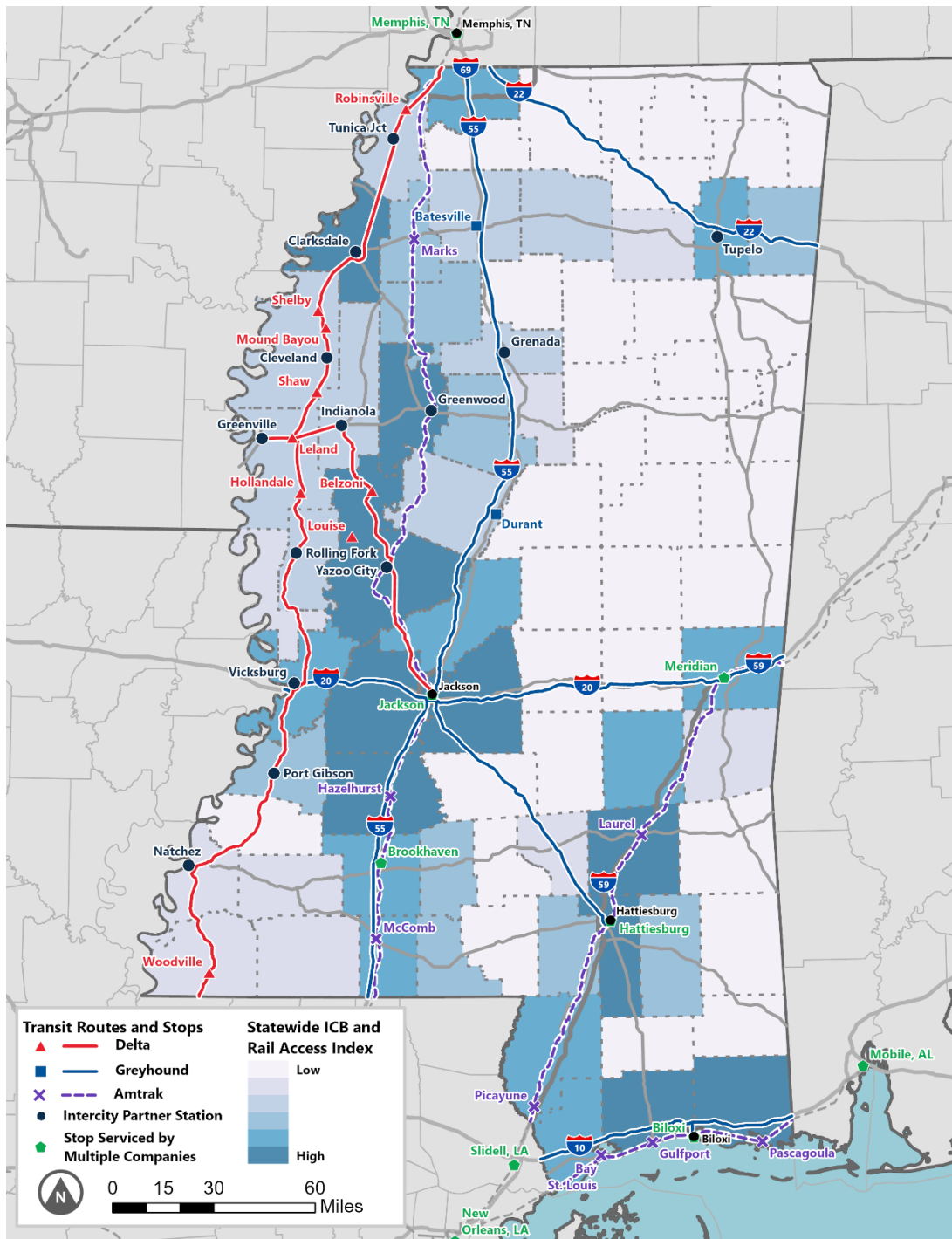


Figure 11. Top Intercity Destinations



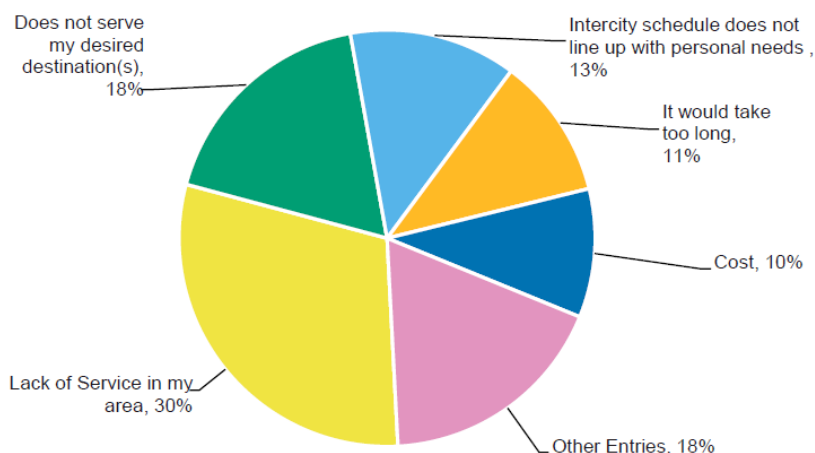
While major urban centers have access to intercity transportation services, significant geographic disparities remain. **Figure 12** illustrates the distribution of ICB and passenger rail access throughout Mississippi and highlights areas where residents have limited access to transportation options.

Figure 12. Intercity Bus and Rail Access by County



Survey respondents identified several barriers that limit use of intercity transportation services, including limited-service availability, inconvenient schedules, lack of awareness, and challenges accessing stations. These findings are summarized in **Figure 13**.

Figure 13. Reasons Why Intercity Service is Not Used



Collectively, these findings indicate that many transit-dependent populations continue to face challenges accessing intercity transportation services, particularly in rural portions of the state.

3.3.2 PROVIDER NEEDS

Provider Needs focus on the infrastructure, operational, and coordination requirements necessary to support effective intercity transportation service delivery.

The assessment found that opportunities for multimodal integration vary throughout the state. Existing intermodal centers provide a foundation for improved connectivity; however, the quality of connections between local transit, regional transit, ICB, and passenger rail services differ significantly by location.

To identify opportunities for improved intermodal connectivity, existing transit services were mapped alongside Amtrak, Greyhound, and Delta Bus Lines routes. GIS analysis and aerial imagery were applied to assess infrastructure availability and proximity between modes. The analysis focused on identifying locations where transit services intersect with intercity transportation and where infrastructure investments could support multimodal integration. A total of twenty-six locations (**Table 3**) were identified in the analysis and assigned an integration level for each of the stops using the following scale:

- **High Integration:** All transit modes are available at one shared location and include amenities and joint services (e.g., covered waiting area, ticketing/fare, local service information, etc.) that support ease of transfers between modes. Union Station in Jackson (**Readiness**)
- **Readiness** evaluates Mississippi's ability to leverage existing transportation assets, facilities, providers, and funding programs to strengthen intercity connectivity.

The assessment found that Mississippi possesses many of the foundational components necessary to improve intercity transportation, including an established network of regional transit providers, existing ICB operators, passenger rail services, and a statewide system of intermodal centers.

In addition, several transportation hubs already provide examples of successful multimodal infrastructure. Jackson Union Station, Hattiesburg Depot, and Gulfport Station each demonstrate varying levels of readiness to support expanded intercity transportation integration.

However, funding limitations, operational constraints, and inconsistent coordination practices continue to limit the ability of these assets to function as a fully integrated statewide network.

3.3.3 INNOVATION AND INTEGRATION

Innovation focuses on opportunities to improve connectivity through enhanced coordination, technology, and service integration.

The assessment identified several opportunities to strengthen statewide mobility through improved connections between local transit systems, regional transportation providers, ICB operators, and passenger rail services. Existing transportation assets often operate independently, limiting the ability of passengers to seamlessly transfer between services. **Figure 17** illustrates opportunities to improve multimodal connectivity through enhanced integration of transportation services and facilities.

