

**BLANCO COUNTY**  
**Transportation and Economic  
 Development Plan**

Adopted February 23, 2021  
 by the Blanco County Commissioners Court

WITH SUPPORT FROM:



# Blanco County Transportation & Economic Development Plan

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Report Organization

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The Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development Plan is the result of a collaborative effort between Blanco County and the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) with support from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to develop a vision for economic growth and transportation improvements to guide Blanco County through the year 2045.

The report is organized by the following major tasks:

- **Introduction** – description of the study area, study background and purpose; the participants in the study; purpose and benefits of a county transportation plan; the relationship between transportation and economic development; public involvement; and the study process
- **Existing conditions** – discussion of the existing land use; natural environment and air quality; safety conditions; transportation conditions; and revenue for the cities of Blanco and Johnson City
- **Future conditions** – discussion of future population and employment; future land use; as well as planned and programmed roadway improvements
- **Travel demand modeling** – discussion of process utilized to develop the model, including traffic zone analyses and projected traffic volumes; deficiencies and needs; and an evaluation of the alternative roadway network, including a consideration of county goals
- **Comprehensive transportation plan** – details of the proposed functional classifications and roadway cross sections
- **Economic development plan** – discussion of the existing demographic and socioeconomic trends and conditions, including age and population, employment, schools and health facilities; discussion of the state of the county economy; tourism; development along US Highway Corridors; broadband internet; and future recommendations for economic development in the county.
- **Recommendations and plan implementation strategies** – findings and recommendations from the study; the process utilized in prioritizing the projects; possible funding sources for the projects; and steps to implement the plan

## 1.2 Study Background and Purpose

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The Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development plan was undertaken because Blanco County, the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) recognized the need for coordinated regional transportation plans. The document also supports the goals and intentions set forward by TxDOT's Rural Transportation Plan. Collaboratively, these plans provide for system connectivity and continuity, both within and between the counties, and integrate economic development strategies with standard transportation analyses to provide greater context for planning and implementation of transportation improvements. In addition, CAPCOG and TxDOT took advantage of the opportunity to provide insight on the best strategies to develop long term economic prosperity for Blanco County. TxDOT sponsored the Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development plan to develop long-range transportation and economic development plans for counties that might not otherwise have the resources to develop these types of plans.

A county-based transportation and economic development plan (TED Plan) is a blueprint for the future that looks at all modes of transportation, including roads, transit, aviation, rail, pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development plan allows local county officials to identify

and preserve rights-of-way needed for expansion of existing facilities as well as future new location corridors to serve anticipated growth and development.

The need for such a plan is driven by the continuing rapid population growth occurring in the nearby five-county Austin-San Marcos-Round Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area (Greater Austin MSA). Significant development has occurred in western Travis and Williamson Counties since 2000, and continued development of the neighboring communities such as Dripping Springs, Marble Falls and Fredericksburg will have a more direct impact on Blanco County in the future.

A proactive public involvement/outreach process assured that this comprehensive plan is developed by county residents for county residents to address the transportation needs of a growing population.

## 1.3 Study Area

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Blanco County is located west of Hays and Travis Counties. The vicinity map for Blanco County is provided in **Figure 1.1**. The study area for the Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development plan included all of Blanco County and coordinated with all the adjoining counties.

Blanco County is approximately 710 square miles. The county seat is Johnson City, with the other city in the county being Blanco. The 2017 population of Blanco County was approximately 11,626 residents, with an average density of 16.3 residents per square mile. In the past ten years, growth has also occurred in the county extraterritorial jurisdiction and in the census designated place of Hye, Texas.

Two public school districts serve Blanco County residents: Blanco and Johnson City Independent School Districts. There are two state parks in Blanco County: Pedernales Falls State Park and Blanco State Park. There is one national park in Blanco County: The Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical State Park.

The Interstate Highway System does not go through Blanco County, but it does include two roads that are part of the National Highway System. Roadways within Blanco County are classified as principal arterial, minor arterial, major collector, minor collector or local road. **Figure 1.2** shows the functional classification of the state highways (SH) within Blanco County. The major roadways for through traffic in Blanco County are U.S. Highway (US) 281, and U.S. Highway (US) 290. It should be noted that while US 281 is not characterized as an interstate highway through Blanco County, it does serve as the alternate route to Interstate 35 an important highway corridor that facilitates commerce between Canada and Mexico.



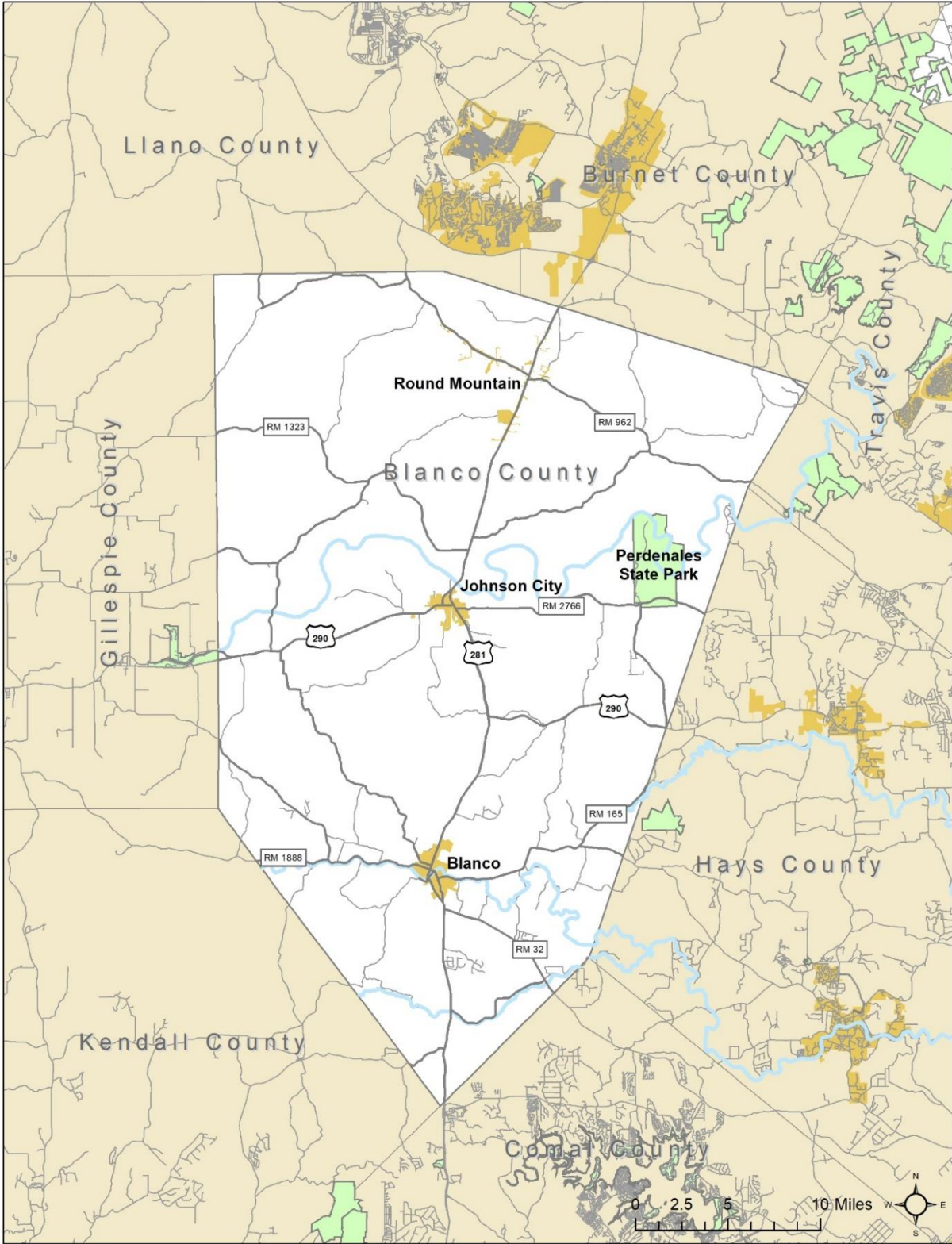


Figure 1.1 Blanco County Map



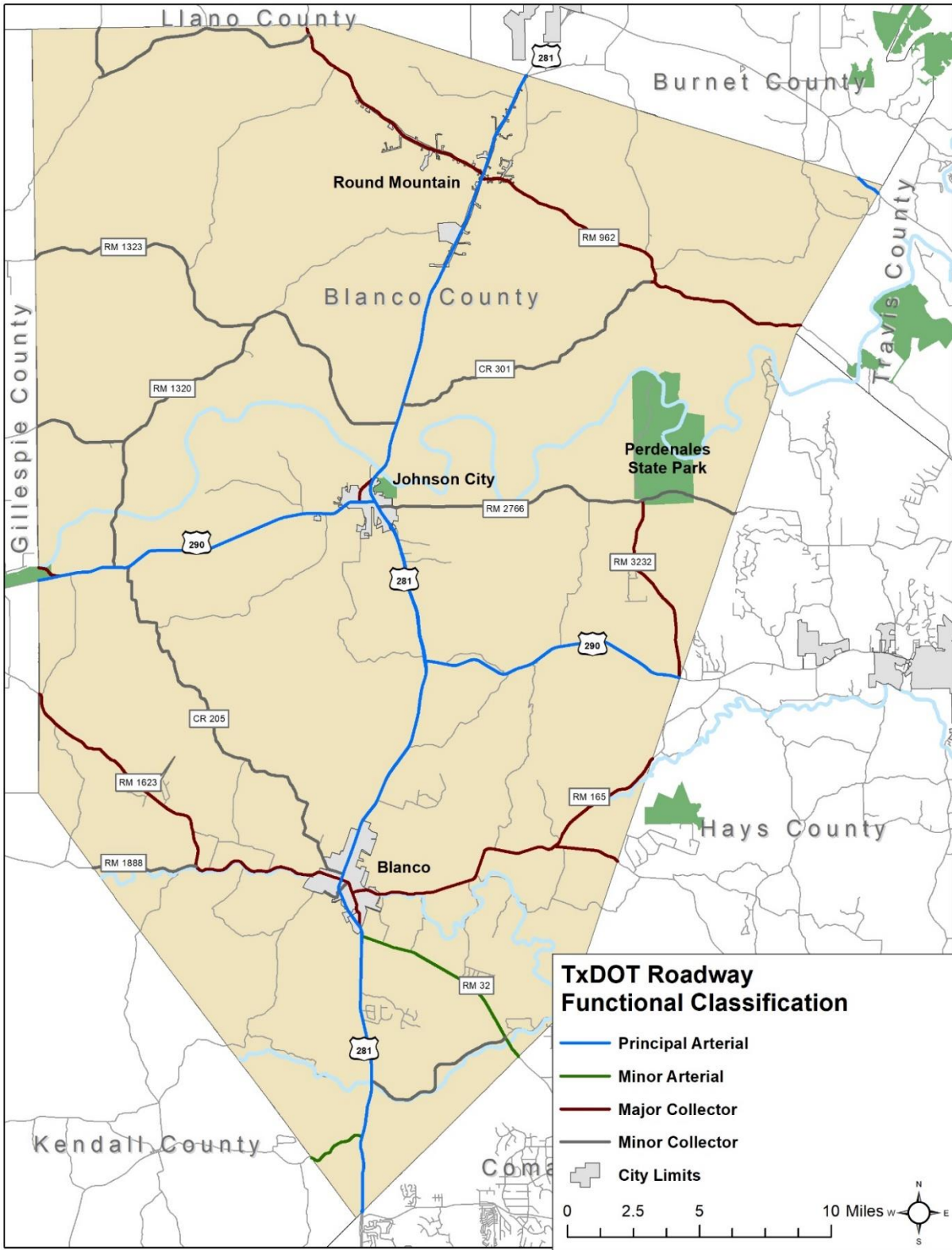


Figure 1.2 TxDOT Roadway Functional Classification for State Highways in Blanco County

## 1.4 Study Participants

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Three groups or agencies participated in the Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development planning process. The agencies and their responsibilities are listed below:

- Blanco County – served as the lead agency directing the project, headed by the county judge, commissioners and staff.
- CAPCOG – provided support to other agency members; provided support to county and local officials; provided guidance for the public involvement activities; provided technical analysis for specific aspects of existing and future conditions; hosted the community survey; and assured that the planning process was consistent with the local and regional transportation planning process.
- TxDOT – provided support to other agency members; provided support to county and local officials to meet the goals and objectives outlined by the Advisory Committee; provided guidance for the public involvement activities; coordinated with CAPCOG to facilitate data sharing; provided technical analysis for specific aspects of existing conditions; and assured that the planning process was consistent with the local and regional transportation planning process.

In addition to the participants listed above, an Advisory Committee was formed to provide guidance and input to the process (members are listed in the Appendices.) The Advisory Committee was comprised of local business representatives, chambers of commerce, Pedernales Electric Cooperative representatives, the City of Johnson City mayor, City of Blanco mayor and city engineer, and Blanco County Appraisal District.

## 1.5 Purpose and Benefits of a County Comprehensive Transportation Plan

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TxDOT defines rural as an area outside of a Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) defined boundary. As a result, specific planning considerations have been established to regularly assess and evaluate rural roadway issues in these important areas. As stated earlier in this chapter, the purpose of a TED Plan is to create a blueprint for the future that looks at all modes of transportation and to identify and preserve rights-of-way needed for expansion and growth. In 2007, Texas House Bill (HB) 1857 amended local government code Chapter 232 in 2007 to give authority to the county commissioner’s court and to city councils to refuse, partially or in whole, a plat that encroaches on a future transportation corridor.

The Blanco County TED Plan creates a collective vision of how transportation needs will be addressed as growth occurs in the future. It is a guideline for the county, the cities within the county, and residents to consider in planning new residential, commercial and industrial developments. The county will be able to share this plan with other entities, such as utility providers, school districts, economic development groups, TxDOT and land developers. The Blanco County TED Plan will also be a reference during any general planning updates and will be instrumental as undeveloped land is converted to other uses or as property is redeveloped.

## 1.6 Relationship between Transportation, Land Use and Economic Development

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Transportation and land use are interrelated. This means, in part, that land use affects the level of transportation service that is needed. For example, where land is used in a low-density residential pattern, frequent transit service is usually not cost-effective. Similarly, it means that the level of transportation service affects the kind of land use that will be suitable for an area. For instance, an established truck route will make it easier for adjacent land to be used for industrial or commercial uses. A multimodal, high quality transportation system can help attract or retain intended land uses. Conversely, a new large-scale residential development will generate additional travel for the existing roads that provide access to the new development. Improvements to the roads serving the development may be needed to improve access to the development.

In addition to land use affecting the level of transportation service needed, the interrelationship of land use and transportation can affect economic development as well. As land use drives transportation infrastructure needs, changes in transportation infrastructure will in turn provide increased opportunities for development as well as affect access to employment.

Given the relationship between transportation and land use, decisions about needed transportation facilities and programs should consider the demands of the local population and the growing economy.

Transportation planning should provide for a circulation system that reflects existing and proposed land use patterns – to provide efficient access within a commercial core for pedestrians, bicyclists, cars, trucks and buses – while also encouraging quiet access in a residential neighborhood. Investments in the transportation system are expected to support growth and/or redevelopment targeted by the county’s land use goals.

Land use plans at both the regional and local level are used to forecast future transportation demands. Projected employment and population growth translate to growth in traffic volumes in specific geographic areas. High-intensity land uses, such as office space and retail, generate significant demands on the transportation system. Planning for high-intensity land use should include an assessment of the traffic impact on the existing streets.

## 1.7 Public Involvement

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The objective of the public involvement outreach was to share information with the public and project stakeholders about the planning process and how to provide feedback; collect feedback from the community in a convenient method for participants; and use the community input to identify community transportation and economic goals and reviewing proposed improvements.

The communication strategy included seeking feedback on effective strategies from the project Advisory Committee; developing a community survey; making presentations at commissioner’s courts meetings; proactively seeking traditional and social media involvement; using a questionnaire to broaden involvement; holding four advisory committee meetings, a presentation Blanco County Commissioners Court and one public meeting for local input; and meaningfully incorporating public input into the development of the Blanco County TED Plan.

## 1.8 Study Process

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The Blanco County TED Plan process was conducted in three phases. Phase I was the project initiation stage and consisted of data collection, execution of a memorandum of understanding between the participating entities, baseline mapping, public involvement planning, establishment of the committees and initial coordination efforts. Phase II was the needs assessment stage in which land use forecasts, traffic projections/travel demand modeling, needs analysis, scenario planning and additional public involvement took place. Phase III was the actual plan development stage. This stage included evaluation of potential projects, drafting of the financial options and adoption of the plan by the county.

# Chapter 2 - Existing Conditions

## 2.1 Conditions

In order to develop a plan, the first step in the planning process was to gain an understanding of the existing conditions in Blanco County. A variety of factors were considered in the assessment of transportation needs, including:

- Demographic and socioeconomic analysis, which help describe who is living/working in Blanco County as well as lay the foundation for population and employment projections;
- Land use that influences transportation needs as it relates to the location of residential, commercial, educational and industrial developments;
- Numerous natural environmental features that affect decisions on both land use and transportation;
- New air quality standards issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which will impact the transportation planning activities in most MPOs, which in turn may impact the ability of adjacent counties to provide a coordinated transportation system; and
- Vehicle crash data to help identify key locations where spot improvements may be warranted.

## 2.2 Housing

**Figure 2.1** below highlights the Blanco County Housing market conditions over the past eight years. The housing market in Blanco County is largely homeowner based, with the renter market making up only 22 percent. In addition, the common dwelling unit in Blanco County is the single-family home followed by mobile homes.

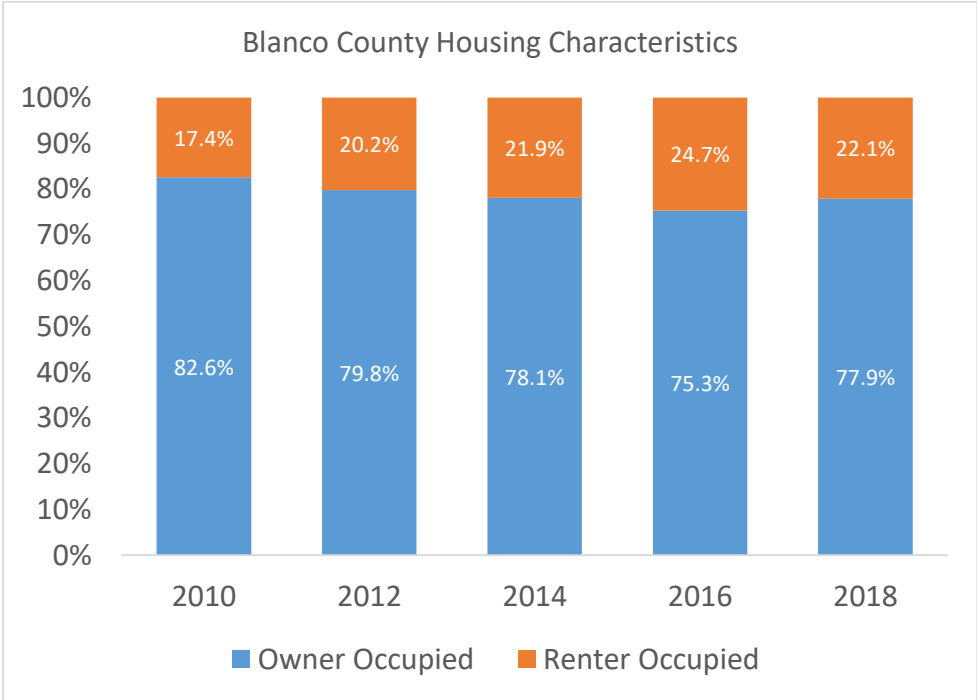


Figure 2.1: Blanco County Housing Characteristics

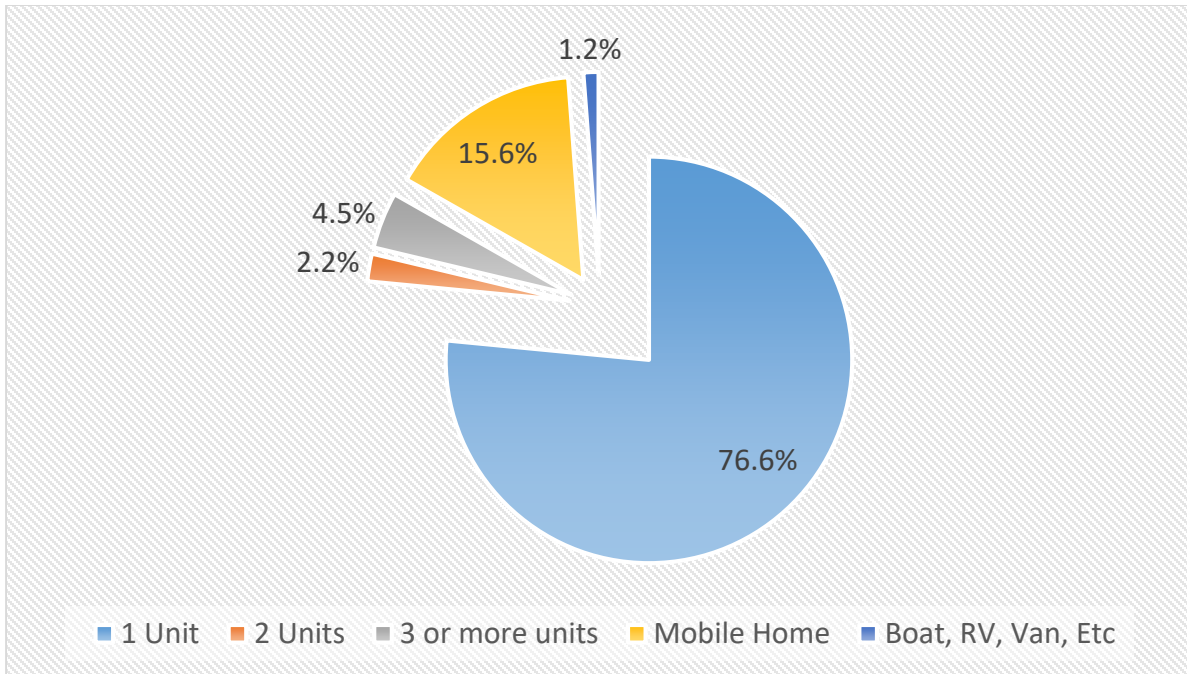


Figure 2.2: Blanco County by Dwelling Unit

Most of the housing stock in Blanco County, 65 percent, was built prior to 2000. Thirty-five percent of the housing stock in Blanco County has been constructed since 2000.

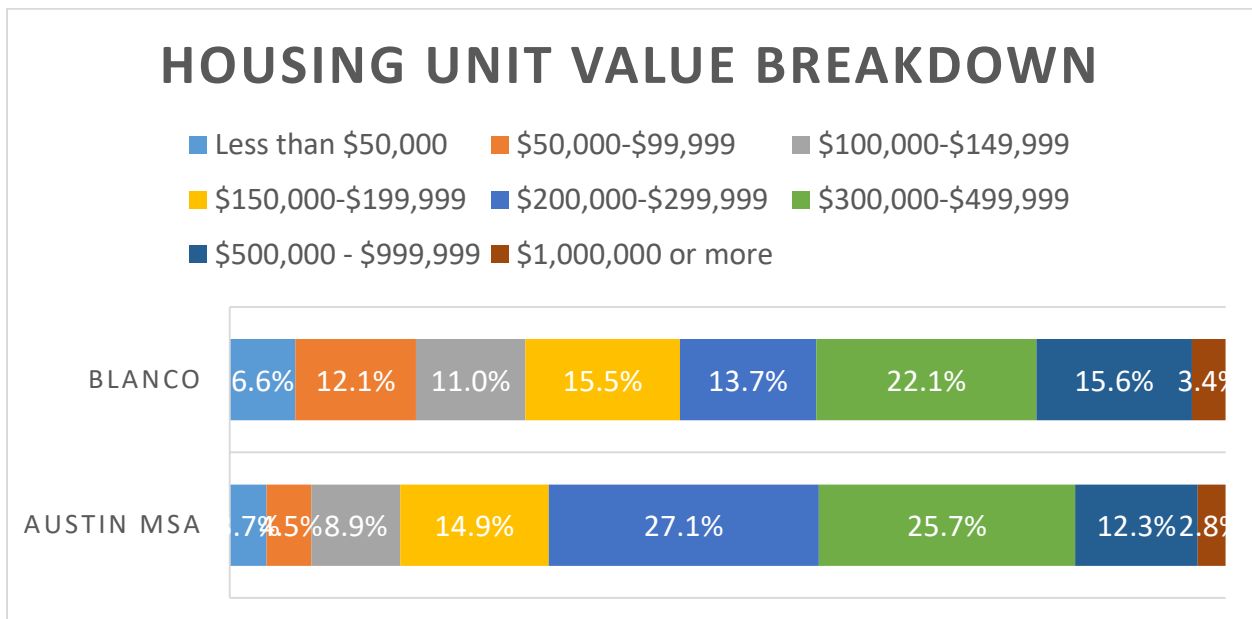


Figure 2.3: Housing Unit Value Breakdown

Home values vary across the county, an increasing amount (40 percent) have a value of \$300,000, which closely resembles the Austin MSA.



## 2.3 Demographic Trends

Demographic trends, as discussed in this chapter, are based on the baseline population and employment figures taken from the U. S. Census. Population data from the U.S. Census Bureau were obtained for Blanco, Burnet, Hays, Llano, Travis and Williamson counties, and the state of Texas. These data reflect the official population count for the county and are useful in the analysis of past and current growth trends. **Table 2.1** shows the 1980-2020 population for the counties and state and the compound annual average growth in population by decade and for the 40-year period.

County	Population					
	1980	1990	2000	2010	2019	2020
Blanco	4,681	5,972	8,418	10,497	11,393	11,504
Burnet	17,803	22,677	34,147	42,750	47,634	48,196
Hays	40,594	65,614	97,589	157,107	225,515	234,895
Llano	10,144	11,631	17,044	19,301	19,428	19,452
Travis	419,573	576,407	812,280	1,024,266	1,265,110	1,291,415
Williamson	76,521	139,551	249,967	422,679	570,763	589,861
Texas	14,229,191	16,986,510	20,851,820	25,145,561	29,193,378	29,677,772

County	Compound Annual Average Growth by Period				
	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2010	2010-2020	1980-2020
Blanco	2.47%	3.49%	2.23%	0.92%	2.27%
Burnet	2.45%	4.18%	2.27%	1.21%	2.52%
Hays	4.92%	4.05%	4.88%	4.10%	4.49%
Llano	1.38%	3.90%	1.25%	0.08%	1.64%
Travis	3.23%	3.49%	2.35%	2.34%	2.85%
Williamson	6.19%	6.00%	5.39%	3.39%	5.24%
Texas	1.79%	2.07%	1.89%	1.67%	1.85%

**Table 2.1: Historic Population and Compound Annual Average Growth, 1980-2020**

Estimates and projections were prepared by the Texas State Data Center. Under the projections shown in **Figure 2.4**, Blanco County's population will grow from 10,500 in 2010 to 12,600 in 2050. Blanco County has enjoyed a period of consistent growth and exhibits many characteristics that one would expect for a rural county that is located near a quickly growing major metropolitan center. Current projections indicate that steady growth in Blanco County's population is expected to continue in the years ahead. Nevertheless, even with the additional population that is forecasted, Blanco County will remain sparsely populated in comparison to other counties surrounding the Austin MSA. This has implications not only for issues such as transportation and education, but also for the type and amount of development that can be expected to result should current trends continue.

