City of Walker: Latent Transit Demand Analysis

Tech Memo 1: Service Providers and Service Analysis

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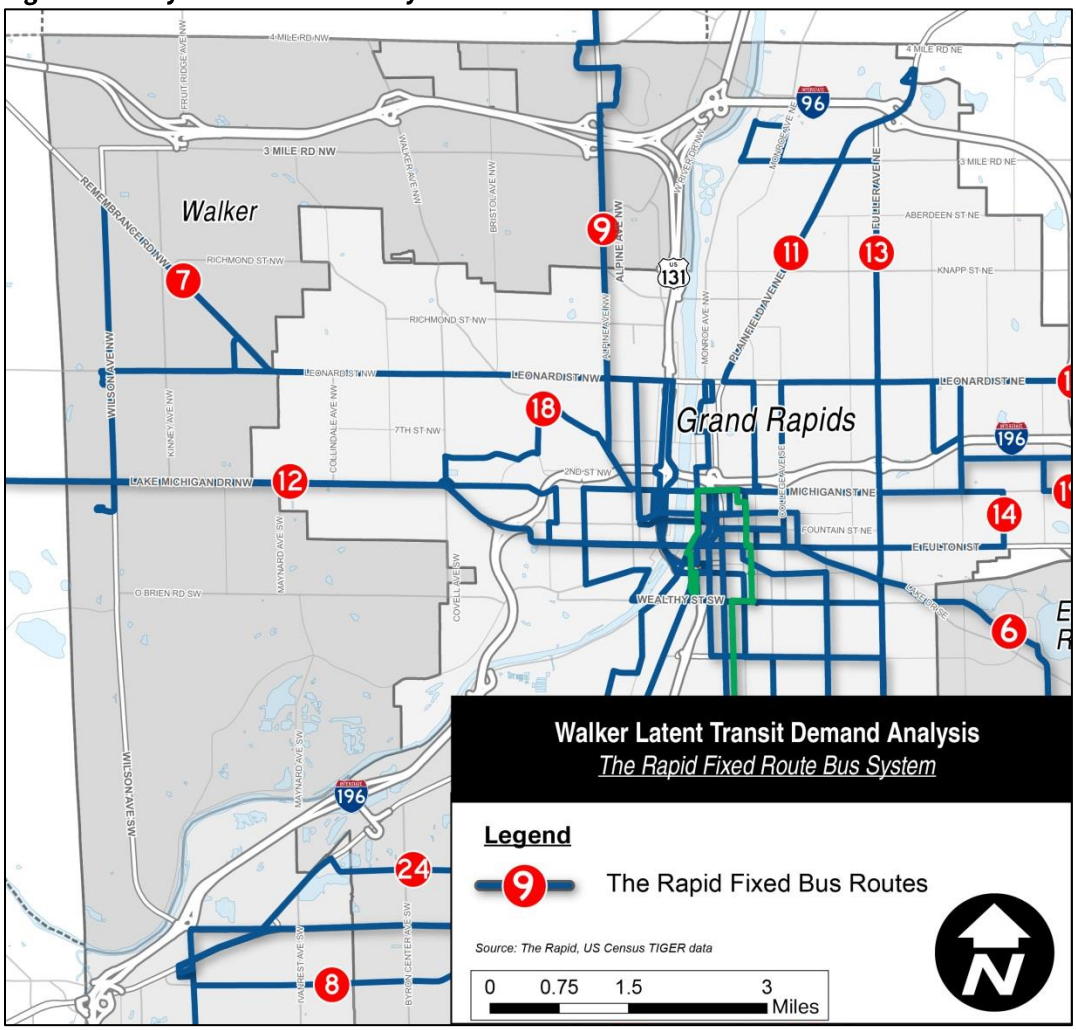
1.0 Introduction

The Interurban Transit Partnership (ITP), which operates under the moniker "The Rapid", is the main transit agency operating in Kent County and serves the cities of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Walker, Wyoming, Kentwood, and Grandville. The Rapid operates 28 fixed bus routes, as well as paratransit and vanpool services, that provide transportation services to the Grand Rapids region.

With a population of roughly 25,000 people, the City of Walker is growing with the region. As Walker increases its population, development and employment continues to grow with much of the increase located in the 3 Mile Road and 4 Mile Road corridors (in the northern edge of the City). Figure 1-1 shows Walker in relation to Grand Rapids and The Rapid's service area.

