

DEMOGRAPHICS

Berks County's transportation system is an essential asset, connecting residents and businesses to jobs, markets, goods, and services at local, national, and global levels. To anticipate how transportation in the county will evolve over the next 25 years, it is critical to analyze the socioeconomic and land-use factors that shape travel demand and patterns.

Population and employment growth typically drive increases in travel and commerce. Additional demographic and economic variables—such as age distribution, per capita income, the proximity of housing to jobs and services, household structure, education levels, and transportation costs—also play key roles in determining travel needs and preferences. Travel behavior often varies significantly across age groups. For instance, recent trends show that younger Americans are driving less than earlier generations for a variety of reasons, while older adults are staying in the workforce longer and maintaining more active lifestyles than their predecessors. These evolving demographics will guide future transportation planning, helping to create a balanced, multimodal system capable of addressing diverse mobility needs.

Geographic Location

Berks County is a county of the third class, comprised of 72 municipalities: 1 city, 27 boroughs, and 44 townships. It is located in southeastern Pennsylvania, surrounded by six other counties: Schuylkill County to the north, Lebanon and Lancaster counties to the west, Lehigh and Montgomery counties to the east and Chester County to the south (see Map 1). Reading, a city of the third class, serves as the county seat. The county's geographic location and transportation network promote accessibility and mobility for people and freight to several surrounding larger metropolitan areas including Allentown (39 miles), Philadelphia (56 miles), Baltimore (97 miles), and New York City (125 miles).



Berks County's topography has profoundly influenced its historical development and transportation network. The county spans a diamond-shaped area of 864 square miles, with its northern and southern borders defined by sections of the Blue and South Mountains—two ridges of the Appalachian chain—that rise to an average elevation of about 640 feet above sea level. Combined with the Schuylkill River and its extensive system of creeks and streams, the region's abundant limestone geology and rich, fertile soils attracted early settlers in the early 18th century.

Population

As of 2024, Berks County is home to 433,015 residents and is the ninth most populated county in Pennsylvania. In comparison to the six neighboring counties, it ranks fourth in overall population. From 2010 to 2020, population increased 4.2 percent, exceeding state figures but falling below the national rate of growth. Population growth slowed between 2020 and 2024, above the state but consistent with national trends.

Most counties show modest growth through 2030 - 2040, but that pattern diverges by 2050. Berks County's population shows growth through 2040, but that growth dramatically slows in 2040 - 2050. Surrounding counties like Lehigh, Lebanon, and Lancaster show the most sustained growth, while the older, industrial Schuylkill County is steadily losing population. Berks County ranked fourth in the number of in-migrants between 2017 - 2018. In 2021 - 2022, the latest data available, the county fell to fifth compared to the other six surrounding counties. The reasons for this are numerous but could include retirements or decisions on improving quality of life and employment prospects.

COUNTY POPULATION BETWEEN 2010 AND 2024

County	2010	2020	2024 Est.	% Change 10-20	% Change 20-24
Chester	498,886	534,413	547,840	7.1%	2.5%
Montgomery	799,874	856,553	867,573	7.1%	1.3%
Lehigh	349,497	374,557	378,792	7.2%	1.1%
Berks	411,442	428,849	433,015	4.2%	1.0%
Lancaster	519,445	552,984	557,931	6.5%	0.9%
Lebanon	133,568	143,257	144,186	7.3%	0.6%
Schuylkill	148,289	143,049	143,558	-3.5%	0.4%
Pennsylvania	12,702,379	13,002,700	13,018,639	2.4%	0.1%
United States	308,745,538	331,449,281	334,922,499	7.4%	1.0%

Source: U.S. Census, Census 2010, 2020, and American Community Survey, 2024 5-year Estimates (DP05)

COUNTY POPULATION PROJECTIONS, 2020 - 2050

County	2020 Census	2030 Projected	2040 Projected	2050 Projected	% Change 20-30	% Change 40-50
Berks	428,849	442,748	453,624	460,295	3.2%	1.5%
Chester	534,413	552,077	567,038	571,892	3.3%	0.9%
Lancaster	552,984	569,039	583,665	599,146	2.9%	2.7%
Lebanon	143,257	148,872	155,167	161,410	3.9%	4.0%
Lehigh	374,557	391,415	405,502	416,810	4.5%	2.8%
Montgomery	856,553	864,526	866,836	858,686	0.9%	-0.9%
Schuylkill	143,049	138,732	133,698	127,877	-3.0%	-4.4%
Pennsylvania	13,002,700	13,185,540	13,226,568	13,195,997	1.4%	-0.2%

Source: U. S. Census, 2020 Decennial Census, The Center for Rural Pennsylvania *Pennsylvania Population Projections 2030-2050*

