

Chapter 2

Region Profile



Chapter 2 – Region Profile

Understanding the region's characteristics is vital for maintaining the current transportation system and planning for future needs. This chapter reviews current conditions and projected demographic and economic trends that impact transportation demand and infrastructure. It outlines factors influencing travel and anticipates population and employment growth over the next 25 years. While data is often presented at the county level, transportation planning for the Black Hawk County metropolitan area is managed by the MPO, which falls within the RTA and significantly influences regional transportation.

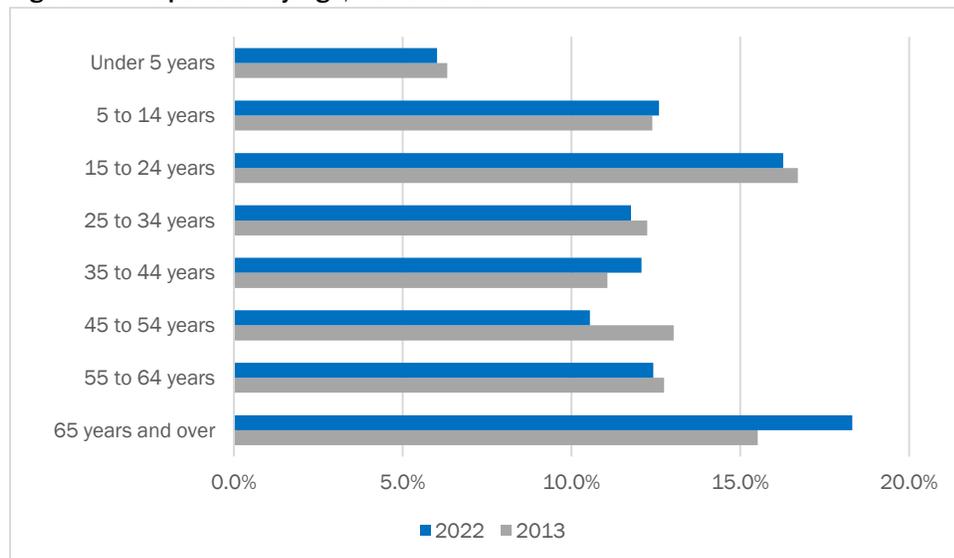
Population

The Iowa Northland Region, comprising Black Hawk, Bremer, Buchanan, Butler, Chickasaw, and Grundy Counties, had a combined population of 215,372 per the 2020 Census, with most residing in Black Hawk County. The RTA area, excluding the MPO, holds 94,101 people. Table 2. shows the population by jurisdiction.

Over the past 50 years, the region's population has fluctuated, notably declining during the 1980s economic recession that impacted agriculture and manufacturing and led to outmigration. Since then, growth has stagnated due to lasting recession effects, industry changes, and rural-to-urban migration. An aging population trend from 2013 to 2022 (Figure 2.1) underscores the need for adapting services and infrastructure.

This historical context is crucial for understanding the current demographic and economic landscape of the region. It highlights the challenges faced in maintaining and expanding the population base, which in turn affects regional planning and development efforts.

Figure 2.1: Population by Age, 2013 vs 2022



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2013 and 2022

REGIONAL STATS

94,101
Total Population¹

29,300
Jobs²

\$86,373
Median Household Income³

8%
Below Poverty Level³

88%
Use Cars to Get to Work³

Sources:

¹U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census

²U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2021

³U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-year Estimate, 2022

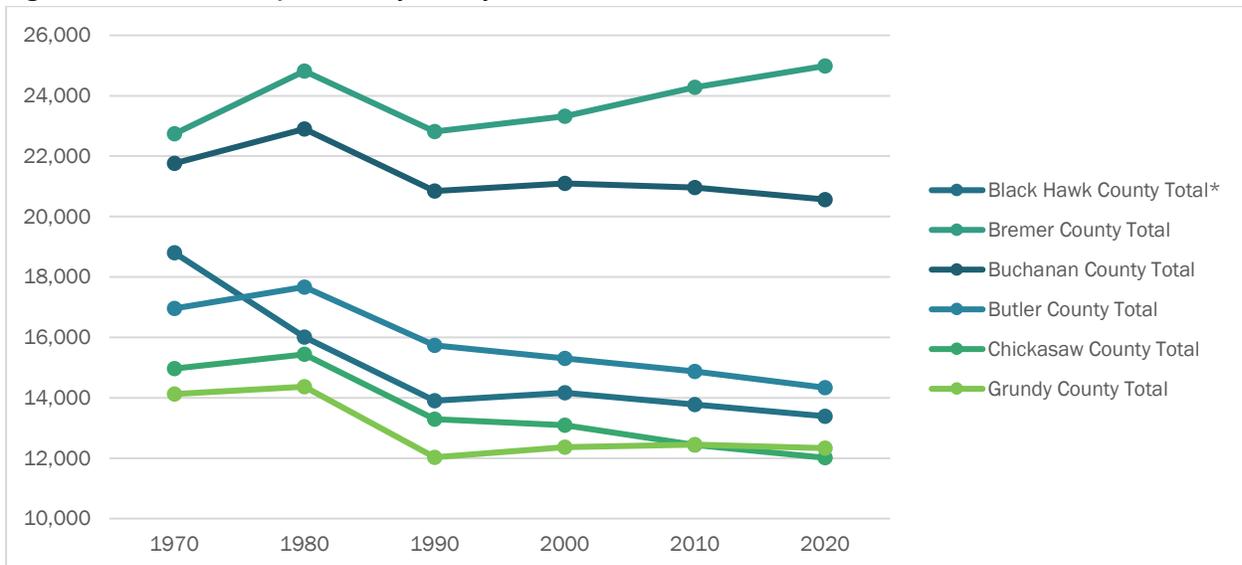
Table 2.1: RTA Population by City and County, 2020

Black Hawk County		Bremer County		Buchanan County	
Dunkerton	842	Denver	1,919	Aurora	169
La Porte City	2,284	Frederika	204	Brandon	341
Unincorporated	6,747	Janesville	1,034	Fairbank	1,111
		Plainfield	393	Hazleton	713
		Readlyn	845	Independence	6,064
		Sumner	2,030	Jesup	2,508
		Tripoli	1,191	Lamont	429
		Waverly	10,394	Quasqueton	570
		Unincorporated	6,978	Rowley	270
				Stanley	81
				Winthrop	823
				Unincorporated	7,486
	9,873		24,988		20,565

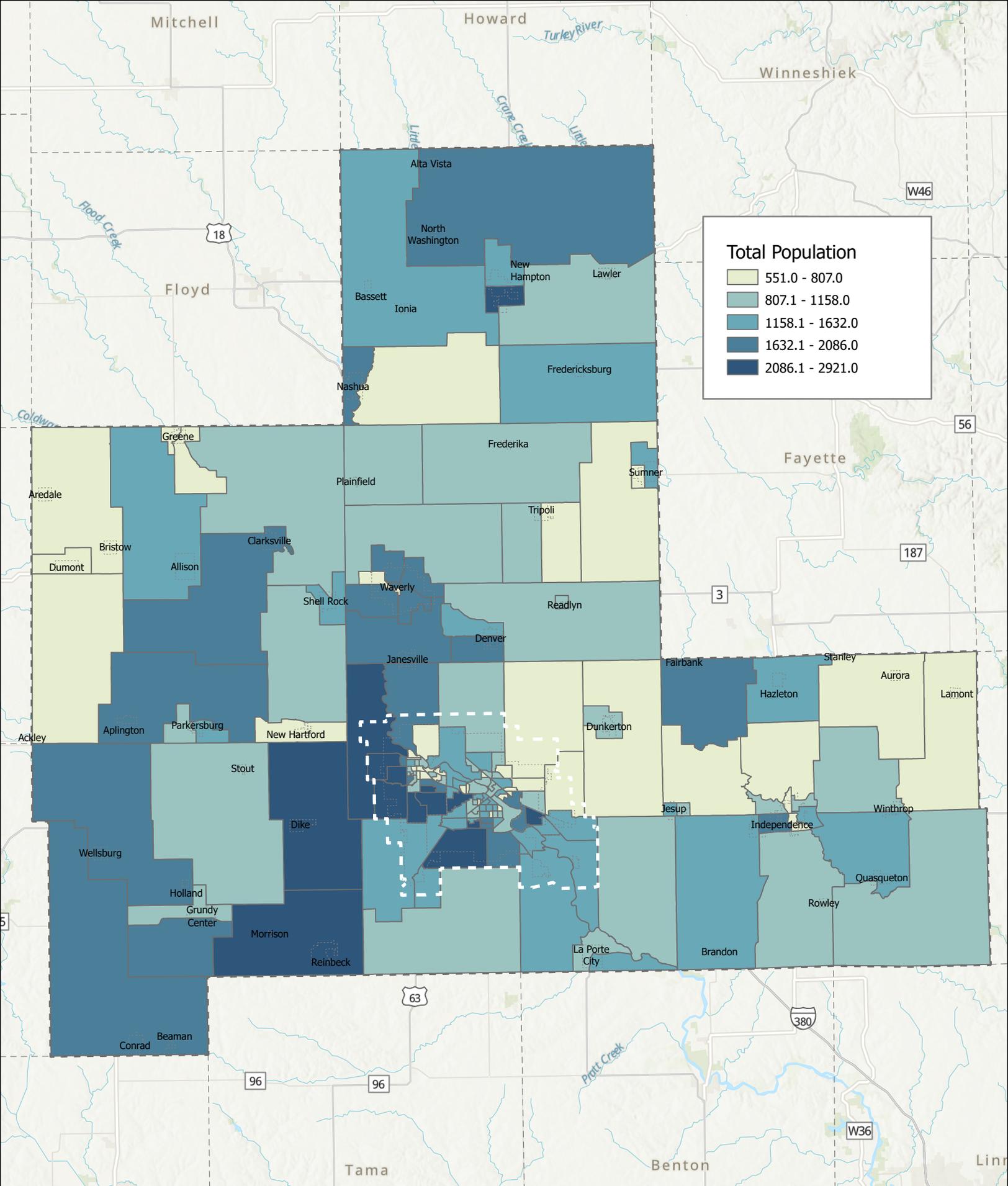
Butler County		Chickasaw County		Grundy County	
Allison	966	Alta Vista	227	Beaman	161
Aplington	1,116	Bassett	45	Conrad	1,093
Aredale	62	Fredericksburg	987	Dike	1,304
Bristow	145	Ionia	226	Grundy Center	2,796
Clarksville	1,264	Lawler	406	Holland	269
Dumont	634	Nashua	1,551	Morrison	98
Greene	990	New Hampton	3,494	Reinbeck	1,662
New Hartford	570	N. Washington	112	Stout	191
Parkersburg	2,015	Unincorporated	4,964	Wellsburg	720
Shell Rock	1,268			Unincorporated	4,035
Unincorporated	5,304				
	14,334		12,012		12,329

