

# **RATS**

## **Rockford Area Transportation Study**

### **Metropolitan Planning Organization**

City of Rockford, Public Works Department  
425 East State Street, Rockford, IL 61104  
(815) 967-7062

### **POLICY COMMITTEE**

*Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey, City of Rockford  
Mayor Darryl F. Lindberg, City of Loves Park  
Mayor Frederic C. Brereton, City of Belvidere  
District Engineer Gregory L. Mounts IDOT, Dist 2  
Board Chairman Susan L. Anderson, Boone County  
President Linda M. Vaughn, Village of Machesney Park  
Board Chairman Scott H. Christiansen, Winnebago  
County*

## **ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & TITLE VI CONSIDERATIONS**

related to  
Transportation Planning and Transportation Improvements  
in the

### **ROCKFORD METROPOLITAN AREA**

as prepared by the

Rockford Area Transportation Study (RATS)  
the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)  
for the Rockford Area

March, 2006

THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED IN COOPERATION  
WITH THE FOLLOWING:

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Highway Administration  
Federal Transit Administration  
Illinois Department of Transportation

THE CONTENTS, VIEWS, POLICIES AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED  
IN THIS REPORT ARE NOT NECESSARILY  
THOSE OF THE ABOVE AGENCIES

**Table of Contents**

INTRODUCTION.....	3	Woodruff/Wallenburg Expressway.....	13
The Rockford Area Transportation Study.....	3	Sage Drive.....	13
Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.....	3	Springfield Avenue Connection.....	13
Executive Order 12898.....	4	Harrison Avenue Reconstruction.....	14
Law vs Executive Order.....	4	Harlem Road.....	14
The Overall Goal of EJ.....	4	Charles Street relocation.....	14
The purpose of this document.....	4	West State Street Corridor.....	14
COMPLEXITIES OF ASSESSING EJ.....	4	The Mayor's Welfare to Work Task Force.....	14
OVERALL EJ GOALS OF RATS.....	6	WinGIS.....	15
PAST EJ EVALUATIONS IN THE ROCKFORD AREA.....	7	RAT/SLAT Traffic Simulation Modeling & Analysis Study.....	16
CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PICTURE.....	8	CONCLUSIONS.....	16
Low-income households.....	8	Map 1a – HH w/ less than \$15K Annual Income.....	17
Black or African Americans.....	8	Map 1b – HH w/ Incomes Below Poverty Level.....	18
Non-minorities (Whites).....	8	Map 2a – Distribution of Blacks.....	19
Minorities other than Blacks.....	8	Map 2b – Distribution of Whites.....	19
Hispanics.....	9	Map 2c – Distribution of Other Minorities.....	19
Households with Zero motorized vehicles.....	9	Map 2d – Distribution of Hispanics.....	19
Main Public Transit Routes.....	9	Map 3 – HH w/ Zero Vehicles.....	20
Persons with Disabilities.....	9	Map 4 – Persons Commuting to Work by Transit.....	21
TIP (FY 2004).....	9	Map 5 – Distribution of Persons w/ Disability.....	22
FTA 5307.....	9	Map 6 – FAU/STP Projects Throughout RATS History.....	23
STP-U.....	9	Chart 1 – Selected Year 2000 Census Block Group Data – Correlation Coefficient Matrix.....	24
Current STP project.....	10		
Selected Year 2000 Census Data.....	11		
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND THE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS.....	11		
NOTABLE EXAMPLES OF EJ CONSIDERATION.....	12		
Illinois State Toll Highway Alignment.....	12		
Perryville Road south of IL-173.....	13		
Central Avenue.....	13		

## I. INTRODUCTION

**A. The Rockford Area Transportation Study (RATS)** is the name given to the federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Rockford Metropolitan Planning Area. RATS encompasses the jurisdictions of Rockford, Loves Park, Machesney Park, Belvidere, a large part of Boone and Winnebago Counties and the smaller jurisdictions of Cherry Valley, New Millford, Winnebago, and Roscoe. RATS is governed by a Policy Committee consisting of the top elected officials of the first six entities cited above along with the District Engineer of the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) (District 2, headquartered in Dixon, Illinois). RATS is responsible for conducting a comprehensive, coordinated and continuing transportation planning process in accordance with detailed Federal guidelines stemming from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), and the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) as enacted by the US Congress (12 years ago, six years ago, and 4 months ago respectively).

**The main required parts of the planning process include:**

1. The annual development of a Unified Work Program (UWP) that describes the planning work to be accomplished in the coming year, assigns or coordinates the work responsibilities, and allocates the funds available for planning to the various participants.
2. The Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) that lists all major transportation projects to be implemented over the next three years by the above-mentioned and other authorities in the area.
3. The Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRP) that coordinates all major transportation improvements planned for the next 25-30 years.
4. The Public Participation Process (PIP), a document that sets forth how the public is to be informed and involved in the transportation decision-making and planning process. When conducting the planning process.
5. RATS must also comply with Federal guidance pertaining to non-discrimination: Title VI and Environmental Justice – the subject of this report.

The Lead Agency for RATS is the City of Rockford Public Works Department, located at 425 East State Street, Rockford, IL 61104. The RATS Study Director is the City Traffic Engineer (Steve Ernst). RATS employs 2-3 full time staff and receives assistance on a part-time basis from several other staff of the City of Rockford and the other RATS participants.

**B. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states** that: "no person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Title VI bars intentional discrimination as well as disparate impact discrimination (i.e., a neutral policy that has the effect of a disparate or disproportionate impact).

**C. Executive Order 12898** was issued in 1994 by President Bill Clinton and applies to both minority populations and low-income populations. The order amplifies Title VI and states that: "each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations." In response to EO 12898, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued similar orders or statements requiring consideration of environmental justice to be a part of the overall transportation decision-making process and the metropolitan planning process.

**D. Law vs Executive Order.** It should be recognized that Title VI requirements are laws mandated by Congress -- as opposed to executive or administrative orders. The relative weight of these legislative approaches is debatable but for purposes of this report they are considered equal. It is noteworthy, however, that EO 12898 goes further than Title VI by including the consideration of low-income groups but that Title VI law pertains not just to groups of populations, but also to individual persons. Whether this distinction was intentional or merely an inadvertent oversight is not clear. However, it would seem incongruous to recognize discrimination against a minority group or person as an unethical practice but not recognize discrimination against a low-income person as a similarly unethical practice. Therefore, it is arguable that the EO 12898 and the other administrative orders are intended to be an extension of Title VI to prevent discrimination against both low-income individuals and groups. Throughout the remainder of this document, the term Environmental Justice (EJ, for short) will be defined in that broader sense and the EJ and Title VI mandates will be considered synonymous.

**E. The Overall Goal of EJ** is to ensure that all communities and persons, across the nation, live in a safe and healthful environment. Further, the Order recognizes that many undeniably beneficial public works projects, infrastructure improvements and governmental actions are often accompanied by adverse or undesirable impacts. Therefore, the requirements seek to ensure that minorities and low-income communities or persons don't bear the brunt of a project's or action's adverse impacts, while white and higher income communities or persons take the lion's share of the benefits.

**F. The purpose of this document** is to provide an overall assessment of how the RATS planning process approaches and works toward compliance with the above cited laws and orders.

