

Language Assistance Plan

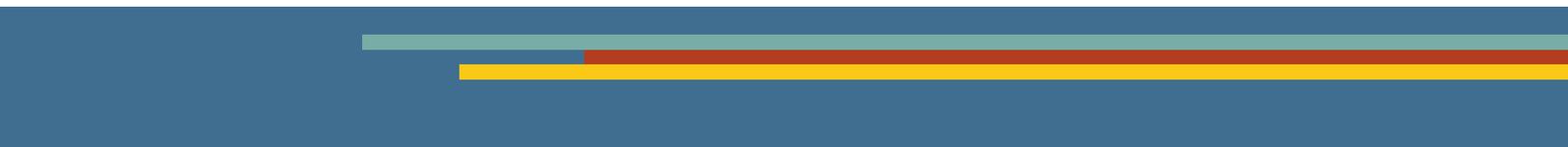
Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization

March 2021

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Introduction

The Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is responsible for planning and prioritizing transportation projects and funding allocation in Greater Des Moines. The MPO works with the public, planning organizations, government agencies, elected officials, and community groups to develop transportation plans and programs through a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive planning process. This planning process guides the use of federal and state dollars spent on existing and future transportation projects and programs. The **Language Assistance Plan** plays an important part in that process. It ensures individuals with limited English proficiency have meaningful access to the transportation planning process.

Background

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) requires that DOT recipients take responsible steps to ensure meaningful access to the benefits, services, information, and other important portions of their programs and activities for individuals who are Limited English Proficient. Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for Persons with Limited English Proficiency," reprinted at 65 FR 50121 (August 16, 2000), directs each Federal agency to examine the services it provides and develop and implement a system by which persons with limited English proficiency can meaningfully access those services. The Executive Order states that recipients must take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and activities by persons with limited English proficiency.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000d et seq., and its implementing regulations provide that no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives Federal financial assistance. The Supreme Court, in *Lau v. Nichols*, 414 U.S. 563 (1974), interpreted Title VI regulations promulgated by the former Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to hold that Title VI prohibits conduct that has a disproportionate effect on persons with limited English proficiency because such conduct constitutes national origin discrimination.

Federal agencies have published guidance for their respective recipients in order to assist them with their obligations to persons with limited English proficiency under Title VI. This order applies to all state and local agencies that receive federal dollars. The Language Assistance Plan outlined below is based on the federal guidance provided by U.S. DOT.

Who is a Limited English Proficient Person? Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English are considered limited English proficient. The U.S. Census Bureau does not define limited English proficiency or non-limited English proficient populations. It reports data based on the four categories of English-speaking ability: very well, well, not well, and not at all.



Language Assistance Needs Assessment – Four Factor Analysis

This plan outlines how to identify a person who may require language assistance, the ways in which the MPO provides such assistance, any staff training that may be required to provide such services, and the resources available to reach out to the people who may need language assistance service. To prepare the Language Assistance Plan, a needs assessment was conducted utilizing the four-factor analysis, as recommended by U.S. DOT. The four factors are:

- Factor 1: The number or proportion of persons with limited English proficiency who are eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by MPO services and programs.
- Factor 2: The frequency with which persons with limited English proficiency come into contact with MPO services and programs.
- Factor 3: The nature and importance of the MPO's services and programs in people's lives.
- Factor 4: The resources available to the MPO for outreach to persons with limited English proficiency, as well as the costs associated with the outreach.

Factor 1: The number or proportion of persons with limited English proficiency eligible to be served or likely to be encountered by MPO services and programs

The planning and programming decisions made by the MPO will affect the future economic health of the region and the transportation options available to residents. An effective Language Assistance Plan program is the only way of determining the extent to which the transportation needs of the limited English proficiency population mirror those of the community at large and the extent to which persons with limited English proficiency have different needs that should be addressed through the planning and project development process.