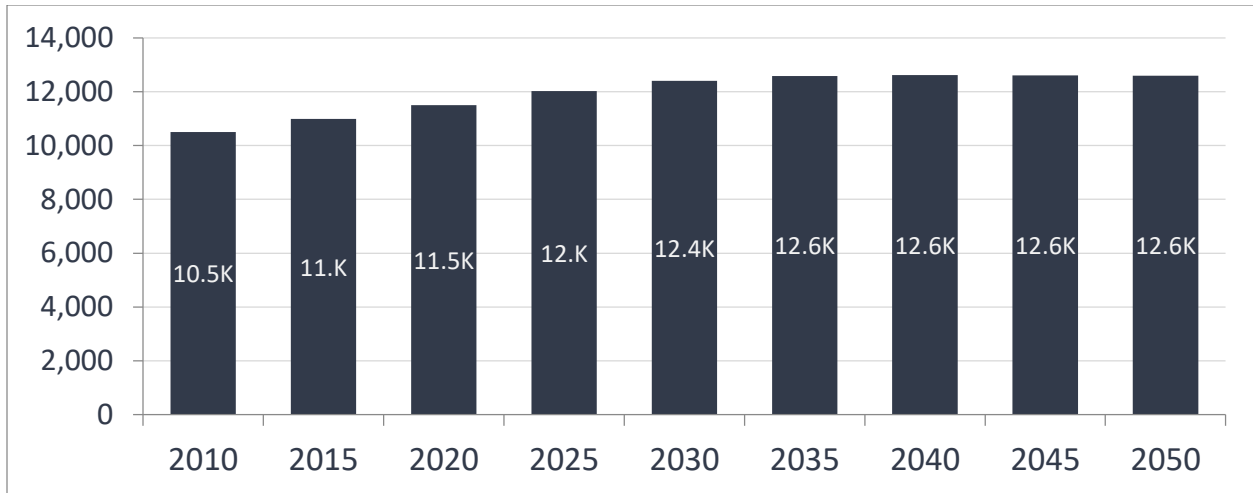


Figure 2.4: Blanco County Population Growth Projections (2010 – 2050)

## 2.4 Employment

Employment projections for the region only extend until 2028. As shown in **Figure 2.5**, Blanco County anticipates seeing employment growing from 3,800 in 2015 to 5,100 in 2028, an expansion of 1,300 jobs.

**Table 2.2** shows a breakdown of projected employment in various sectors ranging from 2001 to 2029.

Starting in 2020, declines in information and financial services sector will improve, with projected declines instead in education and health service industries. Employment levels in Blanco County have managed to rise at a modest pace. Current forecasts indicate employment growth from 2020- 2028 will add 700 new jobs to the area. Among these, the strongest gains are expected to occur in the construction and manufacturing sectors.

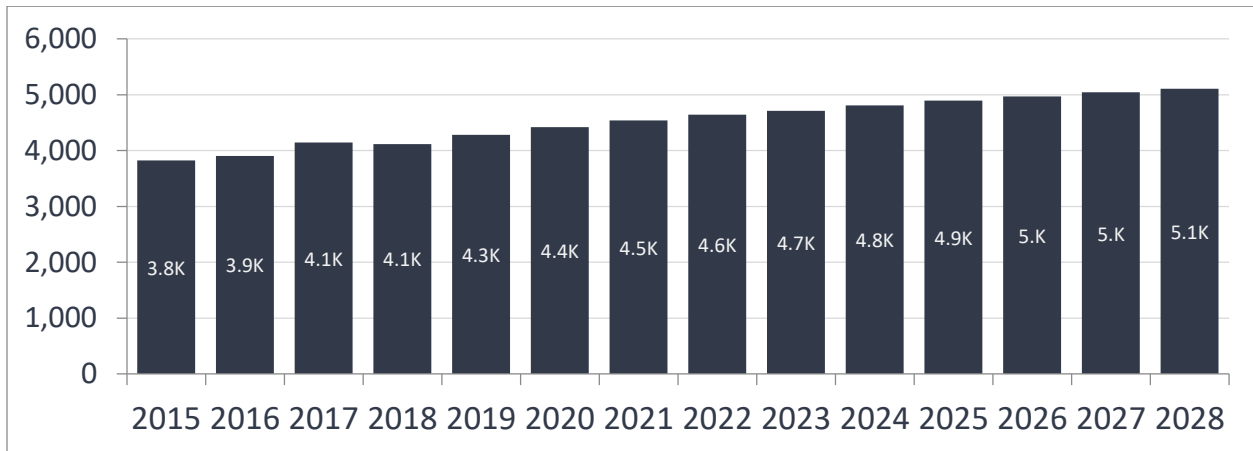


Figure 2.5 Blanco County Employment Projections (2015 – 2028)

Industry	2019 Location Quotient	Change 2010-2019
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	7.17	-20.84%
Construction	3.14	9.21%
Management of Companies & Enterprises	2.70	-11.29%
Utilities	1.84	-56.71%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	1.37	29.18%
Transportation & Warehousing	1.02	20.44%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	0.99	-1.48%
Accommodation & Food Services	0.98	10.83%
Manufacturing	0.96	141.14%
Government	0.95	-9.47%
Retail Trade	0.84	27.48%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	0.78	40.41%
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	0.71	-41.45%
Administrative & Support & Waste Management & Remediation Services	0.69	-11.14%
Mining, Quarrying, & Oil & Gas Extraction	0.67	149.16%
Finance & Insurance	0.57	-33.65%
Wholesale Trade	0.45	34.09%
Health Care & Social Assistance	0.33	1.26%
Educational Services	0.33	-34.72%
Information	0.20	-26.50%

**Table 2.2: Blanco County Labor Export Balance 2010-2019** *Source: EMSI, CAPCOG*

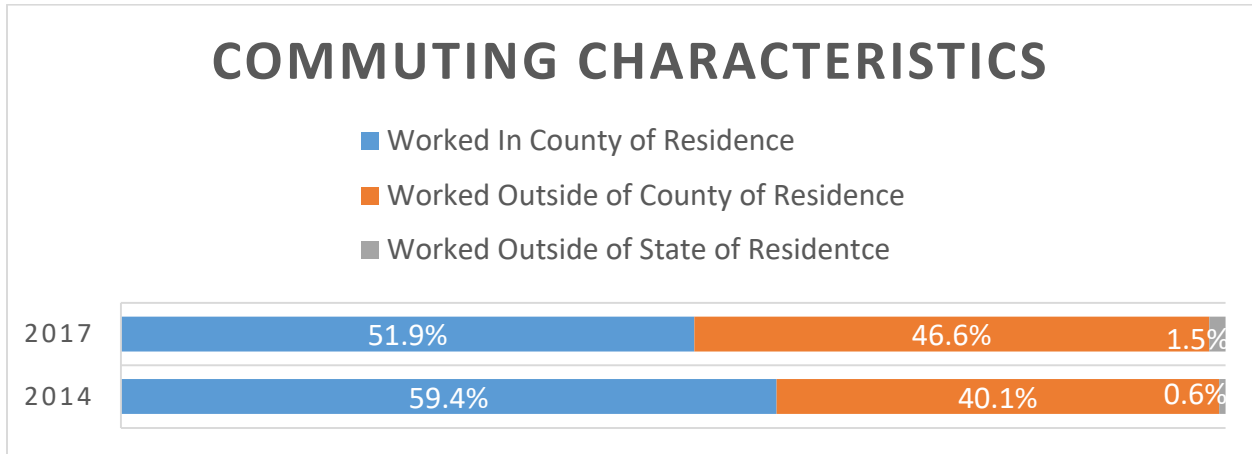
Blanco County is a net exporter of labor across most industry segments, however it is increasingly reliant on commuting managers from outside of the county. While Blanco County does supply labor to employers in nearby counties, it does not, at current levels, maintain a large enough workforce to support a significant base for employment that is independent of its neighboring counties. While the county's workforce is expected to grow in the years to come, its limited supply of available workers is likely to inhibit the county's ability to attract primary employers, such as manufacturers, who depend on a ready supply of skilled workers. This does not mean that Blanco County cannot still support or attract new employers, simply that the type of employment growth and the type of industries that are suited to the county will have to look past or be unaffected by this condition.

	<b>Private Sector Employment</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2029</b>
<b>Total</b>	Construction, Natural Resources, & Mining	621	931	932	951	1,129	1,228	1,287
	Manufacturing	103	58	114	222	349	436	479
	Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	754	791	442	547	624	680	711
	Information	32	32	18	12	17	24	28
	Financial Activities	144	180	159	149	158	179	193
	Professional & Business Services	181	245	552	554	552	600	629
	Education & Health Services	176	151	183	261	211	209	209
	Leisure & Hospitality	244	235	304	359	473	539	576
	Other Services (except Public Administration)	168	183	181	189	199	209	215
	<b>Total Private Sector Employment</b>	<b>2,422</b>	<b>2,821</b>	<b>2,897</b>	<b>3,249</b>	<b>3,716</b>	<b>4,109</b>	<b>4,331</b>
<b>As a % of County Private Sector Employment</b>	Construction, Natural Resources, & Mining	25.65%	33.01%	32.18%	29.28%	30.38%	29.89%	29.72%
	Manufacturing	4.24%	2.04%	3.94%	6.83%	9.39%	10.61%	11.05%
	Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	31.13%	28.05%	15.27%	16.82%	16.79%	16.55%	16.41%
	Information	1.31%	1.12%	0.64%	0.36%	0.45%	0.58%	0.65%
	Financial Activities	5.93%	6.39%	5.49%	4.58%	4.25%	4.35%	4.45%
	Professional & Business Services	7.46%	8.69%	19.07%	17.05%	14.86%	14.61%	14.53%
	Education & Health Services	7.27%	5.34%	6.31%	8.03%	5.69%	5.09%	4.82%
	Leisure & Hospitality	10.09%	8.32%	10.49%	11.03%	12.73%	13.12%	13.30%
	Other Services (except Public Administration)	6.93%	6.50%	6.26%	5.83%	5.34%	5.08%	4.97%
	<b>Percentage Growth</b>	Construction, Natural Resources, & Mining		49.88%	0.10%	2.07%	18.64%	8.78%
Manufacturing			-43.91%	98.37%	94.21%	57.20%	24.90%	9.84%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities			4.95%	-44.10%	23.54%	14.16%	8.97%	4.56%
Information			-0.42%	-41.57%	-36.33%	44.04%	40.73%	17.99%
Financial Activities			25.41%	-11.74%	-6.52%	6.18%	13.19%	7.74%
Professional & Business Services			35.70%	125.43%	0.25%	-0.30%	8.69%	4.84%
Education & Health Services			-14.48%	21.46%	42.66%	-18.95%	-1.13%	-0.19%
Leisure & Hospitality			-3.93%	29.50%	17.92%	31.96%	13.97%	6.83%
Other Services (except Public Administration)			9.35%	-1.12%	4.41%	4.85%	5.17%	3.00%

**Table 2.3 Blanco County Employment (2001-2029)**

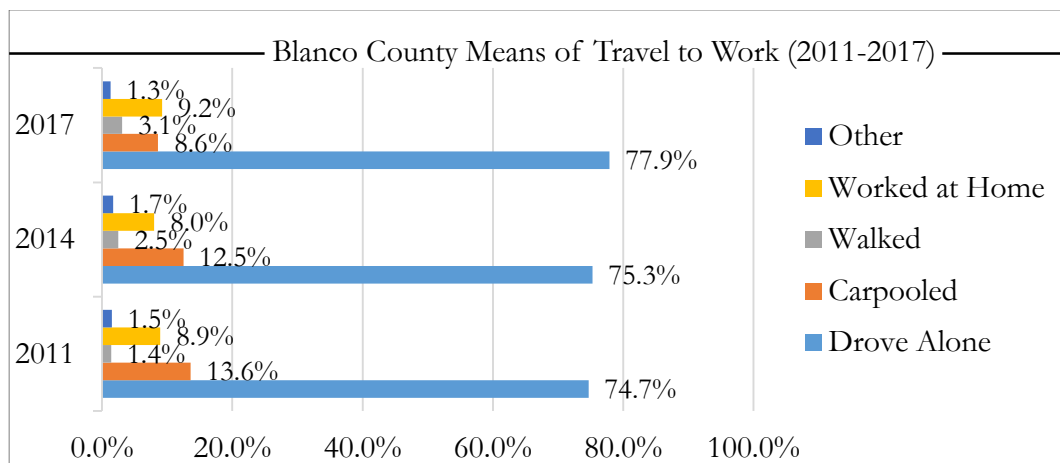
## 2.5 Travel to Work

Most Blanco County workers are employed within Blanco County (**Figure 2.6**). About 51 percent of the workers remain in Blanco County, while another 46 percent commute outside Blanco County. Individuals often commute to Johnson City, Austin, San Antonio, Fredericksburg, Marble Falls, and San Marcos.



**Figure 2.6: Location of Workplace for Blanco County Workers**

Over the past decade, little has changed about how Blanco County residents travel to work every day. They still overwhelmingly travel alone by car. One change that is rather significant from the standpoint of economic development, however, is the increase in the number of individuals who work at home. This reflects broader trends occurring as a result of advancements in communications technologies and wider acceptance of telecommuting by businesses. It also highlights the need and opportunities associated with communications infrastructure in Blanco County, particularly fiber optic and broadband internet.



**Figure 2.7: Location of Workplace for Blanco County Workers**

## 2.6 Age

Blanco County will see slight population gains in age cohorts under 18 over the next 30 years. During that same time period the cohort that will expand the most will be the 65 and over cohort. The expansion in this cohort can be attributed to more people aging in place and that Blanco County is a desirable retirement destination for those in that age cohort.

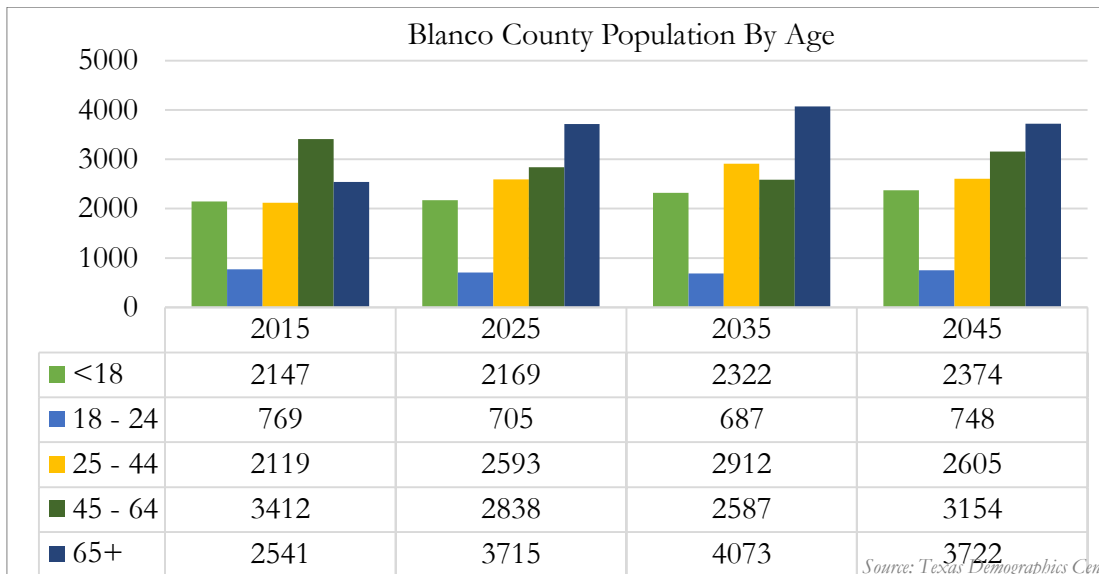


Figure 2.8: Population by Age

## 2.7 Schools

Blanco County has two independent school districts within its jurisdiction, Blanco and Johnson City. Both school districts are located within Texas Education Agencies Region 13. On average, high school students from this region average a 24.3 percent college graduation rate. The percentage of school age children living in Blanco County has remained consistent over several decades as shown in **Table 2.4** below.

School Year	1989-1990	1999-2000	2009-2010	2018-2019
School Age Children (5-19) as a Percentage of County Pop.	19.30%	18.80%	17.50%	16.09%

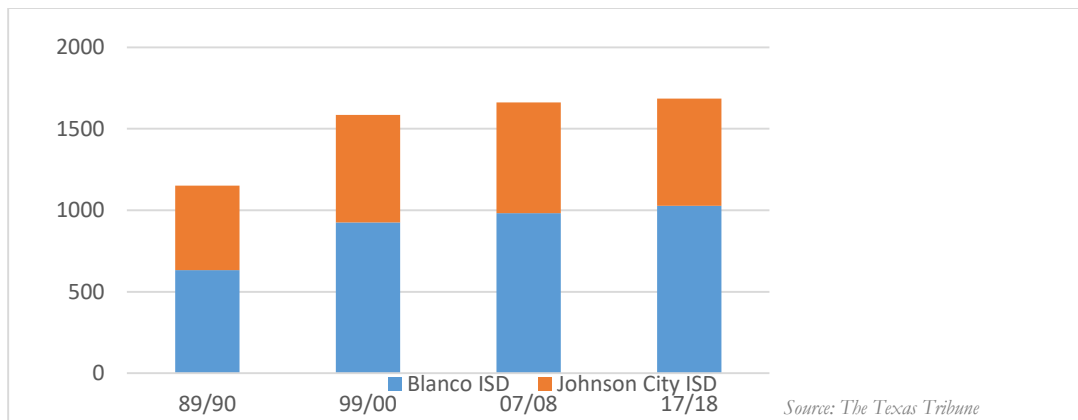
Table 2.4: Blanco County School Enrollment

For the 2017-2018 school year both school districts received an accountability rating of B from the Texas Education Agency. The accountability ratings are based on three factors: student achievement, school progress and closing education gaps. Student censuses, shown in **Table 2.5** indicate that Blanco ISD student population is 36 percent larger than Johnson City. With a larger student population Blanco ISD carries a larger portion of economically disadvantaged and at-risk student populations and produces greater number of high school graduates.

School Year	1989-1990	1999-2000	2007-2008	2017-2018
Blanco ISD	633	926	983	1028
Johnson City ISD	518	660	678	657

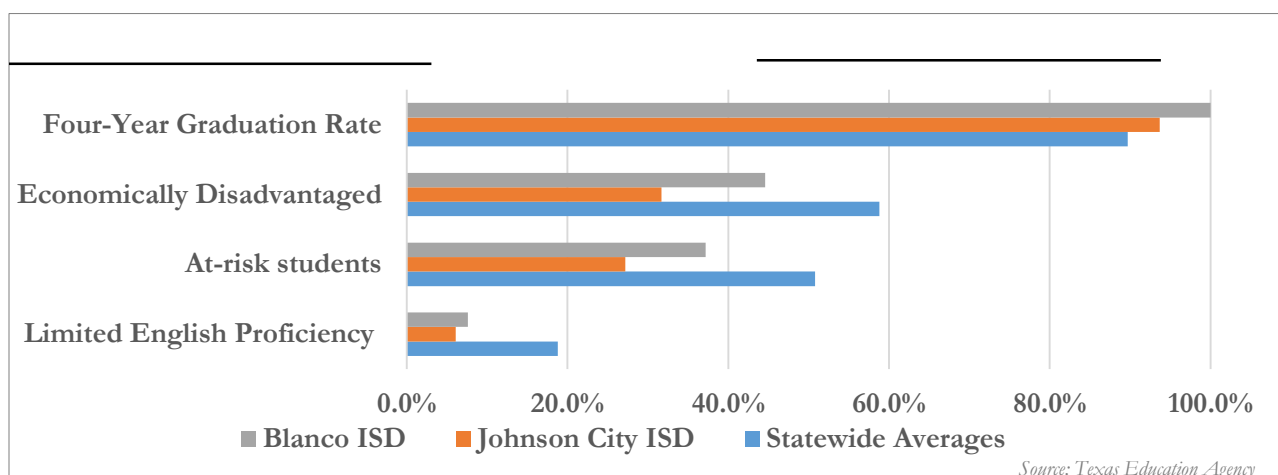
Source: The Texas Tribune

**Table 2.5: TEA Enrollment for Blanco County ISDs SY1989-90 through 2017-18**



Source: The Texas Tribune

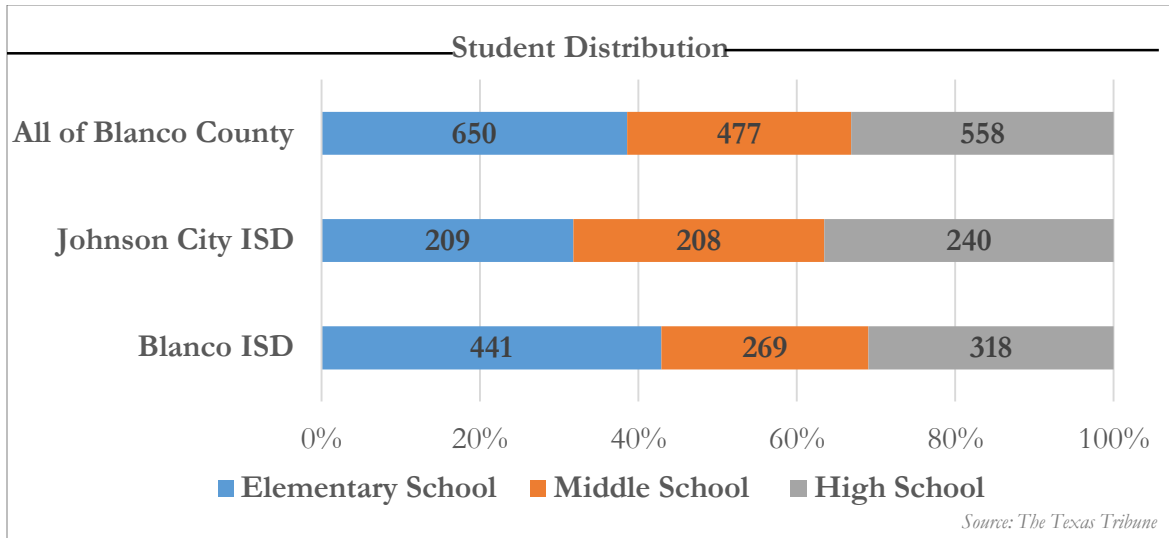
**Figure 2.9: Enrollment at Blanco County School Districts**



Source: Texas Education Agency

**Figure 2.10: TEA Student Academic and Socio-Economic Indicators for SY 2018-19**

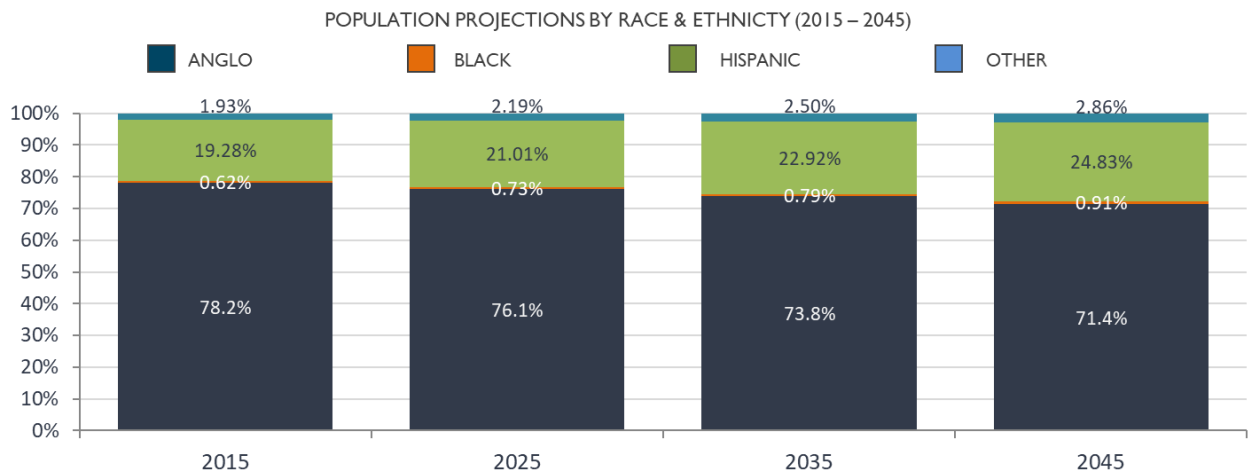




**Figure 2.11: Distribution of Blanco County Students by Grade and ISD**

## 2.8 Socioeconomic Conditions

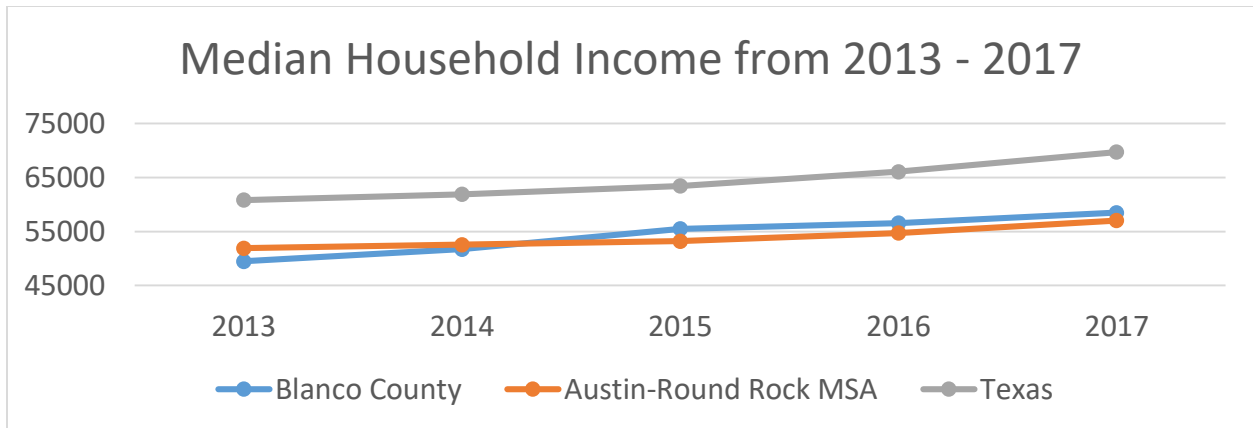
**Figure 2.12** provides a growth projection through the year 2045 of the population makeup for Blanco County. Race and ethnic makeup will change dramatically for some groups by the end of the period. Hispanic populations will grow from 19 percent to 24 percent. Anglo populations will shrink (78 percent to 71.4 percent), Black populations and “other” race cohorts will remain essentially static.



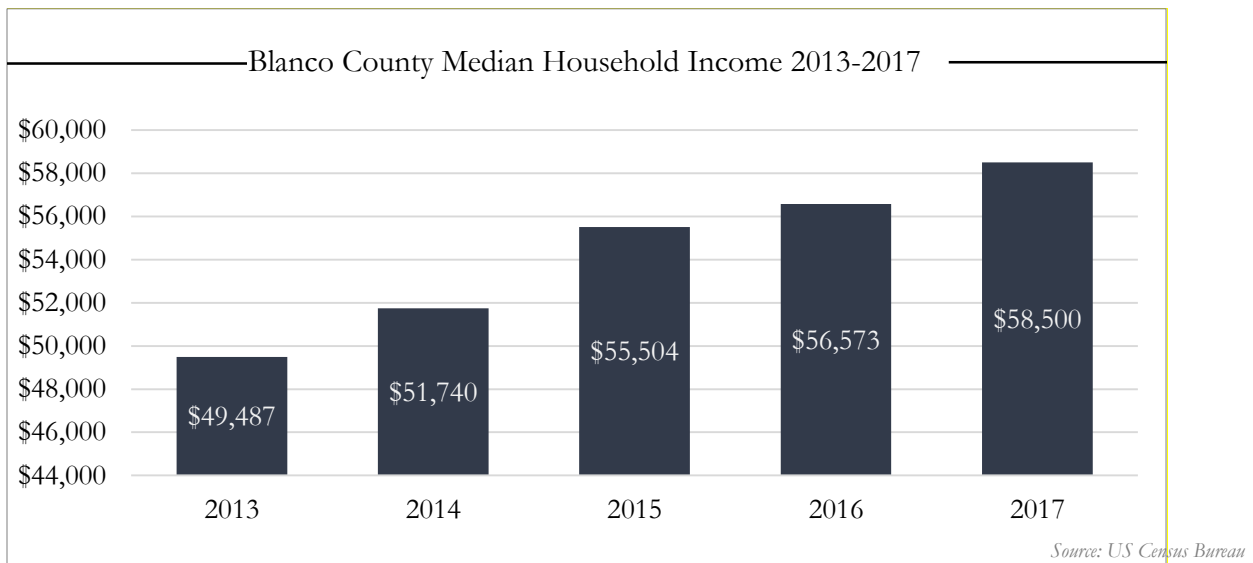
**Figure 2.12: Blanco County Demographic Growth Projections by Race (2010 – 2045)**

## 2.9 Income

**Figure 2.13** illustrates that median household income in Blanco County (\$49,487) was below the Texas median in 2013 (\$60,830).



