

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Background and Goals

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance -- including transportation. The Environmental Justice (EJ) Orders add that "Federal agencies shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations." Compliance with provisions of Title VI and the EJ Orders extend to all transportation investment and planning processes and need to be considered in metropolitan and statewide planning.

Environmental Justice addresses the effects of all programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. Environmental Justice seeks to:

- avoid or minimize high and adverse human health, environmental, social and/or economic effects on minority and low-income populations;
- ensure full and fair participation of all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process; and
- prevent denial of, reduction in or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by minority and low-income populations.

In the context of Environmental Justice, disproportionate and adverse effects are defined as unfavorable effects that minority and low-income populations predominately experience. They are typically more severe or greater in magnitude than the adverse effects suffered by non-minority or non low-income populations. The Greater Hickory Metropolitan Planning Organization (GHMPO) will work through compliance goals and planning process goals to conduct population identification, process documentation and benefit/burden assessments in order to identify and avoid disproportionately high and adverse effects on minority and low-income populations.

One of the Goals in the GHMPO's 2040 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) specifically addresses the issue of Environmental Justice. The GHMPO seeks to provide:

- A transportation system that gives equitable transportation options to low-income and minority neighborhoods and improves the quality of life of all residents of the GHMPO Planning Area.

The following Objective and Policy statements ask the GHMPO to

- Ensure a multi-modal transportation system which provides access and mobility to all residents, while protecting the public health, natural environment, cultural resources and social systems.
- Ensure environmental justice by providing transportation facilities that do not disproportionately affect disadvantaged populations.

Minority Population and Population below Poverty Level

Minority Persons

Minority persons are those who are identified as:

- African American,
- American Indian,
- Asian/Pacific Islander,
- Other/Mixed Race, or
- Hispanic (any race).

Poverty

The US Census Bureau's defines poverty as "following the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive 14, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation using Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition uses money income before taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps)." For example, the weighted average poverty threshold for a family of four in 2011 was \$23,021.

(See <<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/index.html>> for the complete set of dollar value thresholds that vary by family size and composition.)

Environmental Justice Analysis

Table 10-1 describes the total population of the Greater Hickory MPO/Unifour RPO and those in minority, low-income and seniors/persons 65+ groups. The total population is 364,567 with an estimated 82.2% of the population as white, non-Hispanics. Minority population totals 17.8%. The minority population in the Greater Hickory MPO is found in three categories: African American, 6.8%, Hispanic, 6.5% Asian and Pacific Islander 2.4% and Other/Mixed Race, 4.7%. Residents below the poverty threshold in the region constitute 65,726 persons, or 18.4% of the total population. Persons over 65 (seniors) equaled 56,506 residents, or nearly 15.5% of the total population.

Table 10-1.		
Greater Hickory MPO/Unifour RPO Demographic Estimates, 2011		
Demographic Group	Estimate	Percent
Total Population	364,567	100.00
White Non-Hispanic	299,842	82.2
Total Minority	64,725	17.8
African American	24,862	6.8

American Indian	1,432	0.4
Asian/Pacific Islander	8,824	2.4
Other/Mixed Race	17,277	4.7
Hispanic (Any Race)	23,644	6.5
Individuals below Poverty Level	65,726	18.4
Seniors (65 years and over)	56,506	15.5

Source: 2011 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau.

GIS technology enables the GHMPO proposed thoroughfare improvements, transit routes, criteria pollutant air quality monitors, and employment concentration areas (defined as traffic analysis zones with more than 500 employees) to be superimposed on locations of minority and below poverty population concentration areas to complete an environmental justice analysis. Maps provided were separated by County, which includes Alexander County (Map 10-1, page 10-4), Burke County (Map 10-2, page 10-5), Caldwell County (Map 10-3, page 10-6), and Catawba County (Map 10-4, page 10-6).