As indicated in the table below, the latest Census data shows a steady growth of the increasingly diverse population in the region. For the purposes of the Language Assistance Plan, we have defined the region as the four counties – Dallas, Madison, Polk and Warren – that are straddled by the greater Des Moines metropolitan area. The region has experienced a substantial increase in non-English speaking population or people who speak a language “other than English” (see Table 1).

Table 1: English Proficiency

MPO	2000	2010	2013	2019	Percent Change (2000-2019)
Language Spoken At Home	4-County Total				
Population 5 years and Over	434,830	500,375	527,485	587,868	35%
Language Other Than English	34,558	51,416	57,270	69,703	102%
Speak English Less than "very well"	16,994	24,434	26,033	29,146	72%
Spanish	16,132	26,413	28,305	30,027	86%
Speak Spanish Less than "very well"	8,135	13,373	13,919	12,148	49%
Other Indo-European Languages	9,609	10,499	11,968	15,067	57%
Speak English Less than "very well"	3,993	3,984	4,093	5,091	27%
Asian and Pacific Island languages and Other languages	8,817	14,531	16,997	24,609	179%
Speak English Less than "very well"	4,798	7,066	7,769	11,907	148%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

The ACS classified persons speaking a language other than English in their homes and if they spoke English “very well” or “less than very well.” Those individuals that speak English “less than very well” are classified as Limited English Proficient persons according to FTA C 4702.1B. Table 2 shows the languages spoken at home for all persons 5 years old and older, with number and percentage of persons broken out by language within the MPO planning area.

The Department of Justice defines the Safe Harbor threshold as 1,000 persons OR 5% of the total population in the MPO planning area, whichever is less, for vital document translation. As shown in Table 2, Spanish; Russian, Polish, other Slavic languages, other Indo-European languages, Vietnamese, and other Asian and Pacific Islander languages, Arabic, and other African languages pass the threshold for speaking English “less than very well.” The MPO will continue to monitor the Census data and ensure that the Language Assistance Plan is updated in a timely manner when the threshold population is reached in any additional language groups.

