

Pinal County Transit Governance Study

# Technical Memorandum 1 Existing Conditions

March 2020



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# 1 Study Overview

## Introduction

Pinal County and the Central Arizona Governments (CAG) commissioned a Transit Governance Study as part of efforts to implement the Pinal County Regional Transportation Plan. This study will evaluate transit governance models and recommend a framework to guide future governance, management and implementation of public transportation services in Pinal County. The analysis will include recommendations on how existing and future public transportation services can coordinate and collaborate on service delivery as well as how the region should manage, structure and oversee public transportation service development.

Recommendations will be developed with leadership provided by the Pinal Regional Transportation Authority (PRTA), CAG and Pinal County in collaboration with a Technical Working Group. Input will also be collected from a larger stakeholder group. Technical work will be conducted by a project team comprised of consultants led by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates and supported by Wilson & Company and the Gordley Group.

## Background

The Pinal County Board of Supervisors formed the PRTA in 2015 after periods of rapid population growth and increasing demand on its transportation network. By establishing the PRTA, the County began the processes of identifying transportation improvements and developing a funding stream for implementation. In 2017, the PRTA asked voters to approve a 20-Year Comprehensive Multimodal Regional Transportation Plan (“the Plan” or “the Regional Transportation Plan”) and a half-cent sales tax tied directly to the Plan. In November of the same year, Pinal County voters approved both the Plan and sales tax,

Projects included in the Regional Transportation Plan – and funded by the sales tax - largely consist of roadway projects. In total, roadway investments account for 92.5% of the funded projects. The Plan also included funding for local road projects for less populated municipalities, funds for Plan administration, and public transportation element. The public transportation element included \$1 million per year or about 3% of the total funding. Specific funding allocations called out in the voter approved plan included:

- Construction of Park and Ride facilities throughout Pinal County
- Annual funding for dial-a-ride services to assist people with disabilities, seniors and members of the general public, and the provision of annual operational funding for the existing system.

The first step in this process of fulfilling the public transportation element of the Plan requires an assessment of existing transportation conditions in Pinal County. This memorandum, the first of a

series of working papers, documents existing conditions in Pinal County. It includes an assessment of the current and future market for transit services and an inventory of existing public transportation services.

## Study Goals

Among the challenges facing the PRTA as it moves forward with the public transportation elements of the Regional Transportation Plan is the need to create a framework to manage and govern future public transportation services in Pinal County. The study will consider different models and options for collaboration across communities and coordination between existing and potentially new transportation services. Recommendations must consider the needs of communities already providing transit services and offer flexibility to incorporate new services that may be added as Pinal County adds people and jobs. In identifying a governance structure, the study will consider several questions including:

- How can individual cities, towns and other partners collaborate to guide transit service development in Pinal County?
- What are the different governance and organizational models that could be used to guide future collaboration?
- What are the costs and benefits of individual models? How do they help existing service providers? How does each model support and encourage development of new public transit services?

These questions are intertwined; the cost and benefits of different governance models depends on how cities and towns want to collaborate. Likewise, how partners want to collaborate will determine the composition and structure of individual governance structures. Answering these questions is fundamental to the overall study. This technical memo is designed to identify needs and opportunities and provides an overview of how transit services are currently provided in Pinal County. The memo also provides insights into future public transit needs.

## Findings from the Existing Conditions Analysis

The existing conditions analysis compiled information on the underlying market and demand for transit services and the availability of existing services. Key findings from the analysis suggest the following:

- Overall **Pinal County is growing rapidly**, both in terms of population and employment. However, growth is not occurring equally across the County, with some areas growing rapidly and others slowly.
- Even as the county adds people and jobs, **overall population and employment density will be low**. In 2050 when Pinal County's population approaches 1 million people, the population density will be about 180 people per square mile, less than half the density of Maricopa County in 2017.

- To date, Pinal County's growth includes significant development on the northern edge of the county, in areas such as Apache Junction and San Tan Valley, within the Phoenix urbanized area and employment catchment. In 2017, roughly half of Pinal County residents commuted to Maricopa County for work, with most workers traveling to Phoenix and its suburbs.
- However, an economic and regional center is emerging within Pinal County in Casa Grande and the surrounding communities of Coolidge, Florence, Maricopa and Eloy. These areas have experienced rapid growth and are forecast to grow faster than other parts of the county.
- While most of the growth is focused on the northern corners of Pinal County, there are needs and development in the southeast corner, including Saddlebrooke and Red Rock. While smaller, these communities should be part of the transit conversations.
- Pinal County's socioeconomic characteristics suggest a need for transit and likelihood to use it. This includes relatively high numbers of older adults, people with disabilities and people with low incomes.
- Existing transit services are limited and focused on local markets. Travel demand, employment travel and development patterns suggest existing needs to travel between communities for jobs and services. The demand for regional transit service is expected to continue in the future.
- Casa Grande and Eloy have active plans for new public transportation services but need funding to move forward. Casa Grande's service development plans call for local services, while Eloy's recommendations include a local and regional route.
- Funding has limited the growth and development of all public transportation services, but especially regional services. Currently the Central Arizona Regional Transit (CART) service connects the communities of Casa Grande, Coolidge, Eloy, and Florence. The City of Maricopa's COMET services also provide some regional service via its regional demand response service. Expanding service within these communities and connecting to new ones will require additional funding and commitments.

## Implications for the Governance Study

The existing conditions analysis suggests that as part of developing a governance structure, Pinal County will need a process that encourages and supports both local and regional services. There is healthy tension associated with service needs – especially between local and regional service needs - that will underscore decisions about transit funding and governance:

- Several communities in Pinal County have identified needs for transit services, with many routes called out in planning documents, including Apache Junction, San Tan Valley, Eloy and Casa Grande.
- The availability of a regional funding source could help unlock federal transit funding, especially in urban and rapidly urbanizing areas (Casa Grande and Maricopa). It is unlikely however that PRTA funds will be able to match the full share of federal urban transit funds. Funds will also need to be shared with existing services funded with local resources.
- Combined, individual communities and stakeholders in Pinal County are contributing roughly \$700,000 (2018) annually to operate local and regional public transportation services, including some human service transportation providers.
- Most existing and planned services are focused on local needs, but the data suggests a growing need for regional services, including intra-Pinal County services as well as connections to the major employment markets in the Phoenix metro area.
- The region has not discussed or developed priorities for regional transit services that are shared across multiple Pinal County communities. The lack of regional direction includes geographic areas but also ridership markets.
- A future governance structure will lead to a structure that supports balancing local and regional needs as well as the needs of different markets, including longer distance regional commutes, regional needs to access medical services, access to local and regional services and local connections.

## 2 Transit Market Analysis

### Overview

Regions and communities are always changing, the pace of these changes and associated development patterns impact needs for the overall transportation system and the underlying demand for public transportation services. This technical memo begins with a transit market analysis that considers current needs and emerging opportunities. The analysis uses population, employment, land use and demographic data to understand the underlying need and demand for transit services. Forecast data provides insights into future needs and opportunities.

Pinal County is a relatively small county in terms of population and employment, especially considering the geographic size of the county. However, it has grown rapidly over the last two decades and is forecast for continued development. Population has more than doubled since 2000 to its currently level of approximately 466,200, a number that is expected to increase to 616,000 people by 2030, according to the “medium” forecasts estimates provided by the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity.

Employment is also on the rise, increasing from 50,000 in 2010 to nearly 125,000 in 2017. Growth and development are directly impacting the need for transportation improvements in Pinal County and are partially responsible for the motivation of the voters’ decision to approve a Regional Transportation Plan and sales tax initiative through the PRTA.

### Market Analysis Methods

The demand for transit service can largely be explained by a handful of factors, including population and employment density, but also socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the underlying population. Density is a key factor because areas with higher concentrations of people and jobs indicate a higher market for travel, allowing transit to be more competitive. Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, like age, income, disability and access to a vehicle also increase the demand for transit.

The Pinal County transit market analysis, therefore, focuses on the size and distribution of people and jobs as well as the distribution of people more likely to use transit, such as people with low incomes, people without access to a vehicle, older adults, youths and people with disabilities. It also includes underlying travel flows and the location of major activity centers, such as large employers, medical centers, shopping areas, together with universities and colleges to identify places where people travel to and from.

Key data sources for the analysis include population and employment data from the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) Five-Year Estimates and Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) programs, as well as forecasts developed by CAG and the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity.

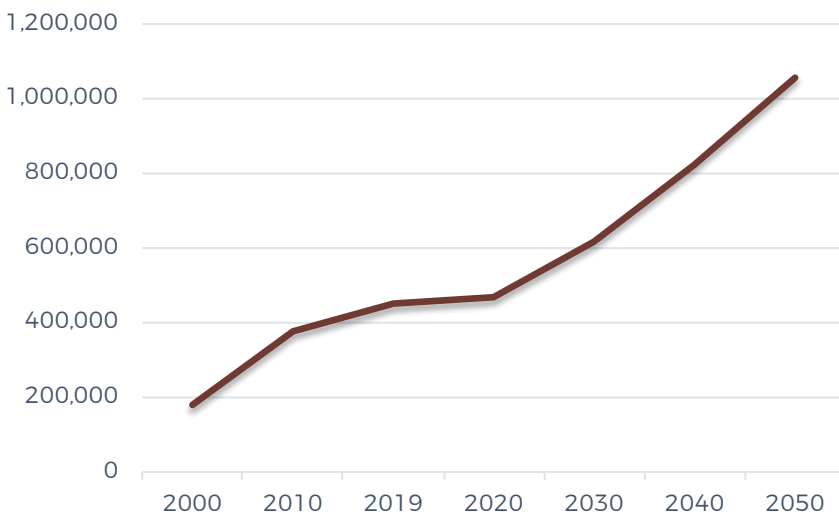
## Population

Between 2000 and 2019, Pinal County's population grew by over 250%, increasing from roughly 180,000 to just over 453,400. Population growth is expected to continue; Pinal County expects to reach over 466,000 people by 2020, then increase to 616,000 by 2030 and reach over 820,000 people by 2040. Despite experiencing rapid growth, Pinal County's overall population density is quite low at about 76 persons per square mile. This compares with nearby Maricopa County, which has a population density of 452 persons per square mile.

Pinal County's population is currently concentrated in Casa Grande, Apache Junction, Maricopa, Florence, and the unincorporated San Tan Valley area. The distribution of population currently shows highest densities in the northwest portion of the county, like Apache Junction and San Tan Valley, which function in part as bedroom communities for the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Future population growth will continue current trends with exceptions for communities along the northern border of Pinal County (see Figures 2 - 4). For example, the data suggests that Maricopa and Apache Junction will continue to grow for the next several years but start to slow down by 2040 in favor of communities like Casa Grande, Coolidge, Florence and Eloy. This data suggests that cities and towns along US Interstate 10 (I-10) will continue to grow and increase in importance as the county's population center.

Figure 1. Pinal County Population, 2000 - 2050



Source: US Census Bureau Decennial Census 2000, 2010; Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity 2019-2055 SUB-COUNTY POPULATION PROJECTIONS: Medium Series



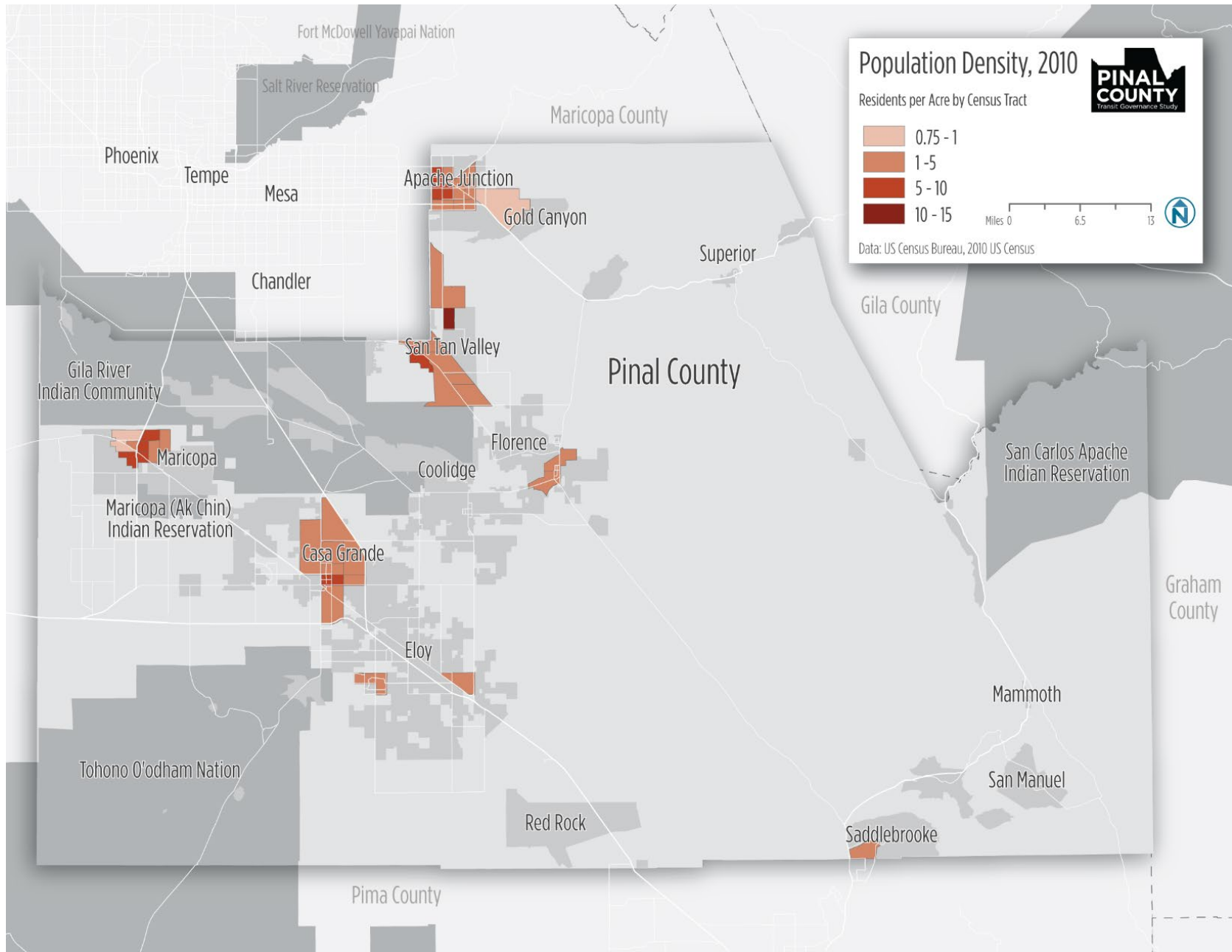
**Figure 2 . Existing and Forecast Populations Municipalities in Pinal County, 2000 – 2050**