Poverty Population Concentration Areas Determination

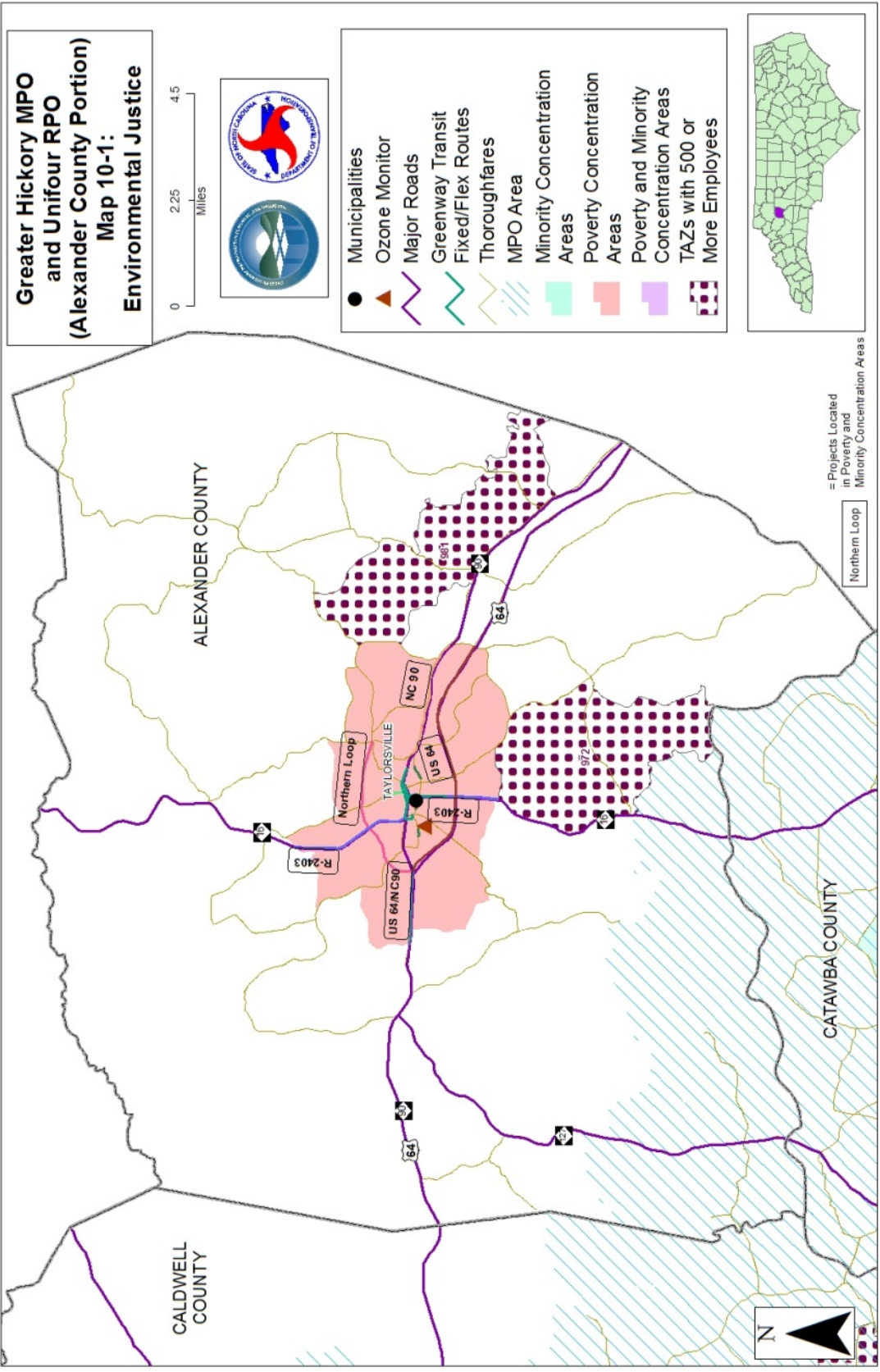
The maps for this chapter show poverty concentration areas by highlighting in pink census tracts with poverty levels that are 125% of the regional average (18.4%) or 23%. Poverty data comes from the 2007-2011 (5-year) American Community Survey. A total of 10 out of 73 Census tracts in the region were identified as poverty concentration areas by using the 125% of the regional poverty average threshold. Census Tracts shaded in purple are both a poverty concentration area and a minority concentration area. Results from Maps 10-1 to 10-4 indicated that poverty concentrated areas can be found in both urban and rural locations in the region.