## II. COMPLEXITIES OF ASSESSING EJ

Determining whether Environmental Justice is being served a complex matter. A hypothetical example unrelated to transportation or the Rockford area that might serve to illustrate some of the difficulties involved is that: many communities across the country have chosen to construct huge incinerators to deal with burdening waste disposal problems. Some evidence exists, however, suggesting that harmful air pollution occurs in the immediate vicinity of such facilities. Regardless of whether the pollution is real or not, the existence of an incinerator is not likely to have a positive impact on property values in its vicinity. For a community not to consider these impacts and locate all of its incineration plants in close proximity to low income or minority-occupied areas could constitute environmental injustice. Such a situation could easily occur unintentionally. Land costs would be lower in low-income areas and more vacant land often exists in these areas. Further, low-income and minority persons are less apt to be knowledgeable about or speak up against the adverse impacts of such projects. Even a well-meaning

public official might blunder toward the low-income area sites because they would save taxpayer dollars and be in the path of least resistance. On the other hand, if the adverse effect were somehow mitigated, the low-income areas might in fact be the best locations for the incinerators. If combined with comprehensive urban renewal efforts and financial compensations that relocated affected persons to better locations, the situation could be equitably resolved. Regrettably, determining if Environmental Justice is being served with respect to transportation projects is similarly difficult for several reasons.

- A. First, transportation projects nearly always have substantial diverse economic justifications. Business and industrial leaders are often very supportive of such projects for profit-making reasons. Local officials are typically supportive of transportation for community growth and tax base enhancement reasons. The conundrum is that transportation projects are essential to the economic vitality of communities and regions but at the same time can have adverse impacts related to noise, pollution, displacement of housing, and separation of neighborhoods as well as other barrier effects. Proponents of a project can argue that: "The neighborhood, community, or region declined because we didn't make adequate transportation improvements. . . or conversely, the area declined precisely because of the impact of the transportation improvements."
- B. Second, the general citizenry usually supports travel-time reduction and traffic congestion relief measures. Few people would argue against the maintenance and reconstruction of existing roadways. With one broad exception, most people are even supportive of completely new roadways for the same reasons. Unfortunately many citizens, rightly or wrongly, are "NIMBYs" - i.e., they are supportive of projects that are "Not In My Back Yard (or neighborhood)". All forms of transportation face this objection from time to time. Even bike and pedestrian paths have faced opposition from this point of view.
- C. Third, even the construction of a long new roadway that traverses a variety of diverse neighborhoods may be difficult to evaluate with respect to EJ. Questions can arise as to whether the higher income or non-minority segments are being better compensated for the adverse impacts. Even if the levels of compensations are the same, environmental injustices can occur if the adverse effects have greater impacts on one group. For example, a roadway-widening project that traverses a low-income and high-income area might have the same new ROW needs in both areas. However, because of the market values of land, the low-income properties are likely to be compensated less. But more important, because of the smaller lot sizes and road setbacks in the low-income area, the low-income area is likely to suffer much more from the adverse impacts of the increased traffic and the diminished amenities of their properties. Simply stated, a home that is only 20 feet from a five foot ROW expansion is likely to suffer far more harm than a home that is set back 100 feet, or even 30 feet, from the ROW/roadway expansion.
- D. Finally, it must be recognized that implementing transportation improvements involves extensive, expensive efforts that take place over long periods of time - years if not decades. Short-term snapshots of the planning process or improvement process are likely to be misleading. In any given year, some areas, regions, communities, or population groups may appear to be neglected while others are over-burdened. This may not be the case when the situation is evaluated over longer-time spans.

### III. OVERALL EJ GOALS OF RATS

While it may be difficult to come to distinct black or white conclusions, EJ must be considered as we develop transportation proposals and plans and implement transportation projects. Specifically, we must make concerted efforts to recognize the adverse impacts of our proposals, as well as the beneficial aspects. Second, we must take action to identify exactly who will be affected and to what degrees. Third, we must inform and involve the public, especially those persons likely to be affected, in the planning and decision-making process. Fourth, we must consider alternatives and choose carefully and fairly among those alternatives. Lastly, whatever we choose we must equitably compensate or mitigate for any damages our projects may cause. As we proceed through these steps, RATS and the RATS participants must strive to:

- A. Direct fair shares of funding or assistance to minority and low-income persons and populations.
- B. Minimize the adverse impacts of all our activities on all persons and groups, but especially on minority and low-income persons and populations.
- C. Make concerted efforts to determine what populations are going to be affected, before we spend any federal funds, implement any federal program, impose any federal regulations, or create or cause any adverse or harmful impacts.
- D. Periodically, review and analyze our past actions to determine, to the extent possible, if we are treating all groups equitably.
- E. Make concerted efforts, as we plan and program our activities, to involve minority and low-income groups, in the decision-making process.
- F. Promote EJ efforts both within RATS and by all the RATS participants within their respective jurisdictions, especially the local units of government with transportation responsibilities.
- G. Take into account the diversity of the RATS participants and all the communities within the RATS Metropolitan Planning Area (MPA). Specifically:
  1. With respect to the suballocations of State and Federal grants and subsidies, special care should be taken to assure that those communities with higher levels of minorities and low-income populations are not short-changed. Specifically, the older central cities of Rockford and Belvidere, which have higher concentrations of minorities, should be given special consideration. Similarly, the older "suburbs" of Loves Park, and Machesney Park that have some concentrations of low-income persons should not be neglected.
  2. Care should be taken that all communities are represented when important decisions are made, especially decisions that will affect minority or low-income person or groups.

### IV. PAST EJ EVALUATIONS IN THE ROCKFORD AREA

This report is the second formal EJ evaluation for the Rockford area. The first was conducted in May of the Year 2000. On file in the RATS' offices, that report found no evidence of injustice to low-

income persons or groups in the Rockford area. In addition, the Rockford area has been repeatedly assessed with respect to Title VI requirements – again with no evidence of injustice.

Further, over the past three decades, Title VI Assessments of the services provided by area public transit operators [the Rockford Mass Transit District (RMTD) and the Loves Park Transit System (LPTS)] have been conducted by RATS every three years, on the average. In these three decades, the positive findings have been repeated numerous times. In fact, very few allegations of discrimination have ever been filed; no such allegations were filed during the last review period, nor since the last review to the present time; and, no allegations of discrimination have ever been substantiated. This is not surprising because local public transit services are actually better for those areas where there are higher concentrations of minority and low income persons or groups. Like most small urban areas across the country, the Rockford area is highly automobile-oriented. The area's public transit systems are aimed directly at those persons in the Rockford area who are disenfranchised and under-served by the area's roadway/automobile system. While there are frequent comments that the transit route and schedule structure is not expansive enough, this is largely a question of finances. Annually, the area's public transit operators put as many buses on the road as they can reasonably afford, given the current levels of federal, state and local subsidies and farebox returns. Moreover, it would be very difficult to convince the local officials and general public to spend more on public transit at this time. RMTD projected expenditure in FY 2006 is at \$9.2 million, only one percent of the area's daily work trips are by transit, and the current financial situations of Federal, State, local governments are the worst in a decade.

Comprehensive Title VI Assessments of the area's road improvement projects have been conducted less frequently because the effects of such improvements are considered on a project by project basis. In March of 2000, RATS staff took a more comprehensive look at the situation (Title VI Update for Planning and Roadway Improvements, March 15, 2000) and found no apparent evidence of inequitable treatment of minorities. Based on 1990 Census Block data, RATS staff prepared dot distribution maps of all of Winnebago and Boone Counties and the City of Beloit. This area includes the entire RATS Metro Area, the SLATS (State Line Area Transportation Study) area and outlying parts of Winnebago and Boone Counties. The series of maps displayed total population, White households, Black households, Asian households, Native American households, Hispanic households, Employed persons, Unemployed persons, and Households with incomes below 30% of the median. A visual comparison of this set of maps with another set of maps prepared each year and displaying the proposed roadway improvements in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd years of the annual Transportation Improvement Program (FY 2000 TIP) showed a balanced distribution of roadway improvement projects.

