

VIA Advanced Rapid Transit

North/South Corridor Purpose and Need

Final

Prepared for:



Prepared by:



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Introduction

This report documents the Purpose and Need for the Advanced Rapid Transit (ART) North/South (N/S) Corridor project that is being advanced by VIA Metropolitan Transit (VIA). It provides high-level background information on VIA's Rapid Transit Network Plan and an overview of the ART N/S Corridor's transportation system, land use, population, and employment. The report concludes with purpose and need statements that provide the rationale for investing in the ART N/S Corridor transit system.

Project Background

Between 2017 and 2018, VIA completed an extensive planning and alternatives analysis that led to the development of a proposed Rapid Transit Network (Rapid Transit Network Plan, October 2018). This network, locally known as ART, applies Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) characteristics such as dedicated transit lanes and transit signal priority to improve transit travel time and reliability. The culmination of that effort led to the identification and prioritization of four (4) merged corridors for rapid transit investment in three (3) distinct phases (Figure 1). The first phase includes the ART (N/S and East/West (E/W) Corridors. The ART N/S corridor was determined to advance first due to its high ridership, connection to key destinations, and stakeholder input. The ART N/S Corridor is in Advanced Project Definition (ADP) stage, which includes confirmation of ridership and service plan, concept design, and continued coordination with stakeholders and the community.

The ART N/S Corridor would be approximately 12-miles long and would connect San Antonio International Airport in the north to Steves Avenue in the south, as shown in Figure 2. To leverage major capital investments in a park and ride and a new transit center, service connections are planned to Stone Oak Park and Ride in the north and Brooks Transit Center in the south. Key roadways within the N/S Corridor that ART would operate on include US-281 Frontage Road, Isom Road, San Pedro Avenue, St. Mary's Street, Navarro Street, and Roosevelt Avenue. The corridor would connect two of the three largest employment centers in the region and serve key destinations along the corridor including San Antonio International Airport, North Star Mall, Park North Shopping Center, San Pedro Springs Park, San Antonio College, VIA Metro Center, Baptist Medical Center, Downtown San Antonio, G.W. Brackenridge High School, Roosevelt Park, San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, several H-E-B grocery stores, and numerous high density commercial and residential areas. The North Star Transit Center is an important transit hub on the ART N/S Corridor that connects to 10 transit routes, including frequent, skip, and local services that provide access to numerous areas outside the ART N/S Corridor, as well as a direct connection to the North Star Mall which is a key activity center and destination.

Phase

1	2	3
East-West BRT	North-South Central BRT	Northeast BRT
		Northwest BRT

² Source: AAMPO 2020 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

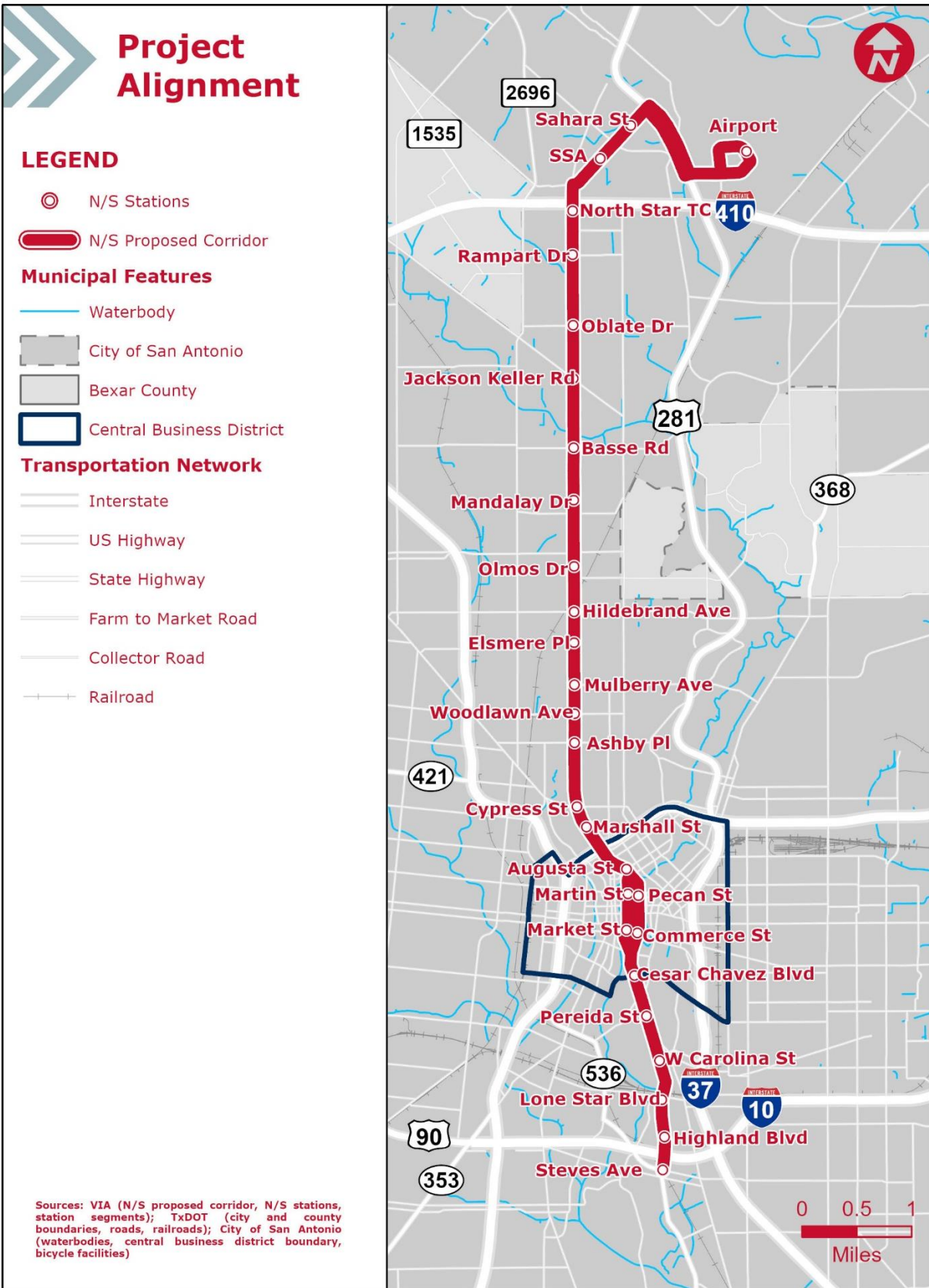


Figure 2. ART N/S Corridor Project Alignment Map

ART North/South Corridor Overview

Transportation, demographic, and land use information along the ART N/S Corridor is summarized and mapped in this section. The goal of this section is to describe existing conditions and provide context to issues that the ART N/S Corridor aims to address.

Transit System

San Antonio is served by VIA's bus system which offers several service levels to meet various rider needs. The ART N/S Corridor intersects 33 different bus routes (Figure 3, Table 1). These routes provide access to the ART N/S Corridor primarily at the North Star Transit Center and in Downtown San Antonio, with some intersecting the route at key roadways, such as Hildebrand Avenue and Basse Road. These locations provide important transfer connections to other destinations within the region. Buses from these routes arrive within the corridor every 15 to 60 minutes, with service spanning from 4:00 a.m. to 10:45 p.m., depending on the route. As of 2019, the most popular routes within a half-mile buffer surrounding the ART N/S Corridor are Route 2 (frequent service) and Route 100 Primo (BRT-Lite in mixed traffic), which have combined average weekday ridership of over 8,300 trips (Aug 2019). Route 3 (skip service) and Route 4 (frequent service) currently serve the corridor in Downtown and north of Downtown, with a combined average weekday ridership of 5,100 (Aug 2019). Route 34 (frequent service), Route 42 (local service), and Route 40 VIVA Missions (skip service) serve the corridor south of Downtown (Aug 2019). One issue currently impacting transit service along the N/S Corridor is that the current 0.21-mile average distance between bus stops leads to frequent stopping, increasing overall travel time for passengers. In 2019, the routes that serve the Project Corridor had an average on-time performance of 75%, which is 10% less than VIA's on-time performance goal of 85%.

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Existing VIA bus routes connect to the N/S Corridor at the North Star Transit Center, Downtown and at major intersecting roadway



Table 1. Bus Routes Intersecting and/or on the N/S Corridor

Service Type	Route Numbers
Express	6, 7
Frequent	4, 24, 79, 82
Metro	2, 5, 8, 30, 32, 34, 36, 42, 51, 54, 67, 88, 90, 95, 96, 97, 502, 534, 602, 647, 648
Primo	100
Skip	3, 14, 40, 550, 551