Figure 17. Intermodal Center Optimization



Similarly, **Figure 18** illustrates opportunities to improve network connectivity by strengthening links between transportation providers and expanding access to intercity transportation services.

Figure 18. Connectivity Optimization



These findings suggest that future investments should focus not only on expanding service availability, but also on improving coordination, information sharing, schedule integration, and multimodal planning. Enhancing these connections would increase the effectiveness of existing transportation assets while improving access for residents throughout Mississippi.

3.4 KEY FINDINGS AND CAUSES

The assessment identified four recurring challenges that influence the effectiveness of Mississippi's intercity transportation network:

- Limited coordination across providers and agencies
- Inconsistent access to technical resources and support
- Funding allocation practices that constrain operational flexibility
- Limited visibility into service gaps and unmet transportation demand
- These challenges affect both passengers and providers, resulting in reduced connectivity, inconsistent travel experiences, and missed opportunities to maximize the value of existing transportation investments. The following chapters evaluate these challenges in greater detail and present recommendations designed to address the underlying causes while strengthening statewide intercity mobility.) illustrates this level of integration.
- **Moderate Integration:** Transit modes are available at a shared location with amenities, but joint services are not present, and/or local transit is limited and require transfer to another physical location to access other parts of the service area. The Amtrak Station in Hattiesburg is an example of Moderate Integration (Error! Reference source not found.).
- **Low Integration:** Intercity service and local service are physically separated, or there are no amenities or joint services at a shared intercity/local service stop. The Amtrak Station in Gulfport (**Figure 16**) shows the physical separation between the intercity and local transit modes.

Intercity Bus Element

Table 3. Intermodal Connection Assessment

Location	Modes Present	Available Infrastructure	Integration Level	Notes
Batesville	Greyhound	No shelters at stops or station	Low – proximity only	Shared stops
Bay St. Louis	Amtrak	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Low – proximity only	Limited local service
Biloxi	Amtrak, Greyhound, Flixbus	Shelter, waiting area	Low – proximity only	No nearby CTA stops
Brookhaven	Amtrak, Five County	Shared depot, waiting room	High – proximity only	Opportunity to connect to Greyhound
Clarksdale	Delta Bus Lines	No shelters at stops or stations	Low – proximity only	Shared stops
Cleveland	Delta Bus Lines	Delta Bus Line Passenger Station	High – fully co-located	Joint ticketing center
Greenwood	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Low – proximity only	Space for Delta Bus Lines pickup/drop-off at Amtrak
Greenville	Delta Bus Lines	No shelters at stops or station	Low – proximity only	Shared stops
Grenada	Delta Bus Lines	No shelters at stops or station	Low – proximity only	Shared stops
Gulfport	Amtrak, CTA, National Park Ferry	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Low – proximity only	Infrastructure gaps limit integration potential
Hattiesburg	Amtrak, Greyhound, Hub City Transit	Shared depot, waiting room	Moderate – partial integration	Opportunity to connect to Natchez Transit

Intercity Bus Element



Location	Modes Present	Available Infrastructure	Integration Level	Notes
Indianola	Delta Bus Lines	No shelters at stops or station	Low – proximity only	Shared stops
Jackson	Amtrak, Greyhound, JTRAN, Natchez Transit	Shelters, waiting area, amenities	High – fully co-located	Strong foundation for future expansion; lacks airport link
Laurel	Amtrak	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Low – proximity only	Limited local service
Marks	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Low – proximity only	Space for Delta Bus Lines pickup/drop-off at Amtrak
McComb	Amtrak	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Low – proximity only	Limited local service
Meridian	Amtrak, Greyhound	Shared depot, waiting room	High – fully co-located	Shared office space with Choctaw transit
Natchez	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines	Shared depot, waiting room	Moderate – Partial Integration	Limited local service
Pascagoula	Amtrak	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Low – proximity only	Limited local service
Picayune	Amtrak	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Low – proximity only	Limited local service
Port Gibson	Delta Bus Lines	No shelters at stops or station	Low – proximity only	Shared stops
Rolling Fork	Delta Bus Lines	No shelters at stops or station	Low – proximity only	Shared stops
Tunica	Delta Bus Lines	No shelters at stops or station	Low – proximity only	Shared stops

Intercity Bus Element



Location	Modes Present	Available Infrastructure	Integration Level	Notes
Vicksburg	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Low – proximity only	Shared stops
Yazoo City	Amtrak, Delta Bus Lines	Shelter, waiting area at Amtrak	Moderate – Partial Integration	Space for Delta Bus Lines pickup/drop-off at Amtrak

Figure 14. Jackson Union Station



Figure 15. Hattiesburg Depot

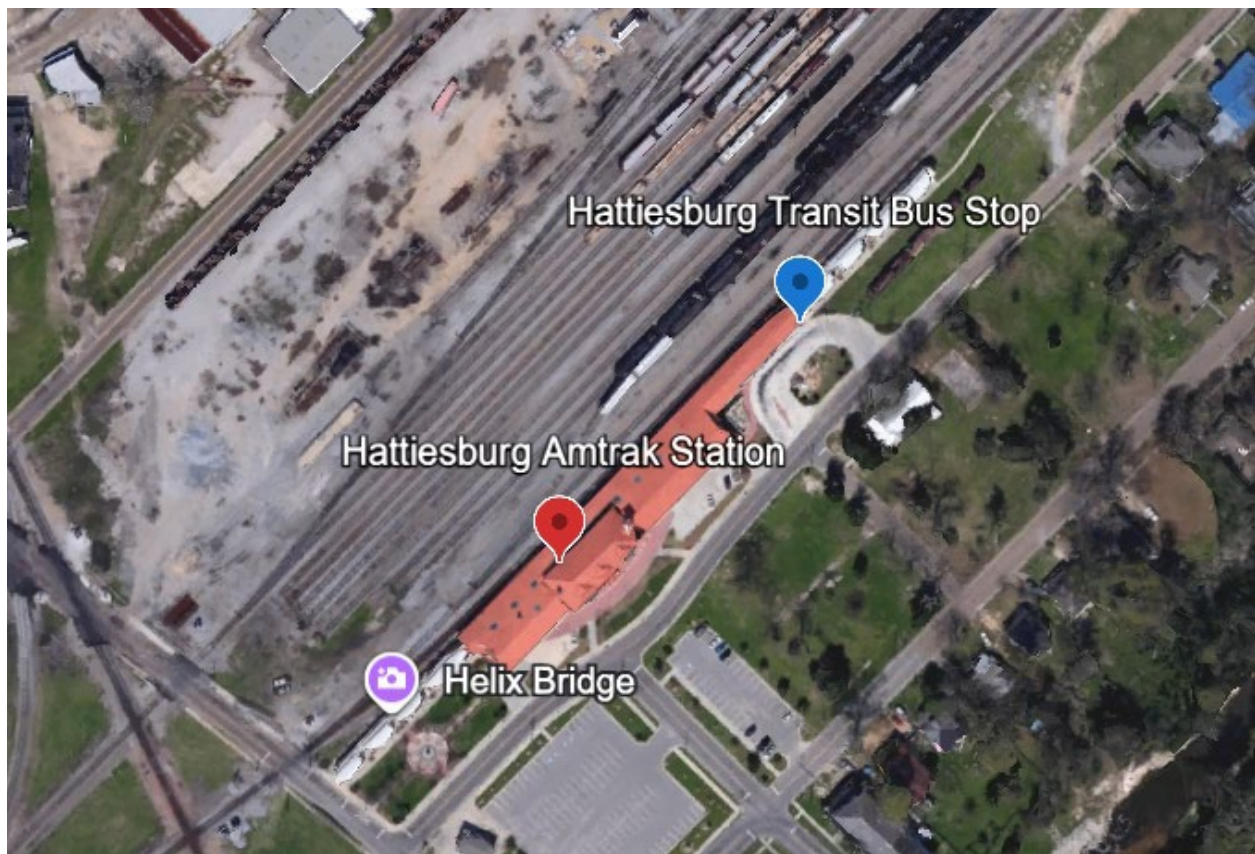
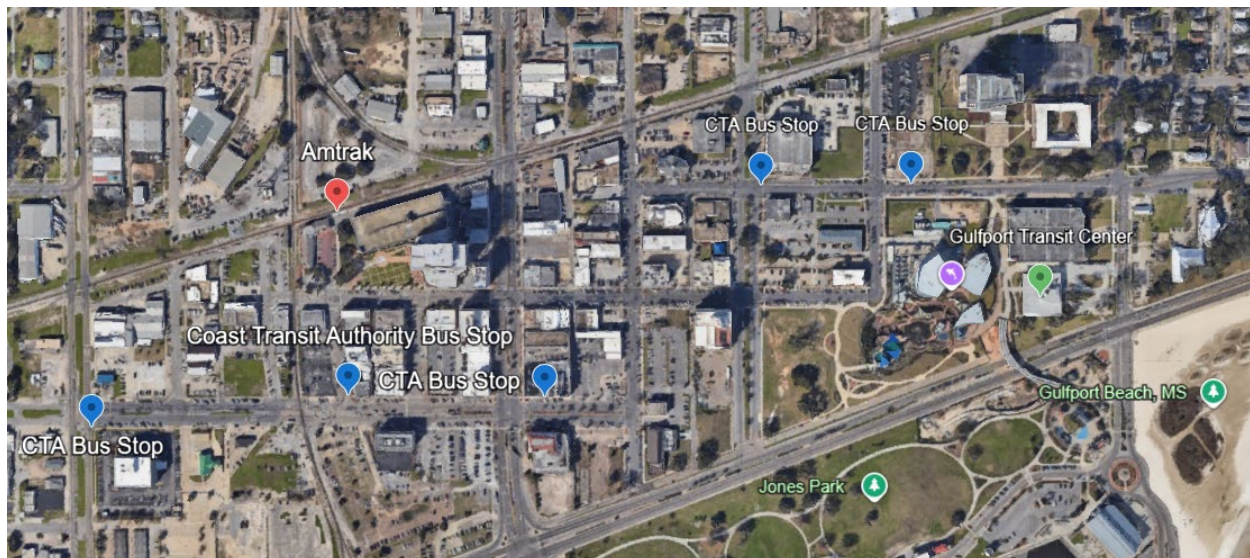