COUNTY MIGRATION FOR 2017-2018 AND 2021-2022

2017-2018	In	Out	Difference		2021-2022	In	Out	Difference
Chester	22,216	19,741	2,475		Chester	23,058	20,829	2,229
Montgomery	36,395	34,209	2,186		Schuylkill	5,259	4,246	1,013
Berks	13,063	12,582	481		Montgomery	37,432	36,797	635
Lebanon	5,473	5,179	294		Lebanon	5,540	5,148	392
Schuylkill	4,053	3,869	184		Berks	13,629	13,541	88
Lehigh	16,237	16,436	-199		Lehigh	16,501	17,023	-522
Lancaster	14,520	16,391	-1,871		Lancaster	15,081	16,200	-1,119

Source: Internal Revenue Service, Statistics of Income Office, Migration Data, County to County Migration Data, 2017-2018 and 2021-2022

Population Density

Of the seven counties, Berks County has the fifth highest population density. This is in part due to the physical size of the county. The county is the 18th largest in the state and only Lancaster County is larger when comparing the seven neighboring counties.

The United States Census Bureau defines a place “urban” when the population density is a least 1,000 people per square mile. Based on current estimates, 30 of the 72 municipalities in Berks County could be considered “urban” by this definition.

Population density is an important consideration in transportation planning. As more people move into and within the county, the density of residential and employment opportunities changes in both magnitude and distribution. Reading and most of the older boroughs contain the highest densities of persons and jobs, while the rural areas contain more land and therefore, lower densities (see Map 2). The provision of transportation services is affected in different ways by density of people and jobs. Mass transit services operate more efficiently in very dense, urban areas. Areas that were formerly rural are now developing at suburban densities but are neither dense enough nor close enough to the transit system to warrant system expansion. Many rural roads, bridges, and intersections are not constructed to standards adequate to handle increased demands created by new development.

POPULATION DENSITY BY COUNTY, 2024

County	Size (Sq. Mi.)	2024 Pop. Est.	Density
Montgomery	483.0	867,573	1796.2
Lehigh	345.2	378,792	1097.3
Chester	750.5	547,840	730.0
Lancaster	943.8	557,931	591.2
Berks	856.5	433,015	505.6
Lebanon	361.8	144,186	398.5
Schuylkill	778.6	143,558	184.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2024 Estimates (DP05)

Households

The household is the primary driver of trip making, so it is important to examine trends and forecasts of the number of households. Large families tend to generate fewer trips per person than do smaller families because there is a tendency towards increased vehicle occupancy with each trip. The number of households increased by 2.7 percent in Berks County between 2019 and 2024 ranking sixth out of the 7 counties. The lower rate of household growth mirrors the slow population growth the county is experiencing. In 2024, a Berks County household had 2.57 people per household (PPH), down slightly from 2.62 in 2019. The county has slightly more people per household than the state average of 2.39. Map 3 shows the persons per household by municipality in Berks County.