Area	2000	2010	2019	2020	2030	2040	2050
City of Apache Junction - (Pinal County Portion)	31,541	35,546	41,415	41,873	45,988	53,274	58,942
City of Casa Grande	25,224	48,571	56,914	57,518	75,049	92,880	118,395
City of Coolidge	7,786	11,825	12,970	13,154	33,311	66,274	94,741
City of Eloy	10,375	16,631	19,227	19,528	37,874	71,918	114,753
Town of Florence	17,054	25,536	28,241	29,130	44,220	64,667	89,945
Town of Kearny	2,249	1,950	2,102	2,102	2,215	2,215	2,215
Town of Mammoth	1,762	1,426	1,639	1,692	1,702	1,702	1,702
City of Maricopa*	1,040	43,482	55,019	59,126	79,793	88,838	98,233
Town of Queen Creek - (Pinal County Portion)	119	449	6,716	7,176	9,108	11,003	12,148
Town of Superior	3,254	2,885	3,103	3,161	3,184	3,184	3,184
Remainder of Pinal County	79,323	187,469	226,068	231,715	283,716	364,922	461,976
<b>Total Population Pinal County</b>	<b>179,727</b>	<b>375,770</b>	<b>453,414</b>	<b>466,175</b>	<b>616,160</b>	<b>820,877</b>	<b>1,056,234</b>

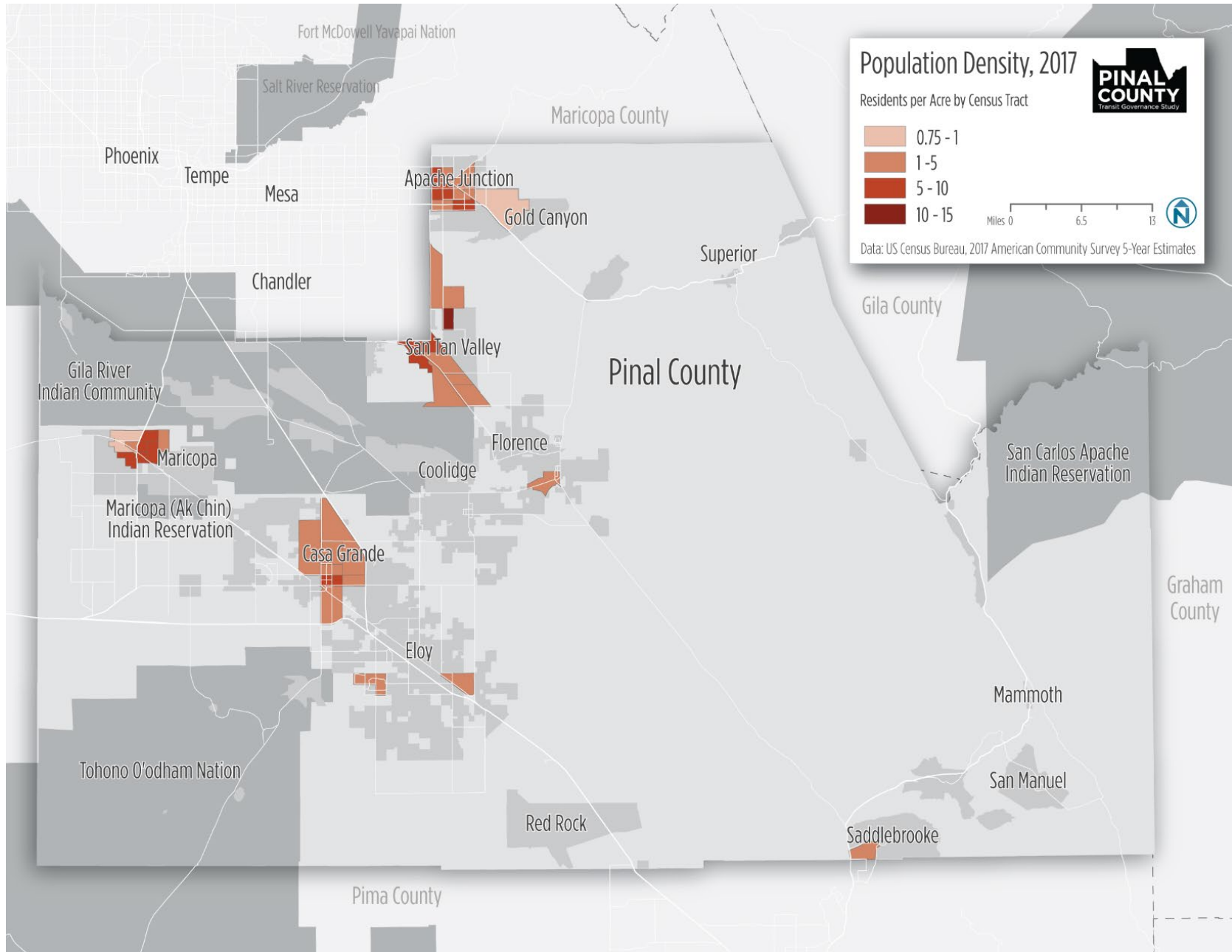
Source: US Census Bureau Decennial Census: 2000, 2010; Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity 2019-2055 SUB-COUNTY POPULATION PROJECTIONS: Medium Series

\*The City of Maricopa was incorporated in 2003. The population in 2000 for the area was approximately 1,040.

Figure 3. Pinal County Population Density, 2010



**Figure 4. Pinal County Population Density, 2017**



## High Need Populations

In addition to population density, socioeconomic characteristics influence an individual's propensity towards transit use. National research shows that many population groups often have a higher propensity for transit use than the overall population. These include:

**Zero Vehicle Households:** People with limited or no access to a personal vehicle, either by choice or by necessity, are more likely to rely on transit. Given Pinal County's predominantly suburban and rural character, car ownership rates are high. However, according to the US Census Bureau's 2017 5-year estimates, 13.3 percent of Pinal County households do not own a vehicle. Zero vehicle households are concentrated in Pinal County's largest communities: Apache Junction, Maricopa, and San Tan Valley (unincorporated) (see Figure 5).

**Low Income Residents:** Residents with lower incomes tend to use public transportation to a greater extent because it is less expensive than owning and operating a personal vehicle. In Pinal County, the largest populations of individuals with low incomes are in Apache Junction, Casa Grande, Eloy and San Tan Valley. For this analysis, households with an annual income below \$35,000 (approximately 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level for a family of four) are included as low-income households (see Figure 6).

**Older Adults:** Older adults begin to drive less as their age increases, and in some cases begin to use public transportation more often. According to the 2017 American Community Survey, approximately 20 percent of Pinal County residents are aged 65 or older, a rate that is higher than the national average (16%). In Pinal County, older adults are concentrated in Apache Junction, Maricopa, and Casa Grande with another cluster in the southeast corner of the County, in Saddlebrooke (see Figure 7).

**People with Disabilities** - Individuals with disabilities may be unable to drive or have difficulty driving and may be more likely to rely on transit or paratransit services to meet their transportation needs and maintain an independent lifestyle. Concentrations of people with disabilities in Pinal County are found in Apache Junction, Maricopa, Casa Grande and San Tan Valley (see Figure 8).

Figure 5. Pinal County Zero Vehicle Households (2017)

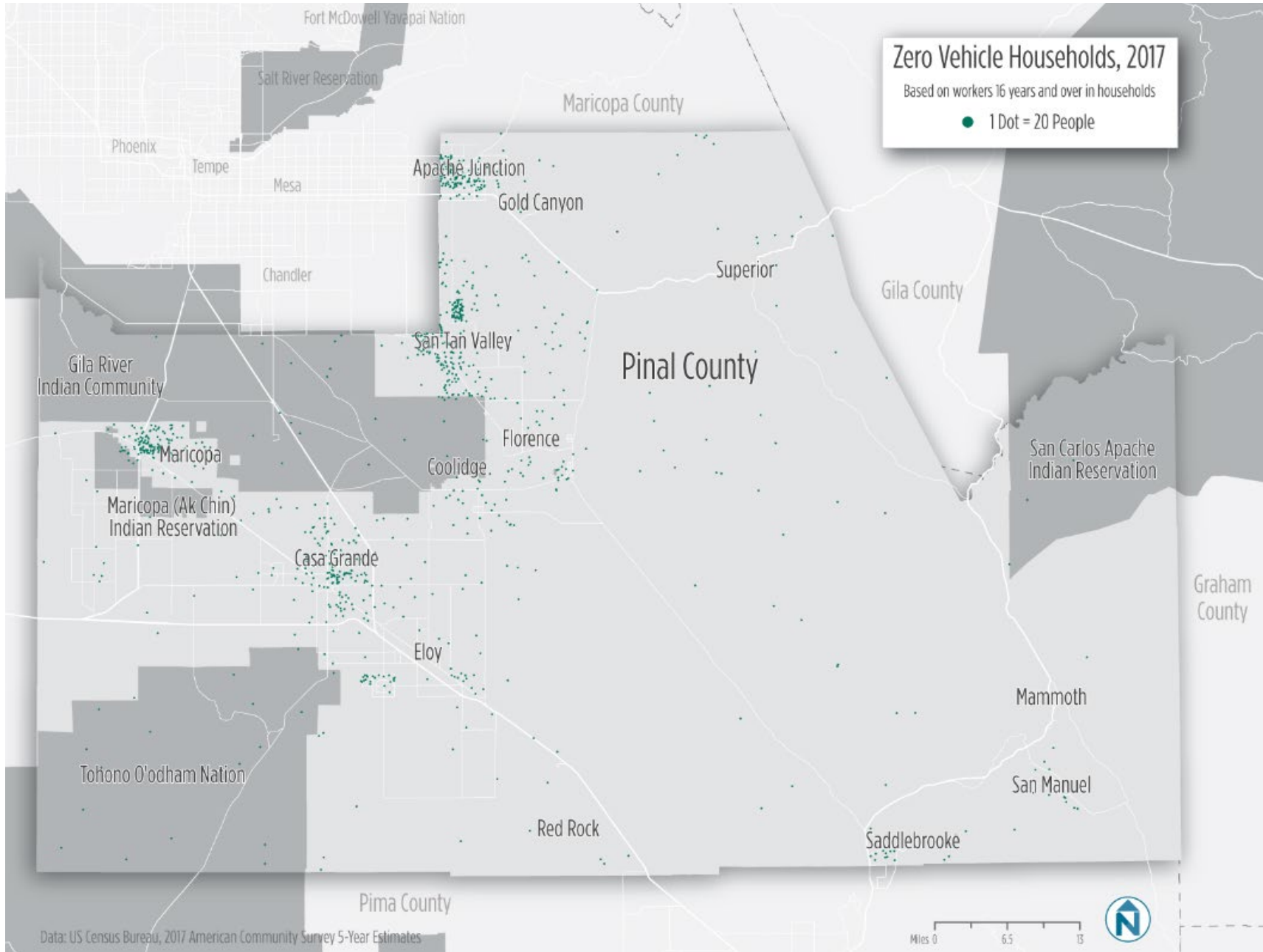


Figure 6. Pinal County: Low Income Households in Pinal County (2017)