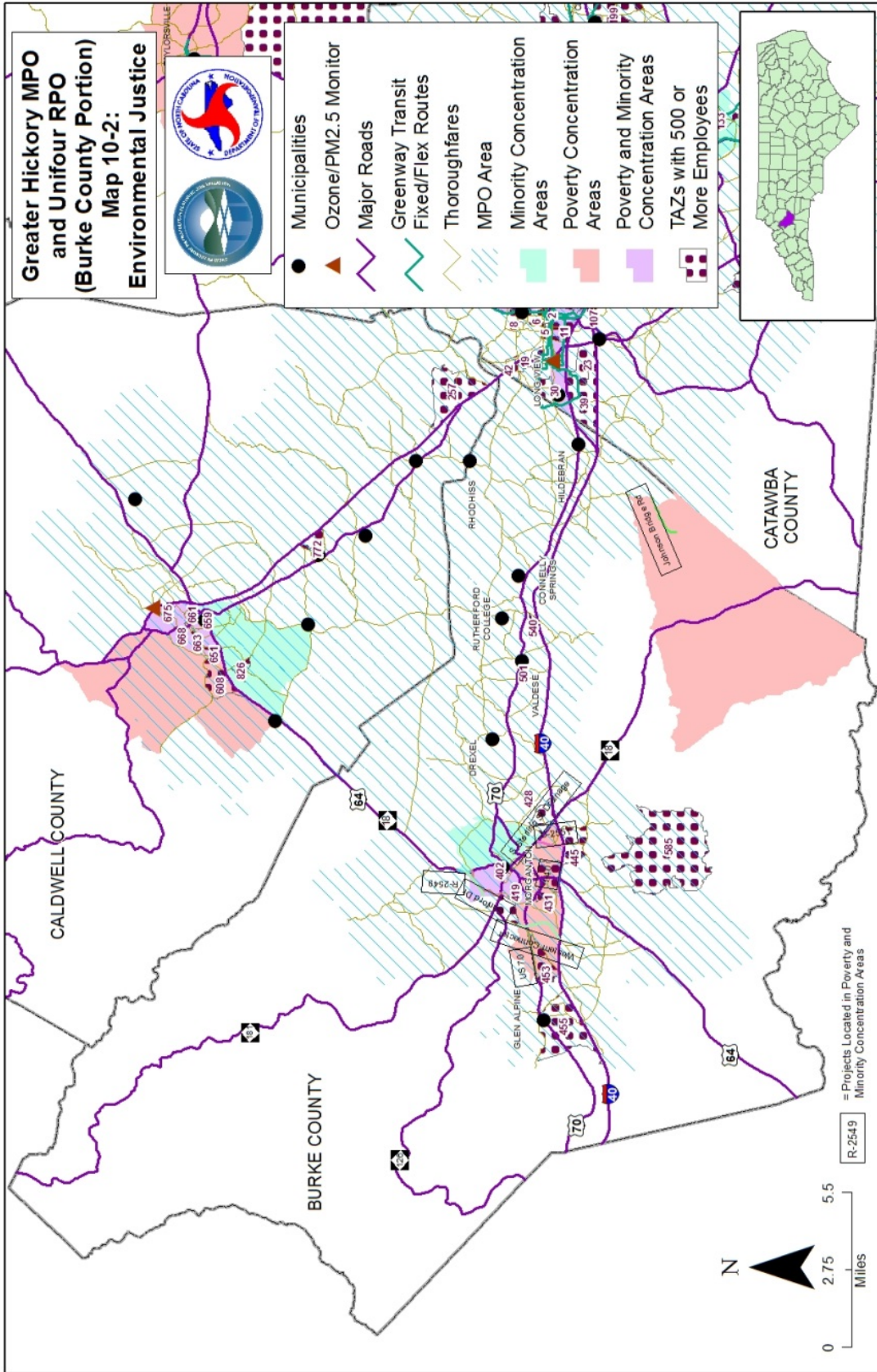
Minority Population Concentration Areas Determination