Figure 16. Gulfport Station



3.4.1 READINESS

Readiness evaluates Mississippi's ability to leverage existing transportation assets, facilities, providers, and funding programs to strengthen intercity connectivity.

The assessment found that Mississippi possesses many of the foundational components necessary to improve intercity transportation, including an established network of regional transit providers, existing ICB operators, passenger rail services, and a statewide system of intermodal centers.

In addition, several transportation hubs already provide examples of successful multimodal infrastructure. Jackson Union Station, Hattiesburg Depot, and Gulfport Station each demonstrate varying levels of readiness to support expanded intercity transportation integration.

However, funding limitations, operational constraints, and inconsistent coordination practices continue to limit the ability of these assets to function as a fully integrated statewide network.

3.4.2 INNOVATION AND INTEGRATION

Innovation focuses on opportunities to improve connectivity through enhanced coordination, technology, and service integration.

The assessment identified several opportunities to strengthen statewide mobility through improved connections between local transit systems, regional transportation providers, ICB operators, and passenger rail services. Existing transportation assets often operate independently, limiting the ability of passengers to seamlessly transfer between services. **Figure 17** illustrates opportunities to improve multimodal connectivity through enhanced integration of transportation services and facilities.

Figure 17. Intermodal Center Optimization



Similarly, **Figure 18** illustrates opportunities to improve network connectivity by strengthening links between transportation providers and expanding access to intercity transportation services.

Figure 18. Connectivity Optimization



These findings suggest that future investments should focus not only on expanding service availability, but also on improving coordination, information sharing, schedule integration, and multimodal planning. Enhancing these connections would increase the effectiveness of existing transportation assets while improving access for residents throughout Mississippi.

3.5 KEY FINDINGS AND CAUSES

The assessment identified four recurring challenges that influence the effectiveness of Mississippi's intercity transportation network:

- Limited coordination across providers and agencies
- Inconsistent access to technical resources and support
- Funding allocation practices that constrain operational flexibility
- Limited visibility into service gaps and unmet transportation demand

These challenges affect both passengers and providers, resulting in reduced connectivity, inconsistent travel experiences, and missed opportunities to maximize the value of existing transportation investments. The following chapters evaluate these challenges in greater detail and present recommendations designed to address the underlying causes while strengthening statewide intercity mobility.

3.5.1 USER NEEDS

The User Needs Assessment identified several challenges that limit access to and utilization of intercity transportation services throughout Mississippi. The following findings summarize the most significant user focused needs identified through demographic analysis, public engagement, accessibility assessments, and connectivity evaluations.

- **Limited access to intercity transportation services:** Access to ICB and passenger rail services is concentrated within a limited number of communities, including Jackson, Gulfport, Biloxi, Hattiesburg, Meridian, and Tupelo. Many residents, particularly in rural areas, must rely on local transit, regional transportation providers, or personal vehicles to access the intercity network.
- **First-mile and last-mile connectivity barriers:** Existing intercity transportation services often operate independently from local and regional transit providers. As a result, travelers may experience challenges reaching ICB stops and passenger rail stations, particularly in areas with limited local transit service.
- **Transit-dependent populations face disproportionate impacts:** Demographic analysis identified concentrations of older adults, individuals with disabilities, low-income households, and zero-vehicle households in areas with limited access to intercity transportation services. These populations are more likely to rely on public transportation and may face greater barriers to accessing employment, healthcare, education, and other essential destinations.
- **Limited-service awareness and passenger information:** Public outreach findings indicate that many residents are unaware of available intercity transportation options, service schedules, and available connections. Survey respondents frequently cited a lack of information and uncertainty regarding available services as barriers to utilization. These findings suggest opportunities to improve passenger information, trip-planning resources, marketing, and statewide mobility management efforts to increase awareness and improve access to existing services.

3.5.2 PROVIDER NEEDS

The Provider Needs Assessment identified several operational, infrastructure, funding, and coordination challenges that affect the effectiveness of Mississippi's intercity transportation network. The following findings summarize the most significant provider-focused needs identified through stakeholder outreach, facility assessments, and evaluation of existing intercity transportation services.

- **Limited coordination among transportation providers:** Intercity transportation services rely on coordination among local transit agencies, regional transportation providers, ICB operators, passenger rail providers, and human service transportation programs. While informal partnerships exist in many regions, coordination practices vary considerably across the state, resulting in inconsistent transfer opportunities, passenger information, and service integration.

- 
- **Funding constraints limit service flexibility:** Existing funding structures primarily support capital investments and traditional service delivery models. Providers identified limitations associated with operating assistance, mobility management activities, marketing, and coordination efforts, reducing their ability to adapt services to changing travel needs and strengthen connections with other transportation providers.
 - **Gaps in multimodal integration:** Many communities rely on local and regional transit services to access intercity transportation; however, schedules, transfer locations, and passenger information are often not coordinated.
 - **Inconsistent passenger facilities:** The quality of ICB stops and transfer facilities varies significantly across the state, affecting accessibility and passenger experience.
 - **Limited visibility into service gaps:** Providers identified challenges in collecting and utilizing data to identify unmet travel demand, prioritize investments, and evaluate service performance.
 - **Intermodal centers represented a major opportunity:** Mississippi's twenty-six intermodal centers provide a strong foundation for improving multimodal connectivity, though most would benefit from enhanced coordination and passenger amenities.