Figure 1-1: City of Walker Boundary

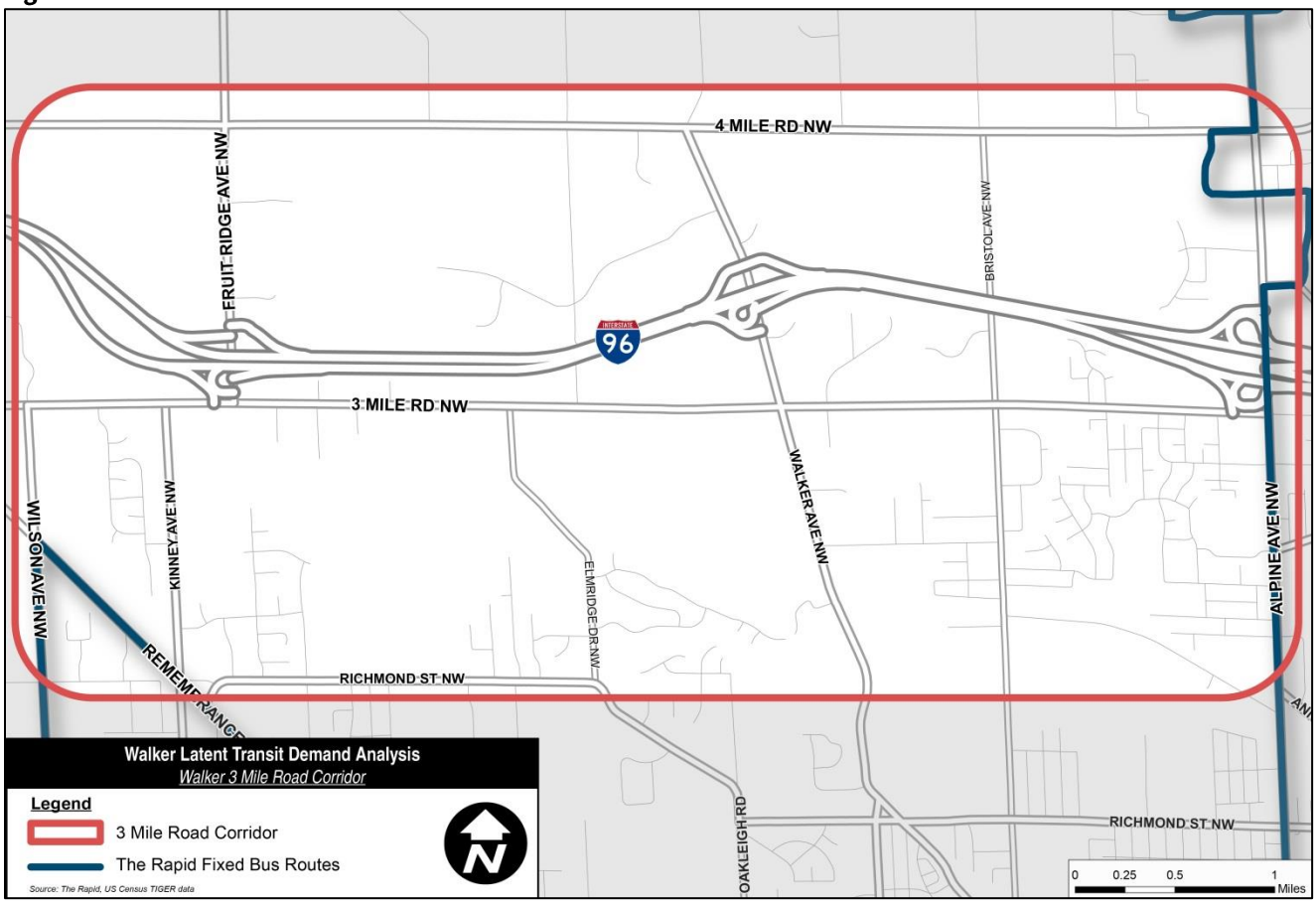


1.1 Project Description

In July of 2016, board members representing the City of Walker asked The Rapid to look into the possibility of expanding services based upon latent demand within the City of Walker. Currently, Routes 7, 9, 12, and 50 serve Walker, but no transit service is available in the 3 Mile and 4 Mile Road area, which is home to many new light industrial facilities, the Meijer Corporation Headquarters, and Kenowa Hills High School, among other potential transit generators. **Figure 1-2** shows the 3 Mile Road Corridor that this study will focus on.

The City of Walker Latent Transit Demand Analysis aims to determine the demand for transit within Walker and develop recommendations for transit service, specifically the area around 3 Mile and 4 Mile Roads. This memo will explore the existing transit service providers that operate in the City of Walker and the details of the various services they provide. Understanding the existing providers and transportation services can help inform recommendations for future transit in the study area.

Figure 1-2: Walker 3 Mile Road Corridor



2.0 Service Provider Identification

Various transit providers operate in Walker and their services include fixed route, paratransit, demand response, and ride-hailing/taxis. The table below lists the transit and transportation providers that operate in the City of Walker and the specific services they provide.

Table 2-1:Transportation Services Provided in the City of Walker

Transportation Service	Service Type	Who Can Ride?	Service Provider
Public Transportation			
Fixed Route Bus	Fixed Route	Everyone	The Rapid
GO!Bus	Demand Response	Seniors/Disabled	
Passenger Adaptive Suburban Service (PASS)		Everyone	
West Michigan Rideshare	Rideshare	Everyone	
Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) Transportation	Demand Response	Seniors	Hope Network
Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan		Seniors	
Specialized Transportation		Seniors/Disabled	
RideLink	Demand Response	Seniors/Disabled	Hope Network
			The Rapid
			Senior Neighbors
			ACSET
			United Methodist Community House
			American Red Cross*
Employment Transportation	Demand Response	Employees of Registered Employers	Wheels to Work: Walker
Wheelchair Transport	Demand Response	Everyone	Health Care Associates Transportation
Vanpool	Rideshare	Everyone	MichiVan
Supplemental Transportation			
Ride Hailing	Vehicle for Hire	Everyone	Uber
			Lyft
Taxi	Vehicle for Hire	Everyone	MetroCab
			Yellow Cab

**Service will be discontinued in June 2017*

All of the service providers offer various services to fit the needs of their clients. For example, The Rapid operates fixed route service, three types of demand response service, and a vanpool service. Similarly, Hope Network operates a variety of demand response services that provide rides to different groups in the region. Section 3.0 will explore the details of each of the transportation services available in Walker.