## **V. CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PICTURE**

The table at the end of this section contains selected data from the Year 2000 Census pertinent to Environmental Justice considerations. At the back of this report are a series of maps that illustrate this data and examine the distribution of low income persons and minority persons compared to the distribution of major transportation improvements overseen by RATS. These illustrations are similar to those previously developed with 1990 Census data, described above. An additional illustration is included that looks at the distribution of the most significant federally-funded transportation improvements since the formation of RATS over 40 years ago. Although the illustrations are largely self-explanatory, some comments are in order.

- A. Maps 1 and 1 B** illustrate the distribution of Low-income households. In all three maps, one dot represents 20 households that have annual incomes below the Census-defined poverty level or less. Note that the bulk of poverty households are concentrated in the older west central, central, and south central parts of Rockford. The data shows poverty in other parts of the Metro area but in a more scattered distribution.
- B. Map 2a** illustrates the distribution of Black or African Americans throughout the area. With a total of roughly 30,000 persons, Black represent 9.3% of the combined population of Boone and Winnebago Counties, 90% of which reside in the City of Rockford. The great majority of Blacks are concentrated in west, west central, and southwest Rockford. The less dense scatterings in north and southeast Rockford reflect slow trends of integration that have been occurring in the last two to three decades.
- C. Map 2b** shows the distribution of Non-minorities (Whites). A comparison of Maps 2 and 2a will show a high degree of integration in most of Rockford east of the Rock River. Northwest Rockford has higher numbers of Blacks but is substantially integrated with Whites. Only west Rockford (between School Street and Cunningham) and southwest Rockford are poorly integrated. In two areas have extremely dense concentrations of Blacks.
- D. Map 2c** illustrates the distribution of Minorities other than Blacks. These include persons reporting as Multi-Race, Asian, American Indian and Hawaiian. As with Blacks, most of these persons reside in the City of Rockford. However, with the exception of a concentration in the older south central part of Rockford (the Seventh Street / Broadway area) this group is somewhat homogeneously distributed through out Rockford. Persons who reported their race as “Other” are not mapped.
- E. Map 2d** illustrates the distribution of Hispanics throughout Boone and Winnebago Counties. While the majority of Hispanics reside in Rockford (over 15 of the 24 thousand persons), a substantial number live in other parts of the two counties. The second largest concentration is in the City of Belvidere. The densest concentration, however, is in southwest Rockford where Blacks and other minorities are also located.
- F. Map 3** provides another probable indication of low-income situations. The map illustrates the distribution of Households with Zero motorized vehicles available. As expected, a comparison with Map 1b, Persons below the Poverty Level shows remarkable similarities. Map 5a shows the zero-vehicle households compared to the location of the Main Public Transit Routes. As expected, most persons in Rockford without vehicles reside in the vicinity of public transit. In addition to the concentrations in Rockford, there are a substantial number of households in Belvidere with zero vehicles. Although there is no fixed-route public transit service in Belvidere, there is publicly provided demand-response paratransit service (door-to-door or curb-to-curb). It is likely that many non-vehicle owners avail themselves of that service. These conclusions are supported by Map 6 that illustrates the distribution of person who reported they use public transit to commute to work. Note that while there are substantial concentrations of transit users in vicinity of the Rockford Mass Transit District’s (RMTD) routes, there are also substantial transit users in areas that local public transit does not serve. These latter transit riders are likely persons who take advantage of park and ride situations in their commutes to the Chicago area.

**G. Map 5** was prepared to determine if there were any significant spatial concentrations of Persons with Disabilities. It appears that these persons are homogeneously distributed throughout the community. Such a distribution points to the continued need for the demand-response, door-to-door or curb-to-curb paratransit systems operated by RMTD and by Belvidere/Boone County (operated by the Boone County Council on Aging). Such a scattered, low-density population could not be cost-effectively served with a fixed-route bus system.

**H. Numerous transportation improvements** throughout the area are funded with State and/or Federal funding. This funding comes from a wide array of programs and sub-parts of those programs. However, it is important to note that the RATS Policy Committee has direct, discretionary control over only two of these sources: the FTA 5307 Program and the “urban” part of the Surface Transportation Program [STP-U, formerly the Federal Aid Urban (FAU) Program]. Most of the other Federal funds that come to the area are governed by strict guidelines that limit or direct their use to special maintenance or safety projects and/or they are under the discretion of IDOT.

Throughout the history of RATS, the FTA 5307 funds (and their predecessor sources) have been strictly reserved for public transit uses. Even though ISTEA and TEA-21 give the RATS MPO the discretion to use these funds for highway uses, RATS has continued reserving them for public transit needs. To a large extent, Map 5a which shows the public transit routes and where these funds have been spent.

**Map 6** is important because it comprehensively illustrates where the RATS Policy Committee has spent the STP/FAU funds over the 30-40 year history of that source. More specifically, Map 12 shows the location of 11 of the total 13 projects authorized by RATS since the early 1970s. (The two projects that are not shown were simple local street resurfacing projects in Rockford and nearby parts of Winnebago County that affected a number of streets and accounted for less than 4% of the total \$42.4 million spent.) Of the 11 projects mapped, four were extremely beneficial to minority and low-income areas: the 15th Avenue Bridge Reconstruction, the Harrison Avenue Bridge Construction, the Harrison Avenue improvement west of Alpine, and most important, the construction of the Harrison / Springfield Extension. Together, these four projects account for \$20.44 million dollars or 48% of the total FAU/STP dollars spent. All of these projects have provided or enhanced important transportation linkages through distressed areas provided better access to areas that have jobs and commerce needed by minority and low-income persons. The Harrison / Springfield Extension is important because this new linkage is expected to be a key stimulus for the economic revival of Rockford’s west and southwest sides.

Nearly all of the other projects, although not directly beneficial to minority and low-income areas, have been indirectly beneficial because of a long-standing RATS policy of targeting these funds toward “regionally significant” projects as opposed to projects that benefit only one jurisdiction. The Harrison Avenue improvement east of Alpine provided further access to jobs and commerce for minority and low-income persons. The Alpine / US 20 Interchange provided better regional access to the interstate highway system. The Riverside Boulevard Reconstruction project was an essential part of the Riverside / I-90 Interchange another valuable link to the interstate highway system and stimulus to economic development. The Harlem Road Reconstruction project was a compliment to the Harlem Road Bridge project (locally funded), part of a valuable new linkage of Rockford’s northwest side with Machesney Park and Loves Park. Only the Windsor Road

Reconstruction project, the High Crest Road Project and the Five Points Intersection Project were of lesser regional significance and benefit to minorities and low-income parts of the community.

**J. Map 12** also illustrates the Current STP project that is just now getting underway. Previous Harrison Avenue improvements (cited above) were made nearly 30 years ago. Since then, normal roadbed deterioration coupled with recent and forecasted increases in traffic now necessitate a complete rebuilding of most segments of Harrison Avenue between IL-2 and Alpine Road. Along the way, several key intersections are in need of extensive improvements as well as the bridges over the railroads. This \$20-\$30 million endeavor is located just to the south of distressed areas in southeast Rockford and is also needed to maintain essential linkages with the minority areas of southwest and west Rockford.