3.5.3 READINESS

The Readiness Assessment evaluated Mississippi's ability to implement future intercity transportation improvements through existing assets, funding programs, and institutional capacity. The assessment identified several factors that influence the state's ability to implement and expand intercity transportation improvements:

- **Strong foundation for future improvements:** Mississippi benefits from existing ICB operators, passenger rail service, regional transit providers, and twenty-six intermodal centers that provide a framework for future connectivity.
- **Funding limitations constrain implementation:** Limited operating assistance and local matching funds reduce the ability of providers to pursue service expansions, facility improvements, and discretionary funding opportunities.
- **Existing assets are not fully leveraged:** Many opportunities to improve intercity mobility can be achieved through enhanced coordination and integration of existing transportation services and facilities.
- **Technical and planning capacity varies across providers:** Differences in staffing, data collection, and planning resources affect providers ability to identify service needs, evaluate performance, and implement improvements.
- **Readiness is strongest for coordination-focused improvements:** Many identified needs can be addressed through policy changes, mobility management, service coordination, and improved multimodal integration rather than major capital investments.

3.5.4 INNOVATION AND INTEGRATION

The Innovation Assessment evaluated opportunities to improve intercity mobility through enhanced coordination, multimodal integration, technology adoptions, and mobility management

strategies. The assessment highlights key opportunities to strengthen connectivity through improved coordination, integration, and use of technology:

- **Multimodal integration presents the greatest opportunity for improvement:** Existing ICB, passenger rail, local transit, and regional transportation services often operate independently, limiting opportunities for seamless passenger transfers and coordinated travel.
- **Intermodal centers provide a foundation for innovation:** Facilities such as Jackson Union Station, Hattiesburg Depot, and Gulfport Station demonstrate opportunities to function as mobility hubs supporting coordinated transfers, passenger information, and multimodal connectivity.
- **Passenger information and trip planning remain fragmented:** Travelers often must navigate multiple providers, schedules, and information sources, creating barriers to intercity travel and reducing awareness of available transportation options.
- **Mobility management strategies are underutilized:** Improved coordination among transportation providers, centralized trip planning resources, and coordinated marketing efforts could significantly improve statewide connectivity while leveraging existing transportation assets.
- **Many mobility challenges stem from integration rather than infrastructure gaps:** The assessment found that strategic investments in coordination, passenger information systems, and service integration may provide substantial benefits without requiring major infrastructure or service expansions.
- **Technology can enhance network visibility and accessibility:** Expanded use of trip-planning tools, real-time service information, and coordinated passenger communication platforms could improve the user experience and increase utilization of existing intercity transportation services.

3.6 SUMMARY

Section 3 evaluates Mississippi's intercity transportation network to assess how well it meets user and provider needs and supports future improvements. Existing services, intermodal facilities, and overall connectivity is considered in the assessment and structured around user needs, provider needs, readiness, and innovation.

The existing intercity transportation network consists primarily of private ICB providers and limited passenger rail service, providing key connections between major cities but with constrained rural access. A system of 26 intermodal centers was analyzed as the foundation for multimodal connectivity, though integration levels and service quality vary significantly across locations.

The results of the assessment include gaps in access, coordination, infrastructure, and service awareness, particularly affecting transit-dependent and rural populations. Overall, findings indicate that while Mississippi has a solid base of assets and services, limited coordination,

funding constraints, and weak multimodal integration reducing network effectiveness and highlight opportunities for improved connectivity and mobility statewide.



Union Station in Jackson, Mississippi

4 Funding

This section provides an overview of the key federal funding framework supporting ICB services, with a focus on the Section 5311(f) program and its role in enhancing rural connectivity. It outlines program requirements, eligible uses, and funding mechanisms, including the use of in-kind match provisions. The section also examines how Mississippi administers these funds through its State Management Plan and compares this approach to practices in peer states. This assessment highlights key differences in program structure, flexibility, and implementation that influence the effectiveness of funding in supporting intercity transportation services.

4.1 5311(F) PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Formula Grants for Other than Urbanized Areas program, administered by the FTA under the U.S. Department of Transportation, is commonly referred to as Section 5311. This formula-based program provides funding to states to support public transportation in rural areas and in urbanized areas with populations under 50,000. While Section 5311 supports rural public transportation broadly, Section 5311(f) specifically focuses on strengthening connections between non-urbanized areas and the broader regional and national intercity transportation network.

4.1.1 REQUIRED APPORTIONMENT

Under 49 U.S.C. §5311(f), states are required to allocate at least 15 percent of their annual Section 5311 apportionment to support the development and implementation of ICB transportation services.

4.1.2 ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

Eligible activities under the Section 5311(f) program include all of the following:

- Planning and marketing efforts for ICB services
- Capital investments in ICB facilities
- Development of joint-use facilities
- Operating assistance through purchase-of-service agreements, user-side subsidies, and demonstration projects
- Coordination efforts to improve connections between rural transit systems and ICB carriers.

Funding may be used to support the expansion of service through subsidized feeder routes or new intercity connections, as well as technical assistance, planning and marketing activities, and capital investments that improve system accessibility, connectivity, and overall performance.

4.1.3 COST SHARING

The federal cost share for ICB projects under Section 5311(f) aligns with the broader Section 5311 program. Specifically, federal funding may cover up to 50 percent of net operating costs and



up to 80 percent of net capital and administrative costs. Additionally, state administration, planning, and technical assistance activities that support ICB transportation may be funded at a 100 percent federal share when applied within the allowable cap on state administrative expenses. Planning activities for ICB services are not subject to the 15 percent ICB set-aside limitation; however, when such planning activities fall outside the state administration cap, the federal share is limited to 80 percent of total planning costs.

4.1.4 ELIGIBLE PROJECT DELIVERY APPROACHES

Section 5311(f) provides flexibility in how ICB projects are delivered, allowing states to partner with both public transit agencies and private intercity bus operators to improve rural connectivity. Projects may be implemented through direct grants, purchase-of-service agreements, contracts with private carriers, or other cooperative arrangements that support eligible intercity bus services and activities.

This flexibility enables states to tailor project delivery to local needs while encouraging coordination among transportation providers. Public agencies may partner with private ICB operators to expand service, improve schedules, enhance passenger amenities, or strengthen first- and last-mile connections through coordinated service planning. Regardless of the delivery approach, funded activities must support the objectives of the Section 5311(f) program and comply with applicable federal requirements.

Selecting the most appropriate project delivery approach depends on the specific service need, the capabilities of participating providers, and the desired mobility outcomes. Flexible implementation strategies can help maximize the effectiveness of available funding while fostering partnerships that improve access to the statewide ICB network.

4.1.5 IN-KIND MATCH

Federal regulations allow eligible non-federal matching requirements for Section 5311(f) projects to be satisfied through cash contributions or approved in-kind contributions, provided the contributions are necessary for the project, can be appropriately documented, and comply with applicable federal requirements. In-kind contributions may include the value of donated services, facilities, equipment, or other eligible resources that directly support the delivery of an approved ICB project.

The ability to use in-kind match can provide greater flexibility for both public agencies and private ICB providers by reducing the need for direct cash contributions while encouraging partnerships that expand rural mobility. For example, a local government may contribute the use of an intermodal facility, a transit provider may provide passenger transfer coordination or dispatch support, or an intercity carrier may contribute eligible operational resources as part of a coordinated service agreement, provided these contributions meet FTA eligibility requirements and are properly valued and documented.



States are responsible for establishing procedures to document and verify the value and eligibility of in-kind contributions in accordance with federal grant requirements. Incorporating appropriate use of in-kind match into program administration can help reduce barriers to participation, encourage coordinated projects, and leverage local and private-sector resources to strengthen Mississippi's ICB network.

4.2 STATE SPECIFICS

Section 5311(f) provides states with flexibility to design and administer ICB programs that support rural connectivity; however, the implementation of this program can vary significantly based on state-specific policies and management approaches. In Mississippi, the State Management Plan establishes the framework for how 5311(f) funds are applied, including eligible activities, operating assistance structures, and administrative requirements. A review of Mississippi's approach, compared to federal guidance and practices in peer states, reveals several key distinctions that influence how effectively funding can be used to support ICB services.

4.2.1 OPERATING ASSISTANCE STRUCTURE

Federal guidance allows Section 5311(f) funding to support net operating deficits for ICB services that provide meaningful rural connections. This approach enables transit providers to recover the full cost of service delivery, including administrative overhead and system-level expenses.