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census

Figure 2.2: Historical Population, by County



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1970 to 2020. *Black Hawk County includes La Porte City, Dunkerton, and all unincorporated areas



Map 2.1

Total Population by Census Block Group

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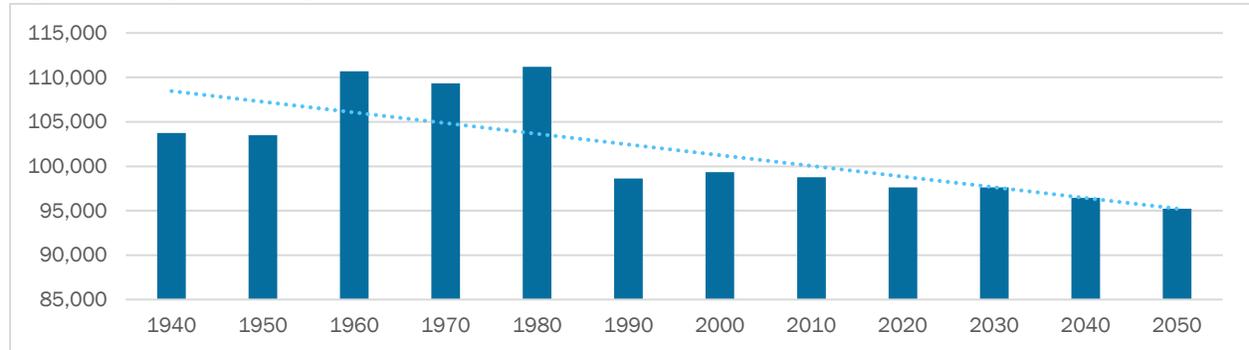
Population Density

The RTA region serves a diverse and expansive area. With a total combined population of 94,101 across 2,983 square miles, the region has an average population density of approximately 31 people per square mile. For comparison, Iowa's average population density is 58 people per square mile. This density varies significantly, with much of the population concentrated in urban centers. This variation in density presents unique challenges and opportunities for regional transportation planning and infrastructure development.

Population Projections

Population projections for the Iowa Northland Region, using U.S. Census data from 1940 to 2020, suggest a continued linear decline through 2050. The region peaked in 1980 but has since faced population decreases due to economic changes, with recovery remaining elusive. If current trends continue, further population loss could impact economic stability, public services, and infrastructure. Addressing outmigration of younger residents and a growing elderly population will be key to ensuring long-term regional sustainability and vitality.

Figure 2.3: Population Projection, 1940 to 2050



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, 1940 to 2020

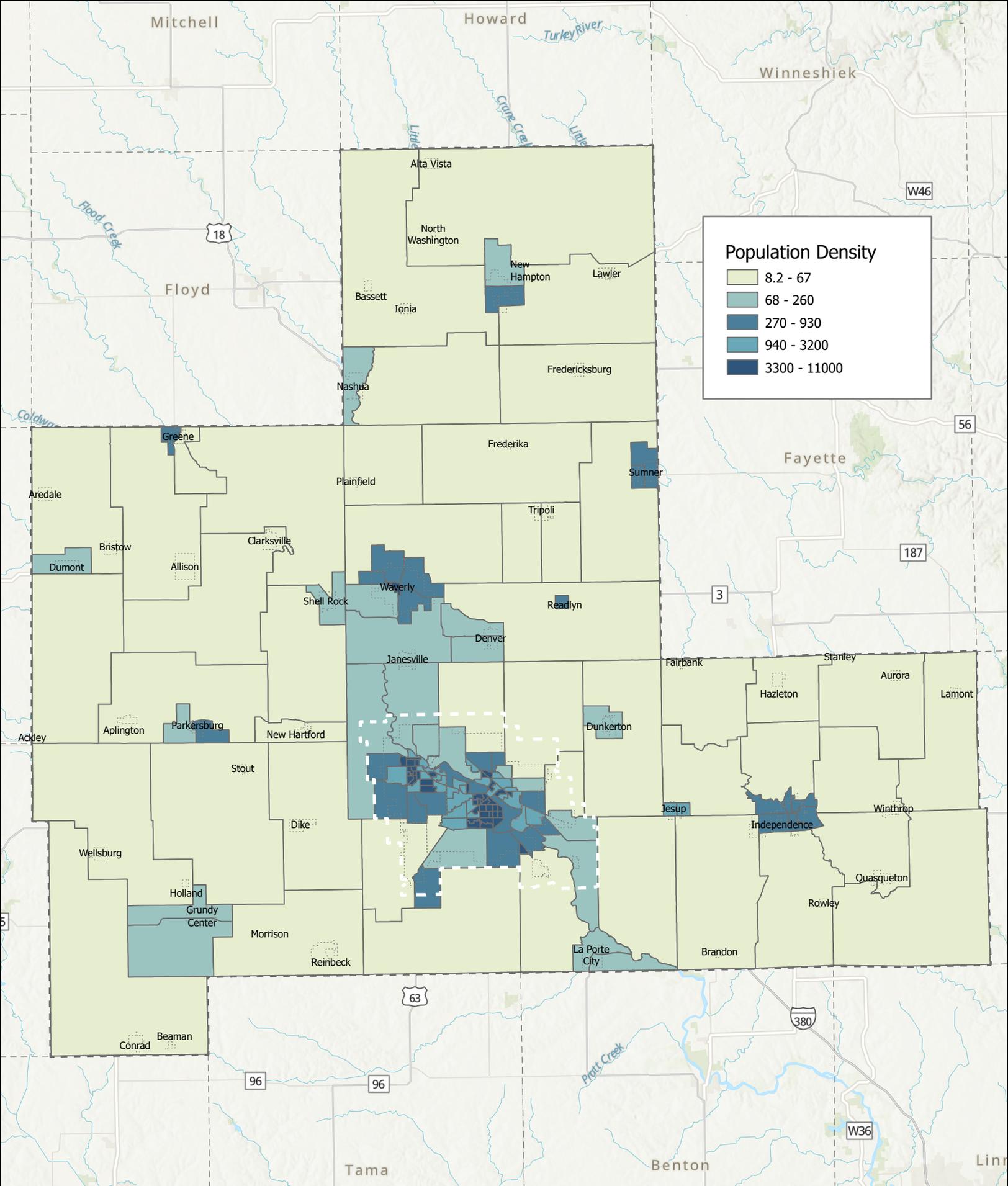
Housing Characteristics

Table 2.2 provides a housing profile for the region. This profile reveals that approximately 25 percent of households have one or no vehicles available. These households are more likely to depend on carpooling, public transit, walking, or bicycling to get to and from their destinations.

Table 2.2: Selected Housing Characteristics

	Region	State
Total housing units	46,640	1,417,064
Occupied housing units	91.3%	91.0%
Vacant housing units	8.7%	9.0%
Housing Tenure		
Owner-occupied housing units	83.3%	71.5%
Renter-occupied housing units	16.7%	28.5%
Year Structure Built		
2000 or later	14.6%	19.3%
1960 to 1999	43.0%	41.5%
1959 or earlier	42.5%	39.2%
Vehicles available		
No vehicle available	3.0%	5.6%
1 vehicle available	22.5%	29.6%
2 or more vehicles available	74.5%	64.8%
Median value owner-occupied	\$200,063	\$181,600

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2022



Map 2.2

Total Density by Census Block Group

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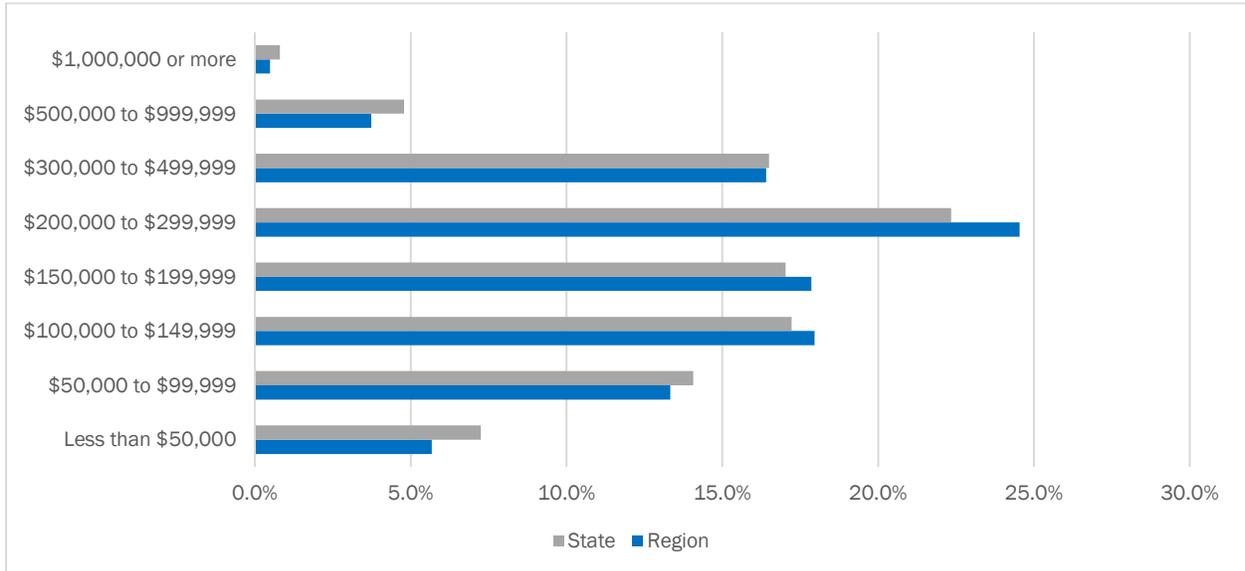
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Housing Value

The cost of housing and the cost of transportation are two large factors in determining where people choose to live. Workers are faced with the advantages and disadvantages of living in an urbanized area or living in a community or rural area outside of it. The median owner-occupied home value is \$200,063 and there is a wide range of housing value in the region.

