

# TRANSPORTATION ACCESS IN

# LA CROSSE

## *from* **ARRIVE TOGETHER:** Transportation Access and Equity in Wisconsin

The report examined the effectiveness and equitability of transportation in nine cities and major metropolitan regions across Wisconsin. This examination is a culmination of 2010 U.S. Census data, figures provided by public transportation systems, the state of Wisconsin, and direct personal interviews with transit riders. The report concludes that, while each community faces unique challenges in providing transportation access to employment, medical services, major businesses, local attractions or other points of interest, the absence of consistent and sufficient funding for public transportation is a major hurdle across the board. Inadequate financial support from federal and state governments and an inability to raise additional resources through local funding mechanisms like Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) are making it increasingly difficult for local public transportation systems statewide to provide mobility for all.

### LA CROSSE TRANSIT OVERVIEW

City of La Crosse residents have the best public transportation access in the county, run by the Municipal Transit Utility (MTU), but some more limited public transportation is also available in areas adjacent to the city. There is also the area to the East of Losey Boulevard and north of Farnam Street, where the distance to a bus stop is six or more blocks. Some areas are served only as demand-response areas, requiring a rider to contact the MTU for a special pick up or to request the special stop. More than 90 percent of the population of La Crosse is within 1/4 mile of a bus stop. A number of regional transit systems help commuters travel to La Crosse, including Onalaska/Holmen/West Salem Public Transit (a shared fare taxi service), the Scenic Mississippi Regional Transit Bus that runs fixed routes between La Crosse, Vernon County, Crawford County, and Minnesota transit systems that allow connections to the La Crosse system. La Crosse County provides transportation services within the entire county for seniors and riders with a disability.

### TRANSIT SYSTEM BARRIERS

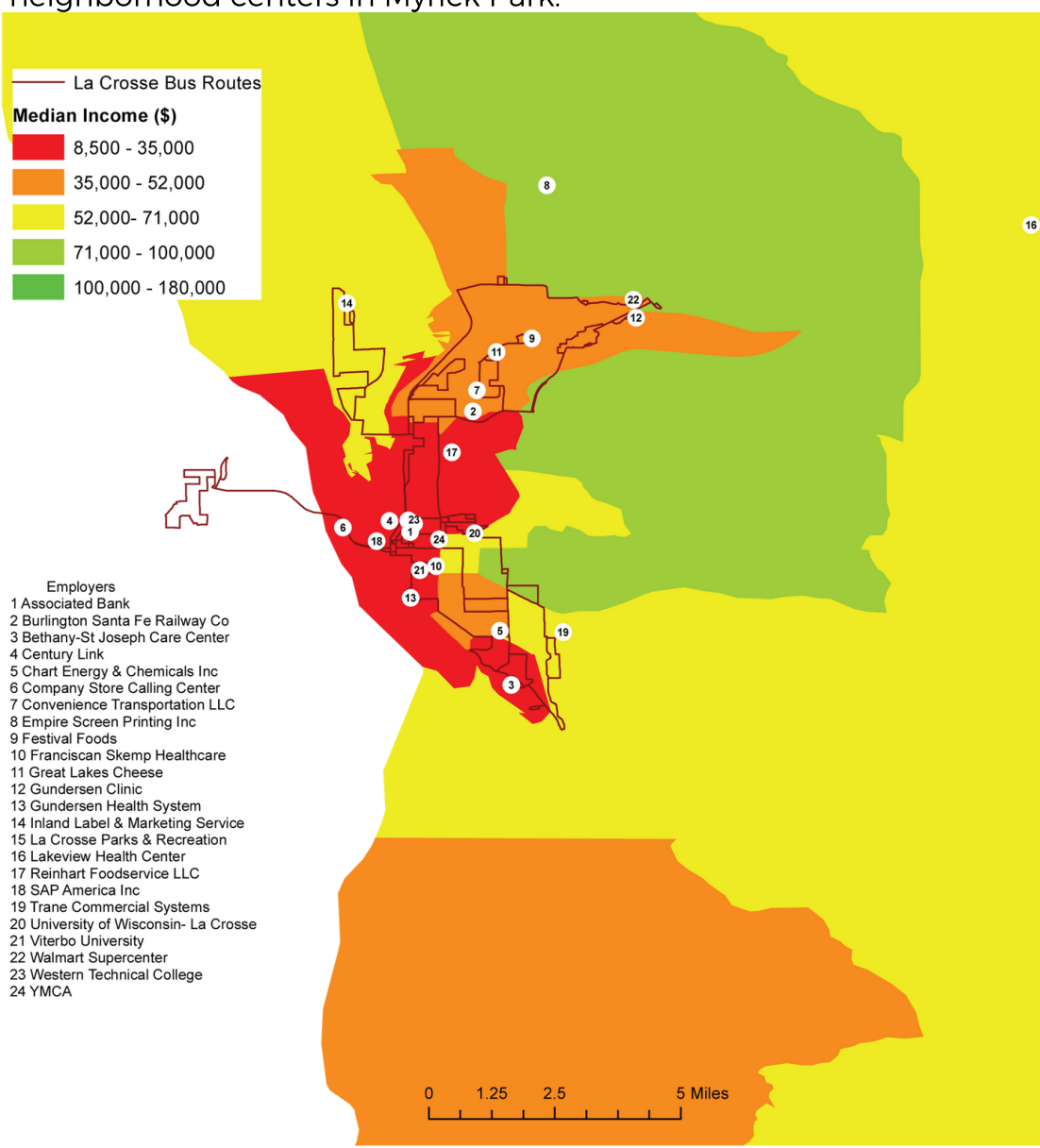
Current and future challenges include expanding schedules and service routes to allow more people to efficiently and regularly commute by bus to work, school, shopping, entertainment and appointments in and outside of the City of La Crosse. Because the current system routes every bus downtown and there are limited transfer locations, with a half-hour wait time between routes, riding the bus to work or school is not feasible or convenient for many potential riders. If their work schedule falls outside the MTU's limited hours of operation or their workplace is far from a stop, those jobs are out of reach unless they can find a carpool or a friend or relative to provide transportation. CouleeCAP, a nonprofit area community action program, notes that "Transportation costs are the second largest household expense after housing. For many families, a reliable vehicle can be the determining factor in keeping a job or accessing more favorable employment."