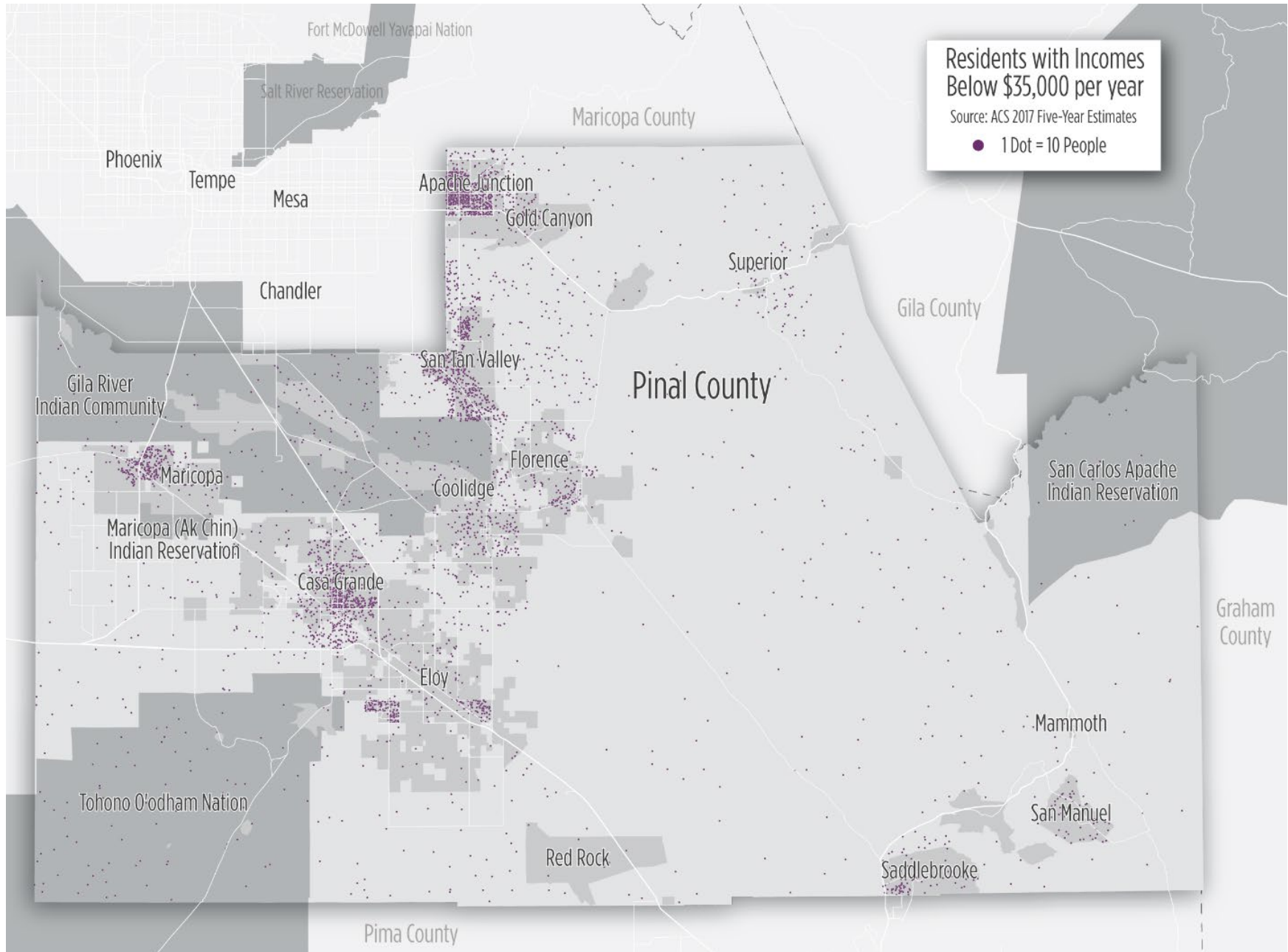


Figure 7. Pinal County: Residents Aged 65 or Older (2017)

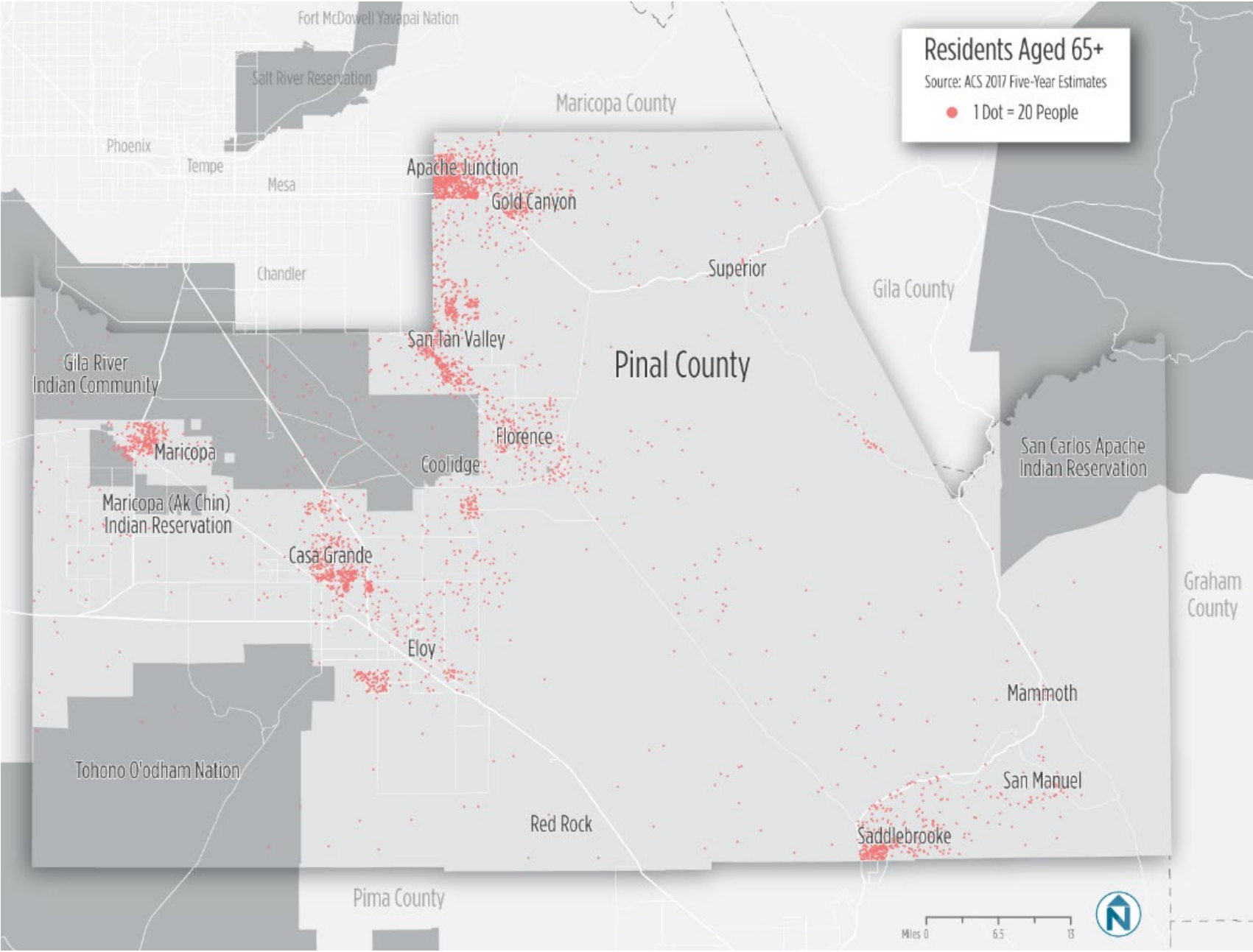
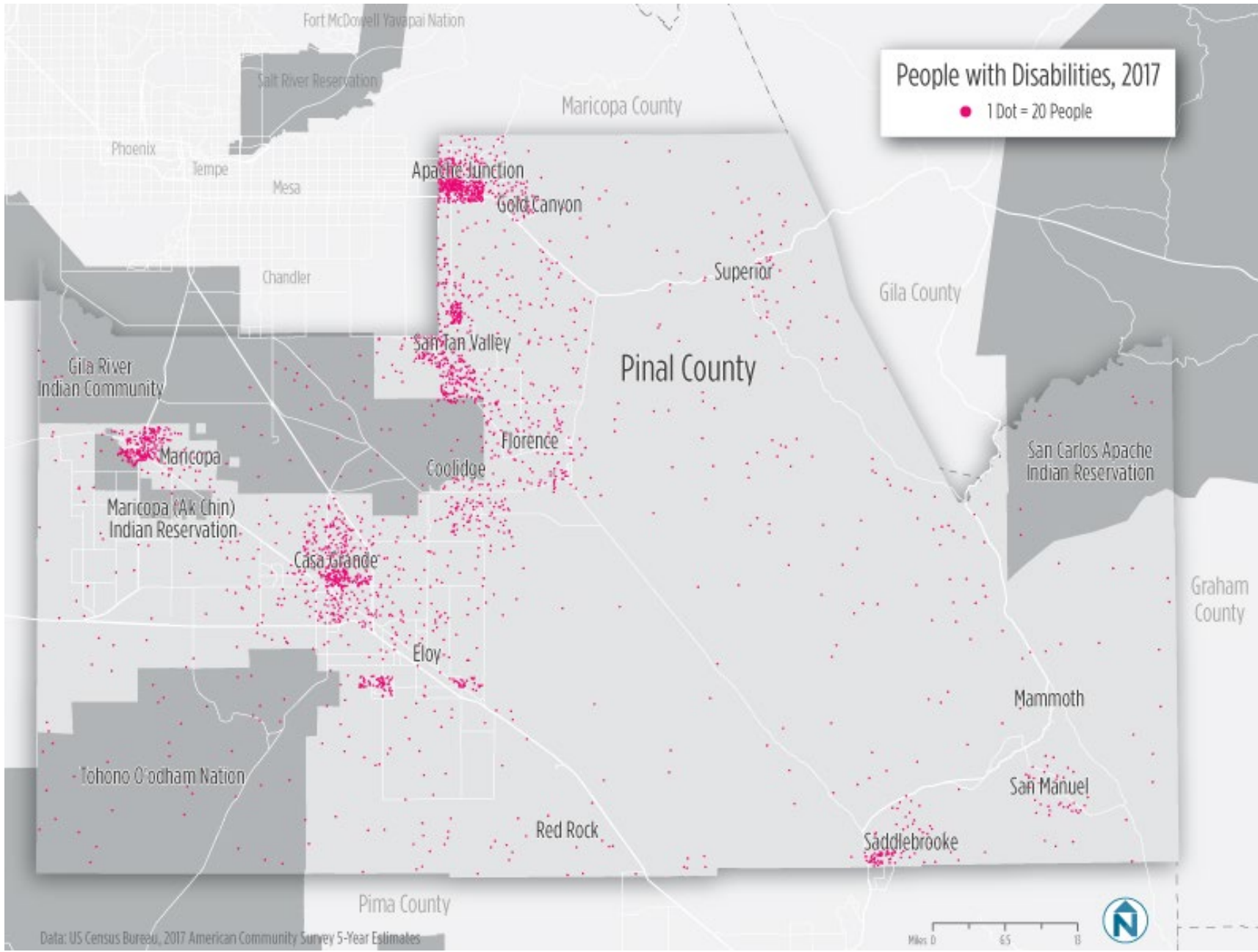


Figure 8. Pinal County: Residents with Disabilities (2017)



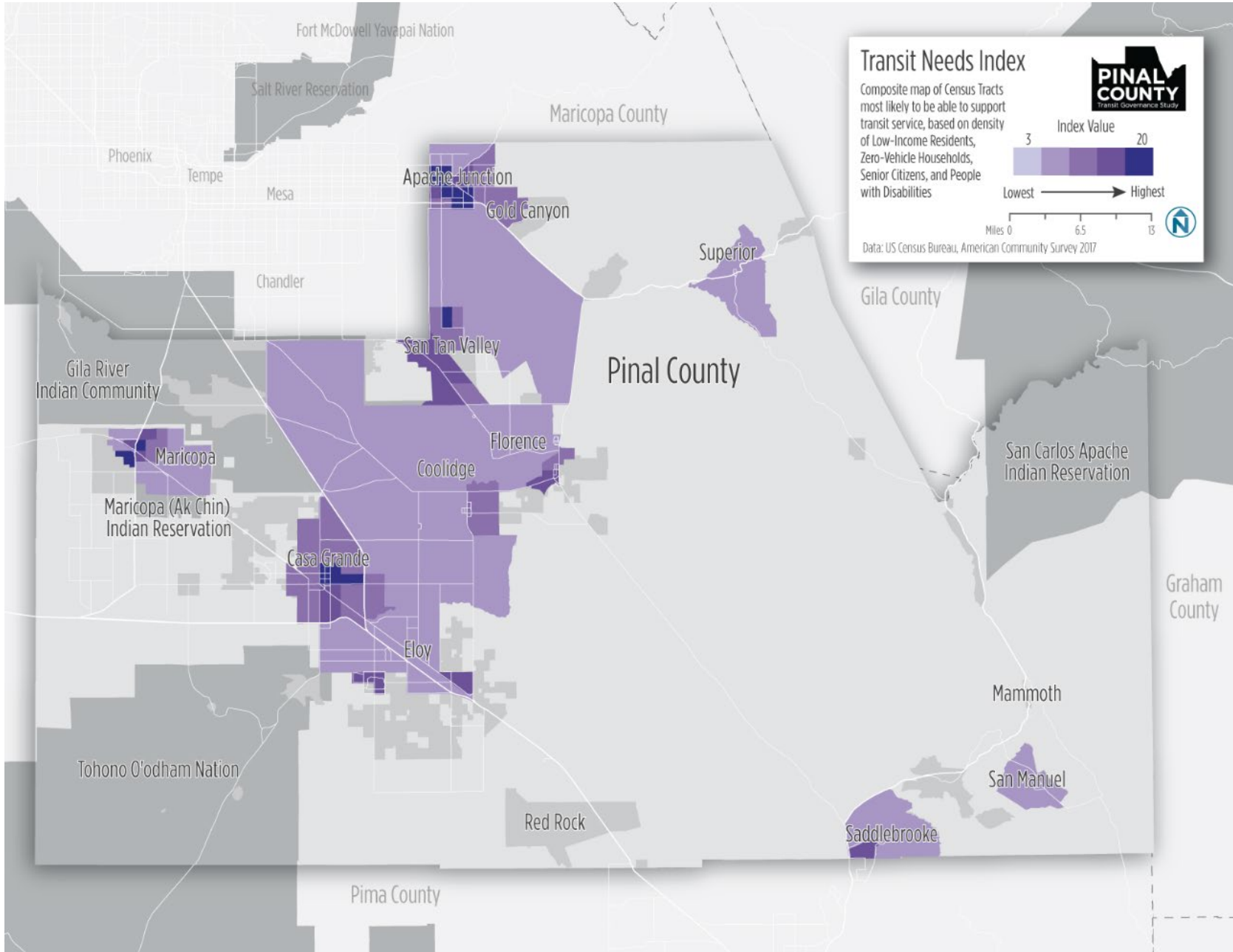


## Transit Needs Index

The market analysis considered each of the individual populations with a higher propensity to use transit separately. We also combined the information into a Transit Needs Index. This analysis reflects the density of transit-supportive populations - zero-vehicle households, households with incomes below \$35,000 per year, people over the age of 65, and people with disabilities - in each census tract in the county. It then assigns each census tract a score of 1 (least transit-supportive) to 5 (most transit-supportive) for each of those four metrics, then adds up the scores to determine an overall transit need score.

