

2009

# Lanier County Public Transportation Assessment



Southern Georgia Regional  
Commission

11/15/2009

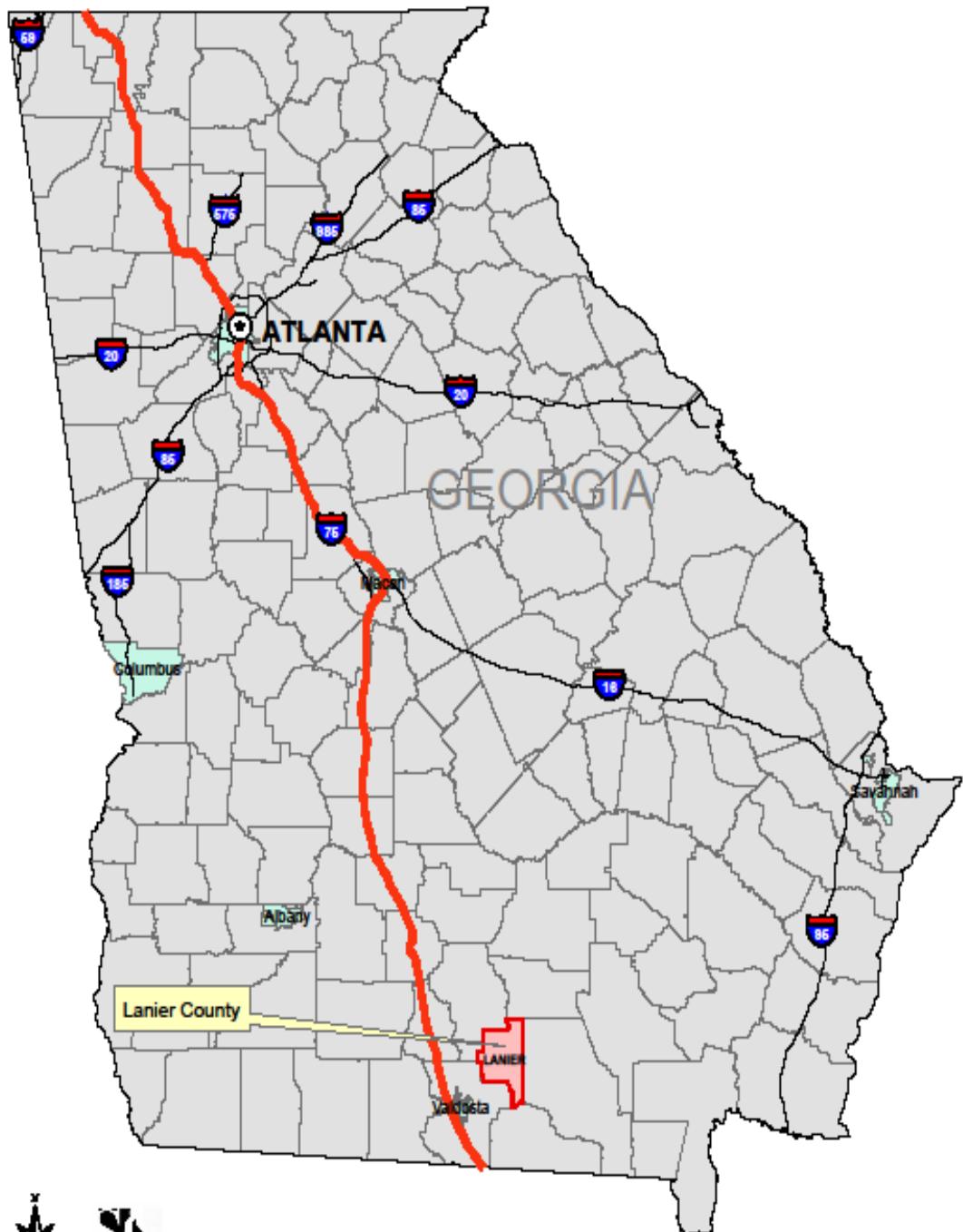
## **Executive Summary**

The primary purpose of the Lanier County Transit Development Plan is to present viable transit alternatives and recommendations on how best to achieve the transportation goals and objectives identified by the community. According to the Community Transportation Association of America (CTAA), more than one third of America's population lives outside of urbanized areas. Nearly 40 percent of the country's transit dependent population – primarily senior citizens, persons with disabilities and low-income individuals – reside in rural areas. Yet in many rural communities, public and community transportation are extremely limited or absent. The demographics, mobility needs and resources of rural areas are much different than those of urban areas.

This assessment is the strategic guide for public transportation in Lanier County over the next five years. The assessment includes an evaluation of existing services, a review of demographic and travel behavior characteristics of the service area, the development of transit related goals and objectives, a demand estimation and needs assessment, proposed transit alternatives, enhancements and recommendations, and the preparation of a 5-year Capital and Operating Plan.

Public transportation is a vital component in most rural communities, with Lanier County being no different. The availability of public transportation provides options to senior citizens, those without vehicles, and those who are physically or economically disadvantaged. The ability to provide a transportation alternative for those who live in a rural area is as important as for those who live in a high density metropolitan setting. The availability of reliable public transportation improves the quality of life in rural communities across the state by providing safe, efficient and economical service. It also serves as a vital component necessary for a healthy economy.

## Lanier County Location Map



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# LANIER COUNTY LOCATION MAP