Source: VIA

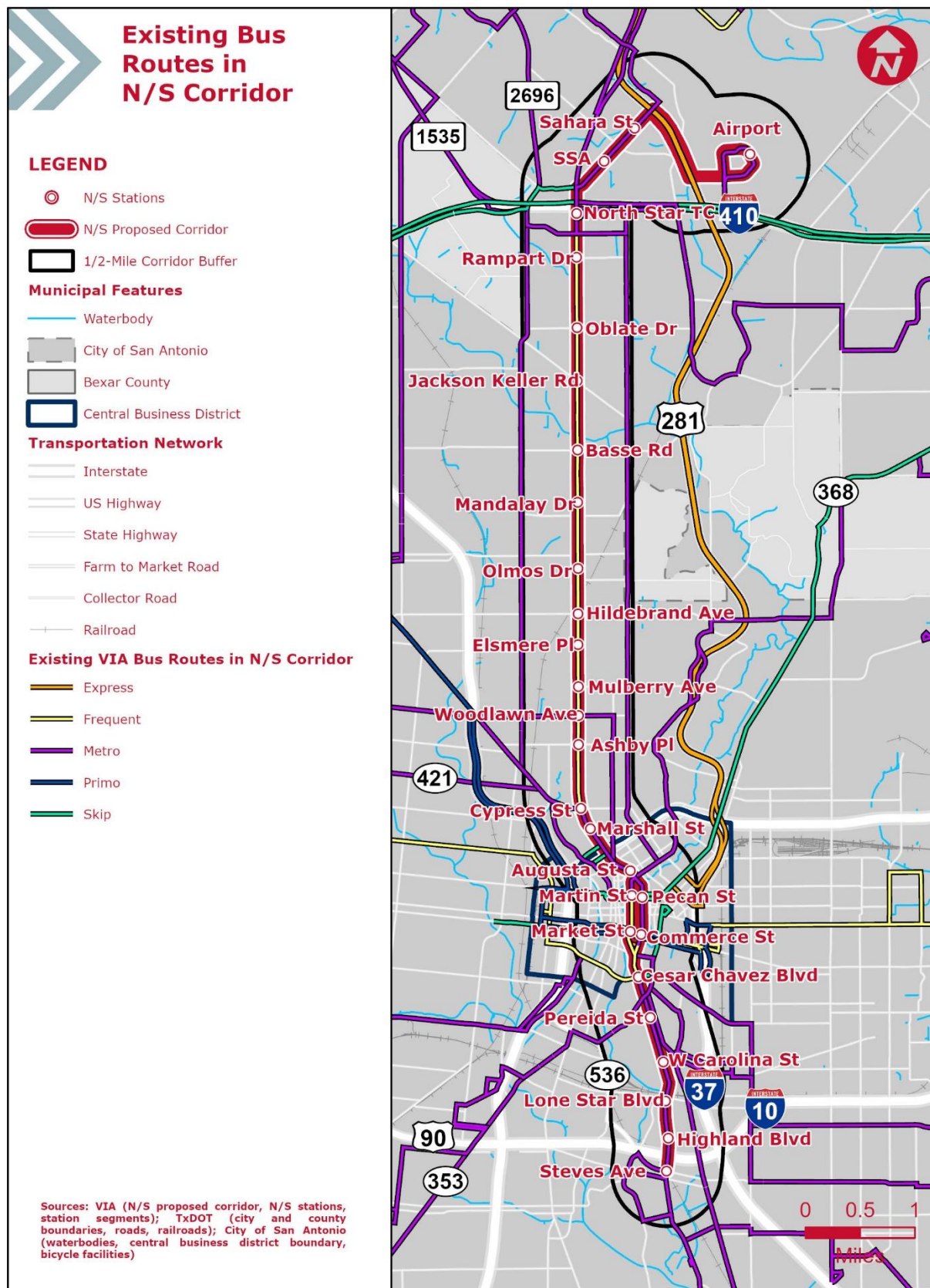


Figure 3. ART N/S Corridor Existing Bus Routes

Source: VIA

Land Use, Population, and Employment

The ART N/S Corridor is among the fastest growing and most diverse corridors in the San Antonio metropolitan area. The following sections provide an overview of existing land uses and existing/projected population and employment in the ART N/S Corridor.

Land Use Summary

The ART N/S Corridor traverses several Regional Centers with distinct land use patterns, including the Greater Airport Area, Midtown, and Downtown (Figure 4). The following paragraphs describe, generally, the land uses along the ART N/S Corridor starting from the Airport in the north, to Steves Avenue in the south. Figure 5 illustrates the existing land uses along the ART N/S Corridor.

The northern portion of the ART N/S Corridor, between the Airport and Basse Road, is largely commercial with a mixture of airport supportive businesses, offices, light industrial uses, large regional shopping centers, and multifamily residential within ½ mile of the corridor. Land uses directly adjacent to the corridor are mostly commercial in nature, with some pockets of single-family residential scattered within the ½ mile buffer.

Between Basse Road and Woodlawn Avenue, the areas directly adjacent to San Pedro Avenue are largely single-family residential with commercial uses scattered throughout most of this part of the corridor. Several higher intensity use areas do exist, including the immediate area surrounding the San Pedro Avenue/Basse Road intersection and along Basse Road which includes a mixture of community and regional commercial, light industrial, and some multifamily residential. Within this stretch, another pocket of more dense commercial uses exists between Dora Street and Hildebrand Avenue.

To the south of Woodlawn Avenue, the corridor enters Midtown and then Downtown, where land use patterns transition to denser commercial uses, with industrial, single-family, and multifamily uses scattered throughout as you get closer into the Downtown area.

South of Downtown, beginning at Cesar Chavez Boulevard, the corridor transitions back to mostly commercial uses directly adjacent to the alignment, with the surrounding areas being comprised of single-family residential. Close to the southern extent of the ART N/S Corridor, there are several large commercial and industrial land uses to the west of the alignment. In this same stretch, the east side of the alignment contains largely single family uses.

