

# Ben Hill County Transit Development Plan



*Prepared by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission*



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# Table of Contents

I	Introduction .....	4
II	Socioeconomic Characteristics .....	4
	Population .....	4
	Income .....	4
	Modes of Transportation .....	5
	Commuting Patterns .....	6
	Age.....	6
	Livability Impact.....	6
III	Goals and Objectives for Transit.....	7
IV	Evaluation of Existing Services.....	8
V	Transit Demand Estimation/Needs Assessment.....	10
	Title VI and LEP Analysis.....	10
	ADA Analysis .....	12
	Transit Need / Demand Analysis.....	12
V	Recommendations.....	16

# List of Tables

Table 1. Population Demographics.....	4
Table 2. Economic Characteristics .....	5
Table 3. Residents 60 Years and Over & Vehicle Availability.....	6
Table 4. Ben Hill County Population Breakdown .....	10
Table 5. Residents who Speak Spanish .....	11
Table 6. Residents with Disabilities by Age.....	12

# List of Figures

Figure 1. Map of Ben Hill County .....	4
Figure 2. Workers by Mode of Transportation .....	5
Figure 3. Ben Hill County Transit Annual Total Trips.....	8
Figure 4. Annual Average Trips per Mile.....	9
Figure 5. Annual Trips per Vehicle .....	9
Figure 6. Annual Miles per Vehicle.....	9
Figure 7. Average Hours per Vehicle.....	9
Figure 8. Average Paid by Public Riders per Trip .....	10
Figure 9. Average POS Cost per Trip .....	10
Figure 10. SGRC Transit Brochure .....	11
Figure 11. Service Area Characteristics Input Table.....	13
Figure 12. Rural Transit Need/Demand Estimation .....	13
Figure 13. Input Data from Peer Transit Systems .....	13
Figure 14. 5-Year Operating Budget Estimates .....	13

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*This publication does not constitute a standard, specification or regulation. This document is prepared in cooperation with the Georgia Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration.*

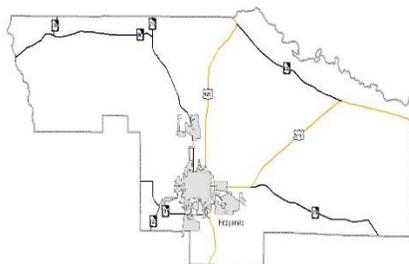
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## Introduction

The Ben Hill County Transit Development Plan (TDP) was developed by the Southern Georgia Regional Commission to be used as an informational guidebook. The Ben Hill County TDP can be used as a source for Ben Hill County's elected officials and staff when discussing and answering basic questions about rural public transit in Ben Hill County. This TDP is also shared with the Georgia Department of Transportation to keep them current on rural public transit characteristics in the community. Ben Hill County, GDOT, and the third-party operator (TPO) should use this report to guide the rural public transit system and to enhance service delivery for the residents of the community. This TDP will analyze socioeconomic factors and ridership data, as well as other areas that typically affect public transit. This TDP will also compare and contrast the characteristics of Ben Hill County and three of its peer counties: Bacon, Cook, and Turner, all of which have rural public transit systems.

The TDP covers an analysis of demographic characteristics of the area, transit related goals and objectives, a demand estimation and needs assessment, and a 5-year Capital and Operating Plan. This information will give officials a better understanding of the opportunities that the Ben Hill County public transit system has created or will eventually create. When comparing demographic information as well as other Census information in this report, the US Census Bureau 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimates will be utilized to show the current statistics for each county involved unless otherwise noted.

Figure 1. Map of Ben Hill County



## Socioeconomic Characteristics

Many community factors contribute to the planning process or incorporation of public transit services into a community. Socioeconomic and demographic data supplies an overall view of the community and is broken down to understand the potential need for public transportation services. Based on the data provided, other pertinent information and professional opinions of those in the transportation field, an informed decision can be made concerning the future need and potential use of public transit in Ben Hill County.

### Population

Ben Hill County, Georgia is a largely rural county in Southern Georgia. The 2010 Census lists the population for Ben Hill County to be about 17,634 persons. However, the 2015 ACS estimated population for Ben Hill County is 17,477. Below is a table representing the population demographics for Ben Hill County and its peer counties.