The transit needs index identifies the areas in Pinal County with the greatest need for transit service (see Figure 9). This analysis tells us that the highest need for transit is mostly consistent with the overall population clusters and includes areas in Apache Junction, Casa Grande, Maricopa, San Tan Valley and Eloy. Smaller clusters of need are also visible in Florence and Coolidge as well as Saddlebrooke in the southeast corner of the county.

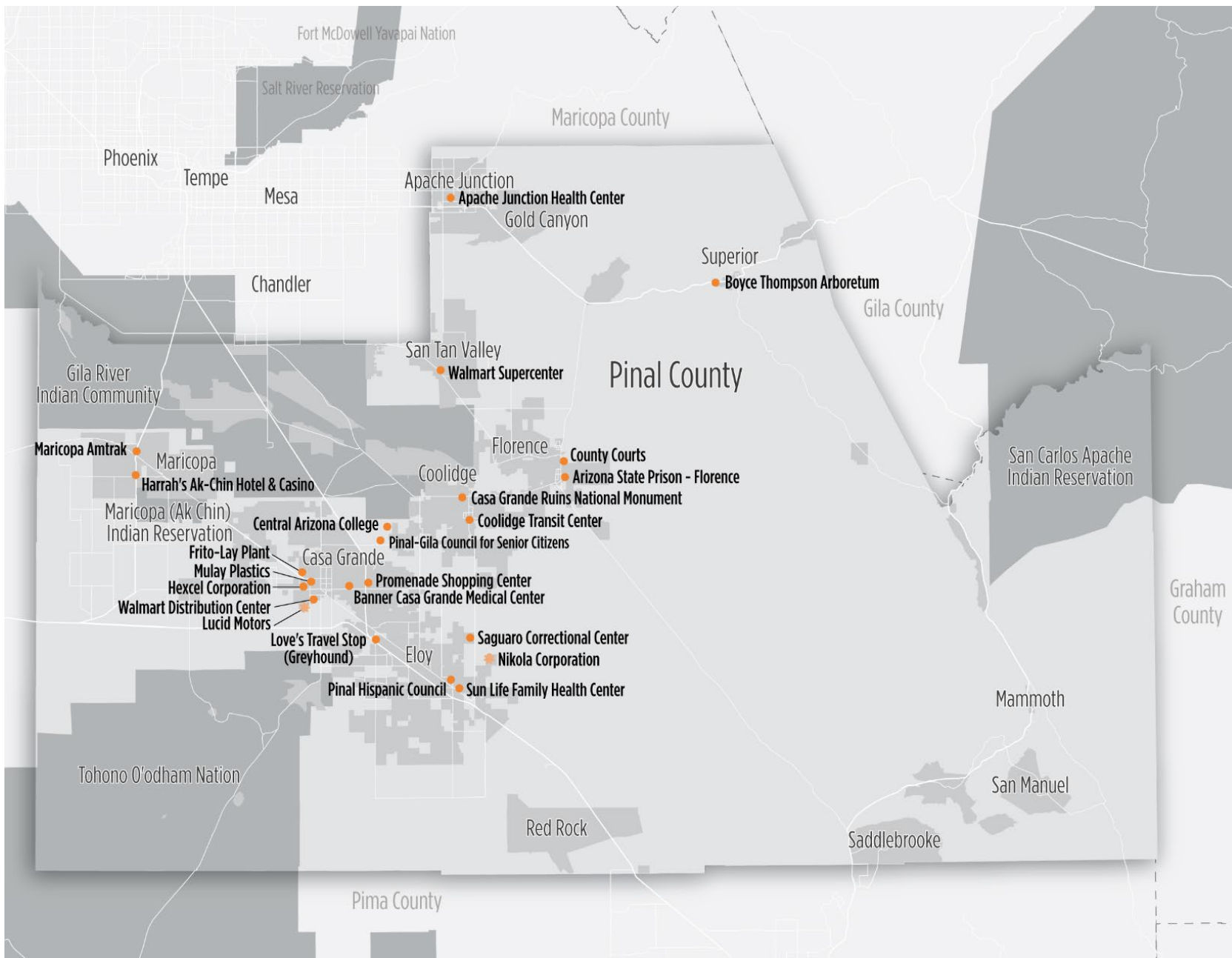
Figure 9. Pinal County: Transit Needs Index (2017)



## Activity Centers and Destinations

The analysis of population and employment trends identifies transit needs based on the distribution of people and jobs. We also know there are important activity centers, like shopping malls and retail centers, hospitals, town centers, and other large employers, that represent places where people travel. The study team mapped a handful of regional destinations in Pinal County (see Figure 10); this analysis suggests a cluster of activities in Casa Grande as well as in Florence and Coolidge.

Figure 10. Activity Centers in Pinal County



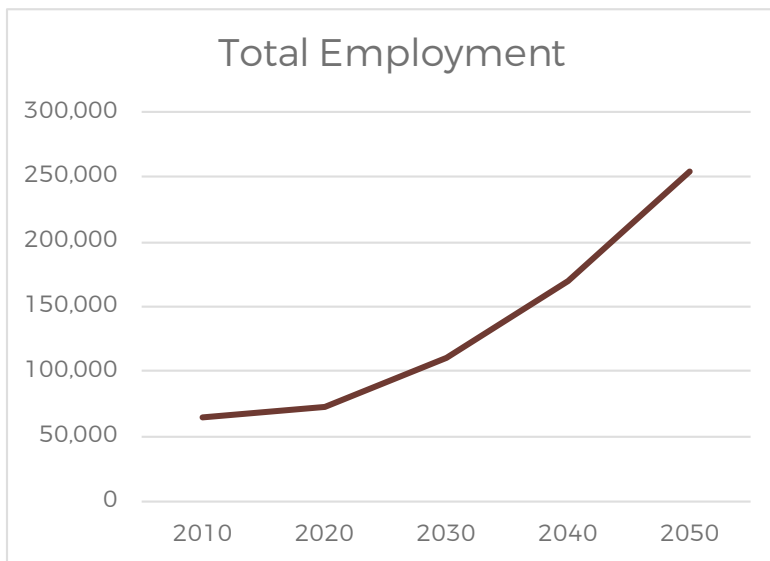
## Employment

Like population, employment in Pinal County has grown steadily. In 2010 the County had roughly 50,000 jobs, increasing to 125,000 in 2017, with forecasts for 200,000 jobs by 2030 and more than 325,000 by 2050 (see Figure 11).

Jobs within Pinal County are somewhat concentrated in the areas with population density; Apache Junction, San Tan Valley, Casa Grande, and Florence (see Figure 12). Other areas, however, like Eloy, Coolidge and Maricopa have relatively low employment suggesting that residents must commute outside of the community for jobs and services.

Despite increasing growth, the portion of people who live and work in Pinal County is still quite small, at about 25% of all residents. An even smaller portion of Pinal County residents work in their home communities (see Figure 13). Indeed, nearly half (48%) of all Pinal County residents commute to the Phoenix metropolitan area for work, including to jobs in Phoenix, Mesa, Tempe and Chandler. More detailed information on where Pinal County residents work see Appendix B.

**Figure 11. Pinal County Number of Jobs (2010 – 2050)**



Source: Maricopa Association of Governments, Central Arizona Governments

Figure 12. Pinal County Employment Density (2018)

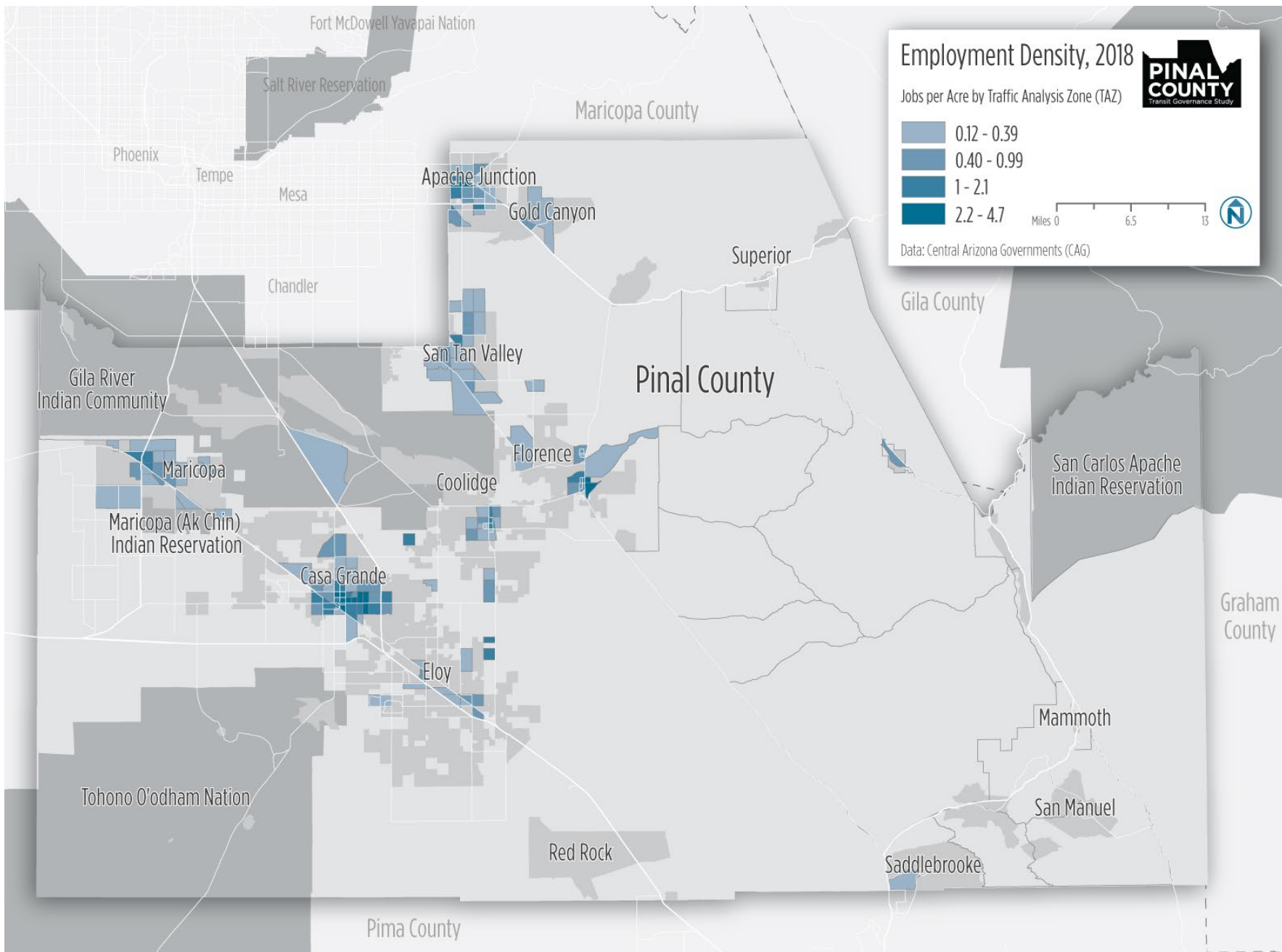


Figure 13. Pinal County Residents Employment Destinations (2017)