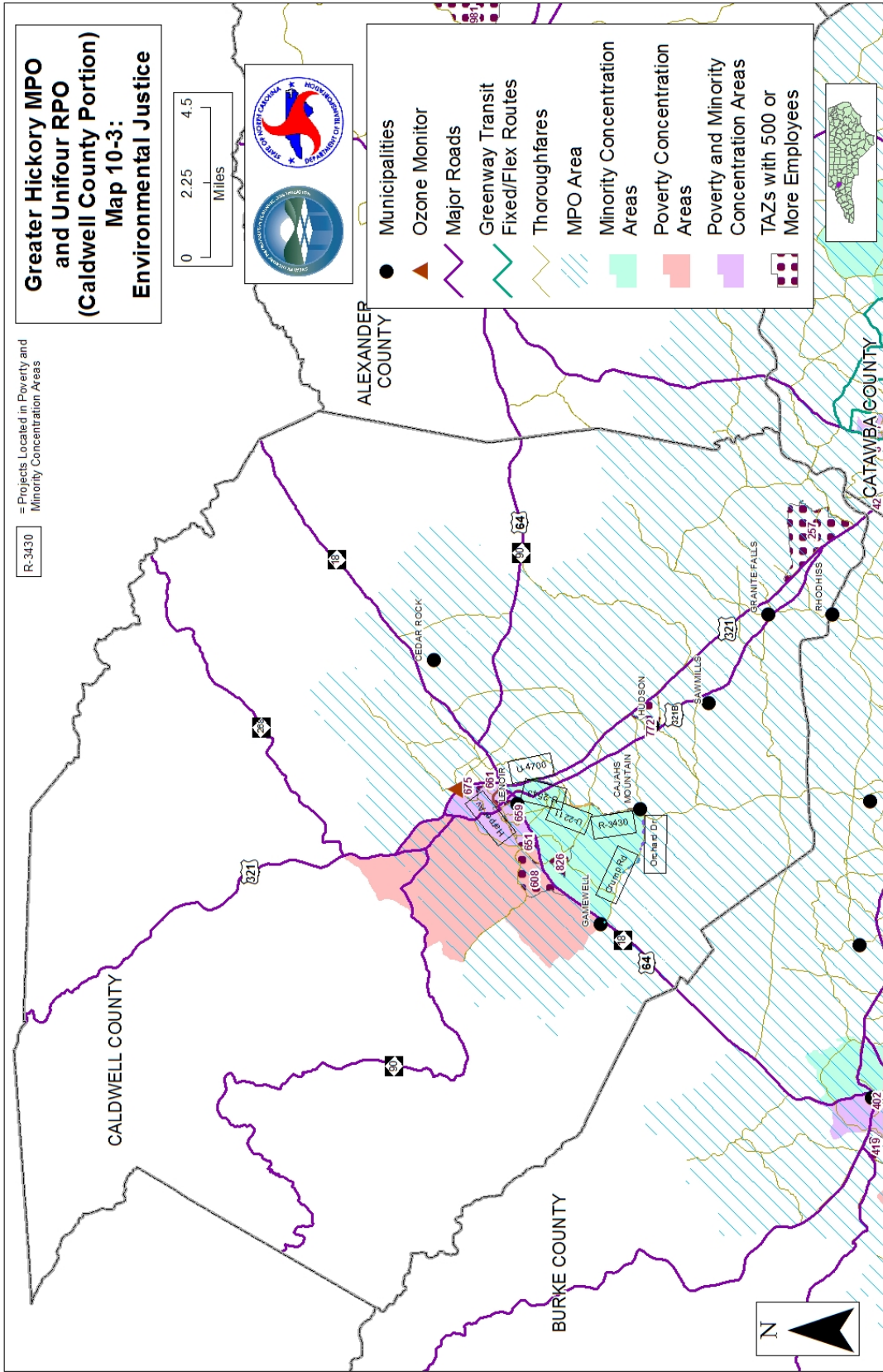
The maps for this chapter show minority concentration areas by highlighting in blue Census tracts with minority population that are more than 150% of the regional average (17.8%) or 26.7% minority population. Minority Census tract data comes from the 2010 Census. Minority means anyone who resides the region that is not white non-Hispanic. A total of 12 out of 73 Census Tracts in the region were identified as minority concentration areas by using the 150% of the regional minority average threshold. Census tracts shaded in purple are both a poverty concentration area and a minority concentration area.