In contrast, Mississippi's State Management Plan emphasizes reimbursement for specific vehicle-related operating costs, such as fuel, tires, oil, and preventative maintenance. While these expenses are essential to service delivery, this structure may limit the ability of providers to recover broader operational costs, including dispatching, administrative support, and service management functions. As a result, the program may offer less flexibility compared to states that utilize net deficit funding models.

4.2.2 ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

FTA guidance permits a broad range of eligible activities under Section 5311(f), including operating assistance, capital investments, planning, marketing, and coordination efforts that enhance intercity connectivity. Mississippi's State Management Plan acknowledges several of these categories, particularly planning, marketing, and capital investment in facilities but places less emphasis on operating assistance as a primary tool for sustaining or expanding service. This distinction may result in a program structure that prioritizes infrastructure and planning activities over direct service delivery. In comparison, states such as Minnesota, Michigan, and Washington utilize Section 5311(f) funds to support a more comprehensive range of activities, including operating support and service expansion initiatives that directly address rural mobility needs.

4.2.3 COST REIMBURSEMENT APPROACH

The reimbursement structure in Mississippi appears to rely on individual cost categories rather than fully allocated cost models. This differs from approaches used in states such as North

Carolina, where reimbursement is based on a fully allocated cost-per-mile methodology. Fully allocated models allow ICB providers to account for all costs associated with service delivery, including administrative overhead, maintenance, dispatching, and support functions. By contrast, Mississippi's approach may limit the extent to which providers can recover the true cost of operating intercity feeder services, potentially impacting service sustainability and provider participation.

4.2.4 STATE-LEVEL PROGRAM CONDITIONS

Mississippi's State Management Plan outlines specific eligibility requirements for participation in Section 5311(f) program, including involvement in regional planning processes and demonstration that a significant portion of service occurs within the state. While these conditions help ensure alignment with statewide transportation goals, they may also introduce additional administrative requirements for providers. Federal guidance allows states considerable flexibility in administering the program, but variations in state-level requirements can influence which providers are able to participate and how services are structured. In some cases, these requirements may present barriers for private intercity carriers or smaller rural transit providers seeking access to funding.

4.2.5 REQUIREMENTS FOR OPERATING ASSISTANCE

To receive operating assistance under Mississippi's program, ICB operators must meet defined eligibility criteria and demonstrate that their services support rural connectivity. While this aligns with federal intent, other states have implemented more structured requirements tied to performance and connectivity outcomes. For example, North Carolina requires operators to demonstrate connections to the national ICB network and maintain coordinated ticketing and transfer systems, while Michigan emphasizes filling identified rural service gaps and providing meaningful multimodal connections. These approaches highlight opportunities for Mississippi to further refine its requirements to emphasize system integration and performance outcomes.

4.2.6 COMPARISON TO PEER STATE PRACTICES

A comparison with peer states (**Table 4**) illustrates that Mississippi's approach is more conservative in its use of Section 5311(f) funding. States such as Colorado and Washington utilize net deficit funding models to support ongoing operations, while others including Minnesota and Michigan leverage the program to support a broader mix of operating, capital, and coordination activities. These approaches allow for greater flexibility in addressing service gaps and sustaining intercity connections. Additionally, states that use fully allocated cost models provide a more comprehensive mechanism for reimbursing providers, which can improve program participation and service viability.

Intercity Bus Element

Table 4. Section 5311(f) Funding Peer Analysis

State	Policy / Program Approach	Fed Apportionment / State Supplement	Eligible Uses	Operating Assistance Structure	In-Kind Match	Takeaways
Mississippi	Grant-based Section 5311(f) program administered by MDOT, emphasizing rural connectivity, feeder services, and coordination between transit providers and intercity carriers	Sets aside 15% of Section 5311	• Coordination activities • Planning • Demonstration projects • Facilities • Joint-use facilities • Marketing • Purchased-service • User-side subsidies	Limited to: • Preventive maintenance • Repair • Fuel/oil • Tires Administrative and overhead costs are not eligible operating expenses	Uses federal in-kind match provisions	Program supports a variety of activities but provides less flexibility for operating assistance than peer states
Colorado	Integrates Section 5311(f) with statewide Bustang and Outrider programs administered through CDOT	Sets aside 15% of Section 5311; supplements service through the state-funded FASTER program	• Capital • Corridor development • Facilities • Feeder services • Interregional bus service • Planning • Operations	Supports: • Route operations • Service development • Corridor expansion	Uses federal in-kind match provisions	Strong integration between state-funded and federally funded intercity services creates a more cohesive statewide network
Washington	Uses the Travel Washington program to develop and operate coordinated statewide intercity corridors	Sets aside 15% of Section 5311; supplemented by state-funded Travel Washington investments	• Capital improvements • Corridor operations • Facilities • Interline ticketing • Marketing • Passenger information • Service development	Supports: • Driver costs • Fuel • Maintenance • Training • Passenger service functions • Route deficits • Operating expenses	Uses federal in-kind match provisions	One of the most flexible operating models, emphasizing statewide corridor development and passenger connectivity
Minnesota	Competitive ICB grant program focused on performance-based route investments	Sets aside 15% of Section 5311	• Capital improvements • Connectivity projects • Marketing • Planning • Route subsidies • Service development	Supports: • Route subsidies • Service development • Continuation of existing ICB services that are subject to performance reporting requirements	Uses federal in-kind match provisions	Strong emphasis on performance metrics, reporting, and competitive route funding
Michigan	Combines Section 5311(f) with the state-funded Comprehensive Transportation Fund to support statewide intercity mobility	Sets aside 15% of Section 5311 apportionment; supplemented by state-funded Comprehensive Transportation Fund	• Bus replacement • Coordination activities • Facilities • Multimodal connections • Planning • Route subsidies • Service development • Terminals	Supports: • Operating assistance • Route development • Service expansion • Multimodal connectivity	Uses federal in-kind match provisions	Provides one of the most comprehensive funding structures, leveraging state funds to support both operations and capital investments

4.2.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

The differences between the policy approach outlined in Mississippi's State Management Plan and broader federal guidance suggest several implications for program effectiveness. The emphasis on vehicle-specific operating costs and limited use of operating assistance may constrain the ability of providers to expand or sustain intercity services. Similarly, administrative requirements and reimbursement structures may limit participation by private carriers or smaller providers. While the current approach supports foundational elements such as planning and infrastructure, there may be opportunities to enhance program flexibility, improve coordination, and better align funding mechanisms with the full cost of service delivery.



Passenger purchasing Amtrak ticket at Union Station

5 Solutions

The solutions in this section were developed in response to the needs assessment, stakeholder input, and identified gaps in intercity and rural transit service across Mississippi. The recommendations are structured to address **four core challenges** observed throughout the study:

- Limited coordination across providers and agencies
- Inconsistent access to technical resources and support
- Constraints in funding allocation practices
- Limited visibility into service gaps and unmet demand

Each solution is intended to be scalable, forming a cohesive framework for improving statewide mobility.

5.1 COORDINATION ACROSS PROVIDERS AND AGENCIES

STATEWIDE MOBILITY MANAGEMENT COORDINATING COUNCIL

It is recommended that MDOT establish a Statewide Mobility Coordination Council to formalize coordination across agencies and stakeholders involved in transportation service delivery. The council should include representatives from Regional Mobility Management programs, human service agencies, public transit providers, regional planning organizations, advocacy groups, and rider populations.

The ICB study identified that coordination efforts vary significantly by region, resulting in inconsistent availability and duplicative efforts. Establishing formal coordination across the state would support more consistent planning and improve alignment between human service transportation, public transit systems and ICB operators. The Council would serve as a centralized body that:

- Facilitates regular communications and collaboration across regions and provider types,
- Promotes consistency in service delivery practices and access to funding programs
- Provides a forum for discussing statewide mobility challenges and solutions

Policy actions to take into consideration include defining roles, responsibilities, decision-making authority of the council, and integration of coordination requirements into funding programs where feasible.