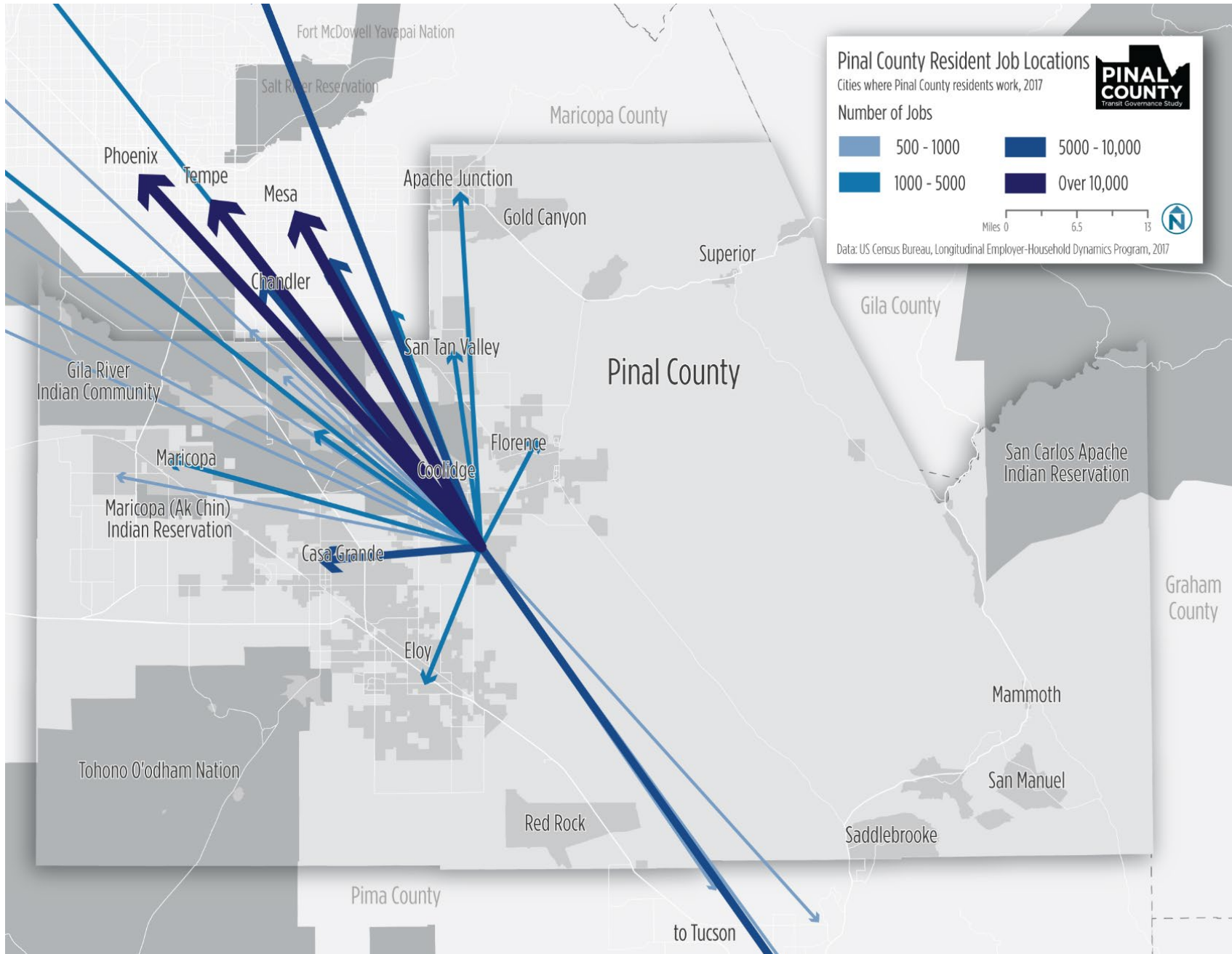
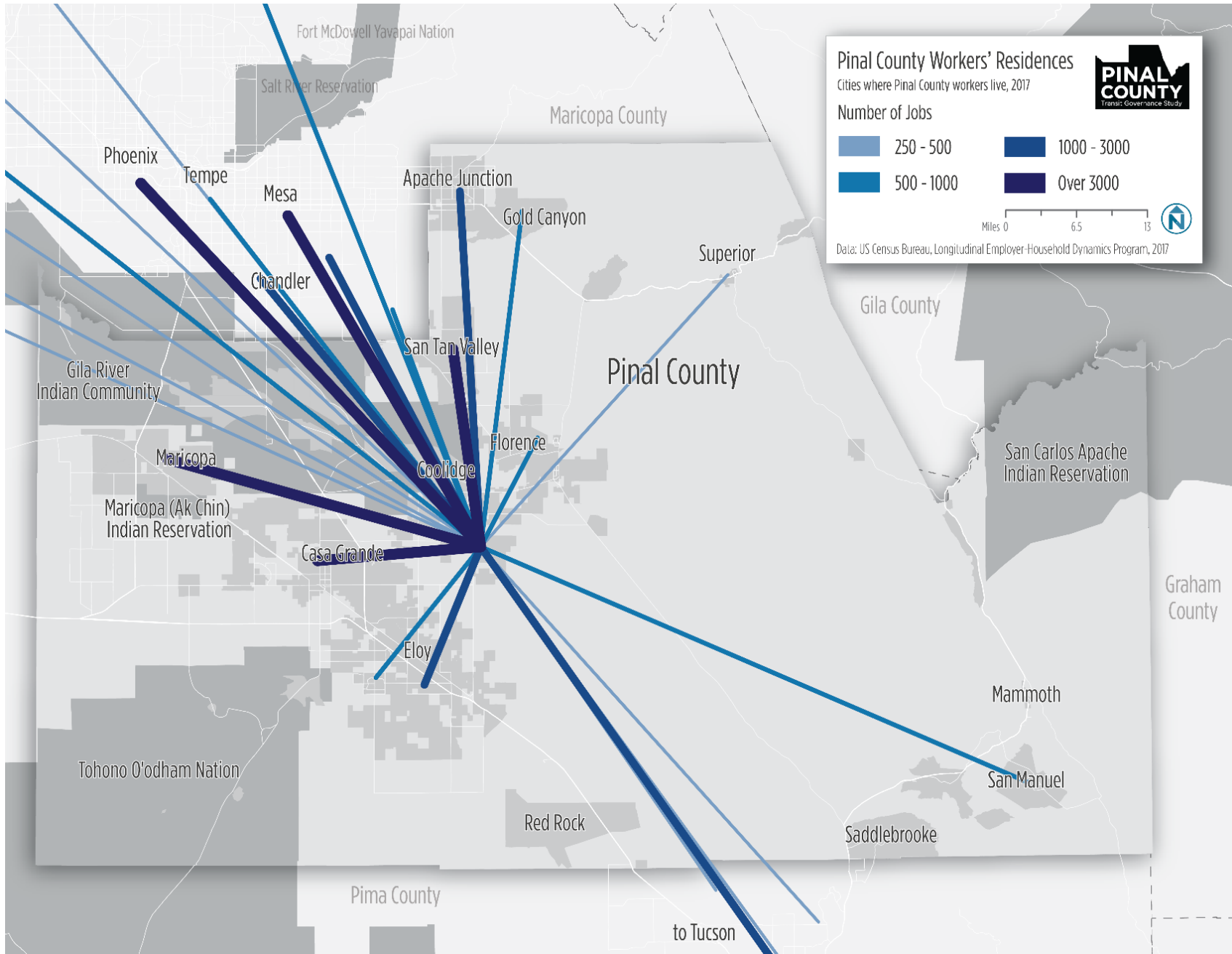


Figure 14. Cities Where Pinal County Workers Live, 2017





## 3 Transit in Pinal County: Existing and Planned Service

### Overview

Pinal County is currently served by several local, regional, and human service transportation providers. Greyhound and Amtrak Thruway Bus Service also provide a limited number of intercity trips per day to Phoenix and other regional destinations.

Public transit service is primarily operated as demand response or deviated fixed route service with relatively low frequency, reflecting the rural characteristics of the county. There are four public transit services in Pinal County available to members of the general public: the Cotton Express, Central Arizona Rapid Transit (CART), the City of Maricopa Express Transit (COMET), and Gila River Transit. A fifth service On-the-Go provides transportation services to older adults and people with disabilities in eastern Pinal county.

Transit service in Pinal County is focused on local service. The potential to expand service to new areas and between communities is limited based on the availability of funding and challenges associated with building partnerships across stakeholders. The PRTA funding could potentially influence this paradigm by providing financial resources that encourage development of regional transit services and/or service to new areas. The following section presents an overview of the individual transit services operating in Pinal County, together with their current funding and governance structures.

### Cotton Express

#### Overview

The City of Coolidge operates local bus service, branded as the Cotton Express. The service began in 1990 with entirely demand-response service and expanded to operate deviated fixed-route in 1993. Currently, the Cotton Express includes deviated fixed route, and demand-response bus service.

Cotton Express' two deviated fixed routes operate along the main corridor of Arizona Boulevard; the Red Route serves locations west of Arizona Boulevard, and the Blue Route serves locations east of Arizona Boulevard. Riders may request a deviation up to ¼ mile off the fixed route so they are dropped off or picked up closer to their destination. Deviations must be scheduled at least 24 hours in advance. The deviated fixed route service is available on weekdays from 7am to 8pm, The Cotton Express also includes demand response service. This is a reservation-based service on weekdays from 7:00 am to 5:00 pm. The adult cash fare for a one-way trip is \$1.00.

The Cotton Express links residential areas with schools, shopping areas, employment centers, and other key destinations. According to surveys, riders primarily use Cotton Express service for access to education and training (45 percent), shopping and personal business (23 percent) and health and

medical trips (20 percent).<sup>1</sup> Ridership on the Cotton Express has fluctuated over the past few years (see Figure 15), but with annual ridership around 20,000.

**Figure 15. Cotton Express Ridership, 2016 - 2019**

Year	Red Route	Blue Route	Deviated	Demand-Response	Total
2016	4,682	3,233	-	6,839	23,241
2017	5,467	3,773	-	8,941	18,181
2018	6,180	3,929	-	9,989	20,098
2019*	4,799	3,065	1,443	6,300	15,607

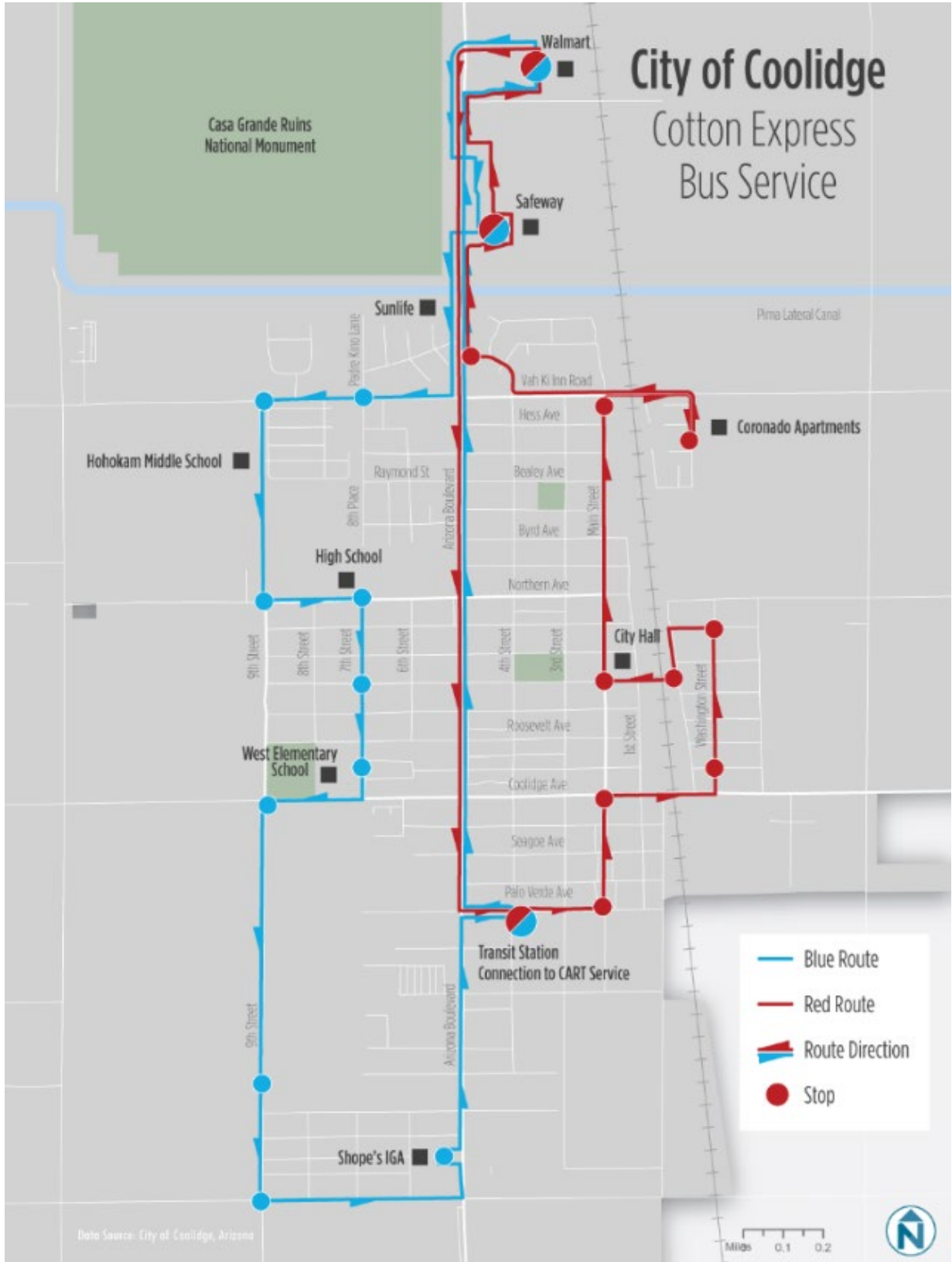
\*January to September 2019

Source: City of Coolidge

Cotton Express owns and operates a total of nine vehicles, seven of which are in active revenue service. The City of Coolidge also operates the Coolidge Transit Center, which serves as a transfer point between the CART and Cotton Express systems.