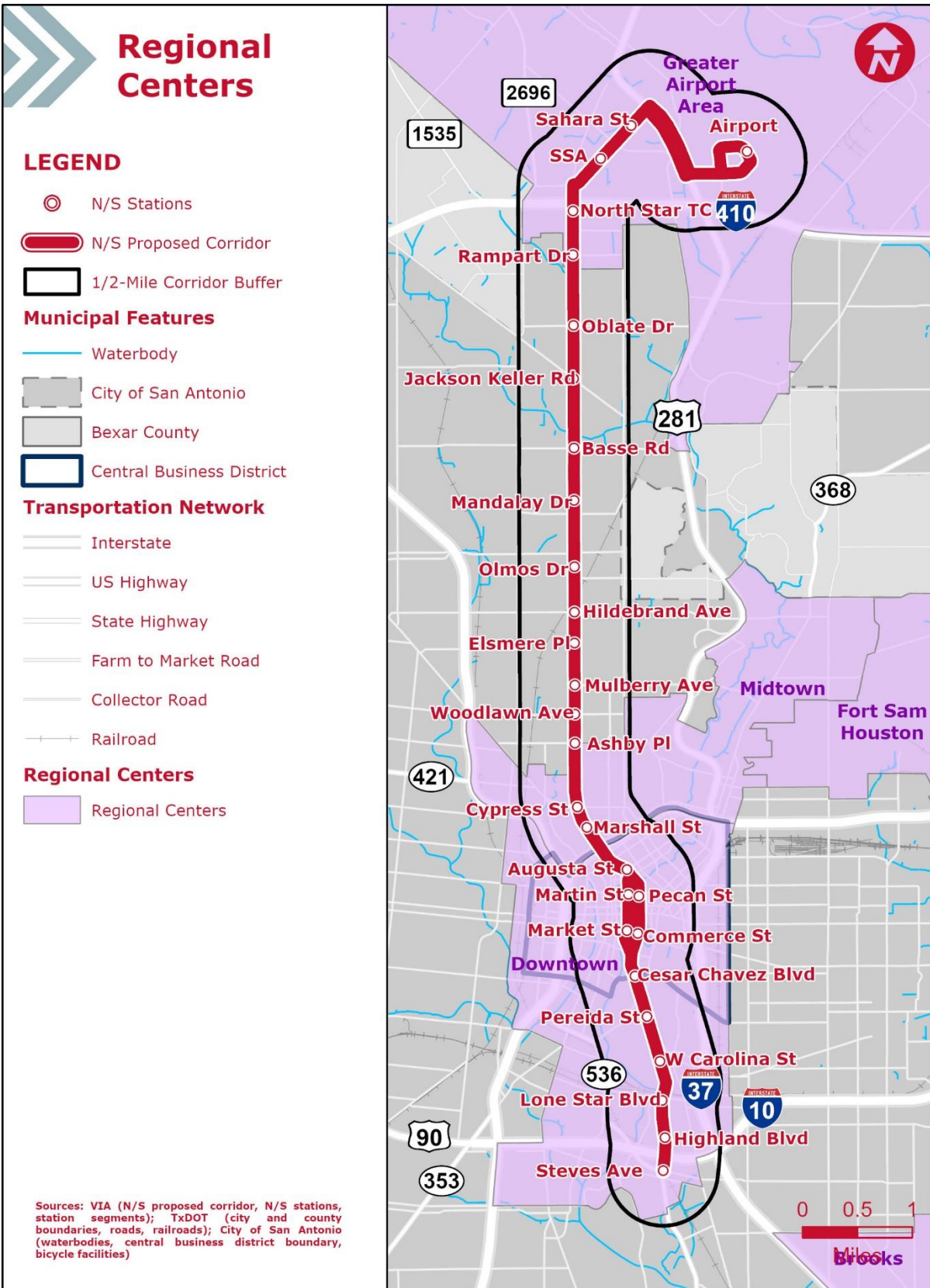


Figure 4. San Antonio Regional Centers

Source: City of San Antonio

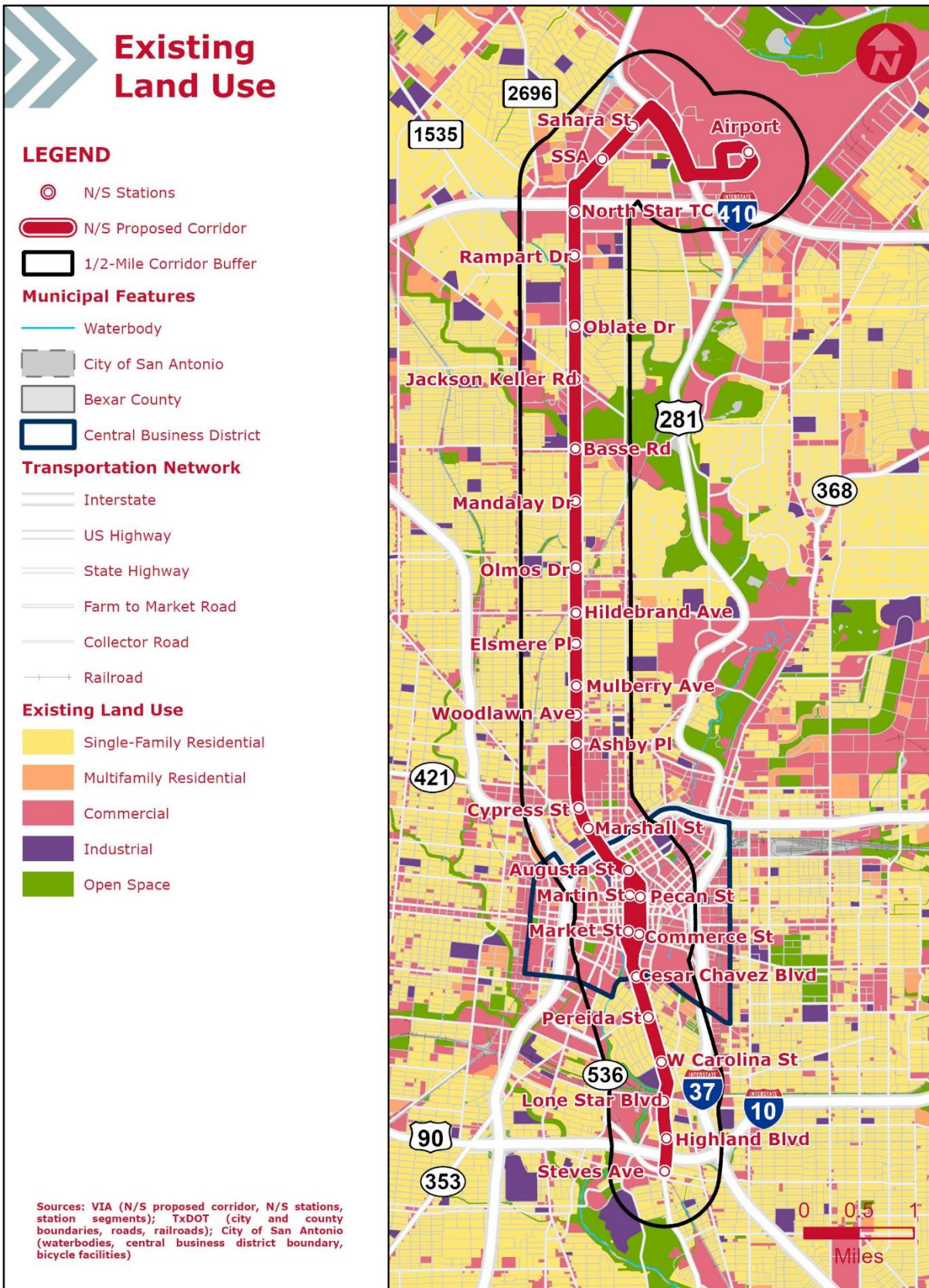
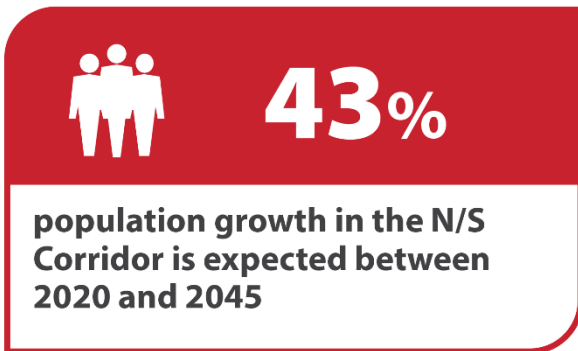


Figure 5. ART N/S Corridor Existing Land Use

Source: Bexar County



Population Summary

Overall, Bexar County is expected to increase its total population by 44% between 2020 and 2045, adding approximately 922,010 new residents to the County.³ Currently, several of the densest population centers in the San Antonio region are located along and near to the ART N/S Corridor study area, as shown in Figure 6. The Alamo Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (AAMPO) population projections estimate that the ART N/S corridor will grow from approximately 54,000

residents as of 2020 to approximately 77,000 in 2045, representing an increase of 43% more residents within the corridor. 2045 population density along the ART N/S Corridor is shown in Figure 7. By 2045 the ART N/S Corridor is projected to increase its density, outpacing the County, with an approximate gain of six people per acre; in contrast, the County is expected to experience an increase of two people per acre (Table 2). Figure 8 illustrates population density growth between 2020 and 2045. Between 2020 and 2045, the largest increases in density along the ART N/S Corridor is anticipated to occur in Downtown, south of Downtown towards the southern terminus of the ART N/S Corridor, and near the Jackson Keller Road, Basse Road, and Mandalay Drive station areas.

Table 2. Current and Projected ART N/S Corridor and Bexar County Population Density

		2020	2045	Change
Population Density (avg. people/acre)	ART N/S Corridor	8.4	14.5	+6.1
	Bexar County	5.8	7.7	+2.0