Figure 2.4: Housing Value, Owner-occupied Units

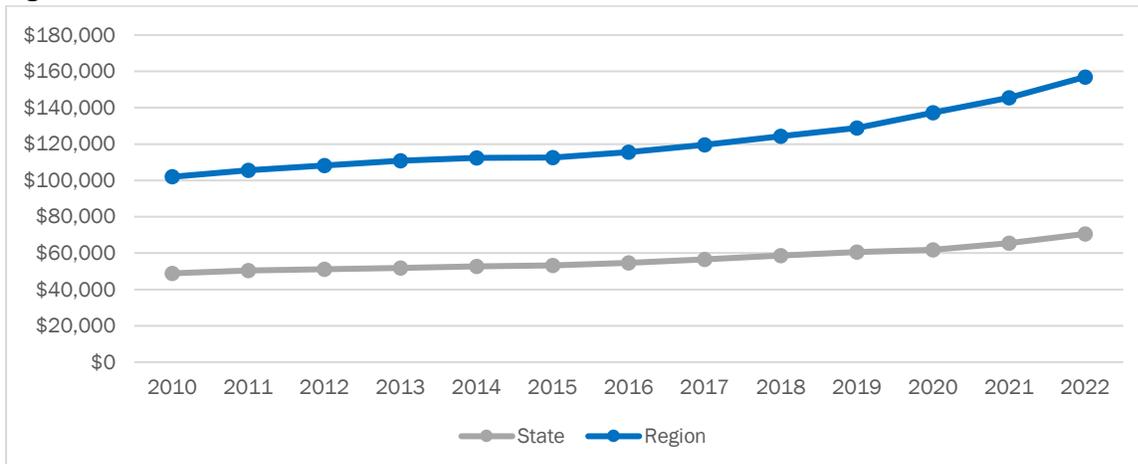


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2022

Household Income

According to the FHWA Livability Initiative, transportation is the second largest expense for most households after housing. Households living in auto-dependent locations spend 25 percent of their income on transportation costs. Housing that is affordable and located closer to employment, shopping, restaurants, and other destinations can reduce household transportation costs to nine percent of household income. Figure 2.5 compares the median household income for the region and the State of Iowa.

Figure 2.5: Median Household Income



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2010 to 2022

Poverty/Low Income

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people and families are classified as being in poverty if their income is less than their poverty threshold. Approximately 7.8 percent of the population within the region, excluding the MPO area, is below the poverty level. Map 2.3 shows the percentage of the population that is below the poverty level by Census tract, highlighting areas with higher concentrations of poverty. By understanding the geographic distribution of poverty, communities can better allocate resources to enhance connectivity and ensure equitable access to essential services and employment opportunities across the region.

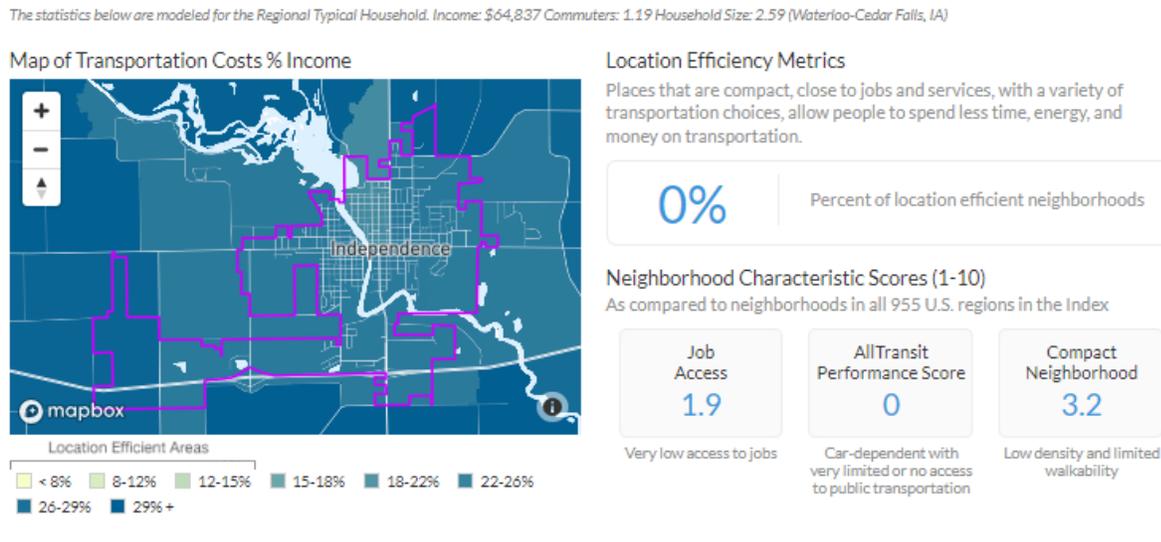
Average Housing and Transportation Costs

Traditional measures of housing affordability do not consider transportation costs. According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology, a household's second-largest expenditure is typically transportation costs. Compact and dynamic neighborhoods with walkable streets and high access to jobs, transit, and a wide variety of businesses can be more efficient, affordable, and sustainable. Figure 2.6 illustrates the average housing and transportation costs as a percentage of household income for Independence, New Hampton, and Waverly.



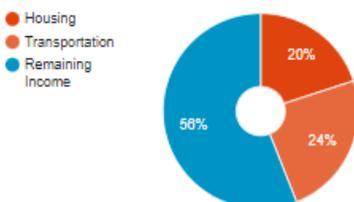
Figure 2.6: Housing and Transportation Fact Sheets

Source: [Center for Neighborhood Technology, Housing and Transportation Fact Sheet](#)



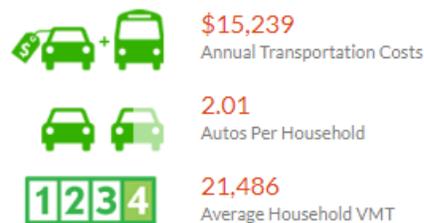
Average Housing + Transportation Costs % Income

Factoring in both housing *and* transportation costs provides a more comprehensive way of thinking about the cost of housing and true affordability.

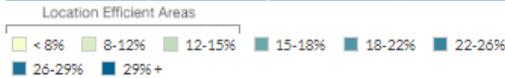
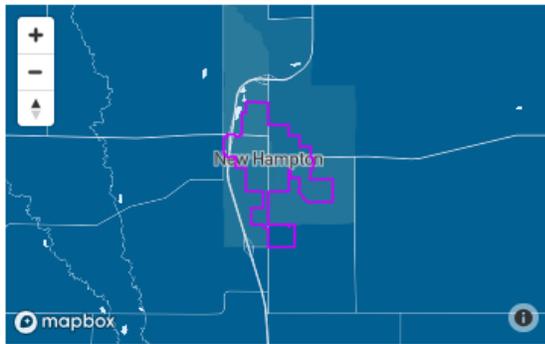


Transportation Costs

In dispersed areas, people need to own more vehicles and rely upon driving them farther distances which also drives up the cost of living.



Map of Transportation Costs % Income



Location Efficiency Metrics

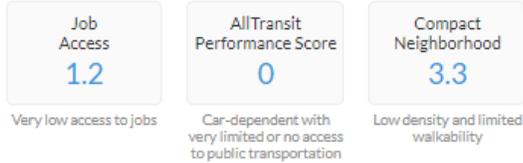
Places that are compact, close to jobs and services, with a variety of transportation choices, allow people to spend less time, energy, and money on transportation.

