



## **BCDCOG INTRODUCES REGIONAL PLAN TO LINK RURAL WORKFORCE TO TRANSPORTATION, JOB OPPORTUNITIES**

### *FOCUS ON ACCESS TO JOB SKILLS TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT*

**NORTH CHARLESTON (May 7, 2020)** – The [Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments](#) (BCDCOG) recently released its 2020 Rural Workforce Transportation Study, which outlines a regional strategy focused on improving access to job training and employment for the region's rural workforce.

The year-long undertaking aimed to:

- Develop an understanding of the region's rural workforce and skill sets.
- Identify existing and expanding industry training and employment gaps that could be filled by the rural workforce.
- Develop and evaluate potential strategies to connect the rural workforce to job skills training and employment opportunities.

Rural areas in the region, where public transportation options are limited or unavailable, were home to approximately 20 percent of the Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester counties' unemployed workforce prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the study found.

While the tri-county region has a consistently lower unemployment rate than the state as a whole, rural portions of the region average approximately one percent higher unemployment rate (7.8 percent) than the region overall (6.9 percent), and some rural areas have unemployment rates as high as 30 percent.

"Increasing our focus on rural workforce transportation has been a priority for BCDCOG and we have analyzed the makeup of that group, the skill sets of its workers and where the training gaps exist," said BCDCOG Executive Director Ron Mitchum. "Without the information gathered in the study, it would be challenging to meet the employment and transportation needs of the residents in the rural tri-county area."

The study, informed by extensive research and a nearly 60-member stakeholder group made up of employers and community leaders, identified 14 potential service areas and four main clusters in the three-county region. Consensus was reached that moving

forward with a carpool and vanpool-oriented strategy would best meet rural workforce training and job transportation needs. Multiple options are available as to how that service could be structured.

Implementation of the plan will likely begin with a vanpool pilot program in 2020. Potential and secured funding sources include local, state, non-profit and federal grants, as well as employer contributions.

“The Rural Workforce Transportation Study Report is an important building block as we look at how to integrate transportation strategies that connect the rural labor force to job skills training and employment opportunities in the region,” said Sharon Hollis, BCDCOG principal planner.

Initiated by the BCDCOG in January 2019, the report was developed in response to the [2018 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy](#) (CEDS), which provides strategic direction and action items to guide economic development over the next half-decade.

- Read the [Rural Workforce Transportation Study Executive Summary](#)
- Read the [Rural Workforce Transportation Study](#)

#### **ABOUT BCDCOG**

*The BCDCOG is a voluntary association of, by and for local governments, and was established to assist Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester county leaders in planning for common needs, cooperating for mutual benefit, and coordinating for sound regional development. BCDCOG's purpose is to strengthen the individual and collective power of local governments and to help them recognize regional opportunities, eliminate duplication, and make joint decisions. For the latest on BCDCOG, visit [BCDCOG.com](#), like us on [Facebook](#) or follow on Twitter at [@BCDCoG](#).*

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