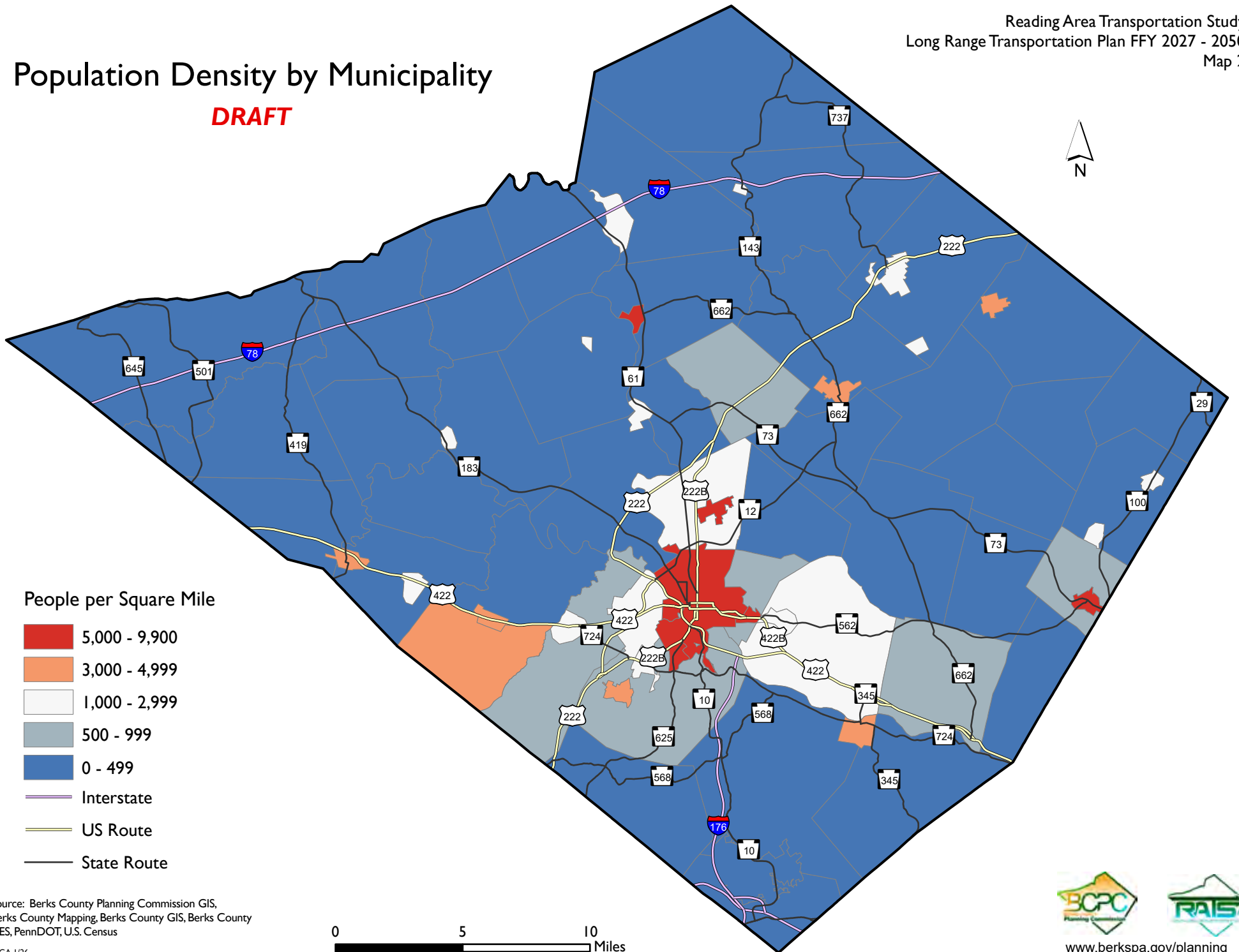
NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS, 2019 TO 2024

County	2019	2024	% Change
Chester	200,402	212,491	6.0%
Montgomery	334,387	350,351	4.8%
Lebanon	57,609	59,921	4.0%
Lancaster	210,985	219,224	3.9%
Lehigh	146,145	151,220	3.5%
Berks	167,105	171,580	2.7%
Schuylkill	69,870	67,295	-3.7%
Pennsylvania	5,693,314	5,806,452	2.0%
United States	137,428,986	143,775,355	4.6%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2019 and 2024 5-year Estimates (DP04)

