

Chapter 12

Equity & Environmental Justice

The JACTS 2050 Long Range Transportation Plan must identify and address disproportionately adverse human health or environmental effects that the transportation system programs and policies have on minority and low-income populations. The basic principles addressed by the Environmental Justice analysis are:

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

Methodology

The Environmental Justice Analysis is typically performed on capacity improvement projects. To ensure the principles are being met, the methodology entails mapping the EJ zones where low-income (poverty) and minority population concentrations exceed the population averages for the Jackson MPO, overlaying the capacity improvement projects or Jackson Area Transportation Authority (JATA) bus routes, and visually analyzing the potential impacts.

The following methodology is followed to ensure a fair process:

- 1) Acquire the most current population data from the United States Census Bureau and adopt the United States Department of Human Services Poverty Standards as publicized by the department.
- 2) Compute the county average and establish a county baseline threshold for minority and impoverished populations.
- 3) Synthesize the Census data with the Location Quotient statistical method to calculate and compare the shared contribution of an area's local economy to another referenced economy; in this case, Census Block Group data to county-level data.
- 4) Develop sets of thematic maps showing the spatial location of minority and low-income populations at the MPO level.
- 5) Overlay maps of improve and expand projects over the minority and low-income population maps and analyze for intersections on the basis that a project is included or is partially tangential to an EJ zone.
- 6) Overlay maps of the JATA bus routes and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) corridor over the minority and low-income population maps and analyze for

intersections on the basis that the transit route is included or is partially tangential to an EJ zone.

Location Quotient Statistical Method

Location quotient (LQ) is a sophisticated statistical technique used in calculating and comparing the shared distribution of a local economy. For example, an individual county or region is referenced relative to a base economy such as the state. The LQ statistical method strives to show if a local economy has a greater share than expected of a given base economy. It marks the additional contribution that such local economy is contributing.

The statistical notation for LQ is:

$$LQ_i = \frac{\frac{x_i}{n_i}}{\frac{x}{n}} \text{ or } \frac{x_i}{x} \times \frac{n}{n_i}$$

Where,

LQ_i = Location Quotient for a local economy

x_i = Total number of EJ identified population groups for a local economy

n_i = Total population for a local economy

x = Total number of EJ identified population groups for a reference economy

n = Total population for a reference economy

The LQ method is used to determine whether or not a particular Block Group in Jackson County has a greater share of its racial and low-income groupings than expected. A Block Group having a LQ value greater than one ($LQ > 1$) will be recognized as an EJ zone within the county. Block Groups with $LQ > 1$ provide evidence that such a racial and low-income group(s) has a population greater than their expected EJ populations. The Block Groups would represent the selection set identified as EJ zones.

Environmental Justice Populations Definitions

Definition of “Minority” for the Purposes of Environmental Justice

According to the U.S. DOT Order 5610.2, the following groups are to be considered when conducting an Environmental Justice Analysis and are defined as follows:

- *Black or African American*: A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
- *Hispanic or Latino/a*: A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, South American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
- *Asian & Pacific Islander*: A person having origins in any of the original people of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands.
- *American Indian & Alaskan Native*: A person having origins in any of the original people of North America and who maintain cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition.

According to the 2021 American Community Survey Data, the countywide averages for the minority populations are as follows: African American 8.2%, Hispanic 3.9%, Asian and Pacific Islander 0.6%, and American Indian and Alaskan Natives 0.004%.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Corridor

ADA requires public transit agencies that provide fixed-route service to provide paratransit service to people with disabilities who cannot use the fixed-route bus or rail service because of a disability. ADA paratransit service must be provided within 3/4 of a mile of a bus route or rail station, at the same hours and days, for no more than twice the regular fixed route fare.

Definition of “Low Income” or “Individuals Living Below Poverty Level” for Purposes of Environmental Justice

The Office of Management & Budget defines low income as a person whose household income is at or below the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines. The guidelines are used as eligibility criteria for the Community Services Block Grant Program as well as a number of other federal assistance programs. According to the 2021 American Community Survey data, 11.2% of Jackson County’s population falls below the national poverty threshold.

Analyzing Potential Impact Centers

The environmental justice analysis requires analyzing the potential impacts of capacity improvement projects. However, as discussed in Chapter 9, there are no planned or proposed capacity improvement projects in this plan. The ongoing I-94 modernization project has been identified and documented in an environmental reevaluation process. Any environmental impacts will be mitigated according to state and federal laws. The three major areas of concern for capacity projects are provided on the next page for reference.