Table 1. Population Demographics

	<b>Ben Hill</b>	<b>Bacon</b>	<b>Cook</b>	<b>Turner</b>
<b>Population</b>	17,477	11,222	17,033	8,338
<b>Median Age</b>	38.6	37.9	37.1	35.1
<b>Population Over 60</b>	17%	22%	23%	19%
<b>White</b>	56.5%	65.8%	77.9%	64.3%
<b>Black</b>	35.7%	29.6%	15.0%	29.7%
<b>American Native</b>	0.2%	0.5%	0.0%	0.1%
<b>Asian</b>	0.6%	1.1%	1.2%	1.4%
<b>Hispanic or Latino</b>	10.9%	3.6%	7.8%	10.8%

### Income

Income is one aspect of demographic information that plays a major role in the

need and/or use of public transit services. Whether the community is urban or rural, income is often used as an indication of the need for public transit in a community. When comparing Ben Hill County to Bacon, Cook, and Turner, it is noted that Ben Hill County has the lowest median income at \$29,994, which is nearly \$1,000-\$7,000 less than that of its' peer counties.

Table 2. Economic Characteristics

	<i>Ben Hill</i>	<i>Bacon</i>	<i>Cook</i>	<i>Turner</i>
<b>Median household income</b>	\$29,994	\$37,162	\$35,683	\$31,806
<b>Persons below the poverty level (%)</b>	35.3%	17.9%	11.4%	25.4%

Poverty status is often an indication that a number of residents are in need of public transportation services and are more likely to have a greater reliance on public transit services. In Ben Hill County, an estimated 6,169 individuals are below the poverty level. This means that about 35.3% of the county's population is in poverty under the federal definition. Even though there is a high number of citizens below the poverty level, they are still finding ways to pay for and maintain transportation. Although there is no direct connection between transit ridership and access to vehicles in Ben Hill County, it may be inferred that if the public transit system is affordable and accessible to all residents it may offset some of the costs of transportation for individuals at or below the federal poverty level.

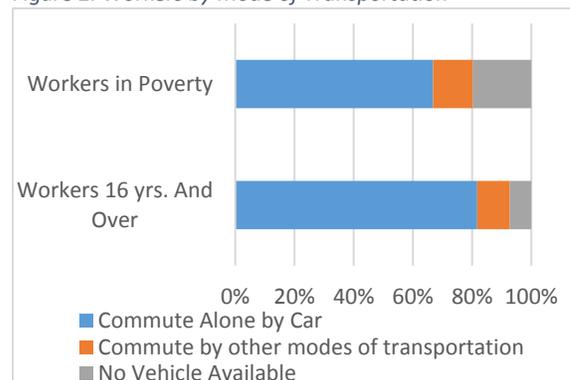
### Modes of Transportation

While many families do not suffer the expense burden that vehicular transportation can have; there are some families that do. This mode of transportation has a significant impact on those families that are living in poverty. Of the approximately 6,011 workers 16 years of age and over in Ben Hill County commuting

to work, approximately 3,960 persons have 1 or 2 vehicles available for use. Approximately 1,600 workers 16 years over have 3 vehicles available for use and 445 workers have no vehicle available for use. To further breakdown this number as it relates to other demographic information, of the approximately 1,542 workers below the poverty line in Ben Hill County, 228 persons do not have a vehicle available to use. This indicates that while transportation is likely a higher portion of a households outlays, many are continuing to find a way to pay for a car, gasoline, and maintenance costs, or asking friends for transportation to work, appointments, and other trips which require a vehicle. From asking friends and family for transportation to just walking to one's destination, citizens are using various modes of transportation to get where they need to go. In Ben Hill County, 83.7% of workers commute to work via a single-occupancy car, truck, or van and about 11.3% commute in a carpool of at least two persons. 90 persons walk, and 138 persons use other modes of transportation, which include motorcycles, bicycles, and/or taxicabs.

The number of persons carpooling, walking, busing, and using other modes to commute to work is an indication that this percentage of the population is more likely to use or need public transit services.

Figure 2. Workers by Mode of Transportation



### Commuting Patterns

In Ben Hill County, over 6,000 citizens commute to work daily. Of the 6,000 workers in the county, more than 1,280 or about 21.4% commute out of the county for work every day. This is an indication that Ben Hill County is contributing workers to jobs in surrounding counties. A majority (73%) have a nineteen minute or less commute, while the remaining percentage of commuters have a 20 to 60 minute or over commute. The mean commute time for Ben Hill County's workforce is 16.4 minutes from home to work. This moderate number of commuters to other counties could also suggest that this particular segment of the population is less likely to need public transit services as a primary means of transportation.