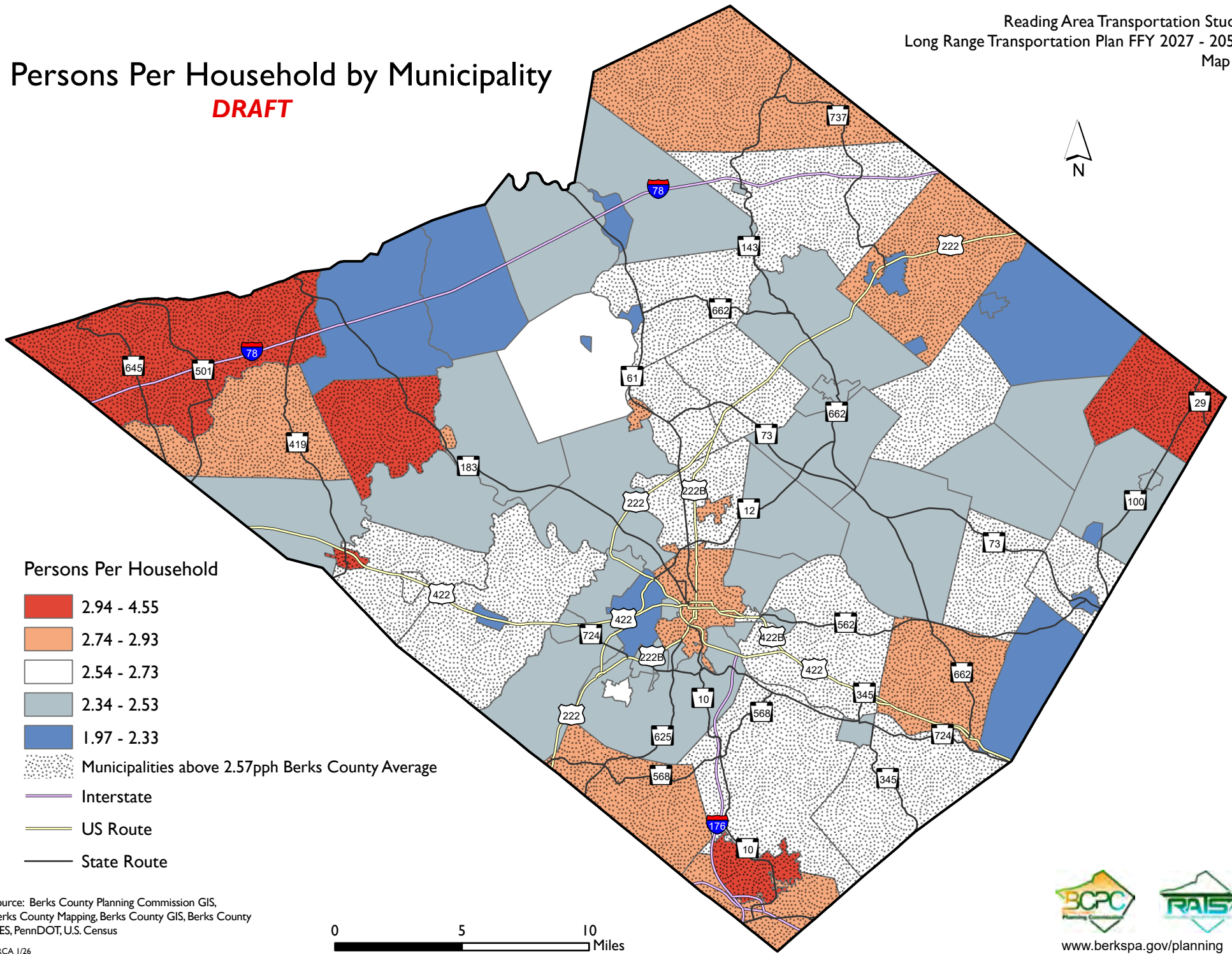
Population Density by Municipality

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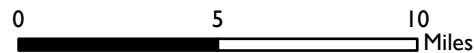
Persons Per Household by Municipality

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Source: Berks County Planning Commission GIS,
 Berks County Mapping, Berks County GIS, Berks County
 DES, PennDOT, U.S. Census

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Berks County Poverty

In 2024, Berks County had the second highest overall poverty rate of the seven counties and is 0.5 higher than the state poverty rate. From 1960 – 2000, Schuylkill County had the highest overall poverty rate. Berks surpassed Schuylkill in the 2000 – 2010 decade. According to the latest estimates Schuylkill County again has the highest poverty rate out of the seven-county region. While the highest rates of poverty are in the City of Reading, several boroughs and townships have had considerable poverty gains in the last decade. (see Map 4)

To provide some explanation of why some Berks County municipalities saw substantial increases in poverty, staff explored American Community Survey data on usual hours worked during a week for those between the ages of 16 and 64 and median household incomes. Most Berks County municipalities have seen declines in hours worked with sharp declines in full-time employment hours. There have also been substantial increases in part-time employment and no employment whatsoever.

Berks County median household incomes grew 25.9 percent between 2019 and 2024. This rate is slightly below both state and national figures. There are some Berks County municipalities that have median household incomes that are below the state median.

Berks County Elderly Population

As the “baby boom” generation ages, the amount of elderly population in the region will increase which will have a significant impact on the transportation system. Driving will become difficult or impossible for many, as they grow older, with an increasing need for transit and paratransit services. Improvements in roadway signage, lighting, or other highway system elements will be needed to accommodate a higher number of drivers with visual or other physical challenges due to aging. In Berks County, 18 percent of the population is 65 and over, up from 16.9 percent in 2019. Statewide, the population age 65 and older is expected to rise from 19.5 percent in 2024 to 23 percent in 2040. Map 5 shows the concentrations of the 65 and over population by municipality in Berks County. According to the Federal Highway Administration, in 2023, drivers 65+ accounted for approximately 25.2 percent of all licensed drivers in Pennsylvania.

Elder mobility will be a focus of long- range transportation and safety planning. The vast majority of older adults prefer to “age in place” by continuing to live in their current homes and communities. Many older adults in Berks County are dependent on cars, particularly in the suburban and rural areas of the county, which typically developed around the motor vehicle as the primary mode of transportation.

Berks County Disabled Population

In 2024, 13.5 percent of Berks County residents identified themselves as being disabled. This is a very slight decrease from 13.7 percent in 2019. Map 6 shows the concentration of disabled people in Berks County. Disabled mobility will also be a focus of long-range transportation and safety planning as the majority of disabled people prefer to live in non-institutionalized settings such as nursing or personal care facilities or in their own homes. This trend will be constantly monitored and documented in subsequent plan updates because if the numbers increase rather than decrease it may elevate the need for transit and paratransit services in the boroughs and townships outside the metropolitan area.

Berks County Limited English Proficiency Households

Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English are considered by federal law to be limited English proficient, or “LEP.” This language barrier may prevent individuals from accessing services and benefits. In 2024, 5.8 percent of Berks County households had limited to no proficiency with the English language. Map 7 shows many of those households are in the City of Reading, with other concentrations in Muhlenberg Township, Laureldale, Mount Penn and Kutztown Boroughs. Reading and Muhlenberg exceed the countywide average.