**Figure 2.13: Annual Median Household Income (2013 through 2017)**

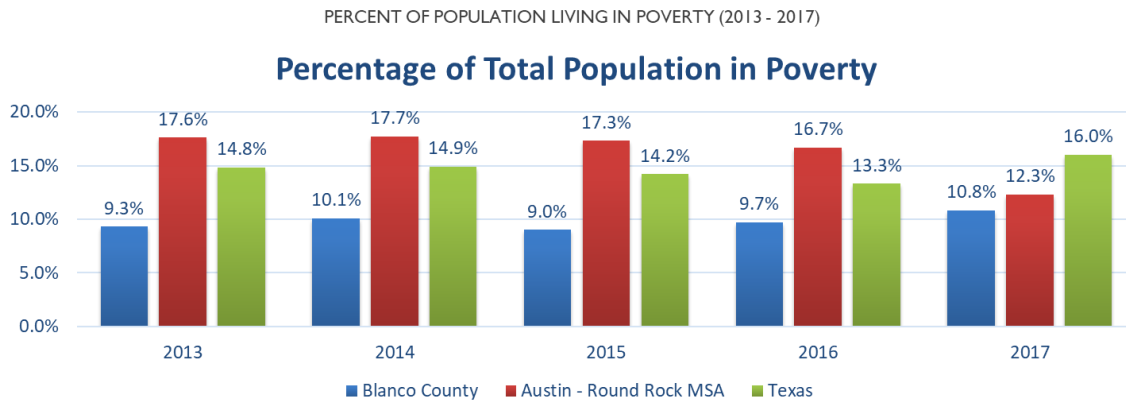


**Figure 2.14: Blanco County Median Household Income 2013-2017**

Median income in Blanco County rose from \$49,487 to \$58,500 from 2013 to 2017, an increase of 15.4 percent.

## 2.10 Poverty

Captured over a five-year window, the Blanco County poverty rate has had little fluctuation from 9.3 percent and has stayed lower than Texas' overall rate of 14.8 percent (**Figure 2.15**).



**Figure 2.15: Percent of Population Living in Poverty (2013-2017)**

## 2.11 Review of Existing Plans

### City of Blanco Comprehensive Plan

In 2005, the City of Blanco with the assistance from the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) and the Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC) adopted a comprehensive plan. This plan covered projected demographic changes, current and future land use plan, growth management objectives, community and economic development objectives, downtown revitalization objectives, historic preservation objectives, and a city storm water assessment. The plan also includes an implementation guide that outlines the detailed actions for addressing the components of the comprehensive plan.

The plan outlines the importance of public involvement and it is noted in the introduction that the plan was not “created by outsiders working in a vacuum; rather it utilizes the concerns of Blanco residents to identify what they feel is most critical to Blanco’s prosperity”. The plan recommends that it should be reviewed annually by the Blanco City Council with involvement from other groups as well.

### Johnson City Comprehensive Plan

The 2009 Johnson City comprehensive plan includes a demographic analysis of current and projected population trends; land use objectives to accommodate future development; as well as objectives and recommendations for economic development, historic preservation, downtown revitalization, housing development, and community development.

The Johnson City comprehensive plan also outlines the following transportation thoroughfare and infrastructure goals:

1. Reduce the effect of commercial trucking on the safety and quality of life within the community
2. Ensure a safe local street network by installing adequate traffic management signage, traffic-calming devices and maintaining the streets in proper operating condition
3. Promote alternative transportation opportunities to serve the needs of the residents

4. Avoid the development of new thoroughfares that would reduce traffic volume through the City's commercial areas
5. Plan and construct new roadways to ensure safe and adequate access to all areas within the community.
6. Mitigate flooding of existing roadways and lands

The Johnson City comprehensive plan also features an implementation guide that provides strategies for turning the goals of the plan into actions.

## 2.12 Land Use Inventory

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Blanco County has experienced growth since the 60s, after a 30-year period of declining population. With continued growth expected, the county needs a balance between accommodating new development and preserving the county's natural resources. The three incorporated cities: Johnson City, Blanco, and Round Mountain, currently comprise almost 36 percent of the county's population.

Land use is a term that planners and policy makers employ that simply describes how humans "use the land." Descriptive terms commonly associated with land use include:

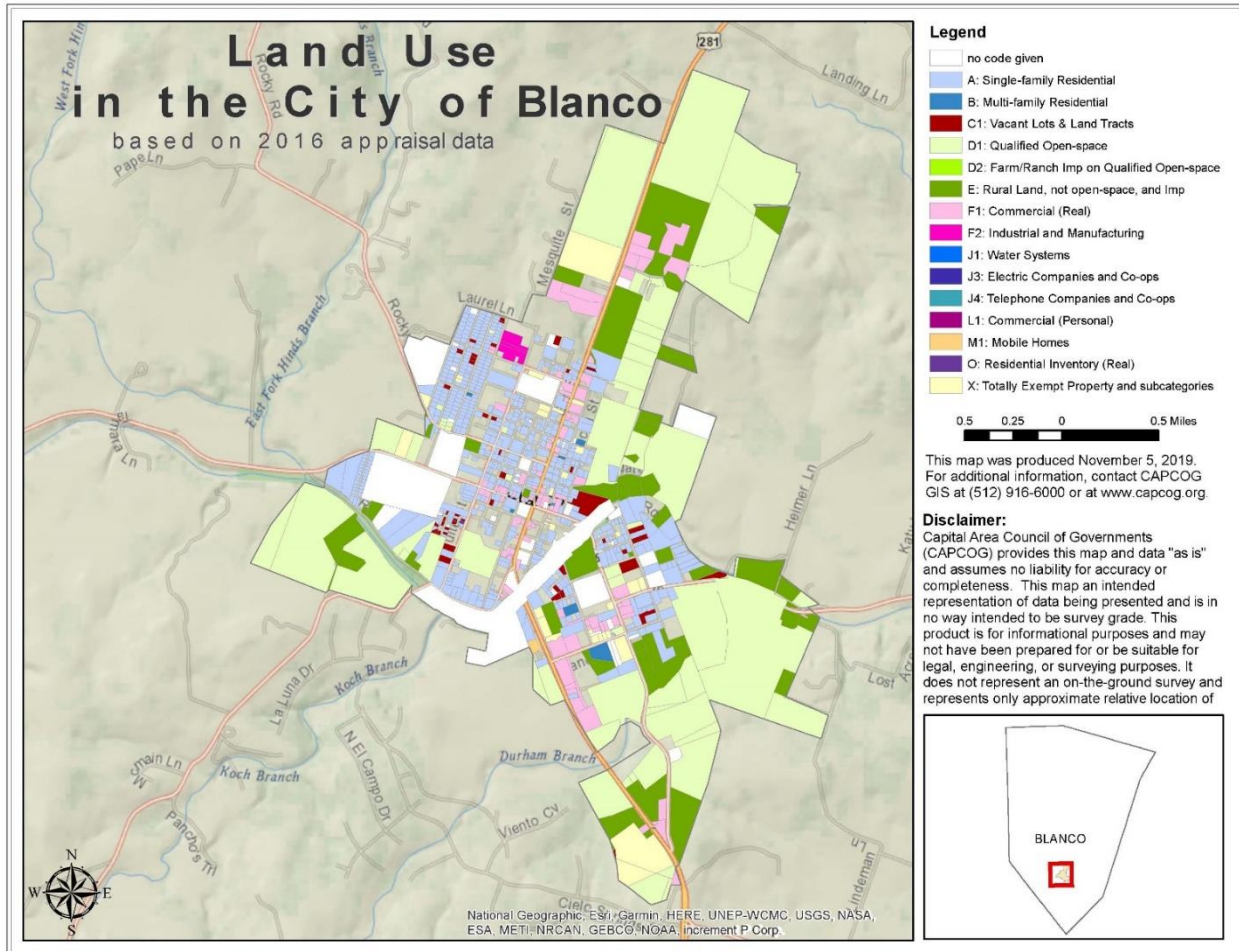
- Type, including residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, etc.;
- Intensity, meaning rural, exurban, suburban and urban.
- Density, or persons or households per square mile; and
- Connectivity, in terms of transportation, water, wastewater, power, etc.

In the past, the planning perspective was that land use determines transportation needs. For example, traffic associated with a new development on a county road outside of town creates demand for additional lanes. The new development is the catalyst for increased road capacity. Many communities are finding that increasing road capacity to support existing development can spur additional growth that, in turn, increases traffic and the demand for additional capacity. This demonstrates there is a much closer connection between land use and transportation.

Historically, Blanco County's rural land use pattern was supported by a network of local, county, farm-to-market, and state arterial roadways that satisfied county residents' transportation needs. There will be a shift however in the transportation infrastructure required to support the needs of the county's residents. Understanding these changing land use patterns will provide insights for future transportation requirements as well as the types of land use they stimulate.

## City of Blanco Current/Future Land Use

**Figure 2.16** features the current land use in the City of Blanco. Current land use features primarily single-family residential zoning near the center of town (intersection of Route 163 and 281), with retail and commercial development focused along the major thoroughfares. There is currently a notable amount of land that is vacant on the map as well. **Figure 2.17** features the city's future land use and shows the city's desire for development.



**Figure 2.16 Current Land Use Map, City of Blanco, Texas**



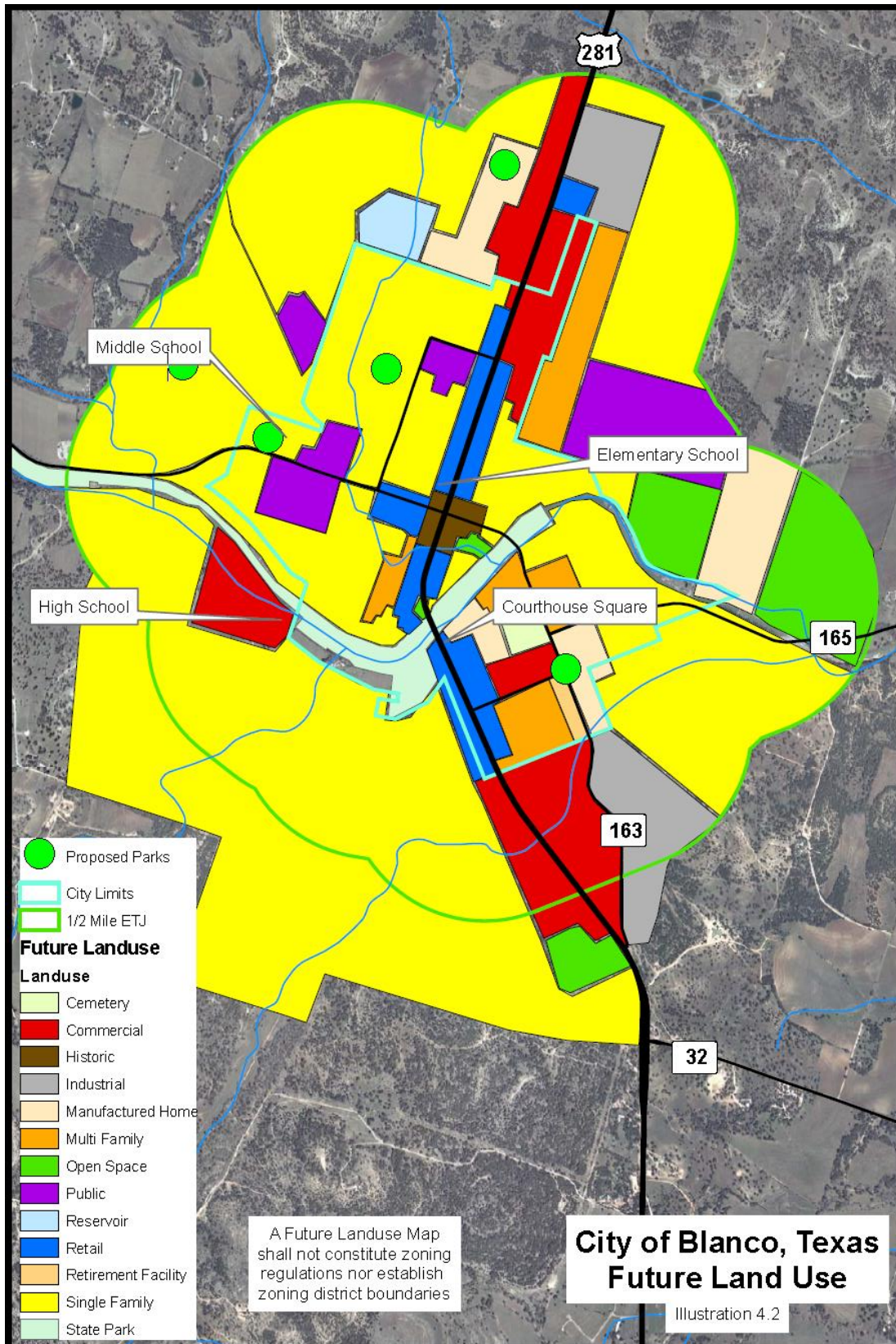
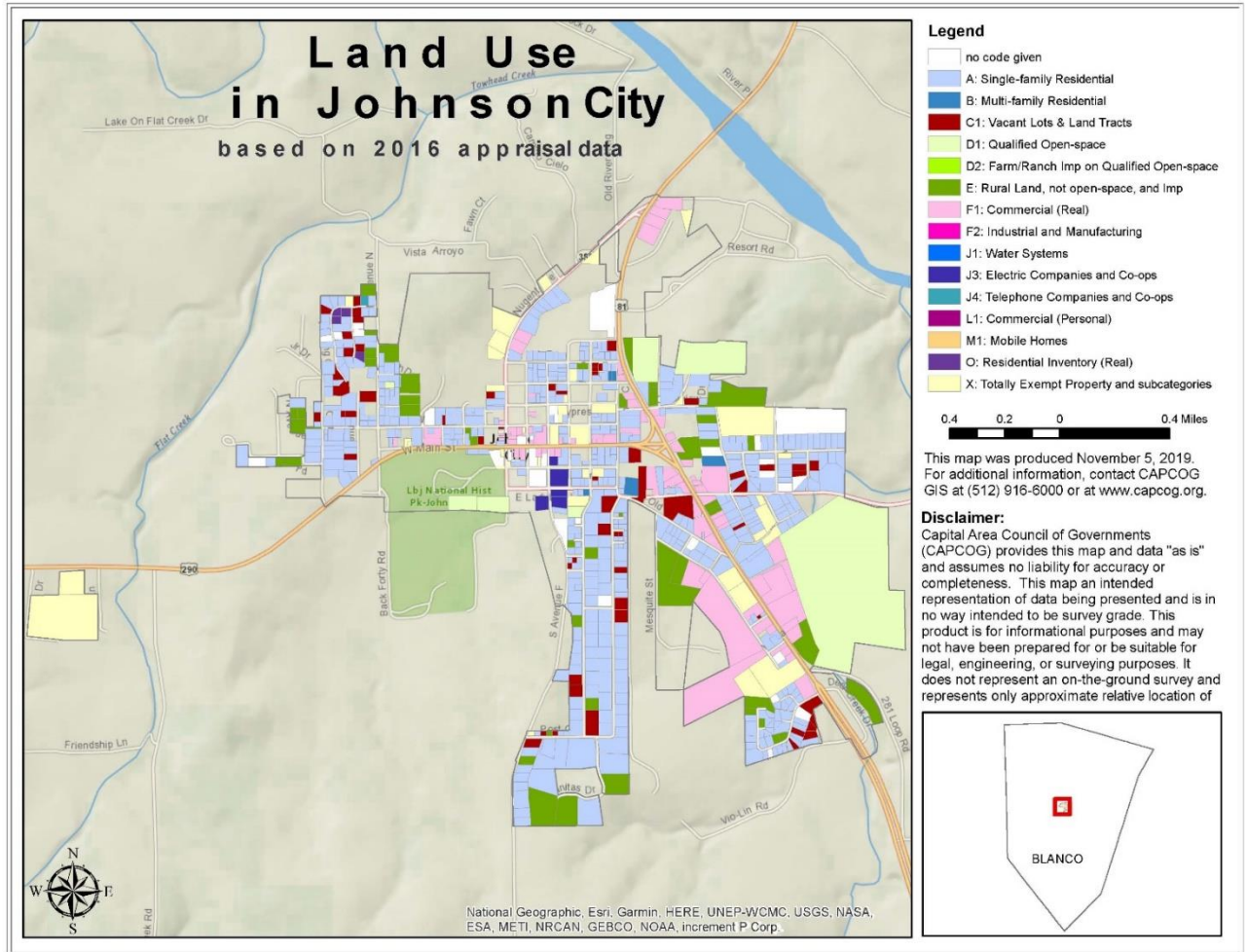


Figure 2.17: Future Land Use Map, City of Blanco, Texas



### Johnson City Current/Future Land Use

Johnson City’s land use is characterized by a mix of residential, commercial and public uses centered on the axis of its two main arterials, US 290 and US 281. Agricultural uses generally extend from the city limits to the extraterritorial jurisdiction.



**Figure 2.18: Current Land Use Map, Johnson City, Texas**

The city’s planned future land use extends commercial development primarily west along US 290, and to a lesser extent along US 281. Expansion of single-family homes would be served by new public land uses including schools and parks. Notably, extensive area for industrial development was identified to the southeast along US 281. Future land use plans in both Blanco and Johnson City anticipate balanced growth with a mix of land uses.

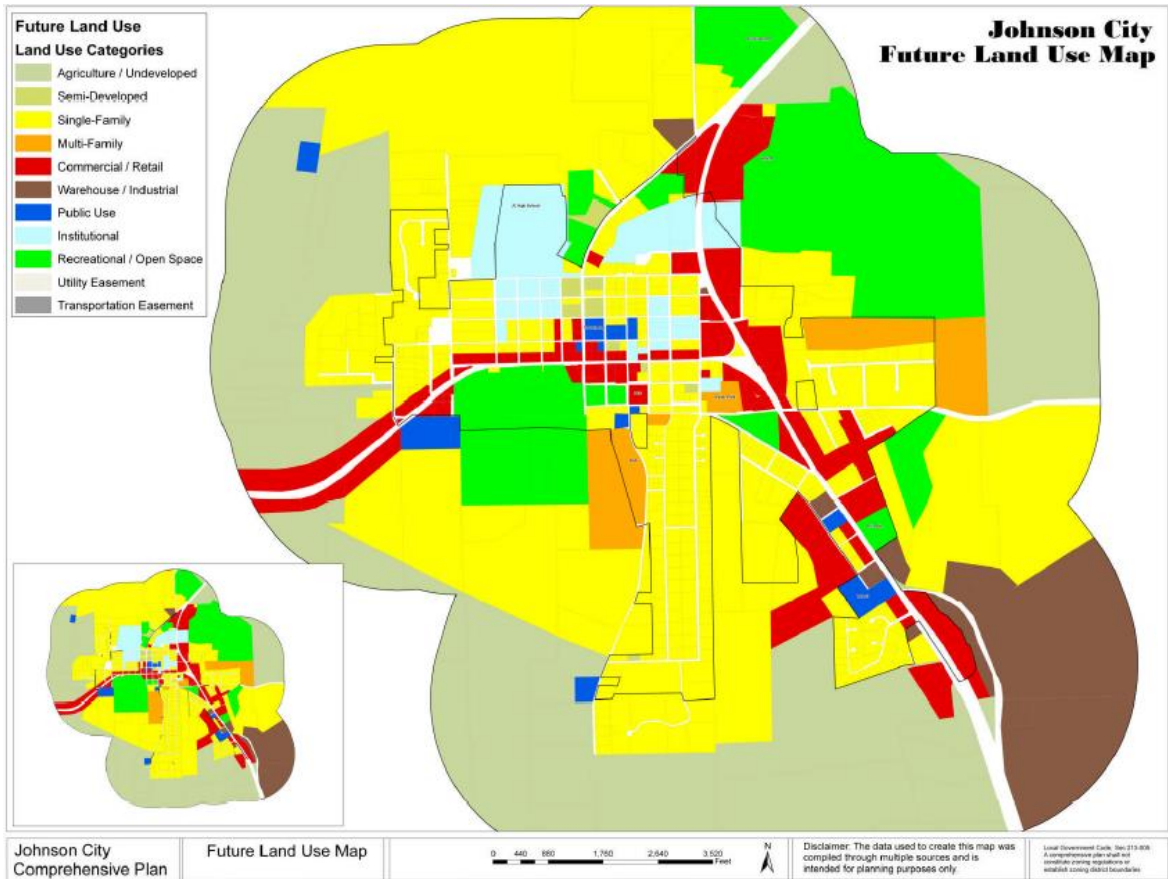


Figure 2.19: Future Land Use Map, Johnson City, Texas

## Round Mountain Current/Future Land Use

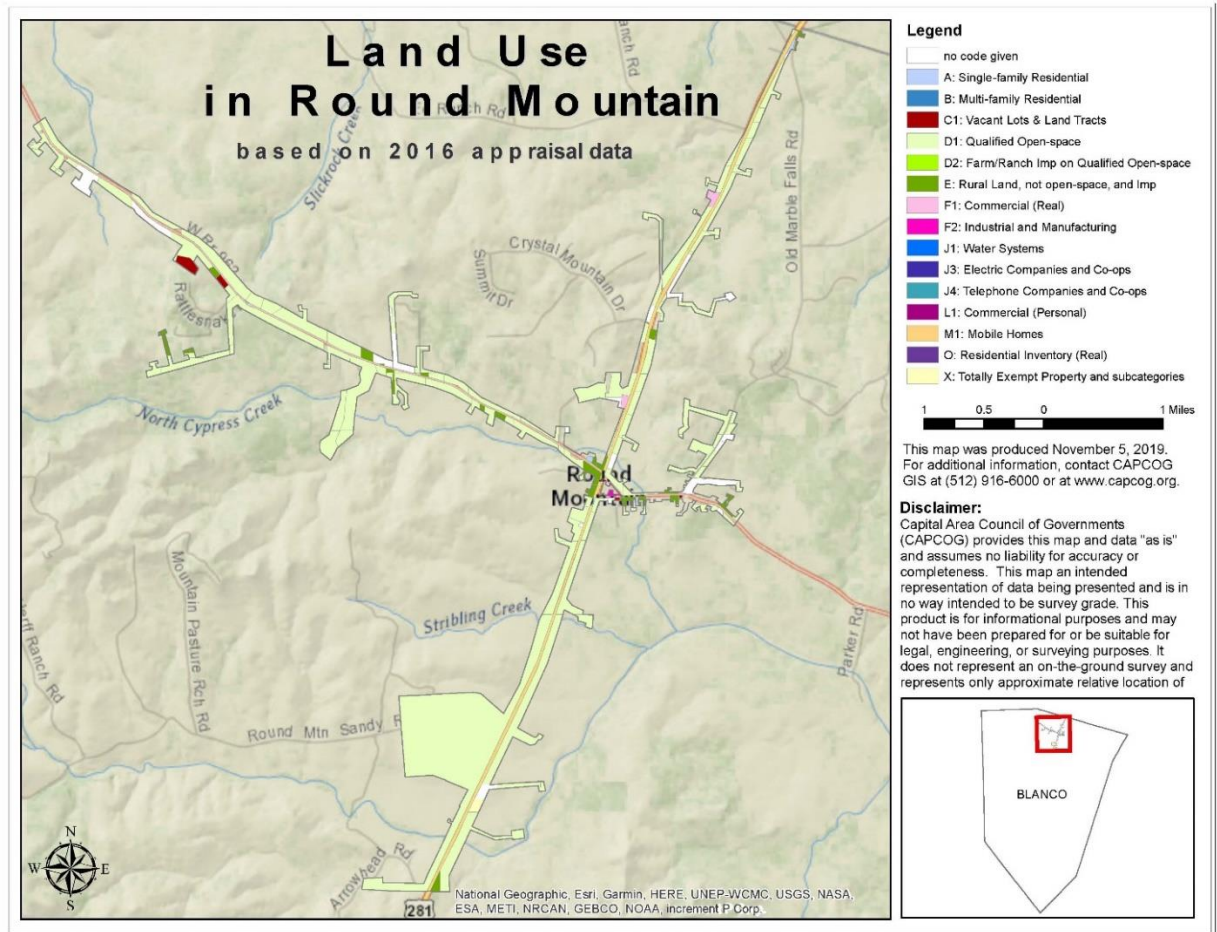


Figure 2.20: Current Land Use Map, Round Mountain, Texas

## 2.13 Flooding

On Memorial Day weekend in 2015, less than a year after the last Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development Plan was finalized, Blanco County experienced severe flooding causing two deaths, damage to at least 20 homes along the Blanco River, and the destruction of a bridge on Ranch Road 165, which intersects the Blanco River. The flooding also caused Johnson City to be subject to a boil water notice. Flooding in adjacent Llano County and Travis County in the fall of 2018 led to the destruction of another bridge and a weeks-long crisis for the City of Austin's water system. In May 2019, flooding along the Blanco River took another life. As these recent examples indicate, flooding poses an important and ongoing risk to Blanco County. The county's ability to adequately manage flood risk is critical for its ability to accomplish its goals for economic development and transportation. Aside from the impact to the community related to loss of life and damage to existing property, a community's flooding can also affect its credit rating and the willingness of people to make long-term investments, thereby making it harder for the community to develop its economy or transportation system.

In January 2019, the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) completed the *State Flood Assessment*, as a report to the 86<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session.<sup>1</sup> The report provided an assessment of the state’s flood risks and included preliminary findings from stakeholder input related to what they refer to as, “three key pillars of comprehensive flood risk management:”

1. Mapping
2. Planning
3. Mitigation

One important existing program related to flooding is the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The NFIP is a federal program allowing property owners in participating communities to purchase insurance against flood losses in exchange for the community’s agreement to adopt and enforce local regulations to reduce future flood damage. Under the Texas Water Code, all cities and counties are required to participate in the program,<sup>2</sup> and provides all “political subdivisions,” the authority to take action to prevent flood damage beyond the minimum required for participation in the NFIP.<sup>3</sup> One of the key requirements is to identify and map flood risk through Flood Hazard Boundary Maps (FHBM)s and Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs). These maps are official maps that display different types of flood risk and determine the requirement for purchasing flood insurance. They are used for public communication of flood risk, regulation of land development, and establishing flood insurance rates. Of particular concern for FIRMs are areas with at least a 1 in 100 annual chance of flooding (i.e., “100-year floodplain”), which would have at least a 1 in 4 chance of flooding over the term of a 30-year mortgage. All properties with federally backed mortgages located within a 100-year floodplain are required to have flood insurance.

One of the key findings of the *State Flood Assessment* was the need for better mapping of flood risk within the state, and in this area, Blanco County has probably the most acute flood mapping needs among all the counties in the CAPCOG region. While Blanco County does have flood plain maps needed for it to participate in the NFIP, the maps are 29 years old and are not available digitally, unlike the other counties in the CAPCOG region. The age of Blanco County’s maps makes it at least 10 years older than the next oldest maps used in adjacent counties.

County	Effective Date of FIRM
Blanco	2/6/1991
Burnet	3/15/2012 or 11/1/2019
Gillespie	10/19/2001
Hays	9/2/2005
Kendall	12/17/2010
Llano	5/2/2012
Travis	9/26/2008, 1/6/2016, or 1/22/2020

**Table 2.6 Effective Dates of FIRMs in Blanco and Adjacent Counties**

Because Blanco County’s population has grown by 96% since 1990 (5,972 in the 1990 Census compared to 11,702 in 2018, based on the Census Bureau’s Current Population Estimate program), and new rainfall estimates from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) show significantly higher peak 24-hour rainfall totals for Blanco County than existing estimates, an updated flood map would likely look

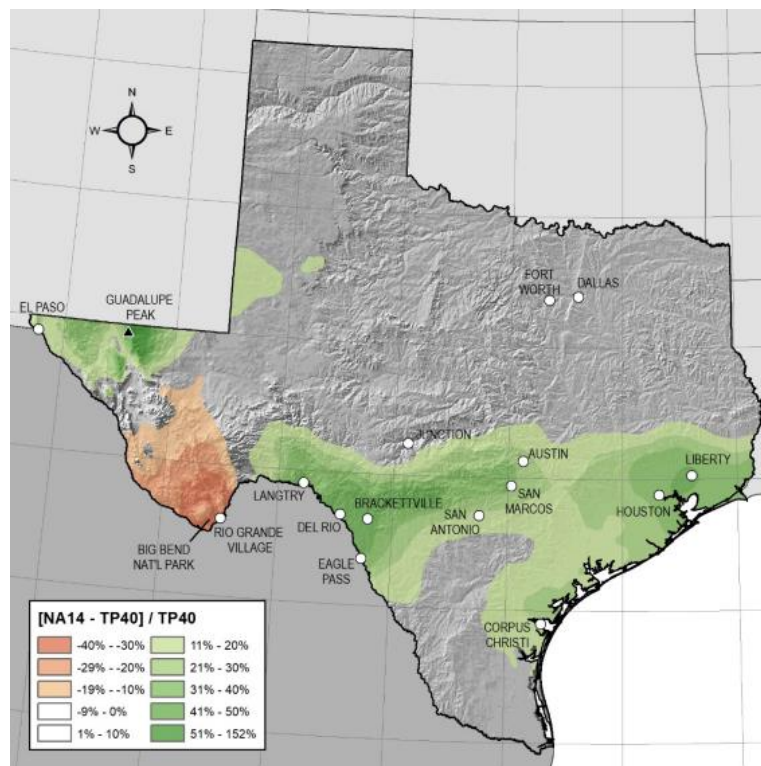
<sup>1</sup> Texas Water Development Board. *State Flood Assessment: Report to the 86<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature*. January 2019. Available online at: <https://texasfloodassessment.org/doc/State-Flood-Assessment-report-86th-Legislation.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Texas Water Code §16.3145

<sup>3</sup> Texas Water Code §16.315



quite different than the existing one. A map of Texas from the Atlas 14 report shows that Blanco County is one of the areas of the state that would expect the most significant changes to its maps based on the new rainfall estimates.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 2.21 Percent Difference in 100-year 24-hour rainfall estimates for Atlas 14**

Updated maps would help ensure:

- a) That appropriate flood insurance rates are being applied to properties within Blanco County
- b) That Blanco County is regulating development in all areas that are high risk that may not be identified as high risk on the existing maps
- c) Blanco County is not unnecessarily regulating or prohibiting development in areas currently classified as high risk for flooding that new mapping may show is no longer high risk
- d) Blanco County and TxDOT can design and route roads to avoid or withstand flooding conditions, and
- e) Blanco County and TxDOT can determine the highest-priority areas for eliminating low-water crossings

Fortunately for Blanco County, the southern portion of Blanco County has Base Level Engineering data available that can enable it to update its FIRMs for those areas. However, most of the county currently lacks this type of data.