1) Disproportionately high adverse impact to low-income/minority areas

For any future capacity improvement projects, it is important that these projects don't have an adverse impact to the community, especially for low-income or minority areas.

2) Minimizing/blocking access of low income/minority areas to transportation

Minimizing access can be characterized as the permanent closing of streets or interchanges in order to accomplish capacity improvement projects.

3) Neglect of the transportation system in low income/minority areas

The Jackson MPO is approximately 720 square miles and includes 19 townships and the City of Jackson. The targeted low income (% below the national poverty level) areas mapped cover approximately 20% of the county and the composite minority areas mapped cover almost 60% of the county. It has been determined that there is no neglect of investment in the transportation system in the low-income and minority areas.

Justice40 Initiative

The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) is in the process of implementing the Justice40 Initiative, which is an all of government approach that sets a goal of 40% of the benefits of certain federal investments flowing to disadvantaged communities. Through Justice40, USDOT will work to increase affordable transportation options that connect Americans to good-paying jobs and improve access to resources and quality of life in communities.

Public Transit Investment

Public transit in Jackson County is provided by JATA. The agency's fixed-route service area includes the City of Jackson and portions of the urbanized area. Their Reserve-A-Ride program provides demand response service to all residents of the city and county. Reduced fares are available for the elderly, disabled and student populations. It is important that capacity projects don't restrict the access of residents to the public transit system services. It has been determined that there is currently no neglect, reduction or delay in the receipt of transportation benefits by those residing in low income or minority areas. Maps illustrating how JATA routes serve minority and low-income populations in the Jackson Urbanized Area are provided for review on the next several pages.

Conclusion

The Jackson MPO will continue to update and maintain the public participation mailing list, and continue to improve communication, coordination, education, and involvement activities in order to reach the traditionally disadvantaged populations (including minority and low income) to ascertain and evaluate potential effects or impacts resulting from future projects.

Figure 12-1: Environmental Justice and JATA Routes – Blacks and African Americans