Source: AAMPO 2020/2045 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

³ Source: AAMPO 2020/2045 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

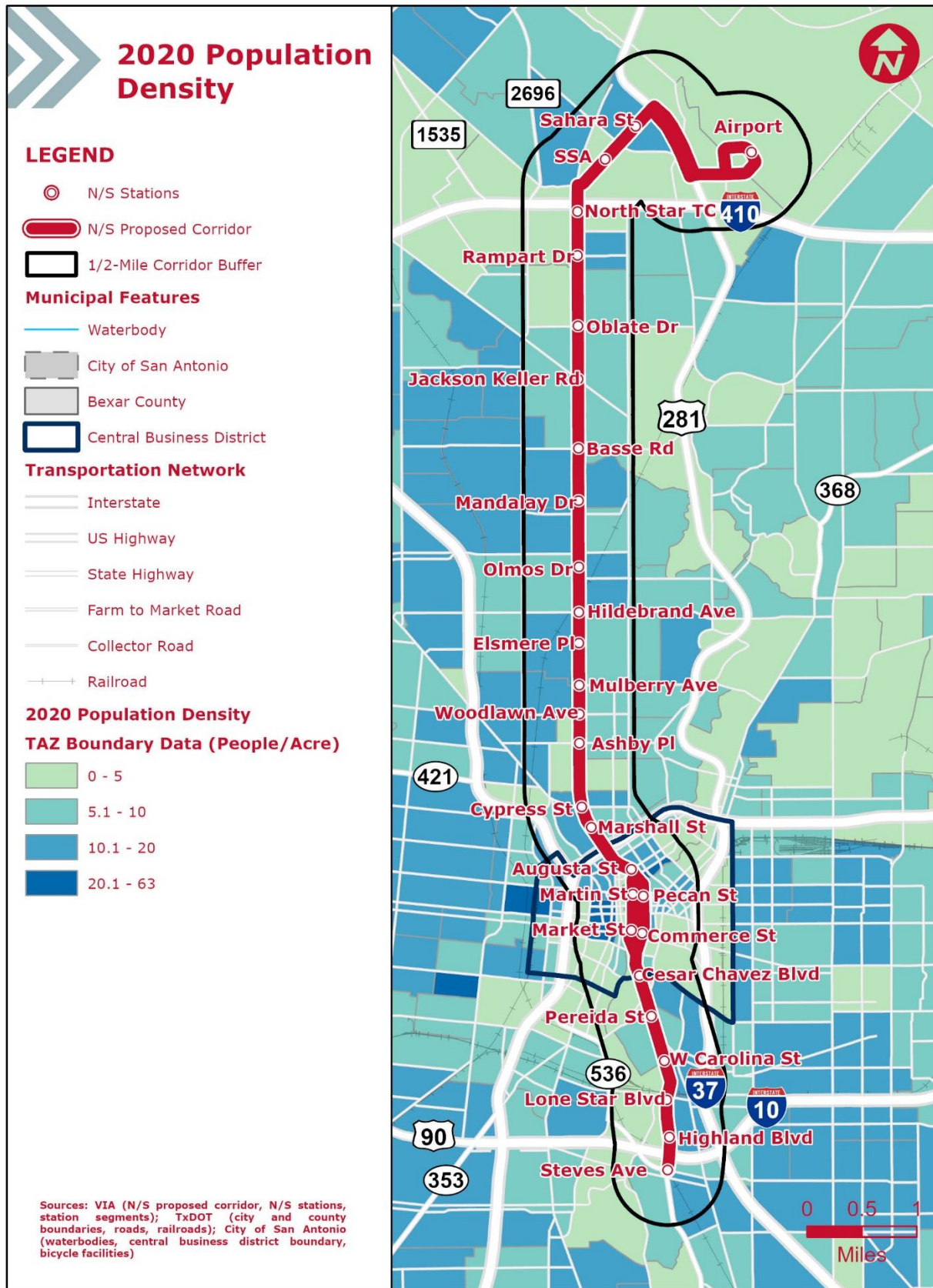


Figure 6. ART N/S Corridor 2020 Population Density

Source: AAMPO 2020 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

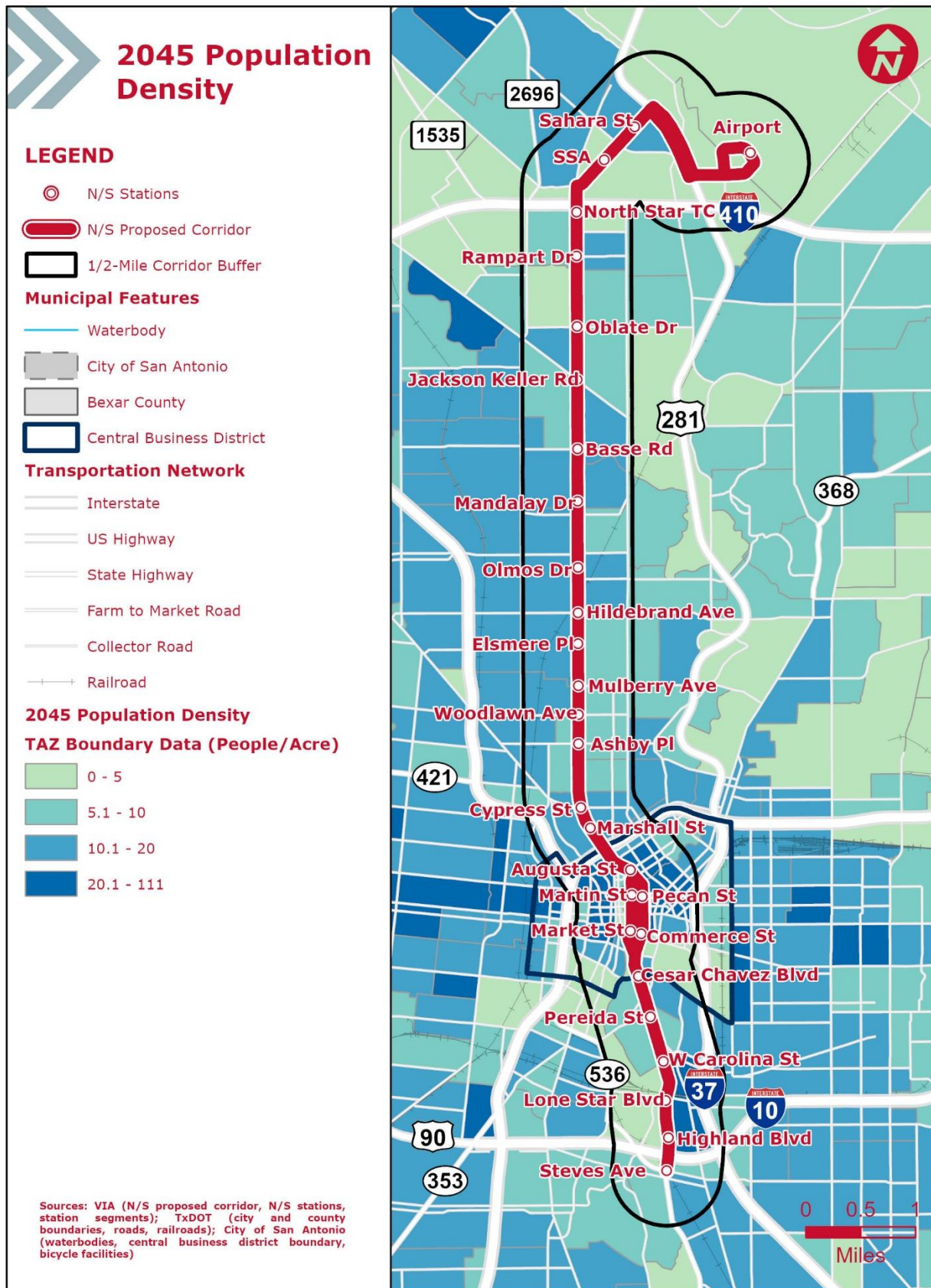


Figure 7. ART N/S Corridor 2045 Population Density

Source: AAMPO 2045 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

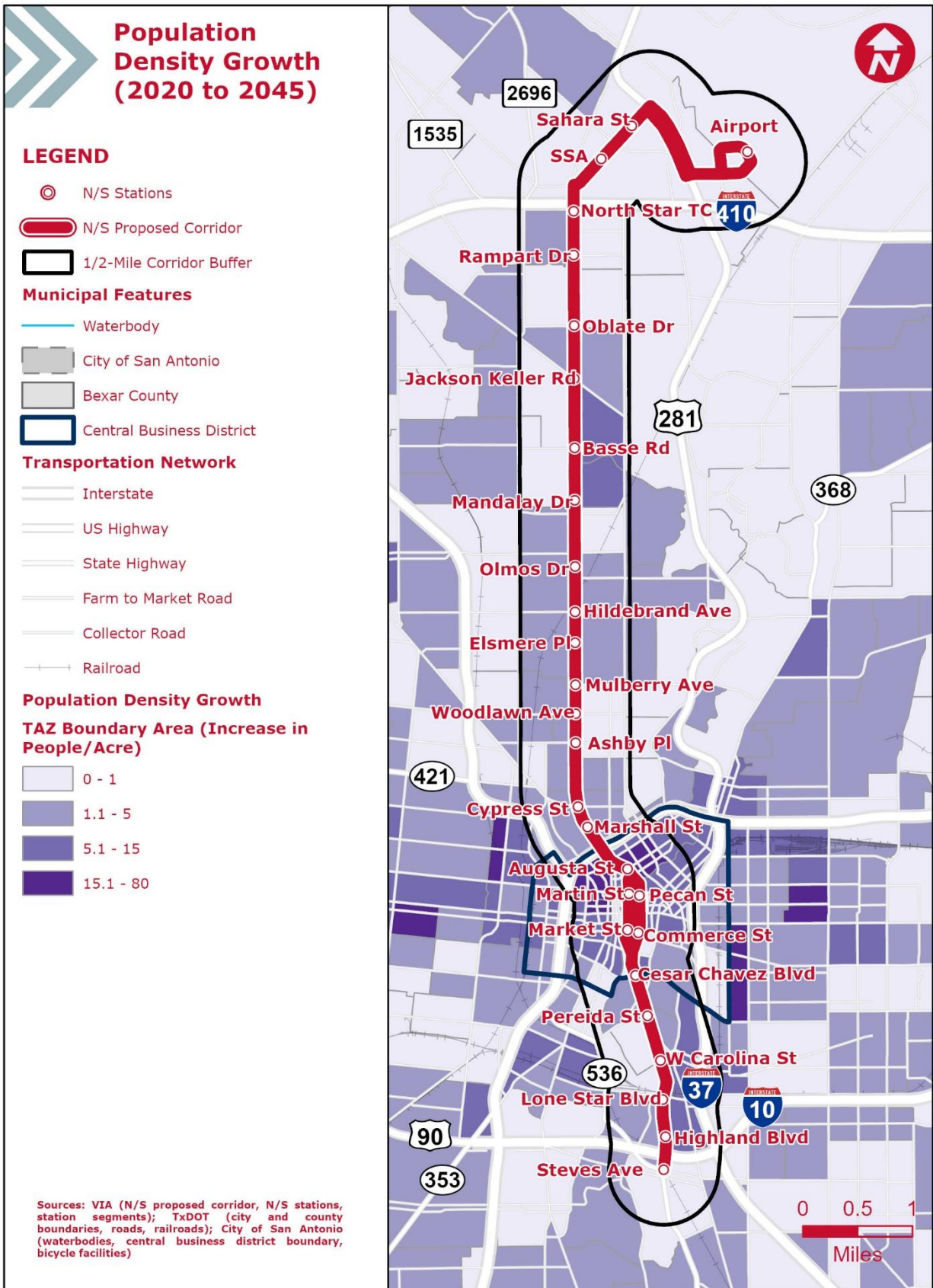
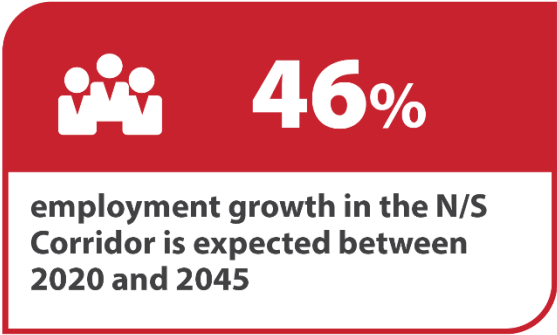


Figure 8. ART N/S Corridor Population Density Growth (2020 – 2045)

Source: AAMPO 2020/2045 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data



Employment Summary

Overall, Bexar County is expected to increase its total employment by 56% between 2020 and 2045, adding approximately 564,404 new jobs to the County.⁴ The ART N/S Corridor is expected to grow from 108,000 jobs as of 2020 to over 158,000 by 2045, representing an increase of 46% more jobs within the corridor. The main employment centers are concentrated in the northern end of the ART N/S Corridor and Downtown, as illustrated in Figure 9.

Employment growth is expected to occur along the north central portion of the ART N/S corridor west of the Basse Road, Fresno Drive, Olmos Drive, and Hildebrand Avenue station areas (Figure 10). The ART N/S Corridor is projected to gain six jobs per acre while the County is only estimated to gain two jobs per acre between 2020 and 2045 (Table 3). The densest employment growth is anticipated to occur within and near to the Downtown area (Figure 11).

Table 3. Current and Projected ART N/S Corridor and Bexar County Employment Density

		2020	2045	Change
Employment (avg. jobs/acre)	ART N/S Corridor	35.5	48.0	+12.5
	Bexar County	4.8	6.9	+2.1