### Age

Age can be a significant determining factor in rural public transit systems. Older residents are more likely to need transportation to and from medical appointments, shopping and other daily activities. Approximately 21.5% of the population of Ben Hill County is over the age of 60. This is higher than the state average. Older residents oftentimes forgo driving or their vehicle altogether and this can increase the number of older residents who rely on local public transportation services.

Table 3. Residents 60 Years and Over & Vehicle Availability

	<b>Ben Hill</b>	<b>Bacon</b>	<b>Cook</b>	<b>Turner</b>
<b>Total</b>	3,753	2,283	3,337	1,988
<b>Male (%)</b>	43%	45%	46%	44%
<b>Female (%)</b>	57%	55%	54%	56%
<b>No Vehicle Available</b>	14%	6%	7%	8%

### Livability Impact

There are many factors that make a community more livable, such as the overall cost of living, accessibility and quality of healthcare, grocery stores, and other amenities. Many of these amenities, especially in rural areas, require a vehicle because they are not within a reasonable distance or lack the infrastructure for residents to safely walk or bike. For this reason, public transit services can be very important in increasing the livability of a community. Public transit along with bike and pedestrian infrastructure offers optimum results for a livable community. As the livability increases so will the quality of life and this will also create an atmosphere for growth and economic development due to residents having available transportation options. Public transportation services also give those who do not own vehicles or have been asking friends and family for transportation more freedom and flexibility to reach their destination/s. Through the implementation of a public transit system in Ben Hill County, one more livability factor has been added to help increase the quality of life for residents.

### Goals and Objectives for Transit

GDOT lays out several goals and objectives for rural public transit in Georgia. Many of them are straight forward and are discussed here. The Southern Georgia Regional Commission has additional goals that impact rural public transit in Ben Hill County. In this section the goals and objectives will be discussed as well as how Ben Hill County Transit is currently meeting them.

#### 1. Basic Mobility to Serve All Georgians

In Ben Hill County, the transit service is open to all residents. The Georgia Department of Transportation contracts with the Southern

Georgia Regional Commission to provide coordinated human service transportation for seniors and other clients, these trips are Purchase-Of-Service (POS). POS and public trips are provided on a daily basis for destinations such as jobs, medical appointments and shopping trips for Ben Hill County residents.

## 2. Program Implementation

Ben Hill County administers the 5311 rural public transit program through coordination with GDOT and its TPO, RMS Inc., meeting or exceeding the FTA program requirements. As is demonstrated through the performance criteria noted before, the Ben Hill County Transit Service meets or exceeds most of these criteria on a daily basis.

The SGRC works with Ben Hill County and GDOT to provide technical assistance and analysis of the transit service delivery to better inform local and state officials.

## 3. Efficiency and Effectiveness

The Ben Hill County Transit System is operated in an efficient and effective manner by the county and its TPO. Utilizing POS contracts, the TPO is able to utilize these funds to match the federal funds used to supplement the public riders. The TPO and Ben Hill County effectively work with GDOT to provide an efficient transit system for the residents of the county.

## 4. Safe, Secure Quality Service

The Ben Hill County Transit System is safe and secure, utilizing a proven training program for drivers and dispatchers. Ben Hill County and its TPO maintain safety and driver records that

provide for a safe and secure environment for the riders.

## 5. Accessible Service—Usable by Persons with Disabilities

Ben Hill County Transit is committed to meet the needs of all users of the system. All vehicles are lift equipped to assist riders in wheelchairs. All drivers have been trained on how to operate the lifts, assist riders, and make sure each rider is safely secured aboard the vehicles.



*Transit vehicle in use.*

Working with RMS, Inc. and the SGRC Ben Hill County Transit provides coordinated transit services for clients throughout the community, recovering the fully allocated costs of these trips and assisting in meeting the federal match requirements for the rural public transit program.

The SGRC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy or (CEDS) includes a goal that seeks to 'Ensure that the region's transportation systems are intact to facilitate growth.' The CEDS covers a broad region of 18-counties, and encourages each local government

to address transportation concerns at a local level, including the establishment of public transit systems.

The SGRC also produces a Regional Comprehensive Plan, similar to local, county-level Comprehensive Planning efforts. A goal in this plan includes the need to determine the transportation needs of seniors and an aging population. This impacts the mobility of the regional population and how communities develop and implement their land use policies.

Overall, Ben Hill County is meeting the goals and objectives set out by GDOT and other entities. Ben Hill County should work to include goals for public transportation in its next comprehensive plan update and continue to actively participate in regional transportation and land use planning efforts with the SGRC.