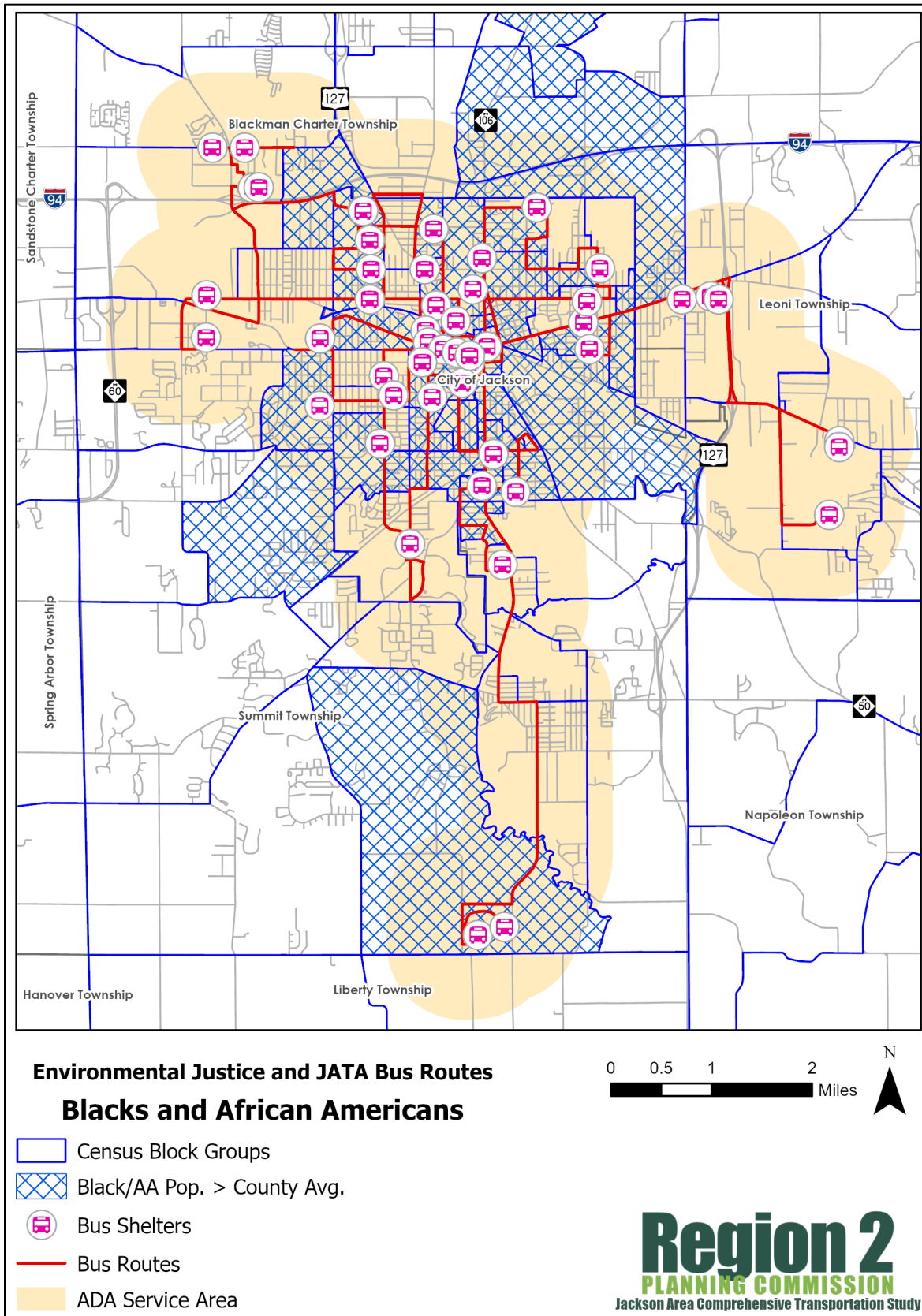


Figure 12-2: Environmental Justice and JATA Routes – Asians and Pacific Islanders