BERRIEN COUNTY

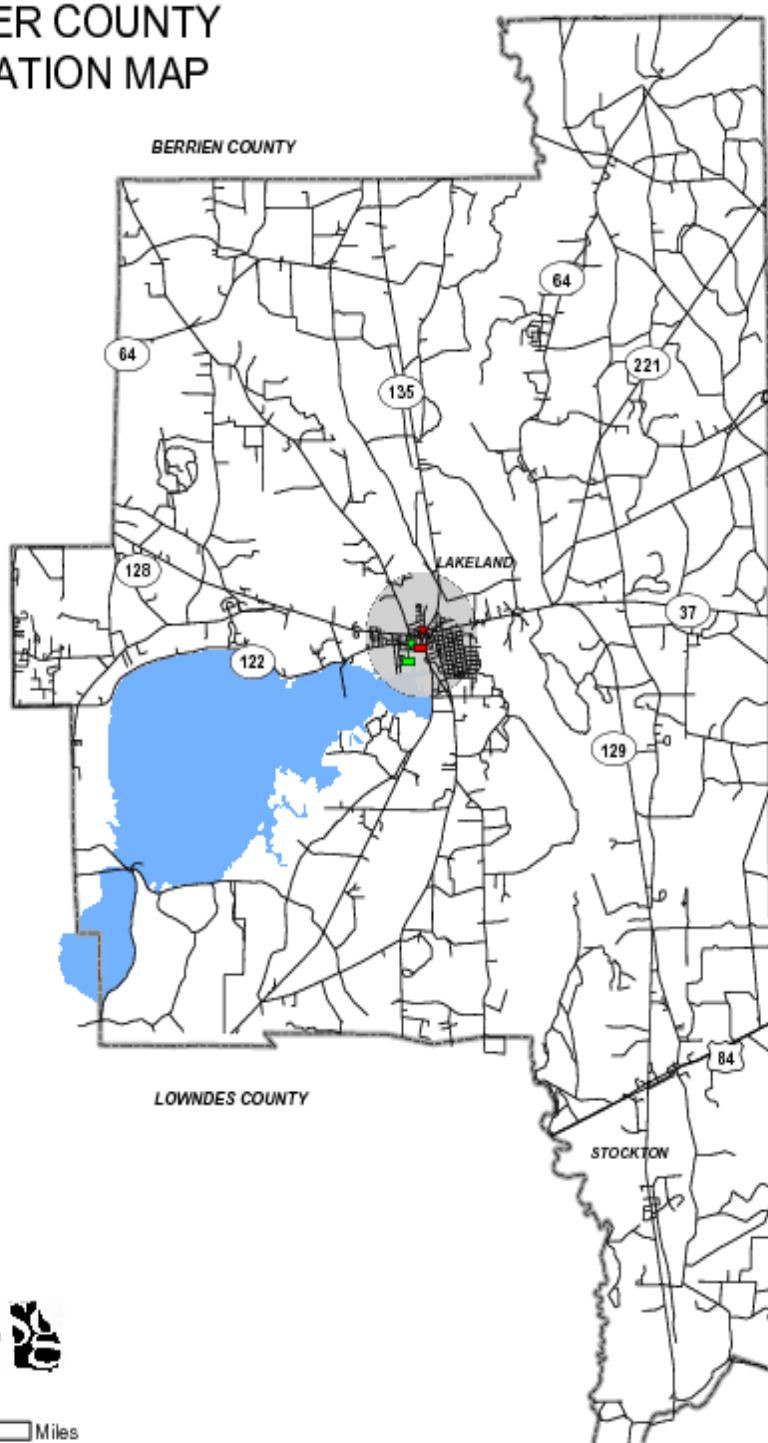
ATKINSON COUNTY

CLINCH COUNTY

LOWNDES COUNTY

STOCKTON

ECHOES COUNTY



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## II. Overview of Section 5311

The Section 5311 Rural Transportation Program offers rural communities an opportunity to provide transit services to their citizens which improve access to medical centers, jobs, and other activity centers. The program is administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to provide assistance for rural public transportation by allocating funds to the states on a formula basis. These funds can be used for capital assistance, operating assistance, planning, and program administration. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) is the designated recipient of these funds for the State of Georgia and is responsible for administering the federal funding to local sub-recipients throughout the State. GDOT may also provide a limited amount of state capital funding to rural transit systems that receive Section 5311 funds. Because the Section 5311 program provides assistance for the provision of public transportation services, transportation services that use this funding must be open to the general public, and advertised as such.

The State of Georgia has set several statewide goals for the Section 5311 program. These goals are the primary objectives produced by GDOT in order to guide rural transit systems and operators to running the most effective, efficient, safe, and accessible services possible. Each goal serves to cover a certain aspect of the transit system, from purpose to execution. The goals of the 5311 Program are as follows:

- **Basic mobility to serve all Georgians-** Public transportation services that serve all Georgians, especially those with the most critical needs for access and mobility while providing service to all populations without any trip purpose restrictions or eligibility requirements.
- **Program implementation-** Partnering with the FTA to administer Section 5311 funds while managing a program that provides timely management direction, guidance, and reimbursement to allow local entities to provide quality service.
- **Efficiency and effectiveness-** Maximizing ridership while recognizing significant differences in communities that will affect usage, including utilizing the appropriate type of service and the appropriate vehicles to best serve the population.
- **Safe, secure, and quality service-** Operating equipment that is safe and regularly inspected for quality and overall condition while running services operated by staff that meet the highest qualifications and that are trained proficiently in all necessary skills.
- **Accessible service-** Providing service that is accessible to all users, including those with disabilities, and using operators trained to proficiency in passenger assistance, lift use, restraints, and mobility devices.
- **Coordinated provision of transportation in rural areas-** Coordinated services at the State level through interagency coordination, and coordinated services at the local and regional levels where coordination will result in the most efficient, quality service that meets rider's needs.

Any rural transit system in Lanier County should meet and/or exceed these goals in order to provide the best services possible. In addition to the goals GDOT has also established minimum criteria that must be met by rural transit programs that are listed in the Rural Public Transit Service Policy. These include, but are not limited to:

- Services should not be duplicative of other transportation services available
- Vehicles should be utilized to reach a goal of 500 one-way passenger trips per vehicle per month **or** be operated 120 hours per month **or** should be operated at least 1000 vehicle revenue miles per month (the miles a transit vehicle travel while in revenue service)
- Vehicles should be available for public transportation services on a daily basis
- Vehicle trips for charter, contract, or subscription service should fully recover allocated costs
- The system should aim to recover a minimum of 20 percent of its public transportation costs from fare box revenues generated through regular public transportation operations, with a minimum of 10 percent recovery required from fare boxes.

## **Eligible Project Expenses**

Section 5311 funds can be used for capital and operating costs, which are the two types of costs incurred for developing and continuing a rural transit system.

### **Capital**

Capital expenses under Section 5311 may include: vehicles, communication equipment, lifts, equipment installation costs, computer equipment and software, office equipment, and fare boxes among other items. **Local funding for capital acquisition must be at minimum 10 percent of the total costs**, but could be greater depending upon the availability of State and Federal funds.

### **Operating**

Local funding for operations is required to cover the non-federal costs of the net deficit. Under the GDOT Section 5311 program **10 percent of the public transportation operating costs must be provided from fare income or other local dollars**. Federal funds may be applied to system operational deficits subject to the availability of funds. **Federal participation is allowed up to 50 percent of the eligible net operating deficit** (gross eligible operating expenses less operating revenues); **the remaining 50 percent (or more) must be provided from local funds**. This means that the federal share can be up to 50 percent of the remainder of the total operating costs minus the total revenues brought in by the service. Operating revenues include farebox and agency contract revenues. Georgia policy requires that at least 10 percent of the operating costs are recovered by farebox revenues.