### Evaluation of Existing Services

This section will examine how the Ben Hill County Transit System has been operating as well as how it compares to other communities of similar size (Bacon, Cook, and Turner). This section will compare the first full year and only year of available data for Ben Hill County with the counties mentioned above. This data will also analyze trends and the future growth of the transit service.

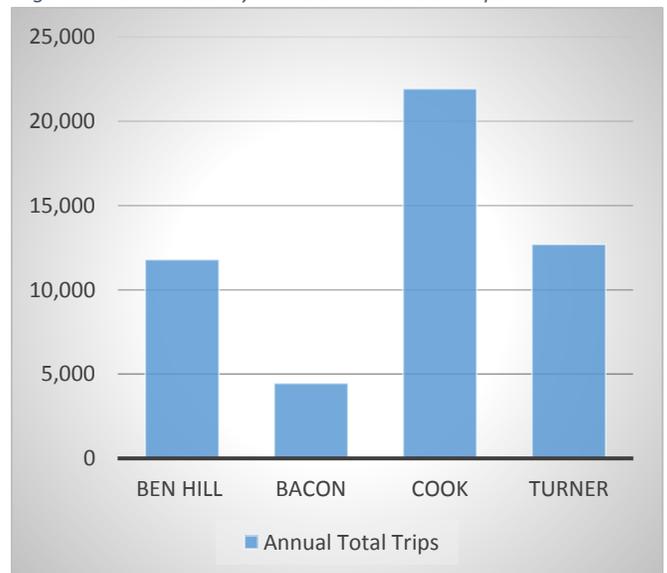
Ben Hill County's Public transit system is similar to that of other counties in the region in that it is a demand-response system. The Ben Hill County transit service charges \$3.00 for one way trips within the city and the price varies outside of the city/county depending on destination. The service is available from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm Monday - Friday. Currently, peer counties charge \$3 for trips that are less than ten miles, \$5 for trips that are over 10 miles with the destination still being in the county, if the destination is outside of the county, an extra

\$0.50 per mile is charged and are available 7:30 am to 5:30 pm Monday - Friday.

The Ben Hill County transit system currently provides an annual rate of 11,785 trips using three ADA accessible vans. Of these trips, 5,647 are Purchase-of-Service (POS) trips and 6,111 are public trips. For many of the transit systems in the region, Purchase-of-Service contracts (POS) supplement the ridership and utilization of the public transit systems. Below are several charts that compare Ben Hill County's transit system to the peer counties of Bacon, Cook, and Turner.

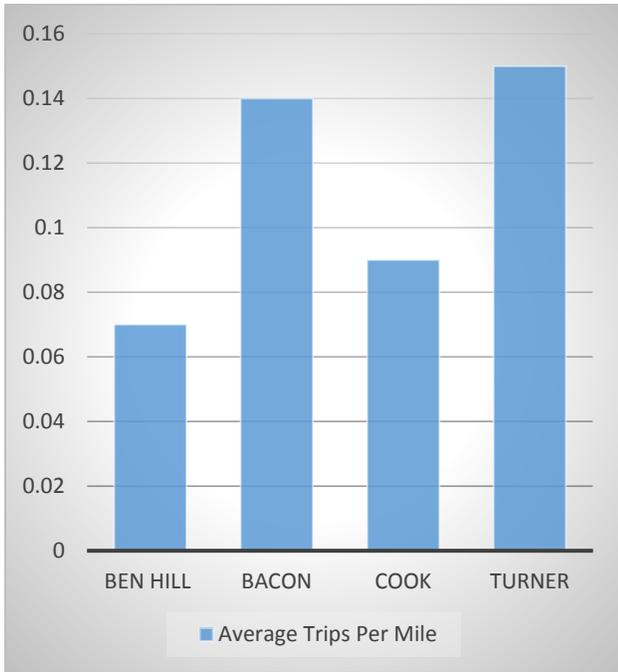
The graphs and charts in this section will provide operational and cost information for Ben Hill County transit; however, other data and information should be considered before taking action to make any changes to the public transit service. In the following graphs, 2016 transit data for Ben Hill County is compared to 2015 transit data of the other counties. Ben Hill transit is new and only has one full year of data available.