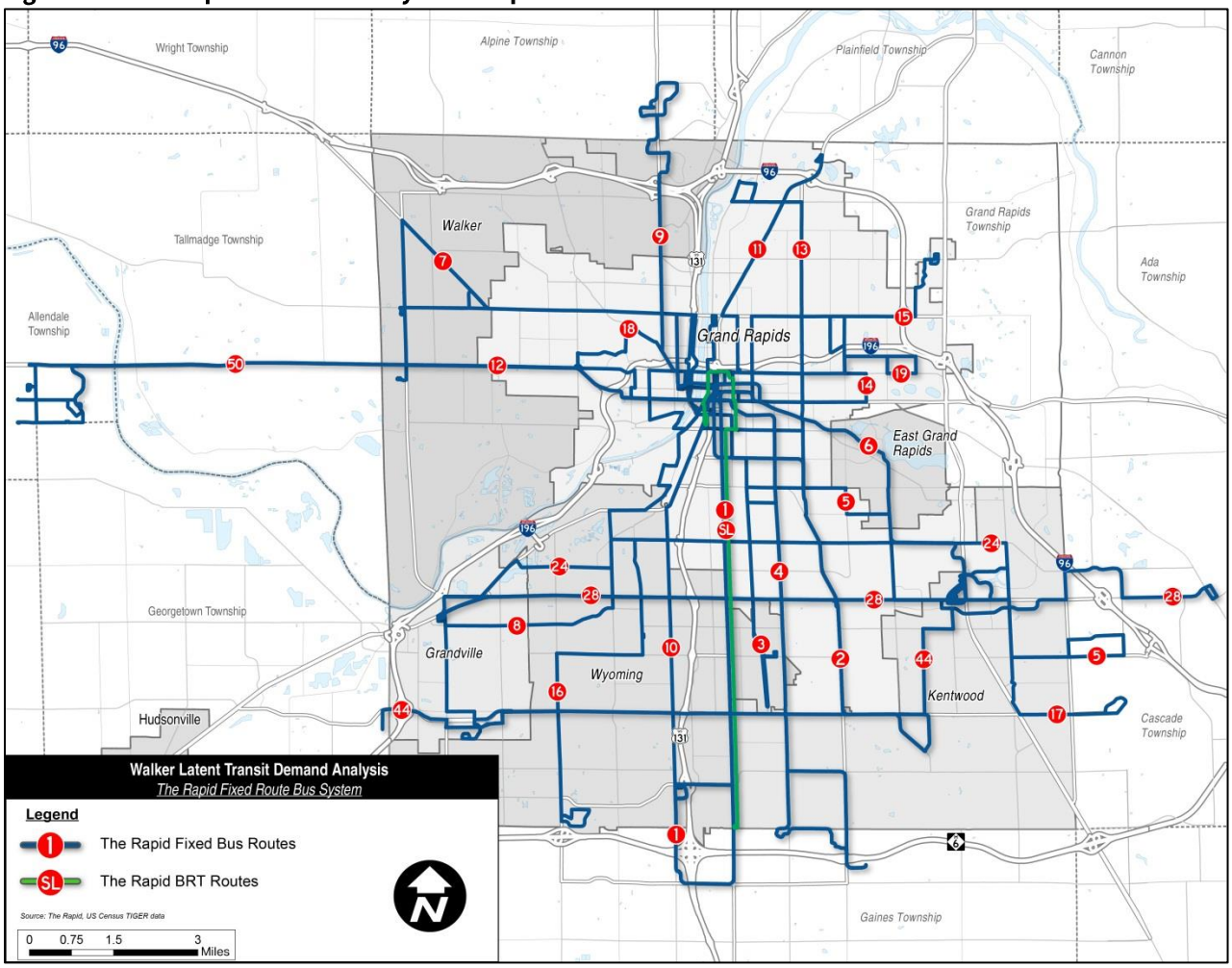
3.0 Transportation Service Assessment

3.1 The Rapid – Fixed Route

Service Overview

The Rapid operates 28 fixed routes throughout their 185 square mile service area and operate bus rapid transit, traditional bus service, and free downtown circulators. Buses operate between 4:30 AM and 1:00 PM Monday through Friday, between 5:15 AM and 11:15 PM on Saturday, and from 7:15 AM to 7:15 PM on Sunday. Single fares for an adult on the fixed route service are $1.75. Seniors and disabled passengers ride for a discounted rate of $0.85. 10 ride tickets, as well as 1 –day, 7-day, and 31-day unlimited passes are also available. **Figure 3-1** shows the system map for the fixed route system.

Figure 3-1: The Rapid Fixed Route System Map

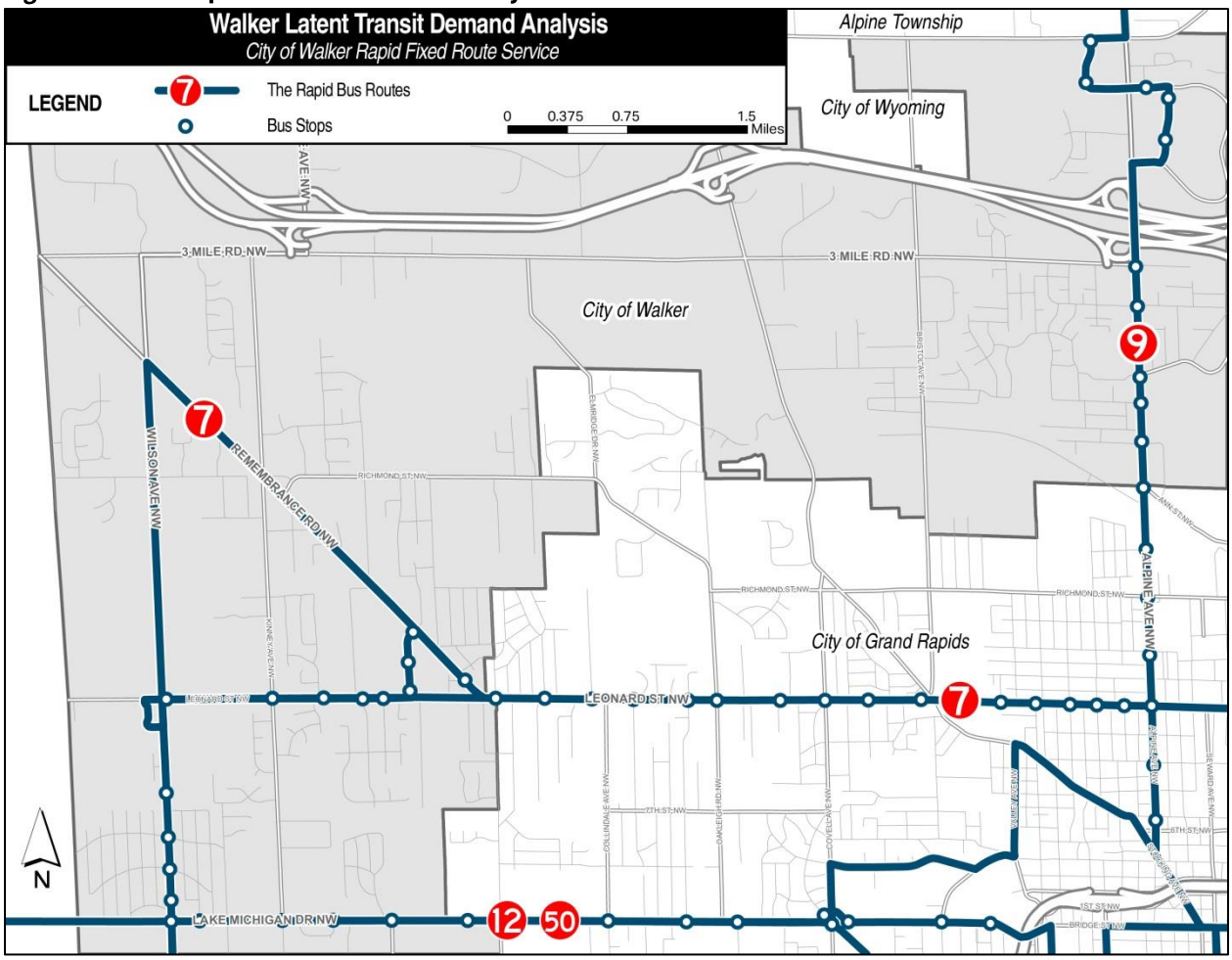


The Rapid's fixed route service is accessed by waiting at a designated bus stop. Riders must pay their fare in order to ride the vehicle. The major demand generators for The Rapid's fixed route system are employment areas, medical centers, high population density neighborhoods, and higher education campuses.

The Rapid is operated using a combination of state, local, and federal funding sources, as well as from fare revenues. Local funding comes from a property tax millage. Costs per passenger averaged $3.06 in 2016, up $0.35 from 2015, due to the decrease in ridership on the system.