Source: AAMPO 2020/2045 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

⁴ Source: AAMPO 2020/2045 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

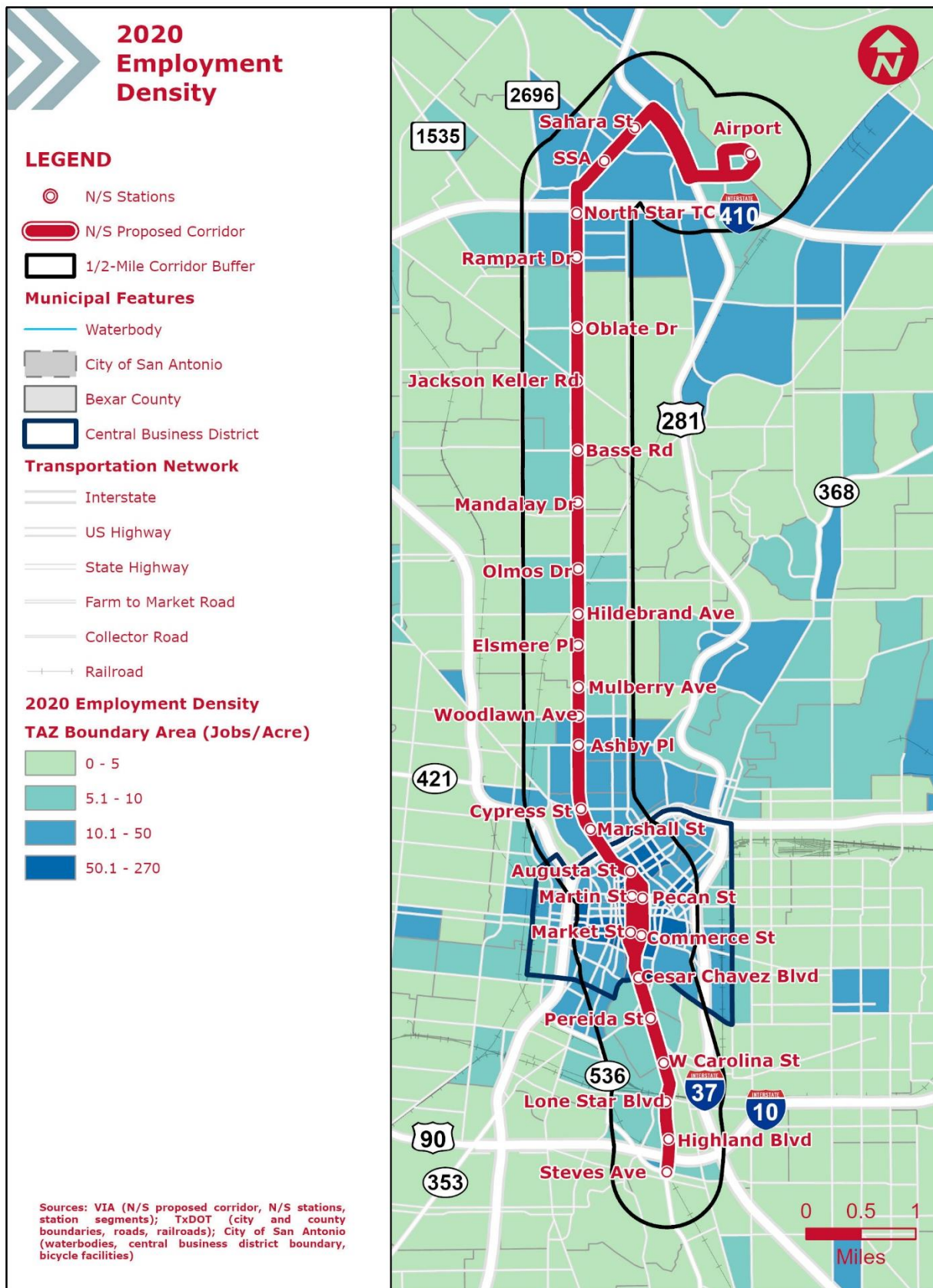


Figure 9. ART N/S Corridor 2020 Employment Density

Source: AAMPO 2020 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

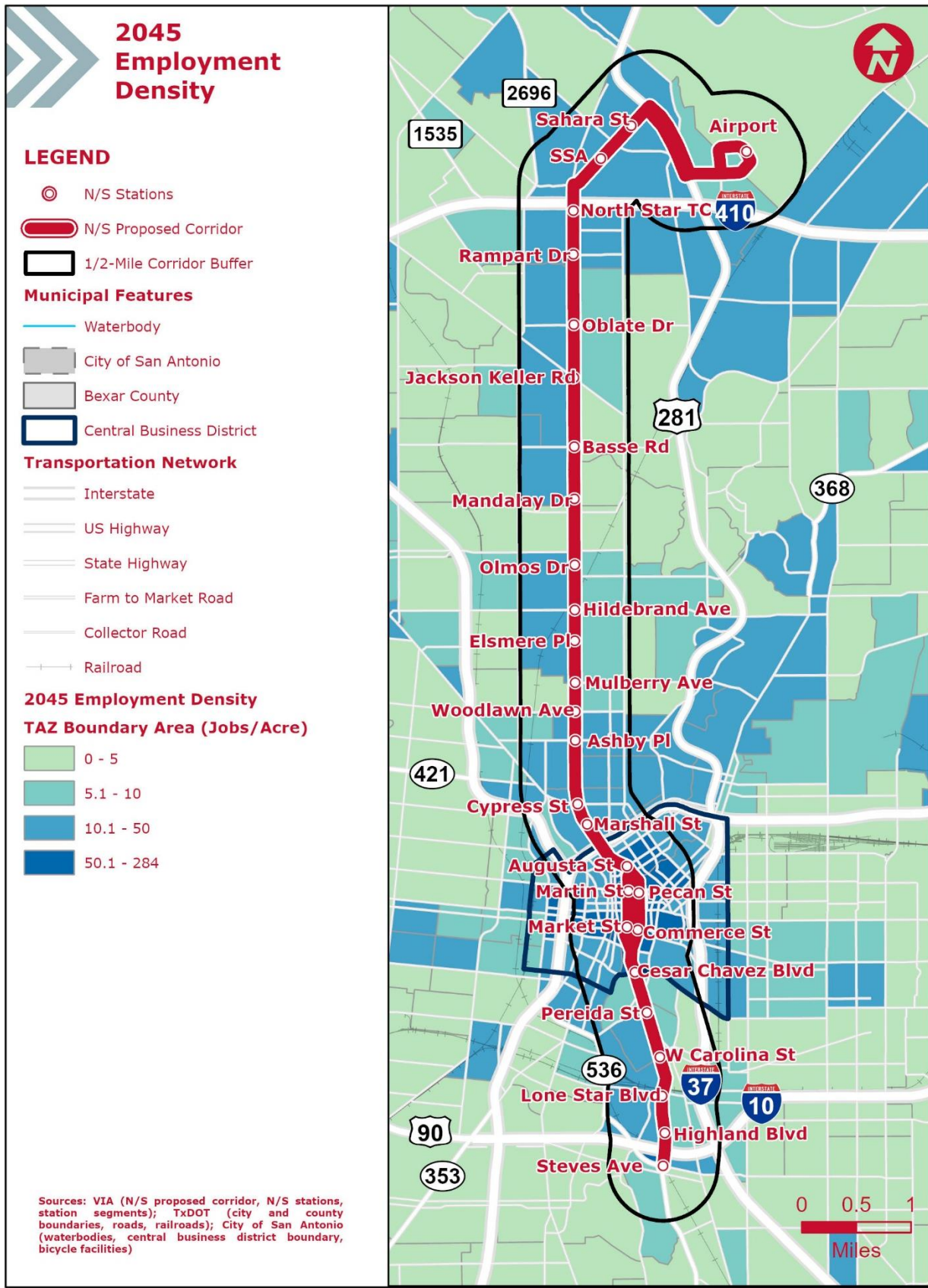


Figure 10. ART N/S Corridor 2045 Employment Density

Source: AAMPO 2045 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

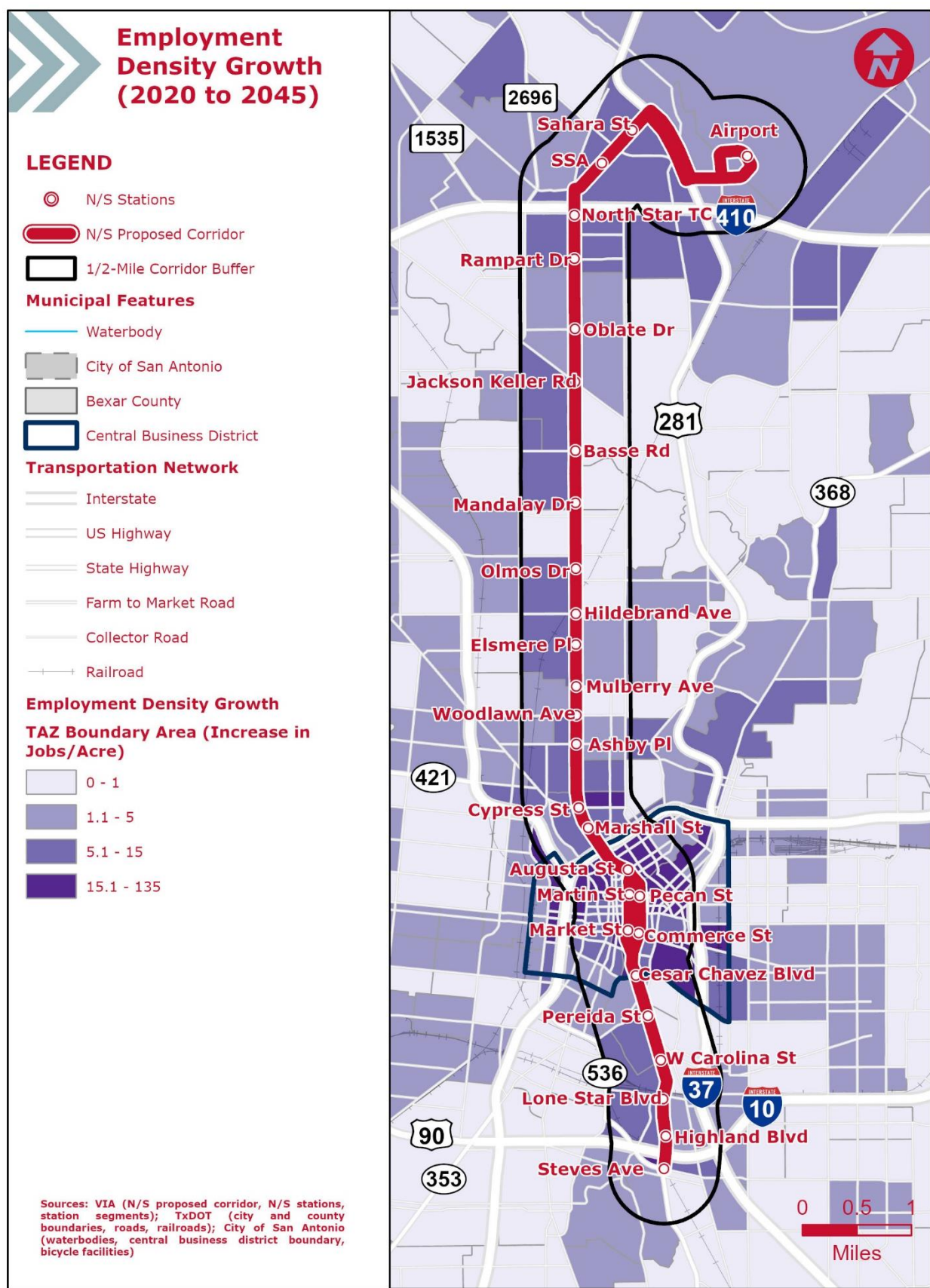


Figure 11. ART N/S Corridor Employment Density Growth (2020 – 2045)

Source: AAMPO 2020/2045 Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ) Data

Socioeconomic Characteristics Summary

The ART N/S Corridor includes low-income populations, zero car households, people with disabilities, and people aged 65 and over that are more likely than others to rely on transit or active modes of travel for their daily mobility. These populations will benefit from the improved mobility options that ART will provide. Based on 2019 Five-Year American Community Survey (ACS) data, the socioeconomic characteristics of residents in block groups within a half-mile buffer of the corridor are as follows:

- 33% of households have incomes below the federal poverty level;
- 91% of residents identify as part of a minority group;
- 13% of residents are aged 65 and older;
- 25% of residents 18 and over have a disability; and,
- 21% of households do not own an automobile.