Figure 3. Ben Hill County Transit Annual Total Trips



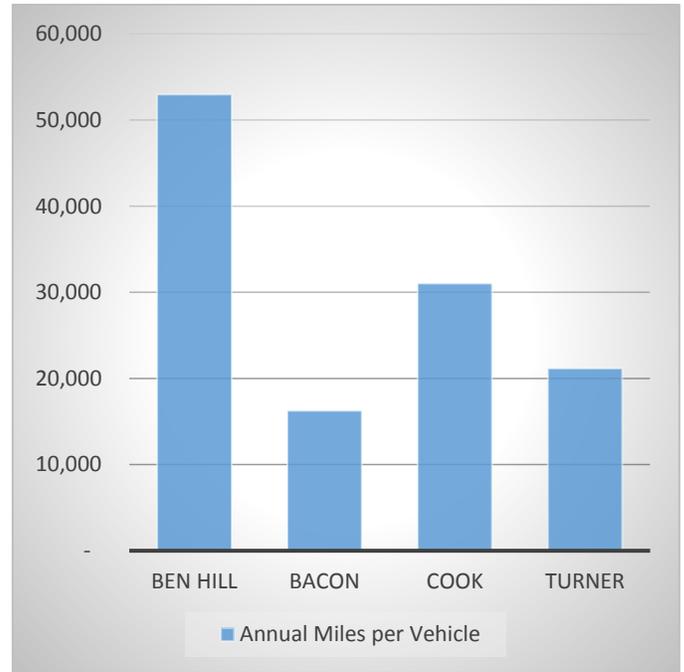
Ben Hill County is well within range when compared to similar counties in the region. Ben Hill County is also providing a high number of trips due to only having three vehicles

Figure 4. Annual Average Trips per Mile



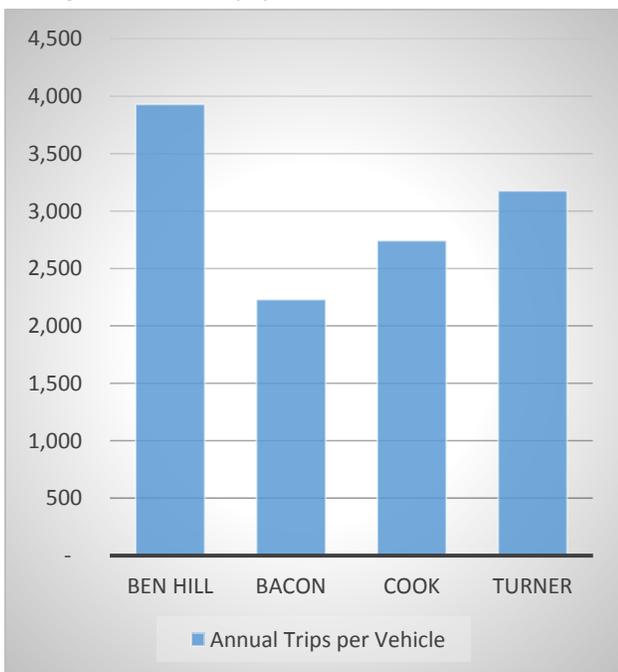
Ben Hill provides the least amount of trips per mile, averaging 0.07 trips/mile. Typically in rural areas greater distances are required for travel.

Figure 6. Annual Miles per Vehicle



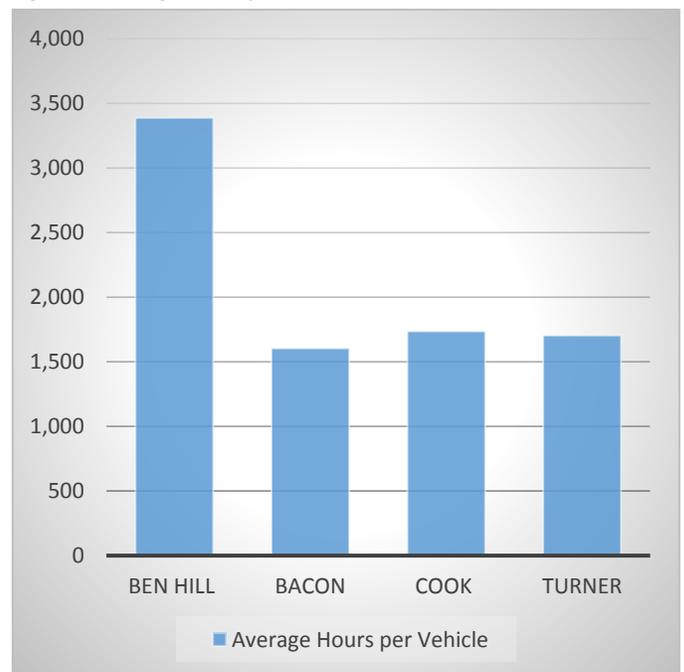
Mileage in rural transit trips tend to be quite high, due to the low density characteristics of the rural landscape. Ben Hill County is also servicing a high number of trips utilizing three vehicles.