5.2 TECHNICAL RESOURCES AND CAPACITY

MISSISSIPPI RTAP ENHANCEMENT

Develop a state-specific Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) website to serve as a centralized resource for training, technical assistance, and program guidance. While the national RTAP provides national-level resources, a Mississippi-focused platform would address state-specific processes, requirements, and needs. Stakeholder feedback indicated that smaller

providers and rural agencies often lack the staff capacity and technical expertise needed to effectively navigate funding programs and operational requirements. A centralized resource would reduce duplication of effort and improve consistency across regions. The website would be able to provide access to training materials, recorded workshops, and best practices. As well as tools and resources to support grant development and program implementation.

Policy actions to take into consideration include establishing ongoing funding and staffing support for RTAP administration. As well as require or incentivize participation in training programs tied to funding eligibility.

5.3 FUNDING ALLOCATION PRACTICES

FUNDING POLICY GUIDANCE

Develop and adopt a formal policy framework to guide the allocation of capital and operating funds for rural and intercity transit services. The framework should define clear criteria and priorities to ensure that funding decisions align with identified needs and statewide mobility goals. The ICB study found that existing funding allocation practices may not consistently reflect areas of highest need, particularly where operating support is limited. A formalized approach would improve transparency, accountability, and strategic investment. The policy framework would establish transparent criteria for funding allocation and define the appropriate balance between capital investments and operating support. As well as provide guidance on prioritizing system preservation versus expansion and address current limitations in funding structures, particularly related to operating assistance. Hopefully allowing for more efficient and equitable distribution of funding, leaving capacity for expanding services.

5.4 SERVICE VISIBILITY AND GAP IDENTIFICATION

GIS SERVICE COVERAGE MAP

Develop a GIS-based service mapping and analysis tool accessible to MDOT and Regional Mobility Managers to support identification of service gaps, unmet demand, and coordination opportunities. A key finding of the ICB study is the lack of a centralized, data-driven platform to visualize and assess service coverage statewide. Without this capability, identifying and addressing gaps remains reactive and fragmented. This analysis tool would be able to map existing transit services, intercity routes, and service boundaries. Incorporate demographic and trip demand data to identify high-need areas. With it could come improved understanding of statewide service coverage and data-driven decision-making for service planning and funding allocation.

Policy actions to take into consideration include establishing data sharing agreements between providers and MDOT and standardizing reporting requirements to ensure consistent data inputs.

Additional solutions can be found in **Appendix A**.

6 Strengthening Multimodal Connectivity

Effective intercity transportation depends not only on the availability of ICB service, but also on how well it connects with regional transit providers, local transit systems, passenger rail, and other transportation options. Improving these multimodal connections can expand access to ICB services, reduce transfer barriers, and improve the overall passenger experience. This section identifies strategies that strengthen coordination across transportation providers while recognizing that Section 5311(f) funding is intended to support the planning, operation, and coordination of ICB services. Passenger rail connections are discussed where they enhance multimodal travel opportunities but are not the primary focus of the program.

6.1 STRENGTHENING MULTIMODAL COORDINATION

Improving connectivity to Amtrak requires a shift from mode-specific planning to a multimodal coordination framework that explicitly incorporates passenger rail into statewide mobility planning efforts. Several identified solutions provide the framework to achieve this.

The **Statewide Mobility Management Coordinating Council** and **Cross-Departmental Mobility Working Group** create formal structures to align transit, human services, and other transportation providers around shared mobility goals, including rail access. These entities can help identify where connections to rail stations are not currently being made and develop coordinated service strategies.

Additional coordination focused solutions such as, **Intercity—Better Connections Between Systems and Regions**, and **Regional Coordinated Transit Service**, support the development of a system where rail stations function as key nodes within a broader transportation network rather than isolated endpoints.

6.2 IMPROVING FIRST/LAST MILE CONNECTIONS

A primary barrier to rail usage is limited access to stations, particularly in rural areas. Several solutions directly address this issue by expanding the effective service area of Amtrak. Key applicable strategies include:

- **Mobility Hubs and Park-and-Rides**, which create centralized locations where rail, transit, and other modes intersect, improving transfer convenience and accessibility
- **Expanded Demand Response Systems**, which can provide flexible connections to rail stations in low-density areas
- **Integrated Mobility Partnership Program**, leveraging partnerships with community organizations, healthcare providers, and employers to facilitate access to transportation services
- **Bike/Ped Infrastructure Programs and Complete Streets Initiatives**, which improve safe, non-motorized access to stations

Together, these strategies extend the reach of Amtrak beyond station locations and make rail more accessible to a wider population.

6.3 ENHANCING INFORMATION, TRIP PLANNING, AND USER EXPERIENCE

The gap assessment identified that fragmented information and lack of integrated trip planning tools limit the usability of the existing network. Several technology-focused solutions improve visibility and ease of use for multimodal trips involving rail. Key solutions include:

- **Statewide Real-Time Trip Planning and Integrated Applications:** Providing a unified platform for trip planning across bus and rail services
- **Mobility as a Service (MaaS):** Enabling users to plan, book, and pay for multimodal trips—including bus and rail—within a single interface
- **Universal Payment App:** Reducing barriers associated with multiple fare systems
- **GIS Service Coverage Map (Top 10 Solution):** Supporting planning-level identification of gaps and informing service adjustments to improve rail connectivity

These tools improve the overall passenger experience by making multimodal travel more intuitive, reliable, and accessible.

6.4 ALIGNING FUNDING AND PLANNING TO IMPROVE MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY

Several identified solutions support aligning funding, planning, and project development with improved access to rail. Key strategies include:

- **Capital Planning Pipeline and Project Shortlists,** which ensure that rail-supportive projects are developed and positioned for funding
- **Centralized Grant Writing and Pre-Application Readiness Screening,** improving the competitiveness of funding applications for multimodal and rail-related projects
- **Coordinate STIP Development Across Roadway, Active Transportation, and Transit Investments,** ensuring that projects supporting rail access are prioritized in statewide planning
- **Transit-focused Statewide Transportation Improvement Fund,** which can provide funding for services and infrastructure that improve access to rail

These approaches ensure that investments are not made in isolation, but instead contribute to a more connected, multimodal system that supports Amtrak access.

6.5 ROLE OF DATA AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The implementation of a GIS-based Service Coverage Map, combined with broader data and performance management solutions, provides a foundation for continuously improving connectivity to Amtrak services.

Additional supporting solutions include:

- **Transit Data Management Systems and Travel Behavior Analysis tools** to better understand trip patterns and unmet demand.
- **Mobility Management Performance Measures** to track improvements in coordination and connectivity

These tools allow MDOT and partners to monitor access to rail stations, identify gaps in feeder service, and evaluate the effectiveness of implemented solutions over time.



Passenger station in Hattiesburg

7 Recommendations

The ICB Study confirms that Mississippi's existing intercity transportation network provides an important foundation for statewide mobility; however, significant service gaps, coordination challenges, and funding limitations continue to restrict connectivity for many rural and transit-dependent populations. The findings from the needs assessment, connectivity analysis, stakeholder outreach, peer review, and service integration assessment demonstrate that strategic investments and policy modifications are needed to strengthen the statewide intercity transportation network and improve long-distance mobility access across Mississippi.

This section outlines key recommendations and implementation strategies intended to:

- Address the unmet needs identified throughout the study
- Improve statewide intercity and multimodal connectivity
- Better align Mississippi's policies with federal guidance and peer state practices
- Strengthen coordination between local, regional, and intercity providers
- Position MDOT to more effectively utilize Section 5311(f) funding to support rural mobility

The recommendations are organized into five categories:

1. **Policy and Program Governance**
2. **Network Development**
3. **Coordination and Multimodal Integration**
4. **Planning, Data, and Performance Monitoring**
5. **Funding and Implementation Priorities**

7.1 POLICY AND PROGRAM GOVERNANCE

7.1.1 UPDATE THE STATE MANAGEMENT PLAN TO EXPAND OPERATING ASSISTANCE FLEXIBILITY

One of the most significant findings of this study is that Mississippi's current Section 5311(f) implementation framework emphasizes reimbursement for vehicle-specific expenses rather than broader net operating deficits. While this approach supports basic operational costs, it may limit the ability of providers to sustain or expand intercity connectivity services.