ART in the N/S Corridor will provide more equitable transportation options to corridor residents that

- **Are low-income* (33%),**
- **Identify as a minority group (91%),**
- **Have a disability (25%),**
- **Are aged 65 and over (13%), or**
- **Do not own an automobile* (21%)**

* Data collected at household level



Figure 12 highlights key areas within the corridor where a larger proportion of block group households are considered low-income, which is defined as households that are below the Federal poverty level. Areas with the largest concentration of low-income populations are located near the Steves Avenue, Cypress Street, and Fresno Street station areas. Figure 13 highlights areas along the ART N/S Corridor where a higher proportion of households do not have access to a personal vehicle and are likely to be transit or active mode dependent. The Downtown, Midtown, and the northern end of the ART N/S Corridor have notable concentrations of households without access to a personal vehicle.

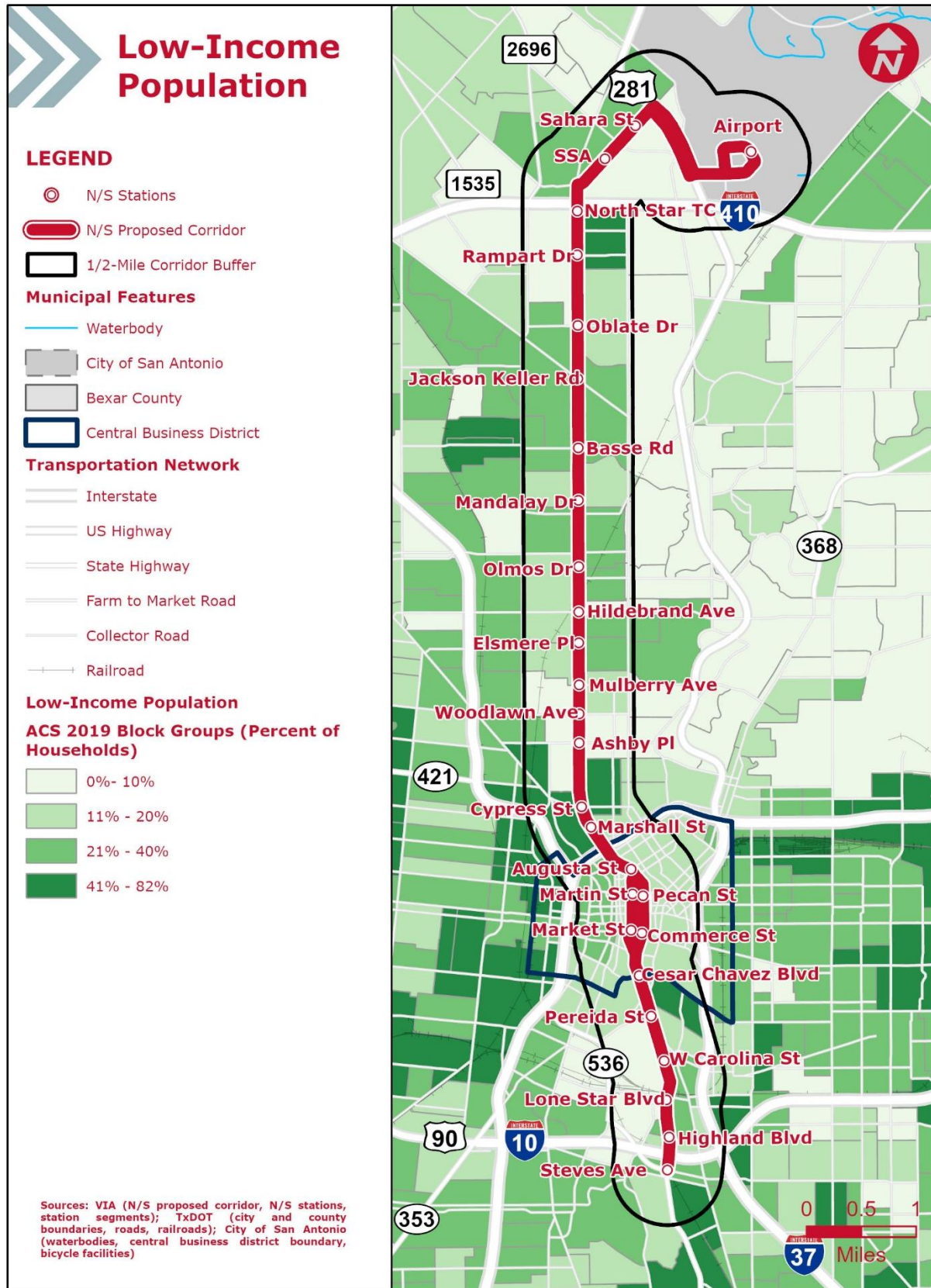


Figure 12. ART N/S Corridor Low-Income Population

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) Block Group Data, 2019

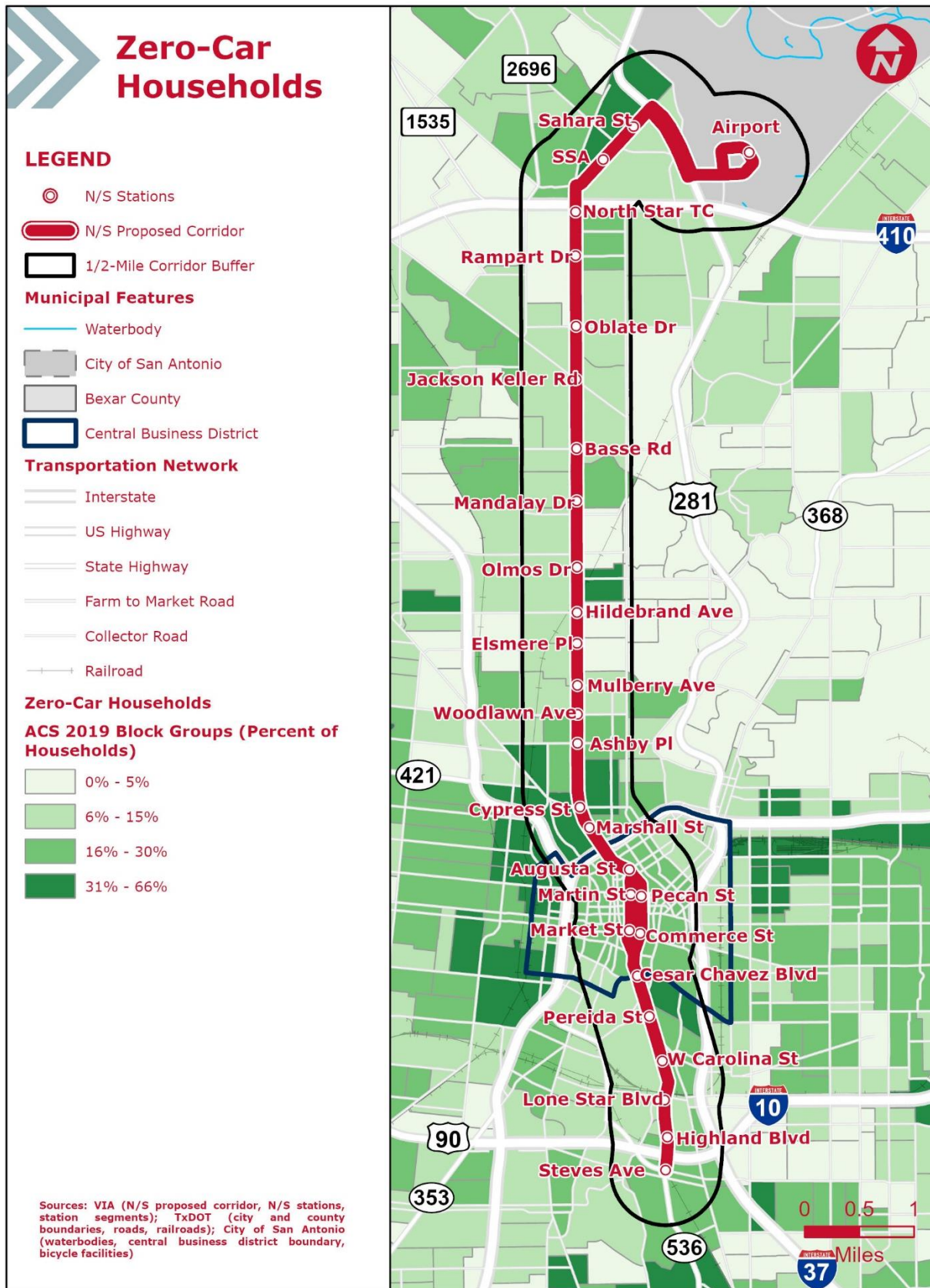


Figure 13. ART N/S Corridor Zero Car Households

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) Block Group Data, 2019

Transportation Network Overview

Mode Share

In Bexar County, about 2% of residents take transit to work while about 80% drive to work alone.⁵

Within the ART N/S Corridor, a higher percentage of commuters use transit (roughly 7%) or active modes of transportation compared to Bexar County (Table 4). Thus, improving the quality and frequency of transit service within the ART N/S Corridor could result in an even larger portion of the mode share.