Table 2: Detailed Breakdown of English Proficiency

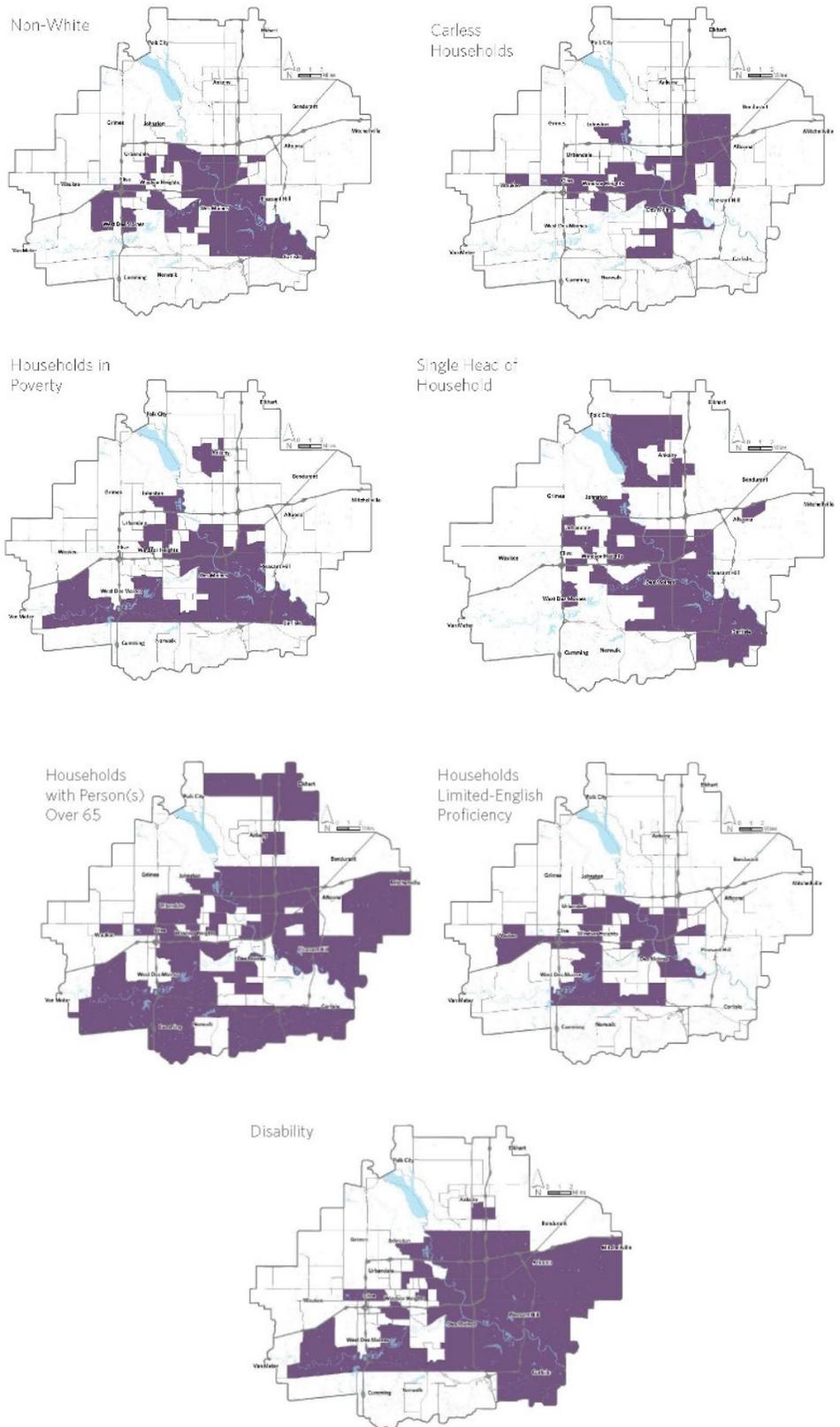
	Total	Percent of Total
Total:	587,868	100%
Speak only English	518,165	88.1%
Spanish:	30,027	5.1%
Speak English "very well"	17,879	3.0%
Speak English less than "very well"	12,148	2.1%
French, Haitian, or Cajun:	1,677	0.3%
Speak English "very well"	1,262	0.2%
Speak English less than "very well"	415	0.1%
German or other West Germanic languages:	1,222	0.2%
Speak English "very well"	985	0.2%
Speak English less than "very well"	237	0.0%
Russian, Polish, or other Slavic languages:	6,694	1.1%
Speak English "very well"	4,072	0.7%
Speak English less than "very well"	2,622	0.4%
Other Indo-European languages:	5,474	0.9%
Speak English "very well"	3,657	0.6%
Speak English less than "very well"	1,817	0.3%
Korean:	307	0.1%
Speak English "very well"	166	0.0%
Speak English less than "very well"	141	0.0%
Chinese (incl. Mandarin, Cantonese):	1,570	0.3%
Speak English "very well"	840	0.1%
Speak English less than "very well"	730	0.1%
Vietnamese:	4,302	0.7%
Speak English "very well"	1,772	0.3%
Speak English less than "very well"	2,530	0.4%
Tagalog (incl. Filipino):	1,029	0.2%
Speak English "very well"	488	0.1%
Speak English less than "very well"	541	0.1%
Other Asian and Pacific Island languages:	8,735	1.5%
Speak English "very well"	4,521	0.8%
Speak English less than "very well"	4,214	0.7%
Arabic:	3,516	0.6%
Speak English "very well"	2,200	0.4%
Speak English less than "very well"	1,316	0.2%
Other and unspecified languages:	5,150	0.9%
Speak English "very well"	2,715	0.5%
Speak English less than "very well"	2,435	0.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates 2019

The Des Moines Area MPO works to ensure the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all residents in the region. This means that no group, including a racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic, should bear a disproportionate share of negative health or environmental consequences of any project. To ensure fair treatment, the MPO studies seven Degrees of Disadvantage to identify Environmental Justice areas, or those areas with large populations of traditionally underserved individuals.