Routes 9, 7, 12 and 50 operate in the City of Walker and travel along Alpine Avenue, Remembrance Road, and Lake Michigan Drive. There is a large service gap along 3 Mile Road between Alpine Avenue and Wilson Avenue in north Walker. During peak times, Route 50 runs every 6 minutes, Routes 7 and 9 run every 15 minutes, and Route 12 runs every half hour. The fixed routes that operate in Walker are shown in **Figure 3-2**

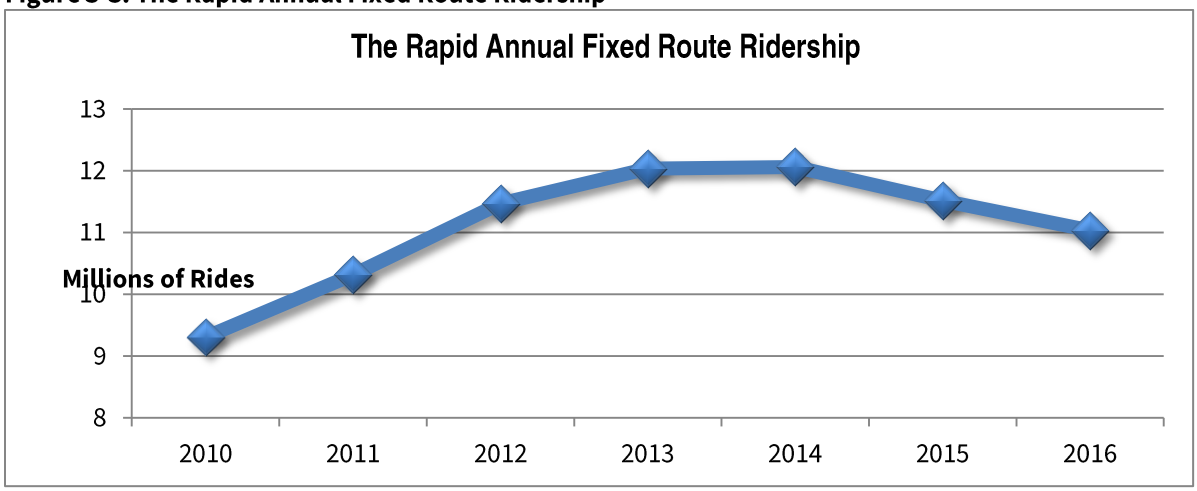
Figure 3-2: The Rapid Fixed Routes in the City of Walker



Ridership

Riders of all mobility abilities can be accommodated on The Rapid's fixed route system. However, the majority of those using fixed route buses are not people with disabilities. In 2016, The Rapid provided more than 11 million rides. Ridership has been declining over the last few years, likely due to an improving economy, lower gas prices, and a fare increase from $1.50 to $1.75 in October 2015. **Figure 3-3** shows the total system ridership from 2010 to 2016. **Table 3-1** shows the annual ridership for the routes that travel through Walker.

Figure 3-3: The Rapid Annual Fixed Route Ridership



Source: The Rapid Annual Report Card 2015, 2016, NTD Database

Table 3-1: Annual Ridership of Routes Operating in Walker

Route	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016
7 – West Leonard	242,464	245,727	268,417	263,070	253,417
9 - Alpine	678,535	686,462	677,050	617,497	584,296
12 – West Fulton	201,970	186,036	185,502	168,255	172,718
50 – Campus Connector	1,418,432	1,488,601	1,428,021	1,319,392	1,316,166

Source: The Rapid

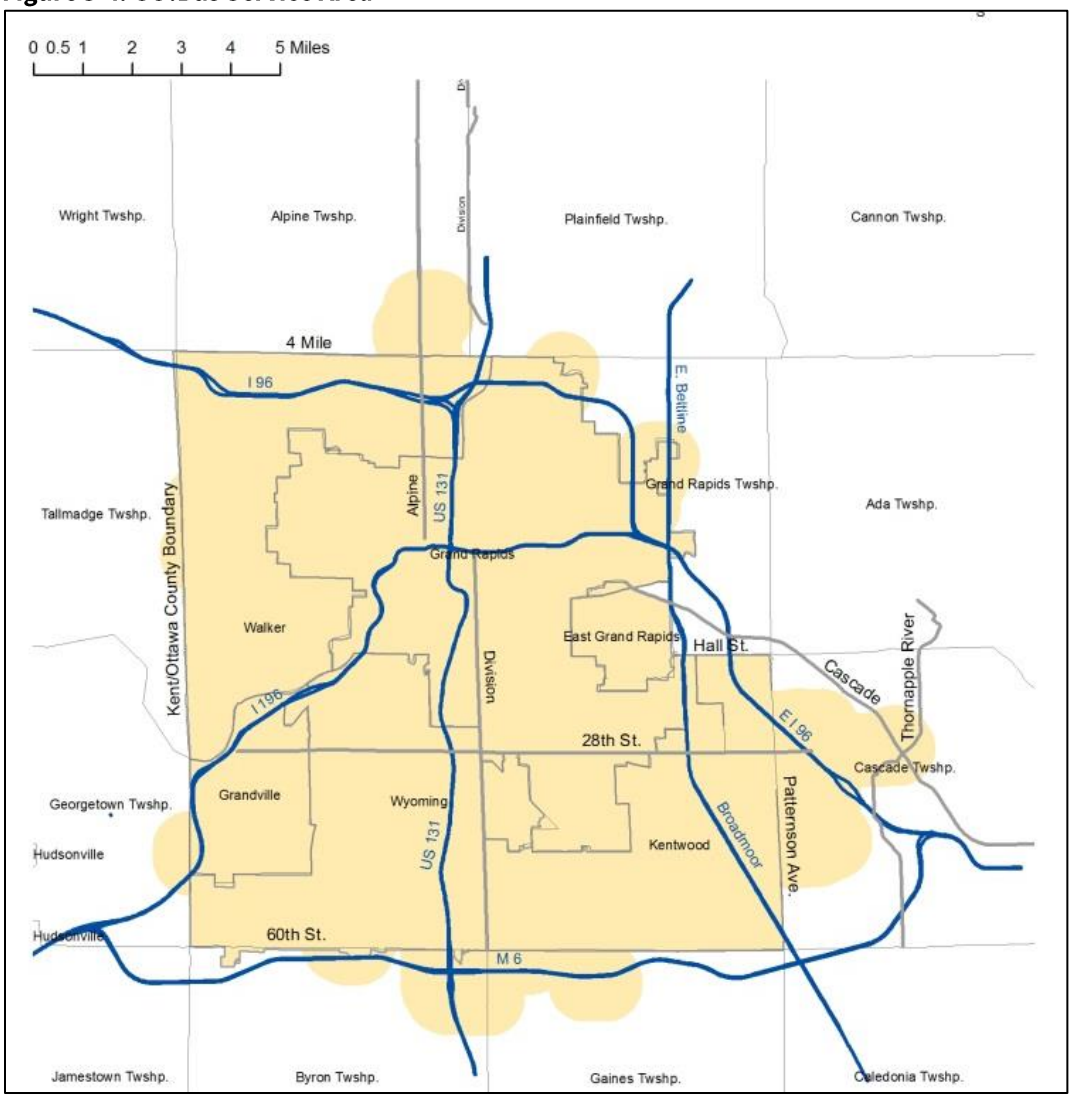
The Rapid's fixed routes serve a large range of demographics in the Grand Rapids area. Nearly all of the block groups in the service area with a high population density, high percentage of households in poverty, high number of zero car households, and a high proportion of disabled individuals are accessible by a fixed route. These groups are all considered to have a higher propensity for transit ridership. The fixed route service also serves many higher income areas and less transit dependent neighborhoods in the Grand Rapids region.