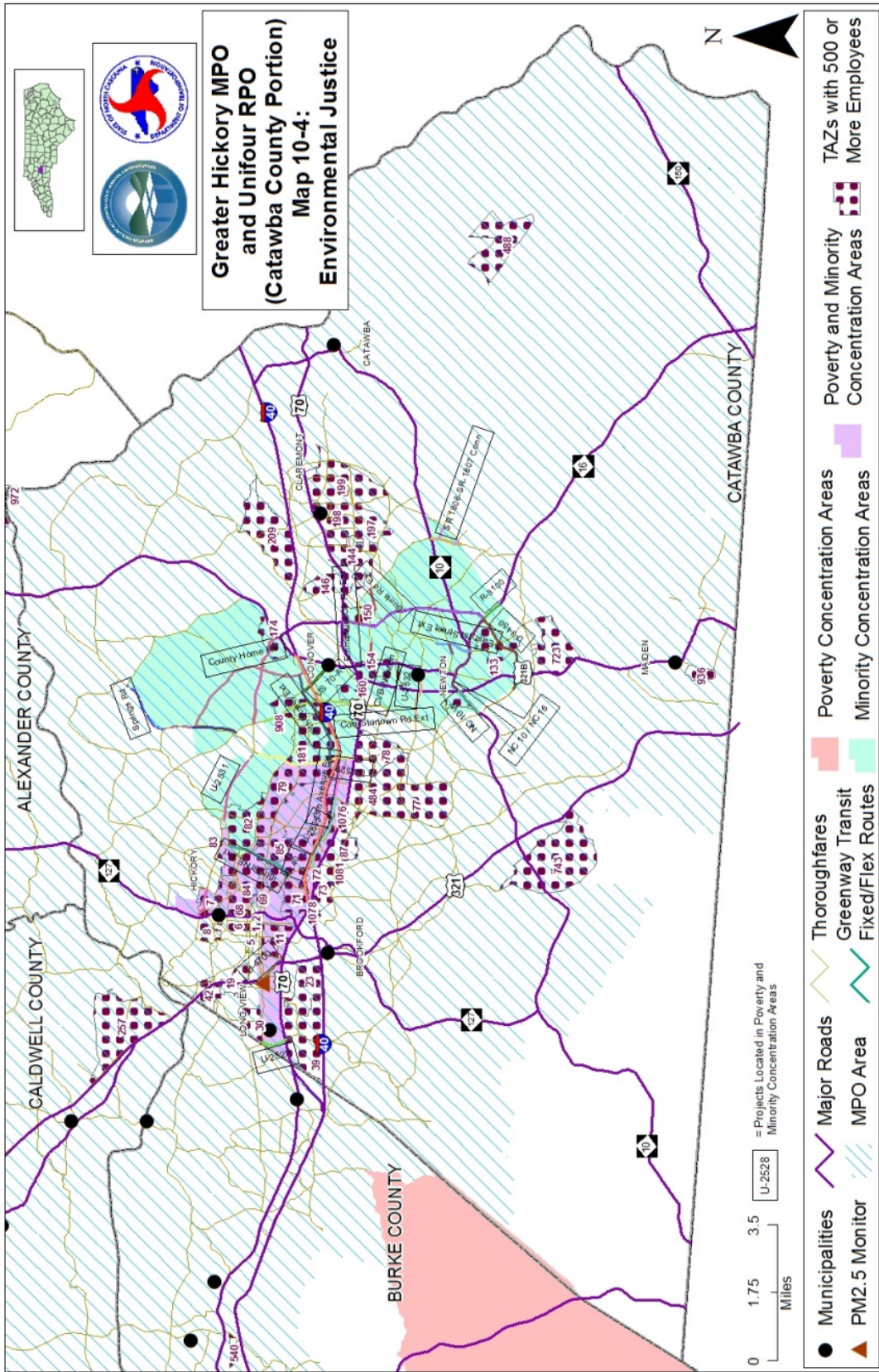
Poverty and Minority Concentration Areas by County