<sup>4</sup> NOAA. Atlas 14. Precipitation-Frequency Atlas of the United States, Volume 11 Version 2.0: Texas. Silver Spring, MD, 2018. [https://www.nws.noaa.gov/oh/hdsc/PF\\_documents/Atlas14\\_Volume11.pdf](https://www.nws.noaa.gov/oh/hdsc/PF_documents/Atlas14_Volume11.pdf)

Beyond mapping, Blanco County and local property owners can also take other steps to improve flood risk management, including:

- Updating flood plain ordinances
- Elevation, flood-proofing, and/or reconstruction
- Flood awareness training and/or education
- Property buyouts or relocations
- Flood warning system
- Local drainage improvements
- Roadway bridges, culverts, and pipes
- Local channel conveyance improvements
- Local detention and/or retention basins
- Regional detention and/or retention basins
- Levees, flood walls, and related infrastructure

## 2.14 Air Quality

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Air quality is an important indicator of a community's quality of life, but an area's compliance with National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) can also have indirect impacts on a county's economic performance. Requirements for air permits can also affect economic development, particularly for certain types of facilities that would be expected to emit large amounts of air emissions.

EPA sets NAAQS at levels it considers necessary to protect human health and welfare. Areas that are designated "nonattainment" are considered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as either violating a NAAQS or contributing to a violation of the NAAQS nearby. Blanco County is currently designated "attainment/unclassifiable" for all NAAQS, and all indications are that it should expect to remain so for at least the next five years.

For each air pollutant that EPA has established a NAAQS, the state must conduct ambient air quality monitoring in various locations based on where the highest air pollution levels are expected to occur. Depending on the pollutant, the state is required to operate monitors in metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) above certain sizes or near certain large sources of emissions. There are none of these "regulatory" air monitoring stations located in Blanco County, although there are regulatory monitoring stations in nearby Bexar County that are violating the 2015 ground-level ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) NAAQS, and monitors in adjacent Comal, Hays, and Travis Counties that are close to violating the O<sub>3</sub> NAAQS. While Blanco County itself does not have any monitors documenting its pollution levels directly, CAPCOG's analysis of air modeling data for Blanco County and the region suggests that while its air pollution levels are lower than these much more urbanized counties, its position downwind from them means that Blanco County likely experiences high air pollution levels whenever these nearby counties are experiencing high air pollution. From a public health perspective, residents, employees, and visitors in Blanco County should heed air pollution forecasts and warnings for these two areas even though they are not located within either the Austin-Round Rock-Georgetown or San Antonio-New Braunfels MSAs.

Fortunately, O<sub>3</sub> and other regional air pollutants are on a steady downward trend, so public health related to air quality in Blanco County should be expected to continue to improve over the next five years. However, since EPA must revisit these NAAQS every five years, there remain risks to the broader regional economy and regional transportation planning as a result of issues with compliance with the NAAQS. With Bexar County already designated nonattainment for O<sub>3</sub>, transportation planning along US-281 to the south of Blanco County is already affected by federal “transportation conformity” requirements. Blanco County residents or businesses driving into Bexar County are therefore already being indirectly impacted by Bexar County’s O<sub>3</sub> nonattainment designation, and if any other adjacent counties struggling to maintain compliance with the O<sub>3</sub> or any other NAAQS were to be designated nonattainment, additional roadways connecting to Blanco County would also be subject to transportation conformity restrictions.

EPA is expected to be completing its review of the O<sub>3</sub> and particulate matter (PM) NAAQS in late 2020. It appears likely that EPA will retain the current O<sub>3</sub> NAAQS, but may tighten the PM NAAQS, which could put the adjacent counties at risk for a nonattainment designation for the PM NAAQS in 2022 (when EPA would be required to finalize any new area designations). Since Blanco County is not located within an MSA, it would not be reviewed for inclusion in a nonattainment area associated with Austin or San Antonio, but it could be indirectly affected due to the broader regional economic and transportation planning impacts of nonattainment designations nearby.

## 2.15 Safety

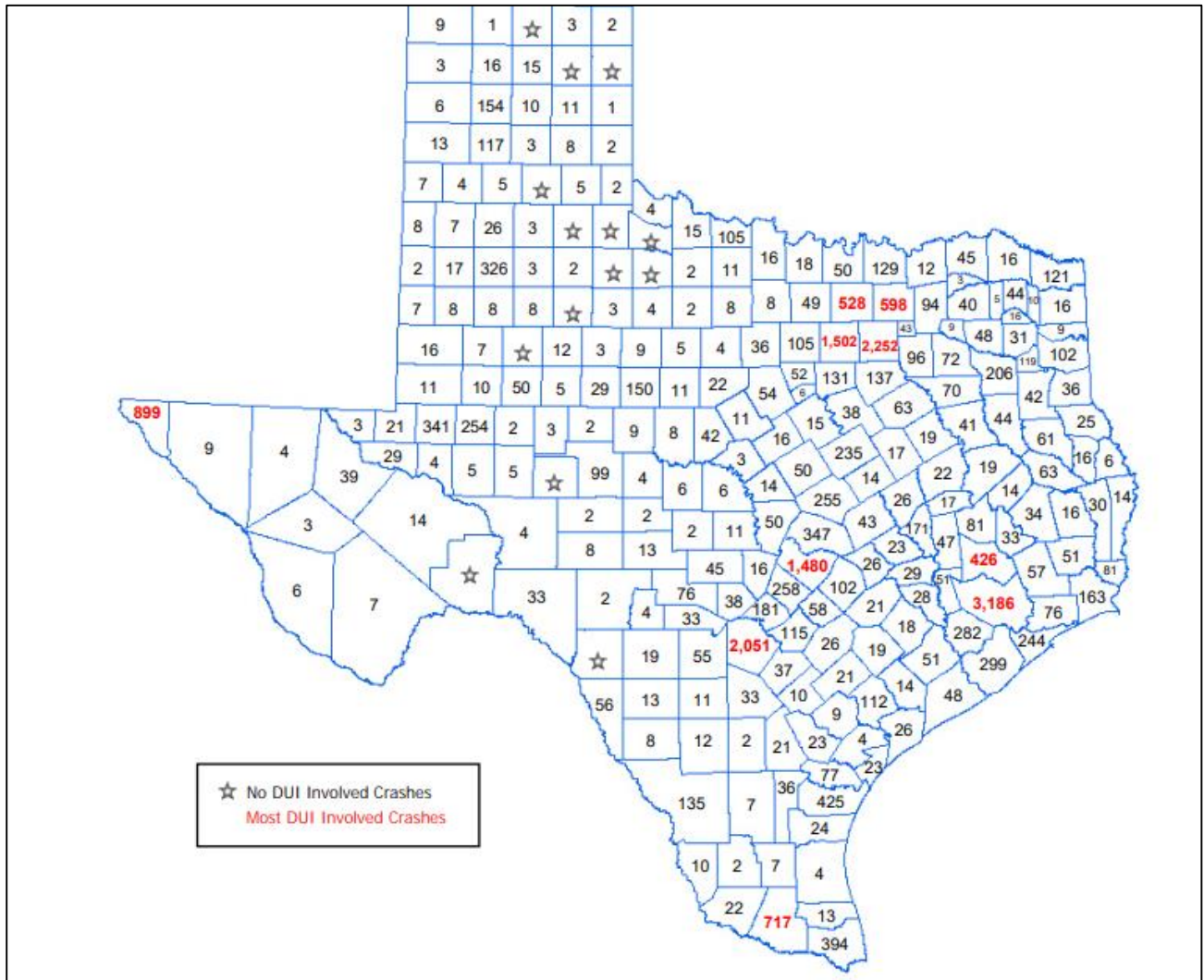
As per Texas Transportation Code Chapter 550, TxDOT is responsible for the collection and analysis of crash data submitted by Texas law enforcement officers on form CR-3, Texas Peace Officer's Crash Report. **Table 2.7** shows the 2018 crash data for City of Blanco, Johnson City and Blanco County. This information is from the TxDOT’s CRIS (Crash Records Information System) database. The data included 294 crashes located in the study area over that time period. Crashes occurred in greater frequency along the overall highway system than within the incorporated cities of Blanco and Johnson City. These portions of the county highway system carry significant traffic volumes, so having increased crash volumes is consistent with the overall usage rates.

City/County	Fatal Crashes	Fatalities	Suspected Serious Crashes	Suspected Serious Injuries	Non-Incapacitating	Non-Incapacitating	Possible injury Crashes	Possible Injuries	Non-Injury Crashes	Non-Injuries	Unknown Severity Crashes	Unknown Injuries	Total Crashes
Blanco County	5	5	11	16	26	47	24	33	152	409	9	19	227
City of Blanco	0	0	3	5	5	14	1	3	16	69	2	9	27
Johnson City	0	0	0	0	5	7	3	3	32	112	0	0	40

**Table 2.7: 2018 Crash Records Information System Summary**

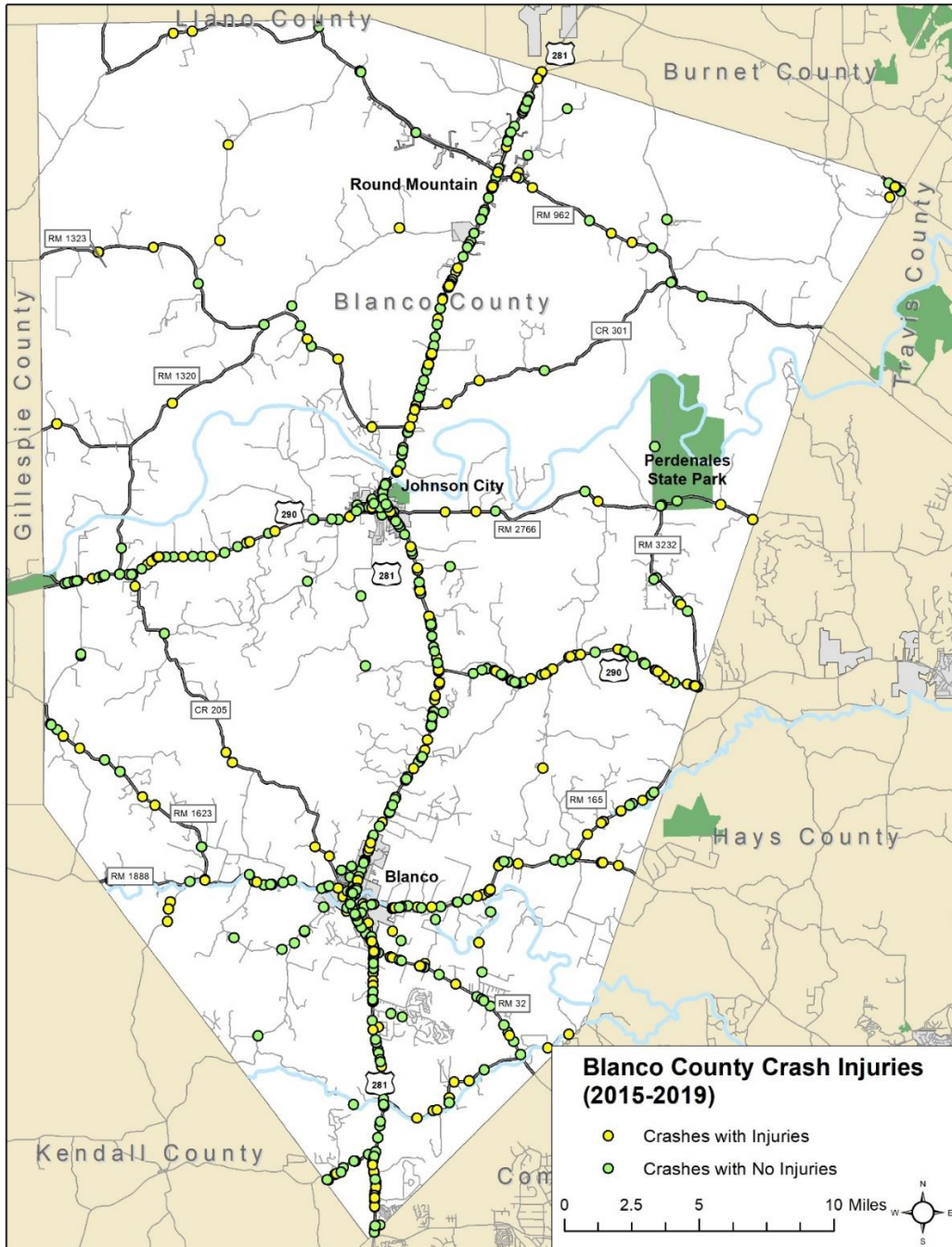


**Figure 2.22** shows the number of drunk driving involved crashes from across Texas for 2018. Blanco County has the lowest number of reported crashes at 16 in the 10-county CAPCOG region.



**Figure 2.22: 2018 Crash Records Information System Summary**

**Figure 2.23** illustrates the vehicle crashes with injury that occurred along the TxDOT roadway system from 2015-2019. **Figure 2.24** shows the fatal crashes from 2015 to 2019 and the collisions per million vehicle miles traveled, respectively. Injury crashes commonly occur in the urban environments and along the major highways. Fatal crashes occur rarely, but also occur around population centers and highways.



**Figure 2.23: Blanco County Crash Injuries (2015 – 2019)**

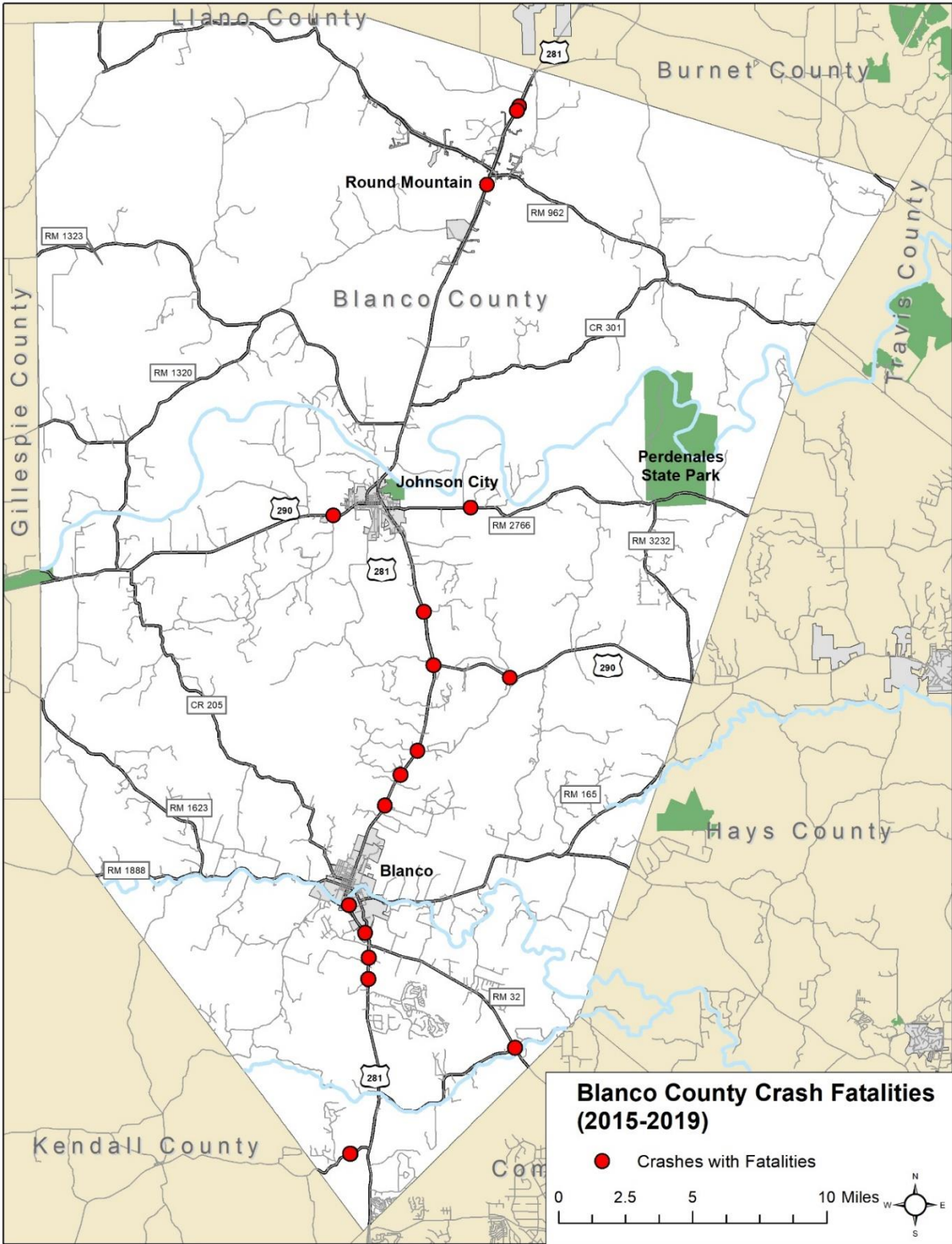
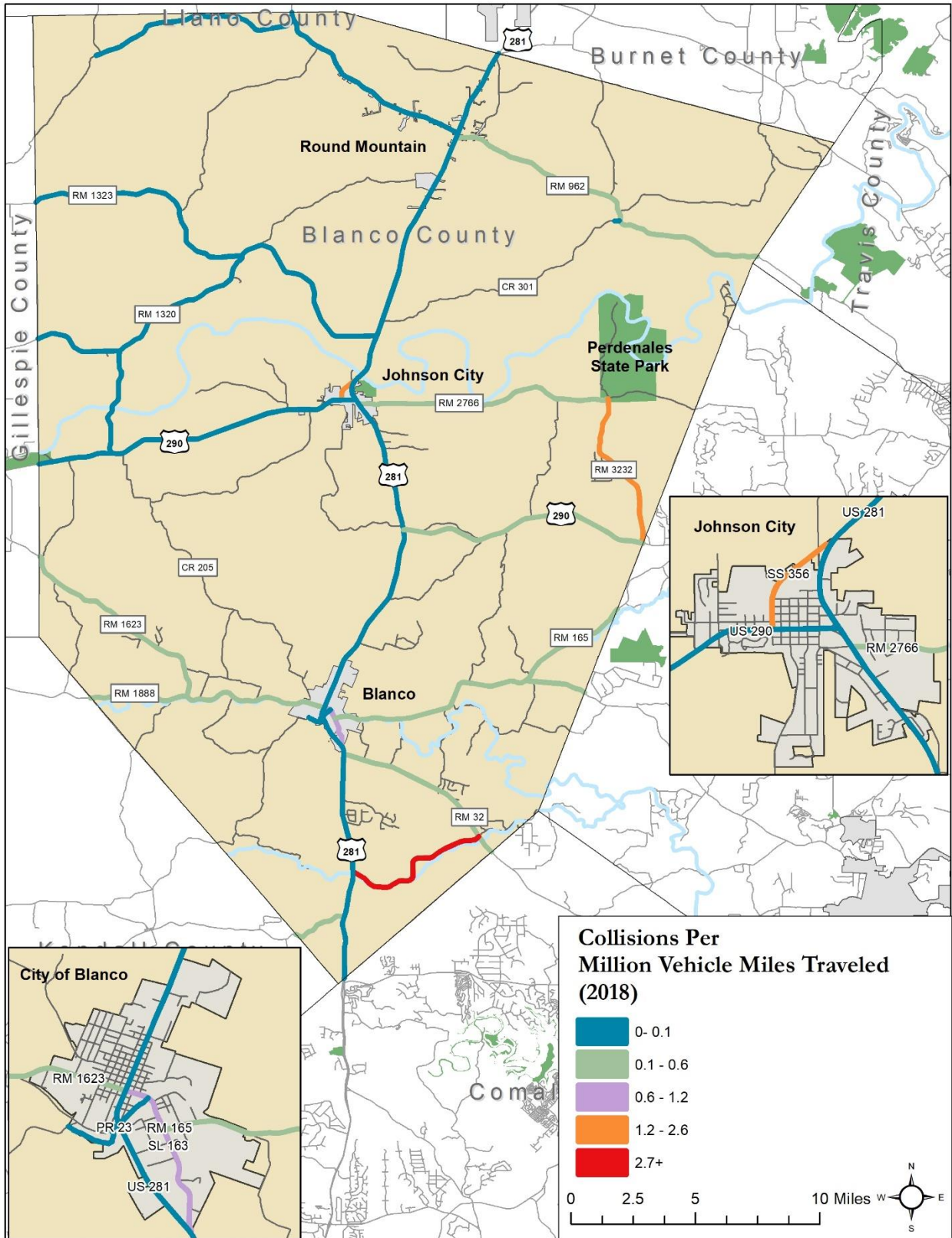


Figure 2.24: Blanco County Crash Fatalities (2015 – 2019)





**Figure 2.25: Blanco County Collisions Per VMT (2018)**

## 2.16 Existing Transportation Conditions

This section reviews Blanco County's roadway networks, alternative modes, transit elements, and truck traffic.

### Roadway Network

The roadway system in Blanco County is provided and maintained by the state, the county, Johnson City and the City of Blanco. It provides a network for people and goods to move through and within Blanco County.

**Figure 2.26** illustrates the existing daily traffic volumes on the road networks in Blanco County. **Figure 2.27** shows the capacities of the Blanco County road network. Most roads maintain free flows, except for a few roads in the southern portion of the county.

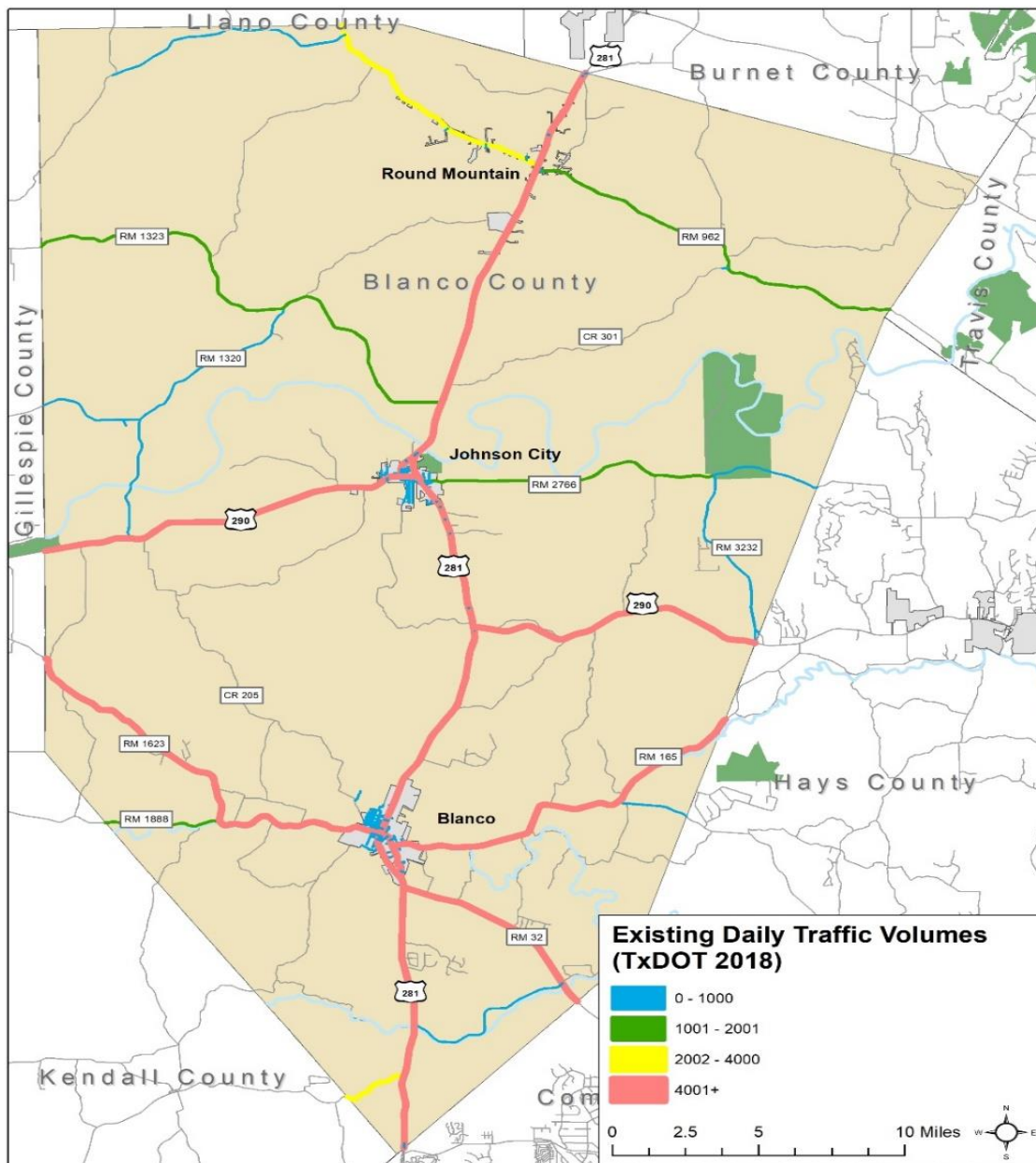
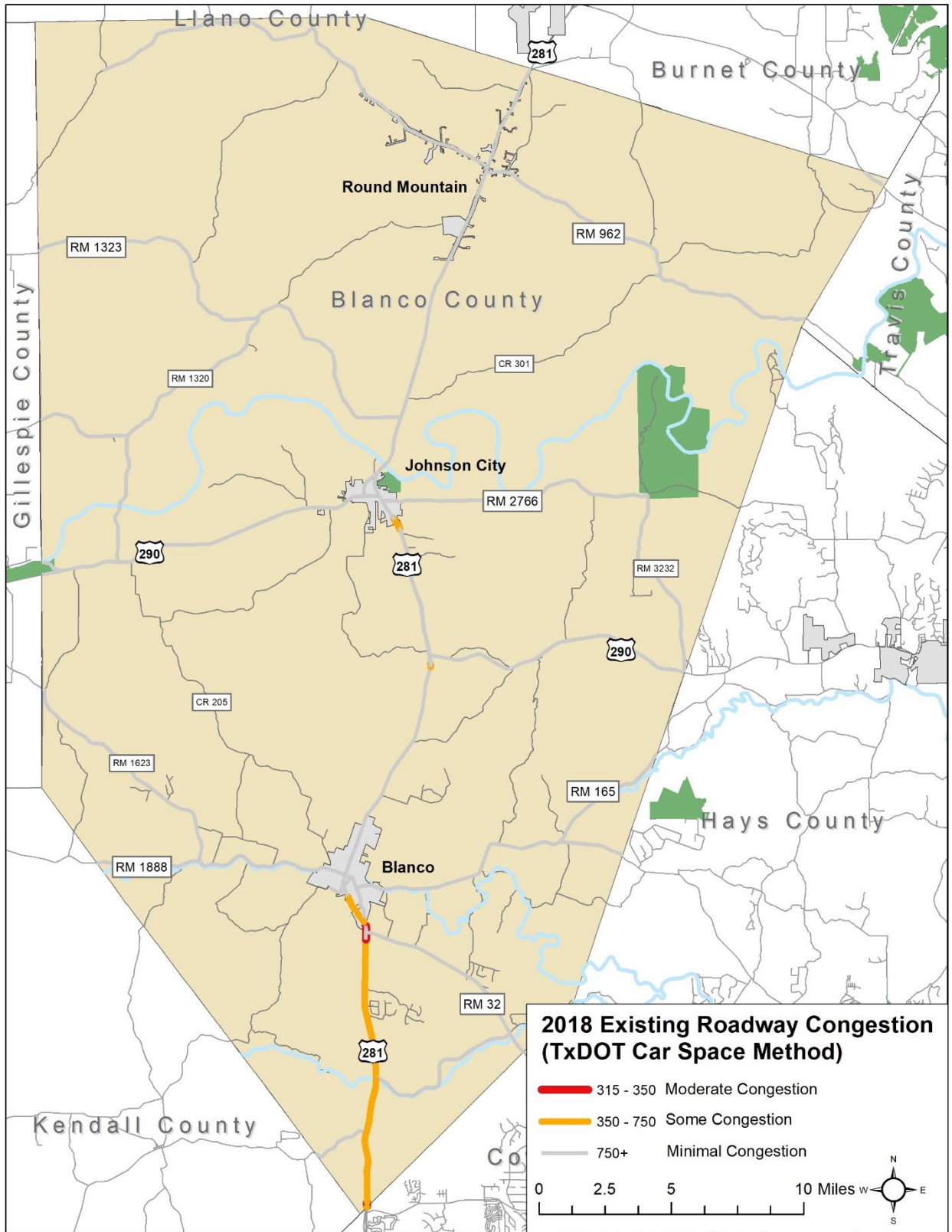