Figure 5. Annual Trips per Vehicle



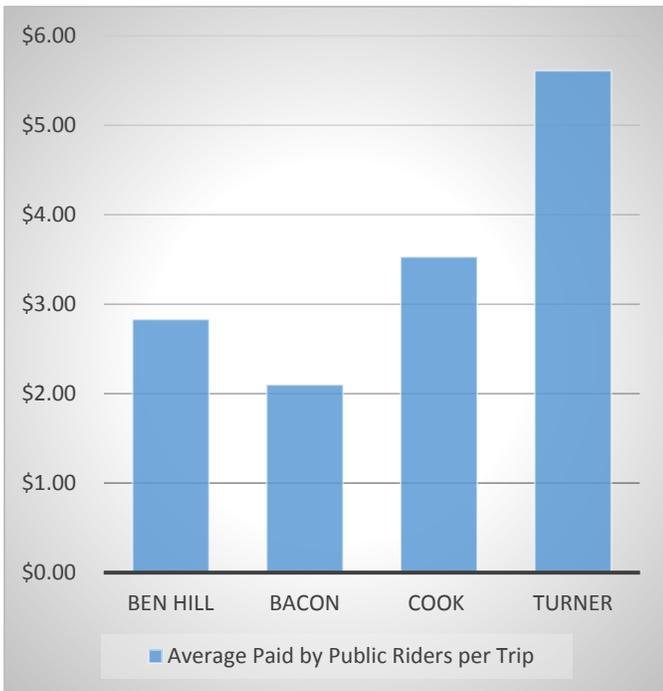
Ben Hill County has a higher ATV than Turner County within its first full year of operation, both have 3 vehicles, this could indicate that Ben Hill County may need to implement another transit vehicle soon.

Figure 7. Average Hours per Vehicle



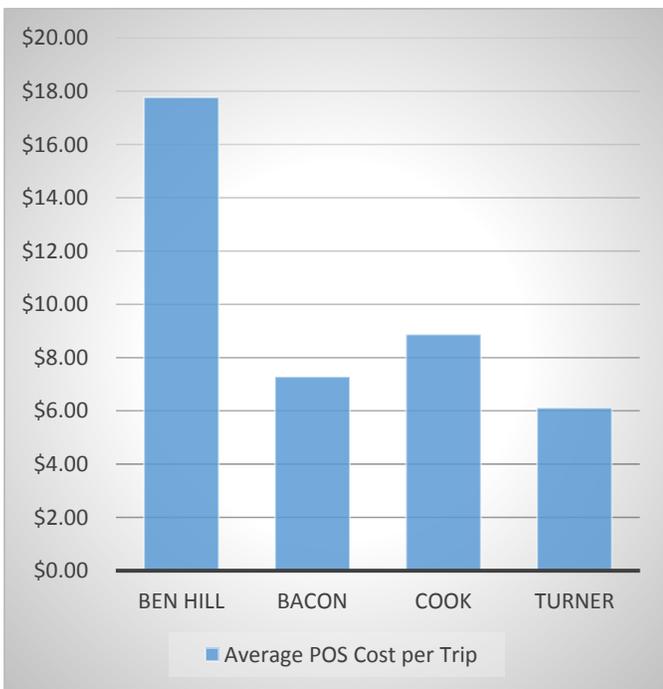
The rural, low density development in Ben Hill County means that transit trips are typically longer and more time is spent per vehicle and per trip travel to each destination.

Figure 8. Average Paid by Public Riders per Trip



Ben Hill County is noticeable lower than other counties were in their previous year of service.

Figure 9. Average POS Cost per Trip



Ben Hill County's POS/Trip is very high compared to peer counties in its first year of services.

## Transit Demand Estimation/Needs Assessment

This section provides data and analysis of certain characteristics of Ben Hill County. Ben Hill County is a county with a high number of commuters (many who find/use other modes of transportation), a low median income and relatively low household income in comparison to its peer counties. Ben Hill County also has a significant poverty percentage. All of these factors suggest that the demand and the need for public transit may increase should these socioeconomic characteristics continue.

### Title VI and LEP Analysis

As a recipient of federal funds, Ben Hill County must adhere to all federal laws and regulations regarding the delivery of public transit services. These laws include but are not limited to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Executive Orders covering Environmental Justice and Limited English-Proficiency, which state that any public transit service may not discriminate against a rider on the basis of race, color, sex or limited ability to speak the English language, among other traits. Knowing the demographics of Ben Hill County along with other factors is beneficial to estimating the need/demand for transit, planning, and continuing the current rural public transit service. Below is the population breakdown.