Selected Year 2000 Census Data for Boone & Winnebago Counties Combined				Racial / Ethnic Mix <sup>1</sup> Persons & % of Total			
<b>Annual Income<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>House-holds</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Persons with some type of Disability<sup>2</sup></b>		White	267,238	83.5 %
Less than 15K	16,179	13 %	52,427	18 %	Black	29,692	9.3 %
\$15-\$30K	22,518	18 %	<b>Person traveling to Work Daily<sup>2</sup> by:</b>		Multi-Race	5,824	1.8 %
\$30K-\$60K	42,103	34 %	<b>Public Transit</b>	<b>Other</b>	Asian	4,988	1.6 %
\$60K-\$100K	29,102	24 %	1,479 or 1 %	146,874	Amer. Ind.	919	0.3 %
More than \$100K	12,677	10 %	<sup>1</sup> Data taken from 100% (sf1) tables. <sup>2</sup> Data from sample (sf3) tables. Data is illustrated on the maps at the end of this report.		Hawaiian	106	0.0 %
Below Poverty	29,152	24 %			Other	11,437	3.6 %
<b>Households with Zero Vehicles Available<sup>2</sup></b>	9,252	7.5 %			Total	320,204	100 %
					Hispanic	24,425	7.6 %

**VI. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS.**

Over the past decade, Federal guidance (stemming from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act, ISTEA) has required that MPOs develop a formal report detailing the processes and procedures by which the MPO notifies and involves the general public of its transportation planning and programming activities. The Public Involvement Process (PIP) (now referred to as the Public Participation Process, and order of SAFETEA-LU) lists the typical schedule for the annual or periodic preparation of required documents such as the Unified Planning Work Program, the Transportation Improvement Program and the Long-Range Transportation Plan. The PIP provides the general RATS meeting schedule and specifies how the public can become involved.

Over the years, RATS and its participating members have employed numerous techniques to inform and involve the public in its decisions making. With respect to general and long-range planning, these attempts have met with only limited success. We suspect that part of this is because the general public

appears to be satisfied with the transportation system. Perhaps this is because the transportation planners, designers and engineers have done a reasonably good job of designing, sizing, constructing and maintaining an effective roadway network for the area. However, a part of this "satisfaction" also derives from three independent factors: the size of the community, the relative flatness of the terrain, and the proximity to the Chicago urban area.

As one of the smallest of the large urban areas in the country, the Rockford area has not grown to the threshold where a typical trip from one side of the urban area to the other takes more than 20-30 minutes. Even without a cross-town expressway, motorists can traverse the breadth of Rockford in a time span that most people do not consider burdensome. The relative flatness of the terrain and the lack of major physical barriers contribute to the ease at which motorists can travel through the area. Only the Rock River presents a significant physical barrier and it is crossed by enough bridges that it is hardly noticed. More troublesome than natural physical barriers are the multiple, poorly aligned or canted grid systems that originated in the early years of Rockford's development. Perhaps the greatest blessing bestowed upon Rockford planners, from the standpoint of determining public satisfaction, is the proximity to the Chicago area. Because nearly all Rockfordians travel periodically into the Chicago area, where roadway congestion is many times greater than in Rockford, most Rockfordians recognize that the travel situation could be much worse.

For both RATS and the RATS member/participants, a much greater degree of public involvement has frequently been achieved when the public has been presented with specific projects. Some of these are discussed in the following section of this report.

Generally, to summarize material set forth in the RATS PIP report, RATS attempts to notify and involve the public in several ways:

- A. Direct Mailings.** RATS maintains an extensive mailing list, nearly 200 names, and uses this list on a regular basis. All persons on this mailing list are notified 1-2 weeks prior to every RATS Technical and Policy Committee meeting of the date, time, place and agenda of each meeting. Everyone on the list also gets copies of the materials to be presented, discussed and acted on at the meetings. This list is rigorously maintained.
- B. Media Notification.** The above mailing list includes six TV/radio stations, three newspapers and three libraries.
- C. Open Meetings.** All RATS meetings are open to the public and the public is invited to participate in discussions on any and all topics.
- D. Annual Notice.** An annual notice is placed in the newspaper of greatest circulation announcing the planning process.
- E. Shirrtail Involvement.** RATS avails itself to and participates with numerous special interest groups. Examples include: the Mayor of Rockford's Transportation Task Force (in the 1980's) area bicycle groups, area environmental groups such as the Natural Land Institute and the Sierra Club, the Rockford Board of Realtors, the Rockford Chamber of Commerce and others.

**F. Special Studies Involvement.** RATS makes unique efforts to involve the public in special studies it is conducting. This typically includes study start-up meetings where the public is informed of the purposes of the study and the public is invited to make preliminary comments. The public is usually notified of these special meetings via newspaper articles and public service bulletins. This is common practice for all large, special studies. It was done with the Woodruff/Wallenberg Study; the WinGIS (regional GIS feasibility study); the transit route and schedule analyses; the Riverside / Alpine / Forest Hills Congestion Management Study; the West State Street Corridor Study; The Rail Consolidation Study; the Belvidere-Rockford Commuter Rail Feasibility Study and Alternatives Analysis; the RATS/SLATS Traffic Simulation Modeling Study; and numerous others.

## VII. NOTABLE EXAMPLES OF EJ CONSIDERATION – PAST AND PRESENT

The following is a partial annotated list of other exceptional efforts to involve the public in the transportation planning and decision-making process – past, recent and current.

**A. Illinois State Toll Highway Alignment.** Perhaps the most significant past example of an environmental justice decision in the Rockford area is one that occurred almost a half-century ago. During the 1940s and 50s, as the Interstate Highway system was conceived, Rockfordians debated the location of what is now I-90, the Interstate Highway that links Rockford with Chicago and the eastern US and with Minneapolis and the western US. At that time, alternatives were presented that routed I-90 through the heart of Rockford. To this day, there are still factions that argue, for economic and downtown revitalization reasons, that Rockford would have been better served by a "through-town" routing. Regardless, the decision of the City fathers, at the time, was to locate the facility far east of the urban area. The through-town alternative, many of them felt, would have been entirely too disruptive and harmful to Rockford's homes, citizens, neighborhoods and businesses.

**B. Perryville Road south of IL-173.** Another significant past example of EJ is the "around-the-park" routing of Perryville Road. The original proposed routing would have been through the center of what is now Rock Cut State Park.

**C. Central Avenue.** Similarly, a proposed extension of Central Avenue, in west Rockford, was stopped at the point where it would have cut through what is now the Klehm Arboretum, one of the most significant collections of tree and plant species in northern Illinois. The halting of this project is especially significant because much of west Rockford is low-income and the preservation of this park was likely of much greater benefit to persons in the area than was the extension of Central Avenue.

**D. Woodruff/Wallenburg Expressway.** Another proposed cross-town expressway, the Woodruff/Wallenburg Expressway has been, in various forms, contained in Rockford's plans for nearly a century. The proposal would cut through Rockford from the southeast to the west, traversing the edges of numerous neighborhoods, many of which are low to moderate income and would have formed a permanent barrier between neighborhoods. Further, the noise from this facility would have been disruptive, if not harmful, to thousands of persons in its proximity. While the project was abandoned primarily for cost reasons after a feasibility study five years ago, considerable debate over the possible harmful environmental effects and barrier effects of the proposal also contributed to its rejection.

**E. Sage Drive.** Residents of Sage Drive, a north-south collector connecting with the highly-traveled Riverside Boulevard arterial, appeared before the RATS Technical and Policy Committee numerous times in 1999 arguing against the installation of a traffic signal and turn lane at Sage and Riverside. The residents felt that the improvement would drastically increase through-traffic on the collector thereby adversely affecting their neighborhood. Although this area is not minority or low-income in status, the situation serves as an example of the commitment of RATS to allow input from citizens on EJ issues. This situation will require continued monitoring as development proceeds at the north end of Sage Drive.