It is recommended that MDOT evaluate updates to the State Management Plan to allow for a more flexible reimbursement structure consistent with federal guidance and peer-state practices. Potential policy modifications include:

- Expanding eligibility for fully allocated operating costs
- Allowing reimbursement for dispatching, scheduling, administration, and coordination activities
- Supporting feeder services that connect rural communities to the national intercity network
- Providing clearer guidance on the use of in-kind match opportunities
- Establishing performance-based operating assistance tied to connectivity outcomes

These modifications would allow Section 5311(f) funds to be utilized more strategically to address identified rural mobility gaps and improve long-term service sustainability.

7.1.2 INTEGRATE INTERCITY COORDINATION INTO PLANNING

The study identified inconsistent coordination between local transit systems and intercity providers. To improve statewide integration, MDOT should consider incorporating intercity coordination requirements into:

- Transit Development Plans (TDPs)
- Regional transit plans
- Mobility management programs
- Long-range transportation planning activities

This could include requiring providers to document:

- Existing intercity connections
- Transfer opportunities
- Service coordination efforts
- First- and last-mile barriers
- Opportunities for future integration with ICB and passenger rail services

Including these elements in local and regional planning efforts would help ensure that intercity connectivity is considered as part of ongoing transportation system development.

7.1.3 ESTABLISH FORMAL COORDINATION STRUCTURES

The study identified fragmented coordination efforts across regions and providers. Establishing a Statewide Mobility Management Coordinating Council would provide a formal mechanism for:

- Coordination between transit and intercity providers
- Data sharing and statewide planning discussions
- Identification of multimodal investment priorities
- Coordination of schedules and transfer opportunities
- Development of statewide mobility strategies

This recommendation directly supports the study's findings regarding inconsistent service coordination and limited integration between transportation systems.

7.2 NETWORK DEVELOPMENT AND CONNECTIVITY

The connectivity assessment and demographic analysis identified several regions where expanded intercity or feeder services may provide significant mobility benefits. Many of these areas contain concentrations of transit-dependent populations but have limited access to intercity transportation services.

Based on the needs and gaps analysis, the following priority regions may benefit from expanded service coordination, feeder services, or future intercity service development.

Table 5. Priority Regions for Network Development and Connectivity Improvements

Region	Rationale	Improvement Opportunities
East-Central Mississippi	Counties including Neshoba, Leake, Winston, and portions of east-central Mississippi demonstrate limited proximity to intercity services while also containing populations with elevated mobility needs.	- Regional feeder service connections to Meridian or Jackson - Coordinated demand-response service aligned with intercity schedules - Expanded mobility management partnerships
Delta Region	Although Delta Bus Lines and Amtrak currently serve portions of the Delta, connectivity gaps remain between local systems and regional destinations.	- Expanded coordination between Delta Bus Lines and intercity providers - Improved station access and transfer infrastructure - Additional feeder services to Amtrak stations and major intercity stops
Gulf Coast	Improved multimodal coordination along the Gulf Coast could strengthen tourism, workforce mobility, and regional economic connectivity.	Integration between: - Amtrak Gulf Coast services - CTA services - ICB carriers - Ferry connections - Airport access
Rural Southern	Large portions of southern Mississippi remain outside practical access to intercity transportation services.	Expanded demand-response coordination, mobility hubs, and feeder services could improve access to regional destinations and healthcare services.

7.3 COORDINATION AND MULTIMODAL INTEGRATION

7.3.1 DEVELOP INTERMODAL TRANSFER AND MOBILITY HUB STRATEGIES

The integration assessment identified that only a limited number of locations currently demonstrate strong multimodal integration. Most intercity stops lack:

- Coordinated transfer infrastructure
- Shared amenities
- Wayfinding

- Passenger information systems
- Coordinated schedules

MDOT should prioritize investments that improve intermodal functionality at key transfer locations, particularly:

- Jackson Union Station
- Meridian
- Hattiesburg
- Gulfport
- Greenwood
- Yazoo City

Potential improvements include:

- Shared waiting areas
- Coordinated passenger information systems
- Improved pedestrian access
- ADA accessibility enhancements
- Designated pickup/drop-off infrastructure for feeder services

7.3.2 IMPROVE FIRST- AND LAST-MILE CONNECTIVITY

A recurring finding throughout the study was that many residents remain unable to access intercity services despite living within reasonable geographic proximity to stations or corridors. Recommended improvements include:

- Expanded demand-response coordination
- Mobility hubs and park-and-rides
- Partnerships with human service agencies
- Complete Streets and pedestrian improvements
- Coordinated local feeder routes

These improvements would significantly expand the effective service area of existing intercity and rail services.

7.4 PLANNING TOOLS, DATA, AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

7.4.1 EXPAND GIS-BASED SERVICE PLANNING AND MONITORING

The GIS analysis conducted as part of this study demonstrated the importance of statewide service visibility and gap identification. MDOT should continue development of GIS-based planning tools for improving long-term planning and prioritizing investments where mobility needs are greatest. Specific recommended GIS capabilities include:

- Mapping statewide service coverage
- Identifying underserved populations

- Monitoring multimodal connectivity
- Evaluating proximity to intercity services
- Supporting data-driven funding decisions

7.4.2 DEVELOP STATEWIDE PERFORMANCE MEASURES AND CONDUCT ONGOING MONITORING

The study identified limited consistency in how intercity connectivity performance is measured statewide. Recommended performance measures include:

- Population access to intercity transportation
- Connectivity between local and intercity systems
- Transfer reliability
- Rural coverage
- Ridership and utilization trends
- Accessibility and equity measures

A supplemental element is conduction performance monitoring. Such ongoing monitoring should be tied to future funding priorities and implementation activities.

7.5 FUNDING STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PRIORITIES

7.5.1 PRIORITIZE PROJECTS THAT IMPROVE CONNECTIVITY OUTCOMES

Future funding decisions should prioritize projects that:

- Improve rural access to the national intercity network
- Strengthen multimodal integration
- Expand first- and last-mile connectivity
- Improve coordination between providers
- Address identified geographic service gaps

Projects that demonstrate measurable improvements in statewide mobility and connectivity should receive priority consideration for funding assistance.

7.5.2 EXPAND USE OF FEDERAL FUNDING FLEXIBILITIES

The study identified opportunities to better align Mississippi's program structure with available federal flexibilities. Recommended actions include:

- Increased utilization of in-kind match opportunities
- Greater use of operating assistance for feeder services
- Improved coordination with discretionary grant programs
- Development of multimodal funding partnerships

These strategies can help maximize the impact of available federal and state funding resources.

7.5.3 PHASED IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Implementation of these recommendations should occur through a phased approach focused on:

- Near-term policy and coordination improvements
- Mid-term service integration and planning initiatives
- Long-term infrastructure and service expansion investments

This phased strategy allows MDOT and partner agencies to build upon existing services while progressively improving statewide connectivity and mobility outcomes.

8 Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive assessment of Mississippi's intercity transportation network. It is grounded in an evaluation framework that considered user needs, provider needs, system readiness, and opportunities for innovation. Drawing on demographic analysis, stakeholder input, peer benchmarking, and system-level evaluation, the study confirms that while Mississippi has a foundational network of ICB and passenger rail services, its effectiveness is constrained by gaps in coordination, limited rural access, and constraints in funding and program delivery.

The analysis highlights that transit-dependent populations—including individuals experiencing poverty, older adults, persons with disabilities, and households without reliable vehicle access—are often located in areas with limited proximity to intercity services. At the same time, peer comparisons demonstrate that Mississippi underperforms across key service metrics, indicating that existing services may not fully meet demand or provide sufficient connectivity. These findings underscore the need for a more strategic and integrated approach to intercity transportation by better aligns service delivery, funding practices, and planning efforts with demonstrated mobility needs.