Berks County Zero Vehicle Households

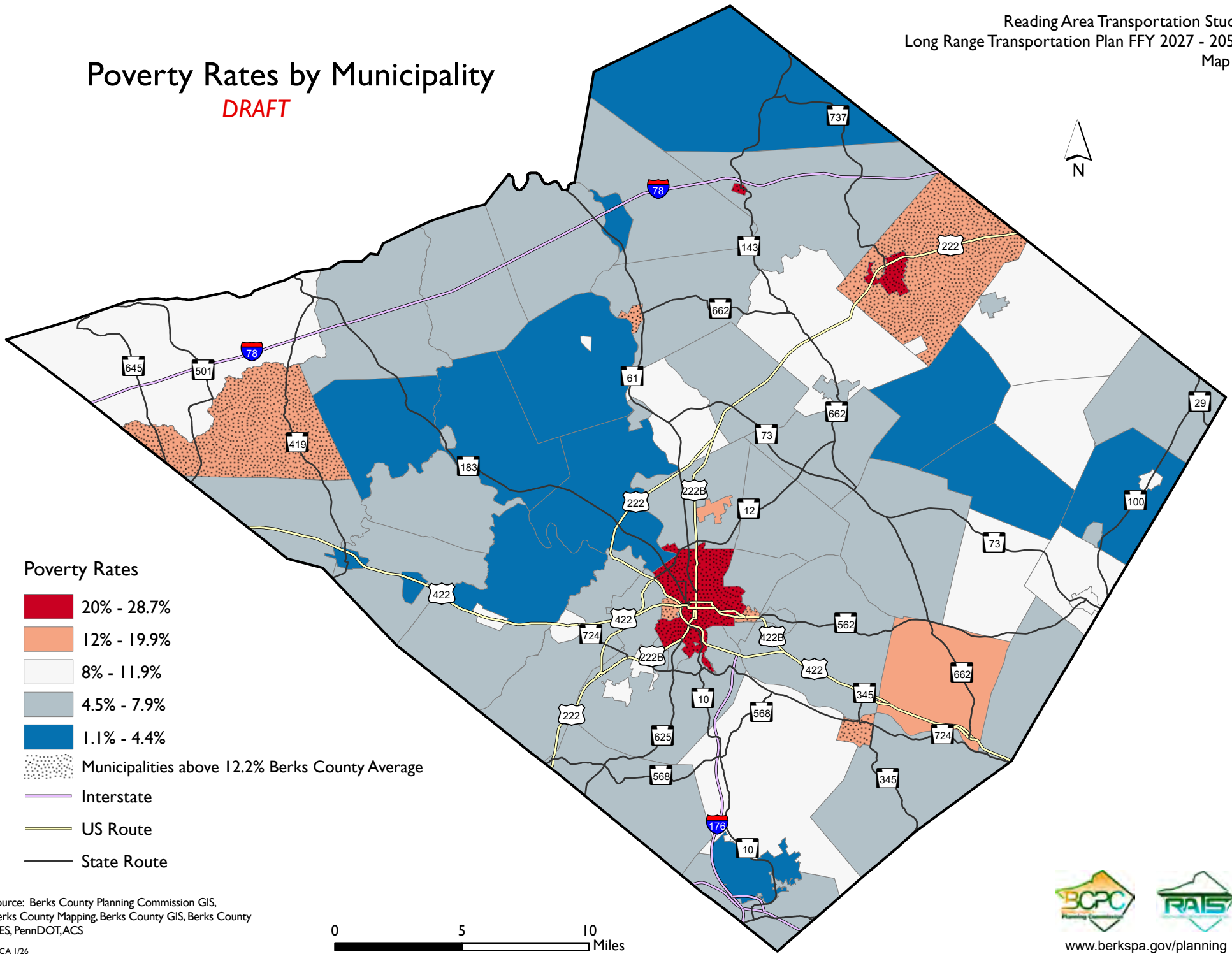
Despite the dominance of automobiles, 8.7 percent of Berks County households do not have access to a vehicle. This is a slight increase from 8.3 percent in 2019. Map 8 shows the percentage of these households by municipality. Although the majority of Zero Vehicle Households are in the City of Reading, Map 8 shows several municipalities meet or exceed the county average. Lack of access to a personal vehicle or transit may leave residents with poor access to employment and healthcare centers. The more limited access to a private automobile, the more reliant on public transportation an individual or household becomes.

Berks County Minority Population

Minority populations are defined as those groups differing, especially in race or ethnic background from the majority of a population. For the purposes of this analysis, the United States Census standards for identifying minorities will be used. The average minority population in Berks County is 26.1 percent, an increase of 4.9 percent since 2019. The municipalities that exceed the county average are highlighted on Map 9.