**F. Springfield Avenue Connection.** As previously discussed, the area's last STP-Urban-funded project connected Springfield Avenue, north of West State Street with Harrison Avenue and completed an inner ring road system that traverses Rockford, Loves Park, Machesney Park, and Cherry Valley. The project required the acquisition/demolition of roughly 50 homes, most of which are occupied by low to moderate-income families. One of the few projects of its kind in the Rockford area that required the taking of a large number of homes, the consensus of the most observers was that the merits of the project outweighed the adverse impacts. The economy of west Rockford has been blighted for decades and access to the area was not the best, especially to and from the south. While the project drastically impacted several homes, full Federal relocation standards were applied and the new and redevelopment opportunities expected to incur from this project are considered to be a potential blessing to all of the other low-income homes and neighborhoods in the area. The project had been planned for more than 20 years and had gone through numerous alternative evaluations and public hearings. The project itself has been presented to the public at numerous public information meetings. In the end, only a single property owner remained in opposition and eminent domain powers were employed. Because of the urgency of the project, "quick take" powers were invoked. A property settlement was reached judicially.

The Springfield Connection was a superb example of the potential contradictions inherent in the application of the environmental justice concept to transportation projects. On the surface, it would appear that a project requiring the removal of 50 homes, most of which are low/mod income, minority occupied households, is a prime example of environmental "injustice." Without doubt the removal of these 50 homes will create hardship for the persons involved. On the other hand, many of the homeowner were eager to avail themselves of the purchase and relocation benefits, thereby allowing them to depart from a blighted area with little other potential for recovery.

**G. Harrison Avenue Reconstruction.** As previously discussed this project, the areas next STP-U project, is a vital transportation link that will provide substantial benefits to minorities and non-minorities alike.

**H. Harlem Road.** One of the Urban Area's previous and largest FAU projects, this improvement ran near moderate-income non-minority neighborhoods and there was no substantial adverse impact on low-income persons or minorities. The project was also of substantial regional significance – providing benefits to both Loves Park and Machesney Park as well as improving the connectivity of the system in the area and better linking those communities with northwest Rockford.

**I. Kishwaukee Bridge.** This multi-million-dollar bridge over the Kishwaukee River gorge was constructed as part of the I-39 Interstate by IDOT. Minorities and low-income persons were not

impacted, but special care was taken in bridge design and construction to ensure minimum impact on the natural environment in the vicinity as well as other residents.

**J. Charles Street Relocation.** Recently, the privately owned Swedish American Hospital (located in a low/mod housing area and business area) purchased all properties in a 3-4 block area adjacent to the existing hospital on the south side of Charles Street for the purpose of hospital expansion. The hospital project and the Charles Street relocation adversely affected some of the low/mod properties to the south, east and west. Again, this transportation project is an example of an environmental justice conundrum. Every effort was made to mitigate these impacts including the construction of a boulevard-like street cross-section. More important, the adverse impact of losing the hospital, (which was a strong possibility if the hospital didn't modernize) would have been extremely adverse to the neighborhoods and far outweighed the adverse effects of the relocation of the roadway.

**K. West State Street Corridor.** As previously documented, west Rockford is an economically blighted area with a high concentration of African Americans. Recently, the Rockford Public Works and Community Development Departments used Federal Special Planning and Research funds for the purpose of developing a comprehensive land use and corridor plan in conjunction with IDOT-planned roadway improvements on West State Street. This planning effort involved extensive public involvement and produced a plan that most agree will minimize the adverse impacts of necessary roadway improvements on adjacent low-income / minority neighborhoods as well as stimulate the revitalization of these neighborhoods.

**L. The Mayor's Welfare to Work Task Force.** In the mid-1990s, in response to federal welfare reform legislative changes, the Mayor of Rockford formed the Welfare to Work Task Force. Nearly every social service agency in the Rockford area, public and private, participated in this lengthy series of meetings over a several month period for the purpose of determining how best to assist area low income persons and families as they made the transition from welfare to work and self-sufficiency. RATS staff and staff from the Rockford Mass Transit District (RMTD) participated in this effort from the beginning, particularly on the Transportation Subcommittee. Key pieces of knowledge gained or confirmed from this effort included:

1. Transportation is one of the most significant obstacles facing the area's minorities and financially challenged persons in the Rockford area. In spite of the fact that more than \$6 million (at the time) was being spent annually on public transit services, the transit system was skeletal. Severely lacking was nighttime service and Sunday service.
2. All types of transportation assistance were discussed including: leasing autos to the poor, assistance in obtaining auto loans; driver training; basic auto maintenance training; transportation vouchers; car pooling and expanding the mass transit services.
3. Critical times for persons returning to work would be the evening and nighttime hours when transit service is at its minimum or nonexistent. This is especially troublesome because many persons starting new jobs would work second and third shifts.
4. A critical period for persons returning to work would be the first few weeks or months of employment. That period, when they are "unknowns" to their fellow workers would be the most difficult time for them to arrange car pools.

5. One of the most difficult situations for transit users with dependant children is obtaining accessible childcare. Dropping a child off at a nursery or care facility necessitates leaving the bus, a factor which can increase trip time by another 30-60 minutes just in wait-time for the next bus.
6. Another difficult situation for transit users is accessibility to basic job training and adult education facilities.

As a result of the above, RMTD restructured its service and began providing limited nighttime service shortly after the last EJ Assessment was developed. At the same time, RMTD applied for Federal Access to Jobs funds for Sunday service. Although it has taken several years, RMTD recently received a federal grant to provide such service. RMTD also applied for special grants to construct and establish a day care and training facility in the vicinity of the downtown transfer center. Those requests have been denied to date.

**M. WinGIS.** In the mid- to late 1990s, RATS and IDOT were instrumental in rekindling the effort to develop a regional geographic information system (GIS) for all the jurisdictions in Winnebago County. This action is important to EJ.

At the very beginning of this document, we made special note of the need to make concerted proactive efforts to determine the effects, positive and negative, of proposed transportation projects or plans on all persons, ethnic groups, minority groups and economic groups in the community. The challenge of avoiding disparate impacts on various persons and groups within our community must start with knowing where those persons and groups are with respect to the projects and plans proposed. In the past, making these determinations was painstakingly difficult and time consuming. Today, computerized Geographic Information programs can map and display this information with relative ease. Further, using GIS systems, transportation alternatives can be quickly developed, compared with the locations of populations, and more easily evaluated for their impact on minorities and low-income groups.

In the last 4-5 years important new developments have taken place in Winnebago County. The WinGIS project and consortium is now taking accurate mapping to levels that will permit alternatives analysis to degrees never before possible or economically feasible. Further, always valuable Census data will soon be even more useful when it can be applied to and compared with the transportation alternatives.

**N. RAT/SLAT Traffic Simulation Modeling & Analysis Study.** Completed in 2004, via a grant from IDOT, is a comprehensive traffic simulation modeling effort that will encompass all of Winnebago and Boone Counties in Illinois and the southern part of Rock County, Wisconsin. This model will enable regional planning and transportation network alternative evaluations at a level never before possible in the region. When coupled with WinGIS (above), this model will greatly expand RATS' ability to evaluate potential network alternatives.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The above discussions, past assessments and attached maps and charts serve to illustrate that environmental justice has been a long-standing consideration in the RATS planning process.

Information has been developed that identifies the location of minority groups and low-income populations in the Rockford area. Four important points deserve reiteration:

- A. When compared with transportation projects in the TIP, it appears there is an equitable balance of projects in minority / low-income areas and non-minority / upper income areas.
- B. When compared with the deployment of the public transit system there is strong evidence that the public transit operators are providing much better service to minorities and low income person and groups than to the general population. This is as it should be – the service is being provided to those who need it.
- C. When compared to the allocation of Federal transportation funds that are under the control of the RATS Policy Committee – low-income and minorities areas have received a sizable share of these projects and funding.
- D. When compared with anecdotal situations there is strong evidence that environmental justice has long been an important topic in the Rockford area, even before the term was coined – and that concern continues today.