<sup>1</sup> Council of Arizona Governments & Sun Corridor MPO Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plan, 2019

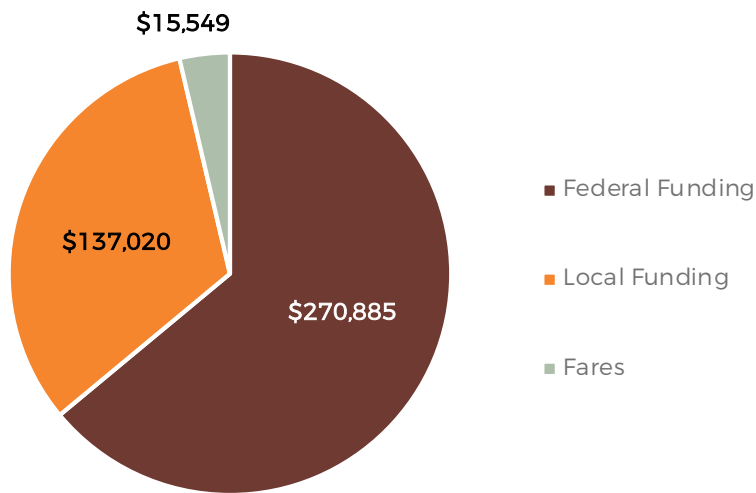
Figure 16. Cotton Express Fixed Route Service



## Funding

The 2018 annual budget for the Cotton Express was \$423,214. Funding included federal resources (64%), local funding (32%) and fares (4%) (see Figure 17). The Cotton Express reported an average cost per trip of \$30.07, which includes the average between the cost of a demand response trip (\$22.46) and cost of a trip on the bus service (\$35.62). The average cost per hour of service was \$63.53<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 17. Cotton Express Funding Sources, FY2019**



## Governance Structure

Cotton Express service is operated by the City of Coolidge and is under the purview of the Coolidge City Council and the City Manager. Transit personnel, including the Transit Manager, drivers, and dispatchers, are City employees and are subject to the City's guidelines for hiring, performance evaluations, and promotions.

The City's Transit Advisory Committee (TAC) provides input on Cotton Express service delivery. The TAC was created in 2016 and provides guidance on the provision of CART service. Representation on the Transit Advisory Committee includes riders, businesses, older adults, people with disabilities and the CART Board.

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<sup>2</sup> National Transit Database 2018 Annual Agency Profile

## Central Arizona Regional Transit (CART)

### Overview

Central Arizona Regional Transit (CART) is a regional bus service that serves the towns of Coolidge, Florence, and Casa Grande, as well as Central Arizona College. It was established in 2010 as a pilot regional bus system and made permanent in 2011. CART is operated by the City of Coolidge. Unlike the Cotton Express, which relies entirely on city funds for the local revenues, CART is funded through a partnership that includes the City of Coolidge, Central Arizona College, Pinal County, and the Town of Florence.

CART service consists of two deviated fixed routes (Westbound and Eastbound) that operate along the same corridor, essentially creating an out and back service. The two routes operate in a complete loop every 2.5 hours and run from 5am to 8:30pm on weekdays. During morning and evening peak periods, more frequent service is provided by the AM Sweeper and PM Sweeper services. They serve employment, retail, government, and educational hubs in Central Arizona College, Casa Grande, Coolidge, and Florence. The Coolidge Transit Center provides a transfer point between the CART system and the Cotton Express. The station at Love's Travel Stop in Eloy also provides a transfer point between CART and Greyhound intercity service.

Ridership on CART has declined over the past several years, dropping from a high of 26,539 annual riders to an estimated 12,000 riders expected in 2019.

**Figure 18. CART Annual Ridership by Year (2015 – 2019)**

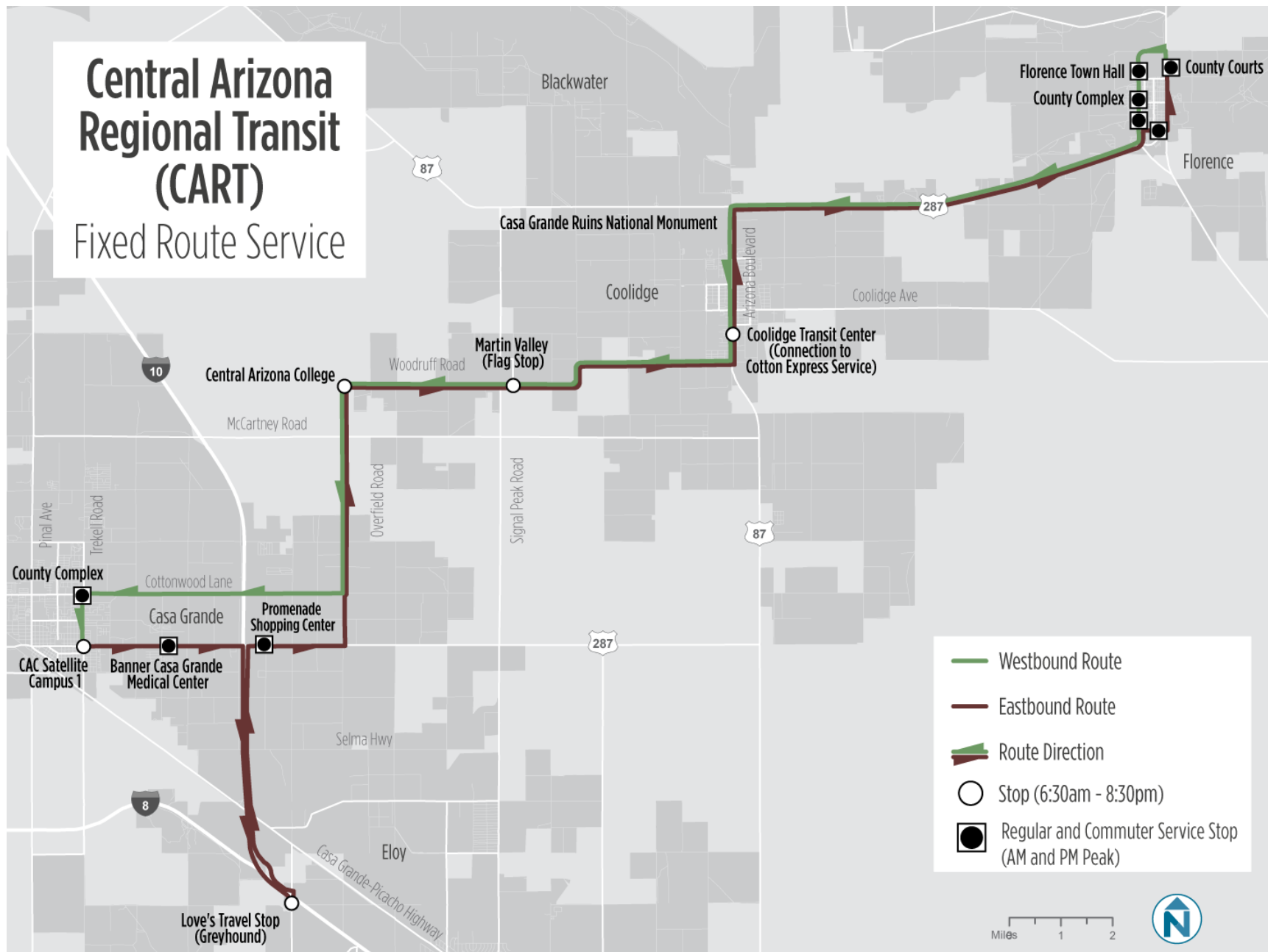
Year	Annual Ridership
2015	26,539
2016	17,920
2017	14,019
2018	12,985
2019*	8,663

\*January through September 2019

Source: City of Coolidge, AZ

CART owns three in-service revenue vehicles, one spare revenue vehicle, and a shop truck. The City of Coolidge also operates the Coolidge Transit Center, which serves as a transfer point between the CART and Cotton Express systems.

Figure 19. CART Fixed Route Service Map

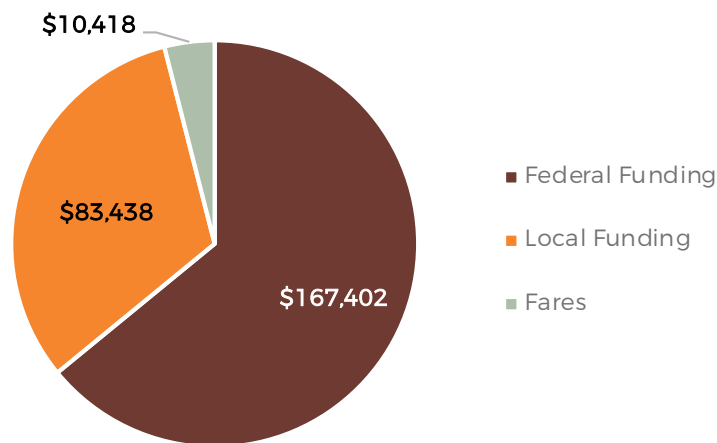


## Budget and Funding

In 2018, CART had an annual operating budget of \$261,323. The largest source of funding was provided by the Federal Transit Administration's 5311 Grant Program, which is administered by ADOT and accounted for \$167,400 in FY2019. The remaining \$94,076 was raised through contributions provided by local partners and fares (Figure 20).

Roughly 30% of CART's annual operating costs are used to support administration and the remaining 70% is spent on service operations, including driver salaries and vehicle maintenance.

**Figure 20. CART Funding Source, FY2019**



## Governance Structure

CART is operated by the City of Coolidge. Manager, drivers, and dispatchers are City employees and are subject to the City's guidelines for hiring, performance evaluations, and promotions.

CART receives input from the City's Transit Advisory Committee which was created in 2016 and advises the City of Coolidge on the provision of both Cotton Express and CART service. Representation on the Transit Advisory Committee includes riders, businesses, older adults, people with disabilities, plus the CART Board.

The CART Board includes representatives from the member agencies of Pinal County, the City of Coolidge, the Town of Florence, and Central Arizona College. An Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between these entities describes the commitments that each organization makes to the transit system and provides the local matching fund commitment that allows CART to obtain federal funds.

## City of Maricopa Express Transit (COMET)

### Overview

The City of Maricopa Express Transit (COMET) system provides bus service to the City of Maricopa, Arizona. Service is characterized into four types (local demand-response, local limited demand-response, regional demand-response, and a local circulator), although differences between services is not significant:

- **Local Demand Response** service is a reservation-based service that operates anywhere within the City of Maricopa's borders. Riders are picked up and dropped off at the curb and must make a reservation at least 24 hours in advance of making a trip. Local Demand Response service is available Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm. Fares are set at \$1.00 for a one-way trip.
- **Local Limited Demand Response** service is the same type of service as Local Demand but operates for shorter periods of time (9:30 am to 1:30 pm) on Tuesday and Thursday.
- **Route Deviation Service** is a scheduled fixed-route service that circulates through the City of Maricopa. It provides links between several grocery stores (Fry's, Walmart), community facilities (Pinal Health Clinic, Sun Life Health Center, Public Library) as well as parks. The bus will also deviate off route up to ¼ mile to bring riders closer to their destination. The circulator operates Monday through Friday between 7:00 am and 5:30 pm. One-way fares are \$0.50 per rider.
- **Regional Demand Response** service is a reservation-based service that provides service to regional medical services. On Tuesdays, the bus travels between Maricopa and Chandler Regional Hospital and on Thursdays the bus travels between Maricopa and Banner Hospital in Casa Grande. Riders can also use the service to travel within 5 miles of either destination. Reservations must be made 24 hours in advance and the fare is \$3.00 per one-way trip.

COMET operates these services with a fleet of five vehicles – two 21-passenger buses and three 6-passenger minivans – and provides approximately 4,100 trips per year. All services are open to the general public, and all vehicles are ADA-equipped. COMET receives federal funding through the FTA 5311 Formula Grants for Rural Areas program.

### Budget and Funding

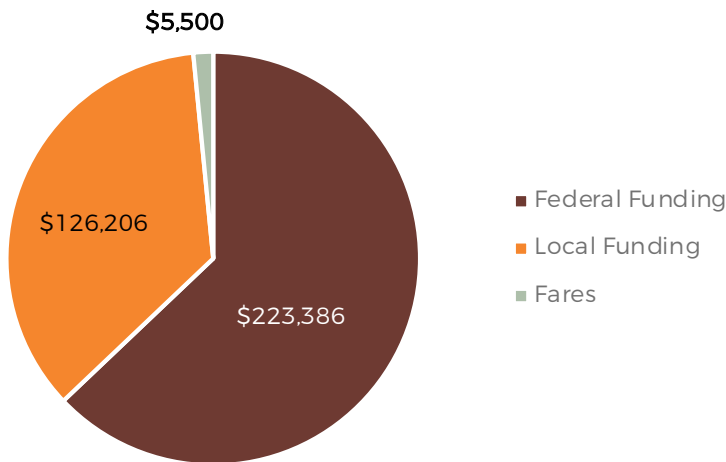
The City of Maricopa's COMET service had an annual budget of \$355,048 in 2018. This budget included \$322,839 for operations and \$32,209 for capital projects. FTA 5311 funds contributed \$223,386, inclusive of \$194,398 used to support operations and \$28,988 for capital projects. The City of Maricopa contributed \$126,206 and roughly \$5,500 was raised through fares (Figure 21). About 25% of COMET's annual operating costs are used to support administration and 75% supports service operations,



including driver salaries and vehicle maintenance. The cost of a single trip on the service was \$70.16, while the cost per hour of service was \$72.47<sup>3</sup>.