Poverty Rates by Municipality

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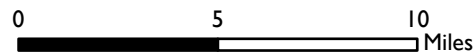


Poverty Rates

- 20% - 28.7%
- 12% - 19.9%
- 8% - 11.9%
- 4.5% - 7.9%
- 1.1% - 4.4%
- Municipalities above 12.2% Berks County Average
- Interstate
- US Route
- State Route

Source: Berks County Planning Commission GIS,
 Berks County Mapping, Berks County GIS, Berks County
 DES, PennDOT, ACS

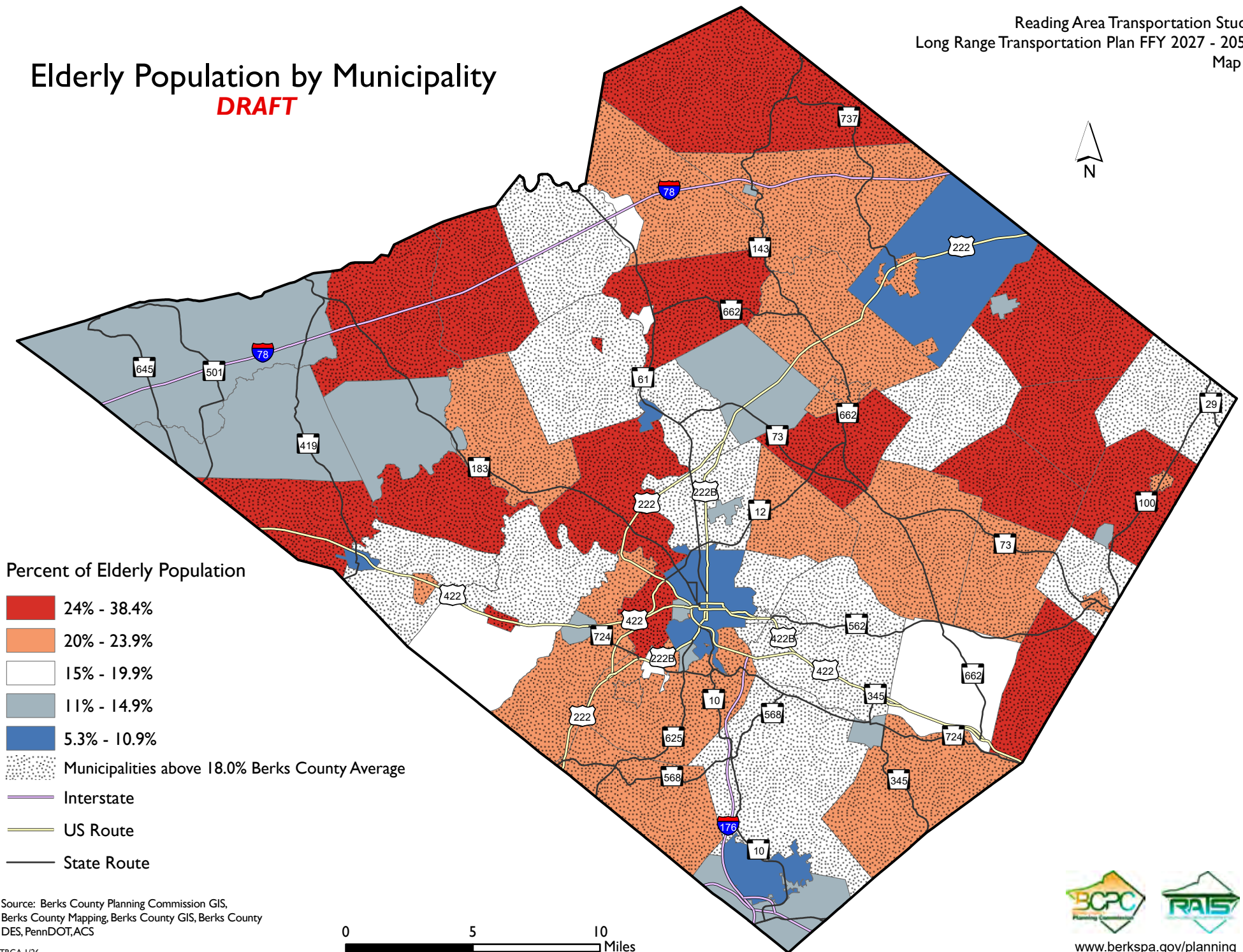
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Elderly Population by Municipality

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Disabled Population by Municipality

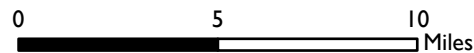
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Percent of Disabled Population