Map 1 – HH w/ less than \$15K Annual Income

Map 1b – HH w/ Incomes below Poverty Level

Map 2a – Distribution of Whites

Map 2b – Distribution of Blacks

Map 2c – Distribution of Hispanics

Map 2d – Distribution of Other Minorities

Map 3 – HH w/ Zero Vehicles

Map 4 – Persons Commuting to Work by Transit

Map 5 – Distribution of Persons w/ Disability

Map 6 – FAU/STP Projects throughout RATS History

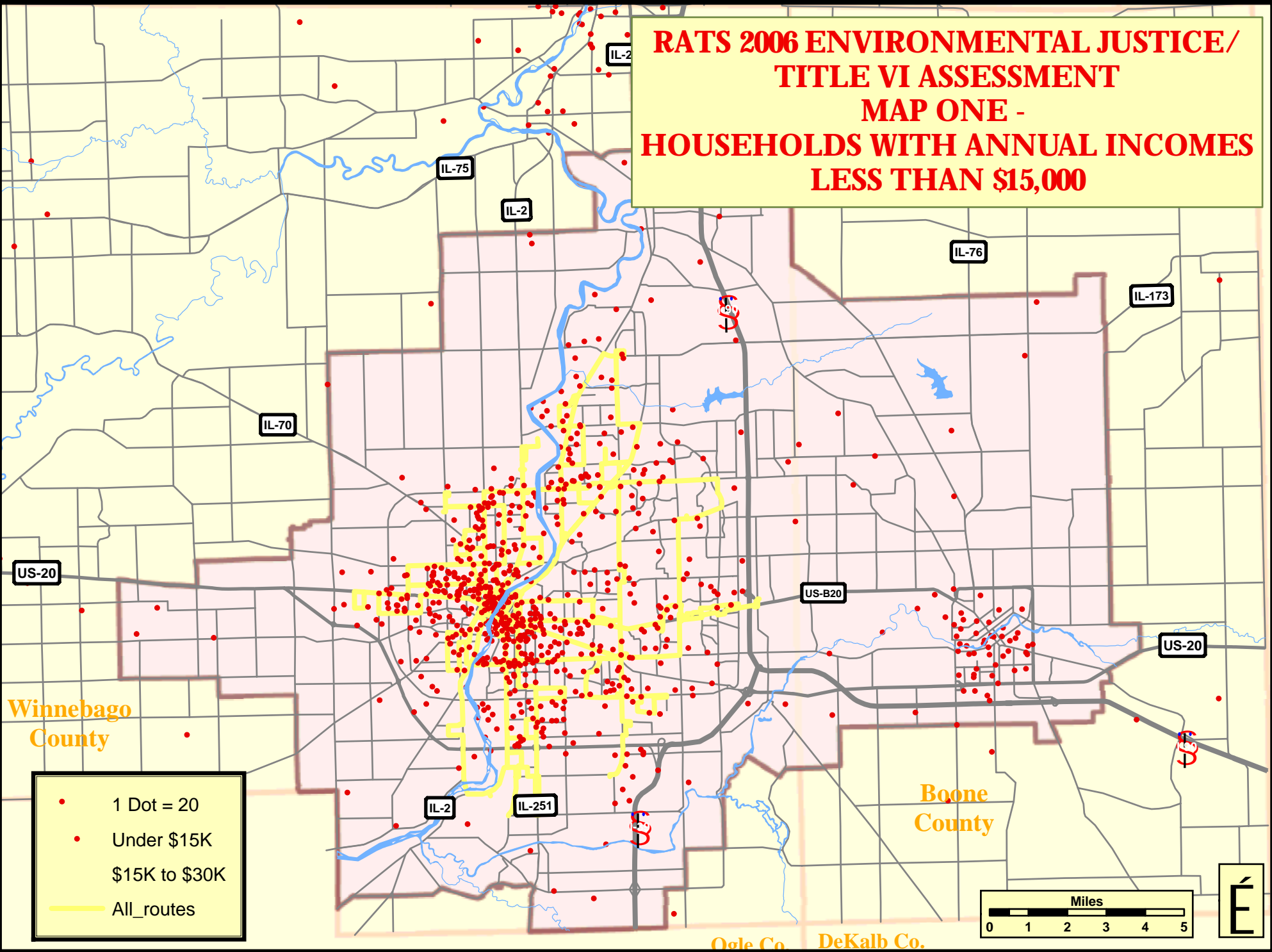
Chart 1 – Selected Year 2000 Census Block Group Data – Correlation Coefficient Matrix

### **Public Involvement Process:**

This document was presented for public comment for two months prior to its being presented for adoption by the Rockford Area Transportation Study's (RATS) Policy Committee. On January 18<sup>th</sup> of 2006 this Environmental Justice and Title Six Compliance document was placed on the RATS homepage at <http://www.cityofrockford.net/government/works/index.cfm?section=planning&id=977>.

On January 19<sup>th</sup> of 2006 this document was presented to the RATS Technical Committee for review and comment. There was only one set of comments or suggestions made before the 29<sup>th</sup> of March. Representatives from RMTD wanted their routes added to Map 1 and Map 1B, which was done. This document was presented to the RATS Policy Committee on March 29, 2006.

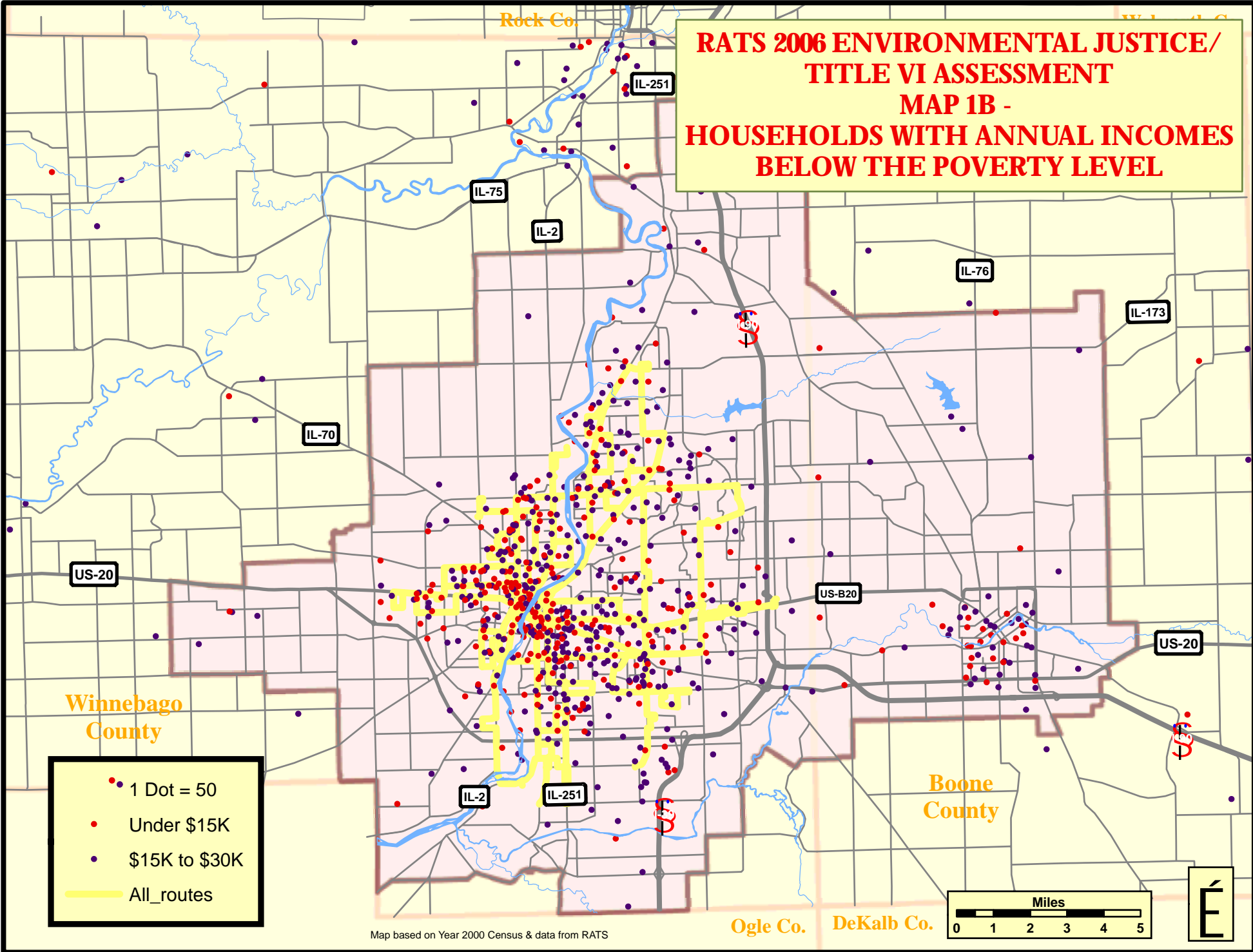
**RATS 2006 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE/  
TITLE VI ASSESSMENT  
MAP ONE -  
HOUSEHOLDS WITH ANNUAL INCOMES  
LESS THAN \$15,000**