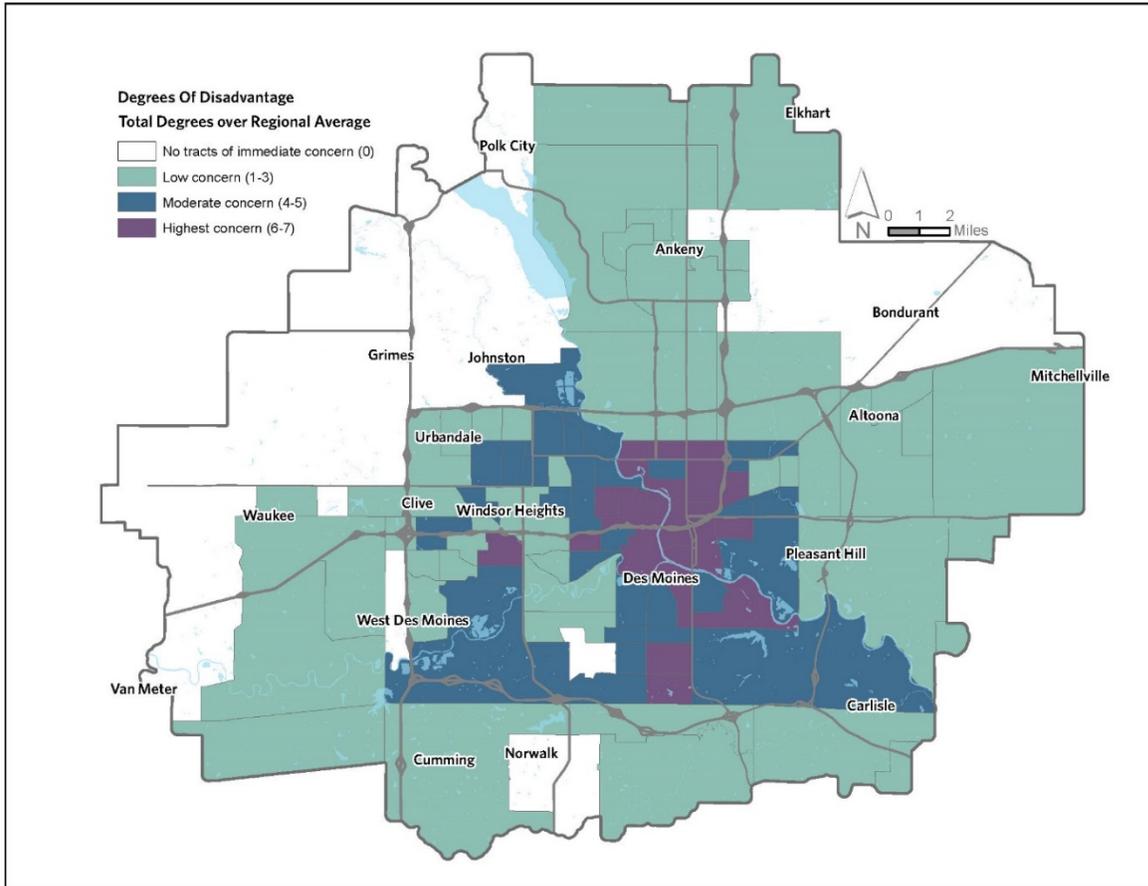
The Degrees of Disadvantage methodology looks at U.S. Census Bureau data at the tract level to locate Environmental Justice areas within the region. Data are obtained for seven population groups, including non-white population, car-less households, persons in poverty, single heads of households with children, persons over 65, limited English proficiency, and persons with a disability. A regional average for the percent of people in each of the population groups is then determined.