After the 2020 Census data is collected, it is likely that the City of Maricopa will be eligible for FTA Small Urban 5307 grants. This change in eligibility would impact both the amount of funding available and the requirement for local matching funds.

**Figure 21. COMET Funding Sources, FY2017**



Source: City of Maricopa, AZ

### Governance Structure

COMET is operated by the City of Maricopa. The Mayor and City Council oversee the service and provide policy support and direction. Service administration is provided by City of Maricopa staff and the operation of the service, including driver salaries and vehicle maintenance, is provided by a third-party private contractor.

## Gila River Transit

### Overview

Gila River Transit (GRT) is a fare-free, deviated fixed-route service operated by the Gila River Indian Community. It began service in 2016 and operates shuttles on Mondays through Fridays from 8:00am until 4:30pm, with one additional shuttle operating on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The shuttles provide service to key destinations including the Hu Kam Hospital in Sacaton, the Boys & Girls Club, the

<sup>3</sup> National Transit Database 2018 Annual Agency Profile

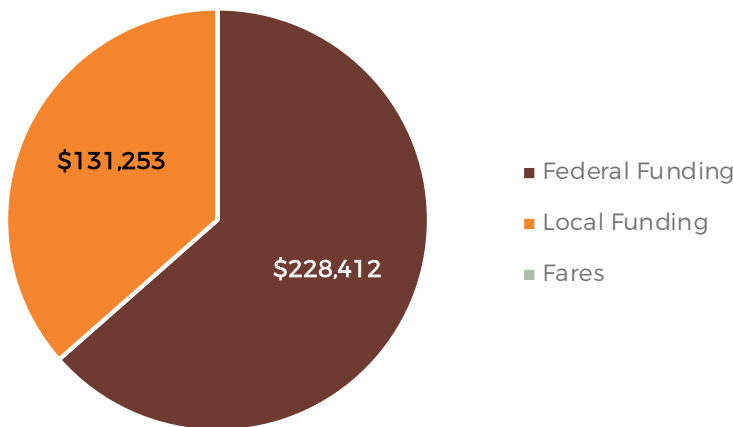
Komatke Health Clinic, as well as schools, libraries, and housing and job centers. Door-to-door deviated service is also available to residents based on disability or health conditions.

In FY2018, GRT used three vehicles to provide 25,651 trips, 54,782 revenue miles, and 3,823 revenue hours. GRT’s average cost per trip was \$14.02 and the cost per hour of service was \$94.08<sup>4</sup>.

### Budget and Funding

Gila River Transit’s annual operating budget in FY2018 was \$359,665. Funding sources include FTA Section 5311 grants (administered by ADOT) and local funds provided by the tribe (see Figure 22). GRT operates as a fare-free service, so the agency budget does not include fares as part of their funding portfolio.

**Figure 22. Gila River Transit Funding Sources, FY2018**



Source: National Transit Database, 2018

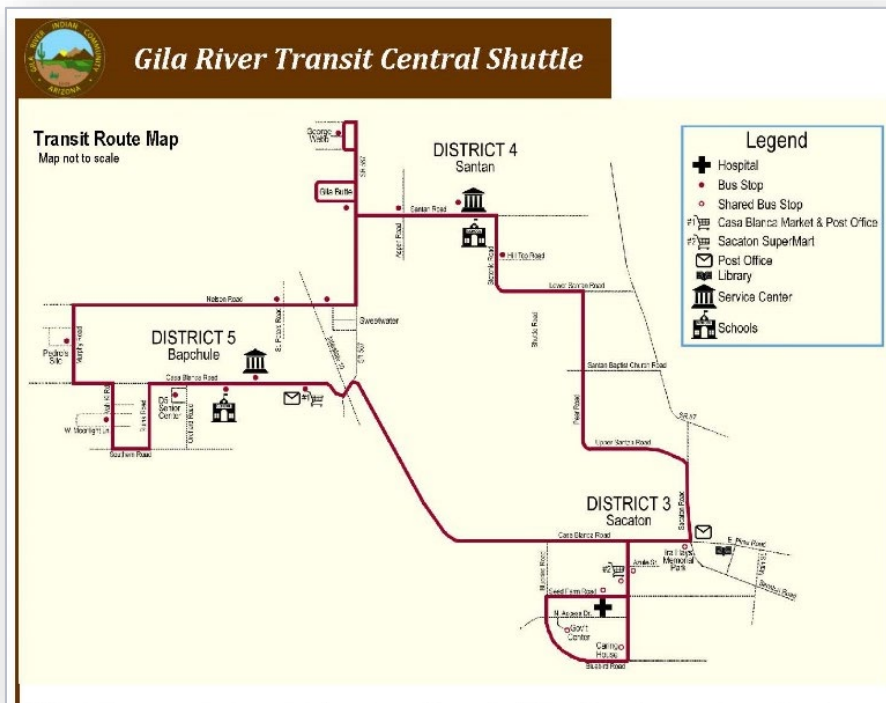
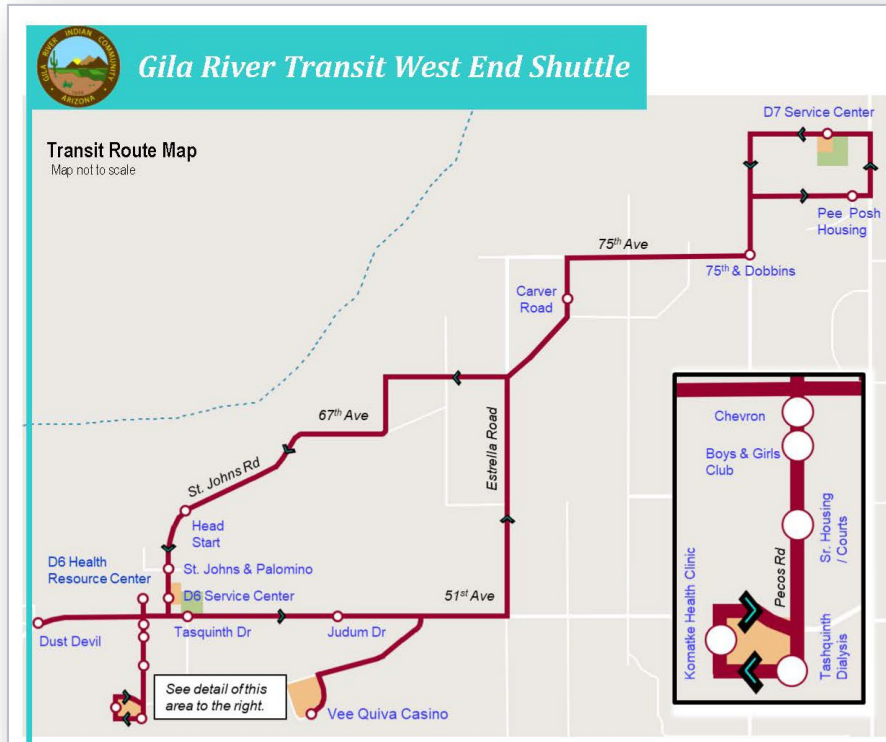
### Governance Structure

GRT is operated and managed by the Gila River Indian Community. All drivers and mechanics are employees of the tribe.

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<sup>4</sup> National Transit Database 2018 Annual Agency Profile

Figure 23. Gila River Transit West End and Central Shuttles



## Human Services Transportation

There are several human services transportation providers available across Pinal County operated by a variety of agencies and organizations.

### On-the-Go Express

The Pinal County Department of Public Health operates and funds On-the-Go Express, a demand response service that provides transportation to adults aged 60 and over and persons with disabilities who live in eastern Pinal County (Oracle, Oracle Junction, San Manuel, Mammoth, Aravaipa, Dudleyville, Kearny, Hayden, Winkelman, Saddlebrooke, Riverside/Kelvin and Superior). The service is funded by Pinal County and has an annual budget of \$250,000. Capital costs are funded through a combination of Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 funds and county funds. On-the-Go's average cost per trip was \$37.21 with each hour service costing \$91.17.

On the Go takes older adults and people with disabilities to medical appointments. The service also delivers prescriptions and groceries. The suggested donation for services is \$2, and it operates Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM until 3:00 PM. Transportation is by appointment only and requires a minimum of 72 hours of advance notice. Vehicles are dispatched from a Pinal County facility located in Oracle.

**Figure 24. Program Overview – On-the-Go Express**

Organizational Status	Local Government
Service Area	Eastern Pinal County
Major Funding Sources	Pinal County Public Health Services District
Number of Vehicles	6
Annual Trips (FY 2017-18)	6,718
Annual Hours (FY 2017-18)	2,742
Annual Miles (FY 2017-18)	101,426

### Horizon Health and Wellness

Horizon Health and Wellness is a not-for-profit agency that provides psychiatric and medical services to disabled individuals and families in Pinal and Gila counties, including primary care, psychiatric evaluations, substance abuse treatment, and individual and group therapy.

Horizon provides transportation services to eligible patients at no additional cost. Individuals may be transported to and from medical appointments, case management services, and other purposes that meet medical necessity criteria. Transportation services are provided Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm. Additionally, transportation services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to individuals who live in agency group homes.

Horizon’s service area is a 45-mile radius from Casa Grande. Horizon receives federal funding for its vehicles and equipment through the 5310 – Rural Public Transit program.

**Figure 25. Program Overview - Horizon Health and Wellness**

Organizational Status	Non-Profit Agency
Service Area	45-mile radius from Casa Grande
Major Funding Sources	ADOT 5310, Cenpatico/Steward
Number of Vehicles	38
Annual Trips - Pinal (2017-18)	16,896
Annual Hours - Pinal (2017-18)	18,099
Annual Miles - Pinal (2017-18)	306,412

### The Opportunity Tree

Formerly known as the Arizona Foundation for the Handicapped (AFH), The Opportunity Tree provides support to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities through a variety of employment, in-home, and residential services.

**Figure 26. Program Overview – The Opportunity Tree**

Organizational Status	Non-Profit Agency
Service Area	Casa Grande
Major Funding Sources	State of Arizona
Number of Vehicles	10
Annual Trips	11,296
Annual Hours	7,852
Annual Miles	109,881

### Pinal-Gila Council for Senior Citizens (PGCSC)

The Pinal-Gila Council for Senior Citizens (PGCSC)<sup>5</sup> provides a variety of services to individuals aged 60 or more living in Pinal and Gila counties, including transportation. Transportation services include transportation to senior centers in the Pinal and Gila counties (Apache Junction, Casa Grande, Coolidge,

<sup>5</sup> Data was not available to support a Program Overview table.

Eloy, Globe, Florence, Hayden, Miami, Superior, and Payson). Additional service may be available to medical appointments, stores and other locations as possible.

Funding for PGCSC’s transportation services include federal funds provided through Area Agency on Aging grants. Additional funds are provided through passenger donations.

**Figure 27. Program Overview – Pinal-Gila Council for Senior Citizens (PGCSC)**

Organizational Status	501 (c)(3) Non-Profit
Service Area	Pinal & Gila Counties
Major Funding Sources	Not Available
Number of Vehicles	3 (out of service)
Annual Trips (2018)	Not Available
Annual Hours (2018)	Not Available
Annual Miles (2018)	Not Available

### Pinal Hispanic Council

The Pinal Hispanic Council (PHC) is a non-profit organization that was established in 1990 to provide behavioral health services in Eloy, Arizona. PHC provides outpatient services related to mental health, and substance abuse to children, families, and adults in Eloy, Coolidge, Casa Grande, Arizona City, San Tan Valley, Florence, and the Picacho areas. PHC provides transportation to its members for medical appointments, as well as basic and emergency assistance. PHC’s hours of operation are Monday to Friday from 8am to 5pm, with additional service on Saturdays as needed.

**Figure 28. Program Overview - Pinal Hispanic Council**

Organizational Status	501 (c)(3) Non-Profit
Service Area	Pinal County
Major Funding Sources	5310, Cenpatico
Number of Vehicles	23 (plus 3 spare vehicles)
Annual Trips (2017)	17,103
Annual Hours (2017)	1,820
Annual Miles (2017)	269,733

## Town of Florence – Dorothy Nolan Senior Center

The Dorothy Nolan Senior Center in Florence operates a transportation program for seniors who are 55 years or older, and for people with disabilities, and provides transportation to shopping, medical appointments, and the senior center itself. The center operates four vehicles, two of which have wheelchair lifts. The program vans operate Monday through Friday, from 8am through 4pm.