0%

Percent of location efficient neighborhoods

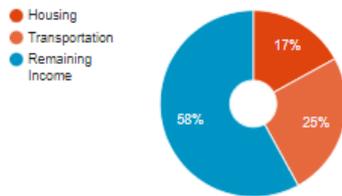
Neighborhood Characteristic Scores (1-10)

As compared to neighborhoods in all 955 U.S. regions in the Index



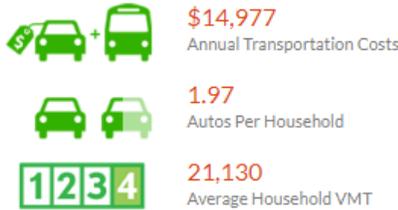
Average Housing + Transportation Costs % Income

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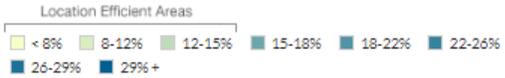
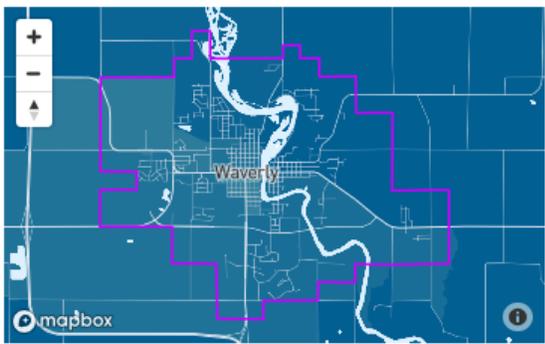


Transportation Costs

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Map of Transportation Costs % Income



Location Efficiency Metrics

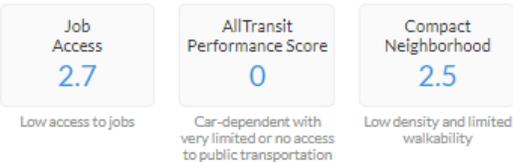
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Percent of location efficient neighborhoods

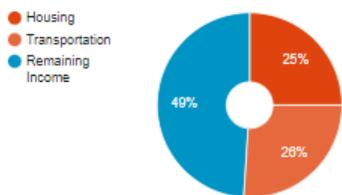
Neighborhood Characteristic Scores (1-10)

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Average Housing + Transportation Costs % Income

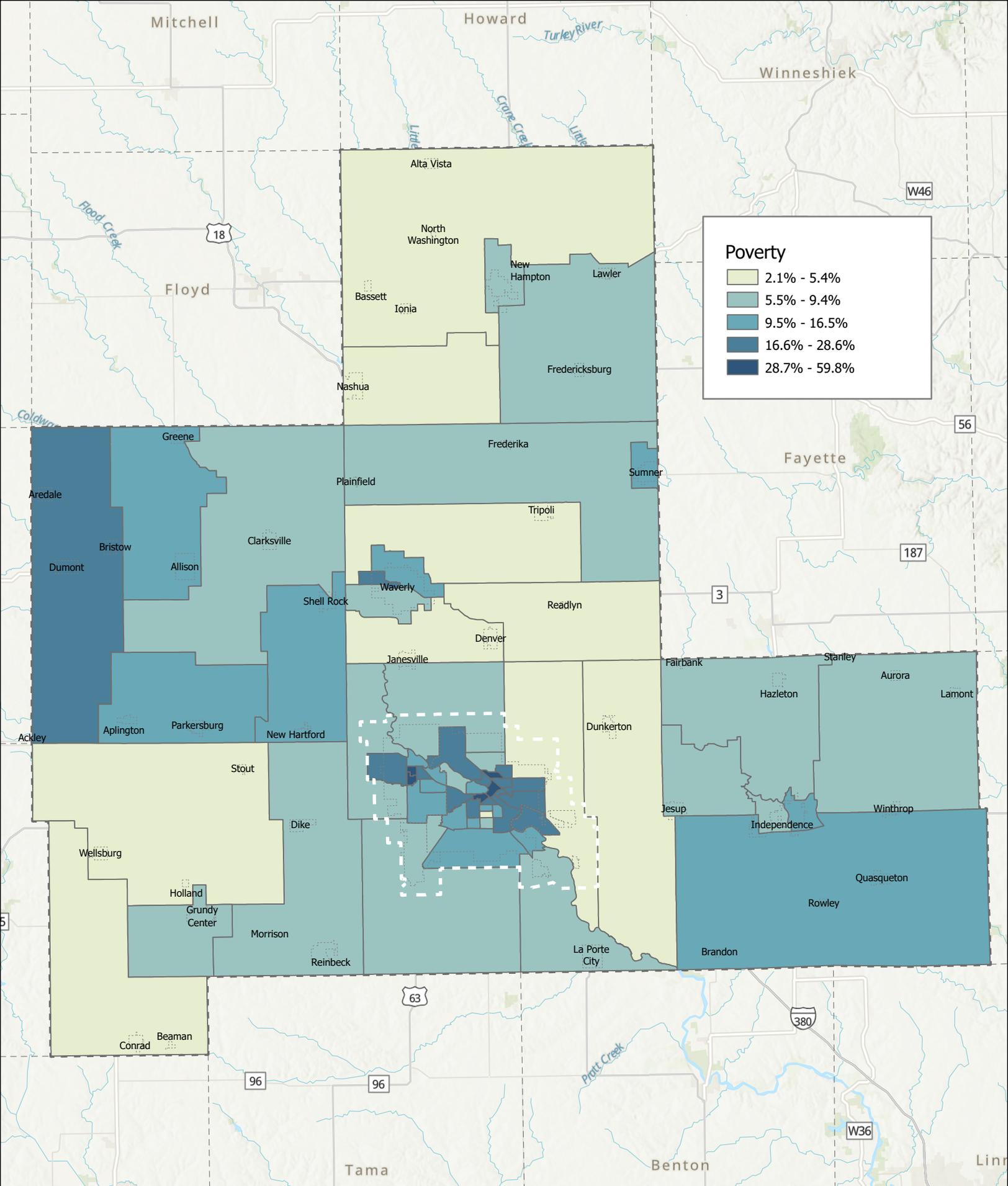
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Transportation Costs

In dispersed areas, people need to own more vehicles and rely upon driving them farther distances which also drives up the cost of living.





Poverty

- 2.1% - 5.4%
- 5.5% - 9.4%
- 9.5% - 16.5%
- 16.6% - 28.6%
- 28.7% - 59.8%

Map 2.3
Poverty/Low-Income by Census Tract

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Racial and Ethnic Minorities

For the purposes of this plan, Racial and Ethnic Minorities are defined as individuals that do not identify as White alone. Under this definition, the estimated Minority population accounts for approximately 4.7 percent of the total population in the region, excluding the MPO area. Map 2.4 shows the number of persons that do not identify as White alone by Census block group, and Map 2.5 shows the percent of the population that is foreign born by Census tract.

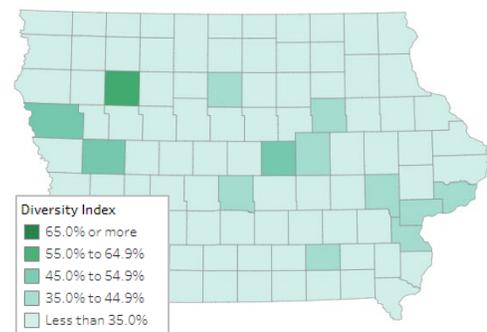


Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

The U.S. Department of Justice defines LEP persons as, “Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English...” Approximately 1.1 percent of the population 5 years of age and older within the region, excluding the MPO area, are considered LEP individuals. This information is crucial for the RTA to consider, as LEP individuals may face significant barriers to accessing transportation services. Map 2.6 shows the percentage of the population that is considered as LEP by Census tract.

Ethnic Diversity Index

The U.S. Census Bureau uses a Diversity Index (DI) to measure the probability that two people chosen at random will be from different racial and ethnic groups. The DI is bounded between 0 percent and 100 percent. A value closer to 100 indicates that much of the population has different racial and ethnic characteristics. Map 2.7 shows the DI for the region by Census block group. For comparison, Black Hawk County has a DI of 30.8 percent, the ninth highest in the state.

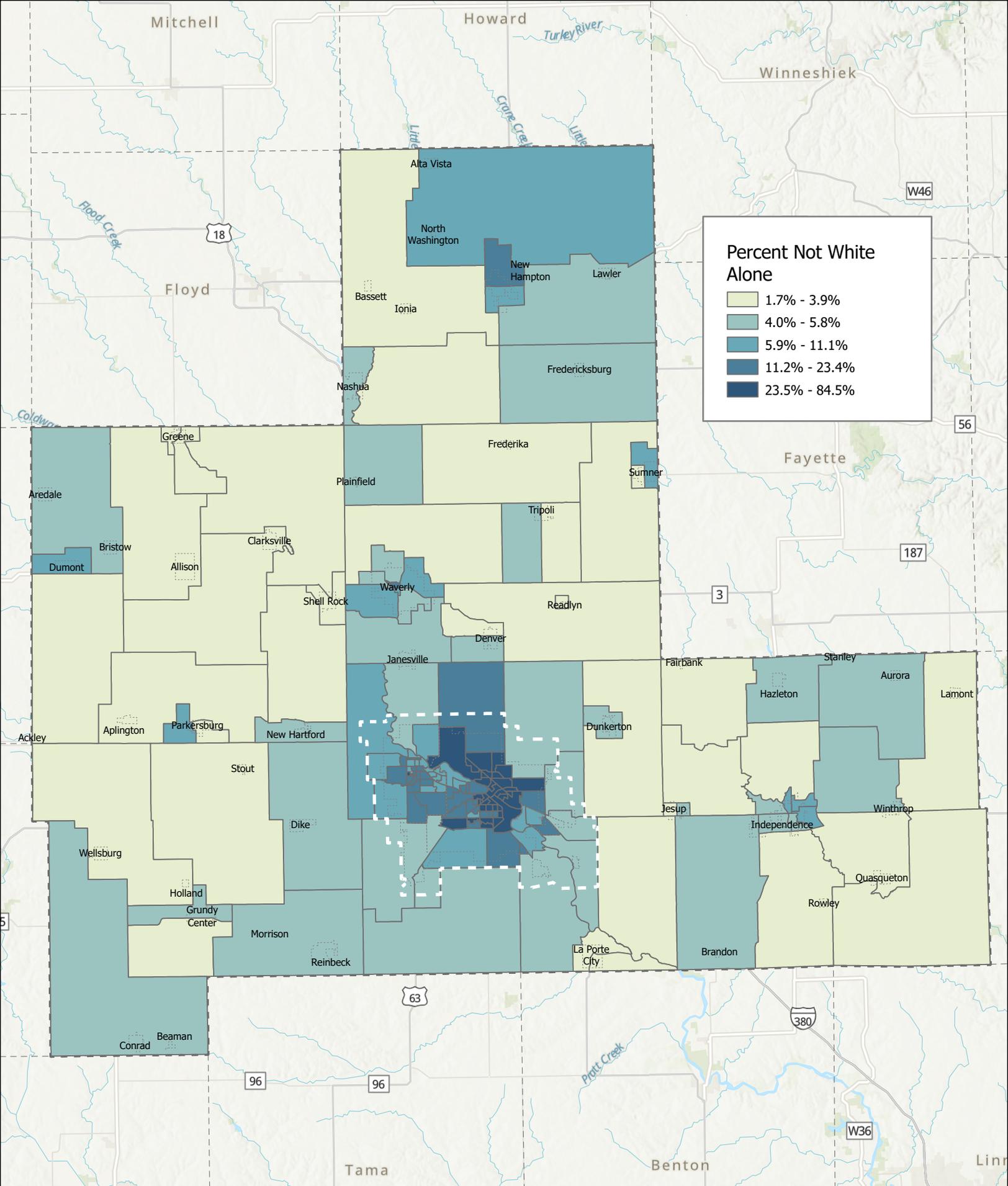


<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-the-united-states-2010-and-2020-census.html>

Persons with Disabilities

To capture a variety of characteristics that encompass the definition of disability, the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey identifies serious difficulty with four basic areas of functioning – hearing, vision, cognition, and ambulation (movement); difficulty bathing and dressing; and difficulty performing errands such as shopping. Approximately 11.8 percent of the total civilian noninstitutionalized population in the region, excluding the MPO area, have at least one disability. Map 2.8 shows the percentage of the population with disabilities by Census tract.