Figure 1: Degrees of Disadvantage



These Degrees of Disadvantaged are mapped to show the number of degrees of disadvantage exist within each tract of the region. The darker the shade of purple in this map represents a higher degree of disadvantaged populations. Environmental Justice areas in the region can be seen in Figure 2 below.

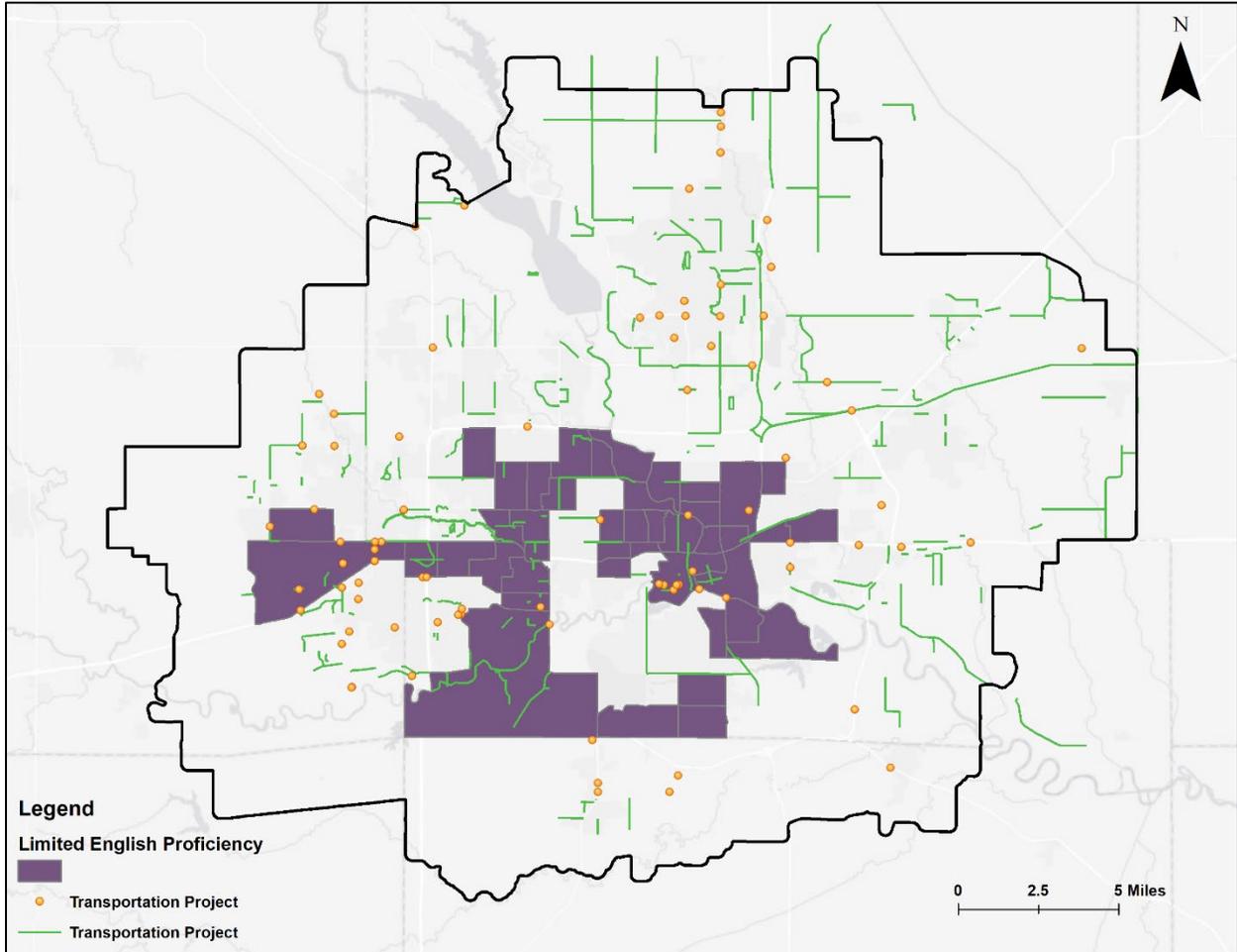
Figure 2: MPO Environmental Justice Areas