3.2 The Rapid – Demand Response

Service Overview

In addition to fixed route service, The Rapid operates a variety of demand response services that cater to different populations in the region, both of which operate within the City of Walker. GO!Bus is a demand response paratransit service that offers door-to-door service to all locations within the six city service area, including those greater than ¾ of mile from all bus stops. All of Walker is accessible by GO!Bus. The service operates from 4:45 AM to 1 AM on the weekdays, from 5:13 AM to 10:10 PM on Saturdays, and from 7 AM to 7:20 PM on Sundays. The service is open to both seniors and the persons with disabilities. Fares are $3 per ride for ADA eligible riders and $8 per trip for non-disabled seniors. **Figure 3-4** shows the service are for GO!Bus.

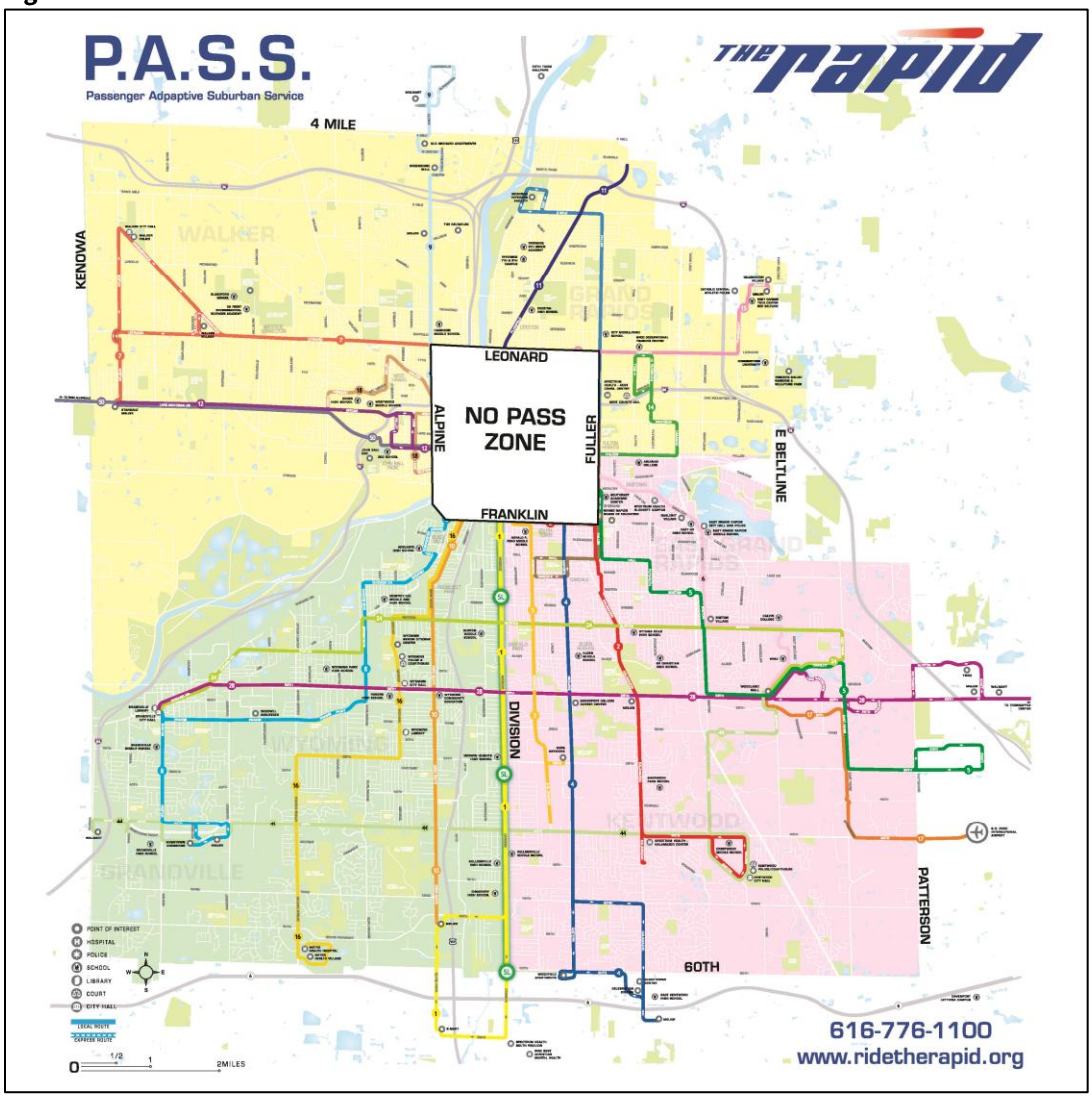
Figure 3-4: GO!Bus Service Area



The Rapid's GO!Bus service is primarily an ADA paratransit service that provides rides for persons with disabilities, however non-disabled seniors can also use the service but for a higher price. All riders must apply for eligibility in order to use the service.

Passenger Adaptive Suburban Service (PASS) is a feeder shuttle operating in the suburban areas of the The Rapid's service area. PASS transports passengers from their curb to a fixed route within the zone they are picked up from. There are three zones in the service area: north, southwest, and southeast. The greater Downtown Grand Rapids area does not have PASS service. Hours of operation are from 5:15 AM to 11:45 PM during the weekdays, from 8 AM to 9:45 PM on Saturdays and from 8 AM to 7 PM on Sundays. Rides are $3.50 each and include a free transfer to the fixed route bus. **Figure 3-5** shows the service area and the three zones for the PASS service.

Figure 3-5: PASS Service Area



PASS is open to all residents who live more than 1/3 of a mile from a fixed route and within The Rapid's service area, regardless of age or mobility. Riders using PASS must be registered with The Rapid.

Both GO!Bus and PASS require advanced reservations to ride and must be made before 4:30 PM the day before a trip. GO!Bus serves trips for all purposes, including medical, recreational, and shopping, anywhere within the paratransit service area, which is ¾ of a mile outside of the fixed route service area. PASS serves trips only between a rider's curb to the nearest fixed route bus stop, within the zone a rider is picked up in.

In 2016, The Rapid's total cost per passenger for demand response (GO!Bus and PASS combined) was $23.75, which was an increase of $0.28 per rider from 2015.

Ridership

The average monthly GO!Bus ridership in 2016 was 29,598 which is down nearly 5% from 2015. The average monthly ridership for the entire PASS service was 656, and 249 within the north sector. PASS also decreased from 2015 to 2016. **Table 3-2** shows the past three years of ridership for the GO!Bus and PASS services.

Table 3-2: GO!Bus and PASS Average Monthly Ridership

Year	GO!Bus	PASS - Total	PASS - North
2014	32,256	973	358
2015	31,084	843	298
2016	29,598	656	249

Source: The Rapid

3.3 The Rapid – Vanpool

Service Overview

West Michigan Rideshare is a carpool and vanpool program that operates in Kent, Ottawa and Allegan Counties and is managed by The Rapid. Users who live or work in the City of Walker can use the West Michigan Rideshare services to commute to and from work by carpool or by vanpool. The carpool program matches up commuters traveling in the same direction who are interested in carpooling. There is no cost to join as participants use privately owned vehicles.