Income from coordinated human services transportation provided under contract, called Purchase of Service (POS) funding, may be used to either reduce the net project cost or to provide local match for Section 5311 operating assistance at the discretion of the local program.

Operational costs may include, but are not limited to, administrative costs (which may not exceed 20 percent of total operating expenses), driver, mechanic, and dispatcher costs (including licenses, vehicle insurance, drug and alcohol testing, and uniforms), repair costs, and fuel.

*Because portions of Lanier County are within the Valdosta Urbanized Area, the Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) must review any proposed project that would use Section 5311 funds. The project must be included in the Regional Long Range Transportation Plan and be included in the MPO's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) as well as the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).*

### **GDOT Local Public Transportation System Goals**

According to GDOT's *Administrative Guide and Grant Application for Rural Transportation Programs*, the goal of the public transportation system is to "develop and maintain an effective and efficient network of transportation services available to the public. The system should be safe, clean, reliable, and responsive to travel needs of all citizens. It should also be supportive of local economic activity by facilitating access to local markets, industries and commerce.<sup>i</sup>"

These transportation services operate as a business with operating costs, payrolls, and revenues. Because they operate as public systems, they also have to be publicly accountable. Although there are several sources for outside funding, these services should be funded to the "maximum extent possible by the generation of revenues through the farebox." The minimum required return for services through farebox revenues is ten percent of the total operating cost for a system, which, if not made by farebox revenues, must be covered by the local government.

### III. Geographic and Demographic Analysis

#### Lanier County Overview

Lanier Co. is a small rural county located in South Central Georgia. The 157<sup>th</sup> county to be created in the State of Georgia, Lanier Co. was born by a constitutional amendment approved on Nov. 2, 1920. Lakeland, the county seat, is Lanier County's only incorporated municipality. The county has a total area of 200 sq. mi., 187 of which is land and the remaining 13 sq. mi. is covered by water. The county seat of Lakeland is approx. 200 miles southeast of Atlanta, GA and 15 miles northeast of Valdosta, GA. The 2008 population estimate listed by the US Census Bureau was 8,277, which is up 14% from the 2000 population of 7,241. Of the 7,241 people who lived in Lanier County in 2000, 2,730, or 37.7% lived in the City of Lakeland.

#### Population Overview

Table 1 below shows population trends for Lanier Co. and the State of Georgia since 1980. It can be seen from this chart that between 1980 and 1990, Lanier Co. experienced a decrease in population by 2.2%, or 123 people, while the City of Lakeland experienced a 6.8% decrease. At the same time, the State of Georgia saw its population as a whole grow by 1,020,650 people, which was an increase of 15.8%. During the following decade Lanier County and the City of Lakeland's population both began to increase, and by the year 2000 the county had experienced growth of 23.6% and the city followed the same trend with an increase of 9.6%. The State of Georgia's population also grew by a large amount, increasing its total population by 20.9%. Over the course of the 2000's, the City of Lakeland, Lanier Co. and the State of Georgia continued to experience population increase, with the City of Lakeland seeing a small increase of 1.5%, Lanier Co. growing by another 9.9% and the State of Georgia by an additional 14.5%. The population increases may be accounted for by an increase in residents from Moody AFB and from the growth in the Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Area.

Table 1: Population Growth				
	1980	1990	2000	2010
<b>City of Lakeland</b>	2,647	2,467	2,730	2,772
<b>Lanier County</b>	5,654	5,531	7,241	8,035
<b>State of Georgia</b>	5,457,566	6,478,216	8,186,453	9,550,897

Source: DCA DataViews for Georgia

Table 2 show projected population growth for the City of Lakeland, Lanier Co., and the State of Georgia. For the City of Lakeland, growth is expected to continue at a slow pace, with less than one percent growth in population every five years between 2010 and 2030. Lanier County will also see continued growth, but to a higher extent than the City of Lakeland. Between 2010 and 2030 Lanier Co. is predicted to see an overall increase in its population by 1,587 people, or 16.5%. Average growth per five years for the county is expected to be around 4.5%. The increase in population for the City of Lakeland is low compared to the county, which is

more in line with overall growth rates throughout the state. For the same time period, Georgia is expected to see its population increase by 22.2%.

<b>Table 2: Future Growth Projections</b>					
	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>
<b>City of Lakeland</b>	2,772	2,792	2,813	2,834	2,855
<b>Lanier County</b>	8,035	8,431	8,828	9,225	9,622
<b>State of Georgia</b>	9,550,897	10,233,118	10,915,340	11,597,562	12,279,784

Source: DCA DataViews for Georgia

The current population density for Lanier Co. is 38.7 residents per sq. mi. This is a low density for both the region and the state as a whole. As of the 2000 census, Georgia had a population density of 141.4 people per sq. mi. As the population of Lanier Co. continues to grow, the population density should increase to around 51.7 people per sq. mi. by 2030. It should be noted that although the City of Lakeland has a very high population density, the city itself has a small land area of only 3.13 sq. mi. However, this also shows that in Lanier Co., 37.7% of the population currently lives on 1.7% of the land. Although there is no set population density required for transit to be successful in a community, generally low population densities are not conducive to high ridership. Low population densities translate into a smaller tax base, meaning that fewer funds are available for subsidizing transit<sup>ii</sup>

<b>Table 3: Population Density</b>			
	<b>Population</b>	<b>Land Area</b>	<b>Density</b>
<b>City of Lakeland</b>	2,730	3.13	872.2
<b>Lanier County</b>	7,241	187	38.7
<b>State of Georgia</b>	8,186,453	57,906.14	141.37

Source: DCA DataViews for GA

## Demographics

When discussing the necessity of a transit system in a rural community it is important to determine the needs of the community based on demographic characteristics such as age and economic background. These factors can predict need and usage characteristics based on known usage and ridership statistics from other rural areas. It is also important to determine these characteristics for each community within the county to determine target areas with the most need for public transit opportunities.

### *Age Characteristics*

Table 4 below shows age characteristics for the different age groups living within Lanier Co. and the City of Lakeland. A majority of the population in both the county and the city are between the ages of 25 and 44 years old. Also, in both the city and the county the population under 18 is the second largest group. The population of elderly residents, or those over the age

of 65, in both the city and county is just above ten percent, with 10.6% of the county's residents and 13.6% of the city's being over the age of 65.