- 20% - 33.9%
- 17% - 19.9%
- 13% - 16.9%
- 9% - 12.9%
- 7.5% - 8.9%
- Municipalities above 13.5% Berks County Average
- Interstate
- US Route
- State Route

Source: Berks County Planning Commission GIS,
 Berks County Mapping, Berks County GIS, Berks County
 DES, PennDOT, ACS



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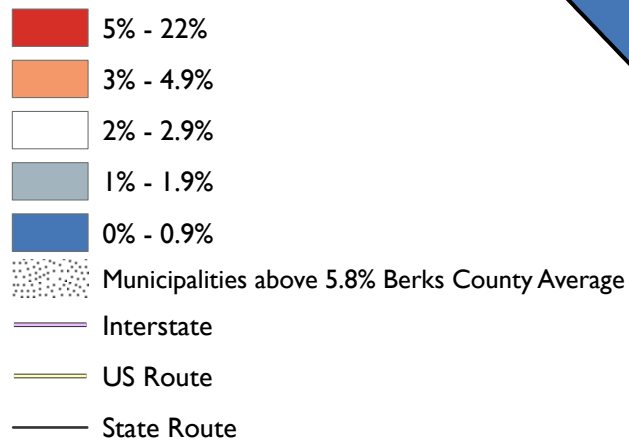
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Limited English Households by Municipality

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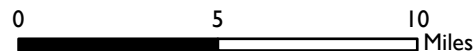
Limited English 14yrs and Older *



* No one in the household age 14 and over speaks English only or speaks English "very well"

Source: Berks County Planning Commission GIS,
 Berks County Mapping, Berks County GIS, Berks County
 DES, PennDOT, ACS