- 1 Dot = 20
- Under \$15K
- \$15K to \$30K
- All\_routes

Map based on Year 2000 Census & data from RATS

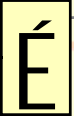
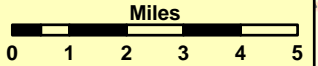
**RATS 2006 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE/  
TITLE VI ASSESSMENT  
MAP 1B -  
HOUSEHOLDS WITH ANNUAL INCOMES  
BELOW THE POVERTY LEVEL**



- 1 Dot = 50
- Under \$15K
- \$15K to \$30K
- All\_routes

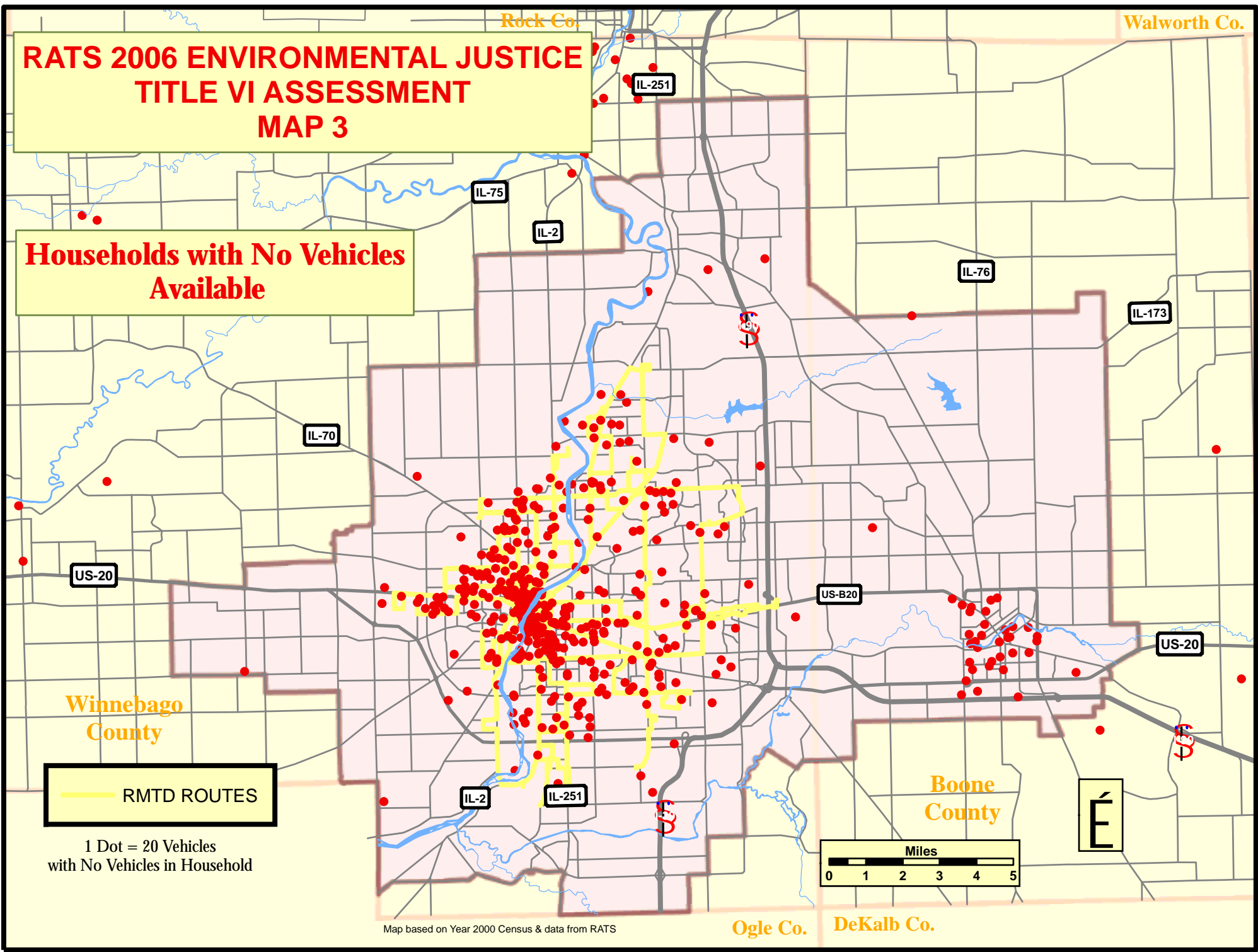
Map based on Year 2000 Census & data from RATS


Ogle Co. DeKalb Co.



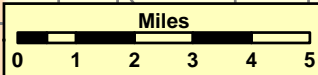
# RATS 2006 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TITLE VI ASSESMENT MAP 3