<b>Table 4: Lanier County and Lakeland Age Distribution</b>				
	<b>Lanier County</b>		<b>City of Lakeland</b>	
	<b>Pop.</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Pop.</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Under 18 years</b>	1,983	27.4	726	26.6
<b>18-24 years</b>	797	11	322	11.8
<b>25-44 years</b>	2,208	30.5	789	28.9
<b>45-64 years</b>	1,482	20.5	521	19.1
<b>65 years and older</b>	771	10.6	372	13.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,241</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,730</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: 2000 US Census

Table 5 below shows population projections for Lanier Co. through the year 2030. According to the Georgia Dept. of Community Affairs (DCA), Lanier Co. is expected to experience fairly slow growth in most age categories, with the 35-44 age group expected to grow by 74.1% between 2000 and 2030, while the 14-17 age group is expected to decline significantly, dropping from 335 in 2000 to 142 by the year 2030.

<b>Table 5: Lanier County Population Projections by Age</b>								
<b>Age</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>	<b>% Change</b>
<b>0-4</b>	522	525	528	531	534	537	540	3.3
<b>5-13</b>	1097	1141	1184	1228	1271	1315	1358	23.8
<b>14-17</b>	364	327	290	253	216	179	142	-61
<b>18-20</b>	335	347	359	370	382	394	406	21.2
<b>21-24</b>	462	480	497	515	532	550	567	22.7
<b>25-34</b>	1030	1096	1163	1229	1295	1361	1428	38.6
<b>35-44</b>	1178	1324	1469	1615	1760	1906	2051	74.1
<b>45-54</b>	853	924	995	1066	1137	1208	1279	49.9
<b>55-64</b>	629	680	730	781	831	882	932	48.2
<b>65 +</b>	771	796	821	845	870	895	920	19.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>7241</b>	<b>7640</b>	<b>8036</b>	<b>8433</b>	<b>8828</b>	<b>9227</b>	<b>9623</b>	<b>32.9</b>

Source: DCA Dataviews for Georgia

## Economic Characteristics

Table 6 below shows unemployment characteristics for each age group in Lanier Co. as of the 2000 census. The "labor force" is the sum of all employed and unemployed adults. Some citizens may not be listed as in the labor force if they are retired, a student, or institutionalized. The unemployment rate is calculated by dividing the number of unemployed workers by the total number of workers in the labor force and multiplying the result by 100. The highest levels of unemployment were found in the lower age groups. In the

later age groups, 55+, many workers are retiring and exiting the labor force, leaving a smaller percentage of the total population seeking employment.

Table 6: Lanier County Employment (2009)				
Month	In Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
Jan.	4152	3782	370	8.9%
Feb.	4200	3773	427	10.2%
March	4169	3796	373	8.9%
April	4166	3825	341	8.2%
May	4081	3772	309	7.6%
June	4072	3765	307	7.5%
July	4098	3758	340	8.3%
Aug.	4088	3731	357	8.7%
Sept.	4026	3692	334	8.3%
Oct.	4079	3680	399	9.8%
Nov.	4041	3684	357	8.8%
Dec.	unav.	unav.	unav.	unav.

Source: GA DOL 2009

To gain perspective on how Lanier County ranks relative to other counties in the area, Table 7 shows annual averages for the 5 counties that border Lanier Co., as well as the State of Georgia. As of 2008, Lanier Co. had a 5.8% unemployment rate, which was low in comparison to Atkinson, Clinch, and Berrien counties, but slightly above the average for the region as a whole.

Table 7: Labor Force Activity 2008				
County	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Rate
Lanier	4,141	3,900	241	5.80%
Atkinson	3,453	3,169	284	8.20%
Berrien	8,732	8,129	603	6.90%
Clinch	2,798	2,598	200	7.10%
Echols	2,275	2,181	94	4.10%
Lowndes	54,559	51,617	2,942	5.70%
<b>Lanier Area</b>	<b>75,958</b>	<b>71,549</b>	<b>4,364</b>	<b>5.70%</b>
Georgia	4,847,650	4,545,675	301,975	6.20%

Source: GA Dept. of Labor Area Labor Profile

As of the 2000 US Census, household income distributions for Lanier Co. show that a majority of the households in Lanier Co., 51.3%, earn less than \$30,000 per year. About 23% of households earned between \$30,000 and \$50,000, almost the same amount earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and less than 3% of households in the county brought in more than \$100,000. The most shocking figure here is that almost 17% of households in Lanier Co. brought in under \$10,000 as of the year 2000, a number which is 7% higher than the average for the State of Georgia<sup>iii</sup>. The median income for the county was \$29,171<sup>iv</sup>, which was \$13,262 lower than the state median income of \$42,433.

<b>Table 9: Lanier Co. Income Distr.</b>		
	<b>Households</b>	<b>%</b>
\$0 to \$29,999	1337	51.3
\$30,000 to \$49,999	613	23.5
\$50,000 to \$99,000	587	22.5
\$100,000 or more	72	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2609</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: 2000 US Census

Per capita income is a measure of the total income in an area divided by the total population of the same area. This measure is generally used to determine relative wealth of an area when compared to other similar areas. For Lanier Co. and the City of Lakeland, per capita income was relatively low in comparison with the Georgia average in both 1990 and 2000. Although the three regions grew in relative unity in regard to per capita income over the decade between 1990 and 2000, the state level remained well above both the City of Lakeland and that of Lanier Co.

<b>Table 9: Per Capita Income (\$)</b>			
	Per Capita Income		
	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2010</b>
City of Lakeland	8,225	13,156	17,469
Lanier County	8,319	13,690	18,504
State of Georgia	13,631	21,154	unav.