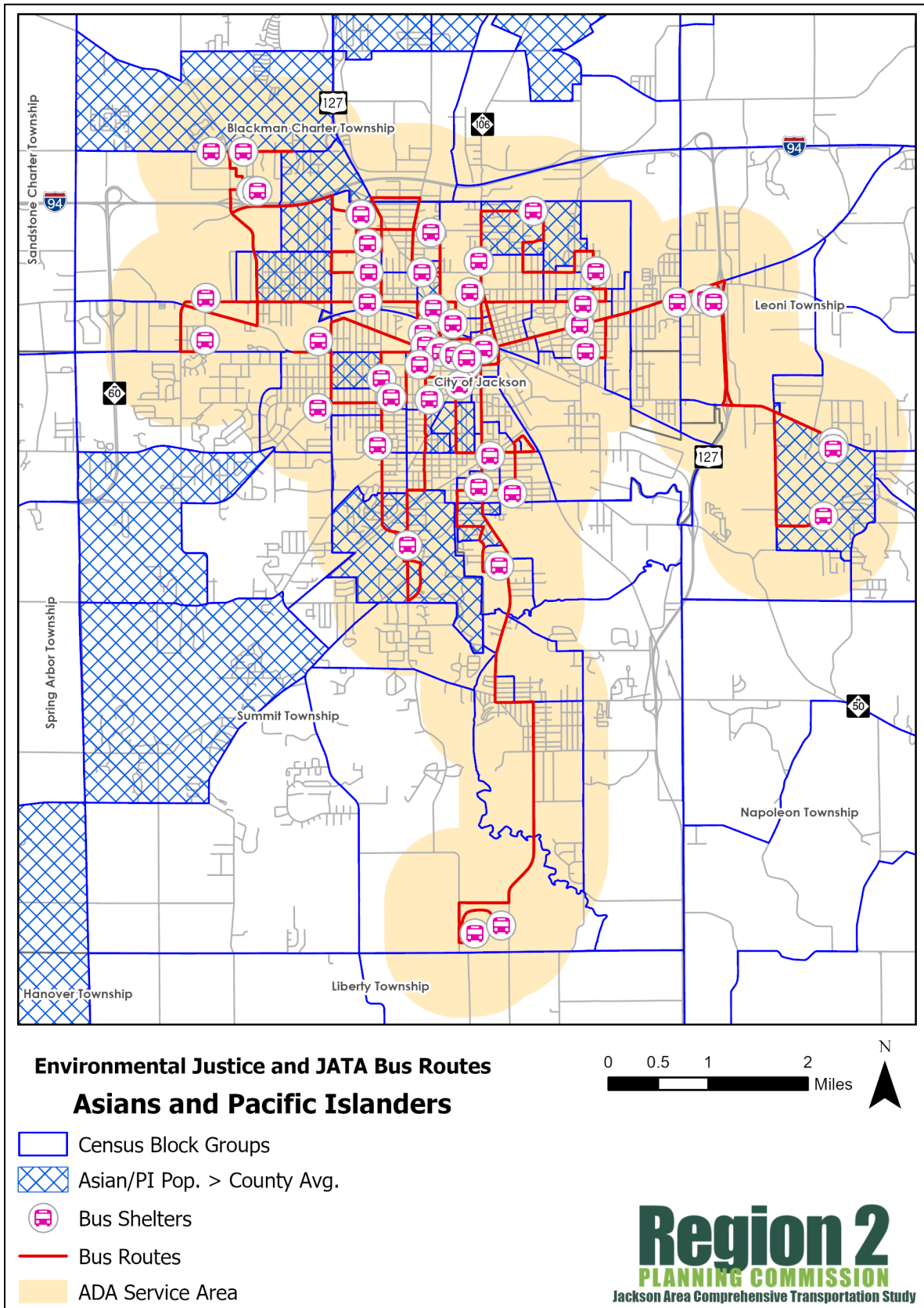


Figure 12-3: Environmental Justice and JATA Routes – American Indians and Alaskan Natives