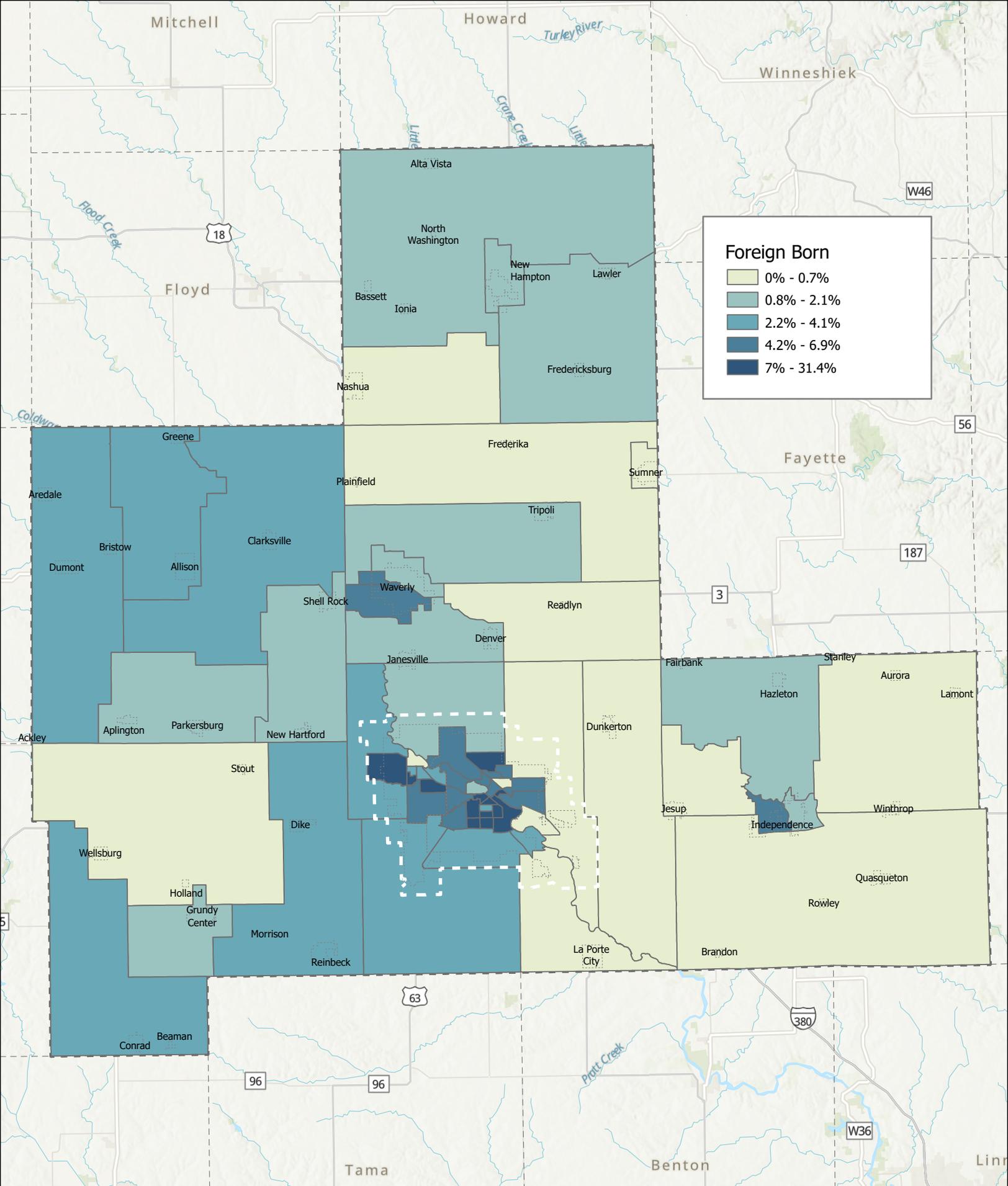


Map 2.4

Racial & Ethnic Minorities by Census Block Group

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Foreign Born

- 0% - 0.7%
- 0.8% - 2.1%
- 2.2% - 4.1%
- 4.2% - 6.9%
- 7% - 31.4%

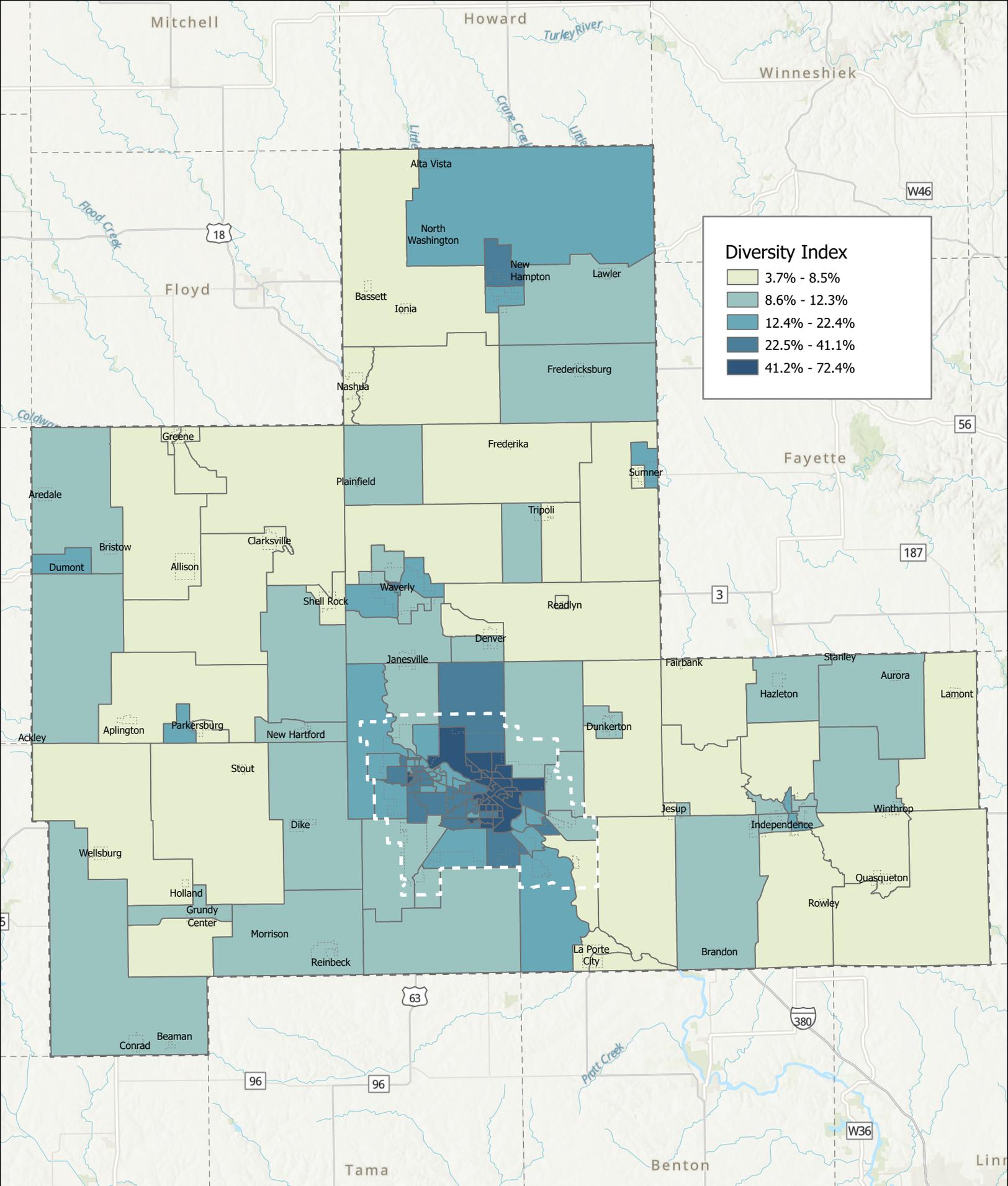
Map 2.5

Foreign Born Population by Census Tract

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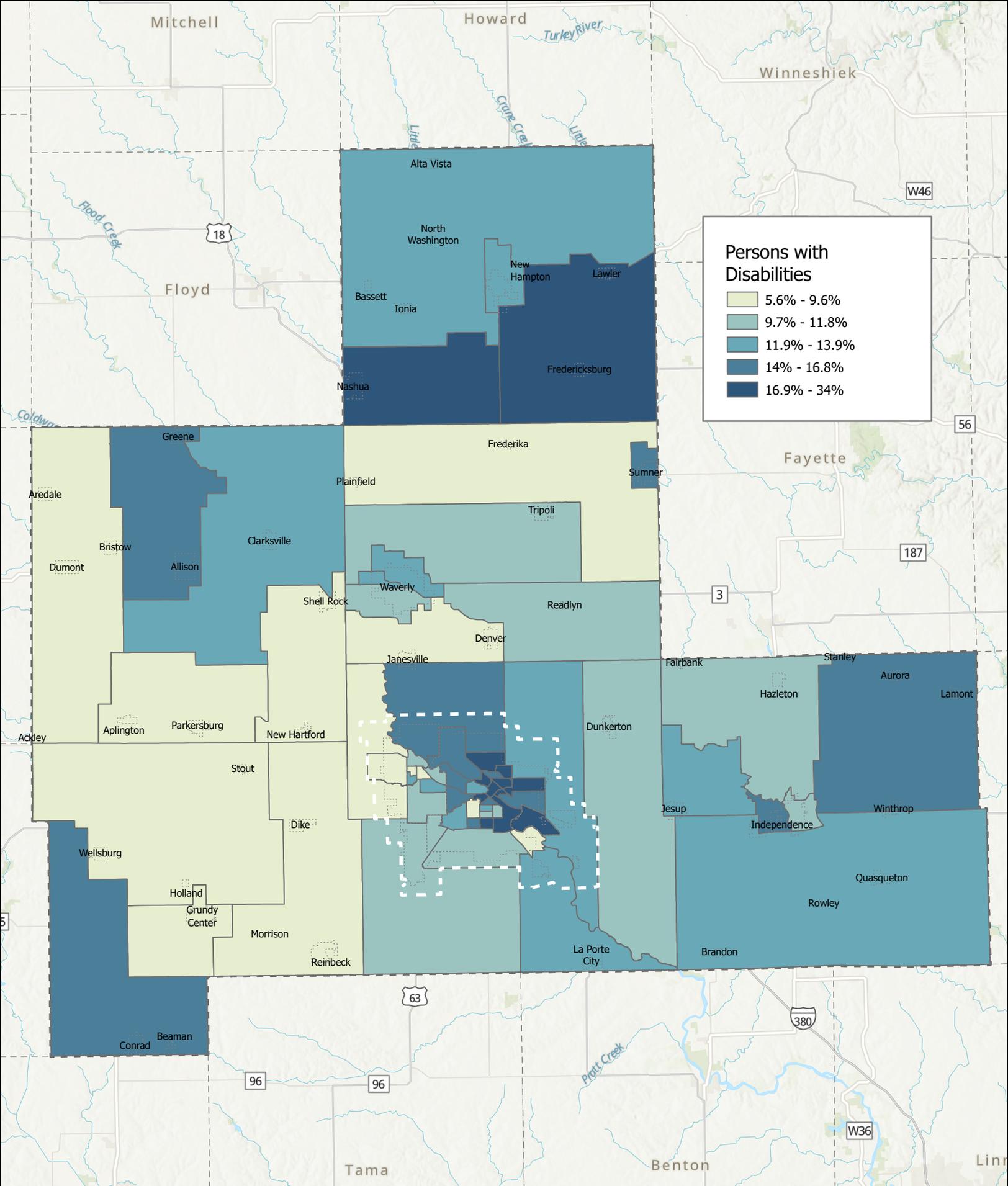
Map 2.7

Ethnic Diversity Index by Census Block Group

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Map 2.8

Persons with Disabilities by Census Tract

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Jobs

The number of jobs in the region has seen a modest increase over the past two decades. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were approximately 29,300 jobs in the region in 2021, an increase of 2,000 jobs since 2002, reflecting an average annual increase of 0.39%. Map 2.9 shows the number of jobs, and Figure 2.7 shows the job counts by North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) industry sector.