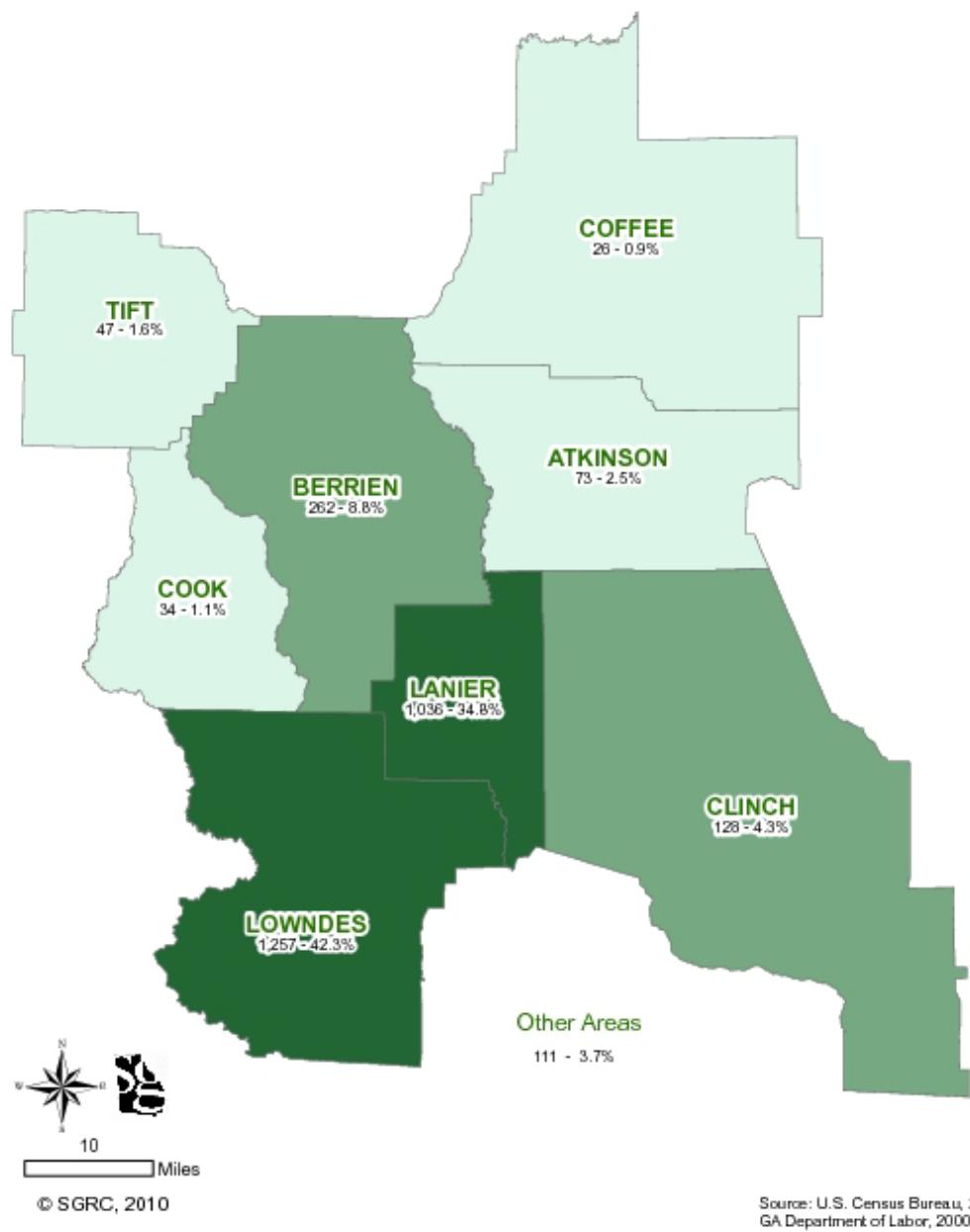
Source: DCA Dataviews for Georgia

## Commuting Characteristics

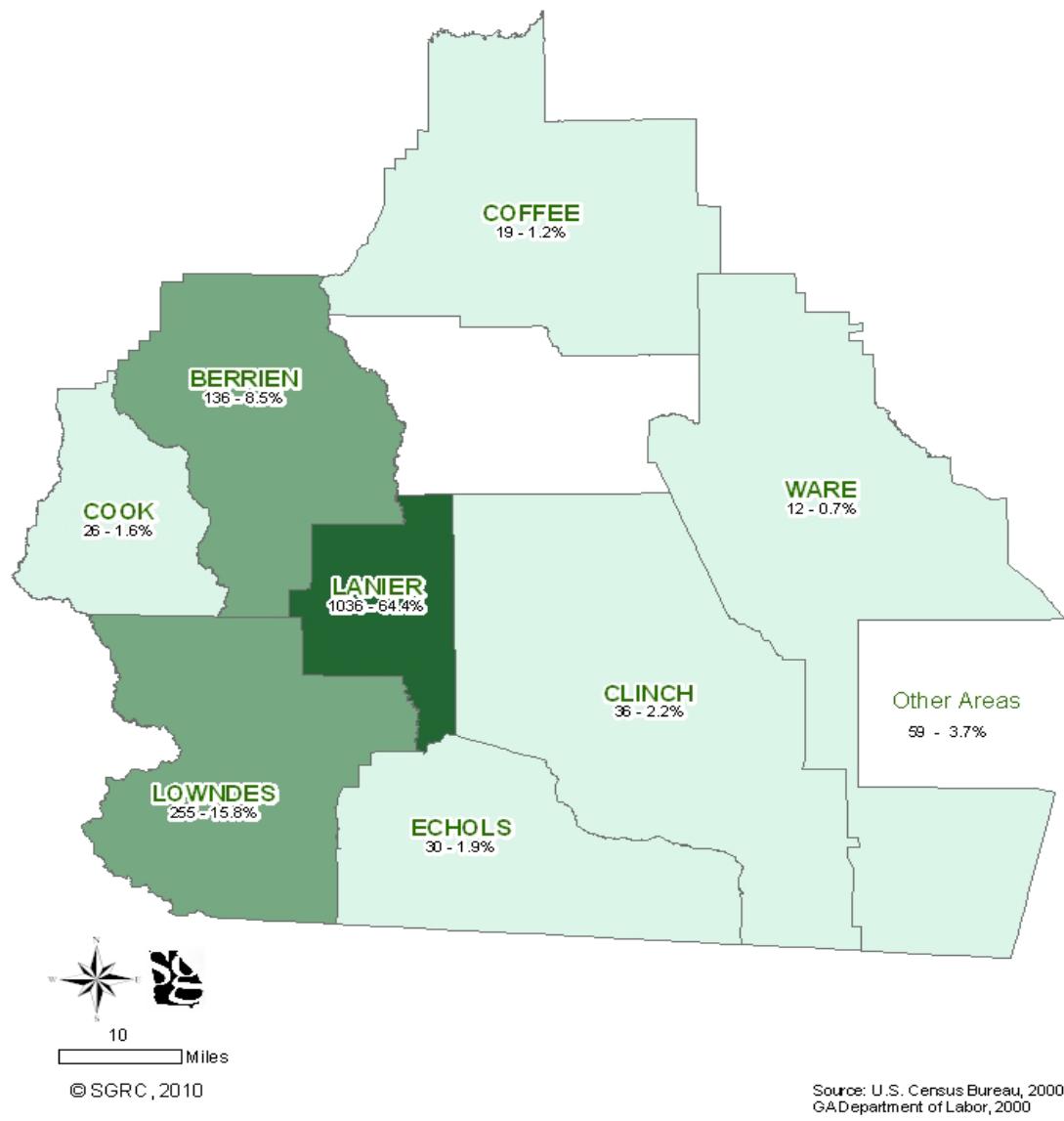
Over 42% of the employed residents of Lanier Co. are employed in Lowndes Co. The second largest area of employment for Lanier Co. residents is Lanier Co. After Lanier, Berrien Co., Clinch Co., and Atkinson Co. are the largest employers of Lanier Co. residents. This shows that over 57% of employed Lanier Co. resident work outside of Lanier Co.