Figure 2.26: Existing Daily Traffic Volumes

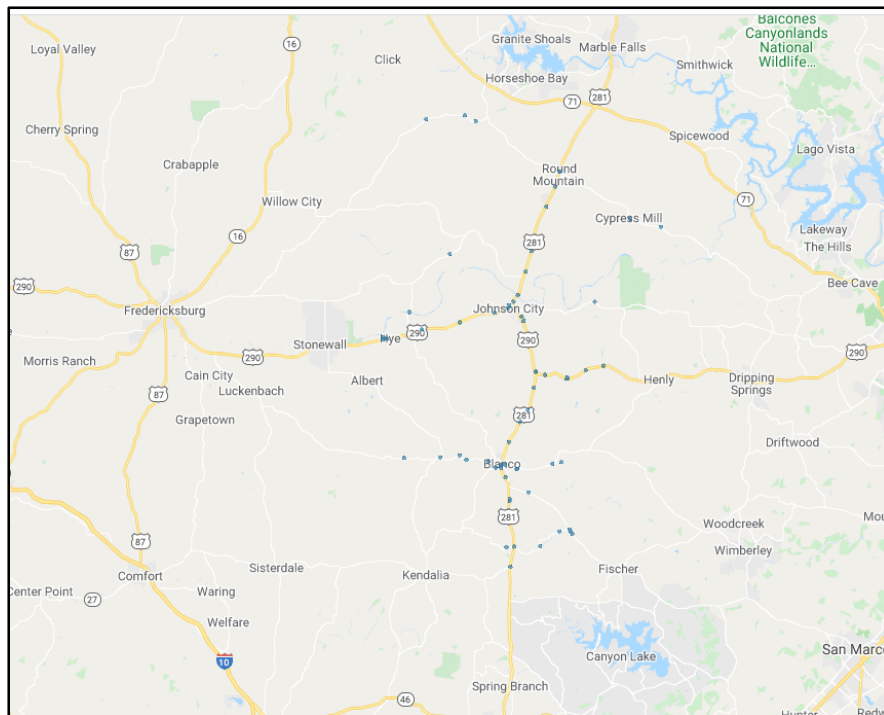


**Figure 2.27: Existing Congestion Conditions**



## 2.17 Bridges

Based on the national bridge inventory, maintained by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), there are 62 bridges within the Blanco County roadway system. Fifty-five of these bridges are owned by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), six are owned by Blanco County, and one is owned by the City of Blanco. The purpose of the bridge inventory is to have a collection of information on these unique structures that include ownership, age of the bridge, classification type, location, material of the bridge components, average daily trips, a summary of inspection findings, and maintenance records and plans. Bridges are ultimately given a "bridge sufficiency rating" which is calculated, based 55% on the structural evaluation, 30% on the obsolescence of its design, and 15% on its importance to the public. As of 2008, a score of 80 or less is required for federal repair funding, and 50 or less for federal replacement funding. The bridges of Blanco County are classified as either "good" or "fair" based on the FHWA established standards.



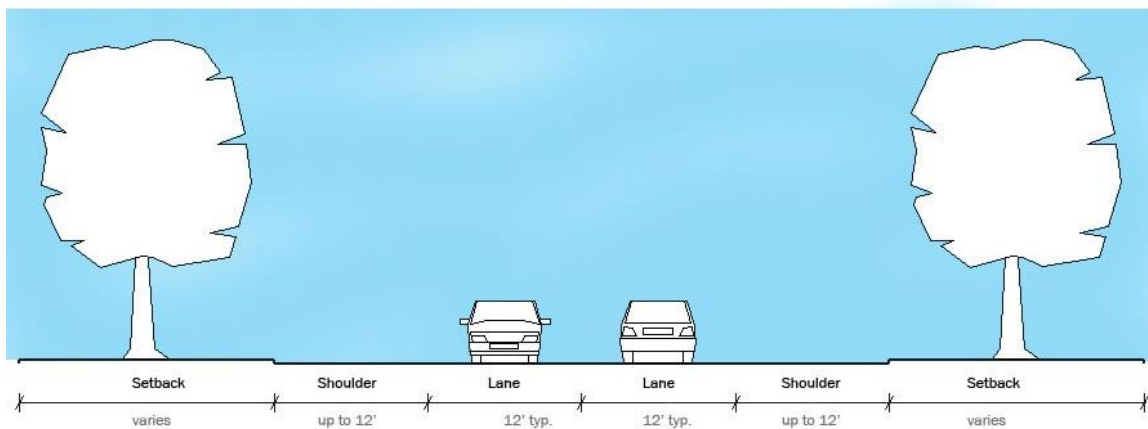
**Figure 2.28: Blanco County Bridges (2020)**

## 2.18 Typical Roadway Sections

Roadways are owned, designed, and maintained by several different entities within the county. Highways, labeled “US” and “RM” in this the county, are the responsibility of the Texas Department of Transportation, in addition to several other designations. TxDOT also has the responsibility to maintain roads within the two state parks. County roads often include the prefix “CR”, but also usually have a locally known name. City streets are generally those within city limits, but not on the state highway system. Following are visual examples of typical roadway sections found in Blanco County. Widths and roadway geometry vary along the roadway.

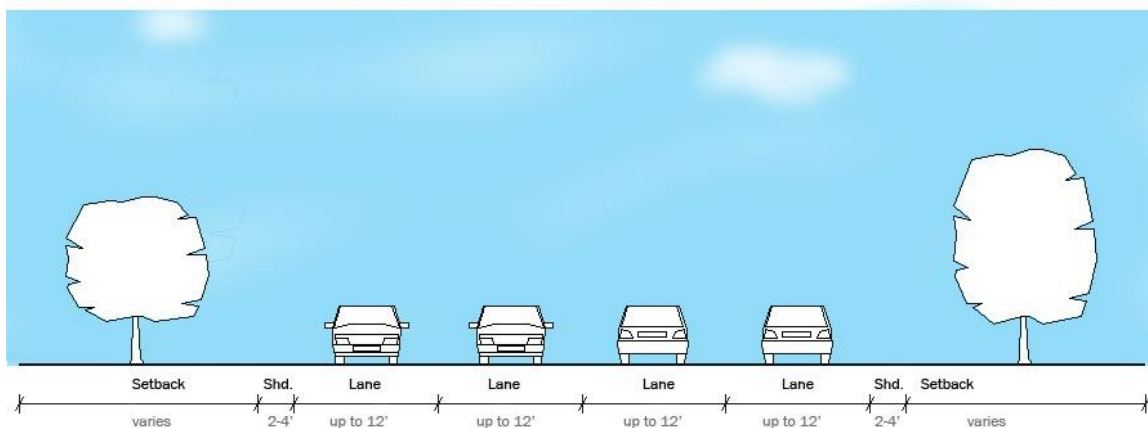
### Major Arterial, Urban (U.S. 290 in Johnson City, just west of U.S. 281)

This section makes use of wide shoulders, providing maneuvering space for turning vehicles, bicyclists, and even pedestrians where sidewalks are not provided.



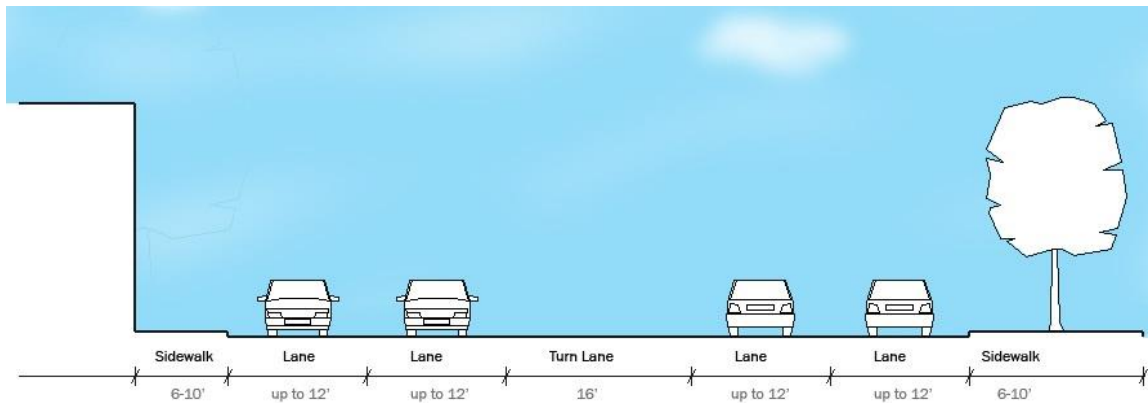
### Major Arterial, Rural (U.S. 290 near Hye)

As drivers head west toward Fredericksburg, US 290 transitions to four lanes of traffic with a small shoulder. The additional lane supports additional traffic volumes and discrepancies in driver speed, but shoulder width is limited.



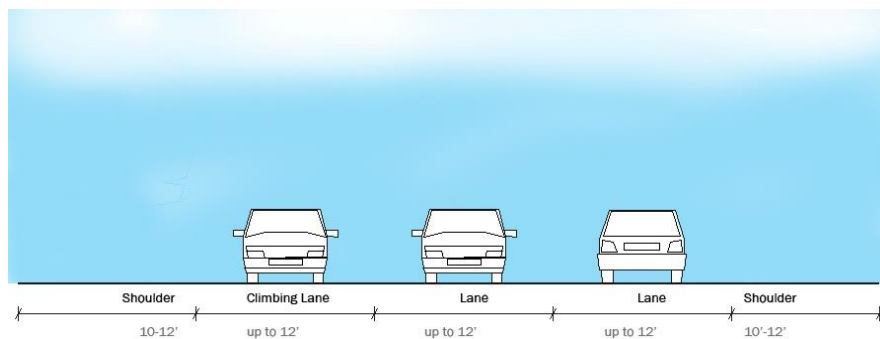
### Major Arterial, Urban (U.S. 281 in downtown Blanco)

In downtown Blanco, U.S. 281 currently has sidewalks on both sides of the roadway, with four lanes and a center turn lane.



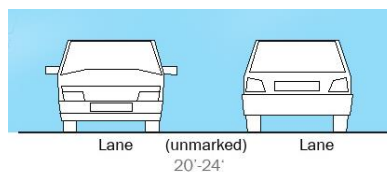
### Major Arterial, Rural “Super 2” section (U.S. 281 south of Blanco)

South of Blanco, U.S. 281 is generally a two-lane rural highway, except in some of its hilliest sections, where a Super 2 treatment is added. This improvement adds an additional lane on uphill climbs, where speed discrepancies between vehicles are the greatest, and sight distances are often limited. This feature reduces likelihood of crashes, while helping to maintain vehicle flow. Wide shoulders offer additional safety for motor vehicles and bicyclists.



### Collector, Rural (Pedernales Hills Road)

The following example of a rural collector has three other roads leading to it, but it is not anticipated to serve a large volume of traffic. Though Pedernales Hills Road has a gravel surface, it has similar dimensions to a local city street, which are most often paved.



## 2.19 Alternative Modes

Blanco County relies upon a diverse network of transportation infrastructure. This document looks at the transit elements and truck traffic existing in the county.

### Transit Element

As Blanco County continues to grow, the level and type of transportation service provided by the Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS) is in the process of changing to meet the needs of the growing population. To increase the efficiency of the transportation system, public transit vehicles can be utilized to accommodate many people who are taking similar routes to a common destination. Because Blanco County does not have large employment centers likely to occur in dense urban area, public transit also serves the purpose of transporting those who are unable to drive, walk or bicycle to their destination. Specialized transit is a flexible alternative to fixed route/schedule traditional transit, and utilizes vehicles such as shuttle buses, vans, and taxis. The specialized service ranges from those allowing pick-up/drop-off along a defined route by request to those that offer on-demand door-to-door service within a given geographical area.

### CARTS

CARTS is a rural transit district, a 7,200-square-mile region surrounding Austin. It is a mixture of a rapidly growing metropolitan center surrounded by rural, suburban and rapidly urbanizing rural to metropolitan transition areas.

Demand-response service is available to Blanco County. CARTS offers prearranged service to the public for inter-city, inter-county, or travel outside of Blanco County to its service area. Their services are offered throughout the week for local and regional trips. Route information can be accessed at their website [www.ridecarts.com](http://www.ridecarts.com). **Table 2.8** displays the Blanco County CARTS transit schedule.

The Regional Transit Coordination Committee (RTCC), an effort covering the 10-county capital region and including multiple regional partners, provides routine transit planning assistance to counties to ensure that improvements are made to create a more responsive and seamless transit network for all residents.

Destination	Route Day	Departure Time	Return Time	One-Way Fare
Local Service	Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday	9:00a - 12:30p		\$2.00
Johnson City	Tuesday & Thursday	1:00p	4:00p	\$4.00
Marble Falls	2nd Monday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00
Austin	4th Friday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00
San Marcos	2nd Friday	8:00a	2:00p	\$6.00
San Antonio	1st & 3rd Friday	8:30a	2:00p	\$6.00

**Table 2.8: Blanco County CARTS Transit Schedule as of 9/20/2018**

### Ride Share

Currently, there are no consistent ride share providers in the county. Attempts have been made to host Uber and Lyft seminars to drum up interest in the service and recruit drivers, but there is no sustained participation or interest to establish service at this time.

## 2.20 Truck Traffic

It is important that industrial sites, which affect the economic well-being of the community, are served by appropriate roadways which are designed, constructed and designated for truck use. Large trucks may hinder the operation of local roads built for the use of passenger vehicles. Heavier vehicles cannot maneuver and stop or start with the same agility as passenger vehicles, thereby reducing traffic flow and causing damage to the existing pavement. In addition, there are safety concerns associated with large industrial traffic mixing with local traffic. **Figure 2.29** illustrates the amount of daily truck traffic flows from 2011 and 2017. The data indicate that the counts are the lowest TxDOT category, with flows of 0 to 1,992 trucks per 24 hours. In eight years, there has been an increase in truck traffic in both the north and southern routes of the county.

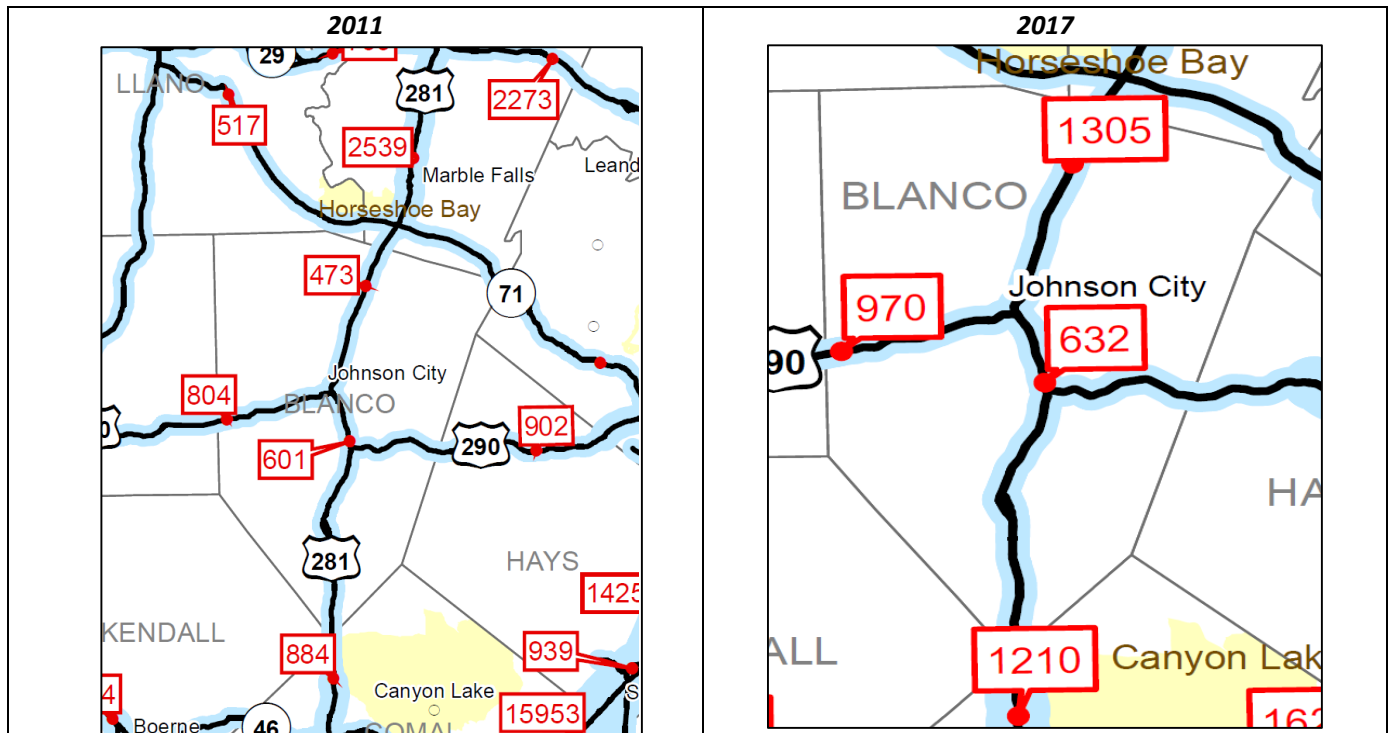
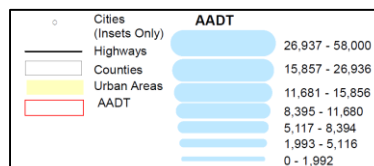


Figure 2.29 Blanco County Truck Average Daily Traffic



## 2.21 Existing Transportation Financing

### Blanco County Revenue

Most funding for Blanco County comes from taxes, which accounted for 81 percent of county revenues in 2018 and 2019 (Table 2.9).

Revenues	Total	Percentage of Total Revenue
Current Taxes	\$6,152,971.00	81.20%
Debt Service	0	0.00%
Transfer From Reserves	\$763,500.00	10.08%
County Sales Tax	\$512,000.00	6.76%
Out of Co boarding, prisoners	\$12,000.00	0.16%
Total Grant Revenue	\$44,000.00	0.58%
Other Revenue Sources	\$93,115.00	1.23%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$7,577,586.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

*Source: Blanco County*

**Table 2.9: Blanco County General Revenue Fund Sources (2018-2019)**

The Blanco County Road and Bridge Fund receives funding from numerous sources (Table 2.10). The single largest source of revenue is the county's share of automobile registrations. Traffic fines and add-on fees for automobile registrations account for the second and third largest sources of road and bridge fund revenues.

Funding Source	Total
Auto Registration (CO. Share)	\$300,000.00
Traffic Fines (Road/Bridge)	\$100,000.00
Auto Registration (Add-on fee)	\$100,000.00
Lateral Road Fund	\$16,000.00
TXDOT (Prorated Axle Tax)	\$20,000.00
Total Transfers From General Fund to Road & Bridge	\$457,770.00
<b>Grand Total Road and Bridge Funding</b>	<b>\$993,770.00</b>

*Source: Blanco County*

**Table 2.10 Blanco County Road and Bridge Fund, Revenue Sources (2018 – 2019)**



Most expenditures from Blanco County’s Road and Bridge Fund are for employee salaries and benefits, accounting for approximately 48 percent of the entire Road and Bridge Fund collectively (**Table 2.11**). Materials related to road construction and maintenance (highlighted in grey) account for the next highest expense at approximately 43 percent collectively.

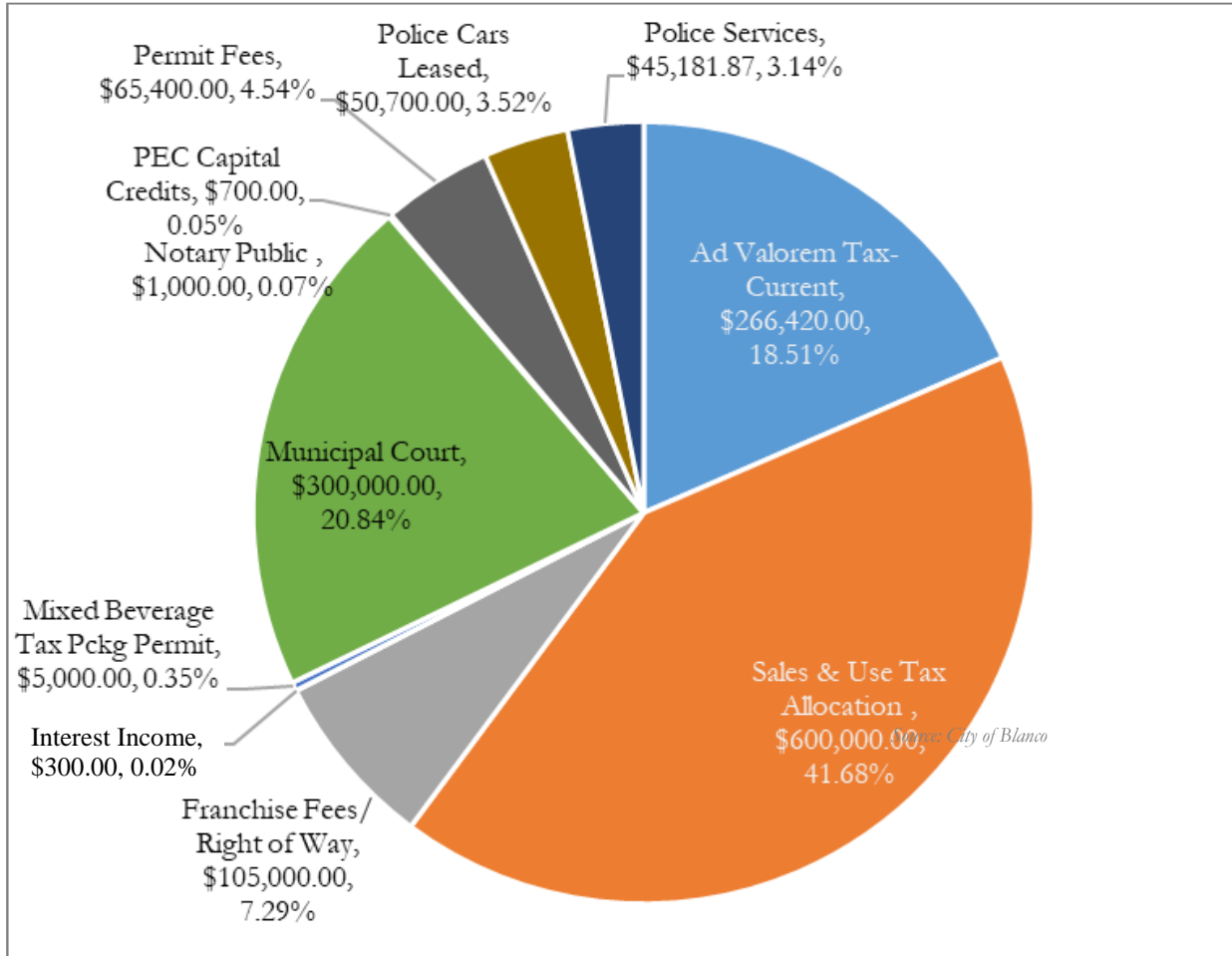
<b>Blanco County Road and Bridge Fund Expenditures</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage of Expenditures</b>
Total Salaries	\$297,593.00	28.92%
Total Employee Benefits	\$196,616.00	19.10%
Paving	\$224,000.00	21.77%
Road Materials	\$66,000.00	6.41%
Fuel	\$55,500.00	5.39%
Concrete	\$24,900.00	2.42%
Equipment Maint./Tools	\$40,000.00	3.89%
Contract Labor	\$11,000.00	1.07%
Maintenance of Joint Equip	\$16,000.00	1.55%
Culverts/Cattle Guards	\$13,000.00	1.26%
Telephone	\$4,500.00	0.44%
Road Signs/Markers/Safety Equipment	\$16,250.00	1.58%
Uniforms	\$6,300.00	0.61%
Miscellaneous	\$7,500.00	0.73%
Road Projects (new line)	\$50,000.00	4.86%
<b>Total Road and Bridge Fund Expenditures (2018 - 2019)</b>	<b>\$1,029,159.00</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

**Table 2.11: Blanco County Road and Bridge Fund Expenditures (2018 – 2019)**

*Source: Blanco County*

**City of Blanco Revenue**

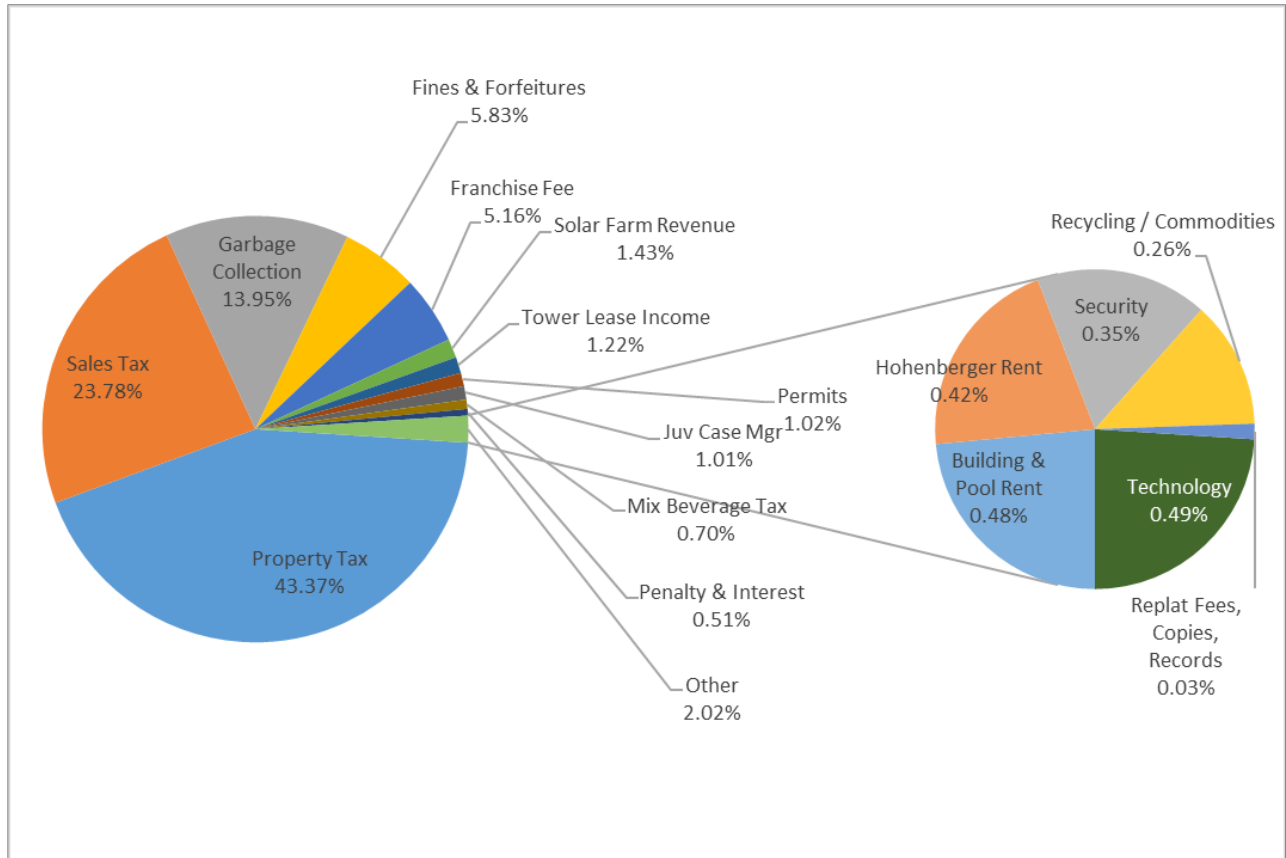
The largest portion of revenues for the City of Blanco comes from sales tax revenue, which accounted for 41 percent of city revenues in the city’s 2018 – 2019 budget, as illustrated in **Figure 2.30**. The city also utilizes an ad-valorem tax, which accounted for 18 percent of the city’s general fund revenues.