Map 2.9: Number of Jobs

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2021

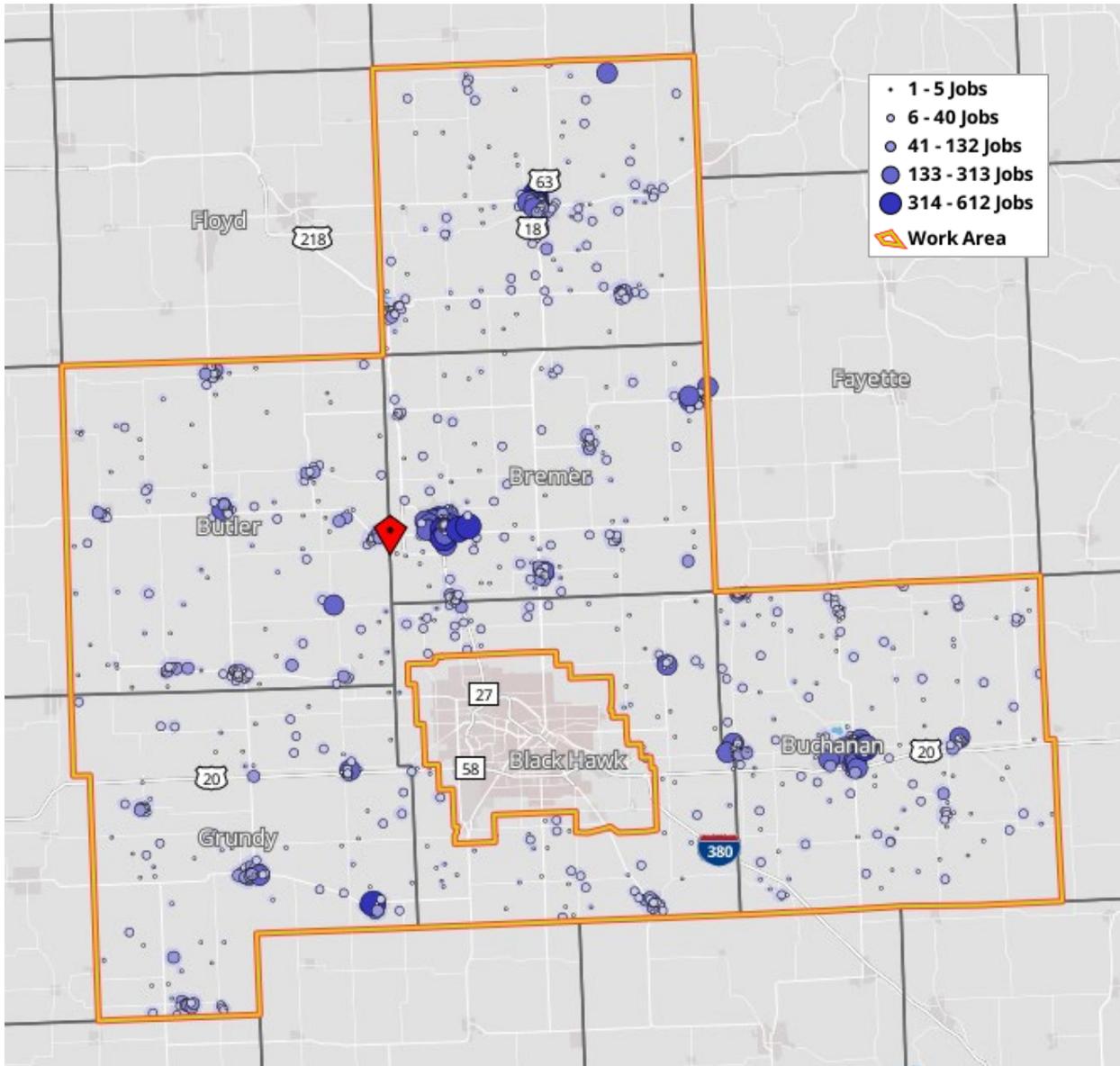
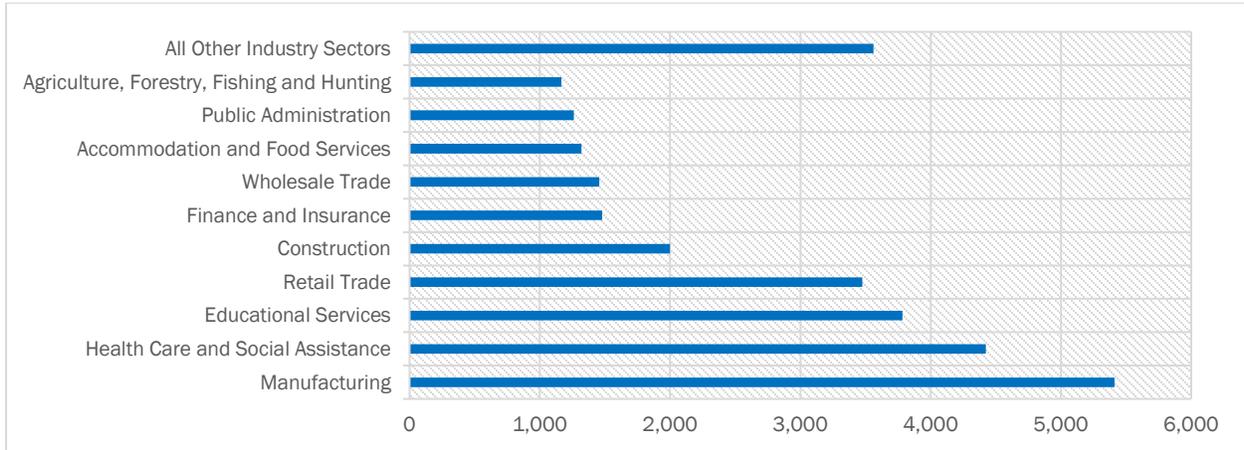


Figure 2.7: Jobs by NAICS Industry Sector

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2021



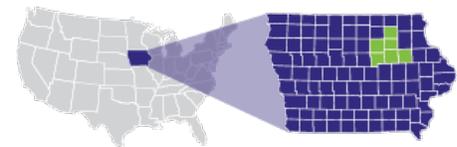
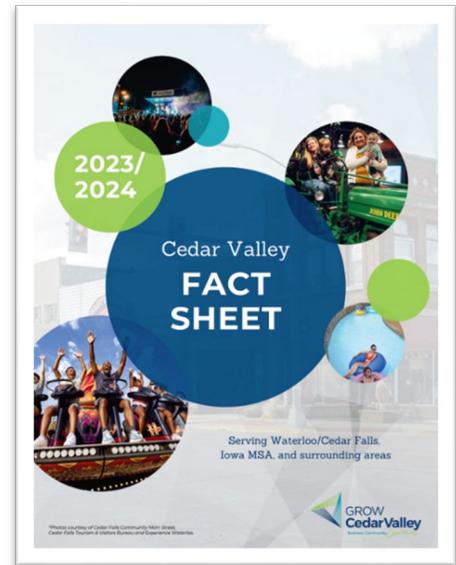
Major Employers

Table 2.3 lists the major employers in the region, including the Black Hawk County metropolitan area. Of these top employers, manufacturing, education, and health care are the top three industries by number of employees. These industries play a critical role in the region’s economic stability and growth, providing essential services and pronounced levels of employment. The prominence of these sectors underscores the importance of supporting infrastructure and policies that foster their continued development, ensuring sustained job creation and economic resilience.