The solutions and recommendations presented in this study establish a coordinated framework for advancing Mississippi's intercity transportation network. Key strategies include modernizing policy and funding structures to improve flexibility, expanding service in high-need regions through feeder and demand-response connections, strengthening multimodal integration through improved transfer facilities and mobility hubs, and enhancing data-driven planning and performance monitoring capabilities. These elements are designed to work collectively to improve service availability, system efficiency, coordination, and the overall user experience.

Implementation of these strategies will require sustained collaboration among MDOT, regional transit providers, intercity carriers, and community partners. Through a phased and targeted approach, MDOT can more effectively leverage Section 5311(f) resources to address identified service gaps and improve statewide connectivity. Ultimately, this study provides an actionable roadmap for developing a more integrated, accessible, and resilient intercity transportation system that expands mobility, strengthens connections to regional and national networks, and better supports the long-term economic and social needs of communities across Mississippi.



APPENDIX A

Appendix A. Complimentary Solutions Supporting Intercity Bus Connectivity

The following complementary solutions support and enhance Mississippi's intercity transportation network by improving regional coordination, expanding access to services, strengthening operational efficiency, and supporting long-term multimodal planning efforts. While these recommendations were developed as part of the broader statewide mobility framework, they provide direct benefits to ICB and passenger rail connectivity by addressing many of the gaps identified throughout this study, including limited first- and last-mile access, inconsistent coordination between providers, fragmented customer information, and operational inefficiencies.

These strategies are intended to complement the primary ICB recommendations identified in Section 5 and provide additional opportunities for improving statewide mobility and connectivity across Mississippi.

REGIONAL SERVICE INTEGRATION AND NETWORK EXPANSION

ICB services benefit from stronger integration with regional and local transit systems. Many rural and small urban areas rely on local demand-response or deviated fixed-route systems as the primary means of transportation, yet these services are often not coordinated with intercity schedules or transfer locations. Improving integration between local and intercity transportation services can significantly expand the effective reach of the statewide network without requiring substantial investment in new standalone intercity routes.

REGIONAL COORDINATED TRANSIT SERVICES

The development of Regional Coordinated Transit Services would support improved alignment between local providers and intercity carriers by encouraging coordinated schedules, shared transfer points, and integrated service planning. These efforts would improve continuity between systems and create more seamless travel experiences for users transferring between local transit and intercity services.

Potential benefits include:

- Improved connections between rural communities and intercity transportation hubs
- Reduced transfer times and improved reliability between systems
- Better coordination of transportation resources across regions
- Enhanced access to employment, healthcare, and educational destinations

EXPANDED DEMAND RESPONSE COORDINATION

Expanded demand-response services coordinated around intercity routes and stations can improve first- and last-mile access, particularly in low-density rural areas where fixed-route transit may not be feasible. Coordinated demand-response services can function as feeder systems that connect residents to ICB and rail services.

This approach is particularly beneficial in areas:

- Outside of existing fixed-route service coverage
- With high concentrations of older adults, individuals with disabilities, or zero-vehicle households
- Where intercity services exist but local access remains limited

Together, these approaches extend the reach of intercity transportation services while improving accessibility and regional mobility.

CUSTOMER INFORMATION, OUTREACH, AND TRAVEL AWARENESS

Clear, centralized, and accessible customer information is critical for intercity travelers navigating multiple systems and providers. The study identified that fragmented information, inconsistent service visibility, and limited awareness of available transportation options are significant barriers to intercity service utilization.

STATEWIDE MOBILITY RESOURCE LIBRARY

The development of a Statewide Mobility Resource Library or centralized mobility platform would improve visibility of transportation services across Mississippi by consolidating information related to:

- ICB and rail services
- Local and regional transit providers
- Eligibility requirements for transportation programs
- Available mobility resources and assistance programs
- Transfer opportunities and service connections

A centralized platform would simplify trip planning and improve understanding of available transportation options, particularly for first-time users and underserved populations.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND TRANSIT AWARENESS TOOLS

Complementary outreach and awareness initiatives can further strengthen intercity service utilization by increasing public understanding of available transportation options and improving communication with rural and underserved communities.

Potential outreach efforts may include:

- Targeted mobility awareness campaigns
- Travel training programs
- Community engagement initiatives

- Multilingual customer information materials
- Regional coordination with healthcare providers, educational institutions, and workforce organizations
- These efforts improve system visibility, strengthen user confidence, and support increased utilization of intercity transportation services

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY AND SHARED SERVICES

ICB operations can be strengthened through shared service models and coordinated administrative functions that reduce duplication and improve operational efficiency across providers and regions.

REGIONAL TRANSIT OPERATIONS CENTERS

Regional Transit Operations Centers provide opportunities to consolidate functions such as:

- Dispatching
- Scheduling
- Customer service
- Driver coordination
- Communications and service monitoring

Shared operational models can reduce administrative burdens on smaller providers while improving consistency and coordination across the statewide network.

Potential benefits include:

- Improved coordination between local and intercity providers
- Reduced operational redundancy
- More efficient allocation of staff and resources
- Enhanced service reliability and responsiveness
- Improved regional coordination during disruptions or emergencies

These strategies support a more integrated and efficient statewide mobility system while strengthening intercity connectivity.

DATA, PERFORMANCE MONITORING, AND LONG-TERM SYSTEM PLANNING

Data-driven planning and performance monitoring are essential for sustaining and improving intercity transportation services. The study identified a need for more consistent statewide data collection, service monitoring, and system performance evaluation to support strategic investment decisions and identify unmet mobility needs.

TRAVEL BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS AND TRANSIT DATA MANAGEMENT

Tools such as Travel Behavior Analysis Software and Transit Data Management Systems can help agencies:

- Better understand statewide travel patterns
- Identify unmet demand and service gaps
- Evaluate ridership trends

- Optimize routes and schedules
- Improve service reliability and coordination

These tools provide a stronger analytical foundation for long-term mobility planning and intercity service development.

GIS-BASED PLANNING AND SERVICE ANALYSIS

GIS-based service coverage analysis supports improved understanding of:

- Existing intercity and local transit coverage
- Demographic concentrations of transit-dependent populations
- Gaps in first- and last-mile connectivity
- Opportunities for multimodal coordination

These tools can support more proactive and data-driven decision-making related to service planning and funding allocation.

FORMAL FUNDING ALLOCATION FRAMEWORK

A formal Funding Allocation Framework can further strengthen statewide mobility efforts by establishing clearer guidance and priorities for capital and operating investments. The framework would improve:

- Transparency in funding decisions
- Accountability and consistency in investment priorities
- Alignment between funding decisions and statewide mobility goals
- Strategic prioritization of service preservation versus expansion

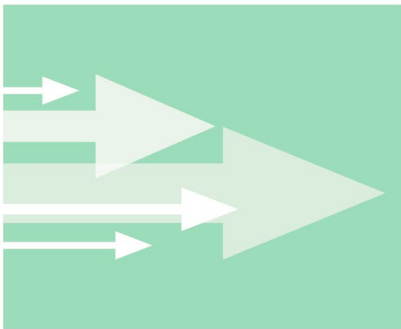
The framework could also provide greater flexibility in addressing operating assistance limitations and support more efficient allocation of resources across the statewide network.

RELATIONSHIP TO ICB AND RAIL CONNECTIVITY

Collectively, these complementary solutions support the broader goals of the ICB Study by improving coordination, expanding accessibility, strengthening multimodal integration, and enhancing the overall user experience. While many of these strategies were developed within the broader statewide mobility planning process, they provide direct benefits to intercity transportation services by:

- Improving access to ICB and rail stations
- Strengthening coordination between providers
- Expanding first- and last-mile connectivity
- Enhancing statewide trip planning and customer information
- Supporting more efficient and sustainable service delivery
- Providing a stronger framework for long-term multimodal transportation planning

These complementary strategies reinforce the primary recommendations identified in this study and help establish a more connected, coordinated, and resilient statewide transportation network.



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