**Figure 2.30 City of Blanco General Fund Revenue Sources (FY 2018-2019)**

**Johnson City Revenue**

Property tax makes up the largest percentage of Johnson City’s general fund revenue, accounting for 43 percent of revenues in the 2018-2019 fiscal year. Sales tax also makes up a substantial portion of Johnson City revenues at 23 percent.

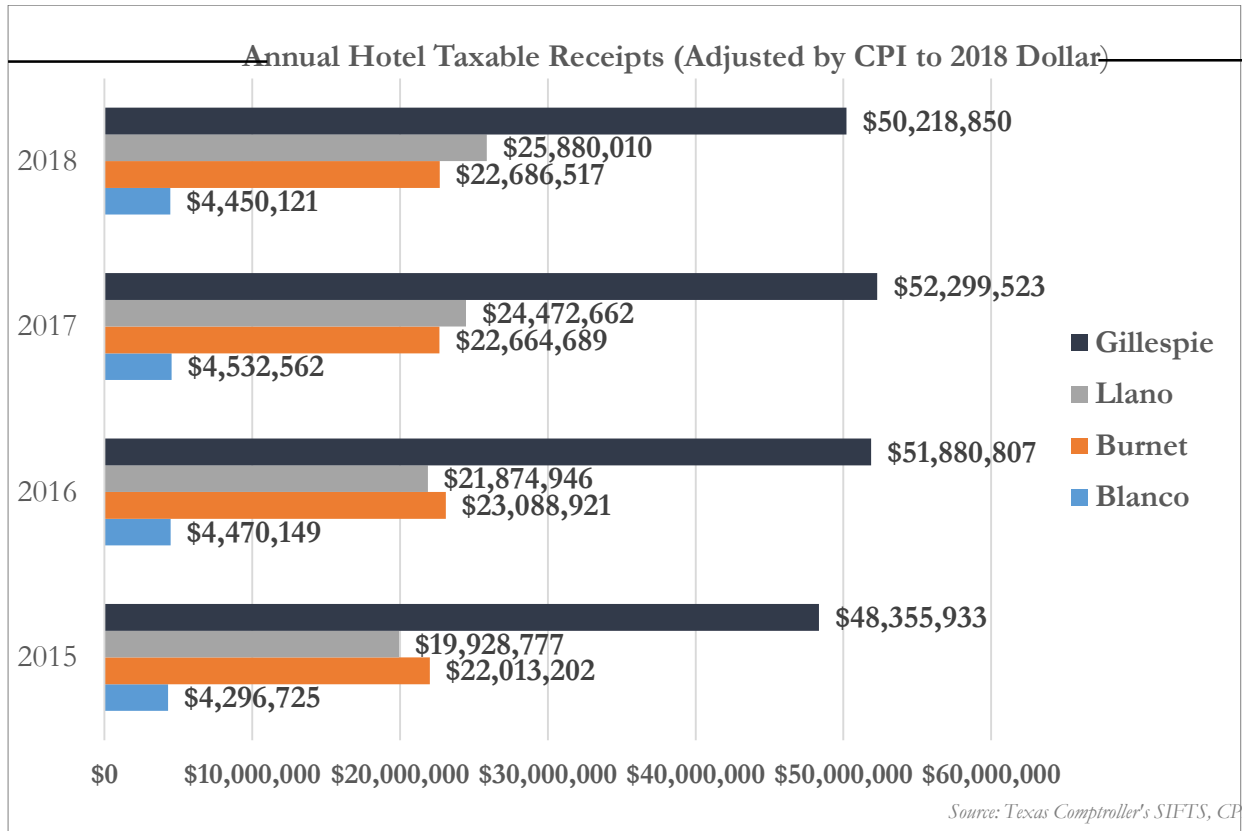


**Figure 2.31 Johnson City General Fund Revenue Sources (FY 2018 – 2019)**

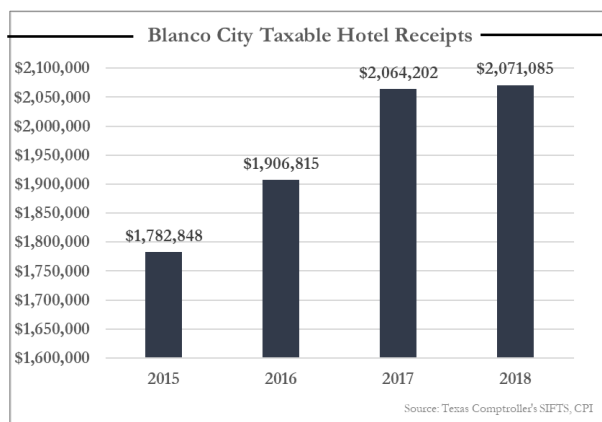
*Source: Johnson County*

## 2.22 Tourism Revenue

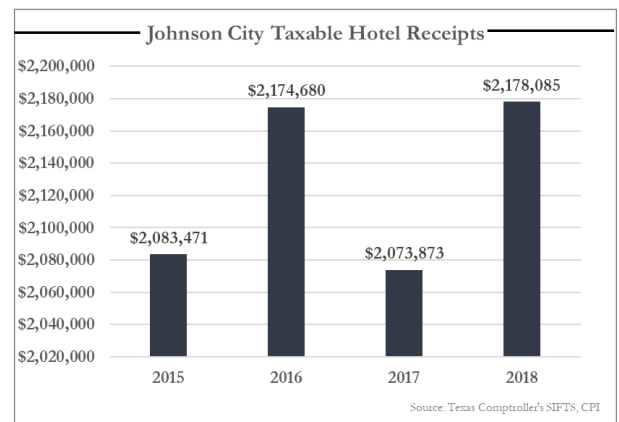
Hotel occupancy is a key measure for tourism and is looked to by hotel developers to gauge the potential of a given location to support new hotels. Although the selection of hotels is rather limited (again, a factor of the county’s small population and rural location), hotel occupancy rates are generally healthy when compared to surrounding counties.



**Figure 2.32: Annual Hotel Taxable Receipts for Blanco and Peer Counties 2015-2018**



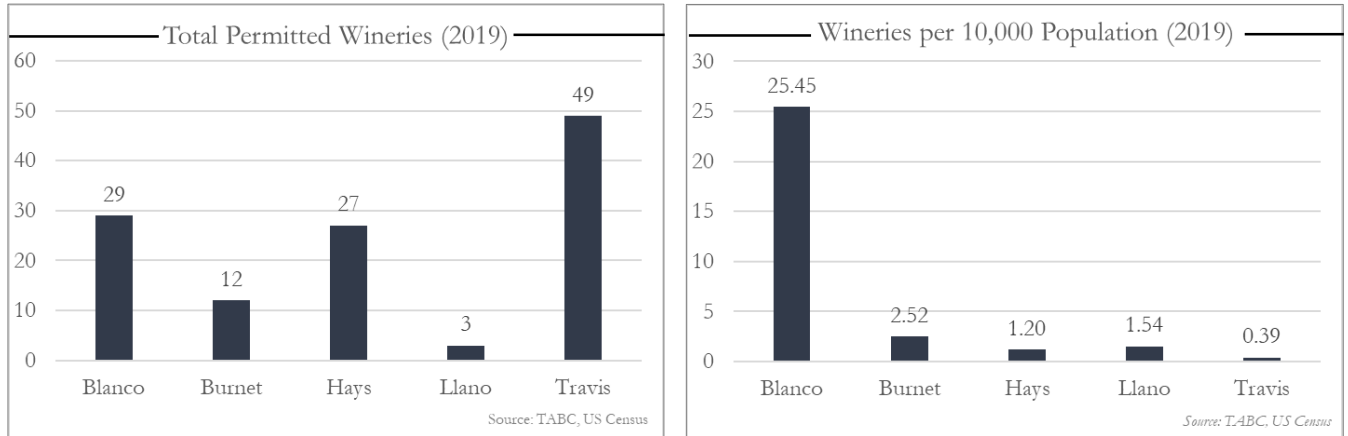
**City of Blanco Taxable Hotel Receipts 2015-2018**



**Johnson City Taxable Hotel Receipts 2015-2018**

**Figure 2.33: Municipal Hotel Receipts 2015-2018**

The general health of Blanco County’s tourism sector has produced a solid source of tax dollars which are able to be used to support public services as well as community and economic development initiatives. As of 2018, hotels in the city of Blanco and in Johnson City have posted a combined \$4.2 million in taxable hotel receipts. Through efforts to increase tourism activity in Blanco County, these figures can strengthen, leading to additional financial resources without increasing tax rates.



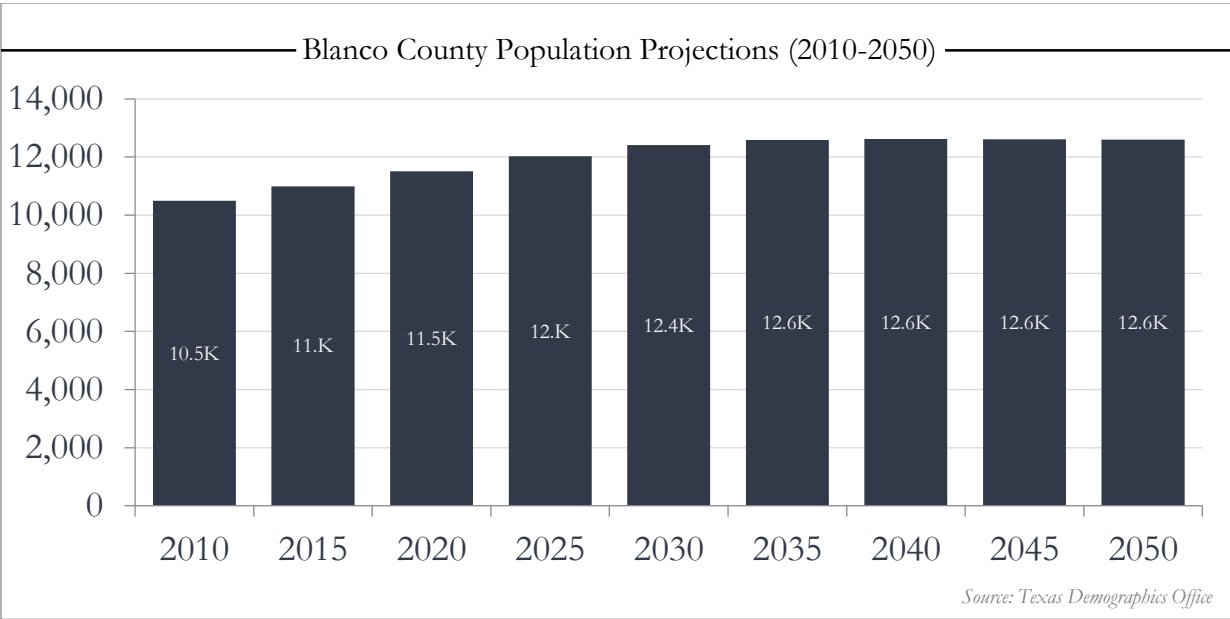
**Table 2.34: Local Wineries**

A major component of Blanco County’s tourism sector is the large presence of vineyards and wineries located in the county. Blanco County is in the heart of the Texas Wine Trail, and with a highly successful brewery and distillery present, the county has several attractive tourism assets that it can leverage to support local and regional tourism. For the presence of those assets to have a broader impact on the county’s economy, however, it will be important for communities within the county to fully incorporate them into a cohesive county-wide brand and to take steps to ensure that the county’s transportation infrastructure and downtown areas complement the growth occurring within this sector.

# Chapter 3 – Future Conditions

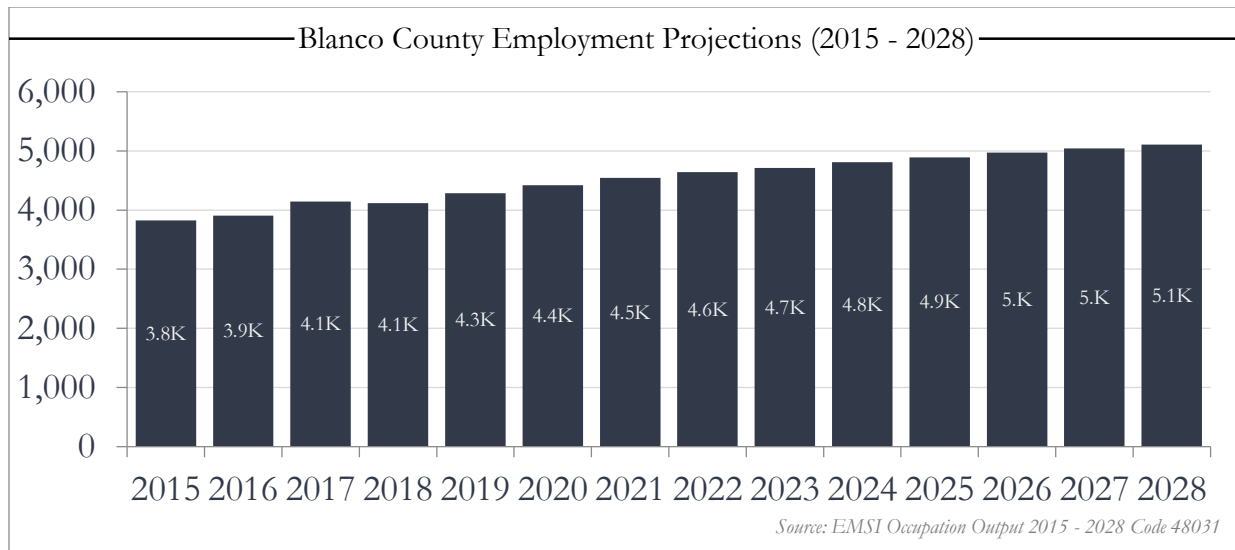
## 3.1 Future Population and Employment

Based on the 2017 U.S. Census, the population of Blanco County was 11,626. For the past three decades, the population of Blanco County has been increasing at an annual rate of between 2 and 3.5 percent per year. The population projections, as provided by the Texas Demographic Center (TDC), show an increase of more than 2,100 persons between 2010 and 2050 for Blanco County. To analyze the future roadway network, it was necessary to determine the socioeconomic characteristics of the county. The future population and employment estimates provide a basis for understanding the socioeconomic conditions expected in Blanco County. The future transportation needs will be based on growth patterns and distribution of population and employment throughout the county. The 2010 base year estimates for existing socioeconomic data are based on information provided by TDC. **Figure 3.1** illustrates the TDC base year data.



**Figure 3.1: Blanco County Population Growth Projections (2010 – 2050)**



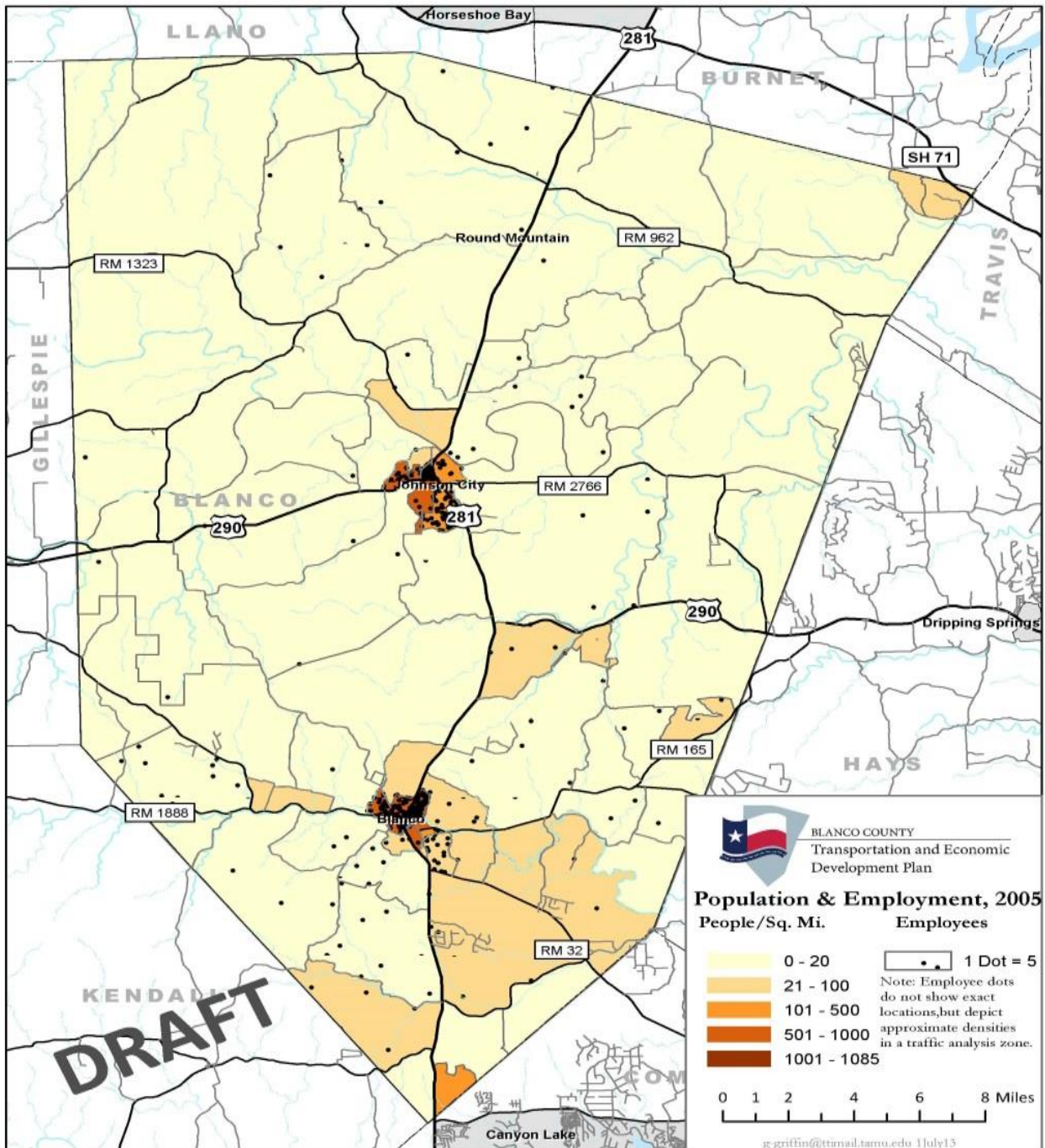


**Figure 3.2: Blanco County Employment Projections (2015 – 2028)**

With a projected population of 12,600 persons for Blanco County by 2050, it is expected that residential growth will increase along the transportation corridors leading to Blanco County from Comal, Hays and Burnet Counties as they are upgraded, and within the city limits and extra-territorial jurisdictions (ETJ) of the cities of Blanco and Johnson City. **Figure 3.2** represents the results of the population and employment density over the next 13 years. Actual employment within the county is projected to grow by less than 2,000 over the time period. The employment projections were further refined by employment sector as seen in **Table 3.1**.

Description	2019 Jobs	2029 Jobs	Change in Jobs 2019-2029	% Change in Jobs 2019-2029
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	347	330	(17)	-5.0%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	12	22	10	82.8%
Utilities	26	11	(15)	-58.5%
Construction	739	936	196	26.5%
Manufacturing	318	479	160	50.3%
Wholesale Trade	69	88	19	27.7%
Retail Trade	352	403	51	14.4%
Transportation and Warehousing	158	209	51	32.2%
Information	15	28	13	88.2%
Finance and Insurance	96	119	23	24.0%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	55	73	18	32.4%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	195	221	26	13.3%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	163	220	57	35.2%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	179	188	9	5.0%
Educational Services	35	37	2	4.8%
Health Care and Social Assistance	178	172	(6)	-3.3%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	100	142	42	42.4%
Accommodation and Food Services	352	434	82	23.3%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	196	215	19	9.9%
Government	593	643	49	8.3%
Total	4,184	4,974	790	19%

**Table 3.1: Blanco County Employment Projections by Industry 2019-2029**



**Figure 3.3 Blanco County Population and Employment Density**

Most employment growth is expected to primarily occur in Johnson City, Blanco, and along the US 281 and US 290 corridors.

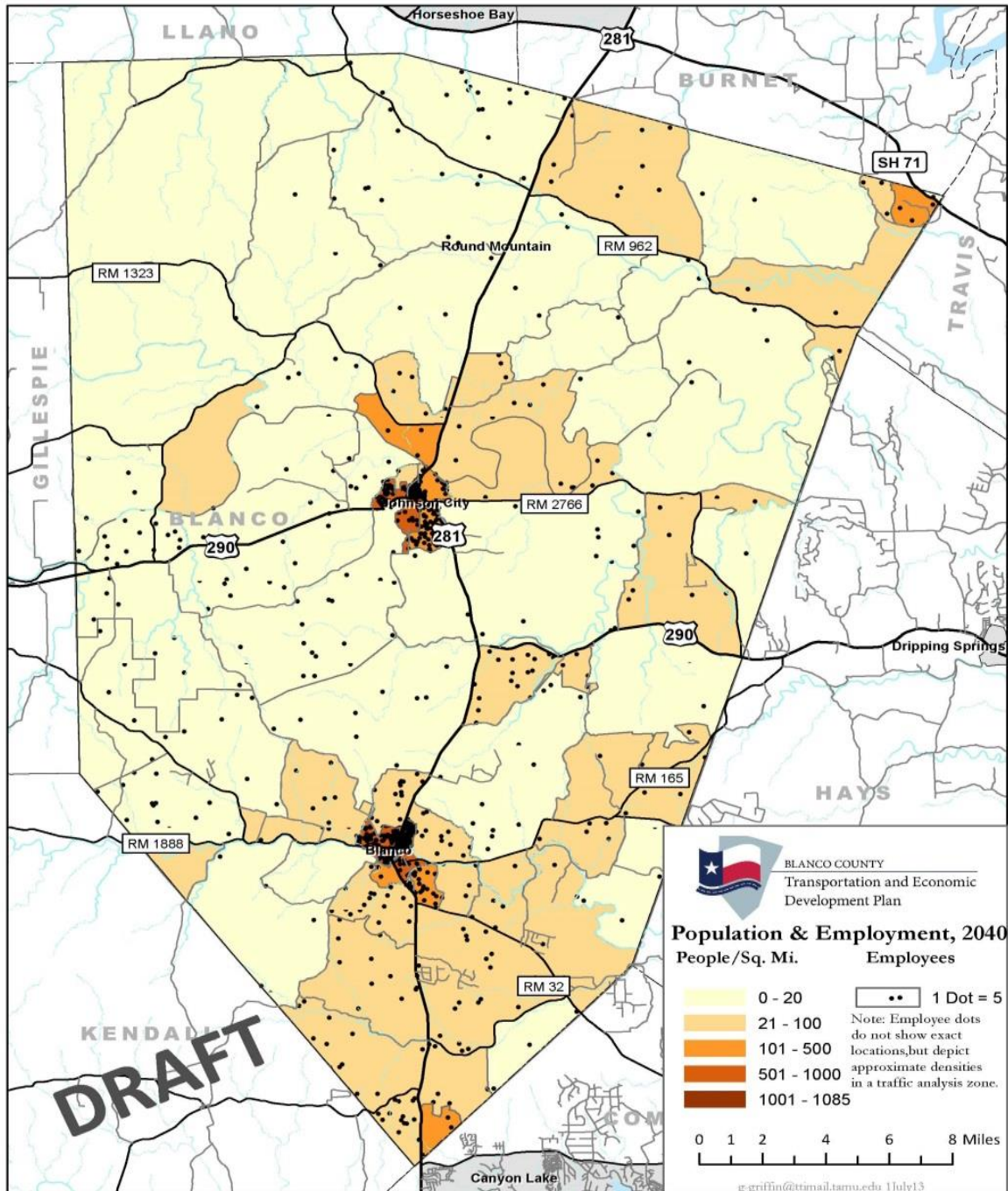


Figure 3.4 Estimated 2040 Blanco County Population and Employment Density

### 3.2 Future Land Use

The cities of Blanco and Johnson City both have comprehensive plans that include current and future land use maps. In order to implement a plan, the governing authority must have the implicit and explicit authority to manage growth (i.e. future land use). Implicitly, the governing authority's elected officials must agree on a set



of policies that reinforce the approved plan. The Johnson City and Blanco comprehensive planning documents represent these municipalities' efforts to define policies that govern future land use. The Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development Plan is a major initiative to shape the future of Blanco County. However, one must be aware that counties' abilities to control land use is extremely limited, especially in comparison to cities.

These planning documents are then implemented via explicit authorities granted to the governing bodies by the State of Texas. For municipalities, that means land use control in the form of zoning and building codes. These controls are implemented in coordination with the comprehensive plan to encourage efficient and compatible growth. Counties have less authority, but with a completed major thoroughfare plan such as this document, Blanco County can begin requiring right-of-way (ROW) dedication from developers for future transportation corridors. This explicit, but subtle, tool will allow Blanco County to do its part in encouraging an efficient transportation system while significantly reducing the cost of future ROW acquisition.

### 3.3 Planned and Programmed Transportation Improvements

TxDOT has several transportation improvements that have already been programmed for Blanco County. These planned projects are either underway or will begin in the five to 10 years. These improvements address some of the more immediate transportation needs within the county. Future needs and improvements will be addressed in Chapters 5 and 6. **Table 3.2** lists the TxDOT projects for Blanco County.

Project	Project ID	Highway/Road	Project Description	Finish Time Range
<b>PROJECTS UNDER DEVELOPMENT</b>				
A	91423011	VA	OVERLAY ROADS, PARKING LOTS AND CAMPSITE PULLOUTS WITHIN THE Park	CTB:5-10 Years
B	25301058	US 281	CONVERT TO SUPER 2	CTB:5-10 Years
J	25302032	US 281	2LN UNDIVIDED TO 4LN DIVIDED	CTB:5-10 Years
K	25301059	US 281	2LN UNDIVIDED TO 4LN DIVIDED	CTB:5-10 Years
S	70002049	SH 71	CONSTRUCT CONTINUOUS LEFT TURN LANE WITH SHOULDERS	CTB:5-10 Years
<b>Finalizing for Construction</b>				
	91423010	VA	STATE PARK IMPROVEMENTS	CTB: 4 Years
C	25307006	SL 163	LEVEL UP, SEAL COAT & TY D OVERLAY	CTB: 4 Years
D	25204002	SS 356	SPOT REPAIR AND TY D OVERLAY	CTB: 4 Years
G	25203052	US 281	SEAL COAT	CTB: 4 Years

H	11306030	US 290	LEVEL-UP AND SEAL COAT	underway or begins soon
I	11305049	US 290	LEVEL-UP AND SEAL COAT	underway or begins soon
M	25301061	US 281	TOM OVERLAY	CTB:5-10 Years
O	153401018	RM 1623	LEVEL-UP, REPAIR, AND SEAL COAT	CTB: 4 Years
Q	25301062	US 281	REHABILITATE BRIDGE	CTB: 4 Years
R	327801003	RM 473	IMPROVE GUARDRAIL TO DESIGN STANDARDS, SAFETY TREAT FIXED	CTB: 4 Years
<b>Construction Scheduled</b>				
E	11306029	US 290	PROFILE EDGELINE & CENTERLINE MARKINGS	underway or begins soon
F	11305048	US 290	PROFILE EDGELINE & CENTERLINE MARKS	underway or begins soon
L	28501004	RM 2325	LEVEL-UP AND SEAL COAT	underway or begins soon
N	25301060	US 281	SEAL COAT	underway or begins soon
P	11303031	US 290	FULL DEPTH REPAIR, UNDERSEAL AND TOM	underway or begins soon

**Table 3.2 TxDOT Transportation Improvements for Blanco County**

# Chapter 4: Current Conditions and Key Issues

## 4.1 Business Development

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There is a popular adage no local elected official wants to hear: economic development is a marathon, not a sprint. This is especially true for Blanco County and its cities. With a limited available workforce, much of the business development that can be expected to occur is likely to be generated through organic growth and local entrepreneurship, as seen with the county's distillery and ale brewing companies. This business development cannot always, if ever, be traced to a specific initiative or campaign; rather it typically occurs as local business activity builds upon itself, leading to better utilization of existing infrastructure and resources and the development of wider and stronger business linkages. For these reasons, organic business development is often more enduring than growth resulting from the recruitment of a company from somewhere else which, after the tax abatement expires, moves on to another location.