Table 2.3: Top 20 Employers

Company	Industry	Approximate Employees
John Deere	Manufacturing	5,800
UnityPoint Health	Health Care	3,379
Tyson Fresh Meats	Food Processing	2,980
MercyOne	Health Care	2,573
Waterloo Community Schools	Education	1,700
Target Distribution Centers	Distribution	1,700
University of Northern Iowa	Education	1,650
VGM Group	Diversified	1,521
Hy-Vee Food Stores	Grocery	1,181
Cedar Falls Community Schools	Education	1,168
City of Waterloo	Government	1,025
Western Home Communities	Health Care/Housing	962
Hawkeye Community College	Education	730
Bertch Cabinet Manufacturing	Manufacturing	727
Veridian Credit Union	Financial	647
Omega Cabinetry/Masterbrand	Manufacturing	600
City of Cedar Falls	Government	588
Central Rivers AEA	Education	562
LSB/LSBX	Financial	450
Wartburg College	Education	450

Source: Grow Cedar Valley, 2023/2024 Cedar Valley Fact Sheet

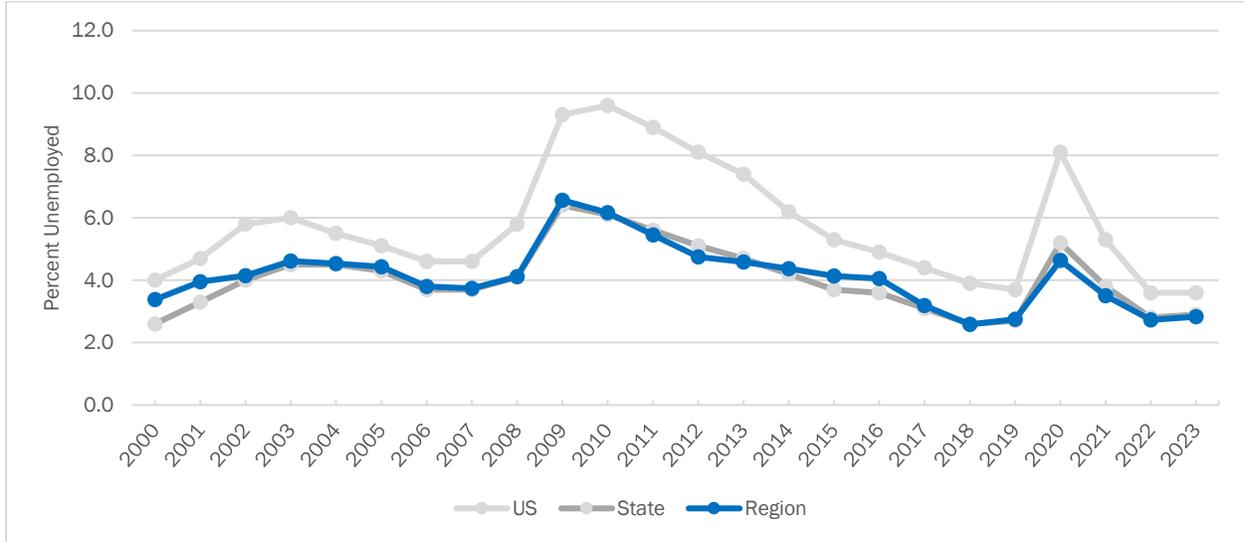


Unemployment

Figure 2.8 displays the unemployment rate for the region over the past 25 years, alongside the statewide and national averages. Since 2000, the region has experienced an unemployment rate comparable to the state, consistently outperforming the national average. This relative economic resilience can be attributed to several factors, including the region's diversified economy, which relies heavily on stable industries such as manufacturing, education, and healthcare. The presence of major employers and educational institutions also provides a steady stream of job opportunities, further insulating the region from broader economic downturns.

Figure 2.8: Unemployment Rate

Source: Iowa Workforce Development, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Annual Average Unemployment Rate

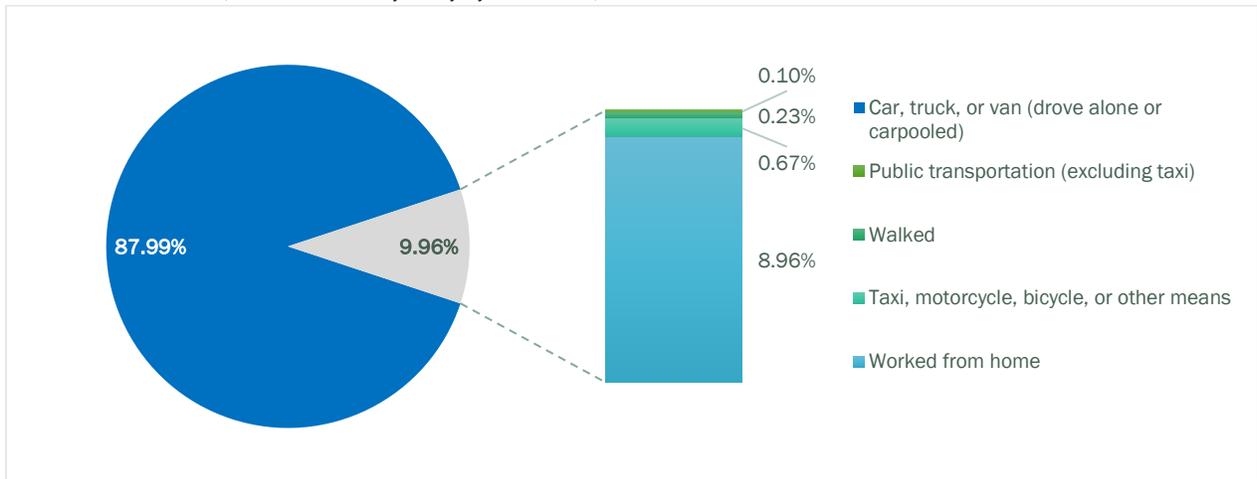


Mode of Transportation to Work

The Iowa Northland Region remains an auto-oriented community. Approximately 88 percent of residents utilize an automobile for travel to work (Figure 2.9). Working from home is the next highest mode at 9 percent. Public transportation, cycling, and walking make up a small fraction of the commute methods, highlighting the region's heavy reliance on personal vehicles. This reliance underscores the need for continued investment in road infrastructure and initiatives to support alternative transportation options.

Figure 2.9: Mode of Transportation to Work

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2022

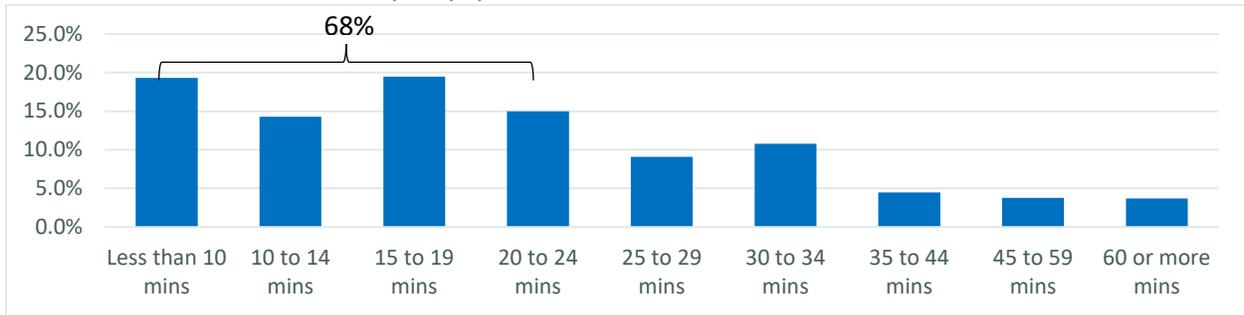


Commute Time to Work

Figure 2.10 provides travel times to work for the region. Almost 70 percent of commuting trips are 24 minutes or less, indicating that a significant portion of the region’s workforce lives relatively close to their place of employment. This short commute time suggests that most residents can avoid the longer, more stressful commutes that are common in larger metropolitan areas. The data also highlights the efficiency of the local transportation infrastructure in facilitating quick and convenient travel for most workers.