**Figure 29. Program Overview - Town of Florence**

Organizational Status	Local Government
Service Area	Town of Florence
Major Funding Sources	5310
Number of Vehicles	4
Annual Trips (2018)	3,826
Annual Hours (2018)	1,572
Annual Miles (2018)	18,973

## Planned Services

Given Pinal County's rapid growth over the past two decades, there has been increased interest in developing more substantive transit services across the county. Recent studies in the cities of Casa Grande and Eloy have explored potential options for a variety of transit service types.

### Casa Grande Transit Development Plan (2019)

The City of Casa Grande is located approximately halfway between Phoenix and Tucson, five miles northwest of the I-8 and I-10 interchange. Its population exceeded 50,000 people as of 2010 and is expected to increase to 126,000 by 2050.

The TDP conducted in 2019 recommended two local routes for Casa Grande:

- A local out and back deviated flex route on Florence Boulevard
- A downtown and health services route that would operate as deviated flex route service.

Both services were recommended to operate 12 hours a day, five days per week. ADA service would be accommodated with the deviated flex service design and fares are recommended at \$1.00 for an adult one-way fare, \$2.00 for an all-day pass.

Longer term options include development of service in the southwest area, creating a southeast corridor route, operating on Pinal Avenue, extensions to the Florence Boulevard Route and a Kortsen-Cottonwood loop.

## City of Eloy Transit Feasibility Study (2019)

### Planned Services and Recommendations

The City of Eloy completed a study of transit needs in 2019 which created a set of short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations. The near-term scenario recommended two services:

- A local flex circulator route that connected downtown destinations including local libraries, grocery stores, and community centers, and other shopping and social services providers.
- A regional bus route to connect Eloy and Casa Grande, with service to the Promenade Mall (including Walmart and Fry's), Banner Hospital, and the Central Arizona College. The regional bus route would also connect with Greyhound and CART services.
- Both local and regional services were recommended for weekday service from 7am to 7pm on weekdays and reduced service on Saturdays. No service is recommended for Sunday.
- The proposed fare was \$2.00 for a one-way adult cash fare.

Longer term recommendations include evaluating service performance and potentially increasing service to the CoreCivic facility outside of Eloy and seasonal service to the Eloy Municipal Airport and Silverado RV Park.



# APPENDICES

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# Appendix A: Review of Relevant Documents

## Pinal County Transit Feasibility Study (2011)

The Pinal County Transit Feasibility Study was one of the first times Pinal County took a comprehensive look at regional transit needs. The study identified an arc of development around the eastern and southern sides of the Gila River Indian Community and along I-10 between Casa Grande and Eloy with slower growth in the eastern part of the county.

The study noted that the county's long-term transit needs will be much greater and different from its short-term transit needs. With the expected variability in growth levels and patterns, Pinal County will need to develop a flexible approach that can evolve as needs change. The study recommended a series of steps designed to develop and strengthen transit services over the longer term. These strategies included:

- Initiate a Pinal County Transit Coordinating Council (TCC).
- Improve coordination among existing services.
- Improve sharing of expertise among providers.
- Better publicize and market existing services.
- Develop common branding for existing services.
- Explore funding opportunities.
- Pursue opportunities for the development of intra-county regional transit services.
- Explore opportunities to partner with Maricopa County's RTPA and Pima County's RTA on the development of inter-county regional services.
- Conduct additional work needed to develop a Pinal County JPO.
- Investigate zoning changes to facilitate and support transit use.
- Incorporate a transit opportunities assessment in county and local subdivision review processes.
- Incorporate transit, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities into new roadway projects.
- Further investigate development of a countywide vanpool program.
- Further investigate development of a countywide volunteer driver program.
- Conduct periodic transit plan updates

## Southeast Valley Transit System Study (2015)

The Southeast Valley Transit System Study assessed the potential for transit services and ridership demand in the southeast subarea of the Maricopa Association of Governments region. This area included parts of southeast Maricopa County (Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa and parts of the Gila River Indian Community). It also included northern Pinal County, including Apache Junction, the San Tan Valley, the cities of Maricopa and Florence, plus a large swath of the Gila River Indian Community. The study was completed in 2015 and included recommendations for the short, medium- and longer-term time frames.

Short term recommendations focused on maximizing the investment of Valley Metro services, positioning the network for growth and improving the customer experience. Specific strategies called for the consolidation of service and improving frequency on remaining services.

Midterm recommendations addressed route frequency, service extensions, route alignment changes and increased regional connections. These included expansion of regional service into Apache Junction, development of park and ride lots, connections between Florence and the San Tan Valley and the addition of a local circulator in Apache Valley. Longer term recommendations had a 10-year time frame and were designed to accommodate continued growth with new express services in Apache Junction, the City of Maricopa and San Tan Valley, with park and ride lot development in Coolidge and Florence.

## Coolidge Transit Plan (2016)

The City of Coolidge completed a transit plan in 2016, which presented a Five-Year Plan for the Cotton Express and CART programs. It provided a comprehensive overview of the then-current operations, financial performance, and governance of the two transit services. The Plan also incorporated data from transit rider surveys and outreach and assessed the demographic characteristics of the areas in which these two services operate. It used this information to project levels of demand for transit service and presented a series of recommendations to meet current and anticipated demand. a two-phased approach for implementing service improvements. Phase 1 recommendations were designed for a 12 to 18-month time frame. Phase 2 recommendations were designed for an 18 to 60-month timeframe. The recommendations for each of the systems are as follows:

### Cotton Express Phase 1:

- **Formalize route-deviation policy:** The plan recommends that Cotton Express limit deviations to 2 deviations per trip circuit within  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile of the route to improve service reliability.
- **Provide bi-directional service along Arizona Boulevard:** The Plan proposes that the Cotton Express Blue Route alter its service direction to provide bidirectional service in conjunction with the Red Route to better serve the many commercial destinations on Arizona Boulevard.

### Cotton Express Phase 2:

- **Introduce limited-hour Saturday service:** The Plan recommends introducing Saturday service from the morning until the afternoon on a trial basis in response to public feedback.

#### CART Phase 1:

- **Provide a local circulator in Florence:** The Plan recommends providing expanded and more frequent coverage in Florence by implementing a simple circulator route.
- **Increase service frequency along the trunk line (Florence to Coolidge, and Coolidge to Central Arizona College):** The Plan recommends increasing the number of daily trips from 6 to 10.
- **Extend service to Florence Gardens, Florence Anthem Hospital, and Eleven Mile Corner Road:** The Plan recommends implementing new routes to serve these communities which currently lack transit service, with routes connecting to either Florence or Coolidge.

#### CART Phase 2:

- **Extend service to San Tan Valley, Sacaton, Blackwater, Arizona City, and Eloy:** The Plan recommends implementing several new routes on limited service frequencies (3 trips per day during daytime hours) to serve outer communities in Pinal County.

#### Administrative and Staffing Recommendations:

The Plan recommends that Cotton Express review its fare and discount policies, improve performance monitoring and data collection, promote connectivity, and work with local businesses to develop incentive program to encourage transit use. The Plan make the same recommendations for CART, and recommends a fare increase and the expansion of the IGA to include the communities of Casa Grande, Eloy, and Gila River Indian Community.

#### City of Maricopa Rural Transit Demand Study (2018)

The City of Maricopa, in conjunction with MAG, undertook a study to identify potential improvements to its current transit services. The City sought to evaluate the potential for reinstating regular regional transit service with the Phoenix metropolitan area (as its “Maricopa MAX” express service was suspended during the Great Recession), as well as with neighboring communities in Pinal County. The study proposes four service alternatives, including:

- Four AM inbound and four PM outbound express bus trips to Phoenix each weekday
- Fixed-route service connecting Maricopa to Valley Metro Routes 72 and 81 in Chandler
- Fixed-route service to Valley Metro Rail 44<sup>th</sup> Street Station and the Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport
- Reducing the size of route deviations on its current Regional Demand Response services to Chandler Regional Hospital and Banner Casa Grande Medical Center

## CAG/Sun Corridor Metropolitan Planning Organization Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan 2017 – 2019

The Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan is produced and revised by the Central Arizona Governments (CAG) and the Sun Corridor MPO on an annual basis, whose regions include Pinal and Gila counties. The plan identifies the transportation needs of people with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes. Participation in such a plan is a pre-requisite for any agency or entity that seeks federal funding through Section 5310 programs. This plan contains descriptions of all of Pinal County's human services transportation providers, including overviews of their services provided, target markets, funding sources, ridership data, and inventory, and was used to populate the "Human Services Transportation" section of this report.

### Casa Grande Transit Development Plan (2019)

The Casa Grande Transit Development Plan included a comprehensive analysis of existing conditions in Casa Grande, noting recent and planned growth. The study also considered service needs and the Federal Transit Administration funding allocated to the Casa Grande urbanized area. The study prepared a handful of service alternatives that identified the following key markets:

- Florence Boulevard between Promenade Mall and Pinal Avenue
- Pinal Avenue
- Casa Grande's historic downtown neighborhood
- Health and social service offices

Other strategies evaluated included voucher services and all demand response service options.

The recommended alternative is to move forward with the Florence Boulevard spine route and a downtown service area loop with both services operating as deviated flex routes. The service is recommended to operate 12 hours a day, five days per week. ADA service would be accommodated with the deviated flex service design and fares are recommended at \$1.00 for an adult one-way fare, \$2.00 for an all-day pass.

Longer term options include development of service in the southwest area, creating a southeast corridor route, operating on Pinal Avenue, extensions to the Florence Boulevard Route and a Korsten-Cottonwood loop.

### Eloy Transit Feasibility Study (2019)

The City of Eloy completed a study of transit needs in 2019 which created a set of short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations. The near-term scenario recommended two services:

- A local flex circulator route that connected downtown destinations including local libraries, grocery stores, and community centers, and other shopping and social services providers.

- A regional bus route to connect Eloy and Casa Grande, with service to the Promenade Mall (including Walmart and Fry's), Banner Hospital, and the Central Arizona College. The regional bus route would also connect with Greyhound and CART services.
- Both local and regional services were recommended for weekday service from 7am to 7pm on weekdays and reduced service on Saturdays. No service is recommended for Sunday.
- The proposed fare was \$2.00 for a one-way adult cash fare.

Longer term recommendations include evaluating service performance and potentially increasing service to the CoreCivic facility outside of Eloy and seasonal service to the Eloy Municipal Airport and Silverado RV Park.

## Appendix B: Additional Demographic

**Figure 30. Top 20 Places (Cities, Census-Designated Places, etc.) Where Pinal County Residents Work**

Place	Number of Jobs	Share
Phoenix city, AZ	33,643	22.9%
Mesa city, AZ	14,277	9.7%
Tempe city, AZ	12,051	8.2%
Chandler city, AZ	9,929	6.7%
Casa Grande city, AZ	9,125	6.2%
Scottsdale city, AZ	7,217	4.9%
Gilbert town, AZ	6,756	4.6%
Tucson city, AZ	6,257	4.2%
Florence town, AZ	4,247	2.9%
Apache Junction city, AZ	3,725	2.5%
Glendale city, AZ	2,292	1.6%
Maricopa city, AZ	2,032	1.4%
Queen Creek town, AZ	1,686	1.1%
Coolidge city, AZ	1,465	1.0%
San Tan Valley CDP, AZ	1,385	0.9%
Eloy city, AZ	1,294	0.9%
Peoria city, AZ	1,157	0.8%
Sacaton CDP, AZ	1,065	0.7%
Ak-Chin Village CDP, AZ	787	0.5%
Stotonic Village CDP, AZ	769	0.5%

Source: US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Household-Employer Dynamics Program, 2017

**Figure 31. Top 20 Places (Cities, Census-Designated Places, etc.) Where People Employed in Pinal County Live**

Place	Number of Jobs	Share
Casa Grande city, AZ	8,980	14.9%
Phoenix city, AZ	4,230	7.0%
San Tan Valley CDP, AZ	4,017	6.7%
Mesa city, AZ	3,846	6.4%
Maricopa city, AZ	3,573	5.9%
Gilbert town, AZ	2,358	3.9%
Chandler city, AZ	2,178	3.6%
Coolidge city, AZ	2,117	3.5%
Apache Junction city, AZ	2,105	3.5%
Tucson city, AZ	1,825	3.0%
Eloy city, AZ	1,742	2.9%
Florence town, AZ	991	1.6%
Scottsdale city, AZ	698	1.2%
Tempe city, AZ	698	1.2%
Arizona City CDP, AZ	660	1.1%
San Manuel CDP, AZ	585	1.0%
Gold Canyon CDP, AZ	538	0.9%
Queen Creek town, AZ	525	0.9%
Glendale city, AZ	514	0.9%
Avondale city, AZ	483	0.8%

Source: US Census Bureau, Longitudinal Household-Employer Dynamics Program, 2017



# Appendix C: Transit System Vehicle Information

## Cotton Express

**Figure 32. Cotton Express Assets**

Vehicle	Count	Service	Passenger Capacity
Arboc (Chevy G450)	5	Cotton Express	19
Arboc (Chevy G450)	1	Cotton Express	14
Braun Entervan	1	Cotton Express	6
Ford E450	1	Spare	19
Shop Truck	1	Non-Revenue	N/A

## CART

**Figure 33. CART Assets**

Vehicle	Count	Service	Passenger Capacity
Arboc (Chevy C5500)	1	Spare	32
Int. Max Force	2	CART	32
Freightliner (Cummins)	1	CART	24
Shop Truck	1	Non-Revenue	N/A