Table 4. Commute Mode Share in the ART N/S Corridor

	ART N/S Corridor	County
Drive Alone	75%	79%
Carpool	9%	11%
Transit	7%	2%
Active	4%	2%
Other	6%	6%

Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimates, 2019

Traffic

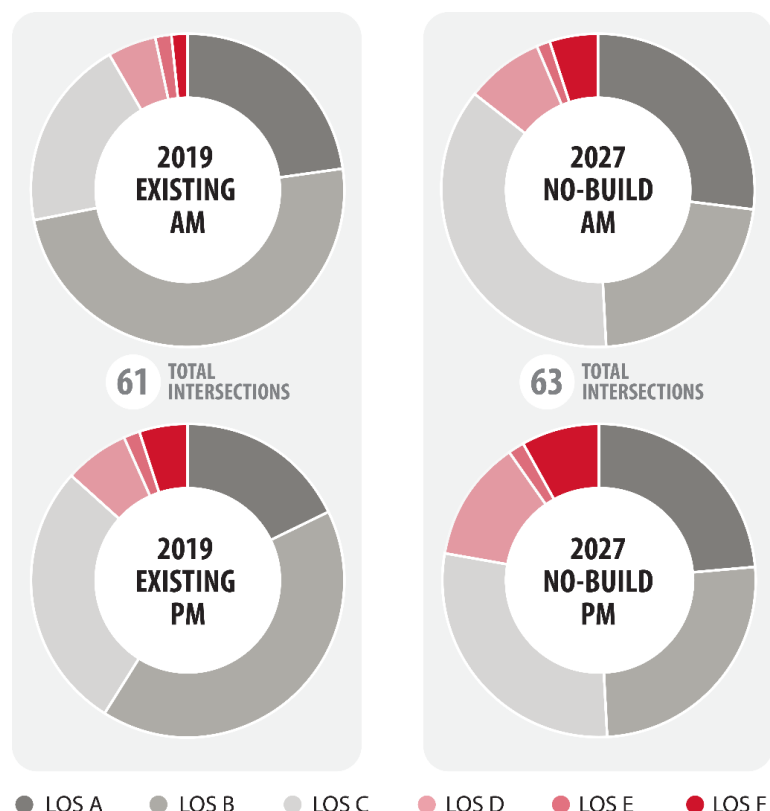
As population and employment increase in the region, there will be more traffic on San Antonio's roadways, leading to both traffic delay and congestion that will increase travel time. Those regional impacts to the transportation network will be felt on the ART N/S Corridor, impacting service reliability and transit travel time.

Existing levels of congestion are measured in terms of the daily volume compared to the capacity of the corridor roadway segments. Congestion is classified as the intersection level of service (LOS) where LOS A reflects free-flow conditions and LOS F reflects poor performing intersections.

Existing LOS was evaluated for 2019 (base year) as well as for 2027 (No-Build), which is the assumed year service would begin to operate. The 2027 assessment is considered the No-Build scenario because it does not consider the impacts of ART implementation. In those years, the analysis identifies that some delay will occur along the ART N/S Corridor, mostly in Downtown, Midtown and to the north towards the I-410 interchange/Airport. Figure 14 illustrates the number of corridor intersections where significant congestion/traffic delay occurs in the AM and PM Peak Hours in 2019 (base year) and 2027 (No-Build). **There is an increase in the number of intersections that change to LOS F in both the AM and PM time periods between the base year and No-Build (without the introduction of ART service).**

⁵ Source: American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year Estimates, 2019

Figure 14. Existing (2019) and Future No-Build (2027) Corridor Intersection LOS



Source: VIA 2019 Traffic Counts/2027 Forecasted Traffic Volumes

Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities

The ART N/S Corridor contains few existing bicycle facilities, as shown in Figure 15. Downtown San Antonio has a more complete bicycle facility network which lends to better connections to transit service. A number of trails and bike lanes run parallel and/or connect to the ART N/S Corridor. Greenway trails are also present in the corridor's extremities. The City of San Antonio has added numerous bicycle facilities in recent years, and the 2011 Bicycle Master Plan outlined a set of improvements to add bicycle facilities citywide. In addition, the 2020 Bicycle Master Plan Update will include an updated Complete Streets Policy and a micromobility toolkit to guide more complete streets improvements and incorporate more transportation options into the transportation system. A bike lane is currently proposed by the City of San Antonio along Roosevelt Avenue near the southern portion of the ART N/S Corridor.

The portion of the ART N/S Corridor near Downtown includes a well-connected sidewalk network, improving the accessibility of travel to and from transit stops as shown in Figure 16. The availability of sidewalks along the roadway network decreases further out from the city center, particularly where speed limits are higher and arterial street density is lower. While sidewalks generally exist along key roadways, though some are missing connections to and from residential areas, it will be important for the ART N/S Corridor stations to be well connected to a robust bicycle and pedestrian network to increase ridership, walkability, safety, and support station area development.