**“The bus system has made it difficult for me to find full time employment; mainly because the route might not be close to where the office is, or it has limited times of the day when it travels to certain areas. Also if I’m working late at night I have to wait almost an hour for the bus.”** -Rachel, La Crosse

## TRANSIT TO LA CROSSE'S LARGEST EMPLOYERS

The map shows transit access to La Crosse's 25 largest employers as well as median income levels (taken from the 2010 US Census). Bus coverage of the city is fairly comprehensive, with most residents living no more than four blocks from a bus stop. But there are pockets, notably the neighborhood surrounding one of the city’s three neighborhood centers in Myrick Park.



## OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND SERVICE AND FUNDING

Thousands of commuters from communities north of La Crosse travel daily into the city along limited north-south roadways restricted by the Mississippi River in the West and steep bluffs in the East. An over-reliance on private vehicles for commuting and the underfunding of public transportation in the greater La Crosse area continues to challenge area planners. Even if funding were available, it often goes toward building new roads or adding lanes rather than to transit systems. This inequity in spending harms low-income populations who must use their limited income to pay for cars and gas to get around. Those who don’t own cars, meanwhile, are forced to subsidize roads and parking infrastructure that primarily benefit drivers with their tax dollars.

The map was created by 1000 Friends of Wisconsin. For full report: [sierraclub.org/wisconsin/ArriveTogetherReport](http://sierraclub.org/wisconsin/ArriveTogetherReport)

**The La Crosse/La Crescent area should explore pursuing a regional approach to providing and funding transit service. Within the La Crosse region there are currently four public entities providing transit service... As the region has grown more interdependent, this model is no longer meeting the needs of residents and businesses. The region should consider consolidating the administration and funding of transit service under a single organization to improve efficiencies and reduce disparities in service within the region.”**