## Households with No Vehicles Available



 RMTD ROUTES

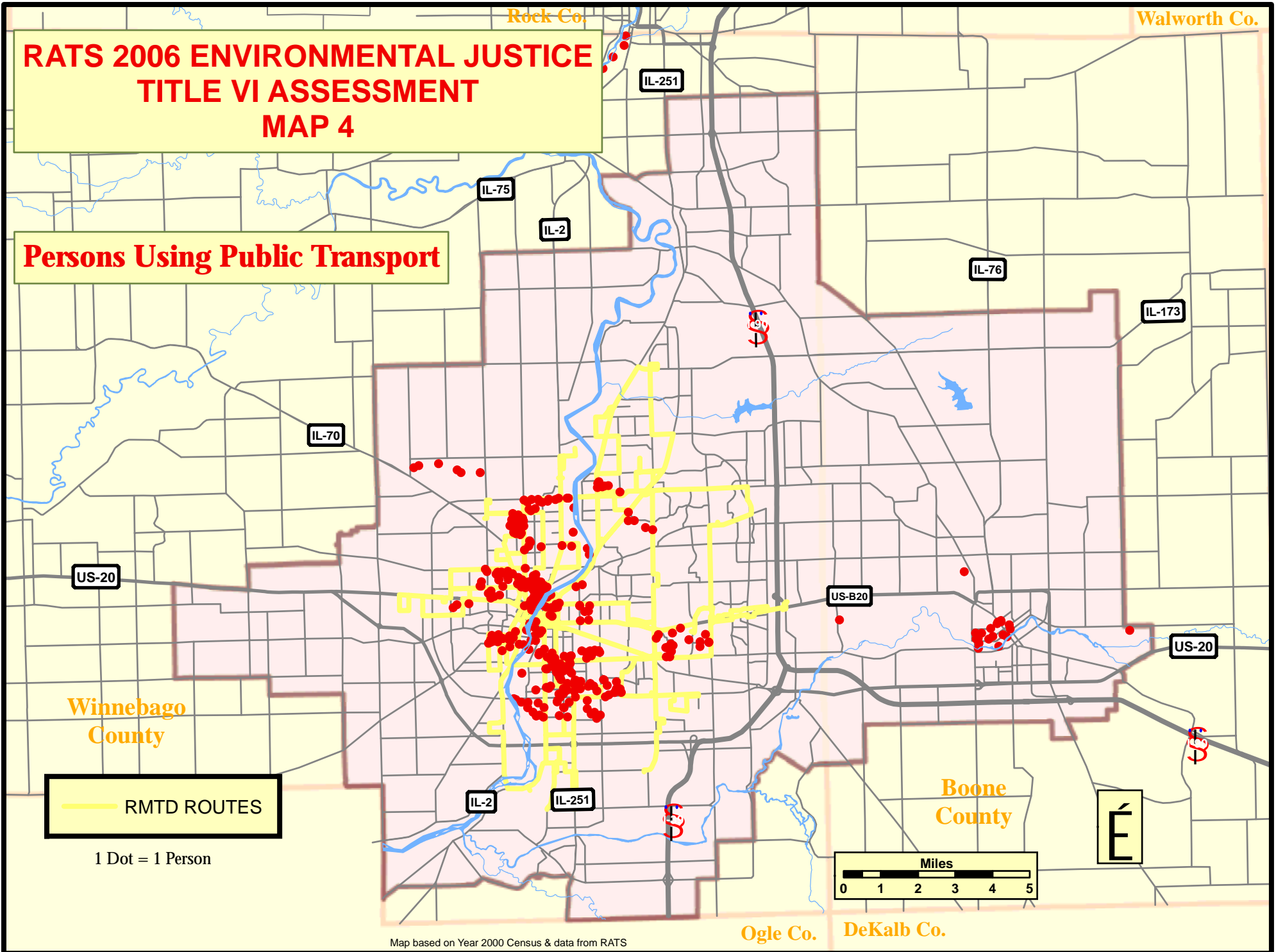
1 Dot = 20 Vehicles  
with No Vehicles in Household



Map based on Year 2000 Census & data from RATS

# RATS 2006 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TITLE VI ASSESSMENT MAP 4

## Persons Using Public Transport



Map based on Year 2000 Census & data from RATS

# RATS 2006 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE TITLE VI ASSESMENT MAP 5

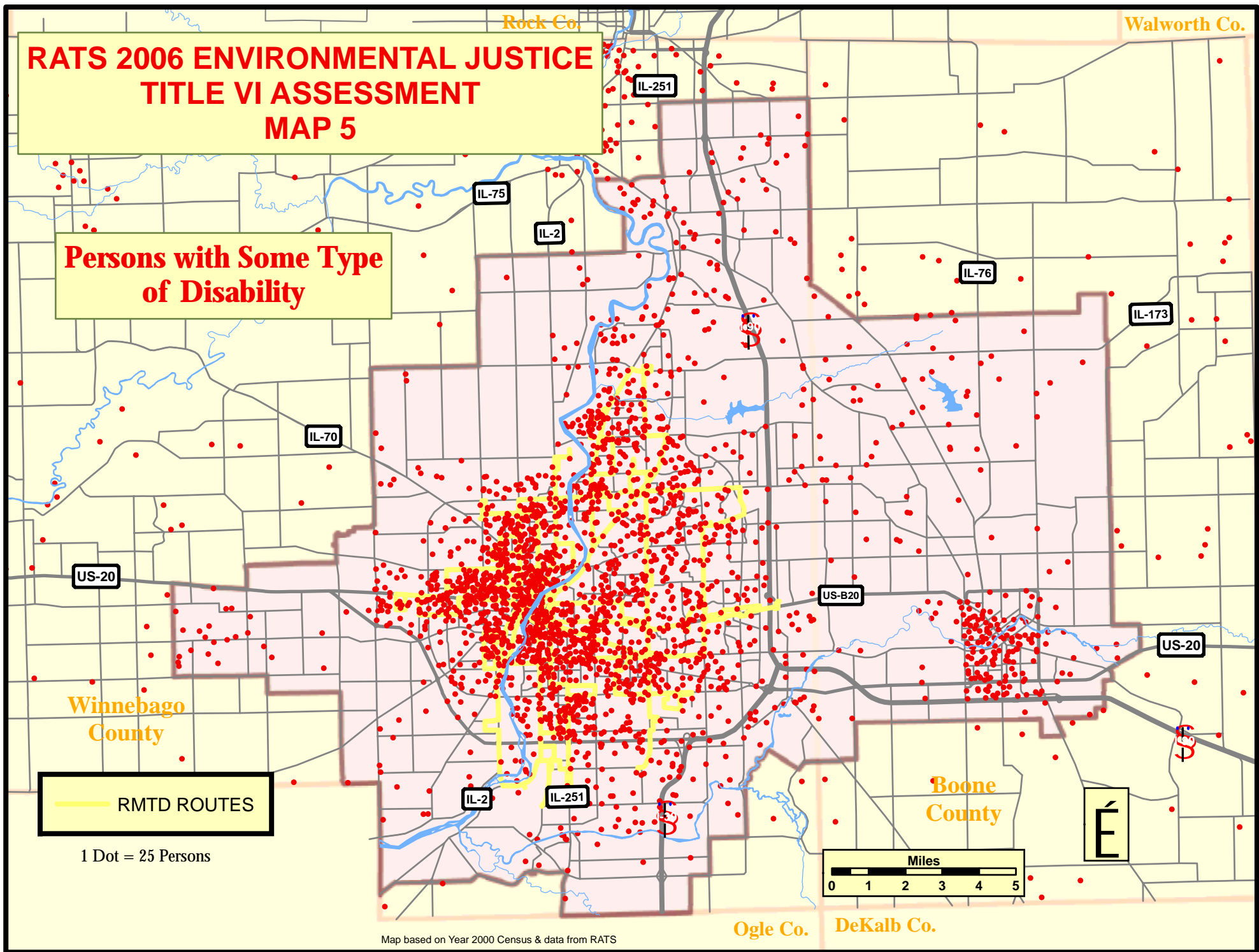
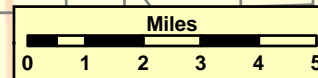
**Persons with Some Type  
of Disability**

Winnebago  
County

Boone  
County

— RMTD ROUTES

1 Dot = 25 Persons



# RATS 2006 Environmental Justice Title VI Assessment

**MAP 2A  
TOTAL POPULATION**

**MAP 2B  
BLACK POPULATION**

**MAP 2C  
HISPANIC POPULATION**

**MAP 2D  
ALL OTHER  
RACIAL MINORITIES**

**MAPS 2A-D**

- Public Transit Routes (RMTD)
- Arterial & Collector Rds
- Rockford Metro Planning Area
- Counties

1 RED DOT = 50 PERSONS

Source: US Census 2000 (block-level data)