The vanpool program offers a shared ride to work, using a van provided by The Rapid, for at least four people traveling to a similar destination. Those commuting less than 60 miles each way pay $500 per month per van, while commuters traveling over 60 miles each way pay $700 per month per van. Costs are split between the participants in each vehicle and, in 2016, the average vanpool user paid $83.83 per month. Vanpool participants decide on a central area where they are picked up and dropped off.

Vanpool and carpool users start their trips by first registering with the West Michigan Rideshare program. There is no required pick-up or drop-off location for either service, but in most cases riders meet in a centrally located place like a grocery store or park-and-ride lot. The majority of carpool and vanpool trips are for traveling to and from work, so major demand generators are the largest job centers in the region. This would include Downtown Grand Rapids, 3 Mile Road in Walker, and Grand Valley State in Allendale, among others. In 2014, The Rapid's cost per passenger for the vanpool program was $7.01 per unlinked passenger trip.

Ridership

Anyone living in the three county service area can use the carpool and vanpool services offered by West Michigan Rideshare. Most users of the program are commuters traveling to and from work each day. Since the service operates within a three county region, a wide range of population and demographics is able to use the service.

In FY2016, The RapidVan program provided 45,065 rides, which amounts to an average of 3,755 rides per month. This was spread out over 27 different vanpools, many traveling from Muskegon to Grand Rapids. In total the vanpool program saved 1,551,048 vehicle miles traveled in FY2016. **Table 3-3** below shows the vanpool routes and number of vans used per route in FY2016.

Table 3-3: West Michigan Rideshare Vanpool Routes

Vanpool Route	Number of Vans Used
Muskegon to Grand Rapids	10
Lansing to Grand Rapids	5
Kalamazoo to Grand Rapids	3
Grand Rapids to Muskegon	2
Big Rapids to Grand Rapids	1
Howard City to Grand Rapids	1
Allegan to Grand Rapids	1
Holland to Benton Harbor	1
Grandville to Benton Harbor	1
Muskegon to Holland	1
Gowen to Hudsonville	1
Rockford to Grand Rapids	1
Greenville to Grand Rapids	1
Big Rapids to Holland	1

Source: The Rapid

In 2016, one van traveled to the Meijer headquarters in Walker, from Kalamazoo. This van provided 2,348 total rides, traveled 30,612 miles, provided 142,049 passenger miles traveled, and saved nearly 105,000 pounds of CO_2. Additionally, there were 221 users who registered for the carpool service that had an origin or a destination in the City of Walker.

3.4 RideLink

Service Overview

RideLink is a network of area transportation providers that offer transportation services to any person over the age of 60 within Kent County. RideLink offers curb-to-curb service for seniors to any destination, including doctor visits, recreational visits, shopping trips, and more, between the hours of 8 am and 5 pm Monday through Friday. RideLink service is free; however, riders are encouraged to make a $2.00 donation to the provider. The service is provided by Hope Network, Senior Neighbors, the Area Community Services Employment and Training Council (ACSET), United Methodist Community House, the American Red Cross, and The Rapid. The Rapid manages the scheduling and registration of riders, but each of the agencies above use their vehicles to provide transportation services. In June of 2017, the American Red Cross will no longer be providing RideLink services.

All seniors age 60 and over are eligible to use RideLink. Trips are made by making an advanced reservation by no later than noon the day before the trip is needed. Riders must pre-register with The Rapid in order utilize RideLink. The vehicles used for RideLink are capable of accommodating those in wheelchairs and with other ambulatory disabilities.

Ridership

Between the six providers, RideLink provided a total of 66,235 rides in 2016. This equates to an average of 5,520 rides per month, which is an increase of nearly 12% from 2015. Average monthly ridership and total annual ridership for RideLink is shown below in **Table 3-4.** RideLink is a contracted service and each service provider is paid a different amount for trips. In 2016, The Rapid was paid $16.99 to provide each RideLink trip.

Table 3-4: RideLink Ridership

	2014	2015	2016
Average Monthly Ridership	4,058	4,928	5,520
Total Annual Ridership	48,699	59,141	66,235

Source: The Rapid

3.5 Hope Network

Service Overview

Hope Network is an organization that offers variety of services, including transportation, to disadvantaged groups throughout Michigan. As part of their Community Support Services division, Hope Network provides both senior and specialized transportation services, mostly within the Grand Rapids area.

Hope Network partners with the following agencies to provide door-to-door and door-through-door demand response transportation services to citizens in the area:

- Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan (AAAWM)
- RideLink
- Care Resources
- Network 180 Programs
- Competitive Employment Transportation
- North Kent Transit

A specific fare structure is not defined for the Hope Network transportation services but is based on the program riders are being transported to. Fares may also be required upon boarding or riders may be billed each month. The service operates from 5 AM to midnight, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Hope Network serves all of Kent County along with portions of Ottawa County.

All trips using Hope Network's transportation services are initiated via an advanced reservation. Trips must be made on a weekday by 4:30 PM the day before the trip and rides can be scheduled up to 7 days in advance. Since there are a variety of programs that partner with Hope Network for transportation, the trip purposes vary. The major trip purposes are transportation to medical, adult day care, work, various programming activities, and to Hope Network sites.

Hope Network transportation services are available for seniors and disabled persons looking to access Hope Network sites, Goodwill Industries, Adult Day Care centers, medical trips, and others. The vehicles are able to accommodate all types of riders, including those in wheelchairs and with ambulatory disabilities. No ridership data was available for this memo.

3.6 Wheels to Work: Walker

Service Overview

Wheels to Work: Walker is new pilot project that was launched in June 2016 to help provide affordable transportation options for workers in Walker. The program is a partnership between Hope Network, the Governor's Office of Urban Initiatives, the Kent County Essential Needs Task Force, Disability Advocates of Kent County, The Rapid, the City of Walker, and employers located in the region. Shuttle vehicles are provided by Hope Network and The Rapid's PASS program. The service functions only as a transportation option to places of employment. Service runs from 3 AM to 1 AM, seven days a week, but future expansion of the program may result in 24 hour service. Each ride costs a total of $5.55. Employers pay $2.55 per employee per trip and the remaining $3 is paid by the employee through payroll deduction.