Of the 113 census tracts only 8 (7%) are under the regional average for all seven degrees. The remaining 105 tracts are home to at least one group of disadvantaged populations. While concentration is highest in the central urban areas, outlying communities also have disadvantage populations, especially so near clusters of multi-family housing units

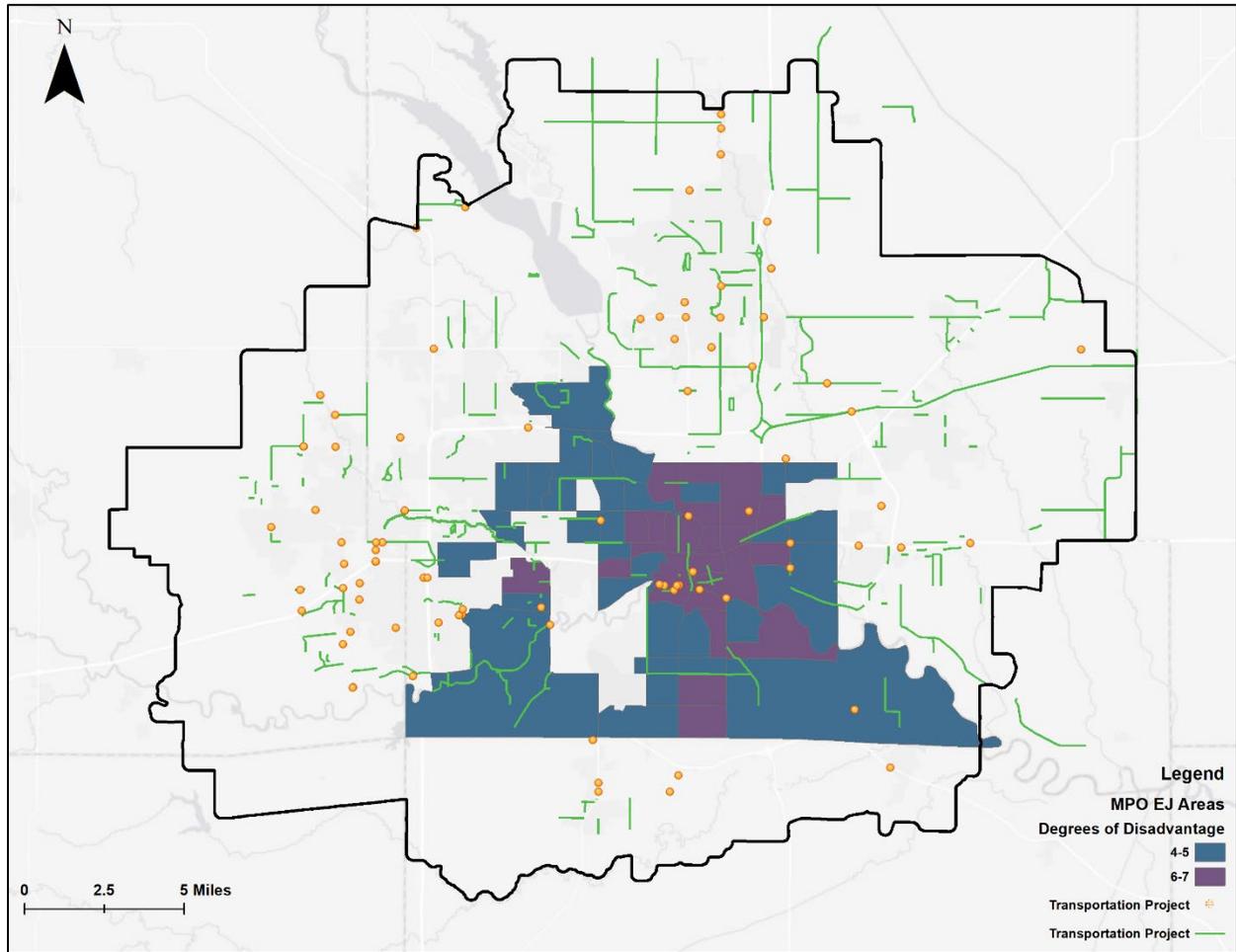
In terms of the limited English proficiency population, it was determined that the MPO planning area regional threshold is 2.5 percent. Approximately 39 percent of FY 2021-2024 transportation capital improvement funding are estimated for projects in or near census tracts with a limited English proficiency population greater than the regional average. (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Transportation Projects and LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY Population by Census Tract