Table 4. Ben Hill County Population Breakdown

Factor	Population
<b>Total Population</b>	17,477
<b>Race</b>	
<b>White</b>	9,871
<b>African American</b>	6,237
<b>Other</b>	288
<b>Hispanic</b>	1,081
<b>In Poverty</b>	6,024

Four factors are used to determine the county’s need to provide services for persons with Limited English Proficiency. The four factors are outlined here:

**1. The number or proportion of LEP persons eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by the public transit service.**

The second most common language spoken at home in Ben Hill County is Spanish. It is estimated that there are a total of 819 persons, or 5.1% of the total population that speaks Spanish. This percentage is reasonably lower than the national percentage of people that speak Spanish at home. The US Census Bureau estimates that of the persons 5 years and older in Ben Hill County, 225 or 27.3% of persons who speak Spanish are linguistically isolated, meaning that they do not speak English very well.

Table 5. Residents who Speak Spanish

Estimate	819
Margin of Error	+/- 197
Ben Hill County %	5.1%
United States %	13%

**2. The frequency with which LEP individuals come in contact with the transit service.**

Ben Hill County Transit does not have a history of LEP individuals who could not use the system. It is recommended that if needed Ben Hill County utilize the website of the Southern Georgia Regional Commission where a Google Translator is available for potential riders to learn more about the service.

The Southern Georgia Regional Commission has also put together a Regional Transit Brochure that can be accessed on the SGRC website as well as in print form at various locations throughout the region. The “Transportation Options in Southern Georgia” brochure has transit service information written in both English and Spanish

and local governments can also request this as well as many other brochures that are available.

Figure 10. SGRC Transit Brochure



**3. The nature and importance of the transit service provided by Ben Hill County to the LEP community.**

Ben Hill County Transit is provided as a service to riders in the county to access basic, non-emergency public transit services.

**4. The resources available to Ben Hill County and overall costs.**

Ben Hill County could provide materials in other languages for the potential riders; however, based on the information provided here, there

does not appear to be a great need at this time that would justify the overall costs of providing these services to residents. As noted previously, it is recommended that potential riders utilize the SGRC website at [www.sgrc.us](http://www.sgrc.us), where a Google Translator can provide for basic information on the service to LEP individuals or use the “Transportation Options in Southern Georgia,” brochure which is also located on the website and can be requested in print form.

### ADA Analysis

In Ben Hill County, 1,658 persons have an ambulatory difficulty, meaning they have difficulty moving about under their own power. The population 65 years and older account for 44% of those individuals with an ambulatory difficulty, however, this is just one type of the disability and different disabilities should be considered so that the public transit system is accessible for everyone. Residents that have disabilities are more likely to need public transportation to get to doctor’s appointments, or just go shopping, but this can prove difficult without ADA accessible vehicles to transport them. Oftentimes residents with disabilities have a greater reliance on someone else providing transportation for them.

Table 6. Residents with Disabilities by Age

AGE	Total Population	Disabled Residents	Disabled Residents (%)
Under 5 years	2,911	0	0.0%
5 to 17 years	7,862	444	5.6%
18 to 34 years	9,108	609	6.7%
35 to 64 years	14,580	3,152	21.6%
65 to 74 years	3,220	1,240	38.5%
75 years and over	1,894	1,333	70.4%

### Transit Need and Demand Analysis

Understanding the potential number of residents who need trips as well as the number of residents who may use the transit service as an option every once in a while will help determine the future characteristics of the Ben Hill County transit system. For many families, it can be a tough challenge for them to meet their transportation needs even if they have one or even two vehicles. These families face the challenge of long trips to work and to businesses that put many miles on vehicles that may or may not be pre-owned and already worn down. A family that only has one mode of transportation faces just the challenge of meeting the transportation needs for the whole family. This analysis consists of these factors and others to estimate the possible demand for rural public transit trips within Ben Hill County. The information is based on the use of transit system information from Ben Hill County as well as comparable information from peer counties that are similar in size, population and transit data. Using the Transportation Research Board’s *TCRP Report 161: Methods for Forecasting Demand and Quantifying Need for Rural Passenger Transportation: Final Workbook and Final Spreadsheet Tool*, the SGRC was able to produce the following estimates of rural public transit need and demand for Ben Hill County.