Although a majority of the employed residents of Lanier Co. work in other counties, over 64% of people who work in Lanier Co. are Lanier Co. residents. The highest percentage of workers who commute from outside of Lanier Co., 34.8%, originate in Lowndes Co. Berrien Co. has the second highest number of commuters to Lanier Co. with about 9%, and the remaining counties fall below 2%.

## Employment Commuting Patterns from Lanier County



## Employment Commuting Patterns to Lanier County



<b>Table 12: Means of Transportation to Work</b>		
	Total	%
<b>Car, Truck, or Van- Drove Alone</b>	2,321	77.8
<b>Car, Truck, or Van- Carpoled</b>	484	16.2
<b>Public Transportation or Taxi</b>	0	0
<b>Bicycle</b>	3	0.1
<b>Walked</b>	71	2.4
<b>Other Means</b>	51	1.7
<b>Worked at Home</b>	55	1.8

Source: 2000 US Census

A large majority of workers over the age of 16 drive to work alone as shown in Table 12 above. The second largest group is those who carpool, and the third, but much smaller group, is the walkers.

<b>Table 13: Number of Vehicles Available by Housing Unit</b>		
	#	%
None	254	9.8
1	891	34.3
2	930	35.9
3 or more	518	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>2593</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: 2000 US Census

Table 13 above shows the number of vehicles per household in Lanier Co. Almost 10% of the total occupied housing units in Lanier County are listed as having no car. The majority of households in Lanier Co. own more than one car. The households with no car or one car per several residents are the most likely to house transit dependent residents, or those without a form of transportation.

## **IV. Evaluation of Existing Services**

Currently, there is not a public transit system in Lanier Co. The county is interested in learning more about beginning a system in order to serve the needs of its transit dependent population and community as a whole.

The county does own a van for transport of seniors to and from the senior center in Lakeland for various daily activities. This van operates daily and is used solely for senior transportation, most of which is either to the center or home from the center, however some trips are taken to other areas as means of recreation. The senior transport van generally makes ten or twelve trips per day; however, the number varies depending on the activities of the day and needs of the patrons. The senior center believes that this service is adequate to serve the needs of the seniors in Lanier County.

## V. Transit Demand Estimation and Needs Assessment

In order to determine the necessity or feasibility of a public transportation program in a community it is important to determine the overall need for those services as well as potential demand for the transportation service. Transit need is different from transit demand in that transit need exists whether a service is provided or not. Transit demand, on the other hand, is defined as “the number of passenger-trips that will be taken when a given level of passenger transportation service is available.”<sup>v</sup> The need for public transportation services can be determined by exploring a number of factors, such as the transit dependent population of a community, including the elderly, persons with disability, and those in the community without access to transportation. Also, other transportation services provided, or the lack thereof, can be a sign of need.

Table 14: Transit Dependent Population				
Population	Lanier Co.	%	State Avg. %	Natl. Avg. %
Over 5 yrs. w/ a Disability	1508	23.8	19.7	19.3
Persons w/ mobility limitations	568	7.8	unav.	unav.
Under 18 years	1983	27.4	26.5	25.7
Over 65 years	698	9.6	9.6	12.4
Below Poverty Line	1284	17.7	13	12.4

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Lanier Co. has relatively high population of persons with disabilities. As of the 2000 census, Lanier County was 4.1% over the Georgia average of persons with disabilities and 4.5% over the national average. The population with disabilities is important because this population generally has a high reliance on outside transportation and often do not have personal transportation available. A further indicator of transportation need is the number of residents with mobility limitations. This was a term used in the 1990 census to determine the number of residents in an area with difficulty being mobile outside of their residence. As of the 2000 census, this measure was replaced with “go-outside home disabilities”, which only calculated these disabilities for residents over 16 years. The number of people with mobility limitations for Lanier County was calculated by adding the number of people with “go-outside home disabilities” with the number of residents less than 16 years with physical disabilities. As seen in Table 14, the number of persons with mobility limitations in Lanier County is 568, or 7.8% of the total population.

A second measure of transportation necessity is the elderly population within a community. In Lanier County, there are 698 residents over the age of 65. This accounts for 9.6% of the total population, which is the same as the state average and 2.8% below the national average. Another population that is considered “transit dependent” by the FTA is those under the age of 18. For this age group, the county is above both state and national averages by a small margin.

The third group considered to be “transit dependent” is the portion of the community that lives below the poverty line. Poverty is a measure formed by the Census Bureau that “uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to detect who is poor.”<sup>vi</sup> For Lanier County, 17.7% of residents fall below this level. This is a relatively high

percentage of the population as compared to the State of Georgia, which is at 13%, and the country as a whole, which averages 12.4% of residents below the poverty line. This is a good measure of transit dependency because those families that fall below this level may not be able to afford necessary transportation for access to jobs and other uses.

What these numbers show is that in relation to its overall population, Lanier County has a high population of transit dependent residents. Currently, the transportation needs of these residents are either being provided by outside sources (such as friends, co-workers, church groups, etc.), are not provided for at all, or, in the case of a few seniors, are covered by the transportation services provided by the senior center.

After several interviews with county officials, it was determined that, in general, most residents of the City of Lakeland and Lanier county in need of transportation are able to meet their transportation requirements through outside transportation sources, such as family or friends. The City of Lakeland is small in size and it is believed that most residents without motor vehicle transportation within the city are able to get around by walking or riding a bicycle. Most of the services that would be utilized within the city and county would be for trips to larger neighboring communities, such as the City of Valdosta, where there are many more medical facilities, shopping opportunities, and other locations that Lanier County residents may need to visit.

No outside groups or individuals have approached the county recently about the necessity for public transportation, and job access in the county is not noticed as a major challenge. However, there are obviously residents who do have difficulty finding transportation for whatever need and ensuring that all residents have access to necessary transportation is a goal of the county.