The MPO analyzes Environmental Justice base on regional performance measures set in the long-range planning process and compares performance between Environmental Justice and non-Environmental Justice areas. The most recent analysis showed that 18 percent of the total land area in the MPO is consider an Environmental Justice area, and 39 percent of MPO residents live in Environmental Justice areas. Approximately 34 percent of FY 2021-2024 transportation capital improvements funding are estimated for projects in or near Environmental Justice areas with four or more degrees of disadvantage. (See Figure 4).

Figure 4: Transportation Projects and Identified Environmental Justice Areas



Factor 2: The frequency with which LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY persons come into contact with the MPO services and programs.

The first factor identified Spanish as the most significant language spoken by the limited English proficiency population in the four-county region. The size of the limited English proficiency population in this region will likely continue to increase and, as a result, so will the probability of future contact with this population as part of the planning process. However, to date, no requests for language assistance services have been made by individuals or groups with limited English proficiency. As the limited English proficiency program is expanded in the region, any requests for language assistance will be monitored and used to gauge the effectiveness of the MPO's outreach to these populations.

The MPO conducts regular board meetings, advisory committee meetings and public hearings throughout the year. Community outreach and the MPO's website is the main source of potential contact between the MPO and persons with limited English proficiency. As a result, the frequency of contact is difficult to anticipate.

The MPO's Public Participation Plan highlights the need for outreach opportunities that engage populations that have traditionally been underserved and lacked involvement in the transportation planning process.

Factor 3: The nature and importance of MPO services and programs in people's lives.

The MPO programs use federal funds to plan for future transportation improvements and projects, and therefore do not include any direct services or programs that require vital, immediate, or emergency assistance, such as medical treatment or services for basic needs such as food or shelter. Further, the MPO does not conduct activities such as applications or interviews prior to participation in its programs or events. The participation of any citizen with the MPO or its committees is voluntary.

However, the MPO must ensure that all segments of the population, including persons with limited English proficiency, have been involved or have had the opportunity to be involved in the transportation planning process to be consistent with the goal of the Federal Environmental Justice program and the policy of the MPO.

The impact of proposed transportation investments on underserved and underrepresented population groups is part of the evaluation process in use of federal funds in three major areas for the MPO. These three areas are deemed to have the most widespread impact on the lives of people in the region:

- The **Public Participation Plan (PPP)**, public engagement plan for planning activities;
- The **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**, a 4-year staged program of federally funded projects for all modes of travel;

- The **Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP)**, a 35-year forecast of multi-modal transportation needs; and,
- The **Passenger Transportation Plan (PTP)**, a plan for the coordination of public transportation systems.

Inclusive public participation is a priority consideration in other MPO plans, studies, and programs, as well. The impacts of transportation improvements resulting from these planning activities influence all residents. The MPO will place greatest emphasis on language assistance for educational materials and public input related to the three major programs and plans identified above. Related materials are often helpful with outreach for other MPO projects and studies.