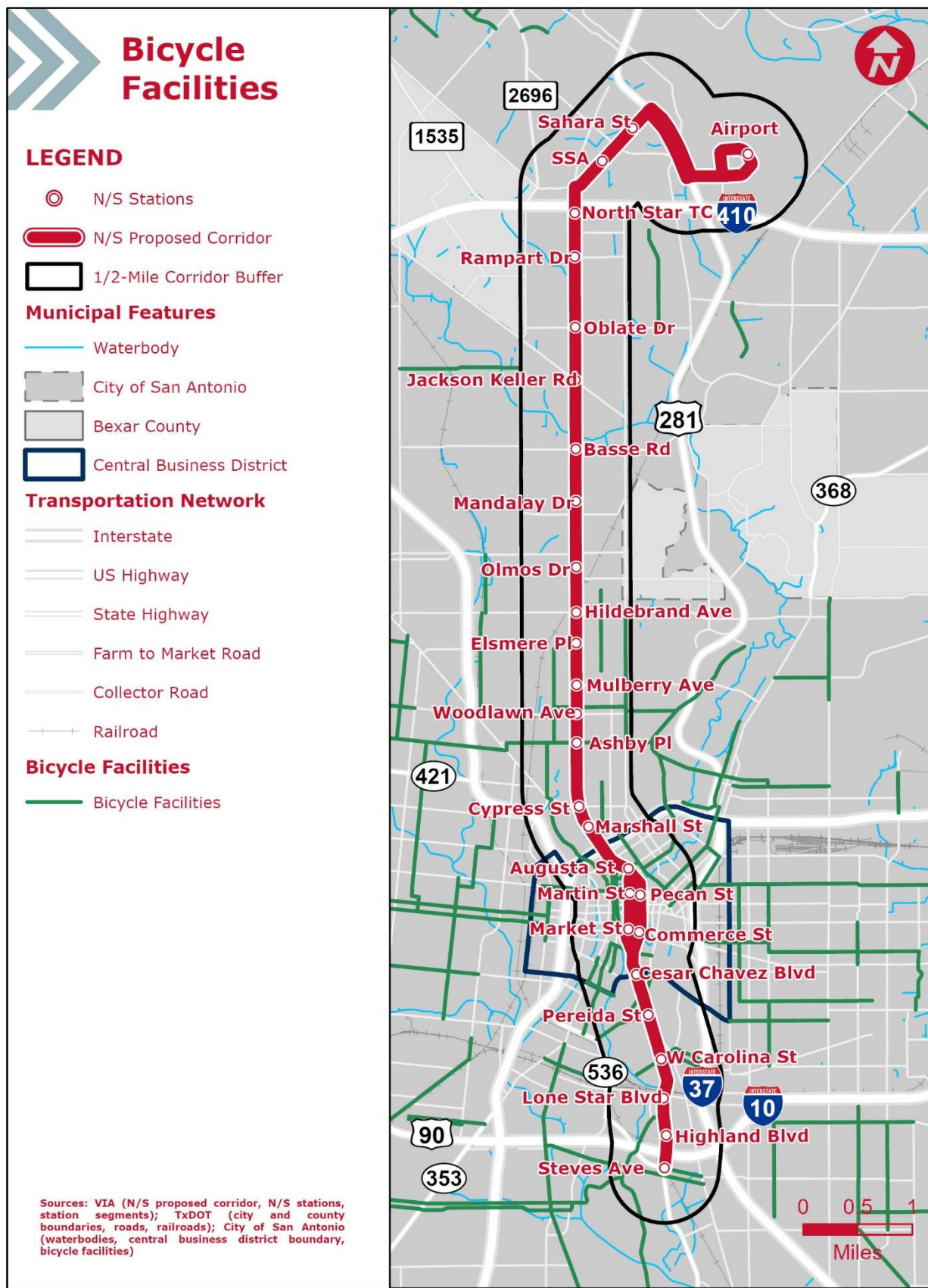


Figure 15. ART N/S Corridor Existing Bicycle Facilities

Source: City of San Antonio, 2021

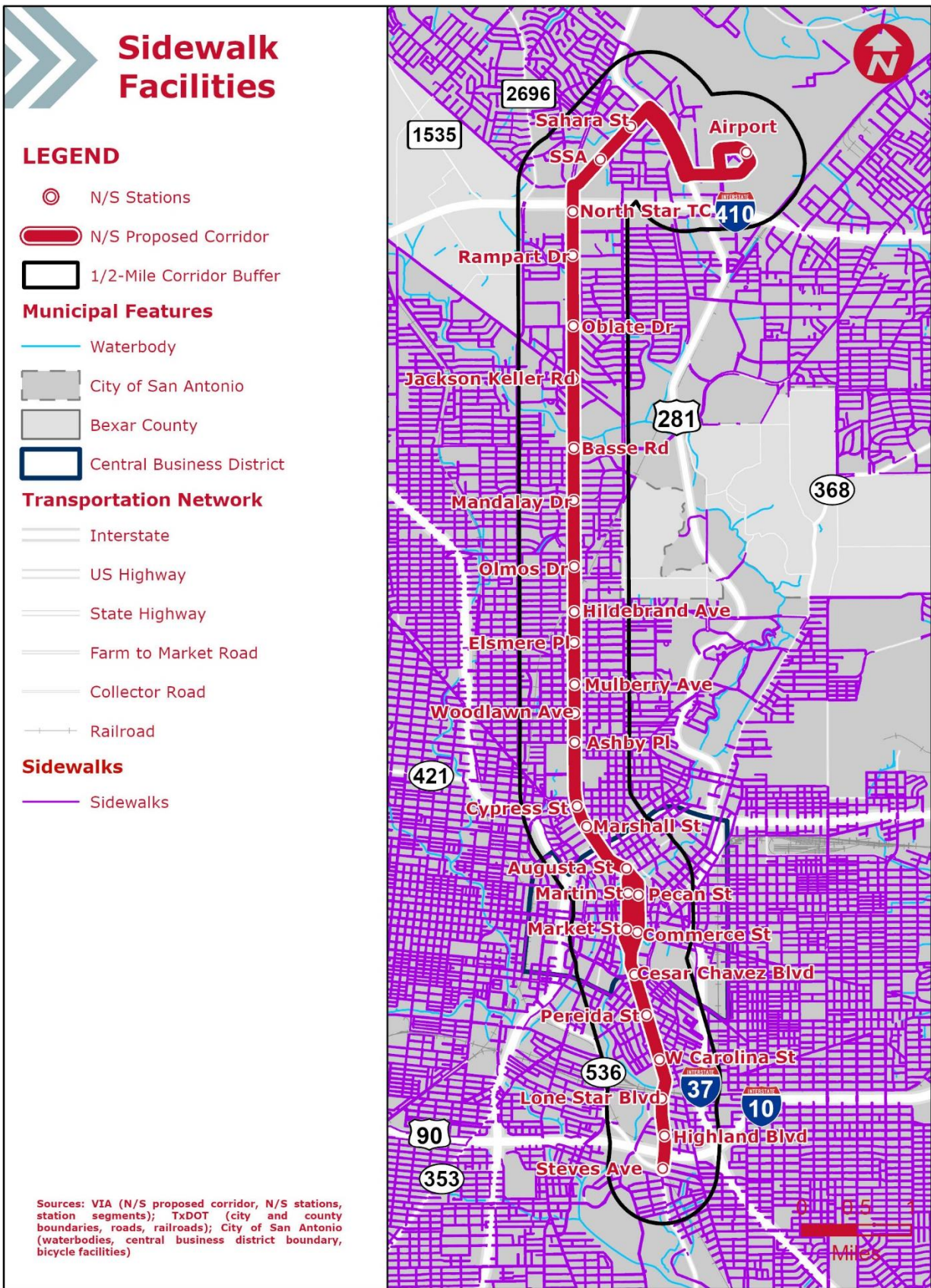


Figure 16. ART N/S Corridor Sidewalk Facilities

Source: City of San Antonio, 2021

Purpose and Need

VIA Rapid Transit Network Purpose and Need

Through extensive community involvement and coordination with its partners, VIA identified Rapid Transit as an opportunity to offer a more reliable, attractive, quality bus service that operates in dedicated right-of-way with priority treatments at selected intersections.

The overarching purpose for VIA's Rapid Transit Network is to develop a multi-corridor system of transit improvements that provide highly reliable, direct transit connections between key activity centers; address reliability issues with the current bus service in the corridors; better serve current riders and attract new riders to the system; improve overall mobility; strengthen the competitiveness of transit; support the region's land use vision and growth plans; leverage local investments in infrastructure; and enable people to live closer to jobs, saving households both time and money.

Several specific needs were identified that were common to all planned Rapid Transit Network corridors. Those needs are to:

- **Provide highly reliable transportation choices;**
- **Strengthen regional multimodal connections;**
- **Enhancing safety for transit users and active mobility users in the corridor;**
- **Promote the region's land use vision; and**
- **Provide equitable transit solutions for residents.**

ART North/South Corridor Project Purpose

VIA has started advancing its planned Rapid Transit Network along key corridors and has identified the ART N/S Corridor as the project to be implemented first due to its strong ridership potential, with a preliminary warrant analysis showing over 22,000 boardings within the corridor. This proposed project would improve access and mobility for corridor residents and employees and connect to major key destinations throughout the region. In general, the purpose of the ART N/S Corridor project is to:

- **Improve reliability associated with the current bus service within the corridor by adding dedicated lanes and transit signal priority (TSP);**
- **Improve equity of transit service;**
- **Better serve current riders and attract new riders;**
- **Strengthen the competitiveness of transit;**
- **Support the region's land use vision and growth plans;**
- **Improve air quality by reducing congestion and vehicle miles traveled (VMT);**
- **Leverage local investments in infrastructure; and,**
- **Provide social benefits through transit investment that supports equitable housing opportunities and workforce access.**

ART North/South Corridor Project Needs

The ART N/S Corridor project would address the following specific transportation needs in the corridor as identified through the planning and public engagement process:



Create competitive travel choices that ensure reliability and speed, to support growing employment centers

Transit is well established within the corridor. For example, key bus routes in the ART N/S Corridor carry an average of nearly 13,000 riders daily (Aug 2019). Route 2 on Blanco Road, Routes 3 and 4 on San Pedro Avenue, Routes 34, 40, and 42 on St. Mary's Street/Roosevelt Avenue, and Route 5 on McCullough Avenue serve a significant portion of the ART N/S Corridor. Critical issues impeding improved transit service quality in the ART N/S Corridor include:

- Congested roadways in the study area result in long trip times and unreliable bus service. Transit times can be as much as three times as long as a similar trip by an auto.
- Need for more direct service and/or improved transfer conditions to reduce transfer activity and travel times.
- Short distances between bus stops increases overall dwell time and makes it difficult to travel longer distances by bus in the corridor.
- Need to expand transit waiting areas and facilities to handle increased ridership at the busiest stops.
- Need to provide more frequent service throughout the entire day, to meet existing and future demand, particularly for night shift service and essential workers.

Existing traffic chokepoints near North Star Transit Center and in the northern portion of the ART N/S Corridor impact travel times and reliability. Future growth will add to traffic congestion in the corridor, with a significant increase in areas already experiencing deficient mobility levels of service. This increase in traffic congestion will make it even more challenging to provide fast and reliable transit service.



Strengthen the interconnected multimodal network of transit, air travel, driving, cycling and walking, to improve access between key regional centers in the corridor

In this fast-growing corridor, additional transit capacity is needed to facilitate continued economic growth and ensure connectivity to retail centers, universities, employment centers, medical facilities, and other activity centers remains reliable.

New transit connections are needed that will link this corridor to the overall transit network and other identified rapid transit corridors.

Regional Centers, as identified in the City's Comprehensive Plan, located within the ART N/S Corridor include:

- Greater Airport Area – Classified as a Logistics and Services Center, this is San Antonio's largest employment area with 96,000 jobs. The center includes the San Antonio International Airport, large concentrations of office uses and major retail destinations. The area also has 78,000 residents.

- Midtown Activity Center – This activity center is located just north of Downtown, serving a mix of multifamily residential development, institutions, and businesses and includes 13,000 residents and 23,000 jobs.
- Downtown San Antonio – As noted in the Comprehensive Plan, this “is the center of San Antonio’s traditional economy and is the third largest employment center in the region, anchored by a multi-billion-dollar tourism, education, and healthcare industries.” There are approximately 29,000 residents and 68,000 jobs located downtown. There were 37 million visitors to San Antonio in 2017, many of whom visit the downtown area.⁶ Outside of the Central Business District, toward the southern extent of the ART N/S Corridor, there are numerous small business and restaurants. The planned Lone Star Redevelopment will serve as an additional mixed-use anchor along the ART N/S Corridor.



Support growth by improving equity, housing, and transportation choices by linking strong neighborhoods to major centers of economic activity

The ART N/S Corridor is projected to experience population (43%) and employment (46%) growth in the next 25 years.⁷ To accommodate this growth, adopted local and regional planning policies must continue to support urban infill development and redevelopment focused on key nodes within the corridor. These

are staggering statistics that, when taken as a whole, point to increased travel time, air quality issues and congestion, which will likely be a threat to the projected future growth and prosperity of our region. All sectors of the local economy will be affected. As a result, the quality of life Bexar County enjoys today will be compromised as a consequence of poor planning for the future. In contrast, a well-connected and efficient transportation network increases access to businesses and allows for an overall higher level of mobility, effectively expanding opportunity and the freedom of movement for its citizens.

Not only would the ART N/S Corridor expand opportunities for employment growth but **investing in ART would improve equity by expanding access to these employment growth areas along the corridor for users of all income levels and races.** Through investment of equitable development, ART could create transit-oriented centers that provide housing and employment opportunities for all income levels to alleviate displacement and ensure San Antonio provides ample opportunities for all.

Transit investments within the ART N/S Corridor need to be supportive of the scale and character of land use developments envisioned by the City of San Antonio and VIA. Improvements in local transportation provide economic development, which in turn creates economic activity and increased desirability. Key sites targeted for revitalization and redevelopment should be coordinated with development of frequent transit corridors to ensure residents have the option to live in communities where they can easily reach jobs, medical facilities, education centers, and other activity centers by transit, by foot, or on bicycle. Having these walkable communities and transportation choices available helps the region

⁶ Source: San Antonio Visitor Alliance, 2018. The Economic Impact of San Antonio’s Hospitality Industry, <https://savisitoralliance.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2017-Hospitality-Report-dtd-Nov-2018.pdf>

⁷ Source: AAMPO 2020/2045 TAZ Data

manage congestion, minimize travel delays, and grow a robust economy. With these improvements, the public enjoys greater access to services and lower transportation costs. These benefits stimulate development and generate economic activity.

Summary

A well connected and accessible transit system can be used to improve the mobility of a region's residents, workers, and visitors. The ART N/S Corridor is anticipated to see significant growth in population and employment, including a high percentage of people who are transit dependent. Those who are transit dependent or who choose to utilize transit as their primary mode of transportation are reliant on VIA to provide them with reliable transportation options. Investment in the ART N/S Corridor project would ensure that San Antonio has a world-class, reliable, and equitable transit system that improves access and mobility for corridor residents, workers, and visitors, connecting to major key destinations throughout the region.

The purpose of the ART N/S Corridor project is to:

- **Improve transit travel time and reliability within the corridor to better serve current riders and attract new riders;**
- **Improve reliability of transit service for transit dependent and choice riders;**
- **Strengthen the competitiveness of transit;**
- **Support the region's land use vision and growth plans;**
- **Improve air quality by reducing congestion and VMT;**
- **Leverage local investments in infrastructure; and**
- **Provide social benefits through transit investment that supports equitable housing opportunities and workforce access.**

The ART N/S Corridor project would address the following specific transportation needs:

- **Strengthen the interconnected multimodal network of transit, air travel, driving, cycling, and walking, to improve access between key regional centers in the corridor;**
- **Create competitive travel choices that ensure reliability and speed, to support growing employment centers; and**
- **Support growth by improving equity, housing, and transportation choices by linking neighborhoods to major centers of economic activity.**