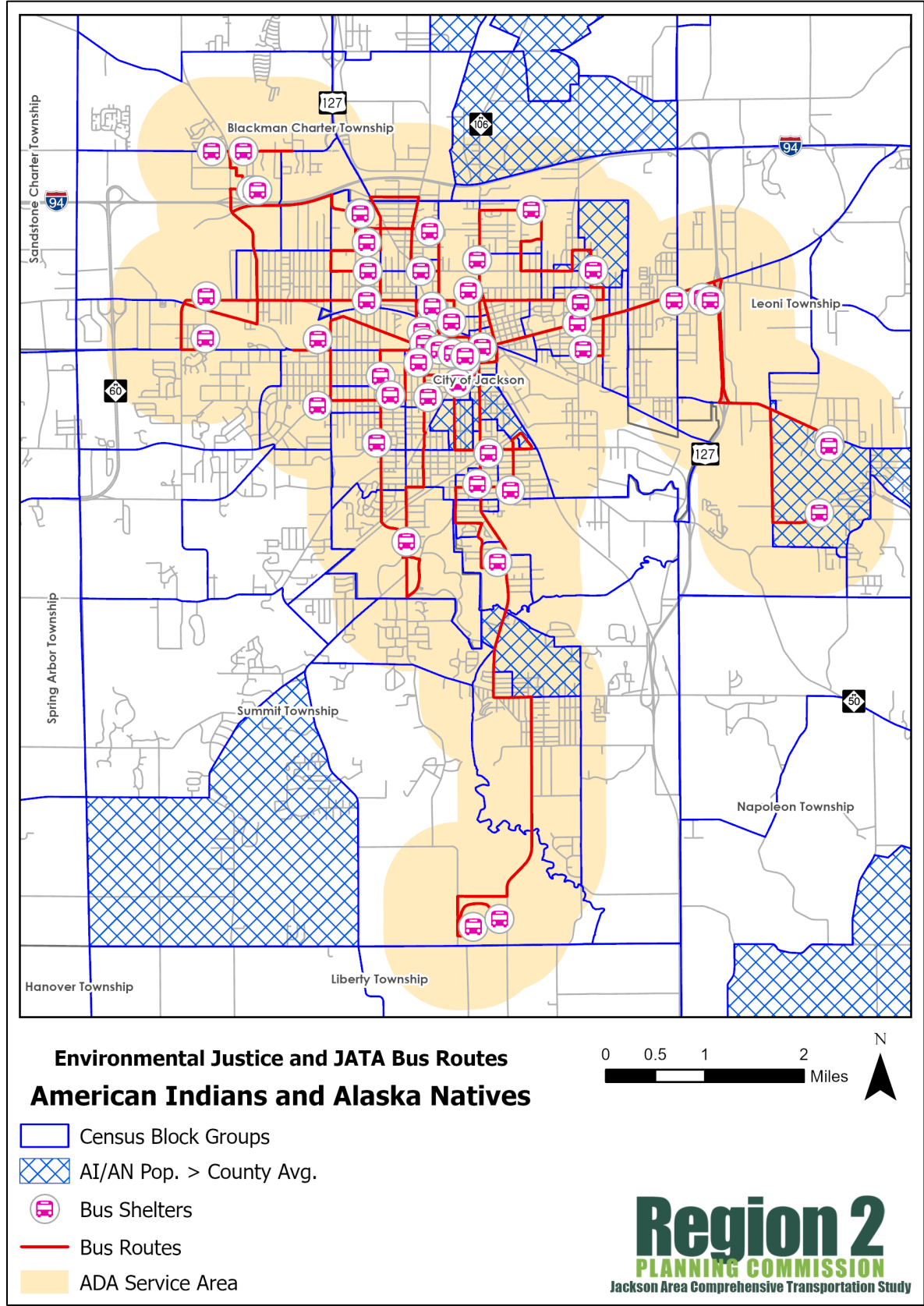


Figure 12-4: Environmental Justice and JATA Routes – Hispanic and Latino/a

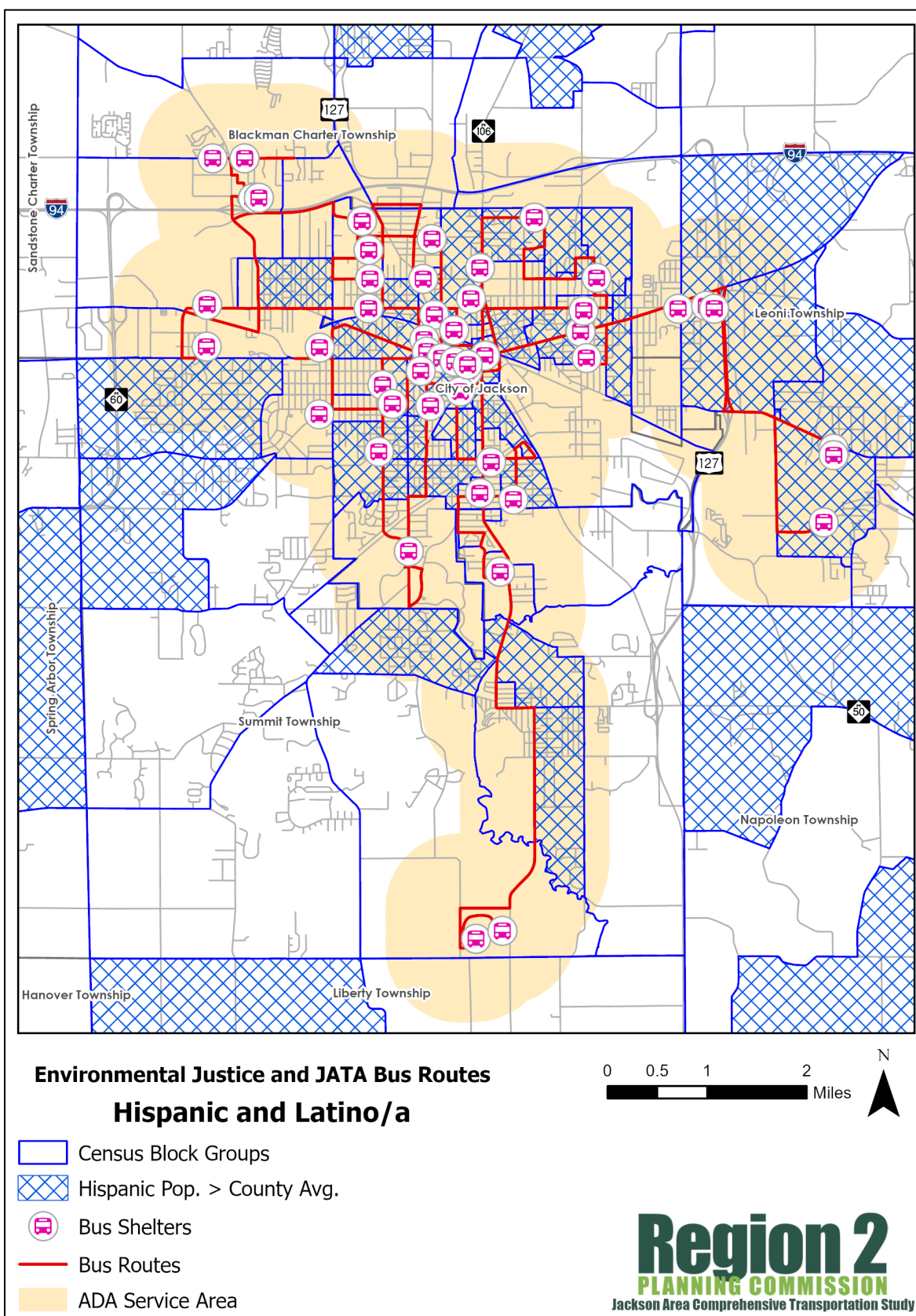


Figure 12-5: Environmental Justice and JATA Routes – Impoverished Individuals