- Having workers to supply local businesses will be a challenge until the county's population grows so that more people live and work here
- Telecommunication services are critical to businesses who may conduct business transaction online or may have built a business model dependent on a robust online presence
- Housing is a chicken-and-egg issue when discussed in terms of economic development; if there were more housing units, more workers would be available to supply a labor force. But if more employers were here, the employees would create a greater demand for housing
- Roads are a long-term issue when it comes to economic development. Currently, there are no major employers currently located on or taking access from the state highways. However, as a county with a large portion of roadways, development of any nature along these corridors will impact future functionality and needs to be addressed. Increases in residential or commercial development will present an increased trip and traffic volumes to a portion of the highway corridor. Development mitigations efforts should be considered including, traffic impact analysis, access management study, and right-of-way dedication fee to partially funded local modification of shoulders for turn lanes.
- Increased traffic volume on Highway 281 is inevitable; the challenge is how to capture the attention of motorists that might have the time and inclination to break from their trip to get coffee, have a meal, or stop at local shops and boutiques.
- Urbanization from the north and south are acknowledged trends but will not have a significant impact on economic development for several years. Development patterns will eventually support more retail and professional services. The driving tenets to any retail expansion remain trade area, population size and forecasted population. As Blanco County eclipses the 11,000 population mark and grows toward 15,000 to 20,000, more of these opportunities will become available. The best response to future development is to ensure development codes are reviewed to ensure optimal development outcomes.



## 4.2 Economic Development To-Date

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Representatives of both cities have indicated their interest in economic development activities with an eye toward small businesses in the downtowns and a proactive approach to tourism, particularly festivals and special events. During the economic development committee meeting, the need for a better approach to parking during festivals was mentioned, possibly including more land. Parking and movement of pedestrians is also a challenge, both for special events as well as for vehicles parking along the highways when they stop to go into retail businesses.

Both the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce and the Blanco Chamber of Commerce have websites that promote tourism and have current events listed which is important. Johnson City's Chamber website provides wine-dine-shop options, lodging, and lists several wineries. Blanco also has a visitor's bureau website that has useful information. Neither city's website nor those of the other organizations noted have a section on economic development resources. When looking for information on this area of Texas, Cofran's Texas, the Hill Country Portal is packed with information, links, and refers to economic development in Johnson City with an email link to the mayor; it is unclear who the sponsor is for this website.

## 4.3 Challenges

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Because Blanco County and its cities are small and rural, the human and financial resources are limited which means the pool of individuals who are actively involved in the community is limited; and those who are willing volunteers are called on often but risk getting burned out. The limited resources available (particularly the time of those actively supporting community development efforts) coupled with the work required to support the execution of strategies that are regarded favorably within the county highlights the importance of coordinating efforts and investments in ways that can produce a significant impact on the economy and on the community.

The small, rural population of Blanco County also presents a challenge to attracting most national and regional retailers; the demographics simply do not meet the criteria used by retail developers and their favorite tenants (and their lenders) to choose to locate in a particular community. Although, in time, Blanco County can expect to see its population rise to the point that it may be in a better position to support broader retail development, that will take many years and should not be a central component of an economic development strategy for the county and its individual communities. Retailers and restaurants are unlikely to come to Blanco County from outside in the numbers that may be desired, however this is not to say that there are not opportunities for Blanco County to grow its retail and restaurant offerings – it will simply require that growth to be spurred from inside the county, primarily by local independent businesses.

There was some level of insistence that emerged in focus groups and survey responses that the county government should be funding the economic development efforts, presumably because economic development planning is being done county-wide and should be an additional layer on top of what the cities are doing. While counties need to be included in incentive policies and development decisions, they typically do not fund or take the lead. Of the ten counties in CAPCOG, only Bastrop and Burnet counties provide any funding for economic development and in both cases, the focus is tourism only.

Because of a limited workforce, as outlined in the "Existing Conditions" section above, the attraction of primary employers (a firm in an industry such as manufacturing that employs a significant number of workers

and produces goods or services that are typically consumed outside of the region) is not a strategy likely to reap a strong degree of success, particularly in the near-term.

The promotion of events and assets throughout the county to attract visitors is currently being done with some success; we are unable to gather specific metrics on attendance to festivals, etc. that would detail the extent of that success, however anecdotal evidence and input from focus groups offer reason for confidence. The best way to maximize efforts for a robust promotion campaign is through a coordinated effort of all entities engaged in tourism and visitor outreach efforts; this is a challenge today because there is insufficient motivation to work for the greater good of the county, even as stronger coordination of efforts could be expected to benefit all portions of the county.

## 4.4 Organization and Funding

In addition to the local funding sources discussed below, this section of the plan presents basic material covering funding sources for transportation programs and discusses traditional transportation funding sources, such as pass-through financing and regional mobility authorities are also discussed.

Finance Tools	Action	Authority	Project Type	Requirements	PROs	CONs
<b>Public Improvement Districts (PID)</b>	Improvement Finance	CH 372 of the Local Government Code - City	Public Improvements in a specifically designated district	Assessments for specific purposes in addition to property taxes	Fund non-municipal improvements	Assessments
<b>Type A Economic Development Sales Tax Corporation</b>	Business Development	Ch 501- 505 of the Local Government Code – City: municipal election to create or dissolve	Projects promoting development that creates primary employment	Revenues generated by up to ½ cent sales tax; established by municipal election	May be useful to fund relocation of industry	Primarily for job creations; expenditures are more limited than Type B Corp.
<b>Type B Economic Development Sales Tax Corporation</b>	Business Development and Supplemental Improvement Finance	Ch 501- 505 of the Local Government Code – City: municipal election to create or dissolve	Projects promoting commercial development and quality of life more generally	Revenues generated by up to ½ cent sales tax; established by municipal election	Provides public funds to leverage with other public or private funding sources	May fund wide variety of economic development projects including “quality of life”
<b>Hotel Occupancy Taxes</b>	Business Development	Ch 156 of the Tax Code - City	Programs or projects to promote tourism and hotel and convention industries (heads in beds)	Revenues taxed on room rental, limited to tourism promotion	Funding for advertising or promotional materials for redevelopment	Limited uses
<b>Property Tax Abatement</b>	Business Development	Ch 312 of the Tax Code	Business Retention and expansion (new capital generation)	Requirements for investment and job creation established by the city, granted to individual business interest	Relatively simple to administer; deferment of revenues vs. capital outlay	Targets specific projects/investment, not area
<b>Community development Block Grants (CDBG)</b>	Improvement Finance and Supplemental Improvement Finance	Federal Authority – Funds flow to City via County or Council of Governments	Infrastructure, social programs, affordable housing, and economic development programs	Compete with other small cities for available funds to benefit low-mod Census tracts	Properly structured application may provide wide benefits	Highly-competitive federal oversight requirements, project specific
<b>Grants and Loans</b>	Business Development and Supplemental Improvement Finance	Ch 380 of the Local Government Code	Programs to promote business development commercial activity to promote local economic development	An ordinance a project & financing plan appointment of a board increment only available	Ordinarily limited to “public” improvements	Does not provide additional sources of revenue to fund

Blanco County is adjacent to but not part of the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), and it does not belong to any other MPO. Therefore, transportation funding programs that are administered through or with the cooperation of an MPO will not be eligible for use in Blanco County. Should Blanco County join CAMPO in the future, funding opportunities through the MPO should be considered.

However, in addition to CAMPO, there are a variety of funding opportunities from regional planning partners and stakeholders. CAPCOG provides regional planning support to Central Texas counties, including Blanco County. The Capital Area Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CARTPO) is a branch of CAPCOG that works for rural transportation planning and funding. CARTPO serves as a forum for elected officials to come together on transportation issues to recommend changes in policy and practice, advocate for legislation, recommend regional priorities, direct certain planning and data initiatives, oversee the federally proscribed local consultation process, and collaborate with CAMPO. CARTPO and TxDOT often work together in planning and funding transportation projects.

There are funding opportunities from state planning organizations as well. TxDOT has many ongoing and planned projects for the county. The Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority (CTRMA) can also issue bonds for transportation projects. Federal and state spending programs are also available.

# Chapter 5 - Travel Demand Modeling

Following the study of the existing conditions of an area, the next step in a transportation planning process involves analysis of the information to estimate future transportation demands. The travel demand model serves as an important tool during the analysis of the future transportation system. Its primary role is to forecast vehicular trips and then distribute them into the county network of roadways to estimate future roadway level of service. The section provides an overview of the modeling procedure used to develop and evaluate the existing and future network performance as well as the travel demand model results for the 2045 forecast year.

## 5.1 Model Development

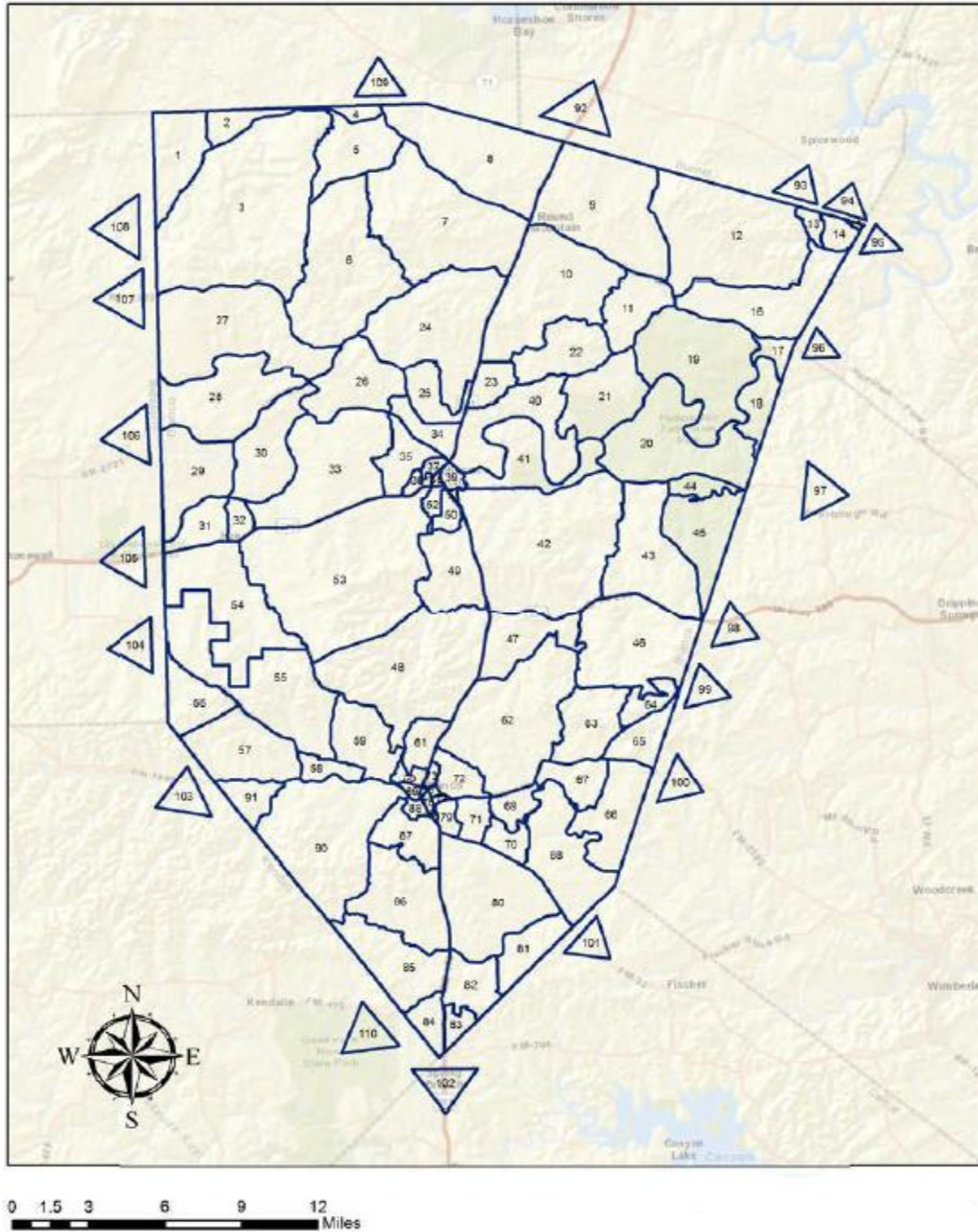
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To develop the base model, the project partners relied on data previously provided by TxDOT. The data provided included the definition of 91 internal traffic analysis zones (TAZ's), relatively small geographic zones used for analysis of travel activity, and 19 external traffic nodes to represent traffic entering into the county from the exterior boundary.

## 5.2 Traffic Analysis Zones

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Socioeconomic data were developed to include various categories and allocated to TAZ's. The TAZ's are geographic areas, polygons, generally bonded by a roadway network, natural barriers, or geographic features. The Blanco County model consists of two zone types: internal and external. Internal zones are the zones within the study area, and external zones are placed along roadways entering and leaving Blanco County. **Figure 5.1** shows the TAZ boundaries developed for this study. There are a total of 110 zones, including 91 internal and 19 external zones. Figure 5.1 provides a map of the TAZ's for the Blanco County travel demand model.



**Figure 5.1 Traffic Analysis Zones (TAZ's) for Blanco County Travel Demand Model**

Most urban travel demand models follow a four-step process that includes mode choice (transit, auto, etc.). Since Blanco County currently has limited bus service, the number of trips provided does not make a significant impact on roadway capacity. Therefore, the travel demand model was developed using the following three-step process:

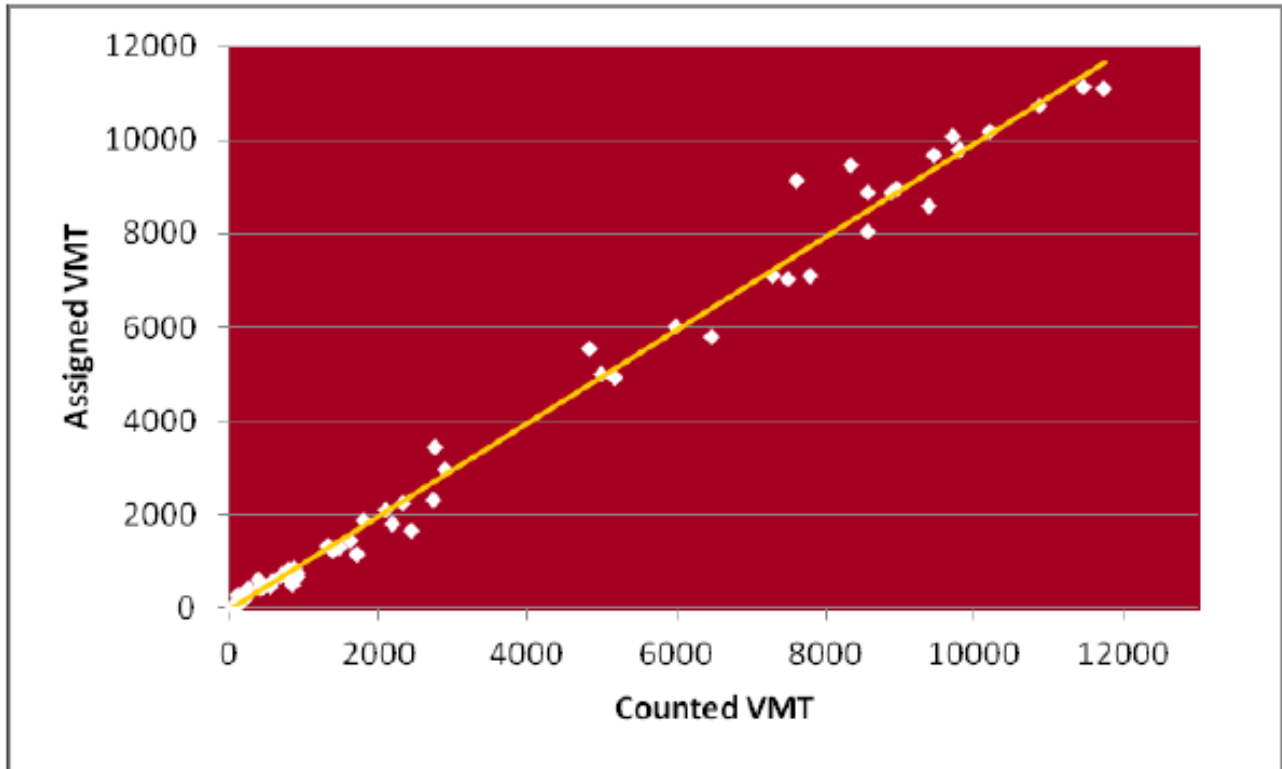
1. Trip generation: Trip generation is simple statistical model that projects the member of weekday trips a household will produce, based on household income, number of autos owned, number of workers and household size.<sup>1</sup> The objective of trip generation is to estimate the trip productions and trip attractions by trip purposes for each zone and external station in the region. The zonal trip generation estimates for Blanco County were prepared using TxDOT’s TripCAL5 trip generation software.
2. Trip distribution: The second step matches trip origins at households (by zone) to trip destinations at employment locations (by zone).<sup>2</sup> The objective of trip distribution is to determine the origin-destination trip patterns of the trip productions and attractions estimated in the trip generation step. The trip distribution models were performed using TxDOT's ATOM2 software.
3. Trip assignment: the final step of this travel demand model involves assigning the vehicles to the networks of roads.<sup>3</sup> The objective of trip assignment is to load the trips into appropriate links in the roadway network in order to identify levels of roadway congestion. In order to ensure that the model accurately estimates traffic, a calibration process is needed. The assigned traffic volumes are compared against actual traffic counts for a known year- in this case, 2005. The 2005 roadway network was validated by first comparing the regions assigned vehicle miles traveled (VMT’s) to counted VMT’s. The results indicated that the overall network assigned VMT’s (on the counted links) was slightly larger than 100 percent, which indicated a good match between modeled and observed travel demand. **Table 5.1** provides the region wide VMT summary.

Counted VMT	Assigned VMT	Percent of VMT
199,776	200,337	100.28

**Table 5.1 Study Area VMT Summary**



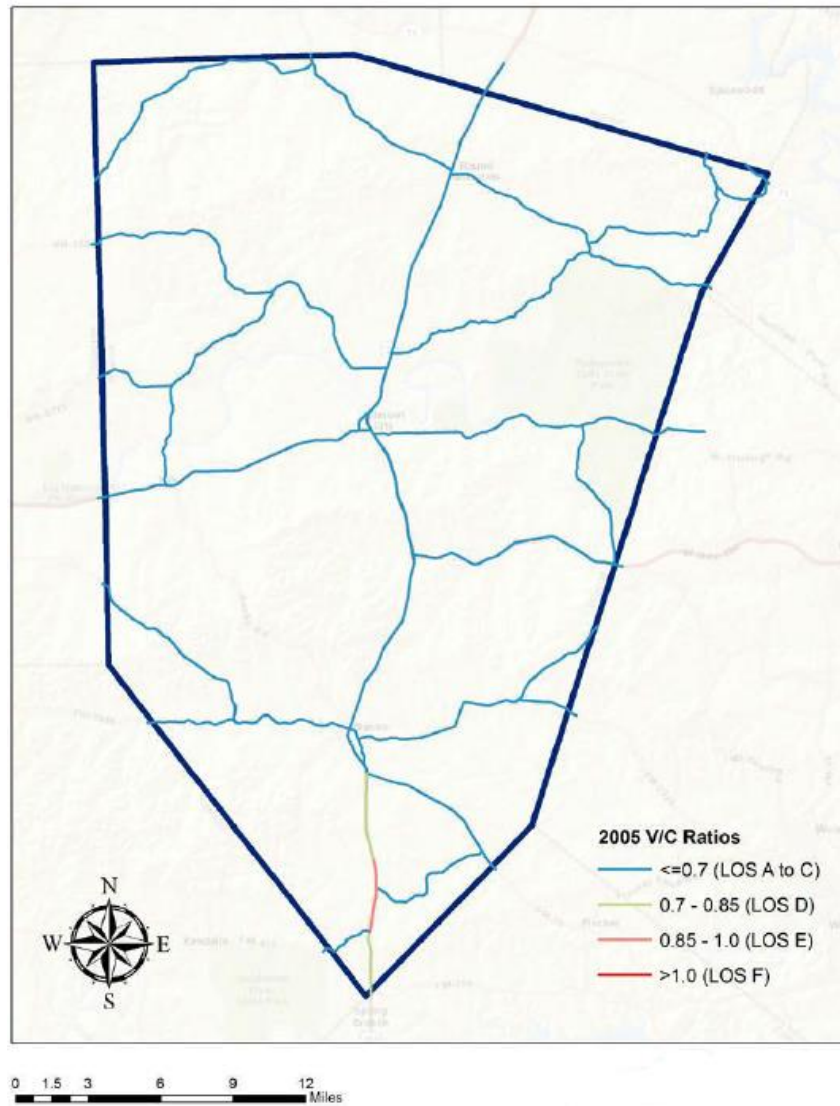
The final step in the validation process was to examine the model's ability to replicate traffic for each individual roadway network link. As seen in the scattergram in **Figure 5.2**, the diagonal line represents a tight fit, while the values above the line represent an over-assignment and the ones below the line represent under-assignments. Overall, the graphic indicates a reasonable fit of the individual assigned links for the 2005 Blanco County base model.



**Figure 5.2 Scattergram of Counted VMT's to Assigned VMT's**

### Traffic Volume Projections

Based on the 2005 base year assignment results, the assigned total VMT's in the study area were approximately 593,895 miles per day, while the estimated vehicle hour traveled (VHT's) were 12.791 hours per day. The average daily resulting speed on the network was 45.84 miles per hour. The resulting 2005 traffic assignment volumes for the study area, as well as the volume-to-capacity (V/C) ratios (the number of vehicles on the road divided by the capacity of the roadway infrastructure) are shown in **Figure 5.3**.



**Figure 5.3 Modeled Blanco County Traffic Volumes and Level of Service**

## 5.3 Evaluation of Future Needs

Once the 2005 base year travel demand model was developed and validated, the model was used to evaluate the transportation needs for the 2040 planning horizon. To achieve this, two different model scenarios using the 2040 forecast year demographic database were developed:

Scenario I: No build model scenario. The network system was evaluated without making any adjustments or improvements to the 2005 base year network under the 2040 projected population and employment growth.

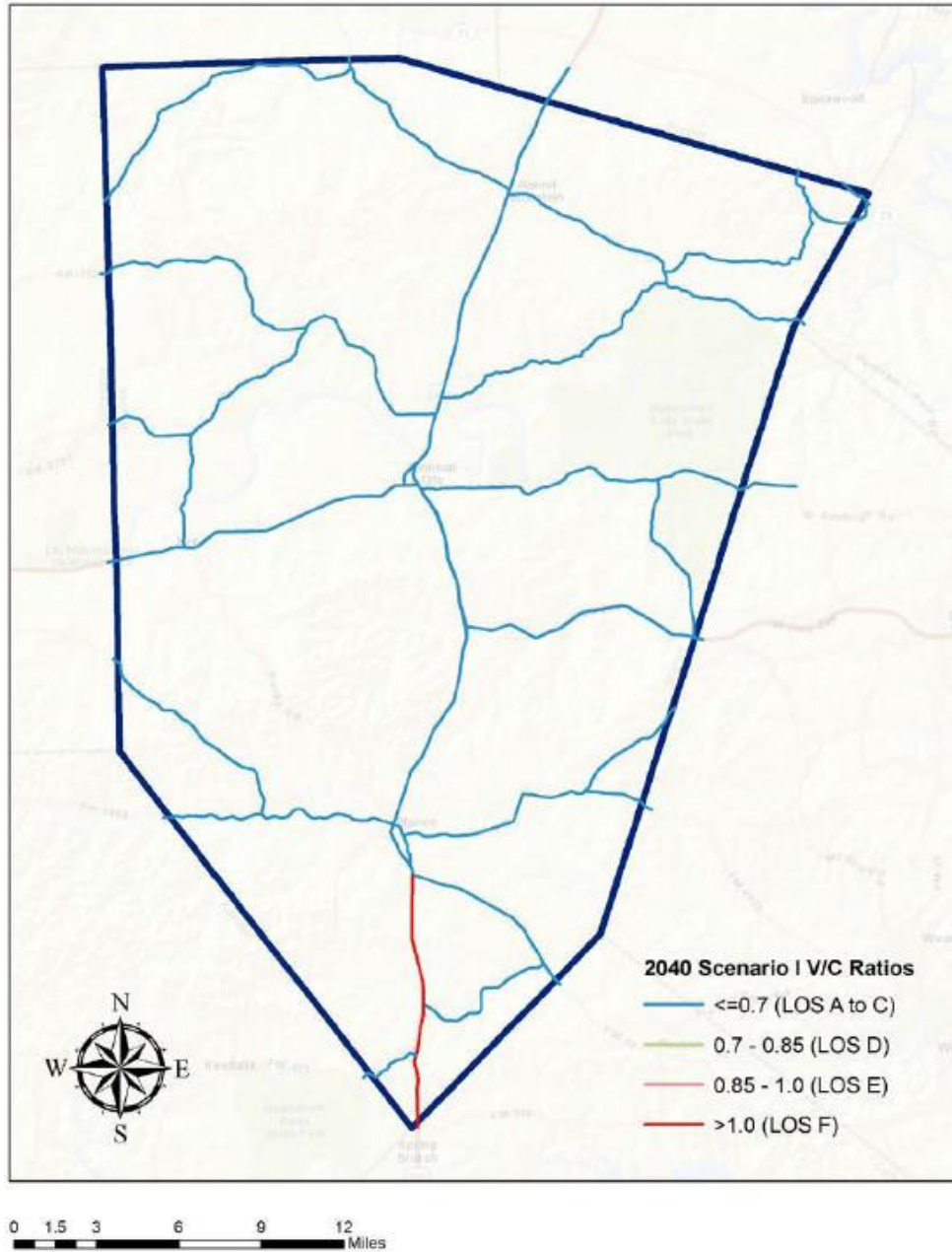
Scenario II: Improved US 281 scenario: The network system was evaluated after improving the capacity of US 281 south of the city of Blanco to the Comal County line (with a change from a two-lane to four-lane roadway) under the 2040 projected population and employment growth.

**Table 5.2** presents the traffic assignment summary results for Scenario I and II as well as the base year model for comparison.