Figure 2.10: Commute Time to Work

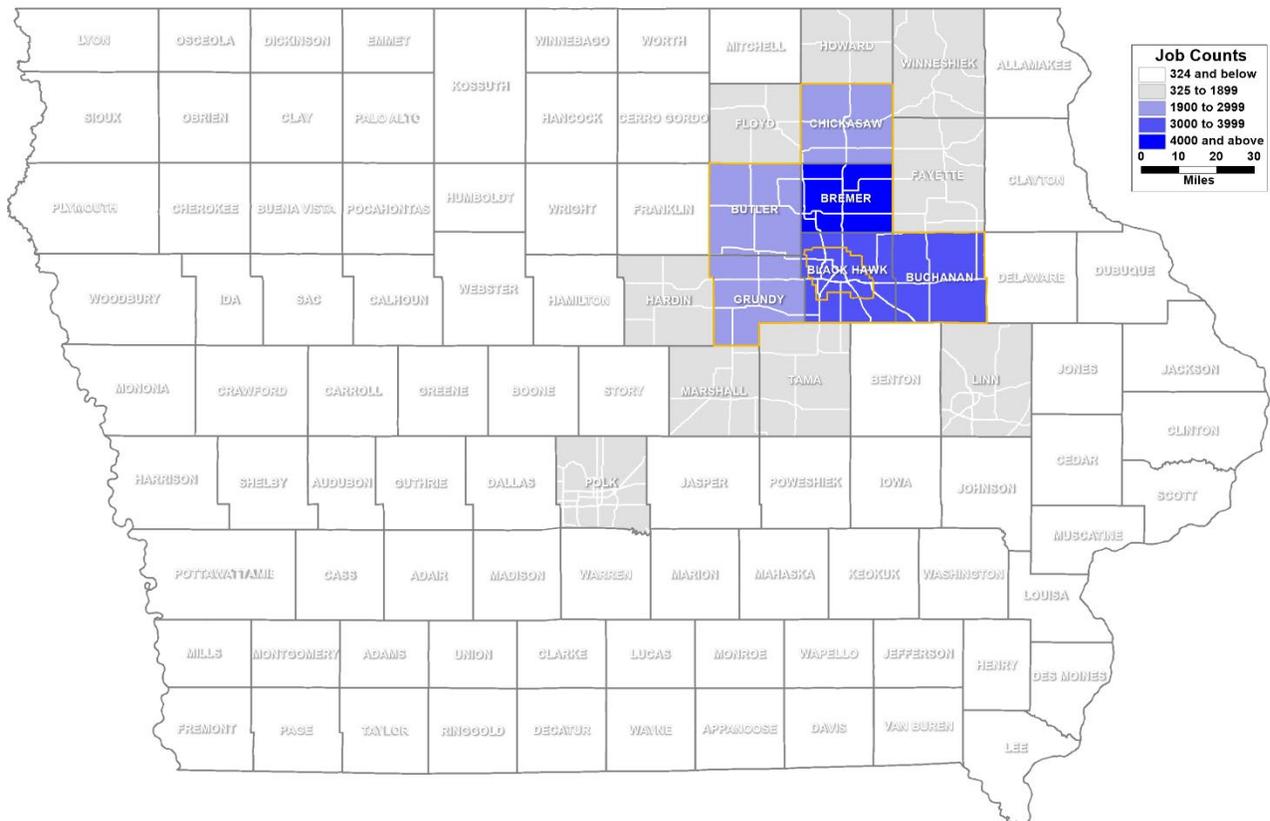
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, 2022



Map 2.10 shows the job counts by counties for workers living in the region in 2021 (i.e., where do people that work in the region live). Of the 29,000 workers employed in the region, approximately 17 percent live in Bremer County, followed by Black Hawk County (13.1%) and Buchanan County (12.2%).

Map 2.10: Job Counts by Counties for Workers Living in the Region

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2021

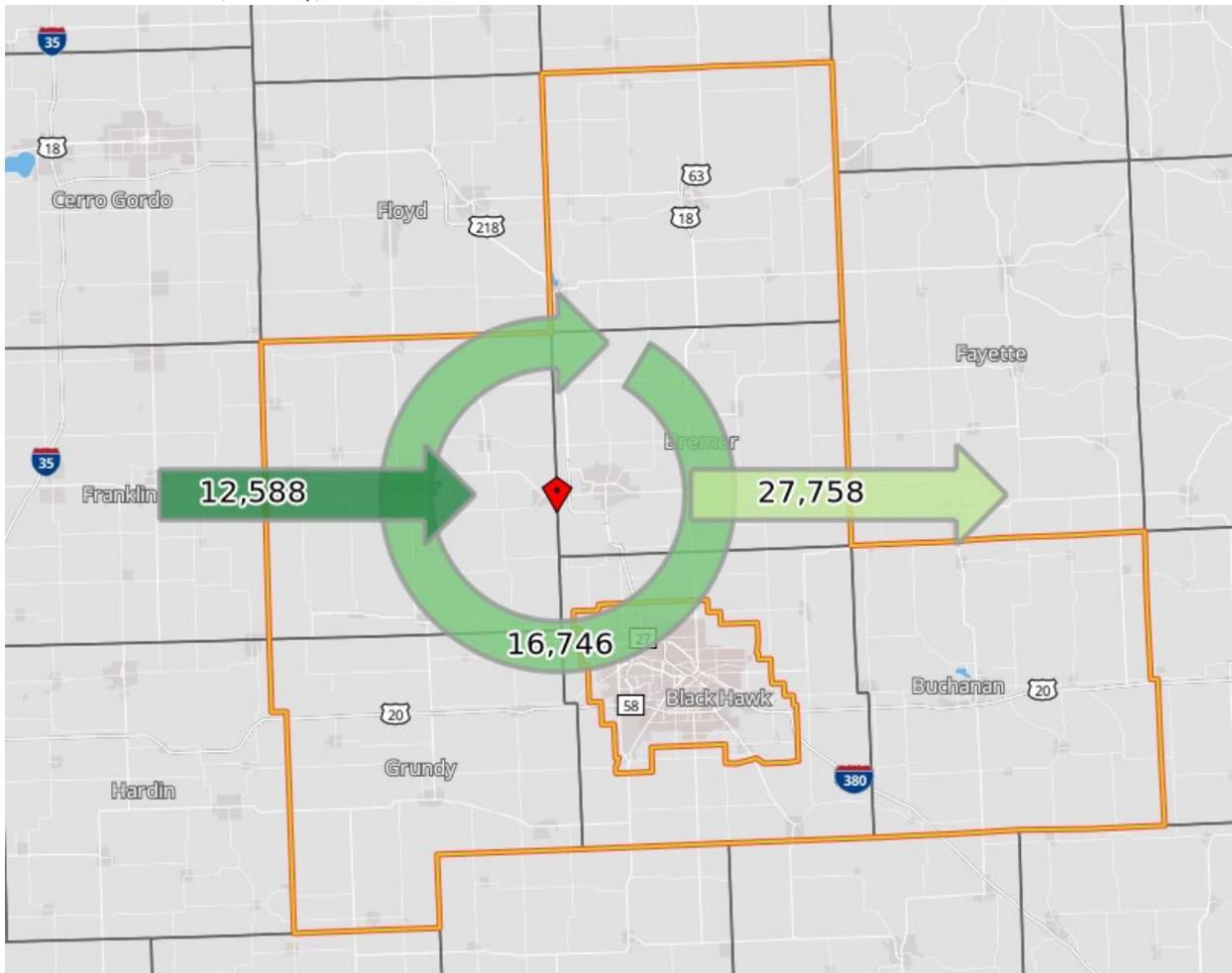


Map 2.11 illustrates the movement of workers commuting in and out of the region. As shown, more workers live within the region and are employed outside (27,758) compared to those who live outside the region and commute in for work (12,588). The presence of the metropolitan area of Waterloo/Cedar Falls within the region is particularly relevant, as it serves as a central hub for employment, influencing commuting patterns and underscoring the need for robust transportation infrastructure to support both local and regional travel demands.



Map 2.11: Inflow/Outflow of Jobs in the Region

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2021



Employment Projections

In addition to forecasting population, it is important to forecast future employment. The regional job growth rate was calculated using U.S. Census Bureau OnTheMap data from 2007 to 2021. This timeframe offers a more current picture of the area's growth. Expanding the analysis timeframe helps smooth out fluctuations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a more stable basis for forecasting future employment trends. To calculate the number of jobs within the RTA region, excluding the MPO area, a shapefile of the RTA boundary was imported to OnTheMap, enabling the calculation of jobs specifically within the RTA boundary.

Linear projections from 2007 to 2021 were used to forecast the number of jobs in the region through the horizon year 2050. In 2021, there were an estimated 29,334 jobs. This figure is projected to increase modestly by 441, resulting in a total of 29,775 jobs by 2050. This represents an average annual job growth rate of approximately 0.051%. For comparison, the average annual job growth rate in the U.S. over the past decade has been around 1.2%.

The region will continue to rely on the larger pool of jobs in the Waterloo/Cedar Falls metropolitan area, which is projected to experience a significant increase. According to the MPO 2050 Long-Range Transportation Plan, the metropolitan area is expected to add 9,700 jobs by 2050. This anticipated growth underscores the importance of the metro area as a crucial employment hub, offering opportunities that can support the broader regional economy. As the region's job market remains relatively stagnant, the metropolitan area's growth will be vital in providing employment options and stimulating economic activity across the entire region.

Table 2.4: Employment Projections

	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021	2050
Black Hawk	1,701	2,055	1,361	1,387	1,476	1,478	1,366	1,314	287
Bremer	9,516	9,612	9,669	9,792	9,962	9,982	9,778	9,282	9,716
Buchanan	6,134	6,001	6,340	6,352	6,504	6,610	6,601	6,596	7,495
Butler	4,015	3,913	3,402	3,636	3,690	3,352	3,292	3,374	1,906
Chickasaw	4,356	4,445	4,366	4,647	4,593	4,623	4,875	4,854	5,874
Grundy	3,738	3,813	3,831	3,760	4,097	3,954	3,967	3,914	4,496
Total	29,460	29,839	28,969	29,574	30,322	29,999	29,879	29,334	29,775

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2007 to 2021