There are several factors that weigh against a public transportation system in Lanier County. The county's relatively small population and low population density could mean low demand and higher cost per rider for the county. Another negative factor is that many people in Lanier County commute to neighboring counties for work. This negatively impacts the potential number of riders for the county because although the system could be utilized to transport these residents to jobs in other areas, the vans would be occupied for longer periods of time and unavailable to other residents within Lanier County who may need the services.

## **VI. Service Options**

When assessing the feasibility of beginning a Rural Transit service, it is necessary to explore the different options for doing so. There are two different types of service that are most appropriate for rural transportation programs: demand-response or route deviation service, and contract and subscription service.

According to the *Georgia Administrative Guide for Rural Public Transportation Programs* (January 2007- June 2008 funding cycle), the following types of service are appropriate for rural public transportation programs:

**Demand-response or route deviation service-** Demand-response is a type of service where individual passengers can request door-to-door or curb-to-curb transportation from a specific location to another specific location at a certain time. Route deviation services operate along a public roadway on a fixed-route, but may deviate from the route occasionally to take a passenger to a destination or pick one up from an origin, after which they return to the regular route.

**Contract and subscription service-** Subscription service is a type of demand-response service in which routes and schedules are pre-arranged to meet the travel needs of riders who sign up for the service in advance. Often these riders are clients of human service agencies, who contract with the transportation operator to provide the service on behalf of the agency. This type of service may be provided by a Section 5311 program only to the extent that it does not violate FTA Charter Bus restrictions.

\*Fixed-route services are generally not appropriate for rural communities because of the lack of sufficient population densities. These services operate along fixed routes on a fixed schedule and serve established stops. Fixed-route services require a separate complimentary paratransit service under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In most rural and small communities, route deviation service is the appropriate and most cost-effective way to implement fixed schedule services.

### **Local Operation vs. Third-Party Operators**

Local city and county governments are the eligible sub-recipients for the Section 5311 Program for the operations of public transportation services. The local government may choose to operate the service as a function of the local government, or by a contract with a Third Party Operator (TPO). If a TPO is used, the public agency continues to have full contract responsibility and fiscal accountability and is responsible for all financial matters and for compliance with Federal and State program requirements. The agency is also responsible for the conduct and submission of an annual audit.

As previously mentioned, one option for beginning a rural transit system is for the public agency receiving Section 5311 funds to operate the system in-house. This means that that agency would be required to take on the role of executing everything necessary to operate the system; including maintaining vehicles, hiring, training, and maintaining staff, scheduling

all rides and routing, and executing all other necessary functions of the system. There are only a few counties in South Georgia that operate their transit systems effectively in-house, including Tift County and Pierce County.

In the Southern Georgia region, almost all rural transit services are operated by a TPO. This means that a third party operator is contracted to run the day-to-day operations of the transit system within a community. In communities that operate on this system, the local government agency applies for transit funding through the Section 5311 program, provides vehicle insurance and monitors the transit systems' operations within the county. The TPO takes care of most everything else, depending on the contract worked out between the recipient of funds and the TPO.

## **VII. Five-Year Administrative, Capital, and Operating Budget**

Any transportation system that would begin in Lanier County would need local funding. The job of elected officials and County employees is to determine whether the services provided to the citizens would outweigh the costs associated with providing them. To determine feasibility of beginning a new public transportation system, the overall need must be weighed against the costs that will be incurred by the County and its residents.

Tables 23-27 below illustrate proposed public transportation funding for a Section 5311 program. For the first year, 2011, the estimated total cost is \$102,540.00 (excluding estimated revenues), which means the county would receive \$46,143.00 from the federal government and match this. Projected estimates were created by using figures from a county with a program of comparable size and by increasing the proposed budget by 5% annually. These numbers are for a system that would utilize two vans and two full-time drivers.

Table 28 illustrates the proposed capital budget. The local government is required to provide 5% of the total capital budget, federal funds provide 80% of the budget, and state funds provide 15% of the budget. Although the State of Georgia has historically covered a certain portion of funding for Section 5311 programs, this is not a guaranteed funding amount. The amount of funding the State provides could vary depending on the amount of funds available. If the State is unable to provide extra funding to support the system, any excess costs would have to be covered by the local government.

In addition to start up funds, the county can also receive funds to assist in the training of public transit employees. The Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) funds are provided by the state and can be used by all entities eligible to apply for 5310 and 5311 funds. RTAP funds are used for driver training, grants management, vehicle maintenance, individual training needs reimbursement, registration fees, seminars, etc.

**Table 23: 5-year Administrative and Operating Budget**

Grantee: Lanier County	Reporting Period (in Fiscal Years; July-June)				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Administrative Budget</b>					
Director Salary	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Supervisor Salary	\$15,540.00	\$16,317.00	\$17,133.00	\$17,990.00	\$18,890.00
Bookkeeper Salary	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Secretary Salary	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Training/Travel	\$400.00	\$420.00	\$441.00	\$463.00	\$486.00
Marketing Expenses	\$200.00	\$210.00	\$221.00	\$232.00	\$244.00
Telephone Expenses	\$1,000.00	\$1,050.00	\$1,103.00	\$1,158.00	\$1,216.00
Office Supplies	\$500.00	\$525.00	\$551.00	\$579.00	\$608.00
Rental Expenses	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Standard Overhead	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Computer Software	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Audit	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$1,103.00	\$1,158.00	\$1,216.00
Other	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>Subtotal Administrative</b>	<b>\$18,640.00</b>	<b>\$19,572.00</b>	<b>\$20,552.00</b>	<b>\$21,580.00</b>	<b>\$22,660.00</b>
 <b>Operating Budget</b>					
Driver Salaries (2 Full Time)	\$42,000.00	\$44,100.00	\$46,303.00	\$48,618.00	\$51,049.00
Dispatcher Salary (2.5 days per week)	\$6,300.00	\$6,615.00	\$6,946.00	\$7,293.00	\$7,658.00
Mechanic Salary	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Fuel*	\$25,000.00	\$26,250.00	\$27,563.00	\$28,941.00	\$30,388.00
Maintenance and Repair	\$3,000.00	\$3,150.00	\$3,308.00	\$3,473.00	\$3,647.00
Vehicle Insurance	\$5,000.00	\$5,250.00	\$5,513.00	\$5,789.00	\$6,078.00
Drug/Alcohol Testing	\$500.00	\$525.00	\$551.00	\$579.00	\$608.00
License	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Uniforms	\$525.00	\$551.00	\$579.00	\$608.00	\$638.00
Communications (Cell Phones)	\$2,100.00	\$2,205.00	\$2,315.00	\$2,431.00	\$2,553.00
Other	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>Subtotal Operations</b>	<b>\$84,425.00</b>	<b>\$88,646.00</b>	<b>\$93,078.00</b>	<b>\$97,732.00</b>	<b>\$102,619.00</b>
 <b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$102,540</b>	<b>\$108,218</b>	<b>\$113,630.00</b>	<b>\$119,312</b>	<b>\$125,279</b>
<b>Purchase of Service Revenue</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>Farebox Revenue (10% of operating total)</b>	<b>\$10,254.00</b>	<b>\$10,821.00</b>	<b>\$11,363.00</b>	<b>\$11,931.00</b>	<b>\$12,528.00</b>
<b>Net Expenses (Less Farebox Revenue)</b>	<b>\$92,286.00</b>	<b>\$97,397.00</b>	<b>\$102,267.00</b>	<b>\$107,381.00</b>	<b>\$112,751.00</b>
<b>Purchase of Service Local Funds</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>Excess POS (Above Local Match)</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>Section 5311 Federal Share</b>	<b>\$46,143.00</b>	<b>\$48,698.00</b>	<b>\$51,133.50</b>	<b>\$53,690.50</b>	<b>\$56,375.50</b>
 <b>Local Share (Includes Any Excess POS)</b>	<b>\$46,143.00</b>	<b>\$48,698.00</b>	<b>\$51,133.50</b>	<b>\$53,690.50</b>	<b>\$56,375.50</b>