Factor 4: The resources available to the MPO for limited English proficiency outreach, as well as the costs associated with the outreach.

The MPO seeks input from all stakeholders, and every effort is made to ensure that the planning process is as inclusive as possible. Continued public involvement and participation is encouraged throughout the process.

Given the size of the limited English proficiency population in the MPO area and current financial constraints, full language translations of complete transportation plan documents and maps is not considered warranted or cost-feasible at this time.

The MPO will seek to identify any existing Spanish outreach materials from organizations such as federal, state, and local transportation agencies that can be effectively used as outreach tools to these communities. The MPO will also expand efforts to collaborate with state and local agencies and educational facilities to provide language translation and interpretation services when practical, in consideration of funding limitations.

Implementation of the Language Assistance Plan

One of the main tasks for the MPO is to monitor the prioritization of transportation projects in Mobilizing Tomorrow, the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). In particular, the MPO must analyze any major decision made to the overall transportation system, particularly if it negatively affects areas of high concentration of limited English proficiency population. Some of the ongoing Language Assistance Plan implementation strategies include:

- Identifying the limited English proficiency Individuals who need Language Assistance;
 - Language Assistance Measures;
 - Public Involvement; and
 - Monitoring and Updating the Language Assistance Plan.
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Identifying the LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY Individuals who need Language Assistance:

The MPO will continue to monitor the language needs of the limited English proficiency individuals within its services area and will continue to do the following:

- Continue to monitor the languages and the customers' needs encountered by the front-line staff;
- Use the Census Bureau's Language Identification Flashcards to help identify limited English proficiency individuals at public meetings and the front desk;
- Continue to monitor the American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate published each year by the U.S. Census Bureau for changes in the limited English proficiency population; and,
- Closely monitor the Census data and ensure that the Language Assistance Plan is updated in a timely manner when the threshold population is reached for limited English proficiency populations.

Language Assistance Measures:

The MPO will continue to implement the current measures to assist the limited English proficiency population and will continue to enhance its services to strengthen the Language Assistance Plan to include:

- Continue to provide for interpreters as needed in Spanish; Russian, Polish, other Slavic languages, other Indo-European languages, Vietnamese, and other Asian and Pacific Islander languages, Arabic, other African languages, and any other language requested through the Iowa International Center's Interpretation and Translation Services;
- When possible have a dedicated staff person willing to provide assistance to a Spanish-speaking person;
- Provide links on the MPO website in Spanish, Serbo-Croatian, Vietnamese, Arabic, Russian, and Polish with information on how to receive translation assistance;
- Continue to translate important notices regarding major transportation planning studies or changes in policies that may directly or indirectly impact the limited English proficiency population; and,
- Continue to work with local social-services agencies to disseminate information to the limited English proficiency population and to collect information regarding the unmet needs.

Public Involvement:

The MPO will continue to implement an inclusive public outreach process as detailed in the Public Participation Plan:

- Continue to monitor the effectiveness of the current process via feedback received from the public as well as certain targeted surveys;
- Update the Public Participation Plan as needed; and,
- Explore new and innovative techniques and strategies to engage the public in transportation planning.

Monitoring and Updating the Language Assistance Plan:

The MPO will continue to update the Language Assistance Plan as required by the U.S. DOT and as the characteristics of the population change. Updates will be made as necessary and may include, but are not limited to:

- Changes in limited English proficiency population by number or area as new information are made available;
- Updated analysis of the current limited English proficiency service area;
- Requirements for addition language translation services; and,
- Updates to policies and procedures if such guidance is directed by the MPO Board.

Contact Information

The MPO does not intend that its Language Assistance Plan exclude anyone requiring language assistance and will make every reasonable effort to accommodate requests. Anyone who requires special language services should contact the MPO's Title VI Coordinator or the Communications and Strategy Manager:

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