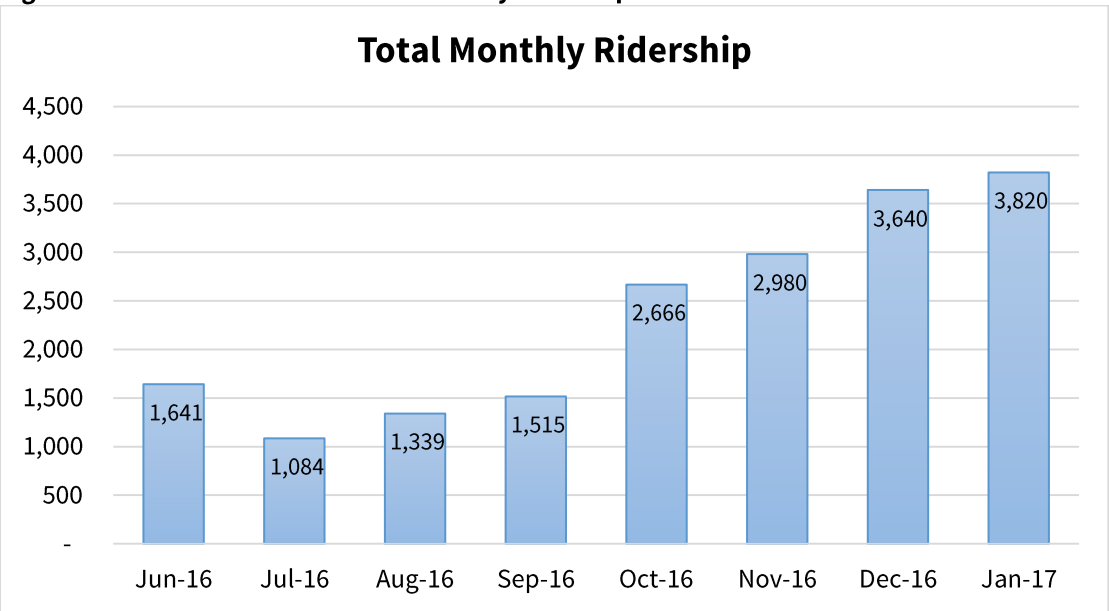
Wheels to Work: Walker is only available to employees that work for participating employers and live in Kent County. The majority of participating employers are located in the City of Walker. Employers first must register their company to be included in the program. Employees are then able to apply and are accepted to use the service. All correspondence and scheduling happens through Hope Network. Riders are picked up and dropped off at hubs in neighborhoods with transportation needs

around Kent County. The hubs are never farther than ½ mile from a rider's home but change depending on who is riding each day.

Ridership

The companies that are currently utilizing Wheels to Work: Walker are Custom Profile, Effex Management Solutions, Magna Mirrors, Hope Network Industries, Plasan Carbon Composites, Praxis Packaging Solutions, Prostaff Employment Solutions, Irwin Seating, Quality Edge, S. Abraham and Sons, Workbox Staffing, and Challenge Manufacturing. Many of the participating companies are located on or near 3 Mile Road. In the first eight months of operation, Wheels to Work Walker has provided 18,685 rides. **Figure 3-6** below shows the monthly ridership for Wheels to Work.

Figure 3-6: Wheels to Work: Walker Monthly Ridership



Source: Wheels to Work: Walker, The Rapid

3.7 Health Care Associates Transport

Service Overview

Health Care Associates Transport is a transportation service that provides wheelchair transport to any destination, including to the doctor, dentist, shopping, special events, and more. Health Care Associates Transport does not have a specific service area and there is no limit on distance traveled. Additionally, the service is available seven days a week, 24 hours a day. There is no set fare structure for the service, but rides within a 10 mile radius of downtown Grand Rapids are $60. This means that all of Walker is accessible for this fee. Special weekly rates are also available and companions ride for free.

The transportation services offered by Health Care Associates are specifically for people who are in wheelchairs and need transportation services. All vehicles and drivers are equipped to handle wheelchairs and safely help riders in and out of the vehicle. Trips on Health Care Associates Transport

are initiated by making an advanced reservation prior to the trip. In many cases, drivers wait for riders during their appointments. Ridership data was not available for this memo.

3.8 MichiVan

Service Overview

MichiVan is a vanpool service is sponsored by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and used by commuters traveling to a similar destination. Participants use vans provided by vRide or Enterprise Rideshare. Maintenance, insurance, titling, licensing, and repairs are included with the monthly fee and are carried out by the providers. MichiVan operates throughout the State of Michigan in areas where there is no Local Rideshare Office. In the case of those commuting to the City of Walker, only those who live outside of Kent, Ottawa, and Allegan counties would use the MichiVan service. Otherwise, riders would coordinate their vanpool through West Michigan Rideshare.

There are no set hours of operation and a free emergency ride home service is available for unexpected occurrences. Riders pay a monthly fee based on the one-way mileage of their commute and the size of the van. Fees can be as low as $66.78 per month per person. The service is free for the primary driver of the van or vanpool groups can opt into splitting the cost between all users and rotating drivers.

The majority of MichiVan vanpool users are traveling to and from work. Vanpools in Michigan traditionally operate in areas where public transportation is unavailable or is unsuited to commuter travel needs. In many cases, vanpool participants meet at a central location, like a park-and-ride, shopping mall, or grocery store. This makes them more popular for longer commute trips from outlying areas to an area of higher employment density. Trips originate when users sign up for the service, pay the monthly user fee, and are assigned to a vanpool. The major demand generators for MichiVan in the Grand Rapids area are the places with high employment density, like Downtown Grand Rapids and Grand Valley State. No ridership data was available for this memo.

4.0 Supplemental Transportation Resources

4.1 Ride Hailing Services

Operating Overview

Ride hailing services Uber and Lyft both operate in the greater Grand Rapids region and within the City of Walker. Uber and Lyft both offer curb-to-curb service for rides, but the fare structures of the two providers vary. Uber charges a $1 base fare and a $1.55 booking fee upon request for a vehicle. A minimum fare of $5.05 is required. Lyft also has a $1 base fare and a $1.75 service fee (similar to Uber's booking fee), but the minimum fare is $3.50. Both services charge $0.15 per minute and $0.75 per mile.

Both Lyft and Uber use dedicated smartphone applications to "hail" a ride. Users enter their pickup and destination locations and a driver is matched with the user. All payments are made through the application and no physical payments are made. Uber's service area includes much of the greater Grand Rapids Region, including all of Kent County south of 14 Mile Road, and Jamestown, Georgetown, Wright, Talmadge, Allendale, and Polkton Townships in Ottawa County. **Figure 4-1** shows the Uber service area.

Lyft's service area is extends farther than Uber's and does not follow strict geo-political borders. Their service area includes the core Kent County cities of Grand Rapids, East Grand Rapids, Walker, Kentwood, Wyoming, and Grandville. It also extends north to Cedar Springs and Casnovia and to the west to Grand Haven. **Figure 4-2** shows the Lyft service area.