Statistics	2005 Base Year	2040 Scenario I No Build	2040 Scenario II Improved US 281
Total Assigned VMT	593,895	836,065	835,753
VMT/Person	63.43	49.42	49.4
VMT/Household	158.8	114.75	114.71
Average Input Network Speed	46.43	45.57	45.56
Total Assigned VHT Using Input Speeds	12,791	18,348	18,342
Average Resulting Network Speed	45.85	44.1	45.16
Total Assigned VHT Using Resulting Speeds	12,954	18,958	18,505
Average Trip Length for All Trip Purposes	10.21	9.59	9.59
Capacity VMT	2,692,027	2,715,185	2,813,203
Assigned VMT/Capacity VMT (V/C ratio)	22.06%	30.79%	29.71%

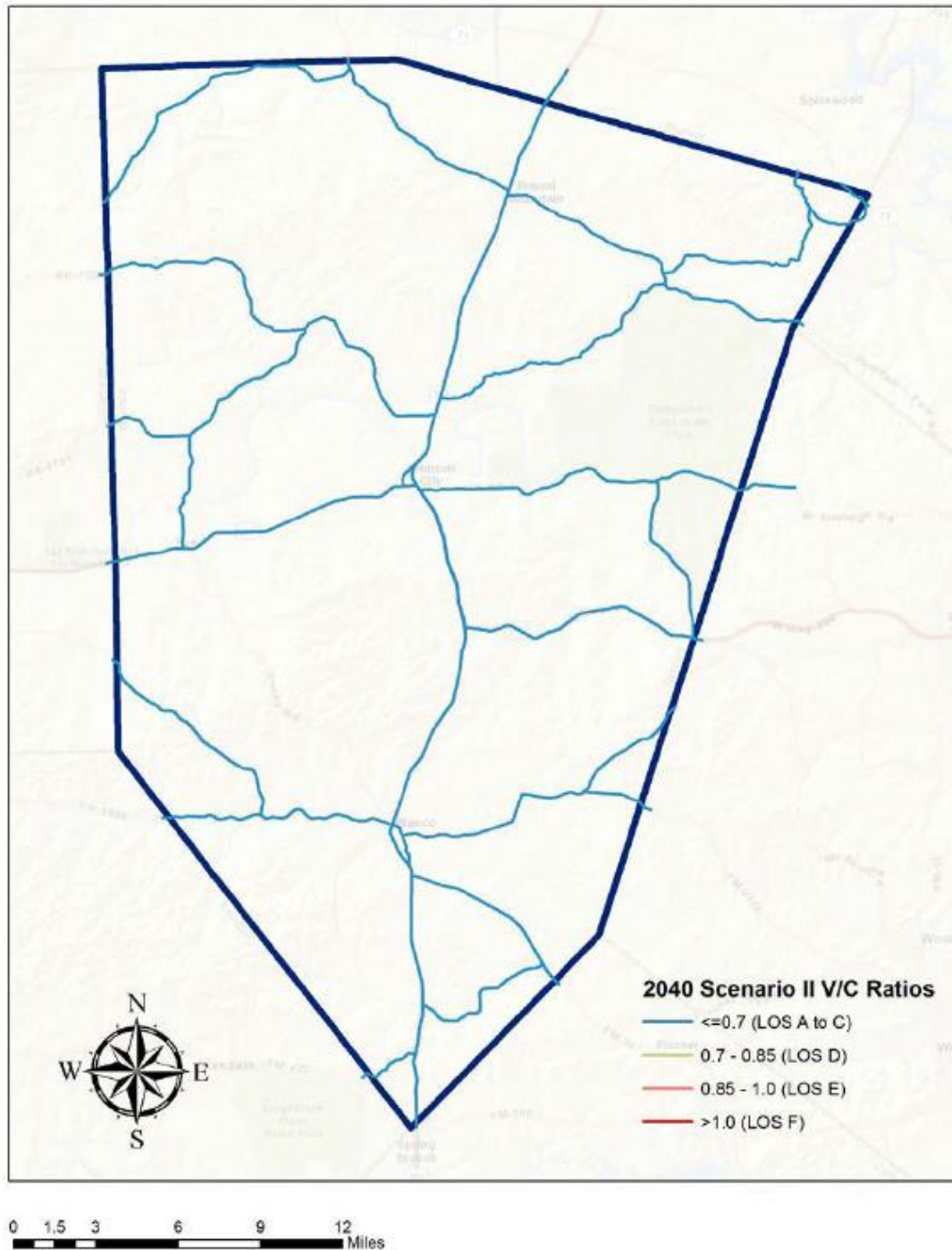
**Table 5.2 Forecast Year Traffic Assignment Summary Results**

As shown in **Figure 5.3**, there were no roadway segments in the base year model with LOS F (forced traffic flow with significant delays). When the 2040 no-build scenario (Scenario I) was applied, US 281 south of city of Blanco experienced congestion, with a V/C ratio exceeding 1, resulting in LOS F. The Scenario I traffic volume results are shown in **Figure 5.4**.



**Figure 5.4. Blanco County Model Traffic Volumes and LOS—Scenario I: No Build.**

However, under Scenario II, the congestion on the southern portion of US 281 was eliminated. In scenario II, the southern part of US 281 was improved by adding lanes to the roadway segment. The modeling results for Scenario II showed that no roadway segments exceeded a V/C ration of 1 or had LOS f, and all roadway segments had LOS A to C. The Scenario II traffic results are shown in **Figure 5.5**.



**Figure 5.5 Blanco County Model Traffic Volumes and LOS Scenario II: Improved US 281.**

# Chapter 6 – Transportation and Economic Development

## 6.1 Economic Development Overview

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Combining transportation and economic development in the planning process for Blanco County is especially appropriate since so much of this county’s development has been along the highway and connecting road systems, a trend that continues. Several economic development issues directly or indirectly relate to the county’s road network including commuting patterns of the labor force, opportunities for future residential and commercial development, and the link between traffic and tourism. Also, county transportation plans have typically looked at major employers’ impact on existing traffic generation; in this case, the county could plan for infrastructure based on desired locations for future employers over the next 20 years.

This project’s scope of work blends the transportation planning process with the updating and integration of strategies for economic growth, with strong consideration to infrastructure needs for future development and to the support and management of growth that preserves Blanco County’s heritage and culture.

CAPCOG convened four “focus group” meetings with an advisory committee group representing citizens involved and interested in economic development. Invitations went to public and private sector representatives who could provide some historical information about past efforts, what works and what does not, as well as provide insight on new business interests, new development, or key challenges. The participation included some of the planning committee but was not limited to those members.

## 6.2 The Approach to Economic Development Planning

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CAPCOG’s approach with technical assistance to cities and counties for developing economic development strategies is always grounded. Often communities arbitrarily select strategies that cannot be supported by necessary factors of business development: available workers with appropriate skills or access to training, available infrastructure (water, sewer, roads, housing, telecommunications), reasonable cost of doing business, and coordinated community leadership. The recommendations for economic development in this plan will be an honest assessment based on information and demographic data available, and it will identify resources appropriate for achieving realistic goals.

It is important to note that the term “economic development” refers to the involvement of the public sector to induce some level of investment that improves local economic factors; private sector investment by an individual or a business without public sector influence is simply capitalism. So, an economic development plan for Blanco County should be the combined forces of the local governments and other publicly funded organizations for a common cause: to bring more dollars to the business community which will in turn create jobs and pay taxes. Business development strategies can include, starting a new business or expanding an existing business in categories that include more services and products for local citizens, businesses that attract visitors, and production of goods for local use and export. Sometimes the most fundamental strategy involves building the foundation for future growth and economic prosperity.



## 6.3 Public Involvement Process

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Development of the Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development Plan was guided by the goal of developing a data informed and locally supported plan by Blanco County for Blanco County. From the start of the project, the need for community outreach was recognized, and a process was developed.

### **Advisory Committee**

An advisory committee was comprised of county residents, elected officials and administrators from the cities of Blanco and Johnson City, local business owners, PEC delegates, and local chamber of commerce representatives.

The advisory committee was tasked with providing insight for the planning process and ensuring that the community's vision was reflected in the final plan. The committee completed the following activities:

- Provided background on development patterns, trends and future needs for member organizations
- Provided feedback on vetting of assumptions, such as the allocation of future population and employment growth within the county
- Participated in a mapping exercise to identify issues and to propose recommendations for transportation improvements
- Reviewed and provided comments on the draft plan
- Developed and supported the final plan adoption process

### **Blanco County Survey**

As noted, a specific goal of the Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development Plan included gathering residents' opinions and thoughts about the future growth of Blanco County. In total, approximately 225 residents completed the survey. The survey was hosted on a web page and links to the survey were conveyed through newspaper articles, city websites, county websites, chamber Facebook pages and Twitter.

### **Presentations**

In addition to gathering input through the survey, the project team provided a public presentation to Commissioner's Court and hosted a public meeting to inform residents about the status of the plan and provide them an opportunity to comment on the work. The public meeting was held February 18, 2020 with approximately 25 people in attendance. At the meeting, the attendees had the opportunity to view several exhibits including:

- TxDOT Functional Classification Map: an exhibit describing the functional classification of major roadways in Blanco County
- 2017 Annual Average Daily Traffic
- TxDOT Roadway Projects for Blanco County
- Blanco County TxDOT Highway System Map for comments

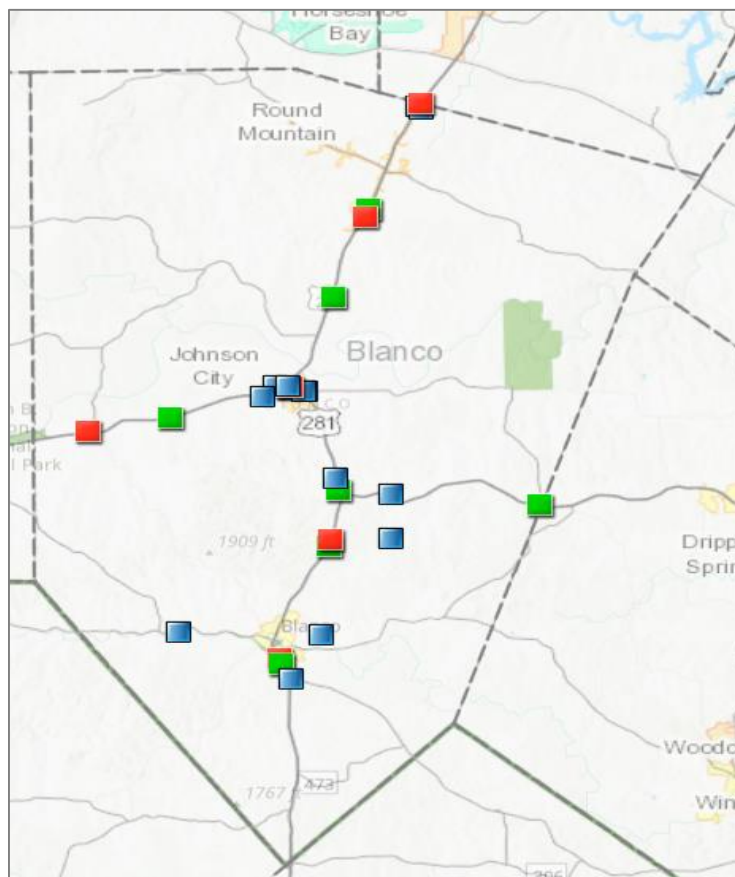
### **Public Meeting Summary**

For the community, safety issues were the most common mentioned criteria for prioritizing operational projects. Often projects under development are a result of feedback and comments received from the public. In other cases, projects are developed to respond to increased volume or to improve levels of service. During this round of public meetings, several recommended projects by the public were in areas not

currently under consideration for improvements. For TxDOT to consider projects for an area that are outside of the current proposed or developed projects the community must request that a study be initiated by TxDOT's Traffic Office. It was mentioned that this process is first-come, first-serve (based largely on funding), and it was linked to the colloquialism "the squeaky wheel gets the grease."

The most mentioned criteria for prioritizing added capacity projects were fatalities and crashes. After safety concerns, congestion was consistently mentioned as the most often used criterion for evaluating which corridors need added capacity. Congestion was evaluated based on delay cost and a.m./p.m. peak-hour levels of service.

In addition to safety and congestion, the corridors where conditions are currently acceptable, based on delay cost and a.m./p.m. peak hour levels of service, have considerable development currently underway or planned and were mentioned as areas where TxDOT engineers are aware of and are developing projects or getting ready to initiate some improvements.



**Figure 6.1 Public Meeting Transportation Comments**

## 6.4 Infrastructure Needs Assessment

An integral part of developing an effective plan is assessing the needs of the county. The transportation requirements of the county may also differ depending on one’s perspective. Municipal, county and TxDOT technical staff may recognize needs differently than the general public. To ensure a comprehensive assessment, Blanco County selected a diverse stakeholder committee that represented a broad spectrum of county residents with diversified areas of expertise and knowledge. The stakeholder committee, with input from citizens that attended the public meetings, developed a list of recommended transportation improvements along with suggested economic development related enhancements, as shown in **Table 6.2**.

The transportation model provides valuable information about how the system will operate as various improvements are made or not made. Using the no-build (see Chapter 5), planners can see where the worst conditions occur. Inputs into the model can also be adjusted and will result in different outcomes. For example, an increase in truck traffic percentages will produce a different result than using passenger auto inputs. As conditions change, the model can be updated to reflect the change, including as the population and employment of Blanco County grows and additional daily traffic volumes increase. To maintain economic vitality as well as the quality of life of citizens, the transportation plan must be updated.

Moreover, the transportation model shows which roads will need expansion in the future. These allow the county to proactively plan for growth and expansion. The county may require developers to donate or convey right of way as part of the development process. This plan gives the Commissioner’s Court the authority to do so. Identifying infrastructure needs assures that environmental quality concerns can be avoided or mitigated when planning future transportation improvements.

## 6.5 Economic Development Recommendations

<b>Small Business Development Recommendations</b>	
1.	Expand resources for small business
2.	Downtown beautification and lighting
3.	Commercial signage standards are too restrictive/not business friendly
4.	Expansion of broadband service
<b>Tourism &amp; Recreation Recommendations</b>	
5.	One-stop-website for tourism/recreation county-wide
6.	Downtown access for events
7.	County authority for HOT collections
<b>Housing Recommendations</b>	
8.	Expand workforce housing

**Table 6.2 Recommended Economic Development Improvements**

## 6.6 Transportation Recommendations

<b>CMTE/PUBLIC RECOMMENDED ROADWAY EXPANSIONS/OPERATIONAL IMPROVEMENTS</b>			
	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>ISSUES</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1.	City of Blanco 281 Bypass	Create an alternate route to 281 and keep the existing route as the "Business Route" through City of Blanco.	Locally initiated by local governments.
2.	City of Blanco US 281 Tractor Supply	Traffic speed and cross turning traffic are dangerous combination.	TTC is taking action to reduce the speed limit in the area.
3.	South of Blanco: US 281	Install a traffic light at FM 473 and US 281	
4.	City of Blanco SH 281 at 4 <sup>th</sup> Street	Can the intersection be re-engineered to allow for easier turning movements	
5.	US 281 (Burnet County line to Johnson City)	Expand shoulders to allow for acceleration/deceleration lane for merging traffic?	
6.	US 281- South-Central Blanco County	Improve traffic flow and left turn problems	TxDOT will restripe and create a turn lane in the next 3-5 years.
7.	US 281 (US 290 to Comal Co. line)	Improve access from Indian Hills Drive onto US 281 for better turning protection	
8.	US 281 & FM 32	The intersection configuration can no longer handle the traffic in the area. Can the intersection be enhanced/widen?	Intersection improvement project that can be referred to TxDOT Traffic Operation Office for study and response.
9.	US 281 @ FM 32	Installation of signalized intersection	Request for a traffic study needs to be submitted to the TxDOT Traffic Operation office. If conditions warrant TxDOT will develop a plan.
10.	US 290 (US 281 to Hays Co. Line)	Flashing beacon indicating the 3222 and Hwy 290 intersection be installed along the 290 ROW	
11.	US 290 (US 281 to Hays Co. Line)	Widen the shoulders through the McCall Creek area	
12.	Johnson City	Speeding along 290 through Johnson City	Due to the roadway classification, reduction in speed limit may not be possible.

CMTE/PUBLIC RECOMMENDED SAFETY RELATED IMPROVEMENTS			
	LOCATION	ISSUES	COMMENTS
1.	City of Blanco Blanco High School 1215 4 <sup>th</sup> Street	Installation of traffic signal at FM 1623, Teri Lane (Blanco High School)	Request for feasibility study should be initiated by City of Blanco. The area must meet 8 warranted conditions for TxDOT to consider installation.
2.	US 281	Improve ingress/egress from US 281 into the Brushy Top community	
3.	281 Blanco County in general	The transitions from two to four lanes along US 281 throughout the county. Widen the shoulders to provide more of a transition between the two to four lane zones?	The planned restriping will improve these conditions.

CMTE/PUBLIC RECOMMENDED PEDESTRIAN AND OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS			
	LOCATION	ISSUES	COMMENTS
1.	Johnson City	DT Johnson City needs better street lighting, signage and crosswalks to improve pedestrian safety.	Streetlights and signage can be addressed through local planning efforts. Sidewalks and some pedestrian elements are eligible for funding under a future TASA call for projects.
2.	Blanco Middle School 1500 Rocky Road and 7 <sup>th</sup> street	Pedestrian improvements (sidewalks, crossings) around the Blanco Middle School Campus	
3.	281 @290	Pedestrian-Bike Crossing	

CMTE/PUBLIC RECOMMENDED GENERAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES			
	LOCATION	ISSUES	COMMENTS
1.	Countywide: TRANSIT	VIA service to San Antonio	
		Local bus service for seniors	
2.	Countywide: Transportation	Public Airport Improvements	

**Table 6.5 Advisory Committee/Public Recommended Projects**

Within each section of **Table 6.5** a specific location is described, the identified issue is explained, a planned or proposed improvement is offered, and frequently, an additional comment is included to cross reference to another related proposal or to clarify jurisdictional responsibility for the recommended project.

## 6.7 Economic Development Recommendations

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As future development occurs within the extra territorial jurisdictions of Blanco and Johnson City, this plan will provide a blueprint for the future transportation system which developers will need to consider when planning new communities. There is a direct relationship between land use, economic development, and transportation, and the impacts on the transportation system will need to be considered as each new community is built.

As stated in the introduction, the Blanco County Transportation and Economic Development Plan is intended to be a tool for the county, cities, developers, chambers of commerce, and the general public as Blanco County grows. It is particularly important that residents within the county can identify transportation and economic development needs during the development of the plan. For optimal use and effectiveness, this plan should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis to see if the assumptions are still valid. Likewise, if there are jurisdiction changes, the plan should be reviewed to make sure the priorities still make sense or to take advantage of new opportunities.

## 6.8 Economic Development Recommendations

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### **1. Providing Resources for Small Business**

The strategy of economic gardening, or the ability to connect entrepreneurs and local small business owners to resources to support, sustain and grow their local enterprises, is suitable for Blanco County given the current economic and transportation conditions it is experiencing. One of Blanco County's greatest assets is the existing businesses located in the area. Embracing strategies, policies and practices to grow these existing businesses should be a high priority because job growth from existing businesses can exceed job growth from industry attraction.

### **2. Downtown Beautification, Lighting and Access**

In rural towns, the identity of a city or county is rooted in their downtown. Downtown, for the cities of Blanco and Johnson City, serves as the destination and gathering area for the communities. In this capacity, it should also be the primary focus of all economic development efforts. For Blanco County and its two largest cities, the downtowns should be thought of as the "anchor tenant" and top destinations on the area's tourism list of assets.

Downtowns provide a wealth of planning opportunities from producing community events, creating a public art program, developing and enhancing pedestrian access, managing parking and infrastructure, constructing public facilities, anticipating public safety issues, attracting and retaining businesses, and marketing, to name a few. Based on the endless opportunities for planning and development, both cities could establish local planning advisory committees to develop downtown priorities to address future development. In their capacity, the Blanco TED stakeholder group conveyed that ingress and egress into the downtown areas during festivals needs to be developed to ensure that access is not limited to vendors or the general public.

Throughout the planning study, comments were received by the general public, stakeholders, and local businesses to improve ingress/egress and general access to the downtown areas. After several site



visits on peak traffic days, it was observed that small investments in downtowns can see a higher return on investment.

By concentrating economic development efforts and investment in downtown districts, communities are typically able to support a more significant and near-term impact than would occur by spreading resources across a wider (but thinner) set of priorities. As downtown is a central hub for both communities' events, it is important to consider accessibility issues in the form of parking, pedestrian access, logistics and vendor access. As successful development takes hold in the downtown districts, communities are then able to apply the gains realized through increased property values and taxable sales to address other priorities that build on a successful core. Moreover, by focusing development and public investment in downtown areas as opposed to green fields, communities can better utilize and improve upon existing infrastructure as opposed to paying for new infrastructure where none exist. This has significant implications not only for economic development but also transportation.

### **3. Revise and Update of Commercial Signage Regulations**

Building and commercial signs are intended to provide appropriate project and tenant identity without "sign clutter" that reduces sign effectiveness. A revision of local standards or ordinances will clarify sign specifications including size, materials, number of signs per business, temporary signs, and lighted signs. Development of the new standards can be done through a local sub-committee which can develop recommendations to be delivered back to their local city council for consideration and adoption.

### **4. Broadband Access**

Broadband as defined by the Federal Communications Commission is high-speed Internet access that is always on and faster than the traditional dial-up access. Broadband includes several high-speed transmission technologies such as cable modem, DSL, wireless and satellite. Access to broadband in Blanco County is not consistent with most residents having access to the internet through a traditional cellular data plan. Deploying broadband infrastructure and services, as well as supporting the universal adoption and meaningful use of broadband, are challenging - but required - building blocks of a 21st century community. The success of a community has become dependent on how broadly and deeply the community adopts technology resources – this includes access to reliable high-speed networks, digital literacy of residents, and the use of online resources locally for business, government, and leisure. At the time of this report Connected Nation, is consulting with the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) on ways to increase broadband access across Blanco, Burnet and Llano counties. Currently, residents and business owners are asked to participate in a broadband survey so that a clear understanding of coverage can be established and TDA with Connected Nation can interact with local and regional providers to increase access.

### **5. One-Source Website for Blanco County Destination Planning**

Serving as the gateway to the Texas Hill Country, Blanco County is poised to offer visitors a wealth of experiences. To increase the potential for visitors to travel and stop in Blanco County, more should be done to publicize and promote the county's destinations. As a result of stakeholder meetings and significant online research, it was easy to surmise that Blanco County and the cities of Blanco and Johnson City have an attractive list of places and events.

There are currently two websites that promote Texas Hill Country tourism that include Blanco County destinations: The Hill Country Visitor and the Hill County Portal. The problem with both sites is that neither provide a comprehensive list of all attractions. This is a missed opportunity which should be addressed if the area is going to maximize tourism revenue. This is also a critical challenge given the distance to the center of neighboring metropolitan centers and given the number of competing alternative destinations for weekend travelers and for more casual day-trippers.

The first step in developing a more comprehensive, focused campaign is to complete an inventory of all tourism assets – this should include any place where someone can shop, eat, play a sport, undertake a hobby, fish, hunt, rope and ride, sleep, drink, or tour. The value of these assets as tourism destinations can be enhanced through the creation of multiple recommended itineraries and travel “packages” (simply a list of places to go and things to do based on time and interest) each designed to appeal to different age groups, interests and place of origin (i.e., Austin versus Houston).

## **6. Expand Workforce Housing**

Workforce housing is defined as “housing that’s affordable to households earning 60 to 120 percent of the area median income.” It has also been defined as affordable if the housing costs are no more than 30-40 percent of income. Across the region, housing availability and affordability are increasingly becoming the biggest issues facing communities. Many municipalities and counties – rural, suburban and urban – are beginning to review policies to ensure they maintain or grow their supply of affordable and workforce housing. Locally based incentives developed at a municipal level have been effective at implementing change. These incentives include:

### **a) Expedited Process of Development Approvals Purpose**

The timing of the review for development approvals can be a factor in the overall cost of a development. Expediting affordable housing developments reduces time but can avoid setbacks by having a staff member shepherd a development through the process. The requirement extends to other reviews and approvals, including site plan review, zoning hearings, and special approvals/variances and plat recordation. The city and the county can partner together on this process with the County Appraisal District having a reciprocal expedited plat recordation process for affordable housing plats approved by the cities. Expediting permits requires affordable housing developments to be placed ahead of other developments. This may result in tension with other developers whose developments are therefore put behind. It would be beneficial to ensure that local government staff understand the importance of reducing permitting time and expense to publicly supported developments. For this policy to be optimal, all staff who work in the engineering and planning departments must be involved and fully informed of what is expected of them regarding expedited permitting for affordable housing developments. Various local government departments should be able to verify that a development was reviewed expeditiously and forwarded for final approval and builder notification.

### **b) Fee Modifications, Waivers, or Reimbursement**

Fees are a major expense in developing land. More importantly, fees associated with supporting affordable housing development can be temporarily modified as an inducement to encourage development. To address these concerns, the cities and county can establish temporary changes to development fee structure or offer waivers or modifications. By modifying impact fee requirements to reduce the cost, the cost of developing housing can be reduced, and the savings

passed on in the form of lower rents or lower sales prices. Some potential fees that could be modified for temporary incentives include:

- Informal Review
- Site Plan Review
- Platting and Subdivision
- Building Permit
- Variance or Special Exception
- Impact fee
- Roads
- Park Dedication
- Infrastructure

By reducing or waiving fees for the affordable housing developer, the local government may not have to provide as much subsidy or incentive to encourage development. The methodology for implementing this type of practice includes a fee waiver, fee deferment or fee modification.

**c) Inventory of Property and/or Lands for Affordable Housing**

Available land that is suitable for affordable housing development is a primary concern for housing providers. A land bank is an active and thorough tool that can be used to implement the surplus land stature. With appropriate disposition, policies can create more opportunities for the successful development of affordable housing.

**d) Encourage Infill Development**

Infill development is new development that takes place in an existing developed area where vacant lots may exist. Construction on these lots can be cost effective to a developer because they do not carry the same development costs as new development on raw land. In this capacity, infill development can be used to expand the supply of affordable housing in older neighborhoods that have established services and utility connections to reduce development and construction costs. Coordination with the Capital Area Financing Corporation (CAFC) for additional affordable housing resources including first time homebuyer assistance and the capacity to support infill development projects as part of their regional Community Housing Infill Program (CHIP). The CHIP program is a community-supported program to revitalize existing neighborhoods by locating potential infill properties, securing the properties for below market prices when possible, providing incentive financing, qualifying a targeted income group of homebuyers, building moderate income homes or low-moderate income rental housing, providing homebuyer/homeowner incentives, and promoting the necessary community support services and infrastructure.

**e) Establishment of a Housing Policy or Plan**

Enacted on a city level, the establishment of a local housing policy can be a pro-active way to create community support and development of affordable housing plan that is community driven and supported. Given the unique building environment within the county based on water restrictions, this may benefit the local governments so that the development standards can be developed and addressed in the proper context to address resource limitations, that include water. Furthermore, development regulations that include minimum parcel square footage, lot and setback requirements, and building material standards ensure that quality development that supports the local aesthetic will be built to the same standard as previous structures.

## 6.9 Local Transportation Policies

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### 1. **Incorporate traffic impacts into development processes**

Understanding the traffic impact posed by future residential or commercial development is crucial to future planning efforts, especially when that development occurs on the TxDOT highway network. The impacts that these potential developments present to the established roadway network need to be identified before approved. A traffic impact analysis (TIA) provides information on the potential traffic expected from a proposed development. A TIA also evaluates the impact of the proposed development on the roadways in the immediate proximity of the proposed development. Additionally, a TIA study examines measures to mitigate impacts from a proposed development and maximize safety and efficiency of the adjacent roadway system. The TIA standard can be adopted by both the city and county. Prior to local adoption consideration should be given to the development thresholds that would trigger the TIA requirement. Traditional considerations include number of vehicle trips per day, number of vehicle trips during peak hour from the site or adjacent roadways, a proposed study radius area that includes the roadway, traffic signals, stop signs and intersections.

### 2. **Roadway Access Policies and Procedures**

The primary purpose of a roadway network is to provide a corridor that affords vehicular traffic a high level of service. A level of service is defined as a measure of traffic flow and congestion. As defined in the Highway Capacity Manual (published by the Transportation Research Board – National Research Council), it is a qualitative measure describing operational conditions within a traffic stream, generally described in terms of such factors as speed and travel time, freedom to maneuver, traffic interruptions, comfort and convenience, and safety.

The development of property adjacent to the highway for commercial and residential purposes is a secondary purpose of the highway and should not negatively impact the primary purpose of mobility along the corridor. The cities and the county can establish a uniform framework to receive and evaluate requests for access to the highway, including main lanes, ramps, and frontage roads. The policies thereby reflect and allow access only where an applicant has demonstrated that the requested access will not significantly diminish the level of service on the highway and traffic safety will not be impaired. Preference for access will be given to dedicated public roadways that are identified on local thoroughfare plans. Driveway access will be considered only when access from an alternative public roadway is not possible. This policy does not create or limit any current or future right to access as a matter of state property law. Rather, the policy establishes the engineering criteria and application process used for permitting the construction of a specific access point when the right of access already exists (i.e., when such access rights are reserved in a deed conveying property to the city, the county, and/or TxDOT for the road). Access may require a permit from other jurisdictions. This policy is cumulative of those policies, and a permit issued by the county pursuant to this policy does not eliminate the need to obtain a separate permit from those jurisdictions.

### 3. **Emergency Evacuation Routes**

An efficient roadway system is critical to the vitality of a community. Expansion of the existing roadway network will allow for alternatives to the existing roadway network. Alternative routes are helpful not only for safety but to also accommodate growth. The presence of east-west corridors

through Blanco County improves county transportation. The need for established east-west corridors is also important in times of disaster. Currently, there are east-west corridors accessible to residents in northern and southern Blanco County. Access to a central east-west corridor is a bit more tentative because much of a potential route along CR 2766/Robinson Road is well below grade and has several un-guarded low water crossing segments.

Currently, CR 2766 intersects US 290 in Johnson City and runs east through central Blanco County, east from Johnson City, through Pedernales State Park and further east becoming Fitzhugh Road in Hays County.

For central Blanco County having a reliable east-west roadway is significant because of the flooding that occurs in and around Johnson City from the Pedernales River. Once a flood event is underway, residents are unable to travel west or north for evacuation purposes. This is important because from 2015-2020 the Pedernales and Blanco Rivers have had a 100-year flood annually resulting in community flooding. For the residents of Johnson City and central unincorporated Blanco County that means evacuation to higher ground only through CR 2766 is their only outlet and it becomes completely impassible once a flood event is underway.