\* for years 2012 on - 3.44 gal per Energy Information Admin. Short-Term Energy Outlook  
2009 X2 vans X8 hours @ 2 gal hr X260 days

## **Capital Expenses**

“Eligible capital expenses include the acquisition, construction, and improvement pf public transfer facilities and equipment needed for a safe, efficient, and coordinated public transportation system as well as certain other expenses classified as capital in section 5302(a)(1).”<sup>vii</sup> Although these costs do not recur annually, they will recur on a regular basis, with buses and vans requiring replacement every 100,000 miles, or every 4 years.

<b>Table 28: 2011 Prices for Capital Equipment</b>		
<b>Capital Budget</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Standard Van		\$26,500
Conversion Van		\$41,000
Conversion Van w/ Lift		\$42,800
Shuttle Van	1	\$42,800
Shuttle Van w/ Lift	1	\$46,000
Shuttle Bus		\$46,500
Shuttle Bus w/ Lift		\$52,500
Mobile Radio	1	\$1,900
Base Station	1	\$6,800
Computer, Printer & Software	1	\$3,800
Computer & Dispatching Software	1	\$21,200
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$92,600</b>
<b>Federal Share (80%)</b>		<b>\$74,080</b>
<b>State Share (15%)**</b>		<b>\$13,890</b>
<b>Local Share (5%)</b>		<b>\$4,630</b>

\*Prices quoted from GDOT Capital Equipment for RTIP & STIP correspondence  
\*\*Contingent upon State funding availability, if funding is not available this amount will fall on the local Govt.

## VII. Goals, Objectives and Recommendations

### Goals and Objectives

**Goal 1:** Provide safe, efficient, reliable and affordable transportation to the citizens of Lanier County and the City of Lakeland to enable access to medical, educational, social, and economic activities, especially for those who have no alternative mode of transportation.

**Objective 1:** Provide the most cost-effective service possible for both riders and the county by exploring alternative funding options such as Purchase of Service contracts.

**Objective 2:** Work with communities of similar size and population that already operate services to develop a transportation system that is based on experience and effectiveness.

**Goal 2:** Ensure public support for public transportation by involving citizens in planning efforts and decision-making processes.

**Objective 1:** Hold regular public meetings to discuss transportation systems and growth and development steps.

**Goal 3:** Coordinate transportation planning activities between local governments, regional planning organizations, and State and Federal authorities.

**Objective 1:** Encourage participation of all local governments to allow for the most effective planning strategies for both residents of the City of Lakeland and Lanier County. Encourage participation from unincorporated communities within the county as well.

**Objective 2:** Involve the State of Georgia and the Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization in planning and coordinating activities.

**Objective 3:** Develop a sustainable transportation system that meets the needs of the community and comprehensive planning goals.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that a rural public transit service not be implemented at this time. In the future as Lanier County continues to grow and become more urbanized the need for a rural public transit will continue to grow. In the interim, Lanier County and the City of Lakeland should continue to discuss the transportation needs of the community. Lanier County should continue to work with the Valdosta-Lowndes Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Southern Georgia Regional Commission to build awareness of transit services and to help identify populations in need of transportation services.

As populations continue to grow around urban areas and have less financial resources to commit to individual county operated transit systems, the opportunity to cooperate across jurisdictional boundaries is an opportunity to share financial and capital resources in smaller communities. This alternative should be explored by Lanier County at a future date.

If and when the county decides that operating a public transportation service within Lanier County is feasible, it is recommended that the county operates the service through a third-party operator. This is the most cost-effective and efficient way of getting a service off of the ground. Third-party operators bring necessary experience from operating other services and they have become familiar with getting services started in new areas whose local governments most likely have little to no experience operating public such services. Third-party operators will also be able to provide assistance with the completion and execution of funding requests and grant applications. Third-party operators offer communities the opportunity to operate these services without needing to hire new employees or deal with vehicle maintenance or the logistics of trip scheduling and route planning.

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<sup>i</sup> GDOT Administrative Guide and Grant Application for Rural Public Transportation Programs, Title 49 U.S.C. Section 5311

<sup>ii</sup> “An Evaluation of Regionalizing Rural Transit Systems in North Dakota” <http://www.mountain-plains.org/pubs/pdf/MPC97-77.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=04000US13&-qr\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U\\_QTP32&-ds\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U&-redoLog=false](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US13&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U_QTP32&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U&-redoLog=false)

<sup>iv</sup> [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=05000US13173&-qr\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U\\_QTP32&-ds\\_name=DEC\\_2000\\_SF3\\_U&-redoLog=false](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=05000US13173&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U_QTP32&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF3_U&-redoLog=false)

<sup>v</sup> Transportation Research Board, TCRP Report 3, [http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp\\_rpt\\_03-a.pdf](http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_03-a.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Census Bureau Glossary, [http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/epss/glossary\\_p.html](http://factfinder.census.gov/home/en/epss/glossary_p.html)

<sup>vii</sup> FTA C. 9040.1F “NONURBANIZED AREA FORMULA PROGRAM GUIDANCE AND GRANT APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS” [http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/FTA\\_C\\_9040.1F.pdf](http://www.fta.dot.gov/documents/FTA_C_9040.1F.pdf)