Figure 4-1: Uber Service Area - Grand Rapids Region

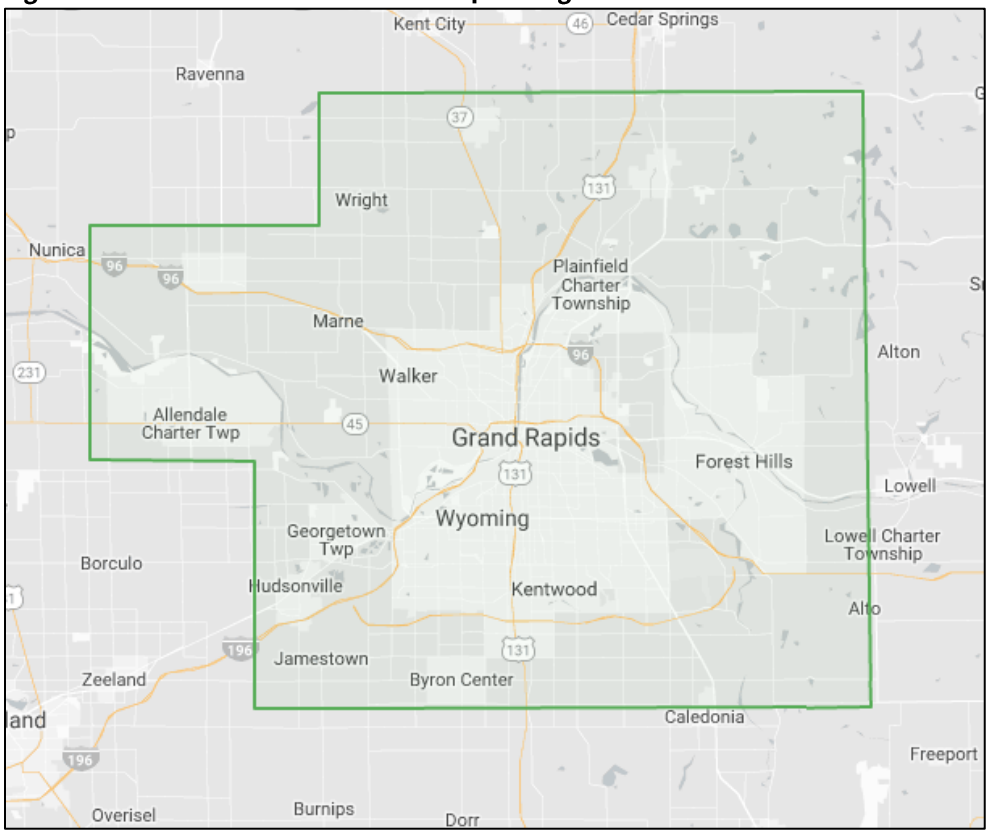
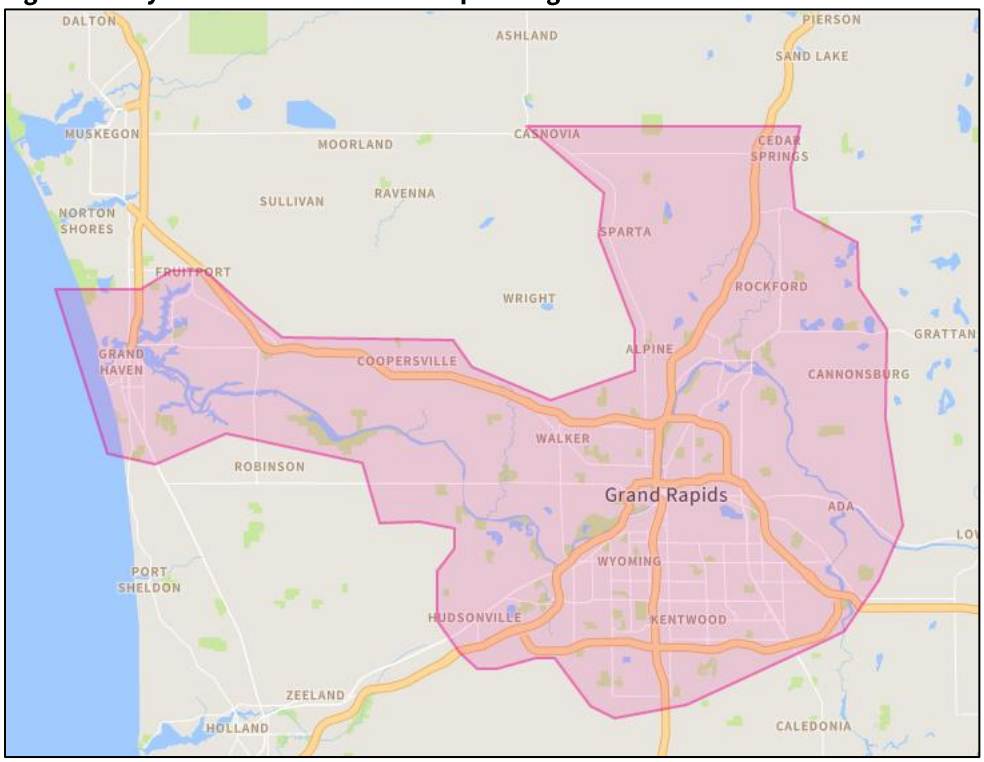


Figure 4-2: Lyft Service Area - Grand Rapids Region



4.2 Traditional Taxi Service

Operating Overview

A number of local taxi companies operate within the Grand Rapids area including Yellow Cab, Metro Cab, Great Lakes Taxi, Boss Taxi, and Grand Rapids Taxi, among others. Many of the taxi companies do not provide specific rates for their service, except for Yellow Cab. Their rates are as follows:

- Meter Starts at $3.30
- $1.80 per mile
- $21 per hour for wait time

These rates are likely similar to the other cab companies operating in Grand Rapids, but are higher than Uber and Lyft fares. The taxis require prior booking by calling the dispatcher or making a reservation online, and most do not allow passengers to flag down drivers. Taxis are available 24 hours a day and there is no set service area for the taxi operators.

5.0 Conclusion

Not all of the transportation providers operating in the City of Walker would be able to provide service to the corridor that would be targeted to those traveling to and from work. The employers in the corridors are growing and are interested in expanding the options for reliable transportation for their employees. Some employees, looking for affordable transportation options, are creating their own rideshare programs to commute to work. The senior and disabled transportation service providers, like GO!Bus, RideLink, Hope Network Transportation and Health Care Associates Transportation have operating schemes that are dependent on providing transportation to seniors and disabled persons. These providers likely do not have the capacity or ability to provide additional transit service. Additionally, carpool and vanpool services are a non-ideal transportation service to provide in this corridor as this service is catered more toward long commutes, is less cost efficient, and would not function well picking-up and dropping off larger numbers of riders.

However this corridor could potentially benefit from a fixed route service, a more localized demand response service along 3 Mile and/or 4 Mile Roads, or a hybrid version of the two services. Further analysis will determine the need for and type of additional services in the corridor. In the next task, commuting patterns, employment concentrations, transit propensity, employer surveys, public outreach data, and overall service needs will be analyzed to determine the type of service, number and type of vehicles, operating times, and route options that may be needed to serve the Study Area.