The analysis shows the need for rural public transit in Ben Hill County (not POS - Purchase of Service trips) is an estimated 319,500 one-way trips (annually) in Ben Hill County based on the communities’ mobility gap. This number is high because it factors in the many potential riders that find alternative means of transportation, like getting a ride with friends or family, walking, riding a bicycle, etc. Further analysis shows that there is an estimated demand for 22,300 more trips annually for the general rural public transit system (this does not include POS or human service agency trips). Currently Ben Hill County provides about 6,000 POS trips through RMS and there are an additional 3,000 trips being made under the DHS coordinated transportation program. More specifically, an estimated total demand of 61,500 more POS trips could be





Figure 13. Input Data from Peer Transit Systems

Input Data from Peer Transit Systems or Existing Transit Service									
Name of Peer System	Bacon County	Cook County	Turner County						
Population of Area	11,222	17,033	8,338						
Size of Area Served (Square Miles)	286	233	290						
Annual Vehicle-Miles of Service Provided	32,476	248,192	84,638						
Annual Vehicle-Hours of Service Provided	3,207	13,883	6,813						
Service Type (Fixed Route, Route-Deviation, Demand-Response)	Demand-Response	Demand-Response	Demand-Response						
Number of One-Way Trips Served per Year	4,458	21,929	12,700						
Degree of Coordination with Other Carriers (Low, Medium, High)	Low	Low	Low						

Results of Peer Data Comparison		Population	Annual Vehicle-miles	Annual vehicles-hours
Input Data for My System:		17,477	158,895	10,163
Observed Trip Rates		Demand Estimate Based On:		
Peer Values		Population	Annual Vehicle-miles	Annual vehicles-hours
Trips per Capita				
Maximum	1.5	26,216		
Average	1.1	19,225		
Median	1.3	22,720		
Minimum	0.4	6,991		
Trips per Vehicle-Mile				
Maximum	0.2		31,779	
Average	0.1		15,890	
Median	0.1		15,890	
Minimum	0.1		15,890	
Trips per Vehicle-Hour				
Maximum	1.9			19,310
Average	1.6			16,261
Median	1.6			16,261
Minimum	1.4			14,228
Values expected for my system				
Maximum		26,216	31,779	19,310.0
Average		19,225	15,890	16,261.0
Median		22,720	15,890	16,261.0
Minimum		6,991	15,890	14,228.0



FY2021-2022

Net Operating Summary		
Administrative Total / Ratio	\$ 86,210.46	21%
Operating Total / Ratio	\$ 321,600.94	79%
Total Operating Budget	\$ 407,811.39	
LESS: POS Revenue	\$ 60,552.07	
LESS: Non-5311 Expenses	\$ -	
Public Transportation Budget	\$ 347,259.33	
LESS: 10% Fare Revenue	\$ 34,725.93	
Net Operating Total	\$ 312,533.40	

Vehicles	6
Average Trips Per Vehicle	1736
Total Trips Projected	10,416
Percentage of Public Trips	66.00%
POS Trips	3,412
POS Amount	\$ 60,552.07
Rate Per Trip	\$ 17.75
POS Fully Allocated Costs	\$ 91.60
Total Public Trips	7,004
Subsidized Revenue Per Public Trip	\$ 22.31
Expected Farebox Per Trip	\$ 4.96

Budget Summary	Totals	Federal	State	Local
Operating Budget Total	\$ 312,533.40	\$ 156,266.70	\$ -	\$ 156,266.70
POS Local Funds	\$ 60,552.07	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 60,552.07
Excess POS Local Funds	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Capital Budget Total	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Budget Grand Total	\$ 251,981.33	\$ 156,266.70	\$ -	\$ 95,714.63

## Recommendations

The Ben Hill County rural public transit service has greatly impacted the quality of life for Ben Hill County residents by creating access to employment, healthcare services, shopping, and other general needs. Based on the research and data collected and analyzed within this Transportation Development Plan, the Ben Hill County Rural Public Transit Service is doing an excellent job of providing public and coordinated transportation trips to residents.

The staff of the Southern Georgia Regional Commission recommend that Ben Hill County continue to gather socioeconomic, demographic and other pertinent information concerning the Ben Hill County Transit System, such as this report, in order to make changes as need be to the operation of the transit system as demographics and socioeconomic characteristics change. We also recommend Ben Hill County take into consideration the fact that Purchase-of-Service (POS) trips are split between two service providers and consolidating these trips may result in Ben Hill County paying a lesser amount for the operation of the rural public transit service.

If Ben Hill County would like more information about the data in this Transportation Development Plan please contact the Southern Georgia Regional Commission at (229) 333-5277.