In Alexander County one Census Tract (404) was identified as a poverty concentration area (Map 10-1). This Census tract which includes Taylorsville is located outside the MPO boundary. Within the Alexander County poverty concentration Census tract is the Taylorsville flex route which runs from 10 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. three days a week. Greenway transit provides demand response service to Alexander County five days a week. The Alexander County ozone monitor is also located in the poverty concentration Census tract. The ozone monitor is currently in attainment status.









The analysis identified two TAZs with more than 500 employees adjacent to the Alexander County poverty concentration Census tract. These TAZs include employment with the Alexander County prison and several manufacturing facilities. Several major thoroughfares including US 64, NC 90 and NC 16 cross the poverty concentration area. Several minor projects listed on the LRTP run through the Alexander County poverty concentration area. A detailed description of these projects can be found in Chapter 2 or in Appendix D. No minority concentration areas were identified in Alexander County.

In Burke County (Map 10-2) Poverty Concentration Areas and Minority Concentration areas are located in Morganton. Additionally, a Poverty Concentration Area exists in the southeast portion of Burke County, which is mostly outside of the MPO Boundaries. Greenway transit does not offer fixed route service in Burke County; however, demand response is available for Burke County residents five days a week. Employment TAZ analysis shows that several job centers are located within or adjacent to the minority and poverty concentration areas in Morganton.

Numerous major thoroughfares cross the poverty and minority concentrations in Morganton. Improvements to I-40 interchanges in Morganton will help improve access to the Interstate for residents in the Morganton minority and poverty concentration areas. NC 18 runs through the poverty concentration zone in southeastern Burke County.

Caldwell County (Map 10-3) poverty concentration areas are focused in the northwestern portion of the City of Lenoir and overlap with minority concentration areas near downtown Lenoir. Both concentration areas fall mostly within the MPO Boundaries and within proximity to major thoroughfares. Greenway transit does not offer fixed route service in Caldwell County; however, demand response is available for Caldwell County residents six days a week. The Caldwell County ozone monitor is located in the minority and poverty concentration census tract. The ozone monitor is currently in attainment status.

TAZs with 500 or more employees are located mainly along Highway 321 which runs from Lenoir to Hickory. Several major thoroughfares traverse the minority and poverty areas in Lenoir including US 64, US 321, US 321 A, NC 18 and NC 90. Thoroughfare planning calls for improvements to US 321 and 321A, a loop on Lenoir's east side, and a new road beginning at US 321 connecting to NC 18 near Cedar Rock. These thoroughfare improvements will make moving around the Lenoir area easier for residents, workers and visitors.

In Catawba County (Map 10-4) Poverty Concentration Areas completely overlap with Minority Concentration Census tracts and are located primarily in Hickory and Long View. Minority Concentration Areas extend further eastward into Newton and Conover. The entirety of these areas fall within the MPO boundaries, and are within proximity to multiple TAZs with 500 or more employees, primarily located along the I-40 and US 70 Corridor. A fine particulate matter monitor is located in the minority and poverty concentration zone in Hickory. The monitor is currently in maintenance status with no violations over the federal limit in more than 5 years.