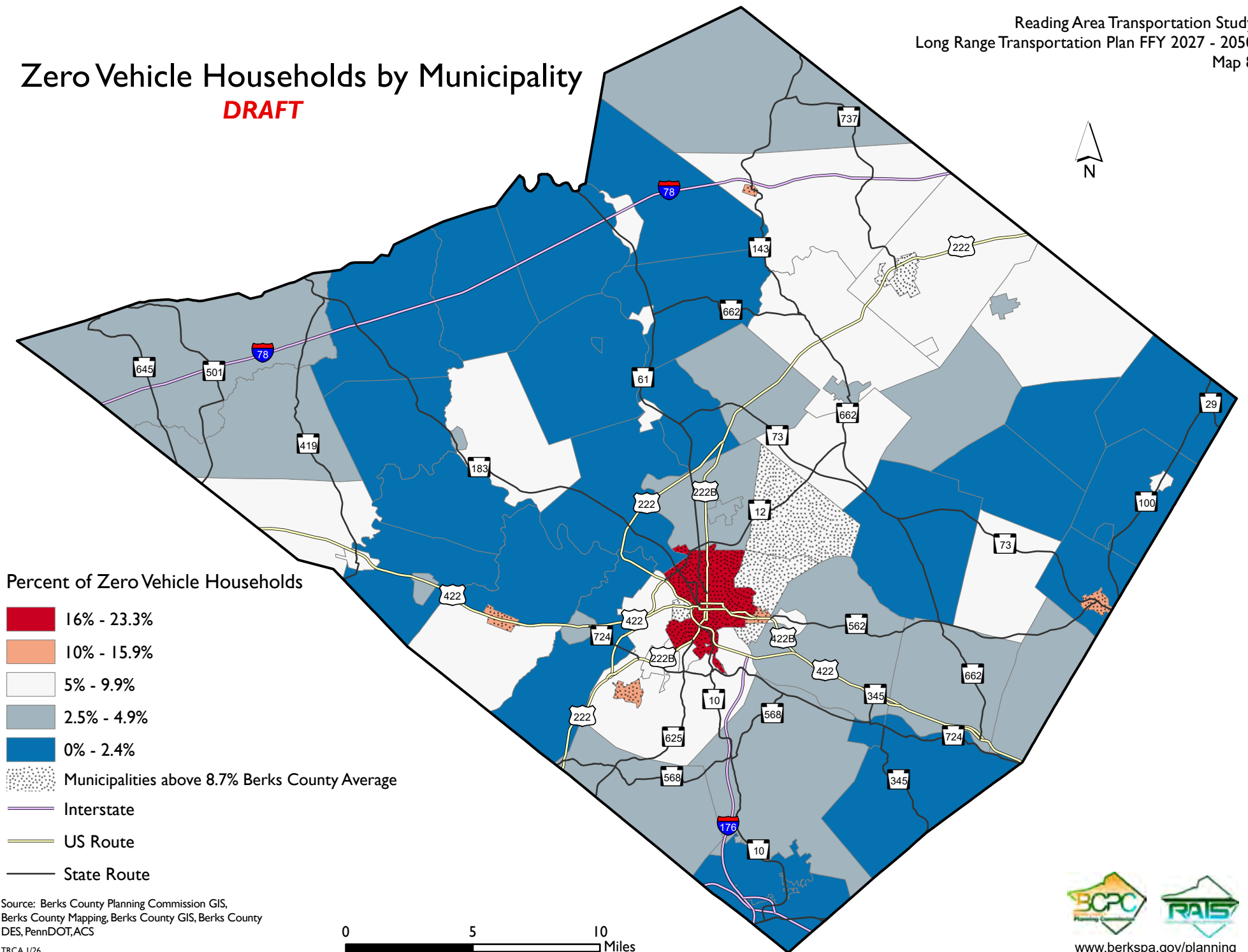
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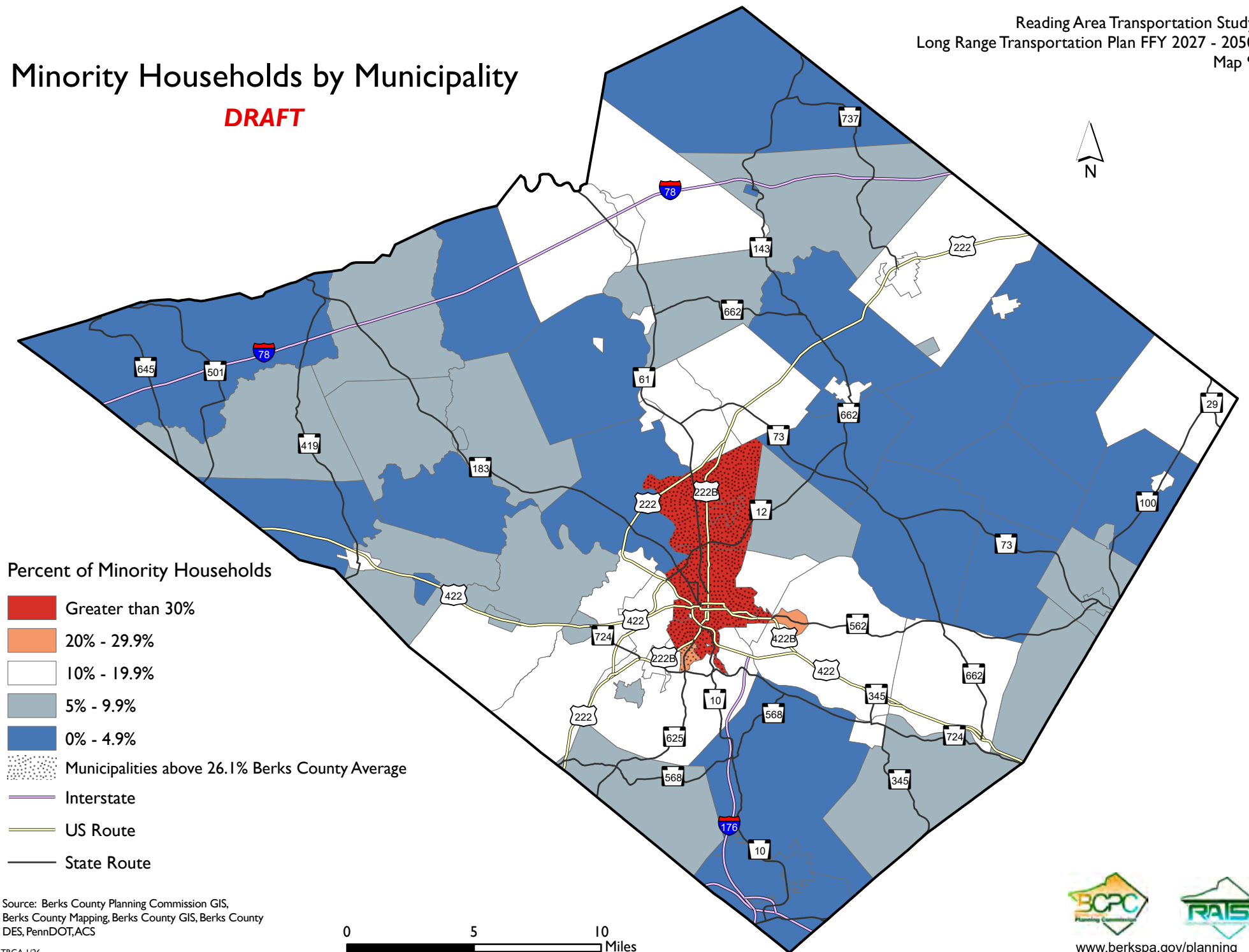
Zero Vehicle Households by Municipality

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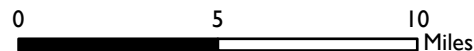
Minority Households by Municipality

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Source: Berks County Planning Commission GIS,
 Berks County Mapping, Berks County GIS, Berks County
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