Greenway transit has six fixed routes that run through the minority and poverty concentration zones in Catawba County. Routes 1 and 2 provide service in Hickory. Routes 3 and 4 provide services for portions of Hickory and Newton. Routes 5 and 6 provide service for portions of Conover and Hickory. Demand response service is also available in Catawba County six days a week.

Thoroughfare improvements in the cities of Conover, Hickory and Newton will increase connectivity in and around these cities. Improvements to NC 16, NC 10 and NC 127 South will

also benefit residents in the minority and poverty zones by helping them move more easily around these cities and into surrounding areas of the County and the GHMPO.

Transit access for poverty concentrated areas in Catawba County is limited to the major urban areas where transit is readily available -- the cities of Hickory, Newton, and a small portion of Conover (Map 10-4). Fixed transit, unfortunately, is essentially non-existent for rural areas outside of the larger cities. Major plans for thoroughfare improvements in Catawba County include increased connectivity in Hickory, Newton and Conover and substantial improvements to NC 16, NC 10 and NC 127 South. These major thoroughfare improvements will enable low-moderate income persons in the urban areas greater access to other areas in the County and beyond.

Conclusions

The tract with the highest minority concentration (80.3%) in the MPO is Census Tract 109, located in the Ridgeview and Kenworth areas of Hickory. Census Tracts 104.02 with 45.9% minority and Tract 110 with 41.6% minority are also located in the Hickory city limits. Other areas of high minority concentration can be found in the central area of Lenoir (Tract 301, 45.1%), Morganton (Tracts 206, 43%; Tract 204, 39%, and Tract 205, 38.1%) and Newton with Tract 113 at 34.9% minority population.

Map 10-4 presents in detail the central areas of Hickory and Newton and clearly shows that transit is widely accessible in areas of minority concentration in central Hickory and Newton, as well as providing access to retail and medical service along US 70, Highland Avenue and Tate Blvd. No fixed transit routes exist at this time in Morganton (Map 10-2) or Lenoir (Map 10-3), the other minority population concentrations in the MPO. Proposed thoroughfare improvements, also shown on Map 11-4, indicate a balance between areas of minority concentration, where fewer thoroughfare improvements are projected, and more rural areas across the MPO. New thoroughfares are less likely to be needed in urban areas where land is typically more intensely developed than in rural areas. Fewer new thoroughfares mean less disruption to the existing urban fabric and the daily lives of minority residents.

Minority residents and some who live below the poverty threshold live in the same Census tracts. These are areas where the GHMPO must continue to insist that transportation policies and decisions do not disproportionately negatively affect these groups. Transit access is good for urban residents of Catawba County's largest cities; residents of Morganton and Lenoir, however, are currently without fixed transit routes. Low and moderate income residents of the MPO have better access to fixed transit routes if they live in the larger cities in Catawba County than if they live in other counties. Rural residents with low-moderate household incomes are not served by fixed transit in the GHMPO. Western Piedmont Regional Transit Authority (WPRTA), however, does serve all four counties with demand response van service which is utilized by low-moderate income and older populations.

Suggestions for Environmental Justice Recommendations

- The GHMPO shall put into practice the three basic principles of Environmental Justice, described above (page 10-1) to benefit minority, low income and older populations.
- The GHMPO shall work to establish fixed transit routes in minority, low income and older population areas of Morganton and Lenoir where they are currently non-

existent. The process should begin with a feasibility study of adding fixed transit service to these areas. Increase public outreach to poverty and minority concentration areas to seek their feedback and needs for transit service, including access to work and medical care.

- Transit options to low income residents in the GHMPO shall be extended, where feasible and as funding allows, to low income residents in rural areas of the counties.
- Expand fixed transit routes in the Morganton area and from Morganton east to Valdese and Rutherford College where many seniors currently reside.
- Map past transportation projects in identified environmental justice areas (minority and poverty concentration) to determine project effects over time.